

Educational Status of Tribal Women in Four Eastern States of India

Indrakshi Ghosh

Abstract

Scheduled tribes were the most backward classes in Indian society. Women's position was further depressed. In this educational status of scheduled tribe women's position was compared with scheduled tribe males' and general caste women's position. Comparison was done for four eastern states of India over a thirty year period. The states were chosen as Assam, Bihar, Orissa and West Bengal and the period taken under consideration was from 1991 through 2011 article.

Keywords: Scheduled tribe girls and women; Education; Deprivation

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1.Introduction

Education refines sensitivities, activities and perceptions that contributes to national cohesion scientific temper and independence of mind and spirit thus furthering the goals of secularism and democracy enshrined in our constitution. Education is the key factor for national development. Education is considered as powerful instrument of social, economic, political and cultural changes. The role of education is to impart knowledge, develop skills and inculcate right type of attitudes, values and interests. The Kothari Commission suggested that education should relate to life, needs, aspirations of the people. It increases productivity, accelerate growth and step up modernisation. It helps in developing social, moral and spiritual values among the future generations. Destiny of India is shaped in the classrooms. The fifth Constitutional Amendment Act has made primary education as a fundamental right to the children of 6 to 14 years of age. Education is an investment in human capital. It enhances one's well-being. Illiterate people have low self-esteem and low social status. Spread of education resolves social problems like poverty, ignorance, illiteracy, diseases, population growth and environmental degradation. Every individual is endowed with certain potentialities and through education this has to be brought out to achieve a harmonious development. According to National Policy on Education (NPE 1986), education produce self-assured, more productive, more capable citizens.

The disadvantaged population groups are the victims of multiple handicaps due to various reasons:

- 1.They do not have easy access to basic educational infrastructure like schools, teachers and books.
- 2.The content of education rarely fulfil their specific learning needs.
- 3.The nature of curriculum transaction is not conducive to their learning styles.
- 4.The model of schooling and education presented to the disadvantaged groups is alien to the cultural need of these groups.

The educationally disadvantaged groups fail to see any point and purpose of formal education .They remain outside the school, drop-out or fail to achieve the desirable learning levels. Scheduled tribes are most impoverished and marginalised population in India. India has 10.2 crores of ST population. It is 8.6 per cent of total India's population according to 2011 census. Tribal population is a minority in number but they represent an enormous diversity of groups. They differ in respect of dialects, physical features, size of the population, various cultural and religious habits etc. Prior to the Constitution of India, the tribals were variously named as aboriginals, adivasis, forest tribes, hill tribes, primitive tribes etc. In 1951 our Constitution identified them as 'Scheduled Tribes'. In 1951, the number of STs were only 212, but their number has increased to 705 by 2011 census. They have more than 270 languages in India (India Education Report 2002). They are occupying 15 per cent of land area of our country in various ecological and geo-climatic conditions. There are 75 ethnic groups considered as Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups. STs are in largest no in Orissa(62 per cent). It is found that 22 per cent of tribal habitations have less than 100 population, more than 40 per cent have between 100 to 300 people and others have less than 500 people(Panda 2011; Sujatha 2008). According to Prof. Amartya Sen unless we properly address the capabilities of the marginalised groups we shall not be able to achieve economic freedom, political freedom and social opportunities. Although these conditions are different from one another but they are interconnected. The Imperial Gazetteer of India, 1911 defined tribe as a 'collection of families bearing a common name, speaking a common dialect, occupying or professing to occupy a common territory and is not usually endogenous though originally it might have been so'(Nithya 2014). The tribes in India are usually residing in hill areas, forests, near the seas and in islands. Their culture and life-style is different from non-tribals (Preet 1994). Though our national leaders and Constitution makers are committed to uplift the tribal people, yet the desired level of development has not been achieved.(Chandra Guru et al:2015)

2. Historical Perspective

During colonial period for increasing revenue collection Britishers brought most of the tribal regions under their administrative control (Sen 1992). According to Virginius Xaxa incorporation of tribal regions under colonial rules led to their integration into the larger social system which resulted in further marginalisation of the tribals (Virginius Xaxa 2015). The non-tribals in course of time evicted the tribals from their lands and encroached their land illegally. Non-tribals became the landlord and tribals turned into agricultural labourers in their own land. This ultimately resulted in rebellion movement in tribal territories which compelled the British Govt. to think anew. Britishers thereafter kept the tribes in isolation (away from the national mainstream) (Chandra Guru et al 2015). British policy of isolationism allowed them to remain backward (Bhowmik 1988; Sen 1992).

Individual and collective efforts were made by many social workers to bring the tribals into mainstream. The Christian Missionaries took up development activities for tribals specially in the field of health and education. Their approach was humanitarian and they succeeded in Assam ,Bihar and Madhya Pradesh.

3. Post Independence Developments

After independence Jawaharlal Nehru followed the principle of the development of tribal communities along the line of their genius and nothing should be imposed upon them. Since independence various strategies were undertaken for tribal welfare. However from the seventies the emphasise was shifted

towards development. In this context according to Dhebar Commission (appointed during fourth 5year plan) different tribal groups were at different stages of development. For example primitive tribal groups were in the pre-agricultural level of technology (at the hunting and gathering stage) and they had stagnant or diminishing population. The Govt. of India identified 52 ST communities as primitive scheduled tribes. In the Fifth Plan emphasis was given to the primitive tribes. An` area development approach` was adopted which allocated special funds only for areas with more than 50 per cent tribal population. During Fifth Plan an Integrated Tribal Development Project was undertaken to focus on the development of tribal dominated areas. In the Sixth Plan development of primitive tribal groups was prioritised. From Seventh Plan special emphasise was made on tribal women and children. Govt. of India took a policy decision that only competent and sensitive Govt. servants were to be given posting in tribal areas. Competent NGO s and voluntary organisations were given opportunities to work with the tribals Dhebar Commission identified that inappropriate and unattractive teaching methods were responsible for low literacy rate, frequent drop-out etc. Dhebar Commission also suggested for the provision of mid-day meal, clothing, free book delivery etc. to all the tribal children. The Commission also recommended for opening of schools at localities where 30 students are available .There should be a school within one mile of every child. The Commission further suggested for adjustment of timing, vacations and holidays of schools to suit the tribal social and cultural life. Kothari Commission (1966) suggested for spread of education. It emphasised for parents` education along with their children.

