Even today in the 21st century India, the psychosocial and cultural environments have innumerable prejudiced traditions and redundant customs: dowry, child marriage, illiteracy, physical and mental violence, etc. The Indian girls because of their secondary status in the society may have low self-esteem and poor psychological well-being. Thus it becomes important to study the psychosocial and cultural barriers faced by Indian girls in order to offer a timely correction that can help them play a substantial role in shaping-up the future village society. The broad objective of the present study was to identify the psychosocial and cultural barriers in a village society which hindering to get girls’ full potential. Two hundred and ten participants, between the age group of 13-19 years, from District Rohtak in Haryana (India), responded in a specific survey. Interviews and focus group discussions were also held. About 10 discourses were taken with rural women. Results obtained show certain factors as inhibitors (e.g. harmful traditional practices, conflicting situations, gender discrimination etc.). The implication of the findings in providing directions to policy makers, social scientists, and health practitioners towards rural areas regarding adolescent girls has been discussed.

Keywords: Socio-cultural barriers, personal growth, rural, adolescent girls

Cultural ethnicity includes the cultural values, attitudes, and behaviors that may distinguish ethnic groups and lead to specific behavioural styles. The subjective sense of ethnic identity may be held by group members coupled with the experiences associated with ethnic minority status, including powerlessness, discrimination, and prejudice (Phinney, 1996). Recent demographic data indicate that a systemic willful killing of female infants is a thing of the past in many developed countries (Hrdy, 1999). Several cultures have practiced female infanticide to get rid of unwanted girls (Hrdy, 1999; Rousselle, 2001).

Gender discrimination is most prevalent in Indian cultural ethnicity. Although female infanticide is now a crime in India, census data of the last two decades show a persisting male bias in sex ratios in several parts of the country (Muthulakshmi, 1997; Natarajan, 1997). The ratio of girls to boys in India is becoming increasingly skewed in favour of boys, as more and more girls are being selectively aborted as foetuses or killed after birth (Arnold, Kishor & Roy, 2001; Malaviya, 2005). Between 1992-93 and 1998-1999 the estimated number of sex selective induced abortions declined from 69,000 to 62,000 and from 57,000 to 51,000 in Haryana and Punjab respectively. Rural areas show higher preference for sex selective abortions than urban areas, UNFPA (2001). The 2001 census had already highlighted the adverse sex ratio in Haryana. Whereas India has reported a child sex ratio of 927 girls to 1000 boys, against a world average of 1045 women to 1000 men, Haryana lagged far behind in overall ratio with 861/1000 and Sonepat had 839/1000. The ratio further worsened in Rohtak with 796/1000 and Sonepat with 783/1000, in the 0-6 age group which was 820/1000 for overall Haryana. Though it was reported in “The Tribune” of July 5, 2006, State Health Minister claimed slightly improved
status for various districts of Haryana, including Rohtak (820/1000) and Sonepat (790/1000).

This sex ratio is worse when the first child is a female; it is a miserable 614/1000 in Punjab, 667/1000 in Haryana, and in urban areas it goes down to 614/1000. The country average in this category is 759/1000. However, when the first child is a male, Punjab’s sex ratio goes up to a healthy 1003/1000 (Jha et. al., 2006). In other words, with one son in the bag, families are less inclined to go in for sex determination tests and female foeticide. Their study also focused on the education variable reporting that children born to mothers with matriculate or higher education had a significantly lower sex ratio at 683/1000 than illiterate mothers at 869/1000. More education appears to make it easier for mothers to access sex determination tests and female foeticide networks in the countryside.

Recently conducted survey (2007) by Canada based International Development Research Centre reported about the preference of only one child, a son; Rohtak in Haryana was one of the sample areas.

