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Breaking Rural Bonds Through Migration: The Failure of Development for Women in India

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BREAKING RURAL BONDS THROUGH MIGRATION:
THE FAILURE OF DEVELOPMENT
FOR WOMEN IN INDIA

by
Shobha Srinivasan

A Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School
of Loyola University of Chicago in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the degree of
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VITA

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CHAPTER I

WOMEN, DEVELOPMENT AND DEPENDENCE

Roja a woman resident of the slum called Chand, in the city of Delhi says,

I came to Chand after my marriage. Some months later my husband left me. It has been about thirteen or fourteen years. I haven't seen or heard from him all these years. My parents bought the train ticket for me to come here. That was part of the dowry..... Coming to Chand was a blessing for me. Can you imagine what my life in the village would be without a husband? These people (meaning the people of Chand) are now my family. I am happy here. I don't ever want to go back to the village.

Roja and her neighbors grew up in a poor village in Tamil Nadu. Twenty-five years of development policies in that area did not have any impact on the lives of Roja and her neighbors. I wondered if Roja might not have migrated had she grown up in a village that was more developed. My study tries to explore, first, the impact of development by comparing the lives and opportunities of women in two different villages, one developed and the other less developed, and second, explore the impact of migration on women by comparing the lives and opportunities of women in the urban slums to those of their rural counterparts. Accordingly, I compare the lives and opportunities of three

groups of women, women from a developed village, women from a less developed village and women from an urban slum.

In my study I examine two theoretical models of development; modernization and world systems theory. policies based on modernization theory emphasized economic growth but failed to take into account the inherent structures in particular societies and therefore contributed to uneven development and unparalleled migration to the cities. World systems theory on the other hand focuses on the inherent social structures in India of caste and female-male dependency structures. From my analysis of three groups of women I found that the lives and opportunities of the migrant women were better than their rural counterparts because migration weakened the structures of caste and female-male dependency. The practical suggestion for policy makers and planners thereby implied is that more attention be given to caste and gender based inequalities.

IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

Exploitation of and discrimination against women are global phenomena, but their consequences are particularly tragic in the Third World. Poverty and the lack of basic necessities of life combine to aggravate the inequities, making women's existence a continuous battle for survival (Chhabra 1979). Before 1970 very few studies on women and development existed. Women were totally neglected in

studies conducted by social scientists. Boserup's study on "Women's Role in Economic Development", therefore was a landmark demonstrating as it did, that women have been excluded from the mainstream of civic, social, and economic life and are only "marginally used" in speeding up the development process.

Until recently it had been assumed that a woman's role in the Indian society is that of a wife and mother, and most studies have taken only those aspects into consideration (de Souza 1975,p. 15). Leon and Viveros (1983) rightly point out in their study of rural women in Columbia that,

rural development projects often fail to appreciate the actual and potential economic contribution of women.... [Women have the] problem of the double day. Since domestic tasks are thought to be natural for women, little attention is paid in economic planning to ways of lessening the burden and time spent in this work (p,10).

Although women have been extensively involved in the agricultural sector, official policies view women only as performing the traditional roles in society and consider them peripheral to rural development. Lourdes Beneria (1982) explores how development contributes to making women's status and role marginal. She shows how changes in technology, intensive penetration of capital into the agricultural sector, and redefinition of men's and women's responsibilities within and outside of the household have generally resulted in the displacement of women from productive activities. This lead to the consequent

diminution of women's social status and power.

Even institutionally women's economic role has not been recognized. It is a fact that agricultural activities carried out by women are not included under the category of "productive labor" by the Census Board of India. This is in spite of the fact that eighty percent of the rural women in India are engaged in agricultural activities such as sowing, replanting, threshing and animal farming. Hence the question that arises is: why is women's work not considered productive?

The answer seems to lie in the cultural dominance of men over women in India. Until recently studies conducted on women and development were from a "male" point of view, as if to say that, men are the principal actors in development and women have little or no say at all. Schlegel (1977, p. 2) has noted that from all the studies conducted "one gets the impressionthat culture is created by and for MEN¹ with children, women and the aged as residual categories." Reiter (1975, p. 12) makes the point explicitly:

A great deal of information on women exists, but it frequently comes as questions asked of men about their wives, daughters, and sisters, rather than from women themselves, often represented as a group's reality, rather than as only part of the cultural whole.... What women do is perceived of as housework, and what they talk about is called gossip, while men's work is viewed as the economic base of society and their

¹ Emphasis mine.

information is seen as an important social contribution.

This is the main cultural reason why women's roles have been traditionally understood to be peripheral. The argument that women's "economically active" work outside of the household is marginal and supplemental is based on the view that a woman's role is primarily within the family. This view has been emphasized repeatedly in books, novels, studies and research. Not enough attention has been given to women's experiences and what women have to say about their role in development in India. Thus, before women can be included in the development process, before her conditions for work can be improved, before her access to productive resources and her participation in the decision making process can be achieved, it is important to recognize women's identity apart from men and listen to women themselves talk about their lives, opportunities and their role in development (Loutfi 1982,p. 1).

Women's experiences and realities are unique and cannot be surmised from those of men. Development must be examined from the women's vantage point, with their lives and opportunities being taken into account. It is not sufficient to look at their role in development only from the perspective of the state, agencies and other institutional groups. As Ramachandran concludes, the "root cause of neglect of women in national planning and administration [in India] is the incorrect and inadequate

appreciation of the role played by women in development...." (1978, p.1). This study examines how development affects women, but looked at from a feminist point of view. It tries to listen to the torments, the struggles, the 'unspeakable' pain and anguish of Indian women and attempts to voice their view of the situation.

It has been nearly forty-two years since India's independence. While the eradication of poverty still remains India's foremost goal, (Garibi Hatao² slogan of the Congress-I electoral campaign), the eradication of the miserable plight of Indian women still does not figure as a prominent goal. And yet, if the poor of India are considered "oppressed", the women of India are doubly so. Discounted, discriminated against, deprived and debilitated, India's women carry the brunt of the poverty burden.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

In this study I explore Indian women's lives and opportunities in the development process. I interviewed women in their own environment and gathered information about their lives and opportunities and whether they feel they have a sense of power in changing the social, cultural and eco-political structures of society.

Before we look at women and development in India, we

² Garibi Hatao are Hindi words meaning Eradicate Poverty' - these words were made famous by Indira Gandhi when she was campaigning for Prime Minister in 1967.

need to take a look at theories of development in general. It is important to understand these theories of development and the rationalizations for them, because, these ideologies influenced the Government of India to adopt policies and strategies for development. The most prominent theory is the modernization theory of the 1950's and 1960's which postulated a trickle down effect assuming that once the overall economy of an area developed, everyone would benefit from it. This theory did not foresee uneven development and the unprecedented migration to the cities from the rural areas. The second theory is more comprehensive in its scope in that it took into account the inherent structures of the Third World societies and explained imbalances in terms of dependence and power. I will now examine these theories at length.

MODERNIZATION THEORY AND WOMEN'S DEVELOPMENT

Modernization theory has perhaps been one of the most important sociological theory on the subject of development since the 1950's. It has various definitions and expressions, but the essence of modernization theory is that, once there is economic growth in a country, it will soon be followed by a whole host of cultural and social changes (Lauer 1982,p. 283). Daniel Lerner (1968,p. 387) enumerates a number of characteristics of modernity upon which there is considerable consensus:

1) a degree of self-sustaining growth in the economy -or at least growth sufficient to increase both production and consumption regularly; 2) a measure of public participation in the polity; 3) a diffusion of secular-rational norms in the culture; 4) an increment of mobility in the society ; 5) a corresponding transformation in the modal society that equips individuals to function effectively in the above social order.

The central variable then in modernization theory is economic growth (as measured by GNP or per capita income). Once economic growth occurs, the theory hypothesizes, it is followed subsequently by many other structural changes in the areas of demography, stratification, polity, education and family. The following section discusses how exactly these changes take place.

1. Demography: Along with modernization, there is, first of all, population growth. Not only does the mortality level decline but extreme fluctuations are virtually eliminated because the crises that brought many deaths (crop failures and epidemics) are brought under much greater control. The typical pattern during modernization has been a growth of population. In particular, it is the middle and upper classes that expand during modernization. Not only are they more oriented toward change than the lower classes, but this expansion of theirs is a function of the changing occupational structure.

2. Stratification: The growing middle class means not only

that the process tends to become self-sustaining, but also that modernization involves a trend toward increasing equality. As society progressed from hunting and gathering to horticultural to agrarian societies, there was ever increasing inequality, but the 'modernized' society would represent the historical reversal of that trend (Lenski 1966,p. 308). Along with these changes in stratification, the theory predicted that the status of females would rise, that adolescents would gain new status and that the aged would lose their high status.

3. Polity: Modernization was to bring changes in polity as well. Local interests and loyalties were to give way to some extent to nationalism. The economy would itself demand this shift as it requires an extensive market and modern methods of communication and transportation. There was to be a greater democratization of the political process; political power tends to be more widely distributed. The state also expands its functions. The enormous increase in size and complexity of government is associated with proliferation of governmental functions. The locus of national politics is the urban area and chiefly the capital city. There is a progressive trend toward urbanization.

4. Education: The fourth area in which significant change occurs is education. Education changes quantitatively and

qualitatively. Quantitatively, there is a considerable growth of educational organizations and enrollment in schools. Universal primary education is established (P.C. Lloyd 1969,p.88). Qualitatively, the complex division of labor and specialization demands a 'formal system of education to prepare men for their jobs' (Kahl 1959,p. 61). The curriculum is modernized, a significant part of the education is of a technical nature, and education is secular rather than sacred (Kazamias 1966).

5. Family: The fifth area of change is the family. Extended kinship relations (like the joint family for instance) tend to disintegrate and the nuclear family becomes prominent as the nation modernizes. Residence patterns as well change (Bert Adams 1969, pp. 47-60). Likewise, traditional patterns of property holding and inheritance tend to give way to newer forms of arrangement.

This then delineates the basic hypothesis of the modernization theory. The crucial and most important variable is economic growth, carrying with it as part of its train changes in the social and cultural sphere. Thus economic growth comes first, followed by changes in population, stratification, polity, education and family.

Modernization in India

It was with the hopes of initiating these changes that immediately after independence, India, a young country and a large and promising democracy, moved in the direction of modernization. The first five year plans were totally geared to industrialization and developing the economy. Modernization theories as proposed by Davis (1975), Moore (1974) and Glass (1965), emphatically state that improved socio-economic conditions are the crux of changes in other aspects of life. This principle was accepted by Indian sociologists and economists. This is seen in the manner in which they measured the important indicators of modernization. Desai (1966) for instance delineates the following indicators.

changes in the socio-economic status through improvements in education, income and occupation; shifts from rural to urban living and from a predominantly agrarian to a predominantly industrial economy; better accessibility to modern health care facilities, improvements in life expectancy, and reductions in infant mortality; improved work opportunities and status of women, changes in the structure and role relations in the family; and finally, changes in value orientation - from a traditional, fatalistic outlook to one in which the individual has more control over his/her actions (p. 100-102).

Likewise demographers, like Mamdani (1972) and Chandrasekhar (1972), continued to stress that improvement in the socioeconomic status of the population was vital,

even though they argued that changes in fertility patterns were instrumental to modernization.

Economists such as Krishna (1973), Ahmed (1972), Dandekar and Rath (1971) and Sen (1981) argued that increased agricultural productivity through the use of modern technology such as better irrigation facilities, better seeds and modern methods of cultivation, coupled with a policy of land redistribution would abolish poverty in the rural areas. This was the way to improved socioeconomic conditions for the majority of the rural Indian population. Economic and technological growth, they emphasized, would be the key to the process of modernization. Even Srinivas (1955), who spoke of the importance of caste, felt strongly that the modernization process occurred through the "breaking down" of the traditional value system.

Critique of Modernization Theory

Two decades after India's independence, however, modernization theory as implemented in India, came to be criticized for several reasons, most of all because it failed to bring about the idyllic reforms it sketched out. Perhaps its biggest failing was that it did nothing for the advancement of women. The reason is easy to see.

Modernization theory before the mid-1960's assumed that the benefits of growth would essentially "trickle down" gradually to all segments of the society. However the

development of the 1950's and 1960's produced little change in the condition of the majority of the poor in the developing countries. Some writers even argued that the condition of the poor deteriorated. Also the number of poor increased during periods when other economies registered growth rates (Kuznets 1955). Sociological studies on poverty in the developing countries showing the failure of economic growth in terms of distribution of income began to appear in the late 1960's and early 1970's (Chenery, et al 1974). Soon, it became quite clear that in most developing countries the condition of the majority of the poor had not improved with economic growth. The poor continued to live in rural areas and according to one estimate more than eighty percent of the population in developing countries is in "either absolute or relative poverty" (World Bank 1975, p.4).

Critique of Modernization from Women's Point of View

Perhaps the two most important aspects of modernization theory that came under criticism were the assumptions of separation of the work place from home and the definition of the men as primary breadwinners.

In "traditional" society production and consumption were organized within families and kinship units. The family performed all the functions which included reproduction and socialization of new generations, the

provision of security, health care and other social services to the family members. But with the increasing differentiation of responsibility, production was transferred from the family to the modern farm, firm, and factory (Smelser 1970; Goode 1966).

A further result of the modernization process is the redefinition of roles. The idea of modernization was that the husband becomes the primary breadwinner, supporting the family economically with the income earned outside of the home. The wife in turn is entrusted with the household work, assuming the primary responsibility for raising children and providing sustenance to the family (Moore 1974; Smelser 1970; Parsons 1967). Modernization writers such as Hoselitz and Moore (1966), theorized that the low rate of female labor force participation occurs because modernization results in an increasingly affluent society, where the income of the male members is enough to support the family. This "minimizes the number of women who must earn an income in order to supplement the family finances" (Goode 1966, p.242; Parsons 1966).

From the women's point of view, modernization theorists are guilty of several fallacies and limitations. First, modernization theorists postulated that due to the fact of economic development the status of men and women is

no longer ascribed but achieved.³ They also assume that gender is the basis for the economic division of labor. But as long as society has a sex based division of labor, there is absolutely no avenue available for status to be re-defined on the basis of personal achievement. It continues to be associated with gender. It therefore remains that at least one important social status is still ascribed.

* Second, the modernization theorists espoused that economic development expands the range of employment opportunities for women outside of the household. But socialization of sex roles defines the primary role of women to be that of wives and mothers. This limits their choice of occupational roles. Also, the conflict that may arise between the responsibilities on the job and those in the household deter women from preparing themselves for jobs outside of the home. Added to this, male sex roles define masculinity in terms of a man's ability to provide for his wife and children. Therefore men discourage their wives' from working (Little 1976, p.82).

Third, the modernization theorists assume that most women do not need to find employment outside of the home. However empirical evidence from Latin American countries show that most families in the lower economic classes cannot survive on a single income (Safa 1975; Arizpe 1977). In

³ In traditional societies status is usually ascribed rather than achieved. For example, a person's position in the caste hierarchy is ascertained by birth.

other developing countries too women are forced by economic necessity to find employment outside of the home (Buvinic and Youssef 1978).

Fourth, modernization assumes that nontraditional society is characterized by the monogamous nuclear family with the male as the head. This assumption excludes approximately thirty percent of the world's households which are headed by females (ICRW 1980, p.3). Papanek indicates that these women must seek employment to support themselves and their families (1976, p.58). The fallacy of the modernization theorists is that they believe that "more enlightened planning" (Elliot 1977, p.5) will remove the obstacles to women's participation in development. As Elliot rightly points out "too many studies have located women's perceived passivity and resistance to change in female nature instead of examining how their life experience in positions of powerlessness may have made them distrust new initiatives" (Elliot 1977, p.5).

Fifth, land holding, one of the most important structures of rural India was left unchanged by modernization. One of the basic problems with the practical applications of the modernization theory is that it did not advocate changes in the structures of society, but left them intact. For example, in rural India, because of the importance of land, wealth is measured in terms of the

number of acres a family holds and in the type of land.⁴ To take a hypothetical example, a typical village exhibits the following pattern of land holding structure:

5 families own 40 acres each
10 families own 2 acres each
25 families are landless laborers

As a result of modernization and the consequent pouring in of seeds, fertilizer, pumps and other irrigation facilities, the crop increases a hundredfold. Nevertheless, the distribution of profits still follow the same pattern.

5 families corner 80 percent of the crop
10 families get 20 percent of the crop
25 families get just 0 percent of the crop

Thus, unless the structure of landholding is radically changed, modernization does not really affect the masses of rural India, nor the condition of Indian women. Unless there are some radical structural changes in their life, there will be no change in women's status and situation.

If modernization theorists are to be believed, women from a developed village would be more aware of their social, economic, political and family rights and opportunities than women from a less developed village. On the other hand, if the critics of modernization are to be believed then there should not be any major difference

⁴ Land, can be classified very broadly into wet and dry land. Wet land has the capacity to be more fertile and needs less fertilizers as compared to dry land. Wet land has a higher yield per acre and capable of yielding cash crops.

between the women of the two villages. I compared two villages in India, one economically developed and the other not so developed to see how development has affected the lives and opportunities for the women of these two villages. I found no major differences between the developed and less developed villages.

The failure of the modernization process cannot be placed squarely on the shoulders of the Indian government alone. Its inability to change social structures was largely due to the constraints placed on development by international forces. The World Systems Theory, with its structural analysis of power relations, as proposed by Immanuel Wallerstein (1974) and the Dependency Theory as proposed by Andre Gunder Frank (1967) recognize the fact that structural change is the major underlying factor of development and also point out the important role of international forces in the development of the Third World. This theory helps explain the rural-urban imbalance in development and thus provides an explanation for the unprecedented growth of urban centers.

WORLD SYSTEMS THEORY OR DEPENDENCY THEORY

Dissatisfaction with the capacity of modernization theories to explain continued poverty and backwardness in Third World countries led some observers to look for systemic connections among the contradictions noted by

developmentalists. As Wallerstein (1974) and Frank (1967) pursued these linkages through the social infrastructure of the Third World countries, they became increasingly impressed with the constraints placed on development by international forces.

World system theorists rightly argue that "underdevelopment" is not the result merely of deficiencies or inadequacies in a nation's institutions and values. Rather, location in the international economic system crucially determines a nation's development or lack of development. One of its most representative theorists is Immanuel Wallerstein. According to Wallerstein, the entire world is the proper system of analysis.

The world system is understood in the following manner. First, Wallerstein argued that there is a worldwide division of labor. The division is not merely along occupational lines, but it is primarily geographical. The varied economic tasks are not distributed equally among all the nations of the world. This unequal distribution is largely a function of the social organization of work, magnifying and legitimizing the ability of some groups to exploit the labor of others to receive a larger share of the surplus (Wallerstein 1974, p. 349). Thus the capitalists or exploiters become the core states. The core states dominate and exploit the rest of the world, which includes the peripheral and semi-peripheral areas. In the core countries

free labor engages largely in skilled work. In the peripheral areas, labor is coerced and primarily unskilled.⁵

Wallerstein argues that there is a widening economic and social gap between the various areas of the world system. This so-called widening gap is not an anomaly, but a basic mechanism of the operation of the world economy (Wallerstein 1979, p.73) brought about by the multi-national corporations. One of the more important aspects of the organizational structures in the world economy is the growth of the multi-national corporation, which is able to function rather independently of national governments.

There are a number of variations on the world system theory. For example, Johann Galtung talks about the world system in terms of imperialism (1971, pp. 81-117). He divides the system into center and periphery nations. Center nations export manufactured goods, while periphery nations export primary goods. Such an international division of labor results inevitably in great inequality. The center nations are united while the periphery nations lack cohesion. A periphery nation is likely to have its trade with one particular center nation, but the center nation may have trade relations with any number of periphery states. Thus the world system is characterized by economic

⁵ The semi-periphery is composed of areas between the core states and the periphery; some of the semi-peripheral areas were core areas in the past, while others moved up from the periphery.

imperialism with a minority of center nations dominating and exploiting the majority of periphery nations. Andre Gunder Frank referred to the same classification when he spoke of some nations being dependent on others (Frank 1967, pp. 20-73).

The theory also argues that the same pattern of inequality is reproduced within developing countries. The urban area or city takes the place of the center or core state. The rural area or villages take the place of the periphery states. Just as the center, so also the city, produces finished goods. Just as the periphery states, so also the villages, produce the raw goods. And just as the periphery states are dependent for their economy on the center states, likewise the villages are in a position of dependence on the city. Thus capital and technology is concentrated in the urban centers with the rural areas totally dependent on the urban area for its sustenance. This pattern of dependence is also portrayed in the relationship between the landlord and the landless peasant. Studies on Asian economic development (Griffin and Khan 1982) indicate that the initial distribution of wealth and income is a decisive influence over the pattern of growth and this growth has been biased toward the capital intensive urban centers, the poor from the rural areas have no other option but to seek a livelihood in the urban centers. The modernization model of "trickle down" and "grow now,

redistribute later" is not a valid option as it aggravates poverty and also results in increased and fast paced urbanization.

The very same pattern of inequality and dependence is found within the caste hierarchy. The upper caste represent the core and the lower caste the periphery. Just as the periphery is dependent on the core, the lower castes are "bonded" in various ways to the upper castes.

The very same pattern of inequality and dependence is reproduced within the family. The man, like the center, is involved in activities which are production oriented. His tasks are "primary" and he is called the primary breadwinner. The woman, mirroring the periphery, is involved in tasks which are supportive and secondary. And just as the periphery is dependent on the center, so also the woman is dependent on the man.

As if to confirm this analogy, modernization theorists assumed that whenever migrations take place, it is the man who leaves the village first, and goes to the city to find a job. There he finds a job in one of the better-paying industries and hopefully sends the "income" back home for the woman to support the home and children.

World Systems Theory and the Imbalance of Power

The relative powerlessness of women in development decision making may be viewed in the framework of dependency

as part of men's striving for domination and power over women (Hartmann 1981). Marxist-feminists indicate that the patriarchal control within the family or kin group is linked to the division of labor by gender. Hartmann (1981) summarizes dependence of women as follows:

Dependence is simultaneously a psychological and political-economic relationship....Control (by men) of women's labor power is the lever that allows men to benefit from women's provision of personal and household services. including relief from child-rearing and many unpleasant tasks both within and beyond households.... Patriarchy's material base is men's control of women's labor; both in the household and in the labor market, the division of labor by gender tends to benefit men (p. 372).

Women have no power as compared to men in the local, national and international spheres, all of which are interrelated. Events at the local or familial level are influenced by the institutions of the State. Similarly, every country in the world is affected by the changes that take place outside of its borders because of the existence of multinational organizations. Charlton explains this dependence with the help of an example:

The choice by a village woman to breast-feed her infant is conditioned in part by forces over which she has no control: the availability of manufactured formulas, advertising and other sources of information (such as health workers), prices and cash income, and government policies regulating the operations of multinational corporations. This example is a reminder that the conditions of a woman's life - even in remote villages - are influenced by institutions and events that are physically removed from her (1984 pp. 23-24).

Even as social, cultural and religious institutions provide women with love, honor and protection, these institutions also reinforce female dependency. As differentiation between the private and public spheres increases, women's status rapidly decreases, even if women traditionally had informal political power. Rogers points out that there is a male bias in planning and a dominance of male planners, and even when there are women planners they do not automatically reverse this trend of discrimination against themselves. Rogers argues that this is because the women in senior positions may have internalized the male value system. Nonetheless, women occupying senior positions may lead to a more positive attitude in dealing with issues regarding women and development (1980, p. 52).

Thus, world systems theory analyses development and underdevelopment in terms of power relations. It is because the center nations wield economic and social power over the periphery nations that the latter are dependent on them. Also as the city wields economic and social power over the rural areas that the latter are dependent on them. Similarly, as the lower castes are compelled to rely on the upper castes for their employment and livelihood, they are dependent on the latter. And again, it is because of the patriarchal system that men wield economic and social power over women, so that the women are dependent on men.

To break this strangle-hold of power then, women need

to get out of the patriarchal system and the caste structure. One way to do so is by migrating to the city and taking up jobs there. I found that taking up a job in the city is not just a source of income and economic power, but also an opportunity for women to become the focal point of a whole new web of relationships. When women migrate to the urban areas they are forced to mix with peoples of different castes and classes. This results in breaking the caste barriers and the traditional village hierarchy is gradually eroded. Women become independent, become bread winners (sometimes the primary one), get involved in political and community groups, interact with other women and relate to the larger network of the "clan". They are thereby no longer tied to their husband and no longer dependent on "their" men to support them.

Studies conducted by Singh (1978) and Vatuk (1982) in Delhi indicate that in recent years such new patterns of female migration can be discerned.⁶ Migration to urban areas from the villages, until recently, had been predominantly a male phenomenon, as the rates of migration indicate. In the 1970's, as a result of the earlier modernization policies, there was widespread migration of men to urban areas because of the rapid industrial

⁶ Even in Latin America the same pattern of migration is found. Initially, it was predominantly males who migrated, but in the last two decades this pattern has been reversed, and there have been streams of female migration (Lopes 1961; Margulis 1968; Kemper 1977).

development and consequentially the women were left behind in the villages. This trend has now been reversed, as the following statistics indicate.

In 1971 the total migration from rural to urban areas was 14 percent, but 23 percent for males and only 7 percent for females (Census of India). Five years later, the sex ratio of female to male migration to Delhi had increased from 768:1000 in 1971 to 801:1000 in 1975 (TCPO 1975,p.81). This would suggest that the female migration from rural to urban areas in India in general has increased over the years. Other studies indicate that an increasing number of women agricultural laborers migrate (Singh 1978; Mukerjee 1975; and Arangannal 1975; Desai and Pillai 1972;) and that male only migration has become less common in recent years (Joshi 1976; Sen 1960).

Women's Opportunities and the Structures in Society

This is study of women's lives and opportunities and whether these opportunities are affected more by development than by migration. I show the impact of development by comparing lives and opportunities of women from a developed village with that of a less developed village. Similarly, I compare migrant women with their rural counterparts to reveal the contribution of migration in shaping the lives and opportunities of women and breaking rural bonds. If migration is shown to have a greater impact than

development, then it is apparent that societal structures play a significant role. Consequently, policies that are directed to changing inherent social structures are more significant than policies directed to rapid economic growth. In short, the world systems perspective with its emphasis on power relations provides the framework necessary to understand the inherent structural imbalances.

I argue along with other sociologists and feminists that one's social background shapes one's life and opportunities. In order to understand women's lives and opportunities (economic, social, familial and educational), it is important to have an overview of the socio-economic, and cultural factors which are the two major structures of society that shapes women's lives and opportunities. The following sections will aim to understand the present structures in India, which have relevance for the women in my study. The two villages I studied are Sitha, the developed village and Palaya, the less developed village. The urban slum that I studied is Chand.⁷

Women and the Social Structure: Caste in rural India provides the basis for land distribution, the availability of government help, irrigation facilities, and educational opportunities. It is the social structure that provides the

⁷ I have used pseudonyms for the names of the three areas and for the names of the women in the study to maintain their privacy and anonymity.

framework for social interaction with separate wells for upper and lower castes, segregated residential areas and no inter-caste marriages. In order to lessen the discrimination among the castes, the Indian Constitution envisioned as one of its goals the abolition of the caste system. The caste system, which earlier was a means of division of labor, is a hierarchy of endogamous divisions in which membership is hereditary and permanent. Here hierarchy includes inequality both in status and in access to goods and services (Srinivas 1962).

In India caste restrictions are more binding on women than on men.⁸ This has led to a high degree of seclusion for women, emphasizing or reinstating their dependency on men. Subservience of women to men is encouraged (Toward Equality 1975), and this aspect coupled with the low status of castes, becomes an added burden.

Caste divisions are permanent. An individual person cannot change his/her caste, nevertheless, the whole caste group can become 'dominant' by gaining either economic or political power (Kothari 1970). A caste can be accorded a higher status, because it becomes 'dominant', or it gets "sanskritised", though this happens only locally.⁹ (Srinivas

⁸ This is discussed in greater detail in Chapter Four.

⁹ A process by which "a low Hindu caste, tribal or other group, changes its customs, ritual, ideology, and way of life in the direction of high and frequently 'twice-born' caste. This claim is made over a period of time before the arrival is conceded. (Srinivas 1966, p. 50).

1955, 1962).

The caste system also dominates the implementation of development policies and resulted in the increased abuse of the lower castes by the higher castes. Development policies favored those with economic resources to acquire new technology. The lower castes most not having the economic resources to acquire the new technology borrows money from the higher castes. This gave rise to a system of bonded labor in India. The interest on the loan is high and the upper caste family will employ the lower caste family for a very low wage. The lower caste family is expected to pay the interest and the capital from their wages. Further, the family is not allowed to look for alternative employment and in fact is enslaved or 'bonded' to the higher caste family.

The finding of caste based discriminatory practices and the existence of bonded labor in the villages would imply that caste is still an important social structure and the economic status is related to it. In the city where the population is cosmopolitan, in the sense that people from different parts of India live contiguously, ties among the families are based on kinship, and consciousness of caste hierarchy is no longer be prevalent. This breaks the dependency of the lower castes on the upper castes.

Women and the Economic Structure: Women's economic opportunity depends to a large extent on the pattern of land

holding and on the family income. Land, being the most important resource, is the very basis of livelihood in rural India. Hence, the pattern of land holding has been a major issue since independence in 1947. In fact, Indian law establishes an upper ceiling on the amount of rural land one can own, based on the type of soil and the fertility of the land. Anyone holding more than the upper limit would have to forfeit that excess to the landless farmers. This method, it was hoped, would result in the equitable distribution of land and the equitable distribution of economic resources. However, the state does not enforce this. In actual practice, there are many loop-holes, and to this day land in rural India is not equitably distributed (Dandekar and Rath 1971).

Land ownership also determines economic opportunity. In so far as the bigger farmers possess greater ability to invest, they will be better at exploiting new ideas. Since the use of modern techniques and technology are regarded as a means to increase productivity, the ability to borrow in order to implement modern techniques tends to be very closely linked with the possession of land and other assets; people with small holdings are unable to secure credit for inputs on the requisite scale (Prasad 1974, p.20). Though, in theory again, the credit system does not operate against farmers who have small holdings, in actual practice, credit is difficult to obtain because small farmers have limited

collateral. Consequently, the small farmers are either forced to sell out to the big land holders or look for other means of employment.

