

Skewed Sex Ratio, Male Marriage Squeeze and Buying of Girls for Marriages

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Aditya Parihar

Research Scholar,
Centre for Social Work,
Panjab University,
Chandigarh

Monica Munjal Singh

Associate Professor (Chairperson),
Centre for Social Work,
Panjab University,
Chandigarh

Nirmala Devi

Assistant Professor,
Dept. of Sociology,
Guru Nanak Dev University,
Amritsar

Abstract

In the state of Haryana, preference for son and neglect of the girl child has a long history. As a result of it the sex ratio and the child sex ratio of Haryana has witnessed a sharp decline. There are cultural factors that contribute towards a strong preference for sons in the Indian society. A commonly held belief is that sons will support their parents in their old age as the majority of the Indian parents live with their sons and their families after their marriage. Due to various economic, social and physical limitations, daughters are generally not in a position to contribute towards the welfare of their natal home. This strong preference for son leads to male marriage squeeze and potential bachelors in Haryana were not able to get brides in local areas. Therefore new tactics were adopted by the grooms' families to get brides for these potential grooms. Buying or purchasing brides from other or under developed states is one of such tactics that the grooms' families are adopting these days. Therefore the present paper tries to study the phenomenon of Bride Buying in Haryana. The second part of the paper examines the network through which brides have been trafficked from one state to another. The final part of the paper deals with the conclusion of the paper.

Keywords: Marriage, Son Preference, Male Marriage Squeeze and Bride Buying.

Introduction

In the state of Haryana, preference for son and neglect of the girl child has a long history. As a result of it the sex ratio and the child sex ratio of Haryana has witnessed a sharp decline in sex ratio (The Tribune, 2014). It gives a sorry state of affairs as far as the status of women is concerned. An alarming preference for sons is so intense that women in Haryana who give birth to a girl child are called by derogatory names like *Bharpai*, *Bhateri* (Enough), *Maafi* (Forgive), *Mariya* (deathly), and *Badho* (Excessive) - reminder of their unwanted status for the rest of their lives. Women fear giving birth to daughters and opt for different practices to have a son. A woman is respected in the family as well as the community only when she gives birth to a son. For women, the importance of sons is attached to their material and emotional well being, it is logically very strong. Therefore, women will require more support from their children, than their spouses in their old age (Vlassoff, 1990; Nugent, 1985; Vlassoff and Vlassoff, 1980; Cain, 1981). There are cultural factors that contribute towards a strong preference for sons in the Indian society. A commonly held belief is that sons will support their parents in their old age as the majority of the Indian parents live with their sons and their families after their marriage. This practice in Indian Society is due to lack of social security for the elderly persons (Shekhar and Hatti, 2010). Therefore the decisions of the parents are likely to be motivated by their concerns about their own security in their old age. Due to various economic, social and physical limitations, daughters are generally not in a position to contribute towards the welfare of their natal home.

The preference for son is strong because of the following reasons: he'll carry on family line, he would hire property, he is considered capable of earning money, he would bring wife (and in this form a capable domestic helper) into the family, he would get dowry in his marriage and last but not the least he plays an important role in the last rites performed as per Hindu Religion. Evil of technology and regressive social thought had a disastrous impact on India and especially Haryana. Das Gupta (1987) found that sex

selective abortions and preference for son have also been identified as determinants of declining sex ratio in Asian countries. Kaur (2004) found that nurses, midwives, RMP's and ANM's have been active mediators in strengthening people's desire for male children. She further highlighted that they all project their action as social work by lessening the dowry burden of several girls that parents have to bear and also furthering the national goal of reducing India's population. Premi and Raju, (1998) analyzed that the killing of female foetus has a long history in north India and remains quite common in certain areas and some communities. Therefore, preference for sons results in discrimination against daughters in their normal life cycle. Kaur (2007) in her article illustrated that the importance of having a son is internalized to such an extent that women are disheartened at the birth of even the first girl child. She also found that, the women undergo repeated pregnancies and multiple abortions at the cost of their own health, so that they may give birth to sons. Vishavnath (2004) found that female infanticide was not only prevalent in the North and North West where not only elite Rajputs adopted and practiced it, but populous landowning groups like *Thakurs, Jaats, Ahirs, Khatris* and *Gujjars* also practiced female infanticide and thus their area had a low sex ratio. Even Das Gupta, (1987) observed that people in economically progressive states of Punjab and Haryana, have rapidly adopted the small family norm but continue to prefer son over daughters. An eminent demographer Bose (2001) has categorically remarked about Haryana as '*Demaru or Daughter Killer State*'.

Objectives of the Study

1. To conceptualize the Phenomenon of Bride Buying;
2. To examine the Networks of Bride Trafficking;
3. To find out the problems faced by these brides in Haryana.

