

BETI BACHAO, BETI PADHAO - FOR A BRIGHTER INDIA

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INTRODUCTION

India is home to 20 percent child population of the world. Here, nearly 100 million children fall in the poorest wealth quintile. Therefore for any kind of inclusive growth, child population of the country needs adequate assimilation. Besides, these efforts must pay due attention to the gross disparities and the ground realities of the country. Disparity between girls and boys, between girls and boys belonging to different regions of the country must be taken in to account for giving girl children their due position in India.

Achieving gender equality and empowering women is one of the important targets of the Millennium Development Goals. Despite the fact that the gentle touch of a daughter and her voice has a soothing touch effect on parents, it is unfortunate that the practice of female feticide prevails in our country. There is a serious dichotomy in our lives between our ideas and reality, which is particularly painful in the case of girls and women in our society. The United Nations Organization has declared "October 11th" as the International Day for the Girl Child since 2012. The opportunity to born, opportunity to grow in safe and secure environment, opportunity to develop one's full potential are some of the major issues concerning the girl children in India.

A look at some of the indicators of human development will explain the problems of the girl children in our country.

Human Development Indicators

Indicator	Boys/Male	Girls/Female	Total
Population (0-6)	8,29,52,135	7,58,37,152	15,87,287
Sex Ratio (0-6)			914/1000
Literacy Ratio (7 years and above)	82.14	65.46	74.04
MMR (2007-09)	.....	212	.....
IMR (2009)	49	52	50
U5MR (2009)	60	69	64
Life expectancy (2002-06)	62.6	64.2	.....

Net Enrollment Ratio (2007)	97.3	93.6	.....
Dropout Ratio	....	.....	.....
Primary (2007-08)	25.7	24.4	.....
Middle (2007-08)	43.7	41.3	.....
Secondary (2007-08)	56.6	57.3	.....
Median Age at First marriage	.....	17.2	.....
Work Participation Rate	.....	.....	28 million

- Source:
1. Causes of India, 2011.
 2. Sample Registration System 7th July, 2011.
 3. NDHS – III 2005-06.

Killing of a girl child after birth, also known as female infanticide has been observed in the Indian society. While the practice of female infanticide killing daughter after birth, the current practice of female foeticide eliminated her in her mother womb itself. Thus the juvenile sex ratio has registered a continuous decline in India with a decadal variation of -3, -2, -17, -18 and -13 in the year 1971, 1981, 1991, 2001 and 2011 respectively.

The census of 2011 has recorded the lowest ever sex ratio of 914 in the age group 0-6 years with 3 million missing girls from 78.8 million in 2001 to 75.8 million in 2011. The decline in the juvenile sex ratio up to 1981 could be attributed to female infanticide and higher mortality rate among girl child due to neglect and discrimination. But the sharp decline in the juvenile sex-ratio in 1991, 2001 and 2011 census is definitely the outcome of the practice of female foeticide as prenatal diagnostic techniques became popular in Indian during 80's.

Few causes responsible for decline of girl child:

- The cultural legacy of strong son's preference
- The practice of dowry.
- The perception of girls being a paraaya dhan.
- Problems related to the safety and marriage of girl child.

Issues concerning girl child

In India, the legal age of marriage for a girl is 18 years. However, 36.8 percent of girls marry before attaining 18 years and the median age of the girls at the first marriage is 17.2 years. Child marriage not only violates human rights, it deprives the girl children of their childhood, lack of opportunity to education and poses serious health risks for them. Teenage pregnancy, a consequence of child marriage and 12 percent had become mothers before 16 years.

Globally one third of the deaths of the children less than five years of age are attributed to malnutrition. However, discriminatory feedings practices further nutritionally impoverishes the girls vis-à-vis boys. For the girls, the nutritional intake is relatively inferior both in terms of quality and quantity.

Anemia, especially in adolescent girls is an equally challenging problem. Almost 7 in 10 children within the age group of 6-59 months were observed to be anemic. A study by the Ministry of Human Development found that 3.7 percent children in the age group of 6-10 years and 5.2 percent in the age group of 11-13 years had either dropped out of the school or had never attend any school in 2008. The Right to Education Act 2010 provides for free and compulsory education to children below 14 years of age. This Act also incentivizes girls for completing elementary education. There are several factors responsible for the dropping out of the girls such as early marriage, household works, looking after siblings, distant schools, lack of female teachers, lack of toilet facilities etc.

Trafficking is yet another global problem which is done mainly for sexual exploitation of women and children. Of these, majority are children especially girl children. Neglect and discrimination against girls is a serious issue as it denies them their basic human rights. The discrimination is of several types that are amply reflected in the child sex ratio, educational attainment, child marriages, health, malnutrition, Infant Mortality Rate, Maternal Mortality Rate and other development indicators. The girl child is also highly susceptible to abuse, violence and exploitation both inside and outside her home. It has been widely observed that the crimes against girl child have been increasing over years.

At this juncture, Government of India made a social campaign with the title "Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao" that aims to generate awareness and improve the efficiency of welfare services meant for girls. The scheme was launched with an initial corpus of Rs.100 crore. The scheme was introduced in October 2014 to address the issue of declining child sex ratio. Prime Minister Modi launched the programme on 22nd January 2015 from Panipat, Haryana. In August 2016, Olympics 2016 bronze medalist Sakshi Malik was made brand ambassador of this scheme.

The objectives of the scheme are:

- ❖ Preventing sex selective abortion.
- ❖ Ensuring survival and protection of a girl child.
- ❖ Ensuring education of the girl child strategies employed to successfully carryout the scheme
- ❖ Implement a sustained social mobilization and communication campaign to create equal value for the girl child and promote her education.
- ❖ Place the issue of decline in Child Sex Ratio (CSR) in public discourse, improvement of which would be an indicator for good governance.
- ❖ Focus on gender critical districts and cities low on CSR for intensive and integrated action.

- ❖ Mobilize and train Panchayat Raj institutions / urban local bodies as catalysts for social challenge.
- ❖ Enable inter – sectoral and inter institutional convergence at District/Block/Grossroot levels.

In order to control the evil of female foeticide, the following remedial measures are suggested:

- ❖ Government should stress on the elimination of all forms of gender discrimination to enable the women to enjoy all the rights given to her by law of the land i.e., political, social, civil cultural and economic.
- ❖ Media can play a vital role to bring change in the mindset to treat the girl child on par with the boy without any discrimination.
- ❖ Scrupulous implementation of the existing law to eradicate the evil of female foeticide.
- ❖ Participation of parents, institutions of civil society, NGOs, political religions leaders through a multipronged approach.
- ❖ Mobilizing social, political, and administrative campaigns and initiating awareness campaigns to explain about the adverse effects of declining sex ratio.

Need is to educate everyone regarding this situation of missing girls and the existing threat. The nation cannot afford to ignore the needs of the girl child anymore. Considering the socio-economic educational disparities, it however demands a paradigmatic shift in the coming educational policy with a convergence approach. Thus with the commitment of the government on Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, it can certainly take lead in the making of the nation. It is earnestly hoped that this scheme will protect the girl child from all evils and pave the way for attaining the goal of inclusive growth with social justice.

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