

“DEATH BEFORE BIRTH” - FEMALE FOETICIDE IN INDIA

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DOI: 10.46609/IJSSER.2021.v06i09.029 URL: <https://doi.org/10.46609/IJSSER.2021.v06i09.029>

ABSTRACT

In spite of legal provisions to prevent female foeticide , it continues to occur in many parts of India. Foeticide has become a social hazard in theera of ultrasound and technology. This paper theoretically analyses the magnitude of the incidence in an analysis of India.

Key words: foeticide, sex ratio, infanticide, abortion

Introduction

The elimination of the female fetus at any stage during the pregnancy after determining the sex of the fetus is known as female foeticide. It can also be defined as killing of the girl child in mother’s womb itself. In legal context, it refers to the deliberate or incidental killing of fetus due to a criminal human act, such as a blow to the abdomen of a pregnant woman (Wikipedia). Historically in absence of genetic testing, infanticide was the only inhumane option for discarding the female child. This practice continues today in southern parts of India where people cannot afford an illegal ultrasound test. Whereas in states like Punjab and Haryana families can afford illegal test to know the sex of the baby and discard it.

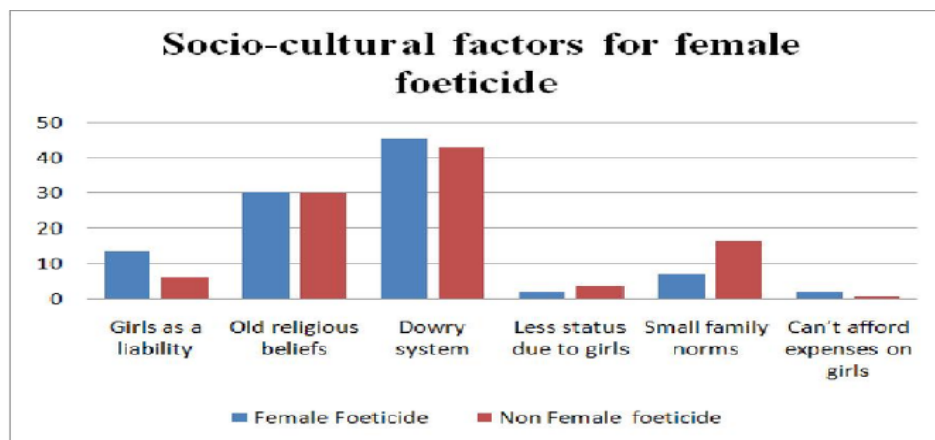
II. Factors Leading To Female Foeticide

There are various factors resulting in the occurrence of female foeticidein India;

- A. **Religion Causes:** religious influence leaves a sturdy impact on traditional beliefs which believe that son, is fundamental for religious formalities, which are executed at different phases of life. It is considered that cremation through a son guarantees that parents are blessed with direct passage to heaven. The oldest Vedas and Upanishadshave directed that the prominence of such rituals and traditions can be achieved only if the son of the family performs them. These rituals are considered as a privilege and therefore this right is bestowed on the son or any male member of the family. Whereas a daughter is considered

to be an auspicious sign of Goddess Laxmi but at the same time there are many families who kill the female foetus only because they want a malechild to free them from all the sins after their death.

- B. **Social causes:** There have been many social causes behind the practice of female foeticide, as it is believed that daughters do not offer social security to parents. The orthodox Indian Society considers the birth of daughter a redundant investment that will yield no returns as daughters marry away and live with their husbands and his family. Dowry ascertains to be an additional disbursement apart from the expenses in bringing her up, educating her etc. Daughters are also perceived as a disgrace in Indian society as the parents have to maintain a status in the society. A typical traditional Indian family wishes that their family name continued which according to them can be done only through a son. Thus, daughters are undesirable, as they do not continue their maiden name after marriage. The practice of infanticide and foeticide especially prevail in higher caste and among the rich, as they have to sustain their prestige amongst higher caste. But for the middle class and lower-class families, protection of the girl child is the main concern. As crimes against women are increasing in our country there isa terror in several families regarding the protection and security of their daughters. Therefore, the parents believe that killing of the daughter before she is born is better so that she does not become the prey to the countless crimes, which will ultimately destroy her life and result in humiliation for her parents.
- C. **Technological Factors:** Global thrive in technology is another factorleading to the killing of girl child before birth. The presence of low-cost Tecnologies like ultrasound, have led to sex-based abortion of female foetuses, and an increasingly smaller number of girls born each year.



Source- ResearchGate

Impact Of Female Foeticide

- Given the lower value placed on women in the Indian society, parental sex determination with intention of preventing female births must be viewed as manifestation of violence against women, a violation of their human rights.
- The pregnant woman though often equally anxious to have a boy, is frequently pressurized to undergo abortion. Many women suffer from psychological trauma as a result of forcibly undergoing repeated abortions.
- The low sex ratio resulting from resulting from female foeticide which are manifesting themselves in various ways like
- Trafficking of women for sexual work and marriage. Such marriages are not sustainable because of cultural differences and results into instances of physical, mental and sexual abuse of the bride.
- Increased crime against women like sexual harassment, lewd remarks against them, and instances of eve teasing.