There are substantial researches showing discrimination between boys and girls not only before birth but also after birth. Cultural and ethnographic reports suggest that the role of cultural practices, like the high costs of dowry and the prospect of old age care and protection by sons, are the main reasons for the prevalence of female neglect, Miller (1981). More recently, in a survey published about Delhi in Hindustan Times (August, 2008), about the reasons of boys being given preference over girls revealed several interesting facts. Females reported such diverse reasons as support in old age (90%), bringing in dowry (75%), continuation of the family name (37%), while males responded as continuation of the family name (89%), support in old age (88%), wealth remaining in the family (60%), and bringing in dowry (17%). One of the reasons, as reported by Hoffman (1988), is that in India sons are seen as a source of economic security. Parents believe that sons will support them in their old age, while daughters belong to the husband’s family and take on the responsibilities of the husband’s family. Hence, the son’s value stands enhanced.

It is well known that the Indian community is facing social problems such as female foeticide, violence against women, early marriages of girls, dowry and low female literacy levels. These problems cannot effectively be targeted without the effective and substantial involvement, and commitment of the community and the families, particularly the women (Punia, Balda & Punia 2005). Studies in north and south India have found that boys rather than girls are much more likely to be taken to a health facility when sick (Caldwell, Reddy, & Caldwell, 1982; Caldwell & Caldwell, 1990; Das Gupta, 1987; Ganatra & Hirve, 1994; Govindaswamy & Ramesh, 1996; Kishor, 1995; Ravindran, 1986; Visaria, 1988). Sons are preferred over daughters for a number of economic, social and religious reasons, including financial support, old age security, property inheritance, dowry, family ancestry, prestige and power, birth and death rituals and beliefs about religious duties and salvation (Dyson & Moore, 1983; Kishore, 1993; Das Gupta & Bhat, 1997; Basu, 1989; Miller, 1981; Caldwell & Caldwell, 1990).

The present study is focused on gender related discrimination in a particular state of India, that is, Haryana. Haryanvi culture is full of discriminatory phrases like ‘a girl is other’s property’ (ladki toh paraya dhan hai), ‘a girl is a guest in our house’ (ladki toh hamare ghar main mehmaan hai), (Sapru, 2006) that reflects a less preference for girls over boys. Similarly, there are other cultural believes prevalent in Haryana that reflect gender discrimination in favour of boys. For example, Kamal (2007) has cited
several prevalent gender discriminatory phrases such as 'more boys mean more hands and more hands mean more power and control' (‘Jitene ladke utna latta jitney latta utna kabja’, p100), ‘a boy is the lamp of the home while a girl is a burden’ (‘ladka ghar ka chirag hai, ladki ghar ka bhojh’, p46.), preference is for more than one son as shown in the phrase – ‘one eye cannot see much’ (eik aankh ka ke michna or ke kholna).

Male and female literacy rate is 79.3% and 56.3% respectively to the total literacy rate of 68.6% in Haryana (Bose, 2001). The gap is 23% which is more than the national average of 21.68%. However, Central and State governments have been introducing policies in an effort to improve the status of woman and the girl child, as well as to reverse the skewed trend. For instance, the Chief Minister of Haryana has announced a reward of Rs. 5 lakh for the village that would excel in checking female foeticide and drug de-addiction at state level and Rs. 1 lakh would be awarded for the village at district level for the same purpose. Haryana Government has several plans in progress for adolescent girls, for instance, facilities for educational loans, free of cost cycles to scheduled caste girls, and Kishori Shakti Yojna (Adolescent Girls Scheme). Several other schemes, having the objective of improving the nutritional and health status of adolescent girls between 11-18 years of age has also been launched with the objectives to empower and strengthen women and girls. These include such objectives as to train and equip them to improve home-based and vocational skills, to promote awareness of health, hygiene, nutrition, home management, child care, and take all measures so as to facilitate their marriage upon attaining the age of 18 years or even later. Ladli Laxmi Yojana has been established with a view to create positive thinking about girls among the masses, improvement in gender ratio and improving standard of education and health of girls. Apart from this, for laying a solid foundation for their future this scheme provides monetary incentives at different educational levels, for instance, in class 6th Rs. 2000/-; 9th Rs. 4000/-; 11th Rs. 7500/- and so on. “Save a Girl Child” campaign highlights the achievements and value of young girls. In 2002, the Haryana Government has launched a scheme “Devi Rupak” for the welfare of woman and girl child wherein an incentive of Rs. 500/- per month for a period 20 years will be given to the couples who opt for sterilization after the birth of their first child if it is a female child. Ostensibly, remarkable efforts of the government have not been much effective in this direction due to deep-rooted psycho-social and cultural factors.

