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Gender Inequality in India: Evidence from a Rural Survey in West Bengal

by

Clem Tisdell

June 2000

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GENDER INEQUALITY IN INDIA: EVIDENCE FROM A RURAL SURVEY IN WEST BENGAL

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Abstract

Notes the unfavourable female-male ratio in India and its declining trend. In addition, the convergence of this ratio for the scheduled castes towards that of the general castes is noted as well as the slight decline in this ratio for scheduled tribals. A reason for this trend is suggested. Gender inequality is explored by summarising the results of survey of wives in the Midnapore area of West Bengal. Wives in four villages were interviewed so as to include tribals (Santals), and non-tribals, all of whom were Hindus. The socio-economic characteristics of those interviewed are first summarised and general information provided about the survey. The results are then used to consider several aspects of inequality in relation to sons and daughters, to gauge the influence of wives on the welfare of their children and to compare the socio-economic status of wives in comparison to husbands. Comparisons are made between Santal and non-Santal preferences and socio-economic behaviour. The results reported here provide an initial overview of data provided by the survey. This data will be subjected further, at a later time, to statistical analysis e.g. using ANOVA and possibly Probit and Logit relationships will be explored.

GENDER INEQUALITY IN INDIA: EVIDENCE FROM A RURAL SURVEY IN WEST BENGAL

1. Introduction

For India, as a whole, considerable evidence exists of discrimination against females in terms of their entitlements[1] and opportunities compared to males (Agnihotri *et al.*, 1998; Dyson and Moore, 1983). This inequality reflects itself in low female-male ratios for the Indian population, a lower expected length of life for females than is biologically anticipated, a lower investment in the education of females (and in their human capital generally) compared to males, indicated by low female-male ratios for school enrolments, especially at higher levels of education[2,3].

Due to premature death of females in India, female-male ratios are significantly less than unity in India whereas, biologically, they ought to be in excess of unity. This gives rise to the so-called phenomenon of "missing" women (cf. Agnihotri *et al.*, 1998). Selective infanticide, abortions based on prior knowledge of the sex of the infant, long hours of work for females compared to males and limited access of females to food when it is scarce and to medical attention when it is needed may all contribute to this situation.

Indian census data, as summarised in Table 1, indicate that female-male ratios declined in India between 1961 and 1991. This occurred despite rising per capita income in India. This suggests that with rising incomes discrimination against females in India has risen rather than fallen. Note also from this table that with rising incomes, these ratios for the scheduled castes have fallen and have converged towards those of the general castes. While female-male ratios in India are highest for the scheduled tribes, these ratios are still below unity and have also fallen slightly.

Table 1
Female to Male Ratios (FMR) in India, 1961-1991;
Number of Females per Thousand Males

	Total Population	General Castes	Scheduled Castes	Scheduled Tribes
1961	941	934	957	987
1971	930	924	935	982
1981	934	930	932	983
1991	927	923	922	972

Source: Agnihotri et al. (1998) p.5

What is the explanation for these trends? One possible explanation is that 'seclusion' of females involves a family cost and is a sign of family social status. Those on higher incomes, usually members of the general castes, were most frequently able to practice seclusion of females. With higher income, it becomes increasingly possible for members of scheduled castes to imitate members of the general castes. In addition, tribal people are becoming more integrated with the surrounding dominant society and are increasingly influenced by it values, as pointed out by Sahu (1996). Whether these trends in female-male ratios will continue remains to be seen.

It may, however, be interesting to note that cross-sectional data from our survey (details of which are provided later) in rural West Bengal indicates that the freedom of movement and action of females is most restricted for those in the highest income group (see Figure 1). Whereas 55% of wives in the top income groups said they were significantly restricted in their social actions, only 14% in the middle income groups said this and 21% in the lower income groups sated this. Using ANOVA, the differences between the top income group and the other groups were found to be highly significant statistically.

