

**RURAL LITERACY IN INDIA AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES****Alka Dutt<sup>1</sup> & Rajat K. Sant<sup>2</sup>, Ph. D.**<sup>1</sup>Assistant Professor, Cluster Innovation Centre, University of Delhi, Delhi<sup>2</sup>Associate Professor, Maharaja Agrasen College, University of Delhi, Delhi**Abstract**

Literacy shapes the development and achievements of individuals in a society. literacy is the key of better development of cognitive abilities and mental faculties. process and speed of modernization,urbanization, industrialization, economics& commerce directly affects the literacy rate of a nation. literacy rates in India are directly associated with process of urbanization. bulk of job opportunities in urban places ensures the need for literate people. literates migrate from rural and semi urban places to urban cities because urbanization is result of higher level of economic activities of trade, commerce and industries. service sector like banking, distribution and supply, education, IT and so on witness prolific growth in and around urban centers.

Now the question arises, what about literacy rates in rural India? and why it is quite poor in rural India? improving literacy rate in rural India is surely able to bring the upliftment of most vulnerable section of society and make them more aware towards important aspects of life like population control, health & hygiene, environmental conservation, employment avenues &self-employment and so on.

**Key Words:** Rural, Education, Literacy, Socio-Economic Development



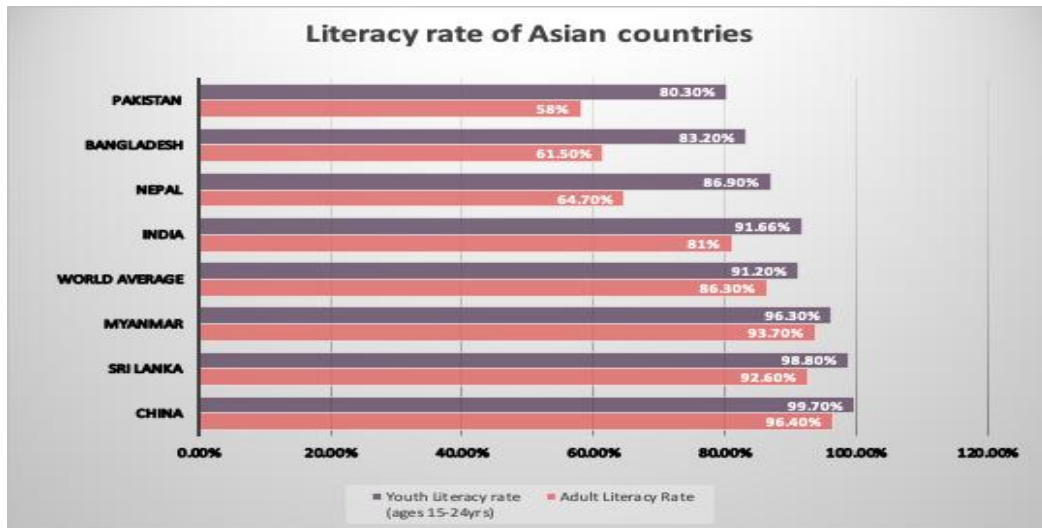
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**INTRODUCTION**

How the literacy is defined in India? in census 2011, the literate is defined as the person of child above age 7 who is able to read and write with understanding in any language. our country was successful in achieving 74% literacy rate (82.14 % for males and 65.46% for females) by 2011 (census data) as compared to 34.5% in 1971. However,India still falls short of the literacy target envisaged by planning Commission. the target of achieving 80% of literacy rate by 2011 has not been fulfilled. literacy penetrated India with inter-regional variations, for e.g. Bihar came last with 63.8% literacy in 2011 census preceded by Arunachal Pradesh (66.95 per cent) and Rajasthan (67.06 per cent). Kerala, with around 94% literates in state, won the first position in literacy list of India. Lakshadweep and Mizoram attained 2nd and 3rd position by achieving 92.3% and 91.58% literacy rate respectively.

