

Son Preference in Rural North India – Reflections on Social Reality in Oral Culture of Haryana.

*Garima Singh

Research Scholar, Department of Political Science, University Of Delhi and Assistant Prof. at Vivekananda Institute of Professional Studies, New Delhi
Corresponding Author: Garima Singh

Abstract: Son preference in Haryana is not only exposed by the unequal sex ratio of the region, but is also reflected by the attitudes and expectations of the people. While the son birth is welcomed with beats of utensils (*thali bajana*) and mood of festivities, the birth of a female child is ridiculed as an onerous burden. The oral culture of the region which reflects the emotion and character of the society remains very vocal for the fondness for the sons and the non preference for the girl child. The paper attempts to trace the fervour for son preference as depicted in the oral culture of Haryana. It seeks to highlight the local perceptions and its connection with the wider social reality.

Keywords: Son Preference, Oral Culture, Haryana, North India.

Date of Submission: 10-08-2017

Date of acceptance: 21-08-2017

I. INTRODUCTION

The son preference in Haryana is very much shown by the figures of sex census. The 2001 and 2011 census exposes low sex ratio in the region. The latest Census of India (2011) uncovered that the sex ratio, an important determinant of gender equality (i.e. number of girls per 1,000 boys) stands at 879, whereas ‘the child sex ratio (i.e. number of girls per 1,000 boys among children in the age group 0-6 years old) in Haryana has dropped to 834 females against 1,000 males (Census of India, 2011). The social, economic, demographic evidences provided by many scholars have continually shown the gender bias attitude in Haryana. The female sex ratio, as recorded in the decennial census operations, has been declining since the colonial period, introduction of new technologies have wrecked havoc in this ratio (Chowdhry, 2005, p.5189).

The oral culture of a region is a reflection of the values and beliefs of a particular society. Not only is the oral popular culture a way of knowing the society better, but also it exposes the emotions and beliefs held close to the people in their everyday life experiences and its relation with the social order. The paper therefore attempts to analyse the oral culture of rural Haryana in order to reflect on the social reality of son preference. The paper is based on songs collected during the span of period 2014-2016 from the rural villages of Haryana.¹

II. SONS VS. DAUGHTERS

The oral tradition of Haryana encourages the love for son and shows noticeable preference of boys vis-a-vis daughters. A local proverb in Haryana “*Chora mare nirbhag ka, Chori mare Bhaagwan ki*” (unfortunate is the one, whose son dies, fortunate is the one whose daughter dies) shows the good fortune of bearing a son and daughters are best averted. The love for sons is accompanied along with dislike for daughters. The oral culture of the region enthusiastically rejoices the son birth. A song shows how the birth of a boy child is valued above the girl child.

Song 1

*Jis din laado tera janam hoya, hui e bajar ki raat,
Tuti khatoli ghaal ke amma soi, babul phire udaas,
Nau lakh diwe laado chas dhare the te bhi ghor andhera,
Jis din lala tera janam hoya tha, hui e soran ki raat,
Lal palang amma bhi soi, babul ghoda dodave,
Ek diwa ae lala chas dhara tha jagmag jagmag raat.*

Translation

O lovely Daughter, the night you were born, that night was the darkest of all.
On a broken cot your mother slept, and your father was sad.
Nine lakhs lamps were lit up but still it remained dark.

O my son, the night you were born was a Golden one.

On a red bed your mother slept, and your father rode a horse in happiness.

With just one lamp lit in the window, the night remained sparkling bright.

The song of rural Haryana reflects the happiness and the brightness of son birth, while the daughter's birth is mourned and described as an ill fated event, the birth of a boy brings hope and joy for the whole family. The oral culture of Haryana can be noted for son preference; not only daughters are inauspicious but are considered as a curse for the family. This emotion also results in expectations from the women for reproduction of a male child.

In Haryanvi society, a newlywed or an expecting woman is expected to give birth to a son. Epithets like 'chora ho', 'bhagwan chora de' 'dudho nahao, puto falo' emphasise the expectations attached to her for the male birth. Surrounding the gender bias, the societal and family expectations for the new mother are formulated and expressed in terms of fondness of the sons. A woman is expected to give birth to boy and lead the male progeny of the family. A patriarchal society like Haryana places too much emphasises on the son carrying the name of the father for the next generations as daughters belong to the other family, the existence of the daughters therefore is to carry the name forward of the marital family rather than their natal family. The songs of the region can be noted to voice these expectations from the women. A folksong of Haryana shows the social bias for boys wherein a women demands *hari dhaak* (green raisins) to eat from the husband and the husband promises to bring a lot of it for her only if she reproduces a son. Some of the lines of the songs goes like this.

Songs2

Balamji se araj karun thi, maine hari hari dhaak mangado se,

Jo gori tum chori janogi, buri baat karogi humte

Jo gori tum put jaogi, dhaak mangadun aur kahin te.

Translation

Wife: oh my dear Husband please bring me green green raisins.

Husband: O' Dear, if you will give birth to a female child you will do a bad thing to me.

