

Born to Die: Female Infanticide in Madhya Pradesh

Mahendra K. Premi and Saraswati Raju

Introduction

Consequent upon the publication of the 1991 census preliminary results, one of the widely debated issues in India has been the declining sex ratio (defined as the number of females per 1000 males) in the country. The 1991 census recorded a sex ratio of 927 females per 1000 males compared to 934 in 1981.

It is observed that the sex ratio in the population aged 7 and above declined from 929 in 1981 to 923 in 1991. Similarly, the sex ratio in the population aged 0-6 declined from 962 in 1981 to 945 female per 1000 males in 1991. In the first instance, the lower sex ratio reflects that women suffered from neglect in the past and probably continue to do so even now. A fall of 17 points in the child sex ratio over a decade, however, is very substantial and a matter of serious concerns which needs explanation.

Several questions arise with regard to the trend in the overall sex ratio and that among children aged 0-6. Have the living conditions of the females in general and young girls in particular deteriorated over time? Has the sex ratio at birth become more favorable to males in recent years? Is the practice of female infanticide in certain parts of the country substantially contributing to the shortage of girls? Have females been underenumerated in the 1991 census as compared to the 1981 and earlier censuses?

It is noteworthy that a couple of years ago, there were newspaper reports about female infanticide being practiced by a certain community in Salem district of Tamil Nadu. Later reports indicated that the practice prevailed in a few other districts as well. On the basis of these reports, a question was raised in the parliament and the Honorable members were keen to know if female infanticide prevailed in other parts of the country as well and if so, what are the basic causes for it. The Department of Women and Child Development in the Ministry of

Human Resource Development has been directly concerned with this particular issue on an all India basis. The 1991 census revealed that 10 districts had child sex ratios below 870. Among rural community development blocks, 182 had a CSR that was below 870. This was considered to be of serious concern and the government wanted to know the reasons behind the particular phenomenon.

Specifically, they had the following objectives:

- a. To discern the variables which have traditionally been responsible for undervaluation of female children;
- b. To identify the locations (villages) and communities in the study area with extremely low sex ratios; and
- c. To ascertain the extent and intensity of incidence of female infanticide.

We opted to undertake the research project in Madhya Pradesh and selected Bhind district for a detailed survey. Additional observations were made in Morena (Madhya Pradesh). These districts had registered very low sex ratios in their populations in the 1991 census.

Historical Perspective on Female Infanticide

Social workers, administrators and researchers in India and abroad have been concerned about female infanticide for a long time now. It is generally believed that infanticide in India was prevalent amongst certain warrior caste groups during the nineteenth and early parts of the twentieth century. The practice was not known among the lower classes.

The concern of the Census Superintendents in north India regarding the practice of female infanticide is reflected in almost every census report, particularly in the chapters on 'sex structure' of the population. This concern became more serious when they found the sex ratio extremely low in certain parts of the country and among certain castes, clans or tribes. Considering female infanticide an unnatural and horrible practice, the British government passed an Act in 1870 banning the practice in the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh. The Act was later extended to cover the Punjab province and Rajputana Agency, etc. Having banned female infanticide, British officials felt that infanticide could no longer serve as an

explanation for low sex ratios among particular groups and that there had to be other factors to explain the phenomenon.

The Census Commissioner of India for the 1911 census wrote 'Hypergamy, or the rule that a girl must be given in marriage to a man of higher rank, makes it very difficult and very expensive to obtain a suitable husband, while the admission of inferiority which is implied in giving a girl in marriage is a blow to a man's pride. Apart from this, a Rajput husband often tyrannizes his father-in-law. Female infanticide was resorted to in order to avoid these troubles which the marriage of a daughter involved'.

