



Rashtra Mahila

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Editor's Column

When the sex-ratio between females and males in the country has taken a nose-dive due to rampant female foeticide and utter failure of the Pre-natal Diagnostic Act (which bans pre-determination of the sex of the unborn child) a district in the Punjab, Nawan Shahar, has been able to reverse the ratio, within two years, from 808 girls per 1000 boys, to 975 per 1000, through proper motivation and monitoring.

This unique feat in the state of the Punjab (which has the lowest sex-ratio in the country) is the result of one man's crusading zeal, who realised that indiscriminate female foeticide would cause irreversible damage to the society and the declining sex-ratio would have severe repercussions in future on the status of women, if remedial measures were not taken immediately.

Deputy Commissioner Krishan Kumar motivated his officers to adopt villages to keep regular track of pregnant women. Along with this, he projected the grim scenario of the Punjab of tomorrow where, 202 men out of every 1000 would not be able to find wives because of the adverse sex-ratio, which in turn, would culminate

FOCUS HOPE FOR THE GIRL CHILD

into increased sexual violence, trafficking of women and destabilization of the society.

His strategy was simple - a blend of reward and punishment. Last October, he carried out 170 inspections of 30 ultrasonic clinics. Out of which, seven were temporarily shut and one permanently. In addition, if a couple aborted a female

foetus, they would have to give the reason, to the district officials. A case would be registered if their explanation was found unsatisfactory.

Besides, Kumar set up district-level coordination committees and assured *Panchayats* of Rs. 2.5 lakh grant for ensuring sex-ratio of 950 females to 1000 males. Any *panchayat*, where the number of females exceeded the number of males, stood to gain a further reward of Rs. 3 lakh and any person giving information of a foeticide would get a reward of Rs. 5,000.

Admittedly, Krishan Kumar is a shining example to other Deputy Commissioners, who have the same powers but lesser commitment. His strategy should be replicated in other districts of the country to contain the adverse sex-ratio. All it entails is one's vision, dedication and total commitment to a noble cause.

Seminar on Women's Empowerment

Surya Sansthan organised a seminar on women's empowerment at the Kribhko auditorium, Noida. Speaking on the occasion, NCW Chairperson Dr. Girija Vyas said that it was essential for women to be economically independent and also their empowerment should be useful for the society and family. She said despite continuous struggle, women are proving themselves in every field.

In the second session, Mridula Sinha, former president of the Central Social Welfare Board said, "We should talk about family empowerment because it is inseparable from women's empowerment. She also said that every women should be economically self-reliant."

Surya Sansthan has opened a polytechnic for women called Suryasha. Discounts will be given to

widows, separated women, physically challenged and economically backward women.



Chairperson being welcomed at the Seminar

Meeting of the Chairpersons of State Commission

A meeting of Chairpersons of State Commissions for Women was held on 22nd August, 2006, to discuss the following items : Action plan of the Commission for the year 2006-07

- Implementation of the 'Chalo Gaon Ki Ore' programme in different states
- Need for statutory Women's Commission in all States
- Problems faced by various State Commissions
- One major subject to be identified which may be taken up by the State Commissions on behalf of NCW
- Programme for Bal Vivah Virodh Abhiyan to be carried out in various States
- Implementation of PNDT Act in different States
- Problems of trafficking in different States and measures to be taken to tackle this menace.

Welcoming the Chairpersons of the State Commissions, the NCW Chairperson stated that the State Commissions as well as the NCW have carved out a niche for themselves by the persistent efforts made to ameliorate the conditions of the downtrodden women at the grassroot level. But much more efforts were needed to raise the status of women as well as to empower them. The NCW, she said, had launched an ambitious programme 'Chalo Gaon Ki Ore' to make rural women aware of their legal rights as well as health issues. She impressed upon the Chairpersons to percolate down this programme at the village level. She further stated that either one day or half a day programme may be conducted on this subject involving the Gram Sabhas so that the rural masses can be aware of MMR, female foeticide, PNDT Act, cooperative movement, etc.

The subjects identified by the State Commissions for Regional/State level Seminars are : Sexual Harassment; Crimes Against Women; Women Victims of Armed conflict at Kokrajhar and Karbi Anglong; Impact of Globalization in Tripura; Family Courts and Regional Level Seminar on Trafficking; Problems of Women Representatives in Panchayati Raj

Institutions; Workshop on Counsellors; Workshop on Vishakha Guidelines; Female Foeticide; Problems of Women Elected Representatives in Panchayati Raj Institutions; Post Rescue of the Victims of Trafficking; and Witness Protection Programme; Workshop on Marriage Registration.



Chairpersons of State Commissions for Women

Expert Committee Meeting

A meeting of the Expert Committee on the North Eastern States was convened to find out ways to implement more programmes of NCW in the North Eastern Region.

Speaking on the occasion, Dr. Girija Vyas, pointed out that though the NCW has kept a provision of 10% of the budget to be spent in North East, yet it was not in a position to do so due to lack of proposals from NGOs of NE Region and also due to lack of information regarding the credibility of some of the NGOs existing in the North East. She also said that the 'Chalo Gaon Ki Ore' programme, conceived by NCW, must percolate down from the State capitals to the village level. She suggested that legal Awareness Programmes may be held under the banner of 'Chalo Gaon Ki Ore' programme.

