

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Statement of the Problem

The issue of discrimination against girl child has always been a matter of concern and speculation in social science discourses. The perceptions and social traditions which are rooted in patriarchal social order determine the way boys and girls would be treated in their birth, in socialisation and in everyday life. The elements of patriarchy which are ingrained in the social order often shape the character traits of the men and women and the children and which find expression in their attitudes, social relations and behaviours. The result is that both masculinity and femininity are the constructions of the society (Simone de Beauvoir 1953). The matter of social concern is that the elements of gender discrimination and neglect of girl child are reproduced in the social space and have long-range implications in the formation of self of girls and their future. The social mechanisms for gender discrimination are reproduced in the family, in the peer groups, in the community, in language, consumption, at work place and in all other social institutions. The larger forces like globalisation, the market economy and the large-scale commodification and consumerism reinforce the mechanisms of gender discrimination.

The continued preference for boy-child, the unwantedness of girl child, neglect of education of girls, the greater incidence of malnourishment among girls, sexual assault of different kinds of the growing girls in their everyday life while turning them into sex objects and exploitation of their labour, both manual and mental, have become the matters of grave social concern. There are evidences of thousands of girl child going missing after birth and in many cases even before they see the light of the day. Earlier there was the practice of female infanticide (it is still reported occasionally) but now with the advancement of modern technology there is the wide-scale practice of female foeticide, largely in urban centres.

Amartya Sen's 'missing women' (Sen 1990, 2005) has now become the phenomenon of 'missing daughters' (Kabeer 2013). Demographers and social scientists argue that a mix of patriarchal outlook and calculative rationalism contributes to this 'missing daughter' syndrome which is manifested in the dramatic drop in child sex ratio in certain parts of the country, particularly in the north and western parts. Another site of foeticide and resulting drop in child sex ratio is the urban, affluent, educated class who seem to sustain both feudal outlook and new form of calculative (materialist) rationalism in their approach to girl child, careerism, and a new 'hedonism'. A definition of good life in terms of consumerism seems to have shaped their perceptions and social actions (which includes reproductive behaviour as well). Preference for boy child seems to be universal across the classes and caste-groups, irrespective of their rural or urban living. The prevalent notion among Indian parents is that they will get a place in heaven if their pyres are lit by their son and that the sons are the 'lighting lamp of the family' or, in colloquial phrase, called the *kul dipak*. The girls, on the other hand, are considered a liability since they grow up with insecurities and the parents have to arrange huge amount of dowry in their marriage. Investment on the development of their human resources is considered a 'waste' since their in-laws would draw the benefits. The demographers and social scientists have been arguing that the preference for boy child and discrimination against girl child is found in its crudest form in the urban educated middleclass and not in the tribal and village communities. This is because the urban educated middleclass has access to the technology of sex detection (amniocentesis) and has the money power to manipulate the laws to destroy the female foetus, which the rural poor do not have. The shared perception that guides peoples' life is more important to decide the familial and societal approaches to girl child. Keeping the dramatic drop in child sex ratio the government has swung into action. The earlier family planning slogan was *choto paribar sukhi paribar* and the idea was to put a check on population growth but the new slogan like 'girl child, if taken care of can be *sampad* or asset'. There have been stringent laws banning amniocentesis and abortion to stop killing of female foetus. Several schemes have been launched by both the central and state government agencies to give scholarships to girls at different levels of education.

There have been provisions for reservation of at least one-third of seats in local bodies for the women. There have been programmes to improve the nutrition and health status of the girls and campaign for gender sensitization. There has been a growing realization among the policy makers that enhancing the economic value of the girls would help fight gender discrimination.

Even accepting the fact that patriarchy is the dominant discourse that defines societal approach to the girl child one can notice a counter trend as well, where alongside rationalization of family size by restricting reproduction to one child or two children (and this is reflected in the fact that the total fertility rate in India in 2021 has dropped to 2, which is below the replacement level of 2.1) the educated urban middleclass seem to be freeing themselves, at least partially, of male-child bias and appear to be content with one daughter or even two daughters. However, the drop in child sex ratio is not applicable or equal in all parts of the country. The shared image of 'good life' does deter urban educated middleclass people to restrict the number of children but they do not mind when the child is or children are daughters. It is not that they did not want a boy but they accept the fact (and do not regret) that their child is daughter gracefully. They take all possible care of their daughter/daughters and perhaps draw pride in their daughter's success. Some even justify having daughter by saying that she will take care of them if and when the situation demands, particularly in their old-age. All this indicate to a major social and cultural change so far as the position of girls is concerned. Both the parents and their daughters, especially in urban middleclass locale, are making serious efforts to revise at least some elements of patriarchal order by applying their autonomy or agency.

A close examination of the conditions of daughters in India thus brings out two possible realities. One is that of apathetic and negligent attitudes towards girl child leading to elimination of daughters where they are treated as unwanted and therefore subjected to all forms of discrimination in a social ambience and where dowry system is prevalent in its ugly form and the grown-up women are there to serve the other members of the family and produce male children. In such a social situation it is an enigma to be born as a girl child.

However, the other reality is that there is an effort on the part of the parents and children to free themselves from the elements of patriarchy and not to discriminate against the girl child. They are treated at par with the boys and parents do not regret having one and even two daughters. The parents bring up their daughters with all love and care and the daughters too reciprocate the gestures of their parents by taking all possible care. The middleclass parents have all the willingness and material resources to provide best possible education which in turn help the daughters to be economically self-reliant and have a professional career of their own.

The middleclass parents have rationalised the size of their families restricting the number of children to two at the most. In many cases both the parents are employed or economically active and do not have time to have more children. The dowry does not trouble anybody (since the groom's party knows that they will get enough without asking) and the daughters grow up to take care of themselves as well as their parents. Most of the urban middleclass families that we see around us are families with a single daughter, families with two daughters and families with a son and a daughter. The daughters in the family are pampered and often over-cared. The life of the parents remains daughter-centric. One can notice these two conflicting trends in familial/societal approaches towards daughters.

One can come across another situation where a family has a son and a daughter or more than one son and daughters in the urban middle class. Such families give an opportunity for a researcher to examine if the parents give a preferential treatment to their son/sons while subjecting the daughter/daughters to discrimination of various kinds. It is possible that the educated urban middleclass has undergone a process of modernisation and they have overcome many of the feudal and patriarchal discourses. In the urban families one can also get an opportunity to examine the intergenerational change of perceptions towards boys and girls while covering both the parents and the younger children in the study.

The focal point of this study therefore is to reconstruct the understanding of the changing position of daughter/ daughters in the family, be it a single-daughter family or a family with two daughters or family with a son and a daughter and its implications for the girl child/children and for the gender relation at the larger societal level. The study focuses on reconstructing the praxis of ‘acceptance’ of and ‘preference’ for the daughters and the socially shared perceptions behind such practices.

