

The Gender Question

Females, constituted 49.29 per cent of the total population in Orissa in 2001. Compared to the all-India level, the state has a relatively favourable sex ratio of 972 females per 1000 males. Female life expectancy at birth (for the year 2001–02) in Orissa (59.71 years) is slightly lower than that for the males (60.05 years) and much lower than the all-India average. (63.87 years for males and 66.91 years for females). On the other hand, infant mortality rate per 1000 live births in Orissa for males (for the year 2000) is 98 and for females 92, whereas these are respectively 67 and 69 at the all-India level.

Demographic Features

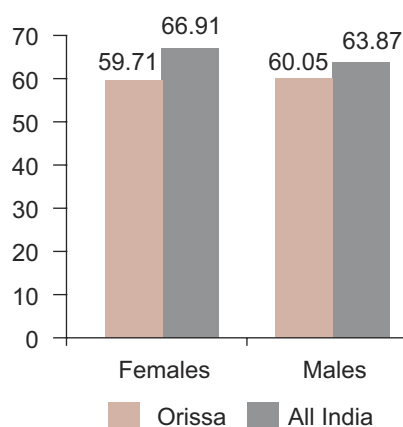
For the state as a whole, the sex ratio started declining steadily from 1931, as also for most districts. By 2001, all but six districts had an unfavourable sex ratio. This is particularly true of Angul, Balasore, Cuttack, Khurda, Sambalpur, and Sundargarh districts, all of which are relatively more urbanised and industrialised.

At the state level, while the sex ratio for all age group population is 972 females per 1000 males, it comes down to 950 females per 1000 males in 0–6 year age group of population. Further, at the district level, the situation is worse in the case of developed coastal districts and also in the central tableland districts of Dhenkanal and Angul. It seems that better access to sex determination tests through ultrasound and amniocentesis techniques resulted in female infanticides during early stages of pregnancy.

The lower sex ratio in the 0–6 year age group of population compared to the overall sex ratio in Orissa in general, and that in the developed coastal belt in particular, is a clear manifestation of gender bias.

Fig. 6.1

Female Life Expectancy at Birth in Orissa (2001-2002)



All other factors being equal, the female foetus and female children are biologically sturdier compared to their male counterparts. However, in the patriarchal social set-up, women are socially and legally deprived of their natural rights. As a result, gender based inequalities pervade all spheres of society and affect the planned development process.

Education

Mother's illiteracy and lack of schooling directly disadvantage their young children through poor quality of health care and high infant and child mortality and malnutrition. Mothers with more education are more likely to adopt appropriate health-promoting behaviour such as having young children immunised. Low investment in female education thus tends to reduce a country's overall well-being.

The male literacy rate in the state is 1.5 times higher than that for the females. Female literacy rate is the highest (71.06 per cent) in Khurda

district and the lowest (21.02 per cent) in Nabarangpur district. The female literacy rate is very low in the highland and tribal districts.

Gross enrolment ratios for boys and girls in primary schools have respectively increased from 28.0 and 1.0 in 1947–48 to 125.7 and 91.5 in 1999–2000. Similarly, in upper primary schools, gross enrolment ratios have respectively increased from 6.0 and 0.4 to 66.6 and 43.8 during the same period. The Gender Parity Index thus improved from 0.07 in 1947–48 to 0.66 in 1999–2000.

The rates of dropouts are marginally higher in the case of girls in upper primary schools. However, over the period 1973–2001, the rate of dropouts declined from 75.3 per cent for boys and 81.1 per cent for girls in 1973 to 42.3 and 41.4 per cent respectively in 2000–01, at the

primary level. At the upper primary level, it declined from 84.2 and 90.2 in 1973 to 70.9 and 77.1 per cent in 2000–01 for boys and girls respectively. This shows that the gender based disparity in education continues to prevail, through at the reduced rate.

Health

According to NFHS-2 (1998–99), almost half (48 per cent) of the women population in Orissa suffers from the problems of nutritional deficiency, with a body mass index (BMI) of less than 18.5. This problem is particularly serious for younger women, illiterate women, and women belonging to the SC and ST communities. Similarly, prevalence of anaemia among the women of 15–49 year age group and children of below 3 year age is very high. As a result, they are more vulnerable to diseases and sickness unlike their male counterparts. In this situation, their problems get aggravated due to gender bias in health care access and practices and health seeking behaviour.

