

From Marginalization to Empowerment: A Sociological Analysis in Insights into Women's Higher Education in Odisha

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ABSTRACT

This sociological study endeavors the dynamic of women's participation in higher education in Odisha, India. Education is the backbone of society, driving improvements in social, economic, and cultural conditions. Historically, women's roles were limited to domestic duties, with education deemed unnecessary. Family members and society believed women's education was futile, as their primary responsibility was managing the household. However, times have changed. Today, women are pursuing education, careers, and independence, achieving their goals and becoming self-sufficient, contributing significantly to societal development and growth."This research leverages secondary data from the 2011 census to conduct a spatial analysis of women's higher education outcomes across different socio-economic strata. The methodology incorporates straightforward tabular representations and statistical measures, including percentage calculations and ratio analyses, to facilitate a comprehensive examination of the data."This study finds a positive trend in Odisha's literacy rates between 2001 and 2011, with a particularly notable increase in female literacy. The growth in these areas can be credited to enhanced socio-economic status, upgraded transportation and communication infrastructure, and increased access to educational institutions. Jagatsinghpur, Cuttack, Kendrapara, and Puri demonstrate exceptional female literacy rates, with 72%, 71%, 70%, and 69%, respectively, highlighting the region's dedication to women's education." The data highlights a significant educational gap between SC and ST women in Jagatsinghpur, with SC women showing a higher literacy rate of 62% compared to 46% for ST women.

Keywords: Marginalization Women, Empowerment, Education, SC and ST, Literacy

INTRODUCTION

Educational attainment is the first and foremost step towards improving the quality of life, awareness, and skill levels of people in society. Literate individuals are more capable of comprehending and responding to their social, political, and cultural environments, which plays a major role in their overall development. It acts as a catalyst for social upliftment by boosting the returns on investments made in almost every aspect of development, such as population management, health, cleanliness, degrading the environment, and employing the weaker members of society (Amaravati, 2024).

Literacy, or the capacity to read and write, is essential to both social and economic advancement. It

has a major influence on how far a nation can go. India, a developing country, has seen significant progress in raising its literacy rates. Kerala has the highest literacy rate among Indian states, and it places a strong focus on educating women. Since women's literacy promotes greater engagement in many facets of life and has a positive impact on societal transformation, it is essential to women's empowerment. A high rate of female literacy is also associated with better population stabilization and family planning. Research indicates that educated women, especially those without financial independence, are more likely to utilize contraceptives, which improves family planning results

Women empowerment has always been a critical issue in India. Numerous academic studies have been

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carried out on this topic. However, this research focuses on the connection between women empowerment and higher education in Odisha, one of India's least developed states (<https://www.sociologygroup.com/women-empowerment/>; Satapathy, 2016).

One of the world's oldest civilizations, India is renowned for its diverse society and rich cultural legacy. Its socioeconomic growth has advanced significantly since attaining independence. India, the seventh largest country in the world, is geographically unique, with the Arabian Sea to the west and the Bay of Bengal to the east, and the Great Himalayas to the north and the Indian Ocean to the south. India differs from the other countries of Asia due to its distinct geographic location.

The 2011 Census found that 73% of Indians were literate. However, it was ranked at 77.7% in the 2017–18 National Statistical Commission study. At 87.7%, the literacy rate in urban regions was substantially greater than that in rural areas, which was 73.5%. India has a significant gender disparity in literacy rates. For those seven years of age and above, the effective literacy rate was 70.3% for women and 84.7% for males (Literacy in India - Wikipedia).

