RASHMI PRAMANIK*

Las adolescentes: víctimas de los estereotipos culturales en la India. El caso Sambalpur

The Adolescent Girl-Child and Victim of Cultural Stereotypes in India: A Study from Sambalpur City

RESUMEN

El presente artículo está basado en un estudio realizado entre alumnos de octavo a noveno grado de las preparatorias Femenil Lady Lewis, Burdharaja y Town, en la ciudad de Sambalpur, India. Su objetivo consiste en examinar la carga laboral de las alumnas de preparatoria en su ambiente escolar y doméstico. La participación de padres y maestros de los alumnos estudiados evidencia diversos prejuicios de género ampliamente aceptados por la sociedad, revelando temores y desventajas que obligan a las estudiantes a jugar un papel secundario en un contexto sociocultural dominado por hombres; en el cual, bajo la excusa de que "las mujeres deben ser obedientes", son presionadas para realizar actividades adicionales en la escuela y en la casa. Ciertos estereotipos prevalecientes acerca de las mujeres limitan su libertad en el ámbito doméstico y externo; estas ataduras físicas y mentales, aunadas al temor, dan como resultado una actitud negativa. La dominación masculina es absoluta: los hombres controlan incluso la visión personal que las mujeres tienen de sí mis-

mas, lo que impide fortalecer sus talentos naturales.

Palabras clave: mujeres adolescentes, estereotipos culturales, discriminación, sociedad patriarcal, India.

ABSTRACT

The study was conducted among the school-going children of three different high schools, namely: Lady Lewis Girls' High School, Burdharaja High School and Town High School of Sambalpur city, India. Data were collected from students who were between 8th and 10th standards of the sample schools. As many as 80 students (total 240 students) were selected on a random basis from the attendance registers of each of the sample schools. Relevant information was gathered mostly by interview, observation and group discussion. The paper makes an attempt to explore the workload of the school-going girl students both in home and school environments. It analyses various cultural stereotypes on the girl-child which are widely accepted by the

* PG Department of Anthropology, Sambalpur Univesity, Jyoti Vihar, Orissa, India- 768 019
  rashmipramanik@yahoo.co.in

118

parents and teachers of the sample students. It brings to light various fear factors and disadvantages that force them to play a subservient role in the male-dominated surrounding. A female student is pressurized with both school task and other activities in school and at home with the plea "girls are obedient". There prevail certain cultural stereotypes about girl children, where there is regulated freedom both in domestic and outside sphere. The physical and mental strain coupled with a sense of fear creates a negative attitude. The male domination becomes complete when the men become masters of the inner space too. A girl-child is deprived of nourishing her natural talents. All barriers must therefore be eliminated to enable girls without exception to develop their full potential and skills through equal access to education and training, nutrition, physical and mental health care and related information.

Key Words: adolescent girl child, cultural sstereotypes, discrimination, patriarchal society, India.

India has witnessed advancements in all fields but bias against a girl-child is still prevailing in the country. Her world is filled with despair and she is left alone on a barren land searching for a warm touch, mother's love and father's lullaby. Discrimination against girl-children and threatens on their life remain a global phenomenon that may occur before birth and continue beyond childhood into adulthood. Girl-children are exposed to discrimination and violence in all settings, often in places where they should be protected, in their home, school, and immediate community. They are also often among the most vulnerable when familial, social or community structures collapse, such as when they are deprived of parental care or familial support, during humanitarian emergencies or armed conflicts. Traditions and rituals outline the survival of the girl-child in India. Patriarchal norms, low status of women and son idolism are the primary reasons that cause bias against the girl-child in India. The nation of mothers still follows a culture where people idolizes son and mourns daughters. UN figures out that about 750,000 girls are aborted every year in India. Abortion rates are increasing in almost 80 per cent of the India states, mainly Punjab and Haryana. These two States have the highest number of abortions every year. Every year 12 million girls are born in India; 25 per cent of them do not survive to see their fifteenth birthday. Age specific death rates reveal that up to the age of 35 years more females than males die at every age level (UNICEF, 1990).

In every culture, important practices exist which celebrate life-cycle transitions, perpetuates community cohesion, or transmits traditional values to subsequent generations. These traditions reflect norms of care and behavior

119

based on age, life stage, gender, and social class. While many traditions promote social cohesion and unity, others erode the physical and psychological health and integrity of individuals, particularly girls and women. Factors such as limited access to education, information, and services allow those that may be most harmful to persist. Girls are often treated as inferior and are socialized to put themselves last, thus undermining their self-esteem. Discrimination and neglect in childhood can initiate a lifelong downward spiral of deprivation and exclusion from the social mainstream. Adolescent girls may receive a variety of conflicting and confusing messages on their gender roles from their parents, teachers, peers and the media. Despite the existence of various constitutional safeguards and a National Policy for Children (1974) to support the girl-child, she is never recognized as a separate entity.

