

Gender Discrimination and Social Policy interventions: A study of Madhya Pradesh - Critical Connections

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ABSTRACT: Gender discrimination starts early in life as even new-born girls do not seem to have the initial advantage that is usually the case- neonatal mortality i.e., dying within the first month of birth - is higher for girls than for new-born boys. It is in this milieu that a government-bilateral collaborative schemes are initiated aimed at empowering women in an integrated manner. The schemes so far have focused on Curbing Sex-Selective abortion by enhancing the worth of the girl child, improving school enrolment and reducing school dropout rate, reducing insecurity of parents having only daughters, Encouraging and motivating families to have supportive mechanisms for daughters and to value and love them. Mostly these schemes have never focused at the capability enhancement of women. The study tries to have a look at these schemes operational in Madhya Pradesh.

KEYWORDS: Child sex ratio, patriarchy, marriage, nutrition, gendered roles, Government social intervention initiatives.

INTRODUCTION

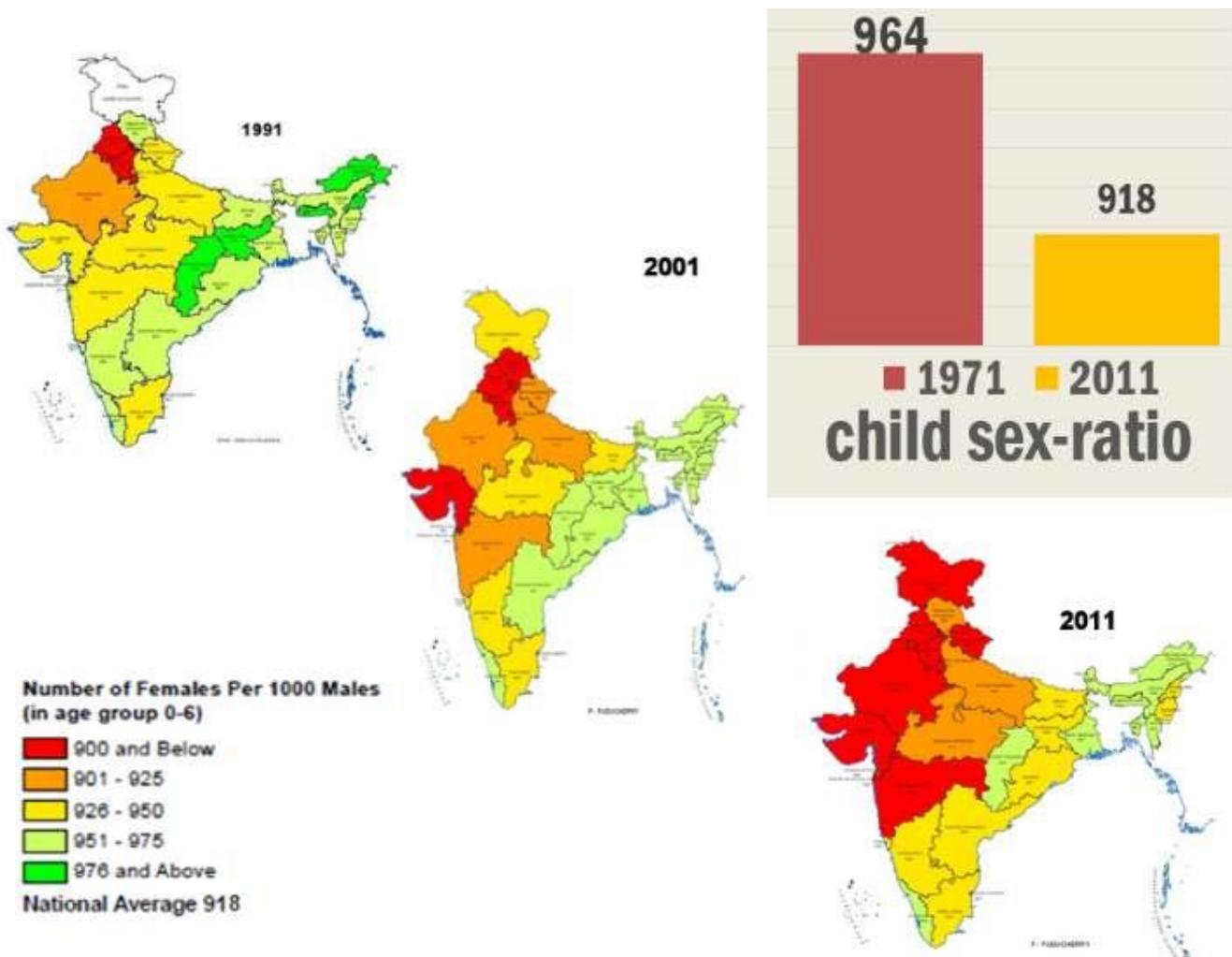
The policy environment in India, particularly on social issues has always been resonant with contradictions and contestation of varying degrees –gender has been one such domain. Often the modernising state has been imagined as in binary opposition to patriarchal values in society, a role the state seizes on its own through co-opting feminist vocabulary (Dietrich, 2003). At times this role is thrust upon the state by the international policy environment. Foreign donors stress that the state apparatus must formulate plans and policies aimed at a gender-equitable future to comply with mandatory stipulations in foreign funding for a gender inclusive perspective. And yet, the state can also reinforce patriarchy through allocation of authoritative resources to men (Rai, 1996). The dynamics can be further complicated as the state strives to achieve both goals- to look liberal and simultaneously to reaffirm gendered codes through clever use of traditional symbols of female strength (Hensman, 1996).

