

Girl Child in India : A Profile

The Child

According to Indian Constitution Child is a person who has not complete his / her 15 years of age (Legislation of India 1979). According to child labour Prohibition and Regulation Act 1986 Child means a person who has completed his 14 years of age. The concept of Child relegated by United Nation Convention on the Rights of the Child (1990) seems to be informed inspired and permeated with human model of the concept of 'Man'; The Child has been recognised as a person. Indian National Policy for Children (1974) declared children as the 'Supremely important assets' of a nation. By 1901 World population was about 4500 million of which 1500 million were aged below 14 years. By the year 2000 this will expected to be 500 million more. In each year about 120 million infants are born, the great majority of whom live in developing countries. 1981 census of Indian numbered 265 million population below the age of 15 years which is estimated to grow by 15 million in 1991. About 37 percent of Indian population is consisting of children (year book 1997).

The Girl Child

Under the United Nation Convention a Child means every human being below the age of 18 years. The Girl Child means the Child having female sex. In case of girl: after birth childhood continues upto 5 years, her school age continues from 6 years and adolescence from 13 to 18 years. According to Family Law and Child Marriage Resistant Act 1929 Child means a person who is a male has not completed 21 years of age and if a female, has not completed 18 years of age.

Because of environmental and cultural reasons in our country girls attain puberty much before 18 years. In many societies there is a system of early marriage. The early marriage is followed by early pregnancy, loss of childhood, withdrawal from school, mental tension and anxiety. Thus inspite of she being a child with full growth, she gives birth to children, remains busy in child rearing and home / family managing before attaining 18 years.

Therefore in many legislation the identifying age of a girl child is kept at or below 14 years. (Sour : 1994)

Early childhood is an important and delicate period for an individual growth. Development deficiencies during this stage lead to permanent reterdation in physical and mental growth. Gender discrimination is one of the most all pervading forms of institutionalised deprivation. Like many other Asian countries, in India girls are under the grip of such discrimination.

Traditional Notion Regarding Girl Child in Indian Society

The Gender bias is deep-rooted in our culture because of political, historical, religious, social, psychological and economic factors (Chowdhury 1995). Being based on our religious scriptures, early poetry and sayings it is so deep rooted in our ancient culture that it is very difficult to remove this biasness. Traditionally Indian Society idolizes son, an obsession that cut across all differences. Sons are considered ritually and economically desirable and ensure the continuation of the lineage and the family name. They are essential not only to light the funeral pyres of their parents in order to release their soul from the bondage of the bodies but also become the economic support of the parents in their old age. On the other hand, from the day of their birth the girls are looking upon more of a burden and liability and is likely to be given a meager share of family affection and resources out of the belief that the investment make on her brings no return instead, when she gets married a sizeable dowry has to be given to her which is considered to be a draining of family resources. The discrimination is manifested in denial or ignoring her educational, health, nutritional and recreational needs. She gets rather a different treatment by her own family. Family structures and social values function in such a way that girls grew up looking upon themselves inferior and subservient entitled too much less of every thing than sons. Girls are socialized from the very beginning to accept the situation and the ideology of male supremacy which makes them prey to a whole range of discriminating practice. Customs, rituals and traditional practices frequently makes a girl the 'lesser child' who is denied optimal opportunities and means required for growth and development during various stages of childhood. The duality of values that operates in the patriarchal family is internalized at an early age as a natural inevitable part of life. Infact a girl of 10 years espouses and propagates cultural values which initiate against the interest of the female gender make her 'a prisoner of her gender'. In the earlier part of this decade

gender bias was reflected in female infanticide, gloom over girl baby's birth, lack of health, nutritional, educational and recreational facilities for girls. The modern medical science has played havoc with the status of girl child by detecting the sex of a foetus by ultrasonography and abortion of the foetus if its sex is not the spouses' choice which is in most of the cases a female foetus. 'Sati' and 'Devdasi' system are also part of this malady.

Gender - A Social Distinction

In any society role, responsibility, interaction and distribution of resources are made on the basis of decisions which are embedded in the cultural values. Gender distinctions thus manifest complex interaction of economic, social, cultural, ideological and historical circumstances. There is a difference between 'Sex' and 'Gender'. 'Sex' being a physical and biological distinction while gender is social and cultural distinction. Gender is an analytic category and is created social structure, and is a system of relationship rather than a set of attributes which distinguish male and female (Krishna 1990, Sharma 1995).

