



## **Declining Sex Ratio - Exploring The Intersections Of Patriarchy And Gender As Roots**

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### **Abstract**

The Census 2011 results on the sex composition of the Indian population have so far been discussed within the framework of understanding the reasons prevailing upon behind the declining child sex ratio: the reasons ranged from Dowry, Poverty, the use of prenatal diagnostic techniques [PNDT] followed by sex-selective abortion, neglect of female child, to female infanticide and feticide. This paper attempts to explore the intersections of Patriarchy, Gender inequality and sex selection which in turn influence and contribute to the declining child sex ratio which is highly unfavorable to girl babies and girl fetuses.

**Keywords:** Gender Inequality, Sex selection, Prenatal diagnostic, child sex ratio

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### **1. Introduction**

The human population constituted with male and female in major portions in addition to the transgender, Lesbian, Queer, Bi-sexual etc. Each and every human being has the right to be born, grow and contribute to the social and economic development of a nation. The participation of each gender into the development process requires that no one should be discriminated which is ensured and enshrined in the Indian Constitution. However, there has been conflicts, discrimination, disparities across gender, caste, class, race, region, religion, culture etc. People adapt to the regional, cultural, linguistic, gender, caste, class impositions which further gets developed into culture of one region, or social group. Gender form the basis for all such differences as irrespective of the social group or divisions there has been gender differences observed and experienced. The female gender has been the most vulnerable throughout the life across the various category of analysis. It cuts across class, caste, religion, race, culture etc. Due to continuous conflict of interest between social groups, the desire to accumulate capital, not to part with such capital accumulation, the women get discriminated throughout their life. Since marriages are patri local in the social construction, the women are made to move away from the parents which ultimately poses difficulties for women to claim their equal share and opportunities. Due to unequal distribution of power, ownership and control of resources, and increasingly emphasized gender role of women on reproductive roles, the women experience subordination and subjugation right from womb to tomb. This is well articulated by several studies and evidenced through the continuous declining sex ratio registered in Indian Census since 1961. The magnitude of declining sex ratio among the children,

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[Juvenile Sex Ratio or Child Sex ratio] has been more than the Adult Sex Ratio. The declining sex ratio has the vicious cycle of relationship. The girl babies are not encouraged to be born as the girls are perceived as burdensome, and quite difficult to keep them safe and face some form of violence or the other throughout their life. More than the above reason, the technology plays a dominant role in contributing to the poor sex ratio. The technological innovation does not always be supportive to women be it Assisted Reproductive Technologies or food processing technology in the agricultural field. The technology has been male centric in nature and often facilitates the men to survive better rendering the girls and women at disadvantageous. Patriarchy, cultural norms, and social construction and gender role expectations play a vital role and intersect each other in determining the status of women and girls in the society. It is in this background the present study has been attempted to analyse the intersections of patriarchy and gender on the declining sex ratio in India.

## 2. Objectives

To analyse the trend in the sex ratio as presented in the Indian Census since 1961, identify the root cause for the declining sex ratio and explore the interconnections, intersections and linkages of patriarchal norms, gender construction and variation in sex ratio and offer recommendations to prevent female feticide which get further extended to other forms of violence against women and girls.

## 3. Methodology

The study has primarily based on the secondary data collected from Census reports of 1961- 2011. The male female sex ratio, the differences across decades were analysed and inferences have been drawn.

The declining child sex ratio is the most disturbing issue in the context of human capital formation in India. As per the Census of India, child sex ratio (0-6 years) have been observed to have continuously and steadily declining with a record of 971,945, 927, and 914 for 1981, 1991, 2001 and 2011 respectively. It is unfavorable to female sex ratio. The steady and continuous declining sex ratio of baby girls indicate that the girls are not wanted as they are considered as a expensive, unsafe, burdensome and cannot constitute as heirs of the family and therefore cannot take forward the family name. Each girl baby is significant to the society given the kind of contribution to the pro creation and social and public participation. Several women who proved and excelled in various fields had they not been given the opportunity and forced to get killed in the fetus, the country would not have blessed with their contributions as leaders and great thinkers. Hence it is high time that their participation and contribution is well recognized and the State put an end to the declining sex ratio by various means. The civil society plays a significant role to play in arresting and combating such an extreme form of violence where the baby girl is denied with the right to be born.

