

Missing Women

SEX SELECTION AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

4.1 DECLINING SEX RATIO

Many of you must have seen advertisements like the one below and also heard slogans issued by the government like "Save the Girl Child" or "Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao" on the radio, on TV and in newspapers. Have you wondered why these slogans and advertisements are necessary? Why save the girl child? What is the danger that she is facing? And, by the way, what is sex selection and sex ratio? This Unit tries to answer some of these questions.

What is sex ratio?

Sex ratio is a measure that compares the number of women and men in a particular population group—such as children below 10 years of age (called **Child Sex Ratio - CSR**) or adults above 18 years (**Overall Sex Ratio - OSR**). In other parts of the world sex ratio is measured by counting the number of

boys/men per 100 girls/women. In India, however, we measure the number of women/girls per 1000 men/boys. Now the danger faced by children in India is that their number is decreasing at an alarming rate. This has resulted in a **gender imbalance**. In India, child sex ratio—the number of girls who survive—has declined from 983 per 1000 boys in 1951 to 918 per 1000 boys in 2011. This means that in 2011 the situation seems to have worsened and there were **37.3 million more men than women in the country**.

It was in the mid-1970s that demographers first took note of the gradual decline. The landmark **Towards Equality Report** of the **Committee on the Status of Women in India** which was prepared in 1973 in the **UN Year of Women**, strongly emphasized the need for taking note of this "shocking" and "inexplicable decline in the numbers of women." The reason this was seen as shocking was

OSR and CSR							
	1951	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001	2011
Over all Sex Ration (OSR)	946	941	930	934	927	933	943
Child Sex Ratio (CSR)	938	976	964	962	945	927	918
Delcine in OSR and CSR							
	1951	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001	2011
Over all Sex Ration (OSR)	-	-5	-11	4	-7	6	10
Child Sex Ratio (CSR)	-	-7	-12	-2	-17	-18	-9

Table 1: Child sex ratios (CSRs) and overall sex ratios (OSRs)

Stop Sex Selection, Save the Girl Child

Pre-conception, Sex Selection and Pre-natal Sex Determination is a Criminal Offence

PC&PNDT Act 1994: Salient Features

- PROHIBITS sex selection before and after conception
- PROHIBITS misuse of preconception and prenatal diagnostic techniques for determination of sex of the foetus
- PROHIBITS advertisements of such techniques for detection or determination of sex of the foetus, even through internet
- REGISTRATION COMPULSORY for facilities providing preconception and prenatal diagnostics capable of determining the sex of the foetus
- MAINTENANCE and PRESERVATION OF RECORDS COMPULSORY in the prescribed formats including Form F*

Who all are liable?

- Unit in charge/owner of diagnostic facility
- Doctor/persons who perform the test
- Mediator abetting pregnant woman's access
- Husband/relatives of the pregnant woman
- Persons advertising sex selection in any form

The pregnant woman herself is considered innocent under the Act unless proved otherwise

Penalties under the PC&PNDT Act 1994

For Doctors/Owners of Clinics <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Up to three years of imprisonment with fine upto Rs. 10,000 for the first offence • Up to five years of imprisonment with fine upto Rs. 50,000 for subsequent offence • Suspension of medical registration of doctors if charges are framed • Cancellation of medical registration of doctor for five years by the State Medical Council in case of first offence and permanent cancellation in case of subsequent offence 	For Husband/Family Members or Any other person abetting sex selection <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Up to three years of imprisonment upto Rs. 50,000 for the first offence • Up to five years of imprisonment upto Rs. 1,00,000 for subsequent offence • Up to three years of imprisonment and upto Rs. 10,000 in fine
For Non registration of any organization using Ultra sound machine, scanner or any other equipment capable of determining sex of the foetus: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confiscation of equipment/machines and further action as per the provision of Section 23 	
For any advertisement regarding sex selection: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appropriate authorities empowered with the powers for search and seizure for non-compliance of the Act 	

Every offence under the PC&PNDT Act is cognizable, non-bailable and non-compoundable.



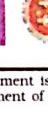
Celebrate her life!



