

PARLIAMENTARY FORUM ON CHILDREN  
&  
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Proceedings

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- Lecture by : Ms. Razia Sultan Ismail Abbasi  
Co-Convenor India Alliance for  
Child Rights
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SHRIMATI MARGARET ALVA: Hon. Speaker, Lok Sabha; hon. Deputy Chairman, Rajya Sabha; hon. Members of Parliament; Ms. Razia Sultan Ismail Abbasi, Co-Convenor of the India Alliance on Child Rights; Shri P.D.T.Achary, Secretary-General, Lok Sabha; and friends:

It is indeed a great pleasure for me to welcome you all today to the Lecture on *'Issues pertaining to the Rights of the Girl Child'* being organized jointly by the Bureau of Parliamentary Studies and Training (BPST) and the Parliamentary Forum on Children. We are deeply beholden to the hon. Speaker for having agreed to grace the occasion and to share with us his views on the subject. On behalf of the Bureau of Parliamentary Studies and the Parliamentary Forum on Children, I welcome you, Sir, to this Lecture. We are also glad to welcome the hon. Members of Parliament who have made it convenient to be here this morning despite their busy schedules.

We have with us this morning Ms. Razia Sultan Ismail Abbasi, Co-convenor of the India Alliance on Child Rights. A renowned crusader for the rights of children especially girls, Ms. Abbasi has the distinction of being the first and only Asian elected President of the World YWCA. Championing the cause of girl children, she is rendering yeoman service, promoting a campaign for ensuring to them their rightful place in society. Making inter-faith and inter-community dialogues instruments, under the leadership and guidance of Ms. Razia Abbasi, the India Alliance on Child Rights is doing commendable work in creating awareness and a greater understanding among the people on issues concerning the rights of the girl child. We are proud of your outstanding contribution and leadership to the cause of the girl child, and feel privileged to have you amongst us to share with us your views and experiences on the subject especially because we have shared a common battle, if I may say so over the years.

Children are the most important yet vulnerable section of our society. The right of every human being, more so of a child, to mature as a dignified and healthy human being, is indisputable. On the physical and intellectual development of

children, depends the survival, well-being and prosperity of human civilization. In this backdrop, it becomes inevitable that their future is shaped with great care, ensuring of the blossoming of their overall personality.

The knowledge of the causes and consequences of neglect and discrimination against the girl child has become widespread. So have the measures to combat the same. We are proud that as a nation we conceived of the notion of 'gender equality' much before the world started talking about it in 1975, while marking the International Women's Year. Through constitutional, statutory and developmental measures, our endeavour has always been to ensure to the girl child her due place, rights and freedoms. Our National Policies for Children, Education, Nutrition, Population, Health, etc., lay particular emphasis on providing special support to the rights and development of children.

Though our achievement in this sphere are noteworthy, the fact remains that we are still far from achieving total equality between boys and girls. Girls are still discriminated against and neglected. Their subjection to marriage at a tender age is still prevalent in many parts of our country especially in rural India. Incidences of female infanticide and selective abortion of the female foetus continue because of preference for a male child. Factors like denial of access to basic health care, nutrition and education to the girl child are also the reasons for the disproportionate female-male ratio which has reached at an alarming stage today.

I believe, the members of Parliament are in a position to make their contribution towards changing the mindset of the people besides being a force in evolving better policy options and in toning up the administration.

I am sure, the hon. members would be benefited from Ms. Abbasi's ideas and would be motivated to address various problems pertaining to the rights of the girl child.

With these words, I once again welcome the hon. Speaker, the hon. Deputy Chairman, the hon. Members of Parliament, Ms. Razia Sultan Ismail Abbasi and all

others present with the hope that we will all benefit from the Lecture, to be followed by a questions-answer Session. Thank you.

Now, I would like, to request the hon. Speaker to address the gathering. MR. SPEAKER: Hon. Deputy Chairman, Rajya Sabha; Shrimati Margaret Alva; Ms. Razia Sultan Ismail Abbasi; Secretary-General; and friends:

I am very happy to be here to associate myself with this Lecture Session on the Lecture on '*Issues pertaining to the Rights of the Girl Child*'. Today we have with us Ms. Razia Sultan Ismail Abbasi, Co-convenor of the India Alliance on Child Rights to give her views on the subject so that we can be enriched. India Alliance on Child Rights represents a countrywide alliance of networks, NGOs, think tanks, activists, academicians and concerned individuals which is striving for the protection of the rights of the children. Under the dynamic leadership of Ms. Abbasi, the Alliance is spearheading the campaign for safeguarding the rights of the children and for ensuring them and enabling an environment for their full development.

