

*Search of Truth, Series-12*

# Female Foeticide

## LET'S STOP

### Murdering Our Daughters!



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# Female Foeticide

## Let's Stop Murdering Our Daughters

Our society is struggling with innumerable social evils, of which unjustified gender-bias is the most recognisable. Across cultures and societies, females have mostly been looked down upon as the lesser sex – a liability, a burden, a shame. Women are being denied the right to food, right to education, right to career, right to inheritance, right to a decent living and even the right to life. Female Foeticide is the bitter and uncomfortable truth that is undermining the very foundations of our society.

### Female Foeticide

Female foeticide is defined as the selective abortion of a foetus for the sole reason that it is a female. With the widespread use of **Ultrasound (Sonography)** for gynecological procedures, medical diagnosis and treatment has become more advanced. However, it has brought with it the curse of pre-natal sex determination. It has now become very easy to determine the sex of the foetus a few weeks into pregnancy – a piece of information which is being misused by male-obsessed parents and unscrupulous doctors to abort the female foetus and deny her the opportunity to open her eyes in the world.

Female Foeticide is a retrograde step from female infanticide – an age-old cruelty. Earlier, when pre-natal sex determination was not possible, the birth of a girl child was so despised that at some places when a lady was about to deliver, a large vessel containing milk was placed close by; if she delivered a boy, the milk was distributed in the village and if she delivered a girl, the infant was drowned in the same milk. Elsewhere, young innocent girls were buried alive for no fault of theirs and even the women-folk participated in this

abominable act.

God's message to mankind, the Holy Qur'ān draws a sad picture of this grotesque practice when it says, **“And when one of them is informed of the birth of a female, his face becomes dark, and he suppresses grief. He hides himself from his people because of the ill of which he has been informed. Should he keep it in humiliation or bury it in the ground? Unquestionably, evil is what they decide.”** (An-Nahl: 58-59)

## **Declining Sex-ratio**

As per the 2011 census in India, the national sex ratio stands at a dismal **943** women for every 1000 men; with states like Haryana recording an alarmingly low figure of **877** and Daman & Diu a jaw-dropping **618**! This trend is more prevalent in cities with even the national capital lagging at **866**. Apart from these, the states of Jammu and Kashmir, Punjab and Gujarat have also recorded the lowest sex ratios in India. Statistical data suggest that the decline in the sex ratio has been more pronounced after the advent of pre-natal sex determination procedures and the easy access to abortions. This has led analysts to zero in on Female Foeticide as being the primary culprit involved in pulling down the sex ratio in India. Millions of girls have been murdered in the past couple of decades in India at the altar of illegal abortions.

## **Reasons for Female Foeticide**

But why are females so despised in Indian society in the first place? Let us have a look at the reasons for Female Foeticide/ Infanticide.

**1. Financial apprehensions:** Boys are seen to be an asset and girls a liability. The sons are expected to earn for the family once they grow up and lend it financial support whereas the daughters would consume the family's resources and eventually get married off to another family. This is not seen as a good 'investment'!

**2. Dowry:** Closely related to the first cause is the issue of dowry. In Indian society, the wedding of a girl is a great financial burden on the father as he is expected to arrange for a lavish feast and give away his life's savings as dowry to the groom's family. In case of more than one daughter, this burden gets compounded; fearing which, the father chooses to kill his daughter in infancy or in the foetal stage.

**3. Social apprehensions:** The son is considered to be the torchbearer of the family name. He continues and expands the family. The daughter, on the other hand, would contribute towards the expansion of her husband's family. This social drawback goes against girls and they are done away with at birth itself – or even before being born.

**4. Family honour:** Some families consider the abundance of sons as a matter of honour and the abundance of daughters as an embarrassment. Having to bow down before the girls' in-laws is also taken to be a matter of grave dishonour. This has led to many a girl child not being able to see the light of day.

**5. Security apprehensions:** Parents presume that upon reaching old age, it is the sons who will look after them; daughters will marry and get settled down elsewhere. The medical and financial needs of the parents are expected to be fulfilled by the sons alone; it is they who would be their support in their old age, not the daughters. This, in effect, renders the daughters 'useless' and hence they are not found to be worth bringing up.

**6. War liability:** In ancient times, when tribal warfare was the order of the day, boys used to protect the clan and were trained as soldiers. However, the womenfolk could not serve in the army because of their physical weakness. Also, if the tribe was to lose the battle, the women used to be captured as slave girls, resulting in deep humiliation to the tribe. This was especially true in ancient Spartan and Arab



communities, but is rarely a cause of female foeticide in contemporary Indian society.

## Repercussions

Rampant murder of girls creates social imbalance, with far fewer females in society as compared to males. The situation is so deplorable in certain north-western Indian states that the population has run out of brides to marry off their sons to. Brides are, therefore, either being 'imported' from other states or being 'shared' among several brothers!

The shortage of brides naturally leads to depression and sexual frustration among men, which in turn opens up avenues of unnatural sexual behaviours like pornography, prostitution, rape, adultery, homosexuality and other illegal, immoral and sinful activities.

