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From Campaign to Volunteerism How "Each One Teach One" Has Changed Across Literacy Missions in India

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ABSTRACT
"Each One Teach One" began in India as a missionary principle of personal duty and became, over eight decades, the working basis of national literacy policy. This paper asks how the position of the volunteer changed as the principle passed through successive literacy missions, and whether volunteerism weakened responsibility for adult literacy or merely redistributed it. It uses a historical-comparative design built on official documents, parliamentary answers, programme guidelines, and secondary studies. Six phases are examined: the missionary and nationalist origins (1930s–1947), state adoption through Social Education and functional literacy (1947–1977), the National Adult Education Programme (1978–1987), the campaign era of the National Literacy Mission (1988 to the 2000s), Saakshar Bharat (2009–2018), and the New India Literacy Programme, or ULLAS (2022–27). Each is read through five questions: who teaches, who recruits, who pays, how success is measured, and what ends the programme. The paper proposes a provisional typology of the volunteer that runs from moral duty through collective mobilisation and managed volunteerism to digitally mediated volunteering. It finds that the unpaid status of the volunteer was the most stable feature of the principle, while the organiser of that effort changed from sponsor to department, to district movement, to panchayat hierarchy, and finally to an application and a test. Responsibility was therefore redistributed more than abolished, but the volunteer's shared ownership of the outcome, strongest in the campaigns of 1989–91, weakened. Measures of success have remained counts of outputs that are rarely reconciled, and gender gaps, the exclusion of Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe learners, and weak retention persisted through every change of form. The evidence is strongest on programme design and weakest on results and on volunteers' own experience, and the paper identifies state case studies and oral histories as priorities for further research.

Keywords: Each One Teach One; adult literacy; volunteerism; National Literacy Mission; Total Literacy Campaign; Saakshar Bharat; New India Literacy Programme (ULLAS); India

INTRODUCTION
Few phrases in the history of Indian adult education have travelled as far as "each one teach one" (EOTO). The formula is associated with Frank C. Laubach, a Christian missionary whose literacy work among the Maranaw people of Mindanao, begun in 1930, rested on a simple obligation: every adult who learned to read was expected to volunteer time to teach another.[1] From the mid-1930s Laubach turned towards India, as missionary under colonial rule (1935–47), consultant to the Government of India after independence (1948–55), and representative of a voluntary organisation from 1956 until his death in 1970.[2] [3] Even in this one biography the slogan had begun to move from the mission field towards the state.
Nearly nine decades on, the principle is still audible in official language, but it describes a different undertaking. In February 2022 the Ministry of Education approved the New India Literacy Programme (NILP) for 2022–27, to be "implemented through volunteerism."[4] Volunteers register on a mobile application, and by May 2025 the

[1]Frank C. Laubach Papers, 1924–1952, Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Columbia University Libraries, finding aid, https://findingaids.library.columbia.edu/archives/cul-4492566.

[2]S. Y. Shah, "Laubach in India: 1935 to 1970," *The Courier* 26, no. 2 (1991): 9–23, https://core.ac.uk/download/215670712.pdf.

[3]S. Y. Shah, "Laubauch [sic] Method of Teaching Adults" (ch. 13), in *Teaching Techniques*, INFLIBNET Centre e-book series, https://ebooks.inflibnet.ac.in/aep06/chapter/120/.

[4]Government of India, Ministry of Education, Department of School Education & Literacy, "Monthly Summary for the Cabinet for the Month of February 2022," https://education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/dsel_feb22.pdf.

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Ministry reported some 41 lakh of them.[5] Mizoram, Goa and Tripura had by then been declared fully literate on a nationally prescribed benchmark of 95 per cent.[6]

Between Laubach's primers and the application lies a succession of programmes that each recalled voluntary teaching while rearranging who carried responsibility for it. A Lok Sabha answer of August 1991 conceded that the centre-based programme had a "dull, unattractive and demotivating" learning environment and announced a shift to mass campaigns "which are volunteer based, cost-effective and result-oriented."[7] The Ernakulam campaign on which that design drew needed some 50,000 volunteers simply to survey 600,000 households.[8] The volunteer was thus a campaigner in one decade, a component of a managed scheme in the next, and a registered user of a digital platform in the most recent.

This paper argues that the principle has persisted as a slogan, but that its institutional meaning has shifted in three broad steps. It began as a moral duty of the educated, carried by missionary and reformist networks; it became, in the total literacy campaigns, a method of mass mobilisation in which the community and the district administration shared ownership; and it is now a voluntary, state-coordinated and increasingly digital task. Each step altered who teaches, who is accountable for results, and what "literate" means. The Census treats a person aged seven or above who can read and write with understanding as literate, and recorded 74.04 per cent in 2011,[9] whereas the present programme declares a territory "fully literate" once 95 per cent is crossed.[10]

The scholarship supplies the groundwork but leaves this question largely untouched. Bhola's UNESCO study of eight campaigns is the standard comparative reference,[11] Boughton and Durnan note that interest in mass campaigns declined in the 1990s,[12] and Karlekar's volume evaluates the Total Literacy Campaign in six districts,[13] yet such studies are organised around a single programme. Wagner noted a "central paradox": great investment against illiteracy with remarkably little knowledge of what works.[14] EOTO is usually treated as a slogan that travels unchanged from scheme to scheme, not as a model whose structure has been repeatedly rebuilt.

Three questions guide the inquiry. How was EOTO conceived and operationalised in each phase of Indian literacy policy? How did the volunteer's role change from campaigner to participant? And what best explains the change: ideology, state capacity, funding or technology? The study uses a historical-comparative method, drawing on government documents, parliamentary records, programme guidelines and secondary studies, and puts one grid of five questions to every phase: who teaches, who recruits, who pays, how success is measured, and what ends the programme. Section 2 sets out the literature and concepts, Section 3 the sources and method, Sections 4 to 9 the six phases, Section 10 the comparison, Section 11 the discussion and Section 12 the conclusion.

2. LITERATURE AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This section surveys how the history of Indian adult education has been written, fixes the working meaning of the terms on which the argument depends, and places EOTO between two pedagogical traditions, those of Laubach and Freire.

2.1 Historiography

[5]Press Information Bureau, Delhi, "Goa Achieves Full Functional Literacy," 30 May 2025, https://dsel.education.gov.in/sites/default/files/update/PIB2132893.pdf.

[6]Press Information Bureau, Ministry of Education, "Tripura becomes third state in the country, after Mizoram and Goa, to achieve Full Functional Literacy," 23 June 2025 (copy hosted by the Department of School Education & Literacy), https://dsel.education.gov.in/sites/default/files/update/PIB2139103.pdf.

[7]India, Lok Sabha, *Debates*, Written Answers, 5 August 1991 (Sravana 14, 1913 Saka) at pp. 229–30, https://eparlib.sansad.in/bitstream/123456789/38726/1/10_I_05081991_p118_p120_t151.pdf.

[8]Richard W. Franke, "Lessons in Democracy from Kerala State, India" (Presidential Lecture, Montclair State University, 25 March 1999), section "The Total Literacy Campaign: 1989–91," https://msuweb.montclair.edu/~franker/KeralaPapers/FrankeKeralaPresidentialLecture1999.pdf.

[9]"Literacy," Know India: National Portal of India, citing *India Book 2020: A Reference Annual*, https://knowindia.india.gov.in/profile/literacy.php.

[10]PIB, "Tripura becomes third state … to achieve Full Functional Literacy," 23 June 2025 (n. 6 above).

[11]H. S. Bhola, *Campaigning for Literacy: Eight National Experiences of the Twentieth Century, with a Memorandum to Decision-Makers* (Paris: UNESCO, 1984), https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000062893.

[12]Bob Boughton and Dave Durnan, "Cuba's 'Yes, I Can' Mass Adult Literacy Campaign Model in Timor-Leste and Aboriginal Australia: A Comparative Study," *International Review of Education* 60 (2014): 559–80, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11159-014-9421-5.

[13]Malavika Karlekar, ed., *Paradigms of Learning: The Total Literacy Campaign in India* (New Delhi: Sage, 2004), description at https://www.bagchee.com/books/BB16103/paradigms-of-learning-the-total-literacy-campaign-in-india.

[14]Daniel A. Wagner, review of H. S. Bhola, *Campaigning for Literacy*, and Valerie Miller, *Between Struggle and Hope: The Nicaraguan Literacy Crusade* (University of Chicago Press, 1986), https://repository.upenn.edu/handle/20.500.14332/38604.

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The standard narrative is a succession of eras named after the dominant programme. The e-PG Pathshala course on adult education gives successive chapters to Social Education, the National Adult Education Programme (NAEP) and the Total Literacy Campaigns, and the guidelines of the NILP place Social Education, the NAEP and Saakshar Bharat in one line of descent.[15] [16] This paper adopts that periodisation but asks what happened to the volunteer inside each period. Social Education, defined by an official committee as a "course of study directed towards the production of consciousness of citizenship among the people," treated literacy as one component among several and, in Shah and Chakrabarti's account, was merged with Community Development in 1952.[17] Functional literacy, "literacy integrated with the occupation of the learner,"[18] and the NAEP followed; the review of the NAEP found that it "remained confined to literacy,"[19] and in 1991 the Government listed the faults of the centre-based approach and announced volunteer-based campaigns.[20]

The campaign phase has the richest literature: Chakrabarti's module sets out its logic,[21] Franke describes the mobilisation at Ernakulam,[22] and Karlekar offers district studies.[23] The Indian studies, however, mostly concern one campaign or district and seldom compare the volunteer's position with that under the NAEP or Saakshar Bharat. For the recent phases the literature is thinner and this paper relies mainly on official documents. Saakshar Bharat was described as a revised version of the National Literacy Mission though its delivery combined paid functionaries with voluntary teachers,[24] and the NILP is presented as a movement though its operating logic is registration through an application.

2.2 Key Concepts

Campaign, programme and mission. Chakrabarti stresses that a Total Literacy Campaign is time-bound, area-specific and committed to full coverage,[25] and Boughton likewise describes mass campaigns as mobilising "local resources, local organizers, and local facilitators."[26] A programme, by contrast, is a continuing set of centres and functionaries, as the NAEP was. Volunteerism, mobilisation and service. The United Nations defines volunteering as activity "undertaken of free will" and not driven mainly by pay, yet it records that survey respondents counted help given to a government programme or scheme as volunteering.[27] Indian literacy missions have organised voluntary effort through the state at nearly every stage, so the paper distinguishes volunteerism in the narrow sense (individual, unpaid, freely chosen), mobilisation (collective, the volunteer being one of a community of owners) and service (an individual's contribution within a structure that registers, monitors and rewards it). Literacy as skill and as empowerment. What the volunteer teaches, a skill, a consciousness or a certifiable competence, is a variable to be tracked. Table 1 combines these distinctions in a provisional typology of the volunteer, an analytical device developed for this paper.

