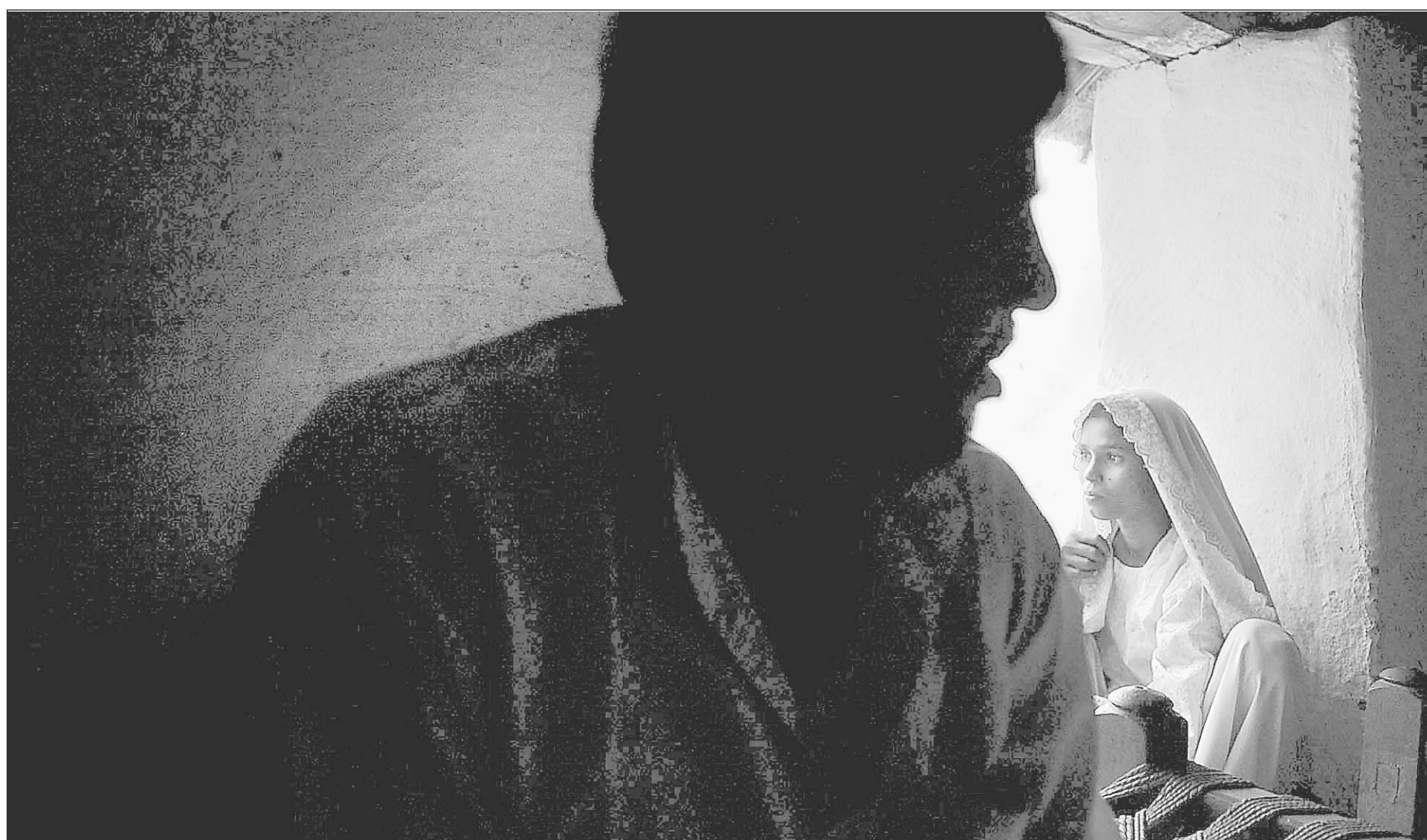


THE KILLING OF EVE



Israel Khan, 26, imported a wife for 4,000 rupees, about \$90, in the Mewat region about 100 miles south of New Delhi. Rakshana Begum, seen squatting near her husband, has given him two sons and three daughters.

