

# Perspectives of Gender Disparity in Nagaur District of Rajasthan

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**Tejbir Singh Rana**

Associate Professor  
Dept. of Geography,  
Shivaji College,  
University of Delhi,  
New Delhi, India



**Aayush Deswal**

Student,  
Weston High School,  
Wellesley Street,  
Weston, USA

## Abstract

The essential goal of development cannot be achieved without the very substance and component of gender. Development needs to be participatory, including both men and women. Based on the perspective that gender is socially constructed, this paper looks into the issue of gender disparity prevailing in Nagaur district of Rajasthan. The study paper highlights the disparities enacted in the socio-cultural context which maintains and promotes gender inequalities. It tries to establish the genesis and diffusion of gender-based biasness. The study focused on the implications of gender-based discrimination on women folk. The flow of study is to identify the role of education, economic empowerment and health for gender equality in rural habitat of remote semi-arid region. It focuses on the potential role of the Cradle Baby Scheme (CBS) in reducing the gender gap.

**Keywords:** Gender Inequality, Literacy, Workforce proportion, Child Sex Ratio, Cradle Baby Scheme.

## Introduction

Globally 89% of girls complete primary education, but only 77% complete lower secondary education, which in most countries is 9 years of schooling. In low income countries, the numbers drop to below 2/3 for primary education, and only 1/3 for lower secondary school. Lack of education or limited education impacts girls' life outcomes materially. They are likely to get married earlier and / or bear children early before they are mentally and physically ready to be a wife or mother. This not only impacts their health but also the outcomes for their children. The children born this early are likely to have lower chances of survival. If they survive, they are likely to do poorly in school [1]. Furthermore, lack of education impacts their expected earnings, lack of participation in making decisions in the households. It also leads to lower income for the households.

Like many emerging and poor countries, there are large disparities in the economic, social and schooling opportunities available to men and women in India [2]. Gender disparities begin early in life, with female infants having a lower chance of survival than male infants, due largely to the parental neglect of female infants. The discrimination continues as the child grows older, first in the form of smaller rations of food, leading to malnutrition (especially for high order females), and later in the form of fewer schooling opportunities relative to boys. Women face discrimination in the labour market as well, primarily in the form of lower wages. This paper focuses on gender discrimination related to health, education, status, and social opportunities. Amartya Sen advocates that social exclusion represents an important loss of capability in its own right, as well as being a cause of other deprivations that further remove the individual or group from access to a good life or means to acquire it [3]. As gender disparities continue to exist and several measures being attempted to overcome the situation, it becomes essential to understand the key differentials that exist in social, economic, and health sectors [4]. Literacy is an important indicator of socio-economic and cultural development. It is regarded as both a means and an end of development [5]. Literacy is a basic need in order to cope with everyday life [6].

Given the importance of opportunities provided to girl children, the study explored and analysed the issue of gender disparity at a micro level in a district of Rajasthan. We also analysed the effectiveness of a scheme, Cradle Baby Scheme, in addressing some of these issues. The heinous practice of Female Infanticide which is nothing but killing of the newborn girl baby soon after its birth with or without the consent of the mother, is prevalent in several parts of the Nagaur district of Rajasthan. Fearing future

