

## Disparity in the Literacy Level among the Scheduled and Non-Scheduled Population: Indian Scenario in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

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### Abstract

*According to the Article 45 of the Indian Constitution, 'free and compulsory education for all children up to the age of 14' is a constitutional commitment in India. It aims to give everyone a chance to learn and get benefited from basic education- not as an accident of circumstances or as a privilege but as a right. But due of the prevalence of rigid caste system in India, the right to education became reserved for the privileged few thereby denying the right to education to the deprived sections of the society. After independence, by the efforts of Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar, who fought for the rights of the 'Depressed Classes', the Scheduled Population have been benefited by the "Reservation Policy". Accordingly, the Constitution has laid down the general principles for the policy of affirmative action for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. This paper makes an attempt in mapping out the literacy level and the extent of rural-urban gap and male-female disparity in literacy rate existing among the scheduled and non-scheduled population in India, after six and half decades of independence. Furthermore the paper has tried to analyse the best possible reasons responsible for the existence of any such disparities in literacy level and has also made an effort to discuss about the new strategies and appropriate programmes which will hopefully result in bridging the gap between the privileged and un-privileged classes of the society.*

**Key Words:** *Literacy, Scheduled and Non-Scheduled Population, Rural-Urban Gap, Male-Female Disparity.*

Literacy is often considered as one of the sensitive indicators of social development. This is because literacy helps a social group to acquire a higher social status through the process of social mobility. Thus studies regarding the literacy pattern of a country seem to be relevant enough in today's society.

In most of the developing countries, the narrowly defined concept of 'literacy' considers a person to be literate, if he is able to read street signs and posters and can decipher a letter, but he might not read a newspaper with anything like reasonable comprehension and read less and less, and

as the years go by, he eventually lapses back into the state of illiteracy. On the other hand, 'functional literacy' in a developed country takes into account of a person, who approaches the standards of a primary school level, even after six years of formal education. It implies the ability to read a newspaper in an hour or so, to follow a leaflet or a simple pamphlet issued by the Ministry of Agriculture, to absorb a well-written instruction manual for a technical appliance or a machine, in short, and to make productive use of reading and writing (Blaugh, 1976).

In India, the definition and method of assessment of 'literacy' varies across various sources, such as the Census of India, National Literacy Mission (NLM), National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO) and National Family Health Survey (NFHS). However, the decennial census definition is the most widely acceptable and frequently quoted estimates of literacy in our country. According to the census enumeration, 'a person, who can read and write with understanding in any language, is considered to be 'literate'. The person may or may not have received any formal education.' In India, the data on literacy, obtained through census enumeration is based on self-declaration of the respondent, and thus, it classifies all individuals into two categories, i.e. literate and illiterate. This definition of literacy includes different grades of people starting from those who can only read and write to those who have mastered certain disciplines. Thus, India follows a fairly liberal definition of 'literacy' (Govinda et. al, 2005).

Literacy in India has made remarkable strides since independence. In 1901, a little over 5 per cent of the Indian population was literate, which increased to around 16 per

cent in 1950, a mere increase of 11 per cent in the literacy rate during the first half of the century. In the post-independence period (Fig No: 1), the decadal growth in literacy has shown a substantial progress from 18.35 per cent (5+ age group population) in 1951 to 74.04 per cent (7+ age group population) in 2011.

However, these average values are often misleading and do not present a correct picture within the countries like India where rural-urban differences, gender disparity and disparities within the social classes are clearly demarcated. Hence several efforts have been made by both the central and state governments so as to do away with these social differences, by formulating policies and programmes from time to time.

After completing sixty-six years of independence and having experimented with special welfare programmes, it is high time to assess the achievements. Thus, we need to analyse whether disparity exists in the levels of literacy among the scheduled and non-scheduled population, even after making provisions for providing equal opportunities to these socially backward classes.

## Objectives

This paper makes a modest attempt in mapping out the state level literacy pattern in India, with special emphasis on the scheduled and non-scheduled population. It aims to analyse the temporal and spatial aspects of literacy gap existing between these two social classes. It also focuses on the changing spatial patterns in terms of rural-urban gap as well as male-female disparity in the literacy level between the scheduled and non-scheduled population in India.

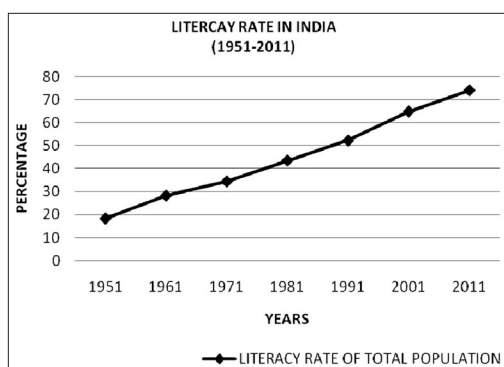


Fig. 1 :

## Data Base

This study is basically a Macro level analysis covering only the major states of the entire country as a whole. Therefore, the analysis is purely based on quantitative data obtained from different secondary sources like the Census of India, Series- A, Primary Census Abstract, Final Population Totals, 1991 and 2001, Census of India, SC/ST Series, Primary Census Abstract for Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes, India/State Level Data, 1991 and 2001, prepared by the Government of India. It must be mentioned here that the analysis is mainly based on 1991 and 2001 data, as 2011 state level data on literacy rates of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes are still not available.

## Methodology

The period for present investigation covers 1991 and 2001. The collected data from different sources were processed in percentage. Finally the processed data have been put in the tabular forms and for comparative analysis these data have been represented by graphs.

