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Gender Disparity In Rural Literacy : A Micro-level Analysis Of Sangli District

D. D. Gaikwad

Dept. of Geography,
D. B. F. Dayanand College of Arts & Science, Solapur.

Abstract:

India, a developing country in the third world with agrarian economy, has 72.20 percent population living in 6,40,000 villages (2001 Census). In contrast, industrially developed state Maharashtra has 57.57 percent people living in 41,095 villages. The study area, Sangli district has 721 inhabited villages carrying 1,950,306 rural people (75.49%). The rural people has a lower literacy rate (74.14%) than the literacy rate of urban population (84.17%). There is a positive correlation between the degree of economic progress and the degree of literacy. Literacy is an indispensable means to acquire skills for improving economic and social well-being. The National Adult Education Programme, the first country-wide programme launched in 1978, viewed literacy as means to bring about fundamental change in socio-economic development. It is the key to both development and population control. Sex-wise (Gender) study of literacy pattern reveals that there is a striking difference in the literacy rates between males and females. Female literacy rate is comparatively lower than that of male. In India, despite our concentered efforts in over last 60 years, only 65.38 percent of the population was reported as literate in 2001 Census, whereas female literacy was 54.16 percent. In case of rural areas, their proportions are 59.40 percent and 46.70 percent respectively. As compared to Indian Scenario, Sangli district is a progressive district, with 74.14 percent people are literate in which female literacy percentage is 62.42. Keeping this in view, in the present paper apart from analysis (micro / village level) of gender disparity in literacy, a modest attempt has been made to identify the villages, that need attention for promotion of elementary / adult education especially for women in order to reduce or eliminate female literacy in rural areas of Sangli district.

KEYWORDS:

v Literary, Illiteracy, Gender Disparity.

1.INTRODUCTION:

Prior to the advent of skills of reading and writing, society could be classified as being in the pre-literate cultural stage. The change from pre-literate to literate society is said to have begun somewhere during the fourth millennium B. C. though a gradual transition from pictography to the use of an alphabet (Golden Hilda)¹. Literacy brings about fundamental changes in socio-economic development. Disparity in literacy generates number of social, economic and political problems which may threaten the very foundation of development. Education is undoubtedly an area, which has to receive undivided attention from the Government. Therefore, it is imperative to identify regions (here villages) which are lagging behind not only in literacy but also the extent of gender disparity in literacy rate. The concept of literacy that varies from country to country, generally refers to the minimum level of literacy skills. Trewartha², considers the basis of length of schooling not a valid measurement of educational accomplishments. The Population Commission of United Nations considers, 'the ability to both read and write a simple message

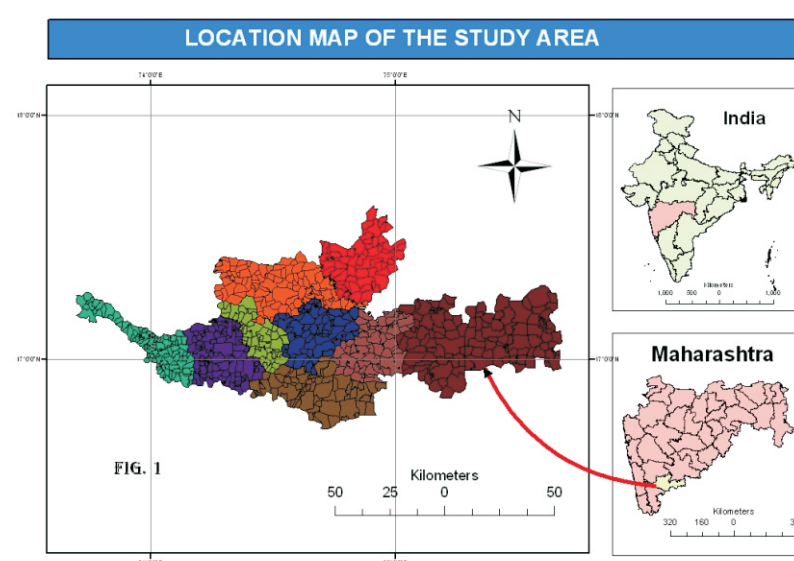
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with understanding in any language a sufficient basis for classifying a person as literate.' The Indian Census has adopted this definition. According to 2001 Census of India³, 'a person aged 7 years and above who can both read and write with understanding in any language has taken as literate.' Literacy is essential for eradicating poverty and mental isolation for cultivating peaceful and friendly international relations and for promoting the free play of demographic processes (Chandna)⁴. Illiteracy, on the other hand, takes away man from his dignity, perpetuates ignorance, poverty and mental isolation, deters peaceful and friendly international relations and free demographic process and hampers social advancement, economic growth and political maturity. Above all, literacy influences other such attributes of population as marriage, fertility, mortality, mobility, occupation, etc. A certain level of literacy is, therefore, a basic requirement for people to get out of ignorance and backwardness (Gosal and Chandna)⁵. In Population Geography Literacy is considered as a fairly reliable index of socio-cultural and economic advancement (Chandna and Sidhu)⁶. Thus, literacy is essential for economic development, social advancement and demographic growth of a country. Being extraordinarily, one has to shout loudly that, "India's destiny is shaped in her Classrooms." The male-female differentials in literacy rate is called as gender disparity in literacy rate.

