

**Study on**  
**“DISCRIMINATION OF THE GIRL CHILD**  
**IN UTTAR PRADESH”**

**Conducted by**  
**Social Action Forum for Manav Adhikar**

**New Delhi**

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## **PREFACE**

***"Short-changing girls is not only a matter of gender discrimination; it is bad economics and bad societal policy. Experience has shown, over and over again, that investment in girls' education translate directly and quickly into better nutrition for the whole family, better health care, declining fertility, poverty reduction and better overall economic performance"***

**- Kofi Annan, United Nations Secretary General**

The present research study titled "DISCRIMINATION OF THE GIRL CHILD IN UTTAR PRADESH" has been undertaken by Social Action Forum for Manav Adhikar, viz. SAFMA. SAFMA is a Non-Governmental Organisation of lawyers, professionals and people committed to the Protection & Promotion of Human Rights. The philosophy of SAFMA is reflected in its name, for 'Manav', i.e. human being, stands not only for human values (life) but also for humanism (life with dignity). And 'Adhikar', i.e. Rights, stands not only for protection but also for Empowerment. 'Discrimination of Girl Child', a subject of great socio-legal significance, not only raises a number of highly sensitive issues, but more particularly impinges deeply on gender justice and the right to equality as enshrined in the Constitution of India.

Discrimination against the girl child occurs in every strata of society - rich or poor - having different forms of manifestation, but is more visible especially in poverty stricken families or in families under financial stress. One of the crudest forms of discrimination is the one which takes place subtly and is sanctioned in the name of culture. A girl is made to fit in a culturally defined role - be it at home or outside. Traditions have portrayed girls as less important than boys, less deserving of basic quality of life. Some of these retrograde traditions have “become so deeply internalized that they have come to stand for what is ‘right’ and ‘natural’, and the girls themselves have frequently come to endorse their own second-class status”.<sup>1</sup> Such deliberate discrimination of the girl child patently violates the right to equality and the right to life as guaranteed by the Constitution of India.

The main object of SAFMA in conducting this research study was to fill the knowledge gaps and thereby assist in devising purposeful lines of action that will facilitate removal of the barriers in the socio-development of the marginalized girl child. We are grateful for the support given to us by Prof. Ved Tripathi, Deen Dayal Upadhyay Gram Vikas Sansthan (Rural Development Institute), Dr BR Ambedkar University, Agra in conducting this study survey and in determining the extent of discrimination of the girl child in District Agra, Uttar Pradesh.

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<sup>1</sup> Women, Culture and Development – A study of Human Capabilities Edited by Martha Nussbaum and Jonathan Glover, 1995.

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### BACKGROUND

#### CONSTITUTIONAL MANDATE

The Constitution guarantees equality and prohibits discrimination on the grounds of sex. The Constitution guarantees the right to equality (Article 14)<sup>2</sup>, right to life (Article 21)<sup>3</sup>, prohibits discrimination and empowers the state to make special provisions for the girl child (Article 15)<sup>4</sup>. The Government invoking these provisions have introduced various special measures. In consonance with this policy various laws have been enacted. The discriminatory provisions of law are being progressively reviewed. The National Commission for Women, the Department of Women and Child Development and the Parliamentary Committee on Empowerment of Women have reviewed various laws and recommended amendments to many of the laws with the objective

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<sup>2</sup> **Article 14. Prohibition of discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth** .....(3) Nothing in this article shall prevent the State from making any special provision for women and children.

<sup>3</sup> **Article 21. Protection of life and personal liberty.** No person shall be deprived of his life or personal liberty except according to procedure established by law.

<sup>4</sup> **Article 15. Prohibition of discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth** .....(3) Nothing in this article shall prevent the State from making any special provision for women and children.

of promoting equality and to amend discriminatory provisions. Despite the constitutional mandate of equal legal status for the girl child, the same is yet to be realized. The *de jure* laws have not been translated into *de facto* situation for various reasons such as illiteracy, social practices, prejudices, cultural norms based on patriarchal values, poor representation of women in policy-making, poverty, regional disparity in development, lack of access and opportunity to information and resources etc.

## **UN CONVENTIONS**

### ***Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)***

On 10 December 1948, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted and proclaimed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). In incorporating Fundamental Rights in Part III of the Constitution of India and Directive Principles of State Policy in Part IV, the Constitution makers were influenced by the just adopted UDHR. Article I of the UDHR states "*All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.*" Article 3, the first cornerstone of the Declaration, proclaims the right to life, liberty and security of person - a right essential to the enjoyment of all other rights. However, the fact is that even these basic human rights are denied to the girl child and India has a long way to go before the human rights of the girl child are enforced.

### ***Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)***

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) was adopted in 1989. It is one of the most ratified conventions in the world (191 countries). It provides an agenda for action in identifying enduring forms of inequality and discrimination against girls, abolishing practices and traditions detrimental to the fulfillment of their rights and defining an effective strategy to promote and protect those rights. India acceded to the CRC on 11 December 1992, with a declaration regarding the progressive implementation of Article 32 thereof on child labour, particularly with reference to paragraph 2(a) on the provision of a minimum employment age. However it is still far from effective implementation of its provisions.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child recognizes that

*"States Parties shall respect and ensure the rights set forth in the present Convention to each child within their jurisdiction without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the child's or his or her parent's or legal guardian's race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or status".  
(Art. 2, para. 1).*

Yet in India girls continue to be treated as inferior and are socialized to put themselves last, thus undermining their self-esteem. Discrimination and neglect in childhood initiates a lifelong downward spiral of deprivation and exclusion from the social mainstream. Indicators show

that the girl child is discriminated against from the earliest stages of life, through her childhood and into adulthood. The reasons for the discrepancy include, among other things, harmful attitudes and practices, such as **preferences for sons - which results in female infanticide and prenatal sex selection - early marriage, including child marriage**, violence against women, sexual exploitation, sexual abuse, discrimination against girls in food allocation and other practices related to health and well-being.

It is important to note that Article 51(c) of the Constitution of India enjoins on the State to endeavour “to foster respect for international law and treaty obligations”. Indian courts have endeavoured to interpret the Indian Constitution and laws in consonance with the provisions of the international instruments ratified by India. Article 253 of the Constitution empowers the Union to legislate with respect to its treaty obligations without reference to or being bound by the scheme of distribution of legislative powers under the Constitution.

Overall, however, the situation that emerges is that India still has a long way to go before the human rights of the girl child are enforced. Certain social trends have in fact made the situation worse, as borne out by the fact that the **girl child is discriminated even before her birth in the form of foeticide and after birth in the form of infanticide, and numerous other forms of violence and parental neglect**. The third article of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights says that everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person. However,

in India the girl child is denied these basic human rights every day in large measures.

***Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)***

After the CRC, the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), ratified by 163 countries, is the most extensive and widely ratified international agreement promoting the rights of girls and women. This Convention, while drawing on international human rights treaties, is a separate and distinct convention addressing the rights of women. It clarifies the negative consequences of discrimination and seeks full equality between men and women regardless of marital status, in all fields of political, economic, social and cultural life. States that have ratified the convention must take concrete steps, such as enacting laws, establishing women's rights commissions and creating conditions to ensure that the human rights of girls and women are realized. It's progress is monitored by the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women.

India was a signatory of CEDAW in 1980 and ratified it on 9 July 1993. India submitted a declaration regarding Articles 5(a) and 16(1) that reiterates India's commitment to abiding by the provisions "in conformity with its policy of non-interference in the personal affairs of any Community without its initiative and consent." India also registered a declaration regarding Article 16(2) on minimum marriage ages and compulsory registration; although India fully supports the principle, *"it is*

*not practical in a vast country like India with its variety of customs, religions and level of literacy."*

In its report to the CEDAW the Government of India stated in its National Empowerment Policy for Women, 2001, that it was committed to encourage changes in personal laws such as those related to marriage, divorce, maintenance and guardianship so as to eliminate discrimination against women with the initiative of and with the full participation of all stake holders, including the community and religious leaders.

The Government claims that it has undertaken various measures, through law, policies and programmes in the last 7-8 years to address gender inequality and to eliminate discrimination against women and girl children. Many laws and programmes are still being reviewed to repeal the discriminatory provisions. However the government admits that gender discrimination continues to be a daunting challenge and that it will continue to pursue all measures, in a concerted manner, to eliminate discrimination against women and to translate the *de jure* rights into *de facto* enjoyment of rights and equal results. The Government is committed to pursue the National Policy on Empowerment of Women, 2001 and the Plan of Action that is being adopted to give effect to this policy, strengthening gender budgeting and the Women's Component Plan and adopting planning strategies that enhance socio-economic gains for women, which in turn would lead to empowerment of women.

## **OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY**

The main object in conducting this research study is to fill the knowledge gaps and thereby assist in devising purposeful lines of action in order to:

- **eliminate all forms of discrimination** against the girl child and the root causes of son preference, that result in harmful and unethical practices like female infanticide and sex selection before birth;
- **increase public awareness** of the value of the girl child and at the same time strengthen the self-esteem and status of the girl child,
- **improve the welfare** of the girl child.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **RESEARCH STUDY**

#### **Coverage, Scope, and Methodology**

Uttar Pradesh is the most populous state in the country with a population of 16.6 crore (2001 Census). It is also the fourth largest state in geographical area covering 9.0 per cent of the country's geographical area. Almost all social indicators of the state show that the state stands on 13th or 14th position among the sixteen major States<sup>5</sup>. Bihar and in some cases Orissa, are the only two states which lag behind U.P. in terms of social development indicators like medical facilities, teacher-pupil ratio in primary schools, birth rate, death rate, infant mortality rate, literacy, per capita income, electrification of villages, per capita power consumption etc.

#### **Health**

According to the Uttar Pradesh Govt. sources, female life expectancy is less than 55 years and the under-five mortality rate is as high as 141 per thousand. Among all major Indian states, Uttar Pradesh has the highest crude birth rate (32.9), the second highest crude death rate

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<sup>5</sup> [http://www.upgov.nic.in/upinfo/up\\_eco.html](http://www.upgov.nic.in/upinfo/up_eco.html)

(10.4) and the third highest crude infant mortality rate (85.1).<sup>6</sup> Infact the infant mortality rate in western Uttar Pradesh is 96.7 per 1000 live which is higher than the state average. **If a girl is born in Kerala she can expect to live 20 years longer than if she is born in Uttar Pradesh.** According to the recent National Family Health (NFHS) survey, Uttar Pradesh comes second to Bihar among the major Indian states in terms of the incidence of malnutrition among children below the age of five. This explains to a large extent the low possibility of child survival in Uttar Pradesh.<sup>7</sup> The NFHS survey reflects the female disadvantage is much more severe in rural than in urban areas. This probably suggests a gender bias and a neglect of the needs of the girl child. The disadvantage of the rural child is evident in the higher infant and neonatal mortality rates in rural than in urban areas in either sex.<sup>8</sup>

The NFHS also depicts the association between maternal education and child mortality rates. All components of child mortality are observed to decline with increasing maternal education. All child mortality rates are higher amongst illiterate mothers compared to mothers who had completed high school education. The infant mortality rate for children

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<sup>6</sup> [http://www.censusindia.net/results/eci13\\_page1.html](http://www.censusindia.net/results/eci13_page1.html) e-Census India, Issue 13, August 2002  
Orissa and Madhya Pradesh both have a crude death rate of 10.9.

<sup>7</sup> *supra note 5*

<sup>8</sup> The National Family Health Survey (NFHS-2)(1) conducted in 1998-99 provides a comprehensive profile of population, health, and nutrition in India. The information was collected from a representative sample of approximately 90,000 ever married women aged 15-49 years drawn from all states of the country. A similar number of women were covered during the NFHS-1 in 1992-93(2), which provided a comprehensive demographic and health database for India. Infant and child mortality reflects a country's socio-economic development.

The Neonatal Mortality Rate in Uttar Pradesh is 51 per 1,000 live births (NFHS 2-1998-99).

of illiterate mothers is one and a half times the rate for children of mothers who are literate, and is two and a half times the rate for children whose mothers have atleast completed high school. Statistics reveal that nearly 40,000 women lose their lives giving birth, each year and roughly one out of every 15 maternal deaths worldwide takes place in Uttar Pradesh (refer to Table 1).

**TABLE 1. INTER-STATE DIFFERENTIALS IN INDIA IN MATERNAL MORTALITY RATIOS<sup>9</sup>**

Kerala	Bihar	Madhya Pradesh	Rajasthan	Uttar Pradesh	Orissa
30	115	200	340	390	437

### **Education**

The literacy rate in Uttar Pradesh at 57.36% is below the national average ( 65.4% ). Female literacy situation in Uttar Pradesh is dismal with the literacy rate for females being abysmally low at 42.98% as against 70.23% for males.<sup>10</sup> Literacy rate of SC females compared to general population is much lower (10.69%).

