

Kudi-Maar: The Vexed Question of Infanticide in Punjab: A Colonial  
and Post Colonial Perspective

By

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## **Abstract**

The aim of this dissertation is to focus on the historical and cultural factors responsible for female infanticide in Punjab. It is a state with one of the worst sex ratios in the country, with the national average being 940 females for 1000 males (Census of India 2011). The systematic killing of the girl child has produced several reactions. Academic journals and books, governmental reports, film, cinema, theatre and television have all devoted attention to this discrimination against the girl child that begins in the womb itself. However, what many of these works miss is the question of ‘continuity’. Why does female infanticide, first documented in a systematic manner by the British colonial state continue to exist today? The purpose of this thesis, hence, is to highlight the continuity of the practice of killing of the girl child. It aims to trace historically the prevalence of female infanticide in Punjab and the colonial efforts in this direction. Also, how did women themselves perceive this practice? What accounts for its continuity in the region with infanticide being replaced by feticide? This dissertation, hence, wishes to trace the historical and legal precedents of this practice in colonial India. This will demonstrate not just the historical roots of this practice but also provide a more nuanced understanding of its continuation in contemporary India as well.

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## Introduction

The discrimination faced by the girl child in the Indian subcontinent has a long history and is a reality in the lives of the majority of Indian women today. It is evident in the selective elimination of the girl child through infanticide and feticide, in violence against women as reflected in dowry deaths and rape; in discrimination faced by the girl child in terms of nutrition and access to health care. The systematic killing of the girl child has produced several reactions. Academic journals and books, governmental reports, film, cinema, theatre and television have all devoted attention to this discrimination against the girl child that begins in the womb itself. To give an example, the highly publicized series ‘Satyamev Jayate’ hosted by Bollywood actor Amir Khan dedicated its first episode to female infanticide and feticide.<sup>1</sup> Various television serials have started devoting attention to this issue. Documentaries have also been made that seek to understand this discrimination.<sup>2</sup>

However, what many of these works miss is the question of ‘continuity’. Why does female infanticide, first documented in a systematic manner by the British colonial state continue to exist today? The purpose of this thesis, hence, is to highlight the continuity of the practice of killing of the girl child. Focusing on Punjab, a state notorious for the practice of female infanticide, it examines British colonial intervention against the practice, beginning with Act VIII of 1870 and later legislative actions. It seeks to critically evaluate how the nature of the Act and the lack of will of the British colonial state led to the failure of the legislative measures introduced. Furthermore, an attempt will be made to show how the British colonial state’s

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<sup>1</sup> Female Foeticide, Episode1: Daughters are Precious. Available from: [www.satyamevjayate.in/](http://www.satyamevjayate.in/) issue 01[Accessed March 1, 2013]

<sup>2</sup> See for Example, It’s A Girl Documentary Film. Available from [www.itsagirlmovie.com/synopsis](http://www.itsagirlmovie.com/synopsis). [Accessed March 21, 2013]

emphasis on the practice of infanticide as a high caste practice and its linkage to dowry led to it being seen as a marker of high caste status. As a result, it came to be adopted by castes that traditionally did not practice it, as a means of gaining social mobility. Looking at reformist tracts that belittled the practice of bride price, this thesis seeks to show how dowry came to be seen as a means of gaining high caste status. This had long term repercussions as far as the link between dowry and female infanticide in post-colonial Punjab is concerned, where dowry continues to be a one of the prevailing causes for daughters being seen as an economic burden and a reason for male preference. This thesis will also explore other factors for the continuation of killing of the girl child, including the use of sex selection tests to abort female fetuses.

Here I wish to accept that my own circumstances have played a role in my desire to research the question of female infanticide and feticide in India. I was born as the second girl child in my family, five years after the birth of my elder sister. Being given the right to be born, I was also provided the best of education and opportunities by my family, something which not all girls born in India can lay claim to. My parents, both well-educated teachers, candidly shared with me that they were happy at my birth but faced some negative comments from their relatives and friends. My mother proudly shared that when her aunt expressed sympathy that my mother has given birth to a second girl child, she retorted, '*meri beti mera beta banegi*' (my daughter will prove to be like a son for me). As a child, I would hear this story again and again and feel proud that I was born a girl who would be like a son for my mother. However, as I grew up, I started questioning what this meant. Does that mean that as girl, I am inherently inferior and the only ways I can lay claim to equality is by imbibing the qualities of a boy? Did it mean that I should go beyond the traditional role of being a wife and mother, to aim for economic independence and support my parents in their old age? Did it mean that my mother took solace in the belief that her

second child might be female by sex but would prove to be boy in fulfilling the roles traditionally assigned to a boy in Indian society?

As I started my journey to adulthood, I became more aware of how my parents and I constantly had to grapple with societal constraints enforced on me on account of my gender. My parents endlessly worried about my safety while travelling alone, of me coming home before dark, the fear of being sexually assaulted in an unsafe city like Delhi. Travelling alone in crowded public buses, being pinched and touched inappropriately by strangers as an everyday experience, I too sometimes lamented having been born a girl. Despite being educated and economically independent, constant pressures on marriage by my family and community made me wonder if economic independence could bring me freedom as far as my marriage partner was concerned. As I came across women who were forced to or desired to produce only male offspring, I wondered about the strength of the hold of patriarchy on women today.

My own experiences made me acknowledge myself not just as an observer but a willing participant in the discourse on infanticide and feticide. I decided to draw upon and reflect on my own experiences while researching female infanticide and feticide. Callaway (1992) has stressed the need for researchers to situate their own background as a mode of self-analysis and political awareness. Enslin (1994) also faced a similar problem in her ethnographical study of Western Chitwan in Nepal. She confronted her positionality as a researcher whose marriage into an activist family in Nepal forced her to situate her own research. Referring to the active role her husband (as a western educated Nepali) and she (on account of her marriage) had to play on account of the historic role her marital family had played, she raised ethical dilemmas she faced in the course of her own research. Her research was based on how women from different ethnic and caste groups viewed the changing economic and social conditions in Western Chitwan

district in Nepal. Yet, she acknowledged that she was not allowed to be a silent observer and referred to the role she played in the emergence of *Nari Jagaran Kendra* (Women's Awareness Centre) in Chitwan district. However, for her, this very intervention in local affairs signified how local accountability could transform ways and places of doing research. She acknowledged her privileged position as a white, western educated woman vis-à-vis other women in Nepal and her ability to enter their lives as a result of her marriage into a Nepali family. For her, the dilemma of unequal relations of power and privilege can be overcome if a researcher looks at it in terms of situated knowledge and becomes engaged, situated and accountable for in local relations and politics. I wish to engage critically with this understanding in my work.

## **Methodology**

This work focuses on historicizing and analyzing the practice of female infanticide and feticide. This practice exists because of the fundamental devaluation of women, of women being seen as unequal to men in a patriarchal society like India. However, my training in Gender Studies led me to question the very categories such as 'women' and 'patriarchy' that are taken for granted while researching practices like female infanticide and feticide. Historians like Bennett (2006, p.57) have called for the need to acknowledge the oppression of women as a group as a valid goal of critical enquiry, of the need to acknowledge how 'women-as-a-group were disempowered compared to men of their group', terming it 'patriarchal equilibrium'. She acknowledged that it varied in its form and structure in different societies yet persisted as a universal characteristic in all societies. However, Bradley (1996) points out its rejection by contemporary feminists for its portrayal of women as passive victims, for its inability to deduce the complexity of power relations, of differences based on race, class and ethnicity that mark the distinction not just between women but men and women as well.

In fact, recent research has questioned the use of the term 'women' as an umbrella category irrespective of differences of class, race and ethnicity. Riley (1988) historicized the category of 'women' and pointed out that women are historically, discursively constructed and always relative to other categories which themselves change. For Riley (1988, p. 2), 'being a woman is inconsistent and cannot provide an ontological foundation'. Furthermore, for Riley (1988, p. 10) what allows women (an unstable category) to come together is mutual enmity against men, what she calls a gloomy prerequisite of feminism. She goes on to state that it is sexual antagonism that shapes sexual solidarity; and that assaults and counter-assaults, with all their irritants, are what makes for a rough kind of feminism. An important contribution in this direction was also made by Butler (1990, p.4) who questioned the stability of the term 'women' and regarded it a 'troublesome term, a site of contest, a cause of anxiety'. Furthermore, by questioning the distinction between sex and gender, by characterizing gender as performativity, Butler made an important contribution to queer, transgendered and lesbian studies. Based on this premise, for Butler (1990, p.6, 8), 'the premature insistence on a stable category of women inevitably generates multiple refusals to accept this category.' For her, the feminist movement would be better served if it acknowledged the very instability of the category 'women' that it seeks to undermine.

Looking at the history of female infanticide and feticide and the systematic removal of daughters, the above academic works, though extremely useful, do not provide answers. How do they help to us understand the killing of female fetuses and infants in Indian society and the role of women in relation to this? While in the west, the above academic debates are useful, in India, where the feminist movement is fighting for the basic right of women to exist, what is needed is for women to think of themselves as a unified group, irrespective of differences. This can be seen

from the fact that female infanticide began as a practice confined to a few castes but today, systematic removal of daughters exists irrespective of class and caste differences. Thus, researching on the question of continuity of male bias as reflected in the practice of infanticide in colonial and post-colonial Punjab, I have found the concept of patriarchy to be useful. Furthermore, while I acknowledge that the category ‘women’ is neither monolithic nor universal, their removal through feticide and infanticide is. Young (1994), grappling with the meaning to be assigned to the term “women” stressed that what is needed is to conceptualize women as a serial collective, formed by shared circumstances rather than common attributes and identity. It is this understanding that I wish to grapple with in my work, using both historical sources and ethnographic data in my thesis. I chose this interdisciplinary approach to enable me to show continuity and linkages that exist with regard to the systematic elimination of the girl child from colonial to post-colonial times.

Thus, historical sources have been consulted, including archival sources on female infanticide found at the National Archives of India (henceforth NAI) and at India Office Collections (henceforth IOC) at the British Library, London. Being a historian, I was drawn to the archives to find out how the British viewed the practice of female infanticide. Born into a Punjabi family in Delhi, I was drawn to Punjab, a state even today known for its imbalanced sex ratio. It was also a state where the British first used legislation to curb the practice of female infanticide. This led me to the question—what were the complexities that the archives brought to light with regard to British intervention in female infanticide? What were the causes that led to the practice of female infanticide for the British colonial state? Why does it continue today? To understand the causes for its continuation today, this work draws on newspaper reports, supplemented by secondary sources in the field.

An important concern of this thesis is to reflect on the voices and opinions of women with regard to female feticide and infanticide and to engage critically with the question of women's agency in relation to these practices. In this thesis, it was decided to use a questionnaire to gauge women's opinion on the question of male preference in Indian society. A questionnaire design was chosen to enable the respondents to answer freely and not come under the influence of social desirability bias while dealing with the issue of pre-natal sex selection and male bias. The chosen sample to which the questionnaire was distributed was female students studying in educational institutions. This was done in order in order to raise the question whether male bias and differential treatment of women is more often practiced by uneducated people in India? It seeks to highlight that to understand women's choices and agency in relation to their reproductive choices, it needs to be asked how young women receiving higher education respond to questions regarding their ability to make decisions within their families. For Patel (2007, p. 35), 'in the context of female feticide in India, the agency and passivity of women as producers remain an enigma with regard to educated, gainfully employed women who prioritize their reproductive careers in unexpected ways. When it comes to the unrelenting desire to produce sons against daughters, women's agency poses challenging questions'. By choosing girls currently studying in a college in Punjab and a school in Delhi to respond to the questionnaire, it seeks to understand how young women with the benefit of education look at the question of family bias and differential treatment.

Thus, in designing and distributing the questionnaire, it was decided to get the questionnaire filled by girls studying in educational institutions, aged between 16 to 23 years of age. This was done to understand the views of girls who are being provided an education and aspiring to have a career and what they think about the decision-making power they hold or will hold in the future.

Thus, the questionnaire was disseminated to girls (under eighteen years of age) studying in a public school in Delhi, teachers teaching at the same institution in Delhi, undergraduate women (18 years and above in age) pursuing their studies in a women's only college in Jullundur, Punjab; and a few working women with children who volunteered to fill the questionnaire. Interviews were also conducted with three well-educated, financially independent women. While the questionnaire design was followed in relation to the questions asked, follow up questions were asked to get an understanding on how they view their reproductive choices. The two educational institutions were chosen because I was able to receive consent from these institutions to get the questionnaire filled by their students.

In administering the questionnaire, permission was obtained from the principals of both the school and college and the questionnaire filled by the students who agreed to fill the questionnaire. The questionnaire was distributed by teachers and the students assured that their identity would remain anonymous. In the cases where names have been given, pseudonyms have been provided to maintain the anonymity of the participants.

