



International Research Journal of Interdisciplinary & Multidisciplinary Studies (IRJIMS)

A Peer-Reviewed Monthly Research Journal

ISSN: 2394-7969 (Online), ISSN: 2394-7950 (Print)

Volume-I, Issue-VIII, September 2015, Page No. 45-54

Published by: Scholar Publications, Karimganj, Assam, India, 788711

Website: <http://www.irjims.com>

‘Missing Woman’–

A terrible story of gender inequality and neglect in India

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Abstract

Among the serious gender related problems that Indian society has been suffering from pre independence is ‘Missing Woman’ problem. In India, the concept is used to explain the drastic gender inequality problem. The concept was first systematically discussed by Nobel Laureate Indian Economist Amartya Kumar Sen to define the gender biasness prevail in the under developed or developing countries like India. In India the low sex ratio in all the census shows the real picture of gender inequality. The deeprooted notion that son brings benefits to their parents and daughter impose cost, which gives birth to a desire to son and not to have daughters. To be more clear, a daughter becomes a liability because she is not income generating and also costs a dowry. So the son preference and daughter aversion results in drastic missing woman problem in India, a terrible story of gender inequality and neglect.

1. Introduction

The term “Missing Woman” was discussed comprehensively by the Indian, Nobel prize winning economist Amartya Kumar Sen in his book “Development and Freedom.” Now a days it is used to refer the drastic gender inequalities specially in underdeveloped and developing countries. Sen has claimed that woman were ‘missing’ in millions from the total population of Asian countries in particular. On the basis of various. Assumptions, he calculated that excessive female mortality due to gender biasness account for a 6% to 11% deficiency in the total number of woman, what he termed as “Terrible story Inequality and Neglect.” Sen defined the ‘Missing Woman’ as the woman who is not present in the society due to gender biasness. Here Sen compared the actual population sex ratio with an expected population sex ratio that would be obtain given equal treatment of the sexes in the distribution of survival related goods. The additional females that would have to alive in order to equate the actual with the expected sex ratios would be the number of ‘missing woman’ at that point of time.

Missing Woman = number of woman who should be alive – number of woman who actually are alive.

India is growing dynamically in every field. Though the country has witnessed advancement in all fields but bias against a girl child is still prevailing in the country. For many decades, Indian’s demography has featured by an unnaturally low child sex ratio. Much fewer girls than boys have been born, which has given rise to the missing woman problem. The rational discriminatory

behavior of parents who prefer sons over daughters is the basic cause of this terrible story of gender inequality.

2. Objective of the study

- (i) Tries to analyse the main causes of missing woman problem in India.
- (ii) Tries to find out different policies and provisions by government of India to solve the missing woman problem in India.
- (iii) To give suggestive measures for tackle the missing woman problem.

3. Methodology

The methodology adopted for the study is explanatory cum analytical and descriptive in nature and is based on secondary data collected from various publications, books, journals, internet etc.

4. Missing Woman Problem in India - A Brief Outlook

According to UNDP report 2000 China and India together accounted more than 85 million of the nearly 100 million missing woman estimated to have died from discriminatory treatment in health, nutrition access or pure neglect because they have never born in the first place.

Amartya Sen also holds India responsible for 32 million woman. These woman ought to have present in India if our sex ratios were on par with the world. Some inhuman conspiracy of race fixing is gradually eliminating India's female population.

India's sex ratios are highly masculine. Though the overall female ratio has increased from 927 in 1991 to 940 in 2011 census yet it is vary low as compared with the world average of around 990, while in Russia it was 1140, in Japan 1041 and in USA 1029.

