

Status of women in Odisha: An empirical analysis

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ABSTRACT

This paper is an attempt to empirically analyze the status of women in Odisha, a state located in the eastern coast of India, in terms of indicators like Percentage of Women, Sex Ratio, Maternal Mortality, Female Literacy and Life Expectancy at birth etc. The study is based on the trend analysis of available secondary data from different sources like Census, Sample Registration System and National Family Health Survey. It has been observed that over the years there have been many positive changes as far as status of women in Odisha is concerned. Share of female population, which was on a decline during the entire 20th century, has started improving; but needs to improve more. Similar has been the trend in case of reduction in MMR, increase in female literacy level as well life expectancy of women in the state. It was also felt that there is a need to change the mind set of people, those of men who have been dominating and controlling women in one way or the other for centuries now and of women, who need to understand their own values and assume the status.

Key Words : Status of women, Sex ratio, Female literacy, Odisha

INTRODUCTION

India is known for its rich cultural heritage. And one of the most important factors that justify the greatness of India's ancient culture is the honoured place that was ascribed to women in Indian society (Singh, 1998). In fact, it is believed that "Where women are honoured, gods reside there" (Sathyavani, 2014; Goel, 2017). Looking at the historical background of Indian society, it can be observed that women in India were given a high status in Vedic times (Sathyavani, 2014; Goel, 2017). In all sorts of religious ceremonies, both husband and wife had to perform rituals together. As cited by Boserup (1990), no religious ceremony by the husband could bear fruit without the participation of his wife. It shows the status enjoyed by women in ancient India. However, during the course of history women somehow lost their place, their status and there are a number of social, cultural, economic and political factors which led to such a shift in the status of women in India (Goel, 2017).

In the words of Pandiselvi and Lakshmi (2015), although women constitute half of the population of the country, they have been deliberately denied opportunities of growth in the name of religion and socio-cultural practices. In their words, in pre-independent India, women were forced to get involved in many filthy religious and socio-cultural practices which brought down their status in the society to an all time low. They became victims of Sati pratha, Purdah system, forced child marriage, opposition to remarriage of widows, prostitution, polygamy, female foeticide and infanticide, domestic

and spousal violence, heavy domestic workload, widespread illiteracy, economic dependence, non recognition of their economic contribution and many more.

As far as these vices are concerned, one thing can be found to be common in all – *i.e.* complete denial of individuality. Women never had an identity of their own. There was always a male to dominate her in every phase of her life – either as a father, as a brother, as a husband or as a son. At the same time, it has to be admitted that things had changed in a positive way, yet there is a long path to cover. In this context, this paper is an attempt to analyze the status of women in Odisha, a state located in the eastern coast of India.

Indicators of status of women:

Status of women refers to the positions that women occupy in the family and in society relative to those of men and of women of other classes, other countries, other times. Usually, there are three things which are often looked at while trying to assess the status of women in any society.

- 1) Their roles in relation to men – what they have to do and what others are doing
- 2) The extent of actual control enjoyed by women over their own lives.
- 3) The extent to which they have access to decision making process and are effective in positions of power and authority

In the words of Ranjana and Awdesh (2014), status of women can be studied from the magnitude and degree of control that a woman has over her own life consequential of access to knowledge, economic resources and the extent of autonomy experienced in the process of decision making and choices. In fact, they had used 11 indicators for creating an index of status of women in their study which included Female literacy rate (age 6+), Median age at first marriage, Median age at first birth, Women using modern contraceptive, Women not anemic, Women received at least one anti natal checkup (ANC), Institutional delivery, Women exposed to any source of media (either television or radio or newspaper), Women's current work status, Women involved in the decision Making to own Health and Women with access of money. As such, there are several other simple indicators of status of women as compiled by United Nations and other organizations or scholars. Some of these indicators are Literacy, Education, Employment, Age at Marriage, Political Representation, Legal Rights, Sex Ratio, Decision Making Power, Health and Nutritional Status, Relative Mortality Rates and Life Expectancies, Freedom and Access to Resources etc. However, the current study involves a trend analysis of some frequently used indicators of status of women like Percentage of Women, Sex Ratio, Maternal Mortality, Female Literacy and Life Expectancy at birth for the state of Odisha. Further, the study also attempts to analyze the existing rural – urban variation in those indicators in the state.

