

Female Feticide – A Quest for Survival

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Abstract

A natural balance is visible within every object and creature of the nature, but the humans have disturbed this balance by exploiting the nature for their own selfishness. On account of this, he has not only disturbed the natural balance for industrial development by polluting the environment but also committed an inhuman act by reducing the sex ratio of males and females. The main reason for the excessive downfall in the male-female sex ratio during the last few decades is the female feticide. Due to technological advancement, the sex determination test for the developing fetus has now become easy.

According to a report published by UNICEF, entitled "Bharat ki Balika: ek jhalak", out of 10 million girls born in India, 25% of girls die before giving birth and every 6th death occurs due to gender discrimination, sexual exploitation and violence against females. Out of 6, 1 girl doesn't celebrate her 12th birthday. In 402 locations in India, the mortality rate of women is higher than men. There is no second opinion that today Indian women are making remarkable contributions in the fields of science, technical education and other areas, but if we look into the ground reality, we find it quite disappointing because the gender-based discrimination in the Indian society is still deep-rooted. The Indian society is still very reluctant towards the girl's birth. According to the data of the 2011 census, the sex ratio in the age group of 0-6 years was 927 which shows the downfall in the girl population as compared to boys. Today, the increasing cases of female feticide have transformed into a burning social problem which is the root cause of many other serious issues. On account of this, the population of women is decreasing day by day.

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What is female feticide?

The term, ‘female feticide’ means, killing the female fetus in the mother’s womb. It is defined as aborting a female fetus after a sex determination test. Ultra-sonography and Fetoscopy help determine abnormalities in the fetus and abortion is done, if it is a girl. The definition of feticide is - “Feticide is the abortion of a female fetus, beyond the legal procedure”.

Female feticide is the selective abortion/elimination of the girl child in the womb itself, done deliberately by the mother, after the detection of the child’s gender through medical means. This is usually done under familial pressure from the husband or the in-laws or even the woman’s parents. Unplanned pregnancy is generally the reason behind abortion. However, female feticide is a far more heinous crime than the aged old practice of killing an unwanted child, even before it is born.

Like many societies around the world, India is too patriarchal in nature. A set hierarchical system prevails in all spheres of the social order. The fanatic obsession with the male sex, though is one of a kind, right from the ancient scriptures, one finds instances where men are glowingly praised as the key to continuing the family lineage. A girl is forced to undergo multiple pregnancies and (or) abortion, until she fulfills her lifelong goal of being a breeding machine that produces male offspring as per the needs of the family.

Objectives of the study

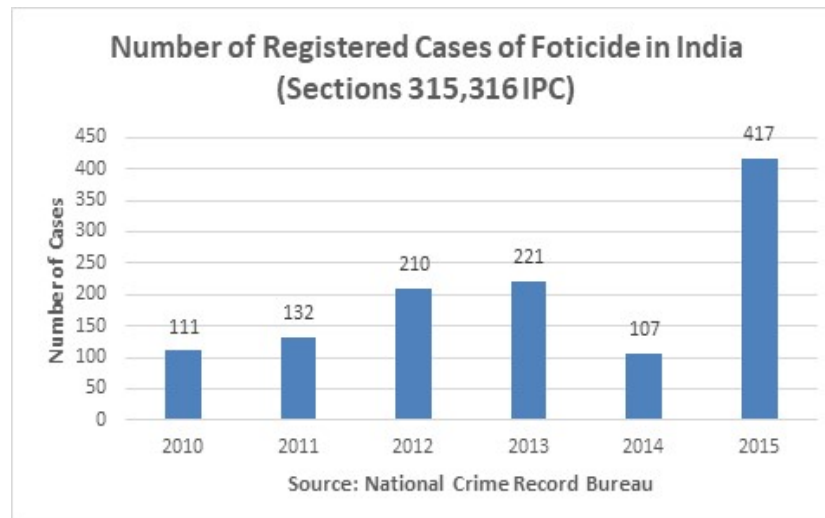
An objective is very important for the research study as it makes the research meaningful and predictable. The specific objectives of the study are as follows:

- i) To find out the responsible factors for female feticide in Indian society.
- ii) To find out the consequences of female feticide in Indian society.
- iii) To analyze the government’s steps to counter the female feticide.

