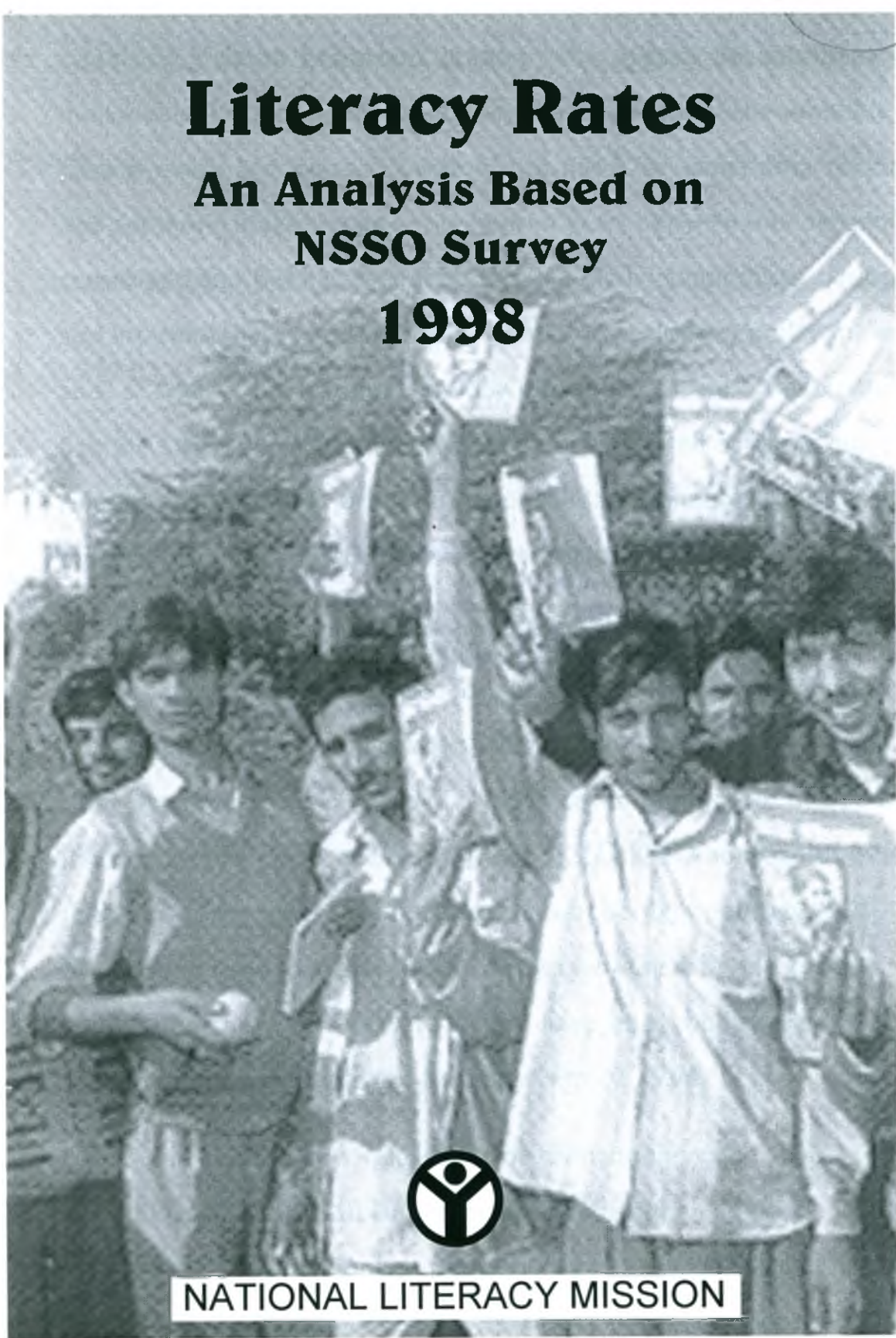


Literacy Rates

An Analysis Based on NSSO Survey 1998



NATIONAL LITERACY MISSION

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Literacy is an important input in the overall development of individuals. In India, data on literacy are provided by the population Census every ten years. However, the need for generating reliable and authentic literacy data in the interim years between one decennial census and another has been felt most acutely by economists, national and international organisations, planners, practitioners, policy makers and, of course, the National Literacy Mission. Therefore, the National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO) was requested to carry out the required exercise and bring out a consolidated picture of literacy as from the time of the last decennial census in 1991.

2. This is the first time that NSSO has taken the trouble to process literacy information and format it in usable and coherent terms, although it has been collecting raw data from its 6000 field officers since its inception in 1950. NSSO takes samples of 40,000 households each year and a sample of 1,20,000 households every five years. They have now updated the exercise right upto December of 1997, including therein the results obtained in the process of conducting the 53rd Round. They have also, while releasing the figures, *made an estimation up to the end of 1998.*

3. The data now released is of tremendous value. It is a well-known fact that Human Development Indices compiled by the UNDP, World Bank Reports, Education compilations brought out by UNICEF (as very recently in their 'State of the World's Children Report, 1999)

and UNESCO Publications – all rely on the latest available literacy data to make inter-country comparisons. In light of these circumstances, the value of the data now released by the NSSO cannot be over-emphasized.