And if you will give birth to a male child, I will bring lot of raisins for you from somewhere else.

The song not only highlights the expectations of the society, but also the power and privilege that a woman gains if she gives birth to a boy child. While the demands of a woman giving birth to a female child would not be entertained by the husband, a woman who gives birth to a male child gets in a position of negotiations from the patriarchal structure. Maithreyi Krishnaraj cites that since historical times, a woman is glorified as a mother only she bears a son. Marriage for women is primarily to bear a male child (p.3, 2010). According to Indian psychoanalyst Sudhir Kakkar, in his work *The Inner World: A Psycho-Analytic Study of Childhood and Society in India* (1981) analysed that after a woman gets married and enters a strange land leaving her natal family, she often faces humiliation and unsympathetic attitudes by the in-laws, motherhood becomes a culturally approved way of achieving a status and power in the family, and especially if she reproduces a male heir. (1981). Until recently women are blamed if they bore daughters, and even new knowledge regarding XX and X-Y chromosomes does not alter the penalties for women not bearing sons (Krishnanraja, 2010, p. 33). Reproducing a male lineage therefore becomes important for the women in Haryanvi society for the power that it comes along.

III. VALUE OF SONS IN HARYANA

Ravinder Kaur in her article *Dispensable Daughters and Bachelor Sons: Sex Determination in North India* (2008) addresses certain explanation that shows the reasons of non-preference for daughters and therefore love for sons. According to her, hypergamy (the need/desire to marry daughter in high status families), demand of dowry often faced by daughter's parents, women lower value in wheat farming (which require less labour, boy could be more helpful in other types of farming), seclusion or lack of participation in productive activities, kinship and marriage ties which makes them move to distant house and live with their husband, patrilocality, and lack of daughter's support in old age as can be expected from son, contributed to the non-preference for daughters.

In Haryanvi society a birth of son remains pertinent due to the compulsions of economy. Much of the culture and ethos of Haryanvi society remain shaped by the agricultural milieu of the region. It is the peasant culture of the region that the value placed on son birth remains pertinent.

Prem Chowdhry in her work *Socio-Economic Dimensions of Certain Customs and Attitudes: Women of Haryana in the Colonial Period* (1987) historically traces the agrarian nature of the economy, she analysed that in British period, Haryana remained one of the most backward and underdeveloped region of Punjab. The hardships faced by the region in terms of scare rainfall, bigger land holdings, low yielding and hand to mouth living made landowners to depend on their family's labour for economic production. This emphasis on labour within the family reinforced covetousness for a male progeny. The male child was seen as important as the rains. The local proverb expresses the love for sons for economic reasons. A proverb *Meehn aur bettya te koon*

dhappya sai (Who can be satisfied without rain and sons; for cultivation both are necessary) (Chowdhry, 1987) shows that son preference in Haryana is largely attributed to the labour that the son provides for within the family.

The daughters in this respect remains of lesser economic value. Daughters in northern India are referred as *Paraya dhan* (someone else property), her labour and priorities are seen as attached to the marital home. Moreover the temporary status of daughters with the family makes them undesirable and unproductive for the natal family in economic terms. A song of the region shows how the father of a daughter is a loser and the father-in-law a winner. This victory of the in-laws can be seen in terms of the productive labour of the daughter in her marital family.

Song 3

*Ughane se pahyan babul hey bhajya sajan dola datiya
Kunsa hey harya lado kunsa hey jeeta, kiske te pad rahye pachne
Babul hey harya lado Sasura jeeta, babul ke pad rahye pachne
Babul te lado tera us din harya jis din janmi thi dhihaydi.
Sasura lado tera us din jeeta jis din janmya poot.*

Translation

Oh beloved husband, please stop the palanquin, my father is running towards me barefooted.
O Dear Daughter who has lost and who has won, and who is out of breath.
O Dear Daughter, your father has lost and your father- in-law has won and your father is restless.
O Dear Daughter, your father became a loser the day you were born.
O Dear Daughter, you Father-in-law became victorious the day a son was born.

In Haryana, daughter are seen as burdens on the parents, proverbs like *karza bhala na baap ka, beti bhali na ek* (debt remains bad for the father, like even having a single daughter) highlights how women are equated in terms of burden to the parents. Not only in terms of economic support for agriculture, but daughters are also undesired for the consideration regarding their wedding. A daughter has to be sent off to the marital family with lots of belonging. When the woman is given to the family during marriage in '*kanyadan*', the father of the daughter is also expected to give gifts for its easy survival. This remains as a burden on the father to fulfil the demands of the in-laws during marriages. A song of the region shows such a demand by the groom's father.