Current scenario of female feticide in India

In India, the progress in the Ultrasound technique took place in the year 1979. Although the expansion of this new technology was at a slow pace in the beginning, yet it started expanding speedily and globally from the year 2000’ onwards. In India, this technique was misused by determining the sex of the fetus, leading to the termination of female fetus in large numbers. According to an assessment, more than 10 million cases of female feticide have taken place in India till the date, due to superstitions and backwardness in the society about the birth of a girl child.

Figure-1

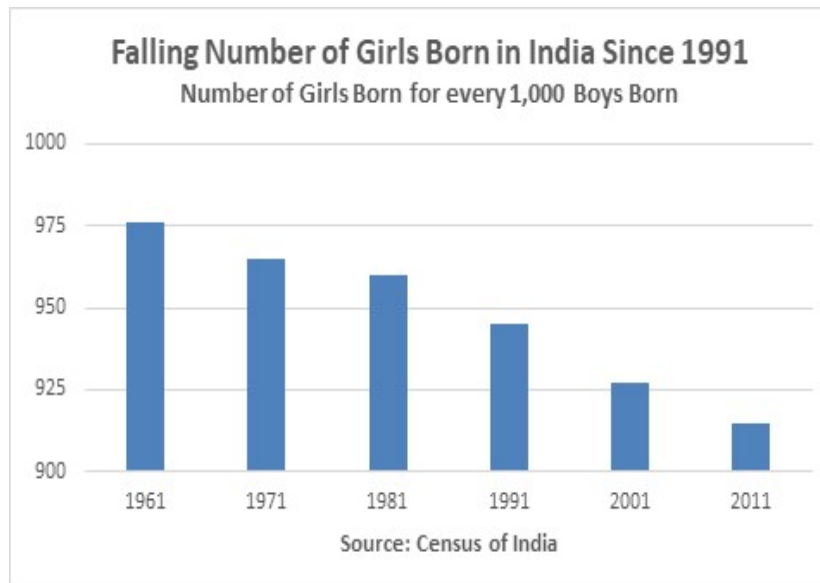


According to the National Crime Record Bureau, a total of 417 cases of female feticide were registered in India, during 2015, out of which most of the cases belonged to the states of Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Haryana. At present, female feticide has emerged as a burning problem, on account of which a fall in the gender ratio can be easily noticed almost throughout India which is a clear proof of increasing cases of human rights violations and atrocities on the female community.

Child sex ratio and female feticide in Indian states

The census of 2001 indicates that while there is an increase in the overall child sex ratio of the country, however the child sex ratio has dropped from 945 females per 1000 males in 1991 to 927 females per 1000 males in 2001 and 940 females per 1000 males in 2011. It is estimated that 50 million girls and women are missing from India's population because of the termination of the female fetus. The female feticide in India has now increased by 49.2%.

Figure-2



The frequency of female feticide in India is assumed to be an estimation derived from its high birth sex ratio, i.e. the ratio of boys to girls at birth. The natural ratio is assumed to be between 103 and 107 and any number above is considered as suggestive of female feticide. According to the recent Indian census, the sex ratio in the age group of 0 to 6 years in India has risen from 102.4 males per 100 females in 1961 to 104.2 in 1980 and 107.5 males per 100 females in 2001 to 109.9 females in 2011.

The child sex ratio is within the normal range in all the eastern and southern states in India but it is significantly higher in certain western and particularly northwest states, such as Maharashtra, Haryana, Jammu and Kashmir (115, 120 and 116) as of 2011' respectively. In the census, the child sex ratio in the western states of Maharashtra and Rajasthan was found to be 113, 112 in Gujarat and 111 in Uttar Pradesh.

The following table presents the child sex ratio data for Indian states and Union territories, according to the data of the 2011 census of India in the age group of 0-1. The data suggests that 18 states/UT had a child sex ratio higher than 107 at birth, implying excess males at birth and/or excess female mortalities after birth before she reaches at the age of 1-13, 3 states/ UT had normal child sex ratio in the age group of 0-1 and 4 states / UT had birth sex ratio less than 103, implying excess females at birth and/or excess male mortalities after birth but before it reaches at the age of 1.

