

## Discrimination against the Girl Child in India

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About one quarter of India's population comprises girl children up to the age of 19 years. Today's girl is tomorrow's mother. However, she is discriminated socially, psychologically, economically and in violation of the law. She is discriminated at the age of her rapid social, physical and mental development. This gender differentiation is socially defined and continues from cradle to grave. It is more in rural than in urban areas. So heavy is the weight of discrimination that it tips the scale of survival against her. It has been estimated that every sixth female death is due to gender bias (Prasad 1990:4). Therefore, different facets of this discrimination are discussed and some ameliorative measures are suggested herebelow.

### **Who is a Girl Child?**

Under the UN convention, a child means every human-being below the age of 18 unless, under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier. After childhood, her school age continues from 6 to 12 years and adolescence from 13 to 18 years.

Because of the hot-climate in our country, girls attain puberty much below 18 years. Moreover, a recent ICMR study in six states reveals the prevalence of early marriage. The average age at marriage of rural girls is 13.8 and their age at consummation of marriage is 15.3 whereas of urban girls the respective ages are at 16.2 and 16.7 (Gopalan 1993). Early marriage is followed by early pregnancies, loss of childhood, withdrawal from school, mental tensions and anxiety. In spite of 'she being a child' with full growth, she gives birth to children and remains busy in child rearing and home-managing before attaining 18 years. Therefore, in many legislations, her identifying-age is kept at or below 14 years.

### **Demographic Trend**

The gender discrimination starts even before birth. The girl child is killed in the womb after detecting the sex of the fetus through the tests of amniocentesis. In Bombay, of 40,000 female foetuses aborted in 1984 ; 16,000 aborted in one clinic alone and in a particular hospital, of the 8,000 abortions performed, 7,999 were female foetuses (Prasad 1990:5). Subsequently, Maharashtra only banned the female-foeticide on 11th May, 1988. Female infanticide, though outlawed as early

as 1870 in India, is practiced in several parts of India using the sap of calotropis plants, paddy grains, giving sleeping tablets, etc. The girl child is unwanted and uncared for because of the expenses on her car-boring, puberty, marriage and dowry, and offering of gold ornaments to the babies of the daughter.

Biologically, females are stronger than males and without any negative interference they have a longer life span. Despite this, the sex-ratio in all census years is strongly adverse to females (Table 1). There are 929 females per 1,000 males in India according to 1991 census as compared to 972 females per 1,000 males in 1901. Only in Kerala, the education and health delivery system have favoured females in sex-ratio (1032) in 1991 census. In different age-groups up to 19 years, the sex-ratio follows the same trend. The male dominance numerically in sex-ratio is attributed to high proportion of male conceptions and births, and undercount of females generally. Mainly, this is due to female-selective mortality in (a) early childhood, and in (b) pregnancy and delivery of early married girls. According to Registrar General's data of 1987, 36.8% of total girls compared to 33.6% of total boys in the age group of 0 to 4; 3.9% of girls to 2.8% of boys in the age group of 5 to 9; 1.4% of girls to 1.5% of boys in the age group of 10 to 14; and 2.5% of total girls compared to 1.9% of total boys in the age group of 15 to 19 die in India (UNICEF 1990:64). These age-specific mortality rates have been declining over the years along with the infant mortality rates (Table 2). But, the data from 1971 to 1987 shows higher death of female children in rural areas consistently in these age groups than in urban areas (UNICEF 1990:76).

Table 1: Sex-ratio in India (Females per 1,000 Males)

Age Group	Census Year			
	1951	1961	1971	1981
0	974	995	927	963
1-4	998	971	943	978
5-9	967	966	951	941
10-14	938	348	30	896
15-19	946	942	944	890
Overall Sex Ratio	946	941	930	934

India's maternal mortality rate, estimated as 400 to 500 per 100,000 live births, is about 50 times higher than that of many industrialised countries. This mortality rate, as high as 1,000 to 1,200, has been reported in certain rural areas (DWCD 1988:99). Two high-risk groups among pregnant women are (a) those under 18 years and (b) those with pregnancies less than 2 years apart. As estimated, 10% to 15% of all annual child births (around 26 million) occur to these teenage mothers (DWCD 1988:98). Many of these mothers run the risk of life because of

their lack of knowledge about reproduction process, malnourished status, small pelvis, undernutrition and overwork during pregnancy. Besides the malposition of child, the share of deaths from toxæmia, and sepsis is higher among the teenage mothers who also face considerable threat from abortions, anaemia, bleeding (UNICEF 1990: 14-17) as well as from deliveries conducted by untrained practitioners mostly under unhygienic conditions. Also, those who marry before the age of 18, are likely to give birth to more children in short spacing, with danger to their life.