Empowering outcomes of any initiatives aimed at women would differ depending upon the locational contexts in which they are being implemented because patriarchy does not enact homogeneously (Raju, 2001). That is to say, patriarchal structure even as a common referral domain for understanding gender relations (in India) gets intercepted by spatial contexts. It is still possible, for example, to talk of 'soft' versus 'hard' patriarchy in the context of patriarchal regimes in India (Kabeer & Mahmud, 2004). In India, the rigidities of gendered social space along the north and north-west axis as compared to relatively more gender-egalitarian social spaces in the south has been talked about at length across several disciplines (Chen, 1995; Dyson & Moore, 1983; Jejeebhoy & Sathar, 2001; Menon-Sen & Shiva, 2001; Murthi, d reze, & Guio, 1995; Raju et al., 1999; Rustogi, 2003). Scholars seem to converge on the opinion that the region extending from Rajasthan, Punjab, and Haryana to Uttar Pradesh and part Bihar in the North Indian Plain shares a basic patriarchal structure reflected through (among other things) a sexual division of labour and status-based norms of behaviour and seclusion for women despite immense diversities in class, caste and communities at various scales. For example, it has often been suggested that scheduled caste and tribal women are freer than women belonging to other castes and ethnic groups because of their economic contribution to house-holds.

Thus the specific objective of this study is to analyse the components of these schemes and policies and examine their conceptual clarity in terms of their contradictions, contestations and challenges as far as the

status of women is concerned. It is also to determine the awareness of these policies, schemes, programmes and laws to women and men especially in terms of countering gender discrimination. For this study, Child Sex Ratio (CSR) has been taken as an indicator of women disempowerment.

Gender discrimination starts early in life as even new-born girls do not seem to have the initial advantage that is usually the case- neonatal mortality i.e., dying within the first month of birth -is higher for girls than for new-born boys. Not uncharacteristically, however, this disadvantage continues at a much enhanced pace and before the 1st(post neonatal mortality) and the 5th birthdays(child mortality), 46and 119% more girls than boys succumb to neglect –what in literature has been termed as 'differed infanticide'. The Census (2011) data showed a significant declining trend in the Child Sex Ratio between 0-6 years with an all time low of 918. CSR reflects both, pre-birth discrimination manifested through gender biased sex selection, and post birth discrimination against girls. Easy availability and affordability of diagnostic tools has been critical in increasing Sex Selective Elimination (SSE) leading to low Sex Ratio at Birth (SRB). Further it also contributes to the decline in CSR. Strong socio-cultural and religious biases, preference for sons& discrimination towards daughters has accentuated the problem. Coordinated & convergent efforts are needed to ensure survival, protection and education of girl child to help realise her full potential.

