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## **INTRA-REGIONAL DIFFERENTIALS IN THE PERCEPTION REGARDING SON PREFERENCE IN UTTAR PRADESH : EVIDENCES FROM THE FIELD**

### ***Abstract***

*This study aims to examine the intra-regional differences in perceptions or opinions of respondents regarding factors associated with son preference in two selected regions, Bundelkhand and Central region in Uttar Pradesh, which are economically and geographically different but are very similar when it comes to the patriarchal mindset about meta son preferences. The analysis and observations emerged in this paper are based on the primary survey which had been conducted with the help of structured household schedule for the sample selected. We also used case study and focus discussion method to get more insight into our objectives. To corroborate our findings obtained from the primary data, we have applied the logistic regression technique to determine the factors responsible for Son Preference and have taken first child preference to be a son as the dependent variable. The explanatory variables considered to influence son preference in the model are area, family type, mother's education and land ownership. Our main findings reveal that in our intra-regional comparative analysis, area of residence, land ownership and mother's education to some extent are the variables which are defining son preference in Bundelkhand region whereas, mother's education is a very strong variable to decide child preference in central region, while other determinants do not hold good in this case. Family type has come out to be no-effective variable to influence preference of the first child in both the regions. This indicates two important policy implications that education and economic development are important tools to bring a positive change.*

**Keywords:** *Son Preference, Uttar Pradesh, Bundelkhand, Child Sex Ratio.*

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*As long as the birth of a girl does not receive the same welcome as that of a boy, so long we should know that India is suffering from partial paralysis"*

**- Mahatma Gandhi**

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## Introduction

The preference for sons over daughters resulting in declining child sex ratio is located in the broader understanding of status of women in our country. The preference for sons is driven by various socio-economic and cultural factors and is a reflection of the wide gap in the differential roles of girls and boys (Radkar 2018). The country's sex ratio at birth, which is the number of females born per 1,000 males, is showing a worrying decline, according to the Sample Registration System (SRS) survey. The figure stood at 896 for 2015-17, down from 898 in 2014-16 and 900 in 2013-15. All states have experienced considerable progress in literacy and educational attainment over time, but equality has still not been achieved in most states (Arnold et.al. 2001). For instance the highest CSR reported in Census 2011 was of Meghalaya at 970 and lower was reported in Haryana at 830. Most of the southern and eastern states have CSR above 950 whereas many northern and western states have CSR below 850 (Census 2011) and this reflects a regional divide when it comes to gender imbalance. The phenomenon of son preference has increasingly gained attention over a period of time since age-old customs, in conjunction with greater demand for small families, along with the availability of modern medical technology has resulted in sex-selective abortion, female infanticide and daughter neglect. Sen (1990) famously pointed out that there were more than a hundred million missing girls in Asia due to parents' son-preferring attitudes. Gupta in her study (1987) states that "An implication of generalized sex bias is that discriminatory behavior need not occur at a conscious level. Parents in a society may simply have internalized certain norms that lead them to give better care to their sons than their daughters, and excess female mortality may be an unintended consequence". The decreasing Child Sex Ratio (CSR) has been a concern in India's demography in recent times as this ratio has decreased markedly from 927 in 2001 to 914 in 2011 for the country as a whole. This decline is more for rural areas from 934 in 2001 to 919 in 2011 and for urban areas it is 906 in 2001 and 902 in 2011. The clue of regional influence on low CSR can be speckled by degree of low CSR across different regions. There are studies focussing on the regional divide related to kinship-gender structures. While the historical reasons are not fully clear, the general inference is that position of women in Southern and eastern parts of the country possibly because of matrilineal influences, the cultural divide between Dravidians and Aryans, and the prevalence of labor-intensive wet-rice cultivation-women are better off than women in the North (Malhotra et.al. 1995).

In this backdrop, the rationale of the study lies in the fact that there is a need for specific local study regarding son preference in India in order to understand the ground reality. The rest of the paper is divided into following sections. The next section discusses the objectives of the study and hypotheses. Data and methods are discussed in detail in the third section. The fourth section elaborately deals with gender perspectives in the two regions namely, Bundelkhand and Central Uttar Pradesh taken into consideration for the study. The fifth section discusses statistical and descriptive analysis followed by conclusion in the sixth and final section of the paper.

### **Objectives and Hypotheses**

This study, on the basis of field observations, aims to examine the intra-regional differences in perceptions or opinions of respondents regarding factors associated with son preference in two selected regions, Bundelkhand and Central U.P., which are economically and geographically different but are very similar when it comes to the patriarchal mindset about meta son preferences. Bundelkhand is backward and central region is comparatively prosperous in terms of economic development. It also attempts to examine the reasons why women from Bundelkhand are more likely to prefer sons when compared to Central U.P.

