

Chapter-13

FROM GENDER DISCRIMINATION TO GENDER EMPOWERMENT: CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF BETI BACHAO BETI PADHAO SCHEME

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ABSTRACT:

BBBP scheme is aimed end gender discrimination and gender inequality. However, the identification of root cause for the gender violence, gender inequality and gender discrimination is footed on the misconception that is CSR and SRB caused by prenatal sex selective abortion and post natal neglecting health, nutrition, and educational needs of the girl child is the root cause for the gender discrimination and gender disempowerment in Indian society. Actual root cause of gender discrimination and gender inequality in India is 'socio-religious and political institutions and practices of patriarchy'. It is only by challenging, questioning and transforming various patriarchal practices we can bring gender equality and gender empowerment.

INTRODUCTION:

Beti Bachao and Beti Padhao (hereafter BBBP) scheme was launched by the NDA government on 22 January, 2015. It is based on the misconception that CSR (Child Sex Ratio) and SRB (Sex Ratio at Birth) caused by prenatal sex selective abortion and post natal neglecting health, nutrition, and educational needs of the girl child is the root cause for the gender discrimination and gender disempowerment in Indian society. This seems to be very radical statement. Let us explore this step by step.

Part I: Review of Literature on Gender:

First of all, gender and sex are two different terms. Sex is biological and physiological difference between male, female and other and gender is a social construction. This means gender that is man and woman, masculinity and femininity, boy and girl are social construction and it is reproduced, transformed or both through the performance of gender roles. Gender roles are historical and cultural specific in nature. Ortner, in her seminal book *Making Gender* (1996:1) claims "Subjects as constructed by, and subjected to, the cultural and historical discourses within which they must operate". That is to say gender identities constructed or made through historical and cultural specific performances of gender roles. For example; girl child should wear pink dress, play with Barbie doll and boy child must use blue dress, play with racing cars are some of the gender specific roles performed under the supervision of their parents. As they grow up many more gender specific roles performed by boys and girls and finally as a woman she has to take care of kitchen and man has to work outside. Performance or practices of these gender specific roles through socio-religious bases and sanctions lead to justification for gender stereotypes, gender inequality, gender discrimination and ultimately gender violence.

Secondly, some believe that gender roles and gender inequalities are flowed from sexual differences. In sociology we call them biological essentialists, who seem to claim “anatomy is destiny” (Leibowitz, 1975: 23) that is to say the women’s subjugation is related to their physical traits. The physical and biological traits of women such are smaller in size, softer body and fattier tissues, pregnancy, lactation and so on are better suited for the women to be “nurturant, affective, docile followers” (Leibowitz, 1975: 23) on the contrary the males are naturally large in size, better muscles (muscular), strong and bony chest, body hair and so on is conceptualized as sign dominance. “By virtue of being leaders, providers, protectors and sexually aggressive, larger males are more likely to father stronger babies” (ibid 23). Question can be asked whether contemporary social roles are result of physic\al differences or contemporary physical differences are result of past social roles. It is difficult establish this hypothesis since we have no way to go back to primitive stage of human existence. Authors like Lila Leibowitz (1975) and Marlene Zuk (2005) tried to observe the non-human primates and their social adaptations to the environmental and social changes. Therefore, one thing is for sure there are no conclusive proofs to establish gender roles and gender inequality is flows from sex and sexual differences.

Thirdly, male domination in Indian society or in any other society is the root cause of gender discrimination. The male domination is derived from patriarchy and socio-religious and political institutions and practices reproduce patriarchal institutions. Patriarchy can be defined as a system of male domination in all spheres of life from morality, religion to politics and even to the action and movement of women. With regard to Indian context Uma Chakravathy (1993) describes says, “the foundation of Brahmanical Patriarchy lay in the collective subordination of women and lower-castes so that upper-caste men could control both wealth and labour. This control was ensured through a number of texts that were written by men, where women were instructed to be obedient and chaste, in return for which they would be venerated. Women, along with lower-caste men, were also kept away from material wealth and resources, which made them dependent on upper-caste men. In this manner, by strictly controlling reproduction, upper-caste men could retain their social dominance for generations”.

