

Levels of Disparity in Literacy in Bharmour Block of Himachal Pradesh: A Spatio - Temporal Analysis

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ABSTRACT

India is a country with high gender disparity in literacy. As per Census 2011, overall literacy rate of Himachal Pradesh is 83.78% whereas the male and female literacy rate is 90.83% and 76.60% respectively. Chamba being least literate (73.08%) district occupies a unique place in the history of Himachal Pradesh in terms of its origin, growth and development. Bharmour block is one of the backward blocks of district Chamba. Highly dissected and rugged mountainous topography and lack of transportation and communication facilities contributed in the backwardness of the study area. The study is entirely based on the secondary sources of data which have been collected from District Census Handbooks, Directorate of Census Operations, Shimla. The present study is an attempt to find out the gender disparity in literacy at village level. The study is based upon Sopher's method to calculate disparity in literacy. The study found leading and laggard villages in terms of gender disparity in literacy with appropriate reasons behind them.

Keywords: gender disparity, rugged topography, Sopher's method, leading and laggard.

INTRODUCTION

Literacy and educational attainment are powerful indicators of social and economic development among the backward groups especially for women in India. Gender disparity in literacy is conspicuous. In India, male literacy is higher than female literacy. The gap between male and female literacy is a sensitive indicator of social discrimination. The gender gap in education occurs when there are systematic differences in schooling levels between men and women (Kaushik and Kaushik, 2012:95-107). Gender disparity in education means a gap between men and women in getting education. Gender disparity hampers the overall well-being of society because blocking women from participation in social, political and economic activities can adversely affect the whole country (Bhat and Khurshid, 2011:135-150).

The 21st century is known for women, as they established their right in every stage of life. But in terms of literacy women are very lag behind as compare to men in India (Islam and Mustaqim, 2015). Gender disparity in literacy is often measured either as the gap between or the ratio of female and male literacy levels (Mishra, 2006:42). The Male-Female differentials in the literacy rates of Indian population spring from the differences in the type of economy, social life and migratory pattern. The unusually large disparity in literacy among men and women was the result of a long continued prejudice against the education of women, and also against their employment outside the home (Singh, 2015: 173-175). Gender disparity hampers the overall well-being of society because blocking women from participation in social, political and economic activities can adversely affect the whole country (Bhat and Khurshid, 2011:135-150).

Though the Constitution of India gave equal civil rights to both men and women but still in each and every corner of state and society of the country male dominates their counterpart (Pathak and Gupta, 2013). In such a context women empowerment is the most desired aspect. Women can most effectively be empowered through education.

Education provides them muscle, money and mobility (Samudra, 2014:283-196). Disparity among male and female in the aspect of literacy is a sensitive indicator of gender discrimination (Singh and Sharn, 2015). Low level of female literacy creates gender gap in literacy which is a constraint on the improvements of an individual's as well as nations socio-economic conditions (Islam and Mustaqim, 2015:189).

According to IAEA Newsletter (2014) a large gap exists between the male and female population if you inspect their levels of literacy. The problem of illiteracy, in particular among women, is a huge area of concern not only in India but also across the world and it directly impacts development efforts (Katiyar, 2015:5-23). Gender disparities begin early in life, with female infants having a lower chance of continued existence than male infants, owing largely to parental ignore of female infants (Kumar et al., 2016). The prejudice against the female continues as the child grows older—first in the form of smaller supplies of food and nutrition and later in the form of fewer schooling opportunities relative to boys (Sharma et al., 2015; quoted by Kumar et al., 2016:243-254).

Chamba being one of the 115 aspirational districts as identified by the NITI Aayog, occupies a unique place in the history of Himachal Pradesh. Bharmour is one of the backward blocks of this aspirational district. Continued inadequacy of basic infrastructure largely an outcome of the constraint posed by difficult terrain of this block located in the Himalayan region, has kept this block deprived both socially and economically. During the early 1990s, about 60% of the population excluding the 0-6 age group was illiterate. However, the average literacy rate of the block has improved to 73.85% by the year 2011 (Census of India, 1991 and 2011). There is a wide gap between male and female literacy rate and i.e. 82.33% and 64.67% in 2011 census. Thus, the present study attempts to assess the levels of gender disparity in literacy in Bharmour block of Himachal Pradesh.

