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Study of Disparity in Urban-Rural Literacy in West Bengal, India: A District-Level Analysis

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Abstract:
Educational attainment is the most important step for enhancing quality of life, raising awareness, and developing skills within society. Higher literacy and education levels positively influence different sectors of development. The present study attempts to analyze the pattern of urban rural literacy and its differentials in the districts of West Bengal, India. The temporal trend of literacy, considered from 1971- 2011 shows gradual increasing rate of urban and rural literacy and narrowing down of the differential. The study also investigates the spatial pattern of urban rural literacy along with its differential at district level. It has been observed that differential index of urban rural literacy is higher in the northern and western districts and comparatively lower in the southern districts nearer to Kolkata metropolis. Sixteen independent variables have been selected and correlation with differential index has been determined. Out of sixteen variables six are significant at 99% level of confidence in their relationship with urban rural differential index, whereas, two variables are significantly correlated at 95% level of confidence.

Key words: Rural Literacy, Urban Literacy, Literacy Differential Index, Correlation analysis

1.Introduction

Literacy plays a critical role in various aspects of individual and societal development. Literacy is fundamental to personal and societal growth across academic, social, economic, cultural, and environmental dimensions. It enables individuals to read, write, and comprehend information, which is essential for academic success (UNESCO,2016). Literate individuals can access the wealth of information through books, articles, and digital media, enhancing their learning and academic performance. Literacy encourages critical thinking and problem-solving skills, which are crucial for academic progress and innovation (National Research Council,2012). Literacy empowers individuals by giving them the tools to understand their rights and responsibilities, leading to greater participation in societal activities. Attainment of education enhances communication skills, enabling individuals to express themselves effectively and engage in meaningful conversations. Literacy promotes social inclusion by reducing inequalities and enabling marginalized groups to access opportunities and resources (World Bank,2018). Literacy opens up a wider range of job opportunities and improves employability, leading to better income and economic stability. Literacy provides the skills necessary for entrepreneurship, enabling individuals to start and manage businesses effectively (UNESCO,2017). Literate individuals can engage in cultural exchange, learning about and appreciating different cultures, which fosters mutual respect and understanding (OECD,2013). Literacy enhances creative expression through writing, storytelling, and the arts, contributing to a rich and diverse cultural landscape. Literate individuals can make informed decisions about their environmental practices, contributing to sustainability. Literacy empowers individuals to advocate for environmental protection and engage in actions that promote conservation and sustainability (World Bank 2018). Moreover, literacy and education are crucial for individuals to attain freedom in both their personal and social roles (Dreze, J., & Sen, A. (1999).

According to the Indian census of 2011, a literate person is someone aged more than six years who can read and write with understanding in any language. Those who can only read but cannot write are considered illiterate. Prior to 1991, all children under the age of five were automatically classified as illiterate. UNESCO has been working to expand the concept of literacy for all since 1946 believing it as a part of right to education and gateway of empowerment. Since its founding, UNESCO has broadened the definition of literacy beyond traditional reading and writing to encompass a wider array of skills, including digital literacy, media literacy, education for sustainable development, global citizenship, and job-specific abilities. Developing countries like India not only have low literacy rates but also experience significant inequalities between male and female literacy, young and adult literacy, rural and urban literacy, caste wise and regional literacy rates. Urban -rural disparity in literacy rate is one of the key aspects of literacy differential in India. This gap is too widespread to affect male and female literacy rates, and manifests in varying degrees across all areas of social life. As per census 2011 total literacy rate in India is 72.98% where sharing of rural and urban literacy is 67.76% and 84.1% respectively. The disparity in urban-rural literacy rates stems from the significant differences in the socio-economic conditions of urban and rural areas in India. The rural economy, primarily based on agriculture, does not adequately support formal education and skill development. In contrast, the urban economy, which relies heavily on the secondary and tertiary sectors, demands a minimum level of literacy.

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Several research works have been done on inequality of literacy pattern and educational attainment. Zhang (2006) measured urban-rural inequality in primary schools of Sub-Saharan African countries. Variation in the availability of educational facilities between urban and rural areas has also been considered (D'Souza VS 1982, Jhariya, G. P. & Jain, C. K. 2014). Economic stagnation in rural India, prevalence of poverty, caste based segregation, continuous rural to urban migration have been considered as important factor of urban rural disparities in literacy (Shafiqullah, S. 2011, Som et.al, 2014, Shahid Imam, 2021, Desai & Kulkarni, 2008). Distance between school and home, availability of free meal at school, low or free cost of education have been considered as significant factors of disparity of urban rural literacy pattern (Becker 2009, Afridi,2011, Agrawal,2014). Poverty has been considered as major factor of high dropout among scheduled tribe women in the north-eastern states of India (Mitra & Singh, 2008). Parental education, rate of employment, village and school infrastructure are said to be responsible for lower dropout of girl students (Drèze & Kingdon, 2001; Dostie & Jayaraman,2006). Regional disparity of literacy based on urban and rural scenario have been investigated in Indian context (Imam, S, 2021; Shafiqullah, S, 2011, Jharia & Jain, 2014). Composite differential of literacy pattern of West Bengal has been investigated considering inequality of gender, caste segregation and urban rural difference (Chattoraj, K, & Chand, S, 2015). Per Capita Net State Domestic Product, teacher student ratio, percentage of married female, male and female labour force participation rate, total fertility rate, state-level social sector expenditure have been recognized as key factors to determine quality of urban rural educational attainment across Indian states (Das, S,2023).
In this context, the present study aims to examine the pattern of urban-rural literacy disparities in West Bengal, identify the impact of socio-economic factors contributing to these disparities, to provide policy recommendations to reduce these differences across the districts of the state.

