



SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF FEMALE FOETICIDE

Introduction:

Male and female is the pillars of the society and they are inevitable for the survival of society. They perform explicit social role and function for society so that sustains the social structure. One of the most significant social functions is that they systematized family by relation of marriage which is the vital social structure and primary group as well as center of society. The dynamic social function of family is procreation and socialization of newly birth child which is essential requisite for the existence of society. It is expectation that the proportion of male and female child must be equal and some extent it to be natural.

Child and society:

Of course, there have been so many customs and beliefs prevailing in different society about birth of child which affects the rate and proportion of male and female child. The numbers of child, the gender of baby born in future, their status and role etc. are always decides by the customs and beliefs of particular society from centuries. The customs and beliefs about the child are extremely dominant and widespread in traditional society like India. The child is the grace of god, important of the birth of son for the *moksha* of ancestor and perform of certain rites and rituals as well as sustains the generations are the established by custom in Indians from centuries. Although the birth of son is more prefers than girl child by Indians the girl child never ignored by the ancient India. In Indian culture and civilization, the girl child represents beauty, auspiciousness and prosperity. She is worshipped as Dawn, the bringer of hope, but with the advent of the Muslim rule the social status of the women was declining day by day. So number of social problems related to women were created and developed in Indian society. One of them social problem related to women is female foeticide which invented in medieval India particularly in Rajputs (Kshatriya). Although the custom of Dudhpiti was prevalent in Rajputs only, the other Indians have never ignored the birth of child.

The situation has succeeded for centuries in India even though the proportion of men and women in India has been remained same and equal. However, the census data of last few decades has revealed the unequal sex ratio especially the lower numbers of female compare to male. It is the result of the social customs, social attitudes, female foeticide or negligence of the girl child. The social problem of female foeticide is one of the major and complicated one in Indian society, especially it is more critical in specific states as well as Gujarat. So I attempt to analyze the social implications of the problem of female foeticide in the present article.

Methodology:

The article is based on the interpretation of secondary source of data especially on census data as well as the observation of Ahmedabad and Anand district of Gujarat where the problem of female foeticide is extremely worried form. I have derived some social implications and generalizations of female foeticide after the analysis of the census data and observation.

The problem:

Female foeticide is the abortion of a female foetus outside of legal methods. "Atrocities against a girl child start even before she is born, with the connivance of greedy doctors, lakh of parents in certain

parts of the country in their eagerness to have sons, get rid of daughters through sex determination tests, indulging in the crime of female foeticide.”¹ It is the physical, biological and mental exploitation and harassment of women as well as girl child. So it is a cruel practice towards the mother, woman and girl. Female foeticide takes place when a foetus is aborted after it is determined to be female. Under this illegal practice, the sex of the unborn child is determined by using the technique of ultrasound and if it happens to be a female foetus, it is aborted through medicine or surgery.

It is one of the most widespread social evils in the India. It is deep-rooted in the patriarchal family and customs mindset where boys are preferred over girls for various irrational reasons. Importance of birth of son and the custom of dowry have engendered the undesirable approach to birth of girl child. The ultrasound technology has been facilitating and making severe the problem. Shri Ghulam Nabi Azad, Union Minister for Health and Family Welfare stated in a written reply to the Rajya Sabha on 11th February 2014, that “Some of the reasons for neglect of girl child and low child sex ratio are son preference and the belief that it is only the son who can perform the last rites, that lineage and inheritance runs through the male line, sons will look after parents in old age, men are the bread winners etc. Exorbitant dowry demand is another reason for female foeticide/infanticide. Small family norm coupled with easy availability of sex determination tests may be a catalyst in the declining child sex ratio, further facilitated by easy availability of Pre-conception sex selection facilities.”⁴

