

Abortion-Female Foeticide in India

The thinking of people in India regarding giving birth to female child has not changed from ages. Indian society is still suffering from this evil. People curse saying that it is a male dominated society. But it is the consent and willingness of mother-in-law to abort female foetus. Family celebrates the birth of a male baby. On the other hand family becomes sad and thinks a burden the birth of female baby. The daughter-in-law is ill treated if she has given birth to a female baby. The technology is misused to abort a female foetus.

In spite of over six decades of Independence, in spite of India making rapid progress in science, technology and other fields, the picture that we see of India as of now is not one that can be appreciated, especially in terms of its treatment to the fairer sex. Discrimination against girl children, parents' neglect of the girl child, illegal abortions and female infanticide are clear instances of this. The practice of female foeticide, which is illegal, is still prevalent in our country. There is one section of the Indian society which is trying its level best to be liberal in their thoughts, although aping the Western culture. On the other hand, there is another section of the society, in fact a large chunk of it, which is still in the clutches of orthodox views and thoughts.

Female foeticide is one such grave social problem arising out of the so-called "traditional thoughts" of our society. Illegal abortion of the female foetus is done due to family pressure from in-laws, husband or the woman's parents, and the reasons for this are preference of son, girls being considered as a burden, poverty, illiteracy, social discrimination against women etc.

Abortion:

Abortion, a subject often discussed in medico-legal circles, interims various streams of thoughts and multiple discipline, like theology, because most religions have something to say in the matter, ethics, because human conduct and its moral evaluation are the basic issues involved; medicine (in several of its sub-disciplines), because, interference with the body for a curative or supposedly curative issue is at focus; and law, because regulation of human conduct by sanctions enforced by the state through the process of law ultimately become the central theme for discussion.

Abortion may be classified into various categories depending upon the nature and circumstances under which it occurs. For instance, it may be either:

- (i) Natural;**
- (ii) Accidental;**
- (iii) Spontaneous; and**
- (iv) Artificial or Induced abortion.**

Abortions falling under the first three categories are not punishable, while induced abortion is criminal unless exempted under the law. Natural abortions is a very common phenomena and may occur due to many reasons, such as bad health, defect in generative organs of the mother, shocks, fear, joy, etc. Accidental abortion very often takes place because of pathological reasons where pregnancy cannot be completed and the uterus empties before the maturity of fetus. An induced abortion is denied in law as an untimely delivery voluntarily procured with intent to destroy the foetus. It may be procured at any time before the natural birth of the child.

Historical Abortion Statistics, India

Year	Abortions, Residents, Total	Abortion % (All in Country)
2003	763,126	2.81
2004	726,096	2.71
2005	721,867	2.69
2006	682,242	2.53
2007	642,174	2.39
2008	651,974	2.42
2009	689,534	2.55
2010	657,191	2.44
2011	625,454	2.32
2012	661,369	2.47

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Female foeticide is the act of aborting a foetus because it is female. The frequency of female foeticide is indirectly estimated from the observed high birth sex ratio that is the ratio of boys to girls at birth. The natural ratio is assumed to be between 103 and 107 and any number above it is considered as suggestive of female foeticide. According to the decennial Indian census, the sex ratio in the 0 to 6 age group in India has risen from 102.4 males per 100 females in 1961,^[1] to 104.1 in 1981, to 107.8 in 2001, to 108.8 in 2011.^[2] The child sex ratio is within the normal natural range in all eastern and southern states of India, but significantly higher in certain western and particularly northwestern states such as Punjab, Haryana and Jammu & Kashmir (118, 120 and 116, as of 2011, respectively).^[3]