The literacy rates in any area were determined largely by a variety of historical, social and economic factors. Often it is not easy to prepare an exhaustive list of all such factors determining literacy due to complexity, of socio-economic set up. According to Ghosh⁷, literacy is influenced by as many as 15 different factors. He determines that there is a very high correlation between parental income and literacy rate.

STUDY AREA

The study area is a district i.e. "Sangli District" in the southern part of Maharashtra State of India (Fig.1). Its selection identifies and recognizes 'District' as basis of administrative system in India. According to Oxford Concise Dictionary, 'a district is defined as territory marked off for special administration purpose.' Sangli district lies between 16°40' N and 17°33' N latitudes; and 73°42' E and 75°40' E longitudes; and has an area of 8572 sq.km and population of 2,583,524 (1,950,306 rural and 633,218 urban) – spread over in 721 inhabited villages and 8 urban centres. Its rural density of population is 236 persons per sq.km and the rural sex ratio is 962 females per thousand males. Administratively the district is divided into 9 tahsils (2001). Of the 35 districts in Maharashtra State, Sangli occupies 21st rank in area and 15th rank in population. It is characterized by sharp differences in terrain, pattern of settlement and social identity. The district is divided into 3 district physiographic divisions : i) The Western Hilly Area with heavy rainfall; ii) The Central River Plain Zone with moderate rainfall and iii) The Eastern Plateau Region with low rainfall endowed with drought prone condition. In the study area (rural) agriculture is the major source of livelihood. Distribution OF INCOME AND ASSETS IS ALSO HIGHLY UNEQUAL.



OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the present study are to analyse the gender disparity in literacy at micro-level, i.e. the literacy differentials at village level by sex and to identify the villages that need attention for promotion of elementary or adult education especially for women in order to reduce or eliminate female literacy in rural areas of Sangli District.

DATABASE AND METHODOLOGY

The present paper is primarily based on secondary data. The data on sex-wise literacy (population aged 7+ years) and gender gap in literacy rate for the Census Year 2001 have been collected from Directorate of Census Operations, Mumbai, Maharashtra. There are found wide differences in literacy rates not only at village level but also at tahsil level. According to gender gap, the villages are classified into 5 categories, viz. Very low, Low, Moderate, High and Very High; whereas tahsils are grouped into 3 categories. The spatial disparities in sex-wise literacy rates and gender gap for the study area have shown by multiple bar graphs and choropleth maps.

