

## **Intersectionality of Gender, Religion and Culture: A Study of Women Rights in an Indian State**

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### **Introduction**

Gender Equality, in recent times, has gained accelerated momentum as an emerging issue in discussions and debates in policy making bodies, scholarly forums as well as the society at large. The attention of the international community has been shifted toward gender related issues with the realization of the importance of women in the developmental process. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, while emphasizing the dignity and worth of the human person, addressed the equal rights of men and women. It is described as the first international guideline for the liberation of women. The General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Entered into force in 1981 the CEDAW set forth an international standard for Women's rights and liberation for which it is often described as an international bill of women rights. Gender equality is not only a basic human right, but its achievement has enormous socio-economic ramifications. Empowering women fuels thriving economies, spurring productivity and growth. Yet gender inequalities remain deeply entrenched in every society. Women lack access to decent work and face occupational segregation and gender wage gaps. They are too often denied access to basic education and health care. Women in all parts of the world suffer violence and discrimination. They are under-represented in political and economic decision-making processes.<sup>1</sup>

The 1995 Beijing Conference on Women recognized that the status of women had advanced in some important respects in the past decades but that progress had been uneven. Inequalities between women and men had persisted and major obstacles remained with serious consequences for the well-being of all people. In its Platform for Action it affirmed that "Local, national, regional and global peace is attainable and is inextricably linked with the advancement of women, who are a fundamental force for leadership, conflict resolution and the promotion of lasting peace at all levels." It expanded the concept of gender mainstreaming by advocating application of gender perspective to all legal and social norms and standards, to all planning and development. In its declaration it emphasised that "It is essential to design, implement and monitor, with the full participation of women, effective, efficient and mutually reinforcing gender-sensitive policies and programs, including development policies and programs, at all levels that will foster the empowerment and advancement of women."<sup>2</sup>

Gender equality has been one of the eight Millennium Development Goals to which world leaders of 158 countries pledged at the New York in 2000. According to the Millennium Development Goals Report 2013, launched on July 1, 2013 by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, too many women around the world are still dying in childbirth when we have the means to save them; only 53 percent of births in rural areas are attended by skilled health personnel.

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In developing regions, women are more likely than men to work as contributing family workers on farms or other family businesses, with little or no financial security or social benefits. The report also acknowledges that persisting gender-based inequalities in decision-making continue to deny women a say in the decisions that affect their lives.<sup>3</sup>

India has enunciated gender equality in its Constitution since its inception. The Constitution of India has made several provisions for women emancipation in its Chapters on Fundamental Rights, Directive Principles and Fundamental Duties. Moreover the Indian Parliament and state legislatures have taken initiatives with the aim of protecting, promoting and empowering women. In Chapter on Fundamental Rights, while Art 14 of the Indian Constitution provides for equality before law and equal protection of law among other things without any discrimination on the basis of sex. Art 15 (3) allows the state to make special provision for women. In other words the Constitution empowers the state to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favor of women by ways of legislation and policies. Art 39 (C), which falls in CH IV, Directive Principles of State Policy, calls upon the state to ensure equal pay for equal work. Through later amendments the Constitution imposes a fundamental duty on every citizen through Art 15 (A) to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women. From the Fifth Five Year Plan (1974) onwards, there has been a marked shift in the approach to women's issues from welfare to development.

India has also ratified various international conventions and human rights forums to secure equal rights of women, such as ratification of Convention on elimination of all forms of discrimination against women in 1993. Women have been finding positions in local governance structures, overcoming gender biases. Over one million women have been elected to local panchayats as a result of 1993 amendment to the Indian Constitution requiring that one-third of the elected seats to the local governing bodies be reserved for women. The passing of the Pre-natal Diagnostic Tech Act in 1994 also is a step in removing gender discrimination. This Act seeks to end gender determination tests and female feticide and prohibits doctors from conducting such procedures for the specific purpose of determining the sex of the fetus. The Government also announced the National policy for empowerment of women in 2001 to bring forth advancement, development and empowerment of women. The Government has also drawn up a draft national policy for the empowerment of women, which is a policy statement outlining the state's response to problems of gender discrimination.<sup>4</sup>

The National Commission for Women was set up by an Act of Parliament in 1990 to safeguard the rights and legal entitlements of women. "The 73rd and 74th Amendments (1993) to the Constitution of India have provided for reservation of seats in the local bodies of Panchayats and Municipalities for women, laying a strong foundation for their participation in decision making at the local levels."

