

A Comparative study on Literacy level of Rural Female in different Agro-climatic regions of West Bengal, India

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Abstract: *An educated female can play a very crucial role in the development of the country. Education serves as a source of women's empowerment because it can respond to their challenges and make a radical change in life. This paper presents based on a study conducted by secondary data which has been taken from Census of India 2011. This study has been focused on the rural female of different districts of different agro-climatic zones of the state of West Bengal. The educational status of the rural female is estimated by one parameter: literacy rate. The finding reveals that literacy among the female in rural areas was much lower. In the Purulia district, the female literacy rate was very low whereas the North 24 Parganas district had the highest literacy rate. The female literacy rate in the study area may be affected by some factors like urbanization, availability of alternative work, the concern of parents towards girl's education, availability of educational institutions etc. Socio-economic condition, location, parental literacy, non-availability of educational institutions, social barriers, parent's negative attitudes towards girl's education, the low adaptation of Govt. programmes, low status of development etc. probably acted as major constraints of women's education.*

Key Words: *Rural women, Female literacy, Factors of literacy, Rural Bengal*

1. INTRODUCTION:

A nation can be truly educated when the entire population is educated. Education is the milestone for empowerment. Our basic needs are– Food, Shelter and Clothing. And Education is a right for all individuals because education is an essential part of all human being. Education helps us to intake new things. By education, an individual becomes the smartest and effective. And for female's education is the most crucial thing. Women are the pillar and strength of our society. India has the second-largest civilization in the world. But India lags far behind in terms of female's education. Countries like India will never be able to move forward without the advancement and education of female. In Brigham Young's words "You educate a man; you educate a man. You educate a woman; you educate a generation".

In the world, many women are feeling insecure and unhappy because of their marital condition. They can't leave easily because they have no better choice. They are uneducated and lack of proper skills. It can easily be avoided if we access education for all girls. An educated woman can educate the children, leads the family to make the right decision, and contributes financially for the betterment. It strengthens the ability to think, protect one from oppression and abuse. The restriction imposed on women's education in the "Manu Smriti" clearly shows that the position of women has been degrading since the post-Vedic period, even in the case of education. Women were confined to the maintenance of the kitchen and were treated as childbearing machines (K. VasanthaGouri, 2007). In the early 20th century, some movements were able to enact some laws to improve the status of women in society. However, women were not encouraged to enter the public sphere, but the gender and domestic role were considered to assist education in more efficient delivery (Chanana, 2001)

A study in two villages in Odisha reveals two factors affecting girl's dropouts from school, one is infrastructural defeats such as not getting high school in the village or the surrounding villages and second is other institutional problems such as domestic works, caring for young siblings, parental income as child labour etc. affect girl's education. Despite several government programs, barriers to girl's schooling have not been removed. An overall approach needs to be taken to overcome institutional and infrastructural barriers (Pattnaik&NagarajuGundemeda, 2016)

In Charles Malik Leo's words "The fastest way to change society is to mobilize the women of the world". According to UNESCO, if all women had a secondary education, then about 12 million children could be able to get out from malnutrition. This is very true that a girl's education is an important step towards a full-fledged mother

because almost half of the children under the age of 5 are malnourished. It is common to see how lack of education has spread in society. Girl's education is not only providing knowledge but also gives a potency and awareness. So that everyone benefits for a long time (Inspired Adventure, 2018) In India, females are dominated in this patriarchal society and considered as somebody's (who will marry her) property. Here women are treated as liability and spending money on their education is like wasting time and resources. But now the thinking has changed a bit. Poor parents want their daughter to be educated and established. The objective of the study is to compare the literacy of rural female in different agro-climatic zones of West Bengal. The hypothesis of the study is there is no significant difference in the literacy rate of rural female among different agro-climatic zones of West Bengal.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

This review is trying to connect the relationship between female and education.

Educated women have enough right to choose marriage, family and family size. Whether they work outside the home depends on them (Ginzberg, 1966)

The employment of women keeps their status intact in the family and society. All kinds of employment ensure the contribution of women to society (Devi, 1982)

Desai and Krishnaraj (1987) explained that some newly emergent middle-class families become interested in educating middle-class girls in the middle nineteenth century. Millions of girls are admitted to the primary level of education but rarely go to the secondary level. And factors like Poverty, domestic works and child marriage were responsible for low school attendance.