Skewed Sex Ratio leads to Male Marriage Squeeze

Further the studies highlighted that the steep decline in sex ratio and child sex ratio has led to the problem of shortage of girls in the marriageable age in Haryana. The review of various studies highlighted that a growing number of unmarried men have posed the biggest challenge that has ever been felt, disturbing the very fabric of the society. The Haryanvi men are using different methods to meet the shortage of brides, e.g. relaxing the norm of Gotra exogamy, caste endogamy, finding brides from another region. Studies of Ahlawat (2009), Kaur and Larsen (2013), Mishra (2013), Darling (1928), Kaur (2004) found that men of marriageable age are facing a problem of shortage of brides in their local market. Ahlawat, (2009) has pointed out that an increase in the number of unmarried men has posed the biggest challenge. In Haryana there is a great tension around the question of marriage of such men. Statistically speaking, Haryana has a very high figure of unmarried men. According to the 1991 Census, there were 36.24 percent men in the category of 15-44 years of age and these were marked as never married. In some villages of district Rohtak the percentage of unmarried males was 44 percent. There is a combination of

factors like low sex ratio, polygamy, widow-remarriage, poverty and unemployment which are responsible for a number of male bachelors in the state. Mishra (2013) observed that the various reasons that made men were not able to get brides were unemployment, lack of education, having smaller or no land holdings, alcoholism, tainted reputation and the absence of an older man in the family who could spread the word for his son seeking a match. Moreover, there is a shortage of girls. The rigid system of not allowing inter-caste marriages or not marrying the girls of same *gotra* has also led to increase in the shortage of brides. Therefore it can be said that there is a male marriage squeeze in the state of Haryana. Years of rampant sex selective abortions and rigid marriage laws in the Jaat community of Haryana have led to a 'drought' of brides. Chowdhry (2014) observed that the agrarian states like Haryana and Punjab have an excess of unemployed males and the low sex ratio leads to Male Marriage Squeeze, which results in shortage of brides for these eligible bachelors. Kaur (2013) in her article "*The Bare Branches Crisis*" found that Punjab and Haryana have skewed sex ratio; hence the extent of the marriage squeeze in both the states should roughly be the same.

Purchase of Brides from other States

To meet this shortage of brides in marriageable age various strategies have been adopted by the villagers in Haryana to find brides for prospective grooms. Buying a bride from other region or state is one of such strategies. These brides are addressed as '*Paro*' or '*Biharo*' in their conjugal homes. In some parts they are also known as '*Biharan*'; a term implying poverty, desperation, filth and savagery. These brides are brought from Himachal Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Hyderabad and Bangladesh. Ahlawat (2009) in her article on '*Missing brides in rural Haryana: A study of adverse sex ratio, poverty and addiction*' very firmly pointed that this phenomenon of Bride buying is not new and was prevalent in Punjab, Haryana and other adjoining states. In earlier marriages Jaats of Haryana were marrying Jaat girls from Uttar Pradesh but what is significant is the fact that now a Jaat or Ahir or Meo man/boy from Haryana is marrying a woman of intermediate or low caste from Assam, Bengal, Bihar etc. Kaur (2013) pointed out that Haryana imports brides to meet marriage squeeze, but Punjab does not because the pervasive drug addiction among the youth of Punjab equalizes the number of men and women entering the marriage market and reduces the need to look for brides outside the states.

Girls who Purchased as Brides

Various studies highlighted that generally girls who opted for such kind of marital alliances belong to poor families with no land and their parents are unable to meet exorbitant dowry demands of bridegrooms in their local marriage market. Khatri (2014) in Haryana's Crisis: Bridegrooms all decked up, but no one to marry reiterated these girls were from poor families and their parents are not in a position to meet the high demand of dowry to the local grooms in their local areas. The poor economic

condition and large family size compels these parents to opt for dowry free marriages for their daughters. It becomes very difficult for the girls from other areas to adjust to the life of Haryana but in fact they don't have any choice but to learn to live in that environment. Kukreja and Kumar (2013) found that these rising demands of dowry compel the parents to opt for dowry free marriages of their daughters to boys from distant states like Haryana. Mukherjee (2013) observed that women who are compelled into these relations are in the jams of poverty and are ineligible for marriage in their own marriage market as dowry demands of the local grooms cannot be fulfilled. Chander and Mohan (2010) in her article highlighted that these brides were from extremely poor families and had no familial support to bank upon. Therefore, they have no choice but to adjust to the life. Mishra (2013) found that poverty and inability to meet the dowry demands of the grooms is the reason for women to enter into cross region marriages. Kaur (2013) observed that the main attraction for the poor parents in giving away their daughters in long distance marriages is the absence of dowry in such marriage alliances. Drishti Stree Adhyayan Prabodhan Kendra report revealed that most of them come from poverty-ridden villages of Assam, West Bengal, Jharkhand, Bihar and Orissa, and their families are in perpetual need money; and despite the prevalence of the dowry system in the north Indian states, men are ready to pay for a wife (The Hindu, 21st August, 2011). Kaur (2004) observed that the shortage of women as a result of low sex ratio leads to a decline in dowry rates. Blanchet (2003) in her research article 'Bangladeshi Girls sold as wives in North' documented the case history of 112 Bangladeshi girls and found that several of Bangladeshi girls had been sold to men who could not find wives locally because they were relatively old in age or had flawed reputation. She analyzed that most of the girls were teenage girls from villages and their parents could not afford to pay for their dowry. She further tried to analyze the role of go-between's, *dallals* or traffickers in this kind of phenomenon. Darling (1947) observed that economic uncertainty as well as indebtedness encourages dowry under conditions of both prosperity and poverty as has been known for the agrarian economy of Punjab and Haryana since the colonial times.

