

Women's well being and development in Himachal Pradesh: A district level analysis

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Abstract

Himachal Pradesh has shown remarkable progress in women's development within a short span of four decades. Women are repositories of culture and traditional knowledge. Status of women and their progress is important for evolution of society. The state has shown high sex ratio (972), female literacy (76%) and work participation. Inequalities are negligible. Urbanization is a recent driving force, changing the stable society and strong institutions. Areas which are more urbanized will have higher values compared to remote areas lacking transport. Sex ratio is a determining factor. Ownership of land and distance from urban areas would affect work participation. Education levels would be higher in places which are accessible.

Key words:

Introduction

Himachal Pradesh as a state had started developing since 1975 after its creation. In spite of having the least level of urbanization, it has made remarkable progress in alleviating poverty and transforming their lifestyle for the past four decades. In no time its development became the archetype for policy makers and scholars. The state had witnessed rapid transformation in social aspects such as health and education including reduction in infant mortality rate, fertility, mortality, female literacy, education, state domestic product in comparison to India. Its status as a special category state and its strategic location has also contributed much towards its development by attracting funds from the central government. Society in the state is more egalitarian as landless households are less; wages in agriculture are considerably

higher and lesser inequality in income. Employment of people in the public sector and remittances received further boosted the process of development. Other contributing factors are high agricultural production; higher proportion of workers in rural nonfarm sector and Horticulture practices. Politics at grass roots level, accountability of elected members and active involvement of Panchayat Raj Institutions have also fostered development. One of the other factors of development has also been the liberal attitudes towards the women. Women in the hills have been keeper of culture and indigenous knowledge. They enjoy preferably higher status in the society owing to their economic productivity (Bhati and Singh, 1987). In the mountains they are financially independent and decision makers in the household work etc (Sethi R. M, 1989), as men migrate out for livelihood,

often performing men's role (Anand. A and Josse, 2002). This participation in decision making empowers them and eliminates exploitation. But their contributions to national income remain unaccounted due to the underestimating of domestic work. This in a way is compensated for the hours of unpaid work. (Boserup, 1980 et.al).

Research Question

What is the pattern of women's development and well being with respect to accessibility and effect of urbanization with respect to Himalayan topography?

Objectives:

In the light of the above discussion the objectives are as follows:

- To study the socioeconomic transformation of women by observing the levels of education, work, health, marriage and ownership of property at district level, across two decades.
- To observe the aspects of women's development in relation to the accessibility and variability of the topography and the level of urbanization.
- **Study Area:** The study will cover all twelve the districts of Himachal Pradesh substantiated with a case study from the Kangra district as reference data for a comprehensive analysis.

Database and Methodology:

For the proper analysis of the topic data was procured from the B and C series of the Census of India, 1991, 2001, and 2011. Statistical Abstracts of Himachal Pradesh were referred to for relevant information.

Also the Agricultural Census 2000-01 and 2010-11 was dealt upon for ownership related data.

The Methodology is a blend of both qualitative and quantitative analysis. A development index is constructed having different aspects of education, employment, health and possession of operational holdings by women. These aspects will bring about the scenario for the female population of the state which will be studied district-wise and will be compared to urbanization and the Transport network (accessibility). The variables are summarized and were converted into percentages before being standardized and compiled into composite index. The state of Himachal Pradesh is unique in a varied ways, women's development and progress in aspects such as literacy, employment, health and political participation has been achieved. In spite of its close proximity to Punjab and Haryana which lag behind in the latter aspects and bear strong patriarchal hegemony, women here are more progressive and empowered taking decisions at least at household level. Therefore our study attempts to understand the level of well being, its causes and changes over decades at district level. The study is divided in the analysis of the aspects of development in the initial part followed by correlation between urbanization and transport network with the development index of the districts of Himachal Pradesh. Urbanization and road density was taken as independent variables and composite index as the dependent.