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

The Present study is entirely based on the secondary sources of data relating to Gender disparity in literacy which have been gathered from District Census Handbooks, Directorate of Census Operations and Department of Education, Shimla. The study examines the differentials in attaining the literacy levels between male and female in Bharmour block of Himachal Pradesh. It covers a time period of 20 years i.e. 1991, 2001 and 2011 and based on the analysis of 252 villages reported as per the 2011 census. However, there were 99 inhabited villages in 1991 but the number of these villages decreased to 96 in 2011 census.

The gender disparity in literacy has been analyzed with the help of gender disparity index (after David Sopher, 1980) with the help of under mentioned formula:

$$GDI = \log X_2/X_1 + \log 200 - X_1 / \log 200 - X_2$$

Where, GDI = Gender Disparity Index

X₂ = Percentage of male literates

X₁ = Percentage of female literates

The ideal case of the index is 0. If it is negative then no disparity against X₂. Higher the value of index, greater is the disparity or vice versa.

Study Area

Bharmour block is a tribal block inhabited by the Gaddi community and about 83 per cent of the total population belongs to this community as per 2011 census. The Gaddis are semi-nomadic tribes who rear the sheep and goats of Kangra and Chamba districts in Himachal Pradesh. These semi-nomadic herders who keep moving with their herds throughout the year in search of grazing land (Biswas and Rao, 2016). Chamba district has been declared a tribal area by the Pastoralists of the Himalayas 101 Government of India keeping in view its geographical remoteness and backwardness (Simmy, 2021:99-107). Bharmour block (comprising Bharmour tehsil and Holi sub-tehsil) is a hilly isolated rural area of the Chamba district of Himachal Pradesh. Sprawling over an area of 1818.37 sq. kms, it housed population of about 39,108 persons as per 2011 census. It covers about 27.88 % of the total geographical area about 7.53 % of total population of Chamba district.

The longitudinal extent of the study area ranges between 76°21'15" and 76°53'09" E and latitudinally it is located 32°10'41" - 33°40'17" N (Fig. 1). In the north and north-east, the study region forms the boundary with Churah tehsil and Lahaul-Spiti district. In the east, it shares boundary with the Lahaul-Spiti and Kangra districts. Kangra district shares boundary with Churah tehsil in the south and south east. The Chamba district of demarcates boundary in the west (Fig. 1). There were 31 gram panchayats in Bharmour block as per 2011 census. There are 252 villages in the Bharmour block out of which 7 villages have got abandoned in 2011. There were 99 inhabited villages in 1991. The numbers of these inhabited villages increased to 102 in 2001. While this number decreased to 96 villages in 2011.