Apart from low BMI and nutritional deficiency in case of women, the incidence of malnutrition is very high among both male and female children of Orissa. NFHS-2 shows that, in weight for age and weight for height indicators, female children are marginally more malnourished than their male counterparts.

Childbearing and poor reproductive health can lead to maternal depletion, thereby affecting women's survival. Taking six critical parameters which affect/reflect reproductive health, a Reproductive Health Index has been constructed for the 30

Map 6.1
Sex-ratio (Number of Females per 1000 males)

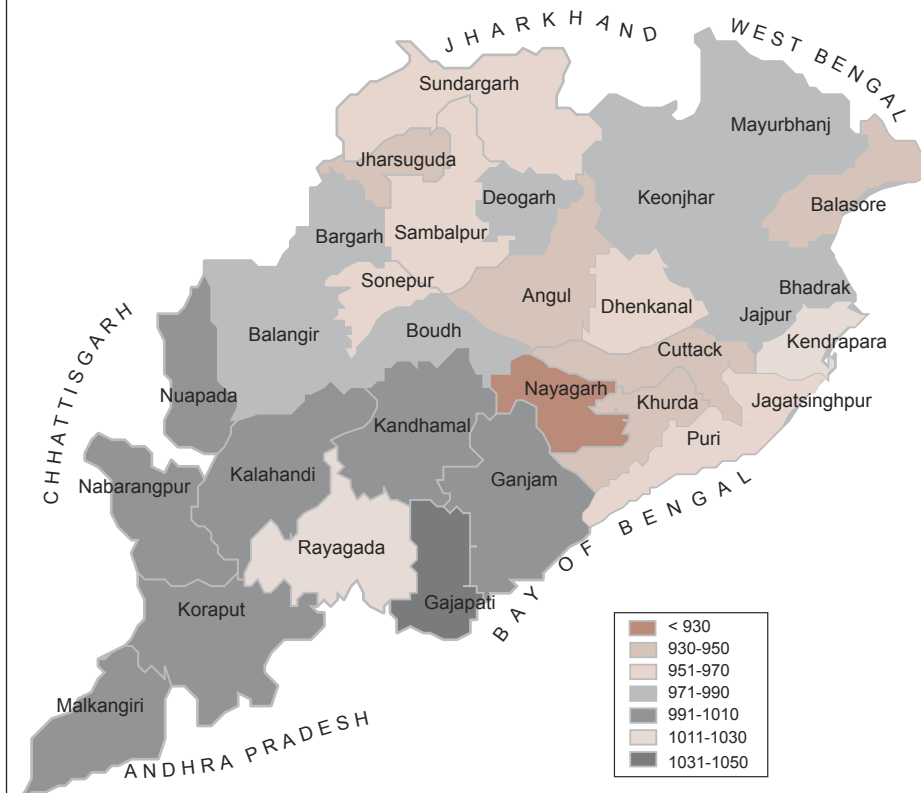
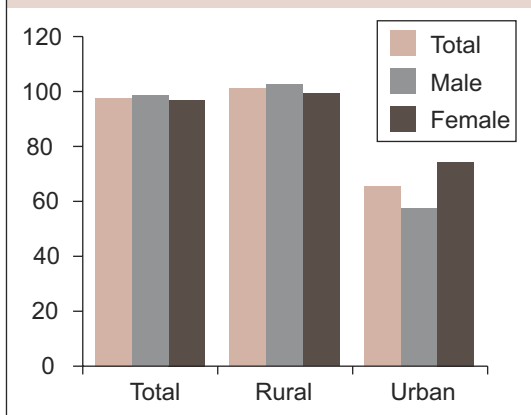


Fig. 6.2

Infant Mortality Rate by Sex and Residence, 1998



newly created districts of Orissa, which can indicate the status of reproductive health in Orissa.

There is a clear gender bias against women in family planning acceptance, particularly with respect to sterilisation. In other methods also, there is bias against women. Thus, the burden of family planning acceptance mainly falls on women though men can accept some methods, relieving women from this burden.

It has been widely observed that women live longer than men on average. However, in Orissa, as per data for 1996, the life expectancy at birth of male persons (56.9 years) is marginally higher than that of the females (56.6 years). This difference is very small also at different ages. The life expectancy of urban females is higher than that of the rural females. In rural areas, the life expectancy of male persons is higher than that of the females. This pattern is seen in almost all age groups.