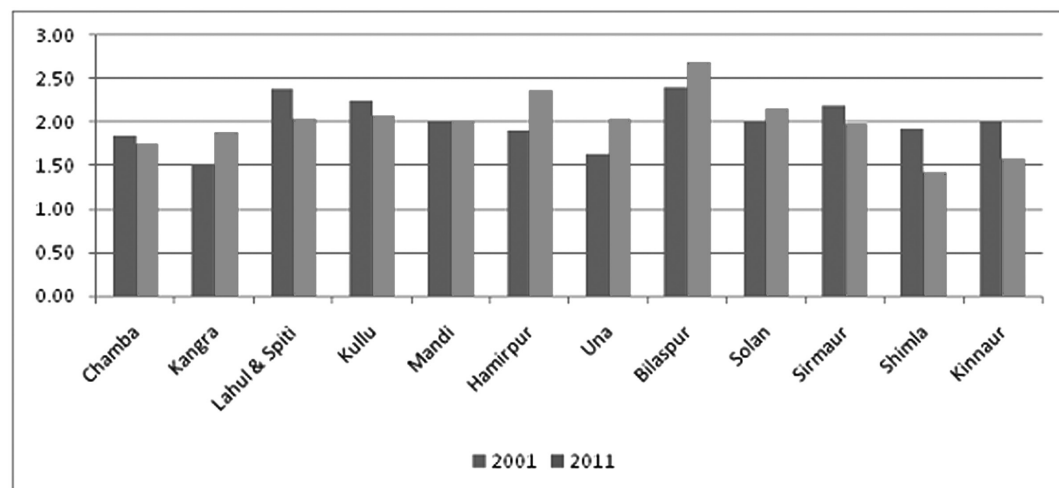
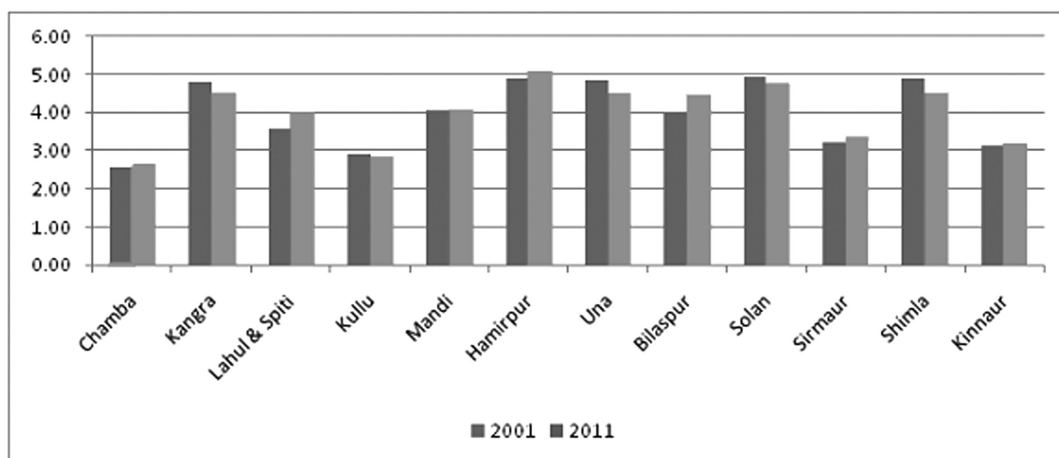
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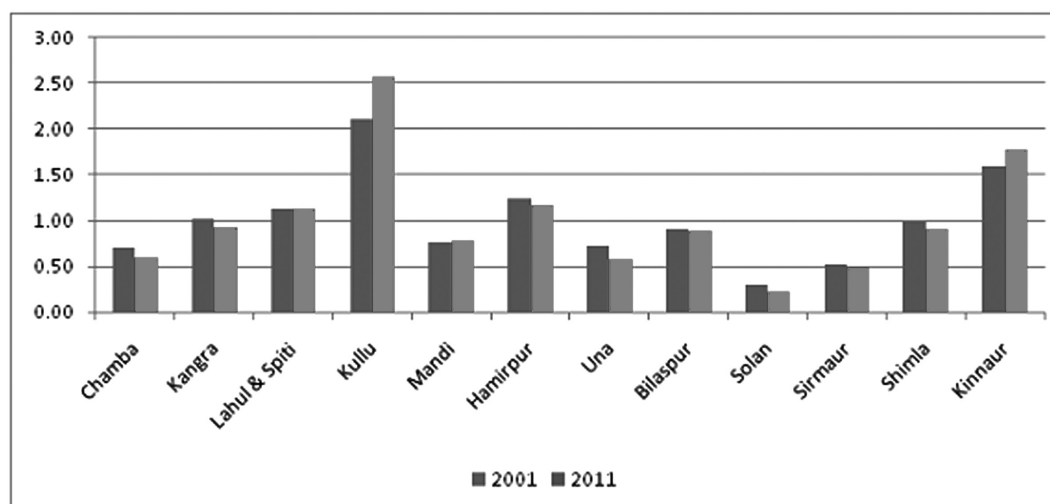
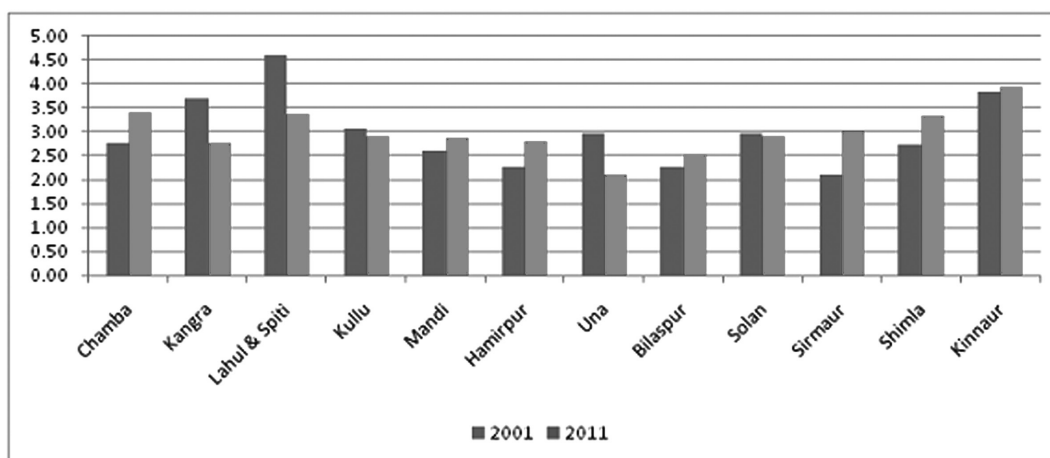
Education: The States education has grown by leaps and bounds. Literacy rate