However, from the 1970s on, most feminist critics reject the genderless mind, finding that the "imagination" cannot evade the conscious or unconscious structures of gender. Gender, it could be said, is part of that culture-determination which Oates says serves as inspiration. Such a position emphasizes "the impossibility of separating the imagination from a socially, sexually, and historically positioned self". This movement of thought allowed for a feminist critique as critics attacked the meaning of sexual difference in a patriarchal society/ideology. Images of male-wrought representations of women (stereotypes and exclusions) came under fire, as was the "division, oppression, inequality, [and] interiorized inferiority for women". Catherine MacKinnon develops her theory of gender as a theory of sexuality. Very roughly: the social meaning of sex (gender) is created by sexual objectification of women whereby women are viewed and treated as objects for satisfying men's desires (MacKinnon, 1989: 113). Masculinity is defined as sexual dominance, femininity as sexual submissiveness: genders are "created through the eroticization of dominance and submission. The man/woman difference and the dominance/submission dynamic define each other. This is the social meaning of "sex" (MacKinnon, 1989: 113). In particular, we must make reference to the position one occupies in the sexualised dominance/submission dynamic: men occupy the sexually dominant position, women the sexually submissive one. As a result, genders are *by definition* hierarchical and this hierarchy is fundamentally tied to sexualised power relations. The notion of "gender equality", then, does not make sense to MacKinnon. If sexuality ceased to be a manifestation of dominance, hierarchical genders (that are defined *in terms* of sexuality) would cease to exist.

It is felt that within the "specie" children it is necessary to be gender conscious for better understanding of Indian social realities. The struggle for human rights in India in recent years has identified the girl-child as a priority target and brought forth into focus her rights and status. It also focuses the need of her integration into the mainstream of societal and national life. The girl-child has her rights. These rights stem from her status- a dependent, young individual who requires love, care, protection and guidance if she is to survive and develop. But there are differences between her needs and rights and even through her needs may be known and established, they are not necessarily assured by her rights (Devasia and Devasia, 1991: 1). There are numerous issues that call for new paradigms of action or strategic paradigm shifts. To mention a few: How can the role of the family be reoriented and strengthened in improving the status of the girl-child? How could public awareness of the value of the girl-child be increased and her status, self-image and self-esteem strengthened? How should families be made more conscious of the importance of better health care, nutrition and education for the girl-child? The problem of the girl-child is a long neglected area marked by deep rooted gender bias prevailing in the country which calls for immediate attention.

METHODOLOGY AND AREA OF STUDY

The study was conducted among the school-going children of three different State Government managed high schools, namely: Lady Lewis Girls' High School, Burdharaja High School and Town High School of Sambalpur city, Orissa. Data were collected from students who were between 8th and 10th standards of the sample schools. As many as 80 students (total 240 students) were selected on a random basis from the attendance registers of each of the sample schools. Of the 80 respondents from each school, 12 students from each school were tribal students. The respondents were selected from the class attendance registers by lottery method. Information was collected from the sample respondents on different aspects of their daily life, their early conditioning, the expected roles and obligations in the family, the attitude of their parents and teachers towards them, etc. The parents and the teachers of the primary respondents constituted the secondary respondents. Interview was taken from the 2/3rd of the total number of 18 teachers of the three sample schools. Information was collected from 32 parents (18 female and 14 male) of the total sample respondents.

121

At the initial stage the sample students were briefed the reason as to why and what sort of information would be collected from them. The basic objectives of our study were told to the sample students. The respondents were also encouraged to ask questions to clarify their doubts. They were given enough space to ventilate their own ideas and perceptions on different aspects of the study in a non-threatening environment. Care was taken to ensure that neither the teachers nor the parents were present when the respondent was interviewed. The teachers of the sample schools were made known about the significance and the need of conducting such a research. Information was collected from them about the education of the girl-child, parental attitude, sample children's performance, their performance in cultural activities, attendance, etc. in the school. Sample parents were asked about their views on the education of their daughter, the kind of household activities she undertakes at home, the nature of support she receives from her parents, etc. An attempt has been made here to analyze some broad features of the sample respondents and their families. It is important to know the family type of our respondents because the family environment helps or hinders the study atmosphere. From an analytical point of view the total number of families have classified into two types i.e. nuclear family (a family having parents and unmarried children) and an extended family (a family consisting of more than one nuclear family). Of the total sample students, more than half (i.e. 55%) are members of nuclear family and 45 per cent are from extended family background. An analysis has been made on the religious affiliation of the sample students. An overwhelming percentage of 83.33 per cent are Hindu students, 10.00 per cent are from Muslim and 6.67 per cent are from Christian religious background. Taking into account the monthly income of the parents, the economic conditions of the sample students have been categorized into three groups, i.e. low-income group, middle-income group and high-income group. The economic condition of the family mainly depends on the employment status of the parents. Of the 240 sample students, 76(31.67%) are from high-income bracket whereas the corresponding figures for middle-income group and low-income group are 98 (40.83%) and 66 (27.50%) respectively.

Relevant information is gathered with the help of three different sets of interview schedules. Of the three, one interview schedule is prepared for the sample students, another for their parents and the last one for the teachers. Both participant and non-participant observation methods are employed for

122

data collection. Besides these techniques, case study method is also used to supplement our analysis. Group discussion was also conducted among the female students and their teachers. The research is more qualitative than of a quantitative type. The voices of some respondents and parents have been recorded.