Comparative Literacy Rates of STs and Total Population 1971-2011

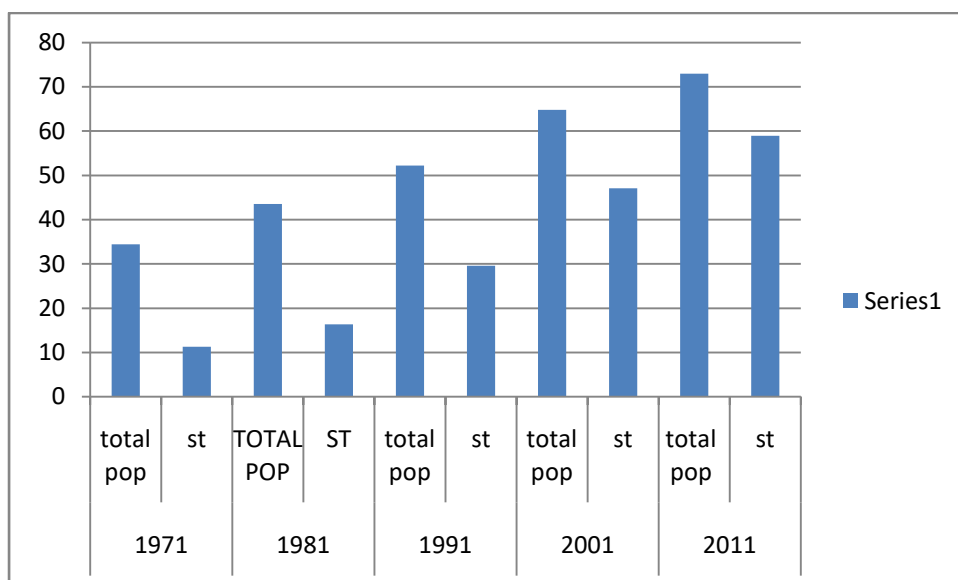


Fig-1

Comparatiive Literacy Rate for SC and ST Population 1971-2011

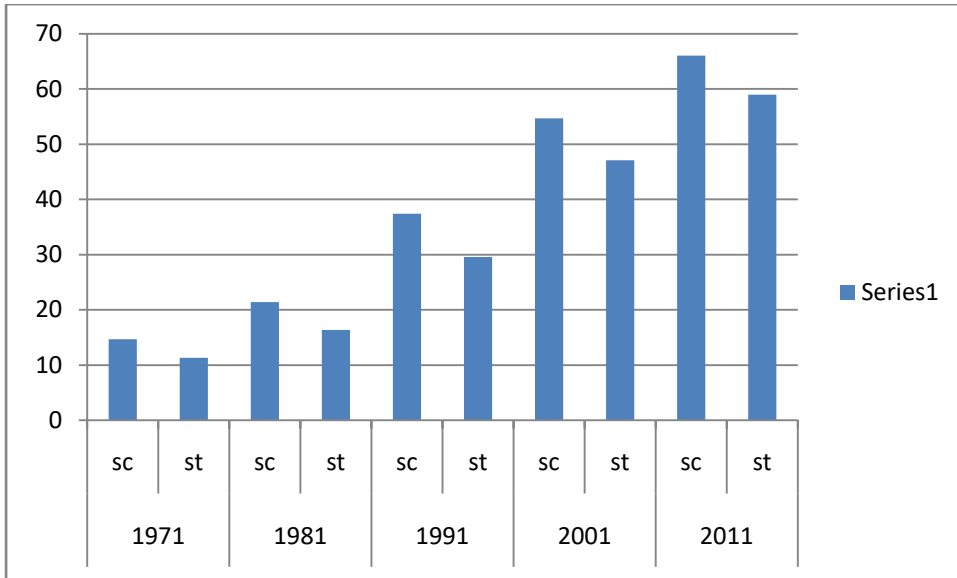


Fig-2

Gender-wise Literacy Trends of Tribal Population in India 1961-2011

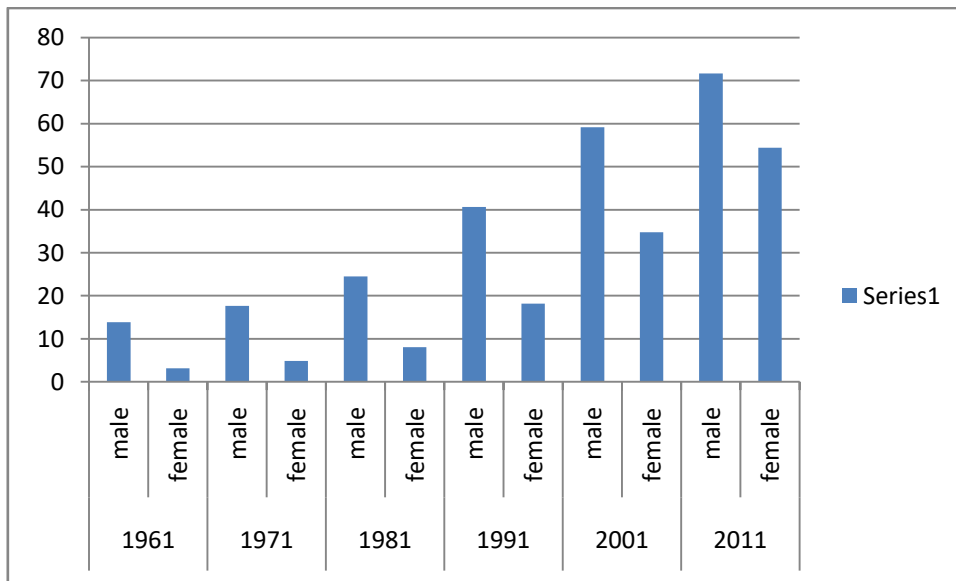
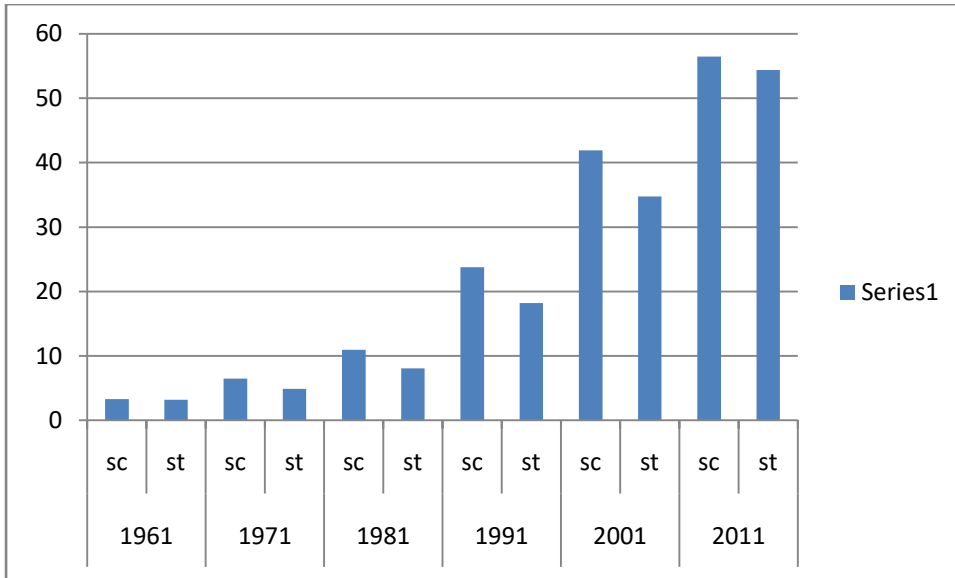


