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Dwindling Sex Ratio in Jammu & Kashmir: A Case Study

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Abstract:

The state of Jammu and Kashmir stood as an example, holding gender and cultural equality, which kept women with high esteem and little chances of their elimination. But the neighboring impacts of Punjab and Haryana specifically spread its paws to our state as well. There were times when the fairer sex was the most exploited lot. And those dark clouds have still not vanished away. Their capabilities were never applauded, they were never shouldered responsibilities, and they were not entrusted with tasks that men would usually do, they were denied access to education, and their opportunities were usually curtailed. And they were just expected to follow certain specific cultural norms that have been their lot since the life of Nethanderal human beings. Contrary to the traditional means of bearing daughters after daughters just to have the required number of sons, the modern technology has facilitated sacrifice of unborn daughters. And the technological ones are playing the villains. The pre-natal diagnosis doesn't allow the girl child to see the light of the world. With the ongoing velocity of fertility transition, couples are rather forced to achieve a desired sex composition of children. Women's empowerment in India still has a long way to go even when women have come out of their cocoons and proved their worth. Though India is rising, but so is gender and space inequality. Along with rise in population size, there is evidence of maleness in sex ratio in general as well as in child sex ratio in particular. The 2011 census has exposed that all districts of the Valley has fewer than 900 girls for every 1,000 boys in the "below six years" category. The overall gender ratio in the state for this age group has dwindled from 941 in 2001 to 859 in 2011. This lowering sex ratio over the last few decades reveals a continuing imbalance in the gender relations and has restated the fact that there is a stark gender disparity at the very basic levels, starting at birth. The sharp decline in female sex ratios over the years suggests that female foeticide and infanticide might be primarily responsible for this phenomenon followed by general neglect of the girl child. Gender differentials are not controlled by individuals. Moreover, gender differentials are not poverty-bound; instead they are wide-spread among all income and rural-urban groups. This report is expected to provide vital clues for policy makers to decide on emerging areas for research on declining child sex ratio in Jammu & Kashmir.

Keywords: Declining Sex Ratio, J&K State, Female Infanticide and Foeticide, Dowry, Gender Disparity

1. Introduction

To measure the extent of the prevailing equity between males and females in a society at a given point of time, sex ratio is an important social indicator. An alteration in sex-ratio largely reveals the elementary socio-economic and cultural patterns of a society in diverse ways. Girl child in India faces elimination and discrimination in their very right to live. Generally, daughters are underestimated compared to sons. In most cases, a girl child is discriminated against since the time she sees the light of the day. She is abandoned in fewer cases. She gets less of nurturing and play, lesser medical treatment if falls ill and that does bring about gender inequality. But with the advancement in technology in medical diagnosis, this inequality begins even before her birth. The sex of the child is identified before the birth and selective abortion is the way out, if found female. A gross misuse of technology, it is and it's happening in spite of umpteen legal regulations banning the same. There are most barbaric acts against the fairer sex, starting from dowry deaths to female infanticide and female foeticide. A multifaceted blend of economic, social and cultural factors is responsible for this. And this happens all over the broad horizons of India. Declining sex ratio is an issue of grave apprehension in India and especially in our home state. This sharp decline in the child sex ratio in the last decade clearly attests the practice of female foeticide. It is a matter of great concern, as it will lead to serious demographic disparities and adverse social consequences.

2. Jammu & Kashmir: Trends in Declining Sex-Ratio

Jammu and Kashmir, the crown of India, is the 19th most populated state, as per the census 2011. It has population of 1.25 Crore, which has increased from 1.01 Crore in 2001 census. But what is alarming is the sex ratio. Sex Ratio in Jammu and Kashmir is 883

per 1000 males, which is below national average of 940 as per census 2011. In 2001, the sex ratio of female was 900 per 1000 males in Jammu and Kashmir.

