



ISSN Print: 2394-7500
ISSN Online: 2394-5869
IJAR 2015; 1(6): 98-100
www.allresearchjournal.com
Received: 07-03-2015
Accepted: 06-04-2015

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Female foeticide: Effects on society

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Abstract

Women who constitute half a human population have been discriminated, harassed and exploited irrespective of the country to which they belong, unmindful of the religion which they profess and oblivious of the timeframe in which they live. Everywhere women are confronted with many challenges. Crime against women is an issue of national shame. Female foeticide is perhaps one of the worst forms of violence against women where a woman is denied her most basic and fundamental right i.e. "the right to life". The phenomenon of female foeticide in India is not new, where female embryos or foetuses are selectively eliminated after pre-natal sex determination, thus eliminating girl child even before they are born. As a result of selective abortion, between 40 and 45 million girls and women are missing from the Indian population. In some parts of the country, the sex ratio of girls to boys has dropped to less than 800/1000. The United Nations has expressed serious concern about the situation. This paper draws attention to female foeticide and its effects on society. Skewed sex ratio, women trafficking, increase in rape and assault and population decline are the serious challenges in front of the Indian society as the consequence of female foeticide.

Keywords: Female foeticide, sex selection abortion, skewed sex ratio, women trafficking.

1. Introduction

In spite of over six decades of Independence, in spite of India making rapid progress in science, technology and other fields, the picture that we see of India as of now is not one that can be appreciated, especially in terms of its treatment to the fairer sex. Discrimination against girl children, parents' neglect of the girl child, illegal abortions and female infanticide are clear instances of this. The practice of female foeticide, which is illegal, is still prevalent in our country. There is one section of the Indian society which is trying its level best to be liberal in their thoughts, although aping the Western culture. On the other hand, there is another section of the society, in fact a large chunk of it, which is still in the clutches of orthodox views and thoughts. Female foeticide is one such grave social problem arising out of the so-called "traditional thoughts" of the society. Illegal abortion of the female foetus is done due to family from in-laws, husband or the woman's parents, and the reasons for this are preference of son, girls being considered as a burden, poverty, illiteracy, social discrimination against women etc.

2. What Is Female Foeticide?

Female foeticide is the selective abortion/elimination of the girl child in the womb itself, done deliberately by the mother, after the detection of the child's gender through medical means. This is usually done under familial pressure from the husband or the in-laws or even the woman's parents. Unplanned pregnancy is generally the reason behind abortion. However, female foeticide is a far more heinous sin than the age old practice of killing an unwanted child, even before it's born.

Like many societies around the world, India is too patriarchal in nature. A set hierarchical system prevails in all tiers of the social order. The fanatic obsession with the male sex, though, is one of a kind. Right from the ancient scriptures, one finds instances where men are glowingly praised as the key to continue the family lineage. A girl is forced to undergo multiple pregnancies and (or) abortions, until she fulfils her lifelong goal of being a breeding machine that produces male offspring as per the needs of the family.

Objectives

- To find out the responsible factors for female foeticide.
- To find out the consequences of female foeticide.

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3. Responsible Factors for Female Foeticide

Every unethical act, like this one, has some age-old lame reasoning behind it, which is used as genuine justification by its staunch supporters. The root cause for female foeticide lies within the cultural norms as well as the socio-economic policies of the country where this practice prevails. Main responsible factors for female foeticide are discuss below:-

