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## **OCTOBER 11, 2016: INTERNATIONAL DAY OF THE GIRL SAVE GIRL CHILD & EDUCATE HER**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Woman is the procreator and the mother of tomorrow shaping the destiny of civilization. For a woman, pregnancy is the most delighted event but in India in some cases the birth of a girl child is a gloomy and despair event and perhaps the gravest concern facing humanity. The United Nations has been observing each year on 8th March “International Women’s Day since 1975 to achieve specified mandate enshrined in its resolution. Subsequently, in order to focus undivided attention to girl child the United Nations, since 2012, has been observing 11th October each year as “International Day of Girl Child”. Acknowledging the significance of the girl child India went ahead and has been observing 24th January each year since 2008 “National Girl Child Day” & National Nutrition Week from September 1-7 since 1982 . It is against this background, this development perspective article briefly highlights the pathetic scenario of girl child worldwide & in India specifically despite the implementation of specific policy & programs in India and suggests strategy to achieve the goal “ Save the girl child & Educate the girl” as a part of United Nations Sustainable Development Goal-4 [“Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls “by 2030] when India could not achieve UN Millennium Development Goals by 2015 in this regard.*

### **Keywords:**

*Save Girl Child, Girl Child Day, Educate The Girl.*

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

On December 19, 2011, the United Nations General Assembly passed a resolution adopting October 11, 2012 as the inaugural International Day of the Girl Child. The resolution states that “The Day of the Girl recognizes the empowerment of and investment in girls, which are critical for economic growth, the achievement of all Millennium Development Goals including the eradication of poverty & extreme poverty, as well as the meaningful participation of girls in

decisions that affect them, are key in breaking the cycle of discrimination and violence and in promoting and protecting the full and effective enjoyment of their human rights. It further recognizes that empowering girls requires their active participation in decision-making processes and the active support and engagement of their parents, legal guardians, families and care providers, as well as boys and men and the wider community”

International Day of the Girl Child being observed every year on 11<sup>th</sup> October since 2012 is, therefore, expected to create massive awareness among all stakeholders and renew our pledge to offer/present more & more opportunities to girls in critical areas viz. gender equality; legal rights; right & access to education, nutrition, health/medical care; protection from all sorts of discrimination & violence; and more importantly end child marriage forever, among others. The observance of this day must reflect the Government’s policy, programs & campaigns that can guarantee girls safe & secured life equal to their male counterparts without any discrimination.

## 2. CURRENT GLOBAL SCENARIO

Despite observance of international women’s day since 1975 & internal day of the girl child since 2012 following are the ground realities at the global level.

- It is most pathetic that even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, according to a report by Save the Children released on 11<sup>th</sup> October 2016 [which coincidentally was International Day of the Girl] in developing countries, one in three girls are married before the age of 18 and one in nine before the age of 15. UNICEF estimates this figure will grow to 950 million by 2030. “Child marriage starts a cycle of disadvantage that denies girls the most basic rights to learn, develop and be children,” said Save the Children International CEO Helle Thorning-Schmidt. “Girls who marry too early often can’t attend school, and are more likely to face domestic violence, abuse and rape. They also bear children before their bodies are fully prepared, which can have devastating consequences on their and their baby’s health.”
- According to International Labor Organization’s special report on the girl child and labor, more than 100 million girl children between the ages of 5 and 17 are engaged in child labor, out of which over 50 percent of them are in hazardous industries, and 20 percent of those are below 12 years of age. It is hard to get correct statistical information about girl child labor since the kind of work that girls are forced to undertake is more invisible than that of boys, viz. work in agriculture and dairying, grazing cattle, collecting fuel and water from distant locations, and domestic work. Many girls are engaged in active labor which is disguised as household chores. ILO reports that 10 percent of girls are engaged in "household chores" for more than 24 hours in a week which is twice as much as boys. One of the most heinous gender specific forms of child labor is child prostitution. The Human Rights Watch reports that prostitution ages have dropped from 14-16 years in the 1980's to 10-14 years in 1991.
- Worldwide collectively girls of 5-14 years of age spend more than 160 million hours more on household chores than boys of the same age do
- According to the United Nations Cyber school bus paper on the girl child, out of 130 million children not in school, almost 60 percent of them are girls. By the age of 18, girl children have received on average 4.4 years less education than boys. It also reports that

at least one in three girls and women worldwide has been physically harmed or sexually abused in her lifetime.

