



Campaign against Female Foeticide

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Received: July 08, 2019; **Published:** August 17, 2019

Abstract

In the Indian society, there has been prevalence of the practice of female foeticide as well as female infanticide. The individuals possess numerous viewpoints regarding the birth of female child and their desire for the male child has been extremely strong. In the cases of all the families belonging to rural or urban areas, high status or affluent families or the poverty stricken families belonging to socio-economic backward sections of the society, all the elderly people possess this viewpoint that male children would effectively contribute in bringing wealth, fame and reputation to the families and female children are considered to be the liabilities. The rural communities believe in marrying off their girls at an early age so that they are able to have more children and the children desired are males. When a woman gives birth to the male child, she is considered to be prestigious and her respect increases within the society. When a woman gives birth to the female child, she in most cases is abused and harassed. In the present world, there have been initiation of policies and laws against the practices of female foeticide. Female children have the right to live, female foeticide and infanticide are considered to be violence and criminal acts against women. Female children, if they are born, if they are well nourished and educated, then they can certainly contribute in the generation of magnificence, brilliance, wealth and prosperity for the family. In the case of female children, it is important that every means should be adopted by the parents and other family members to nurture them in a good manner and make provision of all the adequate necessities that are required to live an efficient life.

Keywords: Female Foeticide; Infanticide; Discrimination; Policy Framework; Technology; Society

Introduction

Women who establish half of the human population have been differentiated, annoyed, harassed an achievement regardless of the country to which they belong, unaware of the religion which they practice and unmindful of the timeframe in which they live. In each and every place, region and area, women are supposed to face and deal with many challenges. Female foeticide is perhaps one of the poorest forms of violence against women where a woman is denied her most basic and fundamental right i.e "the right to life". The phenomenon of female foeticide in India is not new, where female embryos or foetuses are selectively eliminated after pre-natal sex determination, thus eliminating girl children even before they are born. As a result of selective abortion, between 35 and 40 million girls and women are missing from the Indian population [1].

In Indian society, female foeticide has emerged as a scorching social problem during the last few years. The girl child in India is considered right from her birth as a supplementary problem, an extra mouth to feed, a responsibility and another man's property. The birth of a son is regarded as indispensable in Hinduism and many prayers and extravagant offerings are made in temples in the hope of having a male child. Modern medical technology is being utilized in the facility of this religion determined in devaluing of women and girls. Woman is created at par with man in all features. Women have equal rights with men in this world; in religion and society, women have been given immense significance. Divine Justice demands that the rights of both the genders should be similarly revered since neither is better to the other in the eyes of Heaven. These influential declarations from the Bahai's writing are honoured by Bahai's as appearances of the Divine Will [1].

Female foeticide and female infanticide

Female foeticide means the abortion of the female baby in the mother's womb. Whereas female infanticide is homicide of a baby girl after she has been born. The practice of homicide of the female child after her birth has been prevalent within the Indian society for most of the years. But foeticide is the inheritance and contribution of the advancement made by the medical science. Amniocentesis was introduced in 1975 to detect foetal abnormalities but it soon began to be used for finding out the sex of the baby. Ultrasound scanning, being a non-invasive technique, rapidly acquired approval and is now available in some of the most inaccessible rural areas. Both techniques are now being used for sex determination with the meaning of abortion if the foetus turns out to be female [1].

With the beginning of transfer and commercialization, the use of pre-natal diagnostic technologies is developing into a flourishing corporate in India. This is principally for the determination of gender selective abortion of the female foetus. The mismanagement of technology basically emphasizes the secondary status given to girl children in such a way that they are discarded out even before they are born. Associated to infanticide, foeticide is perhaps a more satisfactory means of positioning off the undesired girl children. Infanticide can be an obviously cruel and inhuman practice while foeticide that is carried out by skilled professionals is a medical practice that makes use of scientific techniques and skills and decreases the responsibility factor that is connected with the complete implementation [1].

Factors responsible for female foeticide

The factors that are responsible for female foeticide have been stated as follows

- **Status of Women:** As it has been observed that within the Indian society, the status of women have been low and deprived as compared to men. The factors such as health, diet and nutrition and education of girls and women have not been taken under consideration especially amongst the backward sections of the society. The individuals who are unaware and not well educated possess this viewpoint that men and birth of the male child can bring them wealth, fame and status. They also believe in the education of the male child so that he is able to earn wealth and bring glory and reputation to his family [2].

