

Literacy Pattern and Gender Gap among Tribal Women in Himachal Pradesh: A Geographical Analysis

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Abstract:

The development of India is not possible without the women contribution towards the nation because they constitute half of the population of India. Female literacy an important social attribute, contributes significantly towards socio-cultural and economic progress of any society. This is no less true in the case of tribal society in Himachal Pradesh. In fact various dimensions of social and cultural change in the tribal society of the state can be well understood in the light of prevailing female literacy and education. In Himachal Pradesh the female literacy rate among the schedule tribes has witnessed a considerable increase during the period 2001-2011 as compare to the national and state average. However, there exists marked variation in this respect across the state. With this perspective an attempt is made in this paper to analyze the literacy patterns among the tribal women in Himachal Pradesh based on secondary data, shall be derived from census publication. The study has examined the nature and magnitude of change in the literacy level of scheduled tribe women during the study period and has tried to see as how far the literacy gap has been narrowed down. The simple percentage and choropleth techniques has been used to represent the statistics and portray the spatial variation

in changing literacy pattern of scheduled tribe women in Himachal Pradesh.

Key words: Tribal; Spatial variation; Rural-urban differential; Gender disparity.

INTRODUCTION

Himachal Pradesh, can hardly be called a tribal state though it is inhabited by tribes like the Pangwala, Gaddi, Gujjar, Kinnaura, Lahaula, Lamba, Jad, Kampa, Swangla, Beda and Zoba. The tribal socio-cultural milieu in the state is not only fascinating but also unique in respect of certain elements of culture. The total tribal population of Himachal Pradesh is 392126 (2011 census) people, which constitute about 5.7 per cent of the total population of the state.

Literacy along with educational attainment is considered to be the hallmark of modern society (Kar and Sharma, 1994). In recognition to this, developing countries like India view literacy and education as necessary and basic ingredients of economic and social development planning. But, diffusion of literacy in India has neither been uniform in its spatial spread nor in its social coverage. The prevalence of low literacy among the tribals, low castes and other lagging segment of Indian population (Nayak, 2002). One of the main objectives of the tribal sub-plan was to increase the level of literacy and educational attainment thereby, building up inner strength of the tribal people (Hasnain, 2001). The Indian tribes have been exposed to literacy only recently by and large, the response to programmes of literacy and of formal education has varied economic and demographic characteristics and on the magnitude and direction of the forces of modernization, i.e. urbanization and industrialization (Bose, 1970).

A few studies conducted in the recent past reveal that women education plays a crucial role in the socio- economic

development of society. Mishra (2002) has rightly remarked that girls education has significant bearing on economic well-being of country. Despite best concerted efforts through special stipends and scholarships.

On the other hand, the various dimension of social and cultural change in a tribal society can be understood in the light of literacy and education. This is more so in the case of tribal women, because educated tribal women can play a vital role towards socio-economic upliftment of their society.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY:

The present study is aimed at realizing the following objective

- To analyze the progress, spatial variation and rural urban differential in literacy among tribal women in Himachal Pradesh.
- To know the disparity between the literacy rate of scheduled tribe males and that of scheduled tribe females and also to know the literacy gap.

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

The present study is based entirely on secondary data, which have been obtained from the census of India reports for the census year of 2001 and 2011. The districts constitute the area unit of study.

Formulas applied

Literacy Rate: In the census 2011, a person aged seven and above (excluding the child population of the age group of 0-6 years) who can both read and write with understanding of any language is treated as literate. It denotes the most basic and essential criterion of human development.

Progress in Literacy

Like most other parts of the country the progress of literacy among the tribal people in Himachal Pradesh had also been very low before to the country Independence. This was more so in the case of women folk. The level of literacy and education remained very low until 1970s. In other words, the tribal societies, which are often described as the pre-literate. A glimpse into the census reports clearly shows that the level of female literacy rate among the tribal people has been increasing over the year from 53.32 percent in 2001 to 64.20 percent in 2011 as against 67.42 percent, to 75.93 percent respectively among the state non-tribal female population (Table - 1).

