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Gender bias in modern Indian society: A study on geographical perspective

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Abstract

Gender bias remains a significant socio-cultural issue in contemporary India, profoundly affecting societal dynamics and demographic trends. It examines the root causes, manifestations, and consequences of gender bias, particularly in relation to skewed sex ratios, female foeticide, and socio-economic disparities across different regions. By analyzing these factors, the study aims to provide insights into the complexities of gender inequality and propose strategies for fostering gender equity in diverse geographical contexts.

Decline sex ratio is an emerging issue mainly in developing countries. Female foeticide or infanticide is one of the major causes behind it. By use of modern technology one can easily identify foetus sex in the womb of mother and if it is girl fetus aborted silently. Though it is prohibited by law but some dishonest doctors and clinics do it for money. Days are not so far away, when there may be the manifestation of the situation where brides will not be accessible for the marriage of the sons to maintain the lineage and continue the human race of even those people who believe in the long-standing tradition of son preference, that “only sons can offer Pray Pindadana, Mukhagni and not the daughters”. Therefore, it is felt that the mindsets of the people should be changed right from now towards the importance of the girl child in the family.

Keywords: Gender bias, female foeticide, sex ratio, challenges & consequences and mitigating strategies

Introduction

Gender bias, manifested through discriminatory practices and attitudes towards women and girls, continues to pervade various facets of Indian society. Despite significant strides in economic development and modernization, traditional beliefs and patriarchal norms persist, influencing gender roles, access to education, healthcare, and opportunities for women. Geographical variations amplify these biases, reflecting diverse socio-cultural landscapes across India's states and regions. This study delves into these geographical dimensions to understand how gender bias is shaped by local traditions, economic conditions, and regional policies. In this regard, the term ‘Abortion’ was historically a taboo subject, deeply stigmatized across the globe. However, over recent decades, legislative changes and shifting societal norms have gradually liberalized attitudes towards abortion in many countries, including India. While legal reforms have expanded access to safe abortions, ethical debates persist, particularly around issues like female foeticide and infanticide. These practices, deeply entrenched in cultural beliefs, highlight persistent gender biases that skew sex ratios and perpetuate societal inequalities. Hence, there are no formalized women’s movements in India. The issue of declining sex ratios, particularly in developing countries, has become a critical concern. Female foeticide and infanticide are among the primary causes contributing to this imbalance. Despite legal prohibitions, the practice continues covertly, facilitated by modern technology that allows for prenatal sex determination and subsequent abortion of female fetuses. This practice is rooted in deep-seated cultural beliefs, including the preference for sons due to traditional roles in rituals like Pyre Pindadana and Mukhagni. Urgent societal change is necessary to recognize the value of the girl child and address these ethical challenges.

Objectives

This article attempts to synthesize the provided content into a coherent narrative on gender bias in modern Indian society, focusing on geographical perspectives on the following

grounds;

1. To find out the contribution of Geography in mind set and cultural practices
2. To analysis the regional variations
3. To study the ethical issues regarding abortion as well as gender bias
4. To know the Govt. scheme to alleviate female foeticide as well as gender bias.

Methodology

The entire research work has been done based on the secondary data which includes the following points;

- i). Literature Review ii). Secondary Data Collection iii). Analysis and iv). Recommendations.

Results and Discussion

The ancient Romans did accept the execution of unwanted infants. Further-more, such customs are not unique to antiquity. Thousands of newborns are still slain or allowed to perish every year all across the world. Since male children are typically viewed as more desirable than female children, female babies are often targeted for elimination in China's current 'one child' policy, which shows many infants executed (Parker 2009). Such traditions are also found in different parts of India, showing by the study of sex composition. According to 2011 census, out of total population of 1210.1 millions, 623.7 millions are males and 586.4 millions are females. Thus the overall sex ratio for Indian population is 943 female / 000 male. It is very interesting that the sex ratio of India has been suffering a continuous decline from 20th Century. There were 972 females / 000 males in the country's population at the beginning of 20th century i.e. 1901 whereas in 1951, 1981, 1991, 2011 the sex ratio is shown as 946 females / 000 males, 934 females / 000 males, 927 females / 000 males and 940 females / 000 males respectively. On the other hand, A research by Pew Research Center based on Union government data indicates foeticide of at least 9 million females in the years 2000–2019. The research found that 86.7% of these foeticides were by Hindus (80% of the population), followed by Sikhs (1.7% of the population) with 4.9%, and Muslims (14% of the population) with 6.6%. So, changes in sex composition largely reflect the underlying socio-economic and cultural pattern of the country in different ways.