2. Study Area

West Bengal is a state of Eastern India bearing the cultural heritage since historical age. West Bengal is the thirteenth largest state in India. It stretches from Himalaya in the north to Bay of Bengal in the south and lies between $21^0$25′N to $27^0$13′N and $85^0$50′E to $89^0$50′E. The state shares international border with Bangladesh to the east and Nepal and Bhutan to the north. As per the 2011 Census, West Bengal had a population of approximately 91 million, making it the fourth most populous state in India. West Bengal is one of the most densely populated states in India, with a population density of around 1,029 people per square kilometer. The state has a diverse demographic profile, including a mix of ethnic groups and communities. The sex ratio in West Bengal is relatively balanced, with approximately 947females for every 1,000 males according to 2011 census. A significant portion of the population is young, with a large number of individuals under the age of 35 which provides a demographic dividend for the state's workforce. West Bengal boasts a high literacy rate of about 76.26%, higher than the national average. The male literacy rate is around 81.69%, while the female literacy rate is approximately 70.54% as per 2011 census. Urban literacy rate and rural literacy rate in the state is 84.78% and 72.13% respectively and both are higher than the national average in 2011. The state has an extensive network of primary and secondary schools, ensuring basic education for a large portion of the population. The government has implemented various programs to improve enrollment rates and reduce dropout rates. West Bengal is home to several prestigious institutions of higher learning, including the University of Calcutta, Jadavpur University, and the Indian Statistical Institute. These institutions attract students from across the country and around the world. The state has numerous technical institutes and polytechnics offering courses in engineering, technology, and vocational skills. Institutions like the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Kharagpur are renowned for their excellence in technical education. Despite significant progress, challenges remain in terms of educational infrastructure, teacher-student ratios, and ensuring quality education in rural and remote areas. Various state and central government schemes have been initiated to improve the quality of education. Despite significant progress, challenges remain in terms of educational infrastructure, teacher-student ratios, problem of dropout, prevalence of gender wise, caste wise and region wise disparity of literacy rate. Focusing this disparity the present study emphasizes on analyzing pattern of inequality of urban rural literacy.

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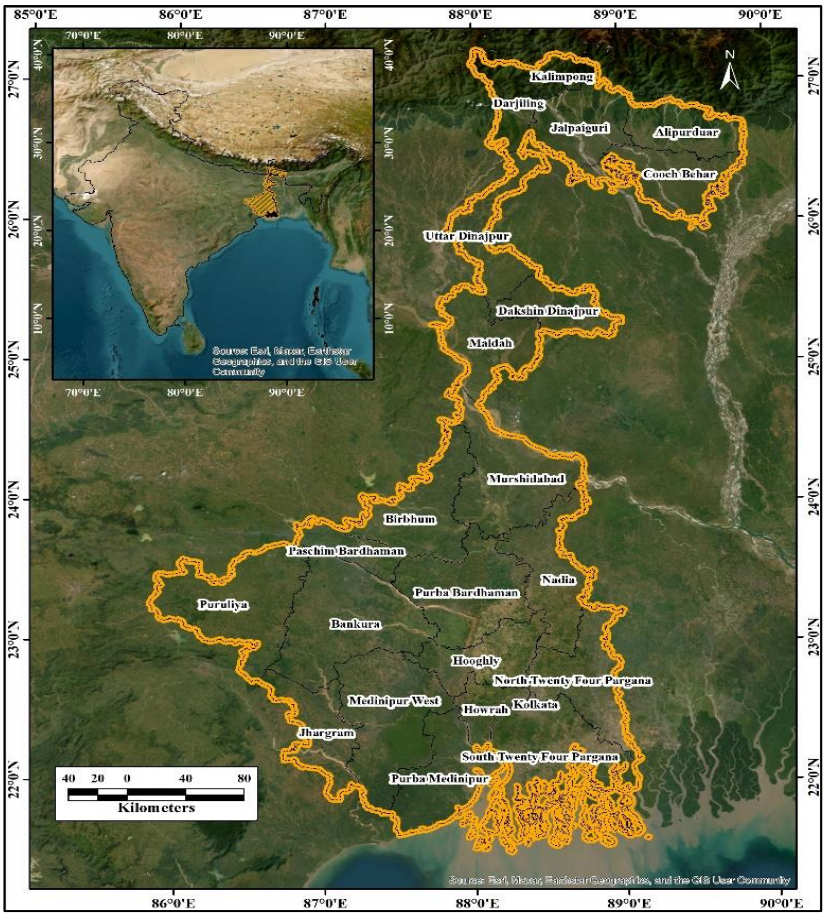

Fig 1: The Study Area

3. Database and Methodology

3.1 Database

The study is based on secondary data. Most of the data related to total literacy, male and female literacy, rural and urban literacy, scheduled caste and scheduled tribe population, urban population, male and female working population at district, state and national level have been collected from Indian census reports of 1971, 1981, 1991, 2001, 2011, Census of India, Ministry of Home Affairs, Govt. of India. District wise sex ratio has been taken from survey of West Bengal State Rural Livelihood Mission, Panchayats & Rural Development Department, Govt. of West Bengal. District level report on total fertility rate has been collected from report of Centre for Development Studies, Thiruvananthapuram, India. Multidimensional Poverty Index data have been collected from National Multidimensional Poverty Index Baseline Report, NITI Aayog, Based on NFHS-4. Road density data have been obtained from Economic Review (2011-12), Department of Planning and Statistics, Govt. of West Bengal. Number of primary school data have been sourced from data provided by West Bengal Board of Primary Education, Govt. of West Bengal. Data on number of electrified households has been collected from report of Department of Power, Govt. of West Bengal.

