



# BREAK THE BIAS

A study Report on status of women's political empowerment in Odisha

## Rationale of the study

Women's political empowerment is regarded as a key driver for economic and social development. Odisha government has stepped up many efforts for holistic empowerment of women. Following the 73rd Amendment, Odisha became the first state in India to go one step ahead by reserving 50% seats for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions. In the last general election in Odisha, the gender gap in voter turnout has significantly reduced to 2 per cent. This large turnout and representation of women in grassroots politics is the doorway of growth in the democratic form of governance.

Generally, women are considered a reliable source of vote bank for political parties. Before elections, parties in government and opposition endeavor to woo women voters, through their poll promises. In our state, the ruling party is always indicted for using women Self-Help Groups of Mission Shakti as concrete vote banks. However, limited research studies have taken place to be cognizant of voting patterns, factors influencing women voters, their independent decision making, and participation in post-election political activities at the grassroots level in panchayat elections. In Odisha, local body elections are largely managed and/or influenced by contractors. Nevertheless, we have not studied the participation of women as contractors in rural infrastructure and other developmental work. It is in this context that the following study was conducted.

## Process

Atmashakti Trust along with its allies Odisha Shramajeebee Mancha (OSM) and Mahila Shramajeebee Mancha, Odisha (MSMO), launched a state-wide campaign to demand advance accountability from people contesting in elections during the three-tier Panchayat election process. The campaign also delved further into many factors which presumed to whom people ultimately voted for and what the next move should be vis-à-vis women empowerment.

An online survey was designed after carefully reviewing the literature, secondary data, and discussions with grassroots team members associated with women-centric issues. We opted for the online survey format to attain easy access, timely data collection, and efficient analysis. The grassroots level workers were oriented on the study's format, methodology, and objectives.

## Research methodology

The study was undertaken in 16 districts across Odisha which are mostly represented by Tribal, Dalits, and other marginalized communities. The districts are Mayurbhanj, Sundergarh, Jharsuguda, Deogarh, Sambalpur, Bolangir, Kalahandi, Nuapada, Nabarangpur, Rayagada, Malkangiri, Koraput, Gajapati, Kandhamal, Boudh and Nayagarh. The survey was conducted on women voters who have just voted in the recently concluded panchayat elections. The sampling was done randomly among the village women who were available to discuss the factors influencing the decision-making through a self-administered study form. The data was subsequently harvested from the forms.

### Sample size and respondent profiles

- A total of 6109 respondents took part in this survey, out of which 90% were married, and 10% were unmarried till the date of the completion of the survey.
- The study age group ranged from 18 to 60 years. Out of this, 7.1% were between 18-24 years, 17.5% were between 25-29 years, 35.5% were between 30-39 years, 26.2% were between 40-49 years, 11.2% were between 50-60 years, and 2.5% were above 60 years.
- The educational qualifications of the respondents also had a wide spectrum, ranging from postgraduate to complete illiteracy level. Out of the respondents, 1.15% were postgraduate, 4.6% were graduates, 3.5% were under-graduate, 21.2% were matriculated, 12.2% were upper primary, 24.6% were primary, 21.8% were literate, and 10.9% were not literate.

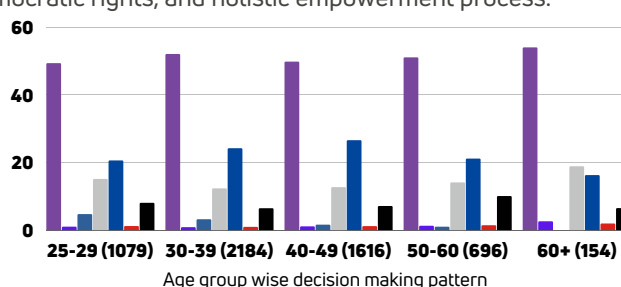
The survey commenced on 16th February and concluded on 6th March 2022. The majority of women were surveyed at home, whereas others were also surveyed outside polling booths.

