

Review Article- Medico-Social Issue

Save the Girl Child-Clarion Call of the Hour

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Introduction

It is a sad paradox that when we, on one hand, venerate our country as Bharat Mata and worship Durga, on the other hand, carry out reprehensible practices like female foeticide and bride-burning. Moreover, ironically, there are festivals like Rakhi and Bhai Duj, when men vow to protect their sisters, yet these same brothers murder their sisters without compunction for a misdirected sense of family honour. Further, despite taking an oath in front of the fire, edacious and lazy husbands burn their wives for bringing insufficient dowry, whereas wives pray and fast for their husbands' long life and wellbeing during Karva Chauth.

Added to this misogynistic socio-cultural mind-set is the shameful connivance of venal doctors who violate the very basis of the Hippocratic Oath through selective prenatal sex determination and then cold-bloodedly murder the innocent little female foetus.

The girl child is increasingly being excluded from life itself!

Scenario & Reasons for skewed Child Sex Ratio

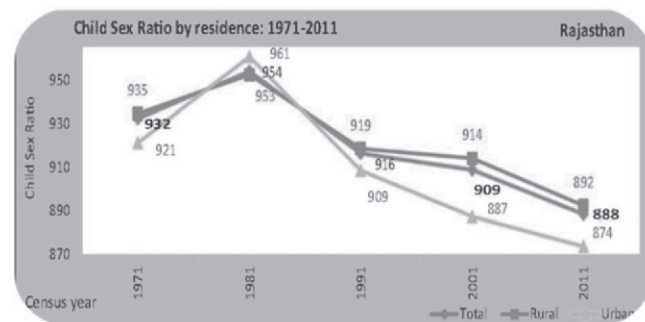
Census-2011 reflected a declining trend in the Child Sex Ratio (CSR) between 0-6 years. An all-time low of 918 girls to 1000 boys was startling. The decline in the CSR is a major indicator of women disempowerment. CSR reflects both, pre-birth discrimination – manifested through gender biased sex selection – as well as post-

birth discrimination against girls. Easy availability and affordability of diagnostic tools has been contributory in increasing Sex Selective Elimination (SSE) leading to low Sex Ratio at Birth (SRB). Strong socio-cultural and religious biases, preference for sons and discrimination towards daughters have accentuated the problem.

Despite pockets of matrilineal societies (the Nairs of Kerala, the Bunts and Billava of Karnataka, the Khasi, Jaintia and Garo of Meghalaya) India is overwhelmingly paternalistic – and this cuts across all religions. This is reflected in the imposing of dress codes for girls (purdah, burka, banning jeans etc), curfew and vegetarian food in girls' hostels, and female students not being allowed to carry mobile phones. Such weird restrictions and fatwas are decreed by Khaps and other community/religious elders. Girls are treated as a burden – paraya dhan. There is intense societal pressure on parents to

provide large dowries for their daughters. This ranges through all socioeconomic strata, the most intense pressure prevailing in prosperous states with high standards of living and consumerism.

Trend in Child sex ratio in Rajasthan 1971-2011



A son is a son till he takes him a wife, a daughter is a daughter all of her life.

Irish saying



Sons bring in dowry and are perceived to carry on the 'family name' and supposedly look after their aging parents. The harsh reality is that sons invariably neglect their parents and just want their share of ancestral/parental property and it is daughters who are more caring.

Sons get the best clothes and choicest tasty and nutritious foods so that may "grow to be big and strong and earn money and fame". Their prowess is especially desirable in agrarian societies. Girls are deprived of milk and given leftovers. Their clothes are generally hand-me-downs. Girls are excluded from various rituals especially during their periods when they are seen to be 'impure'. They may not get the best medical attention and their menstrual hygiene too is neglected. They are invariably anaemic and deficient in calcium/Vit D3.

It has been reported that in rural areas newly born girls are given a decoction of opium and subsequently stealthily buried. This shameful practice is done by the grieving mother herself – a sordid example of gendericide.

The abhorrent 'sati' may have been abolished but Indian girls and women are still being killed systematically or are just like the living dead. The hypocrisy is most evident during Navratra when 'kanyas' are fed and worshipped!

Thankfully the hideous practice of female genital mutilation is not as prevalent in India as in some parts of Africa.

The role of medical professionals has not been the most laudatory. There may have been a few black sheep who conducted pre-natal sex determination and female foeticide, but the rest of the doctors

should have put a stop to this heinous act. The regulatory bodies like MCI and IMA should have been more proactive in weeding out these nasty elements from the profession.

This abnormal sex ratio leads to a lot of unpleasant long-term consequences. There is increased violence against women – one hears of repugnant incidences of infants being raped. Young men cannot find brides. The

frustrated youth either turn to commercial sex workers and are exposed to HIV and other STDs or turn to antisocial activities or violent crimes. Such persons can easily be brainwashed and lured into antinational militant activities.