### **The study aims to test the following hypotheses**

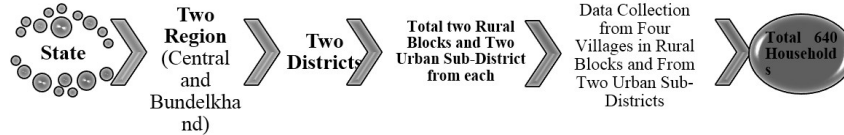
1. There is a significant relationship between area of residence (rural or semi-urban) and son preference. If a household is in semi-urban area, then the likelihood for son preference by the household is low.
2. There is a significant relationship between joint family and Son preference.
3. There is a significant relationship between Mother's education and son preference. The less educated a mother, is it is more likely that she will prefer a son.
4. There is a significant relationship between land owned by the household and son preference.

### **Data and Methods**

The analysis and observations emerged in this paper are based on the primary survey which had been conducted with the help of structured household schedule for the sample selected. We also used case study and focus discussion method to get more insight into our objectives. The study has been carried out in two districts of Uttar Pradesh to assess the intra-regional cause-effect relationship regarding son preference. Data for the study was collected through stratified random sampling and hence, there was low probability of contaminating data. Multistage sampling procedure was followed to choose respondents from these districts (see Figure 1). On the basis of highest and lowest child sex ratio as per Census 2011, two districts each were selected from two administrative regions of the state. The name of the districts chosen were Lalitpur and Jhansi from Bundelkhand and Barabanki and Kanpur Nagar from Central region. A sampling frame consisting of all the Community Development (C.D) block was prepared for each district. Again from each district on the basis of highest and lowest child sex ratio as per Census 2011 two C.D blocks were chosen (see table 1) so as to have a comparative analysis of rural and semi-urban setting. To have rural perspective those villages were selected which had maximum and minimum CSR as per Census 2011 and also which had number of households more than 100 to maintain uniformity in selection

of data. From each village 20 households were selected. Again from each selected districts, two sub-districts (*tehsils*) were taken to capture some urban perspective. The total sample size is therefore of 640 households.

**Figure 1: Intra-Regional Selection of the Sampling Units**



Source: Author's Construction.

**Table -1: Child Sex Ratio (0-6 years)**

Child Sex Ratio	Region	2011
<b>Bundelkhand</b>		
Maximum	Lalitpur	916
Minimum	Jhansi	866
<b>Central U.P</b>		
Maximum	Barabanki	932
Minimum	Kanpur Nagar	897
	Uttar Pradesh	902

Source: Census of India 2011, Uttar Pradesh, DCHB

To corroborate our findings obtained from the primary data, we have applied the logistic regression technique to determine the factors responsible for Son Preference which is the response variable and is binary in nature (Yes: 1; No: 0). In our study we have taken the first preference of child to be a son as the dependent variable. The explanatory variables considered to influence son preference in the model are area, family type, mother's education and land ownership which are categorise in following manner (see Table 2)

**Table 2: Description of Determinants responsible for Son Preference**

Variables	Categories
	Dependent variable
Son Preference	Yes - 1 , No - 0
	Independent variables
Area	Rural -1 , Semi-Urban - 2
Family Type	Joint-1 , Nuclear- 2
Mother's Education	No or less education -1 , Better or Higher education-2
Land (in Hectare )	Continuous variable

The disaggregated Model for the two regions Bundelkhand and Central U.P is framed as followingas:

**Model (1): For Bundelkhand Region**

$$\text{LOGIT}(\text{Son Preference}) = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 \text{Area} + \alpha_2 \text{Family Type} + \alpha_3 \text{Mother's Education} + \alpha_4 \text{Land size} + \varepsilon_{1i}$$

**Model (2): For Central U.P. Region**

$$\text{LOGIT}(\text{Son Preference}) = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{Area} + \beta_2 \text{Family Type} + \beta_3 \text{Mother's Education} + \beta_4 \text{Land size} + \varepsilon_{2i}$$

**Gender Perspectives**

In this section we have presented region wise observations from the field .

