



ROLE OF CRADLE BABY SCHEME IN CURTAILING FEMALE INFANTICIDE IN TAMILNADU

T. Priya

Ph.D Research Scholar, Department of History, Annamalai University, Annamalai Nagar, Chidambaram, Cuddalore, Tamilnadu

Cite This Article: T. Priya, "Role of Cradle Baby Scheme in Curtailing Female Infanticide in Tamilnadu", International Journal of Interdisciplinary Research in Arts and Humanities, Volume 1, Issue 1, Page Number 201-203, 2016.

Introduction:

The cradle baby scheme [CBS] was launched in 1992 by the government of Tamil Nadu in response to the practice of female infanticide. Nearly two decades on, even as little is known about the functioning of the scheme, it continues to attract criticism from civil society. To place the debate on a somewhat more informed footing, this paper examines the potential role played by the CBS in the reduction of female infanticide in Tamil Nadu. It begins providing the background against which the CBS along with other interventions was introduced. This is followed by a description of the scheme an analysis of its implementation, the response of different actors and implications for the future of such schemes. Tamilnadu's two decade old cradle baby scheme tries to ensure that female babies who would otherwise have been killed are given up for adoption. Civil society activists are not happy with the scheme because they feel that it only encourages parents to abandon female babies and is not a substitute for tackling the crime of sex selection and female foeticide. However, until the girl child is welcome in families such a scheme will be needed. Female infanticide being practiced among some communities, Salem district was brought to the notice of the government. Dr. J. Jayalalitha has ordered to conduct a study in Salem district and submit a detailed report covering 5 blocks the government revealed that over 24 years, out of 1200 infant deaths nearly 45% were due to infanticide. As a result the government have introduced the cradle baby scheme, for women babies, as an immediate short term measure to ensure survival of girl children born in blocks identified as high risk area. Parents have been advised to leave their female babies in the cradle, if they do not want bring in them up. Families were openly asked to deposit unwanted female infants in the cradles rather than they kill them. The scheme was originally introduced in three districts Salem, Dindigul and Madurai. Since 2001 following the return of AIADMK to power additional centers have been opened in Theni and Dharmapuri districts with an increased budget outlay (from 510,000 in 2003-04 to Rs 680,000 in 2005-06) for the scheme was gradually extended to most districts in Tamil Nadu with the creation of 188 cradle centers. Cradle babies are eligible for all the benefits under AIADMK rule for the girl child Mother Theresa wished and expressed her blessing to Dr. J. Jayalalitha for a humanity welfare and eager of children for cradle baby scheme.

Status of Cradle Children in Tamilnadu:

According to the policy note of Tamil Nadu 2010-2011 around 3622 babies (529 male 3093 females) have been received under the scheme and are taken care of with the help of government grants.

During the period 14.7.1997 to 13.5.2001 only 10 children were surrendered under the cradle baby scheme. Out of this one baby has been taken back by the parent with the change of government again in 2001 the scheme was revived and extended to all the district in Tamil Nadu. In NOV 2006 the government of Tamil Nadu ordered to study the status of children of 1540 cradle children placed in adoption, following the news when an adopted cradle of years old was tortured and brutally battered by an adopted parent in Salem. As on 31st DEC 2010 according to information received by campaign against sex selection abortion under RTI act 2005 around 4415 children were received under the scheme among these 4001 were female children and 414 were male children died. AS the abandoning of female infants became a daily event many rights based NGOs, particularly in Salem, Dharmapuri, Madurai and Theni districts who believed that the scheme violates the very rights of the girl children motivated the families to retain the new born female infants which were on the verge of abandoning with the help of NGOs thousands of female babies have been saved in the above districts.

The expansion of the cradle baby scheme in Cuddalore, Ariyalur, Perambalur, Thiruvanamalai and Vilupuram only legitimizes the abandoning of the female children. The state advocates the parents and makes announcement advertisements to place their unwanted female babies in primary Health Centers, Hospitals, orphanages children's Homes, Railway stations, and bus stands etc. As a result the number of parents abandoning their own female babies has increase. The number of adoption centers too multiplied two fold from 11 to 22 to meet the supply side. The cradle children are the main source of supply for the adoption centers.

Role of NGOs in Care Taking of Cradle Babies:

In the earlier days after the introduction of CBS, people would usually leave their unwanted babies in the late hours of the night to avoid detection with many dying by the time they were found in the morning. Succumbing to widespread criticism of the manner in which babies were collected, the government later changed the modalities. Since 2001, babies were collected with the help of village health nurse a child nutrition worker NGOs fieldworker. Occasionally, parents gave their babies directly to the district collector at the Salem

administrative office. Usually, no reimbursement paid for the expenses of parents travelling to surrender their babies. Normally, a time period of two months is given for the parents to return and reclaim their babies if they so desire. Meanwhile these children are cared for by the district cradle centre. The centre subsequently hands the babies over to the NGOs or adoption such children are monitored and required to maintain regular contact with the NGOs and the adoption agencies. These NGOs and adoption agencies also charge prospective parents some fees that go towards the administrative and paper work costs of the office. By 2005, the Tamil Nadu government had twenty-one licensed adoption agencies, of which nine were also recognized for inter country adoption (krishnakumar2005).the number of adoption centers rose from 11to 23 and CBS is supposed to have created a “girl baby glut” for these centers. More fundamentally NGOs and activists have criticized the scheme on the grounds that it absolves parents of their responsibility towards their daughters, For instance. Ruby Thiagarajan, President of Salem young women’s Christian Association argued that the scheme encourages son preference as women can continue to “dump the girl child in the cradles” till they have the desired number of sons.

Eradication of Female Infanticide and Announced Cradle Baby Scheme:

Patriarchal family system that has existed for many centuries along with special rights of male for family property and religious rights has resulted in a strong male preference in many countries. Thus dowry system and low status of girls in the society have led to problems of female infanticide in many parts of Tamil Nadu. The government have been taking action to assess the situation in certain selected blocks to create the social mobilization to eliminate anti-social practices such as dowry and female infanticide to ensure registration of pregnancies, birth, all infant deaths promote institutional delivery and family planning measures half of IRDP loans to be given to women with special emphasis to cover high risk groups and blocks with adverse sex ratio and other gender sensitive indicators .In 1992, following the continued efforts of NGOs and the media the Tamil Nadu Government acknowledged the prevalence of female infanticide and announced several schemes to “eradicate” it. These included

- ✓ The CBS which allows families to hand over unwanted female babies to the government.
- ✓ Legal action against perpetrators in infanticide, and
- ✓ The Girl Child Protection Scheme (GCPS) which provide financial incentives to families with only daughters.

The focus here is on the CBS which was first introduced in Salem district in 1992. Instead of resorting to female infanticide, parents who were unwilling to bring up their female babies could place them anonymously in cradles located in noon meal centers, PHCs, selected orphanages and NGOs. Subsequent to their placement in cradles, babies were to be placed for adoption. Between 1992 and 1996, 140 babies were placed in government cradles.

Cradle Scheme Vs Female Infanticide in Tamilnadu:

Cradle scheme has not succeeded in stopping /reducing female infanticide. Elimination of girl children after the birth has been consistently reducing which is evident by analyzing the infant mortality rate of male and female and the gender difference and intensity of the practice of female infanticide. The elimination of girl child after birth is replaced by the practice of female foeticide. With a mushrooming of scan centres, wider misuse of technology to determine the sex if the fetus and silent killing in the womb has increased. The technological advancement has made deep inroads into rural region. Sex Ratio at birth is an indicator to understand the prevalence and intensity of female foeticide.SRB is poor in rural region when compare the same with urban region, which establishes the hypothesis that infanticide is replaced by foeticide. The study of infant mortality if girl children is also necessary to understand female infanticide.

Cradle Baby Scheme to Be Extended In Tamilnadu:

New born female babies at the cradle baby centre Dharmapuri Government Hospital. Concerned over the fall in the child sex ratio as revealed by the 2011 census chief minister J. Jaylalithaa on Sunday ordered the extension of the scheme to five more centres to be set up in five more districts at a cost of Rs 47.45 lakh. The cradle baby scheme a brainchild of chief minister Ms. J. Jayalalitha will be extended to Cuddalore, Ariyalur, Perambalur, Vilupuram and Tiruvannamalai districts as the 2011 census has revealed a fall in the child sex ratio in these districts. Ms. J. Jayalalitha said in an official statement that the female infanticide and foeticide could be the reason for this trend in these districts. Cradle baby centres will be set up at a cost of Rs 47.45 lakh and each centres will have a superintendent an assistant nurse an assistant and other workers. The centres will have adequate stock of milk powder, medicine and clothes besides. Cradle will be placed at hospitals primary health centres and children homes to receive girl children.

She said the cradle baby scheme launched in Salem district in 1992 with a view to eradicating female infanticide was later extended to Madurai, Theni, Dindigul, Dharmapuri, Erode and Namakkal districts in 2001. When she became chief minister of the state for the second time. As many as 188 centres in these districts were equipped with incubators, life saving drugs, refrigerators, gas connections bet sheets and clothes for children. The government also organized camps seminars and conference to create awareness of female infanticide. The scheme was appreciated not just in India but across the world. Many girls were saved from the clutches of death

and were later given in adoption; they grew up in families and received good education and are leading a prosperous life. Ms. J. Jayalalitha said that so far 3,200 girls and 582 boys had been rescued subsequently 2,088 girls and another 170 girls and boys were in foreign countries Non-resident Indians adopted 13 girls and boys. A total of 160 children were handed over to their parents. She said the scheme and the awareness created by the government had the desired effect in these districts. The child sex ratio in the state was 1000:942 as per the 2001 census and the figure became 1000:946 in 2011 census. But Cuddalore, Perambalur, Ariyalur, Vilupuram, and Thiruvannamalai witnessed a negative trend.

Cradle Baby Scheme Hopes to End of Female Infanticide in Tamilnadu:

The battle of female infanticide the government of Tamil Nadu has operated a programme for the past two decades. The cradle baby scheme under which young mothers can quietly and anonymously hand over the newborns to the state started in 1992 the project runs in towns and villages across Tamil Nadu. The children are then sent to registered orphanages where they are put up for adoption. Since the cradle baby programme began poverty stricken parents and single mothers have handed in over 3,706 children, mostly girls. More than 3,600 of them have been adopted by childless middle-class couples in Tamil Nadu officials said. However, activists say the programme has failed to tackle the root cause of female infanticide by promoting the abandonment of girls and allowing parents to shift responsibility to state.

Conclusion:

Cradle baby scheme is one of the major schemes to save the girl children from killing them by an cruel system called infanticide due to lack of awareness among the society that a birth of a girl child is an evil to the family. It is an evil practice from the olden days till fifteen years back in some districts of Tamil Nadu especially in Salem, Dharmapuri, Theni, Dindigul and Madurai, which caused a lack of female children in the society. Out of this the government of Tamil Nadu has to take a serious action to save the girl children in the society The chief minister of Tamil Nadu Dr. J. Jayalalitha this scheme namely cradle baby scheme. The object of this scheme is to prevent the female infanticide in those districts and in entire Tamil Nadu. The Cause of implementing this scheme resulted in eradication of the female infanticide in Tamil Nadu

References:

1. Athreya, V B and Sheela Rani Chunkath 'Fighting Female Infanticide', The Hindu, Madras, March17, 1996.
2. Broune John Cave, Indian Infanticide, London 1815.
3. Chunkath S.R. Athreya V.B., Female Infanticide in Tamil Nadu: Some evidence. Economic and political weekly, 26 April, 1997.
4. Dr. J. Jayalalitha, 15 point Programme for Child Welfare. Government of Tamil Nadu, Department of Social Welfare, Madras, 1993.
5. George S.M, The practices of female infanticide and female foeticide: response by Non- governmental Organizations, Towards Preventions of Female Infanticide, Center for Rural Health and Social Education, Tirupatur, 1995.
6. George, Sabu, Rajaratnam Abel and B D Miller, 'Female Infanticide in Rural South India'. Economic and Political weekly, May10, 1992.
7. Ghosh. S. K. Women and Crime, Ashish publishing House, New dehli, 1993.
8. Kirubhakaran R. Secretary to Government of Tamil Nadu, Social Welfare & Nutritious Meal Programme Department, Government Order, MS NO 533, 11 October , Madras, 1993.
9. Krishnaswamy S. Female Infanticide in Contemporary India-A Case study of Kallars of Tamil Nadu, Women in Indian Society, Sage publications, New Delhi, 1988.
10. Michael Tooley, Abortion and Infanticide, Clarendon press, New Delhi, 1983.
11. Raychoudhary S.C. Social, Cultural and Economic History of India, Surjeet publications, Delhi, 2005.
12. CASSA, Cradle Baby Scheme Position note, May 2007.
13. w.w.babycenter.in.
14. <http://www.makkalmurasu.com./tamil/new's>.