Farmers who cannot avail themselves of the modern techniques of cultivation resort to using intensive labor (Prasad 1974, p.19). If the small holding is the sole source of a cultivating family's livelihood, it is liable to be over-cultivated, and the soil runs the risk of being exhausted and impoverished (Sen 1962; Prasad 1974). The problem then becomes one of survival rather than one of economic opportunity. The wives of the small land holder are forced to enter into "subsistence and lowly paid activities" (Chabbra and Basu 1980, p. 34).

The findings in the U.N. Social Survey (1975) indicate that in the Third World countries rural women from families with little or no land are forced to subsist increasingly on heavy and low paid work in the agricultural sector and in informal activities such as cottage industries, petty trade, and in domestic services. Rural women, in addition to doing their share of subsistence farming for the survival of the family, are also responsible for the task of child rearing and housework, the unpaid work of food processing, fuel collection, water lifting and haulage.

Working further against the women whose families have little or no land is the fact that technology too is in favor of men and in favor of farmers with big land holdings.

First, there has been less attention directed toward the development of technologies for many of women's tasks, such as grinding grain, threshing, cooking, etc. (Ahmed 1978). Second, advanced technologies in agriculture tend to be made available only to men, even where one of the principal effects is to reduce the amount of physical force required (Ahmed 1978; Loutfi 1982). Leon and Viveros (1983) report a similar pattern in Latin America of insufficient attention to technologies that reduce or lessen the amount of burden and time spent on domestic activity.

Women traditionally do not have land in their name. But the more land held by the husband, the more government aid is available to him, including credit, irrigation facilities and agricultural input. This makes life a little easier for the women who belong to big land holding families. On the other hand, for those who have no land at all or very few acres, government help and economic opportunity is even more scarce. Women, who belong to families without any land holdings, are forced to seek daily wages working on the lands of the bigger farmers or jobs that are unskilled and lowly paid. Thus, the more land a family has, the more secure is women's employment. Conversely, the less land a family has, the greater the anxiety about finding employment.

For women migrants to the city, land holding becomes irrelevant and economic opportunities (in the form of jobs)

are more equally accessible to all. The urban area is a labor market with much greater opportunities than in the rural area.

Women and the Family Structure:

Just as the prestige of a family increases with the amount of land it has, a woman's status increases with the number of sons she has. Whether educated or not, all rural families believe that an extra son is an extra helping hand, but an extra daughter is an extra burden for whom dowry has to be given. Presently by the time an Indian woman has completed her reproductive span, she has had an average of five to six live births. Fertility in India is highly esteemed, and a woman with a large number of children is regarded with respect. A barren woman suffers the most social ostracism in the rural areas. The more children she has, especially sons, the higher her status in the society.

A high level of fertility affects women in a sex segregated society in several ways. First, it leads to high maternal mortality. This is because women have their first child at very young ages and because repeated pregnancies further endanger their health. This situation is worsened if those pregnancies are combined with malnutrition. According to the Census of India (1981) estimate, the maternal mortality was 376 per 10,000 live births. Second, as women are tied down by child care, housework, and

agricultural labor, only a few options are open to them for personal growth apart from their role as wife and mother. Third, as high value is attached to the reproductive functions, formal education tends to become defined as irrelevant for girls since they are destined for marriage and motherhood at an early age. Though the mean age at marriage increased from 16 years in 1951-1961 to 18.5 years in 1971-1981 (Census of India 1981), girls continue to be married before puberty. This is most common in the rural areas.

The rich farmers invest in technology while the poor invest in children, particularly sons. Poor women are faced with frequent pregnancies and their main role becomes that of bearing children to help in the survival of the family. In the rural areas where the economic advantages of having many children, particularly sons, is widely recognized, high fertility becomes less a personal choice of the woman than an outcome of socio-economic factors such as poverty, high infant mortality, the requirements of the family work force, and the need for old age security (Mamdani 1972). The survival of the whole household and her own is at her expense. The greater the number of children, the more the family can earn in wages. But, it is the woman who bears the hardship and danger of childbirth especially when she often has very little option or say in the matter. This lack of choice for women in matters relating to fertility is

due mainly to economic reasons and the resulting dependence on men.

Women with higher education have lower rates of fertility, but not necessarily because they have been consulted about family size. Studies have indicated that even though levels of education of women might increase, their role in the decision making process of family size does not increase (Singh and de Souza 1980; Loutfi 1980).

Since 1975, Family Planning programs have been widely propagated all across India. In the rural areas one finds larger numbers of women sterilized than men. This is because pregnancy is considered a female issue and problem. In spite of the fact that women bear the brunt of reproduction, they have no voice in deciding family size or who should undergo sterilization. This reflects the subservient position of women. In the urban areas the decision to adopt family planning maybe made jointly.

Another area that women are relegated to in the family is that of housework and child care. There areas of work are defined as "woman's work". Women in rural India spend long hours in housework gathering fuel, and taking care of the children. Household work is characterized by planners and developers as being unproductive, and thus the hours spent doing those jobs are thought to be inconsequential.

The importance given to fertility results in the emphasis on marriage. Girls from a very young age are

groomed for marriage. For women in India across the board, marriage is important and so is the giving or taking of dowry. The women try to save for their dowry from a very young age, in hopes of a better married life.

Women and the Educational Structure: The pattern of early marriage and a negative attitude to female education is largely responsible for the high rate of female illiteracy. According to the 1971 Census of India the literacy rate was 19 percent for women and 40 percent for men, and in the rural areas it was 13 percent and 24 percent respectively. The low rates for literacy for women are because education is a negative factor for the woman especially in relation to finding a groom. The prospective bridegroom is expected to have a higher level of education than the prospective bride (Singh and de Souza 1980).

Planners have always had to contend with the question of how important it is to provide formal education to rural women and men. The National Adult Education Programme (NAEP) was started in 1976 with an aim to provide facilities by which adults could learn to read and write. Most of these programs came to a halt because of decreasing enrollment. The following reasons were enumerated: first, rural people felt that there was no pressing need for them to learn to read and write. Second, they felt that the knowledge they gained would not help them with their

agricultural activities. Third, they lacked the necessary facilities to learn, a factor which contributed to low female enrollment at the commencement of the program and later to the declining attendance of those enrolled (Saigal 1981).

Loutfi (1980,p. 42) argues that more benefits will accrue to women if they receive vocational training specifically directed toward job opportunities rather than formal education. If the aim of education is to create an awareness among women regarding their rights and privileges in society and to increase their power, then informal education fulfills this role admirably. Alfred de Souza (1980,p. 12) also notes that instead of formal education for women, which is "largely irrelevant" to their needs, the situation of rural women could be improved if they are given opportunities for informal education in production, marketing, nutrition, hygiene, cooking, etc..

The real problem however lies in the cultural dominance of men over women. One of the reasons women are discouraged from formal education is because their earnings are a decisive factor in improving the conditions of the family. Unlike men, women contribute their entire earnings to support the family. Contrary to the opinion that upward social mobility is a result of increasing social mobility of the male head of the family, studies conducted by Singh (1978) and Majumdar (1978) indicate that upward social

mobility of the family is rather the result of the upward mobility of the female. This is so because women plough their entire earnings into educational facilities and opportunities for their children, while men contribute, in many cases, only half of their earnings to the family budget (Singh 1978; Majumdar 1978; Karl 1984).

The priority of men's education over women's is another facet of women's cultural dependency on men. In the rural areas, women who have less pressure on them to seek employment would be more formally educated than women who are forced to leave school and seek employment to subsidize the family income. Girls from poorer families are therefore likely to have their education discontinued at puberty, in order to find work or to be married. The children (both daughters and sons) of migrants on the other hand, would have an equal opportunity for formal education.

Women and the Political Structure: Linked with economic and educational opportunities is political awareness and participation. Except for the short period during the National Struggle for freedom in the 1940's, women have largely remained outside of the political arena.

In the rural areas, political awareness is at a minimal level. Thus, Juan (1979) notes that in Sudan, survival is the basic daily concern of the poor rural women, and "what is going on beyond one's village is not a

priority." Huntington and Nelson (1976) comment that the poor in the less developed countries do not participate in politics because politics is generally irrelevant to them or even futile in some cases, and in some cases both. Thus in societies where women are subservient to men, it is the men in the family who decide on which political candidate to support (Huston 1984, p.104). In rural India the lack of economic resources also means that women would tend to vote for those candidates or parties that give them economic incentives, bribes or cash in hand. If economic incentives are not an issue then the choice of a political candidate is decided by the male head of the household.

In theory, the Panchayat,¹⁰ (the political decision making body of the village), is open to men and women and peoples of all castes. In practice, the Panchayat has always been run by men and by people who belong to the "dominant" or powerful caste in the area. In several villages social workers have started a Mahila Samajam (women's organization), but in most cases these are informal groups that meet primarily for cultural entertainment. In the case of the rich in the rural areas, the decision to support a political party is caste based, whereas for the poorer people it is based on immediate monetary incentives.

In the cities the political party plays an important

¹⁰ The word Panchayat literally means a council of five. Though it can consist of less or more than five people, it still is the governing body of the village.

role in determining the candidate. Women who have migrated to the city are far more embroiled in a political atmosphere.

CONCLUSION

These five major areas of areas of social life (social, economic, familial, educational and political) shape women's lives and opportunities available to them. Based on these areas I interviewed women so as to understand their lives and the opportunities available to them. In addition to this, I collected data from each household for each of the villages and the urban slum so as to give a general understanding of the distribution of caste, land holding and occupational structure, family size, educational level, and political awareness and participation. In Chapter II, I discuss the methodology involved in this study and in Chapters III and IV, the two villages Sitha and Palaya. In Chapter III, I present the general layout of the villages, the administrative setup in the rural areas, and the data collected from each of the households on the caste structure, occupational structure, land holding pattern, educational level, family size and political participation. In Chapter IV the focus will be on the women themselves. I compare the lives and opportunities of the women from a developed village (Sitha) with a less developed village (Palaya). In Chapter V, I summarize my findings from the

urban slum, Chand and describe the women's lives and opportunities. In the conclusion, Chapter VI, I contrast the lives and opportunities of the women from the rural areas and the urban area.

CHAPTER II

METHODOLOGY

PROBLEM FORMULATION

Most studies on women and development have been based on questions asked of men about the role of women in the family and society (Reiter 1975). This means that the data collected is indirect, as men have answered questions about women's lives and opportunities. It is important to conduct a study on women, where women themselves are interviewed and talk about their opportunities and lives. My study does so by talking to women in the rural and urban areas in India about their lives and opportunities.

The study focuses on three categories of women; they are: women from a developed rural area, women from a less developed rural area, and women who have migrated to an urban area. I focused on two villages: a developed and a less developed village. By comparing the women from these two areas the objective was to examine the effect of development on the lives and opportunities of women. In the second part of the study I examined the women in an urban slum and compared their lives and opportunities to those of their rural counterparts. In this way I examine the impact of migration on the lives and opportunities of women. In

sum, the study examines the impact of development and migration on the lives and opportunities of women. I focus on these three groups of women because they should differ substantially on the key variables¹ that I studied.

For the purpose of this study the selection of the developed and less developed rural area is based on the type of land and amenities like electricity and irrigation facilities. The urban slum is Chand, because it has a fairly high number of families from the same taluk as the villages. To study the differences in the lives and opportunities among the women, I traced the migrants² from a taluk in the rural area to the urban center. These urban women were compared to the rural women who had not migrated. Chand is the urban area discussed in this study, Sitha, the developed rural area, and Palaya, a less developed rural area.

Following Development theorists, I hypothesize that, women from a less developed rural area are less likely to be aware of their opportunity to inherit land, their access to education, the employment opportunities and the right to

¹ The key variables are occupational patterns, land holding and inheritance, educational opportunities, marriage and dowry, family size and child care and political consciousness.

² For this study a migrant is a person who has moved from a rural area to an urban center and settled for at least five years or more. Five years was chosen as the cut off point as this would give them time to assimilate and get themselves acclimatized to the urban way of life.

their earned income compared to women from a more developed area and the urban area. These women are also less likely to make a choice of their political affiliation as that is a choice determined by their caste and that too by the male members of the caste. Even the choice of number of children is made by the husbands, instead of being a joint decision by the wife and husband.

Conversely, it would be expected that the more developed rural area is characterized by women inheriting land, having a higher rate of literacy, aware of and having a right to the income they earn, aware of consequences of giving and receiving dowry, and a voice in the decision making process of the number of children as compared to the less developed area. These women then would also be aware of social organizations that would help them in cases of wife abuse, etc., and choose to support a particular political party of their own free will rather than comply with the decision made by the men.

In the developed rural area, development did not permeate to all sections of the population. It is only in the richer and wealthier families that the women's lives and opportunities are different from the lives and opportunities of the less developed rural area. In fact the poorer women's lives in the developed village are no different from the poorer women's lives in the less developed village.

Third, the women's lives and opportunities in the

urban area³ are very different compared to the women in the developed and the less developed areas because of the fact of migration. Migration results in the women interacting with people of varied castes and social classes.

Consequently women develop a greater awareness of their rights. Hence women from the urban area have greater opportunities for employment and education and right to income, inheritance, choice of marriage and political freedom, than women from a developed rural area.

UNIVERSE AND SAMPLING

I used a purposive method of sampling. I chose to focus on Tamil Nadu, a state in South India, and specifically on Salem District,⁴ because of my familiarity with the local language and the area. Of all the taluks⁵ in the district Salem Taluk was chosen as it experienced the most out-migration (Census of India - Salem District

³ It should be noted that the urban women are studied only in comparison to their rural counterparts and not in relation to other women in the city, or the problems of assimilation etc..

⁴ From the level of the state, the next smaller administrative division is called district, which is broken down into taluks, which is further sub-divided into panchayats. Taluks are collection of panchayat unions and panchayat unions are a collection of villages.

⁵ There are 16 districts in Tamil Nadu. They are Madras, Chengalpattu, North Arcot, South Arcot, Dharmapuri, Salem, Coimbatore, Nilgiris, Tirunelveli, Kanyakumari, Ramanathapuram and Periyar. There are nine taluks in Salem District. They are Attur, Mettur, Nammakkal, Omalur, Rasipuram, Salem, Sankari, Tiruchengode and Yercaud.

Report, 1971), and thus it would be easy to trace migrants from these taluks.⁶

I divided the villages of Salem into two categories: those that had wet land and those that had dry land and subdivided each of the two categories into those that had electricity and running water supply and those that did not. Areas with very fertile land generate higher incomes than areas with dry land, as the investments into the land do not have to be very high to generate a substantial income. Also, the presence of electricity indicates that the land is irrigated with electricity pumping the water into the fields rather than having bullocks drawing the water from the well or river.

The above criteria generated four lists: one, dry land with irrigation facilities, two, dry land without irrigation facilities, three, wet land with irrigation facilities, and four, wet land without irrigation facilities.

In order to select of a developed and less developed village, I chose to focus on two of the listings. They

⁶ According to the Census of India - Salem District Report, 1971, Nammakkal Taluk faced the most amount out-migration. But in the same period 1960-1970 the Salem District Steel factory was built in Nammakkal Taluk and this led to a lot of villages being taken by the Steel Factory. Thus, it led to the displacement of all the inhabitants of the villages. The taluk which faced the most amount of out-migration next to Nammakkal was Salem, and as the later did not have any apparent conditions for out-migration, it was thought better to choose Salem Taluk as the area of study.

represent the extreme categories: dry land with no irrigation facilities and wet land with irrigational facilities. Within each of the two lists I focused on smaller size villages, that is, those with a population of less than 1000 and households less than 100. This was done because of my time constraint in conducting the study and because a smaller population size would help in establishing a better rapport with the people of the village.

From the two listings of the villages only those with Hindus were selected. I did not want to study villages which were predominantly Christian or Muslim. The Christians and Muslims are a well organized group because of the nature of their religions. Hence their organization would be a confounding variable.⁷ Also there are very few villages that are predominantly Christian or Muslim in Salem Taluk and it would be difficult to find villages with a similar distribution of religions and caste.

The two final lists comprised of ten villages each, of which one village was chosen at random from each list. The villages are Palaya and Sitha. Sitha is the developed village and has wet land and electricity. It belongs to Pandi panchayat union and firka.⁸ There are 61

⁷ Some sects of Hinduism are well organized in the cities but not so in the villages. Yet they do not have the structure afforded by the Christians and Muslim communities.

⁸ Firka is a revenue unit comprising of a collection of panchayat unions and many times a part of a panchayat union may fall under one firka and the other part under

households in Sitha. Palaya has dry land and limited electricity and is a less developed village. It belongs to Thalam panchayat union and Malai firka.⁹ Palaya has 163 households.

I used a different process of selection of the urban slum. I wanted to identify migrants from the same taluk in order to compare the perception of the urban women with those in the rural areas. Tracing migrants from the same taluk or area would ensure that the social, cultural and economic conditions of the urban women before they migrated resembled those of their rural counterparts. This would enable a comparison of the social cultural and economic factors.¹⁰

Before 1975, slums in Delhi were a consequence of a group of people settling in a particular area. When other streams of migrants came into the city from different areas, the slums grew in size, but maintained their regional character (Singh and de Souza 1980). For example, the people from Salem would be together in one area of the slum

another firka.

⁹ Thalam and Malai are pseudonyms.

¹⁰ This is a one-time cross sectional study, unlike a longitudinal study. In a longitudinal study, the idea would have been to select a few women from a rural area and trace them over the years till they migrated to a city, keeping track of their roles and perceptions along the way. Since this was impossible, the next best alternative was to select slum dwellers who came from a particular area (that is, taluk) and compare their rural counterparts from the same taluk.

and the people from Rajasthan in another area. In 1975 under emergency rule, all slums in the city were cleared overnight and the inhabitants relocated to the outskirts of the city. This resulted in people losing their small community. The removal of the slums meant that the regional quality of the slum was lost and also the people lost their sense of identity. It also meant that the slums were relatively new. That made it impossible to trace people from a specific area in Tamil Nadu.

However, there are two very old settlements in Delhi which the Government did not clear. One of them is in Old Delhi and the other is called Chand. In the Old Delhi slum the migrants from Salem are scattered and it is very difficult to administer an interview schedule to all the migrants from Salem Taluk. In Chand however, the houses are organized in rows and all the inhabitants from Salem are largely located in one area. So of the two slums I chose Chand because of the feasibility of doing the study in that area and tracing the inhabitants of Salem Taluk.

RESPONDENTS OR SOURCE OF DATA

I used two sets of respondents for the study. First, I interviewed the oldest member in each household in the both the villages and the urban slum in order to obtain demographic and economic information, like land holding patterns, cropping patterns, irrigation facilities, income

levels, education, number of children, and caste membership. I visited all the 61 households in Sitha, the 163 households in Palaya and the 25 households in Chand. Second, to collect information on the lives and opportunities of women, I randomly selected women in Sitha, Palaya and Chand and interviewed eight women in Sitha, twelve in Palaya and eight in Chand.¹¹

TECHNIQUES OF DATA COLLECTION

I employed two methods of data collection in the study. The first method of data collection is through formal interviews with the oldest member of every household in the two rural areas and urban slum.¹² The formal interviews helped me gather background information on landholding patterns and number of wells and irrigation facilities, income, occupational structure, caste distribution, educational level, and family size. I also conducted formal interviews with Government Officials, such as the Assistant Tahsildar, the Revenue Officer and the Village Administrative Officer. The second major technique of data collection was observation and informal interviews

¹¹ The breakdown by caste for Sitha is three Vanneer women, two Vallal and three Nadar women. In Palaya the breakdown was five Vanneer women, two each from the Nadar and Arundithiyar castes and three from Pallakamoodu. All the eight women from Chand were from the Vanneer caste, as that area consisted of only Vanneer families.

¹² A copy of the questionnaire is enclosed in Appendix A.

with the women and men in Sitha, Palaya and Chand.

As the purpose of the study was to gather information about women's lives and opportunities, I had to get them to talk to me about their lives, their aspirations and frustrations. To do that I went to the field everyday and let the women get comfortable with me. Sometimes I gathered information in a group where there were two or three women but mostly I talked to women on a one-on-one basis. By establishing a familiarity with the women, they were willing to talk freely with me about themselves. Also, it helped me understand and empathize with the lives of the women. It is very important in a study of this nature to have the "verstehen" approach that Weber (1968) emphasized.¹³ I also wanted to be able to have an in depth and inside knowledge of the women's lives and opportunities. For this purpose I gathered background information on both the villages and the slum. I visited the field everyday and the information was gathered over months.

DATA COLLECTION

To collect information on women's economic opportunity, I recorded information from each household on

¹³ What is significant in this approach is a method which both interprets and understands, and explains. This interpretation is important because this gives me the ability to explain. So it is of utmost importance to understand before asking questions and then explain these interpretations.

its land holding, the type of work, the irrigation and agricultural facilities they have, the government help and the supplemental technologies afforded them. I particularly asked the women about their right to land ownership and whether they control their work environment and income.

I also collected data on the family planning program in the villages. I questioned the rural women on the number of children and whether they have a say or not in the number of children they should have. I also addressed the problem of doing the housework and child care.

I collected information from the women about their views on marriage and the practice of dowry. I measured level of education by the years of education completed by the women and men. I also collected data on the drop out rate among girls and boys.

I studied caste based oppression by the number of caste based wells, number of inter-caste marriages and the number of people in occupations other than those restricted to their caste. I also gathered information on the existence of bonded labor.

CONCLUSION

The collection of data took approximately eight months. The information gathered from the two villages, Sitha and Palaya, and from Chand is analyzed in the following three chapters. In Chapter III, I will give a

general overview of the two villages, from the data collected from all the households. This will enable us to understand and place the lives and opportunities of the women in the social, familial, economic and political context of the two villages. In the following chapter (that is, Chapter IV), I will discuss the interviews with the women in the two villages and compare and contrast their lives and opportunities. In Chapter V, I will discuss the data gathered from the women of Chand, the urban slum. Chapter VI is the conclusion of the study where I will show that in the rural areas development has not helped women but the fact of migration has helped far more in improving their lives and opportunities. Appendix B gives an account of the experiences in the field.

CHAPTER III

SOCIAL STRUCTURES IN TWO RURAL AREAS:

SITHA AND PALAYA

This chapter begins with a brief overview of the demography of the two villages, Sitha and Palaya.¹ Then I will discuss the land holding patterns, occupational structure, income and educational status of the people in the two villages. Finally I will examine political issues such as water shortage and cooking stoves. The purpose of this overview is to present the two villages in perspective, in order to better understand women's lives and opportunities in relation to the economic, educational, familial and political structure.

Sitha and Palaya belong to Salem District of Tamil Nadu. Salem District has many large and small industries, but its economy still depends largely on agriculture. Seventy-one percent of the population of Salem district is distributed among one thousand small and medium sized villages,² and as many as 63 percent² of the workers are cultivators and agricultural laborers. About half of the

¹ Appendix C gives a detailed account of the Geography and Administrative Setup in the two villages.

² Sitha and Palaya are small to medium sized villages.

district area is under cultivation. The district also has vast areas of protected forests. According to the various agricultural development schemes, the district has made great strides in rural development in the areas of dairy products, poultry, animal husbandry, farm mechanization, improved seeds (high yield variety), irrigation and co-operative societies (Salem District Report, Census of India, 1971).

DEMOGRAPHY

As shown in Table 1, both the villages have a considerably lower female population compared to the male, lower even than the national proportion of females to males, of 933 females per thousand males.³ A low percentage of females in the population is usually a resultant of high female infant and maternal mortality (Toward Equality 1975).

The village of Sitha has 61 households with a population of 251 and an average household size of 4.1. The percentage of women and girls in the village is approximately 41 percent of the total population of the village. About 46 percent of the families have two children each, and 34 percent have one child each. The people of this village are aware of family planning programmes and

³ India is one of the few countries where the number of females compared to number of males is considerably lower than other countries. (Statistical Abstract of India, Department of Statistics, Ministry of Planning 1986).

have decided not to have more than two children, with the exception of eight families, who have more than three children.

The village of Palaya is comprised of 163 households with a population of 728 people, of which 45 percent are women and girls. The average household size is 4.47, with 62 percent of the families approximately having two to three children. These data suggest that there is no difference in the composition of females in both the villages. Table 1 gives the percentage of women and men in each of the villages.

TABLE 1

PERCENTAGE⁴ OF WOMEN AND MEN IN SITHA AND PALAYA

Village	Women	Men	Total
Sitha	41 (102)	59 (149)	100 (251)
Palaya	45 (327)	55 (401)	100 (728)

Caste⁵ plays a very important role in the lives of the people in India, especially in a rural area where

⁴ The absolute values are given beside the percentage values.

⁵ In India, there are four major castes, and each of these have subcastes. Of the four major castes are, the Brahmins or priestly caste is on the top, followed by the administrators or Kshatriyas, then the Vaishyas or tradesmen and finally the menials or Shudras. The "untouchables" fall outside of the framework as they are considered to be "outcastes".

personal and social relations are defined by caste rules and restrictions. Table 2 depicts the caste composition and the hierarchical status of the castes in the two villages.

TABLE 2
CASTE FRAMEWORK IN SITHA AND PALAYA

Sitha	Palaya
Vanneer	Vanneer
Vallal	Pallakamoodu
Nadar	Nadar
	Arundithiyar

In Sitha, there are three caste groups, Vanneers, Vallals and Nadars. In the caste framework the Vanneers are Vaishyas and are a majority constituting nearly 56 percent of the population. The Vallals constitute 28 percent of the population and are categorized as Shudras, a Scheduled Caste. The Nadars are also Shudras and a Scheduled Caste, falling below the Vallals in the caste framework. They constitute approximately 16 percent of the population.

In Sitha, the highest caste is Vanneer, but the dominant caste is Vallal. To understand this phenomenon it is necessary to know the history of the Vallals and their relationship to the Indian Constitution's goal to "uplift"

the castes and tribes through affirmative action.⁶ This policy made funds, positions in universities, admissions to schools, and jobs, easier for people who had borne years of injustice. The affirmative action is based purely on caste and not on the economic condition of the caste member. However, there is a distinction made between scheduled⁷ and backward castes, the latter getting more benefits. The Vallals are a subset of the Shudra caste and are defined as a scheduled caste. However in 1962, the Vallals succeeded in having themselves reclassified as a backward caste. As a result they could avail themselves of the better opportunities the Government provided. This made the already rich Vallals even richer. The Vallals thus exemplifies Rajani Kothari's (1971) discussion of dominant castes, in which a socially backward caste gains dominance through economic and political power. The Vallal's economic power thus modifies the social status ranking in Sitha. It is Vallal on the top, then Vanneer and subsequently the Nadar. This however does not mean that caste no longer plays an important role, because a Vanneer still will not

⁶ Various safeguards have been provided in the Constitution for promoting and safeguarding the interests of the Scheduled Castes. A listing of the safeguards and their corresponding Articles in the Constitution is given in Appendix II.

⁷ Scheduled Castes comprised all the Untouchables, those that fell outside of the caste hierarchy. But the Backward Castes are those that are low in the caste hierarchy but because of caste rules were oppressed economically and socially.

marry a Vallal, because the latter is of lower caste than the former.⁸ Table 3 depicts the distribution of people in the various castes in Sitha and Palaya.

TABLE 3
DISTRIBUTION BY CASTE MEMBERSHIP

Village	Caste	Percent of Number of Population Households	
Sitha	Vanneer	56 %	34
	Vallal	28 %	10
	Nadar	16 %	17
Palaya	Vanneer	89 %	145
	Pallakamoodu	7 %	11
	Nadar	2 %	3
	Arundithiyar	2 %	4

In Palaya, the castes that inhabit the area are, Vanneers, Pallakamoodu, Nadar and Arundithiyar. In the caste framework Vanneers are Vaishyas and constitute 89 percent of the population in Palaya. The Pallakamoodu fall in the Shudra category, constituting seven percent of the total population. Nadars are also Shudras, but ranked below the Pallakamoodu in the caste hierarchy, and constitute two percent of the population. The Arundithiyar is also a

⁸ In Sitha, in spite of the fact that the Vallals are a dominant caste, for this study I will discuss the Vanneers first, then the Vallals and finally the Nadars. This will make comparison with the other village Palaya easier to understand, because there the Vanneers are highest and the dominant caste.

shudra subcaste but ranked below the Nadars. They comprise two percent of the population. Both the Nadars and Arundithiyars are classified as Scheduled Castes by the Government of India. The highest caste in Palaya are the Vanneers.

Generally in the rural areas, caste membership defines where a person can live. Palaya is structured around caste membership. However, in Sitha the land holdings are large and the wet land is scattered across the entire village. As a result the richer peoples' houses are also scattered. The poorer castes are employed by the richer castes and live on the latter's land.

TOPOGRAPHY

Sitha is thus made up of scattered houses with each household consisting of a land owning family along with their helpers and workers. Sometimes there are ten acres of land separating one household from the other.

Palaya is divided into hamlets on the basis of caste membership. The main hamlet in Palaya consists only of the Vanneers and comprises 100 households. This hamlet goes by the name Palaya, whereas the other hamlets take their caste names to be name of their hamlet. Some of the Vanneers are scattered by the roadside and the rest of the Vanneers live near their land holdings.

According to the 1971 Census of India, Palaya has

only hundred households. But on doing a census of the village, I found that the village actually consists of 163 households. The discrepancy between the Census count and mine can be explained in two ways. One, census officials usually go to the hamlet which is "nearest" to the road and ask them to list the number of households in the village. As the Vanneers hamlet is also called Palaya. There are 100 Vanneer households. Most of those households are located near the main road. There is another factor that may contributed to the erroneous count. In Tamil, the local language of the people, the same word is used to refer to village and hamlet. The Vanneers live closest to the highway and give the number of 100 households to each of the following questions:

How many houses are there in this village?

How many houses are there in this 'entire' village?

The answer changes to include all the other hamlets only when they are asked the question of, "how many houses are there including those of other castes?" So when asking information about a village, it is necessary to emphasize that you are concerned about the entire village inclusive of all the castes and not just the hamlet. It is possible that the Census officials did not distinguish between the two concepts. I made the mistake of asking for the number of households in Palaya when I first arrived and got the same

answer of 100! My error became apparent to me only after I completed the survey of the entire village.