4. Let us take a look then, at the facts and figures now released by the NSSO with respect to literacy attainments in the age group 7+ (the same age group that the Decennial Census addresses). First, a quick look at the comparative overall picture of growth in literacy levels between 1991 and 1997 as well as that projected for 1998:

Year	Literacy Percentage
1991	52
1997	62
1998	64

5. This shows a jump of 10 percentage points between 1991 and 1997 (a time frame of just 6 years) and 12 percentage points between 1991 and 1998 (a gap of just 7 years). This compares extraordinarily with the decadal trends of previous years since independence which are depicted below:

Year	Literacy Percentage	Percentage Decadal Growth
1951	18.3	
1961	28.3	10.0
1971	34.4	6.1
1981	43.5	9.1
1991	52.2	8.7

Average Decadal Growth – 8.5%

6. The NSSO figures show that in the current decade, *in a matter of just 6 years, the decadal average of all earlier years has been surpassed!*

7. **Second**, the increase in literacy is particularly rapid between July 1995 and December 1997. This was, in fact, the hardest time period for the National Literacy Mission when Literacy Campaigns moved northwards into the Hindi heartland and faced enormous administrative challenges and deeply-ingrained, adverse, socio-cultural milieus.

8. **Third**, the urban-rural differential in literacy rates has shown a marked decline. The table below illustrates the point:

YEAR	URBAN	RURAL	DIFFERENCE
1961	54.4%	22.5%	31.9%
1971	60.2%	27.9%	32.3%
1981	67.2%	36.0%	31.2%
1991	73.1%	44.7%	28.4%
1997	80.0%	56.0%	24.0%

It would be seen that for the first time in a span of just **6 years**, *the urban-rural differential has dropped by more than 4% i.e. faster than in any previous decade.*

Again, the rapidity of *growth of literacy in rural areas, as opposed to urban areas, is markedly more in the last 6 years as opposed to any previous decade.* This would be evident from the table below:

YEAR	URBAN	RURAL	INCREASE IN URBAN	INCREASE IN RURAL	DIFFERENCE
1961	54.4%	22.5%	-	-	-
1971	60.2%	27.9%	5.8%	5.4%	-0.4%
1981	67.2%	36.0%	7.0%	8.1%	1.1%
1991	73.1%	44.7%	5.9%	8.7%	2.8%
1997	80.0%	56.0%	6.9%	11.3%	4.4%

It would be seen that in the period **1991-97**, the rate of growth in rural areas has been **11.3%** as opposed to rate of growth in urban areas, which has been **6.9%**, i.e. the rate of growth in rural areas has outstripped the rate of growth in urban areas by as much as **4.4%**.

9. Fourth, and vitally important, the rise in female literacy between **1991** and **1997** has been **11%** whereas the male literacy rate for the same period has risen by **9%**. In the previous decade, too, the female rate of literacy had grown faster than the male rate

(9.6% as against 7.8%). Thus, the faster rate of growth among females has not only been maintained but slightly enhanced. This is a tribute to the special emphasis laid by the NLM on women's participation.

10. Fifth, *the total number illiterates in the country will actually show a significant decline.* As per the figures provided by NSSO, the projected number of illiterates in the country in the year 2001 would be evident from the following table:

(in million)

Year	Total Population (All Ages)	Age group	Total Population	Non-literates
1961	438.93	7+	356.85	249.40
1971	548.16	7+	445.65	283.03
1981	665.29	7+	541.04	305.31
1991	846.30	7+	688.16	328.88
1997	953.04	7+	774.91	294.46*
2001	1031.63	7+	838.82	268.42**

* Source: NSSO Survey 53rd Round.

** Extrapolation based on NSSO Survey 53rd Round.

It would, therefore, be seen that the number of illiterates actually shows a marked decline of 60.5 million between 1991 and 2001. This is despite the annual rate of population growth of little over 1.8% which takes India's population to over one billion in the year 2001. This is no doubt a significant achievement.

11. Another important feature that becomes evident is that significantly greater progress has been achieved in the 15-35 age group which is the primary target group of the National Literacy Mission. The figures after 1991 show us this clearly:

Comparison between Literacy Rates (7+) and 15-35 age group

Year	Literacy Rate (7+) %	Literacy Rate (15-35) %	Literacy Rate (7+) Males %	Literacy Rate (15-35) Males %	Literacy Rates (7+) Females %	Literacy Rates (15-35) Females %
1993	56	60	68	72	43	47
1994	57	60	69	72	44	48
1995	58	62	69	74	46	50
1996	59	63	70	74	47	51
1997	62	66	73	77	50	54

12. Mizoram has overtaken Kerala and now holds the top spot with 95% literacy. Kerala, which is now in second place, has gone from 89.81% in 1991 to 93% in 1997. Among the Southern States, Tamilnadu continued its inexorable march jumping from 62.66% in 1991 to 70% in 1997.