In order to explain the changing spatial pattern of disparity level, modified form of Sopher's Index of Disparity (by Kundu and Rao) has been used to calculate the male-female disparity and rural-urban disparity among both the scheduled and non-scheduled population by using the following formula:-

$$\text{Disparity Index (Ds)} = \log (X_2/X_1) + \log ((200-X_1) / (200-X_2))$$

Where,  $X_2$  = percentage of male literates/  
percentage of urban literates

$X_1$  = percentage of female literates/  
percentage of rural literates

i.e.  $X_2 \geq X_1$ .

## Results and Discussions

The Constitution of India empowers the President of India (via articles 341 and 342) after consulting the heads of the different states i.e. Governors, to notify certain groups of the society as Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes by an order and also to edit it later as required. The actual complete listing of castes and tribes was made via two orders- The Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950 and The Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order, 1950 respectively. The Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950 lists 1,108 castes across 25 states in its First Schedule, while the Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order, 1950 lists 744 tribes across 22 states in its First Schedule. The persons belonging to Scheduled Castes or Scheduled Tribes in a particular State or Union Territory will be enumerated as belonging to Scheduled Castes or Scheduled Tribes only, if, such a caste or tribe is listed in the Scheduled Castes List or Scheduled Tribes List of that particular State/Union Territory. As per the 2001 Census, the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes constitute 16.2 per cent and 8.1 per cent of the total population of India respectively, or together make up around 24.3 per cent of country's total population.

## Trends in Literacy Rate since 1961

The Table No. 1 shows the trends of literacy pattern of the country since 1961. It has been noted that the literacy rate of the total population has been 28.31 per cent in 1961, and has further increased up to 64.83 per cent during 2001. Similarly, in 1961, 10.67 per cent of Scheduled Castes and 8.53 per cent of Scheduled Tribes were found to be

literate, which have increased to 54.69 per cent and 47.1 per cent respectively in 2001. Thus, the literacy pattern shows an increasing trend among the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and the total population, as well, since 1961. This was

possible because of the ‘national literacy mission’ drive launched by the Government of India, which has created a new scope of immediate awareness to supply the energy for rapid growth of literacy in the country as a whole.

**Table No. 1:** Increase in Literacy Rate during 1961-2001

Years Category	1961 (% increase)	1971 (% increase)	1981 (% increase)	1991 (% increase)	2001 (% increase)
Total Population	28.31	34.45 (21.69 %)	43.56 (26.44 %)	52.21 (19.86 %)	64.83 (24.17 %)
Scheduled Caste	10.27	14.67 (42.84 %)	21.38 (45.74 %)	37.41 (74.98 %)	54.69 (46.19 %)
Scheduled Tribe	8.53	11.30 (32.47 %)	16.35 (44.69 %)	29.60 (81.04 %)	47.10 (59.12 %)

**Source:** Census of India, Various Years.

However, it is quite surprising to note that, though the literacy rate of the total population is comparatively higher than that of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes during the reference period of 1961-2001, yet the percentage increase in the growth of literacy rate has been always higher among the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes than that of the total population as a whole. This could be because of the “Reservation Policy” introduced by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, which might have provided several opportunities to these socially backward classes in the field of education.

### **Literacy Rate: State Level Patterns (1991-2001)**

In 1991, the literacy rate among the scheduled population for India stood around 33.51 per

cent. As per 1991 census, the literacy rate among the scheduled population is as high as 80.33 per cent in the state of Mizoram and as low as 22.87 per cent in Rajasthan. In fact, the Table No: 2 shows that most of the states of India, e.g. Mizoram, Kerala, Nagaland, Manipur, Sikkim, Assam, Goa, Himachal Pradesh, Gujarat, Tripura, Maharashtra, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Punjab, Haryana, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and West Bengal, have recorded literacy rate higher than the national average. On the other hand, the states like Uttar Pradesh, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar and Rajasthan have shown literacy rate lower than the national average, ranging from 23.14 per cent to 31.28 per cent, in case of scheduled population. According to 2001 census, the national average literacy rate of the scheduled population in India had increased up to 51.57 per cent. The

literacy rate among the scheduled population stands highest in the state of Mizoram (89.34 per cent) in 2001. Other than this, the states of Kerala, Goa, Himachal Pradesh, Sikkim, Manipur, Nagaland, Maharashtra, Assam, Uttarakhand, Tripura, Tamil Nadu, Meghalaya, Punjab, West Bengal, Haryana, Gujarat and Chhattisgarh have also recorded literacy rate higher than the national average (Table No: 2). In 2001, the lowest literacy rate has been noticed in the state of Bihar (28.45 per cent) followed by the states of Jharkhand, Orissa, Uttar Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan, Arunachal Pradesh and Karnataka, which have also shown literacy rate lower than the national average for the scheduled population (Table No: 2).

On the other hand, in 1991, the national average literacy rate for the non-scheduled population was recorded to be 57.73 per cent, with Kerala as the highest literacy rate of 91.34 per cent. Here, apart from a very

few exceptional cases like Bihar, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Sikkim, all other Indian states have shown literacy rate higher than the national average of 57.53 per cent (Table No: 2).

In 2001, the literacy rate among the non-scheduled population is recorded to be as high as 92.10 per cent in Kerala and as low as 50.58 per cent in Bihar. In case of the non-scheduled population, most of the states of India e.g. Kerala, Tripura, Goa, Mizoram, Maharashtra, Himachal Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Punjab, Orissa, Uttarakhand, West Bengal, Manipur, Gujarat, Nagaland, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka, Haryana, Meghalaya and Sikkim have shown literacy rate higher than the national average (68.95 per cent) with a few exceptions like Bihar, Jammu and Kashmir, Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Andhra Pradesh and Rajasthan (Table No: 2).