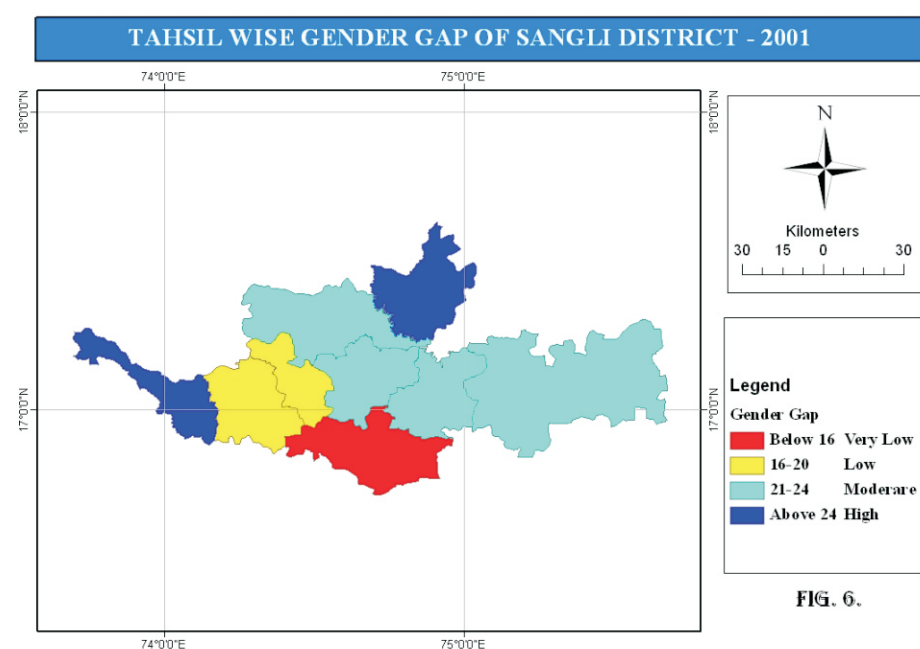
TAHSIL-WISE GENDER DISPARITY (RURAL) IN LITERACY RATE

Table.1 Sangli District
Tahsil-wise Rural Literacy Rate by Sex and Gender Gap (2001)

Sr. No.	Tahsil	Literacy Rate		Gender Gap in Literacy Rate
		Males	Females	
1.	Shirala	86.4	61.0	25.3
2.	Walwa	87.8	69.1	18.7
3.	Palus	88.7	70.3	18.4
4.	Khanapur	85.6	63.7	21.8
5.	Atpadi	78.5	54.3	24.2
6.	Tasgaon	87.2	66.1	21.1
7.	Miraj	87.4	67.5	19.9
8.	Kavathe Mahankal	83.5	62.2	21.3
9.	Jat	74.3	51.3	23.0
10.	Sangli District	85.86	62.42	23.44

Literacy Rate is the percentage of literates to population aged 7 years and above.

Source :Census of India, 2001, Final Population Totals, Maharashtra, Series No.28, Sangli District.



Sex-wise study of literacy pattern reveals that there is a striking difference in the literacy rates between males and females. It reveals from Table.1. that the female literacy rate is comparatively lower in all tahsils than that of male. It signifies that the process of literacy has been operating largely in the context of its functional or occupational value which therefore gives greater emphasis towards male education, as gender differentiation exists in terms of occupation. In general, low status of women, male dominance society, finance, rural backwardness, traditional jobs, etc. are the major reason for low literacy rate among females than males. The low economic conditions of the study area restrict female education (Krishan and Shyam)⁷. Here, the gender gap and female literacy rate are inversely proportional to each other, i.e. higher the gender gap means lower the female literacy rate and vice-versa. Owing to above discussions and observing Fig. 2, it is clear that male-female literacy rate differs from tahsil to tahsil. Highest gender disparity in literacy rate of 25.3 is found in shirala tahsil, situated in Western Hilly Region and it is followed by drought prone affected tahsils of Atpadi and Jat respectively. Kavathe Mahankal, Khanapur and Tasgaon tahsils of Plateau Region fall under moderate category; while tahsils in the Central River Plain Zone, like, Palus, Miraj and Walwa depict low difference. Agro-economically well developed tahsil, Palus has the lowest (18.4) difference in male-female literacy rate. Thus, there is an intimate correlation between physioclimatic divisions and gender disparities in the study area.

