



Problems of female foeticide and technological challenges

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Abstract

In this modern age, Female foeticide the selective abortion of female foeticide cases are increased now a day. Women have been the subject of deprivation, discrimination, intimidation, and unjust treatment in society throughout history. The difference is only in the forms that differ from time to time and from society to society. They are even denied the right to be born female foeticide determined by many factors, but mostly by the vision of having to pay a dowry to the upcoming bridegroom of a daughter. The sex-determination tests were basically designed to detect gender related congenital abnormality in the unborn child. It is unfortunate that it is abused largely in India and other Asian countries to detect the sex of the foetus in order to have it aborted if it happens to be that of a female. This paper is based on the secondary data, which is discussed about Impact of female foeticide, comparison of Urban and Rural areas, Laws and measures against female foeticide, suggestion to eradicate this social evil. Source for this article collected from books, research articles and from e- journals.

Keywords: female foeticide, impact, comparison, challenges, suggestions

Introduction

Women have been the subject of deprivation, discrimination, intimidation, and unjust treatment in society throughout history. The difference is only in the forms that differ from time to time and from society to society. Women are considered inferior, given secondary status, subjugated to the male, subjected to various ordeals and deprived of the basic right of existence. They are considered persons whose duty is to act on the advice of males, serve them, please and take care of them: first father, then husband then son. They are given such an ideal role as to live at the mercy of the husband and die at his pyre. The reason is that in the social fibre of many societies males are given a privileged position because they are bread-winners, feed the family, and continue the name of the family. Women are the commodities at the disposal of males, whenever and however they want to use them. Thus, they are in a subordinate position, do not represent an independent entity, have no control over their lives, and do not stand on their own, but constitute the *amour propre* of others. Assaults on a woman's life and atrocities against her dignity and self have been witnessed in the entire passage of history. Girl infants were buried alive. They were killed by rubbing poison on the mother's breast and feeding them with milk of the errukam flower or oleander berries. The other way to get rid of them was using the sap of the calotropis plant, paddy grains or giving them sleeping tablets. Further, they were sold, used against their wishes, tortured and had severe injuries inflicted on their bodies and minds. Sometimes their parents and kith and kin performed these inhuman acts with a heavy heart and great grief and sorrow. The point to ponder is why these types of heinous act occur, what forces people to commit such types of acts and why society remains a silent observer? The modern and sophisticated but heinous assault on women is not to allow them to come into existence. It is none other

than female foeticide. It is the elimination of the female foetus in the womb. Medical advances and technological development have enabled scientists and medical practitioners to initiate certain methods and techniques to determine the sex of the foetus. The most important among them are amniocentesis, chorion villus Biopsy and now the widely used ultrasonography. People are interested to know the sex of the foetus. When it is determined, and found to be a female one, it is aborted. The sex-determination tests were basically designed to detect gender related congenital abnormality in the unborn child. It is unfortunate that it is abused largely in India and other Asian countries to detect the sex of the foetus in order to have it aborted if it happens to be that of a female. The intention behind such tests is good but humans, under the influence of hedonistic tendencies, always manipulate good to satisfy their egos, desires and ambitions at the cost of others and society as well. This is the case with these methods. They are, in the course of material advancement, by and large, used as sex pre-selection tests. In India the sex-determination test has been used since 1978 and has gradually become popular. As a matter of fact, private clinics throughout the country were established to do lucrative business. Previously, amniocentesis was used during the 14-18 weeks of pregnancy to determine the sex of the foetus. Later on, certain improvements took place and sophisticated techniques were developed. Now the sex of the foetus is determined by transvaginal sonography after 13-14 weeks of pregnancy through a machine. Abdominal ultrasound can also be done from 14-16 weeks to do the job. One of the sophisticated methods to determine the sex of the foetus as well as to fulfil the desires and aspirations of people to have a male child is the Erison method. It is a device to separate the X and Y chromos from the sperm and then inject back only Y chromos into the womb to ensure a male foetus.

The cost of this test is around Rs.15,000 to 25,000.

IMPACT of female foeticide

Female foeticide is a severe blow to humanity. It is the most disgraceful and deplorable act on the part of human beings who are considered to be the superior creatures of God responsible to create conducive conditions for the existence and survival of their fellows. It has widespread repercussions on humans and society as well. The first predicament is that it amounts to homicide, destruction of a life and liquidation of the human race. The foetus contains life and its elimination is an awful crime. All those who are involved in this heinous act must be severely dealt with.

The second serious impact of female foeticide is disparity in gender ratios. The South and East Asian countries like India and China are worse affected as the female foetuses are selectively aborted after pre-natal sex determination. Thus, avoiding the birth of girls has damaged the structure of the population to an alarming extent and the number of females has decreased. The result is that the selective abortion, according to an estimate, has taken the lives of 35 to 40 million girls who could not be part of the Indian population.