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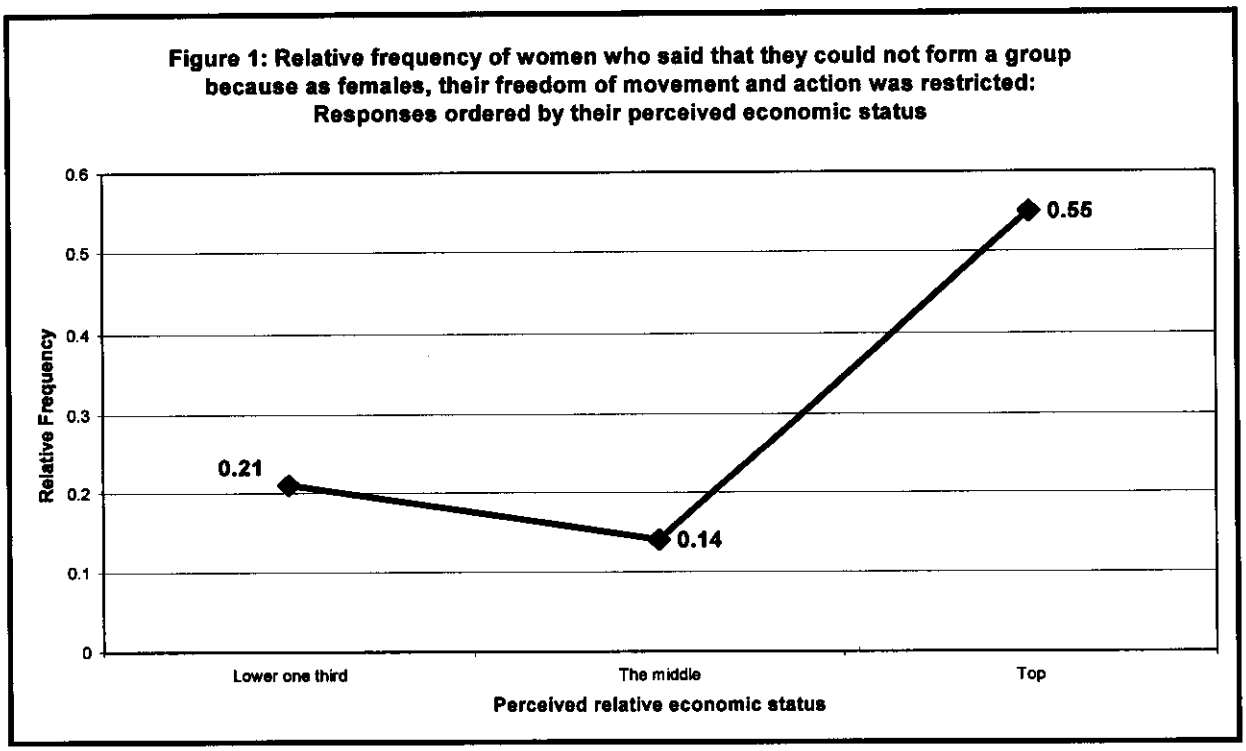


The demand for seclusion of females does seem to be related to income levels in India, with those on high incomes having a high demand for seclusion of females. The relative frequency of seclusion in the highest income groups is about 3-4 times that in the lower income groups in our survey sample.

Because (see Table 2) 'missing women' as a proportion of the population appear to have risen as India's income per capita has increased, this suggests in economic terms that women are treated as an inferior commodity in India. However, it is possible that this tendency could reverse itself as income per capita rises even more (cf. Tisdell, 1996) but this is by no means certain to occur or to occur quickly.

From Table 1, it is at least clear that tribals have a higher female-male ratio than the general population, even though even this is below what might be expected biologically. In relation to this aspect, Murthi *et al.* (1998, p.385) commented

"A higher proportion of scheduled tribes in the population reduces the extent of anti-female bias

in child survival, and this effect is statistically significant. It interesting that this variable has a significant effect even after controlling for females labour-force participation which is generally higher among scheduled tribes than in the population as a whole. This suggests that tribal societies have other features that enhance the relative survival chances of female children. Examples of possibly relevant features are kinship systems and property rights."

But amongst the scheduled tribes significant differences exist in the treatment of females; some are quite patriarchal whereas others, such as the Kassis in Northeast India, are matriarchal and matrilineal. The Santals interviewed as part of the survey reported on in this essay belong to a patriarchal and patrilineal society.

Furthermore, other cultural factors play an important role in India such as the north-south cultural divide. The Indo-Aryan culture of the north is staunchly patriarchal whereas the Dravidian culture of the south allows greater social influence by females. Kin relationships and marriage customs in the south enable a female's family to retain meaningful close contact with her and her new family after marriage for reasons outlined by Dyson and Moore (1983). Consequently, female-male ratios tend to be higher in the south of India than in the north (see Figure 2 for approximate divide) where bride and bridegroom usually come from villages distant from one another and the female's parents have little or no influence on her new family after marriage. Females generally appear to fare better after marriage when their own blood family is able to have close contact with their new family. This is probably for bargaining reasons (cf. Schultz, 1990; Haddad *et al.*, 1997).

