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RESEARCH ARTICLE

DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE IN INDIAN STATE OF HIMACHAL PRADESH: A GENDER SYSTEM PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

Gender system comprises the socially-constructed expectations for male and female behaviour in every human society. It prescribes a division of labour and responsibilities between women and men and bestows different rights and obligations to them. Intentionally or unintentionally, inequality is established between the both sexes in autonomy, power, and well-being, which are mostly to the disadvantage of females. Terms such as female empowerment, gender roles, women's freedom, and women's status will be better analyzed if taken in the system context because it comprises the entire complex of roles, rights, and statuses that surround male and female in a given society. The impact of gender systems on demographic change is as important as the impact of demographic change on gender system. Over the years, many factors have altered the demographic structure of Himachal Pradesh. It has also influenced the gender system and in turn influenced by it. This paper tries to analyze the time series of gender data for understanding the determinants of change, and impacts of demographic change and gender system on each other. Spatio-temporal variations in sex-ratio in Himachal Pradesh not only point towards differences in geographical and economic conditions but also indicate towards existence of different gender system in every region. This makes a strong case for intervention strategy so as to influence the gender system and demographic change accordingly.

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INTRODUCTION

Himachal Pradesh is one of the few states in country where gender equity is an integral part of the social code as well as the focus of developmental programmes. This is evident by the fact that the state has a high sex-ratio and female literacy rate well above the national level. The state also has a high incidence of women employment than the many other states of country (GoHP, 2011). Since women are at the centre of demographic change, a mechanism focused towards their position in the society determines the success of government interventions (GoI, 2005). Sex ratio and life expectancy of men and women are the two important factors in the analysis of change in demography and gender system. During the last century, Himachal Pradesh had mostly shown an increasing trend in the number of women per thousand men barring the decades 1911-1921 and 1931-1941, when sex ratio dropped from 904 to 902 and from 906 to 897 respectively. The following decades witnessed a continuous recovery and the sex ratio reached to 976 in 1991. During the last decade of twenty first century, a decline in sex ratio by eight points from 976 to 968 is recorded by the Census 2001. Provisional population totals in Census 2011 have recorded an increase of six points in sex ratio over past decade from 968 to 974. These trends definitely have some important implications on the gender system dynamics.

Gender system comprises the socially-constructed expectations for male and female behaviour in every human society. It prescribes a division of labour and responsibilities between women and men and bestows different rights and obligations to them. Intentionally or unintentionally, inequality is established between the both sexes in autonomy, power, and well-being, which are mostly to the disadvantage of females (Mason, 1995). Terms such as female empowerment, women's freedom, and women's status will be better analyzed if taken in the system context because it comprises the entire complex of roles, rights, and statuses that surround male and female in a given society. The impact of gender systems on demographic change is as important as the impact of demographic change on gender system. Over the years, many factors have altered the demographic structure of Himachal Pradesh. It has also influenced the gender system and in turn influenced by it. This paper tries to analyze the time series of gender data for understanding the determinants of change and mutual impacts of demographic change and gender system. Census data are mainly analyzed with simple tables and graphs. Some important policy implications also emerge after analyzing the dynamics of demography and gender system.

Changes in demographic composition:

Censuses in last sixty years do not show much variation in the sex-ratio of Himachal Pradesh (Figure 1). The ratio is

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continuously improving till 1991. Afterwards, it declines by 8 points during next decade. However, latest Census has recorded an improvement of 6 points during decade 2001 to 2011. Himachal Pradesh is the least urbanized state of India with 9.80% of urban population. Therefore, the total sex ratio is more influenced by the rural population as compared to small urban population. Urban sex-ratio has seen some erratic changes over the years. From 1951-1961, there is a noticeable decline of about 58 points. But it improved continuously till 1991. But it again receded by 36 points between 1991 and 2001. However, there is a good improvement of 58 points between 2001 and 2011 (Census of India, 2011).

