

*Narottam Gaan*

## **WOMEN DEFICIT AND VIOLENT CONFLICTS: PERSPECTIVES ON DEMOCRACY IN ASIA**

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### **Abstract**

Literature on civil war, insurgency and terrorism has highlighted the role of other causal factors such as the scarcity of valuable natural resources, the degree of ethnic fractionalization, societal segmentation and the type of political regime while showing short shrift to the importance of population age structure. Saying this does not in any way denude these factors of their significant role in the onset of civil war but the importance of youthful age structure in insurgency based civil wars and terrorism should not be undermined. Numerous studies explicated how female deficits in Asia could drive the youths into the vortex of violence and terrorist activities. Taking India and China as case studies, this paper argues that a significant number of young adult males will not be able to tie the nuptial bond due to deficit of women in the society. These left out unmarried adult males would be the stirring causes of conflicts, insurgency, civil war and acts of terrorism intensely affecting the perspectives of democracy in these countries.

### **1. Introduction**

The influence of youthful age structure for onset of civil wars and terrorist activities is enormous. In 2005, 1.9 billion people- nearly one third of the world's population- is under the age of 15. Ninety percent of these youth lives in less developed countries. Even if the fertility decreases, large birth cohorts in the developing countries are unlikely to dwindle for a few decades and will stay until 2035. As these large birth cohorts enter adulthood, the risk of insurgent civil wars and terrorism increases. In absolute numbers, the increase in youth cohorts will be enormous. In the average least developed countries, the ratio between the number of 15 to 29 year olds and the number of 30 to 54 year olds is expected to stay above one until 2035. The strain on school systems and labour markets in these countries will be profound. It is likely that a high relative cohort size with burgeoning women deficit will be the inciting causes of conflicts, insurgency,

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civil war and acts of terrorism in the least developed countries profoundly affecting the perspectives of democracy in these countries.

Thus, a very youthful population is an important factor among others that flare up only under certain conditions or sparks. At the same time, sparks can only trigger violent conflicts when contextual factors enable them. In such a situation, relative cohort size is an important predictive factor for civil war, particularly insurgent based civil wars. The link between relative cohort size and civil war becomes stronger if attention is riveted at the sub-national level, as insurgent groups often come from sub-populations with high relative cohort size. (For example, Chechens in Russia, Northern Irish in the United Kingdom, and Palestinians in Israel, Kashmiri Muslims in India, Bodos in Assam). Recent suicide bombings in London and Paris are important reminders that developed countries are not immune to violent rebellions from youthful sub-populations. They signal the urgent need to improve integration and equality. Industrialized countries facing major pension shortfalls due to high ratio of retirees to workers could mitigate the problem by hiring young workers from the developing world though migration and integration are politically sensitive issues.

Different studies show that by the year 2020, 12-15 percent of their young adult males will not be able to tie the nuptial bond because the girls who would have grown up to be their wives were eliminated by their societies instead. With each passing year between now and 2020, both the proportion and number of young adult males that exceed the number of young adult females in China and India will increase. Furthermore, this is compounded by the fact that in a society of too few women, the men who get the chance to marry are certainly of higher socio-economic status. Those men who are left out are poorer, less educated, less skilled and less likely to be employed. These left out unmarried adult males are likely to evince a predilection for establishing a system based on physical force in order to obtain what they cannot obtain legitimately. In such a spectrum of remaining unmarried, their likely shift from potential threats to potential protectors of society can be stalled.

It is in this context that the main objective of this paper is to demonstrate how this difference in the population of both male and female in a particular age group in the developing countries has impacted the stability of their respective political systems. To analyze this, the paper is organized as follows. The first section provides an Introduction, while section 2 gives a theoretical outlook of gender, conflicts and democracy. Section 3 examines the empirical evidences of this nexus particularly focusing on the Asian countries. Section 4 tries to analyze the effects of female deficit on democracy and the security trajectory of the countries. Finally, section 5 concludes with the recommendations.

