

CHAPTER II

PROBLEM SPECIFICATION

2.0 Introduction

One of the principal sources for literacy figures is population census. Literacy statistics tell us the number of literates and illiterates wherein criteria of literacy and illiteracy are often vaguely stated and variously applied. In census enumeration, the word of the respondent or the judgment of the enumerator is relied upon as no actual test of literacy is feasible. While statistical figures project progress of literacy in numbers, the meaning / definition of literacy has been varying.

2.1 What is Literacy ?

A UNESCO study (1953) conducted in 26 countries, collecting data from censuses, taken since 1900, showed, definitions of literacy and illiteracy are widely divergent, ranging from can read or cannot read to can or cannot write a short letter to a friend and read the answer. Ability to sign one's name is in some cases considered as sufficient evidence of literacy, while in others it is not ¹.

The United Nations Population Commission (1948) has recommended that literacy should be defined for census purposes as the ability both to read and to write a simple message in any language ².

The World Congress of Ministers of Education on the Eradication of Illiteracy, convened by UNESCO in Teheran (1965) concluded that rather than an end in itself, literacy should be regarded as a way of preparing man for a social, civic and economic role that goes far beyond the rudiments of literacy training, consisting merely in the teaching of reading and writing. The process of learning to read and write should be made an opportunity for acquiring information that can immediately be used to improve living standards, reading and writing should lead not only to elementary general knowledge but to training for work, increased productivity, a greater participation in civic life, a better understanding of the surrounding world and should, ultimately, open the way to basic human culture .

UNESCO's Revised Recommendation (1978) concerning the international standardization of educational statistics distinguishes between literacy and functional literacy. A person is literate "who can with understanding both read and write a short simple statement on his everyday life", whereas an individual who is functionally literate is able to "engage in all those activities in which literacy is required for effective functioning of his group and community and also for enabling him to continue to use reading, writing and calculation for his own and the community's development" .

In India, for census purpose, literacy meant :
- (1901) can or cannot both read and write any language.

- (1911, 1921, 1931) a person should be regarded as literate ,
if he could write a letter to a friend and read the answer
to it .
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Thus, literacy has a limited sense in census operations. In the 1971 census, a literate was described as a person who could both read and write with understanding in any language. However, even in census operations, meaning/definition of literacy has been varying from being "...just able to spell through or scribble imperfectly a few words in any language"⁶ , wrote the census commissioner of Cochin in 1901, to the ability to read and write with understanding in any language. It is not only that the meaning/definition of the term literacy has been varying but other dimensions were being added too. We have already seen UNESCO definition distinguishing between literacy and functional literacy.

UNDP (United Nations Development Programme) in its Human Development Report 1996⁷ describes adult literacy - the target age group being 15 and above - as the ability to read and write with understanding a short, simple statement on everyday life. Here, in essence, UNESCO (1978) definition of literacy and the above remain the same while the age group gaining significance; implying that adult literacy in a society is a matter for concern.

Coming back to the Indian scene, we would find that Total Literacy Campaigns (TLC) and Total Literacy are being spoken and written about with some interests since the 1990s after the

successful Ernakulam Total Literacy experiment in Kerala. Once again there was concern and renewed national interest when promotion of literacy was identified as one of the national Missions in the seventh five year plan. As a result National Literacy Mission (NLM) was launched on 5th May 1988 with the objective to impart functional literacy to 80 million illiterate persons in 15-35 age group - 30 million by 1990 and additional 50 million by 1995.

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In the terms of the NLM, functional literacy implies :

- achieving self reliance in literacy and numeracy.
- becoming aware of the causes of their deprivation and moving towards amelioration of their condition through organisation, and participation in the process of development.
- acquiring skills to improve the economic status and general well being.
- imbibing the values of national integration, conservation of the environment, women's equality, observance of small family norm, etc.

The NLM further prescribed levels in three R's as follows :

Reading :

- a) Reading aloud with normal accent simple passage on a topic related to the interest of the learners at a speed of 30 words per minute.

- b) Reading silently small paragraph in simple language at a speed of 35 words per minute.
- c) Reading with understanding road signs, posters, simple instructions and newspapers for neo-literates etc.
- d) Ability to follow simple written messages relating to one's working and living environment.

