



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

A Geographical Analysis of Gender Disparity in Literacy in The Districts of West Bengal.

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ABSTRACT

Regional development is best expressed through the levels of literacy and education, as it directly affects the social, economical and political aspects of a region. Education alone is the instrument that ushers a community into a prosperous path. Though The Experimental World Literacy Program (UNESCO) has declared literacy as a human right, yet it has been denied to several groups directly or indirectly. Gender disparity in literacy is a global issue which has been carried, faced and tolerated since many generations arising largely out of favour-ism towards male child than a female child. An illiterate woman faces more hardships in life than the literate ones. The existence of disparity in literacy amongst the two genders brings sluggish and lope- sided development of the country. Increasing female literacy rates or bridging of the disparity rates means opening opportunities for women in economy, increasing her individual rational thinking and also improving her social status which in turn means attainment of women empowerment. India although been a fast growing economy is crippled by literacy disparity between the two genders. Several programmes and policies have been implemented to improve the situation. Amongst the states, Kerala has the lowest disparity rate while Bihar has the highest disparity rate. In this paper the existence of literacy disparity in the state of West Bengal has been studied. The state stands at 20th position in terms of literacy rates. This paper aims at bringing forth the fact that gender disparity in literacy exist in the state of West Bengal by making an analysis of literacy rates of its various districts following the census data and also aims at providing suggestive measures through which the situation can be improved.

Keywords: Literacy, Gender, Development, Disparity rate, Differential index, Male- Female.

1. INTRODUCTION

"Literacy unlocks the door to learning throughout life, is essential to development and health and opens the way for democratic participation and active citizenship"

- Kofi Annan

Illiteracy is neither a local nor a national issue rather is a global issue. It has always functioned as a catalyst in bringing economic stability and improvement in the social well-being of the individual and the communities. The human capital responsible for bringing higher productivity in the economy, are manifested directly by the rate of literacy that the nation possesses.

UNESCO, in its mission statement of 2013 states- “A literate community is a dynamic community, one that exchanges ideas and engages in debate. Illiteracy, however, is an obstacle to a better quality of life, and can even breed exclusion and violence.”

Often it is difficult to define the term ‘literacy or literate’, as the connotation of the term varies from nation to nation influenced by their socio-economic and political environment.

In 1957, UNESCO gave the following definition- “A person is literate who can with understanding both read and write a short simple statement on his (her) everyday life”.

However, the 1957 definition of the term is more unfitting in the view of the role it plays.

Therefore, UNESCO established the Experimental World Literacy Program in 1966 which gave a functional definition to the term- “A person is functionally literate who can engage in all those activities in which literacy is required for effective functioning of his (her) group and community and also for enabling him (her) to continue to use reading, writing and calculation for his (her) own and the community’s development”.

The Experimental World Literacy Program also categorised literacy as a ‘*human right*’ in 1966. Though it has been declared as a human right yet several groups or communities are denied of this right either by imposing certain restrictions or due to inefficient and insufficient development of channels of education that can act as an impetus in spreading the awareness to the people regarding its importance. According to Lumsford, Moglen and Slevin, “literacy is a right and not a privilege: A right that has been denied an extraordinary number of our citizens” (Keefe & Copeland, 2011). The denial of the literacy or education amongst different groups or communities is observed more distinctively between the two genders (i.e. male and female) where the latter faces certain degree of biasness in one form or the other. Gender disparity in education is not a new concept rather is a practice that has been carried, faced and tolerated since many generations and is largely due to the orthodox and insensible social and cultural norms upon which a society or a family is built where consideration or favour-ism of many rights and privileges to the male child over a female child is prevalent as popularly female are considered sub- ordinate to the male and not equal.

According to UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), the global literacy rate is 83.6% (for 15 and above age group). However, the global literacy rate for the male is at 90.0% while for female, it is at 82.7%. This educational gap between the genders is largely seen in most of the underdeveloped and developing countries where male enjoys significant advantages than the female. In the view of understanding and analysing education and gender, UNESCO introduced the concept of ‘gender parity’ which simply means achievement of equal participation for boys and girls in education calculated in terms of Gender Parity Index, which refers to numbers of girls per ‘n’ numbers of boys in primary, secondary and higher secondary education. The Gender Parity Index (GPI) is calculated by UNESCO wherein, a GPI value of 1 signifies that there exists equality in education, a GPI of less than 1 indicates that boys are preferred over girls while the opposite is true when the GPI is greater than 1.

Table no.1- gender parity index of selected countries

Name Of The Country	Gender Parity Index (15 To 24 Age Group)	Year
AFGANISTAN	0.5	2011
ANGOLA	0.8	2014
ARGENTINA	0.1	2016
BANGLADESH	1.03	2018
BHUTAN	0.9	2012
CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC	0.6	2010
ETHIOPIA	0.7	2007
INDIA	0.97	2018
PAKISTAN	0.83	2017
PAPUA NEW GUINEA	1.1	2010
SIRREA LEONE	0.8	2013
SOUTH AFRICA	1.0	2015
SRI LANKA	1.0	2017
THAILAND	1.0	2015
YEMEN	0.7	2004
ZAMBIA	0.9	2010

Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics 2018.

According to Indian Census definition ‘Literacy’ means ‘a person who can read and write a simple message in any language with understanding is considered literate’. In India, up to census 1881, the total population was taken into consideration while computing the literacy rates. However, from 1991 onwards, the sub- population lying in the age group of 0- 6 years were excluded, thus, total population from 7 years and above are only considered in the computation of the literacy rate till date.