A problem that I faced in a questionnaire dealing with a sensitive issue like sex selection tests is that of social desirability bias. To deal with this problem, the students filled the questionnaire in the familiar environment of their respective school and college to enable students to fill the questionnaire without feeling nervous or under pressure. At the same time, it cannot be denied that the sex selection test was a topic that these girls were aware of and understood that as a result of social desirability, they could not acknowledge that it was something practiced in their own families. As discussed by Bradburn, Sudman and Wansink (2004), 'Social desirability bias is a significant problem in survey research. This is especially the case when the questions deal with either socially desirable or socially undesirable

behaviour or attitudes. If the respondents have acted in ways or have attitudes that they feel are not socially desirable ones, they are placed in a dilemma’.

To deal with this problem, it was decided that the questionnaire be filled in by students without teachers and me as a researcher being present, to put them at ease. However, this is not to deny that the self-administered paper questionnaire did not have any problems. Bradley, Sudman and Wansick (2004) point to the lack of social interaction in a self-administered questionnaire and the lack of ability of the researcher to ask follow up questions. However, they argued that to compensate for this lack of social interaction, the self-administered questionnaire must depend on the questions asked to elicit accurate responses.

The questionnaire was designed in such a way that the questions first try to elicit responses from the students about their family structure, their goals and ambitions and the decision-making power they hold or believe they can hold in their respective families. The latter questions pertained more directly to sex selection tests where respondents could be influenced by social desirability bias.

Furthermore, asking questions requires a researcher to read between the lines. According to Anderson, Kathryn and Jack, Dana (1998), a woman’s view of her life combines two separate, often conflicting perspectives: one framed in concepts and values that reflect men’s dominant position in the culture, and one informed by the more immediate realities of a woman’s personal experience. Thus, to hear woman’s perspective accurately, they highlight the need to listen in stereo, receiving both the dominant and muted channels and tuning them carefully to understand the relationship between them. This technique has been utilized in understanding and analyzing the responses of the students.

Finally, this study is based on a small sample size. The total number of respondents who replied to the questionnaire was sixty seven in number. The fact remains that very few institutions are ready to participate in a study on a sensitive topic like female feticide and infanticide. Two institutions, DAV Model School, New Delhi and Lyallpur Khalsa College, Jullundur were chosen as these institutions agreed to give their students and teachers an option to respond to the questionnaire. Given the reluctance of people to respond to the question of sex selection, the fact that students and teachers of these institutions agreed to fill in the questionnaire makes their responses significant. The decision to ask the teachers of the institution to respond to the questionnaire was made as being older and married, they would have faced choices in relation to childbirth and spousal and societal reactions to them. Furthermore, their responses were important to understand how educated, financially independent women view their reproductive choices. Along with this, a few women employees at Shyam Lal College and some married women with children in Delhi also agreed to respond to the questionnaire. Their willingness to participate in the study was crucial as many married women and female gynecologists who were approached refused to respond to the questionnaire even after assurances of full anonymity. Thus, I acknowledge that while the sample size of the respondents who filled the questionnaire is small, it was still useful to understand how both gainfully employed married women as well as young women who are being educated and aiming for a career look at the issue of male preference and an unbalanced sex ratio.

### **Existing literature on Female Infanticide and Feticide and Purpose of this Study**

There have been a few works that have looked at female infanticide and efforts of the British colonial state to curb it in Punjab. Female infanticide was first discovered in India in 1789 in the

state of Benaras by Jonathan Duncan (Kasturi 1994). As far as Punjab is concerned, Malhotra (2010) and Snehi (2003) highlighted that the practice of infanticide was discovered after the annexation of Punjab in 1846 by John Lawrance. It was found to be practiced amongst certain castes— the *Rajputs* and especially the *Bedis Khattris* of Punjab. Malhotra (2010) traced the story behind the beginning of the practice of infanticide amongst the Bedis. She then went on to highlight how the Bedis were persuaded by the British to give up this practice through persuasion and appeal to incur lesser costs during weddings.

Kasturi (1994, p. 174) explained that such indirect measures were not successful and ‘there was a growing disillusionment with the efficacy of appeals to the ‘reason’ and ‘humanity’ of those who murdered their girl children’. As a result, the Act VIII of 1870 (Female Infanticide Act) was passed in 1870. Kasturi went on to highlight the loopholes of this Act that ensured the continuation of this practice. Kasturi (1994, p. 185), however, pointed out that for the British, the Act was deemed successful and was repealed in 1906. For her, ‘despite the numerous problems associated with the Act VIII of 1870, an apparent fall in female mortality statistics in the proclaimed villages by the end of the nineteenth century occasioned both a false sense of optimism and a rapid decline in direct interference in the affairs of the suspected clans’. Nonetheless, the continuation of this practice could be seen in various discussions on female infanticide in Punjab dating from 1901 onwards that demonstrated that the practice was far from over.

As far as the reasons for the practice of female infanticide are concerned, the colonial rulers opined that it was, first, the desire to maintain caste status as marrying a female into a family of inferior caste was considered a sign of dishonor. Tambiah (1973, p. 218) held that endogamous marriage (marriage between the same castes) and hypergamous unions were the guiding rules for

marriage in India. He defined the institution of hypergamy as ‘women of lower status marrying men of superior status as well as a privilege allowing men of superior status a greater access to a wider range of women of his own and inferior statuses’. Tambiah traced the roots of this institution to the ancient text Manusmriti that provided the basis for upward mobility in the form of anuloma (a superior caste uniting with an inferior caste woman) as a means to gain higher caste status. It was this pressure of marrying women to men of similar or higher caste status, for Tambiah (1973, p. 223), that gave rise to the practice of female infanticide. Malhotra (2002, p. 52)) acknowledged that hypergamy was seen as a major cause of infanticide in colonial Punjab but held that the actual situation was that of isogamy (marrying within the same caste group). She quoted Ibbetson’s text of 1881 that noted a tendency towards hypergamy among the highest castes but tried to show isogamy as the established practice amongst most groups including the high castes.

Dowry, the gift given to a girl at the time of marriage along with exorbitant expenditure in marriage was considered another reason behind the practice of female infanticide as it made girls an ‘economic burden’ (Malhotra, 2010; Snehi, 2003; Oldenburg 2002). An important contribution in this respect has been made by Oldenburg who tried to trace whether it was the demand for dowry that led to the killing of a girl child at birth. As highlighted by Oldenburg (2002, p. 6), the British colonial state based their argument on the grounds that lower castes receiving bride price would have no incentive to kill their daughters. However, several families from Hindu lower castes such as the Jats (who practiced bride price) and did not follow the practice of dowry, were also found guilty of committing female infanticide.

Oldenburg (2002) argued that it was the changes introduced under the British, namely, the ‘masculinization’ of the economy (with commercialization and mechanization) along with

introduction of royatwari system (a land revenue system with a fixed land revenue demand and sale of land in the event of non-payment of revenue) and codification of customary laws that mauled the social fabric of Punjab and made a male child more desirable. With land becoming a saleable property and with commercialization, land could be owned by male members only and no longer a part of women's *stridhan* (property). She viewed dowry in pre-colonial India not as a curse but as a marker of status and a source of financial support in difficult times. A new situation emerged with the establishment of individual property rights in land. Land emerged as a commodity with proprietary rights given to men. For Oldenburg (2002, p. 103), in contrast to customary laws prevalent in Punjab in which produce of the land was shared between men and women, the establishment of land as a saleable property under the British colonial state relegated women's property rights to the margins and contributed to worsening gender equality.

Oldenburg (2002, p. 159) also linked the desire for a male progeny with the equation of Sikhs of Punjab as 'martial'. The Punjabis, particularly the Sikhs came to be seen as martial as against the 'effeminate' Bengalis due to the loyalty that the Sikhs had displayed during the revolt of 1857. As a result, there was large scale induction of Punjabis into the British army. Oldenburg (2002, p. 159) highlighted, 'by late nineteenth century, Punjabis made up fifty-seven infantry units and Bengal fewer than fifteen. Bengalis, always effeminate, were now dismissed as hopeless poltroons while the Punjabi Muslims and Sikhs were seen as real men with hair on their chests who could be counted on in the battlefield'. Furthermore, with the emergence of a new land revenue system based on commoditization of land and its conversion into a saleable property, the fear of losing proprietary rights over land in the event of non-payment of land revenue loomed large. In this scenario, cash salaries of soldiers enrolled in the army became a source of relief for peasant families that could be used to pay revenue in times of stress. As a result, a preference for

male progeny was generated and expressed through selective female infanticide. Thus, for Oldenburg (2002, p. 122), ‘the growing preference for sons is better read as an obsession for security in a time of new insecurities than a cultural diktat’.

Malhotra (2010) agreed that colonial policies contributed to the perpetuation of the practice of female infanticide. The attempt to link infanticide to caste and attempt to curb marriage expenses led this practice to be a marker of high status and led to lower castes seeking upward mobility by spending more lavishly on weddings. M.N. Srinivas referred to this attempt of lower castes to adopt practices of upper castes for upward social mobility as the practice of ‘sankritization’ (1952). While acknowledging the significance of the argument on the ‘masculinization’ of the economy under the British, Malhotra stressed that this argument does not explain the continuity of the practice of infanticide/feticide in post colonial period. For her (2010, p. 94), ‘economic reasons can only make sense in conjunction with an understanding of the cultural context and milieu of the Punjabi people’.

What I wish to stress is that the works, highlighted above, though significant, suffer from limitations that I wish to address in my work. Snehi’s work (2003), for example, is restricted to a study and analysis of the works of Oldenburg and Malhotra and does not bring original scholarship to the field. As far as the works of Oldenburg and Malhotra are concerned, Snehi (2003) brought forth their limitations when he stressed that the works of both Oldenburg (2002) and Malhotra (2003) have not dealt specifically with female infanticide. Oldenburg's work has analyzed infanticide in relation to dowry while Malhotra's main concern has been the creation of a middle class identity in colonial Punjab through the prism of gender. Though Malhotra (2010) in her article dealt specifically with infanticide, her work was restricted in its attempt to look at indigenous responses and tended to ignore the legislative repercussions brought into the forefront

by the colonial state in its effort to curb female infanticide. Furthermore, these works have been silent with regard to the role of women in relation to the question of infanticide.

The purpose of this study, hence, is to trace the cultural and legal precedents of this practice to provide a more nuanced understanding. Of specific concern will be colonial intervention in the practice with the capture of Punjab in 1849. Furthermore, the aim of this study is not just to trace historical antecedents of this practice in colonial Punjab but also to explore its continuity in post-colonial Punjab and Delhi (as the national capital with a substantial Punjabi population). Infanticide continues to be practiced in Punjab. Furthermore, with the availability of sex selection techniques and legalization of abortion, a new element has entered the picture; the practice of female feticide. Census figures show that male bias, distorted sex ratios and practice of female feticide continue in this region. In the latest census figure of India (2011), the child sex ratio has fallen to 914 females for 1000 males, the lowest since independence. (Anon, 2011a). Though the child sex ratio has improved marginally in Punjab, it is still at the bottom with only 846 females for 1000 males (Anon, 2011b). At the same time, it is a state with high levels of female literacy. Does better education empower women and improve their status within the family? This needs to be juxtaposed with emphasis on family planning and sex- determination tests, which are rampant in Punjab. Harris-White (2002, p.125) in her study of Tamil Nadu termed this deliberate sex selective abortion as ‘gender cleansing that does not need concentration camps but takes place in the bosom of the family’.

Various works on female feticide and infanticide in post-colonial India have raised important debates with respect to female feticide. (Miller, 1981; Patel, 2007; Sekhar and Hatti, 2010; Bumiller, 1991). With urbanization, family planning etc., the need for male progeny has been met scientifically through pre-natal diagnostic techniques and despite the passing of ‘PNDT’ (Pre

Natal Diagnostic Techniques Regulation and Prevention) Amendment rules 2003, the practice continues to be rampant. Though the PNDT Act has made the sex determination test illegal and a crime, many clinics continue to illegally perform this test. What are the legal loopholes that make this possible? Also, what are the cultural factors that ensure the continuation of this practice? Do education and a high socio economic status act as deterrents against this practice?

A crucial concern raised but not directly addressed by Patel (2007) and other articles on female feticide is the prevalence of female infanticide along with feticide. What accounts for the existence of this practice today? Who practices it? What are the factors that make a female child a burden? What are the implications of an unbalanced sex ratio for Punjab? Significantly, Patel (2007) has reiterated that with a two-child norm, one girl child is seen desirable but more than one is seen as a burden. Marriage expenses, dowry and high costs of education (to meet a suitable bride groom) are all held responsible for this. This needs to be juxtaposed with laws such as dowry prohibitions and equal inheritance for both male and female child. Yet, have laws broken the hold of customs?

