

CANADIAN DEMOGRAPHER DR CAROL VLASSOFF VISITS DY PATIL MEDICAL COLLEGE IN PIMPRI TO RELEASE HER BOOK ON GENDER BIAS IN RURAL INDIA

'Preference for sons impeding economic growth, women welfare in India'

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ON THE latest leg of her Indian tour, Canadian demographer Dr Carol Vlassoff released her new book 'Gender Equality and Inequality in Rural India: Blessed With a Son' on Friday to show her research findings on the severe gender bias towards sons in India. Vlassoff, also a professor of epidemiology met doctors at DY Patil Medical College, Pimpri and Indian Medical Association to present the findings.

About the new release, Vlassoff, also a women health specialist said, "My book explores the intersection of long-standing cultural norms, socioeconomic context and a rising India. Gender bias affects the way women are viewed and treated in their communities, which on a larger scale deters them from contributing fully to the global economy."

The author visited India for the first time at an age of 27. The large population of the country, as she says in her blog published in the New York Times in March, surprised her and intrigued her enough to find out the reason behind



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its rapidly growing population.

She found answers when she returned as a doctoral student in the 70's at University of Pune and undertook a research project at Gove Village in Satara from 1975 to 2008 that soon showed a severe gender bias towards sons.

Vlassoff said, "Most women said they wanted only three or four children, but they had an average of 5.6. The key determining factor was the number of sons they had - they would keep having children until a boy was born. I completed two follow-up studies in Gove in 1987 and 2008. In 2008, son preference

was still evident: For every village girl aged 6 or younger, there were 1.4 boys."

During her research in 2008, she found out that only 7 per cent of married Gove women worked in white-collar jobs like teaching and office work. Interestingly, these women made more use of modern contraceptives and delayed having their first children longer than unemployed women with the same amount of schooling.

Moreover, these women were also significantly more willing to stop having children after only one or two, even if they did not have sons.

Dr Sharad Agharkhedkar, a pediatrician at DY Patil College said, "Vlassoff, with a decade-long career at WHO, has focused on women empowerment and highlighted the country's preference for male children which is getting in the way of economic growth and women welfare."

Apart from promoting male sterilisation, Vlassoff also spoke about the promising government pilot project 'Honeymoon Package' which was initiated in Satara District in 2007 to promote reproductive health and improve the sex ratio.