India is a country with great potential. With the second largest population and tenth largest economy in the world, India represents a country that is not quite a domineering world power, but that is on the precipice of being able to compete at the highest levels in terms of technological development and economic strength. One of the biggest factors holding back India’s progress is its high rate of illiteracy, especially in regards to women. Despite recent attempts at educational reform by the Indian government, the most recent census (2011) reports that overall adult literacy is at 74.04%, with a rate of 82.14% for males and 65.46% for females. This information clearly illustrates a dramatic disparity in literacy between the genders, amounting to a gap of 16.68%. The situation is even worse for women living in rural areas, with the literacy rate as low as 46.37%.\(^1\) A low level of literacy in women has been connected to a variety of social, economic, and health issues, including malnourishment, high levels of fertility, high infant mortality, low earning potential, and a subordinate status within both the household and larger community. Furthermore, illiteracy limits modernization and economic development efforts by preventing a large portion of the population from participating in educational and


\(^2\) Victoria Velkoff, "Women’s Education in India," 1998,
career opportunities that would help cultivate the generation of intellectuals, innovators, researchers, etc. that India needs in order to become a fully modernized country. In order to combat the problem of women’s illiteracy in rural India, the area that needs the most help, a team of researchers has devised the following action plan.

**Background Information**

India is a populous country with vast differences in economic resources, social hierarchies, and cultural traditions across states, thus this plan focuses in on Rajasthan, the largest Indian state with one of the country’s lowest illiteracy rates (66.11% in 2011). Rajasthan is essentially a rural state located in the northwestern region of India. Its economy is primarily agricultural, with wheat, barley, sugarcane, pulses, and oilseeds serving as the main food crops, while cotton and tobacco are the state’s cash crops. Rajasthan also produces the most wool and opium in the country. Though the state of Rajasthan is dominated by a rural economy, its location in the semi-arid region of India makes irrigation difficult and has resulted in multiple droughts and water shortages over the years, hurting the earning potential of farmers in the area. Unsurprisingly, Rajasthan is one of the poorest states in India, with communities suffering from a lack of financial resources, insufficient health

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care, extremely few social services, and high rates of illiteracy.\(^5\) In accordance with the national trend, the problem of illiteracy is more prevalent in women, with 47.76% of women unable to read compared with 79.19% of men. Cultural practices play a part in this; many families prevent their daughters from going to school, assuming that their time would be better spent helping out with household and farm chores rather than getting an education. In many areas of the state, the dominant ideology states that girls are better off being married at a young age and taking care of a family.\(^6\) Boys are seen as having the most potential to provide for the family when the parents are too old, thus they are allowed to go to school at much higher rates than girls. Other barriers to education for both girls and boys include a lack of adequate school facilities; some schools simply aren’t big enough to hold all of the students while the ones that are available often lack basic necessities like water and bathroom facilities.\(^7\) Due to the gender-limiting cultural ideologies predominant in Rajasthan and the state’s widespread poverty, the action plan we have devised uses a social movement approach, with the goal of changing the perceived value of female education while also raising the level of literacy and thus the potential for economic growth and a higher quality of life in the state.

**Action Plan**


Our plan is to institute a summer tutoring/mentorship program based out of Jaipur (the capital of Rajasthan) that will reach out to the poorest and most illiterate rural communities in the state and provide reading skills to young girls in the area. Despite the lack of educational opportunities that affects many of Rajasthan's residents, the state is home to over 250 colleges, several of them well known to the rest of the world.\(^8\) Thus, Rajasthan has an abundant resource of college students that we will target to serve as the tutors in this program. We have chosen to do a summer program because not only will college students have abundant time on their hands, but rural families in Rajasthan will also have less of a need for their children to do farm work, as the summer is a slower paced time in terms of cultivating crops. The extra time that the summer affords provides the perfect opportunity for an intensive summer program that would allow children to be caught up to age-appropriate reading standards and consequently be less likely to be held back in school or drop out entirely. In addition, the program would allow college students to actually live in the communities they will be serving, thus alleviating the problem of inadequate educational facilities as the tutors will be brought directly to the villagers. The success of this program in helping to raise the literacy rate in Rajasthan will be dependent on primarily three things 1) Our ability to start a movement raising awareness about the problem of illiteracy targeted to various members of the community and convince them to support our program 2)

Our ability to locate funding for the program and 3) Our ability to establish a pilot program in one town that will be the basis for expansion to other areas of Rajasthan.

