

Women Empowerment: Antidote to Population Explosion and Conducive to Development

Aliva Mohanty

School of Women Studies, Utkal University, Bhubaneswar 751 004 Orissa, India

In the ongoing endeavour to meet the challenges of population explosion women empowerment is the single most important factor. The result of the population census 2001 indicate that the population of Orissa which was 103,02,917 in the year 1901 has grown to 367,06,920 in 2001 and the progressive growth rate over 1901, in terms of percentage, is 256.28%. But it is alarming to note that although the State Agriculture Policy 1996 aimed, among other things, at doubling the production of food grains, the production, productivity and the per capita availability of food grains have declined as elaborated in the Economic Survey 2000-2001 issued by the Government of Orissa. Total food grains (consisting of rice, cereals and pulses) production was 67.82 lakh M.T. during 1995-96 and the same for 1999-2000 is estimated at 55.62 lakh M.T. The average yield rate of rice decreased to 11.27 quintal per hectare during 1999-2000 from 12.12 quintal per hectare in 1998-99. The per capita availability of food grains was 198 kg. in 1995-96. It decreased to 154 kg. in 1999-2000. It is also pertinent to mention with reference to the "White Paper on Orissa State Finances, March 2001" circulated by the Orissa Government that the gap between the per capita income of the State and the National average per capita income at 1980-81 constant prices has risen from Rs.316.00 in 1980-81 to Rs.1126.00 in 1997-98 which is around 41% lower than All India per capita income.

The current scenario in Orissa appears to be rather a simple reading of Thomas Malthus who argued in 1798 that since "food is necessary to the existence of man" and "the passion between the sexes is necessary and will remain nearly in its present state" population growth

would inevitably lead to an imbalance between people and available resources.

But Malthus' predictions relating to population growth and development failed due to technological advances on a worldwide scenario. Additionally strategic investments in health and education have induced dramatic results in growth and demographic outcomes. And in this context the strategy of empowerment of women is the single most important factor to combat population explosion. Take a specific example, that better education is associated with higher contraceptive use and lower fertility (Schultz, T. Paul "Human Capital, Family Planning and their effects on population growth" in *American Economic Review* 84(2) pp. 255-60 during 1994). Secondly, more the education expands more the economic opportunities for women. Thirdly infant mortality is lower in families in which women are better educated, and so fewer births are necessary to attain the desired number of children in any family as has been clearly analysed by Gary Becker (1960) in "An Economic Analysis of Fertility" published by Princeton University Press. These investments in education and health have been found "to improve growth and reduce poverty directly" as reported in *World Development Report on Attacking Poverty* published by the World Bank in 2000. These findings are also borne out of the Indian experience. "In fact, there is good reason to relate the remarkably high life-expectancy levels in Kerala to its educational achievements, particularly of women and on the other side, to relate the low life expectancies of some of the northern (Indian) states to backwardness in female education", vide. The Amartya Sen and Jean Dreze Omnibus "India : Economic Development and Social Opportunity".

Women empowerment is not only confined to the sector of demographic change. Elimination of invariable subjugation, drudgery of domestic work and repeated child bearing and in a positive

(This paper was presented in the International Conference on Issue of population Stabilization & Development from 8th - 10th Feb. 2002 organised by Council of Cultural Growth Cultural relations in collaboration with UNFPA, New Delhi and Population Foundation of India.)

sense higher to greater utilisation of creative abilities and personal contributions and participation in productive economic activities do enrich the realms of economic, political and social reform in our country. "Even the level of economic production is likely to be higher than other things being equal, in a society where women are able to engage in diverse range of activities compared with that in a society where their life is confined to domestic work in the Indian context" to quote Amartya Sen and Jean Dreze.

Thus women empowerment is not only an antidote to population explosion but also is conducive to development as such.

The scope of the paper encompasses a study of female literacy and Women in work force in organised and unorganised sectors in Orissa and the goals of Draft Policy Document "Orissa State Policy for Women" by Women and Child Development Department of Government of Orissa, the National Policy for the Empowerment of Women, 2001 and the National Population Policy 2000 both circulated by the Government of India. As part of strategy to action, the Mission Shakti, 2001 of the Government of Orissa has been ushered in. The overall nature of Mission Shakti's role is catalytic and self-liquidating on achievement of its objectives, i.e. formation of client controlled, managed and owned micro-finance federations at Block and District level.

Education is a vital input for empowerment of women. The author undertook an intensive survey in rural areas of undivided Cuttack, Keonjhar and Kalahandi Districts of Orissa and came across a very interesting phenomenon. That 52.58% of illiterate women preferred large families consisting of 6 to 8 members. Whereas 23.07% of women having education above M.E. standard opted for the same. The table 1 below indicates the detail.

