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A Study on Literacy Development of Females with Particular Reference to the Weaker Section in Bihar

Introduction

IT is right time to reconsider our national planning of achieving universal enrolment and retention of ages 6-14 years and universal literacy of the population over five years of age. Moreover, special emphasis is being sought for females for their greater involvements in our society. Naturally involvements of females are subjected to precondition that they first of all be educated. But it is a pity to say even in this later stage of the 20th Century that the standard of education of females particularly in rural areas is very poor as compared to males. Hence whatever we talk about universal literacy, it should directly or indirectly impose special reference to females who need attention more than what is required for males. It is equally important to look into the situation prevailed among population belonging to the weaker sections and minorities. The standard of education of males and females, in particular, in these sections was notably low in the past and present as well, to smaller extent. It is needless to say that the untoward incidence of overall lower female education could not occur in a day, rather it occurred historically. In a true sense, in the vedic period although females were not discriminated in the society; they were given education like males etc., it might be only in post vedic period that our ancestors who for their self interests made a system of social discrimination out of which females were neglected in the fields of education, in particular. Likewise negligence of female education could be found from elsewhere (Majumdar, 1971).

As such; it is essential first of all to raise the standard of education of those unprivileged sections, if at all we want universal literacy of our population. To do so past trend and present position of those sections, in particular, are necessary. In the present paper an attempt has been made to see how much literacy development has occurred to females relative to that among males in overall population with particular reference to Scheduled caste Hindus and Muslims. Enrolment and drop-out have not been studied because of limitation of data. In a bid to appraise the actual situation based on empirical data, some estimates on literacy were obtained (Mukhopadhyay, 1987; Mukhopadhyay and Ghosal, 1988) and used for this purpose. The estimates were obtained from data on a household survey conducted in the

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rural areas of districts around Patna in 1983. About the survey, it may be mentioned that altogether 72 sample villages were chosen in districts of Patna, Nalanda, Muzaffarpur and many others. The survey was conducted in 1880 households using a two stage stratified random sampling technique. More about the sample design, data collection etc. is available elsewhere (Sarkar, 1985).

Method of Analysis

For the purpose of analysis of data, higher mobilities of literacy percentages between father and son and between mother and daughter were calculated. A brief description of calculation of mobilities is as follows. From the cross-classified data on education years of daughters and mothers, the percentages of daughters being literate while mothers were illiterate were considered and used as higher literacy mobility. Similarly it was done for son and father. Mobility figures were given for different birth cohorts of son/daughter for populations belonging to Scheduled caste Hindus and Muslims along with overall population. Ratios of male-female literacy figures for different birth cohorts were given to measure the disparities over time. Finally, the Spearman rank correlation (ρ) method was applied on the data for statistical evidence of literacy development on the one hand and the narrowing of male-female disparities on the other.

Results

*Overall View of Literacy Standard**

From the overall data it has been indicated that among males over 10 years of age, 62.5 per cent were literate in rural areas of the districts around Patna in 1983. The female figure, on the other hand, showed almost half that of male rate. Among different social groups, upper caste Hindus (including Brahmin, Kayasthas, Bhumihar etc.) possessed highest literacy rates both for male and female (90.6 and 72.3 respectively) over 10 years of age in comparison with the corresponding percentages of 36.7 and 8.8; 68.2 and 29.7; 49.1 and 27.0 respectively for Scheduled caste Hindus, other Hindus and Muslims. Worst situation may be said to have prevailed among Scheduled caste Hindu females with very low literacy figure even less than ten per cent in 1983. The reason for this low level of literacy is due to the fact that females of ages 50 years and above were completely illiterate. Their literacy development started recently for about 30 years back. However, there was a steady increase in literacy rates from age group 30-34 years to 10-14 years. Muslims on the other hand showed very slow progress, although that was not so much bad in the past as obtained in case of Scheduled caste Hindus.

Overall Literacy Mobility

We now propose to study the literacy mobility between father and son and between mother and daughter. This sort of analysis not only gives the literacy (status and development) of population but also may signify the pattern of change between father and son or between mother and daughter. Moreover, attitudinal aspects of the population in regard to

*This portion has been obtained from a report and details may be available (Sarkar, 1985).

the educational development of younger generations may also be studied from this kind of mobility approach. A glance at the following concise table gave such a picture.

