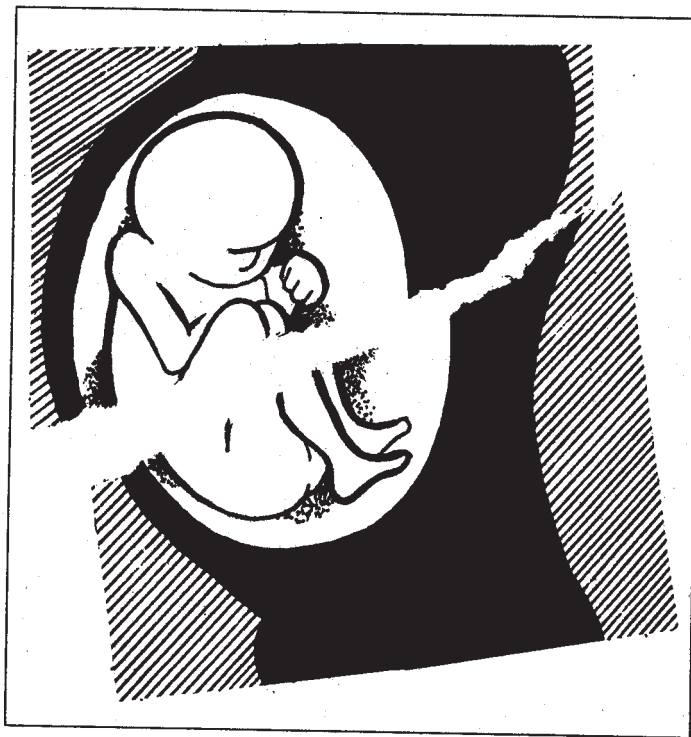


Sex Determination Tests in Surat

A Survey Report

by
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IN the small city of Surat in Gujarat there are two main methods of sex determination that have been adopted: amniocentesis, which involves the removal of about 15cc of amniotic fluid from inside the amniotic sac covering the foetus through a long needle inserted into the abdomen; and chorionic villi biopsy which involves the removal of the elongated cells of the tissue surrounding the foetus, through the

cervix. By the second method sex determination is possible between the sixth and the thirteenth week.

During a survey in Surat conducted by **Garbh Jati Parikshan Virodhi Manch** we interviewed twenty leading gynaecologists. Except for one private hospital and two more government hospitals, each of these gynaecologists performs the tests. One doctor has adopted the pre-selection method. Three doctors

adamantly favoured the test. The rest stated that they do not favour the test and the resulting practice of female selective abortion. These doctors emphasized that they refuse the test outright in the case of first pregnancy. They said that people belonging to every caste and religion have the test done. Most of the clients are from the educated middle classe families. In no case did we find the lowest economic groups approaching these clinics.

According to one doctor the largest number of couples requesting the test are from families where both husband and wife are working. They are not even ready to risk having a second female child.

In Surat there are two laboratories for sex determination tests. We could obtain statistics from only one of these.

According to this one laboratory a minimum of 1,200 sex detection tests are done every year. This means that if 50 percent of these are females at least 600 female foetuses are destroyed every year in one laboratory, alone.

Almost all the doctors stated that since our society is male dominated, a preference for a male child is inherent in all couples, irrespective of caste and class background. They said that the escalation of marriage and dowry related problems are further motivating young couples to prefer a male child. A daughter has become even more unwanted. Except for two, all the doctors stated these reasons for parental reluctance to have a female child. Two doctors felt that even parents who can well afford to have many children, including daughters, prefer a male child merely because this preference represents a social trend. It is a social norm to desire male children and to shrink from having female children.

All the doctors doing the test emphasised that they do the test to retain their patients and to maintain an amicable relationship with their clientele. Three doctors with a flourishing practice argued that sex determination tests are a method of family planning. These doctors argued that when a woman has to produce more children in the hope of having a male child, her health is adversely affected, and thus the test saves women unnecessary agony. This view ignores the complications and hazards involved in abortion. In

many cases the woman is pressurised to abort three or four female foetuses. Chorionic villi biopsy itself is presented as risky by the doctors, and one doctor clearly stated that women have come to her with severe complications after a chorionic biopsy and a spontaneous abortion resulting from it.

Some doctors favoured a ban on the tests and their moral dilemma was quite obvious in the course of interviews. Others felt that despite a ban, underground clinics might mushroom. Most of the doctors clearly stated that once the ban was

imposed they would refuse to perform the tests. One laboratory refused outright to give away statistics. Their argument was that it is after all the woman herself who comes for the test. These people have no answer to the question: do women in our society really have the right to take decisions in general and a decision regarding the birth of a child in particular?

In our survey we discovered that most young women doctors were strongly opposed to the test and tried to dissuade couples from going in for the test. They say that a legal ban on the test could definitely be of help in discouraging the practice.