The 0 to 6 years child sex ratio in India is even worse than sex ratio of total population. The 2011 census report reveals the true fact of gender inequality in India. The male female sex ratio of children under 0 to 6 years of age 914 female child per 1000 male child. This dropped 1.40% during the last decade while allover sex ratio raised 0.75% in India. The following table explains the state wise change in child sex ratio during the decade in India

Table No. 01 – State wise Change in Child Sex Ratio during the decade in India

S.L. No.	States/Union Territory	0-6 in 2001	0- 6 in 2011	Change	Total 2001	Total 2011	Change
	INDIA	927	914	- 1.40%	933	940	0.75%
1	Jammu & Kashmir	941	859	-8.71%	892	883	-1.01%
2	Himachal Pradesh	896	906	1.12%	968	974	0.62%
3	Punjab	798	846	6.02%	876	893	1.94%
4	Chandigarh	845	867	2.06%	777	818	5.28%
5	Uttarakhand	908	886	-2.42%	962	963	0.10%
6	Haryana	819	830	1.34%	861	877	1.86%
7	NCT of Delhi	868	866	-0.23%	821	866	5.48%
8	Rajasthan	909	883	-2.86%	921	926	0.54%
9	Uttar Pradesh	916	899	-1.86%	898	908	1.11%
10	Bihar	942	933	-0.96%	919	916	-0.33%
11	Sikkim	963	944	-1.97%	875	889	1.60%

12	Arunachal Pradesh	964	960	-0.41%	893	920	3.02%
13	Nagaland	964	944	-2.07%	900	931	3.44%
14	Manipur	957	934	-2.40%	974	987	1.33%
15	Mizoram	964	971	0.73%	935	975	4.28%
16	Tripura	966	953	-1.35%	948	961	1.37%
17	Meghalaya	973	970	-0.31%	972	986	1.44%
18	Assam	965	957	-0.83%	935	954	2.03%
19	West Bengal	960	950	-1.04%	934	947	1.39%
20	Jharkhand	965	943	-2.28%	941	947	0.64%
21	Orissa	953	934	-1.99%	972	978	0.62%
22	Chhattisgarh	975	964	-1.13%	989	991	0.20%
23	Madhya Pradesh	932	912	-2.15%	919	930	1.20%
24	Gujarat	883	886	0.34%	920	918	-0.22%
25	Daman & Siu	926	909	-1.84%	710	618	-12.96%
26	Dadra & Nagar Haveli	979	924	-5.62%	812	775	-4.56%
27	Maharashtra	913	883	-3.29%	922	925	0.33%
28	Andhra Pradesh	961	943	-1.87%	978	992	1.43%
29	Karnataka	946	943	-0.32%	965	968	0.31%
30	Goa	938	920	-1.92%	961	968	0.73%
31	Lakshadweep	959	908	-5.32%	948	946	-0.21%
32	Kerala	960	959	-0.10%	1058	1084	2.46%
33	Tamil Nadu	942	946	-.42%	987	995	0.81%
34	Puducherry	967	965	-0.21%	1001	1038	3.70%
35	Andaman & Nicobar Islands	957	966	0.94%	846	878	3.78%

Source – Census 2011

In the above table it is clear that Mizoram has the highest child sex ratio of 971 girls per 1000 boys followed by Meghalaya with 970 girls per 1000 boys and Andaman & Nicobar Islands with 966 girls per 1000 boys. Though Meghalaya has a negative growth of 0.31% for child sex ratio, the state still stands on the second position. Haryana with only 830 girls per 1000 boys. Next is Punjab with 846 girls per 1000 boys and Jammu & Kashmir with 859 girls per 1000 boys. Punjab registered the highest growth of 6.02% in child sex ratio during the decade. Unfortunately Jammu & Kashmir has a whopping -8.71% negative growth and that bring the sex ratio from 941 to just 859. In last 10 years only 6 states and 2 union territories out of 35 states/union territories in India have a positive growth in child sex ratio. Only 4 out of this 8 states / UTs have a change of above 1%. Those are Punjab with 6.02%, Chandigarh (UT) with 2.60% Haryana with 1.34% and Himachal Pradesh with 1.12%. These data indicate the gender imbalance prevail in Indian demography which creates the 'Missing Women' problem.

