



e-ISSN: 2319-8753 | p-ISSN: 2347-6710

IJRSET

International Journal of Innovative Research in
SCIENCE | ENGINEERING | TECHNOLOGY



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF INNOVATIVE RESEARCH

IN SCIENCE | ENGINEERING | TECHNOLOGY

Volume 13, Issue 5, May 2024

ISSN INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER
INDIA

Impact Factor: 8.423

 9940 572 462

 6381 907 438

 ijirset@gmail.com

 www.ijirset.com

Bridging the Literacy Divide: A Study of Socio-Economic and Gender Disparities in Ajmer District

Dr.Sonu Sahu, Dr Sandeep Yadav

Assistant Professor Shiv Mahavidyalay, Saroli Mod, India

Professor, Government Girls College, Bundi, India

ABSTRACT: This paper examines the multifaceted impact of literacy on economic development, social mobility, and political stability, with a specific focus on the Ajmer district of India. Highlighting the critical role of literacy in cultural expansion and socio-economic transformation, the study traces literacy trends from India's independence to the present, noting significant rural-urban and gender disparities. Analysis of tehsil-wise data reveals stark differences in literacy rates between urban and rural populations, as well as between males and females. The highest rural-urban literacy gap is found in Nasirabad tehsil, primarily due to its urban concentration and army cantonment. Gender disparities are most pronounced in Bhinay tehsil, where socio-cultural barriers impede female literacy. Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe literacy rates are also examined, showing significant variation across tehsils, with Ajmer tehsil having the highest literacy rates for these groups. The paper identifies key factors influencing literacy levels, including urbanization, socio-economic status, and educational infrastructure. The study underscores the need for targeted policies to bridge these gaps and promote equitable literacy development, which is essential for the holistic growth of the region.

KEYWORDS: Literacy Disparities, Rural-Urban Gap, Gender Inequality, Socio-Economic Development

I.INTRODUCTION

Literacy has often been considered essential for economic development, social mobility and political stability. Rising poverty, high crime rates, inequality due to the level of development, political instability and economic stagnation have increased. Literacy is a component of the cultural expansion of any region. It develops the qualities and stability of individuals, enables them to perform certain economic, political and cultural functions and plays a dynamic role in the socio-economic transformation of a society. In recent years, literacy has helped in enhancing the lives and social value of a large number of poor people. Literacy helps a social group to achieve higher social status through the process of social mobility. Educational backwardness is one of the tragedies of India's development. At the time of independence, only 17 percent of the total population of the country was literate.

The Human Development Index (HDI) developed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is commonly regarded as an alternative to income-based measures of happiness. The three HDI indicators are longevity, health and standard of living. Not only is rising income an indicator of human development, but education and literacy are also important for a society and nation. UNESCO defines literacy as 'the ability to recognize, understand, interpret, create, communicate and calculate using printed and written material relevant to different contexts'.

II.STUDY AREA

Ajmer district is situated in the center of Rajasthan and surrounded by Jaipur and Tonk district in the East and Pali in the West. Nagaur district touches its north boundary while Bhilwara district is in the South. The shape of the district is triangular. The district lies between 26⁰25'North to 26⁰29'North latitudes and 74⁰37'East to 74⁰42'East longitudes. Total area of Ajmer district is 8481.40sq.Kms.

Ajmer district is sub divided into 4 sub-division namely Ajmer, Beawar, Kekri and Kishangarh and comprises of 9 tehsils Ajmer, Nasirabad, Masuda, Beawar, Bhinay, Sarwar, Peesangan, Kekri and Kishangarh. The total population of Ajmer district is 2,583,052 in 2011. Rural and urban population of the district is 1,547,642 and 1,035,410 people.

III.METHODOLOGY

The following formula as used by Krishan and Shyam has been used in the present analysis.

$$DI = \frac{X_2 - X_1}{T}$$

Where, DI = Differential Index

X_2 = Literacy Percentage of Males, Urban population

X_1 = Literacy Percentage of Females, Rural population

T = Literacy Percentage of total population

To measure the real development of literacy following formula is used.

$$\text{Composite Index of Development} = \frac{\text{Total Literacy Rate}}{\text{M-F differentials} + \text{R-U differentials} + \text{Caste differentials}}$$

IV. ANALYSIS

Literacy has been measured in India since the first census in 1872 for different divisions and classes based on age, sex as well as special categories. It included people who could sign their names. The 1961 census considered the population above 5 years of age as literate, but a change was made in 1991 to exclude the population aged 0-6 years to obtain literacy rates, arguing that the ability to read and write with some understanding may not be acquired by individuals until the age of 7 years or more. Thus, estimates of percentage literacy obtained from census documents are not strictly comparable over time. Literacy differentials has therefore been used to make literacy figures consistent over time.