13. But the real surprises lie in the oft-maligned 'Hindi Heartland'. Rajasthan has shown dramatic improvement pushing forward from 38.55% in 1991 to 55% in 1997 (a 16.5%

differential); **UP** has moved from 41.6% to 56% (14.4% differential) **Bihar** from 38.5% to 49% (10.5% differential) **MP** from 44.2% to 56% (11.8% differential) during the same period. But **Himachal Pradesh** moving from 63.9% to 77% (13.1% differential) has surged forward to take third position in the country – a proud and commendable feat indeed.

14. In the West of the country, **Maharashtra** has moved from 64.9% to 74% (a differential of 9.1%) and **Gujarat** from 61.3% to 68% (6.7% differential).

15. In the East, **Sikkim**, **West Bengal** and **Assam** have done particularly well. **Sikkim** has moved 22.1 percentage points forward from 56.9 to 79; **West Bengal** has done remarkably, surging ahead by a differential of 14.3% from 57.7% to 72%. So also has **Assam**, which has pushed forward from 52.9% to 75%, a differential of 22.1%. Unfortunately, **Orissa's** performance is worst among all the States, with a growth of only 1.9% in the last 6 years.

16. In the North-Eastern Region, apart from **Mizoram**, **Meghalaya** and **Nagaland** have done quite well. **Meghalaya** has moved 27.9 percentage points forward from 49.1 to 77; **Nagaland** has gone forward by 22.4 points, from 61.1 to 84.

17. Among the smaller units, **Andaman & Nicobar Islands** is now at 97%, **Lakshadweep** is at 96% and **Pondicherry** at 90%.

18. *On the international level, India has now outstripped countries such as Nigeria, Iraq, Egypt, Ghana, Saudi Arabia and Uganda and is, of course, far ahead of its neighbours, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal.*

19. *The figures now released by NSSO show that we are at present, maintaining an annual rate of literacy growth of approximately 2%. If this rate is maintained, India would reach a level of between 66 and 68% by the time of the Decennial Census of 2001. Assuming, as literacy experts hold, that full literacy for India means the sustainable, threshold level of 75%, then India could be expected to touch this level sometime between 2005 and 2006. This would be far earlier than the previous expectation of around 2011.*

20. What significance do the NSSO figures hold for us? Some conclusions that could be drawn are:

- (a) The decision to continue literacy efforts in the *Mission* mode is fully justified;
- (b) *Low cost* education, as imparted under the National Literacy Mission (per head annual average cost is a mere **Rs. 75** as against **Rs. 984** in the formal primary system) can prove extremely effective;
- (c) Stress on *girls and women* is paying dividends;

- (d) The *campaign* approach has proved its worth and TLCs should now be followed by *intensive Post Literacy and Continuing Education efforts*.

21. In sum, it can now be said with conviction that the battle against illiteracy has been well and truly joined. *What had earlier taken a whole decade to achieve, has now been realised in just under six years.*

22. There are immense challenges yet to be met and enormous amounts of hard work lie ahead. Yet, the NSSO figures will provide great encouragement to literacy workers, activists, volunteers, NGO's, practitioners and, of course, the Mission and the Government.

■ ■

THE LITERACY DIFFERENTIAL

As between end -1991 (Census) and end -1997
(National Sample Survey Organisation)

S. No.	INDIA/STATES	LITERACY RATES 1991			LITERACY RATES 1997			DIFFERENTIAL		
		Persons	Male	Female	Persons	Male	Female	Persons	Male	Female
	INDIA	52.2	64.1	39.3	62	73	50	9.8	8.9	10.7
1.	Andhra Pradesh	44.1	55.1	32.7	54	64	43	9.9	8.9	10.3
2.	Arunahcal Pradesh	41.6	51.4	29.7	60	69	48	18.4	17.6	18.3
3.	Assam	52.9	61.9	43.0	75	82	66	22.1	20.1	23.0
4.	Bihar	38.5	52.5	22.9	49	62	34	10.5	9.5	11.1
5.	Delhi	75.3	82.0	67.0	85	91	76	9.7	9.0	9.0
6.	Goa	75.5	83.6	67.1	86	93	79	10.5	9.4	11.9
7.	Gujarat	61.3	73.1	48.6	68	80	57	6.7	6.9	8.4
8.	Haryana	55.8	69.1	40.5	65	76	52	9.2	6.9	11.5
9.	Himachal Pradesh	63.9	75.4	52.1	77	87	70	13.1	11.6	17.9
10.	*Jammu & Kashmir	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	59	71	48	26.3	26.8	28.5
11.	Karnataka	56.0	67.3	44.3	58	66	50	2.0	-1.3	5.7
12.	Kerala	89.8	93.6	86.2	93	96	90	3.2	2.4	3.8
13.	Madhya Pradesh	44.2	58.4	28.8	56	70	41	11.8	11.6	12.2
14.	Maharashtra	64.9	76.6	52.3	74	84	63	9.1	7.4	10.7
15.	Manipur	59.9	71.6	46.6	76	86	66	16.1	14.4	19.4
16.	Meghalaya	49.1	53.1	44.8	77	79	74	27.9	25.9	29.2
17.	Mizoram	82.3	85.6	78.6	95	96	95	12.7	10.4	16.4
18.	Nagaland	61.6	67.6	54.7	84	91	77	22.4	23.4	22.3
19.	Orissa	49.1	63.1	34.7	51	64	38	1.9	0.9	3.3
20.	Punjab	58.5	65.7	50.4	67	72	62	8.5	6.3	11.6
21.	Rajasthan	38.5	55.0	20.4	55	73	35	16.5	18.0	14.6
22.	Sikkim	56.9	65.7	46.7	79	86	72	22.1	20.3	25.3
23.	Tamilnadu	62.7	73.7	51.3	70	80	60	7.3	6.3	8.7
24.	Tripura	60.4	70.6	49.6	73	79	67	12.6	8.4	17.4
25.	Uttar Pradesh	41.6	55.7	25.3	56	69	41	14.4	13.3	15.7
26.	West Bengal	57.7	67.8	45.6	72	81	63	14.3	13.2	17.4