OBJECTIVES

Against this backdrop, the paper makes an attempt to:
• Explore the everyday experiences of the girl-child in school and home;

• Analyses various cultural stereotypes on the girl-child which are widely accepted by the parents and teachers of the sample students and

• Examine various factors that force the sample girl children to play subservient role both in home and community

SOCIAL LEARNING THEORIES

Social learning theorists hold a huge array of different influences that socialize us as women and men. This being the case, it is extremely difficult to counter gender socialization. For instance, parents often unconsciously treat their female and male children differently. When parents have been asked to describe their 24-*hour* old infants, they have done so using gender-stereotypic language: boys are described as strong, alert and coordinated and girls as tiny, soft and delicate. Parents' treatment of their infants further reflects these descriptions whether they are aware of this or not (Renzetti & Curran, 1992: 32). Some socialization is more overt: children are often dressed in gender stereotypical clothes and colors (boys are dressed in blue, girls in pink) and parents tend to buy their children gender stereotypical toys. They also (intentionally or not) tend to reinforce certain "appropriate" behaviors. While the precise form of gender socialization has changed since the onset of second-wave feminism, even today girls are discouraged from playing sports like football or from playing "rough and tumble" games and are more likely than boys to be given dolls or cooking toys to play with; boys are told not to "cry like a baby" and are more likely to be given masculine toys like trucks and guns (Kimmel, 2000: 122–126).

123

According to social learning theorists, children are also influenced by what they observe in the world around them. This again makes countering gender socialization difficult. For an instance, children's books have portrayed males and females in blatantly stereotypical ways: males as adventurers and leaders, and females as helpers and followers. One way to address gender stereotyping in children's books has been to portray females in independent roles and males as non-aggressive and nurturing (Renzetti & Curran 1992: 35). Some publishers have attempted an alternative approach by making their characters, for instance, gender-neutral animals or genderless imaginary creatures (like TV's Teletubbies). However, parents reading books with gender-neutral or genderless characters often undermine the publishers' efforts by reading them to their children in ways that depict the characters as either feminine or masculine.

There is an encouraging and a growing awareness among the concerned parents and teachers that harmful traditional values and practices act as root causes for discrimination and violence against girls. Some of them opined that the socializing processes observed for boys and girls are designed and rigorously applied to instill a feeling of superiority to boys while girls are groomed to accept subjugation and inferiority with apathy. Several studies both scientific and social attest the fact that value based discrimination is systemic and universal. The established patriarchal system has long endured the passage of time cutting across geographical boundaries as well as religious and class differences. While this unfortunate situation is universal the manifestations of expression of discrimination and the degrees of violence against girls vary from society to society. Discrimination against the girl-child occurs in every strata of society - rich or poor having different forms of manifestation, but is more visible especially in poverty stricken families or in families under financial stress. One of the crudest forms of discrimination is the one which takes place subtly and is sanctioned in the name of culture. A girl is made to fit in a culturally defined role –be it at home or outside. Traditions have portrayed girls as less important than boys, less deserving of basic quality of life. Some of these retrograde traditions have "become so deeply internalized that they have come to stand for what is 'right' and 'natural', and the girls themselves have frequently come to endorse their own second-class status". Such deliberate discrimination of the girl-child patently violates the right to equality and the right to life as guaranteed by the Constitution of India.

124

TEACHER'S ATTITUDE

Teachers must learn to recognize and eliminate gender bias, because it can limit students' ambitions and accomplishments. Sanders (2003) states he has tried to present a number of strategies that will help elementary teachers to reduce gender stereotypes in classrooms. The teachers not only restrict them within the classroom but also when they are outside the classroom, thus silencing their voices. It is also observed that not only the teachers exercise their domination but even the male students dominate over them. This leads them to a mental depression. Bidegain Ponte (2006) clearly points out that not all teachers are good mentors to girls. Both male and female teachers need special training and capacity building to develop patterns of support and understanding of the challenges girl children face in the school setting. Mentoring, which provides girls with positive role models who are slightly older than themselves, can have a lasting positive impact on girls' empowerment. It can serve as a welcome complement to formal schooling and provide girls with a free space to express themselves without feeling the pressure to succeed. Systematic gender discrimination disadvantages girls in the area of curriculum, in access to authority and role models since a disproportionate number of teachers and administrators are male, and more directly through harassment by male teachers and students (Smith, Bourne, & McCoy, 1998). According to Larkin (1994), adolescent girls become increasingly desensitized to pervasive harassment and abuse to the point where they persistently fail to identify verbal forms of abuse. The impact is to further minimize and conceal the everyday experiences of violence in the life of the girl-child. Vandana Shiva, Kester Kevin, and Jani Shreya (2007) lays emphasis on the role-play for empathy building and awareness of gender issues and human rights. He argues that increased representation of females' at all decision-making levels in national, regional and international institutions and mechanisms for the prevention, management and resolution of conflict.

Of the 240 sample students, 146 (60.83%) found their class-teacher non-cooperative by nature. Only 94 (39.17%) students thought the class-teacher to be co-operative. A higher percentage, i.e, 68.33 per cent of the female students had an opinion that their class-teacher was non-cooperative towards them.