Writing :

- a) Copying with understanding at a speed of seven words per minute.
- b) Taking dictation at a speed of five words per minute.
- c) Writing with proper spacing and alignment.
- d) Writing independently short letters and applications and forms of day-to-day use to the learners.

Numeracy :

- a) To read and write 1-100 numerals.
- b) Doing simple calculations without fraction involving addition, subtraction upto three digits and multiplication and divisions by two digits.
- c) Working knowledge of metric units of weights, measures, currency, distance and area and units of time.

- d) Broad idea of proportion and interest (without involving fractions) and their use in working and living conditions.

Now, let us take a look at the total literacy concept. Total literacy is a concept which got evolved alongwith the total literacy campaign of the 1989-90, the Ernakulam experiment.

Jana Bodhana Saksharatha Yajnam 1989 (PELCK -People's Education and Literacy Campaign Kottayam) in Kottayam town of Kerala was, perhaps, the forerunner to the TLC in Ernakulam district. The Kottayam experiment - 100% literacy in 100 days - was a crash programme⁹ for three months (March - June 1989). With the help of volunteers from Mahatma Gandhi University, PELCK succeeded in making 2000 non-literates in 6-60 age group in the town fully¹⁰ literate within three months. The second part of PELCK was fifteen month long people's education, a series of intensive campaigns of one month duration each (see appendix-I).

Ernakulam district was declared totally literate on 4th February 1990. The age group covered was 6 - 60 years. In the Kottayam experiment, 100% literacy and total literacy were often used interchangeably whereas with the Ernakulam experiment it became more and more total literacy campaign. Today, total literacy is a widely used term. What does total literacy mean ? Does it mean the same whenever the term is used ?

Total Literacy :

In order to standardise the modalities of evaluation of learning outcomes of literacy campaigns and desirability of declaration of a district or a project area as fully literate, an

Expert Group was constituted by the Department of Education, Ministry of Human Resources Development, Government of India under the chairmanship of Prof. R.H. Dave. The group recommended a methodology of evaluation of learning outcomes and suggested a test design, weightages to be given to reading, writing and numeracy skills, cut-off points to judge the success of the learner in achieving stipulated literacy norms and the desirable levels of achievement. The Group recommended that a learner in order to be successful in the evaluation test should score at least 50% in each of the skills of reading, writing and numeracy and should score 70% in the aggregate. According to the desirable norms set out by the Dave Group, a literacy campaign should succeed in making 80% of the identified learners literate as per the above mentioned criterion ¹¹.

What age group do the identified non literates belong to ? Do all the TLCs or literacy projects have a particular target age group ?

A district is usually declared a total literacy district for a particular age group (15-35 or 15-45 or such other age group as identified by the concerned authorities) when the aggregate of neo literates comes to 80% or more of the identified learners in that age group. However, in practice, there has been some confusion in this regard; and there exist different procedures (e.g., 80% of the total population of the identified age groups, ¹² or sometimes 80% of the enrolled population only) .

In spite of the Dave Committee norms, total literacy declaration lacks a common yard-stick as it varies with age-group and population of non-literates. Does the total literacy concept (success defined as 80% of identified illiterates in a defined age group in a TLC achieving the Dave Committee norms on testing) promote a learning society ?

An Expert Group under the chairmanship of Prof. Arun Ghosh, appointed by the Ministry of Human Resource Development to look into the progress, problems and evaluation of the Total Literacy Campaign initiated by the National Literacy Mission made the following observations :

...the target of Total Literacy (at 80% achievement) is unrealistic and misleading; it encourages the fudging of figures and distracts attention from the process of promoting a learning society. Also progression from 10% literacy level to 50% is infinitely more difficult -and
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commendable - than progression from 40% to 80% .

The Expert Group recommended that the concept of total literacy at 80% level of success be given up. The target approach of achieving total literacy should be given up and the objective should be to seek to achieve high success rates rather than total literacy. A success rate of 55-60% among identified non-literates
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should be considered to be a good success rate .

Probably, scribbling one's name in 1901 to functionally literate in the 90s, meaning of literacy has been varying. Since the beginning of the century the term literacy has grown wider and broader in its scope and meaning. New dimensions like age group and functionality were added to it. With the target

approach of the total literacy concept, quantitative aspects too surrounds the term literacy other than the qualitative aspect.

