Female Infanticide in the Colonial Punjab

The Punjab was one of the last territories to be annexed by the British in 1849. They had annexed the Cis-Sutlej States and Jalandhar division in 1846 and were familiar with the region and its economic potential since the early years of the 19th century. The introduction of British rule in the Punjab region ushered in a phase of change not only in the administration and economy but also the social sphere. In this territory the bugle against this crime was first sounded by Mr. John Lawrence, the first Commissioner. John Lawrence’s continuous denunciations, warnings and threats backed by his personal communication and influence considerably arrested its progress in that quarter, by arousing alike the fears and sympathies of the people.¹ He denounced it as murder, but the main loophole of these instructions was that these all were verbally communicated to subordinates and they did not take them seriously. The British had attempted verbal methods in various parts of western and north India though unsuccessful yet they followed the same mechanism in the Punjab. Even though the officers had the experience of other provinces and its consequence, the same scheme was adopted here. The present chapter attempts to highlight the efforts of the British in dealing with suppressive measures against female infanticide and impact of these efforts on the social scenario of the Punjab region.

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section covers the early responses of the British officials to the practice of female infanticide in the Punjab in the context of their experiences elsewhere in the subcontinent. The second section examines the reasons behind the killing of the girl child and the methods used for the same. How the people were trying to justify their inhumane act of murder of the girl child. The third section presents an overview of the issue of female infanticide in the Punjab and British responses and some general comment to it are put forward in this context.

In 1849 Sir John Lawrence, the Lieutenant Governor of Punjab issued orders that read, ‘Thou shall not commit Sati, Thou shall not kill a Daughter, Thou shall not bury a Leper alive’ this clearly reflects the prevalence of the practice of female infanticide in the province of Punjab. In 1851, Major E. Lake, the Deputy Commissioner of Gurdaspur, was the first who drew the attention of the Board of Administration to the ‘enormity’ of the practice of female infanticide in the Punjab. At this time the Board was not in a position to take any substantial measures against the practice as it was focused on organizing the administration of this newly acquired province. The commissioners were however, were asked to make an investigation into the nature and extent of female infanticide in their respective districts and bring back a report on the prevalence of such killings. The investigation or inquiry about the extent and spread of the issue of female infanticide was the first concern of the British officers in the province of Punjab. As the British officials and government has considerable experience in dealing with the same problem in other parts of India, especially in Western India. As the Board of Administration got the preliminary information regarding the crime from the various districts, they devised their full plan to curb the problem and protect the life of the girl child. The existence of this crime had been first reported among the Bedis and it was among them that the first efforts were made to put a stop to it. Mr. D.F. McLeod the Commissioner and Major Herbert Edwardes the Deputy Commissioner of the Jalandhar District were the first officials who took this subject seriously and prepared valuable reports which pointed to the position of the Bedis and Khatris in this region.

Based on their previous experiments and experiences the British decided to make engagements with the local chiefs, as they had in western India, to curb the crime. The colonial rulers thought that if once they got confidence and trust of the local chiefs; they would definitely get the desired results in every field. The Bedis and Bunjal Khatris castes both they even though were Khatris they did not inter-marry. To solve the dispute between them a large meeting was organized on 4th April 1853 which lasted three days under the presidentship of McLeod, the Commissioner of the Jalandhar division. In this meeting the Bunjal and Bedi Khatris consented

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to waive all their misgivings and were ready to exchange daughters in marriage with the Bedis, on the condition that their own marriage customs and ‘rates’ should be retained. In this meeting an agreement to regulate the marriage expenditure was also signed which was fixed according to the income of the bride’s family.\textsuperscript{5} It was due to Major Edwardes, the Deputy Commissioner of the Jalandhar division in 1852-53 that a reconciliation was brought about between the Bedis and Bunjal Khatris who formerly belonged to the same caste but had separated from one another because of internal jealously and rivalry.\textsuperscript{6} The British were ‘successful’ in their efforts of patch up in-between same castes and groups. This had been identified as following female infanticide.

At this time it was thought that the fixing of marriage expenditure would produce good results because people lived only to save money in order to marry their daughters. Such was the custom which was present all over India but its extent in the Punjab reached ‘beyond the limits’ of the people. For example, on the marriage of Kanwar Nau Nihal Singh, grandson of Maharaja Ranjit Singh with the daughter of Aattri chief an amount of seventeen lakhs was spent.\textsuperscript{7} So the British officers felt that if they were successful in fixing the expenditure on the daughter’s marriage it would definitely result in a stop on further killing of the girl child. Though Kanwar Nau Nihal Singh did not belong to the common masses as he was a prince and such money expenditure could be justified in the situation. Even though the idea of the fixation of marriage expenses was good for the common masses as some time they too become the victim of over expenditure on the marriage girls.

In June 1853, Mr. Robert Montgomery, the Judicial Commissioner of the Punjab after analyzing the reports from all quarters, found that their efforts in the Cis-Sutlej areas and in the Jalandhar division had not been altogether ineffectual. They were able to put stop at some extent to the practice of female infanticide openly. Mr. Montgomery in his report suggested that the principle of voluntary reduction of marriage expenses, which had been adopted by the Bedis and Rajputs at the Jalandhar and Hoshiarpur meetings, should be introduced further and that the law should interpose to secure all marriage parties from the attacks of the Bhats and Mirasis. He also

\textsuperscript{5} Minute by R. Montgomery, 10 June, 1853.
\textsuperscript{6} Minute by R. Montgomery, 10 June, 1853; Selections from the Records of the Government of India, Punjab, Vol. 1. Lalita Panigrahi, \textit{British Social Policy and Female Infanticide in India}, Munshiram Manoharlal, New Delhi, 1972, 104.
\textsuperscript{7} John Cave Brown, \textit{Indian Infanticide Its Origin, Progress, and Suppression}, 140.
suggested issuing a proclamation denouncing the practice as being one of murder. Second, the village headmen were to be made responsible for reporting the village management and losing income arising therefore. Third, an annual census of the inhabitants of the suspected clans and last a meeting should be called of the heads of ‘infanticidal clans’ near Amritsar to discuss the various problems of intermarriages and marriage expenditures. John Lawrence, the Chief Commissioner approved of all these measures except that the headmen of the village should only be punished for flagrant neglect of duty and open supervision or secret espionage on to extortion and oppression. The Governor-General in Council was nevertheless of the opinion that the sentiments of the government in condemnation of this horrible crime, should not be left to make their own way upon the convictions of the people but should be openly proclaimed and enforced by denunciation of certain punishment upon those who are convicted of offending. He was aware of the practical difficulties which one have to face during the reporting of any case of female infanticide as it was done inside the four walls of the house. On other hand, John Lawrence put emphasis on the reforms in the institution of caste hierarchy and intermarriage norms. Lord Dalhousie also supported the efforts of the John Lawrence and he also firmly declared in his minute of August 1853 that the offender should be given the punishment as a murderer. The ‘success’ rate of all these measures had already been seen by the British in the province of Gujarat from 1800 to the 1850s.

In the province of Punjab another problem arose that was how they could enforced their suppressive measures without having any system of espionage, nevertheless, Dalhousie made it clear especially with regard to the Bedis, the clan most addicted to female infanticide, that if they continued with the practice they would not only be guilty of the penalty of murder but would also forfeit their Jagirs and pensioners allowances.