**Table 1: Sex Ratio in India, 1901 to 2011**

Year	No. of Women per 1000 Men	Decadal Variation
1901	972	
1911	964	-8
1921	955	-11
1931	950	-5
1941	945	-5
1951	946	-5
1961	941	-5
1971	930	-11
1981	934	+4
1991	927	-7
2001	933	+6
2011	940	+7

Source: Census of India, 2011

The authenticated data in table -1 evidenced and established the factual trend that there has been a steady decline in sex ratio which is unfavorable to women. It is often underlined that poverty, dowry,

advent technological development such as Sex determination tests, sex pre-selection, scientific techniques like amniocentesis, ultra sound Scan, chronic villi biopsy, sex selection with chromosomes scanning X-Y separation with Pre-implantation Genetic Diagnosis(PGD) practice etc are reasons for declining sex ratio. However, gender role expectations, and gender constructions have been the predominate factors which influence the trend that leads to widespread practice across various caste, class, religion and geographic region etc. If gender as a Social category of analysis is taken, then the gender norms and ideals play the crucial role in influencing the rights of women and girls personally, structurally and ideologically in the society. The gender-based norms determine the power and privileges between the sexes. Such unequal power relations get further extended its control to all the private and public spheres of society with codified values, norms, conditions and practices through the constructed feminine and masculine ideologies. These internalized gendered ideologies, divisions, roles, responsibilities have made the society to function and act with 'double standards' which gets everything perceived with Patriarchal/Androcentric vs Misogyny perspectives. Such double standard notions often end up the human to behave in a hypocritical and unethical manner. Double standard gender construction is the important cause for all forms of violence and discriminations against women and female children. In the Indian context, of all the various forms of violence that have been prevailing upon and experienced as gender-based violence, the declining child sex ratio i.e., female feticide is the worst form of violence which directly contributes to genocide. Such crimes against women happen widely due to aversion towards of either female children or preference for sons. Will the society be peaceful and calm with the so called "Maintaining Culture and Values and Family Name and Fame" imposed by patriarchy and feudalism, in the absence of sufficient number of girls not available for eligible male to be married off? Would it push to further human trafficking, flesh trade, female sex work and ultimately contribute to increasing crimes against women and further question the very birth of the female child? Would such issues lead to emergence of sex trade, men increasingly seeking to sex workers due to non-availability of suitable eligible aged girls, will such gender imbalance in sex ratio promote child or early marriages for want of safety and rendering women still vulnerable in terms of increasing MMR, IMR etc, and above all, Would such gender balance resulting in men seeking to sex workers leave the society with dwindling family system? These are the primary questions to be answered while studying on the declining sex ratio. Such questions have been well articulated in various studies but they have not been much analysed with the gender perspective with the implications on social gender imbalance and possible loss that 'missing girls' be contributing. More so, the studies have not focused on the biologically deterministic attitude and patriarchal or androcentric perspective which is all along encouraging and entertaining to the declining sex ratio. In order to partially answer such questions, the present paper analyses the declining sex ratio and its impact on the society.

#### **4. Gender as a Social Construct**

Gender is defined as a social construct where the society has created a divide between men and women, say masculine and feminine tasks, roles, expectations, behavior, attitude, perceptions, etc. As Social Gender Learning Theory advocates, it is bounded and governed by the society and any deviant is penalized and punished and those who adhere strictly to such constructed values and norms are appreciated and rewarded. As West and Zimmerman [1987] put it, "gender is a social construct which differentiates the roles, responsibilities and rights of women and men. Gender is an accomplishment of society, which relates to conception of appropriate attitudes and activities for particular sex categories. It is not simply individual quality however it is consummated in relations with social members. The members of the society continuously characterize the activities to individuals and that can be defined by their behaviours as "womanly" or manly" (qualities like motherhood, nurturance and caring) also place them in a social framework (John Heritage 1984). Gender is clearly more than a role or an individual characteristic; it is a mechanism whereby situated social action contributes to the reproduction of social structure (West&Fenstermaker 1993). Through formulation of social structures or institutions, gender produces and maintains power and inequality in society. Race, class and gender as socially structured "matrix of domination" (Patricia Hill Collins, 1990, 1998, 2004). Gender makes an individual to believe its various social constructions for a variety of reasons to their social identity and recognitions and successful social relations require all the interactions of participants to present, monitor and interpret gender displays (Martin 1998; West and Zimmerman 1987). According to Lorber, "no social place for a

person who is neither woman nor man” (1994, 96), which means nobody knows how to interact with such a person without any gender identity like sir/madam. As Weston observed, “Gendered traits are called attributes for a reason; people attribute traits to others. No one possesses them; traits are the product of evaluations” (1996).

