



## Literacy Trends and Differences of Scheduled Tribes in West Bengal:A Community Level Analysis

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### KEYWORDS

Census data, India, Literacy, Tribal, West Bengal

### ABSTRACT

*The present paper is based entirely on secondary sources of information, mainly drawn from the 2001 and 2011 Censuses of India and West Bengal. In this paper, an attempt has been made to analyse the present literacy trends of the ethnic communities of West Bengal, and comparing the data over a decade (2001 – 2011). The difference between male and female has also been focused. The fact remains that a large number of tribal women might have missed educational opportunities at different stages and in order to empower them varieties of skill training programmes have to be designed and organised. Implementation of systematic processes like Information Education Communication (IEC) should be done to educate communities.*

### Introduction

The term, tribe, comes from the word 'tribus' which in Latin is used to identify a group of persons forming a community and claiming descent from a common ancestor (Fried, 1975). Literacy is an important indicator of development among ethnic communities. According to Census, literacy is defined to be the ability to read and write a simple sentence in one's own language understanding it; it is in this context that education has to be viewed from a modern perspective. Educational backwardness is a distinct gender dimension (Rani et. al. 2011). The male-female gap in literacy and educational attainment among the Scheduled Tribes is significant. According to the 2011 census, the tribal population of the country is 104 Million, constituting 8.6% of the total population. The tribal population in West Bengal is 5296953 which constitutes 5.1% of the total ST population of India. The literacy rate is an important parameter to judge the literacy condition of a nation. The literacy rate is defined as the percentage of literates among a population aged seven years and above. According to the 2011 census, the literacy rate of India is 74.04% whereas the same for the Scheduled tribes is just 59% , while the rate is 68.5% among males and 49.4% among females (Bisai et al 2014). The literacy rate of the scheduled castes is 66.1%. This shows that, currently, the tribes lag behind from not only the general population but also from the Scheduled caste population as to both literacy and education. In view of the above, an attempt has been made to analyse the present literacy trend of the ST communities of West Bengal, and comparing the data over a decade (2001 – 2011). A special emphasis has been given to the educational status of the tribal communities and particularly tribal

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women of West Bengal.

## Methodology

The data for the present study have been extracted from the 2001 and 2011 Censuses of India and the state of West Bengal. The effective literacy rate and percentage of literacy growth was calculated based on literate people having age 7 years and above. Single age-wise effective literacy rate has been calculated by dividing number of literates of each age (7 years onwards) by population of corresponding ages and multiplying it with 100. All statistical analyses were performed by using Microsoft excel 2007. The effective literacy rate and literacy growth rate were computed based on the following formulae:

$$\text{Effective Literacy Rate} = \frac{\text{Number of Literate persons aged 7 and above}}{\text{Population aged 7 and above}} \times 100$$

$$\text{Literacy Growth Rate} = \frac{\text{Present Literacy Rate} - \text{Previous Literacy Rate}}{\text{Previous Literacy Rate}} \times 100$$

In this paper, an attempt has been made to analyse the present literacy trends of the ethnic communities of West Bengal, comparing the data over a decade (2001 – 2011). The difference between males and females has also been focused. A special emphasis has been given to the educational status of the tribal women of West Bengal.