TABLE - 1

State/UT	Boys (0-1 age) 2011 Census	Girls (0-1 age) 2011 Census	Sex ratio (Boys per 100 girls)
INDIA	10,633,298	9,677,936	109.9
JAMMU & KASHMIR	154,761	120,551	128.4
HARYANA	254,326	212,408	119.7
PUNJAB	226,929	193,021	117.6
UTTARAKHAND	92,117	80,649	114.2
DELHI	135,801	118,896	114.2
MAHARASHTRA	946,095	829,465	114.1
LAKSHADWEEP	593	522	114.0
RAJASTHAN	722,108	635,198	113.7
GUJARAT	510,124	450,743	113.2
UTTAR PRADESH	1,844,947	1,655,612	111.4
CHANDIGARH	8,283	7,449	111.2
DAMAN & DIU	1,675	1,508	111.1
BIHAR	1,057,050	958,907	110.3
HIMACHAL PRADESH	53,261	48,574	109.6
MADHYA PRADESH	733,148	677,139	108.3
GOA	9,868	9,171	107.6
JHARKHAND	323,923	301,266	107.5
MANIPUR	22,852	21,326	107.2
ANDHRA PRADESH	626,538	588,309	106.5
TAMIL NADU	518,251	486,720	106.5
ODISHA	345,960	324,949	106.5
DADRA & NAGAR HAVELI	3,181	3,013	105.6
WEST BENGAL	658,033	624,760	105.0
KARNATAKA	478,346	455,299	105.1
ASSAM	280,888	267,962	104.8

The Indian census data suggests that there is a positive correlation between abnormal sex ratio and better socio-economic status and literacy. This may be connected to the dowry system in India where dowry deaths occur when a girl is seen as a financial burden. Urban India has a higher child sex ratio than rural India, according to 1991, 2001 and 2011 census data, implying a higher prevalence of female feticide in urban India.

Responsible factors for female feticide in Indian society

Although our country and society have abandoned many customs and evil traditions during the last 70 years after independence, yet the desire for a son as a child is such a custom that is clearly visible in every section of our society. This is a sorrowful fact that not only the illiterate, but the literate persons are also fully affected by the mentality of such discrimination. There are many such incidences, where numerous female fetuses are found in the agriculture fields, streams, heaps of garbage etc. A female feticide is an immoral act that has been practiced for a long due to socio-cultural and economic reasons. The reasons for female feticide are as follows:

- **Dowry system:** The general perception is that the cost of marriage and dowry has gone up, so the daughters have become a greater financial burden. The dowry system is invariably blamed for female feticide. We are not convinced that dowry alone is the main cause of female feticide. Families that are well-off and don't have to depend on dowry to augment their income are also opting for female feticide.

- **Ancient traditions:** There are many rituals in our society that are to be performed by the son of the family. Our society makes it very necessary to have at least one son. Men are regarded as protectors in our society, so this feeling tends the families to go for sex-selective abortion. This is also a myth that the daughter is the property of someone else and in the future, only the son will take the name of the family and its dynasty forward. These factors are responsible for female feticide.
- **Technological advancement:** The new technology and technological advancement have also encouraged the female feticide. The advanced Ultrasound technique was introduced in India in the year 1979 and the female feticide began in the year 1990. Although the expansion of this technique was very slow in the beginning, yet it took a big leap in the year 2000'.
- **Legal authentication of abortion:** In India, abortion has got the legal authentication but presently, illegal sex determination tests and abortion are the main reasons for the falling sex ratio in India. The new bride of the family is pressurized to bring forth a son and due to this reason, she is forced to undertake a sex determination test and in case, she is detected with a female fetus, her pregnancy is terminated without her consent.
- Lack of awareness about the PCPNDT Act and its ineffective implementation are the main factors of female feticide in contemporary Indian society.
- Some of the greedy doctors do this heinous act to fulfill their money desires.
- Lack of education, poverty and the caste system are also important factors for female feticide in Indian society.

Consequences of female feticide in Indian society

There is a continuous downfall in the sex ratio in India. If we trust on the claims of various NGOs working on the issue of female feticide, then we find that 11,117 girls have died in India during the last 5 years (2010-2015) which needs to be prevented in time, otherwise its consequences will be dire.