- The report, entitled 'Every Last Girl,' ranked 144 countries from the best to the worst in which to be a girl. Based on the considerations of child marriage, schooling, teenage pregnancy, maternal deaths and the number of female lawmakers, the worst countries in which to be a girl are Somalia, Mali, Central African Republic, Chad and Niger while countries at the top include Sweden, Finland, Norway, Netherlands and Belgium. India ranks 90th on the list with Pakistan ahead of India at 88 & Sri Lanka at 60. Bangladesh ranked below India at 111.

### 3. INDIAN SCENARIO

**Child Sex Ratio:** Declining child sex ratio measured as number of females per 1000 males in the 06 years of age has not been a recent phenomenon as is evident from the following data since 1901 census till latest 2011.

**Table 1:** All India Average Child Sex Ratio According to Census from 1901 to 2011

Year	CSR	Year	CSR	Year	CSR	Year	CSR
1901	972	1931	950	1961	941	1991	927
1911	964	1941	945	1971	930	2001	927
1921	955	1951	946	1981	934	2011	919

Source: Census 2011

In India, it is a matter of serious concern that demographically the child sex ratio [CSR], a measure of females per 1000 males, has been progressively declining in each decade of census since 1901 to 2011. It steeply declined by 26 from 972 in 1901 to 946 in 1951 and further by 27 to 919 between 1951 and 2011. Despite a plethora of summits, conferences and events held for promoting gender equality unborn female foetuses continue to be killed in the womb itself or female infants dumped as garbage. If it continues, it will further aggravate the gender imbalance in the society. Reasons for abortions are male dominating society, poverty, rights to property, dowry obligations at the time of marriage, and various religious, cultural and spiritual myths. Girls are viewed as economic burden, various beliefs and social factors have resulted in widespread discrimination against the girl child resulting in alarming decrease in CSR, particularly so in some States, and this is where the roots of female foeticide in India lie. Some of the reasons for neglect of girl child and low CSR, as stated by Shri Ghulam Nabi Azad, former Union Minister for Health and Family Welfare in a written reply to the Rajya Sabha are son preference and the belief that it is only the son who can perform the last rites, that lineage and inheritance runs through the male line, sons will look after parents in old age, men are the bread winners etc. Exorbitant dowry demand is another reason for female foeticide/infanticide. Small family norm coupled with easy availability of sex determination tests may be responsible for declining CSR.

**Table 2:** State-wise Child Sex Ratio According to Census 2001 & 2011 [0-6 years]

State	2001	2011	State	2001	2011	State	2001	2011
J&K	941	862	Odisha	953	841	Maharashtra	913	894
Himachal	896	909	West B	960	956	Goa	938	942
Punjab	798	846	Sikkim	963	957	Andhra	961	939

Chandigarh	845	880	Arunachal	964	972	Karnataka	946	948
Haryana	819	834	Nagaland	964	943	Kerala	960	964
Delhi	868	871	Manipur	957	936	Puducherry	967	967
Rajasthan	909	888	Mizoram	964	970	Tamil Nadu	942	843
UP	916	902	Tripura	966	957	Lakshdweep	959	911
Uttrakhand	908	890	Meghalaya	973	970	A & Nicobar	957	968
MP	932	918	Assam	965	962	Rural	934	919
Chhatisgarh	975	969	Gujarat	883	890	Urban	903	902
Bihar	942	935	Daman&D	926	904			
Jharkhand	965	948	D&NH	979	926	All India	927	919

Source: Census 2001 & 2011

### Census 2001 & 2011

Between 2001 and 2011, while national average of CSR declined by 8 from 927 to 919 as many as 18 states and three Union Territories [UT] showed declined CSR ranging from 3 to 79 whereas 11 states and two UTs had improved CSR varying from 1 to 48 . Puducherry did not exhibit any change.

