

## New Sociological Reflections on: Declining Sex Ratio, Cross-Region Brides, Inter-Regional Marriages in Haryana, India

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### ABSTRACT

The unfavourable sex ratio is a significant concern in contemporary Asian emerging nations such as Taiwan, South Korea, China, India, and Pakistan. Among these, India—particularly its northern states such as Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Punjab—has been disproportionately affected. Haryana is one of the states with the most pronounced gender inequality. While the state is widely recognized for its agricultural productivity, industrial development, electricity generation, and consistent contributions to the sports sector, it is also frequently criticized for its regressive social attitudes. These include resistance to inter-caste marriages, honour killings, entrenched patriarchy, crimes against women, female foeticide, and a predominantly masculine sex ratio. Such practices have contributed to a shortage of marriageable women and a growing marriage crisis. In response, there has been a significant influx of cross-regional brides into the state, with surplus bachelors seeking spouses from other regions of India—particularly from the North-East, South, Central, and Eastern parts of the country—as well as from transnational sources such as Nepal and Bangladesh. This article reflects the declining sex ratio, long-distance matrimonial alliances within Haryana, and explores the lived experiences of cross-regional brides in interregional marriages.

**Keywords:** *Masculinity, Skewed Sex Ratio, Bride Scarcity, Long-distance Marriage, Haryana*

The imbalance of the sexes is a global concern, but it is particularly acute in developing countries such as Taiwan, South Korea, China, India, and Pakistan (Guilmoto, 2012). In India, a persistent disparity in the male-to-female ratio reflects deep-rooted structural and cultural biases. According to the Census of India (2011), the national sex ratio stands at 940 females per 1,000 males. This imbalance significantly influences various aspects of life, including everyday social interactions and the institution of family formation. Religion further intensifies these disparities, shaping gender norms and reproductive behavior (Kumar, 2023).

In Haryana, where the majority of the population practices Hinduism, the gender imbalance is even more pronounced. The 2011 census data reveals that Haryana has 121 fewer females per 1,000 males than the national average and 61 fewer than the country overall (Census of

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India, 2011). Additionally, the child sex ratio is notably lower among religious groups such as Hindus, Jains, and Sikhs when compared to Muslims and Christians, underscoring the role of both religion and culture in sustaining gender-based discrimination (Bhalotra et al., 2020). Thus, both cultural values and religious ideologies serve to reinforce systemic gender inequity in India.

In Hinduism, the responsibility of performing the cremation ritual (*mukhagni*) traditionally falls upon the eldest son, a religious obligation that reinforces the cultural preference for male children and perpetuates gender bias (Chopra, 2014). This patriarchal norm contributes to systemic discrimination, fostering social practices such as honor killings, misogyny, and various forms of violence against women, factors that have been associated with the rise in **femicide** in conservative societies (Kaur, 2004; UNODC, 2019). Ashish Bose, a distinguished Indian demographer, coined the term “daughter elimination and craze” about the increasing use of ultrasonography for sex-selective abortions, and categorized Haryana as a “DEMARU” state—a Daughter-Eliminating Region of India (Bose, 2001). He attributes this phenomenon to entrenched socio-cultural conservatism, or what he refers to as “social illiteracy”, shaped by archaic traditions and patriarchal values.

Haryana’s gender imbalance is perpetuated by a range of structural and cultural issues, including sex-selective abortions, rigid patriarchy, and high maternal mortality, all of which contribute to the declining sex ratio in the state (Bose, 2001; Jha et al., 2011). As a result, there has been a marked decline in the number of women available for marriage and a corresponding rise in the population of single men in states like Haryana. Faced with this scarcity, many men look beyond their regional boundaries, resulting in a surge in interregional marriages (Kumar, 2022).