Lastly, exploration of female infanticide and feticide brings forth the question of women's agency. Women play an important role in the continuity of this practice and in the working of patriarchy. How do women themselves look at this practice? What determines their reproductive choices? This has to be linked to the ability to produce sons as bringing forth the value of the woman in her marital home. What is significant is that it continues to be important even for highly educated, urbanized women who continue to espouse the need for a male child. To give an example, a family friend (a working professional) who gave birth to a second female child was greeted not with congratulatory notes but condolence with one relative pitching in, 'test karva liya hota' (you should have gotten a test done). The episode Satyamev Jayate brought forth

how mother-in-laws force their daughter-in-laws to undergo abortions, and many women, though not pressurized by their families, undergo abortion as they believe having a boy would give them greater approval in their families.<sup>3</sup> The question of women's agency with respect to feticide is an important aspect covered in this work.

This work has been divided into three chapters. The first chapter looks at the historical development of the practice of female infanticide in colonial Punjab. Tracing the beginning of this practice in 1846, it goes on to look at the first legislation against it in 1870. Furthermore, as the later legislations passed in Punjab indicate, it seeks to understand the role played by the British colonial state in cementing this practice and how the British grappled with the question of infanticide in India. The second chapter discusses the various factors (cultural and legal) responsible for female feticide and continuation of infanticide in post-colonial India. Finally, in the third chapter, a questionnaire that was answered by undergraduate students in a girl's college in Punjab, students and teachers at a girl's school in Delhi and by women employees at a college in Delhi has been brought forth. Through an analysis of their responses, an attempt is made to understand the vexed question- why does discrimination against women continue to begin in the womb itself?

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<sup>3</sup> Female Foeticide, Episode1: Daughters are Precious. Available from: [www.satyamevjayate.in/](http://www.satyamevjayate.in/) issue 01[Accessed March 1, 2013]

## **Kudi-Maar: Female Infanticide in Punjab: A Colonial Perspective**

This Chapter wishes to explore the colonial antecedents of the practice of female infanticide in Punjab to understand its continuities in post-colonial Punjab. Infanticide was discovered in Punjab by British governor Sir Lawrence (1848) as prevalent amongst certain castes—*Bedis* most prominently who were given the epithet of *kudi-maar* (killer of daughters) (Browne, 1857). Along with practices like *sati* (burning of a widow on her husband's pyre), the intervention of the British colonial state against female infanticide was aimed at removing customs and practices deemed cruel to women (Mani, 1998). This chapter will trace the legislative interventions undertaken by the British colonial state in Punjab to stamp out female infanticide and the causes for its failure. Furthermore, this chapter will also seek the role attributed to women as far as the practice is concerned. Unlike *sati*, where women were the victims, female infanticide provided a more complicated picture where women were often found guilty of killing their infant, as shall be explored in the latter part of this chapter. In other words, how do we look at the question of women's agency in relation to female infanticide?

### **British Colonial Intervention and Female Infanticide in Punjab**

On March 18, 1870, Act VIII for the prevention of murder of female infants was enacted by the British colonial state in India. The Act was introduced in areas considered notorious for practice of female infanticide: North Western Provinces, Punjab and Oudh. It laid down (a) the making and maintenance of registers of birth, marriages and death in the above mentioned districts (b) the use of police force for the purpose of preventing or detecting the murder of female infants in such districts (c) punishment and prosecution for committing murder of female infants or any

other offence considered punishable under the Act and (d) provided for placing neglected children under supervision and making legal guardians pay for their monthly allowance.<sup>4</sup>

As laid down in the annexure to the bill for the prevention of female infanticide, the cause of the crime of female infanticide for the British colonial state was due to the enormous cost of marriage ceremonies that had to be met by the father of the bride. Along with this, the necessity of a hypergamous marriage was also held to be a crucial cause. Browne (1857, p. 9) stated:

‘The first motive, doubtless, is the pride of caste; and it thus operated throughout the whole of Hindoo nation. It is an established custom that a female may not marry into any caste or tribe which is not at least of equal rank with her own. To marry an inferior is, in their eyes, degradation, but to remain unmarried is an actual dishonor.’

The remedial measures proposed were also twofold: to prevent the extravagant expenditure on marriage and secondly, to abrogate the custom through measures introduced in the Act VIII of 1870.<sup>5</sup> As emphasized by Murthy (2007 p. 5), unlike sati, the practice of infanticide was not sanctioned by any sacred Hindu text, and was, thus, a domestic crime committed in secrecy and silence, it was also paradoxically represented as incorporating ceremonial elements into its practice. It was this very disjuncture between religious textual authority and the enactment of a religiosity, argued Murthy (2007, p. 5), which divorced the performance of infanticide from any claims to religious textual tradition, so that officials of the East India Company could now safely demarcate infanticide as a custom alone.

The earliest recorded example of this practice during the jurisdiction of the British colonial state was in 1789 when Jonathan Duncan, resident in Banaras, attested to the existence of ‘daughter

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<sup>4</sup> *Papers of Act VIII of 1870*, Home-Legislature, File no. 1044, July 1868, pp 1-4.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

killing' amongst the *Rajkumars* of Banaras, who under his insistence had agreed to stamp out this practice (Brown, 1857). It was subsequently discovered in many other states such as Orissa, Kathiawar, N-W province etc. In the annexure to the bill for the prevention of female infanticide, the practice is described as being endemic to many tribes of *Rajputs* and the practice in Banaras, Agra, Oudh, Allahabad, Manipur etc. is mentioned.<sup>6</sup> Snehi (2003) highlighted how in Punjab, after its annexation in 1846, the Commissioner of the Jullundhur daob, Lord Lawrence, found its existence amongst the *Rajputs* and especially the *Bedi Khattris* of Punjab. Malhotra (2010) traced the story behind this practice amongst the *Bedis*. A descendent of Guru Nanak (the founder of Sikh faith who condemned the practice), Dharam Chand, on the eve of his daughter's marriage, faced humiliation at the hands of the groom's party. Though customary marriage practice in Punjab places the bride's family in an inherently inferior position, the *Bedis*, on account of being descendants of Guru Nanak, considered themselves superior. Unable to bear this humiliation and in order to claim a higher status, Dharam Chand declared that all *Bedis* should kill their daughters as soon as they were born rather than face insult ever at the hands of a groom's party. Herein, Malhotra (2010, p. 98) makes the important point that 'female infanticide can be said to have been adopted as a strategy for upward mobility, for doing away with a daughter meant never having to bow before anyone, even one nominally held superior'.

John Cave Browne, in a book on Indian Infanticide brought out in 1857, referred to the various means deployed to kill the girl child by dais (midwives) who stopped the infant from breathing by covering her nose and mouth, by exposing the infant to extreme cold or heat but also by neglect (Browne, 1857). Flora Annie Steel, a memsahib married to a British civil servant in Punjab in her extensive travels discovered the local custom in which women left their dead

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<sup>6</sup> *Papers of Act VIII of 1870*, Home-Legislature, File no. 1044, July 1868, pp 1-4.

female infants outside the village for jackals to carry off, if the jackals carried them away, it would be good omen for the birth of a male child (Steel. 1929). Amongst the *Bedis*, Browne (1857, p. 117) referred to practice amongst women of burying the corpse with a piece of *goor* (jaggery) between the lips and a twist of cotton in their hands and reciting the following couplet:

“ *Goor khaie, poonee kuttea,  
Aaap na aeei, bhay an ghuteaa*”

The English translation is as follows:

“Eat your jaggery<sup>7</sup> and spin your thread,  
But go and send a boy instead.”

Thus, for the British colonial state, the criminal nature of the act due to existence of customary practices against the girl child made intervention against infanticide necessary, leading to the enactment of Act VIII of 1870. Also crucial to note was the role of women in killing the girl child. However, as the case of Punjab demonstrated, the Act of 1870 was deemed insufficient to wipe out female infanticide and revised infanticide rules were introduced in 1885 in nine villages in Jullundur district, addressing the loopholes of the Act. It was held that statistics showed that Act VIII of 1870 had not been successful in curbing the practice of female infanticide. The revised rules laid down the definition of minors as children under the age of twelve, except married female children living with their husbands, who were deemed to be adult females. The revised infanticide rules also made it mandatory for the head of each family to report to the *chowkidar* (village headman) of the village the birth and marriage of all females and death of all females under the age of twelve. In addition, the *dai* (midwife) had to report illness of a newborn child to the *chowkidar* of the village. The *lambardar* (revenue collector) was to be held

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<sup>7</sup> Jaggery is a traditional form of sugar consumed in Punjab and many other parts of India.

responsible for the due performance of duties by a *chowkidar*, the latter to report to the police the birth, death and marriage of a girl below twelve years of age as well as removal of a pregnant woman from the village.<sup>8</sup>

Significantly, the revised infanticide rules also laid down the castes held responsible for practicing female infanticide— the *Jats* in particular along with *Bedi Khattris* and *Rajputs* (held responsible for female infanticide in the annexure of the bill). Elaborate expenditure rules were laid down with regard to marriage of girls for the Jats of Punjab. The bride's father was not to exceed the amount mentioned and was to produce before the district magistrate an account of the expenses incurred. In case of expenditure exceeding Rs. 159, the concerned person could receive imprisonment up to six months, or a fine of Rs. 1000, or both.<sup>9</sup> This measure demonstrated how for the British colonial state, high expenditure in marriage by a bride's father along with a need to maintain high caste status continued to be a major cause of the practice of killing the girl child.

However, rules laid out for the suppression of female infanticide in 1885 were again deemed inadequate to suppress the practice as brought out in a letter by J.P.Hewitt, Secretary to governor of Punjab addressed to the Judicial and General Secretary to the Government of Punjab. This was based on the opinions of Sir Dennis Fitzpatrick, governor of Punjab till 1897, that the provisions of the Act of 1870 brought in force in nine villages of district of Jullundur (Punjab) to wipe out the practice amongst particular castes (Jat Sikhs particularly) were unsuccessful. Using the infanticide reports of 1895, Sir Daniel Fitzpatrick showed the continuity of the practice of infanticide in Jullundur, Ferozepur and Ludhiana districts. As a result, it was held that ' although

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<sup>8</sup> *Scheme for the suppression of the crime of female infanticide by Medical Agency in the Jullundur district*, Home Dept., File Nos. 40-41, June 1900, p. 18.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 19.

the Act of 1870 had been brought into force in nine villages in one district only (Jullundur) in the Province, there was no doubt whatever as to the fact that among certain castes (Jat Sikhs) in the Jullundur, Ferozepur and Ludhiana Districts, female infanticide still prevailed to a most lamentable extent'<sup>10</sup>. This was a reflection of the inability of the British colonial state to put into force effective laws against the practice of female infanticide.

As a result, in 1900, new rules were proposed for the suppression of female infanticide. By notification No.315, dated 12<sup>th</sup> February 1901, the new rules were enacted. What is crucial is that new rules reduced the number of villages in which the rules were to be put into force from nine to five villages in Jullundur. Furthermore, unlike rules of 1885 that fixed the marriage expenses for Jats of the villages, the new rules stated that marriage expense for each tribe should be fixed separately by the district magistrate. Furthermore, these expenses were fixed not just for the bride's family but the groom's as well.<sup>11</sup>

The suppression of female infanticide was now put into the hands of medical agencies. The Act of 1870, enforced in nine villages of Punjab in 1885 had put the inspection of birth and death of girls below twelve years of age in the hands of a police officer. The revised rules of 1900 placed power in the hands of a medical officer visiting the village. It also named medical officers who could conduct post mortem exams to find out the cause of death of female children below the age of twelve. The other provisions for the suppression of female infanticide remained the same as before.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>*Scheme for the suppression of the crime of female infanticide by Medical Agency in the Jullundur district*, Home Dept., File Nos. 40-41, June 1900, p. 21.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 21.

However, the ineffectiveness of the measures was made evident by the cancellation of the notification No. 315, dated 12<sup>th</sup> February 1901, that introduced measures to suppress female infanticide in five villages of Jullundur. In a letter dated April 20, 1921, it was held that these measures had been a cause of disaffection, and that two of the most notorious centers of disaffection in the Jullundur district were villages to which the Act has been made applicable and blamed official corruption as a cause of disaffection. It was stated that the provisions of the Act interfered in domestic privacy of the subject population, such as the entrance of police into a house with females present after the death of an infant girl for enquiry. The rule to prohibit the disposal of the body of the female child till the completion of the enquiry, and the transfer of the body to medical centers to conduct post mortem exams, also became a source of disaffection. It was held that this practice caused inconvenience to the people and had become a source of discontent. The lack of any prosecution in the concerned villages under the Act was also blamed for the lack of success of the measures undertaken.<sup>13</sup>

It is also crucial that the British colonial state held the measures undertaken in the villages concerned for the suppression of female infanticide to have caused no gradual improvements from 1901 to 1911. On the other hand, the British colonial state held that imbalanced sex ratio had led girls to be a source of profit in the marriage market. In other words, as a result of the number of boys exceeding the number of girls, instead of resorting to the practice of giving dowry, the practice of demanding bride price was being resorted to. Furthermore, for the government of Punjab, bride price would make girls more desirable and would prevent the practice of female infanticide. As a result, the provisions of revised rules of infanticide,

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<sup>13</sup> *Female Infanticide in Punjab*, Home-Police, File Nos. 383-388, May 1921, p. 5.

introduced in five villages of Jullundur, came to an end in 1921.<sup>14</sup> However, the effects of these measures and the reformist responses to these measures had a long term impact and continue today in post-independence India. The next section will look at the effects of the laws introduced for the purpose of suppression of female infanticide in Punjab.