Only one out of four in the 7+ age group was able to read and write in 1991. This figure goes down to 19 % for rural areas, 11 % for the scheduled castes, 8 % for scheduled castes in rural areas, and 8 % for

<sup>9</sup> [http://populationcommission.nic.in/npp\\_app3.htm](http://populationcommission.nic.in/npp_app3.htm)  
National Population Policy 2000 - APPENDIX III Demographic Profile

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.census.gov/ipc/prod/wid-9801.pdf#search=%22uttar%20pradesh%20girls%20complete%20%20years%20of%20schooling%22>

the entire rural population in the most educationally backward districts. In terms of more demanding criteria of educational attainment on the completion of primary or secondary education, in Uttar Pradesh, in 1992-93 only 40 % of literate females could complete the cycle of eight years of schooling involved in the primary and middle stages. In the late 1980s, the incidence of illiteracy in the 10-14 age group was as high as 61 % for rural females, and more than two-thirds of all rural girls in the 12-14 age group never went to school.<sup>11</sup>

Another barrier to education is the lack of adequate school facilities. There are not enough classrooms to accommodate all of the school-age children. Furthermore, the classrooms that are available often lack basic necessities such as sanitary facilities or water. In Uttar Pradesh, a recent survey found that 54 percent of schools did not have water supply and 80 percent did not have latrines (The World Bank, 1997b).<sup>12</sup> Lack of latrines can be particularly detrimental to girls' school attendance. The inadequate supply of classrooms is further compounded by the large increase in the number of school-age children due to high population growth rates. For instance, in 1993, Uttar Pradesh needed to build 284,000 additional classrooms to achieve full enrollment of children age 6 to 10 (The World Bank, 1997b). On the other hand, in states where population growth rates are low (e.g., Kerala), the number of primary-age children is beginning to

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<sup>11</sup> *supra note 5*

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.census.gov/ipc/prod/wid-9801.pdf#search=%22Furthermore%2C%20the%20classrooms%20that%20are%20available%20often%20lack%20basic%20necessities%20such%20as%20sanitary%20facilities%20or%20water.%20In%20Uttar%20Pradesh%2C%20a%20recent%20survey%22>

decline and state governments can focus on improving the quality of education rather than increasing the supply of classrooms.

## **TARGET AREA**

Agra District covering 4027 sq kms comprises 6 Tehsils. 15 Blocks, 114 Nyaya Panchayats and 636 Gram Sabhas. District Agra has a total population of 788,394 out of which 440,405 is rural and 347,989 urban. The study has been conducted in Hironda village, Tehsil Kheragarh, Block Saiyan, District Agra, Uttar Pradesh, making a comparison of the rural and urban areas of District Agra.

Hironda, a notified Ambedkar village is about 6kms off the Agra-Gwalior National Highway, not served by any public transport services. Most families (55%) are Below the Poverty Line (BPL). General literacy levels are low. As for women, 71.8 % are illiterate. As in most villages in India this village is also dominated by a feudal culture of male supremacy. Women are principally taught to bear up with male atrocities and gender violence in various forms. They are categorically discouraged to seek redress against the same. As a cumulative effect of all these morbid realities women in this area are temperamentally defensive and collectively resigned to a total feeling of powerlessness.

The present research study determines the extent, the patterns and trends of discrimination of the girl child, and whether it is limited to a particular educational, social and caste background, age group, among various other factors. A comparative analysis has been made between rural (Village Hironda) and urban area (Agra City) of District Agra. Most

families in the village selected are Below Poverty Line (BPL) and general literacy levels are low; specially among the women.

**Units of Observation :** 1. Parents of the Girl child.

a. Mother

b. Father

2. Adolescent Girls

3. Adolescent Boys

### **DATA COLLECTION**

A) Sources of basic data: Door to door visits

B) Types of Data and Method : Participant Observation  
Interviews  
Questionnaires

**TIME BUDGETING :** 4 months

Preparatory Work 2 weeks

Pilot Study 2 weeks

Data Collection 8 weeks

Data Analysis & 4 weeks

Report Writing

## **17CHAPTER 3**

### **FINDINGS**

#### **QUESTIONNAIRE**

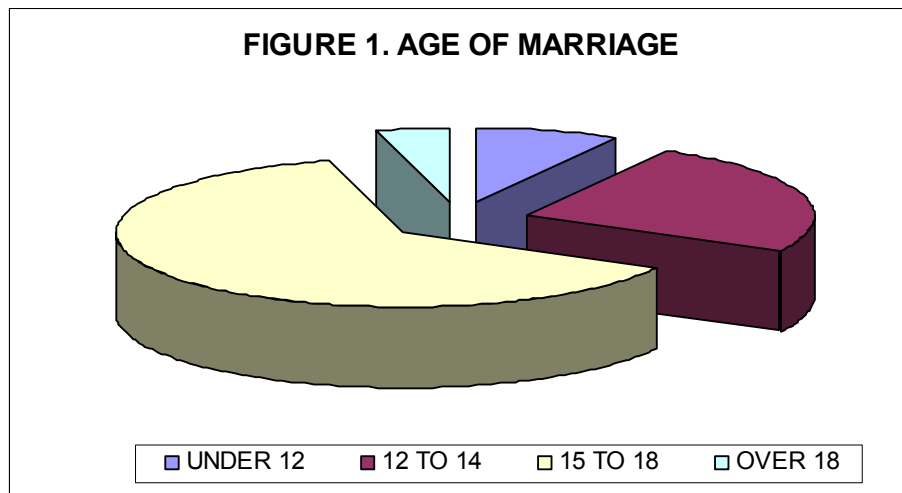
In each corner of India, girls face discrimination, they often receive less food than boys, have less access to schooling and unlike boys they are made to do long hours of labour beginning at a tender age. Therefore, to assess the level of discrimination, the questionnaire was divided into different parts. The questions were repeated and asked in different ways to elicit the correct response and also to be able to know when the respondents were not giving the correct answer and are intentionally providing incorrect information. Often respondents deliberately give the response that they feel is politically correct but they may not hold the same view.

While analyzing the data all efforts have been made to reduce bias caused by both non-response and incorrect answers. While considerable care was taken to ensure high standards throughout all collection and processing operations, the resulting estimates could inevitably be subject to a certain degree of error.

