

# GIRL CHILD ISSUES: NEED TO ENSURE STRINGENT POLICIES

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Approximately 1,50,000 women and children are trafficked from South Asia every year and for most of them India acts as a country of origin and destination. In some of the cases, women and girls are trafficked to other countries via India. It is estimated that nearly 5000 to 7000 Nepalese girls are trafficked into India annually for sexual exploitation.

India is growing dynamically in every field. Today, the boom in economy, innovative technologies and improved infrastructure has become nation's pride. The country has witnessed advancements in all fields but bias against girl child is a serious matter to be looked into urgently. Girl Child is the pride and dignity of our nation. The right and prompt opportunity to be born, chance to grow in a safe and secure environment, opportunity to develop own full potential are some of the major issues concerning the girl children in India. There are many problems that a girl child undergo in her life which subsequently hinder her empowerment. There are several institutions (Government and nongovernment) that are attempting to bring in changes in practices related with discrimination against the Girl Child in India. Discrimination against a girl child begins in the mother's womb, when she is deprived of her right to live. Census data suggests that the necessity for a male child, a deep rooted cultural need, has not only lived through the years but has also increased by many points. Simple techniques allow easy determination of sex of the foetus. The practice of female foeticide is widespread despite it being an illegal activity. Modernisation, growth and education were expected to create a safe and healthy environment for the girl child, but the country is witnessing the opposite. Actions have been taken in the form of laws, schemes and awareness campaigns by both the government and the independent bodies. However, one needs to look into effectiveness of all such initiatives and parameters that could be used to measure the same.

## Girl Child Issues:

### Female Foeticide and Infanticide:

Female foeticide is an act of destruction that causes death of a foetus. This is not a natural

act but a deliberate one. This is called as sex-selective abortion, as the sex of an unborn baby is determined through medical techniques and the same is aborted if the sex turns out to be a female one. Killing of a girl child after birth is called female infanticide. It is feared that close to 8 million foetuses have been killed in India since the census in 2001. (India's unwanted girls, 2011). **Eminent economist, Amartya Sen in 1990 supposed that about 100 million girl children have been either aborted before birth, killed after birth or neglected to death (Gendercide, 2010). 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.** 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 India during 80s and continuing still now with advancement in the technology. The practise of female foeticide and infanticide spans centuries in the rural India. However, the practise over the decades has spread to the educated urban India as well. Despite rising income, education and standard of living, preference for male child exists. Sex determination techniques have made it possible for families to fulfil their deep-rooted traditional desire for a male child.

Table: Sex Ratio and Child Sex Ratio

Year	Sex Ratio	Child Sex Ratio
1991	927	945
2001	933	927
2011	940	914

Source: Census of India, 2011



## Girl Child Trafficking

Child trafficking, according to UNICEF is defined as "any person under 18 who is recruited, transported, transferred, harboured or received for the purpose of exploitation, either within or outside a country". There have been many cases where children just disappear overnight, as many as one every eight minutes, according to the National Crime Records Bureau. Children are taken from their homes to be bought and sold in the market. In India, there is a large number of children trafficked for various reasons such as labour, begging, and sexual exploitation. In most of the cases it is the girl child that became serious victim of trafficking. Girl Child is being widely selected for trafficking over male child for various grave reasons. Children are traded off as sex workers, domestic servants, construction workers, labourers in shops, on farms etc. During the trafficking process, traffickers violate an extensive array of human rights. They are subjected to physical, psychological and sexual violence, their movement is restricted. There is just no safe and healthy working environment, their wages are confiscated and they are generally subjected to inhuman and degrading treatment, forced labour, slavery-like practices or slavery. They are increasingly affected by ill health, insults and humiliation and a life of uncertainty and risks. They have no access to their families. The number of children trafficked worldwide for sexual exploitation or cheap labour on an annual basis is 1.2 million. Approximately 1,50,000 women and children are trafficked from South Asia every year and for most of them India acts as a country of origin and destination. In some of the cases, women and girls are trafficked to other countries via India. It is estimated that nearly 5000 to 7000 Nepalese girls are trafficked into India annually for sexual exploitation. National Human Rights Commission estimated that almost half of the children trafficked within India are between the ages of 11-14. Thus, trafficking is a global problem which is done mainly for sexual exploitation of women and children. Of these, majority are children especially girl children. Therefore, to provide the girl children a safe and secure environment to grow and prosper in life, serious measures have to be implemented at all level of governance.