The eastern region of India is home to Odisha, formerly known as Orissa. With a population of nearly 41 million, it ranks eleventh in terms of population and ninth in terms of area. There are a lot of Scheduled Tribes in the state. According to the 2011 Census, there were 41,974,218 people living in Odisha, with 7,003,656 residing in urban areas and 34,970,562 in rural areas. Of the 5,273,194 children in the 0–6 age group, 747,324 live in cities, while the bulk, 4,525,870, live in rural regions. There are 26,742,595 literate people in the state overall, with 5,364,680 living in urban regions and 21,377,915 in rural areas. In 2011, 72.9% of people in Odisha were literate. The literacy rate was 70.2% in rural areas and higher in urban areas. Rural areas had a literacy rate of 70.2%, while urban areas had a higher literacy rate of 85.7%. In rural areas, the male literacy rate was 79.6%, while the female literacy rate was 60.7%. In urban regions, the male literacy rate was 90.7%, and the female literacy rate was 80.4% (Pandey, 1993).

In Odisha, Khordha had the highest urban literacy rate at 91%, while Jagatsinghpur had the highest rural literacy rate at 86.5%. On the other hand, Malkangiri had the lowest urban literacy rate (74.5%), while Nabarangpur had the lowest rural literacy rate (43.9%). Khordha had the greatest urban male literacy rate at

94.2%, while Jagatsinghpur had the highest rural male literacy rate at 92.5%. Koraput had the lowest male literacy rate in the countryside (54.1%), whereas Malkangiri had the lowest male literacy rate in the city (83.4%). The rural literacy rate for women was lowest in Koraput (31.3%) and highest in Jagatsinghpur (80.4%). In urban areas, Khordha had the highest female literacy rate at 87.5%, and Malkangiri recorded the lowest at 64.9% (<https://sme.odisha.gov.in/>).

Odisha is a state with a significant tribal population, as 22.85% of its residents belong to Scheduled Tribes (STs), while 17.13% are from Scheduled Castes (SCs). The literacy rate in Odisha is 69% for SCs and 52.24% for STs, which is considerably lower than the state's overall literacy rate of 73%.

Review of Literature:

Behera (2015), In the paper titled “Primary Education among Tribal People of Mayurbhanj District of Odisha: An Evaluative Study” The author investigates the condition of elementary education in the Mayurbhanj district's indigenous villages. This district has the greatest number of tribal people and is the largest in Odisha in terms of land. The study looks into the state of primary education in the area right now and the government's initiatives to make elementary education universal. The 7th All India School Education Survey (2002), National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) surveys, State Report Cards created by the National University of Educational Planning and Administration (NUEPA) in Delhi, and information from the Odisha Primary Education Programme Authority (OPEPA), the Tribal Welfare Department of Odisha, and the SCSTRTI, Odisha were among the many sources of data used in the study. The paper further analyzes educational parameters at the district level and seeks to highlight the need for focused attention from researchers, policymakers, administrators, and educationists to meet the goals of the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) in the state.

Garada (2019), In the study titled “Literacy Disparity in Odisha: A Zonal Analysis,” the author emphasizes the urgent need to address regional and social disparities in literacy to foster the overall socio-economic development of Odisha. The research reveals that while the coastal areas of Odisha have made significant strides in improving literacy, primarily due to better access to educational resources, the non-coastal regions—especially in the

northern plateau and tribal areas—continue to face lower literacy rates. The study stresses the need for targeted interventions in these non-coastal zones, with a focus on improving infrastructure, increasing access to education, and addressing social issues such as gender inequality. To achieve more equitable literacy rates across the state, the research suggests promoting urbanization, ensuring an even distribution of resources, and overcoming historical and social barriers to education.

Nayak *et al.* (2021), In their paper titled “Gender and Rural-Urban Literacy Disparity in India with Special Reference to Odisha,” the authors highlight the role of literacy as a powerful tool for human empowerment. An educated individual can enhance their skills and productivity, ultimately leading to a better quality of life. In contrast, illiterate individuals remain trapped in ignorance. This paper examines literacy disparities both within Odisha’s districts and across states in India, focusing on rural-urban and gender-based differences in literacy rates. To analyze these disparities, the study employs Sopher’s Disparity Index. Additionally, statistical tools such as the Coefficient of Variation (CV), arithmetic mean, range, and percentages are used to analyze secondary data sourced from the Government of India’s census.

