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Familial Power Relations
Issues of gender and son preference in rural South India

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Abstract

This study deals with the impact of overall processes of societal change on already existing patriarchal structures in Indian society by investigating the phenomenon of son preference and daughter discrimination. In India the natural biological sex ratio of slightly more females than males in the population is reversed, predominantly in the youngest age group. The 2001 Census reveals that the sex ratio in the 0-6 year's group has declined since 1981. What is even more alarming is that child sex ratios have continued to decline in spite of general progress, economically and socially. The family is the most basic and fundamental form of organisation and structuring of social life, it constitutes the most immediate and relevant institutional arrangement to focus upon. The empirical material in this study has been collected during a field stay in rural south India using the qualitative inductive method. Moreover, the study attempts to understand the phenomenon of daughter discrimination from a structural point of view, hence, familial power relations and transformation from a gendered perspective constitutes the theoretical base.

Key words: Son preference, daughter discrimination, transformation, gender, sex-ratio

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1. Introduction

India is a country that is experiencing rapid changes yet maintaining old values and traditions. The country has achieved high growth rates in the recent decades and has grown to be the 11th largest economy in the world. Yet poverty and discrimination persist. There are some aspects of transformation that are accepted by the Indian society while some others are not, in practice this often results in the reinforcement of already prevailing values and traditions (Nilsson, 2004:4). Hence, earlier observations convey that these opposite forces do not always contradict each other; on the other hand some old values are in fact backed up by modern ones. Moreover, it has been argued that India is in a transition period, stuck in between traditional and modern society. This is particularly interesting as development cannot solely be seen in terms of economic growth. Distribution of economic growth, level of education, level of democracy and equality are other important aspects that are taken into account. India being a vast country with the second largest population in the world is highly heterogeneous; more than 300 languages are spoken, myriad of castes and social classes, different religions etc. It is precisely this heterogeneity that makes any discussion of development and change in India a complex matter.

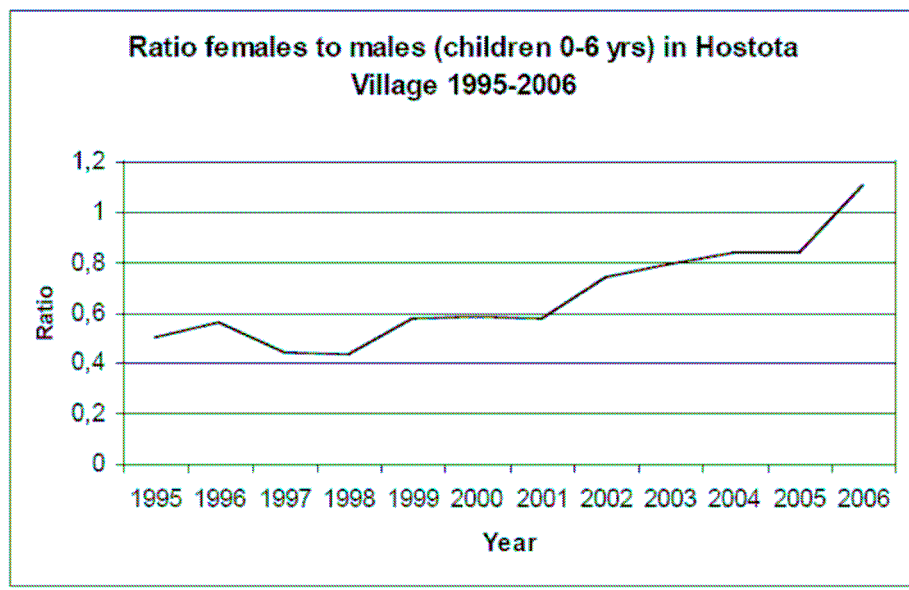
Since gaining independence in 1947 India has undergone substantial changes, economically as well as socially. Poverty and illiteracy have declined considerably during this period. Nevertheless, a matter of great concern is the alarming trend of the general preponderance of males over females in the population. The 2001 Census Of India has highlighted a disturbing development towards an increasing undesirability of girls and growing preference for sons. India, in fact, exhibits one of the highest rates of masculinity in the world. The reversed natural biological sex ratio of a slightly higher number of females than males in a population has a long history in India.¹ Sex ratios show a decline in the proportion of women in the total population throughout the 20th century. Notable is the sex ratio of the 0-6 age group where the decline in females since 1981 is alarming. Clearly, there is a reason to believe that the daughters in India is in great danger as a result of gender based discrimination and son preference. Particularly striking is that the trend of “missing girls” has increased over the last decades (Larsen, 2004:2).

The objective of this essay is to analyse the role of the family and its intra-household power relations in the trend of declining child sex ratios in rural areas of India. The study is built on the recognition of the declining child sex ratios as a result of a process of change in which a multitude of different social, economic and cultural factors with reference to transformation and patriarchy have importance. The case study was conducted in rural Hostota Village, Uttara Kannada District in the Western Ghats of Karnataka state, South India. The two

¹ It should be noted that the biological aspects of sex ratios at birth and what is considered as “natural” is coloured by euro-centrism, thus based on sex ratios in western countries (Hatti et al, 2006:2).

outstanding demographic features of the study area (Hostota Village) are *a low child sex ratio* and *a high proportion of joint families*.

Fig.1



1.2 Disposition .

The essay is divided into four chapters. The opening chapter provides a brief presentation of the investigated phenomenon (skewed child-sex ratio in relation to son-preference). Furthermore, its background along with definitions and interpretations of concepts that constitutes the core of the essay. A discussion concerning the choices of methodology and the actual field work will also be included in this chapter. Chapter two consists of a presentation and motivation of the theoretical framework. Chapter three deals with the collected data derived from the case study, hence this is the chapter in which son-preference and gendered familial power relations will be discussed in detail. The collected data from the field study is interpreted with help of the selected theories that comprise the theoretical framework. Moreover, that the theoretical framework will be used as a tool to analyse the empirical material in order to provide an image of the most prominent aspects affecting son-preference in relation to familial power relations in rural south India. The closing chapter consists of concluding thoughts and suggestions for further research.

1.3 Purpose and research questions

Sex ratio is the numerical relation between males and females and works as a basic indicator of the extent of equity between men and women at a given point of time. Variations and changes in sex composition reflect social, economical and cultural patterns of society (ibid). Given the declining femininity of children in India age 0-6 since 1981, it is clear that the structures within the family and society are largely male dominated. These patriarchal structures and attitudes are strongly related to different parts of society; politically, economically, religiously to mention a few. It is however, for this study of greater significance to take the intra-household allocation of resources and distribution of power into consideration. It is within the institution of family the decisions concerning female infants are taken (Hatti et al, 2006:1) The legitimisation of daughter discrimination is thereby dependent on already existing inequalities within the family. Hence, the aim of this study is to examine the power relations and its mechanisms within the family. Moreover, to study whether the mechanisms of patriarchy, despite the ongoing process of transformation and economic growth, supports the oppressive structures that prevent girl children from growing up or even being born in the first place. Gendered hierarchy is deeply rooted in the cults and traditions of Indian villages, why it is of great interest to examine attitudes to son preference in a rural area among villagers yet under the impact of transformation and development.

