

## Disparity in Literacy between Rural and Urban Scheduled Castes Population of Assam

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### Abstract

A developing country is characterized not only by literacy rate but also by a great disparity in literacy between rural and urban population, between male and female and between the young and the aged. Literacy is an important indicator of socio-economic, cultural and educational development for a nation, for a society, and for a country. It is the key indicator to measure the overall development, according to which, the quality of life, awareness level and level of skill of the people can be measured in a society. Indian Constitution implemented the right to education to ensure free and compulsory education for the age group 6-14 years. However, in every stratum of the Indian society, disparity in literacy rate is remarkable. This study is conducted to look into the disparity in literacy rate between rural and urban population of Scheduled Castes (SC) of Assam.

Key words: Rural -Urban, Disparity, Scheduled Caste (SC), Literacy Rate

### Introduction

Education is the backbone of the process of socio-economic development of a nation. It plays a vital role in creating dynamic citizens who can contribute meaningfully to nation building. No nation can be on the path of progress and development with an illiterate and uneducated population. Literacy is considered as a crucial indicator of education. It is an important demographic element through which human progress towards development and modernization could be measured. It contributes to every aspect of developmental efforts, such as, population control, health and hygiene, environmental issues, empowerment of weaker sections of the society, etc.

However, both the underdeveloped and the developing countries in the world are characterized by a low literacy rate. Not only that, they are also characterized by a conspicuous disparity in the literacy rates between urban and rural population as well as male and female population. In Indian context, this disparity can also be discerned between castes and

communities. India has made a concerted effort not only to educate the population but also to remove disparity in literacy rates which exists at various levels.

India is a diversified nation consisting of various tribes, castes and communities; and disparity in every front, be it economic, social or literacy exist among them. Even within a tribe or a caste, such disparity exist based on gender, age group, geographical location, etc. Disparity in literacy rate, in particular, is obvious between rural and urban population irrespective of castes and communities. It can be attributed to the rate of changes occurring in urban and rural areas. In the words of Siddiqui Shafiquillah (2011), “Literacy, like other innovations, originates in urban places and diffuses subsequently into the countryside. The process of literacy begins in the town and trickles down to villages” (287). Das and Pathak (2012) observe that in India, literacy rate is much higher in an urban area than in rural areas despite several measures taken by both central and state governments. This contributed to the low development of socio-economic indicators in rural areas (2). This paper is an attempt to study the rural-urban disparity in literacy rates among Scheduled Castes (SC) of Assam.

### **Objective of the Study**

The objective of the present study is to analyse the disparity of literacy between rural and urban population of Scheduled Castes in Assam.

### **Methodology**

This study has been carried out based on secondary data collected from various census reports of Government of India from the year of 1991 to 2011. For measurement of disparity in literacy rate between Rural and Urban population of Scheduled Castes in Assam, the method of Sopher’s Disparity Index (DI) has been used. The formula is as follows:

$$DI = \log\left(\frac{x_2}{x_1}\right) + \log\left(\frac{100-x_1}{100-x_2}\right)$$

where  $DI$  = Disparity Index

$x_1$  = Lower Value

$x_2$  = Higher Value

In case, if the value of Disparity Index is zero (0), it indicates that there is no disparity or there is perfect equality between  $x_1$  and  $x_2$ . However, with the increasing value of  $DI$ , the disparity will also increase.

### **Analysis and Interpretation**

The Scheduled Castes (SC) comprising sixteen castes is one of the major castes of Assam. As per Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes Order Act 1976, the sixteen castes are (1) *Bansphor* (2) *Bhuinmali, Mali* (3) *Brittal Bania, Bania* (4) *Dhupi, Dhobi* (5) *Dugla, Dholi* (6) *Hira* (7) *Jalkeot* (8) *Jhalo Malo*, (9) *Kaibartta, Jalia* (10) *Lalbegi* (11) *Mahara* (12) *Mehtar, Bhangi*. (13) *Muchi, Rishi* (14) *Namasudra* (15) *Patni* (16) *Sutradhar*. According to 2011 Census data, in Assam, out of total population of 31,205,576, 7.15%, that is, 22,31,321 is SC population. Again, among the total SC population, 81.82%, that is 18,25,761 are rural population. A characteristic feature of Scheduled Castes is that they are a deprived class both socially and economically, and their backwardness can be attributed to lack of literacy and education which is the consequence of the fact that majority of them are rural based.