TABLE 1: ESTIMATED TWO-GENERATION LITERACY MOBILITY OF MALE AND FEMALE

<i>Birth cohort</i>	<i>Age group</i>	<i>Literacy status</i>	
		<i>only son</i>	<i>only daughter</i>
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
1969-73	10-14	25.1	40.8
1959-68	15-24	30.3	34.9
1949-58	25-34	30.8	20.2
1939-48	35-44	26.8	18.5
Before 1939	45+	26.7	6.0
Before 1969	15+	28.6	21.6

Note. Percentages were calculated in each age-group separately for son and daughter. Other literacy status figures were not shown in the above and subsequent tables.

It was indicated in Table 1 that 28.6 per cent of sons aged 15 years and above were literate while their fathers were illiterate. Daughters in the same age range showed slightly lower value with 21.6 per cent. That is to say that although the mobility was not very high either for male or for female, comparatively a slightly higher mobility may be said in respect of the former. From the birth cohort figures as shown in Table 1 one may observe that whereas sons' literacy status with respect to their fathers were more or less invariant at different points of time, the figures for daughters increased considerably and rapidly from a meagre amount of 6.0 per cent in the birth cohort, 'before 1939' to 40.8 in 1969-73 indicating an increase of 35 points within 35 years. One thing may emerge that when fathers were literate along with their sons, mothers were illiterate although, whereas daughters' literacy status improved over time. Another important attitudinal aspect of female population in regard to their daughters' literacy may emerge from this. That is, illiterate mothers were becoming more conscious regarding the education of their daughters as time goes on.

Here we propose to study the literacy mobility figures in respect of Scheduled caste Hindus and Muslims. Table 2 shows the same figures for these two social groups in the area under study in 1983.

A perusal of Table 2 gave literacy mobilities for son and daughter (ages 15 and above) with respect to their father and mother respectively as 29.6 and 7.1 for Scheduled caste Hindus and 20.4 and 19.7 for Muslims. While there was a sizeable amount of difference between male and female among Scheduled caste Hindus, Muslims on the average gave no such difference for ages 15 and above. Whatever be the current situation of Scheduled caste Hindus, it was especially marked for females in column 4 that there was a gradual improvement of literacy of daughter. The table showed 0.2 in ages 45 and above to 41.8 in 10-14 years i.e., almost 42 points increase during 35 years. It may indicate an attitudinal change among illiterate mothers regarding the education of their daughters in Scheduled

caste Hindu families. And in near future the overall position of scheduled caste Hindus may improve significantly, if the present trend continues to be. Although such observations were present among Muslims, those were not as prominent as Scheduled caste Hindus. No definite trend was marked for the literacy development of son either for Scheduled caste Hindus or for Muslims.

TABLE 2: ESTIMATED MOBILITY OF LITERACY FOR SPECIFIC SOCIAL GROUPS

<i>Scheduled caste Hindus</i>		<i>Muslims</i>			
<i>Birth cohort</i>	<i>Age-group</i>	<i>Literacy status</i>			
		<i>only son</i>	<i>only daughter</i>	<i>only son</i>	<i>only daughter</i>
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
1969-73	10-14	32.9	41.8	16.8	19.3
1959-68	15-24	36.8	16.0	20.6	33.9
1949-58	25-34	34.0	6.1	24.7	21.6
1939-48	35-44	27.2	1.8	12.8	13.3
Before 1939	45+	18.6	0.2	15.2	6.0
Before 1969	15+	29.6	7.1	20.4	19.7

Sex-Differences in Literacy Development

In this section, a resort was made to see how male-female differentiations changed with time using the ratios of literacy of only son to only daughter over different birth cohorts. The following table gives such differentiations for overall population, Scheduled caste Hindus and Muslims.

TABLE 3 : ESTIMATED RATIOS OF MALE-FEMALE LITERACY CHARACTERISTICS

<i>Birth cohort</i>	<i>Age-group</i>	<i>literacy of only son/only daughter</i>		
		<i>overall population</i>	<i>Scheduled caste Hindus</i>	<i>Muslims</i>
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
1969-73	10-14	0.6	0.8	0.9
1959-68	15-24	0.9	2.3	0.6
1949-58	25-34	1.5	5.6	1.1
1939-48	35-44	1.5	15.1	1.0
Before 1939	45+	4.4	93.0	2.5
Before 1969	15+	1.3	4.2	1.0

Overall figure of 1.3 for ages 15 and above for overall population indicated a slight difference of literacy status between male and female in the area under study. Whereas Scheduled caste Hindus showed much higher value like 4.2, Muslims possessed only 1.0.