Ministry of Health and Family Welfare



Government of India



Ministry of Health and Family Welfare



Government of India

Figure 1: Newspaper Advertisement issued by the Government of India

inexplicable was because it was believed that with modernization and development there would be improvement in all spheres of life. But surprisingly, the situation of women was worsening!

Now you might think that the birth of a child is a natural process—after all we have no control over the sex of the child that is going to be born. Yes, it is true that the number of men and women in any population is never quite equal. You might be surprised to know that on an average, slightly more boys than girls are born. This is why sex ratio at birth is usually 950 girls per 1000 boys in many countries where sex selection is not practiced widely. But the baby girl has a slight biological edge over the male to survive. So generally there are more female children than male children in any population. Furthermore, women tend to outlive men at the other end of the life cycle. Therefore, in the age group of 15–65 there are normally more women than men in most countries.

However, contrary to this, India has been amongst the very few countries in the world, along with Nepal and China, where the number of girls who survive is lower compared to boys. Our neighbouring country, Bangladesh, does not have this problem. Its sex ratio is similar to the world norm. This indicates clearly that, contrary to our perceptions, economic development does not better the situation. Developed states like Punjab and Haryana have had very bad sex ratios. Similarly urban areas or cities fare worse compared to rural areas.

Why are sons preferred over daughters?

Many researchers agree that the

following factors play a role in determining the sex ratio in India:

- **One,** traditionally, **dowry** has had a significant role to play in families and communities deciding they did not want daughters. Female infanticide, earlier largely found in upper-caste communities, is now spreading to all communities along with the practice of dowry.

Points to discuss:

Is the above statement true? If there was no practice of dowry, would our society be kinder to girls?

- **Two,** the **government's policy of the two-child norm** has pushed many to plan their families with "at least one son and at the most only one daughter." The pattern of **sons inheriting the property, managing land, property and businesses makes daughters less desirable.** Added to this, the costs of educating the daughter and marrying her into a good family are making families decide not to have daughters.

Points to discuss:

Are only sons entitled to inherit property? What does the law say? Find out.

- **Three, the availability and spread of modern ultrasound technology** to detect the sex of the baby since the 1980s, has made it easier for people to take this decision. We discuss this in more detail in the next class.

4.2 DEMOGRAPHIC CONSEQUENCES

The struggle against sex-selective abortions

Thus, despite girls having a natural advantage in terms of survival, in our country social and cultural practices that privilege boys over girls have played a significant role in creating the gender imbalance. Unfortunately, new medical technologies that help detect physical abnormalities in the foetus can also help determine the sex of the foetus. These technologies are used widely to know the sex of the child before birth and have further aided the discrimination against girl children because once the foetus is known to be female, some families may force the woman to undergo an abortion.

Amniocentesis and Chorionic Villus Sampling are two sex-selection techniques that became prevalent in developing countries in the 1980s. Given the continuing desire for sons in our society and the prejudice against girls, as mentioned earlier, many have used these technologies to terminate the pregnancy once it is discovered that the foetus is female. This process of selective abortion is called female foeticide. These, along with several cases of female infanticide, that is, the killing of the female child upon birth, have contributed to this severe numerical imbalance between the sexes.

Many women's groups turned their attention to the issue of female foeticide and, in 1982, a national coalition of such groups demanded a complete ban on medical tests that aid sex selection. In 1985, the Forum against Sex Determination and Sex Pre-Selection (FASDSP) was established in Bombay. As feminist scholar Mary E John remarked, "The creation of the FASDSP turned the issue into a national campaign which used all the skills of organizing—from street theatre and demonstration to public interest litigation."

In fact, local activists have reported that medics are ready to reveal that a foetus's sex for as little as 600 rupees. Doing so is illegal, and discouraged by various campaigns, but the law is almost impossible to enforce. Slapping the father on the back and saying "you're a lucky man" is hint enough. Demand for scans is rampant. Many enterprising technicians tour villages with scanners on bicycles.

- Have you heard people say they are lucky to have sons?
- Do you really think it is bad luck to have girl children?

