

Education Policies and Educationally Backward Blocks in Punjab

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Abstract: Punjab is among the most developed states of India, rather the state enjoys the prosperity in terms of physiographic conditions, drainage system, economic conditions, agriculture and other resources, but in case of literacy, the state lags behind from many other states of India. Some of the areas show a grim picture in terms of development in this sector. The researchers are trying to highlight those areas where the problem is becoming worse in last few years and moreover also focus on the causes and implications of the problem. For this, the educationally backward blocks were recognized in Punjab in 2007, out of the total 142 blocks, all 21 blocks which fall in the Malwa region were educationally backward blocks (EBB). Despite all the policies of the Government, the blocks are still facing the problems. Some individual, state level and university level studies are undertaken and of course suggested some remedies and also there are many organisations which are making best efforts to improve the present scenario but with little success. Considering the seriousness of the problem and its long term implications, analysis regarding government policies in the existing EBB in Punjab and their problems has been undertaken.

Keywords: Backwardness, education policies, educationally backward blocks, Punjab.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The education system in India has gone through a long journey and the traditions from the past few years have undergone a new augmentation. Government of India is aiming for many rigorous and determined efforts in this field of education so that the target of inclusive growth can be reached as soon as possible. A great attainment of the Indian Government is a shoot up in the literacy rate from 18.3 percent in 1950-51 to 74.04 percent in 2010-11. Such an accomplishment is the result of a lot of efforts by the Indian government in the education sector. Education contributes to the wellbeing of every citizen of the country and the overall development of the country. Education is not only a medium to improve productivity and growth but is also an effective tool of enlarging and raising the participation in democracy and reforming the society (Goel, 2008). Thus, the role of education is very crucial in the development of every nation.

While speaking about the importance of education, Mahatma Gandhi once said, "By education, I mean an all-round drawing out of the best in the child and man- body, mind and spirit". On the other hand, Swami Dayananda Saraswati viewed education as, "formulator of the character". Nelson Mandela, the South African Noble Laureate stated that, "education is the most powerful weapon to change the world". It is a universal remedy of all the problems as it plays significant role in a country's economic growth and motivating political and socio-cultural changes.

In Punjab, besides the prosperity, the state has shown some serious concerns related to demographic issues and among these literacy rate is one of the key issue. In spite of all the great efforts by the state government and non-government organisations the literacy rate of Punjab (Malwa region) is still lagging behind many other states of India. Also the literacy rate among the females and other weaker sections of the society is quite disturbing. Unfortunately, they are always subject to neglect from the historical times and this type of unequal treatment still persisted in the recent period but with the varying amount in many of the areas of Malwa region. Present study is based upon the following objectives:

- to analyse the literacy scenario of Punjab
- to identify and educationally backward blocks of Punjab
- to illustrate the policies of the Punjab government for EBB.

The present study is descriptive and exploratory. It is primarily based on secondary data collected from various sources like MHRD reports, economic surveys and census reports and various websites of state and

national education departments. The analysis has been done on the basis of different Indicators, like literacy data of previous decades, district wise and region wise comparison of literacy rate etc. Descriptive statistical tools like bar graphs, maps and tables, etc. have been used for the interpretation of the data.