1.2. The problem in a broader context

Gender question in social science discourses is located in spatial and temporal contexts. The prevalent notion of gender in India is however stereotyped, skewed and exaggerated. The practice of unwantedness of girl child and reluctance towards girl child starts itself from the place which is considered the safest and protected place of the world- the mother’s womb. Ironically this doesn’t remain so for the female foetus many a times. The female foetus falls victim of the aggression and violence of the world outside which relentlessly tries hard to put an end to its existence. As a result, countless unfortunate girls do not see the light of the day. Besides the widespread availability of new sex selection techniques which is often blamed for skewed sex ratios during the last two decades, the central role is played by the deep-rooted patriarchal norms that values the culture of son preference (Dyson & Moore 1983; Bhat & Zavier 2007; Guilmoto 2012). The patriarchal structure including patrilineal descent and inheritance, patriarchal authority and patrilocal residence, makes it mandatory for the presence of a son in the family leading to the many facets of gender discrimination and gender inequality both at the familial and societal levels. India, with a largely patriarchal kinship pattern, is known for son preference and discriminatory social practices against women (Miller 1981; Das Gupta 1987). Studies have also shown that the practice of sex selection is more pronounced amongst the urban, educate upper castes and richer population (Guilmoto 2012; John et.al. 2008; Jha et.al. 2011; IIPS 2007; Agnihotri 2000; Arokiasamy & Goli 2012). These results have made the researchers comment “... recent increase in literacy and Indian per-person income might have thus contributed to increased selective abortion of girls” (Jha et. al. 2011: 6).

Demographers account for the statistical data from different parts of the country highlighting the plight of girl child in India. It is estimated that the number of girls missing in India is between 5.7 to 6 lakh girls per annum during the decade 2001-2011 (Kulkarni 2007; Jha et al. 2011). The child sex ratio CSR (0-6 years) as per 2011 census states that there are 919 girl child per 1000 boys and that the number has reduced from 927 girl child per 1000 boys as per 2001 census. Demographers asserted that the maximum malpractices and atrocities practiced towards girl child were in the north-western parts of India. Facts stated that these regions include Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Delhi, parts of Bihar and Orissa which always showed apathy towards girl child. Discrimination against girl child is stronger in Punjab and Haryana in comparison to other states of India (Das Gupta & Bhat 1997; Bhat and Zavier 2003; Miller 2007). It is also seen that relative to north Indian regions, daughters in south Indian families are more valued, both socially and economically, resulting in low son preference (Jeffery et. al., 1984). However, the 2011 census shows that these regions have considerably improved in their child sex ratio (CSR). In Himachal Pradesh the CSR rose from 896 in 2001 to 906 in 2011, Punjab it is 846 in 2011 and 798 in 2001, Haryana rises from 819 in 2001 to 830 in 2011, Chandigarh rose to 867 in 2011 from 845 in 2001, Delhi rose from 868 in 2001 and 886 in 2011. The figures clearly indicated that north-western India has developed a more liberal outlook towards girl child and are accepting daughters which was apparently the most deprived states of India. (John 2011:10).

Cultural factors play an important role in determining fertility trends in India (Basu 1992; Jeffery and Jeffery 1997). Fertility in India is not only considered to be the decision of the parents solely but is backed by lavish cultural interventions, politicians, economists, demographers and basically by the society at large. The fertility behaviour is intrinsically related to social context as the new born child needs to be accepted by the society. Mere statistical data provided by demographers have failed to provide substantial reasons as they have overlooked the cultural nexus in matters of fertility in India. Fertility has to be understood in the light of economic, political, religious, social conditions and most importantly in the light of the world-view of people.

The middle class in India as conceived broadly by social science discourses is considered as the 'service class'. It also includes the professional class and the intellectual class and also the petit bourgeoisie (the owner of small enterprise in Marxian sense) and traders of middle-income group and also the bearer of middle-class values. This class emerged after the modernisation era and therefore manifests a logical-rational approach towards their thinking and actions. It is this class that seems to have resorted to 'rationalization of family size' and have idealised the one-child or two-child norm. The most plausible explanation given to such practices is that educated couples belonging to the urban upper middle-class categories give more importance to economic factors and this drives couples to calculate the cost and benefits of reproduction. The idea of providing a 'good life' and possessing a strong social-capital (according to Bourdieu 1986) juxtaposes the practice of rationalising the family size. Another significant juxtaposition observed in such practice is the elimination of disparity between men and women in terms of women working outside the family. In contemporary times both men and women have got equity of labour. Women's economic independence-working outside the house and earning an independent income gave them a new impetus and perception and one such impetus is reducing the family size. This class of people who belongs to the professional class are often referred as the 'disciplined class'. They serve the society by adhering to the small family norm, either having a single-child or maximum of two-child family. This has led to the drop in sex-ratio where the couples have given their consent.

The situation that needs to be analysed by social scientists is whether such logical-rational approach of delimiting or rationalisation of family size has impacted upon the gender perspective. The problem to be addressed is whether such practice has brought any change in the psyche and perception of young couples belonging to the urban middle-class in the reproductive stage. Social scientists have observed that in urban area there are growing number of families with a single-daughter or two-daughters and such families do not run after a son. This offers a special case of inquiry because such families seem to have overcome the pressure of overwhelming son preference.

1.3. Objectives of the study

The study has been done with following objectives in mind.

- a. To study the reproductive behaviour of the married couples (like how and when they plan about having a child, how many children they plan to have, fertility gap, mode of family control, and so on) covering two generations and see the nature of rationalization of family size and preference for boy or girl child.
- b. To identify the nature of discrimination of the girl child/children and preferential treatment of the boys (if they exist at all) and study the factors that contribute to such differential treatment in the family.
- c. After having identified the nature of preferential treatment, if any, for boy child and neglect of girl child, we would proceed to study its implication on their upbringing. The social values, norms, practices and symbols would be studied to understand the collective and familial approach to the daughters. The experiences of the parents and their daughters would be recorded in a comparative perspective.
- d. To assess the social implications of gender preference or discrimination in the personality/identity formation of the girls and their approaches to life and society in their formative age.
- e. To understand all these processes, it would be essential to study the shared perceptions and values of the elderly members, the parents, the kinship-groups and the social stereotypes that influence differential gender treatment and the specific social locales of the families in terms of education, and class. The specific social locale of an individual girl child (particularly her looks, qualities and personality) would also be studied since it may determine the way she would be valued in the family and society and be treated.

- f. It would also be essential to study the process of formation of the counter-discourses on the part of parents and children that challenge the dominant patriarchal discourses.
- g. To analyse the findings of my study in Siliguri in the light of the all-India trends; the latter can be grasped from census data and empirical studies done in other parts of India.
- h. To locate the findings in the light of relevant social science discourses.

1.4. Conceptual framework

The study is done against the backdrop of rationalization/modernisation theory propounded by scholars like Weber, Durkheim, Simmel, Habermas, Ritzer, Giddens who basically see modern life as one-dimensional where calculative rationality prevails. Weber made it a point that in modern capitalist societies rationality has been separated from morality. Since capitalism is profit-oriented, it is rationalised and calculated in every aspect so that the outcome could be figured and depending on it the effectiveness and efficiency could be expanded (as cited in Friedman 1986). Like other positivist scholars, Weber propounds the practice of progressive mathematization of experience and knowledge in everyday life and that modern society should be based on rational experiments and proof in every aspect of life (*ibid*). Durkheim (1984) sees modernity in terms of organic solidarity. The weakening of mechanical solidarity gives rise to organic solidarity which marks the beginning of modernity. Modern society is highly related to industrial society which characterises division of labour and decline of collective consciousness leading to more of individualism.