Just as caste determines the location of a person's home, it also determines the land holding patterns and the agricultural facilities available to the people.

LAND DISTRIBUTION

Agricultural production depends to a great extent on the pattern of land utilization. About 52 percent of Salem district area was cultivated and sown. This was slightly above the state average of 48 percent for Tamil Nadu. As much as 19 percent of the land is covered by forests in Salem district and eight percent of land was barren and uncultivable. In Sitha 55 percent of the land is wet and thus there a high yield from the land. However in Palaya 86 percent of the land is dry and the yield also very low. The type and land and yield determine the amount of government facilities that will be available to them. Typically, wet land is a better collateral than dry land, and a person with wet land has a better possibility of obtaining the limited government facilities than a person with dry land. Thus the richer farmers have better access to the government facilities for irrigation, better seeds, etc..

Sitha has predominantly wet land, because of a river that flows through the village. Of the 61 Households in

Sitha, eleven households do not have any land holdings. The total or net area available for irrigation is 153 acres, of which 85 acres (or 56 percent) is wet land and the remaining 68 acres is dry land. Of the dry land 5 acres of land was left fallow in the years 1985-1986, of which four acres belonged to four Nadar families and the remaining one acre to a Vanneer family.

In Sitha, of the fifty families who have land holdings, 28 households reported having irrigation facilities such as a well or a combination of well and electricity to draw water from the wells. Twenty-six of these households received help from the Government in the form of bank loans, electrical connections, high yield variety of seeds, etc.

In Palaya the total area available for irrigation is 170 acres, of which only 26 acres (or 14 percent) is wet land, and the remaining 144 acres is dry land. The type of wet land in Palaya differs from the wet land in Sitha. In Sitha the wet land is naturally wet because of the presence of a river. In Palaya all the land is essentially dry land and the 24 acres of wet land is artificially created through irrigating the land throughout the year with water from the wells.⁹

⁹ This is an expensive method in India, and especially Salem, where the monsoons are short and the summers are hot and long resulting in water loss from the wells. So every two years the farmers who own wells have to dig deeper for more water, depending on the monsoons. This method of

LAND DISTRIBUTION BY CASTE

The data on Sitha and Palaya show that the land holdings are mainly in the hands of the upper or dominant castes of a village. These castes also own most of the wet land. This influences the income obtained from the land. In addition to land holdings, the irrigation facilities too is concentrated in the hands of the upper or dominant castes.

In Sitha, the Vallals own 57 acres of land, of which 53 acres is wet land. This is approximately 63 percent of the total wet land. The Vallals have mostly wet land and only 4 acres of the land owned by them is dry land. The Vanneers own 84 acres of land, of which 32 acres is wet land and 52 acres is dry land. Only one Vanneer family is landless. The Nadars own 12 acres of dry land, of which nine acres is left fallow. In short, the Vallals who comprise 28 percent of the population own 38 percent of the land. The Vanneers who comprise 56 percent of the population own 55 percent of the total land. The Nadars who comprise 16 percent of the population own nine percent of the total land. This distribution has to be understood in the light of the amount of wet land owned. Though the Vallals own only 38 percent of the land in Sitha, they control 62 percent of the wet land. Land is thus not

irrigation is limited to people who have their own wells.

equitably distributed in Sitha and the upper castes still control most of the land. Even the few acres of land the Nadars have is uncultivable because it is dry and they do not have the facilities to irrigate it.

In Palaya, of the total 144 acres of dry land, Vanneers own 125 acres. Of the 24 acres of wet land, they own 22 acres. The Vanneers have control over 85 percent of the total land available for cultivation in Palaya. Of the 125 acres of dry land belonging to the Vanneers, 47 acres was left fallow.

The Pallakamoodu own 20 acres of land totally of which 18 acres are dry land and two acres are wet land. Of the 18 acres of dry land 14 acres were left fallow. There are four Arundithiyar families, one does not have any land holdings and the other three own one acre of dry land each, all of which are left fallow. The three Nadar families have no land holding whatsoever. In summary in Palaya, Vanneers who constitute 89 percent of the population control 86 percent of the land and Pallakamoodu comprise seven percent of the population and have 12 percent of the land. The Arundithiyars have two percent of the land and the Nadars do not own any land.

In comparing the two villages it is apparent that development did not change the pattern of land holding, as the upper castes control most of the land in both the villages and consequently are the richer people in both the

TABLE 4
PERCENT¹⁰ DISTRIBUTION OF LAND BY CASTE MEMBERSHIP

Village	Caste	Wet Land	Dry Land	Total	Fallow
Sitha	Vallal	62	6	37	-
	Vanneer	38	76	54	20
	Nadar	-	18	9	80
	Total	100 (85)	100 (68)	100 (153)	100 (5)
Palaya	Vanneer	92	86	86	73
	Pallakamoodu	8	12	12	22
	Nadar	-	-	-	-
	Arundithiyar	-	2	2	5
	Total	100 (24)	100 (146)	100 (170)	100 (64)

villages. The poor in both villages are dependent on the richer/upper castes for their livelihood. The Table 4 gives the distribution of land by the various castes in the two villages.

Among the 163 households in Palaya, only 14 households have irrigation facilities. Of these, 13 households are Vanneers and the remaining one is a Pallakamoodu family. All the wells are manually operated with bullocks.

To review, structurally, differences in the overall

¹⁰ The absolute values for each column is given within parentheses.

level of development are not reflected in the distribution of land, as the dominant and richer castes in both the villages still have control of most of the land, and also own all the wet land available. The availability of irrigation facilities is also restricted to the dominant and richer castes in the two villages.

INCOME FROM LAND

The type of land a person owns determines the type and quality of crop. This in turn determines the income from the land. In Sitha, fifty-six percent of the land is wet and very rich and thus the income from the land is also greater than for the people of Palaya where most of the land (86 percent) of the land is dry and arid.

In Sitha, the wet land allows for the growth of cash crops.¹¹ All the Vallals grow two main cash crops on their land, sugarcane and coconut. The Vallals irrigate their dry

¹¹ Cash crops are those that are not for direct consumption but are products that generate a higher income because they are used either in industries to make other products or are considered a luxury product. For example, sugar is a cash crop, because it is considered a luxury product, and also it is not for direct consumption. The Government has a quota for the consumption of sugar. It determines the amount of sugar a family of four would need and anything above that is considered a luxury, and is to be bought in the open market. The opposite of cash crops are those that are deemed as necessary crops like rice, wheat, vegetables, etc.. These products do not generate a high income. Rice is a staple food in South India, and requires wet land. Even in an area where monsoons are regular and frequent, the return from rice is not as great as cultivating a cash crop.

land to grow groundnut (or peanut). The same pattern for the wet and dry land is followed by the Vanneers. Two of the Vallal families also grow rice.

The people who grow sugarcane have the necessary machines to convert the cane to juice and boil it until they get jaggery (or raw brown sugar) from it. This jaggery is then sold to the nearby sugar mill which processes it and makes pure white sugar. Usually people in the villages use jaggery rather than sugar in their cooking, the preparation of sweets¹² and in their coffee. The coconut tree also yields a very high income because every part of the tree can be sold or put to use.¹³

Palaya does not have this range of cash crops. Because it mainly has dry land, it has only a small harvest of rice and coconut. As rice needs to be transplanted into wet fields, the crop is highly dependent on monsoons or ample water facilities. Rice is also a labor intensive crop. In Palaya, if the monsoons fail, the rice crop is

¹² Sweets in the South India are different from the sweets in the Western world. Sweets are served as a main dish, and cooked mostly with jaggery. They are sometimes served as desserts.

¹³ The coconut leaves are used to thatch the roofs of the huts. The outer covering of the coconut is used to make coir. The inside white kernel can be used in cooking or can be dried. If dried, it can be used in cooking or made into coconut oil. This oil is very popular all over India and used as hair and body oil. Coconut is also a sacred fruit in India. All religious Hindu festivals offer coconut to the deities and at weddings in South India it is presented to the visitors as a sign of good will.

lost, and the village falls into a slump. On the other hand in Sitha the soil is highly fertile and well irrigated because of the government facilities available to families with substantial land holdings. Thus their rice crop can survive a delayed monsoon.

In the villages the occupational structure and income levels are associated directly with land holding patterns. If income from the land is low, then the only option open to the people is work as laborers in the households or farms of the richer people.

OCCUPATIONAL STRUCTURE

In both the villages of Sitha and Palaya, the people with land holdings that can be irrigated are farmers. The rest of the people are daily laborers and have the problem of finding employment every day.

In Sitha 56 percent of the population work on their own land. The remaining 44 percent of Sitha's population are coolies or daily wage laborers, working on someone else's land for a daily wage. Eighteen percent of the coolies have land of their own, but not sufficient to sustain them. All the Vallals are self employed farmers, with the exception of one family who is an absentee landlord. The main occupation of the Vanneers (62 percent) who own considerable land is farming and the remaining 38 percent are coolies of which eight percent have the

secondary occupation of farming. The Nadars are primarily coolies.

In Palaya, 78 percent of the population is employed as daily wage laborers or coolies. Of the total population 33 percent are also involved in weaving. Twenty percent of the households are self employed weavers. In the entire village only three households, that is, two percent of the population, reported that their main occupation was farming.

In Palaya 77 percent of the 145 Vanner households, are employed in coolie work and twenty percent (which is approximately 29 households), own weaving equipment. All of the Vanner looms are run with electricity. The remaining three percent of the Vanner households are self employed, and own tea and coffee shops, and small grocery stores.

All the Pallakamoodu households, with the exception of four families, are employed as coolies. In one family the male head is a mechanic and the other household is predominantly involved in farming. The remaining two families own manually operated weaving equipment. All the Nadar and Arundithiyar families work as coolies.

The above description of occupational patterns in Palaya, shows that the few available facilities are distributed among and controlled by the "better-off" castes. The Nadars and Arundithiyars, who are at the bottom of the caste hierarchy, work only as coolies, while the Vanners, some of whom are financially better off, can afford the

'mechanized' weaving machines. Financial aid is available to those who are able to put some money up front or "are in the know" of Government officials. Even the two Pallakamoodu families who own weaving equipment conform to the overall pattern. They either have their own financial resources as in the case of one of the families, or have "contacts" in the government as in the case of a Pallakamoodu family, where the female head is a member of the Village Taluk.

In both the villages, people who work as coolies are not assured of coolie work from day to day. They leave for work at 7:30 in the morning but the landlords and owners of mills and weaving equipments arbitrarily decide who will work that day. Some have to return home without work or wages for that day.

EDUCATION

The occupational structure is closely linked to the educational patterns. Given that employment is assured only for the richer castes, it is not surprising that the same pattern holds true for access to educational facilities.

LITERACY

In both Sitha and Palaya, men have a higher rate of literacy than women. In Sitha out of a population of 251, 25 percent of the people are educated, that is, they have

completed at least six years of formal schooling. Of the 64 educated persons, 35 are Vallal, 26 are Vanneer and only five are Nadar. The proportion of women to men who are educated is nearly 1:2. Studying the patterns among the adults and children could give us an understanding of whether the rate of literacy has increased or decreased from one generation to the next. Table 5 gives the distribution of adults and children in Sitha and Palaya.

TABLE 5
PERCENT DISTRIBUTION OF ADULTS AND CHILDREN

Village	Caste	Number of Adults		Number of Children	
		Female	Male	Female	Male
Sitha	Vanneer	57	60	64	56
	Vallal	10	13	19	19
	Nadar	32	27	17	25
		100	100	100	100
		(66)	(101)	(36)	(48)
Palaya	Vanneer	80	87	92	92
	Pallakamoodu	17	9	3	5
	Nadar	1	2	2	2
	Arundithiyar	2	2	3	1
		100	100	100	100
		(179)	(204)	(148)	(205)

Table 6 depicts the percent of educated adults and children in the two villages. Of the 20 adult Vallal, 90 percent have attended school, and three have had education beyond high school. Of the Vallals three dropped out after

eighth grade, others went on to complete their high school education and one of them became a lawyer. Among the Vallal children, all have either attended school or are still undergoing schooling. All the Vallal children intend completing their high school education and one girl is doing her baccalaureate. Of the adult Vanneers only six attended school. Whereas, from a population of 50 Vanneer children, 19 (that is 38 percent) of them have had some education. Among the adult Nadars, six percent have had some education. Among 18 Nadar children, only three have attended school.

TABLE 6
PERCENT¹⁴ EDUCATED ADULTS AND CHILDREN

Village	Caste	Percent of Adults		Percent of Children	
		Female	Male	Female	Male
Sitha	Vanneer	20	22	43	54
	Vallal	60	67	50	38
	Nadar	20	11	7	8
		100	100	100	100
		(10)	(18)	(14)	(24)
Palaya	Vanneer	83	81	94	94
	Pallakamoodu	17	19	6	6
	Nadar	-	-	-	-
	Arundithiyar	-	-	-	-
		100	100	100	100
		(6)	(16)	(17)	(33) 99

¹⁴ Absolute values for each column are given within parentheses.

In Palaya, only 10 percent of the people have ever attended school out of a population of 728. The proportion of female to male in the entire village is 1:1.2. But the number of women who are educated compared to the number of men is only 1:4. Only six percent of the adults have attended school, and most of them are men (73 percent). Among the 50 children who have attended school only 34 percent are girls.

Among the Vanneer, about six percent of the adult population has attended school and among the children 14 percent have attended school. Nine percent of the adult Pallakamoodu population has attended school compared to the 21 percent of the child population that is presently attending school. None of the adults or children among the Arundithiyars or Nadars have had any education.

The above description indicates that the men in the village have a higher level of education than women and that the higher and dominant castes have more education than the poorer and lower castes. These differences on literacy reflect the patterns of school dropout ratios in the two villages.

DROPOUT RATE

There is high dropout rate in both Sitha and Palaya, especially among the poor. They usually drop out after the

fifth grade. Also among the poor the drop after fifth grade is the highest among the girls.

In Sitha, of the adult population that attended school 67 percent dropped out before sixth grade. That rate declined to 26 percent among the children. The Vanneer adults had the highest drop out rate of 100 percent, but among their children only 21 percent dropped out. Among the Vallals the adult drop out rate was 63 percent by sixth grade whereas only two out of sixteen children dropped out. Among the Nadars all the adults dropped out by sixth grade, and only 33 percent of the children dropped out. Though the drop out rate has steadily decreased, it is clear that the drop out among the richer and dominant castes is far lower than the poorer castes. This is because only the better off castes can afford to send their children to school. The lower castes cannot send their children to school because that would be a loss of additional income for the family.

In Palaya, 69 percent of the adults who attended school dropped out before sixth grade, while only 36 percent of their children did so. Among the Vanneers, 68 percent of the adults and 37 percent of the children dropped out by sixth grade. Three out of four (that is, 75 percent) of the adults and two out of three children among the Pallakamoodu dropped out before sixth grade.

There is a lack of interest in formal education among most of the poorer people, because earning a livelihood at

the present time is a pressing need as there no source of steady source of income forthcoming for the family. As Parvathi a Nadar from Sitha says, "what is there in sending children to school? What are they going to do with education? Are they going to get a highly paid job? It is better they go and get a job now. At least that way they will bring home some money." Also the possibility of a better job in the future is not assured. Maniamma, a Nadar¹⁵ from Palaya says,

the government officials say that if children have an education, then they will get a job with the government. But to get a job with the government, we have to know somebody. Without knowing someone in the government we can't get a job. People say that folks like us, because of the reserved quota, can get into the government easily, but you don't see any one of us working with the government ... For now I don't have money and I have to send my son to work.

Another reason why the drop out rate after the fifth grade is high is because until then education is totally free of charge and the school provides lunch for the children at school. Once the child enters the sixth grade, the local area school requires them to send Rs.10 per month. This may seem very little in comparison to what the government thinks it is offering the people, but on an average monthly family income of Rs.250 for a family of 4,

¹⁵ Nadars are a scheduled caste, because of which they have privileges that the government accords them, like jobs, education facilities etc..

it is about 4 percent of their income.

Besides education that the government provides at a subsidized rate there are other governmental facilities and programs aim to improve the conditions of the people in the rural areas. Two such programs which I would like to highlight are, irrigation facilities, (including water facilities, high yield variety (HYV) seeds and loans for constructing wells), and cooking stoves.

GOVERNMENT HELP

IRRIGATION FACILITIES

The constitutional requirement of aiding the scheduled castes and making India self sufficient led to the formation of Block Development Offices in the rural areas. These Block Development Offices offer Government help in the form of monetary loans to buy equipment for farming or weaving, boring a well, getting high yield variety seeds, etc.. The richer castes in Sitha take advantage of the facilities provided by the Government far more than any of the inhabitants of Palaya.

In Sitha, all the Vallals have received help from the government. Among the 16 Vanneer households (out of 34 households) who received help from the government, thirteen had some wet land and the remaining three had more than two acres of dry land each. None of the Nadars received any Government help. Wet land seems to be a condition for

government help because it provides the best collateral for loans.

In Palaya, only nine families received government help, including eight Vanneer families and one Pallakamoodu family. Of the eight Vanneer families four received government help for better irrigation facilities and the other four for weaving equipment. The one Pallakamoodu family that received government help, was one in which the female head is a member of the Panchayat.

Water is a scarce resource in Tamil Nadu, especially in Salem which is the hottest of the districts. Water therefore easily becomes a political issue. In Sitha, water is less of a scarce resource as the village is situated near a river. The Vallal families all have two wells each, one for irrigation purposes near the fields and the other for consumption near the home. The Vanneers too have no problem accessing water as they either have their own wells or share a well with two or three families. The Nadar families are all dependent on the Vallal families for their livelihood and as the Nadars are the ones to draw or pump the water from the well, the Vallals "let" the Nadars use the water for themselves too.

In Palaya the Vanneer families are the only ones who have wells. During the last elections the incumbent politician built them a water tank in order to enlist the votes of the Vanneer in the area. Here the water from a

boring-well is pumped into the tank. Funds to build this tank were collected from the entire village and the whole village was supposed to use it. But caste restrictions do not allow other castes to access the tank. Two Vanneer families have their own wells. The Pallakamoodu have an open well with a wall around it not very far from their hamlet and they are able to draw water from it during the monsoon season and for part of the summer. Only one Pallakamoodu family has a well of its own; this is the home where the lady of the house is a member of the Panchayat.

The Arundithiyar families have a well, but it is an open hole. There have been incidents of cattle and a person who have fallen into the well. This well is quite dry and muddy and needs to be drilled deeper. At least three Nadar families of Palaya do not have any source of water. The Vanneer families with their own wells allow the Nadar families to use the wells once a day. If the timing is not convenient to the Nadar families, they have to walk a good distance to share a well with the neighboring village. The Arundithiyars too have to walk a good distance for water especially during summer when the land gets totally parched and the wells run dry. All but the Vanneers must then use a public well between Palaya and a neighboring village, about 3/4 of a mile from Palaya. Even drinking water has to be fetched from these wells.

The rich have wells because the Block Development

office gives a loan only to those people who can come up with half the cost. The lower caste families live at subsistence levels and do not have the means to come up with half the money. This regulation thus ensures that only the rich and powerful can get water resources close to their homes.

Government help to buy weaving equipment or get better irrigation facilities also disproportionately benefits the upper or dominant castes in both Sitha and Palaya. The government banks use land as a collateral for the loans. Because the government makes only limited funds available for these projects, the banks rate a farmer with ten acres of land more credit worthy than a farmer with four acres of land. As noted earlier in the chapter, wet land is more credit worthy than dry land. Of course this process also leaves the poorer farmer without any means to improve his condition. Government help can also be enlisted if a family has "contacts" in the government bureaucracy, as in the case of the Pallakamoodu woman in Palaya who is a member of the local panchayat.¹⁶

COOKING STOVES

The problem of a cooking stove and related materials is a central one in the villages. One, because food is a

¹⁶ The panchayat is an important and influential committee in the village.

central issue¹⁷ and, two, because of the unsafe method of cooking. The unsafe methods of cooking result in homes being burnt down easily and when people do not have enough money to buy food, it is quite impossible to build a new home.

The Block Development Officer of the area realized that a new form of cooking stove is necessary in order to stop the houses from burning down and also make the lives of the women safer. In fact, he told me of a cooking stove that would use small twigs instead of firewood, and reduce the amount of smoke it produces. This innovation is known as the "smokeless choola".¹⁸ This stove is available to the people for a nominal cost of Rs.20.00 to Rs.30.00. This cost was further subsidized¹⁹ for the scheduled and backward castes.

According to the Block Development Officer²⁰ all the villages were notified about this new stove. However I found that in Palaya nobody knew about the smokeless choola.

¹⁷ Food is a central issue among the poor because a large part of their income is spent on it (Karl 1984). They go to the market everyday to buy food from their daily wages. Their income does not afford them the luxury of saving a part of their daily wages for a day when they will not find employment. For them no work literally means no food.

¹⁸ Choola means stove.

¹⁹ The exact cost of the subsidized choola was not yet decided upon when I was last there.

²⁰ The government distributes the stove through the Block Development Office (BDO).

In Sitha only the Vallals had any knowledge about it. The BDO claims that they went to each village and demonstrated the choola but that nobody except the Vallals expressed an interest in the new model. However, the Vallals do not want to purchase it as they have more efficient and easier to use kerosene stoves in their homes.

The distribution of the choola also demonstrates how favoritism guides access to government help. The BD Officer claims that the office has sold about 50 of the choolas to people who approached them for it. He claims that people who did not have money could obtain a loan if they had collateral. However I found that these choolas have been sold to the houses neighboring the BDO and also to people who work as helpers²¹ to the staff of the BDO. As they do not have anyone as a help from Palaya, no one in that village has a smokeless choola. In addition, all those who have bought the choola paid for it in full at the time of purchase. The Block Development Officer reports these full sales as "success stories" and the lack of the popularity of the loan plan for the choolas as an indication of the disinterest among poorer families.

In fact, the truth is quite different. When I became aware of the smokeless choola, I told the women of Palaya about it. One of the women went to purchase one of these

²¹ There are no helpers from Palaya at the Block Development Office.

choolas, but the BDO told her that they did not have enough choolas at present. This was not true as one of the staff at the BDO had shown me a room where there were at least 25 - 30 such choolas. The BDO also claimed that the woman from Palaya did not have adequate collateral, although she offered as collateral her share of a hand operated weaving machine worth at least Rs.300 to Rs.400. I went back to the BDO and asked the person in charge about the applicant from Palaya. He denied that there was such an applicant and told me that he did not have any choolas in stock.²²

It is likely that the choolas are limited in supply because this is a trial run. Unlike the Latin American countries where technology is not present to lessen the burden for the women, in India the Government has developed these cooking stoves which are less hazardous and can be used with small pieces of wood. But this technology is widely procurable and the availability of these stoves are to people who are "in the know" of the staff of the BDO or wield enough power locally. This incident reveals in a graphic way the vicious circle of poverty. In order to get loans and facilities, the poor must have a collateral. But in order to have a collateral, they must first be rich. Thus loans and facilities are available only to the rich,

²² It is indeed highly unlikely that the BDO could have sold twenty choolas in a span of two days, when it took them six months (according to their own statistics), to sell fifty choolas.

and the poor cannot get access to them. Hence there is a absolute chasm between the official intention behind development aids and its actual operation and help of the poor. This is another example which shows that development has worsened the conditions of the poor.

CONCLUSION

The discussion of land distribution, the occupational structure, income, education and governmental help, shows that only the dominant or the richer castes have access to the better facilities. This in turn maintains their already high levels of income at the expense of the poorer castes.

In Sitha, the dominant castes control the best land (wet land) and the resources. Sitha has wet land and is able to report a higher yield from the land. This process is aided by the amount of government help available to them. Palaya has dry land and thus a low yield and low income from the land. The government facilities are also not that easily available, making the people depend on subsistence farming or on income earned as daily wage laborers.

Thus development has helped maintain and strengthen the power structure within each village. This is more apparent in Sitha where government aid and facilities have helped the richer and dominant castes control the few facilities available.

In summary, development programs have aided the rich

to get richer. It has redistributed the resources away from the poor. The poor in both villages are badly off, without any facilities to better their conditions. If development has reached the villages, it is thus restricted to the already rich and does not "trickle down" to the rest of the population. If anything, development has widened the gap between the rich and poor. The poor in Sitha have even become more dependent on the Vallals. A similar pattern of dependency is produced between men and women, whereby development has made women more dependent on men as all the limited facilities are directed toward the men. The next chapter discusses the lives and opportunities of the women in Sitha and Palaya.

CHAPTER IV

WOMEN AND RURAL BONDS: IN SITHA AND PALAYA

The previous chapter established that Palaya was the less developed village compared to Sitha. It also concluded that Sitha has wet land and therefore has a higher income from the land. The upper castes are a wealthy group and receive government help. Whereas, Palaya, on the other hand, has dry land and is not a wealthy village. Also part of the reason they are poor in Palaya is because they find it difficult to obtain government help. Thus the most important comparison is among the rich and poor women in Sitha to the women of Palaya. In this chapter I will describe the lives and opportunities of the women in Sitha and Palaya.

OCCUPATIONAL STRUCTURE AND INCOME

In comparing the two villages Sitha and Palaya, I found that the rich women of Sitha did not have to seek employment, as they all worked on the family land. However, the majority of the people in Palaya and the poor in Sitha were however faced with the problem of finding employment

everyday and worked very long hours.

If official statistics on women are to be believed then women are the unaccounted and invisible labor in the rural areas. The work they do aid the men perform their tasks. However, men make the final product which is what gives the family an income. For example, women weed agricultural land, smoothen the thread before it is used in weaving by the men, or separate the husk from the rice. These jobs are paid much less than the jobs that men perform. More importantly, these jobs are not available on a daily basis, but are among the most seasonal of agricultural jobs. Also, in the case of weaving, a woman smoothen thread only once in three days, to let the men keep pace with them in weaving. As a result women frequently find themselves jobless.

Whether women are employed or not, their jobs are always thought to be inconsequential or a factor of not much importance to government officials or to the society as such. The revenue officer Mr. Mani vocalized a much held belief of the men when he stated that, "the women (in the villages) do nothing but sit under the trees and gossip." This opinion is widely held and consequently women's contribution to their families and society is thought to be peripheral or of little consequence.

I noted earlier that in Sitha the Vallals are self-employed farmers and the women in the Vallal families work

on the land alongside men. Their families are all economically well off as they produce cash crops which sell at very high prices in the market. Likewise the Vanneer women work on their own land. However, the Vanneer women who are coolies, reported problems with the landlords for whom they worked.

Tulir, a Vanneer woman who works as a coolie says that,

sometimes we work in the richer Vanneer houses as agricultural laborers, and sometimes the Vallal households hire us. During harvest it is easy to find jobs, but the rest of the year it is difficult..... If you start working in one house, you have to continue there. You can't go to someone else's house.....

The pattern of loyalty to one's employers holds true here, but is explained by Tulir as a reciprocal arrangement whereby, "the Mudaliar¹ will give us the old clothes, and also help my family financially when we need it." Tulir's attitude that, "I cannot go to another house to work even if they pay me more", seems prevalent among the Vanneers who go for coolie work. Tulir and other such women have no choice but to work in the Mudaliar's house. If they do not comply, they will lose their financial support in times of need and the reciprocal arrangement gets severed. This arrangement seems almost feudal in nature.

¹ Mudaliar is the term used to refer to landlords or employers of coolies. The Mudaliars act like patrons who give coolie jobs. In this context it used to refer to one's boss deferentially.

However the Nadars face the biggest problem. Their problem is that of bonded labor. The Nadars who are coolies are all 'attached' to the Vallal families. I use the term 'attached' within quotes because that is the literal translation of the Tamil word used by the Vallals to indicate that the Nadar family lives on their property, and works for them. I found that the term 'attached' is just another term for bonded labor.

Bonded labor is banned by the Government of India. According to Article 23 of the Indian Constitution "traffic in human beings and beggars and other similar forms of forced labor are prohibited under the provisions of this Article and any contravention of this provision shall be an offence punishable in accordance with law" (Saigal 1981, p.273). Before and after independence (in 1947), various state governments had passed laws abolishing the bonded labor system. The Parliament enacted the Bonded Labor System (Abolition) Act, in 1976, which declared "bonded laborers free from any obligation to render free service, setting up of vigilance committees to help identification of bonded laborers and for the economic and social rehabilitation of the freed bonded laborers" (Saigal 1981, p. 274).

In spite of these laws bonded labor persists and exists in Sitha. A poor family becomes "bonded" when they borrow money from the richer families, usually landlords.

The poor cannot repay the debt with their current level of income because their daily wage is less than Rs.5.00, and the rate of interest on the loan is exorbitant, anywhere up to 200 percent per annum. The poor family tries to repay the landlord by working on the landlord's land for no wages. Before 1973, generally the bonded laborers were not paid any money for their labor. Their labor was considered a payment toward the interest and as they earned just a pittance the principal never got paid. If wages are paid, it is so minimal that the family is in most cases not even able to meet the interest payments, and the debt accumulates.

The Vallal families in Sitha now do pay a daily wage (between Rs.2.00 and Rs.5.00),² but it is so minimal that the Nadars can not meet even their interest payments. The Nadars in this village receive on an average about Rs.3.50 per day. This money is not forthcoming everyday and their monthly income in most cases is barely enough to buy food, let alone clothing. The Nadars are totally dependent on the Vallals for their food, clothing and shelter. Though this situation of bonded labor is not apparent, the Government

² The official conversion rate is Rs.15.00 per \$1.00.

officials know about these conditions, but take no action.³

In a bonded labor situation, the Nadars' first commitment is to their landlords, that is, the people who gave the family the loan. Even if the Nadar family finds employment for the day at a higher rate than the one the landlord is willing to offer, the first commitment of the Nadar family is to his/her landlord always. Elani, a Nadar says,

During harvest there are a lot of people who need coolies. The adjacent village pays a lot more than the Mudaliar. But many times we cannot go and work at that village because the Mudaliar sends word that he needs us that day. We have to do what he says. After all, we live through his generosity. We have to take what he gives us and listen to him. He sometimes gives us food and on new year's day gives us new clothing. Those people in the other village do not do that. They also will not give us money when we need it like the Mudaliar.