Network of Bride Trafficking

The studies by Khan (2013), Khatri (2014), Mohanty (2015), Satyarthi (2013) and Kukreja and Kumar (2013) have revealed that there are different modes how these brides are landed up in Haryana. Truck drivers play a key role as middlemen in such marriage alliances. Khan (2013) examined the network by which the bachelors arrange brides for marriages and found that a good number of people from Haryana who are involved are working as truck drivers. First of all those also act Middleman who brings brides for those men who are unable to find brides in the local market. Khatri (2014) in *Haryana's Crisis: Bridegrooms all Decked up, But no One to Marry* found the network through which these brides were arranged for marriages and found that there

were agents spread all over the state who were engaged in the business of buying girls from outside the states. Mohanty (2015) in the article found that the business of bride trafficking is so lucrative that locals are turning into middlemen for securing brides for families seeking partners for their sons. Mukherjee (2013) in her study analyzes the economic exchanges going on between the girl's family, and the person who acts as a go-between. In this whole commercial exchange money does not reach the bride's family. Satyarthi (2013) by referring to the National Commission for Women India highlighted that more than half of the girls got married before they attained the legal age. He further analyzed that there is a phenomenon of trafficking of young women from the state of West Bengal, Assam, Orissa and Tripura to Haryana and Punjab because of the shortage of girls for marriage in both the states. Mishra (2013) found that the low sex ratio leads to the shortage of girls as a result of which the girl child of poor parents is sold off as a commodity by virtue of the high demand of such girls in these states. The rampant demand for these purchased brides is mostly fulfilled by the states that are economically backward like Bihar, West Bengal, Assam etc, where parents of daughters are not able to fulfill the demands of dowry. Khan (2013) examined the mode through which the phenomenon is going on and found that Panipat and Sonapat are the main transit points of this trade and huge number of placement agencies is found actively working as the trafficking network there.

Problems faced by Purchased Brides

Thus some pertinent questions regarding acceptance of such brides in Haryana has been arising. Khan (2013) have focused on the problems faced by these brides in their matrimonial homes and questioned do these brides and offspring born out of this union enjoy the same social status as local brides or do they face discrimination? Daily newspapers and Studies indicate that most 'bought brides' are exploited, denied basic rights, treated as maids, and eventually abandoned. Mukherjee (2013) in her study *Skewed Sex Ratio in Haryana* tries to observe the phenomena of bride buying in Haryana and found that these brides faced problems of adjustment and acceptance in the new environment. She also observed that the lack of support system to fall back in despair was also one of the reasons behind their worries. Cultural differences, language and varied food eating patterns are some of the problems faced by these brides. In most of the cases it was found that once the bride is purchased by the family they treat her like a commodity. The onus of adjust is totally upon these brides and cases were found where these brides were sexually shared by all the male members of the family. Therefore marriages where the brides are purchased by the grooms they face lot of problems and are also discriminated by the family and village communities.

Conclusion

Thus from the above comment it is very clear that patriarchal mindset of rural inhabitants in Haryana leads to the decline in sex ratio from last many decades consistently. Decline in sex ratio has

also shocked the social structure of rural Haryana and it has also smashed the institution of marriage in rural Haryana negatively. Consistent decline in sex ratio further leads to shortage of women in the marriageable cohort and there is a male marriage squeeze in the rural areas. Due to the male marriage squeeze men of marriageable age are not able to get brides in local marriage market. So, men who are unemployed, landless, illiterate and suffering from any physical deformity start searching for brides from other states and this leads to buying and selling of girls for marriages. Cultural differences, language and varied food eating patterns are some of the problems faced by these brides. In most of the cases it was found that once the bride is purchased by the family they treat her like a commodity. The onus of adjust is totally upon these brides and cases were found where these brides were sexually shared by all the male members of the family. Therefore marriages where the brides are purchased by the grooms they face lot of problems and are also discriminated by the family and village communities. They are totally isolated from their maternal families and the offspring from such kind of marriages are also discriminated by the villagers. Therefore, the social status of these brides is very low and intervention from the government and civil society is the need of the hour. It is very important that these women should not be discriminated and treated equally by the community members.

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