The Contribution of Geography

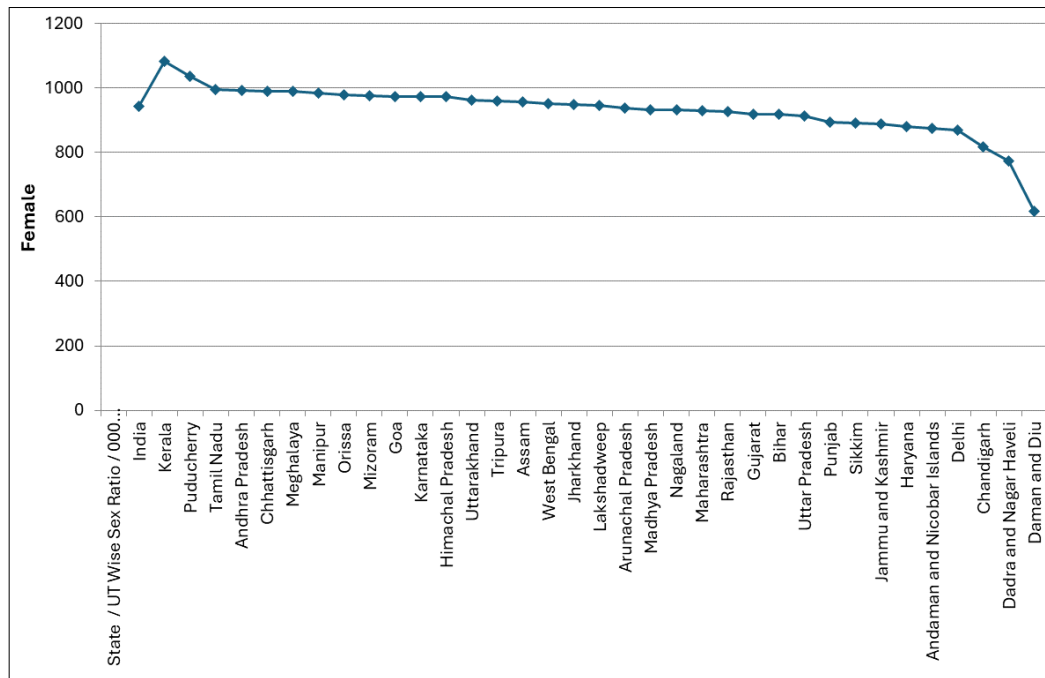
As Geography has many branches and great involvement with several disciplines therefore, it plays a significant role in depiction the mind set and cultural practices of the people related to female infanticide that influencing the gender bias. There are so many geographical factors like urbanization, societal, religious etc. which are influencing the gender bias in different regions of the country. The physical factors of any region also influencing the human

activities, behaviours, living status etc.. In this regard, it is found that there are far differences in sex ratio due to various scopes of livelihood, education, communication etc. comparing the plain and mountainous region. According to 2011 census, in West Bengal the sex ratio of Darjeeling city (Mountainous Region) is 1007 per 1000 males and Child sex ratio of girls is 946 per 1000 boys whereas in Tamluk Municipality (Plain region), Female Sex Ratio is of 963 against state average of 950 per thousand male, moreover Child Sex Ratio in Tamluk is around 946 compared to West Bengal state average of 956 beside this situation, it is also found that the sex ratio of Uttarakhand state (Mountainous / Hilly state) is 963 female / 000 males and in the state of Haryana as a plain region, the sex ratio is 877 female / 000 male because of more preference of son as to financially support the family on the basis of traditional patriarchal society. Therefore, the gender bias in India manifests differently across regions, influenced by historical, cultural, and economic factors. Northern states like Haryana and Punjab exhibit starkly skewed sex ratios due to prevalent practices of female foeticide and infanticide, driven by son preference and dowry traditions. Southern states generally fare better in terms of sex ratios but may face challenges related to gender disparities in education and employment opportunities. Understanding these regional variations is crucial for formulating targeted interventions and policies to address gender inequality effectively.