The following research questions are;

- *To what extent are intra-household power relations relevant to son-preference?*
- *To what extent are family members aware of gendered power relations within the family?*
- *To which extent do men and women support or oppose son preference?*

1.4 Hypothesis

Uttara Kannada District is a region where Indian traditions and cults have a major influence on most parts of society and peoples' everyday life. Patriarchal structures are prominent features deeply rooted in these cults and traditions why it will be difficult to observe these separately without getting into a complex discussion concerning religion and history. This thesis rests on the premise that old patriarchal structures are left untouched or becomes reinforced by new values introduced into Indian society by transformation (Mohanty, 2003:142). It is a reasonable point of departure as my primary aim is to investigate familial power relations from a gendered perspective yet under the impact of transformation.

When it comes to the posed research questions and the quality and accuracy of the answer to these, I expect varying results. For instance, I expect to observe gender inequality of varying extent and on different levels, through observation as well as interviews. I do not however, expect the respondents to show the same awareness of inequalities or gender based discrimination within their social context and families. Firstly due to the fact that the sample consisting of 30 villagers in rural India most likely will not be familiar with/trained to analyse or evaluate their own lives critically. Secondly the patterns and manifestations of power that I intend to identify might be looked upon as matters that concern the functioning and efficiency of the family, not a gendered hierarchy. There is also a possibility that both sexes will feel reluctant to evaluate their lives critically as they feel comfortable and safe in the order of life they know. Finally, I do not expect informants to discuss son-preference and daughter discrimination on a personal level due to the sensitivity of the topic.

1.5 Limitations

The amount of factors that are influencing the level of son-preference at any given time or place are numerous, hence, limitations are just as many. Initially I decided to address the problems surrounding son-preference and daughter discrimination from a gendered perspective by investigating familial power relations, mainly because it seemed to be an appropriate point of departure when investigating this particular phenomenon, but also due to the fact that the length and magnitude of the essay is limited and does not allow any other perspectives without losing its focus. Moreover, I do not dismiss other factors or perspectives and their significance for son-preference or daughter discrimination but I have chosen not to include them in this study.

Secondly, not knowing the local language (Kannada) interfered with my objective to be directly involved in conducting the semi-structured interviews, clearly it was even more difficult to follow or to take an active part of the focus group discussions.

Finally, because of the constraints in time and resources the study had to be restricted to Hostota Village in Sirsi Taluk, Karnataka state.² The choice of study area naturally offered a relatively small population, why the sample consisting of 30 persons in itself is a limitation, primary when it comes to drawing conclusions and generalisations based on the collected material. Hence, this study should foremost be considered as an attempt to raise questions for further and more extensive studies.

² The term *taluka* or *taluk* is used in some states including Karnataka. A taluk is part of a larger district within a state or union territory. It is the ultimate executive agency for land records and related administrative matters.

1.6 Motivation

In India the natural biological sex ratio of slightly more females than males in the population is reversed, predominantly in the youngest age group. As mentioned earlier, the 2001 Census reveals that the sex ratio in the 0-6 year's group has declined since 1981. What is even more alarming is that child sex ratios have continued to decline in spite of general progress, economically and socially. The Census also gives light to the spread of the phenomenon, moreover that it has become a prominent demographic feature in areas or social groups that historically and traditionally has shown balanced sex ratio. Hence, son-preference and daughter discrimination is spreading from old to new regions and in between different social levels and casts why it is of great importance to identify the structure and dynamics of the problem (Sen, 2001:5). Contemporary research suggests comparative case studies from different regions of India, in order to create picture of the cultural, social and economic conditions that either promotes or dismisses son-preference or daughter discrimination.

When conducting a qualitative study based on rural south Indians attitudes on son-preference and daughter discrimination with reference to gender hierarchies and power relations within the family it was of great importance to meet the sample in person. Moreover, I believe that I got a more accurate understanding of the structures that I intended to investigate as I was (besides the interviews and focus group discussions) also taking part in the village peoples' habits and everyday life through observation and participation. When dealing with development issues it is crucial to create an understanding for the culture and social life where the investigation or study is conducted. Many mistakes have been made within the field of development studies due to little or lack of interest and/or insight in people's everyday life, where I believe that many of the answers that are sought are to be found.

1.7 Concepts and definitions

On an overall level this study is a micro level investigation of gender hierarchies and familial power relations in relation to son-preference and daughter discrimination. In order to facilitate the process of reading this text a selection of the most frequently used concepts is explained and defined below; *sex ratio*, *joint family*, *son-preference*, *daughter discrimination*, *transformations*, *patriarchal structures and gender*.

1.7.1 Sex ratio

The numerical relationship between males and females in the population, the sex ratio, is the most basic indicator of equality between men and women in a country at a specific point of time. Changes in this relationship reflect the underlying changes, for better or worse for women, in the country's socio-economic and cultural patterns (Larsen et al, 2006:4).

1.7.2 Joint family

The joint family is a characteristic of traditional India. In a joint family the freedom of the individual member is subject to the interest of the group and the concept of duty is central. A joint family includes brothers and their respective spouses and children as well as old parents living together. Family members share property, residence and kitchen. Family matters are dealt with jointly and in most cases the oldest male member is considered the most responsible and powerful. The joint family is clearly a cost efficient family structure for families in rural areas, the benefits are in the form of collective ownership and use of necessities. (Larsen et al, 2006:5).

1.7.3 Son preference

In India men and women are conceptualised so differently that the one cannot replace the other. Son-preference rests on the principle that there are more social, cultural and economical advantages in raising a son (Thekurdesai, 52:2006). Everywhere in India families strive to have at least one son, in some cases families will try to maximise the number of sons and minimizing the number of daughters. Most Indians would agree upon the "need" of daughter in a family but that a son is crucial for the family's survival and honour. Generally speaking, the birth of a son is celebrated more than the birth of a baby girl, sons are granted higher prestige and thus preferred to daughters (Säävälä, 2001:168).

1.7.4 Daughter discrimination

The problem of "missing girls" or declining femininity rests upon the premise of privileging sons over daughters (son-preference) and is fundamentally a problem of gender inequality. As stated above the birth of daughter may be regarded as a misfortune particularly if all previous children are daughters too (Säävälä,

2001:170). The methods used in order to prevent the birth or the even the upbringing of a baby girl are several. The choice of which one are dependant on availability, why there are differences in dealing with the problem in rural areas compared urban areas as well as between higher and lower classes. *Female infanticide* are primarily practised in rural areas among the poor, it is for the most part carried out by a local midwife or mother-in-law. In this case the baby girl is usually poisoned, suffocated or abandoned. Among the rich urban- and rural population *sex-selective abortions (foeticide)* after ultra-sound or amniocentesis is the most common method. The third technique is the so-called *extended infanticide*, which involves neglect of the girl child by not providing essential nutrition and denial of health care (Hatti).³

1.7.5 Patriarchal structures

Patriarchal structures are more or less prominent in all corners of the world. India has undergone substantial changes since independence but despite considerable progress (which has brought along new choices and alternatives economically and socially) patriarchy remains untouched or in some cases even reinforced. Indian society is fundamentally patriarchal in that sense that women are inferior to men by tradition, examples of this are so-called *patrilinear structures* which mean that lineage and heritage takes place through the male line. Following the same pattern is the *patrilocal system* which automatically place married couples to live in the household of the husband's family (ibid).

