
Professionalization in Adult Education in India

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Abstract

This paper gives a brief overview of the professionalization of Adult Education in India. It also highlights the primary characteristics of the different initiatives going on in the country regarding the process, critically analyses their overall impact at different levels in the system and suggests some steps that might enrich the whole process and help to generate more impact.

The Context

India is looking forward to its new education policy in 2016. Skill development initiatives (though still outside the purview of adult education in the Indian context³) in India have infused a new life in adult education since the last few years. Despite the fact that India is following two different policy lines regarding adult education and skill development, there are possibilities that these policies will converge, sometime in future, to give adult education in India, a new shape, a new structure and a new definition according to the broader perspective on adult education, followed in many countries across the globe⁴. In order to understand this dynamism in India, it is important to understand the growth and development of adult education in India and the leap towards skill development. This paper focuses on the area of professionalization of adult education in India and tries to present briefly, an overview of the current situation of adult education as a profession in India.

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³ In India, adult education in practice focusses only on reading, writing in any language and simple arithmetic calculations.

⁴ Across many countries, including Germany, adult education includes skill development and vocational training.

Adult Education as a Profession: Conceptual Understanding

Professionalization, in terms of adult education, is itself a debated term. Writers like Peter Jarvis and Collin Griffin (Jarvis 1983; Collins 1991) define it as a semi-profession arguing that it has “...no firm theoretical base, no monopoly of exclusive skills or special area of competence or rules to guide practice, less specialization than occupations generally regarded as professions and control exercised by non professionals.”⁵

On the contrary, writers like Elsdon consider it as a profession (Elsdon 1975).⁶

It is however, important to understand that it might have different meaning in different contexts. In some contexts, it has been able to develop as a full fledged profession, while in others, it has been subsided at the standard of a semi-profession, while still in other contexts, it is at a nascent stage. However, while we compare the professionalization of adult education in different contexts, we can figure out that it has the potential to develop into a full-fledged profession and it is just at different stages of development according to the role that adult education plays or needs to play in different contexts and how much space, it is being provided by the mainstream policy of education in that country.

In order to understand in the Indian context, it is important to understand how it is conceptualized in the Indian context and what role it plays. It is also important to understand what role it can play in future in the society to understand the possibilities of development of adult education as a profession in the Indian context.

Historical trajectory of Adult Education in India

The history of modern India begins with the colonial period, so does the history of professionalization of adult education.

The first documented schools backed by the government were the jail schools in 1851, started by British officials, started by Dr. Walker in Agra Jail. Apart from that, there were night schools and literacy classes in Mysore and Baroda. Objective was to focus on indoctrination of Indians and preparing them to work for the British. Some social reformers, Mahatma Gandhi and few other nationalist leaders in India, and Tagore, an educationist, author and Nobel Prize Laureate, also took up adult education efforts. Their efforts focused at the generation of a national consciousness among Indians to become self-reliable and independent, fight against social problems, dogmas and superstitions, and sometimes, to stand up and fight against the British rule.

⁵ Collins, M. (1991): *Adult Education As Vocation*. London: Routledge, pp86-87.

⁶ Elsdon, K.T. (1975): *Training for adult education*. Nottingham: Department of Adult Education University of Nottingham.

In 1935, provisions were made for an interim government in India and when it was formed in 1937, Adult Education became a part of the mainstream policy on education. Syed Mahmud, the education minister of Bihar, led the drive and many provinces adopted adult education programmes including literacy classes for adults and establishment of libraries. In 1939, Indian Adult Education Association was established followed by the Journal of Adult Education in 1940 (Dutta, 1986).⁷ As the Indian national movement grew and caught up pace, attempts for adult education went week and till 1949, there was hardly any major breakthrough. After independence, Central Board of Secondary Education was formed that suggested the 'social education' programme to implement government's agenda of educating the adult population about civic values to strengthen democracy apart from literacy. In 1956, UNESCO funded to begin with research and professional literature and the National Fundamental Education Centre (NFEC) was established. Not much was done in the following years and when the new radical government came in 1976 after a lot of political upheaval and with a background of social transition. Adult education gained space in the priority list and the National Adult Education Programme (NAEP) began with an objective to organize literacy campaigns all over the country. In 1986, the government of India came up with its major policy document on education and the New Education Policy, 1986 was announced. India had young leadership and the government understood that it was important to address the concerns of the marginalised masses for bringing them into the mainstream. As a result, the National Literacy Mission was launched in 1988 and functional literacy was at its core (Shah 1999)⁸. In 2009, Saakshar Bharat Mission began which was supposed to culminate the National Literacy Mission and be its successor but later on, both are still continuing with Saakshar Bharat Mission as the flagship programme of the government primarily to eradicate illiteracy.⁹