### **Dowry, Bride Price and Infanticide: What Infanticide Rules Reveal**

The legislative measures undertaken revealed the loopholes in the Act VII of 1870 and the lack of will of the government to bring about successful prosecutions under the Act. The Act of 1870 was introduced in the first case only to Oudh, North Western Provinces and Punjab. In Punjab, as the earlier section revealed, subsequent legislation reduced the scope of the Act, from nine to five villages of Jullundur, and finally, in 1921, rules for suppression of female infanticide by medical agency were found to have caused discontent in these five villages and were cancelled. It was also stressed that no successful prosecution had been made under the Act. Kasturi (1994) in her analysis of the Act VIII of 1870 referred to the lack of successful prosecutions under the Act. The lack of incriminating evidence, lack of witnesses and the domestic nature of the crime, which Kasturi (1994, p. 183) noted, 'took place within the private, and more specifically, the female space', were all held responsible for the lack of successful prosecutions under the Act. It is also crucial that the act required cooperation from the midwives (*dais*) to report the birth and death of a girl child in the village. However, this ignored the fact that the midwives were bound to the family they worked for and were often accomplices in bringing forth the death of the infant girl born to the family. Tandon (1961) in his autobiographical account mentioned this as well. He stated (1961, p. 146):

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<sup>14</sup> *Female Infanticide in Punjab*, Home-Police, File Nos. 383-388, May 1921 p. 6.

‘Child birth always took place at home and was entrusted to the care of the family dai. Dais were usually old Muslim women who had earned a reputation for midwifery. Like the family barber, there were family dais who over years delivered succeeding generations.’

The fact that the revised rules on infanticide reduced the operation of Act of 1870 to five villages and its subsequent cancellation in 1921 was a reflection that for the government, suppression of female infanticide remained a minor concern. Not surprisingly, then, Act VIII of 1870 and subsequent legislation had only a limited impact. For Kasturi (1994), the failure of the Act was embedded in the policy of repression and not reform. Hence, coercive measures were deemed insufficient to deal with this problem. However, I would argue that it was not just the coerciveness of the measures but the nature of the Act itself (depending on the cooperation of midwives) and the lack of will of the government to enforce the act that were significant in the failure of legislative measures to suppress female infanticide.

Furthermore, I wish to argue that the some of the measures introduced under the Act VIII of 1870 and subsequent legislation and reformist responses had a long term impact as far as the practice of dowry and bride price were concerned. As highlighted in the previous section, the British colonial state linked the practice of infanticide to a practice conducted by the high castes due to the necessity of marrying a girl in the same rank or higher rank than them and the practice of dowry (gift giving) and the heavy expenditure incurred on her marriage by her father. Browne (1857) traced the practice to the horror of giving a daughter to an inferior caste and the ruinous expenditure incurred by a bride’s father towards her marriage. On the other hand, the castes that practiced the custom of bride price

were seen as a major impediment to the practice of infanticide. Thus, as stated in the letter dated April 20, 1921:

‘It has been pointed out by the Commissioner of Jullundur, who has recently toured through the tract subject to the restrictions, that social conditions have been changed by the existing disparity between the male and female elements in the population so that daughters, instead of being a source of ruinous expenses to their families as they formerly were, are except in families of very high status, a source of profit or advantage in the marriage market’.<sup>15</sup>

Thus, for the British colonial state, it was high castes that practiced dowry while low castes practiced bride price and this made girls a source of profit and prevented them from killing their girl child. The imbalanced sex ratio was also seen as a major factor for many families resorting to the practice of bride price. By linking the practice of dowry and high expenditure incurred in marriage as a high caste practice, it made the practice of dowry as a marker of high caste status. As a result, this practice was appropriated by lower castes to gain a higher caste status.

Furthermore, as the case for Jullundur showed, Jats were held responsible for practicing infanticide and rules were laid down regarding expenditure to be incurred on marriage. However, Jats were known to practice bride price. Here also the British colonial state adopted the belief that amongst the Jats, this practice was conducted by the high born, especially amongst the Sikhs (Malhotra, 2002, p. 59).

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<sup>15</sup> *Female Infanticide in Punjab*, Home-Police, File Nos 383-388, May 1921, p. 5.

Oldenburg (2002) critiqued the equation of dowry with female infanticide. For her, it was the changes introduced by the British colonial state in the economy (with commercialization and mechanization) and the codification of customary laws that fueled the desire for male progeny in colonial Punjab. With land emerging as a saleable property and with commercialization, land could be owned by male members only and no longer a part of women's *stridhan* (property). Furthermore, the large scale induction of Sikhs and Punjabi Muslims into the army after revolt of 1857 further contributed to the desire to have male children (Fox, 1985).

Here I wish to stress that while acknowledging the significance of the Oldenburg's argument on the 'masculinization' of the economy, this does not explain the continuity and the widespread practice of infanticide/feticide in post-colonial period.

To understand the continuation of this practice, one needs to look at the circumstances that led bride price to be seen as an unfavorable practice, as a marker of low caste status. As a result of the categorization of infanticide and dowry as markers of high caste status, a number of reformist tracts emerged in Punjab that spoke against the practice of bride price. They used the *kissa* tradition to spread their message amongst the indigenous population. Malhotra (2002) refers to the use of *kissas* in print form during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries Punjab as means to carry reformist message in popularized version. These tracts, which I discovered in the India Office Collections at the British Library, attested to the fact that as a result of British policies with regard to female infanticide, by early twentieth century, bride price came to be seen as a low caste practice

and as a source of profit with dowry being a cause of infanticide and as a marker of high caste status.<sup>16</sup>

Not surprisingly, then, reformist *kissas* emerged against the practice of bride price, asking parents not to sell their daughters. *Navan Kissa Kudi Vechan da siyappa* (against giving away daughters in marriage for money) by Khwaja Abdur Rahman in 1922, *Dhian Di Pukar* (Call of Daughters) dated August 1914 by Kartar Singh Pracharak, *Navan Kissa Kudi Vechan da haal* by Gagan Singh (undated), *Navan Kissa Kanya da Virlap* by Munshi Ghulam Muhammad (girl bewailing and cursing her father who had given her away in marriage for money), the undated tract entitled *Kudi Vechan da haal* (affects of selling your daughter) all spoke against this practice and belittled the families that practiced it. For example, Khwaja Abdur Rahman wrote:

*Dhiyan Vechan Jehde,  
Unha nu Allah di maar.*<sup>17</sup>

(Those who kill their daughters face the wrath of Allah)

Similarly, *Dhian di Pukar* by Kartar Singh wrote in his reformist pamphlet:

*Dhi da paisa na khain  
Ve babla dhi da paisa na khain*<sup>18</sup>

(Do not make money from your daughters)

These tracts were significant because they belittled the practice of bride price. Thus, with dowry being seen as a high caste practice and bride price seen as a demeaning practice in reformist

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<sup>16</sup> Khwaja Rhaman, *Navan Kissa Kudi Vechan Da Siyappa*, Amritsar: Abdul Hanan Bookseller, 1922; Kartar Singh Pracharak, *Dhian Di Pukar*, Laillpur: Pratap Singh Sunder Singh Pustak Vala, 1914; Munshi Ghulam Muhammad, *Kanya da Virlap*, n.p.; Gagan Singh, *Kudi Vechan Da Hall*, n.p.

<sup>17</sup> Khwaja Rhaman, *Navan Kissa Kudi Vechan Da Siyappa*, Amritsar: Abdul Hanan Bookseller, 1922, p.1.

<sup>18</sup> Kartar Singh Pracharak, *Dhian Di Pukar*, Laillpur: Pratap Singh Sunder Singh Pustak Vala, 1914, p.2.

tracts, the practice of dowry and expenditure incurred on a daughter's marriage came to be seen as a marker of high caste status. This had long term repercussions as far as the link between dowry and female infanticide in colonial and even post colonial Punjab is concerned, not attested to in the existing works on female infanticide in Punjab.

### **Infanticide: A Crime Committed by Widows?**

The legislative measures introduced by the British colonial state also raised an important aspect: the role of women as far as the practice of infanticide was concerned. For the British colonial state, it was pride of race and ruinous expenditure incurred on a girl's marriage that caused the crime of infanticide. Amongst the *Bedis*, it was shown to be a decision taken by Dharam Chand, the male head of the family on account of the humiliation he faced at the marriage of his daughter. However, McLeod, lieutenant governor of Punjab, in his minute on the suppression of infanticide, dated June 22, 1870, brought to the fore an important aspect. Referring to the views of Pandit Motilal Kathju, a native of Punjab regarding the practice of infanticide, he pointed out that for Kathju:

‘It is quite an error to suppose, as some do, that mothers amongst the latter are opposed to this practice, as it could not possibly exist without their willing countenance and cooperation’.<sup>19</sup>

Kathju went on to state:

‘Female infanticide was practiced with women as willing accomplices, it is women who first announce to their male relatives the sex of the child that is born and are the parties who accomplish the horrible deed’.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> D.F. McLeod, *Minute on the Suppression of Infanticide*, File no. 27, June 1870, p. 1.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 1.

Malhotra (2002, p. 50) highlighted the view of Munshi Bakshi Ram Das Chibber, a Brahman, who reminisced that when he was eight years old, his mother on giving birth to a girl, placed the girl in his arms and the midwife poured a jar full of cold water on her head. He also suspected that his mother had poisoned her with the milk of Ak tree. Kasturi (1993, p. 183) gave the example from Azamgarh where a grandmother belonging to a high caste family was sentenced to transportation for life when it was proved that she had suffocated her newborn grandchild by placing a placenta over the mouth of the infant.

Newspaper articles reported cases of conviction against the crime of infanticide in which the accused were Hindu widows who committed the crime due to shame of giving birth to an illegitimate child. The paper Social Reformer gave the case of a Hindu widow sentenced to transportation for life throwing into a well the corpse of her child with a view to concealing its birth. (Anon, 1925a). Another newspaper gave the case of a Brahmin widow Sunderbai who was sentenced to transportation for life for strangling her female child with a strip torn from her saree after being abandoned by her father. The newspaper stressed that this case demonstrated the inhumanity of the law in India. In England, a law was introduced in 1922 to distinguish infanticide from ordinary murder. The law also held that when an infant was killed by the mother while she was still under the effects of child birth so that the balance of her mind was disturbed, it should be treated as a separate offence from murder and punished accordingly. The article highlighted that no such law existed in India (Anon, 1925b).

However, the subsequent dismissal of the proposal of the Bombay government on the recommendation of the Bombay High Court to amend the Indian Penal Code to make infanticide distinct from murder was based on the belief that conditions in India with respect to infanticide were more complicated. The Viceroy and his council, after consulting with the local

governments, held that the amendment would encourage the practice of infanticide by treating it as less than murder. The government of Punjab also stressed that the proposed amendment would encourage infanticide. Furthermore, it was not just widows who committed it due to fear of carrying illegitimate children.<sup>21</sup> It was not just widows who committed infanticide due to fear of carrying illegitimate children. Folk songs and customary practices indicate the role played by women with regard to the practice of female infanticide in India, which occurred within the confines of the home. As a result, convictions occurred only against widows who had no familial support and in cases where there was substantial evidence of physical violence on the infant's body (Kasturi, 1992). In all other cases, the strength of local alliances and domestic nature of the crime of infanticide ensured that the practice of female infanticide remained hard to prove.

### **Conclusion**

It is significant that the British colonial state undertook legislative measures to put an end to the practice of infanticide in Punjab. However, these measures were not successful. The introduction of infanticide in a small area and colonial government's lack of will and fear of discontent all proved to be reasons for the failure of measures introduced for suppressing the practice of killing the girl child. Furthermore, as this chapter has demonstrated, the laws introduced by British colonial government had repercussions as far as practice of infanticide is concerned.

Thus, the categorization of the practice of female infanticide as a high caste practice, as being practiced due to pride of caste and to prevent ruinous expenses in marrying off a daughter had long term repercussions in Punjab. Bride price, which was seen as a low caste practice that made the birth of girls favorable, came to be shunned by castes that practiced it to gain upward mobility. Reformist tracts also emerged against this practice that came to see bride price as

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<sup>21</sup> *Proposed Amendment of the Indian Penal Code so as to Provide For Infanticide as Distinct from Murder*, Judicial, 1926, File No's 529-25, p. 6.

selling of girls and dowry as acceptable. Muslim reformist tracts are significant as they shunned the customary practice of giving *mehr* (a fixed amount paid by the bridegroom for the bride) in favor of dowry and stressed on bride price as being looked down upon in Islam. Thus, the categorization of infanticide as a high caste practice and its linkage with dowry led to it being practiced by castes and religions that traditionally did not practice it. As a result, this practice gained a much stronger hold than it did before British legislative interference against it.

