

Gender Dimension of Literacy in Different Regions of the World with special reference to India

Dr. Roselin Basumatary
Assistant Professor, Economics,
Kokrajhar Govt. College,
District- Kokrajhar, Assam, India.

Abstract

Literacy is a key measure and a key skill of a population's education. Gender inequality in literacy rate is an obstacle for the society's development. Using secondary data the study examines the gender gap in adult (aged 15+ years) literacy rate in different regions of the world in 1990, 2000, 2011 and 2016, gender gap in adult (aged 15+ years) literacy rate in different countries of South Asia in 2015 and gender gap in literacy rate (aged 7+ years) in the states and union territories of India in 1991, 2001, 2011. Gender inequality in adult literacy rate where females lag behind males is observed in all the regions of the world. The gender inequality in adult literacy rate where females lag behind males is found to be the highest in the Southern Asia amongst the different regions of the world in 2016. In 2015, in South Asia, Afghanistan is seen to have the highest gender inequality in adult literacy rate followed by Pakistan, Nepal and India. However, Maldives is seen to have the lowest gender inequality in adult literacy rate. In India, although the inequality declined in almost all the states and union territories, gender inequality in literacy rate can be observed in all the states and union territories in 2011.

Keywords: gender, literacy, regions, world.

Introduction

Literacy is traditionally defined as the ability to read and write, with understanding, a short, simple statement about one's everyday life (United Nations, 2008). Beyond the traditional concept, literacy is now understood as a means of identification, understanding, interpretation, creation and communication in an increasingly digital, text-mediated, information rich and fast- changing world. Literacy has a multiplier effect in that it empowers and enables people to participate fully in society and contribute to improve livelihoods. Literacy improve child and family health and nutrition, enables greater participation in the labour market, reduces poverty and expands life opportunities and therefore is a driver to sustainable development (United

Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, n.d.). Although United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) made efforts since long back for a literate world still not all people of the world are literate. The effect of it is an exclusion of low literate and low skilled youth and adults from full participation in their communities and societies. Literacy is a key measure and a key skill of a population's education. Gender inequality in literacy rate is an obstacle for the society's development.

The state of being male or female especially when considered with reference to social and cultural differences rather than biological ones is called gender. The condition of being unequal or disparity is called inequality. The inequality in physical structures and bodily strength between female and male are not of discriminatory nature but simply a biological fact. Gender inequality is the inequality between females and males. Gender inequality exists in political representation, labour market, health, education etc. Gender Inequality is a function of gender discrimination. According to the United Nations Development Program (United Nations Development Program, n.d.), ending all discrimination against women and girls is not only a basic human right, it is crucial for sustainable future; it is proven that empowering women and girls helps economic growth and development. The goal 5 of the Sustainable Development Goals is to achieve gender equality. In the Preamble of the Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action for the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal four (Education 2030), the participants committed to ensuring that all youth and adults, especially girls and women, achieve relevant and recognised functional literacy and numeracy proficiency levels and acquire life skills, and that they are provided with adult learning, education and training opportunities (The World Economic Forum, 2015).

The paper aims to examine the :

- 1) Gender gap in adult (aged 15+ years) literacy rate in different regions of the world in 1990, 2000, 2011 and 2016.
- 2) Gender gap in adult (aged 15+ years) literacy rate in different countries of South Asia in 2015.
- 3) Gender gap in literacy rate (aged 7+ years) in the states and union territories of India in 1991, 2001, 2011.

Review of Relevant Literature

Gumbel (2004) in his study tried to find out the influence of gender inequality in health, education and the labour market using cross country regression for democratic industrialised countries in 1970. He found that a high per capita income was associated with less gender inequality.

In 2009, Klasen and Lamanna examined to what extent gender gaps in education reduced economic growth. Investigating for the Middle East, North Africa and South Asia for the period 1960-2000, Klasen and Lamanna found that gender gaps in education considerably reduced economic growth.

Licumba, Dzator and Zhang (2015) analysed the impact of gender equality in education on economic growth on a panel data of five Southern African countries between 1970 and 2010. They found a positive and significant effect of gender equality in education on economic growth in the region.

Methodology

Using secondary data the study examines the gender gap in adult (aged 15+ years) literacy rate in different regions of the world in 1990, 2000, 2011 and 2016, gender gap in adult (aged 15+ years) literacy rate in different countries of South Asia in 2015 and gender gap in literacy rate (aged 7+ years) in the states and union territories of India in 1991, 2001, 2011. Gender Gap (GG) is a disproportionate difference or inequality between the sexes. GG in Literacy Rate (LR) shows the gender inequality in literacy rate. To calculate the GG in adult LR, male adult LR minus female adult LR is followed. So, a positive value of GG in adult LR indicates inequality where male adult LR is higher than female adult LR. A negative value of GG in adult LR indicates inequality where female adult LR is higher than male adult LR. A zero value of GG in adult LR indicates equality of female adult LR male adult LR.