The child sex ratio in India shows a regional pattern. India's 2011 census found that all eastern and southern states of India had a child sex ratio between 103 to 107,^[3] typically considered as the "natural ratio." The highest sex ratios were observed in India's northern and northwestern states - [Haryana](#) (120), [Punjab](#) (118) and [Jammu & Kashmir](#) (116).^[4] The western states of Maharashtra and Rajasthan 2011 census found a child sex ratio of 113, Gujarat at 112 and Uttar Pradesh at 111.^[5] The Indian census data suggests there is a positive correlation between abnormal sex ratio and better socio-economic status and literacy. Urban India has higher child sex ratio than rural India according to 1991, 2001 and 2011 Census data, implying higher prevalence of female foeticide in urban India. Similarly, child sex ratio greater than 115 boys per 100 girls is found in regions where the predominant majority is Hindu, Muslim, Sikh or Christian; furthermore "normal" child sex ratio of 104 to 106 boys per 100 girls are also found in regions where the predominant majority is Hindu, Muslim, Sikh or Christian. These data contradict any hypotheses that may suggest that sex selection is an archaic practice which takes place among uneducated, poor sections or particular religion of the Indian society

The following table presents the child sex ratio data for India's states and union territories, according to 2011 Census of India for population count in the 0-1 age group.^[6] The data suggests 18 states/UT had birth sex ratio higher than 107 implying excess males at birth and/or excess female mortalities after birth but before she reaches the age of 1, 13 states/UT had normal child sex ratios in the 0-1 age group, and 4 states/UT had birth sex ratio less than 103 implying excess females at birth and/or excess male mortalities after birth but before he reaches the age of 1.

S. No.	State / UT	Boys (0-1 age)	Girls (0-1 age)	Sex ratio (Boys per 100 girls)
1	ANDHRA PRADESH	626,538	588,309	106.5
2	ARUNACHAL PRADESH	11,799	11,430	103.2
3	ASSAM	280,888	267,962	104.8
4	BIHAR	1,057,050	957,907	110.3
5	CHHATTISGARH	253,745	244,497	103.8
6	GOA	9,868	9,171	107.6
7	GUJARAT	510,124	450,743	113.2
8	HARYANA	254,326	212,408	119.7
9	HIMACHAL PRADESH	53,261	48,574	109.6
10	JAMMU & KASHMIR	154,761	120,551	128.4
11	JHARKHAND	323,923	301,266	107.5
12	KARNATAKA	478,346	455,299	105.1
13	KERALA	243,852	238,489	102.2
14	LAKSHADWEEP	593	522	114.0
15	MADHYA PRADESH	733,148	677,139	108.3
16	MAHARASHTRA	946,095	829,465	114.1
17	MANIPUR	22,852	21,326	107.2
18	MEGHALAYA	41,353	39,940	103.5
19	MIZORAM	12,017	11,882	101.1
20	NAGALAND	17,103	16,361	104.5
21	ODISHA	345,960	324,949	106.5
22	PUDUCHERRY	9,089	8,900	102.1
23	PUNJAB	226,929	193,021	117.6
24	RAJASTHAN	722,108	635,198	113.7
25	SIKKIM	3,905	3,744	104.3
26	TAMIL NADU	518,251	486,720	106.5
27	TRIPURA	28,650	27,625	103.7
28	UTTAR PRADESH	1,844,947	1,655,612	111.4
29	UTTARAKHAND	92,117	80,649	114.2
30	WEST BENGAL	658,033	624,760	105.0
31	A & N ISLANDS	2,727	2,651	102.9
32	CHANDIGARH	8,283	7,449	111.2
33	DADRA & NAGAR HAVELI	3,181	3,013	105.6
34	DAMAN & DIU	1,675	1,508	111.1
35	DELHI	135,801	118,896	114.2
India		10,633,298	9,677,936	109.9

Source: Census of India, 2011

Reasons for Female Foeticide

Various theories have been proposed as possible reasons for sex-selective abortion. Culture is favored by some researchers, while some favor disparate gender-biased access to resources. Some demographers question whether sex-selective abortion or infanticide claims are accurate, because underreporting of female births may also explain high sex ratios. Natural reasons may also explain some of the abnormal sex ratios. Klasen and Wink suggest India and China's high sex ratios are primarily the result of sex-selective abortion.