Women's attitudes towards family planning are influenced by education. Women concentrate on family planning after at least some level of study. Education enhances family planning decision and they like to keep small families. A positive alignment between education and adoption of family planning is a broader realization of the need for a rational attitude toward family size. The adoption of family planning measures the acceptability of a small family as an ideal family. Education raises awareness on women's health, location of health centres or hospitals and family planning services (Siddiqui, 1987)

According to Saxena (1988), there are some factors (economic, social, cultural and other) that affect women's participation in economic activities in India. Educational development raises awareness among women about the importance of economic freedom and position in society.

The female literacy rate in India is less than literacy among male. Boys are more likely to get opportunities in education than girls. Women's education was determined by some factors such as per capita income, working patterns, number of working members, age of marriage etc. (Guha, 1991)

the legacy of women's struggles to establish their right to education is the contemporary women's movement in India. Part of the challenges is thinking through concerns about gender and education, unrevealing the dialectical link between the formal education and larger social system of economic processes and their impact on women's lives (Nandini Manjraakar, 2003)

Women literacy is very crucial for increasing productivity. As a result, the infant or child mortality rate decreases and population growth becomes higher. Women are not getting sufficient representation at every level of formal education. Going to primary school and taking lesson depends on the socio-economic situation and teacher's attitudes (Mishra, 2009)

According to Afridi (2010), as a result of the increasing education of father and mother, the educational skills of the daughter increase, more than a son. But with the increasing maternal education, there is a significant reduction in the difference between sons and daughters.

The status of women in society cannot be improved without imparting skills and vocational training as well as traditional and non-formal education. Women's empowerment requires not only dynamic legislation but also changes in the mental state of people living in the society. The provision of basic infrastructural facilities in schools is not adequate. Parents need to understand that sending their girls to school is much more profitable than sending them to other jobs for little money (Kumar & Sefali Roy, 2012)

A study was done in Madurai District on the impact of education on women and the findings were educational qualification play an important role in the behaviour and empowerment of women (Sekhar, 2014)

3. METHODOLOGY:

The present study is based on secondary data. The data of the Census of India (2011) has been considered for the study. The Block level data for the entire study district has compiled and analysed according to get the objective-based result.

This study has been made in six districts of West Bengal namely- Darjeeling, Cooch Behar, Malda, North 24 Parganas, Purulia and South 24 Parganas. One district from each agro-climatic zone has been selected randomly and in

total six districts from six agro-climatic zones has been selected from the study. Despite different limitations; all C.D blocks have been taken into consideration from each district to meet the study need. Selected variables are considered for the study. The Block level has further analysed to get the study result.

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION:

The result of this study reveals the percentages of the Community Development block with the different level of literacy.

Table-1: Community Development Block wise female literacy rate in different districts understudy

District	Indicators	Literacy Rate of Female up to 50%	Literacy Rate of Female 51-60%	Literacy Rate of Female 61-70%	Literacy Rate of Female More Than 70%	Total
North 24 Parganas	Frequency of C.D. Block	0	0	7	15	22
	Percentage of C.D. Block within District	0	0	31.82	68.18	100.0%
	Percentage of C.D. Block under all the C.D. Blocks of the Study	0	0	19.44	40.54	20%
Darjeeling	Frequency of C.D. Block	0	2	3	7	12
	Percentage of C.D. Block within District	0	16.67	25	58.33	100.0%
	Percentage of C.D. Block under all the C.D. Block of the Study	0	9.09	8.33	18.92	10.9%
Cooch Behar	Frequency of C.D. Block	0	1	10	1	12
	Percentage of C.D. Block within District	0	8.33	83.34	8.33	100.0%
	Percentage of C.D. Block under all the C.D. Block of the Study	0	4.55	27.78	2.7	10.9%