India has a high rate of gender disparity in literacy and is one of the major concerns that the country has. In India, women face prejudice at every level in society they are not treated at par with men, socially, culturally, economically or politically, and as a result they go down far behind men in almost all spheres of life (Kumar, Kumar, & Rani, 2016). According to Census of India, 2011, the literacy rate of India is at 74.04%, wherein, literacy rates for male and female are at 82.14% and 65.46% respectively. Similar disparities in literacy can also be seen amongst the Indian states where Kerala has the highest number of literates- 94.0% and lowest gender disparities in literacy with 96.1% and 92.1 %for male and female respectively. On the contrary, Bihar has the least number of literates- 61.8%, and highest gender disparity with 71.2% and 51.5% for male and female respectively. There are several factors that have contributed to the emergence of such saddening situations such as poverty, preference to boy child’s education rather than girl child’s education, dowry, early marriage, lower enrolment and many more.

The male- female literacy gap is more predominant in the rural regions of the country. This is largely due to the regional disparities in the development of the urban and rural areas both economically and socially. In rural areas, the existing gap is controlled by several factors such as, consideration of male population as the earners while female population as home makers. The existence of the dowry system makes education of a girl child uneconomical as parents feel that money should be saved for her marriage rather than spending it in educating a girl child. The early marriage of a girl child is also one of the significant factors in creating a gap.

However, with each passing year, the efforts in the eradication of the gender disparity in literacy and preserving ‘the right to education’ in the country is carried out for which several policies and programmes are implemented such as Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao, Sukanya Samridhi Yojna, Balika Samridhi Yojna, etc., and has achieved a considerable degree of success and satisfaction.

The National Policy on Education 1986, made an emphasis on the elimination of women’s illiteracy and obstacles inhibiting their right of entry to education, elementary education, and women’s participation in

vocational, technical and professional education at different levels (Kumar, Kumar, & Rani, 2016). Similarly, the five-year plans played a major role in upliftment of women's status on education. The sixth five-year plan (1980- 85), considered women an integral part of development and considered women as a direct participant in the process of development and not a mere indirect stakeholder of country's development. During the eighth and ninth five year plans several programmes were launched to uplift women's education such as Balika Samruddhi Yojna (1997), Sarva Siksha Abhiyan (SSA). The tenth and eleventh five year plans not only focussed on the education status of women but on the overall development of women like improvement in sex ratio, GER, achieving the MDGs and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) related to girls and women more specifically. The Constitution of India (86th Amendment) Act 2002, played a significant role in empowering women's education wherein the education of the children (irrespective of gender) between 6-14 years of age was made compulsory.

Table No.2- Literacy Rates Of India 1951-2011

CENSUS YEAR	TOTAL IN %	MALE IN %	FEMALE IN %
1951	18.33	27.16	8.86
1961	28.30	40.40	15.35
1971	34.45	45.96	21.97
1981	43.57	56.38	29.76
1991	52.21	64.13	39.29
2001	64.83	75.26	53.67
2011	74.04	82.14	65.46

Source: consecutive census of India 1951- 2011

II. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY AREA.

The concerned study area, West Bengal (21° 25'N to 26° 50'N & 86° 30'E to 89° 58'E), extending from Himalayas in the north to Bay of Bengal in the south, is the fourteenth largest state of India with total geographical area of 88,752 km² (34,267 sq. mi), and is located in the eastern region of the country with Kolkata, one of the mega cities of the country as the capital. The state shares international boundary with Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan in the east and North respectively and shares inter-state boundary with Odisha, Jharkhand, Bihar, Sikkim and Assam.

During the British rule, West Bengal was the epitome of cultural heritage and consists of large number of intellectuals and professionals largely due to the fact that Kolkata (Calcutta at the time) was the capital from where impulses of development spread to other parts of the state. At present, the state is the amalgamation of societies having varying degrees of social and economic development therefore exhibiting a huge diversity both at regional and micro levels. The total population of the state, as per 2011 census is 91,347,736 (7.55% of India's population) and has population density of 1,028 per sq. Km. The sex ratio of the state stands at 950 (females/1000 males).

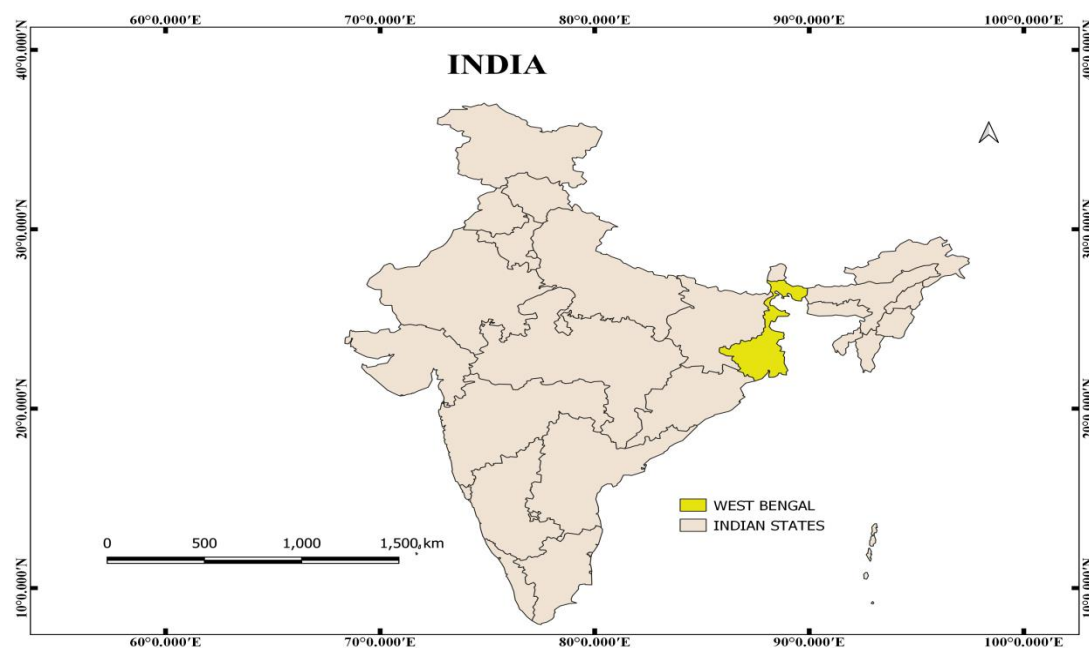


Fig no 1- Locational map of the study area- West Bengal.