## Girl Child Labour, Abuse, Exploitation and Domestic Violence

Apart from various reasons for girl child being trafficked, Child Labour has got serious implication and it is one of the prime reasons of trafficking. Trafficking children for domestic slavery is a relatively new development that pose grave threat for empowerment of girl child. Focus with regards to abuse has generally been more in the public domain such as child labour, prostitution, marriage and illegal activities. Mal-treatment of girl child by the care givers has the potential to emotionally and mentally harm children to a very different degree. In most of the cases when a child is being exploited it is mainly for labour, domestic works and sexual abuse. They could not have the joys of childhood. Worse is the condition of the girl child. She has to start working in the household and in the fields in the rural areas. Neglect of the girl child is so much that forty lakh of the one crore. twenty lakh born every year die before they are fifteen. **The fate of children in almost all the Third World countries is the same. According to a report of International Labour Organization (ILO) 200 million children below 15 have to earn their livelihood. The ILO report tells that 80 per cent of Pakistani carpets are made by children who also work in India, Nepal and Afghanistan to make rugs. The same report says they cut diamonds in slums in Gujarat and Mumbai, cut cocoa beans, make T-shirts in Bangladesh, handbags in Thailand. They work with dangerous chemicals in Moroccan tanneries, wash earth and gravel to separate gold in Peruvian rain forests and work in jasmine fields in Egypt.** In most of the cases girl child is much affected than male child physically and mentally.





## Child Marriages, Health and Malnutrition Problems

Child marriage not only violates the human rights of the girl children but it also leads to several harmful consequences for them such as lack of opportunity to education, sexual exploitation, violence and early pregnancy. It deprives the girl children of their childhood and poses serious health risks for them. Teenage pregnancy, a consequence of child marriage, is quite common in India. The early marriage of girls normally results in the early pregnancy of the adolescent girls leading to the birth of undernourished children. About 16 per cent girls within the age group of 15-19 years had begun childbearing. It also affects the health of the mother as her tender body is not adequately strong for child bearing. This situation enhances the risk of maternal deaths. When a girl marries as a child, the health of her children suffers too. The children of child brides are at substantial greater risk of perinatal infant mortality and morbidity, and stillbirths and infant deaths are 50 per cent higher in mothers younger than 20 years than in women who gave birth later. There is ample chance that reducing child marriages will help to ensure more children survive into adulthood.



### Initiatives for Empowerment of Girl Child

The pride and dignity of any country lies in its future torch bearers, particularly in empowering today's children. In a country like India children in general and girl child in particular occupies a place of primacy. Thence, empowering girl child is not just empowering one family but the whole nation. Many initiatives have been taken by the governments, non-governmental organisations to ensure free and safe living of girl child in India. But still some of the above said problems exist in some places of India affecting