This strict step of Dalhousie was very similar to the effort of Willoughby with regard to the Jahrejas of Kathiawad. Dalhousie also approved of the suggestion of giving rewards, honors and titles to the castes abandoning female infanticide.

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8 Extract from letter No. 3894 From J.P Grant, Esq., Officiating Secretary to the Government of India to J. Lawrence, Esq., Chief Commissioner of the Punjab, Fort William, 7 September 1853; John Cave Brown, Indian Infanticide Its Origin, Progress, and Suppression, 218-220.

9 Minute by Dalhousie, 8 August 1853, Board’s Collection, Vol. 2, 564.
On 8th July 1853, John Lawrence forwarded a minute from the Judicial Commissioner and a report by Major Edwardes on ‘Female Infanticide in the Punjab’ to the Governor-General in Council. The Governor-General and his council approved of all the suggestions made by them, but he had objection to open supervision or secret espionage on the part of the police, as it was likely to lead to extortion and oppression. After receiving instructions from the Governor-General in Council, John Lawrence issued the following proclamation throughout the Punjab.

Whereas, it has been brought to the notice of the Most Noble the Governor-General in Council, that the practice of destroying female children, either at the time of birth or subsequently is prevalent among certain classes of people in the Punjab, the following orders are hereby notified to the public, with a view to the suppression of this horrid practice, which is sinful in the eyes of God and hateful to the authorities,

‘Any person committing the crime of infanticide in defiance of God and of the authorities will incur the penalty of murder. The crime was most prevalent among the Bedi community but some of the members have lately abstained from it. This fact has afforded great satisfaction to the Governor-General and it is hoped that all the Bedis without exception will give up the evil practice and follow the right path; otherwise those families who continue to perpetrate the crime shall besides incurring the penalty of murder, forfeit all their jagirs and other pensionary allowances which may have been assigned to them by government. Any person, who conscientiously fearing God and the authorities may use his endeavors towards suppressing the crime of female infanticide in compliance with the wishes of government, will be held deserving of reward, honor and title from the Governor-General of India. Be it known that a general meeting of high British functionaries attached to the Punjab and of Rajas or chiefs and other local gentry, will be held at Amritsar in the month of Katak (October), during the Diwali festival with a view to devise measures for the suppression of

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Letter No. 3894, From J.P. Grant, Esq., Officiating Secretary to the Government of India to John Lawrence, Esq., Chief Commissioner of the Punjab, 7th Sept. 1853, Fort William, Calcutta.
female infanticide. All persons desirous of attending the meeting are hereby invited.'11

The measures like declaring the practice of female infanticide equal to murder and fear of confiscation of estates and pensioner allowances were not new efforts of the British in the Punjab. They had experience of these efforts in western India earlier. These measures were taken before the grand meeting of Amritsar of 1853. This proclamation served a background for the chiefs and local leaders of the Punjab. By these steps local chiefs become aware of the views or stand of the government over the issue of female infanticide. Now it became clear to everybody that the British were serious on this matter and they wanted to put a stop to this crime and if people did not take these measures seriously it would not bode well with them, and they might have to lose their jagirs, pensions and honors as bestowed to them by the British government.

The great meeting held at Amritsar12 on the 29th, 30th and 31st October, 1853 specifically for the suppression of female infanticide and the enactment of sumptuary and other rules for regulating the expenditure at marriage ceremonies. The ‘success’ of the meeting was remarkable and the Chief Commissioner believed that its moral effect would be long lasting. The gathering of all ranks was very large. The significant impact was that the sympathy of the people was roused and an apparent hearty desire to cooperate with the authorities was visible. A general resolution was adopted and signed in an open Darbar by all the representatives of the various grades. In the meeting, the following memorandum has been drawing out and copy sent to the Governor-General and his council.13 At the same time a proclamation was also issued throughout the Punjab denouncing the crime of female infanticide and threatening all who were proved guilty of it with punishment for murder.

This meeting originally was to be presided over by the leading Punjab officials as the Chief Commissioner, Mr. John Lawrence, with his Judicial and other colleagues, supported by Mr. D.F. M’Leod, Mr. Charles Raikes and Mr. G.C. Barnes with the Commissioners of the

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11 Selection from the Public Correspondence of the Punjab, Vol. I, No.6,441.
12 Letter No. 1029, From J. Melvill Esq. Secretary to the Chief Commission to J.W Dalrymple Esq., Officiating Under Secretary of India, Fort Willam, 31st December 1853, Lahore, 243-248.
Jalandhar, Lahore and Cis-Sutlej Divisions respectively. Mr. Lawrence however, was urgently summoned to the frontier and Mr. Raikes the Commissioner of the Lahore division, was prevented from attending by sudden and severe illness, an absence of both of these was regretted by the whole meeting, not only because he had taken keen interest in it, but because he was looked to as the expositor of the principle which he had himself originated and which that meeting was assembled.

A large number of local chiefs of all ranks in the Punjab were assembled. Amongst them were the members of the former Darbar, independent Rajas and tributary Jagirdars, the representatives of all the leading families among the Sikhs, the chiefftains of the Kangra Hills, the Bedis of Dera Baba Nanak. The commercial and municipal heads of every city note, within 200 miles of the Amritsar. Besides these classes, there were chiefs, lambardars, zamindars from every district, representing the agricultural and trading interests.  

The first day of the meeting was devoted to the preliminary formation of the general committees which comprising all the most intelligent and influential Rajas and Sardars with the Deputy Commissioners. The various types of suppressive measures already there and how effective they had been discussed and all the delegates also agreed that they should be taken these as the basis of future proceedings. On the second day these principles were communicated by the heads and delegates to their castes and classes, in private conclave. The Rambagh presented the novel and striking scene of bodies of local Rajputs, Bedis, Khatris, Muslims and others formed into separate groups under the guidance of their own chiefs deliberating on the most important object for which they had been brought together by the British. After four or five hours close and earnest consultation the committee handed in their written and duly attested agreements. In these documents were laid down well graduated scales of marriage expenditure for the different castes and communities whose interests were concerned. In the majority of them three or four grades of expenditure, according to the means and position of the parties contracting the marriage in society were recognized and a maximum as well as a minimum of  

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14 From, R. Montgomery Esq. and G.F Edmonstone Judicial and Financial commissioner of the Punjab to J. Melviel Esq, Secretary and Agent to the Governor-General for the Punjab, Foreign department- Political- 28 April 1854, 243-48.
expenditure fixed with all the details of charge, the gratuities to Brahmans, Barbers and others
and like expenses of the marriage feast and procession, were laid down at length.

The last or third day of this meeting was devoted to the great Darbar or council, when all
who had hitherto been deliberating separately were to combine together in one general assembly
and to declare publicly with one heart and one voice their determination to suppress this crime.
Separate agreements were signed by the British with chiefs of different castes and communities
as they themselves had designed, to fix the expenditure on the marriage of the daughters. It was
for the first time in the colonial Punjab that all the classes were called jointly to discuss the issue
of female infanticide. All the chiefs of classes were dealt separately by the British after
discussing their causes or reasons for the killing of girl child in their castes respectively.

