

Female Infanticide: A Gender Issue

Dr. Raju.E

Assistant Professor, Department Of Sociology,
Government College for Women, Mandya, Karnataka

Abstract: *Female infanticide is the deliberate killing of new born female child. These phenomena are most prevalent in patriarchal societies in which the status of women are low and a preference for male descendant is built into the cultural ideology. Female infanticide spread across all social and economic boundaries. In rural and poverty stricken areas; lack of education, economic resources, and access to healthcare are the factors that lead to killing of infant girls. In urban areas, selective abortion is commonly employed by the individuals by approaching modern medical technologies that determines the sex. Unfortunately, even with the Government programs and human rights organizations made an effort to terminate these customary practices with education, financial incentives, and threat of punishment, inspite of all the female infanticide remain in existence. In contemporary societies such as India and China, Female infanticide is actively persuing.*

Keywords: *Female infanticide, Gender, Groups, Poverty and Upliftment.*

I. INTRODUCTION

In the global scenario India is becoming a force to reckon with and we are very proud of this fact. But there are some home truths that we are unaware of or are turning a deaf ear to them, female infanticide is one of them. Female Infanticide is the intentional killing of baby girls due to the preference for the male babies and from the low value associated with the birth of females, and also poverty, dowry, green revolution are responsible factor for female infanticide. This practice is a deliberate and intentional act of killing a female child within one year of its birth either directly by using poisonous organic and inorganic chemicals or indirectly by deliberate neglect to feed the infant by either one of the parents or other family members.

The phenomenon of female infanticide is as old many cultures, and has likely accounted for millions of gender selective deaths throughout history. In all cases, specifically female infanticide reflects the low status accorded to women in most parts of the world. It is arguably the most brutal and destructive manifestation of the anti-female bias that pervades in patriarchal societies. Female Infanticide is prevalent almost globally. Studies show that infanticide is prevalent among Arabian tribes, the Yanomani Indians of Brazil and in ancient

Rome. This practice was quite common in China, although it was thought to have been largely eradicated after the communist revolution, but in recent years there have again been report of female infanticide in China. Baby girls are discarded in deep caves, sometimes; they will be tied up in gunny bags and thrown into the river. Some baby girls are forcibly given insecticides to kill them. Sometimes they will be sealed in deal wood boxes, taken to open grounds and killed mercilessly. According to the report published in peoples daily in 1980-81, 40 girls belonging to Hanhui in North China were killed by immersing them in river. According to the report published in Nanpang daily, in 1982, 200 girls are mercilessly killed, according to another report, a bucket of water is kept in the labour room beside the bed so that a female child. If born can be thrown to the bucket and killed. In most of the other states strong superstitious are prevalent.

However, it was the British who first documented the practice of female infanticide in India. In some parts of Rajasthan and Punjab, female infanticide was practiced in the early 19th century, and its incidence was high among the Jadeja Rajputs of Saurashtra in 1805. There were no daughters in a village in eastern Uttar Pradesh during the same period. Though the practice is of recent origin among the Bhati

community in Jaisalmer, their sex ratio is one of the lowest in the world (approximately 550). Contemporary cases of female infanticide can be traced in parts of western Gujarat, Bihar, and Madhya Pradesh. The state of Tamil Nadu tops the chart of female infanticide cases. It is reported in the districts of Salem, Dharmapuri and Madhurai.

Female Infanticide in Tamil Nadu was first highlighted in the national media in 1985 by the leading newsmagazine 'India Today', which reported the existence of the practice in Usilampatti, Madhurai district. This practice was primarily prevalent among Kallars, the dominant caste of this area. In the nearly 300 poor hamlets of the Usilampatti, as many as 196 girls died under suspicious circumstances in 1993. This report shocked the public because; women in Tamil Nadu are known to be better educated and to have a greater degree of autonomy than their counterparts in northern India.

A study of Tamil Nadu by the Community Service Guild of Madras similarly found that "female infanticide is rampant" in the state, though only among Hindu (rather than Moslem or Christian) families. "Of the 1,250 families covered by the study, 740 had only one girl child and 249 agreed directly that they had done away with the unwanted girl child. More than 213 of the families had more than one male child whereas half the respondents had only one daughter."

In Tamil Nadu, Female infanticide which is practiced by various groups, such as Vellala Gounders, Padiyachi Gounders, Parayars, Thevars, Pallars, Kallars, and some groups of scheduled castes. Especially, this practice is more prevalent among Kallars community. These communities were use new techniques and kill babies, such study show that, baby's father went to the field plucked a handful of oleander berries that are known for their lethal poison, and returned home. Baby mother mashed them into a milky paste and fed her crying infant with the substance. The parents then shut the small door of their hut, sat outside, and waited for the poison to do its work. Within an hour the baby began to twitch and tremble fitfully. Slowly she started spouting blood through her mouth and nose. The parent heard her whining. A few more minutes, and all was quiet. They dug up a little patch of ground inside, brought and buried the dead baby. In a report, Mother says, "I lay on my bed weak after childbirth. My mother-in-law picked up the baby and started feeding her milk. I knew what she was doing. I cried and tried to stop her. But she had already given her milk laced with yerakkam paal [the poisonous juice of the oleander plant]. Within minutes, the baby turned blue and died," Karuppayee says matter-of-factly."

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of the present study are as follows;

- ✓ To analyse the causes for female infanticide
- ✓ To analyse what type of method are used to kill the girl babies.
- ✓ To analyse the socio-economic condition of the family.
- ✓ To analyse the role of government to eradicate the female infanticide.

