



# Killing of Female Children in India and Surrounding Countries

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## **Abstract**

The killing of newborn female children is a brutal practice with ancient origins in human history. Unfortunately, in today's world, incidents of killing female children still occur in some countries. This article focuses on the practice of killing female children by breaking their necks in India, Nepal, and Sri Lanka. There are various reasons behind the savage killing of female children. Based on the information I witnessed and learned during my visits to India, Nepal, and Sri Lanka for four years starting from 2012, I will discuss this issue.

**Keywords:** Killing of female children, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka

## **Introduction**

In India, Nepal and Sri Lanka, because of the many deprivations that girls are subjected to, their fathers kill them by breaking their necks right after birth. The deprivations faced by these female children include:

- a. Being obligated to obtain permission from a religious figure (Brahmin) to marry,
- b. Being required to send proposals to potential grooms,

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- c. Needing to be approved by both the groom, his mother, and his father,
- d. Being compelled to provide a dowry of approximately \$100,000 worth (house, car, shop, capital, etc.) to the groom,
- e. Facing a prohibition on returning to their parents' home after marriage,
- f. The prohibition of determining the gender of a pregnant child through ultrasound,
- g. If the husband dies, being required to be injected with morphine and burned alongside him,
- h. If the husband dies, while other women can marry up to four times, they cannot leave the house, must shave their heads continuously, and are forbidden to remarry,
- i. Being obligated to fast for 11-12 days a year, consuming only liquids, for the well-being of their husbands,
- j. Even after marriage, being obligated to meet with single men introduced by matchmakers,
- k. If an unmarried matchmaker expresses interest in a married woman and she approves, she is required to marry him,
- l. If married to multiple men, being obligated to visit the house of one husband each day and perform the services of that house and husband,
- m. These treatments faced by female children being accepted by their religions and laws.

### **Reasons for Killing Female Children**

- a. Being obligated to obtain permission from a religious figure (Brahman) to marry: If a girl wants to get married, the first step is to obtain a document from a Brahman certifying her eligibility for marriage. When a matchmaker goes to a boy's family, the first question they ask is whether the girl has a valid marriage certificate from a Brahman.

b. Being required to send proposals to potential grooms: In Buddhist and Hindu cultures, fathers of prospective grooms advertise in newspapers, describing their sons' qualities and intentions to marry, and interested parties are instructed to contact a provided phone number.

c. Needing to be approved by both the groom, his mother, and his father: During the process, if the girl is rejected by the boy, his mother, or his father, she is turned away.

d. Being compelled to provide a dowry to the groom: After finding a match, negotiations often involve what the girl's family will provide to the boy's family in terms of a dowry, including items like a house, car, shop, or capital.

e. Facing a prohibition on returning to their parents' home after marriage: In Buddhism and Hinduism, once a girl is married and moves to her husband's house, she is forbidden from returning to her parents' house.

f. Prohibition of determining the sex of a pregnant woman's child by ultrasound: In regions where Buddhists and Hindus are concentrated, it is legally forbidden to determine the sex of the child in the mother's womb by prenatal ultrasound.

In surrounding countries where Hindus and Buddhists are a minority, it is allowed to determine the sex of the unborn child by ultrasound.

If the sex of the child to be born is determined by ultrasound, the women who will give birth to girls are given an abortion by their husbands.

There is an inscription on the walls of hospitals in countries where ultrasound is allowed: Either pay \$100 now, or you will have to pay \$100,000 in the future. This is the \$100 payment; have an abortion, be the murderer of your child and get rid of the girl child.

g. If the man she married dies, her husband should be shot with morphine and burned in the fire side by side with her husband: When a man dies, his body is placed on wood and burned. There are cremation places in the city and usually on the riverbanks. They drugged the dead man's wife with morphine and burned them alive on the same woods as if they were burning.

However, since the United Nations banned this practice 60 years ago, this practice is only practiced in villages outside the city centre.

