

Abstract

This paper suggests that, from a materialist perspective, dowry deaths in India, including both homicides and suicides, are caused by social pressures from the hierarchical relations of production that tie Indians to each other and to the rest of the world. Hierarchical relations of production in three major areas are examined: (1) India's subordinate relations or dependency in the capitalist world market, (2) the class structure which concentrates control of basic economic resources in the hands of a small proportion of the population, and (3) the subordinate and generally dependent position of women in the control of resources. Within this context, dowry demands, that is, the catalysts for dowry deaths, are one of a number of attempts for men to raise their status at the expense of women. Work of diverse scholars as well as data from fieldwork in Southern India in 1987 is examined.

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Dowry Deaths in India: A Materialist Analysis

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DOWRY DEATHS IN INDIA: A MATERIALIST ANALYSIS¹

The tragic deaths of a seventeen year old mother and her two year old daughter in Tamil Nadu both conform to the basic pattern found in many areas of India and illustrate why so few of these dowry-related deaths are ever documented in official records.²

A member of a relatively affluent and influential community, Sheena, an unhappy young woman, locked the door of her house, poured ten liters of kerosene over herself and her daughter, and then ignited it. They were still alive when relatives found them and poured water over them. Several painful hours later, they finally died.

As in most dowry deaths, the woman who died was being harassed by her in-laws to obtain material resources from her relatives and was being cut off from the support of her own family. Although Sheena was her husband's cousin, his family treated her as a servant. Her mother-in-law boasted to others that Sheena did all the laundry for them, including her husband's sister and family, who all lived in a separate house. When Sheena expressed a wish to live with her mother, her husband told her that if she did, then he would die, threatening even his own suicide to keep her with him.

Her suicide, clearly a dowry-related death, was whispered of as such on the street where she lived. The final catalyst for her death was the demand by her husband and in-laws that she receive a share of the dowry being paid to her brothers for their weddings. This, coupled with the fact that her husband told her she could not attend her brothers' weddings--thereby cutting her off even more from her family--seems to have driven her to her last desperate act. She deliberately brought her daughter home from where she was staying at her mother's house so she could join her in death, not leaving her to the probable abuses of her husband's family and his next wife. Both her husband's family and her own family confirmed that hers was a dowry death, for each family accused the other of causing her death. Her family said she died because her in-laws were demanding the dowry, while her in-laws said she died because her family did not give her the necessary money.

Even though these deaths took many hours and there was much crying and coming and going on the street--friends, relatives, people coming from other communities, then going back to gossip--these deaths will never be part of any official statistics on dowry deaths. It is one more "cooking accident," as attested by the statement of a doctor who is a member of the community. And even though Sheena's mother cried for days in a voice that could be heard all through the street and made loud accusations against her daughter's in-laws and husband--saying how they were responsible for killing her--this case will never go to court. The community would not allow that to happen. They take the position that such things should be resolved within the community. And in upper castes such as Sheena's, this strong internal social control is one of the ways they still maintain themselves.

THE PROBLEM

Dowry deaths in India frequently take the form of spectacular "bride burnings." Sometimes they are suicides like Sheena's. Sometimes they are

murders of a daughter-in-law by her in-laws or husband. While cooking with kerosene is common and there are many genuine accidents, dowry deaths are so frequently identified as "cooking accidents" that the phrase "cooking accident" is seen as a euphemism for dowry deaths by women's groups. And because crimes that result in dowry deaths are committed within the home, by family members, with no outside witnesses, they are virtually impossible to prove, particularly if they are deaths through burning. In those cases that are not labeled as "accidents" but rather are suspected to be murder or suicide, police usually identify them as "suicides." While it is true it may be difficult to distinguish between murder and suicide, the police tend to choose the option that stigmatizes the woman and does not involve confronting her husband or in-laws.

Whether they are suicides or murders, dowry deaths usually occur after the woman has experienced extreme harassment by her in-laws and husband, including demands for the payment of more and more dowry by her family. Such demands, not only for such things as household goods, video recorders, motor scooters, houses, and land, but also for increasing amounts of cash, do not occur just at the time of marriage, but sometimes for months and years afterward. And some dowry demands, like those on Sheena's family, involve pressure on an entire extended family. Sheena's brothers had to wait to marry until after she had married, in order to help pay her dowry. And when her brothers finally arranged to marry, Sheena's in-laws pressured her to obtain a share of the dowries they received. The economic demands put on Sheena are just one variety of continuing dowry demands, which frequently occur for many years.

While dowry is illegal in India, it continues to grow, as do the deaths associated with it. And they continue to increase among those that are not the poorest but among those with middle incomes.