“Ultrasound technology arrived in the China and India in 1979, but its expansion was slower in India. Ultrasound sex discernment technologies were first introduced in major cities of India in 1980s, its use expanded in India's urban regions in 1990s and became widespread in 2000s. Female foeticide has been linked to the arrival, in the early 1990s, of affordable ultrasound technology and its widespread adoption in India. Obstetric ultrasonography, either transvaginally or trans abdominally, checks for various markers of fetal sex. It can be performed at or after week 12 of pregnancy. At this point, $\frac{3}{4}$ of fetal sexes can be correctly determined, according to a 2001 study. Accuracy for males is approximately 50% and for females almost 100%. When performed after week 13 of pregnancy, ultrasonography gives an accurate result in almost 100% of cases. Estimates for female foeticide vary by scholar. One group estimates more than 10 million female fetuses may have been illegally aborted in India since 1990s and 500,000 girls were being lost annually due to female foeticide. MacPherson estimates that 100,000 abortions every year continue to be performed in India solely because the fetus is female.”²

Magnitude:

The recognizable result of female foeticide is unequal male-female sex ratio where number of females is declining compare to males. So I focus on the census data of last six decades of male-female sex ratio. The numbers of female compare to par 1000 male was 946 in 1951 census, 941 in 1961 census, 930 in 1971 census, 934 in 1981 census, 927 in 1991 census, 933 in 2001 census and 943 in 2011 census. The data show the unequal sex ratio where the proportion of girl child was constantly declining till the 1991 census. After the realization of the problem and its magnitudes, the Government of India enacted the law (1994 & 2004) in stringent form and applied consciously as well as started the campaign of Save Girl Child. Although the ratio is well again in last two decades, yet it is lower and unequal many States/U.T. which can be realize by the following table.

Distribution as Rank of States/U.T According to Sex Ratio in India

Rank	States/U.T.	Sex Ratio	Rank	Child Sex Ratio
1	Kerala	1084	7	964
2	Pondicherry	1037	6	967
3	Tamil Nadu	996	14	943
4	Andhra Pradesh	993	18	939
5	Chhattisgarh	991	4	969
6	Meghalaya	989	2	970
7	Manipur	985	20	930

8	Odisha	979	17	941
9	Mizoram	976	3	970
10	Goa	973	16	942
11	Karnataka	973	12	948
12	Himachal Pradesh	972	24	909
13	Uttarakhand	963	28	890
14	Tripura	960	9	957
15	Assam	958	8	962
16	West Bengal	950	11	956
17	Jharkhand	948	13	948
18	Lakshadweep	946	23	911
19	Arunachal Pradesh	938	1	972
20	Nagaland	931	15	943
21	Madhya Pradesh	931	22	918
22	Maharashtra	929	27	894
23	Rajasthan	928	30	888
24	Gujarat	919	29	890
25	Bihar	918	19	935
26	Uttar Pradesh	912	26	902
27	Punjab	895	34	846
28	Sikkim	890	10	957
29	Jammu and Kashmir	889	33	862
30	Haryana	861	35	834
31	Andaman & Nicobar Islands	876	5	968
32	Delhi	868	32	871
33	Chandigarh	818	31	880
34	Dadra and Nagar Haveli	774	21	926
35	Daman and Diu	710	25	904

Source: 2011 Census of India³

The above table shows that male-female sex ratio and child sex ratio as per rank of different states and under territory of union of India according to census of India, 2011. It is clear from above table that male-female sex ratio and child sex ratio is uneven and diverse in different states and under territory of union of India. I like to analyze first the male-female sex ratio. The Kerala state (1084) and Pondicherry U.T. (1037) has the highest sex ratio where the proportion of females is higher than males while Daman & Diu (710), Dadra & Nagar Haveli (774) and Chandigarh U.T. (818) and Delhi state (868) have the lowest sex ratio in India. The table shows that half of the states and U.T. has higher male-female sex ratio (States/U.T. of 1-18 rank) than national average (greater than 943) while the others have lower male-female sex ratio (States/U.T. of 19-35 rank) than the national average (lower than 943). That mean there are diverse beliefs, customs and practices prevailed in different states which reflected in the different sex ratio as well as child sex ratio.