District	Indicators	Literacy Rate of Women up to 50%	Literacy Rate of Women 51-60%	Literacy Rate of Women 61-70%	Literacy Rate of Women More Than 70%	Total
Purulia	Frequency of C.D. Block	12	8	0	0	20
	Percentage of C.D. Block within District	60	40	0	0	100.0%
	Percentage of C.D. Block under all the C.D. Block of the Study	8	36.36	0	0	18.18%
South 24 Parganas	Frequency of C.D. Block	0	3	12	14	29
	Percentage of C.D. Block within District	0	10.34	41.38	48.28	100.0%
	Percentage of C.D. Block under all the C.D. Block of the Study	0	13.64	33.33	37.83	26.36%
Malda	Frequency of C.D. Block	3	8	4	0	15
	Percentage of C.D. Block within District	20	53.33	26.67	0	100.0%
	Percentage of C.D. Block under all the C.D. Block of the Study	20	36.36	11.11	0	13.63%
Total	Frequency of C.D. Block	15	22	36	37	110
	Percentage of C.D. Block	13.64	20	32.73	33.64	100.0%

In the North 24 Parganas district, the literacy rate of female less than 70% in 31.82% C.D. Blocks and more than 70% literacy rate of female in 68.18% C.D. Blocks. Whereas, among all district's C.D. Blocks, 19.44% C.D. Blocks had less than 70% literacy rate of female and 40.54% C.D. Blocks had more than 70% literacy rate of Female. In Darjeeling district, less than 60% literacy rate of female in 16.67% Community Development Blocks, 25% C.D. Blocks had 61-70% female literacy rate and more than 70% literacy rate of female in 58.33% Community Development Blocks. On the other hand, this study noted that 9.09% C.D. Blocks had less than 60% literacy rate of female, 8.33% C.D. Blocks have 61-70% literacy rate of female and 18.92% C.D. Blocks had more than 70% literacy rate of female. In the Cooch Behar district literacy rate of the female below 60% in 8.33% C.D. Blocks and 61-70% literacy rate of female in 83.34% of C.D. Blocks and more than 70% literacy rate of female in 8.33% C.D. Blocks. Whereas, 4.55% C.D. Blocks had less than 60% literacy rate of female, 27.78% C.D. Blocks had 61-70% literacy rate of female and there were 2.7% C.D. Blocks with more than 70% literacy rate of female among all the district's C.D. Blocks under study. In Purulia district, less than 50% literacy rate of the female was in 60% Community Development Blocks and 51-60% literacy rate of the female were in 40% Community Development Blocks. On the other hand, 8% C.D. Blocks had less than 50% literacy rate of female and 36.36% C.D. Blocks had 51-60% literacy rate of female. In South 24 Parganas district literacy rate of the female below 60% in 10.34% C.D. Blocks and 61-70% literacy rate of female in 41.38% of C.D. Blocks and more than 70% literacy rate of female in 48.28% C.D. Blocks. Whereas, 13.64% C.D. Blocks had less than 60% literacy rate of female, 33.33% C.D. Blocks had 61-70% literacy rate of female and there were 37.83% C.D. Blocks with more than 70% literacy rate of female among all the district's C.D. Blocks under study.

In Malda district literacy rate of the female below 50% in 20% C.D. Blocks and 51-60% literacy rate of female in 53.33% of C.D. Blocks and more than 60% literacy rate of female in 26.67% C.D. Blocks. Whereas, 20% C.D. Blocks had less than 50% literacy rate of female, 36.36% C.D. Blocks had 51-60% literacy rate of female and there were 11.11% C.D. Blocks with more than 60% literacy rate of female among all the district's C.D. Blocks under study. Total 13.64% C.D. Blocs had less than 50% literacy rate of female, 20% C.D. Block has 51-60% literacy rate of female, 32.73% C.D. Blocks had 61-70% literacy rate of female, 33.64% C.D. Blocks had more than 70% literacy rate of female in all districts. North 24 Parganas district had more than 70% female literacy rate in 68.18% C.D. Blocks and Purulia district had less than 50% female literacy rate in 60% C.D. Blocks.