Rural-Urban Gap

The study of rural-urban gap in any region provides an entry into the phase of occupational structure, economy and technological progress, urbanisation, change and government policies. The developing countries of the world (of which India is one) are characterised not only by low literacy rates but also by high disparities in literacy between urban and rural population, male and female population and young and old. The rural-urban gap is essentially a reflection of the degree of different rates of change taking place in towns and villages. Literacy, like other innovations, originates in urban places and eventually spreads to the rural area i.e. the spread of literacy starts from the city and reaches the village. The pace of development depends on the strength of interaction between the two. The extent of urban influence and the intensity of urban-rural intervention are clearly the two major factors in reducing the disparity between rural-urban literacy rates. Urban control can also play an indirect role by stimulating diversification of the rural economy. Diversified base in the village generally accelerates the growth of rural literacy.

Tehsil wise rural-urban literacy differentiation

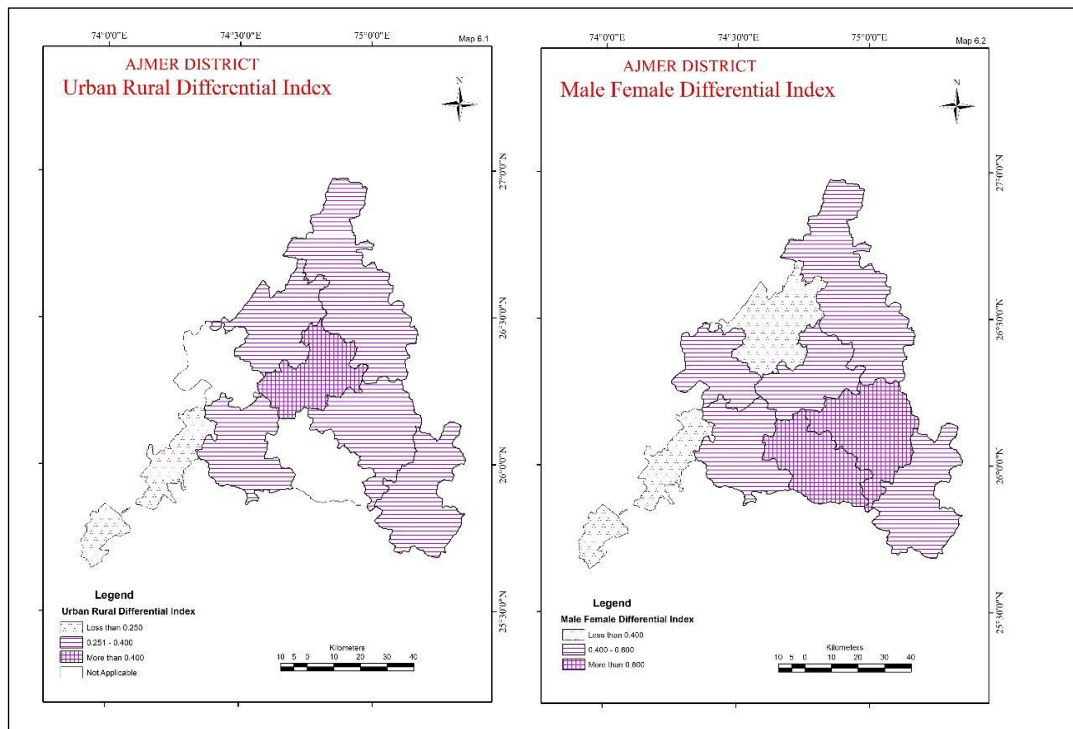
In Ajmer district, the rural-urban literacy differentiation index has been calculated to be 0.257. There can be many reasons for the huge difference in rural-urban literacy rate - such as social and economic awareness is higher in urban population than in rural population, social level of urban women is higher, concentration of educational institutions in urban areas, tendency of rural educated youth to migrate to cities in search of employment, etc.

There is a lot of inequality in rural-urban literacy according to tehsil. It is clear from Table No. 1 that the highest rural-urban literacy differentiation is found in Nasirabad tehsil (0.421). On the basis of rural-urban differentiation index of the district, three categories of differentiation have been created. The highest differentiation is found in Nasirabad tehsil, i.e. the highest difference in rural-urban literacy is in Nasirabad tehsil. More than 88 percent of the people in Nasirabad city are literate, the main reason for which is the status of the army cantonment.