Although overall figure showed a slight improvement of male over female, in column 3, cohort data showed a gradual decline of the ratio values from 4.4 in the age group 45 and above to 0.6 in 10-14 years. This indicates an improvement on the part of female literacy. Moreover, the picture was entirely changed in the recent two age cohorts, 10-14 and 15-24 years whereby the ratios got less than unity which may indicate more and more daughters are being literate compared to son. The figures in column 4 although indicate much higher gap between male and female in ages 15 and above for Scheduled caste Hindus, the cohort data show a remarkable decline of ratio values from 93.0 in 45 and above to 0.8 in 10-14 years. From such figures one may conclude that females from Scheduled caste Hindus were illiterate universally in the long past but they have gradually improved their status over time. As a result the male-female gap narrowed down considerably. It may be that because of higher gap in the past the overall figure for ages 15 and above got higher value overimposing the recent improvement. The pattern for Muslims was more or less same at different periods of time as shown in column 5.

Statistical Test

The Spearman rank-difference (ρ) correlation method has been applied to the ratios and individual literacy figures for females at different age cohorts. The correlation coefficients (p) have been found to be highly significant in the cases of Scheduled caste Hindus, Muslims and overall populations. The correlation coefficient was highest for Scheduled caste Hindus with unity, 0.97 for overall population and 0.7 for Muslims. As a matter of fact, because of recent literacy development among Scheduled caste Hindu females the value became highest. That much development was not marked in case of Muslims giving slightly lower coefficient figure.

Discussion and Conclusion

An attempt was made in the present paper to highlight the literacy development of population belonging to some specific sections who were found to be backward in literacy development in Indian context. Female population has been all time neglected in our society in the long past. Similarly population belonging to the weaker sections like Scheduled caste Hindus and Muslims was found to be backward in the sense of their literacy development as compared to some other higher classes of people. As a matter of fact, more emphasis is required to uplift those sections of population especially females, if at all we want universal literacy of our population.

An indication of development of female literacy was observed in the paper, although the level may be low. Age-cohort data showed that ratios of male to female literacy status were very high in the past but afterwards declined even for Scheduled caste Hindus. In an observation in regard to overall Indian literacy development for females, Sharma and Retherford (1987) pointed out that significant sex differentials in literacy rates exist, but these are narrowing with the passage of time as indicated by a rising trend in the rates of female literacy rate to the male literacy rate. It was especially pointed out that there was a clear evidence of literacy development of daughters with respect to their mothers among

Scheduled caste Hindus over time. Such observation though was present in Muslim families but that was not as prominent as the former. Statistically it was found that there was a significant correlation between rise in female literacy and the decrease in the male-female gap in literacy status particularly for Scheduled caste Hindus.

Although a trend of development of literacy status particularly for females among Scheduled caste Hindus was noticed in the rural areas around Patna, 1983, it is much needed to see their way of development especially in other places of India also along with the overall population development scheme. Their enrolment is still not upto the mark. Overall study by ESCAP (1982) indicated that the achievement of the constitutional goal of universal elementary education has been considerably delayed largely because of the very low enrolment of girls, especially those belonging to the scheduled castes and tribes. Moreover, Bihar was one of the six relatively backward states like JK,¹ Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh accounting for a disproportionate share of the children, six to ten years old, who did not attend school (ESCAP, 1982). Government of India has formulated plan to set up non-formal education centres particularly for school drop-outs, for children from habitation without schools, working children and girls who can not attend whole day schools. Special emphasis should be given to females of the weaker section and minority while executing micro-planning scheme to avoid drop out as laid down at para 5.12 of the Policy (National Policy on Education, 1986). While in the actual field it is necessary to set up more and more voluntary agencies and panchayati-raj sponsored institution (as advocated in NPE, 1986) to tackle the huge rural population residing especially at remote places and backward regions. The contribution of Central Social Welfare Board is no less important and should be geared up. Adult education programme should be made more effective in the sense that more and more adults especially females from the weaker section can take these facilities within their nearest reach and outside their normal duty hours. If the things are done like-wise the aim of the Government may fruitfully be fulfilled in near future.

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