As you are aware, this lecture will be the second one on the issues pertaining to the children which is being organized jointly by the Parliamentary Forum on Children and the Bureau of Parliamentary Studies and Training (BPST). On the 9 of December last year Ms. Aan Veneman, Executive Director, UNICEF had spoken on '*Children's Development - Challenges facing India*'. While the lecture by Ms. Veneman was on the development of children in general, the subject of today's discussion is gender-specific highlighting the issues confronting the girl child.

India has one-fifth of the world's children, and 34 per cent of the total population of India is children between 0 and 14 age group. Obviously they need focussed attention from us and everybody particularly the Members of Parliament. Now, it is a matter of great concern - if it is not a matter of great shock and inhumanity - that in all countries, in many parts and amongst many people, a girl child is treated as a liability. Therefore, when we talk about issues pertaining to the rights of the girl child, I believe the first and the foremost right that we must ensure is right to born and then her right to live with dignity in an environment permeated by

gender equality and sensitivity. We have to consider very seriously how far we have been able to do that. Another grave issue which confronts girls is violence against them which is happening in many ways including sexual exploitation, abuse, rape, prostitution, child pornography and trafficking. It is essential that as a nation we should take effective steps immediately. There are some laws like The Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Prohibition of Sex Selection) Act; Compulsory Registration of Birth and Death Act, and other laws regarding women and children especially directed towards preventing violence against them. (bl/0920/mmn-am)

During the last Winter Session, Parliament passed the Commission for Protection of Child Rights Bill providing for a National Commission and State Commissions for the protection of child rights. It has been given some powers but we have to see how they are properly implemented.

Hon. Members of Parliament, we have a special duty as representatives of the people to play a role of opinion leaders in their respective constituencies. They can influence and shape the thinking and attitude of the people towards the girl child. Collectively, we, as Members, can influence the Government to take more proactive measures, and where necessary, to amend the existing laws to promote the welfare of the children. As parliamentarians, we can make substantial contribution in updating children related laws and formulating policies that prohibit children's exploitation.

It is hardly necessary to be said that the future of a country depends on the kind of facilities, which we provide to the children of the country, and especially for us, our children constitute a large portion of the population. The issues that confront the children or problems that inhibit their growth, particularly that of the girl child, have to be addressed urgently and holistically.

The Beijing platform for action has rightly identified the girl child as one of the 12 critical areas of concern that require the attention of all the countries. In our country, while the Government is taking various initiatives to bring genuine

concern to the centre-stage of public expenditure and politics, we, as parliamentarians, must contribute meaningfully to bridge the gap between women and men, between girls and boys.

The constitution of the Parliamentary Forum on Children represents an important step in this direction. We are arranging several lectures, on different subjects, especially those are matters of concern for the country as a whole and in areas where parliamentarians can make substantial contribution. If we are alert, we can try to make our concern translated into action by the Government and the society as a whole. Therefore, I am very happy to welcome Ms. Razia Sultan Ismail Abbasi. I am sure her lecture will be extremely useful to us and provide us direction as to which way we should move. May I request you to please share your views with us?

MS. RAZIA SULTAN ISMAIL ABBASI: Hon. Speaker, Mrs. Alva, Deputy-Chairman of the Rajya Sabha, Secretary-General, dignitaries, Members of Parliament, Secretary to the Ministry of Women and Child Development and friends;

First of all, I would like to thank you all for the privilege of being here. This is not a light subject that I have been assigned and it is not a light task to bring it forward to persons like yourselves who already know the state of a nation, rule on the state of the nation and take decisions that affect the lives of adults and children alike. I am sure I will not be bringing you anything terribly new but what I would like to try and do is to provide some underlining as to what will happen to us if we ignore any major segment of our people.

When we think of women, we tempt to call them weaker sections of the society. The poor are weaker sections of the society but the poor outnumber the rich. So they are not a category. Women should be half of India but they are not. They are less than half. There lies the core of the problem that we face in relation to the girl child.

I would like to present the facts to you with the help of power point visuals but before that I would put a couple of thoughts before you, which, I hope, will trouble you in a constructive way, all the way to the Monsoon Session and beyond. Today is the last day of this Session. But I come with an enormous amount of hope and the possibilities of parliamentarians to provide the leverage that this very important part of our people deserves and they have not yet got.

■ Who are the daughters of India? I am one of them but I am a lucky one. I have come to this stage of my life with many, many benefits and many allowances made and many opportunities given to me. I do not really represent the people that I am going to talk about today because they are, firstly all unwanted. Secondly, often they are sent packing before they are able to really claim to be alive. Thirdly,

they are a diminishing group in our society because we have found that it is more expedient to get rid of them than to retain them in family, community and society. Women are not quite half of India. The female species is not quite half of India because we get rid of some of them.

