

GENDER IMBALANCE IN INDIA: SEX SELECTIVE ABORTIONS AND FEMALE DISCRIMINATION

Madan Mohan Laddunuri*

Abstract

India a diversifying country facing huge gender decline from past decades, especially women. India is one of the countries across the world which has the lowest and the declining gender ratio. It is 940 women against 1,000 men as per 2011 census. The total population of India crossed 1210 millions and male population 624 million while female, 586 million population. The shortfalls of women are 38 millions and it is considered huge gender gap. This trend shows the seriousness of the matter and it has rung alarm bells across the country in spite of higher levels of literacy and economic development. It is found that sex ratio has improved from 933 to 940 during the decade 2001-2011 for total population in national level while decreased the sex ratio from 927 to 914 for 0-6 age group child population. It is identified with continuance of female foeticide, infanticide as a result of inadequate nutrition, health care and neglect, female discrimination, high maternal and female mortality persists in India and worsen the sex ratio. The measures must be taken to improve the sex ratio by enacting and implementing strict laws to avoid the sex determination of the foetus and additionally to bring changes the mind-set constructed by the patriarchal values.

Keywords: Sex Ratio, Sex Selective abortions, Female discrimination, Low status of women

* · **University of Gondar, Gondar, Ethiopia**

Introduction

Sex ratio defined as the ratio of men to women in a population, and expressed as the number of males per either 100 females or in a case of India, 1000, females (Unicef ,2011).The natural “sex ratio at the time of birth” is 105.This means at birth, there are 105 baby boys for every 100 baby girls. Nature provides that baby boys a little high in number as compared to baby girls because men have a higher risk at dying than women. It happens since birth to death but more in early childhood days (Gompertz law of mortality).There are many countries have sex ratios at birth higher than 105. Whenever sex ratio exceeds 105, the ratio is not “natural” any more. Societies with a dominating preference for baby boys tend to interfere in nature and decrease the number of born baby girls by sex-selective abortion and infanticide(Gender Debate ,2012). Worldwide, there are 107 boy babies born for every 100 girl babies(livescience,2011). In a case of India, more than 112 boys are born to 100 girls, mainly due to the sex selective abortions combination with preference for Son (The Hindu, May 24, 2011).There is approximately 100 million women missing, since 1990 to present day and due to the male/son preference and resulting sex selection at birth, and the maltreatment of young girls remains a major concern, particularly in parts of Asia (Anderson & Ray 2010).

This gender imbalance has serious negative consequences for all of society in the long run and Sex ratio is one of the important index to understand women’s health and social status in any society. In India, Skewed sex ratio existed in spite of steady economic growth over the past decade and government legislating against sex selective abortion (The Hindu, March 21,2012). The present paper has been undertaken with the following specific objectives to study

- 1.To analyse Indian sex ratio by comparing with different regions/countries of the world
- 2.To find out the changing patterns of population sex ratio during 2001-2011.
- 3.To study sex ratio in total population and age group of 0-6 years in different Indian states and union territories.
4. To examine sex ratio disparities between rural and urban India

Results

India is one of the countries across the world which has the lowest and the declining gender ratio. It is 940 women against 1,000 men as per 2011 census. When it compared with the global sex ratio and the sex ratios of other countries/continents, particularly the Asian countries, it is one of the lowest (Table 1).

India's gender ratio adverse to women and it every time declines with some fluctuation since right from the beginning of census operations 1901 to 1991. But one good sign is since 1991 to 2011, there is a gradual improvement in sex ratio from 927 to 940 but that is not enough to get equal sex ratio (Table 2).

It is clear from census of 2011, total population of India crossed 1210 millions and male population 624 million while female, 586 million population. The shortfall of women are 38 millions and it is consider as huge gender gap. This trend shows the seriousness of the matter and it has rung alarm bells across the country. (Table 3).

The census data indicate sex ratio phenomena in different states/union territories of India. The lowest sex ratio prevailed in Haryana state as 877 women per 1000 men and the highest in Kerala, 1,084 and in union territories Daman & Diu is lowest and Pondicherry is highest, 618 and 1031 respectively. It is found that sex ratio has improved from 933 to 940 during the decade 2001-2011 for total population in national level while decreased the sex ratio from 927 to 914 for 0-6 age group child population. The overall sex ratios in most of Indian states and union territory found improvement during the decade 2001-2011 for total population but the child sex ratio, the age-group 0-6 years has consistently declined almost in every state and even union territory (Table 4).

