

**Culture and Gender Discrimination: An Exploratory
Study of “Nakusa” (unwanted) Girls of Maharashtra,
India**

By

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Abstract

This study is conducted mainly to examine the naming practices of the girls in the Satara district of Maharashtra, India by analyzing the factors responsible for girl child discrimination. Initially, a household survey was conducted in 2013 in the selected villages along with case studies. Several parents in Satara district have named their daughters as 'Nakusa/Nakoshi' means 'unwanted' in local Marathi language, in the hope and superstition that the next child will be a boy. The naming of girl as 'Nakusa' was reported among the Hindus and in rural areas only. 'Nakusas' were in between the ages of 4 to 48 years, indicating the naming practice was very old and still prevalent and most visible form of gender discrimination. Most of the 'Nakusas' were either third or fourth child of their parents. 'Nakusa' girls are experiencing various socio-psychological problems due to their peculiar name, including humiliation in schools and community.

INTRODUCTION

Discrimination against girl child in India is an obtainable reality and it reflects serious gender based differences, inequalities and neglects. The general perception is that girl child suffers deprivation from 'womb to tomb'. The complex structure of the culture and socio-economic factors prevalent in the society deprive the girl child. The family attitudes towards children are shaped by powerful culture of the community, and it leads to different treatment based on their sex (Miller, 1981). Cutting across regions and different strata of society, neglect of the girl child are widespread in India. Some evidence-based studies show that girls are given less food, health care, and education than boys, a situation highly prevalent in some parts of India. According to the 2011 Census, the decline of child sex ratio (particularly 0-6 age group) reflects a bitter truth. Not very long ago, there was time even with widespread negligence of females, and the sex ratio was not as skewed as of today. But, in the era of sophisticated medical technology, girl child are not even allowed to born.

In India, the general perception about the girl child is reflected clearly in a Tamil proverb “having a daughter is like watering a flower in the neighbour’s garden” (Sekher and Hatti, 2010 a). By analyzing the male-female ratio, Amartya Sen (1990) in his imperative paper titled “More than 100 Million Women are Missing”, highlighted the magnitude of increasing gender discrimination in India.

The present study examines the naming practices of girl children in the Satara district of Maharashtra by analyzing the factors responsible for the girl child discrimination. According to Sue and Telles (2007), “selecting a name for a child represents an important cultural decision. Names oftentimes signify ethnic identity, particularly the identity that parents expect for their children. Given names have obvious long-term consequences; as labels they influence the socialization of children and contribute to the development of personal identities. Although parents may choose from an apparently boundless number of names, their choices are shaped by social and cultural influences (P- 1383-84).”

In the Indian context, most of the names of people are inherited from ancient scriptures and mythology. Another practices still existing in a different manner, particularly naming a girl child as “Nakusa/Nakoshi” which means ‘Unwanted’ in Marathi language. “The study of naming practices provides a window into parental visions of the ethnic identity of their children, thereby addressing how ethnic identity is directly influenced from one generation to the next. Naming practices represent behaviours which are much more concrete measures than attitudes and opinions.” (Sue and Telles, 2007, P- 1385). However, in the context of study area, the naming of the girl as ‘Nakusa’ is a clear manifestation of parental attitude towards daughters. Though this practice was prevalent for many decades, it has become noticed recently when a mass re-naming function was organized in the district 2011.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The existing literature on socio-cultural factors responsible for the discrimination against girl child in India is abundant in nature. In an era of general improvement of female

status and socio-economic changes, daughters in India are still vulnerable to social and cultural discrimination. Even if the socio-economic transformations has challenged the foundations of all the culturally established believes that have been perpetuating son preference, the institutional changes regarding relationship between generations have still enough to change our general belief that a son is necessary and a daughter cannot replace the duties of a son. Some existing studies argue that improvement happened in almost all spheres of socio-economic life have so far contributed very little towards the empowerment of women. Due to an immense increase in the dowry transactions have certainly reinforced the perception that having daughters is a liability whereas having a son as a necessity.

Discrimination against girl child and gender inequality in Indian society is, therefore, interconnected with the culture of patriarchy, patrilineal and traditional stereotyping (Bhadra, 1999). Different kinship systems of India have both adverse and positive situations for women. The marriage systems also vary considerably across regions in India having implications for female autonomy. Northern part of the subcontinent had more exogamous marriages and southern part of the subcontinent had more endogamous and egalitarian marriage systems, with matrilineal family forms (Dyson and Moore, 1983).

The traditional, patrilineal, patrilocal and exogamous marriage and kinship systems generally prevalent in much of the subcontinent have always placed women in a low-status (Dyson and Moore, 1983; Sudha and Rajan, 1999). The analysis of the regional variations in female-male ratio highlights the role of cultural factors. Culture is a significant determinant of the position of women in the society. Where the culture is female-friendly, survival chances of the girl children are better (Agnihotri, 2000).