1.7.7 Gender relations

Gender relations are the social relationships between men and women, moreover, connection, cooperation, conflict, competition, separation etc between sexes. Gender relations also deal with the distribution of power and how it is divided between the sexes. Moreover, the power approach is crucial in that sense that it creates and reproduce a systematic differences in men's and women's position in any given society (ibid).

1.7.8 Transformation

The term transformation refers to structural and overall societal changes brought along with modernisation, economic and social. Moreover, it can be understood as

³ Lecture notes from Hatti, Neelambar. Dept of Economic History

a process of change with an increasing dependence on market mechanisms. (Weber, 1978:638).

1.8 Methodology

1.8.1 Methodological point of departure

The chief objective was to conduct a micro level study that deals with negative CSR in selected village communities in Karnataka, South India. In order to find answers to the posed research questions the study had the character of the inductive qualitative methodology. In accordance with this approach interviews was the main tool for investigating the matter. Hence, general observations in combination with two types of interview techniques were conducted. General observations is a research strategy that is carried out in order to get a comprehensive yet general picture of the study object but more importantly the context that surrounds the study object on a basic level. It is a good starting point for any study and was in this particular case mainly conducted before the interviews started (MacDougall et al, 2001:119). Primarily, observations resulted in finding out where to find the study objects and when to approach them. This way I got a general idea of how to select and when it was appropriate to schedule persons I wished to include in the sample. The villagers and the selected sample on the other hand got a notion of my objective which probably improved my chances to successfully collect the material I intended to gain.

As observations could not stand alone as the basis for the collection of data, two types of interviews were conducted in order to extend and provide more depth to the collected material. The first technique was interview through focused group discussions (FGD), this in order to obtain information through *intimate communication* with three or more persons in each group as respondents, as well as the explicit information created in group discussions through *group dynamics*. A focus group is not a collection of individual interviews, it is a single entity in its own right. The structure and the content of the discussion may vary considerably from one focus group to the next because of the unique dynamics created of that specific group. Moreover, the group interaction is believed to yield more and richer information than individual interviews with the same participants (MacDougall et al, 2001:118). This study relies on the assumption that women in many aspects are inferior to men why women and men were interviewed separately.

In addition to the focus group discussions, semi-structured interviews were conducted. Semi-structured interviews are conducted with a fairly open framework which allow for focused, conversational, two-way communication. This technique can be used both to give and receive information. Unlike conventional interviews which are based on a questionnaire framework, where detailed questions are formulated ahead of time, semi structured interviewing

starts with more general questions or topics. It is suggested that persons that are exposed to this type of interview technique are likely to find the “interview situation” relaxed and more willing to discuss sensitive issues because of the informal approach. Merely a few questions should be designed and phrased ahead of time, hence the majority of questions are supposed to arise spontaneously during the interview, allowing the researcher and the person being interviewed the flexibility to probe for details or discuss certain issues (ibid). Secondary sources, as in a broad variety of literature, articles and various internet based material constitutes the backbone of this thesis by providing a multitude of information and perspectives that have been taken into consideration throughout the process of writing this thesis.

1.8.2 Sample

The initial plan was to include 10% out of the total population in Hostota Village in the sample. The total number of inhabitants in Hostota proved to be 324 and the number of households 57 in June 2006, why I wished to include 15 men and their spouses age 30-40 with at least two children in the sample. The thought behind this plan was that 30 informants in that age group were likely to have experience from the phenomenon of son preference and also constituted a number of informants that is appropriate for this type and size of study. Moreover, the sample included married persons with varying socioeconomic background (i.e landowners and non-landowners), as my principal objective was to identify intra household gender hierarchies in villages as a significant aspect of son preference. Married couples were interviewed in focus groups (five in each groups, one sex at a time) and individually as married women felt uneasy to express their personal views in front of their spouses. 3 couples (6 individuals) were interviewed separately through semi-structured interviews. It was however, difficult to find 15 couples in the age range 30-40 years old in Hostota and as the study progressed I came to accept a wider age range in within the sample. The youngest woman came to be 17 years old and the oldest woman 58 years old. The youngest man in the sample was 19 years old and the oldest 69 years old.

1.8.3 Field work

Having the advantage of a local supervisor I had been in contact with before leaving Sweden, it was already decided that the planned two months stay would start off with a brief stay in Bangalore for discussions with my local supervisor, Dr Madushree Sekher. (Population Research Centre, Institute for Social and Economic Change, Bangalore). This meeting was essential for selecting the sample village in Uttar Kannada District. Dr Madushree Sekher helped me to get

in touch with my interpreter Mr. Ramchandra Bhat. Subsequently my interpreter accompanied me to the field area where he arranged for me to stay with a family. Staying with a local village family and to take an active part in their household was fruitful in that sense that I got a better understanding for their living conditions and everyday life. Besides, it most certainly accelerated the process of getting accepted in the village.

The inductive qualitative methodology is sensitive to misinterpretations and inaccuracy, the language barrier and misunderstandings for instance. It is also time demanding as it in most cases takes time to establish contact and trust with informants. Considering the sensitivity of the topic, the questions used in the interviews have been carefully formulated in order not to harm or offend informants in any possible way. Hence, the most crucial point of the field stay was the importance of being accepted in the village so that the population would respond to the questions I asked them. And then to listen and encourage them to reveal their thoughts around the topics we discussed without revealing my own opinions and views. In order to gain the villagers trust I adapted their customs, which among many things included wearing traditional Indian clothes.

A problem that I was not prepared to encounter was the frustration I experienced as a result from not being able to push for certain information, information I could only achieve if I put pressure on my interpreter who was sometimes hesitant to ask more direct questions. At times I felt that the cultural barrier between my interpreter and me much stronger than between me and the informants. It is also possible that questions that I suggested may not have been appropriate to rise in that particular moment or context. It seems like that is both the advantage and disadvantage with working with a local interpreter.

1.8.4 Method of analysis

The collected material has been analysed through an *ad hoc* method i.e. a mixture of procedures (Kvale, 1997:). The initial phase in analysing the empirical data dealt with the reading of the raw material, which consists of extensive notes taken down during interviews and texts based on reflections after observations. The notes from the focus groups were difficult to deal with as the groups consisted of several persons, very often talking simultaneously. After reading, raw data was arranged into categories (Mercado –Martinez & Ramos-Herrera, 2002:796). These categories were then analysed through thematic analysis. Moreover, the material was linked to selected theories through themes derived from the collected material with reference to the theoretical framework (Aronsen: 1994:2). Hence, primary data has been complemented with secondary sources to give structure and depth to the analysis.

1.8.5 Validity and ethical considerations

It is of great significance to address issues on objectivity when conducting qualitative work. Despite the level of difficulty, the aim has been to keep an open mind through all phases, furthermore, to keep an unprejudiced mind in all processes ranging from selecting the sample to analysing the data (Chesney, 2001:128). (Hence, it has not been my intention to make judgements). The interview situation also needs careful considerations, before, during and afterwards. Conducting interviews there is always the possibility that the interviewer influences the respondents, resulting in answers assumed by the respondents to be correct rather than reflecting the respondents' actual opinion. Another possibility is that the participants in the focus group have influenced each other, or have chosen to "go" with the dominant position. The points mentioned above shall be considered as possible sources of error (*ibid*).

