Pattern of female literacy and gender variation in North-East India.

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Abstract

The quality of human population of any society can be judged through its literacy level. Literacy particularly female literacy plays a significant role in the social advancement and economic development of a region. North East India recorded a low level of female literacy in the past because of its isolated location and social taboo and restriction in female outdoor activities. However in independent India the progress in female literacy is significant. Though there has been progress, the gender gap in literacy was not covering till 2001 which remained wide. In 2011, significant progress in female literacy is observed recording 59.94 percent female literacy as against 68.99 percent male literacy. Besides, significant spatial disparity in respect of female literacy is observed across the region. Among the seven states of the region viz, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram, the state Mizoram recorded the highest female literacy rate during the post independence period. Interestingly Mizoram ranked second in both male and female literacy among the states of India as per census of India, 2011. An attempt has been in this paper to analyze the changing pattern of female literacy in all the districts of North East India and the sex disparity in literacy in the region.

Keywords: Female literacy, social advancement, gender gap, economic development.

1. Introduction

‘Literacy can be instrumental in the pursuit of development at personal, family and community levels. Literacy is a human right and at the core of education for all. Literacy skills are essential in today’s knowledge societies, conferring benefits on individuals, communities and nations. It is a key to improving the lives of millions of people living in extreme poverty and especially women’ (Education for all Global monitoring Report, 2006, UNESCO). Therefore, female literacy can be considered as essential for socio-economic development of a developing country like India. It is more important in the north eastern part of India where socio-economic condition of major section of people is very discouraging.

Girls’ education has been an area of special concern for the government, academician, social reformers as well as policy maker of independent India. Many articles are incorporated in the constitution of India which have direct or indirect bearing on the education of women. The Article 15 (3) of the Indian constitution empowers the state to make special provision for welfare and development of women and children. Government of India also setup various committees and commissions for development of women education and to suggest ways and means to enhance the educational statues of women. The foremost among them is the National Committee on Women’s Education (Durgabai Desmukh Committee) set up in 1959. The Committee emphasized the need
of women education as major concerned. The committee recommended that girls as well as women should received good, varied and comprehensive general education like boys and men and also a suitable professional as well as vocational education which equip them fully for their duties both at home and outside (Anita Nuna and Poonam Agarwal, 2011). The Kothari Commission, 1964-66 also in favour of women education. The National policy on Education (NPE), 1986 revised in 1992 also focused on women education. Right to Education Act, 2009 and Sarva Siksha Abhiyan (SSA) also aim to remove gender disparity and progress of education for all. But unfortunately women education has been lagging behind even after 68 years of independence.

Women education also negatively related to fertility rate and thus directly influence the growth of population. It also helps to reduce mortality especially infant mortality rate. It directly influences in the improvement of nutritional status of the children increase the school enrolment of children and in the decrease of number of school dropout. North East India comprises seven states viz; Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura. Through in the latest data the state Sikkim is also included within the region, the present study covers only the above mentioned seven states. According to 2011 census, North East India records the female literacy rate of 59.94 percent as against 65.46 percent for the country as a whole. Further it is noticed that all the states of North East India except Mizoram are lagging behind in respect of female literacy than major states of India or the nation as a whole.

2. Objectives

The main objectives of the paper are-

i) To analyze the progress of female literacy in North East India and sex disparity in literacy.

ii) To analyze the spatial pattern of literacy in North East India and changes over space and time.

3. Data base and methodology

The present work is done mainly on the basis of Secondary data collected from different sources like Census of India and Government reports. Data collected and processed and using statistics like Standard deviation as well as Mean and also Sopher’s disparity index the Gender disparity in literacy are found out and finally analyzed. The analysis of the problem is also supplemented by a diagram for giving clear exposition of the pattern.

4. Progress of female literacy in North-east India

Before the introduction of the modern education by the British administration and Christian missionaries, the female formal education in the region was at an infant stage. Isolated location with about 60 percent of the areas are inaccessible covered by hills and mountains, very low socio-economic status of women are the main hurdles resulting such backwardness in respect of education in North East India. It was a time, when there was hardly a literate women in the region out of one hundred women population. However with the extension of western influence and mass conversion of tribals of north eastern states to Christianity as well as development and spread of education among them by the Christian missionaries, the traditional social surface of the region undergoing transformation towards a new order (Kar, B.K, 2002). Prior to independence the female literacy in the region was very low and progress was also slow. During the early four decades of the twentieth century, the female literacy rate in Assam which included Meghalaya and Mizoram increased from 0.59 percent in 1901 to 4.38 percent in 1941. However progress of male literacy was better than the female literacy recording 7.45 percent in 1901 to 20.76 percent in 1941. The situation in other states was also discouraging. In the Post Independence period, the progress is though found to be encouraging it is not very significant even in the later part of the eighties of the twentieth century (Table-1).

