

Status of girl child: A Study in Khap belt of Haryana

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Abstract

This paper aims at presenting a profile of Haryana from a gender point of view. The focus is on gender discrimination which starts at the time of birth of a girl child. The sex ratio of the state since 1901 is the indication of the status of girl child in the state of Haryana. Sex ratio is directly linked to problem of female foeticide in the state of Haryana despite of PNDR ACT, 1994. Thus the present paper is explaining gender bias in Haryana, which is reflected through a skewed sex ratio and child sex ratio along with persistent gender violence. The paper has been divided into three parts. The first part of the paper will throw a light on the district wise trends of sex ratio. The second part will be the discussion part, where the reasons will be highlighted with the help of data gathered from field areas, i.e. various districts from the state of Haryana. Finally the last section will deal with conclusion and inferences.

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I. Introduction

Constitution of India, guarantees equal rights to both men and women in India. Both men and women are important for the survival and continuation of human civilization, but reality is quite different. India is a patriarchal society, where women are not considered at equal position with men. The literature too highlights that the birth of girl child was not welcomed; rather birth of a son was celebrated. There are many cultural festivals which are celebrated on the birth of a son, like *Chhuchhak*, *Chhati*, *Kuan Pujan*, *Ahoyee ka vrat*, in Haryana and *Lohri* is celebrated in Punjab. On the contrary, women in these regions were given names like *Bathheri* meant enough, reflecting that they are not wanted. Thus the present paper is based upon Haryana, which is a progressive state economically but at social front it is still lagging behind. It had 21 districts in total and out of which 19 districts had sex ratio below 880 and child sex ratio of the state was 830 reflecting upon the poor status of girl child in Haryana (Census 2011). The state of Haryana came into being on 1st November 1966, after the reorganization of the Punjab state on linguistic basis. Hindi speaking areas of the parent state were separated from the Punjabi speaking areas and reconstituted as a new state of Haryana. The region comprising the present state of Haryana lagged behind in terms of development, when it was part of Punjab (Nayar, 1966; Rai, 1987; Siwach, 1976). Presently Haryana is a small state with an area of just 0.44 lakh sq. kms. Presently the state has four administrative divisions, comprising of 22 districts in total.

Gender Discrimination

Discriminatory attitudes towards women have existed for generations and have affected the lives of girls/women. The literature highlights that birth of a girl was regarded as a misfortune, while the birth of son was welcomed. There were numerous methods for killing a daughter after her birth, sometimes she is thrown in well and many a times she is put in a covered jar. So that she feels suffocated and finally dies. Another method which was highlighted by literature was

that sometimes 'bante' or coins are put into her mouth. Gender discrimination continued if the girl child survived, i.e. she is not given enough food to eat. Although after independence, the Constitution of India has granted equal rights to women still gender disparity continues. Chakrabarti (2006) found that economic growth has a strong influence on growing bias against women. Economic growth and gender discrimination have increased simultaneously in north India's richest states of Punjab and Haryana (Chowdhary, 1994; Gupta, 1987). Oldenburg (1992) states that low age at marriage and family structure influence gender discrimination. Mitra (1979) has linked the declining sex ratio to the oppression of women. On global scale, studies have been documented by various scholars on patterns, trends, and determinants of declining child sex ratio in India (Chakraborty and Sinha, 2006). Sangwan and Sangwan (2008) have focused on declining child sex ratio and the after effects of it on the socio-cultural milieu of society. World Development Report 2012 on Gender equality revealed that "The ratio of female to male child mortality in Haryana is worse than any country in the world" (Filmer, King and Pritchett, 1988: 22). The table 1 highlights that deteriorated status of girl child in the state of Haryana.

Table 1: District wise Sex-Ratio in Haryana (1901-2011)

District/s	Years											
	1901	1911	1921	1931	1941	1951	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001	2011
Ambala	806	753	776	785	797	807	828	882	902	903	868	885
Bhiwani	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	880	880	878	897	878	879	886
Faridabad	905	878	858	859	880	854	848	810	811	828	839	902
Fatehabad	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	853	852	870	881	877	884	873
Gurgaon	905	878	858	859	880	895	891	886	880	871	873	854
Hisar	881	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	871	866	859	859	853	851	872
Jhajjar	N.A.	856	852	864	915	911	902	903	891	861	847	862
Jind	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	849	857	860	857	838	852	871
Kaithal	845	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	849	837	843	848	853	853	881
Karnal	844	828	828	815	833	860	853	856	856	864	865	887
Kurukshetra	N.A.	826	827	815	832	858	853	859	872	879	866	888
Mahendergarh	806	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	972	961	910	939	910	918	895
Panchkula	N.A.	753	776	785	797	799	805	820	833	839	823	873
Panipat	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	866	857	852	849	852	829	864
Rewari	881	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	930	926	927	926	927	899	898
Rohtak	871	856	852	864	915	883	885	878	869	849	843	897
Sirsa	861	837	877	855	878	843	845	865	877	885	882	897
Sonepat	811	856	852	864	915	886	886	867	886	840	839	856
Yamunanagar	811	762	783	789	802	841	836	848	855	883	862	877
Mewat	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	907
Palwal	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	880