The largest decline in the number of females in the Indian population is taking place among the youngest children. This country, since the census count began, has always outnumbered women but girls among the females have not always been as few in comparison to boys as women have been in comparison to men. But over the last 15 years or so, the statistics have crossed over and we now have less female children for every 100 or 1000 male children than we have women for men. Why is this?

There is some noise being made about the incidents of female foeticide. It is a more modern response, a more technologically shabby response to the threat of having a daughter than infanticide. But infanticide has not gone away. Where the technology is not readily available, infanticide is reportedly reviving. Whose fault is this? Like dowry deaths, we tempt to say that these are social crimes. These are the results of son preference, which is the social preference. Then, where is the role of Parliament and State? Where is the role of Government? No

matter whose fault it is, I think we have to ask the question as to whose responsibility it is to do something about it. But here the difficult task falls on the State, and, therefore, on\*the legislators of the State. What is it that we can do? In what setting or what scenario are we asking this question?

We have the Eleventh Five Year Plan now on the drawing board. What will it change for female Indians, whether we think of the women or think of the children? We have now a Ministry. Many of us are so happy about it. We have now a full-fledged Ministry for Women and Child Development. Where does the girl child stand in that Ministry? Today, she has been mainly in the corridor. There is a Women's Bureau. There is a Department. There is a Child Department. The girl child is part of women's human rights. So, to some extent, she comes under that part of that portfolio.

Girl child is also a child. We are not sure whether the children are people up to 14 years or people up to 18 years. But our bold new National Plan of Action for Children does establish that the responsibility for children is recognised by the State as extending up to the age of 18. So, we have 34 per cent of us, as hon. Speaker said, who are below the age of 14 but there are 42 per cent of us who are below the age of 18. It is something like half but less than half of those are girl children. So, where does the girl child stand?

I recall a Joint Secretary, not the present one, saying that I handle the girl child. What was she doing? Not much. We had a SAARC decade. First, we had a SAARC year and then we had a SAARC decade for the girl child. It is 10 years. At the beginning of it, some plans were made but at the end of it, there was not even a report. It is from 1990-2000. How many girl children did we lose in that decade whom we should not have lost? We do not have that statistics either.

So, the girl child gets lost. Woman's rights are her rights and she is the foundation where women's rights should be given. Children's rights are her rights. She helps the child, who is left behind, in the fulfilment of those rights. Human rights are the rights of every child but the girl child somehow does not qualify.



(cl/0930/mmn-sk)

Unless the two halves of the new Ministry, like the two halves of the old Department, really connect, the girl child will remain in somewhat unassigned, unrecognised space. The girl child will be neither with this one nor with the other. Or, it will fall in the crack.

We have a national policy for the empowerment of women. What does it say about girls? We do not yet have a national plan for women. But what would it say about girls? We have a national policy for children and it is a very fine one of 1974. Still it is standing as one of the good policies that we have drafted. We now have a national plan for children; and this plan has a section on girl child. But does the girl child require a section? Or does she require a whole plan?

If we go into the statistical half, we realise that we are not talking about some small component of people who should be covered by a scheme. We are talking about half of India and it is the unsung half. If 42 per cent of us are below 18, then half of women are also children. Half of the female population is also very, very young. 54 per cent of us are below 25. We do not have a young-oriented perspective and within the young-oriented perspective, we, perhaps, are not sufficiently looking at where this small child, who happens to be female, should be positioned.

If you allow me, I would like to move on to show some visuals. As I said, we are a young population. Whether we say we had an old civilisation or not, our numbers tell us of the different resources that we are a young population. We should be taking pride in this but we do not always seem to. We seem to be a little bit apologetic for having so many children. Internally, we seem to be disappointed and apologetic for having daughters at all. So, I would say that in this capital, where we are somewhat pushed by population policies and population control thinking, the numbers are not something that we claim with pride. If we look at what is happening in our population, first of all there is something unnatural about having more males than females in a population. In the normal biological balance,

it is not so: In the normal biological balance, you have about 106 males for every 100 females. We have far less than this.

If we look at the sex ratio in our States, Kerala, of course, stands out as a golden line. There is far more gender balance. Over all, this is looking at all ages, the females and the males in India. Daman and Diu have, for some reason, very few females. Delhi is one of the worst settings for females. Haryana and Punjab are already somewhat infamous as being anti-daughter. But if you look at the whole list of States, there is a variation but in many of them you see that girls and women have been outnumbered. The present count is 933 females overall in our population to every 1000 males. If we begin to look at the children, we find the figure is even less encouraging.

As I said, the statistics have crossed over and the gap between female and male in the 0-6 age group, which first alerted our Government and many of us in 1991 with the census results, is growing up.