According to census 2001, out of 29 states and six UTs, 20 states and four UTs had CSR above national average [927] whereas as per census 2011, 18 states and three UTs recorded CSR above national average [919]. Out of 24 states and UTs that had CSR above national average in 2001 two states [J&K and MP] and Lakshdweep showed lower CSR in 2011. The CSR is more skewed in the land-rich and affluent states of Punjab, Haryana, Gujarat and Delhi. The 2011 census data showed that the CSR in Punjab, Haryana, Gujarat and Delhi was as low as 846, 834, 890 and 871 female for 1000 males respectively and shockingly, a recent survey in villages around Chandigarh indicated that the number of boys outnumbered girls in every village.

The states having CSR above national average in 2001 and 2011 are Bihar, Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura, Meghalaya, Assam, West Bengal, Jharkhand, Odisha, Chhatisgarh, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Goa, Kerala and Tamil Nadu along with UTs of Dadra & Nagar Haveli, Puducherry, Andaman & Nicobar. However, 12 states of these have showed declined CSR in 2011 such as, Bihar [-7], Sikkim [-6], Nagaland [-21], Manipur [-21], Tripura [-9], Meghalaya [-3], Assam [-3], West Bengal [-4], Jharkhand [-17], Odisha [-12], Chhatisgarh [-6], and Andhra Pradesh [-22] along with UT of Dadra & Nagar Haveli [-22] whereas six states have improved CSR in 2011 such as, Arunachal Pradesh [+8], Mizoram [+6], Karnataka [+2], Goa [+4], Kerala [+4] and Tamil Nadu [+1] along with UT of Andaman & Nicobar [+11] and Puducherry [0]. Of those nine states having CSR below national average in 2001 and 2011, five states have improved CSR in 2011 such as, Himachal Pradesh [+13], Punjab [+48], Haryana [+15], Delhi [+3] and Gujarat [+7] along with UT of Chandigarh [+35] whereas four states have further shown declined CSR in 2011 such as Uttrakhand [-18], Rajasthan [-21], UP[-14] and Maharashtra [-19] along with UT of Diu & Daman [-22]. ,

### Top & Bottom Ten

Seven states [Chhatisgarh, Meghalaya, Tripura, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram and West Bengal] with two UTs [Puducherry and Andaman & Nicobar] continued to be among top ten in

2001 and 2011 whereas eight states [Punjab, Haryana, Delhi, Gujarat, Uttrakhand, Rajasthan, Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh] with one UT[Chandigarh] also continued to be among bottom ten.

**Table 3:** Top & Bottom Ten States based on CSR in 2001 & 2011

2001		2011	
Top Ten	Bottom Ten	Top Ten	Bottom Ten
Dadra & NH [979]	Punjab [798]	Arunachal P [972]	Haryana [834]
Chhatisgarh [975]	Haryana [819]	Meghalaya [970]	Punjab [846]
Meghalaya [973]	Chandigarh [845]	Mizoram [970]	J& K [862]
Andhra P [967]	Delhi [868]	Chhatisgarh [969]	Delhi [871]
Puducherry [967]		Andaman & N [968]	
Tripura [966]	Gujarat [880]	Puducherry [967]	Chandigarh [880]
Jharkhand [965]	Himachal P [896]	Kerala [964]	Rajasthan [888]
Assam [965]			
Nagaland [964]	Uttrakhand [908]	Assam [962]	Uttrakhand [890]
Arunachal P [964]			Gujarat [890]
Mizoram [964]			
West Bengal [960]	Rajasthan [909]	Tripura [957]	Maharashtra [894]
Kerala [960]		Sikkim [957]	
Lakshdweep [959]	Maharashtra [913]		
Andaman & N [957]	Uttar P [916]	West Bengal [956]	Uttar P [902]
Manipur [957]			
All India [927]		All India [919]	

Source: Census 2001 & 2011

### Number of districts by Ranges of CSR

Among 640 districts in the country, 515 [80.47%] recorded CSR more than 900 in 2001 which, however, declined to 447 [69.84%] districts in 2011. Consequent upon this, number of 125 districts having CSR between 800 and 899 in 2001 increased to 193 in 2011.

