



Socio-Cultural Determinants of Gender Discrimination and Declining Sex Ratio: A Comparative Study of Jammu and Doda Districts

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ABSTRACT

Gender discrimination remains a significant social and demographic concern in India despite improvements in female literacy, educational participation, political representation and legal protection. The imbalance between males and females in a population is not merely a demographic phenomenon; it reflects the interaction of social values, family structures, economic conditions, cultural practices and perceptions regarding the relative worth of sons and daughters. The present study examines the socio-cultural determinants of gender discrimination and gender imbalance in Jammu and Doda districts of the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir. The study adopts a comparative and descriptive research design based primarily on secondary data obtained from Census of India publications, District Census Handbooks and government sources. Particular attention is given to sex ratio, child sex ratio, female literacy, rural-urban differences, family norms, son preference, marriage practices, inheritance expectations, economic dependence and access to education.

The paper argues that gender imbalance must be understood through a multidimensional framework encompassing son preference, patriarchal family structures, gendered division of labour, marriage and dowry-related expectations, inheritance practices, reproductive decision-making, differential investment in children, and unequal social autonomy. The comparative evidence suggests that policy interventions should be locally differentiated. While Jammu requires particular attention to the extremely adverse child sex ratio and the interaction between urbanisation and reproductive preferences, Doda requires stronger interventions related to female education, economic empowerment, social awareness and rural accessibility. The study concludes that sustainable improvement in gender equality requires simultaneous transformation of social norms, expansion of women's capabilities and effective implementation of legal and welfare measures.

Keywords: Gender discrimination, sex ratio, child sex ratio, son preference, socio-cultural determinants, female literacy, Jammu, Doda, gender inequality, Jammu and Kashmir.

INTRODUCTION

Gender equality is an important indicator of social development, human rights and inclusive economic progress. A society's treatment of women and girls is reflected not only in access to education and employment but also in family formation, reproductive decisions, inheritance, healthcare, political participation and everyday social relations. Gender discrimination may therefore appear in direct forms, such as unequal access to education or employment, as well as in less visible forms, including son preference, differential allocation of

household resources, restrictions on mobility and expectations concerning marriage and domestic responsibilities.

The sex ratio is one of the most important demographic indicators through which gender imbalance can be examined. It is conventionally expressed as the number of females per 1,000 males. The child sex ratio, generally measured for children aged 0–6 years in the Census, is particularly important because it provides an indication of gender imbalance at an early stage of life. A highly adverse child sex ratio may be associated with differential



treatment of girls, reproductive preferences and, in some contexts, sex-selective practices.

The present study focuses on Jammu and Doda districts. These two districts provide an interesting basis for comparison because they differ considerably in demographic structure, literacy, urbanisation and socio-economic characteristics. Jammu is relatively urbanised, densely populated and has a comparatively high literacy rate. Doda is geographically extensive, predominantly rural and has historically experienced lower female literacy. Despite these differences, both districts operate within broader social structures in which family expectations, marriage systems, gender roles and cultural norms influence the status of women.

Official Census data demonstrate that the overall sex ratio did not decline between 2001 and 2011 in either district. Jammu's sex ratio increased from 865 to 880 females per 1,000 males, while Doda's increased from 913 to 919. However, Jammu's child sex ratio remained extremely low at 795 in both 2001 and 2011. Doda's child sex ratio was considerably higher at 933.

This distinction is important. A discussion of gender discrimination should not rely exclusively on changes in the overall sex ratio. The overall ratio can be affected by migration, mortality and population structure. The child sex ratio provides a more focused demographic signal concerning the relative representation of girls in the youngest age group. Consequently, the present study uses both indicators while examining the broader socio-cultural environment.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND

Gender discrimination is deeply connected with the social construction of gender roles. In patriarchal societies, men are often associated with economic provision, family lineage and decision-making, whereas women are traditionally assigned reproductive and domestic responsibilities. Such divisions can create unequal access to education, employment, property and public resources.

One of the most frequently discussed dimensions of gender inequality in South Asia is **son preference**. Sons may be perceived as future economic

supporters, carriers of the family name and providers of support to parents in old age. Daughters, by contrast, may be perceived as members of another household after marriage. Where marriage-related expenditure and dowry expectations exist, daughters can additionally be viewed as a financial burden. Such perceptions may influence fertility decisions and the allocation of household resources.