The years of adolescence are the years of change and development at the biological, psychological, and social level. This is the period when girls start menstruating, get married and some of them have their first child, especially in the rural areas. It is in these years of transition from childhood to womanhood that girls, perhaps, need maximum attention to enable them to be healthy and productive in later stages. Yet this group has been neglected so far (Kumari, Singh & Dubey, 1990). It is a period of active personality development, resolving Identity vs. Role Confusion crisis and addressing “Who am I?” questions (Erikson, 1968). Since birth a baby girl in some parts of India is unwelcome. Uncountable prejudiced traditions, redundant customs, practice of dowry, child marriages, illiteracy, physical and mental violence, sow the seeds of dependency for a lifetime that lead to a negative impact on her psychological well-being. Hudson and den Boer (2004) have argued that male biased sex ratios also affect the mental health of men and women in complex ways.
The study would focus on identifying the various socio-cultural barriers faced by women of Haryana in realizing their full potential along with developing certain potential psychosocial intervention strategies/module for eradicating gender discrimination from society and for enhancing psychological well being of adolescent girls. Having a secondary status, a girl may have poor psychological well-being and socio-cultural practices may interfere in their flow and growth. Hence, it is an important subject of study as by correcting it in time, girls could play substantial role in shaping-up the future village society. Carrington (1957) noted that man-made factors are disturbing and are caused by conflicting domestic and cultural influences. Therefore, the solutions to their problems also lie with men. Research on perceived control and negative life events suggests that girls and women with a higher sense of uncontrollability may exhibit more tendencies of learned helplessness than boys and men (e.g., Leadbeater, Blatt, & Quinlan, 1995). Powell and Clarke (1975) noted that the problems of adolescents need to be understood in terms of their change of roles from childhood to adolescence.

The broad objective of the present study is to identify socio-cultural barriers in the personal growth of rural adolescent girls.

Method

Sample

Incidentally sampled 210 rural adolescent girl students within the age range of 13-19 years studying at 9th to 12th standard in either of the two co-education schools: Government Higher Secondary School, Jasiya, District Rohtak (Haryana) and Navyug Higher Secondary School, Mundhal, District Rohtak (Haryana) responded to a questionnaire prepared on the basis of focus group discussion and non-participant observation.

Procedure

Focused Group Discussion: The first attempt to obtain qualitative information relied on focus group discussions with rural women and adolescent girls. About 10 discourses were taken with rural women (15-25 per group). The gender discrimination was discussed along with other topics. Similarly with adolescent girls some informal talks were held about their life-difficulties, gender discrimination, entertainment, facilities etc.

These discourses were taken during an NGO’s (named Choupal) visit during 2007-2008. The NGO, in leadership of Dr. Tonk, Head, Department of Medicines, RML Hospital, New Delhi, caters to all specialties in medicine, veterinary, agriculture and psychological help. The group stays with the villagers the whole day on Sundays and provides their specialties.

Non-participant Observation was also done throughout the study period by the first author. Based on the analysis of qualitative data, a questionnaire was designed for adolescent girls who were interviewed with the questionnaire for validating the qualitative data.

By taking view of observational output most relevant questions were prepared. These are –

1. Do you think you require information on some more topics/issues that your present environment does not give? Yes/No. On which topics?

2. Do you think there is any need to change your parents’/guardians’ attitudes to understand you? Yes/No. For example…

3. Do you think there is difference between a boy and a girl in the society? Yes/No. For example…
4. Do you always feel secure? Yes/No. Where if no…

5. Do you think that you have a flourishing environment? Yes/No. Where if no…

6. Do you think that the aim of your life is clear and you are successfully moving towards it? Yes/No. If no, what obstacles…

7. Traditions that create obstacles in your way…

8. What should be the age and qualification to get married?

9. If, for one day, you have power in your hand what would you like to change for girls?

10. Do you feel proud/ inferior in being a girl in the society? Why?

Consent from school principals was taken for data collections and they were also interviewed about the issues related to adolescent girls. The above mentioned questionnaire was administered in Hindi, since most of the students in the schools belonged to Hindi medium. Interviews were also held with the participants to validate the questionnaire data.

