

FEMALE INFANTICIDE IS AN INFANTILISM IN OUR SOCIETY
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Infanticide is the intentional killing of infants. Infanticide has been practiced on every continent and by people on every level of cultural complexity, from hunters and gatherers to high civilization, including our own ancestors. Rather than being an exception, then, it has been the rule. In technologically less advanced societies, infanticide was widely accepted, up into the present century. It was very common to destroy infants that were deformed or diseased or illegitimate or regarded as ill omens. But the practice was not restricted to such cases. In many societies, custom determined how many children a family should have, and infanticide was enjoyed as a means of achieving the desired family size. In such societies the practice of infanticide was extremely prevalent.

We know that female infanticide is deliberate killing of newborn female children or the termination of a female fetus through selective abortion. In some countries, female infanticide is more common than the killing of male offspring, due to sex-selective infanticide. While female infanticide has at times been necessary for survival of the community-at-large, there have also been instances where it has been related to the general societal prejudice against females which characterizes most male-dominated cultures. There are many diverse reasons for this wanton destruction; two of the most statistically important are poverty and population control. Since prehistoric times, the supply of food has been a constant check on human population growth. One way to control the lethal effects of starvation was to restrict the number of children allowed to survive to adulthood. Darwin believed that infanticide, “especially of female infants,” was the most important restraint on the proliferation of early man.

Infanticide was also widely accepted in more highly developed cultures. It was a common practice among the ancient Arabs, who sometimes regarded it as not merely permissible, but a duty. Female infanticide was common in the poorer districts of China, and although prohibited by both Buddhism and Taoism, was not regarded as wrong by most people. In India, infanticide was accepted during the Vedic age, and the practice was common, over a long period of time, in various Hindu castes. Infanticide was also accepted and practiced by the two most advanced cultures of ancient Europe, Greece and Rome. The status of infanticide in Rome was very

similar. The exposure of healthy infants was probably less common; however this apparently reflects, not a difference in moral outlook, but the need for a population sufficient to maintain a large army. So while the killing of healthy infants was disapproved of, it was not viewed as an especially serious crime. This attitude toward infanticide was shared by the greatest of the Greek philosophers, Plato and Aristotle. Aristotle, in the ideal legislation proposed in his *Politics*, holds that deformed infants should not be allowed to live. Plato, in the *Republic*, goes further, and advocates the destruction not only of defective children, but of those who are the product of inferior parents, or of individuals past the ideal child-bearing ages.

Many philosophers believe that infanticide is intrinsically wrong, and seriously so- for the same reason, and to the same degree, as the killing of an adult human being. Most, however, are content to appeal to the fact that virtually everyone feels that infanticide is seriously wrong. There is a serious question whether philosophers who make such an appeal are right about the facts. Is it true that most people think that infanticide is morally on a par with killing an adult? It is true that the vast majority of people feel that the killing of a normal infant is morally wrong, and it may also be true that they believe that it is seriously wrong. But the situation seems very different in the case of infants that are not normal, where at least a very substantial minority- and possibly a majority- believe that infanticide ought to be permitted.

The practice of infanticide has taken many forms. Child sacrifice to supernatural figures or forces, such as the one practiced in ancient Carthage, may be only the most notorious example in the ancient world. The situation is succinctly summed up by Laila Williamson an anthropologist of the American Museum of Natural History, at the beginning of her article, 'Infanticide: An Anthropological Analysis'. Infanticide is a practice present-day westerners regard as a cruel and inhuman custom, resorted to by only a few desperate and primitive people living in harsh environments. We tend to think of it as an exceptional practice, to be found only among such peoples as the Eskimos and Australian Aborigines, who are far removed in both culture and geographical distance from us and our civilized ancestors. The truth is quite different. Infanticide has been practiced on every continent and by people on every level of cultural complexity, from hunters and

gatherers to high civilizations, including our own ancestors. Rather than being an exception, then, it has been the rule.

The practice has been well documented amongst the indigenous people of Australia, Northern Alaska and South Asia. Barbara Miller argues the practice to be “almost universal”. Miller contends that in regions where women are not employed in agriculture and regions in which dowries are the norm then female infanticide is commonplace, and in 1871 in *The Descent of man, and selection in relation to sex*. Charles Darwin also wrote that the practice was commonplace among the aboriginal tribes of Australia.

In 1990, Amartya Sen writing in the *New York Review of Books* estimated that there were 100 million fewer women in Asia than would be expected, and that this amount of “missing” women “tells us, quietly, a terrible story of inequality and neglect leading to the excess mortality of women.” Initially Amartya Sen’s suggestion of gender bias was contested and it was suggested that hepatitis B was the cause of the alteration in the natural sex ratio. However it is now widely accepted that the numerical worldwide deficit in women is due to gender specific abortions, infanticide and neglect.

In seventh-century Arabia before Islamic culture took root, female infanticide was widely practiced. This is attributed by scholars to the fact that women were deemed “property” within those societies. Others have speculated that to prevent their daughters from a life of misery the mothers would kill the child. With the arrival of Islamic rule the practice was made illegal, however Michelle Oberman believes “there is little reason to believe that call was heeded”.

In nineteenth century England, for example, infanticide was so rampant throughout the country that a debate over how to correct the problem carried out in both the lay and the medical press. An editorial in the respected medical journal *Lancet* noted that “to the same of civilization it must be avowed that not a state has yet advanced to the degree of progress under which child-murder may be said to be a very uncommon crime. The United States ranks also high on the list of countries whose inhabitants kill their children. For infants under the age of one year, the American homicide rate is 11th in the world, while for ages one through four it is 1st and for ages five through fourteen it is fourth.

