

**GENDER REGIMES, REPRODUCTIVE STRATEGIES, AND GENDER  
PREFERENCES FOR CHILDREN:  
A CROSS-CULTURAL COMPARISON OF VILLAGES IN JAMMU,  
KASHMIR, AND LEH**

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A CROSS-CULTURAL COMPARISON OF VILLAGES IN JAMMU,  
KASHMIR, AND LEH**

*by*

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*Submitted*

*In fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of **Doctor of Philosophy***

*to the*



**INDIAN INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY DELHI**

**January, 2023**

*Dedicated to my mother*

*and to countless mothers who stand tall against tradition in support of their daughters*

## Thesis Certificate

This is to certify that the thesis titled “**Gender regimes, reproductive strategies, and gender preferences for children: A cross-cultural comparison of villages in Jammu, Kashmir and Leh**”, submitted by Charumita Vasudev, to the Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi, for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, is a bona fide record of the research work done by her under my supervision. The contents of this thesis, in full or in parts, have not been submitted to any other Institute or University for the award of any degree or diploma.

*Ravinder kaur*

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*Charumita Vasudev.*

**Charumita Vasudev**

## Abstract

The thesis studies how the gender preferences for children are shaped by socio-cultural contexts and local political economy. It explores how the politics of population and demographic change takes place as a compounded effect of decisions taken by individual couples. The thesis starts by tracing how, when, and why, the ‘simplistic’ statistic of child sex ratios in India came to be considered a *social issue* that was worthy of policy and legal interventions. Situating the three regions studied (Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh), in this broad context, the thesis adopts a comparative approach to understand how the value attached to children of different genders might vary in regions that are geographically and socio-culturally very different from each other. It was found that while in both Jammu and Kashmir, sons are preferred over daughters; the local political economy and institutional arrangements determine whether a preference for sons would mean the elimination of daughters before birth, their relative deprivation after birth, their early marriage as a mobility strategy or severe restrictions on their mobility to ensure control over their bodies. The villages in Kashmir were found to be relatively less daughter averse, as evidenced by the relatively equal intra-household distribution of resources amongst young children as opposed to the higher female child mortality and pervasive sex-selective abortions in Jammu. While some factors were peculiar to each location, some others like attitudes towards abortions, threats of sexual violation and harassment on the streets, and psychological burden to protect ‘vulnerable daughters’ who were always a liability for the family of birth versus ‘protector-provider’ role of sons were some of the factors common to both the locations leading to a preference of sons over daughters. This was in stark contrast to the villages in Ladakh where social arrangements and old age support structures have eased the normative compulsions of having children in general and sons, forcing one to question the patriarchal systems that seem inherent to societies and thus asserting that there are different ways in which societies might organise themselves.