Despite the fact that this social education programme drew some attention from the authority, there was no clear budget allocation exclusively under the head of 'adult education' till 1966 in the first three five year plans. In later plans too, adult education has been given very less priority over primary education. The major argument behind such an allocation is that if all individuals are enrolled in schools at the primary level, there will be no illiteracy at all. This points towards the limited understanding and perspective of the government towards adult education. The governments in India have always focused on primary education as the final solution for tackling with the problem of illiteracy and have failed to realize that adult education has much more to do than literacy. It is important to realize that the commitment for inclusive development and sustainability can not be met without expanding the scope of adult education because enrollment in schools at the primary level may not guarantee that individuals will be capable enough to earn livelihood and lead their lives in a sustainable manner. Also, it does not strengthen individuals enough to fight for their rights and understand their duties as responsible

⁷ Dutta, S.C. (1986): *History of Adult Education in India*. Indian Adult Education Association, New Delhi.

⁸ Shah, S.Y (1999): *An encyclopedia of Indian Adult Education*. National Literacy Mission, Directorate of Adult Education, MHRD, GoI, pp. 1–36, pp. 341–365.

⁹ www.saaksharbharaat.nic.in/saaksharbharaat/homepage accessed on 12.01.2016.

adult citizens. Moreover, it is important to formulate and implement a strong policy on adult education because learning does not end with formal schooling or in Universities. Lifelong Learning and Continuing Education has been rarely seen in policy implementation in India and with regards to professionalization of adult education, this is quite sad because there is nothing much to do in adult education in practice.

Apart from this, it is important to understand the policy on skill development in India which till now, is separate from adult education officially in India but has a relevance from the international perspective on adult education (which includes skill development in adult education). In 2005, the National Knowledge Commission was established in India with a purpose to understand how far India is ready for a transition to knowledge economy and what is required further. The Commission came up with its 'Report to the Nation' in 2006 with a wide number of suggestions at the macro, meso and micro level. Following this, a department for skill development was established under the ministry of human resource and development and the Skill India programme was launched in 2009. In 2014, a full-fledged ministry called the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship came into existence and in 2015, the government came up with its major policy document on skill development. All skill development initiatives in India are to be dealt with by this ministry since 2014 as per the official declaration by the government but there is still some overlapping in the skill development and vocational educational initiatives as they also exist in the Sakshar Bharat Mission and have not been completely withdrawn at the policy level. This has generated a little confusion regarding policies on skill development under adult education programmes because monitoring and control mechanisms for skill development and vocational education are not mentioned clearly in adult education policy and programmes. It is also important to notice that the Ministry of Skill Development and entrepreneurship has entered into strategic partnerships with 12 other ministries for skill development initiatives but the Ministry of Human Resource and Development is absent from the list. The National Skill Development Mission launched in 2015 is the flagship programme of the Government which also tries to consolidate more than 70 schemes for skill development programmes going on under 20 different ministries and departments in India apart from new initiatives.¹⁰

Adult Education: Structure, Policy and Formation

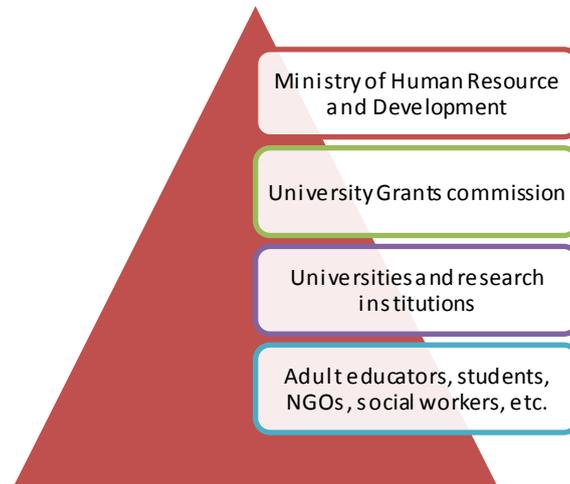
In order to understand the extent of professionalization of adult education in India, it is important to begin with an understanding of the existing structure of adult education in India. From the Indian perspective, it is important to understand two structures in India: first, the structure according to which adult education (primarily literacy) is imparted in India by the government and the second, the structure that is responsible for professional training and independent capacity building of the people engaged in adult education in India. A third structure for skill development initiatives is also mentioned to understand the dynamism in India from a broader perspective.