Table 1. A provisional typology of the volunteer in Indian literacy missions (author's synthesis)

[15] S. Y. Shah and Vandana Chakrabarti, "Era of Social Education" (ch. 15), in *Adult Education in India: National and International Perspectives*, e-PG Pathshala, INFLIBNET Centre, https://ebooks.inflibnet.ac.in/aep01/chapter/era-of-social-education/.

[16] Government of India, Ministry of Education, Department of School Education & Literacy, *Guidelines: New India Literacy Programme, Financial Years 2022–27* (draft), https://dsel.education.gov.in/sites/default/files/2023-01/Draft_Guidelines_of_NILP.pdf.

[17] Shah and Chakrabarti, "Era of Social Education" (n. 15 above).

[18] Vandana Chakrabarti and S. Y. Shah, "Era of Functional Literacy" (ch. 16), in *Adult Education in India: National and International Perspectives*, e-PG Pathshala, INFLIBNET Centre, https://ebooks.inflibnet.ac.in/aep01/chapter/era-of-functional-literacy/.

[19] S. Y. Shah and Vandana Chakrabarti, "Era of National Adult Education Programme" (ch. 17), in *Adult Education in India: National and International Perspectives*, e-PG Pathshala, INFLIBNET Centre, https://ebooks.inflibnet.ac.in/aep01/chapter/era-of-national-adult-education-programme/.

[20] Lok Sabha, *Debates*, Written Answers, 5 August 1991, pp. 229–30 (n. 7 above).

[21] Vandana Chakrabarti, "Total Literacy Campaigns under National Literacy Mission, Part I" (ch. 18), in *Adult Education in India: National and International Perspectives*, e-PG Pathshala, INFLIBNET Centre, https://ebooks.inflibnet.ac.in/aep01/chapter/total-literacy-campaigns-under-national-literacy-mission-part-i.

[22] Franke, "Lessons in Democracy from Kerala State" (n. 8 above).

[23] Karlekar, ed., *Paradigms of Learning* (n. 13 above).

[24] Government of India, Department of School Education & Literacy, *Saakshar Bharat: Centrally Sponsored Scheme* at paras 1, 11, 28–29, 42, 44, https://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/sites/default/files/ressources/india_saaksharbharat.pdf.

[25] Chakrabarti, "Total Literacy Campaigns under National Literacy Mission, Part I" (n. 21 above).

[26] Bob Boughton, "Mass Literacy Campaigns: A Way Back to the Future?," *Adult Literacy Education* 5, no. 2 (2023): 20–32 at p. 21, https://www.proliteracy.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/2-Research-Article-2-2.pdf.

[27] United Nations Volunteers, *2022 State of the World's Volunteerism Report: Building Equal and Inclusive Societies* (Bonn: UNV, 2022) at pp. 16, 31, 45, https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4082931/files/UNV_SWVR_2022.pdf.

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Model	Status of the teacher	Basis of obligation	Locus of accountability
Moral duty (1930s–47)	Educated individual, often a missionary or reformer	Religious and ethical obligation	The teacher's conscience and the sponsoring body
Collective mobilisation (1988–2000s)	Community member within an organised campaign	Social movement and local ownership	Community and district machinery
Managed volunteerism (2009–18)	Volunteer teacher alongside paid coordinators	Participation in a state scheme	Samiti structure and programme hierarchy
Digitally mediated volunteering (2022–27)	Registered individual user	Civic service, with academic credit in some settings	App-based registration and reporting

2.3 Two Pedagogical Traditions

Laubach's approach was a system as much as a slogan: a one-to-one method built on a chart linking picture, letter and word, locally prepared primers, and a chain in which each new reader teaches another. In Shah's words, EOTO "uses volunteers and requires no extra funds, once the basic materials are printed."[28] Freire supplies the contrast. He characterised conventional teaching as a "banking" relation, in which "Education thus becomes an act of depositing,"[29] and proposed conscientisation, in which, as Blackburn summarises, "awareness of the 'world' is raised in the process of discovering the 'word.'"[30] The contrast should not be drawn too neatly. Franke reports that the Kerala campaign sought to "take the immediate problems in people's lives as material for literacy training,"[31] which resembles a Freirean orientation without establishing Freirean influence. The two traditions serve as reference points for what a volunteer is expected to transmit, a code or a consciousness, and not as labels for particular missions. The comparative literature also treats campaigns as state-led mobilisation that depends on an organising body and political will,[32] so a change in either should change the volunteer's role, a hypothesis and not a premise.

2.4 The Gap

The gap is structural more than empirical. Programmes have been described, campaigns evaluated and pedagogies set out, but EOTO has not been treated as a model whose structure has been rebuilt under one name. This paper takes the principle as the unit of analysis and the schemes as the contexts in which its meaning is redefined.

3. SOURCES AND METHOD

This section explains the design of the comparison, the kinds of evidence on which it rests, the grid through which each phase is read, and the limits that follow from the state of the record.

3.1 Research Design

The study uses a historical-comparative design. Its unit of analysis is the institutional form taken by EOTO in a given phase, and not the individual scheme. Six phases are compared: the missionary and nationalist origins (1930s–1947), post-independence state adoption (1947–1977), the programme era (1978–1987), the campaign peak (1988 to the 2000s), mission-mode bureaucratisation (2009–2018) and the NILP (2022–27). The periodisation follows the genealogy that official documents present, adjusted to bring the volunteer into focus. Skocpol and Somers distinguish three uses of comparative history: parallel demonstration of a theory, macro-analytic testing of causes, and the contrast of contexts.[33] The present design is chiefly of the third kind. The phases

[28]Shah, "Laubauch [sic] Method of Teaching Adults" (n. 3 above).

[29]Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos, 30th anniversary ed. (New York: Continuum, 2000), 72.

[30]James Blackburn, "Understanding Paulo Freire: Reflections on the Origins, Concepts, and Possible Pitfalls of His Educational Approach," *Community Development Journal* 35, no. 1 (2000): 3–15, https://academic.oup.com/cdj/article/35/1/3/356700.

[31]Franke, "Lessons in Democracy from Kerala State" (n. 8 above).

[32]Boughton, "Mass Literacy Campaigns", p. 22 (n. 26 above).

[33]Theda Skocpol and Margaret Somers, "The Uses of Comparative History in Macrosocial Inquiry," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 22, no. 2 (1980): 174–97, https://cambridge.org/core/journals/comparative-studies-in-society-and-history/article/uses-of-comparative-history-in-macrosocial-inquiry/CD5E420879461CBCE03A87E1AA5E84A4.

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are not independent cases, since each inherits the institutions and disappointments of the one before, so the explanatory claims in Sections 10 and 11 are reasoned interpretations and not causal tests.

3.2 Sources

Primary material comes from parliamentary answers, which show what ministers conceded at a given moment; committee and review reports; planning documents; programme guidelines and scheme documents, read as statements of design and not of practice; Census and survey data; and archival material, chiefly the Laubach papers and Nehru's and Gandhi's writings. Several documents, among them the 1939 reports and the 1980 Review Committee report, could be reached only through catalogue records or secondary accounts, and the text says so where they are cited. Secondary sources serve for evaluation (Karlekar's district studies), concepts (Section 2) and orientation (the INFLIBNET modules, used to check periodisation but not as independent evidence where a primary source exists). Press Information Bureau releases are treated as official self-reporting: they show what the Ministry announced, not what learners achieved. Encyclopaedic, commercial, coaching-institute and blog material is not used. Web sources were last consulted between 27 and 29 October 2026, and full addresses are given in the notes.

3.3 The Analytical Grid

To keep the comparison from drifting into narrative, five questions are put to every phase: who teaches, who recruits, who pays, how success is measured, and what ends the programme. Two of them change in kind across the period. On measurement the evidence moves from counts of persons taught, through enrolment and district declarations, to assessment-based certification, as in Saakshar Bharat's assessments with the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS), held twice a year with a pass mark of 40 per cent in each component.[34] On recruitment it moves from church networks, through local organisations working with district administrations, to registration on a portal.

3.4 Limits of the Evidence

Three limits qualify what the paper can claim. The first is the unevenness of state-level records: central documents are plentiful, while those of state missions and district samitis survive mainly as summaries, so the comparison leans on the Centre's account and the well-documented Kerala campaigns risk standing in for the whole. The second is the contested nature of literacy statistics. The Census definition rests on a household report and not a test; the Population Reference Bureau observes that the respondent is normally the head of household and that census literacy "may be a poor indicator of reading and comprehension levels."[35] Programmes have used enrolment counts, district declarations, certified assessment and now a 95 per cent benchmark; these are not commensurable, so the paper compares the measure each phase adopted and does not splice them into one series. The third is voice. Volunteers are read through the documents that describe them and not through interviews, and the data do not permit causal inference about learner outcomes.

4. ORIGINS: MISSIONARY AND NATIONALIST ROOTS (1930S–1947)

Before independence the principle of EOTO had two quite different carriers: a missionary movement that arrived with a ready-made method and a theology of service, and a nationalist movement that valued adult education chiefly as political awakening and that, between 1937 and 1939, controlled provincial governments able to act on it. The evidence for this phase is thinner than for any later one, and the section says where it runs out.

4.1 Laubach and the Transfer of a Method

The archival description of Laubach's papers records that he began literacy work in Mindanao in 1930, developed the concept of "Each One Teach One" to encourage every adult who learned to read to volunteer time to teach others, and organised the World Literacy Committee in 1935.[36] According to Shah, he arrived in India in January 1935 at the invitation of missionaries, among them Mason Olcott.[37] Between 1935 and 1939 he made four literacy tours, took part in some forty literacy conferences, and developed experimental primers with local workers in

[34]Government of India, Department of School Education & Literacy, "Expression of Interest: Evaluation Study of Scheme of Adult Education and Skill Development (Saakshar Bharat)," April 2017, https://education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/tenders/EoI_SB040517.pdf.

[35]Population Reference Bureau, "Examining Literacy Using India's Census," 20 October 2008, https://www.prb.org/resource/examining-literacy-using-indias-census/.

[36]Laubach Papers, Columbia University Libraries (n. 1 above).

[37]Shah, "Laubach in India", pp. 10–11 (n. 2 above).

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Marathi, Telugu, Tamil and Urdu.[38] What crossed from the Philippines was a small system: a chart linking picture, letter and word, "3 or 4 key words" identified with local people, primers of ten to twelve lessons, and a one-to-one arrangement in which "one literate volunteer teaches one illiterate person to read," needing no extra funds once the basic materials were printed.[39] The teacher was an unpaid literate individual; the recruiting body was the mission or church and not a government; and the small costs fell on the sponsor. Success was measured, so far as the surviving accounts show, by the number taught and primers produced, with no common assessment.

