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OCTOBER 2012

*Introducing...*

MRS REYNOLDS  
AN EXCLUSIVE  
GOSSIP WITH  
BLAKE LIVELY

TZIPORAH  
SALAMON  
FASHION'S  
HOTTEST  
MODEL &  
SHE'S 62

**GENDERCIDE:**

"Why I  
strangled my  
new born  
daughter"

THROUGH  
THE LENS  
WITH  
RANKIN

The

Beauty

THE LOOKS, THE  
SKIN-DEEP SECRETS  
AND THE UAE'S  
MOST GORGEOUS

ISSUE

270 stylish  
steals &  
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STYLISH. SMART. SOPHISTICATED.

feature/global report

# it's a girl

These are there deadliest words in the world where women are still considered so inferior their very lives are placed in jeopardy

A YOUNG GIRL WHO WAS  
TRAFFICKED IN CHINA SETS OUTSIDE  
HER HOME IN THE SNOW OF IT  
WHERE SHE WAS RESCUED



A woman shyly giggles as she raises her hand to her neck and mimics how she killed eight of her baby daughters by strangulation. She laughs because she thinks it's normal, she wanted a boy. Her society pressures her to have a boy – a girl simply isn't good enough.

Whilst across the majority of the globe women hold positions of power like never before, there are others whose path is not destined to be that of CEO or head of state.

In some nations, the very fact that they remain alive is seen as something of a minor miracle. This is the cultural fabric of India and China. Nations where the killing of baby girls is ever prevalent.

In a new documentary, *It's A Girl*, filmmakers expose the horrific truth behind gendercide, an ancient practice that still exists today in societies where pressure to have a son in order to continue the family name is more important than a girl's life. According to UN reports, 200 million women are 'missing' due to gendercide. This systematic slaughter is the greatest women's rights issue in the world today.

Experts behind the thought-provoking documentary reveal all about the devastating plights across China and India where they eliminate more girls than the number of girls born in America every year...

## Gendercide in China

— by Reggie Littlejohn, President of Women's Rights Without Frontiers (international coalition to oppose forced abortion and human trafficking in China) and leading voice behind the campaign to free blind Chinese activist Chen Guangcheng, who was jailed and tortured for exposing forced abortion in China

I'll never forget my first encounter with gendercide. I had journeyed to Varanasi, India and was about to step into a boat for a ride on the Ganges. A small form in the water caught my eye. Floating next to the stern of the boat was a perfectly formed, dead baby girl.

Gendercide is most severe in China and India, which share a strong cultural preference for sons, who traditionally carry on the family name, work the fields and care for their parents in old age. Daughters join the family of their husbands at marriage. There is an old saying: "Raising a girl is like watering someone else's garden."

In India, there are 112 boys born for every 100 girls. In China, the birth ratio is the most skewed in the world: 120 to 100.

Why is the ratio in China so much greater than that of India? The One Child Policy aggravates the underlying son preference. When couples are restricted to one child, women come under intense pressure to ensure a boy.

Many women committing gendercide are victims of coercion. A woman need not be dragged out of her home and strapped to a table to be a victim of forced abortion. Persistent emotional pressure, estrangement from the extended family, threat of

abandonment or divorce, verbal abuse and domestic violence often overpower women who otherwise would choose to keep their daughters.

Because of this gendercide, there are an estimated 37 million more men than women living in China today. The presence of these 'bare branches' – men who'll never marry or carry on the family line – is the driving force behind human trafficking and sexual slavery, not only within China but from surrounding nations.

It's estimated that up to 70,000 children are trafficked within China each year. Because the One Child Policy prevents most families from having a second child, parents of girls may traffic a boy into their families, and parents of boys may traffic girls into theirs. This was the case for one couple featured in *It's A Girl*. Their young daughter was stolen as she was playing just outside their home. After a prolonged and frantic search, she was discovered in a neighbouring village. A couple – parents of a boy – had trafficked this young girl into their family to ensure a future bride for their son.

Gendercide may be an ancient practice, but the problem is getting worse. Because of the increasing availability of ultrasound technology and abortion,



THE THREE YOUNG DAUGHTERS OF MISS LI, A CHINESE WOMAN WHO ESCAPED FORCED ABORTION AND NOW LIVES OVER 1,000 MILES FROM HER DAUGHTERS TO AVOID EXTREME PENALTIES FROM THE FAMILY PLANNING POLICE IN CHINA.

eliminating a female foetus has become both easy and socially acceptable.