Source: Census of India-2001/11, Series 7: Haryana.

Research Objective:

The main objective of this paper is to explore the various gender discrimination practices in the State of Haryana

Research methodology:

The paper is based on both primary and secondary data. The area of the research is State of Haryana. Data was collected from Community members, both male and female, Sarpanches and Pradhans of various Khaps etc.

Section II

PREFERENCE FOR SON: FEMALE FOETICIDE

Son preference is deeply rooted in patriarchal cultural and religious beliefs that uphold the essential value of having a son in a family. Preference for son was observed to be very strong in the state of Haryana especially the Khap belt.

The preference for son is also a form of gender discrimination. Because of which, women are being neglected in every phase of life, from the time of birth till the old age, mainly due to patriarchal ideology followed by community

members. Following comments highlight the strong preference for a son and reasons why daughters are considered a liability in the Khap belt of Haryana.

Preference for a son is so strong that parents kill their daughters in the womb (female foeticide). During a group discussion a woman respondent said:

*'ladka budhape ka sahara hota hai, ladke se hi vansh aage badhta hai
ladki to apne ghar chali jaawe'*

(Informal Group discussion with Middle age group women, Jaat Caste, Meham Khedi, Rohtak)

(A son is the one to provide support for old age and carries the family lineage forward. The girls leave their family and go to their in-laws home).

Another woman respondent said:

'Pita ka antim sanskaar¹ karta hai ladka, sewa karega, beta budhape ka sahara maana jata hai'

(Woman Jaat Respondent, 28 years old, Karora, kaithal)

(Only a son lits the funeral pyre and looks after the parents in old age. The son gives support to the parents in old age) Preference for son was found to be very strong irrespective of caste, class and gender. It is a very strong belief among the villagers that a son remains with them in their old age and supports them. The family legacy continues if a son is born, whereas daughters leave their parental home and go to their in-laws' house, but the son stays with them.

An attempt was also made to gain the perceptions of the community regarding the birth of a girl child. A male respondent said:

"ladki hone se mooh ko tala lag jata hai"

(Male Jaat Respondent, 40 years old, Meham Khedi district Rohtak)²

(At the birth of a girl child the family is rendered speechless).

The respondents revealed that the birth of the girl child was not liked by the family members and all the community members shared similar views. Apart from this the majority of respondent also said that if the first child was a girl then second child should not be a girl.

'Doosri Ladki nahi chahiye ji'

(Group discussions with community members, men and women of middle age, Jaat Caste, Jhajjar/Rohtak)

(Second child should not be a girl).

The respondents expressed their strong desire to have a son. If a daughter is born first, a common phrase used by them was "one is enough".

During the discussion, Pradhan of Dahiya Khap said:

'Kanya bhroon hatya us din khatam ho jayegi, jis din ladkiyaan safe ho jayengi'

(Male Jaat Respondent, 60 Years old, Jhajjar)

(The day girls are safe, Female Foeticide will stop)

Another Khap Pradhan said:

¹ Last rites to be performed by the son only revealed by majority of respondents.

²([http://www.ijhssi.org/papers/v4\(11\)/D04011016024.pdf](http://www.ijhssi.org/papers/v4(11)/D04011016024.pdf))

'Hum ladki ko kitna daan dete hai...use koi jarurat nahi hogi kuch banane ki apne ghar mein, khushi khushi dete hai, yeh aap dekh rahe ho sab, bahut samaan hai, hamari jo ladki biyahi jati hai use hum saat peedhi ka rishta maante hai, use usko koi dukh takleef hoyegi to raat ko bhi jayenge, uske bachon ki shaadi mein bhaat bharte hai'

(Male Jaat Respondent, 62 Years old, Jhajjar)

(We give so much of dowry (daan) to the girl that she does not need anything else. We give happily as you must have noticed. When our daughters get married, we maintain our relationship with her for seven generations. If we see her in pain, we will reach her even at midnight to take care of her. We take the load of expenditure during her children's marriage also).