Infanticide is a crime overwhelmingly committed by women, both in the third and First World. 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. Education is the basic human right that is vital to personal and societal development and well-being. 'If you educate a man, then you educate a person, but if you educate a woman, then you educate a complete family'.

The bias against females in India is related to the fact that 'sons are called upon to provide the income; they are the ones who do most of the work in the fields. In this way sons are looked to as a type of insurance. With this perspective, it becomes clearer that the high value given to males decreases the value given to females. So female infanticide in India has a history spanning centuries. The dowry system has been cited as one of the main reasons for female infanticide and sex-selective abortion as many families who live in poverty cannot afford to raise the funds for a suitable dowry. Those women who undergo sex determination tests and abort on knowing that the fetus is female are actively taking a decision against equality and the right to life for girls. We know that in the past, women were treated as mere house workers, expected to be bound to four walls of the house and managed only household chores. So in many cases, the women are not independent agents but merely victims of a dominant family ideology based on preference for male children.

In India, since 1974 amniocentesis has been used to determine the gender of a child before birth, and should the child be female then an abortion can be carried out. According to women's rights activist Donna Fernandez, some practices are so deeply embedded within Indian culture it is "almost impossible to do away with them" and she has said that India is undergoing a type of "female genocide". The children's right group CRY has estimated that of twelve million females born yearly in India, one million will have died within their first year of life. In the Indian state of Tamil Nadu during British rule, the practice of female infanticide in Tamil Nadu among the Kallars and Todas was reported. In 1985, it was reported by India Today that female infanticide was still in use in Usilampatti in southern Tamil Nadu. The practice was mostly prevalent among the dominant caste of the region, Kallars.

The Indian Association for women's studies reported in 1998 that 10,000 female fetuses are aborted yearly. In the Times of India gave figure of 50,000 abortions of female fetuses yearly, while another study gave a figure of 78,000 killed between 1978 and 1983. The conflicted statistics in this studies show that this crime against women are an undetectable crime, and the numbers are indicative of genocide. The decline of the sex ratio is another indication of female infanticide and sex-selective abortion. The biggest and most easily measurable effect is the low female-to-male ratios. It is so great that today 36% of men between the ages of 15 and 45 in the wealthy state of Haryana are unmarried. This prevalence of unmarried men has a destabilizing effect that counteracts the stabilizing and enriching effects of families in a society. The 2001 census showed a sex ratio of 972 females per 1,000 males.

As of 2005 it is estimated that 22 million women are missing in India, which had been estimate at 3 million while under colonial rule. (8) In Rajasthan many baby girls were brutally murdered in March 2010, one day old girl thrown into canal was found alive in Kurukshetra in 2008 and obsessed with the desire to give birth to a son, a frustrated mother killed all her three daughters in Odisha in 2007. The United Nations has declared that India is the most deadly country for female children, and that in 2012 female children aged between 1 and 5 were 75 percent more likely to die as opposed to boys.

A number of strategies have been proposed and implemented to try to address the problem of female infanticide, along with the related phenomena of sex-selective abortion and abandonment and neglect of girl children. We know that in 1991 girl Child Protection Scheme was launched. It operates as along term financial incentive, with families having to meet certain obligations, such as sterilization for the woman. Once the obligations are met the state puts aside Rs 2000 in a state run fund, and reaching twenty the girl may use the money, which now should stand at Rs 10,000, to either marry or go into higher education.

Today, infanticide is still most common seen in areas of severe poverty. National Center for Biotechnology the number of girls is continuously decreasing and if no initiative is taken then there may be a time when have no girls in India. The government has tried various approaches to help prevent the practice In India

government started the Baby cradle scheme. The plan was to allow families to give their child up for adoption without going through paper work, no names are taken. The scheme has been given praise for possibly saving the lives of thousands of baby girl, but it has also been criticized by human rights groups, who say that the scheme encourages child abandonment and also reinforces the low status in which women are held. The scheme which was piloted in Tamil Nadu saw cradles placed outside state run health facilities. So wake up join campaigns launched by UNICEF and the Indian government and make your country a just one.

There are a number of possible responses to the worldwide problem of female feticide. Female feticide, another heinous evil propelling in our society is the conjunction of two ethical evils: gender bias and abortion. In this the girl children become target of attack even before they are born. The most fundamental response is to decry the practice of abortion and the circumstances that lead women to resort to it. But, now the time has changed, like men women could excel in every field. The principle should also be reflected in specific social and economic policies to protect the basic rights of women and children, especially female children. Now female feticide and infanticide has adversely affected Indian society. It has been reported that female infanticide existed in India since 1789 in several districts of Rajasthan; along the western shores in Gujarat- Surat and Kutch; and among clan of Rajputs in eastern part of Uttar Pradesh. It was so rampant in Kutch that only five of such families were found who had not killed their 'new born' daughters. Various sexes determination techniques like biopsy, sonograms, ultrasounds scan tests and amniocenteses were introduced to detect fatal abnormalities. Unfortunately, these tests were used as tool by number of families to detect the sex of the child that is yet to born. Government regulations prohibiting the use of prenatal sex identification techniques for nonmedical purposes should be strictly enforced, and violators should be punished accordingly. It will be quite helpful to give a halt to this heinous crime. Now India has tremendous examples of woman who have risen from the ashes and done the country proud. It should be known each and everybody that female child is not a curse on the society. She is one of the most beautiful and precious gift of god. She carries within her the beginning and the end. Patience and tolerance are the two important virtues bestowed by god on the woman, helps her to face bravely the

troubles of the society. The principle of equality between men and women should be more widely promoted through the news media to change the attitude of son preference and improve the awareness of the general public on this issue. It should be necessary that to create a society that celebrates the birth of both gender equality and to develop and implement new innovative approaches to fight the menace. It is important to usher significant changes in societal attitude and perceptions with regard to women in every sphere.

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