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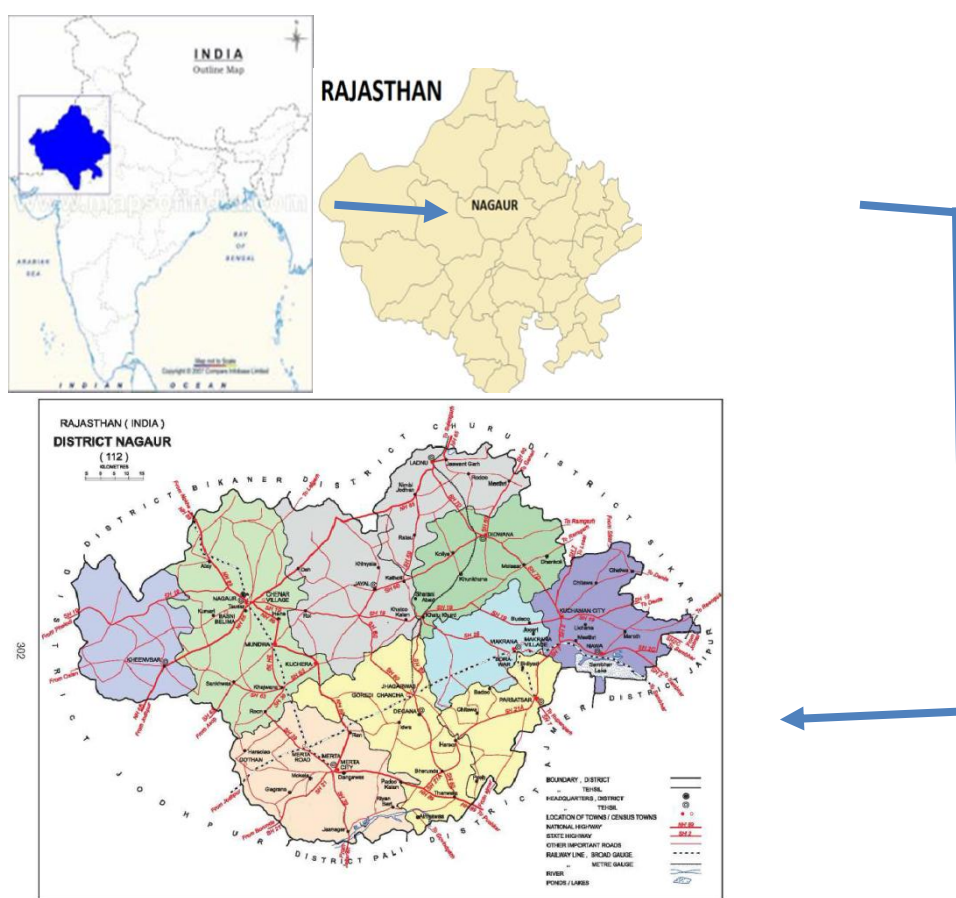
problems in bringing up a girl child, parents' resort to this mercy killing of female infants. The practice of female infanticide has gained acceptance in the society as it relieves parents from the problems of paying dowry, spending of money at the time of marriage, and other fears regarding a girl's future [7].

### Objectives of the Study

1. To review the level of gender disparity in literacy rates in the Nagaur district of Rajasthan.
2. To review the level of gender disparity at the workplace in the Nagaur district of Rajasthan.
3. To review the level of gender disparity among female infants (0-6years) in the Nagaur district of Rajasthan.
4. To study the potential role that Cradle Baby Scheme can play in the reduction of female infanticide in the Nagaur District of Rajasthan.

### Study Region

This paper investigates the issue of gender inequality prevailing in Nagaur District of Rajasthan (Figure 1). The district has 3.307 million population with 1.696 million males and 1.611 million females residing in a geographical area of 17.718 sq. kms. The district has a semi-arid climate, because of this its three-fourth of the area is covered with the Thar Desert. It is a water stressed region with a short and erratic rainy season. The primary occupation of the region is agrarian. The district has 10 tehsils (sub-divisions), comprising 1589 village habitations. The density of the district is 187 persons per sq. Km. which is less than half to the national average.



### Methodology

The present study is an attempt to discuss the level of gender disparity in Nagaur District of Rajasthan. In this study paper, secondary data has been taken into consideration from Census of India (2011), District Census Handbook Rajasthan Series (2011, Census of India), Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS, 2011), and Policy Welfare Scheme (Department of Women and Child Development, Tamil Nadu). The primary data has been collected through various questionnaires performed from the local people of Nagaur District of Rajasthan, with an addition of direct observations

from group discussions with women in the district, primary school girl students, elders of families, etc. A stratified method was used for questionnaires. Statistical methods were used for the determination of the level of gender inequalities in the dimensions of Literacy (the study paper considers high literacy rates as a positive indicator), Workers Proportion (this study considers the Main Workers proportion as a positive indicator for economic participation of women), and Child Population.