Initially, there was very little public support for campaigns against female foeticide. However, when reports of female infanticide from districts in Tamil Nadu became national news, the entire country was horrified. This helped step up the campaign pressure.

The campaigns led to the Indian government placing a ban on diagnostic tests that help determine the sex of the foetus. Known as the **Preconception & Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (PCPNDT) Regulation and Prevention of Misuse Act (88)** it was introduced in 1994. It limits the use of pre-natal diagnosis to detect a list of selected congenital conditions and explicitly

prohibits using these techniques for sex determination of the foetus. (See the newspaper advertisement - Figure 1.)

The Supreme Court of India has also issued detailed directives to the national and state governments to raise awareness on the law on sex determination and for increased surveillance of all clinics providing ultrasounds. You must have seen boards in the maternity wards of hospitals and in diagnostic centres urging people not to ask for the sex of the unborn child. The hospital staff are not allowed to disclose it. Doing so is a punishable offense. This measure is aimed at preventing female foeticides. Despite this, there are many cases reported in the media about the misuse of the diagnostic tests and medical terminations of pregnancy in the case of a female foetus.

What's wrong with having more men: Social consequences of a skewed sex ratio

This still leaves us with the question: what is wrong with having more men? Many social science researchers have tried to address the questions: What are the social consequences of the skewed sex ratios? Why should we be worried that there are close to 4 crore more men than women in India?

- One of the adverse results is what sociologists and demographers have called the "**marriage squeeze**." In states like Rajasthan and Haryana, sex imbalance has led to a **shortage of brides and therefore, a severe marriage crisis**. The surplus males left unmarried are more likely to be poor, uneducated, unemployed, of a low

status or disadvantaged in some other way.

More reasons for "missing women"

Even when a girl child is born unharmed, researchers have noted that a **general neglect of the health care and nutritional needs of girl children has meant that female mortality rates are higher in India**. In other words, girls are more likely to die in the early years than boys in India. In 1990, eminent economist, Amartya Sen, argued that a 10 crore women are "missing" in the regions of South Asia, West Asia and North Africa. "These numbers tell us, quietly a terrible story of inequality and neglect leading to the excess mortality of women." He concluded that if women have equal access to health, medicine and nutrition and also to gainful employment outside the house, their chances of survival and well-being improve vastly.

reproduction, domestic work, and care work.

- With increased violence against women, parents may **withdraw female children from education and get them married early**.

Hence, not only should we protect the fundamental right of every girl child to be born and lead a healthy, happy and fulfilling life, we should recognize that a **more balanced sex ratio is a primary requirement for the well-being of both men and women and society in general**.

Points to discuss:

1. Why do you think the number of girl children is declining in India?
2. What are some of the negative effects of sex selection?
3. Do you think rethinking gender roles will result in lessening the extent of female foeticide?

Gender Spectrum

BEYOND THE BINARY

10.1 TWO OR MANY?

What we learn from most science textbooks is that biological factors such as chromosomes, genes, gonads and hormones decide whether a person is male or female. Less emphasis is given to factors such as social roles, behaviours and identities most of us adopt to conform to the masculine-feminine norms in a given society at any given time. This Unit provides some information about the extent of variation that exists at both biological and societal levels. It highlights the fact that the strict male-female dichotomy is grossly inadequate to characterize all human beings. Instead, we need to engage with the idea of a "gender spectrum."

Most of us would have learnt that if the fertilizing sperm contains an X-chromosome, the egg will develop into a female. If it contains a Y-chromosome, it will develop into a male. But it is not that simple. Even six weeks after conception, the gonads [tissue that could become testicles or ovaries] of both sexes appear identical. The whole process of sex differentiation is not complete even at birth. For an interactive video demonstrating how biological sex is determined, see www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/body/how-sex-determined.html. Anne Fausto-Sterling points out that "...chromosomes, hormones, the internal sex structures, the gonads, and the external genitalia all vary much more than most people realize." (You may consult the Course Website for an interview with Anne Fausto-Sterling on this topic). In this Unit we will find that there are many reasons why we need to rethink the

the binary of male-female and move towards the idea of a gender spectrum.