This practice is of very old standing in northwest India. The practice was found to be widely prevalent amongst various sections of the population in the United Provinces, the Punjab and Rajputana, especially among Khattris, Rajputs, Jats and all classes of Sikhs. With the Jats, it frequently happened that where several brothers lived jointly, the eldest alone married and the younger brothers shared his wife. There was thus no need for many women. In most cases, infanticide was practiced only to a limited extent, with the first and possibly the second daughter being allowed to live, especially when there were also several sons. But among some tribes, every single daughter was killed, so that sometimes not a single girl was to be found in a whole village. After different measures to stop infanticide had been tried and found unsuccessful, an Act (VIII of 1870) was passed with the object of placing under police surveillance the communities suspected of the practice (Census of India 1911, 1913: 215f)[2].

Presenting the 1921 report, the Census Commissioner of Gwalior State wrote: 'Female infanticide does not now exist anywhere in this State and must be ignored as a factor causing deficiency of female sex. But it is very striking that Tonwarghar (presently known as Morena district), the habitat of Tonwar Thakurs, should show, as in 1901 and 1911, the lowest proportion of females to males. Tonwar Thakurs, of all castes and races, show the smallest ratio of 526 females in the whole state. In their own district they return the very low proportion of 438 per mile, i.e., less than one female to two males' (Gwalior Census Report 1921: 47)[7].

The Census Commissioner for Gwalior State for the 1931 census pointed towards great deficiency of females in Bhind and Tonwarghar districts due to the fact that lower castes, which were invariably found with an excess of females, were in considerable minority in those districts while the Rajput and Brahman elements in the population were at their strongest and an excess of males was a marked

characteristic of those castes (Gwalior Census Report 1931: 94)[8]. Regarding the sex proportion among different castes, he wrote that: 'at one end of the scale is the Sondhia, Balai, Sahariya, Bhil and Bhilala with an almost even proportion of the sexes; at the other end is the Rajput, Brahman, Bania and Maratha, all showing a startling excess of males.'

Further, Bhaduria and Tonwar Rajputs have very low figures indeed (637 and 623 females per 1000 males respectively). They are the most important, if not the most numerous, sub-castes in the northern part of the state, and suspicion of infanticide has rested more heavily and more continuously on these people than on any other. The point to notice is that the present proportion of females at age 0-6 in the case of these two communities is the lowest as compared to any other caste of significance.

The existence of female infanticide is now absolutely denied in the state. Whether this is because the actual destruction of female infants has been replaced by the more abominable practice of leaving them to die of sheer willful neglect is difficult to say. And in this case, so extraordinary is the disproportion between boys and girls, that it would be rash to attribute the result wholly to the hereditary incapacity of these people to produce female children (Gwalior Census Report 1931: 95). It may be added here that the sex ratio among the Kachhwaha Rajputs in the 1931 census was 712 and among Kayastha, it was 745. Similarly, Brahmins returned a sex ratio of 776 in that census.

Two things become clear from the historical accounts. Firstly, in some families, specific incidents of hurting Rajput pride because of their daughters led to a collective decision to destroy all their daughters as soon as they were born. In some pockets, the then prevailing custom of a woman having to spend the night in a Muslim household after her marriage, brought shame to Rajputs who then decided to do away with their daughters.

In our study, we met an old woman in a village in Gohad block of Bhind district who told us that, among Gurjars of that area, a woman after marriage was customarily required to spend a night with a Muslim family. To save themselves from this insult, they destroyed their daughters. Secondly, Rajputs and Gurjars normally followed the rule of hypergamy and the marriage of a daughter involved a huge dowry and other expenses, which many Rajputs were unable to meet. To save themselves from dishonor, they destroyed their daughters. It seems that some of these traditions or practical difficulties continue to force people to destroy their daughters.

The above description also indicates that the practice of female infanticide was largely prevalent among Bhadauria, Kachwaha, Shekhawat, Tonwar, Bhatti (or Bhati), and Jadeja Rajputs and Gurjars. According to the district administration, Bhind has a high proportion of Bhadaurias in Ater block, Kachwahas in Lahar block and Gurjars in Gohad block. In Gohad block we found that Yadavs have also been practicing female infanticide. In fact, our data from the 10 villages of Gohad block indicate a sex ratio of only 392 among the Gurjars, 400 among the Yadavs, 417 among the Rajputs (essentially Rathors), 583 among the Jats, and 714 among the Brahmins, in children below the age of 7 years. Tonwar Thakurs have been a major caste group in Morena, and villages inhabited by them show a considerably low proportion of females among children aged 0-6.