Another male respondent said:

'Khap Panchayat jyada general jati ki hoti hai Haryana mein jaat hoti hai, khap farmaan jari kar dete hain khule roop mein samajik kaarya mein lage rehte hai...ladkiyon ki crisis khap panchayat ki den hai''

(Male Khati Respondent, 29 Years, Rohtak Town, Member of SCRIYA, Jhajjar)

The male respondent explained that Khap Panchayat in Haryana was dominated by elderly influential members of Jaat community. It pronounces diktats related to social and marital matters. Respondents revealed that it was because of the diktats passed by Khaps strictly following of the *Bhaichara* norms that result in crisis for the girls.

Notion of Honour

A woman respondent said:

'Hamara samaaj purush pradhan samaaj hai, ladke ko koi kuch nahin kehta hai.lekin ladki agar kuch kar jayee to mushkil hai'

(Woman Jaat Respondent, 57 Years old,, Rewari)

A woman respondent revealed that our society is male dominated. Rules for the boys in the family are flexible, but for the girl those rules were rigid. It was narrated by almost all the respondents that the honour of the family is in question if girls indulge in some shameful or something wrong happens to her. A male respondent said:

'Sexual relation ko izzat maana jata hai'

(Male Khati Respondent, 29 years old, Jhajjar)

(Honour is related to sexual relations).

Fear of mishappening

A male respondent said:

'Aadmi darte hain ladki ho jayegi to uske sath galat hadsa nahin hona chahiye....dahej ke wajah se bhi darte hain mishappening na ho jaye isiliye padhana bhi nahi chahiye hai'

(Male Jaat Respondent, 39 years old, Sonapat)

(Men fear the birth of a girl child due to the apprehension that anything wrong should not happen to her. Giving of dowry too deters them and the fear of any wrong doing by daughters forces them not to educate them).

The notion of honour is attached to the daughter/women. People fear unforeseen mis-happenings that can take place and affect of the daughter due to which they kill daughters in the womb and get rid of the lurking fear. A male respondent voiced his fear:

'Log ladki ko chahte nahin hai, ladki par atyachar, dahej pratha, chedchaad, balaatkaar ke wajah se, isiliye log ladkiyan nahin chahte, sarkaar karti kuch nahin hai sirf bolti hai, ladki ka ghar se bahar jana chinta ka vishya hai'

(Male Kumhaar Respondent, 54 years old, Rohtak)

The respondents revealed that they do not want to give birth to a girl child due to heavy responsibility and honour attached to it. Parents are particularly anxious about the safety of their daughters both at home and within the village. A woman respondent said that she could not leave her daughter alone in the house. The fear of molestation, eve-teasing, abuse/harassment and dowry has forced people not to have a girl child in their family. A strong idea of family and community honour therefore results in the female foeticide.

Daughter continues to be a liability

During discussions with the villagers in Khap belt, questions on dowry (len-den) were asked. Respondents were asked whether dowry should be given to the girls or not, a male respondent said:

'Dene Len thoda bahut to karna padta hai nahin to kaun rakhega ladki ko'

(Male Khati Respondent, 55 years old, Jhajjar)

(Some dowry has to be given otherwise who will keep our daughter).

Respondents during the discussion revealed that it is very important to give dowry at the time of marriage. The dowry is given for the sake of the happiness of their daughters. Daughters should be respected and not harassed by the in-laws. To avoid this dowry is given.

During discussion, Pradhan of Meham Chaubasi on elopement said:

'Jab hum sab kuch dete hain apni ladki ko shaadi ke time to woh fir kyun aise bhag ke shaadi karti hai'

(Male Jaat Respondent, 70 years old, Pradhan Meham Chaubasi Khap Panchayat, Rohtak)

(“When we give everything to our daughters, then why do they elope with boys of another caste”, astonished Khap Pradhan remarked).

Respondents were of opinion that giving dowry is very important at the time of a daughter's marriage; otherwise married daughter would be tortured by her in-laws. At times even after marriage, she is forced to either get dowry or leave the house. A daughter thrown out of her in-laws' house also becomes a matter of honour. In order to avoid this insult to the daughter, the dowry is given by parents. The community members too endorse this ideology.

