

# **A Micro Investigation of Social Change, Status of Woman and Fertility Decisions in Karnataka : Methodology and some Findings\***

## **Introduction**

**I**NDIA is one of the few developing countries to have experienced noticeable changes on the social, economic and demographic fronts in the last half-century. The traditional notion of a 'self contained stagnant village' is no longer true. There are many studies highlighting changes in the social and economic situation of Indian villages. In the early stages the village society was studied in the context of poverty. The second phase of village studies between the World Wars and lasting until the late 1950s emphasized aspects of social structure and social stratification following the tradition of the functionalists and structuralists. Of late, interest has shifted towards understanding the process, direction and implications of social and economic change (Srinivas, 1976; Epstein, 1962 and 1973; Ishwaran, 1970; Caldwell *et al.*, 1982a).

In the more recent period, there have been general improvements in food availability, levels of education and access to modern health facilities, and there have been changes in patterns of agriculture and occupational structure among the great majority of the population. These changes have led to an improvement in the standard of living and a certain degree of upward social

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mobility. However, little attention is given towards the understanding of *the* relationship between social and economic changes and family systems, marriage patterns and status of women. This relationship is normally taken for granted and has been ignored in social and demographic research in India. An adequate interest in understanding these issues is necessary to explain the ongoing demographic transition in India.

There are studies pointing to a slow but consistent increase in the age at marriage for women, a secular decline in mortality, a slow and modest fall in fertility, and an increase in the use of contraception. These are essentially the correlates of demographic change which, in the investigator's view, are very closely related to the family system and the role and status of women. Any demographic process cannot be adequately addressed by demographic variables alone; it requires support from other variables which are normally the concern of disciplines like sociology, anthropology and economics.

In the Indian demographic literature, the relationship between social change and a demographic process is treated as trivial, and data on such issues are not ordinarily available from the traditional sources such as the census and sample surveys. The data on literacy rates, educational attainment, age at marriage, occupational structure and so on which are normally presented by the censuses can be used only to obtain a general understanding. But such data cannot answer research questions which are intended to probe causal relationships between variables and the underlying mechanisms. In the absence of sufficient background knowledge about society, the survey research is not likely to be rewarding in this regard because of the pre-planned and rigid nature of its operation and its inability to add new areas of investigation during the data collection phase. Even when the author was in the field for data collection using anthropological methods, he was not aware in the beginning that this relationship between the family system and the role of women, and fertility would emerge as crucial in explaining the demographic process, although one of the objectives of the study was to investigate this relationship.

It is only recently that there have been attempts to study the relationship between family systems, the role and status of woman and the demographic processes in the Indian sub-continent (Caldwell *et al.*, 1982a; Dyson and Moore, 1983; Nag *et al.*, 1982; and, to some extent, Cain, 1981). Even from among these, Dyson and Moore's analysis of data from census and official publications provides only an overview and lacks an in-depth understanding of the questions raised. The conventional indicators of the status of women, such as sex ratio, mortality rates, levels of education and taboos against widow remarriage are essential but not sufficient considerations to properly explore the issues. Similarly, village endogamy or exogamy and family structure are essential aspects of the matter but fall short of fully explaining the family (kinship) system, because there is a need to explore various other aspects of their influence on the family systems. The best approach in understanding the

status of woman is to evaluate the relatively active role of a woman (wife) in family matters in a culture specific context rather than to evaluate her status in comparison with the male (husband). A strong suggestion of the need for the former type of evaluation of power or status was made as early as in 1960 in Blood and Wolfe's formulation of 'resource theory' which they elaborate to include aspects of culture and individual competence.

It is conventionally believed, and sometimes even stressed, that India is a highly kin-oriented and predominantly patrilineal society (Ishwaran, 1965: 83), in which the male dominates all aspects of the family and its management, including procreation and reproduction. At a more general level, Paige and Paige (1981) have used Freudian theory to prove that in traditional societies, control over reproduction through the institution of rituals, such as those of puberty and maternity, was essentially to retain and augment the social power totally controlled by the males. Although such arguments are useful for an understanding of traditional societies, there is another side to the story. Women who are of central importance in reproduction, have always had a say and are now beginning to play a greater role in these matters. Such roles and the involvement of women in home making are accommodated better by employing a structure based on family systems. The concept of the family system used in this discussion, is different from the context of patriarchy or matriarchy and also from the structure of family expressed in terms of joint or nuclear family. In this paper, a family system is regarded as unilineal or bilateral depending upon what kind of inter and intra-family relationships the family has with kin and affines. It has been argued that in South India the family system appears to have always been different from the unilineal system, but in recent years it has become more bilateral in nature where both the kin and affines have *a certain level of control*, often conflicting, over a family, even when it is structurally a nuclear one.