While the meaning and scope of the term literacy kept varying from time to time, what progress did the country make in literacy ?

2.2 The Progress of Literacy

Three tables are presented in this section to show the progress of literacy (statistical data) in India since 1901. Table 2.1 shows the progress of literacy in India and Kerala for 1901 - 1981. Four erstwhile princely states and Madras Presidency under the British, figure in Table 2.2. Literacy figures for Kerala and a few other states for 1951 - 1981 are shown in table

Table 2.1 Literacy Rates : Kerala and India 1901 - 1981.

Census Year	Persons %		Male %		Female %	
	Kerala	India	Kerala	India	Kerala	India
1901	11.14	5.35*	19.15	9.83*	3.15	0.60*
1911	13.31	5.92*	22.25	10.56*	4.43	1.05*
1921	19.02	7.16*	27.88	12.21*	10.26	1.81*
1931	21.34	9.50*	30.89	15.59*	11.99	2.93*
1941	NA	16.10*	NA	24.90*	NA	7.30*
1951	40.47	16.67 ⁺	49.79	24.95 ⁺	31.41	7.93*
1961	56.85	24.02	54.97	34.44	38.90	12.95,
1971	60.42	29.45 ⁺⁺	66.62	39.45 ⁺⁺	54.31	18.69 ⁺⁺
1981	70.42	36.23	75.26	46.62	65.73	24.73

NA Not available
 * for undivided India
 + Excluding Jammu & Kashmir
 ++ Excluding Assam
 Source : Census of India 1901-1981

Table 2.2

Number of literates per 1000 population (for all ages, 1901-41) :
 Four Princely States and Madras Presidency.

State/Province	1901	1911	1921	1931*	1941
Cochin	134	151	185	337	353
Travancore	124	149	241	289	477
Baroda	88	98	125	209	229
Mysore	48	62	83	106	129
Madras Presidency	63	76	87	108	130

* 1931 figures for 5 years & above
 Source : Census of India 1901-1941

Table 2.3

Percentage of literates to the total population 1951-81.

States	1951	1961	1971	1981
Andhra Pradesh	13.2	21.2	24.6	29.94
Assam	18.3	27.4	28.8	NA
Bihar	12.2	18.4	19.9	26.20
Gujarat	23.0	30.5	35.8	43.70
J & K	NA	11.0	18.6	26.67
Karnataka	19.3	25.4	31.5	38.46
Madhya Pradesh	9.8	17.1	22.1	27.87
Maharashtra	20.9	29.8	39.2	47.18
Orissa	15.8	21.7	26.2	34.23
Punjab	15.2	24.2	31.1	40.86
Rajasthan	8.9	15.2	19.1	24.38
Tamil Nadu	20.8	31.4	39.5	46.76
Uttar Pradesh	10.8	17.6	21.8	27.16
West Bengal	24.0	29.3	33.2	40.94
Kerala	40.7	46.8	60.4	70.42

- NA : Not available
- Figures for Assam in 1971 includes those of Meghalaya and Mizoram
- Figures for Punjab in 1971 include those of Chandigarh and Haryana.
- In 1981, census could not be held in Assam.
- Total population includes age group 0-4.
- Source : Census of India 1951 - 81.

Even as early as in 1901, average literacy in Kerala was more than double the all India average. The disparity between all India average and Kerala average literacy was widening decade after decade from 1901 - 1981. If the average female literacy in Kerala was a little less than one third of the average male literacy in India in 1901, by the year 1951, the average female literacy in Kerala was more than the average male literacy in India by at least 6%. This gap between female literacy in Kerala and male literacy in India kept widening as could be seen from table (2.1) for 1971 and 1981. The disparity between female literacy in Kerala and India remained ever so widening, more or less creating a gulf between the two. The decade between 1911 and 1921 shows that Kerala registered better progress in literacy compared to the all India average. This trend continued for the remaining decade too. When Kerala improved the literacy percent by more than 16% for the decade 1951 - 61, the average all India increase was less than 8%.

Cochin and Travancore Princely States of Kerala, were leading the rest of India in matters of literacy. Even Baroda and Mysore, the two advanced Princely States of pre-independent India, and the Madras Presidency under the British were far behind Cochin and Travancore in literacy. Cochin had a leading position in literacy since 1901, except for 1921 and 1941.

