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Satara renames its 'unwanted' girls



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They all got rid of the name 'Nakoshi', which means unwanted in Marathi

"Unwanted" is what 265 girls in Satara district were called until today. In a public renaming ceremony held on Saturday, all the girls got rid of the name "Nakoshi" meaning unwanted in Marathi, and hopefully, the humiliation that came with it.

Owing to a "tradition" that reflects gender bias, several parents in the region have named their third or fourth daughter Nakoshi, in the hope that the next child will be a boy. In a recent survey, district health officials realised that this was a rampant practice in Satara. In a bid to undo the damage, and spread awareness about protecting the girl child, the district administration organised a public event to rename and honour the girls.

Waiting for her renaming ceremony to start, 10-year-old Nakoshi Bavdhane told *The Hindu* that she is the fourth girl born to her parents. "I am happy that my name has been changed. It was embarrassing to say my name whenever anyone asked," she told *The Hindu*. Asked what the new name was, her mother Janabai struggled to remember. "Hey, Nakoshi, what's the name?," she asked her daughter. "Aishwarya," she replied. "It is so difficult. I don't know if I will get used to saying it," Janabai said,

of all four of them. Who will give so much dowry?," Janabai asks.

Nakoshi Kirdat (32) has a similar story to tell. An anganwadi (crèche) worker in Karanjepet village, she had her name changed to Neeta when she got married at 18. However, she remained "Nakoshi" on paper. "I was sent to school only till tenth class, as my parents didn't have money to educate me. But I always wanted to do something important, and gain respect. I have accepted the fact that my parents didn't want me when I was born, but I didn't want to give up on myself," she states, with the faith that the new name will also give her a new identity.

However, in a region where gender bias only starts with the name, and the parents think of daughters as a burden, there is a possibility that the change will only be restricted to the renaming ritual, and not reflect in the actual change in mindset.

Satara District Health Officer Dr. Bhagwan Pawar addressed the concern and told *The Hindu* that the renaming will send out a positive message to people, that girls must be welcomed in the family.

"It might not change the sex ratio of the district drastically, and the mindsets of people will take years to change, but this is one way of telling our girls that we need them, and they are indispensable in our lives," Dr. Pawar said.

It took eight months for the officials to recognise the "Nakoshis" in schools and anganwadis across the district. Dr. Pawar's team found 26 "Nakoshis" in Chief Minister Prithviraj Chavan's hometown Karad. At 881, the district's child sex ratio is lower than the State average of 883. Most of the girls come from poor households, Dr. Pawar said.

First noticed

The process to identify "Nakoshis" in the State was initiated by Ahmednagar-based activist Sudha Kankria who first noticed the trend in 2007.

"I realised it was a vicious circle that the girls are a part of; their parents didn't want them, so in turn they don't want girls. It needs to break somewhere, and getting a new identity is surely a beginning of that process," Ms. Kankria said.

Baramati MP Supriya Sule of the Nationalist Congress Party, who was the chief guest at the event, addressed the girls and said, "Even if your name is "unwanted" we need you girls in the State. In Maharashtra, girls will be treated equal to boys."

Social worker Varsha Deshpande who works on issues of female foeticide, stated that the renaming ceremony should not merely remain a ritual.

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