- **Preference for the Male Child:** Elimination/removal of girls from the family tree even before they are born clearly indicates the vehement desire for a boy child. In the countries where female foeticide has become unbridled, the core factor is the need to continue the family line through the male born into it. Sons are seen as the main source of income. Even though women today can easily rub 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 sigh of relief for a job well done in getting their 'daughter' settled.
- **Dowry System:** In India, the age old custom of 'dowry system' puts a damper on the parents' spirits who are 'blessed' with a girl child. Right then and there, begin the calculations associated with marriage expenses, which may happen after a couple of decades, following the child's first breath. A lump sum paid to the daughter in twenty years when the currency value may depreciate and inflation may sky rocket is seen as a tragedy waiting to happen. It would be so much better to get rid of them with just a fraction of the amount.
- **Deteriorated Status of Women:** Males are the stronger sex when it comes to the pecking order in a country, but that does not entail a curbing of rights for women. Rather than whining about the denied opportunities, women should stand up and try to grasp the chances they want for themselves. However, this Utopian scenario is not quite easily achieved in practice. Centuries of repression has made inferiority second nature to most women. They willingly embrace the role of the meek, submissive, docile wife who works relentlessly to cater to the whims of her husband. The worst enemy of a woman is the woman herself. Female foeticide happens with the explicit consent of the mother. While most mothers to be agree to this misdeed out of a sense of duty to the family, there are many who take the initiative themselves.
- **Foul Medical Ethics:** With the legalization of abortion in India, illegal sex determination of pregnancies has become an everyday reality. The professionals in the medical field are only too glad to help parents realize their dream of a healthy baby boy. Female foeticide is openly discussed amongst many in the healing fraternity and even pin boards outside certain clinics read, 'Pay Rs.500/- today to save the expense of Rs.500000/- in the future'. The initial meagre sum is the cost of a pregnancy termination, while the bigger amount specified in comparison, is the expense that the family will be burdened with in the form of dowry for the girl.
- **Industrial Growth:** Industrialization of the health sector has further strengthened the selective sex abortion quarter.

With the advent of CVS amniocentesis and Ultrasound, sex determination of the foetus has become much easier than it was earlier. This goes on to show how the manufacturers of high-tech equipments and gadgets, used to run these tests, benefit from the woes of future parents and their unborn child.

4. Consequences of Female Foeticide

As Newton's Third Law of Motion states, 'for every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction', the after effects of this genocide are fatal and far-reaching. Blinded by the need for an assertive gender to rule the house after the parents' demise, the majority are often ignorant of the disaster they unwittingly invite by indulging in female foeticide.

- **Skewed Sex Ratio:** In India, the number of girls per 1000 boys is declining with each passing decade. From 962 and 945 girls for every 1000 boys in the years 1981 and 1991 respectively, the sex ratio had plummeted to an all-time low of 927 girls for 1000 boys in 2001. If that statistic is a matter of concern, the current figures are toeing the danger line with only 914 girls for 1000 boys in 2011.
- **Female/Women Trafficking:** The steep decline in the number of girls makes them scarce for the teaming 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 order brides. Women, often young girls who've just crossed the threshold of puberty, are compelled to marry for a price fixed by the groom to be. They are usually bought in from neighbouring areas, where the number of girls might not be as miniscule as the host region. Child marriages become a rage and child pregnancies, a devastating consequence. The moment when a land participates in the trade off of its women population, it is a sure path laid ahead with pitfalls.
- **Increase in Rape and Assault:** Once women become an endangered species, it is only a matter of time before the instances of rape, assault and violence become widespread. In the backdrop of fewer available females, the surviving ones faced with the reality of handling a society driven by a testosterone high. 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.
- **Population Decline:** With no mothers or wombs to bear any child (male or female), there would be fewer births, leading to a decline in the country's population. Though a control in the demographic statistics is currently the goal of many nations like China and India, a total wipe-out of one sex is not the way to achieve this target. Science would then have to look up solutions to do away with the swarming number of men, should such a worst case scenario happen.

5. Prevention and Cure

The issues of female infanticide, female foeticide and selective sex abortion have gained global attention. Many international and national law making bodies have come forward to stop this cruel practice. Of the numerous steps taken to curb the matter, the prominent ones are:-

- Cancellation/permanent termination of the doctor's license who partakes in fulfilling a client's demand to do away with her girl child.
- Heavy penalty imposed on companies like GE that specialize in marketing medical equipment's used for illegal sex determination and abortion in unlicensed clinics and hospitals.
- High fines and judicial action against 'parents' who knowingly try to kill their unborn baby.
- Widespread campaigns and seminars for young adults and potential parents to enlighten them about the ill effects of female foeticide.

6. Conclusion

Days are not so far, when there may be emergence of the situation where brides will not be available for the marriage of the sons to maintain lineage and continue the human race of even those people who believe on long standing tradition of son preference, that "only sons can offer Pyre Pindadana, Mukhagni and not the daughters". Therefore it is felt that the mind sets of the people should be changed right from now towards the importance of the girl child in the family. There is an urgent need to alter the demographic composition of India's population and to tackle this brutal form of violence against women.

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