In 1951, about three years after independence, none of the Indian states could boast of mass literacy or even 50% literacy. Except for Kerala, Indian states did not show even 25% literacy. When more than 60% of Kerala's population were literates in 1971,

no other Indian state had even 40% literates, a status Kerala enjoyed two decades before. In 1981 there were only five states which registered more than 40% literacy against Kerala's 70.42%. There were at least six states which had less than 30% literates in 1981, trailing four decades behind Kerala. It is disturbing to see that the gap between Rajasthan (with the lowest 8.9% literacy in 1951) and Kerala further widened than narrowing down from 1951 to 1981.

Tables 2.1 - 2.3 show that Kerala enjoyed a high literacy rate compared to all India average and other parts of the country since 1901. The two princely states of Kerala, Cochin and Travancore, were way ahead of the other two advanced princely states of India, Baroda and Mysore in matters of literacy. Kerala's leading position on the literacy front since 1901 brought it acclaim and attracted a few researchers to study the literacy performance. However, there aren't many studies which exclusively focus on this aspect compared to the, number of studies conducted on 'Kerala model' development in general. Some studies which have the focus on the literacy aspect of Kerala are presented in the following section.

2.3 Related literature :

Gough (1968) studied the distribution and uses of literacy in traditional Kerala (traditional Kerala refers to the feudal kingdoms from the mid-fifteenth to the mid-eighteenth century). It is suggested that compared with most of India, Kerala had an unusually high proportion of literate people in the traditional

period. It is argued that Kerala's high agricultural productivity, growth of overseas commerce, land sales, cash rents, mortgages, cash wages for soldiers and urban artisans must have fostered the use of simple literacy for accounting and legal documents. In traditional Kerala, although, considerable quantitative development of literacy occurred, it was put to work mainly in the service of trade, political relations, the arts of the court and the elaboration of priestly esoterica. In spite of widespread literacy, there was apparently little interest in the sceptical questioning of tradition or the conscious search for scientific, as distinct from mystical, truth. Relatively widespread literacy, even, did not break down the strict rules of social distance obtaining between the various literate birth-status categories, nor, indeed, between the minute subdivisions within each category. However, Gough hypothesises that if the running of large kingdoms of Kerala, large scale overseas trade and even the fundamental dichotomy between priests and rulers could have been possible in the absence of widespread literacy.

Eapen (1981) studied the contribution of the Church Mission Society to the progress and development of education in Kerala. It was found that educational activities of the missionaries contributed to the highest level of literacy; especially the enormous increase in women's education in Kerala.

Nair (1981) studied the relationship between primary education, population growth and socio-economic change in Kerala. The study revealed that in Kerala the major emphasis was on the strengthening and development of primary education during the

pre-as well as post-independence era in contrast to the policy of rapid development of the higher stages of education elsewhere in India. As a result of this emphasis, the rates of enrolment at the primary stage were very large; so also were the rates of retention within the system. This resulted in higher rates of literacy, particularly among women; in the state a much higher proportion of girls enter the system and are retained in it. The rapid process of educational expansion of the masses which began in Travancore during the 1860s, Nair concludes, was the combined result of several socio-economic compulsions of that period. Among them, the social unrest which made it imperative on the part of the government to introduce mass education and the fear of large scale conversion of the population to Christianity, combined with the appearance of elements of modernity in diverse areas of economic activity, were the strongest. The existence of a favourable socio-economic environment was mainly responsible for the large scale support that the process of development of primary education received spontaneously from almost all sections of the population; it also accounted for the acceleration of this process in subsequent decades.