Fig-3

Female Literacy Trends of SC and ST Population from 1961 through 2011

**Fig-4**

Literacy rate of Scheduled Tribe population was only 8.6per cent in 1961 and female literacy rate was more depressing; it was only 3.2per cent . In the third plan Govt. of India conceptualised Ashram Schools. Besides hostel facilities were imparted to the tribal students for boarding and lodging. Despite those measures literacy rate did not cross 11.39per cent in 1971 .Causes behind low literacy rate were absenteeism, stagnation, drop-out and seasonal migration by the tribal children .Besides in a situation of dire necessities of life education becomes a matter of luxury for the tribal family (Pradhan 2011). In spite of intensive efforts , literacy rate increased marginally from 11.3per cent in 1971 to 16.35per cent in 1981 and female literacy rate remained only 8.05per cent in 1981. It shows in first three decades tribal education was very slow. Because of this low literacy rate a Tribal Sub-Plan was initiated during Fifth 5-Year Plan which put priority to the education of women and children. Fourth All-India Education Survey (1978) discovered that more than 2500 tribal habitations had no school. For Secondary schooling 82.18per cent of the tribal population was within reach of 8 kms and only 18.8per cent of them had access to higher secondary school (Ministry of Tribal Welfare, High Powered Committee, G.O.I Report:2014).

At the time of Sixth 5-year plan ,nearly 49per cent of tribal boys and 70per cent tribal girls were yet to receive elementary education .The National Policy on Education (NPE) was framed in 1986.The primary objective of NPE was to break stagnation in primary education with special emphasis on disadvantaged groups. Seventh 5-year Plan (1985-1990) gave priority to Universalisation of elementary education to all children in the age group of 6-14 years by 1990.NPE recommended for developing curricula in tribal language in the early stage making arrangements to switch over to the regional language in latter years. Besides NPE suggested for locally relevant context and curricula , locally produced text books in local dialects. All these led to change in the graph of tribal education. But the gap between tribal and non-tribal education remained to be double-digit from 22.21per cent in 1991 to 14.03per cent in 2011.

4.Problems of education of Tribals

1.Medium of language: Medium of instruction at school is different from their vernacular. It poses constraint for the tribal children to access the education imparted at school.

2.Location: Geographical location put barriers to their attendance at school. Most of the primitive tribes still live in hill areas or dense forests. Lack of proper transport facilities and lack of schools in these regions put another obstacle towards attaining education.

3. Parental Attitudes: Since education does not yield immediate economic return the tribal parents prefer to engage their children in remunerative employment which supplements the family income.

4. Availability of teachers: Since tribal villages are mostly in rural areas teacher absenteeism is a regular feature which affects the education of tribal boys and girls.

5. Lack of proper monitoring: This is due to poor coordination between the Tribal Welfare Department and School Education Department.

6. Socio-economic condition of the tribal people: Poor socio-economic condition or economic impoverishment is the main reason for lower rate of literacy and other educational achievements of the tribals. It is impossible for marginalised households to invest in education in the form of school fees, costs of books, uniforms, meals and transportations. Rather children do contribute to their family income as child labour and indirectly specially girl children are better engaged to contribute in household chores.

7. Cultural Gap: Tribals are not catered to the culturally linked education. There is cultural gap between the education they receive at schools and they face in their day-to-day life.

8. Basic Amenities: Mere school buildings fail to attract girl child unless it has some basic amenities like drinking water, separate toilet for boys and girls etc. The common toilet facility in many cases prevents tribal girls from enrolling after fifth standard. Hence the drop out ratio goes higher for tribal girls.

9. During the cultivation period the drop-out rate is much higher because children assist their family members in sowing, weeding, plantation and harvesting activities.

10. Economic hardship: It is major factor for low enrolment and high drop-out.

Additional factors for poor female literacy rate are gender based inequality, social discrimination and economic exploitation, the engagement of girl child in domestic chores, the low enrolment of girls in schools, their poor nutrition (gender biased nutrition) and low retention rate and high drop-out rate (GOI 1998). However 2011 census data indicate that educational development is quite uneven for different states.

5. Comparative study of four Eastern States of India

Assam, Bihar, Orissa and West Bengal are chosen for comparative study of the educational status of tribal women and girls.

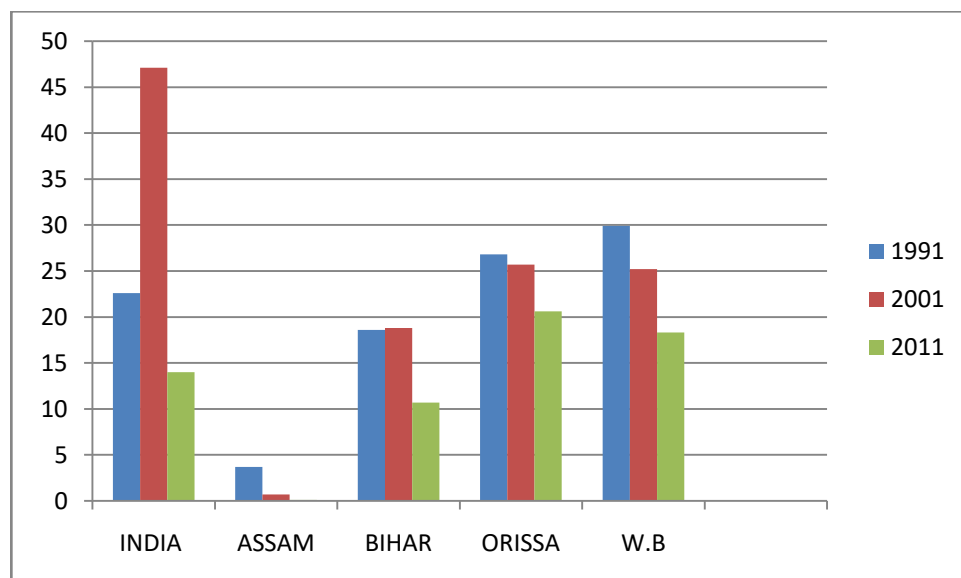
Assam: Assam is one of the more economically backward state of India. More than two-thirds of the population lives in rural areas (NSS 64TH Round). Among the social groups OBCs account for almost half the population. The next largest group is STs at 14.02 per cent. According to 2011 census Assam has a better sex-ratio of 954 females per thousand males, which is higher than the all India sex-ratio (940 females per thousand males). For education indicator Assam's performance is better than other eastern states. It is due to the Sarva Siksha Abhiyan, and the participation of village communities through Village Education Communities (VECs). (HDR2011)