Laws such as the Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, Sati Prevention Act, Dowry Prohibition Act and Indecent Representation of Women (Prevention) Act protect women from the more "traditional" crimes such as rape, abduction, dowry, torture, molestation, sexual harassment and selling of girls into slavery. However trafficking of women is still very common in this poverty-stricken country. Women from economically backward families are kidnapped and forced into prostitution. Incidents of women being charred to death after their husbands' death have been reported recently.

In spite of constitutional and legislative provisions against gender discrimination, the achievement of gender equality has not been up to mark. Women are still discriminated and subjugated to male dominance in the society. It is generally felt that women in India have little control over their lives and do not have the decision-making power in their households. The declining ratio of the female population in the last few decades is evidence of this. Women belonging to weaker sections of the society, i.e., the Scheduled Castes / Scheduled Tribes / other backward classes and minorities, do not have easy access to education, healthcare and other productive resources. The gender ratio, the proportion of females per thousand males, has fallen from 962 in 1901 to 933 in 2001 in India. Population Census of 2011 it was revealed that the population ratio in India 2011 is 940 females per 1000 of males. The Sex Ratio 2011 shows an upward trend from the census 2001 data. Since the last five decades the sex ratio has been moving around 930 of females to that of 1000 of males.<sup>5</sup> One of the states which is showing a decreasing trend in the population of women 2011 and is a cause of concern is Haryana. The state of Haryana has the lowest rate of sex ratio in India and the figure shows a number of 877 of females to that of 1000 of males. "The deepening of the gender ratio imbalance can be largely attributed to a marked preference for a son in tandem with a rapid decline in fertility, as infant daughters may be subjected to maltreatment, neglect and abandonment, and new technologies allow sex selective biases against females.

According to the most recent estimates, China and India account for nearly 80 percent of all ‘missing women’ in the world.”<sup>6</sup>

**Objective of the Study :** The study is an attempt to know the perception of college women about gender equality in an Indian state i.e. Odisha and see how they view that factors of intersectionality such as religion and culture condition the rights of women

### **Theoretical Concerns**

Traditionally positions were not available to women in certain areas like education, service sectors such as police, military, engineering etc. As it is so succinctly said, “Women were loudly and proudly kept out of certain spheres of life.” Today the scenario has changed as it is no longer the case and women are visible in every walk of life. This leads to the claim that today there are no barriers preventing women from social mobility and gender parity. Scholars who have contested this assertion argue that in spite of progressive constitution, laws and institutional arrangements in India there are still barriers which hold women back. The question naturally arises: what are these barriers that perpetuate the dichotomy between masculine and feminine in India despite major changes sweeping the world affecting even the arena of gender relations? A feminist scholar, Vasudha Dhagamwar, answers with “culture, custom and religion.” In her essay, “Obstacles to Empowerment of Women,” she argues that social pressures and perceptions hold women back. She is perhaps stating the obvious when she says that in India, “culture, custom and religion are intertwined.”

As Manisha Priyam, Menon, & Banerjee observe very pertinently:

”For most women in India, despite the fact that the identity of being a secular citizen is available, it is the identity conferred upon them by their families and communities that is the most significant and abiding. This identity is controlled and crated by putting together elements from culture, custom and religion – elements that determine what it means to be a woman ( or a man ) , and what are the appropriate roles, activities and aspirations for the woman so defined.”<sup>7</sup>

Another scholar, Uma Chakravarty, has highlighted the linkages between cultural practices and patriarchy in her insightful analysis of the relationship between gender and caste in India.<sup>7</sup>

A scholar, Aamaria Vargas, notes that most societies, even “Western” states have customs and religious practices that make them more patriarchal than others. Yet, some societies have customs and religious practices that make them more patriarchal than others. She says how culture (as the customs and social institutions built throughout history in a social group) defines a woman’s role at three levels- family, society and culture. Within family, patriarchal societies have traditionally attributed to females a bigger burden of household chores and caretaking responsibilities, while men have historically been engaged in remunerative activities. She talks of women’s double burden of household responsibilities and paid full-time jobs. These social roles have confined women to economic dependency on men and put them in a disadvantaged decision-making position within the family. Second, due to their roles at home, women have been deprived from public positions. Denying them the possibility to participate at all levels of politics only reinforces the muting of their voices. Finally, culture also determines the ability for women to have roles other than those related to the family thus allowing them independence. This is of particular importance given that traditional societies put community or family at the heart of their functioning and depend on the decision-making of the collective. This demonstrates how traditional practices can be in conflict with the respect of women’s fundamental rights.