Modernization industrialization and urbanization have been playing important role since the last two decades of the twentieth century. Moreover new policies of the Government to enhance the literacy rate is also one of cause of increased literacy especially female literacy in this part of India. Moreover, there are certain other aspects which make the picture of female literacy and education in the North East State more clear. The study of literacy by age-group is great significance for assessing the future potential of literacy development. Table-1 reveals the progress of male and female literacy and sex disparity in literacy in the region.
The Table -1 reveals that within the period of sixty years (1951-2011) the increase in female literacy in North East India is much lower than the corresponding figure in India except for 1981 and 1991. During this period male literacy always surpasses female literacy both in case of North East India and India. The female literacy was only 4.80 percent in 1951 i.e. just after the independence which increased to 59.94 percent in 2011 while for the country as a whole the female literacy rate has increased from 7.90 percent in 1951 to 65.46 percent in 2011. The corresponding percentages of male literacy rates for North East India are 15.90 percent in 1951 and 68.99 percent in 2011, while for the country as a whole the male literacy rates are 24.90 percent in 1951 and 82.14 percent in 2011. The sex disparity in literacy calculated by Sopher’s Disparity Index also indicates a wide disparity between male and female in all the census period ranging from 0.5740 in 1951 to 0.1723 in 2011 in the north east region of India as well as India ranging from 0.5872 in 1951 to 0.3852 in 2011.

Sopher’s disparity Index (DIS), 1974 has the formula,

\[
\text{DIS} = \log_{10} \left( \frac{p(1-q)}{q(1-p)} \right)
\]

Where, \(p\) and \(q\) are the probabilities that members of the two groups (here Male literacy and Female literacy). According to this Index, higher the value, higher is the disparity and lower the value, lower is the disparity.

**Source:** Census of India, 1951 and 2011.

*Data excludes Assam in 1981 Census.


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5. **Spatio temporal pattern of female literacy and gender gap**

The trend of literacy in the seven states of North East India is presented in the table-2 which indicates significant spatio temporal variations of female literacy.
Table 2: State wise Progress of Literacy and Gender Variation in percent in North East India, 1991, 2001 and 2011.

(Literacy in Percentage)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>States</th>
<th>1991 Male</th>
<th>1991 Female</th>
<th>Gender gap</th>
<th>2001 Male</th>
<th>2001 Female</th>
<th>Gender gap</th>
<th>2011 Male</th>
<th>2011 Female</th>
<th>Gender gap</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Arunachal Pradesh</td>
<td>51.45</td>
<td>23.69</td>
<td>21.76</td>
<td>65.43</td>
<td>40.23</td>
<td>25.2</td>
<td>73.69</td>
<td>59.57</td>
<td>14.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Assam</td>
<td>61.87</td>
<td>43.03</td>
<td>18.84</td>
<td>75.23</td>
<td>51.85</td>
<td>23.38</td>
<td>78.81</td>
<td>67.27</td>
<td>11.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Manipur</td>
<td>71.63</td>
<td>47.60</td>
<td>24.03</td>
<td>80.33</td>
<td>61.46</td>
<td>18.87</td>
<td>86.49</td>
<td>73.17</td>
<td>13.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Meghalaya</td>
<td>53.12</td>
<td>44.85</td>
<td>8.27</td>
<td>71.18</td>
<td>50.43</td>
<td>20.75</td>
<td>77.17</td>
<td>73.78</td>
<td>3.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Mizoram</td>
<td>85.61</td>
<td>78.60</td>
<td>7.01</td>
<td>92.53</td>
<td>86.75</td>
<td>5.78</td>
<td>93.72</td>
<td>89.40</td>
<td>4.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Nagaland</td>
<td>67.62</td>
<td>54.75</td>
<td>12.87</td>
<td>76.04</td>
<td>56.87</td>
<td>19.17</td>
<td>83.20</td>
<td>76.69</td>
<td>6.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Tripura</td>
<td>70.58</td>
<td>49.65</td>
<td>20.93</td>
<td>82.42</td>
<td>64.33</td>
<td>18.09</td>
<td>92.18</td>
<td>89.15</td>
<td>3.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North East India</td>
<td>63.20</td>
<td>44.90</td>
<td>18.30</td>
<td>64.48</td>
<td>47.22</td>
<td>17.26</td>
<td>68.99</td>
<td>59.94</td>
<td>9.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>64.13</td>
<td>39.29</td>
<td>24.84</td>
<td>75.85</td>
<td>54.16</td>
<td>21.69</td>
<td>82.14</td>
<td>65.46</td>
<td>16.68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Calculated on the basis of Census data 1991 to 2011.

and gender gap in all the states of North East India.

