



Female Foeticide: Violence in the womb

Chanchal Sharma Govt. P G College Jind

Abstract

Everywhere women are confronted with many challenges .Crime against women is becoming a most common and serious concern in our modern society .Traditional societies in India have elaborate folk techniques for conceiving sons while couples in industrialized countries may use a variety of in-vivo pre-conceptual techniques to influence the sex of the conception .Female foeticide is perhaps one of the worst forms of violence against women .This problem is not new, where girl embryo are selectively eliminated after sex determination during early stage of pregnancy. But also girl child are eliminated after their birth .The United Nation has expressed serious concern about this situation. This paper brings attention on female foeticide and its violence happening in women’s womb. Skewed sex ratio , women trafficking ,increase in rape and assault and population decline are the serious challenges in front of us as the result of female foeticide. This paper also tries to explore the possible options to counter this critical medico-social problem.

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Introduction

After passing six decades of independence in our India, in spite of rapid improvement and progress in science, technology and other fields, the fact that we see of India that cannot be appreciated is its treatment to the fairer sex. Discrimination against girl children, illegal abortions and female foeticide are clear examples of this. Female foeticide is the one of the extreme manifestations of violence against women a social problem that is now spreading unchecked across the country. Female fetuses are selectively being aborted after prenatal sex determination, thus denying a girl’s right to life.

According to a recent report by the United Nations Children’s fund, up to 50 million girls and women are missing from India’s population as a result of systematic gender discrimination in India. Preference for a son has been a prevalent norm in a traditional India household may you be the mother of a hundred sons- “this is the Sanskrit blessings given to Hindu women in India on her wedding day. Sir Jonathan Duncan was the first to present officially earliest known evidences of infanticide in India in 1789. Before the advent of technology in science, female infant was susceptible to homicide at the hands of attending mid wife. The present paper aims to reflect upon the current adverse sex ratio, factors responsible for female foeticide and create possible measures to prevent this critical medico-social problem.



Meaning of female foeticide

Female foeticide is the selective abortion or elimination of girl child in earlier stage of pregnancy in mother's womb, done deliberately by the mother, after the detection of child's gender through medical means. This is due to family pressure given by her husband or the in laws. Another reason is unplanned pregnancy. India is too patriarchal in nature. A set hierarchical system prevails in all tiers of social order. Right from ancient scriptures, one finds instances where men are glowingly praised as the key to continue the family line age. A girl is forced to undergo multiple pregnancies or abortions, until she fulfills her lifelong goal of being a breeding machine that produces male offspring as per the needs of the family. Female foeticide is a far more heinous sin than the age old practice of killing an unwanted child, even before it is born.

Because of simplicity of tests and their easy availability on the other hand, there is a strong son preference on female specific abortions appear to have become popular and widely used people generally thought that cost of the test and related abortion is much lower than the cost of providing dowry and other lifelong presentations to a daughter after marriage. India pioneered in legalizing induced abortion under the medical termination of pregnancy (MTP) Act, 1971 that specifies the reasons for which an abortion can legally perform the abortions and kind of facilities in which they can be carried out.

Objectives

- To find out the factors and consequences which are responsible for female foeticide?
- To generate awareness among women's regarding 'right to life'.

Factors leading to Female Foeticide

The root cause of female foeticide lies within cultural norms as well as socio economic policies of country where this practice prevail. Main responsible factors are discussed below:-

Preference for boy child:

There is a vehement desire behind the elimination of girl child from the family tree even before their birth. Sons are seen as the main source of income. Even though women today can easily run shoulders with men, almost in every field. They set their mind to, the common misconception still remains that it is the male who will help run the house and look after his parents. Once married, women are like cargo,



ready to be shipped off to another household, while parents breathe a sign of relief for a job well done in getting their daughter settled.

Dowry system

The practice of dowry is widely prevalent even in communities and casts in which it had never been known before. As a result, daughters are considered to be an economic liability. In India an average of five women a day are burned in dowry related disputes and many cases are never reported.

The age old custom of dowry system puts a damper on the parents who blessed with girl child and calculations begin about marriage expenses which may happen after a couple of decades. It would be so much better to get rid of them with just a fraction of amount.

Economic factors

There is a clear inverse relationship between the income level and child sex ratio in rural household with landed property.

There is gender biased wage level. For the same work, females are paid less remuneration. Women enter in the domestic non paid services which a patriarchal society gives little or no value at all, so they are regarded as liability than assets. UNICEF estimates that the turnover of foeticide industry has now reached 244 million dollar from 77 million dollar in 2006.

For these economic reasons, females are not desired. Here we can quote an old folk song relevant to this context.

*'Oh, God, I beg of you,
I touch your fat time and again,
Next birth don't give me a daughter,
Give me hell instead....'* An old folk song from U.P.

