Research Paper Commerce

Violation of Right to Live: The Curse of Female Feticide in India

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ABSTRACT

The paper aims to identify the causes and social and cultural implications of female feticide in India and provide certain suggestions to the Government of India to improve its sex ratio. The study concludes that there are various policies initiated by the Government to keep a check on female feticide yet there is defective implementation of the policies.

KEYWORDS female feticide, India

Introduction

Discrimination against women is a problem which has its roots in the social, cultural and religious ethnicity. Deploring the condition of women, incident of female feticide and gender discrimination are a cause of worry and need to be redressed. The magnitude of the problem of female feticide can be related to three issues viz pre-embryocide, female feticide and female infanticide. There has been a gradual significant shift from 'son preference' to 'daughter discrimination'. The question is why female children are still at risk in India despite there is increasing participation of women in economic & political spheres and there is an overall improvement in the status of women?

Magnitude of the Problem in Global and Indian Context

As per UNICEF Annual Report 2011, worldwide, the ratio of girls to boys is 1000 for every 1005. The same source reveals that in India, there are only 914 girls for every 1000 boys and often far fewer. The Lancet, reports that because of this, at least 10 million fewer girls exist in India. The more recent action-aid study says the figure is closer to 35 million in 2011 whereas UNICEF calculates 50 million fewer girls in India by 2012.

Table 1 Male Female Ratio of Top 10 Most Populated Countries Of The World

Rank	Country	Male:Female Ratio	Population
1	China	1080:1000	1,360,720,000
2	India	1070:1000	1,240,000,000
3	US	970:1000	317,626,000
4	Indonesia	990:1000	249,866,000
5	Brazil	970:1000	201,032,714
6	Pakistan	1030:1000	185,567,000
7	Nigeria	1030:1000	173,615,000
8	Bangladesh	1030:1000	152,518,015
9	Russia	860:1000	143,657,134
10	Japan	750:1000	127,220,000

Source: UNICEF Annual Official Estimate 2013

Table 1 clearly states that India is the second most densely populated country of the world. It shares 17.04% of the world's population whereas it has only 0.17% of the total female population. India has second worst sex ratio (only after China). It shows the seriousness and aggressiveness of the problem of less female population.

Table 2 Globala and Regional Estimates of Induced Female Abortion

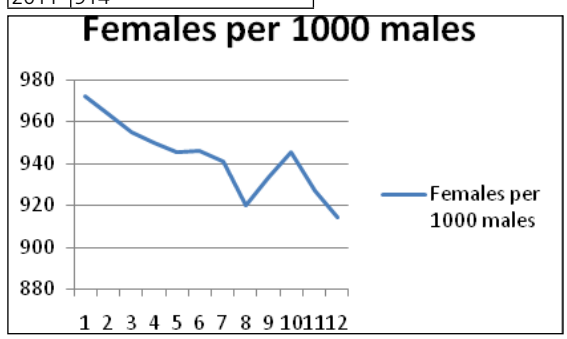
Region	ABORTION RATE (per 1000 males)		
	1995	2003	2008
World	35	29	28
Developed Countries	39	25	24
Developing Countries	34	29	29

Source: Sedgh G et al., Induced female abortion: Incidence and trends worldwide from 1995 to 2008, Lancet, 2012 (forthcoming)

Table 2 clearly shows that induced female abortion rate is higher in the developing countries than the dceveloped ones. The section below throws light upon the situation of females in India.

Table 3 Male/Female Sex ratio of India

Year	Females per 1000 males
1901	972
1911	964
1921	955
1931	950
1941	945
1951	946
1961	941
1871	920
1981	933
1991	945
2001	927
2011	914



Source: Census Reports, Government of India

The picture for females in India is highly dismal. There has been a steep deterioration in the number of females per 1000 males since 1901. Let us have a look at the state wise sex ratio of India.

Table 4 Sex ratio of different states of India in 2011

States	Sex ratio	Literacy rate
Kerala	1084	94.00
Tamil Nadu	996	80.09
Andhra Pradesh	993	67.02
Chhattisgarh	991	70.28
Manipur	992	79.21
Meghalaya	989	74.43
Odisha	979	72.87
Mizoram	976	91.33
Himachal Pradesh	972	82.80
Karnataka	973	75.36
Goa	973	88.70
Uttarakhand	963	78.82
Tripura	960	87.22
Assam	958	78.82
Jharkhand	948	66.41
West Bengal	950	76.26
Maharashtra	929	82.34
Nagaland	931	79.55
Madhya Pradesh	931	69.32
Rajasthan	928	66.11
Arunachal Pradesh	938	65.38
Gujarat	919	78.03
Bihar	918	61.80
Uttar Pradesh	912	67.68
Punjab	895	75.84
Sikkim	890	81.42
Jammu & Kashmir	889	67.16
Haryana	879	75.55

Source: Census Report, 2011

Kerala has the best male female ratio as well as the literacy rate whereas Harayana has the worst sex ratio. The problem of female feticide has its roots in the India since ancient times. Basically there is enormous preference for the male child in comparison to female.