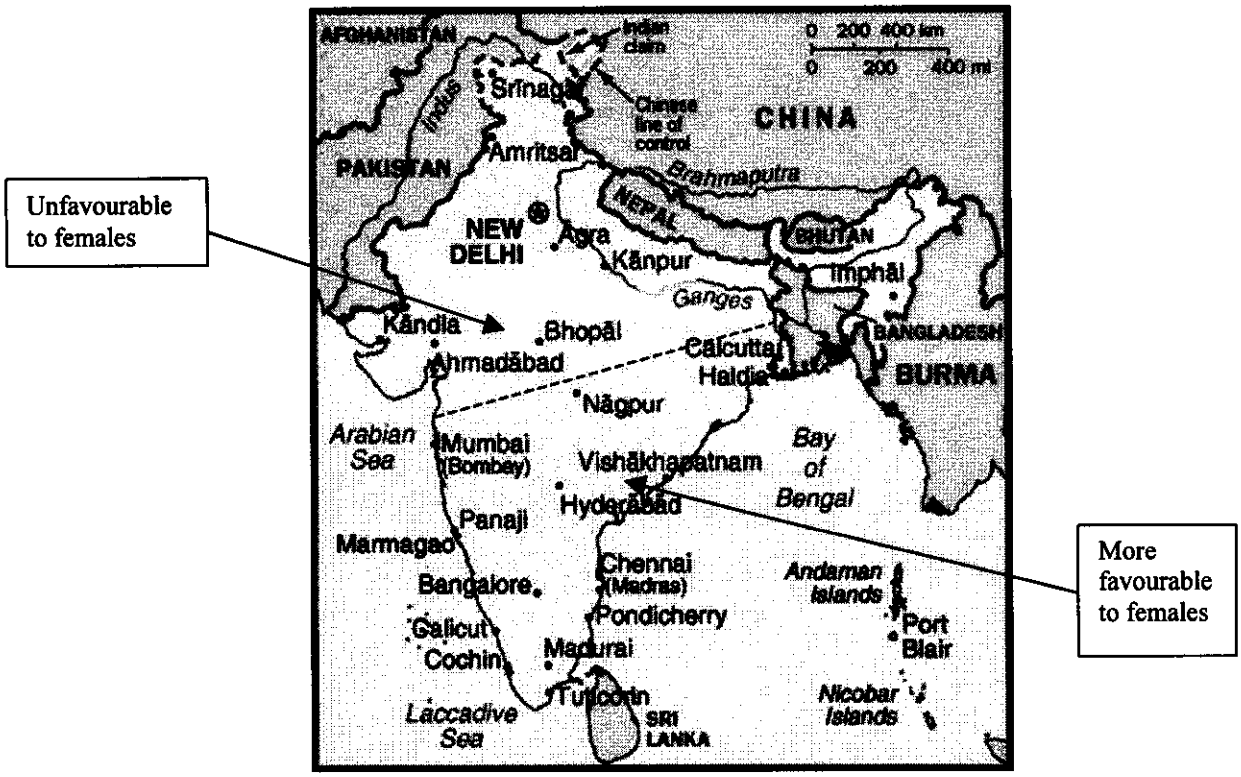


Figure 2: Division of India (excluding northeast states) into north and south demographic gender divide. The broken line is the dividing line.

The purpose of this paper is to report on gender preferences and inequality as revealed by a survey of wives in four rural villages in the southwest of West Bengal in India. The next section provides background about the survey and the villages involved. These follow the main findings in relation to entitlements and the gender of children and the nature of parental decisions about children. Subsequently, the standing an influence of wives in their family and their entitlements are given attention and final conclusions are drawn.

2. Background on the Survey

The four villages selected for the interviews for this study were selected so as to include respondents with different cultural backgrounds or with some variation in cultural background so as to provide a basis for comparative analysis. The respondents in this case are Santals (a scheduled tribe) and non-Santals consisting of Bengalis, either belonging to scheduled castes or general castes and following the Hindu religion. Questions were asked both with the unitary theory of Becker (1981) in mind and bargaining theories, as well as to follow up some points

suggested by Dyson and Moore (1983).

The survey was conducted in the second half of 1999 in the Midnapore district of W. Bengal by local interviewers using a questionnaire devised by Dr K.Roy and myself. Wives were interviewed in four villages (Bandhgora, Banskona, Janakpur and Sadanandapur) of which Bandhgora and Janakpur are Santal villages, Banskona is non-Santal and Sadanandapur contains a mixture of Santals and non-Santals. The number of wives interviewed in each village varied from 27 to 31 (See Table 2) which virtually gave a complete coverage of wives in these villages.

Table 2
Number of wives interviewed in each village and whether interviewees are Santals or not

Village	Total No.	Santals	Non-Santals
Bandhgora	28	28	0
Banskona	31	0	31
Janakpur	27	27	
Sadanandapur	31	10	21
TOTAL	117	65	52

Of the 117 respondents, 65 could be identified as belonging to the Santal scheduled tribe and 52 as being non-Santals of which at least 46 practiced Hinduism. The religion of the remaining four non-Santals was not stated buy in all probability was Hinduism. The majority of respondents practiced Hinduism (see Table 3) but about one-third followed the Sari religion, the original religion of the Santals. Of the 65 Santals in the group interviewed 37 could be identified as following the Sari religion, that is around 57%. Even allowing for the fact that the religion of some respondents could not be identified, it is apparent that a substantial number of Santals in this area have been converted to Hinduism (of the order of 40%), and probably many of those not converted have been significantly influenced by this dominant religion in this area. From Table 3, it can be seen that 61.5% of those respondents followed Hinduism and about one-third the Sari religion with the religion of eight respondents unknown.

Table 3
Religious affiliation of respondents in frequency with percentage in brackets

	Sari	Hinduism	Missing	TOTAL
Santals	36 (55.4)	27 (41.5)	2 (3.0)	65 (100)
Non-Santals	0	46 (88.5)	6 (11.5)	52 (100)
TOTAL	37 (31.6)	72 (61.5)	8 (6.8)	117 (100)

Respondents belong predominantly to either the Santal scheduled tribe or to scheduled castes. Only nine respondents are from general castes and the ethnic/caste association of one respondent was not identified (see Table 4).

Table 4
Ethnic/caste association of respondents – number and relative frequency

	Number	%
Scheduled Tribe	65	55.6
Scheduled Castes	42	35.9
General Castes	9	7.7
Total	116	98.3
Missing	1	0.9
Total	117	100.0

The majority of respondents (52.6%) considered themselves to be in the lowest economic group in their village, 31% suggested they were in the middle with only 16.4% suggesting they were in the top economic group. On the whole, these villagers are poor by Indian standards.

3. Gender Inequality in Relation to Children

Respondents were asked their preferences for sons or daughters as children. The largest number of respondents (49) wanted more sons than daughters, then followed those (41) desiring an equal number of each with five wishing for more daughters than sons (see

Table 5).