Total Scheduled Caste (SC) population in Assam with the break up as literate and illiterate and total rural and urban SC population with the same break up as literate and illiterate population as per census reports of 1991, 2001 and 2011 are presented below in tabular forms to see the disparity in literacy rates between the rural and urban SC population.

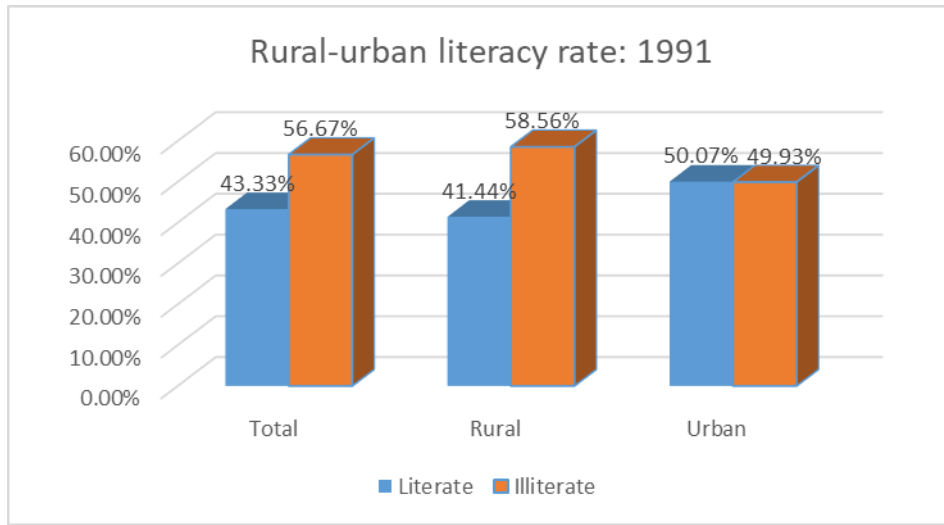
Table No. 1 Total SC Population in Assam with rural/urban divide and the literacy rates in the respective category as per Census 1991

LEVEL	Total SC Population	Literate	Illiterate
Total	16,59,412	7,18,975 (43.33%)	9,40,437 (56.67%)
Rural	14,30,131 (86.18%)	5,92,699 (41.44%)	8,37,432 (58.56%)
Urban	2,29,281 (13.82%)	1,26,276 (50.07%)	1,03,005 (49.93%)

Source: <https://censusindia.gov.in/census.website/data/census-tables#>

The table provides a comparison between literacy rates as per Census 1991 for rural and urban SC Population. The data may be represented graphically with the help of the following bar diagram (Figure No.1) to have a clear picture of the scenario.

Figure No.1



From Table No. 1 and Figure No. 1, it is clear that out of total 16,59,412 SC population, 7,18,975 (43.33%) are literate and 9,40,437 (56.67%) are illiterate. Out of the total SC population, 14,30,131 (86.18%) are rural and 2,29,281 (13.82%) are urban. Among the rural population, literacy rate was 41.44 % percent and 58.56% people were illiterate. In the urban area 50.07% people were found literate and 49.93% people were found illiterate. The gap between literacy rate was of 8.63% in favour of urban population.

