

Department of Women and Child Development, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India : Demographic profile and future strategies for development of the girl child in India. Social Change. June-Sept 1995. 25(No 2 & 3) P.19-29.

Demographic Profile and Future Strategies for Development of the Girl Child in India

Statistics in relation to Sex-ratio, Age-structure, IMR, CMR, Men age at marriage have been indicated. The strategies for future to improve the present condition have been discussed.

Introduction

A study of the demographic profile of the Girl Child should necessarily touch upon the data provided by the decennial population census. Census of India is the single largest source of statistical information on the population of India and its trends. The last such Census was conducted in 1991. As of date, only the Final Population Totals by sex and area have been in circulation while population by age groups and other socio-economic characteristics is yet to be released. Therefore, the demographic analysis in this Paper refers to either the 1981 Census data or the Population projections based on the 1981 Census or the data of Sample Registration System, 1992.

Population as per 1991 Census

An account of population trends according to the 1991 Census is given in Table 1. The distribution of male and female population during 1991 Census maintained the earlier status of 1981 Census with lesser females and a declining trend in respect of sex-ratio, as shown in Table 2.

Unlike in most Western countries, the number of males exceeds the number of females in India. According to 1991 Census, the male population was 439.2 million and the female population was 407.1 million, adding to a total population of 846.3 million. A simple index which gives a comparative picture of the growth of male and female population is the sex-ratio which in Indian context is defined as the number of females per 1000 males. The sex-ratio for India as per 1991 Census was 927 females per 1000 males. A continuous decline in sex-ratio of India has been causing tremendous concern amongst demographers, policy makers and planners. In 1901, overall sex-ratio was 972, which declined to 964 in 1911, 955 in 1921, 950 in 1931 and 945 in 1941, 941 in 1961 and 930 in 1971. The sex-ratio showed slight improvement during the 1941 - 51 decade (by + 1 point)

and 1971-81 decade (by + 3 points). While the increase in the sex-ratio in 1981 is welcomed, one must keep in mind the two statistical points viz.; i) the increase by 3 points per 1000 is by no means spectacular and ii) one cannot judge the trend from one single observation and conclude that the trend has reversed. One must see how things are at least in 1991 and 2001 before concluding that the declining sex ratio has been stalled or even reversed.

Table 1:(in millions)

Census	Male	Female	Total
1971	284.05 (51.8%)	264.11 (42.2%)	548.16
1981	354.40 (51.7%)	330.78 (48.3%)	685.18
1991	439.23 (51.9%)	407.07 (48.1%)	846.30

*Includes Projected Population of Assam

Source: Census of India 1981, Series-I India, Paper 2 of 1983, Key Population Statistics based on 5 percent sample, Registrar General and Census Commissioner, India, New Delhi, 1983 pp. 4&6.

Table 2: Percentage of Female Population and Sex-Ratio (in millions)

Census	Total Female	%age Sex-Ratio	Population	Population
1971	548.2	264.1	48.2%	930
1981	685.2	330.8	48.3%	933
1991	846.3	407.1	48.1%	927

Source: i) Census of India, 1981; General Population Tables (A-1 to A-3), Series I India, Part II-A (i), pp. 563 & 573.

ii) Selected Education Statistics, 1992-1993, GOI, M/HRD, D/Education, p.2.

iii) Census of India 1991, Final Population Totals-1, Series - 1, India, paper 2 of 1992; Registrar General of India, New Delhi, 1991; pp. 13.

As the All India figures tend to be deceptive, it is important to look into the inter-state variations. The following Table 3 presents state-wise trends in sex-ratio (for selected major States only) over a period of three decades.

