SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC STRUCTURE IN THE KHASI MATRIARCHAL POPULATION OF MEGHALAYA, INDIA

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ABSTRACT

This paper focused on demographic profile of Khasi population of Meghalaya, India. Data was collected from 527 households in Khleihshnong Sohra village in 2018. The sex-ratio (1027.97) and female literacy level (92.96%) were found to be higher than the national averages. Matrilineal impact on population structure is found to be remarkable in various demographic attributes. The Workforce Participation Rate (WFPR) was found to be 49.87 where males contribute 69.21% and females 38.70%. No statistical significance was observed in educational attainments between sexes but occupational status between males and females is found to be statistically significant. It is seen that decision making in Khasi is largely controlled by the womenfolk with the authority being passed on from the mother to the daughters. Two types of headships were observed. Chi square analyses shows a clear influence of the type of headship on educational standards and occupational categories between the sexes.

Keywords: Khasi, Household, Matrilineal, Socio-economic variables.

INTRODUCTION

Demographic structure is basically the composition of population in terms of age and sex and other bio-social components of the population. Every population has a different age and sex composition i.e. the number and proportion of males and females in each age group, and this structure can have considerable impact on the population's current and future social and economic situation. The ultimate age-sex composition of the population will depend largely on the ratio of the sexes at birth and on the age-specific mortality rates of the two sexes. The age structure of the population, on one hand, expresses demographic dimensions of development and on the other delineates the challenges for development[1]. Sex ratio is defined as the number of females per thousand males or the converse of it. The former is used to calculate the sex ratio in

the present study. Sex ratio is a useful indicator to assess relative excess of deficit of men or women in a given population at that point of time[2]. It affect various aspects of social life, including the availability of potential marriage partners and the composition of the labour force. Literacy is traditionally understood as the ability to read and write. The term's meaning has been expanded to include the ability to use language, numbers, images and other means to understand and use the dominant symbol systems of a culture. Educational attainment in this study refers to the highest level of education of an individual. Matrilineal practices have enormous impact on the demographic structure in terms of age and sex composition, educational attainment, occupational pursuits, inheritance and decision making between the sexes.

The Khasi society of Meghalaya is matrilineal where authority, title, inheritance, residence after marriage and succession are traced through the female line. So it is presumed that women do not require any special effort to make them establish their rights along with men as they are automatically placed on an esteemed level[3]. Headship in the Khasi matriarchal society influences a large sphere of social parameters such as education and occupation among others. Demographically, the Khasi of Meghalaya in India forms a unique population structure which is rooted in its matrilineal practices.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

The study was conducted in a semi-rural village named Khleihshnong Sohra (famously known as Cherrapunjee) in East-Khasi Hills of the state of Meghalaya, India. A brief pilot study was followed by an intensive fieldwork carried out into two phases for about nine to ten months. A total of 527 households (whole village) were selected by purposive sampling using a pretested and modified demographic schedule in order to understand the in-depth demographic dynamics at the grassroots. Data pertaining to age and sex, household composition, education, economy and other relevant information were collected. The quantitative data was analyzed using standard statistical tools in MS Excel and SPSS while qualitative data was analyzed manually.

Figure 1: Map showing field area

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The age and sex distribution along with age cohort-wise sex-ratio is given in table-1. It was found that in all the age cohorts, sex-ratio is comparatively higher than that of the national averages hinting a possibility of gender disparity in term of sex-ratio that is in contrary to the national experience. Further within the Khasi population, sex-ratio was found to be higher among aged people indicating much higher female life expectancy in population.

Table 1: Age and sex distribution of Khasi population

Age cohort	Male	Female	Sex-ratio
0-4	143	147	1027.97
5-9	150	144	960
10-14	175	167	954.29
15-19	187	192	1026.74
20-24	162	175	1080.25
24-29	127	180	1417.32
30-34	114	136	1192.98
35-39	74	97	1310.81
40-44	70	77	1100
45-49	52	69	1326.92
50-54	35	62	1771.43

55-59	23	30	1304.35
60-64	18	44	2444.44
65-69	17	28	1647.06
70-74	8	21	2625
75-79	5	12	2400
80-84	1	9	9000
85-89	2	5	2500
90+	3	3	1000
total	1366	1598	1169.84

Among the Khasi, the sex-ratio is not only high in the economically active groups but the proportion of females is found to be twice and even trice higher among the children and the aged dependent populations, respectively (table-2). For socio-economic analysis, the population of a country can be divided into three major age groups, i.e. 0-14, 15-59 and 60 and above depending on their contribution to the family's economy. Dependency ratio can be defined as the measure to assess the extent of economic dependency in a population[4]. People belonging in age bracket 15-59 years are expected to work and contribute to the family and national income, and hence, they are referred to as economically active age-group. The total dependency ratio was recorded at 53.83% in which 48.33% are young individuals. This shows that more than half of the population is dependent on working age-group.