METHODOLOGY

The current study is based on an analysis of the available secondary data on various indicators of status of women, which were obtained from different sources including government reports and published articles. As mentioned before, the variables including Percentage of Women, Sex Ratio, Maternal Mortality, Female Literacy and Life Expectancy at birth for the state of Odisha as well as India have been used in the current study. While data on percentage of women, sex ratio and female literacy collected by Census of India have been analysed in the study, for information on maternal mortality and life expectancy at birth, SRS (Sample Registration System of India) and Ministry of Health and Family Welfare data have been used. Further, data on percentage of women

justifying wife beating in Odisha obtained from National Family Health Survey - 3 have also been analysed in the paper. As such, for obtaining a picture of status of women in Odisha and its temporal variation, trend analysis of the mentioned indicators including its rural-urban differentials have been carried out.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Share of women in a population:

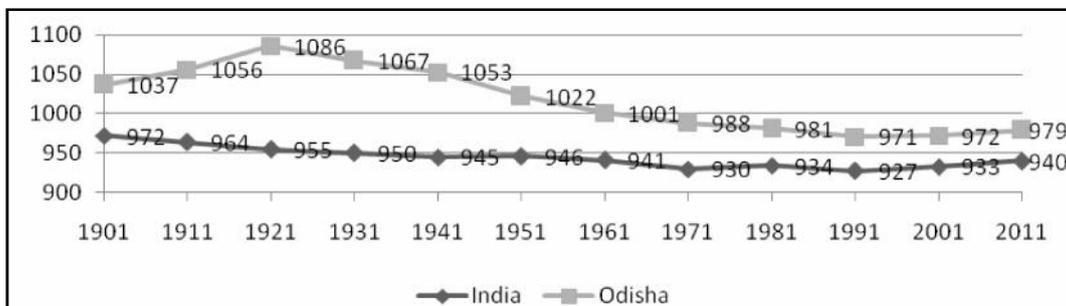
The first two indicators *i.e.* percentage of women and sex ratio are more or less same. In fact, they are just different ways of manifestation of the same demographic feature *i.e.* share of women in a population. As far as percentage of women in a community is concerned, ideally it should be 50% and biologically, it should be slightly more than 50% as women enjoy a higher level of life expectancy all over the globe. But if we look at the trend observed during the post independence period (Table 1), we can clearly see that it is not in favour of women now. While women constituted 50.6% of the total population of Odisha during 1951, it has come down to 49.46% in 2011. Such declining trend in the share of women population is definitely a matter of concern for the society. As evident from the table, the trend has been similar in both rural and urban areas. Although the percentages of women in all the census years have been found to be lower in the urban areas in comparison to rural areas of the state, it does not necessarily indicate towards a better status enjoyed by women in rural Odisha. As such, the lower percentages in case of urban areas are in fact a result of excessive male migration to the towns/ cities.

Table 1 : Percentage of Women in Odisha by types of residence in different census years							
Census Year/ Residence Type	1951	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001	2011
Total	50.55	50.02	49.69	49.53	49.26	49.30	49.46
Urban	46.88	44.68	45.80	46.19	46.41	47.23	48.23
Rural	50.7	50.38	50.04	49.97	49.70	49.66	49.71

Source: Census of India (Figures corresponding to the years from 1951 to 2001 from DES, 2010 and for the year 2011 from Census of India, 2011a)

As mentioned above, Sex Ratio, defined as number of females per 1000 males, is a frequently used index of share of women in a population. The trend in sex ratio from 1901 to 2011 for India as well as the state of Odisha has been portrayed in Fig. 1, which clearly indicates that Sex Ratio has been on a constant decline since long. In fact, there was a sharp decline in the sex ratio of Odisha after 1921, which somehow shows the extent of gender disparity that existed in the state. Although the recent census results show a positive change in sex ratio in the country as well as in Odisha, the figures are well below 1000 indicating the need of taking steps towards improvement in sex ratio. However, Odisha is found to be in a better position, when compared with the national average, which may again because of the fact that Odisha is primarily an out-migrating state with more males migrating out of the state than females.

