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Review Article

## Where is the bride? Progressively declining sex ratio in India: an alarming signal for imbalanced society

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### ABSTRACT

Female foeticide is an extreme form of violence against women, the most active part is being played by the women themselves just for the mere want of a boy, mothers don't feel bad in strangulating their own daughters in their wombs. From decades of sex determination and female foeticide is creating a statistical imbalance regarding the commonly expected 'male: female' birth ratio in India. This offense have been spreaded to the states in India like Punjab, Haryana, Delhi, Gujarat and Rajasthan, with the news of increasing number of female fetus being aborted from Orissa & Bangalore. The 2011 census has revealed a drastic fall in child sex ratio throughout the country. The decline in child sex ratio in India is guarded by the census figure, in 1991 the figure was 947 girls to 1000 boys, ten years later in 2001 it was about for 927 girl child to 1000 boys. In 2011 it further declined to 914 girl children to 1000 boys.

**Keywords:** Female foeticide, Abortion, Sex ratio

### INTRODUCTION

This process began in the early 1990's when ultrasound technique which, was invented to basically check the fetal well-being in utero was being used for this crime. A tendency in Indian families to have a male child particularly, women who abort female fetuses because they don't want their daughters to face the ugly life they are living. Why? They are victims of circumstances and oppression This also leads to the enhancement of this crime. The status of female in India actually symbolizes India's status of being a developing nation. Of course India deserves to be in the list because here in this 21<sup>st</sup> century where we have high technological upgraded treatments to overcome such big diseases but the girl child continues to be murdered before she is born. Female foeticide is still prevalent in the Indian society, infact it has been a practice of hundreds of years. Sadly there have been numerous fetuses being found lying in farms, floating in rivers, wrapped in jute bags etc. The evil of foeticide is not just restricted to economically backward

classes it is infact, the prosperous and the well-off families. This would be really shocking to know that the most of the female foeticide cases in hospitals are taking place by the urban area residential, though they belong to high society but they do this for sake of son. Rising India has left the girl child behind.

The country may marching shoulder to shoulder with the world's top economies. But its 1.21 billion populations have to still shake off its bias against the girl child, the latest census data show. Often killed in the womb, the number of girls 1000 in the 0-6 band, or the girl sex ratio as it is called has dipped to its lowest level since independence. The figure has dropped to 866 in Delhi and 899 in Uttar Pradesh. Haryana and Punjab are at the bottom of the heap with 830 and 846. Jhajjar and Mahendragarh districts of Haryana infamous for female foeticide have the lowest ratios of 774 and 778. In Rajasthan the figure has whittled down to 909 in 2001 to 883 in 2011.

## FACTORS THAT FAVOUR FEMALE FOETICIDE

### *Economic factors*

The female feticide in the 21<sup>st</sup> century has a great deal to do with capitalist modernity. There are aspects of it lying behind these phenomena.

i) For rural households with landed property there is a clear inverse correlation between the income level and child sex ratio. It is especially evident in south India. Again there is gender based wage level. For the same work females are paid less remuneration. In most cases women enter in the domestic non-paid services which a patriarchal society gives little or no value at all, so they are regarded as liability than assets.

ii) Cultural politics of dowry in the Indian society have a lot of answer for this pernicious phenomenon. Since the turn of century the recorded dowry deaths are increasing. Nearly 7000-8000 brides per year are murdered for the lack of full payment of dowry. Nearly 3000-5000 brides are committing suicides for dowry. Brides are thought as commodities and the pre marriage and marriage have been described as 'consumption oriented reproductive journey'. When the reproductive practices make daughters into such economic burden, the threat of having to a mass dowry is motive enough to dispose female commodities (Barbara Harriss-White, 2009).

iii) The female feticide has been co modified. It has started to become a field of accumulation in its own right. The member of the national commission for women admitted that in the era of liberalization "one has to allow freedom of choice to the service seeker and the freedom to sell by the service provider". Feticide may cost one or two month's earnings, while dowry requires mobilization of several years' income. Hence there appears equilibrium between service seeker and provider. UNICEF estimates that the turnover of feticide industry has now reached 244 million dollar from 77 million dollar in 2006 (Barbara Harriss-White, 2009). Those who disapproved of the practice of sex selective abortions but engaged in it against their principles expressed their compulsions and helplessness due to pressures arising out of unhealthy competition in the health care service sector. It was said that if they did not provide abortion care services, some others would have provided them (Tandon and Sharma, 2008).