Table 1
District Ajmer: Tehsil wise Rural Urban Literacy Differentiation

Tehsil	Urban	Rural	Differentiation Index
Ajmer	85.94	64.84	0.263
Beawar	84.31	68.64	0.207
Bhinai	0.000	54.84	0.000
Kekri	78.66	55.63	0.381
Kishangarh	78.97	56.11	0.353
Masuda	79.82	57.27	0.368
Nasirabad	88.39	59.84	0.421
Pisangan	0.000	61.03	0.000
Sarwar	64.56	50.80	0.262
District Ajmer	83.88	59.13	0.257

In the second category, medium differentiation is found in Ajmer, Kekri, Kishangarh, Masuda and Sardar tehsils where urban-rural differentiation is found from 0.250 to 0.400 (Map No. 1). The least urban-rural differentiation is found in Beawar tehsil. Due to the expansion of educational institutions in the rural areas near Beawar city and the proximity of rural background to Beawar city, the least difference is found between rural and urban literacy. Urban population is zero in both Pisangan and Bhinay tehsils, hence differentiation has not been calculated (Table No. 1).



Tehsil wise female-male literacy differentials

A distinctive feature of the Indian population is that women lag far behind men in terms of literacy. According to the 2011 census, the female-male literacy differential index in Ajmer district has been calculated to be 0.385, which indicates high differentiation. Male literacy in the district is 82.4 percent and female literacy is 55.70 percent, as a result of which there is a huge difference between male and female literacy.

Table 2
District Ajmer: Tehsil wise Male-Female Literacy Differentials

Tehsil	Male	Female	Differentiation Index
Ajmer	88.83	71.15	0.215
Beawar	89.61	61.73	0.368
Bhinai	73.32	35.92	0.682
Kekri	76.94	43.60	0.552
Kishangarh	77.59	51.11	0.409
Masuda	78.71	43.18	0.580
Nasirabad	82.59	51.53	0.458
Pisangan	77.41	44.29	0.543
Sarwar	69.50	35.31	0.650
District Ajmer	82.40	55.70	0.385

From the social point of view, the sentiments against women's education, the hindrance to women's movement, the lack of women teachers and girls' schools in rural areas, the prevalence of child marriage, etc. resulted in a high index of gender discrimination. Hence, the predetermined hypothesis that there is high differentiation in female-male literacy in Ajmer district is proved to be true. On analyzing the gender discrimination according to tehsil, it is clear that the highest differentiation is found in Bhinay tehsil, where this index is 0.682 (Table No. 2). In the second place is Sarwar tehsil, where 0.650 female-male literacy discrimination has been calculated. Male literacy is twice as much in both the tehsils as compared to female literacy. The result of high differentiation has been the high rural population and the very low number of girls' schools in the said tehsils.

It is clear from the map number 2 according to tehsil that the female-male literacy differentiation in the district has been placed in three categories. The highest differentiation is found in the Bhinay and Sarwar tehsils in the south of the district, while the largest areas of the district, Kekdi, Kishangarh, Masuda, Nasirabad and Pisangan tehsils have medium literacy differentiation ranging from 0.400 to 0.600. The lowest differentiation in female-male literacy is found in Ajmer and Beawar tehsils (less than 0.400), the main reasons for which are higher female literacy due to the higher urban population, higher number of educational institutions as well as higher number of separate girls' schools.

Tehsil wise Scheduled Caste Literacy

According to the 2011 census, 65.88 percent of Scheduled Caste people in the district were literate, of which male literacy was 79.84 percent and female literacy was 51.44 percent. The literacy level among Scheduled Castes in the district is higher than the state average (59.70 percent).

On analyzing the literacy status among Scheduled Castes according to tehsil, it is known that Ajmer tehsil has the highest literacy rate in the district at 77.33 percent (Table No. 3). The literacy rate of Scheduled Castes has been shown in Map No. 3 by dividing it into four categories. The highest literacy rate among Scheduled Castes is in Ajmer and Beawar tehsils (more than 70 percent). In these tehsils, the literacy level of Scheduled Castes is found to be high due to high urban population, high number of educational institutions, rural people using urban educational institutions, high socio-economic status. This literacy rate is 68.43 percent in Nasirabad tehsil. The literacy level among the Scheduled Castes is high due to daily migration from Nasirabad to Ajmer city and good transport access.

