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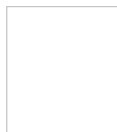
Monday, 14 Mar, 5:24 am

INDIAN EXPRESS



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## CHENNAI

## Who Said Girl Babies are Not Adopted?



CHENNAI: When Meenakshi\* and her husband decided to adopt a baby, they always knew it would be a girl. At first they were disappointed when they were told that they'd most likely get a boy, as they already had a biological girl child. But luck was on their side, and after a long wait, they got a baby girl. "She changed our life; today we cannot live without her," says Meenakshi.

Like Meenakshi, there are other parents who are adopting babies, not just because of medical problems. And this is where the girl child is winning! For the past three years, around 60% of all children adopted have been girls.

From April 2014 to March 2015, a total of 2,300 girls were adopted according to the Minister of Women and Child Development data, out of a total of 3,988 children. In Tamil Nadu, data from CARA (Central Adoption Resource Authority) indicates that 521 girls and 221 boys were adopted in the past three years.

The number of girl babies abandoned still far exceeds the number of boys, and total adoption numbers are also not on the rise. But at least in urban areas, it seems society is gradually becoming more open to adoption. "Attitudes have definitely changed. Not many people consider adoption a stigma," says Jaya\*, who has been working as an adoption agent for a non-profit agency for many years. "More parents come forward to adopt girls; for some it is a socially conscious decision, for others it is a personal choice. But acceptance has increased. Worries like 'how to get an adopted daughter married' are not so strong anymore," she says.

Preethi\* and her husband too consider adoption as one of the best decisions they made. They often forget that their daughter was adopted. "Before taking the decision, we had all these questions of how society would accept our decision. But later, we realised most of these problems were in our heads. Everyone was very supportive, and in the past 10 years, nobody has differentiated our daughter because she is adopted. We wanted a girl because they are more understanding. Girls are stronger," she laughs, even as her husband mildly protests.

After a thorough process with several rounds of counselling, inspection, and sharing all their details, family photos and educational background, they finally got their baby. Though they had already decided they would take the baby even before seeing her, she added that some people still have prejudices and look for the baby's colour, appearance and physical strength. "Many of my friends have adopted a second child after having one biological child," she adds.

That's what Meenakshi did. She adopted a second child though she had her hands full with her first daughter - a special child. "My husband and I had both decided as soon as we got married that we would adopt a girl child. After our first daughter was born, we went through some difficult times and needed some time to settle. But we didn't want to change our decision so went ahead. We felt a girl would bond better with us and her sister," she explains.

Many parents who have a biological boy child also want to adopt girls, says adoption counsellor Saras Bhaskar, an adoptive mother. "People give many reasons - daughters take care of parents for a longer time and some even say they want to dress up their baby girls. Fathers too play a bigger role in adoption than before, as they want a father-daughter bond," she says. But there are issues: illegal adoption continues to be a choice for some couples, a majority of special needs children are adopted by foreigners, and the overall number of babies adopted has not increased. But on the positive side, single, divorced or widowed women are adopting children, and despite the long wait of a proper adoption process, the bundle of joy they get at the end is worth it.

(\*Names changed)

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