Regional Variations

Geographically, female foeticide exhibits significant regional disparities within India. Certain states and regions have higher incidences of female foeticide from the mind setting of gender bias as sons demand because of economic purposes as to increase the source of family income along with social and traditional Hindu culture where only the son has right for Pray Pindadana, Mukhagni etc. and not the daughters according to the culture of traditional patriarchal society. For instance, states like Haryana, Punjab, and parts of Rajasthan have been identified as hotspots where skewed sex ratios persist despite legal and social interventions. The persistence of gender bias in India can be attributed to deeply entrenched socio-cultural norms that perpetuate discriminatory practices. Patriarchal ideologies dictate familial and societal expectations, limiting women's autonomy and opportunities. Economic factors such as poverty and lack of access to resources further exacerbate gender disparities, particularly in rural and marginalized communities. The intersection of these factors creates complex dynamics that reinforce gender bias across different geographical contexts.

i) State wise variations



Source: <https://www.census2011.co.in/sexratio.php>

Fig 1: State / UT Wise Sex Ratio / 000 males by 2011 Census of India

ii) Rural Urban Variations: The sex ratio in India is characterized by the differences in its rural-urban components. The rural sex ratio of India according to 2011 census is 946 / 000 males and the urban sex-ratio is 900 / 000 males. The urban-rural difference in the

sex-ratio of India is the product of sex selective migration from rural areas to urban areas. More males move from rural areas to urban areas in India.

iii) Regional Disparities

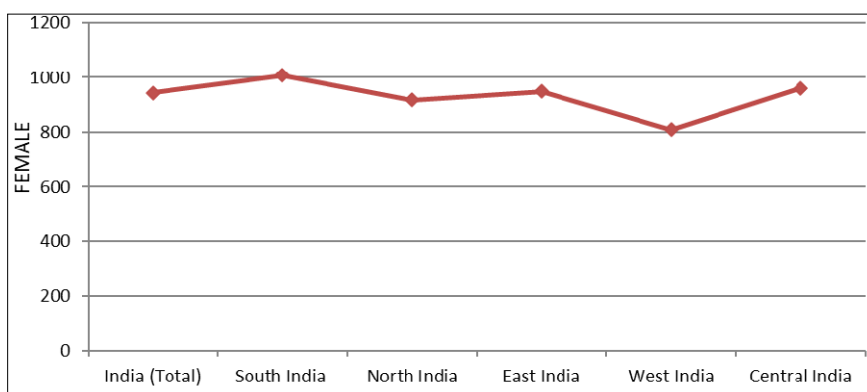


Fig 2: Average Sex Ratio in different Provinces in India, according to 2011 census

A. Ethical Issues

It makes sense to discuss the matter as long as people are open-minded, especially since public opinion on the subject of abortion is polarized at least for now. A mind that is open to such an approach is necessary for mental health. Seeking understanding perspective and enlightenment wherever they may be found is a necessary part of human fulfillment. This suggest that one could have a change of heart upon looking into the arguments more thoroughly, many philosophers belief like Michel Tooley, for instance continue to support abortion and infanticide, although his justifications of these claims have evolved in his important paper “Abortion and Infanticide”. Similarly, Mary Anne Warren changed the way that she justified her support for abortion from what amounted to an un-questioning stance to one that look into account several factors. Although Tristram Engelhardt formerly supported abortion likes, he now feels that abortion is ethically wrong for reasons that are primarily theological

rather than secular. If abortion is ethically unacceptable then a person like who has undergone an abortion or assisted someone else in getting one appears to have committed a grave transgression. The pro-lifers believe that by doing so, they have slain an innocent person. If aborting a child or criticizing abortion turns a person into a morally reprehensible person, then it would appear that both groups are morally reprehensible.

