The idea of this paper is to understand links between literacy and religion in India, keeping a geographical approach. Actually the background of literacy in India bears marks from a long educational process, even politics of education matters mostly after Independence. Despite efforts from politics to improve literacy within the whole country, the goal of universal compulsory education is not completed. The evolution of literacy in India increased during the last century from a very low average to the rate of 65.38% in 2001, which is far from the ‘totally literate target’ of national and international organizations. So how can we present the situation of literacy in India?

A measure of educational planning results can be geographical. This kind of approach indicates achievements and weaknesses of Indian different regions. Being aware of spatial disparities persisting in literacy is not final sake. This is a help to put forward explanation about allocation factors at various level.

The impact of gender inequalities or geographical situation on education can be shown at a macro-level. But prevailing gaps on a local level must be explored through social context. Considering the religious factor as part of the social setting is useful to explain some of the inequalities in education and has to be tested.

Before exploring the situation of literacy in India, we have to keep in mind semantic limits of education. An inquiry on lexical field reveals constraints, which have to be respected if we want to propose a study of this phenomenon. Literacy is a proxy indicator of education in two different ways. First, the educational process may or may not lead to literacy: it is restrained by the confusing nature of education, which encompasses a larger definition of this dynamic. Secondly, the term of literacy that indicates a static time in the educational process, must have a specific concise explanation which can be measured. The ‘ability to read and write with understanding a short simple sentence’ is considered as literacy by educational planners and Indian national institutions.

The count of people possessing this ability is gathered through Census of India and will be used to describe a part of educational issues of this country. To give an approach of educational situation in India, we will work on literacy rates and we will use literacy related vocabulary only.
A first map is made to give an overview of literacy in India on a district level. This shows a wide variation within India. The west coast, southern peninsula and northeastern states like Mizoram are areas of high literacy. Himachal Pradesh and Utteranchal region ranks in areas above Indian average. Otherwise, most of the remaining districts still present a low literacy image. Northern India from Rajasthan to Bengale, including Madhya Pradesh are widely below the national average.

A second characteristic adds to global backward literacy allocation: the importance of illiterates hidden in districts literacy rates below 50%. Why are such disparities persisting?

- The geographic interpretation of the pattern has usually been based on perceived correspondences with other mapped patterns. We can quote some frequent assumptions on Indian literacy distribution which are related to the macro level:
  - **Literacy is closely correlated to urbanization.** As we can see on the map, the district located in urban agglomeration areas shows high literacy rates.
  - **Coastal areas tend to have high literacy because of the long contact with overseas areas.** Overseas contacts generate a demand for increased literacy. This is also true that such contacts lead to the diffusion of ideas about the value of literacy. The west coast is said to be more literate than the east coast because it has **had longer and more continuous overseas contacts.**
  - The ‘South’ missionary impact has been greatest on female literacy by raising it and thereby reducing the difference with male literacy…
  - Some of the mountain states like Himachal Pradesh have given special attention to education and have developed ‘total literacy campaigns’ in the last decade.

All of those factors are linked to others which have a more intense effect at local level. A way to resume local inequalities is by taking interest in the social context of located areas. Two main aspects of local context induce variations in literacy: gender and geographical background.

* Gender disparities are a major issue that can be understood in different ways:
- a global gap is continuing through the evolution of literacy. Difference between female and male literacy is around 20% and following the national average.
- The weight of old generation with high gender disparity matters mostly at the national level. What is disturbing is the gender selected enrolment of new pupils.
- This pursuing spread actually means that despite efforts to increase education within all population, women and girls are subjected to discrimination in schooling enrolment. Total Literacy campaign effects will certainly be seen in national average in the next census.

* The geographical background gap between urban and rural areas is another entry to explain literacy regional variations. Usually, the literacy rate is higher in urban areas and characterized by more schooling facilities developed to get educated workers and employment turned aside from the agricultural sector. Urban areas needs more qualified people.

To understand how such elements weigh on literacy we propose an integrated approach based on a geographical disparity measure.