The Dowry Prohibition Act of 1961 was passed with the purpose of reducing the problem. However, many researchers, including S. Krishnamurthy (1981:36-38), point out that in fact the practice of dowry has been spreading in recent years, going into areas of the country where it did not previously exist. In addition, until very recently there was little or no enforcement of the Dowry Prohibition Act. Like others, Krishnamurthy sees that the pressure to acquire material possessions stimulates the dowry system. Increasing literacy just increases demands for dowry. Families of more educated girls seek educated boys to marry them, and this increases the dowry demand. The girl's parents have to pay both for her education and then for a higher dowry than they would have had to pay if she had had less education.

While dowry deaths have been widely publicized in India in the past several years, it was, prior to that, basically a hidden issue. It has been shocking for many Indians to realize that women from some of their well-off families were experiencing problems of such intensity that they would either kill themselves or be murdered by their husbands or in-laws. Increasingly, women who have been abused have had the courage to go to women's groups or the police.

Exactly how many dowry deaths there are is impossible to determine, but obviously they are much more frequent than official statistics indicate. For example, according to official records, 403 dowry murders occurred in the capital city of New Delhi between 1982 and 1986, but women's organizations

collected data on about 500 cases in 1985 alone. Some of these discrepancies occur because police do not register many dowry deaths or make thorough investigations, and because some of the cases are covered up by families.

In New Delhi, there were only 16 convictions out of 143 cases of dowry death over two and one-half years--and most have involved long appeals. Only one case was reported where a life sentence was issued. The case illustrated the problems--a man and his mother were convicted and sentenced to death for killing his wife, but the conviction was overturned by an appeals court. The Supreme Court upheld the conviction in October 1985, but imposed life sentence instead of death. The case took seven years from the wife's death to the final sentencing, and during that time the husband had remarried.³

A MATERIALIST ANALYSIS

The struggle between the paradigms of materialism and idealism continues to be at the core of all fields concerned with human behavior. While idealist theories look to attitudes, beliefs, and other mental phenomena for causes of social patterns, materialist approaches explain such social patterns by examining underlying material circumstances, particularly relations of production. Within a materialist framework, human behavior is perceived as subject to the same general forces which shape the behavior of all living organisms. As Nikolai Bukharin (1969:20) put it: "causality in nature is objective; it exists whether men are aware of it or not. The first step of science is to reveal this causality and free it from the surrounding chaos of phenomena."

Although cultural materialism, the theoretical perspective used here, is evolving and has many diverse practitioners, it basically uses a broad ecological framework with which to explain sociocultural patterns. Many of its practitioners, including those who identify themselves as cultural materialists or historical or dialectical materialists, would not acknowledge themselves as sharing a perspective but instead focus on their differences. Influential cultural materialists, including Leslie White (1949, 1959), Julian Steward (1955), and Marvin Harris (1968, 1979), have developed an essentially functionalist evolutionary framework that has been the most materialist permitted within mainstream anthropology in the intensely conservative, anti-communist, and anti-intellectual climate of Twentieth Century U.S. culture. However, the work of Marx and Engels,⁴ acknowledged or unacknowledged, provides a base on which contemporary sociocultural materialism has been built, and Marxists like Charles Anderson (1976) or Eleanor Leacock (1971a, 1971b, 1981) have also continued to contribute to its development, clarifying the centrality of relations of production in sociocultural systems.

Much of Twentieth Century thinking in the U.S. and many other countries has been dominated by idealism in a myriad of forms, from the "Great Man" theory of history through various social psychological frameworks that emphasize the importance of changes on the individual level in resolving problems. Since these approaches tend to inhibit rather than help people in understanding and organizing to change the social forces that control them, they are part of the "mystification" which Marx understood perpetuates the status quo. For example, to look for the causes of dowry deaths primarily in the personalities of the men and their families who kill these women, or in the personalities of the women who commit suicide would be absurd.

Why are these deaths occurring? From a materialist perspective, they are basically being caused by social pressures, including economic ones, that are part of the intricate web of hierarchical relationships that tie Indians together and to the rest of the world. Like poverty and other social problems, dowry deaths could be relieved or even stopped if such pressures were reduced or eliminated.

These hierarchical relationships, including the widening gap between the rich and the poor, the intensification of the stratification of men and women, and India's subordinate status in the world market, all favor those at the top at the expense of those below. This hierarchical web has resulted in the concentration of most poor women in the lowest paying and most backbreaking jobs, and of most affluent women in positions of economic dependency. These hierarchical relationships, in association with the large population base, have also made the competition for resources as intense in India as anywhere in the world. Within this competitive hierarchical context, dowry demands--and the deaths themselves--are efforts by some to achieve upward mobility at the expense of others. These attempts can only be understood within the context of India's relations of production.

While relations of production have been defined many ways, Marx (1967:97) said they are "the social relations, society, and specifically, a society at a definite stage of historical development." In broad theoretical terms, there are two major kinds of relations of production: egalitarian and class-based.⁵ In all states, including both precapitalist and capitalist, the hierarchical or class-based relations of production are at the center of materialist analysis.