Table 2 shows the trend in rural-urban variation in Sex Ratio during 1901 - 2011 in India and in Odisha. As evident from the table, sex ratio has been continuously declining in urban areas of the country where as the figures have been found to be improving in rural areas, although the situation had never been in favour of women in India either in rural or urban areas at any point of time during last 12 decades. Nevertheless, the scenario of increasing sex ratio in rural areas and declining sex



Source: Census of India (From MoSPI, 2018)

Fig. 1 : Sex Ratio trend of Odisha and India between 1901 and 2011

ratio in urban areas may be an outcome of excess male outmigration from rural to urban areas in the country. As far as Odisha is concerned, although the figures appear to be better, there is some room for improvement and as discussed before, the better looking Sex Ratio figures may be an outcome of excessive male outmigration to other states of India. Further, unlike the national scenario, sex ratio in Odisha has been on a decline till the beginning of the 21st century, both in rural and urban areas. Sex Ratio, considered as a fundamental indicator of gender inequality is often a result of son preference, which leads to growing female foeticide and infanticide, discrimination against girls and women, declining health status, premature mortality and overall sex ratio favouring males. Therefore, efforts need to be taken to sensitize the public and improve the femininity ratio in the community.

Table 2 : Temporal variation in sex ratio in India and Odisha by place of residence

Region Census Year	India			Odisha		
	Total	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban
1901	972	910	979	1037	1039	967
1911	964	872	975	1056	1058	947
1921	955	846	970	1086	1089	963
1931	950	838	966	1067	1071	924
1941	945	831	965	1053	1058	914
1951	946	860	965	1022	1029	881
1961	941	845	963	1001	1015	807
1971	930	858	949	988	1002	845
1981	934	879	951	981	999	859
1991	926	894	938	971	988	866
2001	933	900	946	972	987	895
2011	943	949	929	979	989	932

Source: Census of India (From DES, 2012)

Maternal Mortality:

Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR) is defined as number of maternal deaths attributed to complications of pregnancy, childbirth and the puerperium occurring within 42 days after the termination of pregnancy divided by number of live births and multiplied by one lakh. Table 3 portrays the trend in MMR in India and Odisha. As far as the probability of mothers dying due to maternal causes is concerned, the situation has been extremely grief in Odisha. However, possibly

as a result of implementation of health policies like National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) and other initiatives taken by the Government, there has been remarkable development in this regard. But it is also true that Odisha lies far behind the national average and have a long distance to cover for achieving the set Sustainable Development Goals.

Table 3 : Trend in maternal mortality ratio in India and Odisha

Region/ Year	1999-2001*	2001-03*	2004-06 [#]	2007-09 [#]	2010-12 [#]	2011-13 [#]
Odisha	424	358	303	258	235	222
India	327	301	254	212	178	167

Source: SRS-RGI (*From MoHFW, 2009 and # - From NITI Aayog, 2018)

Female literacy:

Education is definitely an indicator of development, an indicator of status. In fact, in the words of Kishor and Gupta (2009) education of women has been shown to be associated with many positive socioeconomic changes like lower fertility, infant mortality, and better child health and nutrition, and the achievement of universal primary education has been a key goal of Indian planning since Independence. As far as literacy level of women is concerned, Odisha had an extremely low level of female literacy with less than five per cent of females being literate during 1951, which was almost half that of the national figure. But, it had definitely made a long stride forward to cross the 64% mark in 2011 and being at par with the national level. Table 4 shows the temporal variation in female literacy in the state as well as in the country as a whole.

Table 4 : Temporal variation in Female Literacy in India and Odisha

Region/ Year	1951	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001	2011
Odisha	04.52	08.65	13.92	20.60	34.68	50.51	64.36
India	08.86	15.35	21.97	29.76	39.29	53.67	64.63

Source: Census of India (Figures for India from MoSPI, 2016 and figures for Odisha from Census of India, 2011b)

The rural-urban variation in female literacy in Odisha and India during last two census years are depicted in Table 5, which shows a clear improvement in the level both in case of rural and urban areas of the state as well as of the country. Further, the rate of increase has been faster in Odisha during the last census interval.