Table 5
Preferences for Sons or Daughters

Responses	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
More sons than daughters	49	41.9	45.8	45.8
More daughters to sons	17	14.5	15.9	61.7
An equal number of sons and daughters	41	35.0	38.3	100.0
Total	107	91.5	100.0	
Missing	10	8.5		
Total	117	100.0		

There is a perception that Santals have a more favourable attitude to females than non-tribals (Sahu, 1996; Tisdell and Roy, 2000). For example, Tisdell and Roy (2000) in discussion with villagers were informed that Santals would consider daughters more favourably than non-tribal villagers in the Midnapore region. That might be so but it is not reflected in preferences for daughters as children. Of the Santals answering this question, 45.8% said they wanted more sons than daughters (see Table 6). This compares with 39.6% for non-Santals. Again, 25.5% of non-Santals said they wanted more daughters compared to 13.6% of Santals responding to this question. It is, of course, possible that Santals may show greater preference for sons but nevertheless treat children regardless of their gender with greater equality than non-tribals. Answers to some of the remaining questions provide information about this aspect.

Table 6
Preference for sons or daughters as expressed by Santal respondents

Responses	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
More sons than daughters	27	41.5	45.8	45.8
More daughters to sons	8	12.3	13.6	59.3
An equal number of sons and daughters	24	36.9	40.7	100.0
Total	59	90.8	100.0	
Missing	6	9.2		
Total	65	100.0		

More than half the respondents agreed that their school-aged daughters went to school less frequently than their school-aged sons (see Table 7). The relative responses were similar for Santals and non-tribals. These responses suggest that education is regarded as less important for females than males. More than 90% of respondents answering the relevant question said that they kept their school age children home to help with family duties, with the percentage being slightly higher in relation to daughters than sons. It is clear from this survey that children play an important productive role in most of these rural families, an aspect relevant to Becker's theory (Becker, 1981).

Table 7
School-aged daughter(s) go to school less frequently than school-aged son(s)

Responses	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	50	42.7	58.8	58.8
No	35	29.9	41.2	100.0
Total	85	72.6	100.0	
Missing	32	27.4		
Total	117	100.0		

Confirmation of the fact that less emphasis is placed on education of girls than boys was

provided by a question about plans for the education of sons and daughters. The majority of respondents to this question 57% (see Table 8) said they intended to give more education to their sons than to their daughters. These percentages were slightly higher for Santals (58.9%) than for non-tribals (53.5%).

Table 8
Plans for education of sons and daughters

Responses	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
More education to sons	57	48.7	57.0	57.0
More education to daughters	6	5.1	6.0	63.0
Equal education to sons and daughters	37	31.6	37.0	100.0
Total	100	85.5	100.0	
Missing	17	14.5		
Total	117	100.0		

Respondents were asked whether preference for food is given to sons or daughters in times of food scarcity or whether they are treated equally. The majority of respondents to this question, (68.2%) said that preference is given to boys (see Table 9). This percentage was virtually the same for Santals and non-tribals.

Table 9
In times of food scarcity, is preference given to son(s) or daughter(s) for food or does equality prevail – responses

Preference for	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Son	75	64.1	68.2	68.2
Daughter	12	10.3	10.9	79.1
Equally	23	19.7	20.9	100.0
Total	110	94.0	100.0	
Missing	7	6.0		
Total	117	100.0		

Interviewees were asked whether they gave preference to sons or daughters or treated them equally if medical attention is required. Of those responding to this question, 47.7% said they give preference to sons and only 46.7% said they treated sons and daughters equally (see Table 10). However, a significant difference exists in responses from Santals and non-tribals. Whereas 54.3% of non-tribals said they would give preference to sons only 41% of Santals said this. Equal treatment was a relatively more frequent response for Santals than for non-tribals.

Table 10
Preference for medical attention for sons or daughters

Preference for	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Son	51	43.6	47.7	47.7
Daughter	6	5.1	5.6	53.3
Equally	50	42.7	46.7	100.0
Total	107	91.5	100.0	
Missing	10	8.5		
Total	117	100.0		

In summary, in this rural group, on the whole, preference is given to sons compared to daughters for education, food and medical attention. This is true both for Santals and non-tribals but Santals are less likely to discriminate in favour of sons when medical attention is needed. They are more likely than non-Santals to provide equal access to medical attention for boys and girls. Nevertheless, overall there is lower contribution to the human capital of daughters than to sons in each of these villages surveyed.

It was thought possible that in those families where daughters are considered more burdensome (from an economic viewpoint) a tendency could be present for parents to desire an earlier marriage for daughters. It was found that the desired age for marriage of a daughter was higher in the case of Santals following the Sari religion (17.58 years on average), than for non-tribals (17.35 years) and lowest for Santals converted to Hinduism (17.08 years on average). Santals less frequently expressed concern should their daughter

be 5-10 years older before marriage than the age considered to be ideal for marriage. Overall, responses suggest that Santals feel females children to be less burdensome than non-tribals.

For this group as a whole, there was a preference for having daughters married in their teens and for sons to be married in their early twenties. Age 18 was relatively most frequently considered a desirable age for marriage of daughters, followed by 17 and then 16. Age 22 was the most frequent relative preference for marriage of sons followed by 20 and then 21.

4. Wives and the Welfare of their Children

Several questions were asked to determine the relative influence of wives on the welfare of their children and on decisions about the future of their children.

