



The Changing Scenario of Rural Literacy in India

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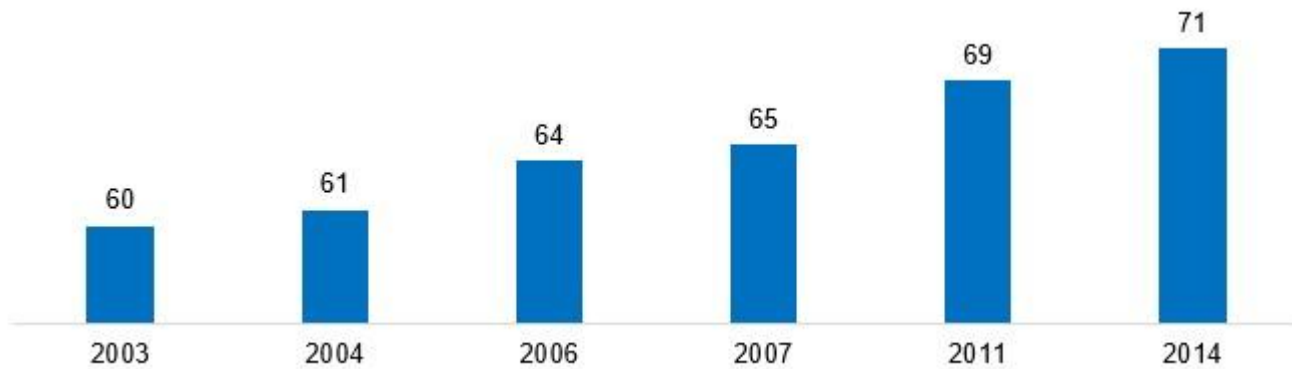
ABSTRACT: India is a country with a 138 crore (1.38 billion) population which is further divided into two sections: urban and rural. The rural population of India represents 65% of the total population, around 88 crore (880 million). As of 2019, the literacy rate in rural India was around 73.5%. This includes 81% male and 65% female literacy in rural section of India. As the rural economy currently contributes to 25-30% of the country's GDP, literacy in these parts is important for the Indian economy.

Between years 2003 to 2014, the rural literacy grew at a CAGR of approximately 3.42%. And to further increase the literacy and growth rate, the government of India has launched many initiatives such as Samagra Shiksha, Jahawar Navodaya Vidyalaya, mid-day meal schemes, digital initiatives etc. The goal of these initiatives is to increase the enrolment rate and also to encourage the already enrolled students to attend regularly.

KEYWORDS: scenario, changing, rural, literacy, India, economy, students, meal schemes, growth rate

I.INTRODUCTION

Agriculture sector is the driving force of India. A large number of the Indian population is involved in the agriculture and allied industries' business.¹ Similarly, there are many sectors originating out of the rural society driving the economy. With education, the rural population can apply new knowledge and implement better technology and practices into their businesses. This will even help in bringing the per capita income of the country up and reducing poverty.²



Rural Literacy (as a % of total rural population)

Schools and Colleges in rural India

India has many school governing bodies. There are many school management bodies having schools spread across India such as the department of education, tribal welfare department, local bodies, government aided, private, social welfare, Kendriya vidyalaya, railway, etc. These schools fall under various categories such as higher secondary schools, universal public schools, secondary schools, public schools.³