In the Indian case, women's participation in household decision-making has substantially increased in recent years. For example, due to urban influence and modernization (Conklin, 1981 : 24-25), and as a result of change from a unilineal to a bilateral family system (Shariff, 1984 : 269-270), there has been a consistent cession of power from the older generation in favour of the younger generation and younger women (Caldwell *et al.*, 1982a : 713). Women are now responsible for changes in the traditional pattern of household decisions, even increasingly those involving the expenditure of money, disposal of family wealth (for example, sale of cattle), and management of children. They are increasingly in control of decisions regarding procreation and rearing of children, maternal health and child care. Their involvement has also increased in the areas of educating children and control over children's participation in the labour force.

However, it is not clear from past research as to how such a change has taken place. Even in North India where women are regarded as being less

autonomous and more deferential than their counterparts in the south (Dyson and Moore, 1983), anthropological investigations have reported that women's spheres have increased, for example in the voluntary choice of the acceptance of family planning methods (Jeifery and Jeffery, 1984). Such findings challenge the validity of the statistics generated from survey research which emphasize a strong male domination throughout the Indian population. It is in this context that the understanding of the demographic process depends to a large extent on the study of female status and autonomy and the impact of the family system on women.

### **The Choice of a Methodology**

Our knowledge of the demographic transition in India comes from an analysis of data from decennial censuses, vital statistics, the registration system and the KAP (knowledge, attitude and practice) surveys of the family planning programmes. Discussions on fertility, mortality and family structure have often emerged as the by-products from these data sources. But such discussions have not helped much in adding to our knowledge of the demographic process because of a lack of supportive and additional data requirements. Such views for situations elsewhere have been put forward by a few researchers, such as Lorimer (1954), Davis and Blake (1956) and Caldwell (1971). For the Indian situation, the urgent need for additional data and the usefulness of a shift in methodological choice has emerged from a series of writings by Caldwell (1976), Caldwell *et al.*, (1982b) and a few others; notable among them are Cassen (1975), Nag (1977), Srinivas and Ramaswamy (1977) and Namboodiri (1980). A greater stress on the requirement of methodological shifts and improvements in demographic research is found in Caldwell's 1976 and 1982 essays :

there has also been a research failure : failure to investigate in detail the ways of life and circumstances of individual acceptance (family planning acceptors) parallel to similar studies of the population as a whole (1976 : 335) The statistical techniques are ever more impressive and are both needed and valuable in that they measure the true demographic position and the direction and speed of change. But in themselves they do not tell us anything about the nature of change (Caldwell *et al.*, 1982b).

The origin of my research interests is similarly the result of some basic doubts about the earlier research reports on fertility and family planning acceptance. Although it is true and acceptable that fertility has begun to fall, the conventional reporting does not go beyond stating differentials in terms of major geographic boundaries and religions. The concept of hardcore groups or remote villages is generally talked about but there has been no effort to identify

them, nor has the lack of people's ability to change been explained. The most common answer given is in terms of insufficient infrastructural facilities, administrative and logistic problems, but no thought has been given to the fact that, inspite of the availability of services, many people are not willing to use the facilities provided to them. Our belief is that such a phenomenon is related to the differential impact of recent socioeconomic and technological developments on the one hand and more recent changes in intra and inter-family relationships on the other.

Aspects of the family system and intra-family relations are, by nature, complex and multidimensional. Therefore, the approach to such research should essentially be a combination of methods drawing from anthropology and the survey techniques, which we will refer to in the following pages as a micro-approach. Survey methods alone are ill-suited to the study of complex social relationships and intricate patterns of interaction, such as kinship obligations, gift exchange (Warwick : 1983 : 283), intra-family wealth flows and mutual support systems (Caldwell *et al.*, 1984). This kind of in-depth knowledge of a society is possible only from prolonged conversations during innumerable contacts, connected and inter-connected questioning, probing and observations. The probing procedures available for interviewers in surveys appear to suffer from inadequate questioning and they do not help in eliciting comparable answers, whereas the more personal, cordial and relaxed atmosphere of the micro-approach enhances the credibility as well as authenticity of the answers and interpretations. Some argue that in the anthropological type of work one gets a wide body of data and much of it is regarded as *dross*, but what is not recognized is the fact that a single project can be used to answer more than one set of questions and that such *dross* is what provides a valuable amount of supportive and supplementary evidence.

Can such an enquiry be undertaken by investigators belonging to the same culture or does it require an outsider to do the job? There are, however, conflicting views about the usefulness and capabilities of researchers for conducting social research in their own countries of the third world. For example, Stycos (1983 : 54) states :

Furthermore, the middle-class and upper-class members of an underdeveloped society, especially the intellectuals, usually know no more, and often less, about their own lower class than an American does about his. Among the largely mistaken notions projected into the lower class are exaggerations of its 'exclusiveness' and of its resistance to the 'invasion of privacy'.

whereas David (1977 : 26) is of the opinion :

... in eliciting propositions dissimilar to western biogenetic notions, there

is the possibility that informants underplay their own ideas and beliefs when questioned by a nonindigenous anthropologists in order not to appear 'primitive'.