Results and Discussion
During focused group discussion, the first author came across certain cases like:

A young widow (age about 20 years) in a village with an infant son (luckily), looks towards the Panchayat’s (community leaders) decision for deciding her fate. She has always been dependent on her father, brother and husband even for visiting one place to another (e.g. even to go to her parent’s house or to her in-laws’ house), and she is not in any position to take her own decisions. She has to endure the ritual of Latta uddana (another person being assigned by the family as the husband, usually the deceased husband’s brother or first cousin). This gets more complicated since her real brother-in-law is already married.

Extreme dependency is an obstacle in her way, and to add to this is her changed status as a widow, which worsens her situation. All these difficulties reduce her to being a puppet in others’ hands. The village society is slowly limping towards nuclear family style from a joint family style. Therefore, education to develop independence, decision making power, self-esteem, occupational proficiency, etc. among females is a must. Supporting this view, Punia, Balda and Punia (2005) reported in a study based in Haryana that women cannot think independently and seek the help of male members even in taking daily life decisions and getting their everyday problems solved.

In another distressing scene the researcher observed a woman, mother of two girls, after willingly doing female foeticide crying with grief as if the abortion was natural and as if it was impossible for her to continue with the pregnancy and give birth to a girl child. Most surprising was the fact that apparently she had been part of the decision making and on this decision she had no regret.

Reason being two mental sets – opting for limited number of children (not more than three at any cost) accompanied by the strong desire of a son that compels her to do this act. Several psychosomatic disorders have been developing in women due to these kinds of social dilemmas.

In the second attempt to gather information, when interviewed, the Principals of the schools showed realization that most of the parents are not interested in sending their daughters outside for study, early marriages are frequent, and there
are fewer opportunities to go outside for education. Parents want protective environment for their daughters and that is probably not perceived to be the case as far as commuting to distant centers of education is involved.

Table-I : Demographic information in terms of Means and Percentages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>11th &amp; 12th class (N=100)</th>
<th>Stream : Arts/ Sciences</th>
<th>Father’s Service</th>
<th>Father’s Education</th>
<th>Mother’s Education</th>
<th>No. of sibling's</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age (mean &amp; SD)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>86% reported their age</td>
<td>50% reported</td>
<td>11% in service</td>
<td>1% Graduate</td>
<td>70% Housewife</td>
<td>1=1% 2=10% 3=23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>age range : 14-19yrs</td>
<td>Art students</td>
<td>6% laborer</td>
<td>16% 12th pass</td>
<td>2% laborer</td>
<td>4=30% 5=11% 6=5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean:16.68 (SD: 1.02)</td>
<td>11% Science</td>
<td>83% Farming</td>
<td>40% 10th pass</td>
<td>28% not reported</td>
<td>remaining not reported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mdn: 17</td>
<td>students Rest</td>
<td>41% below 10th</td>
<td>10% illiterate</td>
<td>36% illiterate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mode:17</td>
<td>of the students</td>
<td>2% not reported</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| 9th & 10th class (N=110) | NA                       | 17% in Service   | 7% Graduate       | 50% Housewife     | 2=15% 3=33% 4=27%|
| Age (mean & SD)          |                         | 13%Labourer      | 13% 12th pass     | 3% laborer        | 5=7% 6=1% 7=1% 16% not reported |
| age range : 13-17yrs     | 35%Farmers              | 36% 10th pass    | 3% below 10th     | 43% not reported  |                 |
| Mean: 14.83 (SD: 0.93)   | 35% not reported        | 18% below 10th   | 1% illiterate     |                   |                 |
| Mdn : 15                 |                          | 25% not reported |                   |                   |                 |
| Mode : 15                |                          |                  |                   |                   |                 |

As reported in the table parents of 13 to 19 years old 9th to 12th class female students from rural areas of Rohtak District were not highly educated (see Table I) and had seasonal earnings except those in service. Number of children per family range was 1-6, having 3 and 4 children being the prominent trend. Higher number of children may be linked with less education and less female foeticide. Jha et al. (2006) focused on education variable reporting that children born to mothers with class 10 or higher education had a significantly lower female sex ratio at 683/1000 than illiterate mothers at 869/1000. It may lead to less educated mothers having higher number of children and less female foeticide but sons’ preference remains equally strong in all.