5. Causes of Missing Woman Problem

Gender disparity is the sole and concrete cause of missing woman problem. The extent of gender disparity can be revealed from a country's female to male ratio. Factors involved in female to male ratio –

- i. Number of female fetuses conceived.

- ii. Ratio of girls to boys born.
- iii. Difference in mortality rates for females and males at each at each age in the life cycle.

Given adequate basic health care and social opportunities, girls and women have a lower mortality rate at every age in the life cycle because of their biological immunity. Moreover, from various surveys it comes to know that the number of female fetuses conceived is higher than male fetuses. Therefore, in general, the higher the life expectancy of a country's population, the more favourable the female to male ratio should be because as the life cycle is extended woman will outnumber men in later age cohorts. But despite these facts, several countries in the world specially the developing ones like India is facing severe missing women problem arising out of gender inequality.

Types of Gender Inequalities

(i) Mortality Inequality: Mortality rate among the females are usually higher than that of the male counterpart on nutritional and medical grounds.

Here Amartya Kumar Sen has contributed a literature showing sex bias regarding inequality in nutritional & medical grounds.

- (a) Sex bias in daily proportion of family's food: Boys usually get greater and more frequent second servings than the girls.
- (b) Sex bias in the threshold of the health problem needed to seek professional medical attention: When sick little girls are not taken to the doctors as frequently as are their brothers. Moreover, boys are taken to emergency rooms for less severe condition on average than are girls.

(ii) Basic facilities Inequality: Basic facility inequalities will include various commonplace privileges and preference afforded to boys and men in everyday life such as sex bias in educational opportunity; male enrolments as well as literacy rates outpace the female figures.

(iii) Special Opportunity Inequalities: In most of the patriarchal societies in many field some professional quality jobs are reserved for only male candidates. This type of division is based on the innocuous idea that the respective provinces of men and women regarding their physical & mental efficiency are different.

(iv) Professional Inequality: It may take many forms—

- (a) In terms of employment as well as promotion in occupation women face greater hardship than men.
- (b) In rural areas, women are paid much lower wage than men even if their skill efficiency and devotion for job are the same.
- (c) In urban areas too where jobs require greater mobility, women are thought to be inferior.
- (d) There are some jobs which are exclusively reserved for male candidates and participation of women is barred.

(v) Ownership Inequality: In many society ownership of property is very unequal. Even basic assets such as homes & lands may be very asymmetrically showed. Most of the inhabited property goes to the male child. A UNDP Report indicates that while 67% of the

world's work is done by woman only 10% global income is earning and a mere 1% is owned by women.

(vi) Household Inequalities: Gender based discrimination can take the form of 'intra household' or 'intra-family' inequality. In each household there is a bread winner and one stay – at – home spouse. Regardless of individual desires a despotic and altruistic head of the family (mainly the bread owner) makes decisions for all members. In developing countries this bread owner is predominantly husband and the wife play the role of the 'stay-at-home spouse'.

(vii) Natality Inequality: Natality inequality manifest in the form of the parents wanting a new born to be a boy rather than a girl. There was a time when this could be no more than a wish but with the availability of modern techniques to determine the gender of fetuses, sex selective abortion has become common in many countries.

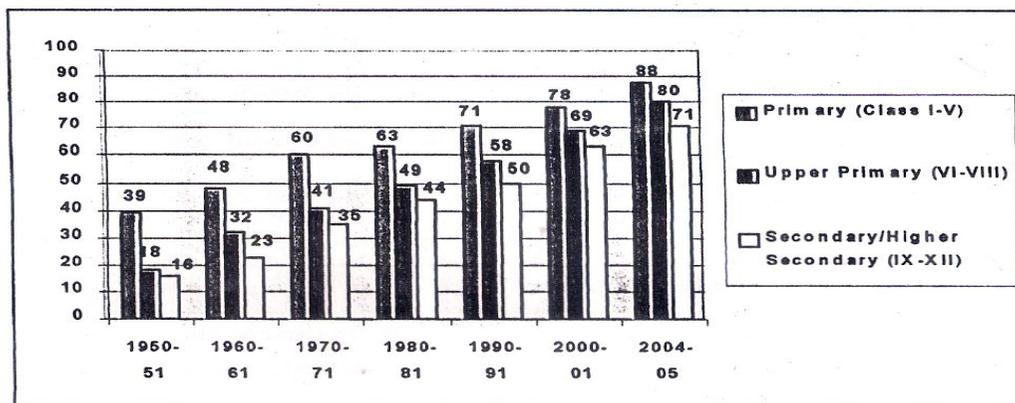
5.1 Gender Disparity in Education–A Crucial fueling Missing Women Problem:

One of the discrimination that girls and women are facing in India is the fact that they are not able to enjoy the right to education. More than half of the adult illiterates (63%) are women and nearly 2/5th girls enrolled in primary schools are drop-outs before grade 5.

Table – 3: Number of Girls per hundred Boys enrolled in school

Year	Primary (Class I-V)	Upper Primary (VI-VIII)	Secondary / Higher Secondary (IX – XII)
1950 – 51	39	18	16
1960 – 61	48	32	23
1970- 71	60	41	35
1980 – 81	63	49	44
1990 – 91	71	58	50
2000 – 01	78	69	63
2004 – 05	88	80	71

Source: Selected educational statistics 2004–05. Ministry of HRD, Dept. of Education



5.2 Gender Parity Index

Gender Parity Index (GPI) is another measure to assess gender equality in education. GPI is the ratio of girl's General Enrolment Ratio (GER) to boys' GER at a given level of education. When the GPI shows a value of one (1) at a level of education—it signifies that opportunities for and access to education are available equally to both girls and boys at that level of education. Over the years, the gender gap has been narrowing, yet substantial gender disparity still persists—which is evident from the following table showing gender disparity index.

Gender Disparity Index = 1 – Gender Parity Index.

Table – 4

Year	Gender Disparity Index		
	Primary	Upper Primary	Elementary
1950 – 51	0.49	0.69	0.49
1960 - 61	0.43	0.52	0.42
1970 – 71	0.32	0.42	0.33
1980 – 81	0.29	0.35	0.30
1990 – 91	0.25	0.31	0.26
2000 – 01	0.17	0.18	0.16

Source: Based on selected educational statistics, Dept. of Education, Ministry of HRD

6. Urbanisation and Missing Women Problem

An interesting trend regarding missing women problem is the urban – rural facts. In sharp contrast to the conventional belief, the female sex ratio is lower in urban areas. Instead of urbanization raising the status of woman, it has helped eliminate them. Urban areas have superior medical technology like sex determination tests of fetuses and abortion thereby contributing to declining ratio.

7. Economic Prosperity and Missing Women Problem

Another striking below on the popular belief that economic prosperity leads to women empowerment is that prosperity and women agency are negatively related.

In rural areas, where poverty is the striking force, most of the women participates in the crop field activities to earn their livelihood. Their participation are not only necessary but also desirable. It thus ensures their survival and make them feel economically powerful.

In urban areas too amidst the slum-dwellers, men and women are equivalent in their earning perspectives. So these women usually possess a greater agency.

But the picture is reverse in case of economically sound classes. Writer Hannah Papanek, after a laborious experiment gave the conclusion that women are withdrawn from the work force in the wake of prosperity. Where women are concerned, the so-called prosperous society moves from income generation to status generation. The wife's non-working status is perceived as being linked to the prosperity level of the husband. Even women see themselves as being in a situation where the need to work is absent. So even as the family's status goes up, the status of the women in the family goes down as her economic power falls.

8. Steps taken by government of India to solve Missing women problem

Government of India has undertaken various policy measures to empower the women and hereby solving the problems of gender inequality. Following table sums up the policies and provisions taken in different five years plans.