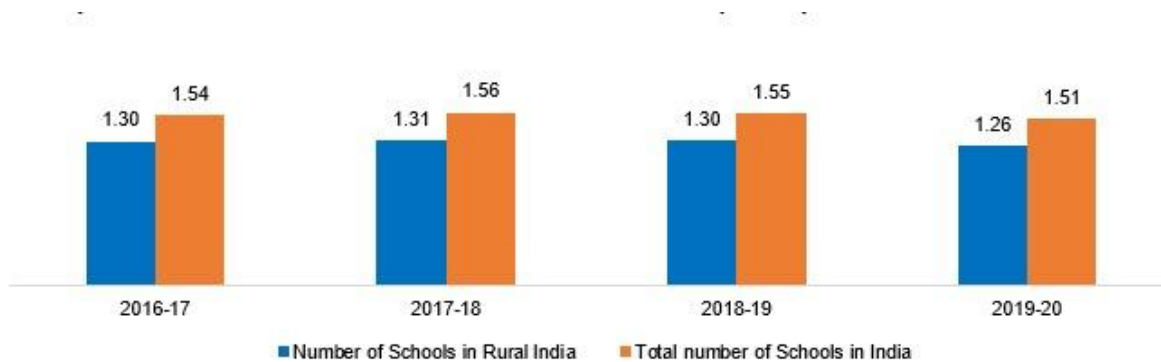


As of 2019-20, the total number of schools in India was 1.5 million and out of those, around 1.26 million schools are located in the rural parts of India. With large part of the population in the region, majority of the schools in India are located in the rural India.

Comparison of total number of schools in India and rural India (million)

The above chart shows the data on schools in rural parts of India. As per this, more than 83% of the total schools are located in rural India.

As of 2019-20, India had around 42,343 colleges and about 60.56% of these colleges were located in the rural parts of the country.⁴



Comparison of total number of schools in India and rural India (million)

Why is it important to educate rural India?

Education opens up new opportunities to access new information and technology that enables an individual to make the right decisions in both personal and professional life. It allows children to understand policies, rights, laws from the young age which will be helpful in the future. As 65% of the population of India is situated in rural areas, emphasizing on rural education will help boost the overall economy. Furthermore, it will also help in reduce migration of people from rural areas to cities of employment and create new opportunities.⁵

Following are some of the reasons why rural education is essential for India's growth:

Agriculture is one of the most important sectors in India. It contributed to 20.2% of the country's Gross Value Added (GVA). As per the census 2011, about 54.6% of the country's population was engaged in agriculture and allied activities. Out of these, about of 70% the total rural households were involved in agricultural activities; 82% of them being small and marginal farmers making it the largest source of livelihood in India. Thus, by improving rural education, agriculture sector can grow a lot with new technologies and knowledge.⁶

Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) sector is a huge contributor to the Indian economy making up about 30% of the country's GDP. The share of MSME related products in total exports from India was 48% during 2018-19. Out of about 63.4 million MSME's in India, 51.25% i.e. 32.5 million MSME's are in the rural areas. With the sector employing about 50 million people in rural India, it is one of the most important sectors in the rural economy. Hence, education is important for the growth of the MSME sector.⁷

Government initiatives for rural education

The biggest proponent of rural education is the government. How the structure is formed, schemes are launched and the plans are executed entirely depends on the government initiative. By understanding this, the government of India has launched many initiatives to promote education in rural areas.



Samagra Shiksha

The is an integrated scheme for schools education launched in 2018-19 by the Indian government, covers pre-schools to class XII. It aims to ensure an equitable quality of education at all levels of school education across India. It works to strengthen infrastructure, gender equality, improving education quality, digital initiatives and the right to education for every child.⁸

Shiksha Karmi Project

The project launched in 1987 in Rajasthan works for universalization of primary schools and socio economically backward villages in the state where the existing primary education is dysfunctional. The project works to improve and adapt the type of education suiting the local needs and conditions.

Lok Jambish Pariyojana

The initiative, also formed in Rajasthan in 1992, works for universalization of elementary education through mass mobilization and participation of people. It works to enroll children in regular schools and ensure they regularly attend. The project also emphasizes on active learning, child centered process and women empowerment and equality through education.

Digital initiatives

To combat issues such as declining student attendance, lack of committed teachers, proper infrastructure and quality and access to education, the government has taken several digital initiatives. These digital platforms, namely e-PATHSHALA, Diksha, MOOC, SWAYAM PRABHA, and National digital library can be accessed through any part of the country.⁹

Various initiatives taken by the government should assist in providing accessibility and affordability of quality education to the rural population. Sectors such as agriculture, MSMEs, dairy, fisheries, fertilizers, etc. contribute in a major way to India's GDP growth. Hence, a well-educated rural population can make a difference in their respective areas and lend more stability to the economy. This in turn should support India's aim to become a US\$ 5 trillion economy by future.

II.DISCUSSION

Rural education plays a pivotal role in resolving many of India's key problems – youth disillusionment, poverty, crime to name a few. It is the rural education scenario which is the yardstick of a nation's development.