## Results

According to the 2011 Census, the overall tribal literacy rate of West Bengal is 57.9%. This shows that, among the ten states having literacy rates less than country's average i.e. 58.96% for the Scheduled Tribe population, West Bengal lies just lower than the nation's average (Fig. 1). The male literacy rate of the Scheduled Tribes in India (2011 Census) is 68.5% whereas the female literacy rate for the same section is merely 49.4%. The tribal males of West Bengal are having a literacy rate of 68.17% and the tribal females show only 47.71% of literacy rate. Comparing the communities as per the 2011 census it can be seen that the Magh community has the highest literacy rate with 88.33% followed by the Lepchas with 82.38% and the least one has been found among the Gorait community with just 32% (Fig. 2). Among males (Fig. 3), the highest literacy rate is found among the males of the Magh community with 91.57% followed by the Limbu and Tamang males with nearly 88%. The least one is found among the Gorait males with 42.21%. Among females (Fig. 4), the highest literacy rate is found again among the females of the Magh community with 85.06% followed by the Lepcha females with 77.93%. The least one is found again among the Gorait females with only 22.62%. There is a significant improvement in the tribal literacy of West Bengal from 1961 (6.55%) to 2011 (57.93%). The literacy rate has been observed to enjoy a gradual increase from one decade to another (Fig. 5). A rapid growth is seen from 1981 – 1991, which is nearly double. This is the same for both tribal males and females of West Bengal. An increase to 68.17% from 11.20% in the literacy rate of tribal males has been observed from 1961 to 2011. Simultaneously, tribal females have enjoyed an upgradation from 1.76% in 1961 to 47.71% in 2011.

Figure 6 shows the overall literacy gap between males –females and its trend over a decade from

2001 to 2011. The male-female literacy gap for the tribes in West Bengal has positively come down to 20.46% in 2011, from 28.23% in 2001. The same for the classified ST population has gone through a reduction very near to the total one as 28.28% in 2001 to 20.99% in 2011. For the unclassified ST population, it is to 8.38% in 2011 from 26% in 2001. In 2011, the wider literacy gap has been noticed in the Bedia community (24.60%) whereas in 2001, wider literacy gap was noticed in the Baiga community (32.51%). The Magh community has been noticed to have the least literacy gap both in the years of 2001 (8.51%) and 2011 (6.51%) with a 2% affirmative decrement in their male-female literacy gap in 2011 since 2001.

Age-wise literacy rates of the Scheduled Tribe population according to the 2011 census of West Bengal has been graphed in Figure 7. The average of the literacy rate of all ages for total population is 50.3%. For males, the average literacy rate of all ages is 59.1% and the same for females is 41.5%. The literacy rate seemed to reach its peak at the age of 11 years. The total population, along with males and females, shows 89.4%, 90.4% and 88.3% of literacy rates respectively at the age of eleven years.

Table 1 shows the community-wise overall percentage of literacy growth both among males and females in 2011 since 2001. The trend of the literacy rate of the STs in West Bengal from 2001 to 2011 have gone through an increment of 33.48% among which the Birjia community has witnessed maximum growth with an increment of 143.36%. On the other hand, the Chakma community has gone through a reduction of 10.17% over a decade. The Birjia community has witnessed the highest literacy growth both among the males and females of the community with 121.31% and 190.86% growth respectively. On the female's side, Birjia females are being followed by females of the Nagesia and the Asur communities with 154.73% and 120.66% literacy growth respectively. The Mal Pahariya community has gone through a 47.96% literacy growth among their males but among females a 71.72% decrease in literacy growth has been noticed.

## Discussion

Today education has been an important indicator of social change. In this context, the scenario of education amongst tribal women who are considered the most backward needs to be examined. The literacy rate by residence in India (Census 2011) is 73%. West Bengal constitutes 76.3% (Census 2011) among it. Male literacy rate by residence in India (2011 Census) is 80.9%. West Bengal constitutes 81.7% (2011 Census) among it. Female literacy rate by residence in India (2011 Census) is 64.6%. West Bengal constitutes 70.5% (2011 Census) among it. The literacy rate of the Scheduled Castes in India according to the 2011 Census is 66.1%, where males share 75.2% and females share 56.5%. The Scheduled Caste people in West Bengal show a similar result with 69.4% literacy rate according to the 2011 Census, where males share 77.2% and females share only 61.2%. The disparity can also be seen in the Non SC ST section of people where the female literacy rate (75.52%) is much lower than the male literacy rate (84.22%). The overall literacy rate of the Non SC ST section of people is nearly 80%. While calculating the literacy rate of the tribals, the unclassified section has shown 63.6% of the same. Even the literacy gap of this section has come down to 8.38% in 2011 from 26% in 2001. There is a prior need to identify such unclassified section for a better result.

