

A Dynamic Nexus Between Gender and Socio-Economic Prevalence among Tribals of Undivided Koraput District of Odisha

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Abstract: The main indicator of the development of the society is the status of the women living there. Developed countries are not as concerned about gender as underdeveloped countries. With today's technological advancements, we can even also determine the sex of the fetus. Thanks to the strict laws framed by the Indian government, though the practice has been restricted, it sees when the mother gives birth to a baby girl and weeps loudly, and the father expresses it with grief to his kith and kin that his first child is a girl, the conscience says to slap them. This custom, which has been widely spread since the eighties, resulted in the shortage of girls for marriage in today's society. In some places, girls are being bought for marriage by paying high prices or. The last census was conducted in 2011. According to this analysis, the ratio was 943 in India and 979 in Odisha. But at the same time, the undivided Koraput district comprising Rayagada, Koraput, Nabarangpur, and Malkangiri, which has been declared as Scheduled Areas under the 5th Scheduled of the Indian Constitution, has given startling statistics. The Sex ratio was 1048 in Rayagada, 1031 in Koraput, 1018 in Nabarangpur and 1016 in Malkangiri. Though the concept of a negative sex ratio is found in modern society, it is not there in tribal society. An attempt has been made in this article to represent the reasons and characteristics of this positive sex ratio.

Keywords: Tribes and Tribals, Sex Ratio, Positive sex ratio among Tribals

JEL Codes: J12, J16, O15, I32, D10

1. INTRODUCTION

Equality is the most solitary aspect of the human mind. Be it in the field of religion, in the field of caste, or the field of social standing, it wants equal respect for all. But it is not always written in the fortune. Nowadays a man can achieve anything through the power of money, glory, honor, and prestige. With today's technological advancements, we can even determine the sex of the fetus. This custom, which has been widely spread since the eighties, has seen a shortage of girls for marriage in today's society. In some places, girls are being bought for marriage by paying high prices, or in some places, this is done through abduction even if it is

small. In some places, keeping in mind the religious order, one is being forced to change one's religion and follow one's own behavior through various attraction forces. So, today's paper is rich with explanations of the reason and statistics of the reason why there is a shortage of girls in the so-called noble society, but not in the society of the tribals.

The tribes constitute an important segment of the Indian population. They are backward both socially & economically and are at various stages of development. They live under different ecological conditions or geographical divisions like the Himalayan region, the central tribal belt of the country, and south Western Ghats. There are island dwellers in Andaman Nicobar Island, Lacadive, Minicoy, and Aminidivi Island included in the categories of Scheduled Tribes. The basic characteristics of the human communities, whose culture remained more or less, unaltered with the march of time, are called tribals. The Tribals constitute an important segment of our country's population. Out of the total population of 121,019,93,422 of the country, STs accounted for 10,42,81,034 which came to 8.6% (2011 census). There are 704 types of tribal in India (Source-Ministry of Tribal Affairs, GOI). Odisha occupies a unique position among the states of the country for the highest concentration of Scheduled Tribes having a population of 95, 90,756(47, 27,732 males and 48, 63,024 females) (2011 Census). It comes to 22.84 percent of the total population of the state. The state has as many as 62 varieties of Scheduled Tribes. The tribal areas are the most backward areas of the state. Scheduled areas of the state fully cover six districts (Mayurbhanj, Sundargarh, Koraput, Rayagada, Nabarangpur & Malkangiri) and seven districts partially (viz. Balasore, Koenjhar, Sambalpur, Kalahandi, Gajapati, Ganjam and Kandhamal). The tribals are also sporadically distributed in the rest of the districts. A great majority of tribes live in rural areas, mostly in the hills and forests. About 94% of the tribals live in rural areas. They have so far remained away from the mainstream of the national economy. Lack of communication & interaction with the outside world keeps them illiterate & ignorant. During historical times, they had been pushed into situations where they had to depend mainly upon nature & forests for their living. The tribals have very inadequate access to natural resource endowment, are primitive in technology, and therefore, are generally very poor in their living. Because of their poverty & ignorance, they were often more exploited by different private, and even some public agencies, than the rest of the rural population. The quality of available land in the areas generally inhabited by the tribals is, by and large, very poor and hence, less productive. The low yield from agriculture makes the tribal economy marginal in character. They are forced to adopt different types of occupations at the same time for their survival. Agriculture, agricultural & non-agricultural wage work, and collection of food, and other products from the forests are the activities that are simultaneously carried by the majority of the rural tribals. Thus, food gathering, hunting, fishing, collecting forest produce, adopting shifting cultivation of "slash & burn" type, and terrace agriculture, which are still found in different parts of the tribal economy indicate the prevalence of simple and primitive

