

**THE PRACTICE OF ABORTING A FOETUS IN INDIA: A SERIOUS
CHALLENGE FOR THE SOCIETY**

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ABSTRACT

From the ancient literature The Taityerio Brahamano to the recent folk song Vajoigeeti the girls are considered as cursed. Even we hear the blessing like 'shataputrabativaba' (mother of hundred boys) but not 'shataputribativaba' (mother of hundred daughters). There are some reasons why the sons are preferred over the daughters to the parents. Most of the parents and the families of our society consider their girls as their liability. Female foeticide or gendercide is at an alarming stage in these following countries (according to The view of UNO) - China, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, South Korea, India, Serbia, Belarus, Bosnia, Cyprus, Hong Kong, Singapur. In detail we can say that in the lack of girls, marriage becomes competitive, which also increases marriage expenditure. As a result the Taiwan starts savings. That savings increases the investment. According to Tsang Jin Oye and Jiya Obo Jhang China had also adopted the same policy.

Keywords- Female Foeticide, Gender discrimination and its impact in society.

1. Introduction

'First comes love, then comes marriage

Then comes name with a baby carriage

I wish you love, I wish you joy

I wish you first a baby boy

And when his hair begins to curl

I wish you then a baby girl'

[*Autograph Book, USA*]¹

From the ancient literature The Taityerio Brahamano to the recent folk song Vajoigeeti the girls are considered as cursed. The Apastambha Dharmasutra said the main duty of the woman is to give birth of son. The Satapatha Brahamano said - 'Yaa Ba Aputra Patni Sa Paribritti'² i.e. the

woman who can't give birth son she must be abandoned. On the other hand the woman who gives birth daughters repeatedly, she must be also abandoned after twelve years³. The Basistha Dharmasutra instructs for the second marriage to the husband who has no son⁴.

Girls are unexpected from the womb of the mother. We have heard about the custom like 'Pungsaban', the natual which was performed during the pregnancy period of the woman for the sake of the son in mother's womb. But we never heard this type of ritual for the sake of the girl child in her mother's womb. Even we hear the blessing like 'shataputrativaba' (mother of hundred boys) but not 'shataputribativaba' (mother of hundred daughters). There are some reasons why the sons are preferred over the daughters to the parents. Most of the parents and the families of our society consider their girls as their liability. Our society considers the economic support in old age for the parents comes only from sons and not from daughters. Hindu scriptures explain, having a son the father can win over the world, he also repays his ancestor's debt. According to Hindu religion the last funeral rites of the parents should be performed only by the sons. Not only in India but also in many other countries daughters are not welcomed in the society. China used to kill the daughters mercilessly for the scarcity of food⁶. New Zealand used to kill the girls because the girls can't participate in the war.

Female foeticide is the burning example of gender discrimination in our society. Actually pre-natal diagnostic tests are meant for the detection of foetal abnormalities and prevention of the birth of defective children. But unfortunately in a country like India or China where sons are preferred over daughters, these tests are misused for the detection of the sex of the foetus. In fact most of the people in India consider these tests as 'Sex Determination Tests' and its real purpose is not known to them. According to a doctor of Mumbai, between 1978-1983 seventy thousand female foetuses were aborted in the whole of India⁷. In 1985 Meri Aan Waren had written a book namely 'Gendercide'⁸ on female foeticide. United Nations Organisations (UNO) has formed several committees to control over gendercide in Asia and South East Asian countries. UNO has made a list of the countries in descending order, where gendercide or female foeticide is very common phenomenon. The just born girl child, abandoned by her mother, is being brought up by the nurses in hospitals or Medical Colleges is very common incident. On 3rd September, 2006, all the news papers had published the incident at Halisahar in Kolkata, where the mother had buried her new born daughter in the breeding place as she had already two daughters and the elder was mentally challenged⁹.

Female foeticide or gendercide is at an alarming stage in these following countries (according to The view of UNO) - China, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, South Korea, India, Serbia, Belarus, Bosnia, Cyprus, Hong Kong, Singapur¹⁰.

