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**Lessons From Census 2011-Exploring The Consequences Of The Lop-
Sided Gender Ratio**

Prof. Archana Sanjay Singh

M.K. Sanghvi College of Commerce and Economics, JVPD Scheme, Vile Parle- West
Mumbai 400049 Email: archana4567@hotmail.com

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ABSTRACT: The paper seeks to identify the reasons for the falling child sex ratio and the lop-sided gender ratio as revealed in the 2011 census data of our country. This is a cause for deep concern as such a phenomenon will have far-reaching impact, some of which is already being felt in states like Haryana and Rajasthan which have become bride deficit and brides are being bought from other states. The paper reviews the problems faced by such brides, bride shortage, marriage squeeze, surplus males, violence against women. The paper also looks at medical and social problems arising from this declining gender ratio. The impact on women development is also surveyed.

Key words: skewed child- sex ratio, prenatal testing, marriage squeeze, bride shortage, migrant brides

The 2011 Census of India has thrown some startling data concerning the child sex ratio. There is an alarming 13 point decline in this ratio as compared to the earlier census of 2001. While all the other parameters are positive in the census, this disturbing fact is something that will have long lasting repercussions and requires to be addressed urgently. This is a fate which is shared by India and China, the two most populous countries.

Two of the most populous countries in the world, India and China shape the gender balance in Asia through the skewed sex ratios which are tilted in favour of males. In China the sex ratio at birth for 2008 was 119 boys for 100 girls and India -110 males for 100 girls. This creates a surplus of 33million surplus males

in China and 37.3 million more men than women in India (2011, Census). There were **927 girls/1000boys** in 2001 and there are just **914girls/1000 boys** in 2011. In India, the **Child Sex Ratio** is defined as the number of females per thousand males in the age group 0–6 years in a human population. This ratio has been steadily declining from 1961 onwards. It was 976 in 1961, 962 in 1981, 945 in 1992 and 927 in 2001 to 914 in 2011. Obviously an imbalance in this age group will extend to older age groups in future years. Currently the ratio of males to females is generally significantly greater than 1, i.e. there are more boys than girls. Even in the capital of our country New Delhi, the ratio has slipped from 868 to 866.

According to the 2011 Census, the number of females per 1000 males in Haryana in 2011 stands at 879 followed by Jammu and Kashmir (889 female) and Punjab (895 females) An even better indicator is the number of girls at the time of birth versus the number of boys at the time of birth. The recently conducted Annual Health Survey 2012-2013 (second updation) has further revealed that Bijnor, Agra, Badaun, Firozabad, Varanasi, Bhilwara, Jaipur, Jaisalmer, SawaiMadhopur and Gwalior have 850 girls per 1000 boys at the time of birth. Delhi is among the top five states/Union Territories with low child sex ratio followed by Chandigarh, Rajasthan, Uttarakhand and Maharashtra. Haryana tops the list with a ratio of 830 girls per 1000 boys followed by Punjab and J&K. When the ratio is calculated at birth it provides a clearer indication of sex selection. On the other hand the child sex ratio reflects the imbalance between the number of girls and boys, indicating that the practice of sex selection (along with other factors such as selective neglect of girls) have led to a drastic decline in the number of girls compared to the number of boys. According to an estimate by the United Nations Population Fund (India), the practice of sex selection has resulted in the loss of approximately 5.7 lakh girls annually during 2001-2008. Dr Arvind Singh, UP Ambassador for Doctors for

Daughter Project (a project of IMA and UNFPA), further informed that the poor child sex ratio or sex ratio at birth is primarily seen as an indicator of male dominated social and family structure. The sex selective abortion is primarily practiced out of various issues including property rights in patriarchal society.

What is startling is that the richer states have a poorer is the ratio. These ratios are poor in prosperous states like Haryana, Punjab and in prosperous communities while the data is better in states like poorer and backward Bihar, Jharkhand and socially and economically weaker societies. (Indian Express, July11, 2014)

The rate at which this problem has grown can be seen from the following figures:

In 1991 not a single district had a CSR less than 800. In 2001, 14 districts had a CSR less than 800.

What is critical is that what began as an urban malaise is fast becoming a rural phenomenon. In Gujarat 20% villages have a CSR less than 800,with 172 villages with a Child Sex Ratio of less than 500.