Since education is an important arena for observation of changes in the definition of masculinity and femininity, this study, through empirical analysis, tries to find out how autonomous the female students feel against the pressures of religion and culture. It tries to know their perceptions of female positions vis-a-vis their male counterparts in their own state so as to find out if religion and culture are viewed as contributing factors to what is called the ‘intersectionality.’

**Intersectionality:** Intersectionality theory is "the view that women experience oppression in varying configurations and in varying degrees of intensity. In a more broad sense it is understood as "the interplay of race, class, and gender, often resulting in multiple dimensions of disadvantage” This feminist sociological theory was first popularised by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, seeks to examine how—various biological, social and cultural categories such as gender, race, class, ability, sexual orientation, religion, caste, and other axes of identity interact on multiple and often simultaneous levels, contributing to systematic injustice and social inequality. (Crenshaw, Kimberlé (1989).

"Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics". *University of Chicago Legal Forum* **1989**: 139–67)

**Methodology**

The study draws from secondary sources as scholarly books and research articles on gender. But it is basically an empirical one which has elicited responses through a structured questionnaire and personal interviews. Random sampling was done through 200 questionnaire sets having a set of 10 closed ended questions and 10 open ended questions that were served in three higher education institutions (two Colleges and one University) of Odisha, an Indian state. In the process of analysis, 153 sets were found to be more or less complete and others were rejected. The qualitative answers that seem characteristic of respondents’ answer have been given after the respective questions in this report while the quantitative measurement of responses have been put in a table format to indicate the trend.

**Odisha at a Glance :**



**ODISHA: Demographics**

Religion in Odisha	
Religion	Percent
<a href="#">Hinduism</a>	94.35%
Christianity	2.44%
Islam	2.07%
Others	1.14%

According to the 2011 census of India, the total population of Odisha is 41,947,358, of which 21,201,678 (50.54%) are male and 20,745,680 (49.46%) are female, or 978 females per 1000 males. This represents a 13.97% increase over the population in 2001. The population density is 269 per km<sup>2</sup>. The dominant ethnic group is the Oriya people and Oriya is the official language. It is spoken as a native language by 73% of the population. Other linguistic minorities in the state are Bengali, Hindi, Telugu, Santali. Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes form 16.53% and 22.13% of the state population, constituting 38.66% of the State population. The literacy rate is 73% with 82% of males and 64% of females being literate, according to the 2011 census. The proportion of people living below the poverty line in 1999–2000 was 47.15% which is nearly double the all India average of 26.10%.

### Measures in Odisha for Women

Several definitive measures have been taken by the State Government in order to improve the status of women in society. Initiatives like 50 percent reservation to women in Panchayati Raj institutions and urban local bodies, 33 percent reservation in Government jobs, and special incentives to girls for taking up education are some of our progressive steps for furthering the status of women. The female literacy has increased by 26 percent between 2001 and 2011, which in itself is remarkable. The number of out-of-school girls which was 261,000 in 2006-07, was reduced to 35,000 in 2010-11. For the past nine years on average, more than 1,000 schools were added each year on both primary and upper primary levels. The Mission Shakti program has been a major success in rural Odisha in the socio-economic empowerment of women.<sup>8</sup>

### Demographic Data: Total = 153

**Age:** 18-21 Yrs – 78 (50.98%), Above 21 yrs – 75 (49.01%)

**Religion:** Hindu – 130 (84.96%); Muslim – 6 (3.92%); Christian – 17 (11.11%)

**Out of 130 Hindus:** General – 96 (73.84%); OBC – 12 (9.23%); SC – 8 (6.15%); ST – 8 (6.15%); Can't Say – 6 (4.61%)

**Educational Qualification:** UG – 47 (30.71%); PG – 94 (61.43%); M.Phil/PhD – 9 (5.88%); Can't Say – 3 (1.96%)

**Educational Stream:** Arts – 102 (66.66%); Science- 37 (24.18%); Commerce – 10 (6.53%); Can't Say – 4 (2.61%)

**Annual Income:** More than 5 Lakhs – 13 (8.49%); 1 Lakhs to 5 Lakhs – 39 (25.49%); 50,000-1Lakhs – 42 – (27.45%); Less than 50,000 – 41 (26.79%); Can't Say – 18 (11.76%)

