

The Gravity of Sex Ratio: Status of Women and Trends in Identification, Resolution of Falling Numbers

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Abstract: The present research is an attempt to study the perception and beliefs regarding female foeticide in Jammu and Kashmir. It is a well-established fact that the status of girl in a society can be resolved by various factors that have a direct or indirect approach towards education, health, economic role, presence in professions and management as well as the decision making power within the family. The influence can be clearly read by certain beliefs and values governing a society. The paper is thus an attempt to solve the ongoing focus on female foeticide as the cause of the adverse sex ratio, amounts to revitalising the issue. The need is to counter male child preference, introduce role fluidity and provide sensitisation to the gender system and visibility to atrocities. The sex ratio is a composite indicator of women's status. It reveals the number of females per thousand males. The natural sex ratio is favourable to the female yet in the developing countries it is adversely represented. According to 2001 census, sex ratio was 941/1000 males in Jammu and Kashmir and according to census 2011, sex ratio is 859/1000 females in Jammu and Kashmir. India's sex ratio throughout the 20th century and in the 21st century reflects a masculine sex ratio. A whole range of discriminatory practices including female foeticide, female infanticide, female genital mutilation, early marriage and dowry have curbed the society at a large level.

The paper thus focuses on trend setting and examines the possible cause of such decline and thus finding the solution to this alarming problem.

Keywords: Female foeticide, female foeticide in Jammu and Kashmir, sex ratio

I. INTRODUCTION:

Gender

Gender is not something we are born with, and not something we have, but something we do (West and Zimmerman 1987) – something we perform (Butler 1990).

Gender is something that holds a huge categorising factor based on collaboration equaling the primal influences in the social constructs. Normally has a stature that leans over on the biological sex and the exaggerated biological differences which is simply a negative approach in its domain and the value.

Anne Fausto-Sterling (2000) sums up the situation as follows:

“Labelling someone a man or a woman is a social decision. We may use scientific knowledge to help us make the decision, but only our beliefs about gender – not science – can define our sex. Furthermore, our beliefs about gender affect what kinds of knowledge scientists produce about sex in the first place. (p. 3)”

Based on the same set of values, gender identity comes in as a person who has belonging or nature or submissive approach towards being a member of a particular gender. And the biological drama on which the term is entirely based on revolves with the advancement in the characteristics of an individual whether the person is born male or female. The simple identification reveals the inward approach towards the possible identities which more or less include, a-gender, gender-fluid, gender-queer, two spirit, androgynous and many others.

Sex Ratio

The measuring values of such data has always built into the interests within the sexes and that the study of the same data has always propelled the subject to a further showcase of understanding it as a whole. The only thing that excoriates the human mind is that the equality and the relationship with regard to the problem in sex determination and sex mortality. It is also understood that sex ratio is enriched by the substantial evidences based on determination and mortality. And the fact that it never remains constant whilst it always changes with the passing years and periods of time.

The most important thing to note here is the elucidation of the problem regarding the decline of such ratio due to the course of time and the reasons behind such declination.

However the most common method in use for representing the average sex-ratio is to determine a number which indicates the proportion of males to every hundred females. Unless otherwise stated, this is the method herein used.

In 1889 Geddes and Thomson in their book on the "Evolution of Sex" stated that "Nutrition is one of the most important factors in determining sex" (p. 47).

Primarily, the sex ratio is affected by trends infertility, mortality and sex ratio at birth (Malhotra & Kant 2006). Usually the sex ratio at birth is 934-961 female births per 1000 male births (104-107) male births per 100 female births) (Ganatra 2008).

While it is not fair to single out India—these sex ratio in China is just as low, and Pakistan has been reported as having the lowest of all (only about 900 women for every 1000 men)

Even more distressing, the sex ratio in India has worsened over the course of the 20th century. In 1901, the ratio was 972 females for every 1000 males; by 1991 it had fallen to 929.9.

There are various reasons that has put the face of such shameful ratio on the top of every database available.

