

STATUS OF RURAL WOMEN IN KARNATAKA



Women's Policy Research and Advocacy Unit

NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF ADVANCED STUDIES

Bangalore

**STATUS OF RURAL WOMEN
IN KARNATAKA**

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by

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with

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Foreword

The Report on the Status of Rural Women in Karnataka is based on fieldwork carried out in several districts of the State, much thought being given to the selection of the districts. It was carried out in collaboration with several Non-Governmental Organizations – that was part of the mandate – and, it also included a study carried out through questionnaires administered to 1171 women and 1103 men on issues relating to gender relations and problems. One of the special features of the study was to concentrate on regions having particular problems. For instance, in parts of Belgaum district, a form of devadasi institution exists while in parts of former Hyderabad State, the preponderance of Dalits and Muslims pose problems of acute poverty and gender segregation. The study is not confined to fact-gathering, important as that is, the advocacy of women's rights being an integral part of it. The publication of the findings in simple Kannada, and using audio-visual aids for distribution among the NGOs and leaders of Panchayat bodies, are envisaged in the final stage of the Women's Policy Research and Advocacy Project (WOPRA). Another feature of the Project is collaboration with selected NGOs at various stages including formulating research strategies and gathering data. One of the happy outcomes of the project is the establishment of continuous links with NGOs.

The study was initiated in August 1994 with a grant from the Ford Foundation, and the first phase of the project was completed a few months ago. The project is now in its second and final phase, and forms part of a wider and more inclusive study of how Panchayat Raj institutions affect women, and how to enable women to play a more influential role in local politics and decision-making. Dr Raja Ramanna, then Director of the National Institute of Advanced Studies, was keen that NIAS should do something to promote the interests of women in Karnataka. This coincided with the decision of the Ford

Foundation, through its Programme Officer, Ms Maja Daruwala, to locate the Women's Policy Research and Advocacy Project in NIAS, which has, as one of its aims, the promotion of collaboration between the science, technology and the social sciences and humanities. I must mention here the part played by my distinguished colleague, Prof R L Kapur, in the discussions which were held with Ms Maja Daruwala, then Programme Officer in the Ford Foundation, which led to NIAS being entrusted with the Project. Ms Srilatha Batliwala was appointed soon after to head the project, and she displayed considerable initiative and skill in steering the project through its first phase. However, she left NIAS in August 1997 to join the staff of the Ford Foundation in New York. Prof R L Kapur and I were appointed Consultants for the first phase of the project. We participated in several discussions not only with the faculty of the WOPRA project but also with NGOs, and specialists in women's studies. I must express my appreciation of the work done by Ms Batliwala, Ms Anita Gurusurthy, Dr B K Anitha, and Ms Chandana Wali. After Ms Srilatha's departure, Dr A R Vasavi, Fellow in Sociology and Social Anthropology Unit, looked after the Project till Dr N Shantha Mohan took charge in November 1997. It is to the credit of Dr Shantha Mohan for quickly assembling a new team and providing continuity to the work of the Project, and also making it a part of a wider study supported by the Ford Foundation. Thanks are due to the current Programme Officer of the Ford Foundation, Ms Mallika Dutt.

Prof R Narasimha, who succeeded Dr Raja Ramanna as Director of the National Institute of Advanced Studies, has evinced a keen interest in the project and its progress. Major Gen M K Paul, V.S.M., (Retd), Controller, has looked after the administrative side of the project with quiet competence and good humour.

M N SRINIVAS
JRD Tata Visiting Professor
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Preface

The social, political, economic and religio-cultural dimensions of society closely impact on the status of women. The plurality, diversity, disparity and the obvious patriarchy prevalent in Indian society, are instances of such dimensions that influence women's position in society. With this in the backdrop, the Women's Policy Research and Advocacy (WOPRA) Unit of the National Institute of Advanced Studies (NIAS) has made an extensive effort to study specifically the status of rural women in Karnataka, through an unique conceptual framework that was developed, and an innovative methodology adopted to focus on women's access and control of resources; private, public and intangible.

This study was initiated by Ms Srilatha Batliwala in 1994 and was completed in 1997, at which point she had to leave NIAS to accept an assignment abroad. It was at this juncture that I took charge of the Unit. I would like to thank the entire WOPRA team and the NGO partners that were responsible for the study, the Director and administration of NIAS and particularly the Ford Foundation for its generous support, that made possible this research, as well as its publication for wider dissemination.

I wish to assure the reader that we have active plans to ensure that the future activities of both research and advocacy envisaged through this study will be fulfilled. I like to place on record, my appreciation to all those who contributed directly and indirectly to the study.

I believe that the study with its comprehensive findings, and numerous insights, that have emerged on the status of rural women in Karnataka, will serve as a useful reference, as well as an aid to advocate policy changes to promote the advancement of women.

N Shantha Mohan

Acknowledgments

We would like to place on record our sincere thanks to the National Institute of Advanced Studies under the leadership of Dr. Raja Ramanna, Vice Chairman and former Director of the Institute, for the unstinted support given by both the faculty and the administrative staff during the entire period of the project. Although there has been a change in leadership in the Institute, with Prof Roddam Narasimha taking over as the Director, the support to the project has been continuous and encouraging.

Our research consultants, Prof M N Srinivas and Prof R L Kapur, have played a major role in giving this project the present form. The constant interaction that we have had with them at various stages has helped in sharpening the focus of the study and maintaining its research quality. We are deeply indebted to the members of the Advisory Board of our project, in particular Dr Gita Sen, (Professor, Indian Institute of Management, Bangalore); Dr Shoba Raghuram (Deputy Director, HIVOS, Regional Office, South Asia, Bangalore) and Dr Shekhar Sheshadri (Additional Professor, National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro Sciences, Bangalore), for their constant support and ideas. We also thank Dr. Malathi Das, (then Secretary of Women & Child and Development, GOK), and Ms Anita Kaul (State Programme Director, DPEP, Bangalore, GOK) for their constant encouragement. The conceptual framework of the project has gained through the discussions with Dr Vina Mazumdar and Dr Vimla Ramchandran.

The participatory approach of the entire study, which is crucial for advocacy, would not have been possible without the support of Mr M V N Rao (Gram Vikas, Kolar), Dr Revathi Narayan (Director, Mahila Samakhya, Bangalore), Ms. Basavarajamma (Director, Reach, Kolar),

Co-ordination Committee, (GRAMA, Chitradurga), Mr Roy David and Mr Uday Kumar (CHORD, Kodagu) and Ms Vani Umashankar, the research assistant who coordinated the study for us in Dakshina Kannada and Kodagu.

We are also deeply indebted to the field investigators who were crucial in the process of data collection: GRAMA's Ramesh, Geethamma, Rathnaprabha, Nagarajappa, Siddalingamma, Pradip, Rekha, Sathya Shankar Aithal, Kusumakshi, Krishna, Gowramma, Shanthamma, Lakshmi, Manjula, Eranna; Mahila Samakhya, Bijapur's Prahallad, Basavaraj, Muthuraj, Sangappa, Shrishyla, Kariappa, Hanumantha, Virupaksha, Peerappa, Renuka, Kambali, Jendamma, Tholabandhi, Uma Kulkarni, Gangu Kulkarni, Prabha Biradara, Susheela Nagannavara, Shobha Joshi, Saraswathi Kulkarni, Vimala Hiremath, Gowri R, Vani, Mamatha; Grama Vikas: Nagamani, Triveni, Sulochana, Chaitra, Girija, Somesh, Shriram, Shrinivas, Gopal; Mahila Samakhya, Raichur's Mahadevi, Shankaramma, Jayamma P, Renuka Bomble, Yashoda R Kolli, Renuka G, Leela Kulkarni, Nagana Gowda, Hanuma gowda, Bheemanna, Shekarappa, Raju; Ms. Vani Umashankar and her team – Brinda Kumari, Shakunthala, Shusheela, Shubha, Sumathi K, Yogeetha, Durgaprasad, Ramanand S, Almeda Alfred, Satyendra Prakash from Kodagu and Dakshina Kannada districts; REACH's team under Amrutha.

To the women and men of the ten villages across six districts who gave patiently and generously their time, we owe a great deal of gratitude, for without them, this study could not have been done.

We are grateful to the Department of Women and Child Welfare, GOK; Department of Health and Family Welfare Services, GOK; District Primary Education Programme, GOK; Directorate of State Educational Research and Training, GOK; National Informatics Centre, Bangalore, GOI; National Law School of India University, Bangalore; Census Department, GOK; Community Centre, St. John's Medical College, Bangalore; Population Centre, Bangalore, GOK; Institute for

Acknowledgment

Social and Economic Change, Bangalore, for providing us with official statistics related to the status of women in Karnataka.

ASTRA, IISc, Bangalore, provided us the site for field testing which we gratefully acknowledge; Krishna Chandran did data processing. The suggestions provided by Dr A R Vasavi, Dr Biswajit Sen, Deepa Dhanraj, Sandhya Rao and Ammu Joseph, at different points of time, were invaluable.

Last but not the least, we are thankful to Maja Daruwala, who was then Program Officer, Rights and Social Justice, Ford Foundation and the present Program Officer, Mallika Dutt, Ford Foundation, for their continual support to the project.

We are also grateful to Dhanu Nayak for editorial assistance.

Introduction

Women's Rights, Advocacy and Academic Research

Since the beginning of the UN Decade for Women, women activists and scholars have systematically brought to light the oppression, exploitation and marginalisation of Indian women in all walks of life. The benchmark in this respect was the Status of Women in India report of 1974. The role played by economic, social, cultural and political institutions in reinforcing this subordination was highlighted in this report and is now better understood. The growing women's movement in the country increasingly brought pressure on the government and political parties to acknowledge the low status of women, and, more important, respond to women's concerns through a series of preventive and promotive programs and supportive legislation.

Today, the impact of many of these efforts is visible: the National Perspective Plan for Women, a National Commission for Women, women-targeted programmes like the Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas (DWCRA) and the Women's Development Programme (WDP) in Rajasthan, and Mahila Samakhya in six states, changes in legislation governing rape, sexual harassment, wife-beating, dowry, Sati, and prostitution, the setting up of special police cells for crimes against women, Family Courts, the reservation of seats for women in the Panchayati Raj system, and the efforts to gender-sensitize data collected in the Census and National Sample Surveys.

These achievements are not the result of random awakening to the plight of women in our country, but reflect the persistent efforts of committed women (and some men) to raise public and government consciousness about the rights of women, and the duty of the state to protect, however imperfectly,

those rights. While initially the focus of women's groups was on the more obviously oppressive practices like dowry deaths, rape, female foeticide and infanticide, research and activism soon spread to the less visible forms of discrimination such as unequal inheritance and property rights, desertion, bigamy and divorce, maintenance, child custody, violence in the family, discrimination in wages, and unequal access to nutrition, education, health care, and employment opportunities. All these explorations highlighted the existence of deeply-entrenched gender biases in virtually every sphere of life. The message was becoming increasingly clear: women's rights, and women's human were being seriously infringed, depriving half the country's population of the equality which was promised in our Constitution.

Some insights into why this was the case was provided by feminist critiques of state-led development strategies and even NGO grassroots interventions, which had generally failed to make any significant dent on the status of women. The approaches used in most programs targeted at women - the welfare, poverty-alleviation, and managerial approaches, for example - did not address the underlying structural factors which perpetuated the oppression and exploitation of poor women.¹ They had failed to distinguish between what Kate Young has called the 'condition' and 'position' of women.²

Young theorized that 'condition' is the material state in which poor women live - low wages, poor nutrition, lack of access to health care, education, training, etc. 'Position' is the social, economic and legal status of women as compared to men. Young argued that it is precisely because most development interventions have focused on the former - that is, on improving the daily conditions of women's existence - that women's awareness of, and ability to, act on structures of subordination and inequality, has been curtailed. Such approaches therefore, improve women's condition, but their position remains largely unchanged.

1 C. Moser, *Gender Planning in the Third World: Meeting practical and strategic needs*, in World Development 1989.

2 K. Young, *Gender and Development: A Relational Approach* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

Maxine Molyneux made a similar distinction between women's 'practical' and 'strategic' interests. While women's 'practical needs' – for food, health, water, fuel, child care, education, improved technology, etc. – have to be met, they cannot be an end in themselves; mobilizing and organizing women to fulfill their long-term 'strategic' interests is essential. This involves,

“....analysis of women's subordination and....the formulation of an alternative, more satisfactory set of arrangements to those which exist.....such as the abolition of the sexual division of labour, the alleviation of the burden of domestic labour and child care, the removal of institutionalized forms of discrimination, the establishment of political equality, freedom of choice over childbearing and ...measures against male violence and control over women.”³

Thus, notwithstanding the significant gains of the past two decades in terms of government programs, legislative correction, and the contributions made by women's groups, NGOs and research centres, there is still a monumental task ahead. The vast majority of Indian women – especially the poorest – continue to live in a reality which no society should accept.

Genesis of the Women's Policy Research and Advocacy Unit

In the plethora of activities aimed at raising women's status in India, the majority are concerned with the condition of women, rather than their position. Yet, it is only by making a concerted effort to raise women's position that their condition can be permanently transformed in ways that are sustainable. At the macro level, positional changes in a democratic state are mainly the result of popular movements and the advocacy efforts of women's groups, NGOs, committed political leaders and bureaucrats. The principle of equal rights is what guides such efforts.

3 M. Molyneux, *Mobilization without emancipation? Women's Interests, the State and Revolution in Nicaragua*, in *Feminist Studies* 1985, 11: 2.

The dictionary defines advocacy as the act of pleading for the cause of another, recommending, interceding on behalf of, and defending. In our country, advocacy for women's rights has tended to be only one of a myriad activities that women's groups are forced to engage in. Understandably, active interventions and programs for alleviating women's condition have generally taken precedence. There is considerable evidence, however, that the time has now come when specialised work in the area of advocacy for women's rights could yield substantial returns.

For instance, it was consistent advocacy by women's groups that raised national consciousness regarding the plight of women in Indian society. It also led to the incorporation of women's concerns and issues in the international human rights movement. Earlier on, a similar process led to the formulation of United Nations Convention on Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), to which India is a signatory. These are not the token gains which they seem: on the contrary, these commitments become the national conscience, and nations will now have to account to the world community for the situation of women in their country. Atrocities against women become the focus of international concern and can lead to sanctions against indifferent nations if world opinion is adequately mobilized.

Advocacy, however, requires special skills and a consistent focus. In many countries, advocacy groups are quite distinct from other activists. Policy research, gathering and collation of data and information, distilling of pertinent facts, analysis, dissemination through various strategically chosen media and methods, understanding the nature of political and legal structures and institutions and, methods of lobbying with these, linking of issues to existing policies and manifestos, and above all, chalking out of alternative approaches and paradigms. All these constitute the stock-in-trade of social advocates. These are specialised skills, signifying a specialised role – one which may not have the glamour and satisfaction of direct grassroots or political mobilization, but in today's world, an increasingly important and valuable one.

The advocacy role is obviously best played by an organization or institution which is perceived as committed to larger social goals but 'neutral' in the political sense. It is also best undertaken by a group which is:

- I. not engaged in direct grassroots work;
- II. able to interact with grassroots groups and programs and thus understand and accurately represent the issues and concerns of the poorest women;
- III. skilled in fact-finding, monitoring, documentation, research and analysis, and linking micro to macro issues; and
- IV. able to generate new perspectives and, with a sound factual base, lobby the representatives of the institutions and structures who are supposed to facilitate change and protect women's rights.

This means a combination of grassroots sensitivity, awareness of larger national and international trends and policies, academic skills, access to information, objectivity and credibility in the eyes of government, NGOs, and legal machinery.

Location of WOPRA at the National Institute of Advanced Studies

We believe that the National Institute for Advanced Studies (NIAS) is particularly well-placed to play the role described above. NIAS is a privately funded, autonomous centre for higher learning. Till recently, the late Mr J R D Tata was the Chairman of the Council of the institute. The Vice Chairman and former Director of the institute is Dr Raja Ramanna, whose versatile background and contributions in the areas of nuclear physics, music, and philosophy, are well known. Currently Dr Roddam Narasimha is the Director of NIAS. He is recognised for his contributions in the field of aerospace and atmospheric sciences and is committed to further the cause of multi-disciplinary research and action towards social change.

NIAS was founded in the belief that national development and social change can be achieved only through a multi-disciplinary approach and this commitment has gained strength over the years. NIAS has two major objectives:

- I. To bring scholars and experts in the natural sciences, life sciences, and social sciences together to understand and work towards solutions to major national problems;
- II. To disseminate knowledge and information in an integrated fashion through courses, workshops, seminars and publications for decision-makers and opinion catalysts in the country.

Nevertheless, the institute wanted to make women's issues, especially in Karnataka where the institute is located, an important area of its ongoing work. Virtually all courses run by the institute for senior bureaucrats and policy-makers include discussions and lectures on women's status and problems, in order to sensitize the participants to gender issues. In addition, at least two senior professors in the faculty have been keenly interested in women's issues in their own work. Gender issues have been a focal area in the research and writings of some of our faculty for many years. Prof M N Srinivas, renowned sociologist and social anthropologist, has had an abiding interest in women's issues since 1942, when his book, "Marriage and Family in Mysore" was published.⁴ He was a Member of the Committee on Women's Studies of the Indian Council of Social Science Research in the 1960s and 1970s, and has delivered several lectures which have made an impact on women's issues in India.⁵

Prof R L Kapur, former Deputy Director and currently Honorary Visiting Professor at our institute, is a psychiatrist by training. He has focused on women's health, and particularly, women's mental health, in much of his work. He co-authored (with G M Carstairs) a seminal work, "The Great Universe of Kota," on the mental health status of people

4 M.N. Srinivas, *Marriage and Family in Mysore* (Bombay: New Book Co., 1942).

5 *Changing Position of Indian Women*, The T.H.Huxley Memorial Lecture 1976; and *Dowry*, at the Centre for Women's Development Studies, New Delhi, 1978.

brought up in matrilineal and patrilineal families, which showed the significant difference in the mental health status of women living in the two radically different family structures.⁶ He has been interacting with women's organisations in Bangalore and has often lectured on issues related to women's health and empowerment. His work, "Alienation of Indian Youth," also had a strong gender focus. We would therefore like to stress the fact that NIAS is committed to working for gender equality.

NIAS has another advantage for undertaking such a project: it is a neutral but respected academic centre, which has a certain credibility with a wide range of individuals and institutions involved in social change processes, namely, policy-makers, grassroots and intermediary NGOs, women's groups, the media, and government bodies. It will therefore have no stereotyped image in the women's development arena, and will thus be able to play a fresh and dynamic role.

Finally, NIAS has considerable experience in advocacy work, as this has been the thrust of its various research studies and training courses. With a committed and intellectually progressive group of experts at its core, we believe we can offer a very supportive environment to this new venture into women's policy research and advocacy. The project on the status of rural women in Karnataka is only a beginning, to enable us to develop a dedicated team, build a relationship with partner organisations, and develop an effective methodology of intervention for an institution like ours. It cannot be over-stressed that no real advancement of this country is possible until the condition and status of women is raised and gender equality becomes a reality.

Objectives of the Project

The overall objectives were to study the impact of social, economic and political policies and programs in Karnataka state on securing women their constitutionally guaranteed rights, and to advocate such policies, programs and other

6 G.M. Carstairs and R.L. Kapur. *The Great Universe of Kota: Stress, Change and Mental Disorder in an Indian Village*. (London: Hogarth, 1976).

interventions which will raise the status of women and ensure gender justice. Specifically, our objectives were:

- I. To study the impact of major policies and provisions in the areas of law, economic development, health, education, family planning, and rural development on women;
- II. To compile, analyze and disseminate these findings, highlighting the priority areas for action;
- III. To broaden, deepen and sharpen the understanding and strategies of all those involved in social change processes aimed at women;
- IV. Organize seminars, consultations, workshops, etc., which bring together policy-makers, administrators, legal experts, activists from women's groups and other NGOs, and women in general, to discuss and debate issues and evolve alternate strategies;
- V. To monitor the implementation of these strategies, wherever possible; and
- VI. To evolve new and innovative methods for women's advocacy and policy research.

Research Plan and Time Frame

The methodology adopted for the project was to base advocacy on a solid foundation of facts and information generated through secondary and primary research. The approach used was to build a concrete data base on the status of women, through primary and secondary research and analysis, in order to locate the specific directions for advocacy that would enable grassroots women to better access and assert their rights. However, in view of the size and complexity of the problems of women in the country, it was decided to focus our research on rural women in Karnataka state. The insights and facts emerging through the research would then inform the advocacy efforts of the project. Targets of advocacy would be not only government policy-makers and administrators, but a wide range of actors whose policies and programs affect women including legislators, the Panchayat

Raj Institutions, trade unions and other federations, NGOs, women's organizations.

Phase I

- I. Setting up of project infrastructure (including recruitment of personnel, purchase of equipment, books and materials, etc.);
- II. Setting up an Advisory Group, comprising eminent scholars, activists, bureaucrats and media persons committed to social justice for women; members of the Advisory Group were also selected on the basis of the resources they could bring to enrich the project;
- III. Collecting readily available secondary data and preparing a broad profile of women's status in Karnataka;
- IV. Consultations / brainstorming meetings with NGOs, planners and administrators drawn from the four geo-political sub-regions of the state namely Uttar Karnataka, Malnad, Mysore,⁷ and Konkan. This elicited a more sensitive and specific range of women's issues to be addressed by the study. The specific objectives of the meetings were to:
 - a) Introduce NGOs, government officials and others to the aims and objectives of the study, its conceptual framework (i.e., assessing the extent of social justice for women, as distinct from a purely development focus), the implications of an advocacy approach, and the proposed methodology, particularly the need for participation of those working at the grassroots;
 - b) Enlist their help in identifying and refining specific issues which the study should address (e.g., special problems of Devadasis, child marriage practices, tribal women's rights); and
 - c) Select organisations willing to collaborate with NIAS in the proposed study, particularly for undertaking

⁷ Not to be confused with the district of Mysore. The Mysore sub-region comprises four districts of Southern Karnataka which were part of the old princely state of Mysore-Mysore, Mandya, Bangalore, and Tumkur.

primary research studies in their areas. In order to maintain a *quid pro quo* relationship, we offered to train the field activists of collaborating organisations in basic research methodology (barefoot researchers, as it were), in return for their contribution to the data collection process. It was emphasized that all data so collected will be a shared resource, and the concerned organisations can use this for their own advocacy at the local level. We also offered a system where the financial and human costs of the research are shared equally by the participant organisations and NIAS.

Phase I concluded with the identification of issues for micro-studies, consolidating the research collaboration with selected agencies, and developing a plan of action and schedule for the following phase.

Phase II

In this phase, the focus was on designing and implementing the micro-studies identified in phase I, analysis and draft report-writing. Specifically, the following steps were involved:

- I. Developing the research design for each micro-study, including selection of samples, instruments and methods (e.g., case studies, group interviews, survey forms, workshops, secondary data collection from local sources such as police, local and district courts, government departments, etc.), and pre-testing;
- II. Training of the investigators from grassroots agencies;
- III. Collection of primary and secondary data;
- IV. Periodic monitoring and troubleshooting at research locales through workshops;
- V. Data analysis;
- VI. Sharing of preliminary findings within the research network and with target group of women. This was done through workshops, and the emphasis was on:

- a) facilitating their participation in analyzing the data and generating deeper insights;
- b) highlighting the advocacy issues and identifying potential means and methods of advocacy;
- c) refining the format and structure of final report.

VII. Drafting of final reports on the status of rural women in Karnataka. Two versions of the report were planned including a more accessible version in the Kannada language for wide circulation at grassroots, NGO, Panchayati Raj institution, and an English language version for other groups. The widespread dissemination of the report will itself be the first step in the advocacy component of the project.

Phase III

The final phase of the project included:

- I. Publication and widespread dissemination of the reports;
- II. A series of seminars will be organised by NIAS, with participants drawn from government, self-government bodies, NGOs, women's organisations, grassroots groups, etc., where the key findings of the report are disseminated and discussed, and intervention strategies are identified;
- III. Identification of future directions for the project, and submission of fresh proposals for undertaking these.

The results of the Status of Rural Women in Karnataka (SRWK) study will be detailed in the rest of this report. It is clear that both NGO and government strategies have at best enhanced women's access to their basic or 'practical' needs but have made little impact on increasing access to their basic rights, or their 'long term strategic interests'. The study has also established that research institutions such as NIAS have a unique role to play in promoting women's rights through participatory research and research-based advocacy.

Chapter 1

Conceptual Framework

Traditional research, including research in women's studies, does not appear to have clearly defined the term 'status'. Like the term empowerment, **status** is one of those amorphous, loosely used terms. It is assumed to be clearly understood and to mean the same thing to everyone. Scanning the literature, we found that both these assumptions are wrong. The frameworks used to study status were defined more by default than discourse: the parameters used by a given study or analysis become the *de facto* definition of the framework to study status. In this sense, at least, a pattern could be discerned: most women's studies research, at least in India, have used a sectoral approach, analyzing the situation of women vis-à-vis men in some key sectors such as demographic status, economic and work status, education status, health status, legal status, and political status. Some studies include the parameter of the incidence and prevalence of violence against women.

However, these parameters themselves pose a problem: they are determined and limited by the nature of existing data, and/or the inherent gender blindness or bias of formal information systems themselves. For example, analysis of women's economic status in formal data systems inevitably boils down to using female work participation rate as a measure. But this data tell us nothing about what control employed women have over their income, the constraints to their choices in and access to the labour market, or what household or productive assets they own or control. Obviously,

¹This chapter is a modified version of a paper prepared for the UNDP/GIDP Gender and Development Monograph Series by Anita Gurusurthy, a Research Associate of WOPRA, NIAS.

these are more important indicators of women's status than merely being in the workforce or earning wages.

One particular model which captured the different dimensions of status sensitively was that developed by Ranjani Murthy. In her paper on 'Gender and Development in India,' Ranjani postulates that the study of status must "place women at the center and examine the degree of control they exercise over their lives...."¹ She outlines five key aspects over which women's control has to be assessed: their labour, resources (economic, health, education and political), their reproduction, sexuality, (their physical integrity and freedom from mental and physical violence), and their mobility.² We found this framework had far greater clarity and potential for generating more sensitive data about women's position in society. By elaborating each of these parameters, it provided a set of concrete measures for comparing women's position with that of men. In short, a way of measuring women's status in comparison with men. Using Ranjani's core framework, we added the dimensions of women's control over political spaces, systems of redressal, and the "intangible resources" that Naila Kabeer stresses.³ Thus emerged the conceptual framework for studying the status of women which is presented here.

The Nature of Gender Subordination and the Meaning of Gender Equality

The outcome of the historical subordination of women, although stark and visible, present themselves in such complex ways that many may perceive them as 'natural', 'immutable', and even 'correct' social arrangements. However, the social and ideological roots of gender subordination are continuously being unearthed by multiple social actors, including

1 Ranjani K. Murthy, *Gender and Development in India* (Madras: Initiatives: Women in Development, 1994).

2 *ibid.*, pp. 2

3 Naila Kabeer, *Reversed Realities – Gender Hierarchies in Development Thought* (New Delhi, London, Verso: Kali for Women, 1994).

researchers, activists, feminist scholars from various disciplines, and grassroots women who are emerging as advocates of their own change.

The concept of equality, articulated so coherently by many Third World feminists, has been significant to the exposition of the term “women’s empowerment” as evidenced in the writings of many feminists.⁴ The erudite examination of the questions concerning what constitutes power, what the gender determinants of power are and what is involved in the process of empowerment has lent clarity to the meaning of the terms “advancement of women” and “enhancement in women’s status.”

This emerging body of knowledge to which Northern feminists have also contributed,⁵ has been pivotal in providing clarity about means and ends, and frameworks to assess means vis-à-vis ends.⁶ Women’s agendas are also being articulated increasingly in the language of rights. Feminist discourse which draws upon the concept of human rights has brought into focus the responsibility of the nation-state in creating and sustaining conditions that enable the achievement of gender equality. A framework to study women’s status has to follow from a clear understanding of gender equality. Studying women’s status means a sensitive diagnosis of the nature of gender subordination through the study of Gender relation in a specific context. It also mean the application of measures derived from a clearly articulated goal of equality to that context.

4 See Gita Sen and Caren Grown, *Development Crises and Alternate Visions: Third World Women’s Perspectives* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1987).

5 See Maxine Molyneux, *Mobilisation without Emancipation? Women’s Interests, the State and Revolution in Nicaragua*, in *Feminist Studies* 1985, 11:2; Kate Young, *Gender and Development: A Rational Approach* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988); and Caroline Moser, *Gender Planning in the Third World: Meeting Practical and Strategic Needs*, in *World Development* 1989.

6 See Kabecr 1994, *op.cit.*, for an analysis of the frameworks for assessing women’s ‘interests’ and ‘needs’ in the context of development planning.

We understand that women's powerlessness stems from the lack of resources – human, material, and intangible.⁷ When we examine gender relations as power relations,⁸ it is evident that men are favoured by the rules of the institutions within which gender relations occur, and that they enjoy and exercise power in commanding these resources. Gender inequality is therefore an outcome of asymmetry in power, where men are in a position of privilege and women of subordination. These power relations often remain unchallenged because the ideology of subordination is taken as given, as if men were meant to be dominant and women subordinate. The ideology of subordination is also self-perpetuating in that the norms, rules and everyday practices of social institutions in which gender relations occur, ensure its reproduction in time.

For women, the absence of power has meant the lack of access to, and control over resources, a coercive gender division of labour, a devaluation of their work, lack of control over their own self, skills, labour, mobility, sexuality, time, and fertility. Their powerlessness is expressed in male violence against women, sexual exploitation that erodes all human dignity and a very acute experience of vulnerability. It is this near-universality of women's vulnerability that quells any need to make a case for gender equality.

Therefore, social transformation in the context of gender has to be premised on the notion of substantive equality rather than on a search for formal equality. While formal equality is based on the notion of the 'sameness' of women and men, substantive equality, on the other hand, would require taking legislative account of the ways in which women are different from men, both in terms of biological capacities, as well as the socially constructed disadvantages women face relative to men.⁹ The human rights framework provides a useful basis for interpreting substantive equality. The principle of social

7 See Naila Kabeer and Ramya Subrahmanian, *Institutions, Relations and Outcomes: Framework and Tools for Gender-Aware Planning*, Discussion Paper 357, Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, Brighton, September 1996. They classify institutional resources in this manner.

8 *ibid.*

9 Ratna Kapur and Brenda Cossman in Kabeer, *op. cit.*

justice is the cornerstone of rights and underlies the goal of gender equality.

In operational terms, the transformation of gender equality based on the human rights framework requires the redistribution of power for promoting women's strategic gender interests. Inherent in this transformation is the challenging of ideology – the rules and the practices that justify the concentration of power in the hands of those whom it privileges. Such a transformation involves a set of enabling policies and conditions created by the state that facilitate the reallocation and redistribution of resources. It focuses on increasing women's access to, and control over, the entire gamut of resources that confer power at individual, household and societal levels. It entails the loss of men's traditional power no doubt, but it certainly does not envisage the abnegation of men's autonomy. What it seeks to do is legitimize women's autonomy by envisioning the notion of shared power.

Transformation for gender equality, therefore envisages the empowerment of women which is two-fold:

- I. Empowerment that is an externally induced process (set in motion by different social actors), involving the creation of conditions that enable women to exercise their autonomy; and
- II. A process that may be termed self-empowerment, which is the process “where women find a ‘time and space’ of their own and begin to re-examine their lives critically and collectively.”¹⁰

While the former process denotes the removal of barriers to as well as the facilitation of women's access to and control over resources, the latter emphasizes women's own agency in seeking higher levels of access and control. Both these processes are fundamental to the attainment of gender equality.

10 Srilatha Batliwala, *The Gender Impact of Technology* (paper presented at the International Crop Research Institute for Semi Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) Workshop on Gender Effects of Technology Dissemination, Hyderabad, May 1996).

Defining 'Access' and 'Control'

The measures of gender equality will therefore have to examine whether there has been a redistribution of resources, whether state policy has facilitated women's autonomy and the extent to which transformation of unequal relations between women and men has occurred. The study of women's relative access to, and control over resources is a useful method of comparing women's position with that of men, and is also a reflection of changes in both ideology and the institutions and structures which mediate such access and control. As indices of gender equality, the terms 'access' and 'control' serve as sensitive indices to capture women's autonomy and status.

But what do 'access' and 'control' mean? And how are they distinct or different from each other? In the context of material, human and intangible resources, access refers to the opportunity available to use the resource.¹¹ For instance, do women get an opportunity to take a loan or go to a health centre for treatment? If they do, they can be said to have access to these resources. Control is much more complex, and needs to be understood within the notion of shared power and on-going negotiation. Control over a resource is the bargaining power to define or determine the use of that resource.

However, control cannot be defined identically for every kind of resource. For a woman, control over her sexuality, fertility, mental and physical security, mobility, and intangible personal resources means her right to make decisions about the use of these resources and that this right, and her decision, is accepted by others. A case in point would be a woman's right to determine whether and whom she will marry, and whether, when, and how many children she will have. On the other hand, control over public and private resources, political spaces, or redressal systems, means the right to equal participation in decision-making about the use of these

¹¹ UNDP, n.d.

resources, and the benefits that accrue from such use. For instance, women must have the right to an equal say in determining what crops will be planted on the family land, when and at what price they will be sold, how the resultant income will be spent, what trees should be planted in a community afforestation programme, whom they will vote for in an election, or where a school will be located.

Thus, we are not defining control as a mere shift of decision-making power from men to women; rather, control means an acknowledged and socially sanctioned equal share in decision-making, in both the private and public spheres. Similarly, in the case of labour, control means women's right to equal opportunity in all occupational sectors without regard to gender, the right to negotiate what work they will do, and how their income will be used.

In understanding control in private and public decision-making, we must also acknowledge that women's views may not prevail in one particular decision, and be totally dominant in another. The point is that the final outcome has been arrived at through a process in which women actively participated and defended their stakes and that spheres of decision-making are not divided along gender lines.

The following framework to measure gender equality examines women's status through the prism of 'access' and 'control'.¹² It outlines the components of status that act as benchmarks or tools of analysis to study women's status vis-à-vis men. We can understand women's status through the examination of their

1. Access to, and control over private assets and resources
2. Access to public resources
3. Control over their labour and income
4. Control over their body – sexuality, reproduction, and physical security

¹² The framework is modified from the model developed by Ranjani Murthy 1994, *op.cit.*

5. Control over physical mobility
6. Access to and control over political spaces
7. Access to and control over intangible resources – information, influence, political clout etc.
8. Position in law and their access to legal structures and redressal.

A detailed analysis of each of these parameters is presented below. The analysis and illustrations pertain to various parts of India and closely parallel the situation in other contexts. The discussion also incorporates the many strategies and interventions that illustrate the attempts to enhance women's status. These examples are a necessary part of the discussion as they point to innovations from the grassroots which are statements of women's strength and a rejection of passivity and victimhood. Some examples also cover interventions of the state.

1. Women's Access to, and Control over Private Assets and Resources

Control over productive resources such as land, equipment, and housing is crucial to basic security. The lack of material resources, or assetlessness in poor households, causes tremendous stress for the poor, and a preoccupation with survival. In fact, assets are buffers that mitigate vulnerability.¹³ While the exigencies of poverty and the associated precariousness is characteristic of the poor – men, women and children, traditional gender-based subordination deprives almost all women, regardless of class, and across communities, of control over assets, making them extremely vulnerable. In most communities, laws (formal and customary) tend to favour men with regard to the right to inheritance – an important means of acquiring private assets. This provides men the much needed leverage for commanding access to opportunities and many facilities available in the public arena. For instance,

13 See Caroline O.N. Moser, *Confronting Crisis - A Summary of Household Responses to Poverty and Vulnerability in Four Poor Urban Communities* (The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/The World Bank, Washington D.C. 1996) for a discussion on the Asset Vulnerability matrix.

men are better able to access housing finance as they are in a position to offer land as collateral. Since the rules that apply within the domain of the household / family favour men, the command over these household resources gives them a tremendous headstart in mobilizing many resources across other social institutions. Thus they have better access to opportunities in social, economic and political structures.

In many agrarian communities, women's access to land is restricted in traditional taboos that prevent them from performing certain operations. For example, women from many communities are forbidden from ploughing. These social rules reinforce the traditional division of labour and assign a lower value to the work (such as weeding, transplanting etc.) that women are permitted to do. In the case of landless women who seek farm employment, such taboos prevent their access to higher wage levels associated with 'male' tasks. In most of these societies, women have little or no claim over the indivisible assets of the family – animals, farm equipment etc. Women from landed households may not even be aware of the extent of household land ownership. Even when women inherit assets, male relatives may usurp these assets through sheer force.¹⁴ Women may even willingly relinquish their rights over the asset, in order to avoid conflict and/or because they perceive the threat of harassment if they attempt to protect their rights. In total disregard of women's autonomy and emotions, customs are used to assert male control over land. In parts of North India, widows traditionally have been persuaded to undergo a levirate marriage¹⁵ to avoid partitioning the property and, the practice has gained a new lease of life since land has become more valuable.¹⁶

In traditional matrilineal and matrilocal societies, women do inherit land, as in some communities in South and North East India. However, many factors have contributed to the erosion

14 See Marty Chen and Jean Dreze, *Widows and Well-Being in Rural North India*, DEP No. 40, London School of Economics, September 1992, for a detailed analysis of the status of widows in India.

15 Marriage to the husband's brother.

16 See Nirmala Bancrjee, *Household Dynamics and Women's Position in a Changing Economy* (paper presented at the International Conference on Gender Perspectives in Population Health and Development in India, New Delhi, January 1996).

of many of the traditional property rights of women in these communities, and a consequent decline in their status. The control over land in terms of its management, use, disposal, etc. is increasingly being determined by men. Also, resources generated from the productive use of these assets, such as income accruing from land, or rent from property, are seldom enjoyed by women. So deep is the association of the notion of male superiority with male control over land, that even women do not perceive the absence of claims vis-à-vis such assets as the denial of a right. The transfer of title by rich landlords in the names of the women of the household in many parts of rural India, is, in fact a powerful illustration of the patriarchal control man possesses over property.

Housing as an important asset of the poor is a well accepted notion. Where customs do not allow women's participation in the labour market, or even where schemes are designed to increase income through home-based industry, the house becomes a production site for women's economic activities. In addition to being an important base for enterprise, housing is also fundamental to physical security. For women, the basic right to housing is often inextricably linked to their dependence on men. In India, the girl child is perceived by most communities as 'a temporary guest', who is to leave the natal home after marriage and is thus, denied any claims to the family assets. The ideology of gender subordination recurs in the patrilocal marital residence, where she has no direct claims on the property / assets of the household. Even here, she has only as much access as is necessary for the performance of the duties that she is expected to fulfill. In most rural households, women invest their labour in the management of the assets that the poor have, in livestock and animals, as a cover to keep poverty at bay. However, their participation in the multiple livelihoods of the household, which are absolutely essential for sustenance, does not entitle them to any exclusive privileges. It is, in fact, a responsibility expected of them. As one woman respondent of the research study on the status of rural women in Karnataka noted, "Taking care of the chicken was my responsibility. He (my husband) just took it away one day and sold it to buy his liquor."

Women even endure male violence in marriage and do not leave the marital home because they fear destitution and sexual exploitation. The reluctance of the natal family to support a woman in her decision to break away from the violent situation because of the stigma attached to separation and divorce, the absence of other shelter that respects women's human dignity and the complete lack of monetary resources to command reasonable shelter, leaves women in such situations of no option but to continue staying with the husband. This dependence is perceived by many women as a trade-off for their security needs. The condition of most state-run establishments that provide shelter to women is appalling. Even though one would expect them to be a safe refuge for women, the shocking fact is that some of them are actually sites of sexual exploitation.¹⁷ A conference on widows held in 1995 in Bangalore, drew attention to the enormous difficulties experienced by widows and aged women. Research has documented the extreme forms of harassment of these widows by male relatives interested in the property that they have inherited from the deceased husband.¹⁸ The absence of control over private assets makes older women, in particular, even more vulnerable. Gold and silver jewellery are important assets in the Indian context. Women in India often pawn their jewellery to enable the household to tide over a financial crisis. Since gold and silver jewellery can be liquidated or mortgaged, very high value is placed on them, especially in poor households. Women bring some gold as dowry during marriage, which is then regarded as a household asset. Although such jewellery may rightfully belong to them, women's opinion is seldom sought in decisions that are made about the disposal of such jewellery.

To deal with women's assetlessness, the Indian state has taken some legal measures that guarantee women the right to inheritance. However, these do not cover all religious communities. In addition, the state has also initiated other

17 In 1996, women in a state home in Jalgaon, Maharashtra, were raped by the municipal corporator. This case generated considerable public fury because of the media coverage. However, other such cases go virtually unnoticed even though they are not uncommon.

18 See Chen and Dreze, *op.cit.*

policies and schemes. Title deeds under the public housing scheme for poor families in Karnataka, for instance, are given in the joint names of the husband and wife. Finding strength in laws that recognise women's rights to inheritance, and claims over the marital home, many women have begun asserting their rights. Legal battles however, are a hard option – they are time consuming and expensive. So long as social perceptions about women's rights do not change, such measures, although a beginning, are ineffective.

One of the most empowering strategies in creating assets for poor women has been the range of programs (of both NGOs and the Government) that sanction loans and grants to grassroots women's collectives for the construction of their own buildings or centres. These '*sangha*-buildings' (the building of the collective or group) act not only as temporary shelters for women in distress, but also as community assets used for community functions. Another important asset for women is the credit base that they create and expand through their savings and credit groups. In many parts of India, the federation of these groups operate as *mahila* (women's) banks which provide credit only to women.

2. Women's Access to Public Resources

Public resources means the entire range of services and fundamental rights guaranteed by the welfare state. The term also encompasses natural resources such as common lands, forests etc. Statistics about the range of resources necessary for the fulfillment of social and economic rights assured by the welfare state such as education, health care, credit, etc., reveal huge gender gaps in many countries. In India, for instance, literacy figures do indicate an increase, but a trend analysis of gaps in male and female literacy rates reveals that the gender gap is not showing signs of narrowing. Those who believe in an equal world may perhaps find it ridiculous to even justify the need for education, basic health care, and the fulfillment of survival needs (food, water, etc.). But for the poor in most developing countries, the fundamental crises relate to fuel, water, health care and delivery, housing,

sanitation, and nutrition. The inadequacy of these resources affect women severely, mainly because women have been primary providers of basic needs. Low access to or shortage of cooking fuel and water means women have to walk longer to fetch water and collect fodder and fuel wood. Non availability of fuel has repercussions on the household such as consumption of fewer cooked meals, switching over to less fuel intensive foods, and loss of schooling opportunities for the girl child. The gendered outcome of such a crisis is that women consume smaller amounts since they eat after the men and children of the households in most traditional cultures. The loss of traditional rights over common land has also contributed to the deterioration of women's status. In fact, the impact of deforestation is not merely a fuel and fodder crisis but has also meant a loss of access to forest-based economic enterprises for women.

In India, these appalling facts are validated by macro-level statistics and micro research data which reveal a declining sex-ratio (as incredibly low as 460 girls for a 1000 boys in the 0-6 age-group, in some pockets¹⁹), higher mortality of girl-children below 5 years of age, low birth weight of girl babies, physical and material deprivation and increasing work burdens of adolescent girls, relative deprivation of food vis-à-vis men despite higher calorie expenditure, an unacceptably high maternal mortality, low enrollment and high drop-out rates of girl children from school. A deeper examination of facts reveals the extremely vicious ways in which deprivation colludes with gender related beliefs, norms and cultural practices, to keep women's status abysmally low.

In the context of women's access to public resources and facilities, the welfare state has traditionally perceived its role as being limited to the formulation of a policy vis-à-vis education or health or by designing schemes for maternal health and adult education. These approaches which have not factored in gendered barriers to women's access (many of

¹⁹ See the summary report prepared on female infanticide prepared by ADITI, an NGO in Bihar in Anita Gurumurthy, *Rural Women in the Indian NGOs Report on CEDAW*, Co-ordination Unit for the World Conference on Women-Beijing'95, New Delhi, December 1995.

them hidden) have failed to empower women. Many developing countries are now economies in transition, and the commitment to social goals is taking a back seat as economic policies are being geared towards privatization and the resultant domination of market forces. Research data available on the negative impact of structural adjustment programs on women reflect their deteriorating status. More research for understanding culture-specific influences of labour-market changes, budgetary-cuts, etc., is being done.²⁰

Women's access to public resources is impeded by many factors. In the case of health services, women prefer not to access a system that they perceive as insensitive, impersonal and even intrusive. Women have not been given the opportunity to shape the philosophy of dominant health systems. This historical exclusion and the social construction of their bodies (discussed in the section on control over women's bodies), has resulted in a health system that is insensitive to their specific needs. Women's access to education, as like to health care, is constrained by cultural factors (withdrawal of girl children after menarche), economic compulsions (girl children withdrawn for care of younger siblings, or to subsidize the education of male siblings in very poor households), structural factors pertaining to the education system (including very long distance of the school from home, little relevance of curriculum to life, absence of instructors and poor quality of instruction, social biases in classroom practices), and the many hidden costs (such as the need to pay higher dowry in order to get a more educated groom for the girl) that influence parental decision to withdraw the girl from formal education. Education for women is seen as secondary to marriage. Another area fundamental to women's access to opportunities is child care. In the absence of child care facilities, the responsibilities of the household continue to be an obstacle to women's aspirations for economic independence. Women's access to the public sphere cannot be total if their opportunities for employment are constrained by the absence of child care.

20 See Sen and Grown, *op. cit.*, for an analysis of the impact of SAP on women.

Technology has tremendous potential for enabling human well-being. But in the case of women (although it cannot be denied that women have also benefited from medical and information technology), the silences speak louder than words. Within the development process, there is no conscious application of technology to alleviate the problems of the majority of women.²¹ Little attention has been paid to, and very limited funding provided for, research to develop technology for safe cooking energy, easy access to adequate and safe drinking water, or for the development of mechanized implements for hazardous and back-breaking agricultural operations performed by women. Ironically, research on new women-centered contraceptives is still a priority. It is no accident that tubectomy is the backbone of the family planning programme in India or that hysterectomy is seen as a solution to menstrual problems. Technology is not aseptic, neither is it gender neutral. It is in fact built upon the substratum of dominant ideology and stereotypes, and becomes yet another instrument that perpetuates hierarchy and discrimination. By not investing in technology that is pro-woman, the welfare state abdicates its responsibilities in yet another way.

Without concerted and committed interventions for the fulfillment of basic needs, programs for empowerment have little meaning. Enhancing access is not only about increasing budget outlays, it is about the will to transform attitudes that act as barriers to access through a variety of measures that can change the social value of girls and women. The copious research on women's health status has given us enough insights for operationalising the terms 'reproductive rights', 'feminist population policy', and a 'gender-sensitive health-policy'. Women are biologically different from men and require gender specific health needs to be met with interventions that are women-specific.

The exclusion of women from knowledge has not only crippled their participation in the public sphere, but kept concealed

²¹ See Srilatha Batliwala, *Transforming of Political Culture—Mahila Samakhya Experience*, in *Economic and Political Weekly* 1996, 31(21), for an analysis of gender.

from women, the weapon that can help in analyzing their position, communicating and publishing their experience and thus challenging their subordination. It is on this subversive potential of education that the case for empowering education can be built.

The role of the state in empowering women through affirmative action is crucial to accelerate the process towards gender equality. But the concept of rights, particularly in the realm of economic and social rights, has been markedly absent from the Indian government's activities and approaches to gender equality.²² However, a positive shift in the relationship between the state and civil society is making more meaningful alliances possible. In the recent years, the willingness of the state to learn from community initiatives, and the collaborations of community leaders and activists with the bureaucracy have helped shape policies and programs that are gender sensitive. Thus, the government of India's Mahila Samakhya Programme of education for women's empowerment, running in six Indian states, is much more than a literacy programme. It incorporates strategies and espouses values that address gender equality as a process demanding social transformation. The District Primary Education Programme of the state also deserves a mention for its sensitivity to gender dimensions of education. As women's groups feel an increasing need to engage with the state and make it accountable, they also experience an urgency to act on their own to create supportive structures so that through their own agency they can orchestrate the conditions necessary for their advancement.

3. Women's Control over their Labour and Income

Women's autonomy cannot be enhanced without addressing their economic dependence, but this remains a very distant goal for most women. Patriarchal ideology not only creates an intra-household division of labour, but the burden of the

22 See Ramya Subrahmanian, *Discrimination Against Women in the Indian NGOs Report on CEDAW*, Co-ordination Unit for the World Conference on Women-Beijing'95, New Delhi, December 1995.

household and its subsistence falls on women as if it were natural. Women find it extremely difficult to take up productive work outside the home. However, when financial conditions deteriorate, it is women's labour that often comes to the rescue of the household. In most poor households, women are victimized by a triple role burden. They have no choice but to work outside the home (engage in productive work), continue fulfilling their responsibilities in ensuring conditions for the sustenance of the household as nurturers and caretakers, and of course, as 'reproducers of the human race', also bear children. Change in gender relations in the public sphere may seem an attainable goal for many women, but the family still remains the last frontier of male domination.

In most cultures, women are known to be more thrifty, to spend their income on family welfare, and to save up for emergencies, sacrificing short-term gains for long-term benefits. Several research studies have clearly established the positive correlation between improved quality of life of the entire family, better nutrition, higher levels of education, etc. and women's increased access to and control over their income. However, women's access to the labour market and to income-earning opportunities is often regulated by the family. Where she has access, it is often due to the pressures of poverty and has little to do with the exercise of individual choice. Indeed the right not to work (right to rest and leisure) becomes relevant in the analysis of women's control over their own labour. Gender-based wage differentials for agricultural work exist despite laws and often in urban and rural areas, poor women shoulder the burden of being the sole supporters of or providers for the family although they are by no means the sole-earners. One of the important findings of a study done by the Working Women's Forum in rural and urban South India²³ was that nearly 84% of the women in the study happened to be the sole contributors to the family income! Against this backdrop of tremendous pressures to feed the children and ensure family survival,

23 See report on Working Women's Forum, *Reaching Out to Poor Women through Grassroot Initiatives: An Indian Experiment*, Madras 1992.

where the men of the household are either unemployed or contribute very little to the household kitty, the academic examination of women's control over their own income seems a mockery of women's reality. A better bargaining position within the household to influence its expenditure patterns in a manner that encompasses their personal aspirations is possible only if the household is truly a domain of negotiation. So long as the household retains its patriarchal character and sustains a hierarchy which exploits women, women's economic autonomy cannot be attained.

The experiences of women's collectives and NGOs working with women in communities indicate that poor women work in extremely adverse and formidable conditions. Wage disparities, exploitative contractors, middle-men, and landlords, extremely appalling working conditions, health hazards, absence of trade unions, the perpetual danger of physical violence, low access to training or vocational skills, leaves women little choice to determine whom to sell their labour to, for how much and under what terms. For instance, the majority of poor rural women in India are employed in agriculture. Most agricultural operations performed by women are extremely arduous and are not mechanized. Where mechanization of a particular operation occurs, because of gender biases and women's lack of access to skill, credit and education, women get rapidly displaced.²⁴

A desegregated view of women as constituting different categories, is essential to understand women's relationship to the labour market. In the case of the upper caste and class, caste rules deny women access to the labour market.²⁵ What seems dangerous for women is the penetration of these rules into castes and communities where women have traditionally had access to the labour market. Women's participation in the labour market is seen as detrimental to family status and

24 See Batliwala 1996, *Gender Impact of Technology, op.cit.*

25 While this is a fact for many landed and rural households, urbanisation and consequent changes in the profile of the educated urban woman has resulted in their increasing participation in the labour market. Another point that needs to be clarified is that in landed households where women do not go out to work.

prestige – the underlying assumption is that since men in these households are effectively performing their ascribed gender roles as bread-winners, women don't 'need' to work. The inverse relationship between economic status of the family and female work participation rates has been established in many studies,²⁶ and has indeed been long recognised as a key feature of upward social mobility in the Indian context. Research on the gender impact of the agricultural policies of the Indian state has shown that an improvement in the household's economic position could cause some of the now 'not poor' households to confine women to home-bound work (without necessarily reducing their total workload) and adopting customs such as dowry where they were not practiced before.²⁷ The interrelationship between household economic status and household mobilization of women's labour becomes a vital aspect on the basis of which one can examine women's autonomy.

A very important aspect of women's participation in the labour market in India is that access to employment outside the house itself is not a stigma but it is that their labour is almost totally appropriated by the household which regulates women's work in the public space sometimes allowing access, sometimes denying access. Women's labour is therefore a 'flexible household resource'.²⁸ Another important fact is that even as 'housewives', women take up many productive activities. Most rural household economies are built on multiple livelihoods and on women's contributions to these, such as processing of agricultural produce, animal husbandry, household industry such as sericulture, weaving, mat-making, etc.

In view of the changing economic scenario due to policy shifts, the following trends are being foreseen,²⁹ and are likely to affect a vast majority of women:

26 See Gurumurthy, *op.cit.*

27 See Bina Agarwal, *Neither Sustenance nor Sustainability - Agricultural Strategies, Ecological Degradation and Indian Women in Poverty*, in Structures of Patriarchy, edited by Bina Agarwal (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1988).

28 See Banerjee, *op. cit.*

29 *ibid.*

- I. An increase in the employment of women which is distress-driven (and hence exploitative), resulting from closing down of household industry and hence from economic compulsions.
- II. A growing reluctance (reinforced by a cultural bias in favour of male child education) on the part of the natal family to invest in girl-child education and skill-training because of the privatization of education and increasing costs on the one hand, and increasing demands on women by the marital family to take up a job on the other. With greater emphasis on skilled jobs in the changing scenario, women will be unable to measure up and hence handicapped to meet competition in the labour market.
- III. As already discussed in the section on women's lack of control over private assets, the rising value of assets in the current context will imply that families will be more anxious to further consolidate their hold on land and other assets and will therefore deprive their female members of property rights.

It is against this complex and fast-changing context that measures being taken by the state and by NGOs to increase women's control over their labour and income need to be examined. Income generation programmes for women to set up enterprises are popular, but the woman's new role as income-earner has not automatically altered the gender roles within the family or the gender division of labour. This is a more gradual and slow process. However, what these strategies have sought to do is to give women a better foothold for bargaining within the household and participating in the household decision-making processes. Also, these programmes have opened up a new door for women – that of credit facilities which they have traditionally lacked.

As a fallout of such programmes, women have experienced a positional impetus in many other ways also; they now enjoy a higher degree of physical mobility which in turn gives them access to the public domain and to new knowledge and

information. In addition to these programs there are many other powerful examples which illustrate women's struggles to gain strength in the labour market. SEWA in Gujarat has made history by unionizing women street vendors from the urban informal sector. A collective of tribal women in Orissa, with the support of Agramee (an NGO), has been fighting a gallant battle against middlemen who collect the forest produce from them, against the policies of tribal cooperatives, against Government officials and the police – all in order to secure a minimum price for the hill-brooms that they make and for obtaining a license to sell non-timber forest produce. Women's groups in Gadchiroli, Maharashtra have renegotiated wages through collective bargaining. The government has also taken initiative to enhance women's access to the market. In Karnataka, the Sericulture Board (a unit of the state government) has a separate 'women's counter' in the cocoon-markets, a step that was taken to encourage women to have direct access to the market.

4. Women's Control over their Body

Perhaps the most cruel aspect of gender subordination is women's lack of control over their own bodies. In most parts of India, women do not have a say in their own marriage - they are married even before menarche, or in early adolescence since cultural precepts exalt parents who give away their daughters even as they are children.³⁰ Early marriage has dire consequences for women; it results in sexual trauma, early pregnancy and associated reproductive and other health problems. For women, the domain of the family is the most intimate and the most difficult within which to exercise their autonomy. In a reality that rarely extends beyond the limited universe of the household, the family becomes the primary source of affirmation for women. Rejection by the family means isolation and therefore women are unable and even

30 In Hindu tradition, the Kanya daan (giving away the daughter) in marriage before puberty, is a venerable act. Although child marriage is illegal, such marriages continue to take place especially during Teej (a festival in Rajasthan) or through rituals such as Thottil Maduve (marriage in the cradle in Karnataka).

unwilling to assert themselves. Motherhood therefore is not merely a personal aspiration, but often a means to social recognition.

For almost all cultures, heterosexuality is the norm and the satisfaction of male sexual needs, the *summum bonum* of sexual relations. Within the institution of marriage, cultural norms demand the performance of wifely duties – the fundamental of them being the duty to participate in and the obligation not to refuse sexual relations with the husband. In fact, much of modern law is built on this premise. Patriarchal ideology does not permit women to be sexual entities in their own right. Practices of dedicating girls to deities and thus to a life of prostitution (the Devadasi and Jogin systems of South India), are for many women an experience of complete violation of their bodily integrity; women who are dedicated are so poor and so young, the question of their true choice is totally meaningless.

One of the most disempowering features of women's internalization of patriarchal standards of sexuality is their complete ignorance of their bodies. The many myths that are linked with fertility and sexuality – “menstrual blood is dirty and polluting”, “if a girl is not controlled and married off early, she brings shame to her family and her community”, “women's sexuality is dangerous to society”, “it's the woman's fault if she has only girls”, act as socializing agents which reinforce within women a negative self-image and an apathy towards their body and sexuality.³¹ These attitudes lead to disastrous consequences for women's reproductive health. They are antecedents of women's neglect of their bodies, the ignoring of early signals of illness, and the hesitation and fear to talk about their illness.

The ‘free will’ to decide for themselves and their bodies is in fact a mirage for women cross-culturally, as they are products of institutionalised systems that have purchased their consent by co-opting them. Take the case of brahminical patriarchy in

31 See Sabala and Kranti, *Na Shariram Nadhi - My Body is Mine*, July 1995.

India. The need for effective control over the sexuality of upper caste women was imperative for the maintenance of caste purity. Thus,

“..... the structure of social relations which shaped gender was reproduced by achieving the compliance of women. Women’s perpetuation of the caste system was achieved partly through their investment in a structure that rewarded them even as it subordinated them at the same time All the anxiety displayed by the early texts to monitor the upper caste woman’s sexuality for maintaining her purity and thus of the caste would become somewhat unnecessary once women became complicit in the larger structure in which their own subordination was embedded.”³²

The control of women’s bodies through the regulation of their fertility for the pursuance of population policy by the State is an example of how women’s bodies are often pawns in the struggles among individuals, families, religions and states.³³ The global dimensions of this issue are more and more evident as women from the developing world protest against the pushing of hormonal contraceptives by multinational drug companies on their women. While many women especially from poor households, clearly voice their need for contraception, they certainly do not bargain for complications that arise from trials (women may not even be aware they are participating in a trial), and extremely poor follow-up, by making this choice to control their fertility.

The challenges facing us are increasing in number. Domestic violence within the impregnable realm of the family and the violation of women’s bodies by perpetrators who are often meant to be their protectors – the army, the police, forest officials – are so common, they have ceased to outrage public

32 Uma Chakravarti, *Conceptualising Brahminical Patriarchy in Early India - Gender, Caste, Class and State*, in *Economic and Political Weekly* 1993, 28(14).

33 Shobha Raghuram and Anika Rahman, *Charting the Reproductive Rights Agenda*, in *Technical Report Series 1.4* (Bangalore: Humanistic Institute for Co-operation with Developing Countries (HIVOS) 1996).

conscience and remain mere reportage in newspapers. The most well-known case is of Budhiben, a tribal woman from the Narmada Bachao Andolan, who was protesting the submergence of her village because of a large irrigation-cum-hydro-electric power project. She was pulled out of her house at night by three policemen and dragged into a ditch and raped, after which she was jailed. However, even though activists protested for many months, the government took no action. Since then local officers and policemen have routinely abused the activists sexually as an act of chastisement.³⁴

For poor, low caste women, redressal for the most inhuman violation of their bodies by upper caste/class men shall remain a distant dream so long as the nexus between caste status and political clout continues to sabotage their access to justice. Through the objectification of women, the dominant media, especially cinema, also play a dangerous role in normalizing violence against women, and in creating a mind-set that exonerates acts of violence. Changing economic relations in places of tourist interest like Goa could also be increasing the exploitation of women.³⁵ There is a major pressure for people to sell their land for the construction of hotels, golf courses etc. and the government has also been taking over the common lands, used by the entire community but not held in the name of any one person. Inflation is making it hard for the local population to survive and women are going to work for the tourist industry where they end up being offered exploitative jobs. As the politics of identity assume tremendous importance in determining access to resources in a highly competitive world, women's bodies become dangerously vulnerable in the games that families, communities and even countries play for economic gain. We live in times where fundamentalists and obscurantists are curtailing women's rights and pushing them into the penumbra of some mythical glorious past – an act which is seen as crucial and central to the assertion of the purity and superiority.

34 See SAKSHI - an NGO, *Violence against Women*, in the Indian NGOs report on CEDAW, Co-ordination Unit for the World Conference on Women-Beijing '95, New Delhi, December 1995.

35 *ibid.*

Within this abysmal scenario, the work of NGOs and women's groups in the areas of women's sexual and reproductive health is an encouraging flip side. The campaigns of the Indian women's movement have brought changes in many laws - one of them being the rape law, where the burden of proof has been shifted from the victim to the perpetrator. The movement has forced the government to legislate against sex-determination and sex pre-selection technologies which have been used to commit female foeticide. It has also been a tireless watchdog of population control programs that abuse women's bodies and violate their human rights. Activists have enabled the creation of a vast body of knowledge about women's sexuality, cultural construction of women's bodies, women's perceptions of their bodies and their reproductive health problems, through detailed documentation.

Grassroots women have regained and reclaimed control over their body in many ways. Through collective reflection about myths, body mapping exercises that enable them come out of ignorance, and understand their bodies, access to information about reproductive technology and spacing methods, the revitalization of traditional herbal methods of healing of which they have been custodians; and even though with much less success, through the tenacious pursuit of law and justice, and participation in international fora, women are challenging the colonization of their bodies.

5. Women's Control over their Physical Mobility

An important and less discussed parameter of women's status is women's control over their physical mobility. Physical mobility has to be examined along the following dimensions:

- I. Does a woman have the autonomy to move freely as an individual? If not, then,
- II. Which are the places a woman has sanction to go ?
- III. Is she allowed to go to these places alone or does she need an escort ?

IV. How do factors such as caste, class, religion, age, impact of economic changes on the household etc. impact upon her mobility ?

The sociological inter-relationship between caste, class and women's mobility is interesting. Patriarchal controls on women's sexuality are maximum in the case of upper castes. The fear of pollution due to inter-marriage or illegitimate sexual contact of their women with lower-caste men, as well as the premium on family honour and avoiding shame in upper caste households, results in severe regulation and control of women's sexuality, which is perceived as the key to the maintenance of caste purity. However, there is tacit social sanction for upper-caste men to have sexual access to lower-caste women. Control of women's sexuality directly manifests itself in the control of their physical mobility. The lower castes who have always provided the manual labour force, have little choice but to send their women out to work and to relax norms of sexual chastity and exclusivity for their women.

Apart from caste rules, menstrual taboos in many cultures and religious strictures also are significant determinants of women's mobility. The controls on physical mobility are maximum in the child-bearing age. The obsession with women's chastity (an euphemism for female monogamy) underlies the limits placed on the mobility of women in the childbearing age. In fact in India, adolescent girls are almost always escorted by male or older female relatives because of the anxiety to safeguard their virginity. Conversely, older women enjoy a greater degree of freedom of movement although widows are disallowed from participating in certain social events. Caste and community rules also impinge upon men's right to mobility. However, the transgression of women's rights to free mobility is much more. Women's gender identity, as is clear from the above discussion, interplays with their other identities and severely limits women's free mobility and makes it a determinant of patriarchal authority.

Control over mobility is a very sensitive and important indicator of autonomy as it debunks the myth that it is the poor and

low caste women who have a lower status. The theory of Sanskritisation,³⁶ and more recent research studies,³⁷ have in fact demonstrated how rising social status results in seclusion and loss of autonomy for women. What is clear is that women's mobility is determined by patriarchal whims and is not based on her choice as an autonomous person. Caste, class and religious rules are conveniently remedied in the event of economic necessity as in the case of Haryana, where poor women are allowed to move about in a village for work provided they cover their face,³⁸ the veiling in this case, being symbolic of patriarchal controls. Thus, if work outside home becomes a dire need, women receive sanction to move out, but within strictly-controlled conditions. Control over mobility is closely related to social notions of women's sexuality as discussed in the earlier section.

In urban India, caste and religious identities become diluted. Women in cities seem to have access to much more public space. The acute paucity of space also loosens patriarchal controls. However, it should not be assumed that urban women necessarily enjoy greater mobility. At this juncture it is vital to remember that an important dimension of the mobility parameter is the autonomy a woman has to choose where she wants to go. Where such choice is absent, her mobility is more an outcome of the demands of her social roles than of her free will. As discussed above, the compulsions of poverty or rising consumerism and standards of living, push women from urban poor and middle class communities into the labour market. Similarly, the urban woman may use public transport to access the nearest hospital for her children, but it may be unthinkable for her to take a bus to go to a cinema theater or to a restaurant with other women or to go to the municipal ward office if she thinks it necessary. Again, the physical distance of the nearest Primary Health Centre, and the need to use public transport may be strong demotivators affecting a rural woman, but she is permitted to

36 See M N Srinivas, *The Changing Role of Sanskritization and Other Essays* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1956).

37 See Chowdhury in Banerjee, *op.cit.*

38 *ibid.*

trek miles alone, if necessary to the water source, or to the forest for collection of firewood.

Physical mobility, although a vital parameter of status, is unfortunately a double-edged sword, since most societies seem to have little respect for women's bodily integrity. Free mobility makes women vulnerable to assault, molestation and rape. Problems of desertion or bigamy by the husband, destitution and a higher degree of alienation in urban surroundings makes women extremely vulnerable in cities. The breakdown of traditional social control and support systems, absence of control over private resources or the lack of ownership of private assets, makes women in urban settlements a high-risk category in case of desertion and consequent destitution. Women often end up on the streets and are exposed to the predictable danger of sexual harassment. Increased physical mobility cannot directly translate into higher status unless there is a social transformation that makes free mobility a safe proposition for women.

In rural areas, most organisations working with women find it an uphill task just to get women to attend meetings in public places. Getting women to come out of their homes, and that too after dark is an impossible task. However, the most exciting moments for women who have been part of a consciousness-raising process are the times that they have travelled out of their villages.

Understanding the value of this, *Swayam Shikshan Prayog* (a network of NGOs and women's collectives in India), has organised learning exchanges which are basically opportunities created for women to move out of their circumscribed spaces. These exchanges have repeatedly validated the theory that increased exposure to the outside world, and to the experiences of other organisations, is not only the most effective way to learn, but empowering in multiple ways. One of the most liberating experiences that women adult learners in the literacy campaign in Pudukkottai in Tamil Nadu have had, is the training that they received in cycling. For poor, illiterate, rural women, the cycle was a means to have access to the world outside and cycling, a very empowering experience.

6. Women's Access to, and Control over Political Spaces

No society can claim to have given its women equal status unless they wield equal political power at all levels. The entry of women into political spaces (including local self government, trade unions, federations of the urban and rural poor, caste/community associations, etc.), is probably the most decisive factor that can reorder the power-relations between men and women in the public arena. "Sustainable and long-term change in the subordination of women is essentially a political process, and can be successfully completed only when women storm the formal institutions of political power that have thus far been controlled by men, particularly those of the dominant social groups."³⁹

Common reactions about women politicians or about women in power are that "they are no different from men in fact even worse" or "they are completely ineffective or incapable" or "they have done nothing for the advancement of women." The truth is that mainstream political structures operate in ways which women have to adapt to, in order to survive. In the absence of other models to emulate, women are often influenced by existing models of leadership (which may be aggressive and dictatorial) and by the traditional (hierarchical and patronage-dispensing) ways in which power has been exercised. Not a single woman entering such an institution can be expected to change its entrenched character single-handedly. Women in power may also be unwilling to challenge hegemonic ideologies underlying institutions and structures from which they stand to gain. This is particularly true when the women themselves belong to dominant groups, where challenging male hegemony may force them to relinquish their stakes as women from upper castes and classes.

Thus, structures and institutions cannot become gender-just until there is:

- I. a critical mass of women within these structures with a feminist consciousness to materially affect their culture and functioning, and

39 Batliwala, *Transforming of Political Culture*, *op. cit.*

- II. a strategic link between these women and a mass-based progressive women's movement to which they feel accountable.⁴⁰

However, it is not the obligation of women alone to transform the nature of power. A critical mass of women can be rendered ineffective unless their combined force is complemented by the will of male allies who also perceive a stake in the transformation of feudal, patriarchal structures. The recent *volte face* by the government which had initially committed to introducing a bill for one third reservation of seats for women in Parliament, is an excellent case in point. Despite the support of all women members of Parliament, the bill was not introduced; the government claimed that there was no consensus amongst all parties!

The recent entry of poor women into politics in large numbers has been an encouraging step towards their empowerment.⁴¹ Through two radical Amendments to the Constitution, the Indian state has taken affirmative action by introducing minimum quotas (of 33%) for women representatives in urban and rural local government bodies. This has legitimized and created a space for women's increased participation and representation in the political sphere. However, most of these women come into the political system with several gender-related handicaps. These include illiteracy, responsibility for housework and child care in addition to paid employment, social and familial opposition to their involvement in public life, a poor self-image and lack of self-confidence, and ignorance about the political system into which they are inducted usually without any preparation.⁴² Many women are actively prevented from participating in the activities of these bodies by male family members and colleagues. The former sometimes insist on attending meetings

⁴⁰ *ibid.*

⁴¹ The Indian State has, by a Constitutional amendment, recorded its commitment to affirmative action for improving women's status. With the 73rd and 74th amendments to the Indian Constitution, a third of the seats in village and district panchayats and municipal bodies have been reserved for women.