LAWS AND SCHEMES TO SAVE THE GIRL CHILD

LAWS HAVING DIRECT IMPACT

1. P.C.P.N.D.T. Act 1994 (Amended in 2016)
Preconceptional and Prenatal Diagnostic Techniques
2. The Prohibitions of Child Marriage Act 2006 (SARDA Act 1930)

LAWS INDIRECTLY BENEFICIAL

1. Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act (1931)
2. Special Marriage Act (1954)
3. Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act (1956)
4. Maternity Benefit Act (1961)
5. Dowry Prohibition Act (1961)
6. Indian Divorce Act (1969)
7. Equal Remuneration Act (1976)
8. Indecent Representation of Women Act (1986)
9. Child Labour Act (1986)
10. National Commission for Women Act (1990)
11. Sexual Harassment of Women At Workplace Act (2013)

GIRL CHILD WELFARE PROGRAMMES

1. "Daughters Are Precious" Campaign
2. Mukhyamantri Rajshree Yojna
3. Kishori Shakti Yojna
4. Nutrition Programme for Adolescent Girls
5. SABLA – Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescent Girls
6. Indra Gandhi Matritva Sahyog Yojna
7. UJJWALA (2007)

The Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao Abhiyan

Coordinated efforts are needed to ensure survival, protection and education of girl child to help realize her full potential. Though the CSR is influenced by number

of factors such as under- registration of girls, differential infant and child mortality, strong socio-cultural and religious biases as mentioned above, it is in large measure determined by Sex Ratio at Birth (SRB). SRB is defined as number of girls born per 1000 boys. The SRB for the period 2008-10 was 908 as against the internationally observed normal SRB of 952 clearly pointing out to lesser number of girls born than the boys in India.

Societal changes must come about through a churning in society. If that is not forthcoming, the govt must nudge in these changes by either judicial activism, legislative or executive initiative, or through journalistic intervention of an independent Press and TV. Thus, came about the announcement by Prime Minister Narendra Modi of the Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao (BBBP) programme to address the decline in CSR through a mass campaign across the country, and focussed intervention and multi- pronged action in 100 gender critical districts.

With the launch of this scheme, the objective of government was to curb problems related to female foeticide and education. Nationwide campaigns are conducted to induce mindset change in people through training, raising awareness and importance of educating girl child. There are two main objectives of the scheme – preventing female foeticide and promoting education of girl child. It was a joint initiative that was taken by Ministry of Women and Child Development, Ministry of Human Resource Development and Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.

Recently this programme along with Nutrition Mission was expanded to all districts of India. Prime Minister launched this ambitious scheme on 8th March 2018 (i.e. World Women Day) from Jhunjhunu, Rajasthan.



Objectives of the Scheme

Prevent female infanticide

One of the major causes of steep decline in the CSR is female foeticide/infanticide and discrimination between girl and boy child. Under this scheme, the district authorities monitor villages and ensure that there is no sex determination test conducted in any healthcare establishment. There are awareness campaigns where parents and families are educated not to go for the test and embrace girl child. Intervention is focussed to enforce all existing Legislations and Acts, especially to strengthen the implementation of Pre-Conception & Pre-Natal Diagnostic

Techniques (Prohibition of Sex Selection) Act, 1994 (PCPNDT Act) with stringent punishments for violations of the law.

Pre-conception and Pre-natal Diagnostic Techniques (Prohibition of Sex Selection) Act, 1994 (PCPNDT)

Unique features adopted by Rajasthan Government in implementing PCPNDT are highlighted below :-

1. 104 & 108 helpline for complaints
 - o Anyone can file complaint against sex determination/ selection on 104 & 108 Toll free services.
 - o It is very easy to access.
 - o Efforts have been undertaken to create awareness about it among the public.
 - o Hamaribeti.nic.in
2. Impact Software
 - o The website was launched on 1st Oct, 2012.
 - o The website address is <http://pcpndt.raj.nic.in>
 - o The system is designed and developed by the National Informatics Centre-Rajasthan.
 - o More than 1554+sonography centres are registered online.
 - o More than one crore Form-F have been submitted online till date (since launch date).
 - o More than 8000 online Form-F are being submitted by centres on daily basis.- 30 lakh sonography p.a.

- o More than 2666+ Tracking devices have been installed.
3. Mukhbir network and the Decoy operations
 - o Under the scheme, State Govt has declared Award of Rs. 2,50,000/- to the “Mukhbir” for giving authentic information of sex selection.
 - o In 2016 25 decoy operations were conducted under this scheme. (Total 83 Decoy Operations conducted in the State including 29 Decoy Operations in 2017.)
 - o Under this scheme 40% of the award amount is given to Informant, other 40% of the award amount is given to Pregnant lady and rest 20% is given to the attendant of the pregnant lady.
 4. Regular inspections by Appropriate Authorities at State/ District/ Sub Division
 5. Separate courts for hearing such cases in all districts
 6. Active tracker on Sonography machines
 7. GPS on new machines
 8. PBI (PCPNDT Bureau of Investigation)

Action taken by Appropriate Authorities in the State Sonography centres (Till April 2017)

Registrations since inception of the Act (Govt. - 222+ Pvt. - 2601)	2823
Inspections	11980
Suspension/ Cancellation	196/431
Seal and Seizures	499
Complaints have been filed in the court	656
Convictions against Sonography Centres including Dealers/ Suppliers of machines	203

Protection of Girl Child

The scheme ensures well being, protection and security of girl child after their birth. With options like 'Sukanya Samridhi', parents or legal guardian can open a small savings account for girls. A small contribution is needed for 14 years and the next 7 years, one will be able to earn interest on it.

