Dropping Sex Ratio at Birth

Why in news?

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NITI Aayog's report has claimed Sex ratio at birth (SRB) has dropped in India.

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What is report on SRB is about?

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- The SRB is the number of girls born for every 1,000 boys, in natural circumstances, the SRB hovers around 952 girls for every 1,000 boys.
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- According to NITI Aayog's report sex ratio at birth (SRB) nationwide had dropped from 906 in 2012-2014 to 900 in 2013-2015.
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- In all, 17 of 21 large Indian States saw a drop in the SRB, with Gujarat performing the worst, declining 53 points.
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What the brief account on dropping sex ratio?

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- In 2016, a report from the Asian Centre for Human Rights noted that between 1994 and 2014, 2,266 cases of infanticide were registered in India.
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- Against 2,021 cases of abortion under the PC-PNDT, even though abortions outnumber infanticides today.
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- While this is a highly disturbing trend, it isn't new for India, which has seen a consistent lowering of the SRB since the 1970s.
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- In the Seventies, sex selection technologies like amniocentesis came about, in which doctors can test the amniotic fluid around a developing foetus for genetic abnormalities.

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- But people soon realised this method could be used to determine the child's sex and to abort it, if female.
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- Other technologies, including the cheaper and less invasive ultrasound, followed, allowing more people to use them.
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What are the concerns with low SRB's?

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- In India SRB is far lower than 952 because of the preference for the male child, this means India is killing girl children in the womb.
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- As on today, around 63 million girls are estimated to be 'missing' in India because of such actions.
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- Low SRBs starting from the Seventies have led to large numbers of "surplus men" today in countries like India and China.
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- There are concerns that skewed sex ratios lead to more violence against both men and women, as well as human-trafficking.
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- In India, some villages in Haryana and Punjab have such poor sex ratios that men "import" brides from other States.
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- This is often accompanied by the exploitation of these brides.
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What were the measures taken in this regard?

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- In 1994, the government took notice and introduced the Prenatal Diagnostics Techniques Act which punishes healthcare professionals for telling expectant parents the sex of a child with imprisonment and hefty fines.
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- In 2003, when technologies that allowed gender-selection even before conception became available, the act was amended to become the Prenatal Conception and Prenatal Determination Act (PC-PNDT), but this Act has been a failure.

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- But due to major gaps in the training of personnel implementing PC-PNDT, this act failed.
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What reforms needs to be taken?

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- India must implement the PC-PNDT more stringently, but must also dedicate more resources to fighting the preference for boys.
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- The Drugs Technical Advisory Board has recently decided that ultrasound machines should be included in the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, so that their import can be regulated.
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Source: The Hindu

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