4.2 Missionary and Reform Networks

Laubach arrived in an existing field of voluntary effort. Patil describes pre-independence adult education as chiefly the three Rs taught in night schools.[40] Mandal observes that reform societies, "many of which also worked as catalysts for the freedom movements," played a part in the early twentieth century, yet judges that "the period 1927–47 may be marked as a period of decline in adult learning."[41] A note in Nature of October 1938 reports an appeal by the National Adult School Union for funds and records that in the Central Provinces the education minister and the university vice-chancellor had associated themselves with the Indian Adult Education Society.[42] Voluntary adult education was thus drawing on overseas philanthropy and beginning to attract the patronage of the provincial governments that Congress was about to lead.

4.3 Gandhi and the Nationalist Reframing

Gandhi's position was more ambivalent than an endorsement of mass literacy. In 1921 he wrote that "literary training by itself adds not an inch to one's moral height."[43] Shah reports that when Laubach showed him a Marathi chart in 1935 Gandhi questioned whether India should be made literate, though he later said "I do believe in literacy for India" and in 1939 wrote that he had been converted to the cause.[44] In the revised Constructive Programme of 1945 he complained that adult education had been "woefully neglected by Congressmen" and defined the work as "true political education of the adult by word of mouth."[45] This is a different volunteer from Laubach's: a political educator, for whom literacy is at best a means. The tension between literacy as a transferable skill and as civic awakening, which Section 2 set out through Laubach and Freire, thus appears in the 1930s and 1940s as a debate inside nationalism.

4.4 The Congress Ministries, 1937–39

The elections of 1937 gave Congress control of provincial education departments, and Shah reports that the Congress governments of seven provinces made the eradication of illiteracy a leading priority between 1937 and 1939.[46] Nehru singled out Bihar: "Bihar was the first in the field and gave a lead to India."[47] In April 1939 he wrote to Laubach that he was "greatly interested in the literacy movement which is gathering momentum in India," which shows that the nationalist leadership welcomed missionary expertise and understood the drive as a movement and not a standing programme.[48] The official records, the Bihar report for 1938–39 and the report of the Adult Education Committee of 1939, exist in catalogued form, but I have not been able to examine their

[38]Shah, "Laubach in India", pp. 11–12 (n. 2 above).

[39]Shah, "Laubauch [sic] Method of Teaching Adults" (n. 3 above).

[40]Asha Patil, "Concept of Adult Education in India, Part 1" (ch. 3), in *Adult Education in India: National and International Perspectives*, e-PG Pathshala, INFLIBNET Centre, https://ebooks.inflibnet.ac.in/aep01/chapter/concept-of-adult-education-in-india-part-1.

[41]Sayantan Mandal, "The Rise of Lifelong Learning and Fall of Adult Education in India," *London Review of Education* 17, no. 3 (2019): 318–30 at pp. 320–21, https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/10088179/1/s17%203h%20%281%29.pdf.

[42]"Indian Adult Education," *Nature* 142 (29 October 1938): 786, https://www.nature.com/articles/142786a0.

[43]M. K. Gandhi, *Young India*, 1 June 1921, as reproduced in *Towards New Education*, ed. Bharatan Kumarappa (Ahmedabad: Navajivan), https://www.mkgandhi.org/ebks/towards-new-education.pdf.

[44]Shah, "Laubach in India", p. 14 (n. 2 above).

[45]M. K. Gandhi, *Constructive Programme: Its Meaning and Place*, revised ed. (Poona, 13 November 1945), item 8, "Adult Education," p. 18, https://www.mkgandhi.org/ebks/construct.pdf.

[46]Shah, "Laubach in India", p. 15 (n. 2 above).

[47]Jawaharlal Nehru, "On the Success of Mass Literacy Campaigns," 14 July 1939, in *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, First Series, vol. 9, p. 353, https://nehruarchive.in/documents/on-the-success-of-mass-literacy-campaigns-14-july-1939-5e26jp.

[48]Jawaharlal Nehru to Frank C. Laubach, 18 April 1939, in *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, First Series, vol. 9, p. 646, https://nehruarchive.in/documents/to-frank-c-laubach-18-april-1939-n52ev7.

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contents, so the account of the drives is deliberately general.[49] [50] Three points can nevertheless be made. The state entered the field, so that the volunteer's effort was organised in part from above. The form of the effort was a drive, time-limited, publicly proclaimed and dependent on a political moment. And its duration was tied to the life of the sponsoring ministries, which ended in 1939.[51] That pattern, an effort that rises with a political commitment and falls with it, recurs in the campaigns of the 1990s.

4.5 The Model Type: Moral Duty and Voluntary Service

Applied to this phase, the grid yields an unpaid teacher drawn from the literate; recruitment through mission bodies, churches and, after 1937, provincial ministries and the Congress organisation; costs met by sponsors; success read from numbers taught; and drives that ended with a tour or a ministry. The label "moral-religious duty, charity-based and voluntary" fits the missionary strand without difficulty and the nationalist strand more loosely, since there the duty was civic and political and a state sponsor was added to the voluntary base. The phase shows in embryo each variable the later sections follow, though no change in literacy can be attributed to these drives. 5. Post-Independence State Adoption (1947–1977)

Independence changed who the sponsor of literacy work could be. The new central government kept the aspiration and replaced the structure: between 1947 and 1977 the volunteer was not abolished but was largely displaced by paid teachers, officials and project staff, with one notable exception in Maharashtra.

5.1 From Literacy to Social Education

The inheritance was heavy: the Ministry's guidelines record that "at the time of Independence in 1947, 86% of India's population was illiterate."[52] The first systematic response did not make literacy its main object. The Saxena Committee's recommendations were accepted in January 1949, with a target of 50 per cent literacy among those aged twelve to forty-five by the end of the First Plan, but the scheme that carried them, Social Education, was defined as a course "directed towards the production of consciousness of citizenship among the people," and literacy was one component among health, vocations, recreation and cultural activities.[53] The missionary method had put the burden of teaching on the newly literate and asked nothing of the state; Social Education put it on the state's own staff. Primary school teachers taught in the centres for a monthly honorarium of Rs 10, and Laubach's proposal of 1950 for an All India Literacy Campaign was shelved for want of funds.[54] In 1952 the scheme was merged with the Community Development Programme, so that the delivery agent became the block-level official. Shah and Chakrabarti record that Social Education Officers were "overloaded with multifarious responsibilities" and that the programme "remained basically a centre based programme" that "did not develop into a popular movement."[55] The Education Commission's findings, as Deshmukh reports them, were severe: the number of illiterates had risen by about 36 million between 1951 and 1961 and by about 20 million between 1961 and 1966, and "a massive and direct attack on mass literacy is necessary."[56] The report has not been consulted directly, so these statements are given as reported.[57]

5.2 The Gram Shikshan Mohim: A Campaign Before the Campaigns

The striking exception is the Gram Shikshan Mohim (village education campaign) of Maharashtra, which Shah and Chakrabarti call the first successful literacy campaign in independent India. Launched in the late 1950s under B. R. Patil, it spread across the state in the 1960s, and literacy in Maharashtra rose from 29.82 per cent in 1961 to 39.18 per cent in 1971, against national figures of 24.02 and 29.45 per cent, a contrast that cannot by itself show

[49]Department of Education, Government of Bihar, *Report on the Progress of Education in Bihar for the Year 1938–39* (Patna: Superintendent, Government Printing, 1940), GIPE Digitised Books, https://dspace.gipe.ac.in/xmlui/handle/10973/47429.

[50]Government of India, Adult Education Committee, *Report of the Adult Education Committee of the Central Advisory Board of Education, 1939* (Delhi: Government of India Press, 1940), catalogue record at https://icvtesting.nvli.in/reports-proceedings/report-adult-education-committee-central-advisory-board-education-1939.

[51]Shah, "Laubach in India", p. 15 (n. 2 above).

[52]Government of India, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Department of School Education & Literacy, *Guidelines on Padhna Likhna Abhiyan (Scheme of Adult Education)* (New Delhi, May 2020) at p. 1, https://dae.education.gov.in/files/pla-guidelines.pdf.

[53]Shah and Chakrabarti, "Era of Social Education" (n. 15 above).

[54]Shah and Chakrabarti, "Era of Social Education" (n. 15 above).

[55]Shah and Chakrabarti, "Era of Social Education" (n. 15 above).

[56]C. D. Deshmukh, *Free but Fettered: The Illiterate Citizen*, Fifth A. D. Shroff Memorial Lecture, delivered 27 October 1970 (Bombay: Forum of Free Enterprise, 1970) at pp. 16, 18, https://archive.indianliberals.in/forum-of-free-enterprise/free-but-fettered-the-illiterate-citizen-dr-c-d-deshmukh-november-12-1970.pdf.

[57]Education Commission (1964–66), *Report of the Education Commission, 1964–66: Education and National Development* (New Delhi: Ministry of Education, 1966), https://cprindia.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Kothari-Commission-Report-Education-and-National-Development-Report-of-the-education-Commission-1964-66.pdf.

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that the campaign caused the difference.[58] It anticipated features the National Literacy Mission would later generalise: a village as the unit of action, a limited period, and the enlistment of local people in teaching. Its method cannot be reconstructed with confidence, because only the catalogue entry of the Planning Commission's field study of 1964 has been consulted.[59] The sources also disagree on scale: Shah and Chakrabarti put the number made literate at about ten million, whereas Deshmukh cites a claim of some thirty lakh at about one rupee a head and adds that "the follow-up has not been satisfactory."[60] [61] Two points are secure: the campaign was successful enough to be treated as a model, and its weakness lay where later campaigns would show theirs, in the follow-up.

5.3 Functional Literacy and the Professionalised Teacher

The turn to functional literacy in the later 1960s changed the volunteer's role in another direction. The Farmers' Training and Functional Literacy Project of 1967–68 aimed to reach one million adults, and was staffed and hierarchical, with one instructor for thirty learners, a project officer in each district and supervisors at a fixed ratio to centres.[62] The teacher was a functionary within a project, not a neighbour who had learned to read. A pilot evaluation found that the project "did contribute to increase in agricultural production," but targets were not met, a committee of 1977 found "inter-departmental coordination" deficient, and most beneficiaries were well-off farmers while marginal farmers and landless labourers were left outside its scope.[63] Success was now measured against an economic outcome, and the beneficiaries were those best placed to use what they learned, an early instance of the continuity of exclusion that Section 10 examines. The Functional Literacy for Adult Women programme of 1975–76 was run by Anganwadi workers who received an extra Rs 50 a month,[64] so the teacher was again a stipended state worker, which distinguishes the phase sharply from Laubach's unpaid chain.

5.4 The Model Type: State-Sponsored and Institutionalised

The phase is best described as state-sponsored and institutionalised, with volunteers supplemented, and in practice often replaced, by paid instructors. Teaching passed from the individual to the state; accountability moved upward to the ministry and the project officer; and the measure of success began to shift from enrolment towards outcomes, though the instruments remained crude. The National Adult Education Programme of 1978 extended this institutionalisation across the country.