⁴² See Ammu Joseph, *GRAMSAT - A Potentially Powerful Tool for Empowerment*, in Madhyam 1994, X (1).

in their place while the latter often take advantage of their illiteracy, ignorance of procedures, neglecting to send them notice of meetings, taking decisions in their absence, brow-beating them into becoming rubber stamps, and so on.

Consequently, women's ineffective performance and inability to wield power has subsequently come under a lot of criticism. But these negative reactions overlook the fact that male leaders who have emerged from the grassroots have also had similar limitations. It is also based on the premise that there is some mythical state of readiness that women should achieve before they are allowed to play public leadership roles and ignores the fact that experience and practice are often the best way of learning new roles. Obviously, any criticism that upholds the exclusion of a disadvantaged group on the grounds of inadequacies arising from historical and social factors, is merely an attempt to preserve the status quo.

For a sustainable change in gender relations and their status, women must enter political spaces - not only formal political institutions such as local, regional or national legislatures, but also community-level spaces like arbitration committees, water- and forest-management committees, peasant associations, and so forth. This itself is not possible unless the obstacles that impede their effective participation are removed by various means of which affirmative action / quota in political bodies is just one. The bottom line is that it takes more than a legislative change for women's position to improve.

7. Women's Access to, and Control over Intangible Resources

Intangibles such as information and knowledge, the skills required to process, sift, connect, synthesize, apply and strategically use information, self confidence, the skill of articulation, are integral but invisible elements in accessing entitlements and material resources, and in asserting rights. For our analysis, it is useful to make a distinction between two different sets of intangible resources, namely:

- I. Those that an individual may innately possess (and which cannot be logically explained) – such as self-confidence, self-worth, communication skills; and
- II. Those that are acquired - such as information, knowledge, and skills.

Clearly, a just society is one that *ensures* that all individuals, regardless of their innate abilities, can acquire basic levels of the first group of intangibles. In other words, regardless of individual variations, conditions are created where no one's self-confidence or self-worth is negated as a result of social discrimination, that everyone has the right to voice their thoughts, feelings, ideas. What is more, a just society will guarantee every individual an equal opportunity to access information, knowledge and skills, by guarding their right to education, training, and public information.

Because of their historical and social disadvantages, most women have very little access to formal knowledge. This historical handicap denies women the qualifications perceived as necessary for participating in development processes at the community level. The assumptions about women's intellectual inferiority, and the ideological and cultural factors discussed earlier, result in an unwitting conspiracy by male community leaders, male officials and administrative authorities, as well as the state to justify the marginalisation of women from planning and development processes. The result is that policies and actions for community development are not merely gender blind but many times detrimental to women's interests. Increasing women's participation in development has been an important goal for the women's movement so that the goals of social development incorporate women's concerns and agendas, and a shift that can effect sustained mainstreaming of women's interests becomes possible. It has also been the most effective way to challenge assumptions about women's ability and knowledge. By finding solutions to community issues, women have gained credibility, an important and essential intangible on the strength of which they have been able to promote their own interests.

However, this improvement in women's status has not always been a logical or automatic process. Increasingly, actors in development are having to contend with the fact that for women's status to improve, interventions that serve the goals of development also need to be consciously designed to serve the goals of gender equality. They realize that towards this end, women's access to intangibles such as knowledge, information and skills have to be given a central place not just to promote their participation in development, but in order that these very intangibles also become tools to challenge subordination for gender-just development. An empowering approach to equality and development is therefore one that is able to encourage the very process of information transfer, skill building, etc., to privilege women. Such an approach also presupposes the imperative for a distinct space and time that women can use to acquire these resources. In institutional terms, this space and time has been operationalised through the mobilization of women into collectives called *sanghas*, *samooths* or *sangams* in various parts of India.

The collective provides a structure and identity for the coming together of women, a forum for raising consciousness and supporting women's acquisition of whole sets of intangible resources denied to them throughout history. It becomes a political base for women to become influential and powerful – to reflect critically, plan strategically and act collectively. It enables women to seek information, experiment with leadership styles, think critically and strategically, build a range of skills – in articulation, persuasion, bargaining, negotiation, decision making, protest, confrontation, etc., and use synergy to grapple with change processes. In many instances, the collective acts as an agent of re-socialization by providing the opportunity for members to collectively question norms and beliefs governing social institutions and reflect about possible ways in which these may be challenged and reformulated. Most importantly, it terminates women's isolation, becomes a vehicle for their participation in public processes and becomes a support structure for handling the backlash or resistance to their efforts.

For most women, it is the collective that is able to provide the much needed leverage to negotiate the chasm between

status quo and change. Through their collective strength, women have interacted with officials from banks, formal credit institutions, and from the administration. In many cases, it has been the savings and credit groups that have supported and encouraged members to enter into local self-government bodies. The collective as a unit of social change is also an instrument that promotes women's visibility. Based on how it functions, communities may be more willing or less willing to renegotiate gender roles. A classic example is the case of the women hand-pump mechanics trained by the Mahila Samakhya Programme in Uttar Pradesh.

The programme developed its initial thrust by seeking to increase women's access to skills, and to train large numbers of women in specific skills useful for community development. The choice of skills was strategic. Training in masonry, and repair of hand pumps used to pump water from bore wells was given to women and the tangible results as manifest in the living standards of the area earned them tremendous respect. The strategy targeted issues crucial to the community (water and housing) and made many dents. It broke the myths that women cannot handle technology, that women are physically and intellectually weak, that these are "men's jobs". It was also a powerful negotiating tool for questioning caste hierarchies - the women who were trained were poor, lower caste women considered in the traditional caste hierarchy as polluting. However, their new status as 'mechanics', gave them the cutting edge with which to negotiate untouchability before undertaking repair work for the upper castes whose hand-pumps needed repair.⁴³ For women themselves, the transition from "*roti, gobar karnewali*" (one who makes bread and cow dung cakes) to "mechanic *sahab*" (Mr. Mechanic!) was a fundamental shift. Their collective strength as a women mechanics group was a major support mechanism in the event of any conflict with the community, with the dominant castes etc.

When women start challenging patriarchal ideology, even as a collective, there is a tremendous upheaval within the community and within their homes. Families may disapprove of their association with the collective because it brings disrepute or

43 See a report by Mahila Samakhya, *Knowledge is like Flowing Water - A Collection of Theme Papers from the Mahila Samakhya Programme*, edited by Abha Bhaiya and Kalyani Menon Sen. (Department of Education, Government of India. n.d.)

because their free mobility or new social roles, demand a restructuring of men's gender roles within the home. During this phase, women's status within the community gets slowly eroded. For most women, it is the household that has hitherto been the primary social capital. When they begin to challenge its rules, and behave in ways that do not have its sanction, women can become extremely vulnerable. It is here that the collective acts as the alternate source of affirmation giving women the space to negotiate the upheaval, absorbing their personal and individual crisis. Eventually, as the activities of the collective gain credibility, women's social image gets recreated. Many women's collectives in India enjoy the trust of the community and wield considerable power. Women leaders from Mahila Milan, the sister organization of the National Slum Dwellers Federation (NSDF) have continuously engaged with male leadership of the NSDF, extending support to the federation's struggles with the administration on basic needs issues and housing rights, ensuring at the same time the adequate representation of women's agendas in relation to these issues. For the NSDF, the Mahila Milan has become an essential political ally.

As examples in the earlier section on women's efforts to access public resources also indicate, the collective becomes the means to acquire intangible assets such as clout, authority and access to positions of power. Not only through grassroots collectives but also through networks, trade unions, and regional caucuses, women have successfully played on tough grounds, as political forces advocating for change, demanding accountability from authorities, and lobbying for resources.

8. Position of Women in Law and Women's Access to Legal Redress

Within the framework of a nation-state whose people are governed by a constitutional and legal regime, law defines people as legal entities. Law provides a regulatory environment and pervades every social institution and structure. Most importantly, the rights available to them as citizens are enshrined in law. For women, law is a tool to seek redressal since their rights as citizens and as women are guaranteed to them by law. Law creates spaces for women to contest beliefs and practices violative of their rights in public, and has the potential for

changing institutions in the most fundamental ways. Although not an end in itself, law is an important means to justice.

The Constitution guarantees the right to non-discrimination on the basis of sex and specifically recognizes the need for special provisions for women in view of existing gender-based inequalities between men and women. The Constitution acts as a reference point by elaborating on the principles that the State must apply while formulating laws. However, the articulation of the position of women in the Indian Constitution does not really serve as a guiding force in ensuring their access to justice. This is because there is no code defining in clear terms what the approach to gender equality should be, with the result that the constitutional guarantees are often used more to reinforce protective measures in favour of women, rather than challenging norms and assumptions that underpin women's inequality relative to men.⁴⁴ The Directive Principles of State Policy, contained in the Constitution, are an important and fundamental part of the framework of governance in the country. But there is no accountability mechanism or a way to ensure that the state really acts upon these guidelines or principles. For instance, the Directive Principles in Article 44 direct the state to endeavour to secure a uniform civil code governing rights in marriage, divorce, property, guardianship and so on. However, the State has taken no measures to ensure that the laws governing these areas (currently based on religion) are made gender-just as a first step to ensuring a common code. Every political party in power is reluctant to tread on the territory of a common civil code because of the political fall-outs. Entrenched patriarchal norms in the majority community, particularly regarding inheritance rights of women, have always resisted any attempts at changing the personal laws governing Hindus. Similarly, minority communities perceive attempts to change their personal laws as an imposition of the dominant, majority, religious world-view, and steps in this direction could lead to loss of critical minority votes. So governments will not make the strategic error of displeasing their vote banks. In the final analysis, women from all communities are at the mercy of unjust religious laws that govern their lives.

44 *ibid.*

Although fundamental freedom and rights are guaranteed equally to men and women, women's lives remain untouched by these provisions. In the Indian reality, women are bound by inequitable family norms and traditions as well as community and religious rules, which completely contravene the rights assured to them by law. Further, legal discourse is not above or uncorrupted by social beliefs and standards of normalcy and morality. A detailed study of many Indian laws reflect the fact that law, in fact, is rooted in a certain conception of women's sexuality.

"Men's affirmation of themselves as subjects is derived from their power over women, who are objectified and exist only for their pleasure. This is systematized through a heterosexual paradigm which is regularized through law... The underlying assumptions of women's sexuality in law seems to operate from two premises. One is a fear of women's sexuality which is sought to be curbed through the institutionalisation of marriage and the wider network of heterosexuality. The other is a seemingly contradictory assumption that women are inferior objects, puppets of the patriarchs and need to be subjugated."⁴⁵

Among the factors that act as obstacles to women's access to legal redressal the most significant is the way the legal system works against their interests. For example, sexual assault that does not involve 'penetration' is listed in the Indian Penal Code as 'Outraging a Woman's Modesty' and is perceived as a less serious offense than rape (which centres around the act of penetration). Thus the values which reflect legal redress for women do not cater to their needs specifically, but to what is perceived to be their need by men.⁴⁶ Many feminist legal experts in India also feel that laws such as the Rape Law, Sati Prevention Bill, and Immoral Traffic Prevention Act, which are supposedly for protecting women from violence, actually penalize the woman. They focus on stringent punishment rather than on plugging procedural loopholes, evolving guidelines for strict implementation, adequate compensation to the victims and a time limit for deciding cases. They vest more power with the state enforcement machinery and instead

45 See Gopika Solanki and Geetanjali Gangoli, *Reining Women's Sexuality Through Laws* (paper presented at the Seventh National Conference of the Indian Association of Women's Studies, Jaipur, December 1995).

46 See SAKSHI-an NGO, *op. cit.*

of empowering women, they have served to strengthen the state.⁴⁷ Stricter punishment has meant fewer convictions and this has brought into focus the need to locate progressive legal changes for women's rights within the larger context of progressive theories of civil rights.

Expensive court fees, very little legal aid, women's fear of the court and their reluctance to bring to book their own brothers, fathers, or husbands, the absence of support structures, and above all women's ignorance of their rights in law limit their access to legal redress. What also prevents the poor from taking the legal road to justice is their lack of faith in the police, and their unfamiliarity with police procedures. In the case of poor women, the lack of trust is probably well founded given the utter disregard of the police for women's physical and emotional agony when they come to report a crime, and that many women have experienced a further violation of their rights and their bodies by the police when they actually come to lodge a complaint.

Although women's position in law seems disillusioning, the necessity to use it for redress cannot be undermined. Many laws in India are perhaps ahead of their times in that social attitudes towards women have not kept pace with the egalitarian content of these laws. The 73rd and 74th amendments to the Indian Constitution which stipulate the reservation of one-third of the seats in local government panchayats (local self-governments at the village level) and municipal corporations, is an excellent case in point.

An interesting feature of the Indian legal system is the coexistence of the traditional and customary laws with the formal legal system. Although the family laws of the dominant religious groups, Hindus, Muslims, Christians, and Parsis have been reformed, the customary laws governing marriage and family relations have been left untouched.⁴⁸ The main reason perhaps is that, in a context where practices differ from village

47 See Flavia Agnes, *Violence Against Women – Review of Recent Enactments* (paper presented at the National Seminar on Women and Law, New Delhi, January 1994).

48 See Vasudha Dhagamvar, *Marriage and Family Law* in the Indian NGOs Report on CEDAW, Co-ordination Unit for the World Conference on Women-Beijing '95, New Delhi, December 1995.

to village, and community to community, the heterogeneity of these laws makes codification an impossibility. Till today, in many parts of India, Nyaya panchayats (justice committees) arbitrate and adjudicate cases. Village level justice committees are usually made up of the dominant castes although caste specific bodies – Jati panchayats, also dispense justice. It can be said with reasonable confidence that almost none of these committees has a woman serving on it. While it may seem rather primitive to seek justice through these bodies in a democracy, with a well established formal justice system, these local bodies are of tremendous relevance to most communities, the most important reason being the speedy dispensing of cases and their proximity. In many ways and in the case of many tribes, the laws are much more egalitarian and gender-just. Divorce is permitted and so is remarriage, crimes against women are also condemned severely, fines may be levied and/or a public apology sought from the accused, and this public condemnation of the crime provides women a sense of justice and requital. These practices are not, however, uniform across the board. Many Nyaya panchayats are also biased against the poor, the lower castes and women.

However, given their legitimacy and power in most communities, they become an important area of intervention for grassroots women's groups and perhaps strategically also, potential collaborators in developing communities in gender-just ways.

Many NGOs in India help women take recourse to legal action by providing legal awareness, legal aid and a lot of emotional and practical support. However, such services are relatively scarce in rural areas. There are a few NGOs that also provide legal literacy services, by reaching out to villages and making women aware of their rights. The experiences of these groups has pointed to the fact that poor women are often so unaware of their fundamental freedoms that the notion of 'rights' is for them an alien concept - they tend to be much more conversant with the concepts of responsibilities and obligations. Legal literacy for a large majority begins from here. An important insight for NGOs working in the area of legal literacy is that the combination of collective strength and legal information is forceful enough to facilitate changes.

Poor women have enjoyed the returns from legal literacy when they have used their knowledge about the law as a collective. In women's own words:

"Our work is to break stones into even sized small pieces. We work in a factory. The men were paid Rs. 30 and the women were paid Rs. 20. When we heard about the equal wages law, we did not go for work, did not permit our men folk to work and prevented outside labour to enter the factory premises. Within one week we got equal wages."⁴⁹ And, "There was a theft in the village. A man was accused and arrested. The police came to take away his wife. All the *sangha* women got together and demanded to see the warrant. They informed him that he could not arrest a woman after sunset and could not take her to the police station without the presence of a woman police constable. We forced him to go away and not harass us."⁵⁰

Gradually, the need to sensitize the judiciary, the police and the administrative machinery is gaining acceptance, and the state itself has supported and initiated such training. What seems important is for women to engage with the law - use it in their struggle despite its limitations, and build a feminist legal discourse upon which the future of law may be built.

Conclusion

In reality, women's experience of subordination and low status is not compartmentalized. However, we have presented a set of tools which, though not all-encompassing, enable a deeper and more sensitive analysis of the nature of women's status and gender relations. It attempts to unearth and highlight the intersecting and multiple ways in which access to, and control over resources, mediated through social institutions and structures, affects gender relations. It aims to generate a more holistic picture of the interlinked dimensions of status across the various indicators.

49 Annual Report, Hengasara Hakkinna Sangha (an NGO working for the empowerment of women through legal literacy).

50 *ibid.*

Chapter 2

Methodology

We have already drawn attention to the existence of quite a few lacunae in traditional research done in women's studies. In the previous chapter, we have tried to broaden and deepen several concepts used in research done in this area and, in the process, have clarified these concepts. Developing the concepts further involved the interaction of theory with method, against the background of feminism and feminist research. We will describe how we operationalized the concepts delineated in the previous chapter. This generated the data collected by women activities, which was then analysed in a manner that would deepen our understanding of the realities of the status of rural women in Karnataka.

This chapter is divided into three sections: the first section discusses the basic theoretical framework of feminist research via a critique of conventional research, the second explicates the methodology that we adopted for the project while the third section looks at the SRWK research process through the lens of feminism.

Section 1:

Theoretical framework of Feminist Research

Feminism challenges the epistemological foundations of Western thought, and argues that this knowledge base is fundamentally misconceived. Conventional research in the social sciences, for instance, has historically been influenced by the prescriptions of the scientific method. Broadly, this has meant adherence to the tenets of the physical sciences – the precedence of 'objective' knowledge over the subjective, the derision of subjective interpretations of 'truth', the emphasis

that there is one absolute truth and the dismissal of individual differences. Therefore, there has been a denial of the conditions of knowledge production, including the attributes, assumptions, world views and frameworks of the producer in knowledge-creation.

In recent times, the social science disciplines have seen the emergence of well developed critiques which have challenged the scientific method. These critiques argue against the subject-object dichotomy, tendencies within disciplines to build theories with universal validity, and the pursuit of "absolute truth". Rather, they make a strong case for the contextualisation of knowledge claims, often specifying the boundaries within which they are valid. For instance, cultural boundaries, economic class, religion, the conditions under which they are generated, the power relations that exist and the like. Thus, it is now recognized that knowledge is different for different groups, and possibly even at different times. Such developments within the social sciences have therefore recognized the notion of differences and set about showing how they are not reflected in traditional epistemology, and also how they may thus better inform the latter.

Feminist social scientists have enabled further introspection by disciplines about processes of knowledge creation, for instance by revealing their androcentricism. They have drawn attention to the fact that in addition to being socially constructed, all knowledge has historically reflected the dominant ideology, serving the interests of the powerful. In this manner, social sciences have traditionally represented men's experiences and perspectives, and promoted largely their points of view and interests. In contrast, the subordinate position of women in society has meant the exclusion of women's experiences and perspectives from the creation of knowledge, and many times, an outright suppression. Thus "feminist analysis is most obviously putting women in where they have been left out, about keeping women on the stage rather than relegating them to the wings."¹

1 Susan J. Hekman, *Gender and Knowledge: Elements of a Postmodern Feminism* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990).

Feminism, therefore, seeks to transform knowledge by instating women's experiences and perspectives within academic discourse. Towards this end, it attempts to reshape the mainstream rather than getting subsumed within the male character of the mainstream. "But to do this suggests questions about structures that have left women out, about the way theories have been constructed without women being a part of this and hence calls for a profound rethinking."²

However, it needs to be stressed that all women do not share the 'same' experience of oppression. The quality of women's experience and oppression is bound to be different. Feminist research recognizes that woman (as also man) is a socially and politically constructed category that varies by caste, class, ethnicity and other factors. More recently, postmodern feminists have furthered the argument that knowledge is historically, culturally and socially rooted; they assert that experiences have to be contextualized within micro-politics and make a case for the existence of a *range of different*, but equally valid, feminist standpoints from conservative liberal to radical feminist.

Feminism thus accounts for the fact that the experience of women is "ontologically fractured and complex because we do not all share one single and unseamed material reality."³

An important aspect of feminist research is that it is not for providing answers to questions 'about' women; social actors or institutions may raise questions and issues merely to consolidate their traditional power and control over women. Feminist research is, in fact, a political project that seeks to bring about change to promote women's interests. Feminist research is therefore, not 'about' women, but 'for' women. Lather also conceptualizes feminist research as a political project.⁴ She argues for a research process that is change-

² *ibid.*

³ Liz Stanley and Sue Wise, *Method, Methodology and Epistemology in Feminist Research Processes*. in *Feminist Praxis* edited by Liz Stanley, pp. 20-47 (London: Routledge, 1990).

⁴ Patti Lather, *Feminist Perspectives on Empowering Research Methodologies*, in *Women's Studies Int. Forum* 1988, 11(6): 569-581.

enhancing and emancipatory, one that is a reciprocally educative process in which emphasis is on consciousness-raising and transformative social action. Feminist inquiry thus has the potential (as well as the responsibility) for the conscientization of women and men, and for the use of research as a tool for empowerment. Feminist writings on methodology also assert that to be transformative, the knowledge that research generates has to be accessible to everyone.

Feminist research followed significant strides made in current times in fields like anthropology, which questioned the notion of 'observer' and 'observed' and explicated the possibility of indigenous knowledge systems. Feminist research replaced 'scientific objectivity' and 'strict neutrality' with 'conscious subjectivity', where the researcher essentially lends his /her experience to the interpretation of facts and figures collected. Feminist knowledge is thus epistemologically different because it is ontologically different. "Feminism is not merely a 'perspective', a way of seeing; nor even this plus an epistemology, a way of knowing; it is also an ontology, or a way of being in the world."⁵

Theory generated through feminist inquiry is based on the principle of reflexivity, an openness that allows for constant reflection. Central to the feminist research process is "the interaction between the researcher and researched, the mutual and inseparable dependency, of facts and feelings, figures and intuition, the obvious and the hidden, doing and talking, behaviour and attitudes."⁶

Succinctly, feminist theory may be said to have the following features. It is

- I. Derived from experience analytically entered into by inquiring feminists;

5 Liz Stanley and Sue Wise, *op.cit.*

6 Sheila Sreenivasan, *The Indian Journal of Social Work – Special Issue: Sexism in Research* 1992, 53(3): 319-328.

- II. Continually subject to revision in the light of that experience;
- III. Thus reflexive and self-reflexive and accessible to everyone (not just to theoreticians as a special kind of person); and
- IV. Certainly not to be treated as sacrosanct and enshrined in 'texts' to be endlessly pored over like chicken entrails.⁷

The most important contribution made by feminism and feminist researchers lies in its fundamental premise that 'woman' is a valid and necessary category in any feminist inquiry or research. 'Women have common experiences by virtue of being women and "these shared experiences derive not causally from supposed 'biological facts' but women's common experience of oppression."⁸ Feminist inquiry thus seeks to give a legitimate place to this experience of oppression and subordination which was absent in previously generated knowledge.

Section 2: Methodology of the SRWK Research Study

The SRWK project was divided into two distinct phases of activities. The methodological steps involved in each phase are described in detail below. The study started in August 1994 and the first draft of the report of the study was ready by July 1997. It is this three year process that has been discussed in this section.

Phase I

This phase comprised three key activities of project planning, secondary study and primary research planning. Detailed planning of the project, and setting up of appropriate systems and mechanisms for supporting the research involved forming

⁷ Stanley and Wisc, *op. cit.*, pp. 24.

⁸ *ibid.*, pp. 21.

an advisory team of individuals from different fields to help the WOPRA team. The secondary research study involved the collection and analysis of available secondary data on different aspects of women's status in Karnataka which took over one year. The data was collated and analysed under five parameters, namely, demographic and health status, education status, work and employment, political participation, and violence / crimes against women. Preparation for, and planning of, the primary research study followed and this involved several important activities which are described in detail below:

1. Involvement of NGOs in the SRWK research process:

The key objectives of the SRWK project was to base advocacy on a solid foundation of research, and to transform the research process in two ways:

- i) To make research itself an instrument of advocacy. In order to do this, we felt that conventional research processes would have to be re-cast, by designing them in such a way that every stage of the research itself becomes an act of advocacy, by sensitizing everyone involved in the research to the problems of women and their low status in society.
- ii) To make the research as participatory as possible, by involving NGOs and activists directly working in the community in the identification of research questions, and later, by feeding the research results back to the concerned organisations and communities so that their strategies and struggles are informed by the research findings.
- iii) We felt that in order to achieve these two over-arching objectives, NGOs and activists committed to gender-justice must be involved in the process right from the inception, from the stage of identifying the research questions onwards. Consequently, an NGO consultation meeting was organised in November 1994, in order to:
 - a) Orient them to the nature and potential of the proposed study of the Status of Rural Women in Karnataka

- b) Brainstorm on the issues that need to be studied in the SRWK primary study
- c) Explore possibilities of partnership with the NGOs for conducting the primary study and subsequent advocacy.

Over 80 individuals and NGO representatives were invited, and a total of 49 people from all over Karnataka attended the consultation. A series of research issues were identified by the participants. Although not all of these could be addressed in the primary research study, they formed one of the main inputs into the identification of the research questions for the study. Some of them would have to be researched through secondary data analysis and qualitative studies to be taken up by the Unit in the course of time.

2. Identifying research questions: Research questions were identified through several processes, including the consultative meeting with NGOs from across the state, the review of secondary data and literature, and the advice and suggestions of experts from diverse fields.

3. Development of a conceptual framework for the study, through a review of existing literature for approaches, measurements, and frameworks for analyzing women's status. The conceptual framework used 7 broad parameters for measuring women's status:

- i) Women's Control over their Labour and Income
- ii) Women's Access to Public Resources
- iii) Women's Control over Private Assets and Resources
- iv) Women's Control over their Bodies
- v) Women's Control over their Physical Mobility
- vi) Women's Access to and Control over Political Spaces
- vii) Women's Access to Rights and Legal Redressal

4. Defining the parameters of the primary study, which included several decisions about its scope and magnitude, namely:

- i) We realized that qualitative research is far superior to understand many of the dynamics of women's status, we nevertheless took this decision for two critical reasons:
 - a) Secondary data review had shown clearly the absence of data on some of the most vital dimensions of the women's position or status in society; and
 - b) We realized that a small-scale micro-study on these dimensions would not be as effective an instrument for subsequent advocacy as a large-scale quantitative study. Past experience had shown that government officials, particularly, often dismiss micro-studies, whereas large-scale, state-wide data is taken much more seriously.
- ii) Given the project's time-frame, and the limited human and financial resources at our disposal, it would not be possible to cover both urban and rural women. The study would therefore focus on rural women at this stage.
- iii) A study of the status of any group is inherently comparative and relational in nature; i.e., we cannot measure the status of a social group without comparing it with that of some other group. Therefore, it was decided that the study of the status of rural women in Karnataka would have to have a control group of rural men

In order for the study to be truly representative, and therefore less assailable at the advocacy stage, the sample would have to be drawn from all the regions – historico-political and agro-climatic – of Karnataka state. A total of 6 districts was chosen.

5. Preparation of the Tool for Data Collection: Separate interview schedules were developed for men and women, based on initial pre-testing. Each schedule was divided into approximately 18 sections, to elicit over 200 items of data, household and individual. The data generated was largely quantitative, although the questionnaire did provide for eliciting some qualitative information.

The next section describes in detail the rationale for and method of selection of the respondents.

Phase II

This phase comprised the design and execution of the primary research study. This included several distinct steps, each of which is described in detail below:

1. Defining Women in the Sample : We decided that the study should restrict its focus to ever-married women in the reproductive age group who have the least autonomy and face the greatest constraints in securing their rights. The study sample therefore comprised of ever-married women in the age group 18-40 and their husband; in the event of the women being divorced, deserted or widowed, the key corresponding male of the household – brother-in-law, father-in-law, brother, etc., was interviewed. The survey covered one female and one male respondent, per household.

2. Selection and training of investigators : This was done in collaboration with NGO partners

NGO Partnerships: It was our intention to collaborate with a large number of NGOs in carrying out the study, but this did not materialize for several reasons: To strengthen future advocacy, the study had to be conducted in representative districts – but we could not identify partner organisations willing and able to participate in all the regions. Several of the NGOs who had expressed interest in participating in the initial phases did not respond, or had some constraints when they were contacted subsequently. Therefore, in two districts – Dakshina Kannada and Kodagu, the study was conducted by recruiting a Research Assistant and local teams of male and female investigators.

The partnerships actualized with four NGOs: REACH and Gram Vikas in Kolar district, GRAMA in Chitradurga district, and the quasi-government programs, Mahila Samakhya in Raichur and Bijapur Districts. The contribution of these

organisations to the study has been substantial:

- I. Deputing their field staff and, wherever necessary, identifying volunteers to be trained as investigators.
- II. Selecting appropriate villages, based on the study criteria, for conducting the study.
- III. Providing the facilities and hospitality for conducting the training of the investigators - including space, food, local transport, etc.
- IV. Providing logistical support during the data collection process (including transport, places to stay, liaison with the village leaders, etc.) and,
- V. Taking the responsibility for doing the first-tier checking and correction of all completed schedules.

Training for Data Collection: The team of investigators, both male and female, were given a three day training which covered a brief introduction to the WOPRA Unit, objectives of the study, the framework of the questionnaire, sample definition, types of questionnaire and guidelines for data collection. A considerable amount of time was spent to ensure that the group had acquired clarity about why a certain woman was to be selected and how this was to be done. The interview was carried out by a team of two investigators. While one concentrated on asking the questions in a conversational style, the other looked for suitable codes and recorded them.

3. Data collection and Data Processing : In most places, data-collection immediately followed the training and took approximately 20 days. The field investigators regularly met for some time at the end of the day to clarify doubts and share the experiences in the field. Any problems encountered in the field which the supervisor, trained by the WOPRA team, was unable to solve, was brought to the notice of the WOPRA team.

The NGO took responsibility for first-level checking of data. The WOPRA Unit did the second-level checking. The process of data entry thus happened parallel with checking and data collection in the remaining villages.

Subsequently, the data was tabulated, and selected tables formed the basis of the analysis for the preliminary report. The preliminary report uses only percentage analysis. Detailed analysis using cross tables, regressions and factor analysis is planned to be carried out along with advocacy during the second phase of the project.

Section 3: SRWK as a Feminist Research Process

In this section we will attempt to critically examine the SRWK research project in relation to the crucial aspects of feminist research process. Feminist epistemological principles are applied to various aspects of the SRWK research process and discussed under four major headings:

- I. The Researcher-Researched Relationship
- II. SRWK as an Empowering Process
- III. Managing Differing Realities
- IV. SRWK as a Political Project

I. The Researcher-Researched Relationship

Research claiming to be feminist cannot have the researcher assume the role of the 'expert'. The task of any feminist research is to position women as knowers. From its early stages, the SRWK project was for us a fertile learning ground. We also hoped that the respondents, particularly the women, would also gain from engaging with this process.

However, we felt that this ideal cannot be accomplished if the research process was not designed to ensure a high degree of comfort for women respondents to feel at ease. Also, we had decided to adopt the survey method for certain concrete reasons discussed earlier, and were fully aware that the survey method being largely structured came with inherent

deficiencies. The important challenge therefore was to deal with the hierarchy implicit between the interviewer and the interviewee, arising from the authority vested with the interviewer. Also, in any situation where a woman is interviewed by a man (which has been the practice in surveys), this authority usually interlocks with gender, and results in a power relationship, wherein the woman interviewee is likely to feel acutely uncomfortable. Not only gender but other significant factors such as class, caste, age, education, location of the interview etc., also do have a bearing on the flow of information.

The gender dimension of the interviewer-interviewee interaction has been discussed in feminist literature. Finch asserts that the 'identification' of women with the woman interviewer is fundamental to women's comfort in the interview situation. This identification arises out of the fact that both parties share a subordinate structural position by virtue of their gender. For feminist research, the woman-to-woman interview is thus "not only a methodological but political issue".⁹ We also felt that it was important that women in the SRWK study be interviewed by women.

Finch also points out that having the woman interviewer has other pay-offs, particularly if the interviewer seeks out the woman interviewee at her (the interviewee's) home. This is a situation in which women respondents confined to the domestic sphere because of their subordinate structural position are likely to welcome a sympathetic listener from the 'outside'. Also, the interview acquires the character of an intimate conversation, wherein the interviewer is a friendly guest and not an official inquisitor.

For the SRWK study, the interviews were held at the respondents' home or at any other location identified by the respondents. We also did realize that the survey method

⁹ Janet Finch, *It's great to have someone to talk to : The ethics and politics of interviewing women* in *Social Researching: Politics, Problems, Practice* edited by Colin Bell and Helen Roberts (Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1984).

could result in an inquisition, divesting the interview situation of respect for the respondent, leaving the respondent feeling interrogated. Therefore, we had a team of two investigators for every interview situation. While one concentrated on establishing and developing the conversation, the other focused on locating the appropriate codes and marking them on the questionnaire. Thus, we tried to ensure that an atmosphere of cordiality and respect for the respondent was created. As the conversation progressed, and became more intimate, in several instances, women felt free enough to even interrupt the interview process to ask personal questions to the investigators. Also, the questionnaire was structured in such a way that the questions initially dealt with less private issues like education, public facilities, work etc., and gradually moved into more intimate areas such as sexuality. The partnership with NGOs also helped us deal with the hierarchies introjected into the interview process by factors other than gender. We also felt that members of the NGOs and the local community certainly enjoy greater proximity to the women interviewed than the WOPRA team.

Ensuring the comfort of male respondents in the SRWK study was equally important. Obviously, men would feel a greater degree of comfort in talking about private issues with men rather than women interviewers. It was therefore decided that we also had a team of two men interviewers for every man who was interviewed.

While the pre-coded structure of the questionnaire and the training of the investigators essentially took care of reducing the bias of investigators, the conversational style and the partnership with field-based organization enhanced data validity in that women's experiences and opinions could thus be better represented. No research can claim to have completely bridged the gap between the researcher and researched, as hierarchies cannot be wished away so easily, but the SRWK research did in all earnestness attempt to address the issue.

The Male Interviewer in Feminist Research

The inclusion of men - as interviewers - has vital implications for feminist research. Where men are interviewed, it makes methodological sense to have male interviewers. However, the significance of training for gender-sensitization in this context cannot be overemphasized. Men participating in the research need to be convinced about the larger feminist project. They may hold the view that feminist research is likely to disturb status-quo causing more harm than good to the community. Potential interviewers who are male may come into the research situation assuming that inquiry into matters concerning the private sphere – issues that are central to feminist analysis – are ‘unethical’. We are not suggesting that women who come into the process as interviewers do not hold such views. However, the point is that gender-sensitization and training are a precursor to any feminist research endeavour.

Our experience with the SRWK process suggests that male resistance within training is certainly stronger and harder to deal with. During the training for interviewers preceding the data-collection, our views were constantly ‘attacked’ by the participating men and we were accused of being biased. “Such questions are not relevant to rural women; these are urban, middle-class problems”, we would be told. The women co-trainees (who incidentally were from the same background as the men) would immediately cite examples based on their experiences in support of our position. This affirmation from women trainees was a useful mechanism to deal with male resistance. Also, once the data-collection process began, the men were more willing to see the “problems” and that there is a case for gender equality.

II. SRWK as an Empowering Process

As much as we were concerned with the outcome of the SRWK study, in terms of research findings, we were also keen that the process of the research itself be empowering to all those actively involved in it.

The purpose of doing research for advocacy is that such research should aid the process of transformation and consciousness-raising. But in doing this, we need to guard ourselves against becoming impositional. As Lather observes, "Too often, we who do empirical research in the name of emancipatory politics fail to connect how we do our research to our theoretical and political commitments. ...; we must practice in our empirical endeavors what we preach in our theoretical formulations. Research which encourages self and social understanding and change-enhancing action, requires research designs that allow us as researchers to reflect on how our value commitments insert themselves into our empirical work."¹⁰ Therefore, research for change has to have a strong element of self-reflexivity and dialogue which in conceptualizing consciousness grapples with "how to produce analysis which goes beyond the experience of the researched while still granting them full subjectivity. How do we explain the lives of others without violating their reality?"¹¹ Such a process, in essence, has to aim at empowering the oppressed to come to understand and change their own oppressive realities.

Dialogue in SRWK Research: NGO Partnerships

The agenda and key questions of the SRWK research emerged out of a consultation with leaders and community organizers from Karnataka-based NGOs, as well as activists, academics, feminist researchers, and others committed to women's empowerment. The consultation was a one-day workshop which synthesized the concerns of the group to be taken up as research issues for advocacy. The project proposal had envisaged the equal participation of NGOs in the research in order to have the benefit of their experience in identifying the research questions, and to address the gap between research and grassroots organisations. As Batliwala comments, "Researchers may access communities, households, and

¹⁰ Lather, *op. cit.*, pp. 576

¹¹ Acker et al. quoted in Lather *op. cit.*, pp. 576

individual respondents through grassroots organisations and movements, but the history of such interactions reflects the same hierarchical power relations as are present in larger society, that is, they do not feel responsible to feed the data or results to those organisations, much less the communities from whom the information was, to use Illich's term, 'expropriated'. Field-based organisations end up resenting the way they have been used by the researchers."¹²

Four organisations came forward to participate in the SRWK study as partners shaping the direction of the action-research. The terms of the partnership were worked out mutually, and were based on a shared commitment to be involved the entire process from generating the data, to analyzing it and evolving strategies for change. The NGO partners were also to be co-authors of the report, and as stake-holders in the transformation process, they could use the data for planning their strategies along with people.

Training of Investigators

The participation of NGOs enriched the research process by enabling the interaction of our theoretical formulations and their experiential insights. It lent a dynamism and reflexivity to the research that continuously shaped and reshaped the process. In all the districts where the study was conducted, we held a training programme for the NGO members who were to become field investigators to talk about gender relations, the social construction of the categories – man and woman, the centrality of ideology, the interlocking of class, caste, and other identities with gender, and significance of the conceptual framework of the SRWK research. The training also focused on the interview method and how to use a feminist approach in data collection. We discussed the need for establishing a relationship of respect, comfort, one in which the woman respondent could feel free enough to talk and more importantly, to refuse to talk about her feelings, and

12 Srilatha Batliwala, *Research-based Advocacy as a Tool for Empowering Communities and Enhancing Public Accountability* (paper presented at the International Workshop on Governance, Sao Paulo, October 13-17, 1996).

opinions. During the training which was a residential programme, we jointly wrestled with the concepts of feminism, gender equality, the relevance of feminist research, etc., within and beyond the training sessions. We were conscious that we were not experts in this process and were willing to disagree. The experience of NGO members enabled the inclusion of context-specific categories into the questionnaire. The open learning environment during the training facilitated the creation of a space where the participant members could critique the questionnaire, point to gaps, inconsistencies etc.

At the end of the data collection process, we were happy that the NGOs perceived the partnership as a useful process that had deepened their understanding about the multiple dimensions of women's subordination and gender relations, and catalyzed them to reconsider their strategies for women's empowerment. As Somesh, one of the young male investigators from the NGO, Gram Vikas put it,

*"When we first saw the questionnaire, and when you were training us, we thought it was very biased. It seemed to be full of your biases and exaggerations as urban middle-class women about the problems of poor women. As rural youngsters, we wondered why you were looking for problems that really didn't exist, and why you had been subtly unfair to men. But after doing the study, we have realized that it is we who were blind! We have lived in villages all our lives and never recognised or understood the difficulties of women – how much they work and how much they put up with! The study has permanently changed our way of looking at women."*¹³

It was indeed very affirming that one of our partner NGOs, in their district reports identified the process of the SRWK research as a beginning and expressed commitment to be part of the advocacy programme, following the research: "Our partnership should not be limited to this work only. We should see that the Government brings in changes in policies

13 Interim Report August 1995- June 96 of the WOPRA Unit, submitted to Ford Foundation.

for women. We should also carry out studies about unmarried and widowed women.....”¹⁴

Much as we are happy that our partners have felt empowered, we are also aware that our primary accountability is towards the women for whose empowerment this research project was conceived. Research cannot truly empower unless mechanisms of accountability are built into its design. As Batliwala points out, “There are no mechanisms for making (research for change) accountable ... to the researched Researchers in general, do not see active advocacy based on their findings as part of their role; they believe that acting on the research results is someone else’s responsibility.”¹⁵

At the outset we were aware of the limited role that research *per se* could play in engineering change. It was therefore, that the project was initially planned so as to include an advocacy component. Nevertheless, we also hoped that by constructing a sensitive tool, we would be able to kindle within our women and men respondents a process of conscientisation, at least in some rudimentary form. The responses of some women validates our efforts in this direction.

Many women have asked the investigators – “*Who are these people who thought of all these questions? They seem to know about our lives better than we ourselves!*” One woman told the investigator “*you really have understood my life.*” Another said, when the investigator apologized for taking up her time, “*Why? You did not ask me a single unnecessary question. For once, someone has thought to ask about all the problems that I face. Let the world know what it is to be a woman!*”¹⁶

These responses indicate that the questions in the interview schedule were like starting points for self-reflection, leading the women through various facets of their everyday life, prodding them to think about and possibly even articulate

14 District report of GRAMA.

15 Batliwala, *op. cit.*

16 Interim Report, *op. cit.*

how women actively construct and interpret “social processes and social relations which constitute their everyday reality.”¹⁷

With men in the community, our experiences were mixed. This is not to say that the research failed in raising men’s awareness about gender issues. In many households, the men would start by insisting that the investigators talk to them and not to their women, because “women did not know anything”. The research aptly demonstrated to these very men that women were eminently capable of articulating their feelings, opinions and thoughts as well as of providing concrete information about the household and the village. Some men did even acknowledge this capability in women when they talked to the investigators informally during their stay in the village. “*What is it that you have done to my wife*”, they would ask. “*She has now begun questioning me*”!!

By and large, men were threatened by the research process – that controversial questions with the potential to disturb status quo were being asked of their women, that outsiders with “strange” notions were “instigating” their women, that strange questions about “personal” matters were being asked of “their” women. In one village, the antagonism was openly expressed and the study was abandoned. But many men were also clearly supportive of the larger agenda for women’s equality and it was therefore possible to complete the study in the remaining villages. As women researchers setting out to collect data “for” women, our purpose and ideology was open and explicit. Men in the community knew we were feminists, and yet, many were sympathetic and even supportive of our agenda, helping us with the difficult ground realities of collecting data.

This familiar contradiction - in endorsing noble ideals such as women’s equality on the one hand, and feeling threatened at the personal level about the change required to live by these very ideals, on the other, was directly evident in the SRWK process also. The response of men in the community, which

17 Stanley and Wise, *op. cit.*, pp. 34.

all of us working with communities have certainly encountered, can be recognised as a starting point, a feminist challenge and agenda to be dealt with. The research also encountered many women who were not convinced about the need for equality as also men who genuinely believed in women's equality. The responses of community women and men - ranging from support, affirmation, feeling of sisterhood, skepticism, resistance, cynicism, suspicion, antagonism, anger and excitement - constitute the menu for SRWK's action plans.

The catalytic role of the tool of inquiry in research we feel is extremely significant in creating a feminist epistemology that can reject the binaries of 'mind and body' or 'intellect and emotion', thus contributing to knowledge creation that restores the rightful place of emotion in academic discourse. Although the interview schedule (constituting 18 sections to elicit 200 items of data), took us one year to formulate, judging from the responses of women we feel that it has been well worth its while. However, we need to reiterate that such empowerment notwithstanding, it is the centrality of women's participation in the advocacy and action phase that will testify to the research's real (empowering) "emancipatory intent".¹⁸ One limitation of large scale surveys that needs to be addressed in the context of empowering research is that while they may enable the creation of baseline data, they are time-consuming. The delay in taking the data back to the field impacts negatively on the momentum generated during the data gathering process. The SRWK research was able to spark off the process of conscientisation, no doubt, but it lacked the mechanisms within its design to sustain and capitalize on the initial gains.

Another lacuna in our work has been the absence of systematic recording of the data-gathering process within the research. Although the documentation by the NGO partners provided valuable insights of how the research process unfolded into a process of conscientisation, the absence of adequate tools to capture the field more completely has resulted in a great loss.

18 Acker et al. quoted in Lather, *op. cit.*, pp. 576.

III. Managing Differing Realities

A feminist position on knowledge is one that recognizes that knowledge is ontologically-grounded. Such a position is “one that is rooted in women’s concrete and diverse practical and everyday experiences of oppressions and it insists that these analytical knowledges are reflexive, (and) epistemologically tied to their context of production.”¹⁹

Feminist research is thus confronted with the task of managing the differing realities and understandings of the researcher and the researched, recognizing the specificity of material differences between differently located groups of women. Also, in being tied to the context of its production, feminist research is necessarily grounded in who the researcher is, proceeding from the characteristics – social, intellectual and organizational location – of the researcher.

In representing reality therefore, the feminist researcher cannot take the position, that her interpretation of the ‘facts’ is the final word. Making a case for dialogue, discussions and debates, and hence for on-going reformulation of knowledge in feminist research, Lather cites Harding and argues that feminism “must run counter to ... the longing for ‘one true story’. To avoid the ‘master’s position’ of formulating a totalising discourse, feminism must see itself as ‘permanently partial’ but ‘less false’ than androcentric, male-centered knowledge”.²⁰

What was the framework that the SRWK research adopted to interpret ‘reality’?

At the consultation that we had before the study, the group discussed this issue in great detail. It was resolved that “we are looking at women’s position from the perspective of human rights and social justice for which we can give precise definitions. Our primary question will be ‘what is women’s

19 Stanley and Wise, *op. cit.*, pp. 347.

20 Harding, in Lather, *op. cit.*, pp. 577.

access to human rights and social justice as guaranteed by the various instruments and what is the reality?"²¹

Thus the project decided to use the rights framework to evaluate women's status. As a key element of our knowledge gaining process, the differences and the subjectivity of women had to be placed within the 'rights' framework. Our sampling method also had to account for broad regional differences and for the inclusion of women of different relational positions from within the households.

The Questionnaire

The questionnaire, by and large, provided for pre-coded options based on our existing understanding, secondary research and pilot survey. To most questions, we attempted to offer several response options and provided for the recording of multiple responses. For instance, we included as many as 16 possible responses for the question on reasons for not using contraception. In addition to providing a range of options to questions, we also included the category "any other" (under which, a response that was not available in the existing menu of options could be recorded). The questionnaire also allowed for the recording of "no response" (if the respondent did not want to answer), and also for "don't know" (when the respondent said s/he did not know the answer). For less researched issues, and questions that solicited respondents' experience or opinions, the questions were open-ended.

Even from the early stages, the project had built in a commitment to openness and criticism. The project had an advisory group, and consultants from various disciplines. We were constantly subjecting our notions and categories to criticism, during the preparation of the questionnaire, the training process preceding the data-collection, in the analysis of the data and the writing of our report. These processes were rooted in intensive discussions, heated debates and passionate deliberations with academics and activists, engaged in various endeavors concerning social transformation.

21 Report of the proceedings of the NGO Consultation organised by WOPRA at NIAS, 1994.

Even with all the discussions, we had to constantly touch base with the field for capturing its real colors. Our draft questionnaire for instance, was an outcome of a very interactive intellectual exercise. But in certain respects, it was still inadequate in capturing women's reality. In the section on work, the draft questionnaire had provided for recording one predominant occupation of women. The field reality was that not only at any point of time were women engaged in more than one occupation, but this occupational profile was dynamic throughout the year. Poverty, seasonality, and other factors did not allow them to put all their eggs in one basket. We had to therefore re-design the entire section on work.

The Research Report

A draft report of the research, written by the core team, has been placed before a larger audience comprising of activists, academics, journalists, other media persons and bureaucrats through a lecture presentation. Although district-wise analysis of the data is not available at this stage, this is an important agenda for the project. Also, taking the 'findings' to the researched, through field seminars, popular and more accessible forms of communication, such as reports in the local language, is an equally important priority. We are aware that it is only when feminist research shifts from ivory towers to putting women at the centre of action, will the agenda of empowering research be accomplished.

Constructing reality in all its completeness is an infinite task. Looking back on the choice of methods to bring in women's experiences to the center, we feel we have a lot more to accomplish. While the survey method was useful in meeting the larger requirement of generating base-line data on women's status in Karnataka, the 'data' thus generated needs to be nuanced with qualitative information generated through more participatory methods that give women a greater scope to describe their reality.

Although we did try to explore the views of men and women about concepts such as 'equality' through the questionnaire,

the survey method with its inherent limitations was only able to scratch the surface. While analyzing our data, typically we encountered the response, “of course, there must be equality between women and men for the family to run smoothly”. Although, we do feel that such a worldview is indicative of people’s belief in role and responsibility division along gendered lines, we are still in no position to interpret people’s worldview of complex notions of rights ensuing from such role differentiation. Also, as Vimochana, a sister organization involved in activism and advocacy pointed out, there is a need to understand deeper the complexities of such notions through a framework that distinctly privileges interpretations rooted culturally, rather than one that takes recourse to explanations that universalize experience. In our explorations on sexuality, we acutely felt the need for other methods that could create a space for women to openly talk about, and jointly explore, the meaning of sexuality, sexual rights etc., methods that could combine the research process with a process of conscientisation. An interview situation that is basically built on pre-coded response options – even if it is sensitive – can barely address such issues in depth.

IV. SRWK as a Political Project

Feminist research always has a political character: it’s goal is to contribute to the creation of a more equal world, and therefore to listen to women, to reshape the dominant, challenge the mainstream and look for alternatives.

“... What we want to collect data for, decides what data we collect; if we collect them under the hypothesis that a different reality is possible, we will focus on the changeable, marginal, deviant aspects – anything not integrated which might suggest fermentation, resistance, protest, alternatives – all the ‘facts’ unfit to fit.”²²

22 Gebhardt cited in Lather, *op. cit.*, pp. 576.

The SRWK project is also essentially a political endeavour aimed at advocating changes to policy for the transformation of gender relations. It is also a beginning of a larger process of changing gender relations at the community level. The conceptual framework was developed around the central hypothesis that empowerment of women demands challenging the ideology of women's subordination. Some central issues that we dealt with, in doing political work as researchers are discussed below :

Including Men

We felt it was necessary to include men in the sample so that we could study the totality of women's experience. The real world is inhabited by both men and women. Obviously, therefore, no research that seeks to transform gender relations can exclude a focus on men. However, the inclusion of men in the SRWK study was precisely to "deconstruct the notion of any transcendent, always all-powerful, patriarchal man"²³ and hence we submit that this decision has not depoliticised the goal of the SRWK research. We also feel that the inclusion of men will help us evolve strategies that can address men's beliefs and attitudes within the change process.

The Indivisibility of Means and Ends

Doing feminist research, as practicing feminism, requires the operationalisation of feminist principles within the entire research activity, by the team engaged in the research. The pertinent questions that have to be addressed include : What values does the team espouse? Are the leader and the team committed to democratic processes? When confronted with problems in the field how are issues of political commitment dealt with? Can political commitment be compromised for methodological convenience? These questions bring to centre-stage the indivisibility of means and ends.

The SRWK team and its leader were fiercely committed to democratic principles. We cannot claim to have been a perfect

23 Stanley and Wise, *op. cit.*, pp. 44.

team but we were determined to apply these principles within our limited understanding, in our day-to-day working. We believed in allowing room for dissent and in dealing with differences through dialogue. We consciously tried to use differences in order to learn and grow. We realized that teams have to be reconstituted as people move on.

In our relationships with our NGO partners, community organizers, and women and men in the field, we were always aware of having to deal with our class, caste and other identities. In negotiating our differing identities, we were conscious of hierarchies as not merely social and historical realities (out there) but as arising in one to one interactions from our own personal antecedents.

We were confronted with many situations during the research process that put our commitments to test. One such experience is cited here. During the data collection in the village, the food for the investigators was usually organised by local women who were members of *sanghas* (collectives). These women were usually from the poorest sections and belonged to the scheduled castes. In one of the districts, two male investigators belonging to the 'upper' caste wanted to make separate arrangement for the food because it was unacceptable to them to eat food cooked by the 'lower' caste women. The community organizer working with the *sangha* women insisted that "empowerment of women meant challenging all oppressive structures – caste included, and hence allowing for a separate eating arrangement on caste grounds would be totally inconsistent with the larger goals of the research." The issue was intensely debated within the group from several angles, including the costs of training new people to replace the two investigators. Both the investigators were also involved in the entire discussion. The consensus was that our commitment to justice and equality could not be jettisoned for methodological convenience. A process committed to empowerment could not afford such internal contradiction. Therefore, we decided to train new people although additional costs in terms of time and energy had to be incurred.

Ethics in Advocacy Research

Feminist research for advocacy involves ethical issues concerning use of data. Commenting on the need to guarantee the collective interests of women, Finch points that individual “interests may be relatively easily secured with guarantees of confidentiality, anonymity, codes of ethics and so on. It is far more difficult to devise ways of ensuring that information given so readily in interviews will not be used ultimately against the collective interests of women.”²⁴

It is likely that the responses of women, especially those who have not gone through a conscientisation process, reveal patriarchal attitudes. However, in analyzing these attitudes, feminist research carries the responsibility of moving beyond simplistic interpretations and placing such opinions within frameworks that explain the why and how of the response. In the SRWK study, a majority of the women held the view that it was not wrong for men to beat their wife. Such a belief is obviously a product of women’s socialization within larger structures and institutions that are essentially patriarchal. Those who have been working with people on gender sensitization will know that such data is most likely to be read on the surface, with little attention paid to the sub-text. People may even conclude that since women hold this opinion, they are the torch-bearers of patriarchy. In the dissemination of such sensitive data, we have felt the need to exercise caution so that such information is not sensationalized and used against women’s interests.

Community Resistance to Research

Resistance to feminist research at the community level from powers that be, poses an important challenge for researchers. The data-collection process in the SRWK study encountered stiff resistance from the male youth in one of the villages. The youth who had read the questionnaire felt that the study in general, and the questions on sexuality in particular, were

²⁴ Finch, *op. cit.*, pp. 83.

violative of 'their' women's privacy. Hence they did not want 'their' women to talk to us. The youth were not willing to discuss the issue and had sternly warned the women investigators of 'dire' consequences if they approached any woman for an interview. The overall climate was so vitiated that data collection had to be abandoned. This instance has larger implications for the generation of feminist knowledge. The increasing assertion by communities of their identities through the control of their women, is indeed detrimental to all political processes towards gender equality.

Mainstreaming Gender Concerns

Undoubtedly, doing feminist research is fraught with challenges, one of which is the question of its location. What are the implications of doing feminist (political) work from within mainstream (apolitical) institutions?

The WOPRA Unit is located within NIAS, a mainstream institution. The Unit was an outcome of the felt need in development practice to mainstream gender concerns. The rationale behind locating policy advocacy efforts within such a mainstream institution was to have the strategic advantage to give visibility to grassroots concerns through access to policy-making bodies.

Being within the mainstream has its advantages, but could entail the risk of co-optation - pressures to assimilate within mainstream, disown associations with struggles and movements, create knowledge that uses experts language. We have resisted the pressure of validation from the mainstream academic community by adopting the position that research 'for' women necessarily entails a non-neutral approach, biased in favour of women's collective interests.

Factors Crucial to Effective Feminist Research

Lastly, we will draw on our experience of the SRWK process to identify aspects that we feel are crucial to the effectiveness of any feminist research process:

I. Setting Goals

The yardsticks that can measure empowerment for the various actors involved in the process must be operationally defined, if a feminist research endeavour is to be really empowering. Goals that are to be achieved have to be clearly articulated at the outset and pursued throughout the process for empowerment to become a conscious, and well thought out product and not merely an output by default. A feminist approach to research will no doubt bring about exciting results. But devoid of specific goals, such an approach might not necessarily be followed by a committed process towards transformation. For instance, the data gathering process might spark off a great deal of animatedness and even raise uncomfortable questions among the community women and men, and among research investigators. Consciously designed inputs such as group discussions during and after the data gathering, analysis of 'findings' along with the community through field seminars, strategy planning for raising gender awareness of women and men in the community, and for interventions based on the research findings with *community* organisations, are required to harness the initial momentum that is invariably generated during data gathering.

Goal setting becomes crucial because the stakes of the different actors involved in the research process are varied. Unless the stakes of the community in transformation are regarded as primary, and the research design consciously accounts for their centrality, the research exercise, becomes ineffective, not qualifying to be feminist. Clearly spelt out goals also help in the accomplishment of the political task of feminist research.

II. Research Design

At the minimum, a feminist research methodology has to ensure that sufficient time is spent in the preparation of a sensitive tool. Investigators must be appropriately chosen and trained to have sensitivity to both people and issues. The process must be democratic at all levels, allowing for the shaping of the research agenda and its ownership by every

participant involved. The proper execution of various tasks require that time and resource planning is realistic and flexible. It must be ensured that participants enjoy enough space to reflect on the questions thrown up by the process including those in relation to community responses, attitudes encountered and the challenges they pose to strategy formulation, and also to personal belief systems. The significance of visionary leadership for facilitating meaningful and synergistic team work in achieving the above cannot be overemphasized.

The objective of research influences the choice of methods. Feminist research that is linked to advocacy and intervention requires multiple methods that can complement each other. Surveys enable quick collection of base-line information and may be more acceptable to address mainstream audiences. Qualitative methods help in deeper understanding of complex issues and are essential if interventions are to be planned. Different research methods have different strengths and may need to be adapted or used in combination with other methods to maximize effectiveness.

In order to plan interventions, the systematic recording of the research process, specifically, the experiences related to consultation workshops, training, data gathering , field seminars, community responses to the research questions, observations related to power relations within the community, is not merely useful but necessary.

Conclusion

We are aware that many of us subject the work we do to critical examination, not necessarily by going back to theory but through continuous introspection. In many ways, our efforts as well as our reflections are often based on intuition. So merely by placing our work against theory we cannot make claims to being any more feminist than the several people engaged in feminist work. By no measure is it possible to determine how true we have been to feminism in any quantitative sense of the term, but we are certainly richer for the learning that this exercise of self-examination has made possible.

Chapter 3

Profile of Survey Respondents and Households

The SRWK Study was conducted in six regionally representative districts of Karnataka - Bijapur in North Karnataka, Raichur in Hyderabad Karnataka, Chitradurga in Central Karnataka, Dakshina Kannada (DK) in the Konkan region, Kolar in South Karnataka, and Kodagu in the Malnad region. Within these, a total of 10 villages were covered, including one village where the survey had to be abandoned after covering 40 households due to resistance from one section of villagers. One of the villages includes an outlying hamlet.

The distribution of respondents and households by district is given in Table 1. It shows a more or less even distribution of households across five districts, with roughly half as many having been covered in Kodagu, which is a very small district. The number of female respondents is slightly greater than males because it includes several women who were living without any adult male partner or relative.

Table 1: District-wise Distribution of Households and Respondents

District	Households		Respondents		Percentage	
	No.	%	Male	Female	Male	Female
Kolar	186	16.9	186	204	16.9	17.4
DK	182	16.5	182	200	16.5	17.1
Chitradurga	207	18.5	207	210	18.5	17.9
Raichur	249	22.7	249	256	22.7	21.9
Bijapur	193	17.3	193	201	17.3	17.2
Kodagu	86	7.8	86	100	7.8	8.5
TOTAL	1103	100.0	1103	1171	100.0	100.0

Profile of Survey Respondents & Households

Table 2 shows that the study population is almost equally divided between those having been exposed to NGO interventions, especially to women's development and awareness-building programs, and those unreached by such efforts. Detailed data analysis to assess the impact of this on key variables of women's status will be undertaken in the next stage of data analysis.

Table 2: Distribution of Respondents and Households by NGO Intervention Area

NGO Intervention Area	Respondents			Percentage
	Male	Female	Total	
No	540	588	1128	49.6
Yes	563	583	1146	50.4
Total	1103	1171	2274	100.0

Table 3: District, NGO partner, & Village-wise Distribution of Respondents and Households

District / NGO partner / Village	No. of Respondents			% Distribution			No. of House holds	% Distribution
	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total		
BDJAPUR / Mahila Samakhya: <i>Malapur</i>	193	201	394	17.5	17.2	34.7	201	17.2
RAICHUR / Mahila Samakhya: <i>a) Talakeri</i> <i>b) Yediyapur*</i>	203 46	210 46	413 92	18.4 4.2	17.9 3.9	36.1 8.1	210 46	17.9 3.9
CHITRADURGA / GRAMA: <i>a) Hosahalli + b) Talaku</i>	136	136	272	12.3	11.6	23.9	136	11.6
DAKSHINA KANNADA / NIAS: <i>a) Paduru + b) Mooluru</i>	182	200	382	16.5	17.1	33.6	200	17.1
KOLAR / REACH & Gram Vikasa: <i>a) Mangapura</i> <i>b) Minjanna Halli</i> <i>c) Nagamangala</i>	69 54 63	78 58 68	147 112 131	6.3 4.9 5.7	6.7 5.0 5.8	13.0 9.9 11.5	78 58 68	6.7 5.0 5.8
KODAGU / NIAS: <i>Rangsanamudra</i> TOTAL	86 1103	100 1171	186 2274	7.8 100.0	8.5 100.0	16.3 100.0	100 1171	8.5 100.0

*The survey had to be abandoned here due to strong resistance from sections of the village - however, the data collected from households was included in the analysis

Table 3 gives village-wise details, and indicates those districts where the data collection was done in collaboration with NGO partners; where no NGO is mentioned, data was gathered by NIAS's own research team.

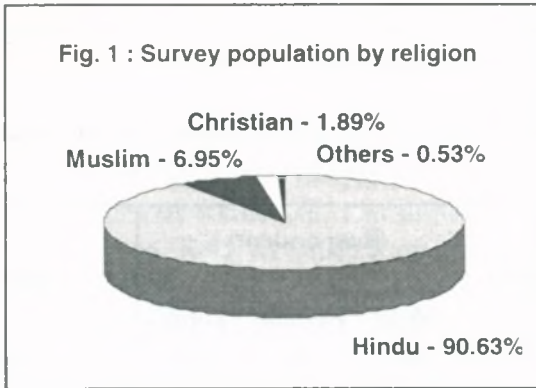


Figure 1 shows the distribution of all the surveyed respondents by religion. We see that the sample mirrors the distribution in the state: over 90% Hindus (including scheduled castes and tribes), about 7% Muslim, just under 2% Christian, and a smattering of other persuasions. The caste figures will show that some portion of the Muslims and Christians also figure among Dalits.

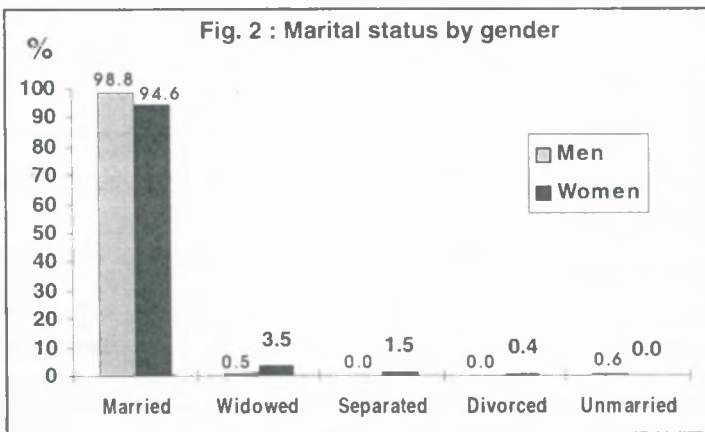


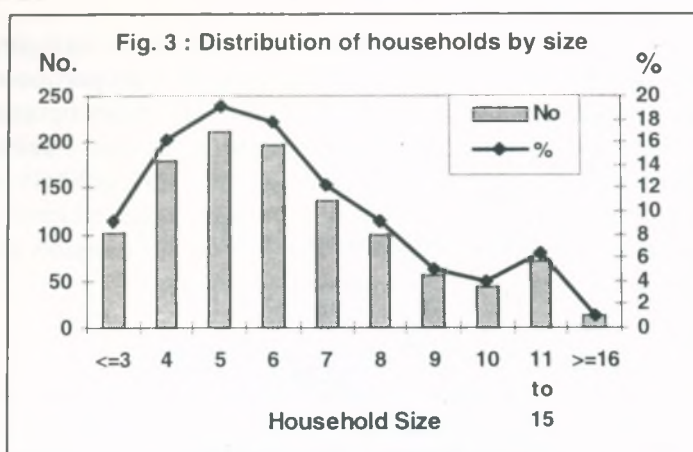
Figure 2 gives the break up of male and female respondents by marital status. We see that while there are practically no

men falling into the “separated” or “divorced” category, about 2% of women are in these groups. The proportion of widowed women far exceeds widowed men, probably because the majority of these women are from female-headed households where the corresponding male was unlikely to also be a widower, but generally a younger male relative of the woman or her late husband - these men are probably the majority of those in the “unmarried” category.

Table 4: Age Distribution of Respondents

Age Groups	Number			Percentages		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Below 20	9	129	138	0.82	11.02	6.07
21-25	108	289	397	9.79	24.67	17.46
26-30	180	298	478	16.32	25.45	21.02
31-35	231	209	440	20.94	17.85	19.35
36-40	217	246	463	19.67	21.01	20.36
41-45	154	-	154	13.96	-	6.77
46-50	110	-	110	9.97	-	4.84
51-55	39	-	39	3.54	-	1.71
56-60	24	-	24	2.18	-	1.06
61-65	16	-	16	1.45	-	0.70
above 65	15	-	15	1.36	-	0.66
Total	1103	1171	2274	100.00	100.00	100.00

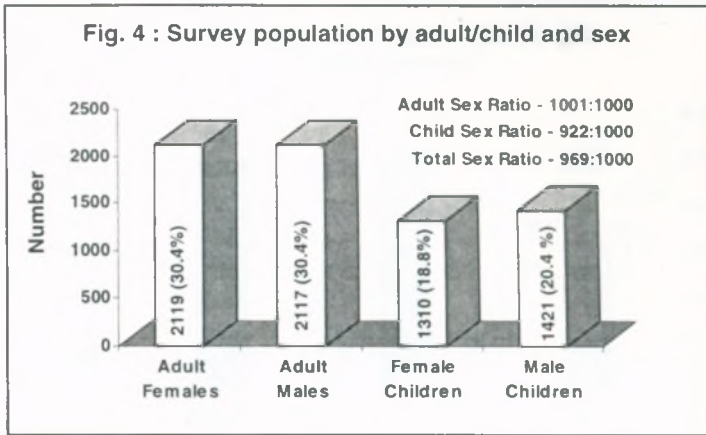
Table 4 gives the age-distribution of the study population. Since the sampling of women was purposive - i.e., women in the reproductive age group of 18 to 40 years - the female age distribution reflects this. However, the ages of the husbands / key males is far more widely scattered. The clustering of men and women also shows a difference: while the majority of women fall into the 21 to 35 group (68%), the majority of men - about 65% - are in the 31 to 50 age group. This indicates the cultural tendency for men to have younger wives.



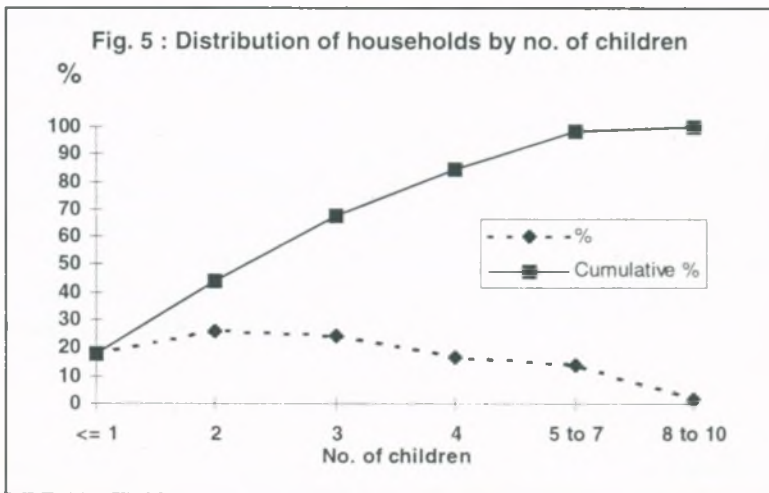
Household size, depicted in figure 3, shows the increasing nuclearization of rural families. The average household size of our study household is 6.4, indicating the predominance of nuclear and small joint families, with parents, their children, and an adult relative or two residing together. In terms of cumulative percentage, nearly 75% of households fall in the 3 to 7 member range. When this is juxtaposed with the mean number of children per household in figure 5, the pattern becomes clearer. Households containing 8 or more persons are a relative minority of 25%.

Figure 4 brings to light one of the surprising findings of the study - the difference between adult and child sex ratios. While the adult sex ratio works out to parity, i.e., 1001:1000 (females to males), the child sex ratio shows a gender bias at 922:1000 (girls to boys). How the adult ratio is closer to normal when the child ratio is so distorted is a matter for further inquiry. However, the sex ratio for the entire study population, at 969:1000, is almost identical to the Karnataka state 1991 Census sex ratio of 960.

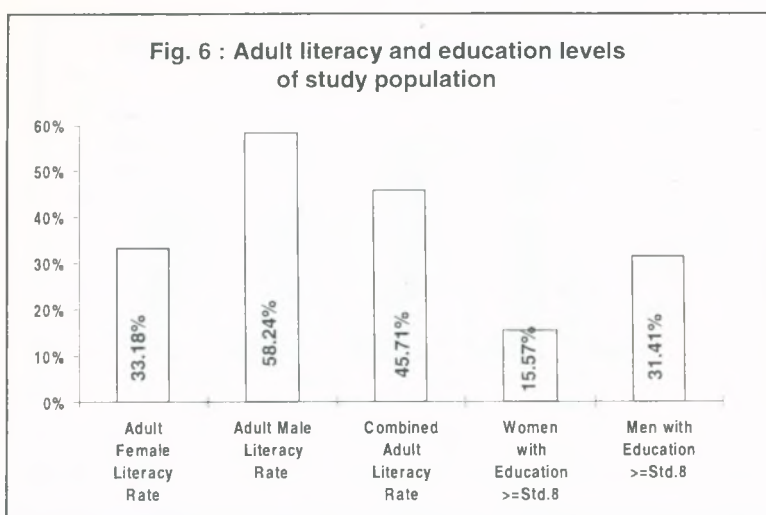
The survey households appear to demonstrate the gradual decline in family size and the growing preference for smaller number of children. The mean number of children per household is just 3, and the vast majority have three or less children; the standard deviation from the mean is also quite



low at 1.6. In households having four or more children, further data analysis will be undertaken to explore whether these are the offspring of more than one couple - in other words, the larger the household, the more likely it is to be a joint family, with more couples and their offspring residing together.