Review Of The Measure Taken To Combat Female Foeticide

In India there are numerous measures taken to prevent and create awareness for female foeticide.

A) Institutional Measures:

- 1) In an attempt to curb female foeticide, the Indian Government enacted the Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (PNDT) Act of 1994, which prohibits sex selection and regulates prenatal diagnostic techniques to prevent their misuse. To this end, the government established a bureaucracy controlling the sale and regulating the use of ultrasound machines, a key diagnostic modality used to facilitate sex-selective abortions. Following the initial implementation of the PNDT Act, a further decline in the 2001 Indian national census sex ratio prompted the passage of an amendment, the Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (PCPNDT) Act of 2003, which addressed pre-conception sex determination and strengthened enforcement of the PNDT Act.
- 2) UNICEF have established many programmes to protect every child from discrimination, violence, and abuse.
- 3) 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 pre-natal sex-selection tests and sex-selective abortions in India.

B) Individual and group appeals and initiatives:

In India's history, there have always been the protests against female infanticides by various national leaders like Vidyasagar, Raja Ram Mohan Roy, BR Ambedkar a few names to mention. In modern times many people stand up against female foeticide.

- 1) Ishita Sharma foundation and KC Mahindra education trust are NGO's who are fighting to save girl child.
- 2) Mrs. Pratibha Patil India's first women President has called upon the medical fraternity to ensure that diagnostic tests are not misused for pre-natal gender determination.
- 3) "Actress Mallika Sherawat is keen to do her bit to raise awareness on the skewed sex ratio in her native state of Haryana" (Hindustan Times)
- 4) Mission Shakti campaign was launched in January 2021 which was a week-long drive to sensitise people against female foeticide by the director of prosecution.

Author's Views On Female Foeticide:

I propound that a foetus is live and being live gives it a right to lead a life. Killing a foetus should be considered a murder as a life is being killed by the process like abortion and forceful killing. So, killer of female foetus should be treated as a murderer in the same way.

Conclusion

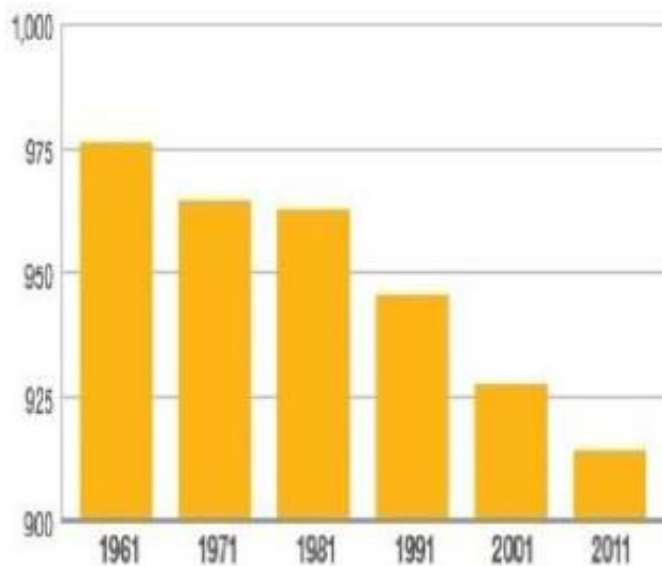
Family honor and prestige could be singled out to be the main cause that largely determines the degree of son preference and/or dislike for the girl child in India. Although quite a few components play an important part in affecting honor and prestige, yet female sexual purity continues to be the key issue in this regard. However, courtesy the pro male bias inherent in patriarchal organization of society, it is a common notion that loss of sexual purity of males does not defile the honor of the family. The compulsion for exogamy, hypergamy, and dowry/groom-wealth which makes the girl child's entry to family all the more disvalued; these three compulsions not only act as a huge drain on the economic and emotional resources of a family, but also together remain a cause of anxiety about the well-being of daughter at her in-laws home even many years after her marriage. Considering the above, it can be said that a girl child is disliked since under the obtaining social ethos, it is perceived that with her arrival makes the

family's honor, and its economic, social and emotional resources vulnerable. The ineffective implementation of the legislation is evident in India's skewed gender ratio. If it is possible to stop abortion and foeticide of female by legal enforcements on the demand and supply sides, female infants will see the light and breathe the air of the earth. Even if there is no direct female infanticides, indirect infanticides must occur until and unless our conceptions regarding various economic, social, and ritual reasons about the girls are changed.

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

Falling number of girls born in India since 1961

Number of girls born for every 1,000 boys born



Source: Census of India

Sex ratio and Child sex ratio (0-6 years) India

Year	Sex ratio	Child sex ratio
1991	927	945
2001	933	927
2011	940	914

Source: Medindia

Table – 2

States with highest decrease in Child Sex Ratio 2001-2011				
States with highest dowry deaths	Dowry Deaths per day (2005-10)	Child Sex Ratio 2001	Child Sex Ratio 2011	Decrease/ Increase in child sex ratio in a decade
Jammu& Kashmir	0	941	859	-82
Maharashtra	0.8	913	883	-30
Rajasthan	1.1	909	883	-26
Jharkhand	0.7	965	943	-22
Uttarakhand	0.2	908	886	-22
All-India	46,606	927	914	-13

Source: Indiaspend

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