

## Social Exclusion and Women: A Study of Differential Sex Ratio In North India

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### Abstract

Social Exclusion of women and gender inequalities or discrimination on the basis of sex has been major social issue and challenge in India in the context of an egalitarian society. Social scientists more especially sociologists have paid much attention to understand the problem from various analytical and theoretical perspectives. Indeed, social exclusion of women has been existing since time immemorial in all known societies mainly in patriarchal societies like India. Very often these gender-based inequalities are justified in terms of values and reproduced through structural systems. No doubt improvements in the status of women have taken place as a result of many policies related to inclusion of women. However, gender inequalities have not been completely removed; they still persist in one form or other in all modern societies. India is not an exception, one of the indicators of social exclusion of women is the declining sex ratio. This study is mainly based on the secondary data particularly data published by Census of India in different time periods. The objectives of this paper are to find out the socio-cultural factors and practices contributing to social exclusion of women and to find out the reasons for gender-based discrimination in North India and propose some policy intervention and recommendations for addressing the root causes for social exclusion of women and lead to decline in sex ratio.

**Key words:** Gender, social exclusion, Inequalities, Women etc.

### Introduction

Social exclusion is a multidimensional process of progressive social rupture, detaching groups and individuals from social relations and institutions and preventing them from full participation in the normal, normatively prescribed activities of the society in which they live. Social exclusion relates to the alienation or disenfranchisement of certain people within a society. It is often connected to a person's social class, educational status, living standards and how these might affect access to various opportunities. It also applies to some degree to people with a disability, to minority men and women of all races, to the elderly, and to youth. Thus, it is useful to begin with the recognition that the idea of social exclusion has conceptual connections with well-established notions in the literature on inequality and deprivation. To be "excluded from society" can take various relative senses, Philosopher Axel Honneth thus speaks of a "struggle for recognition", which he attempts to theorize through Hegel's philosophy. In this sense, to be socially excluded is to be deprived of social recognition and social value. The problem of social exclusion is usually tied to that of equal opportunity, as some people are more subject to such exclusion than others. In this way social exclusion may lead to one being deprived of one's rights (Sen, 2000).

Gender indicates the socio-cultural alias of man and woman and the way societies recognize them and disperse social roles and responsibilities. Gender equality or parity denotes women having the same opportunities in life as men, including the ability to participate in the public sphere i.e. equitable participation in education, the labour market, health services, and politics etc. Gender inequality or disparity therefore means unequal participation or the gap in the achievement of men and women in these spheres of life. Gender disparity hampers the overall wellbeing of society because blocking women from participation in social, political and economic activities can adversely affect the whole society. In many countries, women are not given equal rights as men. In some countries, women cannot vote, they are discriminated against in the workplace, they are not allowed to hold office, they are not allowed to drive, and are subject to other inequalities. Women as a marginalized group are not only excluded from the society but are also permanently removed from the society. Discrimination can be a major causal factor predisposing people to social exclusion. The exclusion applies not only to economic opportunities, such as job-related insurance and medical entitlements, but also to social activities, such as participation in the life of the community, which may be quite problematic.

### Methodology and Objectives

The primary aim of this Paper is to examine the socio-cultural and structural factors in Indian society that contribute to the social exclusion of women, leading to a differential sex ratio in North India. The study specifically analyses the trends and causes of the decline in the female sex ratio across different states and regions in North India. This paper is mainly based on secondary data which was collected through review of Literature, data published by Census of India in different time periods and data published in different government reports and other agencies. The objectives of this paper are;

- To identify socio-cultural factors and practices contributing to social exclusion.
- To explore the gender differentiation in different region of India and
- To find out the reasons for gender-based discrimination in North India
- To propose some policy intervention and recommendations for addressing the root causes of social exclusion of women.