## Solutions

**1. The PNDT Act:** In order to pull the plug on female foeticide, the Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Regulation and Prevention of Misuse) Act of 1994 was put into effect on January 1, 1996 to control the use of sex determination tests. Chapter 1, section 5.2 makes it clear that prenatal tests are illegal when involving the intent of sex determination. Even when it is absolutely necessary that a woman undergo a prenatal test, the sex of the baby is not to be revealed to her or her relatives in any manner.

The fear of the law has, however, not curbed the practice of Female Foeticide, with the sex-ratio steadily on the decline. A comparative analysis of past surveys reveals that the cases of female foeticide have actually increased in certain states instead of coming down.

**2. Islam:** As in India, Female Infanticide was also being practised in Arabia some 1500 years ago before it came to be totally eradicated from the Arab society in a very short time-span. The question is **HOW?**

In the early 7th century, Muhammad (peace be to him) was appointed by God as His messenger in order to bring in a social, religious and political renaissance in the world. God revealed His instructions to Prophet Muhammad (pbth) in the form of the Holy Qur'ān which is full of guidance for the entire mankind. Islam, among other problems, also successfully tackled the abhorrent custom of Female Infanticide. This was done by....

## **Explaining the relationship between parents and their children**

As per Islam, parents are not the owners of their children; they are their guardians. Children are a gift of God to the parents. It thus entails that parents are expected to fulfil the responsibilities they have been entrusted with. They have absolutely no right to harm the child, let alone kill her. They are also advised against acting foolishly with regard to their children as they can be a means of trial for them.

In the Qur'ān (Surah at-Taghabun: 15), it is said, **“Your wealth and your children are but a trial, and Allah has with Him a great reward.”**

## **Explaining that daughters are a gift of God**

The birth of a daughter should be treasured as a gift of God who, in His infinite wisdom, favours some parents with sons, some with daughters, some with both and some with none. This truth has been expounded upon in Surah ash-Shura: 49-50. Killing of the girl child thus amounts to ingratitude and terrible ignorance.

## **Discrediting economic apprehensions**

Hitting hard upon the pretext of girls leading to financial problems in the family, the Qur'ān instructs people, **'And do not kill your children for fear of poverty. We provide for them and for you. Indeed, their killing is ever a great sin.'** (Surah al-

Isra: 31). God Himself provides sustenance for each and every individual. The fear that the girl would eat into the family's provisions is a grave fallacy.

## Making weddings inexpensive

As we have seen in the causes of female foeticide, wedding expenditure and dowry are some of the major reasons why daughters are being killed. This problem was also solved by Islam.

Prophet Muhammad (pbth) has been reported as saying that, '**The best of marriages are those that incur the least expenditure.**' The bride's family has been exempted from all wedding expenses.

The practice of Dowry was totally abolished and instead, the bride was entitled to mehr. The Qur'ān instructs grooms to pay a reasonable mehr to their brides (Surah Nisa: 4) '**And give the women (upon marriage) their bridal gifts graciously....**'

## Prohibiting murder and encouraging the saving of lives

The Qur'ān says, '**And do not kill the soul that Allah has forbidden....**' (Surah al-Isra: 33). The Qur'ān also says that **whoever kills an innocent soul – it is as if he had slain the entire mankind. And whoever saves one – it is as if he had saved the entire mankind.** (Surah al-Maidah: 32)

Unjust killing of any person is strictly prohibited and here we are talking about our own daughters!

## Warning of the accountability in the hereafter

Islamic teachings are centred upon the concept of '**akhirah**' whereby every person would be raised up after his death and would have to face reckoning in the Divine Court of Law. He would then be abundantly rewarded for his good deeds and be severely punished for his sins. Heart wrenching ayaat like the ones in



Surah at-Takweer, '**When the girl child buried alive is asked- For what crime was she killed?**' compelled the Arabs to give up this monstrous act for ever.

## **Positive reinforcement**

Rewards were promised for those who behaved graciously with their daughters. Prophet Muhammad (pbth) is reported to have said, '**He who has a girl child, and he neither buries her alive, nor treats her with contempt, nor gives preference to his sons over her, God will admit him to paradise.**' (Ibn Abbas: Abu Dawood)

## **Leading by example**

The Prophet himself had four daughters and he loved them with all his heart. Once when someone confessed his past sin of burying alive his young daughter, the Prophet felt the child's pain deep in his heart and cried till his beard was soaked with tears. Seeing his grief, everyone present there started weeping profusely.

## **The Beauty of Islamic attitude with regards to Women**

Islam accords utmost respect to women; be they mothers, daughters, sisters or wives; be it their right to inheritance, right to earn, right to mehr, right to dissolution of marriage, right to proper food, clothing, shelter, education, healthcare, and most importantly – the right to life; the right to breathe in this world created by God. Woman is invaluable creation of the Lord; what a shame that she is murdered by the very people who were entrusted with her care!

## **Islam Is For Us All**

God's message is for the entire humanity. Let us follow His message in the form of the Qur'ān and the teachings of His messenger, Prophet Muhammad (pbth), to achieve everlasting success and bliss both in this world and in the hereafter.

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