Table 1: Sex Ratio of Children Aged 0-6 (headcount) in Selected Survey Villages of Madhya Pradesh

Name of the Village	Census 1991	Field Survey 1994
(Bhind District) Mvillage-iv	365	400
Mvillage-v	868	559
Mvillage-ii	527	548
Mvillage-iii	488	598
Mvillage-i	552	670
Mvillage-vi	662	820

3. The Present Study

Selection of Survey Villages

Sex ratios were compiled village-wise for the population aged 0-6 and those aged 7 and above. While the sex and age structure of the population aged 7 and above can be affected by male or female selective migration, the population aged 0-6 is not affected by it. It is affected only by the variation in the sex ratio at birth and differential mortality, that is, neglect of the female child in case of illness. Hence, we have mainly concentrated our analysis on the child population.

As the size of the village population is generally small, it is necessary to establish a threshold value of sex ratio that cannot fall due to chance occurrences. This would, of course, depend on the size of the village population and the variance in the ratio itself. In this regard, we found that if the total child population in any settlement is around 100, a ratio below 641 females to every 1,000 males cannot be due to chance factors and should be attributed to some sort of malpractice against girl children. Similarly, if the numbers of children in a settlement are 245 or more, a sex ratio below 714 cannot result from chance factors alone (Fjellman 1979:194)[6].

We, however, thought that a sex ratio below 800 females per 1000 males is also a matter of concern, particularly in big villages with more than 500 children. Hence, we worked out the sex ratio of the child population for each village with at least 100 children (both males and females) and divided the villages into three different categories:

- a. Where the sex ratio was below 641;
- b. Where the sex ratio was between 641 and 720; and
- c. Where the sex ratio was between 721 and 800.

The lists of villages in the three categories, their total population, population of children aged 0-6, sex ratio in the total population and in the population aged 0-6 for the district of Bhind are presented in Appendix I. It is noteworthy that five villages in Bhind and three in Morena had child sex ratios below 500. When we raised the issue with the authorities and other knowledgeable people, the first reaction was that the census figures were suspect as the sex ratio could not be so low. Since census data cannot be so much at variance with reality as to report a child sex ratio of about 500 if it actually stood at 800 or so, we conducted a quick head count as a check in the survey villages in Bhind district.

Despite some differences between the two sets of data (since our survey related to a period almost four years after the census), the villages still showed disturbingly low sex ratios among children under 7 (Table 3). Although the sex ratio is higher in all the six villages covered in our field survey, the difference is really large in Mvillage-vi and may need some additional probing. In contrast, the sex ratio of children aged 0-6 in Mvillage-vi in the census was as high as 868

compared to only 559 in the field survey and is again a matter which requires special attention.

The data for the selected districts presented in the Appendix are summarized in (Table 2) which also gives the total number of inhabited villages in each district. Taking the villages of all three categories together, we observe that in Bhind the percentage of villages with low sex ratio was 27.0. The proportion of villages with a sex ratio below 641 was 1.7 percent in Morena district.

Table 2: Number of Inhabited Villages and Number of Villages with Very Low Child Sex Ratios in Bhind and Morena (Census 1991).

District	Total Inhabited Villages	Villages with Sex Ratio			% of Villages in a particular Category to Total Villages		
		Between 721-800	Between 641-720	Below 641	Between 721-800	Between 641-720	Below 641
Bhind	877	144	62	31	16.4	7.1	3.5
Morena	1293	127	69	22	9.8	5.3	1.7

Table 3: Caste-wise Sex Ratio of Children Under 7 years of Age in Sample Villages of Madhya Pradesh

Caste	Male	Female	Sex Ratio
Gurjar	52	20	392
Yadav(Ahir)	20	08	400
Rajput	12	05	417
Jat	12	07	583
Brahmin	07	05	714
Scheduled castes	11	14	1272

Source: Based on FieldWork 1994.

