

# BETI BACHAO BETI PADHAO: WILL IT ABOLISH THE ORTHODOX MINDSET?

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## Abstract

*The trend of decline in the Child Sex Ratio (CSR), defined as number of girls per 1000 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. The decline in the CSR is a major indicator of women dis-empowerment. CSR reflects both, pre-birth discrimination manifested through gender biased sex selection, and post birth discrimination against girls. Social construct discriminating 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 leading to low Child Sex Ratio. Since coordinated and convergent efforts are needed to ensure survival, protection and empowerment of the girl child, Government has announced Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) initiative. It is a tri-ministerial effort of Ministries of Women and Child Development, Health & Family Welfare and Human Resource Development. The programme will be initiated with the launch of "Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao", a nation-wide campaign to increase awareness on celebrating the Girl Child & enabling her education. The campaign will be aimed at ensuring girls are born, nurtured and educated without discrimination to become empowered citizens of this country with equal rights. The Campaign will interlink National, State and District level interventions with community level action in 161 districts, bringing together different stakeholders for accelerated impact. Multi-Sectoral actions have been drawn in consultation with MoHFW & MoHRD. Measurable outcomes and indicators will bring together concerned sectors, states and districts for urgent concerted Multi-Sectoral action to improve the CSR. The States/UTs will adapt a flexible Framework for Multi-Sectoral Action through the State Task Forces for developing, implementing and monitoring State/ District Plans of Action to achieve the State/District specific monitorable targets.*

**Keywords:** *Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, Child Sex*

## Introduction

**Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao** ( Save the daughter, educate the daughter) is a campaign of the Government of India that aims to generate awareness and improve the efficiency of welfare services intended for girls in India. The scheme was launched with an initial funding of ₹100 crore (US\$14 million). It mainly targets the clusters in Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Uttarakhand, Punjab, Bihar and Delhi. According to census data, the child gender ratio (0–6 years) in India was 927 girls per 1,000 boys in 2001, which dropped to 918<sup>[1]</sup> girls for every 1,000 boys in 2011. A 2012 UNICEF report ranked India 41st among 195 countries. In the Population Census of 2011 it was revealed that the population ratio of India 2011 is 918 females per 1000 of males. The Sex Ratio 2011 shows a downward trend from the census 2001 data. Speaking on the occasion of International Day of the Girl Child in 2014, the Prime Minister, Narendra Modi had called for the eradication of female foeticide and invited suggestions from the citizens of India via the MyGov.in portal. The Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao (BBBP) scheme was launched on 22 January 2015 by

PM Narendra Modi. It aims to address the issue of the declining child sex ratio image (CSR) and is a national initiative jointly run by the Ministry of Women and Child Development, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and the Ministry of Human Resource Development. It initially focused multi-sector action in 100 districts throughout the country where there was a low CSR. On 26 August 2016, Olympics 2016 bronze medallist Sakshi Malik was made brand ambassador for BBBP. The hashtag #SelfieWithDaughter was promoted on social media in June 2015, which started when Sunil Jaglan the sarpanch of the village Bibipur, Jind in Haryana took a selfie with his daughter Nandini and posted on Facebook on 9 June 2015. The hashtag garnered worldwide fame.

## **Project Implementation**

The Ministry of Women and Child Development would be responsible for budgetary control and administration of the scheme from the Centre. At the State level, the Secretary, Department of Women and Child Development will be responsible for overall direction and implementation of the scheme. The Structure of the Scheme is as follows:

### **At the National level**

A National Task Force for **Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao** headed by Secretary, WCD with representation from concerned ministries namely Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Ministry of Human Resource Development, National Legal Services Authority, Department of Disability Affairs and Ministry of Information & Broadcasting; Gender Experts and Civil Society representatives. The Task Force will provide guidance and support; finalize training content; review state plans and monitor effective implementation.<sup>1</sup>

