

## The Disappearing Girl Child! It is Possible to Save Her!!

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### **Abstract**

*The focus of this paper is on an urgent need to save the girl child, take care of her health emotional and educational needs and her self-esteem to ensure an empowered woman of our country. It discusses the crime against the girl child in a secure place, her mother's womb, (female foeticide) if she is allowed to be born, her own parents kill her (female infanticide) if she escapes these, she faces intentional neglect in her own family and later in her husband's. With the Government making every possible effort to save the girl child, the situation continues to be grim and sad for the girl child in India. However, the paper discusses how a sensitive and a strong administration could successfully save the girl child in a district of Punjab with continuous efforts. The district Nawanshahar was able to save the female foetuses and raised the sex ratio in 2006.*

Indian women have played a significant role in the country's freedom struggle and in developmental processes in the post independence period. Elimination of girls from our society is rampant. It would make it difficult to find women who are empowered. Empowerment of women would mean equipping them to be economically independent, self-reliant, have a positive self-esteem in order to enable them to face any difficult situation and they should also be able

to participate in developmental process. They should be able to participate in the process of decision making as well. Education will be an important factor which would play the most crucial role in empowering women.

The Committee on the Status of Women in India (CSWI) Report in 1974 had warned us about the declining sex-ratio. The 1991 Census had done the same. When we talk about the position/

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status of the Girl Child and the empowerment of women in 2001 we were shocked because the decline in sex-ratio was alarming for girls and women. The Census for 2001 reported the decline in the sex-ratio among children in 'Zero to Six' age group. **It is an unfortunate coincidence that this was being reported in 2001 which was also the year of Women's Empowerment.** If the nation does not wake up now then where will we find women whose empowerment we have been talking about for more than three decades.

There was a marked but unmistakable decline in the sex ratio in the last century. **Never has it been so low for 0-6 age group.**

**The decline in the sex-ratio has not been checked even in 2008! The National Charter for Child adopted in February 2004 and National Plan of Action for Children, 2005 reiterates the Government of India's commitment to the child's Rights to survival, development and protection. Among the 12 key areas identified by National Plan of the Action for Children, 2005, complete abolition of female foeticide, infanticide, child marriage and ensuring protection of the girl child have found place.**

Female infanticide was banned in 1870 through **Registration of All Births and Deaths Act.** This checked female foeticide to a large extent. However, one had been concerned because it came back in 1980s,

**Amniocentesis** was introduced to detect abnormalities of a foetus. Unfortunately the test was used to detect the sex of the child and eliminate if the foetus was a female. Sex of the foetus was not to be disclosed.

Modernisation and scientific discoveries have been misused to harm the girl child. Never in different periods of our history was she as unwanted as she is in 2008. In the ancient period of Indian History, birth of a daughter was a welcome. Gradually preference for a male child led to the unwelcoming of a girl child and it brought sorrow to the family. On the contrary, birth of a son was always desired, looked forward to and celebrated. Increasing marked preference for sons led to the neglect of female children. Marriage is an important institution in India. A woman's child bearing potential is valued. However, she is generally respected only if she bears a son. In the Medieval and Modern periods, a general societal prejudice was prevalent against women and "that is why coming into the world of a female infant meant disappointment to the parents/family."

The girls are also facing severe discrimination in nutrition, health care and education. Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and its schemes such as National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level (NPEGEL) and Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas (KGBVs) are making a positive difference for girls. Girls have silently become wage earners. Parents have

### Discrimination against the Girl Child

Boy	Girl	Mother/Family
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has the right to survive</li> <li>• stays longer in school, is free from the responsibility of domestic chores</li> <li>• as wage earner has freedom to spend</li> <li>• Is paid more wages</li> <li>• health and education needs are taken care of</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• does not have the right to be born or survive. She can be sold without hesitation</li> <li>• Either not sent to school or is withdrawn from school.</li> <li>• She has the responsibility of all the domestic chores</li> <li>• She has to give all her earning at home</li> <li>• Paid less for similar</li> <li>• No one is worried about her nutrition and health</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• consider her as a socio-economic burden</li> <li>• loves son in the hope that he would look after parents in the old age</li> <li>• son brings dowry. daughter takes it son gets skilled and better paid jobs.</li> <li>• does not see any reason for taking care of health and nutritional needs of a daughter.</li> </ul>

more control over the income of the daughters than that of the sons as can be clearly seen in the table given below:

The rural girl child is disadvantaged because she is deprived of all the advantages of the urban girl child, which is due to an inadequate exposure of her parents/family to modern amenities and facilities: transportation, electricity, media, hygiene, health care and access to education. **The urban girl child, however, continues to face the threat to her coming out of her mother's womb alive.**

It is well known that the status of the girl child is related to her mother's which has been low especially in rural India. Marked preference for sons has led to the neglect of the girl child. A

mother's child bearing potential is essentially valued. She receives respect and care from her family when she becomes the mother of a son (Devendra: 1993).

