






<p>Research Paper in Education</p>	    
<p>Dr. Shabana Haydar</p> <p>Assistant Professor, Department of Education, Netaji Nagar College for Women, Kolkata, West Bengal</p>	<p>Literacy Trend in India with Special Reference to the State of West Bengal</p> <p>Abstract</p> <p>Literacy plays a very vital role in the social and economic development of a Nation. A low level of literacy in a population retards the progress of a Nation. The Education for All movement put Literacy high on the agenda among the six Dakar goals by defining it as an essential component of basic quality education after the World Conference on Education for All (Jomtien, 1990). Education is one of the fundamental pillars upon which the entire edifice of the society rests. Without Education any sustainable all-round development or future growth is inconceivable. Growth and development, which is vital, is unimaginable if a large part of the society is bounded in illiteracy. The positive role of education and literacy may generate consciousness and make people aware about their own conditions and about the society in which they live. The purpose of the present paper is to assess the pattern of literacy in India with special reference to the state of West Bengal. The trend in Literacy over the years has shown significant improvement but it is estimated that it would take another several years for India to achieve universal literacy at the current rate of progress however some of the states in India has made tremendous progress in the improvement of literacy rate. The female literacy rate is however lesser than the male literacy. The rural-urban disparity in India and West Bengal is also very wide.</p>

Introduction

Education gives people the ability to access information and understand the range of rights that they hold, and government's obligations towards them. It supports people to develop the communication skills to demand these rights, the confidence to speak in a variety of forums, and the ability to negotiate with a wide range of government officials and power holders.

Literacy is the key to socio-economic progress, and Indian literacy rate grew to 74.04% in 2011 from 12% at the time of independence in 1947. Although this is noteworthy, but the level is well below the world average literacy rate of 84%, and India today has the largest number of illiterate population on earth and it is estimated that by the year 2020 over 50% of the illiterate population will live in India

Objectives

- To analyze the pattern of literacy in India and West Bengal.
- To analyze the pattern of male urban/rural literacy in different States specially West Bengal.

- To analyze the pattern of female urban/rural literacy in different States specially West Bengal.

Methodology: This study is based on secondary data. The data has been collected from Census of India, National Family Health Survey and other official records.

Definition of Literacy: In international usage, literacy is defined as the ability to read and write, at least a simple message in any language; illiteracy conversely refers to the lack or absence of this ability. In other words, if a person possesses the dual skill of reading and writing, he/she is called literate. The proportion of literate persons in a population is termed as literacy level. The population commission of the United Nations defines literacy as "The ability of people to read and write a simple message in any language with some understanding". Indian Census has been using the UN definition.

The National Literacy Mission defines literacy as acquiring the skills of reading, writing and arithmetic and the ability to apply them to one's day-to-day life. The achievement of functional literacy implies (i) self-reliance in 3 R's, (ii) awareness of the causes of deprivation and the ability to move towards

amelioration of their condition by participating in the process of development, (iii) acquiring skills to improve economic status and general well-being, and (iv) imbibing values such as national integration, conservation of environment, women's equality, observance of small family norms.

Literacy Trend in India

Literacy is one of the most important indicators of economic development of a society. Literacy in India grew very slowly until independence in 1947. An acceleration in the rate of literacy growth occurred in the 1991-2001 period. In 1944, the Government of British India with a goal of producing 100% literacy in the country within 40 years, i.e. by 1984 introduced the Sergeant Plan. The 40 year time-frame was considered too long a period to achieve universal literacy by the leaders at the time of Independence, ironically India after 69 years of Independence has crossed only 74% level by the 2011 census.

A significant milestone reached in the 2011 census with the fall in the number of illiterate persons by 31,196,847. Of the total decrease in the number of illiterates, women comprise 17,122,197 and men were 14,074,650. Out of a total of 217,700,941 literates added during the decade, females outnumbered males by 110,069,001 to 107,631,940.

Table 1: Number of Literates in India

	2001	2011	Difference	Growth %
Total	56,07,53,179	77,84,54,120	21,77,00,941	38.82
Male	33,65,71,822	44,42,03,762	10,76,31,940	31.98
Female	22,41,81,357	33,42,50,358	11,00,69,001	49.10

(Source: Census 2011)

As per the provisional figures of Census 2011, in India 77,84,54,120 persons have been counted as literates as against 56,07,53,179 in 2001 census. Among all literates, 33,42,50,358 are females, whereas 44,42,03,762 are males as against 22,41,81,357 females, whereas 33,65,71,822 males in 2001 census. The literacy rate of India in 2011 is 74.0 per cent. Literacy rate among females is 65.5% whereas the literacy rate among males is 82.1%. Literacy level has increased by 9.21% points in the past decade to touch 74.04%. India's literacy rate improved only very slowly moreover it is the slower than the growth during the previous decade.