Ethical aspects have been considered due to the sensitivity of the topics that have been discussed. Material from interviews and discussions are kept confidential. Moreover, results are presented in a manner that excludes the possibility of tracing sources in order to protect their personal integrity. This as a precaution to prevent informants from feeling exposed or offended (Mercado–Martinez & Ramos-Herrera, 2002:796).

This thesis relies on a limited qualitative material, hence, it is not possible to draw any generalisations based on my interviews. My intention has been to highlight and penetrate merely a few aspects of the already limited material in order to address aspects that are difficult to deal with in more extensive statistical studies (Sachs, 2003:10). It is however complicated to discuss and analyse issues of this nature as respondents have a tendency to include a moral dimensions that concern good and bad. This may result in a discrepancy in what people say and what they actually do (Miller, 2001:123). Furthermore, preferences and what is considered to be culturally or politically sensible may not be coherent with the individual that has been interviewed actual actions (Barnett et al. 2005:31). Other studies has shown that people say one thing but do another (Miller, 2001:124). Interviews that deal with hypothetical questions open up for this type of error even more (Agar, 1996:157, Hylland Eriksen, 2005:77). These considerations are important to keep in mind for this particular thesis as it opens up for both dilemmas. Respondents' opinions and feelings towards complex matters (in this case questions concerning son-preference etc) are difficult to summarise in an interview situation (Hylland Eriksen, 2005:76). This was evident in many cases when conducting the interviews as respondents at times had a hard time formulating their views.

2. Theoretical framework

This thesis aims to understand the phenomenon of daughter discrimination from a structural point of view. *Familial power relations* and *transformation* from a *gendered perspective* constitutes the theoretical base. Theories are used to support the analysis of the empirical material as opposed to testing or developing theories, why this thesis shall be considered as theory consuming and not theory building or theory testing.

The theoretical framework for this study rests on the premises that modernisation brings about processes of overall societal change, and that these processes are the so called transformation. Moreover that modernisation or transformation does not always lead to improved gender relations or gender equality for that matter. The problem of missing girls can be linked to social, economical and cultural factors, which together induce son preference and daughter discrimination. The family as an institution is believed to be crucial for the decision making concerning female children. Hence, in order to understand why the lives of female children are at risk and why there is an increasing discrimination against girls in India it is of great significance to study intra familial power relations under the impact of transformation.

2.1 Transformation

A discussion based on the concept of transformation calls for a definition of the same. Transformation refers to societal changes as a result of economic and social modernisation. Polanyi himself refers to the term as: "the social implications of a particular economic system" (Polanyi: 1944:9). Transformation should therefore not be confused with modernisation since it does not comprise the same magnitude of aspects and perspectives that is summoned under the expression - modernisation. Thus, transformation is a part or a consequence of modernisation. It shows the inter-relationship of formal institutions (and formal changes, economic and political) with the deep "informal strata" in which they are embedded, and hence the importance of shared behaviour or thoughts (culture) (Harriss, 2003:351). Moreover, the term transformation focuses on the process where a society's dependency on market mechanisms increases (Weber, 1978:638). From a rural perspective, this implies understanding transformation as a greater inclusion and integration of the village economy, moreover an extension of exchange (Hatti et al, 2006:7). A structural change of this sort implies structural changes on a social and/or cultural level too.

Transformation is used as a theoretical base in this thesis as explaining the broad modernisation oriented trends leading to social change, influencing new

identities, roles and attitudes. Transformation occurs in different shapes and affects various areas in society, economically, socially and culturally among many other aspects. This thesis will however focus on the social aspects of transformation. This definition clearly has limitations why it is of great significance to point out that this study is an attempt to highlight the problem of daughter discrimination rather than to draw conclusions and generalisations based on the collected material.

The usage of the term and concept - modernisation is deliberately avoided. This is due to two major reasons. For one, it is everything but a neutral concept, it is difficult to discuss any matter at the same time as you refer to modernisation without taking side or being biased. Secondly the multitude of explanations and interpretations of modernisation is endless.

2.2 Patriarchal structures in the south Indian context

Patriarchal structures are not systems that are added on to for instance class and cast but are intrinsic to the very formation of and transformations within these categories. A patriarchal structure is essentially based on male dominance, however, depending on which context it is identified in it will get different expressions. The Indian context is in itself an expression that I try to avoid since India consists of a multitude of cultural, religious and social differences. Focusing on the agrarian Hindu population in the south Indian context provides more clarity to the understanding of patriarchy and its manifestations of importance for this study. Significant features for patriarchal structures for this limited context is the way that men and women together upholds traditions such as dowry, kinship relations and family structure (outlined for in section 2.4), reproduction patterns, family planning methods and moral values (Mohanty, 2004:38). Looking at each of the points above it is evident that patriarchal structures constitutes the base as well as upholds these norms and traditions. All of this is ultimately an expression for uneven allocation of power and upholds a “culture of subversion” (Mohanty, 2004:164). Dowry is an example of this as it symbolises male dominance in a sense that men are the ultimate decision makers and overall responsible for economic routines concerning marriage in combination with the fact that women are seen as a commodity on which a price can be set (Mohanty, 2004:28). Furthermore, it is important to keep in mind that not only women are “victims” for a patriarchal structure. Men as well as women experience negative consequences of patriarchy as well as women. Men and women together uphold patriarchal values (Mohanty, 2004:41).

Using this theoretical approach includes careful considerations concerning generalisations and ethnocentrism. Concepts such as patriarchy and dowry are so often used without their specification in cultural and historical contexts (Mohanty, 2004:34). The meaning of and explanations for the rise of patriarchy vary according to the sociohistorical context (ibid).

2.3 Gender and gender relations

Gender should not be confused with sex. Sex is the term that refers to the biological differences between men and women. Sex is universal and is not affected by different social or cultural contexts.

A gender role is a set of behavioural norms associated particularly with males or females, in a given social group or system. Most societies have a gender/sex system, although the components and workings of this system vary widely from society to society. Some see "gender roles" as oppressive stereotypical expectations imposed by society (Mohanty, 2003:24).

Women in most societies are more likely to end up in the role of homemaker. It has been suggested by scientists that biology plays a role in this, while other scientists argue that it is the result of socially constructed gender roles (as well as economic pressures). Many scientists and feminists believe that gender behavioural differences occur because of both factors. However, some have argued that gender roles themselves are abstractions of overall differences between men and women, introducing the idea of circularity and the idea of the social reinforcement of natural tendencies leading to a factitious separation between the activities of males and the activities of females (ibid).

Feminist critics argue that modernity is heavily influenced by patriarchal structures. Moreover that modernity is coloured by asymmetric power relations and hierarchical structures based on gender. This is called the "gendered aspect of modernity" (Yoko, Aiko and Yumiko, 2003). They moreover mean that the opportunities created by modernity are limited to the patriarchal world. The debate includes dichotomies of traditional /modern, private/public, and community/individual, where women are seen as bearers and preserves of tradition. Thus, from a gendered perspective, modernity works in two directions, where it could either result in liberation or constraints, the latter in the sense that old values and norms get reinforced by modernisation (Nilsson, 2004:17).