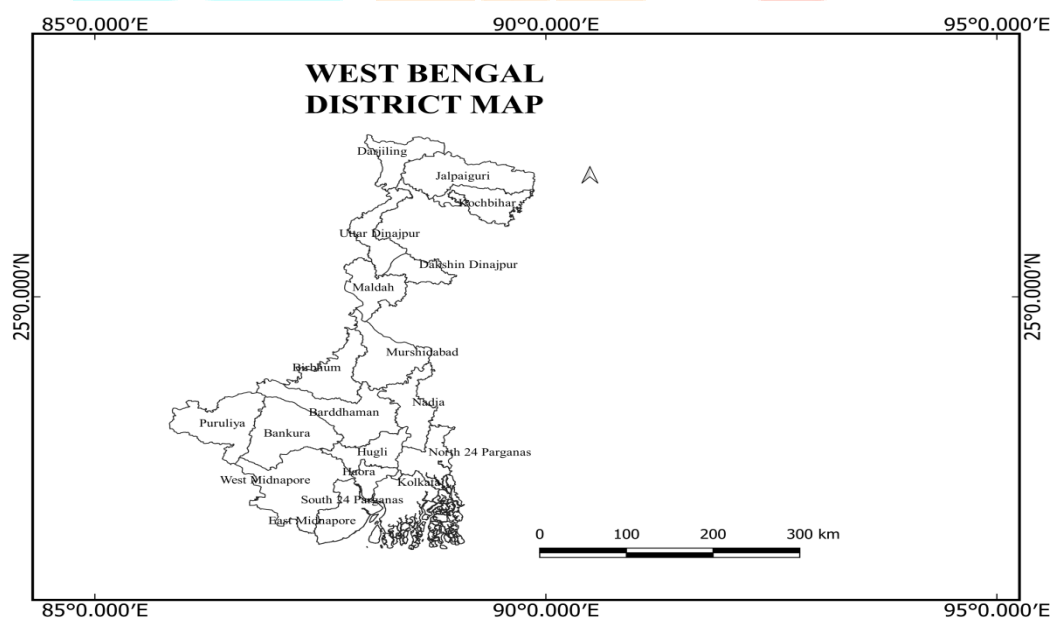


Fig no 2- Districts of West Bengal.

III. OBJECTIVE

The objectives of the paper are: -

1. To show how regional disparities in literacy exists (district wise) in the state in accordance to census years 1991- 2011.
2. To show how the state suffers the gender disparity in education where the female population suffers. This gender disparity in education is calculated using appropriate methods/formula and is compared for the census years 1991- 2011 in order to make a comprehensive comparison and see how far the situation has improved or worsened.
3. Also to highlight various reasons that are cause and effect of gender disparity existing in the state.

IV. METHODOLOGY

The data for the study is a secondary data and are obtained from the Census of India 1991- 2011.

The gender disparity in literacy is obtained by calculating the differential index of each district using the following formula: -

$$1. \text{MFDI} = (\text{MLR} - \text{FLR}) / \text{TLR}$$

$$2. \text{URDI} = (\text{ULR} - \text{RLR}) / \text{TLR}$$

Where, MFDI=Male-female differential index.

URDI=Urban-rural differential index.

MLR=Male literacy rate. ULR= Urban literacy rate.

FLR= Female literacy rate. RLR= Rural literacy rate.

TLR= Total literacy rate. TLR= Total literacy rate

After the calculation of Differential index, the choropleth maps were prepared using QGIS version 3.14.16, to make a comparison between different census year.

In the year 1991, the district of Dinajpur and Medinipur had not undergone division. Similarly, in the year 2001, Medinipur had not undergone division therefore for better calculation purposes, these districts are taken into consideration without their current divisions wherever deemed fit.

V. LITERATURE REVIEW

Illiteracy is one of the major causes that affects the overall socio- economic development of a country. Rao and Gupta in their paper entitled ‘Low Female Literacy: Causes and Strategies’, states that “Literacy is a process, which dispels ignorance and promotes rational thinking. Literacy thus moulds a person to become a responsible citizen.” Though literacy has been declared as a ‘human right’ or a ‘fundamental right’, yet certain groups, especially female are deprived of this right. Deprivation of education to one section of the population causes lopsided development. A recent study by world bank (2013) says that educating women is not a charity, it is good economics and if developing nations are to be abolish poverty, they should educate their women. India represents a picture of contrast when it comes to the educational opportunities for girls as compared to boys and it is also an admitted fact that the society can progress only when its women will act as a strong barrier in realizing its goal. Gender disparity in literacy is one of the major concerns of India. Women face a lot of discrimination at every level in Indian society, especially in rural areas, gender is significant factor for educating children. The relative deprivation of females in field of education is particularly significant because it underlines all other attributes of deprivation in development context. Kumar, Kumar and Rani in their paper- “Gender Disparity in Literacy: Districts Level Evidence from Selected States of India” (2016), clearly highlighted that gender disparity in literacy is not a problem of the single state rather is an issue or drawback faced by majority of the states”. According to National Literacy Mission 1998, ‘the following factors are responsible for poor female literacy rates: gender-based inequality, social discrimination and economic exploitation, occupation of girl child in domestic chores, low enrolment of girls in schools and low retention rate and high dropout rate’.

Som and Misra in their study correlates the low literacy level of female with the levels of income, population growth, number of children, number of schools available. According to them, ‘When a girl or a woman is not educated, it is not only she who suffers but the entire family has to bear the consequences of her illiteracy’.

Roa and Gupta writes- ‘In contemporary society, we can understand the attitude of men and elders are not favourable towards women’s participation in all important aspects of family and society. Right to education, right to poverty, the dowry system, child and early marriages, discrimination in wages, not enjoying their part of earnings are some of the reasons which hold back the progress of women and the less

advantaged sections in the society. Providing education is the only way to change women's position in the society'.