Maji (2016) has discussed some dimensional problems associated with tribal women's educational achievement in his paper as poverty and hunger are the main reasons for the non-participation of tribal girls in education. Well this is true as 'in case of people who hardly get bread twice a day, literacy is a tall talk' (Save 1945). Chattoraj and Chand (2015) in their paper have concluded that

poverty is one of the barriers against literacy and educational development. In addition, ignorance of the parents towards tribal girls' education, and the lack of skilled, committed and gender sensitive teachers (Calder and Huda 2013) in tribal areas are compounding the language barrier. Moreover, there are inadequate basic infrastructure facilities, especially toilets and water. Another issue can be the physical barriers that prevent children from attending school (Sahu 2014), such as the location of the village, roads in poor condition, etc. Ghosh (2007) in his study on the Ho and Mahali tribes of Jharkhand and Lodha in West Bengal said that the enrolment ratio of the tribal females is much lower than the males'. Rana (2003), while reviewing the situation of the primary education in West Bengal, have come up with many infrastructural issues. According to him, parents' participation is in need. The central government and West Bengal State government have introduced various important policies and programmes to overcome the educational barriers and uplift the educational status of the tribal women, for example - the Right to Education Act, Sarva Sikshya Aviyan, the up gradation of Primary Schools under the SSA, New Residential Girl's High Schools/Educational Complexes, Teaching in Tribal language, the 'Sabuj Sathi Scheme', various incentives etc. Despite of all these efforts, tribal women are lagging behind in all spheres. In order to empower them a variety of skill and vocational training programmes have to be designed and organised. Even to take advantage of the various development schemes a certain degree of education is necessary. Implementation of systematic processes like Information Education Communication (IEC) should be done to educate communities, those who need it most.