**Table 4:** Number of Districts by Ranges of CSR [2001 & 2011]

Range	No. of districts		Range	No. of districts	
	2001	2011		2001	2011
>800	18	06	900-949	224	266
800-849	36	52	950-999	279	178
850-899	71	135	>1000	12	03

Source: Census 2001 & 2011

Notwithstanding India putting its best efforts to be an IT superpower and one of the fastest developing economies, tragically represents the lowest CSR in the world. The girl child's discrimination begins before birth in the form of female foeticide. The gender discrimination is reported to have claimed a whopping 50 million female lives. Atrocities against women in one or the other form have been an integral part of the culture since centuries. India has unabashedly

been the home of some of the brutal acts against this gender breed of humanity, commencing from female foeticide and female infanticide to dowry deaths.

Technologies, which facilitate a series of pre-natal diagnostic tools to identify and cure any potential birth defects and associated abnormalities, are misused for selectively aborting female fetuses after such pre-natal sex determination despite a legal regulation banning them. Techniques such as Amniocentesis were introduced in 1975 to identify any genetic abnormalities which sadly became a tool for sex determination and a cause for death for the tiny unborn female fetuses. The larger consequence to both female foeticide and infanticide has been the sharply declining sex ratio.

The United Nations report says that about 750,000 girls are aborted every year in India. Abortion rates are increasing in almost 80 percent in Indian states, mainly Punjab and Haryana. These two states have the highest number of abortions every year. The practice is more prevalent among the weaker sections because of pecuniary poverty and the education and marriage of a daughter is considered a financial burden on their parents. Female feticide and infanticide are not the only issues with a girl child in India. At every stage of life, she is discriminated and neglected for basic nutrition, education, medical care and living standard. She is forced to get married before the legally prescribed age depriving her right to be literate and educated. Lack of education resulted in high fertility rate, aggravating the condition of females in the country.

According to the UNICEF, in 1984 in Mumbai alone 7,999 out of the reported 8,000 abortions that took place were of girls. Girl children are killed shortly after being born when the family comes to know the sex of the child or killed slowly through neglect and abandonment. In 1993 in Tamil Nadu, 196 girls died in suspicious circumstances.

The Union Ministry of Human Resource Development in India reported the average enrolment rate of girls, ages 6-14 and 14-18, as 93.47 percent and 36.77 percent. But it also reports 61.5 percent of girls drop out of school before completing class XII. In India, female literacy rate is still 53.87 percent and one third of the youngster girls are malnourished. Reproductive age group women are anemic and suffering from various other diseases just because of the gender discrimination in the society and limited access to the health services.

Female genital mutilation, though not uncommon in India, affects millions of girls and women every year. Sakshi, a Delhi-based NGO in its survey of 357 school girl children revealed that as many as 63 percent had experienced serious sexual abuse or rape, 29 percent had forced oral sex, squeezing of breast, and genitals. In 30 per cent of all cases, the person behind the act was a family member.

A report of the UNICEF revealed that [i] 15 percent girls in rural India were married before they were of 13 years of age [ii] in Rajasthan 82 percent of girls were married before they were 18 years of age and [iii] 52 percent of girls had their first pregnancy between 15 and 19 years of age. Despite the law clearly banning that it is illegal to allow or facilitate marriage of a boy under 21 years of age and a girl under 18 years of age, it is the Rajasthan State amongst all states in India that tops the average age of a girl at marriage being 16.6 years, closely followed by Bihar [17.2] and Madhya Pradesh [17.0]. The deep rooted social beliefs which force the girl's parents to pass

on the 'burden' of a daughter's living expenses and tradition of early adaptation to the in-laws' families add on to the gruesome list of causes.