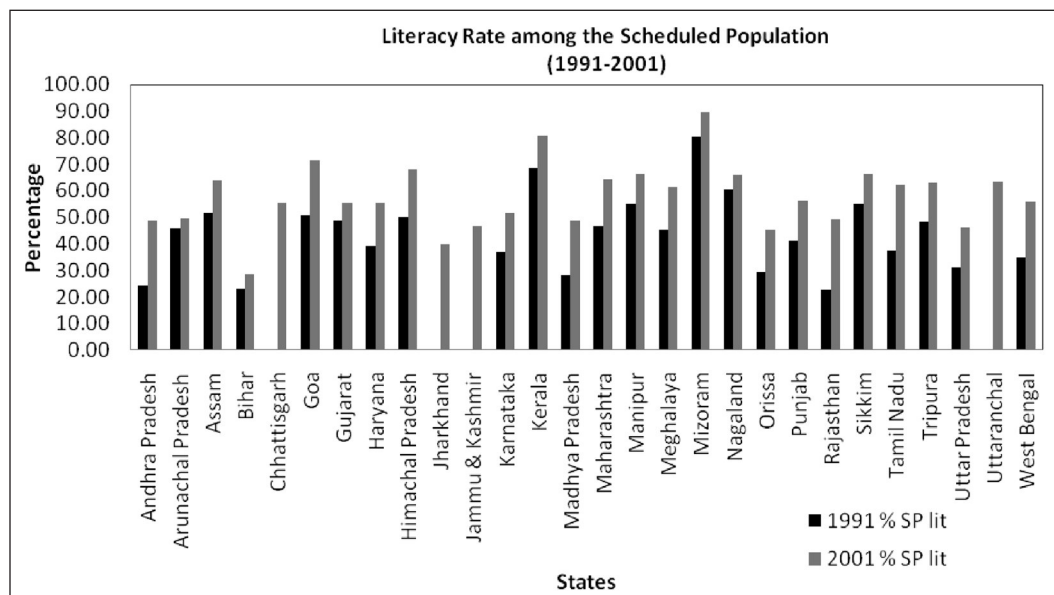


Fig. 2 :

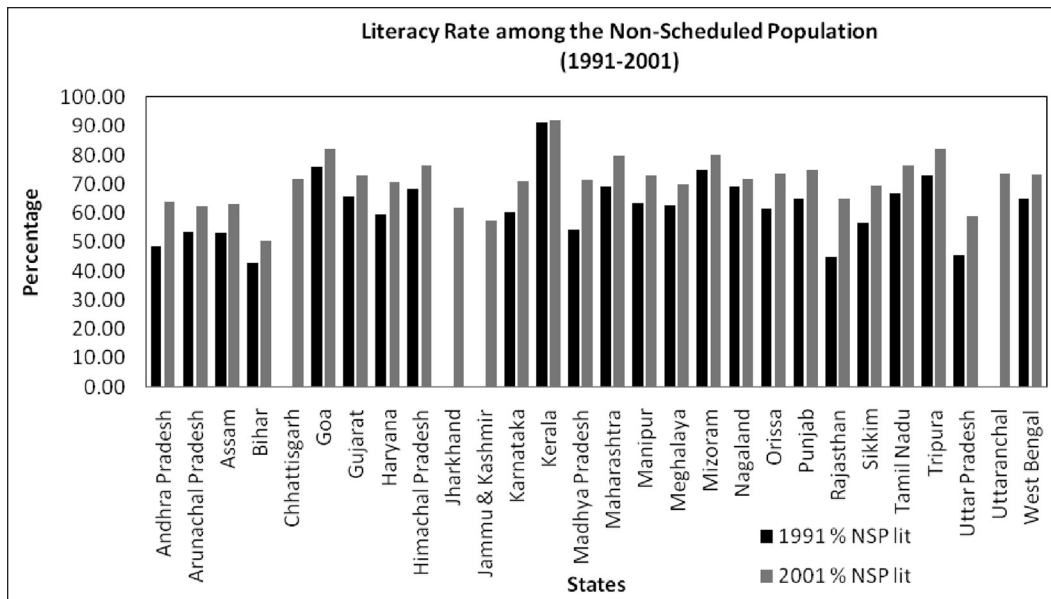


Fig. 3 :

Hence, the analysis shows that though the proportion of literates among both the scheduled and non-scheduled population has increased over the time period of 1991 to 2001, yet the positions of the states from the reference point of the national average literacy rate remain almost unaltered. It is noteworthy to mention that, in case of the non-scheduled population, only the position of the states of Sikkim and Madhya Pradesh has improved. In 1991, these two states have shown literacy rates below the national average, while, in 2001, they have achieved literacy rate above the national average. On the contrary, in case of scheduled population, the position of Karnataka and Arunachal Pradesh has worsened. In 1991, these two states have shown literacy rates above the national average, while, in 2001, their literacy rate have declined below the national average. Thus, the study clearly depicts that in terms

of literacy rates, the scheduled population belongs to a much disadvantageous state when compared with those of the non-scheduled population.

This study therefore, brings out both the brighter as well as the darker side of the nation, too. The brighter part points out that, most of the states of India have achieved the literacy rate higher than the national average for both the scheduled and non-scheduled population thereby increasing the average literacy rate as a whole. On the other hand, the darker side shows that the literacy rate in the economically and socially backward states, specially the BIMARU (Note.iii) and its allied states, lag far behind the national average for both the scheduled and non-scheduled population thereby accentuating immense inter-state variation which ultimately leads to huge regional disparity within the country itself.