levels of technology being adopted by them. They are in the majority living a poverty-ridden life coupled with low levels of literacy, lack of awareness, and low health standards. With the implementation of the number of tribal development & welfare schemes and projects in the country by the government (both by the centre & the state) particularly after independence and during plan periods, some positive changes have come in the socio-economic life of the tribals. A lot of money has been spent. But the results are not to the expectation. They are still lagging far behind in comparison to the non-tribal communities living in the country.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Tribal populations constitute a significant segment of India's demographic landscape, characterized by diverse cultural practices, beliefs, and socio-economic structures. Research indicates that tribal communities often exhibit distinctive demographic patterns, including sex ratios that deviate from national averages (Das, 2017). The favorable sex ratios observed among tribal populations are often attributed to unique cultural dynamics and gender norms prevalent within these communities. Scholars argue that traditional practices, such as female empowerment, equitable gender roles, and community cohesion, contribute to the maintenance of balanced sex ratios (Pattanaik, 2018). Socio-economic factors also play a significant role in shaping sex ratios among tribal communities. Studies suggest that access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities can influence fertility preferences and reproductive behaviors, thereby impacting sex ratios (Nazli, 2021). Government interventions and policies aimed at tribal development have influenced demographic trends, including sex ratios, in regions like Koraput district. Initiatives focusing on healthcare, education, and women's empowerment have contributed to improved socio-economic indicators, potentially impacting sex ratios (Mishra, 2020). Despite the favorable sex ratios observed among tribal populations, challenges persist in ensuring gender equality and addressing socio-economic disparities. Issues such as gender-based violence, inadequate healthcare infrastructure, and marginalization necessitate holistic approaches for sustainable development (Dash & Tripathy, 2020). Many tribal communities have unique cultural practices and beliefs that influence their demographic patterns, including sex ratios. Practices such as female infanticide, differential access to healthcare and nutrition based on gender, and son preference can significantly impact sex ratios among tribals (Das Gupta, 1987). Socioeconomic conditions, including poverty, lack of education, and limited access to healthcare, play a significant role in shaping sex ratios among tribal populations. Poverty and lack of resources may exacerbate gender disparities, leading to unfavorable sex ratios (Dreze & Sen, 2013). Migration for labor opportunities, especially among male members of tribal communities, can influence sex ratios by temporarily altering the demographic composition of these communities. Male outmigration may lead to imbalanced sex ratios within tribal villages (Gupta, 1987). Gender differentials in healthcare