Mayer suggests that the decline is due to sex biases in the demographic transition; that is, as overall health and nutrition improves, it does so at a greater rate for men than for women. As a consequence, the female-to-male ratio falls as mortality rates for both men and women decreased differentially.

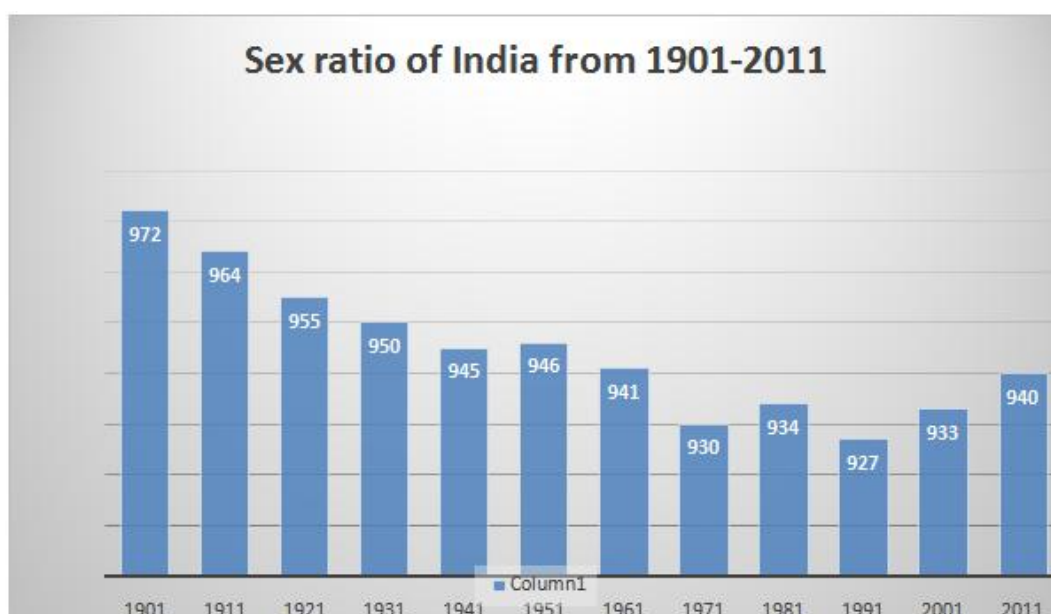
II. SEX RATIO IN INDIA

A Case of Female Foeticide underlines the need for a holistic intervention to ensure that a girl child not only gets the right to birth, but also the right to a dignified life. This is pertinent as down the decades the female has been denied the right to life through female infanticide, cultural neglect and blatant use of violence.

The ratio in which the overall trends in sex and the change in patterns is revealed is under the number involving the females per thousand males. In such case scenario, it might be observed that although the natural sex ratio seems to be favourable to females yet in some of the developing countries, it is not at all represented very well. In all but a few countries of the world, there are typically 105 women for every 100 men.

As such, at birth, boys outnumber girls by about the same proportion, studies have shown that where men and women have access to equal care, nutrition, health and medical attention, women, due to their biologically determined stronger constitution, live longer than men, and, therefore, outnumber them.

India's sex ratio throughout the 20th century and in the 21st century reflects a masculine sex ratio. Infact, one that has declined from the natural sex ratio where females outnumber males. In 1901, India's sex ratio was 972, deficit in the number of females to proclaim intrusion of social factors in its disruption. The sex ratio declines steadily in the years 1901 to 1971 (with a negligible increase in 1951) to improve marginally to 934 and has hovered around 930. In 2001, it stands at 933 to affirm the presence of unfavourable conditions for women's survival.



The state of Jammu and Kashmir

The population of India has always been a terminology and a succession of knowledge and understanding to review the change in patterns and composition as well as values or the past many years. There is a certain emancipated belief that the unusual element of masculine composition over the female has always taken its side in the population strata. Such higher and alarming mortality of females over males has been an alarming thing to note through years.

Since the onset of technological driven era, the greater number of sex selective practices has been widely observed and such availability of various technological advancing instruments and knowledge has propelled the problem further to its extreme course. This young and stupid masculinity and the epic rise in the parabolic end has taken its charts off the level.