Table 1: Indicators of Gender Inequality.

S.No.	Dimension	Indicators	Sources
1.	Literacy	Adult Literacy Rates (M/F).	Census of India, 2011.
2.	Workplace	Proportion of workers (M/F).	District Census Handbook, Rajasthan Series, 2011, Census of India.
3.	Child Population	Child Sex Ratio (CSR). IMR and U5MR (M/F).	ICDS, 2011. ICDS, 2011.
4.	Cradle Baby Scheme	Socio-clinical profile of babies under CBS	Policy Welfare Scheme (Department of Women and Child Development, Tamil Nadu).

**Primary Data**

To procure the primary data an organised questionnaire method was followed. Simultaneously, informal discussion with all the socio-economic strata of people was established. Informal group discussion of local folks was observed. Women of villages were interacted in group and at individual level. The literacy, age, gender and occupation of respondents were taken care during field visit interactions. Geriatrics and school teachers' interaction was accomplished to enquire the problem atgrassroot level.

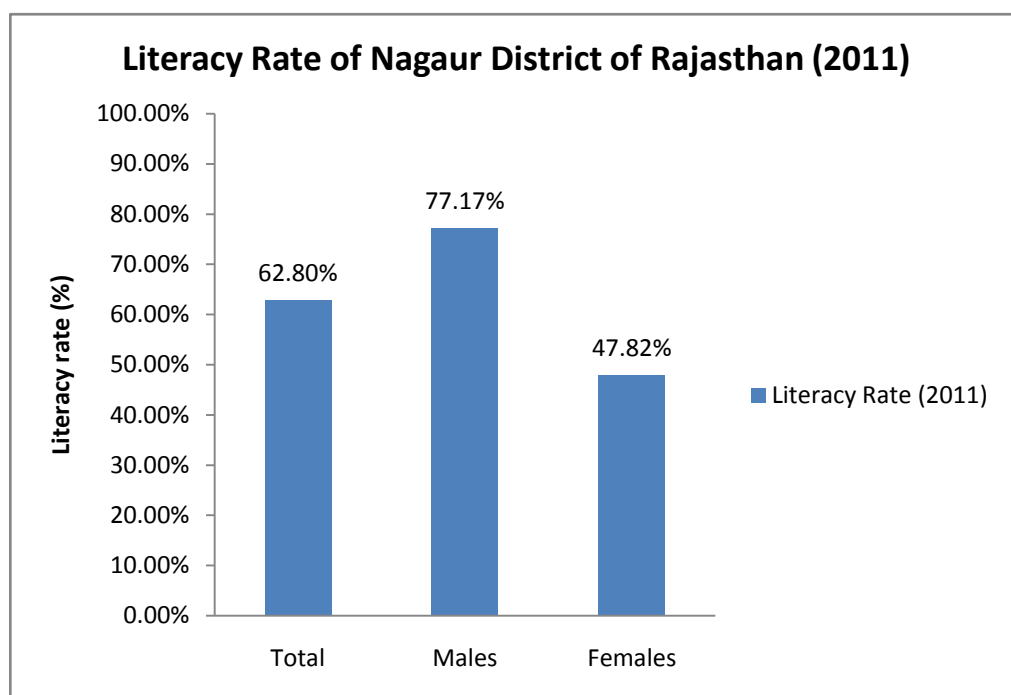
**Secondary Data**

Census of India (2011), District Census Handbook Rajasthan Series (2011, Census of India), Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS, 2011), Policy Welfare Scheme (Department of Women and Child Development, Tamil Nadu).

