



“THE RIGHT TO LIFE”: FEMALE INFANTICIDE AND FETICIDE: AN ANALYSIS OF INDIA

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ABSTRACT Female infanticide and female feticide (the selective abortion of girls in the womb) are significant issues in India. Female infanticide has been a problem for centuries, partly as a result of the patriarchal nature of Indian society. Female infanticide is the deliberate killing of girl babies. It is also described as gender-selective killing or "gendercide". The phenomenon of female infanticide is as old as many cultures, and has likely accounted for millions of genders elective deaths throughout history. Female feticide and female infanticide are common social problems in India creating a serious gender imbalance in the country. 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. The sex selection techniques are providing ample opportunity to the female feticide and socio-economic problems are providing opportunity of female infanticide. Even though the law is a powerful instrument of social change yet law alone cannot root out this social problem. Crime against women is an issue of national shame. Female feticide 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". Sex selective abortions and increase in the number of female infanticide cases have become a significant social phenomenon in several parts of India. It transcends all castes, class and communities and even the North South dichotomy. The girl children become target of attack even before they are born. This paper theoretically analyses the magnitude of the incidence of female feticide and infanticide in an analysis of India.

KEYWORDS : Abortion, Female Feticide, Female Infanticide, Gender Imbalance, India.

Introduction:

Crime against women is an issue of national shame. However, gender selective abortions and infanticide are even more despicable. Now a day millions of girls are missing in India. Study explores the main cause related to the issue of female infanticide and feticide, which increase the imbalance in sex ratio, social violence, negligence of women's in our society, injustice etc. Most broadly defined infanticide; applies to the killing of baby girl due to preference of baby boy. Most strictly defined feticide; as an act that causes the death of a fetus. Research analyzes the main problem related to infanticide and feticide like, lack of education, societies are fascinated about male child because they think that only male child is source of family income, only male child can support economically, socially and emotionally, according to Hindu mythology, parents cannot obtain salvation unless they have a son to perform their last rites, girl child increases their economic burden to obey the social norms like dowry etc., poverty is also a big problem related to the practice of female infanticide and feticide. No doubt, if this practice continues it will disturb the social balance and harmony of the society and it may lead to social problems like increase in sexual offences, sharing of women within and outside wedlock and it creates greater insecurity against women.

Explored Literature Review:

Women are subject to various forms of violence in all societies across the world. Among them, gender selective violence is insidious. Female foeticide and infanticide are the two forms of gender selective violence that are prevalent in developing countries like India (Sama, 2003). It cuts across barriers like castes, class and communities (Tandon and Sharma, 2006). Until few years back, this practice was restricted to few states but it has now spread all over the country. Research studies of numerous scholars" shows that advance in modern medical sciences are being misused for knowing the sex of the foetus with the intention of aborting it if it happens to be that of a female (Kulkarni, 1986; Diaz, 1988; Gangrade, 1988 and Bandewar, 2003). This heinous crime has gone unchecked despite enactment of laws preventing the same. While protecting the human rights of women has received much attention, at the same time some people have also got the right, to be inhuman and commit female foeticide and infanticide unabashedly. The research could also find contemporary cases of female infanticide in parts of western Gujarat, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Punjab, and Madhya Pradesh. In addition, female members of the family usually receive inferior treatment regarding food, medication, and education (Kynch & Sen, 1983). The girl children become target of attack even before they are born. Diaz, (1988) states that in a well-known Abortion Centre in Mumbai, after undertaking the sex determination tests, out of the 15,914 abortions performed during 1984-85 almost 100 per cent were those of girl fetuses. Similarly, a survey report of women's centre in

Mumbai found that out of 8,000 fetuses aborted in six city hospitals 7,999 fetuses were of girls (Gangrade, 1988: 63-70).

Female Infanticide and Feticide: Causes and Effects:

In India, the causes of female foeticide and infanticide are multifaceted (Venkatramani, 1986; Iyengar, 1993; Venkatachalam, 1993; Aravamudan, 1994, Harris- White, 1997; Jain, 1999; George, 2000; Agnihotri, 2003; Sarna, 2003; Patel, 2004; Sharma and Jain, 2005; Pande and Malhotra, 2006; Aravamudan, 2007). The important causes of female foeticide and infanticide as revealed by studies made by these authors are as follows:

1) Son mania:

Indian society is patrilineal, patriarchal and patrilocal. Among the Hindus, the reproduction and heredity beliefs are governed by the laws of Manu (Corcos, 1984). Following this law, Hindus believe that a man cannot attain redemption unless he has a son to light his funeral pyre. Besides religious consideration, economic, social and emotional desires favour males, as parents expect sons but not daughters to provide financial support, especially in their old age.