A recent survey revealed that 56 percent of adolescent girls in India in the age group 15-19 years are anaemic. Studies by various NGOs supporting girl child indicate the dire set of consequences that girls suffer include sacrificing girl's education [a life-long asset], girls becoming more vulnerable to domestic violence and early pregnancies impacting on the health of the mother

Some try to justify sex selection by saying that fewer girls in a society will eventually enhance the status of girls. On the contrary, with fewer girls as compared to boys, it could lead further restrictions on girls and women, increased violence against them, rape, abduction, trafficking and a resurgence of practices such as polyandry (more than one man marrying one woman). In some parts of the country, the media has even reported that women are being 'bought' as brides

#### **4. EVOLUTION OF THE LAWS & POLICY**

The former Chief Justice of India, Y K Sabharwal, declared the year 2007 as the 'Awareness year of female foeticide', and said "The system will deal strictly with those responsible for this crime". From time to time, Central and State Governments in India have enacted following specific laws to ensure health, family welfare and dignity of life of girls and women in particular & children in general.

- The Dowry Prohibition Act [1961],
- The Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, [1971],
- The Centre banned sex-determination tests in Government facilities [1976],
- The Maharashtra Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques Act, followed by similar acts by the Governments of Punjab, Gujarat and Haryana [1988],
- The Punjab Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Control & Regulation) Act [1994], The Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Regulation and Prevention of Misuse) [1994],
- Enforcement of central Act in Punjab [1996],
- The Directorate of Health Services and Family Welfare, Punjab is appointed the authority to implement the Act [1997],
- The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act [ 1929 Act Amended in 2006]
- The Indian Penal Code recognizes Female Infanticide as a punishable offence under the Indian law
- National Commission for Protection of Child Rights [2007]
- Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act [2012]
- National Policy on Child [2013]
- Juvenile Justice [Care & Protection of Children [Bill 2014]

#### **5. CODE OF MEDICAL ETHICS**

Incorporated by the Indian Parliament in the Medical Council Act, 1956, the relevant section of the Code of Medical Ethics stipulates" Any act of termination of pregnancy of normal female foetus, amounting to female foeticide, shall be regarded as professional misconduct on the part of the physician leading to penal erasure besides rendering him liable to criminal proceedings as per the provisions of this Act (Clause 7.6). It is here important to note that the penalty for

unindicated sex determination and female foeticide is striking off the name from the register apart from criminal action.”

## 6. GOVERNMENT’S POLICY AND PROGRAMS

Acknowledging the concern over declining CSR in 2001 the Government has endeavored to address issues of girl child through initiating following measures.

### Policy

- National Policy for Empowerment of Women [2001] and
- National Policy for child [2013]

### Programs

- Swadhar, A Scheme for Women in Difficult Circumstances [2001-02]
- Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescent Girls [SABLA],
- Indira Gandhi Matritva Sahyog Yojana [2010-11] and
- Beti Bachao Beti Padhao [2015]

### Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescent girls [SABLA]

Sabla aims at an all-round development of adolescent girls of 11-18 years of age through Government interventions to enable them to become self-reliant and facilitate their access to learning, vocational training, health and nutrition. The scheme has two major components: [i] Nutrition addressing health and (ii) Non-Nutrition Component addressing the developmental needs. A comprehensive scheme for the holistic development of adolescent girls is being implemented in 205 selected districts across the country, using the Integrated Child Development Scheme platform. The integrated package of services being provided includes [i] Nutrition provision (600 calories and 18-20 gm of protein and micronutrients per beneficiary per day for 300 days in a year [ii] Iron and Folic Acid (IFA) supplementation [iii] Health check-up and Referral services [iv] Nutrition & Health Education [v] Counselling/Guidance on family welfare, child care practices and home management [vi] Life Skill Education and accessing public services, Vocational training for girls aged 16 and above under National Skill Development Program. Up to 31.12.2014, 98.15 lakh beneficiaries have been covered under Nutrition component and 0.42 lakh adolescent girls provided vocational training under Non-nutrition component.