From the above discussion it can be said that it is very controversial matter along with there have normally practiced the determination of sex in the fetus stage although there have some availability of law for the expectation of sex determination needs strict execution in our country. There will be a scarcity of brides in the marriage market mainly because of the adverse sex ratio, combined with an overall deterioration in fertility. So, we must have to change our mindset and not to differ girl child from a boy, otherwise the human mankind will not be found

in the society.

B. Govt. Scheme

The Governments both the Central and States have initiated

different schemes to alleviating the female feticide from the mind set of gender bias and to promote the gender equality which can be understand from the following government scheme.

Table 1: "Special Financial Incentive Schemes for the Girl Child in India: A Review of Select Schemes"

Sl. No.	Program	Year Passed	Central or State Government	Benefits
1.	Balika Samridhi Yojana	1997	Central Government	Cash transfer to mother based on child meeting educational conditions and partaking in income generating activities
2.	Dhan Laxmi Scheme	2008	Central Government	Cash transfers to family after meeting conditions (immunization, education, insurance)
3.	Kanya Jagriti Jyoti Scheme	1996	Punjab	Cash transfers to two girl children in a family after meeting conditions (Immunization, education, insurance)
4.	Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao Yojana	2015	Central Government	Cash transfers based on educational attainment
5.	National Plan of Action	1992	Central Government	For the survival, protection, and development of girl children. Goals include ending female feticide, reducing gender disparity, and giving girls better access to resources
6.	Cradle Baby Scheme	1992	Tamil Nadu	To eradicate female infanticide and to save the girl Children from the clutches of death
7.	Devirupak	2002	Haryana	Cash transfer to couple accepting terminal method of family planning (vasectomy, tubectomy) after birth of 1st or 2nd child
8.	Delhi Ladli Scheme	2008	Delhi	Cash transfer based on educational attainment for first two daughters
9.	Apni Beti Apna Dhan	1994	Haryana	Cash transfer if daughter reaches the age of 18 without being married
10.	Girl Child Protection Scheme	2005	Andhra Pradesh	Cash transfer based on age and educational attainment. Family also has to partake in family planning
11.	Beti Hai Anmol Scheme	2010	Himachal Pradesh	Interest earned on bank account in daughter's name and cash scholarships for each year of school
12.	Bhagya Laxmi Scheme	2007	Karnataka	Cash transfer based on age and educational attainment. Cash provided to families for natural death, health insurance, and scholarships
13.	Mukhyamantri Kanya Suraksha Yojna and Mukhyamantri Kanya Vivah Yojna	2008	Bihar	Cash transfers to poor families with two daughters
14.	Indra Gandhi Balika Suraksha Yojana	2007	Himachal Pradesh	Cash transfers based on age attainment
15.	Ladli Laxami Yojna	2006	Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand	Cash transfers based on educational attainment
16.	Rakshak Yojana	2005	Punjab	Cash monthly transfers for families with two girls
17.	Mukhyamantri Kanyadan Yojna	2017	Madhya Pradesh	Cash transfer for marriage assistance if the family waits until the legal age to marry off their daughter
18.	Sukanya Samridhi Account	2015	Central Government	Interest earned on bank account opened for daughter after she turns 21
19.	Kanyashree Prakalpa	2013	West Bengal	K1 (Age 13-below 18 Girl Child Students) aided Rs. 1000/- annually, K2 When girl turned into 18 years aided Rs. 25000/- one time grant and K3 for M.A. / M.Sc Students aided grant under Swami Vivekananda Merit Cum Means Scholarship

Source: Sekher, T.V. (2010). "Special Financial Incentive Schemes for the Girl Child in India: A Review of Select Schemes" (PDF). International Institute for Population Sciences and https://www.wbkanyashree.gov.in/kp_4.0/index.php

Challenges and Consequences

Gender bias poses multifaceted challenges, including adverse demographic trends, such as declining sex ratios and imbalanced population pyramids. Social consequences include limited opportunities for women in education and employment, contributing to perpetuating cycles of poverty and exclusion. Addressing these challenges requires comprehensive strategies that encompass legal reforms, socio-cultural interventions and economic empowerment initiatives tailored to regional contexts.