#### **MARRIAGE**

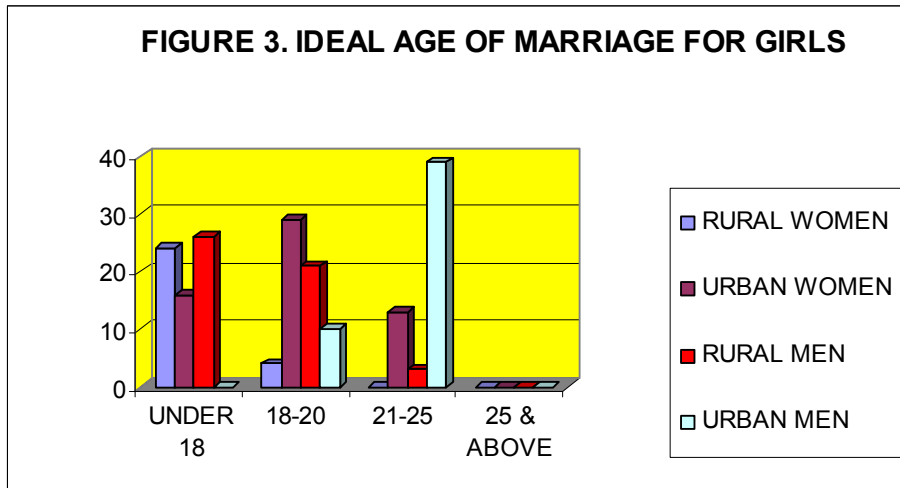
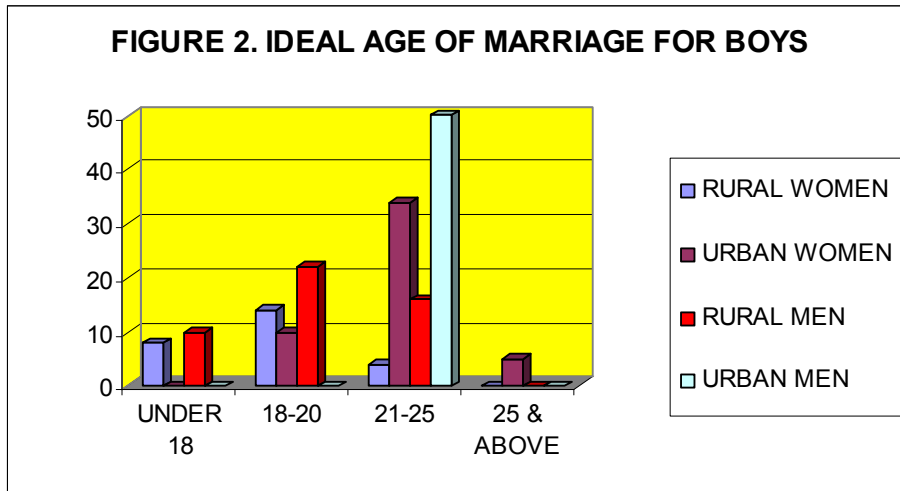
India has laws setting a minimum legal age for marriage. But these laws are often ignored or not enforced in communities where poverty or tradition influences families to marry their daughters at an early age.

Passing laws is only a first step in protecting these girls' rights but their enforcement difficult. Young girls are married off at an early age since they are seen as an economic burden for the family. The older they grow, the higher becomes the dowry demand from the bride groom side. Secondly the most important reason is that once a girl reaches maturity her security becomes a problem and parents prefer to marry her off. Most of the urban women respondents had been married between the age of 18-23 years while 50% of the rural women had been married by the age of 15 years (refer to Figure 1). It is pertinent to mention here that due to the high levels of illiteracy in the village, a lot of the women did not know their age and gave approximate estimates depending on the time of their mensuration.



The rural men had mostly been married under the age of 21 years. The urban men had been married between the ages 21-32 with most of them being married at the age of 22-23 and had their first child by the

age of 24-25 years. On being asked as to what they consider the ideal age of marriage the responses elicited from the rural men and women were disparate from those living in urban areas, and those of men and women were also dissimilar (refer to Figure 2 & 3).



All the women whether urban or rural had had their first child within two years of marriage. It is a well known fact this motherhood at a very young age entails complications during pregnancy and delivery and a risk of maternal death that is much greater than average. The children of young mothers have higher levels of morbidity and mortality. Early child-bearing continues to be an impediment to improvements in the educational, economic and social status of women in all parts of the world. Overall, early marriage and early motherhood can severely curtail educational and employment opportunities and are likely to have a long-term adverse impact on their quality of life and their children's. The women play a negligible role in planning the family. On the respondents being questioned as to who takes decisions regarding family planning, 76% rural men, 92% urban men and 60% urban women said it was the husband. Among the rural women 50% said that they did not practice any form of family planning and children stop being born on their own. What is important is that most women said that their husbands did not allow them to use any method of family planning. On being further queried as to whether they had explained about family planning to their daughter on marriage, over 80% of the respondents irrespective of gender or habitat answered in the negative.

### **INFANTICIDE**

In most communities of India sons are valued more highly than daughters, specially so in Uttar Pradesh where there are 898 females per 1,000 males. The baby, growing inside her mother, may already be

in danger because her parents might choose to end the pregnancy when they find out that their baby is a girl.

On the men respondents being questioned as to whom they would prefer to give birth to, son or daughter, 50% of the rural men and 64% of the rural women preferred a son, while 72% of the urban men and 78% of the urban women said they would prefer a daughter. The urban respondents have probably given this response because they knew the purpose of the study and being qualified educated professionals wanted to look good and felt it was the appropriate response to give. They were obviously lying because in the next few questions when they were queried as to why they wanted a boy, they did not deny the desire for a son and gave reasons such as a person can only get moksha if he is cremated by his son, he is an old age support etc.

There are a number of ultra sound diagnostic clinics in Agra which double as sex determination centres, despite large boards outside which display the mandatory warning. Once one goes inside and makes a deal for an additional Rs 500/- you are revealed the sex of the child. Most women are led to believe that their status depends upon how many sons they have. The results of the study have revealed that the mothers depending on their access to resources usually see two options. In rural areas the option is having many pregnancies in order to have sons (according to the study 34% of the women had 5 to 9 pregnancies and 16% had over 10 pregnancies with one woman even having 15 pregnancies); and in urban areas having pre-birth gender

testing and ending a pregnancy if the foetus is a girl (though none admitted to having an abortion).

The respondents (both male and female) who were a part of the sample in urban area of Agra were highly educated ranging from BA to Ph.d. All denied ever having undergone a sex determination test. Strangely enough however the facts reflected a different position since almost all had one son and one daughter, a fact that was corroborated also by the responses of the girls and boys.<sup>13</sup> That could lead one to believe that there may have perhaps been some sex determination intervention to arrive at such a perfect family combination! In the village, however, adolescent / teenage boys on being queried about the number of their brothers and sisters, most boys had over 2 brothers, 20% had 3 brothers and 20% had 4 brothers, implying that women tended to continue having many pregnancies in order to bear sons.

## **EDUCATION**

The incidence of female illiteracy is alarmingly high in the region and they constitute the bulk of the illiterate population. Lack of education in the girl child especially in the rural areas not merely precludes them from productive employment opportunities but also affects the quality of life of the girl when later she will become a woman. Over 90% of the women respondents were uneducated, hence did not place so much

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<sup>13</sup> It is possible that a sampling error may have occurred since only a small sample was randomly chosen from the whole population, and the results may differ somewhat had responses been obtained from the whole population.

importance on educating the girl. This is most unfortunate because significant number of studies have conclusively shown that female literacy is the single most important factor in determining the success of family planning and primary health care services. Women with education usually have more opportunities, more access to family planning information, and more decision-making power in their families. They are also more likely to marry later in life, to have their first child later in life, and to leave more time between births. The findings of the present study corroborate with the NFHS results which depicts the association between maternal education and child mortality rates. All components of child mortality are observed to decline with increasing maternal education. All child mortality rates are higher amongst illiterate mothers compared to mothers who had completed high school education. The infant mortality rate for children of illiterate mothers is one and a half times the rate for children of mothers who are literate, and is two and a half times the rate for children whose mothers have atleast completed high school.

