

## COMPARISON OF LITERACY RATES AMONG BOTH THE GENDERS IN URBAN-RURAL INDIA (2011)

Varinder Kaur<sup>1</sup> & Mohamad Hidayat Ullah<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Research Scholar, Punjabi University, Patiala, Punjab, India

<sup>2</sup>Research Scholar, Devi Ahilya Vishwavidyalaya, Indore, Madhya Pradesh, India

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### ABSTRACT

*Education is the only medium to empower women. In today's globalizing world, education has become one of the basic requirements to excel in life and society. The present study deals with the literacy rate among males and females living in urban and rural areas of India. The study uses the secondary data which was collected by Census of India in 2011. The present study has observed the huge shocking gap in the literacy rate among males and females. Many aspects of society are responsible for this huge difference in the literacy rate in the country. The present study has also analyzed that why do these differences persist, why are a few states and union territories lagging behind to achieve a high literacy rate, especially among females? The main motive of this study is to find out the ways to achieve high levels of literacy among females.*

**KEYWORDS:** Empower Women, Basic Requirements, Union Territories

### INTRODUCTION

Literacy is a process which transforms an unpolished, raw human into a sparkling civilized personality. Education is a basic tool to excel in life. 'Literacy has to be perceived as a means for empowering women in the wider struggle against inequality and injustice in society (Patel and Dighe, 1997, p.19)'. The definition of literacy varies from country to country. The Census of India considers, 'the ability to both read and write a simple message with understanding in any language, a sufficient basis for classifying a person as literate'.

The constitution of India has given the fundamental right of education to each and every citizen of India, and instead of it, gender bias can be seen in this context even in the 21st century. Central and State governments have created and implemented numerous schemes to decrease this bias and to promote female education, but due to many reasons these schemes does not give such fruitful results in our country.

It is a matter of immediate concern. Moreover, India is still fighting to achieve universal education, but in this case too nothing has come up positively much. The nations which have achieved the goal of high literacy rate are excelling as well as leading the world and counted as developed nations of the world. India should learn from such examples.

'Literacy is one of the important indicators of social development. Knowledge is linked with literacy and formal education. Economic growth is related to degree of literacy. This literacy is one of the important needs of life as well as future development of the human being of the particular region (Patel and Nayak, 2013, p.124)'.

Education also brings a reduction in inequalities and functions as a means of improving their status within the family (Pathak and Gupta, 2013, p.549).

'Illiteracy is essentially a manifestation of social inequality, the unequal distribution of power and resources in society (Patel and Dighe, 1997, p.4)'.

'Literacy programs should now be so designed that they will not only educate women, but will also enable them to see and understand more clearly the ways in which society shapes their perceptions, even their ways of knowing. Such an educational intervention would not only better meet women's needs and learning styles, but would have a conscious intent of not reinforcing society's perception of women's needs as being subordinate to family and that of society at large (Patel and Dighe, 1997, p.17)'.

## OBJECTIVES

Following are the objectives of the study:-

- To highlight those states and union territories of India, which are lagging behind in the female literacy rate;
- To find out the reasons and factors which are responsible for the difference in male-female literacy level in the society; and
- To find out the ways to achieve high levels of female literacy in the country.

## METHODOLOGY

The present work is analyzing the literacy rates in India. The study uses the secondary data collected by Census of India in 2011. The study uses recent data of 2011 to show the difference in male-female literacy rate at the state level. To show the level of literacy in India, the data are divided into three categories and maps have been prepared. For the present study, four maps and four tables have been prepared to show the data graphically.

## DISCUSSIONS

The present work on the literacy rate among males and females of India has observed that there is a huge gap in literacy rate. A great variation can be seen among all the states and union territories of India. Only a few states and union territories have shown low or negligible gap in literacy rate, but otherwise, the rest of the India have shown moderate to high gap in literacy.

The study has observed following two facts about the female literacy rate:

- Urban female literacy is almost equal to the rural male literacy; and
- Rural female literacy is very low in the country.

One thing which is important to mention that total urban population of India constitutes only 31.16 per cent and the rest of the 68.84 percent population is still rural and this rural part of India is the most negligible section of the count. The above mentioned facts can be seen in the following four maps about rural-urban male-female literacy rate.

