

# A Trajectory on Women with Special Reference to Odisha

## Abstract

*"When women are empowered and can claim their rights and access to land, leadership, opportunities and choices, economies grow, food security is enhanced and prospects are improved for current and future generations", Michelle Bachelet - Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of UN Women.*

India has performed poorly in removing gender-based disparities, ranking 114 out of 142 countries in World Economic Forum's 2014 gender gap index, scoring below average on parameters like economic participation, educational attainment and health and survival. . India was the second lowest performing country on health and survival, ranking 141 just ahead of Armenia. The socio-demographic profile of the women in Odisha presents a mixed picture. Child sex ratio in rural odisha is much better than urban situation. Further, it shows a declining sex ratio as we move to the younger age groups. Life expectancy for women (67.3) is higher than men (64.3) in Odisha, but is lower than the national average (69.6). Total literacy rate in Odisha stood at 74.04% while male and female literacy rates stood at 80% and 65.46% respectively. The wide gap between male and female literacy rates in Odisha is indicative of an enduring gender bias in the state. Women are moving forward in every field motivated by the urge to excel and find their own space in the in the society. At the workplace gender equality is improving. The asymmetry between male and female is on the track of slow smoothening. Education is the prime mover to attain excellence through equity.

**Keywords:** Gender Equality, Life Expectancy for Women, Maternal Mortality Ratio, Female Literacy,

## Introduction

Gender is not synonymous with women, nor is it a zero-sum game implying loss for men; rather, it refers to both women and men, and to their status, relative to each other. Gender equality refers to that stage of human social development when both men and women realise their optimum potentiality. India has performed poorly in removing gender-based disparities, ranking 114 out of 142 countries in World Economic Forum's 2014 gender gap index, scoring below average on parameters like economic participation, educational attainment and health and survival. India's slipped 13 spots from its last year's ranking of 101 in the Gender Gap Index by the World Economic Forum. India is part of the 20 worst-performing countries on the labour force participation, estimated earned income, literacy rate and sex ratio at birth indicators. On the other hand, India is among the top 20 best performing countries on the political empowerment sub index. On educational attainment, India ranked 126 with female to male ratio in literacy rate at 0.68. India was the second lowest performing country on health and survival, ranking 141 just ahead of Armenia.

The picture of the state of Odisha is matching in some sectors to the Indian rate and in many cases the situation is abysmal. The Odisha State Policy for Girls and Women, 2014 appears at a critical juncture which further strengthens the government's commitment to gender welfare, rights, and empowerment as a policy document to meet the much needed gender-responsive accountability systems. The objective of this Policy is to ensure an enabling environment for girls and women that promotes equal opportunities, eliminates discrimination, achieves holistic development and empowerment through changes in social attitudes, building strong institutions, and enhancing capacities, so as to facilitate a life of dignity and freedom for women.

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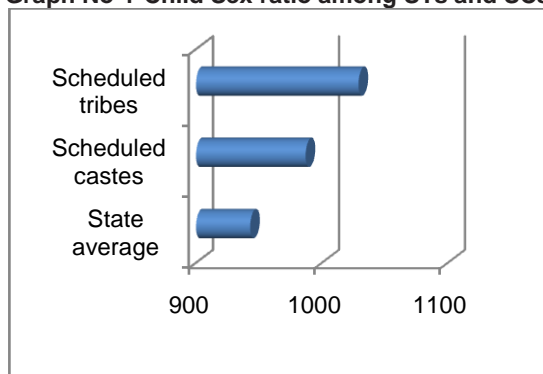
**Socio-Demographic Profile**

The socio-demographic profile of the women in Odisha presents a mixed picture. The 2011 census records the women population at 49.45 % of the total population of the State. But, the sex ratio is a matter of grave concern. Although the overall sex ratio has improved to 978 (from 972), the child sex ratio (0-6 years) has declined to 934 (from 953). However, the child sex ratio among the Scheduled Tribes (who constitute 22.8% of the population in Odisha), is much better with 1029/1000 boys, and among the Scheduled Castes (who constitute 17.1 % of the population) the ratio is 987/1000 boys.