**(a) Bundelkhand**

The Bundelkhand region, rich in mineral resources and flora, with partial access to good quality education, health services and employment prospects showcases low human development. It is challenged by multiple factors like periodic drought, fragmented land holdings, feudal mind-sets, decline in water available for irrigation, low investment and low technological inputs in agriculture, industries. On close observation through field visits, some of the local practices that reveal high degree of patriarchy, stigma against women and girls were excavated. In feudal and patriarchal society of Bundelkhand, women are subjugated and are bounded by traditional roles of home maker. The overall position of women is not very encouraging in this region. In most parts in rural Bundelkhand, girls are married at an early age and the dropout rates among girls are high due to distance between schools and villages, lack of connectivity or safety concern. When it comes to higher education, people still think '*thodha padha so har se gaya, jyada padha to ghar se gaya*' (with some education, people move out in the fields, with more education, people move out of the house). While exploring the field we found that reason for son preference in semi-urban areas of our selected districts is not solely for economic motive rather, it is a mix of typical cultural and economic preferences such as performing last rites, continuation of family lineage, old age support, so on and so forth .During our field visit to village Badaira, Moth block district Jhansi one of the respondent opined "*modha hoga to gaon me izzat badhegi, rutba badhega. Modha budhape ka sahara banega. Modhiya to bhyah ke chali jaygi or agar modhi hovegi to shaadi kaun karayega unki is gareebi me.*" (If a son is born then our status in society would increase, our son is our old age support, where as a daughter has to leave the house after marriage and if a daughter is born then who would bear the cost of marriage in such state of poverty).

On our visit to Aira, village Block Moth of district Jhansi, which has a high CSR of 1136 (Census 2011), the ASHA (Accredited Social Health Activist)

informed us about a “family of seven daughters”. She took us to one semi *pucca* house at the extreme corner of the village, where the family lived. There we met Rama, our respondent, 37-year-old and the mother of the seven daughters. Rama’s husband Rajesh works as casual wage laborer. Rama’s eldest daughter is 18 years old and youngest daughter is 11 years old. Amidst the conversation, a young boy entered the room; Rama introduced him to us as her son. She told us how after giving birth to seven daughters, she ‘lost faith in God’, and adopted a male child from her sister. On being asked as to why she was so keen on having a male child, she told us, ‘*modha hamara dhyan rakhega aur khandan ka naam aage badhayega*’ (son will take care of us, and carry forward our family name) Strong son preference is reflected in women’s statements regarding the number of children of each sex that they would like to have beyond those they already have (Gupta 1987).

For a long period of time women’s inability to stand for their rights was directly correlated with the declining CSR. In order to combat with this problem of declining CSR mere increase in literacy levels of women, is not going to adhere the required solution. Most of the results and our experiences on field convey that there is a need to bring change in outlook of people. Even after increased autonomy of women, a varied behavior regarding strong preference for son and consequent increase in elimination of girl child has continued to increase ‘*Mann ki baat janna asaan hai, par soch badalna asaan nahi hai*’ (It is easy to know what a person is thinking but it is not easy to change their thinking). A woman respondent in Aira village, Moth block.

### ***Water Scarcity, Unmarried Bachelors, Bride Buying: Establishing a Nexus:***

Often referred to as the heartland of India, Bundelkhand region receives an average annual rainfall of 800-900 mm. Due to growing population, over exploitation of water resources, stagnant replenishing of ground water levels, various perennial sources have been reduced to seasonal, creating an acute scarcity of water in most parts of Bundelkhand. A dovetailed consequence is how men in rural parts of Bundelkhand face difficulty in finding a girl for marriage due to scarcity of water in their villages and the requirement for women to travel miles on foot to fetch water. A respondent in village Badanpur, block Babina district Jhansi, told us how despite being employed and earning well, he had been rejected thrice by families of girls in their community, due to water scarcity in their village. Women in the rural areas, move kilometers to fetch water on a daily basis. “*Gagrina phoote, khasam mar gaye*” (a pot of water is so important that even if they receive news of death of their husband, they will first put the pot of water safely) is a common proverb in the area, that highlights the severity of the problem. Due to scarcity of water and the need for women to move for miles to fetch water, bachelors in areas with severe water scarcity face problems in finding brides.

Problem of unmarried bachelors has surfaced, as parents of girls are repudiating marriage proposals, if the boy hails from a village where water resources are scarce. In a social structure like India, where caste, create, community, *gotra*, have been important crucial parameters for marriage, proximity to water resources, is a new addition. In one of our field visits to Lalitpur, Talbehat block, Radheylalthe resident of village Madauna,(Bhadona spoken name), a father of three sons told us how due to scarcity of water in their village all three families who approached them with marriage proposals for their son, backed out eventually. His son, Amit (27 years), tells us '*kaam karte hain, paise kamate hain, fir bhi shadi nahi ho rahi hain*' (despite being employed, I am facing difficulty in getting married). While the relationship between water scarcity and rising number of unmarried bachelors can be clearly established, an added dimension to the situation is practice of bride buying. It is in place to mention that there is substantive literature available to support the positive relationship between skewed sex ratio and bride buying. A study conducted in Haryana, unraveled how skewed sex ratio creates a male marriage squeeze due to which men who are unable to find brides in the local areas, resort to buying brides from far off lands (Singh, 2018). With marriage being a general obligation, men who are unable to find wives due to factors like unemployment or low social status, prefer to pay a "price for paro- the brought woman". The place for such a tradition in the society, clearly indicates towards an erroneous economic and social valuation of women. Many scholars have pointed out that several north Indian states have been coping with bride shortages over a long period of history due to less availability of women as a result of sex selective abortion (Banerjee 1999; Kaur 2013, 2008). Furthermore, Mishra (2013), Kukreja and Kumar (2013), Kaur (2016, 2012), Chaudhry and Mohan (2011), (Misra 2011), Ahlawat (2009), Blanchet (2005), have documented marriage migration or 'bride import' into the female deficit states of Haryana, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan. In our field survey, some cases of bride buying were registered. In most of the cases, either relatives had acted as intermediaries for prospective brides and their loci have been popularized by word of mouth. Bihar and Odisha being the most preferred destinations for bride buying.