### Social exclusion and women

India is a predominantly patriarchal society. In all patriarchal societies women have subordinate positions, so is the case in India. Women have been deprived of many civic amenities in traditional Indian society, despite emerging and increasing opportunities for women there are still inequalities between men and women in each and every sphere like education, economy, polity and social sphere. Sex discrimination in education and literacy exist in large measure, no doubt the literacy rate of female has grown from 8.86 per cent in 1951 to 64.63 per cent in 2011, but the corresponding increase in male literacy during this period was much more i.e. from 27.15 per cent to 80.88 per cent. According to Census 2011 total literacy of India is 72.98 whereas male literacy is 80.88 per cent and female literacy is 64.63 percent. Thus, more than three fourth of the male population and a little more than half of the female population were literate and still women literacy below national literacy which is a distressing situation (Murthy, 2007). Similarly, women are poorly represented in political and decision-making bodies; women representation in the Lok Sabha has never reached the mark of 30 percent of the total members of the house. Even in the state legislature the representation of women is worse (Kundu, Amitabh; Council for Social Development, 2006). There is a wide gap between male and female work participation rate, more over the occupational distribution of women indicates the gender segregation of tasks and the underlying reality of illiteracy among female workers which confines them to low paid and unskilled jobs as compared to males (Arif, 2011).

Thus, under the broad heading of “social exclusion” There is a long list of social problems. These critical issues are central to an appropriate evaluation and assessment of the idea of social exclusion. Among these various problems gender discrimination is one of worse, which needs a great attention of social reformers, social planners and policy makers. Thus, Women are discriminated against and excluded in different spheres of life in as numbers of way and in different regions with different frequencies. Within India itself, per capita incomes in south Indian states of Kerala are much lower than in North Indian states of Haryana, but women in Haryana have a life expectancy 8 years lower than women in Kerala (Arif, 2011). Significantly, micro-level studies have shown that baby girls are more likely to die in families where there is an older male sibling. The worst discrimination and exclusion of women are declining sex ratio. Sex ratio i.e. the number of females per thousand males is a sensitive demographic indicator showing the status of women. Although sex ratio was never in favour of females from long back in history, however this has declined drastically from 972 in 1901 to 927 in 1991. Though there is marginal increase in 2001 and 2011 census but figures of 0–6-year population is worse as compared to overall sex ratio. Actually, the status that is accorded to women by law and by the constitution of India there is a gap between the theoretical possibilities and their actual realization i.e. a gap between the stated social objective and achievement, between legal framework and empirical realities. In this way we find that reform in law and other policies don't always make the desired impact or change because of structural unpreparedness of Indian society to accept their goals and means. Thus, there are some sociological reasons which are responsible for social exclusion of women in Indian society.

### Sex Ratio in India

As discussed above, the women and especially the girl children in India have been the most vulnerable for centuries, and are even today, vulnerable to deprivation as well as discrimination. Our social set up, societal laws, customs, traditions, religious beliefs and above all the sophisticated medical technology has shattered the natural laws for balancing its natural sex ratio (Chaudhuri, 2004). Sex ratio i.e. the number of females per thousand males is one of the important demographic indicators of social health of a society, it is a sensitive indicator of women status, imbalance in sex ratio generates a lot of demographics, social and ethical problems (Allahbadia, 2002; Sharma , 2003). Declining sex ratio has become one of the major social problems of Indian society. It has declined from 946 in 1901 to 927 in 1991, and again showing some improvement in sex ratio. It means that the sex ratio of the country has fallen 19 points in 40 years, as shown in the below table 1. which presents the trend in sex ratio in India from 1901 to 2011.

**Table 1 Sex Ratio in India from 1901-2011**

Sl. No.	Census year	Sex Ratio
1	1901	972
2	1911	964
3	1921	955
4	1931	950
5	1941	945
6	1951	946
7	1961	941
8	1971	930
9	1981	934
10	1991	927
11	2001	933
12	2011	943

Source: Office of the registrar general, Census of India.

