



Levels of Gender Disparity of Literacy in the district of Malda, West Bengal: A Geospatial Analysis

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Abstract

Gender disparity in literacy is one of the basic problems of the Indian society. Though the overall literacy rate is gradually increasing, the female literacy rate still lags behind the male literacy rate throughout the country. This disparity in literacy hampers the all round development of the society. Malda as a district with low literacy records high gender disparity in literacy. According to 2011 census, out of nineteen districts of West Bengal Malda occupies the second last position in terms of literacy rate. The lower literacy and high gender disparity in literacy are obstructing the societal development of the district. Moreover, spatial variation in gender disparity is a serious and contentious issue in the process of development of the district. The present research work aims at highlighting the trends and regional variations of gender disparity in literacy in Malda district. The study reveals that the male literacy rate is substantially higher than the female literacy rate in every block. This disparity also exists by residence (rural-urban) in the district. The work is mainly based on secondary sources of data which have been collected primarily from Census of India, District Statistical Handbook etc. Tabulated data have been synthesized and analyzed using MS Excel-2007, ArcGIS (version 10.3) to draw the suitable maps and diagrams.

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Introduction

In India, due to prejudice against women, socially, economically, culturally and politically women are not considered at par with men and as a result of it, they are lagging far behind men in almost every sphere of life (Kumar, Kumar & Rani, 2016). Literacy is the strong instruments which give empower to women against social inequality and injustice. The central and state government has taken many initiatives for the women empowerment in general and to eradicate gender disparity in literacy in particular. The National Policy on education, 1986 (NPE, 1986) put special emphasis on removing disparities and to offer educational opportunity by providing the specific requirements of those who for long years have been denied equality. It was also to remove of women's illiteracy as well as obstacles created in the way of their access to, and also retention in, elementary level of education was to receive overriding priority, routed through provisions of some special support services, making it time-bound, and also effective monitoring. The primary

emphasis was laid on women's involvement in vocational, technical and skill-based education at different levels (MHRD, 1986). The NPE, 1986 has paid special attention to educationally deprived communities in the interest of social justice and equality. The Government of India went ahead with the 'Saakshar Bharat Mission (SBM)', a new map of the National Literacy Mission on eve of International Literacy day so that complete literacy can be achieved (Day, 8 September 2009). "This plan covered 365 districts in 26 states and UTs, all of which had adult female literacy rates less than 50 percent as per the census of 2001. The primary center of attention of the mission was on women and its intention was to cover a total of 70 million adults for 15 years and above age. The scheme intended to reduce gender and other disparities by providing fundamental education in the country (Kumar, Kumar and Rani, 2016). Despite the implementation of a number of such initiatives, there still remains a huge disparity between in male and female literacy rates. The study area i.e. Malda district as such suffers from high gender



disparity in literacy in the state.

The Study Area

Malda district has been selected as the study area which is the southernmost district of North Bengal. At present, it is under Jalpaiguri Division which is created on 4th March in 1963. Before it, the district was under Presidency Division (Census, 1961). The district occupies the second rank in terms of growth rate of population in the state with 21.24% which is much higher than the state average of 13.84%. It is located between the latitudes of 24° 40' 20" N to 25° 32' 08" N and the longitudes of 87° 45' 50" E to 88° 28' 10" E. The southern part of the district is surrounded by Murshidabad district across Ganga River, the east and the north-eastern part by Bangladesh and South Dinajpur, northern part by North Dinajpur District and the western part by the state of Bihar and Jharkhand (GoWB, 2007).

As per 2011 Census report, Malda district covers an area of 3733 sq. km which shares 4.2% of the total area of the state of West Bengal. The district consists of two sub-divisions and fifteen C.D. blocks. Under the Malda Sadar sub-division, there are nine C.D. blocks viz. English Bazar, Manikchak, Kaliachak-I, Kaliachak-II, Kaliachak-III, Gazole, Old Malda, Habibpur, Bamongola whereas Chanchal sub-division composed of six C.D. blocks viz. Ratua-I, and Ratua-II, Chanchal-I, Chanchal-II, Harishchandrapur-I, Harishchandrapur-II, and It is the home and permanently resting ground of 3988845 persons which shares 4.37% of the total population in the state in which only 13.58% urban population while 86.42% resides in the countryside. The sex ratio is 944 and the literacy rate is 61.73% wherein the male and female literacy is 66.24% and 56.96% respectively (Census of India, 2011).

