



Mains Practice Question

Q. Just as India has committed to moving up the ranks in Ease of Doing Business indicators, a similar commitment should be made on the gender front. Comment in view of the 'son meta-preference'. (250 words)

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Approach:

- Explain the gender injustice in India.
- Comment in the light of 'son meta-preference'.

Introduction:

- **Economic Survey 2018** highlighted the phenomenon of **son meta-preference** which involves parents adopting fertility 'stopping rules' having children until the desired number of sons are born. This meta-preference leads naturally to the notional category of 'unwanted' girls which is estimated at over 21 million, notes the Survey.
- Recently India moved 23 places to secure 77th rank in World Bank's latest 'Ease of Doing Business' report, 2019, due to major improvements in indicators such as resolving insolvency, tax compliance, protecting minority investors and getting credit. A similar mission-mode commitment is required on the gender front.

Body:

- The government's Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao and Sukanya Samridhi Yojana schemes, and mandatory maternity leave rules are all steps towards bringing gender parity in all social indicators like education, health, employment.
- Over the last 10-15 years, India's performance improved on 14 out of 17 indicators of women's agency (ability to make decisions on reproduction, spending on themselves), attitudes (about violence against women/wives), and outcomes (son preference, female employment, education) as per the Economic Survey analyses. But more needs to be done.
- As per one study, skewed sex ratios characterize families of Indian origin, even in Canada which suggests that such son meta-preference is inoculated to even development.
- On gender, society as a whole—civil society, communities, households—and not just the government must reflect on discriminatory social preferences including meta-preference for a son.
- The change has to be made at attitudinal level by attacking the deep-seated patriarchal mindset of preferring sons over daughters. Awareness campaigns, role models alongwith government interventions have potential to bring a shift in this mindset.

Conclusion:

Indian society, as a whole, will have to resolve the issue of gender injustice as gender outcomes are related to deeper societal prejudices. To correct the anomaly of skewed sex ratio and its related impacts on the society, the perspective towards women needs to be changed and various agencies will have to come together to remove impediments towards bringing gender parity, and more specifically, towards woman empowerment to create further role models.

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