Table 1: Education wise distribution of respondents vs size of family

<i>Literacy Group</i>	<i>Size of family 6 -8</i>	
	<i>No.</i>	<i>% of surveyed respondents</i>
Illiterate	94	52.58%
>ME	6	23.07%
Others	38	24.35%
Total	138	100.00%

Waiting for the birth of a son has been the major cause of population explosion in rural areas. Therefore the planners have always thought of ways in which such a menace can be tackled. It is observed that among the various castes, the ones where women are traditionally wage earners, there this factor of women economic empowerment has played an important role in combating population explosion, in the limited way of not waiting for the birth of a son to complete the size of the family.

It is seen from the table 2 that women belonging to castes where they are traditionally wage earners and economically stronger have shown a negative attitude towards waiting for a son to complete the size of the family.

Table 2: Caste wise preference for waiting for the birth of a son

<i>Caste group</i>	<i>Preference for waiting for the birth of a son</i>	
	<i>Positive attitude</i>	<i>Negative attitude</i>
Scheduled caste	12.06%	81.03%
Scheduled tribe	26.00%	66.00%
O.B.C	24.55%	61.67%
General	15.62%	34.37%

Size of the family, infant mortality and a healthy population are important factors in the population scenario of our state. Only when the health of the child is insured through a package of immunization programmes and infant mortality is reduced then only there is all round improvement in maintaining a balanced population.

During the survey undertaken by the author, respondents of social groups according to the support of immunization of children was analysed and the results reflected in the table 3.

Table 3: Distribution of respondents of social groups according to the support of immunization of children

<i>Social group</i>	<i>% of respondents supporting immunization programmes.</i>
Scheduled caste	98.27%
Scheduled tribe	92.00%
O.B.C	97.60%
General	100.00%

Awareness among all segments of women population in rural areas of the surveyed Districts is a healthy sign for maintaining a balanced population. The same survey also established

education/literacy is not only an antidote to population explosion but also an input to development.

It is necessary to go beyond literacy to augment family income and to contribute to over all development, the author further introspects to find the awareness and adoption of income generating and self-employment schemes. It is seen from the table 4 below that each income group have availed some types of the Government's development schemes. It is a measure of success of the Government that 78% of Very Very poor out numbered other in the realm of positive attitudes.

Table 4: Income wise distribution of women according to the availing of Govt's schemes

Sl. No.	Income Group	Availing/Adoption of Govt's development schemes
1	Very very poor	77.30%
2	Very poor	4.50%
3	Poor	13.60%
4	>B.P.L	4.50%

(>B.P.L is with annual income of Rs 11000.00 & above. The rest are below poverty line with an annual income ranging from Rs 8268-Rs11000.00 (poor), Rs 6817-Rs 8268 (very poor) and Rs. 6,816.00 (Very very poor). (Source: India 2021, Operation research group.)

The survey aimed at finding various aspects of individual beneficiary oriented schemes and the problems encountered by the respondents. The very low level (4.50%) of persons above the poverty line was explained by the operation of various alternate commercial schemes offered by the financial institutions. Alternative Bankable income generating schemes were available, generally without any subsidy component. Therefore it is due to the simple fact that whereas people below the poverty line availed the prescribed subsidy, people above the poverty line not being eligible to subsidy obviously opted for some other viable bankable schemes. It is observed that the developmental schemes have still not significantly manifested in BPL category.

It is revealed from table 5 that respondents belonging to various literacy groups have faced technological and marketing problems besides encountering delay in disbursement of loan/funds from Banks. In case of illiterates there is delay in disbursement of Bank loan in almost cent percent of cases. In case of marketing problems, the respondents in the lower rung of literacy have faced severe problems. 88% of illiterates have been the worst sufferers. In case of problems associated with technological development, <ME standard respondents account for 60% But it appears that >ME do not face any problems.

Table 5: Details of problems by various literacy groups

Literacy group	Delay in disbursement of bank loan	Technological problems	Marketing problems
Illiterate	100%	20%	87.50%
<ME	-	60%	12.50%
ME	-	20%	-
>ME	-	-	-

Saving and capital formation have always been treated as part of economic development. During the survey an analysis was made relating to institutions as distinct from private money lending individuals as well the practice among various literacy groups relating to rural savings, the details of which are given in the table 6.

It is seen that commercial banks have been received well by the majority of respondents. Secondly non-banking institutions have exclusive illiterate clientele. The planners of our State may therefore take adequate steps to augment savings in Banking institutions.

Orissa has 76,789 Panchayat wards represented by 25,000 women. The Orissa Gram Panchayat Act 1964 was amended to include a provision that if a male is selected as Sarpanch, then the office of the Naib Sarpanch shall go to a female and vice-versa.

