

**Vulnerable Daughters in a Modernizing Society:
From 'son Preference' to 'daughter discrimination' in modern India***

*“Having a daughter is like watering a flower in the neighbour’s garden”
- Tamil proverb*

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I. Introduction

The high masculine sex ratios of the Indian population had been a matter of concern for some time. Considerable attention have been paid to different dimensions of female deficits in India and persisting regional variations (Sen 1990; Agnihotri 2000; Miller 1981 and 1989; Bhat 2002; Croll 2002), since the numerical imbalances between the male and female sexes were pointed out in the seventies (Visaria 1971; Natarajan 1972). The results of 2001 Census have set off a further debate on the issue and have narrowed down the focus to the changes in the juvenile or child sex ratio¹. Changes in the sex ratio of children, aged 0-6 years, are better indicators of status of girl child in India, known to be more hostile to females in their early ages. It also reflects the sum total of intra-household gender relations². Why millions of girls do not appear to be surviving in contemporary India, despite an overall improvement in development and many governmental measure to enhance the status of women? Why are female children still at risk and why is daughter discrimination on the increase despite progress in female literacy and participation of women in economic and political activities? Is there any significant shift from son preference to daughter discrimination at the household level? There is an urgent need to focus attention on increasing daughter-discrimination and aspects related to children differentiated by their gendered value.

II. Conceptual Framework

Human population exhibits definitive characteristics in terms of its sex composition. In most parts of the globe less females are born, yet females, as compared to their male counterparts, typically survive longer to exceed the males numerically at any given point of time. However, this demographic attribute eludes India where males decisively out-number the females and women constitute less than half of the total population. Sex ratio is a direct indicator of women's status and welfare. The sex ratio changes are usually analysed in a framework that underlies (relatively) greater deprivation and discrimination of females as opposed to males. The major determinants, of numerical imbalances, revolve around factors such as under enumeration of women, fertility, mortality and migration. Under-enumeration of females, relative to their male counter parts, typically encountered in Indian context due to lower status of women, also makes census sex composition more masculine. The census data should be interpreted with caution because improving the quality of age data on children can produce a spurious trend of falling sex ratios at certain childhood ages (Bhat 2002). Though such enumeration bias is relatively greater at certain ages it does not depict the grim reality and warrants interventions that can generate better awareness about the need for accurate age reporting as well as recording.

¹The Census of India measures the sex ratio as number of females per 1000 males as opposed to the standard international norm of number of males per 1000 females. Defining the sex ratio by covering children in age group 0-6 may seem arbitrary but the Census uses it for the purposes of literacy status, categorising (from 1991 onwards) the entire population into two groups, those aged 0-6 years and those 7 years and above.

²The child sex ratios are less likely to be affected by migration, which, if sizeable, can significantly alter the sex composition in numerical terms.

While the 2001 Indian census shows that the overall male-female sex ratio has marginally improved from 927 women per 1000 men to 933 per 1000 during the last decade the number of girls to boys in the youngest age group fell from 945/1000 to 927/1000. The regional disparities also appear to have increased; the northern states generally exhibit a worsening trend in male-female sex ratio as compared to the southern states. The Census evidence suggests a clear cultural preference for male children, particularly among some north Indian states. The sharpest decline for the age group 0-6 years is observed in the northern states, particularly in Punjab (793/1000) and in Haryana (820/1000). The census lists 'sex-selective female abortions', 'female infanticide', and 'female neglect' – typically through giving girls less food and medical care than boys- as "important reason commonly put forward" for this shocking anomaly. The new figures point to the use of new technologies to determine the gender composition. Furthermore, as social norms are changing toward smaller families, the availability of and access to new technologies provide an easy way for parents to achieve such goals. Amartya Sen has called it a 'technological revolution of a reactionary kind'.

III. Fertility trends and son preference in contemporary Asia

One of the most remarkable changes in the last century has been the shift from high to low fertility. Indeed, this has been described as 'the greatest single demographic change in the second half of the century' (Caldwell 1993, p. 300). While the timing, onset, pace and magnitude of this decline varies between countries, in most of Asia there have been two similar and striking changes in fertility behaviour which began in the 1960s. In the 1990s, India has experienced a new fertility decline at the national level. The 2001 census indicated that, after a large spell of unprecedented population growth, the country experienced a gradual decline in fertility levels. However, there is also evidence that there is growing disparity between the north and the south, with the southern states having been more successful in controlling population growth³. In a vast country like India with considerable demographic diversity and heterogeneity and varying levels of socio-economic development among states, the levels and phases of fertility decline vary significantly from one state to another (Bhat 1994; Guilmoto and Rajan 2002; Sekher *et al* 2001).

Several studies suggest that cultural factors have played an important role in determining fertility trends. (Basu, 1992; Jeffery and Jeffery 1997; Das Gupta, 1987). While attention has been drawn to the importance of cultural factors in studying demographic behaviour, few studies have examined in detail the relations between cultural and economic aspects. One important cultural (and economic) feature is the value attached to sons. Many social scientists have argued that with increasing welfare and economic development the importance of factors such as son preference would decline. However, some recent studies have shown that son preference has, in fact, increased alongside lower fertility and rising economic and social welfare. Hence, it is

³ For a detailed review of fertility transition in South India, see, Guilmoto and Rajan (2005). Quantitative and qualitative analysis of fertility changes in four southern states have been made available recently under the South India Fertility Project (www.demographic.net/sifp)

important to further analyse the nexus of economic, social and cultural factors that underlie daughter discrimination, thus shifting the focus from son preference to daughter discrimination.

IV. Fertility decline and adverse sex ratio

During the last two decades, considerable debate has taken place, particularly in India, on the imbalance in sex ratio and the question of 'missing women'. In a significant article titled as "More than 100 million women are missing", Amartya Sen (1990) brought to focus the increasing gender discrimination by analyzing the male-female ratio. He argued rather convincingly that the problem of missing women is "clearly one of the more momentous, neglected, problem facing world today". Miller (1981) in her anthropological study of 'neglect of female children in north India', illustrated the strong relationship between culture and mortality. It is the cultural bias against females in north India, which brings into play neglect and mistreatment of unknown numbers of children. According to her, the solution to this problematic future lies "in giving high priority to achieving gender equality in economic entitlement and increased awareness of the social importance of equal health and survival of males and females" (Miller, 1981: 214).