- **Gender Discrimination:** There has been prevalence of gender discrimination and this factor has been grounded on cultural, economic and religious basis. Sons in the family have been given significance, such as they are sent to educational institutions to acquire higher education, they get engaged in employment opportunities, they work in the fields and are considered as the source of prosperity, who can earn fame, glory and reputation for their family. It is believed that sons are the individuals who preserve the name of the family. The funeral pyre is always lit by the sons of the household, hence, they are considered to be more important as compared to girls. Sons are considered important in the performance of all the rituals and ceremonies [2].
- **Dowry:** This is considered to be a vicious practice that is widely prevalent in India. This is the system when at the time of marriage, the family of the girl has to give certain presents and gifts to the family of the boy. Dowry has been given in the form of money, property, valuables, jewellery, clothing, cars, technology and so forth. The system of dowry is more common in the northern states of India and is likely to contribute to the lesser child sex ratio. Women have lesser control over the economic resources and the main power of the north Indian bride comes from her ability to give birth to male children [2].
- **Income and Financial Position:** It is apparent that to cause a reduction in the rate of female foeticide, it is vital to make use of adequate methods, strategies and put into practice appropriate measures. In making provision of proper diet and nutrition, health care and medical facilities, civic amenities, infrastructure and in leading to proper development, the parents are required to incur costs. When they are financially strong, then the parents do not experience any problems in making provision of adequate facilities. On the other hand, poverty stricken and economically weaker sections of the society do experience problems in even providing proper diet and medical treatment. On the major causes are malnutrition and lack of medical and health care facilities [3]. The poverty stricken families normally experience female foeticide to a major extent, as they lack the resources.
- **Maternal Determinants:** Perinatal mortality studies point to the connection between health of the mother and the birth outcomes. The high perinatal mortality rates within the country reflect upon the deprived status of women, including poor nutritional status i.e. malnutrition and anaemia, low rates of literacy, lack of independence, early marriage and childbirth. In addition, low rates of antenatal care, low utilization of obstetric and other health services and large numbers of deliveries by inexperienced personnel result in poor maternal health and poor birth outcomes, such as low birth weight and prema-

turity. In addition, the effects of maternal characteristics are not limited to the perinatal period. Making improvements in the education of especially expecting mothers and the one's with young children, health care and nutrition, and increase in the use of health services during pregnancy and delivery, and the individuals need not discriminate against the girl children [3].

- **Child Determinants:** In some parts of the country, the individuals gave preference to male children and hence, even practiced female infanticide and female foeticide. In the present world, these practices have been eradicated and females are given preference. They are given equal rights and opportunities as the males. The weight of the child at birth is considered an important factor and it is a vital indicator of the survival of the child and the risk of the diseases that takes place during the childhood stage. Lack of proper care, infectious diseases and lower dietary intake are regarded as important factors that lead to an increase in malnutrition, hence, it is vital for the children to consume proper diet.
- **Nutritional Determinants:** Malnutrition is regarded as the major factor resulting in child mortality accounting for 54 percent globally. Due to malnutrition, the mortality rate increases not only among females but also males. Deprived economic conditions are the major causes of malnutrition among children. When the parents are unable to make provision of adequate diet, when the children do not obtain the essential nutrients, then they get affected by the diseases causing an increase in the mortality rate. The major nutritional disorders are deficiencies of iron, vitamin A and iodine. Micronutrient deficiencies influence child survival and the health and development of the surviving children, including cognitive development. Although possibly economical and reasonable interventions are available. Existing food supplementation and micro-nutrient programs within the country have not achieved significant declines in nutritional deficiencies at state or national levels, a factor contributing to the slowing decline of female foeticide rates. The problems that beset micronutrient programs include, scarcities in supplies, logistical difficulties and the lack of community motivation and education. These shortcomings need to be addressed for these programs to be recognized and sustained [3].
- **Socio-economic Determinants:** In India, the urban areas are more developed as compared to the rural areas. In urban areas, there are provision of hospitals, medical and health care centres that make use of advanced, modern and innovative techniques and methods. In most cases, individuals migrate to urban areas in order to obtain medical treatment. In rural areas as well as in urban slums, there are lack of provision of civic amenities and facilities. The individuals are unable to obtain clean drinking water and lack of electricity imposes detrimental effects upon their health. The individuals residing in these areas are usually illiterate and lack the awareness. When they experience that lack of civic amenities is disadvantageous, then they should make provision of them in their places of residence. It is vital for them to generate awareness regarding various areas that females can also be assets to them as males and promote well-being.
- **Environmental Determinants:** The environment in which growth and development of the children takes place should be safe and secure. It should make provision of all the facilities that are necessary to bring about operative growth of the children. In some cases, excessive heat or cold may have an effect upon the health of the children in a negative manner. Hence, when one experiences hot weather or cold weather, then it is vital to make provision of proper clothing and gear to the children. Especially, when they are going out to play. In rural and tribal communities, the individuals normally depend upon the natural environmental conditions for their survival. They even obtain food items from the forests and carry out the tasks of hunting and fishing. Hence, when they are dependent upon the natural environmental conditions for their survival, then it is necessary for them to be careful, test the food item, and clean it properly before consumption. These aspects are necessary to ensure that parents perform their job duties adequately in upbringing of children.
- **Lack of Medical and Health Care Facilities:** Regular check-ups and health care facilities are essential to prevent female foeticide. In rural and remote regions, there is lack of access to these facilities. Hence, when a child experiences illnesses and health problems, then parents are unable to make provision of health care and medical facilities. Hence, it leads to an increase in the rate of female foeticide. From birth until five years of age, it is necessary to give proper vaccinations to the children. When young children experience illnesses and diseases, then they are in need of medical and health care facilities. There occurs an increase in the rate of female foeticide, when the children are not given proper treatment. When the children would not receive proper medicines, then it would lead to an increase in the rate of female foeticide.
- **Standards of Living:** The individuals are required to form their daily routine standards in a systematic manner. The standards of living of the individuals are important factors in eliminating female foeticide. The occupations and work of the individuals is the primary factor in influencing the living standards of the individuals. The rate of female foeticide is high among the individuals, belonging to deprived, marginalized and socio-economically backward sections of the society.

