

BOOK REVIEWS

The Endangered Sex: Neglect of Female Children in Rural North India. Barbara D. Miller. Cornell University Press, Ithaca, New York 201 pp.

MILLER STATES, “My goal is to explain how and why there are fewer females than males in North India and then to show how that situation might be changed.” She examines three factors which could result in differential mortality rates, nutrition, medical care, and love. Her basic hypothesis is that the “worth” of a child is related to work. In North India there are more boys than girls in comparison with the South. She concludes that since women are more likely to do agricultural work in South India than in the North, female infants are less economically valuable and so subject to neglect if not infanticide. Her work is based on a review of the literature. The author has done no fieldwork in India.

This is a book with a message—women in India must be saved before it is too late—rather than a carefully thought through consideration of a complex problem. The author has obviously done a great deal of work in reviewing the literature, but goes well beyond her data.

The author states, “Unless a concerted effort is made soon to counteract the forces promoting son preference, unless the victimization of North Indian daughters is slowed, then cultural sway will prevail, demanding the demise of fertility, of childrearing, of the female” (p. 169). Yet the average couple in India at the end of the childbearing years has only slightly fewer than six children, at least two of whom are females. Some projections forecast the ultimate population of the country may be between 1.2 and 1.8 billion people before becoming stationary.

Contrary to Miller, there is little evidence of any significant influence on fertility of male preference. It is true that contraceptive use, after having more sons than daughters, was found to lower the fertility rate in Taiwan where adoption of effective contraceptive methods has been extensive. In India those couples having sterilization, either vasectomy or tubectomy, do tend to have more sons than daughters at the time of the operation, but the rate of sterilization is relatively low. In addition, studies have found that both men and women have an average of at least one daughter at the time of sterilization.

The fact that there is a preference for sons does not mean, as Miller suggests, that daughters are not wanted or loved or in fact that sons are loved more. Our own studies of the Lewa Patidar caste in Gujarat State, with a history of female infanticide, found that while two sons were desired, a girl was also wanted by both mothers and fathers. In terms of the Miller hypothesis that the value of women is determined by the extent to which they work in the fields, we found that among the lower status Baria caste whose women do field work, in contrast to high status Patidars whose women do not, there was also a desire for an average of only one daughter. As a matter of fact, a preference for only one daughter was found among all castes, regardless of the role of the women, their work patterns or the type of marriage arrangement. While there is no doubt that hypergamy is a factor in the treatment of women, son preference may also be found where bride price is given.

Little mention is made of the difference between the peoples of the North and South. The Dravidian people of South India are of a different ethnic character and speak languages unrelated to those of the North. It might be safer to guess that differential treatment of women would lie in age-old Brahmanic traditions than simply in the work patterns of women.

The relative needs for numbers of sons and daughters for economic and social reasons should not be confused as Miller does, with wanting and loving girls. The reviewer has attempted to point out that mothers often say they feel closer to their daughters than their sons (“Child Rearing and Social Structure in Rural India,” in Korbin, Ed., *Child Abuse and Neglect: Cross-Cultural Perspectives*, University of California Press, 1981). It was also found that boys were punished more harshly than girls. Much more attention needs to be given to childhood socialization which is likely to produce a strong independent woman who can survive in the family of her in-laws. A son, on the other hand, should be subservient, remain at home, support his

parents and members of the extended family, and, above all, remain under the control of his mother—hardly a woman ill-treated at that stage in life.

Understandably, many Indians tire of Westerners who know little of India telling them, as Miller does quite forcefully, what they must do. The government as well as many public and private institutions have long been aware of the problems faced by women. Countless efforts were made in the nineteenth century to improve the conditions of women and these efforts have certainly been intensified since Independence. But the problems are incredibly complex—as are the many roles of Indian women throughout the life cycle. However, of one thing we can be certain: women in rural North India are not an endangered sex!

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Psychological Approaches to Child Abuse. Edited by Neil Frude. London, England, Batsford Academic and Educational, Ltd. 1980. 240 pp. £6.50

Psychological Approaches to Child Abuse, edited by Neil Frude, a clinical psychologist from University College in Cardiff, Wales, is a paperback containing papers by fifteen professionals from England, Wales, and the United States. Their disciplines include psychology, health policy, psychiatry, social work, and public health. The unifying theme of this collection of papers is an attempt to understand child abuse in "the general framework of interpersonal behavior". The common denominator in child abusing situations was defined as an act of violence by a parent or caregiver against a child that required explanation and intervention, whether or not the child was actually injured.

In contrast to some other books on child abuse, many of the contributors to this volume came to the subject of abuse from previous studies in normal parent-child relations and child development. For instance, Mary Main described her own and other studies of mother-infant pairs that became mutually rejecting and aggressive during the first two years without known abuse. She compared them to another group of mothers and their toddlers known to be abused. She found that abusive and rejecting infants could form positive relationships with persons other than their mothers, and considered this an important indication for the value of therapeutic day care centers for abused children.

Papers by Hilary Graham and by Neil Frude and Alison Goss described women's experiences of early motherhood. Verbatim accounts by nonviolent mothers of nearly ubiquitous feelings of anger and frustration illustrated the crisis of confidence caused by inability to comfort a crying baby. Such mothers expressed sympathy and understanding for parents who were unable to contain their aggression. Their strategies to avoid abuse involved efforts to control their feelings by introducing a barrier, real or symbolic, between mother and baby. It was suggested that the central problem in child abuse is not why a minority of parents batter their children, but why and how the majority of parents manage to survive the early months without resorting to physical abuse.

Other papers focused on punishment strategies (John Newson and Elizabeth Newson), an ethological approach to the understanding of abuse (Kevin Browne and Robert Parr), families who injure their children (Claire Hyman), a paradigm based on aggression theory (Neil Frude), emotional responses in abused children (Theodore Gaensbauer, David Mrazek and Robert Harmon), and long-term effects of abuse on children (Carolyn Okell Jones). A variety of treatment settings and strategies were proposed, related to the nature of the problems in parent-child interaction that lead to abuse. Psychotherapy, "parenting the parent," and support groups were described (Arnon Bentovim), as well as two papers (Judy Hutchings and William Reavley and Gary Griffiths) about behavior therapy. The final papers by Mia Kellmar briefly summarized ways of predicting abuse and suggestions for primary prevention, as well as prevention of abuse in high risk situations and of further abuse in families where it has already occurred.

This volume does not present any original concepts to those who are familiar with the field. However, it contains some interesting observational studies, especially in the area of the continuum between normal families, their stresses, angers, and style of child rearing and discipline, and those parent-child situations in which violence erupts. The emphasis on attempts to understand the interpersonal dynamics in child abuse