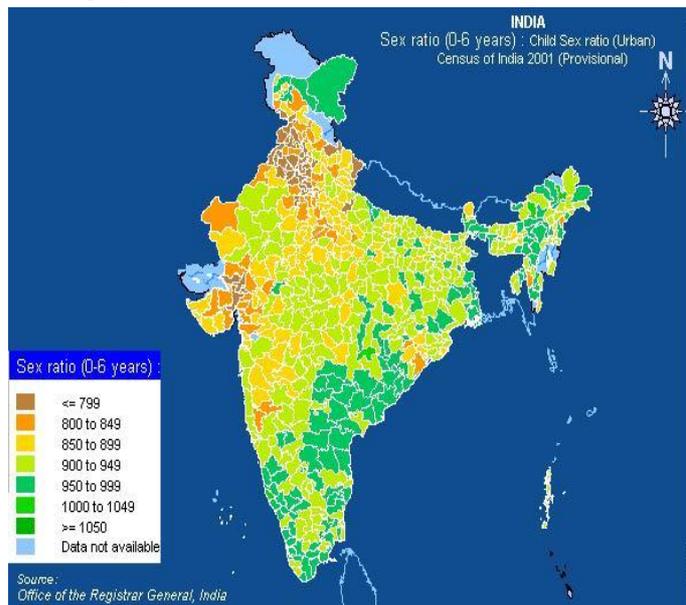


It is in this milieu that a government-bilateral collaborative project experimented with empowering women in an integrated manner in select areas. The long-term objectives were to create an enabling environment for women to lead dignified and empowered lives through direct interventions in health care, awareness generation, education and economic activities. The short-term objectives were to organise women, reduce infant mortality rates, and spread literacy among women and enrolment among girls, addressing the personal (life-skills and livelihood) needs of dropout adolescent girls and provision of institutional support for marketing intervention. Several schemes were introduced starting with the Girl Child Protection Scheme in

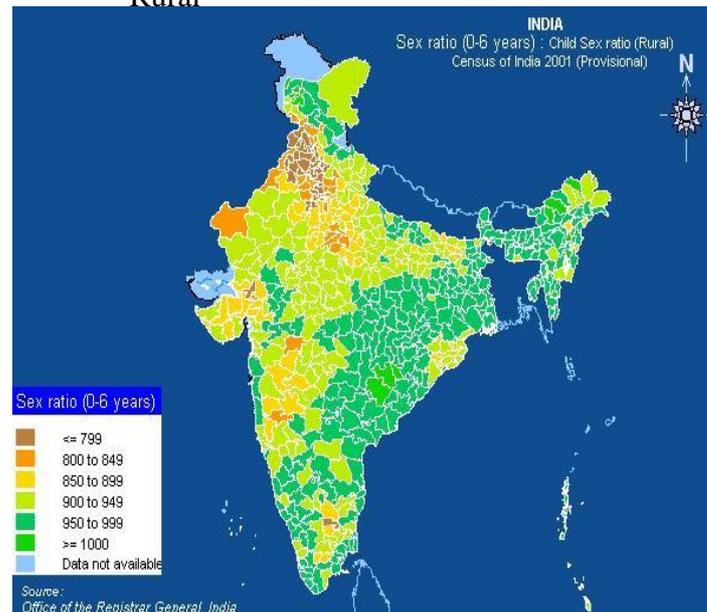
Tamil Nadu, 1992- Forerunner of all such schemes; Madhya Pradesh Ladli Lakshmi Yojana; Gujarat Dikri Bachao Campaign; Girl Child Protection Scheme Andhra Pradesh; Haryana Ladli Scheme 2005; Planning Commission- Constitution of a working group on CCTs in December 2008; Dhanalakshmi –Government of India scheme, 2008; Government of Delhi- Ladli scheme, 2008 and now Beti Bachao Beti Padhao scheme for 100 districts of India with critical /emergency proportions of child sex ratio, introduced in January 2015.