Objectives

The following are the specific objectives of the present study:

- 1) To examine the trend of the extent of gender disparity in literacy in Malda district.
- 2) To examine the spatial variations of gender disparity.
- 3) To propose a few strategies for the eradication of gender disparity in literacy in the district.

Rationale of the Present Study

The present study investigates the gender disparity in literacy of Malda district of West Bengal. It is necessary to measure the gender disparity at the micro level to understand the real picture of the women empowerment and to formulate the proper plan to eliminate gender disparity by the block level administration. The study is unique in the sense that it measures the trend of the gender disparity of the district since 1951 as well as the C.D. block has been considered as the smallest unit of the study. So, the findings of the study may be fruitful to formulate and implement the proper strategies to remove the gender disparity at the block level.

Materials and Methods

The present work is mainly based on the secondary sources of data which have been collected from the District Census

Handbook, District Statistical Handbook and from the website of Census of India. Some books and journals have been reviewed to complete the work. To measure the extent of gender disparity in literacy, the male-female literacy data of the district have taken into consideration while to examine the spatial variations of gender disparity C.D. block has been considered as the unit of analysis. The collected data has been tabulated and analyzed by suitable maps and diagrams to draw the proper inferences. Different software like MS Excel-2007, ArcGIS (version 10.3) has been used to draw suitable maps and diagrams. The literacy has been calculated according to the definition of Census of India, 2011. According to the Census definition (2011), following is the formula of the calculation of literacy rate:

$$Lr = \frac{L}{P} \times 100\%$$

where, L_r = literacy rate, L = No. of literates aged 7 years and above and P = total population excluding 0-6 year population.

The gender disparity in literacy is measured by adopting the Sopher's Disparity Index (1974) as modified by Kundu and Rao (1983):

Sopher's Disparity Index =

$$D_i = \log(X_2/X_1) + \log\{(100 - X_1)/(100 - X_2)\}$$

Kundu and Rao's Disparity Index =

$$D_i = \log(X_2/X_1) + \log\{(200 - X_1)/(200 - X_2)\}$$

Where, D_i = Disparity Index, X_2 = Male, X_1 = Female and $X_{2,2}$ X_1

Results and Discussion

Trends of Gender Disparity in Literacy Rate

Malda district is one of the marginalized districts in terms of literacy rate in West Bengal. The district occupies 18th position in literacy rate among 19 districts of the state. The literacy rate of the district is always far behind the state average since 1951. According to the 2011 census, the literacy rate of the district is 61.73% which is quite behind the state average of 74.04%. The female literacy rate of the district is always a worse situation. The female literacy rate has crossed the 50.00% marks for the first time in 2011. Hence the district is characterized by low literacy rate and the high gender gap in literacy. Figure 1 presents the trends of the gender gap in literacy of the district since 1951. In 1951, the total literacy rate was 11.68% while the corresponding figure for the males and females were 18.10 and 5.00%. Therefore, the gender gap was absolutely high. With the passage of time the total literacy rate of the district is gradually increasing but unfortunately, the gender gap is increasing till 1991. In 1991, the gender gap was stood at 20.68% which is declined by only 3.13% points and reached 17.55% in the 2001 census. But 2011 census shows that this gap suddenly narrowed down to 9.28% which is the positive sign for the development of the society of the district.

Rural-Urban Differentials by Gender Gap (1951-2011)

The gender disparity exists by residence also. Figure 2 provides the vivid scenario of the differential literacy rate and the gender gap in literacy by rural and urban area. Due to the



different and underdeveloped socio-economic conditions in the rural area, the literacy rate is always far behind to that of the urban area of the district but the gender gap is quite high in both cases up to 1991. In 1951 and 1961, the gender gap is high in an urban area as compared to that of rural counterparts. After 1961, this gap started to reduce in an urban area and become low in 2011 while this gap for rural area is still high. Fortunately, with increasing literacy rate along with developed socio-economic condition, the gender gap in literacy is gradually declining in both rural and urban area. Our society is absolutely patriarchy in nature. That is why females are always deprived of all spheres of life.

