



## ATTITUDE OF WOMEN TOWARDS FEMALE FOTICIDE

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### ABSTRACT-:

*The killing of women exists in various forms in societies the world over. However, Indian society displays some unique and particularly brutal versions, such as dowry deaths and sati. Female feticide is an extreme manifestation of violence against women. Female fetuses are selectively aborted after pre-natal sex determination, thus avoiding the birth of girls. As a result of selective abortion, 35 and 40 million girls and women are missing from the Indian population. In some parts of the country, the sex ratio of girls to boys has dropped to less than 800:1000. It is a disgrace for the Indian society, which considers the birth of a girl child as a bad investment of future. She is considered to be consumer rather than a producer, and this narrow viewpoint of the Indian patriarchal society has lead to horrid practices like female infanticide and female foeticide.*

**“From the woman is our birth, in the woman’s womb are we shaped; To the woman we are engaged, to the woman we are wedded; The woman is our friend and from the woman is the family; If one woman dies, we seek another, through the woman are the bonds of the world; Why call woman evil who gives birth to kings? From the woman comes the woman without woman there is none; O Nanak, God alone is the one who is independent of the woman (because He is unborn)”.**

The social malaise of killing the girl child is pretty old in India. **Female infanticide in most places has been replaced by female foeticide.** Earlier it was more in the form of female infanticide – where girl child was poisoned to death soon after her birth. With new advances in technology, the problem has surfaced in the form of female foeticide or sex

selective abortion is the elimination of the female foetus in the womb itself. The sex of the foetus is determined by methods like Amniocentesis, Chorion Villus Biopsy and now by the most popular technique Ultrasonography. Once the sex of the foetus is determined, if it is a female foetus, it is aborted. **Indians have terminated 10 million girl babies in the last 20 Years.** This shocking reality has been uncovered in a study done by medical journal Lancet, which also reveals that female foeticide is not a phenomenon restricted to rural India.

Secondary data shows that nearly 10 million female fetuses have been aborted in the country over the past two decades. The United Nations has reported that India's female ratio between 0-6 years age group has fallen to 896 females per 1000 males, the lowest ever in a decade for the world second most populous nation. Of the 12 million girls born in India, one million do not see their first birthday. Seven thousand fewer girls are born in India each day than the global average would suggest.

Female foeticide remains the gravest of all issues concerning women "Every night in a hospital, a girl child is aborted in silence". Nothing bridges our urban-rural divide better than the preference for sons, even in this new century Delhi's sex ratio began showing a sharp decline with the 1991 census figure of 827. The last two years have been the worst yet for the capital, with figures dropping steadily. A healthy ratio, according to world standards, is considered to be 952 females for every 1000 males. **In sharp contrast, of the 6088 births recorded in district hospitals, 3156 were boys and 2932 girls.** A young mother had to poison her baby because it was a girl. It's high time we end this barbaric practice. Now is the time to energize efforts to put gender equality at the top of international peace and development agenda.

Affluent families in posh areas of the country's metropolises are routinely indulging in female foeticide to fulfill their quest for a male child, according to latest government figures. Providing proof that high levels of literacy and per capita incomes have no bearing on the mindset of people in the posh areas of Delhi and Mumbai, recent government figures show that in high-income South Delhi the sex-ratio was 762, while in Mumbai's Borivali it was 728 and 887 in Goregaon and Andheri West. "It can now be safely accepted that high-income families with increased access to techniques of sex determination are the ones which are going in for selective abortions rather than the low-income group areas, "according to a senior health ministry official".

**“We have a dream of an India in which every woman can feel safe, secure and empowered. Where our mothers, sisters and daughters are assured a life of dignity and personal security. We must end the crime of female foeticide”. Prime Minister, Dr. Manmohan Singh.**

The constitution of India guarantees equality to women. It empowers the states to adopt measures for affirmative discrimination in favor of women and also impose a fundamental duty on its citizens to uphold the dignity of women but despite all this, India's deep rooted “sons only” ethos continues and girls and women face inequity and inequality everywhere. They are devalued as human beings from the day they are born. But what is worse is that they are even denied the right to be born, if their families do not wis them to be born. The present study was undertaken in order to determine to what extent the pregnant women are oriented to the actual problem of declining sex ratio and also to ascertain their attitude towards female foeticide. As a sample one government and one private hospital of Jabalpur was selected.

### **Objectives of the Study**

1. To assess the knowledge of pregnant women about decreasing sex ratio.
2. To assess the attitude of pregnant women towards female foeticide.
3. To find out the relationship of attitude of pregnant women towards female foeticide with variables i.e. age education, religion, occupation, married for years, family income, type of family, residence and source of information etc.