Another finding is that the problem has spread not only to the rural areas but also to states which were gender neutral for centuries. While traditionally states like Punjab , Haryana , Gujarat , Uttar Pradesh, Himachal , Delhi had a low CSR the 2011 census reveals that states like Odisha and Andhra are also becoming gender negative.

While there are the laws ,the 1994 law banning sex-selective abortions set down stiff penalties, but with a sly wink , a nod , use of different colour pens to write out the reports,its strict safeguards are easily circumvented and readily flouted. The National Crime Records Bureau shows how rampant foeticides and infanticides are in some Indian states &most notably in Madhya Pradesh which tops the list. While sex determination is illegal since 1994 with the passing of

the Pre-conception & Pre Natal Diagnostic Technique Act, we are seeing that a law on paper can achieve nothing if the enforcement agencies fail to do their jobs well is demonstrated by this. Probably more important is that people's attitudes to the issue needs to change. This also explains why sex determination clinics do a roaring business in certain parts of the country. They are pandering to the wishes of a patriarchal society which finds innovative ways to conduct a sex determination like the rampant use of mobile ultra sound vans in many parts of rural India which easily escape the net of the law.

The impact of the current skewed sex ratio with more male children than females is already being felt in some parts of India, and is likely to become more acute in the years to come :

- Having less women of marriageable age will mean that a significant proportion of men will in the first instance have to delay their marriage. This will initially affect younger generations of men in their 20s. These men will not only be in surplus within their cohort (age group), but they will also face competition from a backlog of older, unmarried men, who will still be in the marriage market.
- This problem will not be overcome simply by delaying marriage, due to the cumulative impact of the skewed sex ratio over several generations. Thus a proportion of men will in due course have to forego marriage altogether. The poorest males will be disproportionately affected by this marriage squeeze. This may cause destabilisation, and may translate into class-based tensions.

Such a demographic profile has far reaching social consequences. It results in marriage squeeze, surplus males and violence against women, effects on men's sexual behaviour and health and effects on women's status and gender equity

prospects as Ravinder Kaur's research in the area of adverse consequences of sex selection reveals. The bride shortages forecast imply that men in China and India will face serious marriage crisis. Ethnographic evidence on shortage of brides is provided by many scholars for India (Kaur 2004,2012; Ahlawat 2009; Chaudhary and Mohan 2011 and Kukreja and Kumar 2013).

Edlund et al (2007) hypothesise that increasingly male sex ratios in China have contributed to the rise of criminality in China doubling crime in two decades. They found that a one percent increase in sex ratio raised violent and property crime rates by 3.8% and suggest that "the sex imbalance may account for up to one-sixth of the overall rise in crime. Based on data from China's law for 2001, they state that "90% of all arrestees in 2000 were men and overwhelming majority(70%) of perpetrators of violent and property crimes in China were between 16 and 25 years old"(2007:1-2). Xhang (2010 links the rising incidence of raped and sexual harassment in China to the scarcity of women. The same can possibly also apply to India and the 'Nirbhaya' episode could be seen as a case in the point and the rising rape crimes against women as is being reported in media every day.

Years of dis-preference for a girl child is causing acute shortage of brides in north India forcing men to travel to far off poorer regions of India to find wives. These brides face stigmatization, racism, rejection and abuse both from the conjugal families and the communities. Their life is a saga of everyday suffering. A lonely bride endures in a totally alien culture and environment. This impact of female deficit parts of India leads to adverse social problems. Cross-regional brides face a grim fate to leave the greenest and most lush areas of the country and re-root in harsh and dusty places (many brides are imported from lush Kerala to be re- located to dusty Rajasthan); leave easy going cultures (North -East) for a conservative place where one needs to cover faces at all times even at home. To go from living on rice to a place to a place where the

staple food is wheat and bear taunts and insults at their inability to roll out chapatis. To add to this, is the misery of not having anyone for so many hundred kilometres in any direction who can say a word in a language they can understand.