The same can be equally observed by witnessing the sex selective abortion practices which are easily observed and the medical termination of pregnancy are still on the rise.

However, till, 2011, the practice of sex-selective abortions in Kashmir Valley was unknown and even during third phase of DLHS, very few women reported knowledge of sex detection technologies, but the results of 2011 Census unnerved every conscious citizen of the State. As per Census-2011, the child sex ratio (CSR) in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) has drastically come down to 859 as against 914 at the all India level and only two states namely Punjab and Haryana have lower child sex ratio than J&K. What is more disturbing is the revelation that J&K has recorded a decline of 82 points in its sex ratio which is the highest decline among all the states in the country. The most alarming situation is from Kashmir Valley which has recorded a decline of 135 points in comparison to 41 points in Jammu Region. In 2001, there were a total of 12 districts in India which had a child sex ratio of more than 1000; and four of these districts namely Kupwara, Anantnag, Pulwama and Budgam were from J&K and in 2011, the same four districts have recorded a child sex ratio of less than 850. The results in the change in such patterns of census 2011 has thrown the extreme level of humiliation on the members of civil society and on the government as well.

But more likely, Kashmir has always remained under the banner of suspicion and it was not seen that the numbers in the census were not at all taken into account and that the validity and the credibility on these surveys was demanded. Moreover, NHRM started its own mission in educating people about the alarming rate of such figures and that how female foeticide is curbing inside our societies. Soon a common man started to believe that the sharp decline in female sex ratio in Kashmir is a reality and is the result of rapid spread of the use of ultrasound and amniocentesis for sex determination followed by sex selective abortion.

If we look at the census report of Jammu and Kashmir regarding the sex ratio, following points are easily devised from it:

Sex ratio changing all these years in India and the state of Jammu and Kashmir

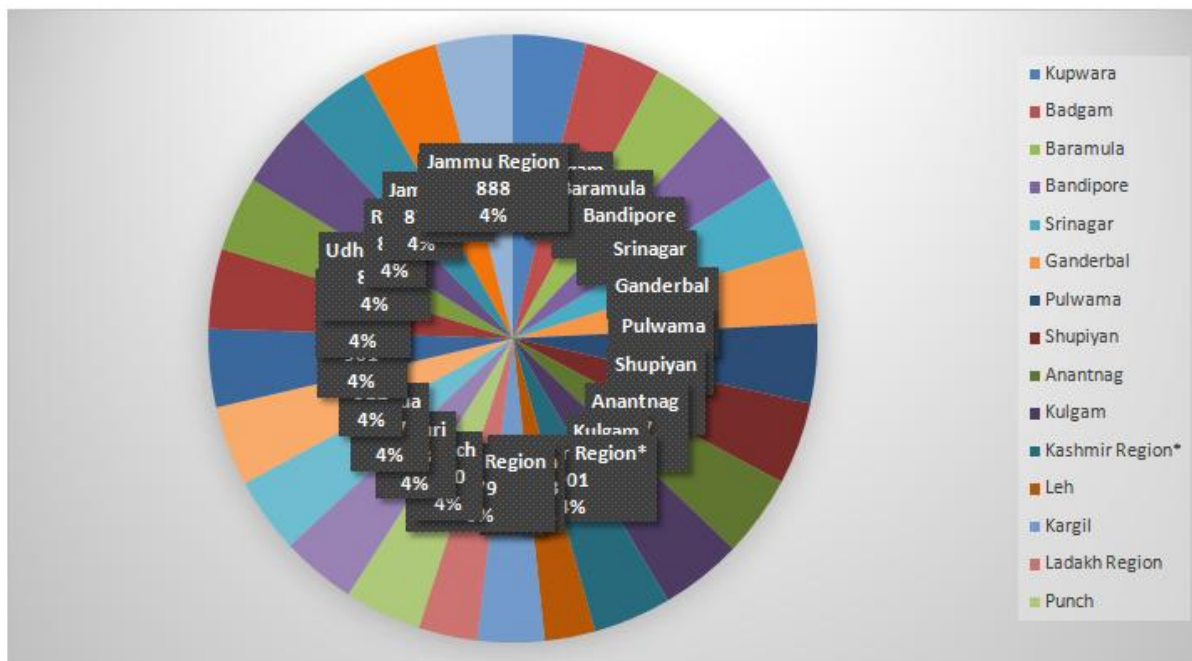
Year	1951	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001	2011
India	946	941	930	934	927	933	940
Jammu and Kashmir	873	878	878	892	892	892	883

