

# GENDER ISSUES: CAN 'BETI BACHAO-BETI PADHAO' CAMPAIGN ADDRESS THEM?

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In the Rig Vedic period, the women occupied respectable place and enjoyed high status in the society. Their condition was good. With the passage of time, their position started declining and it degraded at a faster pace in the medieval period of history. The social evils like purdah, child marriage, dowry, discrimination against girl child, Sati and other such practices disadvantageous to women crept into the system. Though the women in India mostly from the higher classes enjoyed education and other privileges but the common woman still suffered ignominy, deprivation and hurdles. Despite increase in literacy rate of women from 8.86% in 1951 to 65.74% in 2011 and crude literacy rate from 0.60% in 1901 to 56.99% in 2011, the plight of women has remained the same except a microscopic minority who have acquired education, got some government job or are from the economically well of sections of the society. The plight of women is reflected in the adverse sex ratio/ child sex ratio (number of females per thousand males) for more than a century given in the table as under:

The child sex ratio (0-6 population) has shown continuously declining trend for last 50 years since 1961 and declined to 914 in 2011 from 976 in 1961. This has declined in all the states/UTs of India except in eight states/UTs viz, Andman & Nicobar Islands, Chandigarh, Gujarat,



Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Mizoram, Punjab and Tamil Nadu. There has been sharp decline in child sex ratio in states like J&K, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Uttarakhand. Child Sex Ratio has declined in both Rural and Urban areas. Interestingly this decline in Rural India is more than three times as compared to drop in Urban India in 2011 – a matter of great concern. This is despite efforts made by the successive governments in this direction.

Decline/changes in Child Sex Ratio index reflect underlying socio-economic and cultural patterns of the society, especially its attitude towards the girl child. The adverse consequences are increasing incidents of immoral trafficking of women, harassment of women/ girls, violence

Sex Ratio in India 1901-2011

Year	1901	1911	1921	1931	1941	1951	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001	2011
Sex Ratio	972	964	955	950	945	946	941	930	934	927	933	940

towards women, which has in turn affected the sex ratio. Celebration of International Women's day on 8<sup>th</sup> March every year has become a ritual, where, only speeches and pseudo resolutions are made and the poor or the lower middle class women/ daughters find no place there and their lot remains the same. Despite this all, this is visible that status of women in terms of financial position, social status, education, health has improved after independence. The government has also taken up a number of initiatives within the constitutional, legal and social frame work to improve the lot of women and daughters and tried to eliminate the gender discrimination.

### Reasons for declining sex ratio

The reasons for skewed sex ratio and discrimination against women are deep entrenched into our social fabric and traditional mind set of subjugation of women. May be due the fact that efforts have not been made on the lines of the community as to what the people at large think about the gender. Therefore, the answer lies in our social system than outside it. Some of the factors are mentioned below:

- **Male Progeny:** Majority of the people (male/female) in the society have first child preference of a male child. They consider son as proliferating lineage of the family and hence 'son is son' propagates need of a progeny 'son is son'. None of them think of a female as a first child.
- **Safety:** There is a feeling of insecurity about the safety of girls not only while going to the school /college, in the school or college or any other place but also at their own home or in relations.
- **Social trauma for a suitable match:** Even in this electronic era, generally people are afraid of upcoming situation while the girl is of marriageable age that while searching for a suitable match for marriage for their girl as they will have to go through the trauma of her being presented before a number of perspective grooms and family members.
- **Financial burden:** Daughters' marriages are quite costly in India across the communities.

Fear of Expenditure on daughter's marriage is also a factor which forces them to think against having a girl child. Majority of the people still consider daughter a financial burden on the family.

- **Dowry:** Even if a suitable match is found, parents are afraid of dowry demand and even dowry is not a guarantee of comforts and dignity to her in her in-laws home.
- **Work place:** Parents are afraid of gender bias/ harassment of their daughters at the work place, more so in rural areas, where she is not treated well even today.
- **Gender roles:** Broadly speaking gender signifies the earmarking of roles of men and women by the society which also decides (whether we like or not) what is good or bad for them. Over the years, due to growing bias in definition, women ended up with an inferior position. Traditions and practices further contributed to discrimination. May be she is at disadvantage due to her gender specific roles as she has to look after the kitchen work, washing, tending to cattle, rearing child and doing all gender specific roles despite her sharing of male specific works. This scenario can be corrected only through sustained efforts of individuals, govt. and other developmental organisations.

### Suggestions for improving sex ratio

If India is really interested in reversing the trend of continuously declining child sex ratio and wants to improve it in long run, it will have to accord women, a place of pride in the society, will have to refrain from the traditional approach of treating the female gender. When she feels secure in the society her participation will spontaneously increase in all the spheres of life, which will not only automatically motivate them but to their spouses to opt for the girl child. Along with the recent Beti Bachao- Beti Padhao campaign to save the girl child, a multi-pronged strategy should be adopted to address the issue of female gender, which has assumed serious proportions. Some of the suggestions for improving the status of women in the society and reversing the trend of child sex ratio are as given below:

**1. Focussed implementation of Prime Minister Jan Dhan Yojana:** The Prime Minister Jan Dhan Yojana, which has already been launched for accessing banking services to the people and more than 10 crore bank accounts have been opened, should now focus on separate account of women in the family so that she operates the account herself at her will free from any family pressure. It will also boost their participation in decision making in the family and in taking up economic activity on scale. The bankers either through existing SHGs or their direct approach should organise village camps for opening of accounts solely in the name of women in a campaign mode.

