

A STUDY OF PERCEPTION OF YOUTH REGARDING FEMALE FOETICIDE IN RELATION TO VALUES AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS

Dr. Raj Kumar Yadav* & Mrs. Shivani Yadav**

ABSTRACT

Female foeticide is an extreme manifestation of violence against women where female fetuses are selectively aborted after pre-natal sex determination, thereby avoiding the birth of girls. As a result, between 35 and 40 million girls and women are missing from the Indian population. In some parts of the country, the sex ratio of girls to boys has dropped to less than 800:1,000. Against the present existing practices a study was conducted in colleges of Haryana. For the study 200 graduate & postgraduate students were taken and the study analyses youth perception in relation to their values & socio economic values.

INTRODUCTION

"You can tell the condition of a nation by looking at the status of its women".

-Jawaharlal Nehru-

India is growing dynamically in every field. Today, the boom in economy, innovative technologies and improved infrastructure has become nation's pride. The country has witnessed advancements in all fields but bias against a girl child is still prevailing in the country. Women of today are doctors, engineers, pilots, journalists, teachers, administrators, judges including a woman Judge in the Supreme Court, state governors, ambassadors, members of parliament and ministers. Still in our patriarchal society, a boy child is preferred for socio-economic, cultural, religious and various other reasons.

In an age where females have made progress in almost every field, there is a large population who still accord a lower status to women. A son's birth is likened to "a sunrise in the abode of God", "a feather in one's cap" etc. while a daughter's birth has been equated to "watering a plant of other's garden". In our Indian society, a childless woman is perceived as incomplete, the one who has given birth to daughter is partially complete. Only those women who have produced sons enjoy a status of all sorts. The declining sex ratio is a matter of

great concern, as it will lead to serious demographic imbalances and adverse social consequences.

It is agonising to know that the gender bias and deep rooted prejudice and discrimination against the girl child, which have been there down the centuries, are now found to begin in the womb itself. The girl child in the womb faces the peril of prebirth elimination i.e. female foeticide. It is a disgrace for the Indian society, which considers the birth of a girl child as a bad investment in future. She is considered to be consumer rather than producer, and this narrow view point of the Indian patriarchal society has led to the horrid practices like female foeticide. (Walia, 2005).

While the 2001 Indian census shows that the overall male-female sex ratio has marginally improved from 927 women per 1000 men to 933 per 1000 during the last decade the number of girls to boys in the youngest age group fell from 945/1000 to 927/1000. The Census evidence suggests a clear cultural preference for male children, particularly among north Indians. The sharpest decline for the age group 0-6 years is observed in the northern states, particularly in Haryana (820/1000) and in Punjab (793/1000).

Haryana scenario

Haryana has the most depressing figures-the current sex ratio in Haryana is 861 females per 1000 males, the lowest among the

*Professor and Principal R.A.S. College of Education Saharanwas, Rewari (Hr.)

**Research Scholar Rao Abhay Singh College of Education, Saharanwas, Rewari

major states in India. According to a UNFPA study, female foeticide has been the main cause of the declining sex ratio in Haryana. 14 districts have shown an improvement in overall sex ratio compared to the findings of the 2001 census. These included Fatehabad district - 873 females now per 1000 males (828 in census 2001), Faridabad 869 (850), Panipat 862 (809), Panchkula 856 (829), Sirsa 856 (817), Jind 856 (818), Hisar 834 (832), Kaithal 830 (791), Yamunanagar 830 (806), Rohtak 820 (799), Karnal 811 (809), Sonapat 790 (788), Ambala 790 (782) and Kurukshetra 781 (771). The districts that did not show any improvement are Bhiwani, Gurgaon, Jhajjar, Mahendergarh, Rewari and Mewat district. (Source: IANS)

SEX DETERMINATION TESTS

India is indeed one of the few countries to have legalized abortions under the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act in 1972. Abortion is legal in instances where pregnancy carries a risk to the foetus or to the mother, or in case of pregnancy caused by contraceptive failure or otherwise. However, the fact is that abortion services are being provided on demand by an increased number of registered and unregistered service providers. It is estimated that nearly six million abortions are performed every year outside the ambit of the Act.

Three major prenatal diagnostic tests that are being used as sex determination tests are:

1. Amniocentesis (normally performed after 15-17 weeks of pregnancy)
2. Chorionic villi sampling (more expensive and normally performed around the tenth week of pregnancy);
3. Ultrasound (least expensive and normally performed around the tenth week of pregnancy).

Amniocentesis and chorionic villi sampling were introduced in India for the determination of genetic abnormalities but they were soon used more commonly for sex determination. With the introduction of ultrasonography, sex determination has spread like an epidemic in many towns and villages. (Kumar, 2008)

FACTORS RESPONSIBLE FOR FEMALE FOETICIDE

The social malaise of killing the girl child is pretty old in India. Earlier it was more in the form of female infanticide- where girl child was poisoned to death soon after her birth. Girl infants have been known to be killed by rubbing poison on the mother's breast, by feeding infants to milk of errukam flower or oleander berries by using sap of calotropis plant, paddy grains, giving sleeping tablets or by simply burning the girl infants alive. According to Sarna, 2003 factors responsible for this are:

1. Social Security: In India, often the alibi is offered that families prefer boys to girls just because according to them boys provide social security to the aged parents.
2. Evil of Dowry: some people think, a girl means accumulation of sufficient resources for the dowry the parents have to give away, when the girl gets married. Therefore, the parents think that the girl is a financial burden for them, where as the boy is an asset who fetches a fabulous dowry for the parents.
3. Financial Dependence of Females on Husband or In laws: In India socio-economic background has been the villain behind the tragic Female Foeticide. Certain communities want to get rid of female child compelled by the circumstances of dehumanizing poverty, unemployment, superstition and illiteracy.
4. Cultural Factors: the concept of 'Vanshodharak' a male child to perform last rites in Hindus and carry forward measures to reduce Female Foeticide.