Table 2: Death of Infants Under 1 Year of Age per 1,000 Live Births

Infant Mortality	Year						
	1972	1976	1980	1981	1983	1986	1989
Male	132	124	113	110	105	96	92
Female	148	134	115	111	105	97	90
Total avg.	139	129	114	110	105	96	91

Source: SRS Reports, 1972-1989

Of over 13 million girls born every year, less than 11 million survive their first 15 years. The North Indian states form the belt of enhanced mortality of girls. The girl child is someone else's property - 'paraya dhan'. Family members believe that looking after a girl child is like watering a plant in someone else's garden. Hence, she always gets low priority in satisfaction of her basic needs.

### Social Discrimination

Education of the girl child is the determinant of family health, income, lower infant mortality, fertility control, family planning adoption and empowerment of women. Also, the 'Directive Principle' under Article 45 of the Constitution directs to provide free and compulsory education up to the age of 14. Despite of these, in 1981 census in the age group of 6 to 14, 53.48% of boys compared to 30.94% of girls in rural India and 74.72% of boys to 65.52% of girls in urban India are found to attend schools. In the same year, 35.1 % of boys and 25.8% of girls in 5 to 9 age group; 66.9% of boys and 44.9% of girls in the age group of 10 to 14; and 66.1 % boys and 43.3% girls in 15 to 19 age group are found to be literate. However, in all census years, the female literacy rate is inordinately low compared to male literacy. Even if the gain in female literacy is substantive from 1901 (0.60%) to 1991 (39.42%), the trend of male-female differential in literacy rate is also striking (Table 3).

Table 3: Trends in Literacy

Census Year	1951	1961	1971	1981	1991
Male	24.95	34.44	39.45	46.89	63.9
Female	7.98	12.95	18.69	24.82	39.4
Total	16.87	24.02	29.46	36.23	52.1
Age Group	-	5+	5+	5+	7+

Source: 1. *Census of India, 1981, paper II of 1984, p.15*; 2. *Census of India, 1991*.

Two out of every three enrolled children are girls (Tara 1993:9). The dropout rate among girls increases sharply after middle-school level. This happens more in rural than in urban areas. When the mother's work burden is made heavy by more children, poverty, migration and environmental degradation; the daughter is forced not to attend school even when the access to school is easy. She remains busy in cooking meals and looking after younger siblings. Outside her home, she collects water, fuel, fodder and works in agriculture and allied activities to supplement the family's meager earnings. The uneducated and poor parents consider the education of their daughters simply a wastage of money on cloth, books and learning materials. Where there is non-availability of school in rural areas, the parents do not allow their daughters to attend distance school or non-formal education centre. Social taboo, early marriage, unfavourable attitude of parents, irrelevance of school curriculum, non-availability of lady teachers, hostel facilities, female latrines, and dearth of separate institutions for girls are of no less importance for the high drop-out, non-attendance and non-enrollment among girls.

Many literate girls revert to illiteracy finding scant opportunities and support to study successively for at least 4 years. Even in educated families, there is a bias towards the humanities and social science streams for girls while engineering and technology courses are 'masculine' pursuits. The enrollment of girls in engineering and technology courses is only 6 for 100 boys (DWCD 1988:74).

The boy child works for less number of hours but is fed more than the girl. Girls are not only given less of weaning foods and a smaller share of whatever food is available at last but also breastfed shorter. Malnutrition, depression and loneliness in adolescent girls can be attributed to the deprivation of 'breastfeeding' as babies. Girls are taught to eat less and to avoid eggs, meat and fish so that they remain slim to rate better in marriage market and a bigger share is left for their brothers. In well-nourished Indian homes, because of inadequate food, the weight and height of a five-years' old girl record 16.5 kgs. and 105.5 cms. while that of a five-years' old boy record 17.5 kgs. and 107 cms. respectively

(Ghosh 1989: 69-70). In case of chronic unemployment, economic crises, floods and drought, girls are also fed less than the boys.