Equating formal rationality with modernity, contemporary Western scholars like Simmel (1978) states that social differentiation is the by-product of modernisation which favours modern individualism as social differentiation liberates man from control of traditional specifications.

Furthermore, professional specialisation allows individuals to perform diverse complex occupational status and roles in the society, thereby giving the scope for the formation of modern individualism. Simmel in his work *The Philosophy of Money* explains that calculative rationality exerted its influence in diverse aspects of life and that can be very well understood through the study of money economy on modern culture and modern way of life. Money liberates individuality. This shows the accentuation of human capacity for rational calculation. With the coming up of modern factors like urbanisation, industrialisation and nation-state, the traditional factors tend to emancipate individuals from the strict control of the normative forces making them come under the supervision of calculative rationalisation and modernisation forces, making them part of the mass-scale society (Fuchs 1991).

Habermas (1981, 1987b) views modernity as an ‘unfinished project’ as the modern world continues to be based on rationality. He claims that the modern world with its overall social system has multiplied its complexity with excessive use of instrumental reasoning. The utopian goal continues to focus on maximisation of rationality of both the system and life-world. As a result, modern world tends to ‘colonize’ the life world and the rational system denies the freedom to life world and also the freedom that is necessary for overall development of individuals. Hence, rationality has gained hegemony over day-to-day life in Western society.

Giddens (1990, 1991, 1992) sees modernity as ‘juggernaut’ as it is, at least to some extent, turned out of control. He sees modernity to be radicalised and universalised, leading to continuation of modernity. For Giddens, modernity is developed due to the interactions of four major institutions- capitalism, industrialism, surveillance and military power, which are influenced by classical modernity respectively, reflecting continuity and change, rather than disjuncture. Modernity then culminates in globalisation and standardisation. He mentions that with the coming of modernity, social institutions which represents local culture, will be unembedded from local society. He also talks of reflexive human actions with reference to modernity that leads to the emergence of modern self. High modernity which is characterised by trust, risk, and security tends to separate individuals from morality.

Beck (1992) mentions that though the classical stage of modernity represented the industrial society, the emerging new modern society represents a 'risk society'. While dissemination of wealth remained the core area of dilemma in classical modernity, the central dilemma in new modernity is prevention, minimisation and channelling of risk associated with the new modern society. According to Beck, the industrial society or classical modernity has created many new dangers of risk which are unknown to simple modernity. The new modernity rejects the old modernity and gives liberty to its individual to decide their course of actions and social relations without any reference to class consideration, unlike of industrial society that was organised on the basis of social classes. Beck mentions that this process of transformation of individual also creates risk. The risk in modern society is created by individuals themselves as development is essentially perceived in lines of development of science and technology. Beck adds that the risk society (new modernity) continues to be understood in terms of an industrial society due to its conjunction with science and technology which is mainly responsible for the formation of risk that affects modern humankind.

Ritzer (1993) focuses on the fact that modernity and modern capitalistic society is predictable and calculable and that the standard of living is determined on 'quantitative perspectives' and not on qualitative grounds. Rationality/ modernity leads to dehumanization where individuals get entrapped within the 'Iron-cage bureaucracy' which makes people calculative in their perceptions.

Contrary to Western sociologists, the Indian sociologists like Ghurye (1932), D. P. Mukerji (1958), Desai (1955, 1956) are generally of the opinion that the common Indian man is much more integrated and more humanly cultivated than the westernised individuals. Calculative rationality cannot be implemented in its totality in the Indian context as the Indian social reality is much more oriented towards religion, ethics and aesthetics. The historicity of Indian social traditions is the store of values or dharma that they held are largely maintained, and continued (Mukerji 1958 cited in Chakraborti 2010: 245). Scholar like D. P. Mukerji was critical about the modernising ideals of middle class. The Indian middle class also known as the intellectual class is considered as the key to understand the modern Indian culture. D. P. Mukerji asserts the fact that common man in

India is still oscillating between Western rationalism and Indian tradition (Chakraborty 2010)

Therefore it wasn't quite suitable for common Indian man to completely adapt to westernised way of life of instrumental rationality and capitalistic bourgeoisie. Instead of complete rationality/westernisation, Indian scholars D. P. Mukerji, R.K. Mukherjee and T.N. Madan favoured the principle of continuity (*ibid*: 247). Mukherjee considers Indian tradition as modern and democratic (1923:1951) whereas the western civilisation as sick and uprooted (1964) but it leads to a synthetic-integrated model which could retain both the 'Eastern' tradition and surpass West's modernity (1949: 403-409). Shah (1973, 1988, 1991, 2005), Uberoi (1993, 2003), Singer (1968) observes that Indian manages to preserve their traditional values and uphold family and kinship values even in urban-industrial context. There would be possible conflict between old and new but it would just be a transitional stage which would pave way for the synthesis of new roots and values which have its roots in tradition to imbibe its character. Indian and Western scholars talk about a resilient India that can effectively counter the onslaught of the forces of westernisation and modernisation or rationalisation while preserving the traditional values of the institution.

Modern Western society is a complete departure from the traditional ideologies which can be seen in India. In India, the change from tradition to modernity was slow but steady. One of the prominent principles of modernity and rationality is how one can use the best means to a goal. The undertaken research topic aims to study the extent to which contemporary India has been pervaded by the above-mentioned principle of modernity and rationality. The urban middle-class couples show a departure from their patriarchal mentality (of negligence and apathy towards girls) and accepted daughter/daughters in their family. As Simmel pointed out that social differentiation is the resultant factor of modernity leading to individualism, one can find that the urban middle-class which is the outcome of social differentiation practices individualism to the fact that they have managed to come out of the traditional stereotypical attitudes and succumbed to rationality.

They have rationalised their family size to a three-member or four-member family and very well practice calculative-rationality as they aim for a 'good life' and shows no discontentment in making daughter/daughters a part of their family. One cannot deny that the world is opening up and Indian society and culture are no exceptions; the elements of global culture will penetrate into the Indian culture to influence perceptions and behaviour of the people. The educated urban middle class would be hypothetically more open and exposed to the Western and global values and at the same time they would try to preserve the very essence of their own culture. The study approaches the debate with an open mind and locates our empirical finding in this conceptual debate objectively.

1.5. Review of literature

A great deal of literature produced by demographers and other social scientists discuss the unwantedness of girl child, the drop in sex ratio, detection and killing of female foetus and provide explanation for what they observe, keeping the regional variation in mind. Some scholars also argue that the daughters are not that unwelcomed as projected in the dominant discourse. The following literatures highlight the changes the family in India has undergone in terms of its structure and relations, the factors that lead to the decline in child sex ratio in India, the effect of globalization on families in India, the nature of and reasons for continued gender bias, the consequences of development on the status of women so on and so forth. The review of literature is divided into two categories- (1) unwantedness of daughters and (2) changing attitude towards daughters. The purpose of categorising the literature is to grasp the changing dynamism in terms of the position of daughters in contemporary Indian context.

1.5.1. Unwantedness of daughters- These literatures provide an insight to the dropping sex ratio and child sex ratio which are due to unwantedness of daughters. The overarching patriarchal mindset practiced for generations is held responsible by scholars to have propagated the practice of daughter-aversion and atrocities against daughters.