Table 3

Tehsil	Total	Male	Female
Ajmer	77.33	87.28	66.97
Beawar	73.35	86.79	59.73
Bhinai	51.48	70.54	31.92
Kekri	52.91	71.74	33.55
Kishangarh	57.51	72.70	41.60
Masuda	59.77	76.53	42.40
Nasirabad	68.43	83.89	52.32

Pisangan	59.13	75.48	43.05
Sarwar	48.45	66.09	30.11
District Ajmer	65.88	79.84	51.44

District Ajmer: Tehsil wise Scheduled Caste Literacy

In Kishangarh, Pisangan and Masuda tehsils, 55 to 60 percent of this category is literate. Whereas Kekri, Sardar and Bhinay tehsils are the most backward where less than 55 percent of the population of the Scheduled Caste category is educated. In these tehsils, due to lack of good transportation, lack of educational institutions and poverty and unemployment in rural areas, the literacy level among the Scheduled Caste category is very low.

Scheduled Tribe Literacy

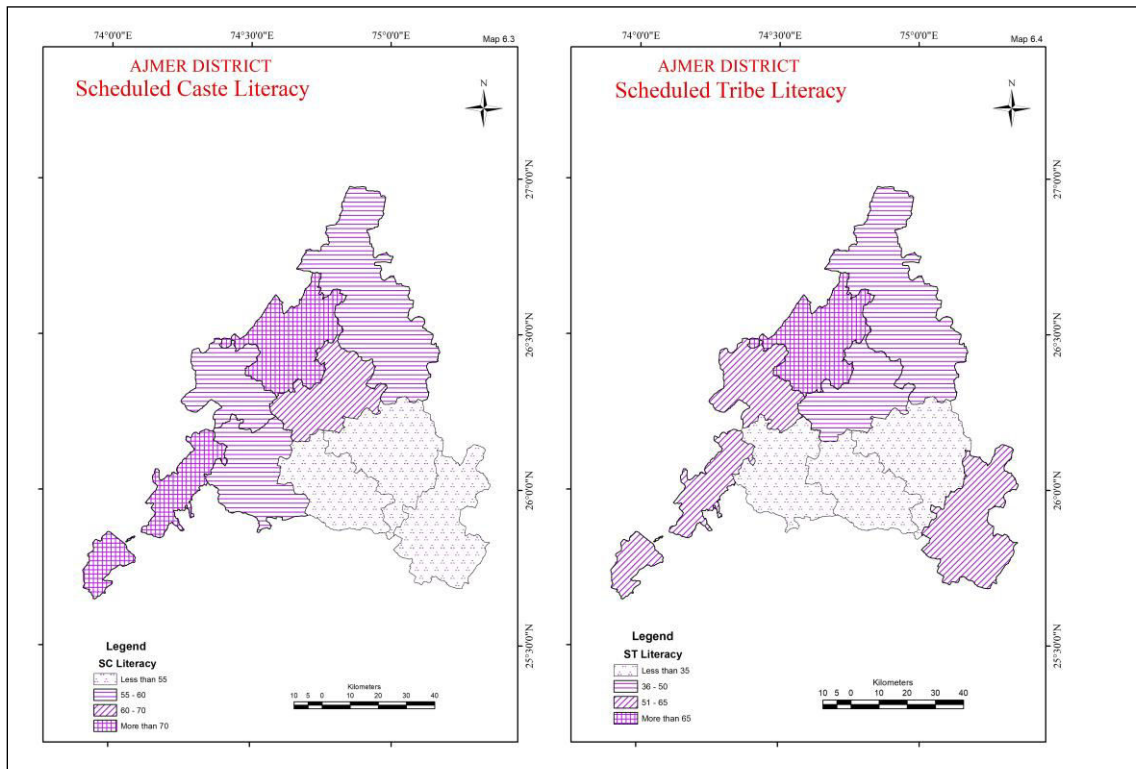
In Ajmer district, the literacy rate of Scheduled Tribes is relatively low as compared to Scheduled Castes.

Table 4

District Ajmer: Tehsil wise Scheduled Tribe Literacy

Tehsil	Total	Male	Female
Ajmer	81.91	90.5	72.6
Beawar	57.18	77	37.69
Bhinai	29.53	47.72	11.19
Kekri	50.43	68.6	31.46
Kishangarh	46.61	59.36	33.06
Masuda	31.42	46.97	15.88
Nasirabad	39.22	53.5	24.95
Pisangan	55.09	70.66	38.74
Sarwar	20.03	31.89	8.02
District Ajmer	49.03	63.93	33.57

According to the 2011 census, the literacy rate of Scheduled Tribes in the district is 49.03 percent, but there are huge variations in it according to tehsil. The highest literacy rate of tribes is 81.91 percent in Ajmer tehsil (Table No. 4). The lowest literacy rate is in Sarwar tehsil where only 20.03 percent people are literate. Tribal literacy is more than 50 percent in Beawar, Pisangan and Kekri tehsils.



