



Pink VS Blue

The Indian society is evolving in every sphere, day-by-day. Though the birth of a girl child is now widely accepted in modern India but little girls in developing countries like ours may not hear this often- "When you grow up, you can be whatever you want to be"! From the day they are born, they are reminded of things they are not allowed to do. The evolution has just begun and there needs to be a change in how a child, irrespective of its sex, is never a burden. It's a blessing!

By: Dipti P.

Premier question is to understand the origin of this fascination to have a baby boy which seems fixated with the Indian society throughout. **Dr. Roshan Jain**, MBBS, MRC Psych (UK), Senior Consultant Psychiatrist and De-addiction Specialist, Apollo Hospital, Bangalore says, "It is difficult to trace the origin of the preference. I assume it's been there for generations, as a male child in any society (especially Indian) is the one who continues the family, seen as the rightful heir to the family legacy, a male child conforms and continues the family beliefs and traditions and cares for his ageing parents. The want has existed in different countries and cultures but in many cultures, due to evolution and societal developments, the preference stands nullified today. However, the desire for a male child manifests blatantly in India, that parents have no qualms about repeated, closely spaced pregnancies and even terminating a child before it is born. Birth of a female child is perceived as a curse with an economic and social liability. Even today, amongst the so called educated class, the traditional ceremonies, rituals, parties and distribution of sweets only happen when a baby boy is born".

However educated parents in the society graciously raise their girl child with pride and confidence. But is this preference for male



child rampant everywhere around the world or is it bound just to India? **Dr. Sajid Ali Khan**, a consultant Psychiatrist, Psychotherapist and De-Addiction Specialist, Kohinoor Hospital, Mumbai guides us in this regard. He states, "The psychology of parents to prefer a specific gender majorly prevails in developing nations like Asia and Africa. There are economic, social, religious reasons behind it. For example, in Indian society there are reasons like high demand for dowry and expenses of marrying off a daughter. A girl is supposed to be 'parayadhan' i.e. somebody else's property so people feel that a son is best for them for physical and economic support".

So the discrimination against girls and women in the developing world is a devastating reality. While a son is considered insurance and a female



child is killed before she is born, it'll amaze to ponder that when this very male child grows up, the search for his ideal female counterpart begins. Which is truly contradicting and on this issue **Salma Prabhu**, a registered Rehabilitation Counsellor, Clinical Psychologist and Therapist says, "Female infanticide has been prevalent from the time when the male heir was the most essential aspect and criteria for a woman to get married. The idea behind searching for an ideal female counterpart is again someone who should be able to bear a male child! Pains are taken right from the diet to the position for conception to ensure that the child born is male. Whereas a female child is a burden; someone who will have to be given a dowry, spend money on the education and then she goes away to another family who benefits from all the efforts put in by 'her' parents. It is a different story that modern



day parents in metro cities do not think this way any longer. However, the thought is still prevalent in the rural areas and it is always desirable to have a baby boy than a baby girl. The ideal counterpart primarily should be able to bear a son and be an asset to the household work and take care of the family. These expectations are prevalent even today, in most urban households while women work, travel, bear children and also cook and keep the house clean".

Although, a girl child is given opportunities to educate herself and earn her living to get acceptance by our society, yet there exists much inequality or gender bias. For the bias to erase away completely from our mind-set, **Dr. Samir Parikh**, Chief Psychiatrist, Max Healthcare says, "At a societal level, we need to create more awareness so that the stereotype is broken. Education is one way to do so and using media to create more sensitivity along with strict punishment for those who indulge in foeticide needs to be ensured. We need zero tolerance on this issue".

Counsellor **Vikhyat Singh** also opines that the encouragement of not differentiating between a girl and a boy child is to come from everywhere. He says, "Encouragement should come from every sphere of the society but I think the onus lies on females. They should protect their girl child and should not feel guilty on the birth of a daughter.

It has been found in many cases that the mother-in-law forces the daughter-in-law to abort the female foetus. Government should also strengthen the laws against foeticide. A complaint has to be lodged against faulty doctors and immediate action should be taken. More schemes like 'Laadli' should be promoted and then creating necessary awareness for such schemes too is very important". Counsellors from the Delhi Mental Health helpline, **Saumya Kumar** and **Christine Jones** also add on, "The attitudinal change will not come unless an individual makes conscious efforts for it. This is what our society is witnessing today. By building infrastructure and providing vocational training and educational programmes, the families in developing countries can be resourced to create healthy and stable lives. That takes the burden of mere survival off young women and gives them the time to get education. With practical help and encouragement, girls are more likely to enrol and stay in schools".

Dr. Gowri Kulkarni, a personal Physician and Registrar, Nation Wide Primary Healthcare Services Pvt Ltd, also states about the complete eradication, she says, "Eradication of bias starts at a very individual level. At every walk of life, a gender bias has been seen. If we do it to our children they will do it to theirs. This rut needs to be broken and it is in an individual's capacity". ■