Bihar: Bihar is one of fastest growing state of India. However there is a high inter-state disparity with North Bihar lagging behind. North Bihar is predominantly agrarian and is highly prone to floods with poor irrigation facilities and hence low agricultural productivity. Southern Bihar, growing at a faster pace, accounted for 0.92 per cent of population are ST within the state. Samekit Karya Yojana has been incorporated in the seven tribal and backward districts – Arwal, Aurangbad, Jehanabad, Gaya, Jamui, Nawada and Rohtas. All of them are in Southern Bihar. Therefore, not only pace of growth has increased, it has also become more inclusive in nature (Economic survey of Bihar 2010-11). Share of the state is 1.22 per cent at all India level. (NSS 64th Round). The literacy rate at Bihar is 63.8 per cent as compared to 74 per cent literacy rate of the country. (Census 2011)

Orissa: Orissa is one of the economically poorer states of India. It has some locational advantages. It is a coastal area. It has abundant natural resources—a fifth of India's coal, a quarter of its iron ore, a third of its bauxite reserves and most of the chromite. However geographical barrier like mountain (the Eastern Ghats), poor infrastructure and indifferent economic governance have hindered its growth and prosperity. Within the state STs account for 23.6 per cent. And across the states it is 9.7 per cent at all India level. In 2007-08 less than half of the STs in the state were literate. The STs have lower literacy rate than state average and the all India average for SCs and STs. Even though public expenditure on education has been rising in normal terms, the real increase was very small (Orissa HDR 2004). Further there were annual fluctuations of expenditure on education as a percentage of GDP. For the year 2007-08, public expenditure on education was 2.7 per cent of GDP and the bulk (95 per cent) of the meagre amount was spent on salaries (Orissa HDR 2004). However the latest estimates from census 2011 show that Orissa with its literacy rate of 73.5 per cent is approaching close to the National Literacy Rate of 74 per cent.

West Bengal: It is most populous and historically most industrialised states of the country. In the recent decades the state suffered de-industrialisations. However it has performed well in the service sector. West Bengal has been home to 3.8 per cent of STs (across the state). STs account for 5.2 per cent within the state. These groups have also been observed to be the poorest (West Bengal Human Development Report 2004). West Bengal is situated in the extreme east stretching from Himalayas to the Bay of Bengal. It is bordered by Bangladesh on its east. Apart from Bangladesh West Bengal get migrants from Bihar, Orissa, Uttar Pradesh settling mainly at Gangetic plane. However the state's performance in terms of literacy was better than the national average. According to census 2011 the literacy rate of West Bengal was 77 per cent as compared to national literacy rate 74 per cent. The state govt. prioritised the opening of new colleges in rural areas. This catered to the SCs and STs who reside in the rural areas. With access to higher education they performed better than the national average for their groups. The other reason for the better performance of the state as compared to the all India average was that the per capita real expenditure on general education more than doubled during the period 1980-81 to 1997-98. The state govt. has introduced an alternate school education system (Sishu Siksha Karmashuchi) with the objective of providing basic education to children aged 5-9 years who were unable to get enrolled in formal primary schools. (HDR 2011)

Gap in literacy rate for total population and st from 1991 through 2011



Source: Statistical Profile of ST in India 2013

Fig-5

2010 -11
State-wise enrolment by stages of school education of ST students

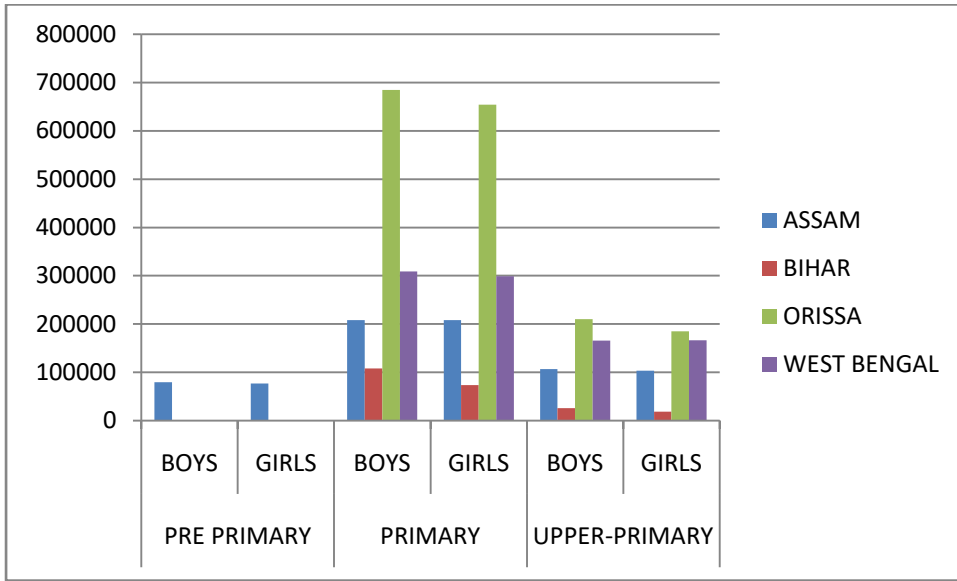
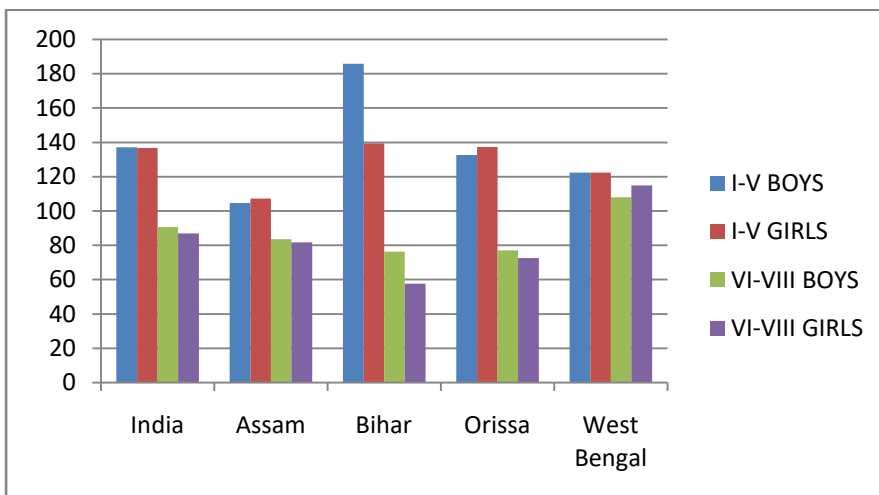