VI. LITERACY RATES AND TRENDS: MAJOR FINDINGS AND OBSERVATIONS.

The state has a literacy rate of 77.08%. Amongst the states and union territories of the country, West Bengal stands at 20th position in terms of the literacy rate (census 2011).

In terms of gender wise literacy rate of the state, male literacy rate lies at 81.69% while female literacy rate lies at 70.54%. Thus, there exists a gap of 11.18%. Similarly, in terms of urban and rural literacy rates of both the gender, 78.48% for rural male literacy rate and 61.98% for rural female literacy rate while for urban population, male literacy is at 88.37% and female literacy at 76.01% (Census 2011). These gaps between the two genders in terms of literacy depicts the educational deprivation the female population of the state has to face largely arising due to various social and economic factors governing a society. The disparity in the education levels between the two genders also suggests the lope- sided development where empowerment or upliftment of half of the population is still undermined.

With increasing urbanisation and 'metropolitanization', the literacy rates of the districts of the state are improving with each passing census year. In 1951, the overall literacy rates of the state were at 24.61%, which has increased to 77.08% in 2011. The graph below clearly showcases the declining trend of female-male literacy gap where the gap was broadest during the 1961 census period.

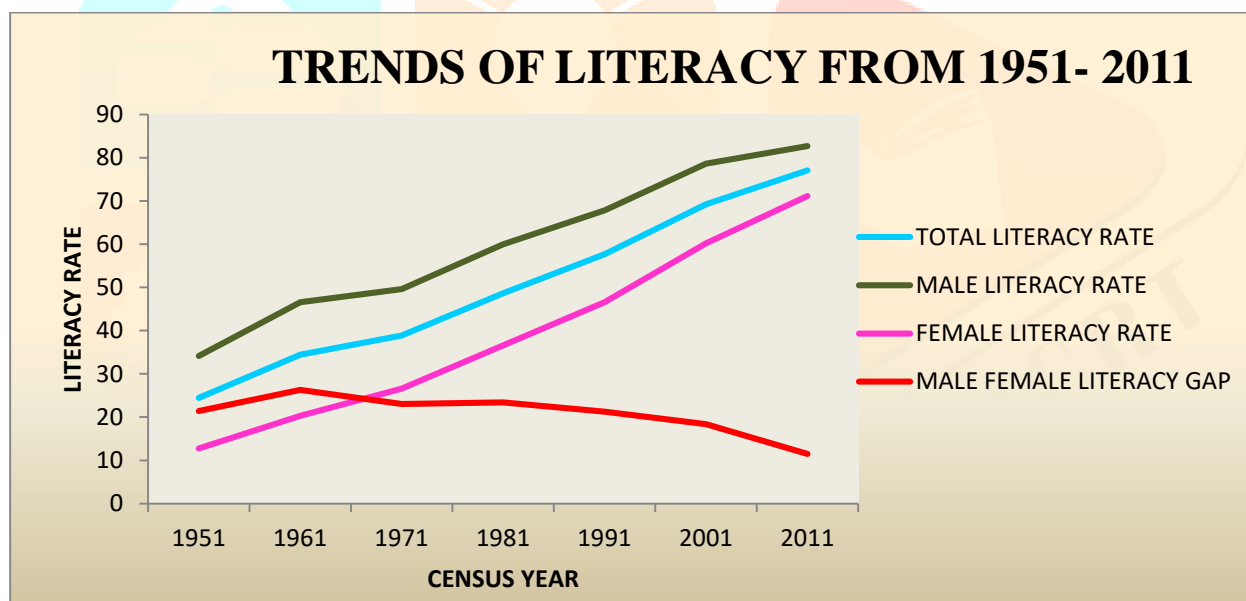


Fig no 3- Line graph to show changing trends of literacy in West Bengal from 1951- 2011

Table no 3- Literacy Census data of West Bengal 1951- 2011

CENSUS YEAR	TOTAL LITERACY RATE	MALE LITERACY RATE	FEMALE LITERACY RATE	FEMALE- MALE GAP IN LITERACY
1951	24.42	34.14	12.74	21.40
1961	34.46	46.57	20.27	26.30
1971	38.86	49.57	26.56	23.01
1981	48.65	59.93	36.56	23.37
1991	57.70	67.81	46.56	21.25
2001	69.22	78.58	60.22	18.36
2011	77.08	82.67	71.16	11.51

Source: Census of India of consecutive years.

VII. COMPARING MALE FEMALE DIFFERENTIAL INDEX

Male female differential index, which is the ratio between the difference between the male and female literacy rate and the total literacy rate, reflects the degree of literacy disparity between the two genders wherein higher the value- higher the degree of disparity and vice- versa.

Table No 4- District Wise Male Female Differential Index 1991- 2011

NAME OF THE DISTRICT	MALE FEMALE DIFFERENTIAL INDEX		
	1991	2001	2011
DARJEELING	0.33	0.24	0.15
JALPAIGURI	0.51	0.33	0.19
COOCH BEHAR	0.53	0.29	0.16
DINAJPUR	0.56	0.37	0.19
MALDA	0.58	0.35	0.15
MURSHIDABAD	0.44	0.23	0.11
BIRBHUM	0.45	0.31	0.19
BARDHAMAN	0.32	0.34	0.17
NADIA	0.3	0.19	0.11
PURULIA	0.9	0.86	0.42
BANKURA	0.84	0.38	0.29
HUGLI	0.28	0.13	0.13
HAORA	0.27	0.12	0.09
KOLKATA	0.13	0.07	0.05
MEDINIPUR	0.36	0.27	0.17
NORTH PARGANAS	240.25	0.16	0.09
SOUTH PARGANAS	240.51	0.33	0.16

Source: Consecutive census years.