## **2. The Nexus among the Evolution of State Concept, Violent Conflicts and Demography: A Theoretical Outlook**

The established notion in political science is based on the maxim that state is a territoriality or boundary inhabited by population. With the Westphalia thematic becoming a *sine qua non* of political theories about state, its constitution and the multitudes i.e. people not only formed the coping stone on which a supreme political entity rests, but also considered to be synonymous with the state. Among a myriad of political and non-political institutions, state stands preeminent to become the sole identity/security referent for the multitude, and refers the title to what a people can be called. Paradoxically, if it is the people who constitute the state, it is in reality the latter which give identity, a political juridical title and a politically recognized existence to the people. In the absence of a state population is just a multitude. Crowned with the supreme uncontested political and legal exclusivity, i.e., sovereign power, state remains the symbol and provides the metaphor for the existence of collective identity transcending any other identity based on other denomination such as caste, class, religion, sex, population and other categories. The state, after the Westphalia Treaty provided the ontological foundation of nationalism. All other distinctions remained either subservient or merged with the ultimate identity with the state. These distinctions remained important to mark the immediacy of their identity and later on with the distant state to distinguish their identity from other people and nations not to override the ultimate identity with the state as a whole.

To view the population as a whole not in terms of distinctions or categories and identifying with the state as a nation is a constitutional desideratum for ushering in a political, legal, juridical order in the society. In other words, the foundation of people is state in the sense that a definiteness or particularity or an identity is thrown around a population to distinguish it from the multitude. State stands as a symbol of political catharsis for collectivity and assumes the rightness of authority to call a population a definite identifiable category to be entitled to come under a politico-legal and juridical order. State is a political immediacy/entity/ character, 'all sought for', political identity to bring an end to being permanently consigned to the category of what Machiavelli once portrayed of Italian people as a masterless man. It remains a permanent and prominent mainstream in the political lexicon protecting and at the same time dominating if need arises, the other strands of different hues.

From an onlooker perspective, the vast population or multitude with different distinctions or categories look cohesive and homogenous as like other distinctions. Identity with the state is the sole and prominent distinction to be achieved by man to be what Rousseau says, "instead of a stupid and unimaginative animal, he becomes intelligent and citizen". The existing plurality of identities does not have the legitimacy to challenge the ultimate identity with

the state. It is insulated from the fear of distortion of particularities. If need arises, it even crushes these particularities to reinforce the identity with state.

Though state was a boundary and spatial distancing concept in relation to similar other states, it is considered 'whole' or permanent from a cosmological perspective, spanning beyond time and space into people's timeless culture or civilization. With the spindle of its own culture, values and hallowed views of civilization, it was tried to be woven into a timeless cosmological tapestry. Instead of being confined to a political identity, it moves beyond to be identified with a civilization. Huntington's clash of civilization is a nice metaphor to justify America as a hegemonic state. "Greatness of a civilization" is culled from history to justify a state. Even Hegel to make state a universal and cosmological concept identified it with the 'march of Gold/ God on earth.'

These were the views about the prominent state providing identity to the people in an age where the monarchy controlled vast empires disintegrates and nations became free to constitute or consider themselves as separate identities on Westphalia thematic. Thus, said does not mean that this established notion about reification of the state's symbiotic relation with people as a collectivity was ideal and the pluralities of particularities in terms of individuals, sex, religion, class, caste or group completely was lost in the whole. Understanding of state as the ultimate refuge of the people can be plausible from a constitutive perspective in a specific historical context.

The development in the field of science and its application to social sciences heralded revolutionary change in the established thinking about state and its relation with people. Newtonian and Cartesian image of the universe as nothing but matter or particles in motion provided the ontological foundation to Hobbes's and Lock's concept of possessive individualism. Individuals are seen simply as particles in motion for power, glory and wealth. Thus, people – the political reification of the collectivity state- were reduced to individuals as a category. In Hobbes's case, complete individualism is complementary with absolute state. Locke seeing the contradiction between absolutism and individualism was of the view that limited state creates the condition for growth of individualism. A new identity in terms of individualism emerged to challenge the absolute state. These categories or distinctions got sharpened with the spread of democracy and liberal ideas for identity in their own distinctions not necessarily with the state. What was looking coherent, homogenous or a collectivity appeared cleft into divisions, cleavages and fractions on the basis of caste, class, sex, religion, group, environment, civilization. These searches for different identities other than with the state clash with each other with state becoming an intervening variable.

These distinctive categories do not perceive as being interconnected or interrelated or as inseparable part of the whole rather think in terms of disjointed separateness or 'the other', needing preferential treatment. They prefer to define their identities in terms of their own distinction not necessarily with the state.