Strategies for Mitigating Gender Bias

To combat gender bias effectively, collaborative efforts are needed at multiple levels. Policy interventions should prioritize enhancing access to education and healthcare for girls, promoting women's participation in decision-making processes and enforcing laws against gender-based violence and discrimination. Community engagement and awareness campaigns play a crucial role in challenging harmful gender stereotypes and fostering attitudes that value gender equity. Moreover, economic empowerment programs targeting women can enhance their socio-economic status and empower them to challenge traditional gender roles. To

effectively mitigate gender bias in modern Indian society, especially considering geographical perspectives, several recommendations can be put forth:

- 1. Education and Awareness Campaigns:** Implement comprehensive educational programs that promote gender equality from early childhood through higher education. Emphasize the importance of respecting women's rights and challenging traditional gender stereotypes and also Conduct targeted awareness campaigns in regions with high levels of gender bias, utilizing local languages and cultural sensitivities to maximize impact.
- 2. Legal Reforms and Enforcement:** Strengthen enforcement of existing laws against gender-based discrimination, violence, and practices like female foeticide and dowry harassment and Advocate for legislative reforms that promote women's rights and ensure equal access to inheritance, property rights, and employment opportunities.
- 3. Economic Empowerment:** Facilitate access to microfinance and entrepreneurship opportunities for women, particularly in rural and economically disadvantaged regions. Promote skill development

programs that enhance women's employability and financial independence, reducing economic dependence and vulnerability.

4. **Healthcare Interventions:** Enhance access to healthcare services for women and girls, including reproductive health services and prenatal care and Combat the practice of female foeticide through strict enforcement of laws prohibiting sex determination tests and abortions based on gender.
5. **Community Engagement and Support:** Engage community leaders, religious institutions, and local NGOs in promoting gender equality initiatives and changing social norms and Establish support networks and safe spaces for women to seek help and support in cases of gender-based violence or discrimination.
6. **Media and Technology Advocacy:** Utilize media platforms and technology to disseminate positive narratives of gender equality and challenge harmful stereotypes and also Promote digital literacy among women and girls to empower them to participate actively in the digital economy and access information.
7. **Research and Data Collection:** Conduct regular surveys and research studies to monitor progress in reducing gender bias and identify emerging trends and challenges and utilize the data-driven insights to tailor interventions and policies that address specific regional disparities in gender equality.
8. **Political Participation and Leadership:** Encourage women's participation in political leadership and decision-making roles at all levels of governance and also advocate for electoral reforms that promote gender parity and ensure fair representation of women in elected bodies.
9. **Collaborative Partnerships:** Foster partnerships between government agencies, civil society organizations, academia, and private sector entities to coordinate efforts and resources towards gender equality and share best practices and lessons learned across regions to replicate successful interventions and scale up impact.
10. **Long-term Commitment and Monitoring:** Ensure sustained commitment from all stakeholders, including government bodies, NGOs, and communities, towards achieving gender equality and establish mechanisms for continuous monitoring, evaluation, and accountability to track progress and address challenges in real-time.

By implementing these recommendations systematically and collaboratively, India can make significant strides towards mitigating gender bias and creating a more inclusive and equitable society across its diverse geographical landscapes.

Conclusion

Gender bias in modern Indian society is a complex issue shaped by geographical, socio-cultural, and economic factors. By examining these dimensions, this study underscores the importance of region-specific approaches to address gender inequality effectively. Sustainable progress towards gender equity requires concerted efforts to challenge discriminatory practices, empower women, and foster inclusive societal norms across diverse geographical contexts in India.

In conclusion, while legal frameworks and technological advancements like artificial wombs offer potential solutions,

lasting change hinges on societal attitudes towards gender and human rights. Embracing the value of the girl child is not only essential for addressing gender bias but also for fostering a more just and equitable society in India and beyond.

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