Table 4: Sex Ratio at Birth and of Live Children (0-6 Years of age) in Madhya Pradesh

	Total Reported Births	Born Alive	Now Alive	Sex Ratio at Birth	Sex Ratio of Live Birth	Sex Ratio of Existing Children
Male	166	151	136	837	775	500
Female	139	117	68	-	-	-

The villages with low sex ratios in each district appear in contiguous tracts. For example, Gohad block in Bhind district had a much higher number of problem villages than other blocks. Ater block of Bhind Tehsil also had a number of problem villages, most probably extending into Etawah and Mainpuri districts of Uttar Pradesh and along the Jaisalmer-Barmer border - a contiguous tract where the problem villages are located.

From the identified three-tier grouping of villages based on sex ratios as shown by the village-level census data, the survey villages were chosen from the stratum of villages with the lowest sex ratios, i.e., lower than 641 girls to 1000 boys. We did not examine the child sex ratio in smaller villages where the problem can be as serious or even worse.

The villages with a sex ratio of 641 or below were the worst, indicating a very high sex imbalance among the young children which could be due either to (1) a very highly favorable sex ratio at birth among the caste groups residing in such villages, much more than observed from the hospital records; (2) acute neglect of the female child and, therefore, excessive female mortality right from infancy through different ages; or (3) female infanticide; or a combination of any two or all the three factors. In the case of large villages where the number of children aged 0-6 is more than 300, even a value of 720 cannot result purely by chance and is generally a result of any combination of the above three factors.

Our field survey has clearly pointed towards neglect of the female child in almost all the villages. The possibility of female infanticide in many of these

villages cannot be ruled out, as there does not seem to be a biological possibility of a sex ratio at birth of more than 115 males per 100 females.

The Survey Methods

Given the nature of the problem and the practical difficulties involved, we only surveyed five villages in Bhind district. We had recognized the complexity of the problem and the delicacy of the probe right from the outset. We were also aware that, if we did the field work ourselves, either we would not get the necessary information, or it would come in a very contrived manner. This could be attributed not only to the fact that we were outsiders, but also because, if proved, the act was tantamount to a crime. In fact, during our initial field visit, we found the respondents extremely wary and unresponsive. That we were from Delhi made matters worse as they saw the inquiry as official and therefore to be opposed.

In any case, we needed a survey team and they had to be local. We were very ably assisted by the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) workers.

Once in the villages, the most spontaneous responses came from the auxiliary nurse midwives (ANMs), Anganwadi workers and, at times, young school teachers. However, the second visit invariably drew much less information. We were told that it is not unusual for the respondents, who were essentially women, to report our presence and queries to their men in the evening (who usually remain out of the village during the daytime when we visited the villages). Since the men knew of the legal consequences of what they were doing, they would warn their women and volunteers against speaking to us.

When we saw this happen repeatedly, we took our survey teams to villages, which were not known, to them. There we conducted the survey ourselves. This included filling up the schedule, talking to informed members of the community, and meeting the official and non-official functionaries and children. This also served as training for the students and the anganwadi workers. We advised the team to conduct and finish the survey as soon as possible because hostility could flare up any time.

In order to get a comprehensive picture of the factors responsible for the low child sex ratio in the selected districts, we discussed the matter with social workers and government officials. Initially, the latter did not accept that female

infanticide was continuing to be practiced in their district. When presented with some hard village-level data, the reaction was that the census figures were wrong. But when certain supporting data were also provided to them, they accepted that the practice was probably continuing. In Bhind, the District Women and Child Development Officer herself reported a couple of cases of female infanticide.

In our fieldwork, we first took a census of all living members. Later, we elicited the fertility history of each ever-married woman, including abortions and deaths. The circumstances, knowledge about infanticide in the family, neighborhood or in the village and their own opinion about girls were also investigated.

The tabulated results are from the structured interviews. It is important to note that some of the results presented here are suggestive rather than conclusive and the nature of the data does not lend them to rigorous statistical analysis and testing.