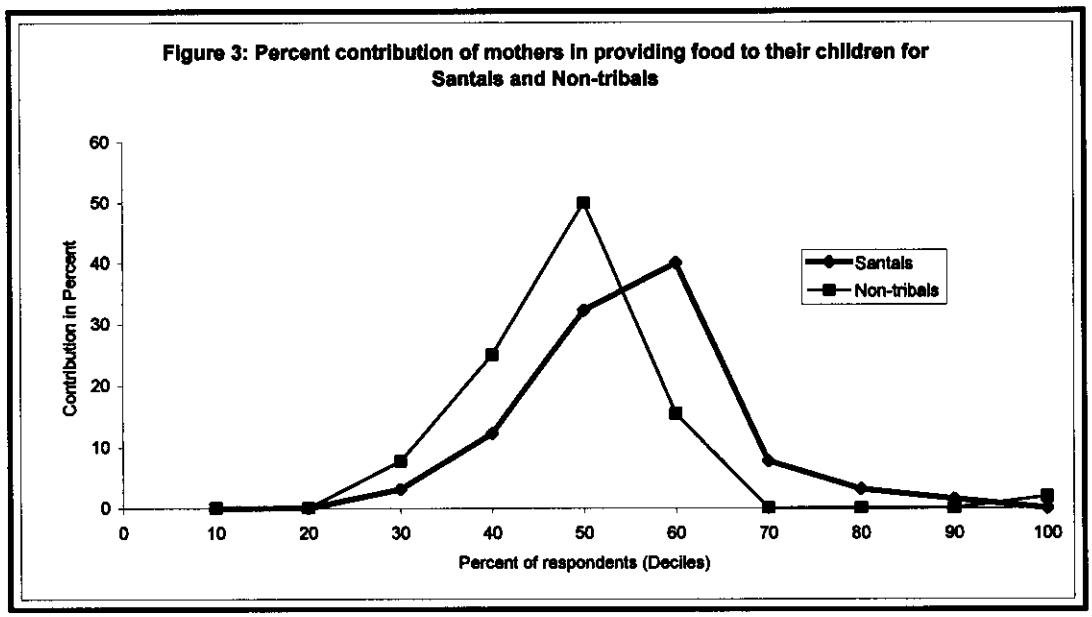
Concerning important decisions about the future of their children,. It was found that joint decisions by husband and wife were most common but in about 30% of cases, it was reported that husbands make important decisions about the future of their children with little influence from their wife. The distribution of responses is set out in Table 11.

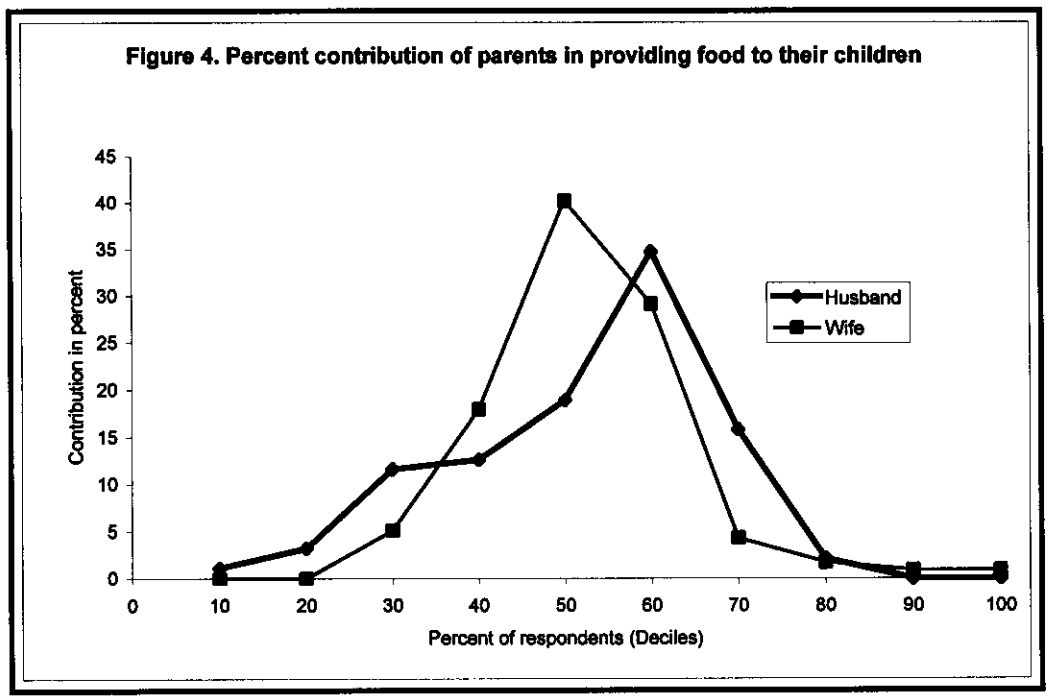
Table 11

Who makes the important decisions about the future of your children in you family?