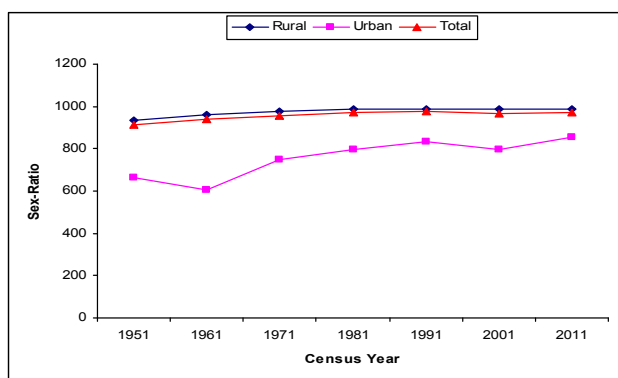


Fig. 1. Change in sex ratio over time in Himachal Pradesh

Bilaspur and Hamirpur districts have shown a continuous downfall during all Census periods between 1981 and 2011 (Table 1). Una district witnessed a big decline during 1981 and 1991 from 1028 to 873 but improved in next decade from 873 to 997. However, latest Census has reported a decline from 997 to 977. Chamba, Kullu, Shimla and Sirmaur have shown a continuous improvement. However, in the Mandi district sex-ratio has remained almost stable. Sex-ratio in Lahaul & Spiti fluctuated in both directions in all Censuses. Sex-ratio in Kangra district followed an upward direction till 2001 Census but has reported a decline of 12 numbers in 2011 Census. Sex ratio in Solan district had a continuous fall till 2001 but has shown some improvement in 2011 Census. Sex-ratio in Kinnaur had declined in 1991 Census, remained almost stable in next decade and then receded by 39 numbers in latest Census.

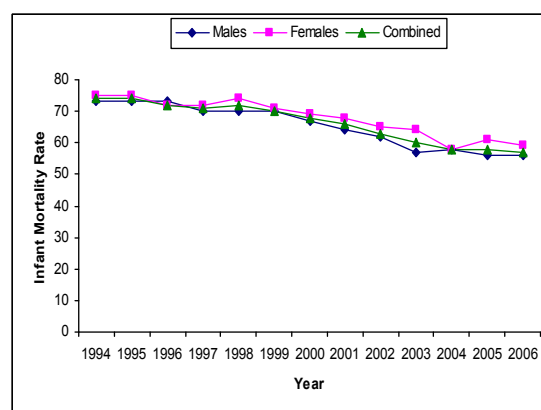
Table 1. Changes in sex ratio in different districts of Himachal Pradesh

District	1981 Census	1991 Census	2001 Census	2011 Census*
Bilaspur	1002	1002	990	981
Chamba	936	949	959	989
Hamirpur	1146	1105	1099	1096
Kangra	1016	1024	1025	1013
Kinnaur	885	856	857	818
Kullu	918	920	927	950
Lahaul Spiti	767	817	802	916
Mandi	999	1013	1013	1012
Shimla	878	894	896	916
Sirmaur	873	897	901	915
Solan	929	909	852	884
Una	1028	873	997	977
H.P.	973	976	968	974

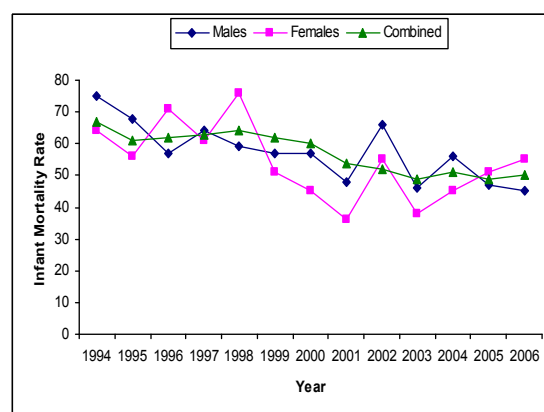
* Provisional Population totals of Census 2011