Table 5 : Rural Urban variation in Female Literacy in India and Odisha in 2001 and 2011

Region Census Year	India			Odisha		
	Total	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban
2001	53.67	46.13	72.86	50.51	46.66	72.87
2011	65.46	58.80	79.90	64.01	60.74	80.42

Source: Census of India (From Reja and Sabnam, 2017)

Table 6 shows the trend in male - female gap in literacy level of Odisha and its rural-urban variation during the post-independence period. Despite of the fact that there has been a remarkable improvement in female literacy in the state, there is a gap between male and female literacy in Odisha, which although has been narrowed down over the years, still has to improve. If we look at the table, the gap in rural areas is still around 20%, which is definitely a big one.

Residence/ Year	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001	2011
Rural	29.78	29.70	31.56	30.79	26.27	19.31
Urban	28.45	27.94	25.43	20.03	15.06	11.13

Source: Census of India (From Census of India, 2011c)

Life expectancy:

There is another indicator of status of Women *i.e.* life expectancy at birth. Although women appear physically weaker than men, they are in fact biologically stronger than their counterparts. And it has been found that in spite of all odds, women all over the globe have higher life expectancy than men. But, when we look at the figures for Odisha, it is observed that women in the state always had lower life expectancy than men. And the situation was similar for the nation too, till 1980s. The flip *i.e.* higher life expectancy for females in comparison to males came during the late 80s for India, whereas in case of Odisha males enjoyed higher life expectancy at birth than their counterparts even during the 21st century. But, as far as projection made by the Department of Health and Family Welfare is concerned, figures are likely to improve during the coming decade.

Region Year/ Gender	Odisha		India	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
1971-81	51.93	49.59	50.90	50.00
1981-86	54.13	51.90	55.60	56.40
1986-91	57.13	55.15	58.10	59.10
1991-96	60.13	58.40	60.60	61.70
1996-01	62.13	61.15	62.80	64.20
2016-20*	66.30	69.60	68.80	71.10
2021-25*	67.80	71.60	69.80	72.30

Sources: SRS-RGI (Actual Figures corresponding to years from 1971 to 2001) and MoHFW (Projected Figures corresponding to years from 2016-20 and 2021-25) from GoO, 2008

Other indicators:

There are a number of other indicators like age at marriage, work participation rate, freedom to move to different places like market, relatives and health care centres, control over money, involvement in making various household decisions, holding and using saving bank accounts, which can be looked in to for having a picture of the status of women in Odisha; but have not been included in the current analysis. However, there was a question asked during National Family Health Survey (NFHS) which explored the perception of society regarding justification of wife beating. There are lots of families, where wives are beaten by their husbands. It is something related to the dignity of women in a society and possibly most men and women would have a negative opinion about it. But surprisingly, when the same question was asked during NFHS, a completely different perspective of the respondents came out. Table 8 includes percentages of women justifying wife beating in Odisha under different circumstances.

As evident from the table, lots of women in Odisha felt that under certain circumstances, a husband can beat his wife. It is well understood that nobody has the authority to beat a person and nobody has the right to justify any such behavior. Nevertheless, such high percentages of women justifying the heinous practice of wife beating clearly indicate the low self esteem possessed by the

Table 8 : Percentage of women justifying wife beating in Odisha

Sr. No.	Justification/ Reason	Percentage
1.	Going out without telling anyone	33.2
2.	Neglecting house or children	39.6
3.	Arguing with husband	33.0
4.	Not cooking food properly	22.9
5.	Showing disrespect for in-laws	44.5

Source: NFHS-3 (From IIPS and Macro International, 2008)

women in the state and the challenge that exist before the state in sensitizing the people including women and improving their status.

Conclusion :

Analysis of the available data showed that over the years there has been many positive changes as far as status of women in Odisha is concerned. Share of female population, which was on a decline during the entire 20th century, has started improving; but has definitely a long way to go. Similarly, Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR) has also been found to be declining in the state, yet the figures are not very satisfactory. Moreover, literacy rate as well as life expectancy of women in Odisha have increased significantly during the post-independence period and are expected to improve further in future. Many a times it is seen that government is always after formulating policies and bringing new laws, aiming at empowerment of women. In fact, there are enough laws, enough schemes in our country. What is really needed is to change the mind set of people, mind set of men who have been dominating and controlling women in one way or the other for centuries now and also the mind set of women, who need to understand their own values and assume the status. Gender equality and empowerment of women must be recognized as key features to enhance the health of a country and achieve social and economic development.

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