In terms of familial exclusion, daughter themselves experience the lesser expectations, and less worth parents have feeling that they are bringing her up just for another family's advantage (Croll, 2000).The term 'son preference' refers to the attitude that sons are more important and more valuable than daughters. In many parts of our country, parents valued their sons for economic, religious, or social reasons (Clark, 2000).

Son preference has a clear cultural dimension. Generally, there are three major cultural and religious reasons that are broadly discussed by researchers for the preference for sons in India, viz. aspects of inheritance, old age support and rituals (Miller, 1981; Croll, 2000, Larsen, 2011). Ethnographic studies reveal that celebration in family occurs only when a boy is born (Miller 1981; Croll 2000; Aravamudan, 2007). Bumiller (1990) opines among the family, the birth of a boy is a time for celebration, but the birth of a girl is often viewed as a crisis.

Marriage costs are the most imperative cultural motivation for strong preference for sons. The familial exclusion of daughters related to their movement upon marriage is a very important and immediate factor. Hence, it is assumed that daughters are associated with loss or double-loss is due to the burden of expenses of her upbringing and marriage. A daughter leaves the natal family after her marriage and the benefits from investment made in her upbringing go to the new family, so it is considered a loss by the natal family. (Croll, 2000; Hatti, et.al, 2004).

In India, for centuries, girl child has been neglected and considered as a burden and liability. She is discriminated in education, clothing, nutrition, health care in upbringing. Among low-income groups, where there are several children in the family, the female child is the first victim in terms of education and health care (Bhadra, 1999). Differences in mortality between boys and girls in north India are largely the immediate result of immense bias toward boys and the relative neglect of girls.

Discrimination occurs mainly in three categories: feeding, dispensation of medical care, and allocation of love and warmth (Miller, 1981). Because of undernourishment, girls are likely to take longer time to recover from illness. This, combined with lack of appropriate medical attention during the vulnerable years of childhood, accounts for the cultural norms and perception that defeats the biological head start with which the female is naturally endowed (Sharma and Gopalakrishnan, 1999). Woman who herself had a worst childhood experience (in terms of discrimination in all spheres including childhood status,

food, education, mobility, etc.), had less autonomy in various dimensions, and felt high instability in her married life, is more responsible for the discrimination against girl child leading to vicious cycle of gender deprivation and discrimination (Agarwal & Unisa, 2010).

The most immediate form of female discrimination at birth is the practice of female infanticide which has customarily been deployed to limit the number of females and to determine the gender composition of families (Croll, 2000). It is apparent from most studies that systematic infanticide wherever it is practiced is directed primarily toward females (Miller, 1981). It is a well documented fact that infanticide in India was prevalent among certain communities during the nineteenth and early part of the twentieth century. The castes that practiced female infanticide in the 19th century included the Rajputs, Jats, Ahirs, Gujjars and Khutris. The British first discovered the practice of female infanticide in 1789 (Hatti, et.al, 2004). In some ways, the female infanticide was the poor woman's version of another phenomenon among India's upper classes- the use of prenatal tests to determine the sex of a child and sex selective abortion (Bumiller, 1990).

According to Sen (2003), "there have been two opposite movements: female disadvantage in mortality has typically been reduced substantially, but this has been counterbalanced by a new female disadvantage- that in natality - through sex-specific abortions aimed against the female fetus. The availability of modern techniques to determine the sex of the fetus has made such sex selective abortion possible and easy, and it is being widely used in many societies" (P-1297).

In many parts of India, both infanticide and fatal female neglect have been replaced by sex-selective abortion (Sekher and Hatti, 2010 a). In the name of gender composition and ideal family size, in many parts of India the widespread use of advanced technologies for the identification of sex of the foetus before birth and this followed by sex selective abortions (Croll, 2000). Furthermore, as social norms are changing toward smaller families, the availability of and access to new technologies provide an easy way for parents to achieve such goals (Hatti,et. al, 2004; Larsen, 2011).

During the last two decades, micro-level studies and surveys reveal the wider distribution, privatization and commercialization of the medical technologies such as prenatal diagnosis technologies and abortion facilities mushroomed in India, primarily used to avoid the birth of daughters due to strong son's preference in the society (Croll, 2000; Hatti,et. al, 2004; Patel, 2004; Aravamudan, 2007). Ultrasound scanning for sex detection has become a huge industry. With every new technological advance, elimination of female fetus becomes much easier and more efficient (Aravamudan, 2007). Designed for the detection of genetic abnormality in the unborn child, technologies of amniocentesis and sonography has put into the hands of 'son- crazy' parents and unscrupulous medical practitioners, a means to detect and summarily eliminate female fetuses. Almost all the foeticide victims were second or third daughters of the family (Sharma &Gopalakrishnan, 1999). A significantly higher proportion of women who had less number of children ever born with no male child experienced abortion than women who have one or more male child (Agarwal & Unisa, 2010). Government of India banned the tests at national level, with the Prenatal Diagnostic Techniques (PNDT) (Regulation and Prevention of Misuse) Act. A large proportion of abortions are being performed in India illegally than legal (Arnold,et. al, 2002; Hatti,et. al, 2004).