According to appendix-B\textsuperscript{15} of the agreement of the Amritsar meeting krarnamah or
agreement on the part of all the chiefs and people residing in the Punjab and the Trans-Sutlej
States respecting the prevention of female infanticide and making of the arrangements in regards
to marriage expenses was signed at Amritsar on the 31\textsuperscript{st} October 1853.\textsuperscript{16} In the territories of the
Punjab the heinous crime of infanticide was not completely suppressed after the agreements of
the Amritsar meeting of 1853. Therefore to check the crime in the Punjab and in accordance with
the order of the Governor-General of India, the people met together with a view to devise
measures for the prevention of the crime and made the following engagements, certifying that
they shall abide by them.

“\text{The crime of infanticide being so hateful to God and in the eyes of government and all}
ious and good men we will, at once cause the apprehension of any person of our tribe who may
perpetrate the crime in our taluks or villages and bring the same to the notice of the authorities
and they would expel from caste any person who may refuse or show reluctance to join in the
endeavors to accomplish the above object. One of the chief causes of infanticide being, the
expenditure of enormous sums of money on the occasion of marriage in providing for dowries
and for the large number of people who attend at weddings, we shall with a view to reduce these
expenses, adopt in our several castes and tribes all the arrangements connected with marriage

\textsuperscript{15} From, R. Montgomery Esq. and G.F Edmonstone Judicial and Financial commissioner of the Punjab to J. Melviel
Esq. Secretary and Agent to the Governor-General for the Punjab, Foreign department- Political- 28\textsuperscript{th} April 1854,
243-48.

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid.
charges which are in force in the Mainipur, Jalandhar and Hoshiarpur districts, on other similar arrangements which may be made by Panchayat in the presence of the several deputy officers who will preside over us. Another great evil besides that of the expenditure above alluded to, is the gathering of Bhat, Rais, Duts, Bhands, Nais, Mirasis and beggars on the occasion of marriage, who threaten and abuse the parties concerned in them and inflicting injuries on their persons with knives and stones alamorously demand charity. If any such party shall in future be found to conduct himself in such an outrageous and harassing manner, he will be apprehended and handed over to the Police and we will never allow him admittance to wedding or give him anything in charity and wise apply to the district officer for aid in the matter.”

Another decision was recorded in appendix-E, an agreement by the Bedis of Kusbah, Dera Baba Nanak, Pargana Butalah in district Gurdaspur regarding the outlay to be incurred on marriage among them. According to this they were agree to the following scale of expenditure to be incurred on marriage, and value of which would depend on the circumstance of her parents.

Among the persons of the-
1st Class- Rs.500
2nd Class- Rs.400
3rd Class- Rs.250
4th Class- Rs 125

This agreement was signed by the principal Bedis of Dera Baba Nanak.

In another appendix- F, an agreement by the Zamindars and Lambardar of village in the tahsils of pargana Amritsar, Taran Taran, Jourian and Juvundie, district Amritsar having assembled together, unconformity to the instruction received at the meeting of the Punjab authorities and having determined by general consent upon the arrangements to be observed in regard to outlay on the marriage of girls among us do hereby engage that expenses of marriage amongst persons of different conditions. All marriage ceremonies shall be regulated in future and which shall not

18 Ibid.
19 Ibid.
be deviated all persons in a low state of life and not living in easy circumstance will expend from Rs. 1 to 125, their barat marriage party can consist of ten persons only. The fees of the lagis was fixed to Rs. 25, the expenditure over the feasting the marriage party and presents to shrine and Brahmins of the village and to relatives fixed to Rs. 40 and last, the expenditure over the dowry to the bride, in household utensils apparel, jewels fixed upto Rs. 60 only. Those in easy circumstance and occupying a middle station in life, will incur from Rs. 125 to 250, their barat marriage party can consist of twenty persons. The fees of the lagis was fixed to Rs. 50, the expenditure over the feasting the marriage party and presents to shrine and Brahmins of the village and to relatives fixed to Rs. 80 and lastly the expenditure over the dowry to the bride, in household utensils apparel, jewels fixed upto Rs. 120 only. While all persons of substance and consequence will at liberty to expend from Rs. 250 to 500 on the marriage of their daughter their barat marriage party can consist of forty persons. The fees of the lagis was fixed to Rs. 100, the expenditure over the feasting the marriage party and presents to shrine and Brahmins of the village and to relatives fixed to Rs. 160 and last the expenditure over the dowry to the bride, in household utensils apparel, jewels fixed upto Rs. 240 only.  

Every class and caste was eager to agree to reduction of marriage expenditure, regulate dowries and fees of mendicants like the Bhats and Mirasis. The Rajputs and Pathan promised to give up the practice. The Bedis and Sodhis too became willing to waive their pride and the Khatris their jealousies and consented to intermarry. The Lahorians and Surins also forgot the feuds which had separated them. It seemed all groups were ready to renounce this inhuman practice.

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20They also decided no girl would be allowed to remain unmarried after the age of 12, that no person shall from mercenary consideration or at the instigation of any of his relatives or of stranger or on the ground of poverty of the party to whom has daughter may be betrothed, be allowed to cancel the betrothals and promise her to another, except only in the event by its being subsequently discovered that the included bridegroom labors under some incurable disease or natural infirmity, such as leprosy, epilepsy, loss of sight, tameness and impotency. In the event of any person, not affecting the marriage of his daughter after she has attained her 12 year or having recourse to any of the illegal proceedings above alluded to, we will bring into the notice of the authorities. It will then rest with the government to deal with the delinquent in the manner that may be deemed proper. The several items of expense attendant on weddings known as vara and ruthba charee shall not for the several classes exceed the scales above laid down. The prevention of the abusive language and boisterous vituperations which the adoption of the above arrangements will naturally give rise to on the part of the different classes of beggar and others who clamorously demand charity at weddings and the protection of the marriage parties from their insulting and noisy demands will rest with government. This is an agreement signed by numerous zamindars and lambardars.
After looking at these measures one may conclude that the British wanted to curb the practice of female infanticide on serious note in the Punjab. They dealt with different castes and communities separately and fixed their marriage expenses as their chiefs desired; nothing was imposed on the public. Each and every measure was openly discussed and according to the demands of the delegates. The government showed some confidence on the authority of the local chiefs as they were the persons who were left with the responsibility of the implementation of the suppressive measures or would report to the police about their breach in their localities. All the present local chiefs agreed to the measures of the British. The colonial authorities felt that the Amritsar meeting was a great ‘success’, in fact more than their expectations.

Inspired from the ‘success’ of the great Amritsar meeting, Mr. R. Montgomery made a call to several Commissioners of those districts which were not included within the range of the Amritsar meeting, to hold a local meeting for the purpose of explaining and obtaining a wider adoption of the resolutions agreed by them. The first response to his call was received from the district of Gujranwala. A meeting was held there on the 5th December 1853, nearly five thousand men of all classes and communities had gathered. These were persons from the neighbouring Khatris of Gujranwala and Wazirabad and more distant Muslims Raats of Hafizabad all were assembled to discuss the issue of female infanticide and an agreement was signed by them in the footprints of the Amritsar resolution. At the same time a meeting was convened at Rawal Pindi, here Mr. Carnac, the Deputy Commissioner gathered all the leading Hindus, Moyal Brahmans and Adhyeghur Khatris in order to include them in similar agreements with which their kinsmen had bound themselves at Amritsar. This shows that the feeling of the people was largely against female infanticide, they supported the view that the practice was wrong and seemed ready to give up the practice, no doubt under the fear of the law and the influence of their chiefs.

