



## STATUS OF GIRL CHILD AND FEMALE FOETICIDE IN DEVBHUMI HIMACHAL PRADESH

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### ABSTRACT

*Human development is not complete without gender equality, and attention to women's entitlements. Even, human society is composed of both males and females. Both are of equal importance and are needed for the perpetuation of the society. Without one, the existence of the other is not possible. This is a universal fact that cannot be negated. Yet we find that women have been target of discriminations and unequal treatments in the society. Ours is a male dominated society and almost all cultures, practice discrimination against the girl child, not only from the earliest stage of life, throughout her childhood and into adulthood through the means of neglect of her health and nutrition, not providing her equal opportunities in education and social interaction etc. but even before her birth in the form of pre-birth sex selection and to abort the female foetus. Keeping in view, present study has been taken with the objectives to analysis the child sex ratio of Indian states and UTs which is in and around 900 (2001-2011) and to study the socio-economic causes for female foeticide in Himachal Pradesh. It is found in this study that the decreasing sex ratio in hill state is not only due to the culture, religion but may also be due to socio economic factors, which has created a serious problem of female foeticide.*

**Key Words:** Female Foeticide, Sex Determination, Discrimination, Unequal Treatment

## Introduction

In ancient India, the women enjoyed equal status with men in all fields of life, Mishra (2006). Works by ancient Indian grammarians such as Patanjali and Katyayana suggest that women were educated in the early Vedic period. Rigvedic verses suggest that the women married at a mature age and were probably free to select their husband. Women played an important part in India's independence struggle. Some of the famous freedom fighters include Bhikaji Cama, Dr. Annie Besant, Pritilata Waddedar, Vijayalakshmi Pandit, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, Aruna Asaf Ali, Sucheta Kriplani and Kasturba Gandhi. Other notable names include Muthulakshmi Reddy, Durgabai Deshmukh etc. The Rani of Jhansi Regiment of Subhash Chandra Bose's Indian National Army consisted entirely of women including Captain Lakshmi Sahgal. Sarojini Naidu, a poet and a freedom fighter, was the first Indian woman to become the President of the Indian National Congress and the first woman to become the governor of a state in India.

According to a 1991 World Bank report, women accounted for 94% of total employment in dairy production in India. Women constitute 51% of the total employed in forest-based small-scale enterprises. One of the most famous female business success stories is the Shri Mahila Griha Udyog Lijjat Papad. In 2006, Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw, who started Biocon - one of India's first biotech companies, was rated India's richest woman. Lalita Gupte and Kalpana Morparia (both were the only businesswomen in India who made the list of the Forbes World's Most Powerful Women), run India's second-largest bank, ICICI Bank. A woman is an architect of society. She establishes the institution of family life, builds the home, brings up the children and makes them good citizens. Her strength in totality contributes in the making of an ideal family, ideal society and an ideal state. After independence, the desired goals have still to be achieved. The ground realities still seem to be hostile to them. It has become essential for women to be politically empowered to achieve socio-economic justice.

The contradictory attitudes expressed about women in classical texts persist in contemporary society. On the one hand, they are regarded as the highest embodiment of purity and power- a symbol of religiousness and spirituality, on the other; they are viewed essentially as weak and dependent creatures requiring constant guidance and protection. Ritual considerations materially add to the desirability of the male. In the traditional scheme of Hindu life, the

attainment of salvation occupies the place of highest importance. For this it is necessary to complete all the rites ceremonies of the life cycle prescribed by dharma. In the patrilineal Hindu society, only a male can offer water to the spirits of the deceased ancestors; a son alone can perform the essential rites ensuring passage to heaven or attainment of salvation. This makes a male off-spring very desirable.

### **Amniocentesis and Sex selective abortion in India**

Amniocentesis and sex-selection in India has four decade history. The Government of India, as well as the medical research establishments from the 1960s identified reproductive biology as a major thrust area for R&D, as the hysteria about the population crisis began to affect perceptions of the Indian intelligentsia. The All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) was one of the major centers of research in this field and received substantial financial support for this purpose from National and international sources. The Institute also had a department of Human Cytogenetic, which found it possible to acquire access to some of the new sex selection technologies by riding the band-wagon of the population panic.