3.2 Methodology

In the present study district has been considered as the base unit of analysis. To assess regional differences in literacy rates, the Urban-Rural Differential Index has been calculated according to the method proposed by Krishna & Shyam (1978).

$$ID = \frac{U-R}{T}$$

Where, ID = Index of urban-rural differential in literacy rate, U = Literate urban population in percentage, R = Literate rural population in percentage, T = Total literate population in percentage. Sixteen parameters influencing urban rural disparity have been selected namely total literacy rate, male literacy rate, female literacy rate, rural literacy rate, urban literacy rate, scheduled caste and scheduled tribe literacy rate, percentage of urban population, percentage of male and female worker, total fertility rate, sex ratio, number of primary schools, road density, percentage of household not having electricity, multiple poverty index. All data have been collected at district level and calculated by the author as required. To get the bivariate correlation between the mentioned independent variables and urban rural differential index as the dependent variable, Karl Pearson's Coefficient of correlation method has been adopted. The level of significance of the

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independent variables has also been tested at 0.01 level and 0.05 level in SPSS 27.0 software. Cartographic techniques have been used to represent trend of literacy, urban rural disparity and analyzed statistical data. Maps showing spatial distribution of rural, urban literacy rate and urban rural differential index in literacy have been prepared in GIS platform using ARCGIS 10.5.

4. Result and Discussion

4.1 Trends of Urban Rural Literacy Rate And The Differential Index

Considering 2011 as the year of latest published census of India, trends of urban and rural literacy rate has been calculated for last 50 years (1971-2011). A comparative study of disparity of urban rural literacy has been considered for West Bengal and as well as for the whole country. Significant gap in rural and urban literacy rate has been observed both for the state and the country. Total literacy rate in West Bengal was 38.86% in 1971 against the national rate of 34.45% (Table 1). Only in 1981 census total literacy rate in West Bengal (40.88%) was recorded lesser than the national rate (43.57%).

Table -1 Literacy Rate and Urban Rural Differential Index, West Bengal and India (1971-2011)

Year	West Bengal				India			
	Literacy Rate			Urban Rural Differential Index	Literacy Rate			Urban Rural Differential Index
	Total	Rural	Urban		Total	Rural	Urban	
1971	38.86	30.63	62.25	0.81	34.45	27.89	60.22	0.94
1981	40.88	32.97	62.81	0.73	43.57	36.1	67.3	0.72
1991	57.7	50.5	75.27	0.43	52.21	44.5	73	0.55
2001	68.6	63.41	81.24	0.26	64.83	58.74	79.92	0.33
2011	76.26	72.13	84.78	0.17	72.98	67.76	84.1	0.22

*Literacy rate and urban Rural Differential Index have been calculated by the author

In 1991 total literacy rate in West Bengal considerably jumped to 57.7% which is higher than the national rate of 52.21%. In 2001 both the state and national total literacy rate increased to 68.6% and 64.83% respectively. 2011 census recorded 76.25% of total literacy rate in the state and 72.92% rate at national level. Rural and urban literacy rate reveal steady increase for the state and the whole nation. Rural literacy rate in West Bengal increased from 30.63% in 1971 to 72.13% in 2011, while at national level during these 50 years it increased from 27.89% to 67.76%. Urban literacy rate also shows a consistent rise during these 50 years both for the state and the country (Table 1 & Fig.2). In West Bengal urban literacy increased from 62.25% in 1971 to 84.78% in 2011, while at national level it jumped from 60.22% to 84.1% during the same period. Both rural and urban literacy rate were higher in West Bengal than the whole country during the time period. Urban rural differential index has been calculated (Krishna & Shyam, 1978) both for the state and the country (Table 1). Over time, inequality of urban and rural literacy has narrowed down for the state and the country as revealed by the steady

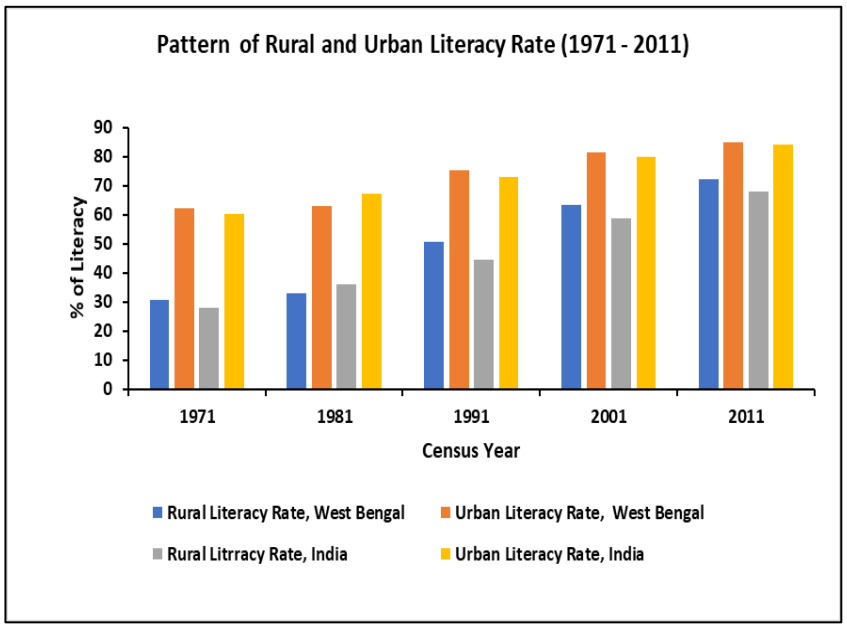

Fig 2: Pattern of Rural and Urban Literacy Rate

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http://www.veterinaria.org
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decline in the differential index value. For West Bengal urban rural differential index value was 0.81 in 1971 which declined to 0.17 in 2011 while the corresponding value at national level dropped from 0.94 in 1971 to 0.22 in 2011. Except 1981 all census year recorded lower differential index value for West Bengal compared to the whole country. After independence in 1951 literacy rate in West Bengal was 24.6% compared to all India rate of 18.3%. West Bengal, once a part of undivided Bengal, played a significant role in the Indian Renaissance, fostering a widespread emphasis on education. This contributed to the spread of literacy in Bengal along with the initiation of women education even before independence. But it was mostly limited in urban area and literacy rate in rural Bengal was considerably low. After independence it was difficult to raise level of literacy among socially marginal and economically weaker people, among women and among people living in rural Bengal. Implementation of different schemes and programme like National Literacy Mission, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Mid-day Meal Scheme, Child literacy through ICDS (Integrated Child Development Services), State-funded Literacy Programme, Education and training for the disabled students, Audio Visual Education have contributed largely to the journey of achieving rise in literacy rate of 24.6% in 1951 to 76.26% in 2011 in the state.

However, it is observed that rural literacy rate (30.63%) was enough less than urban literacy rate (62.25%) in 1971 in West Bengal. Very little change of rural and urban literacy is recorded in 1981 with the values of 32.97% and 62.81% respectively. 1991census recorded highest jump in both rural and urban literacy with the values of 50.5% and 75.27% respectively. Higher increase of rural literacy rate (63.41%) is recorded in 2001 than urban literacy rate (81.24%). In 2011 change of rural literacy rate (72.13%) was higher than the urban one (84.78%). During this time period in India rural literacy jumped from 27.78% to 67.76% whereas urban literacy changed from 60.22% to 84.1%. Both in West Bengal and India urban rural differential index shows declining trend during the considered period (Table-1, Fig-3). In 1971 urban rural differential index was 0.81in West Bengal and 0.94 in India which declined to 0.73 and 0.72 respectively in 1981.

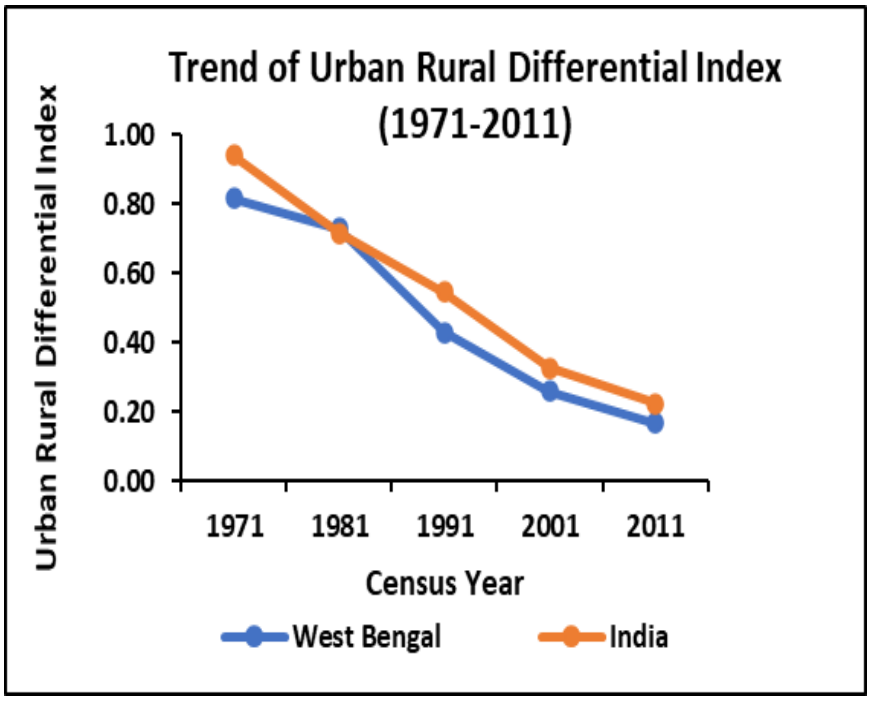

Fig 3: Trend of Urban Rural Differential Index

Sharp decline in differential index is observed in 1991 both for West Bengal and India with values of 0.43 and 0.52 respectively. In 2001and 2011 the differential index again declined in West Bengal to 0.26 and 0.17 respectively. The decline of urban rural differential index both in the state and the whole country reflects gradual rise of rural literacy as a response to improvement of socio-economic condition of the rural area, different programme encouraging literacy and education, better urban rural interaction through communication. Increase of rural literacy rate compared to urban literacy rate mainly contributes to the fall of differential index.

4.2 District wise Spatial Pattern of Urban and Rural Literacy

A steady growth of rural and urban literacy has been observed since 2001and thus district wise decadal change of literacy has been considered for 2001 and 2011 census year (Table 2).