Policies and programmes are often gender neutral. Some of our policies and programmes are in fact affirmatives to women and girls. Part of the problem lies in who brings a daughter for attention. Who decides to put a daughter in school? Who decides that a daughter should be left? Our general level of registration of birth and death overall is so poor that we do not know, of the children born, how many are not allowed to stay alive. A separate problem exists in female foeticide where the child is removed from the population before she actually joins the population.

If we look at this ratio, we see the trouble areas where the red lines are. We see Kerala with its yellow line. We do not see that even in Kerala that there are some inroads into the gender balance of female and male. We do not see that in Tamil Nadu where infanticide of daughters, in certain areas, in certain parts of the community, has now been overtaken by a wider practice of infanticide. Why is this happening? Why do we follow these role models?

The basic question for all of us is this. Who benefits if a daughter dies? Obviously, some one does benefit. Who benefits if she is married off early? In 1991, 1992, and 1993 the Government moved to us for qualitative studies of the status of the girl child in this country. 22 universities were asked to undertake that study. 20 universities actually did it. Neither the universities nor the Government actually picked up on what the findings of those qualitative studies were but a number of posers came up for both Government action and social education. At that time, it was a Government official who stated that India has now three neat early disposal methods for dealing with daughters. You can see the evidence of this in this graph, (d/san)

The black line which shows a sharp drop represents the age group 0-6. The red line represents all ages. In the age group of 0-6, the figure of girls is 927 for every 1,000 boys. This is a bad enough figure. There are figures much lower. If we look at State variations, we have far lower figures, below 800. If we look at within the State variations, we have figures as low as 300 girls per 1,000 boys. Those may be in some pockets, but wherever they are, they should disturb us profoundly. I would wonder in whose constituencies these girls are missing. I do not have the constituency, but many of you do have.

If we look at other age groups, we see a lot of difficulty arising and I will come to that. If we look at children below 14 years, 45.9 per cent are females and 54 per cent are males. There is another age group where the difficulty is showing up. If we look at what is happening to these girls, we see two effects of negative practices. One of the most serious is, of course, prevention of births of girl children. Then comes early neglect followed by what is happening in the upper age groups, when the girl has somehow survived early years of childhood and moves on. In this graph, you see several lines. All of them, unfortunately, except one are going downward. Some of them have very sharp drops and some are gradually declining.

From the 1961 Census onwards, the warning signs became very evident. Before that, perhaps we were not dis-aggregating child data in the same way. We did not take those warning signs as problematic challenges. Therefore, there were few programme interventions that could have done something. If we look at the unambiguous data of the past 15 years, the decline in the number of females to the number of males in the age group of 0-4 and 0-6 is sharp. When we look into the next batch, in the 5-9 age group,, we see that there is a drop. This age group is now falling as rapidly as age group above and below. When we look at 10-14 age group, interestingly, there is a small rise here. One of the questions I would like to put is : "Why do we not try to find out what prevents us from analysing these trends more, what prevents us from looking into it?" I would guess that the reasons are different in different States and settings, but the reasons are surely there to be found.

There is a person in the Census of India Office who is in charge of gender analysis. Much of this information is taken from her. She is Dr. Suman Parashar, Joint-Director. I think, what data she brings leaves us all shaken. She could sit down with each one of the hon. Member of Parliament and give a blow by blow account of the respective constituency over the last two or three Census and you would be able to discern the trend, but you would have to want to look into the reasons.

With regard to 5-9 and 10-14 age groups, there are some question marks. If we look at 15-19 age group, there is something happening, which is perhaps more disturbing than what we see in the 0-6 age group Census data. This is the lowest ratio of any age group - females to males. Mrs. Nayyar is saying child marriage. Yes, that may have a lot to do with it. In this age group, fall out of early disposal, of preventive births and of early deaths is showing up as a secondary figure, but this is also the age chunk in which perhaps the risk and the cost of early marriage, early pregnancy and perhaps early abortions is showing up. There is a reported rise in maternal mortality of the below 18 or below 20 young mothers. Why? Is it

because of the role she is expected to perform, to produce sons early? In some States, is she being subjected to abortion when she is not about to produce a son? I do not know. But here is a question. These are not election issues. These are not party manifesto topics, but these are human costs that India is paying. If the society is not changing, then surely the law and the State must bring about a

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change. We learnt ethics in the school that customs precede law, but sometimes, it does not. Sometimes, customs defy law. Then, what is the role of the law-maker? In this particular case, would it help?