While both boys and girls get different food items less than the recommended daily allowance (RDA), the girls get much less than the boys in the age group of 3 to 4 and 7 to 9 years (Table 4). While diseases kill the girls slowly, deprivation of food kills them quickly.

Table 4: Food Intake of Children

Food Weight Grams	Items in	3-4 Years			7-9 Years		
		Male	Female	RDA+	Male	Female	RDA+
Cereals		118	90	175	252	240	25
Pulses		22	18	55	49	25	70
Green-Leafy Veg.		3	0	62	0	3	75
Roots and Tubers		15	13	40	42	0	50
Fruits		30	17	50	17	6	50
Milk		188	173	225	122	10	25
Sugar and Jaggery		13	16	22.5	30	12	30
Fats and Oils		5	2	30	23.3	8	50

Source: Devedas, R. & Kamalanathan, G. April 1985. "Women's First Decade", Paper presented on Women's KESI, New Delhi: UNICEF  
(quoted in 'National perspective plan for women 1988-20UO. New Delhi: Gal, p.128)

The malnutrition of the girls typically occurs after 6 months of birth, following the introduction of semi-solid food. More girls than boys suffer from severe malnutrition of grade II and grade III up to 48 months of age (Jayam 1991:82).

Studies by National Nutrition Monitoring Bureau (NNMB) confirm that the daily intakes of energy of males and females do not much differ upto 12 years. After 12 years, the intakes of iron and vitamin A are lower than the RDA for both sexes but those of adolescent girls are lower than the adolescent boys (Table 5).

Girls are taken to hospital only in emergency. Immunization of daughters are neglected while sons are attended. Further, the nutritional deprivation at all growth stages causes worse mortality and morbidity among girls than that of boys. More girls than boys suffer from respiratory infections, riboflavin deficiency, iron deficiency, gastrointestinal disorder, protein-caloric malnutrition, dental caries and others (NMC & UNICEF 1985). More percentages

of girls than boys die up to 14 years suffering from fever, infection, digestive disorders, respiratory disorders, central nervous system disorders, circulatory system disorders and others (Barsa 1991: 55-57). Also, malnourished and undernourished teenage mothers give birth to babies with risk to their life and often to low-weight babies with lower thinking, learning and retention capacity.

Table 5: Sex Difference in Iron and Vitamin A Intake

Age Group	Sex	Iron (mg/day)		Vitam A (mg/day)	
		RDA	Intake	RDA	Intake
Adolescents: 13-15 Years	Girls	43	22.4	600	194
	Boys	28	24.5	600	238
16-18 Years	Girls	30	23.7	600	242
	Boys	50	28.7	600	244
Adults	Women	30	25.0	600	236
	Men	28	31.6	600	276

Source: NNMB Rural Survey (1975-80).

### Psychological Discrimination

Sons are considered as an assurance of social and economic security while daughters are burdens. Therefore, parents not only pine for boys but the mother fears the birth of a daughter. This mentality surfaces by more payment to the midwife and higher expenditure on birth ceremony, if the baby is a boy. The feeling of unwanted child comes only when the family has two or three daughters without any son.

The girl child is successively a daughter, a sister, a wife and then a mother but never an individual first. From early childhood, her role models are 'Laxmi', 'Sita', 'Sati' etc. This imprints to be pious, docile and silent, and to never question what the male members of her family decide for her. She is glorified and exploited-a pious image is combined with delirious practices.

The basic emotions in early childhood confine to love, hate and anger. The girl child is taught and reinforced to preach and practice the first one only but not the last two.

The girl child confines her space to the kitchen and backyard. She is prohibited to talk in loud voice, restricted to mix with boys outside home and more restricted in evening hours. Her interactions with peers of opposite sex are looked with suspicion. She is forced to restrict her time, space and mobility. The early socialization of girls emphasises nurturance, dutifulness, obedience, shyness, submissiveness, servitude, dependence, tolerance, sacrifice, timidity and conformity as 'feminine' qualities. She is never encouraged to be assertive. What

begins in infancy, continues through the years. In childhood. She is given the toys related to domestic chores, such as cooking utensils, rice-busks, female dolls etc. to orient her for future roles. Mechanical toys are given more frequently to the boy than to the girl. This hinders the growth of her intellectual capacity.

At home, parents give priority to the satisfaction of the desires and interests of their sons than daughters. The adolescent girl is tacitly denied to involve in decision-making in the family. She hardly takes decisions which affect her life directly. A boy can choose and love a girl of his choice but a girl cannot do so. During menstrual period, she is prohibited to many social and religious functions. On all counts, she receives the symbolic message about her inferior position. By the time she runs her own home, she realises the discriminatory practices on her. Indeed, she has so thoroughly imbibed such practices from childhood that she propagates the same. These practices mitigate against the interest of her own gender group.

In school, the teacher gives more careful listening to boys and encourage them for higher achievement than girls. The text books describe boys as doers, goers, makers of ideas and things; and girls as spiritless observers. Advertisements of banks and insurance companies enhance the prevailing sentiments. They induce parents to invest for the marriage of their daughters and education of their sons. Cinema and TV justify the value of early marriage, low status, sacrifice and tolerance of girls. All these treatments to the girl perpetuate in her a low self-image, low confidence and the fear of failure in any endeavour.

The girl child is also abused sexually. Such cases are rarely registered because of the stigma against the rape victim and private nature of the affair. A study in Madras reveals that only 2.7% of the street girls acknowledge that they have been sexually abused, though 77% say attempts have been made to abuse them (Arimpoor 1992). Only a few abused cases are reported in newspapers. Such practices are common not only in orphanages, reformatories, mental hospitals, school hostels, temporary and permanent work places, and other places of shelter but also at home from male relatives. In many cases, it is not possible to know who-does-what-with-whom.

Many Indians are obsessed with sex. Many boys do not marry before 21 years; many married persons do not live with their spouses due to family or job problems; few are not allowed to marry because of the nature of their jobs; some frequently quarrel with wives and beat them; many landlords prefer to have sex with others other than their wives; and some others are above all psychopaths. The sexual abusers are all those who are either unmarried, perverts or are unable to have proper sex satisfaction within marriage. They exploit the easily available poor and ignorant girls sexually; sometimes through persuasion, sometimes

through seduction, and sometimes using force and authority. Purity of chest is so highly valued in our culture that the abuser feels safe. Neither the girl fearing heavy assault, criticism and punishment nor the parent fearing the blame on her daughter would dare to disclose the matter. Even if data is not available on these aspects, these are hard facts.

Sexual exploitation is also carried out in the name of religion. Poverty and superstition force parents to dedicate their 8 or 10 years old daughter as devadasis to 'Goddess Yellamma' in Northern Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. As soon as the girl reaches puberty, the richest landlord or businessman in the area exploits her sexually and from then on, the girl passes from one man to another. In unorganised sectors, minor girls are exploited sexually at work place by middlemen and contractors who recruit them. Young girls are also sold to others. They marry older men, kept as the second or third wife of rich people or work as their servant throughout life. Those who are procured through fake marriage or who are raped, molested and then sold, are put in brothels. The current aggressive thrust to promote tourism in new economic policy is also causing an increase in child prostitution.

In tribal areas, the unmarried girl or the widow, having the possession of landed property, is declared as witch (or 'dayan') and often beaten to death to capture her property by family members or relatives.

Poverty-stricken parents find difficulty in arranging marriage of their daughters. In their anxiety, daughters become the scapegoats. The anxiety of the parents is released by verbal or physical assault on their daughters, on occasions of their minor or no faults. This helps to create an attitude of fear and rejection of parents or parent-substitutes. That is why, many girls do not pull well with their father- or mother-in-laws after marriage.

In many families, the tasks of the young girl are numerous. She finds no time for fun and play. She remains busy in study, household chores and in work outside home. In few advanced families, parents take their daughters to different classes after school hours like music, swimming, dancing, painting and so on. These are not the classes for pleasure but for achievement and to prove the superiority of their parents in comparison to others. Getting caught in the crossfire between parental desires, education system and household work, she often fails to fulfil the expectations of her roles and becomes the object of aggression.

### **Economic Discrimination**

India has the largest number of child labourers. According to 1981 census, 8.1 million boys and 5.5 million girls below the age of 14 years are workers. The boys

constitute 4.47% of the total male workers and girls 8.65% of total female workers. In the age group of 5 to 14, more girls than boys work in rural areas in transplanting, weeding, watching crops, harvesting, threshing operations, manufacturing, servicing and repairing. Boys are often marginal workers because they go to school for same hours of the day while girls work. From 1971 to 1981, there is an increase in work participation rate of girls and a decrease in case of boys. The 1991 census follows the same trend. However, many girls are ignored by census such as street girls who engage in singing, dancing and domestic work; and girls in circus who remain as trainees to become future artists.