At the beginning of 1854, a joint meeting was organized on the banks of the Jhelum by Captain C. Browne of the Jhelum district and Mr. Sapte of Gujarat, for the adjacent districts. In this meeting the same plan which had been followed at Gujarwanwala and Rawal Pindi was tried and all delegates accepted it without any opposition. At Shahpur, on the banks of the Chenab, Mr. Thornton, with Major Holling, his Deputy Commissioner organized a meeting on 23rd and

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22 Ibid, 168.
24th January 1854, with the heads of the principal Muslims and Hindus families, to impress upon them that practice of female infanticide had been contained since the commencement of British rule, and to consider the measures proposed for the total suppression of the crime. Similar types of meetings were also organized at Multan, Kangra, Ferozepur and Ambala, in all these meeting the nature of the agreements entered at Amritsar were explained to all of them and were adopted with certain modifications in the rates of marriage expenses. Between the years from the Amritsar meeting of 1853 and the various district meetings in the Punjab which ended by the 1855, there was a great keenness among the local chiefs and people against the crime of female infanticide. The most important fact which emerges is if the people readily accepted the restrictions where was the need for the British to have made a strong legislation against female infanticide. The time gap between the meetings on the issue of female infanticide and the Female Infanticide Act of 1870 was not more than 15 years. This was not enough to assess the desired results of the efforts against the long standing practice of female infanticide. This would mean that the agreements of the British had not been effective and by 1870 the need for a law was felt to curb the practice of female infanticide.

The Female Infanticide Act of 1870 had a varied impact in different provinces. After its implementation some problems emerged in the province of Punjab. At the first stage, according to the provisions of Act, a public announcement had to be made regarding the guilty clans and villages which were to come under its limitations. This was the most difficult task for the authorities, since the existence of the crime in a clan or in specific area could be ascertained only by an accurate census of the girls and boys present in that particular clan and marked area. However, wherever the ratio of girls to boys was found to be less than 40% of the villages or clan population these were declared as suspected villages and the rules of the Act were to be put into force. Declaration of any clan as an ‘infanticidal race’, on the basis of statistical enumeration became a major problem for the implementation of the Act. The British to resolve this issue started relying on their assumptions and past experience with the castes and communities where they had found its prevalence. So the list of the ‘infanticidal races’ was ready with the British government. Now the provisions of the Act were to be implemented and the British government and officials in the Punjab felt they had performed their duties very well and honestly, as the
census data of 1881 showed great improvement in numbers of girls per males, especially among the ‘infanticidal races.’

After the passing of the Female Infanticide Act, the government fixed the marriage expenditure on each and every thing including the expenses over the rituals and customs. The main motive of fixing the expenses was to lighten the burden of the daughter’s marriage from the father’s shoulders. The British considered this an important reason behind the prevalence of the practice and restricted the marriage expenses. On account of a marriage people could spend Rs 1 on Milni, Rs 2 on Kamin lag, Rs 2 on Lag on occasion of Phera, Rs 25 on marriage feast, Rs 51 on Khat, Rs 10 on vessels, Rs 15 on jewels, Rs 8 on cloth and clothes, Rs15 on the expenses of lagis on occasion of Khat and Rs. 30 on Muklawa. These were fixed as the upper limits of the marriage expenditure. Further, it was the duty of the father or head of the family celebrating the marriage to produce immediately before the Deputy Commissioner or an officer deputed by him on demand by the same, an account showing the actual expenses incurred, and to prove the correctness of the said account.

All expenses incurred in carrying out these rules, would be recoverable as an arrear of land revenue from the Jats of the village. No proclaimed village or family was to be exempted from the operation of these rules except by the orders of the local government or in virtue of authority to that effect vested by government in any officer. A village or family so exempted would then be struck out of Register A and the erasure could be initiated by the Magistrate of the district or by the district superintendent of police. This procedure seems rather strict and a full register was to be made of ‘infanticidal races’ and their names removed from them only by the consent of a Magistrate. This meant that for a lot for locals, because once their name was entered in Register-A all provisions of the Act were implemented on them and if the Magistrate thought that extra or special police supervision was needed, he could also employ them at their expense. Every caste and community now started trying their level best to be exempted from the web of the Act.

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23 Extract of letter from Secretary to Chief Commissioner’s No.458, 8th July 1853, Hari Kishan Kaul, Note on Female Infanticide.
24 Hari Kishan Kaul, Note on Female Infanticide.
At the end of 1884, the Punjab government again through the Commissioner of Jalandhar called for proposals regarding the reduction of expenditure on marriage, among the Jats who in consultation with the leading Jat sardar of that division framed some rules for the curtailment of marriage expenses and requested permission of the government to circulate them to other districts of the Province with the view to secure co-operation, without which the working of the rules was considered impracticable. The government approved of this action and asked other Commissioners to cooperate in the matter. In 1887, an important gathering was convened at Batala and certain rules for marriage expenses were drawn up. The subject was also taken up by the ‘Jat Association’.25

In March 1889, the government ordered a confidential enquiry to be made in the Delhi, Ludhiana and Hoshiarpur District with reference to the Sanitary Report of 1887, as to why female mortality was in excess of that of males in those district. With regard to Hoshiarpur, the difference was attributed to natural causes. The Deputy Commissioner of Jalandhar found that the deaths of females exceeded those of males only in 21 villages of the Ludhiana tahsil, chiefly inhabited by the Grewal Jats who had a reputation for practicing female infanticide. As regards Delhi, the Commissioner was of opinion that though the practice of neglect of female infants was admitted to yet there was nothing to warrant any action.

In May 1889, the Commissioner of Jalandhar applied for the extension of the provisions of Act VIII of 1870 to the Gill Jats of village Kokari Kalan in the Moga Tahsil, in which there were 40 married women but no female children although the male offspring lived, but the Deputy Commissioner was informed that the statistics supplied did not justify action under the Act.26 In 1890, the government referring to the figures of mortality in the Jalandhar and Ferozepur District remarked that with one exception, in no other district of the Province had female infant mortality exceeded that of male infants and that there was reason to suspect that the practice of female infanticide was no more or less prevalent in those districts. The Deputy Commissioner of those districts was accordingly directed to examine the statistics of suspected villages for term of a year and to prepare a register for those which showed strongly suspicious results. A warning was to be issued to such suspected villages and if the statistics of the

25 Hari Kishan Kaul, Note on Female Infanticide.
26 Ibid.
succeeding years showed no improvement, the case was to be reported with a view to the application of the Act to the offenders in each village.

In 1891, Mr. Coldstream, Deputy Commissioner of Hoshiarpur expressed his suspicion as to the prevalence of female infanticide in village Mahalpur (District Hoshiarpur). In response to a semi-official letter dated the 10th November 1891, from the Punjab Government as to the action taken in restricting expenses on marriages, the commissioner said that measures had been adopted in some of the districts but that nothing could be done in this respect without the help of legislation. The correspondence however, shows that the scheme received cordial support from the leading Jats who organized committees etc., for reducing marriage expenses in question.