Tharakan (1984) conducted a study on "Socio-economic factors in educational development : Case of nineteenth century Travancore". It is argued that the explanation for the relatively better spread of literacy and education as well as the founding of an impressive school network in Travancore in the nineteenth century is to be found in the favourable social and economic forces operating in that society rather than in the enlightened

policies of the monarchical regime and of the Christian missionaries. The study stated that the indigenous school system provided the base upon which the modern system was erected. In the second half of the century both private and government schools increased in number considerably. Of these, the government school system, as it was envisaged in response to the reorganisation of administration and its requirements for trained personnel for middle and low level positions assumed an emphasis in favour of vernacular and primary education. This evidently enhanced its contribution to mass literacy. The attraction of government jobs acted as a main force behind the expansion of educational activities of the elites of the various communities. The motive of getting into government service did ensure more admissions to schools, and greater literacy, especially in Malayalam. The growth in public education facilities in the second half of the century was evidently facilitated by favourable policies of the government. While these policies themselves were influenced by the particular historical context in which they were given shape to, its successful implementation, resulting in growth in number of admissions to schools, and literacy, and its maintenance over the decades, was possible only with adequate public demand for education. This demand was generated largely by socio-economic developments in nineteenth century Travancore. Most important among them, was the commercialisation of agriculture and of the economy which led to the growth of demand for basic literacy skills. Such demand, supplemented by the fact that schools were rather easily accessible, given the peculiar settlement pattern of the State,

Tharakan concludes, must have been the main reason for the relatively higher literacy levels in nineteenth century Travancore.

Mathew (1987) studied the development of education in Kerala and found that the following four factors could explain the resurgence of education in Travancore and Cochin and decline in Malabar : (1) The benevolent policies of the native rulers partly due to their enlightenment and partly due to the compulsions of the British residents; (2) The liberal encouragement afforded to the Christian Missions; (3) The ambitious modernization drive launched by the Travancore - Cochin governments, linking education with government employment; (4) A general improvement of different communities resulting from the limited socio-economic changes initiated by the rulers which acted as an impetus to acquire education.

An Overview : The studies reviewed above have examined the educational policies and educational development in Kerala in general. Socio-economic factors in educational development have also been studied upto a limited extent in some of the cases. However, a detailed and indepth analysis of the socio-cultural, economic and political history of Kerala wherein literacy spread and progressed are hard to come by. Moreover, all most all the studies have Travancore as the term of reference rather than Cochin. Gough draws the conclusion regarding the spread of literacy in traditional Kerala by heavily relying on the occupational pattern of the people. The attempt was at examining literacy as it was spread in that society rather than looking at

the growth and the way in which it progressed. Eapen's study was confined to the contribution of the particular agency, namely, the Church Mission Society, to the progress and development of education in Kerala. Nair and Tharakan examined socio-economic factors which have largely determined the direction, rate and pattern of educational development in Kerala. Mathew made comparative study of educational development in Travancore, Cochin and British Malabar. The main focus of the study was on the educational policies followed by the respective rulers. Socio-economic factors in educational development in Kerala have been discussed in almost all the studies reviewed above. However, a deeper analysis of the socio-economic, cultural and political forces operative in the society at various points of time from 19th century to the present decade to understand the spread and growth of literacy in a continuum has not been attempted.

2.4 The Present Study : Rationale

Kerala, a tiny state on the south-west coast of the Indian subcontinent has been a sort of trend setter compared to other states in the context of the country. Kerala has been long enough on the forefront of literacy, it holds the lowest infant mortality rate (IMR), and it ranks the highest in human development index (HDI) with the lowest per capita income in the country, lower than the country's average. No doubt, it could be said that, it was part of that trend setting and making history that Kerala became the first totally literate state in the country. To be precise, Kottayam town in Kerala staked the claim to become the first totally literate town in the state and

country in 1989. Ernakulam district in Kerala followed suit and set an example before the country to achieve total literacy. After the Ernakulam experiment in total literacy, Kerala secured its third acclaim when it became the first totally literate state, in the country. Total literacy in Kerala - was it the end-product of a single total literacy experiment ?

Tables 2.1 to 2.3 show the literacy progress of the country since the beginning of the century. From the numerical data available in these tables one may tend to conclude that India as a country made, infact, very dismal progress in the field of literacy. However, statistics on Kerala, taken separately, show a different picture. Kerala statistics on literacy look impressive throughout the century, against the context of the country. On the other hand, one would see that even Kerala's performance in literacy was nothing phenomenally impressive. Kerala, too, progressed in literacy slowly and somewhat steadily. As mentioned earlier, when compared with and contrasted against the Indian scenario, Kerala does show a difference making it relatively impressive. Hence in the context of the poor performance in all India average, study on Kerala literacy is not only interesting but also significant. It should be borne in mind that statistical data on literacy at the beginning of the century and today cannot be compared literally, as we have already seen that the scope and meaning of literacy kept varying from time to time.