* Since the Census was not held in Jammu & Kashmir in 1991, the literacy differential for the State has been calculated on the basis of 1981 Census figures.

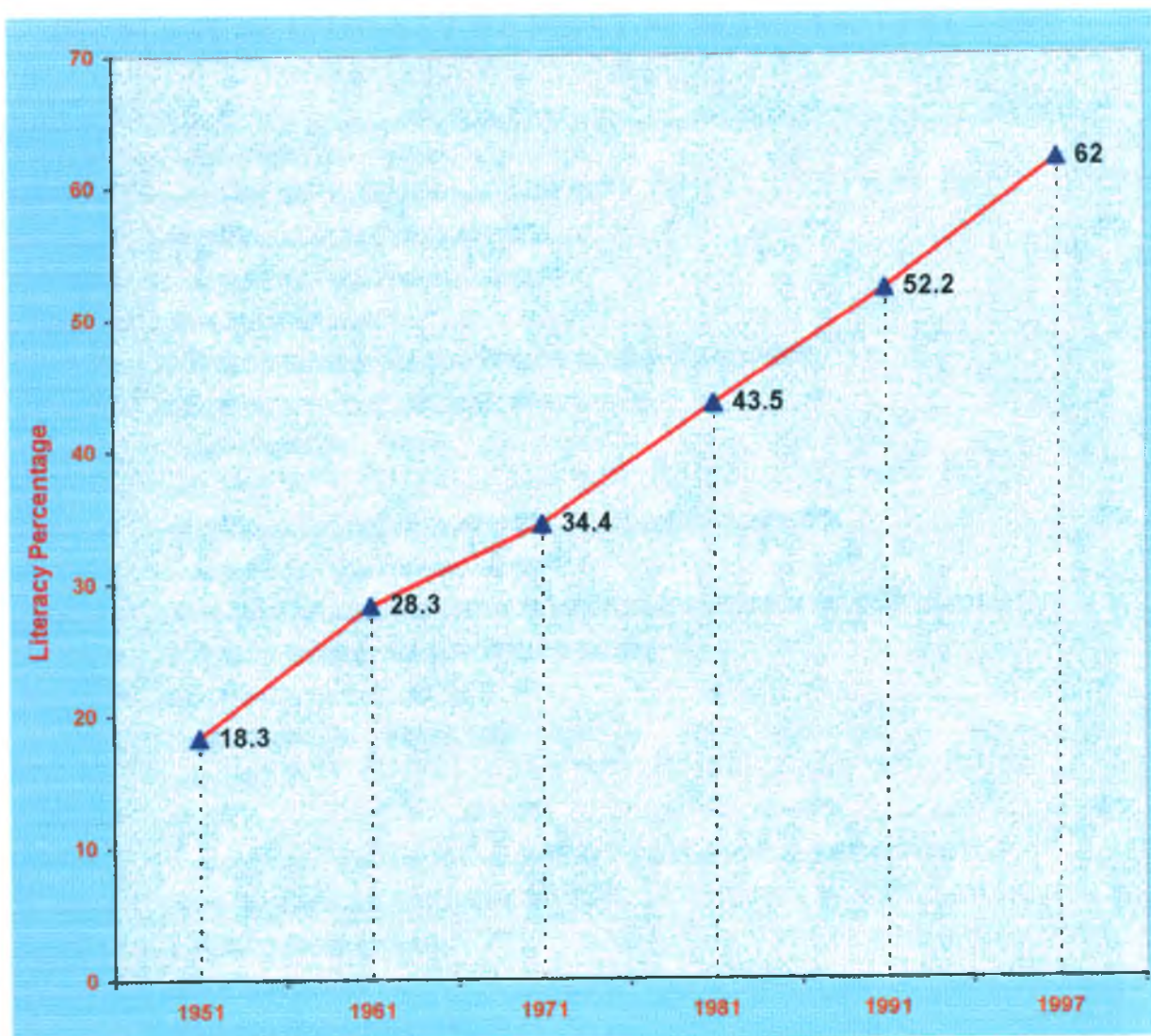
THE LITERACY DIFFERENTIAL

As between end-1991 (Census) and end-1997

(National Sample Survey Organisation)