**Analysis and Discussion****Literacy**

Differences in female and male literacy rates are one aspect of this broader phenomenon of gender-based inequality in Nagaur District of Rajasthan. The literacy rate of population is defined as the percentage of literates in the age-group seven years and above. In India, literacy rate is determined

by 3 R's as reading, writing and arithmetic and not the academic standard. For different age groups, the percentage of literates in that age-group gives the literacy rate. Interaction with local populations pointed to a great indifference of the adult population (both males and females) towards girl education. Local folk considered it, in their words, a sheer waste of money, time and energy. In Nagaur, a female child is considered as a burden when compared with a male child because of social ills like dowry, and, male chauvinism. It was also learned that many government efforts had failed as the local population weighed the immediate gains that education provided against the direct and indirect costs of education. The immediate gratification of using a girl child for various kinds of activities whether in agricultural fields or other small jobs like fetching water, livestock rearing etc. outweighed investing in the girls' education allowing her to have a chance for higher income employment in the future. We discovered that the local population was caught in a vicious cycle of superstition and ignorance. This led to a misogynist society. Families expect girls to get married at an early age and work in the household which includes fetching water, livestock rearing, etcetera which reflects the low perception of the community on schooling girls.



Source: Census of India, 2011.

**Picture 1**

**Young girls carrying buckets on their head in a remote village in Nagaur district.**



### Workplace

For the purpose of the study, work is defined as participation in any economically productive activity. It did not have to involve any compensation or profit making. It includes part-time help or unpaid work on the farm, family enterprise or in any other economic activity. It, however, excludes household work as we are trying to gauge women participation in economic activity outside of her house. All persons engaged in 'work' as defined above are workers. The reference period for determining a person as a worker and non-worker is one year preceding the date of enumeration.

Further, workers were divided into two categories: Main workers (engaged in an economically productive activity for at least six months in the last one year), and, Marginal workers (engaged in an economically productive activity for less than six months). It was used in the Census of 2011 for this classification. For this study, it considers a higher proportion of 'Main workers' as a positive as the person is engaged in economically useful activity for longer. The third category is non-worker (a person who has not worked at all in any economically productive activity during the reference period).

**Main Workers:** In Nagaur, the proportion of women working as main workers was much lower than the proportion of men. Only 17.99% of total females were found to be engaged as main workers as compared to that of 41.03% of total males. The

possible reason for this variation is the existence of a patriarchal society which promotes more women staying home to do household work.

**Marginal worker:** A person who worked for 3 months or less but less than six months of the reference period (i.e. in the last one year preceding the date of enumeration) in any economic activity is termed as 'Marginal worker'. In Nagaur, the proportion of females engaged as marginal workers was substantially higher than that of males.

**Non-worker:** A person who has not worked at all in any economically productive activity during the reference period (i.e. last one year preceding the date of enumeration) is termed as 'Non-worker'. Women's participation in the labour force has been central to our research on gender inequalities.

In Nagaur, fewer women, as compared to men, worked for over six months in the last year. They were primarily marginal workers or non-workers. Our interviews highlighted that work on agricultural land was a key provider of employment for women in the marginal worker category. The key reason for women in the 'non-women' category to not seek work was the expectation for them to do household work and also take care of the elderly family members. Another reason for this gender inequality is that the decision-making power within the household remains in the hands of male members of the family.