Source: Census of India 1951, 1961, 1971, 1981, 1991,2001 and 2011

It can be ascertained from this table the sex ratio that has been changing through the years which is given in terms of Jammu and Kashmir to India in general. The alarming decline can be easily pointed out as in Jammu and Kashmir is 883 which is lower than the sex ratio at national level, i.e. 940 by 57 females per thousand males.

The sex ratio also reveals that from 1951 onwards the ratio has no longer gone up and shown any rise whatsoever but has drastically declined. In Jammu and Kashmir, its first upward trajectory is from 873 in 1951 to 892 in 1981 and later a decline from 892 in 1981 to 883 in 2011.

Table: Sex ratios and decadal change in overall sex ratios in various districts across Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh



The distribution pattern and trend in sex ratio in Jammu and Kashmir at the district level across both the census years, i.e., 2001 and 2011 is given in Figures 2 and 3. To make the picture more comprehensible, OSR (overall sexratio) is subdivided into five categories: (1) >800=very low, (2) 800-849 = low, (3) 850-899 = medium, (4) 900- 949 = high, (5) <950 = very high. In 2001 Census, there was no district reporting sex ratio very low or very high whereas in 2011 Census, there are on the one hand two districts namely Leh and Kargil falling in very low category. On the other hand, there are two districts namely Shupian and Kulgam which were successful in minimizing the gap in number of males and females and the sex ratio in these two districts is now above the national average of 940. In the category of low, Kupwara has replaced Leh, Kargil, Srinagar and Udhampur whereas in the medium category, Bandipora and Ramban are replaced by Baramulla, Udhampur, Ganderbal, Kathua, Srinagar, Badgam and Punch. In the category of high, Baramulla, Badgam, Ganderbal, Punch, Kupwara, Shupian and Kulgam are substituted by Ramban and Bandipora. It is surprising to note that among the eight newly carved districts, six have shown sex ratio in favour of females, in spite of the fact that literacy rate in these districts is lagging behind those districts which have reported high literacy rate but male biased sex ratio.

III. LITERACY

According to the 2001 census, 54.46 per cent of the population is literate in Jammu and Kashmir. The national literacy rate for the same period is 65.38 per cent. Jammu and Kashmir ranks thirty-three among the states and UTs of India, and is followed only by Jharkhand (54.13 per cent) and Bihar (47.53 per cent). Below table shows the changing pattern of literacy in Jammu and Kashmir since 1981.

Literacy Rate in Jammu and Kashmir

Total/Rural/Urban	Persons		Males	Females	
	1981	2001	1981	2001	1981
2001					
Total	30.64	54.46	41.46	65.75	18.37
Rural	25.01	48.22	36.35	60.34	12.19
Urban	51.12	72.17	59.87	80.30	41.05

Source: Census of India, 2001, Jammu & Kashmir.

CAUSES OF DECLINE IN SEX RATIO

This has certain reasons being which has either favoured or disoriented itself on the sex determination and the impact study on it. The first among the few causes are:

MALE DETERMINED PREGNANCY AT THE COST OF MATERNAL HEALTH

The practice of male child preference can further be gauged from the distortions in birth order, higher girl child mortality, and stated preference for male child as also the justifications and legitimacy accorded to male child preference.

Manifestations of the male child preference can also be captured through the cultural neglect that the girls face, resulting in higher mortality of the female child even though biologically the female body has higher survival capability than that of the male.