Responses	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Mostly husband with little influence of wife	36	30.8	30.8	30.8
Mostly wife with little influence of husband	11	9.4	9.4	40.2
Both share in most decisions so they are jointly agreed	58	49.6	49.6	89.7
Other-whether grandparents or other people	4	3.4	3.4	93.2
Missing	8	6.8	6.8	100.0
Total	117	100.0	100.0	

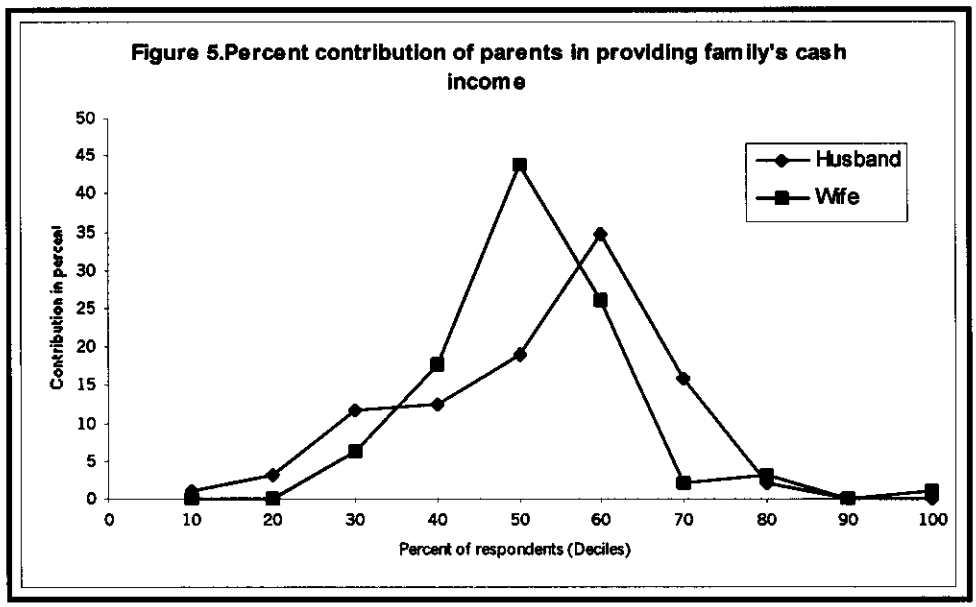
Questions were asked to determine the relative importance of wives in providing economic support for their family. About half of the wives interviewed said, in answering this question, that the family relied on food grown or collected by them (subsistence items) and the relative degree of reliance was higher for Santals than non-tribals (see Figure 3). In the overall sample, wives most frequently claimed they provided 35-55% of the food eaten by their children and their husband 40-60%. The detailed distribution is shown in Figure 4. The subsistence food contribution of mothers is therefore relatively important for the nutrition of children.



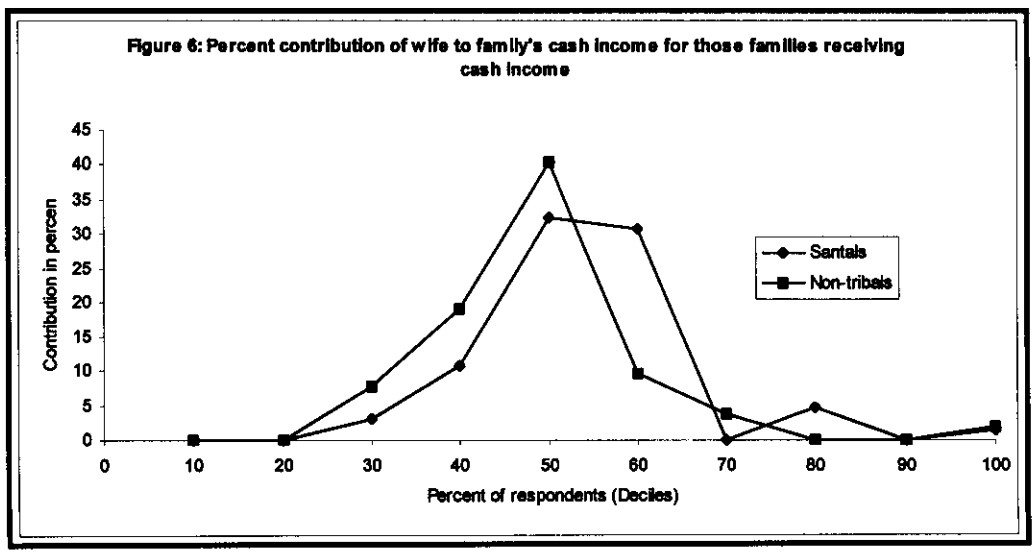


While only 52% of those responding to the question said they had a home garden, virtually all claimed that a home garden was an important source of food for their family. The importance of such subsistence activity should not be underestimated. While about a half of the respondents said it is becoming more difficult to provide food for their family the other half said it was easier or no more difficult.

As for cash income, it appears that the families of approximately 20% of respondents received virtually no cash income. For families receiving cash income, wives supplied



usually 35-55% of it and husbands 20-60%. Details are given in Figure 5. As can be seen from Figure 6, the relative contribution of wives to the cash income of Santal families is on the whole higher than that for wives in non-Santal families. These figures are comparable



to the relative contribution of partners to food for the children, except that the proportionate contribution of the Santal husband may be slightly less in relation to cash. Once again, wives are relatively important providers of cash income for their family.

We observe that Santal wives on the whole contribute relatively more to both the subsistence food needs of their family and to the cash income of their family than non-Santal wives. Whereas the wife has control over the food which she grows for the family, she has little or no control over cash. This is also true in Africa and in South America where it has been observed (Kennedy and Oniang'o, 1990; Gross and Underwood, 1971) that cash cropping reduces the resources available to wives and adversely impacts on the welfare of wives and children (see also, von Braun and Kennedy, 1986).