### *Socio-ritual factors*

Females are vulnerable to brutalities of the male in the forms of physical, mental and sexual assaults and traumas in the patriarchal societal structure of India. Females are subjugated, condemned, and deprived in sphere of life. Every parents of a girl child is at risk for their daughter in this patriarchal society for the mentioned causes. Again for the funeral ceremonies of the parents, presence of a son is a must.

### *Technological factors*

Female feticide is a latest trend of long established gender bias. We are civilized with time and our killing female babes have also been civilized. The presence of low-cost technologies like ultrasound, have led to sex-based abortion of female fetuses, and an increasingly smaller percentage of girls born each year (Jain, 2005).

### *Population policy*

Indian family planning policies promote a two-child family and health workers say this often leads to abortion of female fetuses in efforts to have a "complete family" with at least one son (Sen., 2005).



**Figure 1: Female child found dead in garbage.**

## ROLE OF MEDIA & ENTERTAINMENT

Media and entertainment world has also played an important role to disclose such un-professional deeds of sex determination and female feticide through one of the most seen news on television. It was carried out by two journalists who brought down the sting operation against the doctors involved in such practices. The case against the respective doctor is still dragging in different courts of Rajasthan.

A national television show which has also dealt with this topic recently has extrapolated this issue and showing doctors responsible for majority of female feticide which is not a reality. There has been also a show being telecast on another channel which has also dealt with this topic and on support of that several NGO's have contributed their effort to acknowledge people about this.

## APPRECIABLE PERFORMANCES IN REDUCING FEMALE FOETICIDE

The tribal populated Lahaul-Spiti district has earned the distinction of having highest female ratio in the country with 1017 female per 1000 male. Maharashtra govt. has formed special district level squads to curb female feticide cases. The squad would comprise officials from

police, revenue and health departments and conduct inspections on sonography centers and abortion clinics. The food and drug administration will act against the chemist who sold medicines used in abortion without proper prescription & their license will be cancelled immediately.

In Rajasthan also policy is being formulated in view of the declining sex ratio. Rajasthan has a skewed sex ratio of 883 girls for every 1000 boys, according to the 2011 Census projections.

## REVIEW OF THE MEASURES TAKEN TO COMBAT FEMALE FOETICIDE

In the modern period of Indian history, there have been number of measures taken to combat the female feticides either as an institutional measure or as an individual initiative.

### *Institutional measures*

1) PNDT (Regulation and Prevention of Misuse) Act-1994: Maharashtra is the first state in country to ban pre-natal sex determination through the enactment of Maharashtra regulation of prenatal diagnostics techniques act. Similar efforts at the national level resulted in the enactment of the central pre-natal diagnostic techniques (Regulation and prevention of misuse) Act 1994. The act has two aspects viz., regulatory and preventive. It seeks to regulate the use of pre-natal diagnostic techniques for legal or medical purposes and prevent misuse for illegal purposes. The act provides for the setting up of various bodies along with their composition powers and functions. There is a central supervisory board, appropriate authorities and advisory committees. Violations of the PNDT Act carry a five year jail term and a fine of about 2300 U.S. dollars.

2) The Supreme Court of India has issued notices to the Indian government and the states and union territories on a petition seeking strict implementation of laws that ban pre-natal sex selection tests and sex-selective abortions in India. A concerned Supreme Court observed that the Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Prohibition of Sex Selection) Act 1994 (PCPNDT) that is meant to prevent female feticide in India, has failed. The petition brought to the court's attention the rampant practice of sex-selective abortions in many parts of the country, because of lax implementation of the PCPNDT Act.

3) UNICEF is committed to protecting every child from violence, exploitation, abuse and discrimination.

4) The government declared January 24, 2010 as the national girl child day with a focus on targeting the scourges of female feticide, domestic violence and malnutrition. 'Death Before Birth'- a study on female feticide in India 97.

### *Individual and group appeals and initiatives*

In modern India, there have always been the protests against female infanticides by various national leaders

## SUGGESTIONS FOR CONTROLLING FEMALE FETICIDE

- Introduce one-child norm.
- Bring change in mindset.
- Punish the guilty.
- Religious bodies should act.
- Amend the law.
- Strict monitoring should be done on places or clinics performing obstetric ultrasonography.
- Registration for obstetric ultrasonography should be restricted only to concerned doctors who have post graduation qualifications.
- Amniocentesis and CVS performing centres should also be kept under strict vigilance and this facility to be allowed on only reputed centres.
- Termination of pregnancy without medical advice, should automatically lead to criminal offense under various sections under Indian Penal Code namely section 34, section 120-B, section 302.

Whoever commits this crime should be punished, so there is a strong deterrent against those who indulge in such disgusting crime of female feticide.

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