**Career Option:** Teacher – 71 (46.40%); Banking – 25 (16.33%); Administrative Job – 25 (16.33%); Police – 1 (0.65%); Any Other Govt.Job – 15 (9.80%); Can't Say – 13 (8.49%)

**Mother's Profession:** House Wife – 115 (75.16%); Teacher – 22 (14.37%); Govt. Job – 3 (1.96%); Doctor – 2 (1.30%); Social Work – 1 (0.65%); Business – 1 (0.65%); can't say – 9 (5.88%)

**Father's Profession :** Govt. Job – 49 (32.02%); Business – 39 (25.49%); Teacher – 16 (10.45%); Farmer – 11 (7.18%); Doctor – 4 (2.61%); Advocate – 4 (2.61%); Bank Service – 4 (2.61%); Private Service – 8 (5.22%); Carpenter – 3 (1.96%); Can't Say – 14 (9.15%)

Table 1: (No: 153: 100%)

Statements	Agree	Strongly agree	Can't say/No opinion	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Can't Answer	Missing Data
In India women don't enjoy same freedom as men	82 (53.59)	58(37.90)		13 (8.49)			
In Odisha women don't enjoy same freedom as men	69(45.09)	73(47.71)		10(6.53)			01 (0.65)
Village women suffer more restrictions than urban women	61(39.86)	86(56.20)	6(3.92)				
Religion restricts women's freedom	76(49.67)	55(35.94)	7(4.57)	9(5.88)		6(3.92)	
Love marriage is better than arranged marriage	51(33.33)	29(18.95)	34(22.22)	35(22.87)		4(2.61)	
Parents prefer male child to female ones.	80(52.28)	31(20.26)	9(5.88)	13(8.49)	10(6.53)	10(6.53)	
In your perception there are female feticides in the state of Odisha.	80(52.28)	25(16.33)	22(14.37)	9(5.88)		17(11.11)	
Religion bars women marrying outside their own religion	58(37.90)	69(45.09)	11(7.18)	3(1.96)		12(7.84)	
Women in general do not have landed property in their name	65(42.48)	25(16.33)	27(17.64)	36(23.52)			
Parents in Odisha have to pay dowry for the marriage of their daughters.	55(35.94)	73(47.71)		15(9.80)	10(6.53)		

As evident from the above table/statistics, perception of college-university women in Odisha is that all is not well with women of that state. 90 % of them feel that in India women don't enjoy same freedom as men. More or less same is the case with Odishan women. 73% of them testify that there is male child preference on the part of parents and related to it, nearly 70% college women have the perception that there are female feticides in the state of Odisha. While overwhelming of them feels that rural women have less freedom than urban women (95%), no less than 82% of them are in agreement with the statement, strongly or otherwise, that Religion bars women marrying outside their own religion. Again 86% of these young women are of the opinion that Religion restricts women's freedom. No wonder 83% college women say that Parents in Odisha have to pay dowry for the marriage of their daughters. A little less than 60% of these young women agree with the statement that Women in general do not have landed property in their name. But interestingly a quarter of these women surveyed have no opinion on love marriage, though a bare majority of 53% of them vote for love marriage which speaks for independence of choice on the part of young women about their life partners.

#### Findings from open ended questions:

##### 1. What in your views are the problems faced by the women in your state (Odisha)?

- Women are treated as private property, who live in the four walls of a house.
- Conservative society /family responsible for women backwardness; women are not getting proper education.