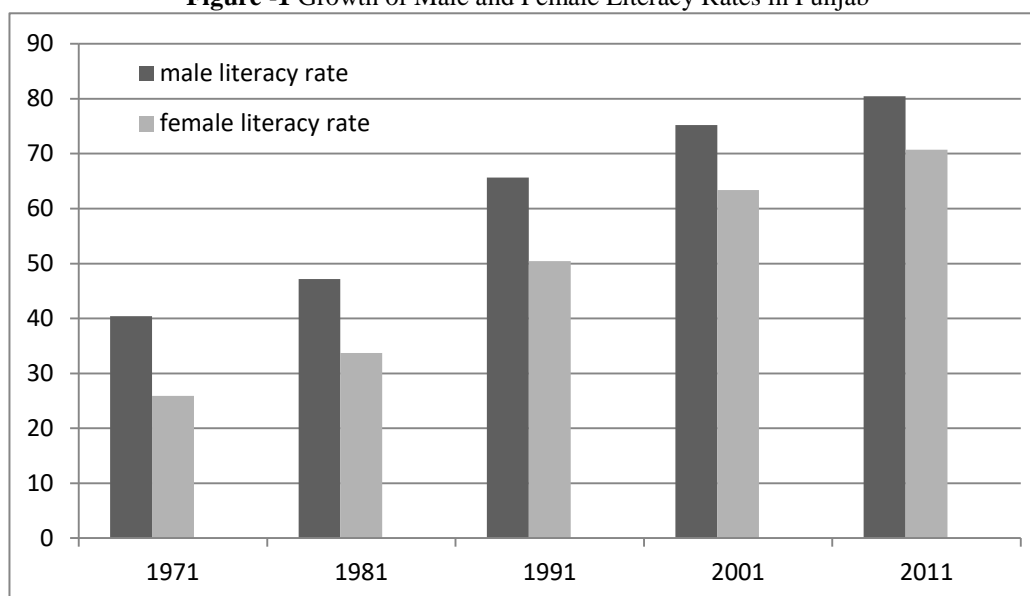
Punjab has seen tremendous change in the last few decades. Government of Punjab has done a lot so that more and more children can have access to the education. Punjab has shown a continuous improvement in literacy from 1971 to 2011 periods. 1971 has been taken as base year, as expansion of education in the state began in seventies. Secondly, the present Punjab came in existence in 1966 after the reorganization of the state. It was only in the post –green revolution period of 1970s that resulted into enormous growth in educational network in the state.

Table-1 Punjab: Literacy Rates during 1971 to 2011

Indicators\Years	2011	2001	1991	1981	1971
Literacy (Percentage)	75.80	69.7	58.51	40.86	33.67
Male Literacy	80.40	75.2	65.66	47.16	40.4
Female Literacy	70.70	63.4	50.41	33.69	25.9
Total Literate (Persons)	18,707,137	14,756,970	9,248,757	6,860,349	4,562,123
Male Literate	10,436,056	8,442,293	5,739,194	4,214,878	2,934,281
Female Literate	8,271,081	6,314,677	3,751,266	2,645,471	1,627,842

Source: Economic and Statistical Organisation, Punjab.

Figure -1 Growth of Male and Female Literacy Rates in Punjab



Source: Computed from Table 1

The literacy rate of Punjab in 2011 is 75.80 percent, which is better than the national average of 74.04 percent. Although male literacy rate is 80.4 percent, but it is slightly less than the national average. The proud fact for Punjab is that the female literacy is 70.7 percent is much better than the national average of 65.4 percent (Census of India, 2011). Further, the gap in literacy rate of male and female has been reduced from 11.8 percent in 2001 to 9.7 percent in 2011. District of Hoshiarpur was at the topmost position in literacy rate at 81.4 percent and now again the district ranks first in the state with 84.6 percent literacy rate and Mansa has noted lowest literacy rate of 61.8 percent (Census of India, 2011).

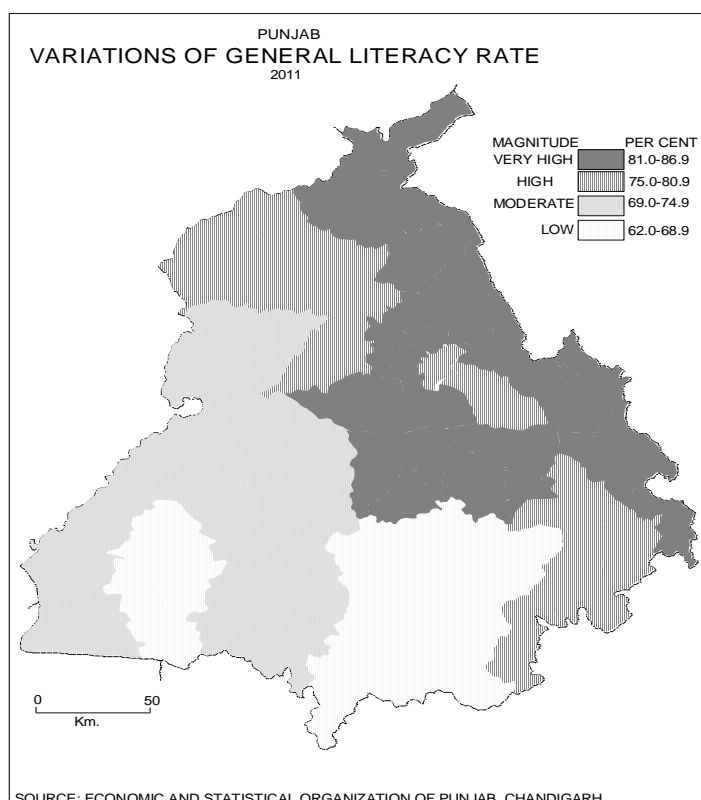
In rural areas of Punjab, the literacy rate is 71.42 percent whereas the rural literacy rate in India is 74 percent. The literacy rate in Punjab is 83.2 percent as compare to the national percentage of 85 percent (census of India 2011).