Gender discrimination can also operate through the institution of inheritance. Although legal reforms have strengthened women's property rights, customary practices may continue to influence actual behaviour. Women may be discouraged from claiming ancestral property because doing so is perceived as disrupting family relationships or reducing the resources available to brothers.

Education is another major determinant. Female literacy can improve awareness of rights, increase economic opportunities and strengthen women's ability to participate in household decisions. However, education by itself does not necessarily eliminate discriminatory social norms. The Jammu data demonstrate this complexity: the district had female literacy of 77.13% in 2011 but nevertheless recorded a child sex ratio of 795.

The relationship between development and gender equality is therefore not linear. Economic growth and urbanisation may expand opportunities for women, but they can also increase access to reproductive technologies and intensify the ability of families to act upon existing son preferences. Consequently, demographic modernisation does not automatically produce gender equality.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study follows a **descriptive, comparative and analytical research design**. It compares Jammu and Doda districts using demographic and socio-economic indicators and interprets these indicators within a socio-cultural framework.

Sources of Data

The study is primarily based on secondary data. Major sources include:

- Census of India 2001 and 2011;
- District Census Handbooks of Jammu and Doda;
- Official district administration publications;



- Government reports relating to gender and child development;
- Published academic studies on gender inequality and demographic change.

The Census District Handbooks provide village-, town- and ward-level demographic and socio-economic information. The official Census catalogue identifies the Doda District Census Handbook as a publication of the Directorate of Census Operations, Jammu and Kashmir, containing Census and non-Census information at local administrative levels.

Analytical Framework

The study examines gender inequality through five interconnected dimensions:

Demographic dimension: sex ratio and child sex ratio.

Educational dimension: female literacy and gender gaps in literacy.

Economic dimension: employment, economic dependence and perceptions of daughters as economic liabilities.

Family dimension: son preference, family lineage, inheritance and reproductive decision-making.

Cultural dimension: marriage practices, gender roles, social norms and community expectations.

Limitations

The most recent comprehensive district-level Census data available for these comparisons are from Census 2011. Therefore, the paper does not claim that the 2011 figures represent the demographic situation in 2026. More recent administrative or survey data may provide additional information, but they are not necessarily directly comparable with Census measures.

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF JAMMU AND DODA

Jammu District

According to Census 2011 data reported by the official district administration, Jammu had a population of 1,529,958, including 813,821 males and 716,137 females. The district recorded an overall sex ratio of 880 females per 1,000 males. Its population density was approximately 653 persons per square kilometre.

Jammu's literacy rate was 83.45%. Male literacy was 89.08%, while female literacy was 77.13%. Thus, although female literacy was substantially below male literacy, the district had comparatively high levels of educational attainment.

However, the child sex ratio was only 795 girls per 1,000 boys. This is a particularly significant finding because it indicates that the gender imbalance was considerably more severe among children than in the total population. The child sex ratio remained at 795 in both 2001 and 2011, according to district Census data.

The contrast between high female literacy and an adverse child sex ratio suggests that educational development does not necessarily eliminate gender-selective attitudes. Gender preferences may persist among relatively educated and economically developed households.

Doda District

Doda had a population of 409,936 in Census 2011, consisting of 213,641 males and 196,295 females. The district's sex ratio was 919 females per 1,000 males. The official Doda district administration confirms these population and sex-ratio figures.

Doda's overall literacy rate was approximately 64.68%, with male literacy at 78.41% and female literacy at 49.69%. The gender gap in literacy was therefore considerably wider than in Jammu.

At the same time, Doda's child sex ratio was approximately 933 girls per 1,000 boys in 2011, substantially higher than Jammu's 795. The district's overall sex ratio increased from 913 in 2001 to 919 in 2011.

Doda is also predominantly rural. Census-based data indicate that approximately 92% of its population lived in rural areas in 2011. Rural Doda recorded a sex ratio of around 930, compared with a much lower urban sex ratio.

6. Comparative Demographic Analysis

Table 1: Selected Demographic Indicators of Jammu and Doda

Indicator	Jammu	Doda
Population, 2011	1,529,958	409,936
Male population	813,821	213,641
Female population	716,137	196,295
Sex ratio, 2001	865	913



Sex ratio, 2011	880	919
Child sex ratio, 2011	795	933
Overall literacy, 2011	83.45%	64.68%
Male literacy	89.08%	78.41%
Female literacy	77.13%	49.69%
Population characteristics	More urbanised	Predominantly rural

Source: Census of India 2011 and official district demographic information.

