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Q5(e)

Discuss the nature of regional variations in sex ratio in India, stating reasons thereof

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2023 · Sociology GS 2 · 10 marks · Perspectives on the study of Indian society

Perspectives on the study of Indian society: Indology (G.S. Ghurye); Structural functionalism (M.N. Srinivas); Marxist sociology (A.R. Desai).

Core demand of the question

- Discuss regional variations in the sex ratio in India and the reasons
- Distinguish overall sex ratio and **child sex ratio**
- Keep a 10-mark length

Revision summary

Sex ratio varies sharply by region in India, especially the **child sex ratio**.

North-western agnatic, dowry-heavy systems show more masculine ratios.

Kerala and parts of the north-east have been closer to balance.

Ultrasound converted preference into selection where law was weak.

Development without gender justice can worsen the ratio.

Introduction

Sex ratio in India is not one national figure with a single cause. Regions differ because kinship, property, and medical markets differ. The **child sex ratio** exposes prenatal selection more sharply than the overall ratio, which also reflects age structure and adult mortality.

Body**The pattern**

- North-western states such as Haryana, Punjab, and parts of Rajasthan and western Uttar Pradesh have shown persistently masculine child sex ratios in census decades after 1991.
- **Kerala** and several north-eastern states have been closer to balance, with **Kerala's** overall ratio historically less masculine.
- Urban prosperous belts can be worse than some poor regions, which kills the simple story that development automatically values daughters.

Reasons

- North Indian agnatic descent, dowry, and village exogamy, as **Karve** mapped, make sons the old-age and property default; daughters marry out.
- South Indian alliance systems and women's fuller public presence in some regions reduce, but do not erase, son preference.
- Ultrasound and the failing enforcement of the Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic **Techniques Act** turned preference into sex-selective abortion where clinics and cash met honour.

- Srinivas's Sanskritizing mobility can worsen seclusion and dowry as groups climb, which is a cruel twist of 'development'.
- Female infanticide and neglect of girl children remain in some pockets; adult sex ratio also follows maternal death and migration of working-age men.

Why region is the right unit

- Dumont's hypergamy and ranked alliance help explain northern honour around daughters.
- Policy that copies one state onto another without kinship will miss the mechanism.

Flow diagram

Kinship dowry property -> Son preference
Ultrasound clinic market -> Sex selection
Son preference -> Sex selection
Sex selection -> Regional child sex ratio gap

Conclusion

Regional sex ratios in India follow kinship and medical markets, not only income. The north-west's masculine child ratios and the relatively better southern and some north-eastern figures are sociological maps, not accidents.

Facts & figures

Child sex ratio

Girls per thousand boys in the 0-6 age group; a sharper marker of selection than the overall ratio.

PCPNDT Act 1994

Law to stop sex-determination tests; enforcement has been uneven.

Haryana-Punjab pattern

Census decades showing highly masculine child ratios in parts of the north-west.

Kerala

Historically less masculine overall sex ratio, linked to social development and kinship differences.

Karve

North-South kinship contrast that helps explain different values of daughters.