Most of the time, a person's biological sex and gender complement each other. (The term cis-gender is used to denote people designated at birth as females who are also generally comfortable with societal notions of femininity and vice versa for males.). However, every society has a percentage of intersex persons who are born with ambiguous biological characteristics. There are others who feel uncomfortable with the biological sex assigned at birth (male or female) and the gender associated with it. They therefore choose to change their gender (transgender persons) either through medical intervention or by presenting themselves, through their clothes and behaviour, as the gender they desire to be.

The process of gendering

Earlier in this course, you would have learnt about the process of socialization that turns people into men and women respectively. Often, we do not pay particular attention to this process, except around puberty when considerable physical and physiological changes take place. Let us take the example of voice pitch. You may have noticed that the voice pitch of 4-5 year old boys and girls is similar: it is very high with the fundamental frequency measuring around 400 Hz. By the time boys reach the age of 13 – 14 years, due to the effect of male hormones such as androgen, their pitch drops sharply down to around 100 Hz. The lowering of pitch in girls is not as sharp. The average fundamental frequency of an adult female voice is around 200Hz.

Girls or women whose voice pitch is much lower than 200Hz are said to have androphonia (a result of increased amount of androgen in their bodies).

There is of course a lot of variation. Some women have very low voices. The much-loved singer Gangubai Hangal is a good example. And some men retain relatively high pitch (for example, our former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and cricketer Sachin Tendulkar). Teenage boys begin to grow a beard. Girls grow breasts. All this is exciting. But it can also be worrying because there is great social—and commercial—stress on the difference. Beauticians would lose a lot of business if women stop worrying about hair on the face or arms. Gyms may close down if men do not worry about their muscles! In fact almost everyone has some worry or the other about whether they fit properly or not into the male-female moulds. We worry about our physical appearance because it has considerable influence on how we perceive ourselves, and how we are perceived by others. Such anxiety about our appearance is central to the development of gender identity which is about our wanting to be masculine or feminine in conventional, socially defined ways.

However, despite such anxieties most people are comfortable with one or the other of the conventional gender identities (the cis-gender people). Many others are not so comfortable, some of whom are defined by the Telangana Hijra Intersex Transgender Samiti as in the box on the right.

As a result of movements about sexuality rights and transgender rights, we know today that there is a wide spectrum of gender identities and sexual orientations among men and women. It is important to seek out this

information because, all around us, society puts a great deal of effort into emphasizing and enforcing a strict male-female dichotomy. This enforcement may be physical (a boy may not be allowed to take dance classes or, a girl may be discouraged from wearing jeans or riding a bicycle). More often, it is ideological—in other words, it works through the mind and emotions. Both kinds of pressure come from families, schools, advertisements in print and electronic media, films and stories, and even textbook lessons. All of these constantly reproduce dichotomous views about masculinity or femininity. In doing so, they erase the shades of difference that exist in the gender identities of individuals in a society.

- **Hijra:** a cultural grouping, whereby members of the transgender and intersex communities formally enter a system of living together and support each other mutually.
- **Intersex:** People with intersex variations have bodies that defy medical norms of classification between male and female bodies. People can have a variety of different intersex variations.
- **Transgender:** Transgender people have a strong physical and mental discomfort with the gender which is unambiguously assigned to them at birth by doctors and society.

Gender is a dynamic concept. In fact, it is an inter-relationship among individual's

- (1) biology,
- (2) internal sense of self, as male, female, both or neither (gender identity).

(3) outward appearance and behaviour (gender expression), and,
 (4) the gender roles assigned to males and females in a given society.