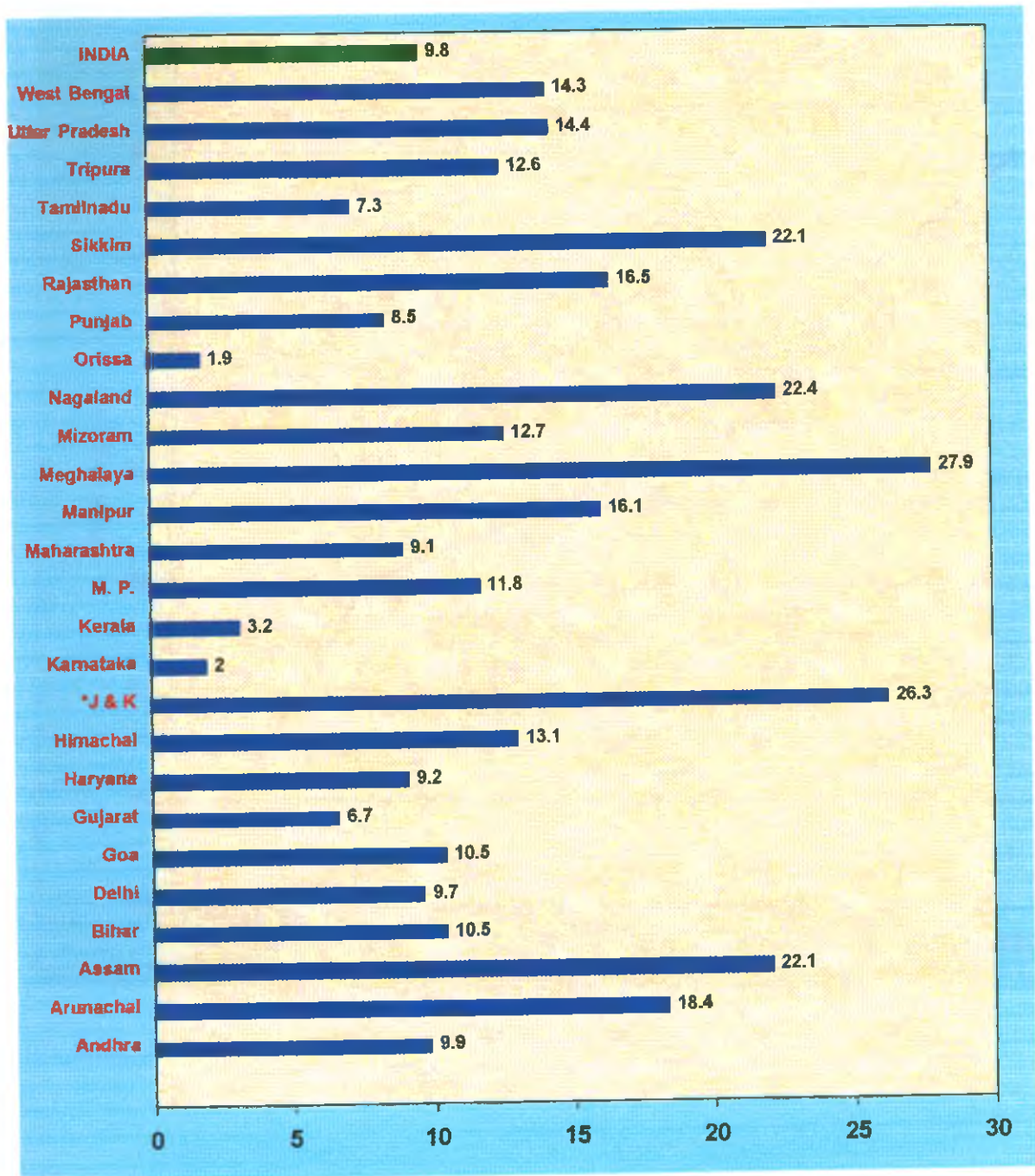
S.NO.	INDIA/STATES	LITERACY RATES 1991			LITERACY RATES 1997			DIFFERENTIAL		
		Persons	Male	Female	Persons	Male	Female	Persons	Male	Female
1.	Andaman & Nicobar Islands	73.0	79.0	65.5	97	100	94	24.0	21.0	28.5
2.	Chandigarh	77.8	82.0	72.3	83	90	74	5.2	8.0	1.7
3.	Dadra & Nagar Haveli	40.7	53.6	27.0	49	66	30	8.3	12.4	3.0
4.	Daman & Diu	71.2	82.7	59.4	86	95	73	14.8	12.3	13.6
5.	Lakshadweep	81.8	90.2	72.9	96	98	93	14.2	7.8	20.1
6.	Pondicherry	74.7	83.7	65.6	90	94	86	15.3	10.3	20.4

