

Save Girl Educate Girl: A Pathway to Women Empowerment



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Abstract

“Gender disparity manifests itself in various forms, the most obvious being the trend of continuously declining female ratio in the last few decades. The recently launched ‘Beti Bachao Beti Padhao’ and ‘Sukanya Samridhi Yojana’ programmes by the Prime Minister have come at an opportune time to encourage birth and education of girls and tackle the abysmally low national child sex ratio of 918 girls for 1000 boys. In India, there is more need for empowerment. The factors which determine women’s empowerment are Education, Poverty, Health and safety. Education, here just does not mean merely teaching the three Rs. – reading, writing & arithmetic, but make them aware of their rights and also realize the discriminatory treatment given to them. Realizing the gravity of situation of the decline in the Child Sex Ratio (CSR) and literacy rate of girls in India, the Government announced ‘Beti Bachao Beti Padhao’ initiative which has the objectives of – Prevention of gender biased sex selective elimination; Ensuring survival and protection of girl child; and Ensuring education and participation of the girl child.”

Keywords: Gender Disparity, Encourage, Education, Child Sex Ratio, Empowerment, Discriminatory, Protection, Girl Child.

Introduction

In the last five decades, the concept of women empowerment has undergone a major change from welfare oriented approach to equity approach. Empowerment as powerfully articulated goal of development interventions has become significant in recent years. While the status of women has advanced in some important aspects in the past decades, progress has been uneven and still inequalities between men and women have persisted.

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 and 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 women still suffered ignominy, deprivation and hurdles. Despite increase in literacy rate of women from 8.86% in 1951 to 65.74% in 2001 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 off 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.

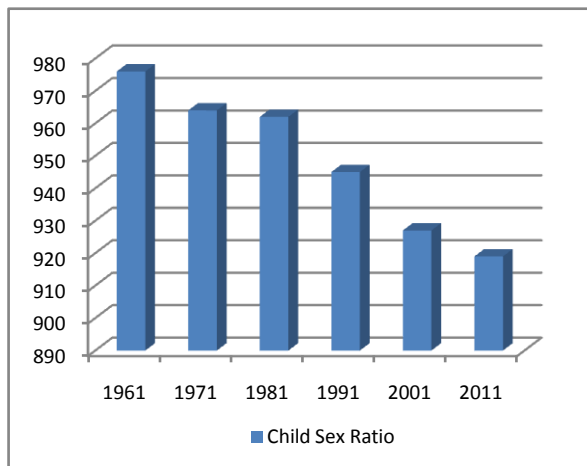
Objective of the Study

1. To analyse to what extent this programme is becoming effective in saving and educating girls.
2. To analyse to what extent the implementation of awareness programme like electronic and print media is effective in achieving the goal of this programme.
3. To know how far we have reached to the goal of gender equality and women empowerment as described in constitution of India.
4. To see how we can bring change in people’s mind set towards girl child on before or after her birth and making this programme a movement.
5. To know how it ignites the empowerment process by discouraging gender disparity, improving child sex ratio and enhancing literacy rate.

The two censuses of India in 2001 and 2011, registered a declining Child Sex Ratio (CSR) in India. The child sex ratio (0-6) has shown continuously declining trend for last 50 years since 1961. The

decline from 976 in 1961 to 927 in 2001 and further to 919 in 2011 is alarming. The decline in the CSR is a major indicator of injustice towards girl child. This has declined in all the states/UTs of India except in eight states/UTs viz, Andaman & Nicobar Islands, Chandigarh, Gujarat, Haryana Pradesh, 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. There is continuous decline is noticed in child sex ratio from 1961 to 2011 as shown in below Table.