India has witnessed growing decadal literacy rates (both rural and urban) but is still lagging behind from other nations of Asia like China, Sri Lanka and Myanmar. the decadal literacy rate increment (total) has been quite sluggish, for e.g. during 2001-2011, it registered a meagre growth of 9.2%.

**Table-1**  
**Literacy Rates of Asian Countries<sup>1</sup>**

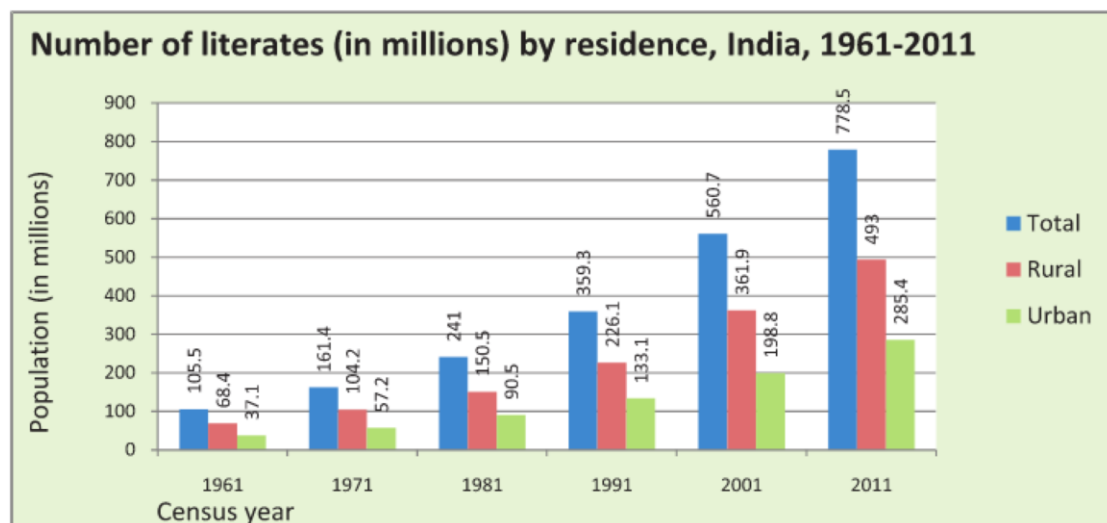


\*Projection Figures 2014

Graph-1

Rate of Literacy by Residence-Person<sup>2</sup>

**Literates by residence - Persons**



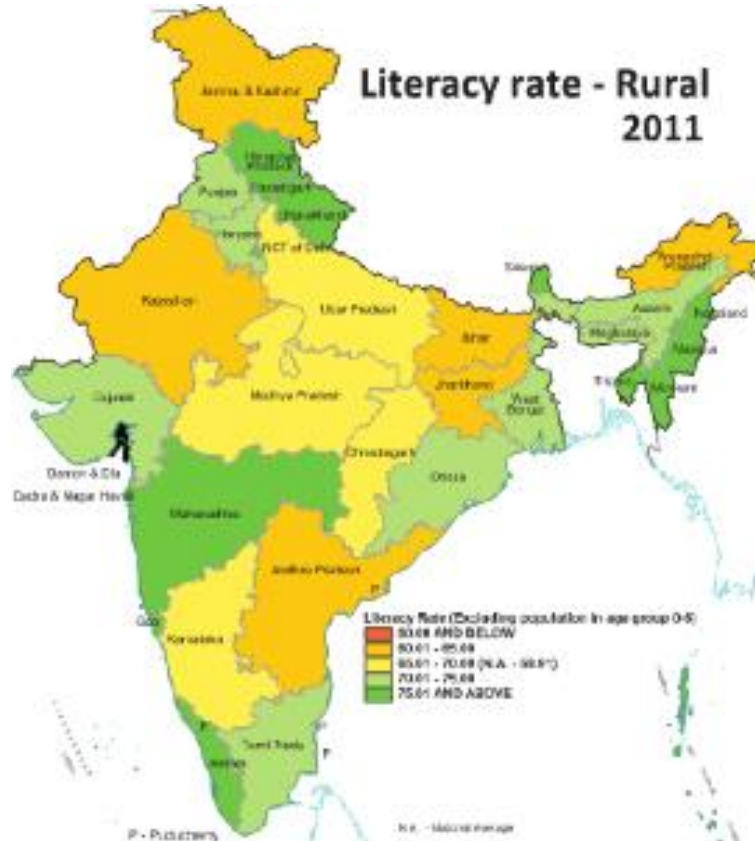
<sup>1</sup><http://data.uis.unesco.org>

