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DETERMINATION OF BACKWARDNESS LEVELS IN LITERACY IN MEMARI-II BLOCK, BURDWAN DISTRICT, WEST BENGAL

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Abstract:

Literacy is one of the most prerequisite conditions of human development. That is why it has been used as an indicator of Human Development Index and planners have emphasized on different schemes and programmes for development of literacy in every planning year. It reduces the obstacles in life. However widespread illiteracy is not new. It is proved from 2001 census data of Memari-II Block that still more than 1/3rd of population of this block is still far from light of literacy. However this single parameter of illiteracy rate is not enough for calling backwardness in literacy. Other parameters such as gender-gap in literacy, range of literacy in an area are to be taken because in developing countries like India gender discrimination is a normal phenomenon and unequal distribution of the results of social reform are also very important. All these factors collectively denote the level of backwardness in literacy. An attempt has been taken to recover such backwardness level in literacy at intrablock level in Memari-II Block.

KEY-WORDS:

Literacy, gender-gap in literacy, range of literacy, backwardness level of literacy

THE STUDY AREA

The area under study concerns Memari-II Block of Burdwan District. It locates within 23°12'N and 23°23'N latitude and 88°01'E and 88°15'E longitude covering an area of 230.48 hectare (185.13 sq. k.m.) i.e. about 2.6% area of the district. This block shares common boundary with five neighbouring blocks. On the north there is Monteshwar Block, Kalna-I on the east, Memari-II on the south, Burdwan-II from the south-west upto west and Burdwan-I on the north –west. Memari-II Block consists of 9 Gram-Panchayets constituting 89 Mouzas of which 88 Mouzas are inhabited and 1 is uninhabited. The Gram-Panchayets are Barapalasan-I & II, Bijur-I & II, Kuchut, Satgachia-I & II, Bohar-I & II all of which are rural (Fig. No. 01). There are 1,36,981 population (2001 Census) i.e. 1.8% of the total district. Although the nearest town is Memari, it is well connected to Burdwan town, the district head -quarter and Kalna by Kalna-Burdwan Road and Monteshwar via Memari-Monteshwar Road.

OBJECTIVES

The major objectives behind the study are to find out the

A) comparative literacy level in local, regional and national context,

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- B) influence of gender-gap in literacy and range of literacy along with illiteracy rate in calculating the backwardness index ,
- c) spatial variations in levels of backwardness in literacy within a block.

BACKWARDNESS IN LITERACY AND ITS MEASUREMENT

Among the various definitions of literacy used by different countries Indian Census adopted the one given by Population Commission of United Nations as 'the ability to both read and write a simple message with understanding in any language' (Chandna, R.C. Geography of Population, p. 345). But now the modified definition by UNESCO in 21st century is the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate, compare and use printed and written materials associated with varying contexts. Single literacy or illiteracy rate cannot be the only measure of development or backwardness of literacy. In countries like India, especially in rural areas gender-disparity in literacy