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Table- 2 District wise Decadal growth of Rural and Urban Literacy

District	Percentage of Rural Literacy		Percentage of Urban Literacy		District	Percentage of Rural Literacy		Percentage of Urban Literacy	
	2001	**2011**	**2001**	**2011**		**2001**	**2011**	**2001**	**2011**
Darjiling	65.99	74.27	83.34	87.48	Nadia	61.82	70.85	81.41	85.35
Jalpaiguri	58.93	69.73	80.02	82.39	N24 parganas	69.07	77.37	69.07	88.87
Kochbihar	64.27	73.16	85.18	88.36	Hooghly	71.02	78.53	82.95	86.91
Uttar Dinajpur	42.86	55.99	80.50	80.28	Bankura	62.04	68.93	80.22	84.42
Dakshin Dinajpur	60.38	70.10	83.28	88.68	Purulia	53.24	62.73	75.40	76.18
Malda	47.76	59.37	79.28	76.58	Medinipur	73.95	81.49	82.91	87.14
Murshidabad	52.28	65.30	68.34	71.85	Howrah	72.81	79.98	81.02	85.21
Birbhum	59.88	69.10	77.65	81.07	S24 Parganas	67.40	75.68	79.84	82.67
Bardhaman	65.83	72.65	77.39	81.54	Kolkata	-	-	80.86	86.31

*Literacy rate calculated by the author

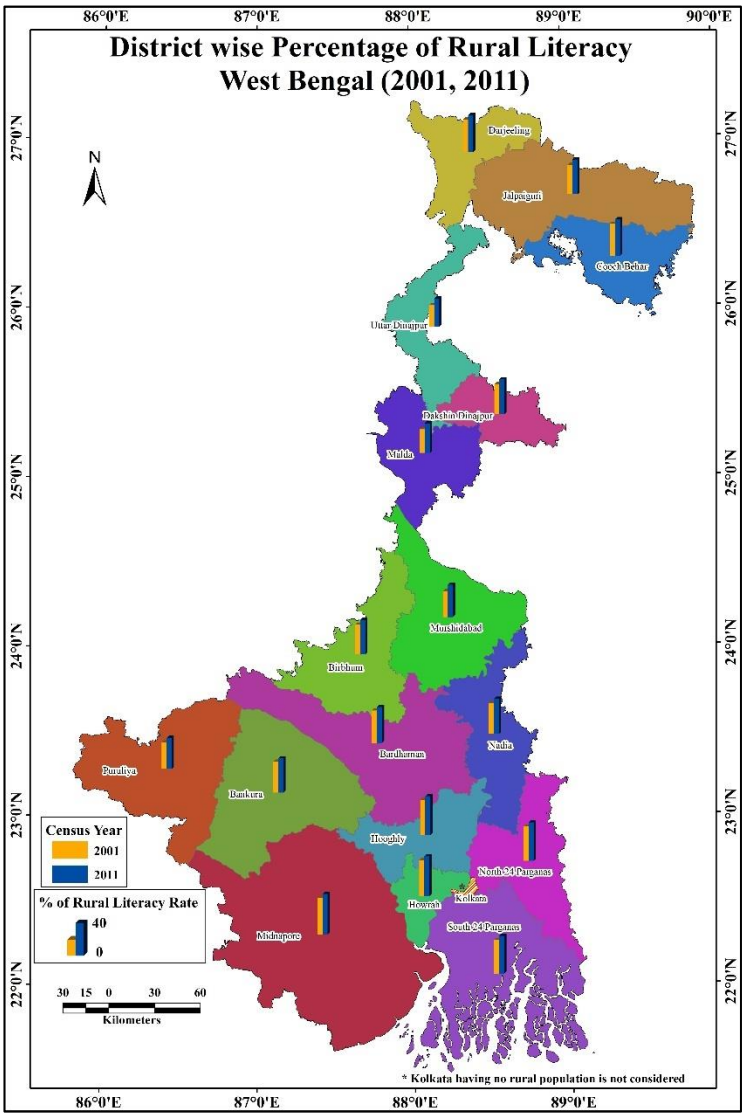

Fig 4: District Wise Rural Literacy

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In 2001, in six districts namely Uttar Dinajpur, Jalpaiguri, Malda, Murshidabad, Birbhum and Purulia rural literacy rate was less than 60%. In Dakshin Dinajpur, Nadia, Bankura, Kochbihar, Bardhaman, Darjiling, South 24 Parganas, North 24 parganas 60-70% rural population are literate. Only Hooghly, Howrah and Medinipur represent more than 70% of rural literacy. In 2011 two districts Uttar Dinajpur and Malda are found to have less than 60% of rural literacy; Purulia, Murshidabad, Birbhum and Jalpaiguri have 60-70% of rural literacy. Other ten districts achieved the mark of more than 70% of rural literacy with more than 80% for undivided Medinipur (Fig.4). Thirteen districts have rural literacy higher than Indian average. In case of urban literacy in 2001 Murshidabad and North 24 parganas show less than 70% urban literacy, five districts namely Purulia, Bardhaman, Birbhum, Malda, South 24 Parganas show 70-80% urban literacy, rest of eleven districts more than 80% of urban literacy. In 2011 Murshidabad, Purulia, Malda show more than 70% urban literacy, Uttar Dinajpur, Birbhum, Bardhaman, Jalpaiguri, South 24 parganas and Bankura represent 80-85% urban literacy, rest of nine districts show more than 85% urban literacy (Fig.5). Ten districts of West Bengal have urban literacy more than the national average in 2011.