6. PROGRAMME ERA (1978–1987): THE NATIONAL ADULT EDUCATION PROGRAMME

The National Adult Education Programme (NAEP) was the first attempt to carry adult literacy to the whole country through a single administrative design. It is the high point of the centre-based, functionary-staffed model, and the programme whose failings the National Literacy Mission of 1988 was drafted to correct. For a study of the volunteer its interest lies in three kinds of teacher: the stipended instructor, the student volunteer and the worker of a voluntary agency.

6.1 Launch and Design

The NAEP was launched on 2 October 1978 to educate 100 million non-literate adults aged fifteen to thirty-five over five years, and the Ministry's later guidelines call it the "first nationwide literacy programme taken up at macro level."[65] Centres of twenty-five to thirty learners were taught by instructors drawn from school teachers, students, village youth, ex-servicemen and voluntary social workers; a supervisor looked after about thirty centres; and ninety-three universities were reported to have received funds in the 1980s.[66] A doctoral study of 1985 describes a "multiplicity of agencies," among them state governments, voluntary agencies, Nehru Yuvak Kendras and universities, and records a Sixth Plan outlay of Rs 200 crore.[67] The model was plural, but only administratively: it spread a centre-based programme across several channels without altering its logic.

6.2 Students, Voluntary Agencies and Mobilisation

[58]Shah and Chakrabarti, "Era of Social Education" (n. 15 above).

[59]Planning Commission, Government of India, Education Division, *Report on Gram Shikshan Mohim of Maharashtra* (New Delhi, 1965; fieldwork 8–20 April 1964), NITI Aayog Digital Library, https://digitallibrary.niti.gov.in/items/857fe58a-d8ef-4fae-a240-5ccf3f77503c.

[60]Shah and Chakrabarti, "Era of Social Education" (n. 15 above).

[61]Deshmukh, *Free but Fettered*, p. 23 (n. 56 above).

[62]Chakrabarti and Shah, "Era of Functional Literacy" (n. 18 above).

[63]Chakrabarti and Shah, "Era of Functional Literacy" (n. 18 above).

[64]Chakrabarti and Shah, "Era of Functional Literacy" (n. 18 above).

[65]*Guidelines on Padhna Likhna Abhiyan*, p. 2 (n. 52 above).

[66]Shah and Chakrabarti, "Era of National Adult Education Programme" (n. 19 above).

[67]I. Ramabrahmam, "Implementation of National Adult Education Programme: Role of Voluntary Agencies" (PhD thesis, University of Hyderabad, 1985) at ch. I, https://igmlnet.uohyd.ac.in/docs/hi-res/hcu_images/TH1357.pdf.

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The volunteer entered in two places. A university workshop report of 1978 called students "the real instructors" and National Service Scheme students "change agents," yet warned that it was "questionable" to assume that every educated person is fit to teach adults.[68] Government grants to voluntary agencies rose from Rs 46.39 lakh in 1977–78 to Rs 156.75 lakh in 1978–79.[69] Organised political mobilisation, however, was kept at arm's length: the Government stated in 1978 and 1980 that political parties and their mass organisations were not eligible for assistance to voluntary agencies, though they might "play an important role in the creation of an environment."[70] [71] In the campaigns of 1989 and after, a district administration, a people's science movement and many teachers and students shared the work, as Section 7 shows. In the programme era the volunteer was welcome as an individual or an agency worker, but not as a member of a movement.

6.3 Critiques: Top-Down Delivery, Weak Mobilisation, Dropout

Official verdicts came from the state itself. A committee under D. S. Kothari was appointed in January 1980 to review the programme "in all its aspects,"[72] and Shah and Chakrabarti report that the programme "remained confined to literacy," with a superficial development orientation and a weak functional aspect.[73] The report itself has not been read for this paper.[74] The most revealing statement is the Government's own in August 1991, describing a centre-based programme for 100 million adults, evidently the NAEP, that suffered from a "dull, unattractive and demotivating" environment, improper selection of staff, poor training, a faulty management system, irregular attendance, and an emphasis on enrolment over attainment.[75] Top-down delivery thus appears as faulty management and staffing; weak mobilisation is addressed by the later Mission's premise that social mobilisation was a task "for which the Government was ill-equipped";[76] and dropout shows in the complaint of irregular attendance, although the sources give no numerical dropout rate and the Planning Commission's evaluation of the rural functional literacy programme has been identified only through its catalogue entry.[77] The Mission's rationale called the NAEP "primarily a Government funded, Government controlled, centre-based and honorarium based programme."[78] Each adjective marks a difference from the volunteer chain with which this paper began.

6.4 The Student Turn and the Model Type

In 1986 the programme was supplemented by the Rural Functional Literacy Project and the Mass Programme of Functional Literacy, which involved National Service Scheme and other college students.[79] The call on students was an admission that the staffed centre could not carry the programme alone, though the sources describe the Mass Programme only as a centre-based drive with student support. The model of the phase is an institutionalised programme with a volunteer fringe: the teacher is an instructor or a student helper; recruitment runs through project officers, supervisors, states and agencies; central funds and grants pay; success is enrolment and course completion; and the programme ended in the replacement of centres by campaigns after 1988. Responsibility moved upward to administrators and was diluted at the base, where no community or political body owned the outcome, the condition the campaigns set out to reverse.

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[68]Rajammal P. Devadas, *Planning and Programming Adult Education: Report of the Workshop of Principals on the University's Participation in the National Adult Education Programme* (Madras: University of Madras, 1978) at chs. III, V, https://ir.avinuty.ac.in/bitstreams/2fcdec18-5b6c-4779-bcac-c775eb277c03/download.

[69]India, Lok Sabha, *Debates*, Written Answers, Phalguna 27, 1901 (Saka) [17 March 1980], Question no. 838, https://eparlib.nic.in/bitstream/123456789/2656050/1/07_II_17-03-1980_p133_p133_u838.pdf.

[70]India, Lok Sabha, *Debates*, 20 November 1978, Starred Question no. 161, "Adult Education Programmes," https://eparlib.nic.in/bitstream/123456789/2623751/1/06_VI_20-11-1978_p146_p146_u161.pdf.

[71]India, Lok Sabha, *Debates*, Written Answers, Jyaistha 19, 1902 (Saka) [c. June 1980], Question no. 108, "Eligibility for Financial Assistance in Adult Education Programme," https://eparlib.nic.in/bitstream/123456789/2408655/1/07_III_09-06-1980_p117_p118_u108.pdf.

[72]Lok Sabha, Question no. 838, 17 March 1980 (n. 69 above).

[73]Shah and Chakrabarti, "Era of National Adult Education Programme" (n. 19 above).

[74]Ministry of Education and Culture, Government of India, *Report of the Review Committee on the National Adult Education Programme* (New Delhi, 1980), catalogue record at https://catalog.cssscal.org/Record/csssc.22041/Details.

[75]Lok Sabha, *Debates*, Written Answers, 5 August 1991, pp. 229–30 (n. 7 above).

[76]Chakrabarti, "Total Literacy Campaigns under National Literacy Mission, Part I" (n. 21 above).

[77]Planning Commission, Programme Evaluation Organisation, *Study of Rural Functional Literacy Programme* (New Delhi, 1991; study undertaken 1985–86), NITI Aayog Digital Library, https://digitallibrary.niti.gov.in/items/e27ac586-3a4f-46ab-bb27-9c322f1d36cd.

[78]Chakrabarti, "Total Literacy Campaigns under National Literacy Mission, Part I" (n. 21 above).

[79]*Guidelines on Padhna Likhna Abhiyan*, p. 2 (n. 52 above).

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7. THE CAMPAIGN PEAK (1988–2000S): THE NATIONAL LITERACY MISSION

The National Literacy Mission, launched in 1988, is the phase in which EOTO came closest to being a social movement. It is also the phase on which most of the literature concentrates, and where the gap between achievement and its measurement is widest.

7.1 The Mission and the Campaign Idea

The Mission was launched on 5 May 1988 by Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi as one of five Technology Missions, with targets of 30 million persons made functionally literate by 1990 and a further 50 million by 1995.[80] Its design rested on a diagnosis of the earlier programme: demand for literacy had to precede delivery, and such demand would come from social mobilisation, a task for which government was poorly equipped and which should be entrusted to an experienced non-governmental organisation, where there was political will.[81] The Government told Parliament in 1991 that it would take up campaigns "in as many districts/states as possible."[82] A campaign covered a chosen area, usually a district, "cent percent." Its Zilla Saksharta Samiti was headed by the Collector and included officers of several departments and NGO representatives; volunteer instructors were trained by master trainers; full-time coordinators were seconded at district, block and village levels; learners worked through three primers; and a declaration ceremony closed the campaign.[83] No earlier phase had combined an official structure, a volunteer base and a public ritual of completion.

7.2 Ernakulam and Kerala

The model drew its confidence from Kerala. The Ernakulam campaign, "Lead Kindly Light," was a joint initiative of the district administration and the Kerala Sastra Sahitya Parishad (KSSP), the state's people's science movement, with the idea attributed to the Collector, K. R. Rajan, and it was launched on 26 January 1989.[84] Franke describes five jathas, or marches, converging on Ernakulam, where volunteers took a pledge to "arm the toiling and suffering millions with the weapon of the letter." The campaign needed some 50,000 volunteers to survey 600,000 households in a single day and mobilised nearly 22,000 volunteer teachers, and most learners were women from the lowest castes and classes. Ernakulam was declared on 4 February 1990, and after the campaign reached the other thirteen districts Kerala was declared the first state to attain total literacy.[85] The numbers, however, do not agree. One account records 161,091 enrolled learners; Franke puts the illiterates identified at 174,000, of whom 135,000 passed; Pillai gives 161,000 identified and more than 2,000 educated young people recruited as volunteers, against Franke's nearly 22,000 volunteer teachers.[86] [87] [88] These probably reflect different counting points and definitions of a volunteer, but they show why declarations of total literacy are treated here as claims to be examined and not as findings.

7.3 The Volunteer as Campaigner

The volunteer in this model is unpaid, usually young or educated, recruited through a public spectacle and a pledge, trained through a cascade of workshops, and engaged in a time-limited drive with a visible end. The motive was civic and patriotic, the reward was recognition at the declaration, and the campaign was cheap, with learners made literate, Franke reports, for less than US$26 each.[89] Accountability was public and local. Teachers and students are well attested in Kerala, and the district administration and a voluntary movement are attested as joint owners at Ernakulam. The role of political parties is another matter: the one detailed account that touches on them, a 1994 interview with a Pondicherry literacy leader, reports hostile parties and four days of attack on the movement in the legislative assembly in March 1992.[90] The interview is partisan and concerns one small territory,

[80]Chakrabarti, "Total Literacy Campaigns under National Literacy Mission, Part I" (n. 21 above).