The main reason being, they are engaged in minority jobs and are unable to make provision of improved living standards for their children. For instance, the rate of female foeticide is high among the families, who are poverty stricken, since they are unable to make provision of the resources that are needed to sustain their living conditions.

- **Social Group:** The social group of the individual is an important determinant of female foeticide. There are differences between families and communities on the basis of norms, values, traditions, principles and standards. In some cases, traditional viewpoints and perspectives of the individuals also enable them to lead to an increase in the rate of female foeticide rate. The individuals belonging to scheduled castes and scheduled tribes have a higher rate of female foeticide as compared to the individuals, belonging to upper castes. The reason being, these groups are not financially strong, they possess low levels of education and literacy skills, they possess traditional viewpoints and perspectives, are engaged in minority jobs and their living conditions are usually low.
- **Education of the Parents:** In the present existence, education is regarded as an imperative aspect in enriching the lives of the individuals. It has been acquiring significance not only within the urban areas, but also in rural areas. The individuals belonging to poverty stricken and economically weaker sections of the society, also aspire to get their children educated. Education of the parents is regarded as an important aspect in enabling them to understand that girls should not be considered as liabilities. They can render an effectual contribution in promoting well-being of their families and communities, when their growth and development takes place in an adequate manner. When the parents are well educated, then they are able to take care of the needs and requirements of the children in an appropriate manner. They are able to understand the psychological traits of the children, and their needs and requirements. Education enables the individuals to carry out the function of child development in an appropriate manner. On the other hand, when the parents are not educated, then they lack the awareness regarding implementation of the function of child development and as a result are unable to prevent female foeticide.

Strategies to restrain female foeticide

In some communities, traditional norms and customs compel the individuals to practice female foeticide, hence leading to child mortality. In order to curb child mortality, it is essential to bring about changes in one's thinking and perceptions. In some cases, individuals even sacrifice their children, out of religious beliefs. Therefore, it can be stated that with the advancement of modern

and innovative techniques and methods, individuals need to bring about transformations in their viewpoints and make provision of safe livelihoods for their children. Practicing norms, values and customs are regarded as appropriate, but one should not practice their beliefs to such an extent that they may encourage child mortality. The strategies to restrain female foeticide have been stated as follows: [2].