II. METHODOLOGY

The study is based on both primary and secondary source of data. Salem and Madhurai districts have been selected for field work; I have collected data from Paraipatti, Ayodhypatti and Chulivenadhanpatti of Usilampatti block, Madhurai district. However, I have gathered information from Sethukuli, Karakadu. Ahekadu villages of Salem district. However, necessary information has been gathered from these districts. From each district 30 respondents have been chosen and total of 60 respondents have been the source of primary information.

CAUSES OF FEMALE INFANTICIDE

Various causes are responsible factor for female infanticide. such as, Preference for the male child, people believe that, the absence of male progeny will deprive them of salvation, they also believe that boys will bear the parents burden in their old age, the male baby will get a social status, ignorance and poverty of the people, strong bias against girls under poverty condition, the low status of women, decreasing fertility an consequent intensification of son preference, spread of the practice of dowry across all caste groups, hypergamous marriage, the green revolution and the resulting marginalization of women in agriculture, and a shift to cash cropping. Another reason for female infanticide was the superstitious belief that if you kill a female child, the next one is sure to be a male.

III. METHODS OF FEMALE INFANTICIDE

Various brutal methods are adopted by parents to kill the female infant. Usually, midwives are hired to carry out the task, who feed milk laced with the sap of poisonous plants or pesticides to the infant, feed salt to increase their blood pressure or even stuff the infants into clay pots. In some cases female infants are starved or dehydrated by parents. However, various methods are use and kill the babies. Such as,

- ✓ Within one or two days after the birth of the child, it is wrapped tightly in blanket or a thick bed sheet and suffocated to death.
- ✓ A few grains of paddy are mixed with mothers breast milk collected in a glass. When the child is given this milk, the grains of paddy stuck up in the throat and make the child choke for breath and kill it.
- ✓ A sleeping child is covered with a wet, thin cloth so that it becomes breathless and dies of suffocation.
- ✓ One such novel method is feeding hot, spicy chicken soup to the babies; they writhe and scream in pain for a few hours, and then die.
- ✓ In yet another chilling infanticide, the umbilical chord is let loose, leading to excessive bleeding and eventual death.
- ✓ Another brutal method of suffocation the baby by placing it beneath a pedestal fan at full blast has stumped, and then baby immediately dies. Some study show that kalli milk and tobacco juice given to the baby, kill the babies.

IV. ROLE OF THE GOVERNMENT

When the leading newsmagazine India Today exposes female infanticide in Usilampatti in 1986, the then government asserted that the practice was confined only to that particular place in the state. Moreover, the government of Tamil Nadu reportedly brought false and baseless charges against the Society for Integrated Rural Development (SIRD), an NGO based in Usilampatti that was instrumental in getting the information published. This apparent form harassment was presumably meant to discourage them from continuing to publicize the issue.

In contrast, the response of the government of Tamil Nadu in 1992, under Chief Minister Jayalalitha was different in the existence of the practice in the state was acknowledged. Earlier that year the state government had launched the Cradle Babies scheme, whereby families were asked to abandon unwanted female infants in cradles provided for that purpose in government primary health centers. In 1992, 77 girls were left in cradles in the Salem district.

The Government launched another program called Jayalalitha Protection Scheme for Girl Child in October 1992. The goal of the scheme was the total elimination of female infanticide by the year 2000. Under its provisions, a poor family with one or two girls and no sons would be eligible for monetary incentives if one parent agreed to be sterilized. Money given in the name of the infant girl would be held in a fixed deposit account until she reached 21 years of age. Further, when the girl went to school, the family would periodically receive grant for educational expenses. This scheme was intended to cover 20,000 families every year. In Salem district 614 girls actually received this benefit over a period of eighteen months. The government also committed itself to undertaking the identification of high risk areas where the practice was prevalent.

SUGGESTIONS

- ✓ Provide counseling to mothers in rural areas.
- ✓ Provide incentives.
- ✓ Provide healthcare and education facilities.
- ✓ Create awareness among women.
- ✓ Government has implemented some programs to upliftment of female children

V. CONCLUSION

We all are proud citizens of India. The need of hour is to realize our responsibilities and give a halt to this evil crime. What can we do to curb the brutal and undesirable practice of mass killing girls? A determined drive can initiate a spark to light the lamp and show the world that we all are part of the great Mother India. The practice of killing the girl child is a cruel and abominable act that must be stopped. The only way for that is to spread awareness and make people realize the consequences of not saving their daughter. So wake up join campaigns launched by UNICEF and the Indian government and make your country a just one.

Various Non-government organizations have intervened at various stages and have initiated several programs to prevent female infanticide like providing counseling to mothers in rural areas, monetary incentives, and healthcare and education facilities. But is spreading awareness and providing these facilities enough to eradicate an evil that is present since ages in our country. We call ourselves a developed nation but when it comes to social evils we are still not independent.

REFERENCES

- [1] Das Gupta M. Selective discrimination against female children in Rural Punjab, Population and development Review.13:77, 1987.
- [2] Iyengar p, Female Infanticide: sex ration in Tamil Nadu dips. Times of India 30 Jan 1993.
- [3] Malavika Karlekar, "The girl child in India: does she have any rights?," Canadian Woman Studies, March 1995
- [4] Sahu George, Rajaratnam Abel, B D Miller, Female Infanticide in Rural South India, Economic and Political weekly, May 30, 1992.
- [5] Sheela Rani Chunkant- V.B. Athrey, Female in Tamil Nadu, Economic and Political Weekly, April 26, 1997.
- [6] Venkatramani, Female Infanticide, India Today, Vol 31, 15 June 1986.
- [7] Viswanath Female Infanticide and the Lewa Kanbis of Gujarat in the Nineteenth Century, The Indian Economic and Social History Review, Vol 10, No 4 1973.
- [8] Vineeta chawla "where are the girls? Female infanticide in India", youthkiawaaz.com