<sup>2</sup>Census of India 2011 Provisional Population Totals

**Literacy rates (Rural) -India:**

Few forward states and UTs having rural literacy rate above 70% include- Maharashtra, Goa, Puduchchery, Kerala, Nagaland Mizoram, Tripura, Sikkim, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Gujrat, Punjab &Haryana, Orissa, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Meghalaya and Assam.

Among North East states, only Arunachal Pradesh remained backward in terms of rural literacy. in Southern Indian states, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh lagged behind their counterparts.



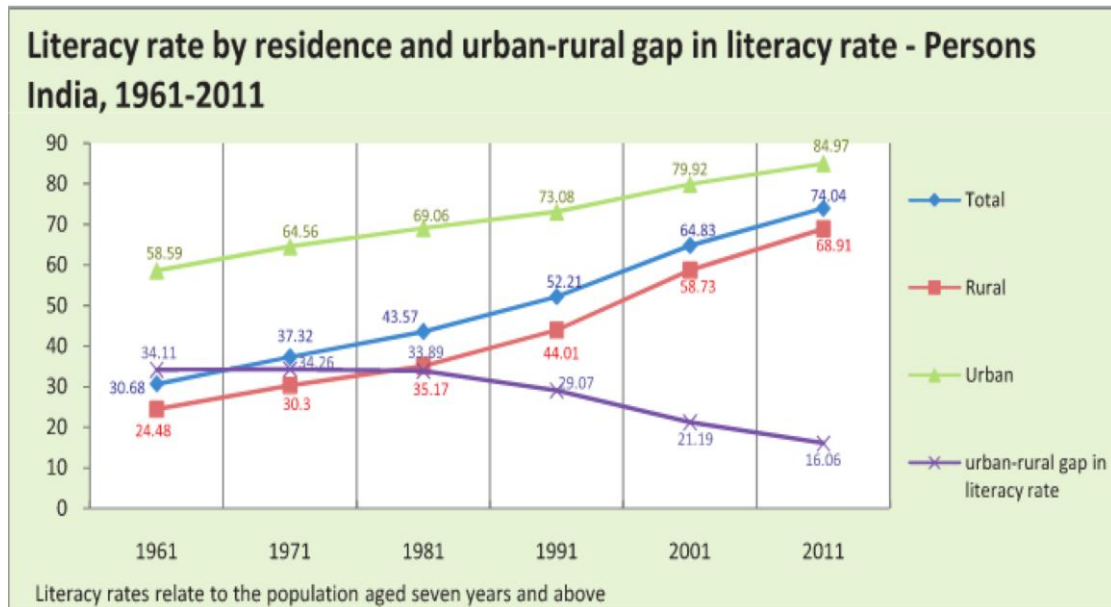
states of Rajasthan, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Dadar and Nagar haveli lagged behind. However, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh also registered poor rural literacy levels owing to newel created statehood and very large proportion of tribal population in these states.

**Achievements& Failures- Rural Literacy expansion:**

RURAL URBAN GAP: during the period 1951-1981, the gap between Urban and Rural literacy rates was constantly high. this gap witnessed some fall in decade 1981-1991 and after 1991 it has recorded much steeper reduction. in 1991 the gap existed at level of 8.21%, in 2001 it decreased to 6.1% and finally in 2011 the gap % remained at 5.14%. (see graph below)

Graph-2

Literacy Rate by Residence and Urban-Rural gap in Literacy rate<sup>3</sup>



Basic character of educational setup in rural villages: central and state governments' efforts in expanding and improving education facilities across the rural India has brought many positive results. ASER Survey 2012 report indicates huge improvement in pupil teacher ratio across the schools in rural India. In 2010, around 39% schools met the 'pupil teacher ratio -norms' fixed by RTE (Right to education Bill) whereas in 2011 it was found to increase and become 73% by the year 2012.