The infant mortality rate is very high both for males and females in the state. The difference in male and female infant mortality is more in urban areas than in rural areas. This more or less implies that while greater efforts have been put on protection of male infants, prevention of female infant deaths in the state fails to get equal attention.

Non-Market Economic Activities

Women in Orissa are found to be discriminated both on the social and economic fronts. They are usually assigned to do only peripheral economic works. The Time Use Survey in Orissa gives some indication about gender discrimination in economic activities, both in paid and unpaid jobs. The survey gives an account of the time spent by men and women in System of National Accounts (SNA), Extended SNA, and Non-SNA activities.

SNA and non-SNA Activities

Men spend more time, about 40.12 hours per week than women who put in 17.07 hours in System of National Accounts (SNA) activities in the state. This might be due to the fact that women are required to devote more time on household work, which comes under Extended SNA activities. Women of the developed districts spend less time on SNA activities than the women of the less developed districts. Similarly, the women in the rural areas put in more hours of work (19.03 hours per week) than the women in the urban areas (8.37 hours per week). Males in both urban and rural areas spend more time on Non-SNA activities compared to females. However, this difference is more in rural areas.

Decision Making

Women have a significant role in household management. Around 92.62 per cent of the females participate in the decision making of the family. Community-wise, female participation rate in the family decision-making is highest among the SCs (93.61 per cent), followed by other communities (92.79 per cent) and STs (91.33 per cent).

Working Women and Unpaid Work

Working women with small children spend more time (10.25 hours) on domestic work including rearing and feeding of small children. Help received from the husbands or by domestic servants is marginal and insignificant. This also implies that their working status does not result in neglect of home and children and that in spite of their sizeable economic contribution, most women have a lower status in the household.

Time used for Forest-Related Activities

The increasing degradation of forest gives rise to the necessity of afforestation, plantation, and regenerating the environment in the state to reduce drudgery, and time spent by forest dwellers, particularly women, on non-timber forest produce (NTFP) related activities to earn a livelihood. One study finds that around 23.71 per cent of total man-days of work of a household was spent for collection of forest produces in 1995 and this has increased to 24.92 per cent by 2000.

Woman-headed Households and Poverty

Women-headed households are likely to fall into chronic poverty more than male-headed households. Thus, women are comparatively more vulnerable than men as they grow old. Unless the status of women is enhanced by providing access to and control over resources, the strong poverty nexus between living arrangements, widowhood, and gender cannot be remodified.

Natural Disasters and Women

Women are the worst sufferers during natural disasters. Women are vulnerable on account of many factors. They faced discrimination in relief and rehabilitation after a natural disaster like the 1999 Super Cyclone. The large-scale destruction of dwelling houses and rural infrastructure brought about many inconveniences to women in their day-to-day activities like bathing, washing, and defecation. Thus, the transient poverty of women, particularly after natural disasters, is comparatively more.

Gender Discrimination in the Marketplace

Female labour in Orissa, as elsewhere, does not have access to the labour market equal to that of men. Women are predominantly employed in labour-intensive unskilled jobs with less security of tenure and lower wages.

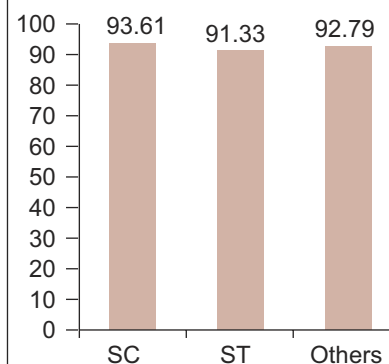
According to the 1991 census, only 27.28 per cent of total workers in Orissa are women. The main workers and the marginal workers among females constitute 58.2 per cent and 41.8 per cent of the total female workers respectively. The unorganised primary sector absorbs as much as 82.7 per cent of the total female workers. Women play an important role in agriculture, animal husbandry, and other related activities. Various NSS rounds have shown persisting differences in male and female wages.

Positive/Protective Discrimination

In order to reduce various forms of social and economic inequalities a number of progressive legislative measures have been enacted by the Government of India. Over the years, traditional gender-based disparities and discriminations existing between men

Fig. 6.3

Social Group-wise Female Participation in Family Decision-Making



and women have been reduced to a considerable extent not only at the all-India level, but also in Orissa. Nevertheless, it is felt that more proactive women empowerment measures at the state level are required to bridge the gender disparity gap.