The literacy profile of the adults in the study population closely resemble the Karnataka state 1991 Census figures for rural female and male adult literacy: 34.76% and 60.30% respectively. However, they are well below the 1991 Census female and male literacy rates if combined for the six districts

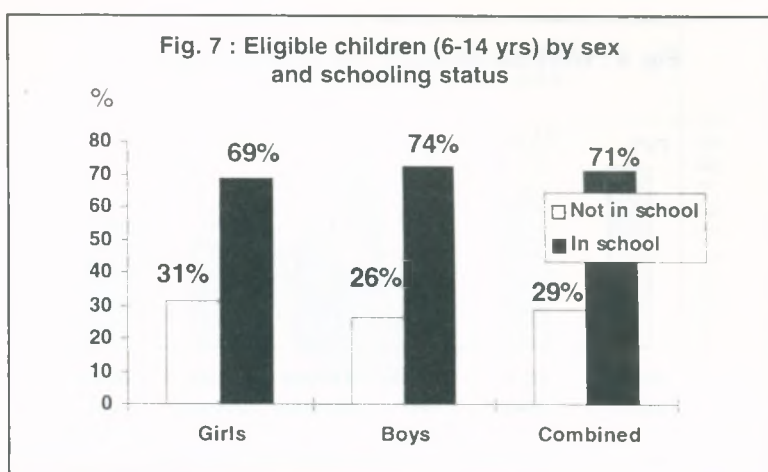


of our study sample: 45.42% and 68.09% respectively.¹ It should be noted that in terms of literacy rates, the six study districts include two of the most educationally advanced districts of the state (Dakshina Kannada and Kodagu), two intermediate districts (Chitradurga and Bijapur), and two of the lowest literacy districts (Kolar and Raichur) - and hence are very representative of the literacy profile of the state. This could be because the study villages were located in fairly backward regions of the backward districts, where literacy is still low, or because the study figures more closely resemble the ground reality than Census rates. In terms of secondary education levels, the gender bias is clearly evident, and shows a greater bias when compared with the State Secondary School Enrollment Ratio for girls of 30%.²

Figure 7 corroborates the findings of many other studies that the gender bias in access to schooling occurs in the secondary, rather than primary school stage. The gender gap between percentage of boys and girls aged 6 to 14 years attending

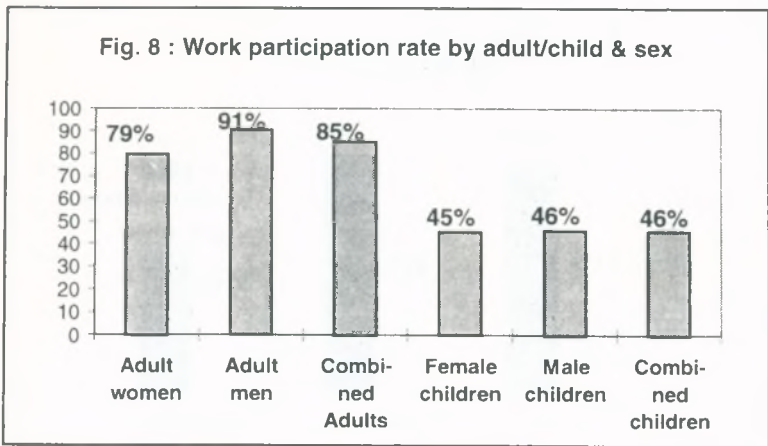
¹ Calculated from figures given in Part II of this report, chapter on *Literacy*.

² *ibid.*



school is quite small - less than 5% in favour of boys. However, it would be important to analyze whether those not attending school are the older girls and boys, the former because of domestic work and taboos against schooling after menarche, and the boys because of joining the labour force. The absence of a sharp gender difference in these figures is a cause for some optimism.

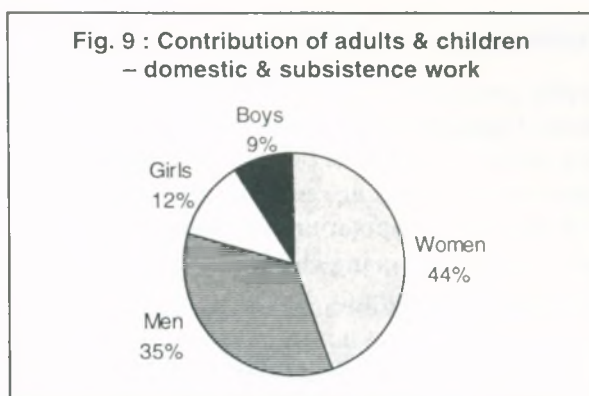
Before examining figure 8, it is important to clarify the definition of *productive work* used in the SRWK study. For our purposes, productive work includes both waged and non-waged work performed for survival, and hence includes the so-called "domestic" and "subsistence" work without which daily life would become unlivable - gathering firewood for cooking fuel, fetching water, grazing animals, cooking, and similar activities. The importance of this in any study of the status of women cannot be overemphasized, since much of the work women and girls do is unpaid family labour and domestic and subsistence work which has been traditionally invisible in our data systems and economic analysis. In recognition of this, even the Census of India today uses an "expanded" definition of work, having incorporated subsistence tasks such as the collection of water and firewood in the Census schedule (Code 93).



Using this expanded and more realistic definition of work, figure 8 shows that the work participation rates of adults and children in the study population is extremely high. The gap between male and female work participation rates is also much smaller than in official statistics. For example, the proportion of working rural men and women in the state in the 1991 Census was only 56.26% and 36.6%³ respectively, compared with 90.69% of men and 79.42% of women in the study population, using an expanded definition of work. The gap between men and women in the study population is only 11.27%, compared to 19.66% - almost double - in the Census figures. Similarly, the data for children aged 0 - 14 shows very little gap in the labour contributions of girls and boys, and that virtually every able-bodied child six years or older is engaged in some form of productive, subsistence or domestic work.

The absence of much of a gender gap in work participation will be further explored in the chapter on labour and income. Meanwhile, figure 7 and table 5 gives us some idea of the gender division of labour in domestic and subsistence work, to examine whether the high male work participation rates above, are because of higher participation of men and boys in domestic work.

³ See Part II of this report.



The data in table 5 seem to corroborate that the high work participation rate for men is probably due to their role in domestic and subsistence work. Surprisingly, the proportion of men and boys contributing to this traditionally female work domain is quite high in the study households, as table 7 shows. It is important to note that labour contributions in this area were reported by women respondents, and are therefore probably less suspect than if they were reported by the men, who might exaggerate their role in this respect. As much as 75% of all men are doing domestic and subsistence work such as fuel-gathering, water-fetching, etc. Further data on this, as mentioned earlier, will be analysed in the chapter on access to survival needs. Among children, however, the gender bias in domestic and subsistence work is a little more evident, with the proportion of girls involved at over 40%, while only 29% of boys are helpers in this respect but the gap is not as sharp as one would expect.

Table 5: Adults and Children's Contributions to Domestic and Subsistence Work by Sex

Adults / Children	Total Number in Study Sample	Total No. Contributing to Dom./Subs. work	% of Total Contributing to Dom./Subs. work
Women	2119	2035	96.04
Men	2117	1591	75.15
Girls (upto 14 yrs.)	1310	533	40.69
Boys (upto 14 yrs.)	* 1421	409	28.78
Total	6967	4568	65.57

Conclusion

The study population shows some similarities and some differences from the state's demographic profile. While the adult sex ratio is somewhat better than the state figure, the child ratio shows a bias against the girl child. The literacy levels of the adult population are significantly below state averages. Non-school going children of the eligible age group are fairly high in number.

The household size is slightly higher, as is the mean number of children per household, but this is because the study has no urban households, which tend to lower these figures for the state. The data also shows that the gender bias in distribution of domestic work is not as sharp as expected, and that the inclusion of subsistence work, so necessary for survival, dramatically raises the work participation rates of both sexes compared to official figures.

In short, the survey population does not show any sharp or significant differences from the state's demographic profile, and could therefore be considered representative.

Chapter 4

Access to Survival Needs

The adequacy and accessibility of resources like water, cooking fuel, domestic lighting and sanitation are critical issues for women. The literature shows that when water and cooking fuel sources are far away, or inadequate in quantity and quality, the negative impact is far greater on women, since the gender division of labour places the responsibility for water and fuel collection mainly on women and girls.¹ Similarly, the lack of adequate water and toilets for personal hygiene has a greater impact on women, particularly on their reproductive health.² Absence of efficient and reliable domestic lighting shortens the working day, and impacts on the educational advancement of both adults and children. In this section of the study, the attempt was to assess the gender division of labour in water and fuel collection in the survey households, and access to lighting and toilets.

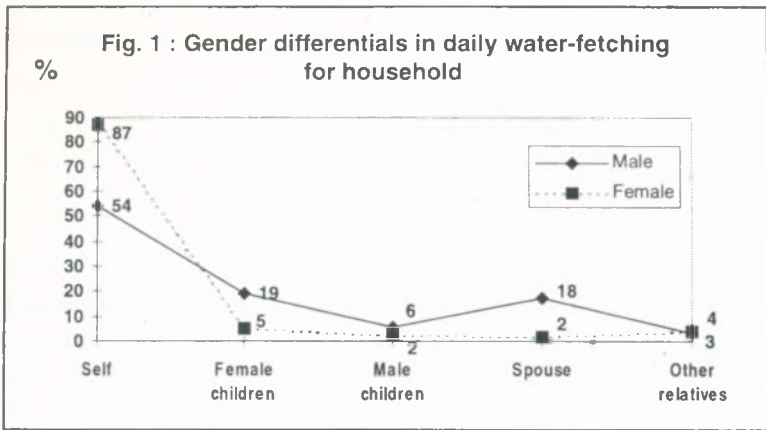
Access to Water

Fetching water for the household's needs on a daily basis is clearly a women's task in these households, though husbands, sons / male children and other men do occasionally help. It is interesting that while 54% of men report that they fetch water every day, only 2% of women say their husbands do so! On the other hand, only 18% of men say their wives perform this daily chore, compared to 87% of women reporting "self". Considering the data from several field studies, including those in Karnataka,³ and common observation in rural areas,

1 See S. Batliwala, *Energy as an Obstacle to Improved Living Standards*, in *Energy as an Instrument for Socio-Economic Development* (New York: UNDP Publications, 1995) and Bina Aggarwal, *Cold Hearths and Barren Slopes* (London: Zed Books, 1986).

2 Rani Bang et al, *High Prevalence of Gynaecological Diseases*, in *The Lancet*, January 14, 1989.

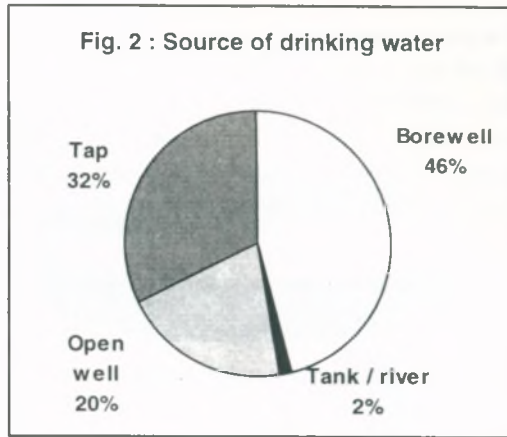
3 ASTRA, *Rural Energy Consumption Patterns: A Field Study*, in *Biomass* September 1982, 1.2 (4)



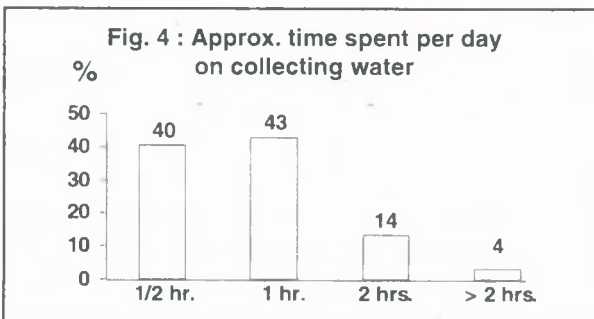
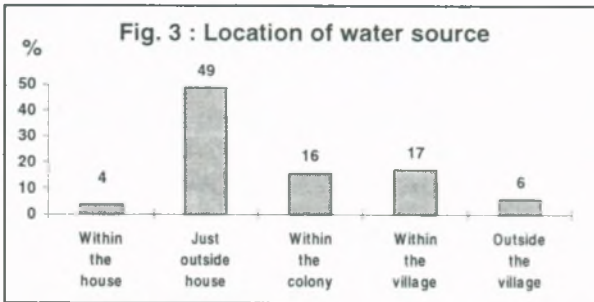
it would appear that men have quite deliberately over-reported their role and under-reported wives' role.

Many more male respondents than female report that children fetch daily water supply. Male reporting indicates that in nearly 25% (274) of households, children take responsibility for collection of water, with girls being responsible in about 19%; this is in contrast to female reporting that children are fetching water on a daily basis in only 7% of households, and girls in only 5%. Such a wide discrepancy between male and female reporting was not expected for children and is intriguing. It is difficult to determine whether it is the result of men having done more guessing, since they don't play much of a role in even supervising this activity, or of women having under-reported children's contribution, since the women are the main water-collectors in most rural households, and don't recognise children's supplementary role.

70% of the households have only a single source of drinking water. It is encouraging to note from figure 2 that nearly 46% have access to borewell water, which is a relatively safe drinking water source; another 32% have access to piped tap water from various government drinking water schemes, though the quality of this varies. Unfortunately, nearly one-fourth (22%) of households are still dependent on the open wells, tanks and rivers for their drinking water, and are consequently much more subject to water-borne diseases.



The vast majority of households – 86% report that their drinking water source is in the village, and hence within easy reach. A surprising 53% have a water source either within the house or just outside. Nearly 87% also reported that they draw water for other purposes from this same source. Thus, only a tiny fraction are forced to walk any distance for their daily drinking and domestic water - this is an unusually happy state of affairs for the women!



Since the water source is so close by, it is not surprising that nearly 83% of the respondents spend around one hour or less per day for collecting water. Those who spend more are clearly those who have to go outside the village. It is the latter category of women who face both time and health impact of the distance of the water source.

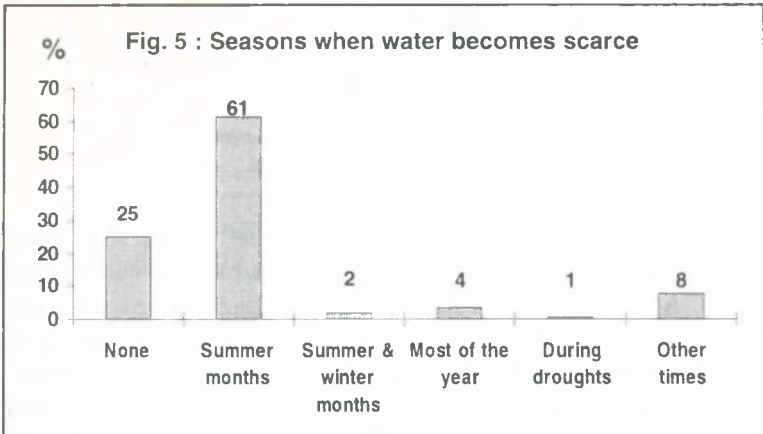
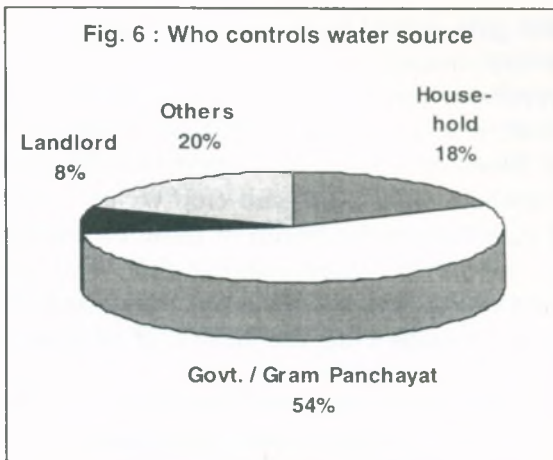


Figure 5 shows that despite the high access to water in most households, seasonal scarcity is a problem. 75% of the female respondents reported that they have difficulty in accessing water, the majority identifying the summer months as the scarcity period. A minority are able to access adequate water all through the year.

Control of Water Source

Access to a resource without control can become a zero-sum game. We have seen that most women, who are primarily responsible for water collection, have high access to water – but this access can be quickly and easily curtailed not only by seasonal fluctuations in availability, but also if they do not own or control the water source. Figure 6 shows that only 18% of households – probably the larger farmers and higher-income households – have control over their water source. These are probably borewells and open wells. The largest group is dependent on water sources controlled by the government and gram panchayat, where maintenance



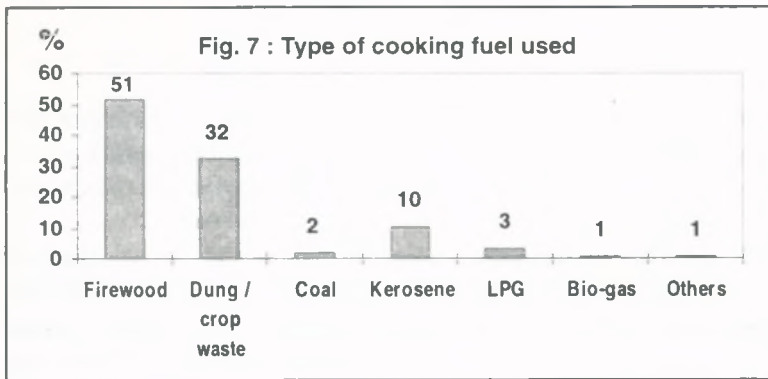
(especially of handpumps) is a major problem. A further 8% and 20% are dependent on sources controlled by large farmers and other private owners who can cut off access if they wish.

To test this, a separate question was asked about whether they experience any difficulty from those who own / control the water source. An overwhelming 92% of the women reported they had no such problems; however, 73 women (8%) reported that they did experience harassment, mostly in the form of verbal abuse (“They scold us”). Of these, only 49 (67% of those having problems) said that they had tried various strategies to solve the problem - these will have to be separately analysed. Notwithstanding this generally cheerful scenario, the possibility of it changing, especially for those relying on privately controlled sources, is ever-present. We must therefore be aware that while the surveyed women have good access to water, only a minority have much control. Lack of such control is more likely to impact negatively on women than men.

Access to Fuel

Path-breaking studies conducted in the 1970s and 1980s in several developing countries showed that the type of fuel used for cooking had a direct bearing on women’s health. The studies documented, for the first time, the fact that

women and girls in rural Indian households spent as much as 6 hours a day cooking on traditional cookstoves which emit large volumes of smoke into the household atmosphere. Furthermore, it was established that the emissions from the traditional biomass cooking fuels used in rural households - such as firewood, dung cakes and crop wastes - were highly toxic and hazardous to the health of those exposed to them.⁴ The need to provide safer cooking fuels and more fuel-efficient and smokeless cookstoves was recognised as a priority intervention for improving the health of rural women and girls.



The study data shows that nearly 93% of households use more than one type of cooking fuel. Figure 7 further reveals that 83% of the survey households continue to rely on biomass cooking fuels like firewood, dung cakes and crop wastes for their cooking. The “safe” fuels like kerosene, biogas and LPG are accessible to only a tiny minority - again, probably the more affluent households. And since all but 10 households reported using firewood for cooking, even the households having access to LPG, biogas, and kerosene are also obviously using firewood, if not for cooking, at least for heating bath water.

⁴ See S. Batliwala, *Women and Cooking Energy* in *Economic and Political Weekly* 1983, Vol. XVIII, Nos. 52 & 53; K.R. Smith, *Health Effects of [biomass cooking fuel] in Developing Countries* in *Bioenergy and the Environment*, edited by J. Pasztor and L.A. Dristoferson (Boulder, Colorado: West View Press, 1991); Report of a WHO Consultation, *Indoor Air Pollution from Biomass Fuel* (Geneva: WHO, 1992).

In the case of households using firewood, crop wastes, and cowdung cakes for cooking / heating water, the gender division of labour for regular gathering or preparing these fuels is presented in figure 8. Unlike in the case of water collection, we see far less differentials in male and female reporting, except in the category of spouse, where once again, men's reporting depresses their wives' contribution, and the women's reporting for spouse is less than half what men report for "self". Again, research evidence and field observation indicates this is predominantly women's work, though men and boys do contribute considerably. It is common for those who graze animals - men or women, boys or girls - to also collect twigs, crop wastes, and shrub for cooking fuel along the way.

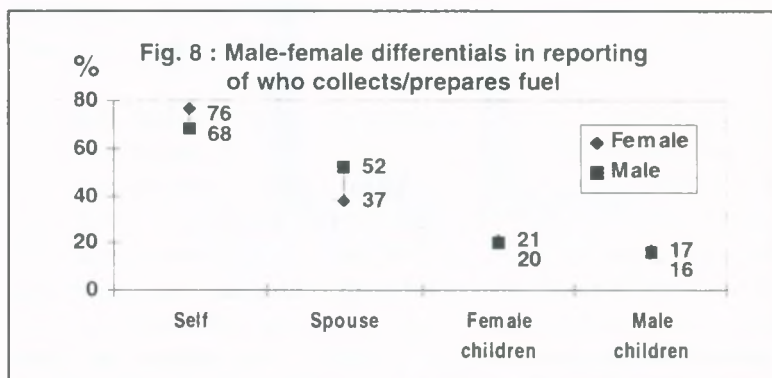
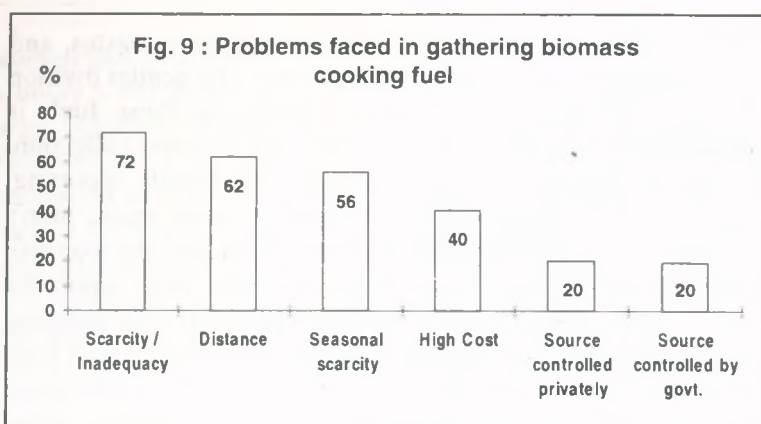


Figure 8 also shows far less discrepancy in male and female reporting of the contribution of children – both boys and girls – to fuel gathering / preparation, though, as could be expected, the proportion of reporting of girls' is slightly higher than that for boys.

The main problem reported in connection with biomass fuels is scarcity and inadequacy, followed by the distance that has to be walked to gather fuel. Scarcity of fuel during the rainy season was the third largest problem reported. Interestingly, a significant number of women reported the control of the source or place of gathering fuel by private owners or government authorities (obviously the forest department and other bodies) as one of the problems they face. The "high



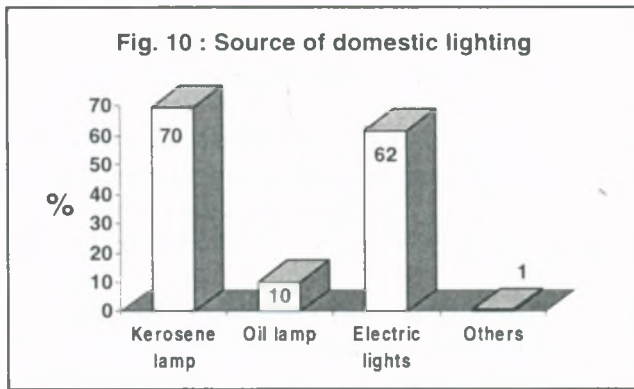
cost” factor is not only in the case of commercial fuels like LPG or kerosene, but because of the increasing commercialization of firewood, which more and more households have to purchase, as opposed to gathering at will.

The problem of scarcity is compounded by the fact that only a tiny fraction of households - 34 (2.9%) - reported that they had smokeless stoves (“Astra Ole”), which cut fuel consumption by half. In other words, barring the 15% or so who are using kerosene, LPG, and electric stoves, the vast majority of women are cooking on traditional, smoky stoves, using hazardous biomass fuels. This not only has extremely serious implications for the health of the women in these households, who cook the household’s meals day after day, but reflects poorly on the government’s failure to effectively disseminate the smokeless stove. It also points to the need for NGOs and Gram Panchayats to take up awareness-building on the efficiency and safety of smokeless stoves, and help ensure their widespread dissemination and use.

Since many of the problems related to fuel are beyond the control of the users / consumers, there is little they can do to tackle them. Nevertheless, a small number of women - 34 or 2.9% - reported that they had attempted to solve fuel-related problems. The steps they had taken included stock-piling fuel for the rainy season, planting of trees, and dialogues with officials about their problems.

Access to Lighting

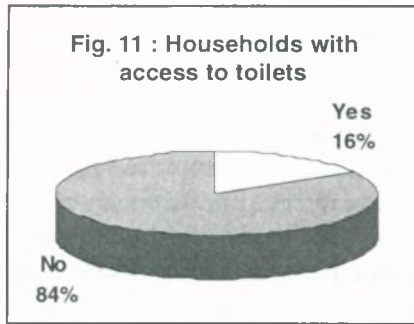
The lack of adequate household illumination has several implications – it not only cuts down the number of hours within which women have to complete their domestic chores, but also has indirect effects. For instance, because there is no proper light at home for study and homework, it can reduce motivation to participate in adult literacy and continuing education programs, and worsen children's academic performance. Adequate illumination within the home is thus not a luxury but a basic survival need.



It is encouraging to note that the government's rural electrification program has had some impact, insofar as nearly two-thirds of the surveyed households have electric lights. Unfortunately, because of the unreliability of rural power supply, this is not a lighting source that can be depended upon, which may explain why kerosene lamps are reported as a lighting source by nearly 70% of the households. A small fraction of households – probably the poorest – use the dim illumination of traditional oil lamps, though some of these may also have other types of lighting.

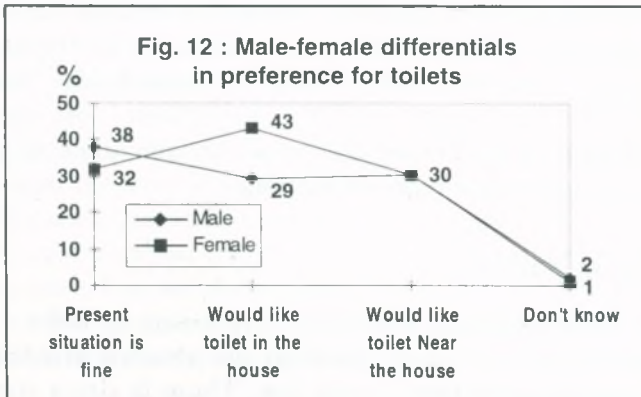
Access to Sanitation

Rural toilet programs have generally failed in India. The motivation to use closed toilets in the absence of adequate water and maintenance is very low. There is also a strongly



embedded cultural preference for open defecation, which rural people believe is cleaner and more pleasant than malodorous closed toilets. However, the absence of toilets has a gendered impact in that women are constrained to perform their ablutions at prescribed times (usually early morning and after nightfall), and hence are more prone to snake and scorpion bites; this also means numerous problems when the woman is ill. As figure 11 shows, only 16% of the households reported having a toilet or access to a toilet.

The data in figure 12 is most revealing: 73% of the women respondents who have no toilets reported that they would like to have one in or near the house, compared to only 59% of men who showed this preference. Similarly, fewer women (32%) than men (38%) felt the present situation was acceptable. This gender difference – though not dramatic, shows that women are more affected by the lack of a toilet facility, and perceive the need more than men.



Conclusion

The survey population shows a relatively high level of access to water as a survival need, compared to safe cooking fuels, efficient domestic lighting or toilets. Control over their access to these needs, however, is not as good. The gender division of labour for collecting water and fuel is not very sharp, but the women of the household still clearly bear the major responsibility for these tasks. Although they are better off than comparable rural women in other parts of the country, there is still room for intervention, particularly in areas like smokeless stoves, adequate and reliable lighting, and toilets.

Statistical Appendices

Table 1: Male-Female Differentials in Responsibility for Collecting

Person responsible	Male reporting		Female reporting	
	No.	%	No.	%
Self	597	54.13	1017	86.85
Female children	212	19.22	59	5.04
Male children	62	5.62	28	2.39
Spouse (wife/husband)	194	17.59	21	1.79
Other adult female relative (S)	16	1.45	29	2.48
Other adult male relative(S)	4	0.36	6	0.51
Other (S)	18	1.63	11	0.94
Total	1103	100.00	1171	100.00

Table 2: Source of Drinking Water

Female	No.	%
Handpump/borewell	695	45.66
Tank/river/stream	23	1.51
Open well	309	20.30
Tap (govt. / panchayat water scheme)	492	32.33
Other (s)	3	0.20
Total Responses	1522	100.00

Note: Female respondents' reporting only

Table 3: Distance of Drinking Water

Location of Source	No.	%
Within the house	43	3.67
Just outside the house	570	48.68
Within the colony	185	15.80
Within the village	198	16.91
Just outside the village	67	5.72
Far from the village	105	8.97
Other (s)	3	0.25
Total	1171	100.00

Note: Female respondents' reporting only

Table 4: Time Spent Daily on Water Collection

Approx. time spent	No.	%
About half an hour	471	40.22
About one hour	500	42.69
About two hours	159	13.59
More than two hours	32	2.73
NA	9	0.77
Total	1171	100.00

Note: Female respondents' reporting only

Table 5: Water Scarcity Periods

Scarcity periods	No.	%
None	292	24.94
Summer months	717	61.23
Summer & winter months	23	1.96
Most of the year	41	3.50
During droughts	7	0.60
Other times	91	7.77
Total	1171	100.00

Note: Female respondents' reporting only

Table 6: Cooking Fuel Used

Fuel:	No.	%
Firewood	1161	51.39
Cowdung cakes	298	13.19
Crop wastes	426	18.86
Coal	44	1.95
Kerosene	230	10.18
LPG	67	2.97
Bio-gas	17	0.75
Electric Stove	9	0.4
Other (s)	7	0.31
Total	2259	100.00

Note: More than one form of cooking fuel is used in 1088 (93%) households

Table 7: Problems with Cooking Fuel

Problems faced	No.	% of house- holds
Scarcity / inadequacy	845	72.16
Distance	729	62.25
Scarcity during rainy season	651	55.59
High Cost	473	40.39
Source privately controlled	233	19.90
Source controlled by Govt.	232	19.81

Note: Female reporting only

Table 8: Source of Domestic Lighting

Source	%
Kerosene lamp	69.77
Oil lamp	10.16
Electric lights	61.57
Other(s)	0.60

Note: More than one source of lighting per household

Table 9: Male-Female Differentials in Preference for Toilets

Whether they would like a toilet	Male		Female	
	No.	%	No.	%
Already have a toilet	178	16.14	190	16.23
No, the present situation is alright	354	32.09	294	25.11
Would like a toilet in the house	272	24.66	399	34.07
Would like a toilet in the house near the house	282	25.57	279	23.83
Don't know / can't say	17	1.54	9	0.77
Total	1103	100.00	1171	100.00

Chapter 5

Access to Food

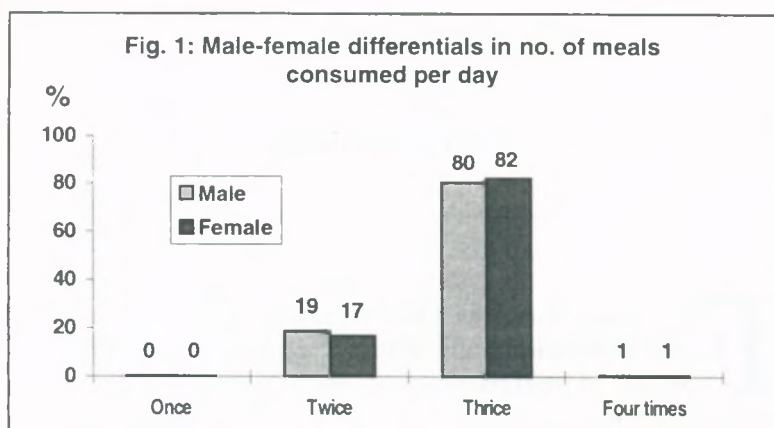
Food was treated as a key private resource in our study, and particularly one where deep-rooted gender biases result in maldistribution, with severe consequences for women's nutrition status. There have been some pioneering studies documenting the fact that women do not get adequate nutrition to support their activity levels,¹ especially during pregnancy and lactation, when food needs are high. This is still a largely unexplored area. Nutritional survey data in the country has shown clearly that inadequate food intake stunts the growth of girls,² and that even in relatively affluent rural households, girls and women get a lower share of food resources, no matter how much work they do.³

Data from the National Nutrition Monitoring Bureau shows that Karnataka has always exhibited very high per capita calorie and protein intakes when compared to most other states in India, even in low income households, possibly because of the consumption of such high-protein staples like ragi and jowar among the poor. Examining the gender dimensions of intra-household food distribution was thus a critical dimension of our study.

The data in this section of the study shows a heartening absence of bias against women in terms of access to food. There is also hardly any gender differential in reporting of food consumption information.

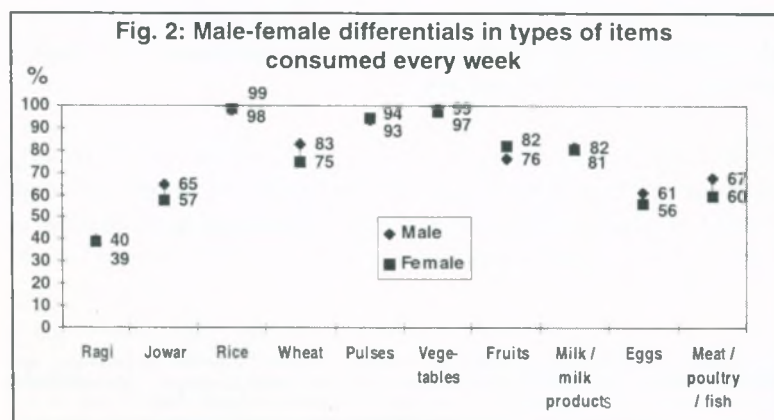
1 S. Barliwala, *Rural Energy Scarcity and Nutrition: A New Perspective*, in *Economic and Political Weekly* 1982, XVII (9); Amartya Sen and Sunil Sengupta, *Malnutrition of Rural Children and the Sex Bias* in *Economic and Political Weekly* 1983, XVIII (19-21).
2 Veena Shatrughna, *Women and Health*, SNIDT Current Information Series (Bombay: SNIDT University, 1986).

3 CARE, *Nutrition in Punjab* (New Delhi: CARE, 1974).

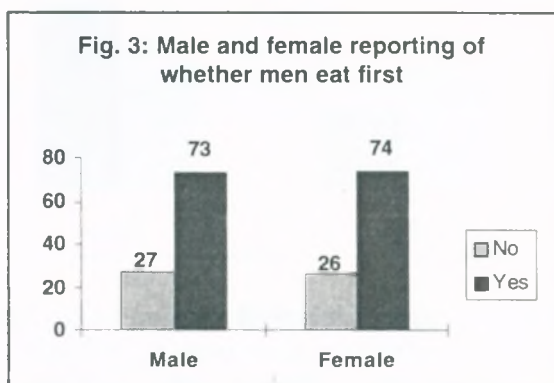


As figure 1 shows, the majority of men and women report consuming at least three meals a day, even though half the households are below poverty line in income terms. The small number of households reporting only two meals may well be the poorest, whose annual income was less than half the povertyline figure of Rs.11,800 per annum.

In terms of types of food items consumed on a weekly basis, there is little gender difference. Differences creep in, as figure 2 shows, only in the consumption of more expensive or luxury food items like fruit, eggs, meat, poultry and fish, where more men report weekly consumption.



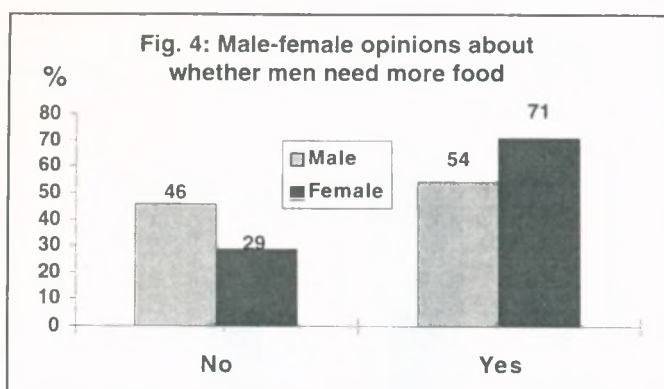
It is extremely important to make a distinction between reporting of whether a particular food item is consumed, and the relative share in terms of *quantity*.



Most studies have shown that due to sequential eating, where the adult women of the household eat last, they often get a very much smaller share of food even if they are consuming the same food items as the men. Figure 3 shows that this pattern holds good in our survey households, and is acknowledged by the men as well. Around three-fourth of the men and women report that the men of the household eat first. Unfortunately, studies of food consumption in terms of calorie intake per item are enormously difficult to do, and was not included in our study. However, we could speculate that in view of sequential eating, it is likely that women consume a lower quantity of most food items, particularly “luxury” items such as fruit and non-vegetarian food.

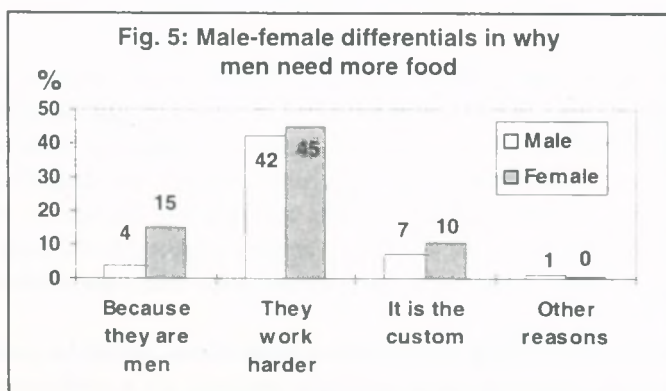
One of the reasons why girls and women are undernourished (even in households where there is no outright scarcity of food) is the deeply entrenched belief that men do more work and hence need more food. Thus, even in situations where women’s calorie output in daily activities is higher, or when there is a shortage of food for various reasons, both men and women believe that it is the women who must do without.

Figure 4 shows that this belief is held more firmly by women than men, showing how strongly women are conditioned to



uphold male privilege. Only 54% of men believe that men need more food than women, compared to 71% of the women respondents. Interestingly, a lot of men – 46% reported that this is not true, compared to just 29% of women. Further analysis will tell us who the men and women are who said men don't necessarily need more food than women - for instance, whether they hail largely from NGO areas, or from districts like Dakshina Kannada and Kodagu, where matrilineal traditions are still strong enough to privilege women's share of food because of the greater recognition of their work.

Examining the reasons given by those who believe men need more food, we see further evidence of conditioning in patriarchal ideology, especially among women. Figure 5 shows that more women than men gave the unquestioned response of "because they are men" and "it is the custom".



The largest number of respondents of both sexes, though, believe that male food requirements are higher because their work load is greater – a fact consistently disproven by field studies.⁴

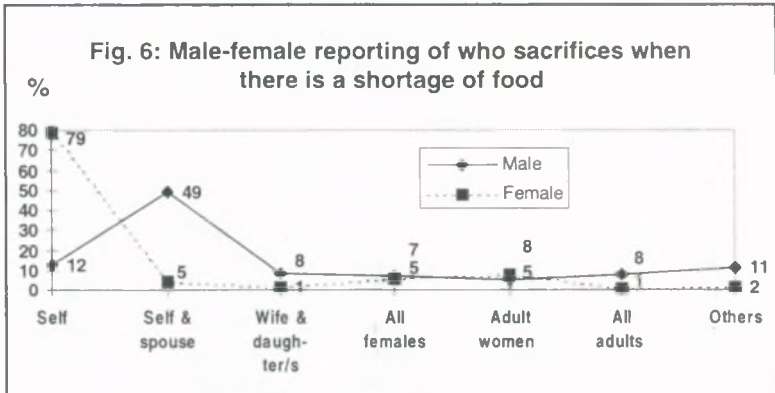
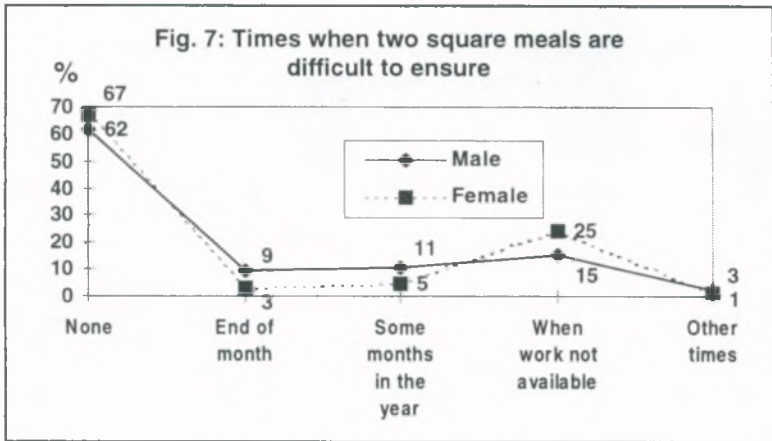


Figure 6 is perhaps the most revealing in showing where the true bias against women's equal access to food lies hidden namely, in times of crisis, when there is inadequate food supply or the household food security is threatened. We see that compared to 79% of women who report that they would be the ones to go without when there is a shortage of food, only 12% of men state that they would make a similar sacrifice. What is more curious is that while 49% of men state that they and their wives would jointly reduce their consumption, only 5% of women agree with this view – women clearly do not expect it nor have they witnessed such sacrifices being made by their husbands. What is more, since women are usually in charge of distributing food at mealtimes, the veracity of their reporting is likely to be higher. It seems evident that the women of the family – both girls and adults are the ones expected to surrender their shares to ensure that the men survive, regardless of how work loads may continue to be distributed. And the men are completely honest about this, since it is not only considered the norm, but the rightful duty of women.

4 S.Batliwala, *op.cit.*

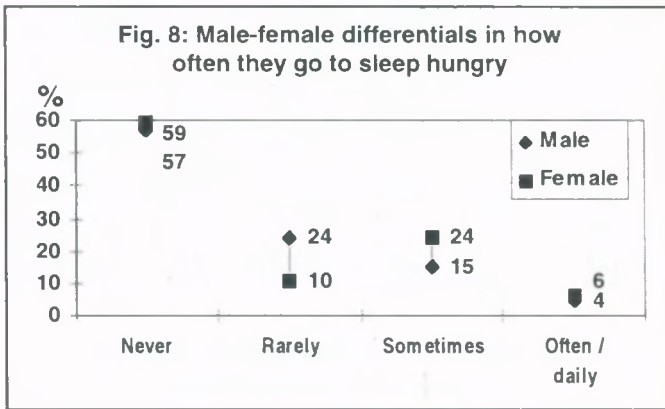
To probe the question of gender biases in access to food a little further, we added some additional questions. One of these was, “Are there times when you find it hard to get two square meals a day?”



The data in response to this question is presented in figure 7, and helps unearth subtle biases a little further. Again, the majority of men and women (62% and 67% respectively) reported that they did not face such a problem at any time. It is curious that in fact more women than men reported a high level of food security, with a lower proportion of women than men reporting inadequacy of food at “end of the month” or “some months in the year.” Once again, since women are the food managers in the household, we can place greater reliance on the veracity of their responses – more so because so few men reported sacrificing their share of food during shortages or scarcities.

What is most interesting about figure 7, however, is that 24% (287) of the women respondents reported difficulty in obtaining two square meals when they did not have work – in other words, when their access to wage labour was reduced – in contrast to just 15% of men who gave this response. These could be households where the women’s income is the main resource for purchasing the family’s food needs. Thus, when their wage-earning is affected, the women themselves obviously go without two meals a day, while probably ensuring

that their men are not as affected. It will also be worth examining whether the women giving this response are largely from the women-headed households.



The final check question on biases in access to food was a simple one: “Other than days of fasting, do you ever go to sleep feeling hungry?” The answers to this query shown in figure 8 endorse the pattern of relative food security and low male-female differentials in most categories that have emerged earlier. However, the gender gap is stark in the response “sometimes”: far more women than men at least occasionally experience a less than full stomach.

Conclusion

Nearly three-fourth of the study population do not experience dire insecurity in relation to food, despite the poverty of at least half of the surveyed households. Given conditions of overall adequacy of household food supply, there does not appear to be a strong bias against women’s access to food, even though women believe even more firmly than men that men need more nutrition. However, the study results indicate that women’s access to food is much lower than men’s in situations of scarcity, and particularly when wage work is not available, thanks to the internalized belief that they must sacrifice in times of difficulty.

Statistical Appendices

Table 1: Male-female differentials in no. of meals consumed per day

Meals per day	Male reporting		Female reporting	
	No.	%	No.	%
One	3	0.27	4	0.34
Two	206	18.68	194	16.71
Three	886	80.33	956	82.34
Four	8	0.73	7	0.60
Total	1103	100.00	1171	100.00

Table 2: Male-female differentials in types of food consumed on a weekly basis

Type of food	Male reporting		Female reporting	
	No.	%	No.	%
Ragi	436	39.53	453	38.69
Jowar	717	65.01	671	57.35
Rice	1080	97.92	1154	98.50
Wheat	911	82.59	878	74.98
Pulses	1030	93.38	1104	94.28
Vegetables	1091	98.91	1141	97.44
Fruits	841	76.25	962	82.15
Milk/milk products	900	81.60	946	80.79
Eggs	676	61.29	659	56.28
Meat/poultry/fish	744	67.45	697	59.52

Table 3: Male-female differentials in reporting of whether men eat first

Whether men eat first	Male reporting		Female reporting	
	No.	%	No.	%
No	298	27.02	305	26.05
Yes	795	72.98	852	73.95
Total	1103	100.00	1171	100.00

Table 4: Male-female differentials in reporting of whether and why men need more food than women

Whether & why men need more food	Male reporting		Female reporting	
	No.	%	No.	%
No	504	45.69	340	29.04
Yes, because they are men	42	3.81	174	14.86
Yes, because they work harder than women	465	42.16	530	45.26
Yes, it is the custom	77	6.98	122	10.42
Yes, other reasons	15	1.36	5	0.42
Total	1103	100.00	1171	100.00

Table 5: Male-female differentials in reporting of who in the family sacrifices when there is a shortage of food in the house

Male reporting			Female reporting		
Who sacrifices	No.	%	Who sacrifices	No.	%
Self	136	12.33	Self	921	78.65
Self & wife	542	49.14	Self & husband	53	4.53
Wife & daughter/s	91	8.24	Self & daughter/s	14	1.20
All female members	74	6.71	All female members	64	5.46
Adult females	53	4.81	Adult females	90	7.68
All adults	83	7.53	All adults	9	0.77
Others	124	11.24	Others	20	1.71
Total	1103	100.00		1171	100.00

Table 6: Male-female differentials in reporting of times in the year when two square meals are difficult to ensure

Times of the year	Male reporting		Female reporting	
	No.	%	No.	%
None	683	61.92	784	66.95
End of the month	103	9.34	34	2.90
Some months in the year	118	10.70	55	4.70
When work is not available	170	15.41	287	24.51
Other times	29	2.63	11	0.94
Total	1103	100.00	1171	100.00

Table 7: Male-female differentials in reporting of how often they go to bed hungry

How often	Male reporting		Female reporting	
	No.	%	No.	%
Never	628	56.94	694	59.26
Rarely	267	24.21	122	10.42
Sometimes	162	14.68	283	24.17
Often	46	4.17	67	5.72
Daily	-	-	5	0.43
Total	1103	100.00	1171	100.00

Chapter 6

Access to Health

The previous chapter showed that there is hardly any discrimination against women in terms of access to food and in types of food items consumed on a weekly basis (except in the case of more expensive items). However, women remain undernourished, partly as a result of sequential eating, and also because their calorie output may be higher. In addition, in times of shortage of food, it is women who do without food.

Poor health status has always been one of the critical indicators of women's low status in Indian society. Until the 1990s, virtually every gender-wise health statistic for the country showed discrimination against women. For instance, higher female infant mortality, high maternal mortality, higher general mortality and morbidity rates in most age groups, and lower life expectancy at birth. The situation has been aggravated by a low age at marriage and high fertility, further depleting the health status of women. It is no wonder then that India projects a far worse profile of women's health than corresponding developing countries like Sri Lanka, Philippines, Thailand or Indonesia.¹ This has been attributed to the general devaluation of women, and the persistent privileging of the male through better nutrition and medical care.² The impact of these combined factors is most clearly manifest in the country's sex ratio, one of the lowest in the world.

It is unequal gender relations that deprive women of the autonomy, decision-making power, and control over resources

1 UNFPA, *State of the World's Population* (New York: UNFPA, 1996); UNDP, *Human Development Report* (New York: UNDP, 1996).

2 World Bank, *Gender and Poverty in India* (Washington D.C.: World Bank, 1991).

that are essential to achieving a high standard of health. This point has been conceptualised by Chatterjee, who posits five gates or barriers that stand between women and their access to health care services:

- I. **Need** - the existence of a health problem or need for a service;
- II. **Perception of need** - whether the need is recognized by the person experiencing it;
- III. **Permission** - the social factors which determine whether women can seek care beyond what is available at home;
- IV. **Ability** - the economic factors which determine the opportunity cost of health care outside the home; and
- V. **Availability** - of the service sought, including distance, timings, staffing, etc.³

For rural women, at least three of these gates are directly and indirectly controlled by the family (perception of need, which is often an outcome of socialization and health beliefs, permission, and ability), and are often denied until the woman is *in extremis* or unable to perform her daily work.⁴ One of the gates, namely, availability, is controlled by the state and the market.

Obviously, social class and caste are critical variables in determining access to health; but women face the double jeopardy of their gender as well as their class/caste. Thus, even if public and private medical services are available, they reproduce not only existing class/caste biases, but also gender biases, and hence tend to sustain inequality. For example, women seeking treatment for aches and pains are often constructed by medical professionals as neurotic malingerers, and are treated with general analgesics or placebos, while

3 Meera Chatterjee, *Access to Health* (New Delhi: Manohar Publications, 1988).

4 World Bank, *op.cit.*; Chatterjee, *op. cit.*

men with similar complaints are more fully investigated and treated, with the quality of care varying with their class.⁵ All these barriers to health care are, in fact, manifestations of women's low status and lack of rights. They also demonstrate why women cannot achieve and sustain good health without a better status and the recognition of their equal rights, the only ultimate means of realising optimal health.

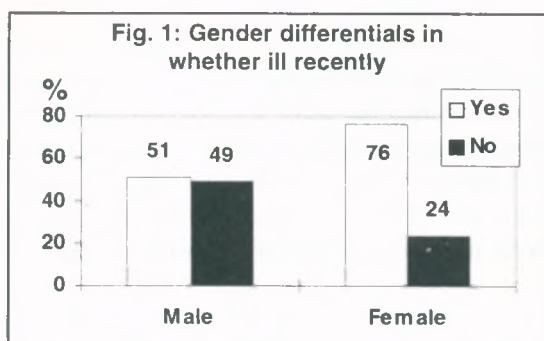
Although Karnataka is not a site of gross gender discrimination in most respects, the study nevertheless attempted to examine the gender differentials in access to health and health care, and particularly those health issues most likely to affect women - such as differential morbidity and access to treatment, women's reproductive health, and gender biases in child mortality. This section of the study was based on several hypotheses, including:

- I. Women are more frequently ill than men;
- II. Women have lower access to modern medical facilities than men because of the cost factor (i.e., more women are likely to use home remedies and traditional healers);
- III. Expenditure on treatment of women's illnesses is lower than on men; and
- IV. Women face more reproductive health problems than men.

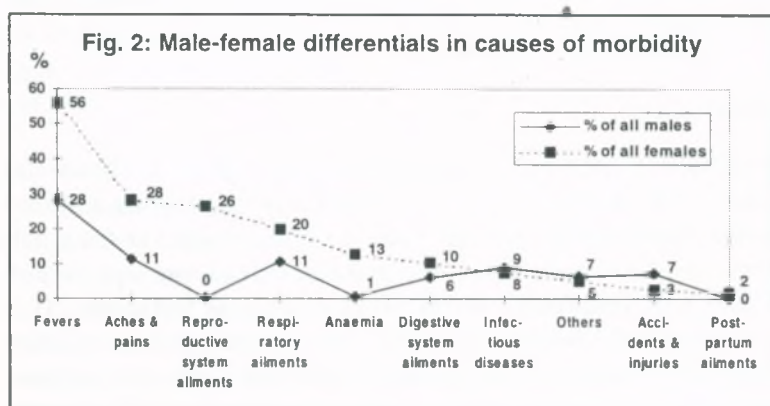
Morbidity

Our first hypothesis stands proved, as figure 1 shows: far more women (76%) than men (51%) reported having suffered any illness in the previous year. In other words, at least half the men had enjoyed relative good health during this period, while only one-fourth of the women were as fortunate. It is also important to note that the rate of morbidity for women reporting illness in the previous year was 2.25, i.e., at least two illnesses per woman per year compared to 1.5 illnesses per man in the previous year.

5 O.P. Kapoor, *Kapoor's Guide for General Practitioners* (Bombay: O.P.Kapoor, 1978).



Enquiring into the kinds of illnesses suffered, (which were symptomatically reported in most cases, except for well-known ailments like chicken pox, measles, etc.) figure 2 shows a distinct gender difference in causes of morbidity. Firstly, it is clear that if we exclude post-partum problems, women have experienced greater morbidity in six out of the nine general categories of ailments. The excess of women's morbidity over men's is most distinct for fevers (28% more), reproductive system ailments⁶ (26% more), aches and pains (17% more), anemia (12% more), and respiratory ailments (9% more). The data also shows that our final hypothesis is valid – far more women than men are subject to reproductive health illness. In fact, only 5 men, compared to 310 women, reported in this category (see table 1 of Statistical Appendices).



6 Most of the women reporting in this category actually had reproductive tract infections.

This differential is not difficult to explain, and has been well documented by research in social medicine. For example:

- i. Having generally lower resistance due to poorer nutrition, women are far more subject to infections, of which fevers are the main symptom;
- ii. In the absence of adequate water for personal hygiene, carrying of heavy loads, unhygienic deliveries, and the general taboos surrounding their reproductive organs, women are highly susceptible to reproductive tract infections (RTIs) and gynaecological diseases - one path-breaking study in Maharashtra found that 92% of the women surveyed had RTIs of some kind;⁷
- iii. Since much of poor women's daily work involves load-carrying (hauling loads of water and cooking fuel), in addition to manual labour in the fields, they are more subject to aches and pains;
- iv. Poor women are well known to be highly anaemic, particularly since they tend to consume less of the more nutritious iron-rich types of food (vegetables, fruit, eggs, etc.);⁸ and
- v. Due to prolonged exposure to the toxic emissions of biomass burning stoves during cooking, rural women have been observed to be more prone to respiratory ailments than men;⁹
- vi. The absence of a marked gender difference in morbidity from the other causes is also a well observed pattern in the country.¹⁰

7 Rani Bang, et al, *High Prevalence of Gynaecological Diseases*, in 'The Lancet', January 14, 1989.

8 Kamala Jaya Rao, *Who is Malnourished, Mother or Woman?* in Medico Friends Circle Bulletin, February 1980, pp.1-5.

9 WHO, *Indoor Air Pollution from Biomass Fuel*, Report of a World Health Organisation Consultation, (Geneva:WHO, 1992).

10 See National Study Group on Health and Medical Services, *Health for All: An Alternative Strategy*, (New Delhi: ICMR/ICSSR, 1980).

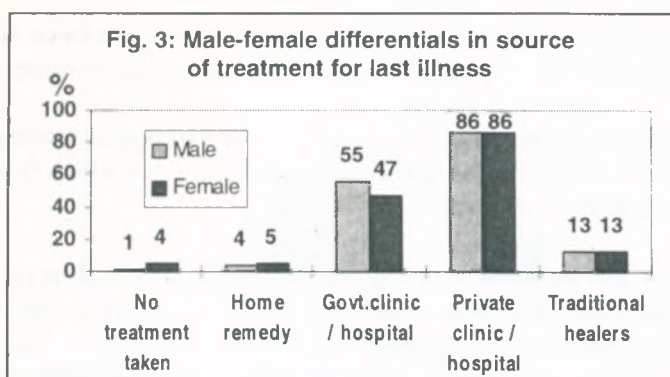


Figure 3 depicts gender differences in sources of treatment approached when they were last ill, a question for which 496 men and 789 women reported. The gender gap is insignificant, including for private and public services, which partially disproves our second hypothesis. However, more women (4%) than men (1%) report not having taken any treatment when they were ill. Curiously, the largest gender gap is in the government clinic / hospital category, which more men report using than women. This could possibly be because not only do men have greater mobility, but also more “connections”, an important criterion for getting proper treatment in ill-equipped government health centres. Incidentally, government centres are not a proxy for free treatment, since most of the government medical staff conduct private practice from the government clinics, and the absence of adequate medicines often means the patient has to purchase these from the market.

Finally, we see that private doctors, clinics and hospitals are the most popular source of treatment, showing the penetration of marketised medicine into even these remote areas. Figure 3 also disproves one of our main hypotheses – that proportionately, more women than men use traditional and religious healers, by showing that almost the same proportion of both sexes have used these sources of treatment.

Gender Differentials in Expenditure on Medical Treatment

Figures 4 to 7 bring out gender biases that are not so obvious in the data presented in figure 3, by examining the expenditure incurred on medical treatment at various levels such as on fees, medicines and tonics, transport to the treatment centres, and on any special diet that might have been necessitated by the treatment regimen. It should be noted that all data in figures 4 to 9 refers to the last illness for which treatment was sought.

The data indicate that in general, there is a much lower proportion of women than men at higher levels of expenditure on medical care, proving our third hypothesis. This cannot be explained in terms of differential causes of morbidity, for as we saw in figures 1 & 2, more women than men have reported suffering from various categories of illness; even in the causes where the gender differential is low, such as in digestive ailments, infectious diseases, and other complaints, the probability that men had more serious problems, which would involve greater expenditure on treatment, is low. The only category that could explain the difference is accidents and injuries, where far more men have reported. But even here, the numbers are so small (see table 1 of the Statistical Appendices to this section), that they would not explain the general trend of higher expenditure on male illnesses. The data in figures 4-7 therefore seem to indicate a more simple rationale: families don't invest as much on treating women when they are ill, and women don't get equal access to higher-cost care.

Figure 4 brings out this bias very graphically: of all women who reported expenditure on medical treatment in their last illness, the majority – 71% had spent less than Rs.100 on this head; and only 9% had spent more than Rs.500. In contrast, only 45% of all men reporting expenditure on medical treatment falls into the below Rs.100 category, and over 21% spent more than Rs.500.

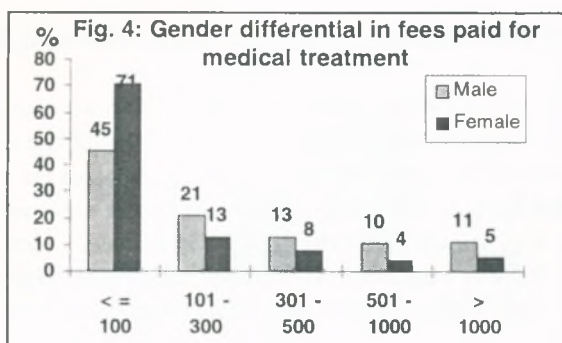


Figure 5 shows that more than half the women who had spent money on medicines for their last treatment had spent less than Rs.100, compared to just 30% of men; on the other hand, 25% of men who purchased medicine for their last ailment spent over Rs.500 on this head, compared to just 20% of women who spent as much.

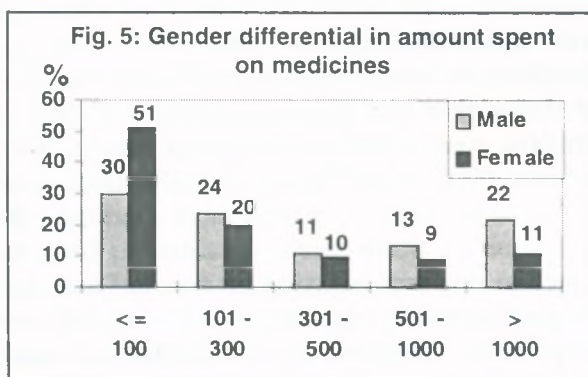


Figure 6 continues the trend: the fact that the majority of women who had travelled to a treatment centre during their last illness spent less than Rs.100 on transportation would seem to indicate that women have generally availed of medical services near their villages. Larger outlays on transport are very male-dominated, and are probably a proxy for those who sought hospital-based or specialist/private or government services in more distant towns and cities, which would obviously involve higher expenditure on travel. In this context, it is extremely significant that not a single woman is present in the above Rs.1000 category for expenditure on transport for medical care (see table 3 of the Statistical Appendices).

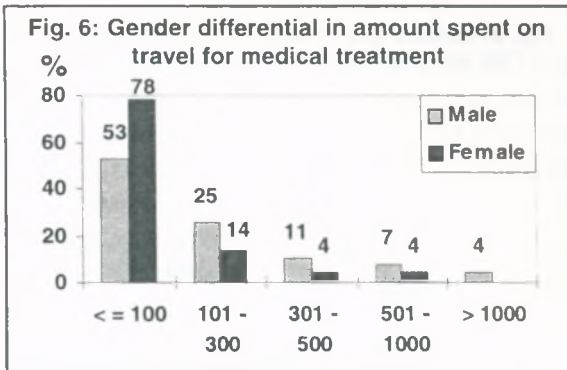
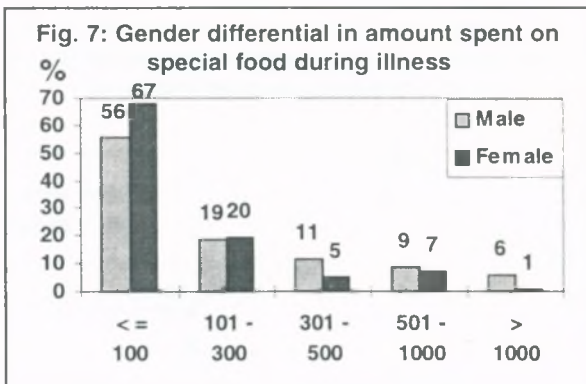
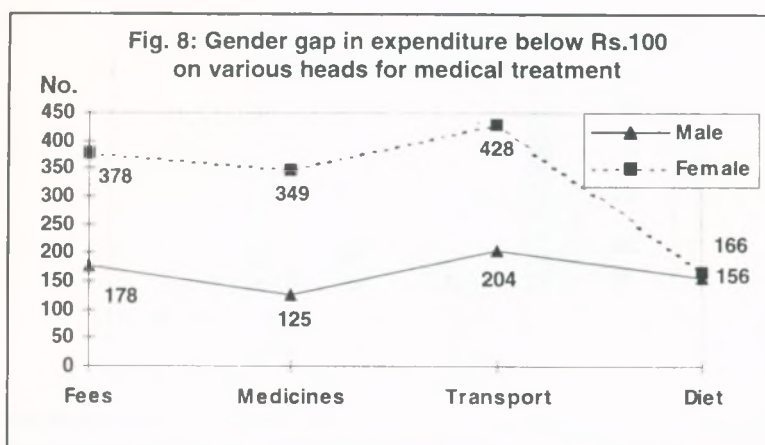


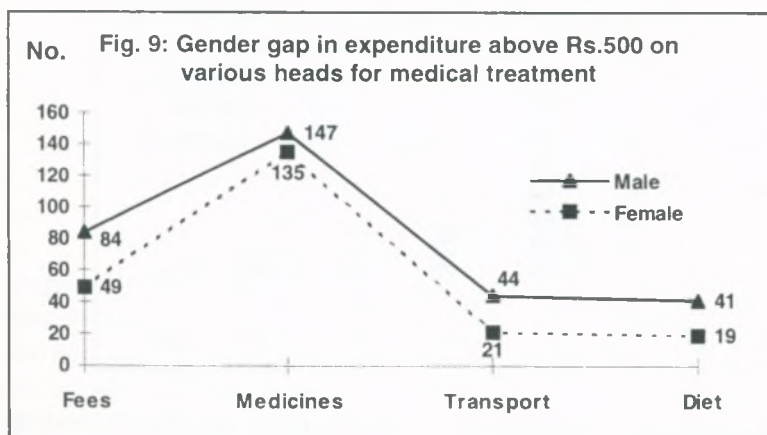
Figure 7 consolidates the trend of higher expenditure on men's illness care. It shows that if heavy outlays have been made on a special diet during illness or convalescence, the patients are more likely to be men than women. What is curious here is that the gap between men and women in the below Rs.100 category is very much smaller than in figures 4-6, where the difference was generally at least 20% in favour of women.



Figures 8 & 9 bring home the point in no uncertain terms, by depicting the gender difference in access to expenditure on treating illness. Figure 8 shows that if Rs.100 or less has been spent on fees, medicines, transport or special diet during an illness, nearly double the number of women as men fall into this category.



In comparison, figure 9 shows that if more than Rs.500 has been spent on any component of treatment, the number of men will exceed the number of women, though the differences, in both percentage and numeric terms, are not so dramatic as in figure 8, probably because very few of these families are affluent enough to afford extremely high expenditure for either men or women.



Women's Reproductive Health

The United Nations' International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), held in Cairo in 1994, had a tremendous impact in shifting the population debate away from demographic goals to a sharper focus on the dismal state

of women's overall reproductive health. The ICPD Programme of Action commands its signatories to address the full range of women's reproductive health needs, rather than obsessively targeting birth rates. In preparation for the ICPD, women's groups and researchers worldwide unleashed a wealth of data showing the poor state of women's reproductive health, and particularly the high incidence of untreated reproductive tract infections, particularly in countries like India. Accordingly, the study attempted to elicit some information on this question from the surveyed women, all of whom were in the reproductive age group.

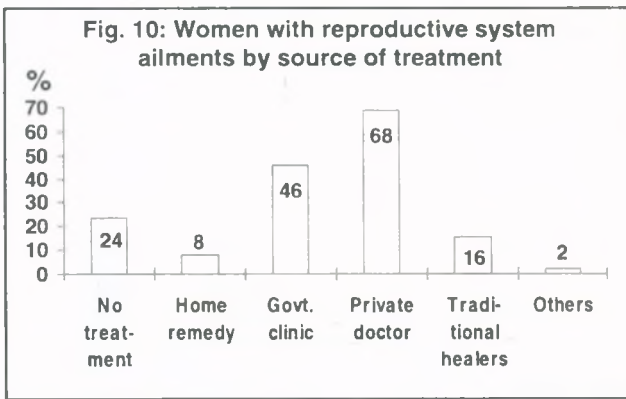
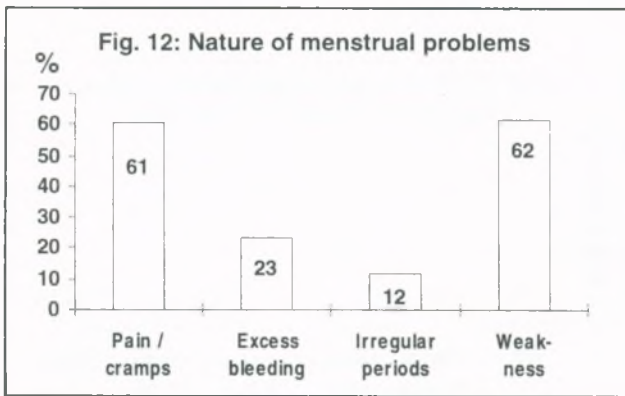
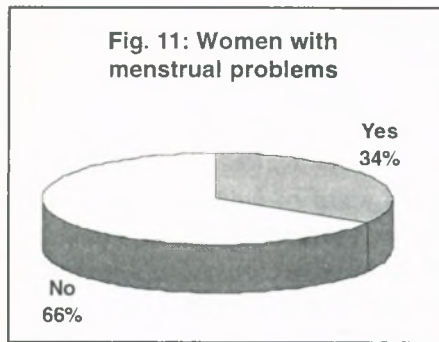


Figure 10 shows that only 24% of the women with reproductive health problems – most of which were reproductive tract infections had not sought treatment. Most had taken treatment from either government or private medical services. The data also shows that nearly two-thirds of the affected women had taken treatment from more than one source, since 310 women reported reproductive health problems, while there were 508 responses for source of treatment. This is in encouraging contrast to the Maharashtra study, where 80% of the sufferers had not been treated.¹¹

Menstrual problems were reported by one-third of the women respondents, which is a fairly high prevalence. According to figure 11, 34% (398 out of 1171 women) reported having

¹¹ Rani Bang, et al, *op.cit.*



difficulties related to their periods; of these, figure 12 indicates that the commonest problems were pain / cramps (dysmenorrhoea) and weakness.

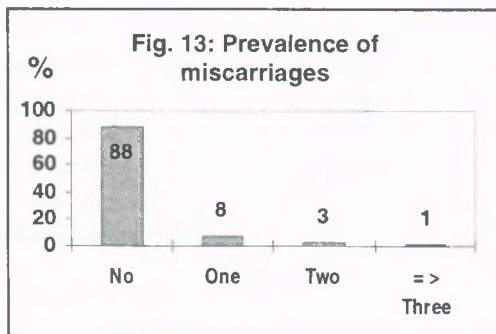


Figure 13 reveals that only 12% of all women respondents have ever had a miscarriage. The actual number of women who reported having had a miscarriage is 142, which is not a small number. In addition, just 54 women reported having

had an abortion. But of these, only 27 women had approached a doctor for the termination of pregnancy, the rest, 21 women reported that they had used traditional methods. The accuracy of the numbers for abortion cannot be very confidently asserted, which is why the data is not represented here. Abortion is still shrouded in secrecy, for obvious reasons, and there may be a large number that have gone unreported. And if this is the case, it is likely that the majority were again performed through traditional means. This is because experience shows that women hesitate to approach government facilities for abortions since they will be inevitably pressurised to get sterilized to meet government family planning targets. Private services are expensive, and women may not be able to command the funds for this without explanations to the husband and family.