Of all visited schools in all states (rural regions), 73% schools had facility of drinking water. again, there were at least 17% school who could not afford extending any facility of water to its pupils.

In year 2010 there were 85.5% schools without toilet and situation improved when 91.6% schools in 2012 had toilet facility. mid-day meal facility was working in 87% of schools visited in 2012.

**Classroom attendance:**

2010 -2012 data suggested that in terms of classroom attendance, states can be broadly divided. all the south Indian states have recorded better class-room attendance compared to

<sup>3</sup>Census of India 2011 Provisional Population Totals

central states of India. similarly, all the north-east states, except Manipur, have witnessed better classroom attendance. Uttar-Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan, West Bengal, Orissa and Madhya Pradesh stand out with poor classroom -attendance in the same period.

**Rural education & its impact on students:**

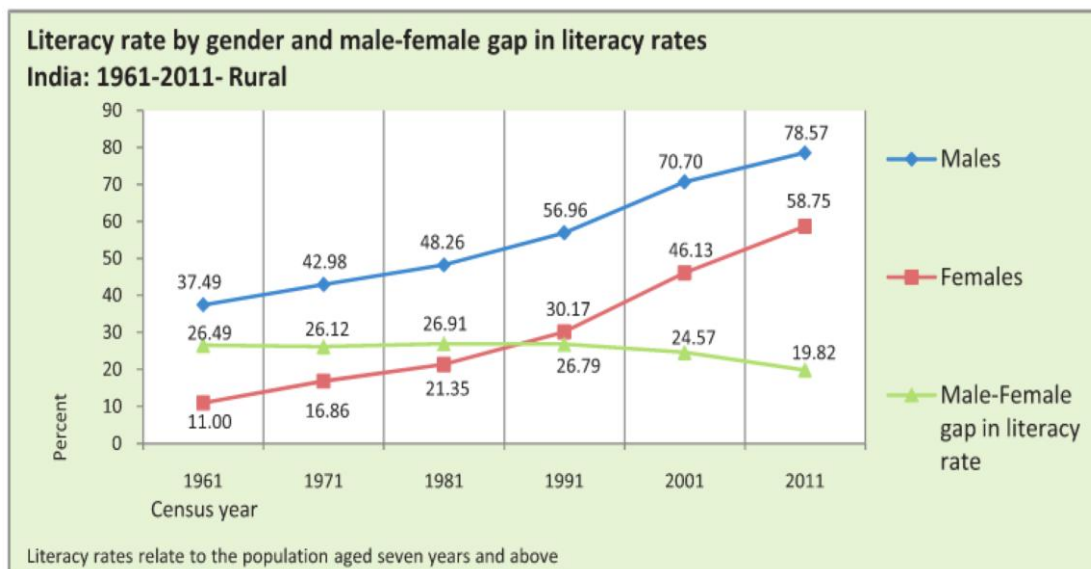
Education system in India is not free from bottlenecks and disparities. rural formal school education in India is generally characterized by lack of modern education and poor speed of modernization and infrastructure development. schools lack basic facilities and large proportion of teachers are incompetent for imparting education in better suited ways.

**GENDER DISPARITY**

Huge gender disparity in literacy levels is testimony of socio-cultural backwardness highly prevalent in India to make it more like a closed society. Indiansociety is marked by strong stereotyping of gender roles as male and female. in rural places, most of the girl children are not allowed much freedom and in many placesthey get literate just up to primary or upper primary class. after that they are not allowed to go out of bound of household activities or family economic activities. most of girls in poorest villages are send to work on farms and not more than 2% of such girls become literate.