Visaria (2007) in her discussions with women from Gujarat and Haryana came to the same conclusion. Based on the study she undertook in Mehsana district in Gujarat and Kurukshetra district in Haryana in 2003, Visaria pointed out how lower caste women, less pressurized by their families to undertake measures to ensure birth of a male child, emulated the practice of the upper castes and their way of thinking. Indeed, this belief was so widespread that even lower castes that did not traditionally practice the custom of dowry emulated this practice to raise their status. This is not to argue that those who do not practice custom of dowry gave preference to girls. Chowdhary (1989) in her study of colonial Haryana pointed out how bride price practiced by the lower castes was looked down upon, with higher castes giving dowry on their daughter's marriage. Furthermore, contrary to the belief that the practice of bride price lay in contradiction with infanticide, Chowdhary (1989, p. 312) pointed out, 'females therefore meant drain, financial for some and moral and ethical for others. It is small wonder that bride price even in its positive aspects could not represent high status for women in any real terms'. It also explains how dowry has become so widespread in post-colonial times. Not surprisingly, post-colonial Punjab, as the next chapter will demonstrate, continues to grapple with it.

Finally, the question of women's agency needs to be explored in relation to female infanticide. Did woman have a choice when it came to the practice of female infanticide? There is evidence

that women committed the act in the domestic privacy of their homes, with midwives (*dias*) as willing accomplices and convictions occurred only in cases where women such as widows had no familial support. Thus, female infanticide was not just committed by widows carrying illegitimate children but by women in the privacy of their homes after giving birth to a girl child. While there may have been voices of resistance, they have been hard to find. Furthermore, this practice continues in post-colonial times where many women continue to eliminate their girl child and give birth to a male child. The question of women's agency in relation to their reproductive choices will be explored in the later sections of the thesis.

## **Does Discrimination begin in the Womb Itself? Being Born a Woman in Post-Independence India**

The previous chapter traced British colonial intervention on female infanticide in Punjab. However, the legislative measures introduced under the British colonial state were unsuccessful in stopping the practice of female infanticide. Furthermore, its categorization of infanticide and dowry as a high caste practice had long term repercussions in terms of devaluation of the girl child. This chapter traces the continuation of the practice of killing of the girl child post-independence with reference to Punjab and Delhi, where this problem is rampant. On the one hand, these states have high per capita income, urbanization and high literacy rates. On the other hand, these two states have one the lowest sex ratios in the country and are notorious for high rate of violence against women, especially rape. Delhi, which was a part of Punjab in British India before being made the national capital, continues to have a substantial Punjabi population and an unbalanced sex ratio. This chapter wishes to look at the various factors that lead to the continuation of this practice today and the reasons why Delhi and Punjab continue to have one of the lowest sex ratios in the country, 866 and 893 girls for every 1000 boys born (Chauhan, 2011).

### **Female Infanticide and Feticide: Continuities since Independence**

Act VIII of 1870 was passed by the British colonial state against the practice of female infanticide. Through various measures against this practice, the British colonial state claimed to have wiped out this practice. However, as the previous chapter demonstrated, these measures were not successful. Furthermore, discrimination against the girl child has continued in post-independence times. As the subsequent data highlights (Fig: 1 and 2), in Punjab, the sex ratio was recorded as 832 girls for thousand boys in 1901. It continued to decline and after independence, showed a marginal improvement of 844 in 1951. In 2001, the sex ratio plunged to 876 girls for 1000 boys from 882 in 1991. The current 2011 census

showed an improvement to 893 girls per 1000 boys. However, it is still much below the national average, which itself is 940 girls for 1000 boys, a symbol of how rampant this problem is in India.

This thesis is based on the premise that the preference for male progeny is deeply embedded in the structure of Indian society. It is embedded in the very notion that being born a man bestows upon you an honor that a woman can never receive. It is grounded in the very idea that a woman is inferior to man and requires his protection. It is this underlying cultural belief that makes a male progeny desirable irrespective of one's economic status and level of education. The previous chapter showed the impact of legislative measures introduced in Punjab in terms of categorizing infanticide and dowry as a high caste practice. While the practice of dowry existed before, it is crucial that the British colonial state regarding dowry as an upper caste practice and laying down elaborate rules on expenditure to be incurred by a daughter's family on her marriage led to it being practiced by those who traditionally did not practice it in Colonial Punjab. This practice has continued since independence. As a result, giving dowry and incurring expenses for a daughter's wedding and the lifelong liability of giving presents has been appropriated across castes. Visaria (2007) in her discussions with women from Gujarat and Haryana highlighted how lower caste women, less pressurized by their families to undertake measures to ensure birth of a male child, emulate the practice of the upper castes and their way of thinking. It also explains how dowry has become so widespread in post-colonial times. The Health minister of Punjab Laxmi Kanta Chawala held dowry to be a major cause of female feticide. (Anon, 2009). The Delhi based NGO Centre of Social Research, in a household survey conducted in Delhi, also held fear and burden of dowry to be major cause of female feticide (Kumar, 2013).

Dube (et al., 2005) opined that the emphasis on dowry as the predominant cause of infanticide viewed the devaluation of women in terms of her marriage expenses alone. They also critiqued the British colonial state for linking infanticide to the practice of dowry. Looking at marriage practices prevalent in Kutch and Kathiawar, Dube (et al., 2005, p. 116) highlighted that ‘colonial reform ignored the heterogeneity of marriage practices of infanticide clans, which ranged from dowry marriages to bride price and exchange marriage’ and focused on dowry alone as the predominant cause of infanticide. While acknowledging the significance of the need to look at various social and cultural factors that lead to a girl’s devaluation in society, the above mentioned work does not take into account that dowry was held to be a major cause of infanticide amongst the high castes. As the case of Punjab has demonstrated, it was this very association of dowry as a high caste practice that led to its appropriation across castes in society. The desire for male progeny is linked to religious practices as well. In the Hindu society, it is based on the centuries old religious belief that a son (and not a daughter) can light the funeral pyre of his parents. However, so embedded is this belief that even religion communities without these religious belief wish to have a male child, Sikhism being a case in point. Sikhism stresses egalitarianism, with boys and girls being accorded an equal status. It points out how Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism, accorded a high status to women and condemned the practice of infanticide. However, In Punjab, where Sikhs are in a majority (in relation to Hindus and Muslims), the opposite trend is seen. In 2008, the National Commission for minorities expressed concern over the depressed sex ratios amongst the Sikhs in Punjab. (Jolly, 2008).The state is notorious for its imbalanced sex ratio (893 for 1000 males), much below the national average. Bumiller (1991) in her interaction with Assumpta, who wished to ensure her next child was a male, was shocked to discover she was

a Roman Catholic. This went contrary to her belief that abortion would not be resorted to by those whose religions forbade abortion. While it is true that some religions like Christianity in 2001 census displayed a positive sex ratio, it cannot be denied that the hold of patriarchal norms extends to them as well. In my interview with Amrita Paul, a Christian, whose parents are looking for a groom for her, she discussed how her family's refusal to give dowry leads some families to reject matrimonial alliance. Indeed, dowry has adopted by religious communities that traditionally did not practice it. Hence, dowry has become a widespread practice since British colonial intervention against infanticide and continues to be a major factor for the devaluation of the girl child in India.

### **Female Infanticide and Feticide in Punjab and Delhi: The Role of Technology**

A new element has entered the practice of discrimination against the girl child in India: the misuse of pre-natal diagnosis to practice female feticide. As the following data demonstrates, the child sex ratio (0-6 years) was recorded at 914 for 1000 boys in the 2011 census (Fig: 1), one of the lowest since independence. This is a reflection of how common sex-determination tests have become to bring forth abortion of female fetuses in India.

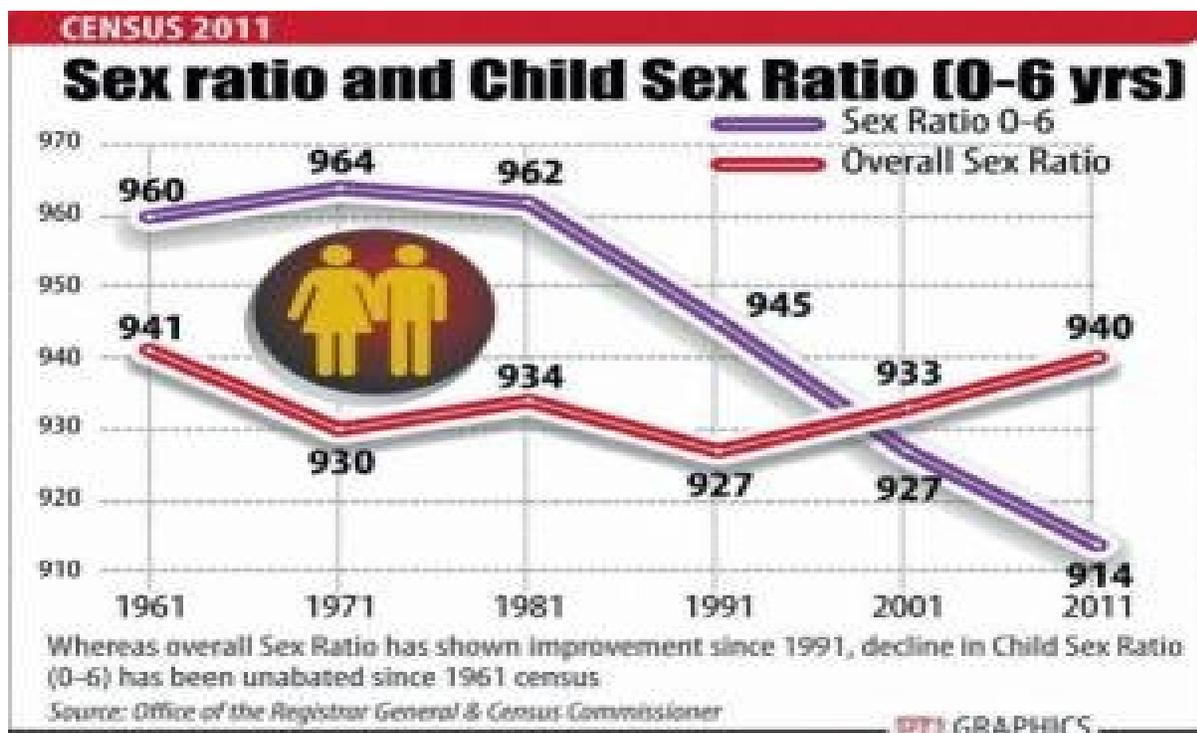
**Fig 1: Child Sex Ratio (0-6 years): Delhi and Punjab (Census 2011)**

Sex Ratio	2001	2011
India	927	914
Delhi	868	866
Punjab	789	846

**Fig 2: Sex Ratio: Punjab and Delhi (Census 2011)**

Sex Ratio	2001	2011
India	933	940
Delhi	821	866
Punjab	876	893

**Fig 3: Comparison of Sex Ratio and Child Ratio in India (1961-2011) (Source: Hindu, April 1, 2011)**



As Figures 1, 2 and 3 demonstrates, Punjab and Delhi continue to have one of the most imbalanced sex ratios, much lower than the national average. In Punjab, in between 2001 to 2011, there was a marginal improvement in sex ratio from 876 (2001) to 893 (2011). However, it remains significantly below the national average of 940 females for 1000 males. The child sex ratio, at 846 females for 1000 males, was also much below the national average of 914 girls for

1000 boys. As far as Delhi is concerned, in spite of being the national capital, it has one of the worst sex ratios in the country, 866 for 1000 males, well below the national average. The child sex ratio, at 866, shows a similar trend. The sex ratio has increased from 821 (2001) to 866 (2011). However, one reason might be larger migration of women along with men to the city from the villages in search of work. This needs to be juxtaposed with the situation ten years before when men migrated while the women stayed back in the villages (Anon, 2011c). Thus, an increase in sex ratio in Delhi, with a high rate of migration, needs to be contextualized critically.

Child sex ratio is an important factor to understand whether discrimination against the girl child begins in the womb itself. At 914 for 1000 births, the child sex ratio has been recorded as the lowest in India since independence. In Delhi, the child sex ratio stood at 866 (2011) while in Punjab, it was recorded at 846 in 2011, an improvement from 876 in 2001. Can this be explained as due to the practice of sex determination tests to abort female fetuses? Several newspaper reports point out to the extensive use of this practice. In 2006, 50 female fetuses were discovered in a well behind a private clinic in Patran, a town in Patiala district of Punjab and the owner of hospital charged with illegally carrying out pre natal diagnostic tests (Jolly, 2006). The imbalanced sex ratio may also be due to higher mortality of girls as against boys. As Miller (1983) has emphasized in her book, in terms of food, health and nutrition, the boy child is privileged over the girl child in India.