In farming, women do almost equal work although it is not perceived by the participants. Hence, mothers’ occupation is perceived to be housewives by most of the girls. It is reported in ‘Report of the Time use Survey’ women do more of the unpaid activities (51%) as compared to men (33%) and also the percentage of time spent by females in unpaid activities was the highest in Haryana (86%).

It shows that the study represents the population which has lesser education, higher number of children, mostly village driven occupations, rooted in their culture and less exposed to the outside world. Consequently, the study must not be generalized with overall Indian and Haryanavi scenario. It may be a representation of the people who have similar kinds of demographic variables.
Table-II: Data shows participants' response in terms of Percentages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>11th &amp; 12th Class (Q :1)</th>
<th>(Q :2)</th>
<th>(Q :3)</th>
<th>(Q :4)</th>
<th>(Q :5)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Information on which topic</td>
<td>Need to change attitude</td>
<td>Discrimination between boy/girl</td>
<td>Feel safe</td>
<td>Environment able to fulfill demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>72% Yes</td>
<td>45% Yes on permission to go outside, need to change their perspective on redundant traditions understanding their feeling, play time, less house work, 24% no</td>
<td>74% Yes 15% No 11% not responded</td>
<td>Yes 39% No:29% 17% Yes, but not during traveling/outside 15% not responded</td>
<td>32% Yes 34% No * problem during traveling, * not able to go outside * Outsiders interference 34% not responded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*46% education including computer, English, General knowledge</td>
<td>*26% further career</td>
<td>Health, self belief development, society, politics, Economy</td>
<td>how to handle with social problems, and Discrimination</td>
<td>28% No response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9th &amp; 10th Class</td>
<td>59% Yes</td>
<td>36% Yes (on permission to go outside, need to change their perspective on redundant traditions understanding their feeling, play time, less house work, 9% No 55% No response</td>
<td>78% Yes 22% No Mainly, on schooling and not permission to go outside</td>
<td>45% Yes 35% No 8% Yes but not outside 12% not responded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>57% on career orientation &amp; education including computer, English, science, GK etc. 7% etiquettes 5% kupratha 4% no need 37% No response</td>
<td>78% Yes 22% No</td>
<td>45% Yes 35% No 8% Yes but not outside 12% not responded</td>
<td>53% Yes 25% No 22% not responded</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Yes:65.5% No:2% No response:32.5%</td>
<td>Yes:76% No:18.5% No response:5.5%</td>
<td>Yes:42% No:32% Yes, but not outside:12.5% No response:13.5%</td>
<td>Yes:42.5% No:29.5% No response:28%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the answer to the question in which area they need more information, along with educational queries they need more information on how to handle social problems, discrimination, redundant traditions, etiquettes, etc. To the parents’/guardians’ need to change their attitudes, they emphasize on more understanding and faith, empathetic attitude required, no discrimination, equal treatment, no boundation, more play time, less house work, etc. They perceived discrimination between boys and girls mainly on not permitting them to go outside, preferring boys’ education more, happier on boys' birth. If we compare 9th and 10th girls with 11th and 12th girls, younger girls found outside environment safer and appropriate. Rural socio-cultural environment may be more challenging during elder years.
Substantial number of girls perceived aim in their lives. Simultaneously, they observed some obstacles to achieve their aims like fear of early marriage, not allowed to go outside for study, lack of information and money problem. Again fear of early marriage and not allowed to go outside formed the major response regarding traditional obstacles, along with *purdah* system, dowry and female foeticide. Marriagable age was perceived in the range of 18-25yrs. They also preferred job eligibility as other major criteria for marriage. In response to the question about power they would like to improve educational and job facilities, safety, no early marriage, no discrimination, They also focus on freedom, western wear (*pant-shirt*).