Though barely 5% of the respondents felt that only boys had the right to education and not girls, but it was seen that boys were given preference over girls in matters of education. 90% of the rural men, 38% of the urban men, all the rural women and 72% of the urban women preferred educating a son since they felt a boy will earn and add to the family income. 26% rural men, 58% of the urban men, 40% of the rural women and only 24% of the urban women said that they want to educate a boy because there is no fear in allowing a boy to go outside his village/locality to study. Hence when resources are limited

and opportunity costs high, the girl child is doubly condemned. Although school attendance is free, the costs of books, uniforms, and transportation often proves to be a deterrent. Negative parental attitudes toward educating daughters are a barrier to a girl's education since parents see her education as a waste of money because she will eventually live with her husbands' families. In urban areas a daughter with a higher level of education will most likely have a higher dowry expense as she will want a comparably educated husband.

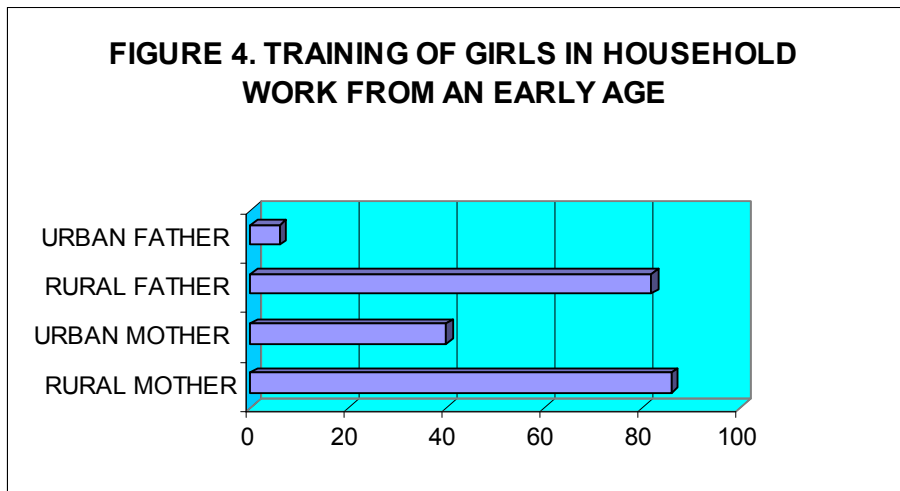
Among the rural folk there is a very low or rather negligible acceptance of women's work outside the home (except of working as a labour in the fields). Rural folk still need to understand the fact that education for girls usually improves both their job opportunities and the amount they can earn. Also an understanding needs to be promoted that an educated girl is more eligible for marriage, because her education will benefit the family's health and well-being. According to the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (Thirty-ninth session) "it would be wrong to presume that the correlation between illiteracy and poverty is absolute. Much depends on the social norms and value which society places on education as well as on girls."<sup>14</sup> The human right to education is "inextricably linked to other fundamental human rights" like the right to equality.

In many cases, girls start to undertake heavy domestic chores at a very early age and are expected to manage both educational and domestic responsibilities, often resulting in poor scholastic performance and an

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<sup>14</sup> <http://www.un.org/documents/ecosoc/cn6/1995/ecn61995-5add1.htm>

early drop-out from schooling. This is reiterated by the responses of the adolescent girls out of which 42% rural girls and 56% urban girls said they got tired doing both house and school work. The levels of tiredness are probably higher among urban girls due to heavier study loads as compared to rural girls. On the parents being queried as to whom they would prefer to help them in the house, most responded daughter. Giving reasons that a girl is “*paraya dhan*”/ not the property of the parents but of her in-laws and she must be trained in household work. When the question was specifically asked to the respondents as to whether girls should be trained in house work from an early age so that they can take control of household activities in their matrimonial home, only 6% urban men and 40% urban women answered in the affirmative, as against 82% rural men and 86% rural women, highlighting the difference in thinking in urban and rural areas.



Thus the study revealed that girls were denied the right to education and all the advantages that go with it, as well as the rights to associate freely and unjustified deprivation of liberty. These are all basic humiliations subjected by the family to the girl while boys are regarded as pillars of tomorrow. Neither are girls allowed to go freely nor do they feel safe, nor are they able to associate in the society as liberally as boys do. On the respondents being asked whether they feared that if girls were given even a little bit of freedom then they would start acting independent 94% rural men, 82% urban men and 90% rural women and 68% urban women answered in the affirmative.

The study also tried to survey as to whether there was a gender bias in the educational material, including curricula. No bias emerged, infact when the boy students were asked whether they remembered having studied about any female personality who has made an impact on them, all of them responded positively, with Mother Teresa emerging first and Indira Gandhi a close second. Others being Kalpana Chawla, Rani Laxmi Bai, Mahadevi Varma, Mata Jijabai, Rani Durgawati, Sarojini Naidu, P.T.Usha and even Lata Mangeshkar, Florence Nightingale and Venus Williams (don't understand which text book mentions her). This reflects that the present curriculam does not portray gender stereotyped roles of men holding high-prestige occupations and being portrayed as strong, adventurous, and intelligent, in contrast to women who are depicted as weak and helpless. This is a positive development and gender biased depictions which are strong barriers for improving women's position in society, have been removed from the text books.

## **IMPACT OF MEDIA**

Girls and adolescents often receive a variety of conflicting and confusing messages on their gender roles from their parents, teachers, peers and the media. On being queried as to whether radio and television entertainment programmes had a bad effect on girls 74% of the rural men, 82% rural women and 90% urban women replied in the positive. Surprisingly enough only 18% of the urban men felt that radio and television had a negative effect on girls.

## **DECISION MAKING PROCESS**

Girls are less encouraged than boys to participate in and learn about the social, economic and political functioning of society, with the result that they are not offered the same opportunities as boys to take part in decision-making processes. There was seen a marked difference between responses among the urban and rural men and women. On being questioned as to whether girls can only live a protected life and cannot be independent and self sufficient, 76% rural men and 92% rural women replied in the positive, as against 10% urban men and 18% urban women. On being questioned as to whether the respondents felt that girls are less intelligent and hence incapable of taking independent decisions, 76% rural men and 78% rural women replied in the positive, as against 10% urban men and 18% urban women. Although there are numerous studies demonstrating a link between education and a variety of demographic indicators (i.e., fertility, infant and child mortality and morbidity), more recent studies are finding that there is a minimum threshold of education (more than 5

or 6 years) that must be achieved before there are significant improvements in female autonomy, particularly in a highly gender stratified society such as the target area.<sup>15</sup>

On being questioned as to whether a man is considered weak if before taking a decision he confers with a woman, 48 % rural men, 72% urban men, 66% rural women replied in the positive, as against only 8% of the urban women. This only goes to show that education empowers women and gives them self confidence by which they feel they are capable of taking important decisions and a man must respect them. While the rural women due to their lack of education continue to suffer from an inferiority complex and consider themselves second rate.