## Literacy Gap (1991-2001)

This section examines the existence of state level literacy gap between the scheduled and non-scheduled population in India.

The Table No. 2 shows that, in 1991 except for the state of Mizoram, the literacy rate is always higher among the non-scheduled population when compared

**Table No. 2:** Literacy Gap between the Scheduled and Non-Scheduled Population (1991-2001)

States	1991			2001		
	Non-Scheduled Population	Scheduled Population	Literacy Gap	Non-Scheduled Population	Scheduled Population	Literacy Gap
Andhra Pradesh	24.38	48.65	<b>24.28</b>	48.88	63.81	<b>14.94</b>
Arunachal Pradesh	45.86	53.66	<b>7.80</b>	49.78	62.51	<b>12.73</b>
Assam	51.55	53.39	<b>1.84</b>	64.04	63.06	<b>-0.98</b>
Bihar	23.14	43.09	<b>19.96</b>	28.45	50.58	<b>22.13</b>
Chattisgarh	##State Not Formed			55.27	71.72	<b>16.45</b>
Goa	50.82	75.86	<b>25.04</b>	71.57	82.20	<b>10.64</b>
Gujarat	48.76	65.94	<b>17.18</b>	55.28	72.91	<b>17.64</b>
Haryana	39.22	59.79	<b>20.57</b>	55.45	70.81	<b>15.36</b>
Himachal Pradesh	50.15	68.58	<b>18.44</b>	67.91	76.24	<b>8.33</b>
Jharkhand	##State Not Formed			39.72	61.94	<b>22.22</b>
Jammu & Kashmir@	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	46.52	57.50	<b>10.98</b>
Karnataka	37.04	60.64	<b>23.61</b>	51.55	70.97	<b>19.43</b>
Kerala	68.44	91.34	<b>22.90</b>	80.78	92.10	<b>11.32</b>
Madhya Pradesh	28.31	54.46	<b>26.15</b>	48.74	71.58	<b>22.84</b>
Maharashtra	46.63	69.15	<b>22.53</b>	64.30	79.74	<b>15.44</b>
Manipur	55.04	63.40	<b>8.37</b>	66.33	73.00	<b>6.66</b>
Meghalaya	45.49	62.88	<b>17.39</b>	61.31	70.01	<b>8.70</b>
Mizoram	80.33	74.86	<b>-5.47</b>	89.34	80.19	<b>-9.15</b>
Nagaland	60.59	69.03	<b>8.44</b>	65.95	71.85	<b>5.90</b>
Orissa	29.55	61.57	<b>32.03</b>	45.25	73.87	<b>28.63</b>
Punjab	41.09	65.11	<b>24.02</b>	56.22	74.89	<b>18.67</b>
Rajasthan	22.87	44.79	<b>21.93</b>	49.07	65.02	<b>15.96</b>
Sikkim	55.02	56.77	<b>1.75</b>	66.35	69.65	<b>3.30</b>
Tamil Nadu	37.32	66.79	<b>29.48</b>	62.08	76.24	<b>14.16</b>
Tripura	48.52	72.82	<b>24.31</b>	63.16	82.27	<b>19.11</b>
Uttar Pradesh	31.28	45.48	<b>14.21</b>	46.24	58.90	<b>12.66</b>
Uttarakhand	##State Not Formed			63.37	73.72	<b>10.35</b>
West Bengal	35.00	64.98	<b>29.99</b>	56.07	73.55	<b>17.48</b>

**Source:** Computed by the authors using data from the Census of India, SC/ST Series & Series-A,

Final Population Totals, 1991 & 2001.

@ In 1991, Census was not held in Jammu & Kashmir.

## The states of Chattisgarh, Jharkhand and Uttarakhand were not formed in 1991.

With those of the scheduled population of the country. In 2001, the situation is almost similar. Here, except for the states of Assam and Mizoram, the proportion of literates remains high for the non-scheduled population as compared to the scheduled population. This ensures the existence of disparity between these two social classes. The main reason for such lower proportion of literates among the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes is that they were deprived of educational facilities for generations (Sawant and Athawale, 1994).

However, the Table No. 2 clearly depicts that, apart from a very few exceptions, the literacy gap between the scheduled and non-scheduled population has been narrowing down over the time period of 1991-2001. This might be probably because of the employment opportunities and reservation policies in the field of education, specially meant for these socially backward classes.

### **Spatial Analysis of Disparity Index (1991-2001)**

The existence of literacy gap among the scheduled and non-scheduled population in India as envisaged in Table No: 2, triggers the need to study the extent of male-female disparity and rural-urban gap in literacy level among the scheduled and non-scheduled population.

### **Male-Female Disparity (1991-2001)**

The most pronounced differentiation in educational opportunity in Indian society is

probably 'sex' (Gore, 1994). This is because the Indian society is mainly characterized by male chauvinism; where the females are not only degraded but also deprived of the right of study (Romatara, 1988). In fact, both the scheduled as well as the non-scheduled population in India have witnessed wide gender disparity in terms of literacy rate. The disparity in male-female literacy rate has been grouped into three categories i.e. high, moderate and low disparity index.

### **i) High Disparity in Male-Female Literacy (Above 0.30 Disparity Index)**

During 1991, the state of Rajasthan (0.85) has shown highest gender disparity in literacy rate among the scheduled population, followed by the states of Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Haryana, Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh, where the gender disparity index ranges from 0.33 to 0.56. In 2001, the situation has improved and the gender disparity among the scheduled population has declined. As per 2001 census, only the states of Bihar, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh have shown high level of gender disparity index among the scheduled population, ranging from 0.32 to 0.47.