## Analysis and Findings

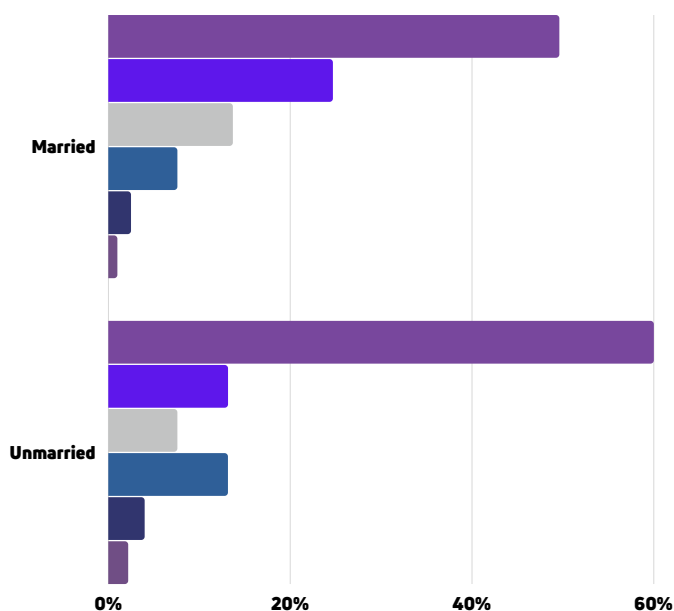
The interpretation and analysis of findings have revealed that **age, education, marital status, engagement in income-generating activities, and participation in the decision-making process** are five components that mostly determine women's independent decision making, exercising their democratic rights, and holistic empowerment process.

### Age group wise decision making pattern

Various studies have revealed that there is a link between age and voting behavior. Our study findings reveal that 49.3% of respondents of the age group of 25-29 are taking their decision to vote by themselves whereas 20.57% have said that their decision-making in voting is influenced by their husbands.



Subsequently, 31.4% of the respondents of this age group have stated that their decisions are being influenced by their Father and Mothers-in-law, Head of the Household or it is decided mutually by the family members. However, for women above 60 years, 53.9% have said that they are making their own decision.



Decision making pattern among the married & unmarried women

#### Decision making pattern among the married & unmarried women:

The study findings disclose that women are still way behind in making their independent decision towards ensuring their voting rights because out of the total 5559 numbers of respondents only 2557 (49.6%) are saying that they are making their decisions by self the rest 1371(24.7%), 760 (13.7%), 423 (7.6%), 137(2.5%) & 57 (1.0%) are saying that the decision was taken by Husband, Head of the HH, Mutually, Father/Father in Law & Mother/Mother in Law respectively. But in the case of unmarried women, the decision making is a little different and it shows that out of 456 numbers interviewed 274 (60%) are saying that they are making their decisions independently while 60 (13.17%), 35 (7.67%), 59 (13.16%), 18 (4%) & 10 (2.19) are saying that the decision was taken by Husband, Head of the HH, Mutually, Father/Father in Law, Mother/Mother and earning members in Law respectively.

#### Participation of women in Gram sabha and Palli sabha

A developing democracy like India needs wider participation of the people irrespective of caste, color, creed, sex, etc. in its political process. However, the study finds that a large chunk of women are less satisfied with the performance of the Gram Panchayat and so far as their participation in Gram Sabha or Palli Sabha is concerned though they constitute a very little bit less than 50 percent of the state's total population. The study report reveals that women's participation is very meager in Gram Sabha in comparison to Pallisabha since 3231 (52.9%) of the respondents have said that they are participating in the Palli sabha whereas 1814 (29.7%) are participating in the Gram Sabha.



Participation of women in Palli sabha



Participation of women in Gram sabha



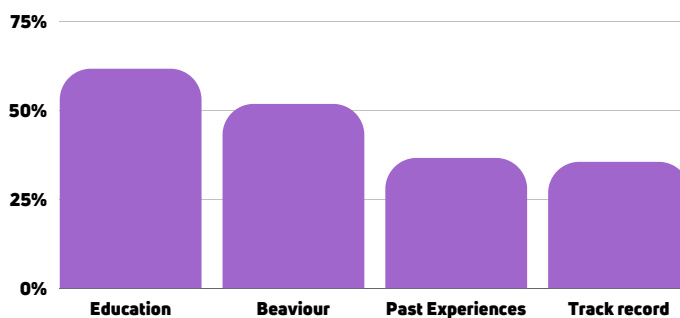
Female's share in construction contract work

#### Female's share in construction Contract work

The report says that this segment has been dominated by male in comparison to female because almost 92.7% of the construction works are being escorted by male contractors while only 7.3% of construction works are managed by either SHG or mutually in very few places.