Mari Bhat's research explain the century-long trend of a falling proportion of females in the Indian population, by identifying the age groups, regions and social groups of the estimated 21 million females gone 'missing' between 1901 and 1991. The Child Sex Ratio is an appropriate measure of understanding the daughter discrimination because it includes its three main components; distorted sex ratios at birth, infanticide, and child mortality (Larsen, 2011). The accelerated fall in the child sex ratio after 1981 seems largely due to the diffusion of prenatal sex-selection techniques in regions with well-entrenched gender bias (Bhat, 2002).

The changes in sex ratios at birth show how discrimination against girls has increased and become more selective as it has become stronger against higher birth order

girls. The sex ratio imbalances are more severe in the north western region, which stretching from Uttarakhand in the north runs up to Maharashtra in the west. For child sex ratios, a well known regional pattern is observed in the so-called ‘Bermudan triangle for the female child’ which embraces the states of Punjab, Haryana, and Western Uttar Pradesh, some of Rajasthan and ravine area of Madhya Pradesh (Miller, 1981; Croll, 2000). The regional disparities also appear to have increased; the northern states generally exhibit a worsening trend in male-female sex ratio as compared to the southern states.

Most of the studies on girl child discrimination in India mainly analyze socio-economic indicators including income and educational characteristics of parents or mothers, economic value of children, son preference, imbalance of sex-ratio, masculinity of the population, infanticide, sex selective abortion, rather than the perspective of the socio-cultural and psychological development of the girl child. Detailed examination of deeply rooted cultural assumptions about gender identity and its relation to the girl child discrimination are still less explored areas in India. Some of the researchers touched upon the cultural aspects of discrimination against the girl child and most of the studies concluded that son preference occurs not because of economic factors only, but also due to strong cultural postulations.

RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

The proposed study becomes relevant as it looks into the discrimination of the girl child in a different manner by analyzing the practice of naming girl child. Son preference in the society and discrimination against the girl child are interconnected. The secondary status of the girl child in India is still continued mainly because of the existing social ideologies, cultural ethos and value systems. Pronounced traditional customs of the society that reflects gender bias, several parents in the Satara region have named their daughters as ‘Nakusa’ means “unwanted” (in local language), in the hope that the next child will be a boy. This practice is still prevailing in the rural areas of Satara district of Maharashtra in Southern India.

OBJECTIVES

The present study intends to:

- a. examine the naming practices of girl children by analyzing the factors responsible for such a practice.
- b. examine the socio economic profile of the families who named their daughters as 'Nakusa' (unwanted).
- c. examine how far naming of girls reflects the discrimination against daughters.
- d. look in to the discriminatory experiences of 'Nakusa' girls in their own households and in the village community as a whole.

METHODOLOGY

The present study is based both on quantitative as well as qualitative techniques of data collection. The study is based primarily on a household survey conducted in Satara District. It took almost two months to complete the data collection. The field work was carried out between 26th, January to 10th March, 2013. The survey was conducted on the basis of available information from a list of girls whose names are changed recently through a renaming campaign of 'Nakusa' girls in the district of Satara by the district administration. The list of 265 girls in 11 Tehsils of Satara district, whose names were changed was collected from Zilla Parishat office, and used as sampling frame for identifying the respondents. The list includes information about the present and past name of 'Nakusa' girls, their age, place of residence, village as well as Tehsil. The list of 'Nakusas' of seven Tehsils namely Satara, Jaoli, Mahabalaswer, Phaltan, Koregaon, Karad and Paatan were obtained. Further, 100 'Nakusa' households were selected randomly from the list. The parents of 'Nakusa' girls from these selected households, spread over many villages were interviewed using a structured interview schedule (see Annexure: D).

Due to seasonal migration of the family and unavailability of the household members, only 77 families were interviewed. Among them, 42 ‘Nakusa’ girls were also interviewed (aged 10 years and above). The Interview Schedule had three parts namely- household schedule, parental attitude towards ‘Nakusa’ girls and a section particularly for interviewing ‘Nakusa’ girls. The interview schedule was comprised of questions on socio-demographic and economic characteristics of the households, factors behind the naming practices, and manifestations of neglect and discrimination against ‘Nakusas’.

Apart from the household survey, three key informant interviews (KII), two case studies of parents of ‘Nakusa’ girls and four case studies of ‘Nakusa’ girls were also conducted. KIIs were conducted with a NGOs activist, a social activist, and a government official, who are directly worked/involved on this issue. The available information from different NGOs based in the district and Zilla Parishat was also collected.

Why ‘Nakusa’ Name? Enquiring into the Practices and Factors

This part discusses the naming practices of the girl child and the underlying factors responsible for it. This part also includes the background characteristics of the households based on a survey carried out in the villages of Satara district, Maharashtra.