Thus these Nadar families feel indebted to the Vallal families and do not fight the injustice. They are also afraid of what would happen to them if they broke this bond with people with whom they have lived for generations. Elani says, "if I leave here where will I go? What will we do? I have no home and nowhere else to go. They give me

³ Surprisingly, on talking to the Village Administrative Officer and his assistant, I realized that they are aware of this and yet they do not take any action against the Vallals because they fear the consequences of such an action. The Vallals are politically and economically very powerful and can oust the VAO and his assistant from their positions.

some food⁴ everyday and I work for them."

Devaki Jain in her article "Women's Employment"

(n.d.) says

A bonded laborer if asked if he is available for work on some site might say 'no' not because he was earning better than the offered wage (in fact he may be starving and unpaid) but because of his contractual bondage. This kind of situation can be extended to women who may not be able to report available for work, however much they need the wage, unless certain other institutional constraints are overcome (p.3).

In Sitha, the Nadar women have no choice but to work at the house of the Vallal family to whom they are attached. The Nadar women do all the heavy work in and around the house, including cleaning the house and the yard, washing the clothes and dishes, pounding or grinding the grain (which is done with a heavy stone mortar run manually). Whatever the housework may be and however long the hours, the pay is the same.

Shanti, a Nadar woman of 22 years of age, lives with her mother and brother. Her father ran away from home when she was still a child and they have not heard from him since. Shanti works with the Vallal family on whose land they live and where her brother also works. The day before I met her, she had worked at the Vallal family's house from dawn to dusk and had ground ten kilograms of rice, cleaned

⁴ The food given by the Mudaliar is usually a form of gruel made of rice water.

the house, washed the clothes and the dishes twice.⁵ For all her efforts she got paid Rs.2.50 at the end of the day. When I asked her whether that was enough money for her to support her family, she said, "they give everyone only that much. I did nothing much but clean the house and grind some grain. Amma (the lady of the Vallal house) always gives me lunch. Twice a year⁶ they give us clothes. They have also given us a house to stay. What more can we ask for?"

Shanti has never been to school. She remembers working with the Vallal family since she was a little girl when she would help her mother, Elandi, on the job. She works there everyday⁷ and in the evening comes home to clean her home and do the housework. I asked Shanti what would she have to do if she wanted to take a day off. She gave me a very surprised look and said, "why would I want to do that? They (meaning the Vallal family), would find it very difficult if I did not go over everyday."

⁵ Dishes are usually washed twice a day. Once in the morning, which would be the previous evenings dishes and once in the afternoon after lunch.

⁶ It is a custom in India to give old clothes to the people who work in the house. The tradition has always been to give at least twice a year; once during the local calendar new year and once during Diwali, a big festival celebrated all over India.

⁷ Daily wage laborers work everyday throughout the year. Women who work in the houses of the richer people do not even get the two days off in a year for festivals that the men get.

Shanti's mother Elandi is a sickly woman, but she has never been to see a physician about her health. On my first visit to the village the Village Administrative Officer's assistant had accompanied me to the village to show me where the houses lay. On our first visit there he looked at Elandi and said, "she is okay. There is nothing wrong with her. She is lazy and doesn't want to work. She would rather send her children to work and sit at home." Shanti has a different perspective on the situation and says that she has seen her mother lose consciousness and fall down. The Vallal family is quite nonchalant toward the whole situation. The lady of the Vallal household just shrugged her shoulders at the situation as if to say that was not her problem.

Shanti is twenty-two years of age and not yet married. Elandi is very upset about it, but says that she doesn't have enough money to give a dowry or even conduct a marriage. Shanti realizes that the lack of money is one of the reasons for her not getting married. She says, "we can't approach⁸ anybody because we do not have money. Also I do not have a father. He ran away and people feel we are

⁸ In India traditionally the girl's family always approach the boy's family in order to contract a marriage. The process is never the reverse. One would expect that with the low female to male ratio in the population the process would be reversed. But because traditional values emphasize the necessity and the importance for a woman to get married, it is the girl's family that approaches the boy's family.

not a good family. If we had money it would not be so bad."

To add to the agony of the mother and Shanti, the Vallal family's oldest son has been following Shanti around and once tried to take advantage of her. Shanti says that she is afraid that one day she may be asked to be sent over to the "house" at night and she would become a marked woman and never have a chance of ever getting married.

Apparently, another Nadar girl was once molested by a Vallal male and that girl never got married and now finds it very hard to find employment in any household. She is considered to be a "bad woman" and none of the families are willing to hire her. She has to go to the adjoining village to find employment, where she does not find employment everyday. Shanti's helplessness is touching. She says, "if they call I have to go. If I don't go I don't know what will happen to the family. Who will give us food?"

In Sitha then, the Vallal women do not seek employment but work on their own land. Some of the Vanneer women work on their own land and some work as day laborers. All the Nadar women are bonded to the Vallal families and work as servants in the Vallal household on a daily basis. It is the coolies in this area who have a problem with employment. The bonded situation worsens the problem of employment for the Nadars.

In Palaya, employment problems also exist. The majority of the people are coolies and the problem of

finding daily employment looms heavily over them. Koyandai, a Vanneer, who finds work every day with the same Mudaliar says,

if you are compliant⁹ and in the good books of the Mudaliar, then work is assured for you..... Why should the Mudaliar do anything for you if you act crazy?¹⁰ The Mudaliar is an important and influential person unlike us. Whenever the Mudaliar asks us to do something, we have to be ready to do it for him. If you don't you cannot expect him to give you work everyday.

Thanga, a 20 year old Vanneer woman, who does not find employment everyday has a different perspective on the issue. She says,

mudaliars do not appreciate that I work hard. Sometimes, some others pay me better and I work for them..... If I work for one Mudaliar, he does not like me to work for another person, even if the other person pays me more..... Am I a fool if I take coolie work in a place where they pay more? Many days the Mudaliar will not have work for you and he will tell you to go home, but if you work for someone else he will get angry..... Some days the Mudaliar will tell you that he has work for you and he will ask you to wait. Sometimes you wait till 12:00 o'clock (in the afternoon) and then he will tell you there is no work and send you home..... I don't get money for this. Tell me, am I stupid to keep waiting and get no money?

Thanga and Koyandai belong to two different generations. Koyandai feels that the present youngsters

⁹ The translation here is not accurate. Complaint is the closest to the Tamil word "nallapadi".

¹⁰ An act of craziness would be not showing up for work or going to someone else's house because they pay more.

have "no respect for elders and are essentially good for nothing." Thanga feels that the older generation got nothing by "bowing down" to the Mudaliar.

There is a lot of bitterness among some of the villagers toward the Mudaliar to whom Koyandai and Thanga refer. The Mudaliar apparently collected money from the residents of Palaya and some near by villages and told them that they would get a share in the spinning factory a mile away. However, the people of Palaya who gave money for this venture have no "share" in the factory. The inhabitants of Palaya are not even employed in the factory. Koyandai's husband was the only one who worked in the factory for a while but he did not like wearing the mask while working.¹¹ The Government has stated that it cannot help the people of Palaya get their money back. This is because the people did not get a receipt from the Mudaliar for the money they gave him. Now the profits are kept by the Mudaliar and the

¹¹ Workers in a spinning or weaving factory are required by law to wear a mask to avoid getting respiratory diseases by inhaling the cotton fluff.

factory is operated under strict security.¹²

All the women in Palaya work. They work as either agricultural workers or as helpers to weavers. They get up at sunrise, around 5:00 or 5:30, leave for work around 7:00 a.m. and usually come home by two or three in the afternoon. Leaving that early in the morning does not ensure them a job but only a chance to get one if it is available. The women put in more hours working than the men, especially because housework falls solely on their shoulders.

When I asked the women of Palaya whether they find employment daily, the answer is always an unconditional "no". Selvi says,

when the men can't find employment everyday, how can we? We cannot do the type of work men can..... The Mudaliar will always hire a man over a woman because he can do different jobs. I cannot lift heavy bales of cotton! I can only do some small things.

When I tried to remind her of her sewing abilities she said, "that is nothing. All women can do that."

¹² When I wanted to visit the factory, I approached the manager of the factory and told him that I wanted to see the insides of a thread spinning factory and that my curiosity drove me to the factory. I was allowed to visit the factory as long as I was not accompanied by any of the people of the village. This was explained to me as being difficult to tell them not to touch things in the factory while being taken around and also to avoid the factory from being vandalized later on. I was escorted all around the factory by the Assistant Manager and told not to speak to the workers as it might distract them.

In Palaya, just as in Sitha, it is the coolie women who find it difficult to find employment because their work depends as they say on the "whims and fancies" of the Mudaliar. The Pallakamoodu feel the same too. If the Vanneer women who are coolies cannot find employment, it is more difficult for the lower caste women to find any employment. As Rama an Arundithiyar asks, "how can you expect me to find work if the Vanneers cannot. We are Chakalis.¹³ We cannot do anything much. I can only clean someone's yard, wash people's porches, etc.."

The fact that different castes do not work together worsens the employment opportunities for the lower caste women. For example, an Arundithiyar woman and a Vanneer woman will not work side by side on a plot of land doing the same job. Thus, if the Vanneer woman gets employment, only another Vanneer women can be hired to help her. As a result the aspect of limited job opportunities for the Vanneer get further limited for the lower castes.

As is true all around the world there exists a sharp discrepancy between the number of hours a woman works and the pay she earns compared to men. Women generally work longer hours because they also have the responsibility of housework and child care. In spite of the fact that most studies on rural development have indicated that women

¹³ Chakalis are leather goods makers.

contribute more to the family income than men and spend more hours at work the remuneration process still discriminates against them. Germain (1980) indicates that in the third world women have different jobs than men (labor market segmentation) and women are paid less than men (differential wage rates). Hartmann and Markusen (1980) justly point out that

.... the fundamental meaning for feminist workplace demands - equal pay for equal work, an end to occupational discrimination, change in the work process to accommodate women - is the attack on the role of work discrimination in the past in reinforcing men's control over women. The restriction of women to low wage jobs has forced women's labor-power to be confined primarily to production in the home.... Thus, these struggles have to be directed primarily not at capitalism but at patriarchy (pp. 91-92).

In Sitha, among the wage earning people, men and women work the same number of hours per day,¹⁴ but the women earn only half as much as men. The men have an average daily rate of Rs.4.00 to Rs.5.00 and the women of Rs.2.00 to Rs.3.00. The rate is so low because of the bonded laborers who are paid minimally. The Vanneer men are paid about Rs.6.00 to Rs.7.00 per day and the women are paid around Rs.4.50 to Rs.5.00. But the Nadars, the lowest caste and the poorest people, earn an extremely low wage and among them it is the women who earn the least of all.

¹⁴ Men work an average of 8.77 hours and the women work an average of 8.74 hours.

A similar pattern exists in Palaya. The men work an average of 5.74 hours a day and the women work 5.39 hours a day.¹⁵ In spite of the fact that men and women spend more or less the same amount of time at work, their wages are vastly different, and men of the higher castes earn more than the men of the lower castes. The average income for the Vanner households is about Rs.7.80, while the average income for the Pallakamoodu is Rs.5.90 for the same job of weaving. The Mudaliar justifies this discrimination based on caste and sex. They argue that the lower castes do not have the capability to work as smartly or as fast as the upper castes.

The situation as I saw it was different. There are differences in how much each group produces but it reflects the type of equipment the upper and lower castes have to work with. For example, a Vanner (a higher caste) person would be given a electric loom to weave cloth, whereas a Pallakamoodu (a lower caste) person is given a slower hand operated loom. The Vanner therefore can weave more cloth than the Pallakamoodu and the wage discrimination is justified. Similarly, the women are given the job of

¹⁵ This statistic is misleading as a work day would constitute only five to six hours a day. In fact, a work day is about seven to nine hours, but the average works out to less because there are many days in a week that people are jobless. Similarly the average wage per day is usually not more than Rs.4.00 for the men and about Rs.2.00 to Rs.2.50 for the women.

softening the thread before it is used for weaving. This is defined as a low skill job. In the agricultural arena too this hierarchy of jobs with their corresponding discrimination in wages is upheld. Weeding, transplanting of rice, separating the husk from the rice, cleaning the jaggery etc. are low skilled and low paying jobs while that of planting the fields and raking the soil and watering the fields are done by the men and are thus defined as high skilled jobs.

Women's contribution to the family is not merely monetary. They spend a lot of unpaid and uncounted hours on household chores and child care, an area which is clearly demarcated as "women's work". This holds true in both Sitha and Palaya. Ramachandran's (1976) point that, "... women from low income households contribute more to family income than those in high income households" is clearly reflected in my data. The women of Sitha and Palaya plough back their entire income into the family. But in Palaya their income is not enough to support the family for two reasons. First, their earning capacity is lower than the people of Sitha and second, the men spend their income in drinking or gambling and also try to take the income the women earn. Sitha also has a problem of gambling and drinking, but it is a bigger problem in Palaya because of the lower income levels. When a person earns only Rs.5.00 a day, spending Rs.4.00 on gambling and drinking is a bigger problem than if a person

earns Rs.10 a day. However, the poor in Sitha are in a similar position as the people of Palaya. In contrast to the poor in Sitha and Palaya, the Latin American (Brazil and other Spanish mainland countries) women have a great deal of control of household finances (Butterworth and Chance 1981) though, like the Indian women they do not have any power in the community.

In Palaya, because of alcoholism and gambling, men do not contribute their entire earning toward household expenditure. Sengoda, a Vanner male, says he gives more than half of his earnings toward household expenditure, but his wife claims, "he does not give more than one rupee many times." As the woman has the burden of household work and child care, I felt that the wife was more truthful about the situation. She has three children to take care of and cannot work everyday and thus finds it difficult to make ends meet.

Natesan, another resident of Palaya rarely gives his income to his wife Selvi, in spite of the fact that Selvi cannot work regularly because they have a two month old baby. Natesan also drinks and gambles, which worsens Selvi's situation. Natesan has sold all the jewelry that Selvi's parents gave her when she got married, and all the

money¹⁶ they got. He often beats Selvi and takes money that she has saved for food. Once when he was drunk he beat Selvi and took the piece of gold that is attached to her mangalsutra.¹⁷

The women are aware and resent this situation but feel quite helpless when their husbands take away the money kept for buying food and use it for gambling and drinking instead. But they do not know what the solution is for the situation. As Selvi says, "he is my husband. What can I say? This is my fate."

My data shows that women do not see themselves as contributing much to society and think of themselves as worthless compared to the men. As Koyandai says,

we cannot do the kind of work men can. Women can only do small jobs..... It is the men who take care of the land and weave the cloth. We only help them. Men lift heavy things and carry them around, we cannot do that..... We are good for nothing.

¹⁶ Gifts of money are given at the birth of a child especially a boy, and the parents of the girl are obliged to give a silver bracelet or money equivalent to that.

¹⁷ The mangalsutra is a yellow thread with a gold ornament, which is tied by the groom around the bride's neck on the day of the marriage. In India where marriage is so revered and thought to the ultimate goal for the women, the mangalsutra is worshipped and guarded against ill fate, which in essence is ensuring the long life of the husband without whom the woman is thought to have no identity of her own. So in the case of Selvi, her husband violating the mangalsutra is very painful to her. This is understandable if one realizes that the mangalsutra is the equivalent of the wedding ring in the Western culture.

They publicly belittle their own efforts in spite of the fact that their income is what provides food for the family. In Palaya because of the high level of alcoholism and gambling among the men the burden of providing the members with food daily falls solely on women. In addition to providing for the family, the women also solely bear the burden of housework. Housework has never been recognized as gainful employment because there is no comparable 'wage factor' attached to it.

UNPAID LABOR: THE AGONY OF HOUSEWORK

Housework includes the concept of taking care of ones own cattle, land, etc.. Nagbrahmam and Sambrani (1983) say that,

there is an area of work that women do that, however, which remains more or less hidden from most investigations. Most often, these chores are additional to their work outside the home. Women in rural areas provide not only a substantial part of the labor force engaged in agricultural and allied activities but also bear the brunt of tedious, and repetitive household work.

Germain's (1980, p.4) observation holds true in Sitha and Palaya. From the micro level studies on rural women, she indicates that, "women spend long hours in productive and household maintenance tasks as well as food preparation, child care etc. And, most rural women work longer hours than rural men" regardless of caste. The Vallal women

in sitha for instance, work on their own land, helping their husbands, and yet carry the full burden of housework and cooking.

Ponnu, a Vallal woman, helps her husband with their land. They hire help during the sowing and harvesting seasons. During the rest of the year she, her two sons, and her husband work on the land. She has a Nadar woman come in daily to clean the house and the yard, and wash the dishes and clothes. She says, "I get up around five in the morning, and get the lunch ready for everyone. We work on the land till the afternoon. When I come home, I do some work in the house. We go back to work on the land around four in the afternoon and work till evening." When I asked her whether her family helps her around the house, she was surprised and said, "all this is women's work! Men never do this." The situation is even worse for the lower castes, while Ponnu has daily help, Shanti a Nadar, comes home to take care of her home and the family, after a full day at work.

Selvi illustrates the variety of work women do. She alone takes care of her son, who is only a few months old, and has to leave him in the care of Devaki (her neighbor) whenever she needs to work. She also takes care of the house, gathers firewood and shops daily for food. She says that gathering firewood is difficult because she cannot pick pieces from someone else's property. People who do not need

the twigs sell them. Starting a fire for cooking requires some twigs or paper to get it going, to which the wood is then added. As paper is a scarce and expensive commodity, the only alternative is dry twigs, which too is not easily available in Palaya.

The only other option is to burn dry leaves at the beginning to get the fire started. This is very inconvenient and most hazardous. Burned leaves fills the air with smoke and makes it unbearable for the women to stay inside and do the cooking. Also, the roofs of most of the homes are thatched with hay or dry leaves of the date palm trees, and liable to catch fire, if the dry burning leaves fly around. It is not uncommon in the rural areas to hear of homes that burned down because of these methods of cooking. If a hut did burn down when a woman was cooking a meal, the blame for the lost home rests solely on the woman. Koyandai says, "I do not like my house to be burnt down, but sometimes these things happen. I look for things to burn for two hours¹⁸ sometimes and I find only a few things..... In the summer it is easier to find firewood, but in the monsoons we have to keep some in the house, dry them and

¹⁸ The concept of time is very different in the rural areas. In Palaya, where only a handful people have watches, they keep track of time by the movement of the sun, and the passing by of the train which is scheduled to pass by twice a day at an appointed time. But the trains usually run late and so a woman who has spent three hours collecting firewood would believe that she has spent one or two hours only.

then use them."

There are other options besides this method of cooking, but all of them cost money. For example, a kerosene stove is most expensive to use. Kerosene, a by-product of oil, is a scarce commodity and may sell for as much as Rs.5.00 a litre. Although the rural women light the fires only once a day, the use of kerosene could cost them up to Rs.20.00 a day. The stove are difficult to maintain unless the expensive models are bought.

The Vallals and rich Vanneers of Sitha do not have a problem with collecting fuel. They use kerosene fueled stoves. However, the Nadars who work as coolies, do not earn enough to use kerosene for cooking. Some of them get scraps of wood and twigs from the houses where they work, especially if the family with whom they work has coconut trees from which there are dry remnants. As a result it is not as difficult to find fuel in Sitha. In both the villages, finding fuel for the cooking stoves would be easier if each household had a substantial amount of land with trees. The land holding becomes a crucial issue and with it the discussion on whether women get a share of the family's property.

LAND HOLDING PATTERN

As a rule women never hold title to the land. Rights to the land pass from the father to son and are considered

to be the son's rightful property. A daughter does not get an equal share of the property because she herself is considered to be the "property" of her husband's house. I found that the women were so dominated by the male culture that they felt the land did not rightfully belong to them. It seems that in the very definition of land, women are excluded.

None of the women in Sitha own land. The Nadars do not have much land and what little they have traditionally goes to the boys in the family. Among the Vallals of Sitha land is given and received in dowry. The Vallals also give and receive land as dowry, but that is a recent pattern. In order to keep control of the land, the family marries the girl off to a relative, usually the father's sister's son or the mother's brother. This makes it possible for the family to buy the land back, if need be, at another point in time. By this method the dowry obligation of a monetary amount is fulfilled and the bride's parents do not have to come up with the cash right away. This way of postponing the costs is especially important because all marriage expenses are borne by the bride's parents.

However, giving land as dowry is uncommon in India and new among the Vallals. It reflects the increasing amount of dowry asked of the bride's families. Because the family is unable to come up with the amount of money demanded by the groom's family, the bride's family gives

land as dowry.¹⁹ Lekshmi, a Vallal woman I talked to, says, "I realize that I can get the land. People say that the government²⁰ allows women to get a share of the father's property. But amongst us the land is always for the men. My father got it from his father and not from his mother. So I should not ask for it."

The Vanneer women do not inherit any land either. When I asked Savitri whether she would think of asking for a share of her father's property she was shocked and said,

why do you ask that? Every girl belongs to another house. I got married and came here. What will I do with the land which is in the house of my birth..... My daughter will get married and go away..... Land is given only to the male children. Is it not that way in your home?

In Palaya also, among the Vanneers the men do not give women a share of the property. Devaki's parents are well off and have about eight acres of land, including three acres of wet land. Her parents have a son, but he is an alcoholic and prone to behave violently, and his father has bailed him out of difficult situations several times. Devaki on the other hand is a responsible woman with two children. In spite of this, her parents will not bequeath the property to her, but will give it to her brother.

¹⁹ This recent phenomena of giving land as dowry indicates that there has been an increase in the giving and taking of dowry.

²⁰ The term Government is used to refer to government policies or the legal system and its laws.

Devaki remarks,

after all I am a girl. Why would they leave the property to me? It should rightfully go to my brother..... When my parents are older, my brother will have to take care of them and so the land should go to my brother..... Because of my marriage,²¹ my son will not get any land. But that is how it is.

Pappa also lives in Palaya and belongs to the Pallakamoodu caste. Her parents immigrated to Bombay and abandoned their three acres of land. Her two brothers also live in the city and according to Pappa have no intention of coming back to Palaya. Pappa got married to a person from the adjoining village. I asked Pappa whether she has any land, to which she replied, "My husband has land. This land here belongs to my brothers..... In your house does your father put your name on the land?! It is in your brother's name." The tone in which she spoke to me was one of surprise, as if I was silly to ask such a question.

Thus women do not think it is their right to inherit land even if they know that the law states that they have a right to it. Tradition continues to play a very strong role in shaping what the women think is their right.

²¹ Refer to section on Marriage and Dowry for information on Devaki's marriage.

EDUCATION

Just as the historical and cultural factors play an important role in shaping the women's thoughts about their right to property, girls are socialized, and their life experiences reinforce from a very young age, to idealize marriage and look forward to it. Because of these societal values, education is not thought to be important for girls. Parents give boys rather than girls the preference and opportunity to education. This discrimination is apparent especially when there are limited financial resources.

In both Sitha and Palaya, the school enrollment for women has been consistently lower than that of the men. The drop out rate has also been consistently higher for women than for men. In Sitha, only 20 percent of the women have ever enrolled in a school. Of those who attended school, 35 percent dropped out by the sixth grade and only three women out of 20 women completed high school.

The Vallal women do not think of education as a golden opportunity to pursue. Nor do they have to be committed to learning to obtain higher education. Ponnu, a Vallal, has a high school education and also married a man with high school education. She has two sons who are in high school presently. She says, "my parents put me in school and I went from one class to another. When I was in high school, my parents found me a husband. The wedding was

not for another five months and I finished high school." When I asked her whether she had ever wanted to continue her education and go to college, she was surprised and said, "no! What am I going to do with going to college? I got married."

Lekshmi another Vallal woman who is doing her baccalaureate through correspondence²² says, "what am I going to do sitting at home doing nothing, so I decided to do correspondence. My parents are looking for a boy for me. When they find one I will get married..... After marriage I cannot continue with my studies." She was quite shocked that I asked her why she would not continue her education after her marriage. She replied, "why would I want to do that? Once I get married that is it."

The Nadar women do not get the opportunity to go to school because as soon as they are old enough to go to work at the Vallal households, they do so. Thus Shanti replaced her sickly mother at work and did not get a chance to go to school.

Those Vanneers who have land of their own send their daughters to school. However, they all drop out after the

²² It is very popular in Tamil Nadu for girls to earn their degree through correspondence courses. This does not involve the girl going for classes and thus the parents feel that they would not have to be bothered with "keeping an eye" on her. Parents would view this as a mere "filler" till the girl got married at which point the girl would give up her education.

fifth standard or at puberty. Tulir says, "once the girls reach puberty they can't go to school. They should help in the house till they get married." Thus education is not seen as a necessity for women, but serves at best as a way to fill time before the goal of marriage is reached.

The women of Palaya also do not see the benefits of education. The lack of money in Palaya is acute. The village itself is a poor one and most of the people live at a subsistence level from "hand to mouth". In such a situation education is a luxury and only for the rich, whose children who do not have any responsibilities and pass from childhood to adolescence. Whereas, poor children go directly from childhood to work. The day they are able to earn some money, the responsibility of supporting the family is thrust upon them. They do not have the leisure time of adolescence (Aries 1962).

Palani, a Arundithiyar of Palaya, has attended only the first and second standard at the local school. She was not allowed to carry on her schooling by her parents because her mother could not pay for her education. Though the local government authorities insist that the education is free of charge, in reality the people pay anywhere from Rs.10 to Rs.250 to educate their children. This actual amount varies from family to family and from year to year

and seems arbitrary.²³ When Palani's mother went back to work on a regular basis after giving birth, she needed Palani at home to take care of the baby. Devamma, Palani's mother, plans to send Palani back to school once the baby is a year and a half old and able to walk about. Then she can take the baby with her to work. Presently, Devamma feels that she has no other option but to discontinue Palani's schooling so that she can take care of the baby.

Devamma has not been educated because her father did not think it necessary to educate a girl. She realizes that with her present income she can never dream of supporting and educating her children and also get her daughter married. She hopes that her father will help her with the financial aspect of her daughter's marriage. That hope holds her back from asking for her father's help now. In Devamma's mind getting her daughter married is more important than getting her educated, because traditionally daughter's are viewed as "trouble" and parents have a responsibility to marry them off.

Shennai, a Vanneer, takes care of her father and younger brother. Her mother died while giving birth to her brother when Shennai was three years old. Her father's sister came to look after them for a few years. When Shennai turned ten years old, she was thought to be old

²³ This arbitrary amount seems like a capitation fee to be paid yearly.

enough to take care of the family and her Aunt went back to her village. Since then Shennai has taken care of the household. She dropped out of school and her interest is to keep her brother in school and take care of the family. She does not have any interest in attending school because she says,

what am I going to go to school for? If my brother goes to school he can earn money. My father cannot send both my brother and me to school. What are we going to do with schooling? We are not like those people (meaning the higher castes) to go to school..... I want to get married and have my own family.

Lower caste women face double jeopardy because they must contend with the men's hold over them and as well as high caste women's hold over them. The women of the lower castes are at the bottom of the totem pole, where their caste and sex prohibit them from obtaining much in society. This holds also for education as my examples have shown. A boy would be given preference to be educated over a girl, and an upper caste girl has better chance of being educated than a girl from the lower castes. This is another example of how caste and the power structure are linked. The Committee on the Status of Women in India notes that,

A daughter cannot effectively take the place of a son. Her loyalties change at marriage. A popular saying in Telugu puts it, "Bringing up a daughter is like manuring and watering a plant in someone else's courtyard", for her services and affections go to others. A daughter is an easy source of disrepute for the family, particularly before marriage and also after marriage for she is always referred to as a daughter of such and such family.

Since marriage of a daughter is a matter of anxiety and expenditure; daughters, or at any rate, many of them, are not welcome. People complain that daughters have to be educated as well as married off. This puts a double burden on parents (1975, p.57).

It is apparent from the above discussion that most villagers do not think education is very important, especially for girls. Among the poorer sections of both the villages education is a luxury. Among the higher castes if the boy is educated the families will seek a girl of equal education for him to marry. However, the girls education never exceeds that of the boy. An educated girl is a liability among the lower castes as the boys themselves are not educated. From childhood girls are socialized and their life experiences reinforce them into thinking that marriage is the ultimate goal. This goal has to be achieved even at the cost of their education and literacy.

MARRIAGE AND DOWRY

In India, a woman who does not get married or a woman whose husband leaves her, are thought to bring bad luck to the maternal family, and she is looked upon as a burden²⁴. All the training girls receive are directed toward household

²⁴ Wadley (1988) indicates that the "benevolent Goddess in the Hindu pantheon are those who are properly married and who have transferred control of their sexuality (Power/Nature) to their husbands" (p. 28). Thus there is the religious reinforcement to the importance of marriage in India.

activities, including cooking, cleaning, child care, gathering fuel, etc.. Jain indicates that, girls

..... learn to shoulder responsibility, to look after themselves and others, to manage the kitchen or younger children, or other circumstances whatever the constraints, and later adapt themselves to new situations with no fuss..... most girls are brought up to believe that marriage and motherhood are their destiny... (1975, pp.xviii-xix).

Marriage is considered a natural event in life. If a woman is not married it is because of the lack of dowry²⁵. Shanti, a Nadar, says, "how can I get married if we don't have a dowry? What will they think of my parents? My life will be very bad in my husband's house."

When I was in Sitha, I witnessed a Vanneer marriage. The next day, I saw the bride, Chinna, walking around the area without her finery.²⁶ As this was unusual I talked to her. Her experiences show the problems women face if their dowry is not judged to be large enough. "Last night the first thing my husband spoke about was the amount of dowry my family had given and how come my father had not had a more extravagant wedding. He said he was going to teach me

²⁵ The giving and taking of dowry has been established in India in the Manusmriti (Code of Manu) around 200 B.C. to 100 A.D..

²⁶ Usually in India a girl wears all her marriage finery at least for a week. During that period all the family members and friends come to visit the newly weds.

a lesson.²⁷ After that he left the house. In the morning my husband's people think I said something and drove my husband away from the home." I asked her whether she was going to leave her husband's home and go back to her parent's. She was quite surprised at my question and said, "what will I do leaving? What will people say? My parents will throw me out of the house. I cannot do anything but go back to my husband's house." When I persisted in questioning her about her clothes, she tried to change the topic, murmuring something about not having time in the morning to dress up as she was busy doing the chores.