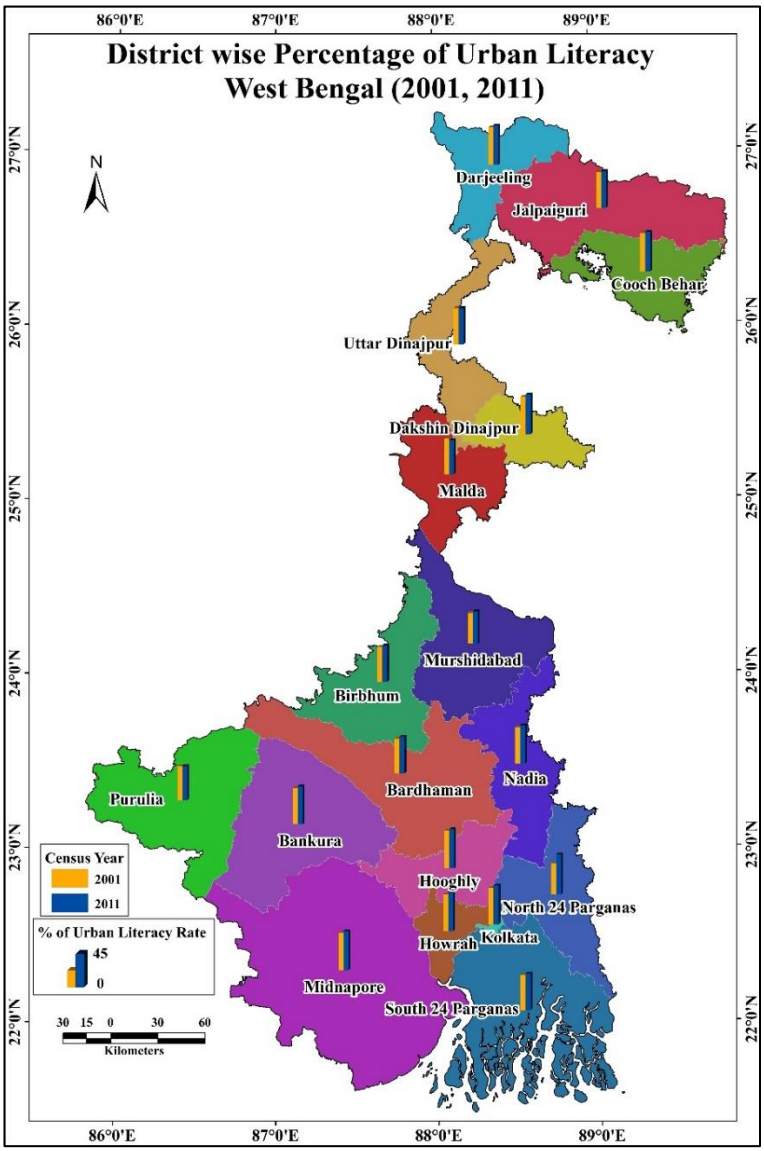

Fig 5: District Wise Urban Literacy

It is observed that decadal (2001-2011) change of rural literacy was much higher than urban literacy. During this period in case of rural literacy more than 10% change is observed for four districts, 8% -10% change for eight districts and 6%-8% change for five districts. Regarding urban literacy 0-4% change is observed for eight districts, 4%-5% change fofive districts, more than 5% change for three districts during this period (Fig 6). Only Malda and Uttar Dinajpur district show little negative change of urban literacy.

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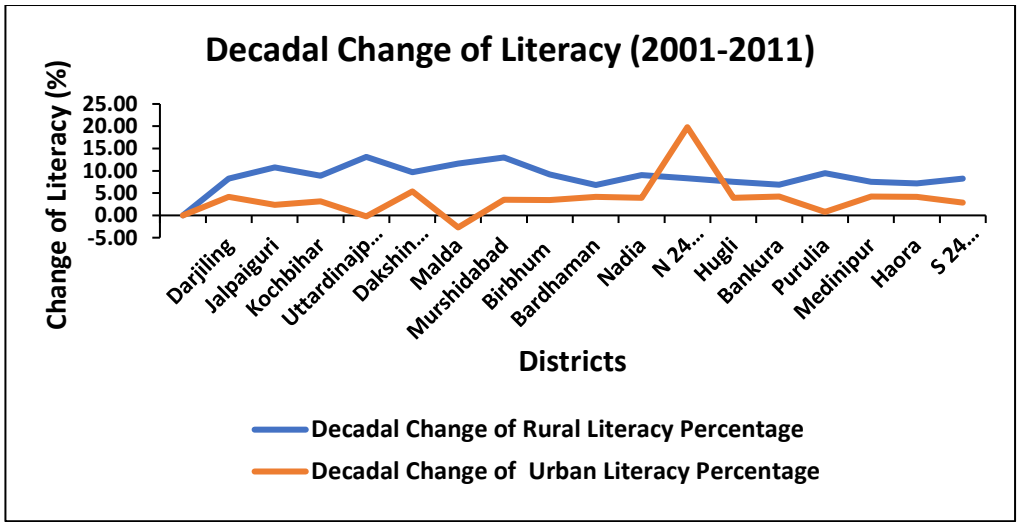