It is observed from the census of India 2011 that the overall sex ratio in India 940 women per 1000 men. There is a wide variation between rural and urban areas of India. Sex ratio 947 women per 1000 men in rural areas, it is slightly above the national average while in urban areas sex ratio is 926 women per 1000 men which is less than national average. But the issue of child-sex ratio, which is at 902 in urban areas while 919 in rural areas. (Table 5).

Discussion

Gender Gap in India

Overall sex ratio 940 men against 1,000 men while child sex ratio 914 girl children per 1000 male children as per 2011 census which is one of the lowest among the countries across the world. Gender ratio consistently declines with some fluctuation during the successive censuses since 1901 to 2011. It is evident from census of India 2011, the total population of India crossed 1210 millions and male population 624 million while female, 586 million population. The shortfall of women is 38 millions and it is considered as huge gender gap. This trend shows the seriousness of the matter and it has rung alarm bells across the country in spite of higher levels of literacy and economic development, in addition to adoption of family planning measures.

Sex-selective abortions and female discrimination

Sex selective abortions have increased significantly, especially in present days even though sex determination considered illegal in India. In developed countries, the sex ratios does not vary as they do in India and do not display any form of sex preferences for infants (Jha et.al., 2011). If first-born is male child there is no discrimination on the next child, and in that case, the gender ratio is 959 female children (0-6 years) per 1,000 male children, but when the first born is female child, then there is a discrimination on second female birth for a want of a male child, and in that case, the gender ratio declines to 542 female children to 1000 male children. When first-born and second born are female, the ratio is shockingly goes down as low as 219 female babies per 1,000 male babies. The reason beyond is still, Parents giving importance for the patriarchal values of gender preference and internalizing the traditional values (The Times of India, 16 July 2005). Similar study shows clearly the situation of sex selective abortions and that the sex ratio is 759 girls per 1,000 boys if the first child is a female whereas the first is a boy, the sex ratio goes up to 1103 girls per 1,000 boys (Aparna M, 2012).

If among the children, there is no male child, the family becomes restless and violent. The occurrence of sex selective abortion, female child abuse, female infanticide, marital discord and mistreatment of women happens in family (Nongbri ,1995; Buch ,1997). A wife may face violence and humiliation from her husband and in-laws if she cannot have a son. This has

negative implications on women's physical and mental health and results in the neglect of female infants (Sen, 2003). Typically, boys are breastfed longer than girls in most of the states of India. Vaccination rates are much lower among girls than boys and girls more malnourished than boys (National Family Health Survey, 3). The persistence of lower level of food intake and health care services among female children. Such a gender-based unfairness put them acute physical deficiency among female children and causing much deaths of female children in the age group 0-6 years. Post-neonatal mortality among female babies is 13 per cent higher than male babies due to gender basis nutritional and other forms of neglect (UNCEF, 2011). The United Nations Children's Fund reports that 8 out of 10 pregnant women suffer from anemia in India. The maternal mortality rate among them is the highest in the South Asian region. India's maternal mortality rate is about 212 per lakh live births (Registrar General, India, 2011).

In contrast of cultural point of view, sons carry family names and perform the funeral rituals of their parents (Das Gupta, 2003). Dowry payments impose heavy financial strain on bride families and lose their entire life savings to meet the financial demands of the groom's family (Kishor, 1995).

Wide Sex ratio disparity among rural and urban areas of India

The present paper established wide sex ratio difference between Rural and urban areas of India according to 2011 census. The overall sex ratio 947 women per 1000 men in rural areas which was above the national average while in urban areas sex ratio is 926 women per 1000 men, it was found less than national average. But the issue of child-sex ratio, which is at 902 in urban areas while 919 in rural areas.

The lower sex ratio of urban areas, in general, is mainly attributed to the fact that opportunities for female employment in Indian towns and cities are very low and the cost of living in urban areas is much higher than rural areas. Faced with these handicaps, the working male members usually decide to leave their families in their villages, while they go to the cities for work themselves or sex selective migration is high (Sneh S & Singh R. 2003).