Gender is a socio-culturally determined identity of male (man) and female (woman). It is a process of acquisition of quality, attribute, behaviour pattern roles through sociolization by which biocategory (identification) of man and woman is done. The Gender and Patriarchy, to be seen in totality in understanding and analysing girl child's and woman's subordination. (PRIA : 1993).

Patriarchy and Gender Bias

The term 'Patriarchy' essentially means the rule of father or the patriarch (a male member of the household or society). The patriarchal control expressed through control over women's' productive power, control over women's' reproduction and sexuality, control over economic and material resources and control over decision making in all aspects of women's' living. The patriarchal kinship system has lead to the concentration of decision making power on the hands of male. Oppression of female gender are highly prevalent in such societies. Where as where kinship patterns are Matriarchal the position of girls and women are found to be much better than the previous one. (PRIA : 1993).

Gender Bias - A View Point

In a traditional patriarchal society a girl's birth is generally not well come. One could see a glumface in the arrival of a female baby. There are several factors responsible for this which has been historical too. Gender marginalization is now accepted not only as theoretical concern but enough empirical evidence are available to substantiate a strong presence of gender discrimination, oppression and subordination in all societies whether developed or developing or underdeveloped. There are three view points to explain such universal tendencies.

The first position is known after a Historical Materialistic School (Marxian). It attributes changes in desirable direction in the condition of women (and also men), if the relation of production are in favour of the labouring masses i.e. a proletarian class. Implicit in this notion are the ideas of power, dominance and also egalitarian mode of ownership and distribution of the material resources. It is believed that if that happens the gender issue will get automatically resolved. Their strategies for alterations in the gender situation are mainly oriented towards organisation of toiling masses on class lines for class struggle for a change in the system of property relations.

The second position is known as a collective product of Cultural School (Structural) and their adherents are known as Culturologists. This school put heavy premium on the ideals or ideational parameters while explaining existence of gender bias. Questions of patriarchy and sexism is generally occupy a centre stage in their mode of analysis. This school of thought consider that some aspects of culture i.e. carriers of ideas and social practices are injurious to the interest of women and girl child in the society. They usually argue in favour of attack on the ideological heritages which they consider responsible perpetuating gender abuse and subordination.

The third position is known after the contribution of the Feminist Scholarship. Girl Child as a special cognitive and empirical category has emerged on the scene only recently i.e. during last two decades. This has arise after some exploration and struggle around gender issues. Credit for this out come particularly go to feminist intellectuals and feminist movements which has helped to provoke and also promote a generalized consciousness on about girl's and woman's social status in contemporary world. (Punaleker: 1995).

Girl Child in Indian Society - The Present Scenario

One quarter of Indian population approximately comprises girls upto the age of 19 years. The total number of teen population (girls) 0-19 yrs. of age are 190.8 million (1981) in India.

Table 2.1:The Girl Child Population in different Age Groups in India(1951-1981).

(Fig. in 1000)

Census/Age Gr. Year	0-4	5-9	10-14	0-14 Years
1951	23706	22350	19511	65617
	13.66a	12.88	11.27	37.81
	6.64b	6.26	5.48	18.39
1961	32875	31555	22992	87422
	15.47	14.85	10.82	41.14
	7.50	7.19	5.24	19.94
1971	38686	39791	31891	110368
	14.65	15.07	12.07	41.17
	7.05	7.25	5.81	20.13
1981	41346	45382	40488	127216
	12.87	14.12	12.59	39.58
	6.21	6.82	6.08	19.12
1991	77119	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.
	17.87			
	8.6			

Source : Census of India 1981.

Note : a % of total female population,

b % of total population.

N.A not available.

The Girl child population aged 0-4, 5-9 and 10-14 years has increased from 27.7 million to 41.3 million, from 22.3 million to 45.4 million and from 29.5 million to 40.4 million respectively from 1951 to 1981. In 1991, the girl child population of the age group 0-4 is approximately between 52-55 million. Absolute population of girl child at the age group almost become double. The girls below the age group 14 year constitute 40 percent of all women and 19 percent of total population.

Sex ratio, i.e. the number of males per 1000 females in the relevant population, is a basic measure used in the study of sex composition.