Table No 5- Degree Of Male- Female Disparity, 1991

DISPARITY IN PERCENTAGE	DEGREE OF DISPARITY	NAME OF THE DISTRICT
Less than 20 %	LOW	Kolkata
20- 40%	MODERATE	Darjeeling, Bardhaman, Nadia, Hugli, Haora, Medinipur, North 24 Parganas
40-60%	HIGH	Jalpaiguri, Cooch Behar, Dinajpur, Maldah, Murshidabad, Birbhum, South 24 Parganas
More than 60%	VERY HIGH	Purulia, Bankura,

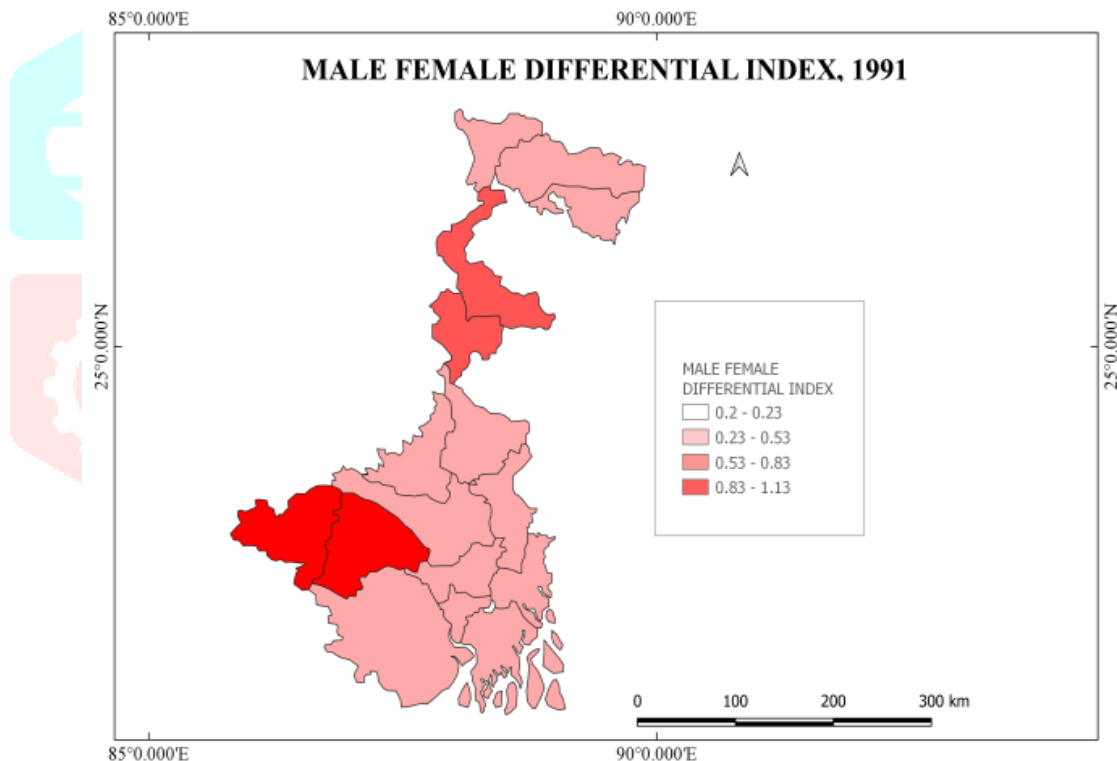


Fig no 4-Map showing Male female differential index, 1991

During the 1991 census, the disparity in literacy among the two genders were high in most of the districts of the state. The above map clearly indicates that, Dinajpur, Maldah, Purulia and Bakura had the highest disparity rates while Kolkata had the lowest disparity rate amongst all other districts.

Table No 6- Degree Of Male Female disparity,2001

PERCENTAGE OF DISPARITY	DEGREE OF DISPARITY	NAME OF THE DISTRICTS
Less than 20%	Low	Kolkata, Haora, Hugli, North 24 Parganas, Nadia
20 – 40 %	Moderate	Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri, Cooch Behar, Dakshin Dinajpur, Maldah, Murshidabad, Birbhum, Bardhaman, Bankura, Medinipur, South 24 Parganas
40-60 %	High	Uttar Dinajpur
More than 60 %	Very high	Purulia