The question was rephrased and the respondents were asked whether families feel that girls should not give their opinion when serious topics were being discussed because only males have the right to decide. Again 90% of the rural women answered in the affirmative as against 40% of the urban women.

## **HEALTH**

Discrimination exists against the girl child in her access to nutrition and physical and mental health services, endangering her current and future health. In many societies in India, parents believe that good nutrition is more important for sons than daughters because sons must

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<sup>15</sup> Autonomy is defined as decision making power within the home, economic and social self-reliance, confidence in interacting with the outside world. Jejeebhoy, Shireen J. 1995. *Women's Education, Autonomy, and Reproductive Behaviour: Experience from Four Developing Countries*. International Studies in Demography, IUSSP. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

be healthy in order to supplement the family's income. Girls are also raised to believe that the family's survival depends on what their brothers earn, they are also likely to believe that boys' needs for food and health care should come before those of girls. Thus the girls themselves develop a low self-esteem and consider themselves second rate.

Despite the fact that Article 24 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child says every child has a right to health care and good nutrition, the girl child is often undernourished and discriminated in quality of nourishment also. However on the respondents being asked as to whom they served food first, all the urban respondents and the rural males said both boy and girl are served food together, with only 14% of the rural women saying that they serve their sons first and then the daughters. On being queried as to who is given more nutritious food, again all the respondents said that both sons and daughters are given equally nutritious food, however again 14% of the rural women said that more nutritious food is served to the sons. To further verify the responses the respondents were given a list of items like milk, curd, fruit, sweets etc. and asked whom they would prefer to feed these to boy or girl. Again all the respondents said that both are given equally nutritious food, with again 14% of the rural women preferring sons.

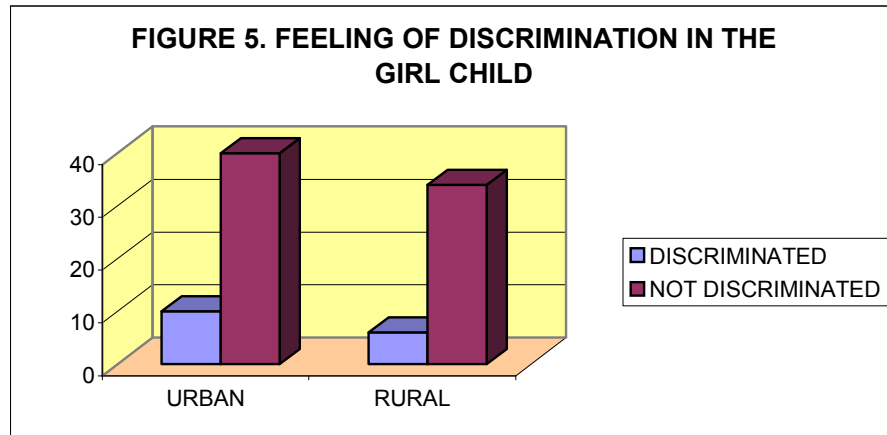
In order to assess whether the girl child is discriminated in being provided medical treatment the respondents were asked the question as to whether they would spend money on the medical treatment of the girl child all the respondents answered in the affirmative. In order to

cross check, the respondents were asked whether medicines for the son were procured immediately and they were given the complete course while the same sensitivity was not shown for daughters. Here there was a marked difference in the responses between the rural and urban mind set. 98% of the urban males and 86% of the urban females said that equal concern was shown in procuring medicine for the son and daughter, whereas only 52% rural males and 44% rural females showed this sensitivity. On being asked as to whether the daughters had been fully immunized, over 80% of all the respondents answered in the affirmative. On being asked as to whether girls are considered physically weak due to their gender, amazingly enough despite the fact that in rural areas women do the menial work and carry heavy loads the rural respondents (both male and female) answered in the affirmative; whereas the urban respondents (specially the males) answered in the negative. This goes to show that mind sets in rural areas still suffer from retrograde attitudes.

### **CULTURAL STEREOTYPES**

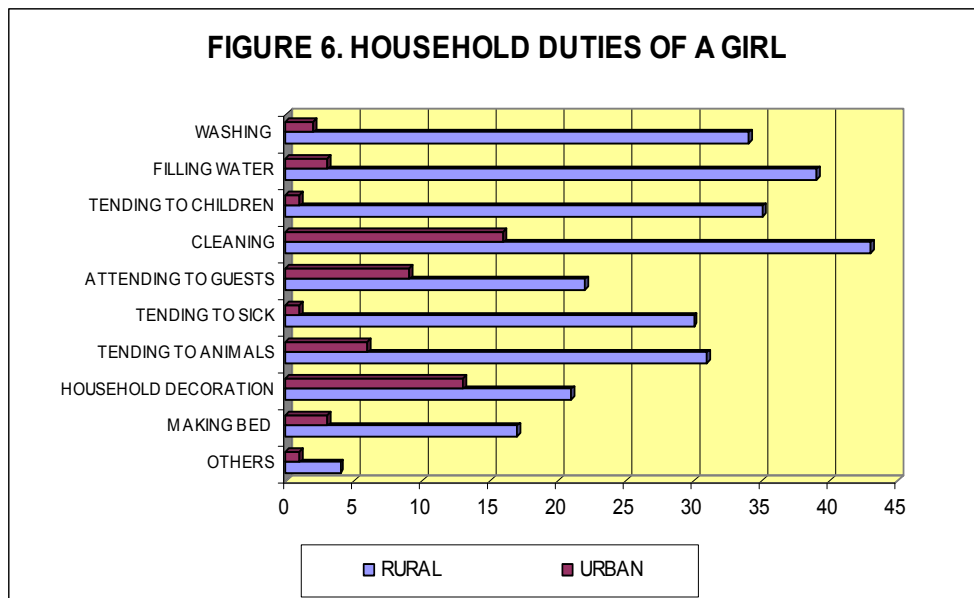
- High levels of " cultural stereotypes" threaten the development of a girl child and her right to equality. Negative stereotypes are used to judge their behavior, thus impairing their performance as women in later years. Cultural stereotypes subordinate the girl child by confining them to the narrow domestic sphere of the household, its production and maintenance. It is felt that one way to empower girls would be to bring them out of the limiting boundaries. Figure 5 below shows that more than 80% of the girls

denied they are made to feel that they are a burden to the family and were discriminated against, which is more of an acceptance of their second class status. The investigators observed the girl child was severely discriminated and were burdened with household chores etc.