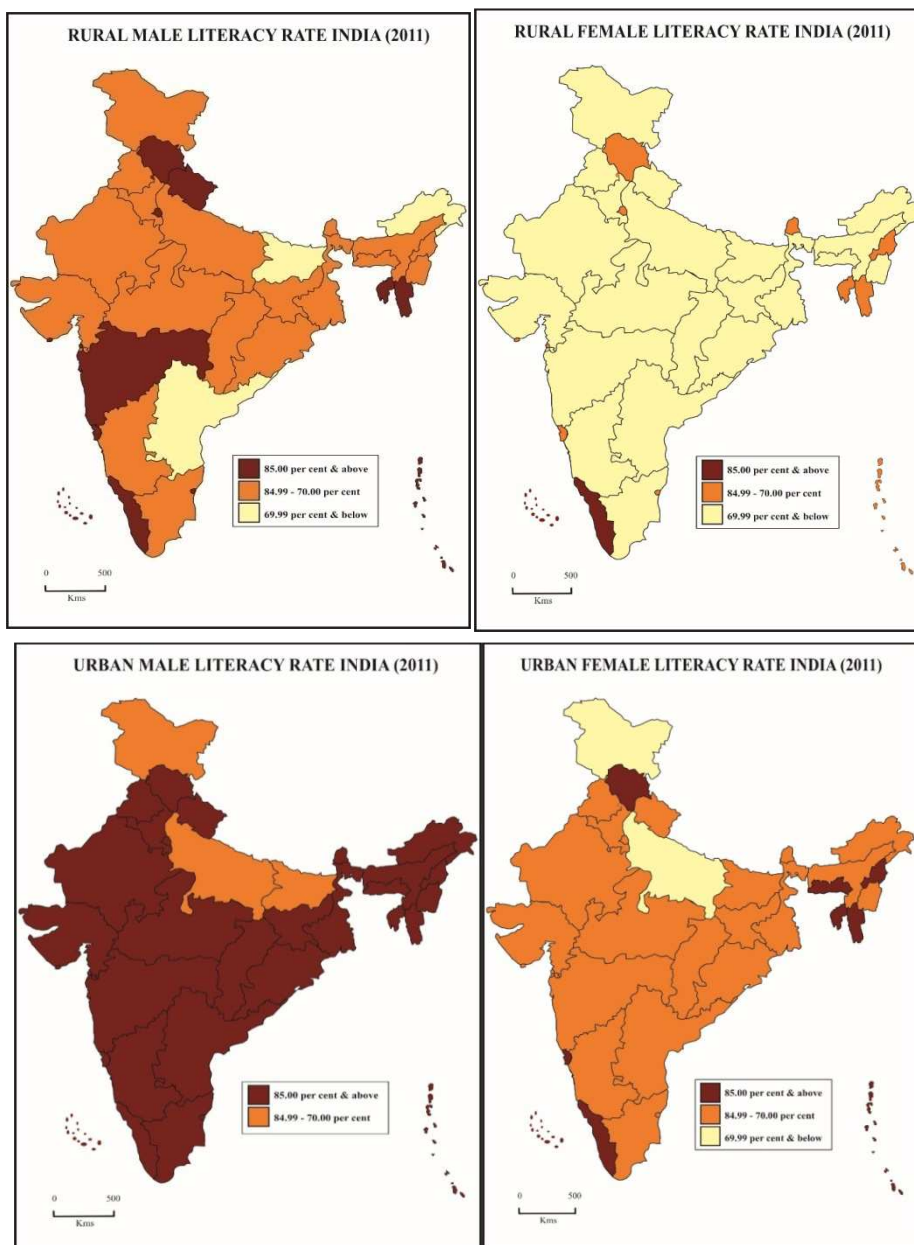


Figure 1

As per the census data on the literacy rate of India, only 57.93 per cent of rural females are literate, which is very low and rural female population accounts for 48.69 per cent of the total rural population. On the other hand, urban female population accounts for 48.16 per cent of the total urban population and urban female literacy is 79.11 per cent.

The total percentage of literate females in our country are only 64.64 per cent, whereas, in case of male literacy this percentage goes up to 80.89 per cent. From the above mentioned figures, it is clear that there is a huge gap of 16.25 per cent in literacy rates among both the genders of the country. Rural females are the major portion who is lagging behind in this race of literacy.