Table 6: Institutions, Literacy groups and rural saving

Literacy group	Postal saving	Commercial banks	L.I.C	Non-banking institution	Private money lenders	Provident fund	Daily Deposits
Illiterate	40%	35.30%	25%	100%	-	-	-
<ME	20%	17.60%	-	-	-	50%	100%
ME	30%	35.30%	37.53%	-	66.70%	-	-
>ME	10%	11.80%	37.50%	-	33.30%	50%	-

Reservation of one third of seats for women in the local bodies in Orissa is intended for:

- (1) Political empowerment of women
- (2) Removal of isolation of women in the village Political system and
- (3) Changing the quality of village leadership.

Women's entry into the village political system would ensure change in the political system of the village, the familial and social perceptions of the role of women and develop grass roots leadership among them. At the Gram Sabha and Panchayat levels a new leadership would emerge which is expected to administer the financial resources better and would provide constructive thinking in village administration and its development.

The decision taken by women regarding the participation in village political system is depicted in table 7.

Table 7: Decision regarding political participation taken by various literacy groups

<i>Literacy group</i>	<i>Husband only</i>	<i>Wife only</i>	<i>Both</i>
Illiterate	7.75	-	91.81
<ME	6.45	-	93.54
ME	5.40	2.70	91.89
>ME	-	11.53	88.46

It is seen from table 7 that with increase in educational qualification the political empowerment of women increases. In case of decision of only husband the percentage of >ME respondents is nil, whereas in case of decision of only wife the >ME respondents out weigh others i.e(11.53%).

The significant results of the paper are firstly, there should be a more comprehensive programme implementation in primary education, inter-district disparity (of 21.02% female literacy in Nabarangpur and 71.06% in Khurda) should convince the administrators and NGOs for greater efforts to cover up the backlog at the micro-level and the target should be 100% female literacy. Secondly there should be concerted drive to go beyond literacy and the women provided with more of technical and vocational education and training. Thirdly the health sector schemes as Integrated Child Development Scheme, presently covering children in the age group of 0-6 years and expectant and nursing mothers in the age group of 15-45 years need to

be supplemented with additional schemes where there will be no upper age limit for nursing and expectant mothers. Fourthly, Self-Help Groups and Micro finance organizations should be supplemented with community work place and marketing infrastructure. The self help mission for empowerment of women in Orissa has come into force in 8th August 2001. The main strategy of Mission Shakti is "Help construct a society which is: self reliant, conscious of socio-economic issues, where there is a spirit of cooperation, where women are appropriately skilled to undertake their choice of activities without hindrances or dependence, where there is leadership development while maintaining gender equity and above all each having a respect for the values of others and each striving for the good of the greater society. Fifthly, there should be de- bureaucratization in letter and spirit not only in administrative agencies engaged in supervision over the SHGs but also in the financing institutions. For it is seen that the Banks are as bureaucratic as the Block Offices. Sixthly, reservation in representative bodies like Grama Panchayats and Urban Local bodies should be extended to the state and national legislatures. Finally there should be some organizations at the micro-level exclusively consisting of women to think and deliberate on all and every aspects of development and population explosion, which happens to be the greatest threat to development.

To sum up education, caste, income and size of family are taken as important parameters for determining the empowerment of women.

Due to superstitions and blind belief women wait for the arrival of a male child. Further the continuation of family, and also for providing support in old age they thought that it is necessary to wait for son.

Immunization of children against serious and preventable diseases has been an important cornerstone of the child health care system. Majority of the respondents support the programme of immunization of children. the women of rural areas are aware about the importance of immunization for their children. They want a healthy child. So they immunize their children.

Adoption of various income generating schemes leads to an increase in their economic status. The poor economic conditions of the women compel them to avail various schemes.

The IRDP, Co-operative society, Shakti sugar, Gramya Bank, crop loan schemes are availed by them. Education plays a major role in the availing of various schemes.

The economic deprivation of the rural women forces them to receive the loan, but they face various problems for the repayment of loan. They face technological problems, marketing problems and delay disbursements for the repayment of loan. For these reasons the loan remains outstanding and they remain in poverty.

Regarding the matter of saving, the rural women do not want to reveal the amount of saving before others. Hence the response regarding the saving is very marginal. The respondents have made postal saving, Commercial bank saving, provident fund etc. The saving attitude of the respondents reveals that they can succeed in increasing their economic empowerment. More amount of saving will lead to a better standard of living of the women. But due to poor economic conditions they cannot save money upto their expectation.

The decision regarding the participation in the political issues and activities the rural women are increasingly taking interest in it. They are becoming increasingly aware of the political problems and issues. In times of election, however their voting behaviour is hardly guided by their own independent judgement. They are still led by the opinions of their husbands and

elders. However, there is a slow and gradual change. Education particularly at middle level of women has enabled them to become aware of the political issues.

All these above mentioned factors go along way in combating population explosion.

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