According to authors such as Mutharayappa et. al., 1997, Arnold et. al., 1998, Vlassoff, 1990,

Male child preference is mainly due to economic, social and religious utility of sons. This preference is strong in northern and Central Indian states, including Haryana and Punjab. The birth of a male child is recognised in his patriarchal roles of a relevant source of financial dependence, provider of the family lineage, protector of the family and its status. Besides these overriding ideological concerns, other situation-specific demands reinforce the male child hegemony in the family. Prior to birth, the mother is roused to the need for providing a male child through the pressure of older women in her immediate environs. The mother-in-law cautions her regarding the continuity of the family lineage. Older women bless her to be the mother of 100 sons. Neighbours suggest rituals and medicines to ensure the birth of a male child. She is pressurised to produce a male child with talk that the first child of her sister-in-law was male. Recurrent taunts, incentives and hopes surrounding the bride produce an anxiety that she should meet the expectations and avoid the tensions of not producing a male child.

STRATEGIES TO COMBAT FEMALE FOETICIDE

1. LEGAL

- Need to review the existing laws on pre-natal diagnostic techniques which can easily ascertain the presence of sex selection technique also
- It is also important to identify and target the clinic and its related organisations that are responsible to spread awareness regarding sex selection techniques for having male child, including community guarding forces.
- there should be a strong enforcement of the ban on sex determination techniques through community policing and discussions.
- it is an urgent requirement to spread legal literacy regarding women's rights, and the crimes as well as insecure obstructions associated with the same.
- there is a need to build pressure for legal reformation which can work in the areas of gender violence including domestic violence, rape and honour killing that can then be legally addressed.
- A state regulation to discourage lavish parties such as the birth of male child should also be banned.

2. AWARENESS CAMPAIGN

- It is important to provide information regarding the extent of female foeticide and infanticide which are thought to be brutal acts no longer practiced.
- also, to raise concerns regarding the control and change in falling sex ratio in the area, especially its repercussions on gender and their plight and remedy of the same.
- there should be an awareness campaign that would strongly condemn the practice of male child preference as a form of gender abuse. This can further dissolve the need to visit deras, pirs, temples, gurudwaras for begetting a male child is not different visiting sex detection clinics.
- also, some awareness regarding government schemes and NGO initiatives to promote the status of the girl child should be given a prime importance.
- the only way to make it possible is to spread awareness that recurring abortions are harmful to maternal health and that it can affect women physically as well as mentally.
- there should be regular launching campaigns which can work in collaboration with religious organisations to advocate the women's control over their bodies in terms of reproduction and sexuality. This can easily enhance and change the existing perceptions about women in general.
- also, the need to encourage the community to celebrate customs, rituals and practices of all life stages without differentiating between males and females can also bring the status of women on the map.
- The campaigns can help in spreading the awareness that a small family need not only include male children irrespective of sex selection and that a girl child is equally relating to the problem in the society.
- the practice to encourage the clergy to denounce mannats and blessings only for male children at Dargahs and Deras should also be prioritized.

- It is important to create awareness regarding gender discriminating norms and their impact on men and women.
- also, it can benefit in undermining hierarchical and hegemonic relationship between the bride's family and that of the groom.

3. SENSITISATION

- Sensitise grassroot organizations, especially panchayats and mahilamandals to gender issues. This should include;
- Questioning the validity of male child preference in families.
- the impact and the change in patterns of Targeting the dowry system rather than only dowry harassment and dowry deaths in the state.
- It can help in promoting the value of women as dynamic workers
- Promoting the principles of social policing and social fencing within the community to act as an instrument to curtail female foeticide and infanticide
- Form community patrols to check clinics and health workers from performing female foeticide.
- Challenging exhibition of dowry, celebrations for the birth of a male child as a status symbol
- Undermine the legitimacy of male child preference.

4. INITIATIVES FOR CAPACITY BUILDING

- Equipping women with productive skills
- Initiate informed decision-making in families and in the community to promote democratic relationships.
- Establishing a network with grass root organisations, line departments and the community.
- Developing skills of communication and decision-making in the community and among the women in particular.
- Providing infrastructure and community mobilisation on gender and empowerment issues.