In most of the society, people follow the gendered traits and qualities to present them as socially accepted perfect individuals through their sex, class, caste, and cultural identity. With this perspective Butler emphasized, gender is performance “a stylized repetition of acts”. Gender display refers to “conventionalised portrayals” of social correlates of gender (Goffman,1976). This gender portrayal are culturally recognized sets of behaviours, appearances, mannerisms and also refers to norms, values, customs and practices; that are acquired and transferred to social systems(Kamala Bhasin,2004). Feminist Indian Historian Uma Chakaravarty (1993) argues that gender class and caste are interlinked; also the caste patriarchy has its relationship with other social structures which are operating the order of society. Caste is a strong force which acts more than patriarchy and capitalism in maintaining the set socio cultural norms. The inter-caste marriages, the kind of fatal end of the guy at Dharmapuri in Tamil Nadu stands as supportive evidences to caste patriarchy and caste violence.

Having said that in the Indian context, gender roles and identities emerge from the caste structured society it is to be analysed the role of religion in perpetrating violence and addressing the gendered behavior and norms. “ A marked feature of Hindu society is it legal sanction for the extreme expressions of social stratification in which women and lower caste have been subjected to humiliating conditions of existence” (Geetha.V,2002). Periyar argues that Masculine and feminine norms are not given, they were existing only as human norms that are common to both men and women expressed as emotions; masculinity is just an expression of brutal male power which is the hurdle to female freedom (Geetha.V and Rajadurai S.V,1998). All the social institutions and members of the society are expected to practice such culturally gendered rules as norm in their everyday life. If they fail to do, such gendered rules challenge their identity and social status. Gender constructed ideologies subjugate women as oppressed as well as retain them as persons with no control over the resources and involve in decision making. Simultaneously society schools women to do duties, responsibilities assigned to them within the framework of social expectations as mother, wife, daughter and in-laws. For example gender ideals of motherhood and childcare have been assigned, expected and gendered as exclusive responsibilities to women and society and glorify the women for such roles. But it is unfortunate that the same society kills the female baby in the fetus and show and start the discrimination right at the conception. Such practices are often forced to be handled by women and the society blame the women as wrongdoers to all such course of actions in the context of patriarchal family.

## 5. Declining Child Sex Ratio as a Gender Based Violence

The established gender ideals, norms, power relations etc have marginalized women from exercising their rights within the private and public spaces. The gender power relations vary across class, caste, religion, region, race, linguistic and state. Gender unequal status of women has been contributing to the widening gender gap in all spheres of society. Prevailing gender discrimination, secondary status of women is created in the mind of every human being which made the society to perceive girl children as liability, burden and threat to the family. This kind of societal attitude and cultural thinking, lead to son preference and abort the female fetus cutting across, caste, class, rural or urban, educated or less educated, employed or unemployed etc. The so called religion, caste which reinforces the stereotyped behavior and expectations on boys and girls keep non reacting to such violence rather contribute to perpetuate such crimes and violence to persist in the society. Religion and Caste, coupled with capitalist patriarchy have a social responsibility to address such issues rather than helping to sustain them.

**Table 2: Child Sex Ratio in Tamil Nadu**

Year	Child Sex Ratio
1901	1047
1911	1046
1921	1046

1931	1036
1941	1010
1951	999
1961	995
1971	984
1981	974
1991	948
2001	942
2011	946

Source: Census of India, 2011

Table -2 presents the child sex ratio in Tamil Nadu for the period 1901- 2011 almost more than a millienium. It is quite surprising to observe that in the early decades of 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the sex ratio was favouable to girls ranging from 1947 to 1010 during the period. 1901 to 1941. It characterized the pre independence period. However there has been a steady decline in the child sex ratio in Tamil Nadu which is linear and straightforward without any fluctuation since 1951. Such trend indicates the abortion of female fetus which might have been practices in only certain areas and not much reported to others, must have been spread to other areas. Moreover, poor resource base after the British had left India, and innumerable loss to be patched up, identification of new resource base, etc forced the nation to slowly introduce Population Control policy which were very severe fruing 1970s and 1980s which could be observed in the 10 points slide in both the decades as 984, 974 respectively for 1971 and 1981. On the one hand there were several propaganda to save the life of female babies, the cradle baby scheme was introduced, welfare schemes with cash deposits, several girl child protection schemes and above all the implementation of PNDT Act and PCPNDT Act etc were introduced. But the society has already got internalized to the values that girls children are no longer safe in the society, they are not going to serve the parents, the marriages will be expensive, the education of the girls would not bring returns to the parents etc which all had forced the parents to increasingly seek to technologies, methods to find sex of the baby in the female fetus and resorted to sex selective abortions which has given rise to declining sex ratio as evidenced in the table.