¹⁰ www.skilldevelopment.gov.in accessed on 12.01.16.



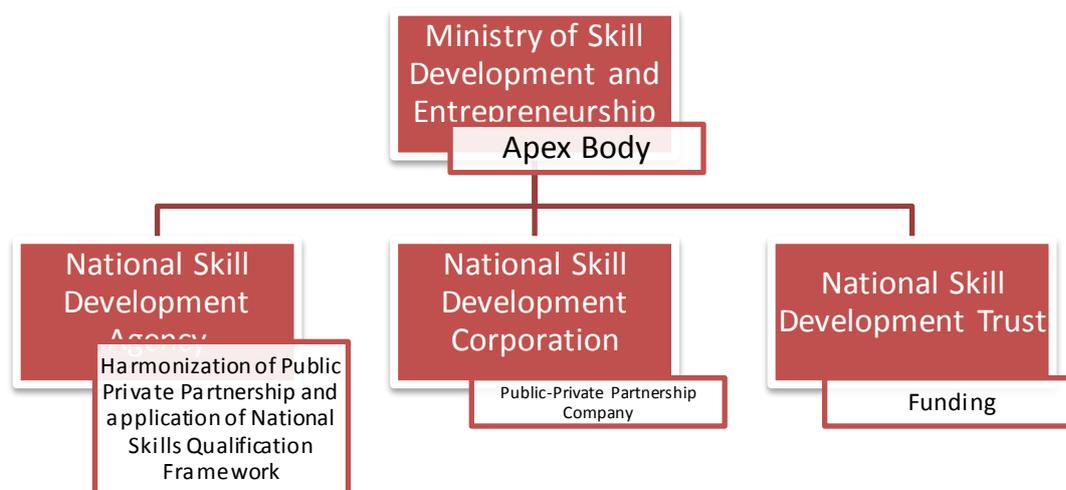
Source: Singh, S. (2016): in Egetenmeyer, R. (ed.) Adult and Lifelong Learning in Europe and Beyond: Comparative Perspectives from the 2015 Würzburg Winter School. Peter Lang Publishers, Frankfurt, pp 246.

This structure was formulated under the National Literacy Mission in India and it explains what formal structures exist at different levels in India to deliver adult education programmes directly. The structure for training and individual capacity build-up of adult education professionals and promotion of research is as follows:



Source: Created by author from general information about the system in India.

Apart from this, the formal structure of skill development in India is as follows:



Source: Created by author for explanation in general.

Changing Concept of Adult Education in India

According to Shah, (Shah 2010),¹¹ the concept of adult education in India has evolved through 4 different stages:

Approaches	Cycles and Periods	Key Concepts	Main Programmes
Traditional and Religious	First Cycle (1882-1947)	Basic Literacy	Night Schools, Social Reform Movements
Life-Oriented	Second Cycle (1948-1966)	Civic Literacy	Social Education
Work-Oriented	Third Cycle (1967-1977)	Functional Literacy	Farmer's Education and Functional Literacy Program, Vocational Training, Workers' Education
Social Change	Fourth Cycle (1978 to date)	Development Literacy	National Adult Education Program, Mass Program of Functional Literacy, Total Literacy Campaigns, Continuing Education, Skill Training, Workers' Education

The focus of adult education programmes in terms of policies has become social change since

¹¹ Shah, S.Y. (2010): Mapping the field of training in adult and lifelong learning in India in Egetenmeyer, R. (ed.) *Teachers and trainers in adult and lifelong learning* Frankfurt am Main, p. 57.

1978 but there gaps at the policy implementation level and despite the change in conceptualization in policy documents, the thrust of adult education programmes remains basic literacy for direct delivery. However, for academia and research, the meaning has broadened and adult education in terms of achievement of goals, is seen in a larger perspective.