Most frequently observed phrases by 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> class girls: ‘world is very bad’ (*Jamana bahut kharab hai*) (12%), ‘other’s wealth/property’ (*Paraya Dhan*) (5%), ‘society thinks of (us) as burden’ (*Bhojha samaj samjhata hai*) (3%). Similarly by 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> class girls: *bojh manate* 5%, *paraya dhan* 3% and *zamana burra hai* 1%.

During survey and focused group discussion other phrases frequently observed were:

- (*hum jab dusare gaon me padhne jate hain* )

### Table II (continued) : Data shows participants’ response in terms of Percentages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Q :7 Traditions that create obstacles</th>
<th>Q :8 Marriagable age/qualification</th>
<th>Q :9 Power for one day</th>
<th>Q :10 Proud being a girl</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; &amp; 12&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; Class</td>
<td>50% early marriage 56% No permission to go outside/ No permission for further study 8%Redundant Traditions (Purani soch) 5% <em>purdah</em> system 5% dowry &amp; Female foeticide</td>
<td>Range=18-25yrs. 18-19= 43% 20-22=24% 23-25=12% No response=21% <em>service (Pairon per khari), self dependent, able to take decision, Graduate</em></td>
<td>Along with education and job facilities, safety, no early marriage, no discrimination,</td>
<td>57% Proud being a girl (give reference of social models-Kalpana Chawla) 5% Yes but feel society thinks of them as inferior (<em>samaj heen samjhata hai</em>) 17% inferior 21% No response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; &amp; 10&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; Class</td>
<td>45% early marriage 23% No permission to go outside 38% No permission for further study 7% discrimination 7% dowry &amp; <em>parda</em> system</td>
<td>Range=18-26yrs. 18-19 =55% 20-22=33% 23-25=12% <em>service (Pairon per khari), self dependent</em></td>
<td>Along with education and job facilities, safety, no early marriage, no discrimination, They also focus on freedom, western wear (<em>pant-shirt</em>)</td>
<td>90% Yes 8% inferior 2% No response</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
to kabhi koi ladka sath-sath ghumane lagate hain to ghar wale sochate hain ki shadi kar do) “when we go to other village to study, at that times some guys start going along, the family thinks that they (girls) should be married” showing gotra complexity. Fear of exploitation of honour (Izaat) makes parents insecure.

- “If I get better educated then there will be problem in getting married” (Jyada padh-likh jaugi to saddi me dikkat aayegi); 
- hearing various kind of talks regarding girls” (samaj me ladkiyon ki tarh-tarh ki bate sunana) again showed parental insecurity.

- “Why should everyone (girls) be made to suffer because of some one?” (Kissi eik ki sajja sabko kyo?) stated by an adolescent girl shows how if one girl does not follow social norms, parents increase strictness for all the girls which at times translates into no permission to go outside the village even for educational purposes, as also early marriage. In focused group discussion also women emphasized that if someone has violated social norms there would be no permission to go out for all other girls by the elders (especially grand parents).

- Discriminatory attitude and behaviour is apparent through other statements like, “daughter is not allowed to go outside while the son remains out all the day” (beti ko bahar nahi jane diya jata aur beta sara din bahar hi rahata he), the son is encouraged and the daughter is discouraged (ladke ko prosahan aur ladki ki upeksha), etc.

It is also observed that phrases which are already documented in the literature were repeated frequently in the discussions, e.g. ‘attained puberty’ (jawan ho gayi hai), ‘has matured’ (Sayani ho gayi hai) (Sapru, 2006; Kumari et al. 1990), sometimes due to puberty period in early adolescent age indicating restrictions. Such revealing comments make them feel shameful, doubtful, insecure and decreased self esteem. ‘After education upon marriage (she) has to cook and do household work’ (Padh likh kya karegi shadi ke baad to chulha hi jalana hai) Kumari et.al. (1990), ‘other’s wealth/property’ (Paraya Dhan) supports Kakar’s, (1978) statement, “A daughter, who ultimately will move to her husband’s family, is viewed as a ‘guest’ of the house”.