How does China enforce its strict One Child Policy? Through forced abortion, up to the ninth month of pregnancy. Women's Rights Without Frontiers recently broke the story of Feng Jianmei to the West. Feng was forced to abort her baby at seven months. The photograph of her, lying



next to her aborted baby, sent shock waves around the world. These forced abortions can be so violent that the women themselves die, along with their full-term babies.

People sometimes ask me how the women in China deal with the intense suffering caused by the coercive enforcement of the One Child Policy. My answer is not encouraging: China has the highest female suicide rate

of any country in the world. According to the World Health Organization, 500 women a day end their lives in China—further depleting the numbers of women.

And yet there is hope. The first step towards addressing a problem is to learn that a problem exists. One of my main challenges in working to end forced abortion, gendercide and sexual slavery in China is the fact

that so few people know about these practices. That's why *It's A Girl* is so important. The footage they obtained in China and India is ground breaking. This film will be the clarion call to the world to stop this hideous crime against humanity.

The women who agreed to be interviewed for the film are true heroes. They have risked much to be included. They can't oppose the One Child Policy themselves,

because the Chinese Communist Party is a brutal, totalitarian regime, but this is a start. Since our sisters in China cannot stand up for themselves, we must stand up for them.

In both China and India, sex-selective abortion is already illegal. The solution, therefore, lies in enforcing existing laws. Beyond this, we must work for a cultural shift that promotes the value of women and girls. ➤



## Gendercide in India

— by Dr Ranjana Kumari, a prominent activist and  
Director of Centre For Social Research (an organisation  
working toward gender justice in India)

Ruksana was born with a leg condition that caused her to limp. Because of the stigma associated with physical handicaps, Ruksana's parents forced her to get married when she was only 15, convinced that she would never find another man willing to marry her. Soon after her marriage, Ruksana's husband began to physically and verbally abuse her.

Domestic violence became a daily practice in her home and her husband even beat and sexually abused her in front of their children. After time, she eventually sought the help of Centre For Social Research's Crisis Intervention Centre. Ruksana received counselling and support and learned about her rights. She slowly gained the confidence to divorce her husband and go back to school. Having successfully gained a college diploma, she supports her children through her teaching position.

Sadly, Ruksana's experience isn't unique. Gender inequality remains at large throughout India and thousands of women face similar forms of violence and abuse at the hands of intimate partners or other family members. However, while violence against women is a growing concern in India, there's also a strong effort in all sectors of Indian society to stem the tide of gender-based violence and achieve equality between men and women. New laws and policies, as well as growing support from law enforcement agencies and civil society

groups, are empowering women to seek assistance in the case of abuse. Furthermore, efforts are being made to improve the implementation of legislation, which is helping to increase the rate of conviction.

In spite of these efforts gendercide remains a growing issue for India's women who



A GRIEVING COUPLE  
EXPLAIN HOW THEIR BABY  
WAS MURDERED BECAUSE  
SHE WAS A GIRL

suffer heavily at the hands of discrimination. One contribution is the practice of honour killings. The perpetrators believe that by killing the family member they are providing justice and restoring honour. Women in particular are often the victims of honour



AN INDIAN WOMAN  
FROM TAMIL NADU SPEAKS  
OF KILLING EIGHT OF HER  
BABY GIRLS

I just strangled it soon after it was born.

killings as a result of them rejecting a forced marriage, or marrying a partner that their family does not approve of.

Dowry deaths also compromise women's safety; there were 8,391 cases of dowry-related deaths reported in 2010. Dowry is a tradition in which the family of

the bride gives cash and presents to the family of the groom. It was originally meant to support new couples beginning their married life. However, India's prevailing patriarchy and rising economic demands has turned dowry into a commercial transaction that is underpinned

by socio-economic standing and reinforces the financial dependency of women on their husbands.

Violence against women often increases when a family requests a larger dowry after marriage or shows dissatisfaction with the dowry they have received. Dowry deaths are on the rise throughout the country. In 2007, the total number of dowry-related deaths was 8,093, a 74 per cent increase since 1995. This increase is closely linked to a women's age at marriage, her education level and her exposure to mass media. States with high levels of dowry-related deaths generally have a lower female literacy rate and less exposure to mass media.

This social and cultural devaluing of women, as well as economic factors associated with the dowry system and the pressure of ensuring the chastity and honour of girls and women is upheld, has led to girl children being seen as a liability. These issues are determining factors in the growing practice of sex-selective abortions throughout the country.