DECADAL GROWTH OF LITERACY PERCENTAGE (7+) IN INDIA UPTO 1991 AND FROM 1991 TO 1997



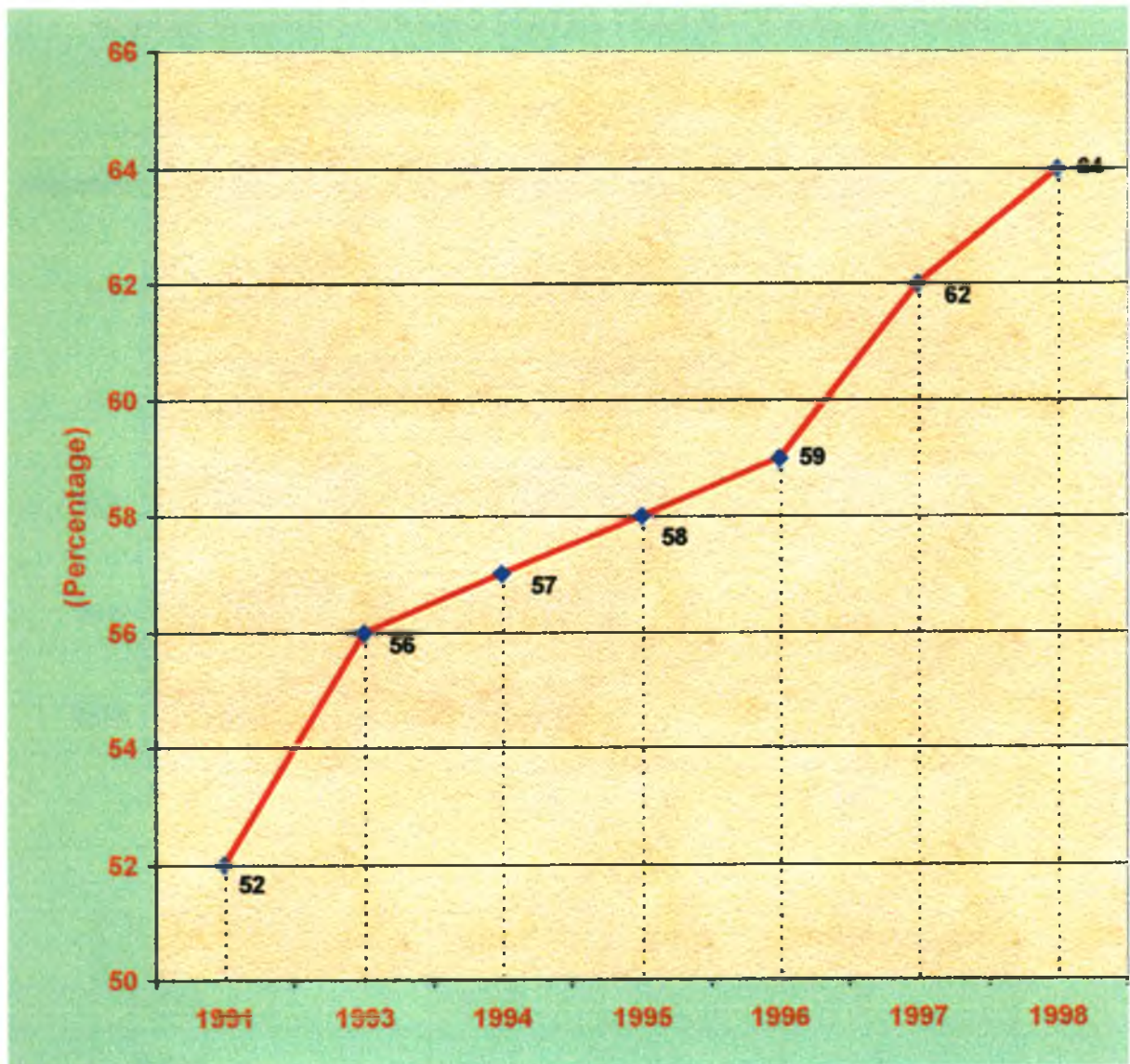
	DECADAL GROWTH %
1951	18.3
1961	28.3
1971	34.4
1981	43.5
1991	52.2
1997	62