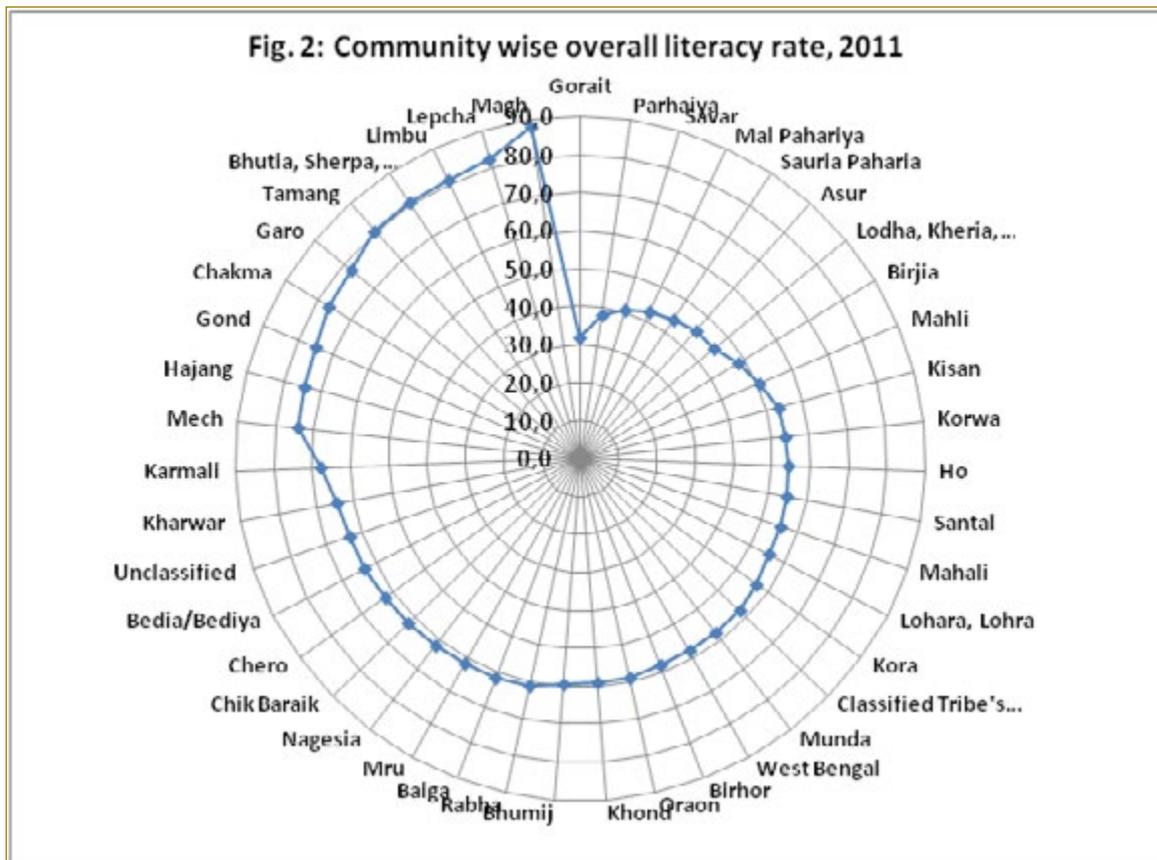
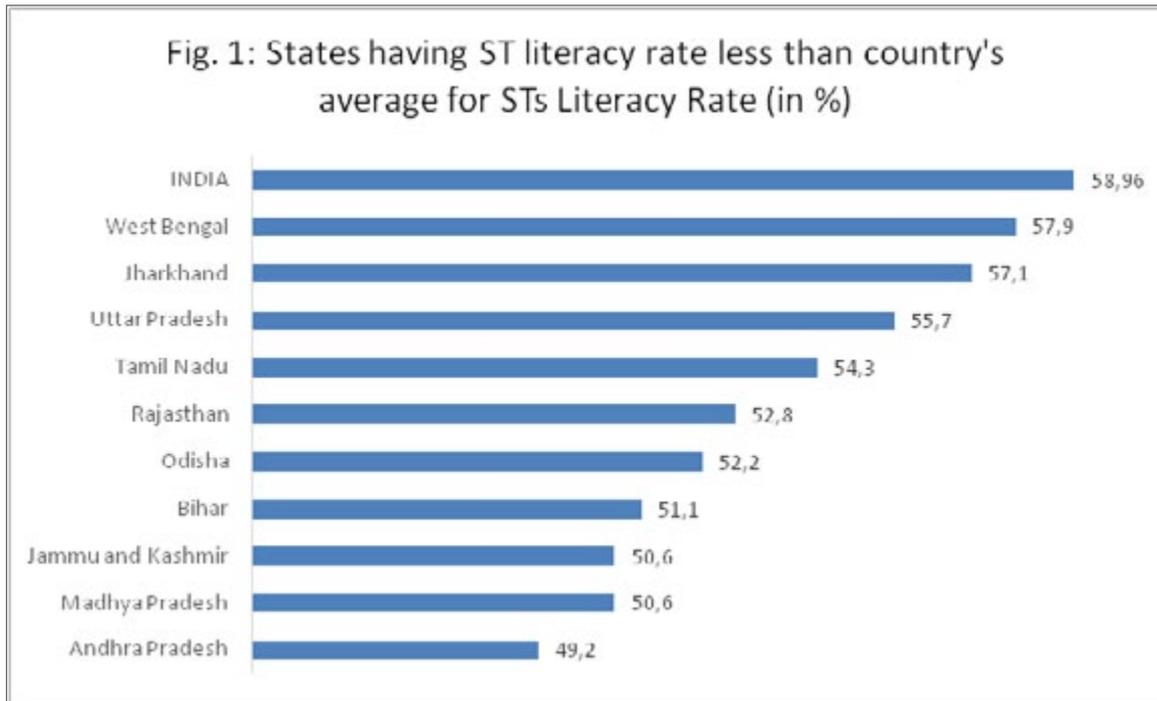
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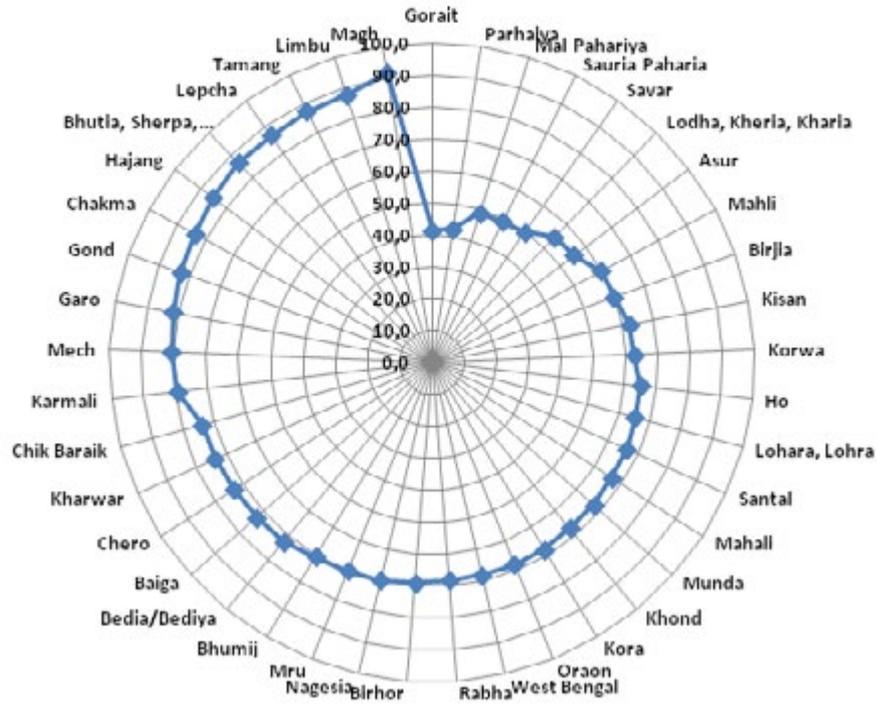
*Table 1: Decadal literacy growth of ST male & female of West Bengal (2001 - 2011)*