The sex ratio in the country has always remained unfavourable to females; it has shown a long-term declining trend. The sex ratio at the beginning of the twentieth century was 972 and thereafter showed continuous decline until 1941. In 1951 there was a marginal increase of one point, but thereafter it again dropped for two consecutive decades to reach 930 in 1971. In fact, between 1961-71 the country saw the sharpest decline of 11 points in the sex ratio, thereafter it fluctuated marginally around 930 in successive censuses. Although the decennial census of India 2011, recorded 10 points increase in the sex ratio i.e. from 933 in 2001 to 943 in 2011, but it remains lower than that was in 1951. Sex ratio is not uniform in all the states and union territories of the country. High sex ratio as per census 2011 was recorded in the state of Kerala with 1084 females. It was lowest in the Daman & Diu with 618 females. Among all the districts in India, Mahe district in Daman and Diu recorded the lowest sex ratio with 591 females (Waheed, 2007). As census 2011 registered an improvement of ten points from 933 in 2001 to 943 in the 2011 census. But a matter of serious concern is the decline in child sex ratio i.e. the number of female children under 5 for every 1000 male children under 5 (Premi, 2001). India is one of the few countries in the World to have a low sex ratio, as the overall sex ratio in the country is declining steadily during the last half century with a sign of improvement. It has declined from 976 in 1961 to 964 in 1971, 962 in 1981 to 945 in 1991, to 927 in 2001 and finally 943 in 2011. It is clear that the sex ratio in the age group 0-6 has decreased at a much faster pace than the overall sex ratio of the country after 1981 (Waheed, 2007). The juvenile sex ratio has been declining in all states and union territories. However, this decline is lower in southern states as compared to north Indian states.

From this analysis we can say that in spite of increase in the level of social awareness, growing education, prosperity etc. and of various legislation for social development of women like domestic violence Act 2005, dowry prohibition Act 1961 as amended in 1986, sati prevention Act 1987, prohibition of child marriage Act 2006, National Commission for Women Act 1990 etc. the women are not empowered to get rid from the shackles of patriarchal structure inside and outside their home. In this way exclusion of women from womb to tomb is prevalent in the society and numbers of females are decreasing in our society. Glance at daily newspapers would bug the splashing news of female feticide, infanticide, child prostitution, child marriage, sexual abuse, dowry deaths, eve teasing, abduction etc.

### **Sex Ratio in North India**

The sex composition of human population as discussed in previous paragraphs is one of the basic demographic characteristics having vital ramification for socio-cultural fabric of a society to measure the extent of prevailing inequality between males and females at a given point of time. It has already been mentioned in preceding lines that the sex ratio is not uniform in the country, it varies from state to state and within a state from one district to another district. Here I present the scenario of sex ratio in various states and especially of north Indian states. There are 28 states and 7 union territories in the country, North of Vindhyas is generally referred as North India, which includes many states like Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Haryana, Delhi, Jammu and Kashmir etc. However, our focus of analysis will be on five states of North India i.e. Punjab, Haryana, Delhi, Himachal Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir.

The overall sex ratio of India is dependent on the sex ratio obtained in different states and union territories and their relative weights in terms of size of population. Table 2 presents the sex ratio of the total population for 1991 and 2011 census for all the states and union territories. The diversity in sex ratio among the states and union territories is phenomenal. According to census of India 2011, the sex ratio among the major states ranged from 879 in north Indian states of Haryana to 1084 in southern states of Kerala, as shown in table 2.

**Table 2 Overall Sex Ratio in India as Per Census During 1991 to 2011**

S. No.	India and State/ UTs*	Sex ratio		
		1991	2001	2011
	INDIA	927	933	943
1	Andaman & Nicobar Islands *	818	846	876
2	Andhra Pradesh	972	978	993
3	Arunachal Pradesh	859	893	938
4	Assam	923	935	958
5	Bihar	907	919	918
6	Chandigarh *	790	777	818
7	Chhattisgarh	985	989	991
8	Dadra & Nagar Haveli *	952	812	774
9	Daman & Diu *	969	710	618
10	Delhi *	827	821	868
11	Goa	967	961	973
12	Gujarat	934	920	919
13	Haryana	865	861	879
14	Himachal Pradesh	976	968	972
15	Jammu & Kashmir	896	892	889
16	Jharkhand	922	941	948
17	Karnataka	960	965	973
18	Kerala	1036	1058	1084
19	Lakshadweep *	943	948	946
20	Madhya Pradesh	912	919	931
21	Maharashtra	934	922	929
22	Manipur	958	974	992
23	Meghalaya	955	972	989
24	Mizoram	921	935	976
25	Nagaland	886	900	931
26	Odisha	971	972	979
27	Pondicherry *	979	1001	1037
28	Punjab	882	876	895
29	Rajasthan	910	921	928
30	Sikkim	878	875	890
31	Tamil Nadu	974	987	996
32	Tripura	945	948	960
33	Uttar Pradesh	876	898	912
34	Uttarakhand	936	962	963
35	West Bengal	917	934	950