Nevertheless, in the recent years, social research has been increasingly done by local researchers and their capabilities and expertise have also improved (Srinivas *et al.*, 1979; Beteille and Madan, 1975). This, however, does not mean that the academics from within the country can do an absolutely satisfactory job. An indigenous field worker, even if he comes from the same linguistic group, runs the risk of being an intruder and an outsider; but, for him, it will be relatively easy to create an impression in the field that the work he does is important and useful. His work is more likely to be regarded as being done by one of them, and the feeling of nearness in terms of national and international boundaries places the local researchers in a better situation to conduct such research. For example, when I explained to some respondents that my work was to write about the life style of the present generation so that the future generation (their own children) could read and appreciate their ancestry, they enquired whether I was to write in Kannada so that they could also read it. This style of presentation of the author's work was best understood by most of the respondents and it created enthusiasm among them to disclose many issues which otherwise would not have been revealed. For an indigenous researcher there are other advantages : unlike outsiders he does not face delays and frustration in getting permission from the government and the bureaucrats; he does not have to rely on local god-fathers in selection of research sites, travel and residential plans; and above all he does not have to depend entirely on carefully selected informants. In short, the problems experienced by researchers are unique to each one of them, and they are not generalizable.

Rivers, as far back as in 1913, defined the nature of field work and has distinguished between 'intensive' and 'survey' work. Many others later have reaffirmed this distinction. But the methodological debates always have been polemic (Reinherz, 1979 : 9) and the discussion of experience are largely personal (Caldwell *et al.*, 1982b: 1). A study based on a micro approach essentially demands a greater involvement of the researchers at all levels. In the survey approach it is possible to limit the involvement of any single person based on the aspect of individual expertise and status in the hierarchy of survey organization. It is important to know that due to a strict division of labour in different steps and stages of a survey, more often than not, the principal investigator remains ignorant of the specific problems of the field work, the rightness or wrongness of the responses and many other issues which can only be felt by actual participation. These experiences are essential for a thorough understanding and clear presentation of the findings. On the other hand, in the micro-approach, the investigator makes all the decisions, collects and analyse his own data, thus there is an intimate linkage between field work and

theory (Srinivas, 1978 : 40). Even if there are shortcomings, he is in a much better position to evaluate the work. The ability, confidence and expertise in the investigator to undertake responsibilities and independent decisions are essential from the beginning. These are largely acquired through academic learning, but most of them are developed or generated in a field situation through first hand experience. Nevertheless, it is important for the researchers to perceive from the respondents' viewpoint, the methods that would work best. However, there are others who have different experiences, for example Stycos (1983 : 55) writes :

They (respondents) have enough familiarity with middle class occupational patterns to know that asking questions and writing down answers is both typical and respectable. In this regard the survey researcher has an advantage over the anthropologist, whose role may be much harder to understand. (1983 : 55)

To get support for this argument, he draws upon the experience of Streib (1952). Both argue that the direct approach (survey) is superior in its methodological merit because of the advantages emerging from 'hit-and-run' techniques, and in its ability to capitalize on 'only highly limited situations' in which the lower status people are willing to speak the truth with the high status individuals (Stycos, 1983 : 56), and that the people are flattered to be asked their opinions and are delighted to have a sympathetic captive audience.

The first two issues are interrelated and raise questions relating to academic morality and ethics, and it is hard to believe that the respondents speak the truth only while they are in a state of suspicion, fear and anxiety. For example, I myself was surprised when a few respondents from one of the remote villages approached me a few weeks after my visit to correct the information which was provided in the first instance. They thought that the information about the most recent birth, if given, would be used to force them to accept tubectomy. It took them several weeks of observation of my activities, and an unprecedented amount of enquiry with other residents of the larger village, to become convinced that my enquiry was for a different purpose and was confidential.

One methodological merit of the micro-approach is its ability to capture the overall essence of society and culture and then proceed to probe into specific issues of research, with a broader section of the population. This is unlikely to happen in case of the surveys where, due to decentralization of operation, the interviewers at the lower level may lack adequate skill as well as practical knowledge. Because of the sampling procedures, for interviewing purposes, certain groups of people may be omitted in surveys since they are considered to be culturally or theoretically a less important section of the population (Peil, 1983 : 81, Caldwell *et al.*, 1982b, Shariff, 1984 :22). The

surveys have another area of inherent weakness emerging from the issue of non-response and refusals, whereas in the micro-approach which employs a combination of methods including focused surveys, such events are negligible and often non-existent.

