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Trend in Child Sex Ratio Among the Mising Community: A Comparative Analysis in the Context of Assam

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ABSTRACT

Among the different demographic indicators, sex ratio is considered as one of the most important variables for understanding demographic features of a community. Sex ratio is also an important variable for determining the quality of life and the status of women in a society. Child sex ratio on the other hand, is an important indicator of a society's progress as a whole. In this article, an attempt has been made to examine the nature of trend of child sex ratio among Misings and compare it with overall scheduled tribes of Assam and overall child sex ratio of Assam in the last three decades. There is a consistent and worrying decline in the child sex ratio among Misings, scheduled tribes of Assam and overall Assam between 1991 and 2011. The disproportionately steeper decline among the scheduled tribes and even more so, the Mising tribe, suggests that these groups are more susceptible to the social factors that negatively impact the birth and survival rates of female children. Addressing these root causes issues through comprehensive policy interventions and community-level awareness programs is crucial for reversing this detrimental trend and achieving gender equality in Assam.

Keywords

Demographic, Child Sex Ratio, Mising Tribe, Gender Equality, Scheduled Tribe

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Abstract— Among the different demographic indicators, sex ratio is considered as one of the most important variables for understanding demographic features of a community. Sex ratio is also an important variable for determining the quality of life and the status of women in a society. Child sex ratio on the other hand, is an important indicator of a society's progress as a whole. In this article, an attempt has been made to examine the nature of trend of child sex ratio among Misings and compare it with overall scheduled tribes of Assam and overall child sex ratio of Assam in the last three decades. There is a consistent and worrying decline in the child sex ratio among Misings, scheduled tribes of Assam and overall Assam between 1991 and 2011. The disproportionately steeper decline among the scheduled tribes and even more so, the Mising tribe, suggests that these groups are more susceptible to the social factors that negatively impact the birth and survival rates of female children. Addressing these root causes issues through comprehensive policy interventions and community-level awareness programs is crucial for reversing this detrimental trend and achieving gender equality in Assam.

Key Words: Demographic, Child Sex Ratio, Mising Tribe, Gender Equality, Scheduled Tribe.

IV. INTRODUCTION

The sex ratio represents a crucial demographic indicator that indicates the relative proportion of males and females within a population. Its variation over time provides valuable insights into the underlying socio-economic and cultural dynamics influencing demographic behavior. Similarly, the child sex ratio is widely regarded as an essential measure of a society's developmental progress and gender equity. The child sex ratio, also referred to as the juvenile sex ratio, represents the number of girls per 1,000 boys within a particular young age group—most commonly 0–6 or 0–4 years. International demographic standards indicate that the ratio observed at birth—approximately 105 male births for every 100 female births (or about 952 female births per 1,000 male births)—should generally continue into early childhood as well (United Nations Population Fund).

However, India has witnessed a continuous and troubling decline in its child sex ratio for several decades. The downward shift has been evident since 1961, with the ratio falling from 945 in 1991 to 927 in 2001, and further dropping

to 918 by 2011. Such a persistent reduction is a matter of serious concern, as it signals deep-rooted gender inequality. The child sex ratio captures both prenatal gender discrimination—such as sex-selective practices—and discrimination after birth, often reflected in unequal care, nutrition, and survival opportunities for girls.

In a country as socio-culturally diverse as India, such demographic indicators serve as powerful tools for understanding the structural characteristics and transformations of different population groups. The present study focuses on the Mising tribe of Assam, which constitutes the second largest Scheduled Tribe community in the state, comprising nearly 17.5 percent of the total Scheduled Tribe population according to the Census of India, 2011. The Mising community, also known historically as the Miris, is an indigenous tribal group predominantly inhabiting the northeastern state of Assam, India. They constitute one of the major Scheduled Tribe communities of the region and are primarily concentrated in the districts of Dhemaji, Lakhimpur, Majuli, Jorhat, Golaghat, Sivasagar, Dibrugarh, Tinsukia, and parts of Sonitpur and Biswanath. The Misings trace their origins to the Tani group of tribes of Arunachal Pradesh and have preserved a unique cultural identity characterized by distinct customs, festivals, and linguistic traditions. Agriculture has traditionally served as the backbone of the Mising economy, shaping not only their livelihood patterns but also their social and cultural practices.

The Mising population is predominantly concentrated in the riverine regions of Dhemaji, Lakhimpur, Majuli, Golaghat, Jorhat, Biswanath, Sonitpur, Sivasagar, Dibrugarh, and Tinsukia districts. Given the significance of the sex ratio as a demographic and social indicator, the present paper endeavors to analyze the trends in child sex ratio among the Mising tribe and to compare these trends with those observed for the overall scheduled tribe population and the total population of Assam.

V. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

There are several indicators used to assess gender equality, among which the sex ratio remains one of the most widely applied and significant measures. This ratio indicates the number of women per thousand men. The Census of India defines the sex ratio as the number of females per 1,000 males in the population (Census, 2001). Among the different demographic indicators, the sex ratio is regarded as one of the key variables for analyzing the population structure and

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demographic composition of a community. It is also an essential variable for determining the quality of life and the status of women in a society. It is generally believed that discriminatory practices against women, as well as a low age at birth, result in high female mortality, leading to a lower sex ratio (Devi, 2004). The sex ratio is, therefore, a useful indicator for understanding women's health and position in any society (James, 2004: 1–12). Jain (2004) pointed out that an unfavourable sex ratio (i.e., when the number of females is small) leads to the emergence of many moral and social evils (Jain, 2004: 69).

Researchers have expressed diverse perspectives on the historical trends of the sex ratio in India. Vanity (2018) observed that over the past century (1901–2011), the sex ratio in India has consistently remained adverse and unfavorable to females. Many scholars have highlighted a distinct correlation between imbalances in sex ratios and the prevailing socio-economic conditions of a region.

The child sex ratio, in contrast, serves as a crucial indicator of a nation's social progress. In a country as diverse as India, where cultural and regional variations strongly influence demographic patterns, a universal demographic measure like the child sex ratio offers valuable insights into the overall health and equity of the population. The child sex ratio (CSR) is defined as the number of females per 1,000 males in the 0–6 age group. It is widely regarded as one of the most significant measures of gender equality, and the growing imbalance in this ratio underscores the continuing presence of gender bias within society (Santhi N.S., 2019).

Commenting on the position of women and the girl child within tribal social systems, Kaur and Singh (2023) observe that due to the predominantly tribal nature of the population in the north-eastern states, women in this region enjoy a comparatively higher status in society. This, in turn, creates a favorable social environment that enhances the acceptance and value of the girl child. The socio-cultural norms and traditions of these communities emerge as key factors contributing to the relatively high child sex ratio observed among tribal societies. Furthermore, the active involvement of women in agricultural and household activities also plays a significant role in maintaining this balance.

In India, the child sex ratio shows considerable variation across different regions. Scholars such as Guilmoto (2008a) have argued that state-level averages often conceal significant local and inter-district disparities. They have also highlighted strong linkages between variations in sex ratios and underlying socio-economic factors.

In this context, it becomes crucial to examine whether the future trend of the child sex ratio among the Mising community of Assam is likely to improve or decline.

VI. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What is the status and trend of the general sex ratio among the Mising community, the Scheduled Tribe population of Assam, and the state of Assam as a whole?

2. How has the child sex ratio among the Mising community changed over the past three decades, and how does it compare with the overall child sex ratio of the Scheduled Tribes of Assam and the state of Assam?

VII. OBJECTIVES

The main objectives of the present article are-

1. To understand the status and trend of the general sex ratio among the Mising community, the scheduled tribe population of Assam, and the state of Assam as a whole; and

2. To examine the trend and pattern of the child sex ratio among the Mising community and to compare it with the overall child sex ratio of the Scheduled Tribes of Assam and the state of Assam over the past three decades.

VIII. METHODOLOGY

This study is entirely based on secondary sources of data. The information has been obtained from the Census of India for the years 1991, 2001, and 2011. These secondary data have been utilized to analyze the trend in the general sex ratio and the pattern of change in the child sex ratio among the Mising community of Assam during the period from 1991 to 2011.

IX. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

A. Trend in Overall Sex Ratio of Misings of Assam (1991-2011):

The trend in the general sex ratio among the Mising tribe of Assam is presented in Table 1. The general sex ratio of the Mising tribe showed a consistent increase across the census periods from 1991 to 2011. In 1991, it was recorded at 954, which rose to 959 in 2001 and further increased to 968 in 2011. This indicates a positive trend in the sex ratio for this specific tribal group.

Similarly, the overall sex ratio for the scheduled tribes of Assam also displayed an upward trend. It was 967 in 1991, increased to 972 in 2001, and reached 987 in 2011, suggesting a steady improvement in the sex ratio within the broader scheduled tribe population of the state.

The sex ratio for Assam as a whole also improved over the same period. It was 923 in 1991, rose to 935 in 2001, and reached 958 in 2011. This reflects a general enhancement in the sex ratio across the state.

Overall, a positive trend in the general sex ratio was observed across all three categories—the Mising tribe, the Scheduled Tribes (overall), and the state of Assam—during the census years from 1991 to 2011. Specifically, the Mising tribe's sex ratio increased from 954 to 968, the overall Scheduled Tribes' ratio rose from 967 to 987, and the state's overall sex ratio improved from 923 to 958.