North 24 Parganas district is one of the developed districts of WB. The effect of urbanization plays a major role in the North 24 Parganas district. Urbanization has an important role to play in the education of female in rural areas. Urbanization enhances female's access to education, decision-making capacity and independence. Urbanization helps to eliminate gender inequality in society and improves female's education and healthcare. It helps female to become better decision-makers, to control their husband's earning, to spend money exactly as they wish, to save money in their bank accounts to get loans from banks under profitable projects. The production of women entrepreneurs provides socio-economic benefits to the country (James Devaraj & Amirthavalli, 2016). Purulia district has a very low socio-economic condition. Most of the women of this district work as agricultural labourers. Although modern education and facilities had a great impact on women's empowerment rural women in the Purulia district lag far behind. Only they have to abide by those unofficial rules and prohibitions from their society. Often, femininity is stunned, they are disrupted by various constraints and inertia of social oppression, but they cannot get out of the social law imposed on them. The mentality always seeks to subjugate the 'weaker' female class within its structure (Manohar Kumar, 2016)

Table-2: District wise mean percentage of literacy rate of female in C.D. Blocks	
District	Literacy Rate of Female
North 24 Parganas	72.68
Darjeeling	68.42
Cooch Behar	65.42
Purulia	48.00
South 24 Parganas	69.10
Malda	54.40
Test statistics	
Chi-Square	74.688
df	5
Asymp. Sig.	.000

It shows that there are significant ($P < 0.05$) differences in the mean score of female literacy rate among the districts, it seems that North 24 Parganas district had significantly ($P < 0.05$) highest mean score of female literacy rate and district Purulia has a lowest mean score of female literacy rate in rural areas.

North 24 Parganas district had the highest literacy rate of female. The effect of urbanization is very high because the city of Kolkata is very close to it. This effect had a positive impact on female literacy. Many schools, colleges, universities or other educational institutions have emerged. Purulia district had the lowest female literacy rate. It may be due to their poor infrastructure, communication system and most of the people might not be aware of the value of education in their life and their poor socio-economic condition was one of the biggest factors. They put more emphasis on work than on female's education and the number of female agricultural labours was much higher. According to census 2011, the literacy rate among the female in the state was 71.16%. Kolkata has the highest female literacy rate and the literacy rate of East Midnapur was 81.81 and North 24 Parganas was 81.05. Purulia has the lowest literacy rate of 51.29 (Santanu Biswas, 2017). Poverty is one of the major obstacles to literacy and educational development. Poverty forces their parents to get involved in work without sending their son or daughter to school. So no literacy program can be successful without a poverty alleviation programme (Chattoraj & Chand, 2015) Here is the variable that has been taken out in this study— Female Literacy. The variable differs significantly. So there was a difference in the female literacy rate of different districts in different agro-climatic zones due to some external factors.

Socio-economic condition, location, parental literacy, non-availability of educational institutions, social barriers, parent's negative attitudes towards girl's education, a low adaptation of Govt. programmes, low status of development, unavailability of alternative works etc. probably acted as external factors. Thus, my study hypothesis (H_0) has been rejected and the Alternative hypothesis (H_a) i.e., there is a significant difference among different agro-climatic zones has been accepted.

5. CONCLUSION:

The based on the data used in the study it is clear that in the state of West Bengal, a considerable number of females were illiterate. In some districts like Purulia, Malda, Cooch Behar, and Darjeeling of West Bengal female literacy rate were very low. The female literacy rate may be affected by some factors. The first and foremost fact is socio-economic condition. Most of the rural population depends on agriculture for their livelihood. Agriculture depends on seasons. Sometimes farmers do not get the right price on time. So how will they take responsibility for educating the children? Education is an additional burden for them. So they cannot even think of educating girls. North 24 Parganas district had more than 70% female literacy rate in 68.18% C.D. Blocks and Purulia district had less than 50% female literacy rate in 60% C.D. Blocks. The socio-economic status of both districts had a difference. It may be acted as a vital reason for the low literacy rate of female in the Purulia district. Lack of functional infrastructure in rural areas may be one of the major reasons for the low literacy rate. Otherwise peri-urban areas were more affected by urban areas than rural areas. Therefore, the impact of urbanization and development are greater in the peri-urban areas than in the rural areas. Secure livelihood and better educational opportunity can play a crucial role in universal literacy.

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