The revised MTP Act of 1975 allows medical termination of pregnancy (abortion) for any of the reasons such as -

- a) The pregnant woman has a serious medical disease or condition that would endanger her life if the pregnancy were to continue,
- b) Continuation of pregnancy would entail a substantial risk of physical and mental handicap to the newborn child,
- c) The pregnancy resulted from rape,
- d) The socio-economic circumstances of the mother would endanger the health of the newborn child,
- e) The pregnancy occurred because of failure of a contraceptive method.

By 1975, the AIIMS knew that the tests were being followed by abortion of female fetuses. An article, Jacobson (1975) in Indian Pediatrics commented that such abortion of female fetuses might not be acceptable to persons in the West but in our patients this plan was followed in 7 out of 8 persons, who had the test carried out primarily for determining the sex of the foetus. The parents elected for abortion without any undue anxiety. Sex determination tests became big business shortly after their introduction in India in the 1970's. Billboards stating, "Invest Rs. [rupees] 500 now, save Rs. 50,000 later" were designed to encourage prospective

parents to abort female foetuses and save on a future dowry, Kusum (1993). Grawal (2004) has found that the sex ratio has altered consistently in favour of boys since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the effect of this has been most pronounced in the state of Punjab, Haryana and Delhi. She says that female foeticide is an extreme manifestation of violence against women.

### **Objective:**

To study the status of girl child in Himachal Pradesh.

To study the causes of declining child sex ratio and disfavor of girl child.

To analysis the child sex ratio of Indian States and UTs which is in and around 900 (2001-2011).

To study the socio-economic causes are the main reasons for female foeticide in Himachal Pradesh.

### **Universe of the study**

Himachal Pradesh has 12 districts and has a total population of 60 lakhs as per 2001 census of India and 69 lakhs as per census 2011. The universe was limited by making selection on the basis of purposive sampling where child sex ratio is less than nine hundred. For these purpose four districts namely Kangra, Hamirpur, Una and Bilaspur, having cultural homogeneity were selected. All the blocks of these four districts included in this study (i.e. 26 blocks). Keeping in view the purpose of the study, one village from each block having maximum difference between number of boys and girls in the age group of 0-6 years was selected. From each village only those women were selected who had one-girl child and a male child after a long span from the birth of first girl child.

### **Research design and Sample**

The design for this study was exploratory as well as descriptive. On the basis of declining trend of child sex ratio, we have tried to find out the concerned reasons by which sex ratio has been decreasing, consequent upon increase in female foeticide. In the first stage, a sample of the districts was drawn. Himachal Pradesh consists of twelve districts. It was decided to select only those districts in the study which have lowest child sex ratio i.e. less than 900. As per the census 2001, districts Kangra, Una, Hamirpur and Bilaspur were selected based on these criteria. In the second stage, the blocks falling under these four districts were considered. All the 26 blocks were included in study. In the third stage, the villages were selected from these blocks. From

each block the village having maximum difference between male and female in the age group of 0-6 was included. Hence, 26 villages were purposively selected. In the fourth stage, the identification of women who had undergone female foeticide posed a great challenge. To overcome this problem and to avoid the opposition from the villagers, it was decided to include all those women in the study who were in the age group of 18-44 years. In this study, only those women were included who had first girl child and a male child after a long span from the birth of the first girl child. As per the information gathered from the record of the panchyat and the health workers, there were 4536 women in 26 villages. Fifty per cent of this i.e. 2268 have been considered for this study. The unit of study was the women in the reproductive age group with first girl child with between 0-6 years of age. Women with foeticide have been identified with the help of information obtained through the informal discussion with the anganwadi workers, old ladies, midwives relatives of respondents, retired doctors, female health workers and some of the respondents who had accepted that they have been gone for the abortion of female foetus, such women were 515 which constituted foeticide group in this study and the remaining 1603 formed the non- female foeticide group. Of the remaining 150 respondents, some were not available at the time of interview and some of them have refused to give information on this account, as a result they were excluded from the study.