*Securing Financial Resources*

We will attempt to tackle the issue of raising awareness and securing the money for a start-up by utilizing both organizational resources and advertising techniques. The problem of illiteracy affecting women in India has already been noted by several organizations in the area, including the Central Square Foundation9, PlanetRead Organization10, India Literacy Project11, the Veerni Project12, and several others, who we can target in order to launch a collective campaign aimed at bringing illiteracy to the public consciousness. With their help, we hope to mobilize both the adherents and conscious constituents involved with this issue. Briefly defined, adherents are the people who believe in a cause and want to see movement goals achieved (though they may be deterred by personal or societal risks), while conscious constituents are people who actually contribute resources towards a cause. We will center our initial marketing campaign on targeting conscious constituents who can benefit the program with financial donations geared towards a start-up program. First, we plan to create Internet campaigns that would target primarily Westerners and non-resident Indians and urge them to donate to our program. The rhetoric used in these campaigns will

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9 http://www.centralsquarefoundation.org
10 http://www.planetread.org/literacy.php
11 http://www.ilpnet.org
12 http://www.veerni.org
emphasize the responsibility of the citizens of modernized and largely literate nations to help countries like India that are still in the process of developing. We will also enlist help from both global and regional organizations that fight illiteracy and other humanitarian issues. For instance, UNICEF is notable for its willingness to award stipends to start-up charitable initiatives and in the past it has even helped to fund a pro-literacy campaign in Bangladesh.\textsuperscript{13} As our pilot program sees results we will expand our advertisements to include Indians who occupy middle to upper-class positions in society, emphasizing the need for the more fortunate members of society to give back in order to build a modern India that is competitive on a global scale. We will use multiple mediums for this purpose, from social media to sponsored billboards to traditional poster advertisements distributed throughout cities and in prominent locations of social and political activity within smaller towns and villages.

In addition to securing financial resources through donors and organizational grants, we will also attempt to appeal to banks to support our project, particularly those that specialize in microloans. Microloans are small, short-term loans with low interest rates that are meant to assist start-up companies in developing countries. In this case, the entrepreneurial activities started by women are meant to enhance women’s productive means by increasing their access to cash and thereby enabling them to build their businesses. Microloans are already popular

\textsuperscript{13} “Stipend Programme Enhances Primary School Enrolment - Dropout and Efficiency Remain Challenging,” 2014,
among many rural women in India, but many of them run into problems when trying to apply for them. One of the minimum requirements in applying for a microloan is the ability to sign your name.14 This stipulation immediately disqualifies all illiterate women from getting loans, which in turn perpetuates their status as second-rate citizens since they cannot become financially emancipated. By teaching women how to read and write, those who have an entrepreneurial spirit will have the means to realize their goals, thereby decreasing women's dependency on males to provide them with economic resources and helping to minimize disparities between the genders. Microloan banks should have a particular interest in funding our project, since an increase in literacy will bring them more business from the women in the region. One bank that has already supported such initiatives is the Sharada Women's Association for Weaker Section, named in the Forbes list of 50 biggest microfinance banks. The bank's mission statement claims that it is “committed to the empowerment of women in the fullest sense of the word and will strive to promote sustainable communities through the strengthening of people’s organization.”15 As this example demonstrates, with the right incentives, banks could see women’s literacy as financially beneficial and thus contribute towards the funding of our program.

14 Shubhra Shama, "Neoliberalization" as Betrayal: State, Feminism, and a Women's Education Program in India, 2011
Mobilizing Human Resources

Besides procuring financial resources, we will have to devise strategies that help us to reach the villages that will be benefitting from our tutoring programs and convince the people to support our program. We will arrange for in-person visits to the relevant areas and present “pseudo-exhibitions,” where we will explain why illiteracy is such an important issue, how the program will work, and how the families living in the villages will individually benefit. As the program develops and demonstrates progress, we can incorporate past students and tutors into our presentations. In order to avoid running into cultural barriers, we will initially target spaces for women (i.e. women’s help circles, nurseries, businesses headed by women, etc.), avoiding areas dominated by male patriarchal control, such as political buildings, which are likely to have more conservative views regarding the role of women. We will also have to carefully navigate highly religious spaces. Hinduism is the dominant religion in Rajasthan and similar to many other global religions, it has traditionally been androcentric (meaning women should find happiness through serving their husbands). In fact, a central ideology of Hinduism is pativratya, which directly translates to husband worship.\textsuperscript{16} This mindset could have a negative impact on our movement as religious leaders or devote religious parishioners could suggest that increased women’s literacy would empower women in a way that is contrary to the familial structure ascribed in the Hindu tenants. In order to combat traditionalist convictions, we will have to prove that increasing the literacy of women will