It is observed that even during the game period or recess time when the students play in the playground, they do not like to play in front of some

125

TABLE 1

Sex	Behavior of Class Teacher		Total
	Cooperative	Non-cooperative	
Male	(46.67%) 56 (59.57%)	(53.33%) 64 (43.84%)	(100%) 120 (50%)
Female	(31.67%) 38 (40.43%)	(68.33%) 82 (56.16%)	(100%) 120 (50%)
Total	(39.17%) 94 (100%)	(60.83%) 146 (100%)	(100%) 240 (100%)

DISTRIBUTION OF SAMPLE STUDENTS IN TERMS OF OPINION ON THE BEHAVIOUR OF CLASS TEACHER AND SEX

particular teachers. The presence of those teachers frightens them. Some teachers in the sample schools have a natural tendency to dominate the students especially the female students. The female students are asked to carry our various tasks during the annual functions in the school. On special occasions like: Independence Day, Republic Day, *Saraswati Puja* and *Ganesh Puja*, they are specifically told to stay for longer hours in the school under the plea- "girls are obedient".

Feminist discourse might even have more pertinent impact on men than on women. Many women know they are oppressed by patriarchy. They have the life experiences of belonging to an oppressed group and have most likely shared personal stories that reveal their wounds from patriarchy. Men on the other hand are less likely to recognize their gender privilege and probably have not shared stories of wounding women through their own oppressive behaviors nor have they grieved with other men over the harm they have caused to women. Vulnerable, acquiescent behavior is not commonly accepted as manly in today's society. Nevertheless, it can be believed that real feminism is not just about hearing personal stories but also about changing the structure of gender relations and acting to eliminate all forms of patriarchy. Unfortunately, some segments of the men's movement, such as men's rights groups and followers of Robert Bly's myth poetic movement, seem less focused on dismantling patriarchy. Bell Hooks (1992) points out that «the production of a kind of masculinity that can be safely expressed within patriarchal boundaries. She further explains that the most frightening aspect of the contempo-

126

rary men's movement, particularly as it is expressed in popular culture, is the depoliticization of the struggle to end sexism and sexist oppression and the replacing of that struggle with a focus on personal self-actualization. She suggests that the men's movement should not be separate from the women's movement but instead become a segment under the larger feminist movement. In this way men would not be taking center stage in yet another part of women's lives allowing a slightly more subtle form of domination to continue.

PARENT'S ATTITUDE

In India inhuman and deliberate neglect of the girl-child has support of religious sanctions and traditional practices (Devasia and Devasia, 1991: 4).While the girls in India share many of their disabilities with other girls in the developed countries, their experience of discrimination is more extensive because of the traditional value system (Krishnamurthi, 1991: 41). Indian girl-children/women are the frogs in the well, constricted in their conduct by tradition. Female children are pestered with innumerable problems and victimized to social stigma in a rigid and traditional male-dominated society. It may not be an exaggeration to say that female children in India are the oppressed, abused, exploited and under privileged human beings on earth. A child when grows up is no longer a dependent child. The parents demand that she/he should act his/her age and try to confirm to adult standard of behaviour. They expect him/her to shoulder up some of the burdens at home. Parents value children's independent activity both as evidence that they are becoming capable, and to relieve the burden on themselves. Both children and their parents promote the view that children play an important part as agents in structuring and restructuring the home as a social institution. Children do not just belong to the family; they, to an extent, together with other family members, continuously create the family. They construct and refine relationships and social customs, and negotiate the division of labour within the home, settling conditionally for duties and freedoms and re-negotiating these over time. However, the involuntary participation of young children in household work and family occupations deprives them of "childhood" and it's many opportunities, including those for schooling, recreation and rest (Nayar, 1991: 37). The traditional balance of labour between women and men has been disturbed in India by significant levels of social change and as a result, the responsibilities shouldered by women far outweigh their current access to re-

127

sources. Men and women, boys and girls do not equally share the domestic burdens. This has weakened the capacity of women to fulfil the demands of their productive and community service roles. This has implications for their children and the well-being of society as a whole. The burden of women and girls is usually unappreciated, unrecognised and unrewarded. Hence, women and girls are most affected by poverty due to their numerous roles.

Busakor (2006) points out that the emerging statistics indicate that millions of school-age girls worldwide are working in domestic service, which is among the most invisible of female-dominated occupations. Some of the sample male students reported that they perform activities such as shopping, gardening and fetching portable water/milk. Most of the female students stated that they get themselves engaged in activities: like assisting in cooking, serving the food, sweeping, washing utensils, cleaning soiled clothes, attending to the guests, preparing the beds, watching the young ones. Looking after younger children of the family is a problem to all those families, which have dependent children. Working parents usually entrust the duty of looking after dependent children on the adolescent girls. Most of the sample students reported that they are somewhat dissatisfied with the assigned home duties. They feel themselves too young to shoulder up the responsibilities given to them by their parents. The female students find it difficult to combine studies, homework and the household responsibilities successfully and simultaneously. Goldscheider and Waite (1991: 96) observed the mothers, fathers and children from the same families. They argued for a reconceptualization of the division of labor as "three-cornered". Their investigation included an examination of which family members were typically responsible for specific household tasks.

A female student of class X states:

> I live in a joint family. My mother has a lot of familial obligations and domestic engagements. I feel pity seeing her doing hard work round the clock. She just works like a machine. On my own I try to assist her in shouldering some of the household responsibilities. Therefore, I do not get enough time to play with my friends.

The experience of Sangeeta unearths her role in the family management. Apart from her school and tuition hours, she spends a great deal of her time assisting her mother. Since she lives in a traditional joint family her mother is bound by many rules and obligations. Sometimes Sangeeta feels disgusted in

128

assisting her mother in domestic works. This robs Sangeeta away from her childhood.