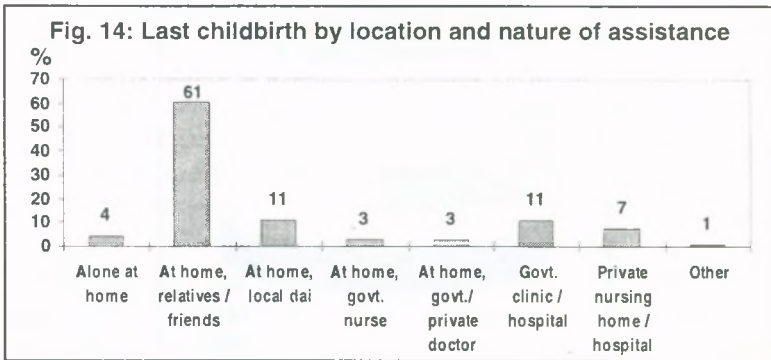
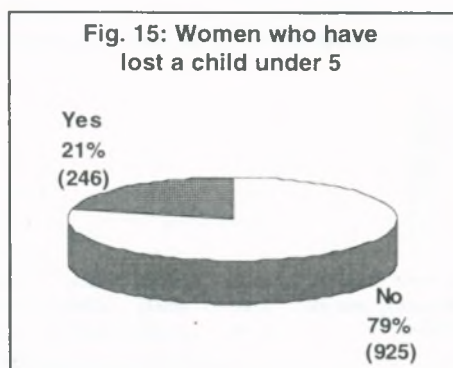


Figure 14 shows a most depressing picture of one of the most critical factors that affects women's reproductive health, namely, safe childbirth under aseptic conditions. Of the 1033 women who had delivered a child, we see that an overwhelming 63% of women delivered the last child at home, assisted by untrained attendants, and probably under unsterile conditions and with traditional birthing techniques that are far from aseptic. This factor must be connected to the large number of women who reported various ailments of the reproductive system and post-partum problems in figure 2. If we assume that the local *dais* who performed another 10% of the deliveries were also untrained and used similarly unhygienic methods, then the proportion of women (and

their infants) who were exposed to puerperal and post-partum health risks is even higher – 73%.

Worse, figure 14 shows the extremely poor reach and coverage of government services - only 3% of the women were delivered by a government nurse, 1.84% by a government doctor in their homes and 11% at a government health centre or hospital. Surprisingly, even private care has not been accessed by many women - just 1% had a private doctor attending at home, and 7% delivered at a private nursing home (see table 8 of the Statistical Appendices). This is probably due to the high cost of private maternity services. This means that the high utilization of government and private health services by women which we saw in figure 3 was not in the context of childbirth.



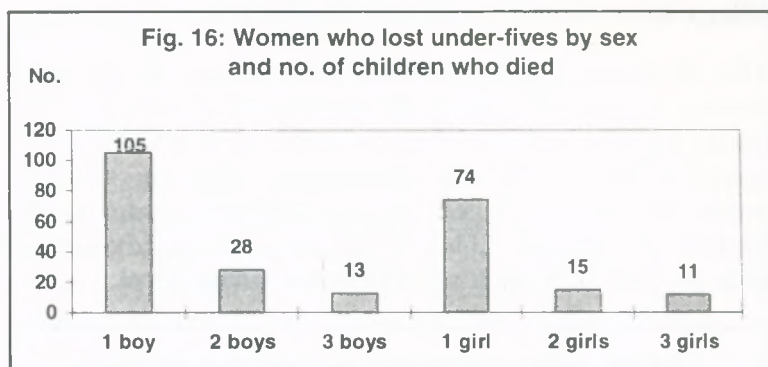
Child Mortality

An incredibly high proportion of women reported having lost at least one child before they reached the age of five, as figure 15 shows. At 21% (or 246 women) this means that one in five women in our sample suffered such a loss. High mortality rates of under-5 children is known to be one of the factors contributing to high birth rates.

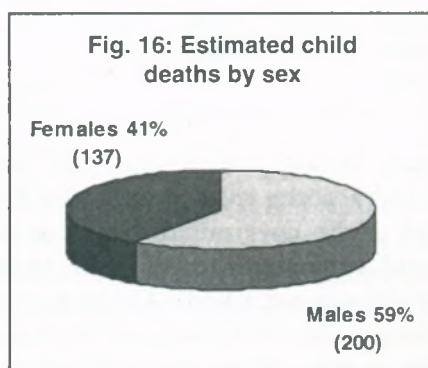
Figures 16 & 17* present us with one of the surprising findings of the study: more male than female children died

*Calculated on the basis of the data in Figure 16.

before the age of five. This pattern is not surprising in and of itself, given that the male child is biologically weaker, and male attrition rates are normally higher in infancy and early childhood in societies where there is no active discrimination against either sex. In our study population, however, this finding becomes most peculiar since we found the child sex ratio for the study households was distorted in favour of boys.



There are only two possible explanations for this anomaly: 1) A larger number of girl children have died *after the age of five*, contributing to the low sex ratio for the 0 – 14 age group; or 2) There has been under-reporting of girl child deaths - a distinct possibility given that neo-natal mortality of female infants is often unreported and unmarked in most of India,¹² whereas the death of an infant son is publicly grieved and considered a great misfortune.

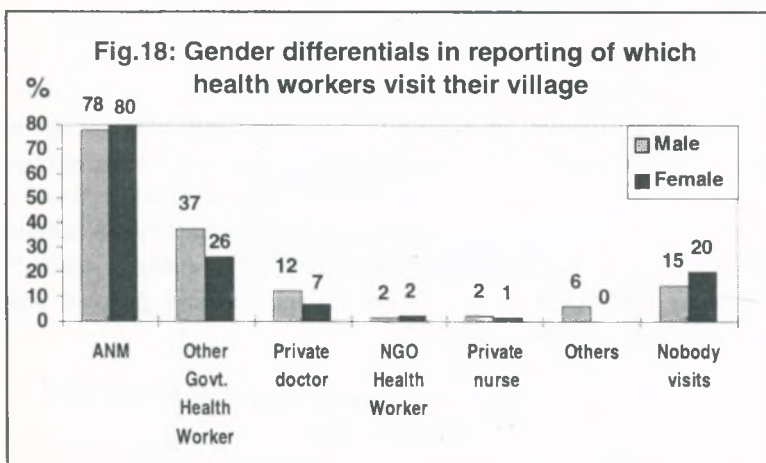


¹² National Commission on Status of Women, *Towards Equality* (New Delhi: Govt. of India, 1974); World Bank, *op.cit.*; ADITHI, *Female Infanticide in Rural Bihar*, (Patna: ADITHI, 1994)

Although the culture of rural Karnataka is somewhat more benign towards women, it is quite possible that a number of girls from these families died between the ages of 6 and 14. But it is also not inconceivable that many more young girls in the study households died before the age of five than have been reported here.

Village-level Access to Health Workers

The absence of timely medical care is one of the main reasons for the poor health of women and children in rural India. In this section of the study, therefore, we wanted to assess the type of health care services that are available within the study villages, in the form of visiting health workers and doctors. This would also help us advocate, if necessary, for more such services at the village level.



It is encouraging to note, from figure 18, that the health worker most available at the village level is the ANM (Auxiliary Nurse Midwife) of the government health services – nearly 80% of men and women report that she visits the village (frequency of visits was not asked). Other government health workers – probably male Multi-Purpose Workers are the next most accessible at the village level. However, the gender difference in reporting of other government health workers suggests that since they are mainly men, women do not use

their services, and may therefore not be as aware of their visits as men. The case with private doctors seems to be similar: going by reporting, more men would appear to be using their services at the village level. The other interesting gender difference is in the category "nobody visits", where more women than men make this complaint. Since women's mobility is lower, they obviously feel the absence of a reliable village-level health service to which they could have easy access.

Conclusion

This section of the study has thrown up a rich fund of data, highlighting gender differentials in access to health and health care, and insights on the reproductive health status of the women respondents. We have seen that women report more illnesses than men, but seem to have accessed treatment almost equally. However, it is clear that women do not have the same access to higher expenditure on their medical care, and must make do with low-cost services and other inputs. There is marked evidence of an increasing use of private services, similar to what has been found in the rural areas of other states. The majority of the study population also has access to at least one type of public health worker at the village level, though the frequency of their availability is yet to be determined.

In the context of women's reproductive health, we saw that almost a third of the women respondents reported reproductive system ailments, especially problems related to menstruation. The proportion of women delivering under unhygienic conditions with untrained birth attendants was nearly two-thirds. About one in five women had suffered the death of a young child. The data indicates a clear need for improvement in the availability, accessibility and quality of reproductive health services for women, especially at the village-level.

Statistical Appendices

**Table 1: Male and Female Morbidity by Cause
(in previous year)**

Ailment / Causes of morbidity	Male reporting		Female reporting	
	No.	% of all males	No.	% of all females
NO ILLNESS	539	48.87	281	23.99
Fevers (P.U.O)	310	28.11	654	55.85
Aches & pains	124	11.24	331	28.27
Reproductive system ailments (including STDs, infertility & related problems, Reproductive Tract Infections (RTIs) & other gynaecological problems)	5	0.45	310	26.47
Respiratory system ailments (including coughs, colds, asthma, etc.)	119	10.79	235	20.07
Anaemia ("Rakta Heenata")	8	0.73	149	12.72
Digestive system ailments (including diarrhoea, jaundice, etc.)	68	6.17	122	10.42
Infectious & communicable diseases (including malaria, TB, measles, typhoid, mumps, chicken pox, filaria, etc.)	100	9.07	88	7.51
Accidents & Injuries (including cuts, burns, bites, etc.)	81	7.34	32	2.73
Post-partum ailments	0	0	22	1.88
Other miscellaneous ailments	73	6.62	60	5.12
Total ailments reported	888		2003	
Total persons reporting illness	564	51.13	890	76.00

Table 2: Gender Differentials in Source of Treatment for Last Illness

Source of treatment	Male reporting		Female reporting	
	No.	% of 496	No.	% of 789
No treatment taken	4	0.81	35	4.44
Home remedy	19	3.83	37	4.69
Govt. health worker	13	2.62	26	3.30
Govt. clinic	80	16.13	95	12.04
Govt. hospital	180	36.29	253	32.07
Private doctor	297	59.88	384	48.67
Private nursing home	33	6.65	70	8.87
Private hospital	96	19.35	226	28.64
Local male healer	15	3.02	5	0.63
Local female healer		0.00	3	0.38
Vaid	18	3.63	24	3.04
Temple /mantravad / holy person	29	5.85	70	8.87

Table 3: Gender Differentials in Expenditure on Fees, Medicines, Transport and Diet in Last Illness

Consultation Fees (Rs.)	Males		Females		Medicines (Rs.)	Males		Females	
	No.	%	No.	%		No.	%	No.	%
1 to 50	128	25.81	284	35.99	1 to 50	125	25.20	349	44.23
51 -100	50	10.08	94	11.91	51 -100	60	12.20	85	10.77
101 - 200	53	10.69	50	6.34	101 - 200	40	8.06	50	6.34
201 - 300	28	5.65	18	2.28	201 - 300	11	2.21	26	3.30
301 - 400	10	2.02	7	0.89	301 - 400	35	7.05	39	4.94
401 - 500	39	7.86	34	4.31	401 - 500	55	11.10	61	7.73
501 - 1000	40	8.06	22	2.79	501 - 1000	42	8.47	33	4.18
1001 - 2000	26	5.24	13	1.65	1001 - 2000	22	4.44	19	2.41
2001 - 5000	12	2.42	11	1.39	2001 - 5000	9	1.81	8	1.01
> 5000	6	1.21	3	0.38	> 5000	10	2.02	6	0.76

Transport (Rs.)	Males		Females		Special Diet (Rs.)	Males		Females	
	No.	%	No.	%		No.	%	No.	%
1 to 50	141	28.43	350	44.36	1 to 50	91	18.35	120	15.21
51 -100	63	12.70	78	9.89	51 -100	65	13.1	46	5.83
101 - 200	63	12.70	46	5.83	101 - 200	33	6.65	32	4.1
201 - 300	35	7.06	29	3.68	201 - 300	19	3.83	16	2.03
301 - 400	11	2.22	2	0.25	301 - 500	32	6.45	13	1.65
401 - 500	30	6.05	22	2.79	501 - 1000	24	4.84	17	2.15
501 - 1000	29	5.85	21	2.66	> 1001	17	3.43	2	0.25
> 1001	15	3.02							

Note: All percentages are calculated for 496 men and 789 women who reported this data for last illness.

Table 4: Source of Treatment Used by Women Respondents Reporting Reproductive Health Ailments

Source of treatment	No.	% of 310
No treatment taken	73	23.55
Home remedy	25	8.06
Govt. health worker	11	3.55
Govt. clinic	46	14.84
Govt. hospital	85	27.42
Private doctor	137	44.19
Private nursing home	22	7.10
Private hospital	53	17.10
Local male healer	2	0.64
Local female healer	1	0.32
Vaid	6	1.94
Religious healers	40	12.90
Other (s)	7	2.26

Note: 310 women reported in this category

Table 5: Reporting of Menstrual Problems

Nature of problem	No.	% of all females
No problems	776	66.27
Yes, pain/cramps	239	20.41
Excess bleeding	92	7.86
Irregular periods	47	4.01
Weakness	243	20.75

Note: all females = 1171

Table 6: Prevalence of Miscarriages

	No.	% of all females
None	989	84.45
One	94	8.03
Two	33	2.82
Three or more	15	1.28
No. of women who had miscarriages	142	12.12

Note: all females = 1171

Table 7: Abortions

Whether had abortion	No.	% of all females
No abortion	1117	95.39
No. women who reported abortions	54	4.61
Source	No. of all abortions	% of all abortions
Medical practitioners	27	50.00
Traditional methods	21	38.89
Others	6	1.11

Table 8: Location and who assisted at Last Delivery

Location / assistance	No.	%
Alone at home	39	3.77
At home with help of female relatives	588	56.92
At home with help of friends/neighbours	37	3.58
At home with help of local dai	113	10.93
At home with help of govt. nurse	30	2.90
At home with help of govt. doctor	19	1.84
At home with help of private doctor	12	1.16
At the govt. clinic/hospital/nursing home	115	11.13
At private nursing home/hospital	74	7.16
Other	6	0.58
Total No. of women reporting on last delivery	1033	100.00

Table 9: Under-Five Mortality

Women who have lost an under-five child	Female reporting	
	No.	% of 1171
No	925	78.99
Yes	246	21.11
No. & sex of under-fives who died	No.	% of 246
One boy	105	42.68
Two boys	28	11.38
Three boys or more	13	5.28
One girl	74	30.08
Two girls	15	6.10
Three girls or more	11	4.47

Note: the second part of this table represents data from a multiple response question

Table 10: Gender Differentials in Reporting of which Health Workers visit the Village

Health Worker	Male	% of 1103	Female	% of 1171
ANM	860	77.97	933	79.68
Other Govt. Health Worker	413	37.44	303	25.88
Private nurse	24	2.18	14	1.20
Private doctor	132	11.97	82	7.00
NGO Health Worker	17	1.54	24	2.05
Other	6	5.83	1	0.09
Nobody	163	14.78	238	20.24

Note: multiple response question

Profile of Asset Ownership

Ownership of, and control over, assets is a source of tremendous security and power. Lack of it makes for precarious living, as can be clearly seen in the case of the rural poor. Where traditional gender-based divisions exist, such a lack renders women particularly vulnerable. In this section we will present the profile of asset ownership. 'Asset' in this study, is defined as land, livestock, house, animals, equipment, jewellery. 'Ownership', again, is not merely in terms of in whose name the asset is bought or retained, but more important in terms of who has the power to sell it.

In this section of the study, our objective was to test three basic hypotheses, namely:

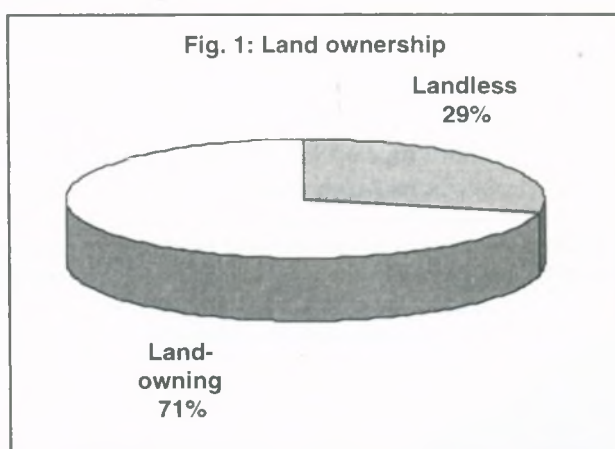
- I. That the majority of household assets (a key form of private resources) are owned by men;
- II. That women's knowledge of household asset ownership tends to be less accurate, by virtue of hypothesis I; and
- III. That if hypothesis II is proved, then women would have little or no control over the assets owned by the household.

While hypothesis I and III have been validated by the results, hypothesis II has been disproved. We shall examine the gender disparities in asset ownership and control in three types of asset - i.e., land, livestock, house.

Land

It must be stressed that since our study was not focussed on economic or agricultural profiles *per se*, we did not provide for

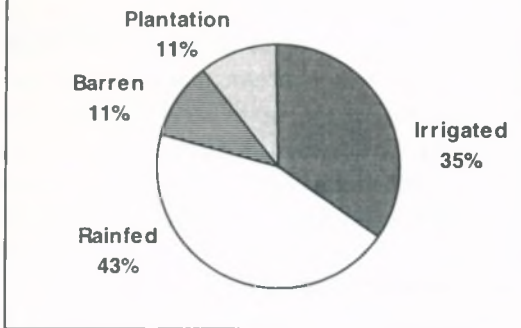
detailed analysis of size of holdings and type of land; therefore, we do not present totals for some of the land data, since it would be misleading. Our focus was on gender disparities in knowledge (using reporting as the proxy) of land and other asset ownership. In this context, it was found that there was no discrepancy between male and female respondents' reporting of land ownership, disproving our hypothesis that women have less awareness of the household's asset ownership. However, the discrepancy in reporting is slightly visible when we get into details of type of land owned and size of holdings of each type, as figure 4 shows.



As figure 1 shows, 71% of the surveyed households own land, and the proportion of landless families is just under 29%. The total number of households reporting ownership of land is 836 (including female-headed households). The relatively low proportion of landless households appears to reflect the land reforms carried out in the state in the 1970s.

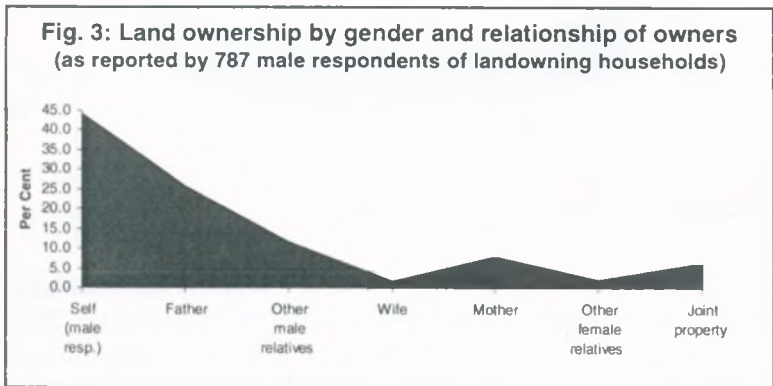
Figure 2 shows the distribution of land by type, indicating that the largest proportion of land owned is dependent on rainfed agriculture, and a full 11% is barren, uncultivable land. District-wise analysis will tell us more about where these types of land tend to predominate. Only a little over a third of all land is irrigated. Almost three-fourths of the households owning irrigated land have small holdings of less than or upto 2.5 acres; and around 50% of households having

Fig. 2: Distribution of land owned by type



rainfed land, own less than or upto 2.5 acres. It will be interesting to analyse the influence of land ownership, especially size of holdings, on factors such as women's decision making and perceptions of gender relations.

Fig. 3: Land ownership by gender and relationship of owners (as reported by 787 male respondents of landowning households)



If we go by male reporting of land ownership, as in figure 3, we see that over 81% of land of all types is owned by men, and that the male heads of household i.e., the male respondent himself or his father, own over 44% and 25% of family holdings, respectively. In contrast, less than 2% of the female respondents (shown as "wife" in figure 3) own land in their own names, and a little over 6% is held in joint names of husband and wife. In fact, if we take female ownership together, as a category, only 12% of land is owned by women. Clearly, ownership of a vital rural asset like land is firmly in the hands of men; this indicates the need to address a second

stage of land reforms that would give women at least joint legal ownership as a means of raising their economic status. Formal ownership will not necessarily lead to functional control over land, as Aggarwal has pointed out,¹ but it is an important and necessary condition.

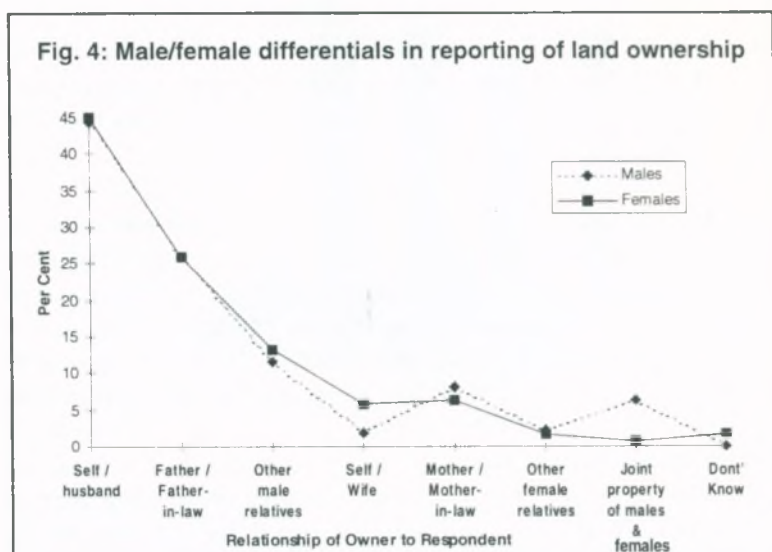


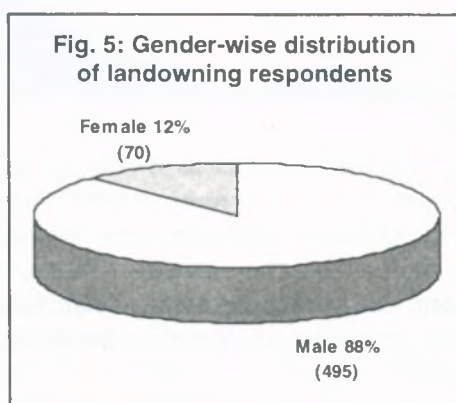
Figure 4, which contrasts female respondents' reporting of land ownership with that of males, brings out some interesting features of the differences between male and female respondents' accounts of who in the family owns land.

- i. Women report themselves as owning much more land (6%) than their spouses report (1.8% owned by wife). This could either be because these women have been given to understand they are the owners, or are in fact owners but the husbands did not want to acknowledge this to the investigators, lest they be thought to have a lower status.
- ii. While men reported as much as 6.3% of land being joint property of husbands and wife, or of men and women of the family related in some other way, not even 1% of

¹ Bina Aggarwal, *A Field of One's Own* (New Delhi, 1996).

women corroborate this. In other words, it would appear that in such cases, even if the land is jointly held, the women concerned are not aware of this. It could also be shaded by the desire of the men to show higher status to the investigators through claiming joint status.

- iii. Nearly 2% of women from landowning households said they did not know in whose name the land was, whereas no male respondent from such households declared lack of this knowledge.
- iv. Interestingly, knowledge of ownership by husband or father-in-law by women is fairly exact, matching male reporting. It is likely, therefore, that those women who reported ignorance of ownership came from households where the primary males (spouse and father-in-law) were probably not the legal owners; if they were, this fact would probably be well known to the woman. Alternately, some of these women could have been recently married and not yet fully familiar with the economic situation of their marital family. With time, and with increased age, women would probably be privy to more such information.



In order to explore further the gender-based differences in land ownership, we disaggregated the data for type of land owned by male and female landowning respondents. Firstly, figure 5 shows that only 12%, or 70 of all respondents owning land are women. We then tested the hypothesis that there

would be a greater preponderance of barren and unproductive land in the hands of women landowners than men landowners.

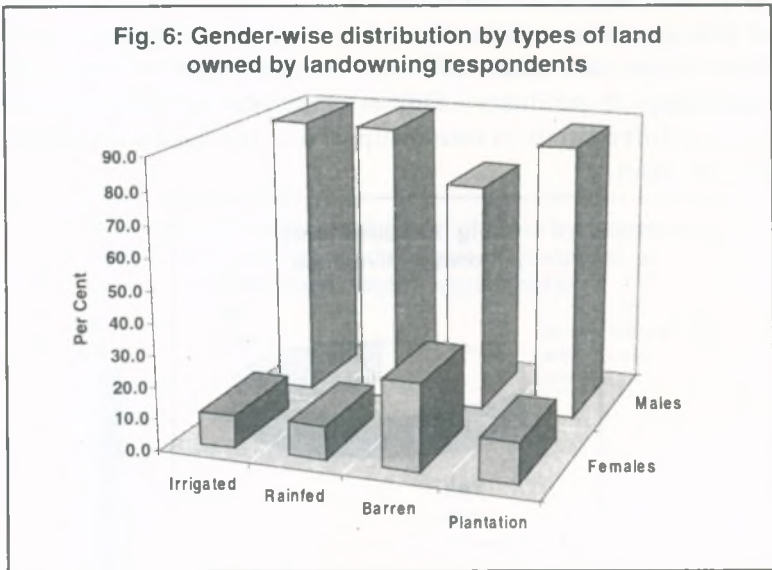
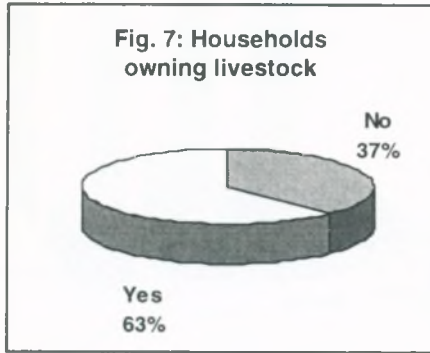


Figure 6 proves this hypothesis in so far as the ratio of women owners is highest in the category of barren land - i.e., a full 27% of barren land belongs to women. In contrast, only 10% of all irrigated land, 11% of rainfed land and 11% of plantation land is in women's hands. Clearly, the proportion of barren land held by women is more than double the proportion of any other type of land they own. This would seem to point to the fact that even when women own land, a larger share of them would hold less productive and uncultivable land, partly neutralising the positive effect such ownership might have on their household and community status.

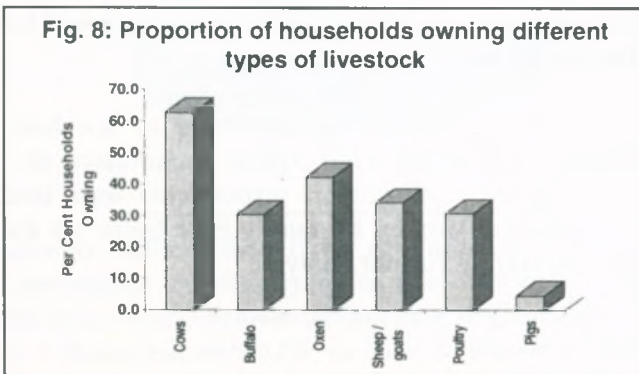
On further study, it will be interesting to see how land ownership impacts on other status parameters in those households where the women respondents own land. A break up of these women by family type (joint v/s nuclear) may also be used in further analysis.

Livestock

After land, ownership of livestock is an important dimension of the economic status of rural households. Ownership of livestock is also often essential to cultivation of land and marketing of produce. Our attempt was to examine the gender differentials in ownership of livestock as an important private asset.



Once again, we found no major gender differential in knowledge of livestock ownership, with almost identical reporting by men and women. 62.6% of male respondents reported that their households owned livestock, while 63% of women reported this. Even this marginal difference is due to the presence of reporting by some of the 68 single women respondents (i.e., the female-headed households where there was no spouse or key male cohort as male respondent). Some of these women are owners of livestock, making up the difference.



Details of livestock ownership by category of animal as reported by male respondents are given in figure 8. The categories are not mutually exclusive. Legal ownership is more difficult to identify in the case of livestock, especially for poultry, sheep and goats, etc. Therefore, the right to buy and sell was used as a proxy to determine functional ownership in this section.

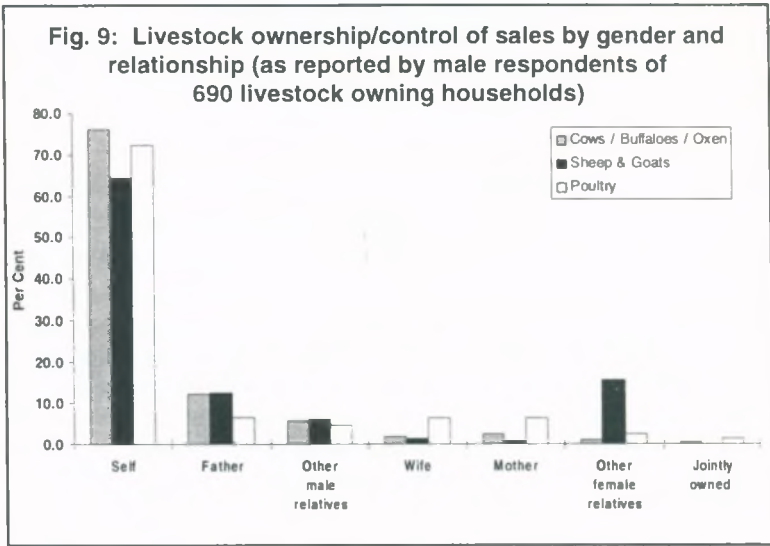


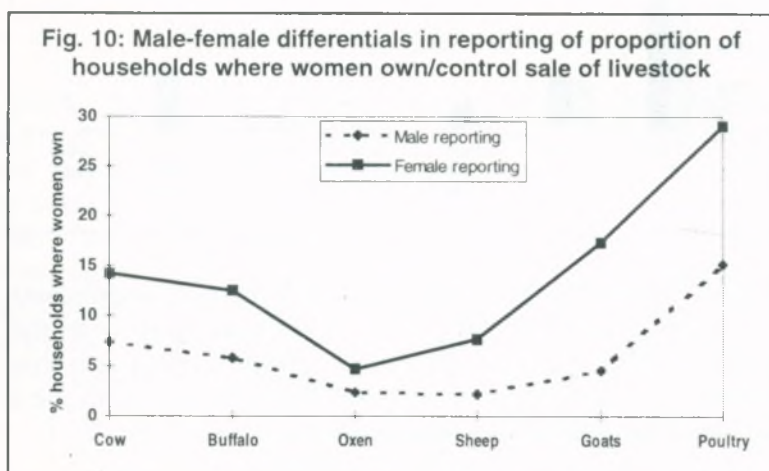
Figure 9 shows that as in the case of land, the male respondents see themselves, their fathers, and other male relatives as the key controllers / owners of livestock. Surprisingly, this is true even in the case of poultry, where we had expected to see a far larger proportion of women owners.

However, when we examine male-female differences in reporting of functional ownership, as in figure 10, there are significant discrepancies. This difference in male and female perception of ownership is most striking in the case of poultry. Men have consistently reported a lower proportion of women owners for each type of livestock, when compared

with women's reporting of the same. This could be because:

- I. More men perceive themselves as heads of households, and hence ultimate owners of all household assets, even if women are technical or legal owners. For instance, women might have taken loans in their names to purchase the animals, but their husbands do not see them as owners of these assets; or
- II. Women do more of the management of the animals (feeding, grazing, etc.) and hence more often see this as functional ownership than do men.

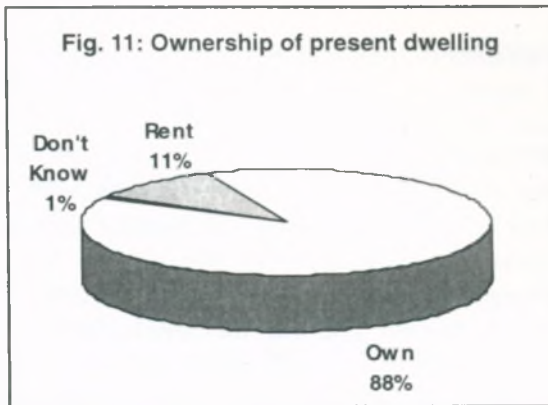
These differences also seem to reinforce the fact that while in the case of land, male and female respondents reported more or less similarly about ownership, in the case of livestock however, the question of ownership is less clear.



Note: these percentages have been calculated as a proportion of the households reported separately by male and female respondents as owning each type of animal.

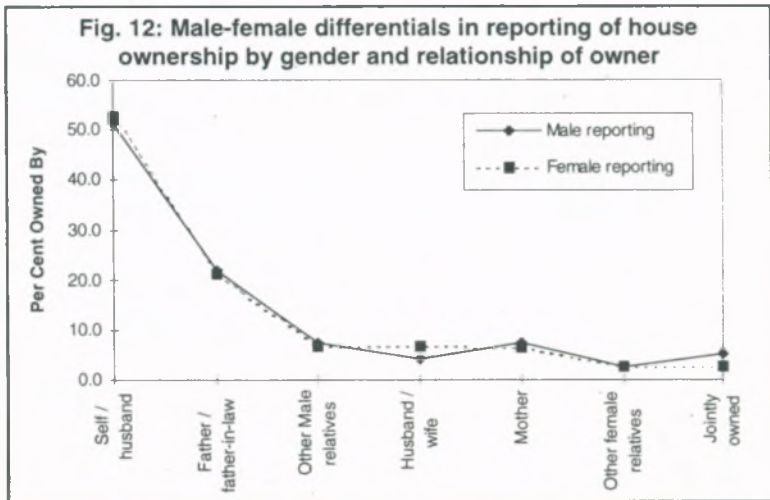
House

Again, there was little gender difference in reporting of whether the dwelling occupied by the household was owned or rented – nearly 89% of men reported the dwelling as



Note: As reported by male respondents

owned by the family, whereas nearly 88% of women did so. However, for the first time, some male and female respondents stated lack of knowledge on this question. The total number of households owning houses was 1000 according to the 1103 male respondents, and 1036 according to the 1171 female respondents.



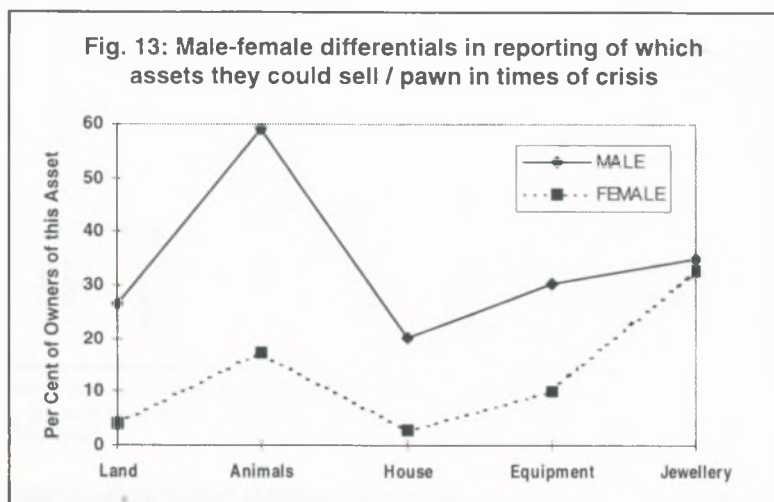
Note: In many cases, the total in each cell may represent more than one house owned by the family; joint ownership by family could either mean joint ownership by male/female family members or both husband and wife.

As figure 12 illustrates, male respondents, their fathers, and other male relatives are once again dominant in ownership of house. There is little or no discrepancy between male and

female respondents' perception of house ownership. Out of the 1101 houses whose ownership was reported by male respondents, 51.23% were owned by the male respondents and 4.18% by their wives; a slightly higher percentage of female respondents report themselves as owners (6.73%), but this could be attributed to the female-headed households. In all, an overwhelming 885, or 80.38% of the 1101 houses owned belonged to men, and just 158, or 14.35%, to women members of the family. The low incidence of joint ownership – barely 5% is a serious issue for women. Not being owners of their dwellings in most cases, and not having joint claims in more than a few cases, the women are very vulnerable to being evicted from the house in case of disputes. The ousting of women (sometimes with their young children), without any alternative shelter, is a common phenomenon.

Control over Assets

As mentioned at the outset, the key objective of this section of the study was to examine gender differentials not only in formal ownership of assets, but in actual control. We used the question, "Which assets could you sell or pawn without



Note: The figure shows male and female responses as a proportion of those actually reporting ownership of the given asset. In the case of jewellery, it signifies own jewellery in the case of women, and wife's jewellery in the case of men.

asking anyone else, in the event of a crisis?" to determine the real nature of control over assets.

Figure 13 shows the interesting results of the analysis of answers to this query. First of all, it is clear that on the whole, only a minority of respondents – whether male or female feel they are in a position to sell or pledge household assets without the permission of others. To this extent, a relatively small proportion of men and women have much control of family assets. Of those who feel they do, however, men clearly predominate. Interestingly, the highest degree of such control in the case of men seems to be over livestock, while women predictably feel most control of their jewellery. It is also worth noting that the proportion of men and women claiming the right to liquidate jewellery is almost equal – indicating that men feel the right to dispose of women's jewellery without their permission, although it does not technically belong to them. The order of perceived autonomy to dispose the asset is probably correlated to the ease with which the asset can be liquidated – which could be why a higher percentage of both men and women report that they could dispose of jewellery and animals.

This pattern, of more male respondents believing they can independently take a decision to sell or pledge family assets, is clearly because patrilineal inheritance rules make it more possible for them to dispose assets that may not be self-acquired. Women do not enjoy these rights, making them far more vulnerable in crisis situations, and hence diminishing their status.

The male-female differentials in perception of control over assets are also clearly related to ownership. Since so few women own assets like the family house, land, or livestock, it is not surprising that very few believe they could liquidate these without permission. However, despite the predominance of male ownership, the patriarchal family structure seems to ensure that even men cannot dispose of major assets without a consultative process of some kind, or permission of the senior male members of the household.

Conclusion

Thus, two of the three hypotheses set out at the beginning of this chapter have been validated by the study findings. The majority of women in the surveyed households do not own – either formally or functionally – the major assets of the household, placing them in an economically weaker and more dependent position. Lack of ownership also impacts in lack of control, so that few women perceive themselves as able to independently liquidate the asset in times of crisis. This dependency and lack of control over a major part of the household's private resources weakens their status and places them in a subordinate position.

Chapter 8

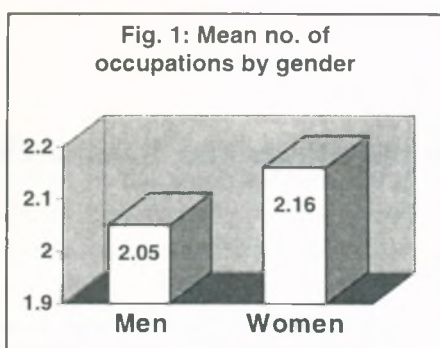
Occupational Status and Income Categories

We discussed how patriarchal households are characterized by a gender division of labour and, more important, how the subsistence of the household is the responsibility of the women in chapter 1. In poor households, the woman performs various functions of reproduction, caretaking and nurturing in the house, in addition to which she has to engage in productive work outside it. As we pointed out earlier, moving up the caste and class hierarchies is inversely related to female work participation. Most important, women's labour is regarded as a 'flexible household resource'. Their labour is regulated by the family which allows access to public spheres or denies it.

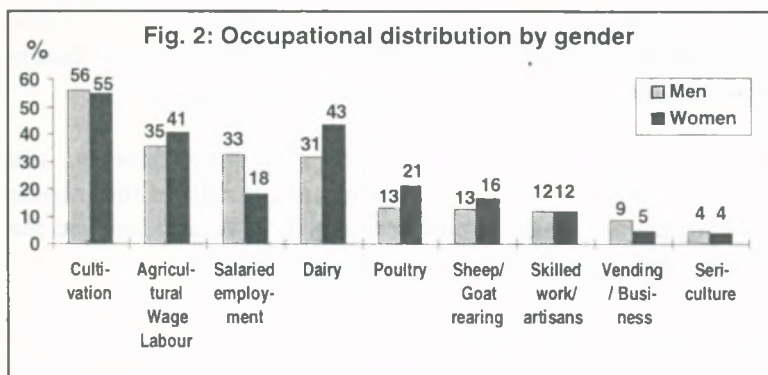
In this section, we set out the objective data on the occupational distribution of respondents, details of the income earned through various productive activities, and analyze the gender differentials inherent in these.

Occupational Profile

Respondents were asked to report on all productive activities through which income was earned in the previous one year. As figure 1 shows, the mean number of occupations per respondent is just over 2 per head for both men and women, which indicates that the vast majority of the study respondents are engaged in more than one income-earning activity / occupation. The slightly higher mean for women shows that the number of productive activities performed by women for income is more than by men, though this is not necessarily rewarded through higher income, as we shall see. In other words, all the surveyed households are dependent on more than one type of economic activity for income, and women



tend to be engaged in more activities than men. Figure 2 shows the distribution of the male and female respondents across various occupational categories. The gender differentials - or lack of them - in different categories are as interesting as they are typical of the trends in the secondary data, and from other studies across the country.



Cultivation: This was the predominant occupation of over half of the study respondents, and almost an equal number of women as men (55% and 56% respectively) report themselves as having been engaged in cultivation in the previous year. It must be noted that 'cultivation' was defined in a way that would ensure that women's unpaid labour would be captured - i.e., a range of activities including ploughing, sowing, transplanting, weeding, supervision of agricultural labourers, working on own farm, processing grains for storage, etc. The Census and National Sample Survey definition of cultivators is those farming their own land. Since our data shows that

the percentage of women who own land is minuscule, most of the large number of women in this category are obviously what the NSS terms as “family helpers”, working on land owned by their spouse / conjugal family rather than themselves.

However, there is one significant departure in our data from the trends shown in national statistics on cultivators: we found that the number of male and female cultivators in both marginal (working less than 180 days in a year) and main (working more than 180 days in a year) categories was almost identical (see table 2 of the Statistical Appendices). This means that women’s participation in cultivation is equal to men, a fact that the formal data systems, and the census in particular, unfortunately do not reflect because of their methodological and definitional limitations.¹

Agricultural Wage Labour: Although only 29% of the study households are landless, 35% of male and 41% of female respondents were engaged in agricultural wage labour in the previous year. This reinforces the national trend of small and marginal farmers and subsistence cultivators having to supplement their meager income by hiring their labour to other farmers.

It is significant that more women than men have reported working as agricultural wage labourers. Further analysis of the other occupations that agricultural labourers are involved in will be necessary to comment fully on the higher participation of women in agricultural wage work. However, pending this, there are some known factors that could further explain the differential: women from small and marginal land-owning households often work as wage labourers in others’ fields to supplement income; the agricultural tasks allotted to women labourers are more labour-intensive (such as weeding); and women’s lower occupational mobility and educational levels tend to inhibit their movement into other occupations. In further analysis, it will be useful to look at what proportion

1 See *Gender and Poverty in India* (Washington D.C.: The World Bank, 1991) Chapter 3.

of cultivators do agricultural wage work and the gender difference that may emerge.

Out of 390 men and 477 women who are agriculture labourers, there were 100 men and 66 women who reported that they worked as bonded agricultural labourers. However, all agricultural laborers, both bonded and others, report that they received at least some amount as wages. Bondage may therefore have been perceived as indebtedness to the landlord/large farmer which the 'bonded' respondents were trying to settle through their labour.

Dairy: Dairying is an extremely important occupation for the study respondents. This can be attributed to the vigorous promotion of dairying through state over the past twenty years through various agricultural extension programs and the National Dairy Development Board's "Operation Flood" scheme. A number of rural credit schemes like the Integrated Rural Development Programme also provided milch cattle on a large scale throughout the state. The setting up of dairying cooperatives and the Karnataka Milk Federation has also helped create reasonably efficient marketing linkages that have rendered dairying an important, viable and profitable economic activity, especially where fodder is not a serious problem. Although value-added processing like butter and cheese making for the urban market is still beyond the reach of the rural poor, keeping milch cattle is still an attractive supplement to agriculture.

Clearly, dairying is a more women-dominated activity - 43% of women compared to 31% of men report being engaged in it. Figure 2 shows that it ranks second in terms of the number of women engaged in it. The 'femaleness' of dairying is not hard to explain: the day-to-day work of feeding and caring for the animals and milking are an extension of women's domestic work. Even if men report dairying as an occupation, they are generally more involved in transporting and marketing of dairy produce.

Salaried / Non-agricultural Wage work: Male participation (33%) in salaried / non-agricultural wage work is nearly twice as much as female participation (18%). This gap is not unique, and has been highlighted by National Sample Survey data over time.² It is a direct reflection of women's low occupational mobility and lower access to formal education, among other things.

Poultry and Sheep Rearing: As in dairying, the participation of women in poultry and sheep and goat rearing is higher than that of men. This is again because women perform most of the daily work of feeding, cleaning, etc., as an extension or part of their regular domestic chores, while men are more involved in marketing and grazing. These gender differences in division of work in any given occupation will become clearer when the data is further coded and analysed at a later stage.

Vending / Business: Although vending and petty business engages only a small proportion of the study respondents, it shows a trend similar to that of salaried / waged work: male participation is twice that of females. Gender barriers on women's physical mobility, restrictions on their free interaction with unrelated men, and their lack of skills and equal access to credit (because of low asset base) are all factors affecting women's participation in business.

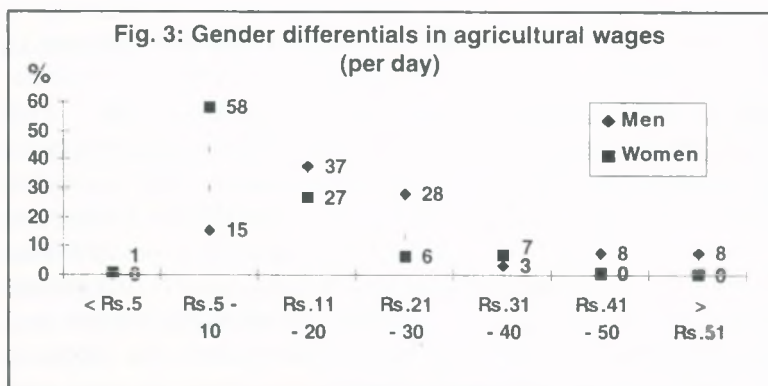
Skilled Work / Artisanal Occupation and Sericulture: In skilled work / artisanal family occupations, and in sericulture, the gender difference in participation is negligible. This could be because traditional family/artisanal occupations (such as weaving or pottery) as well as sericulture, are not viable unless the labour of the entire family is available for production. These are low-technology, labour-intensive occupations, involving a wide range of component tasks, usually demarcated along gender lines. For instance, in weaving, women and children prepare yarn and spin, men operate the loom; in pottery, women and men collect and prepare the clay, men

2 See World Bank *op.cit.* Sarvekshana , or citations of Sarvekshana data.

cast the pots on the wheel, women enlarge the sides of the wet pot so that the base is stable, women collect the fuel so that men can fire the pots; and in sericulture, men irrigate and prepare the land for mulberry planting, both do planting, women weed the plot and pluck the leaves, clean and mount the frames, harvest the cocoons, and men market them at the local silk exchange - in fact, there have been only three women involved in marketing of cocoons in Karnataka!³ Thus, the entire household is likely to participate in some capacity in these occupations, which would explain the absence of gender gap in participation.

Income Profile

Data on income from various occupations was computed in terms of money received in one's own hands from a given activity. The gender differentials in income from different occupations are extremely revealing: we begin with agricultural wages, where from time immemorial, women have been paid less than men. Some 390 men and 477 women respondents reported doing agricultural wage work. Figure 3 shows that of these, nearly 60% of the women agricultural labourers received wages below Rs.10 a day, while only 16% of the male labourers fell below this income level. The majority of male agricultural labourers, though not as shockingly low-paid as women, did not earn very much either - including the 16%



³ See Part II of this report, chapter on *Employment and Work Status of Women in Karnataka*.

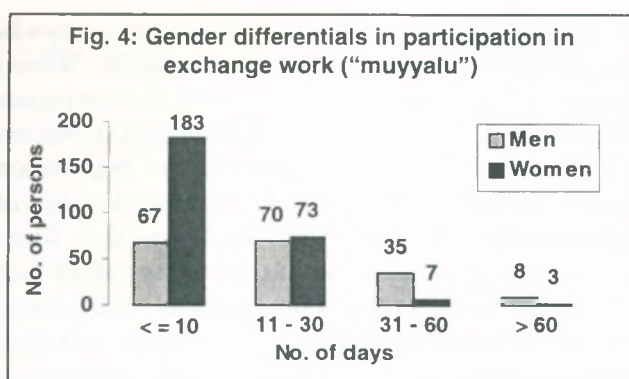
of men in the below-Rs.10 category, some 53%, or over half of the male labourers earn less than or up to Rs.20. When most men earn so little, retaining even a fourth of their income for themselves – and we shall see in the later part of the chapter how many do just this – has tremendous impacts on the household economy. We also see that barely 13% of the women labourers earn more than Rs.20 per day. Thus, not only do women earn less than men, but they vanish from the graph at higher wage levels. This could also reflect women's poor access to higher-paid agricultural tasks that probably involve the use of higher technology. Village and district-wise analysis may throw more light on regional variation in agricultural wages and the gender disparity that exists within regions.

When considering agricultural wages, we must also bear in mind the large number of men and women who reported being bonded / indebted labourers; we don't know if in these cases, most of the already low wages they earn are going towards clearing their debts. Even where the respondents may be getting some net wages in hand, this is likely to be so inadequate as to trap them deeper in the debt spiral.

Exchange labour

The agricultural wage data does not reflect the practice of "*muyyalu*" or *exchange labour*, which is common between farming households, since it does not involve any monetary transaction. It is a social arrangement based on goodwill in which small and medium farmers work on each other's farms to avoid hiring and paying labour. Women's labour is more often given in *muyyalu* - in fact, as figure 4 shows, 266 women as opposed to 180 men reported that they had participated in exchange work. Precisely for this reason, perhaps, we find that the participation of women in agricultural labour is much higher than for men.

Figure 4 shows that women are more likely to be sent for exchange work for short periods of time. For example, 183 women (69%) report that they participated in exchange work

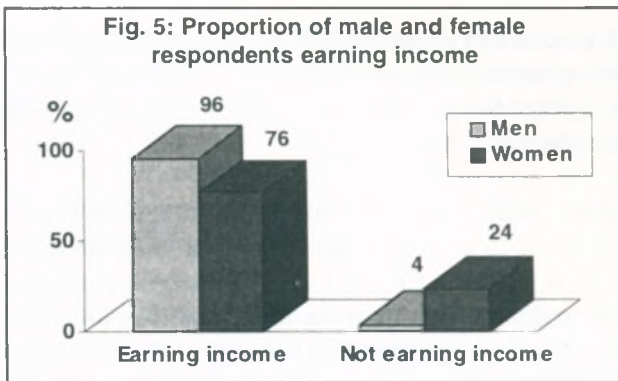


upto 10 days, which is three times the number of men in this category. Since exchange work is almost exclusively practiced by land-owning households, particularly small and marginal farmers, women's labour cannot be spared for long stretches, since it is required not only for work on their own farms, but also for their daily domestic chores. It may also reflect women-intensive tasks that have to be performed at a given stage of the cultivation cycle, within a short, defined period.

Income vs. Work Participation

It has long been established that women contribute more unpaid labour to productive activities than men. This is particularly true in small and marginal land-owning agricultural households, where the entire family works on the land, but all marketing transactions are handled by men, so that women do not receive any cash income in their hands. Exploring this issue, our schedule was designed to elicit information on the full range of productive activities engaged in by the male and female respondents, with corresponding data on the income received from these *in the respondent's own hands*.

Firstly, as figure 5 shows, 96% (1057) men respondents reported receiving income in their own hands from their various productive occupations, compared to just 76% (895) women respondents. This must be juxtaposed against the data presented in figure 1, which demonstrated that in fact, women were engaged in more productive (i.e., income-related)



activities than men (2.16 productive activities per woman, and 2.05 productive activities per man).

Figure 6 further shows in the most graphic terms that the proportion of *unremunerated* production work done by women is much greater than in the case of men. Specifically, only 64% of all productive work done by women accrues income in their hands, compared to 86% of the productive work done by men that yields income.

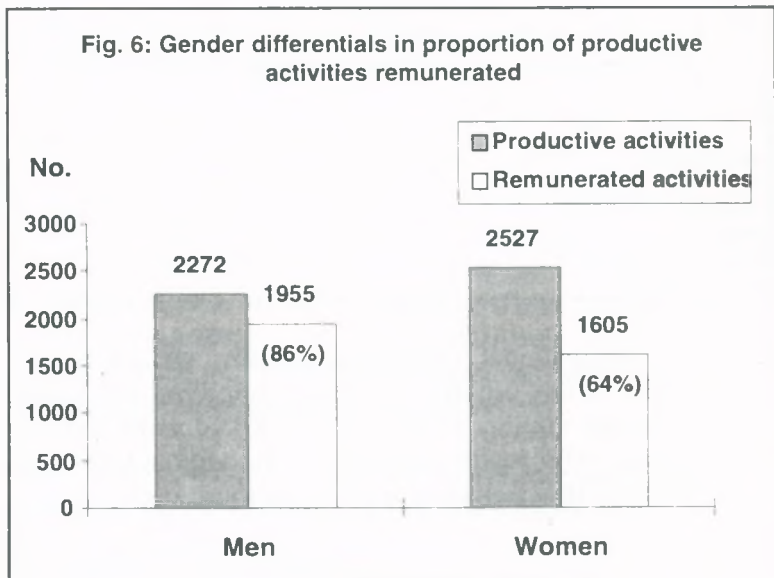


Table 1 gives us an elaborate picture of the gender differentials in work participation as opposed to income earned from various occupations. Several points come to our attention from the data in table 1:

- i) Firstly, male earners outnumber female earners across almost all the occupations except agriculture wage work. This is despite the fact that women's participation is higher than men's in all occupations that are partially or completely homestead-based (i.e., in all occupations except vending / business and salaried / non-agricultural wage work).

Table 1: Gender Differentials in Work Participation vs. Income⁴

Nature of Work / Activity	Earners		Non-Earners		Workers	
	% of total male earners	% of total female earners	% of total male non-earners	% of total female non-earners	Total No. of Male Workers	Total No. of Female Workers
Cultivation	77.76	50.93	22.24	49.07	616	642
Agricultural laborers	100.00	100.00	0.00	0.00	390	477
Sericulture	91.84	73.47	8.16	26.53	49	49
Dairy	70.06	43.70	29.94	56.30	344	508
Poultry	61.97	43.55	38.03	56.45	142	248
Sheep and Goat rearing	75.89	33.16	24.11	66.84	141	193
Skilled work / artisans/family occupation	108.21	82.98	-8.21	17.02	134	141
Vending / Business	104.21	89.29	-4.21	10.71	95	56
Salary / wages earned	100.00	95.77	0.00	4.23	361	213

- ii) In 2 occupational categories, namely, skilled work / artisanal family occupation and vending / business, there are a small number of men (11 in skilled work and 4 in vending) who report earning income although they do not report themselves as working in these occupations.

⁴ See Table 7, Statistical Appendices for expanded table with numbers and percentages.

- iii) While there is no gender difference in the percentage of those earning income from agricultural wage work, we have already seen that women agricultural labourers earn lower wages than men. Data in the latter part of this chapter, in the section on control over income, also shows that fewer women earners are able to retain any part of their income for personal use.
- iv) In dairying, poultry, and sheep / goat rearing, the low proportion of earners to workers, both male and female, indicates the subsistence, rather than commercial nature of these activities in many households, i.e., part of the produce/output is being consumed domestically. However, it is in these very occupations that there are more women workers than men, but fewer women than men earners.
- v) Conversely, there is a high correlation between workers and earners in activities where production is almost exclusively for the market or the activity itself is market-based (e.g., sericulture, vending / business, and skilled / artisanal work), as well as those which directly yield cash income (e.g., salary / non-agriculture waged work). However, even here, women earners are a lower proportion of women workers, in comparison to the corresponding figures for men.
- vi) Although fewer women participate in business or salaried work, these occupations hold a greater potential for women to transact money. This is an important beginning, even if they lack much control over earnings from these sources. Participation in these activities also promotes mobility and exposure, and therefore policy interventions in the areas of credit for business, and employment in non-agriculture work are imperative.

Figure 7 drives home the gender bias in work contributed as opposed to income earned. We see that with the exception of agricultural wage labour, where obviously every worker is remunerated in either cash, kind, or both, in all the



occupational categories a significant proportion of women are not paid for the work they do. As pointed out earlier, the highest incidence of unpaid women workers are in cultivation, dairying, poultry, sheep and goat-rearing, and sericulture, where women do a good deal of work, but do not have access to any income - mainly because they do not participate in or control the marketing transactions that produce income from these activities.

Even when women are remunerated for their labour, how do their earnings compare with that of their men? This is another important aspect of the comparative analysis of women's and men's income from productive work.

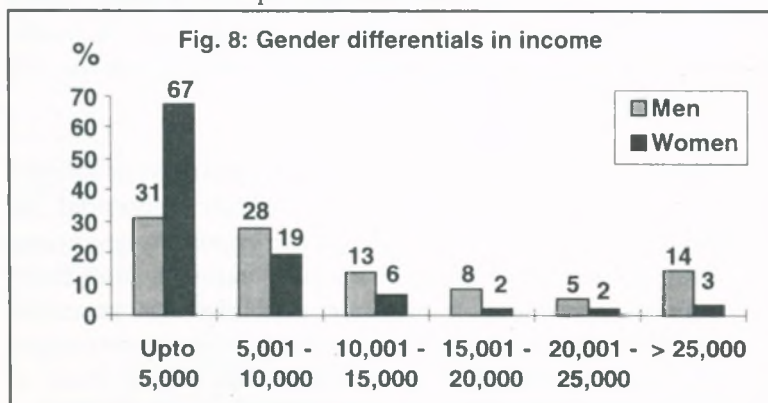


Figure 8 shows that the majority of the 895 women respondents (67%) who receive income in their hands earned less than Rs.5000 in the previous 12 months, compared to just 31% of the 1057 men who earned direct income. As in the case of agricultural wages, we see that the proportion of

women earners declines very sharply as annual income levels rise, though the proportion of men in the higher income brackets - above Rs.15,000 for instance, is also not very high.

Conclusion

The data on occupational distribution and respondents' income brings to light several facts that have been well recorded in the women's studies literature. Women are engaged in not only an equal number of productive activities as men, but even slightly more in terms of mean number of activities per capita; however, only about two-thirds of this work is remunerated. Consequently, although all our female respondents are engaged in productive work of some kind, only three-fourths earn income from this in their own hands, while virtually all the male respondents do so.

This gap is most likely occurring in small and marginal cultivator households, and possibly from women's unpaid labour in activities like dairying, poultry, sheep and goat-rearing, where their exclusion from marketing deprives them of cash income in their hands. Whatever the reason, women who receive no income are in a weaker position to control household income or influence decision-making on expenditures and investments. They have less opportunities to save or acquire assets of their own. It also reflects on the failure of formal credit institutions to reach women. In NGO-intervention villages, there has been some degree of organized savings by women through chit funds, savings in credit groups and the like.

Finally, it appears that women's participation is highest in those occupations that are home-based, and which can be combined with their domestic responsibilities. These are the activities that can be most easily performed by women without changing the gender relations status quo, i.e., without increasing their physical mobility, their unsupervised interactions with unrelated men, their education or skills, and their access or control over family assets and resources.

Ironically, the data clearly shows that few, if any, of the study households could survive without women's labour and income. Yet, the mediation of women's labour and income through the family ensures that women do not challenge existing gender arrangements by gaining more economic power. The current scenario reinforces the economic dominance of the men of these households, and thus upholds women's – and men's – belief that this justifies their subordinate position.

Chapter 9

Control over Labour and Income

This section of the study was based on a similar set of hypotheses as those in control over assets, with one significant difference: we assumed that the majority of rural women do earn / contribute income to the household through their free labour in family occupations, but do not have a corresponding degree of control over either their own or the household income. Further, we wanted to test the hypothesis that women have less control over their labour, demonstrated in lower ability (all else being equal) to change their occupation without the sanction of husbands and family members. We also wanted to determine whether earning women have a better status because their economic contribution gives them greater say in household decision-making. It was our belief that earning wages or income does not *a priori* give women a better status, since existing patriarchal conditioning and controls tend to ensure that women surrender their control over their income to their husbands or family elders.

Household Income

Firstly, nearly half of the households surveyed report total incomes below Rs.10,000 in the previous one year, which means that the annual per capita income of half the study population was below the current poverty line defined by the Government of India as Rs.11,800 per year. At least half of the households in the Rs.10,000 – 15,000 category, would also fall below the poverty line. Moreover, around 25% of households report Rs.5,000 or less as their annual income, which places them in acute poverty, since this is less than half the poverty line figure. The proportion of “below poverty line” households in the study population is therefore, much greater than the

official national figure of 35%. Further data analysis will be done to reveal whether the women-headed households are clustered in this income category. We will also examine the income distribution of women whose husbands have migrated for work, and single women who live as dependents.

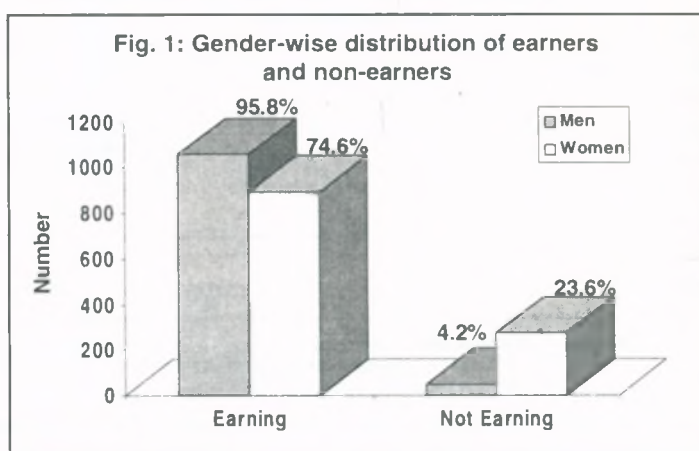
Examining the gender differences in reporting of household income, we find these are not particularly significant, although in each category (except the lowest), fewer women report their households as belonging to that cluster as compared to men's reports. It is not clear whether this points to lower awareness of household income among women because of less control, since women generally do not directly participate in many of the exchange transactions that accrue income such as marketing of agricultural produce. It could also indicate a tendency on the part of men to slightly exaggerate income to boost their status in the investigators' eyes. However, our hypothesis that there would be a much wider disparity in reporting of income between men and women because of the lack of awareness on the part of the women, does not find strong support from the data; it only holds true to the extent that more women (7.43%) than men (1.45%) reported that they did not know what was the household income.

Table 1: Male-Female Differentials in reporting of Annual Household Income

Income Range in Rupees	Male Reporting			Female Reporting			Deviation of female reporting from male* (% points)
	No.	%	Cumulative %	No.	%	Cumulative %	
< = 5,000	283	25.7	25.7	329	28.1	28.1	+ 2.4
5,000 to 10,000	258	23.4	49.1	255	21.8	49.9	- 1.6
10,000 to 15,000	171	15.5	64.6	173	14.8	64.7	- 0.7
15,000 to 20,000	127	11.5	76.1	111	9.5	74.2	- 2.0
20,000 to 25,000	74	6.7	82.8	89	7.6	81.8	- 0.9
25,000 to 30,000	42	3.8	86.6	48	4.1	85.9	- 0.3
30,000 to 50,000	81	7.3	93.9	48	4.1	90.0	- 3.2
= > 50,000	51	4.6	98.5	31	2.7	92.7	- 1.9
Don't Know	16	1.5	100.0	87	7.3	100.0	
Total	1103	100.0		1171	100.0		

Note: annual income was reported by each respondent for the previous year.

In fact, the maximum difference in male and female reporting was in the higher income range of Rs 30,000 to 50,000 (a male to female difference of 3.2 percentage points), and in the lowest income range of below Rs.5,000 (a difference of 2.4 percentage points). This could indicate two trends based on our field experience: women of poorer households are less likely than men to over-report income as a status-booster; and women of richer households have less role in wage-earning and management of the entire household income, and hence, less knowledge of the actual figure. However, we must be cautious not to over-interpret what are at best minimal differentials.



Our first important finding is depicted in figure 1: the proportion of non-earning men is minuscule, while nearly one-fourth of the women respondents are non-earners. This does not mean they do not work, as the work participation data in chapter 4 showed, it only means that less women than men get access to waged work, a finding that is well supported by the secondary data.

Control over Personal and Household Income

The income section of the study also elicited information on gender differentials in control over individual and household income. It should be noted that this data has been analysed only for the 1057 men and 895 women who reported themselves as earning income.

We postulate that control over income is asserted or lost right from the point after receiving one's wages / earnings in hand; if it is customary to hand over one's earnings as soon as one is paid, one has little control over one's income even if some portion or most is subsequently returned to our hands for our expenses. In other words, a notional or symbolic control over one's earnings or equal status is demonstrated by the right to retain income in our own hands, even if it is going to be largely spent on family / household needs.

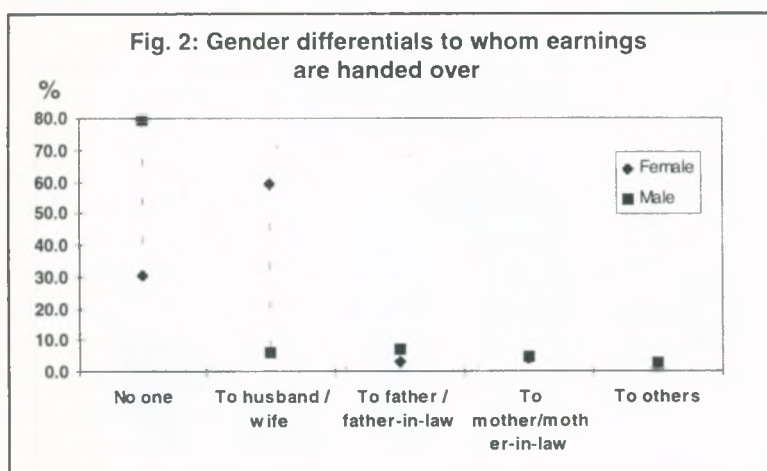
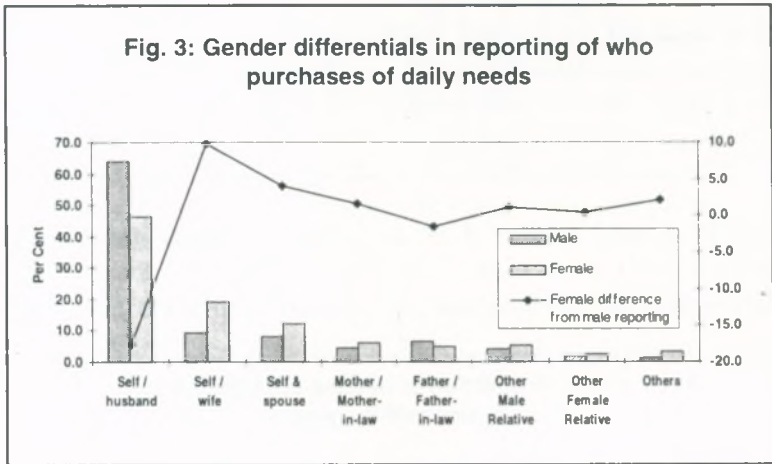


Figure 2 shows that by this measure, only 30% of the earning women in our sample do not hand over their wages to anybody after receiving them, while an overwhelming 80% of the male earners retain control of their earnings at this point. Nearly 60% of earning women hand over their income to their husbands, while less than 7% of the men hand over to their wives. Of the remaining 10% of the women earners, about half (nearly 5%) hand over their wages to a female relative, and the other half to male relatives and others. Clearly, women's earnings are considered the husband's or family / household's property, whereas men's incomes are not treated this way.

The role of purchasing household needs confers, *de facto*, some degree of control over household income. It also means a certain decision-making power vested in the person doing

the purchasing for the household, and to that extent, that individual's status in the household. Figure 3 represents the pattern of responses to the question, "Who buys the provisions for the house?"

