

Literacy Rate and Gender Gap in Scheduled Castes in India

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of the paper is to highlight literacy rate and gender gap in Scheduled castes in India and comparison with Punjab State.

Design/methodology/approach – The paper uses data from the Census of India, Department of Education in India, and National Human Development Report prepared by the Government of India.

Findings – Literacy rate among scheduled caste in India is increasing, but the percentage increasing is not high during last decade. High poverty rates pose to be significant obstacles in attaining literacy and education among scheduled caste in India. But in Punjab, the situation is totally different as increase in literacy rate among scheduled caste is high in comparing to India.

Originality/value of paper – Literacy is considered to be an important tool for improving the status of women among the Scheduled Castes. Aggregate statistics often paint a dismal picture of the low literacy rates and schooling among the Scheduled Caste. This paper presents a social analysis of female literacy in India and compares literacy rates of females and males in Scheduled castes in Punjab.

Article Type: Research paper

Keyword(s): Schedule Castes, Literacy and Gender Gap

Summary

There is sufficient empirical evidence to suggest that discrimination, defined as absence of equal opportunities, exists before the market as well as in the market against certain social categories in India. Inequality in access to sources of human capital acquisition reinforces inequality in the labor market and vice versa. Apparently, caste-community discrimination and class discrimination overlap. However, in the case of socially deprived categories, the latter accentuates the former. The development processes have strengthened caste and community consciousness resulting in the metamorphosis of different social categories into interest groups. The policies designed to promote equal opportunities, taking into account heterogeneity of Indian society, will speed up the process of socio-economic change.

In India, male literacy is higher than female literacy, and literacy rates are higher for nonscheduled caste females than scheduled caste females. In most cities of India, the disparity between gender literacy rates is lower, and this is also true within the castes. The main limitation of this paper is that we have taken only one state that is Punjab and covered only scheduled castes in comparison with India. Social movements in India are examined to offer explanations for the literacy patterns within states. This paper presents a social analysis of female literacy in India and compares literacy rates of females and males in Scheduled castes in Punjab.

Introduction

The Scheduled caste population represents one of the most economically impoverished and marginalized groups in India. This belongs to the lowest hierarchy of social order and is often considered impure or unclean. Although Scheduled Castes are a minority, they constitute about 16.2 per cent of the total population in India (Census of India, 2001), or 166 million people in absolute number. About 28.9 per cent of Scheduled Caste People live only in Punjab and Lowest .03per cent belong to Mizoram.

Literacy and educational attainment are powerful indicators of social and economic development among the backward groups in India. During the British rule there was no organized method to educate the tribal communities except for the work

undertaken by Christian missionary organizations in some regions in India. Currently, the scheduled castes lag behind not only the general population but also in literacy and educational attainment. This disparity is even more marked among Scheduled Caste women, who have the lowest literacy rates in the country (Maharatna, 2005). The male-female gap in literacy and educational attainment among the scheduled castes is significant although this is a common trend among both the Scheduled Castes and the general population. This trend reflects the social and cultural trends and degrees of gender inequality in India.

Literacy Rate

The Census of India currently defines the literacy rate as proportion of literates to total population in age group 7 years and above. Moreover, literacy rates were highly variable, with some States and Union Territories having much higher literacy rates than others. Also, literacy rates for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes were considerably lower than literacy rates for the Non-Scheduled Caste/Scheduled. It was merely 18.3 per cent (for the age group 5 years and above) in 1951, 43.6 per cent in 1981 and is 65.2 per cent as per the Census 2001. In the decade 1991-2001 the number of illiterates declined, for the first time since the Census of 1951, by almost 32 million in absolute terms. There are, however, large inter-State variations in literacy rates in the country. At one end, proportion of literates was the highest in Kerala, at over 90 per cent, and at the other it was less than 50 per cent in Bihar for the year 2001. The regional variations in literacy rates have declined since 1981, though the disparities become more pronounced if one takes into account rural-urban differences or the differences between male and female literacy rates.

Actually the background of literacy in India bears marks from a long educational process, even politics of education matters mostly after Independence. Despite efforts from politics to improve literacy within the whole country, the goal of universal compulsory education is not completed. The evolution of literacy in India increased during the last century from a very low average to the rate of 65.38 per cent in 2001, which is far from the 'totally literate target' of national and international organizations

Literacy Rate in India

Before exploring the situation of literacy in India, we have to keep in mind semantic limits of education. An inquiry on lexical field reveals constraints, which have to be respected if we want to propose a study of this phenomenon. Literacy is a proxy indicator of education in two different ways. First, the educational process may or may not lead to literacy: it is restrained by the confusing nature of education, which encompasses a larger definition of this dynamic. Secondly the term of literacy that indicates a static time in the educational process, must have a specific concise explanation which can be measured. The 'ability to read and write with understanding a short simple sentence' is considered as literacy by educational planners and Indian national institutions. The Literacy rate in India is 65.38 per cent of total population male (75.85 per cent) and Females (54.16 per cent).

The count of people possessing this ability is material recovered gathered through in Census of India and will be used to describe a part of educational issues of this country.

