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From Darkness unto Light : Gender Parity in Population

Dr. RANJANA TRIPATHI

Associate Professor ,Department of English,

Rajarshi Tandon Girls Degree College, University of Allahabad, Allahabad,India

Email:ranjanatrip@gmail.com



Dr. RANJANA
TRIPATHI

ABSTRACT

India is a fast growing economy and a fast changing country. It is called the youngest country since a major part of the total population is under thirty five years of age. But this picture that seems brilliant is of a country where there is discrimination between men and women in all fronts be it at home or at work place, be it as an infant ,as a child or even in the womb .In this paper I shall present some demographic details and trace the historical reasons that have contributed to the growth of such a misogynist mindset and development of a patriarchal society with special focus on the impediments that they have faced to establish themselves in the society today. From the Ancient times to the Modern Age women have struggled to become visible. They have achieved success and have today made a place for themselves. But the real change will be visible only when the mindset of the men changes. I shall also discuss the measures that have been taken to change the mindset of the society and the measures that should be taken to establish a discrimination ridden society.

Key Words Discrimination,Struggle,Success

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India is a fast growing economy and a fast changing country. The country where over 50 percent of the population is under 35 years of age -- the youngest nation as we refer to it. The electronic media here has gripped us all like never before-- social media, social networking are popular - the country is being modernized shopping malls, continental food all give a picture of a nation that has progressed and is progressing. But we are still discussing and debating about triple talak, still burning our brides for dowry , still killing the female fetus, still keeping our girl child undernourished, still not educating her like her brothers, we have to reassess our society--- is it progressing or are we all in the dark? How do we define progress - is it presenting a brilliant picture of a part of the whole

and hiding the reality about the other half. We have to face the reality and bring about a change and push our girls and women from darkness unto light, this reality also has to be brought to light that the society can not progress unless the women also give their share,come forward and contribute in nation building as equals. Gender equity is what we should aim for the progress in the true sense. In this paper I shall present some demographic details and trace the historical reasons that have contributed to the growth of such a misogynist mindset and development of a patriarchal society with special focus on the impediments that they have faced to establish themselves in the society today. From the Ancient times to the Modern Age women have struggled to become visible. They have achieved

success and have today made a place for themselves. But the real change will be visible only when the mindset of the women and men changes. I shall also discuss the measures that have been taken to change the mindset of the society and the measures that should be taken to establish a discrimination ridden society.

In our country even today women are undervalued, underprivileged and decreasing sex ratio is consequence of it. They are still considered as a liability. Gender equity is measured through a number of tools and sex ratio is a major demographic characteristic that indicates the still sad state of the women in our country. Sex ratio is the number of females per thousand males. India is one of the few countries in the world where there are more males than females. The sex ratio of India in 2011 was 940, USA was 1025, Brazil 1042, Japan 1055, Sri Lanka, 1034, Nepal 1014, Myanmar 1048.¹ So where do we stand and what do we boast for. Surprisingly in India the educated urban population is as much going in for sex determination tests and opting for female feticide as much as the uneducated. Indiscriminate abortions of female fetuses is the main cause of the declining sex ratio.

Son Preference in Indian Society

A strong son preference has been found in the Indian society (Pande and Astone, 2007). This makes females vulnerable now more than ever before. In a survey by National Family Health Volume I twenty two percent of women prefer sons to daughters. Only 2.6% have their preference for daughters. 20% of males prefer sons to daughters while only 2% prefer daughters. Son Preference tends to be stronger in both males and females in most parts of Northern India- Punjab, Haryana, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Chhatisgarh and Jharkhand. The weakest son preference is found in the states of Tamil Nadu, Goa, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala. and Karnataka. Meghalaya and Mizoram alone are an exception where both males and females have greater preference for daughters.² Patriarchal subjugation has not only crippled the mind of the women but has also brought about an imbalance in society with dreary consequences. This has not happened suddenly or over a few centuries but has its roots in the ancient

Indian cultural practices. The root of this may be traced back to the Ancient times. In primitive society that was actually barbaric, men by virtue of their physical strength contributed to the fighting strength, women contributed indirectly as they gave birth to boys. Even where there were instances of women contributing to the fighting force, they could not match men. For this reason even the primitive society did not welcome the birth of girls. (Westermarck, A History of Human Marriage, London 1921). In the Vedic period the of a girl was not welcomed but in the Vedic and the Upanishads ages it was in no way a cause of trepidation. Son was an asset to the family as he stayed with his parents and economically enhanced the status of the family. He also carried forward the name of his family. The Atharvaveda contains charms and rituals to ensure the birth of a son in preference to a daughter (III, 23, VI, II). In one of the early Upanishads there is a reference to a ritual for ensuring the birth of a scholarly daughter (Brih Upanishad VI. 4.18). This ritual was not so popular as the one for procuring a son, but cultured parents were anxious to get scholarly daughters. where daughters were the pride of the family (Kundrasambhav VI. 63) Some thinkers of that time even consider a talented and well behaved daughter better than a son. (Sam. Nik. III 2,6).³