### Summary of sample

S.N.	Selected districts	No of villages	Total sample
1	Kangra	13	1282
2	Una	04	369
3	Hamirpur	06	320
4	Bilaspur	03	147
5	<b>Total</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>2118</b>

### Tools and Data collection

A socio- economic status scale was used comprises of general information such as: age, family type, type of house education and income. A questionnaire was framed to have in-depth interaction with the respondents. More than fifty questions were asked from each respondent pertaining to the status of a girl child in these villages, reasons for the declining child sex ratio and their attitude about female foeticide. Interview of respondents were conducted. Focus

group discussion with Aganwadi and health workers, Panchayaty Raj Institutions, doctors, local teachers and old aged persons in the village were also held.

### **The sex ratio in India**

The sex ratio of Indian population has always been of topical interest for the demographers, social scientists, women's groups, various planners, policy makers, and research scholars. Indian census has the tradition of bringing out disaggregated information by sex of various aspects of population. Changes in sex composition largely reflect the underlying socio economic and cultural patters of society in different ways. Sex ratio defined as the number of females per 1,000 males in the population, is an important social indicator to measure the extent of prevailing equity between males and females in a society at a given point of time. The census 2011 brought some important facts regarding vanishing number of girls and has made us aware of the same.

The total sex ratio of India as per 2011 census is 940 females per 1000 males. Although a marginal improvement of six points in the overall female to male sex ratio in India from 933 in 2001 to 940 in 2011 is an encouraging development, the massive decline of 13 points in the child sex ratio (age group of 0 to 6) from 927 to 914 in the country is a matter of grave concern today. The census 2011 brought some important facts regarding vanishing number of girls and has made us aware of the same. The population of India as per 2011 census is 1,210,193,422 compared to a total of 1,028,737,436 in 2001. In absolute terms, the population of India has increased by more than 181 million during the decade 2001-2011. The patterns in sex ratio among the states and union territories are distinct. The top three states recording the highest value of overall sex ratio are neighbours located in the southern part of India namely Kerala (1084), Tamil Nadu (995), and Andhra Pradesh (992). Among the UTs, the top three are Pondicherry (1038), Lakshadweep (946) and the Andaman & Nicobar Islands (878). The lowest sex ratio among the states has been recorded in Haryana (877), Jammu & Kashmir (883) and Sikkim (889). Among the UTs the lowest sex ratio has been returned in Daman & Diu (618), Dadra & Nagar Haveli (775) and Chandigarh (818). Only two major States, Haryana and Jammu & Kashmir have shown decline in the sex ratio. The other Union Territories registering decline in overall sex ratio include Dadra and Nagar Haveli, Daman and Diu and Chandigarh. It is interesting to note that although the number of states and union territories with sex ratio less than 916 declined from twelve to ten in 2011 but percentage share of these states' population has

remained almost constant. In contrast, the number of states and union territories with high sex ratio of 986 and above rose sharply from four in 2001 to seven in 2011 with corresponding increases in the share of population. Movement of large States (Andhra Pradesh) in this category resulted in the increase in the population share. However, overall increasing trend in the sex ratio at the census 2011 has boosted the sex ratio of India. While the overall sex ratio presents encouraging trends across the country encompassing 29 states and union territories, the same is not true in the case of the child sex ratio in the age group 0-6 years.

A glance at the trend will show that in census 2011, child sex ratio (0-6 years) has registered an increasing trend only in six states and two UTs. What gives some cause for cheer is the fact that the states where the child sex ratio had dropped alarmingly in Census 2001 have now shown a slight improvement. This increase is substantial in Punjab (798 to 846-48 points), Haryana (819 to 830- 11 points), Himachal Pradesh (896 to 906- 10 points), Chandigarh (845 to 867- 22 points), Gujarat (883 to 886- 3 points) and Tamil Nadu (942 to 946- 4 points). In addition, Mizoram (964 to 971-7 points) and Andaman & Nicobar Island (957 to 966- 9 points) have also shown increasing trend in the child sex ratio during 2001-2011.