TABLE 3 : State-wise Sex Ratio during 1961, 1971, 1981 and 1991

State/Ut	1961 (Base Year)	1971	1981	1991	Differen ceBetwe en (1981 & 1991)
All India*	941	(-)930	(+)934	(-)927	-7
Andhra Pradesh	981	(-)977	(-)975	(-)972	-3
Bihar	994	(-)954	(-)946	(-)911	-35
Goa	1066	(-)981	(-)975	(-)967	-8
Gujarat	940	(-)934	(+)942	(-)934	-8
Haryana	867	(-)867	(+)870	(-)865	-5
Karnataka	959	(-)957	(+)963	(+)960	-3
Kerala	1022	(-)1016	(+)1032	(+)1036	+4
Madhya Pradesh	953	(-)941	(-)941	(-)931	-10
Maharashtra	936	(-)930	(+)937	(-)934	-3
Manipur	1015	(-)980	(-)971	(-)938	-33
Nagaland	933	(-)871	(-)963	(-)936	-27
Orissa	1001	(-)988	(-)981	(-)971	-10
Punjab	854	(+)865	(+)879	(+)882	+3
Rajasthan	908	(+)911	(+)919	(-)910	-9
Tamil Nadu	992	(-)978	(-)977	(-)974	-3
Uttar Pradesh	909	(-)879	(-)885	(-)879	-6
West Bengal	878	(+)891	(+)911	(+)917	+6

*Excludes Assam and Jammu & Kashmir

Source: Census of India 1991, Series -I Paper 2 of 1992; Final Population totals; Registrar General of India, New Delhi, 1991.

Analysis of State-wise sex-ratio in 1991 reveals that out of the selected 17 States, 10 States viz.; Andhra Pradesh, Goa, Gujarat, Karnataka, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Manipur, Orissa and Tamil Nadu hold a sex-ratio above the national average. The decadal variations in States during 1981-1991 give a very disturbing picture as female population has declined adversely in the State of Bihar (Inter-decadal variation is 35) followed by Manipur, Nagaland, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Rajasthan, Goa, Gujarat, Uttar pradesh, Haryana, Andhra

Pradesh, Karnataka, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu. Kerala is the only State with a favourable sex-ratio of 1036 females per 1000 males in 1991 Census. States like Punjab and West Bengal also show a favourable trend of growth of the female population but paradoxically the State sex-ratio in each of two States remain much below the national level.

The trend of sex-ratio in various States over a period of three decades i.e. between 1961-1991 reveal that 12 major States viz.; Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Goa, Gujarat, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Manipur, Nagaland, Orissa, Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh show a declining trend while 5 States viz.; Kerala, Karnataka, Punjab, Rajasthan and West Bengal show a favourable trend in respect of females. The declining sex-ratio in States like Tamil Nadu, Bihar, etc. would be due to the heinous practice of female infanticide reported in certain districts/communities in these States. These variations are influenced not only by the sex-differentials at birth and under-5 age group but also by other factors like migration. When the discussion is narrowed down to sex-ratio under-5, it is evident that the insufficient prenatal, perinatal and post natal care provided to the girl child, the uncared female babies due to negative social attitudes towards the girl child also play a great role thus, the analysis of sex-ratio is quite complex. But, at the same time, it does give a summary picture of the demographic scene (Bose, Ashish; Report of the National Workshop on the Girl Child, 1987: New Delhi).

Table 4: Percent distribution of child population by sex and residence

	0-4	5-9	Age Group 10-14	(Years) 0-14
Rural	13.7	11.9	11.8	37.4
Male	13.5	11.8	11.4	36.7
Female	13.6	11.9	11.6	37.1
Total				
Urban	11.2	11.2	10.9	33.3
Male	11.4	11.2	10.9	33.5
Female	11.3	11.2	10.9	33.4
Total				
Combined	13.1	11.8	11.6	36.5
Male	13.0	11.6	11.3	35.5
Female	13.1	11.7	11.5	36.3
Total				

Source: Sample Registration System Fertility and Mortality Indicators, 1991; Registrar General of India, New Delhi, 1993; pp.10.

About 37 per cent of India's population comprise of children below 14 years of age. This has fallen from 42 percent in 1971 to 37 percent in 1991.