There are many socio-religio-economic reasons for the biased attitude of family/society with regard to the birth of a daughter (Devendra: 1993). Socially, parents of a daughter feel humiliated when her marriage is to be settled. The reasons for this could be hypergamy. In case of arranged marriages, which is still the socially accepted type of marriage, parents wish to marry their daughters into families which have higher socio economic status. This could be giving a sense of satisfaction and security to the family

of girls. This can not hold true any more because of the rising dowry demands which have acquired a sense of competition. In recent times, even if the marriage of a daughter is arranged in a family of an equal status or even lower, the demand for dowry is higher. Socially, sons are preferred for continuation of family's line, for looking after old parents and for performing their last rites. Economically, sons are viewed as an asset as they look after the land business, help in farming and in settling the local disputes. Daughters are considered to be an economic liability and therefore, bringing them up, spending a little money on their education and a lot of it on their marriage and husband's family even after the marriage ceremonies are over is a continuous burden that parents find hard to carry on year after year.

The fact that a daughter's birth brings sorrow and that she is unwanted socially, ritually and economically, leads to female infanticide. Female infanticide was checked, to a great extent, by the Registration of All Births and Deaths Act in 1870. Unfortunately, even after hundred years of the abolition of female infanticide, since the 1970s, there has been a marked increase in dowry demands/dowry deaths. Tensions have increased in a family where a daughter has to be educated, married and demands of the in-laws have to be met even after years of marriage. This initially, used to be an urban middle

class phenomenon, but now, has found acceptance in the rural society as well. The family of a girl child considers her as a social and an economic burden and a source of tension. This attitude of the parents/family/society has brought back female infanticide and encouraged sex detection test and female foeticide. In various surveys and studies (1980) it was discovered that 450 women out of 700 who went in for sex -detection test when informed that they were carrying a female foetus, 450 went in for abortion whereas all **the 250 women who were carrying male foetus carried on with their pregnancy even though some of them were informed of the possibility of some genetic disorder.** The girl child who manages to escape death in the foetus or as an infant, faces intentional neglect in the childhood and later in her husband's family. The figures prove that crime against girl child/woman are on the increase. (The Sunday Tribune: 28 August, 1994, national dailies, figure of calls of Crime against women (1995-2008).

Legal ban was essential to check female foeticide. Maharashtra government was the first state to legally ban female foeticide in 1988. After the ban was announced, the number of sex-determination tests came down in the State. Other states should have followed the example of Maharashtra but this did not happen. Requests and pleas from women's organisations and Voluntary Health Associations in India

for a total ban on the test, resulted in a central legislation to ban it. Internalising the ban, should have been a priority issue and a massive campaign should have been organised to motivate public opinion. The Bill was passed in January 1996 and is in implementation since, 2001. Result of its implementation are discouraging.

Punjab has been known to have societal sanction both for female infanticide and foeticide. The five high priests comprising Sikhism's Supreme religious authority have directed the Sikhs all over the world to stop practising female foeticide. The direction has gone further to say that any Sikh found guilty would be automatically excommunicated from the Sikh faith. This order was there because the five high priests unanimously agreed that the incidence of eliminating the girl child was high. The recent census reported still lower sex-ratio. Punjab already had a low sex ratio.

The Supreme Court has directed the Union and State Governments to 'stringently' enforce the existing law banning sex-detection and selection procedures. The Diagnostic Techniques (Regulation) and Prevention of (Misuse) Act must also be implemented as per the direction of the Supreme Court to check the declining sex-ratio. It also directed the Union Government to examine the loopholes of the Act and even amend it to plug the loopholes (The Times of India, 5 May, 2001). However, the figures for

2007-08 defy this. There is hardly any improvement in the declining sex-ratio.

As mentioned earlier, girls who survive face nutritional neglect. Recognising the damage done to generation after generation of girl by the low nutritional levels, the Indian Government started a massive Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) in 1975. ICDS infrastructure is also being used to help the adolescent girls (11-18 years). An attempt is being made to meet the special needs of nutrition, health, education, literacy and skill development. It attempts to make the adolescent girl into a better future mother who can also act as an agent of change.

The National Policy on Education 1986 and its revised version in 1992 and the Programme of Action gave unqualified support to Universal Elementary Education and bringing equality between sexes. The focus was on universal enrolment of all children including girls, removal of gender stereotyping and bias in curricular and its transaction. It is, however, more important to remove the difficulties of the parents, and provide support services to bring the two crore out of school children to school education through KGBV

The girl's lesser discrimination in nutrition, health care and education inspire Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and its schemes like National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level (NPEGEL) and Kasturba Gandhi Balika

Vidyalayas towards making a positive difference for girls.