The definition and conduct of 'participant observation' in the anthropological type of approach appears to be taking an evolutionary change, at least in India. Participant observation essentially originated because the researchers were often outsiders who had problems of identification, especially in legitimizing their roles in the context of the study population, and faced difficulties in building rapport and in creating a congenial environment for research. This led to a procedure which was soon recognized as a method known as participant observation, which is a kind of academically legalized deception. But the conduct of (participant) observation can be very simple without resorting to disguise. It can be shown that any behaviour by an outsider, especially one with an urban background, in projecting a feeling of cultural equality is offensive and unacceptable to the respondents. For example, the author could not persuade the respondents not to spend money on getting him a cup of tea from the local restaurant because they were not willing to give him tea made *of jaggery*. They at no time approved of the interviewer smoking *beedi*, but rather, they were willing to spend money to get him cigarettes from the local store. The usual style of dress and the local middle class living standards of the researchers appear to contribute to the benefit of field work rather than adversely affect it. Moreover, there is no need to change them unless in special circumstances demanded by specific situations. For example, when the author was invited for a local ceremony he had to eat food on a *leaf plate* which is the practice on such occasions. For an indigenous researcher the situations to be tackled are different from those of the outsiders and, therefore, his concept of participant observation is different from what is conventionally held.<sup>1</sup> At a general level, a local researcher has similar kinds of likes and dislikes; his method of approach, style of communication, accent and language are common to the study population. He has a distinct identity with the study population, and people enjoy an opportunity to interact on familiar terms with someone from a different section of society. The only option open to the fieldworker in most situations is to be what he really is—a friendly and curious outsider' (Srinivas, 1979 : 4, See also Caldwell *et al.*, 1982b : 14).

In a field situation a researcher without much voluntary effort appears to assume many roles. For example, I was recognized as one of the few educated persons of the village who was accessible and co-operative. Many local residents approached me for various purposes, such as to seek legal advice on

1. For examples of the special problems faced by outside researchers (anthropologists) see Mayer (1975) and Gould (1975).

the land reforms, to secure medicines for simple ailments and wounds and to get formal applications drafted for securing new loans or old age pension. This last role also made me a photographer, because such applications often required photographs. Besides, a researcher who lives in the village for a reasonably long duration becomes a villager himself, as a customer of local stores and milkwoman, and he gets to know his washerman and the barber and above all he finds his own number and place in the lines of people waiting for their turn at the wells or the taps.

### **Methodology of the Present Research**

It was decided to study a rural population of south India which is neither too far from nor too near the urban influence, in the expectation of striking a balance between the importance of intra and inter-village (or village town) relations. The choice of the study area was not based on specific criteria in an effort to justify the typicality of the selected villages, because it is almost impossible to meet these criteria in village studies (Srinivas, 1978). However, the population had to be Kannada-speaking, a language which was well known to the investigator and his assistants. With the intention of examining the survival strategy of the peasants in the dry areas, the villages were finally selected in the semi-arid region of Karnataka. This region also happens to be an area in which the investigator was born and brought up. The area selected comprised a cluster of four villages about 60 km away from an urban metropolis and at least 15 km away from a medium sized town. It must be mentioned that a study based on the experience of a single village suffers from many disadvantages because of the growing interdependence between villages and an increasing role played by the larger central villages in recent years.

The field work was carried out during the calendar year 1981 and the main purpose of the research was to investigate the causes and processes of fertility decline in south India with emphasis on tracing the pattern and process of decision-making. A study of this nature was, at the outset, felt to be feasible only through a long stay with the study population as it required talking to all the family members and more often than not it required interviewing the kinship members who were not residing in a specific family. In our case, the choice to stay in one of the villages was more an academic reason than a practical one as the research team could have easily commuted from a nearby town. It was very soon discovered that the best time to meet many women was between 10 am and 3 pm, when most of the men were out in the fields or attending to other business. This was much truer in the interior villages, and as our team consisted of two males and two females it became easy to interview women in isolation, even for the male investigators.

An added advantage during the field work was the fact that the investigator and his team of assistants were not only indigenous to the research area but

also had rural backgrounds and experience of the rural way of life. This advantage was vital in our research because it enabled the team members to capture intricate local events and situations and put them in a theoretical perspective.

The initial phase of the field work was conventional and was mainly concerned with house listing, mapping, and the collection of data on standard forms with regard to variables such as age, sex, marital status, educational attainments and so on. In the second phase, data on pregnancy histories, child mortality, family planning acceptance and economic situation were collected using a retrospective recall survey method. A sample of all the acceptors of the family planning methods was selected as one group of respondents as well as a sample of an equal number from the remaining families who were non-acceptors for in-depth interviewing on issues relating to fertility and family planning decision-making.