It is pertinent to note that the prevalence of low literacy rate among the tribal women of the state, as elsewhere in the country, has been attributed to the cumulative effects of physical, economic and social constraints including the legacy of the past (Gosal, 1979). The continuance of strong societal prejudices against women’s mobility and education, and absence of awareness among tribal women to the benefits of education and learning are the chief hurdles behind tribal women’s literacy development in the changing world.

Table – 1: Literacy Rate and Gender Gap among Scheduled Tribes and General Population in Himachal Pradesh and India: 2001 and 2011

Years	India								Himachal Pradesh							
	General Population				Scheduled Tribes Population				General Population				Scheduled Tribes Population			
	Total	Male	Female	Gender Gap	Total	Male	Female	Gender Gap	Total	Male	Female	Gender Gap	Total	Male	Female	Gender Gap
2001	64.83	75.26	53.67	21.59	47.10	59.17	34.70	24.41	76.4	85.35	67.42	17.93	65.50	77.71	53.32	24.39
2011	74.64	80.89	69.64	16.25	63.01	71.7	64.0	7.7	82.8	89.53	75.93	13.6	73.63	83.16	64.20	18.96

Source: Census of India, 2001, Himachal Pradesh, Primary Census Abstract
 Census of India, 2011, Himachal Pradesh, Primary Census Abstract

Spatial variation of literacy

Spread of female literacy is an important pre-requisite for socio-cultural and economic development in all societies. It is more so because educating a man is educating an individual, while

educating a women is educating the entire family. In general, the performance of females in this respect varies significantly from one region to another depending on their socio-cultural, economic and demographic characteristics and their response to the forces of modernization. So far Himachal Pradesh is concerned, the female literacy rate among the tribal population is found to be slightly higher (64.20 percent) than their corresponding national average (64.0 percent) as per 2011 census.

In case of district level, it is found to vary from as low as 48.67 percent in Sirmour district to as high as 78.19 percent in Hamirpur district. Among the other districts in the state, kullu (76.03 percent) ranks second in tribal female literacy, followed by Una (71.82 percent), Shimla (71.50 percent), Kinnaur (70.70 percent), Mandi (68.21 percent), Lahaul and spiti (67.14 percent), Bilaspur (65.95 percent), Kangra (65.64 percent), Solan (63.02 percent) and Chamba (57.95 percent).

It is pertinent to note here that among the district having considerably high concentration of tribal population, the female literacy is yet very low. Like-wise the districts having considerably low concentration of tribal population, the female literacy rate is high except Sirmour. It means a large segment of the tribal women living, particularly in the interior or a mountainous area of the state is yet to get the exposure of literacy and education. Moreover, the role of urbanization towards improvement of literacy and education among the tribal women of the state is found to be quite insignificant as most of them dwell in the rural areas.

Rural-urban differential in female literacy

The spatial variation of literacy among the tribal women in the state becomes further clear when it is considered separately for rural and urban areas. As elsewhere in the country and among different population groups, the significantly higher literacy rate among the tribal women in the urban areas of the state as

compared to the rural counterparts had kept the rural-urban differential quite high.

As per 2011 census, the urban literacy rate among the tribal women of the state stands at 81.93 percent as compared to the rural tribal female literacy rate of 63.35 percent. The corresponding figures were 81.15 percent and 52.50 percent for 2001. It is thus found that the rural-urban differential in literacy attainment in Himachal Pradesh has slightly decreased during 2001 and 2011.

The prevalence of high rural-urban differential in female literacy among the tribals of the state is primarily due to the availability of educational facilities accompanied by educational consciousness and better economic condition among the urban residents. In contrast to this, lack of adequate educational facilities and awareness both among the girls and their parents, have been responsible for low female literacy in the interior area. Moreover a large proportion of girls of school going age have stayed back at home look after their household chores and sibling as their and other adult members of the family are engaged in cultivation. In tribal family, girls give every kind of help to their mother in the work at home. During the agriculture season they work in the field their parents.

Even tribal women have interest in educating their girls but other members of their family do not want to educate them because they think that if girl will be educated they will idle and fashionable only while they have to work hard in father-in-laws house. The major impediments are the language barrier. So, the communication gap between the teacher and the taught alienates the tribal child from the school.