Bhat (2002) in her paper 'On the Trail of 'Missing' Indian Females II: Illusion and Reality' states that in order to explain why female-male ratio (FMR) has been falling in India since 1901, it is necessary to probe why the adult sex ratio has been falling during the first half of the last century and why the child sex ratio too began to fall after 1951. This paper basically presents evidence to show that the fall in adult sex ratio was mainly because of the control of famines that used to take heavy toll of older men. The evidences on the age and sex pattern of mortality during famines is sufficiently strong to conclude that it was the control of the famines and declines in starvation- related deaths that was primarily responsible for the rising masculinity in India's population until about 1981. Thus, it was not females who really went additionally missing but it appeared so because older men do not succumb to starvation as they did before. It is seen that the survival rates of older men improved because they were the prime beneficiaries of curative care. The accelerated fall in the child sex ratio after 1981 seems to be largely due to the diffusion of pre-natal sex selection techniques in region with well entrenched gender bias. Although the declines were marginal it is because of the expansion of medical services in rural areas that brought the gender bias in provision of health care to the fore, or from a century-long trend of falling female-male ratio at birth as a result of improvements in nutritional status and midwifery practices.

Agnihotri (2003), in his paper 'Survival of the Girl Child: Tunnelling out of the chakravyuha', deals with the result of the first population census of the millennium which reveal that a number of significant changes have been witnessed in the sex ratio patterns in the country. Firstly, the sex ratio decline among the children in the 0-6 age group turns out to be sharper in the urban areas (32 points than in the rural areas. This is mainly because sex-selective abortion is much prevalent in the urban area than in rural areas. Concentrations of medical facilities and professionals in urban areas have added to this practice. Furthermore, girl children face discrimination in accessing inputs like immunisation and supplementary nutrition. These results in sharp decline in child sex ratio (0-6 years). Secondly, the traditional north-south divide stands significantly modified and the 'northernisation' of sex ratios is rapidly taking the urban route.

Sharp decline in the female-male ratios among the children in the urban areas cannot be explained away by any of the three popular escape hatches of yesteryears, i.e., migration, undercount or biologically ordained high sex ratios at birth. Unlike adults, children below 6 years do not migrate sex selectively; urban areas should suffer much less from undercount than adjoining rural areas and biologically, sex ratios at birth cannot become masculine so rapid. This decline clearly points to one factor, sex-selective abortion or female foeticide that has gained currency during the 1980s and more sharply in the 1990s. The paper therefore presents a clear relevance to the atrocities being practiced towards girl-child in India stating the various factors that led to the vulnerable decline in sex ratio and which further substantiates the trend missing of girl child in India.

Premi (2001) in his article 'The Missing Girl Child' presents empirical data regarding the sex ratio in India with reference to the Census 2001. He begins with analysing the overall sex ratio in India which has showed improvement in two census period- the first one observed between 1971 and 1981 and the second one between 1991 and 2001. When the sex ratio in total population improved in favour of females from 930 to 934 between 1971 and 1981, it apparently seemed that the discrimination against the girl child has been stalled and one could hope for further improvement in the sex ratio. However, the decline in sex ratio by 7 points between 1981 and 1991 was shocking and was viewed as a serious matter of concern birth by the demographers and several women organisations. Concentrating on the states where the overall sex ratio improved substantially- Uttaranchal, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh witnesses a decline in sex-ratio whereas in Kerala the sex ratio improved. Analysing the child sex ratio (CSR), states like Gujarat, Maharashtra, Punjab and Delhi have witnessed substantial decline in child sex ratio. It was 1991 Census that sex ratio for the age group 0-6 years and 7 years and above was tabulated separately. In 1991 Census the sex ratio reported to be 945 but it declined to 927 in 2001. This decline was reported in all the States and Union Territories except in Kerala (from 958 in 1991 to 963 in 2001), Sikkim (from 965 in 1991 to 986 in 2001), Tripura (from 967 in 1991 to 975 in 2001) and Mizoram (from 969 in 1991 to 971 in 2001). The child sex ratio declined in states like Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Gujarat, Delhi and Uttaranchal.

Improvement in living conditions and in the availability of medical facilities throughout the country over the past half a century or more has led to greater survival of both males and females and has not only narrowed down the gap but has also reversed the trend in recent years as is reflected in the life expectancy at birth. At the state level the state level, Bihar, Orissa, and Uttar Pradesh continued to have a higher male life expectancy than that of females. In contrast, all the four southern Indian states- Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu- had female life expectancy at birth higher than male life expectancy by at least two years. Gujarat and Maharashtra have also registered significant improvement in female life expectancy over females. The census 1991 indicates that in recent years not only has female disadvantage been wiped out; there is a greater reduction in female mortality. Probably this has helped in changing the sex ratio in favour of females during 1990's and this is borne out by the improvement in overall sex ratio in the country. The infant and child mortality of females have been lower than males at the national level. The female age specific death rates (ASDRs) for the age group 0-4 and 5-9 have also remained higher all the years between 1984 and 1999. While there has been an improvement in overall female mortality over time, the discrimination against the girl child has continued in Indian society. Hence, part of the decline in child sex ratio in 2001 seems to be result of discrimination while a general pattern of decline in the difference in female-male ASDR is observed, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, Rajasthan, Gujarat along with Uttar Pradesh have continued to have high female-male ASDR differentials in 0-4 age group. It is heartening to note that this differential was not found in all four southern states, Assam, Himachal Pradesh, Maharashtra, West Bengal and Orissa. This implies that sex differential in providing medical treatment to girls in these nine states has almost wiped off. However, the differential in infant mortality rate as also in child mortality rate has still not become favourable to the female child. The two factors together, particularly in the latter part of the 1990's should explain a part of the decline in the child sex ratio. The rampant practice of female foeticide along with a certain amount of infanticide in the several north-western states led to the decline in female child.

Further, all the states that have shown large declines in child sex ratio between 1991-2001- Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Chandigarh and Delhi- are basically economically well developed and have recorded a fairly high literacy rate but contrary to expectation as despite having sound economic and literacy rate, these states have reported decline in child sex ratio.

Das Gupta and Bhat's (1999) article on 'Intensified Gender Bias in India: A Consequence of Fertility Decline' in the edited book *Gender, Population and Development* states that one of the adverse social consequences of the fertility decline in Asian countries along with South Korea and China has been a steep rise in the masculinity of the sex ratio at birth. This suggest that fertility decline in societies characterised by strong son preference can be accompanied by an increased manifestation of the gender bias. There is clear possibility that similar trends may be taking place in India as it is characterised by a strong son preference, especially in its Northern region. Fertility has also been declining in India: Total Fertility Rate has fallen from 4.5 to 3.6 between 1981 and 1991. This throws an insight on the ways in which fertility decline may affect the net manifestation of gender bias and the evidence that the gender bias is increasing in India. Two ways in which fertility decline affects excess female child loss are- with changes in the distribution of births by birth order making for reduced bias while parity- specific gender intensification of the bias makes for increased bias. In analysing the estimates of the additional number of female children went 'missing' during the decade 1981-91 and the increase in the excess of child mortality is likely due to sex-selective abortion or unreported infanticide as opposed to discrimination against a living daughter.