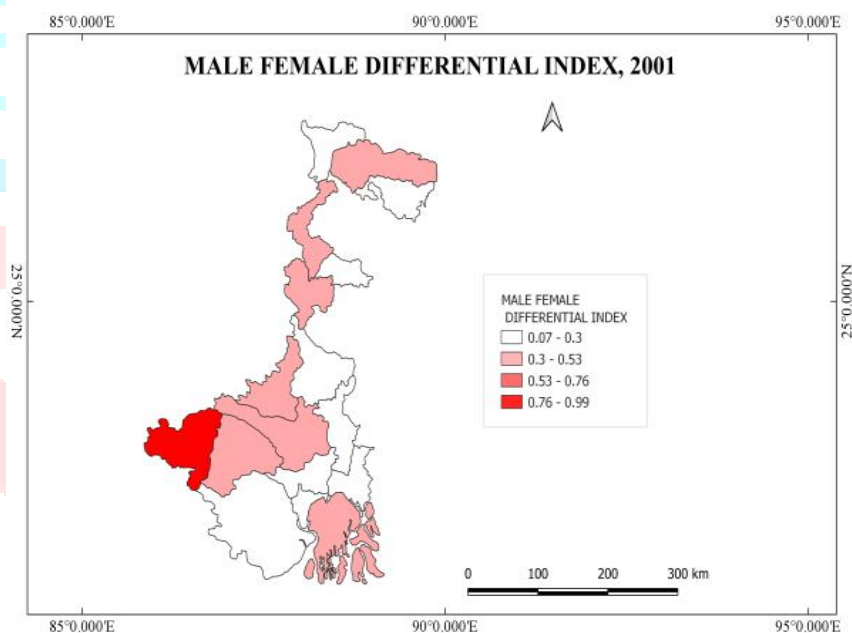


Fig no 5- Map showing Male female differential index, 2001

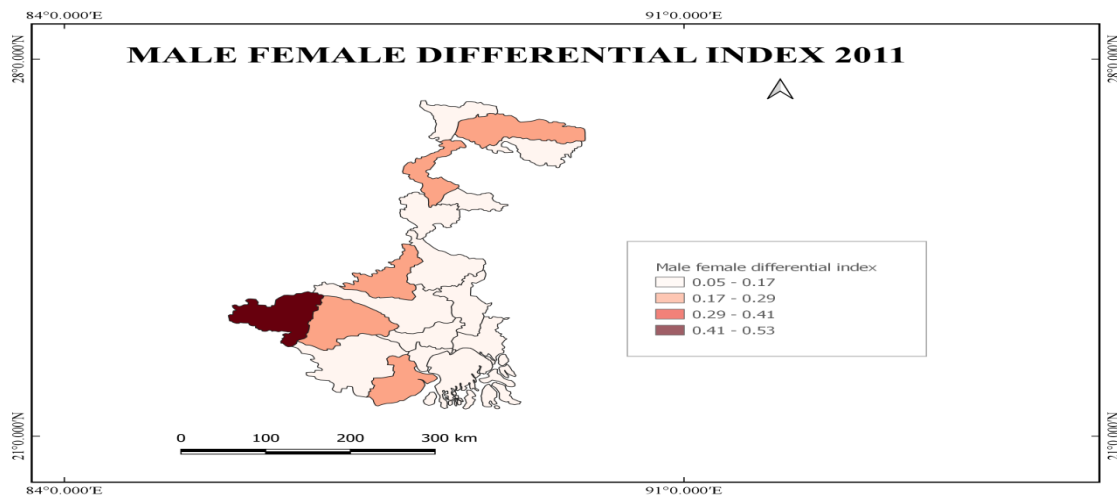


Fig no 6- Map showing Male female differential index, 2011

During the census year 2001, most of the districts would bridge the disparity by bringing about changes in their social and economic frameworks which can be clearly seen in the table no.

The analysis of the male- female differential index map from the census year 1991- 2011, clearly shows that the gap in the literacy amongst the two genders were high during the 1991 census where Purulia, Bankura, Dinajpur and Maldah districts had highest disparities while Kolkata had the lowest differential index and the rest had modera. Such disparities can be largely attributed to the fact that the latter districts were much urbanised and industrialised and therefore the development of these districts, socially and economically were at much higher levels as compared to the former districts. However, in the later census years i.e., 2001 and 2011, much achievement has been made in lowering the differential index, largely due to changing social and economic structures of the societies of the districts.

After calculating the Male Female Differential Index of the districts of West Bengal of three consecutive census year 1991- 2011, it was seen that following districts had achieved following percentages in bridging the differences in male female literacy.

Table No 7- Acheviement In Bridgeing The Male Female Literacy Gap

40% - 53%	Bardhaman, Purulia, Medinipur
53% - 66%	Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri, Dinajpur, Birbhum, Nadia, Bankura, Hugli, Kolkata, North 24 Parganas
66% - 79%	Cooch Behar, Malda, Murshidabad, Haora, South 24 Parganas

Table No 8- Analysis Of Male Female Differential Index Census Year 2011

NAME OF THE DISTRICT	TOTAL LITERACY RATE	RURAL LITERACY RATE	URBAN LITERACY RATE	MALE LITERACY RATE	FEMALE LITERACY RATE	RURAL MALE LITERACY RATE	URBAN MALE LITERACY RATE	RURAL FEMALE LITERACY RATE	URBAN FEMALE LITERACY RATE
Darjeeling	79.92	74.97	87.48	85.94	73.74	82.5	91.23	67.2	83.65
Jalpaiguri	73.79	70.55	82.33	80.61	66.65	78.31	86.69	62.43	77.78
Cooch Behar	75.49	73.87	89.01	81.52	69.08	80.25	92.41	67.07	85.54
Uttar Dinajpur	60.13	57.15	80.67	66.65	53.15	64.06	84.31	49.77	76.69
Dakshin Dinajpur	73.86	71.18	89.42	79.63	67.81	77.42	92.61	64.61	86.15
Malda	62.71	60.42	76.82	67.27	57.84	65.37	78.71	55.18	74.71
Murshidabad	67.53	66.27	72.65	71.02	63.88	69.52	77.15	62.84	68.02
Birbhum	70.90	69.25	81.74	77.42	64.07	76.01	86.75	62.18	76.55
Bardhaman	77.15	73.39	82.75	83.44	70.47	80.05	88.43	66.39	76.63
Nadia	75.58	71.50	85.88	79.58	71.35	76.65	89.63	67.08	81.98
Purulia	65.38	63.75	76.24	78.85	51.29	77.96	84.68	48.93	67.21
Bankura	70.95	69.60	85.23	81	60.44	80.06	90.97	58.66	79.24
Hugli	82.55	79.22	87.75	87.93	76.95	85.71	91.34	72.5	83.95
Haora	83.85	80.82	87.14	87.69	79.73	86.06	88.61	75.29	79.09
Kolkata	87.14	0	87.01	89.04	84.98	0	89.08	0	82.25
Purba Medinipur	87.66	87.47	89.14	93.14	81.81	93.1	93.41	81.45	82.30
Paschim Medinipur	79.04	77.92	87.01	86.66	71.11	85.97	91.61	69.45	84.98
North 24 Pargana	84.95	78.11	89.8	88.66	81.05	82.86	92.79	73.08	86.66
South 24 Pargana	78.57	76.78	83.62	84.72	72.09	83.59	87.93	69.59	84.52

Source: Census of India, 2011.