Fourthly, to establish gender equality and gender empowerment we need challenge and transform root causes of the same. The root cause for gender inequality and gender discrimination is patriarchal institutions and practices, in Indian context whatever religion, language, race and caste we may belong, as Indians we are all part of ‘Brahminical patriarchy’. It is only by challenging and transforming brahminical

patriarchal practices and institutions that we perform in everyday life we can materialize gender empowerment.

Part II: Case Study of Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Scheme:

BBBP Scheme was launched on 22 January, 2015 by the incumbent Prime Minister, Shri. Narendra Modi. It was launched to address grievous problem related to sex ratio as enumerated by 2011 Census. It was found that Child Sex Ratio (CSR) had declined from 945 in 1999 to 927 in 2001 and further it had declined 918 in 2011. The scheme clearly identified that low CSR and SRB (Sex Ratio at Birth) are indicators of gender discrimination and gender disempowerment. It further said “pre-birth discrimination through gender-based, sex selective abortion and post birth discrimination by neglecting health, nutrition, and educational needs of the girl child” . Moreover, it also clearly mentions that “socio-cultural and religious preference for boys was the root cause of the problem”. In other words, root cause of the problem of low CSR and SRB is patriarchal institutional practices such as male inheritance of property, dowry, male progeny is necessary for moksha, and so on.

Objectives of BBBP Scheme

1. Improve the child sex ratio
2. Ensure gender equality and women empowerment
3. Prevent gender-biased, sex selective elimination
4. Ensure survival and protection of the girl child
5. Encourage education and participation of the girl child

Governing Bodies:

The Scheme was governed by three central ministries namely:

1. **Ministry of Women and Child Development:** It takes care of overall supervision, guidance, management of the scheme to the states, UTs, and districts. It also takes care of advocacy and media outreach campaigns
2. **Ministry of Health and Family Welfare:** It ensures regular meeting of Central Supervisory Board (CSB). Implementation and supervision of PCPNDT Act (Pre-Conception and Prenatal Diagnostic Technique).
3. **Ministry of Human Resource Development:** Activation of School Management Committees (SMCs) towards universal enrollment, retention and completion of

secondary education for girls. It aims to encourage girls to in community discussion and participation through *Balika Munch*, construction of ladies toilets in all schools, completion of Kasturba Gandhi Bal Vidhyalayas, construction of girls hostels, district level awards for girl achievers and special financial incentives for meritorious girls.

Three Components of Scheme:

1. Advocacy and Media Campaign
2. Intervention in Gender Critical Districts
3. Financial Incentives to the girl child through *Sukanya Samriddhi Yojana (SSY)*.

Part III: Critical Examination of BBBP Scheme:

This section is not to evaluate the success and failure of implantation of BBBP scheme rather this is to examine the very concept and various components within the scheme.

Firstly, the very BBBP scheme is built on the false conception that is socio-cultural and religious preferences for boys, the root cause of the problem. It is true in its identification that low SRB and low CSR are indicators of various types of gender discrimination and gender disempowerment, which has led to selection of sex selective abortions and elimination of female fetus. Sex selection at birth, sex selective abortions, post birth gender discriminations like domestic violence after giving birth to girl child, not giving post natal care, not educating the girl child are all not causes but symptoms or acts of gender discrimination.

Secondly, the BBBP Scheme has failed or doesn't have political will to identify real cause of gender discrimination - patriarchy or in the words of Uma Chakravathy, "Brahminical Patriarchy". Socio-religious and political institutions and practices that uphold and reproduce patriarchy need to be challenged, questioned and transformed in order to achieve the five objectives mentioned in the BBBP scheme. I say, 'political will' because no party in India would want to challenge the socio-religious and political institutions that propagate various kinds of violence and discriminations.