Paradoxically, the state is constantly asked to identify itself with a particular category's distinctions. The whole is to identify with the part or particularities. The conflicts in the state are understood as the consequences of these categories seeking identity in their own distinctions. Marx developed the category of class in terms of productive forces to challenge the false identity of the proletariat within the state. The wars or violent conflicts were understood in terms class struggle. Caste and religion came up in Indian societies as a category demanding preferential treatment from the state. Sex – the distinction between male and female has recently become a very distinguishable category demanding dismantling of male dominated political institutions.

The population no longer seems a conglomerated and homogenous unit looking alike. It seems to be fragmented into different categories – caste, class, sex, religion, environment and civilization etc. Unity or universalism is no longer the characteristic of state. Particularism and separateness at present defines individuals' identity with state. Identity of individuals in terms of caste, class, gender, religion, reign etc supreme over identities with the state. The root causes of conflicts and motives in the state are found lying embedded in particularistic like caste, class, sex and religion, etc. These particularistic are today found more magnified than their identities with the state-the ultimate political organization. The consideration of 'people' as a whole – a homogenous unit is a constitutive desideratum when a state is to be formed and to survive as a viable political unit. "The voice of the people as the voice of God" is a holistic concept built around the state to endow the latter with stability, permanence and legitimacy to rule. It implies a euphemism for demonstrating legitimacy to the rule.

With the rise of particularities in terms of caste, class, gender, religion, environment, civilizations or groups, 'the people' seems to be fractured and no longer holistic. The identities and security sought in terms of these particularities in the context of a state imply that the human beings are concerned with their immediate, intimate, or those that affect them than with the distance or beyond the immediacy to the far fetched state. Security which is basically understood as protector of identities of human beings both in materialistic and spiritual terms is no longer considered a monopolistic attribute of a state. The discrepancy between the security of state and security of the people came to the fore and occupied the center stage of security studies. Finding out the root causes of security threats or conflicts between states or even among individuals in particularities like caste, class, gender, environment, religion and civilization have become very common today. But demography, the difference in age structure and male/female dichotomy in population studies, has become equally a security threat or a point of conflict within a state with destabilizing consequences.

### **3. Demography and Population Age Structure: Impacts on the Stability of the Political System**

In fact, studies on demographic issues are very few. Demography and population age structure have raised in recent years the concern of policy makers and analysts, because of their consequences upon security, stability and democratic structure of a state. When the demography of a state is analyzed in terms of male and female population and their age structure, the differential in their number in a particular age group has a great impact on the stability of the political system.

#### **3.1. Population Age Structure and Conflict**

Three months after the attacks of September 11, 2001, the New York Times asked, "Is the Devil in the Demographics?". This paper examines the vulnerability of large cohorts of unemployed youth to extremist ideology and political recruitment. In the post-9/11 era, however, there has been very little academic research on the relationship between youthful age structure and warfare. Literature on civil war, insurgency and terrorism has instead highlighted the role of other causal factors such as the scarcity of valuable natural resources, the degree of ethnic fractionalization, societal segmentation and the type of political regime while showing short shrift to the importance of population age structure. Saying this does not in any way denude these factors of their significant role in the onset of civil war but the importance of youthful age structure in insurgency based civil wars and terrorism should not be undermined. History stands to witness the linkage between young population and violence. Herbert Moller<sup>1</sup> in his study established a close correspondence between the rise of Nazi party in Germany and the surges in proportion of young men in the population. Yale historian Paul Kennedy<sup>2</sup> adduces that revolutions occur more often in countries with large populations of energetic and frustrated young men.

#### **3.2. Excess Youth: A Perfect Volcanic Eruption?**

Some recent conflicts in Rwanda, Sierra Leone, the Middle East and Pakistan sponsored terrorism in Kashmir lend credence to excess youth hypothesis. Philip Gourevitch<sup>3</sup> describes how Rwandan genocidaires were recruited from among the jobless young men who were "wasting idleness and attendant resentments.

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<sup>1</sup> Herbert Moller, "Youth as a Force in Modern World", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 10, No.3, 1968, pp.237-60.

<sup>2</sup> Paul Kennedy, *Preparing for the Twenty-first Century*, Random House, New York, 1993.

<sup>3</sup> Philip Gourevitch, *We Wish to Inform You that Tomorrow We will be Killed with Our Families: Stories from Rwanda*, Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, New York, 1998. p. 26.