Table 2.2.: Sex Ratio by Age Group in India (1951-1991)

Year	Sex Ratio by Age group				
	0-4	5-9	10-14	0-14 yrs	All age group
1951	1008	1033	1100	1045	1057
1961	1008	1047	1141	1057	1063
1971	1022	1061	1131	1067	1075
1981	1044	1061	1097	1066	1071
1991	1063	NA	NA	NA	NA

Source : Census of India 1981

N.A..Not Available.

The level of sex ratio shown in the table indicates that at every stage of childhood the boys outnumber the girls. These ratios show a continuing increase with the increase in age and this is true for almost all the census years. Also in the age group 10-14 years the sex ratio has been highly unfavourable for female in all the years. Male predominance at birth is one of the reasons for excess of male over female in all the age groups. Reduction of mortality rates has not been same for both the sexes which has been reduced more in males than females. A steep decline in the sex ratio of the age group 0-6 yrs. is seen in recent years. It has been that the sex ratio is declining even after birth.

It is expected that the improving health care system in our country should contribute to a more favourable condition for girl child. The only factor of the negative situation is the bias in favour of the male child. Every year about 15 million girls are born in our country. Despite of being biologically stronger than boys almost 1/4th of them do not see their 15th birthday. A long standing custom of some of the Asian countries along with India of allowing girl child to die soon after birth either by neglect or by outright infanticide appears to be common in recent years with the help of some crude methods or with the help of the advanced technology of parental testing allow the spouses to abort the foetus if its sex is not of their liking.

Children depend entirely upon the adults for access to resources such as food, health care, and education. Child survival is intimately linked factors like maternal education, maternal age at birth expenditure on health education so on and so forth. In an unfair world, the girl child in poverty stricken household

is twice disadvantaged. She contents with not merely deprivation due to poverty but also discrimination on the basis of gender. Her survival is threatened right from conception on wards in our country where female foeticide and infanticide continue to be widely prevalent.

Health Status of Girl Child

Discriminatory feeding practices for girls start early in life. Studies show that girls child is likely to be breast fed less and shorter period than boys due to the anxiety of giving birth of boy child soon after the girl. Girls are also given food of lower calorie values and in smaller in amounts while rich foods are preserved for boys. 13-15 years old girls consume less than 2/3rd of the recommended calorie intake. They are also weaned earlier. Many more girls are severely malnourished as compared to boys. As far as health is concerned, girls have significantly higher rate of acute respiratory infection, iron deficiencies as compared to their male counterpart. They also receive significantly less response to illness interms of hospital care and medicines or attain immunization. Almost 300,000 more girls die annually. It has been estimated that every sixth female death is specifically due to gender discrimination. Every year 12 million girls are born in India. 25 percent girls born do not survive till 15 years being biologically stronger than the boys. Of this 1/3rd death takes place in the first year.

Death rate percent^{age} of males in 0-4 years is 22.7 while it is 24.8 in case of their female counterpart. In 5-14 years percentage of death rate is 1.6 in males and 2.0 in females. (Ghosh 1995).

Table 2.3.: Infant Mortality Rates (IMR) by Sex - All India (1971-1988)

Year	Male	Female
1971	129	129
1972	132	148
1977	126	135
1979	119	121
1981	110	111
1983	105	105
1985	96	98
1987	95	96
1988	95	93

Source : Govt. of India, Family Welfare Year Book 1990-91.

Table 2.4.: Age Sex specific Death Rate - All India (1978-1988)

Age/ Year Gr.	1978		1988	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
0-4	44.7	52.1	31.8	34.9
5-9	3.7	4.7	3.0	3.4
10-14	2.0	2.0	1.4	1.7

Source : Registrar Gen. of India, Sample Regt. System, Govt. of India.

The IMR has been improved in India since 1971 onwards due to provision of public health facilities. In 1971 Male and Female IMR was same while the female IMR is higher from 1972-1987. From the age specific child mortality rate it is also clear that the IMR among the female was higher but now coming close. It is 92:90 in 1981. Age specific death rate for girl child upto 14 years came down from 12.7 to 10.1. The poor situation prevails due to the inferior status accord to Indian women at home and in society.

Malnutrition in young girls trigger a vicious cycle of undernutrition which spans into adulthood and passes into the next generation. An unhealthy girl child grows up as an unhealthy mother who gives birth to unhealthy babies. Her own poor health and stunted growth results in greater chances of pregnancy related complication that often cause death. Maternal mortality rate in India is also high. All these contribute to growing population of underprivileged people caught in vicious cycle of less than optimal growth, ill health and poverty.