The work of the girls is 'invisible' because it is mainly located in domestic sphere. It defies quantification, monetary valuation and hence is considered as 'unproductive work'. In small scale industries and unorganised sectors, the girl child works with her parent who invariably enlists her daughter to increase the output. She is a helper. She is seen as a worker neither by the state, the employer nor by the parent.

The States, having more percentage of female child workers compared to male child workers, are Maharashtra, Manipur, Nagaland, Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh, Goa, Mizoram, Tamil Nadu, Jammu and Kashmir (Saha 1992:14-15) and Andhra Pradesh (Sinha 1993). The Indian Constitution lays down 14 years as age below which children should not be employed in factory, mine or any hazardous work. But minor girls work in carpet weaving at Mirzapur (UP), handicrafts and handlooms in Kashmir, handle hazardous chemicals making matches and fireworks in Sivakasi (Tamil Nadu), powerlooms and balloon making in Maharashtra, bidi-making in Tamil Nadu, brick-kilns in Bihar and Bengal, slate industry in Madhya Pradesh and mining in Meghalaya.

In rural areas, minor girls work mainly in primary sector and in urban or semi-urban areas in trade, commerce and other services. In agriculture, girls are exposed to heat and rain and have to work in standing and bending postures for long hours. In tribal culture, girls do most of the works both in and outside the home. Besides the work in agricultural fields, minor girls with their mothers collect firewood, mahua, tendu leaf, sal seeds and leaves, and many other leafy vegetables, flowers, fruits, roots, shoots etc. from forest and also market the surplus. In stone-cutting, minor girls are taken with their parents for loading, unloading and breaking of stones. In bidi-making, girls help their parents in cutting and cleaning the leaves and are exposed to harmful dust. Female child labour springs from grinding poverty, lack of land, parental apathy for education, high school drop-outs, absence of compulsory education, large size of family, slow process of protective legislation and inefficient implementing machinery.

Minor girls of 6 or 7 years old are treated as trainees in different industries and paid nothing except mid-day meal or up to Rs. 9/- or Rs. 10/- per day. Their earning increases in the same job when they reach 12 or 14 years. The girls in Bombay and Delhi earn between Rs 100/- and Rs 400/- per month and this earning decreases sharply in Madras (Mathias 1993:57).

The girls work from 8 to 14 hours a day in repetitive and monotonous job, despite their inability to work for 6 hours at a stretch. Often work is carried out at home. They work in ill over-crowded, poorly lit, badly ventilated and worst hygienic conditions without any recreation, leisure and health facilities. Many of them are already suffering from malnutrition. Further, long hours of arduous work in dismal surroundings make them vulnerable to T.B, cold, fever, cancer, respiratory problems, spine-disabilities, vision and ear problems, long, bone and muscle disorders along with damage to central nervous system. They become a source of income for a short-while and often die a premature death. The extreme strain on their organs, their incapacity for sustained concentration, lack of experience in handling machines and tools, lack of protective equipments make them prone to accidents which are at times fatal. Hardly any attention is paid by the employer for their safety. Their status of job is low, nature of employment is casual and payment is made sometimes in piece-rate system. The casual job motivates them to work up to the maximum possible extent for their future security. In piece-rate system, one is paid as per the work done. This also forces for long hours work. The products of girls like carpets, gems etc. are exported. However, European Union and German parliament have the bills seeking a ban on import of Indian goods produced by child labours.

The availability of cheap, docile and unorganised labour depresses the general wage, shrinks the job opportunities for adults, swells the unemployed youths, acts as a disincentive for education of girls and family planning adoption of parents. Supplementing the economic compulsions to work, employers generally argue that employing the girl child, they have helped in increasing the income of her family, decreasing the mouth to feed and saved the child being lazy and idle. Other employers argue that the nimble fingers of the girl are essential for quality production of goods like knotted carpets or in meeting the required speed for filling in million of match sticks into the card-board boxes.

