Chapter - 1

INTRODUCTION
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*Woman is the incarnation of Ahimsa*  
- Mahatma Gandhi

*Woman is the builder and moulder of nation’s destiny. Though delicate and soft as lily, she has a heart far stronger and bolder than man’s. She is the supreme inspiration for man’s onward march, an embodiment of love, piety and compassion*

- Rabindranath Tagore

*A girl is the young plant that gets neither light nor water*

*She is the flower that would have blossomed but cannot*

*Half fed and half heartedly educated, she gets only half wage for her labour*

*The country got its freedom but she continues to be bonded*

- Kamla Bhasin, 1990

Since times immemorial gender difference has been existing due to different physiological functions of males and females. The status of girl child is the key to achieving gender equality and the dignity of women in the future. The mould of adult women is set in childhood. Girl children are a valuable asset to a nation, they are units of reproduction and family and their welfare strengthens social and economic development. In most countries today, the girl child has a lower status and enjoys fewer of the rights, opportunities and benefits of childhood than the boy child who has first call on family and community resources. The situation of the girl child results commonly from prejudices rooted in culture and customs. In our society there are many misconceptions about girl children.
"The birth of a girl grant else-where, here grant a son" (Atharvaveda)

"If you tell a lie, you will give birth to a girl"

"Bringing up a daughter is like pouring water in sand"

"Bringing up a daughter is like watering a plant in another's courtyard"

"A daughter is like a bundle of snakes on the head"

These and similar other sayings abound in all Indian languages, setting the stage on which girls and women must play their assigned roles in society. It is a small wonder that most girls grow up with a decidedly low opinion of themselves and their fellow gender mates. In an article published in Indian Express dated July 23, 1995 a day's activities in the life of an urban girl child is presented as follows:

Table 1.1 A day's activities in the life of a girl child

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Mon</th>
<th>Tue</th>
<th>Wed</th>
<th>Thur</th>
<th>Fri</th>
<th>Sat</th>
<th>Sun</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5:00-6:00 am</td>
<td>Clean utensils</td>
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<tr>
<td>6:00-7:30 am</td>
<td>Clean area, cut vegetables, make tea and serve</td>
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<tr>
<td>7:30-9:00 am</td>
<td>Eat and look after siblings</td>
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<tr>
<td>9:00-10:00 am</td>
<td>Go and work in someone's house (sweep)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1:00-2:00 pm</td>
<td>Come home, eat and give siblings to eat</td>
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<tr>
<td>2:00-4:00 pm</td>
<td>Go and collect firewood, strapping a child on back</td>
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<tr>
<td>4:00-6:00 pm</td>
<td>Come home, and go to help around the house where she works</td>
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<tr>
<td>6:00-7:30 pm</td>
<td>Cut and clean vegetable and work</td>
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<tr>
<td>7:30-9:00 pm</td>
<td>Wash clothes, play with siblings</td>
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<tr>
<td>9:00-11:00 pm</td>
<td>Eat, press father's feet, help to wind up</td>
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</table>

Source Indian Express, July 23, 1995
This shows that little time is left at the disposal of a girl child for her education and welfare.

**Magnitude of the Problem**

India has one-seventh (about 844 million) of the world’s population. About 50 per cent constitute women, and half of them are below the age of 20. About 12 million girls are born in India every year. Out of these, one and a half million do not live to see their first birthday day, and within five years another 3,50,000 succumb to premature death, and by their fifteenth year, only nine million remain alive. Around 105 males are born for every 100 females. Despite the improvement in the economy and provisions of basic services in India, the sex ratio has been deteriorating from decade to decade in the 20th Century, from 972 in 1901 it dropped to 933 in 1981, and 929 in 1991. Age specific death rates reveal that up to the age of 35 years more females than males die at every age level. Abortions, foeticides and infanticides have been cited as reasons. Girls, as compared to boys, are at greater risk of dying during infancy. By this it is felt that the sex ratio may equal at the age of four. But malnutrition, ill health and neglect of girls lead to the death of girl children. According to a recent survey, it is noted that the rate of death of the second born girl is higher than that of the first born girl. The main factor attributed is poverty (Enadu, Vasundara, Nov 2, 1998). All this speaks volumes about the survival prospects of the girl child in India (Illustration-I).
Girlhood: A Perilous Path

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**THE PERIL OF PREBIRTH ELIMINATION**
Intra-uterine foetal sex-determination and termination of "female pregnancies".