### ***Falling Sex Ratios: A Demographic Challenge***

According to the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-IV, 2015-16), the number of unmarried males in India has been on the rise, with unmarried men comprising 15% more than unmarried women in the 15–49 age group (IIPS & MoHFW, 2017). The data also highlight significant regional disparities in sex ratios. In Haryana, the overall sex ratio stands at 926 females per 1,000 males. District-level variations are striking: Sonapat records the lowest sex ratio at 844, while Bhiwani and Jhajjar have the highest at 985 and 982, respectively (IIPS & MoHFW, 2017). Additionally, 39% of women in the state either live alone or share living spaces with non-relatives, reflecting a shifting dynamic in gendered living arrangements.

NFHS findings also show that 31% of women in India either own or co-own land, indicating some progress in female asset ownership. However, deep-rooted patriarchal norms persist, especially in Haryana, where sons continue to be preferred over daughters (Kumar & Gill 2025). According to NFHS-V (2020–21), 10% of women and 11% of men explicitly expressed a preference for sons, while only 2–3% of both sexes preferred daughters (IIPS & MoHFW, 2021). Interestingly, while 71% of men and 83% of women desired at least one daughter, the desire for sons remains slightly higher, with 75% of men and 86% of women expressing a desire for at least one male child (IIPS & MoHFW, 2021).

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### *Criminality Against Women*

Based on this table, these are the major crimes committed against women in India. The researcher will further analyse the significant crimes committed against women in Haryana and Uttar Pradesh.

**Table 1.1 Key statistics on the nature of the crime against women in India**

Sr. No.	Nature of Crimes	2014-15	2017-18	2018-19
1.	Police Apathy against Women	6775	1896	2734
2.	Right to live with Dignity	6421	5770	6792
3.	Outraging the modesty of Women	2659	967	939
4.	Dowry Harassment/Cruelty to Married Women	1338	2371	2584
5.	Property Disputes	1327	NA	NA
6.	Rape	1041	NA	NA
7.	Dowry Harassment/Dowry Death	975	NA	NA
8.	Violence Against Women	911	1787	1636
9.	Complaint by In-Laws	863	NA	NA
10.	Attempt to Rape	709	NA	NA
11.	Right to Exercise Choice in Marriage	NA	403	369
12.	Cyber-crimes against Women	NA	339	402
13.	Bigamy/Polygamy	NA	167	160
14.	Stalking/Voyeurism	NA	149	142
15.	Sexual Harassment, including Sexual Harassment at the Workplace	NA	666	750
	Total	30106	13942	19279

**Source:** NCW (2014-15, 2017-18, 2018-19) reports.

Table 1.1 shows the nature of crimes against women in India, wherein the cases of right to live with dignity and police apathy cases against women remained at the top list of crimes against women for 2014-15, 2017-18, and 2018-19. The cases of outraging the modesty of women, cases of dowry harassment/cruelty to married women, assets disputes and dowry demise, violence against women, acquiescent by in-laws, sexual harassment including sexual harassment at workplace and attempt to rape complaints registered in 2014-15, 2017-18 and 2018-19 report of the national commission for women (N.C.W.) are also grave.

Moreover, the complaints of the right to choose a life partner for marriage, cyber-crimes against women, bigamy/polygamy, stalking/voyeurism complaints registered in 2014-15, 2017-18, and 2018-19, reports of the National Commission for Women (N.C.W.) are at the end of the list of complaints. Thus, this table concludes that the different types of crimes against women are being reported, in which the role of the formal body is vital, but their failure is shown in the above table. The inequality towards women and their suppression does not seem to end only with economic growth or education (Dahiya, 2004).