Graph-3

[Literacy Rate by Gender and Male-Female Gap in Literacy Rates](#)<sup>4</sup>



As shown above since 1961 to 1991, the male -female gap in Rural Literacy rates was above

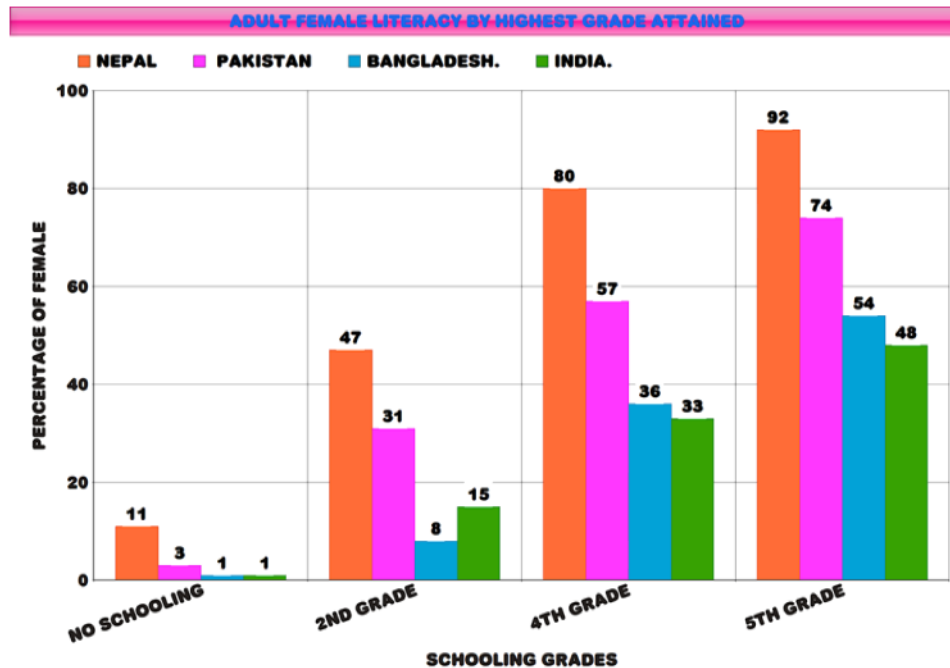
<sup>4</sup>Census of India 2011 Provisional Population Totals

26% and it remained so for 30 years. this created a very bad reputation of Indiathroughout the world. 1991-2001 period registered small dent in this big and constant maintained gender gap. Gap reduced by around 2% (absolute value). however, during decade 2001-2011, female literacy rate witnessed sharper increment of 11.8% compared to male literacy rate of 6.9%, decreasing the Gender gap from 24.5% to 19.8%. this brings some ray of hope that Gender Inequality may be narrowing slowly.

The proportion of Indian Literate women who completed five years of primary schooling was 48 percent, which is much less than Nepal, Pakistan and Bangladesh.(see in graph given below)

Graph-4

[Adult Female Literacy Rate by Highest Grads Attained<sup>5</sup>](#)



Overall female literacy scenario is quite poor if compared the other developing nations in Asia and world. rudimentary socio-cultural approach in Indian society had played worst not only in education sector but also in overall development of rural society.

Girl students were the most vulnerable and generally got dropped out of formal school setup mostly in age 11 to 14. in 2006 around 89% girls (age group 11 -14) in rural areas of 8 bigger states (Jharkhand, Gujrat, Odisha, Bihar, Chhattisgarh and West Bengal) were enrolled and this percentage increased around 94 to 95% in 2011 and 2012. around 26% of girls in rural

<sup>5</sup><https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.ADT.LITR.FE.ZS>

setup who were enrolled at age of 14 got dropped out of schools as they reach age of 18. similarly, the dropout rate for rural boys was found (2012 report ASER) 23%. overall absolute dropout rates come to be 28% for girls and 24.2% for boys.

Low female literacy levels have deep rooted negative effects on development process. lower female literacy directly translates into lower levels of economic independence to women, negative impact on family planning and population stabilization efforts, lower and poorer quality nutrition- consumption among women, inability to understand needs of children and so on.

### **Enrollment and concern on Dropouts Rate(RURAL)**

In age group 6-14 Years, enrollment remain quite decent over and above 96% and the figure was sustained from 2009 to 2012. but in case of senior secondary standard and above total enrolments were very low in past years. the serious improvement came after 2009 and continued well in subsequent years.

