

A Reason for the World to Worry

A Phenomenon in India



For decades, India's demography has featured an unnaturally low child sex ratio. Much fewer girls than boys have been born, which has given rise to the so-called *missing women phenomenon*.

Trying to

understand these traditions in India, it makes difficult to comprehend whether infanticide is done by ignorance or just pure oppression from the society. Watching girls that have been sacrificed at birth makes it a social problem for which different worldwide organizations are trying to identify the issue by approaching this social problem with families and communities that still now days keep practicing female infanticide. Some organizations have been trying to stop communities from committing these crimes, to save the lives of the little girls that are been sacrifice every single day to ensure that their next child is a boy. **50 Million Missing** is a campaign to stop India's female genocide, which was founded by writer and gender activist Rita Banerji. It works steadfastly on boosting public awareness on issues concerning India's female genocide and spearheading action.

Kulwant has three daughters aged 24,23 and 20 and a son who is 16. In the years between the birth of her third daughter and her son, Kulwant became pregnant three times. Each time, she was forced to abort the foetus by her family after ultrasound tests confirmed that they were girls. "My mother-in-law taunted me for giving birth to girls. Kulwant still has vivid memories of the first abortion. "The baby was nearly five months old. She was beautiful. I miss her, and the others we killed". Until her son was born, Kulwant's daily life consisted of beatings and abuse from her husband, mother-in-law and brother-in-law. Once, she says, they even attempted to set her on fire. "They were angry. They didn't want girls in the family. They wanted boys so they could get fat dowries".

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Indian's traditions, believe that daughters are a burden to the family while the birth of a boy is celebrated in which creates controversy for which some men divorce their wives if they do not give birth to a son. In some wealthy regions of India, infanticide has been replaced by abortion; in despite of sex-selective abortions been illegal, many clinics offer this service using ultrasound technology. Too many couples are aided by this technology. Unethical doctors keep practicing abortion on the basis of gender if the fetus is female. Meanwhile the weak enforcement of laws banning abortion, have not made any change towards this social problem. .



Every year, an estimated 500,000 female fetuses are aborted because of their gender.

In several countries such as India and China sex-selective or feticide has replaced infanticide despite many initiatives that have been launched to fight against sex-selective abortion. Also different programs have been developed to benefit poor families whom happened to have only daughters, providing them new homes with the only intention to decline infanticide or sex-selective abortion.

Nowadays, with the alarming results from the infanticide that has been taken place for the past 20 year, 50 million more men than women as a consequence, in which bachelor towns across India are trying to cope with the idea of “missing women”, but the struggle that the majority of single men are facing without a wife, is been creating more crimes throughout India.

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The majority of single men face no motivation in life therefore crimes have started to rise consequently. Men are at a marriageable age but the difficulty is that they cannot find a single girl anywhere at all for marriage, that's why sexually frustrated men are forced to

pornography, homosexuality and bestiality. The traditional beliefs that “sons” will better support their parents; have left this country with some atrocious results. “There is not a single girl in their village”

Government has battled “this practice” for decades so it seems, but India’s gender imbalance has worsened in recent years. Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh implies that the country should be ashamed of its frequent abortions of female fetuses. “This is a national shame and we must face this challenge here and now. No nation, no society, no community can hold its head high and claim to be part of the civilized world if it condones the practice of discriminating against one half of humanity represented by women”. A practice that is widespread because of the cultural preference for boys.

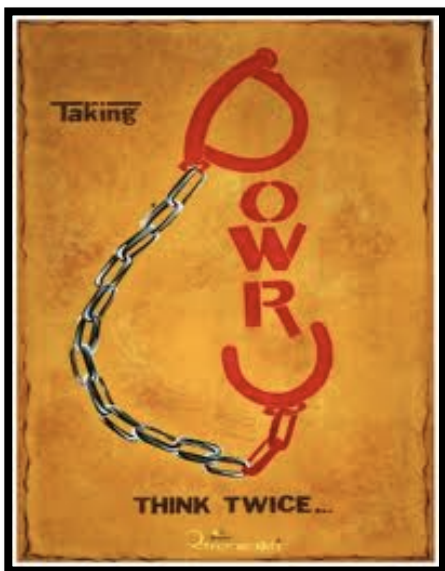
Annual Rates of Female Homicide in India