The Analysis

Table 3 gives the caste-wise sex ratio of children below 7 years of age. It can be seen that the Yadavs, Gurjars and Rajputs have particularly distorted sex ratios. Unstructured interviews with women in Madhya Pradesh indicate very clearly that the practice of female infanticide still continues among these communities and we have oral records of quite a few recent incidents.

The reason given for the continuation of the practice is typically the large dowries. When it was pointed out to them that dowry was not really a problem unique to their communities, and also that they were not particularly struck by poverty (the Gurjars in Bhind are landholders and well-to-do cultivators), the respondents attributed the practice to traditional Rajput pride and hypergamous marriage exchanges. This pride is reflected in the following saying, which is popular in the Madhya Pradesh region: 'Gujar Tek, Ahir hath, Jat kahin so kahin, that is, Gujar's (for Gurjar) swearing, Ahir's (for Yadavs) persistence and the Jat's saying, once expressed, are for keeps (with no latitude for change).

Our analysis confirms our proposition that female infanticide is community-specific. Thus, in Madhya Pradesh, the Gurjar, the Yadav (Ahir) and the Rajput communities have particularly low child sex ratios and, as indicated by direct and indirect evidence, the practice of female infanticide is widespread among

them. It may be seen from the following table that although the sex ratios are much lower than expected even at birth, they become increasingly distorted.

It is significant to note that these communities exhibit still lower sex ratios if they live in villages entirely or predominantly inhabited by themselves. Thus Mvillage-iv, a single caste Gurjar village and Mvillage-ii with 77 percent households belonging to the Gurjar community record in their sample households only 346 and 400 girls per 1000 boys respectively in the 0-6 age group. Similarly, Mvillage-v, a single caste Ahir village, has a sex ratio of 600 in the population of 0-6 years. In contrast, Mvillage-iii, with a child sex ratio of 625, is a multi-caste village and, despite a low sex ratio, is considerably better off than the single-caste villages in the area (Table 5).

That in multi-caste villages the castes with traditionally lower sex ratios also fare somewhat better maybe because, in multi-caste settings, other castes provide informal counter vigilance against the practice of female infanticide - a submission that requires further validation

Table 5: Village-wise Sex Ratio of Existing Children and Deaths (0-6 Years. of age) in Madhya Pradesh

Village	Alive		Dead	
	M	F	M	F
Mvillage-iv	26	9	2	8
Mvillage-v	20	12	1	9
Mvillage-ii	20	8	1	6
Mvillage-iii	40	25	1	1
Mvillage-I	30	14	10	25
Total	136	68	15	49
Sex Ratio	500			

Source: Based on Field Survey 1994-95.

In households which are joint and where elderly members are alive, it is essentially they who wield power and rule with an iron hand.

Education of the younger generation and/or their opinion does not matter much.

Variables which could have made inroads in such settings such as literacy, economic contribution of women and exposure to an alternative set of value system are largely absent in the region. We found that in our survey villages, female literacy is almost non-existent, particularly among the Rajput women (Table 6).

Table 6: Caste-Wise Literacy Rate and Percentage Distribution of Literate Population of Each Sex by Level of Education in the Villages of Madhya Pradesh

	Literacy Rate		Less Than Primary		Primary		Middle		High School & Above	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Madhya Pradesh	65.2	28.6	29.8	48.2	14.7	28.9	24.2	1.8	25.4	4.4
Gurjar	74.2	51.3	34.0	55.8	11.1	30.2	20.4	4.7	34.6	9.3
Yadav	62.4	29.2	35.7	38.5	21.4	61.5	42.9	0.0	0.0	0.0
Jat	56.4	34.3	27.3	75.0	22.7	25.0	36.4	0.0	13.6	0.0
Chamar	53.1	29.2	17.6	57.1	29.4	42.9	35.3	0.0	17.6	0.0
Jatav	50.9	6.5	33.3	100.0	33.3	0.0	25.9	0.0	7.4	0.0
Rajput	36.4	9.1	9.1	100.0	36.4	0.0	27.3	0.0	27.3	0.0
Miscellaneous	75.7	48.8	40.0	57.1	0.0	28.6	33.3	0.0	26.7	14.3

Even otherwise, the Gurjar and Rajput women do not work outside the home so much so that even activities such as collection of water and fuel/fodder, which are traditionally associated with women, are carried out by men in the villages of Madhya Pradesh. Among these communities, female infanticide is widely practiced even now. It is important to note that the Rajput aversion towards women working is observed in other parts of India also. According to a popular proverb in rural Haryana, the Rajputs would rather starve than let their womenfolk work in the fields (Chowdhry 1994: 60,155)[3].