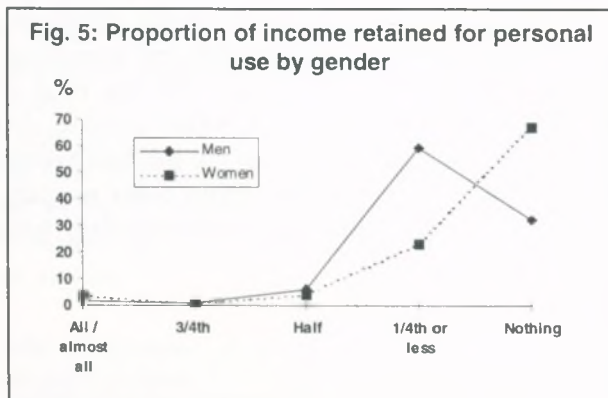
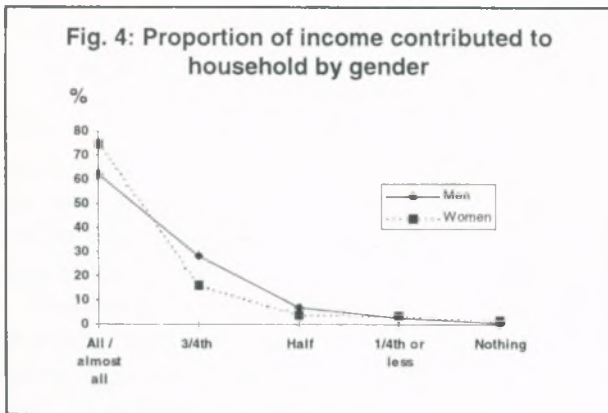


The data in figure 3 firstly shows a relative consonance between male and female responses about who does the purchasing of household needs, as in the case of asset and income reporting. The highest disparity, interestingly, is in reporting of "self" by the male versus "husband" by the female respondents. While about 65% of men claim they are the main purchasers, only 47% of the wives support this claim - the differential here is more significant than we have seen in most other reporting. Notwithstanding this, men and mainly husbands of female respondents are clearly in charge of household purchases, suggesting that few women have the right to make purchasing decisions. Of the total of 1246 responses given by men, 1032 (82.83%) indicate that men (self, father and other male relative) are primarily responsible for buying household provisions. Even older women in the household, such as mothers and mothers-in-law, have little role in this activity.

Table 2: Gender Differentials in proportion of Income contributed to Household and retained for Personal use for Personal use

Proportion of Income	Contributed to Household				Retained for Personal Expenses			
	Men		Women		Men		Women	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
All/Almost all	655	61.96	668	74.64	17	1.62	32	3.57
3/4th	299	28.29	145	16.20	11	1.04	23	0.89
1/2	72	6.81	34	3.80	66	6.24	36	4.02
1/4 or less	27	2.56	32	3.57	624	59.03	205	22.90
Nothing	4	0.38	16	1.79	339	32.07	599	66.93
Total	1057	100.00	895	100.00	1057	100.00	895	100.00

Table 2, and figures 4 & 5, further illustrate the gender differentials in control over income. Firstly, we see that although the percentage of women reporting that they



contribute all or almost all their income to household expenses is greater than that of men, the difference is not as significant as might have been - only around 12 percentage points. Nearly 62% (655) earning men and 75% (668) earning women contribute all or nearly all of their earnings to household expenses. Even the percentage of men reporting that they contribute half, one-fourth or less of their income is only marginally higher, at 9.37%, than their female cohort at 7.37%.

These figures virtually mirror reporting of the proportion of income retained for personal use.

However, this seeming egalitarianism must be placed in the context of the data in figures 2 & 3; even if most men are contributing the bulk of their earnings to the households, they do so while retaining greater notional control, for two reasons: (a) they do not "hand over" their wages to their spouses/relatives as the women do; and (b) they have greater control over the household's purchasing activity.

Table 3: Gender Differentials in Reporting of Proportion of Income Retained for Personal Use by Spouse

Proportion retained for personal expenses	Male reporting on spouses / co-respondent		Female reporting on spouses / co-respondent	
	No.	%	No.	%
All	52	5.81	87	8.23
Almost all	30	3.35	14	1.32
about 3/4th	12	1.34	61	5.77
About half	15	1.68	125	11.83
About 1/4th	73	8.16	267	25.26
Less than 1/4th	190	21.23	217	20.53
Nothing	516	57.65	226	21.38
DK	7	0.78	60	5.68
Total	895	100.00	1057	100.00

Note: personal expenses was defined as money spent on alcohol, betel nut, betel leaves, tobacco, bangles, small savings, etc.

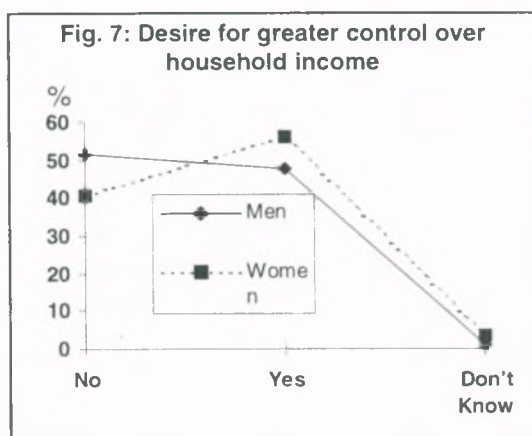
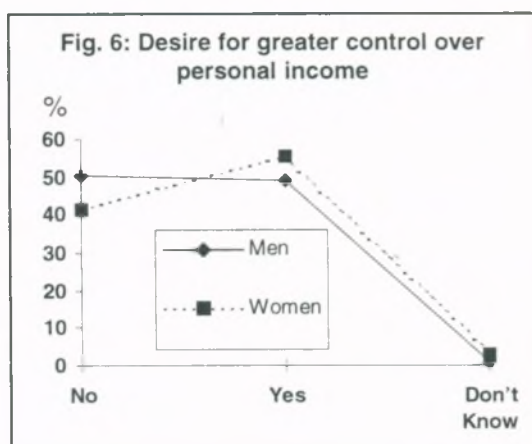
Table 3 brings out further layers of gender differences: it is interesting to see that at one end of the scale, the discrepancy between what respondents report as retaining for their own personal expenses, and what they report the spouse as retaining increases. 101 women report that their husband / male relative retains all or almost all of his earnings for personal expenses, but only 17 men report this about themselves. Similarly, 82 men report about their wife / female relative in this category, while only 32 women have said they retain all or almost all of their earnings for personal use. The discrepancy for men however is much greater. The perception of the 101 women in table 3 who report that their men retain a major part if not the whole of their income, may reflect the fact that they do not receive or handle male wages.

In the case of women however, an identical analysis may be incorrect. The 82 men who report that their wife / female relative retains all or nearly all of her income for personal expenses, may actually be implying that she does not hand over any part of her earnings to him, or ignoring the fact that she may be directly spending the bulk of her income on the household's needs. The noteworthy aspect about the "Nothing" category is that the high male reporting (58%) of women in this category may signify the male / cultural expectation that women are not supposed to retain their earnings for personal use. And the data in table 2 seems to indicate that most women meet this expectation.

As a further highlight to table 3, it is useful to know that while only 11 of the 1171 women respondents said they consume alcohol, 230 men of the 1103 male respondents or 21% reported that they drink regularly. This was also corroborated by the responses in the female questionnaire on husband's / male relative's alcohol habits. Exactly 21% of the women reported that their men drink. This is well below what was hypothesized, and may indicate consistent under-reporting by both men and women due to their perception of drinking as something socially undesirable. Our own field experiences, and that of most other grassroots activists working with women, as well as revenues from rural toddy sales

makes it hard to imagine that regular alcohol consumption by rural men is as low as this!

Figures 6 & 7 show that the gender differences in the desire for greater control over income, both personal and household are surprisingly low. Given this, it is predictable that more women than men feel a need for greater control, given that they are in fact experiencing less control over both.



What is more intriguing is that nearly half the male respondents say they want greater control. Perhaps this is because, even though, nearly 80% of male earners (see table 2) do not hand over their income to anyone, the majority also retain less than

one-fourth of their income for their own use, and would like to retain more. They may also want to have a greater say in household income management, where a senior male of the household is the key decision-maker in this respect.

Control over Changing Occupation

Occupational mobility is a dream for most of the rural poor. It is severely constrained by education, skills, actual economic opportunities, and many other factors, including traditional and cultural perceptions that shape a quasi fatalistic attitude which creates inertia in both men and women. We believe that perceptions of the possibility of change, rooted in self-esteem and self-confidence, also play a constraining role. Our hypothesis was that fewer women see themselves as having an independent right to explore alternatives. The gender biases that are deeply embedded in cultural and social constraints to decision-making are often hidden beneath these material conditions.

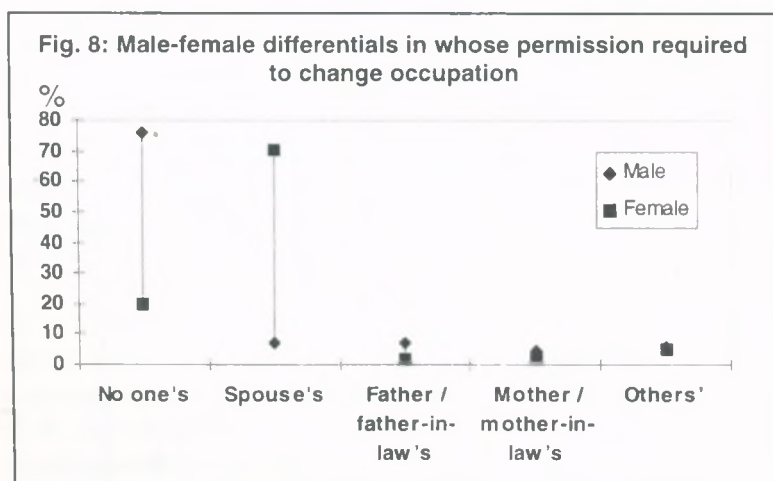


Figure 8 gives us a glimpse of the kind of these ingrained gender biases. The question asked was “Whose permission would you need if you wanted to change your occupation or, if you are not earning, to start earning?” While more than three-fourths of the men who said they would like to make a change in their occupation or type of employment reported

that they would not need anyone's *permission* to make such a change, just under 20% of women felt they were similarly free. Moreover, the majority of women (70%) said the spouse would be key person whose permission would have to be sought, while less than a tenth of that number (7%) of men felt they would need the spouse's permission. In fact, very few men reported the need for even the father's or other relative's consent. Clearly, these are areas of mobility and decision-making where women are firmly under male control, or at least perceive themselves to be under such control.

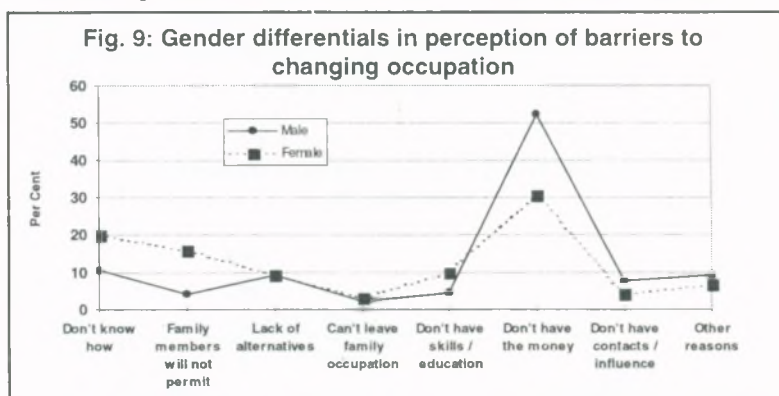


Figure 9 shows that for those women who wanted to start earning or change their occupation, lack of knowledge of how to go about it, lack of skills / education, and familial permission were more significant factors than they were for men. Interestingly, the lack of alternative opportunities in their environment was seen as a barrier by an equal number of male and female respondents, as was an inability to leave the family occupation. Significantly, more men than women gave lack of resources as a major obstacle to change. Does this reflect a perception that a change of occupation is equal to upward mobility, and hence requires money power either for self-employment in a lucrative trade or obtaining a salaried job?

There were also significant gender differences in the "Other reasons" category: while men have reported health problems, lack of support / help and family problems, women identified "lots of housework", having very young children to look after,

and indebtedness to current employer in the "Others" category. This data will be regressed with caste in further analysis to check whether caste plays a key role in perceptions about occupational mobility.

Membership in Unions / Workers Organisations

The capacity to organize and exert some negotiating power over one's wages and working conditions is also an important dimension of control over labour and income. We, therefore, examined the gender differences in membership and participation in unions and worker organisations (if any) at the workplace, and in knowledge of the existence of such fora.

Fig. 10: Whether unions exist in workplace (male reporting)

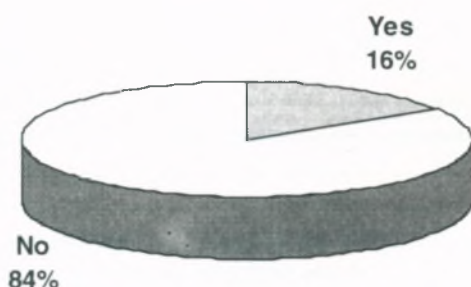
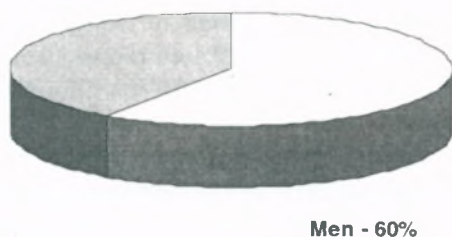


Fig. 11: Gender-wise membership of unions

Women - 40%



There was no gender differential – in percentage terms between male and female reporting of the existence of a union or workers' organization in the place of work. 177 men (16% of all male respondents) and 198 women (nearly 17% of all female respondents) reported that there is a union or organization of workers active in their place of work / occupation. Figures 10 & 11 show that even of those having access to a union, only about 49% were members.

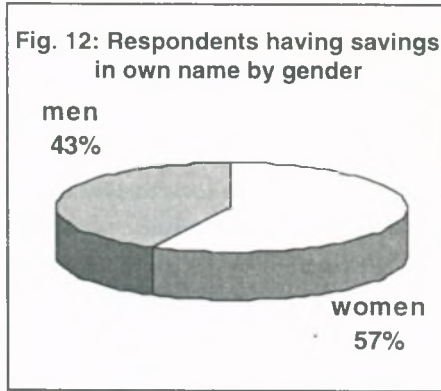
Furthermore, there is a telling gender gap between men and women in membership: about 40% of the women were members, as opposed to nearly 60% of the men.

Obviously, the opportunity cost of participating in unions is higher for women than men, given their responsibilities and gender barriers. This may suggest gender specific barriers. For example, 22 women ascribed their non-membership to house work and lack of time, 19 said that they didn't know how to join, 6 didn't have permission or were not allowed by elders / husband, and as many as 38 women said "I don't want to join" (Nanage Ishta Illa), perhaps connoting participation in such public activities as undesirable for women. Men, in contrast, have given very different reasons for non-membership: 5 men say that they don't have time, 5 say that they don't see any need or it is of no use, 3 have said "I do not have the money", and 4 claimed they were not been given membership (though whether they sought it or not is unclear). For further analysis, it may be useful to cross the data on union participation with NGO intervention, caste, and occupation (e.g., how many agricultural laborers are in unions?). Examining regional variation may also be useful.

Savings

Finally, we examined savings patterns as a final dimension of control over income, on the assumption that those who are able to save money are exercising some degree of control over their personal and household – income, and have greater economic security than those who don't. This section explored male-female differentials in types of savings institutions, in

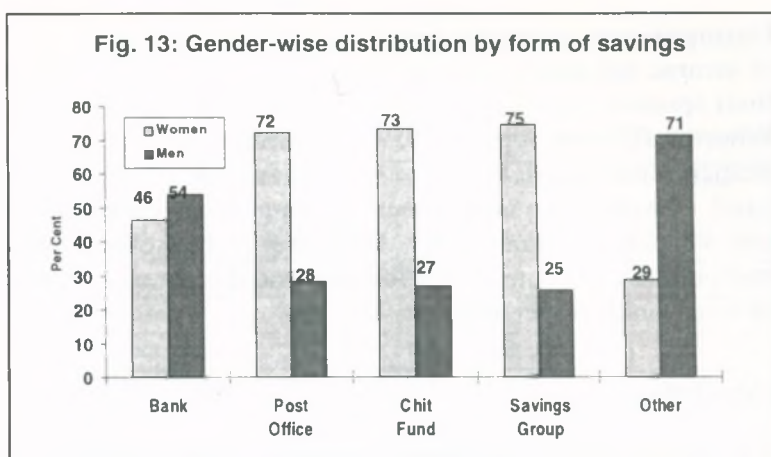
whose names savings were done, and who possessed life insurance, which is being increasingly promoted in rural areas as form of savings and social security.



Less than 200 male respondents and 200 female respondents, barely one-fifth of the sample, reported that they had savings in some form. Savings were being done in their own names or in their children's names. 194 women reported having savings in their own names in women's groups, chit funds, etc., in comparison to just 144 men.

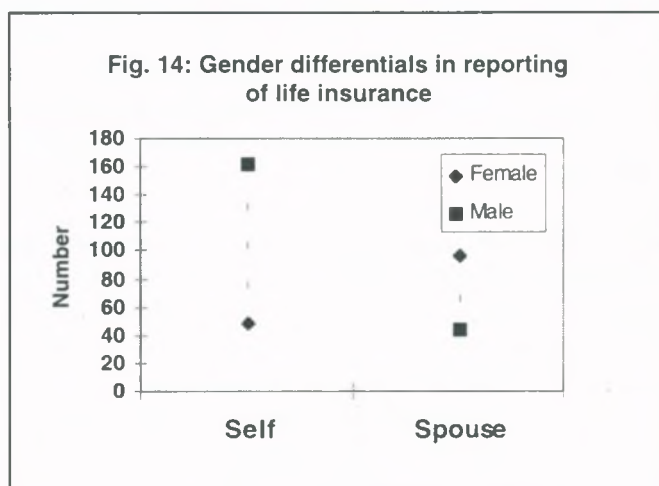
Among the respondents reporting saving regularly, more were doing so in their daughters' names than sons. For instance, 50 women and 14 men had postal savings accounts and 19 women and 18 men had bank savings accounts in the daughters' names. In contrast, only 40 women and 7 men had postal accounts and 9 women and 10 men had bank savings in their sons' names. This obviously reflects anticipation of heavy expenses for the marriage and dowry for daughters, a concern they would not have for their sons. Overall, however, it is interesting that whether for sons or daughters, women are clearly more concerned and motivated to save money for their children than men, despite having far less control over their personal or household income.

There are also interesting gender differentials in the form of savings institution preferred, as figure 13 shows. Clearly, women have greater access to or prefer informal savings



institutions like the chit fund or women's savings & credit groups (usually run by local NGOs). Banks were more popular with men, obviously because men have less constraints on their time and mobility, and do not face gender discrimination in these institutions (though caste or class discrimination may be present), making banks more accessible to men.

209 respondents (barely 10% of all respondents) had life insurance in their own name, with a marked male-female difference: only 23% or 48 of these were women.



Unsurprisingly, given the trends we have seen in knowledge of income and assets, men had a more accurate knowledge of their spouses' possessing life insurance policies than women. Whereas 161 men reported having insurance in their names, women reported just 97 spouses in this category; on the other hand, 48 women reported possessing insurance in their names, and 44 men confirmed this. A handful of households only had purchased life insurance for sons and daughters - 58 and 59 households respectively.

Conclusion

The data in this section strongly supports our hypothesis that women have less control over their income and labour than men. Although, the majority of the households were poor, and below the poverty line, more men than women retain a larger share of their income for their personal expenses. It is not possible at this stage to say whether the nearly 30% of men who retain one-fourth or more of their earnings for personal use come from affluent households. Very few women feel that they can change their occupation or go out and start earning without someone else's sanction, particularly the husband's.

We have also seen that while a large number of women earn wages and participate in income-earning activities, most of them either hand over their earnings to a male relative or relinquish their control over their income. Very few of them exercise much control over the disposal of household income in so far as purchasing household needs is predominantly done by men.

There are hardly any gender disparities in union membership, but a minuscule number have access to these. The barriers to women's participation in these, even where they exist, show the impact of the gender-based division of labour, particularly in domestic work and child care. Finally, few people have the means to save regularly. Of those that do, women typically seem to be taking greater responsibility, probably from their own meager income.

Statistical Appendices

Table 4: Gender Differentials in whether Earnings are handed over

Whether earnings are handed over to anybody	Female		Whether earnings are handed over to anybody	Male	
	No.	%		No.	%
No	270	30.13	No	839	79.38
Yes, to husband	530	59.26	Yes, to Wife	63	5.96
Yes, to Father-in-law	25	2.79	Yes, to Father	74	7.00
Yes to Mother-in-law	35	3.91	Yes to Mother	46	4.35
Other Male relative	18	2.01	Other Male relative	27	2.55
Other Female relative	13	1.45	Other Female relative	5	0.47
To Others	4	0.45	To Others	3	0.28
Total	895	100.00	Total	1057	100.00

Table 5: Gender Differentials in who Purchases Household Needs

Persons Purchasing:	Male		Female	
	No. of responses	%	No. of responses	%
Self	797	64.0	250	19.3
Spouse	117	9.4	601	46.3
Self and spouse	103	8.3	160	12.3
Mother / Mother-in-law	56	4.5	79	6.1
Father / Father-in-law	80	6.4	63	4.9
Other Male Relative	52	4.2	69	5.3
Other Female Relative	27	2.2	33	2.5
Others	14	1.1	42	3.2
Total Responses	1246	100.0	1297	100.0

Note: since there was more than one response allowed for this question, the totals do not represent households or respondents, but the total of all responses

Table 6: Gender Differentials in Desire for Greater Control over Personal and Household Income

Response	Greater Control Over Own Income		Greater Control Over Household Income	
	Men (%)	Women (%)	Men (%)	Women (%)
No	50.24	41.59	51.48	40.64
Yes	48.98	55.35	47.56	56.08
Don't Know	0.78	3.06	0.96	3.28
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Table 7: Gender Differentials in Need for Permission to Change Occupational Status*

Whether & Whose Permission Needed	Male		Female	
	No.	%	No.	%
No permission needed	359	76.22	87	19.91
Spouse's permission	32	6.79	309	70.71
Father/F-i-l's permission	32	6.79	9	2.06
Mother/M-i-l's permission	21	4.46	11	2.52

* Note : to change/improve nature of work or begin earning if unemployed

Chapter 10

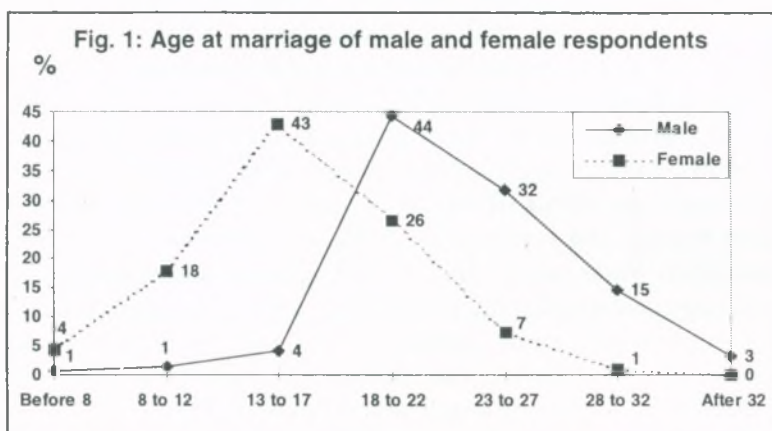
Marriage

Marriage is one of the key social institutions where patriarchal ideology is deeply embedded, and through which not only is women's sexuality and reproduction controlled, but their autonomy restricted, and familial assets like land are retained and increased. In the Indian context, cultural practices around marriage testify to their patriarchal mission in both subtle and gross ways - from child marriage to the social ostracism and marginalisation of widows. Most of all, the evil of dowry, that ultimate symbol of women's low status in society is spreading perniciously even into regions and communities which few decades earlier had practiced bride-price. In Karnataka, uncle-niece and cousin marriages are also highly prevalent as a means of consolidating and protecting family assets. In this section, therefore, we attempted to explore the differential status of men and women in marriage through several hypotheses:

- I. The practice of early and post-puberty marriage of girls is still widely prevalent in rural areas, though men marry at a later age;
- II. The age-gap between bride and groom is kept wide to ensure that wives submit to the authority of older husbands;
- III. There is little awareness, much less observance, of the legal age of marriage for women and men;
- IV. There is a preference for women to marry maternal and paternal relatives;
- V. Neither women nor men have much say in choice of partner; and
- VI. The practice of dowry has increased inter-generationally.

Age at Marriage

A dishearteningly high proportion of women in the sample totally 65% were married below the legal age of 18, compared to only around 33% of men who were married before the legal male age of 21 (see figure 1). Worse, around 22% of the women were married below 13 years of age, which is the average age of menarche in rural areas and 42.87% were married between 13-17 years. This is in stark contrast to the men, nearly 76% of whom married between the ages of 18 and 27 years. In fact, 44% married between 18 and 22. The



vast number of women who were married before menarche is further illustrated in figure 2. It will be interesting to further disaggregate the pattern of pre-menarche marriages in women by district, since the secondary data show clearly that the trend toward early marriage is highest in the north Karnataka districts of Bijapur and Raichur, with districts like Kodagu and Dakshina Kannada having achieved a female mean age at marriage of 22 years.¹ It will also be useful to regress this data with caste and income.

As figure 3 shows, almost one-third of the women respondents got married within 2 years of attaining puberty and nearly 60% of women respondents got married within 4 years of

¹ See the chapter in Part I of this report on the Demographic and Health Status of Women in Karnataka.

Fig. 2: Distribution of female respondents by whether married pre- or post-menarche

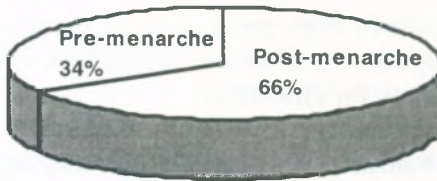


Fig. 3: Women married post-menarche by no. of years after menarche at which they married



attaining puberty which, given the average menarche age of around 13-14 years. This means that most of the women were married before the legal age of 18. The encouraging sign, on the other hand, is the significant proportion of women who married well after puberty and probably after the legal age.

The anxiety to get daughters married soon after they come of age is rooted in the ideology that women's sexuality cannot be expressed outside marriage, i.e., outside the control of one man. The loss of "chastity" or pregnancy before marriage, reduces a woman's marriageability and she becomes a scourge on the natal family. Early marriage is also meant to ensure that girls prove their fertility very early, critical in a society where women's role and social value, and hence status, is largely centered on reproduction. We also see how this might

have affected women's opportunity to continue or complete their schooling, or delay the age of motherhood. This pattern of early marriage and childbirth is also a leading cause of India's high maternal mortality rate (one of the highest in the world), since a very high percentage of first births occur in the high-risk age group of below 18 years, when the body is not yet fully ready for childbirth.

Table 1: Male-Female Differentials in Knowledge of Legal Age of Marriage for Women and Men

Legal age for women	Male reporting		Female reporting	
	No.	%	No.	%
18 years	546	49.50	463	39.54
< 18 years	126	11.42	158	13.49
> 18 years	191	17.32	262	22.37
Don't Know	240	21.76	288	24.59
Total	1103	100.00	1171	100.00
Legal age for men	Male reporting		Female reporting	
	No.	%	No.	%
21 years	319	28.92	232	19.81
< 21 years	140	12.69	147	12.55
> 21 years	403	36.54	494	42.19
Don't Know	241	21.85	298	25.45
Total	1103	100.00	1171	100.00

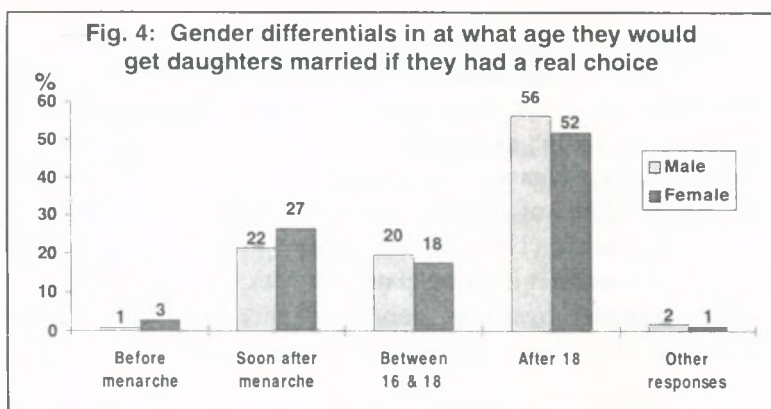
Laws against child marriage and early marriage have been enacted precisely to address this problem. However, lack of awareness of these statutes, compounded by lack of enforcement, renders them of little value. Table 1 shows that the level of awareness of the legal age of marriage for women is relatively well known, but the proportion of women having this information (just under 40%) is lower than the corresponding proportion of men (just under 50%). Less than one-fourth of the respondents said they did not know the legal age for either women or men.

Interestingly, both male and female knowledge of the legal age of marriage for *women* is higher than their awareness of the figure for men. For instance, as many as 36.54% of male and 42.19% of female respondents believed that the legal age

of marriage for men is more than 21 years. On the plus side, only a minority of respondents, with very little gender differential, gave the legal age for either women or men as lower than it is, i.e., as less than 18 years for women and less than 21 years for men. It is also intriguing that a higher percentage (22%) of female respondents when compared to male respondents (17%) have reported that the legal age of marriage for women is *higher* than 18 years. This could be due to the generally lower awareness of the legal facts among women, so that they could err both ways.

Having examined the respondents' own age at marriage, as well as their knowledge of the legal age limits, we explored whether these have any influence on the age at which they would get their daughters married. This question was constructed carefully: firstly, it was not asked of those who had unmarried daughters of any age (even toddlers); secondly, the question was framed as a hypothetical: "If you could decide at what age to get your daughter married, without anyone else interfering in the decision, what age would you prefer?" This was to ensure that the respondents' answers were as unfettered as possible by what they believed was acceptable to other family members or society at large. The answers are presented in figure 4, and present an unedifying picture.

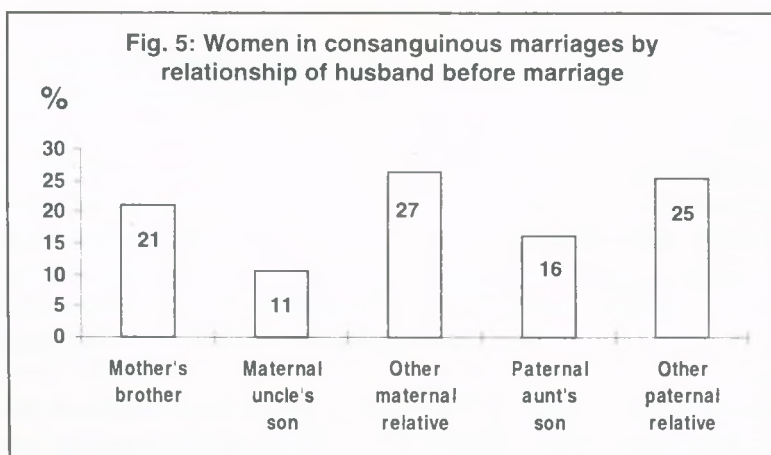
Firstly, even though nearly 52% of the female respondents had married before the age of 16, only 23% felt this was what they would choose for their daughters. In fact, a higher proportion of men (30%) chose this option for their daughters. Although 33.7% of the women respondents were married before menarche, 97% reported that they would get their daughter married after menarche if left to themselves. Encouragingly, the majority of respondents have expressed a preference for getting their daughters married after the legal age of 18 and more women (56%) than men (52%) have articulated this. On the other hand, around one-fourth of the respondents have still opted for "soon after menarche" as their choice. District-wise analysis will reveal whether the preference for early female marriage predominates in those



districts (such as Bijapur and Raichur) where the secondary data show this trend.²

Kinship of Spouses

Consanguineous marriages, especially on the mother's side, were considered the first choice by many South Indian communities, particularly among poorer families, ostensibly because the girl would be well-treated and looked after, if her mother-in-law is also her grandmother. However, they were also motivated by economic reasons - dowry and bride-price could be minimized, or sometimes avoided altogether.

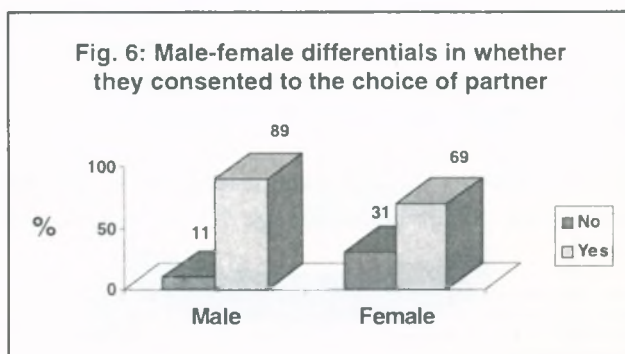


² See Part I of this report chapter on the *Demographic and Health Status of Women in Karnataka*.

Our hypothesis that a large proportion of marriages are consanguineous has been proven, since 42% of women reported that their husbands were related to them in some way before marriage. Figure 5 shows that of those women who have had consanguineous marriages, the largest proportion have married relatives on the maternal side 58%. The maternal uncle and other maternal relatives are the prime candidates in this category. Paternal aunt's son or other paternal relative account for another hefty chunk of consanguineous marriages. Again, it will be useful to look at district-, caste- and income-wise variations in this context.

Choice of Partner

In most of rural India, the custom of arranged marriage is still the norm, although cases of marriage by choice, that too cutting across caste, class and community lines are growing in number. However, we have a long way to go before personal choice marriages become the norm. Given this, we nevertheless wanted to examine the relative degree of control exercised by the surveyed men and women in their marriages, using the proxy of whether they had been given the right to approve or reject the partners chosen by their parents i.e., whether their consent had been even nominally taken before the marriage was performed. As figure 6 indicates, while the majority of both male and female respondents reported that their consent had been taken, nearly thrice as many women (31%) as men (11%) reported that they had not been consulted at all about the partner chosen for them to marry.



Dowry and Bride Price

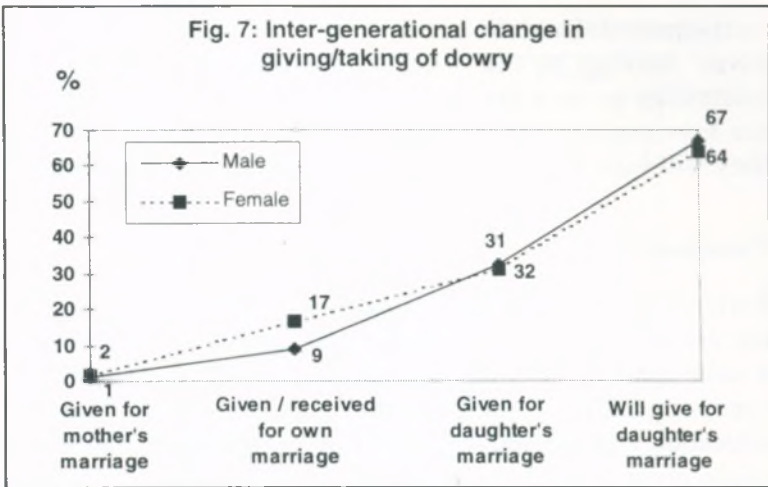
The penetration of the dowry custom even into groups which never knew this practice traditionally is a very disturbing trend, as is the growing incidence of violence against women in the context of dowry.³ While dowry-related violence has not been well documented in rural areas in Karnataka, this tends to give a false picture, as though such incidents are non-existent or rare. What is perhaps more widely accepted is that the infiltration of dowry is a growing cause of rural indebtedness and the declining status of rural women from a range of castes and communities, especially those where bride-price was formerly customary. For example, the Muslim community, which once practiced bride-price in the form of “meher-e-misl,” has begun giving and taking dowry.

In fact, reports from the field show that mental and physical violence and abuse in the context of dowry does in fact occur even in villages.⁴ While very few of our study respondents have reported experiencing dowry-related violence (only 9 cases), over 50% of the women and over 30% of the men cite dowry as a major injustice against women. This reveals that they are aware of the problem, perhaps because of the spread of the dowry custom in their own communities.

Figure 7 illustrates the shocking spread of the dowry custom between three generations. The increase in the dowry custom between the respondents' mothers' marriage and their unmarried daughters' future marriages is by about 65% i.e., nearly two-thirds of men and women who report that to their knowledge, no dowry was paid for their mother's marriage, say they will have to pay dowry when they get their daughters married. 30% say they have already done so for daughters recently married. There is hardly any gender differential in the reporting on this subject, except in one telling case: while only 9% of the males acknowledge having taken dowry for

3 See Part I of this report chapter on *Violence Against Women in Karnataka*.

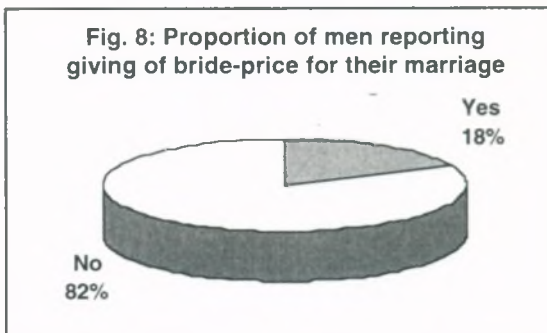
4 Personal experience of Srilatha Batliwala when State Programme Director of Mahila Samakhya Karnataka; and personal communications of field activists from several rural NGOs.



their own marriage, nearly double the number of women say their families paid dowry to their husbands. Of course, these need not be each other's spouses, but the difference is striking.

Apart from dowry, other gifts - particularly jewelry, watches and clothing were given by the women's families to their husbands at the time of marriage. Nearly 42% of the women said their families had given jewellery and watches, but only 19% of the men reported having received these. Similarly, 15% of women reported gifts of clothing, but only 8% of men acknowledge receiving these.

Finally, figure 8 shows that the custom of bride-price, once highly prevalent in rural Karnataka is fading. Only 18% of the



men reported that their families had given bride-price to their wives' families at the time of their marriage. It will be interesting to do a detailed analysis of these households, to see how many of these same men and their wives now feel they will have to pay dowry for their daughters' weddings.

Conclusion

Early marriage, particularly soon after menarche, is clearly the dominant pattern among the study population and hence, a major factor in lowering their status. Early marriage obviously constrained the women's opportunity to obtain a proper education and the self-awareness or awareness of rights that might occur through it. Neither men nor women have much say in marriage in terms of choice of partner and consanguineous marriages continue to predominate. There is some hopeful sign that people see a need for later marriages for their yet-to-be-married daughters, though whether they will be able to act on this when the time comes is a moot point.

The data seems to reinforce the fact that knowledge of the law is not necessarily the key constraint to raising the age at marriage for women; socio-cultural and economic forces are apparently playing a much larger role in the continuing trend of early female marriage.

The dowry custom is clearly and dramatically on the rise, to the detriment of women and represents a potential source of growing violence and increased indebtedness.

Marriage

Table 1: Age at Marriage of Male and Female Respondents

Age at marriage in years	Male		Female	
	No.	%	No.	%
upto 8	8	0.73	50	4.27
8-12	16	1.47	210	17.93
13-17	45	4.13	502	42.87
18-22	482	44.22	310	26.47
23-27	346	31.74	86	7.34
28-32	159	14.59	12	1.02
32 & >	34	3.12	1	0.10
Total	1090	100.00	1171	100.00
Unmarried	13		0	

Table 2: Distribution of Female Respondents by whether Married Pre or Post-Menarche

When married	No.	%
Post-menarche	776	66.27
Pre-menarche	395	33.73
Total	1171	100.00

Table 3: No. of Years after Menarche of Female Respondents' Marriage

Years	%
1 - 2years	30.57
3 -4 years	28.46
5 - 6 years	18.05
7 - 8 years	8.62
9 - 10 years	6.50
11 & above	7.80
	100.00

Table 4. Distribution of Women's Marriages by Kinship of Husband Prior to Marriage

Whether husband was related before marriage	No.	% of all women's husbands	% of all consanguineous marriages
No	676	57.73	
Yes, mother's brother	105	8.96	21.21
Yes, maternal uncles's son	53	4.53	10.70
Yes, mother's relative	131	11.19	26.46
Total - related to mother	289	(24.68)	(58.38)
Yes, Paternal aunt's son	80	6.83	16.16
Yes, father's relative	126	10.76	25.45
Total - related to father	206	(17.59)	(41.61)
Total who have had consanguineous marriages	495	42.27	100.00
Grand Total	1171	100.00	

Table 5: Male-Female Differentials in whether their Consent was Obtained before Marriage for Partner Chosen

Whether consent obtained	Male		Female	
	No.	%	No.	%
No	116	10.64	359	30.66
Yes	974	89.36	812	69.34
Total	1090	100.00	1171	100.00

Table 6: Male and Female Respondents Choice of age at Marriage for their Daughters

Preferred age:	Male		Female	
	No.	%	No.	%
Before menarche	9	0.85	34	3.05
Soon after menarche	229	21.58	297	26.64
Between 16 & 18	208	19.60	198	17.76
After 18	595	56.08	576	51.66
Other responses	20	1.89	10	0.90
Total Respondents who have daughters	1061	100.00	1115	100.00
Not Applicable	42		56	
Total Respondents	1103		1171	

Note: Not applicable = unmarried men, and those who don't have daughters.

Marriage

Table 7: Inter-Generational Changes in Prevalence of Dowry

Dowry paid / will have to pay	Mother's marriage		Own marriage		Married daughters marriage		Unmarried daughters marriage	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Males:								
Yes	14	1.29	98	8.88	69	32.24	494	66.94
No	445	40.73	803	72.80	145	67.76	182	24.66
Bride-price	1	0.09	202	18.31	-	-	-	-
Don't know	631	57.89	-	-	-	-	62	8.40
Total	1103	100.00	1103	100.00	214	100.00	738	100.00
Females								
Yes	20	1.72	193	16.48	67	31.31	520	64.20
No	642	54.82	978	83.52	147	68.69	251	30.99
Bride-price	32	2.73	-	-	-	-	-	-
Don't know	477	40.73	-	-	-	-	39	4.81
Total	1171	100.00	1171	100.00	214	100.00	810	100.00

Chapter 11

Control Over Reproduction and Sexuality

In many ways, the degree of control women have over their reproduction and sexuality is one of the core indicators of their status,¹ since it is one of the fundamental sources of their subordination in patriarchal societies. The norms of chastity and monogamy for women are enforced by denying them economic independence (through the denial of equal rights over familial assets and resources), by the restriction of their mobility and by the biases inherent in the laws that mediate their rights within marriage, the family, and inheritance. All of these are designed to reinforce their lack of reproductive and sexual autonomy and rights. For women who have independent means and income, freedom of movement and association, and substantive legal equality are less likely to meekly submit to male control of their sexual and reproductive lives.

This is not a position held only by feminists or women's rights advocates; it has been recognised and enshrined as a universal truth in several United Nations rights declarations and program documents. For instance, the United Nations ICPD Programme of Action states:

“..... reproductive rights embrace certain human rights that are already recognized in national laws, international human rights documents and other consensus documents. These rights rest on the recognition of the basic right of all couples and individuals to decide freely and responsibly the number, spacing and timing of their children and to have the information and means to do so, and the right to attain the

1 Ruth Dixon-Mueller, *Population Policy and Women's Rights* (London and Westport, Conn.: Praeger Publishers, 1993), pp. 3 - 28.

highest standard of sexual and reproductive health. It also includes their right to make decisions concerning reproduction free of discrimination, coercion and violence, as expressed in human rights documents..... The promotion of the responsible exercise of these rights for all people should be the fundamental basis for government and community-supported policies and programs..... As part of their commitment, full attention should be given to the promotion of mutually respectful and equitable gender relations..... Reproductive health eludes many of the world's people because of such factors as: inadequate levels of knowledge about human sexuality and inappropriate or poor quality reproductive health information and services; the prevalence of high-risk sexual behaviour; discriminatory social practices; negative attitudes towards women and girls; and the limited power many women and girls have over their sexual and reproductive lives.....”²

The Platform of Action of the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995 declared:

“The human rights of women include their right to have control over and decide freely and responsibly on matters related to their sexuality, including sexual and reproductive health, free of coercion, discrimination and violence. Equal relationships between women and men in matters of sexual relations and reproduction, including full respect for the integrity of the person, require mutual respect, consent and shared responsibility for sexual behaviour and its consequences.”³

In the Indian context, controlling women's sexuality and reproduction is at the core of a plethora of cultural traditions and social norms, though these may vary by region, class, caste, ethnicity, and religion. For instance, women's limited freedom of movement, patterns of socialization of the girl

2 UN, *Programme of Action*, para 7.3, United Nations International Conference on Population and Development (Geneva: United Nations, 1994).

3 UN, *Platform of Action*, para 96, Fourth World Conference on Women (Geneva: United Nations, 1995).

child, menarche rites, the treatment of widows, the rules governing women's behaviour in both the private and public sphere, and the "immurement" of women of higher economic and social strata⁴ all reflect the deeper goal of restricting women's sexual and reproductive freedom. The ideals that are promoted in this dimension of her life are in essence very simple: a good woman is an asexual being, the sexual property solely of her husband, fertile and produces many sons, and who remains sexually subservient to her husband throughout her life, fulfilling her destiny of preserving the family line, no matter how she may be treated in the process.

The obsession with virginity and chastity, with fertility and male heirs, and the denial of women's sexual and reproductive rights, result in a whole range of social problems for rural women:

1. The pattern of early marriage, leading to high fertility rates, and consequently high maternal and infant mortality rates, is extremely resistant to change⁵ and damages women's health status, particularly in poor households;
2. The need to prove their fertility immediately after marriage and to produce sons gives the majority of women little control over their reproduction and, little decision-making power in the use of contraceptives or birth control and spacing methods;⁶
3. The preference-for-son syndrome also contributes immensely to high fertility rates and the distorted sex ratio, quite apart from the problem of female foeticide and infanticide;
4. Marriage and motherhood continue to be the sole destiny for millions of women, contributing to the denial of equal

4 M.N. Srinivas, *Cohesive Role of Sanskritization and Other Essays* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989).

5 UNFPA, *The State of World Population* (New York: United Nations, 1997); Malini Karkal, *Can Family Planning Solve the Population Problem?* (Bombay: Stree Uvach Publications, 1989).

6 Shireen Jeejeebhoy, *Women's Status and Fertility: Successive Cross-Sectional Evidence from Tamil Nadu, 1970-80* in *Studies in Family Planning* 1991, 22(4): 217-230.

opportunities for schooling and higher education⁷ and India is the repository of the largest number of the world's illiterate women;

5. Women unable to reproduce are stigmatized and ill-treated for failing to perform their reproductive duty, even if it is the husband who is infertile;⁸
6. The vast majority of women have no rights or control over sexual relations with their husbands and this powerlessness has profound implications for the country at large. For instance, it means that women cannot negotiate condom use with male partners, a critical factor in the spread of HIV/AIDS, thanks to which monogamous wives have become one of the highest risk groups for HIV infection.⁹ The question of women having the right to satisfying sex lives simply does not arise, at least within marriage.¹⁰
7. The lack of rights and rigidly defined expectations in reproductive and sexual matters are also associated with a lot of physical and mental violence against women,¹¹ including rape and wife-beating; and
8. Because women are implicitly viewed as vehicles for reproduction, birth control programs have been obsessively targeted at them, even if the methods promoted cause risks and damage to their health. For the past twenty years, the entire family planning program in India has ignored men's role in reproduction.¹²

7 Anita Dighe, *Situational Analysis of Women's Literacy in India*, in Women and Literacy, Proceedings of the National Working Conference (Bangalore: National Institute of Advanced Studies, 1994).

8 Shireen Jeejeebhoy, *Population, Health and Women in India: Agenda for a National Strategy*, monograph prepared for the MacArthur Foundation (New Delhi, 1993).

9 *ibid.*; D. Worth, *Sexual Decision-Making and AIDS: Why Condom Promotion among Vulnerable Women is Likely to Fail*, in Studies in Family Planning 1989, 20: 297.

10 Radhika Chandiramani, *Listening to Men Talk About Sex* in Psychological Foundation Journal, December 1996.

11 Lore Heise, Jacqueline Pitanguy and Adrienne Germain, *Violence Against Women: The Hidden Health Burden*, World Bank Discussion Papers (Washington D.C.: The World Bank, 1994).

12 Saroj Pachauri, *Women's Reproductive Health in India: Research Needs and Priorities*, in Listening to Women Talk About their Health - Issues and Evidence from India edited by J.Gittelsohn et al (New Delhi: The Ford Foundation and HarAnand Publications, 1994).

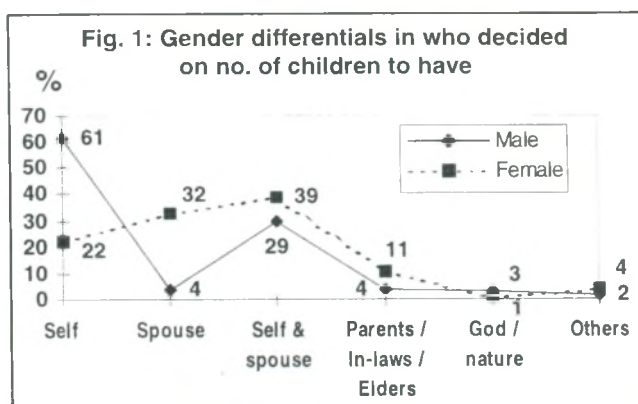
Given these harsh realities, this section of the study focused on assessing the degree of control women respondents had over their reproduction and sexuality, particularly in the form of decision-making about the number of children they had, contraception, and sexual relations. However, considering the Indian culture of silence around subjects related to sex, only one question was asked regarding sexual relations and, even this caused a good deal of consternation among many respondents, and led to the abandoning of the study in one village, as mentioned in chapter 3.

Finally, it should be noted that not all the male and female respondents answered all the questions in this section of the study. For one thing, about 13 of the 1103 male respondents were unmarried, while all the females were married women, even if they were not currently living with their spouses. The base totals for each graph / table are therefore, mentioned in the statistical appendices. On the whole, however, at least 90% of male and female respondents provided responses, making the data quite reliable and representative.

Control over reproductive decision-making

The first issue to be explored in this section of the study was who influenced or determined the number of children the respondent had. Figure 1 represents the responses of 959 men and 1001 women who answered this question, and shows a distinct variance between men's and women's control over decision making about the number of children they should have. Since this was a multiple response question we found that several respondents ascribed the decision to more than one person. This reflects the reality that the number of children a couple has is not, in most rural households, a private decision of the individual or couple.

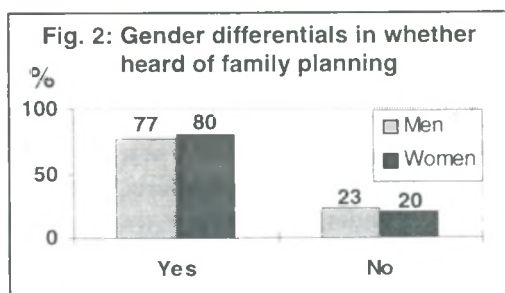
The very first category in figure 1, i.e., "self" tells a tale: only 22% of women reported that they had made the decision compared to 61% of men. Even the 22% of women may not mean that they took the decision unilaterally, but rather that they had a major say in the matter. In contrast, 32% of the



women openly state it was their husband's decision, while only 4% of the men say it was their wives' decision. Joint decision-making on this issue is an encouraging trend, though more women (39%) than men (29%) report this.

Perhaps most significant is the gender gap in the category "Parents / In-laws / Elders," where a far larger proportion are women (11%) compared to men (4%), affirming the fact that women's reproductive decision-making is still, in a significant number of rural households, governed by family elders. Hardly any respondents attributed the number of children they had to "God" or "Nature", but surprisingly more men than women reported in this category. It is tempting to interpret this as an attempt by the men to prevaricate, and disguise their own agency in the decision.

Awareness of the concept of family planning is extensive, as figure 2 shows. A slightly higher percentage of women than men reported having heard of family planning, possibly



because women are more consistently targeted by family planning campaigns and health workers.

Before examining the data on knowledge of different family planning methods, it is important to note that respondents were not given a list of methods to determine awareness, but were asked to list the methods they knew. The data, therefore, represents the knowledge volunteered by respondents, without any bias or leading by the investigators.

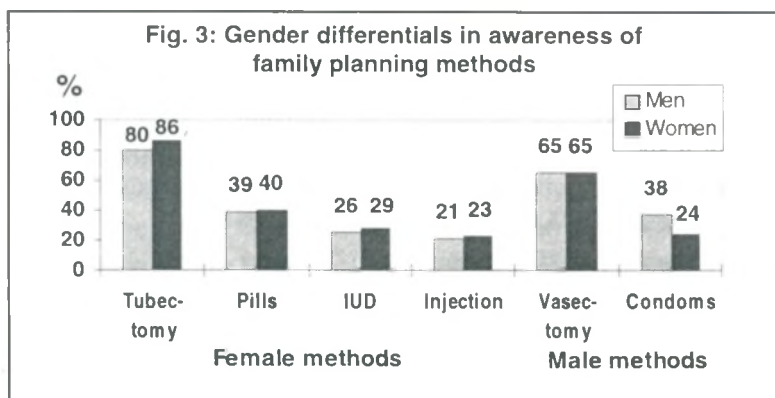


Figure 3 gives a very predictable picture of the kinds of family planning methods that people are aware of. As expected, the methods most known to both men and women are male and female sterilization, a permanent, and more or less irreversible method. In contrast, knowledge of the existence of methods that are temporary, such as IUDs, oral pills, and condoms, is very low, though these have a very important role in promoting women's reproductive health by helping couples to space births.

A surprisingly large percentage – about one-fifth of the respondents have heard of “Injections,” a proxy for the Norplant implant. This is a long-acting hormonal contraceptive with high-risks for malnourished women living in areas with poor health services and follow-up care, but is nevertheless being promoted in India. The lower awareness of condoms among the women respondents has serious implications, since HIV/AIDS is spreading rapidly in many of these areas, and

negotiating condom use with husbands is critical to preventing infection. Finally, figure 3 shows that knowledge of user-controlled methods like pills and condoms is far less than of provider-controlled methods like sterilizations and IUDs, and that female methods are more well known than male contraceptives.

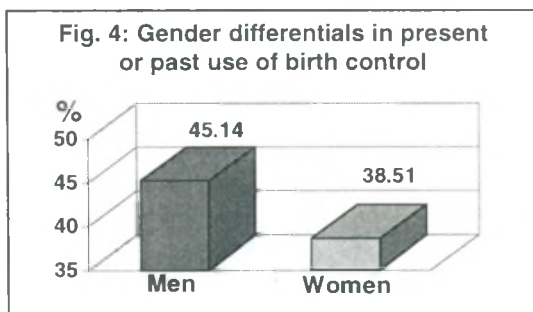
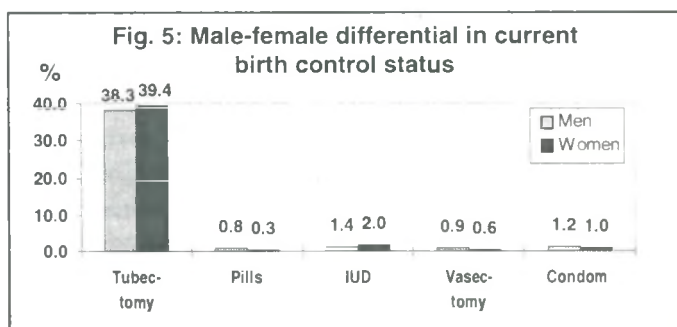


Figure 4 represents data on current or past use of birth control methods by the respondents. Surprisingly a somewhat larger proportion of men report birth control use than women, which contradicts the state-level data from the National Family Health Survey, where only around 5% of men reported current or past use.¹³



Moving to figure 5, which represents reporting of current use of family planning methods, we see a picture more similar to state-level data. Around 40% of the respondents reported that the family planning method used by self in the case of women and spouse in the case of men, was tubectomy –

¹³ See Part II of this report, chapter on the *Demographic and Health Status of Women in Karnataka*.

almost identical to the 41.7% of rural women reporting tubectomies in the NFHS survey. The use of other methods is negligible, particularly male methods. The failure of the family planning services to promote temporary methods, so critical to birth spacing, is very evident. The impact of state enforced women-centered sterilization targets are equally clear in the high proportion of tubectomies.

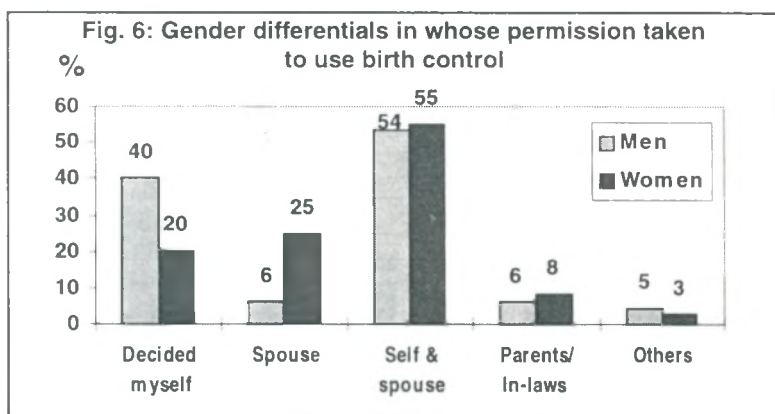
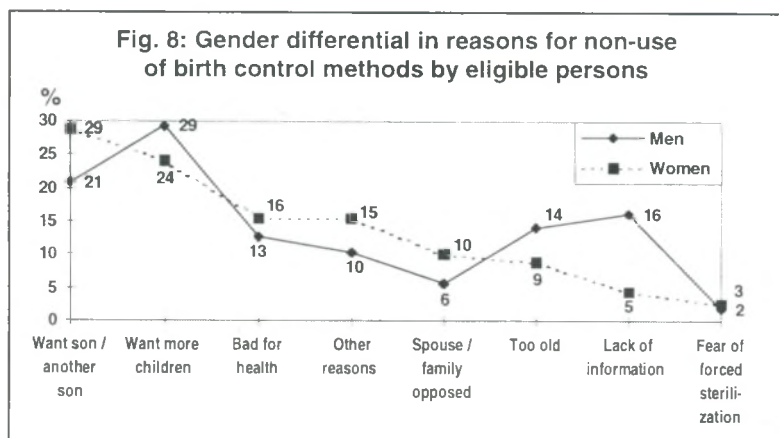
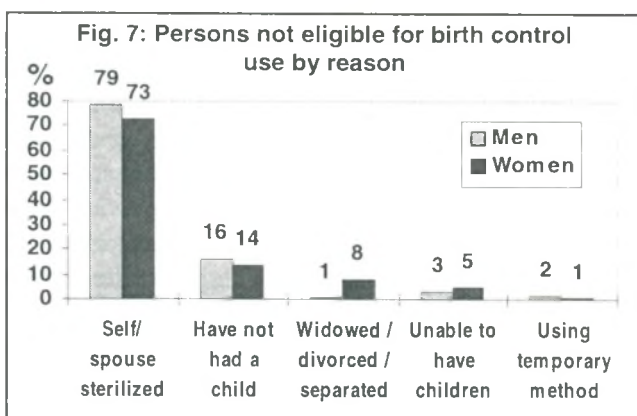


Figure 6 brings out the final dimension of women's relative lack of control over birth control decision-making: only 20% of female respondents who replied to the question of whose permission was needed to use any method of contraception said they had made the decision themselves, just half the number of men reporting this. Inversely, 25% and 8% of women had needed the permission of their husbands or in-laws (respectively), compared to just 6% and 6% of men reporting in these two categories. However, there is a high degree of consonance between men and women reporting that it was a joint decision of husband and wife and an encouraging majority report this (54% men and 55% women). It is hard to determine whether or not there has been window-dressing in this context, since field experience shows that couples consider this the ideal situation, and tend to claim this is the case regardless of the reality. Interestingly, the much maligned mother-in-law simply does not seem to figure very significantly in contraceptive decision-making, even among women (see table 5 of the Statistical Appendices). If we compare the data in figures 3 and 6, some interesting

insights emerge. There is obviously a link between reproductive and contraceptive decision-making and control. It appears evident that only a minority of women are in a position to make decisions about the number of children they bear and hence, about whether or not to use birth control. The low utilization of spacing methods suggests that women can opt for tubectomy of their own choice or with their partner's or in-laws' permission only after the number of children desired by spouse and his family have been born and have survived, with the presence of at least one surviving male child probably playing an important role. This means that women essentially lack control over both their fertility and reproduction.

In striking contrast, men's influence on the number of children their wives should bear is very strong (61% said this was their decision), but influence on wives' use of birth control is somewhat weaker (only 40% said they decided on contraception). Most of all, male responsibility for contraception or sterilization is practically nil – barely 1% reported having undergone vasectomies, and just 1.2% reported using condoms. The bottom line seems to be that a woman cannot decide the number of children she wants, or whether to use birth control, but once the husband and family are satisfied with the number of children she has borne, it is she who is expected to take the onus of preventing further births.

Figures 7 and 8 enlighten us about non-users of birth control. Figure 7 shows the distribution of five categories of men and women who are not eligible for contraception, and accounts for 532 men and 642 women. Obviously, those who have already undergone sterilization (mainly tubectomies, as we saw earlier) are the bulk of this group. It is important to note that nearly 5% of non-eligible women, or 2.6% of all women respondents, report that they are unable to bear children, despite not using contraception. This is a considerable rate of infertility, and there are practically no medical services for such women in rural areas. It is also significant that far more women (8%) than men (1%) report being widowed, divorced and separated as the reason for not using contraception.



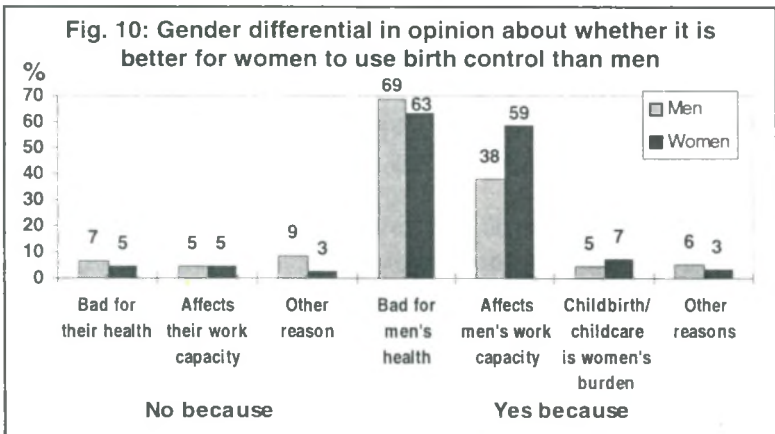
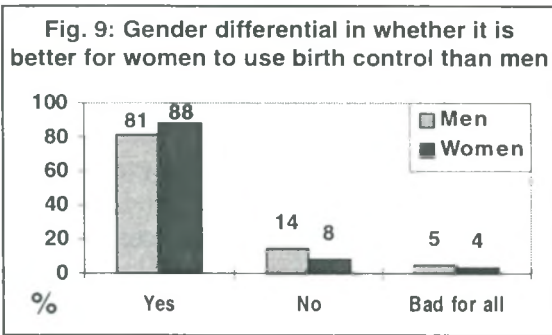
We may now address the gender differentials in reasons for non-use of birth control by those eligible to do so, a group that includes 558 currently married men and 529 currently married women in the reproductive age group. Figure 8 depicts a most revealing picture: the single most important reason seems to be the desire for a male child or another male child. Interestingly, more women (29%) than men (20%) report this, though the higher percentage of men (29%) than women (24%) in the next category i.e., “want more children,” may disguise men who are also aspiring for a son but articulated this more generally. The majority of those who want more children, however, are probably respondents from the 20% of surveyed households where the mean number of children was just one.

Figure 8 also presents us with fairly significant gender differentials in almost every category – an uncommon trend in the study as a whole. For instance, apart from son preference and fear of forced sterilization if they approach a family planning centre, far more women than men give risks to health, opposition from the spouse or in-laws, and other factors as the reasons for not using contraception. And interestingly, more men than women cite their advanced years and lack of information as the reasons. This latter is not as curious as it seems, since as we have pointed out, family planning campaigns have been so focused on women that they probably in fact have a higher knowledge level about available methods and services than men. In fact, more women than men reported having heard of family planning in figure 2.

We next examined male and female perceptions about whether it is safer and better for women to use birth control methods. This was a multiple response question, but applying a xeroth-approximation method, we were able to estimate the distribution of male and female respondents in the three main categories of responses, and the results are presented in figure 9. Not only do the overwhelming majority of respondents believe it is better for women to take the responsibility for contraception, but an even larger percentage of women than men hold this belief.

This could be either because women would like to have greater control over their own fertility, or because they have internalized the value that reproduction and fertility control is not men's responsibility. Inversely, a larger proportion of men than women answered that it was not better for women to take the onus, while a small but significant proportion of both sexes felt birth control methods were not good for the health of either men or women.

Figure 10 now gives us the spectrum of reasons offered by those who agreed and disagreed with the proposition. Clearly, the vast majority of both men and women believe that contraception affects men's health and work capacity, a



widespread myth in India (and indeed most of the world) that is totally contrary to medical evidence.¹⁴ It is most unfortunate to witness how ideological conditioning overrides actual experience in this context, since although very few respondents say birth control methods affect women's health and work capacity, the precise opposite is true: post-operative complications from tubectomies are far more common than from vasectomies, and most of the existing female methods cause a wide range of side-effects and complications that result in a huge loss of woman-hours in productive and subsistence work.¹⁵ It is also most revealing that preserving male health and capacity to work is a goal more vigorously pursued by women than men themselves. This shows women's

14 UNFPA, *Male Involvement in Reproductive Health, Including Family Planning and Sexual Health* Technical Report No.28, (New York: UNFPA, 1995).

15 Karkal, *op.cit.*; L. Bakshi, S. Batiwala, and M. Daswani, *Sex Bias in Modern Medicine: Gender Discrimination in Training, Delivery and Personnel*, in *Social Action* 1985, vol 35.

sense of social and economic dependence on men, regardless of whether women are contributing equally to household survival.

Finally, we come to the most sensitive and revealing question in the entire study: do women have a right to say no to sexual relations with their partners when they are ill, tired or upset? The question was posed slightly differently to men, asking if they respect their wives' wishes in such a context. In all, 1060 men and 1106 women answered this question.

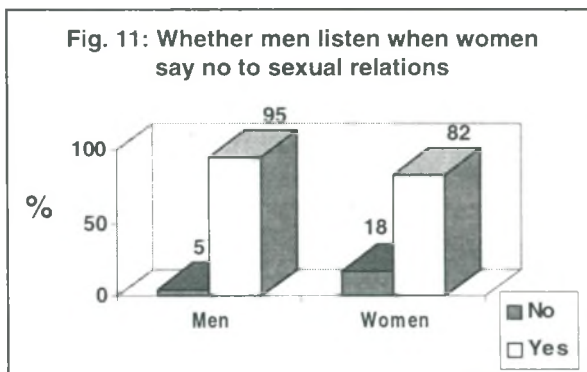


Figure 11, containing the male and female responses to this question, presents one of the most pleasant surprises in the entire study. An overwhelming majority of men said they did not impose themselves on their wives if the latter rejected sexual relations, and most women corroborated this statement. This is a hopeful situation, if the respondents have been completely candid and feedback from the field investigators, both male and female, suggests that most were quite earnest in their reply, after the initial giggling, embarrassment or consternation!

However, the disparity in the proportion of men and women who said “no” to this question is significant. Since 18% of women said their husbands were not sensitive to their wishes, while only 5% of men admitted this, it would be fair to assume that at least 18% of the married women lack control over sexual relations, or at least that their right to refuse sexual relations is not respected by their husbands.

Conclusion

In terms of control over reproduction and birth control, the status of women in the study sample appears to be very low. Only a minority of women have had the right to determine the number of children they want to have, as well as whether they can use any method of contraception. Knowledge and utilization of spacing methods is poor, although this is as vital to women's reproductive and general health as limiting overall fertility.

Moreover, awareness building on their reproductive rights and organizing women to exercise autonomy and assert their rights seem to have had limited or little impact in this critical aspects of their lives, even though NGOs are actively working with women in, at least half the study areas. Both men and women seem to assume that women must take the responsibility for birth control. But this responsibility does not come with the freedom to make decisions about the number of children. The women not only lack autonomy and control over their fertility, but accept this bias in practice, while simultaneously holding the same myths about the harmfulness of male contraception that are widespread among men. The need for education and awareness in this respect, among both men and women, cannot be overemphasized.

The only bright spot in this particular horizon is that women seem to be exercising some control over sexual relations, in so far as their right to say no to sex can be considered an adequate proxy.