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h. The fact that the woman whose husband died cannot leave the house, shaves her hair constantly and is forbidden to marry: After the ban decision of the United Nations, women who could not be cremated together with their deceased husbands shave their hair and cannot leave their husband's house until they die. While other women can marry 1, 2 and 3 men other than their husbands, it is forbidden for this woman to marry even if she is widowed at a young age.

i. Being Obligated to Fast 11-12 Days Annually, Consuming Only Liquids for the Health of Their Husbands: Women are required to fast 11-12 days per year by consuming only liquids such as water, tea, buttermilk, and fruit juice for the well-being of their husbands, while men do not fast for the health of their wives. However, in a household, alongside the well-being of the husband, the wife's health is equally crucial. When a man is unwell, certain things might be disrupted, but when a woman is unwell, everything can be affected.

j. After marriage, they are obligated to meet with unmarried men who come as potential suitors: Imagine a scenario where a woman is happily married for 6 months and has a content household. One evening, the doorbell rings. The husband goes to answer the door and finds an unfamiliar man standing there. "Please, come in," he says.

The newcomer states, "I've heard there's a beautiful lady in this house. I intend to get to know her, have a conversation, and if I like her, I'll marry her." If such a proposition were made to us, we might react by either giving the man a stern warning or even physically confronting him.

However, are these visiting suitors turned away? No, they are not. Just like how some women boast about having 2-3 suitors visiting their daughters each week, these men proudly boast, "I have such a beautiful wife that 2-3 suitors visit our home every week."

When an unknown male suitor arrives at the house, the husband tells his wife, "Dear, a suitor has come to see you." The wife approaches the situation as if preparing for a special event—touching

up her makeup, wearing a nice dress, applying perfume, deciding which aspects to reveal and which to conceal—then she meets the man alone in a room.

k. If an unmarried suitor comes to a married woman and they agree, she is obligated to marry him: If the visiting bachelor and the married woman come to an understanding, the married woman says, "I accept marrying this man as well." The husband has no luxury of rejecting this.

I told my friends who are teachers in schools in India, "Two men sharing the same woman would lead to conflicts." They responded, "No, the system is established; there won't be any issues." When I asked how it could work, they explained, "The system is established. Two men married to the same woman would sit down together and decide on a schedule—on odd days of the month, she stays with one, and on even days, she stays with the other. There's no room for confusion or problems."

l. When married to multiple men, they are obliged to visit one husband's home daily and perform his and his household's duties: A woman leaves one husband's house around 5 PM and stays at another husband's house until 5 PM the next day, and the cycle continues. When staying with one husband, the other husband does not exert any control over her for the 24 hours. During each 24-hour period, she is obligated to fulfill all the household duties of that husband's home.

m. These treatments faced by girl children are also accepted by their religions and laws: Religions like Buddhism and Hinduism, along with the laws of countries where these religions are practiced, acknowledge and accept the mistreatment of girl children.

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After enduring all these hardships, if a married girl child becomes pregnant, on the day her labor starts, midwives and the mother-in-law are called to assist in the childbirth. If the child born is a girl, the grandmother hands over the naked baby to her son, who stands at the door.

Considering the traditions, customs, laws, and religious beliefs, as well as the hardship she would face, the son, thinking he can't find a solution, breaks the neck of his own daughter.

### **Reasons for the Killing of Female Children**

a. Being obligated to obtain permission from a religious figure (Brahmin) to marry: If a girl wishes to marry, it is mandatory for her to obtain a document from a Brahmin certifying her eligibility for marriage. Indeed, when a matchmaker visits a man, the first question asked by the man's family to the girl's family is whether she possesses a marriage certificate from a Brahmin.

b. Being required to send proposals to potential grooms: In Buddhism and Hinduism, fathers of prospective grooms place advertisements in newspapers stating qualities like "I want to marry off my son with these qualifications," along with a photograph. Girls and their parents follow these advertisements. If they like a prospective groom, they call his family and express their interest in arranging a match.

The groom's family responds with dates like today, tomorrow, or the day after, instructing the girl's family to come at 7 pm on a specified day. Dressed up nicely and accompanied by their daughters, the girl's family goes to the groom's house, driven by the fear of not being liked.

c. Being obligated to be approved by both the groom, his mother, and his father: In 30 houses visited, the boy might say, "I don't like this girl, send her away." If the boy doesn't like the girl, he, along with his mother and father, shows the door to the girl and her parents.

In 40 other houses, the boy likes the girl, but the mother says, "My son doesn't know how to choose a suitable woman; this girl can't become a wife," and sends them away.