Despite the fact that over 60% of the respondents did not consider having a girl child an ill omen, but on rephrasing the question over 75% of the rural women said that a family is considered unlucky which has only daughters. This may be probably because of the social and cultural pressure to bear sons and if the woman has only daughters she is cursed for it and the husband's family even goes to the extent of threatening remarriage, not taking in account that both husband and wife are responsible for the sex of the child. The results of the study revealed that boys and girls are expected to exhibit different behaviour, dress differently, undertake different physical and emotional tasks, participate in and perform different activities within and outside the

family. On the girl child being asked as to whether she was treated equal to her brother most said they were treated equally, but when probed further results appeared different. 44 % of the rural girls said that their brother was served food before them as against only 18% of the urban girls. 94% of the rural girls and 50% of the urban girls said that unlike their brothers they had to both go to school and also do domestic chores. Over 40% of the girls admitted to getting tired by this. The rural girls unlike their brother admitted to being made to clean the house, fill water, looking after children, cook food, wash clothes, tend to animals and to sick family members, attend to guests etc. While the urban girls had the burden of cleaning the house, make the bed, attending to guests etc.



On the boys being asked as to whether they had to study and help with domestic chores none of the rural boys answered in the positive, as compared to 34% urban boys. Most of the boys denied being given preference over their sister. On further probing 78% rural boys and 92% urban boys admitted that they did not feel comfortable with the differential treatment between sons and daughters. Over 80% denied indulging in discriminatory behaviour with their sister but admitted that they did not have the courage to confront their family members on this issue.

There was a difference of perception on the advantages of education among the rural and urban girls. Only 14% as compared to 32% rural girls felt that due to their brothers being males were in a better position take advantage of their education.

Due to such factors as their youth, social pressures, lack of protective laws, or failure to enforce laws, girls are more vulnerable to forms of all kinds of violence, particularly sexual violence, including rape, sexual abuse, sexual exploitation and trafficking. In order to protect their daughters they are not allowed to mingle freely with guests nor are they allowed to show curiosity regarding the guest, this being the case more in rural areas as compared to urban areas where parents were seen to be more liberal. On the girls being asked as to whether they themselves felt insecure and whether they preferred to be accompanied by any person 37% rural girls and 88% urban girls answered in the negative, which reflects their desire for freedom and independent movement.

The study also revealed the following statistics:

- On being asked as to whether the girl is seen as a **burden on the family only to be married off** over **74%** rural respondents and **70%** urban women answered in the **affirmative** as against only 18% urban men.
- On being asked as to whether **modesty of a girl is her jewel** over **76%** of the respondents both rural and urban answered in the **affirmative**.
- On being asked as to whether girls should be more **obedient** in comparison to boys over **80%** of the respondents both rural and urban answered in the **affirmative**.
- On being asked as to whether girls should have a greater capacity to **endure hardship or inconvenience without complaint**, in comparison to boys, over 80% of the respondents both rural and urban answered in the affirmative.
- On being asked as to whether girls should be more **sombre** in comparison to boys who can be naughty, over **80%** of the rural men and women and urban men answered in the **affirmative**, as compared to 50% of the urban women.
- Interestingly enough on being asked as to whether the **girls/women should only follow men** 60% rural men and **92%** rural women answered in the **affirmative** as compared to 1% urban men and 10% urban women.
- On being asked as to whether girls should have **no personal desires** and she should only follow the desire of her parents and husband, over **80%** of the urban men and women and rural men

answered in the **negative**. It was **86%** of the rural women who answered in the **affirmative**. The results were similar on the respondents being asked as to whether the **girl child should not have any ambition** and should follow whatever her family desires for her. It was again the rural women who seemed to accord an inferior status to the girl.

- On being asked as if the girl is given even a little bit of freedom **she will go out of control of her parents** over **60%** of the respondents answered in the **affirmative**.
- On being asked as to whether **girls are cowards** as compared to boys over **84%** of the rural men and women and urban men answered in the **affirmative**, while **70%** of the urban women answered in the **negative**.
- Over **90%** of the male respondents felt that it is a right of the male to **scold (maybe hit) a woman** if she makes a mistake. However **68%** of the urban women felt that a man had **no such right** and a woman is not his personal property to treat as he likes.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **CONCLUSION**

From the study findings it is abundantly clear that efforts at gender equality and gender justice must start with equality for the girl child. All barriers must therefore be eliminated to enable girls without exception to develop their full potential and skills through equal access to education and training, nutrition, physical and mental health care and related information. The patriarchal form of Indian society has sanctified the persona of the boy or man as being of greater importance than that of the girl. That makes it all the more imperative to provide extra protection and support to ensure that girls' rights are acknowledged and protected and that the best interests of the girl child must be the primary consideration in all decisions or actions that affect the child or children as a group.

It is also abundantly clear that despite the constitutional provisions on equal legal status for the girl child and the numerous enactments that have been placed on the Statute book in pursuance of that, very little progress seems to have been made so far in making any marked dent in the situation. Though undoubtedly centuries old

traditions and cultural attitudes do take time to change, yet it is more than apparent that there has also been a considerable lack of seriousness in pursuing the prescribed measures of change. For example, even a straightforward and easy-to-oversee enactment that places a prohibition on pre-natal sex determination test remains virtually unimplemented, leading to female foeticide on a scale alarming enough to seriously impact the gender ratio. All said and done, therefore, severe and widely prevalent gender discrimination continues to be an ugly fact of life, pervading all castes and communities, on all human development indices, be it in rural or urban India.

**The findings of this study strongly reinforce the need for well-focused affirmative action not merely on the part of governmental agencies but equally importantly also on non-governmental civil society organizations to secure the following desired objectives:**

- To **eliminate all forms of discrimination** against the girl child and the root causes of son preference, that result in harmful and unethical practices like female infanticide and sex selection before birth;
- To **increase public awareness** of the value of the girl child and at the same time strengthen the self-image, self-esteem and status of the girl child, because girls too have the right to have their views heard and be taken seriously in all matters affecting their lives;

- To **improve the welfare** of the girl child, especially in regards to health, nutrition and education.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **1. Elimination of negative cultural attitudes and practices against the girl child**

- a. Promote changes in negative attitudes and practices towards girls by encouraging and supporting NGOs and other organizations that are engaged in such a mission;
- b. Educational programmes and teaching material to be developed that sensitize and inform students about the harmful effects of certain traditional or customary practices on girl children, so that the new generation does not perpetuate stereotypes;
- c. Include in the syllabi, teaching materials and textbooks, stories of successful women in areas that have traditionally been under represented, such as mathematics, science and technology. This will not only help improve the self-image of girls but also raise their esteem in the male eyes encouraging them to work towards mutual respect and equal partnership between girls and boys;

- d. Training programmes and materials to be developed for teachers so that their awareness is enhanced and they get better equipped to impart and formulate effective strategies for gender-sensitive teaching;
- e. Include religious leaders in this process so that they actively promote and endorse equality of the girl child.