**Source:** Office of the registrar general, Census of India.

In 1991 also Haryana with a sex ratio of 865 was at the bottom with Kerala 1036 at the top among the major states. The improvement in the overall sex ratio between 1991 and 2011 is however noticed in various states and union territories in the table 2, but in contrast there has been a decline in sex ratio in Gujarat and Maharashtra on the one hand and in north Indian

states on the other i.e. Haryana (865 to 879), Himachal Pradesh (976 to 972), Punjab (882 to 895), and Delhi (827 to 868). A very substantial decline of 178 points in Daman and Diu and 351 points in Dadra and Nagar Haveli from 1991 to 2011 (Waheed, 2007). This is clearly evident from the above table and also from table 3 where data has been arranged in ascending order as per census 2011 in which daman and Diu is with 618 females per thousand males lowest in the country.

**Table 3 Overall Sex Ratio in Ascending Order as Per 2011**

S.No.	India and Stats/UTs*	2011
	India	943
1	Daman & Diu *	618
2	Dadra & Nagar Haveli *	774
3	Chandigarh *	818
4	Delhi *	868
5	Andaman & Nicobar Islands *	876
6	Haryana	879
7	Jammu & Kashmir	889
8	Sikkim	890
9	Punjab	895
10	Uttar Pradesh	912
11	Bihar	918
12	Gujarat	919
13	Rajasthan	928
14	Maharashtra	929
15	Madhya Pradesh	931
16	Nagaland	931
17	Arunachal Pradesh	938
18	Lakshadweep *	946
19	Jharkhand	948
20	West Bengal	950
21	Assam	958
22	Tripura	960
23	Uttarakhand	963
24	Himachal Pradesh	972
25	Goa	973
26	Karnataka	973
27	Mizoram	976
28	Odisha	979
29	Meghalaya	989
30	Chhattisgarh	991
31	Manipur	992
32	Andhra Pradesh	993
33	Tamil Nadu	996
34	Pondicherry *	1037
35	Kerala	1084

**Source:** Office of the registrar general, Census of India.

However, all the North Indian states of our focus lie in the top ten low sex ratio excluding Himachal Pradesh with 972 more than the national average, table 3 shows that the overall sex ratio in ascending order in different states and union territories of India as per census 2011. It indicates that there are eleven states and five union territories which have sex ratio below the national average of 943 and seventeen states and two union territories which have sex ratio above the national average and there are only three north Indian states which have sex ratio above the national average majority of the states are from southern and North-Eastern India i.e. four states and two union territories are from south India, seven states from north-Eastern India and one states from Western India. On the contrary there are only one southern union territory which has low sex ratio than the national average while the majority of the states are from North India i.e. four states and four union territories are from North India, five states from western India and four states are from North-Eastern India.

In this way there are great variations in sex ratio in different regions of the country but north India in particular has the lowest position among them all. If we arrange the ten districts having the lowest sex ratio in ascending order in the country, beside other states and union territories majority of the districts are from north Indian states and Union territories, i.e. three districts of National capital (Delhi), and one from each of Chandigarh, Himachal Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir. In this way North Indian states have the lowest sex ratio as compared to the other states of the country (Arif, 2011).

### Child Sex Ratio

India's total population on the first March 2011 stood at 1.21 billion persons with this India became the second country in the world, after China to cross one billion marks. The population of the country rose by 17.7% between 2001 and 2011. What did not rise but declined shockingly was the child sex ratio. The sex ratio is slightly favourable to boys this means that more boys are born as compared to girls. In India however the 1991 census reported a child sex ratio of 945 girls per 1000 boys which declined to 927 during the census 2001 and further declined to 918 in census 2011.