In the districts like Muktsar, Ferozepur, Bathinda, Mansa, Tarn-Taran, Sangrur and Barnala, the literacy rate is below the state average as well as the national average. In these districts the various blocks were recognised which are educationally backward. As we analyse in terms of different cultural regions, all the districts have shown the satisfactory picture in terms of literacy in Doaba and Majha regions but the districts of Malwa region has shown low literacy rate and different policies were formulated to upgrade these areas.

Table-2 Punjab: District wise Literacy Rates in 2011

State/ District	Total Population	Literacy Rate
Gurdaspur	22,99,026	81.1
Kapurthala	8,17,668	80.2
Jalandhar	21,81,753	82.4
Hoshiarpur	15,82,793	85.4
Shahid Bhagat Singh Nagar	6,14,362	80.3
Fatehgarh Sahib	5,99,814	80.3
Ludhiana	34,87,882	82.5
Moga	9,92,289	71.6
Ferozepur	20,26,831	69.8
Muktsar	9,02,702	66.8
Faridkot	6,18,008	70.6
Bathinda	13,88,859	69.6
Mansa	7,68,808	62.8
Patiala	18,92,282	76.3
Amritsar	24,90,891	77.2
Tarn-Taran	11,20,070	69.4
Rupnagar	6,83,349	83.3
SAS Nagar (Mohali)	9,86,147	84.9
Sangrur	16,54,408	68.9
Barnala	5,96,294	68.9
Punjab	27,743,338	76.7

Source: www.pbplanning.gov.in/ 2011.



Distribution of Educationally Backward Blocks (EBB):

At all India level, Ministry of Human Resource and Development (MHRD) is executing various schemes with the purpose of focusing on the areas which fall behind in case of education. For this purpose, educationally backward districts are identified on the basis of gross enrolment ratio, which includes all enrolled in higher education proportionate to population in 18-23 age groups. Considering this 374 districts in all over India have been identified as Educationally Backward Districts (Sanghi,2015).Additionally, the delineation of educationally backward blocks were undertaken to identify the blocks which were low at educational

development. Educationally Backward Block (EBB) is identified where the level of rural female literacy is less than the national average and gender gap in literacy being above the national average (MHRD, 2007). Initially the number of EBB was 3073, which were identified all over the Indian states which were the part of Sarv Shiksha Abhiyan programme. The list was later on expanded to 3479 EBB with the inclusion of a 406 more blocks under this programme. In case of Punjab, out of total 142 blocks, 21 blocks have been categorized as educationally backward blocks, which are listed in the Table below.

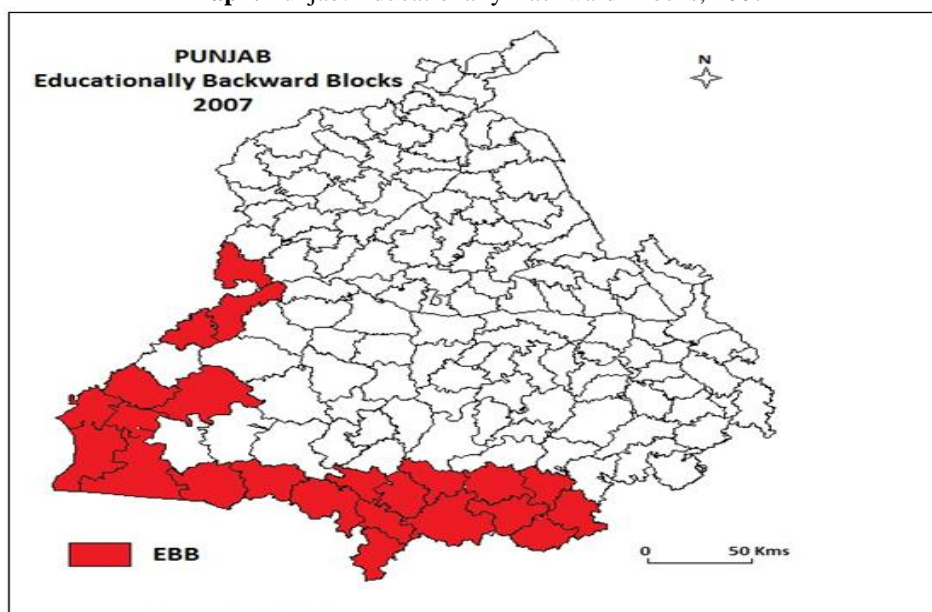
Table-3 Educationally Backward Blocks of Punjab