## सारांश

यह शोध इस बात का अध्ययन करता है कि बच्चों के लिए लैंगिक प्राथमिकताएं सामाजिक-सांस्कृतिक संदर्भों और स्थानीय राजनीतिक अर्थव्यवस्था द्वारा कैसे आकार लेती हैं। यह इस बात की पड़ताल करता है कि जनसंख्या और जनसांख्यिकीय परिवर्तन की राजनीति व्यक्तिगत जोड़ों द्वारा लिए गए निर्णयों के मिश्रित प्रभाव के रूप में कैसे होती है। थीसिस की शुरुआत यह पता लगाने से होती है कि कैसे, कब और क्यों, भारत में बाल लिंगानुपात के 'सरलीकृत' आंकड़ों को एक सामाजिक मुद्दा माना गया जो नीति और कानूनी हस्तक्षेप के योग्य था। इस व्यापक संदर्भ में अध्ययन किए गए तीन क्षेत्रों (जम्मू, कश्मीर और लद्दाख) को ध्यान में रखते हुए, थीसिस यह समझने के लिए एक तुलनात्मक दृष्टिकोण अपनाती है कि विभिन्न लिंगों के बच्चों से जुड़े मूल्य उन क्षेत्रों में कैसे भिन्न हो सकते हैं जो भौगोलिक और सामाजिक-सांस्कृतिक रूप से प्रत्येक से बहुत भिन्न हैं। यह पाया गया कि जबकि जम्मू और कश्मीर दोनों में, बेटियों की तुलना में बेटों को प्राथमिकता दी जाती है; स्थानीय राजनीतिक अर्थव्यवस्था और संस्थागत व्यवस्थाएं यह निर्धारित करती हैं कि क्या पुत्रों की वरीयता का अर्थ जन्म से पहले बेटियों का उन्मूलन, जन्म के बाद उनके सापेक्ष अभाव, गतिशीलता रणनीति के रूप में उनकी प्रारंभिक शादी या उनके शरीर पर नियंत्रण सुनिश्चित करने के लिए उनकी गतिशीलता पर गंभीर प्रतिबंध होगा। जम्मू में उच्च महिला बाल मृत्यु दर और व्यापक लिंग-चयनात्मक गर्भपात के विपरीत छोटे बच्चों के बीच संसाधनों के अपेक्षाकृत समान अंतर-घरेलू वितरण से स्पष्ट है कि कश्मीर के गाँव अपेक्षाकृत कम बेटी विरोधी पाए गए। जबकि कुछ कारक प्रत्येक स्थान के लिए विशिष्ट थे, कुछ अन्य जैसे गर्भपात के प्रति दृष्टिकोण, यौन हिंसा की धमकियाँ और सड़कों पर उत्पीड़न, और 'कमजोर बेटियों' की सुरक्षा के लिए मनोवैज्ञानिक बोझ, जो हमेशा जन्म लेने वाले परिवार के लिए एक दायित्व बनाम 'रक्षक-प्रदाता' के रूप में पुत्रों की भूमिका, कुछ ऐसे कारक थे जो दोनों ही स्थानों में समान थे जिससे पुत्रियों की तुलना में पुत्रों को प्राथमिकता दी गई। यह लद्दाख के गाँवों के बिल्कुल विपरीत था जहां सामाजिक व्यवस्था और वृद्धावस्था सहायता संरचनाओं ने सामान्य रूप से बच्चे और बेटे होने की मानक बाध्यताओं को कम कर दिया है, जिससे एक व्यक्ति को पितृसत्तात्मक व्यवस्था, जो समाजों के लिए अंतर्निहित प्रतीत होती है, पर सवाल उठाने के लिए विवश होना पड़ता है और इस प्रकार से यह दावा करने पर कि विभिन्न समाज अलग-अलग वयस्था से खुद को व्यवस्थित कर सकते हैं।

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## *List of Native Words*

### **Chapter 2- ‘Devis don’t stay’: Waning Fertility, Enduring Caste Dynamics, and Daughter Aversion-Villages in Jammu**

1. Baba/Babaji – a revered person, usually a godman
2. Bahu: Daughter-in-law
3. Bhandaras- Massive feasts followed by big prayer events
4. Bohli: Ritually sacred and pure dish prepared from the first milk of a cow after a calf is born, distributed in the entire village.
5. Dai- women who help during the process of childbirth and provide post-partum care
6. Devi – Goddess
7. Dhamdeh, Bhugga vrat, Bacch Doa- Dogri Festivals/ fasts by women
8. Garam cheezein, Thandi cheezein- literally meaning hot or cold things, referring to the quality of certain foods to be warm or cold for the body( not necessarily in temperature); suggested for giving birth to a particular gender
9. Ghiyur- Traditional dogri dish, considered ritually pure
10. Gode-Bharai- a function done to announce/ celebrate pregnancy
11. Gurus – Literally, teacher; used to refer to godmen
12. Hatya-lagna- literally meaning being responsible for someone’s death; used in the context of
13. Havan- Chanting of holy mantras around a sacred fire
14. Havankund: place where sacred fire is lit for the performance of Havan(25)
15. Havansamagri- Material needed for performing the Havan
16. Jagrata-Prayers and singing hymns all night
17. Kanjak- a non-menstruating young girl who is worshipped as symbolic of the goddess