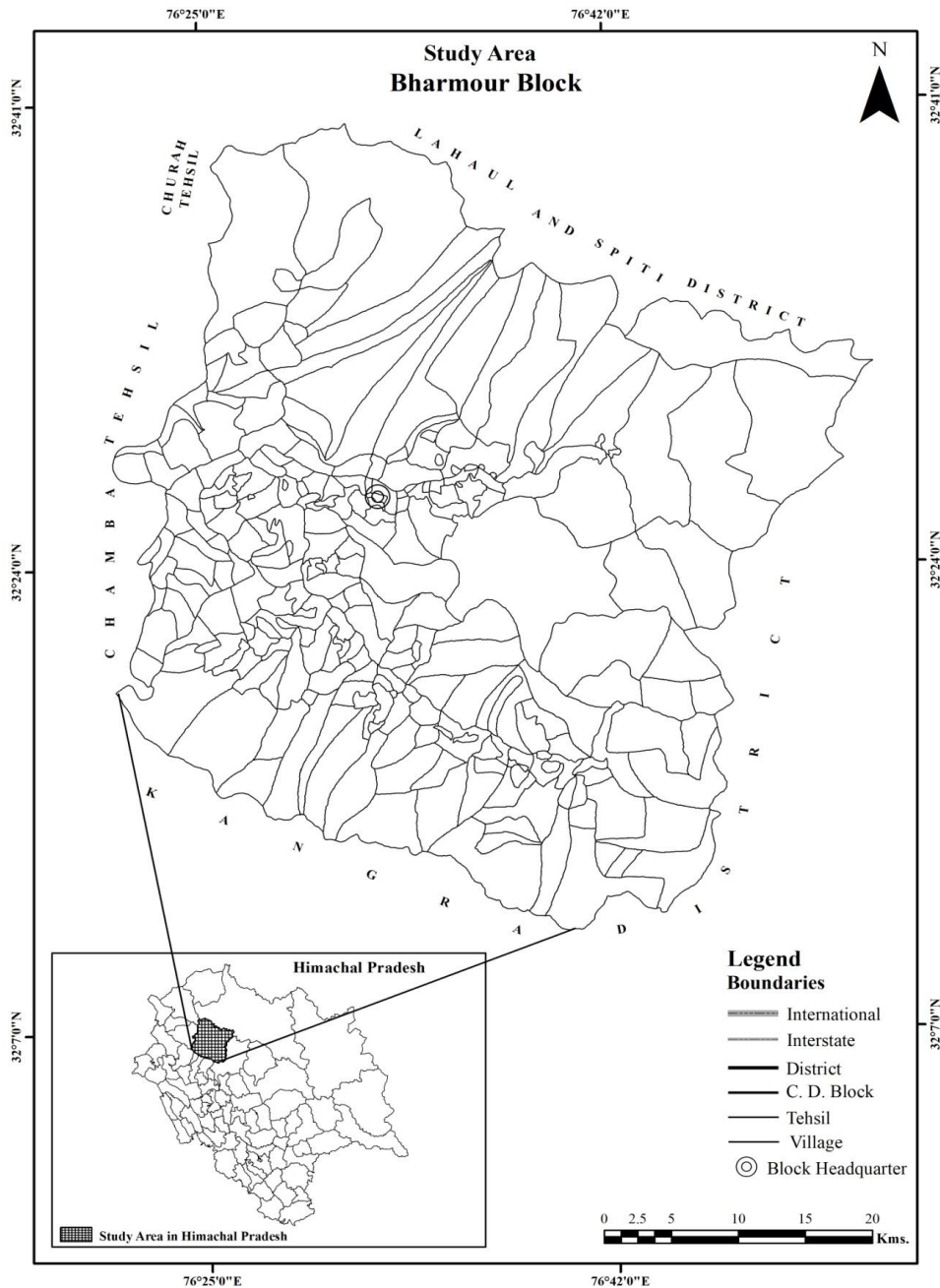


Fig. 1Source: Administrative Atlas Census of India, 2011. P. 148

The maximum height of the Bharmour block is 5678 meters and the minimum height is 1260 meters from the mean sea level. The main streams of the Bharmour block are Ravi River, Budhil Nala, Tundah Nala and Chhobia Nala. The total length of Ravi River in Bharmour block is about 57.14 kms. Kala Nala Oi Nala, Tor Nala and Khinar Nala are the important sources for the Ravi River.

Levels Gender Disparity in Literacy (1991-2011)

Male-female disparity in literacy was quite high in 1991. But with the passage of time it shows a decreasing trend. There were the villages like D.P.F. Bharmani and Dhar Ser in 1991, R.F. Sawin and Kiur in 2001 and Dhar Jalsu and Navei in 2011 for which disparity index was not computed due to lack of required data and zero female literacy in these villages. The spatio-temporal variations in gender disparity in literacy may be discussed into following five categories:

Areas of Very High Gender Disparity – Fig. 2 exhibits that some individual villages in the north-western and central parts of the Bharmour block had registered very high gender disparity in literacy in 1991. In all, about 11 % of the total inhabited villages exhibited very high gender disparity in 1991 (Table 1). Lack of educational facilities

such as schools within villages, classrooms, low retention rate and high dropout rate, social factors such as early marriages of girls, more preference to male children’s education and long distances to travel to reach schools have been attributed to very high gender disparity in literacy. High cost of education and girls’ assistance to their parents in cattle rearing and fetching firewood and other domestic chores are some other factors behind the very high gender disparity in literacy in the Bharmour block. Government of India (1998) also found that “the occupation of the girl child in domestic chores, low retention rate and high dropout rate” are the factors responsible for high gender disparity in literacy. Table 1 brings out that only 2 villages i.e. Thanetar (0.68) and Dhar Ser (0.62) have registered very high gender disparity in literacy in 2001.

Table 1 Bharmour Block: Male - Female Disparity in Literacy

Census Year	Disparity Index					Villages without computation of Disparity Index	Inhabited Villages
	Less Than 0.00	0.00 - 0.20	0.20 - 0.40	0.40 - 0.60	More Than 0.60		
1991	2 (2.02)	12 (12.12)	48 (48.48)	24 (24.24)	11 (11.11)	2 (2.02)	99 (100.00)
2001	4 (3.92)	29 (28.43)	62 (60.78)	3 (2.94)	2 (1.96)	2 (1.96)	102 (100.00)
2011	2 (2.08)	62 (64.58)	30 (31.25)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	2 (2.08)	96 (100.00)