**2. Organising women SHGs and their skill development /upgradation:** The focus should be strengthening of existing SHGs and organising 100% women from the poor sections and middle class (both urban and rural) into self help groups (SHGs) and should be given basic orientation and vocational training for taking up economic/ income generating activities so that they add more to the family income for greater participation in the decision making. It should be taken up under National

Rural Livelihood Mission and Aajeevika Skills recently named as *Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalya Yojana (DDU-GKY)*.

**3. Effective implementation of 'Beti Bachao-Beti Padhao' campaign:** Though 'save-the girl child' programmes are in vogue all over the country, 'Beti Bachao-Beti Padhao' Abhiyan being launched by the Prime Minister of India from Panipat district of Haryana on 22<sup>nd</sup> January, 2015 will make an impact on improving child sex ratio, if it is taken up in the right earnest beyond the television hype and routine talks. Effective steps need to be taken up to break the traditional mental barriers/ blocks of the society in favour of the girl child. More incentive should be given to the poor couple having first child as daughter or both the children as daughters.

**4. Promoting Education:** Education is said to be the liberator and biggest tools of empowerment. All the girls, whose parents are not income tax payee should be given liberal scholarship for pursuing education upto the highest level. To encourage the girls for pursuing higher education, the local administration through out the country should ensure for safe travelling or transportation of girls upto the schools and back to home and to far away places to colleges through the specially deployed public transport. As, the parents for lack of safe travel facilities from their villages or nearby, do not prefer to send the girls to schools and colleges for the fear of harassments of their daughters at the hands of anti social elements. This can be done through Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) and Rashtriya Uchchar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA) (**National Higher Education Mission**).

**5. Creating hostel facilities for girls and working women:** Provision of concessional Hostel facilities to working women and studying girls can help remove fear of safety from the minds of parents, which in turn can bring about a change in the mind set of the society

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in favour of girl child.

**6. Corporate sector in education:** Corporate sector funds, which always remain unutilised, should be utilised for providing travel facilities to the girls from village to school/college and back. The funds could also be used for scholarships to the girls who pursue higher education.

**7. Plantation of Sapling:** As emphasised by our Prime Minister, every rural household should plant a sapling at the birth of the girl child to be liquidated at the time of her marriage so that it becomes a source of financial support and a source of freedom.

**8. Liquor vends away from habitation :** Alcoholism of men is another curse on the women. She has to bear in case the husband is drunkard. Whatever rural poor women earns,

the husband forcefully wastes her earnings on alcohol and smoking. The governments should amend the excise policy to set up the liquor vends away at a safe distance from the habitation.

9. **Proper implementation of existing women welfare/development schemes:** Schemes like Sabla being implemented for protection of adolescent/girl child should be implemented in a proper manner. Instead of introducing new schemes, the existing schemes of health, nutrition, sanitation, hygiene, pre-natal care, anti-natal care, employment and social security should be integrated and strengthened for appropriate and timely benefit to women/girl.
10. **Sanitation and hygiene:** For dignity, privacy and safety of women every households should be persuaded to opt for individual household toilet and there should be adequate and clean toilets in schools and educational institutions. In addition to the above, Menstruation Hygiene Management, which has hitherto remained a taboo, should be taught to both the male and female.
11. **Enforcement of existing legal provisions:** To prevent the harassment of girls/women like eve teasing, molestation, harassment, rapes, acid attacks on girls, the existing provisions of Indian Penal Code (IPC)/ or of any other relevant law should be further amended expeditiously and be enforced timely and forcefully in a proper manner. The Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (PNDT) Act and Rules should be implemented in right spirit.

## Conclusion

There has been continuous decline in child sex ratio in India since 1951 and marginal improvement has started in sex ratio since 1971. If the sex ratio is to improve to check the social consequences and beti bachao-beti padhao has to be made a grand success, it should not remain a mere slogan, it should be supported by proper enforcement of law related to protection of girl child and women. Medical fraternity should come forward in support of this social cause and they should boycott such practitioners who resort to such immoral and unlawful activities. Organising training programmes of girls for their self defence of martial arts in mission mode. Effective IEC campaign through media and inter-personal communication for building a strong movement in favour of girl child should be accompanied by Beti bachao-beti padhao. There may be regular and effective counselling of parents of the girl child and the mother in laws in favour of girl child. Strengthening and building movement for organising women into the self help groups for bank linkage and vocational training for their self dependence would go a long way in improving the sex ratio. Let the society make sincere efforts to bring a change in what Sabana Azmi has rightly remarked that "I have never heard or written in students' book that "my father is in kitchen and my mother is in the office or both are in office'.

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The Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi launched the 'Beti Bachao Beti Padhao' programme in Haryana on January 22, 2015. The scheme aims to address the dipping child sex ratio and empower the girl child in the country. Speaking on the occasion, the Prime Minister said 'Beta Beti Ek Samaan' should be our Mantra. "The thought that only a son will take care of you during your old age is incorrect," said the Prime Minister. 'Beti Bachao Beti Padhao' will focus on 100 gender critical districts where the child sex ratio is particularly low by enforcing existing laws that criminalize pre-birth gender selection, and by improving girls' school attendance, among other measures. 'Beti Bachao Beti Padhao' campaign is the fourth major initiative of the after 'Jan Dhan Yojna', 'Swachh Bharat Abhiyan' and 'Make in India'.

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