However, during our field investigation, no clear evidences to support the relationship between female deficit due to declining CSR and bride buying could be established. While poverty, unemployment, death of spouse, social status, emerged as the major reasons for bride buying in Bundelkhand, initial symptoms of something that may add a new facet to this social catastrophe were detected in the form of an existent nexus between the problem of water scarcity and rising number of unmarried bachelors. Acute water scarcity, resistance from parents of girls to marry their daughters in arid areas, increasing number of unmarried bachelors, might leave men with no alternative, other than buying brides. As men age, they despairingly seek wives. Considering the presence of demand and availability of supply, these

men, are likely to resort to paying a price for 'Paro' (women who are exchanged for money, in the name of marriage are given local names like *paro*, *molki* and *jugaad*).

**(b) Central Region**

Preference for the son and prejudice against the daughter are historical and long standing characteristics of the normative pattern in the Central region of Uttar Pradesh also. In districts Barabanki and Kanpur Nagar, these meta son preferences were ocular, openly declared and candidly confessed by the respondents. In general, people were found to be cognizant of how sex selective abortions are a felonious. Yet several cases of sex selective abortions were registered. The reasons are both economic and social. However, kinship system in India, patrilineal and patrilocal system of the society surfaced as the strongest factors responsible for son preference. The direct impact of these preferences can be seen on women's health, resulting in maternal mortality and morbidity. A general observation also pronounces that women with first born daughters have more children and the last born in these cases is often a male child. Son preferences in this central region are multifaceted, born by the interplay of household, local and macro societal norms. Strengthening the position and refining the economic valuation of females is an urgent policy requirement, in order to confine these detestable practices to history. An incongruous yet interesting observation came in to our notice in village Karauli block, Kakwan district Kanpur Nagar after our interaction with Sita who makes stuffed dolls for puppet shows and plays, she presented to us one of her dolls which she had recently made, she went on to tell us "*Ye hamara bauaa hai*" (*This is my son*) then later lifted the dress of doll to show us what roughly resembled to a male genitalia, imbibed and internalized predisposition toward male child were reflected in this gesture where even dolls are appropriated as "male". Importance of son can be understood by a study by Jayachandran and Ilyana Kuziemko (2011) in which they stated "So long as some preference for sons exists, boys are breastfed more than girls; after the birth of a daughter, mothers are more likely to continue having children (and thus limit breastfeeding) in order to try for a son".

During our visit to Poini village in BaniKodar block of district Barabanki, while interacting with the people in the village we came to know about a couple who had eight daughters. Out of curiosity we visited that home. The father of these eight girls, Shankar, has a kirana shop. He also owns a small landholding, that helps the family in subsistence. His monthly income as stated by him is Rs. 10,000 and expenditure is Rs. 12,000 which reflects his poor economic status. His eldest daughter is 18 years old and youngest is 2 years old. All the girls are enrolled in a nearby private school, as the government school is far off from their place. There is also a mounting pressure from the peer group and society on him to have a son as he is sneered and looked down upon for having so many daughters and not a single son. We asked them that



if they had a son, would they aspire to have a girl child. The couple replied 'Yes'. We asked that if they had two sons would they, still go for a daughter? The couple replied 'No'. From this answer it can be inferred that having one son and one daughter is the ideal family set up but having two sons is also acceptable. Since they had daughters one after one hence it is mandatory to have a son and for this reason the couple has not gone for sterilization and is still hoping to have one son in the family.

### ***Dowry and Sex Determination***

The social evil of dowry might be outlawed in India but its strong roots are still embedded in our society. The congenital accord for demand of dowry has been noted as a conviction that cannot be evaded. Dowry is one of the major causes for son preference and daughter aversion. Having multiple daughters is taken as an act of contempt in northern India, the consequence of which is low investment in higher education of a girl child. A price of dowry is paid by daughters in form of less education and lack of personal and professional growth' *Inter kara ke biha denge chiriya ko, bava jitta chahe padhe* (After post-secondary level I will marry off my daughter, son can study as much as he wants). This was a statement given by a respondent in village Paigupur block Kalyanpur district Kanpur Nagar. In multiple cases that we came across in our field survey, one of the inferences that we could draw is that son preference and daughter aversion has a strong correlation with dowry. *'Ab jo bhi hai ghar me inke maayke se aya hai'* (Whatever is there in or house has been given by her parents).