Bose (2007) draws on fieldwork carried out in Punjab, Haryana and Himachal Pradesh to point to the important link between feticide and family planning. After fifty years of government propaganda advocating a two child policy, this has become the norm in at least the cities and urban areas. However, with small families, a new problem has arisen; parents want the two children to be either just boys or one boy and one girl. Bose (2007) in his study refers to the puzzled

responses from people who could not understand that the government wanted them to have a small family whilst opposing sex selection tests and abortions. Sekhar and Hatti (2010, p. 3) have also pointed to small family norm having increased the practice of feticide and stressed that 'rather than go through repeated pregnancies bearing daughters in an attempt to produce male progeny, small family and reduced fertility seems to imply that unborn daughters are the first to be sacrificed'. For Dube et al. (2005), the growth of a mindset favoring a small family is not simply a reflection of the success of the government campaign. They point to competition over fewer economic opportunities in India as a consequence of its overpopulation. At the same time, deeply embedded patriarchal values lead to the strong desire to give birth to a male progeny rather than female.

The practice of female feticide can be traced to the 1970s when sex determination tests became available in India. The main technology that made it possible was ultrasound, amniocentesis and chorionic villus sampling. The fact that in India, abortion has been legal since 1971, with women being allowed abortion till the twentieth week, made this practice preferable (for those who could afford it) rather than bearing the cost of pregnancy and giving birth to a girl child after nine months. Under pressure from health based organizations and women based groups, the government responded, as late as 1996, by passing the PNDT (pre natal diagnostic techniques) Act. Under this Act, pre-natal diagnostic techniques such as ultrasound can be used only to detect genetic abnormalities in the fetus. The Act forbids sex determination tests and forbids hospitals and doctors from disclosing the sex of the fetus to the parents (Anon, 2003).

What, then, explains the continuity of this practice? One is the lack of legal action as a deterrent to this practice. Though the PNDT Act, amended in 2003, along with other changes such as registration of ultra sound machines, made it mandatory for erring medical

practitioners to be deregistered and to begin criminal proceedings, the rate of conviction has been extremely low. In Punjab for example, since 1990, out of 22 registered cases under PNDT act, only five convictions have occurred (Agnihotri, 2012). This has proven to be a major factor why illegal ultrasound clinics providing sex determination information have continued to thrive.

Visaria (2007) has pointed to how the legalization of abortion has produced negative consequences as far as female feticide is concerned. Patel (2007) has commented that even the legalization of abortion in 1971 was more a measure of population control than a symbol of women's emancipation. Nonetheless, while one cannot deny the right of women to make her own reproductive choices, in a deeply patriarchal society like India, one wonders whether this victory hasn't come with bitter costs. Abortion can be legally performed in India till the twentieth week on grounds of rape, contraceptive failure, health risks to mother and possibility of handicap. With grounds such as contraceptive failure constituting a valid reason for abortion, getting an abortion is not difficult in India (Patel, 2007). With ultrasound being performed as early as the sixteenth week, the practice of ultra sound (in guise of looking for signs of disabilities in the fetus) has been misused to provide information on the sex of the child. This has been aided by a liberal policy on abortion. Furthermore, with sex detection of the fetus and abortion not being carried out at the same time, evasion of the law is easy for clinics having ultrasound facilities and performing sonography (Viseria, 2007).

Sarkaria (2009) also highlighted how the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act provides for abortion up until twenty weeks on grounds of grave injury to the mental or physical health of the pregnant woman. Crucially, the act lays down the failure of contraceptive device or method by a married couple resulting in pregnancy as constituting grave mental injury to the

pregnant woman. However, it needs to be asked if taking away the legal right to abortion is the answer? For Sarkaria, (2009, 940), ‘the unavailability or unlawfulness of abortions in Punjab has not curbed people’s desire for and success in aborting female fetuses’. It raises the crucial question whether it is right to take away the choice that women can exercise over their body through abortion. Also, will taking away the legal right of abortion subject women to unhygienic conditions in private clinics, which illegally runs sex selection tests as well? In a survey conducted in the slum areas of western suburbs of Mumbai by Women Networking, an umbrella group of voluntary organizations, it was found that one out of two people did not know that abortions were legal while being aware of illegality of sex selection tests. As a result, these women were forced to approach ill-trained practitioners for abortions (Malathi, 2013).

This leads to the question that many critics ask—whether increased literacy, economic well-being are deterrents to the practice of female feticide. Is it the poor, uneducated classes that practice female feticide? In her study of the responses of 12,000 respondents in Punjab, Dagar (2007) highlights an interesting fact. She questioned whether socio-economic background discourages female feticide since those practicing it were found to be from an economically sound background. South Delhi, one of the most affluent areas of Delhi, shows a similar trend with a sex ratio of 859, below the state average of 866 according to the latest census figures (Anon, 2012c).

Crucial to the question of female feticide is also the prevalence of female infanticide along with it. Patel (2007) raised this question but was not able to address it. What accounts for the existence of the practice today? Who practices it? Newspaper accounts continue to report the killing child by use of violence, general neglect and through discrimination in nutrition and

access to resources. On February 14, 2012, NDTV, one of the leading English news channel in India, reported and put forth the following case on their website:

### **New-born girl's body found in west Delhi garbage dump**

‘In what appears to be a case of female infanticide, the body of a new-born girl was recovered from a dump in the national capital on Thursday. The body, discarded in a garbage dump in west Delhi's Bharat Nagar area, had been bundled into a polythene bag. The bag caught the attention of locals when street dogs started dragging it. People passing by located the bag and informed police’ (Anon 2012a).

On March 29, 2012, a month later, the following story was reported from Jaipur, capital of Rajasthan on NDTV:

### **Another newborn girl's body found in Jaipur**

‘In yet another shocking incident, a body of a newborn girl was found in a plot in a residential colony in Jaipur on Wednesday, a day after the corpse of a newborn girl was recovered from a dustbin. Some passers-by spotted the body of the infant girl wrapped in a piece of cloth in an empty plot in Ambabari area, a posh colony in the city’ (Anon 2012b).

These newspaper reports are crucial because they point to the fact that along with sex selection tests, discrimination against the girl child can take numerous forms- through neglect of health and nutrition and as these newspaper reports indicate, through the killing and abandonment of a girl child after her birth. It also points to the existence of this practice not just in villages but also in metropolitan cities like Delhi and Jaipur where access to sex selection tests is available.

Why is female infanticide being practiced today? Bumiller (1991), in her study, linked the practice of infanticide to economic conditions. She argued that it the economically sound families who practice feticide as against the poor who resort to killing the girl child after her birth. In her study of the village of Belukkurichi in Tamil Nadu, Bumiller found the practice of female infanticide to be rampant. Despite a high literacy rate, poisoning of new born girls was common. One reason cited was the expenses needed to marry off daughters that they simply could not afford. Also, her contribution to family income (if any, through working in the field as a daily wage earner) would end with her marriage. In an interview with one of the mothers, a feeling of victimization that all women face was evident. As Mariaye, one of the mothers told Bumiller after acknowledging that she killed her daughter, 'I don't feel sorry that I have done this. Actually, I think I have done the right thing. Why should a child suffer like I did' (Bumiller, 1991, p. 102). As for the reasons why infanticide was preferred over sex selection and the abortion, economic costs involved made killing of a girl child after birth favorable. As Rajeshwari, who got her second daughter killed, explained to Bumiller, 'Abortion is costly. And you have to rest at home. So instead of spending money and losing income, we prefer to deliver the child and kill it'(Bumiller, 1991, p. 108).

On the other hand, Bummiler (1991) found a different picture to be prevalent in Bombay, the financial capital of India. In her interactions with doctors at private clinics performing sex selection tests and women resorting to abortion, she found cultural factors to be the predominant factor. For her, the rich classes, who could afford sex selective tests, presented a different picture. For them, it was not the economic costs of bringing up a girl child, her limited capacity as labor force or the expenses needed for her marriage that led to the desire for a male progeny. Nor was it that it was husbands and mother-in-laws who always forced

the mother to abort. Bumiller interviewed Assumpta d'Silva who had two daughters and wanted to abort the third child if she was female. Her husband had a thriving business in Bombay and it was not that the couple could not bear the cost of another child. Nor was her husband pressurizing her to have a boy. She simply wanted a boy as she was tired of the sympathetic responses of people once they got to know she only had daughters (Bumiller, 1991, p. 110).

However, is it really poverty and access to sex selection tests that determined whether people would practice foeticide or infanticide? Is it that the poor and those living in areas without access to sex selection tests resort to infanticide? While Bumiller may have found it true in her study conducted in the late 1980s, does it still hold today? If so, it does not explain why infanticide is resorted to in big cities like Delhi and Jaipur; in the latter case the body of a female baby being recovered from a rich residential neighborhood (Anon, 2012b). It is also true that ultrasound clinics offering sex selection tests are mushrooming in villages as well. While one cannot deny the economic costs that need to be incurred in sex selection and abortion, further study is needed to establish economic conditions as the main determining factor in the continuation of infanticide along with foeticide.

It is crucial that the killing of a girl child occurs through indirect ways as well: in the general neglect of a girl's overall health, food and nutrition. While it is common for preference for food and schooling to be extended towards the boy child, even hospital statistics indicate how girls are denied treatment. A study conducted to measure liver treatment in Delhi's Apollo hospital and kidney transplant in AIIMS hospital received by female vis-a-vis male babies demonstrated alarming trends. It showed that in the last five years, of the 142 babies and children assessed for liver transplant in Apollo hospital, only 44 were girls. Furthermore, due

to the costs involved in getting a liver transplant, parents of 40 of the 44 female babies and children refused treatment. Similarly, in AIIMS, one of the leading hospitals of India, data revealed that 80% of the babies who had a kidney transplant in 2003 were boys. In Escorts Heart Institute, similarly, only 33% of female babies were operated upon as against 66% of the boys (Ghosh, Abantika, 2004). This study, hence, is a reflection of the extent to which discrimination against females is perpetuated in Indian society.

The question that needs to be asked, hence, is whether it is economic factors alone that make a girl child a burden in Indian society. As the case of Assumpta demonstrated, she could afford another girl child but simply wanted a boy. Also, in many cities at least, girls are being educated, earning money and even choosing their own life partners. What explains the continuation of male preference? In my interview with Anita, a well-educated girl, having a Master's degree in Biology and teaching at a public school, expressed her anxiety that her second child should be a boy. She shared that her mother in law did not like her. She hoped that if she had a boy, she might become happy with her. My interview with Meeta, a homeopathic doctor, revealed her dissatisfaction that her first child was a girl. She opined: 'We were all expecting a male child. I gave birth to a daughter while my sister in law had a boy.' Both these girls are educated and economically independent. Yet, in their eyes, a girl does not hold the same status as a boy.

There are rare cases of justice and bravery as well. NDTV reported the following case on November 13, 2011 from Punjab:

#### **A first for Punjab: Man sentenced to death for killing his daughter**

'Sangrur: It's a tale of tragedy but also of hope. Tragedy, because casual laborer Mukesh Kumar killed his 2-day old daughter in the presence of his wife. Hope, because Kumar's own

wife had the courage to go to court to complain against his heinous act. What's more a trial court in the Sangrur district of Punjab has handed out the death sentence to the laborer, thereby sending out a strong message that female infanticide if practiced, would receive the highest possible punishment. The judgment is a first for Punjab where female infanticide is rampant' (Anon, 2011).

However, here it is also important to remember that it is the first judgment giving death sentence in a case of female infanticide in Punjab. Also, it is one of the few cases in which the wife filled a complaint against her husband for killing her child.

Furthermore, this chapter has highlighted the use of sex selection tests to abort female fetuses in Punjab and Delhi. It has also brought out women's own desires to have a male progeny. Visaria (2007) highlighted that it should not be assumed that women resort to abortion only because they are pressurized to do so by the husband and her in-laws. While some women feel pressurized to get sex selection done, some women themselves also wished to have a boy. The previous chapter also showed how women were involved in the act of killing their daughters. For Visaria (2007, pp. 72-73), 'there is a deep internalization of patriarchal values that are linked to women's sense of security. The son preference has been internalized to such an extent that women want the sex of the fetus to be known'. This raises the question of women's agency. How do women themselves look at the practice of infanticide and feticide? What determines their reproductive choices? In the next section, hence, questionnaire and interviews conducted with women help understand the thoughts of women, their agency and victimization. To understand their reproductive choices, I now turn to the women themselves to gauge their views on the above issue.

## **‘I am Treated Equally in My Family but others are not’: The Questions of Silence and Honor: Gauging Women’s Responses**

This chapter aims to look at the responses of women in relation to their decision making ability and reproductive choices. Like Mohanty (1988), I wished to exercise caution and not homogenize all third world women as uneducated, poor and sexually repressed. Thus, I made a conscious decision to elicit the voices of women who are receiving and have received higher education and their views on sex selection tests and male preference in Indian society.