The data on single year population from 1991 Census are yet to become available. The Sample Registration System (SRS) of Registration General of India, however, have brought out an estimate of percentage population in different age groups. As per the SRS 1991, children in the age group 0-14 years constituted 36.3 percent of the population. This proportions in the rural areas and urban areas has been 37.1 percent and 33.4 percent, respectively.

Table 4 shows percentage distribution of child population by different age-groups, sex and residence.

As could be seen above that there is no significant difference in percentage distribution of male and female child population in various age groups upto 14 years. Both male and female children show higher concentration in the rural areas as compared to urban areas which is due to higher Marital Fertility Rates (MFR) in the rural areas (Rural MFR: 5.2, Urban MFR: 4.7) (SRS, Fertility and Mortality Indicators, 1991, Registrar General of India).

State-wise percentage distribution of the male and female population is also depicted in Table 5 to note any conspicuous variation within the major States.

TABLES 5 State-wise Percentage Distribution of Child Population by sex and Age Groups in 1991 (in years)

States	Female Child Population			Male Child Population		
	0-4	5-9	10-14	0-4	5-9	10-14
INDIA*	13.0	11.6	11.3	13.1	11.8	11.6
Andhra Pradesh	11.4	11.4	11.3	11.3	11.6	11.4
Assam	12.6	12.9	11.1	12.0	12.6	10.9
Bihar	15.5	12.4	12.3	15.7	12.3	12.8
Gujarat	11.5	11.4	11.1	11.6	11.7	11.6
Haryana	14.1	12.4	11.1	14.2	12.4	12.4
Himachal Pradesh	12.3	12.0	10.8	13.9	13.0	11.8
Karnataka	11.9	11.7	11.6	12.1	11.8	11.8
Kerala	9.6	9.4	9.5	10.5	10.1	10.5
Madhya Pradesh	14.4	11.9	11.6	14.4	12.1	11.9

Maharashtra	12.9	11.2	10.4	13.0	11.6	10.8
Orissa	12.5	10.4	11.4	12.9	10.8	11.5
Punjab	11.7	11.4	10.6	11.7	11.5	10.8
Rajasthan	13.6	12.9	11.8	14.0	12.7	12.1
Tamil Nadu	9.9	10.3	10.4	10.0	10.6	10.6
Uttar Pradesh	14.4	12.5	11.9	14.4	12.5	12.4
West Bengal	13.3	11.1	11.0	12.7	10.8	10.8

*Excludes Jammu & Kashmir

Source : Sample Registration System. Fertility and Mortality indicators 1991; Registrar General of India, New Delhi, 1993; pp. 59-70.

Table 6: Crude Death Rates by Sex and Residence in India, 1992

Area	Male	Female	Combined
Rural	10.8	10.4	10.6
Urban	7.5	6.7	7.1
Combined	10.1	9.6	9.8

Source: Sample Registration System - Fertility and Mortality Indicators 1991; Registrar General of India, New Delhi, 1993; pp.30.

As per 1991 Census, the highest proportion of female and male children in the age group 0-4 years is noted in Bihar (followed by Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana and so on) while Kerala has the lowest proportion of female children in this age group (followed by Tamil Nadu - where the tragic practice of Female Infanticide is also reported). In the age group 5-9 years, highest female child population is in Assam and that of her counterpart is in Himachal Pradesh, while highest proportion of female children in the age group 10-14 years is in Bihar and for male child population in this age group is concentrated as highest in Haryana. The lowest proportion of female and male child population is found in Kerala for all the 3 age groups except male children in 0-4 age group which is noted as lowest in Tamil Nadu.

Mortality Indicators

Mortality pattern of a given population is measured in terms of Death Rates or estimated Crude Death Rates. It is assessed as number of death per thousand live birth at a given point of time in a reference year.

Death Rates

The 1991 Census estimated Crude Death Rate for India as 9.8, which ranged from 10.6 in rural and 7.1 in urban areas. The State-wise variation illustrated Kerala with lowest Death Rate (6.0) and Madhya Pradesh with the highest Death Rates (13.8). Further, five States have registered the Death Rates higher than the national average viz. Assam (11.5), Madhya Pradesh (13.8), Orissa (12.8), Rajasthan (10.1) and Uttar Pradesh (11.3).