<b>Tribes</b>	<b>Male literacy growth (%)</b>	<b>Female literacy growth (%)</b>
Asur	39.20	120.66
Baiga	22.32	85.02
Bedia/Bediya	17.63	38.65
Bhumij	14.84	65.10
Bhutia, Sherpa, Toto, Dukpa, Kagatay, Yolmo	8.12	15.82
Birhor	47.74	88.20
Birjia	121.31	190.86
Chakma	-8.02	-8.41
Chero	18.00	26.27
Chik Baraik	14.44	44.89
Garo	11.79	24.36
Gond	10.99	35.40
Gorait	6.40	36.47
Hajang	31.84	51.07
Ho	24.94	99.63
Karmali	22.05	26.69
Kharwar	12.36	44.38
Khond	-9.43	2.58
Kisan	12.50	40.65
Kora	16.60	59.94
Korwa	4.76	21.72
Lepcha	6.26	13.50
Lodha, Kheria, Kharia	16.74	60.98
Lohara, Lohra	6.64	21.15
Magh	0.29	2.74
Mahali	19.37	65.95
Mahli	24.32	66.80
Mal Pahariya	47.96	-71.72
Mech	6.94	22.51
Mru	39.27	82.98
Munda	24.32	74.32
Nagesia	57.77	154.73
Oraon	22.97	60.65
Parhaiya	15.16	48.83
Rabha	27.56	62.56
Santal	15.35	61.27
Sauria Paharia	27.64	89.08
Savar	37.05	96.43
West Bengal	18.50	61.59
Unclassified	24.20	98.86
Total (as per census)	18.80	63.67

Images



**Fig. 3: Community wise literacy rate among ST male, 2011**



**Fig. 4: Community wise literacy rate among ST female, 2011**

