



PO Box: 562, F-7, Islamabad, Pakistan

Phone: +92 51 2514555

Email: info@muslim-institute.org
www.muslim-institute.org

An Opinion Piece on

Say Welcome to Baby Girls

by Zeeshan Danish, Research Associate
MUSLIM Institute



Children are a blessing of Allah and they complete one's family. They are a source of happiness and joy in the life of their parents. It is very difficult for parents to discriminate or differentiate between their children when it comes to their love, care and emotions for them. It is especially unthinkable for a mother to distinguish between the maternal compassion she holds for all her children. Parents feel the same way and harbour equal sentiments for their children regardless of their gender. Unfortunately, the realities of life and the attitude prevalent in our society tell us that it's not as simple as that.

There are important questions that we must ask ourselves individually and ponder over as a society: why are baby girls not welcomed into the world with the same warmth and joy with which new born boys are greeted? What forces parents in our society to set aside all compassion for one's own offspring and decide to carry out an abortion when the ultrasound report reveals that the unborn child is yet again a baby girl? Have we the power to decide the gender of our children? Don't we recognize the precepts of modern genetics in the twenty-first century? Isn't Allah Who decides what gender children are to be born with? Does the Almighty make mistake in His natural division? Aren't we, ultimately, challenging Him and His design, by not accepting His decisions and the course of His nature?



It is a harsh reality that preferential treatment and discrimination based on a gender bias exists in almost all societies of the world, albeit in varying degrees. Surveys and research show that sons are better preferred over daughters in a multitude of cultures. What is the major reason of this bias against infant female? There is surely no single, catch-all answer and the answer is certainly not simple. Many reasons may be attributed to this attitude, but it boils down to a few basic reasons that stand out as motivation for those who partake in these evil practices of female infanticide, child abuse and a life time of discrimination. These reasons vary from culture to culture, region to region and so on. For example, in South Asia, reasons for preferring sons over are different than those in Europe.



If we analyse the reasons for this preference for sons over daughters, we come across some oft-repeated reasons or so-called justifications. It must be made clear at the outset that such preference is not merely an expression of preference, a wish or desire to have a son. Many people are actively engaged in what is not only sinful but also criminal to fulfil the ends of their unnatural desires. They perform abortions when they discover the gender of an unborn foetus to be a baby girl in an ultrasound. A number of abortions occur as modern forms of female infanticide due to this gender bias. But here we must confine ourselves to discussing the reasons for why people harbour such strong preferences for sons over daughters. These reasons may be classified into the following four different categories:

(1) "No Reason", (2) "Economy and Property", (3) "Ignorance & False Ego" and (4) "Lack of Humanity".

By 'No Reason', it is meant that people have no justification to offer for their preference of sons and they don't know themselves why they prefer sons. Their preference may simply be an extension or reflection of more prevalent social attitudes. This may even constitute the majority of those who cite their preference for sons. For example, Gallup has been conducting a survey in the United States since 1994 regarding this issue and pattern of result has been consistently the same since the beginning till almost 2 decades later in 2013. The outcome is that the majority prefer sons over daughters. Most surveyed participants have no justification or sound logic for their preference of sons over daughters.

We must question and challenge this implied acceptance or prevalent preference in society. When we have not control or say over our children's gender and it is Allah's decision in the course of nature for such things to be determined, then why we must we harbour such preference for sons over daughters and put ourselves into acts of sin and crime, to carry out abortions, commit female infanticide,



during and after the pregnancy, all the while maintaining the claim that we live in a civilized era.

'Economy' is often a commonly cited reason for people's preference for sons, because male members of society are the bread and butter winners in most parts of the world. They are a symbol of power and independence due to their comparatively higher physical strength and power than females. They can earn more than females; they can support a family business or be the sole bread winner for family dependents. In the case of poverty, they can be relied upon to perform any type of odd or physically challenging job, go abroad for making money and sending remittances home - and we find so many immigrant workers from under developed countries who are serving outside their home countries, and so on. But at the same time, can we find instances where a female member of family - a mother, wife or sister - raises her children and supports her dependents all by herself and successfully gives them a better future? Yes! Of course we can. Every society is replete with such examples and looking around us, one wouldn't be far off. Hence it is a must to consider, question and challenge the ill-founded logic and reasoning presented by those persons who cite economic concerns as cause of their preference for sons over daughters and who single-handedly decide to play god by denying permission to daughters from coming into their lives.