access and nutrition can contribute to variations in sex ratios among tribal populations. Limited access to maternal healthcare and nutrition during pregnancy may result in higher female mortality rates, impacting sex ratios (Borooah & Dubey, 2006). Socio-cultural norms, traditions, and customs significantly shape the sex ratio dynamics among Indian tribal communities. Patriarchal systems prevalent in some tribes may result in son preference, leading to skewed sex ratios. Conversely, in certain matrilineal tribes, different dynamics may be observed. Marriage customs, inheritance practices, and rituals related to childbirth also influence sex ratio outcomes (Kabeer, 1999). Tribal women face multiple vulnerabilities owing to their social background as well as gender stereotypes. The status of women in tribal society is quite complex on one hand they enjoy considerable autonomy in terms of decision-making at household level, mobility and work participation. On the other hand, they have low level of literacy rates, negligible representation in local bodies and are often overburdened as they take care of families and also perform agricultural activities and rear animals. (Sharma et al., 2024). For the improvement of sex ratio as well as child sex ratio, there need of proper implementation of women and child development schemes in tribal area of various states of India and adoption of academic values that treat both the sexes equally. Vansiya (2018). Modern societies or so-called improved societies must learn lesson from tribes about gender equality. Specially educated, rich people must know how rural and tribal people respect girl child. Our education and social institutions including media must work hard to convey this message to community. Shinde (2021). The regions, where sex ratio is low, have posed an unpleasant problem of gender discrimination, resulting in the fall in the status of human resource. (Pathare,2013) Gender equality among tribal groups is a complex phenomenon that needs to be addressed in the context of various issues such as family structure, fertility, child mortality, literacy, sex-ratio, labor force participation, economic worth generated within the household, religion, culture, and exposure to the mainstream population. Tribal women, in general, play an important role in all economic, social and cultural activities. They also have a much higher work participation rate than non-tribal women. (Mitra,2015). Among the tribals the sex composition is relatively balanced. Calculations show that the death rate among tribal females is lower than males. This leads to the conclusion that in tribal society, though facing many odds, females are well looked after and as a result, they enjoy the Nature's law of longer longevity than males. (Sinha, 2000). The scheduled tribe women of most of the tribes work simultaneously with the men in different working sectors to fulfill their basic needs of daily life. They always stay ready to take any burden of their own family either of any domestic works or in other economic fields. Work participation of tribal women depends on the cultural norms of tribes and working sectors available therein. The work participation rate of women of general population (all population) is much lower than that of tribal women. (Mal & Khatun, 2022). High sex ratio in tribal areas has attributed to them for out-migration in order to seek

jobs and to imparting education to their kith and kin. The sex ratio influences the economic conditions, migration, occupation structure, marriage status, fertility, mortality and growth of rate population (Pathare, 2013). As the gender disparity in tribal areas is lower the data hints at misuse of technology for sex selection determination and abortions. Thus, the introduction of modern technology without control measures in place result in the worsening rate of survival of the girl child. (Hans, 2014).

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study aims to investigate the socio-cultural, economic, and healthcare factors contributing to the phenomenon of favorable sex ratios among tribal populations in the undivided Koraput district of Odisha. The impact of government policies, community interventions, and cultural practices on the maintenance of favorable sex ratios within tribal communities in the undivided Koraput district of Odisha.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The descriptive study will employ a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative analysis of demographic data with qualitative exploration of socio-cultural factors. Quantitative methods will involve analyzing census and survey data to determine sex ratios among tribal communities in the Undivided Koraput District, Odisha. Qualitative methods will include in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with community members, tribal leaders, and healthcare professionals to understand socio-cultural norms, economic factors, and healthcare access influencing sex ratios. Data triangulation will enhance the validity and reliability of findings. The study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon of favorable sex ratios among tribals in the region.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Koraput district of Odisha is a tribal concentrated district with a Scheduled Tribe population of 6, 97,583 which accounted for 50.56 percent of its total population. In the adjoining tribal concentrated district, the tribal population to respective district population comes to 57.83 percent in Malkangiri, 55.79 percent in Nabarangpur, and 55.98 percent in Rayagada (2011 Census). About 55 out of 62 tribes in Odisha are found (more or less) in Koraput district. Major tribes of Koraput district (in terms of population) are the Paraja, the Kandha, the Gadaba, the Bhattada, the Bhumia, the Bhumia, the Dharua, the Kondadora, the Kotia, the Omanatya, and the Parenga.

There are as many as 62 categories of tribes found in the state of Odisha All these tribes, in varying numbers are found in the Koraput region. The population of scheduled tribes of the undivided Koraput district (Koraput, Nabarangpur, and Rayagada & Malkangiri) is depicted in Appendix 1 (from 1961 to 2011). Tribes having a population of one lakh and more are Kondh

of Koraput & Rayagada districts, Paraja of Koraput, Koya of Malkangiri, & Bhattada & Gond of Nabarangpur district. The tribal population within a range of 50,000 and more but less than one lakh is Bhattada & Gadaba of Koraput, Bhumia of Malkangiri, Paraja of Nabarangpur & Soura of Rayagada District. Tribes with 20000 population but less than 50,000 are Bhumia of Koraput, Paraja of Malkangiri, and Kondh of Nabarangpur & Shabar of Rayagada district. Tribes with a population of less than 1000 Bhuiya, Oran, Banjara, Gandhia, Kolha, Lohar, Bhathudi, Kawar, Kissan, Madia, Mahali, Lodha, Sounti, Bagata, Baiga, Dal, Ho, Tharua, Chenchu, Desua, Juang, Mirdha, and Rajuar.