Table 2: Literacy Trend in India 2001-2011

	2001	2011	Difference
Total	64.83	74.04	9.2
Male	75.26	82.14	6.9
Female	53.67	65.46	11.8

Literacy Rate: The total percentage of the population of an area at a particular time aged seven years or above who can read and write with understanding. Here the denominator is the population aged seven years or more.

Significantly, the female literacy level saw a significant jump as compared to males. The female literacy in 2001 was 53.67% and it has gone up to 65.46% in 2011. The male literacy, in comparison, rose from 75.26% to 82.14 %. The gap of 21.59% points recorded between male and female literacy rates in 2001 census has reduced to 16.68% points in 2011. The census provided a positive indication that growth in female literacy rates (11.8%) was substantially faster than in male literacy rates (6.9%) in the 2001-2011 decadal period, which means the gender gap appears to be narrowing.

The need to universalize education and accelerate literacy growth was recognized as the crucial input for nation building and was given overriding priority in enactment of the Constitution as well as in successive five year plans. The literacy rate grew from 18.33 per cent in 1951, to 28.30% in 1961, 34.45% in 1971, 43.57% in 1981, 52.21% in 1991, 64.84% in 2001 and 74.04% in 2011. During the same period, the population grew from 361 million to 1,210 million. Every census since 1881 indicates rising literacy in the country, but the population growth rate is high enough that the absolute number of illiterates rises with every decade. India continues to remain behind many of the developing countries.

Literacy Status in Different States of India: Kerala with 93.91% literacy is the most literate state in India. Kerala topped the Education Development Index (EDI); it was followed closely by Lakshadweep at 92.28%. Bihar remained as low as at 63.82%, followed by Arunachal Pradesh at 66.95%. Bihar is the only Indian state in the 2011 census where less than 65% of the population was literate. Six Indian states account for about 70% of all illiterates in India: Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal. Slightly less than half of all Indian illiterates (48.12%) are in the six Hindi-speaking states of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Jharkhand, and Chhattisgarh. Ten States and Union Territories, including Kerala, Lakshadweep, Mizoram, Tripura, Goa, Daman and Diu, Puducherry, Chandigarh, NCT of Delhi and Andaman and Nicobar Islands achieved a literacy rate

of above 85%. Mizoram the second most literate state in India with Serchhip district (98.76%) and Aizawl (98.50%) recording the highest literacy rates among districts. Mizoram literacy rate rose from 31.14% in 1951 to 88.80% in 2001. Madhya Pradesh's Alirajpur district with 37.22% and Chhattisgarh's Bijapur district, with 41.58% has the lowest literacy rate. Tamil Nadu's literacy rate rose from 54.4% in 1981 to 80.3% in 2011. Although the decadal rise from 2001-11 was only 7% (60.4% in 2001 to 67.1% in 2011) Rajasthan had the biggest percentage decadal (1991-2001) increase in literacy from about 38% to about 61%, Bihar significantly raised the literacy rate and as per the 2011 census the literacy rate rose from 39% in 1991 to 47% in 2001 to 63.8% in 2011.

Female literacy varies from around 34% in Bihar to 88% in Kerala; male literacy varies between 60% in Bihar and 94% in Kerala. Rajasthan suffers the widest gender difference: female literacy stands at 44%; male at 77%. There is a wide gender disparity in most of the states. The low female literacy rate has a negative impact on other aspects of development in India.

Illiteracy in different States/Union Territories: During the decade 2001-2011 the absolute number of illiterates decreased by 31,196,847. Uttar Pradesh (7,424,572) contributed the most in the decrease in number of illiterates followed by Bihar (4,250,715), they together account for 37.43% of the total decrease in illiterates. The other States with sizeable decrease in number of illiterates are West Bengal (9.44%), Gujarat (7.60%), Maharashtra (7.15%), Karnataka (6.37%), Tamil Nadu (5.82%), Orissa (5.80%), Andhra Pradesh (4.87%) and Jharkhand (3.96%). The States of Rajasthan (3.18%), Chhattisgarh (0.81%) and Madhya Pradesh (0.80%) show an increase in number of illiterates. Rajasthan increased by 991,420 followed by Chhattisgarh 252,116 and Madhya Pradesh 248,831.