The Government of India announced its **National Plan of Action for the SAARC Decade of the Girl Child (1991-2000) in 1992**. “It was expected to help sustain the consciousness aroused all over the country during the SAARC year of the Girl Child and achieve its goals set for a brighter future of the girl child in India within the decade”. To achieve better status of women in rural and urban India it has to be ensured that **a girl child survives**; is free from poverty, hunger, ignorance and exploitation; is allowed equal and dignified existence with equal opportunities, care, protection, development and most importantly she has the right to enjoy all the above mentioned rights. The survival of the girl child is still under threat.

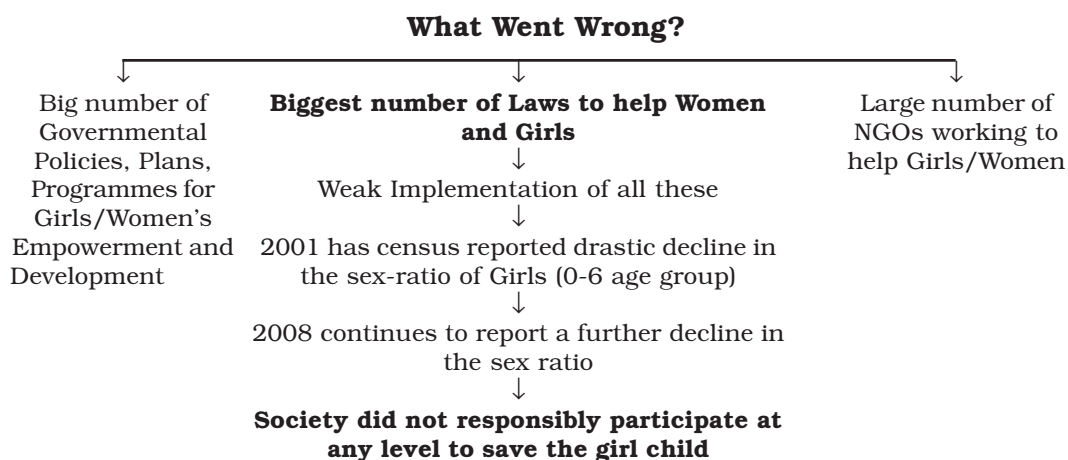
However, India has initiated the process of reviewing all national laws,

policies and programmes to ensure that all these meet all that needs to be done to improve the status of girls/Women. The Indecent Representation of Women Act has been amended to prevent private channels from telecasting derogatory materials. Textbooks have been freed from gender bias. Women’s participation is also visible in local self-governments. To check female foeticide and infanticide, registration of all births and deaths has been reinforced.

It is a matter of national shame that the drastically declining sex-ratio is coincided with end of the SAARC Plan of the Girl Child. India has been a signatory to conventions on the child.

### What Can We Do?

Ensuring birth of a girl child and taking care of all her needs will lead to achieving women’s equality and dignity. We need to continuously remind ourselves that girls are an asset to our nation. Their welfare which makes them confident and healthy in



the mind and body will strengthen our country's socio-economic development. We need to work against prejudices, practices, customs and traditions, which lower the status of the Girl Child and her mother.

We need to remember that it is the girl child who is an indispensable part of our society for its normal social development. She should not be considered as a liability. A general societal concern for the girl child has been lacking because the society has been conveniently giving its sanction to the her death as a foetus or in her infancy and if she escapes these, to neglect her needs and also support to everyone who tries to eliminate her.

Mass campaigns starting from neighbourhood, community and village, city/town in favour of survival of girl child and giving her and a woman, human rights, will bring a positive change. The movement to create awareness about the girl child and a woman due to neglect, torture and atrocities committed must become issues of public concern. Once a movement of the people starts, situation will not only begin to improve for the girl child but policing by neighbours, community will help in bringing down crimes against her in the foetus and outside the foetus. It will be possible to keep a watch whenever and wherever a girl child is born, she will be able to survive and women will lead a happier life. This is seen in the news when neighbours united against the family and the police on the issue of a woman's suicide (Times of India, May 3, 2001). Registration of all births and

deaths is mandatory now. The society/ community needs to ensure it.

Once the platform for girls' survival is taken over by the public, not only the girls will survive but their health and education will also be taken care of. When this happens, India can hope to have its future women empowered. This would lead to the meaningful management of the survival of physically, emotionally, educationally and mentally healthy girls and women who will be able to participate in social, economic, educational and national development by taking right decisions. Education of girls will help them to have a high esteem and confidence Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and its scheme NPEGEL and Kasturba Balika Vidyalaya are making a positive difference for girls.