In 1892, the Commissioner of Jalandhar recommended the extension of the provisions of Act VIII of 1870 to the Gill Jats of Manuki and Kokri Phula Singhwala and suggested that the Gill Jats of Duniwala, Dhaliwal’s of Rania and Raoki Kalan and Sidhus and Brars of Lahra Gagga of the Ferozepur districts be watched. The subject was taken up vigorously by Sir Dennis Fitzpatrick and the government asked the Sanitary Commissioner to make enquiries into the large excess of females over male infant deaths in the districts of Amritsar, Jalandhar, Ludhiana and Ferozepur.

It was in response to the Sanitary Commissioner’s enquiry through the Commissioner that Mr. Douie, Deputy Commissioner of Jalandhar drew up a memorandum and made certain proposals. On receipt of the report of the Sanitary Commissioner, Sir Dennis Fitzpatrick, the Lieutenant Governor, ordered the posting of a medical officer in two or three suspected places of the Jalandhar District as an experiment. He also observed that female infanticide prevailed to a most lamentable extent in the Ludhiana and Ferozepur District. As regards the reduction of expenses on marriages, his honor remarked that by pressing this scheme government would be substituting one motive for other. “At present” he said, “a man objects to have a daughter because among other reasons he has to ruin himself in providing for the cost of her marriage. At the time of marrying her, he would have to be follow the restrictions placed on expenditure that would humiliate him and in addition to incurring ruinous expenditure he could to go jail for disobeying the law”. He referred the whole question for opinion to the Judges of the chief court,

27 Hari Kishan Kaul, Note on Female Infanticide.
28 Ibid.
the Financial Commissioner the Inspector general of Police, the Commissioner, of Lahore and six other officers. A copy of the correspondence was forwarded to the Government of India, who remarked in reply that they would await the result of the experiment which had been instituted by His Honour the Lieutenant Governor.

In 1896, the Commissioner of Lahore recommended the extension of the Act to the Jats of village Sur Singh in the Lahore District, but the government saw no grounds for suspicion and referred back the case to Deputy Commissioner for further enquiry. The Deputy Commissioner and the Commissioner after making enquiries recommended that the proposal might be dropped. In response to Punjab government letter No. 396S, dated 15th July 1896, the Commissioner, of Jalandhar selected some centers for an experiment of the scheme of posting a native medical officer instead of the Police, as required by Sir Dennis Fitz Patrick’s order, accordingly Jadiala, Samra, Bundala, Rurka Kalan and Bilga were part of this experiment.

In 1900 the Punjab Government wrote to the Government of India saying that the rules sanctioned under their notification No. 232, dated the 10th July 1885, had not been effectual in suppressing the crime and submitted some revised rules deemed more suitable for making the scheme proposed by Sir Dennis Fitz Patrick more effective. These suggestion included substituting the medical agency for the Police and recommending that notification No. 3151 dated the 8th Dec 1884, declaring that Infanticide Act to be in force in nine villages of the Jalandhar District be cancelled, and that a fresh notification bringing the five villages mentioned above within the scope of the Act be issued. It was also observed that, if the experiment in these five villages proved successful, it would be extended to other villages in the Province in which the intervention was needed. The Government of India did not approve of a vigorous crusade for suppressing the crime being undertaken immediately, for fear of interference with the domestic privacy of the people, and asked that the Punjab Government should submit their view upon the entire question and if possible, profound a more suitable scheme. They also desired to ascertain, as far back as reliable statistics of enumeration were available and to what extent the practice of female infanticide had diminished under British rule in those part of Punjab. Where it was still supposed to exist it was suggested that a careful comparison should be made for decennial or other convenient intervals, of the proportionate number of boys and girls under five years of age
in suspected families and clans, with the number in the unsuspected families or clans of the same caste or tribe in the same tahsil or other territorial sub-division of the district.

In reply, the Punjab government explained certain difficulties in taking up the entire question at once and proposed to defer the general enquiry until the statistics of the Census of 1901 were available. In the meantime a readiness to make an experiment with Sir Dennis Fitz Patrick’s plan in order to gain experience of its working was made evident and a new notification was issued bringing all Jat residents of the said five villages under the operation of the Act. The revised rules, which were published with Government of India notification No. 307, dated 10th May 1901, A nominal registrar of all Jat families in the proclaimed villages was to be drawn up and annually revised under the orders of the Magistrate of the district. In this register recognized heads of families or masters of separate household were to be entered as the heads of families, and every member of the family usually resident in the village was to be entered by name. All persons under the age of 12 years were to be entered as children, except married female children living with their husbands who for the purpose of these rules, were deemed to be adult females. A special registrar of all births and marriages of females and of the deaths of unmarried female children and of married females under the age of 12 years and not living with their husbands, occurring in the families registered under Rule I, were to be kept up under the supervision of the District Magistrate. The person who was registered as the Head of a Family in a proclaimed village was to report immediately to the Lambardar, through whom he pays his revenue. The occurrence in his family of every Birth, Marriage and Death of a female and also, when required, produce all children of his family for the inspector of a medical officer under Rule VI visiting the village was made essential. Every midwife knowing of or having reason to believe in the occurrence in a family entered in the register prepared under Rule I, of a Birth or the illness of an unmarried female shall at once report to the Lambardar, through whom the Head of the said family pays his revenue. The Lambardar was to immediately report to the Medical Officer appointed under Rule VI, the occurrence whether reported to him or not of a birth, whether male or female, in a family entered in the register kept under Rule I, the marriage of a female, the Death of an unmarried female or a Married female under the age of twelve years and not living with her husband, the illness of a female child and the departure of a pregnant

29 A New Notification No. 315, dated the 12th Feb 1901.
woman to another village. A Medical Officer not below the rank of Hospital Assistant was to be appointed by the District Magistrate for each village, or for several villages jointly for the purpose of carrying out and supervising the provisions of Rules I, II, III, IV and V above. The District Magistrate was also in each case with the sanction of the commissioner, entertain a suitable subordinate staff, and incur necessary contingent expenses on medicines, medical instruments, house rent and other identical charges. Among the families entered in the register kept under Rule I, no person giving a female in marriage nor any one on his behalf, could incur any expense upon any ceremony or custom connected with her marriage in excess of a sum to be fixed by the District Magistrate with the sanction of the commissioner for the particular tribe of which he is a member. Similarly, no such person receiving a female into his family in marriage or any ceremony or custom connected there with exceeding the sum laid down in the same manner. It was to be duty of the father or other Head of Family celebrating the marriage to produce immediately before an officer deputed by him on demand by the same an account showing the actual expenses incurred and to prove the correctness of the said account. No family was to be exempted from the operation of these rules except by the orders of the Local Government or in virtue of authority to that effect vested by the government in any officer. A family so exempted will then be struck out of the registrar kept under Rule I, and the erasure initialed by the Magistrate of the District. Every Zaildar and Lambardar within his own circle and every village officer as defined in section 3(ii) of Act XVII of 1887 was be bound to render every assistance in carrying and the provisions of Act VIII of 1870 and of all rules framed in it.

All expenses incurred in carrying these rules into effect in any village to which they may be made applicable were recoverable as an arrear of land revenue upon the Jat landowners of the villages. The introduction of these rules had to be indefinitely postponed owing to the prevalence of plague in the tract. The old rules seem, however to be still acted upon in the five villages notified in 1901, although not beyond the mere registration, through the Lambardars, of all families of Jats in the village and of the births and marriages of females by medical men, and limited the expenses to be married at the various marriage ceremonies. A breach of any of the rules was of course punishable under the Act.

