

CIVIL SOCIETY'S CHARTER OF DEMANDS TO INDIA'S POLITICAL PARTIES ON THE DECLINING CHILD SEX RATIO

India continues to experience a drastic fall in the child sex ratio (CSR), calculated as the number of girls per 1000 boys in the 0-6 age group. The child sex ratio declined from 945 girls per 1000 boys in 1991, to 927 in 2001 and further to 918 in 2011. The decline is widespread across the country, and has expanded to rural and tribal areas as well.

Child sex ratio reflects both, pre-birth discrimination manifested through gender biased sex selection, and post birth discrimination against girls. Skewed sex ratios can have far-reaching adverse social consequences. As evidence from regions with sex ratio imbalances indicate,

it could contribute to increased violence against women, trafficking, increase in practices such as polyandry and overall rise in crime and general social disorder.

It is time for political leaders and activists to appreciate the gravity of the situation and play an active role as 'agents of change' to reverse the decline in child sex ratios. With the 16th Lok Sabha Election process kicking off we appeal to all the political parties to take on this urgent and critical challenge. In order to reverse the decline and create a gender just society we urge all the political parties to formally commit to the following in their election manifesto for 2014:

1. PROHIBIT GENDER BIASED SEX SELECTION

The Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (PCPNDT) Act in existence since 1994, is an important tool to regulate the misuse of technology including those applicable to pre-conception and pre-natal procedures, and ensure its ethical use. However its implementation has faced several challenges, largely because there has been lack of 'political and administrative will' to implement it. We urge all political parties to commit to executing the law in the following manner:

- a) **Make relevant boards and committees functional:** Ensure constitution and functioning of State Supervisory Board (SSB), State Advisory Committee (SAC), State Inspection & Monitoring Committee (SMIC) and District Advisory Committee (DAC), as prescribed under the Act.
- b) **Raise accountability of Appropriate Authority:** Hold State and District Implementing Authorities accountable for the non-implementation of the

PCPNDT Act. 'Code of Conduct' for officials to implement the Act should be effectively executed.

- c) **Regulate clinics, centres & companies:** Ensure hundred percent registrations of centres providing pre-conception and pre-natal diagnostic services including through Assisted Reproductive Technology (ART) services.

Prosecute clinics not maintaining and submitting records as per the PCPNDT Act. Similarly, prosecute companies and suppliers for not sending their quarterly sale report to the government and violating the PCPNDT Act.

- d) **Regulate resale of ultrasound machines:** Regulate the market of used/resold ultrasound machines to assist in regulating the practice of gender biased sex selection.

- e) **Strengthen legal regime to address Act violation:** Ensure speedy trial of all cases filed under the PCPNDT Act in all the constituencies in order to expedite the prosecution of the violators by establishing Fast Track Courts.

Press for prosecution of internet companies for advertisements on gender biased sex selection as they do not follow Indian law and violate the PCPNDT Act.

Provide protection to ‘whistleblowers’ and ‘witnesses’ in order to increase the conviction rates under the PCPNDT Act.

- f) Initiate policy to support Act implementation:** Establish dedicated cell with adequate financial and

human resources, within the health ministry to deal with gender biased sex selection.

Release Sex Ratio at Birth (SRB) data (number of girls born per 1000 boys born) annually at the district and state level for all constituencies.

Undertake public awareness campaigns to inform people about the core aspects of, and reasons behind, this Act.

2. CHALLENGING PATRIARCHY

At a fundamental level, child sex ratio imbalance reflects deeply entrenched patriarchal values that sustains and promotes the phenomenon of son preference. Therefore, while it is imperative to ensure implementation of the PCPNDT Act, it is equally important to strategically address some key factors that challenge patriarchy and counter son preference. We therefore urge political parties to commit to the following:

- a) Strengthen implementation of laws concerning women and girls:** such as inheritance, prevention of dowry, domestic violence, child marriage, sexual harassment of women at workplace, and enact laws to address their subordination which perpetuates practices such as gender biased sex selection; this will require adequate resource commitment.
- b) Support women’s asset ownership:** ensure property rights for women with specific focus on housing and land allocation.
- c) Invest in the ability of girls to be self-reliant:** through initiatives focused on skill building, improving credit availability, increasing workforce participation and ensuring safety and security in public spaces among others.
- d) Uphold women’s sexual and reproductive rights:** by implementing gender-sensitive communications plans that do not inadvertently perpetuate gender stereotypes or blame women or stigmatize safe and legal abortion. In addition to this, ensure that policies and procedures aid, promote and protect a woman’s right to safe abortion.
- e) Review schemes and policies that discriminate women and girls:** for instance review girl child incentive schemes in terms of its effectiveness and to ensure that schemes are not perceived as compensating parents for having a daughter. Also review schemes to ensure that they are not linked to sterilization and two child norm.
- f) Ensure a policy framework of zero tolerance towards violence against women (VAW):** additionally include initiatives such as announcing national awards for Gram Panchayats that ensure zero tolerance towards VAW and publicizing the criteria for Nirbhaya Fund.
- g) Address trafficking of women and girls:** prosecute traffickers and constitute a special cell for the rehabilitation of those women and girls who have been trafficked.
- h) Provide health insurance support for every girl child:** Excess deaths of girls in the under-5 age category reflect their differential access to healthcare.
- i) Start programmes to support single women:** who are widowed, divorced, deserted or those who do not want to marry. This will go a long way in changing perceptions about them being a liability.
- j) Ensure civil registration:** so that accurate birth data is more readily available across districts to enable monitoring of trends in sex ratio at birth.
- k) Undertake public awareness campaigns:** to challenge the existing feudal-patriarchal values and practice, and to encourage and inspire a new outlook based on gender justice and gender equality.