In societies characterised by strong son preference, fertility decline has two opposing effects on discrimination against female children. On the one hand, there are fewer births at the higher parities which are most subject to discrimination, making for reduced discrimination. On the other hand, parity-specific discrimination becomes more pronounced at lower levels of fertility, making for increased discrimination. These two effects counterbalance each other in determining the net change in gender bias as the course of fertility decline proceeds.

Fertility decline in India has reduced the female disadvantage in mortality for adults through factors such as decreased reproductive stress, while an increase in this disadvantage i.e., mortality rate present for children. 1980s is the decade of most rapid fertility decline in India and juvenile sex ratios became more masculine, including in the Southern states which have traditionally shown less gender bias than the North, despite the much more rapid pace of fertility decline in the South. This indicates that the intensification of gender bias is greatest where its intensity was already highest and the regional patterns of gender bias persist. The increased imbalance in the sex ratio of the population during the 1980s was concentrated heavily amongst children. The data suggest that over million additional girls went 'missing' between 1981-91. Meanwhile the sex ratios of child mortality have remained constant, suggesting that most of this may be attributable to the practice of sex-selective abortions or unreported infanticide. Excess female child mortality after birth continues to be the dominant practice in removing female children in India. The rough estimates for 1981-91 indicate that there were perhaps four times as many excess female child deaths taking place after birth than before birth or as unreported infanticides. In terms of the impact of gender bias on fertility and mortality rates, it is evident that sex- selective abortion is practiced on such a small proportion of total births in India that it cannot account for any significant part of the reduction in total fertility. However, excess female child mortality does add significantly to the child mortality rate: the excess alone constituted a child mortality rate of roughly 46 per thousand live births during the decade 1981-1991. India may perhaps gradually converge with patterns of discrimination against girl child in countries like China and Korea, where sex ratio at birth is rising, but where there is little difference between boys and girls in mortality after birth. It is possible that pre-natal sex- regulation may come to replace post-natal regulation as the more widespread method of controlling the sex- composition of the family, as the psychological burden of abortion is probably lower than that of neglecting a child to death. The authors states this may result in skewing the sex rate even further. On the other hand, it should result in a higher proportion of girls who are born, being born to families who actually want them or at least willing to 'tolerate' them and thus perhaps treat them better.

Das Gupta (1987) in her paper 'Selective Discrimination against Female Children in Rural Punjab, North India' states that sex differentials in child mortality in rural Punjab persist unexpectedly despite relative wealth, socio-economic development including rapid universalization of female education, fertility decline, and mortality decline. The most striking finding is that discrimination against girls is not generalized but highly selective: sex differentials in mortality are affected far more by birth order than by socio-economic factors. While mother's education improves quality of childcare, it does not reduce discrimination against higher birth order daughters. Fertility reduction appears to heighten such selective discrimination. Sex discrimination has often been attributed to a lack of female participation in productive activities and also to economic hardship. This analysis emphasizes the role of women's structural marginalization in this patrilineally organized society in explaining the existence as well as the persistence of sex discrimination.

John (2011) in her article 'Census 2011: Governing Populations and the Girl Child' sums up the child sex ratio (CSR) as per Census 2011 where she states that the statistical data shows improvement in the rate of decline in the growth of population, a rise in literacy rates and also the overall sex ratio. However, there has not been much improvement in the area of child sex ratio (CSR) which has dropped from 927 girls per 1000 boys in 2001 to an all-time low of 914 in 2011. She closely examines the aspects that led to the drop of CSR in 2011. On giving an area-based analysis of CSR 2011 she states that north-west India which have shown the maximum aversion towards girls in the past are slowly gearing up and have shown a slight positive change in the numbers of CSR. The various girl-child protection schemes initiated and implemented by the various governments of the north-western states have contributed in decreasing the apathy towards girl child. However, a close speculation on district-wise studies in north-west areas still show relentless aversion towards girl child and also the continuation of the practice of sex-selective abortion. The apathy towards girl child and the falling CSR's are shifting to the western, central and eastern India- Maharashtra, Goa, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and even Andhra Pradesh has joined the ranks from amongst the southern states. The sex ratio and the child sex ratio have become symbols of gender discrimination.

Gender does play a critical instrument in the undisputed aim of controlling population while not allowing the number of females to drop unduly. The matter taken up by the author delves deep into the fact that on one hand where the Government is pressurizing to limit the population size therefore limiting the number of family members, it is necessary to understand where does 'gender' lies in the whole process of reducing the population of the nation. This period corresponds to the neo-liberalism era where couples' family planning and deciding upon the sex composition of one's children largely depends on confluence of factors like stretching the limited resources and wanting the 'best' for one's children, extreme socio-economic volatility, the availability of technologies and the nature of gender disparities across classes in contemporary society. The couples are stretching on "at least one boy, and at most one girl" family which shows that son preference however have not reduced but aversion towards girl-child has reduced to a certain aspect provided they have a son in the family. Females are still depended on structural changes with a expectation of change in the numbers and acceptability in the society.

Bhattacharya (2012), in his paper 'On Adverse Sex Ratio in Some India States' highlights certain facts about the sex ratio (number of females per thousand males) of the population in some Indian states, especially in the north-east of the country. The states in north-east are ethnically, linguistically and culturally very different from other states in India. The paper presents that although the female children survive better in this region than elsewhere in India, women in the elder age group seem to be in a far more depressing condition than the men in these states. Some hypotheses are offered to explain sex ratio in these areas.

1.5.2. Literature on changing attitude towards daughters- With the onset of globalisation and modernisation, India has been witnessing both socio-economic dynamisms which have had a strong implication on every aspect of the society. Scholars have put forward the view that there has also been a change in perception and attitude towards daughters with the increasing participation of women in paid employment. The government also has taken initiative to introduce cash-based incentive programmes for financially distressed parents who tend to prefer son to a daughter with an intention to change parental attitude towards daughters and to treat them as an asset. The following literatures highlight the

changing position of daughters with reference to change in family structure and its composition and employment opportunities.

Desai and Krishnaraj (1990) in *Women and Society in India* states that the underlying theme of the book is broadly focuses on the way social changes in society have affected women's position, especially the development process, interacting with the pre-existing social structure. Although with development came emancipation and liberation of women, the obvious marginalisation and devaluing of women in many ways is rather the result of interaction between traditional patriarchal structure with capitalist development in ways that are both complementary and contradictory- loosening in some ways and tightening other ways so that development becomes a uniformly benign force improving the status of women. Much of the material presented is empirical and focuses on women in general and not exclusively the upper and middle section of the society, so as to highlight not only the differential impact on women of social change but also the differential impact on different classes. Desai and Krishnaraj, on the economic condition of women have stated that the economy depicts the interaction between patriarchal structure and the emergence and growth of industrial capitalism within a given international economic order. The salaried, educated women are not fully liberated and are subjected to various forms of control; the working women face discrimination, exploitation at work and lack of support and above all male domination at home. The interaction between patriarchal structures and the development process operates through sexual division of labour, occupational segregation and basic contradiction between women's production and reproduction. In analysing the growth of education, the liberal forces have worked to improve women's education, for instance by rising the age of marriage and emphasising education as an important means of emancipation. The positive aspect of the growth of emancipation is the emergence of a feminist consciousness that has exposed the contradiction between the guarantee of equality and its limit in practice. In analysing the structure of the family, the authors have briefly described how women are placed within it. They mentioned that family is the source of retention of values and at the same time absorption of new values. They also stressed on the health perspective of the society.