During the process of field work, when the importance of the relationship between intra and inter-family relationships and demographic behaviour became evident, new questions were asked and the data collection proceeded by gradual stages in questioning the family members to elicit the answers when the field work had entered its second phase. A major clue was the predominance of nuclear families among all the sections of the population. The incidence of the nuclear family was highest among the landed castes and among the high castes. The traditional pyramidal families were found to be rare, and frequently we found more than one family living in a single dwelling structure. Such families existed without any major interference from the older generation normally living in the adjacent dwellings. It became doubtful that the old extended unilineal system existed. Rather, it was felt that emotionally, and also financially, the relationships were more often extended towards the affines (wife's parents and siblings) who had a substantial influence on the younger families. This prompted us to enlarge the dimension of this investigation and more questions were asked about the genealogies, matrimonial relationships, post-marriage residence, division of property, family splits, and source of emergency support.

## **The Study Area**

The total population from among the four villages was 3,158 with a sex ratio of 103 and with 43 per cent of population under 15 years of age. The population ranged from about 2,000 in the largest village to about 250 in the two small villages, and the intermediary village had about 750 population. Although over three-fourths of the population is dependent on agriculture and agriculture-based occupations, 16 per cent of the population of the largest village was found to have incomes from modern jobs. This village is relatively new but had a faster growth in its population during the 1960s and 70s,

mainly due to the extension of government infrastructure for facilities like schools, dispensaries, electricity, farmers' banks, and to the related in-migration. The out-migration from this area has not been very great although over the time period certain caste groups left the largest village, such as the Devanga (weavers) in the late 1930s, Brahmins in the 40s and 50s and Jain money lenders in the mid 70s. The only other type of out-migration, other than that caused by marriage, is of individuals who after having got a certain level of education left the village in search of modern jobs. This latter phenomenon has yet to gather momentum in the study area as a whole. The situation in the other three villages was found to be one of consistent growth due to natural increase. Briefly, the larger village is now a multi-caste, heterogeneous, central village and less dependent on agriculture while all other villages are relatively homogeneous and dependent on subsistence agriculture.

Nevertheless, there has been a consistent and steady decline in the average size of land holding per family not only because of the increase in population but also because of a change in the pattern of family structure. Seventy-seven per cent of all families had either no land or less than 3.5 acres of cultivable land (only 16 per cent of all cultivable land has some access to irrigation). Practically every married son now holds much less land than his father used to own, which is true even among the richest of the landlords of the villages. Now the younger generation desires to stay in neo-local residences cultivating their own share of the land or engaging in non-agricultural occupations. In one of the agricultural villages the desires for an early split after marriage is very strong because the young can still inherit sufficient land to enable them to live separately. In the study area as a whole, it was found that a married son now lives on average for only 6.3 years with the joint family<sup>2</sup> and this is regarded by the older generation as an unwelcome change. A similar finding of declining duration of stay of individuals in joint families has been reported, based on genealogical evidence, by Lakshminarayana (1968) from other villages of the region. This situation itself has enabled a certain level of male dependency on women in the matters of home management and has increased the female involvement.

There has also been a shift in the perception of wealth and security, from immovable property like agricultural lands and buildings to liquid cash and movable property as well as education and good health which are now regarded as important and valuable assets. Although the last two views were found as expected, among the intermediate and high castes of these villages, such views predominated even in discussions relating to the future survival of the peasants. Education is considered, apart from many other benefits, as a definite advantage to help solve the problems originating from the recent

2. See Table 3 for a distribution of time spent in various types of families by a selected number of couples in the study area.

land reforms. Many respondents felt that their sons should study at least to the extent that they can understand the land reform rules and regulations. The desire of parents that their sons should also get non-agricultural and urban jobs is great among the high and intermediate caste groups, and is one of the major causes for many of the changes in life style in these villages. The concern over health has undoubtedly increased and now persons even from the remote villages are prepared to approach nearby dispensaries and hospitals for medication which they normally would have ignored only about ten years ago. One of the most frequent enquiries of the author was regarding the health of ailing family members. Such realizations have changed the whole perception of wealth and security.

In the largest village the intra-village relations are highly segmented and are multi-dimensional in nature due to a wide range of occupational and caste relations. But the situation in the homogeneous villages is one of the horizontal type of relationship and is unidimensional. This difference has an important effect in terms of informational flow and the reciprocal exchange of money and material, between the families of the same village, and has an indirect effect in moulding women's ability to participate in voluntary and individual decision-making.