Table No 9- Male Female And Urban Rural Differential Index Of The Census Year 2011

NAME OF THE DISTRICTS	MALE FEMALE DIFFERENTIAL INDEX	URBAN RURAL DIFFERENTIAL INDEX	RURAL MALE FEMALE DIFFERENTIAL INDEX	URBAN MALE FEMALE DIFFERENTIAL INDEX	MALE URBAN RURAL DIFFERENTIAL INDEX	FEMALE URBAN RURAL DIFFERENTIAL INDEX
Darjeeling	0.15	0.16	0.20	0.09	0.10	0.22
Jalpaiguri	0.19	0.16	0.23	0.11	0.10	0.23
Cooch Behar	0.16	0.20	0.18	0.08	0.15	0.27
Uttar Dinajpur	0.22	0.39	0.25	0.09	0.30	0.51
Dakshin Dinajpur	0.16	0.25	0.18	0.07	0.19	0.32
Malda	0.15	0.26	0.17	0.05	0.20	0.34
Murshidabad	0.11	0.09	0.10	0.13	0.11	0.08
Birbhum	0.19	0.18	0.20	0.12	0.14	0.22
Bardhaman	0.17	0.12	0.19	0.14	0.10	0.15
Nadia	0.11	0.19	0.13	0.09	0.16	0.21
Purulia	0.42	0.19	0.46	0.23	0.09	0.36
Bankura	0.29	0.22	0.31	0.14	0.13	0.34
Hugli	0.13	0.10	0.17	0.08	0.06	0.15
Haora	0.09	0.08	0.13	0.11	0.03	0.05
Kolkata	0.05	0.00	0.00	0.08	0.00	0.00
Purba Medinipur	0.13	0.02	0.13	0.12	0.00	0.01
Paschim Medinipur	0.20	0.12	0.21	0.08	0.07	0.22
North 24 Parganas	0.09	0.14	0.13	0.07	0.11	0.17
South 24 Parganas	0.16	0.09	0.18	0.04	0.05	0.21

As of 2011 census, Kolkata has the lowest male female differential index of 0.05 followed by Haora and North 24 Parganas with each at 0.09. The massive achievement in bridging the gap is largely due to the fact that these areas are highly urbanised and has undergone industrialization leading to changes in the

traditional societal norms wherein equal weightage is given to both the genders. The number of educational institutes in comparison to other districts are also high in the aforementioned districts.

Purulia, Uttar Dinajpur and Bankura districts have highest male female differential index of 0.42, 0.29 and 0.22 respectively. These districts have physical barriers and are dominated by tribal settlement causing hinderances in the developmental processes. It can also be presumed that such a wide gap is due to the slow urbanisation taking place where people still follow rigid traditions and keep female child sub- ordinate to a male child. The absence of educational institutes both in quality and quantity also plays a major role in bringing about such high differential index.

In case of rural male female differential index, Purulia and Uttar Dinajpur has the highest indexes, 0.46 and 0.25 respectively while the female urban rural differential index is highest in Uttar Dinajpur (0.51).

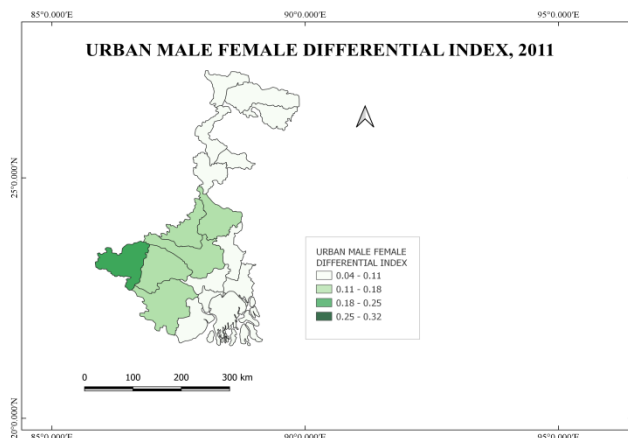


Fig no 7-Urban male- female differential index

In case of urban male female differential Index, the southern and northern districts of the state had comparatively lower disparity in urban areas than western districts of the state.

In case of urban male and female disparity, Purulia has highest differential index while Kolkata, Haora, Maldah, Paschim Medinipur has lowest disparity rates.

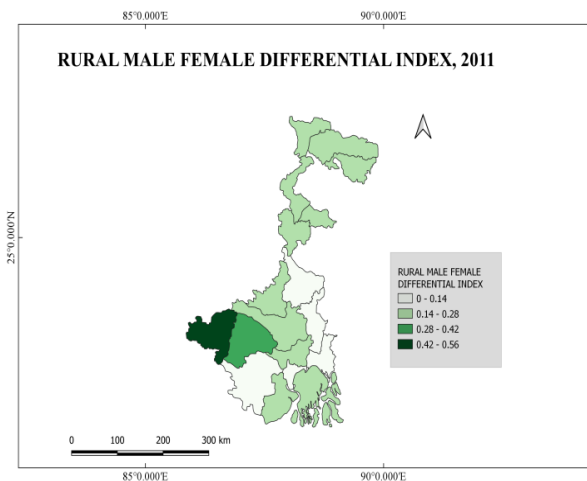


Fig no 8- Map showing Rural male female differential index, 2011

The rural male female disparity in literacy is seen almost in all the districts with highest disparity existing in Purulia, and Bankura largely because of the topography and tribal settlement acting as an obstacle.