VILLAGE-WISE GENDER DISPARITY IN LITERACY RATE

The study area, Sangli district, has 721 inhabited villages carrying 994,155 males and 956,151 females, out of which 720,526 (85.86%) males and 529,968 (62.42%) females are literate, having gender gap in literacy rate of 23.44. Thus, the males are more literate than the females. It is so because, those rural males who get educated have a tendency to migrate to urban areas in search of employment, particularly when there are no avenues in the countryside, outside the agricultural sector. Owing to above dimensions spatial or village-wise gender disparities I literacy rates have been computed into 5 categories (Table.2). In a similar way the Fig.3 has been prepared to depict the same. Some of the striking features of the table and fig. are as below:

Table.2 Sangli District
Village-wise Gender Gap in Literacy Rate (2001)

Sr. No.	Tahsil	Very low <15		Low 16-20		Moderate 21-25		High 26-30		Very High >31	
		No. of Vill.	% of Vill.	No. of Vill.	% of Vill.	No. of Vill.	% of Vill.	No. of Vill.	% of Vill.	No. of Vill.	% of Vill.
1.	Shirala	1	1.07	11	11.70	21	22.34	29	30.85	32	34.04
2.	Walwa	10	10.42	53	55.20	27	28.13	6	6.25	0	0
3.	Palus	10	19.23	20	38.46	19	36.54	3	5.77	0	0
4.	Khanapur	8	7.48	15	14.02	52	48.60	25	23.36	7	6.54
5.	Atpadi	0	0	5	8.33	24	40.00	20	33.33	11	18.34
6.	Tasgaon	2	3.13	16	25.00	33	51.56	9	14.06	4	6.25
7.	Miraj	3	4.76	29	46.03	23	36.51	7	11.11	1	1.59
8.	Kavathe Mahankal	3	5.00	15	25.00	28	46.67	10	16.67	4	6.66
9.	Jat	5	4.00	17	13.60	51	40.80	46	36.80	6	4.80
	Sangli District	42	5.82	181	25.10	278	38.56	155	21.50	65	9.02

Literacy Rate is the percentage of literates to population aged 7 years and above.
Source : computed by authors by using Census Data

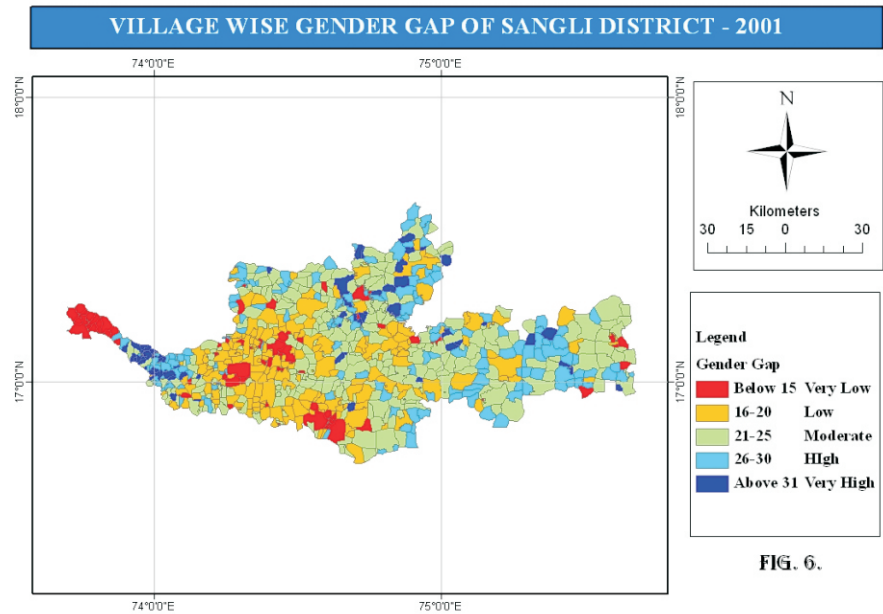


FIG. 6.

i)Very low Gender Gap (<15) :

Out of 721 villages in the district only 42 (5.82%) villages exhibit very low gender gap in literacy rate. As compared to other villages in the study area, the number females in these villages are more literate than that of others. Village Dhotrewadi in Walwa tahsil has the lowest (1.2) gender gap in the district. Tahsil Palus is leading in female literacy rate, as its one-fifth villages depict very low gender gap and it is followed by the villages of Walwa (10.42%) and Khanapur (7.48%) tahsils. All these tahsils are agro-economically well developed. Surprisingly a drought prone tahsil, Atpadi has no single village in this category. Remaining tahsils have very few (less than 5) villages having very low gender gap in literacy rate.