Mr. Rose, who superintended the census office of 1901, was asked by the government to write a special note on the question of female infanticide. In his note dated the 6th Oct 1903
which was submitted in 1904. Mr. Rose after giving brief history of the practiced discussed the date afforded by vital statistics and the mass of figure collected by him in great detail and dealt with the direct and indirect causes of the practice. The remedies suggested by Mr. Rose are given in paragraph 39 of his note which is reproduced below, “I have been not asked to note on this point, but I may venture to suggest that in the present state of our knowledge it is useless to attempt any remedy..... In this connection the figures for the proclaimed villages in Jalandhar are very significant. The registration of births and death is rendered absolutely accurate in the central Districts and especially among the Jat tribes in those Districts. It is of great importance to ensure that female birth is not returned as male. That in all the returns, Sikhs be distinguished from Hindus. That the birth-rate for each sex in each religion Hindu, Sikh and Muslim be worked out annually, for each District and for the whole Province. That the death-rate for the same then worked out, each year from the 1-5 age group and for the 5-10, 10-15 and 15-20 ages. That the tribe, as well as the caste, is invariably recorded in the Birth and Death registers. That a few large Jat tribes be selected in the District in which each tribe is well represented, and that the data suggested in (iii) and (iv) above be complied for each of those tribes.” He wound up by saying: “It ought not to be assumed that a paucity of females births or girls children in any family or status group due to female infanticide or neglect of girl children until it be known a great deal about the general question of the proportions of the sexes at birth. At present we know next to nothing”.

The Commissioner of Jalandhar\textsuperscript{10} expressed his views, based upon elaborate enquiries, in favors of reverting to the old rules instead of substituting Medical for Police supervision and urged that the principal cause operating to maintain and extend the practice of female infanticide was a purely material or Malthusian one. He therefore strongly advocated the adoption of legislation to limit expenditure on marriages. It will be noticed from the above history that although suspicion of killing female infants has been aroused from time to time in the Ludhiana, Jalandhar, Lahore, Ferozepur and Delhi districts, yet the only place where it has reached the stage of moral certainly is a group of villages in and on the border of the Phillaur Tahsil in the Jalandhar district inhabited mainly by Darbari Sikh Jats. In 1852, Mr. Herbert Edwards, Deputy

\textsuperscript{10} A note written by Mr. Fenton, C.S.I, on 20\textsuperscript{th} March 1904, as Deputy Commissioner Jalandhar and his letter No. 11, dated the 16\textsuperscript{th} Jan 1905.
Commissioner of Jalandhar thought that female infanticide was confined to the Bedis and Khatris which implies that at that time the Jats were not so prominent among those resorting to this inhuman practice.

In 1904, the Jalandhar district contained only five villages which were now under the operation of Act VIII of 1870. These villages Jandiala (750), Bilga (765), Samra (713), Bundala (701) and Rurka Kala (743) lie in the Phillaur Tahsil which has 756 females to every 1000 males against 783 in the whole district, 795 in the Natural Division, and 817 in the Province, the male population of the police training school in the Phillaur Fort and of the Railway establishment can hardly have affected the figures of whole tahsil. The main cause of the low proportion seems to be the general paucity of females in Sikh village. Dosanjh Klan which was formally under the operation of the Act but was released in 1901 has the lowest proportion of 692. In drawing inferences from the statistics it has to be borne in mind that this tract has suffered heavily from plague, which as remarked in particularly destructive to adult females. In suspected villages, females in the family way used to be sent away to their parents houses in other villages, by way of precaution, so that in case of female offspring, the infant could be disposed of without arousing suspicion of foul play.

The practice of female infanticide was believed to have prevailed in the Punjab to some extent at the time of annexation of this province, not only among the Darbari Jats or in the Jalandhar district, but generally throughout the central and eastern Punjab. The British believed that that the practice, though on the decline under the influence of a rigidly enforced, criminal Law and the civilizing influence of a humane government, continued to be favored in certain localities particularly in the Jalandhar Doab, and in individual families in the most of hypergamous castes all over the tracts in question. There were of the view that the social revolution was in progress the custom of hypergamy was gradually disappearing and the spread of education, had led to a marked contraction in the extent of female infanticide amounting almost to its virtual extinction. Not fully ceased but considerable improvement, increase in the birth-rates of females was a clear indication of a change for the better. The British found that work should be done in two directions first, prevention of the crime by surveillance under the provisions of Act and second, the curtailment of marriage expenses. Efforts in the latter direction had not met with success and it was not possible to say definitely whether all the villages which
have been under surveillance, had really shown an improvement, and if so whether it has not been due to the general reformation of ideas.

II

The district records and detailed reports of the colonial period provide information on the reasons and methods of the killing of female infants. How people discarded their daughter’s with their own hands and why? Various modes of killing the girl child were known in the colonial Punjab. Among the leading Sikh Jats of the Lohor Manjha it was the rule for the midwife to report the birth of a female child to the Sardar (Head of the family) and to ask for his orders as to whether the first potion (gutta31) should not be administered. At one time an answer in the negative from the head of family must have led to the immediate destruction of the new born baby.32 This was the oldest mode of the killing of the girl child prevalent in the Punjab.

The Census report of 1901 records that when Hindu women wanted to lose a female child during infancy or while it sucks milk, they take took baby into the jungle and put it in a sitting position under a tree, Gur (jaggery) was put into its mouth and a batti or corded roll of cotton between her fingers. Then the mother says in Punjabi:-

\[\text{Gur khaen puii katti, Ap na aen, bira nu ghalle}
\]

(Eat the jaggery, spin the cotton, Don’t come back, but send a brother).

The following day they returned to the place. If the dogs or jackals had dragged the body towards the mother’s home, she considered it a bad omen, saying: Ah! She is coming back—that means another girl.’ But if it was dragged away from the home, she was glad, saying: ‘The brother will come.’13 The desire of son was so strong that people did anything for a boy. They did not even care about the dead body of their girl child and left them unattended for the street dogs. The people saw nothing more significant than their desire for a son.

31The first potion of the food usually jagerry or honey given to new born baby.
32 Hari Kishan Kaul, Note on Female Infanticide.
33 Census of Punjab, 1901, Report, p.214.
In the province of Punjab, Mr. Fenton (1905) as Deputy Commission of Jalandhar in his letter to Commissioner of Jalandhar mentioned the mode of girl child killing in the Muhiyal caste\textsuperscript{34}, as stated to him by Munshi Bakhshi Ram Das, a member of a tribe,

‘the midwife poured over the infant’s head water from a jar that had been chilled almost to freezing by being put out on the roof that cold December night. The child’s face instantly turned black, she gasped once and died soon after. The milk of ‘Ak’ was also used to poison newly born girls. He accused his mother of poisoning his sister and came out of the room trembling.’