There have been a number of studies which have attempted to illustrate how the decline in fertility will effect gender bias and more imbalance in Juvenile sex ratios (Clark, 2000; Das Gupta and Bhat 1997; Croll 2002; Bhat and Zavier 2003 and Vella 2005). A substantial decline in fertility presupposes a desire for fewer children and the means to limit the family size. Both these conditions can be achieved with increase in social and economic development. It is generally accepted that the pace of demographic transition is closely associated with the levels of socio-economic development. However, there are evidences to show that, even in the poorer regions, substantial decline in fertility has occurred through political interventions, in the form of family planning programme. However, the social and economic development and governmental interventions do not ensure any substantial change in the cultural ethos of the society. One important factor (both cultural and economical) that determines the level of fertility transition is son preference. In developing societies, it is believed that a major barrier for decline in fertility was the prevalence of strong son preference, irrespective of socio-economic development. It is also argued that with the increase in welfare and economic development, the influence of son preference would decline gradually. These assumptions are being questioned by some studies indicating that there has been an increase in son preference during the years of fertility decline. This occurs not only in poorer communities but also in populations where women have taken the education, employment and have achieved considerable social status. Das Gupta (1987) has found that excess female mortality for second and subsequent parity daughters was 32 per cent higher than their siblings for uneducated mothers and 136 per cent higher if the mothers were educated. Basu has made similar observation "although her capacity to increase the chances of survival of her children seems to increase with education, the typical Uttar Pradesh women's ability to treat her male and female offspring equally actually decreases" (1992: 196). The existence of strong son preference has resulted in the desire to prevent the birth of daughters by carefully

balancing the desired family size and desired sex composition of the children. In other words, the decline in fertility partly explains the raising masculinity of many populations (Das Gupta and Bhat 1997; Croll 2000). It is hypothesized that as fertility declines, two opposing forces could affect the child sex ratio, what is called as 'parity effect', which leads to a reduction of sex bias and 'intensification effect', which increases it. Considering this dimension, there is a need to examine the influence of the mirror of image of son preference, namely, the daughter discrimination. Does a strong son preference ultimately results in deliberate discrimination against daughters? Miller has stated that "the problem is that son preference is so strong in some areas of India and amongst some classes that daughters must logically suffer in order that family's personal and culturally mandated needs are fulfilled" (1981:25). Logically, this would mean that stronger the son preference, more intense the daughter discrimination.

Rather than going through repeated pregnancies bearing daughters in an attempt to produce male progeny, small family and reduced fertility seems to imply that unborn daughters are the first to be 'sacrificed'. Generally, both infanticide and fatal neglect of female children seem to have been supplemented by sex identification and sex selective abortion, to achieve the desired family size and gender composition. Better opportunities for women's education, increasing labour force participation and an enhanced exposure and freedom, do not guarantee equal status for daughters as that of sons. In many Indian communities, daughters are associated with a double loss. Firstly, a daughter leaves the natal family after her marriage and the benefits from investments made on her upbringing accrue to the new family, constituting a loss to her natal family. This is further compounded by the burden of expenses for her marriage, particularly dowry⁴. Sons, on the other hand, are considered as assets worthy of short and long-term investment. In India, the birth of a boy is thus a time for celebration while a birth of a girl, especially second or subsequent one, is often viewed as time of crisis (Bumiller, 1991). Apart from this economic considerations there are cultural factors that support son preference. All these factors put together contribute to the assumption and firm belief that daughters cannot substitute sons. A common explanation for the existence of son preference and daughter discrimination is that sons can provide old age support. In India, a majority of the old parents live with married children, who, to an overwhelming majority, are sons. Indian context characterized by high levels of uncertainty, where no institutional alternative to the family as a source of social insurance has emerged, parental decisions are likely to be powerfully motivated by their concerns about their own security in the old age. The existence of such an understanding and commitment between parents and sons, called as inter-generational contract, is one of the factors that appears to have remained unchanged through overall Socio-economic changes. Sons are also important because they alone are entitled to perform the funeral rituals of the parents. Added to this, most women have limited or no possibility to contribute towards their parents' welfare. This creates an apparent dichotomy between the value of a girl to her parents and that of a woman to her in-laws.

⁴ Dowry is a considerable burden for the bride's family. In the era of globalization and increase in consumerism, dowry payment is more a rule than an exception. Many communities, where the practice of dowry was totally absent now, have started making huge payments at the time of marriage. In many families have even after the payment of dowry there is continuing uni-directional flow of resources from a women's parental household to her in-laws.

It has also become more costly to raise children as education has become more important and a necessity irrespective of the sex of the child. The increasing cost of education and marriage of girls is a major drain on the household resources, which acts as a strong disincentive to have daughters.

The underlying workings of female discrimination are undoubtedly highly complex. However, a number of broad factors have been identified which together create a situation where sons are preferred and daughters are neglected. The patterns of inheritance are typically patrilineal in India with property passing from father to son. (Miller, 1981; Das Gupta; 1987; Kabeer, 1996; Croll, 2000) Upon marriage the bride leaves her natal home to live with the family of her husband. In this exogamous lineage system women are left out. They become dispensable essentially because they count for very little as individuals. There is a double loss of a daughter leaving the family together with the fact that the benefits from investments made in a daughter's upbringing will accrue to the new family. In other words, even though a woman's status might improve, it does not change the nature of the social order, as it does not directly correlate to a change in her position within it. While valuing adult women's contributions to the household, the system generates strong disincentives to raising daughters.

In recent years, a major factor directly influenced the imbalance in child sex ratio is the widespread use of sex determination technologies and sex selective abortion. Parents used these methods to achieve the desired sex composition of the children within the desired family size. A discussion on sex-selective abortion in Indian context is relevant here.

V. Sex Ratio of India

The child sex ratio has registered fourteen points decline in the rural areas at the national level while this decline is thirty-two points in the urban areas. The most disturbing aspect is the decline in the rural areas of twenty-six States and Union territories at the 2001 Census. This decline has been very steep (eighty-two points) in Punjab followed by Chandigarh, Haryana and Uttaranchal, all in the northern region (Table 1). Kerala is the only state recorded a favorable sex ratio for females. In fact, from 1036 in 1991 it went up to 1058 in 2001. However, similar trend is not reported with regard to child sex ratio. The decline in the child sex ratio in thirty-two states/union territories in their urban areas and in twenty-nine states and union territories in the rural areas speaks about the pathetic status and low desirability of girl child in Indian society.

Table 1: Sex ratio and Child sex ratio for India and major states with Decline or increase of Child Sex ratio -1991 and 2001

Sl. No.	State	1991		2001		Change in CSR 1991-2001	No. of districts where CSR has declined between 1991 and 2001			
		Sex Ratio	CSR	Sex Ratio	CSR		By 20 points	By 20-39 points	By 40 or more points	Total
	India	927	945	933	927	-18	236	123	97	456(79)
1	Andhra Pradesh	972	975	978	964	-11	19	3	-	22(95.7)
2	Assam	923	975	932	964	-11	11	4	3	18(78.3)
3	Bihar	907	953	921	938	-15	14	12	3	31(83.8)
4	Chattisgarh	985	984	990	975	-9	9	2	-	11(68.8)
5	Gujarat	934	928	921	878	-50	7	5	12	24(100)
6	Haryana	865	879	861	820	-59	1	2	16	19(100)
7	Jharkhand	922	979	941	966	-13	13-	-	3	16(88.9)
8	Karnataka	960	960	964	949	-11	15	5	1	21(77.8)
9	Kerala	1036	958	1058	963	5	5-	-	-	5(35.7)
10	Madhya Pradesh	912	941	920	929	-12	22	10	-	32(71.1)
11	Maharashtra	934	946	922	917	-29	16	9	9	34(97.1)
12	Orissa	971	967	972	950	-17	16	10	2	28(93.3)
13	Punjab	882	875	874	793	-82	-	-	17	17(100)
14	Rajasthan	910	916	922	909	-7	13	6	1	20(62.5)
15	Tamil Nadu	974	948	986	939	-9	20	4	-	24(80)
16	Uttar Pradesh	876	927	898	916	-11	25	15	7	47(67.1)
17	West Bengal	917	967	934	963	-4	11	1	1	13(72.2)

Note: Only states with a population of more than 20 million as per 2001 census included

Source: Census of India, 1991 and 2001.