Table – 4: Views of different five year plans on empowerment of women

Sl.No.	Five yr. plans	Views on women
1	1 st plan (1951 – 56)	Sets up the central social welfare board in 1953 to promote women welfare work through voluntary organizations, charitable trusts etc.
2	2 nd plan(1956-61)	Supported the development of mahila mandals to work at the grassroots levels
3	3 rd ,4 th &interim plan (1961-74)	Had provisions for woman education, pre natal and child health services, supplementary feeding for children.
4	Fifth plan(1974-78)	A major shift in the approach towards woman from welfare to development
5	Sixth plan(1980-85)	Accepted women's development as a separate economic agenda. Took a multidisciplinary approach with a three pronged thrust on health, education and employment
6	Seventh plan(1985-90)	Had the objective of bringing women into the mainstream of national development.
7	Eight plan(1992-97)	Saw a paradigm shift from development to empowerment and benefits to women in the core sector of education, health and employment. Outlay for women rose from Rs. 4 crore in the first plan to Rs. 2000 crore in the eight plan.
8	Ninth plan(1997-2002)	Empowerment of women as its strategic objective. Accepted the concept of women's component plan to assure that at least 30% of funds/benefits from all development sector flow to women.
9	Tenth plan(2002-2007)	Suggests specific strategies, policies and programs for the welfare of women.
10	Eleventh plan(2007-2011)	Special measures for gender empowerment and equity will be an essential component of the 11 th plan. The plan will have a special focus on four aspects – violence against women (VAW) economic empowerment, political participation and women's health.

Source: "Women Empowerment Dimensions and directions" social welfare, March 2009

8.1 Financial Institutions

Various financial Institutions are set up for supporting of women to start new enterprises (a step to improve agency). Some of them are–

- (i) Rashtriya Mahila Kosh (RMK) march 1993
- (ii) National Agricultural Bank for Rural Development (NABARD) July 1982
- (iii) Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI) April – 1990.
- (iv) Council for Advancement of people's Action and Rural Technology (CAPART). 1986

- (v) Development Bank for women Entrepreneurs in small scale and tiny sections, RBI. 1956

8.2 Constitutional Provisions in India to solve Mission Women Problem

The constitution declares that the equality before law and the equal protection of laws shall be available for all. Similarly there shall be no discrimination against any citizen on the ground of sex.

Article 14 – Men and women to have equal rights and opportunities in the political economic and social spheres.

Article 15 (1) – Guarantees equalities of opportunities for all citizens in matter of employment.

Article 15 (3) – State can make any special provisions for women and children. Beside directive principles of state policy which concern women directly and have a special bearing on their status.

Article 16 – Equality of opportunities in matter of public appointments for all citizens.

Article 39 (a) The State shall direct its policy towards securing all citizens men and women, equally, the right to means of livelihood.

Article 39 (d) Equal pay for equal work both men and women

Article 39 (e) Protection of health and strength of workers – men, women and children .

Article 42 – The State to make provision for ensuring just and humane conditions of work and maternity relief.

Article 51 (A) (e) – To renounce the practices derogatory to the dignity of women.

8.3 Legislations and laws to provide protection to women

The state enacted several women-specific and women-related legislations to protect women against social discrimination, violence and atrocities and also to prevent social evils like child marriage, dowry, rape, practice of Sati etc. These are as follows–

- i) **Equal Remuneration Act of 1976** provides for equal pay to men and women for equal work.
- ii) **Hindu Marriage Act of 1955** amended in 1976 provides the right for girls to repudiate a child marriage before attaining maturity whether the marriage has been consummated or not.
- iii) **The Marriage (Amendment) Act, 2001** amended the Hindu Marriage Act, Special Marriage Act, Parsi Marriage and Divorce Act, the Code of Criminal Procedure providing for speedy disposal of applications for maintenance ; the ceiling limit for claiming maintenance has been deleted and a wide discretion has been given to the Magistrate to award appropriate maintenance.
- iv) **The Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act of 1956** as amended and renamed in 1986 makes the sexual exploitation of male or female, a cognizable offence. It is being amended to decriminalize the prostitutes and make the laws more stringent against traffickers.
- v) An amendment brought in 1984 to the **Dowry Prohibition Act of 1961** made women's subjection to cruelty a cognizable offence. The second amendment brought in 1986 makes the husband or in-laws punishable, if a women commits suicide within 7 years of her

marriage and it has been proved that she has been subjected to cruelty. Also a new criminal offence of 'Dowry Death' has been incorporated in the Indian Penal Code.