Spatial Variations of Gender Disparity in Literacy

The gender disparity in literacy is not uniform throughout the district. This disparity varies from one region to another. The block level analysis reveals that the disparity index value ranged between 0.047 to 0.168 which is recorded in Ratua-II and Habibpur block respectively. On the basis of regional variations, the district has been divided into three regions i.e. areas of high, moderate and low gender disparity (Fig. 3):

Areas of Low Gender Disparity ($Di \leq 0.090$): As per 2011 census, seven blocks out of fifteen have shown low gender disparity in literacy. The disparity index value varied between 0.047 to 0.087. The seven blocks belong to this group are Ratua-II (0.047), Chanchal-II (0.056), Kaliachak-I (0.058), Harishchandrapur-II (0.066), Chanchal-I (0.075), English Bazar (0.081) and Ratua-I (0.087). Except for Harishchandrapur-I, entire Tal region of the district has shown low gender disparity which is the positive sign for the district. It should be mentioned that all the blocks except Chanchal-I have recorded low literacy rate as compared to district average of 61.73 %.

Areas of Moderate Gender Disparity ($Di: 0.091 - 0.130$): Only three blocks namely Kaliachak-II (0.096), Harishchandrapur-I (0.115) and Old Malda (0.121) block lie in this zone. It is very interesting fact that one block from each physiographic division i.e. Tal, Barind and Diara of the district belongs to this zone.

Areas of High Gender Disparity ($Di \geq 0.131$): The high gender disparity is observed in five blocks such as Kaliachak-III, Gazole, Manikchak, Bamangola and Habibpur ranging the index value from 0.131 to 0.168. In spite of having the high literacy rate entire Barind region of the district except Old Malda has displayed high gender disparity in literacy. From the above discussion regarding gender disparity in literacy the followings are the findings:

- 1) The gender disparity in literacy of the district is high and fluctuating since 1951. The gender gap was increasing till the census of 1991 and started to decline since 2001 and reached 9.28 % in 2011 from 13.28 in 1951.
- 2) There is a difference in gender gap by residence in which up to 1961 in a rural area this gap was low than that of an urban area but after 1961 this gap was gradually narrowed down and become low in an urban area while in a rural

area this gap is still high. It is mainly due to the difference in educational level, socio-economic development, nature of jobs, educational facilities and cultural differences between rural and urban area.

- 3) The blocks having greater concentration of either Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) or both categories of population are showing larger gender disparity (Annexure-I). On the other hand, the Muslim concentrated blocks show low gender disparity. It is mainly due to the lower gender disparity in literacy among the Muslim community than the others in the district (Annexure-II).

Government Initiatives to Eliminate Gender Disparity in Literacy

“Universalization of Elementary Education (UEE) has been accepted as a national goal in India. Central and state governments are making strenuous efforts to achieve this goal (GOI).” There are several legal, constitutional and national statements for the Universalization of Elementary Education. Some of them are as follows:

- a) **Constitutional mandate, 1950:** “The State shall endeavor to provide, within a period of ten years from the commencement of this Constitution, for free and compulsory education to all children until they complete the age of 14 years.”
- b) **National Policy of Education, 1986:** “It shall be ensured that free and compulsory education of satisfactory quality is provided to all children up to 14 years of age before we enter the twenty-first century”.
- c) **Unnikrishnan Judgement, 1993:** “Every child/citizen of this country has a right to free education until he completes the age of fourteen years.”
- d) **The Article 21-A and RTE-2009:** “Right of children to free and compulsory education till completion of elementary education in a neighborhood school” (GOI, 2010).

In spite of the above mandates, there is a wide gender gap in literacy and moreover, about thirty crore population till now completely illiterate. In order to remove gender disparity and illiteracy and to achieve the Universalization of Elementary Education, the central government along with the concerned state government has taken a number of initiatives in different periods such as:

- a. **Mudaliar Commission (1952-53)** is constituted for the improvement of the existing education system in the country.
- b. **Kothari Commission (1964-66)** recommended a number of suggestions towards equalization of educational opportunities and to remove the regional disparity in literacy, it emphasized on girls education along with the education of SC, and ST and other deprived communities (MOE, 1966).
- c. **National Policy on Education, 1986** was to provide equal educational opportunities to all, education for women's equality, women's access to vocational, technical and professional education, to promote quality education among all (MHRD, 1992).