Sex Ratio at Birth

The two rounds of India's National Family Health Surveys (1992-93 and 1998-99) provide information at the state level regarding the sex ratio at birth (SRB). According to this, the SRB increased from 1.06 to 1.08 between 1978-92 and 1984-98 in India as a whole. This is slightly higher than the naturally occurring SRB of about 1.05. In southern states, the SRB is close to 1.05, an indication that the sex selective abortion is rarely practised. However, the SRB was 1.14 in Haryana and 1.20 in Punjab during 1984-98, a clear indication of large-scale sex selective abortion (Retherford and Roy 2003). It was also found that sex selective abortion is stronger among the following sub groups - Urban women, women with middle school complete or higher education, and women living in households with a high standard of living.

Table 2: Changes in sex ratio at birth for India and selected states

Year	India		Haryana		Himachal Pradesh		Punjab		Tamil Nadu		Karnataka	
	1978-92	1984-98	1978-92	1984-98	1972-98	1984-98	1972-98	1984-98	1972-98	1984-98	1972-98	1984-98
All births	106	108	110	114	107	108	114	120	102	105	105	105
1	105	107	109	110	115	105	109	101	100	105	109	104
2	107	108	100	114	100	107	111	123	99	105	101	109
3	107	108	114	129	108	117	117	136	110	101	101	102
4 plus	106	108	116	108	106	107	122	134	104	105	107	104

Source: Retherford and Roy, 2003.

The changes in sex ratios at birth show how discrimination against girls has increased and become more selective as it has become stronger against higher birth order girls (Table 2). It is particularly evident for Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka and to some extent Tamil Nadu for which the earlier time periods recorded higher ratios (less adverse to females) for the first birth order child than the second. In the second time period the ratios were lower for the second birth than for the first. The implicit indication is that this increase is caused by a decline in fertility and a shift toward smaller families, which has given less room to daughters in the family.

VI. Sex Selective Abortion

Birth histories collected during National Family Health Surveys show an unusually large proportion of male births in some population groups, which suggest that female fetuses are being aborted. Sex selective abortion is a two-step process involving determination of the sex of the foetus followed by abortion if the fetus is not the desired sex. During the last two decades, prenatal diagnosis technologies have proliferated rapidly in India, primarily misused to avoid the birth of daughters, as there exists a strong preference for sons. Couples who have achieved their desired family size may not stop having children if they have not reached their desired number of sons. Soon after the introduction of the sex-determination tests, advertisements began to spread both in urban and rural areas by private practitioners motivated by high profit margin in providing abortion services; "Pay Rs 500 (US Dollar 10) now rather than Rs. 500,000 (US Dollar 10,000) later". These attractive advertisements were specifically addressing prospective parents to abort female foetuses in order to avoid future dowry expenses. Daughters are considered as a 'liability' for the family by these advertisements and in a way they exhort women to avail themselves of the services of the clinic to escape the future financial burdens arising from getting the daughter married (Mazumdar, 1994).

Misuse of sex determination tests has been a subject of media attention for many years. Health activists and women's organizations voiced their concern forcing the government to act. In 1994, Government of India banned the tests at national level, with

the Pre-natal Diagnostic Techniques (PNDT) (Regulation and Prevention of Misuse) Act. As per this new legislation, only government- registered clinics and laboratories may employ prenatal diagnostic procedures that could be used to assess the sex of the fetus. The new Act also specifies that no prenatal diagnostic procedures may be used unless there is a heightened possibility that the fetus suffers from a harmful condition or genetic disease. It also states, "no person conducting prenatal diagnostic procedures shall communicate to the pregnant women concerned or her relatives the sex of the fetus by words, signs, or in any other manner". This Act was again amended in the light of the newer techniques of pre-conception tests and the amended rule has come into effect from February, 2003. Now the Act is renamed as the Pre-conception and Pre-natal Diagnostic Techniques (Prohibition of Sex-selection) Act, 1994.

Female foetuses are liable to victimization on the basis of their sex alone even before they are born. Only far reaching social changes that aim at increasing female autonomy, female economic power and the value of the girl child are likely to make a significant impact on the demand for sex-selective abortion. Interestingly, there is no reliable statistics available on sex selective abortion at the state or national level in India. An indirect estimate using the data from two rounds of National Family Health Survey indicates more than 100,000 sex-selective abortions in India every year (Arnold, Kishore and Roy 2002). The evidence of substantial sex-selective abortion in states such as Punjab, Haryana, Delhi and Maharashtra is consistent with the high rates of use of ultrasound and amniocentesis (Retherford and Roy 2003).

Using the data from the National Family Health Survey (1998-99), Arnold, Kishore and Roy (2002) provide evidence on the widespread use of ultrasound for sex-selective abortions in India, and for particular states. Firstly, an evaluation of sex ratios at birth provides the extent of sex-selective abortions because in general (without any sort of intervention) the sex-ratios at birth are usually between 103 and 106 males per 100 females in most societies (United Nations, 1998). If the sex ratios at birth are above 106, it is implied that pre-birth interventions are further reducing the chances of a female birth. As per NFHS-2, the sex ratio at birth in India was 106.9. It was 105.1 five years before as per NFHS-1. Interestingly, the sex ratio at birth varies from 107 to 121 in different states of India (see Table 3); this clearly illustrates the reality that in many parts of India, the female births are avoided successfully by using (or misusing) the modern technology. Women with no sons are more likely to undergo these tests than other women (Table-4). There is a difference in the pattern of adoption of these technologies between northern and southern states of India .

Table:3: Sex ratios at birth for children born in the five years preceding the survey, India, NFHS-1 and NFHS-2.

State	1992-93 NFHS-1	1998-99 NFHS-2
Andhra Pradesh	100.2	103.2
Arunachal Pradesh	115.5	117.5
Assam	96.8	114.5
Bihar	96.8	106.7
Delhi	108.0	120.8
Goa	105.9	115.5
Gujarat	101.9	107.1
Haryana	113.5	117.8
Himachal Pradesh	112.3	112.6
Jammu and Kashmir	112.7	108.3
Karnataka	105.4	104.6
Kerala	99.0	107.7
Madhya Pradesh	108.1	104.5
Maharashtra	106.1	110.6
Manipur	90.6	103.0
Meghalaya	109.0	113.8
Mizoram	104.6	108.1
Nagaland	105.7	106.5
Orissa	110.9	106.0
Punjab	114.1	116.2
Rajasthan	110.8	108.8
Sikkim	U	110.1
Tamil Nadu	97.9	105.7
Tripura	103.5	103.4
Uttar Pradesh	105.4	103.6
West Bengal	103.8	108.8
Group A ¹	107.7	111.6
Group B ²	100.8	104.7
India	105.1	106.9

Note: Estimates for all - India exclude Tripura.

U = Unavailable

¹ Gujarat, Haryana, and Punjab

² Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, and Tamil Nadu

Source: Arnold, Kishore and Roy (2002).