Generally in India, a girl's dowry is considered to reflect her family's wealth. If a family is involved in business, or the parents are very rich, then the dowry demanded or given at her wedding would be proportionate to her family's wealth. Kapadia (1977) states,

The amount of dowry is generally regulated by the social and economic status of the bridegroom's father, the social prestige of the bridegroom's family, and the educational qualifications of the bridegroom..... Education instead of mitigating the evil, has worsened it to a scandalous proportion (p. 137).

Among the Vallals the amount of money asked could be as high as Rs.25,000, excluding jewelry, kitchen utensils

²⁷ This usually implies anything between belittling her and humiliating her in public, to beating her even for the slightest mistake.

and new clothing for both the bride and the groom. Lekshmi, the young Vallal woman who is doing her baccalaureate through correspondence, believes that it is her right to get a dowry from her parents. She says that her brothers will get their fathers property, and she will not get anything. she realizes that the money her parents will give as dowry does not go to her, but says that, "the more dowry I take to my husband's house the better my life will be. If I go empty handed they will treat me like a servant. The dowry tells them that I come from a wealthy family and they will treat me properly." She believes that her parents can afford to give the dowry that is demanded of them, but that they do not want to part with their money.

The dowry issue is a complex one. Though it is banned²⁸ in India and can result in an arrest if a complaint is lodged against either party,²⁹ people continue to practice this custom. Lekshmi's mother brought a dowry with her because her father's family asked for a dowry. Now Lekshmi's mother is against the custom of giving dowry and so is her father, but nonetheless they think nothing of asking for a dowry for their sons. I asked Lekshmi's mother whether she would ask for a dowry for her son. She smiled and said, "yes! People ask for my daughter, so I should ask

²⁸ The Dowry Prohibition Act was passed in 1961.

²⁹ The parties being the people who ask for the dowry and those who give it.

for my son..... That is how it is." Lekshmi's mother goes on to say that the money she would get for her daughter-in-law is not dowry, but "is the parents gesture toward their daughter." This practice reinforces the concept of women as a burden to the family. Even in marriage, the girl becomes a burden while the boy brings wealth into the family. The Committee on the Status of Women noted that,

both on the villages and towns parents offer certain justifications for demanding and accepting dowry. First, since they have to give dowry for the daughters, they are in a way forced to ask for dowry for their sons. Second, the fathers of educated boys like to get back the amount they spent on the son's education..... It is disconcerting to find that education has hardly had any liberalizing influence on the minds of the people in respect to dowry. On the contrary education increased dowry both in the rural as well as in the urban areas (1975, p.74).

Selvi, a Vanneer in Palaya, got married to Natesan and came to Palaya five years ago. She has a two month old son. A distant relative of hers brought the two families together. She saw her husband once before they got married on the day her prospective in-laws came to see her family. A few months later they were married and she came to Palaya. Her father gave a "good" dowry, meaning, a gold jewelry set, new clothes, and a pair of silver anklets. Also her husband got a set of new clothes and a wrist watch. The family was also given Rs.2000 in cash. Apart from all this, her parents also gave a set of stainless steel dishes. At all

the festivals for the first year her parents gave Natesan gifts, as was expected. When she had her child her parents gave both Selvi and the child new clothing and a small piece of jewelry for the baby.

Selvi's husband Natesan drinks and gambles. He has sold every piece of jewelry that Selvi's parents have given them. He has even sold her mangalsutra and squandered the money they got as dowry. When Natesan is drunk he beats Selvi because she is unable to support his habits, and blames her for not bringing enough dowry. Once, Selvi showed me the marks her husband's beating had left on her arm and back. She says,

my father never beat my mother and where I grew up we did not hear of things like that. If my father came to know of this he would take me away from here, but then I will be a woman without a husband and what will happen to my daughter?.....
Look at Devaki,³⁰ see the way she suffers.

An editorial in Manushi refers to this problem

In India we have a glorious heritage of systemic violence on the women in the family itself, sati (Hindu custom whereby women throw themselves on their husband's funeral pyre) and female infanticide being the two better-known forms. Today, we do not kill babies at birth..... Today, we do not wait till a woman is widowed before we burn her to death. We burn her in the lifetime of her husband so that he can get a new bride, with a fatter dowry. 'Woman burnt to death. A case of suicide has been registered. The police are enquiring in to the matter.' For years, such three line news items have appeared almost every day in the newspapers and gone unnoticed..... Death may be slow in coming - a long process of

³⁰ Devaki is discussed subsequently.

killing the girl's spirit by harassment, taunts, torture (1983, p.204).

Wife beating has a long tradition in India³¹. It reflects the belief that the husband has the right to chastise "strong minded and stubborn" women into "better" ways. In most Indian mythology and folklore the Indian daughter, bride, daughter-in-law are portrayed as docile and respectful of their parents, their husbands and in-laws. The role models presented to the girls were of Ahalya, Sita, Draupadi, Tara and Mandodari.³² What these women had in common was their devout service to their husbands and family at all times. Thus girls are socialized and their experiences teach them to be passive partners in marriage, without a will of their own, and doing what is asked of them. They are supposed to be martyrs to the extent that they are selfless. If the Indian woman did not fulfil those pre-requisites then she was scolded, beaten and scorned by her family and society. Wadley (1988) states that,

women because of their evil inclinations and birth, are to be kept under the control of men at all stages of their lives. The ideal women are those who do not strive to break these bonds of

³¹ The practice of wife beating is not restricted to India. Guzman (1983) in a study of women in Lima, Peru states that women "must carry out their duties even if the man beats them, arrives home drunk or does not come home at all" (p. 12).

³² The stories of Sita is expressed in Ramayana and that of Draupadi in Mahabharata, which are the two great epics of Hindu mythology. Among the five women the stories of Sita and Draupadi are known by most Hindus.

control. Moreover, the salvation and happiness of women revolve around their virtue and chastity.... (p. 31).

This concept of 'control' when taken to the extreme results in wife beating. Flavia (1988) says,

Even though society does not actually say that a man has the right to beat his wife, no one denies that he has the right to tame the woman he marries, or make her bow to his will. So when a man cannot tame his wife in any other way he uses force. Aggression and violence are considered to be positive male qualities. The man who is not assertive in his marriage becomes an object of ridicule (p. 155).

These practices had their basis in the Manusmriti or the Code of Laws, (written around 200 B.C. - 100 A.D.), which described in detail the duties of women. The Code of Laws stipulated that women cannot and should never be left to their own devices and have to be always dependent, as a child on her father, as a wife on her husband, and as a widow on her son. According to Manu, the author of Manusmriti, the 'function' of a woman was to procreate for the continuity and posterity of the community. The husband must be constantly worshipped as "God" by a faithful wife even if he be destitute of character, seeking pleasure elsewhere or devoid of all good qualities. Thus the woman became the property of man and she lived and worked for him and his children, which were in turn his property (Kapadia 1977, pp.250-256).

Indian men use their "right" of wife beating to let out their frustrations, their anguish, failures and even their inadequacies. Thus, men beat women for any reason³³ (Flavia 1988). Though the law³⁴ upholds that it is illegal to abuse one's wife, the practice is very common in the villages. It is especially publicly apparent among the lower castes.

Shennai, a sixteen year old girl, sees the predicament that Selvi is in. In spite of it, she still wants to get married and have her own home. She strongly believes that her marriage will be different. She says, "my husband will not be like Selvi's husband. I want to have my own home..... If I don't get married I will have to stay here. When my brother gets married where will I stay? This is not my house."

Shennai has already started collecting things for her dowry. Her paternal aunt gave her a set of silver anklets which is a very important part of the marriage jewelry. She saves a little money every month from what her father gives as household expenses and hopes that she can get enough money to get some silverware and crockery. I asked her

³³ Flavia gives eight major reasons that were stated by 50 battered women in Bombay, India. She also lists the methods of beating involved. These included beating with hand/fist to burning the breast and vagina (pp. 153-154).

³⁴ There is no special law to cover wife beating, but it is covered under a general law for assault under the Indian Penal Code Sections 319-326.

about dowry, especially because they are poor and don't have more than three acres of dry land. She says, "How can I get married without a dowry? The family I go to will expect me bring something to the house..... I know that my father is not rich but I cannot get married without jewelry. What will people say? I want my husband's family to treat me well. They will not do that if I don't bring anything into the family."

Devaki, a Vanneer, had to suffer because her older sister Ponnu, married a man she loved. The family disowned Ponnu and the villagers ostracized her. This had a negative impact on Devaki's chances of getting married. Devaki says, "You cannot marry anybody you want. Parents and elders make that decision for you and you have to abide by that." Because of Devaki's sister Ponnu's love marriage, Devaki's whole family suffered a loss in reputation. Though Devaki finally was able to get married she "made a bad marriage" to a landless person³⁵ who had no choice but live with Devaki's parents. Devaki's "misalliance" was attributed to her sister's marriage. Ponnu could not bear all the shame and committed suicide. Devaki says, "she went the wrong way and dragged me along with her. People in the village will talk about things and once your name has been sullied there was

³⁵ Devaki's parents are landed, and are of the few families with wet land. So it would have been expected of Devaki to marry a person also with considerable land holdings.

no hope for me but to marry a landless person. We got labelled as bad girls."³⁶

After the marriage, Devaki and her husband lived with Devaki's parents,³⁷ until Devaki's husband left her. Devaki's mother does not approve of Devaki's life. She feels whatever maybe the problem, Devaki's home is with her husband and not with her parents, and Devaki should learn to live with him for better or for worse.

What is she doing here when her husband is elsewhere. A woman's home is with her husband and his family after she gets married, not with her parents..... How can Devaki be happy? Men behave badly but that is how they are. If she cannot 'manage a home'³⁸ then that is her fate.

Devaki says,

life without my husband is painful as people think of me as a bad omen. People talk and that hurts. Even the ones who have problems with their husbands are not sympathetic to me. Finally, whether your husband is bad or good, having a husband with you makes a difference in how people view you.

³⁶ 'Bad girls' generally implies that they are not of good character.

³⁷ The practice of the daughter and her husband living in the girl's parents' home after marriage is not uncommon but done only in cases where the girl's parents do not have a son. In this case, Devaki has a brother.

³⁸ Here 'managing a home' implies not only taking care of the home, husband and children. It also implicitly includes the ability to 'keep' one's husband and ensure that he does not leave you for another.

Devaki feels that her married life is not very different from those around her. Her husband was rude whenever he came home drunk but never hit her until she got pregnant with the second child. She says that her husband was angry with her because she was very sick during her pregnancy. This meant that she was unable to work, resulting in decreased income in the family. Devaki says, "Men blame women for getting pregnant and they do not even realize that they had something to do with it." Further she says all her jewelry was sold, not to pay for food, but to pay his gambling debts.

In spite of all the problems of marriage the young girls of Palaya look forward to being married. The married women themselves do not see a life for themselves without a husband. Therefore, they are willing to stay and face the problems with a husband who is an alcoholic and gambler. They see marriage as a natural progression of their lives. Without a husband they will be labelled as "bad" and ostracized.

Thus, regardless of caste and economic status, marriage is important for women. The tradition of dowry continues and the women think it is their right to get dowry. In both the villages, regardless of the level of development, marriage is still the ultimate goal, but it requires a dowry. The young girls want to bring a dowry with them from their home to that of their in-laws so as to

ensure a happier life for themselves. However, in Palaya, a dowry at marriage, does not insure a better life for the women. The added factor of wife beating among the poorer people creates additional misery.

CHILD CARE AND FAMILY SIZE

Marriage brings with it the choice of how many children to have and how to manage the responsibilities of child care. Kakar (1988) indicates the importance of motherhood.

Whether her family is poor or wealthy, whatever her caste, class or region, whether she is a fresh young bride or exhausted by many pregnancies and infancies already, an Indian woman knows that motherhood confers upon her a purpose and identity that nothing else in her culture can. Each infant borne and nurtured by her safely into childhood, especially if the child is a son, is both a certification and a redemption (p. 44).

Child care in the villages of Sitha and Palaya is totally and completely the responsibility of the woman. Men seldom help look after the children or have any role to play in their upbringing or education.

Child care is not a problem for the Vallals or the richer Vanneers, because these women work on their own land near their homes and carry their children to work. The problem arises for the 'coolie' women, the poorer women, who have to travel and work elsewhere. These mothers have a choice: ask their oldest female child to baby sit or, ask

their parents (their mothers-in-law), if they are not working to look after the children.

Female children are an asset when problems of child care arise, especially when the older child is a girl and can take care of her younger brothers and sisters. Girls help their mothers in their daily chores and thus lighten the burden a little for the mother. It is not uncommon to see a girl of six and seven years old carrying her two or three year old brother or sister on her hips while her parents are at work. The need to have someone to take care of the younger children is one of the reasons why parents do not let their daughters attend school. The practice also trains the girls from a very young age to take care of the house. Essentially they play the "alternate mother role" for the younger children in the family.

Among the Vanneer in Palaya, Devaki and Selvi have the youngest children. If Selvi has to go to work, in order to have income, Devaki has to stay behind to take care of Selvi's child. Fortunately Devaki has an older child in whose care she leaves her baby when she goes to work herself.

Lalitha, one of the Nadar women, very rarely asks her parents to take care of her baby. By parents, Lalitha means her mother-in-law since, "men do not take care of children." This is brought out by her surprised expression and her question to me "Do men take care of children? It is the

women who do that." Lalitha says that her mother-in-law will not take care of the children for long periods of time. Also Lalitha feels there is no way by which she can repay her in-laws and she doesn't want to be beholden to them. She and some of her neighbors have worked out a system by which they take care of each other's children in turn. As a result not all the young mothers can go to work on the same day. Some have to stay at home to look after the children. The decision of who is to stay back depends of whose need to get food is greater for that day.

Thus, we see that child care is a problem for the poorer people in both the villages. The richer people can afford to have help. The poorer people have to ask favors from their in-laws or work out a child care system. As Lalitha says, "every morning my first concern is, with whom can I leave my child, so that I can go to work." This system of child care could be viewed as a network which could become the basis of an women's organization at a later point in time.

In a country like India, where economists claim that population growth has retarded the rate of development, the question of fertility and family planning is a major issue. One of the questions I was interested in studying is, who makes the decision about family size. Is it the men or the women? Or is it the economic constraints? The whole issue of family size is distorted and clouded by the family

planning program in India. I found that its effect has been to worsen the lives of these women.

The Family Planning Programme was instituted in India in 1968. The program indicated that,

(a) the immediate objectives, including efforts and performance, objectives set for developing resources and activities for achieving the decision made; (b) the intermediate objective of spreading knowledge, developing favorable attitudes towards encouraging practice of family planning methods; (c) the ultimate objective, which is reduction of fertility so as to bring down the birth rate to 25 per thousand by 1978-79. (Ministry of Health and Family Planning System 1968).

The carrying out of the objectives laid down by the program has led to coercion of the lower castes. The government officials cannot enforce the family planning program among the richer sections of the population as coercion cannot be applied as the rich are the powerful. In Sitha, the men and the women have voluntarily adopted the family planning program. The men have made the decision about the size of the family, as exemplified by Ponnu. Ponnu, a Vallal, has two sons. I asked her whether she would like to have a daughter. She smiled and said, "that is not possible. My husband says two children are enough." All the families have either one or two children. The Vallals and the Vanneers because they employ the Nadars have encouraged them to undergo sterilization. In this way the Vallals and the Vanneers have enabled the program to get

underway.

In Palaya, family planning has been "enforced" by the government. People have been "coerced" into vasectomies and sterilizations though they have received some benefits, mainly monetary, up to a maximum of Rs.100 (about \$6.50). The women do not want to be sterilized and yet are harassed until they comply. The monetary benefit is a poor consolation. It can be argued that the Government cannot force women to undergo sterilization, but the constant harassment of the women and their family members could lead to women being acquiescent to the official demands. Family Planning authorities and social workers connected with the village of Palaya justify their action of coercing people by saying that the directive comes from the government and they have to comply. Nonetheless, the officials carry out the directive very selectively. The Vanneers who are the highest caste in Palaya were not harassed by the officials to undergo the necessary surgery, but members of the other castes were either coerced or bribed into complying.

Family planning in Palaya has always meant that the poorer women (and this generally means the women of the lower castes) are rounded up to be sterilized. Social workers and government officials argue that poorer women have the most number of children and are least capable of

looking after them.³⁹ Hence, they should be the ones to take precautions to avoid further pregnancies. Pregnancy and child birth are believed to be a woman's problem and social workers therefore target women for family planning. Also the men believe vasectomy lessens their maleness. As most of the government officials in the area are men, they do not round up the men in the villages to comply with the family planning program.

Rojamma, a Pallakamoodu⁴⁰ woman of Palaya who had never undergone sterilization, avoided me the first week I was there. If she heard of my arrival she would leave the village and not return till I had left. I learnt later from other women that the family planning authorities came to the village under some other pretext of taking census of the area, and rounded up or got the names of the women who had not undergone surgery. Rojamma herself told me later that she did not want to have the surgery because she was afraid of it. Although she was in her forties and not planning on having any more children, the authorities still bothered her and wanted her to undergo the surgery. Rojamma's case can be understood as an example of resistance to authority. By

³⁹ This point of view, held widely by the government officials, was revealed when I mentioned the family planning program to them in passing in one of my visits to the Block Development Office.

⁴⁰ As indicated in Chapter III, the Pallakamoodu is a low caste in the caste hierarchy.

Rojamma's actions it is amply clear that she fears that the government officials are still after her.

Maniamma, a Nadar of Palaya, has different reasons for not having undergone sterilization. She says, "I have two daughters. What good is that to me? My husband wants me to have a son. I want a son too." When I tried to tell her that there may be a possibility that she might never have a son, she said, "you talk like those family planning people. By praying to God to grant me a son I have a chance of having one..... What sin have I committed not to have a son?" She exemplifies how the high value of sons encourages families who have daughters to try to have a son before they comply with family planning methods.

The family planning program in Tamil Nadu (and I believe in other states in India too), is submerged in politics. In 1975, the Prime Minister of India declared that the most important method by which India can achieve any progress was firstly to control the family size. India was and still is experiencing a rapid population growth, so most of the states in India adopted the family planning program and implemented it with enthusiasm. As a result of the declaration from the Prime Minister, success⁴¹ came to be measured by the number of family planning "cases" a state could register. It became an unwritten rule that to rise in

⁴¹ I got this information from talking to the Village Administrative Officers and the Revenue Officer.

the hierarchy of the State Government and then the Central Government, it was fairly important to have a high number of "cases" successfully sterilized.

The VAO⁴² came under extreme pressure to get large numbers of people sterilized. If a VAO was unable to get "cases", he might be transferred to a remote area and even further out of the career ladder. The "easiest target" for sterilization in the villages is generally the lower castes, because they are not powerful enough to stand up for their rights. As mentioned earlier, the lower castes think of themselves as 'worthless, good for nothing, illiterate and incapable of anything except as beasts of burden'. As Maniamma, a Nadar woman, put it, "They (meaning the political authorities) tell us to go there and we go there ! They tell us to come here and we come here! They know everything. What do we know?" Thus, because of their subservient attitude to authority, the government officials find the women of the poorer castes easy prey for sterilization. For the officials the success of the family planning program means a high proportion of women sterilized. Success in family planning program for the VAO means greater job security and a transfer to a town or city.

I found that men decide on family size among the rich

⁴² The VAO is the lowest rung of a state's authority structure, and is the one who has direct contact with the villagers. Also the VAO in most cases is the village representative to the state.

and dominant castes. But for the poorer people, the Government decides on family size. The decision of family size is thrust on women either by the government officials and their husbands. Young (1983) in a study of Latin America argues that "giving women reproductive autonomy is the first step to creating politically aware, and more self-determining capacity within the population as a whole" (p. 15). This leads to the study of the political choices of the women in the two villages.

POLITICAL CHOICES

In both village all the women do exercise their right to vote, but the manner in which they make their choice differs. In Sitha, the choice is caste dominated and in Palaya, the decision is an economic one. In Sitha, a Member of the Legislative Assembly, which is the State assembly, is a woman who is from the village adjoining Sitha. She is a Vallal and all the Vallals vote for her regardless of their or the candidate's political affiliation. They hope by this they can enact legislation and policies that will benefit them in the future. The Vanneers of Sitha also vote for the same woman as they figure that if the interests of the Vallals are met in the village, their own interests would also be met. As Tulir says, "everybody says that she will do good for us. What is there if she is not our caste. She

is still one of us.⁴³ What do I know? I am doing what they all tell me to do." As Shanti says, "they (meaning the Vallals) know what is better. I do not know how to read and write. They tell me that I should vote, and I do it for whomever they say." The lower castes have little effective choice in selecting a candidate. Over the years they have been convinced that they are illiterate and do not have the ability to make good judgments. While they are not literate, they do not lack intelligence or common sense.⁴⁴

In Palaya, Devaki, a Vanneer, voted for AIADMK⁴⁵ in the last elections. She calls it the MGR⁴⁶ Party, but mostly refers to the party by its symbol, that is, the "two leaves." She got a free saree and five kilograms of rice at a very low price of Rs.2.00 per kilogram. That, coupled with the fact that everyone voted for the AIADMK party, made her do the same. "I just went and said I want the "two leaves". Everyone says MGR will do things for us. MGR is a very nice person. He gave us all free clothing and cheap

⁴³ Meaning that she is from that area.

⁴⁴ Literacy surely has never been a criteria for judging or choosing a political candidate.

⁴⁵ AIADMK stands for Anna All India Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam. This party is in opposition to Congress (I) which is the ruling party in India.

⁴⁶ MGR or M.G.Ramachandran is the party chief of AIADMK and was a matinee idol.

food." Devaki does not know anything about AIADMK or any other political party. She has seen all the MGR movies and says "MGR is a very good person. In the cinema he is always fighting for the poor. Will he not do the same in real life?"

MGR is always portrayed in the movies as being a 'good man' fighting for the poor. The same image has been transferred to politics where he is viewed as a person fighting all odds to serve the poor. His teetotalism is widely publicized and idolized, and the villagers talk with awe of MGR when they remark, "you know they say he doesn't even drink coffee." Others vote for AIADMK because "people say MGR is the one who will do things for us."

In Palaya, Sithamma, one of the Pallakamoodu women, sits on the Panchayat committee. Her family is the only one among the Pallakamoodu that has electricity. She has never been to the panchayat meetings because she is illiterate.

They give you things to read and I cannot read. I have work to do and these people want me to go there and tell them what to do for the village. They can see for themselves what needs to be done. Why should I have to tell them anything? When they come and ask me to put my thumb imprint on some things, I do it.

I asked Sithamma whom she voted for and her answer was, "the two leaves". She gave the same reasons for choosing the AIADMK party as did Devaki, that is AIADMK

party distributed free clothing and cheap rice.

Having Sithamma on the committee, I learned, was a political move by the other Panchayat Union members. According to the Village Administrative Officer, the state rules require the representation of one of the minority castes and a woman in the panchayat. Sithamma fits both requirements and the panchayat decided to kill two birds with one stone by having Sithamma who is a woman and also from the Shudra⁴⁷ caste. She does not get paid for this and her vote is not a key one as there are four other members on the board. In short, having a woman on the political committee did nothing to change or affect the political consciousness of the women. It could be argued that though development policy has been enacted to benefit women, the traditional power legions in the social structure are unwilling to relinquish their strong-hold. Consequently, they chose a woman who is illiterate and dependent to maintain their positions and thus maintain the status quo.

In Sitha and Palaya the decision as to whom to vote for is solely an economic decision. However for the poor the choice is based on immediate economic gratification, whereas the rich look toward long term benefits. If the political party is giving free gifts now, poor people expect it to give many more and larger free gifts when it is in

⁴⁷ The Shudra caste is the lowest caste in the caste hierarchy.

power.

CONCLUSION

In Chapter II I established that Sitha is a developed village as compared to Palaya and that the economic resources available to people in the two villages are vastly different. In Sitha the Vallals are the dominant caste. They also own most of the land in the village and are able to control the economic resources in the area. The poor people in Sitha are dependent on the Vallals and the richer Vanneers for their livelihood.

In Palaya, the land is mostly dry, and thus the government aid in the form of credit and irrigation facilities is also very limited. Most of the inhabitants of Palaya are daily wage laborers. In the following pages I will summarize the main findings in Sitha and Palaya.

Occupational Structure

Among the richer families in Sitha, the women do not have the problem of seeking employment everyday. This is because they work on the family land alongside their husbands. Consequently, the problem of the husbands contributing their income to the family also does not arise. Among the poorer people the problem of finding employment daily exists. The situation is particularly adverse for the Nadars who are all bonded to the Vallal families, and have

no choice but to work in households of the Vallals to whom they are bonded. The Nadars became bonded to the Vallals when they borrowed money from the latter. As the Nadars were unable to pay the debt, their labor was considered as part payment of the loan. If the Nadars choose not to work with the Vallals, it could result in utter poverty, as there would be no means of finding alternate employment. Also the Nadars feel indebted to the Vallals who gave them money in a time of need. This sense of indebtedness and gratitude stops the Nadars from breaking the bond. Also the Nadars feel that they cannot incur the displeasure of the Vallals as they might need the help of the Vallals at some other point in time. This is the reason why Shanti does not want to annoy the Vallal family with her noncompliance.

In Palaya, most of the people are involved in coolie work. All the women try to find employment daily, as their income is the main factor for the survival of the family. Employment is not assured for them, and they have to be dependent on the Mudaliar for their livelihood. These women earn much less than the men. They have a problem getting their husbands to contribute their income to the family, because of the high rate of gambling and alcoholism among the men in Palaya. Sometimes, the men try to take the women's earnings to support their habits.

Inheritance

However much land a family may own, women do not have the right to inherit property. Among the rich in Sitha, the women are aware of the legal provisions of inheritance, but feel that traditionally they do not have a right to land. The women feel that land should be inherited by the sons in the family. The giving and taking of dowry is very high among the Vallals, and families now have started giving land as part of the dowry. The Vallal women feel they have a right to dowry, and if land came as part of the dowry then they feel they have a right to it. However, they feel they cannot ask for a share of the land from their parents if that was not part of the dowry. Among the poor women of Sitha the question of inheritance does not even arise, as they do not own any land. These women however are not even aware of the legal provisions to inherit land.

The women in Palaya are not even aware of the right to own to land. They feel that the land traditionally belongs to the son.

Education

The richer women in Sitha have all attended school and have some education beyond the fifth grade. Among the poorer women though, the enrollment and drop out rates are very low. It is apparent that education is only for the

rich. It is for those women who need not work at a very early age to supplement the family income.

In Palaya, the enrollment rate and drop out rate for the girls is high. There are three reasons for this. First, an education is expensive. Second, girls at very young ages can help in child care and housework and enable the mother to find employment. Alternatively, a girl herself can earn money. As women use their entire income to support the family, the families can benefit by putting the girl to work at a very young age. Third, the women do not see the need for education because they want to get married, and do not see education as bettering their marriage prospects.

Marriage and Dowry

Marriage is viewed as the ultimate goal for all women in both the villages. All the girls from a very young age are groomed for marriage and are concerned about their dowry. The dowry is usually proportionate to the family's wealth, and girl believes that a "good" dowry will ensure her a comfortable life in her in-law's home. As people believe that it is burdensome to keep a girl after her puberty at home, the families tend to get their daughters married off before puberty. This is true of both the rich and poor families in Sitha. In this regard, the case of Shanti, is worth noting. She is past puberty but yet

unmarried. Her family is unable to come up with the money for the dowry and their dependence on the Vallal family has put her in an uncomfortable spot.

In Palaya, all the young girls are eager to get married, in spite of the wife beating they see around them. The reason for beating the women is usually given as insufficient dowry or the inability of the wife to support the husbands habits of gambling and alcoholism. Though selvi brought a sufficient dowry, she is still beaten by her husband. In spite of these incidents of wife beating, Shennai feels that she can take a sufficient dowry to her husband's house and that would ensure a good married life for her.

Fertility and Child Care

The problem of fertility has been a major one for the Indian government and there are many programs to curb the fertility rate. One such program is the Family Planning Programme. Through a quota system the government hopes to gather as many "cases" under the program and people are harassed in order to make them comply. In Sitha however the rich are never harassed as they are the wealthy and the powerful, whereas, the poor are harassed by the government officials and the richer families in the village. This is true especially among the Nadars, who because they are bonded to the Vallals, have no choice but to give in to the

"suggestions" of the Vallals. In Sitha, the decision of family size for the rich women is made by the men in the family, and the decision for the poor by the families they are bonded to and by the government officials.

In Palaya, the people are harassed by government officials to comply with the Family Planning program. Even elderly people are approached by the officials, in order to register the required "cases" and fill the quota. This is because the government officials' promotion depends on the success of the program.

Whatever the size of the family the onus of child care and housework is still the women's. The rich women in Sitha have a little easier life because they have the poor Nadars helping them in their homes and on the land. The Nadar women after a full day at work have to come home to do their chores. The poor women in Sitha also have the problem of collecting firewood daily.

In Palaya the problem of child care is acute especially among mothers with very young children. If these women do not work, there is no income to support the family, and yet they cannot take their children to the place of work. They have tried to set up a rotation system whereby one woman would stay at home to take care of the children. These women, like the poor in Sitha, spend long hours in firewood gathering and housework.

Political Consciousness

Just as the family decisions are made by the men in family, the decision of choosing a political candidate is also made by the men. Though the Vallals voted for one of their caste members, the decision was made by the men in the family. The poorer families in the village had no choice but to vote for the person the Vallals deemed appropriate.

In Palaya, the choice of the political candidate is also made by the men in the family. However, the choice is influenced by monetary incentives. A particular candidate is chosen because he distributed food at very low prices and some clothing. They felt that the political candidate would "give them more things" once he was in office.

Given the above description of the lives and opportunities of the women in the two villages of Sitha and Palaya, women seem shackled by two major bonds. First, men's dominance over women as exemplified by men deciding the family size and political candidates, men not contributing to the family income or helping with housework and the use of physical force (wife beating). Second, caste still provides the basis for economic power. The upper castes own most of the land and the poor landless castes are dependent on the former for their employment and livelihood. Since women do not own land, because land is held in the name of men, the lowest caste woman is at the bottom of the

social hierarchy. These bonds have to be broken before women can benefit from development.