Another male respondent said,

'Yeh to Hindu samaaj hai ismein shuru se hi chal raha hai filhaal yeh kam hai, jaat mein yeh riwaaj kam hai, apni marzi se kuch de do to theek hai Rao (yadav) mein dowry jyada hai'

(Male Yadav Respondent, 40 years old, Jhajjar)

(This is Hindu society and dowry has been there ever since time immemorial. It is somewhat less now. One can give as per one's own wish, but Yadav caste believes in hefty dowry).

In Haryana, a lot of dowry is exchanged at the time of marriage. Though one of the respondents from Yadav caste said that dowry should be given according to one's economic conditions. Another male respondent opposed dowry and said, *'Kuch nahin dena chahiye, jab hum ladki ko itna padhate hain to jaroorat nahin hoti kuch dene ki, haryana mein bahut maangte hai,'*

(Male Jaat Respondent, 42 years old, Rohtak)

(Dowry should not be given. When the girl is educated, then there is no need to give any dowry. In Haryana a lot of dowry is given).

There is always a fear in a parent's mind about the safety of their daughters. The majority of the respondents narrated their fear and said,

"Ji izzat se sabse jyada darr lagta hai, kahin kuch galat na ho jaye"

(Male Jaat Respondent, 50 years old, Sonapat)

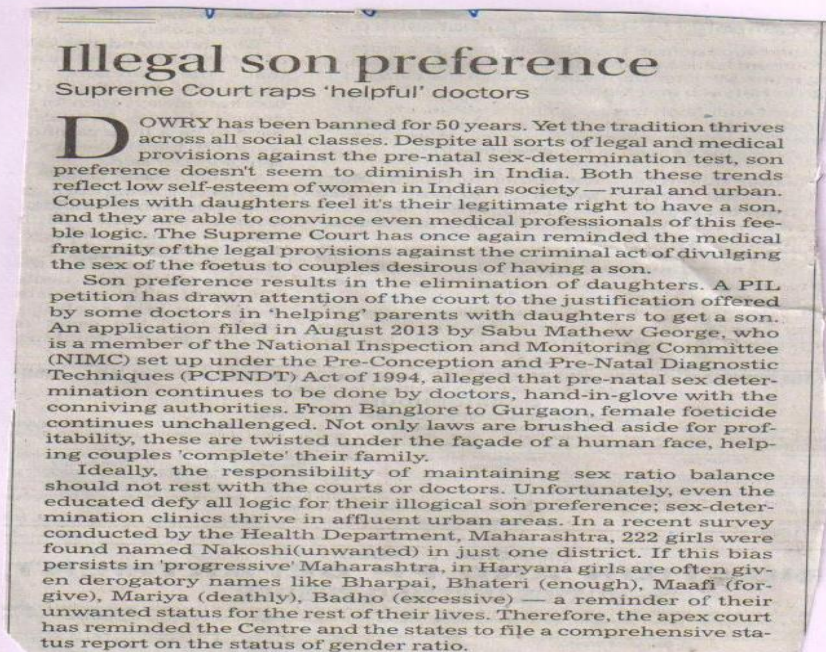
(The biggest fear is the honour of the family and all fear the occurrence of untoward incident).

Interaction with various respondents of both the genders, Pradhan and other members of Khap Panchayat and community members revealed that the girl is considered as a responsibility and the birth of a girl child entails lot of burden on parents. Her safety, education, dowry remains their responsibility, even after getting her married. Even when women are victims of rape, elopement and marriage issues, the society still holds them responsible. Restrictions and punishments are too imposed to curb women's freedom. Restrictions are imposed on their dress, movement, use of mobile phones, visits to markets and so on.

The parents of the girl child usually live in fear of any untoward incident not acceptable to society, which ultimately leads to female foeticide, leading to a skewed child sex ratio. These observations substantiate that the girl child in India is treated right from her birth as an additional burden, an extra mouth to feed, a liability and another man's property (Jena 2008)³. The parents of girls are perpetually worried in terms of losing 'izzat' because of the daughters and hence they don't want them. Hence the preference to a male child and female foeticide or killing of females in the womb is opted for that needs to be addressed at the national level.

Unwanted Status for the rest of their life

Son preference is so high that women in Haryana who have given birth to the girl child are called by derogatory names like Bharpai, Bhateri (enough), Maafi (Forgive), Mariya (deathly) Badho (excessive)-a reminder of their unwanted status for the rest of their lives.



Source: The Tribune 18th Sept. 2014

³ (<http://www.orissa.gov.in/e-magazine/orissareview/2008/december-2008/engpdf/8-17.pdf>)



Source: The Tribune, 18th September, 2014

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