BACKGROUND TO COMBAT FEMALE FOETICIDE

EMINENCE TO GENDER VIOLENCE

There is also a desire to create and sensitize the issues that create gender justice and understanding as well as development of the same. This sensitization has many factors that address all forms and existences of various elements in patriarchy and other atrocities done on women as a means of social injustice. There are many factors that make the values in patriarchy less concerned and imagined to which can be clearly interpreted through the male child preferential accounts which exists but still is not perceived as a social disorder angle.

1. GENDER LABELING

From the same concluding factors, it is quite evident to note that social determination generally implies to the biological existence of a man and a woman. And due to such biological indifferences, work is allocated and distributed along way in between the social and family constructs. In such situations, the role to understand the general stereotyping of female gender in the society can be easily identified.

To focus on female foeticide as the cause of the adverse sex ratio, amounts to trivializing the issue. The need is to counter male child preference, introduce role fluidity, and provide sensitisation to the gender system and visibility to atrocities. The state needs to set up an inter departmental task committee to develop an action plan and evaluation of on-going programme on the basis of the framework of intervention.

IV. CONCLUSION

Gender inequality is a global phenomenon having its offshoots in different spheres of society. It has its reflection in social, economic and political spheres to name a few. India being a primarily an agrarian society with patriarchal social setup is male dominated. Though, India has witnessed structural change in its economic setup yet gender inequality has shown its offshoots in it. Although, at the policy level of the State, gender sensitive issues have been raised with new concepts emerging from reservation of women in political sphere to gender budgeting at the planning level, yet a lot needs to be done.

In the light of the figures revealed by the 2011 Census, which shows the lowest child sex ratio in India, this debate has gained new proportions. This study reconfirms that the skewed sex ratio is the result of the lower proportion of female births. A most evident reflection of gender discrimination can be seen at the alarming decline rate in sex ratio, be it at the national level or to the matter the J&K state.

It is now acknowledged that, although the recorded Indian sex ratio is probably biased to a certain extent by sex-selective under-enumeration, the predominance of males in India's population and the upward trend during the twentieth century are real and reflect the excess mortality of females in the subcontinent (Sudha & Rajan, 2001).

In case of J&K state, as depicted from various surveys, reports and census, gender inequality is clearly a matter of concern. Taking education as a starting point, there is nearly 27% gap between males and females in case of literacy rate. It clearly reflects the attitude of the society towards female education. Although, the literacy rate of education of females has increased from 9.28% to 49.12%, yet it is evident that gender gap has increased from 17.47 to 27.63. One of the greatest concern, so far as gender discrimination is concerned is that of male-female sex ratio. J&K is categorized in those states which have the worst sex ratio. Despite several steps taken state government or non-government organizations, it seems that they have failed to curb this social menace. J&K has shown 82 points decrease in census 2011 to 883. Despite the J&K state has witnessed an emerging trend in its economic sphere, yet the percentage of females as main workers is just 28% and added to it, so far marginal workers of the state is concerned it much higher i.e. 60% to that of females.

In sum up, it can be said that lot of steps at policy level of different organization, be it state or non-state have been taken, but much more is to done, so that we reach to that level where our society will be described as egalitarian.

Further, amendments have also been introduced in the Prenatal Diagnostic Techniques (Regulation and Prevention of Misuse) (PNDT) Act of 1994. This was necessitated as the PNDT Act had failed to curb the practice of testing for sex determination and consequent sex-selective abortion in the country. With the recent amendment to the PNDT Act, preconception and pre-implantation procedures for sex selection are banned in the country. Local authorities have also been given powers to ensure the enforcement of the Act.

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IOSR Journal Of Humanities And Social Science (IOSR-JHSS) is UGC approved Journal with Sl. No. 5070, Journal no. 49323.

Birjais Zahira. "The Gravity of Sex Ratio: Status of Women and Trends in Identification, Resolution of Falling Numbers." *IOSR Journal Of Humanities And Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)* 22.7 (2017): 19-26.