To understand the spread and progress of literacy in a society at any given point of time, one needs to look beyond the numerical data. Numerically precise answers are not only

difficult to arrive at but would be incomplete to understand the growth of literacy in any society. Understanding the relationship between various forces operative in the society and their role in deciding the course and direction literacy would take, is imperative. As literacy makes progress in any society it is best understood when it is put in the context of the socio-economic, political and cultural happenings of the time. Performance or progress in literacy often get reported in terms of numerical data which are hardly explanatory in the absence of deeper understanding of the context.

Statistical data presented in table 2.2 show that Cochin was on the forefront in matters of literacy in the beginning of the century. When Ernakulam became the first district in the country to be totally literate, its legacy as part of the erstwhile Cochin state could not be overlooked. Total literacy achieved by Ernakulam district cannot be considered in isolation from the past. As any statistical data from table 2.1 to 2.3 would reveal that total literacy status achieved by Ernakulam had its share in a long past too. Hence, there is a legacy alongwith the one year total literacy experiment which placed Ernakulam district on the map of totally literate districts in the country at the top.

Studies reviewed above show that attempts to study the spread and progress of literacy culminating in total literacy by understanding and looking for meaning in the socio-economic, cultural and political happenings of the society have not been attempted so far. Although, statistical data would reveal that Cochin kept an impressive level of performance in literacy, it

has not received due attention for indepth analysis on this count. With such a legacy behind it was not surprising when Ernakulam became the first totally literate district of the country. The present study is an attempt to understand the various factors which have been operating in the society that contributed to the total literacy status in Ernakulam district. Some leading questions are,

- How did literacy take its shape in this society ?
- What were the interrelationships between various societal forces and the growth and spread of literacy ?
- What were the roles played by various agencies in the promotion of literacy ?

2.5 Statement of the Problem

Factors responsible for total literacy - A case study of Ernakulam district.

2.6 Objectives

- i. To study historically the attempts at spread of literacy in Ernakulam district in pre-and post-independence period.
- ii. To study the achievement of total literacy in Ernakulam district in terms of the role played by :
 - Voluntary organisations
 - Different socio-cultural institutions/agencies
 - Educationally interested groups/individuals
 - Government officials etc.

- iii. To identify the factors responsible for total literacy in Ernakulam district on the basis of the data regarding objectives 1 & 2.

2.7 Explanation of Terms

Factors : Something contributing to a result (in this case the spread and progress of literacy) which may be changes, events, happenings etc. taking place socially, politically, culturally, economically etc.

Total Literacy : The target population for total literacy campaign in Ernakulam were aged between 5 and 60. More than 98% of this target group were literate when Ernakulam district was declared totally literate.

The concept of total literacy is different from project to project as the target age group and their academic achievement may vary from project to project.

2.8 Delimitation of the study

The study is delimited to the erstwhile princely state of Cochin. Going down the history lane, the study is delimited in time down to 19th century.

Methodological details regarding the present study are presented in chapter 3.

Notes

1. UNESCO, Progress of Literacy in Various Countries : A Preliminary Statistical Study of Available Census Data Since 1900, 1953, p.11.
2. As quoted in ibid, p.13.
3. As quoted in Education and National Development (Report of the Education Commission 1964-66), NCERT, 1970, p.783.
4. As quoted by J.W. Ryan, "Literacy and Numeracy : Policies", in The International Encyclopaedia of Education, ed. by T. Husen and T.N. Postlethwaite, 1985, pp.3102-3103.
5. UNESCO, op.cit, p.16.
6. Census 1901, Cochin, p.93.
7. UNDP, Human Development Report, 1996, p.222.
8. MHRD, National Literacy Mission, 1988, pp.14-55.
9. C.T. Abraham, 100 Percent Literacy in 100 Days, People's Education and Literacy Campaign Kottayam (PELCK) 1989, p.11.
10. MHRD, Evaluation of Literacy Campaign in India : Report of Expert Group, 1994, p.8.
11. ibid, p.14.
12. ibid, p.34.
13. ibid, pp.33-34.
14. ibid, p.64.