A girl studying in class IX tells:

> There is always a rush of guests in my house. I do not remember of a single evening when guests have not crowded my house. Most of the time my mother calls me during my study hours to serve them with tea. In fact I feel disturbed as they talk so loudly.

The above reporting by Preeti shows the non-congenial study atmosphere at her house. It appears that there is arrival of many family friends and relatives in her house. It seems her parents have good social contact. The guests who come there talk to each other loudly forgetting that they create disturbance to Preeti. Many a times Preeti's mother calls her to attend to the guests. This further disturbs her concentration.

A separate room in the house is an essential requirement for a student in order to maintain the study hours. But this is practically not possible for many students in urban place like our study area where the city is over-congested and people stay in houses having limited rooms. Our study shows that as many as 60.83 per cent do not have their own study room and only 37.17 per cent have their own study room. With regards the family size, 81.82 per cent students from large-sized family do not have their own study room.

Gender differentiation is socially defined and continues from cradle to grave. The age old system of inequality and stereotyping of the role of women has resulted in the low valuation of a female child. She is tortured and trained only to be a subordinated to a male. There prevail certain cultural stereotypes about girl-children. There is regulated freedom in domestic and outside sphere. She is subjected to authority and control of not only the adult males but sometimes to that of even male children. Family structure and values function in such a way that those daughters grow up looking themselves as inferior and subservient. There are separate prescription and proscription with respect to girl's dress, habits, mannerism, mobility and social relations in their upbringing. Moral values like silence, sacrifice and sufferance are advocated for girls. Most of sample female students said that they were not allowed to move about freely after they attained puberty and even prior to puberty. They were expected to exercise extra-care while being with any other male members. On the other hand the male students do not undergo such type of restrictions and

129

TABLE 2

DISTRIBUTION OF SAMPLE STUDENTS IN TERMS OF PROVISION OF SEPARATE STUDY ROOM AND FAMILY SIZE

Family Size	Provision of Separate Study Room		Total
	Yes	No	
Small	(66.67%) 64 (68.09%)	(33.33%) 32 (21.92%)	(100%) 96 (40%)
Medium	(23.08%) 18 (19.15%)	(76.92%) 60 (41.1%)	(100%) 78 (32.5%)
Large	(18.18%) 12 (12.76%)	(81.82%) 54 (36.99%)	(100%) 66 (27.5%)
Total	(39.17%) 94 (100%)	(60.83%) 146 (100%)	(100%) 240 (100%)

are allowed to attend the coaching classes even till late hours. This psychological fear that is imbibed in them affects their mental conditions to a great extent. Girls perceive that boys are granted greater autonomy for deciding their movements, and are permitted to be more overtly aggressive.

Our study reflects the attitude of the parents towards their children. 36 (15%) students reported that their parents are very strict, of which one-forth are male and three-fourth are female. 63(26.25%) students opined that their parents are somewhat strict, of which 46.03 per cent are male and 53.97 per cent are female. 45 (18.75%) students stated that their parents attitude towards them is neutral of which 31.11 per cent are male and 68.89 per cent are female. 52 (21.67%) students stated that their parents are somewhat liberal towards them, of which 61.54 per cent are male and 38.46 per cent are female. The remaining 44 (18.33%) told that their parents are very much liberal, of which 81.82 per cent are male and 18.18 per cent are female.

Just as the girl-child is literally born into powerlessness, there are those who are simply born to power –or at least with a right of entry, or easier access, to power. Not only does culture determine individual identities and group affiliations, it is itself determined by the relationship between identities. In her relationships with other members of her society, the girl-child is culturally determined to be marginalized, vulnerable and powerless. This powerlessness not only includes her lack of the full enjoyment of rights and benefits available in her society, but also means that she is powerless to remedy or redress this lack. Adolescent girls are expected to be docile, modest, less talk-

130

TABLE 3

DISTRIBUTION OF SAMPLE STUDENTS IN TERMS OF THEIR SEX AND OPINION ON THE ATTITUDE OF PARENTS [N=240]

Attitude of parents	Sex		Total
	Male	Female	
Very much strict	(25%) 09 (7.5%)	(75%) 27 (22.5%)	(100%) 36 (15%)
Somewhat strict	(46.06%) 29 (24.17%)	(53.97%) 34 (28.33%)	(100%) 63 (26.25%)
Neutral	(31.11%) 14 (11.69%)	(68.89%) 31 (25.83%)	(100%) 45 (18.75%)
Very much liberal	(81.82%) 36 (30%)	(18.18%) 08 (6.67%)	(100%) 44 (18.33%)
Somewhat liberal	(61.54%) 32 (26.67%)	(38.46%) 20 (16.67%)	(100%) 52 (21.67%)
Total	(50%) 120 (100%)	(50%) 120 (100%)	(100%) 240 (100%)

ative and submissive. Traditionally speaking, most parents and teachers instil the orthodox and patriarchal ideas into the minds of the girl-children. It was quite surprising to listen from some female students that their family members restrain them from making their appearance in the drawing and sitting room. They were told that their place is the backyard and the kitchen. During the course of my interview, I questioned some students, as to why they took admission into an exclusively Girl's High school rather than a co-educational school. They replied that their parents were very suspicious about their interaction with male counterparts rather they viewed that a positive relationship between two sexes is quite impossible.