Illiteracy (Male/Female) in different States/Union Territories: The absolute number of male illiterates has decreased by 14,074,650 during the decade 2001-2011. In all the States and Union Territories except Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh and Daman & Diu, the number of male illiterates has decreased. States showing decadal decrease are Uttar Pradesh (26.22%), Bihar (14.84%), Gujarat (7.39%), West Bengal (6.80%), Maharashtra and Karnataka (5.86%) each. The number of female illiterates has gone down by 17,122,197. However, the number of female

illiterates has increased in Rajasthan (929,566), Madhya Pradesh (192,536), Chhattisgarh (173,719) and Mizoram (895). The States which have contributed significantly in decreasing the number of female illiterates are Uttar Pradesh (21.81%), Bihar (12.63%), West Bengal (11.61%), Maharashtra (8.21%), Gujarat (7.77%), Tamil Nadu (7.31%), Karnataka (6.79%), Orissa (6.76%) & Andhra Pradesh (5.41%).

Progress of Literacy and No. of Illiterates in West Bengal: Literacy rate of West Bengal during 2011 was 77.1%. West Bengal ranks quite low among all the states and there is need to intensifying drive to achieve UEE and increase literacy growth. As per the provisional figures of Census 2011, in West Bengal 62.6% have been counted as literates as against 47.19% in 2001 census. The literacy rate of West Bengal in 2011 is 77.10% as against 68.64% in 2001 census. Literacy level has increased by 8.46% points in the past decade to touch 77.10% showing a very slow growth. However, total number of illiterates in West Bengal started declining from the year 2001. Total number of illiterates in West Bengal in 2001 is 21.56% and 18.6% in 2011.

Table 3: Comparison for Literacy Rate in India and West Bengal

Year	India				West Bengal			
	Literacy Rate (%)	N		Increase in No. of Illiterates	Literacy Rate (%)	N		Increase in No. of Illiterates
		Literate	Illiterate			Literate	Illiterate	
1951	18.33	58.9	294.2	+32.4	24.61			
1961	28.30	102.6	325.5	+31.3	34.46			
1971	34.45	157.3	376.2	+50.7	38.86			
1981	43.57	241.0	424.3*	+48.1	48.65			
1991	52.21	349.76	320.41	+18.3*	57.70	32.6	23.9	
2001	64.84	560.7	304.15	-16.26	68.64	47.19	21.56	-2.34
2011	74.04	778.5	272.95	-31.20	77.08	62.6	18.6	-2.96

(Source: Economic Survey, 2011-12; Office of the Registrar General: 2011, India; M/Home Affairs)

From the year 1991 children below 7 years instead of below 5 years are being excluded for calculating literacy. During 1981 illiterate population in the age group 7 years above was 302.06 million.

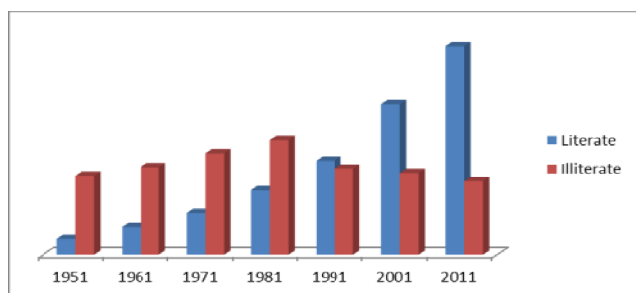
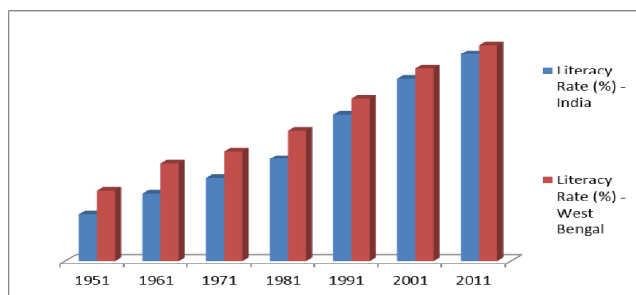


Figure 1: Comparison for Literacy rate in India and West Bengal

Female Literacy

There is also persistent gender gap in literacy in West Bengal. The literacy rates of male and female in West Bengal during the last three census held in 1991, 2001 and 2011 are shown graphically in figure 2. (1981 male 59.93%, female 36.07%; 1991 male 67.81%, female 46.56%; 2001 male 77.02%, female 59.61%; 2011 male 82.67%, female 71.16%) The gender gap in literacy also varies across social classes. As per 2001 census literacy rate of SC male and female were 70.54% & 46.90% respectively, and literacy rate for ST were 57.38% & 43.40% respectively. Thus the gender gap in literacy for SC was 23.64% points and for the ST were 13.98% points respectively. Gender gap in literacy among Muslims was 14.8% point, which is contrary to the popular belief of educational backwardness of Muslim women, though in absolute terms they are behind the state average. Compared to that the gender gap in literacy for all social groups in West Bengal taken together was 17.41% points during 1991, which has improved to 11.51% points during 2011. The figure shows a significant increase in female literacy by almost 10% in every decade. Moreover the gender gap seems to be narrowing.

