



Mains Practice Question

Q. Contrary to popular perception, India's sex ratio at birth declined even as per capita income increased. Discuss. (250 words)

05 Jan, 2021 GS Paper 2 Social Justice

Approach

- Introduce by explaining the context of the given statement.
- Highlight the issues related to lower sex ratio at birth.
- Discuss the measures needed to improve the lower sex ratio at birth.
- Conclude suitably.

Introduction

- India's sex ratio at birth declined even as per capita income increased nearly 10 times over the last 65 years, according to an IndiaSpend analysis of government data. The recently published Sample Registration System (SRS) Report 2018 shows the same that sex ratio at birth in India, declined from 906 in 2011 to 899 in 2018.
- This could be because rising income, which results in increased literacy, makes it easier for families to access sex-selective procedures. This can be corroborated by the fact that many Indian cities have high economic growth but lower figures on sex ratio than rural areas.

Body

Despite improved per capita income in India, skewed sex ratio in India continues to exist due to perpetuation of patriarchal attitudes and discriminatory cultural practices:

- **Continuation of Gender Bias:** According to information from the UNPFA, reasons for female infanticide include anti-female bias, as women are still seen as subservient to men, who often occupy positions of power. As a result, girls continue to suffer educational, health and nutritional discrimination.
- **Son-Preference:** In addition, despite numerous efforts to inculcate the idea of gender equality in India, parents still believe they will be better taken care of in their old age by men, as men are perceived as the principal wage earners of the family.
- **Social Practices:** Despite banning dowry and making it a criminal offense, the dowry system is still prevalent in India. Parents of girls are still required to pay a dowry, which could be a massive expense, avoided by raising males. In many cases dowry is taken even if the bride herself is economically self-independent.
- **Accessibility to postnatal sex selection techniques:** India recorded more than thirteen excess deaths for every 1000 girls under five years of age. This is the highest rate of female deaths in under the age of five years in the world. Better income and awareness of postnatal sex selection techniques may be attributed for this dismal picture.

Other Issues Related to Lower Sex Ratio at Birth

- **Gender-imbalance:** Prof. Amartya Kumar Sen, in his world famous article "Missing Women?" has

statistically proved that during the last century, 100 million women have been missing in south Asia.

- This is due to discrimination leading to death, experienced by them from womb to tomb in their life cycles. An adverse child sex ratio is also reflected in the distorted gender makeup of the entire population.
- **Distortion in the Marriage System:** Adverse ratio results in a gross imbalance in the number of men and women and its inevitable impact on marriage systems as well as other harms to women.
 - In India, some villages in Haryana and Punjab have such poor sex ratios that men “import” brides from other States. This is often accompanied by the exploitation of these brides. There are concerns that skewed sex ratios lead to more violence against both men and women, as well as human-trafficking.

Measures Needed To Improve The Lower Sex Ratio At Birth.

- **Bringing Behavioural Change:** Increasing female education and economic prosperity help to improve the ratio.
 - In this pursuit, the government’s Beti-Bachao Beti Padhao Campaign has achieved remarkable success in bringing behavioural change in the society.
- **Sensitizing Youth:** There is an urgent need to reach young people for reproductive health education and services as well as to cultivate gender equity norms.
 - For this, the services of Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) can be leveraged, especially in rural areas.
- **Stringent Enforcement of Law:** India must implement the Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (PCPNDT) Act, 1994 more stringently and dedicate more resources to fighting the preference for boys.
 - In this context, the Drugs Technical Advisory Board decision to include ultrasound machines in the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940 is a step in the right direction.

Conclusion

Although India has created several impressive goals to reduce its population growth rates, India and the rest of the world has a long way to go to achieve meaningful population policy which are not only based on quantitative control but qualitative control as well.