In summary, the grandiose plan for development did not materialize in India. Instead, government policies pushed the poor to the periphery of development. One of the consequences of this type of modernization was uneven development; the urban areas became more developed than rural areas. De Souza notes that this uneven development was

largely because of the elitist metropolitan model of development adopted by the Five Year Plans in India, with the concentration of investment and resources in the industrial or modern sector, there is a dual economy with dichotomous relationships between the urban and rural sectors This dual relationship may be conceptualized, as Wiebe does, in terms of a model of dominance and dependency..... (1978, p.xv).

This aspect of uneven development and its consequences on the lives and opportunities of migrant women will be discussed in the subsequent chapter.

CHAPTER V

BREAKING THE BONDS THROUGH MIGRATION:

THE WOMEN OF CHAND

The development and growth of the cities in India has largely been unplanned and haphazard. Nearly one-fifth of the urban population lives in slums and squatter settlements. The large cities have attracted the rural migrants because of their ability to provide a wide range of employment, especially in the unskilled sector. In fact, Bose concludes that, "the process of urbanization in India has been essentially a process of migration to the city" (1977, p.106).

The average middle and upper class city dwellers think of slums as blights on the landscape. They view slums as disorganized, unkempt and dirty hovels, crowded with unemployed rural immigrants. Stereotypes of the slums refer to them as a 'festering sore' on the city, harboring all kinds of parasites, pick pockets, gangsters and thieves; in short, the residence of the 'lumpen proletariat.' For these reasons most non-slum dwellers and planners think that the rural migrants are better off if they stay in the clean, pure and spacious surroundings of their villages. Safa

(1975) notes that migrants pose a problem to planners and other Government officials in at least three areas:

1. Finding jobs for this mass of largely unskilled workers and the consequences of unemployment and underemployment.
2. The provision of housing and other public services.
3. The political significance of this large "lumpen proletariat" for the urban and national power.

To some extent these views are correct. Slum life is arduous and moving to the slums of the city would seem to make life more difficult for the rural migrants. However, I found that the women who had migrated to the city had a better life than their rural counterparts.

The slum I chose to study was a very small one in Delhi called Chand. In many ways, but not all, it is typical of other slums in Delhi, except that it housed a large number of families from the Salem taluk. I chose this slum specifically for that reason, because it allowed me to make direct comparisons of the lives and opportunities of these women with their rural counterparts back in Salem. By following this strategy, I could eliminate some intervening factors due to differences in rural village life and could examine more directly the impact of migration on women's lives and opportunities.

CHARACTER OF SLUMS

Most people, including some sociologists, portray slums as highly disorganized agglomerations of antisocial elements. Hunter (1968) accents the main problems of slums as social isolation, alienation, run-down housing, cultural limitation, migration, crime, and broken families. Forman (1971) equates the slum and its inhabitants with pathology and disorganization, stressing family turmoil, gambling, prostitution, drugs and psychological abnormality. Some writers emphasize that continued migration results in pathological families (Moynihan 1965; Forman 1971), and that the normless and tieless migrants contributed greatly to collective violence and crime (Lupsha 1969). Thus life in the slums is seen as unhygienic with high levels of unemployment, alcoholism and crime. When talking of the Third World countries, Rogers and Burdge (1972) have described the life of the growing number of people in urban slums as "indescribably miserable" lacking of basic necessities such as water and sanitary facilities.

Urbanologists and urban planners have therefore attempted find ways to control and contain these areas. There are two broad approaches to urban renewal: slum improvement through provision of housing, and second, relocation of slums (Singh and de Souza 1980). The latter approach was adopted in India and one such effort to

relocate the slum dwellers led to the clearing the slums in New Delhi, the capital of India.¹ This slum clearance and relocation of residents was undertaken in 1975 by the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) in order to "beautify" the capital. In these relocated slums it was difficult for the people to organize themselves along kinship lines as the people were scattered over two or three areas. As a result of this action slum dwellers lost their regional flavor and caste identity and the communities and kinship networks were destroyed.

The Government officials responsible for the clearing the slums also failed to recognize that slum and pavement dwellers form an integral part of the urban economy. Slum dwellers occupy the lowest positions in trade and are involved in labor intensive work. They provide cheap labor essential to the efficient functioning of the urban economy. They can be replaced only at enormous additional cost to the city's economy (Majumdar 1978, p.40). More important for the purpose of this study is that most research has shown that the proportion of employed women in the slums is significantly higher than the proportion of employed women in the urban population as a whole. However, slum women receive lower pay even for equal work, and have far fewer

¹ Similar efforts to project a "modern" image in Latin America resulted in the "eradication of squatter settlements" from the central city in countries like Brazil, Puerto Rico and Peru (Safa 1975).

occupational choices than men (Singh 1978).

Du Toit (1975) indicates that urban migration studies in the Third World countries were based exclusively on generalizations based on Western Europe cases and resulted in misconception. It was espoused that,

people who moved to the cities lost their kinship bonds and became individualistic resulting in anomie. The extended family was thought to be dysfunctional for an industrial society (p.6).

This misconception was rectified as more studies with their basis in Third World countries came to light. In India also the bulk of the evidence (Majumdar 1978; Singh and de Souza 1980) shows that slums are tightly knit communities that exercise considerable influence and social control over their members. Slums are organized along the lines of kinship, caste, religion, or region of origin. Of these features, caste organizations and region shape the social organization most significantly.

SOCIAL NETWORKS AND MIGRATION

My primary goal in this part of the study is not to explain why people migrate. Instead I focus on the changes that take place in the life experiences and opportunities of the women when they migrate to the city from the village. However, the process by which they migrate affects or influences their adjustment to urban life. Does somebody take them there? Do they go there on their own in search of

employment? Do they know somebody in the city who helps them migrate? The availability of social and kinship networks for them to rely on in the migrating process mitigate their trials and tribulations. Kinsmen assist them in looking for a job and help them acclimatize to the city. This whole process of migration shapes how these women perceive the city and their opportunities in it.

Previous research has recognized that kinship networks shape and direct migration from rural to urban areas (Singh and de Souza 1980). The importance of these social networks cannot be over emphasized. For example, all the migrants I interviewed came to the Chand slum with the help of social networks.

Most studies report that the majority of the slum and pavement dwellers cite economic reasons for leaving the village and for migrating to the cities. Singh's (1977) study of four squatter settlements in Delhi found that 81 percent of the respondents had left the rural area because they could no longer earn a living in the village. Majumdar's (1977) study of slum residents found that 57 percent of his respondents thought their life in the slums preferable to what it was in the village. Fifteen percent thought their life was worse and twenty-eight percent saw no difference.

Wiebe's (1975, p.31) study of Madras slums illustrates the complexity of economic factors. He argues

that the rural villagers are pushed out of the villages. There is no demand for labor in the rural areas because of consecutive failure of monsoons and drought conditions, and inability of laborers to pay reasonable rent for the land. He also indicates that the economic opportunities in the cities, such as the demand for labor in the cities due to post Independence development, pull the villagers to the cities. While the push and pull factors operate to bring the migrants to the city, their influx creates acute housing shortages in the urban centers.

De Souza indicates that when the migrants reach the city, "they invariably find themselves pushed into the slums and squatter settlements" (1978, p.xv). One of the important reasons for why the migrants settle in the slums and squatter settlements, de Souza indicates, is that they depend upon kinship, caste and regional networks to find employment and a place to stay. Majumdar notes,

the spontaneous settlements of the urban poor are not merely aggregations of shacks and huts but communities of fellow migrants. Each is based on a network of primary affinities of language, region, village, caste or kin. It enables the rural migrants coming from small village communities to become socialized and acculturated in the complex and diversified environment of a metropolitan city (1978, p.38).

While economic 'push' factors play an important role in shaping migration streams of the poor to the cities, one must bear in mind the importance of the networks and the

part they play in drawing the migrants to particular cities and helping the migrant adjust to city life. 'Pull' factors are equally or more important than the 'push' factors, because information about opportunities for unskilled labor in the cities is quickly communicated to the villages. The low levels of unemployment in the slums is proof of the effectiveness of this process (Singh, de Souza 1980).

However, deciding to migrate requires information about job opportunities in the cities. Such information becomes available to the rural villagers through information networks that reach from the city back to the villages. These networks shape rural-urban migration streams. Information regarding the labor market travels through these networks, and functions to encourage or discourage potential migrants.

These networks also perform adaptive functions for the migrant once she/he reaches the city. Some studies have found that most slum dwellers migrate to particular cities because they have kinship relations, persons of the same caste, or village friends in the city. Kemper observed similar patterns among new migrants to Mexico City.

The role of friends and relatives determines the circumstances of a migrant's initial urban adjustment in several ways, particularly with regard to socioeconomic status..... Such social networks thus convert individual migration into a continuing process with a constantly shifting set of actors, each new migrant profiting from the experiences, pleasant and unpleasant, of those who precede him..... (1975, p.229)

Upon arrival in the city the migrants live with relatives or friends, but they seldom give money in exchange for room or board. These new arrivals incur obligations, which they may have to fulfill at some undetermined future date. These obligations are normally considered social rather than pecuniary, and so are "weighed on the balance scale of traditional reciprocity rather than calculated in the coin of urban economics" (Kemper 1975, p.230). In addition to providing temporary lodging for their fellow villagers, the more experienced migrants intercede to help obtain employment.

Moreover, it is through the influence of kinship, caste, and regional ties (in that order of importance) that new entrants to the city find employment. Most studies have found that migrants generally find employment soon after they arrive in the city, but that only a small minority find their jobs through impersonal contacts. This is true of unskilled factory work as well as other types of employment in the informal sector. This functions to create and sustain caste and regional dominance of particular occupations in the city, be they modern or traditional.

Although the joint family is rare among slum dwellers, the vast majority of the migrants have their close kin living either in the same locality or in other parts of the city. Such family connections provide an important source of support to the migrant. In a study of

squatter settlements in Delhi, it was found that 80 percent of the migrants had their relations, friends, or someone from the same caste or region already living in the city at the time they migrated. These contacts not only helped the migrants find employment and a place to stay (TCPO 1975, pp. 55-60), but as Singh (1978) notes "the kinship ties provide valuable friendship and psychological support to women and the family in addition to other more tangible benefits" (1978, p.70).

Singh's study of four "bastis"² in Delhi found that 92 percent of the households had their kin living in Delhi, evenly divided between matrilineal and patrilineal kin (1977, pp.246-247). The importance of matrilineal or patrilineal kin arises because after a daughter gets married, she adopts her in-laws family as her own and severs her connections with her maternal family. If in the slums the matrilineal relations are strong, then the maternal bonds are indeed not severed after marriage. This could further strengthen the position of the women in the family.

The study also found that kinship ties of both husband and wife are activated almost equally in the city. In fact the husband's sister was most likely to live in the same locality as the migrant and to be the kin with whom the migrants met (Singh 1977, p.247). However, Singh and de

² Basti is the local word for slum.

souza (1980) note that this pattern is quite different from the strict patrilocal and patrilineal organizations of the family in rural areas. They argue that "where village exogamy is practiced, as it is in most of rural India, residence of a brother and his married sister, or of a woman and her own parents in the same locality would be unusual." Thus the kinship ties of the woman would appear to assume a greater importance in the cities than in the village. However, there is evidence that matrilineal ties have always provided an important source of help in times of crisis (Cohn 1975, Gough 1971). The activation of matrilineal and affinal ties in the city may simply be an extension of this pattern (Singh and de Souza 1980, p.53).

This pattern of having contacts with broad kinship networks in the city and in the same locality holds true in Chand. One of the first families that migrated from the rural area had arrived at Chand as household help to a richer family. The migrant woman's in-law had worked with the rich family back in the village. The family (both husband and wife) was promised employment, a high salary and a city life, and so the woman along with her parents-in-law and children migrated to Delhi. On arrival in Delhi, they were provided with "living quarters" (a room), set apart from the employer's house at the back. Such rooms usually have electricity and running water outside - a luxury in contrast to village life where only the rich have such

amenities. Within one year that migrant family had been instrumental in moving three other families to Delhi.

The process seems to be one of attached migration.³

A poor family migrates with a richer family. The poor family then tries to find employment for some of their kin who are still in the villages. They do that with the help of the rich family, or other such families. Slowly this network grows and relatives of the poorer family generally come to the city with some sort of assurance of employment.

Singh and de Souza's (1980), conclusion supports my study in that slum and pavement dwellers are overwhelmingly poor rural migrants, primarily from lower castes or disadvantaged communities, who migrate to the city through caste, kinship, and village networks in search of better economic opportunities. The inhabitants of Chand, without exception, were poor in the villages and belonged to the Vanneer caste. It was the rural-urban network that helped them migrate to the city. With the exception of three families in Chand, all the migrants I talked to had either

³ Bunster and Chaney (1985, pp. 41-42) indicate that in Lima, Peru young girls are brought to the city with the promise of an education in exchange for their domestic work. In many cases contracts are also signed with the girl's family to this effect. The education is rarely forthcoming and the girl continues to work for the "aunt" or the employer. The Chand experience is however very different. Here the whole family migrated to the city, which later resulted in many others coming to Delhi. Also the initial family that migrated moved out of the home of their employer and set up their own household.

married into each other's families, or had a brother or sister in the same area. This network provides them a basis of support in times of family crisis (illness, unemployment, etc.). The network also provides the women of Chand a means of ensuring jobs as domestic servants to other incoming migrants.

In addition to kinship and familial networks, caste and region of origin also play an important part in shaping this transition from participation in the rural to the urban occupational structure. The transition is difficult. The migrants' early socialization in the village have not prepared them for the urban situation in part because socialization and training vary by caste and reflect the rigid association of caste and occupation at the village level.

As a result of the role which kinship and caste networks play in determining patterns of settlement, most slums end up either being dominated by a particular caste from a particular region, or else being divided into caste clusters. Statistics on slum compositions indicate the overall heterogeneity of their caste composition. Nonetheless, the statistics do not reveal the high degree of social and residential segregation of different castes.

Such residential patterns allow for the development of social structures. Thus, Singh (1977), Majumdar (1977) and Lynch (1974) confirm the importance of caste bonds for

the migrants. However, their findings point to several important qualifications about how inter-caste and intra-caste relations operate in the slums. Inter-caste relations refer to how a particular subcaste group compares itself and interacts with other subcaste or caste groups. Intra-caste relations refer to the extent to which people bond with other persons of that particular subcaste. In the city inter-caste relations are not nearly as important as they are in the villages, but the intra-caste relations are the basis for social networks. Thus inter-caste identities tends to loose their significance in the city.⁴ City people tend not to ask each other about their caste membership. For example, city people do not rank the Vanneer in relation to other groups. On the other hand, caste identity continues to provide the basis for intra-caste relations and thus shape the social organization of the slum. For example, a Vanneer would get "contacts" in the city through other Vanneers who are already in the city.

Thus, there is little inter-caste distinction and mainly intra-caste affiliation. Caste seems to create and maintain the identity and unity in the city, but does not maintain the stratification or differences. The reference group for social action and interaction is based on horizontal caste relationships rather than vertical

⁴ Meaning, other people in the city do not associate with a Vanneer because of her/his caste membership.

associations. This is an important fact because it reveals the structural resilience of the caste system. There is a significant modification on the traditional structure in the villages and it raises the possibility of a more open stratification system. Caste thus shapes social identity which in turn influence the social organization of the slum.

My own experiences exemplify this pattern in the slum. No one inquired about my caste. When I asked the women about their caste, I noticed that there was a silence for a few minutes and a surprised look on their faces, then they told me that they were all Vanneers. I was puzzled by this but then realized that I had made a mistake by asking them that question. The anonymity in the city tend to render caste comparisons superfluous. Much later, toward the end of my stay in Delhi, one of the Chand women told me that caste divisions are not as important here as in the village. Back in the village, people of all castes lived in the same village, and people were made aware of the caste membership. In the city, their neighbors were from different regions in India, with different sub-castes than in Tamil Nadu. Under such conditions inter-caste divisions gradually broken down.

DEMOGRAPHY

Chand is one of the smaller slums that escaped destruction in 1975 when most squatter settlements were cleared overnight. Those slum inhabitants were moved to other places where accommodation was to be provided for them.⁵ Chand was not cleared out during that period because it consisted of dwelling units that once met building standards. Although the residences are now dilapidated, they are permanent multi-storeyed buildings constructed under legal permits. Other slums consisted of semi-permanent structures, which were not authorized but built with corrugated iron or hard metal sheets. Still others consisted of squatter settlements or hovels made of a variety of hard and soft materials, including wood, rags, tin sheets, mud, and brick.

The semi-permanent structures of Chand always have a metal sheet as a roof, although the walls are sometimes made of brick. Most of the homes consist of one room, usually ten feet by five feet. Only two families have larger homes with a partition. These two families use one room as a kitchen and the other as a living cum dining cum bedroom.

Of the 75 households in Chand, only 25 are from Salem Taluk. The rest came from Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh, two

⁵ Also refer to the Chapter II on Methodology.

states in North India. I focused on the twenty-five migrant families from Salem Taluk. The 25 households included 94 people of which 41 were women and girls. The average family size is 3.2 persons. All the people belong to the Vanneer caste.

OCCUPATIONAL STRUCTURE AND INCOME

Occupational Structure:

In all but two families both the husband and wife have employment outside of the home. Most of the men are employed in construction work and two others work as watchmen or home security guards for private homes. One of the men is employed with the Supreme Court as a security guard.

All the women of Chand work as domestic servants in the neighboring area. The Chand women "control" that area and are the sole providers of domestic service to the households.⁶ No other community or individual will provide household work in that area without the express "permission"

⁶ It has to be kept in mind that in comparison to the women of the rest of the urban economy the women of Chand are the worst off. But here these women are not being compared to the rest of the urban economy. Though the women of Chand "control" an area of the domestic servant market, the job opportunities open to the migrants is highly restricted. Singh and de Souza indicate that, "among the slum dwellers, the types of employment open to women workers are those with the lowest status and pay compared with other jobs in the urban market. These jobs include domestic service, unskilled labor, and petty business and trade" (1980, p.98).

of the Chand South Indian women. If for example, an employer obtains daily domestic help from some other source, the new domestic servant pays a part of her wages to the Chand women. If the new servant did not pay the "cut," the family that hired the new servant will be boycotted and forced to find replacement servants on their own if the new help decides to leave them. This a powerful way of exercising control. The shortage of domestic help in Delhi means that employers do not like to risk their "good-will" with the women, so they rarely ever antagonize the Chand group. Thus the Chand women have a monopoly in the domestic servant employment market in the area where they work.

Ponnamma⁷ is very vocal in her feelings about "controlling" an area:

We are not like the U.P.,⁸ people who do not even help their own brothers and sisters. If these people (pointing to her kin), did not have control then some one would have taken my sister's position in the four houses that she worked. These people cleaned those houses when my sister was sick and thus my sister was able to go back there to work when she could. You (she looks at me) would not like if you went to work tomorrow and found that while you were talking to me someone had taken your job.

Mariamman is the oldest resident of Chand and says that things were not always the way they are now. She and

⁷ Ponnamma came to Delhi in 1981 to live with her older sister who was married and had a difficult child birth.

⁸ U.P. stands for Uttar Pradesh, a state in central India.

her family were the first family to come to Delhi with a wealthy family from Salem, where the male head of the family was an advocate at the Supreme Court. In those days all their needs were taken care of by the advocate's family, although they got very little money. They lived at the back of the advocate's house and got their food and clothing from the employer. Mariamman was able to procure employment for her relatives and kin through the contacts of the advocate's wife. Initially she and her kin worked only in the houses of the South Indians because of language problems.⁹ But as they learnt a little of the local language, Mariamman and her relatives were able to work in the houses of other people.

Mariamman and her kin came to have 'control' through the help of the jamedarnis (or bathroom cleaners and garbage collectors) of the locality. These women had already established a stronghold in cleaning bathrooms in people's homes and each group had a local "head" to whom they gave a part of their salary. The jamedarnis' system imposed sanctions on households that did not hire one of their own

⁹ In Delhi, the local language is Hindi, but the language these migrant women speak is Tamil. Boyd (1986) in her study of immigrants to Canada indicates that the lack of knowledge of the local language makes integration slower and negative for women. This is not particularly true of the women from Chand. They were able work in the homes of other Tamil speaking South Indians until they were able to learn the local language. This did not appear to slow their process or have a negative effect on the integration process.

They required the new person to pay a part of her/his wages to the jamedarnis and also boycotted the employer. If the new household help left, then the jamedarnis would not clean that house or pick up the garbage. This was meant to teach the members of that household never to hire anyone else outside of their group.

Mariamman, the head of the domestic servants monopoly, relates the history of how they acquired control of this section of the occupational market. The women of Chand decided to approach the "Queen" jamedarni. According to Mariamman, there were a couple of factors that prompted this. First as more of her relatives and friends came to Delhi in search of employment, they were unable to find employment in the area where their relatives were already working.¹⁰ The adjoining locality consisted of smaller homes. These people did not have living quarters for the servants and had to depend on domestic servants who would come to clean their homes once a day. So Mariamman decided to corner that locality and be the sole provider of domestic servants in that area. Also, by this time Mariamman and a few others had learned enough of the local language to get by and felt that they could work in homes of the Hindi speaking people. Mariamman and her co-workers decided to

¹⁰ The area that Mariamman came to was one where the high cadre of government officials resided. These homes belonged to the government and usually each of the families had their own servants.

enlist the help of the jamedarnis so as to get "control" of the adjacent locality.

Second, and most important, the jamedarnis needed money at that point in time. So Mariamman and the other women asked for 'control' of the area for an initial fee of Rs.1000 and a yearly amount of Rs.200¹¹ for the next ten years. As a result of the agreement the jamedarnis let their employers know that if they did not employ the local South Indian help, they would withdraw their own services to that household. If the employer relied on daily help then the employer was forced to abide by the jamedarni's request. Mariamman says,

the 'control' that the Chand women have over the domestic servant market took a long time to develop. It was difficult to make the payments in the beginning. We had to pawn our belongings, our jewelry, etc., to make the payments.

The 'control' not only ensures employment, but serves other functions as well. Every month all the women who got jobs as domestic servants in the area have to contribute Rs.5.00 to a fund which helps local families or newly arriving families, when they need money. The dispenser of this fund is Mariamman. She decides whom to give that

¹¹ Given the exchange rate of Rs.15 to US \$1.00, the amount of money paid by these women may not seem a lot. But this amount has to be understood in light of the fact that since 1966, inflation has quadrupled and at that time the average monthly income these women was Rs.10. Now these women average an income between Rs.200 to Rs.300 a month.

money to and when the need arises.

In Chand, the women work in two or three homes, and their work involves cleaning dishes, washing clothes and cleaning the home (sweeping, dusting and swapping). Each home takes about two or three hours. Generally, their work day is less than ten hours.¹²

Arizpe (1977) in her study of domestic servants in Mexico city notes that, domestic work may be an "economic safeguard" for migrant and poor urban women because of its continued availability. She indicates that domestic service may be the best way to obtain food and lodging for themselves and their children. Grau (1983) writing on domestic servants in Latin America states that,

once in the city the young migrants usually live in the home of their employer, from whom they receive room and board, plus a wage which is often well below the legal minimum. They work six days a week and have no fixed working hours, but are expected to be available all day, even during late evening hours to cater to any needs of the family they serve.... (p. 17).

In Chand, though the initial family that migrated to Chand (Mariamman and her family) came as helpers to their employer's family, the subsequent migrants came to Delhi to live with their kin and seek employment. Initially, Mariamman's family worked long hours in their employer's

¹² Bunster and Chaney (1985) note that in Peru the domestic servants work in their employers home for approximately 18 hours a day.

home, but unlike the domestic servants in Latin America, they received a regular pay, room and board, and were free to come and go when they wished. Mariamman and her family benefitted by living in their employer's home, as this was the base from which they were able to get in touch with other families that needed domestic help. Subsequently, their employer was also able to procure land and a house for them and their kin to live in.

When asked why they chose to be domestic servants, Mariamman answered for them by saying,

what can we do better? These are the only things I know how to do. I do not know anything else. This job was the only one available to us..... Also I cannot do things that you do, like studying and sitting behind a table.

Although the women think that the only job they are cut out for is that of a domestic servant, they do realize the power that they have in controlling their occupation and utilize it to their own benefit. By obtaining the monopoly they have been able to bargain and get three or four days off in a year in order to participate in the major festivals. They also take at least one week off in a year to go on a pilgrimage or visit their family at the other end of town. Mariamman says, "When we take time off we get paid for it..... In the houses where we work the people get paid at their job when they go on vacation. So we decided to tell our employers that we were not asking for too much."

When I asked Mariamman whether she was worried that they would lose their job when they made their demand to their employers, she smiled and said, "It is not like that. If we leave they cannot get any one else. That is my area. No one else can work there."

A contrast to the women of Chand is provided by an example of domestic servants from Peru. Bunster and Chaney (1985, pp. 140-145) indicate that child care is a major problem among domestic servants. The servants in Peru do not have networks or control of the job market. With the constant influx of migrants to the city the domestic servants are afraid of losing their jobs to the former. Thus they do not have any job security. The women of Chand, on the other hand, have control of an area and have job security. Hence they are not threatened by new migrants to the city. Additionally, these women also have the network necessary for child care facilities.¹³

The control the women of Chand exercise can be discussed in the light of power-dependence relationship

¹³ Brettell and Simon (1986) indicate that "female immigrants experience double or triple discrimination by virtue of their sex, birth place, and/or class status" (p. 10). They also state that the jobs the immigrants perform do not offer job security or any benefits. The discussion by Brettell and Simon pertains to immigrant women across international borders, and though some of the issues raised by them are not pertinent here, it is worth noting that the women of Chand are not faced with a totally alien culture in Delhi. These women were subsequently able to gain control of the domestic service labor market in a particular area and negotiate wages and other benefits.

(Emerson 1962; Blau 1964). Emerson discusses four ways by which a group may act in order to avoid being subjected to the power of other individuals or groups. Two of the four criteria are important in relation to the women of Chand. First, the group can supply others with a badly needed service and thus have an excellent bargaining power. This the women of Chand were able to do by providing the much needed domestic service to the middle class homes. The second method is that the group can obtain a service from others without entering into a dependence relationship. The service Mariamman and her coworkers obtained from the jamedarnis, helped establish themselves in the domestic service market.

In short, the "control" group functions as a labor union in that it control access to jobs, negotiates benefits with the employers and provides mutual support and aid to its members. This could be the beginning of a political organization. Unlike the upper and lower caste bonds in the villages which is detrimental to the latter, the bonds among the women of Sitha help them secure employment and have a steady source of income. As a result they have higher living standards and better nutrition than their rural counterparts.

Income:

The average family income in Chand is Rs.700 per

month. The family which earns the most is the one which migrated with an advocate 30 years back. They earn about Rs.1000.00 per month, mainly because the male head of the house has a government job at the Supreme Court. However, income alone cannot be used as a scale to judge their living standards because in addition to getting a monthly income these women also receive food (leftovers from the previous night's dinner).

To measure living standards I therefore looked both at how much people spend on food and how well they eat. Among the poor sections of the population, rural or urban, most of the income is spent on food. Katona-Apte notes that, "in the developing countries the poor spend a high proportion of their income on food" (1978, p.95; Singh 1978). She reports on a study conducted by Mellor (1973) who states that the South Indian poor spend approximately 80 percent of their income on food, while the rich spend 45 percent or less. Thus income levels have to be understood in conjunction with nutritional levels.

Previous studies on nutrition and urban slums differ on the nutritional level of the slum dwellers. Katona-Apte (1977) and Dandekar and Rath (1971) argue that the urban poor are worse off than their rural counterparts. On the other hand, Singh and de Souza's (1976) study of four squatter settlements in Delhi found that the urban poor are better off than their rural counterparts. They show that

the nutritional status of children under five in the urban slum was much better than in the rural areas. They also document that the quality of food eaten, the variety, and the regularity of the supply of food in the urban slums are better than in the villages. Finally, they report that slum dwellers themselves consider their urban diet to be far superior to what they had in the villages.

I found that the pattern of nutrition among the Chand residents confirmed the Singh and de Souza study. The people of Chand are better off nutritionally than their counterparts in the rural area. Most of them still follow a two meal system, one at about 11:00 a.m. and the other around 7:00 p.m., not unlike most South Indians. The women generally eat at the employer's house where they get the left-overs from that morning's breakfast or the previous evening's dinner. The mother usually brings home the leftovers from the employer's house, and children who stay home during the day eat food from the previous day's dinner or the left-overs from the employers' house. The children usually eat vegetables and some form of bread made out of wheat or corn flour.

All the women interviewed say that the food the children get is better than what they got as children and also better than what their relatives give the children back in the village. My own observations confirm this claim. The kitchens are not as bare as the rural homes, rather,

there are some vegetables, rice and wheat flour stocked at home. Unlike the rural households where food is bought only at the end of the day when workers get paid, these homes in the city had a stock of food.

In spite of the fact that food is more ample and easily available to the urban families than to their rural counterparts, women continue to give the men, especially the man of the household and the male children, the best food. Devamma comments on this practice of treating the male better in the following manner. She says, "it has always been that way. He is after all a son, and he will be one to take care of us when we grow old." Investing in the son today is ensuring one's future.

Ponnu has a nineteen year old son and a thirteen year old daughter. When I asked whether girls do not need proper food Ponnu replied,

why is it that you ask that question? Girls get married into other families and then it is those families' responsibility to take care of her. The male child will take care of you when you grow old. If I don't treat him well now, how will he treat me when I go to stay with him when I am old?

UNPAID LABOR: THE AGONY OF HOUSEWORK

Just as traditionally men have been given preferential treatment in the family, the same tradition also defines housework as the job of the women in the family. Housework is still the women's arena in the slum although men help around the house, fix broken things and

sometimes do the grocery shopping. When comparing the responsibilities of the sons with those of daughters in the slums, Singh indicates that,

role allocation based on sex begins very early in life and daughters carry far more responsibility for household tasks than sons. Sons were somewhat more likely than daughters to be given some responsibility for shopping for cereals and vegetables, and for house repairs..... Daughters appear to be an especially valuable domestic resource for women..... " (1978, pp.73-74).

Dhanamma says, "these men at least go to the stores sometimes for us. You should see the way the men in the villages behave. They consider everything women's work back in the villages."