Table 4: Percent of live births in the three years preceding the survey for which ultrasound, amniocentesis, or either was done as part of an antenatal checkup, by number and sex of living children at the time the woman got pregnant, Group A states Gujarat, Haryana and Punjab. Group B states Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu, NFHS-2.

Number and sex of living children	Ultrasound			Amniocentesis			Ultrasound or Amniocentesis		
	India	Group A*	Group B**	India	Group A*	Group B**	India	Group A*	Group B**
No children	19.9	24.4	34.1	2.4	2.2	3.3	20.7	24.9	35.3
One child	14.5	18.2	29.0	1.7	1.0	3.7	15.3	18.3	29.0
One son	13.8	18.7	25.8	1.6	0.9	3.2	14.5	19.0	27.8
No sons	15.3	17.6	28.1	1.9	1.1	4.2	16.1	17.6	30.4
Two children	8.4	12.8	16.0	1.0	0.2	1.8	9.0	13.0	17.4
Two sons	6.7	8.2	16.0	1.2	0.0	3.5	7.6	8.2	18.8
One son	7.0	8.2	14.7	0.7	0.3	1.5	7.4	8.5	15.6
No sons	12.4	23.1	18.1	1.3	0.4	1.0	13.1	23.1	19.1
Three children	5.5	10.5	14.4	1.3	0.0	3.3	6.2	10.5	16.6
Three sons	2.7	(0.0)	(8.7)	1.0	(0.0)	(6.5)	3.7	(0.0)	(15.3)
Two sons	4.1	10.2	18.4	0.2	0.0	0.0	4.3	10.2	18.4
One son	4.7	10.2	11.6	1.2	0.0	5.3	5.3	10.2	14.1
No son	12.3	16.6	18.3	3.7	0.0	1.9	14.0	16.6	20.3
Four or more children	2.8	6.9	8.7	0.5	1.4	1.4	3.0	6.9	9.6
All sons	1.7	(5.8)	(8.1)	0.2	(0.0)	(0.0)	1.8	(5.8)	(8.1)
Sons > daughters	2.3	0.0	12.2	0.1	0.0	1.3	2.4	0.0	13.5
Sons = daughters	2.6	5.2	5.0	0.3	0.0	0.0	2.8	5.2	5.0
Sons < daughters	3.0	8.2	6.5	0.8	2.5	0.9	3.4	8.2	7.4
All daughters	3.9	11.0	(12.7)	0.8	1.6	(4.8)	4.1	11.0	(14.5)
Total	12.1	17.0	26.1	1.5	1.2	3.1	12.7	17.2	27.7

Note: Table excludes Tripura

*Group A includes Gujarat, Haryana and Punjab

**Group B includes Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu

() Based on 25-49 unweighed Cases

Source: Arnold, Kishore and Roy (2002).

Using the NFHS data again, it was observed that at the national level, the sex ratio at birth for mothers who had either ultrasound or amniocentesis was 934 female births per 1000 male births (Table 5). This lower sex ratios for births to mothers who had either of these tests can be attributed to sex-selective abortions. NFHS survey demonstrated that ultrasound and amniocentesis are often used for sex determination and sex selective abortions of female fetuses have been rampant in many states of India, particularly in Punjab, Haryana and Gujarat. Though ultrasound and amniocentesis tests on pregnant women are legal in India, the divulgence of the sex of the child to the parents is illegal since 1996. However, the legislation has been a miserable failure in preventing the couples seeking sex determination and the medical practitioners performing them. Enforcement of legal procedures alone will not reduce these incidences unless there are significant changes in the attitudes and social life.

Table: 5 :Sex ratios at birth for children born in the three years preceding the survey whose mothers received ultrasound, amniocentesis, or neither as part of an antenatal checkup, NFHS-2, 1998-99

State	Ultrasound	Amniocentesis	Ultrasound or amniocentesis	Neither
Gujarat	123.1	*	122.0	101.9
Haryana	183.8	*	186.3	117.0
Punjab	116.7	*	118.1	104.6
Group A ¹	128.7	169.7	128.4	106.0
Group B ²	100.3	91.3	100.6	103.1
India	112.4	120.3	112.3	107.1

Note: Estimates for all-India exclude Tripura.

¹Gujarat, Haryana, and Punjab

²Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, and Tamil Nadu

* Not shown; based on fewer than 25 un-weighted cases.

Source: Arnold, Kishore and Roy (2002).

VII. Field level observations

As part of an ongoing Project, we carried out intensive fieldwork in selected villages of four states. Field observations from Karnataka and Tamil Nadu are presented here, the field data from Uttaranchal and Himachal Pradesh is under process.

Karnataka: Mandya District in a Low Fertility Region

Mandya district is located in the central belt of southern part of Karnataka, and area, which has been physiographically classified as southern *Maidan* (planes) region of the state. The district is compact with high population and village densities. More than 60 per cent of the total population of the district belongs to a single peasant community, the Vokkaligas (gowdas). With the paucity of land for further expansion of area under cultivation, the long history of irrigation expansion, and the Vokkaligas' love for land and cultivation have been documented by social scientists (Epstein 1962, and 1973; Srinivas, 1976). There is fewer land transaction and the land values have increased considerably. Predominant small holding is the characteristic feature of this district. Landholdings of less than 2 hectare form nearly 85 per cent of all holdings. The large holdings with more than 10 hectare account for 0.33 per cent of the total holdings and about 4.54 per cent of the total land held. Thus, marginal and small formers are predominant in the district. The fortunes of a man generally depends upon the size of landed property of his father and the number of siblings with whom he will have to share the property.

Canal irrigation is a characteristic feature of Mandya district. The major irrigation work, the Krishnarajasagar dam across river cauvery was partly completed by 1921 and water was made available to the farmers of the district. Agricultural land, with assured canal irrigation, is the backbone of the economy the district. The major crops

are paddy, sugarcane, ragi and coconut. Sericulture and handloom weaving are the two other important economic activities, which provide work for thousands of families. The district recorded a population density of 355 per sq. km in 2001. The male literacy rate has 72 per cent and female literacy 52 per cent.

Observations from the Study Village: Mangala

Mangala village (in local language means 'auspicious') is located 8 kms away from Mandya town. Coconut gardens and fields of sugarcane and paddy along with canals and streams surround the village. As per 2001 Census, there were 637 households in this village with an average household size of 5. Twenty-one per cent of the households belonged to scheduled castes. The literacy rate is about 60 per cent. The general sex ratio was 926 (females per thousand males) and the child sex ratio (0-6) is 732 in 2001, a considerable decline from 825 as recorded in 1991.

With assured irrigation and the Visvesvaraya Canal passing through this village, many important changes have taken place in the agriculture of this village. The advent of irrigation brought overall changes in the pattern of cultivation and consequently, improved the economic condition of land owning families. Ownership of land implies regular food availability and income for the families. Therefore, land is the most important economic resource for the villagers of the Mangala. Most farmers use high yielding varieties of seeds and apply fertilizers. The availability of irrigation pump sets, tractors and power tillers in a way replaced significant part of agriculture labour. The availability of credit and marketing facilities also helped farmers. The easy access to the vibrant Mandya town with many commercial and industrial establishments also encouraged many villagers to take up employment in the town.

