

WOMEN AND SOCIAL INCLUSION : A STUDY OF FEMALE FETICIDE IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Women are socially excluded in many societies. There are a number of reasons for this phenomenon. This exclusion manifests in the form of malnourishment, anemia, bearing too many children for the sake of husband and in-laws, poverty, illiteracy, over-burden of work, lack of economic opportunities, dependence on others, etc. The worst form of this exclusion is in the form of female feticide. Here, we want to examine declining child sex ratio in India due to female feticide, which will have disastrous impact on entire Indian society in future. Already it has disastrous impact on society in Haryana. In case of Maharashtra, according to the Census 2011 data, fewer girls are born in rural areas than in urban areas. The child sex ratio (number of girls born per every 1000 boys) has fallen from 916 in 2001 in rural Maharashtra to 880 in the last decade – a drop of 36 points. In the same period, the child sex ratio in urban Maharashtra, has dipped from 908 to 888 – a drop of 20 points. One of the main reasons for the declining sex ratio is female discrimination in Indian society. Further a preference for sons has led to an increase in sex determination and sex selective abortions. Females are killed even before they are born without realizing that females are equally important for the survival of human kind and the sustenance of human society. Can there be more horrible phenomenon than this? In this paper, an attempt is made to examine the case of female feticide in India. We shall try to pin-point lack of ethics which has led to this grave problem and analyze the impact of government measures in solving this problem. We will also try to analyze how to inculcate the ethics in society to stop this abhorring practice. Finally we conclude the paper with some recommendations which will have practical implications for millions of Indian females and Indian society.

Introduction

Women are socially excluded in many societies. There are a number of reasons for this phenomenon. This exclusion manifests in the form of malnourishment, anemia, bearing too many children for the sake of husband and in-laws, poverty, illiteracy, over-burden of work, lack of economic opportunities, dependence on others, etc. The worst form of this exclusion is in the form of female feticide. Here, we want to examine declining child sex ratio in India due to female feticide, which will have disastrous impact on entire Indian society in future. Already it has disastrous impact on society in Haryana.

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In this paper, an attempt is made to examine the case of female feticide in India. We shall try to pin-point lack of ethics which has led to this grave problem and analyze the impact of government measures in solving this problem. We will also try to analyze how to inculcate the ethics in society to stop this abhorring practice. Finally we conclude the paper with some recommendations which will have practical implications for millions of Indian females and Indian society

Female Feticide and Declining Sex Ratio in India

In this paper, we specifically want to examine the role of technology in declining child sex ratio in India, which will have disastrous impact on entire Indian society in future. Already it has disastrous impact on society in Haryana. There are not enough women for men to marry in Haryana. So they go eastwards as far as Assam and downwards as far as Kerala. Also they pay a bride price. Women's groups have reported some cases where the wife has run away because she has to physically please not only the husband but also his brothers.

Sometime back, *Times of India* brought out a news item to show how skewed sex ratio is affecting men and women in society (12/1/2014, p.6) :

“Government data on acid attacks, point to patriarchal societies such as UP, Delhi and Haryana, among the states with the worst sex ratios, as accounting for most number of victims, while those with greater roles for women, such as the Northeast, recording a negligible number of such attacks.”

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The main cause for declining child sex ratio in Maharashtra (as any where else in India) is female feticide. Government of Maharashtra has enacted a law - Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (PCPNDT) Act to punish all those radiologist-criminals who conduct sonography on pregnant women to know the sex of the child. If it is female, then it would be aborted by the unscrupulous gynecologists. Recently Government of Maharashtra wanted to issue identification numbers to the sonography machines to immediately identify and punish such radiologists who conduct such sex-selection tests. ("Sonography machines fail to display code : No clarity on who will carry out technical work of embossing identification numbers' *Times of India*, 22/1/2014, p.5). But it will not have much impact because to look down upon women is deep-rooted in our society.

As we noted earlier, one of the main reasons for the declining sex ratio is female discrimination in Indian society Further a preference for sons, increasing consumerism, increasing dowry amounts, women all the time being projected as sex symbols, all have led to an increase in sex determination and sex selective abortions. What does it show? Gross misuse of science and technology. A boon from science to know genetic defects in the fetus, in the form of amniocentesis, is used against the female fetuses in the womb. Females are killed even before they are born with out realizing that females are equally important for the survival of human kind and the sustenance of human society. Can there be more horrible phenomenon than this?

What to do?

It is a deep-rooted problem. There are no easy solutions. Government of India has asked different academic institutions to conduct research to find solutions to this problem. For example, International Institute for Populations Sciences, Mumbai, was given a national level research project to evaluate different schemes giving incentives to bear girl-children in different states about their effectiveness in combating this problem. Currently, a national research project is going on at the Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics, Pune, as to how to reduce the son-preference and promote female preference.

Recommendations

Some measures that can be recommended are as follows:

- (1) Promote female education;
- (2) Provide equal work or economic opportunities for women too;

- (3) Rather than giving dowry, give share in property to the girls;
- (4) Promote simple marriages; don't give gold in the marriage. But invest in her to make her a rich human resource.;
- (5) Promote the idea in society that "for girls, marriage is not everything in life. Marriage is only one dimension of life."
- (6) Most important, attitudinal changes have to be brought about in society in general and among women in particular. Girls need to be developed into mentally strong women.
- (7) Ethics and sensitivity in general population right from childhood needs to be promoted. It is the most difficult solution as in general values are deteriorating in Indian society.
- (8) NGOs and concerned citizens can work with parents in small groups. At least it will take one generation to solve this deep-rooted and multi-dimensional problem.

Conclusion

In our paper, we have tried to analyze the social exclusion of women by discussing the problem of female feticide in India. Also, we need to reflect that science and technology are only tools for human welfare. Government is making efforts by enacting some laws and implementing them. But the approach is not sincere. Unless we develop ethics in our thinking and our attitudes towards women do not change and respect their dignity and accept them as equals, this problem will not be solved.

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