The structure of the Indian population is greatly affected by selective abortion. It is exuberantly skewed. Census data shows that from 1961 to 2001 there was a consistent drop in the sex ratio of females per 1000 males in children 0-6 years of age. In 1961, the sex ratio was 941F: 1000M. In 2001 it dropped to 933F: 1000M. In some states the sex ratio dropped too much. In Punjab it was 793, Haryana 820, Himachal Pradesh 897, and Gujarat 878. If the trend remains the same, it will shatter the fabric of society and damage its moral and ethical values. It is a social menace spreading steadily all over the country.

The birth of girls was dropped further at 914.23 for every 1000 boys in the age group 0-6. years according to 2011 census. There is a progress in the sex ratio in the states like Kerala, Pondicherry and Lakshadweep. other states have been reported decline in numbers of girls, notable among them being Maharashtra, Haryana, Punjab, Delhi, Himachal Pradesh, Chandigarh, Gujarat and Karnataka.

Comparison of urban and rural areas

The unique feature of the trend is that it is more frequent in urban rather than rural areas and among literate rather than illiterate women. It repudiates intellectuals' concern that literate and educated persons are exposed to modernity, more concerned with human values, cherish and propagate human freedom particularly that of women and are expected to protect human lives, discard practices that are dangerous to society and, at least, practise those values essential to maintain the dignity and integrity of humanity.

Similar is the case with urban areas that are the birth places of reformative and welfare movements and where women are more conscious of their rights, struggle for them and act to enhance their status in society. In spite of these, women have miserably failed to resist social pressure, and yielded to the forces that compel them not to take the responsibility of rearing female children and getting them adjusted to society. They have avoided facing the ordeal of providing female children a dignified position in society and sharing the burden

and liability of getting them settled in lives.

The causes of female foeticide are embedded deep in the edifice of society. It is necessary to change the mindset of people and enable them to throw off the yoke of unhealthy and inhuman traditions. Here, they are required to liberate themselves from ruthless and detrimental traditional bonds and develop humane qualities in the true sense. People are under constant social pressure that impels them to commit this type of acts. There are several reasons for that:

Reasons for female foeticide

First, society gives preferential treatment to a male child. It is the general opinion which prevails in our society that a boy is advantageous and beneficial to the family in general and to his parents in particular. He heads the family when the parents retire or become old, looks after and serves them, takes the responsibility of running the family, replaces the parents and, in fact, continues the name of the family. This is all due to the patriarchal structure of the family but is also supported by some religious ethos. In Hinduism, the birth of a son is essential because he has to perform the last rites of the father by which he can attain salvation.

Second, girls are considered a liability and burden that one has to carry throughout one's life, creating difficulty and pain. Parents have to face various ordeals in rearing the girl child, educating her and settling her in life. Their foremost duty is to get her married and search for a suitable and worthy life partner for her at whatever cost is required. They are supposed to develop all possible qualities in her, inculcate moral and spiritual values, make her expert in household work, enable her to be an earning family member and, last but not the least, to ingrain in her those abilities that can make her a good wife who can please her husband and in-laws. In case any mishap comes about or the daughter fails to come up to the expectations of the husband and in-laws, all blame comes to the parents. Thus, parents live under continuous stress and strain.

Third, the marriage of a girl is a costly affair. Parents have to give valuable gifts including jewellery, clothes, furniture, utensils and other materials that are difficult to provide for poor and middle class persons. Sometimes, one is forced to sell one's land or other ancestral properties to fulfil these requirements. If parents fail to provide these materials, they are subject to social criticism and their social prestige is damaged. Parents try their best to provide as much material as possible at the expense of other necessary outgoings as well as of their own comfort and that of other members of the family. They try to meet these requirements in the hope that the girl will be considered respectable and lead a comfortable life in her house of procreation.

Fourth, the institution of payment of dowry, a depravity and social evil, has spread throughout the country. The prospective husband and his family demand a huge and handsome amount of money in cash or in the form of valuable materials in the marriage from the parents of a girl. The price of a groom, in fact, depends upon his social and economic position as well as his lucrative job and business. The groom and his family take advantage of the vulnerable position of the girl's parents. It is a sort of exploitation which the groom does not hesitate to demand in spite of the fact that he also has sisters who have to

face the same situation. It places the parents in an arduous situation who struggle tooth and nail to meet the demands of dowry. Sometimes they succeed but at the cost of great sacrifice and the heavy price which they and the entire family have to bear.

In many cases, the demand is beyond their potential and the marriage bond breaks. It creates great agony and anguish for parents as well as for the girl. Parents experience grief and feel guilty due to their inability to meet the demands. The girl has to face a great deal of mental torture because the breaking of the marriage bond is itself a social stigma. Though there is legislation against dowry, it is not strictly followed and the business of dowry goes on under the table. Parents of the girl compromise with the situation with a view to getting relieved by marrying their daughter and seeing her comfortable as well as her better future in her house of procreation. Sometimes wives have to face death if the demands of dowry are not met. According to estimates, dowry death occurs in India every 93 minutes. However, the whole family of the girl faces a tremendous torment and trauma that are unbearable for them.