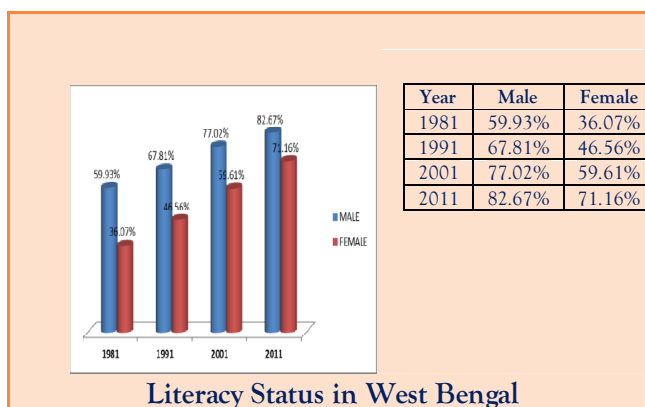


Figure 2: Literacy Trend in West Bengal

Rural literacy among female population of West Bengal during 2011 census was 66.08% implying that little more than one third of the rural women in West Bengal were illiterate. There were two districts namely Purulia and Uttar Dinajpore with rural female literacy lower than 50%. Only East Midnapore had rural female literacy higher than 80% and three districts, namely Howrah, North. 24 Parganas and Hooghli had that rate above 70% but below 80%.

Table 4. Literacy in Rural and Urban West Bengal

West Bengal	Urban	Rural	Total NFHS-4 (2015-16)	Total NFHS-3 (2005-06)
Women who are literate (%)	79.4	66.9	71.0	58.8
Men who are literate (%)	83.9	79.7	81.1	73.9
Women with 10 or more years of schooling (%)	40.0	20.1	26.5	15.7
Population (female) age 6 years and above who ever attended school (%)	81.5	70.4	74.0	64.0

(Source: NFHS 4)

Literacy in Rural and Urban West Bengal

Female literacy of West Bengal according to NFHS 4 (2015-16) was 71.0% and as per NFHS 3 (2005-6) was 58.8%, showing a decadal literacy growth of 12.2%. Male literacy of West Bengal during NFHS 4 was 81.1% and as per NFHS 3 was 73.9% showing a literacy growth of 7.2%. There is a wide gender disparity in the literacy rate in West Bengal. However the data provides a positive indication that growth in female literacy rates (12.2%) was substantially faster than in male literacy rates (7.2%) in the 2006-2016 decadal period, which means the gender gap appears to be narrowing.

According to NFHS 4 (2015-16) urban literate Population (female) in West Bengal was 79.4% and rural literate Population (female) was 66.9% showing urban population (female) more literate. Urban literate Population (male) was 83.9% and rural literate

Population (male) was 79.7% signifying urban male being more literate than rural. Literacy among female Population both Urban and rural is however lesser than the male literacy.

Total number of female Population age 6 years and above who ever attended school as per NFHS 4 was 74.0% and as per NFHS 3 is 64.0% showing a 10% growth. Urban Population (female) age 6 years and above who ever attended school was 81.5% and rural population (female) age 6 years and above who ever attended school was 70.4%, suggesting more girls in urban area than rural area age 6 years and above ever attending school. Moreover total number of women with 10 or more years of schooling as per NFHS4 is 26.5% and as per NFHS 3 is 15.7% suggesting a growth of 10.8%. Urban Population (female) with 10 or more years of schooling as per NFHS4 is 40.0% and rural population (female) with 10 or more years of schooling is 20.1% Implying urban Population (female) being able to complete 10 or more years of schooling more than rural population (female). It is also suggestive of the fact that 79.8% four fifth of the rural women in West Bengal are not being able to complete 10 years of schooling.