- d. **National Literacy Mission, 1988** was launched on 5th May 1988 to impart functional literacy to non-literates and aims at achieving of 75 % literacy rate by 2007. The Total Literacy Rate Campaign (TLC) was the main strategy of NLM for the eradication of adult illiteracy (MHRD, 1992).
- e. **District Primary Education Programme, 1994** was launched to revitalize the primary education system and to achieve Universalization of Elementary Education
- f. **Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, 2001** aimed at bridging up all gender and social gaps and to provide quality and useful and relevant education for satisfactory life for all children in the age group of 6-14 years.
- g. **National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Education, 2003** is to promote the girls to access education and to improve the quality of girls' education and women empowerment. It is an integral component of SSA which provides additional support to enhance girl's education (MHRD, 2003).
- h. **Right to Education Act, 2009** passed to facilitate making provision for free and compulsory education of all children in the age group of six to fourteen years as a Fundamental Right. That means every child is entitled to full-time elementary education of satisfactory and equitable quality in a formal education system which satisfies certain essential norms and standards (MHRD, 2010).
- i. **Mid-Day Meal Scheme, 1995** is again a Centrally Sponsored Scheme, launched on 15 August 1995 keeping a view to enhancing enrolment, retention, and attendance and simultaneously improving nutritional levels among children.
- j. **Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya, 2004** was launched in August 2004 by the Government of India for setting up residential schools in Educationally Backward Blocks (EBBs) where rural female literacy (RFL) is below the national average and the gender gap in literacy is above the national average. The main objectives of this scheme are to ensure quality education for the girls predominantly belong to the socially disadvantaged groups like SC, ST, and Minorities and eliminate rural-urban and gender disparity in literacy.
- k. **Rashtriya Madhyamik Siksha Abhiyan (RMSA, 2009)** was launched with the main objective to enhance access to secondary education and to improve its quality along with the removal of gender disparity by universal access to secondary education.
- l. **Rashtriya Uchchar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA, 2013)** aims at improving the quality of state's higher educational institutions along with fulfilling the important objectives of this scheme is remove regional disparities in access to higher education by setting up new higher education institutions in unserved & underserved areas and to provide equal opportunities in access to higher education to the educationally and socially marginalized classes along with SC and ST communities and promote inclusion of minorities, women and differently able persons.
- m. **Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao (BBBP)** is to celebrate girl child and enable her proper education. The objectives of this scheme are to ensure survival and protection of the girl

child, to prevent gender-biased sex-selective elimination and to ensure education and participation in all spheres of life of the girl child (MWCD, 2018).

- n. **Samagra Shiksha:** The newly launched scheme by the Government of India is Integrated Scheme of School Education popularly known as Samagra Shiksha which will be effective from the year 2018-19. It subsumes the three popularly education schemes of SSA, RMSA, and TEIs (GOI, 2018).

The Sustainable Development Goal for Education (**SDG**)-4.1 states that "By 2030, ensure that all boys and girls complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes. Whereas the SDG 4.5 states that "By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations"

The major objectives of the Scheme are "provision of quality education and enhancing learning outcomes of students; Bridging Social and Gender Gaps in School Education; Ensuring equity and inclusion at all levels of school education; Ensuring minimum standards in schooling provisions; Promoting Vocationalisation of education; Support States in implementation of Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009; and Strengthening and up-gradation of SCERTs/State Institutes of Education and DIET as a nodal agencies for teacher training" (GOI, 2018-19, <http://samagra.mhrd.gov.in/about.html>).

Initiatives by the Government of West Bengal

The West Bengal Government has taken several initiatives for the women empowerment and to remove all type of social and gender disparity especially in literacy and employment. Some of them are as follows:

- a) **Kanyashree Prakalpa** is a Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) Scheme that provides incentivizes to the schooling of all teenage girls in the age group of thirteen and eighteen, at the same time dis-incentivizing child marriage. The Scheme goes much beyond financial enablement - it not only builds awareness of the scheme but also includes adolescent-friendly approaches events, competitions, and Kanyashree clubs. The endorsement of strong women figures as role models to promote helps empowerment. The scheme has been praised world-wide (DWCDSW, 2013).
- b) **Shishu Aloy: Quality Early Childhood Care and Education Centres for All:** The National Policy on Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) emphasizes early investment; it ensures early development most rapidly in the early years of life. It is evident that children who received assistance during their early years can achieve better success at school. Even during their adulthood their employment and earnings are better, better health, and lower levels of welfare dependency and crime rates less than those who did not receive early opportunities.