In another 30 houses, the boy and the mother like the girl, but the father disagrees and asks them to leave.

d. Being compelled to provide a dowry of approximately \$100,000 to the groom: In a new house they visit, if the boy, his mother, and father like the girl, they negotiate over the dowry that the girl's family should provide. In 30 houses visited by the matchmakers, the boy, along with his parents, likes the girl, but they are turned away from those houses due to disagreements regarding dowry items such as a house, car, shop, or money.

Isn't this behavior humiliating for a girl, her mother, and her father?

During negotiations, the girl's father suggests, "I can give you a Hyundai taxi." The boy's father demands a Mercedes or BMW and they agree on a Passat.

The girl's father offers a house in a suburban area. The boy's father agrees if it's in the city center.

The girl's father says, "I can't afford a luxury neighborhood, I can provide a house in this area," and they agree.

The girl's father suggests giving 40,000 rupees. The boy's father agrees if it's 40,000 euros. They settle on \$30,000.

e. Being prohibited from returning to their parents' home after marriage: In Buddhism and Hinduism, once a girl is married and becomes a bride, her family is prohibited from visiting her parents' home again. It's as if they didn't marry off the daughter but sold her into slavery. If someone goes against this rule and is caught, they are penalized. However, the groom's side does not face such restrictions and can freely visit the girl's home.

f. Prohibition of determining the gender of a pregnant child through ultrasound: In regions heavily populated by Buddhists and Hindus, determining the gender of an unborn child through ultrasound before birth is legally prohibited. However, in surrounding countries with Hindu and Buddhist minorities, determining the gender through ultrasound is allowed. If the gender of the unborn child is revealed through ultrasound and it's a girl, husbands often force their wives to have an abortion. If the woman refuses, the husband may resort to violence, causing her to have a miscarriage. Hospitals in countries where ultrasound is permitted display a notice on their walls: "Pay \$100

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now to be saved from paying \$100,000 later." This \$100 payment is an invitation to abort the child and effectively rid oneself of a girl child.

g. If the husband dies, the wife is required to be injected with morphine and burned alongside him: When a man dies, his body is placed on top of wood and set on fire. In cities and often by riversides, there are designated cremation sites.

You know the saying, "May God unite you on a single pillow." When a husband dies, his wife is injected with morphine to make her unconscious, and then she is burned alive alongside him, as if they were both alive. However, due to the United Nations' ban on this practice 60 years ago, it is now only observed in villages outside city centers.

h. If the husband dies, while other women can marry up to four times, widows are prohibited from leaving the house, are required to shave their heads continuously, and are forbidden to remarry: In city centers, after the United Nations' ban, widows whose husbands cannot be cremated alongside them shave their heads and are prohibited from leaving their deceased husband's home until their own death. While other women can marry one, two, or three other men besides their husband, these widows, even if they become widowed at a young age, are forbidden to remarry.

i. Being obligated to fast for 11-12 days a year, consuming only liquids, for the well-being of their husbands: Women fast for their husbands' well-being for 11-12 days a year, consuming only liquids such as water, tea, yogurt, and fruit juice. However, husbands do not fast for their wives' well-being. Ironically, a wife's well-being is often more crucial in a household. When a man falls ill, some things might be disrupted, but when a woman falls ill, everything can be affected.

j. Being obligated to meet unmarried male matchmakers even after marriage: For instance, a wife might have been happily married for six months. One evening, the doorbell rings. The husband answers the door and finds an unfamiliar man outside. The stranger says, "I heard there is a beautiful woman in this house; I will inspect her closely, talk to her, and if I like her, I'll marry her." If such a proposal were made in our society, the person making the proposal would likely face strong reactions, but in these regions, matchmakers are not turned away. In fact, some women boast about having 2-3 matchmakers visit their daughters each week, and men do the same when they receive frequent visits from potential suitors.

When an unfamiliar male matchmaker arrives at a home, the husband informs his wife, "A matchmaker has come to see you." Just as a woman knows how to present herself to a matchmaker to be liked, she freshens up her makeup, dresses well, applies perfume, and decides which parts of her body to reveal and conceal before meeting the man alone in a room.

k. If an unmarried male matchmaker likes a married woman, she is required to marry him: If an agreement is reached between the unfamiliar man and the house's wife, the wife might say, "I agree to marry this man." The husband has no luxury of rejecting the idea.