Fig-6

Source: Statistical Profile of ST in India 2013

Gap in literacy rate between total population and STs (fig-5) is declining over time. The gap is minimum at Assam. Next best is Bihar. For the period 2001-2011 the gap has declined rapidly for India as a whole and for the concerned states also. So far as state-wise enrolment by stages of school education is concerned the enrolment at pre-primary level is zero for Bihar, Orissa and West Bengal. In the primary level enrolment is highest for Orissa. Other states' enrolments are much lower in comparison to Orissa for the primary level. However, in the upper-primary level the enrolment is much lower for all the states. It shows there is high drop-out rate from primary to upper-primary level.

Gross Enrolment Rate of ST students 2010-11



Source: ibid

Fig-7

Gross Enrolment Rate- ST (2010-11)

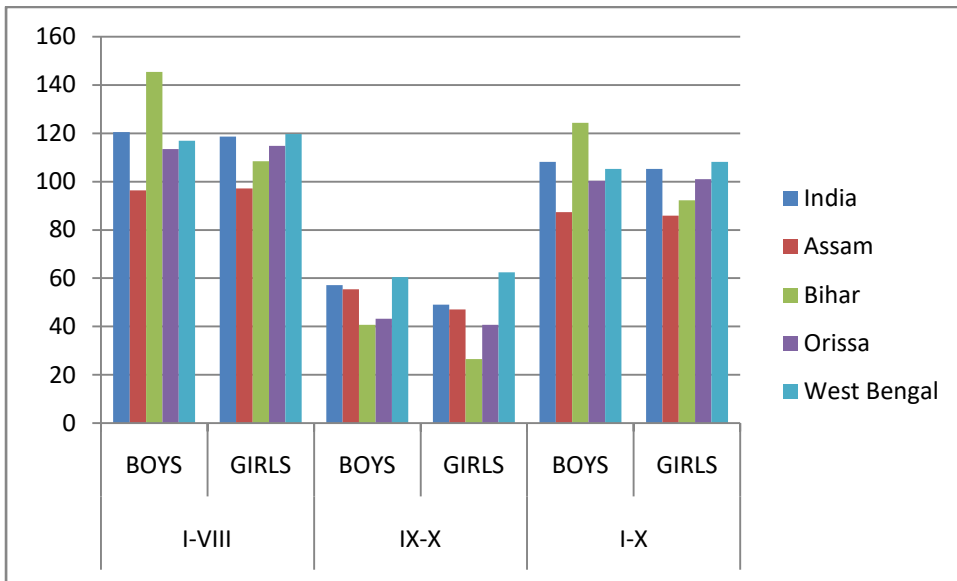
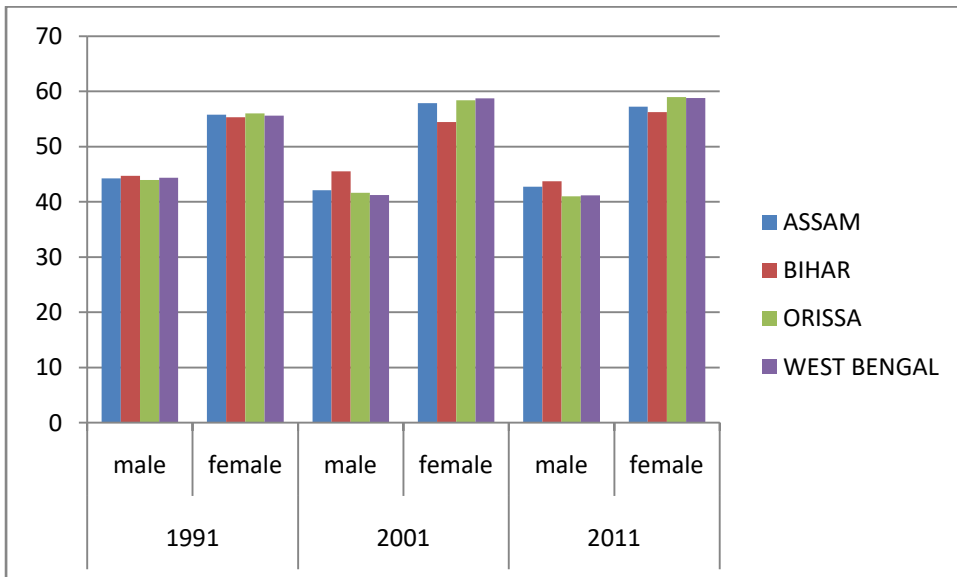