the whole concept of girl child empowerment. For that no single organisation can be pointed out as the reason instead it should be a team effort to see our girl child live safe and securely in mother India. India has enacted a series of legislations such as the Child Marriage Restraint Act 1929; Immoral Traffic (prevention) Act, 1956; the Child Labour (prohibition and Regulations Act), 1986; Infant Milk Substitutes, Feeding Bottles and Infant Foods (Regulation of Production, Supply and Distribution) Act, 1992; the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2000; PC & PNDT Act, 2003; the Prohibition of the Child Marriage Act, 2006; the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009; the Right to Education Act, 2010; etc. Governments also introduced and implemented various schemes and policies to empower girl child, such as **Integrated Child Development Scheme, Udisha for training ICDS workers, Balika Samriddhi Yojana (BSY), Kishori Shakti Yojana (KSY), Nutrition Programme for Adolescent Girls (NPG), Early Childhood Education for 3-6 Age Group Children Under the Programme of Universalization of Elementary Education, Scheme for welfare of Working Children in need of Care and Protection, Integrated Programme for Street Children, Central Adoption Resource Agency (CARA), Programme for Juvenile Justice, General Grant-in-Aid Scheme and Pilot Project to Combat Trafficking of Women and Children for Commercial Sexual Exploitation in Destination Areas** etc. are some of the major policies to combat problems of girl child and there has to be strict vigilance to ensure clear execution of all such schemes and legislations to save the girl child. Some of the key objectives of these schemes are to be punctually fulfilled like stricter implementation of PC & PNDT Act, to directly reduce instances of female foeticide by increasing preference for girl child, to increase the status of girl child in the family and to protect the future of girl child and improve the quality of her life, more importantly educating and spreading awareness to change beliefs and attitudes is vital.

### Beti Bachao- Beti Padhao

Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (save daughter, educate daughter) is a novel and flagship programme of the Government lead by Honourable Prime Minister Shri. Narendra Modi,





started on 22<sup>nd</sup> January, 2015 in Panipat, Haryana. It's a new ray of hope for the girl child to live safely and securely in the society. This scheme tries to eliminate all such problems narrated above and is differently approaching to empower girl child. It was started with an initial funding of ₹ 100 Cr. The scheme mainly aims to curtail female foeticide and infanticide. This major inter-ministerial initiative of the Government of India bringing together Ministries, institutions and civil societies, resulting in a drastic change and yielding positive results on the scheme. The scheme will have focussed intervention and multi-section action in 100 districts with low Child Sex Ratio (CSR). The laws have to be amended, the culprits have to be vigorously punished, the ones involved in the practice of sex determination and sex selective abortion should be punished severely, and the government has to talk tough so that doctors do not indulge in this malpractice. Working towards the BBBP Yojana, the latest advertisements in Visual Media are making the viewers more human in this perspective. The campaigns are boosting the moral of people and helping the unspoken to reach out. If you want results, dedicated efforts have to be clubbed with the monetary incentives.

The immediate issues to be tackled now are,

- Awareness on gender equality
- Education for women
- Medical aid and health issues
- Safety in public transport system
- Women safety cells

- Campaigns on sensitization towards women and children
- Cybercrime cells
- Crisis Management centres
- Awards for role models, parents and other categories

These initiatives will provide a pathway to the young generation. As our Prime Minister said '*Beta Beti Ek Saman*'; this should be everyone's mantra. And every one has to follow this to empower the girl child in turn empowering the nation.

### Conclusion:

Girl Children are the most vulnerable section of society. They are physically, mentally and socially immature and depend on others for survival. The vulnerability and dependency has been a matter of universal concern. Their development is threatened by several dangers including exploitation, abuse, ignorance, material want and social and political intrigue. In order to protect girl children from these the government and the civil society have been playing a vital role. It seeks to protect children everywhere against exploitation, neglect and abuse. Fundamental rights and Directive Principles of state policies are related with children, they state that everyone entitled to all the rights and freedom set forth therein without discrimination of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, birth or other status. Further, it states that girl child needs special care and legal protection before and after birth. All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. Respect of rights of all individuals in the society is the foundation of liberty, justice, development and peace in the world. The success of programs and policies for empowering girl child such as BBBP Yojana depend upon a large number of stakeholders including civil society. Empowering Girl Child needs to be incorporated as one of the important agenda in political dialogue and policy discussion. Real Empowerment of girl child and women can only happen if we redefine the status and role of women in the country and that can make a big difference.

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