Sasmita's mother tells:

> I do not prefer to provide very high level of education for girls. That is why I do not encourage my daughter to go for any technical education. After completing her high school examination, it is important for her to concentrate more on household activities. Gaining expertise in this field would finally help her to be a good housewife/ mother-in-law/daughter-in-law.

131

The above statement highlights the negative attitude of some parents towards female education. Sasmita's mother feels that higher technical education for her daughter is meaningless. Those would be of no use after her marriage. Rather learning how to cook and other household activities will be of a great benefit to Sasmita in her in-law house. This type of thinking by Sasmita's mother may de-motivate her for higher studies.

DISCRIMINATION IN THE SOCIETY

Everyday violence in girls lives takes many of the same physical and psychological forms found in adult experiences. These include harassment, bullying, aggression, maltreatment, physical and emotional abuse. In the past few decades a new category has emerged relating to the impact of children witnessing violence (Jaffe, Wolfe, & Wilson, 1990), demonstrating that children can be victimized in direct and indirect ways. What all of these forms of violence have in common is that they serve to undermine the recipient's sense of self. The corrosive effect is enhanced by reinforcing a sense of powerlessness which limits functioning in both the private and public realms. Girl-children discrimination may damage them mentally, behaviorally and physically, the impact can result in both short and long-term consequences on the individual, on their family and on the community. The impact of discrimination is largely determined by the nature, duration, extent of the discrimination that affects them as well as by the relationship of the perpetrators to the victim and the behavior of the adults. It can affect their mental and physical health and development, impair their ability to learn and socialize. It can lead them to run away from home, exposing them to further risks. The differential access based on the psychological perceptions is more firms and a real threat. The factors herein include all such motives which tend to make a parent reluctant to send daughters to school. One of the glaring factors is the concern for the physical and moral safety of a girl child which makes parents unwilling to let them travel long distances to school each day. The concern may vary urban-rural wise as also the perceived crime rate in a given region.

Religion and socio-cultural factors such as those related to societal, economic, and familial roles of women strongly influence parents choice due to heavy costs imposed on nonconformist behavior. This may have strong influence on schooling decision. Parents may tend to search for a school where only girls are admitted and also the one where women teachers are employed.

132

The concern rises when girls reach puberty. Parents may consider education itself a negative factor whether better-educated women make good wives. Education beyond the level of literacy for girls may be perceived as a threat for their possibilities for marriage. There are perceptions running through society that higher educated women may not prove to be good housewives. Therefore, as the work opportunities for women are increasing and more and more women are joining the mainstream, a constant tension is built up within families between adherence to social norms and its desire to benefit from the changing condition.

The root causes for discrimination are complex and reflect diverse political, economical, social, cultural and religious practices. It may include:

• Traditions and cultural values influenced by "son preference";
• Social silence about domestic violence, household abuse, and submission of a woman to the will of her husband and relatives;
• Social /community support for early disposal;
• Vulnerability relating to the social/community/cultural identity of the girl-child;
• Lack of enabling education and socialization of girls.

The surrounding culture and social context are what define the girl-child. Generally, those responsible for the creation and promotion of culture and social context do not share the same identity as the girl-child. The fact that so many aspects of her identity are determined for her by others or dictated by cultural norms and ideologies that she will never participate in creating or amending, indicates the girl-child's position of powerlessness and vulnerability. The girl-child, as compared with other members of her society, is marginalized. This marginalization renders her "less than", and very often she internalizes this social construction of herself as "unequal", and that is how she comes to develop in the world. This marginalized status of the girl-child will be how she comes to be identified. This identity is solidified and carried on throughout womanhood.

Adolescents, estimated for the age group 10-19 years constitute 22.8 per cent of India's population as on March 2000 according to the Planning Commission's population projections (Government of India. Planning Commission, 2001). Adolescent means "to emerge" or "achieve identity" like other stages of development. It is defined as a phase of life characterized by rapid

physical growth and development, physical, social and psychological changes and maturity, sexual maturity, experimentation, development of adult mental processes and a move from the earlier childhood socio-economic dependence towards relative independence. The period of adolescent is transient, characterized by typical trials and tribulations. Over the next two decades the number of adolescents as well as their share as a proportion of to the total population will be large because of the high fertility rate in the eighties and the population momentum in the nineties. They represent the future of the country and their predicaments cannot be easily overlooked. Within the paradigm of population and development related issues, the role of adolescents in general and adolescent girls in particular cannot be overlooked.

There is an Old Chinese Proverb- "Ten fine girls are not equal to one crippled boy". At the root of many of the traditional practices that prey on the marginalization and vulnerability of the girl-child is the belief that girls are not as valuable as boys. Until a new belief of the true, inherent equality of all is incorporated into the ideologies of all societies and cultures, there is very little hope for the girl-child. Practices such as "female excision, bride burning, female infanticide, sex slavery and tourism, and servile marriage all affect the female child because she is female and because she is a child - both of which are characteristics which virtually ensure positions of vulnerability in many societies".

