



## Editor's Column

It is indeed a sad commentary on the Indian psyche that after nearly twenty five years of the enactment of the Prenatal Diagnostic Technique Act, banning sex selective abortions, followed by several amendments to make it more stringent, early data from India's 2011 census show India's already skewed infant ratio is getting worse. There were 945 girls per 1,000 boys in the 1991 census, 927 in 2001 and now 914-lowest since the country's independence in 1947.

The ratio is most distorted in the states of the northern gangetic plain, such as Punjab, Haryana, Gujarat. Even though these states have reported gains in literacy rate, fast growth and sound economy, preference for male child over the girl continues. Ironically, female foeticide is more prevalent among the affluent and educated people. What is more worrying is that places that used not to discriminate in

favour of sons, such as the poorer central and north-eastern states, have begun to do so.

The 'missing girls' are usually aborted after sex-selection tests. Ultra sound machines are easily available throughout the country and conviction rate against doctors conducting such tests are abysmally low.

### FOCUS

### MISSING GIRLS

Thus, long years of spending liberally on advertisements urging to save girl child and government's incentives and disincentives have had little impact on entrenched gender prejudices.

Hence, government instead of undertaking aggressive propaganda must direct their energies to proactive legislations and gender budgeting. Laws that help to enhance the value of women would be more effective than

propaganda and disincentives to overcome this social evil.

The government has already taken several measures to combat the problem by insisting on joint pattas of land and property, making changes in inheritance laws, offering attractive monetary benefits to girl children, reducing stamp duty on property bought by women, etc.

However, economic empowerment leading to social equity could be just one of the ways to stop female foeticide and infanticide. In the final analysis, an attitudinal shift against male-oriented bias and a change in the society's mindset towards girl child will be able to stop this menace. There must be a change in the belief that daughters are worth less than sons - a belief that is damaging both to women and to the next generation; since healthier, better-educated mothers have healthier, better-educated children.

## Ms. Yasmeen Abrar is acting NCW Chairperson

Ms Yasmeen Abrar has assumed charge as the acting chairperson of the Commission on completion of the tenure of Dr. Girija Vyas on 8th April.

Ms. Abrar has been a member of NCW since 2005, and was nominated for a second term in 2008. Daughter of a well-known freedom fighter of Rajasthan and wife of late Abrar Ahmad, former Union Minister of State for Finance and



Ms Yasmeen Abrar

Parliamentary Affairs. Ms. Abrar grew up in a political family and represented Sawai Madhopur constituency as a member of Rajasthan Assembly from 1998 to 2003. She has also been a consultant with Rashtriya Mahila Kosh. A well-known social activist, Ms. Abrar has been working for the upliftment of women and children for the last two decades.

## Ms. Yasmeen Abrar's Press Meet

After taking over as the acting Chairperson of NCW, Ms. Yasmeen Abrar called a press conference for an interactive session with the media.

She said that she would continue to carry on the ongoing activities of the Commission with special emphasis on NCW's programme 'Chalo Gaon Ki Ore' in order to establish direct contact with women at the grassroot level.

She also said that many laws recommended by NCW have been accepted by the Central Govt. but she would work to see that they were implemented soon. The NCW would form a committee to monitor the various policies of the central and state govts. related to women, to ascertain whether there was



awareness of these schemes at the district and village level.

Answering a question on women's safety, Ms. Abrar said that NCW had a number of meetings with the Police Commissioner, who had promised to take various measures to ensure security and safety of women.

When asked about NCW's intervention in the case of two Noida women living in total isolation, Ms. Abrar said that the matter should be looked into in all seriousness including the reasons for the situation. She said that the Commission had sought a report from the Noida administration and the police in this connection and if not satisfied NCW would constitute a team and visit the spot.

### Make kin liable for Vrindavan widows : says NCW

A majority of the 1,000 odd widows interviewed by the National Commission for Women in Vrindavan have children, who do not care for them. In a report before the Supreme Court, NCW recommended fastening of liability on the children under the Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007

The NCW report said that at least 50% of women have children whom they visit or send gifts and yet these children do not care for them. This fact must be viewed in sync with the old persons bill under consideration.

### NCW calls for making stalking of women a crime

In a major initiative, the National Commission for Women has recommended 'stalking of women' a punishable offence under the IPC. Sending a proposal to the government in this regard, the Commission has asked the government to incorporate a new section, 509(B) in the IPC bringing an amendment to the law to make "stalking of women a separate crime" rather than clubbing the offence with eve-teasing.

As per the Commission's recommendation, any person who stalks a woman with intention to cause serious harm or injury to her or a third person shall be punished "with imprisonment of up to seven years or fine or both" under the proposed Section 509(B) of the IPC.

### Important Decisions

#### SC lifts time bar on mutual consent divorce

It could now be tough for estranged partners to end their marriage by mutual consent. The Supreme Court said either husband or wife could withdraw consent to divorce any time before the decree is passed by the matrimonial court.

The divorce provision in the Hindu law provides that once the application for dissolution of marriage is presented before the court, either of the applicants can withdraw the consent within 18 months.