2) Girl as a "burden":

The evil of dowry system has led to a belief that daughters have to be protected and sufficient financial resources have to be accumulated to support the marriage of the girl. Boys on the other hand are considered as assets, who fetch a fabulous dowry for the parents. This has created a stereo-type notion of girl as a "burden" on the household.

3) Education and the gender skew:

Contrary to the popular belief, Gita Aravamudan"s research shows an adverse link between education and the gender skew (Aravamudan, 2007). The more educated a women is, the more likely she is to actively choose a boy, assuming that she decides to have one child. The only educated women likely to keep daughters are the very independent minded. Educated men, especially in the business class, also want to have sons to carry on their business.

4) Marginalization of women in agriculture:

Although women contribute far more to the agricultural production, they are by far largest group of landless labourers with little real security. Modernization of agriculture alleviates the burden of tasks that are traditionally men"s responsibility leaving women"s burden unrelieved. In some regions, the bias has led to shift from subsistence food (often women"s crops) to cash crops (often men"s crops). The systematic marginalization of women in Indian agriculture has led to an increase in violence against women including the epidemic of female feticide.

5) Misuse of technology:

The tests like Amniocentesis and ultrasonography, which were originally designed for detection of congenital abnormalities of the foetus, are being misused for knowing the sex of the foetus with the intention of aborting it if it happens to be that of a female (Patel, 1984). Thus, female feticide and infanticide is receiving fillip through misuse of technology, done surreptitiously with the active connivance of the service providers.

6) Weak implementation of laws:

The Pre-natal Diagnostic Techniques (Regulation and Prevention of Misuse) Act, 1994, prohibits determination of sex of the foetus. It also provides for mandatory registration of genetic counseling centers, clinics, hospitals, nursing homes, etc. However, the implementation of the law is weak and it has not been used to the fullest. The focus has been only on the registration of the number of ultrasound machines and not on the actual act of abortions of female fetuses. Furthermore, in several cases the accused have not been booked under relevant sections of the Act.

The genocide of girl child, which continues unabated in the country, has led to skewed sex ratio in the country. The 2001 Census figures point to a sex ratio for 0-6 age group of around 927 females per 1000 males (See Table 3). According to some rough estimates from civil registration of births, the present sex ratio has declined to almost 882 females per 1000 males. Assuming an average of 900 females per 1000 males, this point out that almost 10 per cent of females are missing, that would amount to extermination of almost one million women every year.

Table 1: Incidence (I) Percentage Contribution to All India (P) of Crimes Committed Against Children during 2000 (State and UT-Wise)

Sl. No.	State/ Union Territories	Foeticide		Infanticide	
		I	P	I	P
1	Andhra Pradesh	8	8.8	8	7.7
2	Assam	0	0.0	4	3.8
3	Bihar	1	1.1	4	3.8
4	Gujarat	0	0.0	4	3.8
5	Haryana	13	14.3	1	1.0
6	J & K	0	0.0	1	1.0
7	Karnataka	1	1.1	2	1.9
8	Kerala	0	0.0	2	1.9
9	Madhya Pradesh	1.4	15.4	31	29.8
10	Maharashtra	41	45.1	20	19.2
11	Orissa	1	1.1	0	0.0
12	Punjab	0	0.0	6	5.8
13	Rajasthan	9	9.9	5	4.8
14	Sikkim	0	0.0	3	2.9
15	Tamil Nadu	0	0.0	8	7.7
16	West Bengal	0	0.0	2	1.9
Union Territories					
17	Chandigarh	1	1.1	0	0.0
18	Delhi	2	2.2	2	1.9

Source: Crime in India 2000, p. 216.

Suggestions and Ideas to stop female infanticide and feticide:

Paper suggests some important ideas to stop infanticide and feticide, basically to promote education and awareness among the people specially in rural areas, provide free education to girls at school level, facilities should be provided and improve standard of living, involve media/ print media/ news channels, social organizations, prohibition of misuse of technique, banned add of sex determination technique, use medical technique for good purpose, punishment for violation act, government take serious action, involve governmental and non-governmental organizations to work , no further delay to take action, collaboration and help of all departments to stop this practice. This is very serious crime which is followed in our society and openly prevented in our culture, we need to cut this hilarious crime which is against women. We need to cut this crime from their roots. Than after women lives in the society for full of honor & dignity and this is also called the true empowerment of women.

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