I also dwelt on the question whether by collating the voices of women, I am participating in their ability to exercise agency. However, I had to acknowledge that the question of silence and agency in relation to women needed to be re-considered. Parpart (2010) referred to how ability to speak has been seen as a form of empowerment with silence being regarded as a symbol of passivity. However, for Parpart (2010, p.17) one needs to acknowledge silence and secrecy as essential strategies for negotiating gender relations. Living in patriarchal societies where speaking out would expose women to oppression and violence, women adopt silence and secrecy as strategies of survival. She gave the examples of women in Calcutta who keep their income a secret from their husbands as a measure of economic independence to women in Afghanistan who wear western clothes and platforms shoes under their burqas as a silent form of resistance to Taliban rulings. Thus, as Parpart (2010, 25) highlighted, “The choice to speak out against gender oppression may be easy to measure but agency with a transformative agenda may take surprising forms, including the judicious use of secrecy and silence.”

However, while acknowledging the significance of silence as a form of agency, it needed to be kept in mind that even while bringing forth women’s voices, silence as a strategy is deployed by women for various reasons that a researcher has to contend with, as a means of

protecting family honor, as a means to give socially acceptable answers amongst others. Especially when asked questions relating to matters of personal and sensitive nature, many women speak out what they consider desirable and use silence as a strategy to deal with questions they consider embarrassing or revealing.

Butalia (1998) faced these questions when she attempted to record the voices of women and their experiences during the partition of India in 1947. She found a reluctance to speak, to remember a time best forgotten. Herein she made the important realization that during partition, there were no 'good' or 'bad' people, where the same families faced violence and were themselves perpetrators of violence. In this sense, people only said what they wished to remember and in her own words (1998, p. 12), she had to learn to hear 'the hidden nuance, the half-said thing, and the silences which are more eloquent than speech'.

Butalia (1998) in her work relied on oral testimonies to elicit the memories of women on partition. She understood the enormity of the task where memories are never 'pure' or 'unmediated'. However, as stressed by Portelli (1998, p. 65), the specific utility of oral sources lies, not just in their ability to preserve the past, in the very changes wrought by memory. These changes reveal the narrator's effort to make sense of the past and give a form to their lives, and set the interview and the narrative in their historical context. For Butalia (1998, p. 10), thus, oral narratives are extremely significant as they offer a different way of looking at history. They provide a space to the individual voice and offer a different and extremely important perspective on history, a perspective which enriches history'.

Oral testimonies and interviews were conducted in this thesis to understand and record women's voices as far as female infanticide and feticide were concerned. However, when dealing with a sensitive topic like feticide and infanticide, many women refused to speak

about their experiences and did not wish their identity to be exposed even to the interviewer. Many women having girls did not like being approached to speak about their experiences. One woman asked whether she was being targeted because she had daughters and said, 'I treat my daughters well. Why are you asking me all these questions?' Hence, it was felt that women needed to be given anonymity, the right to answer questions in a way that they did not feel that they were being put in the limelight. To elicit the opinions of women, a questionnaire was prepared and distributed amongst a select group to gauge their response.

### **What the Questionnaire Revealed: Some Perspectives**

The students at Lyallpur Khalsa College for women, Jullundur, Punjab added important perspectives for understanding how women may consider the question of discrimination. The twenty seven girls who volunteered to fill the questionnaire were in the age group of seventeen to twenty-one; with the majority being eighteen and nineteen years in age. The college, set up in 1960, admits girls only and is affiliated to the Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar. The college offers courses in Computer Science, Informational Technology, Fashion Design and Merchandizing, Commerce, Science along with courses in History, English, Hindi and Punjabi. The girls interviewed were first and second year Bachelor students of Commerce at the College. The majority of girls, in response to the question whether they are given the same opportunities as boys, replied 'yes'. They all had ambitions and goals for the future. The girls interviewed wished to become teachers, chartered accountants, police officers, bank managers, professors, and fashion designers. All of them replied 'yes' to the question if as a girl, they could decide on their marriage partner, children, job etc. They all stressed that they were aware of sex-determination tests and opined that as

women, they would of course say 'no' to these tests. To the question whether from their own experience, they would prefer to have boys or girls replied that they would treat both boys and girls equally while some asserting that they would prefer to have girls. One girl answered she prefers girls because 'girls are very educated, very lovable, very forward'.

The responses of these girls to the above questions gave a picture of equality, with these girls being raised without discrimination, with ability to take their own decisions and to raise their voices against sex selection. Yet, these responses, also indicated how deeply rooted patriarchal values are in Indian society. They reflect how the notion of *izzat* (honour) is embed in the body of a woman. This was demonstrated, first of all, in the choice made by these students to study at Lyallpur College. It is true that the Lyallpur College where these girls are studying provided education not just in traditional disciplines but in Computer Science, Information Technology, Fashion Design and Merchandizing. The college has a placement cell and holds personality development courses, aptitude tests to groom its students for future jobs. However, the idea that the college has to preserve its student's honour, preserve their chastity and to inculcate in them the ideas of 'true' Indian womanhood is deeply entrenched. As the college website states as the aim of the college:

'The college aims at building not only a palatial building but also a building of human minds...Its purpose is to inculcate the ideas of true womanhood, modesty, chastity and spiritual valour among the young girls. In this age when decadence of moral value is rampant in all walks in life, it strives to cultivate in the hearts of the young students real ethical values, absolute truth, absolute beauty and absolute goodness'.

The hostel dormitory rules also indicate how the college is fulfilling the role of a father in protecting the girls and making their security a priority. The hostel is surrounded by strong

walls and manned by a security guard, not surprising for a college intending to preserve its students' chastity. As even the students' responses indicate, in a state where rape is common and doubts about her chastity ruinous, this protection is not without merits. For Neeta Kaur, a twenty one year old commerce student in her second year of college, security for girls is of crucial importance. In response to the question whether she would prefer to have boys or girls, she answered that she would prefer to have boys and opined, 'girls are not safe in present time. Every day we read of three or four rape cases in the newspaper.' She went on to state that girls studying in hostels needed to be given full protection to save them from sexual harassment. Sunita Kaur, a twenty year old commerce student at the college also shared a similar view and held that while boys and girls needed to be given similar opportunities, the fact remained that girls faced constant threat to their safety and security. For her, 'girls are weak and need to be protected. My family constantly worries about me and while few girls are strong and can defend themselves, most girls require protection'.

The hostel dormitory rules on the college website states:

'There are separate gates for the hostel to provide entrance only to authorized visitors who come to see the girls. The gate is manned by the gatekeeper for all the 24 hours. Visitors are allowed to see their wards on visiting days at specified times. As an attempt to make the hostels secure, the building is surrounded on all sides by huge strong walls. Three watchmen keep watch at night. To keep alert, frequent surprise-checks are made at night by the hostel superintendent the hostel warden and even the principal.'

While all students claimed equality of opportunity vis-à-vis boys, male preference was revealed in the demography of their respective families. Of the twenty seven women who

filled the questionnaire, sixteen of them revealed a family structure consisting of them, one sister and one brother. One respondent had two brothers and two sisters. Six respondents revealed to be the only daughter in their family, having only brothers. One respondent did not specify if she had brothers or sisters. Crucially, of the twenty seven women who filled the questionnaire, only two revealed a family comprising of only daughters. In other words, only 2% of the women interviewed did not have a brother. While it cannot be proved that these families practiced sex selection, the fact that the majority of them had brothers revealed how crucial it was to have a male child in their respective families.

Also important to note are these students' responses to the question regarding their views on marriage. One respondent linked her desire to have a family with marriage. Two respondents stressed that they would think about marriage only after achieving success in their lives. Two women viewed it as a 'wonderful experience that everyone has to experience' while one stated marriage 'bonded families together'. Seven students viewed marriage as an important part of life. Four respondents refused to share their views on marriage. The rest, ten students viewed marriage, in their own words, as a 'compulsion', 'necessity', a 'must' while one girl stressed 'marriage as risky'. These words on marriage, 'compulsion', 'must get married', and 'marriage as a necessity' reveal that for these women, marriage is an inherent reality of their life that they must fulfil at all costs. Furthermore, in their views on the reason for an unfavourable sex ratio, most of the respondents viewed the dowry system to be a major factor, making girls a burden on parents. Thus, they revealed a crucial reality that they as women face, their need to get married and payment of dowry by their parents. Though they refused to comment if their parents would pay dowry on their marriage, their emphasis on dowry as a cause of imbalanced sex ratio reveal that it a part of their consciousness.

Turning to Dayanand Anglo Vedic School, Pitampura, Delhi, eighteen students in the age group of fifteen to seventeen filled the questionnaire. This school is run by a trust and was established in 1981 in Delhi, capital city and urban metropolis of India. This school is part of the chain of schools established by Hansraj, who founded a chain of schools inculcating ‘Anglo-Vedic education to its students’. The first school was established in 1866 with the aim of providing modern western education (as provided in government schools established by the British colonial state) with values of Vedic civilization. As the school website states:

‘The Principal objective of the school has always been a synthesis of modern knowledge and technology with ancient heritage and culture, a blend of ideals of Arya Samaj with modern positivistic paradigm and a combination of spiritual insight and universal values with a global outlook’

What the responses of the students revealed was the impact of family planning policy in this urban metropolis, with emphasis on parents not having more than two children. The fact that two child norm has taken some hold could be seen from the fact of the eighteen girls who filled the questionnaire, only two girls revealed a family demography of more than two children. The family structure was more varied, with ten respondents having a brother and the rest having either a sister or no sibling. All of them expressed their desire to have a career, for example, by becoming doctors, engineers, civil servants with one girl wishing to join the air force when she grows up. They wanted to have a successful career and then get married with some respondents replying they were too young to think of marriage. They had positive views on marriage. They believed they would be able to say no to sex selection tests. Only one respondent opined her fear over her lack of decision making ability after marriage. Seventeen of them replied that they do not feel discriminated against. Curiously, one girl’s

response to her future goal was ‘to become a good, pure girl and then a doctor.’ Her answer to whether she had the same opportunity as her brother was ‘No, I sometimes realize that my brother gets more opportunities’. Her stress on ‘purity’ is a window to the psychology of the families, with girls being taught that their purity, in other words, virginity, absence of sexual contact with the opposite sex is bound up with the family’s honour. Unlike the west, the majority of girls in India are not encouraged to have boyfriends and very few of them can honestly tell their parents if they are dating someone, especially not when still in school. Another girl replied, ‘Yes, I have the same opportunities but parents are more protective towards a girl’. ‘Security ‘and ‘purity’, hence, are issues that girls grapple with every day. Amrita Paul, a twenty nine year old resident of Delhi who was interviewed for this study, shared how she and her family decided that she should quit her promising career in advertising because of lateness of her work hours and lack of safety on Delhi’s roads. Unlike a man, she said, she can’t drive on Delhi’s roads at night without feeling vulnerable.

Teachers of D.A.V Model School also filled the questionnaire. In addition, some married women from different strata of society, who agreed to share their opinion, were given the questionnaire. For those who were married, this additional questionnaire was prepared:

Q. What were the responses you received on giving birth to a girl child/ second girl child?

Q. Did you feel the need, any time during your pregnancy, to go for sex selection tests?

Q. Do you think having a girl child is still looked down in society? If yes, why?

Q. In your opinion, should it be legal to abort a female foetus? Please give reasons.

Uma Khanna, a sixty five year old retired middle class teacher with three daughters, shared her experience of giving birth to three daughters. She stated:

‘First child passed away due to dehydration. Relief at birth of second child. Expected a boy but accepted the next girl child. Received sympathetic responses from relatives and friends. After six years, had third daughter. Mother in law expected boy but husband supported. I was aware of sex selection tests but didn’t want to come in way of nature’.

Arpana Gupta, a teacher with a doctorate from Delhi, expressed how she received sympathy and condolences on giving birth to a second girl child. She was told by family and friends that she should have gone for sex selection tests. My mother, on giving birth to me, her second girl child, received similar responses.

Seema, a forty two year old woman, is a cook by profession with a monthly income of 6000 thousand rupees (110 dollars). She has three brothers and two sisters. She is a widow and has one daughter. She stated that she was given the same treatment as her brothers. However, for her, marriage was a must and the decision regarding marriage should be made by parents for their children. She was against sex selection but wasn’t sure if as a woman she could say no to these tests. Furthermore, having a daughter who is now married, she said ‘she would prefer to have boys as they can help in old age’. Seema’s case is important as she is a single woman living alone in Delhi. Though not bound up in a patriarchal family structure, her views reflected societal norms that place girls at a disadvantage. It also reflected her own insecurity on being a widow in Delhi. Though her daughter lives nearby and visits often, she wished she had a boy who could have stayed with her in her old age. Uma Gupta, who is currently estranged from her husband, expressed similar views. She opined that ‘marriage is necessary because society does not accept single woman and a man provides security to her’. Again, the need for a woman to be protected is reiterated.

Veena Mehra, a thirty five year old woman from Delhi, revealed the fact that education has not really ended male bias in India. Despite having a PhD and working as a lecturer in Delhi, she pointed out that in her family, with two brothers and two sisters, she was not always given the same treatment as her brothers. Her marriage was also a decision taken by her parents and not her. Thus, despite being educated and economically independent; her parents decided for her who she should marry.