Statistical Appendices

Table 1: Gender Differentials in Who Decided the Number of Children You Should Have

Main decision-maker	Male reporting		Female reporting	
	No.	% (of 959)	No.	% (of 1001)
Self	588	61.31	224	22.38
Wife/Husband	34	3.55	324	32.37
Self & spouse	282	29.41	389	38.86
Mother/MIL	6	0.61	41	4.10
Parents/in-laws	21	2.19	41	4.10
All elders	10	1.04	28	2.80
God/nature	26	2.71	6	0.60
Others(S)	16	1.67	35	3.50
TOTAL	983	100.00	1088	100.00

Table 2: Knowledge of Male and Female Birth Control Methods

	Male reporting		Female reporting	
	No.	% of 1103	No.	% of 1171
Tubectomy	882	79.96	1010	86.25
Pills	433	39.26	469	40.05
IUD	285	25.84	334	28.52
Injection	234	21.21	266	22.72
Vasectomy	722	65.46	758	64.73
Condoms	415	37.62	286	24.42

Table 3: Whether Using / Have Used Birth Control Methods

Status	Male reporting		Female reporting	
	No.	% of 1090	No.	% of 1171
Use / have used	23	2.11	478	40.82
Don't use	1067	97.99	693	59.18

Table 4: Birth Control Methods Used

Method ever or currently used by self or spouse	Male respondents who reported		Female respondents who reported	
	No.	% of 1090	No.	% of 1171
Tubectomy	417	38.26	461	39.37
Pills	9	0.83	3	0.26
IUD	15	1.38	23	1.96
Vasectomy	10	0.92	7	0.60
Condom	13	1.19	12	1.02

Note: Multiple response question

Table 5: Whose Permission was Required to Use Birth Control

Key decision-maker	Male reporting		Female reporting	
	No.	% (of 416)	No.	% (of 485)
Decided myself	167	40.14	98	20.21
Wife / husband	26	6.25	119	24.54
Self & wife / Self & husband	223	53.61	267	55.05
Mother / Mother-in-law	7	1.68	14	2.89
Parents / In-laws	18	4.33	25	5.15
Other elders	9	2.16	5	1.03
Others	10	2.40	9	1.86

Note: Multiple response question

Control over Reproduction and Sexuality

Table 6: Reasons for not Using Birth Control

Reasons:	Male reporting		Female reporting	
	No.	% (of 558)	No.	% (of 529)
Want more children	163	29.21	128	24.20
Want a son	81	14.52	91	17.20
Want another son	36	6.45	62	1.72
Spouse is opposed	21	3.76	33	6.24
Parents/elders / In-laws opposed	10	1.79	20	3.78
It is not good for health	70	12.54	82	15.50
Don't know enough about methods	82	14.70	22	4.16
Don't know where to go	8	1.43	2	0.38
They will force me to get sterilized	11	1.97	16	3.02
Our religion does not permit it	6	1.08	1	0.19
Other reasons (s)	57	10.22	77	14.56
Total no. of eligible persons:	558	(51.19%)*	529	(45.18%)*
Not eligible because:	No.	% (of 532)	No.	% (of 642)
Widowed / divorced / separated	6	1.13	53	8.26
No need, too old to have children	79	14.85	47	7.32
Unable to have children	16	3.01	30	4.67
Haven't yet had a child	84	15.79	87	13.55
Spouse had operation	398	74.81	7	1.09
I had operation	20	3.76	461	71.81
My spouse is using FP method	8	1.56	4	0.62
Total no. of not eligible persons:	532	(48.81%)*	642	(54.82%)*

Note: Multiple response question

* Of all married men, i.e., 1090

* Of all married men, i.e., 1090

† Of all women, i.e., 1171

† Of all women, i.e., 1171

Table 7: Opinion about whether it is Better for Women than Men to Use Contraception

Opinion:	Male reporting		Female reporting	
	No.	% of 1103	No.	% of 1171
No because it causes more problems for women's health	76	6.89	58	4.95
No because it affects women's work capacity	52	4.71	57	4.87
No, other reason (s)	98	8.88	34	2.90
"NO" - Total Responses	226	14.14	149	8.45
Yes, because it causes more problems for men's health	756	68.54	739	63.11
Yes, because it affects men's work capacity	421	38.17	685	58.50
Yes, because women must bear the burden of childbirth and childcare	54	4.90	83	7.09
Yes, other reason(s)	61	5.53	39	3.33
"YES" - Total Responses	1292	80.96	1546	87.96
Not good for either men or women	54	4.90	42	3.59

Note: Multiple response question

Table 8: Whether Women's Wishes are Respected if they Refuse Sexual Relations with Husband

	Male reporting		Female reporting	
	No.	% of 1060	No.	% of 1106
No	53	5.00	195	17.63
Yes	1007	95.00	911	82.37
Total	1060	100.00	1106	100.00

Chapter 12

Control Over Physical Mobility

Restrictions on women's freedom of movement is one of the hallmarks of their subordination. Historically, the controls on women's freedom of movement especially in the public sphere, are closely linked to the control of women's sexuality, and particularly to the need to preserve women's chastity and prevent them from mingling with members of the opposite sex other than their own family members. Conversely, in deeply patriarchal societies, unescorted women moving about freely are considered "loose" or "immoral" women, and fair targets of sexual advances if not assault. If women must go out, they must be escorted either by related men or older women.

For instance, even in the progressive city of Bangalore, where hundreds of thousands of women travel alone in public transport to their places of work or study, sexual harassment is a daily and harrowing phenomenon. When women protest these incidents publicly, however, they are often berated rather than supported by bystanders, who openly tell them that they should "stay at home", if they want to be unmolested! The message is clear: "good" women remain in the safety of the private domain; if they want to come out and rub shoulders with men in public spaces, they should either be under the visible protection of some man to whom they "belong" (father, brother, husband, son, or other male kin), or face the consequences.

However, the degree of mobility allowed to women is very much governed by their age, class, caste, and ethnicity among other things. In a society highly stratified along socio-economic lines, the same norms of mobility obviously cannot be applied to all women, for this would not only result in the loss of the labour of poor women to the fields and households

of the rich, but also threaten the survival of poor households whose economies are dependent on women's incomes and subsistence work. Age is a critical factor, since the ideological underpinnings of restricted mobility are based on sexual control. Young girls, whose virginity before marriage is a vital concern, and women in the reproductive years, whose sexual monogamy is the primary goal, are not permitted to move about as freely as older women. Post-menarche limits on free movement and certain kinds of physical activity are rooted in this very concern.

As in so many other areas of their subordination, women are themselves conditioned to accept, promote, and practice the customs and norms that subjugate them. They are given the role of not only socializing their young into the rules of mobility, but also of policing each other in this respect. Controls on mobility are, thus, most often imposed by women on their own daughters, sisters, daughters-in-law and other female relatives.

Finally, since patriarchal societies do not confer high value (or any value at all) on male virginity or sexual monogamy, men of all ages have far greater mobility than women. However, in the Indian context, caste and religious concepts of purity and pollution have placed certain restrictions on the freedom of movement of men belonging to certain social groups. Dr. Ambedkar's pre-Independence campaign of Dalits storming upper-caste temples was a symbolic gesture against precisely such caste-based constraints on physical mobility.

For women, the lack of freedom of movement stemming from ideological, cultural or social roots has serious practical repercussions for several reasons:

1. It is the most common root cause of women's low access to schooling and higher education; low mobility, thus, spells low literacy and education status for women. The consequences of this for the nation as a whole are immense. India has the largest pool of female illiterates in the world.¹

1 S. Batliwala & C. Medel-Anonuevo, *Understanding Women's Literacy Efforts in Asia*, in *Women and Literacy - Proceedings of a National Workshop* edited by S. Batliwala and V. Goswami (Bangalore: National Institute of Advanced Studies, 1996).

2. Even in adulthood, few women are able to avail of opportunities for adult education;
3. Restricted mobility ensures that women get less exposure and lower access to new ideas and information, which materially affects their access to resources and assets. For instance, the tea shop and the Panchayat office are the most common locales where men get access to information about new schemes for loans, housing, land reform, etc., from which they can benefit. Since it is unseemly for women to frequent these public spaces, they lose out in acquiring such assets in their own names.
4. The restriction of women to the private space played a critical role in excluding them from participation as equals in areas of public decision - making like politics and community leadership and adjudication.² The recent 73rd Constitutional Amendment mandating that one-third of all representatives in Panchayat Raj institutions has had a tremendous impact by breaking this taboo, by bringing thousands of women, even the poorest rural women from oppressed social groups into the self-government system, with interesting repercussions on their physical mobility.
5. Since the degree of seclusion or restricted mobility was inversely related to class, this is one dimension in which upper-caste rural women enjoy a lower status than their poorer sisters, with strange ramifications. A major women's empowerment program in the state which actively promoted literacy classes for poor women, and helped mobilize women learners for the government's Total Literacy Campaign, found it much more difficult to get women from richer rural households to enroll in the programme.³

² See Part II of this report, chapter on the *Status of Women's Political Participation in Karnataka*.

³ Personal communication of Nirmala S Shiraguppi, District Programme Coordinator, Bijapur District, Mahila Samakhya Karnataka.

This part of the study was, therefore, based on several hypotheses, including:

- I. Women have less physical mobility than men, in terms of number of places visited in the village and the district;
- II. Women's right to go alone to various destinations is far more limited than men's;
- III. Women's freedom of movement is inversely related to the distance of the destination;
- IV. Women's mobility is greater to places they must go to perform their allotted tasks in subsistence and production related activities (e.g., to the fields for labour, to forest for gathering firewood or grazing animals, to tank / river / well for water collection, etc.), but much less to places of leisure or where public services can be accessed (government offices, Panchayat office, etc.); and
- V. While both men and women face certain restrictions on their freedom of movement by virtue of caste or community, women are confronted with constraints that are particular to their gender.

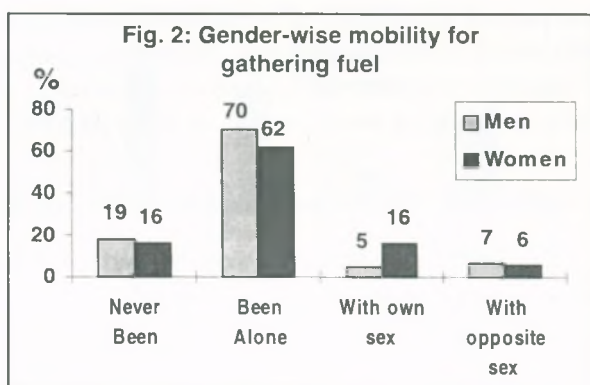
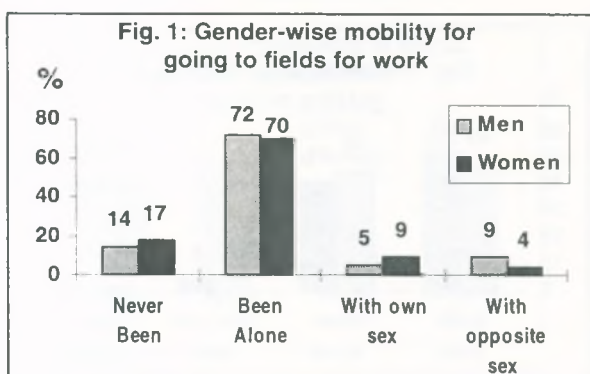
The data in this section of the study was collected by asking respondents to list the places or destinations they have visited, and to indicate whether they do so alone, with members of their own sex, or with members of the opposite sex.

Mobility for Meeting Household's Daily Needs

Figures 1 to 3 represent the data gathered from male and female respondents regarding whether they could go to work in the fields, gather fuel and graze animals alone or with escort.

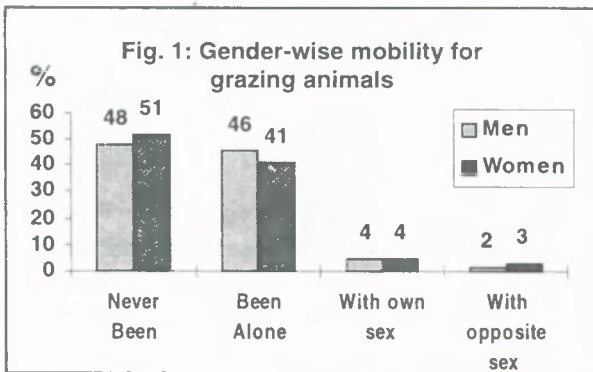
Firstly, we see that there are no significant gender differentials in mobility for performing these daily activities, critical to the household's economy and survival. The vast majority of both men and women report that they can move about on their own for these activities. Even most of those who report going

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with same-sex or opposite sex escorts are probably referring to the normal practice rather than any particular taboo. Those who say they have never performed these tasks are clearly from well-to-do households where such work is either done by hired help or whose needs are purchased from the market. In addition, men and women from non-agricultural households (such as artisans) would also fall into this category.

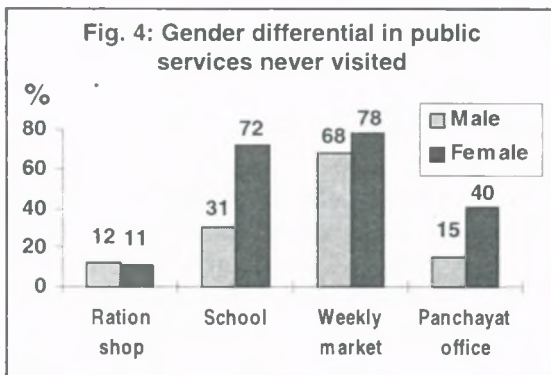
However, when we compare the degree of male and female mobility across the three activities, “to fields for work” has the highest percentage of both men and women traveling alone, followed by places where they go to collect fire wood. The low proportions of those reporting going alone or with escort for grazing animals is simply because not all the respondents’ families own the kind of livestock that have to be grazed. Going by the data in chapter 7, only around 30% own sheep and goats, which have to be grazed over large



areas; the largest proportion of households owned cows (just over 60%) which are often stall-fed. Moreover, grazing is one activity usually entrusted to children or old people, so fewer adult men and women would report in this category.

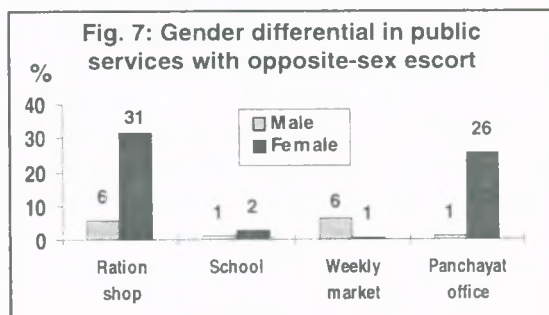
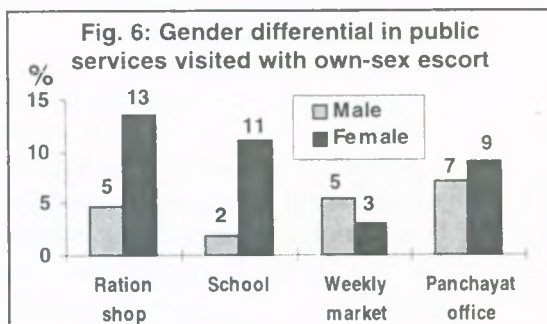
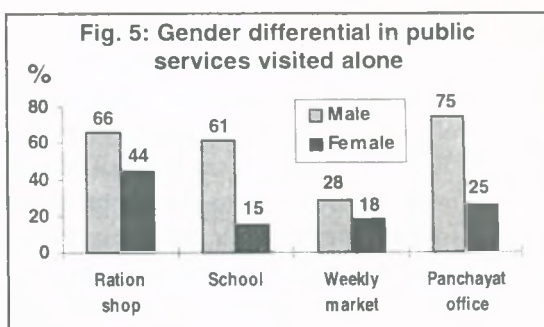
Gender Differential Mobility to Access Local Public Services

The critical difference between women and men, and the factor that affects women's status, is not so much their relative right to go freely to places related to their productive or subsistence work, but to those locations and services which determine their access to various public resources. Figures 4 to 7 show us exactly where women are losing out in this respect. They also bring out some peculiar anomalies.



Firstly, the male-female differentials in mobility are far more significant in figures 4 & 5, i.e., those who have never been to these locations and those who have been alone. Figures 6 &

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7 also show that the likelihood of women having visited these places only with escort of some kind, either of other women or of men, is much greater than in the case of men. The data in these figures clearly prove our hypotheses II and IV: that women have less freedom to travel alone, particular to “public” places that are the traditional male domain.

Specifically, the figures bring out several significant findings:

- I. The most-visited location was the local fair-price shop (ration shop), which about 90% of the respondents had visited. However, while 65% of the male respondents

had gone there alone, only 44% of women had done so. This corroborates the findings in chapter 9 that the daily needs of the household are generally purchased by men in most households. This would also explain why such a large percentage of female respondents (31%) report that they need a male escort to go to the ration shop, since it is a location where “other” men are likely to be present. These women may also belong to higher-income households where women are not permitted to move about alone very freely. Further analysis by caste and class will show whether this is the case.

- II. The Panchayat office is the next most-visited place, even by women, 60% of whom have been there alone or with escort. This is probably because the Panchayat office has become an important power point, and people have become aware of the large number of beneficiary schemes being implemented by this body. It is, therefore, a place not only where information, but potential benefits in the form of material resources may be garnered. More importantly, a number of schemes have specific beneficiary quotas for women, particularly from below poverty-line families, so that it is necessary for women to visit to collect or fill in application forms and other formalities. The likelihood of meeting important or influential people is also greatest at the Panchayat office, e.g., government officials and local elected representatives. All these factors also explains why far more men, nearly 85%, report having visited the Panchayat office than anywhere else.
- III. It must also be noted that this is one place where the majority of women have been with male escort – almost half of the female respondents who report having visited the Panchayat office have done so accompanied by a member of the opposite sex. Interestingly, an equal number of female respondents report that they been to the Panchayat office alone. It is likely that these are women from NGO-intervention areas, since this is a conscious strategy followed by many NGOs working with women.

- IV. One of the big surprises is the very large percentage of both male (67.72%) and female (78.14%) respondents who say they have never been to the local weekly market ("*Santhe*"). There could be several reasons for this, but the most obvious is the penetration of the petty-shop trade into these villages, so that the traditional village market, which is usually held in a large village is visited only for major purchases such as cattle. Daily and weekly needs are probably served by the local petty shop, so that relatively few men and even fewer women have gone to the local market village on market days. Intriguingly, the majority of male and female respondents who have been to the weekly market, have gone alone.
- V. The most discouraging aspect of this data is the very high proportion of respondents who have never visited the local school – almost a third of the men say they have never been, and an overwhelming 70% of women! This is undoubtedly because, unlike the Panchayat office, parents do not have to physically go to the school even to secure admission for their children. Due to the low enrollment rates in rural areas, government directs the school authorities to conduct enrollment without the parents' participation. Thus, while the Panchayat office would demand that beneficiaries personally appear to enroll in any scheme, the reverse happens in schools: teachers have to visit the homes of children who are not enrolled or who have dropped out.
- VI. It is particularly disheartening that 70% of the women, the majority of whom have school-age or school-going children, have never visited the school even once. Clearly, this is considered a male responsibility, perhaps because the men are on the whole more educated than their wives. But the implications of this general lack of interest is far reaching, especially for the retention of girl children which might improve if parents (and particularly mothers') interaction with the school was higher.

Differential Mobility to Places Beyond Village Limits

Our hypothesis III, that women's mobility is inversely related to distance, is clearly validated by the data in this section of the study. Figures 8 to 11 show the high gender differential between men and women who have visited some key places outside the village limits such as the health centre (private or public), the taluk headquarter town and the district headquarter town.

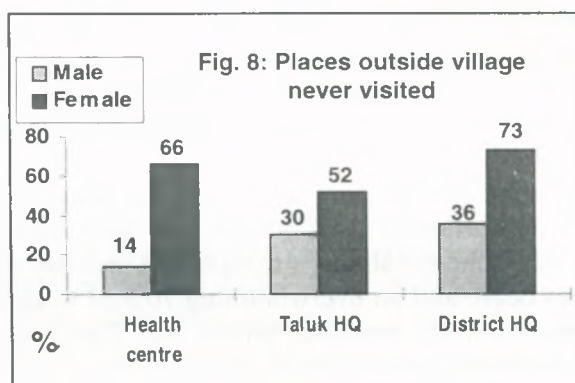
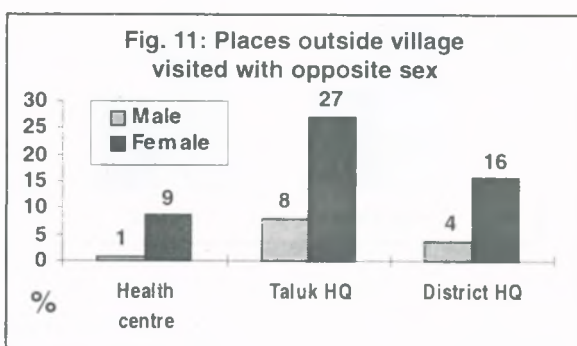
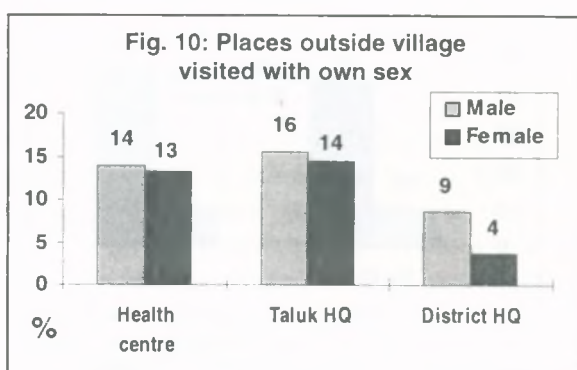
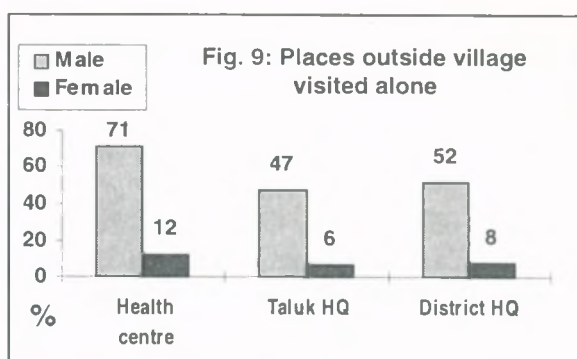


Figure 8 shows that the gap between men and women who have never visited these places is very wide. The highest, in fact, being to the health centre, corroborates our findings in chapter 6, where we showed that when seeking treatment for illness, women had tended to utilise health services that were located closer to their homes. Conversely, very few women have visited any of these places by themselves, without an escort. The few who have might well be older women and women mobilized by NGOs into mahila sanghas.⁴ It is not surprising that more men and women have visited the district headquarters than taluk headquarters, since the more useful government offices and other public institutions (like banks) are located in the district rather than taluk headquarters town. It is also interesting to see (figure 10) that fewer women than men have visited any of these places with escorts of their own sex, compared to those who visited with

4 The Mahila Samakhya program, particularly, used a conscious strategy of giving women the confidence to travel to various places outside the village, without escort, to access different services.

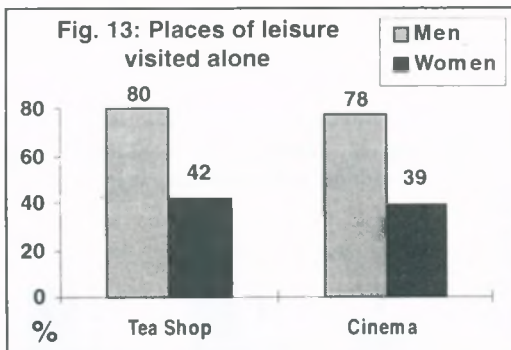
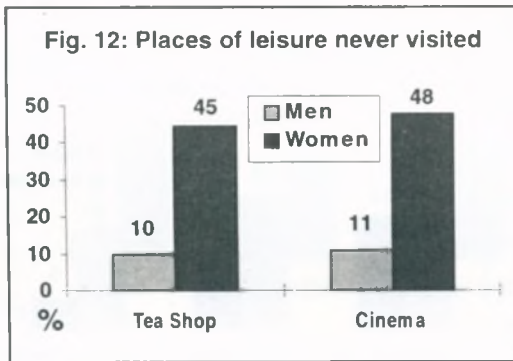
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menfolk in attendance (figure 11). Clearly, it is not very acceptable for women to accompany women to such distant places, which would generally involve traveling in public transport, or hitching a ride in a passing lorry.

Gender Differentials in Visits to Places of Leisure

The taboos against women frequenting places of leisure such as the tea shop or the cinema hall are very strong in the rural and indeed, urban culture. Women who go to such places unescorted are considered to have low moral character, and fair targets of sexual harassment. The tea shop and cinema hall or rather the “tent” cinema which is more common in villages were used as proxies for places of leisure.



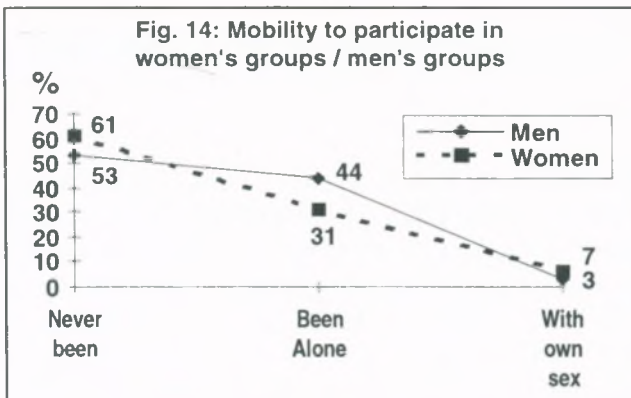
Accordingly, figures 12 and 13 show that a large proportion of women – 45% and 48% respectively have either never visited the tea shop or cinema, in contrast to barely 10% of the men. Similarly, there is a huge gap between the percentage of women who report having visited these places alone (42% and 39% respectively) and the nearly 80% of men who report having gone alone.

But the latter figures for women who say they have visited the tea shop and cinema on their own are intriguing, and bear exploration.

One possibility is that this part of the questionnaire was inappropriately worded, and has yielded misleading data in the case of women. For instance, since the tea shop in many villages also serves as the petty shop for daily needs (such as matches, betel leaves / betel nuts, soap, tea leaves, spices, etc.), it is highly probably that the women who report visiting this location on their own do so to purchase something. Common observation in villages makes it clear that women simply do not go to a tea stall to sit down and have a cup of tea and a gossip with other patrons!

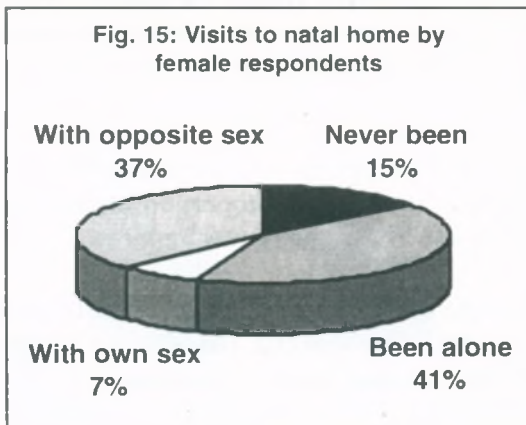
Similarly, most “tent theaters” which screen films in villages have a separate women’s section, and family members may have no objection to women going alone to watch a film, given this arrangement. It is entirely possible, therefore, that women who claim to have visited the cinema alone could be referring to having sat alone in the women’s section to watch a film, even though husband or other males may be seated in the men’s section. Alternately, at least some of these women could be those who went on their own to watch a film on television at the home of their landlord or employer, or at the Panchayat office, though the proportion of women reporting watching TV even occasionally was very low.

The data in figure 14 refer to mobility to participate in social development fora like mahila mandals or sanghas, youth clubs, and other men’s sanghas, and show a relatively low gender differential in mobility when compared to other locations. But even then, over half the men and women surveyed have never been to these fora, and village-wise analysis will tell us if this is because they are not present in certain villages at all, or due to other factors. However, of those who do participate, it is clear that almost all, especially women, can go to mandal / sangha meetings and other activities alone, without escort, obviously because these activities are inherently gender-segregated.



Visits to Natal Home

For women, the right to visit the parents' home after marriage is dear to their hearts, especially where exogamous marriages are the norm. Even otherwise, visits to the natal home are customarily permitted on certain ritually-defined occasions such as religious and cultural festivals, for the first childbirth, etc.



In this respect, the data in figure 15 seem to reflect the impact of the large proportion of consanguineous marriages among the survey respondents. For instance, 41% of the female respondents report that they have traveled alone to their natal home, probably because the natal home is in a nearby village, or even in the same village. An almost equal percentage (37%) report that they visit the natal home with a

male escort - this is probably in cases where they must travel some distance, and use public transport. The 15% of women who report that they have not visited their mother's house after marriage could either be recently married, younger women who have not yet had a customary occasion to do so. It could also comprise some women whose parents are dead, making such visits pointless, especially where their brothers have inherited family property and do not welcome the married sisters after the demise of the parents.

Women-specific Constraints on Physical Mobility

Traditionally, pollution-related taboos on women's movement during menstruation or after childbirth were widely practiced by the upper castes, and have often been adopted by lower castes in the process of Sanskritization. These controls on movement were practiced even inside the house. Although women often get relief from daily chores thanks to these taboos, it also results in their exclusion from various family activities and occasions like festivals.

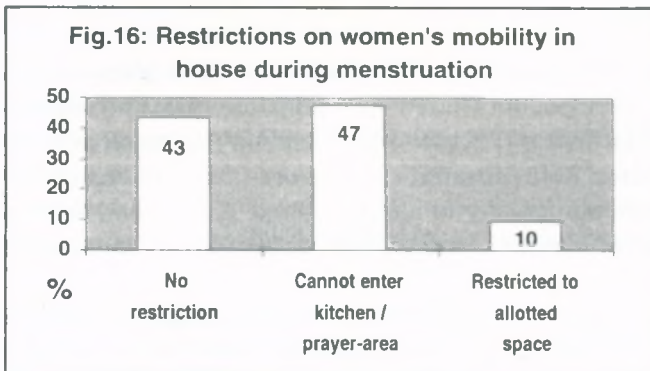
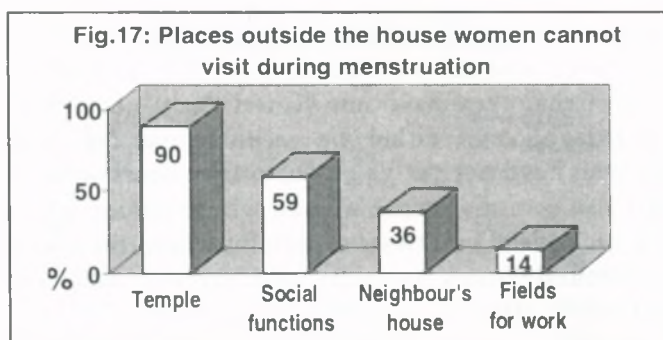


Figure 16 shows that only 43% of the women reported not facing any such restriction inside the house, probably women from poor households who cannot afford to follow such customs. An overwhelming majority – 67% of women are, however, subject to some ritual restrictions. Some 10%, obviously from wealthy households that can afford the space, report being confined to a prescribed area during their menstruating period. Similarly, many women are constrained



from visiting places outside the house during their periods. As expected, figure 17 shows that the most taboo place is the temple; but significant proportions of women are not permitted to attend social functions outside the house, or even visit a neighbour (59% and 36% respectively) during this time. Again, only a small number of households can afford to keep their women from doing wage labour in the fields when they are menstruating – a relief most women would readily avail.

Caste- and Community-based Restrictions on Physical Mobility

In the Indian context, ritual taboos on free access to various places were not only based on gender, but caste and community; these restrictions affected men's mobility as much as women's. The data here attempt to explore this dimension of the problem, particularly to identify where gender and other social categories intersect, and to draw gender-based comparisons.

Since this question was open-ended, the details of places where restrictions on the grounds of caste and community operate have not yet been statistically analysed. However, a significant gender difference in response to this question has emerged: while the majority of men have expressed the restrictions they face in terms of *not having the right* to go to certain places (such as upper-caste colonies, temples, or households), women have articulated as *a choice, attitude, or rule*. For instance, men have more often said, "We cannot go..." or "There will be a fight if we go...", women have tended to say "We should not go....." or "It will cause problems....."

Fig. 18: Gender differential in reporting of caste- & community-based restrictions on mobility

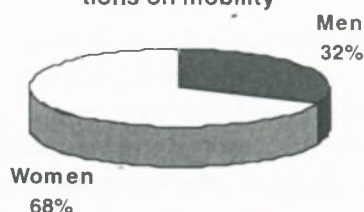
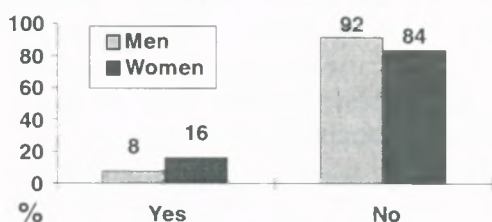


Fig. 19: Experience of caste- or community-based restrictions on movement



While the responses are yet to be coded by place and other details, figures 18 and 19 show the differential in number of women and men reporting experiencing restrictions on grounds of caste or religion. Of all those who answered this question affirmatively, there are twice as many women as men. This seems to suggest that women are more vulnerable to caste based taboos on entry into certain places than men, or at least that women are more often in situations where caste restrictions are practiced in addition to gender-based ones. For instance, more women work inside the homes of upper caste households as helpers or servants. It is also possible that after the mass-mobilization of Dalits in Karnataka into a relatively organised political lobby in the 1970s,⁵ the incidence of open customs against men's mobility has come down due to the potential for conflict. In fact, this is something several men have stated in their response – that it is hazardous for upper caste men to enter lower caste dominated areas as well,

⁵ In the early 1970s, the Dalit Sangharsh Samiti was formed in Karnataka to fight for the rights of Dalits. Although the movement later split into two, unfortunately again on lines of caste (i.e., the "right" hand and "left" hand castes), it did have a considerable impact on state politics and has continued to be vigilant in protecting Dalits from caste violence and oppression.

indicating that caste-based constraints on free movement are not operating in only one direction.

The most commonly mentioned locations where there are caste or community based restrictions on entry are temples, upper caste colonies and houses, certain areas within upper caste houses (in the case of women working as domestic help), and eating places like restaurants and tea shops. A significant number of men have said they avoid certain places because their entry could trigger conflicts and violence. Sadly, many respondents have given the reason for the restriction in the simple but eloquent phrase, "Because we are untouchables." ("*Nawu dalitaru*"); women echoed this in the words, "We are low caste people". It is also noteworthy that many more upper caste women than men answered this question, and spoke about the restrictions on their movement to lower caste homes or areas. This highlights the fact that rules governing caste purity (including taboos on miscegenation) are much more strongly enforced on and internalized by women than men.

Conclusion

The investigation into physical mobility as a parameter of women's status has yielded rich and revealing data. All our hypotheses have been validated. Women's mobility is far more restricted than men's, in general terms, and more specifically restricted in relation to public places that involve intermingling with unrelated men. The degree of mobility is also clearly related to distance and activity - women are permitted to move around on their own to perform vital economic or survival tasks for the household, but not for leisure or information. The further the location of a public service, the less chances that women would ever have visited it, much less availed it. In some cases, even if the service is nearby (such as the school), very few women go there because of their gendered roles and responsibilities. Nearly half the women experience constraints on their movements even within the house during menstruation, and double the number of women as men have encountered restrictions on their movements due to their caste or community status.

Statistical Appendices

Table 1: Gender-wise Mobility by Location, whether Visited, and Escort

Freedom of movement for:	Never been		Been alone		Been with own sex		Been with opposite sex	
	% of all (Actual No.)		% of all (Actual No.)		% of all (Actual No.)		% of all (Actual No.)	
1. Performing survival tasks	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
Fields for work	17.25 (202)	13.87 (153)	69.77 (817)	72.17 (796)	9.14 (107)	5.17 (57)	3.84 (45)	8.79 (97)
Gathering fuel	16.05 (188)	18.50 (204)	62.34 (730)	70.17 (774)	16.05 (188)	4.81 (53)	5.55 (65)	6.53 (72)
Grazing animals	51.41 (602)	47.87 (528)	41.25 (483)	45.88 (506)	4.36 (51)	4.44 (49)	2.99 (35)	1.81 (20)
2. Accessing public services in the village	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
Ration shop	11.19 (131)	12.33 (136)	43.98 (515)	65.73 (725)	13.41 (157)	4.62 (51)	31.43 (368)	5.62 (62)
School	71.82 (841)	30.55 (337)	14.77 (173)	61.47 (678)	11.02 (129)	1.90 (21)	2.39 (28)	1.18 (13)
Weekly market	78.14 (915)	67.72 (747)	18.19 (213)	28.47 (314)	3.07 (36)	5.35 (59)	0.95 (7)	6.26 (69)
Panchayat office	40.14 (470)	15.05 (166)	25.11 (294)	74.52 (822)	9.05 (106)	7.16 (79)	25.79 (301)	0.82 (9)
3. Accessing public services outside village	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
Health centre	65.84 (771)	14.14 (156)	12.47 (146)	70.99 (783)	13.15 (154)	7.43 (82)	8.54 (100)	14.50 (160)
Taluk HQ	52.09 (610)	29.92 (330)	6.40 (75)	46.69 (515)	14.43 (169)	6.17 (68)	27.07 (317)	4.26 (47)
District HQ	72.93 (854)	35.63 (393)	7.69 (90)	51.77 (571)	3.76 (44)	13.96 (154)	15.63 (183)	0.91 (10)
4. Leisure / entertainment	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
Tea shop	44.66 (523)	9.88 (109)	41.59 (487)	79.87 (881)	7.43 (87)	15.50 (171)	6.32 (74)	7.89 (87)
Cinema	47.99 (562)	10.79 (119)	39.11 (458)	77.61 (856)	6.58 (77)	8.70 (96)	6.32 (74)	3.89 (43)
5. Participating in social fora	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
Mahila sanghas / men's sanghas	61.06 (715)	52.95 (584)	30.83 (361)	43.97 (485)	6.66 (78)	3.17 (35)	1.45 (17)	0.64 (7)
6. Visiting natal home	14.52 (170)	*	41.42 (485)	*	7.09 (83)	*	36.98 (433)	*

Table 2: Restrictions on mobility of female respondents within the house during menstruation

Nature of restriction	No.	% (of 1171)
No restriction	500	42.7
Cannot enter kitchen / prayer room	550	46.9
Cannot move beyond the allotted space	113	9.7
Any other	8	0.7

Table 3: Restrictions on movement of female respondents to public places during menstruation

Restricted Places	No.	% (of 1171)
Temple	1049	89.58
Social functions	687	58.68
Neighbor house	427	36.47
Fields for work	160	13.66

Chapter 13

Control Over Physical Security

Violence against women or the threat of violence is the ultimate weapon that secures their acceptance of a subordinate status in the family and community. The new wave of the women's movement in India launched in the 1970s, thus, placed a major focus on violence against women, and fought for reform in the various laws dealing with such aggression.¹ The media was widely mobilized to expose crimes like bride-burning, dowry harassment, rape and custodial rape. Legal reform took the shape not only of amendments to existing legislation, such as the rape and anti-dowry laws, but also initiating legislation for prosecuting acts of domestic violence such as wife-beating. There was a growing recognition of the high incidence and prevalence of domestic violence, and the lack of protection to women from violence occurring within the four walls of the home, or within the sanctified institution of marriage.²

Although dowry-related violence against women was a rare phenomenon in rural areas, particularly in the southern part of the country, the rise of dowry that we saw earlier in this chapter is a worrying trend, with great potential for triggering crimes against women. On the other hand, caste, class and community based violence has always had a gender dimension. Since women's chastity and sexual exclusivity became a symbol of male status and family or community honour in patriarchal societies, women became inevitable targets of

1 Flavia Agnes, *Violence Against Women - Review of Recent Enactments* (paper presented at the National Seminar on Women & Law, India International Centre, New Delhi, December 3-4, 1994); Ranjana Kumari, *Brides are not for Burning: Dowry Victims in India* (New Delhi: Radiant Publishers, 1989).

2 Action Aid India, *Violent Homes - A Study of Shakti Shalini's Experiences with Women Victims of Domestic Violence* (Bangalore: Action Aid India, 1994).

sexual violence in conflict situations.³ Thus, sexual assault and abduction of the women became an almost universal method of dishonoring and demoralizing the enemy, as well as one of the perquisites of the victor. In India, caste conflicts not only result in the burning of huts, but in raping or publicly stripping women. Such incidents are unfortunately occurring even today in some parts of Karnataka.

International human rights agreements were slow to recognise the specific nature of the violence faced by women in conflict, and even slower to acknowledge the domestic violence women experience within marriage and family. It was, therefore, a major struggle for women to enforce the recognition of domestic and other forms of aggression they face as human rights violations, and only partial success was achieved in this respect in the United Nations Human Rights Conference held in Vienna in 1993.⁴

Violence against women is not always physical, but can take the form of psychological abuse as well. This is a murky area in which few epidemiological studies exist.⁵ Whatever we do know, however, points to the fact that women are more subject to neuroses than men, and that women who have a higher status and decision-making power in their households enjoy better mental health than their more subjugated sisters.⁶

No matter what form they take, violations of women's bodily integrity cannot be accepted in any civilized society. And women cannot be deemed to have a high status in terms of control over their bodies, if they are subject to violence or live in fear of violence. In this section of the study, therefore, we

3 Vccna Das, *Sexual Violence, Discursive Formations and the State* (paper presented at the International Conference on Gender Perspectives in Population, Health and Development in India, Organised by the National Council of Applied Economic Research, New Delhi, January 12-14, 1997).

4 Charlotte Bunch and Roxanna Carrillo, *Gender Violence - A Development and Human Rights Issue* (New Brunswick N.J.: Center for Women's Global Leadership, University of Rutgers, 1991).

5 Pauline McConville, *Review of Studies on Women's Mental Health in India* (monograph), (Bangalore: Women's Policy Research and Advocacy Unit, National Institute of Advanced Studies, 1995).

6 G M Carstairs & R L Kapur, *The Great Universe of Kota - Stress, Change and Mental Disorder in an Indian Village* (London: Hogarth Press, 1976).

explored the nature of physical and mental violence faced by women, and attempted to understand the gender differentials in the experience of violence by eliciting data from men as well.

Gender Differentials in the Experience of Violence

Firstly, reporting in the violence section of the interviews was very low. This could be because of several factors: there is a natural and general reluctance to report violence and harassment that has occurred in the “private” sphere - namely, between husband and wife, or within the family. We also realized that the concept of violation / violence that we had implicitly articulated in the study were somewhat alien to the respondents. Many things which happen on a day-to-day basis, especially non-physical harassment, are not really perceived as violations at all. It was also clear that the survey method was too impersonal and inappropriate to elicit information about experiences that could have been deeply traumatic for the victims. The data reported here is, therefore, somewhat patchy, and gives only a brief glimpse of the true picture. Figure 1 shows that far more women than men reported experiences of violence or harassment for various reasons. The total number of incidents reported by women was 289, almost double the number reported by men - 181. Although this was a multiple response question, it seems evident that more women have been targets or victims of harassment. This in itself is an important finding, and the data given in table 1 helps explain why this is the case.

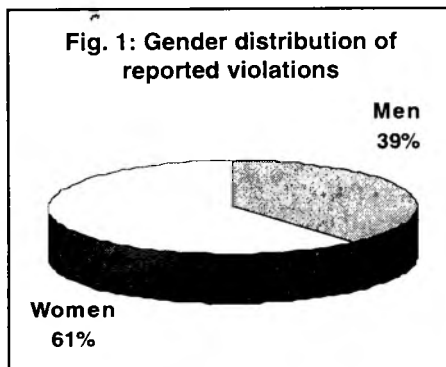


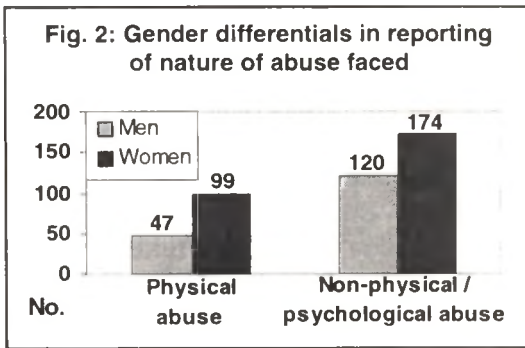
Table 1: Gender Differentials in Causes of Violence / Harassment

Cause of Violence / Harassment	Women	Men	Total
Fights over property / money	129	114	179
Fights with husband / his family - wife / her family	72	17	89
Harassment at workplace	12	17	29
Caste / communal violence	10	10	20
Political quarrels	7	9	16
Dowry demands	9		9
For giving birth to daughter	10	*	10
Suspicion of infidelity	4	*	4
Childlessness	7	*	7
Rape	1	*	1
Harassment / assaults of single women	13	*	13
Others	15	14	
Total no. of violations	289	181	470

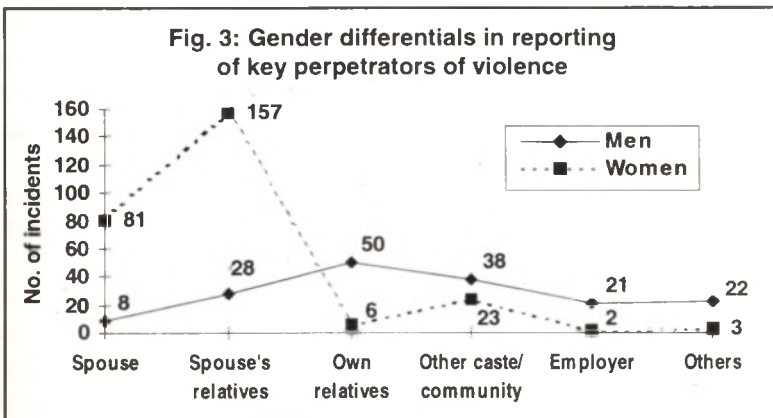
Table 1 shows that, there is no significant gender differential in reporting violations in some contexts property or money related quarrels (129 women and 114 men reported these) workplace harassment, caste or community based violence and political quarrels. There is a huge gap, however, in the category of fights with spouse or his/her family: in fact, the majority of women reported that their property and money related quarrels were with the husband and his family members. This explains why so many more women have repeated their experience of violations in both these categories: in property / money related fights, and in fights with spouse and his family. In contrast, most men involved in property conflicts had fought with their own relatives. What is most tragic is the number of categories of violations that are unique to women, including harassment for giving birth to daughters, for being childless, or for being single (unprotected) women. We did not expect a very high reporting of rape (in fact, only one women reported having been raped by her employer), the absence of reporting of eve-teasing is surprising - perhaps women are not used to viewing these as violations of their bodily integrity or security.

When examining violence, we made a distinction between physical and non-physical or psychological abuse – the latter

could include withholding of money, forced seclusion, etc. Figure 2 shows that while the majority of the abuse reported by men and women in this section was non-physical (120 and 174 experiences respectively), women are in fact victims of physical violence more than men (99 incidents reported by women as against only 47 by men). Many women reported physical abuse for money, property and dowry. Clearly, the deterrents to committing physical aggression on men are greater than in the case of women.



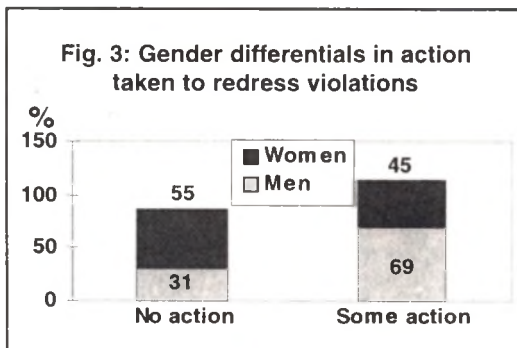
We next examined who were the main perpetrators of violence. Figure 3 brings out the startling difference between whom men report as the main perpetrators of the violence they have experienced, and whom the women cite. It is clear that for women, the overwhelming majority of incidents of violence and abuse have been experienced right within the home, at the hands of their own spouse and the spouse's family

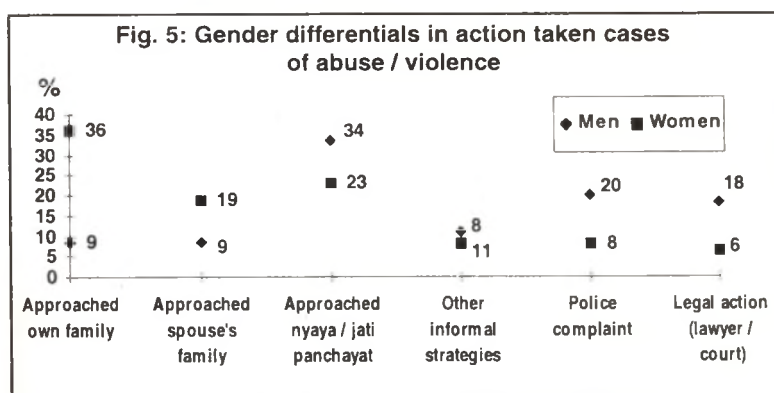


members – 238 out of the total 289 incidents reported by women fall into these two categories of perpetrators. Men's experiences are more evenly distributed, with very few men obviously reporting incidents perpetrated by spouse or spouse's family members. In fact, figure 3 brings out an important gender dimension of relations within extended and joint families: men are involved in or victims of violent conflicts with their own kin much more than women with theirs (50 incidents reported by men in this category compared to just 6 by women). Similarly, men seem to be more subject to abuse by their employers than women, though reporting in this category was very low as a whole. Caste and communal violence does not seem to have had much play in the study villages. In fact, it is interesting that 4 women who reported caste / communal violence cited their husbands as the perpetrators. These could be inter-caste or inter-religious marriages where there is subsequent tension and violence as a result of social and family pressure.

Seeking Redress

What have the victims of violations done to seek redress? Figure 4 reveals that a much larger proportion of women have not taken any steps to redress their grievances (55%) as compared to men (31%). Conversely, men are the most likely to take some action, even through informal means, to bring their violations out in the open and the perpetrators to some kind of justice.





In figure 5, we see the gender differentials in the kinds of action taken by men and women to redress abuse / violence committed against them. Firstly, the data show that women seek adjudication and redress strictly within the “private” sphere - within home and family, probably mirroring the fact that they experience the most abuse within this very sphere. Thus, in 55% of the cases where women did take action, they did so by seeking the intervention of family members – probably family elders, while only 18% of the incidents encountered by men were taken to this private forum. And even within this, we see that many more women have sought the intervention of their own (natal) family (36%) obviously because the husband and his family are the most common perpetrators of abuse and violence against the women.

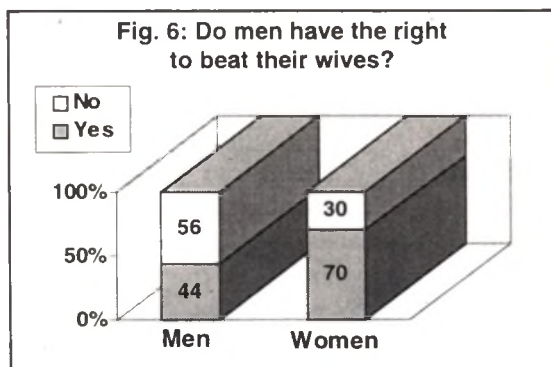
There is a significant difference between the number of men’s violations taken to customary adjudication bodies like the Jati Panchayat, and the number of women’s grievances. In fact, the data show that these bodies have not been accessed by women in cases of gender specific abuse such as dowry demands, childlessness, etc. (see table 2 of the Statistical Appendices). Perhaps women see these bodies as biased in their attitudes to women’s grievances, and so do not approach them as often as men. Interestingly, other informal strategies (such as approaching the local women’s sangha, village leaders, etc.) for arbitration seem to have been tried out by both men and women to an almost equal extent, though the type of forum / individual approached, varies sharply by gender.

Women approach the mahila sanghas rather than landlords or leaders, and men vice-versa.

Finally, the police and formal legal system are clearly not seen as approachable by women for justice and redressal, though even their utilization by men is not very high. In women's case, this is related both to the fact that they experience the most violence within the marital family, and there is an intense social sanction against women maligning the spouse's family name by going to the police or formal legal system, and to the fact that the formal system is relatively inaccessible to women due to its high economic and opportunity cost, their low physical mobility, etc.⁷ Cross tabulations will give us more insight into the kind of violations for which women and men have sought formal legal intervention, but the data suggest it is usually in the context of property disputes.

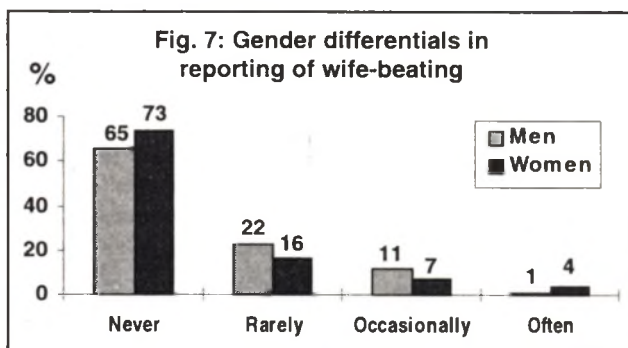
Wife-beating – Attitudes and Reality

It has long been felt that wife-beating is so persistent because women accept it as their inevitable lot in marriage. Figure 6 proves that this is yet another area in which women are trained to be more ardent upholders of male rights and privileges than men themselves. While 56% of our 1103 male



⁷ See *Annual Report 1996-97*, Hengasara Hakkina Sangha (HHS), an organization using legal awareness to empower rural women. HHS's experience also shows that women are extremely reluctant to use the formal legal system for these and many other reasons, including their perceptions about formal law and whose interests it serves.

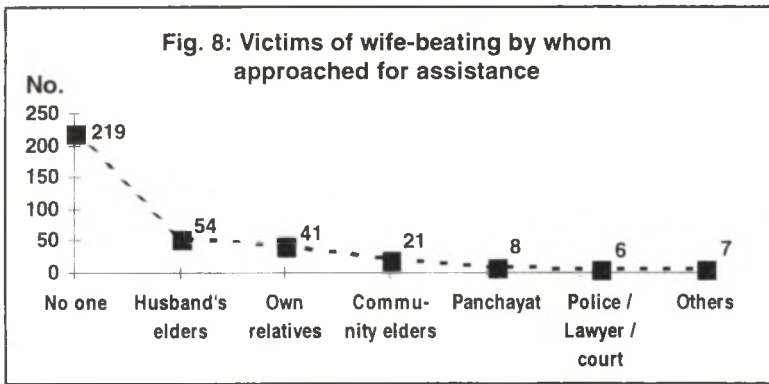
respondents acknowledged that men do not have the right to beat their wives, only 30% of the women respondents endorsed this view, the majority (70%) of the women stating that this was a husband's prerogative. This was often expressed in very revealing ways in the interviews: "After all," said many women, "has he not tied the '*thali*' (marriage chain) for me?" Further data analysis will show whether the majority of women who have contested this traditional male right are those in NGO areas, or where awareness of women's rights have been a conscious part of the NGO's agenda.



The very low gender gap in reporting the incidence and frequency of wife-beating is worth exploring further through qualitative research. Figure 7 shows that although the majority of women sanctioned wife-beating, only a minority have reported experiencing it themselves. In fact, 73% of women respondents said they have never been beaten by their husbands, compared to 65% who said they never beat their wives. Of the women who admitted being beaten, however, a consistently lower proportion report "rarely" or "occasionally" as the frequency, as compared to men. And while 4% of women say they are beaten fairly often or regularly, only 1% of the men report this to be the case. The clash of perceptions is very evident in this data.

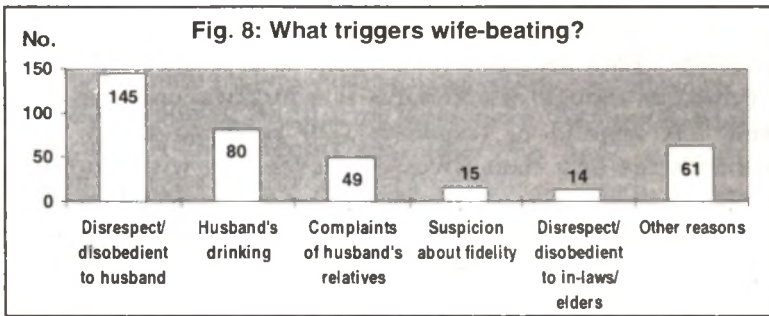
It is also important to note that low reporting of wife-beating does not make it a non-issue, considering that the numbers involved are very significant. 381 men acknowledge beating their wives at least occasionally, and only 312 women corroborate. Going by male reporting, this means around one

in every three wives in our study sample is experiencing this form of domestic violence. This is one of the contexts in which we can rely on male reporting, since men are unlikely to acknowledge such a fact unless it is true (and possibly just the tip of the iceberg), and women's cultural conditioning makes them far more likely to suppress the truth about their husband's physical violence.



Have women sought help to stop wife-beating? Figure 8 indicates that the vast majority have not - 219 (or 70%) of the 312 women who reported the problem say they have not gone to anyone or done anything about it. Of those who have approached different individuals or bodies, we see again that the vast majority have sought the assistance of either their husband's family elders or their own relatives and community elders. Barely a handful have taken the problem to public redressal mechanisms like the village panchayat, the police, or a lawyer. Among the others approached, only one woman reported asking the mahila sangha's help. Even after taking recourse to outside intervention, only 22 female respondents reported that the beatings either diminished in frequency or stopped as a result.

Of those women who are even occasional victims of wife-beating, the majority cite any action of theirs that the husband construes as disrespectful or disobedient as the main trigger (figure 8). In fact, perceptions of disrespectful or disobedient attitudes or behavior by the woman are at the root of most beatings, if we include the categories of complaints by the



husband's relatives, or the in-laws' taking offense. The next largest cause reported is, predictably, the husband's drunkenness. Common wisdom has it that alcohol is the single largest root cause of wife-beating in rural India. But our data showed very low reporting of alcohol consumption among the male respondents.

What figure 8 is also telling us is that wife-beating is used as a weapon to punish challenges to a husband's hierarchical position, authority, or the authority or primacy of his family. This is further evidenced by some of the responses women gave in the "other reasons" category: "when I do not cook the food in time", "when I serve less food", "when I do not work properly"; six women said their husbands beat them if they object to his liaison with another woman; and 7 women said they get beaten if they "answer back"!

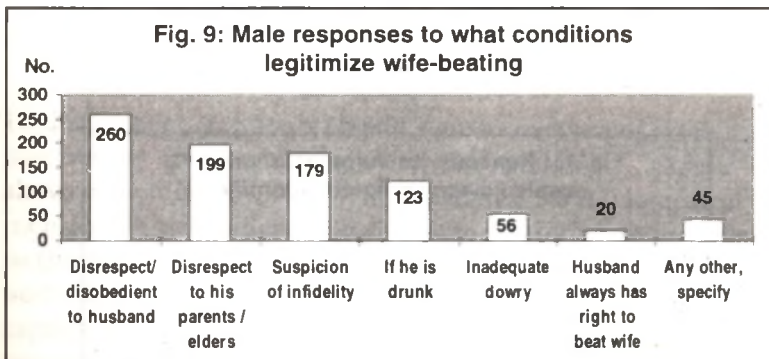
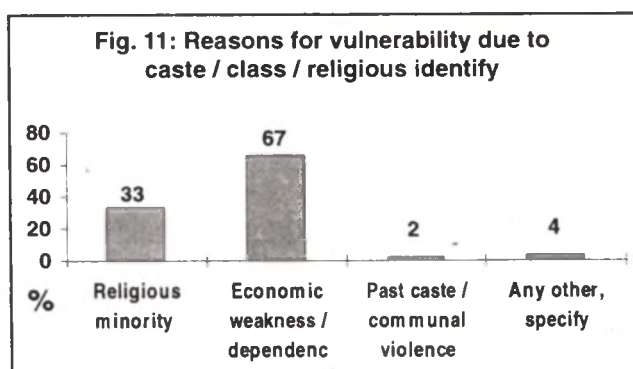
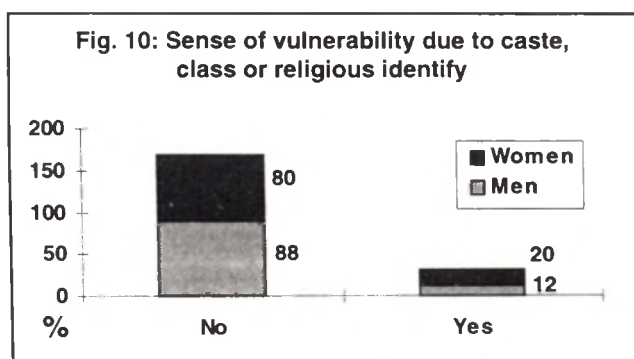


Figure 9 shows that these perceptions and experiences of women closely converge with male views on the subject. The majority of male responses to the question of what situations would make wife-beating justified reinforce the

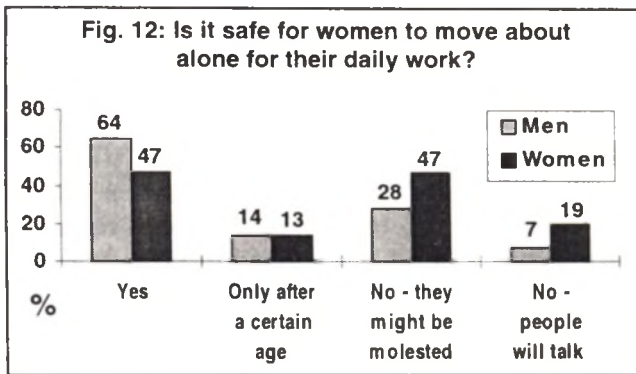
factors of wifely disrespect, disobedience, and suspicion of infidelity. They also sanction a husband's violence when he is drunk, as though drunkenness is a justification in and of itself. A handful of responses (20) seem to assert that husbands can beat their wives whenever they wish, without much reason! Again, we are seeing the ingrained belief that beating is just retribution when wives violate certain codes of conduct. There is also an implicit assumption that a wife must be the receptacle for her husband's aggression in situations when he is out of control - such as after consuming alcohol.

Feelings of Insecurity

Apart from actual violence and abuse, we wanted to explore whether people have *a sense of physical or mental insecurity or fear*, and to what extent these feelings are



related to class, caste, and community identity as well as gender. Figure 10 shows that the vast majority of men and women denied feeling vulnerable to violence or abuse on any of these grounds. But interestingly, more women (20%) than men (12%) respondents said they did have such fears. Examining the reasons cited by women and men, we found no significant gender differences - the percentages were almost the same in each category. Averaging male and female responses gives us the data in figure 11, which shows that economic dependency and powerlessness is the major reason cited by the 131 men and 233 women who reported feeling vulnerable due to their caste or community. Belonging to a religious minority accounts for 33% of the responses to this question - significantly, more women (75) than men (45) gave this response. Past experiences of caste and communal violence account for relatively few responses.



In this respect, gender is clearly a greater source of insecurity, particularly in constraining women's mobility. Figure 12 shows that a lower proportion of women (47%) compared to men (64%) respondents gave an unqualified "yes" response to the question, "Is it safe for women to move about alone to perform their daily work?" The question was designed to capture the core, visceral feelings of safety or insecurity.

This finding poses an interesting counter point to the data in figures 1 & 2 in chapter 12 on control over physical mobility, where we found that in fact, women have the greatest freedom

to move about alone to perform productive and subsistence work for the household. The two sets of data, when juxtaposed, seem to indicate that while women have the right or freedom to go alone to perform daily tasks, they do not necessarily feel completely safe doing so.

Figure 12 also shows almost total convergence between men and women in the category of “after a certain age”, specifying that women can move about alone safely after marriage or after 35 years of age. This viewpoint is based on two implicit assumptions: (a) that older women are not seen as sex objects, and hence, are not as vulnerable to sexual assault or harassment as younger women; and (b) that married women, having become the sexual property of a man, are also safe, since sexual aggression of any kind would attract retaliation and social consequences.

On the other hand, there are significant gaps between the responses of men and women in all the “No” categories: women clearly feel more insecure and vulnerable than men perceive them to be. For instance, women have greater anxieties about being sexually molested or assaulted, or having their reputations sullied, than men have on their behalf. This needs to be further explored through in-depth studies. It was very encouraging to find that a handful of men and women (less than 10), expressed the view that if a woman is mature, confident / courageous and educated, she can move about by herself.

Conclusion

The incidence of violence and abuse as reported by the study respondents is quite low, though given the cultural constraints and the limitations of such a quantitative method, there could have been a significant level of under-reporting. Nevertheless, it is clear that women are more often victims or targets of both mental and physical abuse than men. Women's experiences of abuse are located largely within the household, family, and marriage, with family members and their own husbands being the key perpetrators. The triggers of abuse

of women, particularly wife-beating, are mainly centered around transgressions of their gendered roles and rules of conduct, while men's experiences are more related to property and money disputes with their own relatives, or playing the role of abusers.

More women than men have passively accepted aggression; those women who sought redressal or arbitration have done so largely within the private sphere of family and community elders, while men have sought justice through more public mechanisms, both customary and formal. This could be because of women's conditioned belief that violence such as wife-beating is an inevitable male prerogative, not a crime or act of violence. Women clearly have a very low sense of their right to live free of violence, or their right to seek justice. It is not surprising, therefore, that women feel more insecure and vulnerable to harassment and abuse due to their gender, than either women or men feel due to their caste, class or religious identity.

This section of the study shows an overwhelming need for rights-based awareness building among women, and concerted efforts to bring crimes like wife-beating and sexual harassment into the public sphere.

Statistical Appendices

Table 1: Male-Female Reporting of Physical and Non-Physical Abuse Experienced by Nature of Abuse

Nature of abuse:	Physical		Non-Physical / Psychological	
	No. reported by women	No. reported by men	No. reported by women	No. reported by men
Fights over property	23	31	63	62
Fights over money	17	6	26	15
Fights with spouse / spouse's family	35	4	37	13
Political quarrels	5	2	2	7
Harassment at workplace	2	4	10	13
Caste abuse / violence	2	-	2	9
Communal abuse / violence	-	-	6	1
Dowry demands	7	-	2	-
For giving birth to girl child	2	*	8	*
Suspicion of infidelity	2	*	2	*
Childlessness	2	*	5	*
Because of being unmarried / divorced / widowed / deserted	2	*	11	*

Table 2: Action Taken by Men against Violence / Abuse

Nature of problem:	Action taken/who approached						
	No action	Family (wife's/ own)	Nyaya / Jati Panchayat	Police	Lawye/ court	Other	Total
Fights over property	24	7	27	11	17	7	93
Fights over money	6	7	3	4	1		21
With wife / her family	8	6	1	2			17
Political quarrels	3		3	2	1		9
Harassment at work place	6		5	2	1	3	17
Caste violence	4			1	1	3	9
Communal violence				1			1

Control over Physical Security

Table 3: Action Taken by Women against Violence / Abuse

Nature of problem:	Action taken / who approached							
	No action	Husb's family	Own family	Nyaya/ Jati Pan-chayat	Police	Lawyer/ court	Other	Total
Fights over property	38	8	11	17	3	5	4	86
Fights over money	22	9	7	4			1	43
Fights with husband/ his family	41	7	16	4	1		3	72
Political quarrels	2			2	3			7
Harassment at work place	9		1			1	1	12
Caste violence	3		1					4
Communal violence	4		1		1			6
Dowry demands	3		5		1			9
Giving birth to daughter	7			2	1			10
Suspicion of infidelity	3		1					4
Childlessness	5		1					6
Rape	1							1
Problems of single women	9		2			2	1	7

Table 4: Male-Female Differentials in Reporting Wife-Beating

Have you ever beaten your wife / Has your husband every beaten you	Male		Female	
	No.	%	No.	%
No	722	65.46	859	73.36
Yes, rarely	244	22.12	187	15.97
Yes, sometimes	124	11.24	82	7.00
Yes, often	13	1.18	43	3.67
Total	1103	100.00	1171	100.00

**Table 5: Action Taken against Wife-Beating
(Female Respondents only)**

Action taken / who approached	No.	% of 312
No action / no one approached	219	70.19
Yes, approached elders in husband's family	54	17.31
Yes, approached my relatives	41	13.14
Yes, approached community elders	21	6.73
Yes, approached jati panchayati	4	1.28
Yes, approached the village/nyaya panchayati	4	1.28
Yes, approached the police	5	1.60
Yes, approached the lawyer/court	1	0.32
Yes, approached the Mahila Sanghas	1	0.32
Others	6	1.92

Note : multiple response question

Status of Rural Women in Karnataka

Table 6: What Triggers Wife-Beating
(Female Respondents who have been beaten only)

What triggers beatings:	Female	
	No.	% of 312
If husband is drunk	80	25.64
Harassment for dowry	3	0.96
Suspicion about my fidelity	15	4.81
Complaints by other family members	49	15.71
For being disrespectful/disobedient to my in-laws/elders	14	4.49

Note : multiple response question

Table 7: Under What Conditions can a Husband Beat his Wife
(Male Respondents who Beat their Wives only)

When wife-beating is justified:	Male	
	No.	% of 381
If husband is drunk	123	32.28
If wife did not bring proper dowry	56	14.70
If he doubts / suspects her fidelity	179	46.98
If she is disrespectful / disobedient to his mother / father / elders	199	52.23
If she is disrespectful / disobedient to her husband	260	68.24
Husband always has the right to beat the wife	20	5.25
Any others	45	11.81

Note : multiple response question

Table 8: Feelings of Insecurity / Vulnerability due to
Caste, Class or Religious Identity

Do you feel vulnerable due to class, caste, or religion?	Male		Female	
	No.	%	No.	%
No	972	88.12	938	80.10
Yes	131	11.88	233	19.90
Total	1103	100.00	1171	100.00
If yes, reasons:	No.	%	No.	%
		(of 131)		(of 233)
We are a minority community / less in number	45	23.56	75	29.88
We are economically weaker / less powerful	53	27.75	93	37.05
We are economically dependent on the upper castes	33	17.28	65	25.90
There has been caste/communal violence in the past	3	1.57	6	2.39
Any other reasons	3	1.57	12	4.78

Note : multiple response question

Control over Physical Security

Table 9: Is it Safe for Women / Girls to Walk about alone for their Daily Work?

Whether it is safe:	Male		Female	
	No.	% of 1103	No.	% of 1171
Yes	705	63.91	549	46.88
Yes, after a certain age	150	13.60	154	13.15
No, men may misbehave with them	140	12.70	243	20.75
No, they may be molested / attacked	165	14.51	310	26.47
No, people will talk	76	6.89	226	19.30

Note : multiple response question

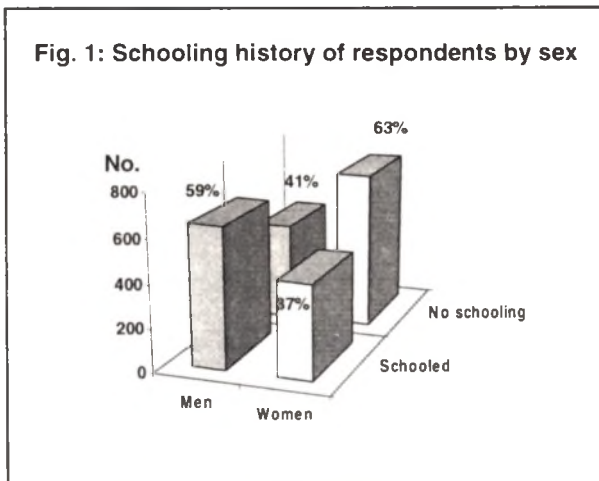
Chapter 14

Access to Education

The hypotheses underlying this section of the study were fairly straightforward: we expected to find major biases against women and girls in access to schooling, continuing education opportunities, and literacy. We also attempted to explore less documented dimensions of the problem, such as parents' perception of the necessary level of education for boys and girls, and inter-generational changes in attitudes to girls' education, if any, since the literature in this area is extensive.¹

Schooling history

Figure 1 shows that only 37% of all female respondents reported having gone to school in their childhood, compared to 59% of all male respondents. This means just under half (47%) of all the respondents had ever attended school. Further,



¹ See Part II of this report, chapter on the *Educational Status of Women in Karnataka*.

of all schooled respondents, only 40% were women. This compares unfavourably with the state's official gross enrollment ratios for the present generation of school age boys and girls, which stands at over 100%. It is also well below the proportion of school-age girls and boys from the surveyed households who are reported to be attending school - 69% and 74% respectively, an encouraging sign of growing awareness and demand for education.