The 20-24 age group is another one that shows a disturbing fall. These are people who are still paying the cost that you see in the age group 15-19. But these figures were not like this some years ago. So, there is a double fall out and there is ' a double effect here of early disposal. What are the early disposal methods that the Government officials talked about in early 1990s. They talked about early sex detection, foeticide or infanticide, early neglect so that you can eliminate the growing financial liability of preparing a girl for marriage and having to pay for marriage and early marriage itself. That was the remark in 1990. Now, we are in the year 2006 and the methods are just being used.

This was around the time when SAARC had batted for the girl child, initially for a year and then a decade, that plans were made. There were even SAARC conferences to review the plans, but we have not solved the problems. Now, we are at a point where the Eleventh Plan is coming on the anvil. What do we want to ask at this point of time? Is this an issue of serious national concern? Is it an issue above party lines? We used to say that our population explosion and our family planning goals were issues above party lines. I do not know what is happening to that commitment. Now, half of our population is under real threat. Is that an issue of national concern? Could it be above party lines? If it is above party lines, what needs to be done? What will happen if we have a world without girls and then eventually a society without women?

(el/0950/rcp)

We will solve the population problem for sure because nobody will be there to have the babies. But, is it the way we want to address the issue? It is not just a question of injustice. Injustice is obvious; it is the question of how do we apply economic common sense, demographic common sense, and developmental balance to the way in which we look at the issue of the girl child.

I would say that one of the greatest needs of girl children in our society today is that they must be lifted out of a ministerial portfolio and made a national concern. They are less educated; they are less fed; they are less protected, and the family pays the cost; the children pay the cost. National development and productivity is affected.

In China, the one-child norm was pushed with great vigour and I think with fairly draconian measures at times. Now, China is extremely worried not only about the fat little single boys in each family but also about the high levels of abortions and the disappearance of girls from their young populations. They are encouraging the birth of daughters. I do not know whether they can actually reverse their own trend but they are encouraging that. In certain parts of India we should be doing the same thing. What does that do to our population control goals? Does it encourage us as a nation and as a State to put them on hold for a while, and would that be politically acceptable? Till such time as education and social consciousness catch up with the imbalance, what exactly would we do? There are schemes for rewarding parents when they have daughters like insurance schemes, grant schemes and other schemes. Firstly, they do not reach far enough; secondly, I have not been able to find out what are the real statistics of how much they have prevented the elimination of girl children in the States where they are being provided. Haryana has one of the worst records in creating a girl child deficit. Haryana also has an extremely well-intended scheme to encourage people to look after their daughters. The question is this. What is it that we ought to do programmatically, policy-wise and legally in terms of enforcement, in terms of

incentives and in terms of disincentives? To whom would these be given? Who is accountable for taking their very small girl child to *Teez* festival and getting her married perhaps to a very small boy child or perhaps to an older man? Who is responsible? Would it include only the parents and the brokers? Would it not include the Government dignitaries and the police who provide law and order support at such a gathering? Would it also not include them? We are on the threshold of Child Marriage Prevention Act. To whom will it punish? Who will care for retrieval of girls from such marriages? The role of the State is diminishing but these are the questions before the State.

This slide shows the figures on people married before the age of 18. When we look at figures within States, we find that there are many districts with figures above 75 per cent, and there are many more with figures above 70 per cent. Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal, and Rajasthan are quite notable for their achievements in child marriage. What do we do about it? It has been illegal for some time. There is not much registration of marriages. Would civil registration of marriages be a restraint? We have had a Restraint Act for some time since 1920s. We are now trying to move for a Prevention Act. There will be Prevention Officers. I fear for their lives. It is not popular to stop a marriage.

Is the problem only foeticide? If we examine the life and death question of missing small girls, that is one piece of the problem. But, is it not a symptom of an attitude about women and not specifically about girls? If the later losses of girl children cannot be controlled, then two things continue to happen. One is that infant mortality persists. One-third of our children are born with low birth weight. This has been a chronic problem for several plan periods and we have not yet tackled it. And 540 out of 1,00,000 women die of maternity-related mortalities. Many more lose their health and remain alive. The figure of 540 is sometimes disputed and we are given a figure which around 400. Either one of them places us among the five worst countries of the world. Many of those women, as I said, are very young. By the time they reach the age of 21, they are already depleted if

they are still alive. So, the later losses become a complication of what is happening to the child struggling to be alive and what is happening to the children of that child. Where are our programme initiatives to look at this? We see a very encouraging fall in overall mortality, but the persistence of mortality in the first part of life - in the first month, in the first year - continues to challenge us. How can child marriages actually be stopped? This is a question for anyone in public life. Have you ever blessed the children who are a party in a child marriage? It is because you may well have been invited. Have you every remonstrated with the family that is entering a child marriage? What has been the result of that? How will we stop it? Is it for the police to stop? Is it for social pressure, or is it for political pressure? Does any of that involve the State or the legislature?