With the objective of greater empowerment of women, the state government has been encouraging their employment in some departments like education, and health, in which their services are more required.

Reservation for Women in Government Jobs

To increase the number of women in public services, 30 per cent of the vacancies in the state government departments arising in a year in Group-B, Group-C, and Group-D services/posts to be filled up by direct recruitment have been reserved for women candidates.

The share of women government employees has increased to 15.30 per cent in 2002 from 10.4 per cent in 1991. Despite this, there is much scope for increasing the percentage of women among state government employees.

Employment of Women in the Organised Sector

The share of women in organised sector employment has shown an increasing trend, increasing from 8.78 per cent to 12.41 per cent between the period 1990 and 2000. However, the percentage share of women in state government departments is higher as compared to their share in Central government departments, quasi government organisations, local bodies, and organised establishments in the private sector. This is primarily due to women's job reservation on the one hand and downsizing of government machinery on the other.

Women in Elected Bodies

The number of women in elected bodies is not satisfactory. Out of the 21 Lok Sabha MPs from Orissa in 2004, only two are women (9.5 per cent); and out of the ten Rajya Sabha MPs from the State, only two are women (20 per cent). The representation of women in the Orissa Legislative Assembly is on the low side (less than 10 per cent of the total number of seats) and an all-out and committed effort is needed to increase this share. Promoting women's rights and increasing their participation in public life may contribute to cleaner business and better governance.

Panchayati Raj Institutions

Orissa was the first state to implement the Constitutional Amendments related to Panchayati Raj and held elections in 1997. The State Commission for Women and Orissa Mahila Vikas Samabaya Nigam (MVSN) were set up as a nodal agencies for empowerment of women to undertake the task of sensitising and educating the women elected to Panchayati Raj Institutions through gender sensitive modules.

More than one-third (35.78 per cent) of the total seats are reserved for the women candidates. A higher percentage of seats is reserved for women in the case of SC seats (46.72 per cent) followed by ST seats (39.51 per cent) and OBC seats (37.96 per cent). As per the Orissa Panchayat Act 1994, one of the two top office bearers, i.e.



Chairperson or Vice-Chairperson of all the three tiers (Gram Panchayat, Panchayat Samiti, and Zilla Parishad) must be a woman. This shows that the state government has been striving hard to empower women by reserving seats for them in Panchayati Raj Institutions.

The reservation of seats for women in the PRIs have started generating positive effects. Women candidates in Orissa constituted 34.74 per cent of the total candidates contesting for various offices of the different Panchayati Raj bodies. A greater percentage of women contest in the PRI elections from the districts where the literacy rate, particularly female literacy rate, is higher.

However, despite reservation of seats for women in the PRIs, many women do not come forward to contest elections owing to their illiteracy as well as inability to communicate with officials about the grievances of their constituencies.

Educational Institutions

A positive step has been taken by the Government of Orissa by reserving 30 per cent of seats in Engineering Colleges of the state for women. Similar reservation is desirable in other educational institutions particularly in Medical and Management colleges. However, female participation rate in College Union elections is very poor in Orissa. Reservation of certain percentage of posts or offices for women (as in PRI institutions) may help to increase the rate of female participation in democratic institutions.

Women-Related Development Programmes

In different Five-Year Plans, various welfare oriented programmes and poverty alleviation programmes have been implemented through Mahila Mandals and Mahila Samitis. Setting up of National and State Commissions for women to prevent dowries and atrocities committed against women and other initiatives have also helped in women's empowerment.

Many earlier schemes were amalgamated by the Government of India and merged into a single new scheme, called *Swarnjayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana* (SGSY). It aims at establishing a number of micro-enterprises in rural areas, building upon the potential of the rural poor. During the year 2000-01, 87 per cent families out of the targeted number of 99,094 families have been assisted in the state.

Though ICDS and the Supplementary Nutritional Programme (SNP) are targeted towards households, they should be modified to give more emphasis to women, particularly girl children, who are discriminated in a traditional patriarchal society, for their increased access to education, health, food, cloth, and leisure.