Nearly 600,000 girls are 'missing' in India each year as a result of selective abortions. Through the use of prenatal technologies, families are able to determine the sex of the foetus. An estimated 10 million female foetuses have been aborted over the past two decades. Somewhat surprisingly, female foeticide has historically been overwhelmingly practiced among educated, middle-class families. However, as the technology has become more available there has been an increase in the practise amongst lower-class and rural communities.

While sex-selective abortions, honour killings and dowry deaths reflect a strong culture of violence

against women throughout India, steps are being taken to prevent these crimes. The 1994 Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques Act prohibits the use of prenatal technologies to determine the sex of a foetus and several states have increased efforts to curb incidences of female foeticide. In addition, increased research conducted by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) has begun to raise awareness.

Women's organisations have also worked to educate women on their rights and provide support to those who have experienced violence. Many NGOs across the country provide counselling, legal support and livelihood programmes for women so that they can become more empowered and financially independent. This is paralleled by government initiatives to promote women's social and political empowerment.

India is modernising at a rapid rate and traditional cultures and practices are being forced to adapt to meet new economic and social frameworks. The rise in violence against women can be seen, in part, as a response to this change and as an attempt to reassert traditional power structures. However, strong efforts are being made to educate communities on the importance and benefits of women's rights and women are becoming more empowered to seek assistance. With further action and support from the government and civil society, Indian women will overcome this growing violence and become an increasingly influential part of Indian society. ■

## Man Behind The Film

EVAN GRAE DAVIS IS THE DIRECTOR OF *IT'S A GIRL* FOR OVER 16 YEARS. DAVIS HAS DEDICATED HIS CAREER TO ADVOCATING FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE THROUGH WRITING AND DIRECTING SHORT DOCUMENTARIES, CHAMPIONING THE CAUSE OF THE POOR AND EXPLOITED. DAVIS DRAWS FROM HIS EXPERIENCE AND PASSION AS HE LENDS LEADERSHIP TO SHADOWLINE FILMS IN THE MAKING OF *IT'S A GIRL*, HIS FIRST FEATURE-LENGTH DOCUMENTARY.

### What was it like working on the project?

Producing a feature-length documentary about gendercide has been an amazing experience for the entire team. Immersing ourselves in an issue like this over several years requires a balance between coping with the overwhelming and seemingly hopeless scale of injustice while also believing that we can make a difference.

### How did you find the women and families to talk to?

Our team spent months researching and talking with individuals and organisations in India and China who are combating gendercide. These partners introduced us to women and families they had met while going about their work. We were heavily dependent on the years of work these partners had invested. This film would not have been possible without them.

### How did you get them to talk about such sensitive topics?

It was extremely difficult to capture stories about gendercide because these women are understandably reluctant to share their experience. Women who have taken the lives of their own daughters are not inclined to admit their involvement, especially when it's illegal. Women who are victims of forced abortion or dowry violence also tend to be hesitant to speak because of the immense cultural or family pressures.

### How would you ensure their safety?

We were extremely cautious to protect their identity. We consulted with the women and their families as well as our partners about potential risks and acted accordingly. We blurred faces when necessary and never used their real names or specific locations.

### Which story affected you the most?

I was most impacted by the mother who admitted strangling eight of her own newborn daughters. It occurred early on in our filming in India and was a defining moment for me. On a personal level, Mitu Khurana, a mother who still fights today for the sake of her twin girls, affected me the most. As a husband and father, I couldn't imagine what she had gone through at the hands of her husband. I couldn't imagine my wife and daughter enduring all that they had experienced.

### Was it hard to sympathise with the women?

There is nothing that can justify women killing their own children. But we might ask ourselves if we would have done it differently if we were in their shoes. The fact of the matter is we are all a product of our environment. And the environment that produced the village woman who killed eight daughters is a brutal, female-hating culture.

### What's your aim with this film?

As we gear up for our international screening tour and action campaign our greatest hope is to catalyse a movement that ultimately brings about change in India and China on a deep cultural level – specifically to see a shift from a patriarchal, sonpreferential culture to one that equally values girls and empowers women to determine their own destiny. Generations of girls are depending on our determination.



*It's A Girl* starts its international screening tour this month in partnership with Women's Rights Without Frontiers, Women's Rights in China, the Invisible Girl Project and other organisations working on behalf of women and girls worldwide. For more information, visit [itsagirlmovie.com](http://itsagirlmovie.com)