The above statement mirrors the reliability and pre supposed expectations that the family of a groom has by looking at examples around them and comparing the amount of 'gifts' a groom gets at the time of his marriage. There is a need to bring change in mind set of the whole society in general, since they are being impetuous in present and completely negating the possibility that the practice of dowry will backfire in much bigger form in future. One of our respondent in Kanpur Nagar stated *'Ladki ko zameen me hissa dene se acha hai dahej de do'* (It is better to give them dowry than giving any inheritance in property). This showcases that more importance is given to material that is feasible rather than assets which can be given to brides in form of any financial backup or security. Furthermore, when asked about views on right of women to inherit father's property one of the respondent commented *'beti ko dahej de do, wahi bahot hain, zameen ladke ke liye Hain'* (Give dowry to the daughter that is enough. Land should be kept for the son). This reflects discriminatory attitude of society towards daughter.

It is in place to mention that women in central region were more cordial and open during our discussions as they revealed that sex determination has been operating as a prerogative in Kanpur Nagar. People were very casual while discussing their cases of sex determination. For instance, one of our respondent in sub-district Ghatampur, Kanpur Nagar stated *'teesri bhi kachre ke dabbe me*

*chali jati par bach gai kyunki pata nahi chala*' (The third one also would have gone in dustbin, but she got saved because it got too late). It was heart breaking to note how stolidly she shared her case. We asked her if she ever had any emotional instability due to consequent sex selective abortion, she astonishing reply was that she was happy to get rid of the foetus and she never had any regrets about the terminations, instead how she was crying when third girl was born. Advocating the benefits of government schemes like '*Beti Bachao*', the official said there was a critical need to deconstruct the entire structure of patriarchy because gender-based sex selection was linked to a larger system of inequality and imbalance of power in the country (Manocha 2015).

During our field visit to Kanpur Nagar, Sunil detailed us about his own life experiences regarding the issue of preference for male child. Sunil is in his mid 40's and has completed his post-secondary education. He is employed as a private driver and his monthly income is Rs 10,000 and expenditure is Rs 10,000 approximately which mirrors his poor economic status. He got married at the age of 25. His wife is a home maker and is a graduate. Although she is educationally more qualified than him but she has no strong say in any household and financial decision making. This indicates the strong roots of patriarchy that are still engraved in our society. After five years of his marriage they were blessed with a baby girl, and three years later with another girl child. His daughters are now 15 and 12 years old and are enrolled in private schools and he provides education for them in best possible ways. After the birth of two daughters, when his wife was in her third month of pregnancy, he was suggested by his friends to go for sex determination of the baby. To our surprise he thinks sex determination to be legal as reported in questionnaire. He opined that 'if a couple has many daughters then what should they do? It is better to get the test done and abort the girl child. So making sex determination illegal is not right'. Since he did not want to come in the limelight of general hospitals, he somehow with the help of his friends got in touch with a clinic which aided entire facility for sex determination at home with a surcharge of Rs 4600.

He further revealed that the whole procedure took place not at his home but in onecar which carried the instruments required for the test. This showcases the audacity, neglect, and lack of concern which people have towards stern laws implemented butnot executed in letter and spirit by the Government. According to the results of the test, the foetuswasof a girl. After knowing about the gender of the unborn baby the respondent was determined to terminate the pregnancy since having another girl child would increase the burden on him. When asked that how another girl would be a cause of increased burden, he blamed dowry as a root of all problems. However, the very next day after the test was conducted, he met with a road accident and due to financial constraints he was not in position to meet the expenses required for termination of the pregnancy. Sunil and his wife decided to go through with the pregnancy, and to everyone's surprise, the baby born to them turned out

be a boy. This again is a pointer towards the authenticity of sex-determination tests, strong son preference, failure of government policies and PC-PNDT Act at the execution level.

### Analysis and Discussions

In this section we have given a detailed description about the socio-economic and demographic variables of the respondents in both the regions followed by statistical analysis explain through logit model.

### Descriptive Statistics

The demographic and socio-economic variables from the interview schedule were divided into seven factors namely Age, family type, husband education, wife education, own land, family monthly income and family monthly expenditure have been explained in Table:3. The total sample N=640 was equally divided between Central and Bundelkhand regions.