Female foeticide	Approximately 1 million
Female infanticide	Approximately 25000 in the State of Kerala alone
Dowry-related murders	Approximately 25000
Preadolescent mortality	1 in 6 dies before 15 yrs Mortality rate 40% higher for girls under 5 than boys the same age
Maternal mortality rate (MMR)	136,000 (1 woman dies every 5 minutes due to pregnancy-related causes)

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Another common way that infanticide is committed, is by given to the babies cactus milk that acts as poison, hot chicken soup is poured into the baby's mouth also babies are made to lie down on wet sack cloth and unable to bear the wetness the die of fits. Also, at the time of delivery, as the baby comes out from the mother's womb, the nose and mouth of the baby is deliberated closed for some time until it dies of suffocation.

Infanticide is more widespread in rural populations; but affects all social classes due to the culmination of both social stigmas attached to girls and poverty. As mentioned before, girls are seen as a burden, while boys are looked upon investment.



A great motive behind such practice is the **Dowry System**, for which requires that a bride's family pay out a great deal of money or property when a female child is married. Let's keep in mind that no sooner than a girl child is born, the parents begin to save money exclusively for the girl to prepare to the large sum of money that has to spent on her as she grows up. During puberty, a great feast is traditionally held, inviting friends and relatives. The purpose is to declare

that their girl child is fit for marriage. The parents spend a lot of money for this event. When giving her in marriage, a large sum of money has to be spent again for dowry and in most cases the dowry demanded is much higher what the family can afford.

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Meanwhile, parents are forced to borrow money, having to spend the rest of their lives repaying the amount borrowed. Nevertheless, the cost of a daughter is not over with marriage. The parents are expected to continue spending for their girl child, and during the eight month of their daughter's pregnancy; they are to hold grand events as well as the first delivery expenses have to be taken care by them. The parents are to put ornaments of gold on their grandchild when as soon as the baby is born also they have to bear expenses of an "ear-piercing ceremony", another grand event to which all friend and relatives are invited, spending nearly \$1,000 to \$2,000 in average. Moreover, whenever there is a death in the family of the girl's husband, the entire funeral expenses have to be taken care by the girl's parents.



For poor families, the birth of a girl child is seen as the beginning of financial downfall and extreme poverty. Also a family without a male child is considered to be a family without an inheritance.

In a country where there are **50 million more men than women**, problems will

keep arising to this society! Most of these social problems in most cases are not due to ignorance but merely from the traditions followed for years in poor counties like India.

My Proposal on this subject, who learns and becomes aware of this awful and gruesome issue, is to alert everyone on the "millions of missing women" for which India is currently facing. It is extremely important to have in mind how men outnumbered women, and it will continue to grow as a problem unless the government takes necessary measurements as well as each one of us.

The principle of equality between men and women should be more widely promoted through the news media to change the attitude of son preference and improve the awareness of the

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general public on this issue; the principle should also be reflected in specific social and economic policies to protect the basic rights of women and children, especially female children.

Government regulations prohibiting the use of prenatal sex identification techniques for nonmedical purposes should be strictly enforced, and violators should be punished accordingly. The laws that punish people, who commit infanticide, abandonment, and neglect of female children, and the laws and regulations on the protection of women and children, should be strictly enforced. The campaigns to protect women and children should be effectively strengthened.

Family planning programs should focus on effective public education, good counseling and service delivery, and the fully voluntary participation of the community and individuals to increase contraceptive prevalence, reduce unplanned pregnancies, and minimize the need for an induced abortion.



We should all sign the Petition

“50 million missing women” in order to add to the global momentum demanding government action in order to do your bit in making India a better place for women to live.

I would like to conclude with a few words by Rita Banerji, “*The change begins with us. Each one of us. It begins with how we respond to this*

issue. The first thing we need to do is to abnormalise what our history has normalized for us. We must refuse to allow this normalcy”. The next time you hear a case of female infanticide or foeticide or a dowry murder- please speak up. Speak loud. Rant, rave, protest, resist but do not say ‘this happens’ and look away.” <http://50millionmissing.campaign.wordpress.com/>