



A PERSPECTIVE IN DECLINING SEX RATIO WITH RESPECT TO POONCH DISTRICT OF JAMMU AND KASHMIR, INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Sex ratio is a significant social factor for determining the equity between males and females in a society at a given point of time. Throughout the world sex ratio has been widely accepted as an important indicator to study diverse features of a population. However in most of the developing countries including India, declining sex ratio has become a grave concern. Due to different socio-cultural beliefs and delusions prevailing in the Indian social system, a girl child is often treated as a burden. Inclination for a son has emerged as one of the prime factors largely responsible for declining sex ratio in India due to the patriarchal nature of the society. The present paper is an attempt to understand and identify various socio-cultural causes responsible for declining sex ratio in Poonch district of Jammu and Kashmir as the district witnessed a drop in the sex ratio from 919 in 2001 to 893 in 2011.

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INTRODUCTION

Sex composition is one of the important social and demographic measure used for determining the status of male and female in a society and is often considered in terms of sex ratio. In India the sex ratio is calculated in terms of number of females per thousand males. It is an influential indicator which reveals the overall social health of a society. It is primarily the outcome of the interaction of various factors such as the differentials mortality of males and females, gender selective migration, sex ratio at birth and the sex differential in population enumeration. Present sex composition of a society decides the fate of its future events such as marriage rate, age structure, labour force, births and deaths. In several societies the present sex ratio is warped due to a number of factors such as early marriage, age of mother at birth, sex selective abortion, infanticide, infant mortality, maternal mortality, health hazards of women and migration. Trewartha (1953) stated that the proportion of the two sexes is basic to geographic analysis of an area because it is not only a vital feature of the landscape but it also influences the other demographic elements significantly and as such provides an additional means for analyzing the regional landscape. In majority of the developing countries of the world including India,

declining sex ratio has become a matter of serious concern. Declining sex ratio is extremely a sensitive issue and is an indication of unequal treatment given to males and females in the society. In spite of one of the fastest rising economies of the world, India is still immersed with the declining sex ratio, which is an apparent sign of gender inequity in India. Various socio-cultural factors are responsible for declining sex ratio in the world, however in Indian social setup fall in sex ratio have been mostly attributed by the co-occurrence of three main parameters namely preference for a son, declining fertility and increased availability of Pre-natal sex determination tests.

Preference for a son has become one of the prime factors largely responsible for declining sex ratio in India due to the patriarchal nature of the society. A girl child is intolerated and discriminated in numerous ways thereby threatening its very existence. However with the advancement in medical science and technology, the detestation and intolerance toward a girl child has gripped up so much in the society that a girl child is eradicated in the womb even before the birth, despite that the sex ratio is already unstable due to intolerance toward daughters. This discrimination against girl child is deep rooted in a diverse set of socio-religious, economical and cultural factors prevailing in the society. The degree of intolerance against the girl child may vary but it categorically exists at different levels and stages in a girl's life, thus affecting her overall development. According to census data of 2011 sex ratio in India is 943 females per thousand of males. In Jammu & Kashmir sex ratio as per the census report of 2011 is 889 which is less as compared to sex ratio of 892 as per the census

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of 2001. Some districts of the J&K state have shown improvement in overall sex ratio while some have shown decline. As per the census data of 2011, Poonch district of J&K has a population of 476,835 and ranks 11th in term of population among all the districts. Sex ratio of Poonch district is 893 as per the census record of 2011 which is higher than the corresponding sex ratio of the state. However it has shown a decline of 26 points in the sex ratio from 919 in 2001 to 893 in 2011. Out of the four tehsils of the Poonch district, the lowest sex ratio is recorded in Haveli tehsil (856) followed by Mandi (884), Surankote (899) and Mendhar (929). The situation is worsening day by day therefore there is a need to awaken the conscience of the people towards the girl child. The present study is conducted to identify and understand various socio-cultural causes responsible for the declining sex ratio in Poonch district of Jammu and Kashmir.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Study Area

Poonch District is one of the remotest districts of Jammu and Kashmir India and is located in the Pir Panjal range of Western Himalayas with an average elevation of 981 meters above the sea level. It is bounded by the actual line of control from three sides and lies within Longitudes 33.77^o N Latitude and 74.1^o E longitudes. Climate of area ranges from sub tropical to temperate with a temperature scope of 19-34 ^oC in summer to 6-17 ^oC in winter. Topography of the study area is hilly and mountainous. Poonch District comprised of 04 Tehsils. 66.74% of the total population of Poonch district is literate, sex wise male 78.84% and female 53.19%.