The population of Mangala village has increased considerably with only 761 in 1951 to 2921 in 2001. Nearly 70 per cent of households were Vokkaligas, the dominant community in the village as well as in the district. Vokkaliga in Kannada means 'cultivator', and they were traditional agriculturists. They are the Gangadikar Vokkaligas enjoying higher rank within the vokkaligas. Undoubtedly, Vokkaligas control the bulk of the cultivable land. According to 2001 census, 36 per cent of the total workers are cultivators and 24 per cent were agricultural labourers in this village.

We observed that dowry, wealth flow from bride's family to groom's family, has become a common practice in all castes and communities. The communities that did not practice dowry in the past have now started this in a big way. This has put a heavy burden on the family in arranging for dowry demanded by the boy's family and also meeting the increasing marriage expenses. Having more children is a financial burden on the family in terms of sending them to school and in performing their marriages. Epstein, who made a study of this village, documents the emergence of dowry practice in this area- "in Wangala, it was Beregowda, one of the most enterprising peasants, who initiated change to dowry payments. He explained that three considerations had motivated him to take this step: first, he was keen to get an educated husband to his daughter. Second, his daughter had not been trained to work in the fields and far from being an economic asset she would be a liability as a wife; finally, he said, Brahmins

had always given their daughters dowries” (1973:197). In another study in South Karnataka village, Caldwell *et al.*, describe the changes in dowry practices - “ The major change was the coming of dowry. In the early 1950s the first dowries in Bangalore were paid by some Brahmin families. Not until the beginning of the 1960s did the first Brahmin landlord family in the study area provide a dowry and not until 1965 was this done by the first Vokkaliga (the major peasant caste) family. It is still not paid by Harijans, although in the largest village they ceased paying the *Tera* five years ago, and the payment is still small among some of the backward castes. Nevertheless, they all anticipate its arrival. In all castes, the bride’s family now bears the major portion of the wedding costs, and it is they who seek loans and sell land” (1982: 707).

Rich Gowda families are ready to pay even Rs.5-6 lakhs as dowry, apart from gold, vehicles etc. The girl’s family meets the entire marriage expenses. The dowry depends upon the qualification and employment position of the boy and land owning status of the family. During our fieldwork we came across Vokkaliga families having only one child, mostly male, and deciding to accept family planning. According to them, if they had more than one child it would be extremely difficult to provide good education and meet the cost of up-bringing. As narrated in our focus group discussions, since land was limited, it was difficult to maintain the standard of living (see annexure-1).

Generally, most of the Vokkaliga families are nuclear. After marriage, women have no right over the parental property including land. The sons inherit all family assets. During our interviews and FGDs, we found that there was a strong preference for small families, and interestingly, most of the couples had already accepted family planning. It was the Vokkaligas who by accepting birth control measures paved the way for other communities towards the acceptance in this village. A majority felt that it was responsibility and sometimes a burden to have more children, particularly girls. The type of fertility transition experienced in this village and other parts of the district has been unique, and one can see a strong relationship between population pressure on land and rapid fertility decline (Sekher and Raju, 2004). Dependence on agriculture in Mandya district is far greater than anywhere else in the state. The paucity of cultivable land and availability of irrigation have resulted in increasing land values. The Land owning Vokkaliga desire to have only one or two sons to avoid further fragmentation of land. As mentioned by Epstein (1998) “They now appreciate that large number of children create economic problems of future generations. But most of them still have a strong son preference. They continue procreating until they have atleast one son. For example, shangowda had one son after his wife had given birth to two daughters. He and his wife then decided that three children are enough for them. A large proportion of villages pursue the same strategy. In this too, old beliefs and customs persist in a changed setting” (P-196). Vokkaligas consider land as the source of old age security, along with the son. Beals, while studying social change in a Mysore village 50 years ago, states that- “ Namhalli’s landowning group, while not threatened with starvation, has been faced, in recent years, with the problem of dividing a limited quantity of land among an ever increasing population. Within the village many solutions to this problem, ranging from abortion to the adoption of iron plows, have been tried. In almost

every family in Namhalli, at least one child has been groomed for urban employment” (1955: 98).

During our fieldwork we observed that a majority of the young couple underwent sex determination test, either in private clinic or nursing home. People from Mangala village, go to nearby Mandya town where two nursing homes are known for conducting abortions. During focus group discussion among Vokkaliga and Scheduled Caste women, we found that almost all were aware of the facilities available to find out the sex of the foetus. We also came across cases where some health workers, particularly ANMs, providing information and advising village women ‘on getting rid of unwanted daughters’. Some of them openly admitted that both the test and the abortions were done in Mandya city. In a few cases, people went to places like Bangalore. This was expensive for the family, but rich Gowdas were ready to spend more money for a ‘good purpose’. For conducting ultra sound test and disclosing the sex of the foetus the private nursing homes in Mandya charge between Rs. 1,000 or 2,000, and if woman prefers an abortion she has to pay an additional Rs. 5,000. During discussions many women justified persuading their daughters or daughters-in-law for abortion saying that it is better to spend Rs. 1,000 now than spending Rs. 10 lakhs later. One woman belonging to the Vokkaliga community said that had this facility (ultrasound) been available 20 years ago, she would have preferred it to reduce the number of daughters. She said “*Hecchu edi kere haal maadtu; Hecchu henninda mane haalaatu*” (more crabs spoil the lake and in the same way more daughters spoil the house). In an attempt to have a son 20 years ago, she gave birth to three daughters.

Another old woman explained the necessity for having a son. In her own words, “*maga manege; magalu pararige*” (son is for our family and daughter is for other family). When asked about whether they depend on their sons for protection during old age, most men and women in Mangala village said ‘yes’. Some of them strongly felt the necessity to have at least two sons. Krishna Gowda quoting a local saying substantiated his argument “*ondu kannu kannalla ; obba maga maganalla*” (one eye is not enough to see, one son is not enough for the family).

It is very evident that, dowry have gone up considerably in all the communities (see annexure 1). The girl’s family is force to meet a series of payments for the marriage, beginning with engagement and concluding with the bride actually going to reside in the groom’s house. In, many communities, dowry practice was totally absent about thirty years ago, now it has become an essential feature of the marriage. The dowry payment include cash, gold, silver and expensive consumer items like TV and refrigerator, and in many cases a vehicle, preferably a car or bike. A portion of the land and property is also transferred from the girl’s family to the boy’s family. Apart from all this, it is a well-established norm among all communities that all expenditure for conducting the marriage have to be borne by the girl’s family. Considering all these expenses and practically no return, many feel that having a daughter is a ‘real burden’ for the family. As a village woman appropriately summarizes the situation: “*Yavaga Honnina bele Eruthade, avaga Hennina bele iliyuthade*” (Whenever the value of gold goes up, the value of the girl comes down).

The preliminary findings from the household survey carried out in the Mangala village clearly indicate the changing attitude towards the perceived value of sons and that of daughters. The tables presented below are based on a survey of 96 young male or female members (those having at least one child in the age group 0-6). Out of 96, sixty-Six belongs to vokkaligas and the remaining from Scheduled Castes.