rose from 32% in 1971 to 77% in 2001. Evaluation of the Education Index as depicted in Figure 1.a using the variables such as literacy, level of education, vocational training, graduation, and teacher pupil ratio of females reveals that Chamba and Kullu had the lowest values. Districts fairing well in education were the more urbanized districts of Kangra, Mandi, Hamirpur, Una, Bilaspur, Solan and Shimla were above 4 in 2001 and 2011.

Education Index

Health: Himachal Pradesh has a stable population with low infant mortality and mortality rates. Lot of NGOs and government agencies are providing health services. The Figure 1.b shows that in terms of Health Index, Kangra and Una were most developed, while Sirmaur is one of the most backward districts in terms of health. Solan has the highest urbanisation and population growth (Ray. S, 2007) Even





though the mean age at marriage is low, fertility in the state still remains low. (Ram. Bali, 2012). Fertility reduction has taken place for both educated and illiterate women and has brought about development in the state. It has strong association with health and human development indicators although the possible causes maybe economic growth and social evolution. Health index was constructed after taking variables such as treatment received by women. Even though the mean age at marriage is low, fertility in the state still remains low. (Ram. Bali, 2012).

Health Index

Employment: The women's work participation has witnessed gradual increase over decades. The absence of taboos and the active involvement of service delivery institutions were the casual factors along with the implementation of NREGA, which provided an opportunity for work with timely payment. However, the decline in the women's work participation rates between 2001 and 2011 from 48.4% to 41.1% has been attributed to the displacement related

distress caused by the developmental projects. The nascence of big development projects has deprived the local community of the resources and its access to it. (Rinki. M, 2005)

In estimating their work participation in non agricultural activities, it was found that Hamirpur, Bilaspur and Sirmour had values below 1.5, while Chamba, Kullu, Mandi, Una, Solan and Shimla have values ranging between 1.5 and 2.5. Kangra, Lahaul and Spiti and Kinnaur have values above 2.5 in 2001 as depicted in Figure 1.c. The picture changes a little in 2011 as only Bilaspur holds the lowest value, Hamirpur, Simaur, have improved to 1.5-2.5, while Kangra and Lahaul and Spiti declined below 2.5.

Operational Holdings: Himachal Pradesh has large number of self cultivating proprietors as outside labour is absent. It was in 1963 that Himachal Pradesh did away with large holdings, granting rights to tenants with the inception of Abolition of Big Landed Estates and Land Reforms Act 1963. Provision of the law changed the agrarian structure and facilitated equal distribution of surplus land. Though the role of women in agriculture and forest based industry is well known, women often were unpaid labourers and faced discrimination. Feminization in agriculture is due to withdrawal of men and women participation and contribution as cultivators was high. Much of ownership and control of land rests with men in spite of most work being done by women. (Sethi, R. M, 1989). It often does not indicate higher status or empowerment as participation might be poverty induced. In an index depicting operational holdings held

by women in Figure 1.d Kullu stood with the highest value of 2.11 in 2001, while districts of Kangra, Lahaul and Spiti, Hamirpur and Kinnaur has values ranging from 1-2. Rest of the districts such as Chamba, Mandi, Una, Bilaspur, Solan etc have few women as operational holders below 1. The trend changes in 2011 when more districts have values below 1 except Lahaul and Spiti and Hamirpur.