The rural and urban distribution of the child sex ratio, revealed that in rural India it was 918 girls per 1000 boys; the data is 904 girls per 1000 boys in urban India. Child Sex Ratio (0-6years) is worse than the sex ratio of total population. Ten million girls are born in India every year and almost 2 million female fetuses are aborted annually after sex determination (Jeeva, Pavalam & Gandhimathi, 2013). Social-economic changes, technology development, education are given as reason for this distorted sex ratio; hatredness towards female child or son preference is prime reason hidden behind this decline in general, particularly gender inequality which further given scope for unequal power relations are the important factors for the declining sex ratio. This trend reflects that the prevalence of robust misogyny in India.

Several researchers argue that gender inequality is institutionalized and structured in the Indian society by patriarchal value based established norms and conditions between the sexes (Baltiwala, 1994; Cain, 1993; Malhotra& Schuler, 2005; Morgan & Niraula, 1995). Besides religion and caste playing a significant role to formulate social and gendered norms, they also influence indirectly misogyny and directly the son preference. The gender stratification has obviously demarcated the roles and responsibilities to men and women through conceptualized ideas of gender division of labour and sex roles divisions. In the process, the rights and freedom of girl children have been sidelines and marginalized.

Denial of equal opportunity and rights to women within the household and in the private space and got extended to public sphere at all levels from birth to death thereby questioning their very existence. Meanwhile the increasing gender-based violence could get strengthened and contributed to the control over the life of women and female children to men. It is necessary to deconstruct the gendered principles of social Institutions to regain the last and dwindling status of women and girl children. Prof .Amirthya Sen in his article “Missing Women”, rightly put it and established statistically the last century that 100 million women have been missing in South Asia due to discrimination leading to women to death

experienced by them in their life cycle. Girls are being denied with their rights right from womb to tomb, which are not actually pronounced explicitly but continues to be practiced in subtle forms. The neglect of girl child in terms of education, health and nutrition, early marriage and repeated pregnancy are taking heavy toll of girls' life; the shortage of girls since 1901 is a result of violence and discrimination against women over the life cycle (Vibhuti Patel, 2013). Particularly the worst sign of continuous declining trend in child sex ratio which is unfavourable to girls coupled with alarming increase in the crimes against women, increasing contributions of Assisted Reproductive Technologies, practicing Sex Pre Selection (PC) Sex Determination (SD) all tend to show and thoroughly establish the determined 'son preference' which is the consequence of and strong manifestation of gender inequality in Indian society.

## **6. Intersections of Patriarchy, Gender inequality, Sex selective Abortions–Declining Sex Ratio**

The structured value based patriarchal institutions are very much in limelight in further perpetuating and sustaining gender inequalities in terms of sanctioning power to individuals and society where they live and culture which they adopt to. Such strong patriarchal ideologies prevalent among the individual get reflected in their attitude, behavior, perceptions and practices. Strong legislations could not prevent or change such attitude but hence the men continue to implement and govern such ideologies – and sometimes encouraged – to abuse women and children without fear of reprisal. The patriarchal power relations play the key role to reassert women's lower status, subordination and power over women by various forms of violence, entrenching the idea that their lives are worth less than men's. As a result, the men are found increasingly in all spheres of life both at the private and public spaces, controlling power, resources and analyze as to how, when and which decisions women can take and not to take.

There are several governing mechanisms adopted by the society. Law and Legislation cannot be the only method to address gender inequalities, discrimination and violence but perhaps it remains as one of the crucial strategies of addressing the oppression and subjugation of women. This institutional nexus of patriarchy results gender inequalities and discrimination at every stage of Women and girls lives, including sex selection before birth, early and forced marriages, as children and adolescents, poor education, health outcomes, systematic denials of basic rights including right to live, sexual and reproductive rights and access to decent and fairly paid labour, a disproportionate burden of unpaid care and domestic work, marginalisation and exclusion in old age. A predominantly patriarchal society which thrived on son preference and had selectively eliminated female infants through a practice of female infanticide, sex selective abortion and sex selections are the worst form of injustice done to the female fetus to grown up women.