The newly formulated Tenth Five Year Plan aims at improving nutritional and health status of women and children to reduce infant and child mortality. The Plan also aims to ensure proper earmarking of funds/benefits in all women related sectors and to identify women component plan and programmes in all sectors of development.

On the occasion of International Women's Day on 8 March 2001, the state government launched a special programme called Mission Shakti, a self-help mission for economic

empowerment of poor women. In addition, the state government, with assistance from the Central government, has launched another special programme for women's empowerment known as *Swayamsiddha*. This scheme aims at capacity building of women SHGs to take up different income generating activities. There are several other programmes specific to women.

Public Expenditure on Women

In the case of Orissa, most of the state budgetary allocation on the social sector has a women component. Not only have there been budget cuts in the plan allocations for women specific schemes but there is also non-utilisation/underutilisation of the allocated resources for these schemes. The low level of resource allocation for the women specific schemes shows that gender sensitivity has not significantly and directly influenced budgetary allocations so far.

The Schemes of the Department of Women and Child Development and the Department of Health and Family Welfare have the maximum impact, both direct and indirect, on the lives of women. However, budgetary allocations of these two departments in recent years, do not present an optimistic picture.

Violence Against Women

Though there are more women PRI members and more government employees at present than earlier, violence against women has increased in the state, particularly during the 1990s.

According to the NFHS-2, at least two in every seven married women in Orissa have experienced domestic violence since the age of 15 years and at least one in eight has experienced domestic violence in the past 12 months. Some of the reasons of domestic violence are suspicion of fidelity, unfaithfulness, disrespecting in-laws, and going out without telling husband. Rape is the major non-domestic violence against women. Others include eve-teasing, and sexual harassment at work place.

The total cases of violence against women have shown positive annual growth rate in all the 11 years between the period 1990 and 2000. This annual growth rate is very high between the period 1993 and 1996. Among the various forms of violence against women, the percentage of molestation is highest (35.23%) followed by dowry-related violence (25.37%).

Dowry-related deaths are very low in tribal districts; the percentage of dowry-related deaths is higher in rural areas than in urban areas; and more than 90 per cent of dowry-related deaths occur in joint-family settings. Dowry also manifests itself in the form of female infanticide and foeticide. There has been an increase in dowry-related violence in spite of the enactment of the Dowry Prohibition Act 1991 by the state government. NGOs are being given financial assistance by the state government to propagate and organise dowry-less marriage. Anti-dowry campaigns, seminars, workshops, and street theatres to create mass awareness are being conducted.

The creation of social awareness among the masses regarding the evils of the dowry system, spread of women's education, and economic self-dependence of women, would



go a long way to deter the evils of dowry menace. Further, social ostracism of persons accused of dowry, may work as a deterrent to put an end to this evil practice.

State Sponsored Support Services

There are several alternative legal support services for women victims of violence in the state. The State Commission for Women, constituted on 30 November 1992, is empowered to act as a civil court and to recommend criminal prosecution against any person accused of an offence against women.

The women who are challenged by conditions like cruelty, desertion, separation, conviction and imprisonment for crime are filing their applications before the Legal Services Authorities/Committees working in the state, which are taking effective steps. In order to contain the violence and crime committed against women, close cooperation among the various agencies working at the state level, including NGOs, is essential.

Policy Implications

There is a compelling case for public action for gender equality. The state also has a crucial role in improving the well-being of both women and men.

General Policy Measures may be:

- (i) Institutions may be reformed to establish equal rights in terms of legal, social, and economic opportunities for women and men.
- (ii) Economic development can be expedited to strengthen incentives for more equal resources and participation.
- (iii) Active policy measures can be taken to reduce persistent disparities in control over resources and political voice (World Bank 2000).

In the short and medium term, active measures are required such as: (i) reducing cost of schooling, (ii) redesigning financing institutions by simplifying banking procedures as well as by delivering financial services closer to homes, markets, and workplace, (iii) gender sensitive land reforms that provide joint ownership of husband and wife over land or that enable women to hold independent land titles, and (iv) providing public support for out-of-home child care services.

Some measures more specifically relevant to Orissa are raising social awareness, spread of female education, reservation, strict prohibition of, and severe punishment for, illegal sex determination tests.

Special policy measures such as programmes targeting women who lose jobs as a result of downsizing are required.

Fig. 6.4
Reported Cases of Violence against Women in Orissa, 2000