Fig-8

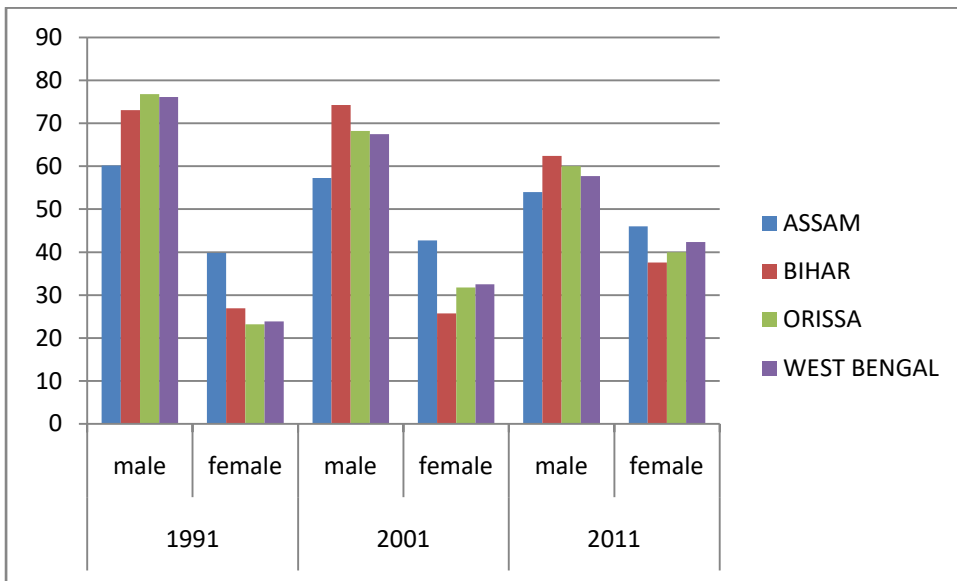
Gross Enrolment Rate (I-V) for Bihar is much above average Indian enrolment rate (fig-7). But it is gradually declining thereafter for the middle school. For West Bengal GER is very good for primary and middle school. In Bihar and Orissa there is high drop-out rate for the middle school. In Assam GER as well as drop-out rate are low. But the drop-out rate is highest for IX-X for all the states.

Illiteracy of ST for the four eastern states from 1991 through 2011



Source: census of India 1991,2001,2011 Fig-9

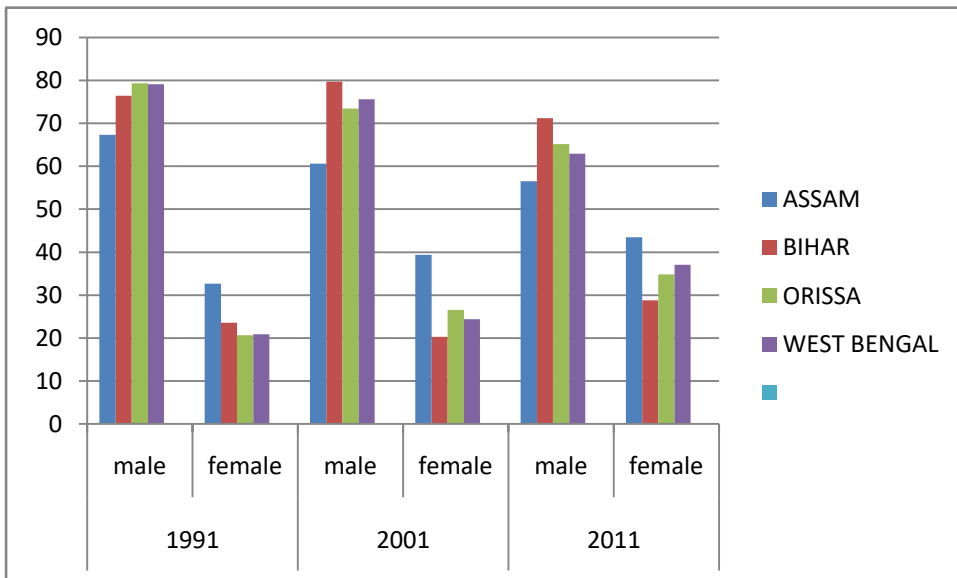
Primary Education of ST of four eastern states from 1991 through 2011



Source: *ibid*

Fig-10

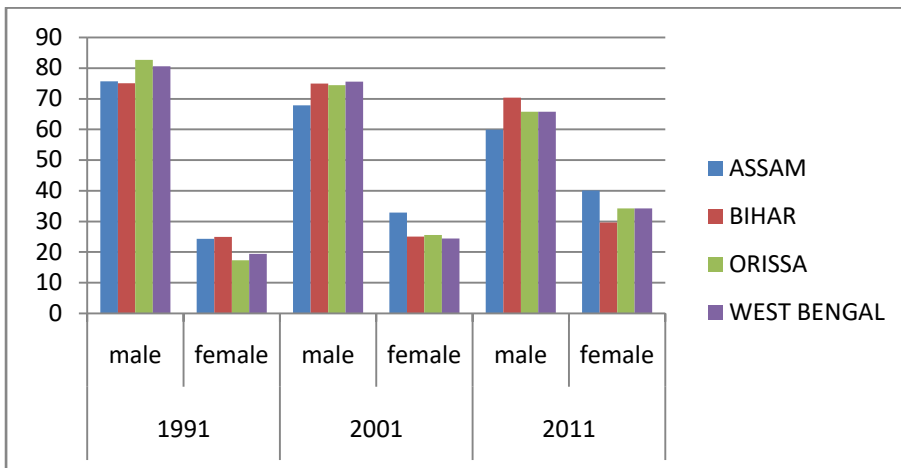
Secondary Education of ST for four eastern states 1991 through 2011



Source: *ibid*

Fig-11

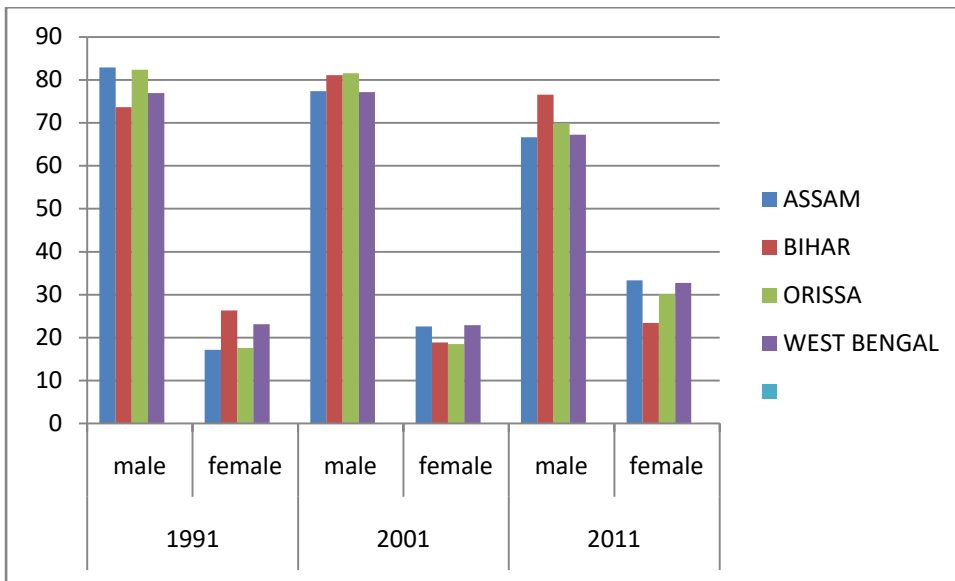
Higher Secondary Education of ST for four Eastern States of India