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**Table 1.2 Key statistics of registered cases of crime against women in Uttar Pradesh and Haryana**

Sr. No.	State	Complaint (2014-15)	State	Complaint (2017-18)	State	Complaint (2018-19)
1.	Uttar Pradesh	19385	Uttar Pradesh	8454	Uttar Pradesh	11287
2.	Delhi	3619	Delhi	1664	Delhi	1733
3.	Haryana	1720	Haryana	901	Haryana	1181
4.	Rajasthan	1473	Rajasthan	661	Bihar	754
5.	Madhya Pradesh	1086	Bihar	559	Rajasthan	733
6.	Bihar	775	Madhya Pradesh	442	Maharashtra	591
7.	Maharashtra	758	Maharashtra	433	Madhya Pradesh	533
8.	Uttarakhand	530	Karnataka	307	West Bengal	323
9.	Punjab	403	West Bengal	268	Karnataka	271
10.	Jharkhand	357	Uttarakhand	253	Uttarakhand	267
	Total	30106	Total	13942	Total	19279

**Source:** National Commission for Women (2014-15, 2017-18, 2018-19) reports.

The above table shows that the National Commission for Women received 30,106 (2014-15), 13,942 (2017-18), and 19,279 (2018-19) complaints of crimes against women through their online platform from across the country. It is shocking that from 2014-15 to 2018-19, National Commission for Women reports show that Uttar Pradesh sustained on top position in receiving complaints, whereas Haryana remained in the third position. Again, it is shocking that out of 30,106 complaints, 19,385 complaints in 2014-15, out of 13942 complaints, 8454 complaints in 2017-18, and out of 19279 11289 complaints in 2018-19 were registered only from Uttar Pradesh.

Further, 1720 complaints out of 30,106 in 2014-15, 901 complaints out of 13,942 complaints in 2017-18, and 1181 complaints out of 19,279 complaints in 2018-19 were registered from Haryana. Both states maintained a top ranking in crimes against women in all these reports. The sum total of all grievances received from both states is double the grievances received from the whole nation. Thus, the above discussion concludes that the conditions of women are worse among these states, and the safety of women is a grave concern in these states.

### ***Emerging Patterns of Interregional Marriages in Asia***

Interregional marriages are a widespread phenomenon, not confined to India alone. In recent decades, countries like Taiwan and South Korea have increasingly accepted “foreign wives” as legitimate immigrants, especially in response to skewed sex ratios and rural male bachelorhood. As Bélanger, Lee, and Wang (2010) note, it took several years for Taiwanese and South Korean governments to recognize and attempt to resolve the challenges associated with what they termed the “foreign bride” problem in Taiwan and the “international family issue” in South Korea. In nations with severely imbalanced sex ratios—such as China and South Korea—the scarcity of marriageable women has compelled men to seek brides from abroad, often through mediated or brokered arrangements (Kaur, 2004). However, these transnational brides often face compounded vulnerabilities due to their outsider status. A lack of familial and institutional support in their new households renders them significantly

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more susceptible to domestic violence compared to local brides. Kaur (2004) further highlights that such women often experience curtailed mobility, restricted autonomy, and a near absence of social support networks in their host communities (Kaur, 2013).

Haryana is seeing a rise in the number of brides coming through interregional marriages from economically disadvantaged states like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal, Assam, Odisha, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and even Bangladesh and Nepal (Kaur, 2004; Ahlawat, 2016). The causes behind these migratory marriages are multifaceted, ranging from a surplus of daughters in certain families to dowry-related pressures, unemployment, and entrenched poverty (Sahoo & Pattnaik, 2020).

### ***Crisis and Compromise: The Social Logic of Interregional Marriages***

In many cases, impoverished parents are coerced into marrying off their daughters through intermediaries who promise financial support. These middlemen often commodify young women, valuing their physical appearance and demanding payments in return. Once paid, the broker transfers the woman to her future husband, often without her consent or full knowledge of the conditions. This practice, which borders on human trafficking, is common in regions like Haryana, where women are sold or forcibly married through deceptive brokerage systems (Ahlawat, 2016). These brides, once relocated, are routinely exploited—subjected to sexual abuse and forced labor in rural households, effectively turning them into bonded individuals under the guise of matrimony (Kaur, 2004; Chowdhury, 2016).