United Nations Organization has warned that the increasing cases of female feticide in India may create a population-related crisis. The incidences of sex-related violence on account of less number of women in the society and child abuse, along with the unethical relationship of wives with other men may increase and a critical situation might emerge in the society due to the devaluation in the social ethics. Therefore, the incidences of female feticide increasing constantly for the last few decades will lead to a far-reaching impact on the society. Many such impacts on the society are already visible which follows as:

- The greatest drawback of female feticide is the unbalanced sex ratio in the population. If timely efforts are not made to maintain the balance of the sex ratio, then it will become very difficult to handle the situation in the times to come.
- According to the Red Cross Society, due to the shortage of girls in Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan, numerous boys have crossed the appropriate age of their marriage.
- The illegal gender-based termination of pregnancy is likely to increase its business up to Rs. 1000 crore shortly.
- The crime against women, such as rape, kidnapping etc. will be increased.
- If the population of women keeps on decreasing constantly then the whole country will run short of girls. Under these circumstances, even the son who is supposed to carry the dynasty forward will not be able to take the family into the next generation. Therefore, the existence of society and the family system may come to an end due to the lack of daughters in the society.
- The tendency to import wives from abroad or human trafficking will start anchoring its roots permanently.
- The tendency of forceful kidnapping and the practice of polyandry will be increased.
- The illegal trafficking and prostitution will get the encouragement.
- The rate of social imbalance in every sector of the society will be increased.
- The female feticide may lead to human trafficking which will make the lives of many worse and then the spirit of violence, dishonor and revenge will be on the rise.

- The United Nations has recently issued a statement that the increasing rate of female feticide in India will cause many types of crimes in the country. Owing to the low population of women in the society, apart from the violence against women, the crimes against children and child marriage will be re-established.

Therefore, at present, the situation of an imbalanced sex ratio in India might convert into more violent in the times to come, which is a matter of concern for everyone. In order to maintain the balance in the sex ratio, the government should bring strict legislation and schemes which will prove to be beneficial in preventing the violence against women.

The efforts done/ steps taken by the government to prevent female feticide

The following steps are taken/efforts done by the government to prevent female feticide:

- Before 1972, the abortion was illegal in India, except in the case of saving the life of a pregnant woman. In 1964, a committee was formed under the chairmanship of Mr. Shantilal to study the issue of making the abortion law more flexible. In 1966, a medical abortion act was constituted by this committee and a legal act by the name of MTP Act 1971 came into existence to make the abortion legal for the first time in India but nowadays, the misuse of this act is increasing day by day.
- Afterward, the previous Diagnosis Technology Act, regulations and misuse prevention act, 1994 was implemented. Under this act, a provision of 3 years imprisonment and a fine of Rs. 10,000/- on being caught in the first instance, 5 years imprisonment and a fine of Rs. 50,000/- on the second instance of such illegal act was made. Under the 1996, amendment act 2002 and subsequent Amendment Act 2003, any person, clinic or diagnostic center, responsible for female feticide would have to keep the whole record of such acts and if any failure or error is found on his part, then the concerned person or the center is likely to be punished for the violation of sub-sections of section 5 & 6 of this act, unless he defends all the allegations and scot-free successfully.
- Under the section 312 and the subsequent sections up to 315 of the Indian Penal Code, there are various provisions for the prevention of female feticide. Under the section 315, there is a provision for 10 years imprisonment or penalty or both to the concerned person or center.
- Considering the falling sex ratio (1000/914) in the census 2011, the Hon'ble Supreme Court has asked the state governments to continue their constant efforts to prevent female feticide. Many state governments are making constant efforts at their own level to prevent female feticide. In order to balance the sex ratio in Uttar Pradesh, the Hon'ble High Court has issued an order to the U.P. Government that the investigation of all the cases related to female feticide should be completed within 3 months. The Haryana government has made a provision to prevent female feticide that anyone who informs about any incidence of female feticide will be rewarded Rs. 1,00,000/- and the Punjab government has also made a provision of rewarding Rs. 2 lakh to the informer of such incidence.
- The Prime Minister of India, Sri Narendra Modi has launched the scheme of “**Beti bachao, beti padao**” on 22nd January, 2015 to prevent the incidences of female feticide and presently, this scheme is being implemented actively in more than 61 districts. To balance the falling sex ratio, the Government of India has tried to associate the girls with education by providing them with scholarships.
- The Indian government has started “Sukanya Smridhi Yojna” for the girls, under which saving accounts can be opened in the banks and post offices.
- Another scheme, named “Ladli Yojna” has been started by the Indian government to prevent the increasing rate of female feticide.
- In order to bring the sex ratio under control, the Haryana government has made strict provisions for its health services in Panipat for the successful implementation of the “**Beti bachao, beti padao**” scheme, the impact of which can be observed. Here, the sex ratio was 730 females, per 1000 males in 2014 which became 810 males against 1000 males in 2015. It is obvious that strict provisions have been introduced by the government to prevent female feticide, despite that, efforts are still on. Therefore, the concerned legal provisions and acts are needed to be implemented more strictly by the state governments.