Folksongs (lokgeet) also reveal as well as support this discrimination, e.g. one where a sister asks of her brother about the discrimination and disparities between facilities provided to them as being highlighted in the folksong “Bir hum ma ke jaaye re, lote the eik sharer, ke kismet nyari nyari re...” Later stanzas of the song point out the difference between the treatment and facilities given to her and her brother. Derogatory names, like Unchahi (unwanted), Bhateri, Kaafi (enough), and Bharpai (paying the penalty) is another example of discriminating traditions, of which other examples include: a boy’s birth being announced by beating a brass ‘thali’ (plate) with a spoon, and singing songs. There are also some conflicting religious practices like special offering to girls in Navratras, to please Devi (the goddess) that is in total opposition to females being aborted or killed which shows the basic conflict in the society.

Radha Devi (2007) categorized marriages age-wise as 10-14 child marriage, 15-17 early marriage, 18-19 acceptable and 20+ preferred marriage, and 4.4%, 25.1%, 34.4% & 35.6% respectively are reported marriages in overall Haryana. However, unreported and rural population data may change this scenario. In the present study perceived marriageable age is 18-25 years. They also preferred graduation and employment for themselves. Discrepancy
between real and ideal situations acts as an inhibitor for their growth and development. Parents (69%) responded saying that the son should be educated, Kumari, et. al. (1990). The process of socialization too helps to perpetuate the system based gender inequality and creates a sense of inferiority among women. Even the well-off families do not encourage expenditure on girls’ education (Shajy & Shajy, 2007). According to the 2001 census, 46% of the women in India are illiterate, most of them living in the remote parts of the country, and who are not even aware of their rights. Therefore, they do not demand the enforcement of their rights within the family, community and nation (Shajy & Shajy, 2007). Moreover, the parents do not wish to risk endangering the reputation of the girl and the family as well. Once a girl has passed the marriageable age it is difficult to find a husband for her, as mentioned in the statements cited before and also supported in previous study as “an educated girl would be more argumentative” (padh likh jaayegi to jyada mann chalayegi), Kumari et.al. (1990).

Lack of play time because of more house work also featured as a major factor of discrimination, and that this attitude needs to be changed, findings supported by Kumari et al. (1990). They also observed that various activities that the girls are supposed to do include washing clothes, cleaning, cooking, looking after cattle, collecting water, taking care of their siblings, etc. which are time consuming and leave no room for relaxation. Kapur (1982) further confirmed that the girl child is overburdened with household chores and taking care of her younger siblings. The role of social pressure has been highlighted as responsible for psychosocial problems, Jesselyn (1953). Recently, Chouhdary and Choudhary (2008) observed that almost one-third (34.33%) girls attributed the reason for their discrimination to society, its values and the customs practised.

Self-esteem is at its highest in early childhood at ages 9 through 12; it drops sharply in adolescence (13–17); continues its decline into the college period (18–22); rises slightly in the post-college years (23–29); and then reaches a plateau in the 30’s with gradual increase from then on until it declines markedly from the 60’s to the 80’s (Robins, Trzesniewski, Tracy, Gosling, & Potter, 2002). Studies have demonstrated that parents are more likely to support shyness and passivity in girls than in boys (Lonigan & Phillips, 2001). Research on perceived control and negative life events suggests that girls and women with a higher sense of uncontrollability may exhibit more tendencies of learned helplessness than boys and men (Leadbeater, Blatt, & Quinlan, 1995). Jacobson’s study (1992) reported that gender bias brings in grossly unequal allocation of resources for girl child and woman with regard to food, nutrition, education, health services, medical care etc. supporting observed gender discrimination in the present study.

Kapur (1982) reported that difficulties in relationships are mainly responsible for problems among adolescent girls. She further observed that the causes of conflict between parents and their adolescent children in their relationships are not only different but even contradictory among different regions, castes and classes. She also observed that adolescent girls cannot be considered as a homogeneous group. Thus, the study must not be generalized with Indian and Haryanavi scenario. It may be a representation of the people who have least outside exposure, are not highly educated, and have a lot of impact of psycho-social and cultural traditions on their behaviour. The present research strongly recommends some intervention programmes for restructuring socio-cultural issues which are hampering girls’ over all well-being.
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