



FEMALE FOETICIDE: A SOCIAL EVILL TO SOCIETY

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Abstract

Female feticide is a curse to Indian society. Female feticide is the illegal practice of killing a fetus which is determined as a female. The frequency of female feticide in India is increasing day by day. Female feticide is prevalent in our country as a major social evil. The patriarchal social structure of India gives a secondary position to women. Social belief is that the family runs through a male and hence the birth of a male child in the family is imminent for carrying forward its generation. Social discrimination and the preference for sons have given rise to the rate of sex determination. (Kapur 1995)

Even some medical practitioners are making high incomes by determining pre-natal sex of the child and aborting fetus at the will of the parents. The practice is unlawful and demands strict punishment in form of fine or jail to the person requesting abortion of the unborn girl child as well as to the practitioner who gets the sex determined. Some kind of complications in pregnancy can also demand surgical termination of pregnancy after eight weeks of conception. This is where the termination or abortion is legal and doctors may have to suggest and opt for discontinuance of pregnancy for the sake of health of the mother carrying the unborn child.

However, the technique of surgical termination is misused by some people in getting rid of the female fetus. Some people intentionally get the sex determined of the unborn child by using the technique of ultrasound and if it is determined as female fetus, they get it aborted. The Indian Subcontinent faces the imbalance sex ratio which is detrimental to the good cause of social upliftment of the society. But the reckless practice is still on without realizing the ill effects and drastic consequences of the practice. Abortion of female fetus is an act of murder.

God is the author of life and nobody should have the right to take it. Some women themselves are in favour of getting their female fetus aborted through surgery which is a



shameful act and must be condemned. Some do it willfully while others are forced by family or are fearful of the social outcomes of bearing a girl child. But in any case, this practice is illegal and disturbs the delicate equilibrium of the nature. Some states like Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh and Gujarat are states where the male-female ratio is most skewed and the menace of female feticide is to blame.

FEMALE FETICIDE AND FEMALE INFANTICIDE:

Female feticide is aborting the female baby in the mother's womb. Whereas female infanticide is killing a baby girl after she is being born. In the past in India, as strong preference for sons made unwanted female infants susceptible to infanticide at the hands of midwives. The practice of killing the female child after her birth has been prevailing in our society since many years and even today the practice is going on. But feticide is the legacy and contribution of the progress made by the medical science. (Giriraj, R. 2004)

Today Amniocentesis which allows identification of sex in uterus has led to abortion of unwanted female fetuses. It was introduced in 1975 to detect fetal abnormalities but it soon began to be used for determining the sex of the baby. Ultrasound scanning, being a non-invasive technique, quickly gained popularity and is now available in some of the most remote rural areas. Both techniques are now being used for sex determination with the intention of abortion if the fetus turns out to be female. With the advent of privatization and commercialization, the use of pre-natal diagnostic technologies is growing into a thriving business in India. This is primarily for the purpose of sex determination and selective abortion of the female fetus. The misuse of technology simply reinforces the secondary status given to girl children in such a way that they are culled out even before they are born. (Meenu Anand, September 2000)

According to Shrivastav(2001), "Paralleled to infanticide, feticide is perhaps a more acceptable means of disposing off the unwanted girl child. Infanticide can be an overtly brutal and inhuman exercise while feticide which is carried out by skilled professionals is a medical practice that uses scientific techniques and skills and decreases the guilt factor associated with the entire practice".



CAUSES:

Every unethical act has some lame age-old reasoning behind it which its staunch supporters use as justification. Also, sometimes the social conditions of the society are such that the people are inculcated with this type of values from the very beginning. There are a number of causes for this evil prevailing and flourishing, some of which are listed below:

1. Male Children are considered a Better Investment:

Some believe that boys are an investment while girls are economic drainer. There is an expression in India that “bringing up a daughter is like watering a neighbor’s plant”. In India the constraint is mostly economic – daughters will require a sizable financial dowry in order to marry. Because daughters leave their families of origin, they are often regarded as temporary members of their families and a drain on its wealth. The main reason is the idea that the male offspring will better support the family. Since sons are seen as the main source of income, even though today, women have many career options, the common misconception still remains that it is the male who will help run the house and look after his parents, while women are viewed as being like cargo, something to be shipped off to another household. Sons are seen as the Producers while daughters are considered to be consumers.

2. Technical Advancement:

Especially ultra-sonography are now conveniently available as the "clinic next door". The sex of a fetus can be determined within 13 to 14 weeks of pregnancy through abdominal ultrasound. These methods have rendered sex determination cheap and easy.