The District Gazetteer of Hoshiarpur also sheds some light on another method of girl child killing; the infants were put into gharas or water-pots and buried in the ground. Sometimes a Brahmin or Banya would rescue the child and bring it up as an adopted daughter- an act of great religious merit.\textsuperscript{35} The parents had many ways at their command to put a female child to death and could defy all the efforts of the police to detect them. The plan which the parents usually adopted was to report sickness and then death. Their hakims refused to give medicines, because they know it would not be administered to the girl child. He too knew that the action was nothing more or less than a ploy to be used if occasion should arise. They were heartlessly careless of their daughter’s health, exposed her to all the inclemency’s of the weather and sometimes brought strong medicines to try and bring on sickness, sometimes even the mothers caused her infant daughter to refuse her natural nourishment by rubbing the nipple over with bitter aloe.

Mr. Perkins Deputy Commissioner of Hoshiarpur, while preparing his report on the subject of the small proportion of girls noted ‘They (parents) either suffocate them or give the juice of the Ak plant in the gurthi, the first nourishment given to a new-born child. Giving of

\textsuperscript{34} Munshi Bakhshi Ram Das, Chibbar, a member of a tribe which followed the custom of hypergamy, say that when he was eight years old, he was awakened one night by a servant and summoned to his mother’s bed-side. He was told to sit on the ground and take in his new born sister in his arms. A note written by Mr. Fenton, C.S.I, on 20\textsuperscript{th} March, 1904, as Deputy Commissioner of Jalandhar and in his letter No. 11, dated 16\textsuperscript{th} January, 1905 to the Commissioner of Jalandhar; Hari Kishan Kaul, A Note on Female Infanticide.

poisonous substance is a common method of girl child killing prevalent in the Punjab as mentioned by different Deputy Commissioners of the region. Other methods included not giving food to new born, leaving unattended, not taking proper medical care of a sick girl child, all led to the death of the unwanted girl.

The colonial officials also point out that the serious depreciation of daughters was on the whole confined to the upper classes of society and to certain sections of those classes where either strict rules of hypergamy prevailed or where large sums have according to custom to be spent on the marriage of daughters. Among the lower orders large sums were frequently demanded and paid on a girl being given in marriage and the daughters were thus considered as valuable property and well taken care of. Receiving a bride price for daughters were common among the lower classes, both of Hindus and Muslims; instead of cash a betrothal in exchange was often accepted. The low caste Muslims of Jaswan Dun very commonly made money by the marriage of their daughters.36

The reasons behind the practice in the Punjab is recorded in the reports of district administration, Herbert Edwardes Deputy Commissioner of Jalandhar (1852) in his report on female infanticide declared bad marriage customs and excessive expenditure on weddings was the root of the mischief.37 The Census of 1868 assigned the heavy expenses attending the marriage of daughters that pressed very heavily upon respectable Sikhs of limited means being the prime cause there can be no doubt. A respectable Sikh, too proud to receive pecuniary consideration for his daughter’s hand, is entangled in debt for life if he has three or four daughters to ‘dispose’ of in marriage. If one after another is born he despairs of ever being able to bear the heavy burden and he hopes that the infants may die.38 Pandit Motilal Kathju and Mir Munshi in their Memorandum on ‘Female Infanticide’ cited two basic reasons behind the prevalence of the crime in the province of Punjab. First, people did not want girl child to be born

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37 Selections from Records of the Punjab Administration, Old Series No.XVI, Hari Kishan Kaul, Note on Female Infanticide.
38 Census of Punjab, 1868, Report, 55.
in their home due to pride of race and second, was the heavy expenses on attending the marriage of daughters.  

Hari Kishan Kaul in his ‘Note on Female Infanticide’ mentioned the reason behind the infanticide as, ‘it is possible for the husband or his relations to take the absolute dependence of the wife in consequence of the peculiar custom among the Hindus, of the wife being tied indissolubly to her husband for the whole of her life knowing that the daughter must depend upon her husband’s people whether they are good, bad or indifferent, the parents of a girl have to put up with all manners of ill-treatment as the hands of her husband’s relations, to an extent which has indeed become proverbial. A story in the Kangra district, in justification of the practice of female infanticide in times gone once upon a time, they say the Raja of Bisohli came to Kangra for the marriage of his heir apparent to the day of the Raja of the latter principality. He was according to custom, the guest of the local chief and for the four days of his stay, all sorts of comforts were provided with scrupulous attention to detail. The dowry given to the princess was valued at two lakhs of rupees and included horses, elephants, conveyances etc. on his way back the Raja of Bisohli’s tent-pitchers found a shortage of mallets and heaped filthy abuses upon the local chiefs for his defective arrangements. The insult had of course to be pocketed with good grace, but the Raja of Kangra resolved that he would in future put female children to death immediately after birth rather than ran to the risk of a similar insult and the practice was soon established. Popular saying such as ‘Dena bhala na bap ka beti bhali na ek’ (it is not good to owe a debt even to the father, or to have been one daughter) attest the feeling in respect of the difficulties created by day in social relationship. The son-in-law was supposed to be a source of great worry. It is said, ‘Jis nahin dakhea sher oh dekhe bilai jis nahin dekha jam oh dekhe jawai’ (whoever has not seen a tiger may see a cat, whoever has not seen the yama may see son-in-law). In other words the son-in-law was likened to the messenger of death.

It has been held by some that the tendency to destroy a female infant was largely due to the exception taken by the most chivalrous classes to being called saala (brother-in-law) and sauhra (father-in-law). This would be only partially correct and was probably a point which has assumed importance in recent times owing to the extreme ignorance of some of the people for no one takes offence at being called brother-in-law or father-in-law of a man to whom his sister or

39 Pandit Motilal Kathju & Mir Munshi, Memorandum of Female Infanticide, Index No. 179D, 20 August, 1870.
daughter has been married. The epithet amount to an insult only when used by some other person.

Captain A.J. O’Brien, in the Presidential Address on “Female Infanticide in the Punjab” quoted many reasons behind the crime, ‘a desire for luxury may lead to infanticide among the comparatively wealthy; fear of disgrace may tend to the same result among the unmarried; while in some places it may be due to a determination to get rid of weakling’s. In a greater portion of the tribes of the Punjab, especially those professing the Hindu and Sikh religions, the rule holds good that all girls must have undergone the ceremonial part of marriage before puberty and that cohabitation commences shortly after puberty. With this great obligation and necessity was attached that girls must marry above them and conversely that men should marry girls of lower social standing.”40 The consequence of this was that whenever a girl child was born in such a family the parents started to calculate the chance of her marriage and if they did not see a probability of raising the necessary dower in time, they decide to kill their own baby girl.

The practice was generally supposed to have originated in the marriage customs of the people who practice it, either from the expense of maintaining or endowing a girl child or the difficulty of finding a husband of rank suitable for her or from the occasioned by having to entertain large number of guest at her marriage. With this the Census Commissioner also found that the girl child’s life was less cared for at all ages and more especially in infancy, than that of males.

The Patiala State Census report of 1911 highlights nine reasons for the deficiency of the girl child in the State one being female infanticide, while others included neglect of female infant life, infant marriage and premature sexual intercourse and child bearing, a very high birth rate, unskilful midwifery, abortion, confinement and bad feeding of women at puberty during their menstrual period and after child birth, hard life of widows and last, the hard labour which women of the lower classes had to perform.41 It highlighted that the social and marriage systems were the main cause for the prevalence of female infanticide in the province. There was much difficulty among high castes to find a suitable match for girl in higher society. If the match was

41 Bachittar Singh, Patiala State Census Report of 1911, 84.
to be found there were privations to be suffered by the girl in the house of her husband. The heavy marriage costs were another cause of female infanticide. It incurred enormous expenses on the father of the bride in the shape of dowry and other things. He therefore, preferred to kill a female child rather to expose himself to the ridicule of his society for not being able to offer a handsome dowry.