‘Surplus Bachelor’ is a very popular term in Taiwan. This is very profitable for their economy also. In detail we can say that in the lack of girls, marriage becomes competitive, which also increases marriage expenditure. As a result the Taiwan starts savings. That savings increases the investment. According to Tsang Jin Oye and Jiya Obo Jhang China had also adopted the same policy¹¹.

TABLE 1.
TRENDS IN SEX RATIO - ALL INDIA (NUMBER OF FEMALES FOR 1000 MALES)

CENSUS YEAR	SEX RATIO
1901	972
1911	964
1921	955
1931	950
1941	945
1951	946
1961	941
1971	930
1981	933
1991	927
2001	933
2011	940

Source: Census of India, 2011

In table no.1 Sex Ratio is expressed as the number of females per thousand males. If there is no discrimination, gender balance should be there. But unfortunately it is not so.

TABLE 2. SEX RATIO OF TOTAL POPULATION FOR THE STATES/UNION TERRITORIES OF INDIA - 2011
(NUMBER OF FEMALES FOR 1000 MALES, STATES ARRANGED IN DESCENDING ORDER).

RANK	STATES/UNION TERRITORIES	SEX RATIO	ZONE
1	KERALA	1084	S
2	PONDICHARY	1031	S
3	TAMILNADU	995	S
4	ANDHRAPRADESH	992	S
5	CHHATISGARH	991	C
6	MANIPUR	987	NE
7	MEGHALAYA	986	NE
8	ORISA	978	E
9	MIJORAM	975	NE
10	HIMACHALPRADESH	974	N
11	KARNATAKA	968	S
12	GOA	968	W
13	UTTARAKHAND	963	C
14	TRIPURA	961	NE
15	ASSAM	954	NE
16	LAKSHADWEEP	946	S
17	JHARKHAND	947	C
18	WEST BENGAL	947	E
19	MAHARASTRA	946	W
20	NAGALAND	931	NE
21	MADHYAPRADESH	930	C
22	RAJASTHAN	926	W
23	ARUNACHALPRADESH	920	NE
24	GUJRAT	918	W
25	BIHAR	916	E
26	UTTARPRADESH	908	C
27	PUNJAB	893	N

28	SIKKIM	889	NE
29	JAMMU & KASHMIR	883	N
30	ANDAMAN NIKOBAR	878	S
31	HARIYANA	877	N
32	DELHI	866	N
33	CHANDIGARH	818	N
34	DADRA & NAGAR	775	W
	HAVELI		
35	DAMAN & DIU	618	W

Source: Census of India, 2011

(Note: Zone S=South Zone
C= Central Zone N
E=North Eastern Zone
W= Western Zone
E= Eastern Zone
N= North Zone)

The ratio of total population for the states and union territories of India shows that the situation is very bad in northern zone. Highly prosperous states like Haryana, Punjab, Chandigarh and the capital city Delhi figure in this list, giving hints for the suspicion that easy accessibility to modern technology like ultrasound and amniocentesis test and consequent sex selective abortions could be the major reason for such low sex ratio in this advanced states. Even the states like Rajasthan, Haryana are forced to buy girls from the neighbor states like Bihar, West Bengal.

TABLE 3.
THE SCENARIO OF WEST BENGAL, THE RATE OF GIRLS (0-6 YEARS OLD) IN 2001 AND 2011

WEST BENGAL	963 IN 2001	947 IN 2011
DISTRICTS	2001	2011
DARJEELING	977	971
JALPAIGURI	973	954
COOCHBEHAR	960	942
NORTH DINAJPUR	973	936
SOUTH DINAJPUR	968	954
MALDA	967	939
MURSHIDABAD	975	957
BIRBHUM	969	956
BURDWAN	960	943
NADIA	975	947
NORTH 24 PARGANAS	961	949
HOOGLY	952	958
BANKURA	955	954
PURULIA	967	955
MEDINIPUR	952	936 (E),960(W)
HAWRA	959	935
KOLKATA	923	899
SOUTH 24 PARGANAS	969	949