18. Kharab- spoilt goods
19. Kuldevtas- gods worshipped by a certain family/ clan
20. Ladoo, Barfi- Common Indian sweets
21. Lohri, Karwa Chauth, Diwali, Baisakhi- Common north Indian festivals
22. Maels- Clan specific yearly meetings held on days that are held on days that are considered sacred for that particular clan/ family.
23. Mokh- big prayer and feast organized to give up a fast that a woman had been observing for certain time
24. Pahadi- People residing in hilly areas
25. Pandits, Gujjars and Bakarwals and Mirpuri Punjabis- Names of communities residing in Jammu area
26. Rewara- middlemen, who help in arranging matches for marriage
27. Suryanamaskar- Reverence to the sun
28. Tantrics- men who indulge in magic and give cures/ solutions to worldly problems through the practice of magic
29. Thiyaan- Daughters
30. Upaye: Solutions; used in the context of certain tasks that the Tantrics suggests, performance of which will lead to solutions to problems.

### **Chapter 3 – ‘Allah will not forgive me; I was the reason for my child’s death’:**

#### **Religion, Fertility and Son Preference-Villages in Kashmir**

1. Allah: Term for God
2. Dawat : Feast
3. Deen: Religion
4. Farmabardaar: Respectful towards elders

5. Gair Khandan: People you are not related to
6. Gurudwara: Place of worship for Sikhs
7. Ijazat: Taking permission
8. Mahram: Men forbidden in marriage, usually used to refer to father and siblings of the opposite gender
9. Manzimyor: Middleman, usually a relative who mediates the decisions regarding arranging matches for marriage
10. Maulvi: Priest for the Muslim community
11. Mehr: Bridewealth, given at the time of marriage
12. Mohalla: Neighbourhood community
13. Momina: God-fearing woman
14. Muharram: Muslim festival
15. Mulazim: Worker, used to refer to someone who works in the government sector
16. Nehmat: Gift, usually from God
17. Nikaah: Prayer ceremony for marriage
18. Sandar/Aqiqah: Celebratory post-birth rituals
19. Sharafat: Decency
20. Shia/Sunni: Sects of Islam
21. Zaath: Local name for castes

**Chapter 4 –‘We are not like down people, we are different’: Social Arrangements, Urban influence and Gender preferences for children- Villages in Leh**

1. Bagpa: Wife moves to the husband’s household after marriage
2. Chhang : locally brewed wine
3. Chokh-se: Low lying tables, used for sitting around and eating

4. Chomo: Female Monks
5. Jiledaar: Descendants of the advisor to the king
6. Lhamas / Lhamaji: Male monks
7. Magpa khyonchis: Bring the son in law home
8. Magpa: Son in law who resides with the wife's parents
9. Panch: Members of a locally elected body known as the village panchayat
10. Phas.pun: Community of neighbors that helps each other in everyday tasks as well as in times of emergency. They are linked by obligatory relations that span over numerous generations.
11. Raktak: Gifts given to the daughter during the time of marriage
12. Skuches: Marriage by theft

## *List of Abbreviations*

ASHA	Accredited Social Health Activist
CHC	Community Health Centre
CSR	Child Sex Ratio
DHS	Demographic and Health Surveys
DLHS	District Level Household Survey
MPW	Multi-Purpose Worker
MTP Act, 1971	Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971
NFHS	National Family Health Survey
NHM	National Health Mission
PCPNDT Act, 1994	Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques Act, 1994
PHC	Primary Health Centre
PNDT Act, 1991	Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques Act, 1991
PoK	Pakistan-occupied Kashmir
SC/ST	Scheduled Caste/ Scheduled Tribe, as recognised in the fifth and sixth schedule of the Indian constitution
SR	Sex Ratio
SRB	Sex Ratio at Birth
US and USSR	United States and Union of Soviet Socialist Republics