#### Decision Making, Woman's Status and the Bilateral Family System

It is noticed that there are at least three different levels and stages of fertility decision-making depending upon the nature of the decision and the type of participating members in the decision process. The primary unit, which can also be interpreted as the primary stage, of decision makers is normally the marital dyad (two-thirds of the total number of families are found to be both structurally and functionally nuclear in the study area). The involvement of kin and other close relatives is the second stage followed by an optional stage of decision-making in which others, such as neighbours, friends, peer group, local leaders and government agents participate (see Figure 1). The impact, for example, of the fertility or family planning decision is directly felt by the couple, especially the wife. It is observed that the ultimate effect of such decisions rests on biological parents and it is only among very few families which are categorized as joint (structural as well as functional) that the impact is distributed across the other members of the family.

Nevertheless, there is a widespread practice of providing various kinds of support to a couple and their children, such as providing clothes, shelter and even education, by both kin and affines. Such support, though appearing to be a cultural practice, is provided on request and often on demand from the biological parents especially the mother. Thus, this can be recognized as one of the planned strategies of parents for child management. This is not the same as saying that the child care and rearing responsibilities are shared by the



extended kin. In the largest village, for example, the young widows and separated women with children are left alone and are responsible for their children, although some kind of support is offered for their living by immediate relatives. Apart from this kind of support, the major sources of emergency or crisis support are the kin and affines. The affines are found to be as much responsible for providing this support as the kin are, while they are the major source for other kinds of wealth transfers (see Table 1). The increasing role of affines has, nevertheless, raised the status as well as power of wife in a family. Besides, woman's involvement in money earning and money managing activities has increased.

Control over future resources is especially crucial, since decision-making involves the allocation of resources within the family. The partner who may provide or withhold resources is in a strategic position for influencing their disposition, (Blood and Wolfe, 1960 : 13).

Blood and Wolfe predict that 'if wives gain increased resources, old patriarchal notions are not likely to remain unaffected for very long' (1960 : 14). This line of thinking fits in perfectly with the kinds of changes taking place in rural Indian society. The resource theory provides a basis for seeking explanations of the nature of the shift in the household power structure and decision-making. In the following section we will discuss the source of such power among the rural population of south India, especially with reference to women, and thus trace a change in the family system and the pattern of decision making.

### *Social Change and the Status of Woman*

(1) Women in the study area derive substantial power from their contribution of monetary income, earned as wage labourers. Once a girl is married she becomes a member of the husband's family in which she ordinarily lives and spends most of her time in household duties and, if required, works on the family farm or in the family occupation. In most of the families in this area, especially those with marginal land holdings, women contribute to the family income by working as labourers. For the area as a whole, it is found that 2.5 per cent of all females work as full-time wage earners, and another 5.7 per cent work full-time on the family farm. An additional 15.3 per cent of all females are engaged in wage earning activities and another 34.8 per cent work on their own farm as their secondary activity. The proportions are greater for those who are married and above 20 years of age, and are highest for women who belong to the Scheduled Castes, and the Service Castes.

(2) Another most important source of power a woman gains over time in her husband's family is her ability to manage a sub-budget and acquire personal wealth. It is universal among the responsible woman in the family to have a

TABLE 1-FREQUENCY OF SOURCE AND KIND OF OUTSIDE SUPPORT  
FOR A SELECTED NUMBER OF FAMILIES

Source of Support Relationship to the Couple	Economic or crisis support		Type of Support Support during sickness and pregnancy		Customary gift givings and reciprocal exchange	
	N <sub>2</sub>	%	N	%	N	%
Relationship to the husband						
Parents	6	7.2	1	15.6	4	6.2
Brothers	19	22.9	1	2.2	15	23.1
Sisters	2	2.4	0	0.0	3	4.6
Others (maternal uncles)	6	7.2	1	2.2	2	3.1
Sub-Total	33	39.7	9	20.0	24	37.0
Relationship to the wife						
Parents	19	22.9	19	42.2	19	29.2
Brothers	11	13.3	11	24.4	14	21.5
Sisters	4	4.8	5	11.1	8	12.3
Others (mater- nal uncles)	1	1.2	1	2.2	0	0.0
Sub-Total	35	42.2	36	79.9	41	63.0
Others						
Employers	3	3.6	—	—	—	—
Friends/money lenders	9	10.8	—	—	—	—
Co-operative banks	1	1.2	—	—	—	—
Sons	2	2.4	—	—	—	—
Sub-Total	15	18.0	—	—	—	—
Total	83	100.0	45	100.0	65	100.0

1N=Number of events.

sub-budget and have individual savings over time. Among these rural families, apart from access to the husband's income to be spent on family requirements, a woman usually can sell small quantities of grains and other family produce on the sly. Women also claim a portion of cash earned by selling the produce of animals which they maintain, such as milk, eggs, and chickens. The money received from selling vegetables, oil seeds and wild nuts, which a woman and her children collect is generally her own property. Over time, a woman tends to save a substantial amount which she uses to buy gold ornaments thereby enhancing her power and status. A similar situation has been noted by Srinivas (1976 : 155) and Epstein (1962 : 237) in other parts of the region.

