



Various theories attempted to explain and justify what led to people wanting a male child, and fearing the birth of a female one. But yet Decades arrived and vanished. And the plight of women fell deeper and deeper into the mire. Then came what was the inevitable fallout of the quagmire - the total hatred in men and women, elders and the youth alike, of the female child.

In a search for a male child many female foetuses are aborted every year and now this has become a trend. We

can simply make out the effects of this trend by knowing the fact that in many families the boys have only brothers, no sisters.

Since the number of girls is falling in the rural areas, so, in many villages parents are unable to find a suitable match for their sons. Recently in a distant village of Rajasthan a bride was married to not one or two but to eight grooms and all of them were brothers.

It is definitely a pathetic situation where raising a girl child is so difficult for these people as they consider her a 'burden' and 'troublesome'. Earlier when we did not have the technology to know about the sex of the foetus, the girl child used to be killed by putting a sand bag on her face or strangulating her or some poison used to be applied on the breasts of the mother. What adds more to it is that neither mothers nor their family members used to express any kind of sorrow on the deaths of their baby daughters. Probably they had no choice themselves but to submit to society's pressures.

Now the scenario has changed. With the help of new technologies one can easily detect the sex of the foetus. So the practice of female infanticide has been replaced by female foeticide.

According to a survey an increase of 28.32per cent has been witnessed in the number of working women in last two decades. But at the same time, what is more shameful is that the subsequent increase has also been registered in the number of pregnancy terminations or abortions by working women. The reasons stated behind this practice are: They want a small family; they want better career prospects; they want a male child and they do not want daughters. Many of these women justify sex selection and abortions because they think that if they deliver a baby boy then they are looked upon in the family

Let's now look at the figures which speak the truth for itself. According to the last official census figures, India with its nationwide ratio of 933 women for 1,000 men had a deficit of 35 million women when it entered the new millennium. Experts are calling it "sanitised barbarism". UN figures tell that about 750,000 girls are aborted every year in India. It as genocide: "More than 6 million killed in 20 years. That's the number of Jews killed in the Holocaust."

Demographic trends indicate India is fast heading towards a million female foetuses aborted each year. In India, if the 1991 Census showed that two districts had a child sex ratio (number of girls per thousand boys) less than 850; by 2001 it was 51 districts. The irony is that the nation of so called goddess and mothers still follows a culture where people idolize the birth of son and mourn the birth of daughters.

Ironically, as income levels are increasing, sex determination and sex selection is increasing all over India. The most influential and affluent pockets have the worst sex ratios. Take Punjab for instance - 793 girls for every 1,000 boys against the national figure of 927. Or South Delhi - one of the most affluent localities of the Capital - 760. In many regions of Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan; the sex ratio of girls for every 1000 boys was mere 745 or 754 or at 779 respectively. Based on the number of births in Delhi every year and the sex ratio across the capital - 814 girls for every 1,000 boys about 24,000 female foetuses are aborted in the capital every year, and about one million across the country.

Abortion rates are increasing in almost 80% of the Indian states and especially in Punjab and Haryana. These two states have the highest number of abortions every year. UNICEF has warned that unless steps are taken to address the problem across the country, India will soon face unexpected social problems like men unable to find brides, gaps in the work force and increased trafficking of women.

The other side of the coin is the issue that attempts to regulate women right to abortion inevitably raise delicate ethical questions, but for a contrary like India this is not a pro-choice or pro-life issue. "Equality is a fundamental right," but where is the gender equality when one million girl foetuses are destroyed every year before birth itself. Therefore we need to understand the fact that our situation is really alarming and extraordinary and preventing this discrimination takes precedence over arguments about women reproductive rights. One more major problem is that despite the prevalence of the ghastly and inhuman phenomenon, the decision to abort a female foetus remains a taboo, and it is difficult to persuade women to talk about the issue. If women themselves become party to the problem then how can we ever think about finding the solution?

The social evil of discrimination and marginalization of women and killing of girl child is ironically deep rooted in Indian ethos and the most shocking fact is that the innovative and hard high end technologies have actually helped in the brutal killing of the Indian girl child. Earlier it was infanticide. Now it is easier with feticide with technology at the helping end. Innovative techniques, like biopsy, ultrasound, scan tests and amniocentesis, devised to detect genetic abnormalities, are highly misused by number of families to detect gender of the unborn child. These clinical tests are highly contributing to the rise in genocide of the unborn girl child.

There is no option other than tougher regulation and control of the "technology and the medical practice" as technology in the hands of greedy, vested interests cannot be neutral. There is a law in place to prevent misuse of the technology and it must be enforced strongly. On the other hand the solution for curbing the increase of feticide can only work through increasing awareness and overall empowerment of women in every aspect.

Women participation in workforce, having disposable incomes and their making a contribution to larger society will make a difference to how women are seen in the society. Female youth icons and role models are definitely making an impact in changing the overall perception of the society which has been highly discriminatory till now. It's high time that police reforms take place and the country gets a modern police force which is more sensitive to the issues of the society rather than the current one which exists to please the whims and the fancies of their political masters. Today even though good and tough laws exist still the offenders get away with ease. Just like many other laws of the country the law preventing sex determination and sex selection exists but enforcement is a big question mark.

Dowry is a big issue for the urban elite because the amount which people are expected to pay as dowry is astonishing and ridiculous. Over that is the cost of the obscenely extravagant Indian weddings. Aside from the costs of dowries and marriages, there are other reasons why daughters are seen as less desirable like there is general belief that sons will look after their old parents and daughters are anyway to go to a different household and are therefore of not much use in the long run. The social and cultural settings are negatively biased against women. After marriage, a woman traditionally lives with the family of the husband, leaving her own parents to be looked after by a son, if there is one, in their old age. Sons carry on the family name and often the business, usually inherit the property and perform the last rites. All these contribute towards a negative bias against the girl child even before she takes birth. After almost a decade of delays, the Prohibition of Sex Selection Act came into force in February 2003, aimed at preventing the use of ultrasound examinations for sex determination. Any person including pregnant women who seek help for sex selection could be sentenced to a three-year prison sentence and fined 50,000 rupees, or \$1,200, while if any doctor is found guilty of this malpractice, he can face suspension of his registration by the state medical council.

Pre-conception and pre-natal diagnostics techniques (prohibition and sex selection) Act, which came into effect on 14th February 2003, was as a replacement of the pre-natal diagnostic techniques (regulation and misuse amendment) Act 2002, that said any kind of sex selection in pre or post pregnancy is prohibited.

There is a need to sensitize the Indian society about the sex selection tests and the impending gender crisis. There is a need to advocate to the society about greater gender equality. Increase awareness about the Pre-Natal Diagnostic Act (PNDT), 1994 as well as its recent amendment passed by the Parliament that bans any form of sex selection tests is needed.

Today, on January 24, 2011, it is for each one of us to find the awareness in our hearts, and share it with those who are still in the dark. It is for us to make that extra effort, take that extra step forward from our busy lives, and reach out to the yet un-enlightened and un-informed, biased members of our neighbourhoods, families, cities and county, and make that change. That will be the true tribute to the National Day of the Girl Child.