Daughters in the early centuries in ancient India were not so unpopular as in the later years. They were brought up without discrimination. They could be initiated to Vedic studies, also could offer sacrifices to gods. Marriage age was not an issue of posing trouble to parents. In that era remarriage was allowed. But in later ages ancestor worship-pitra puja only boys were regarded eligible. The daughters were not given this duty towards their parents as they had to leave home after marriage with their husband and their duties towards child bearing and there after child rearing kept them occupied. This very important ritual of ancestor worship was a major reason for preference of sons over daughters. At the beginning of the Christian era child marriage came into vogue and widow remarriage was prohibited. The caste system had grown into an elaborate system and the fathers of daughters, had limited choice finding a suitable

groom for their daughters. It was at this time that the child marriage began so it was a tough task for the fathers to find a groom.⁴ Around the 5th Century AD the Sati was practiced and parents very often had to see their young daughters burning themselves in the funeral pyre with their husbands. Marriage of the daughter started becoming a responsibility very difficult to be fulfilled successfully. It is to be noted that some thinkers considered the daughters birth auspicious as Kanyadana was a ritual that assumed high merit (Kathasaritasagara, 28, 27 fg.).⁵

Female infanticide had not been practiced at all in early society. It was never acceptable in cultured sections of society. The customs of infanticide come into vogue in some sections of society during the Medieval period. It was in the Medieval era that the daughters were regarded as a burden. In some lower sections of society female infanticide was practiced in a very small section of society. In later ages with the rising menace of child marriage which began in the Medieval Era, threat to the lives of the girl child began. Consequently the female sex ratio declined.

Age distribution of 10,000 of each sex in India.

Year	No. of boys under 5 years	No of Girls under 5 years.
1951	500	500
1941	489	511
1931	1458	1665
1921	1202	1306
1911	1327	1433
1901	1254	1339
1891	1409	1527

Statistics clearly shows that in the 19th Century the infanticide of girls was rare.⁶

One of the most shameful practice of our society today is the decreasing sex ratio of girl child. India is one of the few countries where there are more males than females. Sex ratio is a tool to measure the sex balance in society- it is the number of females per 1000 males . It reflect the socio economic status of the times as well as the status of women. Dangerous trends in child sex ratio of the

past decades is a warning but it is having little impact on the society at large.

Child Sex Ratio in India 1981-2011.

Year	Child sex Ratio
1981	962
1991	945
2001	927
2001	914

The declining child sex ratio is a result of the growing cases of Pre- natal sex determination test, female feoticide, infanticide and death due to malnourishment of girl child. Surprisingly the educated urban population is as much going in for sex determination tests and female feticides as much as the uneducated. In our country sex determination tests such as amniocentesis and ultrasound tests are banned by law and are a punishable offence, but it is performed by the doctors on the request of the father and mother of the girl child in the womb. The decline in number of girls is an indication of the mind set of the men and women and indicates that the society that looks so modern and new lacks respect for half of its population. The law banning the sex determination test came into force in 1994.⁷ All India Democratic Women's Association and the National Commission for Protection of child Rights actively worked to make a law against sex determination and sex-selective abortion. Besides female feticide and infanticide, the other reasons of the decreasing trend in the female sex ratio is lack of medical assistance to the girl child, deliberate neglect and outright killing of female sick children. The girls die due to various respiratory and infectious diseases , neglect and lack of interest in providing proper treatment.

Measures have been taken both by the government and the non government organizations to bridge the gap in the sex ratio. A simple answer to this grim problem of the society is education of the girls, ensuring their jobs through importing skill training or vocational education.Pre Conception and Pre Natal Diagnostic Techniques Act and the Dowry Prohibition Act should be implemented effectively and stringently⁸.

India has witnessed a long-drawn process, defining the evolution of an anti-female foeticide law. Here we highlight the most important milestones:

Key stages

1976: The Centre banned sex-determination tests in government facilities.

1988: The Maharashtra Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques Act, followed by similar acts by the governments of Punjab, Gujarat and Haryana.

1994: The Punjab Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Control & Regulation) Act.

1994: The Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Regulation and Prevention of Misuse) Bill (introduced in Parliament in 1991, passed in 1994)

1996, January 1: Enforcement of Central Act in Punjab.

December 1997: The Directorate of Health Services and Family Welfare, Punjab is appointed the authority to implement the Act.

