Female feticide: A case of financial autonomy in India

Rohini Ghosh
Humanities and Social Science Department,
IIT Kanpur, Kanpur- 208016
E mail: rohini.ghosh@gmail.com

Census records of India indicate decline in juvenile sex ratio especially in Northern India\(^1\). In the state of Uttar Pradesh, near the city of Kanpur there are evidences of sex determination in high caste families with better socioeconomic status\(^2\). Evidences of poor utilization of modern health care\(^3\), \(^4\) are quiet contrast to the fact of increasing access to modern technology for sex determination\(^5\), \(^6\), \(^7\). An upper caste woman, near Kanpur, in her early thirties, belonging to a well to do agricultural family narrates her pregnancy history as:

I Live with my In- Laws, husband and three children. My husband has a college degree but has not joined any service as he has to look after agricultural land. I was married when I was barely 18 years. After a year of my marriage, my elder son was born, and within three years my daughter was born. I was very happy with my two children.

But after a year, my mother-in-law started insisting that we have another male child. My husband was not prepared, nor was I, but could not resist her demand, as financial accounts and agricultural land were controlled by my Father-in-law. I got pregnant and taken to a nearby ultrasound (USG) clinic. Female foetus was detected. My mother-in-law summoned a Dhai, who had thirty years experience of handling pregnancies. I was massaged and given some herbs to drink. I was bedridden for profuse bleeding. My husband took me to a local clinic where I went for curettage.
After sometime, my mother-in-law insisted again, that the only male child cannot control property. We (me and my husband) had no other option! I was pregnant again, a female foetus was detected and I went for curettage. I started suffering from abdominal and back pain with immense fatigue!! Third time, after a gap of six months, I was lucky, after the USG guy told my husband to give sweets to him for the good news!! My younger son was born, though the pregnancy and delivery had many complications. I still suffer from acute abdominal pain, heavy menstrual bleeding and fatigue. But, my family is happy now and even allowed me to work with Didiji.

The interview was often interrupted as the women had to do household chores, was interfered by mother-in-law and other visiting members. The respondent was not comfortable to confess about her age and the abortions.

Education of younger generation plays no role in controlling female feticide, as household finance are managed by older generation, who are in need of male heirs, in Northern India. Age at marriage is mostly below 18 years, and sex determination following unsafe abortions leading to pregnancy complications is prevalent. Strict laws against sex determination exist; so does equal rights for men and women but the enforcement and amendments are needed. Awareness and financial independence for younger generations could be a possible measure to counter the prevalent malpractices influenced by society at large.
References:


