

ECHOES OF SILENCE: ETHICAL CONTEMPLATIONS ON FEMALE FOETICIDE IN INDIAN SOCIETY

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Abstract: India has a long-standing preoccupation with male offspring and views the birth of a female as a poor investment in the future. Girls are viewed more as consumers than producers in Indian patriarchal society, and this restricted perspective has resulted in abhorrent behaviors like female infanticide and female foeticide. Female infanticide has been practiced in India for thousands of years, but with the increased availability of modern sex determination techniques such as amniocentesis and ultrasound, sex selective abortion has become common in most of India's big cities. Women are under social pressure to have boys, and those who fail to do so often feel bad after having a daughter. Such women run the risk of being mistreated by their spouses and being abandoned. This might even result in rejection from the in-laws and from the wider community. The purpose of the current paper is to examine how society views female foeticide while keeping in mind the discussion from above.

Key Words: India, Patriarchy, Female foeticide, Discrimination, Violation, Society.

Introduction

In modern societies around the world, there is growing concern over the issue of girl children who are killed simply because they are female. It is vital to take notice of this serious issue and fix this violation of a girl's fundamental right to life. Many parts of the world, people don't want to have a girl child. In fact, the globe is currently lacking about 100 million women due to the high prevalence of foeticides, infanticides, including baby neglect and abandonment. 80 million missing females are the result of China and India alone. Although sex selective abortion has become more prevalent in the majority of India's major cities, female infanticide has been done there for thousands of years (Srivastava et al., 2021). This is due to the greater accessibility of contemporary sex determination methods like amniocentesis and ultrasound.

Between 35 and 40 million girls and women are missing from the Indian population as a result of selective abortion. The gender ratio of girls to boys has fallen to less than 800:1000 in several areas of the nation. The situation has drawn the serious concern of the United Nations. Since the start of the 20th century, the sex ratio has constantly shifted in favor of boys, and the effect has been most pronounced in the states of Punjab, Haryana, and Delhi (Purewal, 2018). These states were the first to establish private clinics for fetal sex determination, and starting in the late 1970s, selective abortion became widely practiced. Unsettlingly, the tendency is much more pronounced in urban than rural settings and among literate people as opposed to illiterate people.

The poor status of women in Hindu and Muslim Indian communities has been connected to the unfavorable sex ratio. Women's position in a society can be influenced by their education, health, economic contribution, participation in management and professions, and ability to make decisions within the family. The society's values and beliefs have a significant impact on it. Islam allows polygamy and grants fewer rights to women than to men. The preference for the male child is also strongly ingrained in Hindu practice and belief. The ideal woman is portrayed in the Ramayana and the Manusmriti (the Laws of Manu) as subservient and obedient, always in need of a male caregiver first the father, then the husband, then the son.

Hinduism considers the birth of a son to be absolutely necessary, so numerous prayers and extravagant gifts are offered in temples in the hopes of conceiving a son. This devaluation of women and girls by religion makes advantage of modern medical technologies. Religion contributes to decreasing the status of women together with other cultural and economic causes. Due to consumerism and imitation of methods used by the higher caste, the practice of dowry has expanded throughout the country to castes and groups where it had never been accepted. The practice of dowry is generally unaffected by the legal system. In India, a dowry death is thought to occur every 93 minutes. Families are under significant financial pressure to find any way to avoid having girls since they are viewed as a liability due to the requirement of dowries for girls and the opportunity to demand dowries for boys. There are banners promoting sex determination tests that proclaim, according to Sonalda Desai, "It is better to pay 500 Rs. now than 50,000 Rs. (in dowry) later".

Women and Reproductive Technology Advancements In order to promote humanitarian principles, India legalized abortion in 1971 (Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act) (pregnancy can be aborted if it is a result of sexual assault, contraceptive failure, if the baby would be severely handicapped, or if the mother is incapable of bearing a healthy child). Amniocentesis was first used to identify fetal anomalies in 1975, but it rapidly came to be used to identify the gender of the fetus. Being a non-invasive procedure, ultrasound scanning swiftly gained popularity and is now accessible in some of the most isolated rural places. However, sex determination methods are currently being employed with the goal of aborting the foetus if it is discovered to be a female. These techniques don't use genetic material manipulation to choose a baby's sex. Being a part of the same gender-based society, the majority of individuals in the medical profession share the same attitudes toward women. It should come as no surprise that they are delighted to satisfy the needs of potential parents. Medical negligence is on the rise in this field, while general social restrictions against gender selection have had minimal impact.

Attitude of Society towards Female Foeticide

a) Male preference has a direct impact on discrimination against female children. The Indian census has consistently revealed a significant disparity in the numbers of males, women, and children. Decisions taken at the most local level, the family, led to this disparity, which has national repercussions. According to conventional knowledge, economic, religious, societal, and emotional norms that favor men and devalue women are the driving forces behind the preference for sons. Parents expect their sons, not their daughters, to take care of them financially and emotionally, especially as they age. Sons also contribute to the family's wealth and property, whereas daughters use it to support other households.

(a) Many Indian parents believe that having a girl comes with expenses for the extra protective measures taken for daughters. Girls are seen as being especially at risk because family honour sometimes seems to depend only on women's actions rather than that of males. Despite this, it is impossible to say that raising daughters is more expensive than raising sons, especially when contrasted to their brothers' care and schooling. As a result, the only time females appear to be more "expensive" than sons is in terms of expenses that arise during or after their marriage. Additionally, despite the fact that the "investment" made in daughters before marriage is roughly the same as that made in sons, this money is now viewed as being wasted because of the

patrilocal" character of marriage, which means married Indian couples typically reside closer to the husband's family than the wife's.

Prices associated with marriage and related expenses make up a sizable portion of costs. This includes a number of subcategories, including expenses for the bride's family to pay for the wedding, customary gifts for the groom's family, and especially dowry (paid to the groom's family) or even post-marriage expenses (additional dowry demands, support at the time of the first pregnancy, etc).

The Act is governed by a Supervisory Board at the federal and state levels, an Appropriate Authority, and a supporting Advisory Committee. The Supervisory Board's job is to oversee, keep an eye on, and modify the Act's provisions. The appropriate authority offers registration, handles administrative tasks related to inspection, research, and punishes defaulters, and provides registration. The Appropriate Authority receives professional and technical assistance from the Advisory Committee. A first-time offender who violates the Act's requirements faces a fine of Rs. 10,000 and a maximum sentence of three years in prison; repeat offenders face higher penalties and longer sentences. The appropriate authority notifies the state or national medical council to take action against medical professionals, which may result in the practitioners' suspension or expulsion.

A pregnant woman's written consent in her native language must be obtained before any prenatal diagnostic test is carried out by a medical professional. Prenatal testing may be carried out under certain conditions, such as the danger of chromosomal abnormalities in the case of women over 35 and the presence of genetic illnesses that are clear from the couple's family history.

Preventing Female Foeticide

We can infer that there are various justifications for the approval of female foeticide. It was stated that the primary cause was dowry. Daughters are viewed as a waste of money because they cannot support their parents financially in their later years. The suggested actions to stop female foeticide are as follows:

- Female genital mutilation is now prohibited by law. Additionally deemed unlawful is the promotion of sex predictions during pregnancy. The effective implementation of these laws needs to be prioritized. The defaulters should get harsh penalty.

- Education for girls should be free and required up to the upper secondary level. This would lessen what is referred to as parents' "unnecessary investment on girl children" in their daughters. Their girls would no longer be viewed as a liability by them.
- A few initiatives should be launched to help the female children financially. Government employment programmers for women should be launched for this reason, with 100% of positions like teaching, nursing, and telephone operatorship reserved for women.
- Policy intervention to instill these new values in homes as well as legal support to put these values into practice should be offered in order to spread the rights of women to own and inherit property as well as the social obligation of daughters to support parents in the same way as sons.
- Couples who become parents after having a girl child should receive congratulations from the Ministry of Women and Child Welfare. By sending out such messages, the government might raise awareness that the birth of a girl is a happy occasion and give the mother, who frequently finds herself on the receiving end whenever a girl child is born, confidence.
- Moral instruction needs to be taught in classrooms. Teaching children to uphold values and forego gender-based behaviors like female foeticide and dowry is important. It is important to shape the impressionable minds of the young so that they develop into morally upright adults who disapprove of dowry and female foeticide.

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