The spatial pattern of female and male literacy is presented in Fig-1, to understand the gender variations in literacy in all the states of North East India in 1991. It is observed that Arunachal Pradesh had the lowest female literacy among all the states of North East India in 1991 while Mizoram has recorded the highest female literacy rates in the different census periods. Though rugged physiographic condition is prevailing in both the states,
due to other causes such variations are seen.

The Table-2 reveals that in 2011 among the North Eastern states Mizoram recorded the highest female literacy rate recording as high as 89.40 percent which is in the second rank when considered the nation as a whole. It is followed by Tripura (89.15 percent) and Nagaland (76.69 percent). In 1991 and 2001 also the highest female literacy rates are found in Mizoram recording 78.60 percent and 86.75 percent respectively. In spite of the physiographic constraint the hill states of Mizoram, Nagaland and Meghalaya comparatively have recorded high female literacy rates which is due to the contribution of Christian missionaries. In Arunachal Pradesh and Assam low female literacy rates are found. Majority of population of Assam is constituted by both Hindus and Muslims. Illiterate female population is common among the Muslims, which resulted in a low female literacy pattern in the state. The influence of rugged relief and remote location are the main cause of low female literacy in Arunachal Pradesh. In addition to these causes poverty and strong societal prejudices against women’s mobility and education are other causes of low literacy pattern in majority of the states of North East India. Gosal has rightly observed that prevalence of low literacy rate among the women in the region, as elsewhere in the country, has been attributed to the cumulative effects of physical, economic and social constraints including the legacy of the past.

When literacy pattern at micro level i.e. at district
level is observed, the picture is very clear that there is significant variation in the female literacy pattern due to ecological setting and socio-cultural habits and economic condition of the population in the area. According 1991 census, it varies from as high as 85.51 percent in Aizawl district of Mizoram to as low as 14.02 percent in East Kameng district of Arunachal Pradesh. So far male literacy rates are concerned it varies from 90.40 percent in Aizawl district of Mizoram to 34.37 percent in Jaintia district of Meghalaya. Interestingly low male literacy rate is recorded in Meghalaya where matriarchal society is prevalent among the Monkhomr tribe. Out of the total 60 districts in North East India, 25 districts located in different states of the region (10 in Assam, 3 in Manipur, 2 in Meghalaya, 3 in Mizoram, 5 in Nagaland and 2 in Tripura) witness female literacy rate above the regional average. The entire Arunachal Pradesh showed a dismaying picture in respect of female literacy in 1991 which however show a positive change in the next two decades.

In 2001, the pattern has been changing with a significant progress in female literacy. According to 2001 census, female literacy rate varies from 28.8 percent recorded by Tirap district of Arunachal Pradesh to 96.3 percent recorded by Aizawl district of Mizoram. The three districts of Mizoram viz. Aizawl (96.3%), Serchhip (94.1%) and Kolasib (90.2%) recorded above 90 percent female literacy. There are 3 districts in North East India of which Nagaland has one and Mizoram has two between 80 percent to <90 percent literacy rate. On the other hand, there are six districts (Mizoram-2, Nagaland-2, Meghalaya-1 and Manipur-1) in North East India recording literacy rate between 60 to <70 percent.

In respect of male literacy, it varies from 46.6 percent in Mon district of Arunachal Pradesh to 96.7 percent in Aizawl district of Mizoram. It is important to note that according to 2011 Census North East India out of 82 districts 35 numbers have recorded above the national average (54.16 percent) in respect of female literacy.