Among the non-scheduled population, during 1991, high level of male-female disparity index is observed in the states of Bihar (0.42), Haryana (0.31), Madhya Pradesh (0.35), Rajasthan (0.47) and Uttar Pradesh (0.40). In the next decade (2001), only the states of Bihar (0.33), Jharkhand (0.32) and Rajasthan (0.34) come under this category.



## **ii) Moderate Disparity In Male-Female Literacy (0.15-0.30 Disparity Index)**

In 1991, the states of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Goa, Manipur, Meghalaya, Punjab, Sikkim, Tamil Nadu and Tripura have reported moderate level of gender disparity in literacy rate for the scheduled population. During 2001, the states of Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Uttarakhand and West Bengal have been also added to acquire this category along with Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Goa, Manipur, Punjab, Tamil Nadu and Tripura.

For the non-scheduled population, in 1991, the values of gender disparity varied between 0.17 to 0.30 for the states of Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Manipur, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Orissa, Sikkim, Tamil Nadu, Tripura and West Bengal. However, in 2001, the moderate level of sex disparity is observed in the states of Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Manipur, Orissa, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal.

Besides, the states of Chhattisgarh, Haryana, Jammu and Kashmir, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand have shown improvement by reducing gender disparity in literacy rate and have slipped into this category

## **iii) Low Disparity In Male-Female Literacy (Less than 0.15 Disparity Index)**

During 1991, the states of Kerala (0.11), Mizoram (0.02) and Nagaland (0.12) have shown low sex-disparity in literacy rate among the scheduled population. In 2001,

the states of Meghalaya (0.13) and Sikkim (0.14), along with Kerala (0.11), Mizoram (0.01) and Nagaland (0.09), were added to this category.

Similarly, among the non-scheduled population, in 1991, the states of Goa (0.15), Kerala (0.06), Mizoram (0.03) and Punjab (0.14) were included in this category, whereas, in the next decade (2001), the states of Meghalaya (0.06), Nagaland (0.10), Sikkim (0.15) and Tripura (0.08) have also shown low level of male-female disparity in literacy rate along with Goa (0.12), Kerala (0.06), Mizoram (0.03) and Punjab (0.11).

Therefore, the Fig No: 4a, 4b, 5a and 5b clearly depicts that, the gender disparity in literacy rate has narrowed down over the time period of 1991-2001, for both the scheduled and non-scheduled population. The study shows that in 1991, majority of the states in India have shown high gender disparity among the scheduled population, while in 2001, only the states with lower socio-economic development, have recorded high male female disparity. On the contrary, in case of the non-scheduled population, the gender disparity, in 1991, was highest only in the economically backward states, which has further reduced in 2001.

Moreover, the study shows that, apart from a few exceptions, the male-female disparity ratio in literacy rate is always higher among the scheduled population than the non-scheduled population. This is probably because the female members of these socially backward classes are mostly engaged in the traditional works like daily household activities, looking after their children and other family members etc. from very early ages which do not require any sort of formal education. The exceptional

cases are seen in the states of Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland and Sikkim which are mostly inhabited by the Christian tribal population. The influence of Christianity in these northeastern states might have probably played a significant role in encouraging high literacy rates among the scheduled population, without showing any gender discrimination in this regard.

Apart from the disparity in literacy rate between the scheduled and non-scheduled population, the study also points to the disparity existing within the scheduled population themselves. It is interesting to note that, though the benefits of the special provisions were made for the scheduled population, irrespective of sex, it was the men (or boys) who reaped the benefits of these provisions to a larger extent. The main problems faced by the females of the scheduled population are absence of women teachers of their own community,

in-conducive socio-economic environment, early marriage, prejudices against their mobility, excessive involvement in the household chores, inadequate transport facilities and toilet facilities etc thereby accentuating the gender disparity in literacy rate among the scheduled population (Karlekar, 1983).

### Rural-Urban Disparity (1991-2001)

This section reveals the existing pattern of rural-urban gap in literacy rate among the scheduled as well as the non-scheduled population. In India, the literacy rate for the urban population is substantially higher compared to rural literacy rate among the scheduled and the non-scheduled population as a whole. The disparity in rural-urban literacy rate has been grouped into three categories i. e. high, moderate and low disparity index.

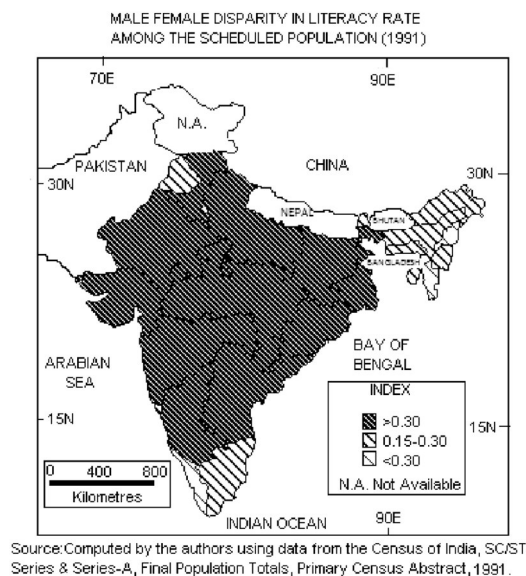


Fig. 4a :