II

Operational Holdings Index

Migration and modernization and Urbanisation have pushed century's old tradition and institutions on the verge of extinction. It was only in 1971 that urban growth started taking place with the first Class I town, Shimla appearing in 1991. The process of industrialisation has also influenced the economic sphere of people's life by increasing income, employment opportunities and improving education and other infrastructural facilities. This has led to the modernization of infrastructure. Increase in medical facilities road networks and banking network was also found. (Sharma V. K, et.al.)

The comparative study of the composite index constructed for the aspects of education, employment, health and ownership of land shows remarkable results as presented in Figure.2. The remotest and least developed districts such as Lahaul and Spiti in 2001 had the highest value of 11.68, indicating the highest level of women's development. It was followed by Kangra and Kinnaur. The high level of women's development in Lahaul and Spiti and Kinnaur could be attributed to commendable birth control

and low fertility rates. The development of Kangra is attributed to better facilities of schools and vocational centres. Shimla being the most urbanised district has better education facilities and has greater proportion of women employed as other workers. However, its fertility rates are below average and demands improvement. Least development for women was observed in the districts of Chamba, Sirmaur and Mandi.

In the year 2011, the districts of Hamirpur and Bilaspur has seen a rise in the level of women's development and joins the other districts of Lahaul and Spiti and Kullu of ranking in the top. These districts having hilly terrain have found no impediments to the growth of women development. This shows that even in the least accessible districts the women remain well informed and empowered. More women are employed be it in agriculture and more of them are literate. The fertility rates have shown improvement for the districts of Hamirpur and Bilaspur. The number of women employed as other workers and households have increased over the years. The districts which have consistently been least developed over the decade was Chamba and Sirmaur with lower values marginally improving by 0.3 and 0.75. Una has been a new addition to it which has been the only district showing a decline in the index from 10.17 to 9.25. Most of the districts on the other hand have seen marginal increase or decline such as Kullu, Mandi, Solan, Shimla, Kinnaur etc.

III

On analysis of all the variables for women's well being and development it

was found that in 2001 Urbanisation had a slight positive correlation with education. However, it had a strong positive correlation with women who had completed their graduation. Also, the level of urbanization had no significant correlation with the health indicators. The sex ratio of the state has shown a steep decline over the years starting from 1991 from 976 to 970 and the value dipped further down to 800 in nearly 40 percent of the villages. Introduction of technology aiding in pre birth sex determination is the major factor in accelerated rate of female foeticide. Government has designed several policies to grapple the issue. Its rich culture had always given women higher status and honour. However influences of nearby States have slowly crept into their culture. (Punam. S)

The negative correlation values of -0.38 and -0.24 indicate that the increase in urbanisation does not guarantee the increase in women employed in the household industries and other than household industry. The development of agriculture was a major contributing factor. Climatic conditions favour the cultivation of high value crops and horticulture. Cultivation of high value crops increases non-farm employment which has strong backward and forward linkages. Eg trade, food processing and cottage industries. In recent years occupational diversification and shift from traditional activities took place within the household. Intra generational mobility happened as a result. (Kumar. A, 2004)

Road density commands a positive correlation of 0.63 and 0.52 with schooling and vocational training of women. Women who are graduate have very slight positive correlation with roads which clearly rules

out limitation of access to higher education institution considering the physical terrain. On the other hand road density shows negative correlation with fertility, birth control and the proportion of women employed as household industrial worker and other workers. This indicates that the problem of accessibility to not stand as an impediment to the improvement of fertility and employment scenario of the state.

In the year 2011, Urbanisation had positive but negligible correlation with the aspects of education for women's development. Stronger relationship was found among Graduate women with a coefficient of 0.62. Birth control is ineffective with the change in urbanization,

however fertility rates show a positive correlation with urbanization. This is because there are another numerous factors that influence the use of contraception. The standard of living of a family determines their accessibility to the usage of the same. Women's status and, their educational attainment, employment status, and their position in the family, are the factors that influence family size. . In other words, the right of women and her choice to decide independently and responsibly on the number and spacing of children has a decisive impact on their ability to take advantage of educational and employment opportunities and to participate fully in societal activities. (Tejinder Kaur & A.