## **2. Elimination of all forms of discrimination against the girl child**

- a. Develop and implement comprehensive policies, plans of action and programmes for the survival, protection, development and advancement of the girl child, to promote and protect full enjoyment of her human rights, and to ensure equal opportunities for girls; these plans should form an integral part of the total development process;
- b. Ensure dis-aggregation by sex and age of all data related to children in the health, education and other sectors in order to include a gender perspective in planning, implementation and monitoring of such programmes;
- c. Strictly enforce laws regarding marriage specially concerning the minimum age for marriage;
- d. Promote and protect the rights of the girl child and increase her awareness of her own needs and potential;
- e. Educate the girl child about the rights guaranteed to her under the Constitution and under international human

rights instruments, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

### **3. Awareness Creating Initiatives**

#### **a) *Designate one Week in the year for the Girl Child :***

*Support Badges* - During the Week, Support Badges to be distributed mainly to school students, which are to be worn throughout the week as a gesture of support towards the cause.

*Leaflets* - Along with each badge a leaflet explaining why the week is being observed to be distributed. The use of such badges and leaflets in small towns will prove to be effective in creating awareness on the issue.

*Poster competitions* – Students of both sexes in schools and colleges to be encouraged to participate in the poster drawing competitions held during the special week.

*Essay competitions* – Similarly essay competitions to be held during the special week on topics like "Girls can do everything", "Today's Women" and "Women are strength not burden." This will encourage the young generation to think about women's status in the society, acknowledge and appreciate the important role women play at home and outside. Thereby breaking the myth, as projected and

nurtured by culture that women are the burden to be possessed, dominated and subjugated.

**b) *Role of the Media***

Girls and adolescents often receive a variety of conflicting and confusing messages on their gender roles from their parents, teachers, peers and the media. Media should be urged to portray positive images of women and establish the concept of gender equality.

**4. Elimination of discrimination against the girl child in education, skills development and training**

- a. A time frame should be set to eliminate the existing gap between girls and boys, by firstly ensuring universal and equal access to and completion of primary education by all girls. In the second stage a time frame to be set to ensure equal access to secondary education. Finally, equal access to higher education, including vocational and technical education, for all girls. Providing of education and skills training will result in increase of girls' opportunities for employment and access to decision-making processes;
- b. Increase in enrolment and improvement in retention rates of girls should be ensured, if necessary by allocating appropriate budgetary resources. Enlist the support of the community, religious leaders and parents besides

formulating incentives, scholarships, access programmes for out-of-school girls and other measures;

- c. Promotion of equal participation of girls in extracurricular activities, such as sports, drama and cultural activities;
- d. Integration of human rights education in educational programmes, enunciating clearly that the human rights of women and the girl child are an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of universal human rights and of the fundamental rights guaranteed by the Constitution of India.

**5. Elimination of discrimination against the girl child in health and nutrition**

- a. Stern measures to be taken with a view to abolishing traditional practices prejudicial to the health of children.
- b. Ensure education and dissemination of information to girls, especially adolescent girls, regarding the physiology of reproduction, reproductive and sexual health
- c. Include health and nutritional training as an integral part of literacy programmes and school curricula starting at the primary level for the benefit of the girl child;
- d. Emphasize the role and responsibility of adolescents in sexual and reproductive health and behaviour through counseling in schools and colleges so that at the appropriate time the girls make informed decisions;

- e. Develop information and training programmes for health planners and implementers on the special health needs of the girl child;
- f. Provide public information on the removal of discriminatory practices against girls in food allocation, nutrition and access to health services;
- g. Sensitize the girl child, parents, teachers and society concerning good general health and nutrition;
- h. Raise awareness of the health dangers and other problems connected with early pregnancies;

**6. Elimination of girl child labour**

- a. Protect the girl child from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with her education, or to be harmful to her health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development;
- b. Strengthen, where necessary, legislation governing the work of children and provide for appropriate penalties or other sanctions to ensure effective enforcement of the legislation;
- c. Use existing international labour standards, including, as appropriate, ILO standards for the protection of working children, to guide the formulation of national labour legislation and policies.

**7. Eradicate violence against the girl child**

- a. Enact and enforce legislation protecting girls from all forms of violence, including female infanticide and prenatal sex selection, sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, child prostitution and child pornography, and develop age-appropriate safe and confidential programmes as well as medical, social and psychological support services to assist girls who are subjected to violence.
- b. Take effective actions and measures to enact and enforce legislation to protect the safety and security of girls from all forms of violence at work,
- c. Take stern measures to eliminate incidents of sexual harassment of girls in educational and other institutions;
- d. Take appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the girl child, in the household and in society, from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse;

**8. Promote the girl child's awareness of and participation in social, economic and political life**

- a. Provide access for girls to training, information and the media on social, cultural, economic and political issues and encourage them to articulate their views;

- b. Support non-governmental organizations, in particular youth-centered non-governmental organizations, in their efforts to promote gender equality and participation of girls in society.

**9. AND, FINALLY....**

**We recommend that a few pilot projects may be taken up in different parts of the country, more particularly in those States where the level of gender discrimination is more acute.** It is important to initiate such projects, because however much we may bewail the failure of the constitutional and legislative support systems to provide protection to the girl child, the harsh reality is that unless change occurs in society's own centuries old gender-discriminatory cultural attitudes and biases no governmental action can succeed by itself. It will be possible through the means of such projects to experiment with and test in live field conditions different approaches, in full collaboration with the community and families at large, so as to derive from the experience thereof actionable lessons on the most practical and efficacious means to alleviate these vexatious problems. There are numerous issues that call for new paradigms of action or strategic paradigm shifts. To mention a few. How can the role of the family be reoriented and strengthened in improving the status of the girl child? How could public awareness of the value of the girl child be increased and her status, self-image and self-esteem strengthened? How could additional income generating opportunities and better livelihood options be made accessible

to women in the family? How could opinion be built against such gruesome and unethical practices of prenatal sex selection, foeticide and infanticide? How should families be made more conscious of the importance of better health care, nutrition and education for the girl child?

These are the kind of issues that the pilot projects will be dealing with. Actionable approaches can be concretized through such experimental pilot projects. These field-tested measures and policy instruments could then be replicated on a larger scale.

**The pilot projects should be handed over for implementation to credible NGOs who have had experience of working on issues of this nature. The projects should be of five years duration, followed by an independent evaluation of the methodologies adopted, techniques developed and lessons learnt.**