Girl Child Marriage

Child marriage can be defined as those marriage which are solemnized below the age of 14 years.

The sociocultural milliea of India has a long favoured universality of marriage for women. Girls failed to full growth potential get married early, run considerable risk of obstetric complications and give birth to low weight babies. 60 percent of Indian girls get married after attending puberty. An average 10-17 percent of the Indian mothers are of the age group of 15-19 years. 13 percent of female death before the age of 24 years are due to complications of pregnancy and child birth.

Table 2.5.: Proportion of Married (10-14 years). Adjusted Mean Age at Marriage (MAM) of Female in India (1951-1981).

Year	Proportion of Ever married	MAM
1951	17.3	15.59
1961	19.5	15.86
1971	11.6	17.16
1981	6.7	18.32

Source : Social Change June-Sept 25, 1995.

In the recent years the rate of early marriage is decreased. The following table give a picture which shows some sign of hope. The mean age at marriage has also been raised from 15.59 (1961) to 18.32 years (1981) to 19.5 year (1991).

Table 2.6.: Age at Marriage (Rural and Urban) 1961-1981 (in percentage)

Year	Age Group			
	10-14		15-19	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
1961	22	6.8	73.7	51.6
1981	7.7	2.4	48.8	28.1

Source : Census of India 1981.

Educational Status of Girl Child

Educational backwardness of the women and girls has been both the cause and result of their low status and subjected position in the society. Educational status of the girl child in India are very low and enrolment in school especially in secondary and higher level is very few. In rural areas fewer girls are attending school than their urban counterpart. Incidents of drop out and stragnation is nearly twice among the girls than the boys. This rate is higher among the rural girls. The main reasons for girls non enrolment in school or premature discontinuation of education are their early assumption of domestic responsibilities, conservative cultural rules, fears of their security etc.

Table 2.7.: The School Enrolment by Stages/Classes for Boys and Girls (1960-1991).

Year	Primary (I-V)			Middle (VI-VIII)			High/Higher Secondary (IX-XII)		
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girl	Total
1960-61	23.6	11.4	35.0	5.1	1.6	6.7	2.7	0.7	3.4
1970-71	35.7	21.3	57.0	9.4	3.9	13.3	4.9	1.7	6.6
1980-81	45.3	28.5	73.8	13.8	6.8	20.7	7.6	3.2	10.8
1990-91	51.1	41.0	99.1	20.9	12.4	33.3	14.0	6.9	20.9

Source : Selected Educational Statistics, M/O H.R.D.

The growth rate of girls enrolment is higher than that of the boys which is indeed a good sign but disparities still remain which should be overcome.

Table 2.8: Age specific Literacy Rate by Sex (1961-1991).

Year	Age Group					
	5-9		10-14		All yrs.	
	Male	Female	Male	Femal	Male	Female
1961	24.8	14.2	54.4	28.3	-	-
1971	27.8	18.9	60.1	38.2	-	-
1981	35.1	25.8	66.9	44.8	56.37	29.75
1991	-	-	-	-	63.36	39.42

Source : Census of India 1991; Provisional Population Total office Registrar General, Govt. of India.
- Not Available

Table 2.9.: Percentages of Children Attending School by Age Group (1981).

Age Group	Male	Female
5-9	44.33	32.21
10-14	62.07	37.41

Source : Census of India 1981; Office of Registrar Gen. GOI.

From the tables it is observed that the literacy rate of both the male and female has increased during 1961-1981. The emerging feature of the recent census is that gap between male & female literacy level is narrowing down mainly due to the growth in female literacy is relatively faster than the growth rate of male literacy rate and this is a good sign indeed. Among the age

groups 10-14 years it has been found that 62.07 percent boys attend school while only 37.47 percent girls can continue their education in 10-14 years of age group. According to 1991 census girls literacy rate was 39.42 as against 63.66 percent of boys.

The factors that contribute against the girl's education are the traditional concept against it, unfavourable learning condition, absence of trained female teacher, lack of community awareness about girl's education, burden of domestic works on her, early marriage, irrelevant curriculum for income generation etc. Even in nonformal educational centres girls form only 1/3rd of the total enrolment.

Girl Child and Employment

Girls work in large number and for long hours both at home and outside the household. But their work is unacknowledged.

Table 2.10.: Work Participation Rate for Main Workers (10-14^{yrs}) by Sex (1971-1981).