### **At the State level**

The States shall form a State Task Force (STF) with representation of concerned Departments (Health & Family Welfare; Education; Panchayati Raj/ Rural Development) including State Level Services Authority and Department of Disability Affairs for **Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao** to coordinate the implementation of the Scheme. As the issue requires convergence & coordination between Departments, the Task Force would be headed by the Chief Secretary. In UTs the Task Force would be headed by Administrator, UT Administration. Some States/UTs have their own mechanism at the State/UT level for Women's Empowerment, Gender and Child related issues which may be considered and/or strengthened as State/UT Task Force. Principal Secretary, WCD/Social Welfare will be the convener of this body. Department of Women & Child Development will have the responsibility of coordinating all the activities related to implementation of the Plan in the State/UTs through the Directorate of ICDS.<sup>2</sup>

### **At the District level**

A District Task Force (DTF) led by the District Collector/Deputy Commissioner with representation of concerned departments (Health & Family Welfare; Appropriate Authority (PC&PNDT); Education; Panchayati Raj/ Rural Development, Police) including District legal Services Authority (DLSA) will be responsible for effective implementation, monitoring & supervision of the District Action Plan. Technical support and guidance for the implementation of Action Plan in the district would be provided by District Programme Officer (DPO) in the District ICDS Office for formulation of District Action Plan using the Block level Action Plans. A Gender expert/CSO member may also be included in the task force.<sup>3</sup>

### **At the Block level**

A Block level Committee would be set up under the Chairpersonship of the Sub Divisional Magistrate/Sub Divisional Officer/Block Development Officer (as may be decided by the concerned State Governments) to provide support in effective implementation, monitoring & supervision of the Block Action Plan.<sup>4</sup>

### **At the Gram Panchayat/Ward level**

The respective Panchayat Samiti/Ward Samiti (as may be decided by concerned State Governments) having jurisdiction over the concerned Gram Panchayat/Ward would be responsible for the overall coordination & supervision for effectively carrying out activities under the Plan.

### **At Village level**

Village Health Sanitation and Nutrition Committees, (recognized as sub committees of panchayats) will guide and support village level implementation and monitoring of the plan. Frontline workers (AWWs, ASHAs & ANMs) will catalyze action on ground by creating awareness on the issue of CSR, collecting data, dissemination of information about schemes/programmes related to girl child & their families etc.<sup>5</sup>

### **Beti Bachao Beti Padhao: Will it abolish the orthodox mindset?**

The saying goes “When you educate a man, you educate a man but when you educate a woman, you educate a generation”. Beti Bachao-Beti Padhao is the social awareness campaign making the parents celebrate the birth of a baby girl instead of getting unhappy. Hundreds of years have witnessed Indian families not rejoicing on the birth of girl child not only in rural areas but also in educated urban circles. On the top of it, the orthodox families used to go for female foeticide or abandoning the girl child, if at all she happened to be born. Social and family constraints did not allow the Girls to go to school or to opt for higher studies. Despite all the campaigning and laws framed earlier, the process continued without much awareness. However, after the new Government led by the Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi took over in 2014, an effective initiative with a new campaign ‘Beti bachao Beti padho’ (Save girl child, educate a girl child) has been launched by the Government of India. The social campaign aims to generate awareness and improve the efficiency of welfare services intended for girls. The scheme was launched with an initial funding of ₹100 crores by the Government and was launched on January 22, 2015 in Panipat, Haryana as the State has very poor Child Sex Ratio (CSR). Initially the scheme was launched in hundred districts across the country and out of them 12 were from Haryana. Beti Bachao Beti Padhao scheme aims at making girls independent both socially and also financially through education. This approach of the Government can facilitate in generating awareness and improving the efficiency of delivery of welfare services meant for women.<sup>6</sup>

### **Low CSR called for the launch of scheme**

The Child Sex Ratio (CSR) census data for 0-6 years was 933 girls per 1,000 boys in 2001, which dropped to 918 girls for every 1,000 boys in 2011. The 2012 UNICEF report ranked India 41st among 195 countries. The 2011 Population Census revealed that the population ratio of India in 2011 was 943 females per 1000 of males. The Sex Ratio 2011 shows an upward trend from the census 2001 data.<sup>7</sup>