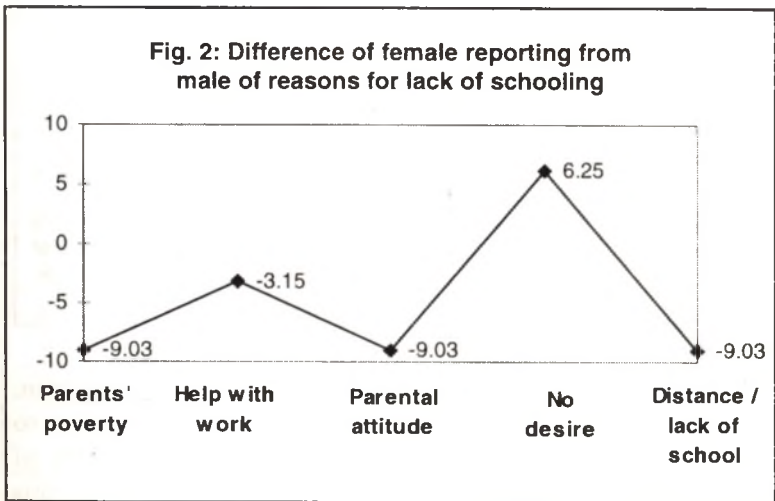


Figure 2 shows very little gender differential in the reasons cited by unschooled men and women for their lack of schooling. Interestingly, the gender gap is exactly the same 9%, for the factors of parental poverty, attitudes, and lack of access to a school, and even less for the other factors. But it must be borne in mind that these data must read against the context presented in figure 1. In other words, the factors mitigating against schooling have worked more strongly against women than men, otherwise the number of unschooled men and women would be roughly equal to begin with, which is not the case. It is also interesting to speculate as to why more women than men cited lack of desire to go to school. Is this in fact an expression of the internalized belief that school is unimportant for girls, or evidence of the insensitivity of school systems and teachers to the girl-child, so that school

was viewed more unfavorably by them?² Similarly, cultural constraints on the mobility of girls may also be reflected in the larger number of women who have reported that there was no school in their natal village, or that the school was too far.

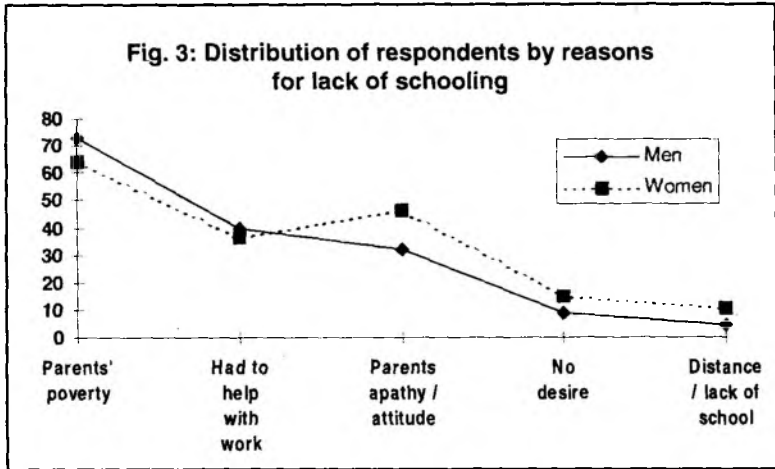
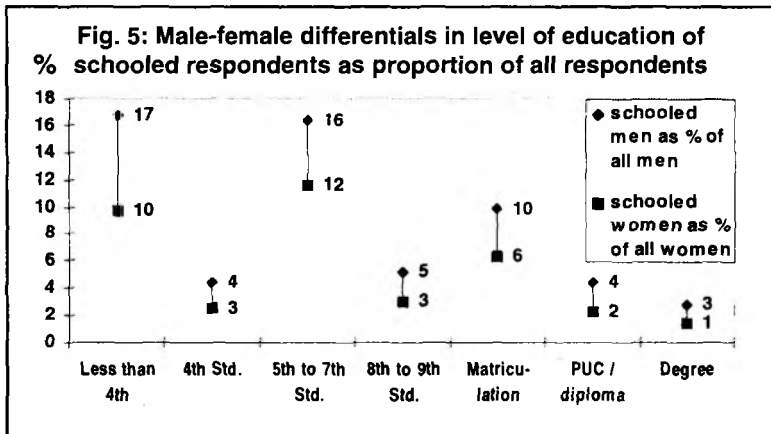
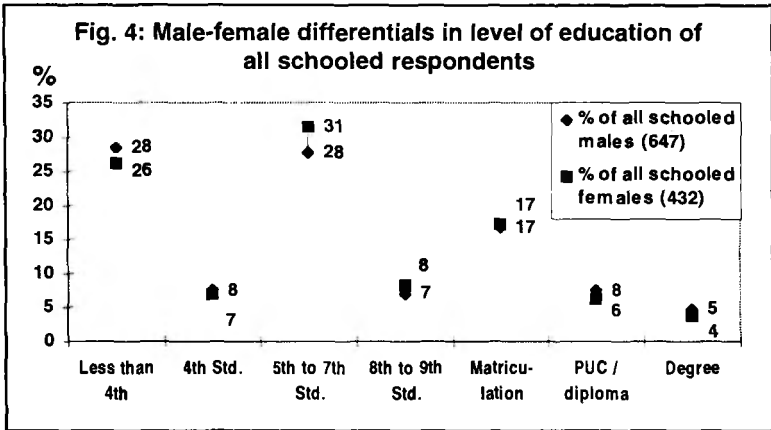


Figure 3 reveals what would be expected in such a population, the major reason cited by respondents who had not gone to school was their parents' poor economic status – 73% of unschooled men and 64% of unschooled women gave this explanation. The second major cause was parental lack of awareness and attitudes to education, especially for girls and for obvious reasons, more women (26%) than men (19%) cited this. The need for their labour at home or on the farm was the third major reason cited.

Apart from these five key factors, the other reasons cited by 47 women for not going to school are illuminating: (a) absence or death of either or both parents; (b) having to take care of younger siblings; and (c) the need to start earning an income. Other reasons cited by 53 men included death of parent/s and the need to earn income; being given in bonded labour was also mentioned by two men.

² The recently introduced District Primary Education Project has placed a major emphasis on re-training of teachers to avoid gender-based abuses and biases against girl children, in recognition of this reality.

To explore the role of gender in the respondents' educational history a little further, we asked men and women if any of their siblings had not attended school i.e., if the men had a sister who had not been sent to school, and if the women had a brother who had not been sent to school. While only 50 women respondents said they had a brother in this category, an overwhelming 589 men said at least one of their sisters had not been sent to school. The gender bias in access to school among the surveyed respondents was, thus, a more generalized trend in their natal families.



Figures 4 & 5 help us make some interesting comparisons of the levels of education attained by male and female respondents. Figure 4, comparing levels for all those

respondents who did go to school, shows little gender gap. Almost an equal proportion of schooled men and women did not go past the 4th standard; of those who did, the gap between men and women at higher levels is not only low, but the proportion of women who attained higher schooling and completed matriculation actually exceeds men. This shows clearly that when women are permitted to study beyond primary school, their chances of completing school are very high. However, it is important to once again emphasize that the absolute numbers of schooled women is far below that of men.

This difference comes out more clearly in figure 5, showing the levels of education of schooled respondents as a proportion of all respondents. Here, we see that the gender gaps are much more visible. Only half as many women as men got a chance to complete lower primary school; only two-thirds as many did upper primary and matriculation; and thereafter, the proportion of women in higher education is only around half as much as men.

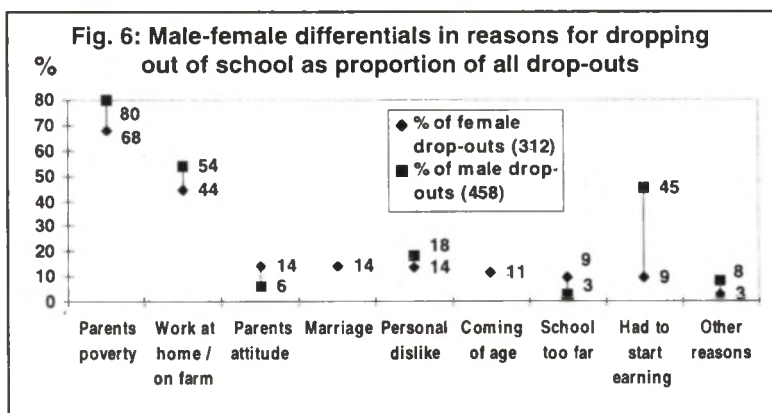


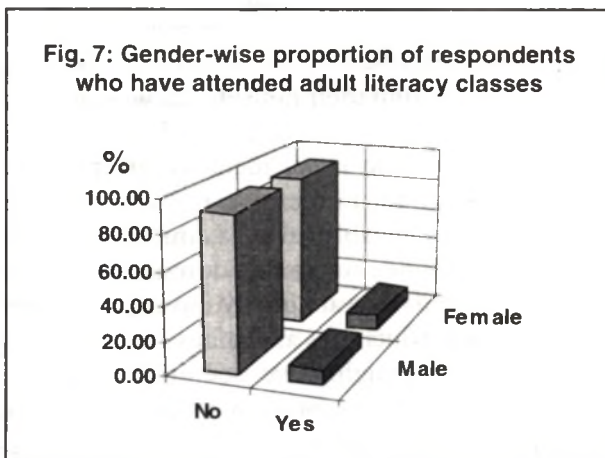
Figure 6, showing the key reasons for dropping out of school for those who had not completed their schooling, brings out further gender differentials.

Firstly, there are two factors unique to women - marriage and coming of age, which account for 14% and 11% of the women who dropped out of school.

Similarly, factors like parental attitude (such as “girls should not study too much”) and distance of the school have mitigated more strongly against women than men, while poverty, the need to start earning wages, and providing labour at home or on the farm have worked more against men. However, male drop-outs reported twice as many reasons as women, which appears to show that girls are more likely to be taken out of school because of their gender, while a combination of factors must come into play for boys to be similarly withdrawn. When scanning figure 6, it is also worth noting that the proportion of male drop-outs to all men who attended school and female drop-outs to all women who attended is almost equal - 71% and 72% respectively.

Access to Adult Literacy

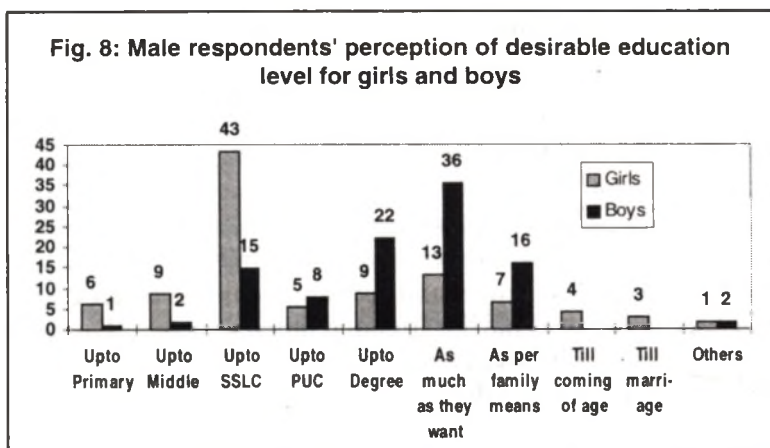
In the past five years, the Total Literacy Campaign (TLC) has been implemented with much fanfare in most educationally backward districts of Karnataka. TLC gave the mobilization of illiterate women into literacy classes a very high priority. However, among the survey respondents, the proportion of those who have attended Adult Literacy classes is dismal: just 8% of male and female respondents, an equal proportion - reported having attended literacy classes. District-wise analysis will reveal whether even these are largely concentrated in the Mahila Samakhya areas, where vigorous



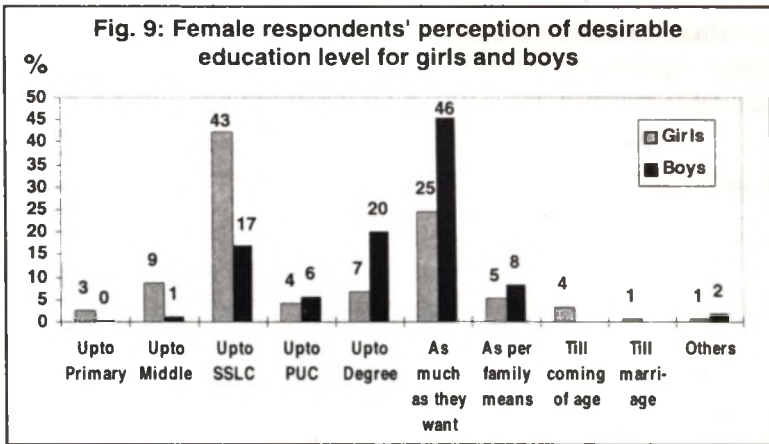
motivation especially of women learners was undertaken by their programme.

Perception of Desirable Level of Education for Boys and Girls

Given their own schooling history and poor access to education, we explored whether men and women respondents attitudes to the desirable level of education for present-day boys and girls had changed, or would reflect their own experience in any way. We consciously did not ask this question with reference to their own sons and daughters, believing that their responses would then be influenced by factors like affordability. Our goal was to get at their normative attitude, not the reality, which



had already been established by the data on the proportion of eligible boys and girls from their households who were actually in school. This was, thus, a perception question, testing what they thought was desirable in an ideal world, if all else was equal. It is also important to mention the way the questions were sequenced: the desirable level of education for girls was asked first, so that respondents would address this issue frankly, without being inhibited or aware of any inconsistency between their answers for boys, which was asked next. Thus, if anything, their responses for boys might have been influenced by what they said for girls, and not the other way around. The results are presented in figures 8 and 9.



First of all, it is interesting to see that as far as basic schooling is concerned, the largest percentage of men and women, and an equal percentage of both agree that girls must complete their matriculation. Almost three times as many hold this view for girls compared to boys. This is partly because a significant proportion of both men and women perceive a PUC or degree level education as necessary for boys; it is also because a large percentage of both genders believe boys should have the choice of studying up to whatever level they wish – a choice only half as many would give girls.

We also see that in the case of girls, there is a significant difference between the views of the men and women in only one category, but a most telling one: almost twice as many women (25%) as men (13%) think girls should study “as much as they want”; this could indicate the women’s resentment of the lack of opportunity to study in their own childhood, as well as the impact of the growing awareness of women’s equal right to education created by both government and NGOs through mass campaigns like the TLC. For boys, more men (16%) seem to feel the level of education should depend on the family’s economic ability than women (8%); and fewer men (36%) than women (46%) believe that boys should study “as much as they want”. Again, since much of the campaigning for literacy and school enrollment has been targeted at women (especially in NGO areas), this could reflect women’s perception that the family should make

sacrifices to ensure education for their children. There are no other significant gender differences in perceptions of the desirable level of education for boys and girls.

Conclusion

The well-established bias against women's schooling and education has been reiterated by the results of the study. Far more women respondents than men did not get an opportunity to go to school in their youth. Controlling for this factor, we did not find significant gender differentials in the level of education attained, or the reasons for dropping out. A disappointingly small proportion had accessed adult literacy classes. On the other hand, most of the men and women showed a positive attitude to the educational needs of present day boys and girls, though a bias in favour of boys for higher education still operates.

Statistical Appendices

Table 1: Schooling History by Gender

Schooling history	Males		Females	
	No.	%	No.	%
Went to school	647	58.65	432	36.89
Did not go to school	456	41.35	739	63.11
Total	1103	100.00	1171	100.00

Table 2: Reasons for not being sent to School by Gender

Reason	Male		Female	
	No.	% of 456	No.	% of 739
Parents could not afford it	333	73.03	473	64.00
Parents were not wise	102	22.37	217	29.36
Parents did not believe in education/ in girls studying	44	9.65	126	17.05
No school in the village	6	1.32	29	3.92
School was too far	13	2.85	48	6.50
Too much work at home/ had to help parents/mother	181	39.69	270	36.54
I did not want to go	40	8.77	111	15.02

Note: No totals are given since more than one reason could be cited by each respondent

Table 3: Level of Education of those Who Attended School, by Gender

Level of education	Male			Female		
	No.	% of 647	% of 1103	No.	% of 432	% of 1171
Less than 4th Std.	184	28.44	16.68	110	25.46	9.39
Completed 4th Std.	49	7.57	4.44	30	6.94	2.56
5th to 7th Std.	180	27.82	16.32	136	31.48	11.61
8th to 9th Std.	45	6.96	4.08	36	8.33	3.07
Completed Matriculation	109	16.85	9.88	74	17.13	6.32
Completed PUC / diploma	49	7.57	4.44	27	6.25	2.31
Completed degree	30	4.64	2.72	15	3.47	1.28
Other (s)	1	0.15	0.09	4	0.93	0.34
Total	1103	100.00	100.00	1171	100.00	100.00

Table 4: Reasons for Dropping out of School by Gender

Reasons for dropping out	Female		Male	
	No.	% of all female drop-outs (312)	No.	% of all male drop-outs (458)
Parents not afford	211	67.63	366	79.91
Family did not believe I should / girls should study too much	45	14.42	28	6.11
Personal dislike	43	13.78	82	17.90
School too far	29	9.30	12	2.62
Work at home	138	44.23	247	53.93
Had to start earning	29	9.29	207	45.20
Other reasons	9	2.88	36	7.86
Coming of age	35	11.22		
Marriage	45	14.42		

Note: No totals are given since more than one reason could be cited by each respondent

Table 5: Male and Female Respondents Perception of Level of Education Desirable for Girls

Desirable level of education	Male		Female	
	No.	%	No.	%
Upto Primary	69	6.26	31	2.65
Upto Middle	96	8.70	100	8.54
Upto SSLC	478	43.34	498	42.53
Upto PUC/DIP.	57	5.17	47	4.01
Upto Degree	96	8.70	81	6.92
As much as they wish	144	12.96	289	24.68
As per family means	73	6.62	63	5.38
Till she comes of age	45	4.08	41	3.50
Till marriage	30	2.72	10	0.85
Others	16	1.45	11	0.94
Total	1103	100.00	1171	100.00

Table 6: Male and Female Respondents Perception of Level of Education Desirable for Boys

Desirable level of education	Male		Female	
	No.	%	No.	%
Upto Primary	10	0.91	5	0.43
Upto Middle	17	1.54	12	1.02
Upto SSLC	161	14.59	198	16.91
Upto PUC/DIP.	84	7.62	66	5.64
Upto Degree	243	22.03	233	19.90
As much as they wish	393	35.63	534	45.60
As per family means	177	16.05	99	8.45
Others	18	1.63	24	2.05
Total	1103	100.00	1171	100.00

Chapter 15

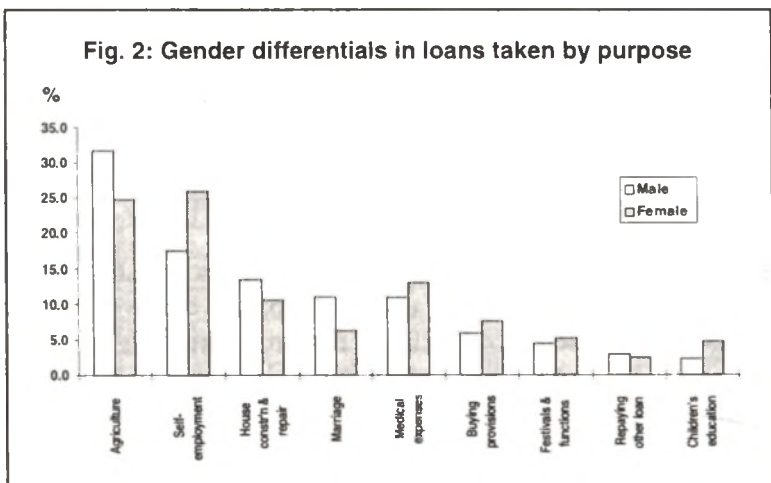
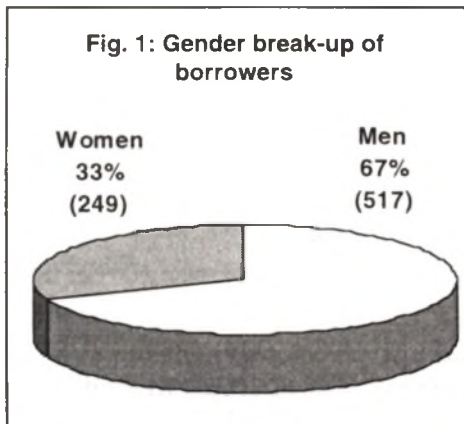
Access to Credit

When we consider access to public resources, credit and institutions providing credit are a key resource. Women's lack of access to credit, particularly from formal institutional sources, has been well documented in India, and has been connected to their lack of assets for collateral. In recognition of credit as an important determinant of economic mobility and status, public sector banks, funding agencies, and NGOs have all undertaken credit programs targeted at poor rural women, with the objective of enhancing women's access to both production and consumption loans, and hence, strengthening their economic position.

In this section of the study, therefore, we wanted to explore women's access to credit relative to men, and discover if there were any gender-based differences in borrowing patterns. The data elicited in this section is highly complex and needs further processing and analysis. Here we present only some of the preliminary findings.

A total of 766 respondents reported having taken loans in their names. Figure 1 shows that 249 of these were women, and 517 were men. This means that 47% or nearly half of all male respondents had accessed credit from different sources, while only 21% of all female respondents had done so. It should be noted that this is not a picture of current indebtedness, but a record of past and present borrowings.

Figure 2 illustrates interesting differences in patterns of male and female borrowing by purpose. While agricultural purposes account for the largest number of loans taken by men, self-employment has a slight edge in the case of women, although women have also borrowed very often for agricultural



operations. In fact, the percentage of men and women who have taken loans for agriculture is nearly the same (39.85% for men and 40.56% for women). In contrast, the number of loans taken for self-employment by women are almost a third more than men's borrowing for this purpose. This could be because of the large number of loan schemes operated especially by NGOs and targeted at rural women, as part of their economic development programmes for women. The proportion of loans taken for marriages is surprisingly low, possibly because the majority of the surveyed respondents are younger parents, and few have as yet encountered this need.

Table 1 shows an important gender differential in access to credit in terms of the extent of borrowing: the range of borrowings reported by men is consistently wider for most purposes: from Rs.100 to Rs. 1 lakh. The range for women is much narrower – from Rs.50 to Rs.35,000, in almost every category. Clearly, larger scale borrowing is still under the purview of men, probably due not only to their head of the household status, but also their greater access to larger loans because they own assets to pledge as collateral.

Table 1: Male-Female Differentials in range of Borrowings by Purpose

Purpose for which borrowed	Male		Female	
	No. of respondents	Range of borrowings	No. of respondents	Range of borrowings
Self-employment	95	500 - 1,00,000	93	200 - 20,000
Self employment of a family member	19	1000 - 55,000	13	800 - 20,000
Medical expenses of self	41	200 - 50,000	25	50 - 10,000
Medical expenses of family members	30	100 - 20,000	28	100 - 20,000
Children's education	15	300 - 25,000	19	100 - 6000
Buying provisions/ration	38	100 - 10,000	31	30 - 6000
Festivals	20	100 - 50,000	15	50 - 10,000
Marriage	72	300 - 50,000	25	200 - 35,000
Other family functions*	8	500 - 20,000	6	400 - 3000
Agriculture	206	200 - 60,000	101	200 - 30,000
House construction	71	1000 - 70,000	33	500 - 25,000
House repairs	16	500 - 20,000	10	1,000 - 6,000
Repaying other loan	19	500 - 15,000	10	200 - 6,000

* such as naming ceremony, daughter's coming of age, poojas, etc.

The preponderance of loans taken for agriculture and self employment may, in fact be a reflection of the greater *availability* of loans for these purposes due to the number of special credit programs launched by the government / public sector banks and refinancing institutions such as NABARD, IRDP, DWCRA, TRYSEM, etc.

In terms of level of indebtedness, it is interesting to note that more women than men have taken more than one loan: 160 women have taken loans more than once or for more than one purpose and from more than one source, while only 133 men have done so. This may also indicate the greater access to small credit schemes that women have gained through NGO-based credit programs, as compared to men.

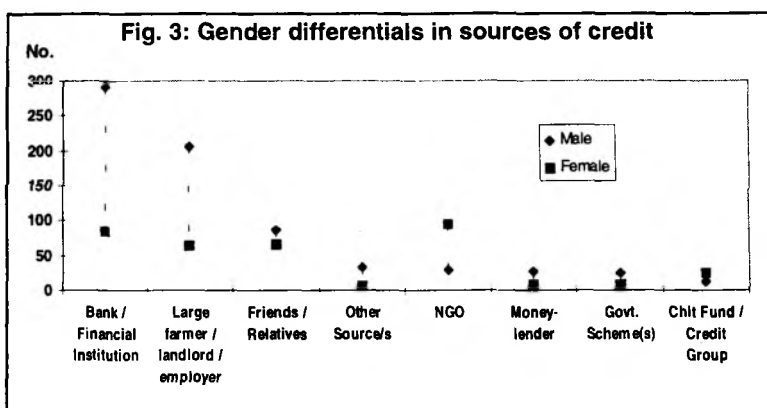


Figure 3 shows clearly that men and women do not have equal access to all sources of credit, and that women have much lower access to formal institutional sources. The fact that so few women (63) have taken loans from large farmers / landlords / employers as compared to men (201), adds texture to the access question. Here, it is clearly socio-cultural traditions that are emerging: few rural women would approach landlords or large farmers for loans if their husbands are available to do so - it would be considered unseemly, and may carry other risks.

It is unclear, at this stage, whether interest rates play a role in determining gender-based access, although the range of interest charged by landlords and large farmers (between 12% to 120% per annum), could be a further constraining factor for women, given their lower access to wage-earning and income. However, the average interest rate reported by men for this source is 24% to 36% p.a. (Rs. 2 and Rs.3 per 100 per month), which is not significantly higher than the rate paid by women borrowing from NGOs and chit funds, which averages at 24% per annum. In fact, some women have reported that they pay 60% per annum or 5% per month interest on borrowings from local credit sanghas and NGO credit schemes.

The lack of assets for collateral is of course, a constant factor for women in approaching the two most popular sources used by men - banks and landlords. Further, the data seem to point to a clear gender distinction in access, governed both by

tradition and reality, to different sources of credit. Women are expected to borrow smaller sums, and are more responsible for small consumption loans, and approach more informal sources of credit (e.g., 114 women, as opposed to 34 men, have taken loans from NGOs and local credit sanghas). Men, on the other hand, take larger loans, especially for heavy production investments, house construction and repairs, etc., and have better access to formal sources of credit (e.g., 292 men have taken loans from banks as opposed to just 84 women). The data indicate a clear need to improve women's access to formal credit institutions, and to acquire assets to enhance their credit-worthiness.

Statistical Appendices

Table 1: Male-Female Differentials in Purpose and Range of Borrowings

Purpose for which borrowed	Male		Female	
	No. of respondents	Range of amount borrowed	No. of respondents	Range of amount borrowed
Self-employment	95	500 - 1 lakh	93	200 - 20,000
Self employment of a family member	19	1000 - 55,000	13	800 - 20,000
Medical expenses of self	41	200 - 50,000	25	50 - 10,000
Medical expenses of family members	30	100 - 20,000	28	100 - 20,000
Children's education	15	300 - 25,000	19	100 - 6000
Buying provisions/ration	38	100 - 10,000	31	30 - 6000
Festivals	20	100 - 50,000	15	50 - 10,000
Marriage	72	300 - 50,000	25	200 - 35,000
Other family function(naming ceremony, girl's coming of age, pooja, etc)	8	500 - 20,000	6	400 - 3000
Agriculture	206	200 - 60,000	101	200 - 30,000
House construction	71	1000 - 70,000	33	500 - 25,000
House repairs	16	500 - 20,000	10	1,000 - 6,000
Repaying other loan	19	500 - 15,000	10	200 - 6,000

Table 2: Male-Female Differentials in Source of Loans and Range of Borrowings

Source of loan	Male		Female	
	No. of respondents	Range of borrowings	No. of respondents	Range of borrowings
Large farmer	118	100 - 55,000	37	100 - 50,000
Landlord / employer	83	200 - 40,000	26	300 - 10,000
Moneylender	26	100 - 71,000	8	150 - 15,000
Bank / Financial Institution	292	500 - >1lakh	84	800 - 40,000
Govt. Scheme(s)	24	4,000 -25,000	9	300 -15,000
NGO	28	1,000 - 43,000	94	700 - 80,000
Savings & credit group	6	400 - 25,000	20	50 - 11,000
Chit Fund	7	200 - 7,000	4	100 - 3,000
Friends / Relatives	87	200 - 60,000	66	90 - 25,000
Other Source/s	33	100 - 50,000	7	300 - 20,000

Note: We cannot cross-tabulate purpose of loan with source since the questionnaire didn't provide for this.

Chapter 16

Access to other Public Resources

Apart from basic survival needs like water, fuel, electricity and toilets, the study examined the data on women's access to other public resources which might have a bearing on their status such as public child care services, fair price shop, and banks.

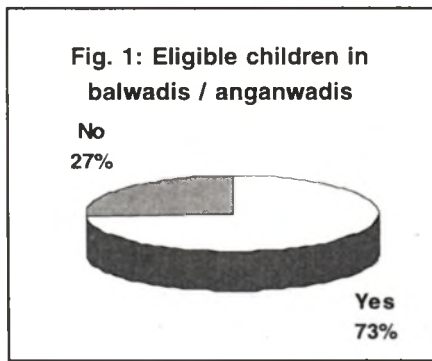
Access to Child Care Services

Since 1978, the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) Scheme has been one of the government's major social sector interventions for improving child survival and the health of mothers. The scheme aims at providing a package of services to pre-school children and their mothers, including immunization, supplementary nutrition, pre-school education, and mothercraft. Today, the scheme covers virtually every block in every district of the country. Several other private and public bodies, including mahila mandals, the Social Welfare Board, and NGOs, also provide child-care services to rural women.

Child care services have been repeatedly identified as an important enabling condition for raising the status of women, as well as improving child health and survival and preparing young children for formal schooling. Access to child care liberates women for some hours of the day from the double burden of caring for children and doing productive work.

There were totally 585 female respondents who had children below 6 years of age, i.e., with children eligible for child care services. This constitutes exactly 50% of the total female respondents. Among these, as figure 1 shows, nearly three-fourth (430 or 73%) reported that their toddlers were attending

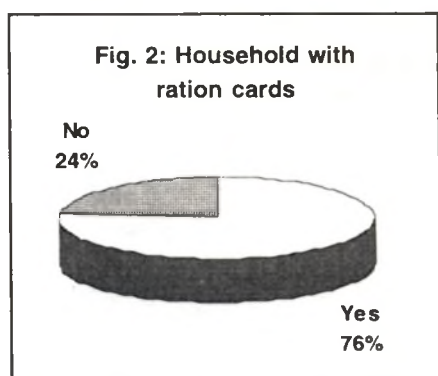
the local balwadi / anganwadi. The remaining 155 (27%) were not sending their young children to the balwadi / anganwadi. The main reasons given by the latter group were that their children were above the apparent cut-off of 4 years of age and hence not eligible, or because there was no facility in their village. This seems to indicate that there is an unmet demand for child care, notwithstanding availability of caretakers at home, or affluence; it might also constitute an attitude change, where the importance of pre-school has been generally recognised.



Access to Ration Cards

The public distribution system (PDS) may not be as critical to the food security of the rural poor as it is to the urban poor, particularly since many rural staples such as ragi and jowar are not available through the fair price shops. Nevertheless, having a ration card has become important for many other reasons. It has become a virtual identity card, required for accessing many other resources (e.g., electoral rolls, bank loans, being selected as a beneficiary for several welfare schemes for the poor, getting subsidized oil, kerosene and cloth, etc.).

Figure 2 shows that the majority of households surveyed do possess ration cards. Further data analysis will reveal whether those without are predominantly higher-income group households, who are not in need of subsidized essentials.



Access to Bank Accounts

Only 353 or 30.15% of the households had bank accounts, as reported by female respondents. Of the remainder, 799 or 68.23% women reported that their families did not have a bank account, while 19 women said they did not know. Of those 353 households with bank accounts, it is surprising to note that 210 or nearly 60% are accounts held in women's own names, as opposed to just 131 in men's names. This information corroborates the data on savings in the section on control over labour and income, where only 120 men reported having bank savings accounts in their own names. Therefore, this is clearly *not* the result of biased reporting by the women.

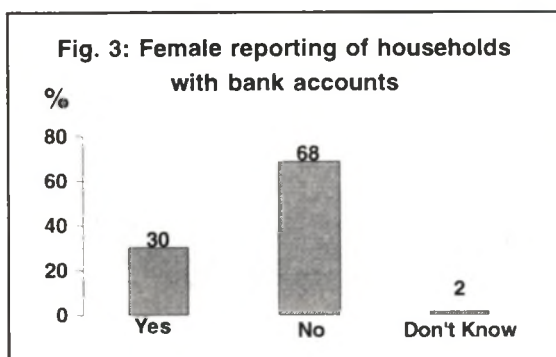
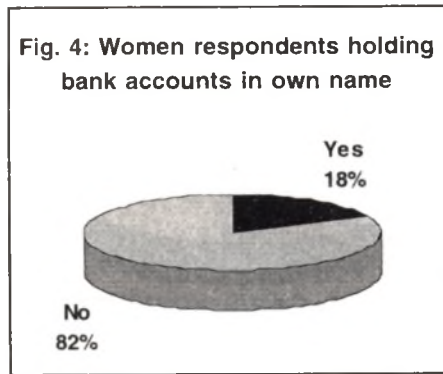


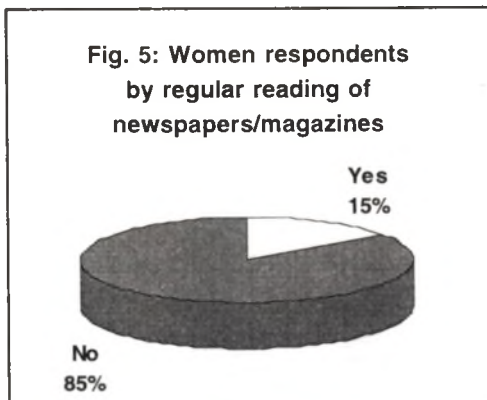
Figure 4, however, shows that in overall terms, the proportion of women with access to bank accounts to all women is very low - just 18%. Nevertheless, the predominance of women account holders among households with bank accounts is an



encouraging finding. Further analysis will show whether these women are predominantly in NGO intervention areas.

Access to Media

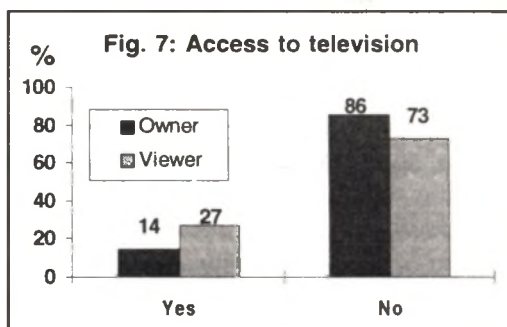
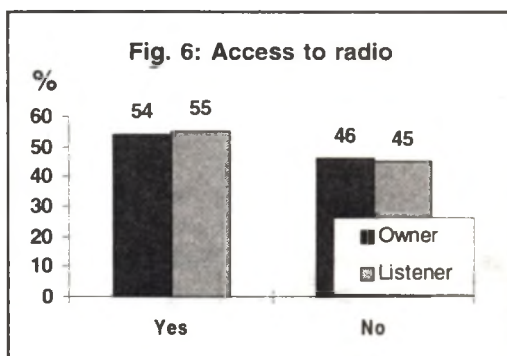
Exposure to new information, ideas, and ways of thinking can have a radical impact on women's status, especially by catalyzing them to challenge traditional norms, attitudes, and practices. It can also provide avenues for accessing resources or seeking redress. Women's exposure and access to both print and electronic media were, thus, examined in the study.



Considering the very low literacy rate of our female respondents 35%¹, it is not surprising that barely 15% (or 177) of the women reported that they regularly read newspapers or

¹ See chapter 3 of this report.

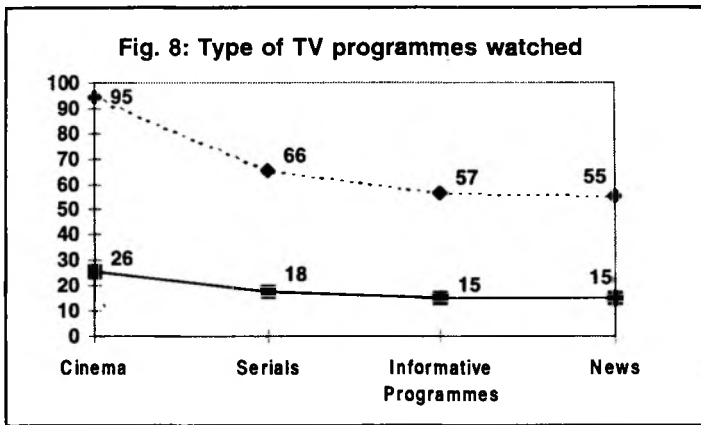
magazines. It seems likely that these are the same 15% of women respondents who have completed at least an 8th standard level of schooling, i.e., the only women who are functionally literate enough to read the print media. The other 20% of women who reported themselves as literate obviously do not have the time, adequate literacy skills, or means to have regular access to newspapers and magazines.



Figures 6 & 7 show a contrasting picture of how ownership correlates to listening / viewing opportunities between radio and television. About 54% (634) of the women respondents reported owning a radio; and slightly more – 55% (645) of all women respondents reported listening to the radio. Therefore, there appears to be a positive correlation between ownership and regular listening in the case of radio. With television, however, only a fraction of women (14% or 166) reported that their families owned a TV, but almost double the number (316 or 27%) reported that they watch TV programs at least occasionally, suggesting that women have access to this medium without ownership.

Of those with access to TV, nearly 60% said they watch only occasionally (every couple of months), while 21% said they watch at least once every third day.

Although TV in particular was hailed as a means of mass education and awareness building, it has largely been converted into an entertainment medium.



As figure 8 shows, the large number of film-based programmes and soap operas are very seductive, with far more women reporting watching this kind of pulp than those viewing more informative or educational programmes. Needless to add, this is also an indictment of the poor quality of such educational shows. While almost all the women with access to TV watch films, and two-thirds watch serials, just over one-half view news and educational programmes. If we place the programme-wise distribution of viewers against the entire female survey population, then the proportion of those viewing news shows and information programmes is even more dismal – just about 15%. At this rate, ushering in greater awareness or change of attitudes through the electronic media will be a Herculean task.

Conclusion

In terms of access to other public resources, women have the highest access to child care services and ration cards. Among the various mass media, women's access to radio is highest.

Access to resources like bank accounts is very poor, though it is surprising that more women than men have bank accounts. Among the other media, lack of adequate education is a major barrier to regular readership of the print media. Few among the women respondents have access to TV, but those that do tend to watch the more unenlightening but entertaining programmes that are dished out in vast quantities by the various channels.

Statistical Appendices

Table 1: Distribution of Female Respondents by Type of TV Programs Watched

Type of program	No.	% of women viewers (316)	% of all women respondents (1171)
Cinema	299	94.62	25.5
Serials	207	65.51	17.7
Informative Programs	179	56.65	15.3
News	175	55.38	14.9

Chapter 17

Access to Political Participation

The restriction of women's roles to the private realm of home and family had an obvious external manifestation: their exclusion from public life, and particularly from participation in decision-making in the public sphere. This was only slightly less true for women from labouring households, whose income and participation in productive work was vital to the economy in general and to the survival of their families in particular. With rare exceptions, women were thus historically absent from leadership roles in the community at large.¹

The freedom struggle changed this dramatically, as hundreds of thousands of women from all classes were strategically mobilized to participate in the mass movements of the 1930s, and took an active part in *satyagrahas*, political rallies, and the *swaraj* movement.² The women of Karnataka were no exception. After independence, however, the emphasis on women's political participation became diluted and narrowed, with the focus mainly on voting. Few women entered the formal political sphere, and the proportion of women contesting elections and becoming political representatives in the state gradually declined.³

The picture was even worse in other forms of political organization. The labour movement was very male-dominated, and male leadership was the norm even in industries with a large female labour force. Other mass organisations like peasant

1 In Karnataka, the most notable exceptions were perhaps the 12th century labour poet and feminist Akka Mahadevi, and Rani Kittoor Channamma.

2 See Part II of this report, chapter on the *Status of Women's Political Participation in Karnataka* for a detailed historical analysis.

3 S. Batliwala and Gayatri V., *Reservation vs. Exclusion: Women in the Karnataka State Assembly*, Deccan Herald, April 7, 1996.

and slum-dweller federations either did not have many women members, or again had no women leaders. The traditional Gram Panchayats and Jati Panchayats were also completely male-dominated, except perhaps in some tribal communities, where women elders played a role in adjudication and community decision-making.

Thus, the only organisations in which women could participate and hold leadership positions were the Mahila Mandals set up in the 1950s and 1960s, and these often became dominated by upper-caste women or the wives of politically powerful men. Moreover, Mahila Mandals were not very influential in local affairs, and often degenerated into tradition-bound fora where women learnt to sew or sing bhajans, rather than influencing public affairs.

Gender equality in various forms of political participation is critical because, in the final analysis, the liberation of women from their subordination is ultimately a political task, and cannot be truly achieved until women become a force to contend with in a political sense. Perhaps in recognition of this, the visionary leader from Karnataka, Abdul Nasir Sab, made history when he formulated the Karnataka Panchayat Raj Act of 1985. Not only was this a genuine attempt at decentralization of power to the grassroots level, but a radical measure to bring women representatives into local self-government institutions. The 1985 Act made history by introducing the reservation of 25% of all Panchayat seats for women, and became a harbinger of the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments of 1992, which mandated a reservation of one-third for women.

The impact of the revised Panchayat system in Karnataka has had tremendous effects on rural women in the state: it not only legitimized the entry of women into these hitherto male-dominated roles, but gave them functional decision-making powers, no matter how limited, over public resources.

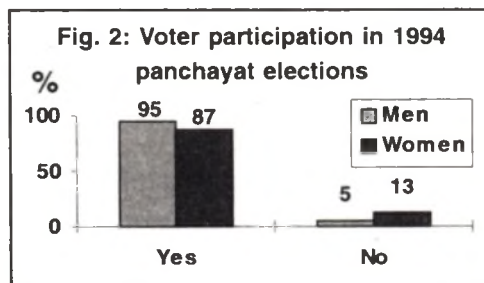
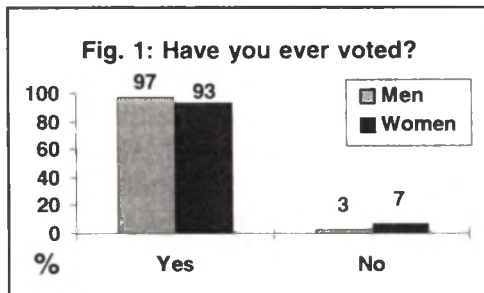
Considering these historical factors, the degree of political participation of women, and their comparative position vis-à-

vis men, is an important dimension of their status which the study explored. Our hypotheses here were that:

- I. Women's participation in the electoral process, such as voting, would be high, compared to other kinds of political activity;
- II. The recent amendments in the Panchayat Raj system has not yet had spin-off effects on the level of women's participation in other political activities; and
- III. When women are members of other political fora (such as unions, caste or ethnic federations, etc.) their roles would tend to reproduce the domestic division of labour

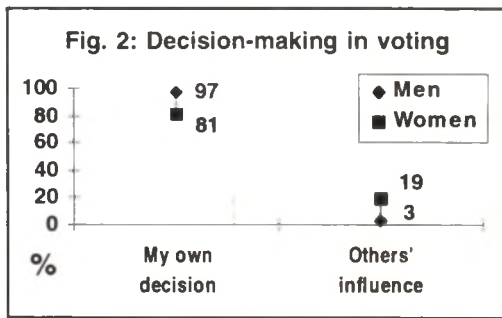
Voter Participation

An overwhelming majority of the study respondents have voted at least once, as figure 1 shows, and the gender differential is also negligible, with barely a 4 per cent difference between women and men. Figure 2, which shows data for the Panchayat elections held in December 1994, shows an



almost equally high participation rate, though the gender gap here is a little larger – only 87 per cent of the women, as opposed to 95 per cent of the men, said they voted in this election.

Figures 1 & 2 also demonstrate how deeply the electoral process has penetrated into rural areas, with almost equal gender impact. Indians take their right to vote very seriously, and the poorer the voters, the more likely they are to exercise their franchise. Cynicism about elections is singularly absent here.



When it comes to deciding who to vote for, however, figure 3 shows that fewer women claim to have made their own choice – at least 19 per cent of the women who gave valid responses to this query stated that their decision was influenced by someone else’s suggestion or opinion, compared to just 3 per cent of men.

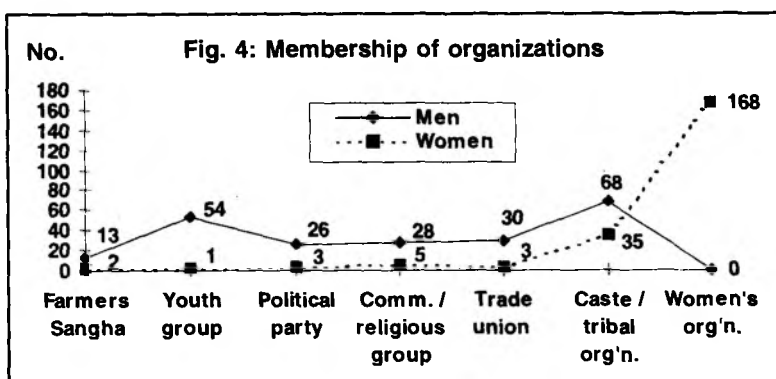
Notwithstanding this, it would be facile to conclude that the vast majority of men, and especially women, independently decided whom to vote for. Decision-making about voting is a complex process: voting patterns are increasingly being determined by caste and community-based political affiliations, not to mention the diktat of the village elite / powerful. We also know that the head of the household, in practice, often determines who all his family members will vote for, *en bloc*. Independent decision-making on voting is a rare phenomenon in rural politics, and qualitative research may throw more light on the true picture than the data given above.

We get a glimpse of some of these dynamics when we analyze the responses of those who say they were influenced. Many of the 33 men who reported that their voting decision was

influenced by others, point to the advice of village elders and caste leaders. Significantly, half of the 215 women who said they were influenced, had been advised by their husbands about who to vote for; in 7 cases, the women in fact reported that their husbands threatened them with dire consequences if they failed to follow his instructions. 33 (15%) had been advised by village leaders, 26 (12%) by the husband's family and around 22 women (10%) reported that political party workers also influenced their decision-making, usually with promises of various benefits (employment, water, land, etc.), if their candidate won.

Participation in Other Organisations

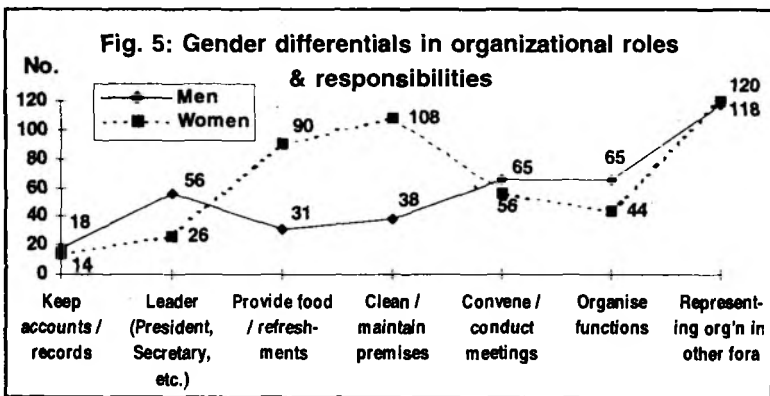
Figure 4 shows that in general, participation in other kinds of political organisations, which might enable them to exert more influence on political decisions indirectly, is very poor. It also proves our hypothesis II, that women have still not entered these kinds of fora in significant numbers, but are largely restricted to women's organisations. However, it is heartening to note that in terms of sheer numbers, many more women than men are members of a women's group compared to male membership of the wide range of other fora that exist in the study areas.



The data in figure 4 also suggest certain other characteristics of rural participation in other kinds of quasi-political and civil society organisations: firstly, the minuscule numbers of both men and women who report membership of such organisations

shows clearly that the impact of the latter is quite insignificant – possibly because they have become spent forces, or are not playing a very dynamic role in community affairs; secondly, the youth clubs / *yuvak sanghas* show nearly as much membership for men as caste and ethnic associations. This could be because youth clubs have increasingly become a major site and mechanism for political mobilization by all the major parties, and are often influential in dispensing political patronage. Membership of these therefore, implies greater potential for power and sway.

Hypothesis III was that even when women are members of social or other organisations, they are more likely to play traditional domestic roles within these. Figure 5 partially confirms this, in that far more men (56) than women (26) report holding formal leadership positions in their organisations, or being responsible for organizing special functions. On the other hand, many more women than men are responsible for providing food and refreshments at meetings (90 compared to 31 men), or for cleaning and maintaining the organization's meeting place or centre (108 compared to just 38 men). This proves our hypothesis that even when women are members of organisations, they tend to reproduce domestic roles.

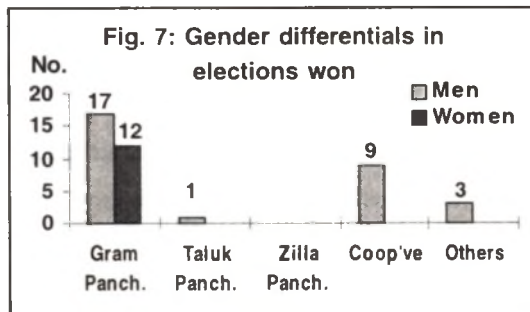
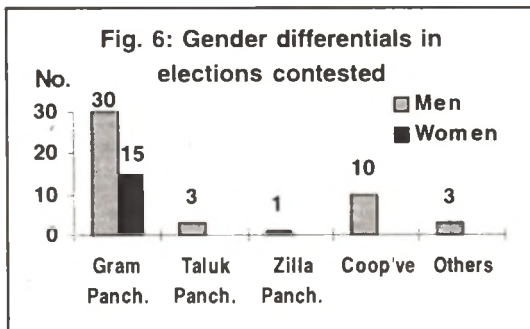


On the other hand, the data shows that almost an equal number of women as men are also playing the roles of keeping organizational accounts and minutes, convening / conducting meeting, and representing their organizations at

other fora. It is fairly certain that the women reporting in these categories are those who are members of the women's *sanghas* and collectives initiated by local NGOs, rather than women members of other local organisations. The point to be stressed here is that the gender gap in performance of traditionally "female" tasks is greater than in other roles. In other words, women may be breaking through into non-traditional roles in public organisations, but the gender division of roles and responsibilities is still alive and well in many ways.

Contesting Elections

With the introduction of the reservation for women in Panchayat Raj institutions, the phenomenon of women contesting elections has come to be widely accepted in rural areas in Karnataka. However, figures 6 and 7 show that at least among the study respondents, this has not yet spilled-over into women's contesting for the right to be elected representatives in other bodies. Even in the panchayats, women have contested only in Gram Panchayat elections



(figure 6), while several men report contesting not only these, but Taluk Panchayat, Zilla Panchayat, Cooperative Society, and other elections.

Figure 7 shows, however, that more women candidates were successful in winning the posts they stood for: 12 out of the 15 women who stood for Gram Panchayat seats won. This is clearly because they contested for seats reserved for women, and because men still face stiffer competition since there are far more candidates contesting a male seat. For instance, of the 12 women who won Gram Panchayat seats, 9 were elected from seats reserved for women; this includes 4 from seats reserved for SC/ST women, 1 from a seat reserved for a Backward Caste woman, and 4 from general seats reserved for women. Among men, only 8 were elected from a reserved seat, 5 from seats reserved for SCs / STs and 3 from seats reserved for Backward Castes. The 'Others' category includes 3 men who had stood for elections to the erstwhile Mandal Panchayats that were in operation till 1992.

Conclusion

Women's political participation is very low if we exclude mere voting in elections, but then, men's participation is not much higher. It is obvious that only a minuscule proportion of the study respondents are members of quasi-political or civil society organisations, which are an important mechanism for articulating their needs and priorities in the public realm, and for increasing their access to public decision-making and resources. This makes them both women and men almost totally dependent on the formal political institutions and political parties to address their needs, making them more vulnerable to manipulation in the absence of alternative fora. It is remarkable, for instance, that although the majority of the respondents' households own land, barely 13 men and two women have reported membership of a farmers organization, though a body like the Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangha claims to be the largest farmers lobby in the state, representing the interests of small farmers. A synergistic process seems to be at work. Many of these organizations

themselves are not very active or effective in community affairs in at least the study areas, and hence interest in participation is generally low.

An encouraging trend is the significant number of women who belong to a local mahila sangha or women's group. This is clearly the impact of local NGO mobilization of women. But they still have a long way to go in terms of holding leadership positions in non-women organisations and fora.

Statistical Appendices

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents by whether They Have Ever Voted

Whether ever voted	Male reporting		Female reporting	
	No.	%	No.	%
No	38	3.4	82	7.0
Yes	1065	96.6	1089	93.0
Total	1103	100.0	1171	100.0

Table 2: Whether Voted in last Gram Panchayat Elections

Response:	Male reporting		Female reporting	
	No.	%	No.	%
No	52	4.7	151	12.9
Yes	1051	95.3	1020	87.1
Total	1103	100.0	1171	100.0

Table 3: Who Influenced Voting Decision

Who influenced	Male reporting		Female reporting	
	No.	%	No.	%
My own decision	1047	94.9	915	78.1
Influenced by others	33	3	215	18.4
Invalid	24	2.1	41	3.5

Table 4: Membership of Organisations

Organization	Male reporting		Female reporting	
	No.	%	No.	%
Farmers Sangha	13		2	
Yuvak Sangha	54		1	
Ambedkar Sangha	6		1	
Mahila Mandal / Mahila Sangha	-		168	
Political Party	26		3	
Trade union / workers association	177		198	
Caste / ethnic organization	56		32	
Religious / communal organization	38		5	
Tribal federation	6		2	
Total no. of members				

Note: Multiple response question

Table 5: Gender Differentials in Roles and Responsibilities of Organization Members

Roles / responsibilities:	Male reporting	Female reporting
Maintaining accounts/records	18	14
Leader (president, vice-resident, secretary, treasurer, etc.)	56	26
Providing food and refreshments/playing host	31	90
Cleaning and maintaining the premises	38	108
Conducting meetings	65	56
Organizing events	65	44
Representing organization / participating in functions of other organisations	118	120

Note: Multiple response question

Table 6: Gender Differentials in whether Contested any Elections and whether Won

Position contested	Female reporting		Male reporting	
	No. contested	No. Won	No. contested	No. Won
Gram Panchayat seat	15	12	30	17
Taluk Panchayat seat			3	1
Zilla Panchayat seat			1	
Cooperative			10	9
Other (s)			3	3
Total	15	12	47	30

Chapter 18

Access to Law and Justice

Law is often defined as the encoding of social rules and norms. Consequently, it reflects the prevailing ideology of a given society, or at least the ideology of the dominant social groups. However, the law is also viewed by many as an instrument for social reform, or even social transformation - something that is not a mere reflection of social reality, but an embodiment of lofty ideals and aspirations – an image, in fact, of how society should be, of how human beings should relate to each other, and how the state should treat its citizens.¹

Where the status of women is concerned, legal reform has been extensively used to empower women at least in a formal sense.² The Constitution of India, for instance, gave women formal equality at a time when even advanced countries of the North had several anti-women statutes in full operation.³ However, patriarchal ideology is so pervasive, deep-rooted and yet invisible, that law tends to reinforce biases against women in both subtle and overt ways.⁴ This is particularly true in the private sphere of marriage and family, where the law has been very reluctant to question gender power relations or intervene in favour of women, as compared to the public domain, where legal reform for gender equality has been much easier to achieve.⁵

1 N.R. Madhava Menon, *Law and Ethics*, Seventh BVNR Memorial Lecture (Bangalore, BVNR Memorial Trust, 1991).

2 Flavia Agnes, *Gender and Law*, RCWS Gender Series, Series Editor: Meera Kosambi (Bombay: Research Centre for Women's Studies, SNDT University, 1994).

3 Switzerland did not grant women the vote until 1974; the United States House of Representatives has not passed the Equal Rights Amendment to date.

4 S.P. Sathc, *Towards Gender Justice*, RCWS Gender Series, Series Editor: Meera Kosambi (Bombay: Research Centre for Women's Studies, SNDT University, 1993).

5 M. Schuler & S. Kadirgamar-Rajasingham, *Legal Literacy – A Tool for Women's Empowerment* (New York: UNIFEM / WIDBOOKS, 1992); Ratna Kapur and Brenda Cossman, *On Women, Equality and the Constitution: Through the Looking Glass of Feminism*, in National Law School Journal 1993, Special Issue (Bangalore: National Law School of India University).

As Kapur and Cossman point out, however, the gender bias in law must be examined at both conceptual and operational levels: i.e., within the formulation of the law itself, and in the way it is applied and practiced. There is an extensive body of critical work by Indian feminist lawyers, particularly analyses of case law and judgments, that demonstrates how the law works *against* women more often than it works *for* them.⁶

For women at the grassroots level, indeed for the majority of Indian women and men, the law is a distant, inaccessible, and unaffordable means to justice. As one practitioner of legal awareness for rural women puts it, "Women see the law as something formulated by an amorphous 'they', used by an amorphous 'they', and benefiting an equally amorphous 'them'."⁷

In today's world, this dilemma goes beyond the realm of formal law to encompass the wide range of human rights that have been formulated over the past five decades, but are not necessarily justiciable. These are more in the nature of social goals which signatory states have agreed to promote and protect, but have not, in many cases, been transformed into legislation or incorporated in existing statutes. The International covenants on Civil and Political Rights, Social, Economic and Cultural Rights, the Rights of the Child, and the Convention on Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women are examples of such global rights agreements, all of which have been ratified by the Indian government.

To take recourse to formal law not only necessitates a certain kind of economic means and physical mobility, but an awareness of one's rights, and the ability to conceptualize the violations of these rights as injustice. A fatalistic acceptance of rights violations as the inevitable lot of women is a serious barrier to gender justice and equality. For most Indian women, particularly the poor and powerless, the conundrum

⁶ Kapur and Cossman, *ibid.*

⁷ Sandhya Rao, Director of Hengasara Hakkina Sangha, a legal awareness programme for rural women in Karnataka, quoted in A. Batliwala, *Hengasara Hakkina Sangha - Case Study of a Feminist Organization* (Bombay: Sophia College for Women, 1997).

is this: they are socialized from earliest childhood to learn and practice a range of duties and obligations, rather than be aware of their rights. They are conditioned to uphold the sanctity of the institutions of family and marriage. But as we have seen in chapter 10, the majority of rights violations experienced by women are within the home and family, with spouses and family members being the main perpetrators of injustice. Women are thus not only more reluctant to seek redress in the public sphere, by taking familial issues to the more public adjudicatory authorities like the panchayats, police or courts, but also have relatively less means, mobility, and decision-making autonomy to do so.

Obviously, litigation is not the best or ideal means of transforming the status of women in any society; but when women's rights and bodily integrity are violated, every civilized society has an obligation to ensure that such women have access to justice and redress, including to the body of laws and rights that have been created for their protection. This is not possible, however, unless women – and men – are *aware of their rights and the laws which protect these rights*. The assertion of rights presupposes knowledge of rights.

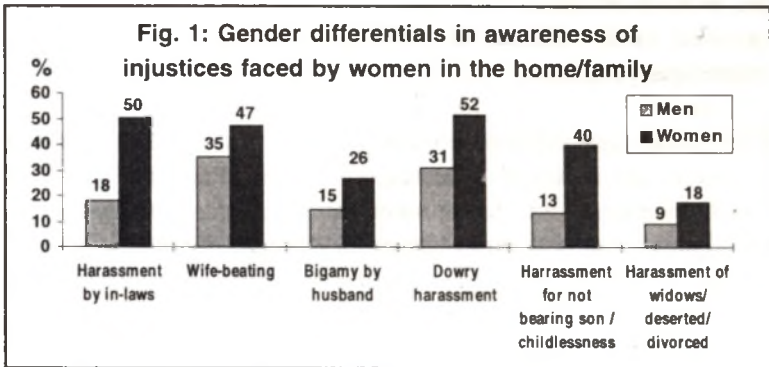
In this section of the study, following on the heels of the section on violence and abuse, we examined women's access to law and justice as a key parameter of their status. Our hypotheses here were:

- I. Women have a lower awareness of injustice, as compared to men; and
- II. Women have less access to both customary and formal law and justice mechanisms.

Gender and Injustice

We began by trying to understand people's perceptions of the forms of injustice faced by women, both in the home and family and in society at large. In order to avoid biasing or leading respondents in any way, we asked them to identify

the injustices they think women encounter, rather than respond to a list of our own. The results presented in figures 1 and 2 are both enlightening and ironic in several ways. Firstly, there was a significant difference between the number of responses to this question received from women and men: there were a total of 3838 female responses, and only 2408 male responses. In other words, each woman respondent on an average could name at least four injustices, while their male counterparts each identified just over two! This seems to disprove our first hypothesis – women do have a considerable awareness of the injustices meted out to them, and their awareness is in fact greater than that of their men.



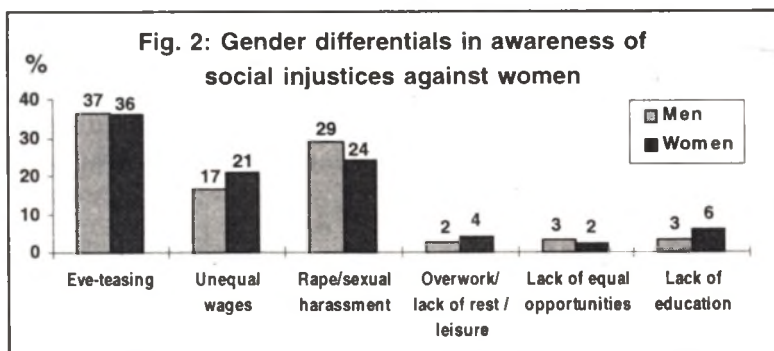
The data in figure 1 is both encouraging and ironic in that it shows that while women have a far greater awareness of the injustices they face within the home than men, the “action taken” data in the violence section and this one indicates that they also see the family as the main source of protection and adjudication.

If we juxtapose the data in figure 1 with the women’s responses in figure 2, we also find that women’s awareness of rights violations within the family and home is far more alive and extensive than of the systemic social deprivations they face. This should not surprise us: home-based injustices, more violent by their very nature, are obviously more visible and real because they are the daily, lived experience of women, while social injustices are often invisible precisely because they are cloaked in the garb of the “natural” order of

gender power relations. Incidentally, we should be alarmed by the fact that 20% of male respondents (221 men) and 10% of female respondents (117 women) answered “Don’t Know” to the question of social injustices against women.

How do we explain the difference between women’s reporting of injustices faced by women in the home and the reporting of actual abuse and violence in chapter 13 Women respondents may have extrapolated from their knowledge of the problems faced by other women – kin, neighbours, etc. It is also possible that even these rural women have been exposed to the media blitz on women’s issues like dowry deaths. Further, the women living in NGO intervention areas may have been exposed to discussions of these questions in NGO-initiated awareness programs.

The percentage difference between male and female reporting is over 10 points under all categories in the domestic sphere of injustices, except for “harassment for not giving birth to a son,” and “harassment of widows / deserted women / divorced women,” where women’s reporting is also not very high. Obviously, men are on the whole either more oblivious to or more complacent about women’s unequal position within the home.



The difference between male and female reporting of social injustices bears further exploration as figure 2 indicates. Male awareness of some of these may be higher because of their greater literacy and education levels, physical and social mobility, and consequent exposure to gender issues in the

print and electronic media. Moreover, since men are the perpetrators of most domestic injustices, but see these as “natural” adjuncts to male privilege and authority, they may actually view “injustices against women” as those structural deprivations occurring outside the household. Women, on the other hand, would have not had much opportunity to conceptualize issues like unequal wages or lack of equal education or other opportunities as rights violations or injustices unless they are active in radical fora or NGOs of some kind.

Finally, it is significant that there were less than 100 male and female responses for the categories “lack of rest,” “lack of education,” and “lack of opportunities.” Clearly, both men and women regard injustices as acts of commission (violence) rather than acts of omission (neglect and denial). The “any other” category included some very illuminating responses. For men, it included the response, “In our village / in our caste, women do not have any problems.” Apart from this kind of defensive response, there were others like “absence of equal property rights”, “lack of consent in marriage”, “lack of employment opportunities”, “snatching away of earnings by the husband”, “street harassment”, “difficulty in getting girls married”, and “lack of freedom to move around freely”. Women respondents also gave interesting responses in the “any other” category, such as “higher positions in office are given only to men”, “husbands take away the wife’s earnings”, “women are even sold off”, “the purdah system among the Muslims”, “lack of freedom”, “marriage without consent” and “exclusion from decision-making”.

We now come to injustices actually faced. Figure 3 shows that only a minuscule proportion of the respondents, either male or female, reported actually experiencing any of the forms of injustice they had identified in the earlier question. As usual, the number of women reporting encountering injustice was higher than the number of men - (145 and 111 respectively). The actual number of injustices reported by women and men here (285 and 139 respectively) is encouragingly close to the number of incidents of physical and psychological abuse reported in chapter 10 (i.e., 289 and 181 respectively).

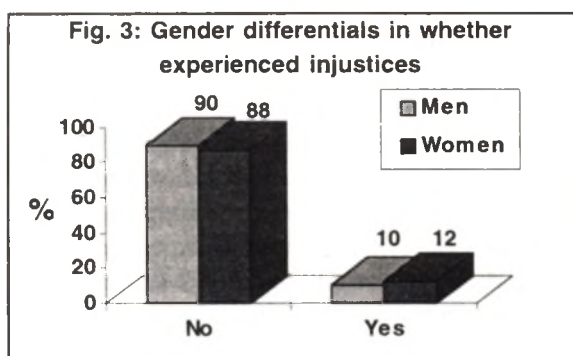
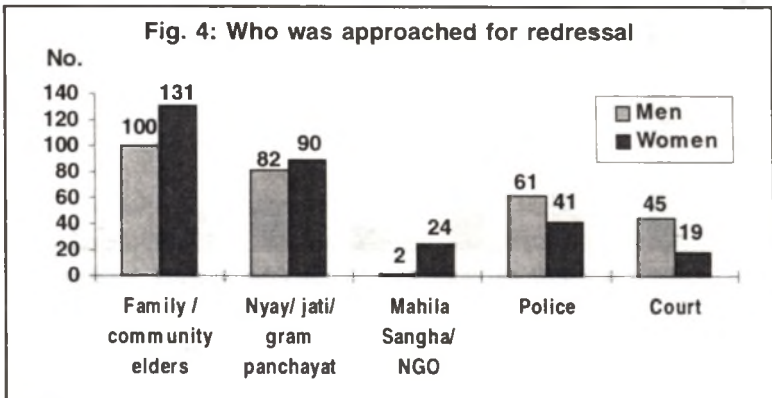


Table 1: Gender Differentials in number of Injustices Faced

Nature of Injustice	Men	Women	Nature of Injustice	Men	Women
Theft / encroachment of land / property	25	17	Harassment by in-laws / relatives	39	89
Harassment by employer	17	10	Suspicion of infidelity, infidelity/bigamy by spouse	0	55
Wage discrimination	15	18	Wife-beating	*	41
Discrimination in access to employment	8	6	Harassment of widowed / divorced / deserted women	0	15
Caste / communal discrimination	14	15	Harassment for childless-ness / bearing daughters	0	9
Political harassment	5	2	Any other	7	4

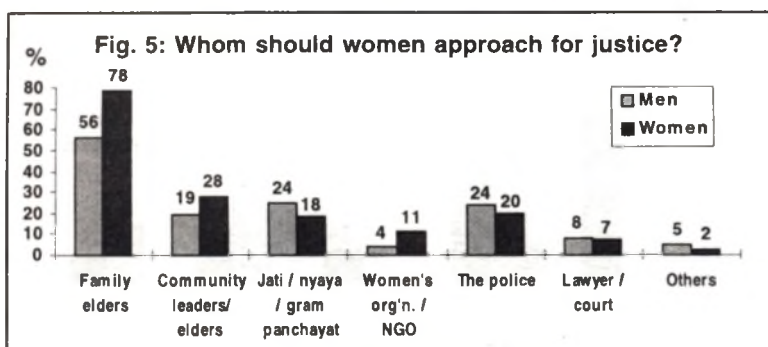
Table 1 gives us a glimpse of the kinds of injustices listed by those who reported personal experiences. The gender bias is once again obvious. Women have recounted many more experiences than men, including several that are unique to their gender. We also hear echoes of the kinds of violent or abusive acts that were reported by women in chapter 13. In the case of men, we are witnessing not only land and property related problems, but reports of discrimination on grounds of caste or community, or in access to wages or jobs, as a category of injustice. Quite a few men report harassment by relatives and in-laws, but not nearly as much as reports from women, who once again indicate that the majority of injustices they face are in the realm of family and household relations.



What action was taken to redress these violations? This question was asked of the 111 men and 145 women who reported direct experiences of injustice. Figure 4 shows that arbitration within the family or, in the case of men, by village elders / leaders, was the first choice. In fact, the majority of the women respondents in this case had actually approached only family elders, while about 60 per cent of the men had actually gone to village / community elders.