The majority of respondents in this survey said that their husband controls the spending of cash in their family. Only in 16.7% of cases did wives control the spending of cash in their family (see Table 12).

Table 12
Who controls the spending of cash in your family?

Responses	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Husband	68	58.1	59.6	59.6
Wife	19	16.2	16.7	76.3
Other Persons	15	12.8	13.2	89.5
Person who earns it	12	10.3	10.5	100.0
Total	114	97.4	100.0	
Missing	3	2.6		
Total	117	100.0		

Information about the control of husbands of cash in Santal households compared to non-tribal ones is conflicting. However, a higher proportion of Santal respondents (64.5%) said their husbands control the spending of cash compared to 55.1% for non-tribals. On the other hand, a higher proportion of Santal wives claimed control over some family cash

compared to non-tribals. Overall, it is clear that for the majority of these village wives have little control of family cash, even when they earn such cash. Given that wives are the main carers for children, it is therefore probable that as the cash income of a family rises at the expense of its subsistence income, the welfare of children suffers.

5. Socio-Economic Status of Wives Relative to Husbands

Both the Santals and the non-tribals in the villages surveyed are patriarchal and patrilineal. In general, marriage partners come from separate villages and the wife joins her husband's household in his village after marriage. Marriage customs differ from those described by Dyson and Moore (1983) for South India.

In over 85% of the cases surveyed, the wife's parents came from another village, that is less than 15% of the wife's parents live in the village of domicile of the husband and wife. These percentages are similar for both Santals and non-tribals. In nearly all cases the wife's parents lived 12 kilometres or less away and commonly 4 kilometres or less. In 95% of cases, the wife's parents visited her house and in a third of cases contact was said to be frequent and close.

In 86% of cases, the husband's parents live in the village where the husband and wife reside and in 21.9% of the responding cases they live in the same house. This situation was similar for Santals and non-tribals.

While in over 84.1% of cases responding, the husband's parents were said to influence decisions of husband and wife, the wife's parents only had an influence in 39.7% of responding cases. Overall, the decisions of the husband and wife were most likely (63.2% of reporting cases) to be influenced by the husband's family (see Table 13).

Table 13
Influence on Decisions of Husband and Wife of Husband's family and Wife's family

Responses	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Husband's family has more influence on decisions	72	61.5	63.2	63.2
Wife's family had more influence on decisions	7	6.0	6.1	69.3
They have equal influence	35	39.9	30.7	100.0
Total	114	97.4	100.0	
Missing	3	2.6		
Total	117	100.0		

Over 40% of wives said they would get no support from their family in times of personal difficulty. This suggests that wives have limited possibilities for support, and this may lower their threat power in a married situation.

Over 54% of wives said they controlled no cash in the family and in 70% of cases there was some family cash over which they had no control.

Questions were asked about divorce. Possibly the easier is divorce for a woman and the greater her entitlements, the greater is her threat power in a family situation. Respondents were rather reluctant to answer these questions. But those who responded agreed divorce settlements favour husbands (98.4%).

In response to the question of whether the wife's husband would be pleased if she could work outside their house and earn cash wage income, the majority of respondents said 'no' (see Table 14). Rather surprisingly, this was given relatively more frequently as an answer by Santal wives than by non-tribals. On the whole, this attitude confines wives to their household, a factor which may limit the empowerment of females. Female employment is sometimes used as an indicator of female empowerment (e.g. by Agnihotri et al., 1998). However, opportunities for cash or wage employment in the region of this study are very limited.

Table 14

Would your husband be pleased if you could work outside your house and earn cash on wage income?

Responses	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
No	64	54.7	59.8	59.8
Yes	43	36.8	40.2	100.0
Total	107	91.5	100.0	
Missing	10	8.5		
Total	117	100.0		

Various questions were asked which might shed light on the deprivation of wives. It was found that on average the hours of sleep of wives (7.36 hours on average) were less than for husbands (8.3 hours on average).

In 73.3% of responding cases, wives go without food when it is scarce to make more available to their husband and children. The relative frequency was similar for Santals and non-tribals. However, the relative frequency with which Santal wives went without food was much higher than for non-tribals, possibly because of greater poverty experienced by Santals.

In the majority of cases, 63.2% of those responding, said they have gone without medical attention or medicine when they needed it. But the relative frequency of deprivation for Santal wives (56.5%) was lower than for non-tribals (69.4%). This reflects a similar disparity in relation to female children.

Most wives felt relatively deprived of education – 78.2% stated that they would have liked more education, the percentage being somewhat higher for Santals (82.5%) than for non-tribals (77.3%). The most common reason given for not receiving as much education as wives would have liked was marriage in childhood (88.5%) with parent's poverty being given as a reason in other cases. It is possible that child-marriage of females may also be related to the poverty of parents. Child-marriage was a frequent reason given both by

Santal and non-tribal wives for lack of education.