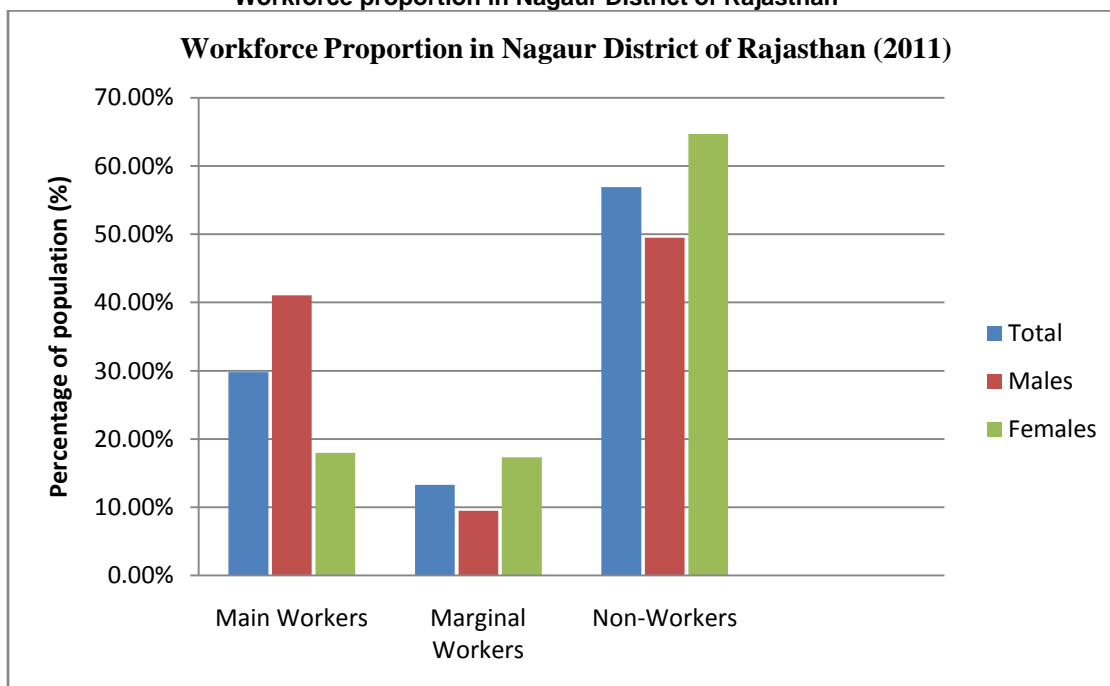
Picture 2

Young boys standing near a primary school in Nagaur district of Rajasthan.



Chart 2

Workforce proportion in Nagaur District of Rajasthan



	Main Workers	Marginal Workers	Non-Workers
Total	29.81%	13.30%	56.89%
Males	41.03%	9.49%	49.48%
Females	17.99%	17.31%	64.70%

Source: District Census Handbook, Rajasthan Series, Census of India, 2011.

### Infant Mortality Rates (IMR) and Under 5 Mortality Rates (U5MR).

IMR is the number of deaths of children under the age of one year per 1000 live births in a year.

U5MR or the Child Mortality Rate indicates the probability of dying between birth and exactly 5

years of age, expressed per 1000 live births. The high number of newborn and under-five deaths of females in the Nagaur District of Rajasthan has several structural and underlying causes. Some reasons are common for both male and female child and some are specific to females. Common causes include poor

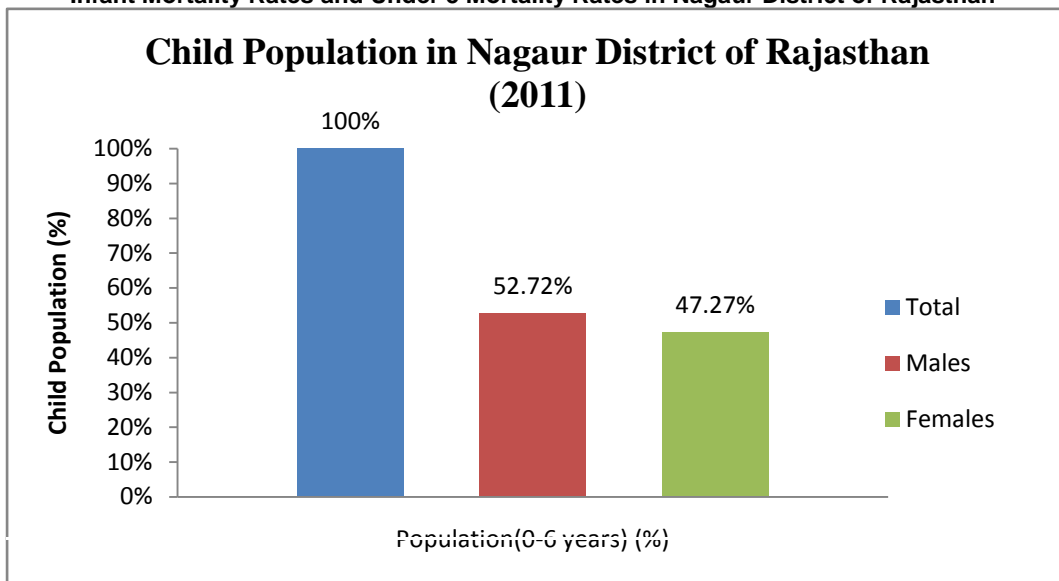
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health services, poverty and ignorance which impacts access to healthy nutrition.