Mohapatra (2023), In her article titled “Girls’ Education in Odisha: Importance, Status, and Challenges,” The author describes the study’s goals, which include determining the obstacles to girls’ education, analyzing the steps taken by the Odisha government to raise girls’ educational standing, and evaluating the literacy and dropout rates of girls in the state. The study draws from a variety of sources, including government websites, internet resources, research papers, reports, articles, and textbooks. The study comes to the conclusion that even though Odisha’s female literacy rate has increased, the state’s female student dropout rate is still rising. SABALA, the Odisha State Policy for Girls and Women (2014), Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, ADVIKA, and the Biju Kanya Ratna Yojna are just a few of the government programs that have been implemented to address these problems. Despite these efforts, significant challenges remain in enhancing girls’ education, including child marriage, negative parental attitudes, a shortage of female teachers, poverty, menstruation-related issues, gender-based violence, and the burden of household responsibilities.

Barman and Halder (2024), In their study “Literacy

Status of the Scheduled Caste Community in West Bengal,” the authors examine the current literacy rates and growth trends among the Scheduled Castes (SC) and their various sub-castes. The paper offers a district-wise analysis of literacy patterns within the SC community in West Bengal, highlighting educational progress and literacy rates across different regions. Additionally, it focuses on the literacy trends within specific sub-castes of the Scheduled Caste population. The study provides a comprehensive analysis of literacy at both the district level and among different sub-castes, showing that literacy rates have consistently increased over time. However, the authors emphasize that significant disparities in literacy growth persist across districts and sub-castes. Some districts and sub-castes continue to exhibit relatively low literacy rates, despite the overall upward trend..

Objectives :

- o To explain the female literacy rate in Odisha.
- o To Analyze the District-wise Comparison of Female Literacy.
- o To explore the Participation of Marginalized Communities, Specifically SC and ST Women, in Education.

METHODOLOGY

This research mainly uses secondary data gathered from multiple sources, such as the 2011 Census, to provide a spatial analysis of women’s higher education across various socioeconomic segments. Simple tabular forms and statistical techniques like percentages and ratios are used in the methodology. The official website of the Census of India, the District Census Handbook, and the District Statistical Handbook are the sources of the secondary data. Furthermore, to supplement the analysis, pertinent books and periodicals have been studied. Census reports from the Government of India (2001–2011) and the Economic Surveys released by the Government of India and the Government of Odisha are among the data that covers a number of years. Statistical techniques such as the arithmetic mean, range, percentages, and histograms have been used to analyze the data effectively.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Table 1 provides literacy rates for both males

and females in Odisha for the years 2001 and 2011. It shows the gender-specific literacy rates as well as the overall literacy rate, highlighting the changes over the 10-year period. By examining these figures, we can understand trends in literacy growth, gender disparities, and the overall educational progress in the state of Odisha. In 2001, the female literacy rate in Odisha stood at 50.51%. By 2011, this figure had significantly risen to 64.01%, representing an increase of 13.5 percentage points. This increase indicates a notable improvement in female education over the decade. Various initiatives by the government, such as promoting female education and improving access to schools, may have played a role in boosting the literacy rate among women. The higher rate of improvement for females suggests that there was a focused effort to address the educational gap between genders in the state. The male literacy rate in Odisha was 75.35% in 2001 and increased to 81.59% by 2011, marking a rise of 6.24 percentage points. Although there is a positive change, the growth in male literacy is smaller compared to females, suggesting that the male literacy rate was already higher in 2001, leaving less room for significant improvement. Nonetheless, the continued rise in male literacy highlights ongoing progress in educational standards in Odisha.