Health not only has a clinical connotation but it has a sociological relevance too. Health is considered by patriarchal structures that subordinate women- the importance of male child, the lack of reproductive freedom within marriage, women's access to family planning and general health care. All this reflects patriarchal domination over women even in terms of health. They also stated about the various forms of violence against women emerging in society. Democratic rights granted in principle are nullified by women's subordinate status. The process of development has increasingly separated the public from private and has enlarged the public sphere with more formal institutions.

However, access to formal institutions is limited for women and the ideologies of many public institutions themselves reinforce traditional subordination. The deepening contradiction in society has a positive benefit in the rising consciousness of women.

Shah (1998) in his paper 'Changes in the Indian Family: An Examination of Some Assumptions' in his book *The Family in India* has made the following observations: one, the emphasis on joint household was greater among the high castes and classes who formed small section of the society than among the lower castes and class, who constituted the vast majority of the population. Second, while emphasis of joint household appears to have declined in recent times mainly in the professional class, drawn mainly from among the higher castes and class in larger cities, it has increased among the masses in rural as well as urban areas. In statistical terms, the upward trend among the former is to such an extent that the overall change in society is upward. This is the reverse of the long established belief not only among the intelligentsia in general; but also among many social scientists that the joint household is disintegrating. Over the last fifty years or so there is widespread of a norm of social life which has been present in Indian society for centuries. The circumstances encouraging this spread are- increase in life expectancy, formation and accumulation of household assets due to economic development, sanskritisation of social life in general and of customs and marriage in particular and use of joint household organisation for upward economic and social mobility. One may perhaps say this to be endogenous changes.

On the other hand, what has been happening in the professional classes in large cities is exogenous change. The latter is articulated in terms of the nuclear family and individualism. An important aspect of parent-child relationship in the professional class is that parents usually make heavy material and emotional investments in bringing up children particularly sons. Many middle-class parents sacrifice a lot for child's career. Most sons and daughters reciprocate positively towards positively towards parents and repay the investments as it were in their latter phase of their life. However, the situation becomes critical when parents become old and disabled. As long as both parents are alive, they continue to support each other but with the demise of one parent the situation becomes bit more serious. According to the author, the son without any doubt is eager to take care of his parent. The problem however lies with unwillingness of the daughter-in-law. The parent unfortunately has to depend on willingness of the daughter-in-law. The son however at times fails to navigate between parents and wife and has to submit before wife. With the acceptance of small family norm, the situation of joint family, in the demographic situation in the urban professional class is changing. Parents usually go for either a single child or two-child family. If there are two sons, they are not likely to stay together after their marriage. However, one of the two is likely to stay with his parents. When the parents have only one daughter there is now a liberal attitude which encourages parents to move to daughter's home.

Somayaji (2006) in his article 'Globalization and Family Change in India' in the edited book *Sociology of Globalization- Perspectives from India* gives an overview of changing Indian family under the purview of globalization. Family is one of the most fundamental units in all human societies has been changing since antiquity. Family has been an institution exhibiting both change and at the same time stability. Changes have taken place primarily in its internal structures with the functions of its various members withstanding changes. Sharma has observed that there are differential cultures that exhibit different kinds of family life. For instance, analysing the family functions it is seen that the family roles are based on gender stereotypes with male associated with work outside the house and women associated with domestic chores.

Changes are witnessed in this respect with the emergence and extension of democratic values the principal of dignity of labour is now witnessed in the family institution. Women are no longer dependent upon men. The democratic values replaced the rigid gender-based division of labour in society. Women's awareness of their rights, men's acceptance of women's liberty, the security to family life provided by the modern government- all dramatically affected marital and familial relationships. The author draws a contrast between family in India and the family after globalization to bring out both the explicit and implicit changes witnessed. He states that Indian family was not the individual but the joint family which consist of adult male coparceners and their dependents comprising wives and young children. The traditional joint family was based on the authority and sharing of relations among adult males rather than on conjugal binds between married couple. There have been subsequent changes in family in India prior to Globalization. The institution of joint family underwent certain structural changes. The commercialization of Indian agriculture as the substitution of an isolated self-sufficient economy by market economy led to undermining of the traditional occupational patterns, joint families, particularly the role position of its members. With the added effect of colonial value, the growth of urbanisation and the introduction of modern means of transport, the introduction of new legislation – all impacted traditional authoritarian Hindu religious ideology and ways of life. Furthermore, the traditional authority structure, i.e., the head of the household, the patriarch or *karta* who had the absolute power over the entire activities of the family started losing ground to the individual breadwinner of the conjugal family unit. The traditional pattern of women's total subordination to men and the father's strict disciplinarian role in relation to his children are changing towards more egalitarian relations. Such changes and the consequent increasing autonomy of the conjugal pair are strengthening the solidarity between the spouses leading to better understanding. The ambition of young couples along with initiative, autonomy, and concern with social justice are challenging the old respect for the established order. For Somayaji, globalization has been projected as a powerful process of growth, which has the potential of all-round development of the humanity in a free and liberal atmosphere.

Anthony Giddens defines globalization as “the intensification of worldwide social relationships, which link distant places in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa” (Giddens 1990: 64). Globalization is a strong process, influencing the entire world and its every aspect like economic, political, social, cultural, having important implications in for human life, including the family life. With the expansion in economic sphere, human mobility leads to change in values and culture which is leading to fast changing modern families in urban centres. The author’s aim of the study is to compare that group of families, which are most mobile, open to change and adoption of new opportunities arising from globalization. The author views the impact of globalization on Indian family in two ways. With the era of economic restructuring through policies of liberalisation, privatisation and globalization, the family is emerging as much stronger institution than before. The alternative point of view is that as a result of globalization, institution of family is becoming progressively weaker as individual grows. With the widening of job opportunities for women, it has led to mobility of women. With the employment opportunities being specialised fostered by liberalised markets, the socio-cultural relationships within the family are also undergoing a dramatic change. Similarly, the discrepancy between girl child and boy child is also diminishing in the ‘modern families’ in the globalization era. Both sons and daughters are encouraged to study in far off town and cities. Besides boys, even girls are allowed to have an independent life. Girls are not only readily adapting to modern trends but by the time they complete their study, they are ready to seek better opportunities all over the globe. The rigid endogamy imposed upon girls as a practice of traditionality is also undergoing a change as it is not uncommon for a girl who has migrated abroad for advanced studies or for a job to marry a foreigner and settle down in another country. The institution of family is undergoing dramatic change in India. In urban centres mostly, globalization is influencing the institution of family greatly. Young girls from middle and upper middle-class background make their own decisions about their future. This shows that parents and families have become much liberal towards their girl child. Rather families are accepting daughters as parochial outlook and stereotyping against girls are diminishing in the era of globalization.

The traditional family values are being replaced by 'modern family' values where individualism is spaced out. The family has witnessed a great deal of structural and functional transformation in recent times but it can be also stated that whether or not the traditional values of hierarchy and holism and the modern values of socialism and individualism are accepted or rejected is still dependent on the existential realities experienced by different family types for which more elaborate empirical studies need to be conducted in different parts of the country.