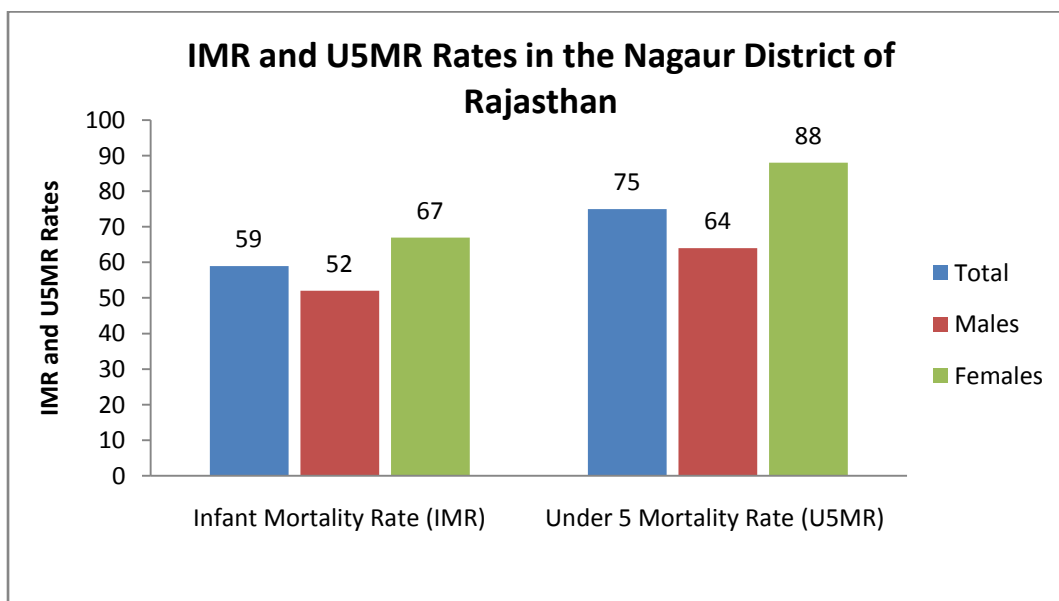
Causes that emanate from discrimination against females include high rates of female illiteracy and consequent implications for their roles and status, early pregnancy; patriarchal mindset of the society; pre-natal sex determination and discrimination against girls, and, excluding mothers and girl child from accessing healthcare and nutrition. The reasons for discrimination against girl child are many. In the region under study, a woman joins her husband's family upon marriage. The patriarchal society does not want to invest in her. In the Hindu culture, the

male child lights a deceased person's funeral pyre which is believed to bring salvation to the deceased. The male child also carries the family name. There is also a dowry system wherein, parents of the girl are expected to give money to the boy's family at the time of marriage. In poor families this is a big burden and hence daughters are not desired. This has led to the inhuman and illegal practise of female infanticide. Even when a girl child is allowed to be born, they are discriminated against with families not investing in their daughter's education, healthcare, etc. This also contributes to higher mortality among girls.

**Chart 4**  
**Infant Mortality Rates and Under 5 Mortality Rates in Nagaur District of Rajasthan**



Source: Census of India, 2011.



Source: Census of India, 2011.