According to Map No. 4, the literacy rate of scheduled tribe population is shown in four categories. The lowest literacy rate is less than 35% in the southern part of the district, in Sardar, Bhinay and Masuda tehsils. 35 to 50% of tribes are literate in Kishangarh and Nasirabad tehsils. Due to the high rural population and the influence of traditional social system in these tehsils, only half of the population in the scheduled tribe category is literate. Tribal literacy rate is 50 to 65% in Kekri, Pisangan and Beawar tehsils, while the highest literacy rate (81.91%) is found in Ajmer tehsil.

Scheduled Caste and Tribe Literacy Differentiation

In India, there is a difference in the literacy rate among various caste and religion communities. In the district too, there is more difference in the literacy of Scheduled Caste and Tribe category as compared to the general category. According to the 2011 census, the average literacy in Ajmer district is 69.33 percent and the literacy of the general category is 70.76 percent, while the literacy of Scheduled Caste and Tribe is 63.95 percent.

It is clear from Table No. 5 that there is a lot of disparity in the literacy differentiation index of Scheduled Caste and Tribe as per tehsil. Ajmer is the only tehsil where the literacy of Scheduled Caste (77.33%) is less than the literacy of Tribe (81.91%). As a result, the literacy differentiation index has been calculated to be negative (-0.059). The highest literacy differentiation between Scheduled Caste and Tribe category is in both Masuda and Sarwar tehsils (Map No. 5), where the differentiation index is 0.521 and 0.658 respectively. There is a difference of 28.42 percent in the literacy of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in Sarwar tehsil, due to which the differentiation is the highest. Medium literacy differentiation is found in Beawar, Bhinay, Kishangarh and Nasirabad, while the lowest differentiation is found in Kekri, Pisangan and Ajmer tehsils. Here, there is very little difference in the literacy of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

Table 5
District Ajmer: SC-ST Literacy Differentials

Tehsil	SC Literacy	ST Literacy	SC-ST Literacy Differentials
Ajmer	77.33	81.91	-0.059
Beawar	73.35	57.18	0.222
Bhinai	51.48	29.53	0.455
Kekri	52.91	50.43	0.048
Kishangarh	57.51	46.61	0.192
Masuda	59.77	31.42	0.521
Nasirabad	68.43	39.22	0.447
Pisangan	59.13	55.09	0.069
Sarwar	48.45	20.03	0.658

Literacy level

The level of literacy in any state depends on the social, economic, political, cultural and religious factors of that state. Urbanization, technological development, number of educational institutions, economic level, means of transportation and communication, status of women in society, attitude towards education for women, general perception etc. are such factors on which the level of literacy depends.

To find out the level of literacy in the district, the group index method has been used in which the following components have been selected -