"Early Childhood Care and Education programme in West Bengal has been cited as the most cost-effective equalizer to break the vicious cycle of inequity through evidence-based interventions are provided for all children and families, especially the most marginalized" (MWCD, 2012).

Besides the above-mentioned schemes, the government of



West Bengal is providing financial assistance in the name of 'Shikshashree', 'Rupashree' not only for financial enablement of women but also for the endorsement of strong women figures as role models to promote psychological and social empowerment. The government also distribute Bicycle free of cost to the students of class nine to twelve for the encouragement of education and literacy among all.

Conclusions and Recommendations

It has been seen that despite the implementation of several schemes and programmes by the Central and state Government since independence for the eradication gender disparity, the country and the study area i.e. Malda district as well are characterized by high gender disparity in literacy. Following measures are recommended for the eradication of all types of social gaps and gender disparities:

- a) Universalizing the elementary education by setting up new girls' schools, providing proper school facilities particularly in the minority-dominated areas where education has not penetrated till the remotest corner.
- b) Ensuring free nutritious food to the children up to completion of elementary education. The allocation of fund for MDMS is no way sufficient to cater to the need of nutrition of the growing up children.
- c) Providing an adequate number of school dresses, shoes and books and other study material at free of cost till to the completion of secondary education to students coming from poor families.
- d) Opening the new schools in the rural and marginalized areas which are underserved by the educational institutes so that children can easily reach to the schools. Special attention required to be given to River Island and river bank erosion-affected areas where drop-out rate is very high.
- e) Regular appointment of well-qualified teachers with adequate female teachers in the school will increase the retention rate of particularly girls.
- f) Removing loopholes in the implementation of RTE Act, 2009 which provide free and compulsory education to the children aged 6-14 years.
- g) Providing monthly scholarship for the higher education to the girl children who are belonging to the BPL families.
- h) Providing girls hostel at free of cost to girls belonging to poor families attached to each higher education institute.
- i) Revamping the adult education and continuing education for illiterate and mere literate parents so that they can understand the value of education and encouraged to send their wards to the institution.

Besides these, every educated people should take some accountability for the expansion of women education to remove gender disparity at the grass root level.

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Annexure-I: Malda District: Block-wise gender Disparity Index, 2011

SL No.	Name of the Block	%age Share of Population to Total Population of the District			Disparity Index
		Muslim	SC	ST	
1	Harishchandrapur-I	59.41	24.60	2.08	0.115
2	Harishchandrapur-II	73.65	12.85	2.88	0.066
3	Chanchal-I	71.22	13.37	0.42	0.075
4	Chanchal-II	71.25	8.33	6.71	0.056
5	Ratua-I	66.88	11.09	8.52	0.087
6	Ratua-II	78.71	6.37	0.97	0.047
7	Manikchak	43.88	27.73	14.87	0.141
8	English Bazar	51.49	17.31	1.89	0.081
9	Old Malda	28.60	32.16	15.05	0.121
10	Habibpur	1.28	50.02	29.11	0.168
11	Bamangola	8.87	49.46	20.15	0.149
12	Gazole	23.60	37.36	19.94	0.138
13	Kaliachak-I	89.29	3.83	0.39	0.058
14	Kaliachak-II	65.98	15.56	2.29	0.096
15	Kaliachak-III	50.72	29.44	7.05	0.131
	Malda District	51.27	20.94	7.87	0.095

Source: Computed by authors based on Primary Census Abstract, 2011

Annexure-II: Block-wise Comparison of Gender Gap in Literacy of Total, Muslim, SC and ST Population, 2011

