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From the Desk of the Secretary

Geographical Society of North Bengal is an NGO located in the district of Jalpaiguri, West Bengal, India. Initially it was formed for educational development in the under developed Dooars area but its area of operation is not restricted in a single point and rather it is open for all, irrespective of geographical space. Geographical Society of North Bengal has stepped in to eight year of its working. The society is bound by promise to continue its unending efforts in the processes of social development and the first edition of ‘Geo-Analyst’ is one of such endeavours related to that. I thank all the members of the society for their kind co-operation to publish this Journal. I appeal to every Academician, Research Scholars and Social scientist from India and abroad to enrich the idea of social science related themes.

Alipurduar
July, 2011

Hiranmoy Biswas
Secretary



Editorial

In our contemporary life, the study of social sciences arouses great significance as the social landscape has been rapidly changing. In view of multi-faceted and dynamic nature of social sciences each and every micro level study of it highlights distinct importance in multi-disciplinary studies. Recently, there is a sign of growing interest as well as anxiety about the social changes taking place almost every part worldwide and the interest in social studies is growing for this reason. The introducing issue of Geo-Analyst, a bi-annual journal of social sciences of the Geographical Society of North Bengal is out on the stand, which has addressed to complex, changing and challenging issues along with few innovative ideas of development in the courtyard of social sciences.

Alipurduar
July, 2011

Piyal Basu Roy
Editor

Status of Literacy, Gender Gap and Human Development in Birbhum District, West Bengal, India: A Geographical Study

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Abstract

Adequate rate of literacy in an area acts as leading factor for human resource development. The countrywide literacy programmes ranging from Adult Education to 'Sarva Siksha Abhiyan' (Education for all) has always highlighted the importance of literacy in human well being and socio-economic development in India. Considering the needs and prospect of literacy as a major concern of all parts of the country, several literacy based programmed are introduced to bring about knowledge mobility among people for socio-economic development, but despite these efforts in last 60 years after Indian independence, there is a spatial disparity in literacy both in urban and rural areas. The present paper aims to assess the spatial status of literacy among the blocks of Birbhum district, West Bengal, India which is considered as one of the backward district if its HDI rank is taken into consideration. This study also reveals that there is inequality in attaining literacy at block level and simultaneously identifies socio-economic constrains responsible for low level and unequal distribution of literacy in the study area.

Key Words: Literacy, spatial disparity, gender gap, development, infrastructure.

Introduction

Literacy in the foremost concern of all countries of the world due to its importance as founding stone in the structure of education and parallel effects on human resource and socio-economic development of nations. The concept of development seems hollow without literacy and education and vice-versa (Tilak, 2007). It acts like an input of an industry harnessing which; one can exchange ideas, develop skill and by applying those, get self-satisfaction, employability and establishment. West Bengal, a state of eastern India has varied physical and human geographical settings comprising all sorts of topography and diverse socio-cultural rhythms. Consequently, regional disparity is found in substantial proportion in its different segments, and literacy is one of them. In most third world

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societies, literacy is an important measure of employment and economic well-being (Henshall & Townsend, 1987). The most important feature of it lies in the fact of gender gap prevailing almost everywhere acutely. Society, that has a preference for not investing in girls' education pay a price for it in terms of reduced growth and income (Dollar & Gatti, 1999). Needless to say that despite launching UN's Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) for overall development, the womenfolk of our country is still very much deprived and they are being ignored because there is still a demand for preferring a baby boy instead of baby girl in rural parts of our country as it is thought that a boy in future can employ more labour than a girl. The economic value of the girl child to the family and to the society is never recognised and then they are victimised at different level (Pillai, 1995). Despite ranking above the literacy rate of the country, some blocks of the district belong to below the state and national level, which is no doubt, a part of due attention. Birbhum, the study area had 48.56 percent literate persons in 1991 which rose to 61.48 percent 2001 although it was below the percentage in comparison to the state as well as the country. Therefore, it is imperative to identify the causes of such anomaly, along with its extent.

Keeping the anomaly in mind, the present paper attempts to examine the status of literacy at different levels and simultaneously tries to understand the process of literacy transition which has been taking place here.

Study area

The district of Birbhum lies between the latitudes of 23°23'30"N and 24°35'00"N and occupies the part of the state. The eastern most extremity of the district is marked by 88°14'00"E longitude and its western most extremity by 87°05'25"E longitude. Birbhum is bounded on the north and west by Dumka district of Jharkhand, on the east by the districts of Murshidabad and Bardhaman. The district has an area of 4545 sq. kms.

Objectives

The objectives of the study area are-

1. to address the micro-regional variation in literacy of Birbhum district and
2. to examine the casual relationship between the variables of literacy and socio-economy.