We need to urgently humanise our dehumanised society which gives sanction to an act which will bring survival of our country to a questionable point. Sensitisation seminars need to be organised at the national, state and district levels. Mass campaigns need to be organised in the villages to sensitise the society/ community about the threat to the life of the Girl Child (0-6 age group). It will be critical to have continuous discussion with the villagers on the dangerous consequences which the society as a whole will have to face in the absence of the Girl Children! With the help of villagers a demand has first to be created for the survival of the Girl Child and later for her education so that we have empowered women! There is need to sensitise everyone by each of

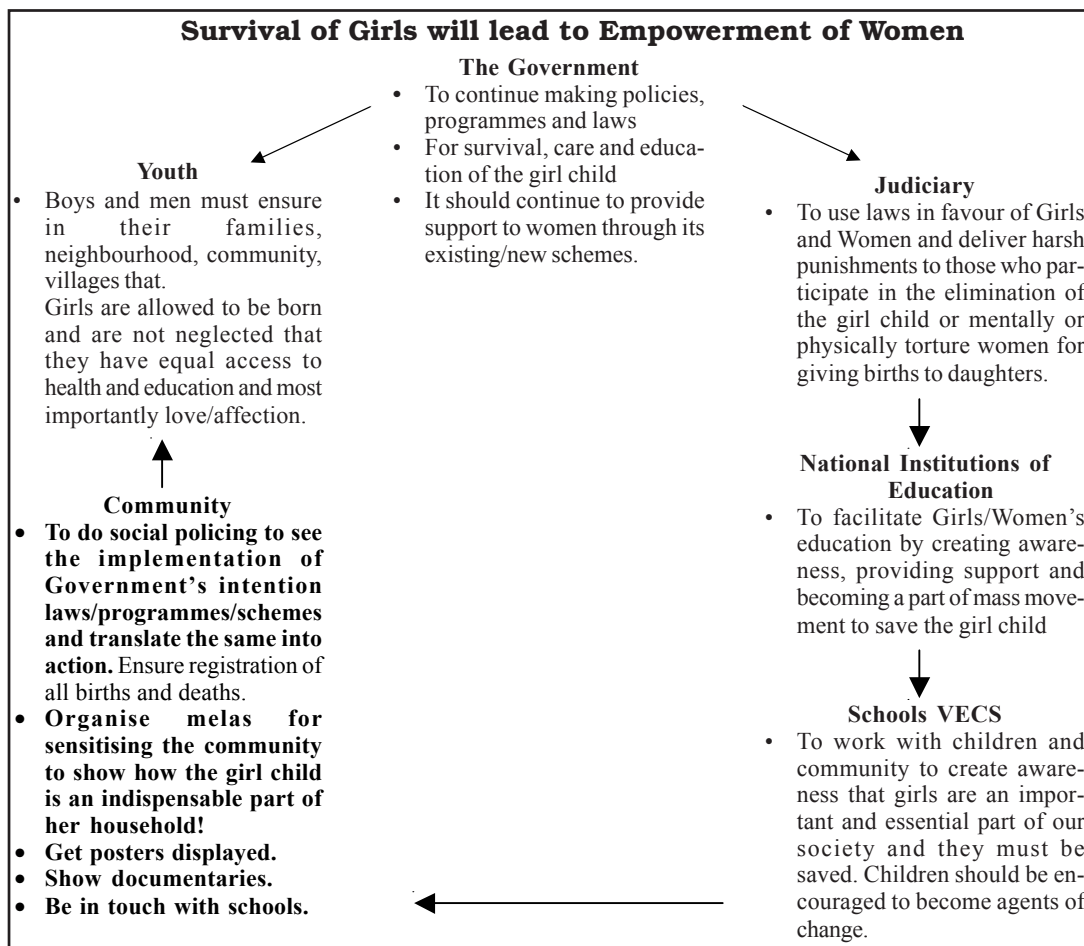
the following playing their roles with sensitivity, responsibility and accountability:

1. The Government
2. Judiciary
3. National Institutions of Education
4. Schools
5. Community
6. Youth

## Part II

### Successful Awareness campaign and enforcement measures to control female foeticide : Nawanshahar

This is how the project was visualised. I first introduced myself in a large number of frequently held meetings and then launched the programme for sustenance by motivating the youth. My office and I remained in touch with the developments in the field on a continuous basis.





**An administrator who can be a part of a peoples movement person like Krishan Kumar can be a guide for all those States where the female sex-ratio continues to decline to help them in their effort to raise the declining sex ratio. His guidance can make a difference. This is how I established my rapport with those who were to work with mission to check female foeticide. This helped me to be a part of the effort.**

**Dear friends,**

It is a matter of great pleasure and privilege for me to get an opportunity to interact with youth like you who vibrate with energy. However, due to some professional compulsion, I am unable to come and have a one to one interaction with you and your prestigious institutions.

Before, I start to explain the various aspects of the project started in district Nawanshahar on female foeticide, I would like to introduce myself briefly. I am technically an engineer and did my Engineering in Electronics and Communication from Engineering College, Murthal, Sonipat near Delhi. After completing my graduation, I was posted as lecturer in the same college and thereafter I joined the Department of Tele Communication, present BSNL.