ii)Low Gender Gap (16-20)

One-fourth (181) villages in the district depict low gender gap in their literacy rates. More than 55% villages from Walwa tahsil show low gender gap, which is followed by Miraj (64.03%) and Palus (38.46%) tahsils respectively. These villages are situated in the Central Plain River Zone of the study area, which in agro-economically well developed. As pointed out earlier it is evident to note that 'economic progress and literacy go hand in hand.' Atpadi tahsil has entered in this category with only 5 villages. 25% villages from both, Tasgaon and Kavathe Mahankal tahsils and few villages (less than 15%) from Shirala, Jat and Khanapur tahsils represent this category.

iii)Moderate Gender Gap (21-25):

Maximum number of [278 (38.56%)] villages in the study area possess moderate gender gap in their literacy rates ranging from 21-25; and correspond with the district average of 23.44. Tasgaon tahsil is leading with 51.56% villages, as against Shirala Tahsil in lacking behind with only 22.34% villages. 40% to 50% villages from Atpadi, Jat, Kavathe Mahankal and Khanapur tahsils depict moderate gender gap. Remaining tahsils also contribute considerably.

iv)High Gender Gap (26-30):

It is observed in as many as 155 (one-fifth) villages in the study area. The highest (46) number (36.80%) of villages are confined to Jat tahsil, followed by Atpadi (33.33%), Shirala (30.85%) and Khanapur (23.36%) tahsils respectively. Drought prone conditions and undulating topography are the major determinants of low agro-economic development and hence high gender gap in literacy rate. The males from these villages are more literate than that of females and migrated to other areas for better employment opportunities. In contrast, agro-economically developed tahsils like Walwa, Palus and Miraj have very low villages falling under this category.

v)Very High Gender Gap (>31):

It is hearty to note that any 9% (65) villages in the study area are confined this category of very high gender gap in literacy rates. It is evident that the number of females in these villages are more illiterate than that of males as compared to other villages. A small village, Sawantwadi (Population 613) in Shirala Tahsil has the highest Gender Gap of 43.3 (81.6% males and 38.3% females) in the study area. The number of villages having very low female literacy rate are maximum (One-third/32) in Shirala tahsil. Undulating topography, heavy rainfall, forest cover, less developed transport network, inaccessibility, low agro-economic development, etc. are the major determinants influenced not only an general literacy trend but also more an female literacy rate. Drought affected tahsils like Atpadi (11), Khanapur (7), Jat (6) and Kavathe Mahankal (4) have also couple of villages which are backward in female literacy. Obviously the developed tahsils like Walwa and Palus have not a single village, while tahsil Miraj has only one village falling under this category.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The empirical evidences of the present study indicates that there exist spatial inequalities in the literacy rates of male and female population. Sangli, one of the progressive districts of Maharashtra has higher literacy rates both in male (85.86%) and female (62.42%) as far as rural population is concerned. The gender gap in literacy rate is 23.44. Higher the gender disparity means lower the female literates than

the males and vice-versa. It varies from tahsil to tahsil and village to village. Agro-economically developed tahsils like Walwa, Palus and Miraj have low, moderately developed tahsils like Khanapur and Tasgaon have moderate, while drought-prone plateau tahsils like Jat, Kavathe Mahankal, Atpadi and Western hilly tahsil, Shirala have high gender gap in literacy rate. It is evident from the analysis that there is a positive correlation between economic development and female literacy. Micro-analysis study at village level results that only 5.42% villages in the study area have very low gender gap in literacy rate. It means the female literacy rate is considerably high. As may as 65 (9.02%) villages in the study area are identified as very high gender gap villages, because in these villages the female literacy rate is very low than that of male. Keeping in view the complexities of socio-cultural and economic scene and the spatial variations in the study area, it should strive for universalization of at least elementary education at the earliest possible. There is an urgent need to pay attention towards the female literacy at all ages and at all levels. In order to achieve this objective, the minimum our state Government can do so to raise the budgetary provision for education, immediately. Therefore, the task of ensuring universal and quality education for all the sections of the society is very formidable. The main challenge before the planners, educationists, administrators and policy makes is the education of the girl child. Only then the area can look forward to “Education for All”.

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