**Table 3: Intra- Regional Socio-Economic and Demographic Profile of the Respondents (N=640)**

Variables	N <sub>1</sub> (%)	N <sub>2</sub> (%)
Region	Central U.P	Bundelkhand
Age (in years)		
15-24	39 (12.2)	35 (10.9)
25-34	141 (44.1)	150 (46.9)
35-44	101 (31.6)	83 (25.9)
> 44	39 (12.2)	52 (16.3)
Family Type		
Joint	102 (31.9)	100 (31.3)
Nuclear	218 (68.1)	220 (68.8)
Mother's Education		
No education	100 (31.3)	121 (37.8)
Primary education(I-V)	40 (12.5)	48 (15.0)
Secondary education(VI-X)	98 (30.6)	87 (27.2)
Post secondary(XI-XII)	30 (9.4)	18 (5.6)
Bachelor or equivalent	32 (10)	29 (9.1)
Master or equivalent	20 (6.3)	15 (4.7)
Doctoral or equivalent	0	2 (0.6)
Own Land (in Bigha)		
Yes	191 (59.7)	184 (57.5)
No	129 (40.3)	136 (42.5)

Note: Values shown in parentheses are percentage of total.

Source: Estimated from Field Survey Data.

To further supplement our observations from the field, we have used a quantitative technique of logistic regression so as to statistically validate our hypotheses and findings from the field. The explanatory variables considered for the model have already been defined in the data and methods section of this paper. The logistic regression models are statistically significant as per the Omnibus test [Model (1):  $\chi^2(5) = 26.967$ ,  $p < 0.01$  and Model (2):  $\chi^2(5) = 13.583$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ]. The model (1) explained 11% and model (2) explained 5.5% (Nagelkerke  $R^2$ ) of the variance in likelihood of Son Preference and correctly classified 66.3% by Model (1) and 59.4% by Model (2) of the cases.

**Table 4: Factors Affecting the Son Preferences (N = 640)**

Region	Variable	B	S.E.	Wald	Sig.	Exp(B)
<b>Bundelkhand</b>	Area(Semi- Urban)	-.890	.251	12.541	.000	.410
	Family Type (Nuclear)	-.155	.267	.335	.562	.857
	Mother's Education (B & H)	-.445	.256	3.017	.082	.641
	Land (in hct.)	.431	.253	2.901	.089	1.539
	Constant	.138	.219	.397	.529	1.148
	<i>Hosmer and Lemeshow Test p value</i>				0.282	
	-2 Log likelihood			401.210		
<b>Central U.P</b>	Area(Semi-Urban)	-.324	.231	1.971	.160	.723
	Family Type (Nuclear)	-.337	.250	1.818	.178	.714
	Mother's Education (B & H)	-.664	.235	7.956	.005	.515
	Land (in hct.)	-.112	.128	.761	.383	.894
	Constant	.536	.211	6.415	.011	1.708
	<i>Hosmer and Lemeshow Test p value</i>				0.183	
	-2 Log likelihood			429.419		

Source: Author's Calculation.

**Model (1): For Bundelkhand Region**

*LOGIT(Son Preference)*

$$= 0.138 - 0.890 \text{*** Area} - 0.155 \text{ Family Type} - 0.445 \\ * \text{Mother's Education} + 0.431 * \text{Land size}$$

**Model (2): For Central U.P. Region**

*LOGIT(Son Preference)*

$$= 0.536 - 0.324 \text{Area} - 0.337 \text{ Family Type} - 0.664 ** \\ * \text{Mother's Education} - 0.112 \text{ Land size}$$

\*\*\*Significant at 1% significant level

\*\*Significant at 5% significant level

\*Significant at 10% significant level

In our models, the first variable to analyze its impact on son preference is the area of residence. Although the incentives for action ultimately flow from social and economic structures, the decisions taken to act on a preference

for sons occur at the level of the individual woman and her house (Pande et.al. 2007). Our statistical results exhibit a negative association between area of residence and son preference in Bundelkhand and Central region of Uttar Pradesh. Statistically in the Bundelkhand region, we found that the likelihood of Son Preference is 2.439 (= 1/0.410) times less in those families which live in Semi-Urban area and in the Central region the likelihood of son preference is 1.383 (=1/0.723) times less in those families which live in Semi- Urban area when compared to Rural area. Hence, area of residence comes out to be a significant ( $p < 0.05$ ) factor for the Bundelkhand region, thus, validating our hypothesis, while in the Central region it is not significant. It is because Bundelkhand region is economically more backward when compared to central region. There patriarchal mindset is deep rooted and birth of a son is considered to be bringing an honour to the family. The intensity for son preference is usually is higher among rural populations. It goes down with increasing levels of education and economic status (Radkar 2018). Moreover, scarcity of water for which people prefer girls to fetch water from long distances, problem of alcoholism, not so fertile agricultural land, geographical hardships are some parallel concerns which have resulted in comparatively low meta preference for the respondents in Bundelkhand region.