The following table 1 shows the proportion of rural female literacy in India. It shows that Kerala leads with highest female literacy, which is followed by Lakshadweep, Goa, Andaman & Nicobar Islands and Mizoram. States/union territories are on bottom in rural female literacy is Rajasthan followed by Jharkhand, Bihar, Dadra and Nagar Haveli, and Andhra Pradesh.

**Table 1: Proportion of Rural Female Literacy Rate in India(2011)**

STATE/UNION TERRITORY	RURAL FEMALE LITERACY RATE
Kerala	90.80
Lakshadweep*	88.50
Goa	81.60
Andaman & Nicobar Islands*	79.90
Mizoram	79.80
Tripura	79.50
Himachal Pradesh	74.60
Chandigarh*	73.20
Delhi*	73.10
Puducherry*	73.00
Sikkim	72.40
Daman & Diu*	71.90
Nagaland	71.50
Maharashtra	68.50
Meghalaya	68.40
Manipur	66.30
Uttarakhand	66.20
Punjab	65.70
West Bengal	65.50
Tamil Nadu	65.00
Assam	63.00
Gujarat	61.40
Orissa	60.70
Haryana	60.00
Karnataka	59.70
<b>India</b>	<b>57.90</b>
Chhattisgarh	55.10
Uttar Pradesh	53.70
Madhya Pradesh	52.40
Arunachal Pradesh	52.00
Jammu & Kashmir	51.60
Andhra Pradesh	51.50
Dadra & Nagar Haveli*	49.60
Bihar	49.00
Jharkhand	48.90
Rajasthan	45.80

Source: Census of India, 2011

Note: \*= Union Territory

Table 2 shows the proportion of urban female literacy rate in India. It shows that Mizoram is the leading state in this factor, followed by Kerala, Tripura, Meghalaya and Himachal Pradesh. On the other hand, Jammu & Kashmir have lowest female literacy, which is followed by Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan, and Andhra Pradesh.

Common factor in the above mentioned states/union territories for high rural-urban female literacy rate (i.e. Table 1 &2) is that these areas face comparatively less social stratification and moreover, in the past times the status of women was a high in these areas as compare to other areas of the country. On the other hand, reasons for the low female

literacy in Jammu & Kashmir and Andhra Pradesh is that these states have experienced continuous terrorism, while Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Jharkhand, and Dadra & Nagar Haveli have shrewd societies and these areas are very backward and less developed parts of the country.

**Table 2: Proportion of Urban Female Literacy in India (2011)**

STATE/UNION TERRITORY	URBAN FEMALE LITERACY RATE
Mizoram	97.30
Kerala	93.40
Tripura	91.40
Meghalaya	89.10
Himachal Pradesh	88.40
Lakshadweep*	87.80
Nagaland	87.40
Goa	86.60
Andaman & Nicobar Islands*	86.60
Maharashtra	84.90
Assam	84.90
Sikkim	84.70
Puducherry*	84.20
Dadra & Nagar Haveli*	83.40
Daman & Diu*	82.90
Tamil Nadu	82.30
Karnataka	81.40
Chandigarh*	81.40
West Bengal	81.00
Gujarat	81.00
Delhi*	80.90
Orissa	80.40
Uttarakhand	79.30
Manipur	79.30
Punjab	79.20
<b>India</b>	<b>79.10</b>
Chhattisgarh	77.20
Haryana	76.90
Arunachal Pradesh	76.70
Madhya Pradesh	76.50
Jharkhand	75.50
Andhra Pradesh	74.40
Rajasthan	70.70
Bihar	70.50
Uttar Pradesh	69.20
Jammu & Kashmir	69.00

Source: Census of India, 2011

Note: \*= Union Territory

Next two tables, i.e. table 3 and 4 are showing the difference in male-female literacy rate in rural and urban areas of the country respectively. States/union territories showing the low gap in male-female literacy rate in both the areas i.e. rural and urban are Meghalaya, Kerala, Lakshadweep, Mizoram, Nagaland, and Tripura collectively. Reasons for the low gap in literacy are high status of women, high sex ratio, less social discrimination, the existence of two broad minded religious groups viz. Christianity & Buddhism, and high literacy levels of base female population While states/union territories showing high gap in literacy are Rajasthan, Dadra and Nagar Haveli, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Manipur, and Chhattisgarh. As mentioned earlier some areas are terror hit zones of India, other are experiencing low sex ratio, low status of women in the home and society in the ancient times, and the existence of such religious groups and communities which are very shrewd and narrow minded about giving some freedom to women.