Photographs by Mary F. Calvert/The Washington Times

INDIA

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to abort the female fetus. In nine episodes from April 4 to June 13, the TV network aired a 12-hour series, "Murder in the Womb." It was based on undercover visits to 140 health clinics in 36 cities in four Indian states: Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat.

Doctors in 100 clinics either agreed to do a sex-determination test and abortion or gave referrals to other doctors who would. Both actions are illegal.

Mr. Shaktawat, who posed as a husband, and his "wife" would tell doctors they already had daughters and had no wish to birth any more.

"Now the baby has grown bigger and it will come out alive," Dr. Nidhi Malhotra from the city of Chittorgarh in south Rajasthan is shown saying in Hindi on the hidden video. "Will you kill it?"

That same video shows the doctor laughing as she levels a fee of 2,000 rupees (about \$44) to abort a child in the seventh month of pregnancy.

It had taken Miss Sharma a year to compile the devastating report, which showed doctor after doctor on camera illegally urging the women — all of whom were at least in their fifth month or more — to abort their female offspring. Abortion is illegal in India after the 20th week unless there are threats to the mother's health.

The documentaries shamed the region's most prominent doctors. A group of physicians offered the station \$34 million to cancel the series.

On April 14, the government filed charges against 21 Rajasthan doctors in the series — but did not prosecute them. The Rajasthan Medical Council suspended the licenses of seven — but allowed them to continue practicing.

Then in the early morning hours of April 18, a group of six men threw stones and broke windows at Mr. Shaktawat's home. He was away in New Delhi, but his family was told worse would happen to them if the series was not stopped.

Majestic Jaipur

Jaipur is known as India's "Pink City" for the luminous rose-colored buildings scattered across the Rajasthan desert and its majestic palaces and gardens. Many of the physicians who were shown on TV urging illegal abortions several months ago live in some of the city's most splendid suburbs.

The Washington Times visited the homes of four of the doctors, all of whom were said to either not be at home or not willing to talk with a reporter. As a reporter and photographer approached the Bhandari Hospital and Research Center, home base for Dr. Rekha Bhandari, a security guard at the entrance to the doctor's two-story home across the street picked up a phone. He said the doctor was not available.

This reporter also approached the gated home of Dr. Sheelu Jain, another doctor implicated in the sting operation as offering to abort a female fetus. She briefly appeared at her gate, then fled.

Dr. P.C. Ranka, who along with his wife was accused of giving an illegal referral to an abortion clinic, was just starting his evening office hours when The Times paid a visit to his home office.



A woman walked past a group of young men in Mysore, India. Men outnumber women in many parts of India where laws forbidding doctors from telling women the sex of their unborn children are often broken.



Mahajbi was brought to a village near Alwar, India, because there were not enough marriageable women in the region. Girls from Nepal and Bangladesh constitute 70 percent of all trafficked girls.

"I am a medicine person," he protested. "I do not do gynecology."

Kavita Srivastava, a local lawyer and general secretary for the human rights organization People's Union for Civil Liberties, said it's no surprise so many doctors in Jaipur are guilty.

"The status of women is already low here because of the feudal Rajput culture," she said, referring to the former ruling caste.

"There are traditions in Rajasthan of women committing johan which is mass suicide or sati where a widow throws herself onto her husband's funeral pyre. A woman's entire identity was subsumed by her husband. If he died, so must she."

Women who committed sati would have temples built in their honor, she added, and palaces in Rajasthan commonly have a wall displaying the last hand prints women left before they died.

"In a woman's death there was value," the activist said. "In her survival, there never was value."

In Rajasthan's violent desert culture, baby girls were drowned in boiling milk or abandoned in a sand dune. Whole villages went decades without female children.

A 1994 law that forbids sex-selective abortions only regulates the medical profession; it does not address the anti-female cast of an entire culture, Ms. Srivastava said.

Long-term disaster

Currently, women-starved parts of western India are importing women. The best trafficking season, reports Supriya Awasthi, South Asia director for Free the Slaves, a New Delhi-based advocacy group, is in the summer during the monsoons, when people are most hungry and desperate.

Girls from Nepal and Bangladesh constitute 70 percent of all trafficked girls. Top Nepalese hubs are the capital Katmandu; Sindhupalchowk, a district north of Katmandu; and Makwanpur, which is east of the

capital.

