Ban on Sex Normalisation Surgeries

Why in news?

- Tamil Nadu government has recently banned sex normalisation surgeries on intersex children except in life-threatening circumstances.
- This order comes as the second such move made by any State on gender and sexual identity.
- The Parliament of the island of Malta adopted the Gender Identity, Gender Expression and Sex Characteristics Act in April 2015.

What is gender, sexual identity and sexual orientation?

- Gender identity is assigned at birth based on the anatomy (male or female sexual organs, both internal and external).
- Sexual identity is what one sees oneself as, and Sexual orientation is the sex a person is attracted.

What does intersex mean?

- Intersex refers to people born with physical and biological characteristics that are more diverse than stereotypical definitions of male or female bodies.
- The intersex condition arises when it is difficult to classify the reproductive organs as male or female.
- Genetically, the male is invested with XY chromosomes and the female, XX. In intersex, there are at least 40 different variations.
- In the field of medical genetics, it is believed that gender assignment is not merely the function of the X and Y chromosomes.
- Rather, hundreds of genes have been identified, mutations or changes in them lead to a ‘different kind of development’, impacting the gender of the foetus.

What is sex-selective surgeries?

- In Intersex infants, not all biological differences can be detected at the time of birth.
- When these differences are apparent at birth, parents are eager to resolve the question of the gender of the baby and pick a gender.
- They are ignorant of the fact that the child will have to pick a sexual identity in the process of growing up.

- This could lead to physical trauma, emotional turmoil and problems arising out of confusion about identity.

What is the government's order?

- Earlier, the Madurai bench of Madras High Court observed that the consent of the parent cannot be considered the consent of the child.
- The government order specifies that such surgeries can only be performed in case there is a life-threatening situation.
- It would require permission from the committee that includes paediatric surgeons/urologists, endocrinologists, a social worker/intersex activist and a government representative.

What is the way forward?

- A great deal of awareness is necessary even for the medical community to recognise the possibilities of gender ambiguity.
- Parents will have to be counselled well into accepting their children as they are.

Source: The Hindu

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