The comparison produces an important finding. Doda had lower female literacy but a considerably better child sex ratio than Jammu. Jammu, in contrast, had substantially higher female literacy but a much more adverse child sex ratio.

This suggests that **female literacy should be treated as an important but not sufficient condition for eliminating gender discrimination.**

The demographic differences may be influenced by several factors, including urbanisation, migration, occupational structure, household composition, fertility behaviour and social norms. It would therefore be inappropriate to attribute the differences to a single cultural factor.

SOCIO-CULTURAL DETERMINANTS OF GENDER DISCRIMINATION

Son Preference

Son preference is one of the most important cultural mechanisms associated with gender inequality. In traditional family structures, sons may be expected to continue the family lineage, support parents in old age and perform socially valued family responsibilities.

Such expectations can influence reproductive decisions. Families wanting a son may continue childbearing until a male child is born. Where prenatal sex determination becomes accessible, strong son preference can also potentially influence reproductive outcomes.

The particularly low child sex ratio of Jammu indicates that the youngest population experienced a significant gender imbalance in 2011. However, demographic data alone cannot establish the precise

causal mechanism. Possible explanations include sex-selective practices, differential survival, migration-related effects and other demographic factors. Further household-level research would therefore be necessary.

Patriarchal Family Structure

Family organisation plays an important role in shaping gender relations. In patriarchal households, major decisions regarding education, marriage, employment, healthcare and reproduction may be concentrated in male members or senior family members.

Women may have limited authority over household resources even when they contribute substantially through unpaid domestic labour. Such arrangements can reproduce gender inequality across generations. In both Jammu and Doda, traditional family expectations may influence the opportunities available to girls. However, the intensity and form of these effects can differ according to location, education, income, community and household structure.

Gendered Division of Labour

Women frequently perform a large amount of unpaid domestic and care work. Cooking, childcare, elder care and household management may be treated as women's responsibilities rather than economically valuable labour.

This can reduce women's opportunities for formal employment and economic independence. Economic dependence, in turn, can weaken bargaining power within the household.

For Doda, where rural livelihoods constitute a significant part of the socio-economic structure, women's unpaid contribution to agriculture and household activities may remain under-recognised. Improving women's access to formal education and income-generating opportunities is therefore an important component of gender equality.

Marriage and Dowry-Related Expectations

Marriage can shape perceptions about the economic value of daughters. Where families anticipate substantial marriage expenditure or dowry-related costs, daughters may be perceived as financially burdensome.

Even where legal provisions prohibit dowry, social expectations surrounding marriage expenditure can



continue to influence family decisions. The perceived cost of raising and marrying daughters may consequently reinforce son preference.

Awareness campaigns should therefore address not only illegal dowry practices but also the broader social valuation of daughters.

Inheritance and Property Rights

Property ownership is closely related to economic autonomy. Although women possess legal rights to property, social practices may discourage women from asserting these rights.

When daughters are expected to transfer their primary loyalty to their marital households after marriage, families may consider property inheritance to be primarily a male responsibility. This can reduce women's long-term economic security.

Strengthening awareness of women's property rights and ensuring accessible legal support can therefore contribute to reducing structural gender inequality.

EDUCATION AND GENDER EQUALITY

Education is widely recognised as an important mechanism for improving women's capabilities. Educated women may have greater awareness of healthcare, legal rights, employment opportunities and political participation.

The comparison between Jammu and Doda illustrates both the importance and limitation of education.

Jammu's female literacy rate of 77.13% was considerably higher than Doda's 49.69%.

Nevertheless, Jammu's child sex ratio was 795, while Doda's was 933. This indicates that high female literacy at the district level does not necessarily translate directly into gender-balanced reproductive outcomes.

One explanation may be that education changes individual capabilities without immediately transforming deeply embedded social norms. Families may support girls' education while continuing to prefer sons for inheritance, lineage or old-age support.

Therefore, gender-sensitive education should go beyond literacy. School curricula, community programmes and higher education should address

gender stereotypes, equal citizenship, women's rights and shared household responsibilities.

URBANISATION AND GENDER IMBALANCE

Urbanisation can have contradictory effects on gender relations.

On one hand, urban areas may provide women with greater access to education, employment, healthcare and information. On the other hand, urban households may have greater access to medical technologies and reproductive services. If strong son preference exists, technological access can potentially reinforce rather than eliminate demographic discrimination.

The Jammu example is particularly important. The district had a relatively high literacy rate and substantial urbanisation, yet the child sex ratio remained extremely adverse in 2011.