LOCATION OF THE STUDY AREA

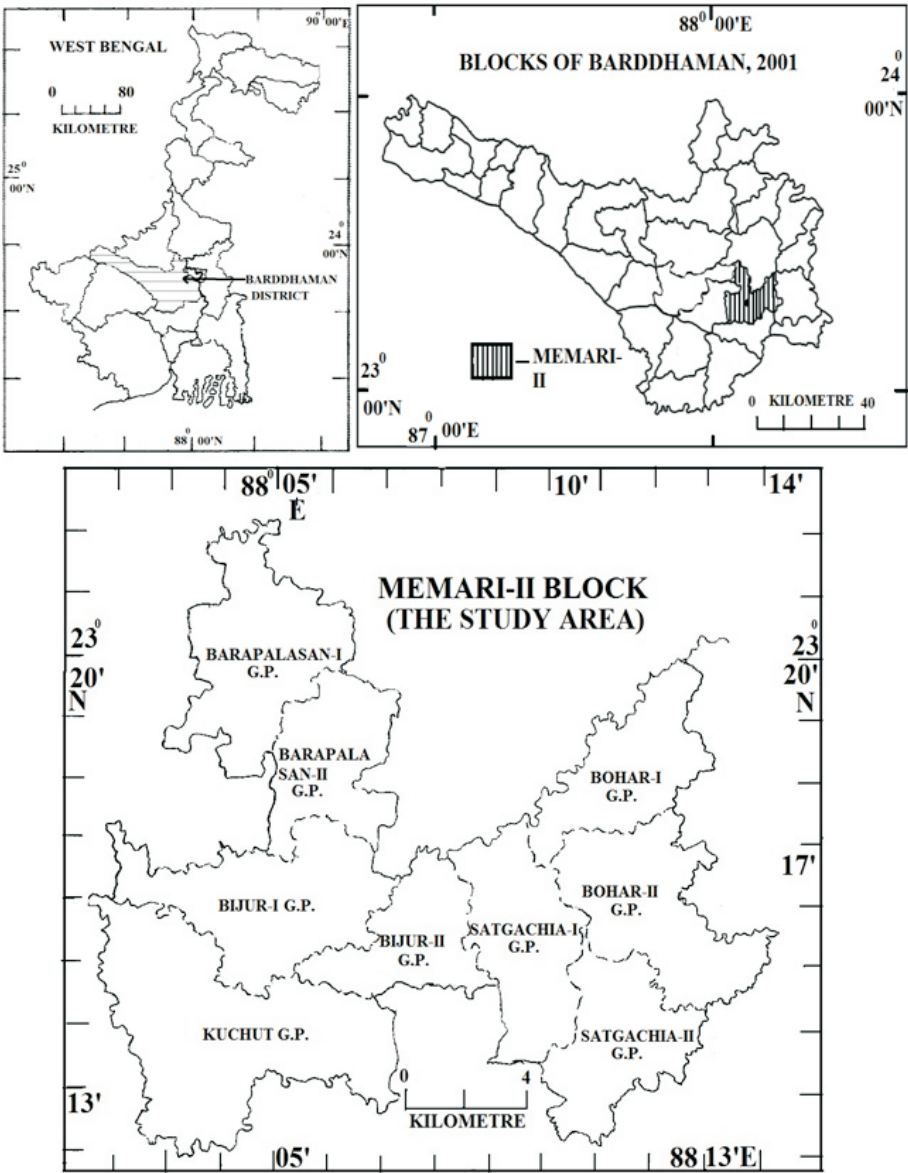


Fig. No.01: Location Map of the Study Area

concerns a deeper attention because still there are such families in which education of women is a challenge and areas where total literacy is represented by male literacy. Thus to access backwardness in literacy gender-gap in literacy becomes an important parameter. Range of literacy represents the unequal growth of literacy where some areas are booming and some are in distressed condition

DATA-BASE

Data employed to do the work is secondary one taken from the Primary Census Abstract, Burdwan District, 2001 published by the Government of India. Block map has been prepared by the author on the basis of data published by Census of India.

METHODS

The methods to determine the level of backwardness in literacy on the basis of illiteracy rate, gender-gap in literacy and range of literacy as follows.

Illiteracy rate (%) = $\frac{\text{Illiterate Population}}{\text{Total population}}$

Gender-gap in literacy (%) = $\frac{\text{Male Literacy} - \text{Female Literacy}}{\text{Total Literacy}} \times 100$

Or, $\left(\frac{\text{Literate Male}}{\text{Total Male}} \times 100 \right) - \left(\frac{\text{Literate Female}}{\text{Total Female}} \times 100 \right)$

Range of literacy within each areal unit = (Highest literacy rate - Lowest Literacy Rate) of each areal unit

Individual score for each Gram-Panchayet =
 $\frac{\text{Original value} - \text{Minimum value}}{\text{Maximum value} - \text{Minimum value}}$

e.g., score of illiteracy rate of Kuchut Gram-Panchayet is
 $\frac{41.08\% - 35.00\%}{41.08\% - 35.00\%}$
 = 1.00

Backwardness index of literacy of each Gram-Panchayet is the average score of three indices. This value ranges between 0 and 1. Higher the value, lower will be the backwardness level and vice-versa.