The term “*elders*” needs to be explained: the Kannada equivalent used by respondents in the study is “*doddavaru*,” which also means “big people,” signifying not just the older and wiser, but also economically and socially powerful individuals. In contrast, “elders” in the context of the household / family implies older members of the family (father-in-law, mother-in-law, etc.).

The data also shows that a surprisingly large number of women report having approached the local Panchayat with their grievances, though this is contradicted by the opinions expressed in figure 5, as we shall see. A considerable number also went to the police or the courts, though here they are clearly outnumbered by men. The women reporting seeking the support of the Mahila Sangha are clearly from villages where NGOs like Mahila Samakhya have been active, and where these have become informal arbitration fora, especially for women’s problems.



The data in figure 5, on the question of whom women should approach for redress, both corroborates and contradicts the reality in figure 4. Figure 5 represents the opinions of all the study respondents, not just those who personally experienced injustices, and clearly upholds the norm that women should seek redress for their grievances within the family, and not approach outside authorities (at least in the first instance). People obviously do not see any paradox in suggesting that the very institution which most consistently violates women's rights is the best guardian or mediator of those rights!

On the other hand, far fewer men and women think that the local Panchayat, NGOs, women's sanghas, etc., should be approached by women, and going to the police or courts seems to be anathema to the majority of our respondents, both men and women! This is in contrast to figure 4, where in fact a significant number of women with grievances had actually approached not only local panchayats,⁸ but the police and the courts in search of redress.

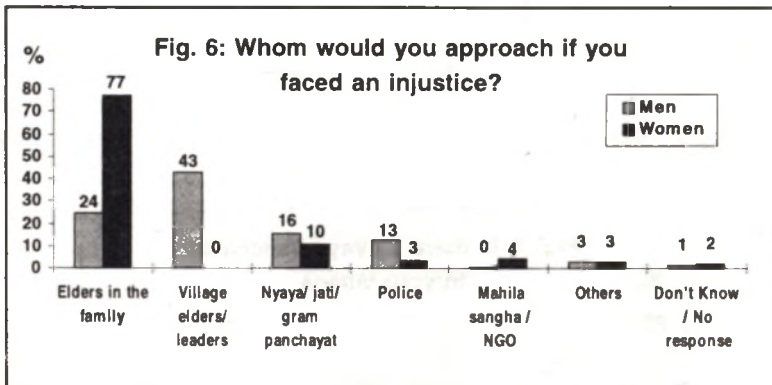
We also see that more men than women seem to feel that women could approach external authorities with their grievances - whether this is because they are responding hypothetically, with no threat to their own family name or selves is a moot point. Regardless of this, women respondents seem to have faith in the innate justness of 'family elders', whereas men seem to prefer local systems such as the Nyaya Panchayats for women's problems. It should be noted that

⁸ Throughout this section, "nyaya panchayats" refer to customary community arbitration bodies, and not the legally constituted nyaya panchayats of the Panchayat Raj Act.

since it is usually the landed elite who preside over the local Nyaya *panchayats*, community “elders” and leaders and the Jati / Nyaya Panchayat may functionally imply the same adjudicating authority.

The small proportion of women (11%) who regard the Mahila Sangha / NGO as a forum for redress, are obviously members of collectives formed by these organisations, and have actually witnessed or played such a role in some context. The corresponding 3.8% men who identify women’s organisations as an option could well be spouses of such women.

Some of the other options for women mentioned by men included: “women can approach neighbors and friends”, “they can go to the village head”, “they should get together and solve their problems collectively”. Some were more cynical, saying “there are no options, suicide is the only way out” and “getting justice is impossible without money”. Some of the 24 women respondents from the “others” category also mentioned “village head”, “husband” and “M.L.A”. Some women said, “I won’t tell anybody” while others said, “we will unite”.



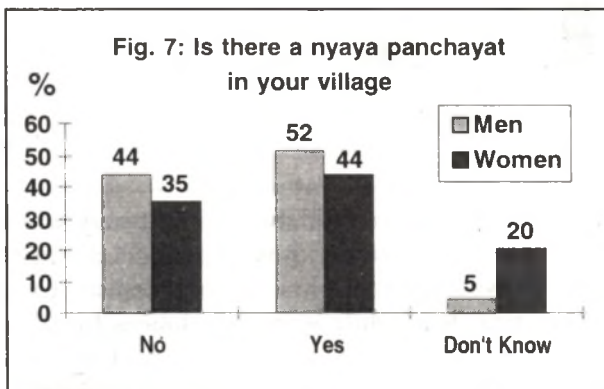
In figure 6, we see the consolidation of the trend: when asked whom they would approach if they experienced injustice, the difference between men’s choices for themselves and for women becomes clear, while women’s choices for themselves and for other women merely get reinforced. For themselves, few men see family elders as suitable adjudicators; they

prefer village leaders / elders and the Panchayat, and as mentioned above, these are often functionally and virtually the same. Far more men are also willing to file police complaints. Women, on the other hand, continue to uphold the family elders as the main source of justice for themselves, with only a minority, 20 per cent saying they would opt for the Panchayat, police, Mahila Sangha or other public fora for support or assistance.

Access to and Perceptions of Customary Redress Systems

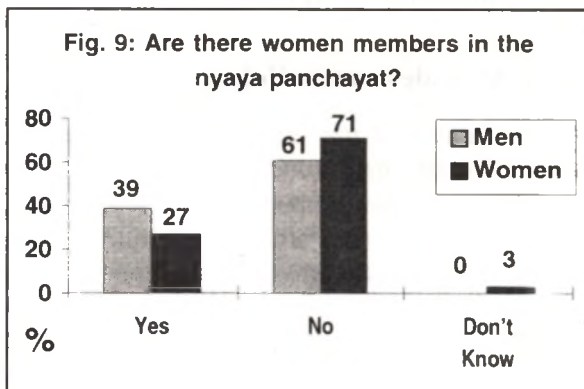
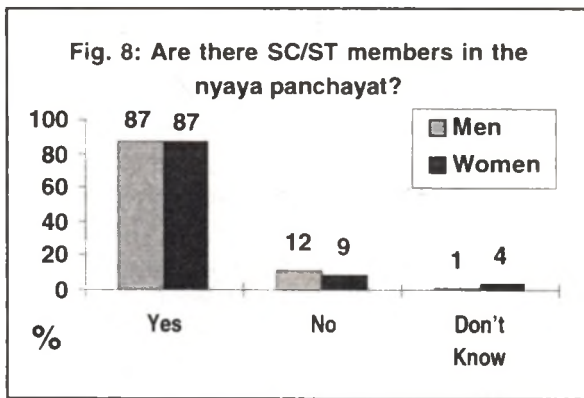
If raising women's status means their gaining access to non-familial redress systems, these mechanisms must be available and accessible to them. We, therefore, explored not only the existence of such fora as traditional panchayats and police at the village level, but also people's perceptions of these bodies.

Figure 7 shows a gender gap in awareness of the existence of a Nyaya Panchayat in the study villages. 20 per cent of women, compared to just 5 per cent of the men respondents said that they did not know if a Nyaya Panchayat existed in their village. This is not only a reflection of women's relative exclusion from public affairs, but also of their lack of physical and social mobility. The significant proportion of respondents who have said "No" is difficult to interpret – it could be that several villages share a common Panchayat, but it does not sit in the given study village; on the other hand, it could also



mean that these customary fora have ceased to function, for all practical purposes, in these specific villages.

Where they do exist, the gender and caste composition of Nyaya Panchayats, will obviously influence their utilization by women and oppressed groups. Figure 8 and 9 present the reporting of the 517 women and 571 men who said there was a Nyaya Panchayat in their village, on the caste- and gender-make up of these bodies. If this reporting is reasonably accurate, it would seem that representation of Dalits is vastly better than representation of women in these customary bodies, which is not surprising. Barring some specific tribes, women have traditionally had no place in community panchayats. Whatever the true picture, it is clear that respondents perceive Nyaya Panchayats as more balanced in caste than gender terms. Women particularly do not seem to believe that there



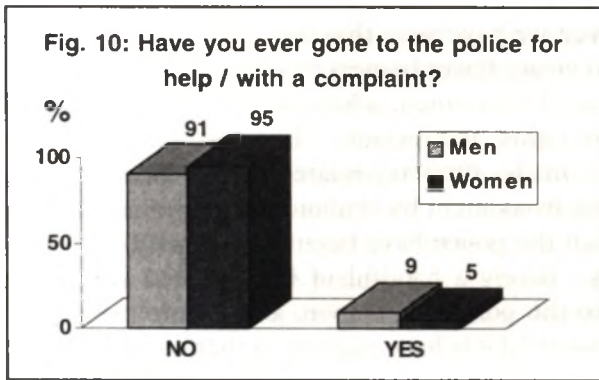
are enough women in panchayats to give them confidence in their ability to arbitrate their grievances fairly.

In terms of issues, the respondents perception was clearly that the Panchayat can adjudicate on virtually any and every dispute or injustice they face. The list of issues it can mediate included property / money disputes, marital conflicts, thefts, wife-beating, caste- and communal conflicts, adultery, bigamy, and sexual harassment (see table 8 in the Statistical Appendices). In other words, both men and women see the arbitration powers of the Nyaya Panchayats as virtually limitless; the assumption seems to be that as a customary adjudicatory institution, it will deal with all matters that occur within its physical and social jurisdiction.

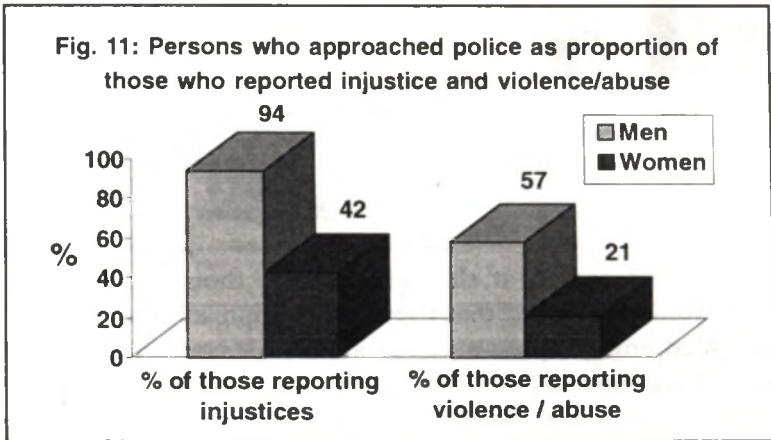
This does not, of course, reflect on how just or fair Nyaya panchayats are perceived to be, particularly by women. In case of property or land disputes, unhappiness with the Panchayat's verdict may lead men to litigate through the formal legal machinery; but for most women, the gendered barriers that constrain them - "family prestige," little or no control over income or assets, low physical mobility, etc. may result in mute acceptance of the Panchayat's verdict, and the family may not permit her to pursue further avenues of justice. For instance, one woman respondent told the investigator that the Panchayat had levied a fine of Rs. 500 on the man who had raped her, hardly "justice" by human rights standards!! This could happen to women even in cases where the crime or violation is not related to her gender.

Access and Attitudes to the Police

A mere 104 men and 61 women have approached the police at least once, constituting around 9 per cent and 5 per cent of all male and female respondents (figure 10). This may not be a particularly low proportion, since we do not know what the general population statistics are in this context. It could well be that only around 10% of the population ever goes to the police, with perhaps slightly higher figures in urban areas. In this chapter, it is more important to examine these numbers

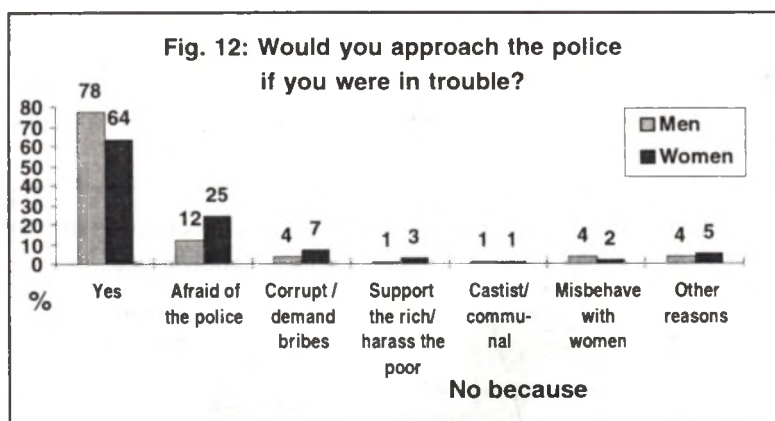


in relation to the number of women and men who reported personal experiences of injustices, and experiences of physical and psychological abuse in chapter 10. These more revealing ratios are presented in figure 11.



We see the very clear gender barrier in access to the police. The ratio of women approaching the police is only 42% of the experiences of injustices reported by women, and just 21% of the incidents of physical and psychological abuse they reported. Without further data analysis, we cannot assert with confidence that all the women who approached the police are from among those who reported injustices or abuse, but the probability is very high, as the statistical appendices of the concerned chapters show. Nevertheless, it is clear that men have greater access and confidence to approach the police than women, and fewer cultural barriers.

Moreover, we have seen that the nature of the problems faced by men create fewer barriers to seeking official assistance than those faced by women, which are rooted in familial violations of their rights and person. For example, 58 men and 22 women made property-related complaints to the police. Similarly, harassment by landlord / employer is another problem for which the police have been approached by 22 men and 15 women. Barely a handful of family-based issues have been taken to the police by women, and even these could well be where local NGOs have supported them to do so.



A large percentage of the respondents, though more men than women reported that they would approach the police if the need arose. Among the various “no” categories, fear of the police was the key factor for both men and women, though double the number of women as men fell into this group. A more open-ended attitude question about the police in general might have elicited more accurate data on people’s actual perceptions of the police. The skew in this representation is that those who said they would approach the police may also hold a number of negative views about them i.e., people may approach the police when they have to, even if they do not have great confidence in their integrity or impartiality.

Responses in the “others” category were very telling: most of the 43 male responses in this group were to the effect that they “may go” or that they “cannot say.” Some said they

would rather “approach the village elders,” or that they would have to “consult village elders” before approaching the police. Of the 59 women who were coded under “others,” *most said they would not go to the police because their or their family’s “prestige” (‘maryada’) would be affected.* There were some women who said it was best to solve problems “within the village”; some said they would ask the village elders to decide whether or not to approach the police. For women, therefore, approaching the police was a major issue, and a decision that would have to be made or at least mediated, by someone other than themselves.

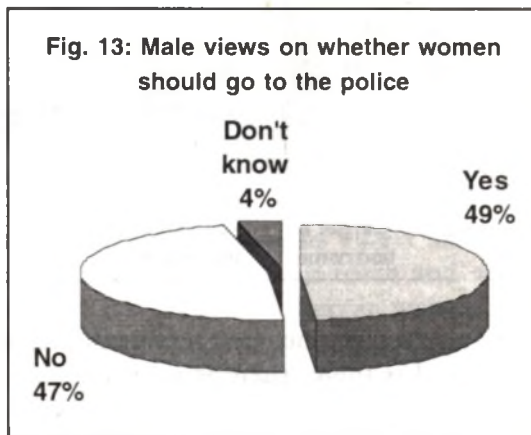
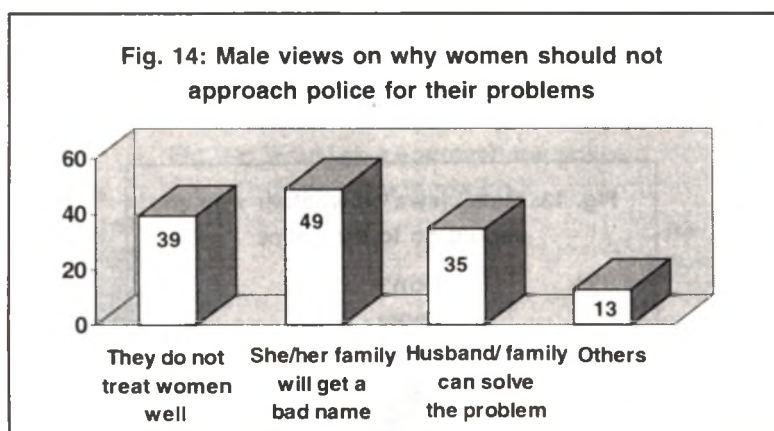


Figure 13 corroborates this from the male perspective. When male respondents were asked their views on whether women should approach the police for violations and injustices they encounter, they were almost evenly divided. 49% said yes, 47% said no, and 4% were uncertain. Of the 556 men who said no, the reasons given are represented in figure 14. The poor image of the police vis-à-vis their treatment of women is a key concern and 39% of the men saying women should not go to the police are apprehensive about this issue. A well-founded fear, given the widespread experiences of sexual harassment and custodial rapes committed by the police especially with poor women. But the main concern, in men’s minds, is clearly the reputation of the woman and the family “name”. In other words, women should not wash their dirty linen in public, and shame their families / spouses by going to

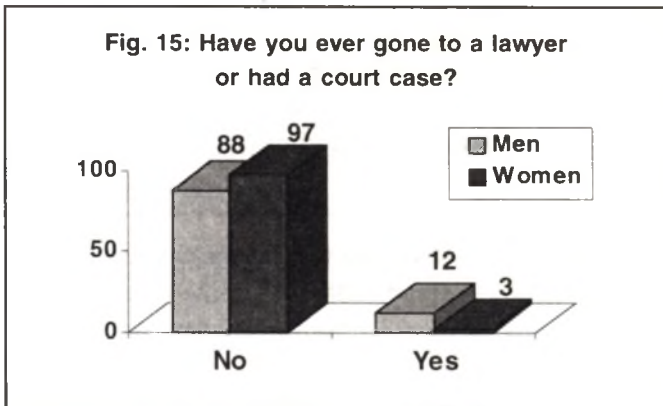
the police with their complaints. This is further reinforced, in a sense, by the belief that the woman should approach her husband or family for a solution, a position held by 35% of the respondents disapproving of women going to the police. The latter group clearly does not visualize the possibility that the problem could be abuse by the husband or family itself - or at least, prefers to ignore this possibility.



The other reasons category included responses such as, “when men / the husband is there, there is no necessity”, “women don’t have enough knowledge”, “if they are well informed they can go”, “our religion (Islam) does not allow it”, “women should approach a women’s organization and go together to the police”, “women’s problems should be solved within the home / village”, “going to the police will bring disrepute to the men of the family”, which reflect the running theme of the responses of this section that injustice done to women should not come under public scrutiny.

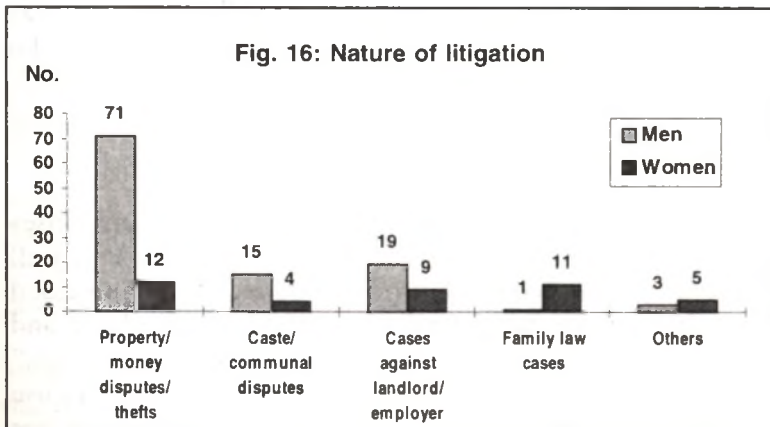
Access and Attitudes to the Formal Legal System

It is not surprising, therefore, that only a small proportion of the study respondents 12% of men and 3% of women, have used this avenue of grievance redress, as figure 15 shows. The gender gap is obviously linked to the same factors that have been described in the earlier part of this chapter, and do not bear repetition.

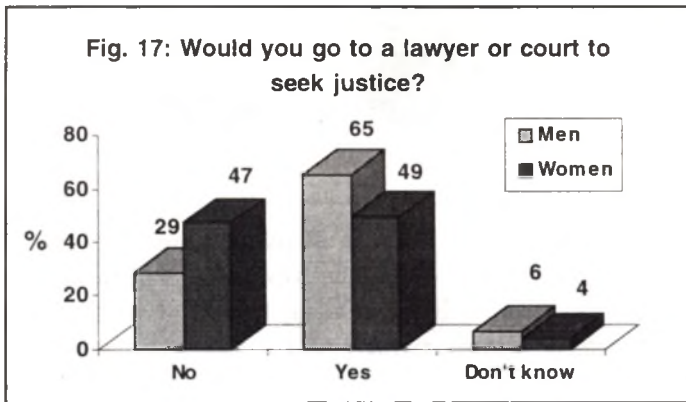


The study also explored how many women and men had taken recourse to the formal law in prosecuting their wrongs. Since it well known that the formal judicial mechanism in this country is almost paralyzed by the huge quantity of litigation, slow rate of case disposal, high cost, and increasing corruption, it is an option out of reach for most of the rural poor. Despite many experiments like “lok adalats”, the belief that the law is beyond their reach and not meant for them is deeply ingrained, particularly in women.

The kinds of issues litigated are presented in figure 16. We once again observe the gendered trend: the majority of cases filed by men are related to land and money, with practically none in the area of family law such as divorce, maintenance, child custody, etc. On the other hand, figure 16 once again



illustrates that of all the cases litigated by women, a relatively low proportion are related to familial disputes: compared to 25 cases filed by women for property disputes, caste/communal conflicts and problems with landlords / employers, just 11 relate to family law.



Finally, figure 17 shows that far more respondents see the formal legal system as out of their purview than they did the police. Not surprisingly, women exhibit more ambivalence here than elsewhere – the ‘ayes’ and ‘nays’ are about evenly divided. This may be because they are less apprehensive about their treatment at the hands of the formal law than with the police, but see all the other gendered barriers that functionally reduce their access. The majority of the male respondents, on the other hand, are quite confident that they would use legal machinery if the need arose. It was interesting, though, that most of the women and men who said “yes” added that they would do so “to get justice,” which seemed to imply that the formal court is seen as the final means for access to justice.

Further analysis will reveal to what extent these responses were influenced by factors like income and caste. It is well known that poor people, and people belonging to oppressed social groups, see the formal law as both unaffordable and inherently biased. For instance, among men who said “no,” were many who said that they didn’t have the money to use the legal machinery, or that “people like us will not get

justice.” Most of those who said ‘no’ also categorically stated that they would sort out problems within the village. But the men who said “yes” made it clear that they would use the courts if they did not get justice from the local Panchayat, especially in property-related matters.

Women who said “no” gave the predictable reasons: “we will decide the matter within our village,” “my family / elders / the head-man / my husband will look after everything,” “I do not know anything about the court,” “I do not have the courage,” “we have no money.” Those who said “yes”, gave responses such as, “if there are disputes about land or property, we will go,” “if we cannot get justice in the village, we will go”.

Conclusion

This section of the study is demonstrating the extent to which women’s access to justice is socially mediated, and particularly by the family. While women’s awareness of injustice within the family is high, their ability to perceive systemic social deprivation as injustice is much lower than men’s. Conversely, men are either intentionally or genuinely oblivious to the violations of women’s rights within the home and family. The majority of women who experienced injustices in one form or another had sought redress, but they are caught in a vicious circle.

There is little social sanction for redressing family-based oppression outside the family itself, creating a paradox. Women’s lack of assets and restricted mobility also negates and counteracts the possibility of their pursuing justice through mechanisms that involve money and travel without family support. While men have freer access to other adjudicatory fora, women’s reach is restricted by the belief that “women’s problems” should not be exposed to the public gaze or prosecuted in public institutions, customary or formal.

Men’s problems, by their very nature, are less governed by the dictates of family honour and propriety. Disputes even with their own relatives, since they are inevitably linked to

assets and resources, can be legitimately resolved publicly. Although informal arbitration at the village level or through local panchayats is more accessible even for men, if these fail to satisfy the contestant, they can litigate their claims through the formal courts if they have the means to do so.

The message of this chapter is thus very unambiguous: for men, economic and social circumstances, rather than cultural norms, are the key factors governing their access to justice, particularly in the public sphere; but for women, their gender is the major barrier in seeking redress outside the family system.

Statistical Appendices

Table 1: Injustices Faced by Women in the Home and in Society

Problems Within the Home	Male reporting		Female reporting		Difference
	No	%	No.	%	%
Harassment by in-laws	199	18.04	587	50.13	32.09
Wife-beating	386	35.00	554	47.31	12.31
Bigamy by husband	162	14.69	310	26.47	11.78
Dowry harassment	344	31.19	606	51.75	20.56
Harassment for not giving birth to son	40	3.63	128	10.93	7.30
Harassment for childlessness	107	9.70	342	29.21	19.51
Harassment of widows/deserted/divorced women	102	9.25	206	17.59	8.34
Larger Social Problems that Women have	Male reporting		Female reporting		Difference
	No	%	No.	%	%
Eve teasing	404	36.63	419	35.78	-0.85
Unequal wages	183	16.59	243	20.75	4.16
Rape/sexual harassment	317	28.74	280	23.91	-4.83
Overwork/lack of rest/leisure	27	2.45	48	4.10	1.65
Lack of opportunities	32	2.90	28	2.39	-0.51
Lack of education	35	3.17	67	5.72	2.55

**Table 2: Personal Experiences of Such Injustices
or Violations of Rights**

Have you experienced injustices? If yes, describe:	Male reporting	Female reporting
	No.	No.
No	992	1026
Harassment by in-laws	16	61
Harassment by other relatives	23	28
Unequal wages	15	18
Communal discrimination	3	2
Infidelity by wife / husband	9	32
Caste discrimination / harassment	11	13
Political harassment	5	2
Harassment by employer / landlord	17	10
Discrimination in employment / job opportunities	8	6
Encroachment/theft of property / land	25	17
Suspicion of infidelity		10
Harassment for childlessness		4
Harassment for not giving birth to a son		5
Bigamy by husband		13
Eve-teasing		2
Wife-beating		41
Rape		2
Harassment of widows/deserted / divorced women		15
Any others	7	4

Table 3: Whom did You Approach for Justice?

Whom approached:	Male reporting		Female reporting	
	No.	% of 111	No.	% of 145
Elders in the family	41	36.94	131	90.34
Nyaya Panchayat	37	33.33	52	35.86
Gram Panchayat	32	28.83	30	20.69
Jati Panchayat	13	11.71	8	5.52
Village elders	59	53.15		
Mahila sangha			17	11.72
Social Service organization	2	1.80	7	4.83
Police	61	54.95	41	28.28
Court	45	40.54	19	13.10

Table 4: Whom Should Women Approach for Justice?

Whom women should approach:	Male reporting		Female reporting	
	No.	%	No.	%
Elders in the family	622	56.39	914	78.05
Elders from the community	210	19.04	327	27.92
Jati/nyaya/gram Panchayat	268	24.30	210	17.93
Women's organization/NGO	42	3.81	132	11.27
The police	262	23.75	231	19.73
A lawyer / the court	84	7.62	83	7.09
Others	52	4.71	24	2.05

Note: multiple response question

Table 5: Whom Would You Approach for Justice if the Need Arose?

Adjudicatory body:	Male reporting		Female reporting	
	No.	% of 1103	No.	% of 1171
Elders in the family	270	24.49	903	77.11
Nyaya Panchayat	92	8.34	68	5.80
Gram Panchayat	51	4.62	46	3.93
Jati Panchayat	31	2.81	7	0.60
Village elders	472	42.79		
Mahila sangha			43	3.67
Social Service organization	4	0.36	5	0.43
Police	138	12.51	38	3.25
Court	13	1.18	5	0.43
Any other (s)	20	1.81	30	2.56
Don't Know / No response	12	1.09	26	2.22

Note: multiple response question

Table 6: Is there a Nyaya Panchayat in Your Village?

	Male reporting		Female reporting	
	No.	%	No.	%
No	481	43.61	415	35.44
Yes	571	51.77	517	44.15
DK	51	4.62	239	20.41

Table 7: Are there SC/ST and Women Members in the Nyaya Panchayat?

	SC/ST Members				Women Members			
	Male reporting		Female reporting		Male reporting		Female reporting	
	No.	% of 571	No.	% of 517	No.	% of 571	No.	% of 517
Yes	495	86.69	449	86.85	222	38.88	139	26.89
No	68	11.91	45	8.70	349	61.12	365	70.60
Don't Know	8	1.40	23	4.45	-	-	13	2.51

Table 8: What Kind of Issues does the Nyaya Panchayat Mediate?

Issues mediated:	Male reporting			Female reporting		
	Yes	No	DK	Yes	No	DK
Property/money disputes within the family	520	37	14	394	43	80
Property/money disputes outside the family	476	79	16	325	81	111
Marital conflict	272	268	31	212	149	156
Theft	453	102	16	308	65	144
Caste conflict	265	280	26	152	171	194
Religious conflict	209	328	34	86	211	220
Wife-beating	409	143	19	275	116	126
Harassment of woman by husband/in-laws	337	205	29	193	166	158
Alcoholism	415	139	17	259	89	169
Adultery by men/women	265	278	28	126	189	202
Bigamy by men/women	313	226	32	193	144	180
Dowry Harassment	290	247	34	142	179	196
Rape	302	236	33	145	167	205
Molestation	292	245	34	156	166	195
Custody of children	184	330	57	92	205	220

Note: multiple response question

Table 9: Have You, at any time, Approached the Police for any Complaint?

Whether approached police:	Male reporting		Female reporting	
	No.	%	No.	%
No	999	90.57	1110	94.79
Yes	104	9.43	61	5.21
If yes, reasons:	No.	% of 104	No.	% of 61
Harassment of landlord/employer	22	21.15	15	2.46
Harassment by upper caste people	5	4.81	3	4.92
Caste conflict	15	14.42	4	6.56
Communal conflict	10	9.62	5	8.20
Because of theft	6	5.77		
Conflict with relatives over property/land/money	38	36.54	16	26.23
Conflict with others over property/land/money	20	19.23	6	9.84
Sexual harassment /rape (self or woman relative)	3	2.88	1	1.64
Harassment by husband	4	3.85	8	13.11
Harassment by husband and in-laws			4	6.56

Note: multiple response question

Table 10: Would You Approach the Police if Necessity Arises?

Whether would approach police:	Male reporting		Female reporting	
	No.	%	No.	%
Yes	855	77.52	748	63.88
No	248	22.48	423	36.12
If no, reasons:	No.	% of 248		% of 423
I am afraid of the police	130	52.42	290	68.56
The police are corrupt / take bribes	40	16.13	80	18.91
They support the rich/harass the poor	14	5.65	31	7.33
They do not support people of our caste/community	6	2.42	9	2.13
They misbehave with women*			17	4.02
They misbehave with women of my caste*			7	1.65
Others	43	17.39	59	13.95

Table 11: Should Women Approach the Police if Injustice is done to them? (Male Respondents Only)

Whether women should approach police:	No.	%
Yes	537	48.68
No	523	47.42
Don't know	43	3.90
If no, reasons:	No.	% of 523
Police do not treat women well	205	39.20
The woman/her family will get a bad name	257	49.14
Woman's husband / relatives should solve her problem	181	34.61
No, other reason (s)	68	13.00

Table 12: Have You ever Gone to a Lawyer or Court for any Problem?

Whether approached lawyer or court	Male reporting	Female reporting
	No.	No.
No	968	1139
Yes	135	32
If yes, nature of case:		
Harassment by landlord/employer	19	9
Harassment by upper caste people	1	3
Because of caste conflict	9	1
Because of communal conflict	5	
Because of theft	8	
Conflict with relatives over property /money	40	10
Conflict with others over property / money	23	2
Sexual harassment/rape (self/relative)	3	1
To seek divorce	1	1
For the custody of the child/children		1
Harassment by husband	*	4
Harassment by husband / in-laws	*	1
Other reasons		4

Table 13: Would You go to a Lawyer or Court for Justice?

	Male reporting		Female reporting	
	No.	%	No.	%
No	315	28.6	551	47.1
Yes	718	65.1	577	49.3
DK / no responses	70	6.4	43	3.7

Conclusion

Perceptions of Status, Equality and Rights

Gender equality cannot, in the ultimate analysis, be achieved unless attitudes are changed. The patriarchal mind-set, born of an ideology that subordinates women from birth and through their entire life cycle, is firmly inculcated in both women and men from earliest childhood through socialization processes and then reinforced through the cultural, social, economic and political arrangements in society.

Most importantly, women have been converted into the primary agents of their own oppression, and have to be sensitized to liberate themselves from the psychology of subordination.¹ But given social structures and institutions, particularly marriage and family, men have to be sensitized too, and mobilized to join in this task, if a truly gender-equal society is to become a reality. This they will do, as field experiences show, when they realize that the liberation of women will also liberate them, even if they lose some privileges in the process. In other words, men must recognise that gender justice is not a zero-sum game, but one that will bring them many gains, and enrich the whole of human society.

If attitudes are to be changed, we must begin by understanding what are people's current perceptions of women's status and gender relations. Such an exercise enables us to find spaces for change in existing attitudes, and enlarge them. This was the primary objective of this final section of our study. In many ways, it was the most revealing and critical part of the study. It tells us a great deal about the mind-set of the study

¹Gerde Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy* (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1986).

respondents not only in what they said, but what they did not say, or could not comprehend.

For instance, both male and female respondents, found it hard to offer an opinion or articulate their position with respect to several questions in this section. This was clearly because until this investigation, many had never given conscious or rational thought to issues like gender equality or women's status. Thus, the subtle differences between questions that were so obvious to us as researchers, evoked more or less identical answers from the respondents, who must have wondered why we asked the same question in so many different ways!

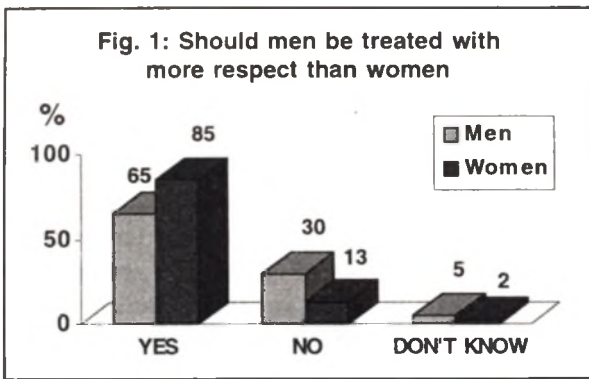
Finally, this was the only section of the entire study that had several open-ended questions, for which the respondents' actual words had to be recorded, rather than the response being located within a given set of codes. This was done to capture the richness and nuances of people's perceptions, and it was very successful in this respect.

Perceptions of Gender Differentials in Status

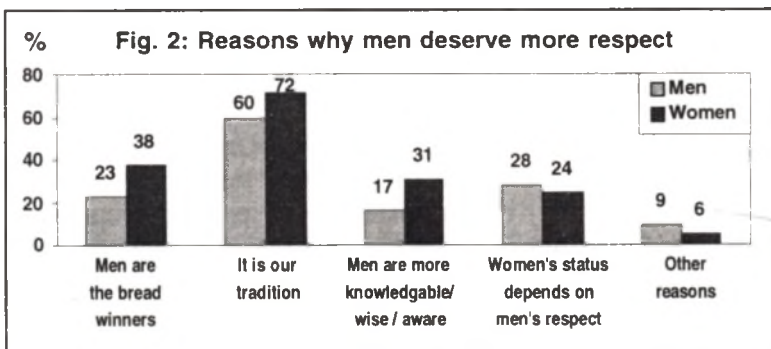
The perception section of the study began with two key question: "Should men be treated with more respect than, and if so, why?" This question and its successors were formulated after our pre-tests showed that "respect" was the best proxy for status in village respondents' frame of reference.

The response to this question (figure 1), and, for that matter, several other questions in this section, mirror the two overarching themes that we find running throughout the study with respect to gender relations:

1. Women more firmly uphold the principle of male 'superiority', and conversely, are less convinced about their right to equality, than men; and
2. There is an unquestioning acceptance of the existing social arrangement with respect to gender and gender relations.



Notwithstanding these two fundamental positions, figure 1 shows that 30% (329) of male respondents and 13% (153) of female respondents stated that men and women should be treated with equal respect. A small number of male respondents 55 (4.99%) and 22 (1.88%) female respondents reported that they didn't know whether men needed to be treated with greater respect than women.



Of the 65% (719) male respondents and 85% (996) female respondents who upheld male superiority, figure 2 shows that nearly 60% of the men and 72% of the women attributed this to tradition and custom (*paddati*), rather than ascribing any particular rationale to it.² This underscores the role of unquestioned acceptance of gendered roles and power in the subordination of women.

² This was a multiple response question, so the percentages will not add up to 100.

Nearly twice the percentage of female respondents (30.92%) when compared to male respondents (16.55%) reported that they believe that men are more intelligent and well informed; this is the most deeply internalized perception among the women, who offer it as the stock response to any question about differential capabilities, status, or decision-making power. As we shall see, women believe that this is the basis for female inferiority and male dominance.

It is important to note that only a minority of respondents saw men's economic role as the source of their higher status, though as usual, 15% more female respondents than male respondents offered this view. This offers us a critical insight: in a rural, largely agriculture-dependent population like this, women's role in the economic well-being and survival of households is not only immense, but often more vital than men's.³ But since much of women's labour is unwaged, and they are never paid as much as men even for the same work, or even for an equal amount of work, men's greater earnings provide the functional bulwark for maintaining the gender hierarchy. This ensures that male, and more importantly, female perceptions of one of the root causes of men's higher status, their legitimate right to greater "respect" remains undisturbed. The fact that women's vital role in household survival has not altered perceptions of status shows the clever dichotomy created by ideology between cultural values and lived experience.

The same phenomenon is witnessed in the significant number of men and women who believe that the status of women is derivative of the respect given to their men. It is interesting, though, that more men than women offered this opinion, perhaps reflecting the latent fear, particularly of poor or lower-caste men, that they will lose social status altogether if their women derive their status independently. After all, for most men at the bottom of the social ladder, the women of their households are often their only source of respect and self-esteem.

³ A fact confirmed by the data in this study (see sections on labor and income), and also in myriad others.

The role of age hierarchy as an intersect with gender emerged in the responses of several men who attributed their greater right to respect to their being older – again, “*doddavaru*”. This reinforces our earlier finding of the age difference between the women respondents and their spouses, and the role this place in sustaining the hierarchy of authority between husbands and wives.

It is this perceived cause-effect linkage i.e., between men’s economic and familial role and their status, and between men’s status and that of their women kin – that further complicates our task of reconstructing social status along the standards of equity, rights and justice.

Table 1: Who are the Women Who do not Get Respect in Your Community?

Responses:	Male reporting		Female reporting	
	No.	%	No.	%
Don't know / Can't say	195	17.68	225	19.21
Women who are not respected:	No.	% of 908	No.	% of 946
Those who are of bad character / immoral in their behaviour	769	84.69	805	85.09
Those who do not obey / behave properly with husband / in-laws	676	74.45	546	57.72
Those who talk too much/speak boldly/'bajari'	296	32.59	249	26.32
Those who are divorced/ separated/ unmarried/ widowed	172	18.94	223	23.57
Those who are childless	70	7.71	214	22.62
Those who have been sexually molested/raped	59	6.49	121	12.79
Those who have not given birth to sons	49	5.39	86	9.09
Others	55	6.06	52	5.49

Table 1 presents the answer to the question, “What kind of women would not be respected in your community (*gaurava sigadantaha mahileyaru*)?” A considerable percentage of women respondents (225 or 19.21%) and men respondents (195 or 17.68%) were either unable or unwilling to respond to this question and said that they were not aware of the kind of women who would not be respected in their community. 908

men and 946 women, understood the spirit of the question that we were exploring the sort of behaviour or character traits that result in loss of respect for women. By ranking the attributes or infringements that would disgrace women (in terms of number of men and women who identified each), we get an interesting profile not only of the qualities that are discouraged and despised in women, but of those that are respected and valued. These present a most revealing picture of the hierarchy of traits that a “good” woman should possess.

We see once again the critical role of sexual chastity and obedience as the most prized attributes for women. As much as 85% of men and women were in agreement that the worst sin a woman can commit, the transgression that would result in loss of all respect, was to be perceived as having a “loose” or “bad” character (“*ketta nadavalike ullavaru*”). The point is that the range of behaviors that could lead to this label are as wide as they are vague,⁴ so the fear of such an allegation is itself an effective weapon in ensuring that women keep the status quo.

The second most important infringement that leads to loss of respect is disobedience to the husband and / or his parents. Another side of this - being aggressive, loud, bold, talking too much (*bajari*) or talking in the presence of “other” men, occupies the third rank in list of unwanted traits. However, it is interesting to note a growing divergence of opinion between men and women from these points onwards. Obviously, fewer women than men consider disobedience / improper behaviour with husbands and in-laws a serious offense, since many would have experienced at first-hand the oppressive and unjust way this norm is applied to subjugate women. There is also a tragic resonance between some of the attributes listed here, particularly by significantly more women than men, and the recounting of injustices and abuse given in our earlier chapters. Childlessness and failure to give birth to sons (in the case of married women), being the victim of

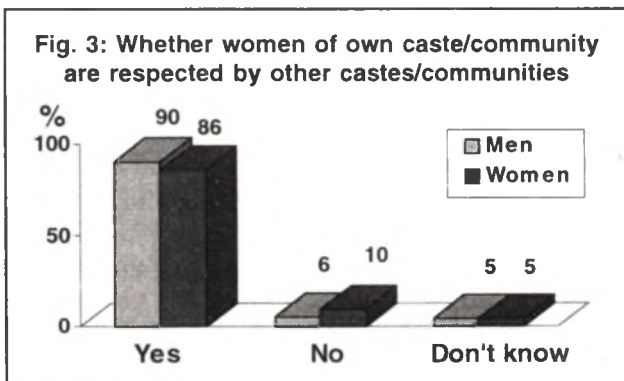
⁴ Field experience (including of the study researchers) shows that attacks on the moral character of women have been used to prevent them attending literacy classes, joining the local women’s collective, or standing for Panchayat elections.

molestation or rape, being divorced, deserted, unmarried or widowed – all these, which are not acts of commission by women, are cited as reasons for loss of respect in the community.

In fact, it is striking that three times the number of female respondents as male identified childlessness as reason for being disrespected. Similarly, twice the number of women as men identified women who have not given birth to sons as those who are usually not respected. Once again, it is lived or observed experience of oppression that is coming through here in the gender difference in reporting. A few female and male respondents also identified, “Devadasi women”, “Women who run away”, and “Women who marry men of other castes”, sex workers, and women having extra-marital relationships, as unworthy of respect. Encouragingly, a handful of men and women, mainly from Dakshina Kannada district (perhaps out of pride in their matrilineal heritage), reported that all women are respected in their community.

Caste, Community and Women’s Status

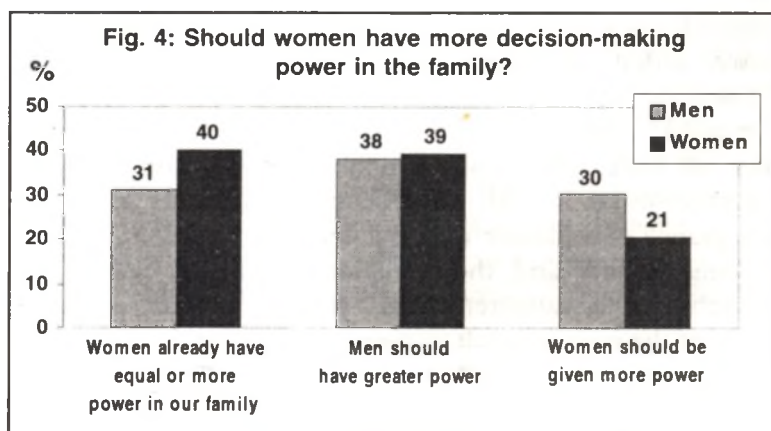
Once again using the proxy of respect, we explored people’s perceptions of how the caste or community factor affects the treatment of women. Figure 3 presents an edifying picture of caste and communal harmony at least in so far as the treatment of women of a given caste or community by people of other social groups. The overwhelming majority of male respondents



(992) and female respondents (1003) had no problem in affirming that women from their caste / community were treated with respect by other communities. Perhaps what is significant in this data, though, is that nearly double the number of women (10%) as men (6%) reported that women from their community were not treated with respect by other social groups. Whether these are women respondents who have personally experienced alienation or discrimination because of their caste or religious identity, or because they fall into some other vulnerable category (e.g., being widowed, divorced, deserted), and have, therefore, extrapolated this discrimination to all women from their caste/community, needs to be explored.

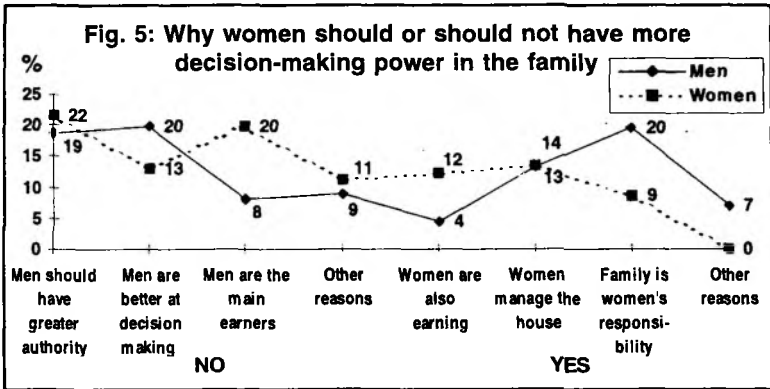
Gender Differentials in Decision-making Power

It has been rightly said that “the family is the last frontier of patriarchy.”⁵ Exploring this dimension, we found that 31% of male and 40% of female responses indicated that in their families, women already enjoyed equal or even greater decision-making power than the men. One must be cautious in drawing too summary a conclusion from this data, assuming, for instance, that there is gender equality in decision-making in these families. It could as well mean that in these



⁵Vasant Kannabiran, quoted in S.Batiwala, *Women's Empowerment in South Asia – Concepts and Practices* (New Delhi: Asian South Pacific Bureau of Adult Education, 1996).

households, women are perceived as already exercising sway in those domains that have been allotted to them as part of their gendered familial roles: e.g., management and allocation of household work, selection of suitable matches for their children, organizing religious functions at home, etc.



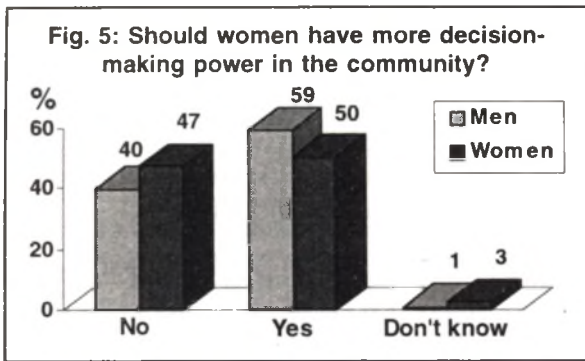
The other significant chunk of responses - 38% male and 39% female - hold that men should have greater say in family decisions. These voices were clearly upholding the current gender contract, based on limiting women's decision-making in the family, and giving the final say to men of the household. Figure 5, with expanded categories of both the "Yes" and "No" responses shows this quite clearly. A few of the women respondents who refuted the need for more decision-making power added other dimensions to their responses, such as, "There are 'elders' in the house", "I have been married only 3 months", "My husband will look after the house", "When men are there, why do we need more power?" and "I am the daughter-in-law". All these convey not only complete acceptance of a passive role, but the link between decision-making powers and their relational positions within the household - as daughter-in-law, younger woman, and wife. Some of the men who felt women did not need more decision making power endorsed these views, stating that given the presence of men, and women's lack of worldly knowledge, women need not be given any additional powers. What is being voiced here is fear of upsetting the status quo in gender power relations.

But equally important, from our study's point of view, are the minority voices - the 30% of male and 21% of female responses that argue for increasing women's role in familial decision-making. It is these voices that will have to be amplified if women are to gain greater household status through more decision-making power in family affairs.

Examining the gender differentials in the "no" and "yes" responses also yields interesting insights: more women than men believe male privilege in this context is linked to their authority and earning power, rather than because they are innately better decision-makers, though more men think they are! Similarly, more women than men are articulating the reality of women's economic contribution and greater responsibility for the family as the rationale for having more say in family decisions, which fewer of the men acknowledge. Several of the women in fact voiced opinions which showed both resistance and resentment of the current situation: "Every time, why should we wait for men's decision?", "Why should we listen to a single person?", "We will develop greater confidence", "The family will improve" and "Women maintain the family, so we need more power".

In fact, men who think women's decision-making power should be enhanced are not necessarily endorsing an equality principle; rather, they seem to believe this is needed mainly because women are the key home-managers, not because of the allocation of responsibilities or income contributions. For example, some of the men who espoused the progressive position for women, said things like, "It will facilitate smooth running of the house" (*samsara channagi nadi bekadare*). Some men who endorsed equal rights did so in a paternalistic way: "Let women learn to be more responsible" (*avaru kariyali*).

The dynamic of current gender relations in these rural households becomes even clearer when we consider the responses to the question: "Should women have more decision-making power in the community than they have now?" Figure 6 shows that there is much more uninhibited support, from both sexes, for expanding women's role and sway in



community affairs than in the home. Clearly, people don't find it as disturbing to the status quo to enhance women's roles outside the family, as long as household gender hierarchies are untouched and unquestioned.

Responses under the "no" category to this question, though, are revealing: they covered the entire gamut from complete resignation to deeply-internalized beliefs in the inherent superiority of males, such as, "The existing power is enough", "Why do we need more power?" "Men take the right decisions", "In our village it is men who take up all responsibilities", "Men are intelligent", "Men earn, so they must have more power".

Women also kept referring to men as "*doddavaru*," i.e., men are "bigger" – a concept that shows the ingrained belief in men's higher status by virtue of their greater knowledge, their earning power, and therefore, their innate superiority. Conversely, there were also a set of responses from women that symbolized their low self-image, such as, "Women don't have much knowledge and information", "Women don't have experience in such matters", "Women cannot go outside or go around like men", "Women cannot talk properly", "Women do not have courage", "We are too young / small (*chikkavaru*) to take decisions".

Some women also gave responses that indicate social disapproval of women's participation in the public arena: "People will start taunting us", "Nobody will respect women",

meaning that women will not command as much respect as men, or that women will lose their "dignity" if they start voicing their views in community matters. Few responses like, "Even women have equal power at present and do not need more", convey an unquestioning acceptance of traditional role differentiation based on gender lines that defines distinctly, female and male spheres of operation.

Encouragingly, the largest number of "yes" responses highlighted a perception of women's equal capability and need for equal opportunities in matters outside the home. They also reflected a greater faith in women's sensitivity and justness. These included: "Women also provide good ideas, if they are consulted", "Women should get equal opportunities; only then will they develop the courage to come forward", "We should have more power, only then can we increase our knowledge", "Women will be respected more / can talk about their problems, only if they get into community affairs", "Women can solve women's problems", "Women will be just", "Women do work with greater earnestness / a greater sense of responsibility", "Only if women get more power can we stop the injustices that are caused to women", "Women will save money, men spend unnecessarily", "Only if women are involved will the village improve", "We can then prevent our men from drinking", "Women understand things better".

Another set of responses from women were in the language of rights, showing a greater awareness of the notion of equality – "Women should be equal to men / they should have equal power", "We have the right to equality." A few responses also linked decision-making power in the community with women's desire for financial independence: "Only if women go out, can they earn their own living".

Among those who did not hold a clear position on this question, there were two sets of responses that are noteworthy: one set genuinely showed the absence of an opinion; the other, however, conveyed a general pessimism about the possibility of changing existing gender relations. For instance,

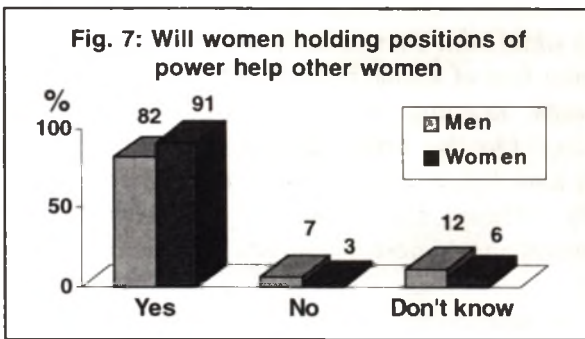
some women said, "Yes, women need more power, but men will not give us the opportunity, they will not allow us to share power."

Among the men who felt women should not have any additional power in community affairs, most cited women's lack of knowledge and experience in the field of community affairs, and some were of the opinion that men are the main players in the public sphere and that women's role must be restricted to the private domain. The fear that men may *lose status* if women start participating in community affairs was also present in some responses. Others felt that the present situation is all right, since the reservation policy (in Panchayat Raj Institutions) had already given considerable power to women. Some of the male responses which conveyed these positions were: "Women's decisions have no value" (*Bele illa*). "If women are given power, what's the use of our living / our existence?" "They don't have as much knowledge" (*Thiluwalike illa*). "Women are fit for housework - why are they needed for community work?"

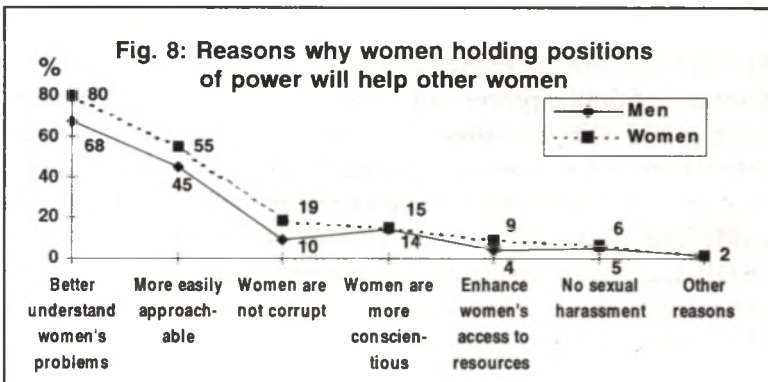
Opinions voiced by the more progressive and liberal men were also interesting and showed that many men are alive to the unfairness of women's exclusion from public affairs, and their inherent power to do good. Some of the typical responses were: "Women take correct decisions", "Women should also be given an opportunity", "It will be helpful for women", "They will work honestly", "The one who rocks the cradle - why can't she also rock the world?"

Reservations for Women in the Public Realm

The next part of the schedule examined people's perceptions of the impact of affirmative action such as through reservations on women. We began by asking how all women would benefit if some women were to hold positions of formal power in bodies like the Gram Panchayat or Zilla Panchayat. The response to this was overwhelmingly positive: 900 (81.60%) male respondents and 1065 (90.95%) female respondents opined that other women would benefit if women are in positions of power.



The predominant reasons cited to justify this view are given in figure 8, and the gender gap is strikingly low for most of the factors identified. The most widely held view is that women understand women's problems better (68% male and 80% female respondents), followed by greater approachability. It is also most revealing that a significant number of men as well as women believe that women representatives in official bodies are not corrupt, and are more conscientious in the execution of their duties, though twice as many women as men hold the former opinion. Similarly, nearly twice the number of female respondents as male believe that women's access to resources in general will improve if some women are in position of power.



These responses both resonate and contradict several themes that have emerged so far in this and other sections of the study. On the one hand, it is believed that if women hold positions of public power, other women can access them

without a significant change in their limited physical mobility, and without fear of sexual harassment or loss of reputation. In other words, keeping intact the rules of gendered social interaction. On the other, despite the belief that women have less knowledge, experience and capability to participate in public affairs, they signify that women are more conscientious and honest when given public responsibility.

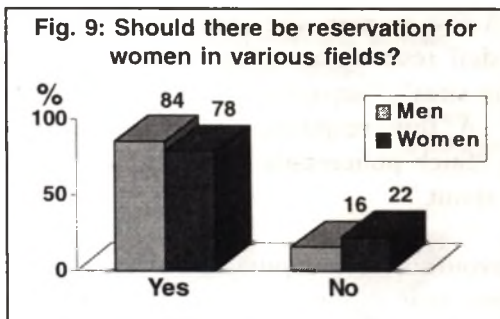
This is in interesting contrast to a survey done by the DSERT with employees of the Education Department of Karnataka state, on attitudes to women in authority. This survey found that over 95% women and men believed that women cannot handle authority and that women in positions of power were “in a state of confusion” and “unable to take decisions”.⁶

Some of the positive responses under the “other reasons” category included views like, “It will give us a voice,” and “We can then teach men a lesson”. The negative responses in “other reasons” included worn-out stereotypes such as “Women are against women”, “If women come to power, there will be no rights for men”, “Women do not have a thinking mind”, “Women cannot take decisions”, “Let women be of assistance to the husband - why help the village”.

Moving on from opinions about women’s representation in positions of public power to a more general probe, respondents were asked the question: “Do you think there should be reservation for women as a category in various fields? Give reasons for your answer.” Investigators were instructed to guide the respondents with appropriate examples such as IRDP loans, job reservations, seats in panchayats, seats in buses, etc., and to draw a parallel with reservation policy for Dalits in academic institutions, jobs, and so forth.

Figure 9 shows that the vast majority of respondents, men and women, believe that there should be reservation for

⁶ Personal communication of Gayatri Devi Dutt, Deputy Director, ETC, Directorate of State Education, Research & Training, Bangalore.



women in access to various types of resources and positions of power. This is not surprising given the fact that the majority of our study households are poor or just above the poverty line, and any measure that would help them increase or enhance their resource and/or asset base is welcome. This reinforces the trend that has been analysed elsewhere: that as long as household gender hierarchies are not shaken, men particularly from poor households, have no objection to women being the chosen beneficiaries of any scheme that brings more resources to the household.⁷ However, we observe once again that more women were opposed to reservation for their gender than men!

Giving examples with the question was a calculated risk, and some respondents were inevitably influenced by the parallels given to explain the concept of reservation. Nevertheless, among the positive responses given by women were many categories that elicited well thought-out opinions: “In a just society, there should be reservation for women in everything”, “We can be independent, only if there are reservations”, “It (reservation) will help women stand on their own legs” and “Women need not then go begging to men”.

Several women also gave personalized responses such as, “It will help women like us”, “It will help us illiterate women”, “We need fifty percent of the opportunities”. There was a broad consensus among women who said “Yes” that reservation will be “useful”, “helpful”, “encourage us” and “help women

⁷ S. Batliwala, *op.cit.*

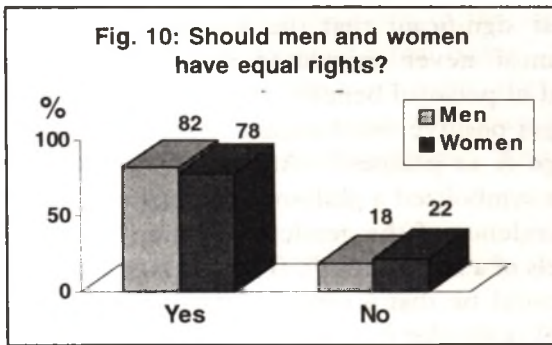
progress". A few women also identified the *areas* in which women needed reservation - "in banks", "separate loans", "loans to buy sites", "separate toilets", are examples of such responses. A few responses conveyed skepticism and pessimism : "Such policies are never implemented, they are only talked about."

Men who favoured reservations did so for broadly the same set of reasons: that through reservations, women could get access to new opportunities, develop themselves, and help other women. The need for reservation for women across caste lines was also reported. Among those 16% of men who opposed reservations for women were many who gave paradoxical justifications for their viewpoint: they felt women are weak, less knowledgeable and confident, and so cannot handle power and opportunities as well as men. Quite a number of men expressed the fear that women will stop respecting men if they gain equal status and power through reservation. Many men have expressed the view that reservation is required *for both men and women* and not for women exclusively. There are quite a few men who opposed reservations for women but were unable to give any rationale for their stand. Some men felt that if reservations are given to women, it would cause conflict in the family.

Gender and Equal Rights

The final query in this concluding section of the interview schedule was an over-arching one, and completely open-ended: "Do you think men and women should have equal rights? Give reasons for your answer." We did not find it necessary to expand or illustrate the question in any way, since the term "Hakku-Adhikara" is quite colloquial and well within the frame of reference of this rural population.

Once again, the vast majority of respondents, with just a 4% differential between men and women, affirmed the need for both genders to have equal rights. In analyzing this dimension of the study respondents' perceptions, it is more illuminating to dwell on the rationale given by those who said "no".



Women who responded negatively were echoing once again the now familiar chant of male superiority – this belief was too firmly entrenched in them to allow any talk of equal rights for women. They stated this in several ways: “Men are more intelligent”, “Men work harder”, “Men take all the responsibilities”, “The family is maintained by men”, “Men have the strength to face any situation”. Some responses like, “Men should have more power”, “Men should be respected more” do not indicate a rational basis for such an opinion, as we saw at the beginning of this chapter, but these women’s unquestioned acceptance of their customary subordinate position. Some women respondents also questioned the fundamental legitimacy of equal rights for women, and reflected both low self-image and contempt for their own social roles: “Women are fit only for the kitchen”, “Women are inferior”, and “We cannot be equal to men”. There were a few women whose responses were based on the traditional rules governing gender relations within marriage: “My husband has tied the *mangalsutra* for me, so I must listen to him.”

Most men who opposed equal rights also cited the by now familiar reasons of women’s inexperienced in public affairs, low levels of knowledge and confidence, and fitness only for managing the home front. They also felt that men’s higher social status warrants and justifies greater rights. These men clearly believe that women would not respect them if they were not under their control, and so fear women gaining equal power and rights. And again, the refrain from some men was that they opposed equal rights for women, but could not specify the reason.

It is most significant that the women advocates of equal rights almost never articulated this position in terms of individual or personal benefit. They saw it as something that had a larger positive social impact: "We need equal rights if our village is to prosper". Another set of positive female responses symbolized a philosophical stance that stressed the interdependence of the genders: "Women and men are like two wheels of a bullock cart". The message behind this vivid analogy could be that a cart cannot move very efficiently if one wheel is smaller than the other; alternately, it could also mean an acceptance or endorsement of a gender-based division of roles and responsibilities. As Srinivas says, "There is an intricate but well-understood division of labour between sexes, and either sex by itself is incomplete and knows it."⁸

Similarly, most of the men who supported equal rights for women gave the smooth functioning of the family, and hence of society, as their main rationale. They believed that since women also work and contribute to the economy of the family, they should enjoy equal rights. It must be noted that many men and women who expressed support for equal rights could not give any specific reason for their answer. Obviously, many of them see it as an ideal, but cannot connect it to their own lives in any real way. This brings us to question whether the notion of equal rights has been interpreted by respondents in a culture-specific way, to mean those rights that facilitate the playing of gendered roles, or something more revolutionary. Only further qualitative studies will help us answer this question.

Fortunately, there were several radical responses from women that showed no ambivalence, and a demand for unqualified and substantive equality: "Equal wages should be paid", "Equal pay for equal work", "Both work equally, so they should have equal rights", "If women have equal rights, then men will not look down on women". "We should have an equal share even in property", "Women should be equally

8 M N Srinivas, *The Cohesive Role of Sanskritization and Other Essays*, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 6-7.

respected”, “We can then take decisions in the absence of men”, “To be independent we need equal rights”, “We can then question men”, “If men have more rights, they will see women as subservient”, “There is no difference between men and women”, “We are also human beings”, “Our equality is guaranteed by law”.

Conclusion

This concluding chapter of our study could well have been entitled, “The Heart of the Matter”. After looking at reams of data on every imaginable dimension of women’s status, we have looked into the psychological core of women’s subordination. The picture that emerges is a patchwork quilt of conservative patriarchal attitudes, subtle resistance, and nascent struggle towards change.

We have seen the cultural definitions and expectations of “good” (meaning respectable) women: those who concede to their husband’s control, meet the role requirement of the submissive daughter-in-law, and are sexually chaste. Having an independent voice, “talking in public,” is not merely disallowed, it is seen as an unfeminine act, one that challenges male authority. Women see their respect/status in the family and society as being derived from the status of their husbands and therefore, loss of the husband’s or his family’s respect, or not having a husband, is perceived as a cause for diminished respect / status. In other words, women are respected and have status only if they follow the age-old rules governing their mobility, chastity, authority and autonomy.

The opinions of women and men on decision-making in the family and community mirror the ambivalence inherent in male images of women, which women in turn imbibe: a mixture of inexperience, incompetence and lack of worldly wisdom and confidence, yet with greater integrity and conscientiousness. There is an implicit acknowledgment of the unjustness of women’s subordination, the denial of equal opportunities, combined with fears of upsetting existing arrangements of gender power. This is most strongly reflected

in the desire to give women a larger role in community affairs, and a greater share of power and resources through reservations, while maintaining the status quo within the family and household. Men's most oft-articulated fear is loss of respect in women's eyes once women gain equal status. This reflects men's core insecurity that they are not inherently worthy of women's respect, but are respected only as long as they wield control and authority over women.

The low self-image of most women is a repeated *leit-motif*, as is their fear of greater power and autonomy, communicating an underlying sub-text that the character of authority is necessarily male. Most men endorse this with the opinion that women do not require independent authority so long as men exist.

However, this chapter has also shown us a bright silver lining: the spirited, articulate voices of a small but significant number of women and men who believe in women's capacity to share power in both private and public spheres, and who sense that the time has come for changing the terms of the gender contract. They offer a ray of hope, and show us what is possible when committed change-agents like NGOs expose people to alternate ways of thinking and being.

Finally, this section on people's perceptions of women's status and gender relations has provided vital grounding for both theoretical constructions of status and for grassroots projects that aim at empowering women. We must come to grips with the huge gap between conceptual definitions and frameworks of women's status, and the ground reality of how women's status is perceived and experienced by communities.

Statistical Appendices

Table 1: Should Men be Treated with more Respect than Women?

Responses:	Male reporting		Female reporting	
	No.	%	No.	%
No	329	29.83	153	13.07
Yes	719	65.18	996	85.05
Don't Know	55	4.99	22	1.88
Total	1103	100.00	1171	100.00

Table 2: Reasons Why Men Should be Treated with Greater Respect than Women

Reasons:	Male reporting		Female reporting	
	No.	% of 719	No.	% of 996
Men are the bread winners	165	22.95	374	37.55
It is our custom / tradition	429	59.67	713	71.59
Men are more intelligent / wise / knowledgeable / aware	119	16.55	308	30.92
Women's status depends on the respect their men get	201	27.96	244	24.49
Yes, others	65	9.04	55	5.52

Table 3: Are the Women of Your Caste/Community Treated with Respect by Other Castes/Communities in the Village?

Responses:	Male reporting		Female reporting	
	No.	%	No.	%
No	61	5.53	115	9.82
Yes	992	89.94	1003	85.65
Don't Know / Can't say	50	4.53	53	4.53
Total	1103	100.00	1171	100.00

Table 4. Do You Feel Women Should Have More Decision-Making Power in Community Affairs than They Have Now?

Responses:	Male reporting		Female reporting	
	No.	%	No.	%
No	466	39.79	520	47.14
Yes	690	58.92	554	50.23
Don't Know	15	1.29	29	2.63
Total	1171	100.00	1103	100.00

Table 5: Should Women Have More Decision-Making Power in Your Family than They Have Now

Summary of responses:	Male reporting		Female reporting	
	No.	%	No.	%
Women already have equal or more power	448	31.37	526	38.56
No	545	38.17	514	37.68
Yes	435	30.46	324	23.76
Total Responses	1428	100.00	1364	100.00

Table 6: Reasons Why Women Should / Should not Have More Decision-Making Power in the Family than They Have Now

Responses:	Male reporting		Female reporting	
	No.	% of 1103	No.	% of 1171
Reasons for not giving more power:				
Men should have greater authority within the family	185	16.77	169	14.43
Men are better at decision making / women are not good at decision-making	193	17.50	102	8.71
Men are the main earners	80	7.25	156	13.32
No, any other reason(s)	87	7.89	87	7.43
Reasons for giving more power:				
Women are also earning	44	3.99	96	8.20
Women have to manage the house	129	11.70	107	9.14
Women are responsible for the family	192	17.41	67	5.72
Yes, any other reason(s)	70	6.35		

Note: multiple response question

Perceptions of Status, Equality and Rights

Table 7: If Women are in Positions of Power, Will it Help Other Women? (e.g. Gram Panchayat / Zilla Panchayat Member)

Positive Responses:	Male reporting		Female reporting	
	No.	% of 1103	No.	% of 1171
Women can easily approach other women for help	494	44.79	642	54.82
Women understand women's problems better	746	67.63	934	79.76
Women are not corrupt	105	9.52	217	18.53
There will be no sexual harassment	59	5.35	74	6.32
Because women in general will gain better access to resources	45	4.08	104	8.88
Women are more conscientious	158	14.32	181	15.46
Other reason(s)	19	1.72	19	1.62
Negative responses - various reasons	73	6.62	34	2.90
Don't know / can't say	130	11.79	72	6.15

Table 8. Do You Think There Should be Reservation for Women as a Category in Various Areas / Fields? (E.g.: Jobs, Seats in Buses, Panchayats, Loans, etc.)

Summary Responses:	Male reporting		Female reporting	
	No.	%	No.	%
No	184	15.71	238	21.58
Yes	987	84.29	865	78.42
Total	1171	100.00	1103	100.00

Table 9: Should Men and Women Have Equal Rights?

Summary Responses:	Male reporting		Female reporting	
	No.	%	No.	%
No	215	18.36	238	21.58
Yes	956	81.64	865	78.42
Total	1171	100.00	1103	100.00

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This study on the Status of Rural Women in Karnataka is unique both conceptually and in methodology. It has looked into the new aspects of women's access and control over resources, her physical mobility, her sexuality, areas that are not often researched.

The methodology adopted was participatory and democratic with NGOs as equal partners as well as the inclusion of an equal number of men who formed the sample of the study.

Findings of the study have highlighted issues of violence, land-rights and ownership, health-care and the multitude of facets that impact on women's lives.

The study would certainly be of interest and be useful reference to researchers, policy advocates, political practitioners, activists, administrators and all individuals concerned for the upliftment of women's status.