Table 1 : Sex wise Female Literacy Rate in Odisha (%)			
	2001	2011	Change
Female	50.51	64.01	13.5
Male	75.35	81.59	6.24
Total	63.08	72.87	9.79

In this Table 2 shows that In Odisha, the district-wise female literacy data reveals significant variation across different regions, with urban areas generally exhibiting higher literacy rates than rural ones. Highest Female Literacy: "The highest female literacy rate in Odisha is recorded in Jagatsinghapur with an overall literacy rate of 72.97%, followed closely by Kendrapara at 70.49% and Khordha at 73.07%". These districts have relatively high female literacy rates, especially in their urban areas. For example, Jagatsinghapur has a rural literacy rate of 72.84% and an urban rate of 74.16%, while Kendrapara shows impressive urban literacy of 74.97%. This suggests that districts with better infrastructure, economic conditions, and education systems are seeing more success in improving female literacy. Lowest Female Literacy: On the other hand, the districts with the lowest female literacy rates are

Table 2 : District wise Female Literacy in Odisha

District	Female Literacy		Total
	Rural	Urban	
1. Bargarh	56.82	71.22	58.27
2. Jharsuguda	59.54	68.04	62.86
3. Sambalpur	56.18	70.60	60.38
4. Debagarh	54.20	68.41	55.20
5. Sundargarh	48.24	71.25	57.37
6. Kendujhar	50.15	61.06	49.97
7. Mayurbhanj	43.32	72.90	45.53
8. Baleswar	62.37	71.32	63.35
9. Bhadrak	67.00	64.82	66.73
10. Kendrapara	70.22	74.97	70.49
11. Jagatsinghapur	72.84	74.16	72.97
12. Cuttack	68.44	79.19	71.43
13. Jajapur	64.31	71.23	64.81
14. Dhenkanal	61.60	76.57	63.05
15. Anugul	58.42	72.76	60.67
16. Nayagarh	63.42	74.42	64.33
17. Khordha	67.88	78.84	73.07
18. Puri	69.50	75.71	70.45
19. Ganjam	50.05	69.27	54.14
20. Gajapati	33.23	63.91	36.91
21. Kandhamal	41.53	71.92	44.45
22. Boudh	50.50	71.61	71.61
23. Subarnapur	55.29	66.75	56.22
24. Balangir	43.68	68.52	46.60
25. Nuapada	37.02	62.50	38.42
26. Kalahandi	38.13	66.23	40.25
27. Rayagada	28.39	62.72	33.43
28. Nabarangapur	27.30	62.14	29.77
29. Koraput	26.03	66.36	32.43
30. Malkangiri	29.54	55.86	31.56

Nabarangapur, Malkangiri and Koraput, where overall female literacy stands at 29.77%, 31.56% and 32.43%, respectively. The rural areas in these districts have exceptionally low literacy rates, such as Nabarangapur (27.30%), Rayagada (33.43%), Malkangiri (31.56%), and Koraput (32.43%). These districts face challenges like geographical isolation, lack of adequate educational infrastructure, and socio-economic barriers, contributing to the struggle in improving female literacy rates. The stark contrast between the high and low literacy rates across these districts highlights the disparity in educational access and socio-economic conditions within the state. There is a pressing need to address the issues faced by the more marginalized districts to ensure that female literacy in rural areas improves.

Fig. 1 illustrates that the coastal districts of Odisha have become leaders in female literacy, with Khordha at