If the female foetus survives until birth.

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**THE PERIL OF ELIMINATION IN INFANCY**
Female infanticide by commission (deliberate killing) or omission (neglect during illness).

If the girl baby survives until early childhood.

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**THE PERIL OF NEGLECT**
Less health care and less food resulting in high mortality and higher morbidity physical wastage.

If the girl child survives until middle and late childhood.

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**THE PERIL OF EXPLOITATION**
Early assumption of domestic responsibilities and sibling care, discontinuation of education, hazardous work and high rates of morbidity and malnutrition.

The under nourished girl becomes an adolescent.

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**THE PERIL OF PHYSICAL STRESS AND DEPLETION**
Early marriage, teenage pregnancy, maternal depletion, anaemia, stunted personal growth, perinatal complications, delivery of low birth-weight babies, high infant morbidity / mortality, low/no education, repeated pregnancies, maternal morbidity, decreased productivity.

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To mitigate the problems of the girls, South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) countries have pledged themselves to undertake certain activities. The culmination of the growing concern for the survival and overall development of the girl child in the SAARC Region was manifested in the decision to observe 1990 as the SAARC Year of the Girl Child. The enthusiastic response to the issues concerning the girl child in 1990 prompted the Heads of Governments/States to declare the 1990 as the SAARC Decade of the Girl Child. A conscious attempt to maintain the tempo and the drive of various activities was initiated in the region during the year of the girl child. In this connection, the Government of India has prepared a separate National plan of action for the SAARC decade of the Girl Child, 1991-2000 A.D.

Drawing upon the world declaration on the "Survival, Protection and Development" of children in the 1990's and the MALE declaration of SAARC, the gender-specific goals for the decade of the girl child in India are in the following three major development areas:

Survival and protection of the girl child and safe motherhood. Aspects like health, nutrition, immunization and maternity and child health, referral facilities, safe/drinking water and sanitation will be given due preference.

Overall development of the girl child with the ultimate objective of freeing her from stereotype roles and the shackles of prejudices, making her economically independent and self-reliant, and facilitating her to the join mainstream of national development with an equal status.
- Special protection for vulnerable girl children belonging to economically and socially deprived or disabled, physically or mentally
goals.

**Argument**

In general, neglect of girl children is based on several perceptions of the parents and society. Here, societal influence seems to play a greater role in the neglect of girls rather than parents themselves. Society expects girls to be very mature and behave rationally, forgetting the insults or reprimands from parents, husband, and in-laws. As a result, neglect of girl children has become a culture. When it became a culture, it has been perpetuated over centuries and generations. Many cultural issues are changing, but this culture of neglect of girls is not changing due to several reasons. The traditional view of girls belonging to another family after marriage is highly prevalent in the society. Another factor is that the girl will have more loyalty and concern for her husband, her children, and her husband's family. Therefore, girls may take some amount of money or property from parents for the development of her family. More work given and neglect shown to girls by their parents is due to the anticipated behaviour of mother-in-law of the girls. Mother-in-law may ill treat their daughter-in-law for not doing things according to the traditions of their families. Therefore, to make their girl children free from the perceptions of the society, parents quite often give more work to girls without respecting their wishes. In extreme cases, the anticipated behaviour may lead to the practice of abortions and female infanticide. Therefore, there is a need to study the problem of
neglect of girls in different places to assess the magnitude of neglect and to know the reasons for neglect. For such a study cross cultural approach provides a better insight. Moreover, the process of modernization is another factor contributing to the neglect of girl children. Modernization means better quality of life. Better quality of life means more income/more money and more education. People who cannot fulfill these aspirations are the ones who neglect their children, particularly girl children. Therefore, the present work is aimed at studying this specific population subjected to these vicissitudes of life. For this, a sample of women belonging to slums and non-slums of urban areas were chosen. These populations are at cross roads of development and modernization and hence may neglect their girl children differentially. Therefore, neglect of girl child is taken as a dependent variable for analysis. However, in the preparation of synopsis the dependent variable neglect of girl child is termed as abuse and neglect of girl child. It is only change of name only.