

## Important Vocab for the Editorial

1. **recognise** (verb) – acknowledge, accept, admit; realize, understand, apprehend.
2. **primacy** (noun) – importance, priority, preference.
3. **women's agency** (noun) – women's ability/capacity for individualized choice and action.
4. **emancipation** (noun) – liberation, freedom, freeing.
5. **seldom** (adverb) – hardly, rarely, almost never.
6. **linear** (adjective) – sequential, straight, undeviating; following in a logical order.
7. **progression** (noun) – progress, process, advancement, development, passage.
8. **to the finish** (phrase) – to a successful conclusion.
9. **hurdle** (noun) – obstacle, difficulty, problem, barrier, impediment, obstruction, hindrance.
10. **entrench** (verb) – ingrain, establish, embed.
11. **passing** (noun) – enactment, ratification, acceptance, approval, authorization.
12. **Medical Termination of Pregnancy (MTP) Act, 1971** (noun) – It provides for the termination of certain pregnancies by registered medical practitioners on certain grounds (reasons).
13. **step forward** (noun) – improvement, development, advancement, progress.
14. **giant leap** (noun) – (very important) progress, advancement, development.
15. **push the envelope** (phrase) – extend the limits of what is possible; try new things that have not been accepted or tried before.
16. **antediluvian** (adjective) – out of date, old-fashioned, outmoded, outdated.
17. **primarily** (adverb) – basically, especially, particularly.
18. **Foetal** or **Fetal** (adjective) – related to the fetus (unborn child).
19. **anomaly** (noun) – something different, abnormal, unusual; oddity, peculiarity, deviation, aberration, exception.
20. **shoulders** (noun) – someone's shoulders considered as bearing responsibility for something.
21. **consensus** (noun) – an idea or opinion that is shared by all the people in a group, agreement, concurrence.

22. **clause** (noun) – (legal) term, provision, stipulation, requirement, condition.
23. **confines** (noun) – limits, borders, boundaries; purview.
24. **marital** (adjective) – matrimonial; relating to marriage/wedding.
25. **trap** in (verb) – confine, get stuck, get caught; trick, deceive.
26. **abortion** (noun) – medical termination of pregnancy.
27. **extension** (noun) – addition, addendum, augmentation, supplement, appendix.
28. **provision** (noun) – clause, (legal) term, requirement, condition.
29. **admittedly** (adverb) – actually, truly/verily, indeed.
30. **sex-selective** (adjective) – relating to an attempt to control the sex (gender-male/female) of the offspring (child/baby) to achieve the desired sex (gender-male/female).
31. **keep one's eye on** (phrase) – oversee, supervise, inspect, observe, monitor.
32. **sex ratio** (noun) – the ratio of males to females in a population.
33. **nosedive** (verb) – decline, fall sharply; drop, sink, plunge, plummet, tumble, slump.
34. **stop short of** (phrase) – balk at, shy away from, recoil from, draw back from. (“balk at” means “be unwilling to, be reluctant to, refuse to (do/accept something, because it is difficult, threatening, unpleasant, etc.”).
35. **at the heart of** (phrase) – at the most important part of.
36. **reproduction** (noun) – breeding, producing young offspring (child/baby).
37. **dramatis personae** (plural noun) – persona, person, role, part (of a play/narrative).
38. **fetus** (noun) – (unborn child); the spelling “foetus” is still used in some non-technical contexts.
39. **gynecologist** (noun) – the medical practitioner who is specialised in dealing with women's reproductive health.
40. **envisage** (verb) – foresee, anticipate, expect.
41. **laborious** (adjective) – difficult, tough, arduous, taxing, demanding.
42. **undergo** (verb) – be subjected to, experience, go through.
43. **frustrate** (verb) – obstruct, impede, hamper, hinder, thwart; annoy, vex, irritate.
44. **lead to** (verb) – result in, cause, bring on, call forth, give rise to.
45. **seek** (verb) – try, aim, attempt.
46. **surreptitiously** (adverb) – secretly, stealthily, secretly, clandestinely, furtively, covertly.

47. **risk one's life/neck** (phrase) – to do something very dangerous (that puts one's life in danger).
48. **retrograde** (adjective) – unprogressive, negative, reverse/regressive.
49. **gestation** (period) (noun) – pregnancy; development, formation (period).
50. **swear** (verb) – promise, vow, affirm, assert, emphasize, stress.
51. **scarcely** (adverb) – hardly, barely, only just.
52. **measure** (noun) – action, step, procedure.
53. **count** (verb) – matter, enter into consideration, be important/significant, signify.
54. **jagged** (adjective) – rough, uneven, irregular, spiked, pointed.
55. **jagged line** (noun) – rough or uneven surface/path with a lot of sharp points.

## A small step: On medical termination of pregnancy law amendments

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### Medical termination of pregnancy laws should recognise the primacy of women's agency

Emancipation is seldom a linear progression to the finish; the hurdles are many, some entrenched in the mind. The passing of amendments to the Medical Termination of Pregnancy (MTP) Act in India recently is a step forward in recognising the rights of women, but is no giant leap. It does push the envelope way past how far the now antediluvian MTP Act of 1971 went, primarily by allowing the termination of pregnancy beyond 24 weeks if there are foetal anomalies. However, it also sets the decision on the shoulders of a medical board formed by State governments for this specific purpose. The amended Act also allows the termination of pregnancy until 20 weeks based on the opinion of one qualified doctor, an improvement from the consensus between the two doctors clause that was previously required. As per the amendment, unmarried women can also terminate their pregnancy, and by replacing the word 'husband' with the word 'partner', it, for the first time, takes the dialogue outside the confines of marital relationships that it was trapped in, legally. In a country where statistics put the number of unsafe and illegal abortions done every year at about 800,000, any extension of legal and safe provisions for termination of

pregnancy is clearly welcome. Admittedly, in India where sex-selective abortions are performed, the state needs to keep a watchful eye on anything that might allow the sex ratio to nosedive further.

But this law stops short of reimagining an issue at the heart of any debate on abortions — a woman's agency over reproduction. The key dramatis personae in a decision to keep or abort a foetus are essentially the woman and her gynaecologist; instead, the law envisages the decision to be made by a board of specialists if an abortion is required after 24 weeks. Among the reasons why the amendments were pushed was the laborious process a woman had to undergo in order to get an abortion, sometimes resolved by courts, but often frustrating and leading them to seek solutions surreptitiously, risking their life. This is retrograde, even positioned against a global trend — the laws in over 60 countries allow women to get an abortion on request at any point in the gestation. While old laws sought to protect the life of a woman on the grounds that medical procedures would be unsafe for the mother after a certain gestational limit — usually 12 weeks — medical capability is no longer a limit. Experts swear medical technology has advanced sufficiently to allow safe abortions in secure health-care settings at very advanced stages of the pregnancy too. The amended Act, then, scarcely recognises women's agency at the centre of it all, and until it does so, through a fundamental change in mindset, measures such as these will count as but small progress on a jagged line.