Table 5: Literacy in Different Districts of West Bengal

	Women who are literate (%)			Men who are literate (%)		
	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total
Dakhin Dinajpur	64.5		67.3	80.2		83.2
Uttar Dinajpur	47.6		51.1	63.7		65.1
Murshidabad	64.7		66.1	86.6		85.1
Bankura	62.0		65.2	82.3		83.7
Purbamedinipur	75.2		76.1	90.4		89.3
Darjeeling	72.1	88.0	78.0	92.4	98.6	95.0
Purulia	48.9		48.1	77.6		76.5
Birbhum	59.1		62.1	87.4		86.2
North 24 Parganas	79.4	85.6	82.9	78.1	84.1	80.9
South 24 Parganas	72.9		74.6	73.9		76.9
Bardhaman	64.1	70.0	66.6	68.8	77.6	72.6
Howrah	76.2	79.8	78.4	84.0	92.4	89.0
Kolkata	80.8		80.8	84.3		84.3
Jalpaiguri	58.8		64.2	72.8		74.5

(Source: NFHS 4)

Literacy Indifferent Districts of West Bengal

The highest incidence of illiteracy is found to be in rural areas. Geographical (rural) areas, which are remote and have higher incidence of poverty generally have lower literacy. From the tables we can say In West Bengal, districts like Uttar Dinajpore with 51.1%, Dakshin Dinajpore with 67.3%, Purba Medinipur with 76.1%, Bankura with 65.2%,

Darjeeling with 78.0%, Purulia with 48.1%, Murshidabad with 66.1% female literacy are identified, as per NFHS 4 data as having poor female literacy and high gender inequality close to 20% and districts like Uttar Dinajpore with 47.6% (rural) 51.1%, (total), Purulia with 48.9% (rural) 51.1%, (total) Jalpaiguri with 58.8% (rural) 64.2%, (total) showed very poor Female Literacy rate as against 63.7% (rural) 65.1% male literacy (total) in Uttar Dinajpore and 77.6% (rural) 76.5% (total) male literacy in Purulia and 72.8% (rural) 74.5% (total) male literacy in Jalpaiguri. All the districts of West Bengal show female literacy both Urban and rural lesser than male literacy.

Districts like Kolkata with 80.8 % female Literacy and 84.3% male Literacy, Howrah with 78.4% female Literacy and 89.0% male Literacy and South 24 parganas with 74.6% female Literacy and 76.9% male Literacy, North 24 parganas with 82.9% female Literacy and 80.9% male Literacy, Bardhaman with 66.6% female Literacy and 72.6% male Literacy showed better literacy rate and less gender disparity in literacy. Districts like Hooghly with 76.3% Female Literacy (FL) 85.8% Male Literacy, Koch Bihar with 66.8% FL 80.8% ML, Maldah with 64.2% FL 71.7% ML, Nadia with 73.7% FL 79.7% ML, Paschim Medinipur with 70.7% FL 82.9 %ML show better performance but gender gap persists. Utmost effort should be made to improve female literacy. Access to elementary education of all the socially disadvantaged groups, particularly girls is one important area for closer monitoring and appropriate interventions.

Conclusion

Today with a population of over 1210.2 million (census 2011), India has a challenging task in ensuring Universal Elementary Education and improving literacy rate. Access to elementary education, Gross enrolment ratio has increased manifold over the years since independence but this has not been able to solve the problem of literacy in India, especially in rural areas and among the female population and other disadvantaged groups. Steps to boost literacy rates should be taken by the states in India. Strong official intervention, community participation in administering programmes, adequate funding for infrastructure and teachers' availability, teachers' training and provision of additional services such as free midday meal, free education to poor community living in villages and towns, setting up of new school

and colleges at district and state levels, forming of committees to ensure proper utilization of funds allotted to improve literacy rate are some of the steps to be taken to improve Literacy Rate in India.

References

- Census of India, Provisional Population Totals, Registrar General of India. New Delhi, 2011.
- Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India, International Institute for Population Sciences National Family Health Survey-4, 2015-16 <http://www.mohfw.nic.in>.
- Census of India (Provisional), 2001 Census of India, New Delhi, 2011, Our Census, Our Future. censusindia.gov.in
- The situation of Children in India, A profile. UNICEF/INDIA/NiklasHalle'nUnited Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), May 2011 www.unicef.in.
- Economic Survey, 2011-12; Office of the Registrar General: 2011, India; M/Home Affairs. <http://r2e.gn.apc.org/node/235>
- <http://www.internationalbudget.org/>
- <http://www.educationworldonline.net/index.php/>
- http://www.indiatogether.org/2004/jul/education_kothari.htm.
- <http://education.nic.in/Elementary/free%20and%20compulsory.pdf>
- <http://righttoeducation.in/legislation-states>
- <http://r2e.gn.apc.org/node/235>