Table2.1: Background Characteristics of households having at least one girl named as ‘Nakusa’

Background Characteristics	Percent	Frequency
Type of family		
Joint	26.0	20
Nuclear	74.0	57
Caste Category		
Scheduled Castes (SCs)	13.0	10
Scheduled Tribes (STs)	23.4	18

Other Backward Castes		
(OBCs)	11.7	9
General	52.0	40
Name of the Caste		
Maratha	52.0	40
Dhangar	14.0	11
Mang	8.0	6
Ramoshi	5.0	4
Others	21.0	16
Type of house		
Kachha	8.0	6
Semi-Pucca	82.0	63
Pucca	10.0	8
Monthly Income of households		
Up to Rs. 2000	65.0	50
Rs. 2000 to Rs. 10,000	35.0	27
Total	100.0	77

Of the total households surveyed, nearly three-fourths (74 percent) are nuclear families and the rest are joint families. Regarding the caste category, more than half of the households (52 percent) comes under the General category. More than half of the households belong to the Maratha community, followed by Dhangar which constitute around 14 percent. About 65 percent of the households have reported their monthly income less than Rs. 2000 and whereas the remaining reported their income between Rs. 2000 to Rs. 10,000.

Table 2.2: Socio-demographic Profile of the ‘Nakusa’ girls

	Percent
Age	
Below 5 years old	4.0

5- 9 years	18.2
10- 19 Years	61.0
20 years and above	17.0
Years of schooling (those above 5 years)	
No schooling	13.0
1 to 4 years	32.5
5 to 10 years	46.8
11 years and above	7.8
Marital Status (those above 10 years)	
Married	16.0
Unmarried	82.7
Occupation (those above 10 years)	
Employed	10.0
Student	56.0
Housewife	13.0
Unemployed	21.0

Most of the ‘Nakusa’ girls (61 percent) are in the age group of 10-19 years. Nearly 8 percent had more than 11 years of education. Most of them were in school going students. At the time of survey more than half of the (56 percent) of the ‘Nakusa’ girls were students and 10 percent were working, mostly as wage labourers

Based on the survey, we found that naming the girl as ‘Nakusa’ was reported among the Hindu households only. The list provided by the Zilla Parishat reveals that one of the girls from the Muslim community had the name like ‘Nakusa’, but during the survey it was found that girl’s name was ‘Nafeesa’ (a common Muslim name). The list of the Zilla Parishat also reveals that all the ‘Nakusa’ cases were reported from the rural areas only.

One of the NGO activists said that this practice was more among the Maratha caste mainly because they were rich and were property owners. If they have a son, the property will remain in their family itself; otherwise it will go to another family. Among Marathas,

particularly very poor among them use ‘Nakusa’ name Better off Marathas usually don’t name their daughters as ‘Nakusa’.It is evident that more than 90 percent of the parents interviewed admitted that they were expecting a boy and not a girl. Unfortunately they got a girl and they named her as ‘Nakusa’.

A mother of a twelve year old girl said “at the time of Nakusa’s birth, I was expecting a boy and was very upset when I got a girl.” She revealed that compare to her other children, she did not particularly care for ‘Nakusa’ during her childhood. Sometimes she left for her work without paying much attention to her daughter. According to a neighbor “mothers usually gave golden earrings to their daughters but, ‘Nakusa’ did not receive any such signs of affection.” Majority of ‘Nakusas’ are 3rd or 4th children of their parents. These parents were desperately looking for a son, but unfortunately had a daughter. So they felt the girl as ‘unwanted’ and hence named the daughter as ‘Nakusa’, hoping that the next child will be a boy. This belief was prevalent among the community.

Table 2.3: Birth order of ‘Nakusa’ girls in the family and with the number of brothers and sisters

Birth order of ‘Nakusa’	Number of elder brothers		Number of younger brothers					Number of elder Sisters					Number of younger sisters		
	No	One	No	One	Two	Three	Four	Five	No	One	Two	Three	No	One	Two
2	11	1	4	6	2	1	11	0	0	0	0	5	3	3	2
3	18	1	5	12	4	0	1	18	0	0	0	10	10	0	1
4	23	5	11	15	2	0	0	5	25	0	0	17	9	0	1
5	13	3	8	6	0	0	0	0	1	13	0	9	3	2	0
6	2	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	1	0	0
Total	67	10	29	40	8	1	12	23	26	13	2	42	26	5	4

Note: This table is based in the actual number of sons and daughters of the households interviewed

The table shows the number of brothers and sisters to the ‘Nakusa’ girls. Ten ‘Nakusa’ girls had at least one elder brother and about 40 ‘Nakusa’ girls had at least one younger brother and 8 had two younger brothers. Moreover, 26 ‘Nakusa’ girls had three elder sisters and 23 girls had two elder sisters. Twenty six ‘Nakusas’ had at least one younger sister, five had two younger sisters and four had three younger sisters.