Table 3: Difference in Urban Male-Female Literacy Rate in India(2011)

STATE/UNION TERRITORY	U.M.L.R.**	U.F.L.R.***	DIFFERENCE
Rajasthan	87.90	70.70	17.20
Jammu & Kashmir	83.90	69.00	14.90
Chhattisgarh	90.60	77.20	13.40
Jharkhand	88.40	75.50	12.90
Manipur	91.70	79.30	12.40
Madhya Pradesh	88.70	76.50	12.20
Bihar	82.60	70.50	12.10
Haryana	88.60	76.90	11.70
Arunachal Pradesh	88.40	76.70	11.70
Andhra Pradesh	85.80	74.40	11.40
Uttar Pradesh	80.40	69.20	11.20
Dadra & Nagar Haveli*	94.00	83.40	10.60
Orissa	90.70	80.40	10.30
Delhi*	91.00	80.90	10.10
Gujarat	91.00	81.00	10.00
Uttarakhand	89.10	79.30	09.80
<b>India</b>	<b>88.80</b>	<b>79.10</b>	<b>09.70</b>
Tamil Nadu	91.80	82.30	09.50
Daman & Diu*	92.10	82.90	09.20
Puducherry*	93.00	84.20	08.80
Chandigarh*	90.10	81.40	08.70
Karnataka	90.00	81.40	08.60
Lakshadweep*	95.80	87.80	08.00
Sikkim	92.40	84.70	07.70
Punjab	86.70	79.20	07.50
West Bengal	88.40	81.00	07.40
Maharashtra	92.10	84.90	07.20
Assam	91.80	84.90	06.90
Goa	93.20	86.60	06.60
Andaman & Nicobar Islands*	93.10	86.60	06.50
Himachal Pradesh	93.40	88.40	05.00
Nagaland	91.60	87.40	04.20
Tripura	95.50	91.40	04.10
Kerala	97.00	93.40	03.60
Meghalaya	92.50	89.10	03.40
Mizoram	98.00	97.30	00.70

Source: Census of India, 2011

Note: \*= Union Territory, \*\*Urban Male Literacy Rate, \*\*\*= Urban Female Literacy Rate

**Table 4: Difference in Male- Female Literacy Rate in India(2011)**

STATE/UNION TERRITORY	R.M.L.R.**	R.F.L.R.***	DIFFERNCE
Rajasthan	76.20	45.80	30.40
Dadra & Nagar Haveli*	76.40	49.60	26.80
Jharkhand	72.90	48.90	24.00
Uttar Pradesh	76.30	53.70	22.60
Madhya Pradesh	74.70	52.40	22.30
Jammu & Kashmir	73.80	51.60	22.20
Chhattisgarh	77.00	55.10	21.90
Haryana	81.60	60.00	21.60
Bihar	69.70	49.00	20.70
Uttarakhand	86.60	66.20	20.40
Gujarat	81.60	61.40	20.20
<b>India</b>	<b>77.10</b>	<b>57.90</b>	<b>19.20</b>
West Bengal	84.40	65.50	18.90
Orissa	79.60	60.70	18.90
Karnataka	77.60	59.70	17.90
Andhra Pradesh	69.40	51.50	17.90
Daman & Diu*	89.40	71.90	17.50
Tamil Nadu	82.00	65.00	17.00
Maharashtra	85.10	68.50	16.60
Delhi*	89.40	73.10	16.30
Arunachal Pradesh	67.40	52.00	15.40
Himachal Pradesh	89.10	74.60	14.50
Puducherry*	87.40	73.00	14.40
Manipur	80.30	66.30	14.00
Chandigarh*	85.80	73.20	12.60
Assam	75.40	63.00	12.40
Sikkim	84.60	72.40	12.20
Punjab	76.60	65.70	10.90
Tripura	90.10	79.50	10.60
Goa	91.70	81.60	10.10
Andaman & Nicobar Islands*	88.50	79.90	08.60
Mizoram	88.20	79.80	08.40
Nagaland	79.00	71.50	07.50
Lakshadweep*	94.50	88.50	06.00
Kerala	95.40	90.80	04.60
Meghalaya	71.50	68.40	03.10