### Child Sex Ratio (CSR)

Sex ratio is defined as the number of females per 1000 males. Sex ratio is an important

substance which measures the extent of disparity between males and females in a region in a given period. This ratio determines the level and the roles

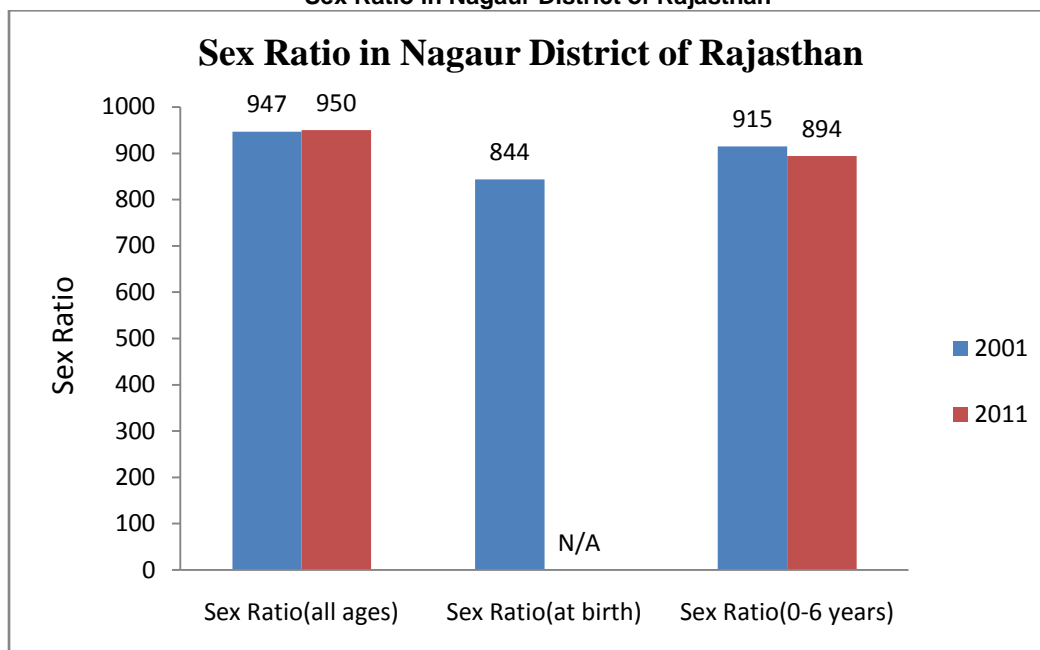
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played by both sexes in attaining the goal of development. The study paper finds that although the Sex Ratio (all ages) has increased by 3 points from 947 (2001) to 950 (2011), Sex Ratio (at birth) and Sex Ratio (0-4 years) have shown a decline by 7 and 18 points respectively. The many factors like child masculinity in the Nagaur district of Rajasthan can be explained by the cultural practices and kinship structure which attaches lesser utility to the female child than a male child which further lead to inhuman social norms that adversely impact the survival of a girl child. Our interviews of the local population, health clinics in the area and review of data on the subject clearly point that the excess female child mortality starts in the prenatal stage itself. In India, the Pre-conception and Prenatal Diagnostic Techniques

(Prohibition of Sex Selection) Act, 1994 (amended in 2003) prohibits sex-selection or disclosure of the sex of the foetus. It also prohibits sale of “any ultrasound machine or any other equipment capable of detecting sex of foetus” to persons, laboratories and clinics not registered under the Act. Despite this because of weak law enforcement, sex-selective abortions of female foetuses are common.

This is not just a Nagaur or India problem but widespread. As per United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) 117 million girls/women are “missing” in Asia alone due to sex selective abortions 1.5 million girls go missing each year [8]. The biologically normal sex ratio at birth can range from 102 to 106 males per 100 females. For India the ratio was 110 for 2011-2013 [9].

**Chart 5**  
**Sex Ratio in Nagaur District of Rajasthan**



Source: Census of India, 2011.