Findings and Discussion

Gender Gap in Adult (Aged 15+ Years) Literacy Rate in Different Regions of the World in 1990, 2000, 2011 and 2016

Gender gap in adult (15 years and above) LR for different regions of the world are calculated for 1990, 2000 and 2011 using secondary data from UNESO Institute of Statistics (2013), *Adult and Youth Literacy- National, Regional and Global Trends, 1985-2015*, UNESCO to show the gender inequality in adult

LR in the different regions of the world for 1990, 2000 and 2011. Table 1 presents the gender gap in adult LR in the different regions of the world for 1990, 2000 and 2011. In the table, the different regions of the world are shown as: Sub- Saharan Africa, South and West Asia, North America and Western Europe, Latin America, Caribbean, Latin America and the Caribbean, Pacific, East Asia, East Asia and the Pacific, Central Asia, Central and Eastern Europe and Arab States. As shown in the table, male adult LR surpassed female adult LR in all the regions of the world in 1990, 2000 and 2011. It is also shown in the table that, the gender gap in adult LR reduced in all the regions of the world. Gender gap in adult LR in 1990 was highest in Arab States followed by South and West Asia and Sub- Saharan Africa. In 2000, the gap was highest in South and West Asia followed by Arab States and Sub Saharan Africa. In 2011, the gender gap in adult LR was highest in South and West Asia followed by Sub Saharan Africa and Arab States. The reduction in the gender gap in adult LR looks quite satisfactory for East Asia, East Asia and the Pacific and Central Asia. Although the reduction in the gender gap also looks quite satisfactory in the case of Arab States also, however, the region had still a significant gender gap in adult LR in 2011.

Table 1

Gender Gap in Adult (aged 15+ years) Literacy Rate in Different Regions of the World in 1990, 2000 and 2011

Sl. No.	Education for All region	1990 (1985-1994 census decade)			2000 (1995-2004 census decade)			2011 (2005-2014 census decade)		
		3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1		F	M	GG in ALR	F	M	GG in ALR	F	M	GG in ALR
2	Sub- Saharan Africa	43.2	63.6	20.4	47.9	67.3	19.4	50.6	68.1	17.5
3	South and West Asia	33.6	58.9	25.3	46.8	70.4	23.6	51.9	74.0	22.1
4	North America and Western Europe	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
5	Latin America	85.1	87.6	2.5	89.5	91.0	1.5	91.6	92.8	1.2
6	Caribbean	NA	NA	NA	71.4	73.9	2.5	67.8	70.5	2.7
7	Latin America and the Caribbean	84.5	87.0	2.5	89.0	90.6	1.6	90.9	92.2	1.3
8	Pacific	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
9	East Asia	74.4	89.0	15.5	87.9	95.1	7.2	92.5	97.0	4.5
10	East Asia and the Pacific	74.7	89.1	14.4	88.0	95.1	7.1	92.5	96.9	4.4
11	Central Asia	97.0	99.0	2	98.6	99.4	0.8	99.4	99.6	0.2
12	Central and Eastern	94.0	98.2	4.2	96.0	98.8	2.8	97.8	99.3	1.5

	Europe									
13	Arab States	41.9	67.9	26	56.5	77.8	21.3	68.4	84.7	16.3
14	World	69.4	82.0	12.6	77.0	86.9	9.9	79.9	88.6	8.7

Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics. (2013). *Adult and Youth Literacy- National, Regional and Global Trends, 1985-2015*. Retrieved from uis.unesco.org

Note: F, M, GG in ALR and NA represents female adult literacy rate, male adult literacy rate, gender gap in adult literacy rate and not available respectively.

The gender gap in adult LR for the different regions of the world in 2016 are calculated by using secondary data from UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2017), Fact Sheet No. 45, UNESCO to show the gender gap in adult LR in different regions of the world in 2016. The gender gap in adult LR in 2016 in different regions of the world is presented in table 2. The different regions of the world shown in table 2 are: Sub-Saharan Africa, Southern Asia, North Africa and Western Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, Eastern and South Eastern Asia, Europe and North America, Central Asia. It is shown in the table that, Europe and North America and Central Asia achieved gender parity in adult LR in 2016. However, in the majority of the regions of the world, gender inequality in adult literacy rate, where females lag behind males can be observed. As shown in the table, in 2016, Southern Asia had the highest gender gap in adult LR where females lag behind males. The table also shows that Sub-Saharan Africa, in 2016 had the second highest gender inequality in adult LR where females lag behind males.