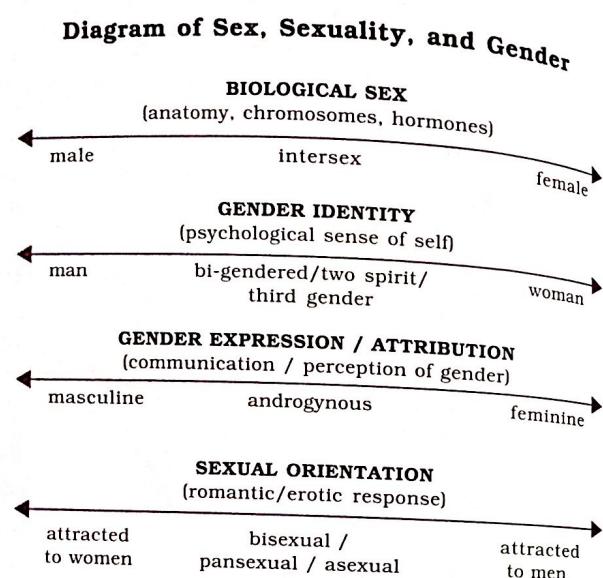
So we can see that, as a concept, gender is extremely complex. But, generally, we do not investigate this complexity scientifically and rationally. We simply take it for granted, especially since we are bombarded by messages about gender in our everyday world. For instance, such messages about gender can be found in the toys boys and girls are encouraged to play with, the clothes they are expected to wear, the kind of domestic chores they are asked to participate in, the professions they are expected to pursue, the games they are permitted to play, in the language used to refer to males and females and so on.

Examine the word lists below:

In the early 1970's, psychologists and sociologists tried to come up with a table below were taken from one such experiment. However, researchers realized that such efforts are pointless, that are conventionally regarded as either male or female. We can see from all these that what we in fact deal with, on an everyday basis, is not a dichotomy but rather a spectrum of genders. Study the figure provided; you may consult more information.

The main point of this Unit so far is to note that our understanding of sex and gender has to be very flexible to account for reality.

Feminine	Masculine	Neither
Shy	Self reliant	Conscientious
Affectionate	Athletic	Adaptable
Loyal	Assertive	Truthful
Compassionate	Forceful	Secretive
Soft-spoken	Analytical	Inefficient
Loves children	Ambitious	Tactful
Yielding	Decisive	Has leadership qualities
Sympathetic	Competitive	Conventional
Sensitive	Willing to take risks	Cheerful
Helpful	Aggressive	Jealous



10.2 STRUGGLES WITH DISCRIMINATION

When a person's identity and/or sexual orientation is not in line with those associated with the biological sex (male vs. female), such a person is subjected to discrimination. Let us read a little more about the gender spectrum in order to understand the experiences of people who do not belong to a strictly defined male-female dichotomy. This will help us relate to their struggles against discrimination with information and sympathy. Also, though most of us do meet people whose gender appears ambiguous, these topics are usually not discussed openly.

Gender discrimination: The case of sports

Maleness and femaleness are not only culturally different; they are also not even biologically stable features. But this fact was poorly understood until recently, and, as a result, athletes regularly faced discrimination and injustice of different kinds. However, gender verification tests were suspended in the Olympic Games in 2000. This was done after enough evidence had emerged that what was called "atypical chromosomal variations" are not atypical at all. This is true of certain hormone levels as well. On the contrary, such variations are so common that it is impossible to judge whether a person is male or female on the basis of gender tests alone.

Despite this, the Sports Authority of India, following the guidelines of the International Olympic Committee, continues to have a policy that says female athletes with high levels of natural testosterone ("female hyper-androgenism") possess an unfair

advantage over other female competitors in view of their enhanced masculine endowments (for example, stronger muscle power due to higher doses of male hormone in their bodies). This "benefit," they say, must be regulated with medical intervention if the athlete wants to continue competing in female sports events. Many sports-women have suffered indignities due to such policies (read the story of Pinki Pramanik and of Santhi Soundarajan on the next page) and faced humiliation. Sports authorities continue to work with the assumption that there are only two sexes: males and females. Thus the Olympic Committee retained a policy of "suspicion-based testing" on a case-by-case basis as did other sports bodies. This policy at different times resulted in two other women athletes being disqualified after winning medals: the South African Caster Semenya (see Course website for details of this athlete) and the Indian track athlete, Santhi Soundarajan – because they failed "gender-tests."