As per the 2011 census, the ST population constitutes 50.56% of the total population of the district of Koraput (divided). On the other hand, it is 57.83%, 55.79% & 55.98% for Malkangiri, Nabarangpur & Rayagada districts respectively. ST population constitutes 54.41% of the total population of the Koraput region (i.e. undivided Koraput district). Table 1 gives us information about the ST & total population of the undivided Koraput district as per the 2011 census.

Table 1: Total Population of ST and their Percentage According to the 2011 Census

<i>Name of Region</i>	<i>Total Population</i>	<i>ST Population</i>	<i>% of ST Population</i>
Odisha	41974218	9590756	22.84
Nabarangpur	1220946	681173	55.79
Rayagada	967911	541905	55.98
Malkangiri	613192	354614	57.83
Koraput	1379647	697583	50.56
Total Un-divided Dist.	4181696	2275275	54.41

Source: Authors' Compilation of Census Report, 2011

The tribals are mostly found living in rural areas in the region, or villages. The population of STs to the total rural population is 96%, 98%, 97% & 95% respectively in Rayagada, Nabarangpur, and Malkangiri & Koraput respectively. Table 2 shows the concentration of STs in Rural & Urban areas (2011).

Table 2: Percentage of STs in Rural & Urban Areas of Undivided Koraput District

<i>Name of District</i>	<i>Total Numbers of STs</i>	<i>Number of ST people in Urban Areas</i>	<i>% of ST people in Urban Areas</i>	<i>Number of ST people in Rural Areas</i>	<i>ST % in Rural Areas</i>
Rayagada	541905	19697	3.64	522208	96.36
Nabarangpur	681173	13117	1.92%	668056	98.07
Malkangiri	357614	8149	2.29	346465	97.70
Koraput	697583	34864	4.99	662719	95.00
Total Un-divided Dist.	2275275	75827	3.33%	2199448	96.66%

Source: Authors' Compilation

It is generally found that the sex ratio in tribal areas goes in favor of females. Koraput region is no exception to it. Table 3 gives us information about ST male & female population & their % to total population (Census-2011)

Table 3: Distribution of Male and Female population in Undivided Koraput District

<i>Name of District</i>	<i>Total ST Population</i>	<i>Total ST Male</i>	<i>% of ST Male</i>	<i>Total ST Female</i>	<i>% of Female</i>
Rayagada	541905	259040	47.8	282865	52.19
Nabarangpur	681173	335028	49.18	346145	50.81
Malkangiri	354614	171717	48.42	182897	57.57
Koraput	697583	337373	48.36	360210	51.63
Total Un-divided Dist.	2275275	1103158	48.48	1172117	51.51

Source: Authors' Compilation

The main indicator of the development of the society is the status of the women living there. Developed countries do not care about gender like underdeveloped countries. The desire for a male child, the killing of female fetuses, and the killing of new born girls, were the actions of human-like demons. It would not be an exaggeration to say that the evil practice has been closed due to the strict laws of the Indian government. But when the mother gives birth to a girl, the mother weeps loudly, and the father tells his cousin that the first child is a girl, the conscience says to slap them. Women were highly respected in the Vedic era. But during the Islamic rule, their hopes and visions were overshadowed by the curtain custom. In today's male-centric society, women are fighting for their rights in every field. First let's find out what Sex Ratio is? It shows the female to male ratio in the population. Statistics say the number of women per thousand men. Census is conducted in the country once in every ten years, from which we get to know about this. The last census was conducted in 2011. And according to his analysis, this rate was 943 in India and 979 in Odisha. But at the same time, the undivided Koraput district comprising Rayagada, Koraput, Nabarangpur and Malkangiri, which has been declared as scheduled areas under Article 5 of the Indian Constitution, has given startling statistics. It is 1048 in Rayagada, 1031 in Koraput, 1018 in Nabarangpur and 1016 in Malkangiri. For the information of the reader, a scheduled area is one in which more than 50 percent of the population is occupied by the tribals. Those whose basic features of culture have remained intact over time are referred to as tribals, Janjati, indigenous peoples, forest dwellers or Scheduled Tribes in terms of the Constitution of India. The reasons and characteristics of this high gender ratio in tribal society are discussed below. In our present-day society there is a custom of Demand in marriage. Girls are often facing ill comment, eve teasing, carelessness by the parents. Some people say that it happens because they wear short clothes, but in the primitive aboriginal Banda community, women only wear a garment called