TRADITIONS AND CULTURE

134

Girl-children are treated as species of lower and secondary importance as compared to boys. They are the last to be enrolled in the school and first to be withdrawn, if any contingency or crisis situation occurs in the family (Balakrishma, 1994: 28). Higher education is practically meant for boys and rarely for girls. It is clear from the study that even today girls do not have equal educational opportunities and there is widespread social prejudice against their education. The educational system in India has expanded enormously but the problems of girls still persist. The ultimate aim of the parents is to see their daughter married off. The parents feel that the school curriculum does not help a girl-child in her future life. So girls do not need schooling at all. It is generally felt because of culture and gender bias that girls have little intelligence and their place is in the home and not the outside world. The findings of a empirical study conducted by Agrawal (1992) tend to confirm

the reality that a heavy work load on the mother means that the daughter cannot get education even when access to a school is easy. However, despite the existence of minimum standards, culture and social context often operate to diminish these international standards.

The lack of rights and rights protection afforded the girl-child is a universal phenomenon; and where human rights denial begins in girlhood and becomes part of the identity of the girl-child, it follows that this identity of denial and marginalization remains part of the identity as the girl-child enters womanhood. This is why the focus on the rights of the girl-child should be a primary consideration. Nations cannot pride themselves on being respectful and supportive of human rights while a substantial portion of their populations languish at the margins of full human rights development. The most vulnerable amongst the population at the margins is the girl-child. Although girls grow into women, their position at the margins, relative to everyone else, does not change; they just get older. Even where slight attention is paid to those on the margins, the focus is usually on adult females, and the girl-child is left to linger on the outer fringes. This relegation of females (girls and women) to the margins or fringes of society identifies them as being outside the sphere of power. The realm of power prevails not just over the economic, social and cultural aspects of society, but also specifically over human rights. Not only Indian girls are socially unequipped to question the injustice done to them, but in the absence of models of role and conduct, they actually propagate dominant social and cultural values which are against their interests (Verma and Mehta, 1995). Born into indifference and reared on neglect the girl-child is caught in a web of cultural stereotypes and practices that divests her of her individuality and moulds her into a submissive, self-sacrificing child.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Socialization of the girl child in India seems to have followed a set pattern where she has been trapped and moulded by deep-rooted combined cultures of patriarchy and hierarchy. Women as such can be dubbed as a population at risk because of their limited access to resources and opportunities and their systematic exclusion from the position of decision making. What is more important is that the process of exclusion tends to start at the very grass root, at the family level. Herein a girl child is subjected to kind of languages and practices which patronizes exclusion of various nature at variety of levels.

135

Gender injustice is among the world's greatest challenges. It drives so many other ills and affects more than half the world. Even though the international community has made measurable progress in recent years with regard to gender equality, we still have a long way to go to create gender justice. A viable implementation and enforcement framework of existing laws and international conventions is still needed. Women and men need to work together with children and youth to break down persistent gender stereotypes. Gendered personalities are supposedly manifested in common gender stereotypical behavior. Take emotional dependency. Women are stereotypically more emotional and emotionally dependent upon others around them, supposedly finding it difficult to distinguish their own interests and wellbeing from the interests and wellbeing of their children and partners. This is said to be because of their blurry and (somewhat) confused ego boundaries: women find it hard to distinguish their own needs from the needs of those around them because they cannot sufficiently individuate themselves from those close to them. By contrast, men are stereotypically emotionally detached, preferring a career where dispassionate and distanced thinking are virtues. These traits are said to result from men's well-defined ego boundaries that enable them to prioritise their own needs and interests sometimes at the expense of others' needs and interests. Chodorow thinks that these gender differences should and can be changed. Feminine and masculine personalities play a crucial role in women's oppression since they make females overly attentive to the needs of others and males emotionally deficient. In order to correct the situation, both male and female parents should be equally involved in parenting (Chodorow, 1995: 214). This would help in ensuring that children develop sufficiently individuated senses of selves without becoming overly detached, which in turn helps to eradicate common gender stereotypical behaviours.

Study after study shows the positive impact of gender equality on sustainable development and on the well-being of children. As the former UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, stressed, "When women are healthy, educated and free to take the opportunities life affords them, children thrive and countries flourish, reaping a double dividend for women and children." It is important to initiate such research, because however much we may bewail the failure of the constitutional and legislative support systems to provide protection to the girl-child, the harsh reality is that unless change occurs in society's own centuries old gender-discriminatory cultural attitudes and biases no governmental action can succeed by itself. It will be possible through the means of such

research to experiment with and test in live field conditions different approaches, in full collaboration with the community and families at large, so as to derive from the experience thereof actionable lessons on the most practical and efficacious means to alleviate these vexatious problems.

From the findings it is abundantly clear that efforts at gender equality and gender justice must start with equality for the girl-child. All barriers must therefore be eliminated to enable girls without exception to develop their full potential and skills through equal access to education and training, nutrition, physical and mental health care and related information. The patriarchal form of Indian society has sanctified the persona of the boy or man as being of greater importance than that of the girl. That makes it all the more imperative to provide extra protection and support to ensure that girls' rights are acknowledged and protected and that the best interests of the girl-child must be the primary consideration in all decisions or actions that affect the child or children as a group. Our study reveals that most of the parents do not feel secure to send their adolescent girls to the school due to the unexpected situations. Sometimes daily newspapers publish so sensitive news that people are seized with panic all over the country especially in metropolitan cities and in other major urban areas of the country. It has been observed that these problems happen mainly among due to their immature physical and mental state and so the intending criminal take chance for doing that. The school-going girls are one of the important portions of these sufferers. These problems have a negative impact on the soft natured innocent girls which hampers their study immensely.