There are many other issues considered to be economic reasoning for this preference. For instance, at the time of one's children's marriage, the parents of daughters are burdened by the obligation to give dowry to their daughters as per desires and demands of in-laws. On the other hand, someone with sons receives a lot of wealth and in shape of dowry.

Ultimately, girls are considered a liability, not just in terms of their marriage but in every other sense as well, due to their dependence and reliance on the male members of their family. Many people do not want to bear the expenses of a girl's education because these are considered an extra liability since they would serve and become part of another family after marriage with no dividends for parents who have invested on her education. The same people would gladly bear the expense educating a son and consider the cost to be an investment in their own future with hope for rewards. This behaviour points to mind-sets preferring money and wealth over the value they give to their children, especially when she might turn out to be a baby girl. There can certainly be no justification in any legal or moral system in this world that gives preference to wealth over the worth of a human being.

Maintaining a hold over family inheritance is another motivation for preference of sons over daughters, especially in feudal and agrarian societies that value consolidated land-holdings. In almost all modern legal systems of the world, girls share the right to heritage of their parents' property with their brothers. However, in some parts of the world such as in some South Asian countries, attempts are made to restrict girls' rights in inheritance. This is primarily because many people are not ready to allow a redistribution of their land and property. Devolving rights in land to girls is often seen as a land holding leaving the family and getting into the hands of outsiders as girls are seen to marry into and become a part of a different family and social support system. This may also partly explain the predominance of close-relation marriages within close-knit tribes and clans in such countries. Such property interests are a strong reason that many do not like baby girls and look at their birth as making them economically weaker, while their sons would make them strong because conversely, by marrying a girl from outside the family, they would strengthen the family claims to outside lands and property even further. Such thinking has entrenched a permanent gender bias into many cultures.

As described above, such social evil and self-serving behaviour is often the reason that perpetrates false ego forcing many to look away from their natural affection for their children and deny them their legal and religious rights in their share of heritage with other siblings. Those attempting to break away from this social cycle of expectation might be made to feel dishonourable. Some would even go to the extent of considering others seeking their daughters' hands in marriage as an infiltration into their economic exclusivity and a threat to their family domain – of course, as defined by a patrilineal system of inheritance and control of family identity. While such repressive thinking may be limited to a very few, but there is a much larger number of people who do not want to be parents of baby girl for avoiding such social confrontation throughout their lives. Even women themselves have been socialised in this bias so much that they would rather be mothers to male children. Some surveys in China show that a significant number of women did not want baby girls and wanted to be mothers to baby boys. A problem exacerbated where the choice is further restricted by only being allowed one child. Due to this reason, the ratio of cases of gender motivated abortions and infanticide is extremely high in China in comparison to other countries in the region, such as India, Pakistan and Korea etc. Regardless of the exacerbation caused by the one child policy, the fact goes to manifestly confirm the extremity to which many are willing to go, driven by their bias against girls, to the extent that they are willing to take not just a human life, but the life of their own daughters.



At the heart of the problem lies the fact that we are unable to look towards the humanity that defines our existence over and above any other difference. People are yet unable to understand that Allah does not differentiate among his creatures on such material basis and that there is no difference between women and men in His Eyes. All are equal before Him. Allah gave honour to both of them as He says in his great book, the Quran, that *ولقد كرمنا بنى آدم* which means that "I granted honour to the all the children of Adam". Here He did not mention male heirs to be a source of

honour in His Eyes. There are indeed distinctions that Allah has created between the sexes and differences in characteristics and qualities between men and women. These differences, however, enable them to fulfil their respective and complementary roles but as human beings they have no superiority over one another solely on the basis of their gender.

It is our responsibility to save humanity and raise our voice against these heinous crimes committed in the name of gender. Additionally, as Muslims, we must fear the account that we must present to God on the Day of Judgment, as we are reminded against any discriminatory treatment towards baby girls:

"And when the girl who is buried alive is asked, for what sin she was killed?"(Quran 81:8-9)

"And when one of them is informed of [the birth of] a female, his face becomes dark, and he suppresses grief". (Quran 16:58)

Thousands of girls, human beings, are killed before birth. We need to take steps to stop this crime and spread awareness about the human individual being the most precious in the world – far greater in value to any other possession or interest in the world. We need to treat our children and raise them to see others as humans and not as male or female. This is the only way the cycle of violence may be broken by changing the way we see our daughters, sisters and wives and by changing the way we teach our

daughters to expect to be treated and seen by their fathers, sons, brothers and husbands and by propagating humanism in themselves so they may no longer raise sons and daughters but rather human beings conscious of their exalted status in the scheme of creation. And we do this by welcoming baby girls to the world.