3. Poverty and Overpopulation:

Poverty, illiteracy and insecurity play a major role in female feticide. Female infanticide and feticide are predominantly practiced in regions of significant poverty and over population. The girls are considered a liability, as they need to be married off with enormous dowry. It is also general belief that family legacy is carried by son only. Also, children are expected to care for parents in their old age in many countries, so upbringing a son becomes a better investment



because they would secure their parent's future, whereas once a girl marries, she becomes the property of her husband and of virtually no value to her parents.

4. To protect girls from other existing evils:

Some believe that in a male dominated society, it is easy to bring up a boy since the safety of the female is a big issue and so raising up a girl involves trouble. Some women resort to female infanticide and feticide in order to protect their daughters from a life of objectification and subjugation in a society dominated by men, where there is a prevalent anti girl attitude.

5. Social Customs:

Owing to certain social customs prevailing in the different communities of India, feticide/infanticide is very common. Factors that favor the female feticide/infanticide are evils of dowry, social security, religion, small children norm, urban living, educational status and society.

REFORM & SOLUTIONS:

- A massive educational effort will be required to modify belief that it is only sons who can make necessary offerings after the death of a parent.
- Public awareness of the issues and grassroots support of the local communities is essential to prevent and eradicate female infanticide and sex selective abortion. Progress has been made in India, where the government has taken steps to implement programs to educate the public and encourage the NGO'S to take action against these practices.
- Strengthening the existing laws-laws are made in India with great fervor, their execution is the main issue. Violations of the PNDT Act carry a five year imprisonment and a fine.
- By embracing an attitude of sensitivity to the specific issues girls face and disseminating ideas of gender equality to people we interact with colleagues, students, children, law makers and friends.
- Sensitizing the medical students who are the doctors of tomorrow; towards the adverse sex ratio while stressing upon the ethical issues in female feticide.



- Organising regular workshops and conferences which would greatly help to reiterate the importance of this problem in the country. Private practitioners should also be encouraged to participate in such programs.
- Education of women is a powerful tool for improving nutrition levels, raising the age of marriage, acceptance of family planning, improvement in self-image, and their empowerment, provide counseling and support services to newly married and pregnant women to discourage them from undergoing MTP(Sharma BR, Vij K and Gautam CS. Murdered in the womb. J Soc Welfare. 2001).
- Weak law enforcement and easy access to ultrasonography fail to curb these practices. The government needs to keep an eye on all sex determination centres and abortion clinics.

CONCLUSION:

The incidence of sex selective abortions is the worst form of gender based discrimination against women. The causes for elimination of girl child indicate that the reasons are similar and different depending upon the geographical location in which female infanticide is practiced. Strong male preference and consequent elimination of female has continued to increase rather than decline with the spread of education.

In order to stop this evil practice, the legislature has enacted certain laws which are the Indian Penal Code, 1860; the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971 and the Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Prohibition of Sex Selection Act) 1994.

The Indian Penal Code is the first law which contained provisions under sections 312 to 316 for prohibiting miscarriage. These sections penalise violent or forced abortions.

The Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971 liberalised law and allowed termination of pregnancy on medical grounds, humanitarian grounds and eugenic grounds.

In order to prevent female feticide, the PC & PNDT Act, 1994 provide provisions under which Supervisory Board, appropriate authorities and advisory committees are to be constituted by the Central Government as well as by the State Government.



But unless social action is supplemented with prompt implementation of regulations under the law meant to stop female feticides, such practices will continue to flourish and sex selective abortions will make women endangered species(Supinder k,2009). Time has arrived to declare a crusade against female feticide both on individual and collective level to stop elimination of daughters only because of their sex.

The Beti Bachao, or Save girls campaign, has been underway in many Indian communities since the early 2000s. The campaign uses the media to raise awareness of the gender disparities creating, and resulting from, sex-selective abortion. Beti Bachao activities include rallies, posters, short videos and television commercials, some of which are sponsored by state and local governments and other organizations. Many celebrities in India have publicly supported the Beti Bachao campaign. Such campaigns must be supported at all levels by all the people, and not only this but several other steps should also be taken up by different organizations and individuals. Various non-government organizations (NGOs) are already taking an active lead in this area. It must be emphasized that the involvement of community leaders, or influential persons, would go a long way in assuring success in such campaigns.

Ironically, female feticide takes place in a country where people worship various forms of Goddesses, and where females are considered as Maa Laxmi's incarnation and where young girls are worshipped and people touch their feet for blessings. But even then, the intentional killing of the girl child continues. Such is the double standards of our society. Right to education, health and empowerment are the fundamental rights of every Indian woman. The horrible illegal practice of female feticide has to be stopped by harsh laws and change in the mind-set of the people. Save the girl child for a better tomorrow.

A little change in our mindset and attitude is all that is needed to welcome daughters in our hearts and in this world.



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