The schemes so far have focussed on Curbing Sex-Selective abortion by enhancing the worth of the girl child, Improving school enrolment and reducing school dropout rate, Reducing insecurity of parents having only daughters, Encouraging and motivating families to have supportive mechanisms for daughters and to value and love them. Mostly these schemes have never focussed at the capability enhancement of women. As quoted by Prof. Bijaylaxmi Nanda “It is sheer economics at work in the context of poor families. The girl-child is not welcomed because of the scheme, the scheme is welcome because the girl-child is a perceived as a burden.”- Geetika Sharma, Addl. Director, WCD, Government of NCT of Delhi, in charge of Ladli scheme, Delhi. Earlier studies establish sex-selective abortion as upper-class, upper-caste, urban phenomenon. Sadly, recent studies (Mary John et al, 2008) reveal this to have become universal with the upwardly-mobile aspirations of the marginalised. The functionaries considered the spending on education as ideal, however they concluded that the chances of the money spent on marriage was significantly higher. The schemes focussing at cash transfers due to the birth of a child did bring about a sense of security and confidence in women and girls, there was little evidence of changes in their decision-making roles or bargaining power and even less evidence of their increased voice within the community. There were no Linkages with rights, entitlements, (Okin, Pateman) develop human capabilities (Sen, Nussbaum, Robeyns) build voice, agency, citizenship (Lister, Werbner, Davis, Mouffe, Mohanty, Roy) and mainstream social protection within broader development efforts (Kabeer).

Urban



Rural



It is largely realised that Social protection schemes need to accommodate a more proactive role of the state while understanding that the state may not always be a benevolent representative of public good. The state can also be a site for struggles over the interpretation of needs and the allocation of resources. Building the capacity of the marginalised and excluded groups to participate in these struggles is indispensable to the promotion of more inclusive systems of social protection and a more equitable path to economic growth (Kabeer). More importantly, the locational specificities of gendered space and spatiality of experiences have been widely acknowledged and commented upon in the academic context (Menon-Sen & Shiva 2001; Raju, 2001; Rastogi 2003) and yet they are rarely incorporated in planning intervention projects. Incorporating the spatiality of existing realities and paying additional attention to the nuances such spatialities entail provide a vantage point for critical engagement with issues of deprivation, discrimination, conflict and tension (Raju).

It has been seen that over the years the Government policy interventions has had a negative impact on the tribal belts of Madhya Pradesh child sex ratio as well. There is a constant declining trend in child sex ratio in the tribal districts of Madhya Pradesh. The child sex ratio of 0-6 population in Madhya Pradesh is continuously declining over the last three decades. This was 941 in 1991, 932 in 2001 and now it is 912 in Census 2011. Out of 50 Districts of Madhya Pradesh, Balaghat district secured 1st rank in case of total sex ratio continuously for three consecutive Census 1991, 2001 and 2011. The sex ratio of this district in 1991, 2001 and 2011 was 1002, 1022 and 1021 respectively. This is followed by Alirajpur (1011), Mandla (1008) and Dindori (1002) in 2011. Morena and Bhind are two worst performing districts in terms of total sex ratio in 2011. Otherwise the bottom six districts by sex ratio; Chhatarpur, Shivpuri, Datia, Gwalior, Morena and Bhind maintain their positions throughout the three Census years.

According to Census 2011, all the five top ranking tahsils by total sex ratio are from two tribal dominated districts of Madhya Pradesh namely Mandla and Balaghat. Ghughari tahsil of Mandla district records highest sex ratio of 1042 females per 1000 males. The other four tahsils of this list are from Balaghat district viz Paraswada (1036), Katangi (1028), Baihar(1027) and Khairlanji (1027). In tribal dominated areas the work participation rate between male and female is almost equal with the result there is no tendency of male preference at birth. The tehsils where lowest total sex ratio has been recorded are Gohad (819) preceded by Mehgaon (820) both are located in Bhind district. Among the bottom five tehsils, three are from Bhind district and two are from Morena district. Both the districts fall in Chambal division of Madhya Pradesh. These census records give a clear indication that equal participation of women and capability enhancement always has a positive impact on social perception of women. The scenario in the urban areas is not very bright either, infact it is worse. This brings forth the reality that the modern education system has not been able to bring any change in this perception, rather a false social and community pride and honour concepts have been introduced.