### **Cradle Baby Scheme (CBS).**

The stereotypical prejudiced attitude meted out to the females in the form of female infanticide has been seen particularly in South-Asian countries. In the late 1980s, it reached dangerous levels in certain districts of Tamil Nadu with a falling sex ratio. A survey conducted under the Dr. J. Jayalalitha, 15 Point Programme for Child Welfare, 1993, revealed that in over 24 years, out of 1200 infant deaths; nearly 45% were due to infanticide. In order to check the practice of female infanticide, the government of Tamil Nadu launched the “Cradle Baby Scheme (CBS)” in selective districts of Tamil Nadu having low child sex ratios. This paper analyses the clinico-social profile of babies saved under the scheme and reviews the possibility of implementing this scheme in Nagaur district of Rajasthan.

According to the policy note of Tamil Nadu 2010- 2011 around 3,622 babies (3,093 females and 529 males) were received under this scheme and were taken care of with the help of government

grants. The state government expanded the scheme and advertised that parents could leave their unwanted female babies in Primary Health Centres, Hospitals, Orphanages, Railway Stations, and etcetera. The scheme provides a period of two months for the parents to reconsider their decision and reclaim their babies if they so desired. If not reclaimed, the centre gives the babies over to the NGOs or adoption. Many cradle children have found homes through adoption centres. The children who attained school-going age were admitted in the good institutions, as directed by the Chief Minister, Ms J. Jayalalitha.

A committee with three officials and 3 non-official members was constituted to review the growth and development of cradle babies and ensure their welfare. It also created and sustained public awareness in favour of female children. There was no significant positive effect of the Cradle Baby Scheme in Tamil Nadu on the child sex ratio which improved only marginally from 942 in 2001 to 943 in 2011.

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However, the rate of girl child literacy improved substantially from 64.55% in 2001 to 73.44% in 2011.

### Conclusion

Gender biasness is a phenomenon of disparities in opportunities of education, health, career, freedom, social and economic decision making based on gender. Based on the review of data and our interviews, there exists a high level of gender inequality in every domain of social life in Nagaur district of Rajasthan. Nagaur performs very poorly in the areas of female literacy, female work participation. The disparity is also clearly evident in the child sex ratio. The interviews conducted further corroborated the clear preference for male child. Should we expect these gender gaps to shrink and disappear over time? Possibly, but to have a higher confidence in that answer and to make quicker progress, there has to be a multi-pronged approach to this social problem. It is critical that any solution addresses both the disparity at birth (female foeticide and female infanticide) and opportunities thereafter (healthy childhood, social status, education, work opportunities and social freedom).

The first approach should be focused on creating awareness. Government and NGOs have to work together in educating the population at large on the criticality of a balanced sex ratio. Similarly, the importance of health, educated girl needs to be emphasized. The second approach should be around removing social ills like dowry that penalize for having a girl child. Third approach should address the issue of female foeticide and infanticide specifically. In addition to laws that criminalize these it requires schemes like Cradle Baby Scheme. This scheme will provide an option to parents who do not want to bring up a girl child to place the child anonymously in cradles located in noon meal centres, PHCs, selected orphanages and NGOs, instead of resorting to foeticide or infanticide. Subsequent to their placement in cradles, babies are to be placed for adoption. Since the program's inception in 1992 in selected districts, approx. 3622 babies (3093 females and 529 males) have been safely left, according to the Tamil Nadu government's directorate of social welfare. As the scheme also provides good education to the cradle babies, the literacy rate of the female child will gradually increase in that region. Educated and skilled labour will lead to an increase in the proportion of women in the workforce in that region. Cradle Baby Scheme (CBS), thus, can lead in shortening the gender gap in Nagaur district of Rajasthan. In fact, a serious evaluation of the education aspect of the

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scheme should be done and ways of further improving it considered. Education is the biggest force multiplier. Education increases human capital wealth, which is the largest determinant of the wealth of nations. It contributes more than natural resources (oil, minerals, etc.) and produces capital (factories, etc.).

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