Socioritual Factors

Females are vulnerable to brutalities of the male in the forms of physical, mental and sexual assaults and traumas in the patriarchal societal structure of India. Every parent of a girl child is at risk for their daughter in this patriarchal society for the mentioned causes. According to Manu, A man cannot attain moksha unless he has a son to light his funeral type. In old age the sons will care for them believably.



Technological Factors

Female foeticide is also a latest trend of long established gender bias. The presence of low cost technologies like ultrasound have led to sex based abortion of female fetuses, and an increasingly smaller percentage of girls born each year.

Networking of Government doctors, private doctors, ANMs and Dais

There is a silent communication between government doctors, medical and paramedical staff and private doctors, with regard to the illegal practice of sex determination tests leading to female foeticide. The dais and ANMs often act as go betweens and collect their honourarium. The doctors know very well that through ultrasonography it is not possible to determine the sex of a foetus within 12 weeks of conception and yet they conduct these kinds of tests and indicate the results. In rural areas, where poorer people who were unable to afford MTPs went to quacks, often with fatal results. A lady 'Dai' used to sweep and mop in a doctor's clinic is very popular among people in PHC areas. So we need to find out the long lasting solutions for the cure of the problem and need to take collaborative step.

Status of Female foeticide Across Various Parts of Country

This issue is common in all states of India irrespective of caste, class and religion or north south divide. About of 5-6 lacs girls a year or 2000 girls a day missing in India due to female foeticide. Highest occurrence of female foeticides are concentrated in Maharashtra, followed by states of Madhya Pradesh, Haryana, Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh.

Consequences of Female Foeticide

Blinded by the need for an assertive gender to rule the house after the parents, the majority are often ignorant of the disaster they unwittingly invite by indulging in female foeticide.

Female/Women Trafficking

Steep decline in the number of girls makes them scarce for the teeming number of males eligible for marriage. As a solution to this issue, illegal trafficking of women has become commonplace in many regions. This is a graver matter than the ideology of mail orders Brides. Young girls just attaining puberty are compelled to marry for a price fixed by the groom to be. They are usually bought in from neighboring



areas, where the number of girls might not be as miniscule as the host region. The moment when a land participates in the trade off of its women population, it is a sure path laid ahead with pitfalls.

Population Decline

There would be fewer births i.e. decline in population occurs when no mother or wombs bear any child (male or female). Although due to control in demographic statistics, the current goal of many nations like India, China, and a total wipeout of one sex is not the right way to achieve this target. So Science has to look up solutions to prevent this serious problem.

Increase in rape and Assault

Once a woman becomes an endangered species, it is only a matter of the time before the instances of rape, assault and violence become widespread. The legal system may offer protection but as is the situation today, many cases might not even surface for fear of isolation and humiliation on the girl's part.

Skewed Sex Ratio

The sex ratio had plummeted to an all time low of 927 girls for 1000 boys in 2001 from 945 girls for 1000 boys in 1991. If that statistics is a matter of concern, the current figures are toeing the danger line with only 914 girls for 1000 boys in 2011.

Review of steps taken to curb Female Foeticide

- PNDT Act 1994: Maharashtra is the first state in country to ban prenatal sex determination through the enhancement of Maharashtra regulation of prenatal diagnostics techniques act. This act has two aspects- Regulatory and Preventive. It seeks to regulate the use of prenatal diagnostics techniques for legal or medical purposes. Violations of the PNDT Act carry a five year jail term and a fine of about 2,300 U.S dollars.
- UNICEF is committed to protecting every child from violence, abuse and discrimination.
- The Supreme Court of India has issued notices to the Indian Government and the states and Union territories on a petition seeking stricter implementation of laws that ban prenatal sex selection tests and sex selective abortions in India. The petition brought to the court's attention the rampant practice of sex selective abortions in many parts of country with doctors indiscriminately conducting sex determination tests and carrying out abortions because of lax implementation of PNDT Act.



- Describing female foeticide as a ‘disgrace’ to society, Mrs. Pratibha Patil India’s first women President has called upon the Medical fraternity to ensure not misusing prenatal gender determination.

Conclusion

The ineffective implementation of the legislation is evident in India’s skewed gender ratio. Even if there is no direct female infanticides, indirect infanticides must occur until and unless our conceptions regarding various economic, social, ritual reasons about the girls are changed. India has yet to go a long way in her fight against pre birth eliminations of females. A concerted effort by the Medical fraternity, the law, the political leaders, NGOs, media, teachers and the community itself is the need of the hour.

Education plays an important role in women’s life. Higher education extend the dimension of thought process of human being and it is also true that an educated women can educate her upcoming seven generations or poor was not conscious of her own identity. It may be concluded that the banning of sex determination test, though an essential and urgently required step, is not the final solution to the problem in the long run, social prejudices against women have to be overcome by improving her status in society. So, Jaago India Jaago!!

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