In addition, the tribal women in rural areas, particularly having least access to the outer world, are much deprived due to gross neglect of female education. Ignorance and indolence have also contributed to low literacy among them in rural area of the state.

Among the districts, the rural urban differential in female literacy is quite high recorded in Shimla district (40.8 percent), Sirmour district (34.85 percent), Bilaspur district (21.79 percent), Solan (21.36 percent) and Chambas district recorded (19.18 percent), above state average (18.58 percent). The districts have recorded low rural-urban differential in female literacy in Kangra (7.02 percent), Kullu (9.42 percent), Hamirpur (11.41 percent), Una (12.26 percent) and Mandi district recorded (16.25 percent), less than state average (18.58 percent). Except two district Lahaul & Spiti and Kinnaur, because these are entirely rural.

Table – 2: Total scheduled tribes Male-Female Literacy (in percent) and Gender Gap in Literacy among the Districts in Rural and Urban Areas of Himachal Pradesh, 2011

Sr. No.	Districts	Total Literacy				Rural Literacy				Urban Literacy			
		Total Persons	Male	Female	Gender Gap	Persons	Male	Female	Gender Gap	Persons	Male	Female	Gender Gap
1.	Chamba	69.10	80.30	57.95	22.35	68.77	80.04	57.57	22.47	84.97	92.99	76.75	16.24
2.	Kangra	74.06	82.30	65.64	16.66	73.71	82.52	65.29	17.23	80.49	88.19	72.31	15.88
3.	Lahaul-Spiti	76.95	86.89	67.14	19.75	76.95	86.89	67.14	19.75	0	0	0	0
4.	Kullu	84.14	90.20	76.03	14.17	81.43	89.21	73.50	15.71	87.90	93.00	82.92	10.08
5.	Mandi	75.89	83.84	68.21	15.63	75.46	83.56	67.68	15.88	87.56	90.61	83.97	6.64
6.	Hamirpur	85.36	92.58	78.19	14.39	84.62	92.07	77.36	14.71	93.66	97.56	88.77	8.79
7.	Una	80.01	87.77	71.82	15.95	79.86	87.69	71.61	16.08	88.23	91.89	83.87	8.02
8.	Bilaspur	75.51	84.63	65.95	18.68	74.92	84.18	65.22	18.96	92.28	97.05	87.01	10.04
9.	Solan	73.11	82.48	63.02	19.46	71.17	81.92	61.80	20.12	87.07	90.14	83.16	6.98
10.	Sirmour	59.74	69.72	48.67	21.05	58.79	68.90	47.68	21.22	87.41	90.76	82.53	8.23
11.	Shimla	75.48	79.80	70.74	9.06	61.03	67.49	53.97	13.52	96.11	97.34	94.77	2.57
12.	Kinnaur	80.04	89.19	71.50	17.69	80.04	89.19	71.50	17.69	0	0	0	0
13.	H.P.	73.63	83.16	64.20	18.98	72.95	82.68	63.35	19.33	87.38	92.47	81.93	10.54