It was decided during discussion that Regional Level Conference on the subject "Role of Women in the Decision Making Process vis-à-vis the Customary Practices" may be held in the North East by 15th of September, 2006, and either

regional or state level workshops may be held in the North East on the Problem of Alcoholism/Drug Abuse in North East Region; Problems faced by Women due to Armed Conflict; Domestic Violence; Trafficking/AIDS.



Expert Committee Meeting in progress

Steps to Check Female Foeticide

The Chairperson Dr. Girija Vyas, has called for a multi-pronged action agenda to tighten the monitoring and implementation of the Pre-Conception & Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Prohibition on Sex Selection) Act (PC & PNDT Act) to arrest the decline in the sex ratio.

Inaugurating a panel discussion on 'A Nation Without Women', organised by the FICCI Ladies' Organisation, Dr. Vyas expressed concern at the decline in the sex ratio and added that it was fraught with serious demographic and social consequences. The effective implementation of the PC & PNDT Act, 1994, she said, was of paramount importance for which it was necessary to foster and appreciate the inter-disciplinary interaction between medical professionals, legal professionals, social scientists and social activists with the object of understanding the areas where law on female foeticide needs to be

reformed or strengthened through better implementation.

For better implementation of the Act, she suggested that there should be a provision for separate registration of

sonography or imaging techniques and gynecological techniques and all powers of the Appropriate Authority may be clubbed together under section 17A of the Act.



Dr. Girija Vyas addressing the panel discussion. Ms. Muktanandini Jain is on her right.

Members' Visits

- Member Malini Bhattacharya attended a legal awareness Camp at Kolkata which was attended by about 50 women and later gave a lecture on laws for women at the Institute for Development Studies. She also visited the Sick Line Slum at Khidirpur and interacted with the women there who said they needed assistance in setting up literacy schools and self help groups in the area.

Ms. Bhattacharya visited Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) where a workshop on Women and Land Rights in Northern India was organised by the Centre for Women's Studies, AMU. She has been appointed a member of the Internal Annual Advisory Monitoring Committee of the Centre for Women's Studies at AMU.

The Member delivered the key-note address on legal awareness programme at Vivekananda College in South 24 Parganas. Later, she attended the launching of 'Chalo Gaon Ki Ore' in West Bengal organised by the State Commission for Women. The Chief Minister released a booklet entitled 'Jago Nari Gram Jagao'.

The Member visited Gaya and inspected the women's cell in Gaya Central Jail, which has accommodation for only 14, yet housed 80 undertrial or convicted women. Later, she inaugurated the state level seminar on Vocational Education for Women.

- Member Nirmala Venkatesh inspected the Nillophar Children and Women's Hospital at Hyderabad, where a series of deaths had taken place. The patients complained about the negligence of the doctors and the staff. The member made a lot of recommendations to streamline the working of the hospital. Later, she went to Bangalore and reached Hospet where she interacted with mining labourers. Thereafter, she reached Saundatti, in Belgaum district and interacted with the Devadasis discussing their problems and the issue of their rehabilitation.

At Bangalore, she enquired into a case of bigamy in which Latha, a resident of Yellapur was cheated by one Kumar. She also enquired into the case of Vijaylaxmi, who was beaten up by her drunken husband. Later, she went to Tirupati to attend the regional workshop on 'Gender Issues in Business'. Thereafter, she interacted with the women employees of the Tirumala Devasthanam and heard their grievances.

- Member Manju Hambrom attended a workshop on 'Women's Rights and State's Law' at Ranchi. Speaking on the occasion, she said that NCW was formed to protect women's rights and there were several laws and acts which put women at par with men. She said that tribal women however, were an exploited lot and their condition would only change if they pressed for their rights.
- Member Neeva Konwar visited Guwahati to attend a workshop on Domestic Violence on women.

NCW for Banning Website Offering Gender-Testing Kit

Concerned at a website offering gender-testing kits for pregnant women, the National Commission for Women (NCW) has asked the government to intervene immediately and was exploring ways to ban it.

The website offers, at a price, the 'Gender Mentor' testing kit, which entails sending the blood sample of the expecting mother by post for DNA tests and within 48 hours, the sex is determined and the information is sent through e-mail.

The Commission has also written to Union Health Minister A. Ramadoss as well as Telecommunications and IT Minister Dayanidhi Maran drawing their attention to the issue and seeking their immediate intervention.

Girl from Jharkhand Becomes First Woman NR Train Driver

Lakshmi Lakra, a young tribal woman from Jharkhand has become the first woman train driver with the Northern Railways.

Lakshmi, a 27-year old diploma holder in electronics from Ranchi, and the first woman engine driver in the Northern Railways follows in the footsteps of Surekha Yadav from Mumbai, who was the first woman train driver in Asia.

She was the only woman in a batch of 372 trainees. After a nine-month training, she joined the Northern Railways as an engine driver.

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