- Women are not allowed to enjoy late night hangouts, late night work. Other problems are eve-teasing, rape.
- Early marriage. Lack of educational and employment opportunities. Discrimination in all spheres of life. Lack of freedom.
- My personal view is that women in Odisha face a lot of problems. There is a strict dividing line between Muslim women and women of other religions such as Hindus, Christians and Sikhs, etc. Muslim girls are always wear Burkha (Veil) .There is no freedom to wear other dresses without Burkha. **(A Muslim girl)**
- In my point of view, women are mostly restricted by their social surrounding, so unable to go outside freely. They cannot improve communication skill. Environmental circumstances also put a lot of restrictions on women, so they do not enjoy that much liberty as compared to men.
- In our state Odisha women face many problems like mental, physical, sexual harassment and murder; they have no freedom to go outside alone to do any work.
- Insecurity in job, while traveling alone; violence and some extend women trafficking. **(Christian Girl)**

**Do you feel that there is a rural-urban divide in terms of freedom and rights of women? (Rural women/girls having less freedom than urban women/girls) Explain in detail.**

- Yes, there is rural-urban divide in terms of freedom and rights of women. In rural areas women /girls are not highly educated, do not know about their rights and freedom for which they cannot raise voice against violation of rights. In urban areas women and girls are enjoying more rights and freedom.
- To some extent. Prevalence of conservative attitude among the most of the people of rural areas in comparison to people in urban areas.
- Yes, there is a rural urban divide in terms of freedom and rights of women. Because rural women are more conservative than urban women and on the other hand urban women are more educated and smarter than rural women. So they enjoy more facilities than rural women. **.(A Muslim girl)**
- Yes, I strongly agree that the rural–urban divide restricts freedom of women because in rural areas there are still lack of awareness and education which make women restricted in doing work or enjoying freedom as compared to urban women. They do not get that much infrastructure and facilities enjoyed by urban women.
- Yes, there is a rural-urban divide in terms of freedom and rights of women. In rural areas women are not highly educated, not know about their rights and freedom for that they cannot raise their voices against the violation of their rights. In urban areas women and girls are enjoying more rights and freedom than those in rural areas.
- The girls get more freedom in urban areas while the girls of rural areas are deprived of it. The urban girls can enjoy and assert their rights because their freedom. The rural girls miss many opportunities. **(A tribal girl answered in vernacular)**
- Urban women are open minded, so they are aware of their environment; they have more freedom in comparison to rural once. **(Christian)**

**2. Do you think religion restricts one's freedom? If so, how?**

- Yes, in Muslim law it is compulsory for every woman to wear burkhas. Muslim girls are married at early age.
- I strictly agree that religion restricts one's freedom .We people always need freedom, but we are always determined by our religion and culture, which restricts our freedom. **(Muslim girl )**
- Yes, religion has also played a crucial role in restricting one's freedom because we see that most women from Muslim community mostly prefer to go for marriage rather than for education and job and they are covered by burkhas (veil) in public. Restrictions of women freedom also happens in varying degrees with all religions.
- Yes, I think that a religion restricts one's freedom. In Hindu society they think that the girls are for marriage within its own religion. They should not marry in other religions. A Muslim woman puts on a black screen(veil) on his face which is a restriction on her freedom. **(Hindu)**
- In today's bad age (Kali Yuga) there are such areas that the girls are not allowed to step outside their home. They are confined within the four walls of the house. The girls also accept it .For that they don't have their freedoms. **(A tribal girl answering in vernacular)**
- Yes, religion as its own rules. So once freedom is restricted for that **( Christian Girl)**
- Yes, because there some restrictions in every religion. **(Christian)**

### 3. Will you go for arranged or love marriage? Give reasons for your views.

- I shall go for arranged marriage, which in my view is better than love marriage. Arranged marriage connects two families, not just two persons. Arranged marriages are more successful than love marriages.
- It depends on my parents but I prefer more an arranged marriage.
- I will go for arranged marriage, because I always respect my parents' decision. **(Muslim Girl)**
- Arranged marriage is definitely better than love marriage .Because there is a lot of family support on both sides so that couple feel secured. If there is any conflict or disturbances or sudden tragedy in the family, the family members of the couple come immediately to help them.  
Love marriage. Because our parents don't allow us to talk to unknown person, but marrying a totally unknown person is ok for them. We have to live our life, we have the right to choose our life partner. **(Hindu girl)**
- I think that love marriage is better than arranged marriage, because when a girl loves a boy and marries her they have good understanding and live peacefully. But some parents think that women cannot choose their life partners. They choose a person and the girl marries him.
- It has been accepted since the Puranic times (ancient period) that the marriage is a very sacred bonding. Because marriage is such an age-old tradition and institution, so I would say that arranged marriage is better than love marriage. **(A tribal girl answering in odia vernacular)**
- According to our age-old tradition, marrying within the caste group, family and clan would live in peace. Marrying in other religion or caste has the possibility of creating a lot of disorder and disharmony in the society. Because of such possibilities our forefathers are opposed to marriage outside our own tribal group.
- I will go for arranged marriage because my parent don't like love marriage and I respect their decision.
- Arranged marriage. Family's choice comes first rather than mine. **(Christian )**