Dowry deaths in India are primarily a result of basic relations of production with regard to three major areas: (1) India's subordinate relations or dependency in the capitalist world market economy, (2) the class structure which concentrates control of basic economic resources in the hands of a small proportion of the population, and (3) the subordinate and generally dependent position of women in the control of resources.

All three of these patterns are interrelated. As Eleanor Burke Leacock (1981:5) succinctly put it: "oppression and exploitation by sex, race, and class are fundamental in the contemporary world" and "theories which ignore this reality are meaningless if not downright destructive."

1. INDIA'S WORLD MARKET DEPENDENCY

India's subordinate position in the world market is the result of being a British colony whose resources were used to develop British and other capitalist industrialization and their control of the world market system.

Like other former colonies, India's dependent capitalism arises from the centralized capital accumulation in developed countries that, in the words of Laurel Herbenar Bossen (1984:4-5), "has been based on a worldwide system of incorporating labor and resources that leaves many areas impoverished and burdened with political and economic structures designed to continue the process." India's relations of production are predominantly agrarian capitalist, with a small percentage of the population owning land and

factories and over 70 percent of the population working in agriculture on other people's land. While India has had a hierarchical system for centuries, its contemporary concentration on extreme hierarchy, with the enormous gap between not only rich and poor but between the middle and the poor, as well as the intense conservatism of many rural areas, may all be seen as aspects of its dependent capitalism which limit the options for economic growth. Within the context of a large population base, this makes the society an intensively competitive one, with many more individuals than opportunities for upward mobility.⁶

M.N. Srinivas (1984:13), argues that "modern dowry is entirely the product of the forces let loose by British rule, such as monetization, education and the introduction of the 'organized sector'." He sees the adoption of dowry as part of the upward mobility efforts of lower caste groups to emulate the upper caste groups.

2. THE CLASS STRUCTURE IN INDIA

With too few opportunities for the over 800 million people--more than three times as many people as in the United States in less than half the geographical area--up to 50 percent of the people live in absolute poverty with incomes of less than \$400 a year, while the wealthy and powerful control the means of production and most resources. Since most women--and men--in India are poor and have to earn money to help care for their families, there are intense pressures on poor men and women to engage in wage labor for day-to-day survival. On the other hand, in a relative sense, women in affluent castes are generally more economically dependent on their families, live much more secluded lives, and are not permitted to obtain divorces.

India's caste structure is part of how India's ruling class has stayed firmly in power for so long. It is a powerful method of perpetuating the status quo, to no small extent by making things seem so complex that people have difficulty identifying the relatively simple and interrelated material circumstances which cause them.

The Indian caste system is an ingenious system of validating the rights of those with wealth and power through the sanctification of religion. Through the doctrines of reincarnation and transmigration, the Hindu religion asserts that the four major varnas (castes) represent the accumulated efforts of individuals' past lives. In other words, like the "protestant ethic," Hindu philosophy assures one that one's position in life is the product of past effort. One deserves what one has. The lower the caste, the worse the past life. The higher the caste, the more deserving the past life.⁷

Today, the caste system is basically a way of controlling reproduction, for in the upper castes, marrying within the group is usually essential to retain the privileges of caste membership. People who marry outside the group may be ostracized, rejected by their families, friends, and caste members. In this way, wealth and positions of power are kept essentially in the hands of the same groups.

However, with the expansion of capitalism, economic pressures have intensified, particularly for those at middle income levels. While capitalism

has made more opportunities available to move upward, they are too few for the number of people. People are trying to move upward, using whatever means they can devise--including dowry demands--to increase their resources.

Srinivas (1967) has pointed out that upward mobility in India involves the process of "Sanskritisation," imitating patterns of the upper groups, including their dietary and other restrictions, such as female seclusion and a prohibition on divorce. These are patterns that expand restrictions on women and increase sexual stratification.

While dowry demands and deaths occur among people at many income levels, they appear to be concentrated among those trying to move upward, at middle and upper middle income levels. That is where women are being especially pressured to maintain or increase their economically dependent status. As men in these groups try to become economically more successful, it increasingly becomes a status symbol for their wives not to work outside the home. This kind of status emphasis effectively blocks women from competing with men for jobs and allows men to more efficiently monopolize economic resources. Women in those circumstances who are harassed for more dowry and who are not supported by their own families usually see no options other than staying with their husbands or dying.

While the majority in India are Hindus, religion is clearly not the major factor which perpetuates the dowry. Instead, social class is more relevant--Christians as well as Moslems in middle and upper middle income groups are all giving dowries, while at the same time condemning the practice. One study (Krishnakumari and Geetha 1984) showed that families who condemn the practice are also collecting dowries for their sons, saying that is how they can get dowry for their daughters. Sixty-six percent of the middle and upper income families interviewed went into debt to get their daughter married.

