

Saturday, May 23, 2009

When Sqn Ldr Prem Kumar Khullar retired from the Indian Air Force, instead of looking for another job to supplement his pension, he decided to devote the rest of his life to helping the helpless. He bought some land in Palwal (Haryana), turned it into green fields, growing wheat and Basmati rice. He set up the Association for Blindness and Leprosy Eradication (ABLE). With his own resources and help from his friends, he set up a hospital where the peasantry of the region could get medical assistance and medicines at a minimum cost or free of charge.

He later added a lending library because books other than textbooks were not available, or beyond the pockets of village folk. That is when he got in touch with me. I gave him books I no longer needed for his library. In due course of time the word spread that Khullar was a do-gooder and would help anyone in trouble. He was in for a surprise.

One early morning he found a newborn girl left at his doorstep. Then another. And another. They were not wanted either because they were illegitimate, or simply because they happened to be girls. Haryana and Punjab have a shameful record of aborting female foetuses or simply burying them alive on birth.

Believe it or not, in both states the ratio is 725 girls to 1,000 boys. In many districts, one out of four girls is killed before or soon after birth. Religious leaders make a lot of pious noise against this evil practice, quote scriptures about the need to respect women as mothers, wives, sisters and daughters but to no avail.

Destroying females is a hoary tradition. In many agriculturist families, brothers shared a wife because all could not afford to get one for themselves. Remember five Pandava brothers who shared Draupadi between them? What can we do to put an end to this vile custom? I, for one, do not have the foggiest idea.



**KHUSHWANT
SINGH**



**Sqn Ldr Prem Kumar
Khullar (retd) feeds an
abandoned baby girl**