### **Rising crimes against women**

Discrimination against girl infants, for several reasons, has combined with the technology to result in a rise in abortions of fetuses identified as female during ultrasonic testing. All this is resulting in the sharp drop in female population while the crimes and sex abuses on women continued to rise. Speaking on the occasion of International Day of the Girl Child in 2014, The Prime Minister Mr Modi emphasized on eradication of Female foeticide and invited suggestions from the citizens of India on MyGov.in portal.<sup>8</sup>

### **Hurdles in Implementation**

1. Unless properly executed and due awareness created, it will be difficult for the scheme to yield desired result
2. Social abuses on women and orthodox trends like female foeticide, domestic violence and child marriage, Sati still making the scheme to be implemented effectively.
3. Government Machinery, police force not taking the complaints against atrocities on women seriously. This creates doubt on its effective implementation
4. Despite all the campaigning, the old mind set of the people has not changed.
5. The scheme requires great Civic body support to achieve the objectives of the scheme
6. The dowry system in varying forms, is also one of the major obstacles in successful implementation of BBBP scheme.<sup>9</sup>

### **Caution Against Spurious Schemes Being Floated in the Name of Beti Bachao Beti Padhao**

It has come to the notice of Ministry of Women & Child Development, Government of India that certain unauthorised sites/organisations/NGOs/individuals are distributing illegal forms in the name of cash incentive under Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) Scheme.<sup>10</sup> The Ministry of Women & Child Development has taken up this matter with the State Government Authorities where this illegal activity has taken place namely Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Uttarakhand, Punjab and Bihar. However, it has come to our notice that the fraud in name of BBBP is taking place in Delhi also. The matter has been reported from different parts of Delhi, particularly in Tikri, Bhatti Khurd, Dakshinpuri Extension, Sangam Vihar, Sanjay Colony, Sarita Vihar, Adarsh Nagar and JJ Colony. It is clarified that the scheme has no provision of individual CASH TRANSFER by Government of India. Beti Bachao Beti Padhao scheme focuses on challenging mindsets and deep rooted patriarchy in the societal system, strict enforcement of PC&PNDT Act, advancing education of the girl child. The focus is on issues of women empowerment over a life cycle continuum. It is not a DBT (Direct Benefit Transfer) scheme. The fraud being perpetuated in name of BBBP is a very serious matter and if any such incidence comes to your knowledge, please report it to the nearest police station and the concerned District Collector/ District Magistrate.<sup>11</sup> The Ministry of Women & Child Development (MWCD) has advised people against falling into trap of such frauds through various print and electronic platforms. It may be noted that distribution of such forms is completely illegal and there is no cash incentive associated in any form with the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Scheme. The Ministry advises that no personal details should be shared in this regard and no one should subscribe to such fraudulent scheme and not to send any such fake form to the Ministry of WCD or any other Government Department. The case has also been referred to Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) for investigation keeping in view the public interest and gravity of the matter.<sup>12</sup>

### **Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao Fails To Address The Stigma Against Girlstigma Against Girls**

The campaign *Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao* (Save the girl child, Educate the girl child) was launched in 2014 by the Modi government with the aim to address the declining Child Sex Ratio (CSR) and to empower the girl child. The specific objectives of the scheme are to prevent “*gender-biased sex-selective elimination, ensuring survival and protection of the girl child and ensuring education and participation of the girl child*”. Its focus is on awareness and advocacy, multi-sectoral action enabling girls’ education and effective enforcement of the *Pre-Conception and Pre Natal Diagnostic Techniques (PC&PNDT) Act*. Can initiatives like this overcome the mentality that sons are more valuable and are to be cherished, while the daughter is always considered a burden.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, do these schemes actually change the orthodox mindset? What happens to a girl if, due to governmental directives, was born to parents who did not want her (this is in no way a justification for sex-selective abortion)? Will her parents and family accept her once she is born?<sup>14</sup>