Additional Observations

When the Village Death Registers of several villages other than the sample villages (for the month of April 1994) in Madhya Pradesh were examined, it was found that, out of 43 infant deaths, 36 were of female babies. Among these female infant deaths, as many as 21 died within two days and 7 died within a week of birth. Altogether, about 78 percent of female infant deaths occurred within a week of birth (Village Death Registers 1994).

Age reporting may be dubious and it is possible that these deaths were instantaneous. Similarly, in another village in Gohad block, the death records kept by the ANM indicated several deaths of girls on the first or second day of birth. Typically, in most such cases, the reason for death was given as pneumonia (even if the infant died within a day of birth) or that the baby girl turned pale, blue, green, or that her body became stiff. All such cases with inexplicable reasons for death seem to be suspected infanticides. On being asked why these strange symptoms do not occur in the case of male babies, we were told that special offerings had been made to deities beforehand! In this context a government doctor's statement in Gohad in Bhind district is of significance.

According to the doctor, when a male child is born, the woman is kept in the hospital for two to three days, but when a girl child is born the villagers take the woman home immediately, even at odd hours, so that the child can be put to rest by feeding her tobacco (personal communication 1994).

Killing generally takes place immediately after the birth 2. According to the men, the reason is that once the mother feeds the child, some sort of bond gets established between the two and then it may be difficult to sever that bond. When we asked: what about keeping the child in the womb for nine months? the question invariably drew stoic silence. A more likely explanation is that it is

much easier and simpler to kill an infant immediately and secretly rather than killing the girl after a few days of survival.

The Rajputs in Bhind district are an extremely male dominated lot with a very strong son preference. There are widespread superstitions among them regarding the birth of male babies. The birth of a male child is often announced by saying *kani modi paida hui hai* (a girl with only one eye is born) so that others cannot cast an evil eye on the boy. In general, the act of female infanticide is performed by putting a little tobacco in the newly born girl's mouth.

We were told in Gohad block that, when a child is being born, the men collect in one room and the women in another. If the child is a boy, they bang a *thali* (metal plate) or fire in the air to announce his birth. If a girl is born, an elderly woman of the house goes to male members and asks *baarat rakhni hai ya lautaani hai* (do you want to welcome the marriage procession or shall we bid them to return?) If the reply is *lautaani hai*, every woman leaves and the mother of the newly born is asked to put tobacco in the girl's mouth. There is no question of resistance as it would mean that the mother herself is at risk of either being killed or thrown out of the house.

The scenario is one of male patriarchy in its extreme form and women are often left with no option but to follow the male order. The conditioning is so complete that the women appear immune to what is happening around them. This is not as shocking as it appears. Murray has clearly established a link between hypergamy (daughter's marriage with a person of a higher social status or position) and patriarchy. According to him, the practice of taking brides from lower status families who will be more 'subservient to male authority' than those from superior status, 'buttresses male dominance' (Murray 1994: 151).[10]

It becomes imperative at this juncture to have a detailed discussion on the concept of hypergamy. As pointed out by Clark, true hypergamy cannot function in a totally closed clan structure because there would be no wives at all for the men at the bottom of the clan hierarchy. Similarly, the women at the top would have no husbands. That is, there would exist, at the upper end of the hierarchy, what is known as a squeeze in the marriage market in terms of availability of suitable grooms (Billing 1991)[1]; (Chowdhry 1994: 70-71). This, of course, is an absurd situation and the Rajputs resolve this problem by extending their marriage networks to the bottom level whereas those at the top resign themselves to selective female infanticide [Clark 1989: 42][4]; [Uberoi 1993][11];

[Murray 1994: 154-155]. In our study region a somewhat similar pattern appears to exist.