The Crude Death Rates for females are significantly higher in rural areas as compared to urban areas. Similar striking difference is visible in death rates for male population in rural and urban areas. Female death rates have been estimated relatively lower than the national averages and even than that of their counterpart in both rural and urban settings. Table 7 gives the State-wise variations in death rates by sex.

TABLE 7: Crude Death Rate by sex, INDIA and major States, 1991

Major States	Person	Male	Female
INDIA*	9.8	10.0	9.7
Andhra Pradesh	9.7	10.4	9.0
Assam	11.5	11.6	11.3
Bihar	9.8	9.4	10.3
Gujarat	8.5	8.9	8.1
Haryana	8.2	8.4	7.9
Himachal Pradesh	8.9	9.8	8.0
Karnataka	9.0	9.4	8.5
Kerala	6.0	6.9	5.2
Madhya Pradesh	13.9	13.6	14.0
Maharashtra	8.2	8.5	7.9
Orissa	12.8	13.2	12.5
Punjab	7.8	8.7	6.8
Rajasthan	10.1	10.1	10.1
Tamil Nadu	8.8	9.7	8.0
Uttar Pradesh	11.3	11.1	11.6
West Bengal	8.3	8.2	8.3

*Excludes Jammu & Kashmir

Source: Sample Registration System - Fertility and Mortality Indicators 1991; Registrar General of India, New Delhi, 1993; pp.30.

Death Rates as presented in Table 7 indicate that the Mortality Rates for female population is higher than the national average for female population, in the State of Assam, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh - where the overall status of women is comparatively lower and the girl child also does not enjoy a high profile and status. Kerala has remarkably registered the lowest mortality rate (5.2) followed by Punjab (the second lowest (6.8), Haryana (7.8), Maharashtra and Haryana (7.9 in each), Tamil Nadu and Himachal Pradesh (8.0), Gujarat (8.1), West Bengal (8.3), Karnataka (8.5) and Andhra Pradesh (9.0).

Infant Mortality

Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) is a crucial indicator to gauge the health status of infants (under 1 year population) and speaks volumes of health consciousness of a community.

The infant mortality rate for India in 1991 was estimated through Sample Registration System as 80 showing higher IMR in rural (87 per 1000 live births) and low IMR in urban areas (53 per 1000 live birth). The data given in Table 8 indicates the male-female and rural-urban differentials.

TABLE 8: Estimated Infant Mortality Rates by sex and residence INDIA, and major States, 1991

Major States	Combined			Rural			Urban		
	Perso n	Male	Femal e	Perso n	Male	Femal e	Perso n	Male	Femal e
INDIA*	80	81	80	87	87	87	53	53	52
Andhra Pradesh	73	76	70	77	78	75	56	65	47
Assam	81	88	74	83	90	76	42	49	36
Bihar	69	68	71	71	70	73	46	46	45
Gujarat	69	70	67	73	76	70	57	56	58
Haryana	68	69	67	73	74	71	49	48	51
Himachal Pradesh	75	81	67	76		69	38	49	27
Karnataka	77	82	72	87	91	82	47	51	43
Kerala	16	17	16	17	17	16	16	17	15
Madhya Pradesh	117	116	119	125	123	127	74	75	73

Maharashtra	60	60	59	69	69	70	38	42	33
Orissa	124	126	123	129	131	127	71	72	69
Punjab	53	55	51	58	60	56	40	41	38
Rajasthan	79	77	80	84	83	85	50	47	54
Tamil Nadu	57	60	54	65	69	61	42	43	40
Uttar Pradesh	97	95	100	102	99	105	74	70	77
West Bengal	71	72	69	76	79	73	47	44	49

*Excludes Jammu & Kashmir

Source : Sample Registration System - Fertility and Mortality Indicators 1991; Registrar General of India, New Delhi, 1993; pp.3 1.