Laws and measures against female foeticide

Excessive female foeticide has emerged as a serious social problem and has attracted the attention of social organisations and a body of people who have raised their voices against it and demanded adequate measures to curb it. The government has also taken into consideration the gravity of the problem and enacted legislation to curb it. Maharashtra was the first state to ban the pre-natal sex determination through the enactment of the Maharashtra Regulation of Parental Diagnostic Technique Act.

Similarly, at the national level the Central Pre-natal Diagnostic Techniques (Prohibition of Sex Selection) Act 1994 was enacted to prevent female foeticide. The purpose was to limit the use of pre-natal diagnostic techniques to genuine medical purposes and to prevent its misuse. It also recommended the formation of different bodies to monitor the use of the technique. It was amended and replaced in 2002 by the Pre-natal Diagnostic Techniques (Regulation and Prevention of Misuse) Act.

The problem is that the implementation of these Acts has been scarce and they could not be strictly implemented. As a matter of fact, people in general and medical practitioners in particular avoided the provisions of the Act and the practice of female foeticide went on. There are serious failures in management and implementation, lack of commitment and motivation, widespread corruption and little knowledge in clinics of the provision of the Act”.

Suggestions to eliminate this social evil

It is necessary to change the mindset of people. Men of knowledge, intellectuals, and social scientists should mould public opinion and convince people by their writings and speeches that women are an essential part of humanity just as men are. They are equal to men and have the potential to come to the rescue of not only their parents but also of any person who is in need of their help. Eliminating the female foetus is killing a life which is not only disgraceful for a human being, but a heinous crime and a grave sin punishable by the law of the land as well as Divine law. The government, NGOs, and

all social organisations should come forward, educate people and make them conscious of the sanctity of motherhood as well as of the disastrous effect of female foeticide. Mass media should be extensively used to bring about an awakening among the populace about the gravity of the problem. They should conduct interesting and impressive programmes to create awareness among people.

Schools and colleges should educate children against this evil and make them aware of the detrimental consequences of this act. They should develop a course under the title of ‘society, problems and change’ or any other title and teach them about the bases of society, its structure, system, role, problems and changes desired to live in peace and harmony with fellow inhabitants.

Dowry, its giving and taking, should be banned and made punishable by law. Social organisations and activists should report such cases to the appropriate authorities and bring the culprit to the court of law. Besides, public opinion against it should be created. It should be considered a social stigma. Those who are involved in giving and taking dowry should be ostracised and people should break off all relations with them. Women, particularly girls, should not marry such persons and also convince others not to do so. Government machinery should be toned up to strictly implement legislation against dowry. Government servants should be dismissed from their job if they commit this crime.

Marriage should be simplified and its cost should be reduced to a great extent. The occasion should be celebrated in a simple way. Great pomp and show should be avoided. A limited number of relatives and friends should be invited to grace the occasion, simple food should be served and the giving and taking of gifts should be avoided. Parents should, at the most, give one or two pairs of clothes and one ornament to the bride or groom at the marriage. It would be good if the marriage is solemnised in the office of the appropriate officer by getting it registered and after that a simple feast should be organised. Mass marriages should be encouraged.

Matrimonial services are also, nowadays, costly. They charge a considerable amount of money for registration. They also charge for further negotiation and contact. Voluntary organisations and welfare associations should take this responsibility, provide these services free of charge and also make the necessary marriage arrangements in a simple but dignified way at less cost.

Girls should be provided free education. A person should be given financial assistance for educating girls and getting them married if he/she has more than two daughters.

Girls should be given vocational education so that they may easily get employment and become self-sufficient. They should become an earning member of the family as soon as possible, meet the requirements of their own lives and also take care of their parents and other members of the family.

Girls should be trained and socialised from early childhood in such a way that they should not consider themselves inferior to boys. Instead, they should be bold, develop courage, dynamism and initiative to live with self-respect and fight against injustice and inhuman treatment.

Moral education should be given to both girls and boys so that they may understand the difference between right and wrong, justice and injustice and appreciate the values that are

essential for human survival in this world. They should also learn to cherish those ideals that enable humans to live with others in peace and harmony, and cooperate with them to make their lives comfortable and meaningful.

Laws against female foeticide should be strictly implemented. All those involved in the violation of the law must be punished. Elimination of the female foetus can only be allowed when the life of the mother is in danger or there is any abnormality in the unborn child, otherwise it should be strictly prohibited. The government should form a board to monitor the implementation of the provision of the law. The board should give permission to abort the female foetus only in genuine cases. Medical practitioners should not be allowed to do it without the prior permission of the board. They should be punished and not allowed to practise in future if they perform abortion for money without the permission of the board.

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