Teaching and Training of Professionals and Individual Capacity-build up for Adult Educators

According to Shah (Shah 2010)¹², there are four methods of teaching and training in India:

Method	Roots in Adult Education in India	Target Group	Nature of the Training Programme and Techniques used	Critical evaluation
Cascade Method	Began in 1989 under the National Literacy Mission.	Facilitators or 'Preraks' who are supposed to work at grass root level to impart literacy education during the Total Literacy Campaigns.	1.Four-tier training system for key resource persons, resource persons, master trainers and voluntary instructors. 2.Focus on information handling and interpersonal skills 3.Primar-based training	1. Poor training quality Gaps in training programmes. 2.Little emphasis on adult psychology, adult pedagogy and andragogy. 3.Failure to integrate goals, structure and training inputs. 4.Pedagogical insensitivity towards adolescents and women who comprised the bulk of learners. 5.Short duration 6.Continuous training because of which many educators remained 'untrained.' 7.Beginning of

¹² This table has been created by the author according to the information provided in the article Shah, S.Y. (2010): Mapping the field of training in adult and lifelong learning in India in Egetenmeyer, R. (ed.) *Teachers and trainers in adult and lifelong learning* Frankfurt am Main, p 63-70.

				training for functionaries in a professional way.
Direct Method	Developed by University Grants Commission in 1980s to train adult educators for functional literacy programme and other literacy-based programmes run by the government.	Student Volunteers and Non-student participants.	1.Focussed on conceptual and operational aspects of adult education programmes 2.Revolved around information and its dissemination	1. No provision for group dynamics 2.Little focus on experience-based training. 3.Lack of individual competency-building. 4.Poor training quality of trainers as well as beneficiaries.
Participatory Method	Developed by NGOs	Adult Educators who deliver NGO based Adult Education programmes.	1.Focus on Experiential learning and people's participation. 2.Emphasised not only knowledge but also on awareness and competency building. 3.Much importance given to field-exposure and practical training. 4.Longer duration and phase-wise training.	1.Shortage of expert trainers. 2.Difficult to train large groups 3.Was able to train effectively, small groups 4.Practical training and exposure helped in competency building of individual adult educators.
Open Distance Learning Method	Adopted by State Resource Centres,	Grass-root level trainers/functionaries for state-run adult education	1.Interactive, audio-video based mobile reception system	1.Generated lot of discussion among target groups 2. Training at mass level

	National Institute of Public Cooperation and Child Development, National Institute of Open Learning, Indira Gandhi National Open University and some other Universities.	programmes, functionaries of Integrated Child Development Services, rural mother and child care centres and women members in rural local governments	at weekly markets for information dissemination 2.Socio-economic tranformation based training for implementing policies in existence at the local level in rural areas. 3.Self-learning and contact programme	
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The above methods of teaching and training only include the teaching and training of adult educators who are a part of literacy programmes, primarily run by the government and some NGOs. However, as argued earlier, adult education and its professionalization go much beyond this direct imparting of literacy education. It is important to include other professionals while we talk about Professionalization of adult education like those who teach the discipline in Universities, those who are associated with curriculum development and other teaching-learning material for adult education trainers and beneficiaries and also, those engaged in research.

Conclusion

There is a need to expand the definition of adult education in India so that more elements could be brought into the discipline and more individuals could get motivated and find opportunities to join adult education as a profession. Within adult education, there are two types of functionaries:

1. Those who are teachers, trainers, researchers and highly skilled professionals in the field of adult education. They need opportunities for life-long learning, exposure to international best practices and more funding opportunities to support their initiatives.
2. Those who are semi-skilled and are engaged in the process of training or practical work but lack appropriate competencies to address the concerns of people they need to educate. They include functionaries at the grass-root level and people involved in NGOs and government machinery because professional diplomas or degrees in adult education are not officially required for these jobs. However, their nature of work requires effective training and field exposure so that they can understand the needs of adults they educate and implement the programmes accordingly.

At present, few universities in India have adult education departments and are offering certification programmes and courses at master's level. There are opportunities for research under M.Phil and PhD programmes. However, the content and pedagogical aspects of these programmes need to be analysed for further understanding of practical situation. In the nut shell, adult education as a profession in India is at a nascent stage due to lack of attention by policy formulators to professionalize it and the overall narrow perspective of the government which views adult education as a short-term, supplementary patch work to make-up with low primary education enrollment and high school drop-out rate. Integrating the skill development initiatives with adult education may infuse a new life into the discipline as well as the profession of adult education but chances are few, owing to much detachment of adult education and skill development at the policy level and lack of motivation of different stake-holders towards adult education.

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