#### What women consider as a benchmark qualities of a candidate

The report says that 5055 (82.7%) Candidate's Education, 3767 (61.7%) Candidate's behavior, 3165 (51.8%) Candidate's experience, 2238 (36.6%) Candidate's track record, 2172(35.5%) Future Development proposed plan by the candidates is the key area that women look for before casting the votes while others could not convey what was the benchmark according to them when it comes to whom they should vote for and why.



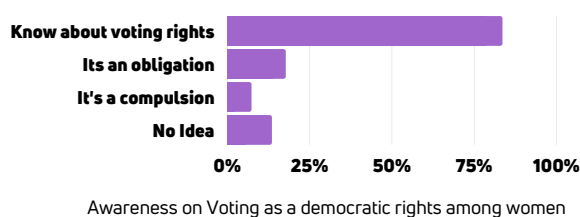
Preference of women for candidates contesting election



## Other key findings

### Awareness on Voting as a democratic rights among women

- The study report reveals that out of the 6109 respondents 4797 (78.5%) numbers know that voting is a right. However, 835 (13.7%), 138 (2.3%) & 339(5.5%) are saying it is an obligation, compulsion & don't have any idea about the exercise respectively.



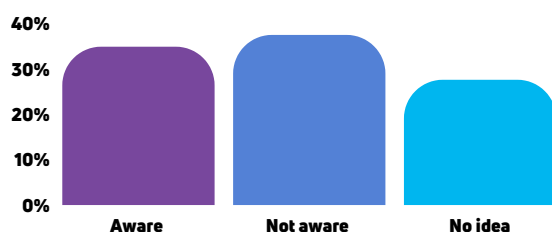
### Perception of the women taking leadership roles (who can lead better once get elected?)

- As per the study report, 3471 (56.8%) respondents said women can lead better in any given circumstances whereas 2638 (43.2%) respondents said that males can lead better than them.



### Women's awareness about the election model code of conduct

As per the survey report, 2129 (34.9%) said that they are aware about the model code of conduct persuaded by the State Election Commission whereas 2292(37.5%) women accepted that they don't. However, 1688 (27.6%) women which is a considerable percentage said that they have no idea about such provisioning.



Women's awareness about the election model code of conduct

## Need to do more/Way Forward

The study findings propound that though the Odisha government's efforts have contributed progressively to better decision-making of women in a socio-economic and political setting, this is, however, not enough for them to cater to their need for political empowerment in true spirit. Thus, more needs to be done on structural as well as implementation aspects so that women can decide on their own, participate and exercise their democratic rights. Based on the survey findings as well as evidence collected from the secondary data, the following are the broad recommendations to help the government take apposite measures in this direction:

- Odisha Government should ensure provisioning to appoint 50% women as a contractor in civil construction work.
- To ensure the women's voices are heard in decision making at the grassroots level, the Gram Sabha quorum should consist of 50% women members.
- Women-centric projects need to be initiated under MGNREGS and other developmental works to ensure their active participation and leadership.
- Mandatory training of SHG members on the Panchayati Raj institution should be taken up by the state government for effective implementation.
- Since a majority of women stated that they are making decisions independently while voting, it's now time for the government to train and build capacities of newly elected women representatives to take charge of their roles and responsibility without the dependency of male counterparts.

## About Us

Atmashakti is a right-based catalyst organization that coalesces Tribal and Dalit people for their socio-economic and political empowerment. For more than a decade with a consistent focus on collectivizing the community, Atmashakti has facilitated the process of formation of more than 23 collectives in 17 districts and 84 blocks of Odisha. Atmashakti has a mission to reach out to eight million underprivileged families in Odisha, Uttar Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and other poor states within India. To know more about us, please visit [www.atmashaktitrust.com](http://www.atmashaktitrust.com)

Atmashakti Trust, 101- A, Friends Colony East, New Delhi-110065, Phone: 011 2631 1407

Email: [info@atmashaktitrust.com](mailto:info@atmashaktitrust.com), Website: [www.atmashaktitrust.com](http://www.atmashaktitrust.com)

### Social Connect



[atmashaktitrust](https://www.facebook.com/atmashaktitrust)



[atmashakti.trust](https://www.instagram.com/atmashakti.trust)



[Atmashakti3](https://twitter.com/Atmashakti3)



<https://bit.ly/2ZofIKW>