Sex Ratio - Top and bottom five tehsils: 2011 Madhya Pradesh

Top			Bottom		
Tahsils	Districts	Sex Ratio	Tahsils	Districts	Sex Ratio
Ghughari	Mandla	1042	Gohad	Bhind	819
Paraswada	Balahghat	1036	Mehgaon	Bhind	820
Katangi	Balahghat	1028	Morena	Morena	824
Baihar	Balahghat	1027	Joura	Morena	831
Khairlanji	Balahghat	1027	Gormi	Bhind	832



The Government has announced several programs to address the issue of decline in CSR through a mass campaign & Multi-Sectoral action plans.

Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Yojana (save daughter, educate daughter) to save and empower the girl child is making waves all over the nation. This major inter-ministerial initiative of the Government of India bringing together Ministries, institutions and civil societies, though not a drastic change yet, the results are yet to be seen. This initiative of Government aims to address the issue of declining CSR through a mass campaign across the country and focused intervention and multi-sectoral action in 100 selected districts low on CSR. The overall goal of the BBBP program is to celebrate the birth of girl child and enable her education.

Ladli Laxmi Yojna The program is an initiative Women and Child Development Department, Public Health and Family Welfare Department. A conditional money transfer scheme -the main condition being full childhood immunisation. Under the scheme, on birth of a girl child, a sum of Rupees 6,000 will be deposited in the name of the girl. Amount of rupees 2000, 4000, and 6000 will be disbursed to the girl child on reaching Standard VI, IX, and XII, respectively. On attaining the age of 21, a sum of rupees 100,000 will be given to the girl for marriage. It also involved tracking Ladli until 21 years of age.

Lado Abhiyan The program is an initiative Women and Child Development Department, Public Health and Family Welfare Department. Lado Abhiyan launched by MP to discourage and prevent child marriage. Lado Abhiyan was launched in 2013 to eradicate the malpractice of child marriage. The main objective of the campaign is apprising the people of the provisions of the Prevention of Child Marriage Act-2006 and making them aware of the ill-effects of marriage in a tender age on the mental and physical development of children.

The campaign is run around the year. Under the campaign, 52,000 child marriages were prevented through counseling before the event from April 2014 to February 2015. In all, 1511 child marriages were prevented on the spot and 41 FIRs registered with police. Under the campaign, 1 lakh children were admitted to schools and information about Prevention of Child Marriage Act was given in 22,000 schools. The novel campaign was recognized at the national level.

Shaurya Dal The program is an initiative Women and Child Development Department, Public Health and Family Welfare Department. The objective is to create an enabling environment that would support girls and women to move freely and make use of choices, spaces, and opportunities for their overall well-being. Shaurya Dal consists of 5 female members and 5 male members who are vocal, proactive and have a say in the community, from the village, who have come together with an objective of creating a women-friendly environment in the society to facilitate their economic empowerment. Government would constitute Shaurya Dals in every village and city ward to give more power to the women.

Mangal Diwas Yojana The program is an initiative Women and Child Development Department, Public Health and Family Welfare Department. Mangal Diwas program is organized in Anganwadi and is dedicated to adolescent girls. On this day, adolescent girls are provide balanced diet and imparted training in maintaining hygiene, etc. In MP, every Tuesday of the month is celebrated as Godbharayi, Annaprashan, Janm divas and Kishor Balika program. The aim of the celebration is to create the atmosphere of affinity. The celebration is organized by the an Anganwadi. The first Tuesday, second Tuesday, third Tuesday, and fourth Tuesday are used for these programs. The following programs are organised on Tuesday.