I am now in the Indian Administrative Service, (1997 Batch and was allotted Punjab Cadre). Before joining as Deputy Commissioner, Nawanshahar, I had tenures as S.D.M. in Jalandhar, three small tenures of A.D.C. in various districts of Punjab followed by my assignment in the Department of Taxation and Finance. I joined the District as District Collector in the month of May, 2005. Before joining this assignment, I happened to interact with some good friends and seniors who sensitised me about the rampant social problem of female foeticide in our

society. To be very honest, I myself was not very much aware about the dimension of the problem 4-5 years earlier. After joining the district, I thought it appropriate to take it on me to do some work on the problem of female foeticide which the Society particularly in Punjab. The practice is a slow poison which will ultimately destroy the whole Society. I wanted to actually accept the challenge to stop it.

The main motivation to work on this project was to assess myself as to whether I could achieve some actual results or not. I wanted to be honest with myself and not to anybody else. There were problems which I can **apprehend initially as to no** one was aware about the seriousness and magnitude of this problem. Secondly, the Health Department which is preliminary responsible to maintain the provision of Prenatal Diagnostic Technique Act (PNDT Act) was totally demotivated. The Scanning Centres were not at all bothered as to whether some information needed to be sent to the Civil Surgeon at the end of every month despite punitive measures provided in the Act. Any couple could approach the scanning centres to get sex determination done and in case it was found that foetus is female one, it was terminated by the same clinic or somebody else.

Census conducted in the year 2001 in the country revealed that the sex ratio had been declining in the State of Punjab at an alarming rate as compared to the previous census year 1991. The sex ratio was still lower among the new born babies (0-6 yrs) as compared to the over all sex ratio which was a more serious matter. All the 17 districts of Punjab were among the lowest 34 districts of the country where the sex ratio was low. The sex ratio was **797** in district Gurdaspur, **793** in Amritsar, **782** in Kapurthala, **817** in Jalandhar, **815** in Hoshiarpur, **808** in Nawanshahar, **793** in Ropar, **757** in Fatehgarh Sahib, **815** in Ludhiana, **818** in Moga, **822** in Ferozepur, **814** in Mukatsar, **820** in Faridkot, **795** in Bathinda, **783** in Mansa, **779** in Sangrur, **777** in Patiala and **793** in whole of Punjab. The sex ratio in district Nawanshahar as per census **2001** was **808** and same

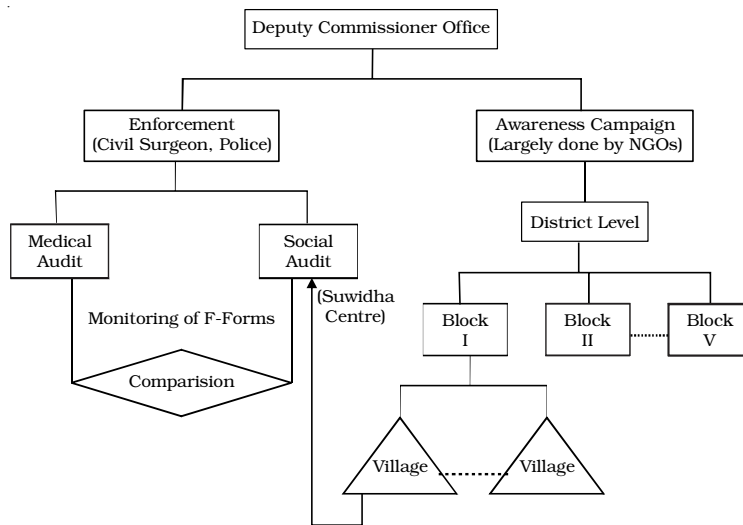
continued to decline in the subsequent years also. The survey conducted by the Child Development Department, Punjab indicates that child sex ratio has come down to **774 in March, 2005**. Thus, there was loss of another 33 girls per 1000 in just a span of four years. Realising that this social evil was reaching an alarming stage, a campaign to control this menace was launched in the district of Nawanshahar in the month of May, 2005.

The programme which was planned and launched in the district can be broadly divided into three main tasks,

- a) Awareness campaign and enforcement measures:-
- b) Medical Audit
- c) Social Audit

Flow chart for the campaign against female foeticide is also reproduced below :-

### Flow Chart For Campaign against Female Foeticide



## **(A) Awareness Campaign and enforcement measures**

### **Registration of Federation of NGOs**

Initially, departmental machinery in the department of Child Development and Health were identified to intensify measures against clinics indulging in sex determination test followed by abortion (in case the foetus was female). However, initial results indicated that efforts were not adequate but the same were temporary and personality oriented and to give some sustainability, hence it was thought proper to involve all the NGOs in the district in this process. With this idea, a federation of NGOs namely UPKAR Coordination Society was constituted and registered under the appropriate law where the members of the Federation were NGOs only. Deputy Commissioner was ex-officio Chief Patron of the Federation. There were 35 members of the Non Government Organisations of the Federation and each of them was assigned particular area of his/her choice. The block and village level committees of the **Upkar Coordination Society** had also come up. In case, district level society intended to organise a function or a rally in a village, it was the duty of village level committee to organise it and district level society was only to facilitate it. This was being done with a view to strengthen the grassroots of the society. It would not only provide sustainability to the campaign at large but also ensure the participation of the community in campaigns against

social evils. 4000 members had already been registered with Upkar Coordination Society and a special campaign was going on to enroll maximum number of members particularly adults and young couples. After constitution of federation and registration of members, awareness campaigns against female foeticide were launched.