Database and Methodology

The study is based on primary and secondary sources of data. Statistical techniques have

been applied to the obtained data sets. Primary data have been collected with the help of a questionnaires survey and secondary data have been gathered from district statistical hand book and Human Development Reports.

Male-Female Literacy

The proportion of male literates in the district of Birbhum is comparatively higher as compared to female. In 1991, the female literate was 35.0 percent which was enough below the male literacy (57.5%). In 2001, this difference was slightly lower where male literates were 69.5% and female literates were 49.7%, although both the male and female literacy were lagged behind the state average (male 77.02% and female 59.61%). This male-female gap is more in rural area than the urban areas in the district (Table-2). If blocks level analysis is made on male female literacy, it is found that there is spatial disparity in the distribution of literates (Table-1). Therefore, it is evident that gender gap in literacy in Birbhum district is quite high. Inter block level study reveals that gender gap in literacy is acute in the blocks of Khoyrasole, Dubrajpur, Rajnagar, Mayureswar-II, and Nalhathi-II in 1991. If the data of 2001 is analysed it is noticed that the gap is in a reducing trend and varied spatially at block level but there is not remarkable reduction. All the blocks have more than 16% gender gap in literacy.

Table1: Literacy rates and Gender Gap across blocks of Birbhum

Blocks	2001		
	Male Literacy	Female Literacy	Gender gap
Murarai-I	55.1	37.6	17.5
Murarai II	54.5	37.7	16.8
Nalhathi-I	73.2	53.7	19.5
Nalhathi-II	70.1	52.7	17.4
Rampurhat-I	72	51.3	20.7
Rampurhat-II	73.2	53.2	20
Mayureswar-I	75.7	54.5	21.2
Mayureswar-II	73.1	51.8	21.3
Md. Bazar	65.5	44.2	21.3
Rajnagar	70.4	45.7	24.7
Suri-I	72.3	52	20.3
Suri-II	73.4	53.7	19.7
Sainthia	74	54.3	19.7
Labpur	71	52.7	18.3
Nanoor	69.3	52.7	16.6
Bolpur Sriniketan	69.3	50.3	19
Illambazar	72.3	53	19.3
Dubrajpur	68.1	44.8	23.3
Khoyrasol	72.2	48	24.2

Source: Computed from Birbhum District Statistical Handbook, 2006

In addition, the literacy rate of the towns is also enough higher in comparison to the rural areas of the district. All the towns of Birbhum district have lower gender gap due to combinations of factors like better infrastructure, socio-economy and much awareness etc.

Table 2: Literacy rates and Gender Gap across Urban areas (Municipalities) of Birbhum

Urban areas (Municipalities)	2001		
	Male Literacy	Female L:iteracy	Gender gap
Rampurhat	88.1	74.1	14
Nalhati	NA	NA	NA
Dubrajpur	74.7	53.5	21.2
Suri	87.6	76	11.6
Sainthia	80.9	65.3	15.6
Bolpur	87	73.1	13.9

Source: Computed from Birbhum District Statistical Handbook, 2006

Therefore, it is imperative to study the available educational infrastructure, socio-economy and consciousness to the literacy to justify the probable causes of this disparity.

Table 3: Literacy rates and Gender Gap among SC and ST people across blocks of Birbhum in 2001

Blocks	SC			ST		
	Male Literacy	Female Literacy	Gender gap	Male Literacy	Female Literacy	Gender gap
Murara-I	32.7	10.97	21.73	41.52	21.39	20.13
Murara II	37.94	16.73	21.21	38.63	20.36	18.27
Nalhati-I	56.19	23.8	32.39	65	39.29	25.71
Nalhati-II	35.48	16.67	18.81	65.01	40.38	24.63
Rampurhat-I	44.65	18.8	25.85	61.05	36.11	24.94
Rampurhat-II	50.74	27.24	23.5	60.19	32.95	27.24
Mayureswar-I	39.24	16.65	22.59	64.46	38.95	25.51
Mayureswar-II	37.9	14.88	23.02	60.11	32.9	27.21
Md. Bazar	42.11	16.33	25.78	53.99	30.07	23.92
Rajnagar	45.44	17.09	28.35	56.43	28.55	27.88
Suri-I	45.1	22.06	23.04	57.77	31.31	26.46
Suri-II	47.42	17.48	29.94	62.59	38.1	24.49
Sainthia	47.72	20.44	27.28	63.08	38.05	25.03
Labpur	44.1	18.99	25.11	54.79	31.42	23.37
Nanoor	31.95	13.17	18.78	52.11	28.8	23.31
Bolpur Sriniketan	45.29	19.35	25.94	59.9	36.16	23.74
Illambazar	43.05	15.53	27.52	57.37	33.17	24.2
Dubrajpur	40.92	14.69	26.23	48.22	20.81	27.41
Khoyrasol	53	22.02	30.98	53.53	26.02	27.51