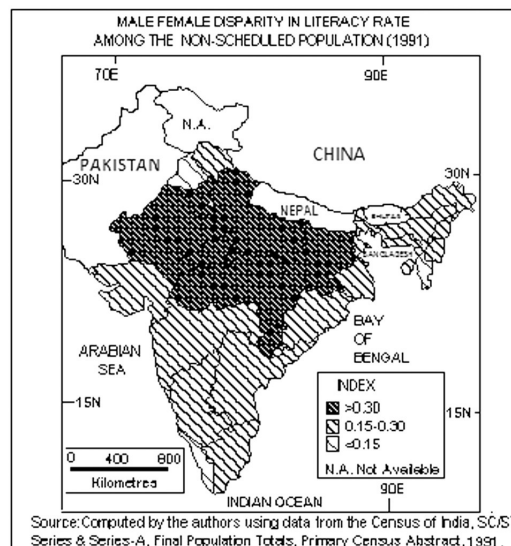


Fig. 4b :

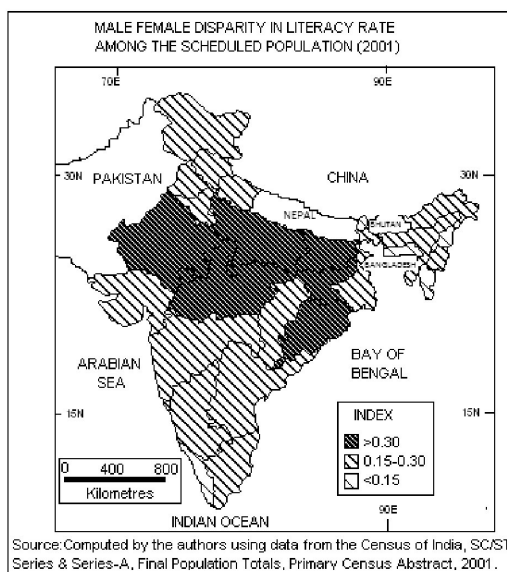


Fig. 5a :

#### i) High Disparity In Rural-Urban Literacy (Above 0.30 Disparity Index)

During 1991, the state of Karnataka (0.45) has shown highest rural-urban disparity in literacy rate among the scheduled population, followed by the states of Bihar (0.41), Andhra Pradesh (0.38) and Rajasthan (0.35). In 2001, the situation has improved and the high level of rural-urban gap among the scheduled population has been noticed only in the states of Bihar (0.42) and Jharkhand (0.33).

Among the non-scheduled population, during 1991, the high disparity index is observed in the states of Meghalaya (0.35) and Rajasthan (0.31). In the next decade (2001), only the states of Arunachal Pradesh (0.31) and Jharkhand (0.36) come under this category.

#### ii) Moderate Disparity In Rural-Urban Literacy (0.15-0.30 Disparity Index)

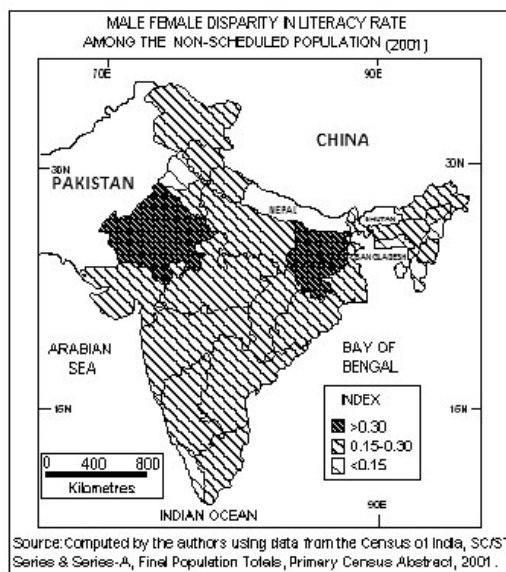


Fig. 5b :

In 1991, the states of Himachal Pradesh (0.19), Madhya Pradesh (0.30), Maharashtra (0.18), Meghalaya (0.20), Nagaland (0.22), Orissa (0.16), Sikkim (0.30), Tamil Nadu (0.22), Uttar Pradesh (0.28) and West Bengal (0.17) have shown moderate level of rural-urban disparity in literacy rate for the scheduled population. During 2001, the states of Andhra Pradesh (0.22), Jammu and Kashmir (0.24), Karnataka (0.22), Rajasthan (0.16), Uttarakhand (0.17), Arunachal Pradesh (0.18), Assam (0.18) and Tripura (0.20) have also reported moderate disparity index, while the states of Himachal Pradesh (0.16), Madhya Pradesh (0.16), Maharashtra (0.16), Meghalaya (0.21), Nagaland (0.24), Orissa (0.18), Sikkim (0.19), Tamil Nadu (0.17) and Uttar Pradesh (0.19) continues their position in this category, even after a decade. The state of West Bengal has improved its position by lowering the rural-urban disparity index and thus has moved on to low category.

For the non-scheduled population, in 1991, the states of Andhra Pradesh (0.25), Arunachal Pradesh (0.20), Assam (0.23), Bihar (0.29), Gujarat (0.16), Karnataka (0.16), Madhya Pradesh (0.24), Nagaland (0.19), Sikkim (0.19) and Uttar Pradesh (0.22) come under this category. However, in 2001, the states of Meghalaya (0.29), Orissa (0.20), Rajasthan (0.21), Tripura (0.18), West Bengal (0.17), Chattisgarh (0.19), and Jammu and Kashmir (0.23) have been added to this category, along with the states of Andhra Pradesh (0.21), Assam (0.24), Bihar (0.30), Gujarat (0.20), Karnataka (0.20), Madhya Pradesh (0.21), Nagaland (0.21), Sikkim (0.16) and Uttar Pradesh (0.18). It is noteworthy to mention here that, the rural-urban disparity ratio in the state of Arunachal Pradesh has increased and thus it has moved to high category in 2001.