Suggestions and solutions for preventing female feticide

- In the 21st century, when we talk of ‘**Sabka Saath, sab ka vikas**’, it becomes our duty to impart the right to education, health, equal opportunity and freedom to women, so that they could be able to fully develop themselves within their own capabilities.
- In order to tackle the situation of gender imbalance, the society at large would have to take significant steps in this regard by abandoning their conventional thinking, traditions, myths & superstitions because the mindset of the society can’t be changed overnight. In order to achieve this objective, every section and group of the society in our country would have to make constant efforts to minimize the gender discrimination at the social, economic, religious and cultural levels.
- The role of women’s education can be most significant in restricting and controlling the female feticide. Therefore, we need to focus our attention on the women’s education and provide the scholarship facilities to the poor female students by making the women’s education necessary which will help promote the women’s education.
- The women need to be made economically self-dependent and they should be encouraged to get the employment by providing them with more and more employment opportunities. In order to achieve this, the government should adopt the policy of reservation and protective discrimination.
- The women should be encouraged to make their own organization at the local level. Non-governmental organizations are also making continuous efforts to minimize the female feticide and play an active role in the process of women’s empowerment.
- The heinous crimes and the problems like female feticide can be minimized by providing education, empowerment to women and legal rights to them in the property and land too.
- We should set up a front against those symbols that are used during the medical procedure for the female feticide. There should be a concrete policy-related manual for the medical practitioners.
- The marketing of medical equipments should be stopped for the illegal sex determination test and abortion.
- After a definite interval, an assessment of the situation, related to women’s mortality rate, gender proportion, illiteracy and their participation in the economy should be made.
- In order to stop female feticide, more activities are needed in the rural areas. Therefore, special attention will be required towards the rural population. The ASHA and Anganwadi activists, posted in the rural areas and primary health centers might play their significant roles in restricting female feticide.
- In order to make the youth generation aware, the programs like awareness campaigns, workshops, seminars and street plays should be organized regularly.
- In this era of information technology, the internet and social media should be used as the medium to spread the message against female feticide.
- The rickshaw puller might also be an effective medium to get the information regarding female feticide because he is the person who takes the pregnant woman to the doctor’s clinic for an abortion.
- The students in the school and colleges should be taught about the future risks in the society due to female feticide.
- The slogans and billboards also play a significant role in reducing the instances of female feticide.
- The heinous crime, like female feticide can also be restricted through the effective mediums like radio, television, help centers, encouraging poems, songs, stories, plays (related to female feticide) etc.
- The law pertaining to female feticide won’t be effective until it gets public support. With the public support only, any crime can be prevented or its incidences can be minimized. The collective participation of both the family and society should be ensured.

Conclusion

This is obvious that in spite of so much effort of the government, various legislations and legal provisions, the population of women is rapidly depleting which indicates that while the religion and the tradition of a person decide every important event of his life, however merely bringing new legislations can’t be sufficient.

Therefore, it is imperative that every section and group of the society comes forward and inculcates positive thoughts toward the solution of this social stigma, only then this burning problem can be resolved. In order to get rid of the problem, like female feticide, the women would have to come forward by becoming aware. Only then the violation of human rights in the society could be stopped undoubtedly. Moreover, the women should get equal status in the society to men, so that the all-around development of the country and the society could take place. Women should get the full opportunity to ensure their participation in the nation-building. Therefore, through this present study, we have been able to throw light upon different aspects of violence and injustice against women and their empowerment and at the same time, we are quite hopeful that we shall be able to implement these aspects in our deeds too, so that we could get a significant achievement towards the violence against women and their empowerment.

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