Year	Male	Female
1971	6.65	2.63
1981	5.48	3.95

Source : Census of India 1981.

The work of girls is usually 'invisible' because it is located in the domestic sphere in household in home industry and as a rule household tasks defy quantification and monetary valuation. They also work in a variety of low wage and low status occupations and casual works mostly in unorganised sectors. Child labour is a social evil in India where 13.6 million child (1981 census) are engaged as labour in various fields. Between 1971 to 1981 the percentage of employed girls increased while overall that for boys declined. On the whole 20 percent of the female workers are under 20 years of age. There is a link between high female work participation in an early age and high rates in dropout of girls from school which is also related to high rate (84 percent) of illiteracy of female workers resulted to their concentration in low paid unskilled jobs. In spite of their increased contribution to work their efforts on joint front i.e. home and outside are not duly recognised even by the parents who are reported apathetic to the demand of girl child. Thus

situation of girl child labour is quite discouraging which further reduces the educational and development opportunities for girls.

Socialization of Girl Child

Gender discrimination of the girl child since birth heightened with the advent of puberty. The young girl suddenly become vulnerable, numerous restrictions are imposed on her as far as her movement and behaviour are concerned. There is an intense preparation in the socialization process for her to take roles as the wife and the mother.

Girl Child Abuse in India

The Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment act PC 94-247, 1974 defines child abuse as 'the physical or mental injury, sexual abuse, negligent treatment of a child under circumstances which indicate that the child's health or welfare is harmed or threatened there by.' These abuse will include not only the physical violence and exploitation but will also include verbal, psychological, emotional, mental, social, economic and sexual abuse, exploitation and ill-treatment, deprivation and neglect of the girl child. The deprivation include depriving her of the love and care concern.

Abuse in the form of female foeticide is a very common phenomena in modern times, which abuses the girl child's right to take birth by using the latest advance modern medical tests like ultrasonography for the detection of the sex of the foetus and abort it if its sex is not of the parent's choice. Female infanticide is another heinous practice, mainly seen in the poverty sicken villages, often having ritualistic camouflaged, where killing of a child under one year of age is done by her parents or others, on whom her care is entrusted.

Girls right education is violated and abused by discriminatory treatment mainly in poverty sicken villages. Very often she is not allowed to attend school while her brothers attend school with less intelligency. The girl child's very right to be a child and to enjoy her childhood is denied to her with the burden of too much household activities and sibling care. Apart from this in some poverty sicken families she is to work in fields, factories in construction works in hazardous occupations, and often as full-time or part-time domestic help. She is exploited at her work place often sexually abused by her employer. All these deny her participation in games, leisures which are essential for her healthy development.

Marriage at the tender age is another form of girl child abuse when a girl being physically and psychologically ill prepared has to undergo the various kinds of strains and obligations after marriage. This increase the risk of early motherhood with various complication, even their life risk along with the risk of child widow and all its resultant agonies.

By the negligence of a girl's health care and nutritional needs her right to continue her life properly is violated. Sexual abuse, rape or pushing the girl child into prostitution are the other forms of abuse which violates her right to protection.

The abuse of any kind impairs the health and integrated development of the girl child.

Measures taken for Improvement of Girl Child in India

At present identify the girl child as the focus of attention for improving the social and economic status of women. World summit on children held in 1990 stressed on survival, protection and development of the children including the girl child. A number of major initiative on behalf of the girl child are under way. SAARC declared 1990, "The year of the Girl Child" and 1991-2000 as the "Decade of the Girl Child". During this period programmes are proposed to increase public awareness of the value of the girl child, reach girls with basic services for there survival and development; ensure their participation in programmes of child development, health nutrition and education, increase the age of marriage; and create positive environment to allow girls to develop into productive and confident young women.

A National Plan of Action for the girl child for 1991-2000 A.D. has been drawn up by the Government. The plan of Action for the Girl Child has three major goals viz. survival, protection and development. The emphasis would also be laid on meeting gender specific needs of adolescent girls. The Plan recognises the rights of the girl child to equal opportunity, to be free from hunger, illiteracy ignorance and exploitation.

For the prevention of female foeticide and infanticide the Central Government enacted the Pre-Natal diagnostic Technique (Regulation and Prevention of Misuse) Act 1994 and ban the amniocentesis for sex discrimination.