Source: Modified after Birbhum District Statistical Handbook, 2006

Table 4: Rural-Urban literacy rates and Gender gap among SC, ST and Muslims in Birbhum, 2001

Category	Rural			Urban		
	Male Literacy	Female Literacy	Gender gap	Male Literacy	Female Literacy	Gender gap
Scheduled Castes	56.9	32	24.9	69.3	46.5	22.8
Scheduled Tribe	44.1	18	26.1	46.2	25.7	20.5

Source: Modified after Birbhum District Statistical Handbook, 2006

Let us examine the gender gap of the SC and ST people block wise. If the literacy rate of SC people across the blocks of Birbhum district is considered, it is found that only three blocks namely Nalhati-I, Rampurhat-II, and Khoyrasole have male literacy rate of above 50 percent rest of the 16 blocks are laying below 50 percent. But if SC female literacy rate of blocks are considered, the picture is completely unexpected as it is too low if compared with SC male. The same three blocks as stated earlier also take lead in this regard. But it is very much unfortunate that all the blocks have severe gender gap if viewed in the perspective of SC people. But what is interesting is that a lot of blocks like Nalhati-I, Nalhati-II, Rampurhat-I & II, Mayureswar-I & II, Sainthia have ST literacy of more than 60, higher if compared with SC literacy. In case of ST female literacy, the picture is also satisfactory, if compared to SC female literacy of the district. But again it is another interesting as well as unfortunate fact that the gender gap between ST male and female is higher and almost equal to the gender gap of SC people, although varied spatially (Table 3).

Now, if the same is explained in the light of rural-urban framework it is found that SC male literacy rate is 56.9 percent and female literacy rate is 32 percent with a gender gap of 24.9 percent in the rural Birbhum. This figure is higher in urban areas where male SC literacy is 69.3 percent and SC female literacy is 46.5 percent with a gender gap of 22.8 percent.

If the rural urban ST literacy is analyzed it is found that males are more literate (44.1percent) than the females (18 percent) in rural Birbhum which is slightly higher (male 46.2 percent and female 25.7 percent) in the urban Birbhum with a gender gap of 26.1 and 20.5 in rural and urban Birbhum respectively (Table 4).

Table : 5 Rank Correlation showing Gender gap vis-a-vis HDI of different Blocks of Birbhum District

Blocks	2001			
	Rank in Gender Gap(A)	HDI rank (B)	Rank difference (A-B)	(A-B) ²
Murarai-I	16	7	9	81
Murarai II	18	19	-1	1
Nalhati-I	12	2	10	100
Nalhati-II	17	8	9	81
Rampurhat-I	7	13	-6	36
Rampurhat-II	9	9	0	0
Mayureswar-I	6	16	-10	100
Mayureswar-II	5	1	4	16
Md. Bazar	4	18	14	196
Rajnagar	1	3	-2	4
Suri-I	8	4	4	16
Suri-II	11	11	0	0
Sainthia	10	12	-2	4
Labpur	15	6	9	81
Nanoor	19	5	14	196
Bolpur Sriniketan	14	15	-1	1
Illambazar	13	17	-4	16
Dubrajpur	3	10	-7	49
Khoyrasol	2	14	-12	144
				$\Sigma d^2 = 1122$

Source: Modified after Birbhum District Statistical Handbook, 2006

According to Spearman's Rank Correlation Coefficient - $r_s = 1 - \frac{6 \Sigma d^2}{n(n^2 - 1)}$

Where "d" is the rank difference and "n" is the number of items in the data.

Substituting the value of "d" and "n" we get

$$r_s = 1 - \frac{6 \times 1122}{19(19^2 - 1)}$$

$$= 1 - \frac{6732}{19(361 - 1)}$$

$$= 1 - \frac{6732}{19 \times 360}$$

$$= 1 - \frac{6732}{6840}$$

$$= 1 - 0.98 = +.02 \text{ i.e. positive correlation}$$

Therefore, it is a fact that there is positive correlation between Gender gap in literacy and HDI of different Blocks of Birbhum District (Table-5)

Conclusion

The present study can give a picture regarding literacy rate and gender gap in the district of Birbhum. It cannot be denied that a balance has to be maintained to reduce the disparity of gender bias in education and to raise status in attaining proper education, particularly for women for the improvement of sporadic dismal conditions in the overall literacy status in the area under study. Thus by ensuring reduction in gender gap and promoting literacy spatially will bring socio-economic development by decreasing regional disparity in education in coming days.

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