[81]Chakrabarti, "Total Literacy Campaigns under National Literacy Mission, Part I" (n. 21 above).

[82]Lok Sabha, *Debates*, Written Answers, 5 August 1991, p. 230 (n. 7 above).

[83]Chakrabarti, "Total Literacy Campaigns under National Literacy Mission, Part I" (n. 21 above).

[84]Chakrabarti, "Total Literacy Campaigns under National Literacy Mission, Part I" (n. 21 above).

[85]Franke, "Lessons in Democracy from Kerala State" (n. 8 above).

[86]Chakrabarti, "Total Literacy Campaigns under National Literacy Mission, Part I" (n. 21 above).

[87]Franke, "Lessons in Democracy from Kerala State" (n. 8 above).

[88]K. Sivadasan Pillai, "KANFED and the Adult Education Scene in Kerala," *Adult Education and Development* 60 (2003), DVV International, https://www.dvv-international.de/index.php?L=1&id=942.

[89]Franke, "Lessons in Democracy from Kerala State" (n. 8 above).

[90]"'It Is Difficult to Sustain a One-Point Literacy Programme'" (interview with a Pondicherry literacy-movement leader, reported by Rustam Vania), *Down to Earth*, 15 July 1994, https://www.downtoearth.org.in/interviews/it-is-difficult-to-sustain-a-onepoint-literacy-programme-32140.

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but it suggests that parties could be adversaries as easily as co-owners, and the paper treats their role as unestablished.

7.4 Extension, Strain and Fatigue

The approach spread quickly. By 2007 the Mission's achievements were summed up as 597 districts covered under the campaign, 485 under post-literacy and 328 under continuing education, with about 127 million reported made literate, 60 per cent of them women.[91] The strains showed early. The Pondicherry speaker described a movement "taken over from the voluntary bodies" once it won recognition and argued that "it is very difficult to sustain a one-point programme."[92] Ramachandran writes that the mission "lost in 1993 the momentum it had gathered from 1989 to 1992," and, citing studies in three districts, that not much literacy resulted beyond the ability to sign one's name.[93] The later stages proved harder: Pillai notes relapse into illiteracy after the Kerala campaign, the Pondicherry speaker reports under 20 per cent of post-literacy funds released by the deadline, and Ramachandran concludes that continuing education largely failed.[94] [95] [96] When the Mission was recast as Saakshar Bharat, the scheme document recorded that the movement had lost momentum and listed limited involvement of state governments, weak management and supervision, lack of community participation, poor monitoring and inadequate funding.[97] The evidence points to state capacity and funding as the weightier explanations, with ideology as the force that gave the early campaigns their energy.

7.5 The Model Type: Collective Mobilisation

The outline's description of the phase as collective mobilisation is borne out by the Kerala evidence, and it is the nearest the principle came to the mass duty Laubach imagined, now organised through a district machinery and a people's movement and not a church. The evidence also shows its fragility. The volunteer's role was strongest where a voluntary movement supplied the organisation and the administration the legitimacy, and weakest when the design was repeated nationally, when officials displaced the movement, and when follow-up depended on funds that did not arrive. The state's response to this fatigue was not to return to the movement but to build a managerial structure around the volunteer.

8. MISSION MODE AND BUREAUCRATISATION (2009–2018)

By the first decade of the twenty-first century the Ministry's own review described the literacy movement as having lost its momentum. The response was not to revive the campaign but to recast the Mission as a scheme, Saakshar Bharat, that placed samitis, centres and contract coordinators around the volunteer teacher. The label for this phase, managed volunteerism, is apt.

8.1 From Mission to Scheme

Saakshar Bharat was launched by the Prime Minister on International Literacy Day, 8 September 2009, as the revised version of the National Literacy Mission.[98] [99] Its principal target was functional literacy for 70 million adults aged fifteen and above, 60 million of them women, and its first phase was limited to districts where adult female literacy was 50 per cent or less in the Census of 2001, together with thirty-three districts affected by left-wing extremism.[100] By 2017 the Department reported 404 of 410 eligible districts covered.[101] The scheme was centrally sponsored, with costs shared 75:25 between the Centre and States, or 90:10 for the north-eastern states, and an outlay of Rs 6,502.70 crore for the last three years of the Eleventh Plan.[102]

8.2 The Architecture of Managed Volunteerism

[91] *Saakshar Bharat: Centrally Sponsored Scheme* (n. 24 above).

[92] "It Is Difficult to Sustain a One-Point Literacy Programme," *Down to Earth* (n. 90 above).

[93] Vimala Ramachandran, "Adult Education: A Tale of Empowerment Denied," eSocialSciences Working Paper no. 1630 (2008), https://ideas.repec.org/p/ess/wpaper/id1630.html.

[94] Pillai, "KANFED and the Adult Education Scene in Kerala" (n. 88 above).

[95] "It Is Difficult to Sustain a One-Point Literacy Programme," *Down to Earth* (n. 90 above).

[96] Ramachandran, "Adult Education: A Tale of Empowerment Denied" (n. 93 above).

[97] *Saakshar Bharat: Centrally Sponsored Scheme* (n. 24 above).

[98] *Saakshar Bharat: Centrally Sponsored Scheme*, paras 1, 11 (n. 24 above).

[99] "Expression of Interest: Evaluation Study of Saakshar Bharat", p. 5 (n. 34 above).

[100] *Saakshar Bharat: Centrally Sponsored Scheme*, paras 13, 19 (n. 24 above).

[101] "Expression of Interest: Evaluation Study of Saakshar Bharat", p. 6 (n. 34 above).

[102] *Saakshar Bharat: Centrally Sponsored Scheme*, para 86 (n. 24 above).

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The design placed three kinds of person in relation to one another. At the base was the Volunteer Teacher, unpaid and expected to teach eight to ten learners; the scheme document states that voluntary literacy educators "are not paid any remuneration," though it allows honoraria from other sources.[103] Above the volunteer stood the Prerak. Each Adult Education Centre, one per gram panchayat of about 5,000 population, was to be run by two contract Preraks, at least one a woman, who organised the centre's work and also taught.[104] Above both stood the samitis. The Panchayat Lok Shiksha Samiti, chaired by the gram panchayat president, with at least half its members women, identified learners and volunteer teachers and managed evaluation, and was nested within block and district samitis chaired by the corresponding panchayat heads.[105]

The Department's notice of 2017 for an evaluation study reports about 1.57 lakh centres, more than 2.82 lakh Preraks trained, and "44.45 lakh volunteer teachers" mobilised and trained.[106] In Assam there were 3,618 Preraks and 98,432 voluntary teachers, with "no provision of remuneration for Voluntary Teachers";[107] for every paid Prerak there were roughly twenty-seven volunteers. Responsibility moved from the community that had owned the campaigns to a hierarchy of local-government bodies that managed them.

8.3 The Reduced Role of the Mass Campaign

The scheme document did not abandon the campaign. It called the volunteer-based mass campaign "the dominant strategy" and envisaged environment-building events.[108] Yet the machinery it set up was that of a continuing centre. Learners were registered at a centre, matched with volunteers, taught in batches and assessed on a schedule, with registration, batching and mobilisation as routine tasks of the Preraks.[109] None of the official documents consulted describes a campaign of the Ernakulam type, with a public pledge, a district-wide survey and a declaration, as the working method; a media campaign and annual awards appear instead.[110] Local events certainly occurred, but the campaign had been demoted from the governing form of the programme to one component of a managed scheme.

8.4 Reporting, Certification and the Measure of Success

Success was now measured by certification. Testing was to follow a state-devised system, with certificates co-signed by a head teacher and the panchayat head and the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) responsible for equivalency.[111] By 2017 assessment had been placed with the NIOS twice a year, and the Department reported about 9.10 crore learners enrolled by October 2016, with 5.88 crore, of whom 4.15 crore were women, declared literate by August 2016.[112] In Assam 655,876 of 984,346 enrolled learners had been certified, though the presentation's year-wise table does not reconcile with its totals: these are administrative counts, not audited figures.[113]

The annual Saakshar Bharat Awards show how reporting was formalised: samitis submitted forms on the method of identifying volunteer teachers and the problems they faced.[114] [115] Independent studies are more sober. A study of ten villages in Uttarakhand found irregular attendance and drop-out to be main problems and a "lack of enough

[103] *Saakshar Bharat: Centrally Sponsored Scheme*, paras 28–29 (n. 24 above).

[104] *Saakshar Bharat: Centrally Sponsored Scheme*, paras 42, 44 (n. 24 above).

[105] *Saakshar Bharat: Centrally Sponsored Scheme*, Annexure I, pp. 33–35 (n. 24 above).

[106] "Expression of Interest: Evaluation Study of Saakshar Bharat", p. 7 (n. 34 above).

[107] Directorate of Non-Formal and Adult Education, Government of Assam, presentation for the 8th Executive Committee Meeting on the Saakshar Bharat Mission (data as of April 2017), https://directoradulteducation.assam.gov.in/sites/default/files/swf_utility_folder/departments/dnfae_sed_uneecopscloud_com_oid_4/do_u_want_2_know/Revised_8TH_EXECUTIVE_COMMITTEE__MEETING__OF.pdf.

[108] *Saakshar Bharat: Centrally Sponsored Scheme*, paras 22–23, 27 (n. 24 above).

[109] *Saakshar Bharat: Centrally Sponsored Scheme*, paras 41, 44 (n. 24 above).

[110] India, Lok Sabha, *Debates*, Unstarred Question no. 4331, "National Literacy Mission," 12 December 2016, https://eparlib.nic.in/bitstream/123456789/693406/1/45197.pdf.

[111] *Saakshar Bharat: Centrally Sponsored Scheme*, paras 57–58 (n. 24 above).

[112] "Expression of Interest: Evaluation Study of Saakshar Bharat", p. 7 (n. 34 above).

[113] Directorate of Non-Formal and Adult Education, Assam, presentation (n. 107 above).

[114] Ministry of Human Resource Development, "Saakshar Bharat Awards 2017: Application Form for Gram Lok Shiksha Samiti," https://www.sndt.ac.in/caee/downloads/2017/sba-17-form-for-glss.pdf.

[115] Ministry of Human Resource Development, "Saakshar Bharat Awards 2016: Application Form for Zilla Lok Shiksha Samiti," https://sndt.ac.in/caee/downloads/2017/sba-17-form-for-zlss.pdf.

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appreciation and recognition for learners and functionaries," though it rests on perceptions.[116] An economics thesis using a regression discontinuity design finds that eligibility raised female literacy in eligible districts by about three percentage points, with an unintended rise in sex ratios at birth.[117] That is more cautious than the administrative counts, but it is an honours thesis whose claims need testing in the peer-reviewed literature.