Non –preference of daughters or daughter aversion in India is clearly noted in the practice of sex selection. The perception of unwantedness of daughters is due to the fact that they are perceived as liabilities. As per the argued in women's movements in India, the manifestation of sex selection is an extreme form of gender-based discrimination against women and girls where girls are not even being allowed to be born and it is a form of gender violence where through the misuse of reproductive technologies female fetuses are selectively eliminated with grave. Such acts bring devastating consequences for pregnant women's mental and physical health which is often overlooked by the self, members of the family, the functionaries in the Health systems, the State and the Law. Women's ability to control their bodies continues to be restricted, preventing them from making decisions that affect them and their families, stopping them from accessing health services, creating risks to their health and life.

Number of studies have underlined that that girls received less medical care than boys and that health dysfunction was tolerated more in the case of girls than boys - neglect of female children, especially when they fell sick, rather than some phenomenon of hidden female infanticide, that was primarily responsible for the female disadvantage in child survival (Jha et al, 2006). There were evidences that there is sex selective discrimination against girls by birth order. Evidence shows that the practice of sex-selective abortions is more prevalent in urban areas and amongst the well-educated women (Guilmoto (2007). The intersection of patriarchy and gender has strongly been contributing to declining child sex

ratio through control over the women's decision making, freedom, autonomy regarding their reproductive rights and right to live both in intra household and public with structured institutionalized gendered ideas and practices. Moreover, continuous trend of worsening child sex ratio over the period of last three decades has significantly been proving and establishing that gender inequality as primary factor to this genocide than any other socio-economic determinants. The human beings constituted with both men and women. If one gender is absent, others cannot exist. Development and progress in the society will be ideal where no children will be unsafe. Let all actors and stakeholders in the society work towards achieving the goal of gender equality.

## 7. Conclusion

The continuous trend in declining child sex ratio in India significantly from the period of 1991 to 2011 is shows that the rising hatredness of female child and the mind set to better kill the female foetus than allow them to born as unwanted child. Though this trend leads to imbalance society, the purposive elimination of female has been done with help of misusing technology under the mask of poverty, dowry, and liability even there is special legislations under implantation due to the gender insensitivity of the state. Beyond to that the deep-rooted gendered norm and ideals of patriarchal structured social institutions' robust upholding is play important role to perpetuate this kind of genocide. To stop this heinous invisible technological sexist genocide and reconstruct the gender balanced society all stakeholders of the society should come forward to take task of deconstruct the gendered social system and to build platform to gender sensitization within self as well as all spheres of society irrespective of sex, caste, class, creed, gender, ethnicity, religion, cultural and region. Besides, a gender-transformative, gender-inclusive and gender-responsive policy frame guided by principles of gender equality and equity is essential to advance and achieve full potential of all women in all spheres of life, namely, economic, social and political. For this, generation of across-the-board gender-disaggregated data, fair representation of women on all decision making platforms, equitable ownership and control over productive resources and a world free of violence and harassment against girls and women, where justice can be accessed and women claim their dignity, autonomy and bodily integrity, and where prevailing masculinity norms are challenged is sought. If the society and people are not hypocrite how could a girl baby be denied in its very conception and the technology help increasingly contributing such brutal act to get scaled up. It amounts to genocide and femicide where a particular gender which is responsible for very procreation in the society, to contribute to expand the society is being killed which if allowed may lead to extinct like other living species in the planet earth. Such barbaric attitude of human to human killing the female fetus is given up where the youngsters who are forthcoming parents have the significant and proactive role to play. The intervention of the State, Law, Educational institutions, Media, Literature, Market, Women's Organizations, and above all the ever-flowing Assisted New Reproductive technologies, have a significant role to play to arrest the female fetus thereby the declining sex ratio. It must be a collective responsibility of all the players, stakeholders and institutions concerned to address such violence against women in the very conception.

It is often claimed that the family system should be maintained by confining to culture and social norms so that the social values be intact. Such proponents never realize that the unsafe environment caused due to unequal power relationship of domination vs subordination between men and women would eventually contribute to neglect and non-preference of girl child. It is high time that the social norms revert back and work from the bottom to eliminate the perception about girl children which is often not in their favour and recognize girls' rights to live. There need not be any preference for any sex of the child. Let the nature given child irrespective of the sex, is considered and celebrated equally. Celebrate the girl child birth with equal warmth, joy and cheers so that the society would not lose the gender balance.

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