District	Name of the EBB
Bathinda	Maur, Sangat, Talwandi
Ferozepur	Abohar, Fazilka, Ferozepur, Jalalabad, Khuiann Sarwar, Mamdot
Mansa	Bhiki, Budhlada, Jhunir, Mansa, Sardulgarh
Muksar	Lambi, Muksar
Patiala	Patran
TarnTaran	Valtoha
Sangrur	Andana, Lehragaga, Sunam

Source: Ministry of Human Resource and Development, 2007.

Table 3 depicts that all the identified blocks fall in the Malwa region of Punjab. It is the largest cultural region of Punjab that covers around two-third area of the state. To identify a problem in such a huge area and implementation of any policy for getting positive results seems to be the difficult task for the government. Secondly, the whole Malwa region is a vast plain region with physiographical variations, the extreme south western areas, which were studded with sand dunes earlier, and are having semi-arid conditions and most of these areas are backward. Thirdly, the areas of Malwa region bordering Rajasthan have shown a grim picture in literacy rate as this state always ranks lower in the literacy figures at national level. Fourthly, except district Ludhiana all districts of Malwa have preponderance of rural population, having low inclination towards education and more interested in the primary occupation of agriculture. On average, Malwa region is in the line with Punjab in number of literates, but this figure is still very low as compared to other districts of other folk regions. Map 1 clearly depicts all the educationally backward blocks of Punjab, which are located in Malwa region, except valtoha which is in Tarn Taran district of Majha region. Most of these blocks have either international border with Pakistan or state borders with Rajasthan and Haryana, and all have semi-arid conditions, economically backward and socially not so advanced and having more proportion of rural populations.

Map1: Punjab: Educationally Backward Blocks, 2007



Source: Mapped from MHRD, 2007 data.

Educational Schemes and Policies of the Government:

A great progress can be seen in India’s Education System in last twodecades. A variety of programmes were initiated by the government to get rid of the problem of illiteracy in both rural and urban India, some of the important schemes initiated during this period are:

- Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) was launched for achievement of UEE in 2001-2002.
- To give impetus to girl’s education two programme, namely National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level (NPEGEL) and Kasturba Gandhi Bal Vidyalaya (KGBV) were initiated in 2003.

- Scheme for Setting up of 6000 Model Schools at Block level was started in 2008-09
- Right to Free and Compulsory Education for Children Act has come into force from April 1, 2010.

Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), is one of the major Schemes of the Government, which is centrally sponsored scheme that was executed by Indian government in partnership with State Governments. It is India's main programme for universalising elementary education. Its main aim is to embrace universal access and retention, to cover the gap of gender and social categories in education and augmentation of learning levels of children. The Scheme was launched in the year 2000-2001, and there was a considerable success in universalising elementary education under the SSA program. The interventions under the SSA program include, building of school infrastructure, allocation of teachers, training to the teachers after a specific period and academic school resources provided to the students, to make availability learning resources for children like textbooks, computers, and libraries. Main focus is on the equal status to all, residential schools for girls known as the Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya have been set up. Another aim of the scheme is the identification of children with special needs and providing them support comprising aids, appliances and monitoring. Under the SSA, there are 19.67 Crore children enrolled in 14.5 lakhs elementary schools in the country with 66.27 lakhs teachers at elementary level (India 2013 Reference Annual, 2013, p. 234).