### 4. Do you think your religion bars you in marrying outside your religion/caste?

- Society does not give permission to marry outside one's religion/caste. Inter-religion / inter-caste marriages are crime in the eyes of society.
- Yes, my religion bars me to marry outside our religion and caste. It is so irritating. **(Muslim Girl)**
- Yes, it is mostly followed by the Hindu Religion. Marrying in the same caste / religion is "Pratiloma Bibaha" and marrying outside the caste is "Anuloma Bibaha" which may create "BaranSankar child" as it is obeyed traditionally as well as scientifically.
- Obviously. Only the caste problem is the major of not marrying outside our religion. Religion is the bar, but society is the reason who won't ever let you and your family in peace. We the humans have created religion, caste and all .So in the orthodox families, it is the major problem.
- Yes, I think our Hindu religion bars from marrying outside the religion or caste. Parents want that the girl should marry within her own caste or religion. If a girl marries a boy from other caste, they think, his caste or religion will be polluted or spoiled..
- Yes, due to certain rules of religion one is restricted from marrying outside from its religion. **(Christian)**
- There should be prohibition of marriage in other religions. If it happens so often then religion will lose its value. **(Christian )**

### 5. Is there any restriction on women by your community or family working outside their homes?

- Yes, there are many restrictions on women by our community and also from our home for working outside our homes. **(Muslim Girl)**
- No, there is no restriction on women by our family for working outside their home. But there are restrictions to do work in late night.
- Yes there are so many restrictions on women by our community for working outside their homes. If a girl wants to study in a good college or university in a faraway place from his home, then her parents don't allow doing this. In case of a job which a woman gets outside his home, it is restricted by her family.
- My family does not have restrictions on women working outside. If any family restricts women, it is because of the position of women in society .They are scared about the safety of their girls or women.
- in my opinion if a woman is highly educated then she can go outside to work. If her in-laws or her husband is opposed to this she should convince and persuade them. In my opinion a girl should go for a job. **(a tribal girl)**

- Yes, women face several restrictions based entirely on gender. A woman cannot travel alone, attend university, work or marry as per her own choices without her guardian's permission. Those who travel or work outside their homes face many problems in daily lives.

**6. Have you ever experienced gender discrimination in your family? Please elaborate.**

- Yes, when I am going to attend any function and it is late night my father calls me thousand times to inquire if I am safe or not.
- No there is no gender discrimination in our family. My parents are educated; they know that there is no difference between a boy and a girl. **(Muslim Girl)**
- No, there is no gender discrimination in our family. If "No", there is no need of elaboration and explanation about it. In our family my parents give equal facilities to my brother, sister and myself.
- Yes, I have the feeling of gender discrimination within the family. Important decisions are taken by men in my family. Again there is a preference for male child. **(Hindu)**  
No I never experienced gender discrimination in my family **(Hindu girl)**
- In my family parents also treat equally son and daughter and give equal opportunity to do something in education, sports, and job sectors also. My parents also love both my brother and me equally.  
In our family we have not experienced discrimination. We are two daughters of our parents who have given us enough love and never made us feel they had a feeling of any loss due to not having a son. **(A tribal girl)**

**7. Have you ever experienced gender discrimination in your social environment? Please elaborate.**

- Yes, I always experience gender discrimination in our social environment. In every field I realise that in such places as school, colleges and in offices, etc. **(Muslim Girl)**
- Yes, I have experienced gender discrimination in our social environment .In every sector, women are discriminated by male persons. Male persons are given more facilities and given more wages or pay for the same work than female.  
In our Society, men are playing a dominant role. Women are underdeveloped and tortured. In the society many people want son, no one want girl child. There are issues like murder of girl child. Many parents kill their girl child in her mother's womb.  
Yes, sometimes I experienced that .The girls cannot go outside for higher studies and marry in early age. They have no right to decide their own life or own future.
- People prefer male child. Women don't have any landed property in their name.
- In every field the society gives more priority to men than women. In the political field men enjoy more power and women enjoy less political power and participate less in state administration.
- Yes, there is always a huge restriction on girls by social environment .But truly; I never care for these as I know I am right.
- Yes, I often experienced gender discrimination in our social environment. At the time of birth many parents wish or want to have a male child than female. Even women are also craving for a male child.  
Gender discrimination is also existing in social environment , in different spheres like education, working place , working outside home, health, participation in elections, sports etc.
- Yes, I have experienced gender discrimination in our social environment. Because boys can go anywhere on their own wish, but those facilities are not available for a girl.
- No, now in the society gender discrimination is not happening in every sphere. Women have become more educated and self-reliant. **(Christian )**