Table 2

Gender Gap in Adult (aged 15+ years) Literacy Rate in Different Regions of the World in 2016

Sl. No.	Region	M	F	GG in ALR
1	Sub- Saharan Africa	72	57	15
2	Southern Asia	80	63	17
3	North Africa and Western Asia	86	74	12
4	Latin America and the Caribbean	94	93	1
5	Eastern and South Eastern Asia	97	94	3
6	Europe and North America	99	99	0
7	Central Asia	100	100	0
8	World	90	83	7

Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics. (2017). Fact Sheet No. 45. Retrieved from uis.unesco.org

Note: F, M, and GG in ALR represent female adult literacy rate, male adult literacy rate and gender gap in adult literacy rate respectively.

Gender Gap in Adult (15 + Years) Literacy Rate in Different Countries of South Asia in 2015

As South and West Asia region is found to have the highest gender inequality in adult LR where females lag behind males in 2000 and 2011(table 1) and, Southern Asia is found to have the highest gender inequality in adult LR where females lag behind males in 2016 (table 2), therefore, the gender gap in adult LR in the South Asian countries in 2015 is examined. Table 3 presents the gender gap in adult LR in the South Asian countries in 2015. The South Asian countries shown in the table are: Afghanistan, Bhutan, Bangladesh, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Iran following the United Nations 2019 development report (www.worldatlas.com). As shown in the table, all the countries have high gender inequality in adult LR where females lag behind males. Afghanistan is seen to have the highest gender inequality in adult LR with a gender gap of 27.6, followed by Pakistan, Nepal and India with gender gap in adult LR of 26.84, 21.06 and 17.96 respectively. Maldives is seen to have the lowest gender inequality in adult LR with the GG of 0.94.

Table 3
Gender Gap in Adult (aged 15+ years) Literacy Rate in Different Countries of South Asia in 2015

Sl. No.	Region	M	F	GG in ALR
1	2	3	4	5
1	Afghanistan	51.47	23.87	27.6
2	Bhutan	71.15	55.12	16.03
3	Bangladesh	64.64	58.31	6.33
4	India	80.94	62.98	17.96
5	Maldives	99.8	98.86	0.94
6	Nepal	75.81	54.75	21.06
7	Pakistan	69.57	42.73	26.84
8	Sri Lanka	93.62	91.71	1.91
9	Iran	91.14	83.18	7.96

Source: Roser, M. and Ortiz - Ospina, E. (2018). Literacy. Our World in Data. Retrieved from <https://ourworldindata.org/literacy>.

Note: F, M, and GG in ALR represents female adult literacy rate, male adult literacy rate and gender gap in adult literacy rate respectively.

Gender Gap in Literacy Rate (7 Years and above) in the States and Union Territories of India

Along with the rest of the world, India is also not free from gender inequality in LR. Among the 9 South Asian Countries shown in table 3, India is seen to have the fourth highest gender inequality in adult LR in 2015. Gender inequality in LR (7 years and above) for the period 1991-2011 across India, including the 8 North Eastern States is shown in table 4. In the table, gender inequality in LR is shown by gender gap in LR. As shown in the table, throughout the period, male LR surpassed female LR in all the states and Union

Territories (UTs) of India and India as a whole except Mizoram. Although the inequality declined in all the states and UTs, gender inequality in LR can be observed in all the states and UTs in 2011. It can be seen that along with Kerala (gender gap 4.043), the two North Eastern States i.e., Meghalaya and Mizoram were on the verge of achieving the gender equality in LR in 2011 with a gender gap of 3.068 and 4.08 respectively. The gender gap in LR in 2011 is seen to be lowest in Meghalaya. This may be because of the reason that multiple tribes in the state of Meghalaya in Northeast India practice or follows matrilineal system. In such societies, lineage and inheritance are traced through women. In such societies, women are expected to play pivotal role and hold a place of pride in the social set up. However, the gender gap in LR remained highest in Rajasthan in India in 2011 with a gender gap value of 27.074. This may be due to the reason that females are accorded lower status in the society. In the North Eastern Region of India, the gender inequality in LR is found to be the highest in Arunachal Pradesh with a gender gap of 14.853, followed by Manipur and Assam with the gender gaps of 13.325 and 11.579 respectively. In all the North Eastern States except Mizoram, the gender inequality in LR declined during the period.