\textsuperscript{16} Vanaja Dhruvarajan, \textit{Hinduism, Empowerment of Women, and Development in India}, 1996.
ultimately benefit families and India as a whole without taking away from the richness of India's culture and traditions.

Building a Pilot Program

In terms of establishing the program itself, we plan to base it out of Jaipur. As the capital of Rajasthan it will provide us with access to both the human and material resources necessary to launch our pilot program. For instance, the city boasts a close proximity to college students since so many universities (including six women’s colleges and the esteemed College of Engineering for Women) are located in and around the area. Two of the main groups that will help further our movement are female college students and feminist groups. We can recruit these people at universities and other centers for women’s issues such as health clinics and childcare facilities, getting participants to serve as tutors, organizers, and advocates at the local level. These will be the people doing the physical work, which includes distributing posters, working with the girls, communicating with various groups, and other activities at the micro-level that are necessary to achieve the movement’s goals. Feminist groups and other social advocates will be responsible for raising awareness of both the illiteracy issue in India and our tutoring program on a regional, national and global scale. Organizations such as the “All India Democratic Women’s Association” have already demonstrated an interest in this issue, and by partnering with this and other organizations we can use their already existing networks and established prestige to help our movement gain widespread approval. Organizations that believe in the use of education as a means of social empowerment would be a great ally in helping to tear down the many barriers that
women face. By choosing a diverse and populous city as our headquarters we will maximize our contact with the most forward thinking, feminist, progressivist minds in India and increase the number of college students and other participants we can attract to the cause. After a solid headquarters has been established in Jaipur, we will expand to the rural settings that we plan on targeting for our tutoring program. However, before we can institute multiple programs in the needy areas of Rajasthan, we must establish our legitimacy by testing our project in a pilot village.

To meet this end, we plan on first setting up a remedial summer program in the Khejroli village, located 54 kilometers away from our headquarters in Jaipur. The village is primarily comprised of farming families, but with a population of over 16,000 residents, Khejroli has government education institutions in place that will make it an ideal location for a start-up program that can be closely monitored. The literacy rate in Khejroli is about four percent above the Rajasthani average, (at 70.48%) but the gulf between male and female literacy is larger than the state average (84.06% and 56.08% respectively), thus a literacy program would still make a significant impact. The pilot program in Khejroli will be run by a recruited group of female university students who will live in the town for the summer while providing tutoring services to girls at the primary and secondary levels of their education. The students will be provided with living quarters that allow them direct access to the girls they will be tutoring. Additionally, we have chosen to use female students in order to increase the amount of comfort the young

girls will feel while working with the tutors. This will also help to prevent any concerns that could arise regarding the propriety of college aged men working with young girls.

In addition to the female tutors, other roles will need to be established to ensure that the program runs smoothly and safely. In order to protect the college students from any dangers that could arise while living alone in a rural area, we will hire a male in house administrator and protective guide known as a Residence Coordinator. Due to the fact that initial responses to our program by some villagers could be hesitant or even outright resistant, it is necessary to have a male presence in the living quarters in order to help ensure that our female tutors do not become the targets of sexual assault or other violence, nor fall victim to any unwanted attention that would interfere with their tutoring. Background checks would be performed on each of our Residence Coordinators, and we plan to recruit them from advising or administrative roles in other humanitarian organizations. Another important role we will need to fill for our pilot program is a Village Collaborator. This person would serve as a direct agent of communication between program organizers and the residents of Khejroli, responsible for getting feedback on how participants are responding to the program and also ensuring that villagers remain supportive of our efforts. We will recruit people for the role of Village Collaborator from inside of Khejroli in order to utilize already established ties to the community and have someone working for the cause that is already trusted by other villagers. The role of Village Collaborator is essential; he must be a charismatic, influential individual capable of convincing the villagers of the program's necessity and
keeping them happy when problems arise. These important roles will be paid positions, thus as the program develops and expands to other villages we hope to provide increasing numbers of jobs to members of the various communities. While these roles will be instrumental to our program's success, we want to make sure that the empowerment of women remains the focus of our drive for increased literacy, thus the female college students we recruit will be the face of our movement. Having educated, successful women displayed in the public light will help to highlight the importance of female literacy and provide young girls with successful female role models (as well as emphasizing to village communities that their investment in their daughters can and will be worthwhile).