To provide free and compulsory education to all children below 14 years

India at present has the largest network of elementary school. The target group of the endeavour to achieve Education for All in India constitute about 1924 million of children in the age group of 6-14 years of whom 60 percent are girls. The National Policy of Education (NPE) 1986 directly addresses the question of setting right the traditional gender imbalances in education. It makes a strong commitment in favour of education for women's equality. It has taken into account the lower enrolment and high drop out among girls. A number of measures are taken to correct the situation and bring more girls to school. NPE 1992 has identified the following three areas of special attention viz. review of school curriculum and text books to remove sexist bias and promote values of equality among sexes; reorientation of teachers to promote gender equality through the teaching; increasing the coverage of gender issues in research and training activities; systematic programmes of non formal school for children including young girls who cannot attend full day school due to household responsibilities. The efforts towards universalisation of primary education have resulted in increased enrolment of girls even in the remotest part of the country. Under the scheme of non-formal education the Nonformal Educational Centres exclusively meant for girls have been increased from 25 percent to 40 percent. The launching of the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP), Mahila Samakhya Programme are the bold steps in this direction. Kasturba Gandhi Sikhsha Yojana (1997) Balika Samridhi Yojana are the schemes for over all development of the girl's education mainly among the SC, ST and weaker section and those live below poverty level by providing them scholarship free text books uniforms etc.

Health and Nutrition are the major components of interventions for improvement in the growth and development of children. The initiatives in this direction are multifarious. The Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) is the largest of its kind in the world. It covers 80 percent of the blocks in this country and provides inter-alia, health check-up, referral services and health and nutrition education to pregnant and lactating mothers and to children in the age group 0-6 years.

Other initiatives include the Adolescent Girls Scheme, a sub scheme of the ICDS, the Child Survival and Safe Motherhood Programme. The Universal Immunization programme, Special Health Check-up Schemes for primary school children etc.

The Child Marriage Restraint Act makes marriage of a girl under 18 years of age illegal and punishable. The mean age of marriage is now about 19.3 years compared to about 13 years at the beginning of 19th century. Beside acts, multimedia campaign have also been conducted against the child marriage.

The labour of the girl child at home and outside is dis-proportionately high and denies her opportunities for development. Government evolving innovative programmes to free the girl child from her traditional fetters. Strategies like raising awareness of parents and society, non formal education, open school, creche service, coverage of adolescent girls in ICDS programme and vocational training have contributed to their educational development. National Policity on Child Labour (1986), Child Labour (Prohibitaion & Regulation) Act 1986, Factories Acts, Mines Act, National Authority for Elimination of Child Labour 1994 all are fromed to save the child as well as the girl child from exploitation.

The Indian Penal Code and Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act make offences of child trafficking, prostitution of children and sexually abuse them liable to higher punishment than those against adults. A committee on Prostitution, Child Prostitutes and Children of prostitutes was constituted to look after their problems and to form strategies for their development.

It is imperative to mobilize political, religious, cultural, administrative and community resources to create and ethos of care and value for the girl child. Such ethos only can eliminate gender disparities. Several multimedia campaigns is to be needed in removing gender bias and developing a positive image of the girl child is society.

Status of Tribal Girl Child in India

India has the largest tribal population in the world approximately 67.6 million as per 1991 census. Tribals constitute 8.08 percent of Indian population and half of its tribal women as in any other social group. They are in different stages of socioeconomic as well as socio-cultural development which may be called a bit backward. Indian constitution have several measures for their protection and development. Children are considered as assets in all societies but in some societies girl children are the victims of gender discrimination and enjoy lower status from the very beginning of their childhood. To probe into the status of girl child in Indian tribal society some criteria like education, health and nutrition, employment etc. should be considered.

Education status may be considered as the first parameter to analyse the status of girl child in tribal society.

Table 2.11.: Literacy Rate of the Tribals (1981-1991)

Year	1961	1971	1981	1991
Total Male	13.04	17.09	24.52	32.50
Total Female	2.89	4.58	8.04	14.50
Total Tribal	7.99	10.89	23.63	23.63

Source : Census Abstract for ST 1961, 1971, 1981 and 1991.

Table 2.12.: Enrolment of ST boys and girls (1981-1991)

Year	Boys	ST Boys	Percentage	Girls	ST Grils	Percentage
1981	44576	3133	7.03	28112	1527	5.43
1991	59218	4951	8.36	42359	3982	7.28
1981	13278	537	4.04	6568	205	3.12
1991	21449	1214	5.66	12997	580	4.47
1981	3061	53	1.73	1077	10	0.92
1991	4205	150	3.57	1994	52	2.61

Source : Selected Educational Statistics 1993, M/O. H.R.D.