2.4 Familial power relations

The family unit is alongside gender an essential aspect when dealing with societal transformation and its consequences. The function and composition of the family as a unit and institution is often changed due to societal changes; economical, social and cultural. Hence, it is of great significance to analyse the relationship between these factors by focusing on the family (Säävälä, 2001:9).

In India the extended or joint family, a multigenerational family system in which parents and their children's families live under the same roof, has been the norm for a long time. The tradition of taking care of the older in the family, and

lack of a functioning social security net to some extent explain the acceptance of the joint family norm in Indian society. The joint family as an institution is more than anything a collective way of working together in an efficient way, and little attention to family members as separate individuals is noted. Moreover, a joint family draws on the economic advantages of a collective undertaking. The benefits are in the form of cost efficiency from a collective ownership and use of necessities (Sääväla, 2001:139). The joint family aims to the better for the whole unit, many times at the expense of women due to the patriarchal structures (ibid).

In traditional societies the family is extended and multifunctional, and is involved in most of the decisions concerning a family member. Indian society is fundamentally patriarchal in that sense that women are inferior to men by tradition, examples of this are so-called patrilinear structures, which mean that lineage, and heritage takes place through the male line (Sääväla, 2001:104). Following the same pattern is the patrilocal system which automatically place married couples to live in the household of the husband's family (ibid). Accordingly, in this patriarchal structure, the senior male heads the family. All decisions run through the patriarch. Decisions concern aspects such as distribution of money, household chores, work, education, mobility to mention a few. Furthermore, the public sphere is reserved for men only, thus the private sphere including domestic life is kept for women. (Sääväla, 2001:134).

The elders and the males are granted the moral right to dominate the younger ones' and women's labour, services and social life. Rural south Indian women lives' are restricted by different and more stringent expectations than men's. If woman for some reason remains childless; she is likely to become marginalised; if her husband dies, she is considered inauspicious; if she divorces an alcoholic or violent man, she will be regarded as shameless; if she does not marry, she is anomalous in the village social life; if she is involved in extramarital relations, she might end up abandoned or in some cases even killed by her relatives. None of these incidents has a similar effect on a man's life (ibid).

A young married woman is in all respects structurally subordinate in her household, on account of her age, gender and the kin relation that binds her to the affinal household. According to existing structures women are considered to have a natural and physiological need to have and raise children, thus, young women have to work hard in order to provide the household with children (Sääväla, 2001:135). In a traditional joint family with a typical patriarchal hierarchy women can raise their status and bargaining space by ensuring a male child (ibid). This applies to young brides in particular, who merely only can gain influence by guaranteeing the birth of a son (Sääväla, 2001:170). This phenomenon is believed to be crucial for the practicing of sex selection (ibid).

3. Empirical analysis

This section will as the heading suggest focus on the empirical data collected during the field stay in Hostota village June 2006. The material will be presented thematically with reference to the theoretical framework outlined for in the previous chapter. The main themes, identified from the empirical material will be separately discussed and linked to familial power relations, gender and transformation.

Since the family is the most basic and fundamental form of organisation and structuring of social life, it constitutes the most immediate and relevant institutional arrangement to focus upon. Thus, in order to understand the reasoning behind the practicing of son preference and daughter discrimination with reference to familial power relations a broad variety of topics were discussed, ranging from agricultural work to direct questions concerning female infanticide. The main themes that will be presented are; *social attitudes, decisions, marriage, children and son preference*. These topics among many others were discussed with the sample.

3.1 Hostota

The state of Karnataka is divided into four regions according to their physical characteristics, namely Coastal, Malnad, Maidan plains and Southern Maidan. Each region also has its own distinct social, economic and cultural characteristics. Hostota village is situated in Sirsi Taluk belonging to Uttara Kannada District in the north western part of the Malnad. The area is characterised by ecological features typical of the Western Ghat mountain range. The monsoon forests and the elevation create a relatively mild climate, high precipitation and access to natural irrigation from the numerous rivers that flow in the valleys. The mild climate in combination with fertile soils provides suitable conditions for agriculture and the majority of the people derive their livelihood from agricultural activities. The cultivation of paddy and areca constitutes the main crop⁴ (Larsen, 2004:20).

Hostota village is situated in a plantation economy area and the joint family form is dominant. The population of Hostota consists of immigrants that migrated from the coastal areas in the beginning of the 20th century. The total population in June 2006 was 324 persons organised in 57 separate households. There are only Hindus living in Hostota, divided into four major casts; the Brahmins, the Nayaks, the Gowda and the Poojaris. The Brahmins is the highest

⁴ A *paddy field* is a flooded parcel of arable land used for growing rice and other semi aquatic crops. Paddy fields are a typical feature of rice-growing countries of east and Southeast Asia including India. *Areca nuts* known for their bitter and tangy taste are routinely used for chewing, especially in combination with the leaves of betel, tobacco and calcium oxide (lime). This practise is popular among elderly people in Asia.

and richest cast, i.e. landowners. The Nayaks and Gowdas are mainly agricultural workers, but in some rare cases Nayak and/or Gowda people own land. The Poojaris are primarily poor agricultural labour employed by landowners. The social order that follows with the cast system restricts free social interaction, at the same time as it provides an already accepted and well working set of behaviours that brings stability to the social life in a village.⁵

3.2 Social attitudes

Have there been changes concerning social attitudes during the last 5-10 years? And if there have been changes, in what way? This was the formulation of the introductory question. The purpose was to found a framework where change and social relations should constitute the base for the discussions and conversations that followed and that dealt with power relations and son preference more specifically. During discussions and interviews questions were raised in a “before” and “present” manner, this in order to facilitate the identification of possible changes, positive or negative.

Through general observations and conversations formal or informal it became evident that modernisation-influenced transformation has approached Hostota on different levels. Interestingly enough it seems like it has come in the form of small changes in people’s mindset and not by economical growth, improved roads or better medical facilities, progress so often associated with transformation. This strengthens the notion of transformation as equally as much a social phenomenon that must not only be measured in economic terms. Furthermore, modernisation and transformation has impact on non-economic arenas in the shape of social values and attitudes (Polanyi 1944:9). The access to basic needs, development of salaries and female work participation among other factors has not yet come to affect Hostota. Even agricultural activities seemed untouched by technological advancements. Plantations were cultivated by man labour like it has been done for centuries. Medical facilities existed to some extent, that is, the late doctor’s son who was not a doctor took care of people in case of emergency. For proper medical attention villagers of Hostota had to travel two hours by bus to Sirsi. The distance from Hostota to Sirsi was not more than 25 kilometres, but the roads were in very bad shape and the bus made stops to pick up or to drop people constantly every five minutes. When it came to the level and accessibility to education Hostota stood out in comparison to other villages in the area. A school that offered education up until 7th standard had been established since more than fifty years. Hence, the people of Hostota are relatively well educated considering the remoteness and general development level in the village. Even older women in the higher cast age groups had experience from some sort of

⁵ The cast system was abolished in 1947 when India gained independence.

school activities, even though they admitted that it was never their own, or their families' intention to provide them with higher education. The level of education seems to be a question of socio-economic background more than a gender question (Sävväla, 2001:53). Little difference or no difference at all was visible between boys and girls concerning access to - and encouragement of education at the present in the Brahmin cast. Young boys and girls in the lower cast are still more of exceptions at higher education institutions. In cases where financial means are put into a lower cast person's education, it is however hardly ever a girl that is given that trust and privilege.