Table in parentheses show the per cent to total inhabited villages

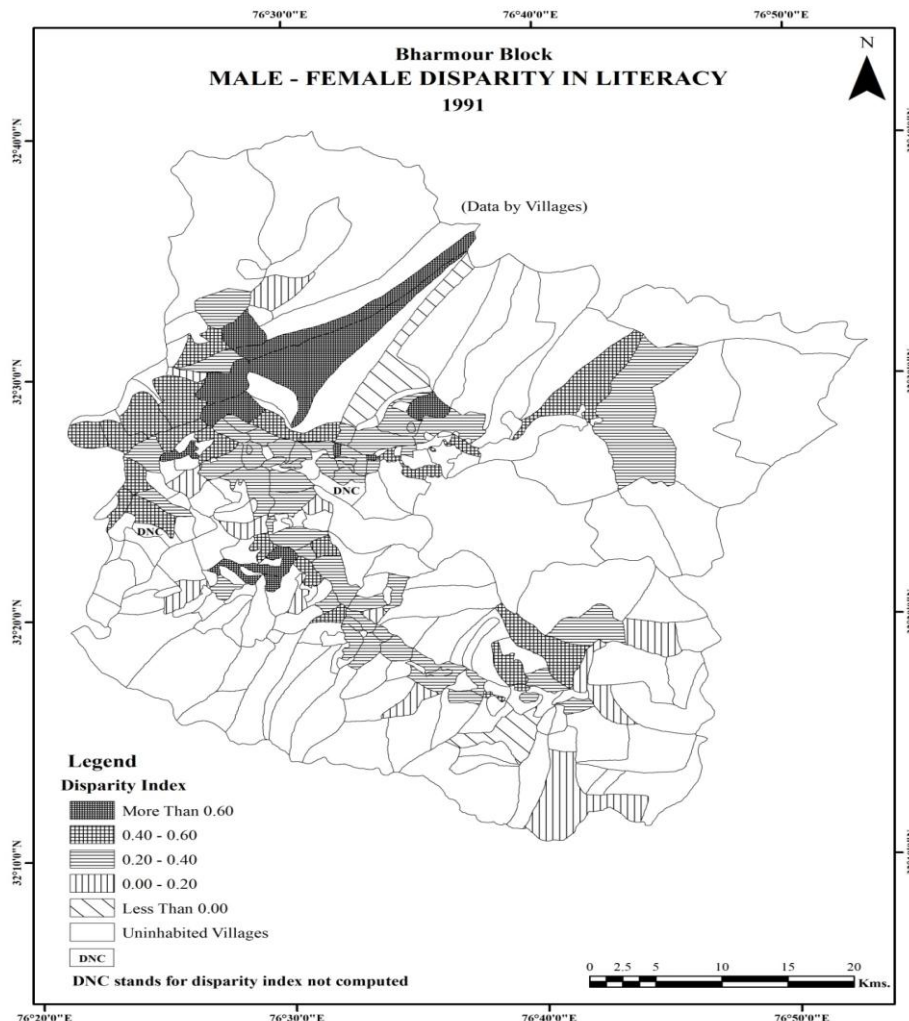


Fig. 2

It is evident from the Fig. 4 that not even a single village has witnessed very high gender disparity in literacy in 2011. Table 1 shows remarkable improvement in narrowing down of gender disparity in education. Many government schemes such as Mid-day Meal (2004), Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (2001) and Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas' (2004) implemented during the first decade of 21st century have played a significant role in the development of education in Bharmour block. Expansion of schooling facilities and road provision, improvement in the economic conditions of the residents, interest of parents towards the education of female children and restrictions on early marriages of girls are some of the factors responsible for conspicuous decline of gender disparity in literacy.

Areas of High Gender Disparity - It is evident from the Table 1 that a little less than one-fourth (24.24 %) of the total inhabited villages of the Bharmour block witnessed high gender disparity (0.40 to 0.60) in literacy in 1991. These villages were found mainly in the mid-western parts of the Bharmour block (Fig. 2). Lack of educational institutions, social thinking about female education, economic backwardness, unfavourable environment i.e. unwillingness of parents towards the education of their daughters and inadequate teaching staff attributed to high gender disparity in Bharmour block. It has been investigated that the number of such villages decreased to 3 villages namely Dhar Fit File (0.46), Palan (0.45) and Silpiri (0.41) in 2001. Table 1 and Fig. 4 show that not even a single village has registered high gender disparity in 2011. Thus, the study represents that there has been a phenomenal decline in gender inequality in the study area.