Swagatam Lakshmi Yojana The scheme will be launched by Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan on January 24 at Ravindra Bhavan. Target groups of the scheme are embryo in mother's womb, newly born girls, every girl going to school/college, school/college students, domestic women helps/woman labourers, women working in various government/private institutions, offices, etc., male community, all public representatives of Panchayats, urban bodies, etc., and various communities, committees, and parties .

Usha Kiran Yojana The program is an initiative Women and Child Development Department, Public Health, and Family Welfare Department. Under Usha Kiran Yojana, complaints are received from women/girl disposed off in time. Usha Kiran Kendras 'on the lines of "one-stop crisis centres" is set up in every district of the state and run by the women's empowerment cell. The first one-stop crisis center in the state was launched first in Bhopal in 2014 by actor Aamir Khan. MP's capital Bhopal was the first in the country to get a one-stop crisis center "Gauravi" for women who are victims of violence. At the center was set up in Jaiprakash Hospital with the support of NGO Action Aid. At the centers, victims can seek help by directly walking in or by calling a toll free number. Victims of rape, dowry harassment, and domestic violence get medical aid and also help in filing FIRs, legal advice and psychological counselling.

Gaon Ki Beti Yojana The program is an initiative Women and Child Development Department, Public Health, and Family Welfare Department. Under Gaon Ki Beti Yojana, every rural girl having passed 12th class exam in first division and taking admission in higher education courses is provided amount 5,000 per annum at the rate of amount 500 per month for 10 months.

Balika Shiksha Protsahan Yojana The program is an initiative Women and Child Development Department, Public Health, and Family Welfare Department. This scheme is a centrally sponsored. The Government of India deposits an amount of Rs 3000/- in the bank of the girl child as in the name of the girl. The amount will be paid to the girl child when she becomes 18 years old and completes the 10th class standard. The prime goal of this scheme is to encourage the girl child to pursue higher studies after they have completed 10th standard. Scheme is applicable for SC and ST girls.

CRITICAL CONNECTIONS

The aim of these policy intervention seems to have expanded from mere stopping abortions to increasing education and capability enhancement with focus on:

i) To prevent Gender biased sex selective elimination: Focussed intervention targeting enforcement of all existing Legislations and Acts, especially to Strengthen the implementation of Pre-Conception & Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Prohibition of Sex Selection) Act, 1994 (PC&PNDT Act) with stringent punishments for violations of the law.

ii) To ensure survival & protection of the girl child: Article 21 of the Constitution defines “protection of life and liberty” as a legitimate right of its citizens. The difference in mortality rates of girls and boys indicates the difference in access to various health care and nutrition services as well as the preferential care and treatment given to boys. The access to various entitlements, changes in patriarchal mind-set etc. are to be addressed in order to ensure equal value, care for and survival of the infant and young girl child. Further implementation of various legislative provisions for the protection of the girl child and women has to be ensured to create a nurturing and safe environment for the girl child.

iii) To ensure education & participation of the girl child: The access and availability of services and entitlements during the various phases of the life cycle of the Girl Child has a bearing on her development. Essential requirements related to Nutrition, Health Care, Education and Protection have to be fulfilled to enable every girl child to develop to her full potential- especially the right to quality early childhood care, elementary and secondary education. Right To Education (RTE) Act, 2010 provides children the right to free and compulsory education till completion of elementary education in a neighbourhood school. Further, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) is a flagship programme for achievement of Universalisation of Elementary Education (UEE) in a time bound manner, as mandated by 86th amendment to the Constitution of India making free and compulsory Education to the Children of 6-14 years age group, a Fundamental Right. Denial of these entitlements is a violation of children’s rights, which will have a lasting lifelong negative impact. This will also adversely impact upon future human development.

CONCLUSION

Discrimination and neglect of girl child can lead to low self-esteem, lifelong deprivation and exclusion from the social mainstream. Appropriate initiatives will be taken to encourage girls to express their views and to be heard, to participate actively, effectively and equally at all levels of social, economic, and political leadership. Long term interventions for gender equality would focus on creating enabling environment including employable opportunities, safety & security, mobility & speedy justice. The impact of these scheme need to be studied at length in coming decades to understand its impact in truly changing the conditions of women and girl child.

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