**Framing Strategies and Mobilization**

In order for our program to be successful, we must successfully frame the issue of illiteracy to different groups. The extremely diverse viewpoints and cultural practices of the Rajasthani community will likely make this a challenging, though certainly not impossible, task. The people of Rajasthan are characterized as being devoutly religious craftspeople who take great pride in their traditional folk music, dances, artwork, handicrafts, and other aspects of their rich heritage. Rajasthan also houses a large indigenous population that has retained some of the old caste system. The varying cultural practices in the state results in a somewhat hierarchical and stratified society\(^\text{18}\) that could make villagers resistant to the thought of help by foreigners or people outside of their position in society. Taking these issues into

account, we believe we can successfully present to various target audiences our program and wider social movement in a manner that will make it appealing to the overwhelming majority.

Framing to Conscious Constituents

As was briefly touched on earlier, presenting the issue of illiteracy to potential conscious constituents will involve calling on the conscience of the privileged. We must convince them that giving back to impoverished communities will benefit not just those communities, but India as a whole by providing opportunities for more people to become educated, high-functioning, high-contributing members of society. One way to do this would be seeking out young girls from struggling families and encouraging people to sponsor their education (with the aid of photographs and other techniques used to evoke an emotional response from targeted groups). We could also target college students who may have come from rural or low-income backgrounds and who feel an obligation to help those locked in a similar situation rise above their situation of poverty. Moreover, a personal or even educationally-based understanding of the many limitations that rural women face may give female college students the altruistic desire to empower these women with the increased social liberties that accompany literacy. We believe that this type of framing will be successful in light of many recent undertakings to modernize India both structurally and ideologically. We will emphasize that modernization can never be complete until all members of society achieve at least a basic level of education and are able to participate more equally in the various aspects of society.
In framing the issue of illiteracy to local villages, we will utilize more traditional ideologies in order to relate to the villagers and prevent them from immediately rejecting our program due to its potential for far-reaching societal change. Literacy can be presented as a way to make young girls more in touch with their cultural heritage by giving them the opportunity to better understand their language and read Indian literature. For instance, girls may be able to help their families improve traditional craftsmanship skills and farming practices by being able to understand written resources and communicate more effectively with others. This type of framing was used to target Tamil women in southern India by suggesting that the women, who were known for making intricate rice murals, were so good at using their hands that they could easily learn to write. Additionally, if the program is eventually expanded to include older women, it could be presented to local communities as a way for mothers to help their families as educated women have a better understanding of things like getting access to social and health services. A third method of framing female literacy to local communities is to emphasize the opportunities that girls might gain if they are taught how to read in the national language. We must demonstrate that by becoming literate, they will have more opportunities for their futures and might even be able to support their families financially in the future by going to college and getting work in the burgeoning Indian economy. Due to the conservative nature of Rajasthani culture

19 Francis Cody, The Light of Knowledge Literacy Activism and the Politics of Writing in South India, 2013.
and the large emphasis that is placed on women staying in the home to take care of their families, this type of framing may not be as successful. However, we can combat this by highlighting the benefits that could be provided to the village as a whole if the girls were able to succeed in school, go to college, and return home with a better understanding of the issues facing their communities and how to bring the needs of the villagers to the public’s attention. In other words, educating even a few could have widespread positive effects for the majority.

Framing to the Opposition

Members of Indian society that could potentially oppose the movement are devout religious groups (such as the followers of Hinduism), who may see in female education a dangerous path that could lead to secularization. However, if we are able to use framing correctly, religious figures could actually help further our movement. If we present female education as something that will allow for better religious practices among the general public, then it is more likely that traditional monks and other religious leaders will see the literacy and education of women in a positive light. For example, women being literate will enable them to read and better understand the scriptures for themselves. Furthermore, women are the primarily influences their children experience, thus if they are more familiar with religious scriptures and practices then they can raise their children to be better adherents to the faith.