Areas of Medium Gender Disparity - Table 1 reveals that 40 % of the total inhabited villages in Bharmour block exhibited medium gender disparity in 1991. These villages were mainly concentrated in the mid-western, central and south-eastern parts of the Bharmour block (Fig. 2). The limited availability of educational institutions in nearby villages, rigid social customs regarding the female education, early marriages of girls and abject poverty to name a few resulted into medium gender disparity. The study indicates that the share of the villages having moderate gender disparity (0.30 to 0.60) increased to 61 % in 2001. These villages have been found in the mid-western, central and some individual villages in the south-eastern parts of the Bharmour block (Fig. 3).

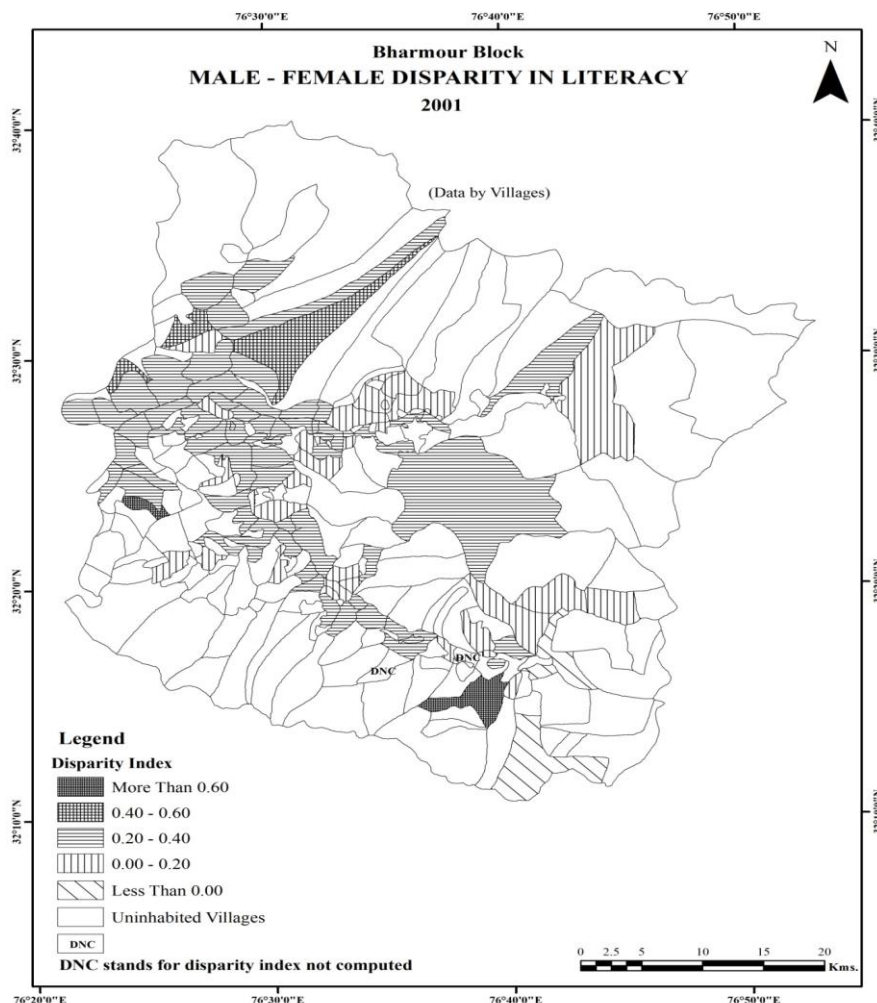


Fig. 3

The main reason in the rise of the ratio of the villages in this category is the decline in the proportion of villages experiencing higher gender disparity in the region. Hence, it shows a positive sign of gender gap in literacy. Table 1 reveals that the share of villages witnessing moderate gender disparity declined to about 31 per cent of the total inhabited villages in 2011. This decline in the share of these villages is due to shift of villages from moderate category to low and very low category of gender disparity in the study area.

Areas of Low Gender Disparity - It reveals from the Table 1 that there were about 12 per cent of the total inhabited villages which registered low gender disparity (0.00-0.20) in literacy in 1991. The availability of educational institutions, teaching-learning materials, low gender based discrimination and awareness among residents about the girls' education resulted into low gender disparity. Table 1 indicates that the number of such villages increased to 29 constituting 28.43 % of total inhabited villages in 2001. These villages have been found in all over the inhabited Bharmour block (Fig. 3). The proportion of such villages increased to about 65 per cent of the total inhabited villages in 2011 (Table 1). So, there is about 52 per cent point change during two decades.