INCREASE IN LITERACY RATES (7+) BETWEEN 1991-1997 INDIA – STATES

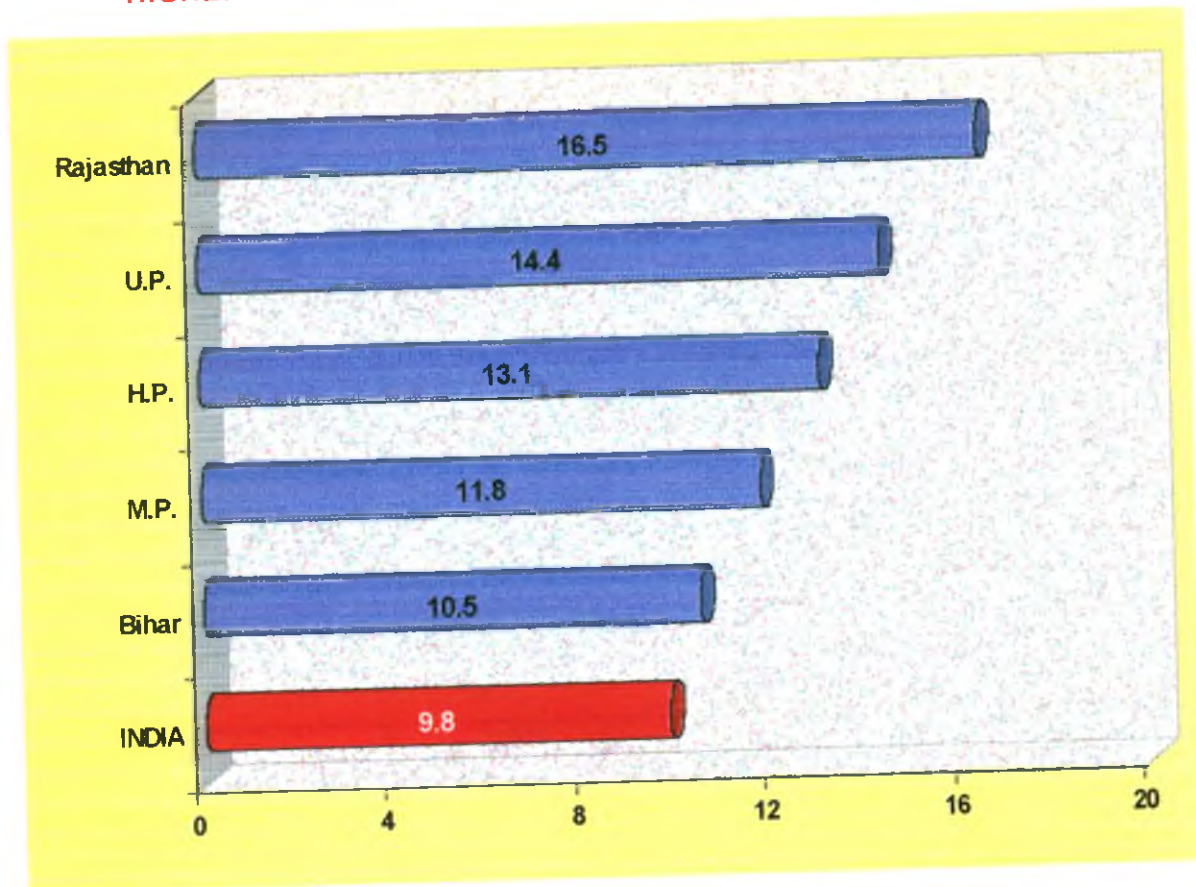


* Census data for Jammu & Kashmir were not obtained in 1991.
Hence the increase is from 1981

GROWTH OF LITERACY RATE (7+) SINCE 1991



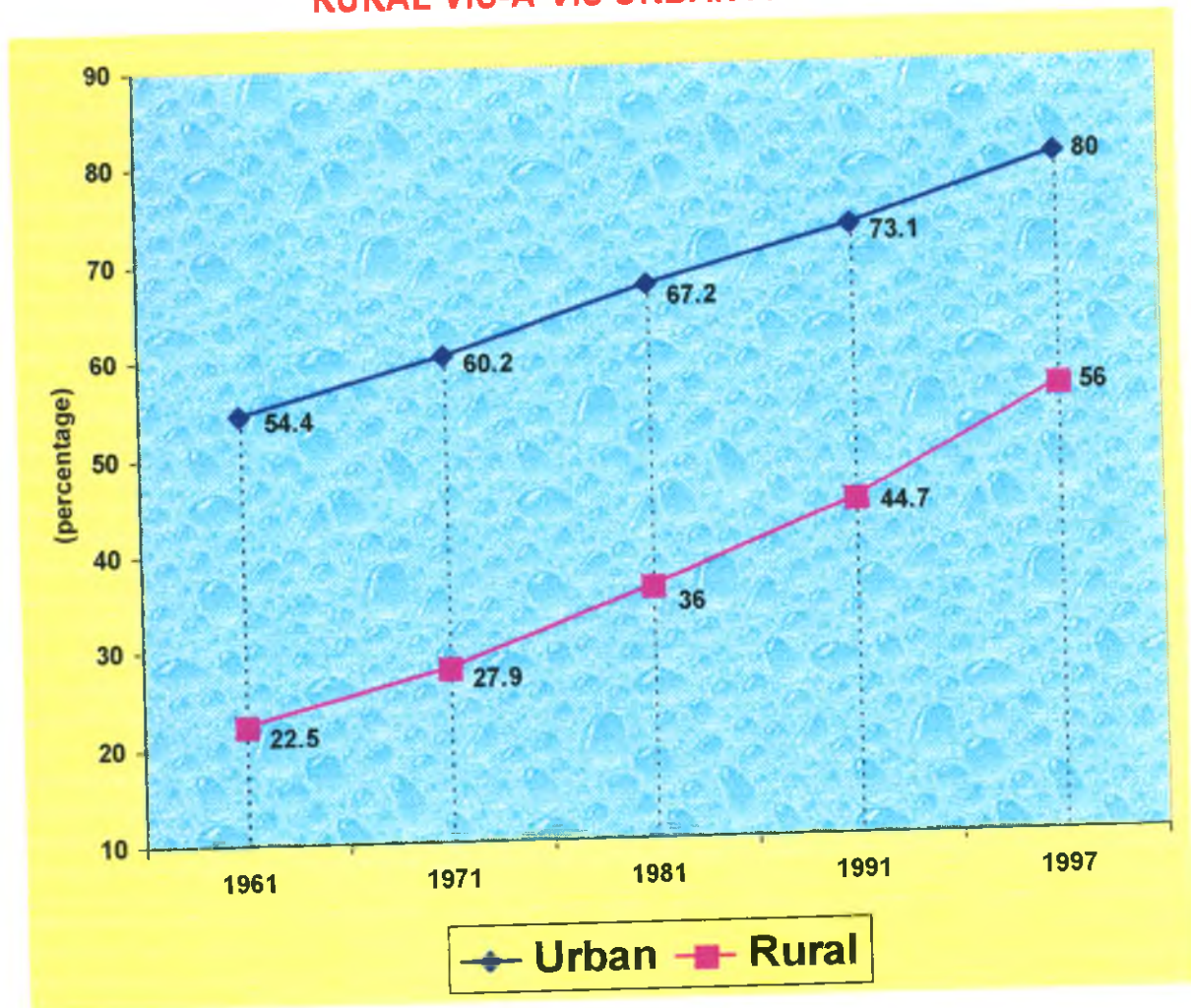
**INCREASE IN LITERACY RATES (7+)
BETWEEN 1991 & 1997
HIGHER IN HINDI-SPEAKING STATES THAN NATIONAL AVERAGE**