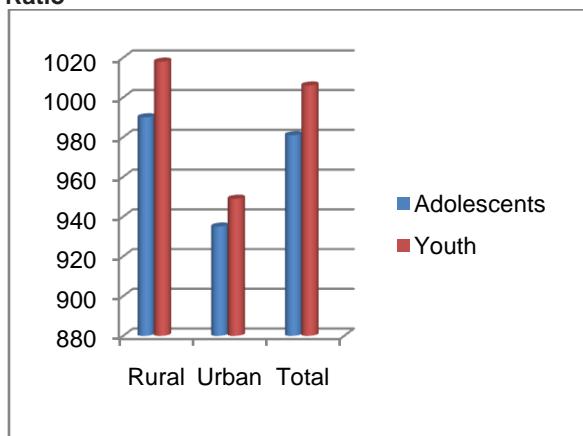
**Table-1 Sex Ratio in Odisha**

Census	Sex Ratio (women per 1000 men)	Child Sex Ratio (girls per 1000 boys)
2011	978	934
2001	972	953

**Graph No-1 Child Sex ratio among STs and SCs**



**Graph No-2 Adolescents and Youth Child Sex Ratio**



The charts above show clearly the difference in the sex ratio among different caste groups as well as the rural and urban child sex ratio among the adolescent and youth. Clearly, child sex ratio among the Scheduled tribes is very positive and higher than the scheduled castes, who in turn have a higher child sex ratio compared to the other general castes. Similarly child sex ratio in rural odisha is much better than urban situation. Further, it shows a declining sex ratio as we move to the younger age groups.

The adverse sex ratio in the State mirrors the “missing women syndrome”. In spite of the strong legal provision against it, sex determination tests, female feticide and infanticide, neglect and discrimination of the girl child is growing in the State resulting in a declining child sex ratio. The fact that adverse sex ratio is more prevalent among the better educated and more developed sections of the society (as shown in the above charts) significantly points not only to the power of the deeper structure of patriarchy but also to the “androcentric” nature of the model of our development. Scheduled tribes and castes, as also the rural people value their girls more than the general castes, and the urban people who are socio-economically more developed.

A quick look at the other important parameters of human development reveals a pattern of women deprivation and gender-based discrimination in our social life. The maternal mortality ratio (MMR) has slightly improved from 258 (2009) to 235 per 1000 live births (2012), but is still alarmingly high and the fourth highest in India. Within the State, the Southern districts have much higher MMR compared to the other regions. Similarly, the infant mortality rate is higher for women (54 per 1000 live births) compared with men (52), while under-five mortality increases to 74 per 1000 live births (against 70 among boys).<sup>1</sup>

Life expectancy for women (67.3) is higher than men (64.3) in Odisha, but is lower than the national average (69.6). The NFHS 3 survey reveals that the 62.8% of the ever-married women in the age group of 15 to 49 years have anemia, and the percentage of pregnant women in this age group who are anemic is as high as 68.1% (as against 37% for men in the same age group) which is one of the main causes of maternal mortality besides having low Body Mass Index (BMI). About a quarter (23%) of women in this age group have below normal BMI. Not surprisingly, they give birth to children who are anemic, and as a result as high as 74.2% of children (6-35 months) are anemic. Antenatal care has increased from 65% (NFHS 1) to 87% (NFHS3). Institutional deliveries however remain low though there has been an increase from 14% (NFHS 1) to 39 % (NFHS 3), and less than half of the child births (46.4%) are assisted by health personnel. Fertility rate in Odisha has declined to 2.4. Family planning becomes increasingly gyno-centric (while they often suffer from complicated health problems due to sterilization, women don't have any control over decisions regarding fertility management). While male and female sterilization were 3.4% and 28.3% respectively as recorded in the NFHS1, the figure declined to 1.0% among men and increased to 33.1% among women in the NFHS3. As per the UN, 720 million women in the world today have been married before they turned 18. Of these, a third (roughly 240 million) lives in India. Data for Odisha reveal that 36.3 % of the currently married women in the age group of 20-24 years were married before the legal age limit.<sup>2</sup> This is the broad health status of women in Odisha after some improvements, albeit slow, recorded due to the provision of reproductive health care and

services through the Janani Suraksha Yojana, IMR Mission and Mortality Reduction Mission and National Rural Health Mission. Child marriage continues to be a major problem in Odisha. But, women’s health rights remain a major problem, and given the cultural and social determinants (which constitute a very complex web) of women’s health, there is a need for an intensive social approach, besides the technocratic medical approach to the problem.