Scheduled Castes in India-

Although many other nations are characterized by social inequality, perhaps nowhere else in the world has inequality been as elaborately constructed as in the India institution of caste? Caste has long existed in India, but in the modern period it has been severely criticized by both Indian and foreign observers. Although some educated Indians tell non- Indians that caste has been abolished or that "no one pays attention to caste anymore," such statements do not reflect reality. Caste has undergone significant change since independence, but it still involves hundreds of millions of people. In its preamble, India's constitution forbids negative public discrimination on the basis of caste. However, caste ranking and caste-based interaction have occurred for centuries and will continue to do so well into the foreseeable future, more in the countryside than in urban settings and more in the realms of kinship and marriage than in less personal interactions.

The SC Population numbering 138 million (1991) in India accounts for 16.48 per cent of the total population of the country now increased to 166 million (2001) accounts

for 16.63 per cent of total population of the country which shows that there has been increase a share of SC population in the last decade. The states with higher concentration of SC population are Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh and Tamilnadu, these five states together account for around 58per cent of the total SC Population of the country.

The Scheduled Castes in Punjab

There are thirty-seven Scheduled Castes notified in the State of Punjab. All of them were enumerated at census 2001. The Scheduled Caste (SC) population of Punjab is 70, 28,723, which constitutes 28.9 per cent of the total population of the State. The State has the highest proportion of SC population among all the States and Union Territories. In absolute numbers, Punjab holds 10th rank and accounts for 4.2 per cent of the total SC population of the country. The growth rate of the SC population during the decade of 1991-2001 at 22.4 per cent is higher by 2.3 per cent if compared to the overall growth rate of the total population.

The Scheduled Castes in the State are predominantly rural, as 75.7 per cent of them live in villages. District-wise distribution of the SC population shows that they are mainly concentrated in the districts of Amritsar, Ludhiana, Jalandhar, Sangrur, Gurdaspur, Hoshiarpur and Patiala. These districts account for 62.5 per cent of the total SC population. The newly formed districts of Muktsar, Moga, Nawanshahr and Mansa have 14.6 per cent of the SCs, while the remaining districts account for the residual 22.9 per cent of the SC population of the State.

Findings

Population of Scheduled Castes at a glance

Table No. 1

	India	Punjab
Absolute Numbers	1666,635,700	7028923
Percentage	16.37	28.85

Gender Gap in SCs at a Glance

Table no. 2

India			Punjab	
	Males	Female	Male	Female
Absolute Numbers	86088760	80546940	3714350	3314573
Percentage	51.65	48.35	52.84	47.16

Literacy Rate in SCs

Table no. 3

India				Punjab		
	Males	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Absolute Numbers	60731074	30401990	91133064	1984354	1356911	3341265
Percentage	66.64	33.36	54.69	63.38	48.25	47.53

Comparison of Literate SCs of Punjab and India (1991 with 2001

Table no.4

(in percentage)

	India		Punjab	
	1991	2001	1991	2001
Males	64.13	66.67	49.8	63.38
Females	39.29	41.90	31.0	48.25
Total	52.91	54.69	41.1	56.2

Analysis of Findings

1. Table 1 shows that Punjab has high proportion of Scheduled Caste in comparison to India
2. Table 2 depicts that Punjab has Less Proportion of Scheduled castes Females i.e, 47.16 percent in comparison to India i.e. 48.35 percent. And Scheduled Castes Males is higher i.e. 52.84 percent in comparison to India i.e. 51.65 percent
3. Table 3 shows that Literacy rate is high in case of SC Females in Punjab i.e. 48.25 in comparison to SC Females in India i.e. 33.36percent. And Literacy rate is low in case of SC Males in Punjab i.e. 63.38 percent in comparison to SC Males in India i.e. 66.64 percent.
4. Table demonstrates that there has been drastic increase in the Literacy rate of SCs in Punjab from 49.8 per cent to 63.38per cent (from 1991 to 2001). But at the India level there is an increase of only 2per cent. In the case of Female SCs in Punjab, the literacy rate has also been improved from 31per cent to 48.25per cent which is showing that there are good prospects of education in Punjab.

Conclusion

Education is an important avenue for upgrading the economic and social conditions of the Scheduled Caste population. This study shows that generalizations regarding the educational and literacy attainment of Scheduled Caste are improving in India as well as at state level. This, in turn, would help to other states that Punjab has formulated appropriate policies in order to facilitate higher learning among the Scheduled Castes. There is ample evidence to substantiate this claim. Improvements in educational attainments have invariably been accompanied by improvement in health and longevity of the population and in their economic well-being. Educated people are likely to be more productive and hence better off. They are also likely to contribute more to a country's economic growth. At the same time, education reinforces the socio-economic dynamics of a society towards equality in attainments and opportunities for its people. Though, the returns to education may vary across individuals, regions, level and nature of education, in general, they are significantly higher for poor developing areas than for the rich. Education is therefore, the best social investment, given the synergies and the positive externalities that it generates for people in their well-being. It is also a priority for countries seeking to develop and sustain their level and pace of development. Each and every individual of a Country has a right to be literate and to contribute in the development of country. Government should play an active role in making more and more people literate irrespective of Caste, Creed and Religion.

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