On our visit to Aira village, Block Moth of district Jhansi, which has a high CSR of 1136, the ASHA (Accredited Social Health Activist) informed us about a “family of seven daughters”. She took us to one semi *pucca* house at the extreme corner of the village, where the family lived. There we met Rama (name changed), our respondent, 37-year-old and the mother of the seven daughters. Rama’s husband Rajesh works as casual wage laborer. Rama’s eldest daughter is 18 years old and youngest daughter is 11 years old. Amidst the conversation, a young boy entered the room; Rama introduced him to us as her son. She told us how after giving birth to seven daughters, she “lost faith in God”, and adopted a male child from her sister. On being asked as to why she was so keen on having a male child, she told us, “he will take care of us, and carry forward our family name.” She told us how, when she was pregnant with her third child, she went to this private clinic in their vicinity, where doctor revealed to her, the sex of her child, for a fee of Rs. 500. “*ek aur beti nahi chahiye thi, lekin bacha girana paap hain, kabhi nahi karna chahiye, isiliye mere saat betiyan hain*” (I didn’t want another daughter, but aborting a baby is a sin I would never commit, that is the reason I have seven daughters), she said.

As we all know that education broadens the perspective and give new dimensions to the thinking pattern. Women’s education is the single most significant factor in reducing son preference. Educated women are less likely to prefer sons over daughters, and highly educated women are especially less likely to do so. (ICRW 2006). The female literacy rate has a trickle-down effect on Son preference and this is reflected in our statistical results also. The

education of mother has come out to be a highly significant variable in influencing child preferences. In the central region (as compared to Bundelkhand), the education of the mother has been found to be a significant factor ( $p < 0.05$ ) to influence the perception about Son Preference. In Bundelkhand region it is not having that significant impact as ( $p < 0.10$ ). The likelihood of son preference in those families where mother is having better or higher education is 1.560 (=1/0.641) times less than those families where mother are having no education at or low level of education in Bundelkhand region while in Central region it becomes 1.941 (=1/0.515) times less than those families where mother are having no education at or low level of education. This implies that more educated the mother is, the less preference for the son and our hypothesis holds good.

Here, we are quoting one case study which narrates that despite being an educated mother how the family pressure forced the respondent to go for sex selective abortion and giving birth to a male child. On our visit to district Jhansi, we came across a family of four, Mamta, Rajesh, and their daughters Riya and Priya (all names have been changed). In one of the studies by Gupta et.al., bearing a son is considered to be a daughter-in-law's duty and responsibility. A woman who cannot give birth or who gives birth only to daughters may be scorned by her in-laws until the birth of her first male child (Robitaille 2017). Corroborating this view point, one of the respondents in Jhansi, Mamta, aged 35 years, holds a Master's degree in Hindi and works as a teacher in the nearby private school. Her husband, who holds a bachelor's degree, works at a pharmaceutical company. As Mamta spoke to us about her family, job and how difficult it was to make ends meet, the presence of financial predicaments in the household became clearly evident. She spoke about how she continued her education after marriage despite strong opposition by in-laws and finally managed to land a job. She went on to share her opinions on girls and said, "Girls and boys are all equal, and a gift of god". However, what seemed to be a case of underemployment and urban poverty, took a turn when we managed to outsource information from our local correspondent, who also happened to be Mamta's brother. He informed us about how Mamta's in-laws pressurized her to deliver a male child. After the birth of two daughters, this pressure intensified even more. Finally, Mamta succumbed to this pressure and two female foetus were aborted, at a local clinic. It was only after the second abortion, that Mamta finally spoke to her parents about the situation. Mamta's parents confronted her in-laws about the situation and even warned them about lodging a complaint with the police. Exasperated by this intervention, Mamta's in-laws forced her and Rajesh (her husband) to move out of their house. Ever since, Mamta and her husband has been living in a small rented place. Our correspondent said, 'My sister received no support from her husband. Even he wanted a male child and chose to be a silent witness. This worsened the situation for my sister.' The fact that Mamta did not speak to us about her abortions, and succumbed to the pressure her in-laws exerted

on her, despite being educated, financially independent and a non-conformist to the idea of Meta son preference, clearly indicates towards deeply internalized deprivation and imbibed marginalization. Parents may choose to keep having children until they get the desired number of sons. This is called son “meta” preference (Jaitley 2018). Hence, sex preference among Indian couples does exist although there is some regional variation in its magnitude. The severity and extent of internalization of social norms and pressures can be felt by the fact that women conceive multiple times till a son is born in spite of acknowledging well, the benefits of having a small family.