The iron clad rules of marriage which have remained unchanged for over thousand years- marry within sub-caste, outside your village but within a tight geographical area have been challenged by the new realities. The migrant marriage phenomenon is not a force of positive social change. Instead, it is a veil behind which these migrant brides are often abused and worked to the bone without any recourse to help. A study has revealed that two hundred thousand women have moved to the states of Haryana and Rajasthan alone in the last five years. These areas have some of the lowest women to men ratio in the world about 720:1000 males. As a result of sex selection which became easily available in the 1990s resulting in a shortage of marriageable women which began to be felt in the first decade of the century. Great majority of men importing wives come from two castes Jats and Yadavs. Though they are not of high caste, they are prosperous and powerful farmers. They have Khap-Panchayats which are self-appointed panels of elders who make extra judicial rulings about many aspects of village life.

Researchers like Reena Kukreja and Paritosh Kumar have found that men who go looking for brides are usually older and can no longer rely on mothers or sisters to cook for them or to do other labour such as tending cattle. They need children to pass their property. Such women are made to work brutally hard, much harder than daughters-in-law who are indigenous in the area because of the contempt in which they are held. Marriage as an institution becomes a covert form bonded labour. Modern ways are as it is throwing newer challenges to this institution with practices like 'live-in' relationships that the society and law need to address. Such cross border brides are perceived as a child of parent

who are willing to sell their daughter. They have no one to advocate for them and no way to flee. The cross-region brides are mostly dalit women at the bottom of the caste hierarchy who leave landless family back at home. Because the Khap-Panchayats recognize the urgent need to import labour inter-caste marriage is tolerated. The women remain in a double bind. The women don't leave their caste status behind and are abused and mocked throughout their married lives. Their fate is worse than that of a dalit woman. A dalit woman at least has respite inside the walls of her house, but for these women there is no respite 24 by 7. They are taunted and mocked with humiliating names like *Molki* (*bought from money*), *Paro* (*Dalit*), *Bihara* (*Backward*), *Kali* (*racist taunt*) and others. A subtle form of racial discrimination is practised as these brides are not taken to any social function because of their colour. As Aamir Khan's show "Satyamev Jayte" revealed sometimes the same bride is shared by many brothers. Ahlawat, Dube and Kaur have researched on practises such as fraternal polyandry "wife sharing by brothers" and leviratic marriage "marriage of widow to her husband's brother" which are seen to be re-emerging because of bride shortages.

It is commonly expected that with the scarcity of women the direction of marriage payments will be reserved i.e, in India, dowry will decline and some form of bride price will take its place. Gender imbalance does reduce net dowry demands and its effect strengthens it as marriage market competition deepens. The lowering of dowry appears to be a positive unintended outcome in of sex ratio imbalance, dowries continue to be high in hypergamous marriages that seek suitable boys.

Scholars like South et al(2012) have suggested that an increasing deficit of potential female partners is likely to accelerate the trend towards later age at marriage in India and raise young men's risk in engaging in commercial sex. Probably some link between increase in HIV can be traced to such a deficit.

Another problem that bachelors and aging bachelors could face is in taking care of the elderly.

Scarce women are not valued more. Economic principle of demand and supply does not seem to work in the gender imbalance scenario. Since women are scarce, they are kept under greater surveillance and there is regression in their status, as stricter controls over them are applied. According to Guttentag and Secord(1983) sex in shorter supply will have a greater “dyadic power “as its member will have an option to leave a current companion and choose another. However they point out that dyadic power may be constrained by “structural powers”(deriving from economic, political and legal structures of a society) and admit that while women in female scarce societies are likely to gain in dyadic power, they may have little structural power which the males are more likely to possess. Women are likely to be valued for their feminine roles, which will restrict their participation in wider world. They will tend to marry early, be homemakers and be less likely to pursue educational and career goals. The shortage of women will therefore gender female roles such as reproduction, domestic work and care work. Women would have little agency of their own and could indeed suffer a deterioration in their equity prospects. It is equally possible that as female security gets compromised vying for them parents may withdraw unmarried girls from schools or education. Thus many of the gains by the women in the recent decades may be in danger of being reversed.

A ray of hope is seen in a recent report in The Times Of India, Mumbai (Feb,3, 2014 p. 10)where the sarpanches of villages of Ghenspur, Dholasan, woke up to the grim reality when they saw very few girls playing in the village streets and decided to fight back. They roped in teachers to create awareness and accompany pregnant women to hospitals to avoid any mischief.The sarpanch of Dholasan village has made every married couple pledge to save the girl child at

marriages and religious functions. Such initiatives at the grass roots are the only way to rectify this skewed gender and child sex ratio.

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