Pinki Pramanik

Pinki Pramanik (born 10 April 1986 in Purulia) is an Indian track athlete who won several medals for her performance both at home and abroad right from the age of 17 years.

In 2012, there was a complaint of sexual assault filed by her female friend. It led to some medical tests to determine her gender. Initial tests claimed her to be a male but further tests remained inconclusive about her gender. Nonetheless, Pinki was initially charged for rape, impersonation, cheating, assault, and intimidation. However, later, Calcutta high court dropped all the

charges and eventually she was declared to be a woman.

Pinki disagreed with the results of the gender tests stating: "I am not a male."

I have always been female. I look more male now because, as part of my training to compete in international athletics, I used to be regularly administered testosterone injections like other female participants. I was told that it was necessary to take these and I never questioned whether these were legal or not because I was focusing on winning and did whatever I was asked to do by my trainers...after that my voice became deeper and I grew more body hair...I was once manhandled and kept in a men's cell in a jail." An attempt was also made to cheat her out of a piece of land granted to her by the West Bengal Government for her performance in the South-Asian and Asian games.

Santhi Soundarajan

Born into a Dalit family in Kathakkurichi of Pudukkottai district of Tamil Nadu in April 1981, Santhi Soundarajan is a track and field athlete. She is a winner of 11 international awards and over 50 national awards and the first Tamil woman to have won at the Asian games. Soon after winning a silver medal in the women's 800 meters race in the 2006 Asian Games held at Doha, she had to undergo a sex test that revealed that Santhi does not possess some sexual characteristics of a woman.

For this reason she was stripped of the silver medal.

"I am treated as an outcast and therefore I am unable to go out of my house. I was shunned by my own local community after being stripped of the silver medal and I was banned from competing by the Indian Olympic association...it is unfair to determine the quality of people based on chromosome tests...it is unethical and biased. It is a humiliating experience for me and my family."

Media reports said that she was born with Androgen Insensitivity Syndrome (AIS), a condition in which affected people are genetically male, while possessing external female genitalia. This means that Santhi was identified by her family as a girl at birth and was brought up as such. Santhi too always considered herself a female. Neither she nor her family was aware of the genetic variation.

In September 2007 Soundarajan was reported to have attempted suicide by consuming poison, but luckily survived. Two months later she started her own coaching academy with 68 students besides working as a daily wage worker at a brick kiln for Rs. 200/- per day.

The experiences of all these athletes raise a host of questions for us today. If a body has female genitals, it is not necessary that it will have preponderantly female chromosomes and female hormones. Most bodies (including yours and mine) marked male and female in this world would not pass "gender tests" if a perfect congruence of all these three factors

were examined. The point is that in everyday life, gender tests are not done because once a sex has been assigned at birth, most of us live our lives accordingly. It is mainly in sex-segregated activities like competitive sports that the question arises, and it is assumed that possessing male characteristics is an advantage in physical activities.

Of course, women athletes who are disqualified for some chromosomal, hormonal or physical variation that casts doubt on their 'femaleness' do

gender and sports is largely derived from this book.

But such unfair norms are now being challenged. Dutee Chand, the 19-year-old sprinter became the first to do so by refusing to abide by the verdict of the Sports Authority of India. It had conducted hyper-androgenism tests on her in July 2014. When the results came in, she was told that if she wanted to compete again, she would need to reduce her testosterone levels either through surgery or with drug therapy. Chand rejected both options. Instead, she decided to challenge the



Dutee Chand

guidelines at the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS), in Lausanne, Switzerland. And in July 2015, the Court suspended the governing International Association of Athletics Federations' (IAAF) regulations regarding hyper-androgenism, stating there was not sufficient scientific evidence. Noting that "sex in humans is not neatly binary," the Court asked the IAAF to submit more persuasive scientific evidence within a two-year period or else the Regulations will be

declared void. More importantly, the IAAF has been asked to create a procedure where athletes are allowed to compete in one of the female or male categories and not excluded as a "consequence of the natural and unaltered state of their body." Even though Chand had to miss the Commonwealth and the Asian Games, she is now preparing for the Olympics to be held in 2016 in Brazil! Read her story narrated in her own words on the course website.