Household survey in Mangala Village

Table 6: Ideal family size according to the respondents

Ideal family size	Communities (percentages)	
	Vokkaligas	Scheduled Caste
1 son	30.3	17.4
2 sons	46.9	47.8
1 daughter	4.6	4.3
1son and 1daughter	18.2	30.4
2 Daughters	-	-
	100	100

Table 7: Assessment on children by parents

	Communities (percentages)	
	Vokkaligas	Scheduled Caste
Sons are more expensive to bring up than daughters	21	24
Daughters are more expensive to bring up than sons	87	72
Will you face difficulty in arranging marriage of your son	18	42
Will you face difficulty in marrying off your daughters	71	89
Son will take care of me when I am old	63	74
Daughter will take care of me when I am old	9	12

Table 8: Parental expectations about the future of children

		Vokkaliga (percentages)	
		Men	Women
How do you think life will be for your daughter (s) ?	Better	NA	11
	Worse		49
	Like your own		40
How do you think life will be for your son (s)?	Better	39	NA
	Worse	12	
	Like your own	49	
Total		100	100

B. Tamil Nadu: Salem District

Salem district recorded lowest child sex ratio in South India in 2001. This district attracted considerable attention in 90s for the prevalence of female infanticide. There are certain taluks in the district which reported shocking anomalies in juvenile sex ratio in 2001. A study carried out based on available PHC records confirms the incidence of female infanticide in the districts of Salem, Dharmapuri and Madurai (Chankath and Athreya, 1997). The 2001 census reconfirms the rampant practice of female infanticide in parts of Tamil Nadu still in existence, despite overall socio-economic development.

In Salem disteict, the average household size is 4.0, with literacy rate 65 in 2001. Two major communities are Vanniyars and Kongu Vellala Gounders. Vanniyar originally formed fighting force of the Pallavas and hence came to be called as 'padayachi'. Their community cohesiveness is remarkable. Some of them practice agriculture as their main occupation. The traditional occupation of Vanniyar is oil pressing and oil selling. The nuclear family is the most common form. Sons inherit property and the eldest son gets a greater share. Daughter dose not have any right to the property unless they have no brothers. Vanniyars are locally categorized as most backward caste (MBC) and the state government has reservation policy for them. Kongu vellaler is an inhabitant of the Kongu region of the Tamil Nadu. Agriculture is the traditional occupation of this community. The other economic activities are animal husbandry, trade, industrial labour etc. They are hardworking agriculturists and specialized in garden cultivation.

Observations from Study village: Kolanayakkanpatti in Mettur Taluk

This village is having 1341 households as per 2001 census with a total population of 4983 (2676 males 2307 females). The average household size is 4.0. The literacy rate is 47 per cent. The general sex ratio is 862 (females per 1000 males) and the child sex ratio is 616 in 2001, a decline from 673 as recorded in 1991. Three major communitis in this village are Vanniyar, Kongu Vellala Gounder and Scheduled Castes.

During our filed work, we came across the incidences of female infanticide from this village. Though some families, including women, are hesitant to talk about it, there are few who openly justified the practice. Though the practice is more prominent among Vanniyars, other communities also occasionally indulge in this 'crime' (see annexure). In many occasions, though the mother of the child was not directly involved, the elder members ensure the elimination of female infant within a week after birth. The methods used for this purpose include feeding the child with poison, loosening the knot of umbilical cord, suffocate baby to death, feeding with paddy husk, and starving baby to death. The more 'modern' method recently observed is to use pesticides or sleeping pills. Some elders use the prediction of local astrologers ('fortune tellers') as a strong justification to get rid of the daughter who will 'cause destruction to the family'. As one old women, narrating the plight of her family said- "it is better they die than live like me". *Penn sisu kolai*, female Infanticide is called in local language, is justified by various reasons by different individuals. Though many families tolerate the first girl, the

subsequent daughters are really at high risk. The generally observation that the female infanticide is confined to certain backward communities like kaller and Thevar proved wrong. It has spread to communities like Gounder, Vanniyar and Pallars. Our discussions with villagers in Kolanaikanpatti indicated that it is not only the poor who indulge in this, but the rich and powerful in the village also practice the *penn sisu kolai*. There are few police cases registered against parents for committing the infanticide. But the arrival of sex determination tests, even in villages, has given a new method for those who can afford to pay. Many economically better off families admitted that they avoided the birth of another girl "with the help of doctor". However, poor women in the scheduled caste colony during FGDs said, "we cannot pay for test and abortion. So we still do infanticide, which is much cheaper". Our study in this village of Salem district clearly shows the practice of female infanticide is being substituted by female foeticide to a large extent, particularly among Gounder community. The efforts of government, NGOs and few panchayat leaders had some impact in reducing the incidences of female infanticide. Pregnant women already having a girl child use to be classified into high-risk category and monitored closely by NGOs. The girl child protection scheme of the state government is being used to motivate parents to care for female infants. Surprisingly, similar effort is absent in combating female foeticide.

Concluding Observations

The preliminary analysis and field level observations from the two low-fertility regions of South India clearly indicate a strong preference for son, particularly among the peasant communities. However, with the drastic decline in fertility, the preference for son has manifested a deliberate discrimination towards daughters. The widespread use of sex selection techniques has provided an opportunity for couples to choose a son rather than a daughter. Along with this, the increasing pressure on limited land on the one hand and the spiralling cost of bringing up children, particularly girls, due to huge amount of dowry to be paid, parents prefer to avoid having daughters. The medical technology has come in handy for many couples for balancing the desired sex composition and the desired small family size. The rapid fertility decline, not accompanied by changes in the cultural values and gender inequality, is in a way responsible for the intensification of gender bias and the deliberate attempt to 'get rid of girls'.

Annexure 1

A. Range of dowry in Mangala village (1970)

Community	Occupation/education of the son-in-law	Dowry paid	
		Cash (Rs)	Items
Rich Vokkaliga	Educated has job in the city	3,000-4,000	1-2 acre irrigated land Jewelry (for Rs. 6,000) Cloths (for Rs. 3,000)
Middle Class Vokkaliga	Educated	1,000-2,000	Jewelry, cloth, (for Rs. 3,000)
Poor Vokkaliga		Up to 1,000	Cloths and jewelry (for Rs. 1500)

Source: Epstein 1973

B. Range of dowry in Mangala village (2005)

Community/Caste	Occupation/education of the son-in-law	Dowry (cost) in 2004	
		Cash (Rs)	Items
Rich (Vokkaligas)	Groom is employed in government/private jobs and settled in the City	3-5 lakhs	Land, car, 100-130 grams gold, clothes. And all other costs for marriage
	Groom is employed in government /private jobs and settled in the village.	2-3 lakhs	Scooter, 80-100 grams gold, clothes and all other expenses towards marriage
Middle class (Vokkaligas & other castes)	Groom is in government /private jobs and settled in the City	1-2 lakhs	Land, scooter, 60-70 grams gold, clothes and all other expenses towards marriage
	Groom is in government/private jobs and settled in the village.	Less than One lakh	Land, scooter, 60-70 grams gold, clothes and all other costs for marriage
	Groom is agriculturist, settled in the village.	50,000	60-70 grams gold, clothes and all the costs for marriage
Poor labourers (SC's and other castes)	Landless Agricultural labour (groom)	10-20 thousands	10-20 grams gold, and clothes and all other expenses towards marriage
Vodda* households	Landless labour (groom)	5-10 thousands	10-20 grams gold, and all the expenses towards marriage. 101 articles like vessels etc.

