

Imbalanced Sex Ratio Is the Relationship between Gender Equality and Socio-economic Growth a Deception?

***Dr. Gunjeet Kaur**

Abstract

Reference to growing imbalances in sex ratios is unavoidable when one discusses women empowerment. Focus on women empowerment per se without securing the right to being of females seems an insignificant, peripheral, superfluous effort. The growing chasm between the number of males and the number of females in our country is a concern that has captured the sensibilities of researchers, policy makers, media etc for quite some time, now, but without any visible change in the ground realities.

Why the birth of a child belonging to a particular sex preferred (read male) and why are ways and means devised to scuttle the arrival of a child belonging to the other sex (read female). Can women claim to be really empowered without ensuring the basic survival of their tribe? What pressures work on them as mothers, when they agree to play (seemingly willing) consort to eliminate the birth of a female child by various ways and means, from the most heinous and obvious (abandonment of female children, disposing female foetus in the most inhuman way) to the most sinister and personal (sex determination tests, seeking blessings and using concoction of various odd god men, invoking celestial interventions etc. for the birth of a male child)?

The socio-economic reasons have often been cited to justify the male preference during birth. Poverty, evil practices of dowry, lack of social security etc make the birth of male child a particularly joyous occasion. It was believed, particularly in the Indian context that economic growth, universalization of education would ameliorate the problem of sex selection at birth and ultimately lead to a society free from gender stratification. It was also believed that economic growth and education would not only contribute in balancing the sex ratios at birth but also make significant influences in dispelling sex related biases and myths and construct a society free from gender inequalities.

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This perception is really not affirmed by data. Of the three urban towns under study Jaipur performs best on development indicators in terms of economic growth, literacy but this is not reflected in the sex ratio of the city (Table1, below). Jaipur (City level) shows the worst sex ratio of the three urban areas under study.

Table 1			
Sex-ratio			
2001	Jaipur	Ajmer	Dausa
Sex-ratio	897	931	899
Census of India 2001			

The empirical study at the level of women councillors also confirms the same trend. Lesser percentage of women councillors in Jaipur have daughters as the table below depicts (refer Table 3.34 in Chapter 3).

Table 2								
Respondents' Total number of Children By Sex								
	Jaipur		Ajmer		Dausa		All	
		%		%		%		%
Daughters	16	66.7	14	73.7	11	78.6	41	71.9
Sons	22	91.7	17	89.5	12	85.7	51	89.5

The case of Punjab seems all the more frightening and retrogressive. The socio-economic emancipation of the state gets no reflection in the sex ratio.

There are examples from the international scene that do not bring any relief. The most recent and symbolic example is the extensive and shameless media hype following the birth of a male child to the younger son of the Japanese Emperor. The basis for such an expression of joy was that the imperial throne (ruling since 660 BC) is secure for one more generation as the imperial house law

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limits monarchy to male descendents. Oh! The similarity of situation seems so close to home. We thought it happened in India only!

Table 3		
Indicator	Name of the Country	
	India	Japan
	Rank	
HDI/177	127	11
GDP/177	118	13
GDP/Capita US \$	114 (2,892)	13 (27,967)
Life Expectancy, yrs	119 (63.3)	1 (82.0)
Enrolment ratio (Combined Pri, Sec & Ter) %	131 (60.0)	-
BPL %	58 (103)	19 (11.8)
GDI/140	98	14
GEM	-	43
Women in Parliament %	118 (9.3)	119 (9.3)
Women as Professionals and technical workers %	-	57 (46.0)
Women as administrators and managers %	-	78 (10.0)
Estimated Female Earned income US \$	109 (1569)	19 (17,795)
Ratio of Female Earned income to Male Earned Income	126 (0.38)	100 (0.46)

Source; Human Development Reports of Respective Countries, 2005, depicting data for the year 2003

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The inability of the Harvard-educated former diplomat, eldest bahu of the royal family to bear a heir (read boy), contributed to her depression and withdrawal from public life is also symbolic of the treatment to women who fail to produce the children of appropriate sex.

The figures in Table 3 above, presents the contrasting socio-economic conditions of the two countries as captured by the UNDP indicators. The rationality of economic growth (in Japan) finds no expression in the irrationality of gender choices to head the monarchy, which in itself is an anathema to rational modern values of democracy and equality but which is continued in the name of tradition to symbolise all that is best of Japanese culture and society.

Hence, the ultimate confirmation of empowered status of women would be when the chances of survival of a female foetal are hundred percent.

***Associate Professor (Sociology)
Govt. of Rajasthan**

Reference

- (i) The Hindu, New Delhi, September 7, 2006

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