

Female foeticide blot on the India story

New Delhi, January 24: Even as India celebrated the National Girl Child Day for the third consecutive year Monday, the condition of millions of Indian women and girl children continue to be deplorable, with the government unable to properly implement the laws against female foeticide.

The United Progressive Alliance government had announced Jan 24 as National Girl Child Day in 2009, hoping to raise awareness about the horrors of sex-selection, abortion and female infant abandonment. The date marks the day in 1966 when Indira Gandhi took charge as the first woman prime minister of the country.

As per the Sample Registration System data of the Registrar General of India, the sex ratio had improved only marginally - from 892 in 2004-2006 to 904 in 2006-2008.

The Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Prohibition of Sex Selection) Act (PCPNDT Act) was brought into force in 1994, to prevent misuse of technologies like ultrasound that enable testing the sex of an unborn child.

But even so, its efficacy speaks for itself, with the number of cases registered nationwide reaching just 123 in 2009, according to the National Crime Records Bureau. As per provisional figures, 107 cases were recorded till June 2010.

According to the 2001 census, the sex ratio is more dangerous in urban areas than in rural parts. Rural areas have 946 females per 1,000 males but in urban areas, the figure is at 900.

Official figures also say that more than 10 million girls have been "missing" in India over the past two decades because of sex-selection abortion.

Ranjana Kumari, director of Centre for Social Research here, thinks that there is lack of political will in the government.

"It is good that now more girls are going to school but there is big contradiction that girls don't have the right to live," said Kumari, who had launched the 'Meri Shakti Meri Beti' campaign in 2009.

"The next census would be more alarming than census of 2001 in term of sex ratio," she said.

Asha Singh, legal adviser of Prayatn Sanstha, a non-governmental organisation which has been working for gender equality for the last eight years, said that India continued to be a male-dominated society.

According to Asha, it is a problem of the people's mindset.

"They consider that there is only investment in a girl child, no profit," said Singh, who travels around villages in north India on her motorbike, campaigning against female foeticide.

"We can't change a thousand years old tradition overnight. We are proud that India is a fast growing country in term of education and technology, but there is still more rejoicing in home when a woman gives birth to a male child," she said.

--Agencies

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