Bride's father - *Mangana hai jo maang chowdhry, dunga main dahej chowdhry, rishta karne aaya hun*
Groom's father - *Tikka k pachas hazar, ghoda gaadi karle tayar, yo mera beta ladla,
65 kasan, 65 teel, tv, cooler aur fridge, yeh mera beta ladla,
Gaddedar bed chowdhry, mejj aur sofa set chowdhry, yeh mera beta ladla.*

Translation

Bride's father- Oh' Chowdhry (groom's father) ask, what do you want? I have come to wed my daughter
Groom's father – fifty thousand for Tikka (ceremony of marriage), with a horse cart for my beloved son.
Sixty five utensils, sixty five clothes, Television and fridge for my beloved son
Bed and Bedding, table and sofa set for my beloved son.

Also, lifelong protection of girl and the notion of *Izzat* (Respect attached to women chastity) attached to daughters makes them non-preferable for a family. These all considerations make girl unwanted in this society. However the love for son in the region comes along with the resultant problems too.

IV. CONSEQUENCES THEREOF

The unequal sex ratio of the region from past many decades has not just been an issue before the government for enforcement of strict measures to curb the killing of girl child and also to save the image of this north Indian state, but also the love for son has generated the problem of surplus men, child trafficking, bride price and violence against women.

The problem of 'surplus men' due to lack of marriage partners in the region has led to a nexus of trafficking operating in the region. So much so has been the demand for girls for marriage and procreation that organised trafficking rackets have started operating in Haryana, Punjab and Uttar Pradesh," said a 2013 report commissioned by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. The desperation for brides could also be seen in 2014 general election in Haryana as well, where young unmarried men march with slogans like "*Bahu dilao, Vote pao*" (get us wife, get our votes)ⁱⁱ. It is important to note that not only women but children are trafficked in the region from nearby states from Bihar, Uttrakhand, Assam etc and are forced into the institution of marriage. According to the 2013 National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) report, 24,749 children and women between the ages of 15 and 30 were kidnapped and sold into marriage across the country (Masoodi, 2014)

In Haryana these women are often referred to as *Mol-ki/Molan-ki* (of a price) or *Paro* (from far off), also words like *Jugaad* (temporary solution) are commonly used for these women. The socio economic status of the *Mol-ki/Paro* women is extremely vulnerable. The women who are imported from other states in Haryana are not only used for sexual gratification but also the women are purchased for their free labour work. These women often face physical and sexual violence and their status as a married woman remains debatable too.

V. CONCLUSION

The son preference in the region not only remains visible by the declining sex ratio of the region, but the oral perception of the region shows their much love for son and non preference for girls. Girls are considered as a burden on the parents, not only lack of support in productive sector, but also the other social conditions of the society makes the girl child undesirable. Irrespective of the changes in the society, much has not changed for the daughters of the region.

The daughters of Haryana have proved their might and have elevated the state to new heights in terms of sports, whether it is Saina Nehwal, Sakshi Malik, Vinesh Phogat, Krishna Poonia or Deepa Malik. They all have showed that if given equal opportunities, they can perform much better than the Sons of Haryana. But the irony is that Haryana still owes its daughters their very right to existence. The initiative of the government for '*beti bachao, beti padhao*' looks gloomy for a scenario where the whole social perception strongly favours her elimination.

REFERENCES

- [1] Census of India (2011) retrieved from <http://www.censusindia.gov.in/2011-Common/CensusData2011.html> on 22 may 2017.
- [2] Chowdhry, Prem, Crisis of Masculinity in Haryana: The Unmarried, the Unemployed and the Aged , Economic and Political Weekly, 40(49), Dec 3, 2005, 5189-5198.
- [3] Krishna, R. M. Motherhood in India: Glorification without empowerment?(New Delhi: Routledge, 2010).
- [4] Kakar, S. The Inner World: A Psycho-Analytic Study of Childhood and Society in India. (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1981).
- [5] Kaur, Ravinder Dispensable Daughters and Bachelor Sons: Sex Determination in North India' Economic and Political Weekly. 43(30), July 26, 2008, 109-114
- [6] Chowdhry, Prem, Socio-Economic Dimensions of Certain Customs and Attitudes: Women in Haryana in Colonial Period, Economic and Political Weekly, 22(48), Nov.28, 1987, 2060-2066.
- [7] Masoodi, (2014) Hindustann Times Report, Updated: Sep 04, 2014 12:43 IST, retrieved on 22nd Jan 2015.

ⁱ The songs which are a part of this article are collected over a period of 2014-2016 from Haryana as a part of my PhD work.

ⁱⁱ An abnormally large number of unmarried men in Haryana has even led to the creation of informal "randa unions". Their slogan is "Bahu dilao-vote pao" (Get us a bride-get our vote) ahead of elections. The "bahu dilao-vote pao" slogan came from the Kunwara Union, set up in Jind in 2009 by Pawan Kumar, now its chairman.

Sukhbir Siwach, The Times of India | Mar 14, 2014, 05.34 AM IST.

IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science (IOSR-JHSS) is UGC approved Journal with Sl. No. 5070, Journal no. 49323.

Garima Singh. "Son Preference in Rural North India – Reflections on Social Reality in Oral Culture of Haryana." IOSR Journal Of Humanities And Social Science (IOSR-JHSS) , vol. 22, no. 8, 2017, pp. 49–52.