

**Whose Laadli is it anyway?
A critique on Delhi Laadli scheme
By Pranav Sukhija**

It is a matter of great shame for all of us to be living in a country where many are ruthlessly discriminating, marginalising and even killing their own daughters and sisters. Women in our country have faced oppression and widespread discrimination for centuries in the form of sati, child marriage, honour killing and many other heinous crimes. But the most obnoxious and brazen act that many, both rich and poor, are engaging in today is pre-natal sex determination followed by abortion of the female foetus.

With the objective of improving the dwindling sex ratio and promoting education for girls, the Delhi government launched the 'Laadli' scheme in 2008. This scheme offers a monetary incentive to girls, whose family's total income is less than Rs 1 lac and are residents of Delhi. The incentive can be collected by a girl after she turns 18, provided she has at least passed class tenth. This money can be utilised for her further education or even marriage.

This scheme has found many takers in a short span of time. As per the information gathered from a senior officer, as many as 275,000 applications have been accepted to receive assistance. The popularity of the scheme can be linked with the marketing budget of Rs 3.83 crores in 2008 and Rs 2.34 crores in 2009. Even though this scheme has been widely publicized there still exists lack of awareness among people about its procedures and conditions. This just highlights the ineffectiveness of the promotional tools being used.

The government must synchronise its efforts with NGOs and civil societies to reach out to the most marginalised section of people and make them aware about this scheme. They can also organise street plays and group discussions to sensitise the people about the plight of the girl child and bring a change in their mindset. Besides, they can assist them in filling Laadli application forms and obtaining birth certificates and other documents. Similarly, anganwadi workers can promote the girl child by generating awareness among the people living in slums and resettlement colonies.

The government must also make some relevant changes in the design of the scheme. I strongly recommend the government to award a small amount in cash as an incentive to parents when the girl child takes admission into class VI. This reward which could be as low as Rs 5000 may be a strong motivator for many parents for applying to the scheme. Another drawback with the scheme is that it is very complex and involves a lot of paper work and bureaucracy. They should think about alternative methods by which the application process can be streamlined. I would recommend the department to assign unique identity cards to all the girls who are availing benefits of this scheme. Instead of

refilling the Laadli form in several stages, they should get the benefits in their bank accounts by showing this ID card.

The number of female birth registrations did increase in 2008 after this scheme was launched. But I doubt if this indicates a dramatic change in the sex ratio of the city as it could just mean that more parents were registering the birth of their girl child than before. To make real change it is time for us to change our rigid attitude and for each of us to start at our homes to promote the girl child among our friends, relatives and peers. There is no time for procrastination. It is time to introspect and act.