Source: Census of India, 2011

This table (no.3) shows the rate of girl children has been decreased in North Dinajpur, Malda, Burdwan, Kolkata and Jalpaiguri The renowned gynaecologist of south Kolkata Dr. Balsala Menon had said Kolkata is one of the important centre for this business where a large number of clinics for sex determination test are being grown up. Even Dr. Menon knows some doctors of Kolkata, who are involved in this business¹². The Telegraph published the article namely 'Female Foeticide Rampant in West Bengal' by Rajarshi Dasgupta, which reflects the picture of female foeticide in Kolkata¹³. On 4th

April, 2011, near Kishanganj, a large number of foetus has been found in a plastic container with chemical¹⁴. This news again proves that the medical clinics are being grown up illegally here and there. Another shocking development is the use of techniques such as sedimentation or centrifugation, Ericsson's Method, electrophoresis, ion exchange through flotation etc which are used for sex pre-selection.

TABLE 4.
DISTRICT WISE SEX RATIO OF WEST BENGAL IN 2011 (NUMBER OF FEMALES FOR PER 1000 MALES)

EELING	971
MEDINIPUR	960
GLY	958
SHIDABAD	957
HUM	956
LIA	955
IGURI	954
H DINAJPUR	954
CURA	954
H 24 PARGANAS	949
H 24 PARGANAS	949
A	947
OWAN	943
HBEHAR	942
DAH	939
MEDINIPUR	936
H DINAJPUR	936
RA	935
LATA	899

Source: Census of India, 2011

As a result clinics with the name board 'BABY OF YOUR CHOICE' are openly found in big cities in India. Fertility clinics are opened where abortions of girl child is going on randomly¹⁵. In Canada the attempts have been made to establish 'SEX SELECTION

CLINICS' which target the South Asian community on the pretext that this practice is culturally acceptable within the community¹⁶.

The pre-natal diagnostic technique (Regulation and Prevention of Misuse) Act 1994 was passed on 1st January, 1996. But effective monitoring is difficult due to the vastness of the country and the large size of the population. It is also very difficult to ensure the co-operation of the doctors, nurses, technicians, staffs and the people since everybody is a gainer in this game. Law alone can't solve the problem is clear from the recent estimate which says that two million abortions are performed after sex determination tests in a year. If female infanticide is also taken into account then the actual figure may increase to around five million in a year.

Women irrespective of any caste, any religion, economic status and educational status do undergo the tests. Sometime under the pressure from the family members and by the time the family decides and succeeds in convincing the carrying mothers to undergo abortion. These abortions causing adverse consequences to the reproductive health of these women.

There are some ethical questions involved in the exercise of these pre-natal medical technologies are¹⁷:

- a) Assuming that the fetus has a life, do we have the right to take away that life?
- b) What is the guarantee that the very use or over use of these medical tests themselves may not cause foetal deformity?
- c) In all the above cases what is its impact on the mental health of women who undergo these ordeals to satisfy the dictates of the society, which is patriarchal?
- d) What will happen if these technologies are used to wipe out a particular community/caste/ethnic group?

World Health Organization (WHO) reported, under the mental pressure and guilt feelings a few mothers of China and Korea (the mothers who thought they killed their baby girl in their womb) committed suicide¹⁸.

Some preventive measures should be taken by the society to wipe out this ulcer. At first people should change their mind set, removing the wrong perception that girls are liabilities, encouraging all the women to take education and enhancing the self worth of women through socio-cultural and economic empowerment of the women. The educated people, the NGO sector should join hands in bringing about the necessary awareness. Though the Women Organisation in this country had worked very hard to improve the status of women as they are organising various kinds of seminars, workshops but their

efforts will not bear fruit if the female sex itself is going to be in danger¹⁹. And in that kind of situation the blessings like 'Putrarthe Kriyote Varja' or 'Shatapatrpotivobo' could not save the girls²⁰.

Notes & References

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9. Mukherjee Soma, 'Adhikaar Theke Khomotayon', Mitram, Kolkata, 2008, p 32
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Notes on Surplus Bachelor: Surplus of males caused by preference for sons means people in China and Taiwa have no chance of finding mate.

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