Table No. 2 Total SC Population in Assam with rural/urban divide and the literacy rates in the respective category as per Census 2001

LEVEL	Total SC Population	Literate	Illiterate
Total	18,25,949	10,23,999 (56.08%)	8,01,950 (43.92%)
Rural	15,53,691 (85.09%)	8,40,839 (54.1%)	7,12,852 (45.81%)
Urban	2,72,258 (14.91%)	1,83,160 (67.27%)	89,098 (32.73%)

Source: <https://censusindia.gov.in/census.website/data/census-tables#>

The table shows literacy rates as per Census 2001 for rural and urban SC Population. The data may be represented graphically with the help of the following bar diagram (Figure No.2).

Figure No.2

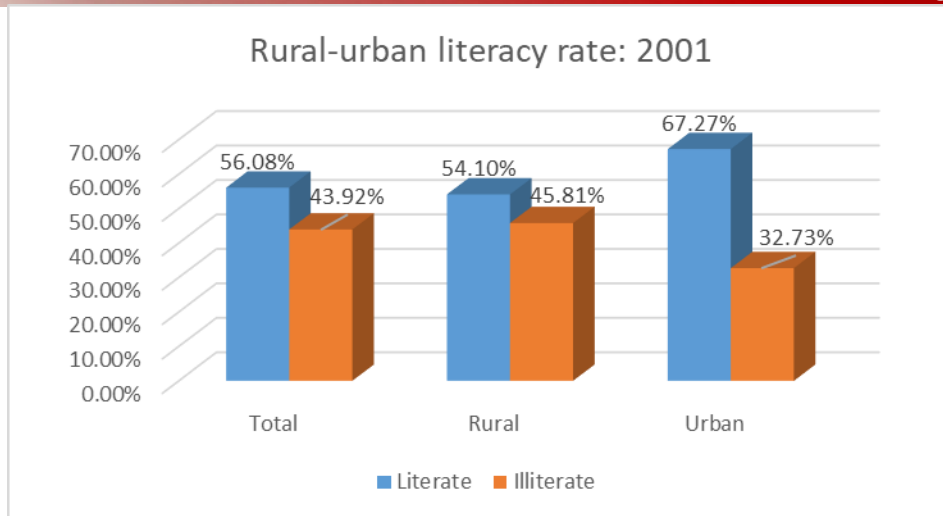


Table No. 2 and Figure No. 2 show that as per 2001 Census, out of total 18,25,949 SC population, 10,23,999 (56.08%) are literate and 8,01,950 (43.92%) are illiterate. Out of the total SC population, 15,53,691 (85.09%) are rural and 2,72,258 (14.91%) are urban. The rural population register a literacy rate of 51.1 % percent and 45.81% people are illiterate. In the urban area 67.27% people are literate and 32.73% people are illiterate. The gap between literacy rate is of 13.17% in favour of urban population.

Table No. 3 Total SC Population in Assam with rural/urban divide and the literacy rates in the respective category as per Census 2011

LEVEL	Total SC Population	Literate	Illiterate
Total	22,31,321	14,89,564 (66.76%)	7,41,757 (33.24%)
Rural	18,25,761(81.82%)	11,89,599 (65.16%)	6,36,162 (34.84%)
Urban	4,05,560 (18.18%)	2,99,965 (73.96%)	1,05,595 (26.04%)

Source: <https://censusindia.gov.in/census.website/data/census-tables#>

The table shows literacy rates as per Census 2011 for rural and urban SC Population and the data are presented graphically in the following bar diagram (Figure No.3) for a better understanding.

