

Literacy: Small cities pip big ones

New Census Data Reveal Mumbai's Rate Lower Than Nashik's

TIMES INSIGHT GROUP

New Delhi: In each of the pairs that follow, which city would you think has a higher rate of literacy: Raipur or Hyderabad? Nagpur or Chennai? Ghaziabad or Bangalore? Jabalpur or Kolkata? Aurangabad or Delhi?

In each of these pairs, the first city is the surprise winner, an analysis of newly released census data shows. While literacy in urban areas tends to be higher than that in rural areas, and bigger cities do even better than the urban average, the differences between big cities are telling.

The data shows that the biggest cities, which function as growth poles for that state or region, have lower literacy rates than slightly smaller cities. So Mumbai has lower literacy than Nashik, which is less than a tenth of its size, and Chennai has lower literacy than Tiruchirapalli, which is less than a fifth its size.

LITERACY IN METROS

City	Population (in million)	Literacy (%)	Female literacy (%)
Delhi*	21.7	87	83
Mumbai**	19.6	91	87
Kolkata	14.1	88	86
Chennai	8.7	90	87
Bangalore	8.5	90	86
Hyderabad	7.7	83	80
Ahmedabad	6.4	90	85
Pune	5.0	91	87
Surat	4.6	89	84
Jaipur	3.1	84	77

*Includes Delhi UA, Noida, Greater Noida, Ghaziabad, Gurgaon and Faridabad

**Includes Vasai-Virar

The 10 million-plus cities with the highest literacy rates are all under 2.5 million in size. This list is dominated by seven Kerala cities, but Ghaziabad in Uttar Pradesh comes in at a surprising sixth. A further statistical surprise is that Ghaziabad's female literacy is the highest of any big Indian city. Maharashtra, Gujarat and Tamil Nadu are the other states whose big cities have high literacy.

The Delhi urban sprawl (including Delhi, Noida, Greater Noida, Faridabad and Gurgaon) has a literacy rate of 87%, which places it in the bottom half of the million-plus cities for literacy.

Mumbai, the financial capital and India's second biggest city, has a literacy rate slightly higher than 90%, which sounds a lot less impressive when you realize that there are almost 90 other big cities with the same or higher literacy rates. Of the metros, Hyderabad is by far the worst performer and its female literacy rate is under 80%.