- vi) Child Marriage Restraint Act of 1976** raises the age for marriage of a girl to 18 years from 15 years and that of a boy to 21 years and makes offences under this Act cognizable.
- vii) Medical Termination Pregnancy Act of 1971** legalises abortion by qualified professional on humanitarian or medical grounds. The maximum punishment may go up to life imprisonment. The Act has further been amended specifying the place and persons authorized to perform abortion and provide for penal actions against the unauthorized persons performing abortions.
- viii) Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act of 1986 and the Commission of Sati (Prevention) Act, 1987** have been enacted to protect the dignity of women and prevent violence against them as well as their exploitation.
- ix) The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005** provides for more effective protection of the rights of women guaranteed under the Constitution who are victims of violence of any kind occurring within the family and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto. It provides for immediate and emergent relief to women in situations of violence of any kind in the home.

Apart from these, there are a number of laws which may not be gender specific but still have ramifications on women.

9. Suggestions for tackle the Missing Women Problem

- (i) The reduction of infant mortality and maternal mortality, which are sensitive indicators of human development, should be a priority concern.
- (ii) Women's traditional knowledge about health care and nutrition should be recognized through proper documentation and its use should be encouraged.
- (iii) In view of high risk of malnutrition and disease that women face at all the three critical stages viz., infancy and childhood, adolescent and reproductive phase, focused attention should be paid to meeting the nutritional needs of women at all stages of the life cycle.
- (iv) Special efforts should be made to tackle the problem of macro nutritional deficiencies especially amongst pregnant and lactating women as it leads to various disease and disabilities.
- (v) Intra household discrimination in nutritional matters in case of girls and women should be sought to be ended through appropriate strategies.
- (vi) Creating an environment through positive economic and social policies for full development of women to enable them to realize their full potential.
- (vii) The de-juror and de-facto enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedom by women on equal basis with men in all spheres political, economical, social cultural and civil.
- (viii) Equal access to participation and decision making of women in social, political and economical life of the nation.

- (ix) Changing society's attitudes and community practices by active participation and involvement of both men and women.
- (x) NGOs can also play a very crucial role in empowering woman by
 - ❖ Providing micro credit programmes i. e. rendering small loans to poor woman for self employment projects that generates income allowing them to care for themselves and their families
 - ❖ Providing appropriate training programs to build technical competency.
 - ❖ Organising health education and awareness campaign etc.
- (xi) The discovery of sex determination test has facilitated the killing of the female fetuses before birth. So government should strictly implement the laws, and should give memorable punishment to the responsible sections

Conclusion

In 2011 census of India, shows that the highest rates of elimination of girls through sex selection and infanticide is not high in the poorest states but in the wealthiest states and cities like Punjab and Haryana and the cities like Delhi and Chandigarh. The states with higher rates of literacy such as Maharashtra and Gujarat have a worse gender ratio than the states with worse literacy states such as Orissa, Assam etc. Also, rural areas in India that lag far behind the urban areas in education and development tend to have better sex ratios than urban areas. So an economic modernization along with universal education is not the only solution because poverty and illiteracy are not the only cause of missing woman problem in India. A closer examination is needed for social cultural and economic structures and opportunities in order to specify the cause as well as ways to confront gender based discrimination in various forms. The need of hour is to realize our responsibilities and gives a halt to this evil crime. The main focus should be changing attitudes of son preference that motivate anti female bias and as much as enforcement of gender equality legislation.

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