Six valley districts have recorded a sharp decline in juvenile sex ratio: Pulwama, Budgam, Kupwara, Ganderbal, Shopian and Anantnag. Though the fall in sex-ratio has been recorded across the length and breadth of the state, Leh and Kargil are comparatively better placed. Moreover cities have turned into a sexual nightmare. The 2011 census has already highlighted the downward trend in sex ratio in both urban and rural areas but the figures are distressing in urban areas. The highly literate districts are seen most prone to this declining trend, pointing out that illiteracy is not the reason.

Year	2011	2001
Population	1.25 Crore	1.01 Crore
Male	6,665,561	5,360,926
Female	5,883,365	4,782,774
Sex Ratio	883	900
Child Sex Ratio	859	964
Total Child Population (0-6 Age)	2,008,642	1,485,803
Male Population (0-6 Age)	1,080,662	765,394
Female Population (0-6 Age)	927,980	720,409

Table 1

Source: <http://www.census2011.co.in/census/state/jammu+and+kashmir.html>

Pre-birth elimination of females (PBEF) seems to be more established in urban areas than in rural areas, but the gap is rapidly decreasing because of easy availability of sex determination tests in rural areas.

	Rural	Urban
Total Population	9,134,820	3,414,106
Male Population	4,809,619	1,855,942
Female Population	4,325,201	1,558,164
Population Growth	19.77 %	35.66 %
Sex Ratio	899	840
Child Sex Ratio (0-6)	860	854
Child Population (0-6)	1,596,076	412,566
Child Percentage (0-6)	17.47 %	12.08 %

Table 2: Sex ratio is worst in Urban than rural areas.

Source: <http://www.census2011.co.in/census/state/jammu+and+kashmir.html>

These figures speak of coming doom; the paradise on earth is no more heavenly for the girl child. The sex-ratio in Jammu & Kashmir state has come down to a low 883 females per 1000 males as per 2011 census. The Child Sex Ratio (CSR) is shockingly 859. The figure was 964, a decade back. These figures are even low than the national average which is 940 females per 1000 males whereas the CSR figure is 944.

There were times when United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) described Jammu and Kashmir as a state where no female foeticide took place. The good times were in 1994-96. There are fewer girls per 1000 boys, in our state, now. It has seen the single largest decline in sex ratio in the country, according to 2011 census as compared to 2001 census. The state has recorded a sharp decline in sex ratio in the last 10 years setting an alarming trend.

District	2001	2011	Variation
Pulwama	1046	836	-210
Budgam	1004	832	-172
Kupwara	1021	854	-167
Ganderbal	1014	863	-151
Anantnag	977	832	-145
Shopian	1011	883	-128
Kulgam	1003	882	-121
Baramulla	961	866	-95
Bandipore	967	893	-74
Rajouri	905	837	-68
Poonch	959	895	-64
Srinagar	928	869	-59

Kishtwar	977	922	-55
Ramban	968	931	-37
Reasi	952	921	-31
Doda	959	932	-27
Udhampur	912	887	-25
Jammu	819	795	-24
Kathua	847	836	-11
Samba	798	787	-11
Leh	955	944	-11
Kargil	980	978	-2
J & K State	941	859	-82

Table 3: Juvenile Gender Ratio: a comparison

Source: "Infanticide Cases on Rise" by Dinesh Manhotra (The Tribune dated September 16, 2012)