Cultural Preference

One school of scholars suggests that female foeticide can be seen through history and cultural background. Generally, male babies were preferred because they provided manual labor and success the family lineage. The selective abortion of female fetuses is most common in areas where cultural norms value male children over female children for a variety of social and economic reasons. A son is often preferred as an "asset" since he can earn and support the family; a daughter is a "liability" since she will be married off to another family, and so will not contribute financially to her parents. Female foeticide then, is a continuation in a different form, of a practice of female infanticide or withholding of postnatal health care for girls in certain households. Furthermore, in some cultures sons are expected to take care of their parents in their old age. These factors are complicated by the effect of diseases on child sex ratio, where communicable and non-communicable diseases affect males and females differently.

Consequences of Female Foeticide in India

Female foeticide has a serious impact on the society, in the overall growth and development of the country. Let us discuss below the effects of female foeticide in India:

Skewed sex ratio: According to 2011 census, the child sex ratio in India was 919 females to 1000 males, which declined from 927 females to 1000 males in the previous decade. Haryana, which is supposed to be one of the richest states in India, takes the top most position in skewed sex ratio. Other prominent states are Punjab, Delhi, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh etc. Skewed sex ratios are seen in almost all the states of India, except in North East India and some of South India. Since 1991, more than 80% of districts in India have shown a reducing sex ratio. Going by this, the next census by 2022 will definitely show a further reduction in sex ratios all over the country. It is horrifying to state that illegal foetal sex determination and sex selective abortion have developed into a Rs. 1000 crore industry in India.

Killing a girl child before or after she is born has an adverse effect on the sex ratio and leads to further social evils. Skewed sex ratio which is the result of female foeticide has other negative consequences in the society.

Shortage of girls for marriage

In a recent report by the Red Cross Society, there are a large number of bachelors who have crossed the marriageable age in Punjab and Haryana because of shortage of girls.

Eligible Jat boys from Haryana are seeking brides from areas which are far away from their home town, like Kerala, to change their "single" status to "married".

Trafficking and prostitution

Increasing number of child marriages

Increasing maternal deaths and ill-health of women

Increase in polyandry

There are many such incidents happening in India. In most villages in India where female foeticide is practiced, one wife lives with many unmarried brothers.

Conclusion

Ironically, female foeticide takes place in a country where people worship various forms of Goddesses, and where females are considered as *Maa Laxmi's* incarnation and where young girls are worshipped and people touch their feet for blessings. But even then, the intentional killing of the girl child continues. Such is the double standards of our society. Right to education, health and empowerment are the fundamental rights of every Indian woman. The horrible illegal practice of female foeticide has to be stopped by harsh laws and change in the mind-set of the people.

Save the girl child for a better tomorrow!!!

References:

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Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971: An Overview
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3. <http://www.johnstonsarchive.net/policy/abortion/abindia.html>
4. <http://www.mapsofindia.com/my-india/social-issues/stop-female-foeticide-save-the-girl-child>
5. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Female_foeticide_in_India

Two real stories from many of such:

First: I was living at Lodi Road Complex 3rd Floor of a Block in 1987. There were four Quarters on each floor. One day night, there was earthquake. We all came out of the houses. I saw the lady (my neighbour) with son in her lap. I immediately asked where is your elder (than son) daughter around 7-8 years. She calmly said “She is sleeping inside house”. I was shocked for poor daughters in India.

Second: It was in 1995. I travelled from Delhi to my native place in UP and reached morning around 7 am. Then I hired a sharing auto-rickshaw. It was school time when I was on the way to my home. In between a father came, stopped our auto to put his son and daughter for school. Then son asked his father “Papa paise”. He immediately gave Rs 2 to his son. Then the daughter also asked “Papa mujhe bhi (Papa give money to me too)”. Papa cried and said: “Chup ho ja, abhi lakhon kharch kar vaegi (Keep mum I have to spend lakhs of rupees in future on you i.e. on marriage)”. Poor daughter kept mum with tears in her eyes.

Give equal treatment to daughters if not better.