Women exceed men in the districts of Hamirpur, Kangra and Mandi. Amongst these three districts, Hamirpur has shown a

continuous decline in sex ratio since 1981 but it is still high at 1096. Kangra had also recorded a decline of 12 numbers during the decade 2001-2011 but the ratio is still higher than the males at 1013. Situation is almost static in Mandi district during last three decades and sex-ratio is 1012 as per 2011 Census. However, women are in the least proportions in the districts of Kinnaur, Solan, Sirmaur, Shimla, Lahaul & Spiti and Kullu where the ratio is less than the state average. It is however important to mention here that the situation in all these district have improved since 1981 and the highest improvement is in the district of Lahaul & Spiti where the sex-ratio increased from 767 in 1981 to 916 in 2011. While comparing time series of sex-wise infant mortality rates of Himachal Pradesh with national rates, the situation represents a better condition in the state. However, the infant mortality rate of females is higher than the males at both levels (Figure 2). National trend depicts a smooth decline since 1994; however, the situation is somewhat erratic in Himachal Pradesh. Female infant mortality rate has decreased by good proportion since 1998 till 2001 but has an upward trend since then except 2002-2003 when it recorded an increase. Except the year 1994 and 2002, the combined infant mortality rate and the male infant mortality rate has remained lower than the national rate in Himachal Pradesh.



India



Himachal Pradesh

Figure 2. Sex-wise Infant Mortality Rates in Himachal Pradesh and in India

Dynamics of gender system

As the gender system represents the socially-constructed expectations for male and female behaviour, it also prescribes a division of labour and responsibilities between them with

different rights and obligations. Gender system in Himachal had also undergone a rapid change due to socio-economic changes and also with the demographic change. The change in gender system itself is influencing the demographic changes and also affecting socio-economic change in the state. After getting statehood in 1971, successive governments started many schemes for the improvement of health and educational facilities. This improved upon the infant mortality rates. This also has a favourable effect on reduction in the number of children. Likewise, the efforts towards gender sensitization and women empowerment have increased the sex-ratio. With all these changes, the role and inter-personal relations of women and men have altered over a period of time thus recognizing equal role sharing as the need of hour and a pre-requisite for a civilized society. Improvement in working conditions, better law and order, entry of more and more women in government, and the employment opportunities in public and private offices are seen as the important factors in the dynamics of gender system. Likewise, the roles and expectations from male behaviour have also undergone a major shift.

There is a tremendous change in the role and status of women in the urban and rural environment. Women are now a significant part of important decision making process at household level. Educated children also act as indirect pressure groups for gender equality in the family. This has an important bearing on family planning issues as well. This strengthening has a positive impact on status of girl child and is reducing the people's strong desire to have male children. All these changes are continuously influencing the micro-equilibriums in the entire social and economic system and consequently having inter-influences on dynamics of gender system and demographic change. The regional variations in sex-ratios and the gender system have mutual influences on each other and also affected by the geographical and economic scenario of the region. It is well recognized that the provision of basic education and health are the foremost factors affecting the sex-ratio. High literacy rate in Kangra, Hamirpur and Mandi has made these regions surpass the 1000 mark in sex-ratio. However, Una district despite having a good level of literacy rate has shown a declining trend in sex-ratio. This may be attributed to some socio-cultural factors that are assimilated with the neighbouring region of Punjab.

Decline in sex-ratio in women abundant districts is not that serious issue as it is with the regions with already low sex-ratios. Solan and Kinnaur districts are very low on sex-ratio and therefore, they may suffer on various levels of gender equity.

Conclusions

It is a well recognized fact that the life expectancy of female is higher than the males. Higher infant mortality rate of female during recent years is a cause for major concern. This factor also contribute in less number of women than their counterparts. There is an urgent need to focus on those regions having least sex-ratio in the state. Education and health facilities across the state have changed the attitudes of people about sibling preferences. It also empowered women with more confidence, thereby involving them better in the family decision making process. Balanced economic development of regions and fair gender support system is bringing much headway in improving demographic indicators. This along with the better incentive system in education along with better inclusion in administration and governance is making gender equality more virtual. It is more important to the state like Himachal Pradesh to further improve vital gender statistics with better focus on gender inclusiveness in education, health and social welfare schemes so that it tops amongst all states in the country.

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