**Table 4 Child Sex Ratio (age group 0-6 years) in States and Union Territories, 2011**

S. No.	India and State/ Union territory*	Child Sex Ratio
1	Andaman & Nicobar Islands *	968
2	Andhra Pradesh	939
3	Arunachal Pradesh	972
4	Assam	962
5	Bihar	935
6	Chandigarh*	880
7	Chhattisgarh	969
8	Dadra & Nagar Haveli	926
9	Daman & Diu	904
10	Delhi*	871
11	Goa	942
12	Gujarat	890
13	Haryana	834
14	Himachal Pradesh	909
15	Jammu & Kashmir	862
16	Jharkhand	948
17	Karnataka	948
18	Kerala	964
19	Lakshadweep *	911
20	Madhya Pradesh	918
21	Maharashtra	894
22	Manipur	936
23	Meghalaya	970
24	Mizoram	970
25	Nagaland	943
26	Orissa	941
27	Pondicherry *	967
28	Punjab	846

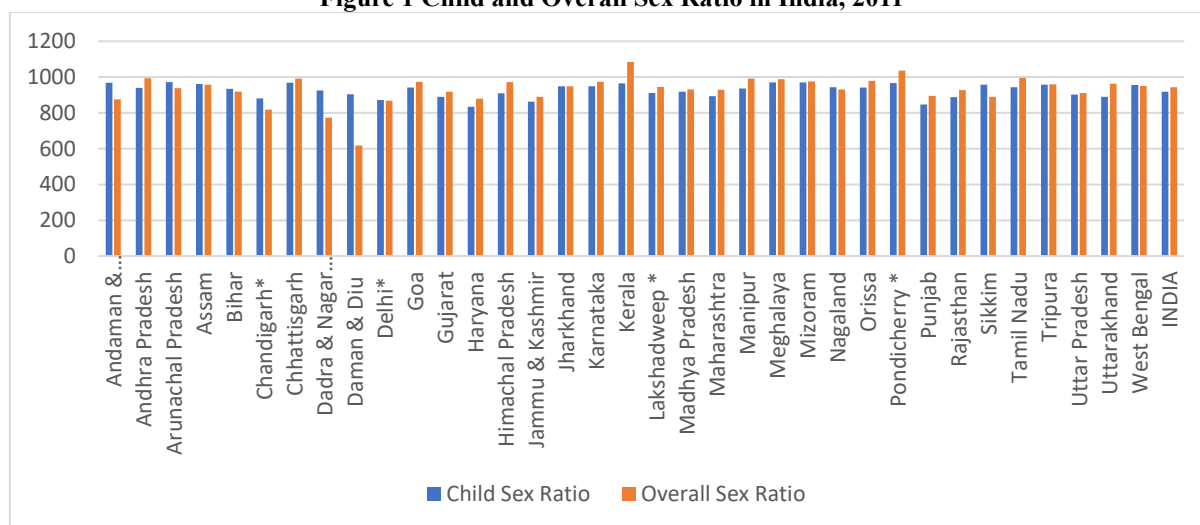
29	Rajasthan	888
30	Sikkim	957
31	Tamil Nadu	943
32	Tripura	957
33	Uttar Pradesh	902
34	Uttarakhand	890
35	West Bengal	956
	<b>INDIA</b>	<b>918</b>

**Source:** Office of the registrar general, Census of India.

A stage will soon come when it would be difficult if not impossible to cope with the problem. Society needs to recognize this discrimination because girls have a right to live just as boys do. Moreover, missing numbers of either sex and the resulting imbalance, can destroy the social and human fabric in the society (Premi, 2001). According to census 2011, the sharpest decline in child (0–6-year population) sex ratio observed in Jammu Kashmir, Punjab, Uttarakhand, Haryana, Delhi, and Rajasthan declined to less than 900 girls per 1000 boys as shown in above table 4.

Thus, a matter of serious concern is for North Indian States, having kinship system with its strong emphasis of patrilocal exogamy, status asymmetry between bride giver and bride takers and curtailment of ties which a married women can have with her natal kin subordinate women quite strongly. While the southern kinship system with its emphasis on cross cousin marriage, spatially endogamous marriage and acceptance of close ties between a married woman and her natal kin is more female friendly. These differences are reflected in the sex ratio patterns in the two regions.

**Figure 1 Child and Overall Sex Ratio in India, 2011**



**Source:** Office of the registrar general, Census of India.

Haryana is in the bottom with 834 females per 1000 males lowest in the country followed by Punjab with 846, Jammu and Kashmir 862 and the National capital Delhi finds a place before Chandigarh (880) with 871 and Rajasthan with 888 followed by Gujarat (890). According to census 2001 there were 49 districts in the country where for every 1000 male children age 0-6 years have less than 850 female children and majority of these districts been located in these north Indian states particularly in Punjab and Haryana (Premi, 2001).