However, a SC bench said even if husband or wife withdrew consent after 18 months but prior to passing of the decree, the court could not grant divorce. "The most important requirement for granting of divorce by mutual consent is free consent of both parties", it said.

#### U.P. tops in number of complaints to NCW, Delhi second

Uttar Pradesh tops the list of states from where maximum number of complaints have been received by the NCW since its inception, followed by Delhi. Official figures also show that 2007 saw the highest number of complaints being received by the NCW in a year - 15,999. Last year, the National Commission for Women got 15,700 complaints while the number was 14,333 in 2009.

## Dr. Girija Vyas thanks the Media

Two days before demitting office on 8th April, 2011, Dr. Girija Vyas called a press conference to thank the media for their support and cooperation during her six-year tenure.

She said that after joining NCW as Chairperson, her first priority was empowerment of women. She initiated the “Chalo Gaon Ki Ore” programme to empower women at the grassroots level.

She said during her tenure important laws regarding rape, maintenance, sexual harassment at workplace, child marriage, prohibition of sex selection, indecent representation of women, etc. have been accepted by the Government.

Answering a question on skewed sex-ratio, Dr. Vyas said that though the PC-PNDT Act was a powerful legislation, it had quite a few gaps about which NCW had indicated to the Govt. earlier. She wanted the Govt. to pass the bill sent by NCW as soon as possible and increase the penal provisions so that violators did not get away with simple suspension of licences.

She said that the Commission would also push for a bill on honour killings and favoured ‘stalking’ to be dealt as a separate offence. NCW has already proposed maintenance for step and adopted children and ‘women in relationship’ in the name of marriage, she added.



*Dr. Girija Vyas addressing the Media. Ms. Yasmeen Abrar, Mr. P.L. Punia, Ms. Zohra Chatterji look on*

## From the Complaint Cell

● A woman complainant, who was a senior resident in a medical institution, came to the Commission alleging harassment at workplace by the head of the department. She alleged that the condition of work had become intolerable for her as she was subjected to constant demoralising remarks by the head of the department. She also alleged that she could not obtain the experience certificate after her tenure got over. She had complained to the Medical Superintendent of the institution but no action was taken in this regard and this compelled her to approach the Commission. Many other employees of that department had filed complaints against the officer earlier but he did not mend his ways.

The Commission intervened in the matter and asked the Medical Superintendent of the institution about the progress of the concerned complaint. After that, the Medical Superintendent and the complainant were called for a hearing. The Medical Superintendent agreed to submit a detailed action taken report on that matter and to forward all complaints to the Ministry of Health, which was the administrative authority. Moreover, he informed the Commission that the complainant had been provided with her original certificate and has been asked to collect her dues from the Accounts Office.

● A victim's father registered a case in the Commission against his daughter's husband, in-laws alleging domestic violence/verbal abuse/threat to life, etc. Both the parties were counselled in the Commission; as a result of which, they reached an amicable solution under which the girl decided to go back to her in-laws' house and the boy's side promised that they would not resort to domestic violence or any form of abuse. Both the parties decided that they would try to live harmoniously for the next 6 months and if they failed, they would approach the appropriate court for further course of action.

## Forcing a dress code wrong : NCW

The National Commission for women and other women groups termed the new rule that makes wearing of skirts on court mandatory for female badminton players as ‘wrong’ and ‘reflective of reactionary and patriarchal mindset’.

NCW's acting Chairperson Ms. Yasmeen Abrar said that ‘forcing a dress code for making the game attractive is wrong. Sports should be treated as sports and viewed as sports ... What is important is your performance and how you play ... not what you wear’, she added.



# NCW BIDS FAREWELL TO DR. GIRIJA VYAS



Members and officers garlanding Dr. Vyas



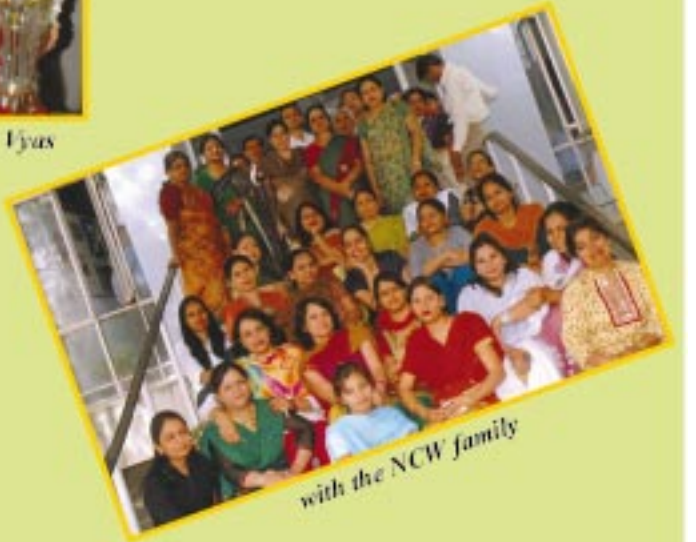
Members presenting a memento to Dr. Vyas



Dr. Girija Vyas



At the farewell function at IIC, Dr. Vyas with Ms. Sushila Teriya, MP and Dr. Mahini Giri



with the NCW family



with the NCW family



Departing from NCW after the Farewell