**8. How Globalization in your opinion has affected women?**

- It has provided opportunity for women to join every sector of economy. They know to manage personal and professional life.
- Globalization has always affected women of every religion, by which they are able to work in different offices, companies and well-known industries. **(Muslim Girl)**
- I think Globalization creates many avenues for women. It has opened up opportunities for women to connect with outside frontiers, now through the internet; women learn and are becoming aware of outside world and develop their skills and knowledge .They are not like that they were in previous era.
- Women are getting westernised due to globalisation.

- It has very much affected the women. Due to this phenomenon women are conscious about their rights and they can participate in every field and enjoy their rights. They can compete and challenge men in every sphere.
- Globalisation affects women in many ways like: Marginalisation of women in the informal labour sector; unequal distribution of properties and it also opens a way for their struggle and empowerment. Yes, Globalisation affected women's life in every sphere. Now days, Globalisation is not only based on only economic activity, it also affects social life of the individual. Due to the impact of globalisation women are more concerned about their rights, justice and liberty. The economic status of working women changed dramatically due to globalisation. For the States, national ,economic and cultural formations including social movements including social movements and organisations are increasingly are affected by globalisation which has also changed unions , their structures , politics, priorities , distinctions , illuminates of women.
- Globalisation affects women positively. Due to it women get more freedom and rights. Globalisation has brought in science and technology for which people can come out of blind belief and superstitions and get new ideas of life and development.

### **9. What should be done to improve the gender equality in the state?**

- Mentality of society should change. Parents give equal preference to both male and female child, and education should be compulsory. We need the arrangement of proper awareness programs.
- Increasing awareness of women about the greater role played by women in the society; equal treatment of women in all spheres of life; opening up of new opportunities for women in every sector of economic, educational and social life.
- First, we should be aware of this. From school days proper teaching should be provided about this. In family, parents should teach their children not to discriminate against anyone, either girl or boy. Government also has to take necessary steps relating to this because there are many laws.
- In my opinion, at first there should be change of mindset. Men should think that women are similar and equal.
- To prevent the gender discrimination and improve the gender relations, every person should feel that men and women are equal and no one is dominant or dependent. We should give opportunity to women to enjoy their rights and compete with men. Every parent should feel that a girl can do such things which the boy can do. First and important thing is to awaken people to come out from fake religious and blind beliefs and their practices. Education should be another way to improve the gender equality in the state.

### **Summing up:**

The status of women depends on the attitudes of the society towards men and women according to various roles they play at home and in society. In modern day, women have started performing multiple roles of working in and outside the home and much greater equality is accorded to them. They are still not equal since in Odisha, the differences between positions in the private and public spheres established for females and male has yet to be bridged completely.

In Odisha the problems associated with rights of women include their lack of freedom, overall subordination to male members of the society, domestic violence, dowry and dowry deaths (bride burning), moral policing, female feticide, etc.

From the responses of college women the inference can be drawn directly and indirectly that despite modernization, Globalization, constitutional provisions and ameliorative laws, religion and culture act as barriers to the freedom of women. To improve the situation these college women have made the suggestions below:

- Gender sensitization from early years
- Both boys and girls should be treated equally at home and instil in them these gender equal attitudes
- Girls should be encouraged to study more and sex ratio should improve in Odisha
- Women should have more space in the decision making process
- Parents should treat their sons and daughters equally
- Education is empowerment; empowerment through education can be achieved with more educational institutions opened in rural pockets of the state

