

## Sex Ratio in India!

I came across an article, Inequalities of Gender Ratio among Religious and Social Groups in India<sup>[1]</sup>, with a lot of information, although lacking in meaningful discussion. Among other things, the article points out that the Christians in India have the best gender ratio of 1023. (India 943 Females for 1000 Males). I shared the article with my brother, an experienced Christian educationist in India and he wanted to know why Christians were topping the ranking. My immediate response was that Christians are better educated and are not among the wealthiest in the country. He was not convinced and it made me think about the subject and here I am elaborating on it.

Sex ratio is used to describe the number of females per 1000 of males; and generally should be near about equal for both sexes. The sex ratio for the entire world population is 102 males to 100 females (see insert below)<sup>[2]</sup>. Due to higher female mortality at birth, the sex ratio at birth worldwide is commonly considered to be 107 boys for 100 girls. This ratio evens out during first year of life where male infant mortality is higher than female, because sex differences in genetic and biological makeup, with boys being biologically weaker and more susceptible to diseases and premature death. However, since late 1980s sex selective abortions of females in many parts of the world has affected the laws of natural selection (see world map below).

India is one of the countries where the sex ratio is remarkably in favour of boys since the records are kept. Past censuses data shows, in 1901 the ratio of females to 1000 males was 972, it continued to decline until 1971, when it was 930 and it has barely climbed to 940 in 2011 census (see line chart below). Analysis of last census data shows southern states of India performing better, with Kerala and Puducherry having best figures with more females per 1000 males.

The major cause of the decrease of female birth in India is considered to be violent treatment meted out to the girl child at the time of birth. Furthermore, young, rural, and poverty-affected women are most vulnerable. Marriage at young age, inability to use contraception, pressures within the family for giving birth to a male child are some of the social evils resulting in this abnormal situation.<sup>[3]</sup> Pregnancy at young age, successive and too many pregnancies contribute heavily to maternal morbidity and mortality. Preference of better nutrition reserved for male child and malnutrition among female children are other factor affecting survival of girl child. When it comes to medical treatment, male child gets the best; and treatment is often delayed for a girl.

Education is also spared for boys and girls are taken off the school soon after they start menstruation, and married off as soon as possible thereafter.

Cast and inheritance, along with dowry are other customs affecting this indicator. Boys mean that the inheritance will remain within the family whilst one has to pay dearly for girl's marriage as dowry. When we had our first child in India and it happened to be a daughter, on breaking the news to my well educated neighbour, he sympathised with me for having a daughter rather than congratulating me. Girl child is considered to be a burden in India.

Wealth is significant in the gender inequality. Rich people can easily afford illegal sex determination technology and abortion. Poor cannot afford it and even if they somehow get to know that it is a girl; rely on back-street abortion, further risking mother's life.

Gavhale reveals in his paper that Scheduled Caste (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) have better sex ratio than the rest in the country, perhaps because of their less harsh customs and inability to rely on wealth for selective abortion. Generally SCs and STs do not enjoy great wealth that may be linked to

inheritance and pressure for big dowries.

Gavhale finally post a table in his paper comparing major religions in India which shows that Christians enjoy the best sex ratio in the country, 1023 females to 1000 men. It may not be so obvious in north where there are very few Christians, as most of the Christians are concentrated in southern part of the country, especially Kerala. Christians also are known for higher literacy rates (Kerala has the highest literacy rate in India) and encourage women to study and work freely. Equal status to boys and girls in the family continues throughout life. Christian educational institutions are renowned all over India for leadership and excellence. Child marriage is almost universally shunned, and practicing contraception is not a problem apart from Catholics, but even among Catholics too many pregnancies are rare.

Another blessing in disguise is that Christian are not among the extremely rich Indians. Dowry is not an important issue and ancestral properties are equally shared among male and female decedents. Perhaps these factors need to be adopted by rest of India to fall in line with the world trends in gender equality.

### **References**

[\[1\]](#) Gavhale GR. Inequalities of Gender Ratio among Religious and Social Groups in India. Humanities & Social Sciences Review. Vol 4, No 2, November 2016 p68-75.

[\[2\]](http://www.census2011.co.in/sexratio.php) www.census2011.co.in/sexratio.php

[\[3\]](#) Anita Roy. Gender equity and universal health coverage in India. Lancet Vol 377. February 2011. p 618-619.

*Please see additional material illustrated below*