It is observed that female infants face higher mortality as compared to their counterpart in the states of Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh. Three states viz.; Assam, Madhya Pradesh, and Orissa indicate IMR higher than the national average. Madhya Pradesh, Orissa and Uttar Pradesh also indicate higher female IMR than the national average for female population. Highest IMR for males and female infants has been registered in Orissa state - which finds its roots in highest IMR for both the sexes in Rural Orissa and partly in urban Orissa. Female IMR in urban Orissa is third to highest amongst all the states.

Kerala is the only State with the lowest IMR for female population (16) and for male population (17) - which is very close to the IMR for any developed country. This could be one of the reasons for highest sex-ratio in the State besides selective male migration and emigration. This further speaks of successful MCH and other health care programmes in the State and above all such a high literacy-all channeling to favourable social environment and attitudes towards girl child. Majority of the States tends to group in the range between 60-79 IMR, followed by 2 States i.e. Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh in 80-100 range and another 2 States in the range of 100 and above i.e. Madhya Pradesh and Orissa. Kerala is the only State with IMR below 20 indicating a trend of health status of under ones close to that of most of the developed nations.

Table 9: Distribution of States by Female IMR levels

Categories for IMR	States
Below 20	Kerala
Between 20-49	-

Between 50-59	Tamil Nadu, Punjab, Maharashtra
Between 60-79	West Bengal, Karnataka, Himachal Pradesh, Haryana Gujarat, Bihar, Assam, Andhra Pradesh
Between 80-100	Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh
Above 100	Madhya Pradesh, Orissa

Child Mortality

Mortality under 0-4 age group counts for majority of the childhood deaths. Childhood mortality varies from State to State and by sex and residence. However, high female mortality may be attributed to son-preference, preferential treatment for health during sickness and gamut of other biased social attitudes. The table gives death rates for children below 4 by sex and residence in the major States.

Female mortality/death rates in the age group 0-4 years has been higher than for her counterpart both in rural and urban areas and also at All India level. Madhya Pradesh registered the highest death rate for male and female children (male: 44.6, female: 44.3) followed by children of both sexes in Orissa (male: 39.3, female: 38.7). In rural India, Madhya Pradesh again tops in death rate for children of both sexes under-4 (male: 48.8, female: 49.0) while in urban India, Rajasthan has highest female death rates (27.1) whereas Madhya Pradesh continues to have highest male death rates in the 0-4 years.

The death rate for female children are found to be comparatively much higher than the death rate for boys in 0-4 years age group.

Early Marriage

Since time immemorial, early marriage for females has received religious and social sanction in our country. In the male dominated society, it finds its rationale in the desires and measures to guard the girls' chastity against strangers. Surprisingly, India has one of the lowest mean ages at marriage in the world. Table 10 depicts a trend of age at marriage of male and female population during eight decades:

TABLE 10 Estimated Death Rate for children aged 0-4 year by sex and residence, India and major States 1991

Major States	Combined			Rural			Urban		
	Person	Male	Female	Person	Male	Female	Person	Male	Female
INDIA*	26.5	25.6	27.5	29.1	28.1	30.2	16.0	15.4	16.6
Andhra Pradesh	21.3	22.3	20.2	23.0	23.9	22.0	14.7	16.1	13.3
Assam	32.4	34.4	0.4	33.5	35.6	31.4	12.4	13.8	10.8
Bihar	22.8	20.9	24.8	23.4	21.4	25.5	16.3	15.4	17.3
Gujarat	23.3	23.1	23.5	25.8	26.3	25.3	17.6	15.7	19.6
Haryana	23.0	22.3	23.8	24.9	24.3	25.5	14.8	13.5	16.2
Himachal Pradesh	19.3	20.4	18.0	19.9	20.9	18.7	7.9	9.5	6.3
Karnataka	23.6	24.4	23.9	27.0	27.0	27.1	13.1	12.3	13.8
Kerala	4.3	4.5	4.1	4.3	4.7	3.9	4.3	3.7	5.0
Madhya Pradesh	44.5	42.4	46.6	48.9	46.5	51.5	23.6	23.1	24.1
Maharashtra	16.3	15.9	16.7	18.3	17.6	19.0	11.5	11.8	11.1
Orissa	39.0	38.8	39.2	41.1	41.0	41.3	16.4	16.7	16.1
Punjab	17.0	15.6	1.4	18.4	16.7	20.3	13.0	12.7	13.3
Rajasthan	30.9	28.4	33.8	32.8	30.5	35.5	20.5	17.0	24.6
Tamil Nadu	16.1	16.9	15.3	18.4	19.4	17.4	11.3	11.8	10.9
Uttar Pradesh	35.6	33.2	38.4	38.1	35.5	41.0	23.3	21.7	25.2
West Bengal	20.6	20.4	20.8	22.3	22.2	22.4	13.5	13.0	14.1