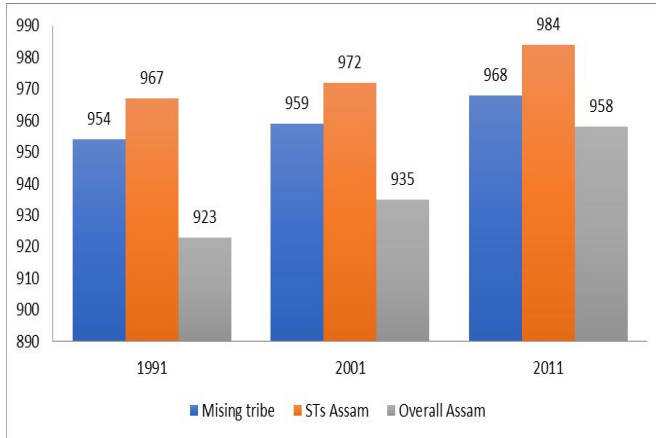
TABLE I: TREND IN OVERALL SEX RATIO AMONG MISINGS, STS AND ASSAM

Census Years	Sex Ratio		
	Mising tribe	STs Assam	Overall Assam
1991	954	967	923
2001	959 (+5)	972 (+5)	935 (+12)
2011	968 (+9)	984 (+12)	958 (+23)

Source: Census of India

Figure 1.

Figure 2. **Figure: 1 Comparison of Trend in Overall Sex Ratio among Misings, STs and Assam**



A comparison in Figure 1 shows that despite the improvement, the Mising tribe's sex ratio was still lower than the overall scheduled tribes' averages in all censuses. However, during the last census period, the sex ratio of the Mising tribe was found to be higher compared to that of overall Assam.

B. Trend in Child Sex Ratio (0-6 Age) among Misings of Assam:

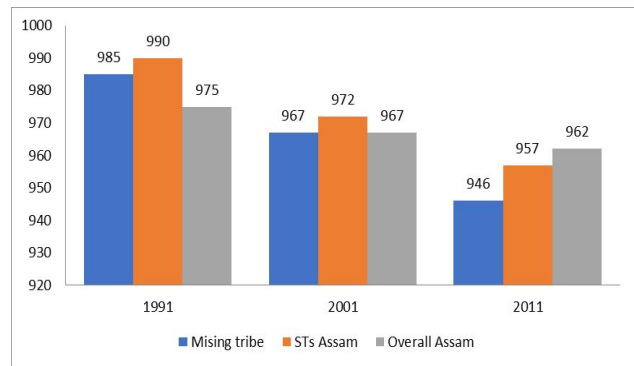
The trend in child sex ratio of Mising tribe of Assam is shown in table-2. The table shows that the overall child sex ratio of Assam is decreased from 975 in 1991 to 967 in 2001 and further to 962 in 2011. The child sex ratio for the scheduled tribe's population of Assam declined from 990 in 1991 to 972 in 2001 and then to 957 in 2011. On the other hand, the Mising tribe experienced the most substantial decrease, with its child sex ratio falling from 985 in 1991 to 967 in 2001 and further to 946 in 2011.

TABLE: 2 TREND IN CHILD SEX RATIO (0-6 AGE) AMONG MISINGS, STS AND OVERALL ASSAM

Census Years	Child Sex Ratio (0-6 Age)		
	Mising tribe	STs Assam	Overall Assam
1991	985	990	975
2001	967	972	967
2011	946	957	962

Source: Census of India

Figure 3. **Figure:2 Comparison of Trend in Overall Sex Ratio among Misings, STs and overall Assam**



While comparison of Mising tribe and scheduled tribes, both groups showed a significant decline, the Mising tribe's child sex ratio consistently decreased at a greater rate in each subsequent census period (18 points between 1991-2001 and 21 points between 2001-2011), indicating a more pronounced trend compared to the scheduled tribes as a whole. The Mising tribe's child sex ratio declined by 39 points from 1991 to 2011, whereas the overall state of Assam experienced a much smaller drop of only 13 points. This highlights a widening gap between the Mising community and the state's average child sex ratio.

The nature of trend in child sex ratio shows that the Mising tribe had the steepest decline in child sex ratio in 1991 to 2011, compared to the scheduled tribes and the overall Assam. The Mising tribe's child sex ratio consistently fell at a faster rate than both the general scheduled tribe population and the entire state of Assam.

X. CONCLUSION

The positive aspect of the Mising tribe is that their general sex ratio is higher than the ratio for the entire state of Assam though it has been lower than that for all the tribes of the state taken together during the period of 1991 to 2011. There has been a steady improvement in overall sex ratio among the Misings as also among the others in the state. The analysis of trend in child sex ratio clearly indicates a consistent and worrying decline in the child sex ratio among Misings, scheduled tribes of Assam and overall Assam between 1991 and 2011. The child sex ratio among the Misings and scheduled tribes of Assam was lower than the state average in 2011, indicating a stronger historical preference for female children in these communities that is now eroding. The disproportionately steeper decline among the scheduled tribes and even more so, the Mising tribe, suggests that these groups are more susceptible to the social factors that negatively impact the birth and survival rates of female children. This trend is often a reflection of deep-rooted issues like a societal preference for male children and neglect of girl children etc. This may also indicate an imbalance in the child population, which can lead to serious socio-demographic consequences, including the further marginalization of girls and women. Addressing these underlying issues through

comprehensive policy interventions and community-level awareness programs is essential to reverse this adverse trend and promote gender equality in Assam.

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