Interestingly enough, the influence from TV showed to be relevant to take into account when investigating the impact of transformation on people's mindset. People in Hostota do not travel, only three persons that I encountered had been outside of Karnataka. Most of the inhabitants had never left the area. It was also very rare with visitors from different areas and backgrounds. Visitors are generally relatives from neighbouring villages. Hence, for most of the time TV is the only input from outside the village. Not everyone can afford a TV, TV sets can only be found in the richer Brahmin people houses. TV was however central and at nights, families without TV would go home to more well-off neighbours to watch. This was also a way of socialising. The soaps that people enjoyed were very modern, at least in relation to the villagers' life in Hostota. People in the soaps would have love-marriages, and dress provocatively. When asking the people if they wished to live more like the people they admired in soaps and TV-shows, they all said no. It was like if they did not at all compare themselves with people on TV, like it was too distant to imagine. They did however get access to alternative ways of thinking and living through TV that they would not have had otherwise. Informants could not see any relationship between the influence from TV and choices they made in their lives. They did not support the idea that influence often occur over time and that it affects a persons mindset gradually. This curiosity yet hesitance towards the modern is typical for people exposed to transformation. Uncertainty and lack of experience from the unknown induces people to hold on to their traditions rather than exploring the modern (Hatti et al, 2006:23). The traditional and modern coexists and becomes clear that transformation can be analysed from a social perspective as it brings about new attitudes and behaviours even in cases where little economical or technical progress have taken place .

3.3 Decisions

Who is responsible for what? Are there particular areas where men respectively women dominate the discussions and decisions? Are there "rules" within the family that gives some family members more freedom and respect? Since this study deals with familial power relations in relation to son preference and

daughter discrimination interviews and discussions based on power and distribution of power within the family in general was of great interest to conduct.

Women and men in the sample openly discussed the matters of power, and only two women out of fifteen expressed that they wished to have more influence over decisions taken in the family (in particular decisions that concerned themselves on a more direct level). In accordance with Säävälä's investigations there seem to be distinct difference between the distributions of power within a household, a family member have more or less power depending on age, sex, and the nature of the sphere a family member is engaged in (Säävälä 2001:135).

Men and only men are engaged in decision making that concerns matters of a public nature. Women are with very few exceptions accepted as suitable for understanding or dealing with decisions that belong to the public sphere. This is true for most countries in the region according to Yoko et al (Yoko et al, 2003:9). Decisions in this sphere mainly concerns financial, formal or official matters. It could also mean simple things like going to the bank to extract money. Women on the other hand dominate the domestic sphere, as in charge of cooking, cleaning and raising children. Women are generally in charge of cooking, cleaning and raising children. Men gladly leaves decisions based on matters of the domestic sphere to women. It is however, the man in the house, often the oldest male in a family that will have the overall responsibility and power over resources and members that belong to the family. Women and men are used to this order and do not bother to question it. The sample are at peace with the way things are, they do not see how it would improve their lives if both husband and wife would be equally responsible for all matters concerning a household as they believe that it is more efficient and safe to divide responsibilities between men and women in a household. This is the way they have been taught to behave as husband and wife, or son or daughter in-law since their childhood (Säävälä, 2003:140). Women are happy with the way things are, one woman started to describe the freedom in her life by saying that she was free to go to town whenever she wished to, as long as she had asked her husband for permission in advance. Her point was that she had more freedom than most other women in her position. Another woman described how power is distributed among women (the domestic sphere) and men (the public sphere) according to age. Young brides that have just arrived to the new joint family have the least power within the family unit. The grandmother is often powerful and has a lot of influence over her sons. Challenging this order is unacceptable and would most likely lead to exclusion of other family members (Säävälä, 2003:139). It is important to keep in mind that a joint family in traditional India despite the ongoing processes of societal change will still hesitate to change the fundamental "rules" of the family. It is much more likely to see the change from joint family structure to a nuclear family structure than to see the change in power relations within the joint family structure. The transformation that is taking place does not seem to affect the intra household power relations within the joint family structure, it does however, encourage the nuclear based family structure. This argument is in line with the Polanyian perspective (Polanyi 1944:9). However, the joint family as an institution is more than anything a collective way of working together in an efficient way, and little attention to

family members as separate individuals is noted. Moreover, a joint family draws on the economic advantages of a collective undertaking. The benefits are in the form of cost efficiency from a collective ownership and use of necessities (Säävälä, 2003:8). The fundamental order of the joint family does not vary between different casts, it seem to be a hierarchy that is gendered more than anything. The patriarchal structures are dominant in the way the family is constructed and functioning (Yoko et al, 2003:109).

3.4 Marriage

Marriage is given an essential place in Indian life, traditionally and at the present. It is important from a cultural and religious perspective but also due to its fundamental function for the composition of family and fertility (Säävälä, 2003:101).

Nowadays child-marriages are more or less non-existent in the state of Karnataka. It is in general not a common phenomenon in contemporary India (Thekurdesai, 2006:52). The villagers in Hostota think of marriage as the natural way of life, that is, when a person reaches the age of twenty he or she should start to prepare for married life. Parents decide when it is time for the daughter or the son to enter marriage. Parents also decide whom the young man or young woman should take as a spouse. Different methods of finding a spouse for the son/daughter are used, depending on which cast the family belongs to. The higher casts use astrology and numerology among other methods. The most important factor is however, that the couple to be comes from similar family backgrounds. Likewise, it is also important that the families get along with each other. There was not one single marriage between spouses from different casts in Hostota. It is very unusual in traditional India at large. And only one couple had gone through with a love-marriage. The couple belonged to the Brahmin cast and their families were already familiar with each other. When the couple decided to ask their parents for permission, no one opposed. There had not been any courtship or dating before the wedding, they had just met at college and become friends. The majority of people prefer arranged marriages to love marriages. People generally believe that young men and women do not know what is best for them due to lack of experience. Romantic love and attraction is not a priority when it comes to a traditional Indian marriage according to the informants. One woman said that “love will grow when you get to know each other”. The oldest man in the sample shared that at the time of his wedding which was more than 50 years ago he had not laid eyes on the woman that became his wife the same day. He saw her the very first time at the wedding ceremony. Nowadays, young men and women are given the chance to meet before a decision is taken. They are also free to turn down an offer they dislike for some reason. It is however rare, and especially girls would not use their “veto” as they feel reluctant to upset the families. Young men

and women trust their parents in this matter. Marriage is foremost a celebration of uniting people, but it also mean separation. Young brides have to leave their homes to live with strangers (Säävälä, 2003:130). This separation is hard for many women, but women in Hostota seem to accept the feeling of being homesick as a part of life. There is nothing they can do about it, other than hoping that their husbands will let them go home to see their relatives one or two times a year. Sex before marriage is an absolute taboo, subsequently none of the informants had or felt that they could express that they had any experience from such activities. Pre-marital sex does take place, but is less common in rural areas due to immense social control and a higher level of traditionalism (ibid).