### **Block Level Meetings**

To begin with, block level meetings were held, whereby village Sarpanches, Lamberdars (village headmen), Chowkidars, Child Development workers (Anganwari workers) ANMs and Local Health Volunteers of health department participated. Along with them, other locals also participated in these functions. During the public meetings, cultural programmes / Nukar Nataks highlighting the menace of female foeticide and its future implication on the Society were arranged. During the meetings, all officers from the Child Development Department, Civil Surgeon and Deputy Commissioner used to address and appeal to the public in general that they should not indulge in female foeticide. Sense official letters were written to all sarpanches by the Deputy Commissioner requesting them to ensure that no case of female foeticide took place in their area.

After having block level meetings, district level meetings were held, whereby all Municipal Committee Councillors and other social activists, Medical practitioners also participated.

In all those meetings, cultural programmes were also organised to convey messages against female foeticide.

During campaign, it was noted that survey of pregnant mothers was perhaps not being conducted in a sincere manner. As a result, there used to be some pressure/ inclination on the part of pregnant mothers who normally approached the clinics for sex determination. Medical science have proved that most dangerous period for sex determination of a foetus is between third month to fifth month of pregnancy. **Realising that such pregnant mothers need to be monitored continuously, a computer software was prepared including telephone numbers of pregnant mothers and in case, they did not have telephone numbers, telephone numbers of the village Sarpanches were noted.** All the details of previous children, age of the mothers, their telephone numbers, visits of ANMs was being entered into computer. After this, a list was generated giving details of pregnant mothers. A lady operator in the D.C's office thereafter, regularly contacted all pregnant mothers by telephone and found out if there was any problem with her or the foetus. This leaves an invisible impact on the minds of the pregnant mothers as well as on her in-laws that somebody is monitoring and watching them. It discourages them from not going in for sex determination test and subsequently abortion. The

computer software also generated a list of the expected dates of delivery of expectant mothers. Enquiries through telephone as to whether baby boy or girl was born were also subsequently made. In case, nothing was reported, investigations were conducted as to where the foetus had gone and under what circumstances were they aborted. This whole process facilitated better enforcement against the persons involved in female foeticide. A copy of the screen of the software and subsequent report generated are enclosed at Annexure "A".

#### **(B) Medical Audit of Scanning Centres**

Recording of Pregnant Mothers and other details

With a view to intensify the enforcement measures further, it was felt appropriate that scanning centres and clinics needed to be monitored more regularly. All scanning centres were required to furnish the details of all scans conducted by them during a particular month to the Civil Surgeon. However, scanning centres on the one excuse or the other, avoided providing this information to the Civil Surgeon. Moreover it became difficult for Civil Surgeon also to monitor all scanning centres manually. To analyse the data submitted by the scanning centres in a more effective manner, a software was prepared at Suwidha Centre, Nawanshahar and all the data collected from scanning centres on the 5th of every month was being fed in the computer. These medical audit reports

were subsequently generated and necessary disciplinary action was taken against scanning centres which indulged in malpractice or did not comply with the rules. Thus, the campaign from both sides i.e. recording of data of pregnant mothers (social audit) from the society's side and medical audit of scanning centres certainly helped to bring down the cases of female foeticide.

### **(C) Social Audit**

#### **Monitoring of survey by Senior Officers**

In addition, surveys were conducted in the villages where all district officers including D.C. i.e. undersigned remained present. It also worked as a deterrent among the people who indulged in this menace. Villages had been identified where sex ratio was poor. There are about 25% of the total villages where sex ratio was abnormally low. Special attention was paid to these villages. Efforts were also made to find out reasons as to why sex ratio was low in those villages. To make people further aware, it was decided that those villages should be taken up for the detailed survey where senior officers i.e. Deputy Commissioner, other district heads including Civil Surgeon remained present. During these meetings all the members of the Upkar Coordination Society remained present. The village panchayat also remained present and groups were formed to conduct a detailed survey in the villages. Rallies were being organised simultaneously in these

villages and informal meetings were also held by Upkar Coordination Society with the village women. Those rallies and awareness campaigns were further followed by holding of cultural programmes in the evening in these villages. Visits of D.C. and other senior officers in those villages enforced deterrence among the people indulging in sex determination on one hand whereas it also put administrative pressure on anganwari workers and ANMs who invariably did not collect data correctly. The information collected during those campaigns was invariably compared with the data collected by ANMs and anganwari workers and if there were discrepancies, the same was put to the anganwari workers by the ANMs at the spot. It forced them to identify and report about pregnant mothers and sex of the new born babies correctly.