- **Intensive Information, Education and Communication (IEC) Campaigns for raising awareness:** Recently, there has been launching of the campaign "save the girl child campaign". One of the main objectives of this campaign is to lessen the preference for the male child by emphasising upon the achievements of young girls. In order to achieve the long term vision, efforts are made to generate the environment, where sons and daughters are considered as equal. There should be involvement of mass media in the promotion of the positive image of women. School and college girls should be targeted in the case of putting emphasis upon the fact that girls and women should be considered equally important as men.
- **Women Empowerment:** Education is considered to be an imperative area in the improvement of the status of women in society. Through education, individuals are able to acquire awareness about different areas such as health, diet and nutrition, family planning, effective implementation of the daily routine activities, it also assists in raising the age of marriage and largely contributes in the empowerment of women. There have been initiation of non-government organizations to encourage non-formal education programs for adult females and school drop-outs, create employment opportunities and make provision of counselling and guidance services for women regarding producing solutions to different kinds of issues and problems.
- **Role of Medical Colleges and Professional Bodies:** The medical practitioners have become part of the campaigns against the misapplication of the technologies with the support of professional associations. There have been medical practitioners who have been strong supporters of the sex-selective abortions, they put emphasis upon the fact that it is the personal decision of the family to determine the sex of the child. The role of medical colleges and professional bodies such as the Indian Medical Association (IMA), Federation of Obstetric and Gynecological Societies of India (FOGSI) and association of radiologists, in countering this serious matter needs to be given significance.

Female foeticide as a manifestation of violence against women

Women are worshipped and revered in every form in India. This is a fact, which all individuals are aware of that women are the ones who raise the family. Educating the woman means educating the entire family. Women can in every form nurture, encourage, develop, bring glory, magnificence and splendour to the family, society as well as the entire nation. This viewpoint, there are some individuals who do not possess, therefore, they give preference only to the male children. Therefore, it is required for the individuals within the country to change their thinking that girls are equally important as compared to boys. The official census of the Government of India has revealed a sharp decline in the sex-ratio of the children in the age group of 0-6 years within the period of ten years since the last census (from 945 to 927 females per 1000 males) [4].

The problems of poverty and unemployment have been prevalent in urban as well as in rural areas within the country. These problems are more common amongst the disadvantaged and the socio-economic backward sections of the society. Due to these problems, the preference for sons has increased within the family due to the availability of manual jobs in rural areas, which females are unable to perform, hence, they believe in practicing female foeticide. There have been launching of campaigns that involves the direct participation and cooperation of both the social public, households, community members, non-government organizations, taking part in focussed group discussions, social audit and so forth. The campaigns and the projects on female foeticide have the main aim to spread the awareness amongst the masses that they should promote birth of female children. If girls are brought up in an efficient manner, then they will be able to equally meet the needs and the requirements of their families and society as compared to boys [4].

Causes for the prevalence of female foeticide

The causes that are responsible for the prevalence of female foeticide have been stated as follows: [5].

- **Religion Causes:** The influence of religion leaves an impact on immeasurable philosophies and traditional beliefs. The individuals possess this viewpoint that a son is responsible for the fulfilment of all the important ceremonies and rituals that take place at various phases of one's life. When a woman gets married, she is blessed by all the elderly people of the family for a male child, hence,

this shows that male children are given significance within the family. It is believed that when the son lit the funeral pyre of his parents, then they are blessed with the direct passage to heaven. Therefore, due to the performance of religious beliefs and ceremonies, people desire to have a male child.

- **Social Causes:** There have been many social causes behind the practice of female foeticide. It is believed that daughters do not bring social security to the parents. The birth of the daughter is considered as an investment that will yield no returns. Sons continue the name of the family, hence, daughters are undesirable and they do not continue their maiden name after marriage. The rich and the affluent families normally practice female foeticide and infanticide, because they are of the viewpoint that they have to maintain their prestige and status within the society and that can be done by having male children.
- **Legal Causes:** The Pre Conception and Pre Natal Diagnostic Technique Act, 1994 was passed 18 years ago due to a distressing increase in the cruel killing of female fetuses by advanced means of scientific technologies. According to the 2011 Census, the child sex ratio is 914:1000 and therefore, it is apparent from these figures that the influence and operation of the Act is still in uncertainty as there has been a continuous decline in the child sex ratio. The Pre Conception and Pre Natal Diagnostic Technique Act, 1994 has demonstrated to be inadequate and unproductive to control the brutal custom of female foeticide.

Policy framework

The National Plan of Action which was meant exclusively for the girl child (1991-2000) was introduced in the year 1992. The main objective of this plan was the survival, protection and development of the girl children. There are certain rights which an individual requires in order to live the life in a productive manner; these rights are the right to equal opportunity, to be free from the problems of hunger, illiteracy, lack of knowledge, ignorance and exploitation. Towards making sure that the girl children survive and there should be a curb on female foeticide. The main objectives have been stated as follows: [6].