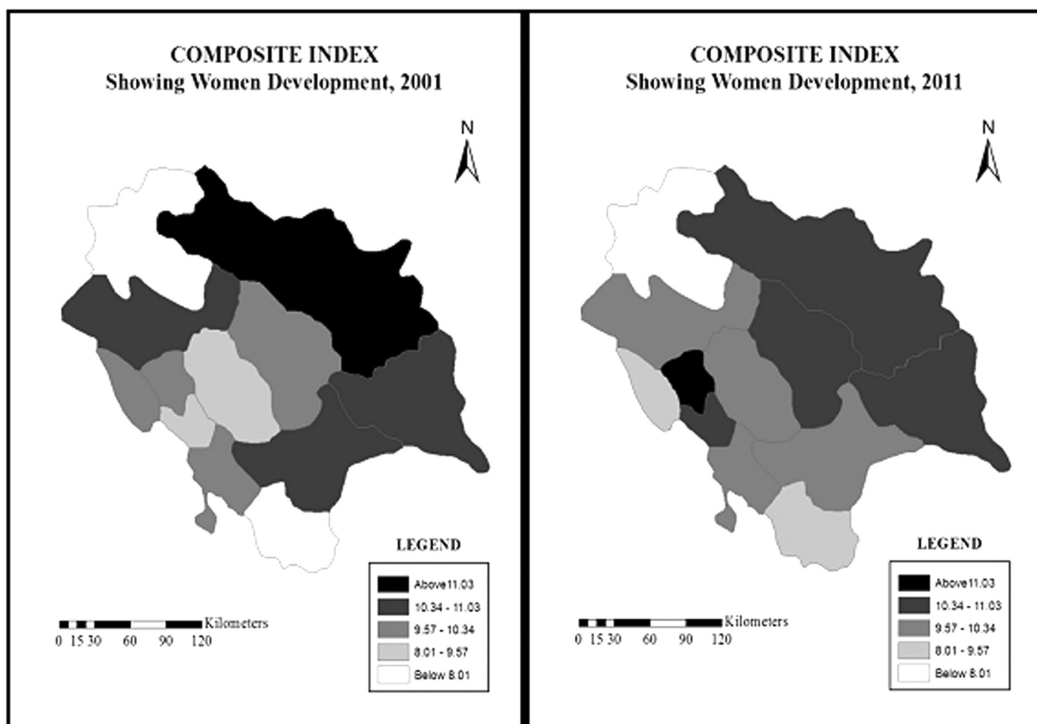


Fig. 2 : Showing Composite Index, Himachal Pradesh, 2001 and 2011

K. Sinha, 2011). Urbanisation also shows a negative correlation with the ownership of operational landholdings indicating that the increase in the urbanisation curbs the possession of land by women.

The network of transportation in the year 2011 shows positive correlation with schooling and vocational training among women having values of 0.77 and 0.641 respectively. Road network has slight positive correlation of 0.43 with general fertility rate. Birth control use in this decade has shown weaker but positive relation in comparison to previous decade. This portrays that road density determines the accessibility of the people in having better awareness in birth control. The better performance of the districts in the remote areas in terms of birth control indicates that the government has taken up the priority to provide basic healthcare services irrespective of its status and physical remoteness. Also, government had actively promoted family planning and ensured the free provision of contraceptives.

Study on present status of women Panchayat in Himachal Pradesh reveals how several acts have resulted in women's participation in politics at grassroots. Women face social and family barriers. Women over 30 to 35 percent were represented the most and widowed, divorced, or single were marginally represented. Women elected as Pradhan majority cases were house wives. The following map represents the composite index across decades.

Himachal Pradesh has the highest female headed household in North India as per 2001 census. (Bose. A, 2006). Women participate in agriculture, hold government jobs and are key decision makers. Districts

like Kangra, Hamirpur, Una, Mandi have high female literacy rates but low sex ratio with urbanised population. Districts with low literacy have better child sex ratio, indicating inverse relationship between literacy and sex ratio. Government schemes and reservations have shown good outcomes. Change in Social attitude is essential for empowerment of women. Sanghaik, (2014). Women from nuclear families are more empowered in comparison to joint families. Women are decision makers when it comes to household work, child care and peripheral areas of domestic work.

Conclusion

Himachal Pradesh has been successful in reducing poverty, uplifting the women, SCs and STs. Poverty has reduced from 36.5% in 1994 to 8.5% in 2011. Land reforms made equitable distribution of land in small holdings. Women now report themselves as being self employed or likely to have salaried jobs thereby lowering inequalities. Education, better health facilities, Tourism and politicians being accountable to the people, transparency and strong local institutions are the underlying factors for the states development. Another contributing factor is the emerging drug trade throughout the state which is a lucrative source of income for the younger generation, is bringing about major change.

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