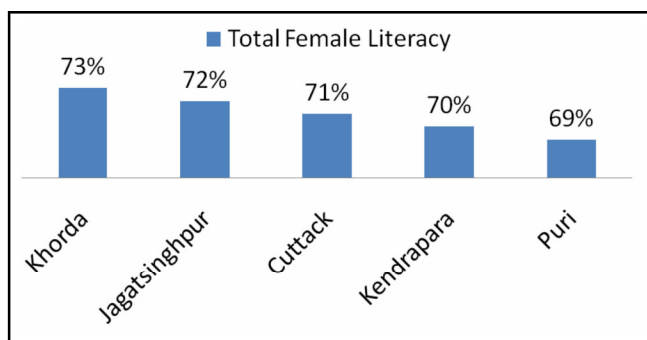


Fig. 1 : District wise highest female Literacy

the forefront with an impressive rate of 73%. Following closely behind are Jagatsinghpur, Cuttack, Kendrapara, and Puri, with female literacy rates of 72%, 71%, 70%, and 69%, respectively. These remarkable figures highlight the region's strong commitment to empowering women through education. Several factors contribute to the higher female literacy rates in these coastal districts, including improved infrastructure, better economic opportunities, and heightened social awareness. The presence of urban centers, industries, and educational institutions in these areas has likely played a significant role in advancing literacy levels. Additionally, the coastal region's greater exposure to outside influences and progressive ideas may have contributed to overcoming traditional barriers to girls' education. As Odisha works toward improving its overall literacy rates, these coastal districts can serve as examples for other parts of the state. By analyzing the elements that have led to their success, policymakers can implement targeted strategies to address the gender disparities in literacy across Odisha.

The Fig. 2 shows that highlights the alarmingly low female literacy rates in six districts of Odisha. Nabarangpur stands at the bottom with a mere 29% female literacy rate, followed closely by Malkangiri at 31%, Koraput at 32%, Rayagada at 33%, and Gajapati at 36%. These districts, predominantly inhabited by tribal populations, have historically faced challenges in accessing quality education. The stark reality of these numbers underscores the need for targeted interventions to address the systemic barriers hindering female education in these regions. Poverty, lack of infrastructure, and deep-rooted socio-cultural norms have contributed to this dismal scenario. To bridge this gap, it is essential to increase access to education, promote awareness about the importance of girls' education, and provide economic incentives to encourage families to educate

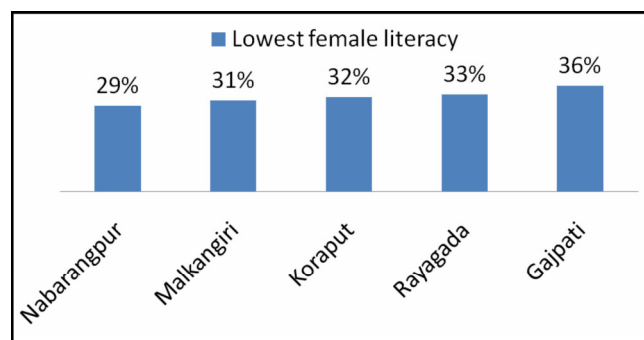


Fig. 2 : District wise lowest female literacy rate

their girls. Only through concerted efforts can we hope to empower the women of these districts and pave the way for a more equitable society.

Fig. 3 compares the female literacy rates of Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) across various districts, highlighting the educational disparities between these two groups. In Jagatsinghpur, the literacy rate for SC women is 62%, while for ST women, it is lower at 46%. This shows a clear gap, with SC women having a higher literacy rate. In Khordha, SC women have a literacy rate of 61%, compared to 50% for ST women, demonstrating a noticeable difference, although the gap is smaller than in Jagatsinghpur. In Cuttack, the gap between SC and ST women widens considerably, with SC female literacy at 60% and ST female literacy at only 39%. This reflects a significant disparity in literacy rates. In Puri, SC women have a literacy rate of 59%, while ST women have a slightly lower rate of 54%. Although the gap is smaller than in Cuttack, SC women still show a higher literacy rate. Finally, in Kendrapara, SC women have a literacy rate of 58%, compared to