The above table shows differentiate child sex ratio as male-female sex ratio in the various states/U.T. of India. In India, the Child Sex Ratio is defined as the number of females per thousand males in the age group 0–6 years in a human population. According to 2011 census child sex ratio is 919 female children compare to 1000 male child (943 male-female sex ratio in 2011 census), who is the lowest ever in the Indian history. That mean the new generation wouldn't desire to born girl child compare to the old generation. Moreover, we can understand from above table that it is lower than of male-female sex ratio in most of the states and under territory of union of India.

From the ranking of various States/U.T. of India according to child sex ratio, we can derive the fact that States/U.T. of India who ranked from 1 to 21 have higher child sex ratio compare to national average

(greater than 919), while the others (22 to 35 rank) have lower child sex ratio compare to national average (less than 919). We can derive the other fact from above table is that there are greater or minor differences between the male-female sex ratio and child sex ratio. There are just ten States/U.T. of India (respectively from higher to lower difference - Daman & Diu, Dadra & Nagar Haveli, Sikkim, Chandigarh, Arunachal Pradesh, Bihar, Nagaland, West Bengal, Assam and Delhi) where the child sex ratio is higher than the sex ratio. It was the remarkable effort against the female foeticide. Of course, it couldn't affect the overall child sex ratio of India because of most of them are small States/U.T. while the bigger States/U.T. have lower number of child sex ratio.

The Gujarat state has been suffering the lower number of male-female sex ratio (919 which is lower than national average of 943 and ranked at 24th according to number of sex ratio) as well as child sex ratio (890 which is lower than national average of 919 and ranked at 29th according to number of child sex ratio). The male-female sex ratio as well as child sex ratio is different in various districts of Gujarat as different states/U.T. of India. The sex ratio is very high subsequently in the Tapi (1007), Dang (1006), Dahod (990), Amreli (964), Navsari (961), Narmada (961) etc. districts while it is the lowest in the Surat (787), Ahmedabad (904) and Kachchh (908) districts. If we look at the child sex ratio, it can be find the variations in different districts. As per data it found in remarkable higher than state average (890) in the Dang (964), Tapi (953), Dahod (948), Narmada (941), Panchmahal (932), Valsad (925), Navsari (923), Bharuch (920) and so on, while it is lowest in the Surat (835), Mahesana (842), Gandhinagar (847) and Ahmedabad (857). The Anand district has 925 sex ratio, while child sex ratio is 884 according to 2011 census.

Relation:

The entire data indicates the unequal sex ratio and child sex ratio which distinguished by many factors like, caste, class, religion, generation, community, state as well as districts. The researches to examine the relation between the factors and the sex ratio will be very useful in the elimination of the problem of female foeticide. I have attempts to analyze the data in the direction which is follow.

- The problem of female foeticide is the major reason of unequal sex ratio which is the outcome of social, cultural and religious beliefs and customs as well as the development of medical science. As a result the male-female sex ratio as well as child sex ratio is has been decreasing in India and Gujarat. Of course, it was slightly increased due to the conscious and comprehensive attempts like, enactment of strict law and its implementation, movement of save girl child, attitudinal change to female foeticide at national level as well as in some States/U.T.
- The above data express the remarkable difference between sex ratio and child sex ratio. It implies that the new generation wouldn't desire to born girl child compare to old generation and it facilitate by obstetric ultrasonography, either transvaginally or transabdominally, checks for various markers of fetal sex. Thus, the new technology is the major reason of female foeticide. So "With increasing availability of sex screening technologies in India through the 1980s in urban India, and claims of its misuse, the Government of India passed the Pre-natal Diagnostic Techniques Act (PNDT) in 1994. This law was further amended into the Pre-Conception and Pre-natal Diagnostic Techniques (Regulation and Prevention of Misuse) (PCPNDT) Act in 2004 to deter and punish prenatal sex screening and female foeticide. However, there are concerns that PCPNDT Act has been poorly enforced by authorities."² Of course, the violation of any law is easy practice in India and it is violated by doctors as well as the people. The fact is that Pre-Conception and Pre-natal Diagnostic Test has been happened very secretly and it became very costly. The raid on gynecologist and sealed the ultrasonography machine haven't big news in nowadays.
- It seems that the new technology of medical science is mostly used by the new generation of urban educated, middle or higher middle class and higher castes where prevailed the social problem of dowry. So there may be differences in sex ratio according to caste, class, religion and community. The bride price have been prevailing in lower castes since the girls are the means of livelihood, girl child is always respectable in lower castes and class while the girl child are less welcome in the higher castes

due to the prevalence of dowry custom as well as son preference. However, it is a matter of independent research.