METHODOLOGY

For assessing various socio-cultural causes of declining sex ratio in Poonch district of Jammu and Kashmir, the data was collected from both primary and secondary sources. The primary sources of the data include field work, interviews along with the observations and census data. In order to acquire first hand information field work was carried in the study area. The secondary sources of the data include journals, books and reports.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In Indian social system, a girl child is often treated as a burden right from her birth. The attitude of the family members toward a girl child always remains different as compared to a boy. This discriminative approach towards a girl child is deeply rooted in the society due a variety of socio-cultural, religious and traditional beliefs. Based on the field data, interview and observations it was found that a lot of factors are responsible for the declining sex ratio in Poonch district of Jammu and Kashmir which are deeply rooted in the society. During field survey, interviews and discussion with the masses of the area it was found that the lack of education and moral values among the masses has a long lasting influence on the social set up of the area. Due to the lack of education and moral ethics people are unaware of the different issues related to female health and maternal care and got indulged in different practices such as early marriages resulting in unsafe motherhood, short spacing of birth intervals, increasing infant and maternal mortality, under weight and anaemic children. All these factors directly or indirectly results in declining sex ratio in the area.

During field observation and interviews, it was also found that son preference is one of the factors largely responsible for the declining sex ratio in the area as like other parts of the country, social setup of Poonch district is also patriarchal in nature. Maximum numbers of the respondents in the study area were of the view that it is important for a family to have a son. They further told that it is the son through which there clan be continued and there is no wrong in having an inclination toward a son. According to them birth of a daughter is a type of burden on them in the shape of economic consideration, dowry, social insecurity and threat to their social stigma such as safety and honour of the family etc. The preference for a son is deeply rooted in their socio-cultural, economic and religious practices as people are of the view that it is the son who provides support in old age and perform last rites and rituals and hence preferred. Moreover it was also found during the field survey that at the time of birth of a girl child little or nominal celebration is done as compared to the birth of a boy. Some of the respondents told that the fear of rising dowry practices, domestic violence, ill treatment by husband and in-laws compels them to eliminate the girl's child before the birth.

It was also found that lack of women empowerment is also one of the reasons for declining sex ratio in the area. Women remains deprived of education and nutrition and don't enjoy equal opportunities with the men. They were highly discriminated in term of education, food and other facilities including the love of the family. Only basic education is provided to the girls as people are of the view that girls are only meant for the household tasks and there is no need to give them higher education. According to some respondents, giving higher education to girls means spending money on that education which doesn't give any return to them as girls have to marry outside. During field survey the girls of some areas of the district were found to be undernourished which may be due to the discrimination in their nutrition as admitted by some respondents. As per some respondents poverty is also a factor which averts them to provide nutritious food to girls as compared to boys thereby depriving them of a healthy life.

During discussion with some of people it was found that female infanticide, foeticide and selective sex abortion is also practiced in many parts of the district due to various superstitions prevailing among the masses. These evils are strongly gripped in the society and are adopted by all the castes, classes and sections of the area. One of the common beliefs deeply rooted in the masses of the hilly areas of the district is that if you abort a female child, next one is sure to be a male. According to some respondents due to increased availability of medical services such as pre-natal sex determination tests it has become very easy to get rid of the unwanted sex in the womb. Moreover it was found that majority of selective sex abortions are done illegally by untrained village practitioners resulting in sometimes death of mother as well as child leading to worse effect on sex ratio in the area. On the basis of field survey, interviews and observations it is revealed that that lack of education and awareness, women empowerment, inclination towards a son, increasing female infanticide and selective sex abortions are some of the major causes responsible for the declining sex ratio in Poonch district of Jammu and Kashmir. Moreover imbalanced sex ratio has also emerged as a critical problem in the area resulting in serious consequences such as trafficking, domestic violence, kidnapping, rape, shortage of brides etc. This discourages the

people from to be the parents of a girl child and thus society gets trapped in an inhuman phase which needs to be addressed. So there is a dire need for vital measures to end the hasty decline in sex ratio.

Recommendations

Keeping in view the declining sex ratio in the study area, following suggestive measures are made.

1. There must be the need of changes in the outlook, attitude and perception of society towards a girl child.
2. There must be the regular assessment and evaluation of the sex ratio at the micro-level.
3. There must be the need of increasing the value of a girl child by providing encouragement, incentives and old age security for giving birth to a daughter.
4. Females should be given autonomy and their contribution must be recognised
5. Skill based free and compulsory education must be provided to female children so that they can support themselves during exigency.
6. There is a need to increase literacy ratio so that helps people to understand the importance of female in the today's era.
7. Seminar and workshop must be held from time to time for improvement and development of women status.
8. There is a need for curbing crime against women and increasing their safety because couples do not prefer girls as they fear of the continued threats of violence that girls may have to face.
9. There is a need of increasing awareness among people about declining sex ratio and toward the problem of less number of girls that society would face in near future.

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