Savitri, who has two sons says, "I train my sons to do housework. I go to work all day and don't have any one to help in the house. I make them do things like shopping for groceries, and running errands..... Of course they cannot do things like washing the clothes and dishes or even cook." Women realize that they are bearing the burden of two jobs and try to enlist their husband's help. However, they feel it is still "not right" to ask a boy or a man to do the dishes or the cooking.

Just as housework has traditionally been defined as the women's arena and performed solely by women, there are other areas which are defined as male territories. For example, land has traditionally been passed from one

generation to another through the male head of the family. Because land is never titled to women, men control the main source of economic power.

LAND HOLDING PATTERN

Usually slum people do not own the land but use any vacant land on which build their homes. For that, they pay a small fine to the Municipality. The inhabitants of Chand, however, have ownership of the land on which their homes stand. In this sense Chand is not a typical slum. This unique ownership of the land was achieved with help from the advocate who initially brought one of the families over to Delhi. They were also assisted in the process by a powerful politician from South India. It was this unique situation of ownership that spared the inhabitants of Chand from being cleared out when the slum clearance took place in 1975 and has given them a sense of security. Yet, this land is held in the name of the male head of the family and the women are not even listed as the co-owners of the land.

In contrast, land is the basis of livelihood in the rural areas. The migrants who left the village and came to the city did not sell their land holdings. Some left the land to their relatives, while others abandoned it. That may create problems because such land can be taken over by anyone who wishes to do so. One would expect that poorer

farmers would take it over. But it is the richer farmers who appropriate the land. The poorer farmer does not have the means to irrigate his own land, and although it would benefit the poor farmer to use the "unclaimed" land, the lack of means to irrigate his own land hinders him from claiming the "abandoned" land. For example, if the poorer farmer was able to claim the additional land, he could probably use it as collateral for a bank loan. But the farmer does not have the deed of ownership to the land to use in such a manner and does not stand a chance in getting the land if he competes with the richer farmer. The richer farmer is more powerful and able to lay claim to the disused land. He irrigates it, reaps a better harvest and increases his crop.¹⁴

Not everyone abandons the land in the village. Two

¹⁴ I encountered one such example in my study. One family in Chand has nobody back in the village and their two acres of land was taken over by the local landlord. The Kannan family did not object to the take-over as they were never going to go back to the village. In fact, since coming to Delhi 15 years ago, they have never returned to the village. They heard about the take-over of their land from people who had gone to the village for a visit. However, the family now has been notified by the State Government that they owe taxes for the past fifteen years on the land they "abandoned." But by abandoning the land already forfeited their right to it. The Kannan family not only cannot pay the amount of money they owe as taxes, but they have lost the money they could have obtained by selling the land. For the last fifteen years the local landlord used the land and instead of the government charging him a tax they have issued a letter for the collection of taxes to the Kannan family. The Kannan family does not have the wherewithal to go to court. They will have to relinquish the land to the richer landlord.

of the women in Chand are fighting for a share of their father's property back in the village. Roja, a woman who shares living quarters with one of the families, has no relative in Chand, and came to Delhi as a bride. A few months after she was married, her husband disappeared. She lodged a police complaint but nothing came of it. She has lived in Chand for about 13 - 14 years and works as a domestic servant in three houses. In one of the houses where she is presently working, her mistress is fighting for a share of her father's property from her brothers. Roja says,

Madam¹⁵ said that the government law states that a girl should get an equal share as the sons and read it out to me. She says she is fighting for it and I should also fight for what is mine. So I wrote to my brother that I want my share of the land. He says I will not get it, but I am going to fight for it.

Savitri, another resident of Chand, is not fighting for a share of the land, but for money that her brother owes her for taking care of her father. Her father was sent to her because her sister-in-law was not nice and her brother promised to send her some money if she took care of their father.

It is more than two years and he has not sent me anything. My mother and father gave so much to their son and now I get to take care of them when

¹⁵ Domestic servants usually refer to their mistresses as Amma or Mataji, which literally means Mother. In the Indian languages, there is no equivalent to the English word Madam.

they are old. My husband does not like it that these people (referring to her parents) are with me and with the income we get, to feed seven people is difficult..... I have three daughters and I have to get them married....

In Chand the women have learnt from the experiences of the other women. They have realized that they have a right to fight for their equal share of their parents' property and money. They are slowly able to break away from some of the traditions.

Just as tradition decrees that men be the sole inheritors of the land, the pattern of directing all the resources in the family to the men has been perpetuated through the centuries. Traditionally women have never been able to take advantage of educational opportunities, as the limited resources available to the family was always directed toward the men.

EDUCATION

Women's low level of education is a good indicator of their low status in India. The differences in education according to age and sex is brought to light by Desai and Pillai's (1972) study of a slum in Bombay. They found a difference in education levels between the younger and older generation. While 25 percent of those below 35 years of age had reached or crossed the high school level only 9 percent over the age of 35 years had achieved the same. Moreover,

only 46 percent of the girls as against 80 percent of the boys in that age group attended school. Further they found a gap between aspirations for boys and aspirations for girls. Eighty percent of the respondents wanted their sons to have at least a high school education because that would help them secure a better job. Only 47 percent of the respondents indicated that they would like the girls to have a high school education. Of these, 90 percent felt that such an education would help the girls find better jobs to support the family.

Factors such as religion, caste, length of residence in the city, income, sex and age affect the levels of literacy and these factors vary from one slum to another. Documented research on slum residents in India have consistently shown that a very large difference exists between literacy rates of men and women. In spite of the fact that education and literacy are improving for both the sexes the gap between the male and female literacy rates seems to be increasing. Second, the studies illustrate that a fairly large number of those who have achieved literacy or have received special training in skills have done so outside of the formal educational system (Majumdar 1977). There has not been much research on this informal mode of education.

Economic, environmental, and cultural factors affect access to education, literacy and special skills are These

factors need to be taken into consideration in any effort to improve the current situation. Of the total population in India in 1971, 40 percent of the males and 19 percent of the females were literate, or 30 percent of total population (Bose 1975, p.162). The sharp difference between rural and urban areas, however, is reflected in the fact that 42 percent of the females in the urban areas were literate as against only 13 percent in the rural areas (Bose 1975, p.163). The ability to read and write does not necessarily reflect participation in the formal educational system. Also, those who do go to school rarely attend school long enough for their education to help them get a job. Singh and de Souza (1980), Wiebe (1975), and Desai and Pillai (1972) indicate that slum dwellers tend to have unrealistic expectations about the kinds of employment even a high school graduate can find.

None of the women who migrated to Chand have had any formal education. However four of them (of a total of 22 migrant women) read and write. Among the younger generation of Chand dwellers, or the first generation of children (a total of 45 children) born to the migrants in Delhi, all have attended school. However, all but two of the 19 girls in Chand dropped out of school after the eighth or tenth grade. They failed in the grade or they could not see the benefits of education. They point to specific examples where formal education did not result in a job they wanted.

The women of Chand unanimously believe that if the girl fails in a grade, then it is time that she drop out of school and find herself some employment, especially as a domestic servant because it is easy to find employment in that field. The other option is to help out with baby sitting while the other women go to work. If a boy fails then he is given one more chance to pursue his education. Education is not provided free of charge, so the limited resources have to be shared. This of course results in the girl giving up her chances for education for the boy. De Souza suggests that the school or the government subsidize girls' education in order to counteract the tendency for boys to be given preference over girls when there are limited financial resources in the family (Singh and de Souza 1976, p.81).

Singh and de Souza (1976) suggest other reasons for low enrollment in the slums. In cases where both the parents work, older children frequently stay at home to look after younger siblings. Though this may be true of both boys and girls, it is more often true for girls. Parents also allow the child to decide whether to attend school or not. Sending a child to school costs money, and if a child does not want to go to school the parents see no reason to spend money on the children unnecessarily.

Shama, a resident of Chand, explains why the girls and boys tend to fail in school.

We do not have homes like our employers to give the children a proper place to sit and study. When the children come to us for help we ourselves do not know what to say. None of us have been to school, so how can we help them with their homework? We did not go to school and we did well for ourselves, so they can also do well without education.

The attitude that education is not necessary is reflected in the youngsters as they do not see the immediate benefits of education. Shambu, a fifteen year old girl who is still in school says, "who is to know whether I will get a good job when I finish school. My teachers tell me that without a B.A. I cannot get a good job." Rama, another girl, would rather not go to school at all and says, " I would rather be out with the other children here. They go to movies and have fun. But my parents will not let me do that."

Palani did not get a job when she finished school. Now she is married and stays at home. She does "not want to wash dishes in people's homes after getting a degree." To the question whether she would be a domestic servant if she did not get a job, she first said "maybe" and later on came back to me to say "no." I asked her why she changed her mind.

I always knew that I would not do what my mother does. Why should I clean people's homes when they are exactly like me. I do not like it when they tell me I am stupid or brainless because I do not know how to do some of the things they ask me to do..... I help my mother sometimes when she asks me to because if I don't, she will shout at me and even beat me.

The cases of Shambu and Palani show that formal education is portrayed to them as a means to rise higher in the hierarchy of social class structure. At the same time this formal mode of education brings with it a value system which tells them that the jobs done by their parents are menial and are "not done" by people with education. The school that Palani went to, and now Shambu attends, is for South Indian children. There they meet children from all strata of society and castes and people of different economic status mix. Shambu's mother Devamma is quite upset with the values that Shambu has adopted. She says that Shambu is very particular about the clothes she wears to school on certain occasions. The school has a uniform which she says is very expensive but on festive occasions the children are allowed to wear whatever they want. Devamma says,

Shambu forgets who we are. I cannot buy her all that expensive material.... She lied in school and said that her father was a government employee, when he is a construction worker. She is ashamed of us. She acts like my employer's daughter. They have the money..... What have I done? My husband says that Shambu should not go to school and I have to fight with him to let her stay in school. I wash dirty dishes to put her through school and she behaves like this. She is acting like Palani. Is it not enough that we had one such person?

The people of Chand expect to get "well paid" jobs on graduation from high school. But they also see that there

are many educated people who are unemployed and do not see the benefit of education.

Other studies have concluded that limited income is the major reason why parents do not send their children to school. Majumdar (1977, p.226) indicates that even with scholarships and reserved seating for scheduled castes, the average family spends about five percent of its monthly income on education. Families living at the subsistence level or below cannot afford to spend money for education. For them education is a luxury. Moreover, there is a double expenditure in sending the child to school. Education not only means expenditure on tuition, but education also carries indirect costs. If the child stayed away from school she/he can do the housework and enable an adult to go to work and bring more money home. In other cases the child could earn money and add to the family income.

Shambu's parents pay a fee of about Rs.15 a month for education. The fee is high, especially as "things in the market are so expensive..... The girl can be earning some money and bringing it into the family instead of me spending more money on her education." Shambu's school fees works out to 3.5 percent of the family monthly income.

Although parents view education differently for girls and boys, the women in Chand see the importance of giving their daughters at least a chance at education. In spite of cases like Palani, the mothers still think that getting an

education is good. "Palani took the wrong turn somewhere and you cannot deny education to everyone because of one bad example." In Chand the women are the mainstay in the family. They provide the basis for healthy nutritional food, and are the major force behind sending their children to school. As Devamma says, "I did not get any education and I cannot do anything other than be a domestic servant.... but if I can put my children through school and they learn how to read and write it will be good."

The educational process has always been impeded for girls because of the pattern of early marriage. In part, girls drop out of school to get married. But parents also view education for their daughters as problematic because they are also afraid that they may not be able to find a bridegroom who has more education than their daughter.

That fear reflects a widespread belief that the groom should have more education than the bride; otherwise the man cannot maintain his superior position in the hierarchical structure of the family. A wife with a higher level of education than her husband would lessen the husband's pride in himself. These cultural factors are very limiting for girls. The more education a woman receives, the smaller her field of potential spouses. This pattern operates in Chand. Some respondents mentioned that it was difficult to find bridegrooms for educated daughters unless a large dowry was given. Girls' education do not enhance their prospects for

marriage or employment.

MARRIAGE AND DOWRY

The average age of marriage among the original migrant women of Chand was 15 years. These women either got married back in their village or came to the city by marrying a migrant. Now there is an increasing age of marriage among the first generation migrants. Palani got married at the age of 18 years, soon after she completed her high school. The girls who drop out of school get married at an earlier age, around 15 years, because the parents feel that having an unmarried daughter at home who has reached her puberty is a "responsibility." Thus, if a girl is getting an education, the parents are willing to wait till she finishes her high school. But if she has dropped out of school the parents would prefer to get her married.

The young unmarried girls of Chand do not want to marry men from the villages and would rather marry men from Delhi. Some of the girls have not been back to their villages and only hear the stories that their parents tell about the difficult life in the village. They say that they would miss the movies and their relatives here if they went back.

For example, Thangaponnu said, "Now they are looking for a boy for me. I told my parents that I want to marry a

boy only from Delhi..... My mother will not want me to leave and go elsewhere as I can come over and help her at times." Asked whether she would pick a boy of her own choice, she says,

I am not like that. Where can I go looking for a boy? My mother and father will pick someone for me..... Even in the house I work, the girls are not allowed to pick their own husbands..... I once worked in a house where this Hindu girl married this Muslim boy, and she was constantly crying because her parents and his parents would not talk to them. She herself told me never to do anything like that.

Palani's name always cropped up when education was mentioned. Palani is seen as a "failure". Although educated, she did not get a "well paid" job and her parents paid a large dowry to get her married. In general education and dowry are inversely related. This inverse relation changes if the girl is to marry someone from the village. In that case the groom gets a passage to the city and that more than compensates for a large dowry.

The giving and receiving of dowry is accepted by the women and girls of Chand. Thanga says,

my employers gave a large dowry for their daughter. They gave two and a half lakhs to a man who lived abroad. They would not have to give that much if he had lived in Delhi..... They took a large loan to pay for the wedding. I cannot give my daughter that much money, but I also have to give something.

The practice of dowry results in preferential treatment of boys over girls. There is indulgence and

tolerance of errant behaviors of the boys but strict codes of behavior are for the girls. Raga's son lives with her and works as a construction worker. He did not complete his high school education and dropped out of school after the eighth standard. He rarely gives his mother or father the income he earns, and his "throwing away" of the money is thought to be natural. Raga says, "he is a male child and boys tend to behave like that. When he gets married it will be his wife's responsibility to see that he brings home the money." At the same time she is very strict with her daughter and very decisive about what her daughter is allowed to do. She says, "My daughter has to finish school and her income has to be given to the family..... I have to give a dowry for her marriage and where can I go for that money?" I asked her whether she is not concerned that her daughter will become like Shambu and Palani. She says, "if she does any thing like that, her father will beat her till her skin peels off."

Generally, in India when a girl does not bring sufficient dowry, the husband feels he has the right to chastise and beat his wife (Flavia 1988). If the husband is also prone to drinking and gambling the wife is even more exposed to abuse. But, the women of Chand do not complain of their husbands drinking. Devamma says, "of course the men do drink sometimes but they do not misbehave..... They are not like that." There have been no cases of wife-

beating. As Ponnu says, "if he hits me, I can hit him right back. I can go to the police and complain against him. My husband has never hit me and no one here has been hit by their husbands either. There is no necessity for that." Devamma works in a house where the husband beats the wife and Devamma tells her mistress that it does not happen in the slum where she lives. "If there are husbands and wives they will shout at each other, but we don't do things like people back in the villages." These women recognize the injustice of wife beating and do not tolerate any abuse from their husbands.

One of the reasons for the women's ability to stand up to their husbands and not tolerate any abuse, is that they probably have a greater say in financial matters. In Chand, unlike in the villages, women get money in their hands, they have their own work and their own income, and moreover, they control their own employment. This gives them a greater sense of power and freedom. For the same reason, these women have a greater say in the size of the family. However, one area that has not changed is child care.

FAMILY SIZE AND CHILD CARE

India has always had to contend with the problem of population control. Through the years the Government has tried to control the growth of population through various

family planning programs. In Chand all families have one or two children each, with the exception of one family that has seven children. The woman with seven children is Palani, who is a high school graduate. All the other women who are married and have two children had been sterilized through a government program in 1976.¹⁶ When the women were asked whether they made a conscious choice at that time, the answer was usually "no".

Tamarai says that, "when I got it done,¹⁷ I had just had a second child, a boy, and all the people at the hospital convinced me that it was a good idea to get it done. They also said I would get some money. I asked my husband and he said that I should not get it done. But I needed the money as I was not going back to work for a month, and I got it done..... When I came back home he shouted at me, but could not do anything as my parents had come to visit us and he is scared of my father." Not all the other women were as bold as Tamarai to disobey their husbands so blatantly.

The other women did it with the permission of their husbands and the decision was strictly an economic one.

¹⁶ In 1976 the government offered people incentives to get sterilized. The government focused especially among the poorer sections of the population, giving them incentives such as a radio or cash up to Rs.200. Many men and women volunteered under that program.

¹⁷ Meaning, when she underwent the surgery for sterilization.

some of them look back on it now and say that, "what I did then was right. What would I do with five children and no way to take care of them."

The women are very vocal about Palani's seven children. They feel that "she should get operated," that is, sterilized. All conversations showed that the decision that she to undergo the surgery and limit the size of the family was jointly by men and women. It was not purely an economic decision, nor a decision made solely by the man as in the villages.

Marriage and the choice of number of children is accompanied by the responsibilities of child care and child rearing. In most cases the mother handles all discipline. In severe cases, when the child is caught stealing, etc., the father may intercede to punish or beat the child. Not unlike the traditional Indian setup, the boys are brought up with greater tolerance and attention than the girls, but it is not uncommon in Chand for parents to beat their children when they misbehave. This is how they themselves were brought up. From the interviews it was apparent that children tend to regard the yelling they get from their mothers as natural or something not to be taken very seriously. But any reprimand from the father is always treated with deference. Here too the women drew a parallel between their way of bringing up children and the ways of their employer.

Sithamma says,

in my employer's house, the man there beats his children with a belt. You should see how those children cry. We don't do things like that, but then these children have to be taught what is right and wrong. My father and mother would beat me as a child when I misbehaved.

Child care and housework are still the complete responsibility of the women. Except for fixing the roofing in the home or helping restore the walls, the cooking, cleaning, and shopping are done primarily by women. As stated in the preceding section husbands contribute their income to the family pool, ranging from 100 percent in one case to 70 percent in another.

The discussion above clearly indicates that the women of Chand exercise their personal choice for family planning and child care practices. Given that, it is not surprising that they also exercise their personal choice in selecting a political candidate.

POLITICAL CHOICES

The people of Chand all support the Congress(I), the political party established by the late Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. They explained that "the news says that there is no one better and people say that the Congress(I) is the only party which will do anything for the poor people." When they were in the rural area, however they

voted for AIADMK party, better known as the MGR party in south India, because it was led by MGR, a matinee idol.

An incident that took place in 1984 in Chand illustrates the political choices made by these women. When Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was shot by a Sikh in 1984, a riot broke out in Delhi. As a result, many innocent Sikhs were killed. Two Sikh families used to live across the street from the families whom I interviewed. The women of Chand gave them refuge and protected them from the mob. This was a brave thing to do because families that harbored Sikhs were also being massacred by the mob. The women of Chand explained that,

these Sardar (or Sikh) families had nothing to do with the killing, and they were very nice to us when we first moved in.... We have lived together for so many years.... The children of our families played together and grew up together.... What are we going to gain by killing them?

Even during the times of political turmoil, the women of Chand were able to exercise their personal judgement and choices. They chose to give shelter to "dissidents" and do not wait for the men in their families to take a stance on the issue before reacting to the situation. As far as I understood, the women never asked the men for their permission or support in these actions. Their choice for a political candidate is no different from those who are economically limited; that is, they vote for a political party that promises them a better life or vote for an "idol"

they admire.

One very interesting phenomena was the women's organization that Mariamman has established. One day I happened to hear the women talking about the sewer system¹⁸ in Chand. What really surprised me was the fact that these women were very vocal about their opinions, and wanted to make a positive change in their environment. They wanted to buy concrete slabs to cover up parts of the sewer system, thus making the area more hygienic. It would be impossible to visualize the same level of political activity and outspokenness of the women in the rural areas. Even Sithamma, the Pallakamoodu woman of Palaya who belonged to the Panchayat, was quiet and did not take an active role in the decision making process of the Panchayat, even when she had an option to do so.

CONCLUSION

None of the Chand residents ever want to go back to their village to stay. Some of them have returned to the village for a visit or attend the marriage of a brother or sister, but nobody has moved back to the village for good. The youngsters who were born in the city have never gone back. The people who go there usually bring back 'horror'

¹⁸ In India, in the slums, the sewer is an open drain system, and these women wanted the Municipality to provide slabs of concrete to cover the drain.

stories of the village. They do not like the scarcity of water, the lack of electricity, the lack of variety of foods, and the slow pace of life. The women of Chand, married or unmarried, have considerable freedom in the city. They go out with their friends and relatives when they wish. They realize that back in the villages women are not allowed to go out by themselves, even for a movie, and have to have a male escort, either a brother or husband. They feel that the women in the villages are rather "silly and stupid" for not standing up to the men and doing what they want.

The women in Chand justify their actions by what they see among their employers (Levi 1977, p.287). Marriage with dowry is accepted and expected in India, in spite of laws that prohibit dowry. The people of Chand practice dowry because their employers practice dowry. The problem of dowry is widely prevalent in India and cuts across all religions and castes. The families in the slum perpetuate it as well.

Marriage in India is thought to be the ultimate goal for women. If a woman is not married by the time she is twenty-five years of age it is assumed that something is "wrong" with her or that she is not of good character. This would ruin the name of the family and makes marriage difficult for the younger siblings in the family. The women of Chand are no different from people of the other castes and religions in India. They feel that the ultimate goal of

women is to get married.

The women of Chand wield power in the family and society because they control their area of employment. They are witness to the life style of their employers, where the women in the households voice their opinions in household matters and many of these women hold jobs and bring in a steady and independent income into the family, apart from their husband. As the women of Chand view this at first hand it affects their own family attitude and their attitude to their husbands. Because the women of Chand wield power over their work they can realize their potential as people who contribute to society in a significant manner. They are able to bring home a steady source of income and thus have a say in matters concerning their household and its members.

Migration has also broken the traditional bonds of the caste system. These women are no longer slighted in front of the upper castes and no longer forced to show deference. They now have greater sense of confidence and self worth.

These findings show that one of the pressing needs is to promote the organization of women's associations, to encourage the participation of women in the decision making and community development, and to foster the development of female leadership in the slums. If this were done, the needs and priorities of women and the family could be articulated and better understood and more effective programs to meet

these needs designed.

CHAPTER VI

THE FAILURE OF DEVELOPMENT: MIGRATION AND THE BREAKING OF RURAL BONDS

The phrase 'developing nations,' a somewhat more polite expression than the former 'underdeveloped nations,' is by far the more inaccurate term. It misdirects our deliberation, while masking the real problems and allowing them to escape solution. In reality, most so-called developing countries are underdeveloping (Chowdhury 1980, p.179).

Chowdhury makes the point that planners in India are so preoccupied with development and industrial growth, but have ignored the root problems. The failure to address these problems led to underdevelopment. Before any development can take place, there has to be a resolution of these problems. My own findings confirm this observation.

My study found that though development was aimed at economic growth, it did not change rural structures. The "trickle down effect" postulated by the modernization theorists did not work. For one thing, modernization policies did not affect the configuration of the caste structure and its land holding pattern, nor did it affect the gender relations.

Instead, modernization policies in India resulted in

uneven development which in turn encouraged an unparalleled migration of the rural poor to urban areas. Although these migrants presented major problems for the cities in which they settled, the migration did have some beneficial effects. Indirectly and covertly, it weakened the caste and gender structures that were binding on rural people.

In the subsequent section I will discuss the findings of my study. Chart I summarizes my findings on women's opportunities in the areas of land holding, occupational structure, income, household work, education, marriage and dowry, family size and child care, and politics in Sitha, Palaya and Chand.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

My findings point to two root causes for the continuing and increasing dependency of women in rural India - bonds of caste and of gender that tie them to the traditional structures of inequality. In each case I found these bonds to be notably weakened for the urban migrant women of Chand.

Caste bonds surface primarily in land holding and access to economic resources. Gender bonds are more pervasive and become visible in women's perception of their own property rights, their access to and orientation toward education, the importance of marriage and dowry as a means

CHART I

Women's Opportunities in Sitha, Palaya and Chand

Areas of Analysis	Villages		Urban Area
	Developed and Rich Families Sitha	and Less Developed Palaya Poor Families	Urban Slum Chand Poor Families
Land Holding Rights	Aware	Not Aware	Aware
Occupation	Control	No Control	Control
Income	High	Low	Medium
Household Work	Some Help (servants)	No Help	Support Group
Education	Some	None	Some
Marriage and Dowry	Is a Priority	Is a Priority	Is a Priority
Family Size	Have some Say	No Say	Joint Decision
Child Care	Some Help (servants)	No Help	Support Group
Political Choice	Caste Based	Shaped by Economic Reasons	Party Based

to obtain status, and in their role as mothers. These two bonds also surface in the nature of political choices women make.

Land Holding and Occupational Structure

Among the rich upper caste in Sitha, men and women work together on their own family land. Job security is not an issue among these upper caste women because they work on the family property. By contrast the poor castes in Sitha and Palaya, are landless and are forced to work as daily laborers whenever they can find work. Sometimes there is work and sometimes there is no work. Their employment is erratic because they are dependent on the landlords for employment. Their jobs are insecure and so is their income. An extreme case of indebtedness are the Nadars who are bonded or work as slaves for the Vallal families. This dependence on the Vallals is particularly desperate for women, as exemplified in the case of Shanti who is mortally afraid that the landlord to whom she is bonded will take physical advantage of her. Once that happens, she will be stigmatized and deprived of a chance of ever getting married. The problems of caste framework and employment and the subsequent dependence of the lower castes on the richer landed castes were not addressed or touched by the development programs.

Unequal land holding patterns thus constitutes one of the root problems to which Chowdhury refers. Related to land is the unequal access to credit facilities, another root problem. Credit facilities, which are offered through Government plans and policies, are supposed to aid the rural population procure better irrigation facilities, and high yield variety seeds. In reality, these credit facilities are restricted to families who can offer a collateral in the form of land. Moreover, the Government officials in the two villages I studied are from the upper caste families, and give preference to people of their own caste when approving access to credit. Thus, the upper castes families who own most of the land also obtain most or all of the credit and government loans. The landless castes are rarely aware of these government programs and when they are aware of them they cannot come up with sufficient collateral to make use of them. As a result, the poor must continue to work on the land of the rich and become increasingly dependent on them for their livelihood. This is what I found in Sitha, where all the Nadar families work as slaves on the land of the Vallals. Thus the caste structure in India takes on an economic dimension and widens the gap between the upper/rich castes and the lower/poor castes.

In contrast to the rural women, the women from Chand have better opportunities for employment. They have a secure job and also exercise control over an area of the job

market (domestic service) in a particular location. This means that the women of Chand are assured of a steady flow of income. My study confirms the findings of Singh and de Souza (1976) and Sethuraman (1978) that the urban slum dwellers believe that their standard of living has improved compared to their situation in the rural areas. Majumdar (1978) in particular notes that the average earnings over a year among the slum dwellers is two and a half times more than what they earned in the rural areas. In Sitha, the average wage among the lower caste people is Rs. 4.00¹ per day and in Palaya the average wage is Rs.6.00. The people of Chand however earn an average monthly salary of Rs.23.00.

The more secure economic position of the families of Chand is also revealed by their nutritional level. Studies of nutritional levels among the urban squatter settlements note that malnutrition is less severe among the urban poor. Singh (1978) concludes that "life in the city, insecure and marginal as it is, is not as subject to fluctuations in food supply, as caused by drought and seasonal shortages that often interrupt the supply of food to the poor in the villages" (p.84). I also found that the women from Chand had higher nutritional standards than the rural households. They have two meals a day consisting of bread, rice and vegetables. This is in contrast to the rural areas where

¹ The official conversion rate is Rs15.00 = \$1.00.

one meal is of rice water (kanji) and the other is of rice and pickles.

Land Holding Rights

The rich Vallal women of Sitha have some awareness of the legal provisions that prescribe equal right to inheritance for women. However, because of the strong patriarchal culture and tradition that envelops them, they do not exercise this right. The poor women of Sitha and Palaya are not even aware of the legal provisions for inheritance, and feel that only the men in the family have a right to inherit property.

In contrast, the Chand women are not only aware of their right to inherit property but are exercising this right. Two women in particular are trying to claim their share of the land. A singular instance is the case of Savitri who is fighting to get money from her brother to support their father.

Education

The rich upper caste women in Sitha are the only women with some education beyond the fifth grade. Education in the villages is for the upper castes, although neither they nor the lower castes see education as the means to better jobs or additional income.

The girls of the lower castes are forced to seek

employment at a very young age to support the family. Among the poor in Sitha and Palaya enrollment rate for women is consistently lower than for men. There are no statistics on rates of absenteeism from earlier studies, but the patterns of enrollment and drop out that I discovered show that the drop out rates for girls is higher than that for boys.

In Chand on the other hand, the rate of literacy has increased considerably from the previous generation. All the 45 children born to the migrants have attended or are attending school and none dropped out before the sixth grade. The women realize that there are benefits to being educated and emphasize the necessity of education for their children.

The difference however between the poor rural women and the women from Chand is, the former cannot even access the educational opportunities because family resources are limited and the limited funds are directed toward the men in the family. In Chand, the girls and boys in the family have an equal chance for education in part because the family income is higher. However, although all the female children presently are attending school, the women still feel that education is more important for the boys than the girls. That is because they still see marriage as of primary importance for girls.

Marriage and Dowry

The traditional view of marriage in India can be seen as a process of 'detachment' from the father's home and an 'attachment' to the husband's family. In other words, dependence on the father is substituted by dependence on the husband. Marriage is still a woman's primary goal and an unmarried woman is viewed as a burden for her family. That is one of the reasons why a dowry is given to the bridegroom's family at the time of marriage. This traditional view of marriage reinstates the subordinate position of women. This view holds true of all the women in Sitha and Palaya.

The richer women of Sitha, the Vallals, get married when they are in their late teens. Possibly government programs to increase the level of literacy has resulted in parents letting their daughters get at least a high school education before marriage.