Child trafficking is now getting mixed up as an issue with the question of what is happening to girls and sexual exploitation of children. Most of the data revealed by the National Crime Records Bureau year after year points to the fact that most of the sexual harassment, molestation and abuse of children, mostly girl children is at home by members of the household including brothers, cousins, uncles, parents, step-parents, grand parents and some of it is by neighbours and people known to the family. The girl is socialised not to protest. The girl is basically socialised not to complain. Child trafficking in certain States which have become girl poor now comes in the form of an import of so-called 'wife'. Haryana and Punjab are showing these figures now. It is difficult to get exact number of cases but they are occurring. Those are the girls from the States which are exporting their daughters for a consideration. Some of those daughters are remarried in courts or resold. They do not necessarily stay with the partner with whom they are initially assigned or married or sold. They are coming from Jharkhand, from Bihar, from some North-Eastern States and from West Bengal. They may be coming also from the lower caste groups within the same State.



(r7san)

Curiously, one of the communities that has not disposed large scale and wholesale of its daughters is the SC community. Till recently, their figures have been evidence of greater protection or perhaps more indifference to disposing of the daughters. Now, those figures are also showing a decline. So, there is somebody's role model beginning to operate on the SC communities as well.

Can these infant mortality rates be improved, if the health of the mother is improved? Of course, they can. Can they be improved, if the education of the young mother is improved? Of course, they can. Does that mean that we should educate child brides more or does it mean that we should also prevent child marriages? What is the state of health of a girl who has been pushed too early into adult social roles? We have two very frightening sets of figures on anaemia which means not having enough food and not having enough nourishment in whatever food we get. One is the percentage of women and girls with anaemia. These are old figures. We should have new ones. But the figures are in the upper 50s percentage-wise -56 per cent or around that. It is the highest in the 15-19 age group girls followed by 20-24 age group. The figure in respect of all ages is much lower. There is a higher statistic in nutritional anaemia and that is for 0-3 age group. The nutritional anaemia of 0-3 age group in India overall is about 74 per cent, that is, three out of four children.

I would like to know this and I hope that there will be a Parliament Question to ask this. How many of those 74 per cent are girls? Girls are displaced from breast-feeding earlier. Girls are less likely to receive good, adequate first solid food or complementary food to complement the milk, but what is the figure for girls in 0-3 age group who are already growing hungry? Scientific research indicates that your nutrition in your first two years of life determines your health profile for the rest of your life. Girls are normally short-changed on nutrition earlier and more roughly than boys. Even in a poor family, efforts are made to feed the boy as well as the family can, but that effort is not necessarily made in the

case of daughters. Children who are anaemic in the age 0-3 grow up to the 15-19 anaemic adolescents. How do we deal with the 0-3 age group low nutrition levels? We have the Integrated Child Development Services Programme. It was originally designed to target the 0-3 age group of children - boys and girls - more than children in the 3-6 age group, but it has more or less ended up being a bit more focussed on the 3-6 age group which is needy enough but not at that critical point in their development.

In a society where we train midwives to be better agents of the safe delivery of children, we live with a situation where a woman, who is called to assist a birth, is often paid for assisting a death. There is a whole social complex that conspires to do this. One set of rates that we have from Bihar says that the rate for delivering a girl child safe and alive is Rs. 50, which is fairly cheap; the rate for delivering a boy child safe and alive is Rs. 100. The motivation of the midwife to deliver a son does not determine the sex of the child, but there is a better earning in that. The rate of finishing off a newborn girl child, that is to say, killing her is Rs. 75. You can make Rs. 25 more for killing the girl baby than for delivering her into her parents' hands alive. There is a small economy operating there. What is the use of training traditional birth attendants, midwives and *dais*, if this is the economy that is operating where they work? Who is asking for these deaths?

The young mother who may survive the next pregnancy or may not is also a victim of the social complex that allows, condones and, in fact, fosters these attitudes. It is much neater to do a foeticide, though it costs more. Are these not acts of murder? When we say dowry deaths are social crimes, we are covering up a homicide. When we say social crimes and son preference for foeticide depending on our personal politics of how we regard an unborn child - is he a living person or not? - are these not equivalent to murder? How do we allow so many murders to keep on taking place? The attitude functions up and down the age line from 0-18 or before 0-18. The status and condition of female Indians is really demonstrating a very multi-faceted injustice and multi-faceted attitude. It is persistent. It is

shameful. We can feel helpless in the face of such information, but we cannot leave the problem alone.

Lack of-health services in the countryside is often cited, but in the countryside as well in the cities, access does not mean that the girl child actually reaches the health care, let alone preventive health care. The family may have access in a technical sense, but the child has to be brought and the child has to grow up with a healthy demand for care and services. If that is not present, then the existence of a primary health centre or an outreach worker does not necessarily solve the problem.