Fig 6: Decadal Change of Literacy

4.3 District Wise Analysis of Urban Rural Differential Index

Though there is a marked disparity between urban and rural literacy, over period the gap has been narrowed down in West Bengal as reflected by the differential index (Table-1). The differential Index dropped sharply from 0.81 in 1971 to 0.17 in 2011.Considerable variation is observed in urban rural differential index among the districts of West Bengal in 2011(Table- 3). The value of differential index varies from 0.02 in Purba Medinipur to 0.41 in Uttar Dinajpur. All districts have been divided into three zones based on variation of urban rural differential index. Five districts namely Howrah, Hooghly, South 24 Parganas, Purba Medinipur and Murshidabad have been categorized under low differential index. All these districts except Murshidabad are close to the city of Kolkata. The influence of metropolitan city has contributed a lot to lower down the disparity of urban and rural literacy. Considerable increase of rural literacy throughout decades is the main reason of decreasing the differential of urban and rural literacy as it is noted in the case of Murshidabad district. Darjiling, Jalpaiguri, Birbhum, Bardhaman, Nadia, North 24 Parganas, Paschim Medinipur have been categorized under medium differential index. High increase of rural literacy and medium increase of urban literacy is observed in Darjiling and Bardhaman; very high increase of rural literacy and low increase of urban literacy is seen in Jalpaiguri, Birbhum and Nadia; high increase of rural literacy and very high increase of urban literacy is observed in North 24 parganas. Kochbihar, Uttar Dinajpur, Dakshin Dinajpur, Malda, Purulia and Bankura districts represent high value of urban rural differential index (Table-3, Fig- 7). Very high growth of rural literacy and low to very low growth of urban literacy is mainly responsible for this high differential index.

Table -3 District Wise Literacy Rate and Urban Rural Differential Index, 2011

	% of Literacy					% of Literacy			
District	Total	Urban	Rural	Differential Index	District	Total	Urban	Rural	Differential Index
Darjiling	79.56	87.48	74.27	0.17	N 24 Parganas	84.06	88.87	77.37	0.14
Jalpaiguri	73.25	82.39	69.73	0.17	Hooghly	81.80	86.91	78.53	0.10
Kochbihar	74.78	88.36	73.16	0.20	Bankura	70.26	84.42	68.93	0.22
Uttar Dinajpur	59.07	80.28	55.99	0.41	Purulia	64.48	76.18	62.73	0.21
Dakshin Dinajpur	72.82	88.68	70.10	0.26	Bardhaman	76.21	81.54	72.65	0.12
Malda	61.73	76.58	59.37	0.28	Howrah	83.31	85.21	79.98	0.06
Murshidabad	66.59	71.85	65.30	0.10	S 24 Parganas	77.51	82.67	75.68	0.09
Birbhum	70.68	81.07	69.10	0.17	Paschim Medinipur	78.00	85.96	76.87	0.12
Nadia	74.97	85.35	70.85	0.19	Purba Medinipur	87.02	88.60	86.81	0.02

*% of literacy and differential index calculated by the author

Statistical summary obtained using descriptive statistics of rural literacy rate, urban literacy rate and urban - rural differential index for 2001 and 2011 is represented in table 4.

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Vol 25, No. 1 (2024)
http://www.veterinaria.org
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Table -4 Summary Statistics of Urban & Rural Literacy & Urban - Rural Differential Index

	2001			2011		
	Urban Literacy Rate	Rural Literacy Rate	Urban Rural Differential Index	Urban Literacy Rate	Rural Literacy Rate	Urban Rural Differential Index
Mean	80.23	61.74	0.31	83.66	72.05	0.16
Maximum	85.19	73.95	0.79	88.87	86.81	0.41
Minimum	68.34	42.86	0.11	71.85	55.99	0.02
S. D	4.07	8.70	0.18	4.82	7.69	0.09