#### **Identifying midwives, ANMs and Nurses**

One big advantage of holding such campaigns in such villages was to identify the basic reasons for the poor sex ratio in these villages. It was surprising to know that sex ratio in a village was as low as 411, whereas the same was almost 900 or above in an adjoining village. Minute examination of the survey ultimately led to a conclusion that there was a nexus between ANMs/Nurses and medical practitioners. The ANMs took the young couples to the scanning centres and subsequently arranged for the termination of the female foetus. By

doing so, scanning centres and medical practitioners were put to least risk and at the same time they were in a position to charge heavy amount of money from the young couples. Medical practitioners also shared heavier amount from ANMs. Not only this, medical practitioners were also appointed Public Relations Officers (PROs) who were supposed to be in touch with all the ANMs/ Nurses and request that such ANMs should bring maximum cases to their employers. **With a view to break this nexus, all midwives/ANMs/Nurses were identified and their telephone numbers were also recorded.** Separate meetings were organised for them and they were strongly warned and advised to restrain themselves, else cases would be registered against them. At the same time midwives were also advised to inform Civil Surgeon at a toll free telephone number 555501 about such couples who came to them for sex determination followed by abortion. This had certainly helped us to bring some of the midwives/ANMs on the Government's side to enable us to curb the practice of sex determination and female foeticide in the district.

#### **Adoption of villages by all departmental officers**

In addition to this, it had been observed that there were employees in some of departments who did not have adequate work during most of the year. To utilise their services in a better way their services were used to help in

checking this social evil. It was considered appropriate to allot five villages each to all such officers. Every officer was requested to adopt five such contiguous villages where he/she would not only monitor sex ratio but would also take the responsibilities to ensure that all children went to schools as well as ensure discipline and punctuality of all Government institutions in those villages. Such officers had been authorised to inspect schools, veterinary hospitals and such other institutions in these villages. These officers also listened to the problems of the villagers regarding drinking water supply, power supply or any other issue of public importance. These officers, on the one hand worked as a link between the villagers and district administration and at the same time they were in a position to develop personal rapport with the villagers.

#### **Mobilisation of young students and meeting with D.C objective**

It was observed that the youth particularly below 25 years who were likely to be affected to a larger extent by the social evil of female foeticide and drug addiction. It was therefore thought appropriate to develop direct rapport with such youth. The other objective was to remove the fear among youth/ general public about the Govt. offices such as Deputy Commissioner office. Therefore, to start with, all college going students in the district were invited to D.C. Office to have a meeting

with D.C. everyday from 11.00 AM to 11.30 AM. Normally 40 students, largely girls participated in such meetings. During such visits officials of D.C. Office as well as single window delivery system i.e. Suwidha Centre were introduced to such youth. During their meeting, they were being advised that, in case they happened to have some work done from D.C. office, they could easily come to Suwidha Centre without any hesitation e.g. for getting driving licenses, arms licenses, birth certificates, affidavits, depositing electricity and telephone bills, passports, marriage certificates, copies of court cases, copy of revenue record, Scheduled caste/Backward certificates etc. While the above said objective was secondary, the primary objective of inviting such youth to the D.C. office was to introduce them to the problem of female foeticide and drug addiction during the half an hour interaction with D.C. An appeal was made to the girl students that Society has given them an opportunity to take birth as girls and women and it is therefore their duty now to protect another girl. The youth was also informed about the alarming trend of falling sex ratio in the State. They were made aware that if such a trend continued, it was not very far when the country will not find women/girls and ultimately the very existence of human beings on earth will disappear. It is shocking to know that many of the students were not even aware about the present trend of this child sex ratio.

During these visits, a data base was also prepared of all the students and the same entered in a computer. Students were also requested to provide their telephone numbers. It helped Upkar Coordination Society as well as D.C. office to communicate with those students. Upkar Coordination Society has offered to give Rs. 100/- to all the students in case they identified pregnant mothers in villages and informed the D.C. office to further register them with Software prepared and maintained at Suwidha Centre. A good response was being received from such students. It became feasible for the D.C. to talk to those students frequently. The students, when they got a call from D.C. office were not only happy but were motivated to devote some more time towards social activities especially the female foeticide.

#### **Memorandum by young girls to Clinics**

To make people aware further about the menace of female foeticide, Upkar Coordination Society devised another method of mobilising those young girls who were yet not involved in the campaign. Such girls were involved to submit memorandum to the various clinics, hospitals and offices with requests to the society to stop the menace of sex determination and female foeticide. Those girls normally put some clothes around their mouths so as to invite attention of the public as well as to enable the girls not to fall in arguments with any of the clinic/ doctors.