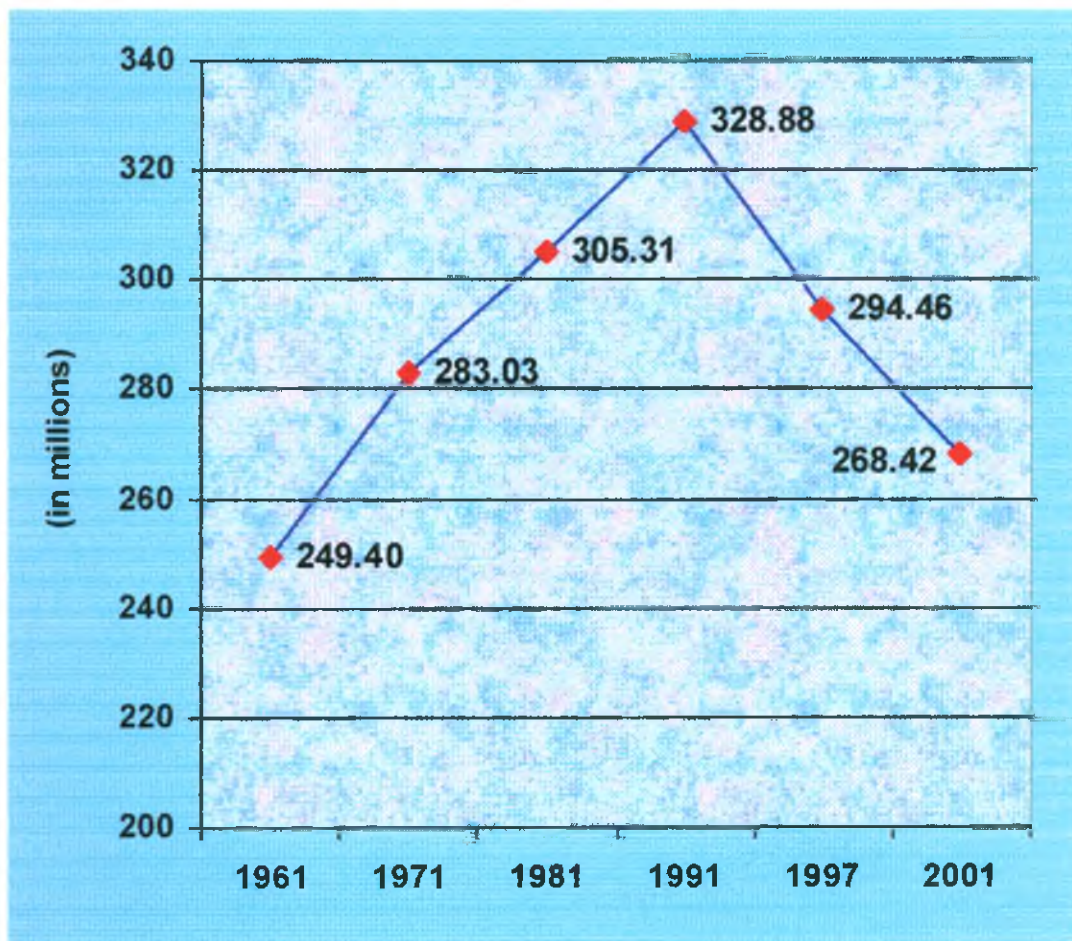
	1991	1997	INCREASE
INDIA	52.2	62	9.8
Bihar	38.5	49	10.5
Madhya Pradesh	44.2	56	11.8
Himachal Pradesh	63.9	77	13.1
Uttar Pradesh	41.6	56	14.4
Rajasthan	38.5	55	16.5

CLOSING THE RURAL-URBAN DIVIDE

INCREASING LITERACY RATES (7+) IN RURAL VIS-À-VIS URBAN AREAS



POSITION OF NON-LITERATE PERSONS BETWEEN 1961-2001



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