Religion, custom, socio-economic status, age-old prejudices, etc. have put the girl child in a subservient and exploitable position. Low rates of participation in education, lack of economic independence, value and gender biases operating here, have resulted in girls not only being dependent on men and other institutions of authority like the family, neighbourhood and the society, but also vulnerable to violence.

Discrimination against the girl child occurs

in every strata of society - rich or poor - having different forms of manifestation, but is more visible especially in poverty stricken families or in families under financial stress. A degradation of values is exhibited in the increasing incidence of preference for the male child and neglect to the female child.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To study the difference in viewpoint of males and females students toward female foeticide.
2. To study the difference in viewpoint of arts and science students towards female foeticide.
3. To study the value pattern of arts and science male and female students.
4. To study the socioeconomic status of arts and science male and female students.
5. To compare the value pattern of arts and science students.
6. To compare the socio- economic status of arts and science students.
7. To study the perception of youth on female foeticide in relation to values and socio-economic status.

HYPOTHESES OF THE STUDY

1. There will be no significant difference in the perception of male and female students towards female foeticide.
2. There will be no significant difference in the perception of arts and science students towards female foeticide.
3. There will be no significant difference in the values & socio- economic status of male & female students.
4. There will be no significant difference in the values & socioeconomic status of arts & science students.
5. There will be no significant difference in perception of youth on female foeticide in relation to their values.
6. There will be no significant difference in perception of youth on female foeticide in relation to their socio- economic status.

METHOD

The present study was carried out on graduate & postgraduate student from various teaching departments of Panjab University, Chandigarh. The present study is essentially a descriptive exploratory research.

TOOLS

The following tools were used for the research:

- * Self made questionnaire
- * Personal value questionnaire Sherry & Verma
- * Socio economic status scale R.L.Bhardawaj

FINDINGS

1. A majority of the youths agreed with the statement that sex of the child can be known before birth.
2. 100% of the total sample of male disagreed with the statement that nature did not intend us to determine the sex of an unborn child.
3. Majority of the youths responded that technology of determining the sex of unborn child be banned.
4. Almost 90% of youths were familiar with the term "Female Foeticide".
5. Most of the respondents were aware of the phenomenon of the declining sex ratio throughout the country.
6. Today's youths think that educated mothers abort more unborn girl child than illiterate mothers.
7. The patriarchal form of Indian society has sanctified the persona of the boy or man as being of greater importance than that of the girl.
8. Majority of the youths did not agree that it is legal to abort an unborn child just because it is not of desired sex.
9. Majority of the youths consider killing of unborn girl child as a murder.
10. Majority of the youths consider strict punishment should be given to people who commit this murder.
11. More than 90% youths think that we need to update our laws.

12. The various reasons for son preference mentioned by the women include that he is the support and provider in old age; brings dowry instead of draining family resources; keeps the family name alive; performs the last rites; on investing in sons, say on education or business, the wealth remains in the family. The main perceived reason for not wanting daughters was mostly dowry by all the respondents.
13. The decline in the number of females in society is increasing sexual and social crimes against women, such as rape, abduction, bride selling, etc.
14. The study reveals a certain pattern of values which is according to the preferences given by the youth towards different values. The pattern of values revealed by the study is as follows:
 - I. Social Value
 - II. Knowledge Value
 - III. Democratic Value
 - IV. Aesthetic Value
 - V. Health Value
 - VI. Religious Value
 - VII. Family prestige Value
 - VIII. Hedonistic Value
 - IX. Power Value
 - X. Economic Value
15. Boys (Science) and Boys (arts) students differ only in family prestige value. They don't differ in social, knowledge, democratic, aesthetic, health, religious, hedonistic, power and economic values. Majority of boys (arts) belong to middle class. No one belongs to upper middle class.
16. Boys (Science) and Girls (Science) students do not differ significantly on any of the values. They do not differ in socioeconomic status as well.
17. Girls (Arts) and Girls (Science) students do not differ significantly on any of the values. Girls (arts) do not belong to upper middle class.
18. Girls (Arts) and Boys (Arts) students differ in family prestige value. They don't differ in social, knowledge, democratic, aesthetic, health, religious, hedonistic, power and economic values. They do not differ in socioeconomic status
19. Girls and Boys differ on religious, knowledge, family prestige and health values. Girls have high family prestige and religious values while boys have high knowledge and health value.

CONCLUSION

The declining sex ratio in the country has sent shockwaves across all sections of society. It seems that the socio-cultural factors are so embedded in the psyche of the people that they even accept wrong ways of life for the sake of social superiority. It is not poverty alone that kills baby girls the choices made by her parents and family have a greater role to play in curtailing her life. Custom and tradition shape these choices and when resources are meagre; these can make a difference between life and death. Females are the backbone of a Nation. Without maternity, existence of world is impossible. So why should we think to kill the generator of humanity?

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