A social activist explained the factors behind this practice-“If first few children are girl then parents surely need a boy. In this situation once again a girl was born, and then the parents give the name ‘Nakusa’. During the childhood, girls do not know the actual meaning of their name. Once they start going to school immediately thier friend’s starts teasing them “Just see, your parents only gave you the name ‘Nakusa’. Parents do not have any problem to reveal others why they named their daughter ‘Nakusa’. One father “We don’t want this girl; and that is why we kept this name for her.” They explicitly told this to neighbors and even to strangers. They also talked it in front of their daughters without any hesitation. One parent during the interview said “This is ‘Nakusa; we gave this name to her because we were actually expecting a boy instead of her.” Interestingly, many parents do not even have any regret in naming the daughter ‘Nakusa’.

Table 2.4: The Parental reasons for naming girls as ‘Nakusa’

Rank	Reasons
1	We already had girl/girls; we do not want another girl
2	Elders, grandparents, and relatives suggested this name
3	If we name ‘Nakusa’, the next child would be a boy
4	It is our request to God to give us a son, instead of a daughter again

When the parents were asked why they named their daughters ‘Nakusa’, most of the respondents revealed they already had many girls and do not want a girl child again. Some stated that they kept this name because suggestion came from elders, grandparents, neighbours and relatives. Many of them had a belief that if they keep the name ‘Nakusa’ for their girl child, then the next child would be a son.

While I was interviewing a mother about the reasons for naming her daughter 'Nakusa', the girl was sitting beside her. The mother said - "*mala hi mulgi nako pahije*" (I don't want this girl). After hearing this, the girl started weeping. But the mother did not bother and continued her conversation. I asked the mother again if she knew the meaning of 'Nakusa'. At first she refused to give me a proper answer and replied that she did not know the meaning; but when I repeated my question, she revealed the meaning of the 'Nakusa' – she said that it meant "*nako aslely mulgi*" ("unwanted girl"). She said that although she did not have any regrets for naming the daughter 'Nakusa', her daughter would always ask her why she had been named so. She, however, did not pay much attention to her questions. Interestingly, many parents stated that because of naming the 'Nakusa', they later got a son.

According to a father "I had three girls. No boys. When the third girl was born, I decide to keep her name 'Nakusa'. I didn't want any more girls." Everybody agreed to his suggestion. Why? He continued. "Three girls, no boy, and I asked myself - do you want '*Vamshacha Diva*' (bearer for the family name) or not?" He finally decided to call his daughter 'Nakusa' and continued to do so even now.

During interviews, we observed when parents started explaining about the reasons behind the name 'Nakusa', the 'Nakusa' girls became very emotional. Their eyes were filled with tears or face became red with shivering lips. Their facial expressions showed that they were really upset. Whenever parents started talking about the 'Nakusa' girls, they were hurt and went on pitching their dress or biting the nails. Some parents stated they have named girls 'Seema' (in Marathi, it means boundary or limit) before or after the 'Nakusa' girl. They thought that, if they name as 'Seema', then it will be the end of the birth of girl. One of the fathers mentioned this "I named this girl 'Nakusa'; again one more girl was born, then I kept the name 'Seema' hoping that I will have no more daughters."

Naming ceremony (*Barse*) is one of the important functions among the community after a baby was born. When a male child was born, naming ceremony was celebrated in a

grand manner by inviting relatives and villagers and distributing special meals to all. But for a girl's naming ceremony, the function was very small and very few were invited. We found that after many girls, if a son was born in the family they are giving names like Ganesh (God Vinayak). Some explained that it was because every month they observe Ganesh Chaturthi, so that child may be born that particular day or that week. Another explanation was after many girls, a boy was born, and then they thought it was a gift by Lord God Ganseha.

	Percentage
Grandparents	34.0
Parents	34.7
Relatives	14.0
Neighbours	13.0
Others	4.3

There are many girls in the same village having the name 'Nakusa'. This practice was prevalent for many decades. Mostly, parents and grandparents suggested the name for the girls.

Table 2.6:Percentage of parents who believed by naming daughter as 'Nakusa', the next child will be a boy, with background characteristics

	Yes	No
Those Believed the next child will be a boy	81.4	18.6
Caste Category		
Scheduled Castes (SC)	70.0	30.0
Scheduled Tribes (ST)	100.0	-
Other Backward Castes (OBC)	100.0	-
General	71.4	28.6
Monthly Income of households		

Up to Rs. 2000	78.7	21.3
Rs. 2000 to Rs. 10,000	87.0	13.0
Father's Education		
Illiterate	90.0	10.0
Primary	82.0	18.0
Upper primary	78.0	22.0
High school and above	82.0	18.0
Mother's Education		
Illiterate	71.4	28.6
Primary	100.0	-
Upper primary and above	100.0	-

More than 81 percent of the parents interviewed believed that the naming of their daughter as 'Nakusa' would naturally end and a boy would be gifted next. Only 19 percent stated that they never had any such beliefs.