1. There should be encouragement of prevention of cases of female foeticide and infanticide and prohibition on the practice of amniocentesis for the determination of the sex. In the present world, there has been prevalence of encouragement of girl children. In urban areas, in medical centres and hospitals, the determination of the sex of the unborn child has been considered unlawful.

2. There should be an end to gender disparity. The ways to end gender disparity has to be brought about in the infant mortality rate, in the case of feeding practices, there should be an expansion in the case of the nutritional requirements in order to cause a reduction in malnourishment by half and make provision of supplementary nutrition for the adolescents and other people and children in need.
3. There has been prevalence of death rates amongst the girls. There should be a reduction in the deaths due to diarrhoea by 50% amongst the girl children who are under five years of age and to make sure that all the children receive immunization against all forms of serious illnesses.
4. There should be supply of safe drinking water and adequate nutrients and food requirements for the individuals. Safe drinking water and proper diet and nutrition are considered to be vital aspects in the maintenance of good health.

Consequences of female foeticide

Within the Indian society, women have been given lower value, they have always been considered inferior in status as compared to men. Prenatal determination of the sex with the purpose of inhibiting female births must be observed as an appearance of violence against women, it is a violation of their human rights. The pregnant woman, though often similarly concerned to have a boy, is commonly coerced to experience such practices. Many women suffer from psychological trauma as a result of compulsorily undergoing repeated abortions, because of having a female child and their strong desire to have a male child. More commonly, demographers notify that in the next twenty years there will be a scarcity of brides in the marriage market primarily because of the antagonistic juvenile sex ratio, combined with a complete deterioration in fertility [7].

While fertility is declining at a fast pace in urban and educated families, nevertheless the preference for male children remains strong. For these families, modern medical technologies are easily accessible. Therefore, selective abortion and sex selection are becoming more public. In rural areas, as the number of marriageable women deteriorates, men would tend to marry younger women, leading to an increase in the fertility rates and thus a high rate of population growth. The kidnapping of girls is an associated phenomenon. People express unwillingness and disinterest against the girls. Kidnapping of girls, trafficking, lack of adequate diet and nutrition, increase in the case of infant mortality rate for the girl children, making them perform the household chores, discourag-

ing them from going to school and acquiring education or getting involved in employment and marrying them off at an early age are some of the consequences that girls face. For instance, there has been a report in The Hindustan Times that young girls from Assam and West Bengal are kidnapped and sold into marriage in the neighbouring Haryana [7].

Conclusion

In India, amongst all the societies and communities, whether they are rich or poor, reside in urban or rural areas, high status or low status, upper class or lower class and so forth always possess the desire of having male children within the family. There have been certain reasons behind these such as religious causes, social causes, legal causes and other reasons such as status of women, gender discrimination and dowry. The status of women within the societies have been considered low as compared to men. People possess numerous viewpoints regarding significance of the male child and unwillingness for the female child. It is believed that when the performance of all the religious ceremonies and functions take place, sons have a crucial role to play.

Low income, poverty stricken families are of the viewpoint that sons should be educated so that they are able to get engaged into a good employment setting. On the other hand, daughters are considered to be investment for the families who will not produce any profits. They are meant to get trained only in the preparation of meals and performance of other household chores, girl children, especially in rural areas and amongst the socio-economic backward sections of the society are discouraged from acquiring any kind of education or getting engaged within the employment setting. Strategies to restrain female foeticide are intensive Information, Education and Communication (IEC) campaigns for raising awareness, women empowerment and role of medical colleges and professional bodies.

In the present existence, it is unlawful to detect the foetus of the unborn child in medical centres and hospitals. There is a requirement to enhance the effectiveness of the existing implementation systems and structures. It is vital to initiate the legal campaigns to enhance the awareness of the provisions of The Pre Conception and Pre Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Regulation and Prevention of Misuse) Act, 1994. It is vital that female children should be allowed to born as every human being has the right to life. Good education, food and nourishment and all the essential needs and requirements

of the girl children should also get fulfilled. Girls are equally important as the boys, all the families and communities should form this viewpoint that even girls can contribute in bringing social security, wealth, reputation, prestige and welfare for their families. Educating a woman means educating the entire family. In the present society, women are getting highly educated, they are in various kinds of enhanced employment settings, hence, these points cultivate this viewpoint that women are equally important as men. Within the Indian society, valuing of women should be encouraged, and all the reasons for which female foeticide is practiced should be eliminated so that women feel secure of her birth and existence.

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Volume 1 Issue 4 September 2019

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