(3) Although the presence of a mature daughter is no shameful in many families especially those belonging to Setty's, Brahmins and a few Balagigas, every effort is made to arrange her marriage as soon as possible.<sup>3</sup> This requires a suitable bridegroom who is also likely to demand substantial sums in dowry. The local practice or custom also ensures a substantial transfer of wealth in the form of gifts, support during delivery, child care and in emergencies, and help in establishing the business and so on, which continues for a long time after the marriage from the girl's parents to the groom or his parents. The girl's parents are obliged to do so because of the fear that the son-in-law and his family may discard or divorce their daughter which not only increases their economic burden but also adversely affects their social prestige and status. This is one way by which the groom and his parents maximize the wealth flow from the girl and her parents. On the other hand, the girl's parents are obliged to please the young man and his kin for accepting her as the bride. The behaviour of the groom and his parents can appropriately be described as exploitative because they tend to maximize not only the social benefits of the new relationship but also the flow of wealth involved in their son's matrimony. The economic forces based on this exchange are strong enough to create an imbalance in the power structure between the kin and affine groups. This also elevates the social status of the boy especially in the affinal circle. Beals observes, from another area in south India, that in the process of building relationships through marriage, the groom is in direct competition with members of his own and fraternally related lineages (1972 : 32). A greater affection from the parents-in-law along with the flow of wealth and emergency support seems to influence young men to assume new responsibilities and become patriarchs themselves by splitting from the joint family with the support of affinal relatives. During the process of this change in the pattern of relative power, the wife (daughter-in-law) appears to draw substantial power enabling her to participate in the household decision-making. Conklin (1981 : 20) has provided convincing evid-

3. One hundred and six of 13 per cent of all women in the age group 15-24 years were unmarried. But all 22 unmarried girls aged above 25 years were in Shetty, Brahmin (both high caste) and Balagiga (the dominant caste) families.

ence for the fact that dowry in the northern parts of Karnataka has increased the wife's say in the external matters of the family decision-making, such as visiting a festival, seeking outside work and deciding about a son's education. Another study of an urban sample of educated girls in Bangalore city has also provided support to this contention (Blumberg and Dwaraki, 1980).

(4) There is sometimes a situation in which the families of origin are unequal both in social and economic status. This situation initially emerged in the upper and middle class urban populations where the educated boys were getting married to girls belonging to a higher economic class and frequently the girls' fathers were themselves highly educated, working as high bureaucrats and officials. This kind of hypogamous marriage is becoming familiar to the rural population in spite of only a slight increase in the level of education of boys in the last two decades. This phenomenon also has supported the emerging pattern of an increase in affinal influence on the newly married couples.

The role and status of patriarchy have declined due to the incapacity of the patriarch to provide substantial inheritance to his sons, while sons are seeking alternative off-farm jobs and depending less on the share of family land. All these factors in combination have enhanced the ability of affines to influence the husbands although they have not completely eroded the effect of kin influence. This change has enabled the wife to derive power and status in her husband's family.

### *Decision making and the Family System*

Table 2 presents the frequency and combination of the decision-makers in deciding about the acceptance of a modern family planning method. It is clear that the wife (who is normally the person to be sterilized) is the prime decision-maker in half the cases, and in about one-quarter of the cases she is the secondary decision maker. On the other hand the husband is the prime decision-maker for 39 per cent of the cases and for another 30 per cent he is the secondary decision-maker. However, this table does not give the same emphasis to the affinal role in decision-making as in the discussion above. The main reason for this is that the local cultural practice does not approve of a married woman (or her husband) giving any credit to her kin (his affines) even if they have provided extraordinary help, which is considered to decrease the status of the husband's parents and his kin. Nevertheless, the affinal involvement is in the background which is reflected in the events in which the wife is the prime decision-maker.

In the contemporary nuclear family, the relationship between the husband and the wife is becoming relatively more cordial and affectionate than in the past and in the extended family. The women in the nuclear type of families are relatively older and have more children, and they have considerable influence and authority in day to day family management.