*Calculated by the author

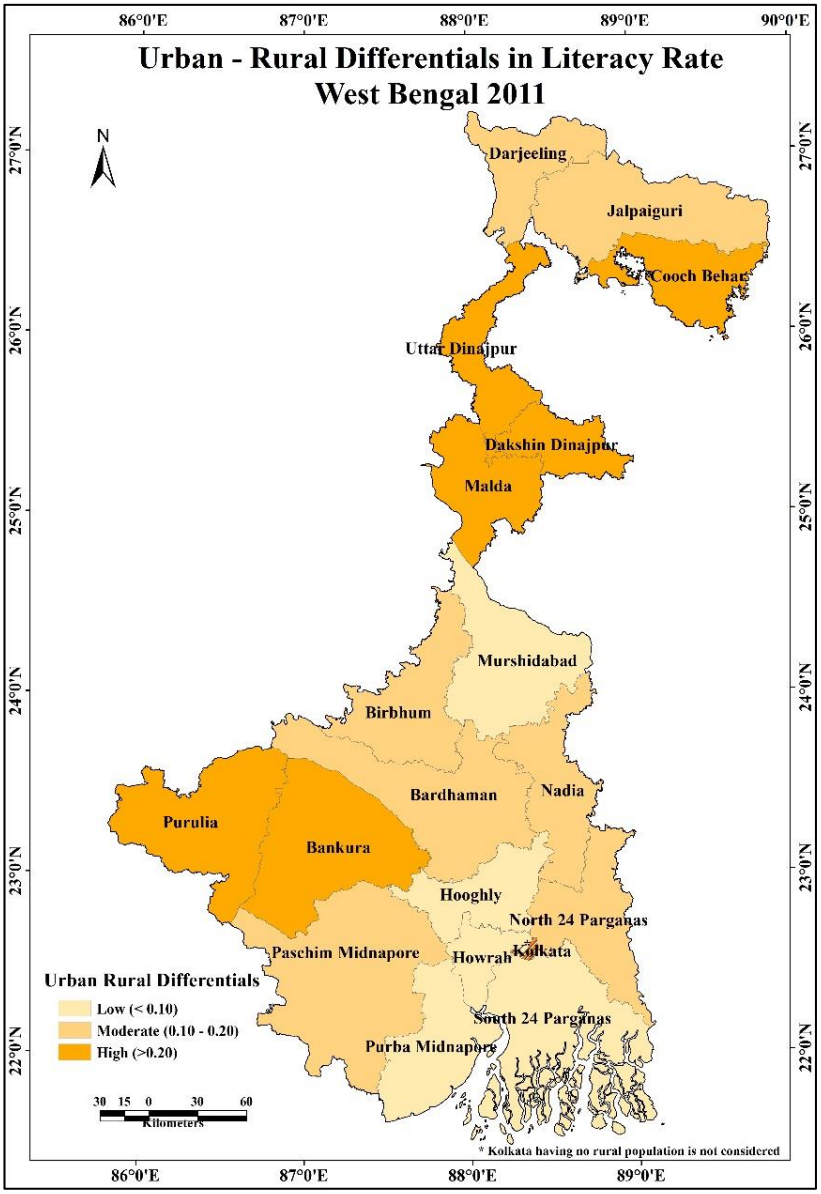

Fig 7: Urban Rural Differentials in Literacy Rate

4.4 Correlation Analysis of the Factors

To find out the relation between the independent factors influencing urban rural differential index, bivariate regression analysis following Karl Pearson's method has been adopted. Sixteen independent factors have been selected to determine their correlation with the urban rural differential index as dependent variable and level of confidence has been computed and tested at 99% and 95% level using SPSS 27.0 version. Six variables show significance at 99% level namely total literates (-.788), male literates (-.757), female literates (-.755), rural literates (-.836), total fertility rate (.616), multiple poverty index, MPI (.601). Two variables namely road density (-.481) and percentage of household not having electricity

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(.493) show correlation at 95% level of significance. Out of sixteen variables ten show negative relation in correlation study (Table- 5).

Table- 5 Correlation Coefficient of Urban- Rural Differentials In Literacy And Independent Variables, 2011

Variable	Coefficient of Correlation	Variable	Coefficient of Correlation
Percentage of Total Literates	-.788**	Percentage of Male Workers	-.447
Percentage of Male Literates	-.757**	Percentage of Female Workers	.447
Percentage of Female Literates	-.755**	Total Fertility Rate	.616**
Percentage of Rural Literates	-.836**	Sex Ratio	-.110
Percentage of Urban Literates	-.215	No. of Primary School/Sq. Km	-.463
Percentage of SC Population	.349	Road Density/Sq. Km	-.481*
Percentage of ST Population	.300	Percentage of Household Not Having Electricity	.493*
Percentage of Urban Population	-.427	Multiple Poverty Index (MPI)	.601**

*Calculated by the author

Low level of negative correlation is observed for percentage of urban literates and sex ratio, medium level of negative correlation is observed for the variables like percentage of urban population, percentage of male workers, no of primary school /sq. km, road density /sq.km, percentage of household not having electricity, whereas high level of negative correlation is represented by percentage of total literates, percentage of male literates, percentage of female literates, percentage of rural literates. High positive correlation is observed for total fertility rate and multiple poverty index (MPI). Medium positive correlation is found for the variables namely percentage of SC population, percentage of ST population, percentage of female workers, percentage of household not having electricity. Low level of negative correlation is found for percentage of urban literates and sex ratio. Among the variables with 99% level of significance four variables show negative correlation, two variables show positive correlation. 95% level of significance is observed for one variable with positive and one with negative correlation.

5.Conclusion

The present study aims to explain the pattern of urban and rural disparity in literacy across the districts of West Bengal. Urban rural differential index has been calculated to analyze the spatial and temporal nature of urban and rural disparity in literacy. Disparity of literacy in urban and rural area is the reflection of variation of socio-economic condition. Existing social values don't support rapid progress of literacy in rural area which make the gap of rural and urban literacy wider. The difference between urban and rural literacy in West Bengal has steadily declined since 1951. The urban rural differential in literacy has gradually narrowed down from .81 in 1971 to .17 in 2011. The main factor of decreasing differential index is the increase of rural literacy rate from 27.89 in 1971 to 67.76 in 2011. It is observed that districts like Howrah, Hooghly, South 24 Parganas, Purba Medinipur having low differential index in literacy as they are characterized by high level of urbanization, higher rural literacy rate, high working population, low total fertility rate, higher number educational institution, high road density and proximity to metropolitan city, Kolkata. Kochbihar, Uttar Dinajpur, Dakshin Dinajpur, Malda, Bankura, Purulia show higher urban rural differential index as they are characterized by lower rural literacy rate, high total fertility rate, high sex ratio, low urban population, low road density, and household electricity. Nadia, North 24 Parganas, Birbhum, Bardhaman, Paschim Medinipur, Darjiling and Jalpaiguri show moderate differential index. The result of bivariate regression reflects high negative correlation with percentage of total, male, female and rural literates at .01 level of significance and negative correlation with road density at .05 level of significance. High positive correlation is found with total fertility rate and multiple poverty index at .01 level of significance, and with percentage of household not having electricity at .05 level of significance. Low level of correlation is observed for percentage of urban literates and sex ratio. The study suggests implementing crucial measures to enhance rural literacy rates, increase the number of schools, improve transportation and communication, extend household electrification, regulate fertility rates in rural areas, and alleviate poverty. These measures will help narrowing the literacy gap between urban and rural areas.

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