Table 4
Gender Gap in Literacy Rate (7 years and above) in the States and Union Territories of India in 1991, 2001, 2011

Sl. No.	States/UTs	1991			2001			2011		
		F	M	GG in LR	F	M	GG in LR	F	M	GG in LR
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1	A & N Islands	65.46	78.99	13.53	75.20	86.30	11.1	82.425	90.267	7.842
2	Andhra Pradesh	32.72	55.12	22.4	50.40	70.30	19.9	59.149	74.883	15.734
3	Bihar	21.99	51.37	29.38	33.10	59.70	26.6	51.502	71.204	19.702
4	Chandigarh	72.34	82.04	9.7	76.50	86.10	9.6	81.189	89.987	8.798
5	Chhattisgarh	27.52	58.07	30.55	51.90	77.40	25.5	60.236	80.269	20.033
6	Dadra & Nagar Haveli	26.98	53.56	26.58	43.00	73.30	30.3	64.318	85.174	20.856
7	Daman & Diu	59.40	82.66	23.26	70.40	88.47	18.07	79.549	91.544	11.995
8	Delhi	66.99	82.01	15.02	74.70	87.30	12.6	80.758	90.937	10.179
9	Goa	67.10	83.60	16.5	75.40	88.40	13	84.661	92.650	7.989
10	Gujarat	48.60	73.10	24.5	58.60	80.50	21.9	69.675	85.750	16.075
11	Haryana	40.50	69.10	28.6	45.70	78.50	32.8	65.945	84.058	18.113
12	Himachal Pradesh	52.10	75.40	23.3	67.40	85.40	18	75.927	89.532	13.605
13	Jammu & Kashmir	NA	NA	NA	43.00	66.60	23.6	56.434	76.754	20.32
14	Jharkhand	NA	NA	NA	38.90	67.30	28.4	55.417	76.837	21.42
15	Karnataka	44.30	67.30	23	56.90	76.10	19.2	68.081	82.475	14.394

16	Kerala	86.10	93.60	7.5	87.90	94.20	6.3	92.070	96.113	4.043
17	Lakshadweep	72.90	90.20	17.3	80.50	92.50	12	87.946	95.557	7.611
18	Madhya Pradesh	29.40	58.50	29.1	50.30	76.10	25.8	59.236	78.729	19.493
19	Maharashtra	52.30	76.60	24.3	67.00	86.00	19	75.871	88.381	12.51
20	Odisha	34.70	63.10	28.4	50.50	75.40	24.9	64.008	81.585	17.577
21	Puducherry	65.60	83.70	18.1	73.90	88.60	14.7	80.674	91.265	10.591
22	Punjab	50.40	65.70	15.3	63.40	75.20	11.8	70.731	80.442	9.711
23	Rajasthan	20.40	55.00	34.6	43.90	75.70	31.8	52.120	79.194	27.074
24	Tamil Nadu	51.30	73.80	22.5	64.40	82.40	18	73.435	86.765	13.33
25	Uttar Pradesh	24.40	54.80	30.4	42.20	68.80	26.6	57.184	77.281	20.097
26	Uttarakhand	41.60	72.80	31.2	59.60	83.30	23.7	70.007	87.403	17.396
27	West Bengal	46.60	67.80	21.2	59.60	77.00	17.4	70.540	81.691	11.151
28	Arunachal Pradesh	29.69	51.45	21.76	43.50	63.80	20.3	57.698	72.551	14.853
29	Assam	43.03	61.87	18.84	54.60	71.30	16.7	66.269	77.848	11.579
30	Manipur	47.60	71.60	24	60.50	80.30	19.8	70.258	83.583	13.325
31	Meghalaya	44.90	53.10	8.2	59.60	65.40	5.8	72.887	75.955	3.068
32	Mizoram	78.60	85.60	7	86.80	90.70	3.9	89.268	93.348	4.08
33	Nagaland	54.80	67.60	12.8	61.50	71.20	9.7	76.114	82.751	6.637
34	Sikkim	46.70	65.70	19	60.40	76.00	15.6	75.611	86.552	10.941
35	Tripura	49.70	70.60	20.9	64.90	81.00	16.1	82.728	91.526	8.798
36	All India	39.30	64.10	24.8	53.70	75.30	21.6	64.635	80.884	16.249

Source: 1. Government of India. (1991). *Census Reports 1991*. Retrieved from censusindia.gov.in
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Notes: 1. F, M, and GG in LR represents female literacy rate, male literacy rate and gender gap in literacy rate respectively.

2. Literacy rate pertains to the population aged 7 years and above.

3. A & N Islands represents Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

CONCLUSION

Gender inequality in adult literacy rate where females lag behind males is observed in all the regions of the world. The gender inequality in adult literacy rate where females lag behind males is found to be the highest in the Southern Asia amongst the different regions of the world in 2016. In 2015, in South Asia, Afghanistan is seen to have the highest gender inequality in adult literacy rate followed by Pakistan, Nepal and India. However, Maldives is seen to have the lowest gender inequality in adult literacy rate. In India, although the inequality declined in almost all the states and union territories, gender inequality in literacy rate can be observed in all the states and union territories in 2011. Several research results indicate that gender inequality in education negatively affects the development of an economy. Therefore, countries should implement policies specially for girls and women so as to bring gender parity in literacy rate. Apart from the policies that government of the respective country take to bring gender parity in literacy rate, the people of the country

should be motivated or made aware of the importance of literacy, literacy and women empowerment and lifelong learning.

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