Main problem remained the high rates of dropout. point of concern was that the dropouts- numbers have been quite high if we compare rural population enrolled in schools at age 14 with those enrolled in schools at age 18. in 2001, around 25% of rural population in 18-year age group were enrolled in schools and the remaining others were dropped out in early stages. the figure of 'little over 25%' increased to 68% in 2013-14. this shows some positive trend in expansion of higher education in rural regions of India.

### **Cognitive Development (Rural): success or failure?**

Education quality is measured in term of development of cognitive abilities that include reading and writing abilities, command in language and ability to solve mathematical problems. it was found that only 35% to 45% students (age group 14 years to 18 years) enrolled in rural school setup could solve class -4 questions. the rest were unable to do so. according to various reports published under "Annual Status of Education Report (ASER)", more than half of students in 5th class/standard of rural schools were incapable of solving primilarymathematics-question and unable to read '2nd standard' textbook.

In ASER Report -2012, in Standard 8, 47 % children were able to read a sentence in simple English, and only 28% were able to translate the simple English sentence in their own language. rural school students of class/standard 3 were given standard 1 textbook and the result found is descripted below:

53.4% student cannot read the text in 2009.

54.4% student cannot read the text in 2010

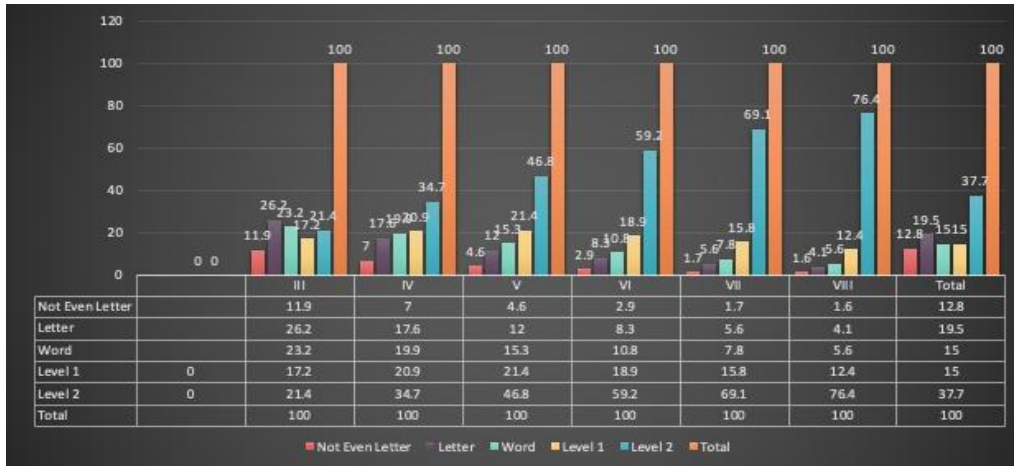
59.7% student cannot read the text in 2011

61.3% student cannot read the text in 2012.

similarly, 75.2% of all enrolled student of standard 5th in rural schools (rural school survey throughout India) could not do simple mathematical division. however, in 2010 this figure was 63.4% which increased to 75.2% in 2012.

**Table-2**

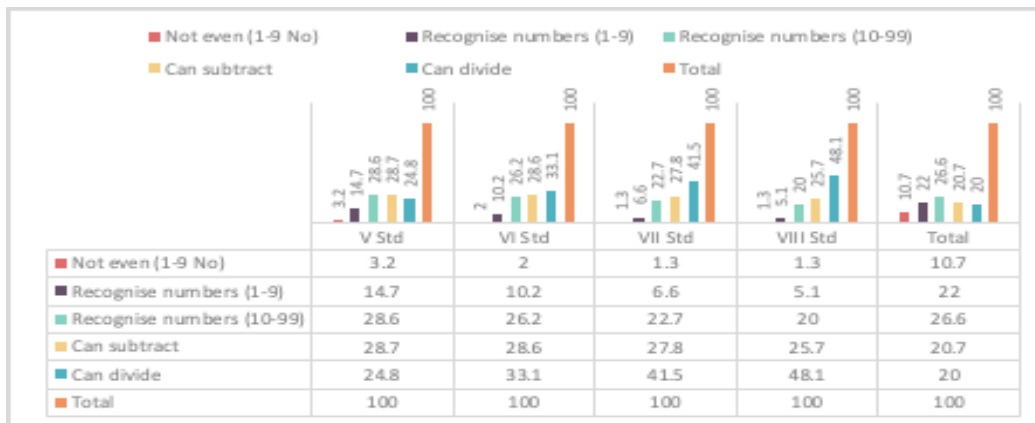
**Percentage children by class and Reading level all school 2012<sup>6</sup>**