With the basic reasons of pride and poverty Oldenburg (2003) also holds the colonial policies responsible for the prevalence of female infanticide as the British never found it worthwhile to examine the social effects of their own methods of governance and development which produced the milieu in which sons became even more preferred and dowry gradually acquired the very characteristics that the British purported to reform.42

Oldenburg illustrates that it was rather the ‘masculinisation’ of the economy, which made the male child even more desirable. The concomitant activity of the State and the large-scale long-term effect of its agrarian development and revenue policies, which purported to modernize the world of the Punjab peasants, transformed it into an even more unambiguously masculine domain where, of necessity, fewer women would survive. The high revenues pushed peasants into indebtedness and from there to jobs in the army, with its cash wages as well as awards of lands and pensions. Since only men could own property, this led further to greater son preference in the family. Thus the British policies helped to strengthen a practice that already existed and was rooted in an anti-female bias. The explanation of Oldenburg did not support the reality of the scenario of the Punjab of 1851 to 1853 as at the time the British annexed Punjab in 1849 and they did not fully established their control over the region. Within the time span of 3 to 4 more years their policies did not have that much effect on the economic life of the people. Though to say that the British policies of land revenue promoted or helped in the spread of the practice of female infanticide may not be fully true. There is no doubt however, that as the British highlighted the issue of female infanticide and organized meetings with the local chiefs, they indirectly promoted the practice of female infanticide as more people become aware of it and probably they started practicing it. At a later data when the reaction to the colonial economic policies kicked in and caused widespread economic problems.

42 Veena Talwar Oldenburg, Dowry Murder, 17.
III

In totality the British efforts to curb the crime of female infanticide started with the Commissioners reports on the prevalence of female infanticide immediately after the annexation of Punjab. As the Punjab was the second last province the British annexed in India, before introducing suppressive measures against the practice of female infanticide in Punjab they had experience of their reform efforts in Western India. The British in the Punjab again started similar engagements with the local chiefs to curb the crime even though this method had not got the desired results in Western India. Still the first effort of the British in the Punjab was the same. In April 1853, Mcleod organized a large meeting in Jalandhar division to discuss the dispute between the Bunjal and Bedi Khatris both did not intermarry though both have equal caste and hierarchical status, Mcleod succeeded to make them agree to the exchange of their daughters to meet the shortage of suitable grooms of the same caste hierarchy which was understood as the cause of female infanticide. The Bedis always justified their act of girl child killing by explaining that if they brought up their daughter there were no suitable grooms available. The British tried to end the dispute of the various caste groups and bringing about an agreement to intermarry.

In June 1853, R. Montgomery suggested voluntary reduction of marriage expenses, law to secure all marriage parties from the attacks of the Bhat and Mirasis, issuing of the proclamation denouncing the practice as being one of murder, made village headmen responsible for the reporting of the village management and annual census of the inhabitants as the suppressive measures to deal with the issue of female infanticide. The register of births, deaths, marriages and betrothal were also prepared by the British. On the other hand John Lawrence emphasized on the reforms in the institution of caste hierarchy and intermarriage norms. The social disgrace made by the groom party and marasis was also believed to be a prominent cause behind the killing of the girl child in the province of Punjab.

A great meeting was organized in October 1853 in which the marriage expenditure of the different castes was fixed differently according to their status and financial conditions. However the Amritsar meeting had great success but again the agreements with the local chiefs did not bring any significant change in the sex ratio patterns of those particular areas. The most important thing that emerged from these agreements of the British with the local chiefs. The
practice of female infanticide was thought to be prevalent among the people, and before the birth of the child a pregnant mother moved to the places where the local chiefs had made no agreements with the British. In this way practice also spread to those areas and among those caste groups where it was not prevalent before the introduction of the suppressive measures.

The British passed the Female Infanticide Act of 1870 to prevent the further killing of the girl child, according to this Act they declared the killing of the girl child equivalent to murder and prepared the list of so called ‘infanticidal races’ in each district which needs strict supervision and actions. There was a proper procedure to declare the ‘infanticidal races’ or caste and control the proper percentage of girls in the total population. According to the provision of the Act wherever the ratio of the girls to boys was found to be less than 40% of the village or clan population they were to be declared ‘infanticidal caste’ and Act were to be put into force. Secondly, again to lower down the marriage expenses the government fixed the expenditure on each and every thing including the expenses over the rituals and customs. From here onwards it was the duty of the father or head of the family to produce an account showing the actual expenses incurred and to prove the correctness of the said account. To identify the crime of female infanticide in various castes the British also followed the system of special police, espionage and rewarding of the informers.

In Punjab all these efforts of the British were not new in nature as they already been implemented in Western India in the province of Gujarat and were in continuity with the early efforts of the Indian rulers as in 1731, Jai Singh of Jaipur had also fixed the marriage expenditure and fees of Bhat's and Charans on the occasion of the marriage of daughters. There was no doubt they were successful in improving the sex ratio in the some of ‘infanticidal castes’ in the Punjab but female infanticide was not the sole factor influence the sex ratio of the population. In fact a shifting trend was noticed among the ‘infanticidal castes’ due to the strict supervision of the British and the espionage system, the ‘infanticidal castes’ stopped practicing female infanticide but at same time its scope spread to ‘non-infanticidal’ castes as they were not suspected by the British. In 1906 the British repealed the Female Infanticide Act of 1870 as they

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43Sambodh Goswami, Female Infanticide and Child Marriage, Rawat Publications, Jaipur, 2007, 279-280, this is a translation of note addressed by the Jaipur council of regency to the Political agent. Dated 27th October 1847, From Major John Ludlow, Political Agent at Jaipur, to Lt. Col. Sutherland, Dated 30th October 1847, Encloure No. 227 of 1847; Consultation No. 78 Of The Foreign and Political Dept., Dated 20 November 1847.
said there is no need of such legislation anymore. By this time the British realized that the issue of female infanticide was not that serious as they had earlier understood it to be. The British officials and District Commissioners reportage too did not support the fact that the issue of female infanticide was widely prevalent. They realized they had only exaggerated the issue and therefore they repealed the Act. Here onwards the British efforts became passive moves were not focused on the eradication of the practicing killing of the girl child.

In reality it seems that in the mid 19th century the problem of female infanticide was only followed by some higher castes and classes especially the Bedis, Khatris and some Jats of the Punjab. The wholehearted ‘agreements’ of all classes as claimed by the British in the general meetings of the populace in all districts points to the fact that it was not a widespread practice, actually the suppressive measures of the colonial State were without any factual information on the issue as admitted by their own officials, resulted in the practice of female infanticide shifted to the ‘lower caste and class groups’ who did not follow such practices. Slowly and gradually the lower castes and classes starts following the customs and belief of the higher caste and classes to raise their social status in social hierarchy. This might be the reason for the shifting trend of the practice of female infanticide in the province. The Act of 1870 was implemented without any statistical information on the demarcated areas. The colonial authorities were actually reluctant to pursue the plan vigorously. The British officials had no statistical evidence of control on the practice of female infanticide in fact, based their decision on certain assumptions.

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