*Vodda is a SC community migrated from Tamil Nadu and settled in the village in 1960s.

Source: Focus Group Discussions carried out in Mangala Village by the study team during 2004-05.

C. Observations from the FGDs – From Karnataka village

FGD with Vokkaliga Women:

“ I have a son and my in-laws wanted one more son but my husband was very keen on sterilisation. One day, he took me to Mandya for operation without informing anybody at home. First, my in-laws were angry with me for undergoing operation, but, now, they appreciate my husband’s decision”.

“ After marriage the daughter has no say in family matters”

“ Daughters are usually very affectionate, but after marriage they have to listen to their husbands. Nowadays, even sons are ignoring them. Can one expect support from sons-in-law?”.

“ In our village, most parents usually stay with their sons. In all cases, gradually the youngest son inherits the parental home.”

“ In this village, some people send their sons to convent schools (better quality education) and daughters to government schools (poor quality education)”.

“ Why to spend money on daughters? when sun are educated they get good jobs, they earn money and look after the parents in old age. Daughters one day or the other, leave the house and become part of their in-laws’ family”.

“In our Vokkaliga community, parents of the boys demand dowry. They think it is their birth right”.

“After paying so much dowry, some in-laws continue to demand more. If the girl fails to bring more money, the husband and in-laws start harassing her. Because of this many people don’t want daughters”.

“ When a girl is born, many families become unhappy. But when a boy is born they distribute sweets and celebrate the occasion!”

“ For my mother we were three daughters and my father used to blame my mother for giving birth to three girls. He used to say that we do not have a son to carry on our *kula-deepa*”.

“ When I became pregnant, my in laws used to neglect me because my mother had given birth to only girl children. so they thought that I will also give birth to a girl child. Every day I use to cry and pray to god for boy baby. When I delivered a baby boy I became a respectable person in the house. My husband was also very happy. On that day they distributed sweets to all our relatives and neighbours”.

“ My husband did not ask me anything during the marriage time. One day I asked him for some ornament and he suddenly reacted like, “you have brought me a big bag of money from your

tavrumane (mother's place) to fulfill all your needs". I felt very bad, and after that I stopped asking things".

"Husband and mother-in law try to avoid girl child. During pregnancy they try to find out the sex of the baby."

"Some women are scared of husband and in-laws and therefore, agree for scanning and abortion."

"For my daughter-in-law, we did scanning to find out the sex of the baby. The doctor after taking 1000 Rupees, did not reveal the sex of the baby. After that we went to another doctor and terminated the pregnancy."

"My daughter-in-law already had two daughters, we were scared really to have one more daughter, so we tried to find out if it is boy or a girl".

"Earlier, there was one nurse, she used to tell me to take my daughter-in-law for scanning to find out whether it is boy or girl".

"Some went to Bangalore to find out the sex of the foetus". But abortion charges in Bangalore very high".

FGD with Vokkaliga Men:

"At present, due to lack of rain and no canal water from KRS, agriculture is becoming difficult, not only in our village, but also in all other villages in the area!".

"Farmers are suffering from inadequate rain, poor market price, problems of pests, increasing cost of fertilizer, pesticides and insecticides. It is becoming difficult to earn sufficient money for day-to-day life. Earlier, farmers were having financial security for their expenditure, But, today's situation is reverse, with income is decreasing and expenditure increasing. "

"Having good income they spent money in marriage and education. Most of the people take loan to celebrate marriage".

"In our village, most farmers belong to middle class having about 2-3 acres of land."

"Awareness has been increasing, people have started believing that, small family is beautiful family."

"People had problems when they had more female children earlier, because of dowry problem. Now, people have more problem than earlier while having two and more sons. Because of partition of the family property, now, people like to have only two children."

"In this village female population is declining. At present, there is no shortage of girls. In future, it may not be."

"Because of marriage expenses and dowry, people go for abortion and elimination of the female child."

“Elders also give advice now, about having limited number of children. This is because elders are suffering due to more children”.

“If we have money, what is wrong in giving in to our children as dowry?”

FGD with Scheduled Caste Women:

“ Now, we are economically in a better position compared to the past. *Sthrishakti*” and “*Swasahaya Sanga 's*” are there, and we can get loan and also save some money.”

“ The income depends on our work. Everyday we work. If we don't work we do not have food”.

“For our daughter's marriage, we borrow money form everyone”.

“ If there are rains and crops, we get coolie work. Where there is drought, we have to starve. Most of us work as labourers in Gowda's land”.

“ After having two children, my mother-in-law told me not to go in for sterilization. Then I thought, if I continue like this, it will create lot of problem for me, I may even die. Then I went to a doctor and decided to go in for operation.”

“ My husband wanted more children, and he was very much against sterilization. But I went and got sterilisation performed. Now, he tells me that I did the correct thing.”

“ I got operated immediately after the birth of my second child. My husband gave me full support in this decision.”

“ Our children go to government school. We have no money to send them to the convent”.

“ If we have daughters, it means more expenditure. If we send our daughters for study, then also the expenditure will be more.”

“It is believed that if we give our daughter within the village, it is always better.”

“ Now, at least, Rs. 40,000 is needed for a simple marriage in our community”.

“Rs 40,000 is enough, if we do in a temple. If we do in Marriage hall, it will cost around Rs. 1 lakh.”

“ Gowdas' give 10-20 *tholas* of Gold. In our caste, no one asks that much gold. We are poor people”.

“ I am having two sons, My son was going to the convent school. But when they increased the school fees, I shifted him to the government school.”

“ *Plucking a ripe fruit from a tree is very easy, and without pain we can take it. But to pluck a raw one, we need to hit it with stone, That is why, people are scared to go for abortion.*”

“ I had a daughter, my husband wanted at least one boy. My mother-in-law cried when I gave birth to a girl child”.

“ I am having two sons, if god gives me one daughter, I will be happy.”

“ When I went to the hospital last time I saw *Mahadeva* and his wife. He is having 3 girls and his wife is again pregnant. Thinking it should to be a girl again, he wanted to abort. But the doctor shouted at him and said! *I am not ready to go to Jail. I will send you, if you ask for abortion*”.

“ In the next village *Rame Gowda's* wife died during abortion. Poor woman. She left behind two daughters.”

“Gowdas even now treat us badly. What can we do? Sometimes even in schools and hospitals, we were not given proper attention, because we belong to scheduled castes”.

FGD with Primary School Teachers

“ One boy, *Harsha*, is in convent. But, his sisters are in our government school.”

“*Kanchana*, she is coming to our school ,but her brother of same age is going to the convent”.

“Even young girls feel depressed. A girl one day told me- 'my mother like my brother very much' ”.

“ Many girls do not have time at home for studying”.

“Their hairs are not properly combed, come late for the class. If we ask them why they are late, they tell us that she can come only after finishing the household chores”.

“ We observe all these things and then we call their parents, and ask them why they discriminate between a girl and a boy. We explain them that both boys and girls are the same. We say bring your son; admit him here in the same school and your daughter also will have company. They agree for everything but they continue to discriminate girls”.

“ When we call them for meeting, we try to convince them. When we go on house visits, we try to tell them not to differentiate between a girl and a boy. Some people listen to us, but some do not listen”.