Child Sex Ratio Scenario



Source: Census of India, (2011)

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 and violence towards women, which has in turn affected the sex ratio. So the alarming need of today is to empower women in every field and it can be only possible by saving and educating girls. The girl child faces persistent threats to life and security due to the socio-economic structure of India. Despite the improvement in Maternal Mortality Rates (MMR), declining CSR continues to be worrying problem. Absence of stringent implementation of legislations like Pre Natal Diagnostics Techniques Act 1994 (PNDT) and The Dowry Prohibition Act 1961 also lead to the persistence of the problem. Beyond sex selective abortion and female infanticide, daughters are seen as a financial liability and social burden. The perception of the girl child induces various forms of neglect related to nutrition, health, education and employment. Patriarchal customs along with unscientific beliefs and practices increase crime against girls and women in the form of sexual assault, trafficking and other practices.

In this context, the Government of India brought out 'an inter ministerial scheme to reverse the declining CSR and improve gender inequality through education, creating awareness and improving public service delivery in women's scheme. Along with the Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD), the other ministries involved were Ministry of Health

and Family Welfare, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting.

After the new Government of India came into power, on 24 July 2014, the MWCD declared that protecting and educating the girl child would a top priority. In this regard Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi launched the '**Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (Save Girl Educate Girl)**' programme, nationwide on January 22, 2015 from Panipat in Haryana. The scheme aims to address the dipping child sex ratio and empower the girl child in the country. It will help in generating awareness and improving the efficiency of delivery of welfare services meant for women with an initial corpus of Rs.100 crore. The Beti Bachao Beti Padhao' scheme is for survival, protection and education of the girl child. The objective of this programme is to bring a change in the people mindset towards girl child on or after her birth. Preventing determination of sex, female foeticide, ensuring safety of girls, their best possible care and providing quality education are integral part of this programme, further, the objectives of the scheme is to prevent gender biased sex selection by strengthening the implementation of Pre-conception and Pre-natal Diagnostic Techniques (Prohibition of sex Selection) Act, 1994 (PC&PNDT Act) with stringent punishment for violations of the law.

In Indian context gender inequality or disparity is manifest or visible in various ways. One of the most obvious of this situation is the continuously declining female ratio in the population in the last few decades. Sex ratio is the term used to indicate the number of females per 1000 of males. Sex ratio is an important indicator of the general status of women in any society. As per the population census of 2011 there are 940 females per 1000 males. The sex ratio in 2011 shows an upward trend as compared to the data from the census of year 2001. As per the census of 2001 there are 933 females to that of males. India has witnessed a steady decline in the sex ratio over number of decades, but in the last two decades there has been a marginal rise in the sex ratio in favour of women. But if we look at the child sex ratio there is a decline. The trend of decline in the child sex ratio (CSR), defined as number of girls per number of boys between 0-6 years of age, has been unabated since 1961. The decline from 945 in 1991 to 927 in 2001 and further to 918 in 2011 is alarming.

Sex Ratio in India 1901-2011

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

As per the study "children in India 2012- A Statistical Appraisal" conducted by the central Statistical Organisation, "During 2001- 2011, the

share of children to total population has declined and the decline was sharper for female children than male children in the age group 0-6 years." The study further establishes that "Though, the overall sex ratio of the country is showing a trend of improvement, the child sex ratio is showing a declining trend, which is a matter of concern." According to report, female child population in the age group of 0-6 years was 78.83 million in 2001 which declined to 75.84 million in 2011. The population of girl child was 15.88 percent of the total female population of 496.5 million in 2001, which declined to 12.9 percent of total number of 586.47 million women in 2011. The study further adds that "Though the child sex ratio in rural India is 919 which is 17 points higher than that of urban India, the decline in child sex ratio (0-6 years) during 2001-2011 in rural areas is more than three times as compared to the drop in urban India which is a matter of grave concern.

Reasons for Declining Sex Ratio

The reasons for the 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 preferences 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

Daughter's marriages are quit 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 failed 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 works. This scenario can be corrected only through sustained efforts of individuals, government and other development organizations.