The more shocking fact comes to notice when we arrange the bottom ten (10) districts having the lowest child sex ratio in the country in table 5.

**Table 5 Districts Having Lowest Child Sex Ratio in the Country, Census 2011**

S. No.	District	State	Sex Ratio 2011
1	Daman	Daman and Diu	534
2	Leh	Jammu and Kashmir	690
3	Tawang	Arunachal Pradesh	714
4	North Sikkim	Sikkim	767

5	Dadra and Nagar Haveli	Dadra and Nagar Haveli	774
6	Nicobars	Andaman and Nicobar Islands	777
7	Surat	Gujrat	787
8	Kargil	Jammu and Kashmir	810
9	Dibang Valley	Arunachal Pradesh	813
10	Chandigarh	Chandigarh	818

**Source:** Census of India, 2011.

It is significant to note that the districts of Daman and Diu, namely Daman with 534 females per 1000 males, are the lowest in the country. States like Gujrat namely Surat District with 787 females per 1000 males and Chandigarh (818) males appear in this category. From the census point of view these districts are considered as red alert districts of the state.

### Causes and Consequences of differential Sex Ratio

It is clear from the above discussion that almost in all the Indian states in general and north Indian states in particular there is low representation of women. The causes for such an imbalanced sex ratio cannot be put down to natural or biological factors, but it is most likely due to socio-cultural and economic factors. While deprivation and malnutrition are some of the economic factors that has been used to explain existing imbalances, where, as infanticide, feticide, dowry deaths, infant mortality among female and discrimination in their health care have been understood to be the result of specific socio-cultural practices which are responsible for lasting consequences (Patel, 2007).

### Conclusion

From the above detailed analysis of censuses data about the differential sex ratio in India in general and exclusion of women, we can say that males are outnumbered in all the states and Union Territories and even in all districts of the states in north India which clearly indicates the level of exclusion and permanent removal of females. Further the relationship between the child sex ratio and economic prosperity seems to be inverse. The income rich states of Punjab, Haryana and Delhi have a lower child sex ratio than the relatively poor states of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. The seventeen states and Union territories in the country had a lower sex ratio in 2011 from the national average. Even most of districts with a low sex ratio are from North Indian states. Thus, in this regard there are various multiple socio-economic and cultural causes which are responsible for this gender imbalance which lead to unbearable consequences in the region.

In spite of all the changes taking place in India, a large section of Indian society in north India in particular still considered girl child or daughter as a liability. The practice of female feticide has replaced the practice of female infanticide and it is now appearing to be a serious problem in many parts of north India which leads to imbalance in sex ratio. Thus, there is no facile resolution to what has been commonly termed the plight of the girl child in India in respect to sex selective abortions and maltreatment according to gender. India's progress toward balancing sex ratio continues to be a constant challenge, despite the many programs and legal manoeuvres enacted in an attempt to uplift females to a better and more equal position of opportunity. Pressing economic needs, the debilitating prevalence of the dowry system and the strong cultural values centred in and maintained by a clearly delineated familial hierarchy press against the ability to effect revolutionary change at the pace and breadth.

Hence, the need of hours is that differential sex ratio in north India must be controlled. It is clear from the discussion that there are several critical issues which underlie the problem discrimination and exclusion of women which lead to decline in sex ratio. These issues need to be addressed carefully and seriously so as to evolve a strategy to combat the problem. It is easy but unrealistic to suggest that the government must frame laws which have teeth and then vigorously implement them to curb the problem. For this there is a need to bring attitudinal change, and a need for a multi-pronged policy and programmatic approach highlighting the potential of girl child, within which legal and other strategies have an important role to play. Because this problem has not been tackled at the level it should have been. Thus, it also includes the strict implementation of dowry laws, creating more job opportunities for women, pension schemes for elderly particularly those who have only daughters, registration of births and deaths stringent implementation of the Pre-natal Diagnostic Techniques (PNDT) Act, and of course a general paradigm shift of social psyche among all sections of our society, which condone such gross discrimination against women. The ultimate solution lies in the fundamental restructuring of our society on the foundation of gender equality and justice.

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