Most of the men were motivated by the opportunity to drink, loot, murder and enjoy higher living standards than they were previously accustomed to”.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, Mastany in his work pointed out the case of Sierra Leone where young people comprised 95 percent of the fighting forces in a recent civil war. In his view, the youth are a “long neglected cohort; they lack jobs and training, and it is to convince them to join the fight”.<sup>5</sup> Recent acts of terrorism in Palestine and the Democratic Republic of the Congo seems to have close correspondence with the fact that both areas have among the highest ratios of young adults (15-19) to older working age adults (30-54) anywhere in the world.<sup>6</sup>

Population growth has slowed worldwide and will likely to end within the next century. But high fertility rates in Africa, the Middle East and Pakistan will continue to bring increasingly larger cohorts of young adults for the next few decades. As the statistics show, the ratio of young people to adults in the developing world will continue to remain well above the 1980 world peak for decades to come. The National Intelligence Council<sup>7</sup> refers to these increasing youth cohorts as a part of perfect volcanic eruption- including failed states, poor economies, environmental scarcity and religious extremism- that will likely stoke the fire of violence in terms of terrorism and insurgency in certain parts of the globe for decades to come.

### ***3.3. Relative Cohort Size: A Better Measure of Age Structure***

The main thrust of the argument is that the presence of young adults is not as important as the degree of alienation, frustration, and marginalization they experience. These factors are subjective and difficult to measure; one way might be to examine how far the schools and the labour markets must expand to accommodate the incoming cohort of teenagers. A rough estimate can be obtained by measuring the current group of young adults (ages 15 to 29) as a proportion of the number of older working adults (ages 30 to 54) to find a relative cohort size after a similar measure proposed by Richard Easterlin.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Lisa Mastany, “The Hazards of Youth”, *World Watch Magazine*, September-October, 2004, p.19.

<sup>6</sup> Sarah Staveteig, “The Young and the Restless: Population Age Structure and Civil War”, *Environmental Change and Security Project (ECSP)*, Issue 11, 2005, p.13.

<sup>7</sup> National Intelligence Council, “Mapping the Global Future: Report of the National Intelligence Council’s 2020 Project,” 2004, Washington, D.C, Government Printing Office, available at: <http://www.foia.cia.gov/2020.pdf>, accessed on 29 September 2010.

<sup>8</sup> Richard A. Easterlin, “What will 1984 be like? Socioeconomic Implications of Recent Twists in Age Structure”, *Demography*, Vol. 15, No.4, 1978, pp. 397-432. Also see, Richard A. Easterlin, *Birth and Fortune: The Impact of Numbers on Personal Welfare* (second edition), University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1987.

Relative cohort size can provide the missing link between the population of young men and the risk of insurgency based civil wars or terrorism. Easterlin's relative cohort size hypothesis explicates the relationship between youthful populations and the economic and psychological frustrations that enable political instability, and ultimately civil war, insurgency or terrorism. As a large relative cohort comes of age, the tension produced by lack of success in the job and marriage markets may in the presence of other factors render armed conflict, rebellion and insurgency a more appealing option. The relative cohort size may not be an immediate cause of civil war. But a large birth cohorts often strain the schooling system and labour market of a county, particularly a developing one, which can result in massive frustration, unemployment, reduced wages and dissatisfaction- and arguably create a potential army of young men who could be easily recruited in a rebellion or terrorist groups like the Nepalese youth into the Maoist fold or the Tamils into the Liberation Tiger of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in Sri Lanka. Yet in most of the developing countries, where economic opportunities are not even sufficient for current youth cohorts, a rise in the population entering the labour force is likely to increase joblessness. In countries with less economic opportunities and fewer channels for enacting social change, large cohorts of young adults may choose more violent means of protest and change.

#### **3.4. *Relative Male Income***

One of the most important explanations of the importance of relative cohort size is what Easterlin calls relative male income, which is the standard of living a man's income can buy relative to his father's standard of living. Relative male income is inversely related to relative cohort size, other things being equal. Not every society may respond the same way to low relative male income but large birth cohorts in any country -particularly males- must be accommodated by the school system and eventually by the labour market. In populations with many women of child bearing age, population momentum will cause overall population size to increase even after decades after fertility declines. The government will be required to increase expenditures on services such as roads, schools, and hospitals to accommodate each new cohort. When the large birth cohort reaches adulthood, they will require more jobs than vacated by previous cohorts.

