

Gender Discrimination and Inequality – A Concern for Indian Society

Meenakshi Dhingra¹, Anju Duhan² and Satbir Singh³

^{1,2}Haryana School of Business, Guru Jambheshwar University of Science & Technology, Hisar, Haryana

³Haryana School of Business, Guru Jambheshwar University of Science & Technology, Hisar, Haryana, 125001

E-mail: ¹meenakshiphd2016@gmail.com, ²duhananju2010@gmail.com, ³nainsatbir@gmail.com.

Abstract—The problem of gender discrimination exists not only in poor and backwards states but also in the developed regions of the country as well. In India the core reason behind gender discrimination is basically the existence of a paternalistic society, where a man is always preferred over woman. For centuries guessing the sex of the unborn child has been a popular activity amongst expectant parents and their families. The often asked question is “Can you tell if it’s a boy or a girl”. Sex selective abortions and female infanticide have become a social phenomenon in several parts of India. The girl children are targeted to attack even before they are born. In some states, parents who cannot afford prenatal sex determination are attempting female infanticide. This kind of negative mind set of society is creating an alarming condition for society as well as for the government of India. The present study aims to explore the current status of gender discrimination in India, and its causes, child sex ratio in North West region in India and present legislation for women empowerment. The study further intends to discuss the solutions for gender discrimination.

1. INTRODUCTION

Discrimination is a very broad concept and a very poor thinking of the society that women come after men. It is stated that women and men share many phases of their living together, cooperate with each other throughout life, still end up with very different rewards and deprivations in the society [9]. In India women do constitute an important place in the development of the economy. However, despite of the increase in their participation and zeal to work with more efficiency and effectiveness as compared to men, they are still facing discrimination in the society. If we closely see the societal structure and analyse the mind-set of the people living in villages, it is very surprising to see that those who prefer men over women or a boy over a girl child, are mostly females. So, in a way it is clear that women themselves are promoting this custom of discrimination against other women and till the time this thought process is not taken out of the mind of these women, who practices it themselves, till then the problem of female foeticide, infanticide, pre-birth sex determination, crime against women etc. could not be removed or it could not be thrown out of the society.

Though we have developed or though we have changed or we pretend that we have changed our mind-set and we try to follow the western countries in our dressing, in our approach and in our routines, but the development which is required that is the development of the brain, has not been to such an extent that we understand that men and women are equal. The social status of women is still in a dark phase and the goal of providing equal rights to women in all facets has been neglected totally. This problem of negligence is not only the poor or backward states, but also in the developed states [2].

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Customarily and notably, though the Indian male dominated culture considers a woman as a member of the family or a group, she is not viewed with her own distinct identity [1]. In India the core reason behind gender discrimination is basically the existence of a paternalistic society, wherein it has been socially and culturally acceptable to devalue women’s contributions to society and to their workplace as well. These myths are deeply rooted in Indian society and are seemingly almost unshakeable [3]. Female foetuses are selectively aborted after prenatal sex determination, thus avoiding the birth of girls. The consequence of this sex-selective abortion is about 35-40 million girls are missing from Indian population. The sex ratio has altered consistently in favour of boys and the effect is more pronounced in the states of Punjab, Haryana and Delhi [4]. Another means of elimination of girl child is the practice of female infanticide. Infanticide as “Killing of an entirely dependent child under one year of age who is killed by mother, parents or others in whose care the child is entrusted” [7]. It is reported that female infanticide existed in India since 1789 in several districts of Rajasthan, Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh. Poverty, ignorance of family planning, cost of dowry etc. have been reported as possible causes for this crime [12]. Such violent acts have attacked the dignity of women as human beings and have left them vulnerable. The twin process of ‘elimination of unborn daughters’ and the ‘slow killing’ through neglect and discrimination of those that are born has

become a matter of concern [11]. Experts warn that demographic crisis will lead to increase in sexual violence and abuse against women and female children, trafficking, increasing child marriage, increase in polyandry practice etc. There are certain reasons as well for this discrimination. The various factors responsible for gender inequality are Social Factors, such as ignorance, illiteracy; Economic factors such as unemployment, low wage, under employment; and Political factors such as low participation of women in the elections and other elected bodies etc. [8]. For eliminating gender discrimination E⁴SD factors (Education, Employment, Economic Independence, Empowerment, Self-confidence, Decision Making) would be very helpful [10].

3. CONSTITUTIONAL PRIVILEGES AND SPECIAL INITIATIVES FOR WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Women empowerment is considered to be one of the solutions to eradicate the problem of gender discrimination. To avoid this situation and to eradicate discrimination, the legislature as well as the government has adopted various mechanisms/means to ensure that the women do not face any discrimination. In this regard there are some laws which have been developed which are for the protection of women similarly to the laws made for protection of the weaker sections of the society.