- The census data also identifies the dissimilarity of sex ratio according to community. The sex ratio is little higher in rural community (949) than urban area (929) of India according to 2011 census. There are variances in the both communities about child sex ratio as it is 923 in rural areas while 905 in urban area of Indian society according to 2011 census. There are so many facilities in cities of gynecologist and Pre-Conception and Pre-natal Diagnostic Test which is one of main reason of female foeticide.

The census data also specifies the variation of sex ratio according to religions. According to census 2011, it is highest in the Christians (1023) and Muslims (951) while in Hindus (939) and the lowest in the Sikhs (903). There is variation in child sex ratio according to religions too. According to census 2011, it is subsequently highest in the Christians (958), Muslims (943), Buddhist (933) and Hindus (913) while in the lowest in the Jains (889) and Sikhs (828). The data shows the remarkable differences between sex ratio and child sex ratio in all the religious community. Moreover, it indicates that the new generation wouldn't aspire in favor of the girl child compare to old generation of all the religious community. It is alarm for the Indian society and if we fail to control the problem, we must be face the critical social problems like, rape, kidnapping of girls as well as prostitution.

Social implications:

I have effort to derive some important social implications and generalization from the above data analysis and my observation. The numbers of girls to be very low compare to boys due to female foeticide or the other social reasons. The fact has created new social circumstance which I have observed like,

- The dowry is reducing, lessened or stopped. The bride price becomes custom instead of the dowry. Many peoples from Patidar and other castes of Charotar married to tribal or lower caste girl by giving the bride price almost to 1.5 lakhs to 2 lakhs. Sometimes such brides fleeing after the marriage of 2-3 months with stolen of money and jewelry.
- The exchange marriage became the custom and essential in so many castes like, Chaudhry, Bharwad, Rabari, Kumbhar and so on and families. The problem is here is that when family problem created in one household where the exchange marriage is happened, it impacts the social relations of other household as well. I have observed that in such cases the male suppressed by her wife and the husband tolerate it because of the well-being of her sister. If the problem can't be solved sometimes it led to divorce in both the household.
- When divorce happened, the female getting easily remarries sometimes unmarried male, compare than the male because of the lesser number of girls.
- The proportion of unmarried men who haven't been able to get a match is increased in some castes (Patidar and Kshatriya of Charotar) which lead them some illegal and anti-social practices like, teasing or harassment of the girls, develop the sexual relations with woman or prostitutes, rape or kidnapping of girls and sometimes on immature girls. Such males are threatened to society because they have no aim in life without of family.
- The age of marriage is increased especially in girls. They have established higher aspiration from future life mate. It is one of the reason of inter caste marriage too. It also affects the nature, relations and power structure of family. These kinds of social researches would be very interesting and helpful for sociology in India.
- It can observe the new attitude develops in the remarkable people who do not want the second child after the first birth of boy child because of socio-economic or personal imperatives.

Conclusion:

The problem of female foeticide is very crucial problem for the Indian society. It affected by social, cultural, economic, psychological and religious factors as well as the development of medical science and such studies will be very fruitful in the abolition of the problem. The significant outcome of the problem is the unequal sex ratio as well as child sex ratio which can be realized by census of India. So the Government of India enacted the law in strict form as well as the movement of Save Girl Child which led to the recovery of sex ratio in last two decades. Of course law and its implementation have some limitations and it's not alone able to eliminate the problem. Change in the mindset of people and socio-cultural customs is the best way to resolve the problem. The media as well as NGOs may play important role in the attitudinal shift of people. The caste panchayat and the religious group can play the imperative role in the resolve the problem. "The Sikh community has taken a welcome step in this regard with its highest religious body threatening to excommunicate anyone found guilty of female foeticide"¹ We should encourage and provide special facilities to those people who has only girl as child.

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