*Excludes Jammu & Kashmir

Source: Sample Registration System - Fertility and Mortality Indicators 1991; Registrar General of India, New Delhi, 1993; pp.34.

The gap between mean age at marriage for males and females has been conspicuously wide upto 1921. It continues to be high although relatively less than before. There has been increase in the mean ages at marriage both for males and females over the years. (Table 11)

TABLE 11 Mean Age at Marriage of Males and Females from 1901-1981

Year	Mean Age (Year)	
	Males	Females
1901	20.0	13.1
1911	20.3	13.2
1921	20.7	13.7
1931	18.6	12.7
1941	19.9	14.7
1951	19.9	15.6
1961	21.3	15.5
1971	22.4	17.2
1981	23.3	18.3

Source: Census of India, 1981, Series-I, India, Part II-Special Report and Tables Based on 5 Percent Sample Data, Registrar General of India, New Delhi, 1983.

TABLE 12 Female age at effective marriage by residence, INDIA and major States, 1991 (in years)

Major States	Combined	Rural	Urban
INDIA*	19.5	19.2	20.6
Andhra Pradesh	18.2	17.9	19.2
Assam	20.5	20.3	22.0
Bihar	18.8	18.6	19.6
Gujarat	20.2	20.1	20.7
Haryana	19.2	18.9	20.3
Himachal Pradesh	19.9	19.6	21.7
Karnataka	19.4	19.1	20.3
Kerala	22.0	22.0	22.2
Madhya Pradesh	18.6	18.3	20.2
Maharashtra	18.9	18.4	20.4
Orissa	19.8	19.7	20.7
Punjab	20.4	20.3	20.8
Rajasthan	17.9	17.8	18.7
Tamil Nadu	20.3	20.1	20.7
Uttar Pradesh	19.1	18.8	20.7

West Bengal	19.3	18.9	21.1
--------------------	------	------	------

*Excludes Jammu & Kashmir

Source: Sample Registration System - Fertility and Mortality Indicators 1991; Registrar General of India, New Delhi, 1993; pp. 13.

The low age at marriages supports empirically the practice of child marriage although no reliable data is available on the incidence of child marriages in the country. Child Marriage Restraint Act is under implementation to check the child marriage and to raise the age at marriage for both the sexes. Paradoxically, this Act along with its inadequacies come in conflict with the Indian law itself - which declares a man of 18 years as a major while the Child Marriage Restraint Act consider him as a child even when he is 20 years (minimum age at marriage under the Act for males is 21 years and for females it is 18 years). This, however, signals for a closer review of the situation. (Bose, Ashish: reported in the National Workshop on the Girl Child December 27-29, 1987 New Delhi).

Table 13: Proportion of girls married in the crucial age groups

Residence Area	Age groups Below 15	(in years) 15-19
Rural	0.5	35.5
Urban	0.1	16.2
Combined	0.4	31.3

This acts without being capable of implementation would bring forth further complications unless the Indian community is vigorously educated to fight against the deep rooted prejudices, social taboos and beliefs, customs and pressures perpetuating this perverse practice.