**Table 3**: Variation of Literacy Pattern in North East India at District level, 1991, 2001 and 2011.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Literacy type</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Highest</th>
<th>Lowest</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>S.D. (Standard Deviation)</th>
<th>District with highest literacy</th>
<th>District with lowest literacy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male literacy</td>
<td>1991</td>
<td>90.40</td>
<td>34.37</td>
<td>61.30</td>
<td>11.67</td>
<td>Aizawl (Mizoram)</td>
<td>Jaintia Hills (Meghalaya)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>96.7</td>
<td>46.6</td>
<td>72.23</td>
<td>11.20</td>
<td>Aizawl (Mizoram)</td>
<td>Mon (Nagaland)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>99.24</td>
<td>57.28</td>
<td>80.43</td>
<td>9.39</td>
<td>Serchhip (Mizoram)</td>
<td>Kurung Kumey (Arunachal Pradesh)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female literacy</td>
<td>1991</td>
<td>85.51</td>
<td>14.02</td>
<td>43.22</td>
<td>13.35</td>
<td>Aizawl (Mizoram)</td>
<td>East Kameng (Arunachal Pradesh)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>96.3</td>
<td>28.8</td>
<td>57.41</td>
<td>14.57</td>
<td>Aizawl (Mizoram)</td>
<td>Tirap (Arunachal Pradesh)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>98.28</td>
<td>44.31</td>
<td>70.02</td>
<td>11.96</td>
<td>Serchhip (Mizoram)</td>
<td>Kurung Kumey (Arunachal Pradesh)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is observed that in 2011, Four (4) districts of Mizoram viz, Serchhip (98.28%), Aizawl (98.00%), Kolasib (93.53%), Champhai (92.20%) have recorded above 90% female literacy rate. While 16 districts of the region (Assam-1, Manipur-2, Mizoram-4, Tripura-4, Meghalaya -1 and Nagaland-4) have recorded female literacy rate between 80% to 90%. On the otherhand 27 districts of the region (Assam-12, Manipur-3, Tripura-1, Meghalaya-4, Arunachal Pradesh-2 and Nagaland-5) have recorded female literacy rates between 70 percent to 80 percent. The rest 25 districts have recorded below 70 percent female literacy rate. It reveals that male literacy rate though comparatively higher than its female counterpart, the progress in female literacy is more in some district, which reflects in the literacy rate of Aizawl and Cherchhip districts during 1991 to 2011. So far standard deviation is concerned, it is comparatively higher in respect of female than that of the male. It is further observed that deviation is more in respect of female literacy in 1991, 2001 and 2011 than its male counterpart

Like any other region, rural literacy rates for both male and female are found to be significantly lower than the urban literacy rate. The highest rural female literacy rate is recorded by Mizoram (62.33 percent) and the lowest is recorded by Meghalaya (42.56 percent) in 1991. So far gender gaps in rural literacy are concerned the highest gap is found in Arunachal Pradesh recording as high as 17.04 percent and the lowest is recorded by Meghalaya (4.69 percent) in 1991. In 2001, the highest rural literacy rate is again recorded by Mizoram (77.3 percent) and the lowest is found in Arunachal Pradesh (36.9 percent). Like 1991 census the gender gap in rural literacy is also highest in Arunachal Pradesh recording as high as 22.7 percent and lowest in Meghalaya (6 percent). It is a discouraging fact that in both the states the gaps have been increasing.

So far urban literacy rates are concerned in 1991 the Mizoram state has recorded the highest urban female literacy recording as high as 82.14 percent which has increased to 95.5 percent in 2001. The gender gap also is reduced from 1.25 percent in 1991 to only 0.6 percent in 2001 which is lowest among all the states of North East India. Like rural female literacy in 1991 the lowest urban female literacy is also recorded by Meghalaya (58.50 percent) which increased to 69.5 percent in 2001 recording the lowest even in 2001. The highest gender gaps in urban literacy in 1991 and 2001 are however recorded by Manipur recording 14.81 percent and 18.7 percent respectively Table-4.

The Table-4 clearly indicates that though there has been progress in literacy, the significant gender gaps still exist in the region. Moreover, there is significant spatial disparity in respect of literacy across the region. Especially religious taboo, social stigma, poor economic condition of the majority of the people, non availability of educational institution, flood havoc in some areas, remote location, rugged topography etc. are the main

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>States</th>
<th>1991</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Gender gap</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Arunachal Pradesh</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>47.31</td>
<td>30.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>72.90</td>
<td>58.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Assam</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>57.36</td>
<td>43.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>80.38</td>
<td>71.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Manipur</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>64.52</td>
<td>48.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>77.53</td>
<td>62.72</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
causes of such disparity in literacy of women.

This indicates that though literacy level become high for both male and female, comparatively male literacy rate is far higher than female literacy due to high status of male in the society.

6. Conclusion

Literacy alters perception, develops personality of an individual. Therefore for overall development of an area all section of people must be educated. Especially development of female literacy is highly essential in North East India, where population growth is very high and economic development is very negligible. Mahatma Gandhi also opines in favour of female education. According to him to educate a man is to educate an individual, while to educate a woman is to educate a family. High population growth which is major problem in the northeast region of India can be also controlled by increasing female education level. A literate mother not only help her children to grow in a healthy way but also help in the over all progress of a family contributing towards the development of society and nation.

As literacy is the key factor of development, therefore proper steps should be taken to remove the social evils like stigmatization of girl child, early marriage, child labour etc. The constitution of India also provides equal rights and opportunity to all Indians irrespective of caste, community and gender. Therefore gender disparity should not be encouraged in all fields especially in the field of education.

References