Ringa which is wrapped around the waist, and there is no social disorder among them! Do they have no biological appetite? Of course, there is but the slogan “*Yatra Naryasu Pujyante Ramante Tatra Devata*” is used in the daily routine in tribal society where we use it while giving speeches on women’s empowerment. They are the people of the moment, they don’t think of their savings for the future.

In today’s society, when a girl child is born, parents’ worries increase. But the tribals still believe that when a girl is born, the god comes to the house. The house is filled with wealth. The place of women in tribal society is very high. Women play the main role in daily life starting from housework to agriculture and other social activities. Compared to men, women in the tribal society are the ones who thresh the grain, removes the useless grass and even take the oxen and plough. Agriculture, which is their backbone, is easily managed by those who have more women in their households. At the time when the men go around drinking wine, the women gather fruits, tubers, cabbages, resins, lac, greens and other daily things from the forest and sell them in the city to improve their economy. They are also given special status in the selection of spouses. But where in the so-called civilized world, we demand that the dowry, but its vice versa is practiced there in tribal society. The bridegroom has to pay the price to the father in law in exchange of his daughter, i.e., known as *JHOLA TANKA*, the bride price. It usually includes money, livestock, clothing, alcohol and feasts. In general, girls are God’s gift to the Tribals, which has shifted the gender balance in favor of women among them.

The tribal communities residing in the Koraput district of Odisha are confronted with a variety of complex socio-economic issues that have their roots in historical marginalization and remote location. The socioeconomic condition of the tribal community in Odisha’s Koraput district is the result of a complex interaction of historical, geographical, and sociocultural variables that have influenced their lives and livelihoods. Koraput is recognized for its varied tribal populations, such as the Kondhas, Koyas, and Gadabas, each with their distinct cultural legacy and economic customs. These tribes have traditionally relied on subsistence agriculture, forest-based activities, and handicrafts to support themselves, keeping a close bond with nature and its resources. The ongoing cycle of poverty and economic vulnerability is one of the most significant difficulties confronting Koraput’s tribal community. The majority of tribal households practice rain-fed agriculture, principally growing rice, millets, and pulses. However, insufficient irrigation systems, poor soil fertility, and unpredictable weather patterns frequently result in low agricultural production and food insecurity. The lack of modern farming practices, market connections, and access to credit exacerbates these issues, leaving tribal farmers reliant on unpredictable natural causes for sustenance. Moreover, strong conservation regulations and limitations on access to forest resources have had a substantial negative influence on the traditional forest-based economy of many tribal people. These people have traditionally relied on the forests to harvest fuelwood, medicinal plants, and other small-scale forest products that

augment their livelihoods and serve as vital supplies for survival. However, indigenous tribes find it more difficult to uphold their traditional way of life and gain access to essential resources as a result of increased conservation efforts and limits on forest access.

With a primarily agrarian economy, they frequently face barriers to accessing modern healthcare, education, and infrastructure because of their rural locations and insufficient government support. Their main sources of income are traditional livelihoods like handicrafts and shifting agriculture, but low productivity and restricted market access impede economic growth. High rates of malnutrition and restricted access to healthcare are caused by poverty and a lack of economic possibilities, which exacerbates the cycle of poverty. These communities are further marginalized by sociocultural constraints such as prejudice based on caste and gender. The need for ongoing efforts to improve the socioeconomic status of the tribal population in Koraput district is highlighted by persistent challenges in infrastructure, education, healthcare, and livelihood opportunities, despite efforts to promote inclusive development through various government schemes.