**Literacy and Education**

Women constitute almost half of the population of the world. Education for women is the best way to improve health, nutrition and economic status of a household that constitute a micro unit of a nation economy.

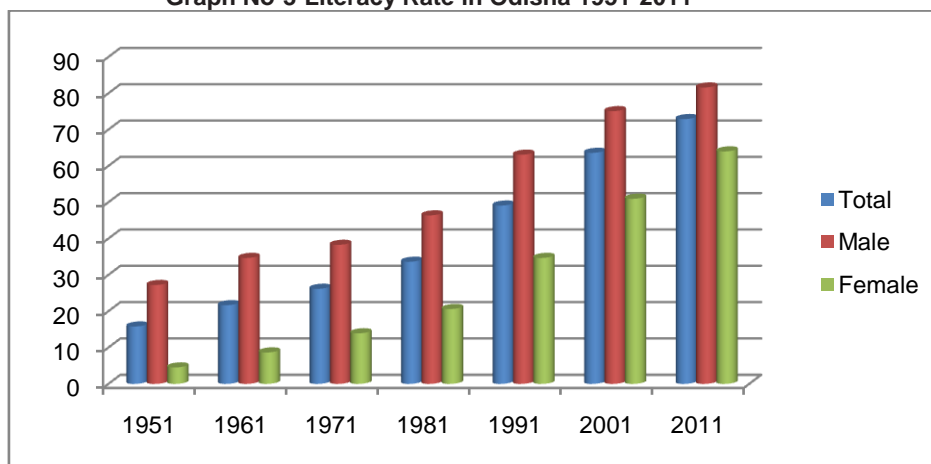
According to the 2011 census, total literacy rate in Odisha stood at 74.04% while male and female literacy rates stood at 80% and 65.46% respectively. The wide gap between male and female literacy rates in Odisha is indicative of an enduring gender bias in the state. Again, if we compare the differences in the urban and rural male/female literacy rates, i.e.26.35 %( rural) and 15.64 % (urban), this also indicates an added disparity in allocation of resources. It is seen

that the coastal belt records a higher rate of success than the western, relatively underdeveloped areas with a preponderance of SC/ST communities.

The overall literacy in Odisha is 73.45 %. But a gender disaggregated data for literacy puts female literacy at 64.36 %, much lower than male literacy (82.40 %). Overall there is a high gender gap of 18 % between male and female literacy in Odisha, in spite of the progressive policy measures such as the Sarva Siksha Abhijan and special focus on the girl child education. Further, there is a great variation in female literacy across socio-economic categories. Female literacy among the scheduled castes is a low 40.33%, and among the scheduled tribes it is abysmally low at 23.23 %.<sup>3</sup>

The school enrolment ratio among girls has shown substantial improvement during the years 2000 and 2012 rising from 58.2 % to 99.6 %. The drop-out rate also has declined from 41.4 % to 0.6 % during this period. But, as we move up in the educational ladder, this optimism fades. The dropout rate at the primary school level is 2.23 %, which jumps up to a high 51.8 % for girls at the secondary school stage.<sup>4</sup>

**Graph No-3 Literacy Rate in Odisha 1951-2011**



Due to the intensity and the extent of gender disparities, Odisha ranks relatively low in terms of the Gender-Related Development Index. The Government of India, in its study on the GDI and GEM scores among the States of India, adopting the UNDP-developed measures to the Indian context, reported the GDI score of Odisha at 0.524 in 2006.<sup>5</sup>

**Table-2 HDI and GDI Scores**

Year	HDI		GDI	
	India	Odisha	India	Odisha
1996	0.530	0.461	0.514	0.445
2006	0.605	0.537	0.590	0.524

While during these ten years Odisha gained in its GDI (0.079 points), slightly more than the Indian average (0.076 points), its position is still far behind compared to States like Himachal Pradesh (with GDI score 0.664), Punjab (0.663), Tamil Nadu (0.655), Uttarakhand (0.647), or even neighboring West Bengal (0.622).