Wide spread discrimination against girl children, adolescent girls and women continues to exist in almost all the parts of our country. The decline in the CSR is a major indicator of disempowerment of women and their subordinate status in the society. The skewed child sex ratio reflects degree of discrimination against girl child even before the birth when with the help of gender biased sex selection test the parents get the abortions done. Similarly there is discrimination of girl child in every walk of life even after birth. Social, cultural and religious practices discrimination against girls on the one hand, easy availability, affordability and subsequent misuse of diagnostic tools on the other hand, have been critical in increasing Sex Selective Elimination of girls. This has led to low Child Sex Ratio in the country. Social stereotyping and violence at the domestic and societal levels are some of the other forms in which gender inequality, male domination and patriarchy are manifest.

One of the most important indicators of empowerment of women is education. Level of literacy and educational attainment are important indicators of development of any given society. Rate of literacy and educational development are considered to be key variables that influence a large number of other social and economic factors that determine growth, such as rate of fertility, growth of population, rate of migration etc. Needless to reiterate that nothing is more important for sustainable development than the social, economic and political empowerment of women. Education is the only sustainable route for achieving empowerment. A large number of studies have proved that women's education leads to rise in their ability and capacity to control their lives and surroundings. Education also leads to greater control over their lives and choices. The education level of an individual contributes in improving quality of life and among women particularly it influences, health of infants, rate of infant mortality, nutritional level of children, quality of life of family in general and women in particular, life expectancy and general wellbeing of the family. As said by Mahatma Gandhi, 'educate one man, you educate one person, but educate a woman and you educate whole civilization'. High level of literacy and educational achievement, leads to greater development, awareness and empowerment of women and girls. But, despite the establishment value of education, the scenario regarding educational attainment of women and girls in India is quite disappointing.

The Literacy Rate in India 1901-2011

Census Year	Total (%)	Male (%)	Female (%)
1901	5.35	9.83	0.60
1911	5.92	10.56	1.05
1921	7.16	12.21	1.81
1931	9.50	15.59	2.93
1941	16.10	24.90	7.30
1951	16.67	24.95	9.45
1961	24.02	34.44	12.95
1971	29.45	39.45	18.69
1981	36.23	46.89	24.82
1991	42.84	52.74	32.17
2001	64.83	75.26	53.67
2011	74.04	82.84	65.46

Source: Census of India, (2011)

Women education is a multi-dimensional phenomenon. No single factor or cause can be held responsible for very low literacy rate of women in India. Subsequently it is associated with combination of many factors including social, cultural, economic, educational demographic, political and administrative and so on. The following are the some of the important factors which could be attributed for the present poor state of affairs of womenfolk in education.

The lower Enrolment

The lower enrolment of girl's schools is one of the foundational factors which stand as stumbling block for women empowerment in India.

Higher Drop-Out Rate

The incidence and prevalence of drop-outs among girls especially in rural, tribal and slums areas seem to be quite high.

Girls Child as Second Mother

In many families girls children play the role of second mother by shouldering the responsibilities of household work such as looking after the sibling, fetching water, collecting firework, bringing fodder for cattle, cleaning and cooking etc.

Cast System

Children belonging to low caste families are forced to learn skills and work ways and not encouraged to go to school due to various factors in the sphere of strict instruction/threat from high caste communities for their selfish motives of keeping them as domestic servants and child labourers in the farms or factory.

Dowry System

Dowry system and other social practices act as causes of the neglect of the child and discrimination against girl child including the deprivation of right of education.

Child Labour Practice

A large segment of child population in India is engaged in child labour practices. According to UN sources India is the most child labour populous nation in the globe with more than 50 million child labourers indulged in beedi works, carpet, making, bricks, mining, quarrying, glass, bangles, match and fireworks, gem polishing, handloom works. Saree, embroidery, coir industry, domestic works, construction etc. In most of these industries girl children are preferred for high productivity and low cost.

Poor School Environment for Girls

In general the school environment for girls in India is not really interesting and encouraging. There are still many schools with poor basic amenities such as drinking water, latrine and toilet facilities, improper building and inadequate number of teachers especially female teachers preferable for any parents for safety of their children from different types of exploitation abuse.