Source: Census of India, 2011, H.P. Primary Census, Abstract

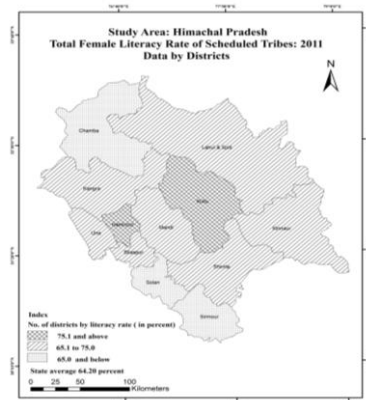


Figure - 1

Gender gap in the total literacy rate of scheduled tribes: 2011

An index of considerable importance is male-female literacy differential or gap as it reflects the socio-economic condition of the area. A variety of factors such as isolated location, legacy of the past of not having proper educational atmosphere, relative deprivation of female in the field of education, etc, among many others, have responsible for causing in the literacy topography among the tribals of the state. It is, however, encouraging to note that the gap between total scheduled tribe males and females literacy rate in 2011, was 18.98 percentage points. Among the districts, the highest gender gap among scheduled tribe males and females literacy was recorded in Chamba district with 22.35 percentage points, followed by Sirmour district with 21.07 percent, Lahaul & spiti with 19.74 percent and Solan with 19.16 percent, (above state average 18.98 percent). The remaining districts like Bilaspur with 18.68 percentage points, Kinnaur with 17.69 percent, Kangra with 16.66 percent, Una with 15.95 percent, Mandi with 15.61 percent, Hamirpur district with 14.39 percent. The smallest male-female literacy differential was found in Shimla district with 9.06 percentage points and was preceded by Kullu district with 14.17 percentage points, (less than state average 18.98 percent) **Figure - 1.**

Gender gap in the literacy rate of rural scheduled tribes: 2011

In the state, the gap among rural scheduled tribe males and females literacy rates in 2011 was 19.33 percent points. Among the districts Chamba has highest gender gap in literacy with (22.47 percent), and was followed by Sirmour district with 21.22 percent points. The smallest male-female literacy differential was found in Shimla district and followed by Hamirpur with 14.71 percentage points **(Table - 2).**

Gender gap in the literacy rate of urban scheduled tribes: 2011

The **table - 2** bring out that in the state, the gap among urban scheduled tribes males and female's literacy in 2011 was 10.54 percent. Among the districts, the highest gender gap was recorded in Chamba district with 16.24 percent, and was followed by Kangra district with 15.88 percent, Kullu with 10.08 percent, Bilaspur 10.04 percent. The lower gender gap between urban scheduled tribes males and females literacy rate was recorded in Shimla district with 2.57 percent.

Although the sex disparity in literacy was usually found to be higher in rural areas than their urban counterparts.

CONCLUSION

The tribal community and their habitats constitute very significant parts of backward region of the state. They comprise 5.7 percent of it's in the state population. As per 2011 census state largest population in absolute forms found in Chamba district. Considering the proportion of tribal to total population the Lahaul & Spiti ranks first. In spite of slow economic progress, Himachal Pradesh has emerged as one of the highly states of the country, where literacy constitutes one of the major social aspect in which considerable progress has been made. At the time of 2011 census the state literacy level was higher than that of India as whole by 8.76 percentage points. According to 2001 census of India 65.50 percent scheduled tribes population of Himachal Pradesh was in position to read and write, the corresponding figure for the general population in Himachal Pradesh was 76.5 percent. Thus, there was a difference of 11 percentage points. At the time of 2011 census 82.8 percent population of Himachal Pradesh was literate, whereas the corresponding average for the scheduled tribe was 73.3 percent thus again a gap of 9.5 percentage points in literacy rate of two sections of society. It is however here thing

to note that the literacy rate literacy gap has slightly narrowed down. According to 2011 census of India 64.20 percent of scheduled tribe females population of Himachal Pradesh was in position to read and write, the corresponding figure for the general female population of Himachal Pradesh was 75.93 percent. Thus there was a difference 11.73 percentage points.

The scheduled tribe female literacy has moved faster than the male literacy resulting in significant narrowing down of the gap between the literacy rates of the two sexes. The literacy rates were high in those areas, which were well developed, in road network and transportation and easy access to education facilities. Areas with low literacy rates are characterized by difficult terrain conditions, poor road network, low level economy and low accessibility to educational facilities. The entirely tribal areas of Himachal Pradesh are characterized by terrain physical condition, poor road network and communication and difficult accessibility to educational institutions. In spite of these problems the tribal areas of Himachal Pradesh, have shown a remarkable achievement on literacy during 2001 and 2011. The study has also highlighted the gender gap in male-female literacy rates.

The above discussion reveals that the level of female literacy among scheduled tribes had witnessed a significant increase in the census years. Among the districts, rural-urban differential in female literacy is quite high in rural area and quite low in urban area. As a whole, the literacy rate among the tribal women in the state has been gradually improving over the year and it is being more so among the new generation.

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