Table 2: Some demographics of Khasi population

Variable	Sub-variable	Ratio/Mean/ %
Sex-ratio	Total	1170
	Child sex ratio (0-6 years)	2306
	Economically active (15-59 years)	1397
	Aged sex ratio (60 and above)	3195
Dependency ratio	Young dependency ratio	48.33%
	Old dependency ratio	5.95%
	Total dependency ratio	53.83%
Family	Nuclear	96%
	Joint	4%
Household Size	single member	2.46%
	2-3 members	18.40%

	4-5 members	34.53%
	6-10 members	39.84%
	> 10 members	4.74%
	Christianity	51.86%
Religion	Traditional	47.13%
	Others	1.01%
	Effective literacy	93.16%
	Crude literacy	80.53%
Literacy level	Male literacy	93.40%
	Female literacy	92.96%
	Youth literacy	97.06%
	Aged literacy	76.83%
	Workforce participation rate (WFPR)	49.88
Employment	Males	61.29
	Female	38.7
	Unemployment rate	50.12

Family is a complex and dynamic institution in India. It is broadly classified into three categories- nuclear, joint and extended. In this study, 96% of population is nuclear households. Many households (39.84%) were found to be having 6-10 members in family followed by 4-5 members (34.53%). Christianity is the major religion in north-east India and the Khasi are no exception. The earliest to witness the expansion of Christianity in North-east India was Meghalaya.[5] This was largely because the British administrator handed over the responsibility and the budget for school education to the Christian missions. More than half of the total population (51.86%) in the studied population practice Christianity followed by the traditional one (47.13%), and other religions like Hindus are minorities.

Literacy represents the lifelong, intellectual process of gaining meaning from a critical interpretation of written or printed text. In India, there is a wide gender disparity in effective literacy rates (aged 7 and above): among men (82.14%) and women (65.46%)[6]. However, in the present study the gap between males and females is reduced to equal with male literacy of 93.40% and female literacy of 92.96% which is quiet contradictory to national scenario and in the major states of India. Youth literacy of Khasi is recorded at 97.06% while that of the aged was found to be 76.83%.

In 2011, the Workforce Participation Rate (WFPR) at all India level is 25.51% for females and 53.26% for males. While there is no rural–urban gap for males (53%), there is considerable rural-urban gap for females (rural= 30%, urban= 15.4%). In 2011 Indian Census[7] WFPR is highest for Himachal Pradesh (51.85) followed by Sikkim (50.47) and lowest for Lakshadweep (29.9). With respect to sex-variation in Indian states the highest WFPR is observed for males in Daman & Diu (71.48) and for female in Himachal Pradesh (44.82). In the Khasi population the WFPR was found to be 49.87 where males contribute 69.21% and females 38.70%. The total unemployment rate was recorded as 50.12 suggesting half of the population is unemployed probably due to lack of job opportunities in the region.

Table-3 represents the distribution of socio-economic variables like education, occupation and income vis-à-vis headship type in the selected population. In the distribution education qualification our data shows that females are having more proportion of graduates and professionals suggesting that females are more education-oriented in comparison with males. This finding is similar earlier study which reports that the trend of women ahead of men in almost all Western countries points to growing advantages for women in education, though the size and speed of these developments varies[8]. However, it has been found that the difference in educational standards among males and females has no statistical significance. While occupation has strong correlation with the outcome of professional pursuits, it is also seen that occupational status between males and females is found to be statistically significant. Five categories of income levels has been assessed with respect to male and female headships in the household but headship type do not seem to influence the income status of the families.

Table 3: Education, Occupation and Income group

Variable	Sub-variable	Male	(%)	Female	(%)	Chi-square*
	Primary	244	20.47	259	18.07	
	Secondary	448	37.58	511	35.66	
	Higher Sec.	124	10.4	145	10.12	
Education	Undergraduate	159	13.34	187	13.05	0.17
	Graduate	138	11.58	199	13.89	
	Professional	23	1.93	43	3	
	Illiterate	56	4.7	89	6.21	
	Government employee	99	54.1	84	45.9	
Occupation	Private employee	33	30.28	76	69.72	
	Business	53	39.26	82	60.74	

	Free-lance	15	45.45	18	54.55	
	Daily wager	380	77.24	112	22.76	**0.00****
	Cultivator	5	100	0	0	
	Housewife	0	0	338	100	
	Unemployed	83	38.07	136	61.93	
	Retired	23	56.1	18	43.9	

		Female headed	**(%)**	**Male headed**	**(%)**	
Income by headship	Lower	48	15.09	15	7.61	
	Lower middle	110	34.59	61	30.96	
	Middle	59	18.5	49	24.87	0.05
	Upper middle	65	20.44	45	22.84	
	Upper	36	11.32	27	13.71	

*(p= <0.05)