Educating Female Child

One of the major discrimination in India is female education. The scheme spreads awareness and campaigns to educate female girl child so that they grow up to become self empowered. The district level officials educate people with importance of girl education. Free elementary education is provided to girls of underprivileged families. The aim is to spread 100% education and literacy amongst females.

There is positive impact post the implementation of this scheme as there is increase in CSR. More families welcome the birth of a girl child happily – the stigma no longer exists. There is increase in education levels of girls after implementation of Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao scheme.

Finance minister Mr. Arun Jaitley in his Budget speech announced that the government would focus on campaigns to sensitize the citizens of this country towards the concerns of the girl child and women. He also included that this process must begin early and therefore the school curriculum must have a separate chapter on the core subject of gender equality. “The village that succeeds in attaining a balanced sex ratio will be awarded Rs 1 crore” was a strong incentive that will reduce the declining CSR and ensuring that the girl child gets equal opportunities to shine.

The financial figures to assist the issue include Rs 50 crore for testing a scheme for safety of women on Public Road Transport by The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways. Additionally, Rs 150 crore will be spent by Ministry of Home Affairs to increase the safety of women in large cities.

From the Nirbhaya fund, there is a proposal to set up Crisis Management Centres this year, in all districts of the capital, Delhi. The centres will be set up in all Government and Private Hospitals.

Outcome of the Scheme

Year	Sex Ratio at Birth
2014	927
2015	930
2016	939

Districts	SEX RATIO (<6 yrs) As per Census 2011	SEX RATIO@BIRTH Apr '15 to Mar '16	SEX RATIO@BIRTH Apr '16 to Dec '16	CHANGE* Apr '15 to Dec '16
Tonk	892	926	998	72
Sikar	848	923	969	46
Jhunjhunu	837	903	944	41
Jaipur	861	904	922	18
Dholpur	857	924	936	12
Dausa	865	919	929	10
S'Ganganagar	854	934	944	10
Alwar	865	912	919	7
S Madhopur	871	913	920	7
Jodhpur	891	950	949	-1
Bharatpur	869	922	919	-3
Hanumangarh	878	971	967	-4
Karauli	852	926	913	-13
Jaisalmer	874	925	903	-22

CSR at birth in Ajmer in year 2016-17 and 2017-18 was 947 and 964 respectively (source: PCTS Software Data)

Support for Beti Bachao, Bet Padhao

Mukhyamantri Rajshree Yojna

Congratulatory message signed by the Hon'ble Chief Minister of Rajasthan is given to every mother who comes to government institutions for delivery and delivers a girl child. From birth of a girl child to her passing 12th standard education from a government school, a total sum of Rs 50,000 is given in installments.

Recent success stories of some female medical professionals

- **Dr. Soumya Swaminathan**, a pediatrician, became the first Indian to be appointed as Deputy Director General of WHO (2017)
- **Dr. Shiralee Runwal**, the "Golden Girl of Gwalior" has secured first rank among girls (overall second) in NEET PG 2018. She has been appointed as brand ambassador of "Daughters are precious campaign" in MP.
- **Manushi Chhillar** a medical student from Haryana, has been crowned Miss World 2017.

What more needs to be done?

Other suggested initiatives include:

- A more stringent Anti-Dowry Act to deter dowry seekers

- Preventing child marriages through compulsory registration of marriages
- Celebrating the birth of the girl child in a grand way
- Laying emphasis on the education of the girl child for their empowerment. Involving Zila Panchayats in implementing and monitoring BBBP.
- Offering economic incentives as a motivation
- Ensuring safety of women in public transport system so that they can commute to and from work at all hours of the day fearlessly and comfortably
- Establishing easily accessible women safety cells
- Conducting campaigns on sensitization towards women and children
- Setting up cybercrime cells to prevent staling and trolling on social media
- Instituting awards for role models, parents and other categories

We've begun to raise daughters more like sons, but few have the courage to raise our sons more like our daughters.

Gloria Steinem

Conclusion

Human society can only flourish if all members – irrespective of gender, religion, caste, socio- economic status, sexual orientation – are integrated as a whole, with equal rights and liberties and freedom of expression.

Beta Beti Ek Saman

Sources-

<http://pcpndt.raj.nic.in>

www.rajswashya.nic.in

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