According to a Report the number of kids who do not attend school in India is probably more than ninety five million. Rural India accounts for a devastating majority of this figure. This awfully alarming statistic seems even worse when we know that boys form much higher percentage of children in rural India who gain a high-school diploma, making the girl child, in particular disregarded, and deprived of a basic education. Nevertheless, more than half of the students in the class 6th are not capable of reading a text book of class 3rd. They hardly know how to solve elementary mathematical questions. Therefore, in preference to focusing on elevating literacy rate, it is time that we target quality education. It is much needed that youngsters are imparted quality education and the knowledge that can be useful in their actual life. As compared to urban India, the state of education is worse in remote areas of the country. State is required to take certain steps so that the rural education in India can be upgraded.¹⁰

The education system operating in rural areas needs uplift, but the million dollar question is HOW?

Recommendation to improve the rural education system:

1. Boost up free learning

This is certainly going increase the literacy rate as more and more parent will be keen to send their children to schools if they are not required to pay for their education.

To those who come from low economic background, the government must provide for their textbooks, library and lab amenities so that they are not left with any reason for not attending the schools.

2. Improvement in school infrastructure



The rural educational institutes suffer a lot due to shortage of proper infrastructure. The schools in rural India do not possess sufficient number of well-trained teachers. In addition to this, the learner-educator ratio is quite inappropriate which makes it even harder to pay attention to every student. This results in low quality education, hardly serving any purpose. If we are to place the base of strong educational life, it needs to start right from the start and this can only be done if the school infrastructure is prepared well.¹¹

4. Innovative teaching techniques

The level of education has gone up in town areas with newer teaching methods being introduced; the teaching techniques employed are still conventional in rural India. The rural schools are still focused on inculcating rote learning in its students. This needs to be transformed.

Holistic development of student is the need of the hour.

5. Promoting computer proficiency

India is progressing technically; however, miserably, the impression of this development has yet not reached to the rural areas. This has led to a digital divide in city and rural students.

The schools in rural area are required to get prepared with computer literacy and technical education as well. This will help them with the level of city education and develop them better.

All that is needed is a huge shift in mindset. People in rural area believe that kids need to be at home to sustain the household. This perception is very short sighted, a life that holds the opportunity of a good living, I am confident, will drive families and their children to adopt a good education across rural India. With sixty per cent of the population living in rural India, education in rural belt truly ought to have much more attention.¹²

III.RESULTS

The literacy rate of Indian women has grown over the years.²¹ According to the World Bank India report, only 1 of 11 girls was literate at the time of India's independence, about nine percent. And at present, the women's literacy rate has jumped to 77% while India's male literacy rate stands at 84.7%. As per the government's National Sample Survey report, Kerala is the most literate state in the country with 92.2%, followed by union territory Lakshadweep (91.85%). The third-most literate state in the country is Mizoram (91.33%). Whereas Bihar has the lowest literacy rate in India at 61.8%, followed by Arunachal Pradesh at 65.3% and Rajasthan at 66.1%. However, around 12.6% of students drop out of school in India, and 19.8% discontinued education at the secondary level. The number is significantly higher for girls as they get married early and in many communities educating girls is not even a priority and is seen as an unnecessary cost. Globally, 1.8 million girls get married underage.¹³

In India, the literacy rate, including the female literacy rate is abysmally low in rural areas and in some pockets of urban areas. The literacy rate in rural India is 67.77% as compared to 84.11% in urban India.²²

The Ministry of Education launched Samagra Shiksha Scheme in 2018-19 that envisaged the school as a continuum from preschool, primary, upper primary, and secondary to senior secondary levels.

Besides, the centrally sponsored scheme of Adult Education – Saakshar Bharat was also launched to improve the literacy rate among adults. The scheme was implemented in the rural areas of 404 districts in 26 states and one Union Territory, which had an adult female literacy rate of 50% and below as per Census 2001²³.