Figure No.3

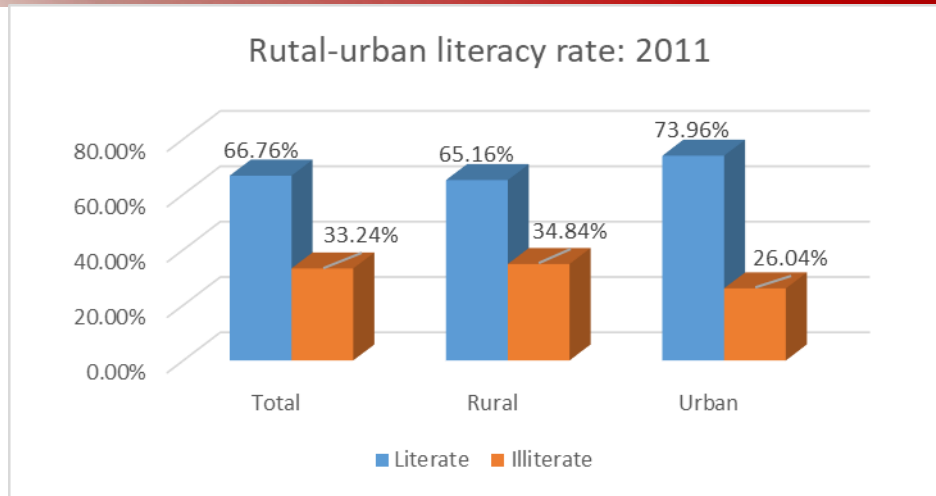


Table No. 3 and Figure No. 3 show that as per 2011 Census, out of total 22,31,321 SC population, 14,89,564, that is, 66.76% are literate and 7,41,757, that is, 33.24% are illiterate. Out of the total SC population, 15,53,691 (85.09%) are rural and 2,72,258 (14.91%) are urban. The rural population register a literacy rate of 51.1% percent and 45.81% people are illiterate, whereas, the urban area register a literacy rate of 67.27% and 32.73% people are illiterate. The gap between literacy rate is of 8.8% in favour of urban population.

From the above analysis, it is clear that there exists disparity in literacy rate between rural and urban Scheduled Caste population of Assam. Now, for the measurement of the disparity in literacy rate and to see whether this disparity is decreasing or increasing in the subsequent Censuses, Sopher's Index is used. The following equation is used to calculate Sopher's Disparity Index (DI):

$$DI = \log\left(\frac{x_2}{x_1}\right) + \log\left(\frac{100-x_1}{100-x_2}\right)$$

where *DI* is Sopher's Disparity Index; *x<sub>1</sub>* is rural literacy rate (lower value); and *x<sub>2</sub>* is urban literacy rate (higher value)

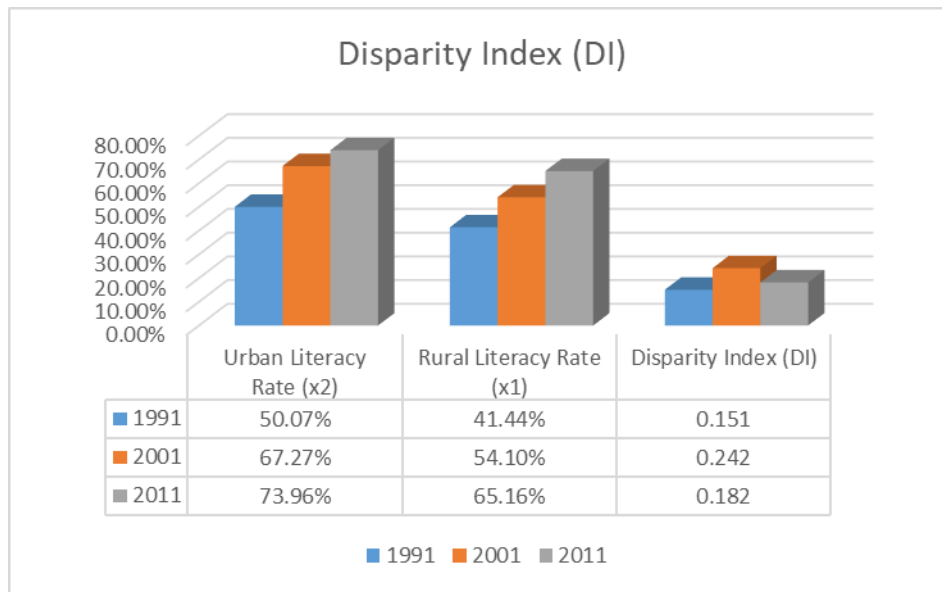
Table: 4 Sopher's Disparity Index (DI) for Literacy Rate