### **Research Methodology**

A descriptive study approach was used to conduct the study, which was conducted in Antenatal OPD of Hospital of Jabalpur. Purposive random sampling technique was used for selection of sample. The population consisted of 50 pregnant women attending OPD. The time period of study was from 01.11.2013 to 15.11.2013. The technique and methods used were structured questionnaire was developed based on review of literature. It consisted of three parts.

The first part consisted of items for obtaining personal information about age, education, religion, occupation, married for years, family income, and type of family and source of information. The second part consisted of statements of find our knowledge of

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respondent about sex ratio, decreasing ratio, causes of declining sex ratio and affects and problems related to female foeticide. The statements were developed for the respondents to respond on 'Yes' or 'No' or 'do not know' basis. The attitude of the female respondents towards the practice of female foeticide was drawn out using the buried questionnaire technique. The reasons for indulgence in this illegal and immoral act were known from the respondents themselves. The following main aspects were investigated and related findings are detailed out below.

**Sample Characteristics:** Majority of the clients were in the age froup of 21-30 years (75%) followed by 21% in the age group of 31-40 years and only 4% above 40 years. 48% of them were the academic qualification graduation and above, 25% were Higher secondary and 17% had passed 10<sup>th</sup> class or below. Most of women were Hindus 52%, followed by Sikhs 14% Christians 32%, and Muslims only 2%. Majority of women 72% were housewives and 28% were professionals. Maximum numbers of women 72% were married for 1-9 years, 25% of women married for 10-19 years and 4% married for more than 20 years. 28% had income less than 5000, 58% of them were having family income 5001-10000, and only 14% were with income more than 10000. Most of women 75% resided in urban area and 25% belonged to rural areas.

Factors	1 <sup>st</sup> Category	2 <sup>nd</sup> Category	3 <sup>rd</sup> Category	4 <sup>th</sup> Category	Percentage
Age	75%, 21-30 Years	21%, 31-40 Years	4% above 40 Years	--	100%
Qualification	48% Graduate or above	25% Higher Secondary	17% High School	--	100%
Religion	52% Hindu's	14% Sikh's	32% Christain's	4% Muslim's	100%
Status	68% Housewife's	28% Professional	4% Professional	--	100%
Year of Marriage	72% married for 1-9 years	24% married for 10-19 years	4% married above 20 years	--	100%
Income of the Family	28% less than 5000 Rs.	58% between 5000-10000	14% above 10000	--	100%

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Native place	75% urban area	25% rural area	--	--	100%
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**Attitude towards female foeticide** – When women was asked about their opinion about female foeticide than 74% of them were in favor and 26% were against it. They argued that they could afford only one female child in the family. Some respondent used to pretext of preferring a male child to give company to their already present male child. The third reason for the favor was that girls are meant to born in the household of the rich and affluence family who could bear the expense of rearing the female children. About three-fourths of the women in the suburban area know about the sex determination test, and female foeticide is favored both in rural and urban areas. Three was universal awareness of SDT and most knew where to go for the test and abortions. In a few places the women blamed doctors who are doing this for money. Some women complained that their families first concern following pregnancy is to put pressure on them to determine the sex. If it is a boy then only need for antenatal care is raised.

**Reasons cited for female foeticede** –The respondent who expressed a favorable attitude towards female foeticide cited various reasons for it.

1. Majority of the sample taken for study approved of the heinous act of female foeticide. An overwhelming majority of 81.47% cited escalating demands of dowry was cited as the main reason for it. The dowry or groom price is so staggeringly high irrespective of the class structure that generation may have to toil to repay the debt incurred during marriage.
2. About 66% of those who gave a nod to female foeticide stated that girls failed to provide any kind of social security to parents. Parents could not expect their daughters to earn and feed them in old age.
3. 65% of those who approved of female foeticide expressed that girls were an unnecessary investment. The repeated, “Bringing up a daughter is like watering a neighbourer’s plant”.
4. A negligible 4% of respondents even felt that female foeticide was a good way to check the growth of female population.

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5. A considerable 60% of the respondents cited post marital problems faced by the girl and denial of property to the girl child as the reason for approving female foeticide.
6. The other reason is the belief that it is only the son who can perform the last rites, lineage and inheritance runs through the male line.