Areas of Very Low Gender Disparity - The study reveals that there were only 2 villages i.e. Dhar Khapru (-0.06) and Thanetar (-0.06) in the category of very low gender disparity in 1991 (Table 1 and Fig. 2). Table 1 and Fig. 3 point out that the number of such villages increased to 4 namely Dhar Jalsu (-0.37), Navei (-0.26), Surai (-0.18) and Urna (-0.04) accounting for 3.94 % of the total inhabited villages in 2001. It is observed in the study that 2 villages i.e. Bharmali (-0.03) and Kiur (-0.16) have witnessed very low gender disparity during 2011 (Table 1 and Fig. 4). The literate male population of these two villages is very low. The major reason behind the low gender disparity in these villages is rise in number of literate married women.

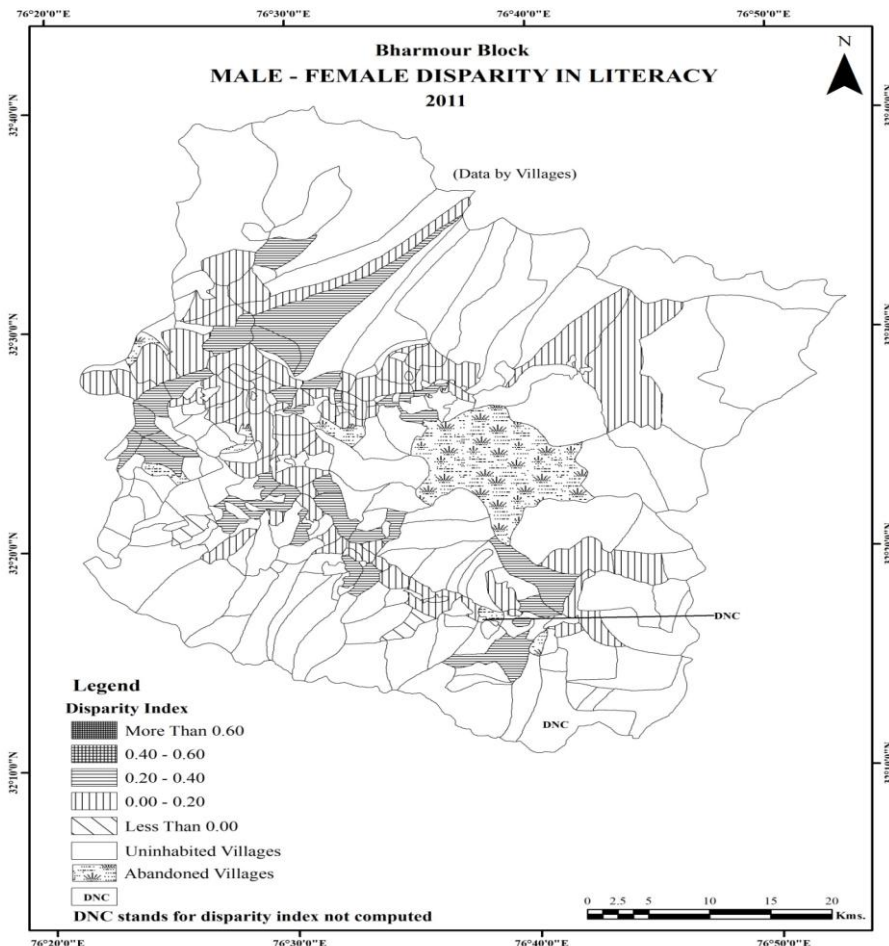


Fig. 4

CONCLUSIONS

The distributional pattern shows significant decrease in the levels of gender disparity in literacy in the Bharmour block from 1991-2011. The study shows that there were about 14% of the villages which had witnessed low levels of male-female disparity in 1991. This proportion increased phenomenally to 66 per cent during 2011 in the study area. The availability of educational institutions, teaching-learning materials, low gender based discrimination, rise

in number of literate women in selective villages and awareness among residents about the girls' education resulted into low gender disparity. The study clearly shows that a little more than one-third (34 %) of the total inhabited villages of the Bharmour block witnessed high gender disparity in literacy in 1991. But, during 2011, there was not even a single village which has witnessed high gender disparity in the study area. The study reveals that 48 % of the total inhabited villages in Bharmour block exhibited medium gender disparity in 1991. It declined to 31.25 per cent in 2011. Thus, the study shows a significant decline in the gap of male-female literacy rate in the mountainous block during the study period.

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