Readily accessible to sex determination scanners have fuelled the problem of a lower child sex ratio in urban areas. In sum urbanisation means greater economic and, social progress but reverse to gender based attitudes in India (Singh M P, 2011).

Regional variation between south and north

The low sex ratios prevailed in most of the north Indian states while high sex ratios in all south Indian states. North Indian kinship system based on village exogamy led to lower autonomy of women contributed to higher childhood female mortality and lower sex ratios by contrast, the southern kinship system based on increased the autonomy of women and contributed to sex ratios which favoured women rather than men (Dyson and Moore ,1987)

Regional differences in family and kinship institutions were the most important factor. The sex ratio was lowest in the North where the kinship system provided the least autonomy of women, moderate in the East where the northern kinship was slightly modified, and was the highest in the South where the women's autonomy strongest(Aparna M ,2012).

Conclusion

Children considered the future of any society, but prejudices and discrimination in the form of traditions, customs and approach towards female children can lead to out number of female in India. There are several factors responsible for the prevalence of one of the lowest sex ratio in India such as continuance of female foeticide, infanticide, female discrimination, high maternal and female mortality and sociocultural practices like dowry, low status of women, discrimination against the girl child and neglect of the girl child resulting in higher mortality at younger age. And these bad practices are not good sign for such a fastest growing economy in the world and creates various social problems in long run. The measures must be taken to improve the sex ratio by enacting and implementing strict laws to avoiding the sex determination of the foetus and additionally to bring changes the mind set constructed by the patriarchal values.

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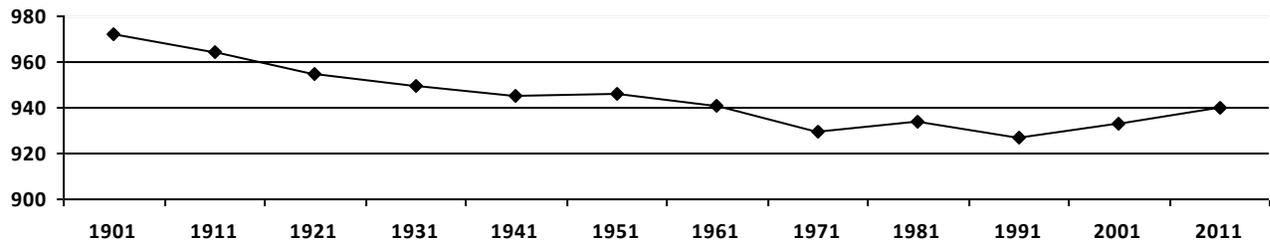
Tables

Table 1 .Sex ratio in selected countries/continents worldwide in 2011

Name of the country	Sex-Ratio (no of females per 1,000 males)
World	984
Europe & North America	1050
Latin America	1000
Caribbean	1030
Sub Saharan	1020
South East Asia	1000
Central Asia	1020
South Asia	950
China	920
India	940

Source: World Population Prospects, United Nations2011

Fig 1. Sex ratio trends in India since 1901 to 2011



Source: Census of India, 2011

Table-2, Distribution of population by sex

Total population of India	1210 millions
Male	624 millions
Female	586 millions
Shortfall of Women	38 millions
Sex ratio (no. of women per 1000 men)	940

Source: Census of India , 2011

Table 3. Scenario of sex ratio in total population and in the age-group of 0-6 (Highest and lowest states/union territories of Indian) since 2001-2011

Indian states/union territory	Sex Ratio for Total population		Sex ratio in the age- group 0-6	
	Year 2001	2011	2001	2011
INDIA	933	940	927	914
South India				
Kerala(Highest)	1,058	1,084	960	959
Tamil Nadu	986	995	942	946
North India				
Uttar Pradesh	898	908	916	899

Punjab	874	893	798	846
Jammu & Kashmir	892	883	941	859
Haryana(Lowest)	861	877	819	830
Puducherry	990	1,031	967	965
Delhi	821	866	868	866
Chandigarh	773	818	845	867
Daman & Diu	709	618	926	909

Source: Census of India, 2001,&2011

Table -4, Sex Ratio in rural /urban areas of India

Area	Sex Ratio	Child sex ratio
India	940	914
Rural	947	919
Urban	926	902

Source: Census of India , 2011