Daughters of Gardeners

2007
52 minutes

Program Synopsis:

Thirty-six million women are missing in India. The economic burden of dowries and the ancestral preference for boys make the birth of a daughter a shameful event. Ultrasound tests and abortions, medical acts which were supposed to represent progress for women, are instead being used against them. 'Daughters of Gardeners' is a deeply moving and profoundly human documentary; an investigation of states where aborting girls has become a very profitable industry. This film follows the journey of a young Canadian journalist, in her quest to understand and document this demographic crisis, as well as its disastrous consequences on the entire Indian society; the inability of men to find wives; the increase in prostitution; the worsening AIDS pandemic; the kidnapping and trafficking of women and the advent of forced marriages.

Teacher Notes:

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Introduction

The imbalance of female to male ratios in parts of India is explored, in this documentary by Karina Marceau. The confronting issue of female foeticide, or selective abortion, in India is causing an increase in prostitution, forced marriages and the number of unmarried men; as well as causing women to be treated like merchandise.

Karina Marceau investigates the reasons for this, and what is being done to address the situation.

WARNING: The opening scenes depicting a baby floating in a pool of water could be confronting for some viewers and it is recommended that they be made aware of the explicit nature of this image.

Program Timeline

00:00:00 Introduction to the issue of female foeticide or selective abortion. Karina Marceau returns to India to investigate this phenomenon.

00:04:03 Katrina arrives in Patran, Punjab State, to investigate the clinic where a number of female foetuses have been aborted and thrown in a well. Introduction to Pooja who worked for the abortionist and ultimately denounced him to the police when she was asked to dispose of an aborted female foetus.

00:08:26 Information regarding abortion, which has been legal in India since 1971. Mention of the Hindu tradition of purdah. Lakshmi Rowat’s story of having aborted five girls, and being harassed for giving birth to three girls before having a son.

00:14:17 Prabhat Jha’s research on selective abortion.

00:17:39 Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh State. The Hindu practice of burning the dead and disposing of them in the Ganges. Only a son can light the funeral pyre for this ritual.

00:21:10 Khotda, Rajasthan State, where there is only one girl for every four boys. Leaders are saying not to kill girls. Crimes and rapes blamed on the shortage of girls and the rising number of unmarried men. Girls are killed by drowning, overdoses of opium or suffocation with sand.

00:27:16 Jodphur, Rajasthan State. A wedding and the cost of having a girl. Even though dowries have been illegal since 1961, the groom’s parents still require payment. They are often cruel to the bride if her family does not provide a dowry, resulting in the death of thousands of women, and many seeking shelter in refuges. The increasing number of classified advertisements for wives is evidence of the shortage of women.

00:34:03 Activists are urging the government to take action. Teenage girls are being kidnapped and trafficked for forced marriages.

00:46:29 Salt Lake City, United States. Concern that the growing millions of single men will become a threat to peace.

00:51:42 Credits

Useful Resources

A significant amount of information is available on the Internet regarding the issue of female foeticide and its impact in both India and China.

A search for ‘bare branches’ will elicit information on the security concerns associated with large male populations and Valerie Hudson’s work.
Program Worksheet

Before the Program

1. Study of a map of India and locate the states of Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan.
2. What is the Hindu tradition of purdah?
3. What is a dowry, as referred to in Indian tradition?
1. What is the ‘silent genocide’ referred to in the opening scenes of the program?

2. In what year was the Pre Natal Determination Test (PNDT) Act introduced? What was its purpose?

3. What percentage has the State Government stated will represent the number of missing girls in the next generation?

4. Describe Lakshmi Rowat’s experience after having given birth to three girls.

5. Note the reasons for this crisis throughout the program.

6. List some of the ways in which baby girls are murdered.

7. Despite being outlawed in 1961, dowries are still an expectation. What often happens to women whose families cannot afford to pay what is considered to be an adequate dowry?

8. List the changes that are occurring as a result of female foeticide in India.

9. What are the concerns expressed by Valerie Hudson in relation to the rise in the numbers of unmarried men in countries such as India?

10. List six words to describe the closing scenes of the program.
1. Investigate the outcomes of the one-child policy in China. Compare this with what is happening in India and comment on any similarities, differences and emerging trends.

2. On her way to India, Karina is reading a book, titled *May You be the Mother of One Hundred Sons* by Elisabeth Bumiller. Provide a book review, outlining the issues addressed by the author.

3. Lakshmi’s view is ‘Have only one or two kids, regardless of whether they are boys or girls. Then have an operation and just enjoy life’. Consider the difference this would make to the lives of people in India.

4. Provide your perspective on this issue, including:
   - your prediction for the future of women in countries such as India and China;
   - the long term consequences of the imbalance between numbers of men and women;
   - what can be done to overcome the problem.

5. Design a pamphlet that could be used to further the Indian government’s attempts to prevent the killing of girls.

6. What does the term ‘bare branches’ mean as referred to in this program?
Suggested Student Responses

During the Program

1. The silent genocide refers to the selective abortion of girls in India.
2. The PNDT Act was introduced in 1994. It was introduced to prevent doctors divulging the gender of the foetus.
3. 40%
4. Lakshmi was harassed and had five girls aborted before giving birth to a son. Her in-laws wanted her husband to marry someone else. There is also the cost.
5. Only a boy can light the funeral pyre to liberate parents from the endless cycle of death and rebirth, there is a general devaluing of women in Indian culture and society, and the cost of dowries and weddings incurred by the bride’s family is prohibitive.
6. Baby girls are murdered by overdoses of opium, drowning or suffocation by sand.
7. The women are treated cruelly and often murdered.
8. Young women are being kidnapped and trafficked and forced into marriage, prostitution is on the rise as is the number of unmarried men. Women continue to be treated like merchandise.
9. Without a family and subsequently a stake in the future and the established order, there is a concern that armed conflict will arise as a result.
10. Open-ended question designed to elicit further discussion after viewing the program.