6. CONCLUSION

The examination of favorable sex ratios among tribals, particularly in the undivided Koraput district of Odisha, underscores the intricate interplay of socio-cultural, economic, and healthcare factors. The case study sheds light on the unique dynamics within tribal communities, highlighting the importance of cultural traditions, gender norms, and access to healthcare services. While the phenomenon of favorable sex ratios presents a positive indicator of gender equity and social development, further research is needed to understand its nuances and implications for policy and intervention strategies aimed at sustaining the well-being of tribal populations in Odisha and beyond. So, after burying all the bad habits and prejudices in the heart, take this oath on the nectar festival of freedom, the Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav to respect women and develop the country. All these things aside, one thing we can all know from the experience and statistics of the world is that the per capita income is higher in the places where the gender ratio is in favor of women.

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Appendix 1: Population of Scheduled Tribes of Undivided Koraput District

<i>Tribe Names</i>	<i>Population as Per Census</i>					
	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001	2011
Bagata	1369	21	627	498	252	21
Baiga	05	04	45	147	20	01
Babhara, Banjari	427	565	1870	2645	2557	77
Bathudi	05	02	33	881	245	141
Bhottoda, Dhotada	156251	190979	233916	26993	338673	78649
Bhuiya, Bhuyan	230	6262	378	5785	2559	198
Bhumia	49584	61501	74740	108784	102814	52576
Bhumij	06	19	462	1083	2526	669
Bhunja	--	1635	1851	2254	2057	49
Binjhal	05	10	68	255	116	23
Binjhia, Binjhoa	--	--	81	307	28	71
Birhor	13	--	03	--	04	04
Bondo Poraja	4677	5334	5854	6863	9303	58
Chenchu	52	--	13	152	3	00
Al	01	--	07	489	37	13
Desua Bhumij	--	03	56	137	79	56
Dharua	4865	6318	7189	10209	7202	8402
Didayi	1978	2164	1971	5324	7322	98
Gadaba	42035	46237	56413	66781	72225	68677
Gandia	--	16	07	329	15	34
Ghara	132	1191	2099	2489	858	31
Gond, Gondo	54760	66991	88571	126526	139036	612
Ho	62	112	30	148	159	44
Holva	3955	5501	8193	11732	9522	3061
Jatapu	10583	7802	17769	4186	13440	95
Juang	154	09	12	136	28	02
Kandha Gouda	--	532	2784	3966	7810	1085
Kawar	87	04	125	228	245	14
Kharia, Kharian	350	85	258	310	542	132
Kharwar	--	--	18	--	3	23
Khond, Kond, Kandha	269901	325144	369231	414206	555231	195154
Kisan	41	04	136	392	343	383
Kol	167	46	155	67	86	17
Kolab Loharas, Kol Loharas	--	3561	1385	1227	851	25
Kolha	743	213	275	1632	842	186
Koli Malhar	03	213	275	108	169	84
Kond Dora	15301	8129	15967	16000	21418	4141

<i>Tribe Names</i>	<i>Population as Per Census</i>					
	<i>1961</i>	<i>1971</i>	<i>1981</i>	<i>1991</i>	<i>2001</i>	<i>2011</i>
Kora	432	25	282	1244	369	18
Korua	07	808	74	93	20	00
Kotia	3447	7022	13555	14978	13192	3378
Koya	53583	58724	87052	141509	121479	341
Kulis	--	--	03	403	78	09
Lodha	33	--	02	1209	162	05
Madia	36	658	33	486		155
Mahali	947	110	106	428	402	74
Mankidi	--	22	06	191	4	07
Mankirdia	--	--	03	65		00
Matya	1119	2594	2807	2781	2543	920
Mirdhas	732	10	32	139	109	05
Munda, Munda Lohara	5887	1517	4612	2296	3409	405
Mundari	03	--	53	365	72	16
Omanatya	14096	17254	18791	24489	222567	17463
Oraon	--	18	177	604	939	537
Parenga	6702	3029	9377	4673	12357	8296
Poroja	137749	193736	248304	322545	295375	221828
Pentias	4112	4349	4856	8764	6842	9632
Rajuar	11	02	131	256	15	00
Bantal	990	1677	1644	7932	7176	1087
Saora, Savar, Saura, Sabara	36161	28359	45941	21064	63899	3126
Shabar, Lodha	16628	35490	29972	12813	36667	799
Saunti	439	01	26	108	153	47
Tharua	03	50	33	59	58	152
Unclassified	396	55203	--	--	16516	***
Total	901255	1151321	1359858	1636079	2103023	697583

Source: Census Reports of respective years from 1961-2011