### The Power of the Adolescent Girl: Vision for 2030.

The member countries including India adopted United Nations Millennium Development Goals in 2000 to be achieved by 2015 which *inter alia* focused sharply attention on improving the status and quality of life of girls and women. Thus, between 2000 and 2015, there has been fairly reasonable progress in improving the status and lives of girls during early childhood. However, there have been insufficient efforts including investment of financial and non-financial resources in addressing the challenges that girls face when they enter the second decade of their lives.



**Save the Girl, Educate the Girl,**

The Government has initiated in 100 selected districts having low CSR a “Beti Bachao Beti Padhao” [Save the Girl, Educate the Girl] program to make girls in India safer inside the womb and better off outside it. Its objectives are: [i]) Prevention of gender biased sex selective elimination, [ii]) Ensuring survival and protection of the girl child [iii] Ensuring education and participation of the girl child. The program is targeted to improve the CSR through mass communication campaign and multi-sectoral interventions for her holistic empowerment. Speaking on the occasion of International Day of the Girl Child, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, called for the eradication of female foeticide and invited suggestions from the citizens of India on "Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao" “Save the girl child” is a campaign to end the gender-selective abortion of female foetus which is supported by human rights groups and NGOs to supplement the efforts of the state Governments to ensure safe birth, survival, protection and empowerment of the girl child.

**7. NEED FOR REVIEW & STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN**

**Review:** The observance of this Day of the Girl should help us acknowledge the substantial socio-economic loss that our society & nation has suffered because of neglecting the girl child and simultaneously make us realize what could have happened/can happen had these discriminatory treatments been totally avoided. It is, therefore, indeed necessary to review our policy & programs and understand the status of the critical issues & identify the factors responsible for slow/unsatisfactory progress on specific themes that were emphasized in past years viz. ending girl child marriage [2012], innovating for girl’s education [2013], empowering adolescent girls: ending the cycle of violence [2014], the power of adolescent girls: Vision for 2030 [2015]. The year 2016 devotes fully on the theme of Girls’ Progress= Goals’ Progress: What Counts for Girls.

**Strategic Action Plan:** A strategic action plan needs to be formulated to harness the full potential of adolescent girls under the scheme. India has been celebrating 24<sup>th</sup> January each year since 2008 as the National girl child day. The Government on this day each year should review performance of the Rajive Gandhi Scheme for Empowering Adolescent Girls right from its inception till date in each of 100 districts covered under the scheme. Besides, an independent assessment should be conducted to identify the strength and weaknesses of the scheme in achieving the expected objectives as also the threat and opportunities in the current socio-economic environment in each district. This review and assessment should facilitate India to develop road map to achieve by 2020 “The Power of Adolescent Girls in India: vision 2030” and fulfil UN SDG-4 by 2030 focusing following areas which can be implemented from the 11<sup>th</sup> October 2016 being the international day of the girl child.

- 100 percent enrolment in primary and secondary schools and access to quality education
- 100 percent vaccinations accompanied by zero-problem of nutrition and health.
- Creating an enabling environment and putting in place appropriate system that can ensure enforcement in letter and spirit [i] the Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Prohibition of Sex Selection) Act and Rules 1994 (as amended up to 2002) which mandates that sex selection by any person, by any means, before or after conception, is prohibited .

- Commitment of the law enforcing administration in each state to do away with child marriage, female foeticide and infanticide and gender-based violence
- Provide authentic information and timely services related to puberty and reproductive health, protecting girls against unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted disease.
- Self-Help-Groups of Women already formed throughout the country must demand and claim girls' rights and ensure to break the cycle of gender discrimination and violence
- Make empowerment of girls an integral part of policy and programs for empowerment of women and facilitate them to significantly benefit from the implementation of all programs of the ministry of health as also from the Integrated Child & women Development Services
- Developing robust Monitoring and Management Information System to monitor the measurable indicators of the performance on quarterly basis in each selected district, half-yearly at State level and once in each year at national level which can be accessed on the ministry's website as also published in print media and discussed in electronic media widely.

In particular, the elected representatives in villages/towns, State Assemblies and country's Parliament and Rajya Sabha have to assume added responsibility in ensuring that the already enacted laws yield the enshrined objectives and country fulfils its mandated responsibility under the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 when it could not achieve by 2015.

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