2.1. Causes: Socio –Cultural Factors Declining Sex Ratio

- This declining sex ratio has sounded alarm bells in the state. Female foeticide seems to be gaining ground in Jammu and Kashmir. It speaks of secondary status of girl-child.
- Though technology facilitates a series of pre-natal diagnostics which identifies and cures any potential defects. But then, these scientific tools are misused. It is giving rise to selective-abortion, after pre-natal sex determination.
- The steep rise in sex-crimes has also been attributed to unequal sex ratio. There were 1194 molestation cases in 2011, against 1038 in 2010. Moreover there were 350 cases of eve-teasing in 2011; a rise from 262 in 2010.
- Due to poverty and illiteracy, there is a stigma about girl child. She is considered to be a burden and a damper on ambitions of family. She is considered to be a consumer rather than a producer. Whereas the birth of a boy is seen as a medium to raise the economic standard of the family.
- Girl child becomes a victim of gross nutritional and health neglect. More females succumb to childhood illness and this indirectly impacts the Child Sex Ratio (CSR).
- Family and social pressures to produce a son are enormous. In most regions, sons are desired for reasons related to kinship, inheritance, marriage, identity, status and economic security. A penchant for boys cuts across caste and class lines and results in discrimination against girls even before they are born.
- Reluctance towards having daughters and other socio-cultural factors discourage women to give birth to daughters.
- Son preference has been one of the most evident expressions of patriarchal society. It has worked against the female sex particularly in their infancy and early childhood.
- A son brings in dowry and is a support in old age, he doesn't drain family resources and investment on sons always remain within the family very unlike girls who have to move to other families .
- The main reason for not wanting to have a daughter is the fear of 'Dowry' practice. The practice of giving/taking dowry has not changed over the years. Rather there are more cases of 'dowry harassment' every year.
- The growing of ultra-sound clinics and the ability to pay for abortions is a major factor responsible for declining sex ratio.
- J&K non-seriousness in implementing Pre-conception and Pre-natal Diagnostics (PC & PNDT) act. This act supposedly has only 84 registered ultrasound clinics. Doctors involved in sex-determination tests is almost a zero and there is nil-conviction rate.
- Neglect of girl-child results in higher female mortality, maternal death, dowry death and female infanticide.

The declining sex-ratio in the state has sent tremors across all sections of society. It points that the socio-economic factors are so tightly entrenched in the psyche that they even accept wrong ways for the sake of social supremacy. It's not poverty alone that kills baby girls. They are most prone and vulnerable to diseases and infections, leading to poor health and shorter lifespan.

3. Recommendations

Voicing concern over the declining sex ratio in the state, the J&K has got sealed 78 clinics for conducting pre-natal sex determination tests, which are most prevalent in urban areas. Declining sex ratio has now been increasingly recognized as a complex and an urgent problem and needs to be addressed head on. The commitment of civil society in general, is most important.

- Only a strong public awareness can curb the evil practice of female foeticide.
- Strengthening the implementation of the Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Regulation and Prevention of Misuse) Act, 1994, which prohibits determination and disclosure of the sex of the foetus, and Prohibition of Dowry Act, is need of the hour.
- Government should involve religious and political leaders for spreading awareness against female foeticide and also involve local sarpanchs and panchs as they deal with public at gross root level.
- The purpose should be to give women their fair place in the society and make them feel that they are inferior to none. The development in a country has no meaning if the society does little against discrimination.

- Stress should be laid on spreading awareness about gender equality and also on keeping a check on suspected hospitals, which are involved in dreadful practice of sex selection.
- Ultra-sound clinics in the states should be sealed at the earliest and legal proceedings should be initiated against people involved in violating PNDT.
- There should be rigorous campaigns against foeticide and infanticide.
- Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) need to be restructured.
- Policies should be devised that allow girl child to live after her birth.
- A multi-sectoral meeting should be brain-stormed. It's not only the responsibility of Health Ministry and Women & Child but also of Rural Development, Education, Info and Broadcasting, Science and Technology and Panchayati Raj.
- Awareness should be spread through local media, community radio, TV channels, local cultural performances and street theatres.
- Not only the girl child be allowed to be born but also to go on and lead productive and self-fulfilling lives.
- The craze for son should be avoided and a son and a daughter should be looked up, treated and educated properly and equally.
- Declining Sex-ratio is not a problem restricted narrowly to the issue of decreasing birth of girl children but is central to women's rights, gender equality and gender justice.
- Banks need to be encouraged to give loans for the education of girl child at low rates of interest.
- Eye should be kept on the expecting mothers who cross Lakhanpur, as it has been observed secretly that people visit the neighboring states for the determination and if found girl, they return after eliminating it. So , it lies on the onus of J&K government that it works hands and hands with other states' governments.
- Strict and stern action should be taken against the culprits

Otherwise the day is not far away that J&K will have to bring in brides from other states like Punjab and Haryana.

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