When both husband and wife are in service, they invariably prefer girl servants below 10 or 12 years for fetching water, cooking, sweeping, washing cloths, cleaning utensils, feeding cattle and looking after younger children. In Delhi, the capital, one lakh street children mostly girls, are engaged in full or part-time domestic work (Panicker & Nangia 1992). This happens because their voice is feeble, their demands are fewer and they have neither any time limit nor fixed

wages to be paid. They are provided food, shelter, and a small salary. The educated class does not bother to educate their servants in evening school or to train them in any craft. These girls are brought from remote villages. In case they are turned out, there is no place they can go or nothing they do except to hunt for another job.

Protective labour legislations do not cover street girls and domestic servants. Secondly, implementing machinery is inadequate to check child labour. Moreover, the penalties are very light for employing child labour. Child labour is also dispersed. Added to this is that the trade unions are not interested in protecting the interests of the child.

Acute poverty in rural areas forces parents, belonging to SCs and STs, to borrow money from private money-lenders. Parents surrender their children as security. The Indian Labour Organisation (ILO, 1993) estimates that 10 million children are bonded. This includes many girls, working in agriculture, Carpet weaving, stone quarries, firework industries and domestic services to repay the debt of their parents, despite the 'Bonded Labour Abolition Act', 1976. Compelled to stay away from home, denied the basic rights of food, housing, health, education and recreation; exposed to unfavourable working conditions, beaten and abused, they have no access to protection.

### **Suggestions**

Based on the above discussion, here are some suggestions to protect the interest of the girl child. Firstly, a central legislation to ban the use of 'Prenatal Diagnostic Techniques'; the enforcement of 'Dowry Prohibition Act' (1986) through community awareness; enforcement of 'Property Laws' (1956) so that the girl has an equal share in parents' properties, to encourage family planning, discourage dowry problems and counter the feeling of economic burden; enforcement of 'Child Marriage Restraints Act' by making compulsory birth and marriage registration; effective implementation of 'Juvenile Justice Act' (1986) and 'Child Labour Act' (1986) for care, protection of juvenile girls and preventing girls from exploitation and hazardous employment; and enforcement of 'Immoral Traffic Act (1986)' to prevent sexual exploitation on minor girls. What is needed is a strict enforcement agency which is absolutely impartial to implement the legislations.

The constitutional provision of compulsory education up to the age of 14 years should be implemented on priority basis. This will be an incentive for family planning, discourage child labour and ensure many advantages discussed earlier. After acquisition of literacy and numeracy, the education must be integrated with the regional, socio-economic framework, condition or production requirements, such as skills required in agriculture, animal husbandry,

promotion of land, water, forest etc. Otherwise, the schooling years would be the unnecessary spending of time. Girl children should be provided stipend, scholarships, books, uniforms, stationery and mid-day meals so that the parents would not perceive the education of girls as a financial burden. Also, support structure such as day-care centres for younger siblings should be provided either at school or in its vicinity. What is required is the political will to do these. The government programmes like ICDS and TRYSEM can reorient for more development and skill acquisition of girls respectively because they are the worst neglected section.

Since the government's inefficiency in dealing with social problems is proverbial, the NGOs can be involved in such problems, aided by funds from government. NGOs can aware and sensitive to the community vis-a-vis parents about the utility of breast-feeding for longer duration; immunization; equal share of food from family's pot; preventive and promotive health aspects; complications of early marriage, pregnancies and benefits of spacing of children; medical check-up during infancy, childhood and adolescence; false religious beliefs; vocational education and overall development of girls. They can motivate the public, employer and trade unions to protect the employment of minor girls and their slavery. Indeed, total abolition is an unrealistic goal immediately. Therefore, girl child should be ensured limited hours of work, weekly rest period, healthy working environment and education as an interim measure. NGOs can organize women, similar minded people, and take the help of 'Mahila Mandals' in villages or localities to work towards the betterment of girl child.

Media and text-books should not instill any sex-role differences. Some of the socially conscious newspapers have done meritorious work in giving publicity to the discrimination against the girl child and sensitising parents for education, health status and care of the girls in the family. More is expected to be done by the radio, cinema, TV and text-books.

The problem of the girl child must be seen in its holistic perspective. The problems of girls can be assessed keeping in view all the ramifications such as mortality, nutrition, illiteracy, poverty and the like. More resources can be provided for welfare schemes to revert the status of girls. Unfortunately, currently the 'structural adjustment programme' cuts drastically in social sectors, further pushing the child away from nutrition, health, housing, and educational facilities. All problems relating to children should be dealt with by one single ministry to avoid the duplicity of plans, programmes and policies.

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