LITERACY IN LOCAL, REGIONAL AND NATIONAL LEVELS

From 2001 census it is seen that Memari –II Block lags far behind the national, state and district level literacy rate (Fig. No. 02). In this 21st century it is a shame that 38.78% population of a block are still illiterate. Here literacy rate is lower by three points from national level, seven points than the state level and sixteen points than the district level. Even if we consider the district level literacy rate then this block is one of the backward blocks in terms of literacy achievement. Here an attempt has been taken to examine the intra block situation of widespread illiteracy in Memari-II Block and for this purpose along with illiteracy rate above mentioned two indices have been considered.

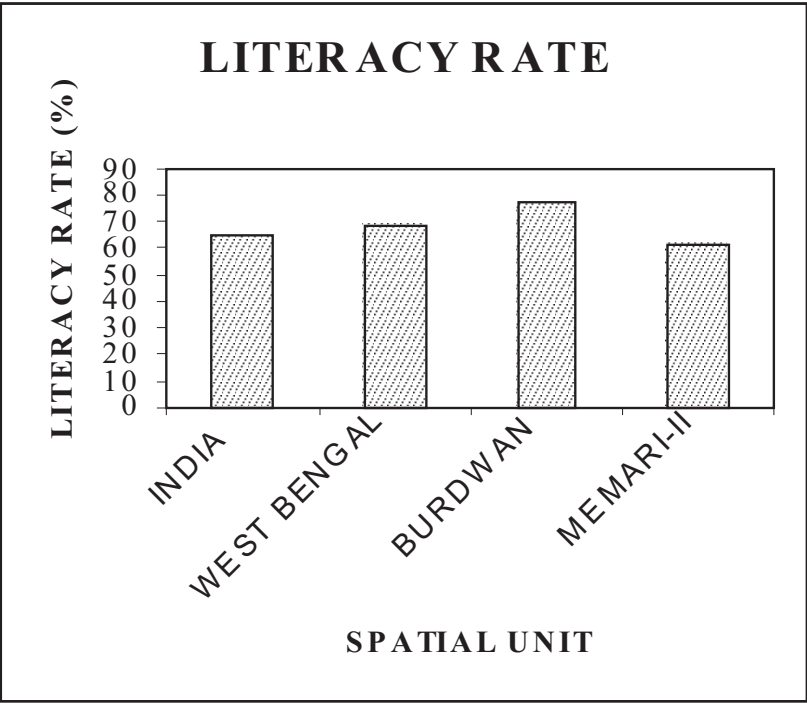


Figure No. 02: Literacy Rate in National, Regional and Local Level
Data-source: Census of India, 2001

Table: Index of Backwardness in Literacy for Each Gram-Panchayet

COMPOSITE SCORE				INDEX VALUE			Index of Backwardness
G.P.s	ILLIT.RATE	GEN. GAP	RANGE	ILL.IT.	GEND.GAP	RANGE	AVG. SCORE
Barapalasan-I	39.02	12.79	35.11	0.66	0	0.84	0.5
Barapalasan-II	38.23	15.53	27.83	0.53	0.31	0.55	0.46
Bijur-I	37.7	21.12	21.27	0.44	0.93	0.28	0.55
Bijur-II	37.87	17.76	39.18	0.47	0.56	1	0.68
Kuchut	41.08	16.37	24.27	1	0.4	0.4	0.6
Satgachia-I	37.27	17.38	28.61	0.37	0.51	0.58	0.49
Satgachia-II	39.39	21.73	26.81	0.72	1	0.49	0.74
Bohar-I	35	15.73	14.16	0	0.33	0	0.11
Bohar-II	38.17	15.74	17.18	0.52	0.33	0.15	0.33

Data source: District Census Handbook, Burdwan District, 2001 and computed by the author