This suggests that economic development and urbanisation should not be assumed to automatically eliminate gender discrimination.

Doda presents a contrasting demographic pattern. Its predominantly rural population recorded a much higher child sex ratio.

However, this should not be interpreted as evidence that rural areas are universally more gender equitable. Doda simultaneously had a much lower female literacy rate. Different dimensions of gender inequality may therefore coexist.

COMPARATIVE INTERPRETATION: JAMMU VERSUS DODA

The comparison demonstrates that Jammu and Doda exhibit **different patterns of gender inequality**.

Jammu's principal concern is the exceptionally low child sex ratio. The district had high female literacy but continued to exhibit a substantial gender imbalance among children. This suggests that gender discrimination cannot be understood solely as a consequence of low education or poverty.

Doda presents a different pattern. Its overall and child sex ratios were comparatively better, but female literacy was substantially lower. Thus, Doda faces a stronger challenge in terms of women's educational and capability development.

Table 2: Major Dimensions of Gender Inequality



Dimension	Jammu	Doda
Overall sex ratio	Lower	Higher
Child sex ratio	Highly adverse	Relatively balanced
Female literacy	Relatively high	Relatively low
Urbanisation	Higher	Lower
Rural population	Lower proportion	Very high proportion
Key concern	Child gender imbalance	Female educational and socio-economic disadvantage
Policy emphasis	Child sex ratio, reproductive norms, gender attitudes	Female education, economic empowerment, accessibility

The evidence therefore supports a **district-specific policy approach** rather than a uniform intervention.

GOVERNMENT AND INSTITUTIONAL MEASURES

Government intervention against gender discrimination operates through several complementary mechanisms, including legislation, education, health services, child protection and awareness campaigns.

The **Beti Bachao Beti Padhao** programme represents one important policy framework aimed at addressing gender discrimination and improving the status of girls. Government data also indicate that the reported sex ratio at birth for Jammu and Kashmir increased from 936 in 2014–15 to 942 in 2019–20 in the cited HMIS series.

Such administrative indicators can provide useful evidence of change, but they should not be directly equated with Census child sex ratios because the indicators are measured through different systems and methodologies.

Effective intervention requires:

1. Strengthening implementation of laws concerning prenatal sex selection.
2. Improving girls' access to secondary and higher education.

3. Expanding women's employment and entrepreneurship.
4. Promoting equal inheritance and property rights.
5. Reducing social acceptance of dowry.
6. Increasing women's participation in household decision-making.
7. Strengthening community-based gender awareness.
8. Improving reproductive healthcare and counselling.
9. Developing gender-sensitive school curricula.
10. Encouraging male participation in household and childcare responsibilities.

CONCLUSION

The comparative study of Jammu and Doda demonstrates that gender discrimination is a multidimensional social phenomenon that cannot be explained through a single demographic or economic indicator. Census 2011 data show that the overall sex ratio actually improved between 2001 and 2011 in both districts: Jammu increased from 865 to 880 females per 1,000 males, while Doda increased from 913 to 919.

Nevertheless, the child sex ratio reveals a striking contrast. Jammu recorded only 795 girls per 1,000 boys, while Doda recorded 933. At the same time, Jammu had considerably higher female literacy than Doda. These findings demonstrate that gender inequality has multiple dimensions and that progress in one dimension does not automatically guarantee progress in another.

Jammu's situation highlights the importance of examining son preference, reproductive behaviour, family expectations and gender norms even in relatively educated and urbanised populations. Doda's situation highlights the continuing importance of female education, economic opportunity, accessibility and social empowerment. The central finding of the study is therefore that **gender balance cannot be achieved merely through demographic programmes or literacy expansion in isolation**. Sustainable change requires transformation in the social value assigned to daughters, equal educational and economic opportunities, greater autonomy for women, fair inheritance practices, reduced marriage-related



financial pressures and stronger implementation of gender-protective laws.

The two districts also demonstrate the importance of context-sensitive policy. Jammu requires particular attention to child sex imbalance and the socio-cultural mechanisms associated with son preference. Doda requires sustained investment in female education, employment and empowerment while maintaining its comparatively favourable child sex ratio.

Ultimately, gender equality is not simply a question of achieving a particular numerical sex ratio. It involves ensuring that girls and women have equal opportunities to survive, learn, work, own property, participate in decision-making and live with dignity. Demographic indicators should therefore be understood as signals of deeper social processes. A successful strategy for Jammu and Doda must combine demographic monitoring with social transformation, education, economic empowerment and community participation.

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