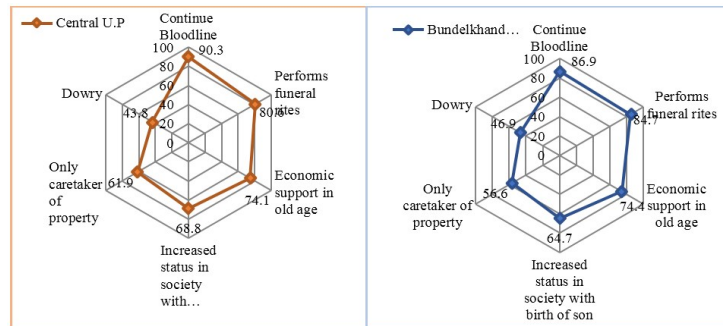
Moving further the model explains strong son preference in the society and how this preference is a cause by the type of family, namely joint family or nuclear family in the society. The likelihood of Son Preference in a Nuclear family is 1.167 ( $=1/0.857$ ) and 1.400 ( $=1/0.714$ ) times less than the children born in Joint family for Bundelkhand and Central Region respectively. However, the sample does not reveal family type to be a significant reason for the son preference, thus, rejecting our hypothesis. This explains that other factors are playing important role in deciding meta-son preference.

The last determinant to influence son preference is the land ownership of the household. When, statistically tested, it has a positive association with son preference in Bundelkhand region which is significant at 10% level of significance, an increase in one unit of land ownership the likelihood of Son Preference is 0.650 ( $= 1/1.539$ ) times increase in those families. However, when tested for Central region it turned out to be an insignificant variable, thus, rejecting our hypothesis. Bundelkhand is more agrarian in nature and Central region is more developed. In central region, education of mother is a more influencing variable whereas, in Bundelkhand, area of residence is more impactful when it comes to son preference as revealed by the respondents. The factors of higher deprivation in Bundelkhand region can be associated to its environmental constraints such as scarcity of water and barren hilly topography with bare vegetation and lack of public private investment, remoteness of villages and unavailability of basic resources which was evidently visible during the field surveys that we conducted. Therefore, it can be concluded that since the households are multi dimensionally poor, therefore their preference for sons is obvious, given their financial constraints.

It is in place to mention that Uttar Pradesh is in a midway phase involving the traditional and modern era as it is going through the process of modernisation. However, strong religious roots where old norms are still followed are instilled in rural as well as urban level. Son preference is one of many old dichotomies that are still prevailing in modern times. Jayachandran in his study lists a number of reasons for such a son preference, including patrilocality (women having to move to husbands' houses after marriage), patrilineality (property passing on to sons rather than daughters), dowry (which leads to extra costs of having girls), old age support from sons and rituals

performed by sons (Jaitley 2018). A number of cultural, social and economic factors influence the relative benefits and costs of sons and daughters. We have also exhibited strong reasons for son preference with the help of a radar chart (Refer figure 2).

**Figure 2: Reasons for Son Preference( in %)**



Source: Author's construction from field Survey

It is obvious from this figure that continuation of bloodline obtained the top most position for the factor suggesting a strong son preference in the Central as well as in Bundelkhand region with 90.3% and 86.9% respectively. The second important factor for son preference came out to be performing funeral rites at 80.6% in Central region and 84.7% in Bundelkhand which explains that old cultural value attached to son is still very high in modern times. The factor of son as an economic support in old age came out to be 74.1% and 74.4% in Central and Bundelkhand regions respectively. The factor that son increases the social status of the family comes out respectively to be 68.8% and 64.7% for central and Bundelkhand. Patrilineal inheritance of the property is noted to be higher in central region at 61.9% and 56.6% in Bundelkhand. To our surprise dowry was reported to be the lowest factor responsible for son preference at 43.8% in central region and 46.9% in Bundelkhand implying that deep rooted mindset about a male child is still very high in our society.

## Conclusion

From the analysis and evidences from the field it can be inferred that meta son preference resulting in declining CSR is a cause of worry for the researchers as well as for the government. Despite documentation of various studies on this social issue and schemes of the government especially for the girl child (*Beti Bachao Beti Padhao*, *Kanya Samridhi Yojana* so on and so forth) and interventions by the state and civil societies, not much difference in the perception of the people regarding daughter preference is evident. Our main findings reveal that in our intra-regional comparative analysis, area of residence, land ownership and mother's education to some extent are the



variables which are defining son preference in Bundelkhand region whereas, mothers education is a very strong variable to decide child preference in central region, while other determinants doesnot hold good in this case. Family type has come out to be no-effective variable to influence preference of the first child in both the regions. This indicates two important policy implications that education and economic development are important tools to bring a positive change. Campaigns at the grassroots level should be designed to sensitize people to change their deep rooted mindsets about son preference and generate mass awareness on this gender discrimination. It is necessary that societal forums need to be engaged more to discuss and dialogue these socio cultural repercussions, bringing them to public domain The road is tough and long but we have to keep treading until we are able to reduce this gender bias.

### **Notes**

1. The period of field survey in the study has been from June 2019- November 2019. The names of all the respondents have been changed to maintain anonymity.

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