Sooryamorthy (2012) in his article 'The Indian Family: Needs for a revisit' mentions that family plays an indispensable role in the functioning of the larger society along with individual development. The changes in Indian family owing to factors like modernisation, urbanisation and industrialisation has influenced parent-child relationship, marital relationships, new conflict roles and power relations. It gives an insight into the directions the family in India is taking. Equality between men and women is a prominent feature of modern Indian family which is evident in matters of partner selection and type of family. The contemporary younger generation prefers to take their own decision without any interference from family or kin. This new practice of equality counters the patriarchal practice where the men of the household were the axis of decision makers for the rest of the family members. The sense of equality among partners is rather strong among who are educated and urbanites. There have been considerable changes in terms of assertion of women's rights. The increasing improvement in the empowerment of women in India today have contributed to irresistible changes in contemporary Indian families. The rights of children, especially girl children specifically are now more protected than ever before. The position of women in contemporary India has definitely improved over the last two decades as they are now more visible and recognised in public spheres of activity. Not only are women taking responsibilities and contributing to family income but their role in decision-making in family affairs has also expanded to be at par with men. Preference for having a boy child is also declining along with decline in preferential treatment for boys and girls in terms of health and education, if not entirely. These changes are more pronounced in urban nuclear and extended families where both parents are educated and employed.

Sekhar (2012) in his article 'Ladlis and Lakshmis: Financial incentives scheme for the girl child' observes that the adverse influence of negative social attitude towards girls have left many girl children to a vulnerable situation. This can be well reflected in the census data which reflects the dropping child sex ratio. The government have initiated various policies and programmes to empower girl children in every aspect of life so as to bring them in equal terms with boys and enjoy the liberty to live life according to their own terms. The programs incorporated special measure in order to protect the survival and security of girl child starting from their conception to birth, infancy and throughout the period of childhood. Poverty continues to remain the major constraining factor that prevents better raising and education of girl child. Given the limited financial resources, these poverty-stricken families prefer a son to a daughter. Keeping this backdrop, the government including state governments have introduced schemes of conditional cash and non-cash transfer to encourage the families to retain girl child and welfare of girl child. The prime objectives of these schemes were to enhance the value of girl child in terms of her being considered as an asset to the family. However, though these policies aim to positively discriminate in favour of girls, it is still unclear whether these have led to change in parental preference and attitude towards daughter.

The above-mentioned literature review throws significant light on both the two possible realities- the unwantedness of girl child, a practice inherent in the Indian patriarchal social order and the other is the reality where parents seem to have come out of the clichéd patriarchal practice of eliminating girl child. Gender discrimination has subsumed the role played by women in terms of fertility and governance but the increased number of literate women and the positive sign of increased literacy play a major role for fewer births. The development process has emancipated women from the closely knit household dimension. The emergence of feminist consciousness put forth the demand of equality. Education ensured women to take a step forward to build up their career ensuring economic autonomy. A good deal of secondary literature also substantiates the fact that globalization has brought in quite a significant change in the family structure.

The emergence and extension of democratic values, education and the principles of dignity of labour is now witnessed in family institutions. The discrepancy between girl child and boy child is also diminishing in 'modern families' as both sons and daughters are encouraged to study in far off towns and cities and after completion of studies girls are also encouraged to take up better opportunities across the globe.

1.6. Universe, sample and method

The prime objective of the present thesis is to study the position of girl child in urban middle-class families in Siliguri, a class one town in West Bengal. The study focuses on middle class families and hence all the middle-class families in the corporation constituted the universe of my study. The 'middle-class' in sociological discourse includes the professional and intellectual class and the 'petite bourgeois' (the owners of small enterprise in Marxist sense) and the traders of middle-income group who are generally the bearers of urban middle-class values. This class is considered to have a rational outlook, not succumbing to the pan Indian culture completely. The middle-class collective persona is supposed to be based more on logic and rationality rather than traditions and superstitions. The middle class has access to education and modern means of communications. This class is also most mobile among the classes and is supposed to be vulnerable to the forces of modernization and westernization. The logic behind the selection of this class for the study is that demographers have almost in consensus blamed this class for rationalization of family size and masculinisation of the family by resorting to amniocentesis and killing of female foetus. The present study is designed to examine whether the middle class in a class I city like Siliguri follow the same all India pattern or they have different outlook towards their daughter/daughters.

Another factor that is instrumental in differential attitude towards daughters relates to community differences. Although middle class category across communities have imbibed similar attitude towards rationalization of family size and hedonism, socio-cultural factors are still contingent upon apathetic nature towards daughters.

In this context two different communities inhabiting Siliguri – Bengalis and Marwaris have been incorporated in the study. The study exclusively focuses on the Bengali community. Inclusion of Marwaris in the study is with the purpose of getting an insight into community difference in attitude towards daughters and whether they follow the same pattern in terms of rationalization and masculinisation of family.

Since all the middle-class families in Siliguri constituted my universe of study I needed to draw a manageable sample of the sampling of the study which comprised of urban middle-class families of Siliguri having a single daughter and urban middle-class families having two children which can be either two daughters or two sons or a one daughter and one son family. The rationale of this sampling is that I wanted to compare the attitudes of the parents towards the single daughters or two daughters and towards the son and daughters and examine the elements of patriarchy and gender discrimination work through the interpersonal relations in family.

The sample is drawn applying the method of stratified judgements sampling as there is need to divide the families into the following categories:

- i) Single daughter families
- ii) Two daughter families
- iii) Families with one son and one daughter
- iv) Families with more than one sons and (or) daughters

Since it would be difficult to have a complete list of families in these categories I have used the method called snow-ball sampling i.e., move from one sample (informant) to another using the known social networks of the informants.

1.7. Fieldwork

The field study has been done in two phases. In the first phase a household survey, which was based on snow-ball sampling, was conducted on 120 families, having equal representation from each of the categories mentioned above to collect the quantitative data

on the background and composition of the families. In the second phase, I used the case study method and did case studies on about 56 families, again, covering all the categories of the family mentioned above. This part of the study is essentially qualitative in nature where the perceptions and views on well-worked out issues relating to gender relation (with focus on boys and girls) are ascertained. As the study is qualitative in nature and not survey type research, the qualitative data collected through case studies is translated into text following the principles of descriptive phenomenology. The descriptive texts representing the views of the informants (covering the parents and daughters) is finally subjected to interpretation (following the principles of Weber's interpretative sociology) to try generalisation or theorization in the light of the existing discourses on the subject. I have also prepared master tables so as to have quantitative data on the socio-economic background of the informants which has been analysed in Chapter 4.

The field study has been conducted in metropolitan Siliguri and respondents residing in all the major residential areas of the city have been incorporated in the study. The areas covered include Hakimpara which is the largest and oldest residential area of Siliguri, Subhaspally, Collegepara and Haiderpara. These particular areas are representative of educated Bengali middle-class families. The respondents primarily lived in their own houses and have been living for two to three generations. The coming up of flats in the city is a recent development and is in response to the growing influx of people from adjacent areas who have settled in Siliguri for its increasing economic potential. The household survey, based on snow-ball sampling, provided an insight to the socio-economic background of the informants which further helped in selecting the respondents for case study. I used my personal contacts to reach out to the respondents and then using their social contact further I completed my household survey. Since I approached the respondents through their close contacts, it facilitated my rapport building with my respondents which helped me in obtaining authentic data of their life.