Table 2.7: Reasons of the addressing 'Nakusa', even after the name was changed (According to parents)

1	Due to habits/practice of many years
2	'Nakusa' was her original name
3	It is very difficult to remember and call her with a new name
4	Everybody calling her old name, we also do so
5	By mistake

Majority of the parents were still addressing their daughters as 'Nakusa', even after the renaming of their daughters. It may be partly due to their habits/practice. Sometimes, it was very difficult to remember a new name. Most of the respondents said that due to habits, they are still calling the name 'Nakusa'. Secondly, 'Nakusa' was the original name given by parents. Thirdly, some parents mentioned that it is very difficult to remember the new name, so continue to use old name.

Some parents also accepted that it was due to lack of knowledge and superstition that they had named their daughter 'Nakusa'. Although the name was changed, now they continued to call her 'Nakusa'. "Why should I call her with a new name? Her old name was habitual to us. I have so many daughters. When the Government starts giving us financial support, then I will call her a new name. When the day 'Nakusa' was born, I thought of committing suicide. I was really disappointed," narrated by a father.

Most of the neighbours and villagers were still using the name 'Nakusa', even after renaming of their girls. The renaming did not have much effect in many villages. Out of the sample, more than 61 percent of the parents stated that the girl child is a burden to the family. Financial constraints were the most important reasons reported by the parents behind this attitude. "Bringing up girls is so expensive. It is very difficult to afford their education and then getting them married." A mother of 'Nakusa' said, she was trying to justify why she did not want a girl. "We have to give so many dowries for a daughter's marriage, otherwise who knows whether her husband's family may create some problems later on. One father told, "I have five girls and one son. Because of these girls, I bear so much tension. I have no job or money. What should I do? I wish to do a job, and have to marry off two more girls. My situation is very pathetic. First three daughter's marriages were performed in a Temple, due to financial problems".

Majority of the sample households were poor. Interestingly, the study found that the 'Nakusa' are in between the ages of 4 to 48 years. It indicates that the naming practice was very old and still prevalent in these villages, predominantly due to traditional belief and superstition.

Experiences of 'Nakusa' Girls in Family and Community

This part of this paper presents the experiences of the 'Nakusa' girls mainly due to the name they bear. Apparently they were exposed to many experiences, problems and

humiliations. A 'Nakusa' said "wherever I went out, I faced the same question. Why your name is 'Nakusa'? Until the 10th class, I did not know the meaning of 'Nakusa'. But when I finally understood the real meaning of 'Nakusa', I faced lot of mental anguish. She kept wondering whether she was really an unwanted daughter to her parents. "Why I am an unwanted girl?" She was troubled with these kinds of thoughts for a long time. When she really understood the meaning of her name 'Nakusa', she decided that never to behave like that of an 'unwanted' in front of the people. She said "but the feeling of a 'Nakusa' still existed somewhere in her mind". She still could not erase this feeling from her mind even after changing her name. Recently she got a new name 'Namrata', in the function organized by zilla parishat, Satara, 2011. "I am happy with my new name and you can call me with this name", she told me.

Another 'Nakusa' (19 years old) said that, when I asked -"what was your feeling when you came to know the actual meaning of your name?" She answered- "*jeva mala 'Nakusa' cha arth kalala tevha majyavar aabhal kosalyasarkha votala*" ("I felt like sky falling down on me when I came to know the actual meaning of my name"). She was afraid of revealing her name to others because people laugh at her. People used to call me 'Nake', a short form of 'Nakusa'. She really wanted to change her name in the school. Now her name was changed during the renaming programme conducted by the Zilla Parishat. But still all her certificates are bearing the old name. "I always felt that my friends and siblings have nice names but only my name is very bad. Why it happened to me" she expressed her feelings. She was confident that one day she will show her parents that she is a wanted daughter for them.

Table 3.1: Why the name 'Nakusa' was given (Opinions of the girls interviewed)

Sl. No.	Reason
1	Many girls were already in the family
2	Parents needed a boy, instead of a daughter
3	Parents do not want a girl at all
4	Parents believed they would get a son, if they name the daughter as 'Nakusa'
5	Grandmother's name was 'Nakusa' and parents felt the daughter was the reincarnation of her grandmother

The table shows the various reasons as stated by the girls for their name as ‘Nakusa’. The most cited reason for having the name as ‘Nakusa’ is that, there are many girls already in the family. The other reasons are the parents needed a boy, instead daughter and parents do not want any more girl child.

A ‘Nakusa’, who is now 32 years old, felt that- “I feel I am a really an unwanted girl in the family”, she said very angrily and looking at her mother, she continued.” My mother and father were concerned about my brothers and elder sister only I was always given a different treatment. That is the case, it would have been better for them to kill me in the beginning itself”, she started crying.