The other major group within Indian society that could potentially be strongly opposed to greater numbers of women becoming literate is men, and especially married men. Currently, most aspects of Indian society favor men and
allow them to maintain a superior position in society. Men are afforded the most educational and occupational opportunities, enjoy full economic, political, and social rights, and are used to being catered to and fully supported by their wives. With all the benefits that men get out of a system of inequality, there will certainly be those who do not want to give it up. However, we can frame the issue of women’s literacy as beneficial to the family by emphasizing the additional financial resources that could be gained if women are educated and thus able to work at higher levels. An extra income would provide additional resources to go towards things like farming supplies, better schooling for children, health care, technology that would make life easier and more. Furthermore, educated women would become more efficient in the roles they currently serve as well, finding new ways to improve the lives of their families. As Gandhi once said, “A man’s education will be of use only to him. But a woman’s education will be of use not only to her family but also to her whole people.” With this mentality we can convince all aspects of Rajasthani society and the greater Indian community of the importance of education in making better mothers and role models for future generations.

Framing to Women

Though it is important to frame the issue of women’s illiteracy to the various groups within the community, it is just as essential that women realize how crucial their own education is. Our framing towards women will represent our most progressive and far-reaching views. The rural women of Rajasthani villages are the beneficiary constituents of our movement; through our program they will develop the literacy skills that will allow them to become more active agents in the process
of their own empowerment and emancipate them from the limited choices currently made available to them. The incentive of women to become literate and formally educated lies in a plethora of potential opportunities, including developing means of communicating with (and making demands to) government officials, learning financial bookkeeping skills in order to satisfy possible entrepreneurial desires, and gaining access to career paths outside of farming and roles outside of marriage and motherhood. Furthermore, by becoming literate, these women be able to contextualize their situation and realize that their poverty and stunted social, political, and economic roles are by no means standard or in accordance with the rest of the Indian or global population. With this new understanding, women can challenge their government officials and community at large, demanding a more equal position in society and higher quality of life.

*Mobilizing People to the Cause*

Once the various groups of constituents are addressed, we will also need to devise ways to mobilize adherents to the movement who will be crucial in taking the our program from a regional to national and global scale. The adherents of the movement could vary considerably in their socioeconomic position, religious views, etc., but they would need to have in common a desire to see an increase in female literacy throughout rural India. This group of people could consist of both men and women who understand the benefits of female literacy (or literacy in general), and support the cause, but hesitate to participate in the movement due to financial, social, or personal restraints. These people may also be limited by pressure to maintain the status quo rather than expanding and redefining gender roles. To
overcome this, we will again highlight the responsibility of the fortunate (the wealthy, educated, connected, etc.) to fight for the rights of those who lack the voice and/or resources to fight for themselves. In addition, while Indian citizens from around the country might not be able to travel to Rajasthan in order to participate in the movement, the pool of adherents could also include social media followings similar to those supporting social change around the world. In this manner, radio and television broadcasters, politicians, humanitarians, social equality activists, and even regular people who are passionate about the spread of female literacy to rural areas, could help communicate the movement’s goals to the greater public in order to increase recruitment and help our movement to grow and expand.

**Desired Outcomes and Conclusion**

There are numerous outcomes that can be derived from the above framing strategies. The primary outcome we hope to accomplish is to bring the issue of illiteracy and poverty in the rural areas of Rajasthan and India as a whole to light in the eyes of the public. We aim to shape the public consciousness by enlisting the help of various groups (i.e. college students, women, and feminists) and launching a widespread campaign to entice people to support our program both through active participation and charitable donations. We hope to change the way women’s roles are defined in India by empowering them through education to make their own decisions and determine the course of their own lives. In the ensuing decade, we hope to see our efforts contribute to the closure of the literacy gender gap in Rajasthan by 10% of the existing rates. With progress being made in this area of the country, we hope to foster change all throughout India and lay the foundation for a
future India that will attain 100% literacy. One of the most prominent signs of a modern society is the elimination of illiteracy; until literacy and education are seriously addressed in India, specifically in rural areas, it will never be able to realize its full potential as a global power.
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