Among the poorer sectors of the population of Sitha and Palaya, marriage of a daughter means one mouth less to feed and also lessens the burden on the family of taking care of a daughter after puberty. Among these families women marry early. To get their daughters married off and pay for the dowry and wedding expenses, the Nadar families usually have to borrow from the Vallal family, to whom they are already bonded. This increases the debt of the Nadar

families to the Vallals and their bondage is reinforced and increased.

Although marriage is the most important goal for these women, it presents them with a difficult life. I found a high rate of wife beating in Palaya by husbands who gambled and drank. Flavia (1988) rightly attributes the problem of wife beating to the sexist structure of the family and society. She states that, "as long as the idea of the man as the head of the family remains rooted in our culture and in the eyes of the law, wife beating will be perpetuated in society" (p.161).

In the urban area of Chand marriage is as important as in the rural area, but the women are not faced with the phenomenon of wife beating. These women clearly are aware of their rights and do not "tolerate" any abuse from their husbands.

Dowry is an essential part of marriage in all cases. All the women feel that it is necessary for them to get "good" dowry. However, the bridegroom and his family determine whether a dowry is sufficient or not. Thus what is a "good" dowry is very subjective. The husband's family may have considered the dowry to have been sufficient at marriage, but once the money from the dowry is spent there is always cause to complain that the initial amount was not sufficient. Women want a good dowry to protect them against complaints and harassments by their husbands. Poor women

cannot buy their safety in this manner. This is one of the reasons for harassment of the wife.

Although dowry always involved money or property, migration provides another opportunity for poor women, if they already live in the city. I found several cases where a girl of Chand marries a man from the rural area, and his passage to the urban area was considered to be a sufficient dowry. The girls do not want to live in the rural area after marriage and prefer that the boy come and live in the city. Although the girls prefer to marry a boy who already lives in city. In this way migration provides a more specific opportunity for poor women to obtain what they consider a good marriage than what they could obtain in the rural areas.

Family Size and Child Care

Family Size

The poorer and low caste sectors of all populations are often harassed by government officials in India to become sterilized or vasectomized. Because fertility is considered a woman's issue, these officials primarily target women. However, I saw no evidence that the upper castes in Sitha were never harassed. They interact socially with the government officials and their caste and familiarity protect them from approaches to undergo sterilization or vasectomy. Even among these families women have little direct role in

family planning; the decision of family size is made by the men in the family.

In the rural areas the harassment of the poor is very apparent. In part that may be because the Village Administrative Officer's promotion depends on his/her ability to record "cases" of sterilization. In part it also reflects the more vulnerable economic position of the poor. The lack of choice was especially evident in Palaya where most of the families gave in to the family planning officials and their monetary incentives. In the words of Maniamma, "hundred rupees is a lot of money and so my husband said I should get operated." Her situation is typical. If the women have not already been sterilized, the decision about family size is made by the men in the family.

The women in Chand are aware of the family planning program and adhere to it of their own free will. For example, Tamarai's fight with her husband, showed that her decision to undergo sterilization was her own. Devamma was considering undergoing sterilization and her decision to do so was jointly arrived at with her husband. Though the reason for adopting the family planning program is mainly economic among the Chand families, the decision of family size is made jointly by the husband and wife, that is because the women control the purse strings for household expenses and thus exercise considerable economic power within the family.

Child Care

Not surprisingly, I found that while the decision of family size in the rural areas is made by the men, child care is still the sole responsibility of the women. This is not a major problem for the rich Vallals of Sitha because they work on their own land and are able to take their children with them or stay behind at home. They also have the Nadars to help them on the land and at home.

For the poor, child care has always been a burden. Among the poor women in Sitha and Palaya, the lack of child care often means that they cannot go to work because women are important contributors to family income. This results in decreased income in the family. As Selvi says, "I do not have anyone to leave my child with when I go to work. But tomorrow I have to earn some money for food. I sometimes leave my child with Devaki, but she too has to work."

The problem of child-care is considerably diminished for the women of Chand. Unlike the poor rural women, the women of Chand are able to take their children to work. Their jobs are secure, they have bargained with their employers and they are able to take some time off soon after the delivery of the baby. Because the women have a voice in the work environment, they have the flexibility that their rural counterparts are unable to enjoy. For example, as Ponnu says, "when my children were born, I took one month

off and my employers paid me for it. Until the children were old enough to go to school, I used to take the children with me to work." Mariamman, another woman from Chand, told me that the women had set up a fund to help their members in financial need and also provide child care facilities.

Hess-Buechler (1976, p. 66) found in her study of Bolivian and Spanish Glacian female migrants that migration per se does not result in major differences in the position of women unless it is "accompanied by changes in her reproductive role through family planning and her productive role in terms of control of strategic resources and education." This is exactly what has happened in Chand. The women of Chand have been able to control their productive and reproductive role. These migrant women control the domestic servant market, in the sense that no other individual can provide household work in that area without the express permission of the women of Chand. This gives them a leverage to bargain for wages, hours of work, paid vacations and maternity benefits. Earlier too I pointed out that the decision to adopt family planning through sterilization was made jointly with their husbands. It is in these ways that the women of Chand feel that their position is better off than their rural counterparts.

political Choices

Although caste is the primary force that shapes political choice, the subordinate position of women also operate to limit their ability to formulate political positions and exercise political decisions. The richer Vallal families in Sitha told me that they vote for a particular political party because they know the politician. The Vallals feel they are helping out one of their own and base their choice of a political candidate on caste loyalties.

In Palaya, the monetary incentives given by the incumbent politician were substantial and the people voted for him. As Devaki says, "I voted for the party with the two leaves. For that I got a free saree and five kilograms of good rice at Rs.2.00 per kilo." Her observation illustrates my observation that political choice among the poor is based on economic factors.

Though the choice of a political candidate is based on narrow economic interests, the rural women, in general, do not exercise their political choices independently from that of the men. Nine of the twelve women I interviewed in Palaya said that they listen to their husbands before they go to the voting booth and do as they are told. As one woman said, "he tells me to place my thumb mark on the two leaves and I do so. I don't know much about these things"

Political consciousness were more developed in Chand. Most of the slums in the big cities of India are tied to different political parties (de Witt 1989, p.63). In Chand too, I found something similar. The women of Chand told me that they voted for Congress-I, a political party that has a large following among the people in Chand. However, the women of Chand showed a subtle political awareness in their ability to distinguish between collective and personal relationships as exemplified in how they helped their Sikh neighbors.

CONCLUSION: BREAKING THE RURAL BONDS

The above findings of study indicate that are two major bonds that tie down the women I interviewed. These are the bonds of caste and gender, both of which are much more binding in the rural areas than in the urban area. This section will review the nature of these bonds and discuss how the women of Chand have broken or at least weakened these bonds.

The Bonds of Caste

Caste is the pervading umbrella that structures every single social relationship in rural India. Caste determines the type of wells, the type of social mixing, the religious status, the marriage partners, and most

importantly the pattern of land holding. In Sitha and Palaya, the upper castes have wells with electrically run pumps to irrigate their fields and provide water to their homes. The lower castes have just a hole in the ground where the water is usually very muddy. If they do not have a well, they have to travel far (three quarters of a mile) to fetch even water to drink. The practice of untouchability, I found, segregates the Vallals and Vanneers from the Pallakamoodus, Arundithiyars and Nadars they occupy separate living areas in the village for the separate castes. During social occasions too, the upper castes occupy a position of prominence. Even on religious occasions, the Vanneers and Vallals have the privilege of visiting and entering the temple first.

Most important however is caste which influences land holding. Since pre-British times, land has been in the hands of the upper castes. According to the jajmani system that prevailed then, large tracts of land were given to the upper castes in exchange for the socio-religious services they performed for the king (Dumont 1970, p.97). In Sitha, the upper castes (Vallals and Vanneers) own 91 percent of the land, and in Palaya the Vanneers own 86 percent. All the wet land in both the villages is concentrated in the hands of the upper castes. The pervasive influence of caste is exemplified by my own experience. One of the first questions addressed to me was what is my caste affiliation.

By contrast, I found that caste hierarchies do not play a significant role in the urban area. The women I interviewed in Chand never gave importance to caste and were surprised when I asked them to what caste they belonged. While, in the rural areas there are separate wells for the upper castes and separate wells for lower castes. In the urban slum there is one water tap for all slum residents, and everyone, no matter her/his caste, has to stand in line. I found that the most important relationship in such a slum is kinship. These kinship networks were developed when the migrants first came to the city. In fact all the 25 families that came to Chand made use of their kinship networks to arrive and settle down in Delhi.

The Caste mentality exists all over India. Everywhere there are Brahmins, Kshatriyas, artisans, peasants and menials, however the regional differences are so great that the understanding of caste boundaries is region-specific. Srinivas states that,

It is not merely that some castes - for example, the bharbujha or grain parcher, kahar or water carrier, and the bartos or genealogists - are to be found only in some parts of the country, or that the position of a few occupational castes varies from one part of the country to another, but that caste mainly exists and functions as a regional system (1966, p.3).

Thus the vertical ranking or the hierarchy of the caste is proper to a particular region. In Tamil Nadu, which includes Sitha and Palaya, the Vanneers and Vallals

are higher in the caste hierarchy than the Pallakamoodus, Arundithiyars and Nadars. This caste ranking may not necessarily be true in Andhra Pradesh or West Bengal where some of these castes do not even exist. This means that the hierarchy of the caste relationship is region-specific and cannot be transferred when people migrate from their region of origin.

This process of status relevance occurs in other settings as well. Thus, a homosexual may be classified as a 'deviant' when he is placed in a heterosexual society, but not were he in a culture or society of homosexuals, then the 'deviance' is no longer relevant. Similarly, when comparing an apple to other apples, the size, shape, sweetness and color come into play. But a comparison between apples and oranges is to no purpose.

In a specific rural area, people of one caste compare themselves to other castes and the hierarchy of relationship is maintained. Thus the Nadars are a lower caste than the Vallals in Tamil Nadu, but this comparison does not have any relevance in Delhi, an urban area, which is in another linguistic and administrative region. Here the people do not have the same grid lines or the basis for comparison with other castes. As Srinivas states, "to the average peasant, the names of the castes in other linguistic areas are pure abracadabra" (1966, p.3). The breaking of caste bonds in this manner also means that the women are no longer

dependent on the higher castes for their livelihood and survival.

The association among the people in the slum is based instead on kinship networks although these are based on intra-caste relationships. However, the reference group for interaction is based on horizontal (within-caste) relationships rather than vertical associations. When migrants first arrive in the city, it is kinsfolk who look after them, help them to acclimatize, find them jobs, and get them started. Accordingly, these kinship networks play a major role in the lives of the migrants. The kinship networks arose out of a basic need for adjustment to life in the cities. In the rural area by contrast, the relationship between the employer (upper caste) and the employee (lower caste) is almost feudal in nature and this dependence makes it impossible for the lower castes to organize themselves or even question their rights. In the urban area there is no such parallel dependence and these intra-caste networks can operate to help the migrants organize.

It is for these reasons that migration to an urban area is like a ticket to freedom. It liberates the women from the grid lines of caste and paves the way for more egalitarian relationships.

The Bonds of Gender Inequality

Another bond that stifles rural women is the unequal gender relations. This inequality is witnessed particularly in the areas of education, land inheritance, income, marriage, fertility, housework and child-care. This inequality is weakened in the urban area, because women in the urban area exercise considerable control over their jobs and their employment. They also have a job apart from their husbands and do not have to compete with them for the same jobs. This gives them considerable economic and social autonomy from their husbands.

One of the reasons why women gained control of the job market in the urban area is because of the type of employment and employment relations. In the rural area, the jobs are seasonal and the women depend on their employers without having any entitlement to work. The employers sometimes give them employment and sometimes do not. In such an erratic job situation bargaining for one's rights is impossible. Here the major issue is one of acquiring the basic minimum to have food on the table. As long as the lower castes are at the mercy of the upper richer castes for such basic survival the bond will not be broken. In the urban area on the other hand, the women are not totally dependent on their employers for their survival or livelihood. They are free to seek employment elsewhere.

Another factor that explains the autonomy of the women from the men is the cooperative that the urban women have developed. The existing kinship relationships formed the basis for interaction among the women in times of need and also became the cornerstone for the development of networks. These became the mechanism for them to gain control of the job market. These kinship networks were also the foundation for women's groups that facilitated child-care services.

The urban women have a dual job (job and housework) as do their rural counterparts, but Chand women have access to child-care facilities through the kinship networks. This leaves urban women with more leisure time than the rural women. Women in general spend a lot of time in household chores and child-care. These factors define their time. If less time can be spent on these activities then women are more free to spend time on organizational activities (Mackenzie 1988).

The urban women also have more flexibility in the hours of work because of the very nature of their job, domestic service, allows them to balance their hours on the job and the hours at home. For the rural women, the job environment is not fluid, they do not have the leisure time to pursue other activities and cannot create the network relationships necessary for child-care. Moreover, the poor lower caste women in Sitha and Palaya must spend inordinate

amounts of time on gathering fuel or fetching water. They have neither the time, energy or opportunities to interact with one another and develop supportive structures to overcome the bonds that keep them subservient.

Even such a factor as physical space plays an important role in aiding the development of control over the job market. In the rural area there are spatial limitations to mixing among members of the same caste. The fact that they live in single homes, at a considerable distance from each other, interacting only with the upper and wealthier castes for basic survival, acts as a deterrent to establishing networks. For example, a Nadar is totally dependent on the Vallal for employment and lives apart from other Nadars. On the other hand, though the Arundithiyars in Palaya live somewhat closer to each other, their dependence on the upper and wealthier castes for their subsistence is so total, that they have no scope or leverage for forming networks to bargain for their rights from their employers.

In the urban area, all the women live and work in a particular locality and see each other often during the day. Their hutments are juxtaposed and they are often in and out of each other's homes to borrow milk or bread or simply chatting. They also leave for work together and come back in the evening together. This provides spatial proximity, which coupled with the fact that they are not

totally dependent on their employer but can seek jobs in other households, provides them the opportunity to organize themselves and bargain for their rights on the job.

It is this control of the job market and control over their source of income which gives the women of Chand a certain self-image, autonomy, and independence from their husbands. As a result, the women in the urban area, in contrast to their rural counterparts, are able to get the male members of the family to lend a hand in household chores, such as, like fixing the house or shopping for groceries. Further, the women in the urban area succeed in getting their husbands to contribute most of their income to help meet household expenses, something which was very rare in the rural area. I attributed this 'willingness' on the part of the male members in the family to do household tasks and to contribute to household expenses to the fact that the women have power and control in the 'public area' and this power is transferred to the 'home'. It is for these reasons - autonomy in the job, social support groups, spatial and time factors - that women in the urban areas are able to weaken their bonds of dependence on men.

My study has shown that the two major bonds that tie down the lives and opportunities for women in the rural area are caste and gender. The lives and opportunities of women in rural India indicate that development programs have perpetuated the traditional gender and caste roles and thus

marginalized or worsened the conditions for women in rural India.

The implication that grows from this research is not that all rural women migrate to the city. Far from it. But the research suggests that migration will be inevitable unless rural planners and policy makers make it their first priority to develop policies that break the stranglehold of caste and landholding on the one hand and unequal gender relations on the other. If development is to reach the rural areas and benefit the women, planners and policy makers need to promote the autonomy of women in the rural areas and otherwise take into account the gender relations in a patriarchal society like India. The catalyst to change in the rural areas is the social organization of the women.

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APPENDIX A

HOUSEHOLD INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

1. Date of Interview:
2. Name of Village:
3. Household Number:¹
4. Name of the person interviewed:
5. Name of the female head:
6. Name of the male head:
7. No. of people in the family:

Adults (above 18 years)		Children (below 18 years)	
Men	Women	Boys	Girls
8. Number of dependents:²
9. Caste:

Subcaste/Subsect:
10. Main occupation of the household:
11. All other occupations:

¹ The household number noted was the one given on the ration card.

² Dependents are people who do not earn a wage income for at least five days in a month.

12. Income of the family:

Weekly Income:

List Income earned by each member of the household per day on an average.

13. If main occupation is coolie (List each member separately):

How many days in a week do you work?

Wage per day:

14. Number of acres of land:

Wet land:

Dry land:

Land left fallow:

15. Yield/year

Rice:

Groundnut:

Sugar/Jaggery:

Vegetables:

Others (Specify):

16. Is there electricity in the house? yes/no

17. Method of irrigation:

Electric:

Bullocks:

18. Number of wells:
Number of wells for irrigation:
19. Who uses the wells?
Family members/same caste/other castes
20. Have you taken a loan from the government? Yes/No
21. If Yes, what were the occasions you took a loan?
22. Education level of the members of the household.
List each member and indicate children who are still undergoing education.
23. Age at which the female and male head of the family were married.

APPENDIX B

FIELD EXPERIENCES

On reaching Salem District, the area of study, I contacted the District Collector's office to get a letter addressed to the various village officers, authorizing me to conduct the study in those two villages. I got an official introduction to the Assistant Tahsildar through people I knew at the Public Works Department. They vouched for me and gave me credibility. The letter merely stated that the respective village officers were to give me all the assistance in conducting the study. It was not really necessary for me get the help of the village officers to do the research, but I wanted to have the letter so that I could get their views on the issue and their assistance in locating all the households in the village.

I met the revenue inspector (RI) Mr. Mani at his office. He has been the RI for the last one and half years.¹ After introducing myself I gave him the letter of introduction I had from the Tahsildar of Salem Taluk, which gave authenticity to my claim of conducting the study in Palaya. Since the revenue inspector for Pandi panchayat union² had gone on vacation, Mr. Mani was the acting RI for

¹ The posting of RI is changed every two years.

² Sitha also falls under his jurisdiction.

Pandi also. Mani was very enthusiastic about helping me conduct the study and offered to organize a meeting with the village administrative officers of both Palaya and Sitha the next day.

I explained to Mr. Mani that the study was to be focused mainly on women and their lives in the villages. His comment to such a study was that it was all 'very simple,' as the women do nothing much and only 'take care of the children and cook for the family' and most of the time "sitting under the shades of the trees gossiping." Mr. Raja's reaction is not very unlike the role women have come to occupy in the research sphere in the social sciences. Women's activities for the most part are described as a "mere backdrop to the more important action by men" (Maguire 1984, p.7).

Mr. Mani's point was that there was nothing to be gained from visiting the villages. "So you should not trouble yourself and go to the villages in this heat. I will ask them to come here and you can talk to them." I tried to tell him that it was no trouble and I was looking forward to going to the villages. At this he remarked that people have come to him earlier in other areas where he has worked to do research and he has never seen them go into the area and do it themselves. "It is too hot and cumbersome to go there." He told me he would show me the village if I wanted to see it and I would be doing him a favor if I did

not inconvenience myself and instead interviewed the women at his office instead. He added that at his office I would have the added luxury of tea and a cool drink whenever I wanted. "The likes of you should never go there. Even the Census officials do not go into those parts to do a head count and only come to this office for the information." He said he did not want to sound as though he was telling me what to do, but if I decide otherwise I was to ask for his help whenever I needed it.

Mr. Mani's reactions and other field experiences indicate that the concept of caste is very strong in the minds of people of rural India. Caste is the basis of division of the village into hamlets and even the distribution of necessities such as having a water supply and electricity, have become "privileges." I was afraid that if the people realized that I came from a high caste they might avoid me and not want to talk to me. When Mr. Mani asked as to which caste I belonged to, I tried to avoid answering the question. Despite the fact that I had not mentioned the caste I belong to Mr. Mani said "people of such a high standing like yourself should not be coming around to these areas of low castes." I explained that caste is not the basis for association and I do not see how he could surmise that I belonged to a high caste. He laughed (maybe at my naivety) and said "I looked at you and I knew right away that you were a Brahmin. You can look at

people and tell their jati."³

I also contacted the Village Administrative Officer (VAO), who is the next in the chain of the administrative command after the Revenue Inspector. Until 1982 the villages in the state had a system where the post of head of VAO⁴ was hereditary. In 1983 the Government of Tamil Nadu won a case against the Karnams who wanted to retain their hold over the villages. The transfer from the system of Karnams to the VAOs has not been a smooth one. The Karnams feel that they have been wronged and they still exert an authority over the villagers. The VAOs therefore find it difficult to carry out their duties, especially in view of the fact that the Karnams do not co-operate with the VAOs.

The VAO of Sitha is Mr. Raj and Palaya is one Mr. Kannan. They had been in that position for the last six months, which was when the VAOs of Tamil Nadu took charge. They would not allow me to go to either of the villages by myself as it was not "not safe". I also discussed with them how I was going to be introduced to the people. They felt that I should be introduced as a Government Employee because the people would then feel compelled to cooperate with me and it would ensure my safety. I did not feel very comfortable with that approach. I wanted to hear whatever

³ Jati, translated very loosely is another word for caste.

⁴ Earlier the VAOs were called Karnams.

the women in the villages had to say of their free will and not because they were coerced into talking with me. Also, my previous experience of working in the villages had indicated to me that people had a negative attitude toward Government officials. As one person remarked, "the Government people come and go. They make these promises and go away. They only talk about doing things for us." I also knew that if I claimed to be from the Government then people would expect some positive actions as a result of the study and I was not in a position to make that promise. Finally, I did not see any point in hiding the truth for the people and I thought that my credibility would be at stake if they came to know the truth at a later point in time. Taking the above considerations into account I felt that it would be better to keep my identity as a student.⁵

The village is not divided into hamlets in Sitha. Rather the land belonging to a particular household surrounds the houses belonging to the landlord and his farm helpers. I did accept some help from the VAO because the layout of Sitha is widespread and the VAO's assistant (or

⁵ The first time I was taken to both the villages by the Village Administrative Officers. They introduced me to the people as being a researcher who as a part of her studies was asked to go to the villages and write about it. The Village Administrative Officer for Sitha took me to each of the landlord's houses and introduced me to the people. It is interesting to note that the VAO did not think it important to introduce me to the farm helpers whom he knew I would also interview.

menial) always accompanied me to the village.

In order to meet everyone in the village personally I decided to take a census of each village. I visited each house in the village and noted demographic information about the family as specified in Appendix I. The questionnaires were in Tamil, but because most of the people were illiterate, I asked the questions and filled out individual questionnaires.

I went to the village of Palaya on the heel of two incidents which created problems of credibility for me. One month before I went to the village a Vanneer had been murdered in the adjacent village.⁶ The house of the Vanneer in question lies across the railway track, only a few yards away from the hamlet of the pallakamoodu. A week before I arrived, the police attacked the Pallakamoodu hamlet in the middle of the night and rounded up all the individuals in those homes including a three month old baby. The police told them that the murderer had to have been from their community as "only people from your caste could have done such a thing." As a result, the first few times I went to Pallakamoodu the people were not friendly and would not give

⁶ Palaya is divided into four hamlets, each consisting of a caste group, namely, Vanneer, Pallakamoodu, Nadar and Arundithiyar (or Chakali). Among those four castes the Vanneer occupy the highest position in the caste hierarchy, followed by the Pallakamoodus, the Nadars and finally the Arundithiyars. Palaya has boundaries of two embankments on the east and west side. The northern boundary is the main road and the southern boundary is a railway line.

me information about themselves or the members of their household. They thought that I was a police woman and visiting the village in the guise of a student. The people of this hamlet had experienced a similar thing in the past when they were harassed to such an extent that they were forced to name some one from their caste as the "culprit" despite the fact that they had no knowledge of the incident. The alleged "culprit" was released from prison in a couple of days because he managed to bribe the policeman, not because they found him innocent, which he was in this case.⁷

The second incident occurred when the Government announced a "family planning" campaign a few days before my arrival. Such campaigns involved forced vasectomy or sterilization. The situation became worse when it was announced that each VAO had to come up with at least ten cases for the campaign. In addition to the VAOs enlisting cases, the Family Programme officials were also visiting the villages for the campaign. Though unstated, it was understood that future promotions, requests for leave or vacation, etc., would be given to people who came up with the most number of "cases". The Family Programme officials are known to travel around the villages incognito and

⁷ Brandao (1983) talks of the poor in Brazil who have "little protection against abuse, arbitrary arrest and harassment to make them confess to crimes that they may not have committed" (p. 16). The argument is that being poor, they are the most vulnerable. This of course is very true in Palaya and Sitha.

"catch" people regardless of their age for either vasectomy or sterilization. Women in Palaya avoided me because they thought that I was from the Family Planning Office. This was especially so among the Pallakamoodu, the Nadars and Chakalis. The Vanneers did not have to worry about forced vasectomy or sterilization because they were the highest caste and most powerful in the area.

The above two incidents made it difficult for me to establish a rapport with the people in the village. Initially, people would ask me such questions as "Why are you working for those (meaning the Family Planning) people?" "Why do you want to catch us?" "We do not have too many children, so why do you want us to have the operation?" Questions about the jobs the men held or the number of acres of land owned were treated with suspicion among the Pallakamoodus. They thought that I was asking those questions because I was interested in finding the "culprit" for the murder that took place in the adjacent village among them.

To overcome these problems, I took the approach of not asking them about their jobs etc., but to talk to the women about their lives before they came to Palaya.⁸ More

⁸ These were women came from nearby villages and had married men in Palaya. I suppose I established a rapport with them because they were at one time strangers in the village too. Thus they were able to empathize with my situation.

importantly, I avoided visiting the villages with an entourage of people because I did not want the people to identify me with Government officials. Government Officials usually travel to or visit villages with their entourage of assistants and others to take care of the "needs" of drinking water, food, carrying their umbrella and bags. The fact that I did not have an entourage following me and also that I went to wells to draw water for drinking amazed them. Each time I began drawing water from the well a few of the women would come forward to help me. They would say, "people like you should not take the trouble of drawing water from the well." They were surprised that I thought nothing of doing things for myself and that I said that if they could draw water from the wells for themselves then it was okay for me to do so. I also told them that it would not be fair for me to ask someone else to do the work for me. These factors slowly thawed the ice. It was easy to win over the children, especially when they realized that I had candy with me, and in two days I had a small following!

A second factor that also helped to break the ice with the people was the manner in which I spoke Tamil. Tamil has many dialects and the people of different regions and castes speak the language differently. My friend who came along to the villages with me belongs to the Brahmin (or priestly) caste and is a native of Salem town and therefore speaks Tamil very well. My Tamil is considered to be that of a low

caste person because of the manner in which I speak it and the words that I use. A lady from the village told me "talking to you is better than talking to your friend because you talk just like us. Your friend is from a higher caste and cannot understand us too well." This I thought was a break through in establishing a rapport with the women in the village.

APPENDIX C

ADMINISTRATIVE SETUP

In a study of this nature, where I am looking at the impact of development policies undertaken by the Government, it is important to have an understanding of the administrative setup in the state of Tamil Nadu. Until recently village Munsiffs and Karnams were discharging the responsibilities of revenue personnel at the village level. These positions were hereditary, a title passed on from father to son. These posts have now been abolished and a Village Administrative Officer (VAO) has been appointed in their place by the Government. As a result of the change the VAO has no choice but comply with Government directives or else he might not be promoted. With the new appointed positions made by the Government, there is dual power structure that the poor in the villages have to answer to. They are already dependent on the upper castes¹ for their employment and livelihood. Now the poor had to also follow the orders given by the administrative authorities. A case in point is the Family Planning Programme, where the VAO has to produce the required number of cases to fill a quota.

At the State level the administrative head is the Chief Minister, who is elected into office. All the administrative positions below the Chief Minister are

¹ Traditionally the Karnams are from the upper castes.

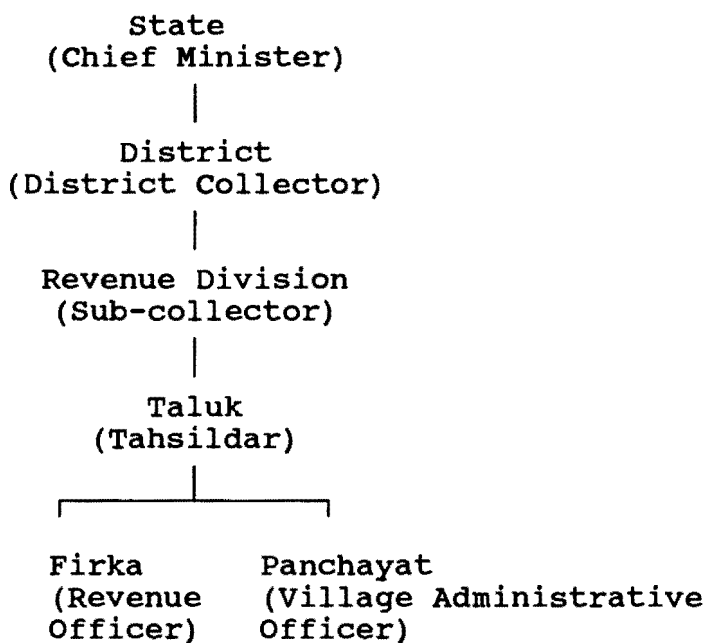
appointed rather than elected. The next administrative unit is the district with a District Collector as the administrative head. For administrative convenience the district is divided into four revenue divisions and each revenue division includes two or three taluks. The sub-collector or Revenue Divisional Officer is the head of a division. The administrative head at the taluk level is the Tahsildar who is assisted by the a Deputy Tahsildar and in certain cases by an Additional Deputy Tahsildar.

Each taluk is further divided into Firkas with Village inspectors as revenue personnel at the firka level. A group of villages constitute a panchayat union. The respective village presidents elect a Chairman who is the representative of a Panchayat Union. In turn, five to eight panchayat unions together makes a taluk. A taluk has thus been sub-divided into firkas and panchayat unions. Chart 1 gives a graphic presentation of the administrative structure and their corresponding officials.

The Government Officer at the panchayat union level is the Panchayat Union commissioner (equivalent to Block Development Officer). Block Development Officers (or BD Officers), are in turn assisted by social workers who operate at the village level. Six to eleven panchayat unions make a planning division for which a Divisional Development Officer is the head. The Panchayat Union Commissioner is directly responsible to the Divisional

Development Officer. According to the 1971 census, Salem District had 958 villages grouped into 35 panchayat unions and governed by four planning divisions.

Chart II
ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE



APPROVAL SHEET

The dissertation submitted by Shobha Srinivasan has been read and approved by the following committee:

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The final copies have been examined by the director of the dissertation and the signature that appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated and that the dissertation is now given final approval by the Committee with reference to content and form.

The dissertation is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

11/15/09

Date

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