8.5 Funds, Fatigue and Closure

The Ministry told the Lok Sabha in 2016 that a review in 2013 by three Indian Institutes of Management had found the programme "received well across the States" but had identified weak monitoring and an "inconsistent flow of funds."[118] The central share released to states fell from Rs 34,634.73 lakh in 2014–15 to Rs 20,689.10 lakh in 2016–17.[119] The scheme was first set to run to March 2012,[120] and the Ministry's later guidelines record "an interim extension till 31st March 2018."[121] As in the campaigns, the volunteer base proved more durable than the funds and supervision above it.

8.6 The Model Type: Managed Volunteerism

Responsibility is distributed across a hierarchy: the volunteer teaches, the Prerak organises, the samiti manages and reports, and the state funds and certifies. Accountability is upward and statistical, in contrast with the public, local accountability of the campaign declaration. The programme extended the volunteer principle very widely, to some forty-four lakh persons by the Department's count, while changing its character. The next phase carries the managerial logic a step further and replaces the samiti and the centre with a registration portal.

9. CONTEMPORARY PHASE: NEW INDIA LITERACY PROGRAMME (2022–27)

The last phase is still under way and differs from the others in what sits at the centre of the design. Saakshar Bharat built an administrative ladder around the volunteer. The New India Literacy Programme (NILP), publicly branded ULLAS, has taken most of that ladder away and put a software platform in its place. Because the programme runs to March 2027, every judgment here is provisional.

9.1 After Saakshar Bharat

The transition was not seamless. The Ministry's guidelines of 2020 record that Saakshar Bharat received "an interim extension till 31st March 2018."[122] The Padhna Likhna Abhiyan that followed set a target of 55 lakh adults within the single year 2020–21, repeated the rule that voluntary educators "are not paid any remuneration," and moved assessment to the NIOS.[123] That it was a bridge to the NILP is my inference, not a statement in the sources.

9.2 Aims, Scale and Money

The NILP began on 1 April 2022 and runs for five years. Its target is "5.00 crore non-literates of 15 years and above age group in five years," or about one crore a year,[124] across foundational literacy and numeracy, critical life skills, basic education, vocational skills and continuing education, and the Ministry frames volunteer participation as "DUTY or Kartavyabodh."[125] The outlay is Rs 1,037.90 crore, of which Rs 700 crore is Central, shared 60:40 between the Centre and States, or 90:10 for the north-eastern and Himalayan states.[126] On the declared target this is roughly Rs 208 a learner, too little for a paid cadre of the Saakshar Bharat kind. Delivery is

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[116] S. B. Joshi and N. S. Bohra, "Measuring Effectiveness of Adult Literacy Program in India," *Journal of Graphic Era University* 7, no. 2 (2019): 159–69 at pp. 165, 168, https://journal.riverpublishers.com/index.php/JGEU/article/download/62/93/185.

[117] Nikhil Shankar, "Adult Education and Missing Women: Evidence from India's Saakshar Bharat Literacy Program" (honours thesis, Department of Economics, Stanford University, 2020/21), https://purl.stanford.edu/ht235kp9815.

[118] India, Lok Sabha, *Debates*, Unstarred Question no. 126, "National Literacy Mission," 18 July 2016, https://eparlib.nic.in/bitstream/123456789/682821/1/35647.pdf.

[119] India, Lok Sabha, *Debates*, Unstarred Question no. 2573, "Sakshar Bharat Abhiyan," 12 March 2018, https://eparlib.sansad.in/bitstream/123456789/772084/1/AU2573.pdf.

[120] *Saakshar Bharat: Centrally Sponsored Scheme*, para 90 (n. 24 above).

[121] *Guidelines on Padhna Likhna Abhiyan*, p. 2, para 1.2.9 (n. 52 above).

[122] *Guidelines on Padhna Likhna Abhiyan*, p. 2, para 1.2.9 (n. 52 above).

[123] *Guidelines on Padhna Likhna Abhiyan*, pp. 3–5, 27, 32 (n. 52 above).

[124] Ministry of Education, *Guidelines: New India Literacy Programme* (draft), para 3.1, p. 13 (n. 16 above).

[125] Department of School Education & Literacy, Ministry of Education, "ULLAS – Nav Bharat Saaksharta Karyakram" (content note, revised, 13 May), https://DSEL.EDUCATION.GOV.IN/sites/default/files/update/ULLAS%20-%20content%20for%20DoSEL%20-%2013%20May%20-%20Revised.pdf.

[126] Ministry of Education, *Guidelines: New India Literacy Programme* (draft), para 13, pp. 60–61 (n. 16 above).

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"in a hybrid mode, allowing States/UTs the flexibility to adopt offline or online mode," at Samajik Chetna Kendras such as schools or Panchayat Bhavans.[127]

9.3 The Digital Volunteer

The guidelines state the rule on payment without qualification: volunteers "will not be paid any salary/monthly honorarium for their services."[128] The pool is wide, taking in school students of Class V and above, trainee teachers, members of the National Service Scheme and National Cadet Corps, Anganwadi workers and teachers; a Volunteer Teacher needs at least a Class VIII education, and registration on the portal is mandatory.[129] The structure is thin beside the three tiers of Saakshar Bharat: the Lok Shiksha Samiti is not mentioned, I could not identify a paid Prerak among the functionaries described, and the school has become the main local institution.[130] Surveyors identify learners and volunteers door to door, but individuals may also register through the application, and a learner is then "tagged" to a volunteer by software, with a default ratio of one volunteer to ten learners.[131] The guidelines even list "Each One Teach One" among the teaching options on the platform, so the old slogan survives as a menu item.[132] The incentive is academic: Parliament was told that three national bodies, the University Grants Commission, the All India Council for Technical Education and the National Council for Teacher Education, offer credits to ULLAS volunteers.[133] The reward is an academic currency, which links the principle to the student cohort that the programme era had used on its fringe.

9.4 Counting Success

Success is now defined by a test. The Foundational Literacy and Numeracy Assessment Test (FLNAT) is held in schools twice a year with the NIOS; reading, writing and numeracy carry fifty marks each, a learner needs at least 33 per cent in every skill.[134] By 2 December 2024 the Minister of State reported "over 1.6 crore learners and more than 38 lakh volunteer teachers" registered, with more than a crore having appeared in the FLNAT.[135] On 3 February 2025 the Ministry gave 1,10,69,400 learners as registered and appeared, and an annexure listed 96,10,923 as certified, a pass rate of about 87 per cent on the Ministry's own figures.[136] Three observations follow. Registration, at 1.6 crore, stood at about a third of the five-crore target after more than two and a half years. The ratio of registered learners to registered volunteers, a little over four to one, is well below the default of ten, so the volunteer register is large relative to the learners it serves, though the sources report registration and not activity. And certification was concentrated: Madhya Pradesh accounted for 43,48,028 of the certified and, with Rajasthan and Tamil Nadu, about 77 per cent of the total, while seven States and Union Territories were shown with none, which the answer does not explain.[137]

A further layer of counting concerns places and not persons. In June 2025 the Ministry announced Tripura as the third state, after Mizoram and Goa, to meet the "nationally prescribed benchmark of 95% literacy among individuals aged 15 years and above," at 95.6 per cent.[138] The releases do not set out how the percentage is arrived at or verified; the declaration is a statement about a rate, not a count of learners who passed.

9.5 The Model Type: Digitally Mediated Volunteering

The profile supports the fourth type in Table 1. The volunteer is recruited by a platform and matched by an algorithm; responsibility is carried by the individual and the school; the state runs the platform, schedules the test and certifies the outcome; and the incentive is academic credit, which turns moral duty into something recorded in a transcript. Two continuities should be noted: payment to the teacher is withheld in principle, as under Saakshar Bharat, and the measure of success is still a count. What the programme has dropped is any organised body

[127]India, Lok Sabha, Unstarred Question no. 948, "New India Literacy Programme," answered 2 December 2024, https://eparlib.sansad.in/bitstream/123456789/2983765/1/AU948_NMFlHq.pdf.

[128]Ministry of Education, *Guidelines: New India Literacy Programme* (draft), para 7, p. 24 (n. 16 above).

[129]Ministry of Education, *Guidelines: New India Literacy Programme* (draft), paras 7.1, 7.1.1, pp. 24–25 (n. 16 above).

[130]Ministry of Education, *Guidelines: New India Literacy Programme* (draft), paras 7.4, 7.5, p. 27 (n. 16 above).

[131]Ministry of Education, *Guidelines: New India Literacy Programme* (draft), paras 7.2.2, 7.3, pp. 25–27 (n. 16 above).

[132]Ministry of Education, *Guidelines: New India Literacy Programme* (draft), p. 39 (n. 16 above).

[133]Lok Sabha, Unstarred Question no. 948, 2 December 2024 (n. 127 above).

[134]Ministry of Education, *Guidelines: New India Literacy Programme* (draft), paras 9.1, 9.4(ii), 9.5, pp. 42–46 (n. 16 above).

[135]Lok Sabha, Unstarred Question no. 948, 2 December 2024 (n. 127 above).

[136]India, Lok Sabha, Unstarred Question no. 82, "FLNAT under ULLAS," answered 3 February 2025, https://eparlib.sansad.in/bitstream/123456789/2989121/1/AU82_5dw5eB.pdf.

[137]Lok Sabha, Unstarred Question no. 82, 3 February 2025 (n. 136 above).

[138]PIB, "Tripura becomes third state … to achieve Full Functional Literacy," 23 June 2025 (n. 6 above).

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between volunteer and state, such as the voluntary agency, the people's science movement or the Lok Shiksha Samiti.

10. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

The preceding sections each read one phase through the same five questions. This section puts the answers side by side, reads four themes that run through them (motivation, accountability, measurement and incentives), and considers the continuities that the change of form did not touch.

10.1 The Phases Side by Side

Table 2. The five-question grid applied to the six phases

Phase	Who teaches and who recruits?	Who pays?	How is success measured?	What ends it?
Origins (1930s–47)	Unpaid literate individuals; missions and churches, then provincial ministries and Congress	Sponsors; provincial exchequers after 1937 (terms not established)	Numbers taught; ministers' declarations	End of a tour; Congress ministries' resignation (1939)
State adoption (1947–77)	Honorarium teachers, project instructors, Anganwadi workers; education and Community Development departments	Plan outlay; Rs 10 a month honorarium; Rs 50 extra for Anganwadi workers	50 per cent literacy target; village declarations; production gains; 17.5 per cent drop-out in a pilot	Merger into Community Development; target shortfalls
Programme era (1978–87)	Instructors from teachers, students and village youth; student volunteers; project officers, states, agencies, district committees	Central funds (Sixth Plan Rs 200 crore, reported); agency grants	Enrolment and course completion	Review of 1980; replacement after 1988
Campaign peak (1988–2000s)	Unpaid volunteers (nearly 22,000 at Ernakulam); district administration with a people's science movement	Government funds; volunteers unpaid; under US$26 a learner at Ernakulam	End-of-primer tests; district declaration	Declaration; later loss of momentum and funds
Mission mode (2009–18)	Unpaid Volunteer Teachers and two contract Preraks per centre; panchayat-chaired samitis	Centre and States (75:25); Preraks on honoraria	NIOS assessments; 5.88 crore declared literate of 9.10 crore enrolled (reported)	Scheme period to 2012; interim extension to March 2018
NILP/ULLAS (2022–27)	Unpaid volunteers incl. students (1:10); surveys, self-registration, software tagging	Rs 1,037.90 crore, 60:40; no honorarium; credits	FLNAT with NIOS certification; area declarations at 95 per cent	Five-year period to 2026–27

The table shows two opposite movements. From the campaigns onward the teacher is unpaid, while everything around the teacher changes: recruitment moves from church and party to department, district machine, panchayat body and database, and payment from sponsor to Plan outlay to a shared scheme. What does not change is that success is read from a count.