Source:ibid

Fig-12

Graduate and Above for ST of four Eastern States of India 1991-2011

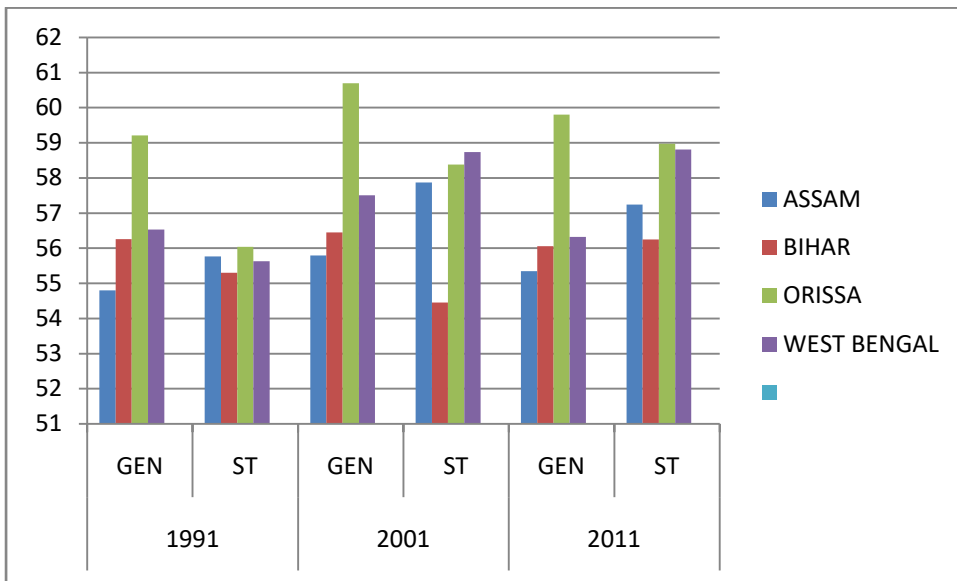


Source:ibid

Fig-13

Fig-9 shows that illiteracy is at higher percentage for female in comparison to male for all the four eastern states from 1991 through 2011. In case of primary education females are lagging behind their male counterpart. However there is increasing trend for primary education for the girls and male female gap is declining over time (fig-10). So far as secondary education is concerned there is sufficient male female gap however it is again diminishing over time. Assam’s position is much better for ST female in comparison to other states. Gap between male and female is highest for Bihar. Orissa and West Bengal is in between those two states (fig-11). The scenario is almost same for Higher Secondary education of ST students. Girls are far behind boys for all the states concerned. Assam’s position is better than other states. West Bengal and Orissa are in between Assam and Bihar. However male female gap is declining over time. The situation is far worse for women in case of ‘Graduate and above’ (fig-13). Male female gap is much higher in this case. Assam and West Bengal are almost at par with each other (for women). Bihar and Orissa are on the backfoot.

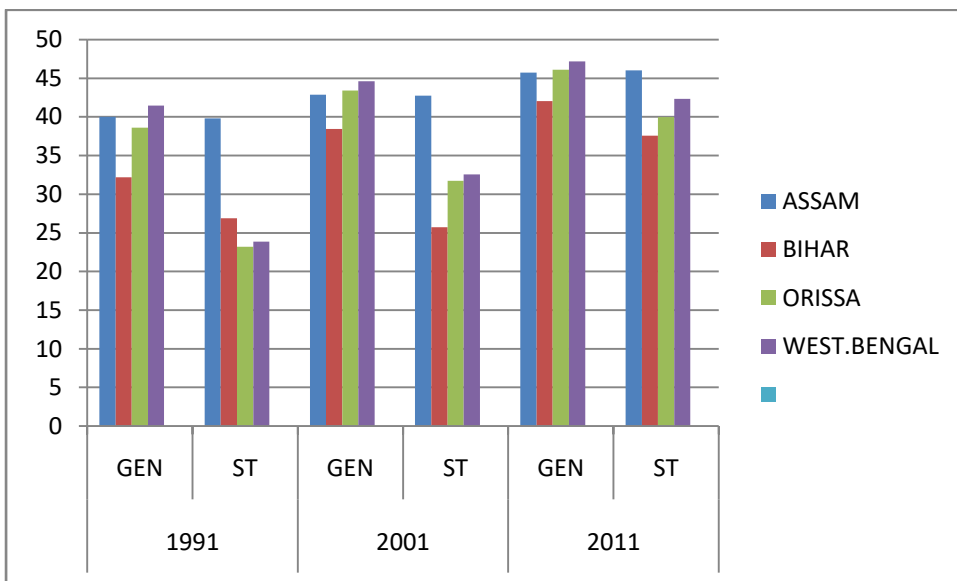
Comparing illiterate general category women and girls with ST category 1991-2011



Source:ibid

Fig-14

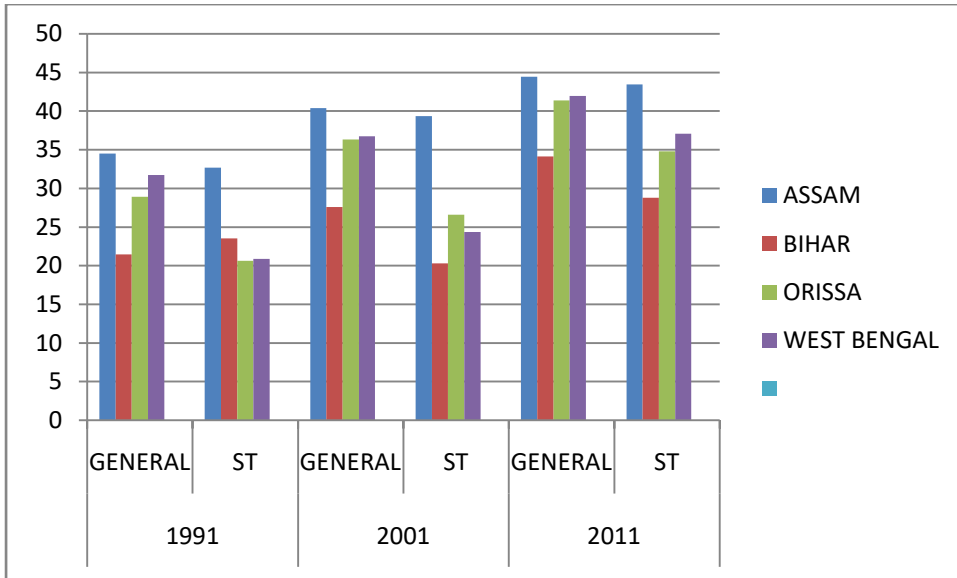
Comparing general category girls with ST girls for primary education 1991-2011



