

Respect girl child



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The 23rd of October 2012, is the last day of the Hindu festival of Navratri—the nine days' regimen of fasting and feasting, which is celebrated in its various nuances—Durga Pooja (worshipping goddess Durga); the rhythmic Garba dancing; the night long singing of bhajans (devi jagran); the Ramlila (enactment of life of god Rama), with the celebrations culminating on the tenth day by immersing the statues of the goddess in the river (from dust unto dust) and burning the effigy of the demon king Ravana (triumph of good over evil). However there is one common thread that links all these different forms of festivities—the feeding of the kanya (girl child) on the seventh, eighth and ninth days.

This is one of the rare occasions in India when young girls of pre-puberty age are in great demand, what with almost every Hindu household trying to feed an auspicious number of them, with the intent of washing away their sins and getting blessed by goddess Durga. It is a common site on these days to see groups of girls moving from one house to another, savouring delicacies (and getting some money too). By this so called act of religious charity the householder tries to buy prosperity for her/his family. Unfortunately many of these very families will find nothing wrong in abetting female foeticide, honour killings, ill-treatment of the girl child, and gross misbehaviour with the womenfolk.

It seems as if this random act of girl- feeding (kanya khilaana) entitles them to a whole year of unbridled brutality against the feminine gender. Even some of our Khap panchayat (village council) leaders, politicians and guardians of law overtly promote suppression of the fairer sex in the name of preserving social values. We Indians are part of a country famous for its rich

diversity which gives us the license to let not one hand know what the other does –feed her one day and then kick her for the rest of the year. Of course, it indeed is a noble deed to help the needy, but all acts of kindness should be genuine and not contradict our general day to day behavior. Instead of this symbolic farce of feeding the girl child once or twice a year, it would do a whole lot of good if we can devote these nine auspicious days in spreading awareness about treating girls/women with dignity and making them equal partners in sharing each moment of this beautiful gift of life which Maa Durga has bestowed upon us.