The scheme was extended up to March 31, 2018. During the implementation of Saakshar Bharat scheme, against the overall target of making 7.00 crore adult non-literates as literates, around 7.64 crore learners who passed the biannual Basic Literacy Assessment Tests conducted by the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) between August, 2010 to March, 2018, were certified as literates.¹⁴

According to National Statistical Office (NSO) data, As of the Year, 2019 India's average literacy rate is 77.70%. The male literacy at the India level in 2019 stands at 84.70% & female literacy stands at 70.30%.²⁴The National Family Health Survey 2019-21 (NFHS-5), points to a literacy rate among adult women (15-49 years) of 71.5%, & adult men (15-49 years) at 87.4%.As per the Census 2011, as many as 763,498,517 (76.34 Crore) persons in the country are literate. Of these 434,683,779 (43.46 Crore) are males and 328,814,738 (32.88 Crore) are females. While the overall literacy rate works out to be 72.9 %, the male literacy rate is 80.89% and that for females is 64.64%, showing a gap of 16.25 percentage points between the sexes at the national level.¹⁵



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#	Literate Population 2011	Literacy Rate 2011	Literacy Rate 2019
Persons	763,498,517	72.99%	77.70%
Males	434,683,779	80.89%	84.70%
Females	328,814,738	64.64%	70.30%

Source: Census 2011, National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5) & National Statistical Office (NSO) data

Literacy rate: Literacy rate is defined as the percentage of literate persons of age 7 years and above. A person who can read and write a simple message in any language with understanding is considered literate.¹⁶

List of States & Union Territories by Literary Rate 2019

Below is the list of States & Union Territories with literacy rates

States & Union Territories	Male Literacy Rate %	Female Literacy Rate %	Average Literacy Rate %
A&N islands	90.11	81.84	86.27
Andhra Pradesh	73.4	59.5	66.4
Arunachal Pradesh	73.69	59.57	66.95
Assam	90.1	81.2	85.9
Bihar	79.7	60.5	70.9
Chhattisgarh	85.4	68.7	77.3
Chandigarh	90.54	81.38	86.43
Dadra and Nagar Haveli	86.46	65.93	77.65
Daman & Diu	91.48	79.59	87.07
Delhi	93.7	82.4	88.7
Goa	92.81	81.84	87.4
Gujarat	89.5	74.8	82.4
Haryana	88	71.3	80.4



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Himachal Pradesh	92.9	80.5	86.6
Jammu & Kashmir	85.7	68	77.3
Jharkhand	83	64.7	74.3
Karnataka	83.4	70.5	77.2
Kerala	97.4	95.2	96.2
Lakshadweep	96.11	88.25	92.28
Madhya Pradesh	81.2	65.5	73.7
Maharashtra	90.7	78.4	84.8
Manipur	86.49	73.17	79.85
Meghalaya	77.17	73.78	75.48
Mizoram	93.72	89.4	91.58
Nagaland	83.29	76.69	80.11
Odisha	84	70.3	77.3
Puducherry	92.12	81.22	86.55
Punjab	88.5	78.5	83.7
Rajasthan	80.8	57.6	69.7
Sikkim	87.29	76.43	82.2
Tamil Nadu	87.9	77.9	82.9
Telangana	80.5	65.1	72.8
Tripura	92.18	83.15	87.75
Uttarakhand	94.3	80.7	87.6
Uttar Pradesh	81.8	63.4	73.0
West Bengal	84.8	76.1	80.5
All-India	84.7	70.3	77.7

Source: Survey by National Statistical Office (NSO). *UTs & NE States based on 2011 Census



Indian States with Highest Literacy Rate

As per the National Statistical Office (NSO) data for 2017-18 on state-wise literacy rate in the country Kerala ranked highest in the list with 96.2%. Delhi stood second with 88.7%.²⁵

Top 10 States with Highest Literacy Rate

#	State	Male	Female	Average
1	Kerala	97.4	95.2	96.2
2	Mizoram	93.72	89.4	91.58
3	Delhi	93.7	82.4	88.7
4	Tripura	92.18	83.15	87.75
5	Uttarakhand	94.3	80.7	87.6
6	Goa	92.81	81.84	87.4
7	Himachal Pradesh	92.9	80.5	86.6
8	Assam	90.1	81.2	85.9
9	Maharashtra	90.7	78.4	84.8
10	Punjab	88.5	78.5	83.7