Indian girls are born carrying the burden of a cultural history of subordination and patriarchy. We live in a gender asymmetric society. It is difficult to do away with gender bias. The male domination becomes complete when the men become masters of the inner space too. A girl-child is deprived of nourishing her natural talents. Unless and until, there is consistent and conscious struggle of religion, custom and tradition, we cannot hope to achieve an uniform civil code which would really incorporate the principles of equality, justice and human dignity. The time is long overdue for the girl-child in India to be given her share of human dignity and opportunity. What is now required is a nationwide grass root level campaign to educate and awaken the people about the rights and role of girl-children. Our search for brave new efforts to give the girl-child her due to allow her to evolve to her potential involves a process of social mobilization that will make her everyone's concern: the me-

dia, the family, the community, the government and voluntary agencies. This approach will not only empower the girl-child in India to enter the mainstream of economic and social activities but also help her to walk out of neglect in which she has been lost for centuries.

REFERENCES

Agrawal, Anil (1992), "Who Will Help Her Learn? To Keep the Girl-child in School, the Environment Must be Improved", in *Down to Earth*, November 15, pp. 22-23, New Delhi: Centre for Science and Environment.

Balakrishna, Rajiv (1994), "The Sociological Context of Girls' Schooling", in *Social Action*, num. 44, pp. 27-37, New Delhi: Indian Social Institute.

Bidegain Ponte, Nicole (2006), *Girl Child Empowerment: A Challenge for All*, expert paper prepared for the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women, in collaboratin with UNICEF Expert Group Meeting on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination and Violence Against the Girl Child, September 25-28, Florence, Italy: UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre.

Busakorn, Suriyasarn (2006), *From the Kitchen to the Classroom: Call for Political Commitment and Empowerment to Get Girls Out of Domestic Labour and Into School*, expert paper prepared to the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women in collaboration with UNICEF Expert Group Meeting on Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination and Violence Against the Girl Child, September 25-28, Florence, Italy: UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre.

Chodorow, Nancy (1995), "Family Structure and Feminine Personality", in Nancy Tuana and Rosemarie Tong (Eds.), Feminism and Philosophy, Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Devasia, Leelamma and V. V. Devasia (1991), *Girl-child in India*, New Delhi: Ashish Publishing House.

Frawley, Timothy (2003), "Gender Bias in the Classroom: Current Controversies and Implications for Teachers", in *Early Childhood Education Journal*, num. 81, pp. 32-47, New York: Springer.

Goldscheider, Frances K. and Linda J. Waite (1991), *New Families, No Families?*, Berkeley: University of California Press.

Government of India (1974), *National Policy for Children*, Department of Social Welfare, New Delhi, India.

Government of India. Planning Commission (2001), *Report of the Working Group on Adolescents for the Tenth Five-year Plan*, August, New Delhi: Planning Commission.

Hooks, Bell (1992), *Men in Feminist Struggle the Necessary Movement, in Women Respond to the Men's Movement*, Leigh Hagan (Ed.), San Francisco: Harper.

Jaffe, Peter, Davis A. Wolfe and Susan K. Wilson (1990), *Children of Battered Women*, Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Kimmel, Michael S. (2000), The Gendered Society, New York: OUP.

Krishnamurthi, Latha (1991), "Human Rights of the Girl-child", in Leelamma Devasia and V. V. Devasia (Eds.), *Girl-child in India*, New Delhi: Ashish Publishing House.

Larkin, June (1994), *Sexual Harassment: High School Girls Speak Out*, Toronto: Second Story Press.

MacKinnon, Catharine A. (1989), Toward a Feminist Theory of State, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Nayar, Usha Sidana (1991), "Labour of the Indian Girl-child: Multi-curse, Multi-abuse and Multi-neglect", in *The Indian Journal of Social Work*, LII, vol. 1, num. 37, Mumbai, India: Tata Institute of Social Sciences.

Renzetti, Claire and Daniel J. Curran (1992), "Sex-role Socialization", in Janet Kourany, James P. Sterba and Rosemary Tong (Eds.), Feminist Philosophies, New Jersey: Prentice Hall.

138

Sanders, J. (2003), "Teaching gender equity in teacher education", in *Education Digest*, vol. 68, núm. 5, pp. 25-29.

Smith, Dorothy, Paula Bourne and Liza McCoy (1998), "Girls and Schooling: Their Own Critique", in *Resources for Feminist Research*, vol. 26, num. 1 y 2, pp. 55-68: Ontario: Centre for Women's Studies in Education at the Ontario - Institute for Studies in Education. University of Toronto.

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) (1990), *SAARC Year of the Girl-child*, New Delhi: UNICEF.

Vandana, Shiva, Kester Kevin and Jani Shreya (2007), *The Young Ecologist Initiative: Water Manual, Lesson Plans for Building Earth Democracy*, New Delhi: Navdanya.

Verma, S. and Manmeet Meheta (1995), "Resilience and Dignity of the Street Girl-child: Some Profiles", in Vijaya R. Dhoundiyal *et al.* (Eds.), *The Indian Girls*, Almora: Sri Almora.

139