Society often frowns upon cross-regional marriages, preferring local relationships (Kukreja & Kumar, 2013). Because they are unemployed, physically disabled, or elderly, disadvantaged men frequently seek brides in locations such as the northern highlands, Gangetic plains, Bangladesh, or Kerala, often without dowries and at a cost. Brides become commodified as their scarcity increases due to the marriage market's "demand and supply" logic (Kukreja & Kumar, 2013; Jeffery & Jeffery, 1983; Jeffery et al., 1984). Impoverished males are either delayed or resort to interregional weddings and bride trafficking, which, while exploitative, help compensate for the scarcity of available wives in their areas (Guilmoto, 2010).

Kukreja's study, which included interviews with 75 Rohtak brides, looked into "long-distance marriages" between women from other states and agricultural caste men in Haryana. These marriages, by using lower-caste girls (mostly SC/ST), unwittingly weaken caste endogamy while also upholding caste hierarchy by avoiding local inter-caste unions. Kukreja (2018) highlighted caste-based oppression, noting that these brides face continued prejudice and that their children inherit their mothers' lower caste rank, resulting in long-term shame and exclusion from dominant caste identities such as "Jaat" (Kukreja, 2018).

Men like Manoj and Rakesh are not isolated anomalies; rather, they are a part of a broader trend in Haryana's cross-regional marriages. Mukherjee (2013) and Kukreja & Kumar (2013) look into how underprivileged men—who may be elderly, jobless, or physically disabled—locate partners through brokers, sometimes without dowries. Many of these men report being fooled; for instance, after a short marriage, a man may be accused of stealing and feel defrauded after paying the broker for all expenses (Kukreja & Kumar, 2013; Mukherjee, 2013). While men like Manoj and Rakesh, both from Haryana, later say that these brokers still defraud their communities, these brokers routinely instruct and watch over

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arriving wives. Because there is minimal institutional control over interregional weddings, these marriages, which usually include serious human rights violations, go mostly unsolved (Kukreja & Kumar, 2013; Mukherjee, 2013).

The Yamuna Par (eastern) women, who were mostly imported for household service and propagation, are referred to as “Paro” in Mewat. Truck workers were the first to employ Paro marriages over 35 years ago; they are transactional and can involve significant age differences (Khan, 2009). These women, who comprise around 14% of the local population, are at risk of sexual exploitation, overwork, and dehumanisation due to their perceived status as outsiders. Despite working in homes and on farms, they are denied family rights. Paro women are frequently excluded from society and deprived of inheritance because they do not have ration cards or legal status, especially after their spouses pass away. When they are no longer considered appealing, many are relegated to low-paying caregiving positions or coerced into abusive jobs and partnerships (Khan, 2009).

### CONCLUSION

The persistent gender imbalance in Haryana, rooted in patriarchal norms and a longstanding preference for male offspring, continues to have far-reaching consequences for social stability and gender justice. This study has examined the wide-ranging impacts of the skewed sex ratio, particularly the rise of cross-regional marriages, the intensification of gendered vulnerabilities, and the commodification of women within the marriage market. The increasing migration of women from other Indian states and neighbouring countries into Haryana—driven largely by a deficit of local brides—reflects a broader crisis in which marriage becomes a tool to manage demographic imbalance rather than a site of agency, autonomy, or equality.

Statistical data from the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) reveal alarmingly high rates of crimes against women in states like Haryana and Uttar Pradesh, further highlighting the structural challenges women face in these regions. Addressing these issues requires more than reactive measures such as incentivising interregional marriages. Instead, a comprehensive approach is needed—one that actively promotes gender equity, combats sex-selective practices, ensures both legal and social protection for women, and encourages meaningful changes in societal attitudes towards gender. Only by addressing the socio-cultural roots of the declining sex ratio and gender-based violence can Haryana move toward a more equitable and socially just society.

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