FEMALE FOETICIDE ON THE RISE IN INDIA

Kamla Sarna

Violence against women exists in various forms, in all societies, the world over. However, the recognition that elimination of gender-based violence is central to equality, development and peace, is recent. In India, the landmark report on the status of women 1975 didn’t deal with this issue. In late seventies and eighties the Indian women’s movement focused on the issues of dowry deaths, female foeticide, sati, rape and other forms of violence. In 1996 the world health assembly endorsed the fact that violence against women is a Public Health problem and female foeticide is one extreme manifestation of violence against women.

Female foeticide is now more widespread in the country than ever before. The practice was restricted to few states a few years ago has now spread all over the country. Girls and women not only face inequity and inequality, they are even denied the right to born if their families do not wish so. In fact, many families do not wish their women folk to deliver baby daughters.

The Declining Sex Ratio: One of the sensitive indicators of boy preference is the sex ratio. The record shows that the sex ratio of the number of females for each thousand males has gone down consistently over the past decades.

The discrepancy in the sex ratio is the most conspicuous in the most prosperous areas of India. These areas have a sex ratio of less than 900 females to 1000 males below the age of six which is evident by the following table.

According to UNICEF study done over 3 years (1994-1996), there are only five states where no case of foeticide or infanticide have been reported which are Sikkim, Nagaland, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Jammu & Kashmir.

Factors Responsible:

1. Social Security: - Consequent upon the advances in medical science, the termination of unwanted children especially female foetuses through abortion has become common in families to satisfy their preference for sons. Studies indicate that there is preference for sons in South Korea, Pakistan, India, Turkey, Mexico, Taiwan and China. In India, often the alibi is offered that families prefer boys to girls just because according to them boys provide security to the aged parents.

2. Evil of Dowry: - Some people think, a girl means accumulation of sufficient resources for the dowry the parents have to give away when the girl gets married. Therefore, the parents think that the girl is a financial burden for them. Where as the boy is an asset who fetches a fabulous dowry for the parents.

3. Financial Dependence of Females on Husband or In-laws: - In India socio-economic background has been the villain behind the tragic female foeticide. Certain communities want to get rid of female child by compelling the circumstances of dehumanizing poverty, unemployment, superstition and illiteracy.

4. Cultural Factors: - The concept of ‘Vanshodharak’ a male child to perform last rites in Hindus and carry forward →
Measures to Reduce Female Foeticide:

Confronted with this situation, it is high time to take preventive measures against female foeticide. Both local leadership and govt. agencies should plan a concerted long-term programme aimed at the educational and socio-economic advancement of the community, e.g. by social welfare and poverty alleviation programmes, to improve the economic status of women. To wean the people away from the traditional practices, voluntary organizations should come forward to promote social education and awareness among the people through cultural programmes and public debate etc.

The practice of dowry, at the time of marriage should also be eliminated through education and concept of equality of sexes. Adult education has to be promoted. Laws relating to counterment of equal rights with regard to parental property should be implemented in the right spirit so that the stigma of liability attached to girlhood and womanhood could be eradicated for ever.

It is a challenge today to initiate a vibrant, effective campaign against female foeticide. Organizations and individuals with different priorities and ideological beliefs have to rally together to battle powerful patriarchal forces operating with in the institutions of the family and civil society.

However the national law against prenatal diagnostic technique (regulation and misuse) Act of 1994 is a positive step which enabled the National Human Rights Commission to direct the Medical Council of India to take action against doctors found abusing prenatal diagnostic techniques. There is a need for sustained campaigning and active monitoring of the act. State Governments should realize the importance and priority of the law and not merely treat it with their usual complacency. Structures for implementation of the 1994 law need to be created at the District level. Volunteers have to be actively mobilized to monitor registration and functioning of sex determination clinics at different districts. Cases have to be filed against the violators and social consciousness has to be raised against the crime.

Members of the society and the religious leaders have a positive role in creating a morally reformed society. The long-term task is to foster a culture of goodness and human dignity which inculcates individuals and institutions against the infection of this despicable human practice. The role of the Akal Takht in Punjab is worth mentioning. The apex religious organization of the Sikhs has issued directives to the community not to indulge in the inhuman and immoral practice of female foeticide and to take stern action against those who would violate this directive i.e. offenders would be excommunicated. Almost all communities have organizations similar to the Akal Takht, if they made a concerted effort to educate their flock, and if need be boycott those guilty of this crime, a radical social change could come about.

REFERENCES: