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The Abortion of Baby Girls in India — At Long Last an Abortionist is Convicted

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Dr Anil Sabhani, a physician and abortionist in India's northern state of Haryana has been convicted, along with his X-ray technician, of offering to perform a sex-selection abortion after an ultrasound test indicated that the baby would be a girl.

The Times [London] reports:

Dr Anil Sabhani and his X-ray technician Kartar Singh were each given two years in jail and fined 5,000 rupees (£62) by a court in the northern state of Haryana.

Both the use of technology to determine the sex of an unborn child and the termination of pregnancies on the basis of gender are illegal.

Despite the law being widely flouted since it was introduced 12 years ago, no doctor had until now had been sentenced to jail; previous convictions led only to a fine.

Dr Sabhani was caught in a sting operation when government officials sent three pregnant women to his clinic in Faridabad, on the outskirts of Delhi, in 2001.

He was captured on video and audio recorders telling one woman that she was carrying a girl and that it could "be taken care of". His clinic was immediately raided by the team and documents recording the procedure were seized.

Sex-selection abortions are thus criminalized in India, and this first criminal prosecution is intended to send a clear signal throughout the nation. India, along with China, already faces a severe shortage of girls and young women. As the reporter explains:

Sex selection is a high-volume, low-risk business," said Dr Puneet Bedi, a specialist in fetal medicine based in Delhi. "Volumes have to be high because one or two cases don't get the errant doctor much money. It's low risk because hardly anyone is ever caught."

The practice is a particular problem in northern India, where the status of women is low. It has led to a skewed sex ratio in wealthier states such as Punjab, where the latest census shows that there are only 793 girls to 1,000 boys. Nationally, there are 927 women to every 1,000 men.

Here is a very surprising aspect of the story:

Experts are concerned by recent research that found the more educated a woman is in Delhi, Chandigarh and Punjab, the more likely she is to use modern technology to determine and abort girls.

In other words, it appears that the greatest demand for sex-selection abortions (and the technology of prenatal gender identification) is found, not among the poor, but among the privileged.

Once again, we come face to face with the logic of abortion as a matter of choice. In India, sex-selection is increasingly seen as morally wrong and is now to be seen as a matter for criminal prosecution. Keep in mind that, in America, no justification or rationale for an abortion is even necessary in most jurisdictions. Women can demand an abortion, at least in the first two trimesters of her pregnancy, for any reason. And we call ourselves the more advanced country?

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