Early Marriage

There is high association of female literacy with female age at marriage. By and large the female age at marriage of 18 as prescribed by various legislations not at all followed in India. It is very much ignored and neglected by the families of parents with low literacy and illiteracy background.

Inferiority, Subservience and Domesticity

The female child in Indian culture especially in rural, tribal and poor families is expected to develop the qualities of inferiority; subservience and domesticity which place severe limitations on her education and development.

Poverty

In poverty stricken families, children especially girls are considered as economic assets as they bring income for livelihood as well to save from economic crises due to death or incapacity of parents like sick, handicapped and aged.

Ineffective Law Enforcing Machinery

Indian constitution and various legislations pertaining to education to children assure free compulsory education all children of this nation but unfortunately the enforcement machinery fail to discharge its duties and responsibilities to the satisfaction of the public interest to the satisfaction of the public interest and welfare of women.

By realizing the importance of women and girl in society, the recently launched 'Beti Bachao Beti Padhao' and 'Sukanya Samridhi Yojana' programmes by the Prime Minister have come at an opportune time to encourage birth and education of girls and tackle the abysmally low national child sex ratio.

If India really interested in reversing the trend of continuously declining child sex ratio and wants to improve through education 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 motivated them but to their spouses to opt for the girl child. Along with the recent the '**Beti Bachao Beti Padhao**' campaign to save the girl child, a multi-pronged strategy adopted by new government to address the issue of female gender, has assumed serious proportions therefore this programme mainly focuses on three objectives:

1. Prevent gender biased sex selective elimination.
2. Ensure survival and protection of the girl child.
3. Ensure education of the girl child.

Strategies for Implementation

1. To implement a sustained social Mobilization and Communication Campaign to create equal value for the girl child & promote her education.

2. Place the issue of decline in Child Sex Ratio (CSR)/ Sex Ratio at Birth (SRB) public discourse, improvement of which would be an indicator for good governance.
3. Focus on Gender Critical Districts and Cities, low on CSR for intensive and integrated action.
4. Mobilize and train Panchayati Raj Institution/ Urban local bodies/ Grassroot workers as catalysts for social change, in partnership with community/ women's/youth groups.
5. Ensure service delivery structures/ schemes and programmes are sufficiently responsive to issues of gender and children's rights.
6. Enable inter-sectoral and inter-institutional convergence at District/ Block/ Grassroots level.

Outcome of the Scheme

1. Effective implementation of Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques Act to stop female foeticides and check the declining sex ratio.
2. Empowering the girl child through education and creating an enabling environment that provides equal access to education, health, employment/skill development etc.
3. Enhancing the value of the girl child through awareness generation. The Media Campaign, geared towards achieving this, would underline the need to use communication that encourages equal value of the girls and emphasized that she is not a liability.
4. The scheme promotes the need for gender equality enshrined in the constitution of India. It brings out how neglect of girls and discrimination throughout her life cycle leads to an unequal status in the society. It also aims to break myths about role of men and women so that negative attitudes and behaviours of the patriarchal society could be changed.

Apart from the broad objective, some of the other actions that are envisaged include a toilet in every girl school in vulnerable districts, an innovation fund at the state level to encouraged best practices in improving the child sex ratio and gender inequalities and district level awards to school strengthening girl child education.

The positive outlook of the present government is geared towards giving women and girls to a greater say and position in society trying to curb discrimination. There are plans to encourage girls to express their views, to be heard, to participate effectively and equally at all levels of social, economic and political activity.

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 (Save Girl Educate Girl)' 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 activity. Organizing training programmes of girls for the self-defence of martial arts in mission mode. Effective IEC (Information and Education Campaign) campaign through media and interpersonal 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 counseling of parent of girl child and mother-in law favour of girl child. Strengthening and building movement for organizing women into the self -help groups for bank linkages and vocational training for their self – dependence would go long way in women empowerment. Let the society makes sincere efforts to bring a change in women's life that they come forward in the race of development.

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