The literacy among the adibasi girls are very low. Though the table shows a slight increase to admit the tribal girl child to school in recent years but the majority of enrolled girl children are withdrawn within the first 5 years. About 95 percent of the enrolled girl students drop out till they reach secondary level. The reasons can be enlisted the following : lack of awareness of parents, lack of institutional support, school curriculum has no relevance to their normal social life, medium of instruction differ from their colonial dialect and soon.

A tribal child is prone to disease since conception. The immunisation of pregnant women is at very low level in tribal society. The mother is subjected to very hard work during pregnancy and 90 percent of deliveries take place by crude methods causing damage to mother and child on occasions. Those who escape death does not get proper medical attention, immunisation and vitamin, protein and nutritional diet in sufficient quantity due to poverty, lack of awareness and lack of resources. In most of the cases she remains unattended without adequate mother care who has to work outside mostly.

Due to inadequate food intake and hardwork child takes diseases very easily. At the tender age of 7 or 8 she is subjected to job involving physical labour and exertions which may affect her health permanently. Damages caused in post puberty age often lead to complications during maternity. They are often as a child made to play in dusty environment which may lead to several types of skin diseases.

Tribal woman is rated as an economic entity in tribal society. The payment of 'Birde Price' at the time of marriage is the price the parents recover for the transfer of this working entity. A girl child in this society had to be much more hard working compared to her male counterpart. Right from her infancy, she is being asked to attain to her younger sibs at home. When the mother goes out to earn she has to stay at home to look after the home and domestic pets. She also become the helper of her mother in domestic activities and soon she goes out of home to earn money through the laborious jobs.

The girl child is generally the worse sufferer of economic disorders in tribal society and is always at the shrinking end of population poverty and environment spiral (Dashora 1995).

OBSERVATION

United Nation Convention define 'child' as the human being below the age groups of 18 years. The girl child is the child of female sex. Due to certain environmental and cultural reasons girls attain puberty much before 18 years and very often loss child hood due to early marriage and pregnancy. So in many legislation the identifying age of a girl child is kept at or below 14 years. Early childhood is a vital period of one's life and development but the girls since this time become the victims of gender discrimination, the most all pervading forms of institutionalised discrimination deep-rooted in our culture mainly because of some socio-cultural, historical, religious and economic factors. The patriarchal dominance lead to son preference on the other hand encourage the discrimination of female child from her birth and make her 'a lesser child', and a 'prisoner of her gender'. 'Gender' is the socio-culturally determined identity of male and female differ from 'sex' which is only a physical and biological distinction. There are three view points to explain the universal tendencies of gender biasness namely Marxist, Cultural and Feminist.

One quarter of Indian population approximately comprises girls upto the age of 19 years. The total number of the population (of girls) are 190.8 million (1997-Year book). The child sex ratio shows at every stage of childhood the boys outnumbered the girls which also increase with ages. Female foeticide infanticide and death of girls child due to negligence is prevalent all over the country. Girls are lessnourished, given food with lesser calories and getting health care when their condition get worsen. Age specific death rate is high among them. Marriage of girls in an early age is another bad thing which may creates child widow, weak child, sick mother and even the death of physically immatured mother. Education status of Indian girls are very low and enrolment in school especially in secondary and higher secondary level is very low specially among the rural areas. The girls are with drawn from school to work in the households and also outside as wage earner. The socialization of girl child from her very childhood is done in such a manner with so pronounced discrimination that she grows up as a lesser child with a great degree of submission, low self confidence and low self esteem. Child abuse, especially the abuse of girl child is a common phenomena now a days despite of the several laws enacted to prevent them from abuse. Any kind of abuse, may be physical, sexual, psychological, violates the right of the victims healthy and integrated development which is harmful for her and for the society too. Government of India have initiated several plans and programmes for the overall development of the status of the girl child though the actual condition has been changed very little. The Status of tribal girl child is quite better than that of their non tribal counterpart. She does not see gloom face at the time of birth but discrimination occurs since she becomes her mother's helper at home. Her health and nutritional status and educational status is very low since her childhood she has to work outside as bread earner. The system of 'bride price' indicate her superior status in their society to some extent.