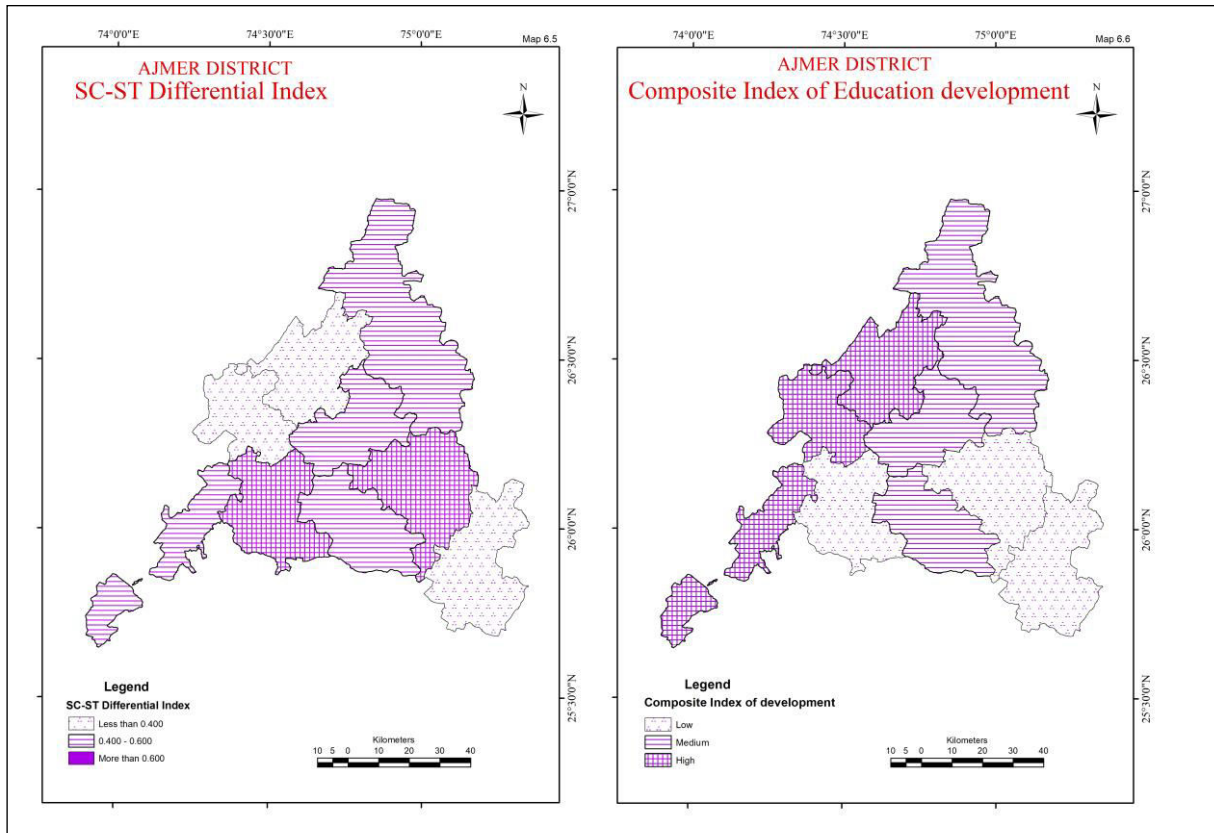
1. Total literacy
2. Difference in female-male literacy
3. Difference in rural-urban literacy
4. Difference in literacy of general category and scheduled caste-tribe category.

Table 6

Tehsil	Total Literacy	Female-Male Literacy Differentials	Urban-Rural Literacy Differentials	Gen SC-ST Differential Index	Composite Index
Ajmer	80.38	17.32	21.10	3.58	1.91
Beawar	75.78	27.88	15.67	3.42	1.61
Bhinai	54.84	37.40	0	8.83	1.19
Kekri	60.44	33.34	23.03	12.34	0.88
Kishangarh	64.68	26.48	22.86	9.86	1.09
Masuda	61.29	35.53	22.55	8.06	0.93
Nasirabad	67.85	31.06	28.55	3.05	1.08
Pisangan	61.03	33.12	0	2.55	1.71
Sarwar	52.60	34.19	13.76	12.33	0.87

District Ajmer: Composite Index

It is evident from Table No. 6 that Ajmer tehsil has the highest level of literacy development where literacy is the highest, difference between male and female literacy is the lowest, difference between rural-urban literacy and literacy of general category and scheduled caste and scheduled tribe category is very low. The level of literacy development in Beawar and Pisangan tehsils has been calculated to be high 1.40 to 1.80 (Map No. 6) whereas the level of literacy development in Bhinai, Kishangarh and Nasirabad tehsils has been between 1.00 to 1.40. The most backward tehsils in terms of literacy development are Sarwar (0.87), Masuda (0.88) and Kekri (0.93), where average literacy is between 50 to 60 percent, there is a high difference (more than 30 percent) between male and female literacy and the highest difference between literacy of general category and scheduled caste and scheduled tribe category.



V. CONCLUSION

The analysis of literacy trends in Ajmer district underscores the critical role of literacy in fostering socio-economic development and reducing disparities. The study reveals significant gaps in literacy rates between urban and rural populations, as well as between males and females, highlighting the urgent need for targeted interventions. Nasirabad tehsil's high rural-urban literacy gap and Bhinay tehsil's pronounced gender disparity reflect broader socio-economic and cultural challenges. Additionally, the varying literacy rates among Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes indicate persistent inequalities that hinder overall development. To achieve equitable literacy growth, it is essential to address these disparities through comprehensive policies that enhance educational infrastructure, promote gender equality, and improve socio-economic conditions in rural areas. Bridging these literacy divides is crucial for the holistic advancement of Ajmer district and the broader goal of inclusive development in India.

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