Meanwhile, the IPC recognizes Female Infanticide as a punishable offence under the India law.

The Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Regulation and Prevention of Misuse) Act, 1994.

The Pre-natal Diagnostic Techniques (Regulation and Prevention of Misuse) Act, 1994 was enacted and brought into operation from January 1, 1996. Primarily, the Act prohibits determination and disclosure of the sex of fetus.

Key Definition: An Act to provide for the regulation of the use of pre-natal diagnostic techniques for the purpose of detecting genetic or metabolic disorders or chromosomal abnormalities or certain congenital malformations or sex linked disorders and for the prevention of the misuse of such techniques for the purpose of pre-natal sex determination leading to female foeticide; and, for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto.

The Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Prohibition of Sex Selection) Act, 1994

The Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques Act was amended in 2003 to empower the above further in light of the new fertility technologies, which facilitate the selection of the sex of the fetus before conception.

The Pre-Conception and Pre-natal Diagnostic Techniques (Prohibition of Sex Selection)

Act and Rules 1994 (as amended up to 2002) (the PCPNDT Act) mandates that sex selection by any person, by any means, before or after conception, is prohibited.¹¹

Key Highlights: The law chiefly provides for the following:

- Prohibition of sex selection, before and after conception.
- Regulation of prenatal diagnostic techniques (e.g. amniocentesis and ultrasonography) for detection of genetic abnormalities, by restricting their use to registered institutions. The Act allows the use of these techniques only at a registered place for a specified purpose and by a qualified person, registered for this purpose.
- Prevention of misuse of such techniques for sex selection before or after conception.
- Prohibition of advertisement of any technique for sex selection as well as sex determination.
- Prohibition on sale of ultrasound machines to persons not registered under this Act.
- Punishment for violations of the Act."[5]

Violations carry a five- year jail term and a fine of about 2,300 U.S. dollars.

The Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971.

An Act to provide for the termination of certain pregnancies by registered Medical Practitioners and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto.

Code of Medical Ethics

Constituted by the Indian Parliament in the Medical Council Act, 1956, the relevant section of the Code of Medical Ethics states:

On no account, sex determination test shall be undertaken with the intent to terminate the life of a female fetus developing in her mother's womb, unless there are other absolute indications for termination of pregnancy as specified in the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971. Any act of termination of pregnancy of normal female fetus, amounting to female foeticide, shall be regarded as professional misconduct on the part of the physician leading to penal erasure besides rendering him liable to criminal proceedings as per the provisions of this Act (Clause 7.6). It is here important to note

that the penalty for unindicated sex determination and female feticide is striking off the name from the register apart from criminal action.

The problem in PC and PNDT Act is that the doctor and the parents of the female fetus both connive to kill the fetus and the government or the NGOs do not even get the information about it. To find out cases of this crime is difficult and then the punishment also is not of the level of the crime. Stricter laws should be framed such that sex determination and termination is not conducted. The implementation of such laws is of utmost importance. Such crimes should be punished and people should come to know about such cases where severe punishment is given. The doctors and the parents should be put to shame by the powerful media and the social media. They should be given exemplary punishment such horrendous crimes should be condemned by the media. Media's role to bring about awareness of the issues is critical. The media should get together and specially work to promote the cause of girls. The achievement of girls should be highlighted to establish them as equal to boys and to spread awareness of gender equality.

In order to change the present state of things, a new development ethics and morality needs to be placed at the core of the development thinking and practice based on the perspectives of realities of the lives of women. A world where there is parity in living conditions, opportunities, options and incomes between women and men and where gender equality is an integral part of development.

Women empowerment should be a major agenda of the political parties. Educated and empowered women are less prone to indulge in malpractices like neglecting girl child or opting for feticide or infanticide. When equal opportunities are provided the girls do better than boys of a family. When women work for an income they become resourceful, independent and earn respect in society. We should move towards a more dynamic paradigm that identifies the wellbeing of women. Real development does not depend on increase of per capita income alone but it is reflected through sustainability, social development, gender responsive development, women's rights as human

rights equity and social justice. Gender has to be at the centre of all developmental planning of all sectors and at all levels. It has been recognized that upliftment or improvement in the status of women alone can bring about development. Women development can not be done in isolation. Efforts have been made to promote gender sensitivity in men through men who are gender sensitive. What is to be made clear is that women empowerment does not mean disempowerment of men. This is a feeling with which men in general suffer. Development is an all inclusive process. If any section is neglected or lags behind development can not be complete. The goal of gender justice is enabled by adopting a holistic approach which involves transformation in planning perspectives and social attitudes. Women have to be brought from darkness unto light, from the invisible to the visible to achieve success in all round development.

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