Overview of Literature

Avachat Shubhada et.al.(2013)

A cross sectional study among 79 medical interns revealed that the knowledge of current sex rates ratio was significantly better among female interns and creating awareness is an effective way to combat declining sex ratio and only 33 interns had correct knowledge regarding all measures. The study emphasizes upon the need to sensitize doctors regarding every aspect of Preconception and Prenatal Diagnostic Techniques Act and selective sex determination.

Korodia Kavita et. al. 2013

The research study analyzed the impact of educational programme on level of awareness regarding female feticide and infanticide of adolescent boys and girls studying in 11th standard Results indicate a significant impact of educational programme was found in the level of awareness regarding female feticide and infanticide among the respondents.

Kushwaha Nisha et. al. 2013

The researcher wrote a conceptual paper highlighting the fact that new technological great assistance from the mid 1980's onwards is responsible for the declining sex ratio as they present the birth of girl child and promote the birth of boy child. She identifies that there is a need to address the mindset of the people and to create awareness among the society regarding women issues.

Manhas Shashi et. al. 2013

The researcher attempted to study the perception and beliefs regarding female feticide among Muslim Community of Jammu sample of 100 Parents (50 mothers and 50 fathers) The study reveals that majority of the parents were aware of the sex determination methods and considered it a right end and safe method for having a son because of economic liability, lack of safety and fear of family honor and it was also revealed that major cause of female feticide in this community was son preference and also suggested few recommendations based on the data to eliminate this social issue.

Salivkar Sanjay et. al. 2012

The researcher identified 5 major reasons responsible for female feticide and the declining sex ratio. The research paper used secondary sources of information and concluded that female feticide is more committed by educated people than uneducated as they are aware of prenatal sex determination tests and sonography.

Samsunnessa Khatun et. al. 2011

The researcher is of the view that female foeticide has become a social hazard of international significance in the era of ultrasound technology and capitalist modernity and tries to focus on the rationale behind the foeticide, and the consequences of this phenomenon on the Indian society. They conclude by reviewing the measures taken to combat this heinous phenomenon for a balanced society.

Sinya Annie 2011

The researcher conducted a study on the 100 eligible couples in rural and urban area each at Bangalore to determine the association between knowledge on female feticide and demographic variables of the respondents. Unpaired't' test was carried out to compare the mean knowledge and Chi square test was used to determine the association between knowledge and demographic variables.

S. Rashmi et. al. 2011

A cross sectional study done with the objective of comparing some parameters (attitude & practice) of gender discrimination (GD) in rural and urban areas of Ahmedabad district showed alarmingly adverse sex ratio (SR) as low as 562 among urban preschoolers. GD was prevalent in both study areas but manifested differently. Preference of male child by both partners an indicator of gender discrimination was seen in both areas, It correlated with female literacy, their low mean age at marriage and first conception. While urban areas showed more adverse sex ratio coupled with awareness and use of Ultrasonography (USG) for sex determination and poor employment status,Rural areas exhibited (along with adverse sex ratio) poor literacy and employment status of females and poor contraceptive use.

Chaudhary et. al. 2010

A cross sectional study conducted on 527 students between the age group of 11-18 years of various schools of district Ludhiana, Punjab to assess the awareness and perceptions of school children regarding female feticide .The results indicate that 97.9% were aware of the issue through TV(50%),followed by newspaper (33%) .Majority of the students (65.2%) felt that discrimination between boys and girls.

D. Aishwarya et. al. 2010

A population based study was conducted in selected Bikaner Panchayat Samiti of Bikaner district (Rajasthan) to assess the awareness of the rural and urban women about female feticide. The findings revealed that (55%) rural respondents and (70%) urban respondents had medium awareness about female feticide. Further results indicated that caste; mass media exposure and socio economic status had positive and significant association with awareness of rural and urban respondents about female feticide.

Kansal R et. al. 2010

The study was carried out to find out the attitude towards

gender preference and knowledge as well as practice toward prenatal sex determination and female feticide among pregnant women. A majority (66.0%) of the pregnant women did not show any gender preference, followed by male preference (22.2%) and female preference (11.8%). A high proportion, i.e. 84.7% and 89.7%, of the total subjects were aware that prenatal sex determination and female feticide is illegal, respectively.