### **iii) Low Disparity In Rural-Urban Literacy (Less than 0.15 Disparity Index)**

During 1991, the states of Arunachal Pradesh (0.07), Assam (0.14), Goa (0.06), Gujarat (0.15), Haryana (0.11), Kerala (0.05), Manipur (0.01), Mizoram (0.06), Punjab (0.10) and Tripura (0.09) have shown low rural-urban in literacy rate among the scheduled population. In 2001, the states of Chattisgarh (0.14) and West Bengal (0.15) were added to this category along with the states of Goa (0.10), Gujarat (0.14), Haryana (0.07), Kerala (0.11), Manipur (0.09), Mizoram (0.07) and Punjab (0.08). However, it is worthy to mention that in 2001, the rural-urban disparity level has worsened in the states of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam and Tripura and thus have attained moderate disparity index.

Similarly, among the non-scheduled population, in 1991, the states of Goa (0.06), Haryana (0.04), Himachal Pradesh (0.14), Kerala (0.03), Maharashtra (0.15), Manipur (0.09), Mizoram (0.15), Orissa (0.15), Punjab (0.14), Tamil Nadu (0.15), Tripura (0.12) and West Bengal (0.15) were included in this category, whereas, in the next decade (2001), the states of Uttarakhand has entered into this category, along with the states of Goa (0.04), Haryana (0.15), Himachal Pradesh (0.12), Kerala (0.03), Maharashtra (0.14), Manipur (0.11), Mizoram (0.13), Punjab (0.14) and Tamil Nadu (0.15). However, the states of Orissa, Tripura and West Bengal have slipped into the moderate category in 2001 because of the increase in the value of their rural-urban disparity ratio.

Therefore, the Fig No: 6a, 6b, 7a and 7b clearly enumerates that the rural-urban disparity in literacy rate exists both among the scheduled and non-scheduled population. This is probably due to several reasons:-

- i) Educational development and urbanization seem to have been moving concomitantly in India. Broadly speaking, high degree of urbanization is generally associated with administrative and educational services and industrial base. Since, the secondary and tertiary sectors require work force with minimum educational qualification, people are attracted towards education, in search of job opportunities in these sectors. Thus, people living in the urban areas and engaged in industrial and service sector shows higher literacy rate among all social classes. On the other hand, people engaged in agricultural



work in the rural areas do not require formal education or job skill, resulting in lower level of rural literacy.

- ii) Out-migration in the rural areas is mostly sex-selective where the literate male population moves to the urban areas in search of employment and high proportion of females in rural area are engaged in traditional occupations, like agricultural or household activities which do not require any formal school of education. This results in increasing the rural-urban gap in literacy rate.

Moreover, the analysis shows that over the period of 1991-2001, the rural-urban gap in literacy rate tends to increase in many states among both the scheduled and non-scheduled population. Such local and regional differentials, both quantitative and qualitative, tend to get further accentuated probably due to rapid increase in urbanization in certain parts of the country. This is probably because educational facilities have a tendency of spatial concentration

in the urban areas both due to the easy availability of the job markets and because of the demand and need of education in the urbanized sector.

The study shows that in most of the states, the rural-urban disparity index of the scheduled population is generally higher than those of the non-scheduled population. This is probably because, the majority of the scheduled population, live in the rural areas and as a result, they are mostly deprived of 'better' chances of being literate due to lack of modern exposure and proper guidance. Moreover, the scheduled population of the rural areas mostly belongs to the labour classes, where there is no need of formal education. Besides, the scheduled population children, living in the rural areas, are mostly involved in domestic and agricultural work to supplement their family, which hinders their educational pursuits. Furthermore, lack of synchronization between the vocational training and peak agricultural seasons also

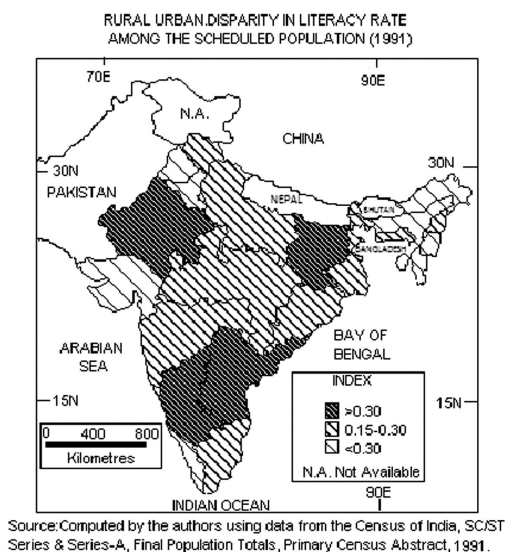


Fig. 6a :

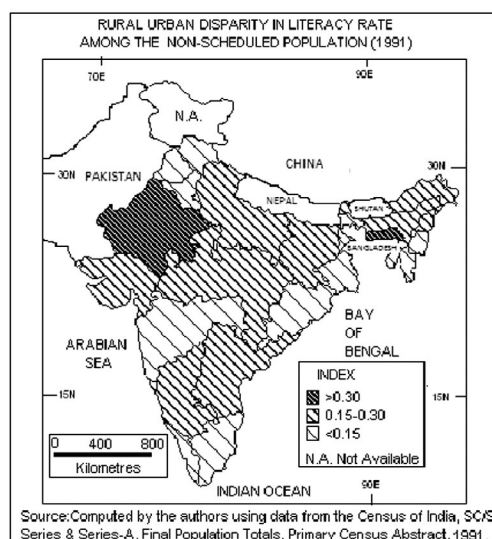


Fig. 6b :