Coming back to 1991 Census, the figures for mean age at marriage for females and males are not yet available. As per the available data, mean age at effective marriage for females in India has been estimated as 19.5 years, which is higher in urban areas (20.6 years) than in the rural areas (19.2 years). Table 12 below presents State-wise information on mean age at effective marriage.

In the 16 major States in the above Table, 9 States' (viz.; Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Haryana, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal) have mean age at effective marriage lower than the national average. State-wise variations place Kerala with highest mean age at effective marriage both (in rural and urban Kerala) whereas Rajasthan has registered the

lowest mean age at effective marriage for females both in rural and urban areas of the State.

To substantiate the above discussion, data on proportion of girls married in the crucial age groups of under 15 and 15-19 years give another dismal picture as stated in Table 13.

In urban areas, 16.2 percent of the girls are married in the 15-19 years age group. Correspondingly, 35.5 percent girls are married in the same age group in rural areas, which is quite high proportion. State-wise picture for married girl's follows in the table given below.

It is disturbing to see that in the rural areas, one out of 200 girls are married away in the country before attaining the age of even 15. When it comes to States, there are States like Rajasthan where the incidence of girls' marriage under 15 years is 2 percent (highest) which notably justifies the practice of child marriage. These percentages in the States of Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Karnataka are 0.9, 0.7, 0.6 and 0.3 respectively.

Strategies for Better Future

The above description supported with demographic data is though not very illustrative but still derives a conclusion that despite various developmental measures undertaken from time to time, a great lot still needs to be done to raise the status of the girl child on par with that of her counterpart.

Realizing the situation of the Girl Child, the Heads of the Governments of the SAARC Region met at male in 1990 and declared 1991-2000 A.D as 'SAARC Decade of the Girl Child'. In fulfillment of this commitment Govt. of India has formulated a National Plan of Action (NPA) for the SAARC Decade of the Girl Child (1991-2000 AD) with a major theme of '**Survival, Protection and Development**' to attend to her gender specific needs and requirements to the fullest possible extent. This was a conscious effort to ensure equitable rights, opportunities, benefits and status to the girl child who faces discrimination much before her birth and throughout her life.

The NPA for the Girl Child broadly envisages three gender specific goals for the Decade (1991-2000 AD) - which are akin to those of World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children in 1990 and the Male Declaration of SAARC. These are:

- **Survival and Protection** of the girl child and safe motherhood
- Overall **development** of the girl child and,

- **Special Protection** for vulnerable girl children in difficult circumstances and belonging to Special Groups.

The formulation of the specific goals and strategies sensitive to multi-dimensional needs of the girl child is the backbone of NPA. To ensure an optimal impact, the proposed goals interwoven with the National Development Goals have been included with specific interventions in each situation. The major emphasis has been to sensitize the Policy-makers, Planners and Administrators, generation of social and legal awareness amongst people to eradicate the prejudices, evil practices against her and to effectively generate positive attitudes towards her and advocacy of resource mobilization to successfully implement the Action Plan.

Nevertheless, supplement the national efforts of the Government, State Governments are also coming forward to formulate State Plans of Action for Girl Child suitable to the indigenous, culturally diverse situations and competing specific problems like Child Marriages in Rajasthan, dedication of girl children as *devdasis* in Karnataka, sale of girls in marriage in Andhra Pradesh and Kerala and the problem of female infanticide in Tamil Nadu etc. So far, Governments of Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Goa have formulated the State Plan of Action for Girl Children.

The NPA also envisages an inbuilt mechanism of gender sensitive monitoring right from the grass root levels to take a proper stock of the impact of the efforts. In this perspective, such an endeavor is a great hope for a brighter future to the Girl Child. The exchange of intercountry experiences in the Region will also help enriching the experience and success stories of each other - which will accelerate the process of betterment and development of Girl Child ensuring self-esteem and equal status that she deserves as a right.

On behalf of the Department of Women and Child Development, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India, Shastri Bhavan, New Delhi - 110 001.