In deeply religious contexts where pre-marital sex is forbidden and men are expected to financially establish themselves prior to marriage, such a shortage of economic opportunities can be particularly frustrating, as the shortage can prevent even educated adults from entering into marriage and achieving cultural notions of adulthood. Imagine the following advertisement for Al Qaeda: "Wanted: Educated individuals preferably with a graduate degree in a technical field who have foreign language skills preferably fluency in English as well as a deep antipathy to their own and others' political leaders and must be comfortable with violence and available for training and important assignments in foreign



countries.” It shows that the terrorists of Al Qaeda were educated, and mostly from countries that have long graduated from the category of the world’s poorest. What led them to such a path is perhaps disgust with their own often corrupt governments, a sense of humiliation by the West, religious fanaticism, boredom and alienation or perhaps dim prospects for a fulfilling career.<sup>9</sup> Research on suicide bombers, for example, has shown that many are well educated and highly capable, yet lack the economic opportunities necessary to establish themselves.<sup>10</sup>

While testing the importance of relative cohort size in the probability of civil wars, the researchers have found that high infant mortality rates, lower per capita incomes, and larger population sizes consistently had a higher risk of civil wars onset.<sup>11</sup> Infant mortality rate and per capita income were nearly strong predictors of civil war onset, and both measures were highly correlated to one another. Calculating youth as a percentage of the entire population (non-relative cohort size) did not determine the onset of civil wars. On the other hand, comparing a specific population of youth to a specific population of adults (relative cohort size) and comparing a specific population of youth to all adults, both strongly predicted the risk of civil war.

As found from the study, future relative cohort size could also be used to predict conflict. Relative cohort size can be measured up to 10 years in advance using current data on population age structure. For example, the ratio of future young adults (e.g., the current 5 to 19 year old) to future older adults (the current 20-to 44 year old) - combined with current information about infant mortality, population size, and governance- can predict whether conflict will occur 10 to 15 years from now almost as well as waiting 10 years to measure the actual cohort size. This finding could help develop conflict prevention policies; by identifying large relative cohorts up to 10 years before they reach young adulthood. Policymakers and funders might devise better strategies for easing the transition, and thus reduce the chances of conflict.<sup>12</sup>

### **3.5. Missing Women and Conflict**

Valerie M. Hudson and Andrea M. den Boer in their works explicate how male deficits in Asia could drive the youths into the vortex of violence and

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<sup>9</sup> Carol Lancaster, “Poverty, Terrorism and National Security”, *Environmental Change and Security Project Report*, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Washington, D.C: 2003, Issue 9, p.19.

<sup>10</sup> Ehud Sprinzak, “Rational Fanatics”, *Foreign Policy*, September-October, 2000, pp. 66-73.

<sup>11</sup> Sarah Staveteig, “Relative Cohort Size and the Rise of Civil War Worldwide, 1955-2000”, Paper presented at the XXV International Union for the Scientific Study of Population Conference, Tours, France, July 2005.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, ECSP, issue 11, 2005, p.15.

terrorist activities.<sup>13</sup> For example, the Indian government's estimate of its birth sex ratio is approximately 113 boy babies born for every 100 girl babies, with some locales recording ratios of 156 and higher.<sup>14</sup> The Chinese government states that its birth sex ratio is approximately 119, though some Chinese scholars have gone on record to show that the birth sex ratio is at least pegged at 121.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, countries such as Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, Taiwan, Afghanistan and South Korea are examples of high female deficit. Another indicator of gender imbalance is early childhood mortality. In some of the Asian nations mentioned above, early childhood mortality rates for girls are actually higher than boys.<sup>16</sup>

What forces drive the deficit of females in Asian nations such as India and China? Some scholars are of the view that hepatitis B disease and antigens of which have been associated with higher birth sex ratios, play a great role in preventing female births.<sup>17</sup> Supporting this thesis is another view that holds gender imbalance in Asia and elsewhere as man made phenomenon. It is through prenatal sex identification and female sex selective abortion or through relative neglect and abandonment in early childhood compared to male offspring, that females are eliminated. Another cause of gender imbalance is the ingrained preference for sons in Asian countries reinforced by religion and ancient culture and underrating of female life. The age old bias for boys, coupled with China's draconian one-child policy imposed since 1980, has produced what Gu Baochang, a leading Chinese expert on family planning, described as "the largest, the highest, and the longest" gender imbalance in the world.<sup>18</sup> For centuries, Chinese families without sons feared poverty and neglect. The male offspring represented continuity of lineage and protection in old age. The traditional thinking is best described in the ancient "Book of Songs" (1000-700B.C.)<sup>19</sup>:

When a son is born  
Let him sleep on the bed  
Clothe him with fine clothes,  
And give him jade to play...  
When a daughter is born,

<sup>13</sup> Valerie M. Hudson and Andrea M. den Boer. *Bare Branches: The Security Implications of Asia's Surplus Male Population*, MA: MIT Press, Cambridge, 2004.

<sup>14</sup> India Registrar General, Census of India, 2001, Series 1: India, Paper of 2001, Provisional Population Totals, Office of the Registrar General, New Delhi, India.

<sup>15</sup> China State Statistical Bureau, Major Figures of the 2000 Population Census, Beijing: China Statistics Press, 2001.

<sup>16</sup> United Nations Population Division, "Too Young to Die: Genes or Gender", The United Nations (UN), New York, 1998.

<sup>17</sup> Emily Oster, "Hepatitis B and the Case of the Missing Women", *Journal of Political Economy*, Vol. 113, No. 6, December, 2005, pp. 1163-1216.

<sup>18</sup> NBC News, September 14, 2004.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

Let her sleep on the ground,  
Wrap her in common wrappings,  
And give broken titles to play...

**Table 1: Number of Missing Women for Selected Asian Countries Using Census Data**

| Country     | Year | Actual Number of males | Actual Number of Females | Actual Sex Ratio | Expected Sex Ratio | Expected Number of Women | Missing Women |
|-------------|------|------------------------|--------------------------|------------------|--------------------|--------------------------|---------------|
| Afghanistan | 2000 | 11,227,000             | 10,538,000               | 106.5            | 96.4               | 11,646,266               | 1,108,266     |
| Bangladesh  | 2001 | 65,841,419             | 63,405,814               | 103.8            | 99.6               | 66,646,266               |               |
| China       | 2000 | 653,550,000            | 612,280,000              | 106.7            | 100.1              | 652,897,103              | 2,700,028     |
| India       | 2001 | 531,277,078            | 495,738,169              | 107.2            | 99.3               | 535,022,234              | 40,617,103    |
| Pakistan    | 1998 | 68,873,686             | 63,445,593               | 108.6            | 99.2               | 69,429,119               | 39,284,065    |
| South Korea | 2000 | 23,068,181             | 22,917,108               | 100.7            | 100.0              | 23,068,181               | 5,983,526     |
| Taiwan      | 2000 | 11,386,084             | 10,914,845               | 104.3            | 100.2              | 11,363,357               | 151,073       |
| Total       |      |                        |                          |                  |                    |                          | 448,512       |
|             |      |                        |                          |                  |                    |                          | 90,292,573    |

Source: Quoted from Valerie M. Hudson and Andrea M. den Boer “Missing Women and Bare Branches: Gender Balance and Conflict” in Environmental Change and Security Program, The Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, NW Washington, DC, Report, Issue 11 2005, p. 22.

From a relatively normal ratio of 108.5 boys to 100 girls in the early 1980s, the male surplus progressively spiralled to 111 in 1990, 116 in 2000, and is now close to 120 boys for each 100 girls at the present time. As it is reported, in 8 to 10 years, China will have something like 40 to 60 million missing women, which will have enormous implications for China’s prostitutions industry and human trafficking. According to a report by the International Planned Parenthood Federation, the vast majority of aborted fetuses, more than 70 percent, were female, citing the abortion of up to 750,000 female fetuses in China in 1999. A report by Zhang Qing, the population researcher of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, said the gender imbalance is statistically related to the high death rate of female babies, with female death rate at age zero in the city or rural areas consistently higher than male baby death rate. Only seven of China’s 29 provinces are within the world’s average sex ratio, Zhang Qing’s report cited eight “disaster provinces” from North to South China, where there were 26 to 38 percent more boys than girls.