There are different ways to show gender disparity. A simple arithmetic scale of gender disparity offers a vision of literacy distribution variations in India. This demonstrates:
- That male literacy is always largely higher than the related female
- Disparities are higher around the average literacy rate
- Gender disparity seems to be reduced for highest literacy rates

This simple representation of gender gap opens a reflection on an alternative for reducing inequalities: most educated areas are characterized by the increased integration of women through the educational system.

Examining the spatial distribution of gendered literacy shows horizontal disparities. The gap appears keeping almost the same global Indian literacy pattern. We have to notice areas like Kerala or mizoram (the higher rates) are not affected by the gap. The measure of literacy variation within India is pertinent in following ways:
- At district level female literacy distribution clearly influences the total rates: higher the gap, higher the negative affect on literacy.
At regional level, gender explains most of disparity intensity: the resultant geographic distribution of female literacy is highly unequal, and a large part of the variation is seen to correspond to variation in the level of concomitant male literacy. Further evolution of literacy in India will depend on the decrease of gender gap. But the integration of women in the educational process has to be linked with geographical background effect.

Urban rural classification shows another gap. Urban bias induces a variation of literacy which has to be taken into account. The global variation giving a favourable position to urban areas is not a precise element of regional literacy distribution:

- **Spatial distribution of urban population and urbanization attracts a specific pattern which is hidden by the administrative divisions.** Urban literacy rate is twisted by the spatial aggregation level.

- **The accessibility of schooling facilities and related high urban literacy rates are mostly dependant to the urbanization distribution.**

The observed patterns from urban/rural distribution is thereby largely influenced by the localisation of cities and agglomeration. Simple correlations show a clear relation with rural pattern considered, at the regional level. Rural literacy distribution offers a better representation of the general literacy situation.

The usual classification needs to be explored and developed by using of a third factor which is religion. - Hindu community represents the largest religion: the weakness of Indian literacy is correlated to Hindu literacy rates. - Areas of Muslim influence tend to have low literacy especially among women. - Belonging to christian community seems to be a vector of literacy (through early female literacy development and utilisation of literacy as diffusion of Christianity)

The distribution of literacy is affected by religious composition at the district level.

Advantaged communities are not the majority. Global rates have to be replaced in the regional context for some evident reasons:

- Major trends presented like gender and geographical aspect influence strongly distinctive
religions distribution. (Presenting major trends like gender and geographocal aspect attracts a distinctive religion distribution)
- According to literacy behaviour, most populated communities weight will be reflected at the local level.

We can observe different patterns from the three major communities:

Hindu literacy distribution is the closest to national average and presents high similarities with the global literacy pattern.

Muslim in South of India are largely advantaged: belonging to a specific community is affected by local factors.

Christians developed better education within the country except for the East part.

To weigh each variable, an exploration of data which leads to a model of literacy.

This model has to respect some principles prescribed in case of Indian literacy. The goal is to preserve influence of most religion and replace it in the general context by giving an idea of local variation. Considering only the influence of religion is not sufficient. Weigh of Hindu literacy attract model and give 78% of variance explanation. 

At this level, the regional distribution is not totally defined by the religious factor. Including rural literacy distribution allows:
- to take into account the geographical context
- to transcend urban bias which overestimates general background
Some results show the geographical influence of religious factor in literacy. The environment overture is a key to understand Indian literacy as an indicator of rurality dependent of the religious context.

Literacy bridles are more an affair of opportunities development through more or less opened environment than a spatial distribution of infrastructures.

Mapping residuals of presented model shows the variations are still auto-correlated:
- under-estimated literacy located in mountain sectors can be explained by the lack of environmental favourable conditions: promoting factors do not encompass probabilities of literacy described in the model
- spatial pattern of under-estimated residuals around Orissa shows there is a missing value in literacy variation.
- The fluctuation of local literacy behaviour can be linked to other social gathering. For example, Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes can be a framework to investigate and improve the variance explained in the literacy model.

To come to a conclusion, elements explaining Indian literacy variation do not take action at the same level. Gender Effect tends to generate macro-level disparities. Geographical background is directly linked with social context and developed opportunities to rise literacy. An examination of religious factor as varying component of Indian literacy shows a higher variance at local level.

Multi-scale approach is needed to perfect the exploration of Indian literacy. Local diversity and opened environment are determinant to target the universal education goal.