The term 'house' in India covers the greatest diversity of dwellings. In 2001, the Census of India reported that 51.6% households in India were residing in *pucca* (concreted), 30.1% were in semi-*pucca* and 18.2% in *kaccha* (thatched) houses. The National Sample Survey[9] also conducted survey on house types in rural India and reported that 49.7% households were residing in *pucca*, 21.4% in semi-*pucca* and 28.8% in *kaccha* houses. The present population, a semi-rural habitation has 46.6% concreted and 42.1% tin-roofed houses. In India, 91% of urban households and 89% of rural households now have access to improved source of drinking water, although urban and rural settlers rely on different sources of drinking water. Among the Khasi, about 90% of households are dependent on local water supply provided by the government. Sanitation is a major problem in India. The percentage of households practicing open defecation decreased from 55% in 2005-06 to 39% in 2015-16.[10]. Among the Khasi, majority of them (61.13%) use *kaccha* toilet facility and the percentage of open defecation is negligible.

Table 4: Other socio-economic variables

Variable	Sub-variable	(%)
House type	Concreted	46.6
	Tin-roofed	42.1
	Thatched	11.24
Source of drinking water	Well	1.35
	Spring	7.71
	Tap	90.94

Toilet facility	*Pucca*	38.4
	Kaccha	61.03
	Open	0.57
Decision Making		
Acquired property	husband	0.76
	Wife	14.1
	Joint	85.14
inherited property	Wife	31.81%
	Maternal in-laws	59.24%
	Joint	8.95%
Children education and marriage	Wife	50.10%
	Husband	1.10%
	Joint	48.80%

Decision making, particularly in the inheritance and devolution of ancestral property in Khasi society is by and large controlled by the womenfolk. The authority in taking decisions is passed on from the maternal side to the daughters. In most of the households maternal in-laws (59.10%) or wives (31.81%) decides for ancestral property. Matters concerning education and marriage of children are decided either by the wife alone (50.10%) or jointly with her husband (48.80%), but rarely the decision in these matters is vested on the husband.

Table 5: Headship-wise distribution of education and occupation in married individual

Education	Female headed		Male headed		Chi square*
	Male (%)	Female (%)	Male (%)	Female (%)	
Primary	26 (11.40)	75 (16.34)	17 (7.56)	21 (9.63)	0.03**
Secondary	92 (40.35)	183 (39.87)	95 (42.0)	80 (36.70)	0.001**
Higher Sec.	21 (9.21)	33 (7.19)	34 (15.11)	42 (19.27)	0.5
Undergraduate	33 (14.47)	53 (11.55)	25 (11.11)	35 (16.06)	0.6
Graduate	29 (12.72)	50 (10.89)	29 (12.89)	21 (9.83)	0.01**
Professional	1 (0.44)	12 (2.61)	5 (2.22)	3 (1.38)	0.02**
Illiterate	26 (11.40)	53 (11.55)	20 (8.89)	16 (7.34)	0.02**
Occupation					

Student	5 (2.20)	9 (1.99)	2 (0.90)	10 (4.59)	0.5
Govt. Employee	38 (16.74)	41 (9.05)	41 (18.39)	10 (4.59)	0.00***
Private	7 (3.08)	29 (6.40)	6 (2.69)	9 (4.13)	0.12
Business	22 (9.69)	51 (11.26)	22 (9.87)	18 (8.26)	0.009**
Freelance	2 (0.88)	11 (2.34)	6 (2.69)	4 (1.83)	0.02**
Daily wager	132 (58.15)	63 (13.91)	119 (53.36)	16 (7.43)	0.00***
Cultivator	3 (1.32)	0	0	0	NA
Housewife	4 (1.76)	174 (38.41)	0	141 (64.68)	0.19
Unemployed	9 (3.96)	60 (13.25)	10 (4.48)	9 (4.13)	0.00***
Retired	5(2.20)	15(3.31)	17(7.62)	1(0.46)	0.00***

*(p= <0.05)

Khasi households are headed either by the males or the females although the family line is reckoned through the females only. Table-5 illustrates the effect of type of headship on the different socio-economic variables. Chi square analyses between male and female headed households were made for the married individuals across all categories of educational standards and occupation. A clear influence of the type of headship on educational standards is observed with significant p-values in almost all categories. Occupational categories such as government employment, daily wagers, unemployed and retired government employees have high statistical significance between the two headship types. On the whole, more females (wives) are involved in educational and occupational pursuits in female headed households while the converse is seen in male headed households where husbands are more involved.

CONCLUSION

The high sex-ratio, high female literacy and the overall female work participation and decision making in the socio-demographic profile of the Khasi matrilineal population is truly unique in Indian context. More proportion of female graduates and professionals and the culturally vested authority of the females in taking various decisions makes the population free from gender biasness that are prevalent in mainland India. Significant influence of male and female headships on educational standards and occupational pursuits indicates some sort of struggle between males and females in for gaining control over the other.

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