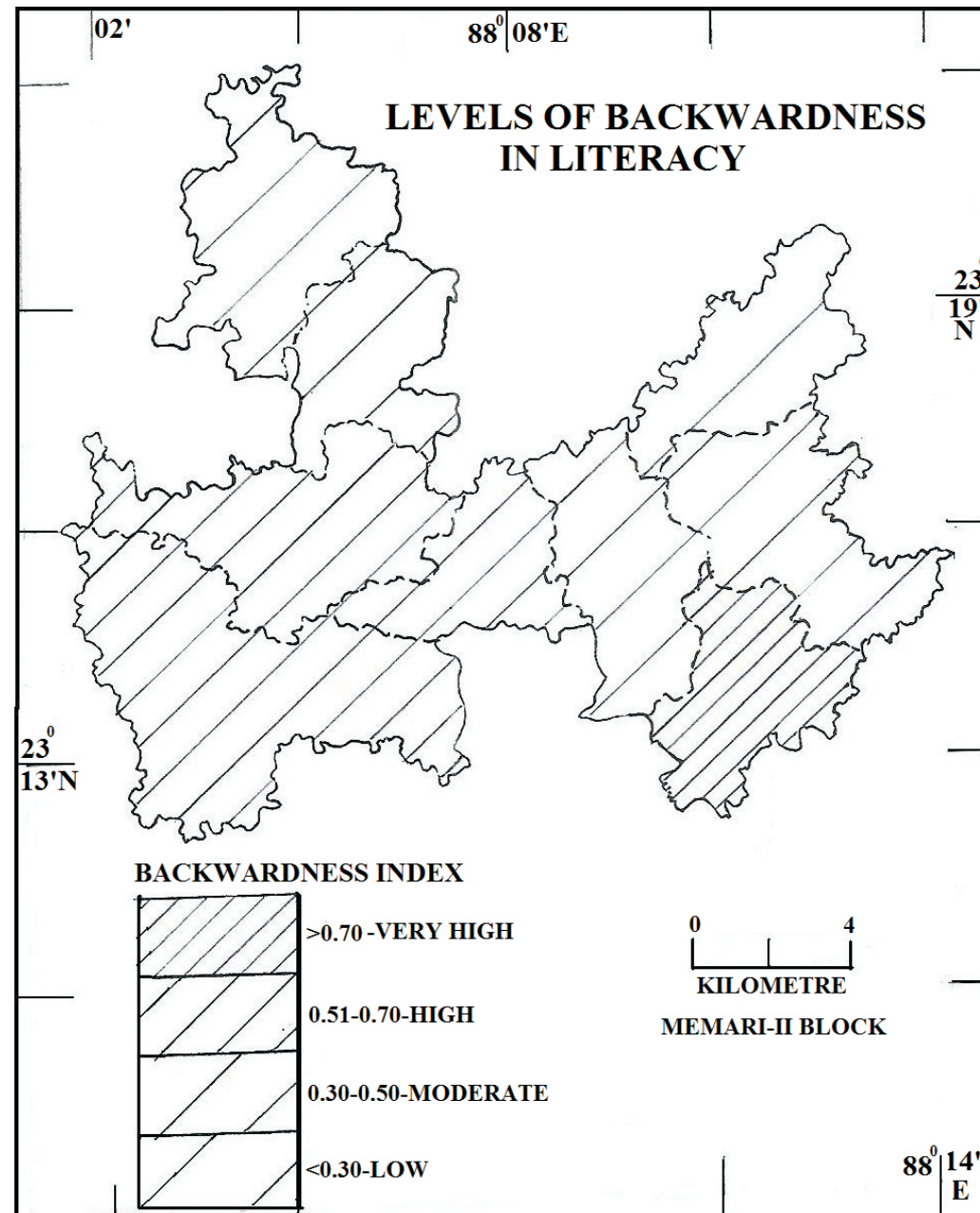


Fig. No. 3: Levels of Backwardness in Literacy in Memari-II Block

CONCLUSION

Among nine Gram-Panchayets of Memari-II Block, Satgachia-II is the most backward Gram-Panchayet and Bohar-II is the least backward Gram-Panchayet in terms of literacy achievement. Five Panchayet areas (>91% of the total Gram-Panchayets) namely Barapalasan-I, Bijur-I&II, Satgachia-II and Kuchut which together hold 58 mouzas out of total 89 mouzas in the block have index value >0.5. Satgachia-II Gram-Panchayet has maximum gender gap in literacy (table) indicating unequal access to literacy between men and women. Bijur-II Gram-Panchayet has not been able to cause even literacy gain within its mouzas. Thus it is quite clear that in spite of so efforts to raise literacy still we are lagging far behind in this 21st century.

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