They end up at a slave market known as Phoolbagh in the Purnia district of Bihar, India's poorest state. Girls are then traded to circuses or loaded on trucks or trains bound for states like Punjab and Haryana, which have the country's worst male-female sex ratios.

Miss Awasthi particularly remembers one 12-year-old she ran into in Allahabad in Uttar Pradesh. She had been raped by five men and was three months pregnant. She had a baby boy, who died.

People go to huge lengths to unload their girl children, she

said. "The government bans child marriage but nothing substantial has been done so far.

"The police can be moved to take action only if there is pressure from the local people who complain to local bureaucrats. Or a court can direct police to act. Or they will act out of pressure from the media."

The shortage of women here has opened the market for "paros," or trafficked women, purchased for 12,000 to 15,000 rupees, or \$260 to \$330. Those under 14 go for less: 5,000 to 10,000 rupees, or \$110 to \$220.

Virendra Vidrohi, Rajasthan state organizer for the Campaign Against Child Labor, said trucks ply India's national highways working with agents who put in "orders."

"If a man wants a woman from Bihar," he said, "he'll contact his local agent and put down an advance, usually 5,000 rupees. The agent will then contact the truck owners who will contact their agents in Bihar or Andhra Pradesh," another eastern Indian state.

Normally, it takes three to six months to get a woman. He estimates there are 15,000 paros in Mewat, a district of Rajasthan about 100 miles south of New Delhi.

Mr. Vidrohi, 44, who wears wire-rimmed glasses and has his hair tied in a greying ponytail, oversees a group of five organizations made up of Muslim, Hindu, Sikh and Christian activists dedicated to helping poor women. For him, the Mewat region is the canary in the mine for the rest of India.

He is based in Alwar, a town of about 65,000, surrounded by villages where trafficked women live. The sex ratio here is a low 887 women to 1,000 men.

A half-hour's drive away through fields of mustard, millet and lentils turns up a desperately poor village of 422 families that has been afflicted by the local drought. There are 15 paros there. Mohammed Hanif, the local imam in a white turban and a salt-and-pepper beard, admitted, "They are not treated the same as other women."

Two sisters: Kuraisha Khan, 30, and Nuraisha Khan, 25, were kidnapped from the Chatra district of Jharkhand, next to Bihar. Kuraisha, the mother of two girls, is pregnant with her third child. She gets two meals a day, she said and was brought to Mewat by train and bus. Nuraisha cradled a 1-year-old son in her arms.

"It was not her decision to come here," her older sister said, "it was her parents' decision."

Other women tell much the same story; usually it is a brother-in-law who arranges to have them and their sisters

shipped far away from their home towns in eastern India. One is Sarbari Bano, 22, mother of two girls, who was brought by train from Jharkhand. Wearing a light green veil and faded blue dress, she is pregnant again.

"I want boys," she said. Israel Khan, 26, is one of the few men present who admitted to importing a wife for 4,000 rupees, about \$90.

"I was poor and couldn't get a wife here," he said. His paro, Rakshana Begum, squatted in the corner. She has given him two boys and three girls. He is no longer poor now; he owns five water buffaloes and a cell phone; his home has white-washed stone walls, a thatched roof, several beds, an electric fan and quilts hanging from the rafters.

Anguman Begum, 38, another paro, approached him for financial help. He ignored her. She was an orphan when her uncle brought her to Mewat at age 8. She was from the state of Assam, hundreds of miles to the northeast.

"I was crying," she remembered of her unhappy journey 30 years ago, "because I couldn't understand the language here. If I wanted to go back to Assam, there was no way to get there."

Now she has seven children and like it or not, Mewat is her home.

"But if I had the money," she said, "I'd go back."



The Washington Times



Part 1: Missing girls: An estimated 10 million female fetuses have been aborted in the past two decades in a nation where sons are prized and daughters scorned.

Part 2: Hostage to dowries: Determining sex before birth—and aborting the fetus if it is a girl—is a cheap alternative to raising a daughter.

Part 3: Compliant doctors: It is illegal for physicians to tell parents the sex of a child before birth. But laws to protect female fetuses are rarely enforced.

Part 4: Corporate culpability: General Electric Corp. profits handsomely by selling ultrasound machines in India.