Year	Urban Literacy Rate ( <i>x<sub>2</sub></i> )	Rural Literacy Rate ( <i>x<sub>1</sub></i> )	Disparity Index (DI)
1991	50.07 %	41.44 %	0.151
2001	67.27 %	54.1 %	0.242

2011	73.96 %	65.16 %	0.182
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The data can be represented with the help of the following bar diagram:

Figure: 4 Sopher’s Disparity Index (DI) for Literacy Rate



According to 1991 Census, urban literacy rate is 50.07% and rural literacy rate is 41.44% and the value of Disparity Index (DI) is 0.151. Again, as per 2001 Census, urban literacy rate is 67.27% and rural literacy rate is 54.1% and the value of Disparity Index (DI) is 0.242. According to 2011 Census, urban literacy rate is 73.96% and rural literacy rate is 65.16% and the value of Disparity Index (DI) is 0.182. There is a steady improvement in both rural and urban literacy rates throughout the three Censuses, though urban literacy rate is always higher. However, the disparity in literacy rate between rural and urban SC population has not decreased. It is remarkable to note that this disparity is lowest in 1991 and highest in 2001.

### Major Findings

i) The Scheduled Caste (SC) population in Assam is mainly distributed in the rural areas. According to 1991 Census, 86.18% of the total SC population are located in rural areas. In 2001 Census, the figure is 85.09% and in 2011 Census, it is 81.82%.

ii) According to 1991 Census, 43.33% of the total SC population of Assam are literate. The figure increases to 56.08% and 66.76% during 2001 and 2011 Censuses respectively. The data show a steady increase in the literacy rate of the SC population.

iii) However, there are remarkable variations in the literacy rate between rural and urban SC population of Assam. As per 1991 Census, 41.44% rural SC population are literate whereas 50.07% urban population are literate and the gap between literacy rates is 8.63% in favour of urban population. The data of 2001 Census shows that 54.1% rural SC population are literate whereas 67.27% urban population are literate and the gap between literacy rates is 13.17% in favour of urban population. The data of 2011 Census reveals that 65.16% rural SC population are literate whereas 73.96% urban population are literate and the gap between literacy rates is 8.8% in favour of urban population.

iv) Both rural and urban literacy rate of the SC population of Assam indicates a steady improvement during the three Censuses but the gap between rural and urban literacy rate in terms of percentage shows no improvement. The urban literacy rate is always higher suggesting that disparity exists. For 1991 Census, Disparity Index (DI) in literacy between rural and urban population is 0.151, again for 2001 Census, Disparity Index (DI) is 0.242 and for 2011 Census, Disparity Index (DI) is 0.182. It is remarkable to note that this disparity is lowest in 1991 and highest in 2001.

### **Conclusion**

The overall literacy rate of the Scheduled Caste (SC) population is lower than the state's literacy rate. Low literacy among the SCs can be attributed to factors like poverty, backwardness, lack of motivation, engagement in traditional occupations, etc. Moreover, the rural-urban divide in terms of literacy among SC population of Assam is conspicuous. This disparity is the result of various factors, such as, availability of educational infrastructure and facilities in rural areas. Lack of awareness among SC people living in remote rural areas contributes to this divide. Poverty compels the families to send their children to work instead of schools. The long history of socio-economic oppression has contributed to a lack of motivation for higher education.

Since Independence, both the central and state governments are making efforts to promote literacy and to reduce the disparity in literacy between rural and urban population of Assam by introducing schemes like free education, scholarships, educational loans, etc. without achieving any satisfactory results. To reduce disparity in literacy between rural and urban SC population of Assam effective governance is necessary. Not only the government but also every conscious citizen needs to accept the eradication of inequality as a personal goal. The facilities should be evenly distributed in rural and urban educational institutions for all castes. The government should

also focus on adequate infrastructure and socio-economic needs to be fulfilled through which rural-urban disparity in literacy can be reduced or can be abolished.

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