Source: ibid

Fig-15

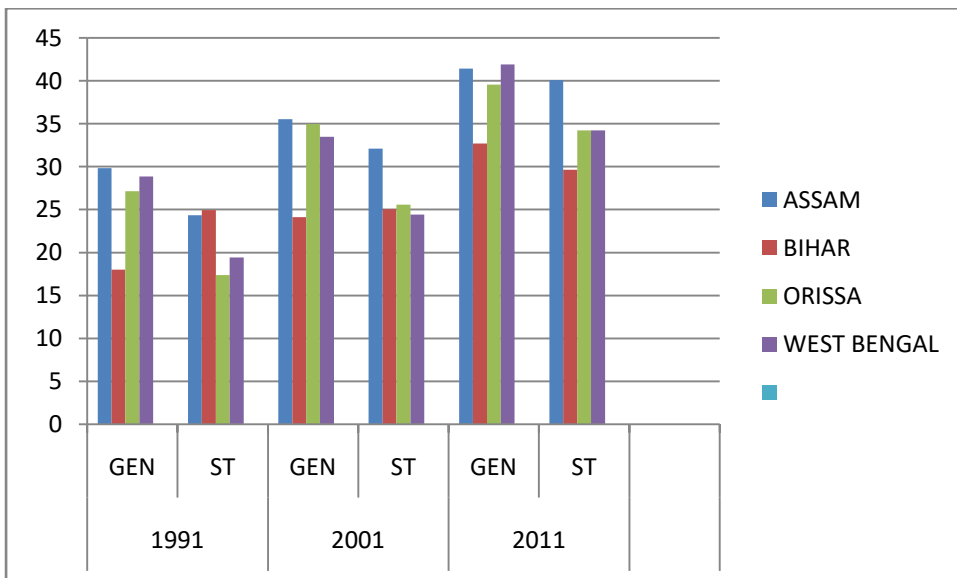
Comparing general and ST category girls for secondary education (1991-2011)



Source: ibid

Fig-16

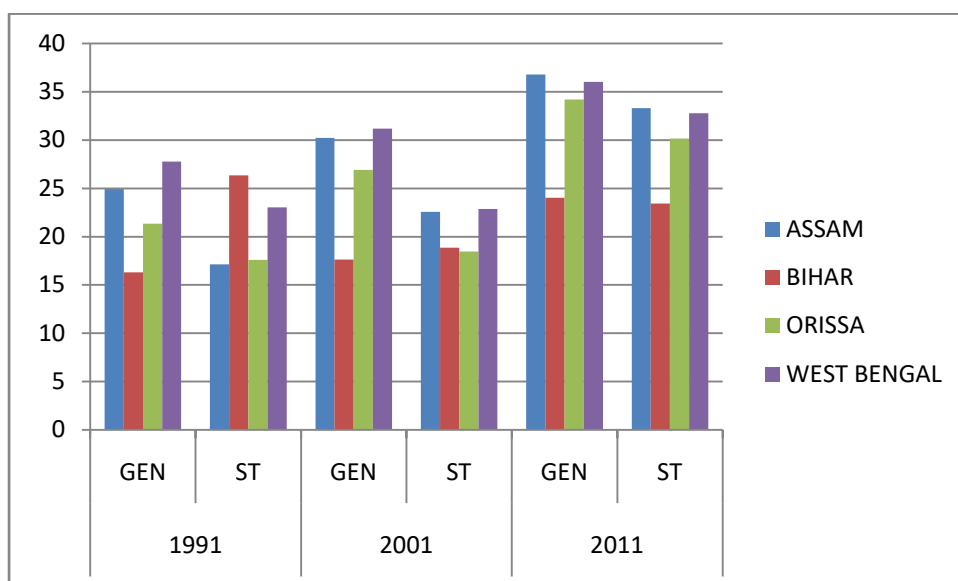
Comparing general and ST category girls and women for Higher Secondary education (1991-2011)



Source: ibid

Fig-17

Comparing general and ST women for Graduate and above (1991-2011)



Source: *ibid*

Fig-18

Comparing general category and ST girls and women for various educational level we do find from the above figs (fig 14-fig 18) that there is gap in educational status of ST category and general category. In Assam percentage of illiterates is higher for ST girls and women comparing general category from 1991 through 2011. For Bihar there are more illiterate in the general category than among the ST women in 1991 and 2001; however in 2011 they are at par. There is highest illiteracy in Orissa. Percentage of illiteracy is higher for general category in comparison to ST girls and women from 1991 through 2011 in Orissa. In West Bengal 1991 shows percentage of illiteracy is higher for general category in comparison to tribal women. However in 2001 and 2011 the situation changes and the percentage of illiteracy for tribal women is greater than general cast and the gap between general cast and scheduled tribe women is increasing over time. There is no gap in primary education in Assam for general and ST category girls. However in other three states there is gap between general cast and STs. The percentage of general cast attaining primary education is higher than STs. However the gap between general and ST is declining over time. For Secondary education it follows the same pattern that is there is almost same level of achievement for general cast and Scheduled Tribes in case of Assam. But there is declining gap between general and ST girls for the other three states. So far as Higher Secondary education is concerned there is gap between general caste and tribal students. However the gap is minimum at Assam. In Bihar at H.S level the percentage of tribal women was higher than general cast in 1991 and 2001. But in 2011 general caste did better than STs. In West Bengal and Orissa the percentage of general category is greater than that of ST category and the gap remains almost same over time. For 'Graduate and above' category percentage of general students is higher than STs in Assam, Orissa and West Bengal. However in Bihar according to 1991 and 2001 census graduate tribal women outnumbered general caste.

6. Conclusion

From the above analysis it is evident that tribal girls and women can prosper if they get proper and adequate opportunities. Different plans and programmes also highlighted this. However till now tribal women are almost at the lowest position in terms of achievement of education. The content policy prescriptions of education must match learning needs as well as cultural needs of the tribals. The education system must acknowledge the special type of capabilities of the tribals. Academics may be enriched by incorporating the tribal culture. There must be educational institutions in remote areas where tribals reside. At the early stage, education should be imparted in vernacular of the tribal community. For tribal girls there should be separate toilet facility in educational institution. There are very many recommendations with very few

implementation. We should implement the policies of various commissions set for the welfare of tribal communities.

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