**Policy suggestions** – The following suggestive measures flew out from the study.

1. Laws have been passed declaring female foeticide as illegal. Advertising for prenatal prediction of sex has also been declared illegal. Strict punishment should be given to the defaulters.
2. The trend of taking and giving of dowry which takes place mostly in educated and upper class homes can not be discouraged by laws alone. Stringent and effective laws should be supported by speedy trials, dowry giving and taking cases should be tried by a special court and short stay homes should be set up for battered women.
3. Efforts and provision should be made to provide social security to parents who are above 65 years of age and have only daughters. They should be provided with old age pension if they do not have a son.
4. Girl children should be provided free and compulsory education up to higher secondary level. This would decrease the so-called “unnecessary investment on girl children” made by the parents on their daughters.
5. Certain schemes should be started for providing economic provisions for the female children. For this purpose, government should start various employment schemes for females where 100% reservation could be made for women in occupations like teaching, nursing, as telephone operators etc.
6. Women’s right to own and inherit property and the social obligation of daughters to support parents in the same way as sons, can be spread by policy intervention to inculcate these new values in households as well as legal support to implement these values should be provided.
7. The ministry of Women and Child Welfare should dispatch congratulatory greetings to couples who attain parenthood with the birth of a girl child. Man respondents in the study felt shame and embarrassment about having many daughters. The government by dispatching such greetings could spread awareness that the birth of a girl is a joyous occasion and would instill confidence in the mother who usually finds herself at the receiving end whenever a girl child is born.

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8. A move away from religious teachings and the advocacy of a scientific, rational, and humanist approach.
9. Various monetary benefits should be provided to parents have daughters like 'Gaon ki Beti', 'Laadli Laxmi Yojna' etc.
10. Women should also be socialized from early childhood to consider themselves as equal to men. They should be encouraged to assume all those responsibilities, which are normally considered to be belonging to the male domain. This would be a positive influence on the coming generations as today's girl child would be tomorrow's mother as well as mother in-law.
11. Ensuring the development of and access to good health care services.
12. The empowerment of women and a strengthening of women's rights through campaigning against practices such as dowry.
13. Inculcating a strong ethical code of conduct among medical professionals, beginning with their training as undergraduates.
14. Regular assessment of indicators of status of women in society, such as sex ratio, and female mortality, literacy, and economic participation.
15. It is only by a combination of monitoring, education campaigns, and effective legal implementation that the deep-seated attitudes and practices against women and girls can be eroded.

**Consequence of female foeticide** – Continuous decline in the number would lead to degradation of the moral values and hence degradation of the society. It might lead to an increased incidence of rape, violence against women, immorality, red traffic prostitution and polyandry. Many women suffer from psychological trauma as a result of forcibly undergoing repeated abortions. More generally, demographers warn that in the next twenty years there will be a shortage of brides in the marriage market mainly because of the adverse juvenile sex ratio. The society will consist of “**all male families**”. In rural areas, as the number of marriageable women declines, men would tend to marry younger women, leading to a rise in fertility rates and thus a high rate of population growth.

**Conclusion** – “**Yatra Naranthya Pujayathe The Tatra Deveatha**” has been our culture in our country a girl is worshipped as a Devi on one hand denied her existence on the other as if she has no right to live. It is agonizing to know that the gender bias and deep-rooted prejudice and discrimination against girl child, which have been there down the centuries, are now

found to begin in the womb itself. The girl child in the womb faces the peril of prebirth elimination i.e. female foeticide. The Atharvaveda says, **“The birth of a daughter, grant it elsewhere, here grant a son”**. This saying in the Holy Scripture sums up the Indian attitude towards female children who are subjected to multifarious travails inflicted by the society on them. The girl children in India have been the most vulnerable for centuries and, are even today, vulnerable to the insults of deprivation as well as discrimination. Whatever the natural biological laws of human reproduction had given mankind for balancing its natural sex ratio, has been taken away by man made laws, customs, traditions, religious beliefs and sophisticated medical technology, resulting in a lower status in society for girls as well as women. **“Elimination of female foetus will not obly lead to male-female imbalance but also disturb social equilibrium”**. In Likewise, the practice has usually been presumed to be most prevalent among the poor and illiterate, because of spiraling dowry dowry demands made on brides by the groom’s family, as well as other traditional prejudices. However, recent UN and Indian studies reveal that female foticide is today most frequent among the rich and highly educated.

The recent technological developments in medical practice combined with the vigorous pursues of growth of the private health sector have led to mushrooming of variety of sex-selective services. One study maps the increased frequency of female foeticide with rising levels of education – lowest among women with a fifth-grade education and highest among women with university degrees. **“Female foeticide is one of India’s most shameful secrets and is supported by a nexus of doctors and affluent people. No one gets convicted, no one is jailed and the efforts to curb it are mostly cosmetic”**.

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