10.2 Motivation

The sequence of motives is duty, movement, service and participation. The evidence fits the first three well and the last less well. In the state phases the motive was largely occupational: a teacher on Rs 10 a month, or an

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Anganwadi worker paid an extra Rs 50, was a functionary,[139] [140] and an INFLIBNET module calls the NAEP "primarily a Government funded, Government controlled, centre-based and honorarium based programme."[141] The campaigns changed the motive: at Ernakulam volunteers pledged to "arm the toiling and suffering millions with the weapon of the letter."[142] Saakshar Bharat placed the volunteer inside a managed structure, with voluntary educators "not paid any remuneration" while the Preraks above them were,[143] and the NILP returns to the language of the beginning, since the Ministry says volunteers are motivated by "DUTY or Kartavyabodh."[144] The sequence is less a line than a circle with additions, and "participation" describes the form of the NILP but not the motive the Ministry names.

10.3 Accountability

Accountability can be traced by asking to whom the volunteer or functionary answered: a sponsor or political organisation in the origins; a department in the state phases; the district and community at Ernakulam, where the work was shared between the Collector's administration and a people's movement;[145] a ladder of panchayat-chaired samitis in Saakshar Bharat;[146] and a platform in the NILP, where "An online MIS will be in place to track the progress of the scheme."[147] The movement from community to district machinery to app-based reporting is supported by the documents, with two qualifications. The earlier public accountability rested on a movement of unusual strength in Kerala, and the sources do not show it repeated elsewhere. And app-based reporting makes the volunteer countable but not necessarily answerable: the sources show no way for a learner to report that a volunteer never taught.

10.4 Measurement

The sequence of enrolment, "total literacy" declaration and assessment is borne out on form but not on reliability. For Saakshar Bharat the Department reported 9.10 crore enrolled and 5.88 crore declared literate by 2016;[148] for the NILP the Lok Sabha was told that 1,10,69,400 had registered and appeared and 96,10,923 were certified, with seven States and Union Territories shown with none;[149] and the Ernakulam accounts differ, as Section 7 showed. Every phase measures an output at exit and none measures retention, though Pillai describes relapse in Kerala and the Uttarakhand inquiry found irregular attendance and drop-out.[150] [151] The NILP guidelines provide for annual achievement surveys on samples of 500 to 1,000 learners per State, though no results have been located.[152] The unit of declaration has also changed, from the district at the end of a campaign to a rate of 95.6 per cent in Tripura with no stated method or count of certified,[153] and the pass mark moved from 40 per cent in all three components in 2020 to 33 per cent in each of three skills, so counts of the "literate" are not strictly comparable.[154] [155]

10.5 Incentives

Incentives were mixed in every phase. Functionaries were paid throughout: Rs 10, the extra Rs 50, and Rs 2,000 a month for a Senior Prerak in Assam.[156] The volunteer, from the campaigns on, was unpaid and rewarded by the community's esteem. In the NILP the reward is formalised, with credits from three national bodies and certificates

[139] Shah and Chakrabarti, "Era of Social Education" (n. 15 above).

[140] Chakrabarti and Shah, "Era of Functional Literacy" (n. 18 above).

[141] Chakrabarti, "Total Literacy Campaigns under National Literacy Mission, Part I" (n. 21 above).

[142] Franke, "Lessons in Democracy from Kerala State" (n. 8 above).

[143] *Saakshar Bharat: Centrally Sponsored Scheme*, paras 28–29 (n. 24 above).

[144] DoSEL, "ULLAS – Nav Bharat Saaksharta Karyakram" (content note) (n. 125 above).

[145] Chakrabarti, "Total Literacy Campaigns under National Literacy Mission, Part I" (n. 21 above).

[146] *Saakshar Bharat: Centrally Sponsored Scheme*, Annexure I, pp. 33–35 (n. 24 above).

[147] Ministry of Education, *Guidelines: New India Literacy Programme* (draft), para 7.15, p. 34 (n. 16 above).

[148] "Expression of Interest: Evaluation Study of Saakshar Bharat", p. 7 (n. 34 above).

[149] Lok Sabha, Unstarred Question no. 82, 3 February 2025 (n. 136 above).

[150] Pillai, "KANFED and the Adult Education Scene in Kerala" (n. 88 above).

[151] Joshi and Bohra, "Measuring Effectiveness of Adult Literacy Program in India", pp. 165, 168 (n. 116 above).

[152] Ministry of Education, *Guidelines: New India Literacy Programme* (draft), para 7.16, p. 34 (n. 16 above).

[153] PIB, "Tripura becomes third state … to achieve Full Functional Literacy," 23 June 2025 (n. 6 above).

[154] *Guidelines on Padhna Likhna Abhiyan*, p. 32 (n. 52 above).

[155] Ministry of Education, *Guidelines: New India Literacy Programme* (draft), para 9.4(ii), p. 45 (n. 16 above).

[156] Directorate of Non-Formal and Adult Education, Assam, presentation (n. 107 above).

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and letters of appreciation.[157] [158] Honour was conferred by a community the volunteer knew; a credit is conferred by a regulating body and counts mainly for students.

10.6 Continuities: Gender, Caste and Retention

The persistent weaknesses show where the form of volunteering was not the cause. Table 3 shows that the male–female literacy gap widened from 1951 to 1981 and has narrowed since, to about 16 points in 2011, with a survey of 2017–18 putting it at 14.4.[159] These figures cannot be attributed to adult literacy programmes, but every phase attended to women, from the classes of 1975–76 to Ernakulam, where most learners were women of the lowest castes and classes,[160] and Saakshar Bharat, whose target was 60 million women of 70 million.[161] The Department reported that 4.15 crore of the 5.88 crore declared literate by 2016 were women, about 71 per cent,[162] and the one independent estimate located finds a rise of about three percentage points in female literacy in the eligible districts.[163]

Table 3. Literacy rates in India by Census year (per cent)

Year	Male	Female	Persons	Gap (male minus female)
1951	27.2	8.9	18.3	18.3
1961	40.4	15.4	28.3	25.0
1971	46.0	22.0	34.5	24.0
1981	56.4	29.8	43.6	26.6
1991	64.1	39.3	52.2	24.8
2001	75.3	53.7	64.8	21.6
2011	80.9	64.6	73.0	16.3

Source: Census of India, as tabulated in MoSPI, Women and Men in India, ch. 3, Table 3.1; the gap is calculated by the author.

The second continuity is the exclusion of the poorest and of the lowest castes and tribes. The Farmers' Functional Literacy Project left marginal farmers and landless labourers outside its scope,[164] and the Census of 2011 put literacy at 56.46 per cent for Scheduled Caste women and 49.35 per cent for Scheduled Tribe women, against 64.6 per cent for all women.[165] The sources give no caste breakdown of those certified under the NILP, so whether an app-based form reaches the groups earlier phases missed remains open, particularly since registration presumes phone or computer skills.[166] The third continuity is retention: the campaigns left it to a post-literacy stage that proved poorly funded, Saakshar Bharat reported certified counts, and the NILP certifies at a test. The programmes since 1949 have done more to count the passing than to study the keeping.

Three findings follow. The volunteer principle has not been a single thing: as its form changed, responsibility moved from sponsor to department, district movement, panchayat hierarchy and platform, while the burden of teaching stayed with unpaid individuals. Measures of success have become more formal but remain counts of outputs that the programmes' own records do not reconcile. And gender, caste and retention persisted through every change of form, which suggests causes the form of volunteering did not reach.

[157] Lok Sabha, Unstarred Question no. 948, 2 December 2024 (n. 127 above).

[158] DoSEL, "ULLAS – Nav Bharat Saaksharta Karyakram" (content note) (n. 125 above).

[159] Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, Government of India, *Women and Men in India* (2021 edition), ch. 3, "Education," Table 3.1 (literacy rates in independent India, from the Census of India) and Table 3.2 (NSS 75th Round, 2017–18) at Tables 3.1, 3.2, https://mospi.gov.in/sites/default/files/reports_and_publication/statistical_publication/Women_Men/mw21/Chapter%203%20Education.pdf.

[160] Franke, "Lessons in Democracy from Kerala State" (n. 8 above).

[161] *Saakshar Bharat: Centrally Sponsored Scheme*, paras 13, 19 (n. 24 above).

[162] "Expression of Interest: Evaluation Study of Saakshar Bharat", p. 7 (n. 34 above).

[163] Shankar, "Adult Education and Missing Women" (n. 117 above).

[164] Chakrabarti and Shah, "Era of Functional Literacy" (n. 18 above).

[165] Press Information Bureau, Government of India, "Various Schemes of the Government Address Issue of Female Literacy Including SC/ST Women," 19 March 2018 (written reply to a Lok Sabha question by the Minister of State, Human Resource Development; copy hosted by the Department of School Education & Literacy), https://dsel.education.gov.in/sites/default/files/update/lu3786.pdf.

[166] Ministry of Education, *Guidelines: New India Literacy Programme* (draft), para 7.1.1, pp. 24–25 (n. 16 above).

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11. DISCUSSION

This section takes up three questions the outline assigns to it, whether volunteerism weakened responsibility or moved it, what was lost when mass campaigns gave way, and what current policy might draw from the record, and then asks how far the argument can be trusted.

11.1 Weakened or Redistributed?

Responsibility for adult literacy sits in four places: the work of teaching, the finding of teachers and learners, the supply of money, and the verdict on success. For the missionary tutor all four lay with the sponsor and the tutor's conscience; in the state programmes three lay with a department; in the campaigns teaching and recruiting were shared between a district administration and a movement, and the verdict was given in public to the community. In Saakshar Bharat teaching stayed with unpaid volunteers while recruiting and reporting passed to panchayat-chaired samitis and the Preraks above the volunteers were paid;[167] in the NILP teaching and enrolment are done by individuals and the verdict is given by a test and a database.[168] The evidence favours redistribution over simple weakening, with one qualification that carries most of the argument. Responsibility moved upward and outward, to samitis, a portal and an examining body; what weakened was the volunteer's share in owning the outcome. Ernakulam made the volunteer one of tens of thousands who had taken a pledge and were thanked at the declaration,[169] while Saakshar Bharat reported some 44 lakh volunteers mobilised and the NILP some 38 lakh registered.[170] [171] The numbers are of the same order, so the principle did not lose its reach, but whether volunteers in 2024 felt the ownership of those in 1990 these sources cannot say.