Sl. No.	C.D. Block	Gender Disparity in Literacy			
		Total	Muslim	Schedule Caste	Schedule Caste
1	Harishchandrapur-I	10.16	5.78	17.88	16.56
2	Harishchandrapur-II	5.98	2.09	16.68	21.37
3	Chanchal-I	7.54	5.58	15.93	22.32
4	Chanchal-II	5.31	0.38	16.72	21.75
5	Ratua-I	8.36	3.92	18.87	20.25
6	Ratua-II	4.33	1.50	16.39	19.95
7	Manikchak	13.29	9.13	16.41	18.61
8	English Bazar	8.08	4.51	13.09	9.81
9	Old Malda	11.59	-0.03	16.63	17.31
10	Habibpur	15.95	10.22	16.27	17.18
11	Bamangola	15.32	4.49	15.80	18.16
12	Gazole	13.66	5.38	16.71	16.92
13	Kaliachak-I	5.88	5.29	12.28	9.66
14	Kaliachak-II	9.67	6.81	17.64	19.44
15	Kaliachak-III	11.84	8.04	14.98	17.41
	Malda District	9.28	4.59	16.20	18.14

Source: Computed by authors based on Primary Census Abstract, 2011

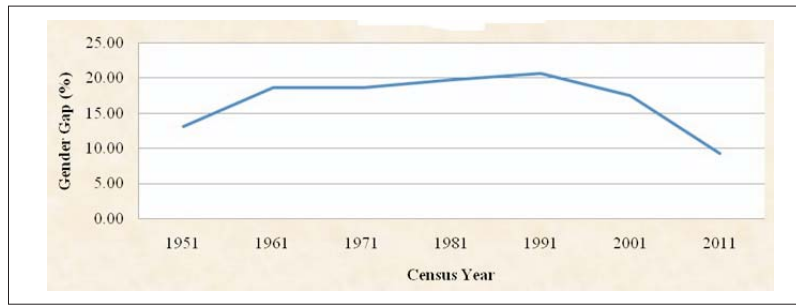


Fig. 1. Trends of the gender gap in literacy rate since 1951

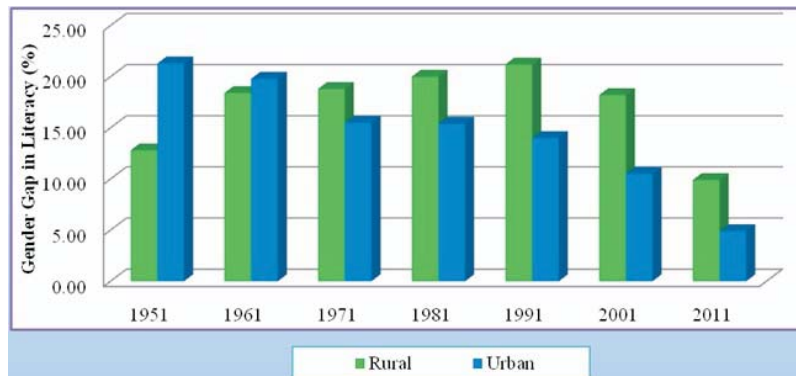


Fig. 2. Gender gap in literacy by residence during 1951-2011

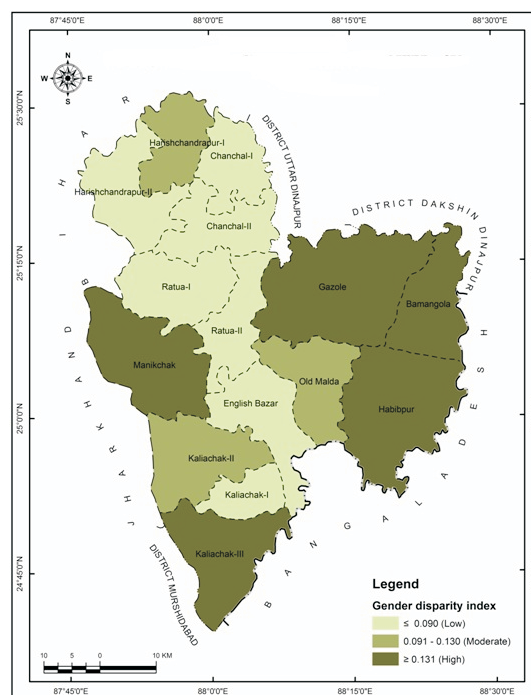


Fig. 3. Regional variations in gender disparity in literacy



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