I told my friends who are teachers in schools in India, "Two men sharing the same woman could lead to conflicts." They disagreed, stating that the system is well-established and no problems would arise. When I questioned how it works, they explained that two men who are both married to the same woman sit down and determine who will be with her on the odd days of the month and who will be with her on the even days. They reach an agreement without any confusion or issues.

l. When they marry multiple men, they are obliged to visit one husband's house every day, carry out the chores of that house and that husband: At 5 in the evening, the woman leaves one of her husbands' houses and stays with the other husband until 5 in the evening of the next day. The following day, she stays with the other husband for 24 hours. When she is with the other husband, the first husband has no control over her for those 24 hours. During each 24-hour period, she is obligated to perform all the chores of that house and serve that husband.

m. The treatment that girls endure, as mentioned above, is accepted by their religions and laws: Religions such as Buddhism and Hinduism and the laws of countries where Buddhism and Hinduism are practiced accept the treatment inflicted on girls.

After enduring all these hardships, if a married girl becomes pregnant, when her due date arrives and labor pains begin, a midwife and her mother-in-law come to the woman's house to deliver the baby. If the newborn child is a girl, the grandmother hands the child over naked to her son waiting at the door. Thinking that adhering to customs, traditions, laws, and religions won't alleviate the troubles their daughter will face, the father kills his own daughter by breaking her neck.

## **Other Methods of Killing Girl Children**

The United Nations prohibited the killing of girl children by breaking their necks 60 years ago. When children are killed, their actions are recorded on film. If the child was killed by breaking their neck, a penalty is imposed. Neck-breaking continues outside city centers. In urban areas, alternative methods are employed to avoid the punishment of death by neck-breaking:

- a. A newborn girl child is confined to a room or a box. After some initial cries, her voice is muffled, and she is left unfed, leading to death by starvation.
- b. In countries like India, where the sun's heat is intense, children are left exposed naked. Due to extreme dehydration, the child's cries subside, and they faint, leading to death.
- c. Babies born from the warmth of the womb are wrapped in wet towels and left outdoors in the cold of the night. These children contract pneumonia from the cold and die.

After such practices and similar methods, when footage is captured, it is observed that the neck was not broken, avoiding the charge of capital punishment.

In 2012, in India, the number of girl children killed, where their necks were broken or they were left to die in the sun, cold, or hunger, stood at 250,000, excluding rural cases. Among those whose necks were found to be broken and documented only in films shot within city centers, the number was 250,000.

Hence, in states of India where Muslims are not the majority, the male population surpasses the female population by 25%. This means that for every 100 females, there are 125 males, or for every 1,000,000 females, there are 1,250,000 males. A million females can find husbands, but

what about the 250,000 males? Religions and laws have found a solution to this issue. A woman can marry up to four different men.

Due to the 13 reasons mentioned above, girl children are killed by breaking their necks in countries where Buddhism and Hinduism are practiced. Neither the laws of the land nor the religions followed by the people raise their voices against the practices of killing these girl children, whether by breaking their necks or through non-Islamic practices after marriage.

### **Conclusion and Evaluation**

There is no crime that justifies the killing of girl children. They are being killed by breaking their necks as a result of a misguided practice stemming from their beliefs and laws.

The Prophet (peace be upon him) said, "He who sleeps while his neighbor is hungry is not one of us." (Hakim, Mustadrak, 4/183, hadith no: 7307). Those living in the same neighborhood or village are considered neighbors. Before the time of the Prophet (peace be upon him), common people would send their wives to those of noble lineage until they became pregnant, hoping their children would belong to the noble lineage. However, apart from the Hashim lineage, other lineages used to kill their girl children. The Prophet (peace be upon him) and his companions took measures to prevent these two practices.

When asked about the sin for which a girl child is buried alive (Surah At-Takwir, 8-9), in this era, it will not just be the girl child who is questioned. Rather, those who are the inheritors of the Prophet (peace be upon him) and those who are part of his community will also be questioned regarding the girls who were killed by breaking their necks and the non-Islamic treatment they received after marriage.

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In addition, believers should be asked the question: "Who is the one who lays down in faith while his neighbor lies down without faith?"

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