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Mains Practice Questions

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Q. What do you understand by sex ratio? Examine the implications of a declining sex ratio and meta son preference? What are the reasons for such trends in India? (250 words)

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Approach

- Define Sex ratio with general world level pattern.
- Highlight facts related to declining sex ratio in India.
- Explain reasons behind the trend in India. Significance: sex ratio as indicator of gender status and societal values.
- Suggest some corrective steps in recent times and success stories.

Introduction

The sex ratio refers to the number of females per 1000 males in a given area at a specified time period. At world level, sex ratio has been in favour of females (1050 females per 1000 males). This is due to two reasons:

- Female children appear to have an advantage over male in terms of resistance to disease in infancy.
- Women have tended to outlive men in most societies, so that there are more older women than men.

Body

In India, the sex ratio has been declining due to prevailing social norms that tend to value males much more than females, which leads to 'son preference' and the relative neglect of girl child. In 1901 it was 972, 946 in 1951, 927 in 1991. Though it showed increasing trend since then (940 in 2011), but there has been declining child sex ratio (0-6 years age) from 945 in 1991 to 914 in 2011.

Reasons and Implications of declining sex ratio

- **Health risk of child bearing by mothers:** India's maternal mortality remains high (4.2 per 1000 live births) as compared to international standards. This necessitates focus on levels of nutrition, general education and awareness, as well as, the availability of medical and communication facilities.
- **Severe neglect of girls in infancy,** leading to higher death rates, sex-specific abortions that prevent girl babies from being born and female infanticide. This is due to social reasons like patriarchal nature of society, dowry etc. Such meta son preference is shown by educated urbanised sections evident in use of modern techniques like sonogram combined with adoption of modern values like nuclear family necessitating fewer children and meta son preference.

Some Corrective Steps

- Improving the health of mothers through institutional deliveries, free pre- and post-natal check-ups.

- Banning use of modern tools for sex-selective abortions like Pre-natal Diagnostic Techniques (Regulation and Prevention of Misuse) Act.
- Removing biases in societal norms and values like Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Andolan, Sukanya Samriddhi Yojana.
- Gender Sensitising policy making like gender budgeting, 33% reservation in local bodies.

Way Forward

All such steps have helped tackle declining sex ratio to some extent like increase in overall sex ratio since 1991, increase in child sex ratio in Haryana (worst affected) since Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Andolan is a case in the point.