TABLE 2—PRIME DECISION-MAKERS FOR FAMILY PLANNING  
ACCEPTANCE IN THE ORDER OF IMPORTANCE

<i>Decision-makers</i>	<i>Large Village</i>		<i>Medium Village</i>		<i>All</i>	
	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
Husband alone	6		7		13	15.3
Husband and wife	8		7		15	17.6
Husband and his kin	0		5		5	5.9
Husband and his affine	0		0		0	
<b>Sub-Total</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>26.4</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>59.4</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>38.8</b>
Wife alone	6		4		10	11.8
Wife and husband	13		8		21	24.7
Wife and husband's Kin	3		1		4	4.7
Wife and husband's affine	4		0		4	4.7
<b>Sub-Total</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>49.1</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>40.6</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>45.9</b>
Kin and husband	2		0		2	2.4
Kin and wife	4		0		4	4.7
Affine and husband Affine and wife	3		0		3	3.5
<b>Sub-Total</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>17.0</b>	<b>0</b>		<b>9</b>	<b>10.6</b>
Force	4	7.6	0		4	4.7
<b>All</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>62.3</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>37.7</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Fortes (1949 : 78-79) clearly brings out the life cycle stages, processes, motivations and capabilities to acquire a greater say in the family establishment and management among the Ashanti women. Although his analysis was of a matrilineal society, similar processes, motivations and capabilities are found with certain variation among South Indian women. The desire to establish a family of her own clearly develops at later ages, by which time she would have had a minimum number of children of the desired sex. Such fertility perfor-

mance appears to be an important source of status. But, after reaching such a status, even if a woman loses the ability to procreate because of biological reasons such as menopause or by voluntary decision such as sterilization, she continues to retain and enjoy the status which she has gained earlier. This is reflected in the growing desire of the women to accept sterilization more for health reasons than for the economic reasons; the community is beginning to applaud the desire of such women who are regarded as the change agents.

TABLE 3—PATTERN OF RESIDENTIAL ARRANGEMENT OF THE NEWLY MARRIED AND PROPORTION OF TIME SPENT IN DIFFERENT FAMILY TYPES FOR SELECTED FAMILIES

<i>Family of Residence after Marriage</i>	<i>No. of Couples</i>	<i>Mean Marital Duration</i>	<i>Per cent of Time Spent in</i>			<i>No. of Acceptors</i>	<i>Per cent Acceptors</i>
			<i>Nuclear</i>	<i>Stem</i>	<i>Joint</i>		
Nuclear	14	164	98.0	2.0	0.0	5	35.7
Stem	13	15.4	27.9	57.8	14.3	8	61.5
Joint	75	18.2	49.5	13.3	37.2	47	62.7
All	102	17.6	53.3	19.1	29.9	60	58.8

Nevertheless, the power and authority maintained and developed by a wife, especially an illiterate one, appears to be always derived from her husband and own kin. In an extended family system these relationships become more complex because the joint families usually have an elaborate system of avoidance patterns which serve to keep the husband and wife from becoming emotionally close (Goode, 1963), and the older generation tries to continue its hold on the younger couple especially through the control of property and sexual behaviour.

An important area of intra-family relationship useful in decision-making analysis is the balance of power between the husband's and wife's kin both of whom try to maintain their influence on the newly wedded couple. The husband's kin, in their effort to maximize the wealth flows, may eventually yield to the power and influence of the wife's kin, which is gained by offers of dowry and other tangible transfers. This area of change in intra-family power and relationships has not sufficiently been emphasized in social research in India. Such a change from a unilineal system to a bilateral system of kin relationships appears to have been taking place for two or three decades and is associated with an increase in the pecuniary interests of the community. A more pronounced change, however, is noticed in the larger village in which intra-village relations play a vital role in determining individual behaviour, when compared with the situation in the smaller villages of the study area.

These are the changes which have begun to occur since independence and the beginning of commercialization which has led to a situation where the extended family and kin influences are declining and affinal influences are assuming prominence, leading towards a bilateral kinship system. Thus, the wife draws power and demands status in the husband's family and acquires a say in important matters like sale, purchase and even borrowing. This process of change is one of the salient features of the modern society and has gathered momentum since the introduction of modern values through education and urbanization and the advent of dowry which occurred almost at the same time in the research area. Thus there appears to be a shift toward an egalitarian relationship between the husband and the wife and there also appears to be a cession of power from the older generation even while the new couple are relatively young.

Another study which has presented similar results was undertaken in Hong Kong and the Philippines by Liu, *et al.*, (1973). They concluded that

.. . bilateral system of kinship network allows a more egalitarian relationship than the unilineal kinship system. Such structural determinants of conjugal power relationships become more important if the family is open and society is closed, (p 84)

Nevertheless, unlike the older couples among whom husband and wife communication was not essential for fertility and family planning decisions, the change in social status of younger married women warrants an increase in intra-family and husband-wife communication and egalitarian relationships (see for example, Conklin, 1973; Koenig, 1981).

It would be appropriate to conclude this paper emphasizing a need to explore the social, economic and cultural basis to explain the contemporary national and regional demographic transitions. Such tasks as we have discussed earlier are done better by employing a combination of available methodologies and application of a mixture of qualitative and quantitative analysis. Nevertheless, it should be noted that while doing so care must be taken to keep up to the academic standards already attained in the respective methodologies and alternative analysis.

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