\*Each cell shows the highest level in reading achieved by a child

**Table-3**

**Percentage children by class and ARITHMETIC level <sup>7</sup>**



\*Each cell shows the highest level in ARITHMETIC achieved by a child

<sup>6</sup>ASER in the News - ASER Centre

<sup>7</sup>ASER in the News - ASER Centre

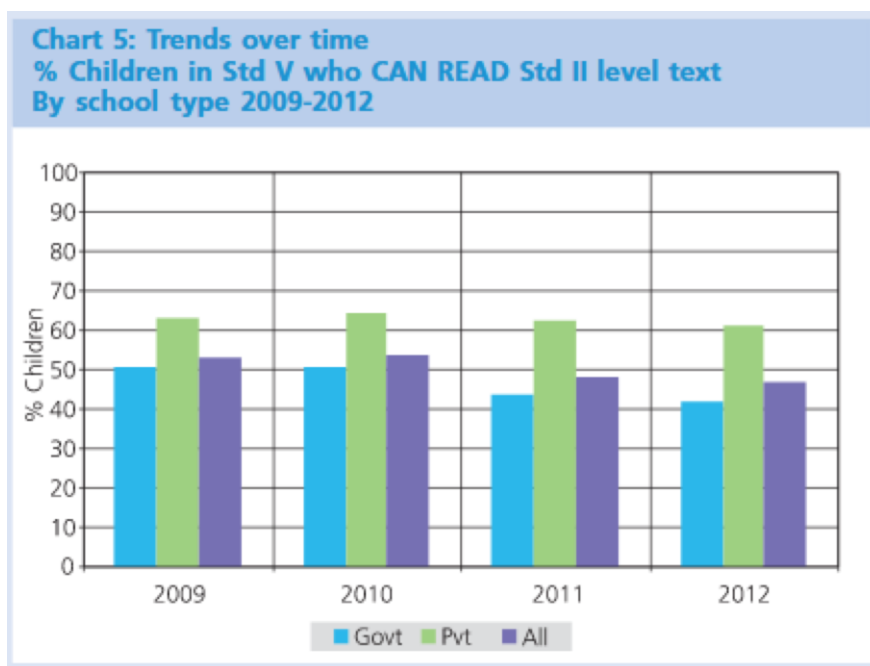


**Private schools in Rural India:**

Rural schools in private setup outperform government schools but remained below the satisfactory norms. students in private schools were found somewhat better in cognitive abilities than those enrolled in government schools but still they highly lagged behind if compared to normal standards. privatization has not been found a important factor in extending quality education in rural setup. private schools were mismanaged, and quality of teachers remained below satisfactory standards.

Graph-5

[Trends of Children in Std V who CAN READ Std II level text by school type<sup>8</sup>](#)



**Education Failure:poor quality of education and resulting in-competencies:**

young people who would become future of India have been trained in a shabby manner. learning deficits accumulates over the years and at later stage it could not be reversed. how such work force can get jobs or show competency in other fields? main problem exists in quality and quantity of teachers in rural education setups. the school education system lacks good Governance. teachers care for attendance fulfillment and salary but don't find any incentive in doing better teaching. there are no punishments for poor performance of teachers. even teachers get the jobs by corrupt practices and they themselves are not qualified to become teachers. a recent survey done by a famous media company showed that rural

<sup>8</sup>ASER 2014: annual status of education report main findings

schoolteachers in northern India were not able to answer basic English words' spellings and common question on general knowledge.

there is no accountability fixed that why 5th standard children's cant does simple division or subtraction. state governments have setup machinery, but nobody cares and sometimes it is not possible to care. there are school inspectors, headmasters, block education officers and so on but still education is given the back seat.

