Abstract

Bias against Girl Child in India Regional Pattern and Perspective

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Bias against girl child, an inherent feature of a patriarchal society, refers to the practice of preference of boys over girls in a family. In other words, it is associated with discrimination or prejudice against girls. The demographic manifestations of bias against girl child can be seen in the differentials in survival of boys and girls as well as in sex differentials in access to education and career building process. Ours is a patriarchal society which demeans women in a variety of way. Women are subjugated to men. The patriarchal structure is characterised by a strong preference for son. A son is treated as a prized entity while a daughter is considered as a burden. A son contributes to the family income and augments wealth through dowry at the time of his marriage. As against this, a daughter depletes family’s resources in the form of dowry at the time of her marriage. In patriarchy, a son provides security to parents in their old age, while daughter shifts her allegiance to the in-laws family after marriage. In the past, therefore, son preference and resultant differential treatment of boys and girls were reflected in sex differentials in survival chances. In the some parts of the country, even female infanticide was in practice. The net result of this was a deficit of girls in the population. The process of social and economic changes over time is expected to have removed the social menace of bias and discrimination against girl child. But unfortunately, this has not happened in India. With the advent of medical technology, persisting son preference and desire for small family size, elimination of girls even before birth in the form of foetalicide became a widespread phenomenon. While at the same time, differential treatment of girls continued to exist as a result of which mortality rate among girls remained higher than that among their male counterpart. Therefore, imbalances in sex composition of population particularly among children continue to grow. Bias against girl child is also seen in the areas of education and career building process. The girls in a patriarchy have a very restricted access to education within the family. Thus, the demographic and social manifestations of bias against girl child include preponderance of male babies at birth, sex differentials in survival of children and differential access to education.
The nature of gender relations and bias against girl child in the country is characterised by a marked variation across regions. In the light of this, the present study has endeavoured to examine into the spatiality in bias against girl child in India taking the three mentioned above. The study is based on both state as well as district level data corresponding to the census year of 2001 and drawn from varied secondary sources. In addition, data were also drawn from the primary survey of two select villages with the help of well structured questionnaire to understand underlying socio-cultural practices at micro level. The study particularly examines the socio-economic correlates of ‘bias against girl child’ and its spatial manifestations. Suitable statistical and cartographic techniques have been applied in the study.