The hint of serious problems ahead can be seen in the increasing cases of human trafficking as bachelors try to purchase their wives. According to one

estimate, over the next decade, some 40 million Chinese men will be unable to find wives due to the scarcity of females, thus the growing number of so called “bachelors’ villages” in various parts of China.<sup>20</sup> While the 2001 census showed that India’s countrywide sex ratio for children under age six had risen to only about 108. It also revealed that the north-western states of Haryana and Punjab had reached ratios of 122 and 126 respectively. This practice of culling of girls is not confined to Asia; evidence for this practice can be found in every continent. India’s predilection for male child is antiquated and ingrained in its culture and religion. A woman having no male child is held inauspicious in the society and augurs ill for those who see her first before starting a new work. The social reasons are that sons will take care of their old parents and as such are entitled to perform all religious functions and offer consecrations to their deceased parents.

#### **4. Effects of Female Deficit on Democracy and the Security Trajectory of Nations**

What effect will this deficit of females have on the security trajectory of nations? In this regard, anthropologist Barbara D. Miller has termed the preservation of a balanced sex ratio a “public good” that nations overlook at their peril.<sup>21</sup> As studies show, by the year 2020, 12-15 per cent of their young adult males will not be able to tie the nuptial bond because the girls who would have grown up to be their wives were eliminated by their societies instead. With each passing year between now and 2020, both the proportion and number of young adult males that exceed the number of young adult females in China and India will increase.<sup>22</sup> The Chinese call it “guang gunner” “bare branches”- branches of the family tree that will never bear fruit, but which may be useful as “bare sticks” or clubs. This Chinese metaphor attests to the centrality of this above thesis that “men who are not provided the opportunity to develop a vested interest in the system of law and order will gravitate toward a system based on physical force, in which they hold an advantage over other members of the society”.

Furthermore, this is compounded by the fact that in a society of too few women, the men who get the chance to marry are certainly of higher socio-economic status. Those men who are left out are poorer, less educated, less skilled and less likely to be employed. These left out unmarried adult males are likely to evince a predilection for establishing a system based on physical force in order to obtain what they cannot obtain legitimately. In such a spectre of remaining unmarried, their likely shift from potential threats to potential protectors of society can be stalled. The rate of criminal behaviour of unmarried

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<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>21</sup> Barbara D. Miller, “Female-selective Abortion in Asia: Patterns, Policies, and Debates.” *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 103, No. 4, 2001, pp.1083-1095.

<sup>22</sup> Valerie M. Hudson and Andrea M. den Boer, *op.cit.*.

men is many times higher than that of married men; marriage is a reliable predictor of a downturn in reckless, antisocial, illegal, and violent behaviour by young adult males.<sup>23</sup> If this shift or transition affects a sizable proportion of a society's young men, the society is likely to become less stable.

Strong evidences establishing the linkage between gender imbalance and conflict are found by studies in India.<sup>24</sup> This is not new. Historical case studies stand a testimony to this. In the 19th century, Nien rebels came from a very poor region in China with a sex ratio of at least 129 men per 100 women.<sup>25</sup> At first, relatively smaller groups of men coalesced to form smuggling and extortion gangs. Eventually, these gangs banded together to form larger armies wresting territory from imperial control. It took the emperor many years to subdue the rebellion. From a sociological perspective, this thesis holds good. The scholars have studied the behaviour of unattached young males, noting their propensity to congregate with others like them and to engage in dominance displays in such groups. Sociologists have found that the risky shift in group behaviour, where a group is willing to take greater risks and engage in more reckless behaviour than an individual member of the group, is much more pronounced in groups comprised solely of unattached young adult males.<sup>26</sup>

With the rising sex ratio, the incidence of crime, violence, drug smuggling, trafficking, prostitution and weapon smuggling will increase.<sup>27</sup> The question crops up how the governments respond to such a situation where the rate of sex ratio is on the increase. Aware of the negative consequences of bare branches, "most governments in the past tried to thin the number of bare branches, whether through fighting, sponsoring the construction of large public works necessitating dangerous manual labour, exporting them to less populated areas, or co-opting them into the military or police".<sup>28</sup> One 16th century Portuguese monarch sent his army, composed primarily of noble and non-noble bare branches, on one of the later crusades to avoid a crisis of governance; more than 25 per cent of that army never returned, and many others were seriously wounded.<sup>29</sup> To control the

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<sup>23</sup> Allan, Mazur and Joel Michalek, "Marriage, Divorce, and Male Testosterone", *Social Forces*, Vol.77, No.1, 1998, pp. 315-330.