As the study is basically qualitative in nature, I had to concentrate on in-depth case study method by focusing on long hour conversation with the respondents, often more than one occasion.

The interaction sessions were a 'dialogue' rather a 'monologue' as I felt that respondents too required to and perhaps, they were interested to get an insight of my experience as a daughter in the family and how I am raised and treated by my parents. I also shared my post-marriage experiences with my husbands and in-laws. The idea of sharing my life experiences with them was to build grounds of compassion and interests so as to get authentic account of their experience and not merely a passive and disinterested viewpoint. The families incorporated in the survey consisted of at least one daughter. I used structured interview schedule so that I could also collect data on the changes in socio-economic composition of the family.

When I initiated my case studies following qualitative research methodology, I asked the respondents to narrate their life experiences. I initially approached the women of the house as I felt comfortable to discuss my purpose of research with them. I also felt that women and other female of the house, if any, would be rather more comfortable as well as interested to share their life experiences with me. I had prolonged discussions with women who were housewives as they could interact with me even while doing their household chores. Women who had only daughter/daughters felt motivated to encourage their daughters to pursue higher studies and be self-dependent. In the process, the children of the house (both daughter and son) would also come and interact with me and share their experiences of schools and colleges. These female respondents were mostly second generation educated. For them graduation was the highest degree of qualification which was a primary necessary condition for a good marriage. They took pride in calling them a graduate which was rare in their times but they also admit that in contemporary times having a graduation degree is not sufficient for their children. The prolonged conversation with these women also provided an insight that a number of them wanted to be financially self-dependent and have an identity of their own. Their inability to do so makes them all the more enthusiastic to make their daughter/daughters self-dependent individuals.

On the other hand, women who were working and professionals could not give much of their time to me. I had only single day conversation with them. They expressed their joy in sharing their journey of achievement with me. Although they could give me only one

day from their hectic schedule, I was welcomed to have conversation over phone as per their convenience. Gradually the male of the house especially fathers also took interest in my research and shared their experiences and their future plans regarding their daughters. Couples who are in the age group of 25-40 years and are in their fecundity period discussed their possible family planning and their perception regarding the size and gender of their family. I too was asked to share my family planning as I too fall in this age group.

I also came across parents who practiced gender preference which were reflected in their narratives. They were not very comfortable in responding to my questions as they considered family planning a very private affair and were reluctant to disclose it. I extended my fieldwork among 60 Marwari households residing in Siliguri to get an insight into community perspectives related to upbringing of daughter's. Though my thesis focuses primarily on the Bengali community, what interested me to incorporate a small section of the Marwari community in my study was to get an understanding of how daughter/s are looked upon in such families which have business as their primary occupation. Business unlike service or any profession is not a tenured job. It takes more than one generation to come up with an established business. It is by virtue of the established business that families derive their identity, social status and prestige in the society. In the context of perpetuation of identity and status, it becomes imperative for the Marwari community to develop a tendency of son preference for the continuation of family business. Marwaris of Siliguri have migrated from their native region Rajasthan and have been residing here for three generations. They are majorly involved in garment and hardware business. Informants mention that owing to their economic needs, son preference is very strong but daughters are also welcomed in the family. They focus on better education of girls too, though the primary aim of focusing on higher education (minimum graduation) is to find a suitable groom for their daughter.

I initiated my conversation with the women of the house. The men of the house were generally busy in their shops so barely could get a chance to interact with them. The female informants narrated their pre-married lives and how their lives completely revolve around taking care of their husbands and children after marriage.

They expressed their desire to see their daughters well educated in reputed English medium schools and pursue graduation degree from a reputed college within or in any metropolitan city- a practice that wasn't encouraged by their parents. They (both husband and wife) wish to do so as they understand the need of modern education in contemporary times. Despite this, their primary focus still remains on marriage of their daughters. They save up for their daughter's marriage right from her birth. Dowry continues to be an integral part of Marwari culture, though the term has now been replaced by 'exchange of gifts'. Marwari parents teach their daughters to focus on *ghar-grihasti* and be a dutiful wife towards husband. I witnessed an incident in one of the informant's house where the daughter who was 18 years old was being taught to make *roti* by the house maid. The girl was reluctant and showed no interest in learning but the mother, who was having a conversation with me, insisted her to learn how to cook. The informants mentioned that they are changing their perception towards daughters, keeping parity with the contemporary times, but are unwilling to hurt their community sentiment which is predominantly patriarchal.

The fieldwork which has been done in two communities highlights how different socio-economic background plays major role in gender relations within family. A comparative analysis has been made in Chapter 8 where the views of Bengali and Marwari parents regarding their social perception towards daughters have been taken into account.

1.8. Limitations of the study

The study is qualitative in nature and therefore I have focused on the details about the lives of the respondents of different categories. Since this was not a survey type research I could not follow the standard methods of defining the universe, selecting an unbiased, adequate or representative sample. I understand that the 'middleclass' can never be homogeneous and some of the sub-categories of the middleclass drawn on the basis of caste, sub-class or religion might go unrepresented in my sample. The middleclass families were selected from two linguistic groups – Bengalis and Marwaris – for a comparative study.

Although unintended, the families I studied turned out to show some heterogeneity and this point would be evident in Chapter 4, which discusses the socio-economic background of the families covered in the study. In selecting the families, I had to look for the categories I had identified beforehand

Following the phenomenological method, the respondents expressed their narratives in autobiographical style and I tried to record what they said verbatim. I started encountering problems while collecting data in my second phase of the study which included the detailed narratives of respondents in the form of case studies. There was problem in rapport building as I had to interview them regarding their personal life starting from their income to their gender preference in family planning. I was also denied meeting on a number of occasions and had to incorporate people who were not a part of my household survey.

Although all my respondents were aware of the fact that the contemporary society focuses on equal treatment of both daughter and son yet on personal level gender preference is continues to play a decisive part in terms of family planning. Respondents were sceptical in revealing their gender preference when they planned for a child. Moreover, seeing me married some of my respondents seemed too much eager and engrossed in advising me to plan a child at the earliest. I, at times, was taken aback and bewildered and waited impatiently for them to finish their advice and provide information pertaining to my research.

Since my research primarily focused on the relationship aspect between parents and daughters and upbringing of the daughters, I encountered problem of confidence building with parents. The central part of the study focuses on the attitude of parents towards their daughters and my primary respondents were the parents. I did not have much opportunity to interact with every child/children of the household. Many parents were not comfortable in allowing me to interact with their children. A large majority of the children were still school kids and the parents felt that children might not understand parents' point of view about raising them up and might question their

method of upbringing. In such cases it was difficult to guess the authenticity of the information as I mostly relied on the parents' attitude towards their children but not the children's point of view of how they perceive their parents' upbringing and attitude towards them. Parents also seemed very strategic in responding to some of my questions. For instance, on being asked questions like what were the decisive factors that led to selection of streams/subject for their son and daughter, parents in the families with one son and one daughter or more than two children gave a 'constructed' answer taking care in not disclosing their preferential attitude towards their son over the daughter. I noticed a tendency among the parents to choose "soft" subjects (meaning social science and literature) for their daughters, driven largely by marriage concerns. Keeping in line with research ethic I recorded their responses undistorted despite having doubts about the truthfulness of some of the information.