Bhalearao Gandhi et. al. 2005
An explorative study was done to explore the income strata and rural – urban variations in extent and justification for female foeticide/ infanticide, and to capture the linkages between male child preference with the gender system and the practice of female foeticide/ infanticide in rural, semi-urban and urban areas of three districts (Amritsar, Jalandhar and Bhatinda) of Punjab. Data was collected from three income groups through interviews. Findings indicated that 19.4% of the respondents resorted to abortion because a female foetus was detected, and they wanted a male child. Resort to female foeticide was reported mostly by the middle income group (23.2%), followed by upper income group (18.3%) and least by the lower income group (15.5%).

George Sabu M et. al. 1998
The research study presents the outcome of an intensive study of the abuse of prenatal diagnostic techniques for sex selection in a rural population of 13,000 in Rohtak district. It concludes that parents tend to be calculative in choosing the sex of the next child and the decision is based on the birth order, sex sequence of previous children and number of sons. Transfer of reproductive technology to India is resulting in reinforcement of patriarchal values as professional medical organizations seem to be indifferent to ethical misconduct.

Objectives of the Study
1. To examine the causes responsible for female feticide and declining sex ratio in India.
2. To bring forth the social and cultural implications of female feticide and deteriorated number of females in India.
3. To provide suggestive measures to the government of India to increase its Sex Ratio.

Research Methodology
The study is exclusively based on the secondary data. The researcher has collected the relevant data from various books and statistics available in United Nations norms, Human development survey report, Prenatal Diagnostic Techniques (regulation & prevention of Misuse) Act, 1994, Pre-conception and Pre-natal diagnostic techniques (Prohibition of sex selection), Act 2002, UNICEF data and data relating to Aaganwadi workers, female health worker (FHW) and chowkidar (functionary reporting to police).

Analysis of the Data
Every unethical act, like this one (female feticide), has some age-old lame reasoning behind it, which is used as genuine justification by its staunch supporters. The root cause for female feticide lies within the cultural norms as well as the socio-economic policies of India.

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 India where female feticide 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.

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 skyrocket 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: I'm not a depressed feminist who would shout herself hoarse about the domination of men in any society. Sure, 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 feticide 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 and termination 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 feticide 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. 500 000 in the future'. The initial meager 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 fetus 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. Many hospitals are known to sign long term contracts with the firms involved in the production of these types of medical machinery. Often, a healthy percentage of the profit is shared with the hospital and both parties enjoy the fruits of rewarding a death sentence.

As opposed to CVS and amniocentesis, the ultrasound technology is cheaper and within easy reach of the lower economically backward strata of society. It is also easily accessible in a hospital/clinic nearby with mediocre credentials.

Social and Cultural Implications of Female Feticide
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 feticide.

Skewed Sex Ratio: In India,the number of girls per 1000 boys is declining with each passing decade. From 933 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. In the case of China, the sex ratio is an alarming 118 boys for 100 girls; that means 848 girls for 1000 boys. This is just an example of two nations trapped in the vicious circle. There are many others struggling with a skewed sex ratio. Is an imbalance in the number of females a

truly worrying matter? Yes, indeed. Sex ratio is merely a microscopic view of the number of both genders. However, when calculated for the entire population, this clearly indicates the widespread disparity. This disparity may prove critical for the country's development in political, economic and emotional spheres.

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 neighboring 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 will be 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 wipeout 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.

Suggestive Measures to the Government of India to increase its Sex- Ratio

'National Plan of Action' exclusively for the girl child (1991-2000) was formulated in 1992 for the "Survival, Protection and Development of the Girl Child" This plan recognized the rights of the girl to equal opportunity and aims to provide freedom from hunger, illiteracy, ignorance and exploitation. Various other initiatives have also been taken by the Government of India, but there is lack in the effective implementation of these policies. The researcher hereby provides certain suggestions to eradicate the problem of female feticide.

- 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 equipments 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 feticide. Ignorance is one of the major causes for the increase in the selective sex abortion cases. Spreading awareness can go a long way in saving our future sisters, mothers, girlfriends and wives.

Conclusion

A cohesive and concerted effort by everyone can prove to be the requisite baby step in the right direction. We may not support the notion of women rising above men, or them becoming the dominant sex, or conquering the world. However, the basic humane consideration to let an innocent child live and see the world she was conceived to grow in is not too much to ask. Let's not be murderers of our own flesh and blood.

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