Though these young women advocate universal and compulsory education for girls, mere education is not enough. Nearly 50% of them are not coming forward in choosing their life partners, but rather are shifting the decision to their parents. Cutting across religions, many girls do opt for and rationalise arranged marriages. This not only speaks to their lack of confidence, but also suggests that they have not fully liberated themselves from the patriarchal mindset and culture. As a young college Muslim girl told in a private interview that in Muslim community there are many issues like polygamy, triple talaq and domestic violence, but significantly many women of the community cannot open their minds and exercise the freedom of expression even in the domestic spheres. But while saying this she also added that though it may seem otherwise, the problem is not a characteristic peculiar to the Muslim community, but women of all religions suffer from subordination and an unequal status vis-a-vis men. From the qualitative answers given by college girls of different religion we find commonalities of perception about gender inequality and injustice in the state. But as the Muslim girl quoted above also commented that in so far as gender is concerned Odisha may not be that worse off like states such as Haryana or Rajasthan (known for female foeticide) or UP and Bihar (known for high Dowry in marriages and large incidence of dowry deaths)<sup>10, & 11</sup>. This is so in spite of the laws banning pre-natal tests<sup>12</sup> and prohibiting dowry through Dowry Prohibition Act.<sup>13</sup> While many girls say that they don't experience gender discrimination at home, but they are almost unanimous that the social environment is not gender conducive. They perceive that their religions and cultures are a fetter on women's freedom. While it is not to ignore that the gender landscape in India/Odisha is changing with more and more women in public space (education, employment and local elected bodies), research reaffirms and reinforces the ideas and notions about the structures of subordination and the unequal gender relations prevalent in the society thus confirming the phenomenon of Intersectionality in the Indian State of Odisha.

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End Notes:

- (1) <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/daw/index.html>
- (2) <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/pdf/BDPfA%20E.pdf>.
- (3) <http://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2013/7/the-gender-dimension-of-the-millennium-development-gls-report-2013/>
- (4) <http://www.azadindia.org/social-issues/GenderInequality.html>
- (5) <http://www.census2011.co.in/sexratio.php>.
- (6) <http://knowledge.insead.edu/leadership-management/women-in-business/gender-discrimination-in-india-a-reality-check-723>
- (7) Priyam, Menon & Banerjee (2009) HUMAN RIGHTS GENDER AND ENVIRONMENT, Delhi, Pearson
- (8) Chakravarti, Uma (2003), Gender Caste: Through a Feminist Lens, Kolkata: Stree.
- (9) <http://hotnhitnews.com/Odisha-Status-of-women-in-society-is-a-major-cause-of-concern-Odisha-Chief-Minister-Naveen-Patnaik-Hotnhitnews-173026092012.htm#sthash.fMjlx9Fw.dpuf>
- (10) India's 2011 census found the highest sex ratios in India's northern and northwestern states - Haryana (120), Punjab (118) and Jammu & Kashmir (116) : *India at Glance - Population Census 2011 - Final Census of India, Government of India* (2013)
- (11) In spite of all the stringent laws and campaigns against dowry, statistics on dowry-related deaths in the country released in 2013 by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) show that such deaths have only increased over the years since 2001. A State wise break-up provided in the statistics show that the highest incidence of dowry deaths was in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. (<http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/rising-number-of-dowry-deaths-in-india-ncrb/article4995677.ece>)
- (12) The Indian government has passed Pre-Conception and Pre-natal Diagnostic Techniques (Regulation and Prevention of Misuse) (PCPNDT) Act in 2004 to ban and punish prenatal sex screening and female foeticide. It is currently illegal in India to determine or disclose sex of the foetus to anyone. However, there are concerns that PCPNDT Act has been poorly enforced by authorities.

(13) The Dowry Prohibition Act 1961[4] prohibits the request, payment or acceptance of a dowry "as consideration for the marriage", where "dowry" is defined as a gift demanded or given as a precondition for a marriage. Asking for or giving of dowry can be punished by imprisonment of up to six months, a fine of up to Rs. 15000 or the amount of dowry (whichever is higher), or imprisonment up to 5 years. (Dowry Prohibition Act". Indiacode.nic.in. 1961)

The incidences of dowry torture continue unabated in the state of Odisha which topped the chart in the entire country in 2012 so far as the rate of crime is concerned. Statistics issued by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) showed that Odisha reported as many as 1,487 cases under Dowry Prevention Act accounting for 16.5 per cent of the total cases recorded in the country during 2012. (Indian Express, August 2013)

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