It can be seen that the husband's family has, on the whole, a greater influence on decision's by a husband and a wife than the wife's family, and a large proportion of wives cannot obtain support from their own family in times of personal difficulty. In most cases, wives have little or no control over cash in the family and husbands do not favour them going outside the household to earn cash or wage income. Women may experience sleep deprivation, and deprivation in relation to food and medical attention, although in the latter case, this is less frequently so amongst Santals. The majority of wives have had less education than they wish and they mainly attribute this to childhood marriage, although poverty of their family also is considered to play an important role. It is difficult for divorce to occur in the villages surveyed and divorce settlements appear to favour husbands strongly. Overall, wives appear to have little bargaining power in comparison to husbands. Husbands enjoy superior socio-economic status.

6. Concluding Comments

This survey of wives in Indian rural villages provides evidence about the unequal treatment of females versus male children and wives compared to husbands. From the survey it can be seen that a preference was on the whole expressed for sons rather than daughters and that daughters are deprived relatively in terms of education, availability of food and medical attention (see summary Table 15). The situation is much the same for Santals and non-tribals except that Santals are less likely to deprive daughters when they require medical attention. Tisdell (1999) suggests that Becker's unitary theory of the family (Becker, 1981) can be used to explain such deprivation when combined with human capital theory.

Table 15

Modal (Predominant) Responses in Relation to Gender of Children – Extent of Male Bias

Response	% of valid responses	Bias for males	Ratio of male Bias[1]
1. More sons than daughters preferred as children	45.8	Yes	3.37
2. School aged daughter(s) sent to school less frequently than school-aged son(s)	58.8	Yes	n.a
3. Plan to give more education to sons than daughters	57.0	Yes	9.5
4. Sons given preference for food	68.2	Yes	6.26
5. Sons preferred for medical attention[2]	47.7	Yes	8.52

Notes: [1] Ratio of frequency of male preference divided by female preference.

[2] Lower for Santals.

In many but not the majority of cases, husbands appear to make important decisions about the future of their children with little influence from their wives but these decisions are more likely to be shared by husbands and wives in the case of Santals than non-tribals. Husbands mostly control the spending of cash in their family. Table 16 summarises control over the future of children and over cash as a function of gender.

Table 16

Relative Control of Children's Future and of Cash by Husband and Wife

Responses	% of Valid Responses	Male Bias	Ratio of Male Bias[1]
1. Important decisions about future of children made by husband with little influence of wife	30.8	Yes	3.28
2. Husband controls spending of cash in the family	59.6	Yes	3.57

Note: [1] Husbands' frequency of dominance relative to that of wives.

Comparative deprivation of wives is evident in terms of their hours of sleep, food availability, access to medical attention, control over cash, and willingness of husbands to allow them to work outside their house for cash or wages (see Table 17). However, Santal wives are more likely to be given medical attention when needed than non-tribals. In the majority of cases the husband's family has more influence on family decisions than the wife's family. Her parents usually live in another village to her place of domicile whereas her husband's parents usually live in their village of domicile, often in the same house. Avenues for divorce are limited and proceedings usually favour the husband in any property settlement. In these circumstances, wives appear to have little bargaining power in relation to their husbands. This contributes to the continuation of their deprived state, undoubtedly made worse by the general poverty of many of the families in this survey. Despite reserved employment quotas, those belonging to the scheduled tribes and scheduled castes experience considerable social and economic discrimination irrespective of their gender.

Table 17
Other Indicators of Deprivation of Wives

Response	% of Valid Responses
1. Husband's family has more influence on decisions of husband and wife than wife's family	63.2
2. Husband displeased if wife works outside house to earn cash or wage income	59.8
3. Wives go without food when food is scarce	73.3
4. Have gone without medical attention when needed[1]	63.2
5. Feel deprived of education	78.2

Note: [1] Relative frequency is lower for Santals than non-tribals

In many respects, Santals and non-tribals in this survey showed similar features in relation to the gender issues investigated. This may be the result of some social convergence. Further analysis will examine whether amongst the Santals, there is a difference between those following the Sari religion and those converted to Hinduism and this group in turn

will also be compared with the remainder consisting of non-tribal Hindus. Furthermore, perceived economic status will be explored as an explanatory variable for the responses.

Endnotes

[1] A. K Sen (1977, 1981) emphasized the significance of entitlements as a contributor to inequality and economic contribution mostly in relation to famines but later, in conjunction with Drèze, he began to indicate its possible significance in relation to gender inequality. See, for example, Murthi *et al.* (1998). For a critical assessment of Sen's theory see Gasper (1993) and Tisdell et al. (1999).

[2] According to UNDP (1998, Table 15, pp.162-163) the gross enrolment ratio for females as a percentage of males for India in 1995 was for primary students 82% and for secondary students 64%, significantly less than the percentage of females in the relevant school age populations.

[3] Some neoclassical economists could, however, contend that these indicators do not support the view that economic discrimination against females exists because they are really a reflection of the relative economic worth of females. This view could suggest that, given the nature of (Indian) society, a low relative investment is made in the human capital of females because the relative return from this investment is lower than from such investment in males (cf. Mincer and Polachek, 1974) and the low female-male ratio in India reflects the low relative economic worth of females. This may be so but there can be no doubt inequality occurs. Furthermore, the structure or nature of society may be responsible for artificially lowering the private economic worth of a female and reducing returns from investment in females. The social structure itself may reflect prejudice. Again, the social return from investment in the human capital of females may be considerably in excess of the private return. For these and other reasons, the neoclassical position mentioned above is facile and appears Panglossian.

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