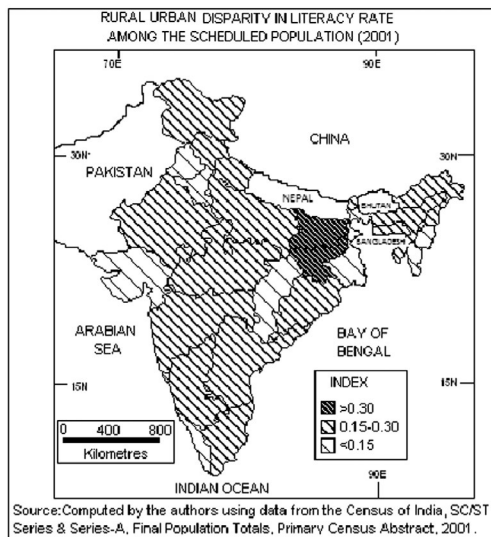


Fig. 7a :

leads to lower rural literacy level among the scheduled population.

## Conclusion

Thus this paper provides an insight into the existing pattern of the literacy rate and the levels of disparity, both male-female and rural-urban among the scheduled and non-scheduled population of India in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The analysis depicts that the proportion of literates among both the scheduled and non-scheduled population has been showing an increasing trend over the past four decades. In fact, though the literacy gaps have declined from 1991 to 2001, yet, the literacy rates of the scheduled population still lags far behind that of the non-scheduled population for most of the states. This signifies the deplorable conditions of the socially backward classes in the country even after six and half decades of independence.

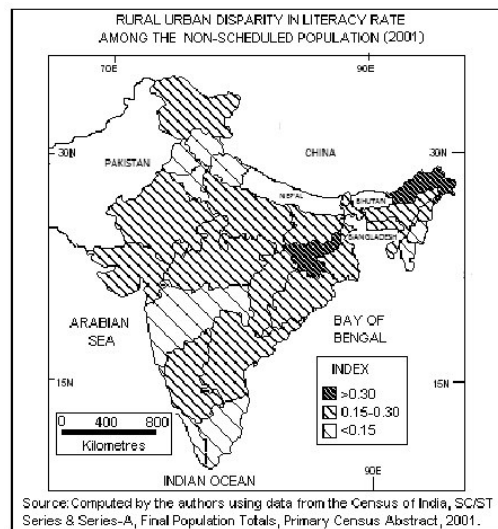


Fig. 7b :

However, the study shows that the states with higher concentration of Christian tribal population have lower levels of disparity, both male-female as well as rural-urban as they have a long tradition of being educated by the Christian missionaries as compared to the non-scheduled population who live in the socially, economically and educationally backward states which lack urbanization and industrialization. Besides, the study ensures that the states with relatively high degree of urbanization, more diversified economy, greater agricultural prosperity, enlightened administration and high proportion of non-agricultural workers show lower male-female disparity and rural-urban gap in literacy level both among the scheduled and non-scheduled population. On the contrary, the states with backward agricultural economy, low degree of urban and industrial development, a fairly long spell of feudal rule in the past show higher gender disparity and rural-urban differences in literacy level for both the scheduled and



non-scheduled population. This results in the prevalence of both inter-state and intra-state variation which ultimately leads to huge regional disparity within the country itself.

Hence, the analysis confirms that despite the long tradition of social reforms and the literacy movement spear-headed by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, the scheduled population lags visibly behind the non-scheduled population in literacy level and discrimination against the deprived sections of the society is still in vogue even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Cultural prejudices, adverse socio-economic conditions and political factors have variously contributed to their educational backwardness, mostly among the women and those who reside in the rural areas, both in terms of the quantity and quality.

The Central Government of India has already implemented several policies like introduction of need-based curricula and work-oriented education where informal education should go hand in hand with the formal education, appointment of the teachers from the same community, provision for the free supply of reading materials, uniform, mid-day meals, initiation of tutorial and remedial coaching for the weaker sections, availability of the hostel facilities, financial assistance etc. so as to achieve the Universal Elementary Education at all the levels of the society and also to bridge the rural-urban gap and gender disparity between the scheduled and non-scheduled population in India.

But, as this age-old practice of social discrimination is deeply rooted within the cultural set up of our Indian society, certain

exogenous forces alone can never do away with this, until and unless the urge evolves spontaneously from within the society itself. Thus, a broad study encompassing the social, cultural, and economic conditions of these socially backward classes along with their proximity and exposure to the mainstream society would, to a large degree, provide policymakers with a better understanding of the heterogeneity among the scheduled population. This, in turn, would help in formulating appropriate policies in different states and regions in India in order to reduce the literacy gap between the scheduled and non-scheduled population in India. In a nutshell, social equality can be achieved only through a strong political will and commitment, which can in turn be generated only through a strong people's movement. So, what we need today is to awaken our inner conscience and open up our mind, so that we can treat all people as a human entity, irrespective of class, caste and gender, in every spheres of life.

#### **Note**

- i) In 1991, Census was not held in Jammu & Kashmir.
- ii) The states of Chattisgarh, Jharkhand and Uttarakhand were not formed in 1991.
- iii) In the mid 80s, economic analyst Ashish Bose coined an acronym "BIMARU", in a paper submitted to then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. "BIMARU" has a resemblance to a Hindi word "Bimar" which means 'sick'. This was used to describe the bad state of economy in backward states Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh. Later Orissa was included in the list resulting in "BIMAROU".

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