The difference in treatment experienced by ‘Nakusa’ girls and their brothers were also probed. 69 percent of the ‘Nakusa’ girls interviewed had a brother. About fifty percent of girls felt that their brothers are getting preferential treatment from their parents.

Table 3.2: The differences observed/experienced by ‘Nakusa’ girls between boys and girls

1	All the facilities for boys first, then only for girls.
2	Parents are ready to fulfill boy’s wishes only.
3	Full time care for boys.
4	When distributing food, parents give preference to boys, then only girls.
5	Parents give preference to the demands of boys but do not do so when girls wanted something.
6	If boy doesn’t like the food, mother will prepare again, but not for girls.

When I asked a ‘Nakusa’ (19 years old) about any particular experience of ill-treating of girls in her family, she replied there exists a preferential treatment for boys in the family. Family and society keep discrimination in treating a boy and a girl, the same is applicable in her family also. “When some guests or relatives come home, then we are not allowed to go in front of them, whereas as boys could. The society and the family consider boy as a ‘*vamshacha diva*’, but at the same time girls in the family are considered as burden. The boys are given full honour and respect in the family. They get priority in each

and every aspect like education, health, etc. “Even in the case of my marriage, I was compelled to accept the decisions taken by my parents. I was never consulted even in the selection of my life partner (husband)” she expressed her helplessness.

Table 3.3: Reasons for preferential treatment given to brothers (according to ‘Nakusa’ girls)

1	Parents always prefer boys, than girls
2	He is the only boy in the family
3	Girls do not belong to that house and will go away after marriage
4	Boys are powerful than girls

A question was posed to ‘Nakusa’ girls- “why your brothers are getting preferential treatment at home?” Most parents prefer boys than a girl. Secondly, he was the only boy in the family. Parents also feel that girls do not belong to the family and get married and go away to another family.

Table 3.4: Problems experienced by ‘Nakusa’ girls because of their ‘peculiar’ name

1	Feel bad when someone calls as ‘Nakusa’ (unwanted).
2	Friends tease her on her name.
3	Feel uncomfortable in telling the name to others.
4	When people were teasing by name, it is mentally irritating.
5	Feeling nervous.

Various problems have been experienced by ‘Nakusa’ girls because of their name presented here. Most common problem experienced by ‘Nakusas’ were that they feel bad when someone call the name ‘Nakusa’. Secondly, when friends were teasing, they feel sad and angry. Even in many cases ‘Nakusa’ girls finds it difficult and uncomfortable to tell their name to others, including schoolmates.

A ‘Nakusa’ (15 years old) said, when people called her ‘Nakusa’, she felt like she did not want that name. But she was helpless and could not force others not to call her so.

So she accepted whatever they called her. But even after renaming, when people call her ‘Nakusa’, she told them that her name was changed to ‘Aiswarya’. But they told her that ‘Nakusa’ was ‘*tondvali*’ (always in our tongue, due to many years of practice). One day, she heard one of her classmates talking to another that, “you know her name is ‘Nakusa’; she is an unwanted child to her mother and father, then why we should care about her? When I heard this, I became speechless and felt very bad. After that incident, I became more and more introvert; I could not speak properly with my classmates.” When, she really understood the meaning of ‘Nakusa’ from one of her teachers, she felt very bad and the burden of being living as an unwanted girl. She could not sleep properly, that night. I always wonder-“why parents choose this name? There are so many good names and they could have selected a better name for me.”

Table: 3.5:Humiliation experienced by ‘Nakusas’ because of their name

	Percent
Experienced Humiliation	
Yes	68.3
No	33.4
From Where	
School mates	26.2
Teachers	9.5
Relatives	55.0
Villagers	64.3
Social/public gatherings	33.3

The table shows the extent of humiliation experienced by ‘Nakusas’ because of their name. More than 68 percent of the ‘Nakusa’ girls reported facing humiliation from the outside their homes. Most of them are humiliated by the villagers and relatives. Nearly one-third of them are facing some sort of humiliation at social and public gatherings. A girl aged 25 expressed her bitter experience during her school days. When she was in sixth standard, one of her teachers was teaching grammar. As a part of it, he had given her the homework of splitting the word ‘Nakusa’, which in fact was her own name. She could not do that

exercise. The very next day, when teacher asked her about that homework, she told him that she does not know how to do it. He became angry and wrote her name on the blackboard by splitting it into three words. 'Nakusa'= *nako asleli mulgi* (unwanted girl). She asked me that was it her mistake having such a name from her family. My name is the biggest problem and humiliation in my life."

Another 'Nakusa' girl informed that "Whether in school or college, everyone is calling me the same old name. Nobody is calling me by new name. Some of my classmates and teachers tease me by saying "*Nake Nako*" which really hurt me a lot. When they are teasing me by calling *Nake*, I feel it is much more painful than 'Nakusa'; what can I do?" Another woman was invited to a function in her family and neighborhood. During the naming ceremony programme, one relative asked her, "'Nakusa' shall we give your name to this new born girl?" Then all the women gathered started laughing. Most of the time, I feel suffocation during the social gatherings.