**“CAN INITIATIVES LIKE BETI BACHAO OVERCOME THE MENTALITY THAT SONS ARE MORE VALUABLE AND ARE TO BE CHERISHED?”**

Yes, government directives are good in terms of taking care of the social construct of gender ratio. We definitely need girls to be born, but can laws make the parents accept and love her? What is the fate of an **unwanted girl** whose family does not want her? Life can be difficult for her knowing that she is not really loved, but is just grudgingly tolerated. In worse case scenarios, there are parents who openly tell their child that they did not want her.<sup>15</sup>

Even though a child is fed and clothed and educated, it is not enough for a child. A child needs loving care to thrive. This can result in long-term mental and emotional problems. Personally, I have known two cases wherein the second girl child was unwanted by the parents. These were educated parents working in the government sector but nonetheless harbouring the mentality of prioritising sons. In both cases, the second girl child was unwanted.<sup>16</sup> I have seen these girls struggling, sad, lost and unable to connect with people around them. Both of them committed suicide in their late teens. To grow up knowing that you are unwanted is very traumatic. Every day you struggle to find a meaningful reason for your existence. Your mental health is definitely compromised. Parental rejection is devastating. In my own case, post my mother’s death at the age of 11, I became the nuisance child. My father hated having to be responsible for 2 kids. Every day we had to listen to his taunts and threats. There were many occasions when I just wanted to end it all.<sup>17</sup>

**“EVEN THOUGH A CHILD IS FED AND CLOTHED AND EDUCATED, IT IS NOT ENOUGH FOR A CHILD.”**

What are the options for a girl child when her family does not want her? Are there any support systems for women in India who have to cope with hostile families? Though the *Beti Bachao, Beti Padho* initiative helps a girl child get a good start in life, we still need more policies that will help a girl overcome the prejudices of her family. First, we need good mental health support services to help overcome trauma and boost a girl’s self-esteem. Next is the need for safe houses/affordable housing, where women unwanted by their families can find shelter and solace. Moreover, there should be effective laws which will protect her inheritance and property rights. In short, the policies should cover a girl child from birth right up to old age. You cannot force anyone to love you, not even your family. But it sure helps to have society’s support to live with dignity.<sup>18</sup>

**Conclusion**

The guidelines stated that to ensure accountability and improvement in services, it was important to document all activities conducted at the district, block and *gram panchayat* levels. Upon closer inspection, the CAG report found that there were no records of implementation for various activities held for Information, Education & Communication (IEC) activities and child development during 2014-2015 and 2015-2016. In Punjab, it was found that meetings could not be held since there were no monthly progress reports produced or even utilisation certificates (UCs) and statements of expenditure (SOE) from the districts. The lack of policy implementation, diversion of funds and the failure of monitoring mechanisms are some of the reasons for the failure of the BBBPS. To achieve the objectives of the scheme, the government must ensure stricter enforcement of the policy guidelines and improve the monitoring mechanisms it employs. There have been reports that state governments have issued orders to independent agencies to check the validity of the data collected by district officials. Audits in various districts revealed that the births of all girls had been registered while those of some baby boys had been concealed to present improved figures of the gender ratio in some districts. The true state of affairs cannot be gauged when poor implementation of policies is combined with data manipulation by government officials who under pressure to show growth. Presenting an ideal picture can make policy makers complacent. It can lead to poor policy planning and eventually the objectives of the scheme will not be achieved if things go on this way. There will be no progress and policy makers' focus will shift away from the scheme. Successive governments have taken multiple measures to improve the gender ratio yet, across India, the practice of female infanticide and foeticide is remains rampant. Every policy contributes in improving the ratio but when policies are not implemented and numbers are manipulated, it sets us back by many years. The long-term effects of a skewed gender ratio range from a lack of employment opportunities for women and health concerns to its impact on the overall development of the country. A drop in the number of women may lead to a decline in population, increase in crimes against women and an increase in human trafficking.

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