Thirdly, when the schemes and policies try to alter or transform the symptoms or trying to do cosmetic changes (like that of trying to improve CSR and SRB) rather than directly attacking the root causes it may not lead to gender empowerment.

Fourthly, the target groups of BBBP Scheme as young and newly married couples, pregnant and lactating mothers; and parents is based on the primary purpose

of increasing the CSR and SRB. No doubt with conscious effort and in certain instances greed for monetary incentives among parents we may say that this scheme has positive impact on improving the CSR and SRB in various gender critical districts of India. Although, there are many reports of under utilization and diversion of funds allocated for BBBP Scheme are being reported specially in Haryana and Punjab (analysis of CAG report). I don't intend to analyze the implementation of BBBP scheme.

Fifthly, the sole stress on improving the CSR and SRB is based on another misconception that increase in number of girls and women in the society will lead to gender equality and gender empowerment. If that is so already, women and children consist of 70% of India's population. In most of the cases children (0-6 years old) are at the side of mother. 70% of population must have eliminated the gender inequality and gender discriminations because quantity will dominate. It should have been female dominant society which is not so because quantity doesn't always determines the success.

Therefore, in order to bring positive changes of gender empowerment and gender equality in Indian society the all the concerned stake holders must attack, challenge, and transform the patriarchal socio-cultural and religious institutions and practices, such as equal rights for women for inheritance, complete abolition of dowry, gender equality at work place, gender equality in political institutions (when women and children consist of 70% of Indian population at least they must have 50% representation) and so on. The list will go on and on.

Part IV: Positive Aspects of BBBP Scheme:

All is not negative in BBBP scheme; there are many positive aspects as well. I would like to enumerate a few.

1. Target of universal enrollment, retention and completion of secondary schooling for the girls, with monetary incentives and awards has forced parents to give equal and primary importance to education of girl child and not to confine her to the kitchen or household chores.
2. Stricter implementation and media campaign against of PC&PNDT Act (Prevention of Sex Selection Act), 1994 (2021) would bring greater awareness of importance of saving girl child among general public.
3. There are various sections of people criticizing BBBP scheme for proportion and utilization fund for media campaign of bring awareness of gender sensitization, gender equality and saving a girl child. According India Brand Equity Foundation

website (managed by GOI) until December, 2018, 56.3% of budget allocation was utilized on awareness campaigns. According to the Hindu report, 80% of funds were spent on media campaigns. I don't find anything wrong in this and would otherwise, think it is very important to bring awareness campaigns to the public on gender discrimination and gender disempowerment. This program has brought large scale awareness among public all over India (to the nooks and corners) that we need to save a girl child, we need to educate our girl children, we need to bring gender equality and need to challenge and transform acts of gender violence and gender discrimination.

CONCLUSION:

Through this paper the attempt was done to critical examination of Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Scheme. The review of various literatures on Gender suggests that the transformation from gender discrimination and gender violence towards gender equality and gender empowerment can only be possible by challenging root causes of gender inequality and gender discrimination. The gender discrimination in India is founded on the socio-religious and political practices and institutions of patriarchy or in the words of Uma Chakravathi, 'Brahminical Patriarchy' (Uma Chakravarti, 1993). We can establish gender equality and gender empowerment by challenging and transforming various institutional practices associated with 'Brahminical Patriarchy'.

BBBP scheme is aimed end gender discrimination and gender inequality. However, the identification of root cause for the gender violence, gender inequality and gender discrimination is footed on the misconception that is CSR and SRB caused by prenatal sex selective abortion and post natal neglecting health, nutrition, and educational needs of the girl child is the root cause for the gender discrimination and gender disempowerment in Indian society. Actual root cause of gender discrimination and gender inequality in India is 'socio-religious and political institutions and practices of patriarchy'. It is only by challenging, questioning and transforming various patriarchal practices we can bring gender equality and gender empowerment.

To challenge and transform socio-religious and political institutional practices of patriarchy we need political will. The political will to give 50% political reservation to women, strict implementation of equal inheritance laws, Dowry Prohibition Act -1961, equality for women in religious practices and so on.

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