Humiliation is the foremost problem experienced by the 'Nakusa' girls, followed by inferiority complex and stress. No one is happy with that name. A 'Nakusa' who is working as a teacher expressed that she can now understand the good and bad happened in her life. But the girls from villages without education and awareness may undergo agony and distress. That feeling of undesirability may haunt throughout their life. "It is not my mistake of being born in this world as an unwanted one; why I am being blamed for that?" Similarly there are many girls who experienced very bad experiences just because of their name. One thing always comes to my mind is that I was born as an unwanted child to my parents. She has now understood that how bad her name is. She doesn't feel angry to those who call by her name 'Nakusa'. She thought that this name is given by my parents. So she thinks that everybody can call her that name.

'Nakusa' girls were experiencing various problems due to their name. None of them like the name 'Nakusa'. Most of the Nakusa girls were facing humiliation from their own home and from their own community, as well. They are happy that their names are changed now and they got a new name. However, most people continue to call them as 'Nakusa'.

Most of these girls have accepted the reality that the ‘renaming’ had very little impact in their life. They wanted to change their names earlier, but their parents were not ready. The government officials and social activists behind the ‘renaming’ campaign believe that new names will help to end the ‘humiliation’ of these girls and will boost their self-esteem.

CONCLUSION

This field based study was carried out in 2013 in the villages of Satara district in Maharashtra, apparently found that the naming of girl ‘Nakusa’ was reported among the Hindus only. The list of ‘Nakusa’ girls prepared by the Zilla Parishat reveals that all the cases were reported from rural areas only. More than half of the sample households surveyed in this study belong to general castes, particularly Maratha community. Majority of the households are poor (about 65 percent of the households have their monthly income less than Rs. 2000).

Interestingly, the study found that the ‘Nakusas’ are mostly in between 4 to 48 years, indicating the naming practice was very old and still prevalent in these villages. Most of the ‘Nakusa’ girls are either 3rd or 4th child of their parents. Only seven ‘Nakusa’ girls had at least one elder brother and 40 ‘Nakusa’ girls had at least one younger brother. Importantly, 26 ‘Nakusa’ girls had three elder sisters. Most of the parents stated that, they already had many girls, so they did not want a girl again. Owing to beliefs, they gave the name ‘Nakusa’ to the daughter hoping that the next child would be a son. Due to severe financial constraints more than 60 percent of the parents consider girls as burden and liability. Still most people addressing these girls as ‘Nakusa’ only even after the renaming were done.

‘Nakusa’ girls were experiencing various socio-psychological problems due to their peculiar name. Most common problem experienced by ‘Nakusas’ were that they felt really bad when someone called them ‘Nakusa’. Furthermore, when it takes the form of teasing, it really irritates them. Even in many cases, ‘Nakusa’ girls find it very difficult and uncomfortable to reveal their name to others. Humiliation is the foremost problem experienced by the ‘Nakusa’ girls, followed by inferiority complex and mental stress.

The hierarchical structure of the society and its gender considerations and prejudices apparently discriminates girl child. The low status of the girl child continues mainly because of the existing social ideologies, cultural ethos and value systems of the society. This study illustrates how strong son preference among parents in the society, and traditional beliefs as well as sex-segregated norms and practices lead to the discrimination of the girls. Parents' naming their daughters as 'unwanted' is the most visible form of gender discrimination and neglect. So, it is very clear that the naming of a person itself signifies the influence of the culture and beliefs. When the intention behind the naming of a person is more than identity, then name 'Nakusa' is an evidence of the strong gender discrimination existing in that society. 'Nakusa' girls are the living examples of strong gender bias and son preference still exist in the society. This study indicates that even after changing their names, the discrimination and humiliation still continue.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The study on 'Nakusa' girls reveals that there is a clear case of discrimination against the girl child. Many have a strong belief mainly due to traditional practices, that if they name their daughter as 'Nakusa' the next child would be a son. The 'Nakusa' girls are facing many problems socially, emotionally and economically. This study highlights the need for a socio-psychological as well as economic support to the girls. The special micro level programme/policy for 'Nakusa' girls needs to be implemented to improve the socio-economic conditions of these 'unwanted girls'. If they are unable to get the needed support in education, health and other aspects, they may continue to feel 'unwanted' throughout their life. They need to be given the chance to prove that they are not at all unwanted and that they are valuable assets to their family and society. Since the renaming of the girls itself does not improve the attitudes of parents and community towards the girl child, there is an urgent need for the implementation of a special policy to tackle this issue as well as regular campaigns, particularly against the superstitions of naming the girl child. The government should come out with an appropriate mechanism for changing their name on all

records/ certificates at the earliest. Financial incentive schemes can have a positive impact to enhance the value of girls in families and society (Sekher,2012).

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