Transgender

A transgender person is someone for whom the sex assigned at birth is different from what they know and feel they are. For most such people, life can be painful and difficult. For those who have the support of their families and the understanding of friends' things may be somewhat better. Some transgender people go in for medical intervention (surgery, hormone therapy) to align the internal sense of their gender with their physical appearance / outward presentation (the change could be either MTF, meaning male to female or FtM for female to male). Many people do not pursue medical intervention to undergo transition because of the costs and the risks involved.

Transition is the technical term used for the process that some transgender people undergo when they decide to live as the gender with which they identify. The reality of many transgender people is that they are subjected to discrimination and harassment. They are denied access to housing; it is difficult for them to find employment even if they have the necessary qualifications. We should be aware of the need for legal protection for people whose cultural/emotional

experiences do not match the physical/biological sex they are assigned at birth. According to one estimate, India has about twenty lakh transgender people. A common term used to describe transgender people, transsexuals, cross-dressers, eunuchs and transvestites is hijra. Most of them face discrimination, live in dire poverty on the fringes of society. Many earn a living as singers and dancers. Many are forced into sex work.

There have been physical attacks and brutalities on over 60 transgender people in Hyderabad alone in the last year. Hijra and transgender people are fighting for of facing discrimination and exclusion from all jobs, education, housing and all welfare measures

From Telangana Hijra Intersex Transgender Samiti

For more information on transgender issues globally, you may consult <http://www.tgforum.com> or <http://www.qrd.org/trans>.

Telangana Hijra, Intersex, Transgender Samiti Some Demands

- Establishment of a statutory Hijra, Intersex, Transgender welfare board in Telangana with involvement of the community members
- Reservation in education and Government jobs and inclusion of transgender column in Government competitive examinations

- 3. Housing complex for the community members
- 4. Single stall bathrooms in public areas
- 5. Reserved seats in public transportation.

We would like to end this lesson by mentioning some positive developments in our country. In 2009, India's election authorities allowed transgender people to choose their gender as "other" on ballot forms. In May 2014, the Supreme Court of India declared the transgender community as a third gender and ordered the government to provide transgender people with reservations in jobs and education in line with other minorities. "It is the right of every human being to choose their gender," the Court and the National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) said in granting rights to those who identify themselves as neither male nor female. All the details of this judgment are available on the internet at <http://www.lawyerscollective.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/Transgender-judgment.pdf>.

And, read below the story of a successful transgender woman from West Bengal.

Manabi Bandyopadhyay – The First Transgender College Principal

In May 2015, Manabi Bandyopadhyay became the first transgender college principal in India. Coming from a lower-middle class family—her father was a factory worker, while her mother is a homemaker—she went to school on the outskirts of Kolkata and later to a well-known city college to study Bengali.

In 2003, she says, she decided to go in for hormone replacement surgery to change her sex from male to female. At work, she completed a dissertation on the role of transgenders in West Bengal, where their population exceeds 30,000.

Manabi says her troubles began when she changed her gender and her name in 2006. Authorities refused to recognise the change, and she was denied pay rises at the college where she taught "because they could not come to terms with my altered gender. There were taunts at work about my sex change. At home, my parents and siblings were worried sick whether my body would be able to cope with the changes. It took five years for the government and society to recognise my status and give me my identity." Ms. Bandyopadhyay says, "I have always been popular with my students, but my colleagues and peers were not so favourably disposed towards me after I changed my gender."

She has recently been appointed as the Vice-Chairperson of the West Bengal State Transgender Development Board. This is a government body. "Now I will have some authority to help members of my community when they reach me in distress. Even today parents think that this is a mental health issue. A few days back, a boy from Burdwan committed suicide when he couldn't stand the pressure from his parents, who wanted him to take psychiatric help because he was a transgender," she said. As a child, Bandyopadhyay was a victim of repeated rape. "I know of so many transgender people who have faced similar abuse. They have nowhere to go. I hope this Board will give them a space where they can report their mental and physical abuse," she says.