Dowry is a prominent characteristic of Indian marriages. Dowry is not compulsory, on the other hand it varies between regions, casts and over time (Tulsi, 2006:38). Ten years ago dowry was more or less compulsory within all casts in Hostota. Nowadays dowry has become rare. Informants explained that dowry is dependent on the access of brides. The phenomenon can almost be described in supply/demand terms. The Brahmins in Hostota made clear that there was a shortage of girls within the Brahmin cast in the area, and that no one could ask for dowry given the difficulty of finding a bride in the first place. There was however expectations on the brides family to pay for wedding expenses. Dowry is still present in the lower cast community of Hostota to some extent. One man described the burden of having sisters or daughters in a joint family household. He was the head of the house and had been obliged to pay dowry for his three sisters. He had also had the pressure of paying for wedding expenses. He was heavily in debt due to these expenses. Considering his limited annual income, he could not pay of his loan in this life time.

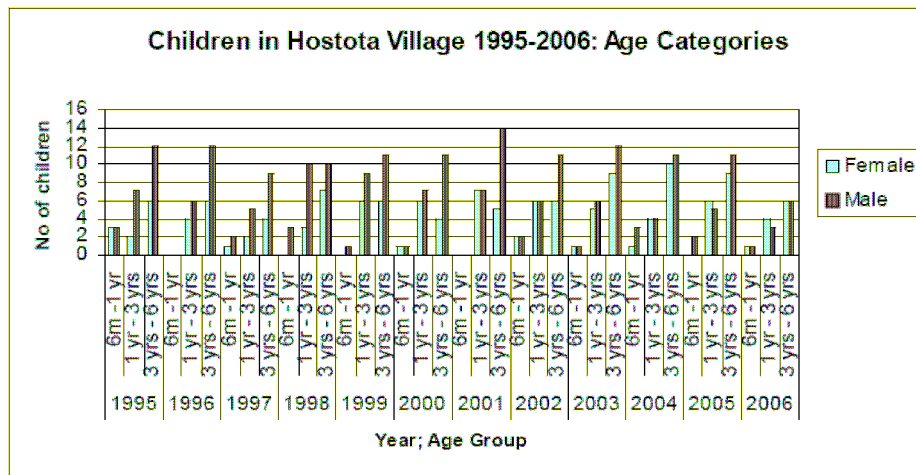
Dowry is believed to be one of the most prominent factors to investigate when dealing with questions that concern son preference or daughter discrimination (Hatti, lecture notes). It is however important to keep in mind that the practising and the routines around dowry is run by men, usually the head of the family due to the patriarchal structure of the family and society (Mohanty, 2004:38). Dowry is a consequence of patriarchal structures in a sense that women are treated as a commodity and also due to the fact that men takes all decisions concerning marriage. Dowry is essentially a payment from the bride's family to the husband's family, the bride's family pays for the bride's protection, food and shelter. It is always the bride that moves away from her birth home due to the patrilocal and patrilinear order (Hatti).

3.5 Children

South Indian women today give birth to far fewer children than their mothers did (Säävälä, 2003:10). The situation is similar also in Hostota. Informants showed to

be open to discuss family composition and family planning. The first question that was raised concerned the ultimate number of children. People in Hostota seemed to agree upon that not more than two children per married couple are wishful. Some even thought that one child was enough. Only one informant out of thirty wished to give birth and to keep more than two children. She later explained that her first two children were female and that she felt the pressure of giving her husband and her new family a son. The actual number of children in the households at the present was low, young parents did not exceed more than two children per woman. Older women in the sample shared the new attitudes but at the same time revealed that times had been different when they were young and that they had given birth and kept more than two children.

Fig.2



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The fertility decline can be understood from many perspectives. The relevance of poverty can not be emphasised enough (Säävälä, 2003:33). There has however, been a radical change in attitude concerning the relationship between the number of children and poverty. The strategy of having many children as “protection” against hunger and poverty has been replaced by the west influenced discourse of raising just a few children. In a direct manner it means fewer mouths to feed, and in the long run people seem to share the opinion that it is better to provide a smaller number of children with sufficient healthcare and education in order to secure their own old age (Säävälä, 2003:175). The lack of a functioning social security net is crucial for how people deal with ageing in India (bid). This is particularly troublesome for the less privileged in the village.

Traditionally there had not been any practise of any particular family planning method in Hostota Village, which is also a reason why more children used to be born. (Before refers to more than 15 years back and there is no data

from that period available). However, everybody in the sample was surprisingly well informed about present contraceptive techniques. Women in Hostota either used the inter-uterine contraceptive device between and after pregnancies or went through a sterilisation operation, (referred to as the “operation” by people in the village). The government has facilitated the process of getting sterilised, women are offered free transportation to the sterilisation “camp”. One of the women that had gone through the operation expressed her relief and gratitude while saying “it is free and it only takes 15 minutes”. Everybody in the sample seemed to welcome family planning methods, and women in particular expressed a sense of gratitude as relieved from the constant worrying of being pregnant. Women in Hostota that had delivered two healthy babies wished to become sterile, even the younger women. Decisions concerning the “operation” were taken with the husband.

All informants had knowledge about abortion, but none of them had any personal experience from it. Women and men in the sample expressed that in the case of an abortion both husband and wife should be active in the decision making process. Informants generally thought of abortion as a bad option, not so much due to religious beliefs as it had to do with the long distance from the village to a hospital. It can also be added that the availability to abortions has decreased dramatically over the last years since the government introduced restrictions as precaution for foeticide as a result of son preference (Thekurdesai, 2006:52).

3.6 Son preference and daughter discrimination

Son preference and daughter discrimination was due to the sensitivity of the topic discussed at the end of each interview or group discussion. Some informants seemed surprised and some even seemed to take offence when the subject was brought up.

According to Hindu cults and traditions, the birth of a son is crucial for an Indian family, whether it is joint- or nuclear based. There are four major reasons or notions that have created and uphold the phenomenon of son preference. First of all, there are the financial problems concerning dowry. Secondly there are the religious aspects involving rituals and ceremonies, for instance, sons are essential to kindle the funeral pyre of parents. Added to this is the economic dimension, where sons are expected to secure parents old age by supporting them financially. And finally there is the social pressure where a couple that is unable to produce sons may experience embarrassment and the stigma of not having a complete family. These are all examples of deeply rooted patriarchal structures in Indian society (Hatti, lecture notes).

Informants showed awareness of the factors and problems that are mentioned above but also stressed that there has been a change in attitude over the last years. New values that have been integrated into Indian society by transformation have brought light to traditional values, attitudes and practises. This has caused people

to change certain aspects of life. The pressure of having at last one son per married couple for rituals and ceremonies was decreasing in Hostota. More than five informants said that they could imagine a woman just as well as a man for that particular purpose. It is however of great significance to underline that it is only certain aspects that have been changed. Low status of women, dominance of patriarchal structures and son preference persists. In some areas son preference is even increasing (Hatti et al, 2006:2).