Source: Census of India, 2011

Note: \*= Union Territory, \*\*=Rural Male Literacy Rate, \*\*\*= Rural Female Literacy Rate

The above mentioned outcome has drawn a conclusion that urban female literacy is equal to the rural male literacy. As per the census, 79.11 per cent of urban females are literate and on the other hand, rural male literacy is 77.15 per cent. Both the percentages are near to each other.

The comparison of two extreme ends of this literacy gap shows a huge shocking gap and also helps to show the real picture of the Indian females. On the one side, there is an urban male literacy rate which is as high as 88.76 per cent and on the other side, there is the rural female literacy rate which is as low as 57.93 per cent and this gap can be seen in the following maps. There is a huge difference of 30.83 per cent at both the ends of literacy rate in India. So, these above mentioned figures show the poor picture of Indian females.

One more fact has come up in the present study is that almost all northeastern states of India are doing well in this regard along with Kerala, Goa, Himachal Pradesh and Lakshadweep. India is the primarily a rural country, more focus should be shifted to the rural areas than in the urban areas because rural areas are showing very pitiful picture especially about females.

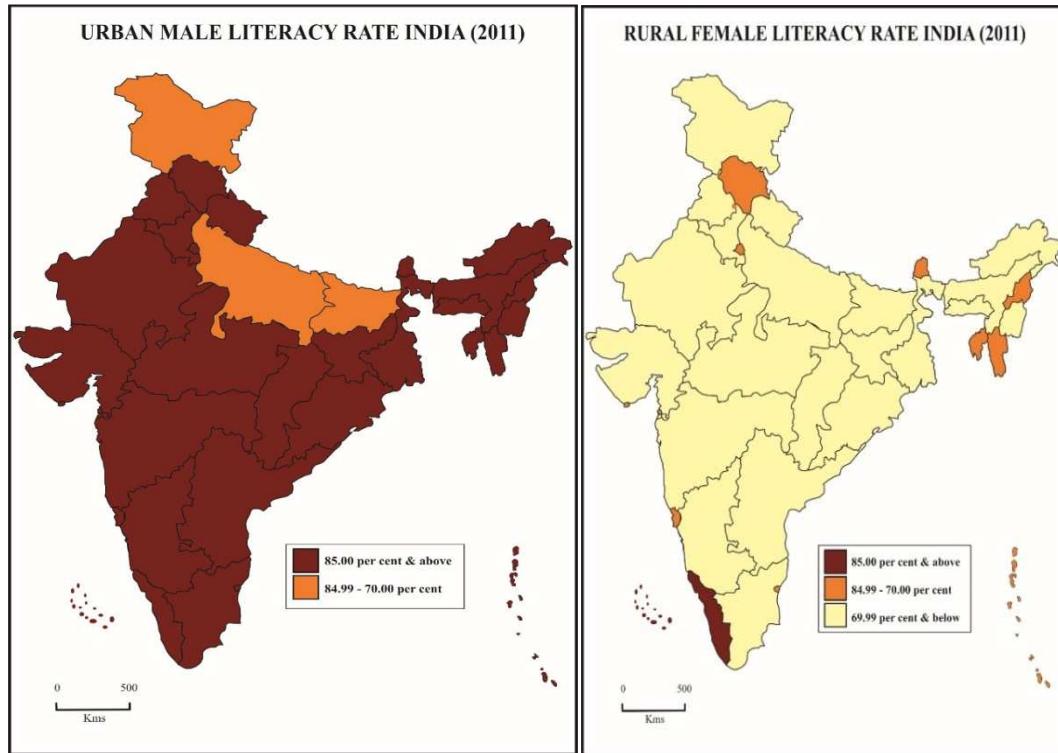


Figure 2

### Reasons for Low Female Literacy Rate in India

Following are the reasons for the low female literacy rate in India:

- Male dominance is prevalent in Indian society since ancient times, which is the basic reason for low female literacy and status in the society.
- India has a poor economic base with agrarian culture, which hinders the path of education in two ways. In one way, due to poor income parents are unable to send their children to schools; and in another way, most of the Indian families are linked to agriculture and earn from this practice. Agriculture practice needs labor force to work in the fields. So the families used their children as labor force and could not send their children to schools.
- Many of the government schools of India do not have toilet facility which hinders girls from going to school.
- Son preference is the second biggest reason of low female literacy. The families which prefer a son over the daughters, they always neglect the needs of their daughter/s and do not prefer to spend money on educating them.
- In some religious groups, status of females is very low and females are bounded in the four walls of the house. Such groups do not let their females out for purpose like education.
- In our society, some particular works (such as weaving) are bound to be done by a particular community and also such works are done by females of the family. To do so, they need not to be educated. 'Illiteracy is widespread among people who speak unofficial and unstandardised languages, which are often not targeted for literacy programmes (Patel and Dighe, 1997, p.1).



- A large proportion of Indian villages do not have easy access to middle, high and senior secondary schools. So rural people do not prefer to send their daughters to far away schools.
- From the past times, females are more illiterate than males and due to this reason our country's half of the population remained illiterate and with the passing times it becomes the base of the country which is large and illiterate.
- Background of the family plays an important role in the education of their children. If either or both the parents are literate than they know the value of education and such families are less in our country.
- A large part of India is unaware about their rights and schemes which are for their up-gradation in the society and these unaware people are mainly women of the country.
- In our society almost everyone studies for functional utility (for earning) and parents of girl child think that spending money on education is waste because one day their daughter will go to her husband's home.
- Discrimination on the basis of caste and status of communities led to low literacy rates.
- 'The social practice of early marriage of daughters, prevalent in many developing countries, affects both, parental view of the level of education daughters needs and women's aspirations for future education (Patel and Dighe, 1997, p.5)'.
- 'Social acculturation reinforces the belief that the usefulness of literacy is limited for women due to their primary role as wife and a mother. While man's claims of knowledge and learning are perceived to be superior to that of women (Patel and Dighe, 1997, p.18)'.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

On the whole, it can be concluded that the picture of female literacy rate in India is very poor. A lot has been done in this regard and a long way has to be covered yet. However, the change is coming in the society, but it needs to be geared up. If India wants to develop than its females have to be equally educated. Females should be equally treated, but before that shrewd males have to realize that females are also human beings like them and are not any object. Education is the only medium which could bring change in the psychology of such people. Issues like the low status of women, son preference, bad conditions of schools, narrow minded society, unawareness about the value of education, low sex ratio, social discrimination, poverty, etc. are some major problems which are the main reasons for low female literacy in our country. Along with government, non-profit organizations, local bodies, and society itself should come up to make a sound future for females.

## **STRATEGIES & SUGGESTIONS**

Following are some strategies and suggestions which if may implement properly then it could improve the picture of female literacy rate in India.

- Creating awareness about an individual's rights and duties at grass root level through big campaign could help a lot to be educating them. This should be a continuous process, not a one-time process (Rao and Gupta, 2006, p.92).

- Access to schools should be easy. Each elementary school should be reachable within one kilometer of distance, middle schools should be at two kilometers, high schools should be at three kilometers and senior secondary should be at five kilometers.
- Occupational and skill development programs should be introduced at early levels of schooling.
- More female teachers should be introduced at school levels so that girls can easily communicate with them and this will provide a sense of security to female students.
- Our education system needs a change because it is a stereotype. After completing even graduation, one cannot get a good job. Our education system should include technical, skill development, applied subjects so that after spending 10-15 years in education one could be able to get jobs. If it is implemented then educating a girl will not be assumed as a burden.
- Local transport fares should be low so that it could be affordable for poor students.
- Government schools of India need an immediate makeover because they are lacking even basic facilities like drinking water and toilet facilities.
- When government schemes implemented in the society, then government should interfere less and it should be governed or taken care by the local bodies.
- In educational institutes, discrimination on the basis of social stratification should be stopped. This would definitely lead to good results in raising the total number of students in the schools.

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