**Table -1.1**

**Child sex ratio of Indian States and UTs which is in and around 900 (2001-2011)**

S.N.	States	0-6 Child Sex Ratio	
		2001	2011
1	Delhi	868	866
2	Gujarat	883	886
3	Haryana	819	830
4	Himachal Pradesh	896	906
5	Jammu & Kashmir	941	859
6	Maharashtra	913	883
7	Punjab	798	846
8	Rajasthan	909	883
9	Uttar Pradesh	916	899
10	Uttaranchal	908	886
<b>Union Territories</b>			
11	Chandigarh	845	867

12	Daman & Diu	926	909
13	Lakshadweep	959	908

**Source: Census of India, 2011**

This table indicates the child sex ratio of Indian's states and UTs which are having child sex ratio in and around 900 (2001-2011). If we look at the census 2011, child sex ratio (0-6 years) has registered a declining trend in five states and two UTs. What gives some cause for cheer is the fact that the states and UTs where the child sex ratio had dropped alarmingly in census 2001 have now shown a marginal improvement. This increase is substantial in Punjab (798 to 846-48 points), Haryana (819 to 830, 11 points), Himachal Pradesh (896 to 906, 10 points) and Chandigarh (845 to 867, 22 points). Six of the States that have recorded the steepest declines are from among the most economically developed ones and even with quite good literacy rate among females. This sex ratio is further declining. According to the UNFPA, (2003), statistics, there were 770 girls counted for every 1000 boys in Haryana (one of India's richest states), 814 girls in Ahmadabad (Gujarat), and 845 in South West Delhi.

**Female infanticide took the form of female foeticide**

Technology changed the mode of getting rid of a girl child. At present Female infanticide took the form of female foeticide. Female foeticide is a practice of sex selective elimination of the female foetus after prenatal sex determination or sex pre-selection, thus avoiding the birth of a girl child. The girl child in India has been the most vulnerable for centuries and, is even today, vulnerable to the insults of deprivation. Whatever the natural biological laws of human reproduction had given mankind for balancing its natural sex ratio, has been taken away by manmade laws, customs, traditions, religious beliefs and sophisticated medical technology, resulting in a lower status in society for girls as well as for women. For too long have they been left on the back burner, facing discrimination throughout their entire journey from cradle to the grave. In particular, peculiar to South Asia, and certainly to India, tradition, values and customs encrusted over time have resulted in the insatiable desire for sons, with families having totally marginalized the joy and pleasure in giving birth to a baby girl. Kolloor, (1990), defined infanticide as, "Killing of an entirely dependent girl child less than one year of age by mother, parents or others in whose care she is entrusted". Historically, female infanticide has been in existence since long. Girl infants have been known to be killed by rubbing poison on the mother's breast, by feeding infants with milk of errukam flower or oleander berries, by using sap



of calotropis plant, paddy grains, giving sleeping tablets or by simply burying the girl infants alive. Kumari, (1995), said that law banned this heinous practice in 1879, more than a century ago. Yet this abuse of girl child which is violation of her human right to life continues to prevail not only in some parts of Rajasthan and Gujarat but recently has been found in some districts of Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra as well.

More than 100 million women are 'missing' from the world today, Nussbaum, (2000). The girl children have been eliminated because they are unwanted eliminated because they have no power to fight back and preserve their own right to life. They are eliminated before they are born or shortly afterward, aborted or victims of infanticide. They are strangled, smothered, burned and mutilated. Every year there are 80 million unwanted pregnancies and 20 million unsafe abortions.

### **Causes of Female foeticide:**

#### **Socio-economic causes**

The socio-economic causes are the reasons, which are primarily materialistic in nature. It is often difficult to separate socio-economic reasons. Dowry is a huge financial burden on the families. This burden leads to the daughter being perceived as a liability. People think that only sons are the source of family income and have to provide for parents in their old age. Daughters do not stay with the family. Hence parents do not get benefited from any investments made on their daughter. It is belief that daughters do not become the support for parents in their old age, and cannot look after their parents in their old age. Labour market discriminations are an important form of economic discrimination. Women are less likely to work in as high position as compared to their male colleagues. Women are often paid lesser than their male counterparts even when they are more productive than their male colleagues. Women's earnings in India are only 38% of the male earnings. Having a boy allows the father to achieve better status in society, where as having a baby girl is seen as curse. Punam (2014;2015); Ryhal and Punam (2009); John et al. (2007); Shakher and Hatti (2007); UNFPA (2003); Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and Third World Centre for Comparative Studies (2002); Bose (2001) concluded in their studies that demographic fundamentalism or preference for a boy-child is on the rise in India, resulting in a declining sex ratio. They have also found that we have strong patriarchal societies, where the cultural and economic value of sons is at a premium, son preference manifests itself in many ways, ranging from differential allocation of household resources, medical care and neglect of girl children. It is the son who provides basic support for his parents. Wealth and

economic development do not reduce son preference, (Punam 2013, 2015; Pande 2003; Malhotra and Kishor 1995).