### **Personal letters to all lady Sarpanches**

Personal letters in the form of postcards were being sent to all the lady sarpanches of the villages as well as wives of the male sarpanches by Upkar Coordination Society and wife of D.C. This found good response from the villagers, particularly women and it generated a social campaign against female foeticide.

### **Organising Rallies on Scooters and Cars**

Rallies on cycles and scooters were organised on appropriate occasions by the Upkar Coordination Society. Such rallies were organised on 2nd October, 2005 (Gandhiji's Birthday) and 23rd March, 2006 (martyr day of Sardar Bhagat Singh). These were in addition to other than rallies held once in a month which was mandatory. People from all age groups invariably participated in such rallies.

### **Intensive campaign through Mobile Vehicles**

To intensify the campaign, Upkar Coordination **Society had taken five vehicles on rent, one for each of the blocks.** Recorded messages of popular singers like Hans Raj Hans and other famous personalities were played on those vehicles. Literature and other materials about Upkar Coordination Society as well on the menace of female foeticide were circulated through these vehicles. Each of the vehicles could easily accommodate 5 to 6 persons and cover about 10 villages everyday. Thus, all five vehicles covered about 50 villages everyday. It was intended to cover all

the villages and make people aware about the social evil of female foeticide. It was believed that those vehicles would complete their four week campaign by 21st May, 2006. Sh. Rajan Kashap, IAS, Chief Information Commissioner, Punjab flagged off these vehicles from Balachaur in district Nawanshahar on 26th April, 2006.

### **Mourning by Society**

To carry the campaign further, Upkar Coordination Society decided to mourn the death of a baby girl whenever an abortion took place after sex determination. Upkar Coordination Society had been visiting such villages where cases of female foeticide came to their notice. Village people also accompanied the members of the Society on such occasions. Such mourning and dharanas had also been staged outside the clinics that had been indulging in sex determination and then abortions.

### **Organising Langers on main roads**

Young girls and Upkar Coordination Society had also been involved in organising langer on the main roads and making appeals to the general public to save the girl child.

### **Appeal to the religious leaders**

Religious melas/fairs had also been used to take advantage of social occasions where large public gatherings took place. Campaigns were organised by Upkar Coordination Society at those places. They also appealed to the religious leaders by submitting memorandum who in turn made appeal to the public to restrain from evil of female foeticide and drug addiction.





A function to celebrate the birth of baby girls in Ladhana Village.



A function organised to honour the parents of new born baby girls

### **Naming of new born baby girls by D.C.**

Functions were organised every month at the district headquarters where all new born baby girls in a particular month were honoured along with their parents by the Deputy Commissioner. All those girls were named after only one name, so that they can identify themselves when they grow up. Names like "Navjot", "Harsimran" and "Jaspreet" had been given in three such functions organised during last three months at district level.

As a result of continuous enforcement measures the sex ratio in 77 villages out of 475 in the district of new born babies had crossed 900. All those village panchayats were honoured on 8th March, 2006 on the International Women Day by Mrs. Anjali Bhawra, IAS, Commissioner, Patiala. **Reports had been also published in almost all National dailies on the front pages. Out Look, a weekly magazine, carried a cover page story of district Nawanshahr in its issue of February 27, 2006.**



Young mothers with their newly born daughters and D.C, Civil Surgeon, functionaries. The names of all the new born girls in Navjot



A play being enacted on female foeticide



Twin girl children born in the month of January, 2006 and parents and other girl children with the D.C.

To remind parents and the community about the disappearing girl child, it is important that functions be organised one after the other on a continuous basis. This is how Nawanshahar was able to bring about a positive change of raising the sex-ratio in many of its villages. This made it a point to be personally present.

“No money is actually required for these campaigns, one needs to take all those involved in female foeticide”. Social audit helps in checking families, individuals, medical practitioners from participating in female foeticide. Monitoring and medical audit makes

the campaign effective. A strong administration with the will to bring about the change for raising the sex-ratio of the girls, ensures an effective social and medical audit.

It is a matter of concern that when a murder is committed in a district, the highest official reaches the spot. It becomes a matter of state and national concern. It is reported to Human Rights Commission. In a district, the number of murders committed is far less than hundreds of missing girls in villages of a district in Punjab. When the girls are murdered in their mothers' womb nobody is bothered and the sense of guilt is totally absent. It is unfortunate that a girl child is not secure in her mothers womb.

A mother who agrees to get her female foetus aborted should be put behind the bars. This would send a message in the entire community, village, Tehsil that strict action is now going to be taken for supporting or practicing female foeticide. This will have an impact as no family would like their daughter-in-law in jail.

The law needs an amendment, the appropriate implementing authority should be the D.C.

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