**Table-3 Data of the Students in the Colleges of the State (with Women Component)**

Sl. No.	Name of the College	Total Students	Women %
1	ANGUL	4243	55.93
2	BALASORE	8946	53.83
3	BARGARH	5265	49.97
4	BHADRAK	5875	54.62
5	BOLANGIR	5471	40.98
6	BOUDH	715	42.80
7	CUTTACK	12578	55.14
8	DEOGARH	9988	43.32
9	DHENKANAL	5221	52.31
10	GAJAPATI	1273	38.73
11	GANJAM	9801	52.97
12	JAGATSINGPUR	4809	56.81
13	JAJPUR	9369	54.42
14	JHARSUGUDA	1775	60.39
15	KALAHANDI	3280	36.43
16	KANDHAMAL	2005	44.64
17	KENDRAPARA	6649	59.15

18	KEONJHAR	5766	<b>53.49</b>
19	KHURDA	11750	<b>54.17</b>
20	KORAPUT	2583	47.81
21	MALKANAGIRI	875	39.20
22	MAYURBHANJ	9551	<b>50.61</b>
23	NAWARANGPUR	1021	39.08
24	NAYAGARH	3998	47.55
25	NUAPADA	928	32.97
26	PURI	7752	<b>56.08</b>
27	RAYAGADA	1466	44.82
28	SAMBALPUR	3986	<b>51.98</b>
29	SONEPUR	2162	49.63
30	SUNDARGARH	7130	<b>60.90</b>

In 16 districts of the state the female strength is more than that of male signifying the growing status of women education.

#### **Warning signal for the nation to wake up**

Yasmina Bekhouche, Economist, Gender Initiatives team, World Economic Forum tells India (108) moves up six positions in the Global Gender Gap Index 2015 compared to last year. This is mainly due to improvements in the Health and Survival and Political Empowerment categories of focus or "pillars". In a year, India has more than doubled the percentage of women in ministerial positions (from 9 per cent to 22 per cent). It now ranks second in the region on the Political Empowerment pillar (it used to rank third last year on that pillar). Another positive element is that India's performance on the Healthy life expectancy indicator slightly improved. Change is slow but it is happening. Compared to last year, the Economic Participation and Opportunity pillar decreased due to a slight decline in the female Labour force participation (from 30 per cent to 29 per cent) and due to a decrease in the Perception of wage equality for similar work. One of the larger challenges that Indian women face, compared to other countries, is the disproportionate amount of time spent per day in unpaid work compared to men. This is one of the reasons why women's labour force participation is lagging behind.

Gender equality campaigner Ranjana Kumari, Director of Central for Social Research expressed, sex ratio figure of 2011 Census is a 'warning signal for the nation to wake up.' However, some areas are showing a silver lining. In India, Sex Ratio was all right, till the time of Independence, thereafter it has declined regularly. According to Census of India 2011, Indian sex ratio has shown major signs of improvement in the last 10 years. From a small number of 933 in 2001, the bar has been raised to 940 in the 2011 Census of India. Although this improvement is fair enough in a developing economy, but still there is a long way to go. India suffers from a huge inequality of male female child ratio resulting in a poor sex ratio in some regions. With an overall improvement in sex ratio, the states of South India has shown major signs of improvement in comparison to states of Haryana and Punjab, where sex ratio is far low than national average figure. According to Census of India, the child sex ratio (0-6 years) in India is one of the poorest, last recorded at 918 girls for every 1000 boys in 2011. The state of Haryana registered a child sex ratio (0-6 age group) of

over 900 in 2015 for the first time in the last 15 years. While the rural sex ratio is 947 the urban sex ratio is 926. Lack of education and poverty in rural areas leads to gender bias seems as a misnomer with this statistics.

#### **Aim of the Study**

1. To study on the gaps regarding.
2. The pace of the women moving forward in many fields motivated by the urge to excel and find their own space in the society.
3. Is gender equality improving?
4. Is the asymmetry between male and female slow smoothening.
5. Is education becoming the prime mover to attain excellence .

#### **Conclusion**

Women are the backbone of the development of rural and national economies. They comprise 43% of the world's agricultural labour force, which rises to 70% in some countries. Women are moving forward in many fields motivated by the urge to excel and find their own space in the society. At the workplace gender equality is improving. The asymmetry between male and female is on the track of slow smoothening. Education is the prime mover to attain excellence through equity.

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