<sup>24</sup> Philip Oldenburg, "Sex Ratio, Son Preference, and Violence in India: A Research Note." *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 27, No.49-50, 1992, pp. 2657-2662.

<sup>25</sup> Sarah Staveteig, "The Young and the Restless: Population Age Structure and Civil War", Environmental Change and Security Project (ECSP), Issue 11, 2005, p.22.

<sup>26</sup> Norris R. Johnson, James G. Stemler, and Deborah Hunter, "Crowd Behaviour as 'Risky Shift': A Laboratory Experiment.", *Sociometry*, Vol. 40, No.2, 1977, pp.183-187.

<sup>27</sup> Valerie M. Hudson and Andrea M. den Boer, *op.cit.*

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> James L. Boone, "Noble Family Structure and Expansionist Warfare in the Late Middle Ages", in Rada Dyson-Hudson and Michael A. Little (eds.), *Rethinking Human Adaptation: Biological and Cultural Models*, West View, Boulder, CO,

rising instability caused by increasing bare branches, the governments are likely to favour more authoritarian approaches to internal governance and less benign international presences. As seen, gender imbalance does not cause war or conflict *per se*, but it can aggravate it. The potential for democracy in countries in Asia like India, China and other countries where gender imbalance is increasing, is likely to be affected by bare branches.

Thus, a youthful population age structure with the bare branches in combination with other factors like rising unemployment, environmental degradation and economic deprivation can increase the risk of the onset of civil conflict and political violence. Recent studies by Richard Cincotta and Elizabeth Leahy suggest that three- fourths of all countries with recent conflict will likely experience conflict in the next decade. One fourth of all non-conflict countries with 60 percent young age structures under 30 years of age will likely experience a new civil conflict during the next decade.<sup>30</sup> As the above studies show, the relative cohort size of youth population between the ages 15 to 29 is more vulnerable to extremist ideology and insurgency. In the event of climate change and its disastrous impact on all aspects of human life, the linkage between youth age structure and violence becomes crystal clear.

## 5. Conclusion

From the above discussions, it can be argued that increase in cohort size of youths combined with deficit of women can exacerbate the crisis further in the Asian countries, which has already demonstrated such symptoms of civil unrest. Table 1 clearly points to the increasing women deficit in Asian countries with India and China heading the list. Gender imbalance does not cause war or conflict *per se*, but it can amplify it. Will the internal stability caused by substantial numbers of bare branches (by 2020, 28 million in India – the same or more in China) overshadow external security concerns for the governments of these nations? Some potentially unstable situations jump to mind: the feuding countries of Pakistan and India have gender imbalances, as do China and Taiwan; and the resource rich Russia Far East faces an influx of Chinese workers while Russia continues to lose men.<sup>31</sup> How will gender imbalances affect the potential for democracy in China and evolution of democracy in India and other

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1983, pp. 79-86. Also see, James L. Boone, "Parental Investment and Elite Family Structure in Pre-industrial States: A Case Study of Late Medieval-early Modern Portuguese Genealogies", *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 88, No.4, 1986, pp.859-878.

<sup>30</sup> Richard P. Cincotta and Elizabeth Leahy, "Population Age Structure and its Relation to Civil Conflict: A Graphic Metric", *ECSP Report*, 2006-2007, p. 55.

<sup>31</sup> Vladimir Radyuhin, "A Chinese Invasion". *The Hindu*, 2003, September 23, available at: <http://www.worldpress.org/Asia/1651.cfm#down>, accessed on November 7, 2005.

Asian countries? The gender imbalances of these two countries will not remain solely their problem, as alone they comprise more than one-third of the world's population. The status of women in these nations could become an important factor in both domestic and international security in Asia, with possible implications for the entire international system.

A better understanding of contextual factors leading to civil wars, insurgency and terrorism may improve policy maker's ability to prevent these in future. Research on the cause of civil wars, insurgency and terrorism should incorporate measures of relative cohort size and women deficit. Unraveling the background factors that put a country at risk for conflict is arguably more important than finding the immediate spark of conflict as policy is much better equipped to address structural problems than immediate factors. In many countries around the world, one cannot prevent large relative youth cohorts and women deficit particularly in Asian countries over the next two decades, but understanding the role of relative cohort size and women deficit and formulation of planning and right policy wisely could help reduce the risk of future insurgency based civil wars.