The sample had knowledge about sex-determination tests but not a single person had experience from it. The same answer was given when the discussion dealt with sex-selective abortions. The final question concerned female infanticide, it was evident that informants experienced this topic as controversial. Some men claimed to not even have knowledge about it, while others said that they had read about it in the papers. None of the persons included in the sample had experience from either direct- or extended infanticide.⁶ Informants were hesitant to speak about the matter, as they claimed that they did not have any experience or hardly any knowledge about it. When asking informants about the process of decision concerning infanticide they thought it was a decision taken by the elderly in the household. Both women and men were familiar with the pressure of having sons, and most of them said that it was appreciated by the in-laws if the young bride gave birth to a son, and that it could strengthen her status and influence in her new family.

Everybody except for one woman in the sample said that the birth of a baby girl was equally appreciated. Most parents wished to have on son and one daughter. Since there is a current shortage of girls in the Brahmin cast, female infants are now more than welcome. The Brahmins are the most influential cast, lower casts follow trends set by the Brahmins. There are many examples of this behaviour, dowry for example. The Brahmin cast is also the group of people that will get influences from outside Hostota and other rural areas before other cast peoples. The Brahmins have better access to TV and telephone for instance.

⁶Extended infanticide is the neglect of the child, poor nutrition and denial of health care.

4. Concluding thoughts

In this final chapter different impacts on son preference and daughter discrimination will be presented. It will discuss the phenomenon of son preference and daughter discrimination in terms of transformation, gender and familial power relations. The chapter aims to answer to the posed research questions and ends with indications of where further research is needed. The chief objective was to investigate the phenomenon of India's adverse sex ratio by conducting a field study in rural south India. The sample village, Hostota had a reversed biological sex ratio among children born after 1995 why I chose to conduct a study in that particular area.

The study posed the following questions; To what extent are intra-household power relations relevant to son-preference? To what extent are family members aware of gendered power relations within the family? To which extent do men and women support or oppose son preference?

The Indian family as an institution is heavily influenced by patriarchal structures (Säävälä, 2003:8). India has transformed considerably since independence but despite substantial progress patriarchy remains untouched or in some cases even reinforced which is in line with Hariss readings of Polanyi (Hariss, 2003:351). In traditional communities like the sample village Hostota patriarchy is very much alive and visible. The dominance of men over women within the family is clarified by the way that power and resources are distributed. Men dominate the public and most important spheres while women are left to take care of domestic responsibilities. The joint family household is an organisation based on the collective, individual needs and dreams are not given much space or encouragement. Women in particular are expected to follow the leader in the household. Women and men show awareness of the unequal distribution of power, both parties however seem to consider these indifferences as a natural given. The structure is so deeply rooted that the people living in it accepts it as the only possible way of living together in harmony. It is similar to the way the people of Hostota accepts the cast system. A person is born with certain privileges or not, and not much can or should be done to overcome these differences. This is fundamentally an expression of peoples need to be part of a context. A set role in many ways limit the individual, especially in an individual based community, but in a group based community it guarantees space for the individual and makes him or her part of the collective. It is also an expression for fear of the unknown (Hatti et al, 2006:9). Traditional India is closed to many influences, that is why transformation only penetrates society in certain ways and on different levels. Rural India in general and Hostota in particular is an example of a place where people live their lives without much interference of influences from the outside world. People in Hostota experience reality as they know it, hence the limited

ability for them to assess their situation objectively or critically (ibid).

The problem of son preference or daughter discrimination is fundamentally a problem of gender inequalities, which are played out within the institution of family. It is within the family that all decision-making takes place, whether the matter concerns dowry or agriculture. Dowry may seem as the main-factor as the practise or non-practise on dowry has a more or less direct effect on the attitude towards female infants and girls in general. Dowry is no longer compulsory in Hostota, the villagers explained that it has become a shortage of girls, foremost in the Brahmin cast and that other casts followed their initiative. A positive attitude towards female will most likely have a positive effect on the reversed biological sex-ratio. Dowry may play an important role for son preference or daughter discrimination, but it a characteristic feature of patriarchal structures as they are expressed in the south Indian context. It is crucial to understand dowry as an expression for patriarchal structures (Mohanty, 2004:38). Hence it is important to analyse the relationships between transformation, gender and power relations with focus on the family. To understand decline in femininity and why there is an increasing discrimination against girls in India it is important to consider the intra-household power relations. The legitimisation of discrimination against girls and son preference is to a large extent legitimised by already existing inequalities within the family (Säävälä, 2003:197).

The people that were part of the sample in Hostota claimed to have absolutely no experience from daughter discrimination. They did however, admit that son preference was a part of “traditional” India but also suggested that attitudes that support son preference were undergoing changes, and that women were given higher status now than before. However, looking at the child sex ratio from 1995-2000 it is difficult not to question the validity in the sample’s statements concerning daughter discrimination. (There were not any statistics before 1995 available). There are only 6 girls to 12 boys age 3-6 in 1995 and 1996. There are two possible explanations to these figures, either it is a coincidence that more than twice as many boys than girls between the age of 0-6 years were present in Hostota in the mid nineties, otherwise the sample were saying one thing while had been acting in another way, this may explain the discrepancy in what people said during interviews and the statistics (Miller, 2001:123). The statistics reveals the possibility that villagers have been practicing different methods of preventing female babies from being born or to stay alive. Furthermore, preferences and what is considered to be culturally or politically sensible may not be coherent with the individual that has been interviewed actual actions (Barnett et al. 2005:31). There is a possibility that the practicing of sex-selective abortions have been present in the past. Practicing of female infanticide has most likely not been an accepted family planning method in Hostota (if at all present). Daughter discrimination *is* a sensitive topic and I did not expect informants to reveal their own stories concerning daughter discrimination. I did however, expect them to indicate that it was or at least had been a feature of the village life in Hostota. Informants were as early mentioned not talkative when the subject of daughter discrimination was brought up, but I interpreted that as a reflection of their lack of experience of the practise of daughter discrimination and

also that they found it rather controversial to speak of. Besides, interviews and investigations that seek the answer to hypothetical questions open up for this type of error even more (Agar, 1996:157, Hylland Eriksen, 2005:77). Men and women shared the same attitude towards son preference and daughter discrimination. There was not any difference in the way they answered to the questions I asked. In general it can be said that informants gave almost identical answers to my questions. This is probably a result of investigating a relatively small sample with similar experiences and values (Hatti et al, 2006:9).

My thoughts concerning further research evolve equally around methodological considerations and new research questions. It is my belief that people tend to have similar opinions and notions in rural areas like Hostota and that small samples and in-depth interviews is appropriate. A large sample has its obvious advantages if the aim is to accomplish generalisations, but if the objective is to gain information of the more private kind out of informants a smaller sample and in-depth interviews is probably the best option. There are areas in India where daughter discrimination is practised and talked about openly. It would be interesting if further research would investigate the reason behind why it is considered taboo in some areas and why it is discussed openly in another area given that son preference and daughter discrimination is practised in both contexts.

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