Source: survey by National Statistical Office (NSO). *UTs & NE States based on 2011 Census

Indian States with Lowest Literacy Rate

As per the National Statistical Office (NSO) data for 2017-18 on state-wise literacy rate in the country, Andhra Pradesh ranked Lowest in the list with 66.2% followed by Rajasthan & Bihar.¹⁷

States with the Lowest Literacy Rate

#	State	Male	Female	Average
1	Andhra Pradesh	73.4	59.5	66.4
2	Rajasthan	80.8	57.6	69.7



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3	Bihar	79.7	60.5	70.9
4	Telangana	80.5	65.1	72.8
5	Uttar Pradesh	81.8	63.4	73.0
6	Madhya Pradesh	81.2	65.5	73.7
7	Jharkhand	83	64.7	74.3
8	Karnataka	83.4	70.5	77.2
9	Chhattisgarh	85.4	68.7	77.3
10	Jammu & Kashmir	85.7	68	77.3

Source: survey by National Statistical Office (NSO). *UTs & NE States based on 2011 Census

Literary Rate Urban Vs Rural

The literacy rate among persons (aged 7 years and above) in India was about 77.7%. In rural areas, the literacy rate was 73.5% compared to 87.7% in urban areas.¹⁸

States	Rural Literacy Rate			Urban Literacy Rate		
	Male	Female	Average	Male	Female	Average
Andhra Pradesh	67.5	53.4	60.4	86.3	73.1	79.6
Assam	89.4	79.9	84.9	96.1	91.4	93.8
Bihar	78.6	58.7	69.5	89.3	75.9	83.1
Chhattisgarh	84	65.6	75	91.8	82.3	87.2
Delhi				94.1	83.4	89.4
Gujarat	85.7	68	77	95.2	86.3	91.1
Haryana	85.8	66.4	77	92.5	81.2	87.3
Himachal Pradesh	92.3	79.2	85.6	97.8	93	95.5
Jammu & Kashmir	84.9	66	75.8	88.5	75.7	82.6
Jharkhand	80.6	61.4	71.4	92.6	78.6	86.1



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Karnataka	78.2	63.1	71	92.5	83.7	88.3
Kerala	96.7	94.1	95.4	98.2	96.4	97.3
Madhya Pradesh	77.9	61	69.8	91.4	79.5	85.8
Maharashtra	87	71.4	79.4	95.3	87.6	91.7
Odisha	82	67.3	74.9	94.4	85.9	90.2
Punjab	85.5	74	80	93.8	86.7	90.5
Rajasthan	77.6	52.6	65.5	91.1	74.6	83.5
Tamil Nadu	84.2	70.8	77.5	92.3	85.9	89
Telangana	70.6	53.7	62.1	91.7	79	85.5
Uttarakhand	93.1	79	86.1	97.4	85.9	92
Uttar Pradesh	80.5	60.4	70.8	86.8	74.9	81.2
West Bengal	82	72.6	77.4	91.4	84.7	88.1
All-India	81.5	65	73.5	92.2	82.8	87.7

The complete educational level of the population for different age-groups

Percentage distribution of rural persons (ages 15 years & above by highest completed levels of education)²⁶

- 31.5% were not literate,
- 20.9% were literate up to primary²⁷
- 17.2% were of level upper primary/middle,
- 24.9% were of levels secondary and higher secondary
- 5.7% were graduates & above.

Percentage distribution of urban persons (age 15 years & above by highest completed level of education)¹⁹

- 13.9% were not literate,²⁸
- 14.7% were literate up to primary,
- 14.0% were of level upper primary/middle,
- 35.8% were of level secondary and higher secondary
- 21.7% were graduates & above²⁰

IV.CONCLUSIONS



According to National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5), 2019-21 male literacy at the India level stands at 84.4% & female literacy stands at 71.5%.²⁹ The male Female gap at the all-India level is 12.9 percentage points with male literacy at 84.7% and female literacy at 70.3%. The gap between male and female literacy is the smallest in Kerala at just 2.2 percentage points. Andhra Pradesh's literacy rate of 66.4% is the lowest among all states in India, and Kerala ranked highest in the list with 96.2%. Delhi stood second with 88.7%.³⁰

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