### **Main reason for female foeticide**

Son preference is in the interest of the family lineage, whose continuity depends on sons alone while daughters are considered to be temporary members of the kin group. Sons are perceived to provide support to their parents, both before and after marriage, but girls can provide very little economic and emotional support. There are so many reasons responsible for female foeticide in Indian society. The data in this regard, collected from the sample under study shows that overall 35% respondents opined that easily available illegal practices of medical facilities is main reason for female foeticide.

40% respondents have expressed about socio-economic reasons as the main factor for female foeticide. 12% respondents opined about dowry system as the main factor for female foeticide. Also 10 % respondents have expressed about old religious beliefs as the main factor for female foeticide.

This finding corresponds to the findings of earlier studies conducted by Srinivasan (2007); Walia (2005); and Das (1987). They have found that dowry system is mainly responsible for the increase in female foeticide in the country. Raju and Premi, (1997); Kundu and Shau, (1991) have also pointed out that the practice of dowry is the main reason for the decline in child sex ratio. It is the main frames of all type of domestic problems that are prevalent both in urban and middle class families. Of course, the reason for both the social groups varies, where the middle class does out of compulsion, urban/high class does this willingly. The groom's family tries to obtain resource through dowry, making up for all the capital they have invested in their son. And as a result, they stick a huge price tag to sell off their son in marriage market. The bride's family on the other hand, tries to protect resources. And the real problem occurs, when the bride's family is aware of the dowry demands, but they knowingly put their daughters in the hands of greedy family, just to shunt away from their responsibilities. Walia (2005) also found that in Ludhiana 82.97 percent cited dowry as the main cause for female foeticide. For them marriage had become an expensive affair. The rise in the cost of living had compelled them think seriously about having daughters. They had to pay a huge dowry to their son-in-laws so that they would keep their daughters happy. The greater the number of daughters more was the economic burden on the parents. Parents could not expect their daughters to earn and feed them in old age. It may

be concluded that from most of the respondents expressed about socio-economic reasons as the main factors of female foeticide.

### **Suggestions and Recommendations:**

- Government should provide opportunity to girls not only to build a career but also to develop their confidence through entertainment opportunity, exposure visits, debate, drama, and other forms of competition.
- As a policy to encourage birth of girl child the Government should extend financial support to voluntary organizations, women's group and Self Help Groups (SHGs) to popularize and convey a positive message about girl child in all states, in general and Himachal Pradesh, Punjab and Haryana in particular. All available means of communication such as media, public lectures, poster campaigns, exhibitions, films and publications need to be utilized.
- Schemes promoting vocational training for skill development, employment and income generating activities such as Support to Training & Employment Programme for Women may be implemented more rigorously. This would help in improving the financial and decision making power of women.
- The study has revealed pathetic situation of women regarding occupational aspects. Empowerment of women through reservation in jobs in public as well as in private sector. This would also increase their decision making skills and can oppose the family demand of sex selection related abortions.
- The Pre-Natal Diagnostics Techniques (Regulation and Prevention of Misuse) Act, in its amended form, is clear and self-explanatory, in nature. However, some of the recent reports on child sex ratio indicated further decline in child sex ratio. These reports clearly point out the loopholes in the implementation of PNDT Act and these loopholes should be plugged and act should be strictly implemented.
- Medical professionals, on account of their position of strength and repute, should be made responsible to counsel their patients and families on the importance of the girl child and the impact of the skewed sex ratio in the society.

## Conclusion:

It is true that a woman is an architect of society. She establishes the institution of family life, builds the home, brings up the children and makes them good citizens. Nowadays we found that female baby being killed before being born i.e. in the mother's womb itself. In this paper we found that the decreasing child sex ratio in hill state is not only due to the culture, religion or psychologically but also due to socio-economic factors, which has created a serious problem of female foeticide. The results bring out the fact that male child preference, gender discrimination and female foeticide do exist today though perhaps on a subtle level in comparison to earlier Indian studies.

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