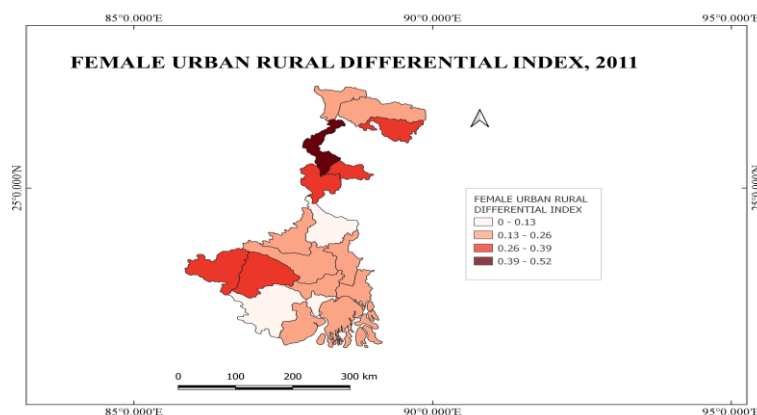


Fig no 9- Map showing female urban rural differential index, 2011

Female urban rural differential is highest in the district of Uttar Dinajpur, followed by Cooch Behar, Dakshin Dinajpur, Maldah, Purulia, Bankura while it is lowest in the districts of Murshidabad, Purba Medinipur, Haora and Kolkata.

Following are the reasons for high disparity rates :-

7.1. INCOME

Several Indian studies (NSSO, 1989; Panchmukhi, 1991; Spahimalini, 1994; NCAER, 1996; Basu, 1997; Bhatta, 1998; PROBE team, 1998; Devi, 2001; Krishanji, 2001; Nambissan and Sedwall, 2002; Dholakia, 2003;) have tried to establish that economic backwardness is indeed a significant factor in explaining the low literacy rate and lower educational attainment among all segment of population (Som & Mishra, 2012).

The families having low-income level indulge or rather encourage their children in earning rather making an expenditure in education. Similarly, the middle-income families send the male children to the family as educating a girl child is considered fruitless as she is wed off to other family plus it saves money that is required for paying her dowry.

7.2. LEVEL OF URBANIZATION

Urbanization is the causes and effect of literacy and education (Som & Mishra, 2012). The employment opportunities are the fruits of urbanization. The areas having low levels of urbanization create limited or insignificant job opportunities resulting into poverty or poverty-like situation where educating a child becomes a hard hurdle. Low level of urbanization also means that the society is still rooted in the traditional mindset therefore education of a girl child is still taboo-like.

7.3. NUMBER OF FUNCTIONING SCHOOLS WITHIN THE REACHABLE SPHERE

The number of functioning schools within a reachable sphere is very important for encouraging a child in attending a school. When the schools are located far, it causes a discouragement amongst the girl child and her family. The necessities of getting proper access to school to enhance schooling outcomes and adult literacy rates, especially for girls, have been supported by a number of studies (Som & Mishra, 2012).

7.4. PROPORTION OF CHILDREN

The areas having high proportion of children have high level of girl child illiteracy mainly due to three reasons. Firstly, since ancient times the girls are engaged in taking care of the household duties. Once the number of family members increase, the duties of the girl increase therefore practically leaving no time for gaining education. Secondly, when the proportion of children increases in a family, preference of attaining education is given to male child due to traditional belief wherein male are considered the bread makers of the family. Thirdly, high proportion of children means high dependency ratio, therefore to feed these mouths, children are forced to work rather than encouraging them to go to school.

7.5. POPULATION GROWTH

Population growth also hinders the improvement that is needed in the education sector as much expenditures are focussed in developing other sectors like administration, finance, medical, defence etc. Only once self-sufficiency is achieved in these sectors focussed can be given to education for both the genders.

VIII. IMPACT OF LOW FEMALE LITERACY ON A SOCIETY AND OVERALL DEVELOPMENT

Although the female constitutes half the population yet their education is neglected in one form or the other. Illiteracy of women means slowing down the process of development. Discouragement of female education encourages early marriages or child marriage which increases the fertility span and therefore increasing the population of the area. It has been found out that illiterate women face more hardships in

life than literate ones (Som & Mishra, 2012). The infant mortality rate is also linked with the mother's education level. Educated mothers are well aware about the health care a child needs and provides the same. However, in case of an uneducated mothers, often they follow traditional methods of health care, often putting the child and their lives at risk. The illiterate women also have to be submissive in the family and face disrespect, physical or mental tortures often leading to her poor health condition.

Illiteracy also makes them incompetent to distinguish wrong from right and vice-versa and therefore raise their children in the same shadow as hers which is a massive blow to all the developmental initiatives taken by the society or the nation.

IX. SUGGESTIVE MEASURES

Following measures can be adopted to bridge the gap in literacy and ensure empowerment of women in education: -

1. Intensive awareness programs should be conducted regularly right from the grass root level.
2. One of the major causes of low literacy rate in rural areas is poverty. People belonging to below poverty line should be provided with certain stipend or some reduction should be made in the fees in order to lessen the financial burden.
3. The practice of early girl child marriage and dowry system should be legally prohibited and regular checks has to be made.
4. The enrolment of the children in primary school should be made compulsory irrespective of gender.
5. Free girls' residential hostels should be provided in the areas which serves not only its population but also nearby areas.
6. Teachers and trainers need to be trained in the conditions of the particular areas or regions in which they are working in order to bring effective and lasting results in enrolling and attaining sufficient literacy levels among women (Rao & Gupta, 2006).
7. Income generating activities should be introduced in the area so that the parents can send their children to schools.
8. Reservation for various government and private services should be made for female as they will encourage education of the female child.
9. Occupation and skill training programs should be opened in order to empower women financially.
10. The society themselves have to accept the two genders equal and reject the bias nature in order to bring balance.

10. CONCLUSION

The overall analysis clearly showcases that disparity in literacy does exist. It is not simply because of the existing social system but also because of the economic status of the families. The development of economy and education has to go hand in hand. In districts where low differential index exist is largely contributed to the fact that these districts have high level of urbanization, adequate number of educational institutes, improvement in modern facilities etc. The spatial analysis also clearly shows that southern and eastern districts have low differential index in comparison to the northern and western districts of West Bengal. However, the state has come a long way in bridging the gap from 21.40 to 11.51 which is an applaudable achievement. In order to further narrow the gap, the government along with various non-governmental organisation has to develop and design policies and frameworks in order to encourage female literacy.

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