- (i) Equality before law for women (Article 14)
- (ii) The State not to discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them (Article 15 (i))
- (iii) The State to make any special provision in favour of women and children (Article 15 (3))
- (iv) Equality of opportunity for all citizens in matters relating to employment or appointment to any office under the State (Article 16)
- (v) The State to direct its policy towards securing for men and women equally the right to an adequate means of livelihood (Article 39(a)); and equal pay for equal work for both men and women (Article 39(d))
- (vi) **National Commission for Women, 1992:** A statutory body set-up by government to observe and study all matters relating to the constitutional and legal protections provided for women, review the existing legislation to suggest amendments wherever necessary, etc.
- (vii) **National Policy for the Empowerment of Women, 2001:** The Department of Women & Child Development under MHRD has prepared a "National Policy for the Empowerment of Women" in 2001. The ultimate mission of this policy is to bring about the development, advancement and empowerment of women of the country [5].

Since the manner in which the offences against women have been changing from time to time, huge development, amendments and inclusions are being made in those laws.

Table 1: Child Sex Ratios (0-6 Years) Census 1991,2001, 2011, Selected States

Region	State	(Females per 1000 males)				
		1991	2001	Difference 2001-1991	2011	Difference 2011-2001
	India	945	927	-18	914	-13
North-West	Himachal Pradesh	951	896	-53	906	10
	Punjab	875	798	-77	846	48
	Haryana	879	819	-40	830	11
	Chandigarh	899	845	-46	867	22
	Delhi	915	868	-47	866	2
North-Central	Uttar Pradesh	928	916	-12	899	-17
	Madhya Pradesh	952	932	-20	912	-20
West	Gujarat	928	883	-45	886	3
	Rajasthan	916	909	-7	883	-16
	Maharashtra	946	913	-33	883	-30
	Goa	964	938	-26	920	-18
East	Bihar	959	942	-17	933	-9
	Jharkhand	NA	965		943	-22
	West Bengal	967	960	-7	950	-10
	Nagaland	993	964	-29	944	-20
	Orissa	967	953	-14	934	-19
South	Andhra Pradesh	975	961	-14	943	-18
	Karnataka	960	946	-14	943	-3
	Tamil Nadu	948	942	-6	946	4
	Kerala	958	960	2	959	-1

Source: Compiled from data of Census 1991, 2001 and 2011

4. STATUS OF CHILD SEX RATIO IN NORTH WEST INDIA

Census 2011 brings out the news that child sex ratio has further declined from 927 to 914 for every 1000 males indicating a decline of 13 females from 2001 to 2011 (Table 1).

Moving on to Census 2011, the state figures point to a clear difference between the north-west and the rest of India. It would appear that there has been a rise of the practice of sex selection in states like Gujarat, Haryana, Delhi and Himachal Pradesh, with small improvements from very low levels in Chandigarh and Punjab. None of the north-western states have fallen further, though they have by no means come back to 1991 levels, which were themselves well below the 950 mark. Punjab's rise from 798 to 846 (48 points) according to 2011 figures makes it now look more like its neighbours, but only a district-wise analysis would reveal where the real changes are. In Delhi the same proportion of families is resorting to sex selection as was true a decade ago. In Punjab the severity of the practice has thus only eased slightly.

According to a news report mentioning district level data for the state of Haryana, the district of Kurukshetra (which had the worst CSR of 771 in 2001) now has a CSR of 817, similar to the trend for Punjab. However, many more districts (Jhajjar, Mahendragarh, Rewari, Bhiwani, Faridabad, among others) have worse CSRs than in 2001 [6]. Whatever the "improvements" in north-west India, CSRs are falling in large parts of western, central and eastern India – Maharashtra, Goa, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh – and even Andhra Pradesh has joined the ranks from among the southern states. Of course, Tamil Nadu is well known for its history of female infanticide and sex selection. In other words, the state wise figures demonstrate a widening of the circle well beyond the so-called prosperity belt of north-west India, to the poorer states. It is likely that the "improvements" in the north-west are related to efforts at monitoring the use of sex determination testing, in contrast with its spread elsewhere. But it would be wrong to equate the two, since the picture is more complex than that. The very fact that the CSRs are falling in such a wide variety of states and then again in a heterogeneous state like Maharashtra, which has witnessed one of the steepest declines in 2011 of 30 points makes it absolutely necessary to wait for the time when a more contextual micro level understanding can be undertaken.

To give an example of such contextual analysis during the previous decade, in a study conducted by a group of researchers [6] during 2003-05 in five of the lowest CSR districts of north-west India, it became evident that within this broad belt where child sex ratios had dropped severely, local contexts were nonetheless extremely significant. Thus for instance, while Fatehgarh Sahib in Punjab demonstrated the presence of families with just one son (especially among Jat Sikhs and urban upper castes), and families in Kangra and Rohtak strived for two children (but very few with only girls), in the districts of Dholpur and Morena significant forms of

child neglect leading to high rates of mortality among girls in larger families went hand in hand with the growing practice of sex selection.

5. CONCLUSION

Gender is used as a common term however, gender discrimination is always related to females as per the traditional mind-set. Children are individuals, and yet we mold them into the genders we assign them based on their genitalia at birth. In order to eradicate the problem of gender discrimination from India, the measures taken in the form of women empowerment could prove to be very effective in this regard [8]. The focus on the issue of discrimination against girl child would be not be complete unless and until medical technologies for sex determination and their utilisation is not scrutinised and regularised effectively. Though the government has made laws and implemented it with its effective regulation, however the question still remains is that, whether all this have done enough to bring parity in the status of women and men or whether all this be able to change the poor mind-set of the society towards females.

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