Government of India implemented another scheme by the name, National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level (NPEGE). Main focus of this programme was to reach '*the hardest to reach*' girls, especially those not in school. The programme was launched in July 2003, which is an important component of SSA. It provides additional support for enhancing girl's education through the growth of '*model school*' in every cluster with more intense community mobilization and supervision of girl's enrolment in schools. Gender sensitisation of teachers, development of gender-sensitive learning materials, and provision of need-based incentives like escorts, stationery, workbooks and uniforms are some of the important parts of the programme. The scheme is being implemented in Educationally Backward Blocks (EBBs) where the level of rural female literacy is less than the national average and the gender gap is above the national average. Scheme includes blocks of districts which are not covered under EBBs but are having at least 5 percent SC/ST population and where SC/ST female literacy is below 10 percent. It is also applicable in selected urban slums. About 3272 educationally backward blocks are covered under the Scheme in 24 States of Assam, Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Jharkhand, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka, Jammu & Kashmir, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Orissa, Punjab, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Tripura, Uttar Pradesh, Uttaranchal, West Bengal and one UT of Dadra & Nagar Haveli. Under NPEGE, around 35,254 Model schools have been opened; 25,537 ECCE (Early Childhood Care and Education) centres are being supported; 24,394 additional classrooms have been constructed, and 1.85 lakhs teachers have been given training on gender sensitization, remedial teaching to 9.67 lakhs girls, bridge course covering 1.53 lakhs girls, including additional incentives like uniforms etc. to about 71.46 lakhs girls (India 2013 Reference Annual, p. 234).

Table 4 Block details in respect of State of Punjab

Total No. of Blocks	142
No. of EBBs	21
No of Non-EBBs	121
No. of Schools Approved (@ one school per EBB)	21
No. of schools functional	21

Source: Annual Report, 2011-12

Central Government has decided to set up 6,000 model schools and one school is to be set up in each block as benchmark of excellence. Out of these, 3,500 schools are to be set up in educationally backward blocks (EBBs) through State/UT Governments and 2,500 schools are to be set up under Public-Private Partnership (PPP) mode in blocks which are not educationally backward. From 2009-10, 3,500 schools are operational in educationally backward blocks (EBBs) through State/UT Governments. In case of Punjab, each educationally backward block has one operational model school. The main objectives of the scheme are to have at least onesenior secondary school that is of good status and constitution in every blockand to have a pace setting role for these schools, also to try out innovative curriculum and activities that imparts knowledge and to be a model in infrastructure, curriculum, evaluation and school governance. The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act came into force from April 1, 2010. RTE act says that every child in the age group of 6-14 years will be provided 8 years of Elementary Education in an age appropriate classroom in the vicinity of his/her neighbourhood. Any cost that prevents a child from accessing school will be borne by the State which shall have the responsibility of enrolling the child as well as ensuring attendance and completion of 8 years of schooling. No child shall be denied admission for want of documents; no child shall be turned away if the

admission cycle in the school is over and no child shall be asked to take an admission test. Children with disabilities will also be educated in the mainstream schools. RTE provides an apt platform to reach the unreached, with specific provisions for disadvantaged groups, such as child labourers, migrant children, children with special needs, or those who have a “disadvantage owing to social, cultural, economical, geographical, linguistic, gender or such other factor.” RTE focuses on the quality of teaching and learning, which requires accelerated efforts and substantial reforms. A report on the status of implementation of the Act was released by the Ministry of Human Resource Development on the one-year anniversary of the Act. The report admits that 8.1 million children in the age group 6-14 remain out of school and there’s a shortage of 508,000 teachers’ country-wide (Kainth, 2016).

To conclude it can be said that this study is highlighting the policies and schemes given by centre government and government of Punjab in educationally backward blocks of Malwa region. The whole schemes are implemented to improve the quality of primary and secondary education that directly correlate with the improvement in the higher education system as well as the quality of living in these particular areas. It also promotes effective teaching and learning for all the students in the backward areas. There is no exaggeration to say that the government policies were implemented in full spirit but the results of these schemes are still far behind the expectations so there is need to balance the qualitative and quantitative development. Highest quality of education is essential and enables people to face social, cultural, economic and technological challenges.

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