Do we need what the mid-term appraisal of the Tenth Plan pointed out, that is, much more outreach services by well motivated and well trained workers who are child care workers, health workers, social workers in the community? To whom are they answerable? Are they answerable to a panchayat, a Gram Sabha? Or are they answerable to somebody who would be willing to defend this part of population? We need people who can track a pregnancy; we need people who can know about a child marriage; we need people who have the guts to prevent them. Where are these people to come from? They cannot come from abroad. This is our own society that has to find these answers.

There is a specific section in the mid-term appraisal of the Tenth Plan which is titled "The Girl Child's Dwindling Numbers". It makes an interesting point about the two-child norm. The two-child norm as a qualifier for standing for panchayati raj elections or for standing for an elected office is not part of the national population policy, but it is a ruling by many State Governments that the two-child norm will operate if you wish to stand for panchayati raj elections. People are disqualified because they have more than two children. Interestingly, a lot of those who are disqualified to date are from the SC and ST communities who do not have a record of destroying their girl children. Will they now be motivated to have sex selective abortions in order to stand for office? Those who want panchayat positions, perhaps, would be motivated. We are not looking at the fall

out of one well-intentioned policy and programme on another situation, but unless we think in an integrated manner, we will pay the price for these things.

Some experts have already suggested a linkage between the imposition of two-child norm and sex selective abortion levels. The National Common Minimum Programme has been reworded to some extent and the Planning Commission in the mid-term appraisal has called for the Centre to ask the State Governments that if they have this norm in place, then they should discontinue asking for it. (gl/1010/rcp)

There needs to be a strong political pressure to make that happen and the benefits of it need to be seen. If we come to education, we see that girls are still trailing behind boys. If we look at improvement enrolment figures - in the case of girls there are improvement enrolment figures - what is it that the girl is able to do with her education? Her role in life according to most of our proposition is to be a good mother. When we say a girl should be healthy, we say she should be healthy in order to be a safe and good mother. She should be intelligent and educated so that she knows how to look after her children. Could she not aspire to be an engineer or even a mechanic or a driver or a legislator? I am not putting it in a falling ranking but could she not aspire to be a person? That does not seem to be a part of what we call the life cycle. The Ministry dealing with social development and women will talk about it. What we want for our girl child is safe personhood, safe citizenship and dignity of being people. Even 10 years in school does not necessarily establish that because social education goes alongside. What can we do with the content and approach of teaching children? As far as the proportion of children who are out of school is concerned, again girls outnumber boys. In dropout rates we see again that the girls outnumber boys. But I think the whole approach as to how we want the people to learn in the community as well as in the school needs to be re-examined. The boys' socialisation is equally critical. Sons are socialised to think of themselves as a superior form of life rather than equal

partners in life. This too is a mistake and it has its fallout on girls. There are better and worse States; there are better and worse districts; and there are better and worse situations. There is one news report which I hope you saw from one Punjab district which talks about a Civil Administrator who is trying to turn the attitude around and he has managed to do that. He has managed to do it because the people have taken up the ideas that he has proposed and there is some positive change happening in that village. But, there are many other villages and districts where that is not happening. So, the question comes back to us as to what is the programmatic change? I must confess that I have not given you too many recommendations as to specific programmatic changes. What is the programmatic change that has come about? How will it be brought to bear on the people? Somehow or the other we have to find the way between punishment and example. The disincentive or incentive both have to be psychological and social. Somewhere this has to become a political priority. We who are not in politics in any technical or formal sense try to politicise the issues of this kind but they need to be politicised by politicians. She cannot be left in the open and empty space between the Women's Department and Child Department or the Law Department and Development or Welfare Ministry. She cannot be left there any more. This is half of India. She has to be in someone's agenda. Thank you very much. (hl/1015/mmn-sk)

SECRETARY-GENERAL: Respected Speaker, hon. Deputy-Chairman of Rajya Sabha, Madam Margaret Alva, Madam Abbasi, Madm Rewa Nayyar, hon. Members of Parliament, ladies and gentlemen, I wish to propose a vote of thanks to all the distinguished personalities sitting here.

We are sitting here this morning and listening to the lecture because of the wonderful initiative taken by the hon. Speaker. This initiative, I am sure, will bear fruit. He has taken this initiative to create awareness in the minds of the hon. Members of Parliament about the various problem areas that our nation faces today, particularly the area relating to children.

Sir, despite your busy schedule, you have been able to come here and inspire us. I, on behalf of the Bureau, express our deep sense of gratitude to you. The hon. Deputy-Chairman of Rajya Sabha has always taken a very keen interest in the activities of the Bureau and he has attended many of these lectures and various other programmes. On behalf of the Bureau, I express my gratitude to the hon. Deputy-Chairman.