It is evident that in hypergamous practices (as among the Rajputs of Madhya Pradesh), marriage alliances are asymmetrical (Uberoi 1994: *passim*). As to the idiom, during the marriage, the bride's father or elder brother ceremonially washes the feet of the bridegroom as a mark of honor. This ceremony is called the 'worship of the feet', *pao puja*, and it connotes an important symbolic elaboration of status hierarchy (Murray 1993: 151). The implicit message is that the bride giver has in principle accepted the superiority of the bridegroom as well as, in some measure; of his near patrilineal relatives.

The ceremony thus marks or creates a difference in the hierarchical status between the two parties, the one 'worshipful' of the other. More daughter's means repeated submission of self-respect to the supremacy of the groom's family. As pointed out by Murray, 'public acknowledgement of one's inferiority is no small matter - especially if the role as an inferior is to be a long-term one' (Murray 1993: 149). A hierarchically highly placed Rajput would do that only under extremely compelling circumstances. That is why they usually do not take a girl in marriage from a lineage or local descent group to which they have previously given a girl in marriage. That is, once a bride-giver village accepts the superior position of the groom's family, it is unacceptable to approach the same village with the offer of a daughter as a bride (*pao puj ke khandan se larki nahin le jaenge*). That is, the difference of status created or expressed in the feet washing ceremony should not be reversed. This is a logical elaboration of the principle of hypergamy, according to which bride-givers are placed at a lower position to that of wife takers (Dumont 1993: 98-99)[5].

Further, those belonging to the lower rungs of the Rajput clans do not normally kill their daughters not only because of an extended marriage network, but also because of the once prevailing practice of sending their daughters as part of the high caste Rajput bride's dowry. Although this practice no longer continues, in the absence of a tradition, the Rana Rajputs do not practice female infanticide.

In institutionalized hypergamy, the circle of people one cannot marry is significantly expanded. The increase in the proportion of those who are defined as exogamous groups thus creates what is known as 'geographic circle of exclusion,' an area directly surrounding and including the woman's village which is excluded as a potential source area for spouses in the marriage market (Libbee 1980:67).[9]

One would expect that under such circumstances, the percentage of unmarried men would be relatively high. Tables 6 and 7 provide some indication of this phenomenon. It is seen that the caste-wise distribution is in the expected direction.

Table 7: Number of Married Men and Women in the Age Group 20-40 in Survey Villages of Madhya Pradesh

State	Total Number		Married		Percentage	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Madhya Pradesh	97	76	82	76	84.5	100.0

Source: Field Survey 1994.

The above analysis clearly shows that it is only select caste groups in certain pockets in Madhya Pradesh who have very low sex ratios and still resort to female infanticide.

The factors responsible for this have generally been reported as high cost of dowry due to the prevailing custom of hypergamy and upholding of Rajput pride. But from the literature survey, we see specific instances among the nobility where they were forced by circumstances to destroy all newly born girls.

Usually a mother sees her daughter as an extension of herself in whom she places her own unfulfilled aspirations, desires and options. But the present scenario is so stark and so grossly patriarchal that not only are women undervalued, their very presence is negated. Under such circumstances, the women do not have any choices they can exercise and a mother is not in a position to visualize a qualitatively better world for her daughter.

Table 8: Caste-wise numbers of married men and women in the age group 20-40 in survey villages of Madhya Pradesh

Caste	Percentage
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	Male	Female
Yadav (Ahir)	79.0	100.0
Gurjar	82.0	100.0
Rajput	86.0	100.0
Jat	88.0	100.0
Brahmin	89.0	100.0
Scheduled Castes	94.0	100.0
All castes	84.5	100.0

Source: Field Survey 1994-95.

It is evident that before attempting any condemnation of the act of female infanticide, or sitting in moral judgement, we need to consider and understand the practice of female infanticide from a structural viewpoint, and place it in the wider historical, social and economic circumstances from which it emerged and continues to prevail at least in select pockets of Bhind in Madhya Pradesh.

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