**Crux of issue:**

rural India suffers many drawbacks like lack of infrastructure, lack of proper grants or funds, lack of better teachers, lack of economic betterment in rural society, lack of information, lack of competitive environment, lack of aspiration in society and so on. we can easily summarize the reasons as follows:

1. vicious circle of Unemployment, poverty, illiteracy and backwardness in rural sector
2. primary stage of economy and least employment opportunities
3. low level of aspirations in children and their parents,
4. poor student to teacher ratio
5. poor quality of teacher along with poor teacher-training
5. gender bias
6. socio-cultural backwardness in rural areas and lack of aspirations
7. insufficient funds allocation from state
8. ignorance, negligence, corruption and insensitiveness in administration by state.

Large proportion of population resides in rural and semi urban India. rural India has been lagging behind in literacy both in terms of 'quality and quantity'. state governments' intervention to break vicious circle of Unemployment, poverty, illiteracy and backwardness has never been adequate enough.

**Role of aspiration, guidance and support from home:**

Most of rural population attending schools are the first-generation learners and therefore the support that should be extended at home-setup from parents' side is generally absent. this is also the reason that due to unavailability of support, courage, aspirations and guidance; the rural children generally lag behind in education compared to urban students. such children are left alone to struggle with school life and without extra guidance they mostly lack cognitive skills to learn efficiently.

disappointment and depression: when rural youngsters who got education remain unemployed or under employed, the dreams of their family members shatters and this bring the huge disappointment and apathy towards the education system. the real culprit remains

lower job opportunities and lack of competitiveness due to lack of quality education. thus, others in village also get dissuaded by the education and mass disappointment become a challenge to crossover.

**Caste system and social backwardness:**

The educational indicators in terms of school retention and enrolment in rural regions mostly obey the system of social hierarchy. population belonging to Scheduled Caste and backward castes are denied the facility of education by help of social malpractices and social pressures. studies done by various groups indicated that backward Class and S.C children generally are not able to carry forward their education beyond 9 years of age.

Caste system and standards of income highly coincide in rural India. backward class and Scheduled Caste society lies mostly in lower or least income group and neither they have support from upper caste society. Even government employees like teachers in school have been found doing caste-based discrimination among their students in rural areas. clear division of society on caste basis has generated huge gap in overall development. education level and income levels are some of the indicators of development.

**Role of Decentralization of economy and industries in expanding the quality education:**

Urbanization in itself brings the modernization by opening vast scope for secondary, tertiary and quaternary economic activities. industrialization and urbanization are important factors that are based on higher level of education and skills. India need to open backward regions to industrialization and urbanization, and it need decentralization of economic and commercial activities. rural areas lack aspirations among children as well as their parents. they don't see any advantage of education since their society is engaged in primary economic activities. opening of new avenues for employment in other sectors hope fully attract people towards the education especially higher education and skill learning.

**CONCLUSION:**

Holistic approach is need of hour. social changes follow the way that economic development has taken. education is always part and parcel of economic development and social change. labour and skill intensive industrial and economic activities have the power to bring change in nearby areas. urbanization follows the same route. governments have to intervene as private players come forward only if higher rates of profits are insured.

government and other Non-governmental organizations have been partially succeeded to make the farmers and labourers understand that proper education has the ability to pave the road out of backwardness and poverty-stricken precarious livelihood on agriculture and related sector prevalent in rural villages. Centre and state governments have to rethink that

how the limited resources should be utilised cleverly. ignorance and use of corrupt practices give birth to negative results and development become a thing too far to achieve.

socio economic changes are to be brought out in most parts of rural India so that society get reshaped according to basic normal standards. backwardness and poverty are rural society will never allow wings of quality education to expand in such setup.

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