Madam Abbasi has today very powerfully focussed on the problems being faced by the children in our country. In fact, she has drawn our attention to the horrifying prospect of having a society without females. This prospect, I am sure, will horrify our Members of Parliament to take up this issue very effectively on the floor of Parliament through various procedural devices available to them. I thank her for giving a very illuminating lecture on this very important subject.

I would propose a vote of thanks to Shrimati Margaret Alva, the Honorary Advisor of the BPST. She has been a source of inspiration to the BPST. I would also thank all the hon. Members of Parliament who have been able to come here and take keen interest in the activities of the Bureau. I hope they will continue to take this amount of interest in the activities of the Bureau. Thank you. MR. SPEAKER: On behalf of all of us, our Secretary-General has conveyed the deep appreciation for what you have said. I am happy that the hon. Members have been able to be informed of this position. Of course, we are generally aware of the issues of girl child. Nowadays, we are becoming statistically more informed about the position. You have also mentioned that.

What I would like to know in a very specific term is this. What do you think that the Members of Parliament can do? There are many laws. We know of the problem of implementation. We can, of course, put questions as to the implementation of the different laws and their effect on the society, particularly the problems of girl child. But ultimately, there has to be a change in the mindset. There has to be a change in the implementation of the various laws. As you have said, how many are really concerned about this? Even in the, probably, so-called

enlightened families, they may be having this. They may be having some of these ideas which we do not support.

(j/san)

Just now you have spoken about education, social consciousness, proper health care and proper nutrition, child workers, child pregnancies etc. Ultimately, you say that it is the political leadership which has also to see that this great forum of Parliament is used properly in a positive and proactive manner. How do you think that Members of Parliament can really help in this? Of course, more laws, probably, are not the only solution. We have to interact with the civil society. How can parliamentarians help in it?

I can try to find out now about the alarming sex ratio in different constituencies. As you have suggested that lady, we will try to find out her names and descriptions. Apart from merely finding out the alarming sex ratio, we cannot be of any help unless we can do something about it. Early marriage, lack of education, lack of nutrition, considering the girl child to be a liability and all these things are generally known in the society. Really none of the persons, who are concerned about it, supports this thing. I am sure, no human being can support it. With all your experience, both in the field as well as practical utilitarian approach in this matter, how do you think that we can really help? We are fully aware of the political aspects of it. We can certainly have a discussion one day. I will welcome the notices of the hon. Members to discuss this matter. Probably Mrs. Nayyar will have a good reply ready for the Minister. Even we should go and try to do something about it. I am not a pessimist at all; I am an optimist. We have to do it. I would like to know from people like you, who are experts, as to what we can do if we want to do.

By merely putting some question, of course, some pressure is put, but I think, it ultimately boils down to the whole attitude of the society. It is so disquieting that even in educated families, there is a bias against the girl child and so long as dowry system' continues in this country, so long as son is the earning

member kind of an approach - that son will help me and daughter will take away money from me - is there, we cannot do much. Dowry is at the background. This is another menace in the society which we have not been able to tackle. It is not a problem of only Mrs. Nayyar; it is the problem of the society as a whole. We have to tackle it in a holistic manner.

I am really thankful to you for a very enlightening lecture. You have put so many questions in our minds. We have to find answers. We, who claim ourselves to be looking after the people's interest, should also try to find the answers to these questions. Thank you very much. If you have any concrete suggestions, please let us know. Then, I have to take leave to attend a meeting.

MS. RAZIA SULTAN ISMAIL ABBASI: Sir, I will just give a very small response. I think, it would help if at the constituency level, apart from fact-finding, a few pro-active steps are taken by political leadership. One such step would be civil registration at least to know who is born and who is dying and what was the cause of death.

MR. SPEAKER: The law is there, but it is hardly implemented.

(kl/1025/rcp)

MS. RAZIA SULTAN ISMAIL ABBASI: The law is there and there are supposed to be 3,00,000 registration units and Registrars in the country. I am not quite sure who they are and where they are but the existence of the machinery has not helped us to bring birth registration up. This is first point.

The other point is about the actual prevention of child marriage. If that can come on a political agenda, of course it may lose some votes but it will also gain some real benefits. These are difficult things but they can be done. The access of families to the political leadership on these constructive issues; if it is made even an experiment, I have a feeling that it would yield results because nobody is taking it on at the moment. It is nobody's job. It is in fact the responsibility of the Administration but it is nobody's job and it is nobody's cause. Any one who has



blessed the child marriage, if he would now stop blessing them, this can be a practical proposition.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you very much.

(ENDS)