Neena Verma, a teacher at DAV Model School also remarked that on the birth of her second girl child, she faced some unfavourable responses from the family. Vinita Aggarwal, a teacher married to an educated Aggarwal family with a service class background, shared her reactions. She pointed out that while her husband and in-laws welcomed the birth of a girl child, some conservative relatives expressed concern and questioned why she had not had a sex selection test done.

Meera Nanda, a fifty four year old teacher, also expressed how deeply embedded patriarchal structure in society is. She acknowledged that she was not always given the same treatment as her brother. More revealing were her views on marriage. She wrote:

‘Although liberal, women like me are occasionally treated like a lower creature to their counterpart. Being a girl, I can only take 50% decisions of my own regarding my marriage, job, children etc. I can give suggestions and put pressure only.’

In other words, despite education and economic independence, she did not see herself as an equal partner in her marriage with her husband. Her husband, ultimately, was the decision maker. This is not to say all women face similar situations. Some women expressed that marriage was a wonderful institution, based on mutual care. However, the continuous

reference to marriage as a 'necessary evil' by the respondents show that it is a decision over which some women seem to have little control.

### **What the Questionnaire Revealed: Some Further Insights**

The questionnaire revealed women's responses to issue of sex selection and male bias in society. It is revealing how few of them acknowledged that they face discrimination and expressed confidence in their ability to say 'no' to sex selection. For them, uneducated people with conservative values, people living in villages, resort to female feticide and seem to have a male bias. For them, the end the of dowry system, education of women, economic independence of women, stringent implementation of the PNDT Act, equality of opportunity and even financial incentives to have a girl child (implemented in Punjab and Delhi) would make sex ratio more favourable.

However, as the responses to the questionnaire subtly revealed, many educated, economically independent women also face discrimination. Women, who filled the questionnaire revealed, though did not openly acknowledge, male bias in society and their lack of decision-making power in relation to their marriage, for example. Neeta Kaur, a twenty one year student of commerce at Layallpur Khalsa College, Jullundur claimed equality of opportunities in her household for both her brother and herself. She viewed marriage as a necessity but stated she only wished to get married after fulfilling her dreams. She opined that she could decide her marriage partner, children, job etc. and has the ability to say no to sex selection tests. Yet, she held the view that she would prefer to have boys as the security of girls was a constant concern. Furthermore, she held that boys are essential to have in a family to protect the girls and that in most families, mother-in-laws and father-in-laws prefer a woman to give birth to a

boy rather than a girl. Meera Nanda, a teacher at D.A.V Model School also opined that girls needed to be protected and their safety was a major concern.

Neeta Bedi, who recently submitted her PhD thesis, held that she was given the same opportunities as her brother and the right to choose her own marriage partner. She believed she was bold enough to say no to sex selection tests. For her, sex selection is resorted to by illiterate people without the benefit of education who desire for a male heir to carry on the family name. Yet, in response to the question whether it is favourable to have boys, she opined:

‘Yes, boys were quite favourable in ancient times but now, among educated people, conditions have changed. Boys are not taking care of their old parents now-a-days so people don’t mind having a girl. Yet, they still want one boy.’

Uma Khanna also reiterated that sex selection tests and male bias was more common in villages than in cities. For her, educated people living in cities don’t mind having a girl. Yet, she also held that in case of the second child if first born was a girl, most families prefer to have boys. Furthermore, she acknowledged how in her own case, her husband’s support was essential after she gave birth to her third daughter. Currently estranged from her husband, she also shared the difficulty of living alone in Delhi and how she constantly feared for her security. For her, thus, marriage was a necessity as ‘society does not accept single women’.

Shilpa, a sixteen year old girl, studying to be an engineer claimed she was given the same opportunities as her brother. However, she answered ‘no’ to the question if she could choose on her marriage partner and make her own decisions regarding her career and reproductive choices. More crucial was her response to the question if she would prefer to have boys or girls. She wished to have girls but not because she considered both boys and girls equal. She answered. ‘I

would prefer to have a girl because a boy is there for his parents only till he gets a wife whereas a daughter remains a daughter to her parents till the end of her life.’ A similar view was given by Swara Bansal, a sixteen year girl who wished to join the Indian Air Force. While asserting she did not feel differentiated against, she held that she could not choose her own marriage partner. Furthermore, for her, it was more favourable to have girls not on the grounds that both boys and girls deserve to be treated as equals but because girls are more understanding and helpful towards their parents in their old age.

Amrita Paul, advertising professional and the third girl child in her family, shared how she had the full support of her parents to choose her marriage partner. Her parents supported her stance against dowry and did not agree to any matrimonial alliances where dowry demands were made. While she held that she has never faced any discrimination in her family, she acknowledged how her brother, her youngest sibling was born when her mom was in her early forties. Though her father was a scientist by profession and her mother a biology teacher, constant pressures by her grandmother forced her mother to try for a fourth child in the hope of giving birth to a boy. She also shared how being in her late twenties and still not married, her family received negative comments from relatives on their stance against dowry. Her parents also do not wish for her to remain unmarried. For, her single status is a cause of worry for her parents and she hoped to get married soon. She even gave up her advertising career as her late hours were a cause of concern for her parents who feared over her safety and also because many bridegrooms favoured a spouse who would come home on time.

What this questionnaire points out to, then, is an ‘othering’ as far as women are concerned, of their lack of decision-making power, of their inability to make choices. In their responses, they stressed that ‘we don’t face discrimination, others do’ and yet they viewed marriage as a

compulsion, a necessity and not a choice. The need to provide safety for girls was also highlighted. With regard to Amrita Paul, despite her strong stance against dowry and belief in equality, the need to get married was a constant pressure in her life and even dictated her professional choices. In case of students of Lyallpur College, family demography revealed a male bias as well. Butalia (1998) in her study of women's experiences during India's partition in 1947, points out to the 'othering' of partition violence, where violence was seen as being located outside the boundaries of the family and community. However, she makes the important point that this obscures the very important fact that many women of Hindu and Sikh communities must have seen their own men as perpetrators of violence. This view has been highlighted by Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin (1998, p. 98) that violence was exercised upon Hindu women by their own families. They quote a narrative, 'One had been raped by ten or more men, her father burned her'. Thus, while there were mass suicides, there were also mass murders of women by their own family members. Similarly, so embedded are the patriarchal structures of society and the idea of family's honor that women refuse to acknowledge its existence in their lives. It happens to others, not them.

### **The way forward**

The responses to the questionnaire revealed how deeply embedded patriarchal values are in the lives of women. Women are not just the sufferers but in many cases, its willing participants as well. As some of the interviews revealed, women felt pressurized to have boys due to the expectations of their mother in laws and other female relatives of their family. Women also accept their lack of decision making power as a fact of life and yet refuse to acknowledge it. 'It happens to others, not me' is a dominant belief system.

From this background, the recent debate on the instability of the category women needs to be questioned. As highlighted in the introduction of this work, Butler's and Riley's work, though extremely important in terms of its discussion on the power of discourse, on sex/gender distinction, gave rise to a dilemma for many feminist academicians and activists working against female infanticide and feticide. If the category of women is unstable, what then accounts for the fundamental devaluation of women? Herein, I wish to discuss two works that debated this issue and were published in the Journal *Signs*. Nicholson (1994) and Young (1994) both delved into the meanings that can be assigned to the term 'women'. Both sought to reinterpret the term 'women'. For Young, what was needed was to conceptualize women as a serial collective, formed by shared circumstances rather than common attributes or identity. Nicholson (1994, p.79) advocated the need to think about the meaning of women as 'illustrating a map of intersecting similarities and differences where the body does not disappear but becomes a historically specific variable whose meaning and import are recognized as potentially different in different historical contexts'.

While one cannot completely do away with the differences, what is needed is to focus on, as Young (1994) stressed, on shared circumstances of devaluation, for women to first acknowledge how this patriarchal structure, of male bias, is embedded in their consciousness. Even educated, financially independent women are brought up with it and it forms a part of their psychology. Once women acknowledge this, they can reflect on how they can change it. To bring about a change in female bias, women need to change how they view themselves. This change will come when women refuse to accept their own lack of decision-making power and bring up their daughters with the right to practice it. It will come when women and their families refuse to pay dowry to get a suitable marriage partner. It will come when

women bring up their sons and daughter without putting them under rigid stereotypes. While acknowledging differences based on age, caste, ethnicity and economic status, discrimination against women as a fundamental fact in Indian society needs to be accepted.

## **Conclusion**

This dissertation began by asking the fundamental question, does discrimination begin in the womb itself? It demonstrated the attempt of the British colonial state to legislate against the practice in Colonial Punjab of killing the girl child that was seen as endemic to certain tribes and castes in Indian society. However, the British colonial state in labeling the practice of infanticide as an upper caste practice, its linkage to dowry and attempt to fix marriage expenditure led to it being adopted by castes that traditionally did not practice it to gain upward mobility. The legislative acts such as Act VIII of 1870 also had a limited impact. It went on to demonstrate the continuity of the practice of discrimination against the girl child in postcolonial Punjab where along with infanticide and discrimination through neglect, medical technology in the form of pre natal diagnostic tests have been used to abort female fetuses. The cultural devaluation of girl child, the burden of dowry and even family planning measures have all attributed to make the birth of girl child unfavorable in Indian society. It showed how women being educated in educational institutions also demonstrate how patriarchal values are embedded in the consciousness despite their vehement assertion that it does not affect them.

It also needs to be stressed that this discrimination against the female child that begins in the womb itself manifests itself in numerous ways—feticide and infanticide being two of them. Women who survive and are given the right to exist face it in physical violence, rape and molestation in a society where they are seen as second citizens. Nothing demonstrates this better than the recent case of the twenty-three year old rape victim who was brutally molested and gang raped on 16<sup>th</sup> December 2012 in New Delhi, the capital of India. A promising physiotherapy student, her life took a dramatic turn when she boarded a chartered bus along

with her friend at 9:30 pm in Munirka, after failing to find other means of transport. As soon as the two got inside the bus, the bus door was shut and when her male companion protested, the five men (including the driver) passed lewd comments why the two of them were out so late in night. While the rape victim's male companion was beaten up and knocked unconscious, she was taken to the back of the bus and brutally raped by the four men, including a minor. She died on 29<sup>th</sup> December, thirteen days after her attack (Anon, 2013).

What followed in India was a massive demonstration against the rape case, with people demanding better safety for women and severe punishment to the rapists. The government responded by forming a panel to look into the country's laws regarding rape and sexual assault. However, in a country steeped into patriarchal norms, where discrimination against the girl child begins in the womb itself, can a change in laws be deemed sufficient? In a country where a girl child is seen as burden as soon as she is born, can there be a change in attitude by an amendment of the Indian penal code? In a country where female feticide and infanticide is rampant, with a sex ratio of 940 females for 1000 males, can massive demonstrations bring more value for the girl child? Not surprisingly, not even a month after the gang rape, a twenty nine year old woman was gang raped in a moving bus in Gurdaspur, Punjab by seven men, including the driver and conductor (Anon 2013a). Is it a coincidence that these two states, Delhi and Punjab, have one of the lowest sex ratios in the country, 866 and 893 girls for every 1000 boys born.

However, the story of the rape victim also provides a ray of hope. Her story was important not just because her rape was a reflection of lack of security of women, her second class status in society and deep roots of patriarchy that refuse to see women as equals to men. Her story is also important because she dared to oppose. She fought back against her rapists. She

fought to live to bring the assailants to justice but finally succumbed to grievous injuries. Most importantly, in a country where a majority of rape cases go unreported due to fear of shame imposed upon the women's body, she refused to silence her story. In letting the world know her story, she refused to 'other' the violence perpetuated against her.

Her story is also important because it demonstrated the need of women to come together to bring a change. Women took to streets and participated in demonstrations against the gang rape. To borrow from Young (1994), by focusing on their shared circumstances, they revealed that change can be brought about. This is an uphill task. However, as the case of the gang rape and the massive demonstrations in which women took a part showed, it is not impossible.

## **Questionnaire**

- Q. What are you studying at the University? Where are you working?
- Q. What are your future goals?
- Q. How many siblings do you have?
- Q. Do you feel you have been given the same opportunities that boys are given?
- Q. What are your views on marriage?
- Q. Do you think, being a girl, you can choose your marriage partner, whether to have children and career etc.?
- Q. Are you aware of sex selection tests?
- Q. Do you think as a woman, if necessary, you can say no to undergo these tests?
- Q. Research has shown that the sex ratio in Punjab/ Delhi is unfavorable for women. Why do you think this is?
- Q. What do you think can bring about a change in Punjab/ Delhi as far as a favorable balance for women is concerned?
- Q. From your own experience, do you think you would prefer to have boys or girls?

For Women with Daughters:

- Q. What were the responses you received on giving birth to a girl child/second girl child?
- Q. Did you feel the need, any time during your pregnancy, to go for sex selection tests?
- Q. Were you made aware by the society that you should have gone for a sex selection test?
- Q. Do you think that having a girl child is looked down upon in India? If yes, why?

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