There is a conceptual reason for caution about "weakened." The United Nations treats volunteering as activity "undertaken of free will," yet notes that respondents counted help given to a government programme as volunteering,[172] and Indian missions have always used the state to organise voluntary effort, so the question is the kind of organisation and not the presence of the state. In the typology of Table 1 the movement to managed and then digitally mediated volunteering is a movement of the organiser, while the volunteer stayed unpaid. A second qualification concerns cost: an unpaid volunteer is cheap only if someone else pays for training, materials, supervision and assessment. Saakshar Bharat paid Preraks and then found its funds irregular: a review of 2013 noted an "inconsistent flow of funds," and central releases fell from Rs 34,634.73 lakh in 2014–15 to Rs 20,689.10 lakh in 2016–17.[173] [174] The NILP budgets about Rs 208 a learner, so the saving is built into the design: cost is redistributed as well as responsibility, moving from the budget to the time of volunteers, many of them students compensated with credit.[175]

11.2 What Was Lost When Mass Campaigns Declined

The record does not permit a golden-age story: Ramachandran writes that the mission "lost in 1993 the momentum it had gathered from 1989 to 1992,"[176] and Pillai records relapse in Kerala.[177] Three losses can nevertheless be identified. The first is the shared, public character of the undertaking: Boughton observes that mass campaigns "almost always occur as part of a wider social movement,"[178] and neither the samiti nor the registration portal is one. The second is the link between literacy and the learners' own concerns, which Franke describes in Kerala,[179] whereas the NILP widens its curriculum to life skills but its method remains a primer taught by a volunteer and tested in a school.[180] The third is the visible end: a campaign stopped and a district was declared, and the sources

[167] *Saakshar Bharat: Centrally Sponsored Scheme*, paras 28–29, 42, 44 (n. 24 above).

[168] Ministry of Education, *Guidelines: New India Literacy Programme* (draft), paras 7, 7.15, pp. 24, 34 (n. 16 above).

[169] Franke, "Lessons in Democracy from Kerala State" (n. 8 above).

[170] "Expression of Interest: Evaluation Study of Saakshar Bharat", p. 7 (n. 34 above).

[171] Lok Sabha, Unstarred Question no. 948, 2 December 2024 (n. 127 above).

[172] UNV, *2022 State of the World's Volunteerism Report*, pp. 16, 31, 45 (n. 27 above).

[173] Lok Sabha, Unstarred Question no. 126, 18 July 2016 (n. 118 above).

[174] Lok Sabha, Unstarred Question no. 2573, 12 March 2018 (n. 119 above).

[175] Lok Sabha, Unstarred Question no. 948, 2 December 2024 (n. 127 above).

[176] Ramachandran, "Adult Education: A Tale of Empowerment Denied" (n. 93 above).

[177] Pillai, "KANFED and the Adult Education Scene in Kerala" (n. 88 above).

[178] Boughton, "Mass Literacy Campaigns", p. 21 (n. 26 above).

[179] Franke, "Lessons in Democracy from Kerala State" (n. 8 above).

[180] Ministry of Education, *Guidelines: New India Literacy Programme* (draft), para 3, p. 12 (n. 16 above).

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describe no comparable event under the NILP.[181] Nor can the decline be explained by flaws alone: Boughton argues that campaigns "remained out of favor with international agencies and western governments."[182]

11.3 Lessons for Current Policy

These points are inferences from the record, not findings of any one source. Registration should be reported alongside activity: 38 lakh volunteers and 1.6 crore learners were registered by December 2024, but the answers consulted give no count of volunteers who taught a learner who sat the test.[183] Retention should be measured and published, using the annual achievement surveys the guidelines provide for.[184] Certification should be disaggregated by sex, caste and State, since seven States and Union Territories show no certified learners and sex-disaggregated figures were found only for Karnataka.[185] A local accountable body between volunteer and state deserves reconsideration, since the NILP guidelines do not mention the samitis of Saakshar Bharat; coordination should be reliably funded if volunteers are unpaid; and the method of declaring an area fully literate should be published. On access, the NILP offers a hybrid mode and Samajik Chetna Kendras for those without devices,[186] but Scheduled Tribe and Scheduled Caste women, whose recorded literacy is lowest,[187] are plausibly among the least likely to hold a registered phone, an inference that justifies monitoring offline enrolment separately. The only credible impact estimate located is the thesis on Saakshar Bharat,[188] and the NILP's fixed period and State-level choices offer material for a better evaluation than counts of registration.

11.4 Limits and Alternative Explanations

The argument rests on a limited base. The principal account of Ernakulam comes from promoters and sympathetic observers; I have not located the evaluation of Saakshar Bharat invited in 2017; the independent studies of that phase are a thesis and a small survey of ten villages;[189] [190] for the NILP almost all numbers are the Ministry's own and the guidelines are in draft; and the volunteer does not speak in these sources. Alternative explanations are also available. The shift from campaign to managed scheme may owe more to fiscal and administrative convenience than to a view of volunteerism, since the record shows funds constraining the later forms.[191] The platform may follow the spread of mobile phones and the state's capacity to build databases. And the decline of the campaign may reflect the rise of Census literacy from 18.3 per cent in 1951 to 73.0 per cent in 2011,[192] since a smaller and more scattered population of non-literate adults calls for a different method; that is an inference and is not tested here. These cautions do not undo the main finding, that the form of the volunteer's responsibility changed more than the fact of volunteering, but they limit how far it can be pressed.

12. CONCLUSION

This paper asked what became of the volunteer when EOTO passed from a missionary slogan to a principle of national literacy policy. It put five questions (who teaches, who recruits, who pays, how success is measured and what ends the programme) to six phases from the 1930s to the programme now running to 2027.

12.1 The Argument in Brief

The principle has had at least four forms. In the missionary and nationalist phase it was a duty. From independence to the late 1980s the state took the work over and the teacher became a functionary on an honorarium. The campaigns that followed the National Literacy Mission of 1988 made it a method of mass mobilisation in which unpaid volunteers, a district administration and a people's science movement shared ownership, with nearly 22,000 volunteer teachers reported at Ernakulam.[193] Saakshar Bharat placed the volunteer inside a managed structure of panchayat-chaired samitis and paid Preraks, with a reported 44.45 lakh volunteer teachers

[181]PIB, "Tripura becomes third state … to achieve Full Functional Literacy," 23 June 2025 (n. 6 above).

[182]Boughton, "Mass Literacy Campaigns", p. 23 (n. 26 above).

[183]Lok Sabha, Unstarred Question no. 948, 2 December 2024 (n. 127 above).

[184]Ministry of Education, *Guidelines: New India Literacy Programme* (draft), para 7.16, p. 34 (n. 16 above).

[185]Lok Sabha, Unstarred Question no. 82, 3 February 2025 (n. 136 above).

[186]Lok Sabha, Unstarred Question no. 948, 2 December 2024 (n. 127 above).

[187]PIB, "Various Schemes … Female Literacy Including SC/ST Women," 19 March 2018 (n. 165 above).

[188]Shankar, "Adult Education and Missing Women" (n. 117 above).

[189]Shankar, "Adult Education and Missing Women" (n. 117 above).

[190]Joshi and Bohra, "Measuring Effectiveness of Adult Literacy Program in India", p. 168 (n. 116 above).

[191]Lok Sabha, Unstarred Question no. 126, 18 July 2016 (n. 118 above).

[192]MoSPI, *Women and Men in India*, ch. 3, Table 3.1 (n. 159 above).

[193]Franke, "Lessons in Democracy from Kerala State" (n. 8 above).

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mobilised.[194] The NILP has made the volunteer a registered user of an application, matched to a learner by software and rewarded with a certificate or credit, with 38 lakh reported registered by December 2024.[195]
Two findings follow. The volunteer's unpaid status was the most stable feature of the principle and the institutions around it the least stable: Saakshar Bharat stated that voluntary educators "are not paid any remuneration," and the NILP guidelines say that volunteers "will not be paid any salary/monthly honorarium."[196] [197] And responsibility was redistributed, not simply weakened: it moved upward to samitis, a portal and an examining body, while the volunteer's share in owning the outcome weakened. Some weaknesses outlasted every change of form. Success has been read from counts that are rarely reconciled, as in the NILP annexure showing 96,10,923 certified and seven States and Union Territories with none;[198] the male–female literacy gap, 26.6 points in 1981, had narrowed to 16.3 by 2011;[199] and retention has been the least studied dimension, though Pillai records relapse in Kerala.[200] These suggest causes beyond the form of volunteering, in the social position of learners and the way programmes are measured.

12.2 Contribution and Further Research

The paper makes three modest contributions. It changes the unit, holding the volunteer constant and letting the programme vary, so that Social Education, the NAEP, the campaigns, Saakshar Bharat and the NILP read as successive answers to one question: who is responsible for teaching an adult to read. It offers a grid and a provisional typology of the volunteer, from moral duty through collective mobilisation and managed volunteerism to digitally mediated volunteering, to separate what was continuous, the unpaid teacher, from what changed, the organiser, the incentive and the measure. And it connects the Indian record to the wider literature, in which government-organised help counts as volunteering and campaigns are typically part of a wider social movement.[201] [202] India shows both a long tradition of state-organised voluntary effort and a moment, from 1989 to the early 1990s, in which that effort was joined to a movement; the later phases keep the volunteer and drop the movement. The paper also records what it could not establish, including unreconciled figures, documents read only through catalogues, and an impact estimate for the recent phase that is a thesis.[203]
Four lines of work would test the argument: state and district case studies drawing on the records of literacy samitis and State literacy mission authorities; oral histories of former campaign volunteers, Preraks and present ULLAS volunteers; an evaluation of the NILP, particularly of whether registration and testing reach Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe women and religious minorities; and comparison with literacy drives in other countries. Until such work is done, the history of Each One Teach One in India can be told with confidence as a history of institutions and with caution as a history of the people who taught.

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The bibliography lists the sources cited in the notes. It is arranged in two parts, primary and secondary, and within each by kind of source. Entries follow the Chicago notes-and-bibliography style used in the footnotes. Where a document was read through a library catalogue or a description and not in full, the entry says so. Web sources were consulted between 27 and 29 October 2026.

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[196]*Saakshar Bharat: Centrally Sponsored Scheme*, paras 28–29 (n. 24 above).

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[198]Lok Sabha, Unstarred Question no. 82, 3 February 2025 (n. 136 above).

[199]MoSPI, *Women and Men in India*, ch. 3, Table 3.1 (n. 159 above).

[200]Pillai, "KANFED and the Adult Education Scene in Kerala" (n. 88 above).

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