“Now, before the birth of the baby they find out the sex of the foetus. If it is a girl, they go for abortion”.

“ Presently, one women is in hospital. She is a victim of sex selective abortion. She had one daughter. After that she is not keeping well”.

“ When I took my sister to hospital for delivery, next to her bed, three abortion cases were admitted. I came to know that they came for sex selective abortion”.

“ In *Mandya*, many are doing this. If you give money to the doctors, they will do everything for you.”

“We tell them, that their daughter is the *Lakshmi* (goddess of wealth) of your house”.

“Most don't have any respect for daughters and they feel that girls are burden.”

“ Some parents think it is better to educate boys than girls, because girls are useful in household work.”

- “ Many parents are not serious about daughter’s education.”
- “She will get married and go away from the family ”
- “ But, for boys, they have many dreams! My son will be an engineer or doctor.”
- “ Very rarely parents want daughters to become doctors or engineers”.
- “At home, parents provide all kinds of facilities. Encourage son to go in for better studies.”
- “Sons are given tuitions to improve their performance.”
- “Many girls come to school late. Parents are not very serious about this”.
- “ Sometimes homework will be incomplete, girls have no time to study, they have to do lot of household work including cooking”.
- “ People here think that the son takes care of parents in old age and he will keep the family name”.
- “ Those without property want their son to take care when they become old.”
- “If the shortage of girls continues, then there will be reduction in dowry”.
- “How in *Mahabharatha* (Hindu Mythological story) *Draupathy* is married to five men. That kind of situation may come here also.”
- “ In Mangala, even poor people give dowry. Even if a boy is an agricultural worker, he gets lot of gold and cash”.
- “Some parents are forced to give their land as dowry”.
- “The village is improving, but the people’s attitude is the same, everyone wants dowry”.
- “No marriage in this village takes place without giving gold and cash to the boy’s family”
- “Now-a-days, boys demand bike or car”.
- “One man told me- I do not want daughters. Even if we spend Rs. 5000 for abortion now, it is better than spending Rs.5 Lakh for dowry.”
- “Government should strictly control this sex determination test and punish the doctors”.
- “I never heard any doctor being is punished for this crime. Even if they are caught, they give bribe and escape.”
- “Two nursing homes in Mandya city are only doing abortion business. Everyone knows about it”.
- “ I know one ANM who acts as an ‘agent’ for private hospitals”.
- “Why blame doctors and nurses? People are responsible for this”.
- “God created man and women. Children are gifts of god, but our people discriminate and ill-treat the girls”.
- “Girls are given less food than boys. Even rich families do this, then why blame poor?”
- “If we stop dowry, then I am sure, sex selective abortion will disappear”.

“Earlier in this village, scheduled castes never used to give dowry. After seeing Gowdas, they have also started. Some people believe that paying more dowries is a prestige issue for family. They sell land, borrow money and give dowry.”

“ Educated girls should refuse to marry if there is dowry transaction. I read in newspapers that, in the cities, few girls refuse to marry when boy’s family demands dowry. Our village girls do not have the courage to do like that”.

“The focus group discussion ended when one of the senior teacher told that “ we teachers must act as models; first we should stop neglecting daughters in our families. Then only we have the right to criticise others”.

FGD with Vodda Migrant Women

“ In our colony, Kamala has two sons. Her elder daughter-in-law has not brought any thing, but the second daughter-in-law has brought a huge dowry. Therefore, the younger one receives more respect than the elder one.”

“ Including the husband and the in-laws, threaten the elder one for not paying dowry. We have seen it with our eyes so many times”.

“ when dowry is not paid fully, the in-laws send their daughter in-law to her parent’s house without hesitation”,

“ We cannot bear the burden of having more than two children, therefore, we are adopting family planning’.

Annexure 2

A. Similarities Found Among Three Communities in Tamil Nadu Village

Following are the SIMILARITIES found among Gounder, Vanniyars and Dalits

1. Male child preference is common among all the communities. In Gounder community they prefer only one child that too only boy child. In other communities like vanniyar and dalit, they prefer a boy child though they have a girl child.
2. Economic and agricultural conditions have improved among Vanniyars and Gounders. In housing, the dalit community has improved by availing group housing from the government.
3. Education of girls has become important in all the communities. A minimum education of 10th class is provided to the girl children irrespective of caste.
4. Celebration of birthdays of both boy and girl children has become common in all the castes. The only difference is that, depending upon the family background, birthday is celebrated.
5. Nuclear family is the most common prevailing system in all castes. But, only in dalit community there are two to three families living together in a house having separate cooking, it is a unique practice among this community.
6. In marriage practices, dowry is quite common. Though the amount of dowry may differ, but the practice exists.
7. Irrespective of caste and economic background, people are aware about sex determination test and they are availing this facility.
8. Female infanticide exists among all the castes. But it is more among Vanniyars followed by Dalits and Gounders.
9. After the death of parents, the property of the family is being distributed to the sons only. But, in Gounder community some part of the property is given to the daughters.
10. In their old age, parents need their sons to be with them. Staying with daughter is considered most undesirable among all communities
11. Foeticide is practiced by all communities. It is utilized more by Gounders, followed by Vanniyars and Dalits.
12. In all the castes, girl children are considered as a burden and liability irrespective of economical background and educational levels.

B. Differences found among three Communities

Characteristics	Vanniyars	Gounders	Dalits
1. Joint / Nuclear family	Both joint and nuclear families exist among them.	They prefer mostly the nuclear family.	Since the housing facility is not enough they (parents and married couples) live under the same roof, but cooks separately.
2 Dowry	Depending on the economic status dowry differs.	Dowry is demanded starting from the minimum level of 15-20 sovereign gold and Rs.25-50 thousand cash. Maximum level depends on the education of the bridegroom, job prospects and regular earnings.	Demanding dowry is not compulsory here. Therefore finding a bride is not so difficult compared to other communities.
3. Preference of size of the family	Prefer to have more than one child. irrespective of economic status at least one male child.	Prefer to have only one child that too a male child.	Maximum preferences of children are three and expect at least one to be male child.
4. Practice of family planning	Women go for family planning without the consent of men.	Women consult men to undergo family planning with one child.	Both men and women discuss and undergo family planning. They try for a male child if not, they undergo family planning after three.
5. Preference for choosing bride groom	Employment is the only consideration, but in the past they gave importance to property.	Land holding and property is given more importance at the time of marriage	Employment is the only consideration.
6 . Practice of foeticide	Quite often	Very rampant	Not so high
7. Practice of infanticide	Very rampant	Not so high	Quite often
8. Land holding	They have land holdings but less than gounders	They have more land holding	No land holdings
9. Condition of women	Empowered through SHGs	Not much freedom within the family	Empowered through SHGs
10. Finding match	It is possible to find a bride-groom suiting to their economic status. But due to infanticide they may find it difficult to get a bride after ten years	Finding a bride is very difficult. (Impact of infanticide in the past)	The present trend in the infanticide may lead to lack of girl children in future.
11. Property sharing	Till marriage, girl child can enjoy the property. After marriage no share is given.	Share of property to the girl child is common. It is done after the death of parents	No share is given
12. Abortion	Abortion is common	Fortune tellers also play a major role in facilitating the abortion. of female foetus	Traditional practice of abortion still exists

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