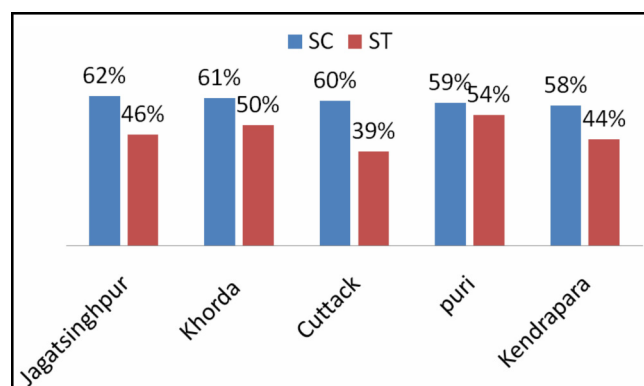
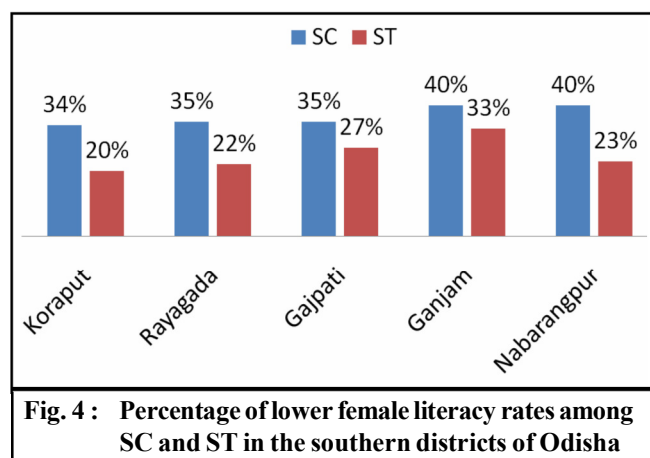


Fig. 3 : Percentage of higher female literacy rate among SC & ST in Coastal Districts of Odisha

44% for ST women, once again indicating that SC women have a higher literacy rate than their ST counterparts. Overall, this comparison reveals that in these coastal districts, female literacy rates are generally higher, with SC women consistently outperforming ST women. The gap between SC and ST women suggests that SC women are more educated, which may be linked to better social and economic conditions. This could be a result of greater access to education and improved opportunities for SC women compared to their ST counterparts.

Fig. 4 compares the female literacy rates of Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) in the southern districts of Odisha, emphasizing those with lower literacy rates. In Koraput, the female literacy rate for SC women is 34%, while for ST women, it is even lower at 20%, making it the district with the lowest literacy rates for both SC and ST women. Rayagada closely follows, with SC female literacy at 35% and ST female literacy at 22%. In Gajapati, the female literacy rates are 35% for SC women and 27% for ST women, showing slight improvements compared to Rayagada and Koraput. In Ganjam, the literacy rate for SC women is 40%, while for ST women, it stands at 33%. Lastly, in Nabarangpur, SC female literacy is 40%, and ST female literacy is 23%. The data indicates that the southern districts of Odisha have considerably lower female literacy rates compared to the coastal districts. Both SC and ST women in these regions have much lower literacy levels, a disparity likely due to several challenges, such as limited access to quality education and lower socio-economic conditions, in contrast to the more developed coastal districts.



Findings and Conclusion:

This study finds a positive trend in Odisha's literacy

rates between 2001 and 2011, with a particularly notable increase in female literacy. A key achievement is the narrowing of the gender gap in literacy, which reflects the state's efforts to improve education for all its citizens. District-wise comparisons of female literacy in Odisha reveal that districts such as Khorda, Jagatsinghpur, Cuttack, Kendrapara, and Puri have higher literacy rates. This can be attributed to better socio-economic conditions, improved transportation and communication facilities, and the availability of educational institutions in these areas. In contrast, districts such as Nabarangpur, Koraput, Malkanagiri, and Rayagada exhibit significantly lower female literacy rates. These districts face several socio-economic challenges, with limited access to quality education and fewer educational resources, resulting in poor literacy outcomes. The study also finds that, overall, Scheduled Castes (SC) women have higher literacy rates than Scheduled Tribes (ST) women in Odisha. Coastal districts, in particular, show higher female literacy rates for both SC and ST groups, while southern districts report much lower literacy rates in comparison to the coastal regions.

Conclusion:

The study highlights the disparities in female literacy rates across districts in Odisha, with coastal districts generally performing better due to better infrastructure and socio-economic conditions. The southern districts, particularly those with high tribal populations, face significant challenges in improving literacy, primarily due to limited educational facilities and socio-economic obstacles. Furthermore, the analysis underscores that SC women have higher literacy rates than their ST counterparts, reflecting the varying levels of access to education and social development in different regions.

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