Under intense pressures to find "good" husbands for their daughters, parents of women often agree to pay higher dowries than they can afford. In addition, the groom's family frequently increases their demands after the marriage occurs.

3. THE SUBORDINATE POSITION OF WOMEN

About 80 percent of people in India live in rural areas, and most women are from small peasant and landless agricultural laborer households. Madhu Kishwar and Ruth Vanita (1984) document their struggle for survival as they perform more labor-intensive work than men but earn 40 to 60 percent of what men make. They also point out that since women are also effectively blocked from control over basic technology, such as the plough, they are forced to be dependent on men.

The generally subordinate position of Indian women in relation to men varies according to social class and the role women play in production, and this subordination has accelerated with the expansion of capitalism. This is consistent with patterns in other Third World countries, for, as Boserup (1970), Remy (1975), Leacock (1981), and Bossen (1984), among others, have pointed out, the intensification of sexual stratification is a feature of extreme capitalist expansion. Increasing dowry demands and deaths are reflections of this in India.

Indian culture has been particularly successful in interpreting its past and present in terms of dominant role models for women to be martyrs, ready to suffer for their families and for others. Tales of women's suicide abound in popular Indian literature and movies. The related custom of sati or suttee (a wife dying on her husband's funeral pyre) was also widespread among some upper castes, particularly the kshatriyas when the British established themselves in India during the second half of the 18th century.⁸ The Indian social reformer Raja Ram Mohan Roy linked the problem of sati to property rights and realized that the economically dependent position of women led them to voluntary suttee.

Like sati, dowry deaths in general (whether suicide or homicide), are reflections of women's dependent status in India. For many women, escape from oppressive patterns does not seem possible by external avenues of the society--only through death. This is frequently true even for well educated and employed women who theoretically should be able to support themselves. But these women usually do not have control over their wages. Their husbands and their in-laws control them economically, and for most middle class women, divorce or even separation is not perceived to be an option that can be used to escape, for it would mean ostracism from their families and castes.

While women may legally own and inherit property, this right is generally under the authority of men--their fathers or brothers before they are married, and their husbands and sons after they are married. Although divorce is legal in India, it is frowned upon and is an option not available to members of many upper or upwardly mobile castes. It might take several years to get a divorce, and in many communities, divorce is so unacceptable that parents oppose it even when they know about the cruelty their daughter is experiencing. Since divorced women usually do not get custody of their children over the age of eight, children are additional incentives for their mothers to endure domestic violence.

Although widows in many upper and upwardly mobile groups may inherit property, they are often under social pressure to give up worldly possessions and distribute them to their children. They are also usually not permitted to remarry, a condition which reinforces their dependent relation.

Clearly, male dominance and female subordination have been influenced by differing relations of production in many areas of the world, as Ester Boserup (1970) forcefully argues. She points out that in regions and classes where women do the predominant work in agriculture, they also tend to have more relative economic independence and freedom of movement. On the other hand, she argues that where plough agriculture predominates and where women do less agricultural work than men, the wife is generally dependent on her husband for her support, and secluded patterns (including the use of the veil) predominate as a way of differentiating upper from lower class wives. This latter circumstance is one that has been characteristic of regions influenced by Hindu as well as Arab and Chinese cultures. It has been a predominant pattern in India.

The differences between dowry and bridewealth further clarify how dowry deaths have been affected by changes in relations of production. Bridewealth or bride-price involves payments from the groom's family to the bride's family and usually reflects more valued and independent relations of women in

production. On the other hand, the payment of dowry from the bride's family to the groom's family tends to reflect more dependent relations of women in production. For example, Scarlet Epstein's study (1973:24) suggests that the transition from bridewealth to dowry in several Karnatakan peasant communities in South India was related to the withdrawal of women from productive activities as well as the lack of training for girls in agricultural work. Similarly, S. Krishnamurthy (1981:25-30) discusses studies which suggest that bridewealth in India is prevalent in poor groups, while dowry is common among higher castes. He also indicates that bridewealth is decreasing while dowry is increasing in sub-castes and communities of Hindus. This is consistent with the spread of capitalism, for as Margot I. Duley (1987:198), along with others, has pointed out, dowry is spreading from upper to lower castes in recent years

Jack Goody (1976), in examining hypotheses suggested by Boserup's work as well as his own, argues that in-marriage and dowry are "methods of preserving differences of property and status in contrast to bridewealth and out-marriage which diffuse them." Like Boserup, he relates the differing patterns of bridewealth and out-marriage found in African cultures as contrasted to the dowry and in-marriage patterns of Eurasia to their differing patterns of agriculture: hoe or plough emphasis.

Differences between North and South India illustrate Boserup's conclusions, as Doranne Jacobson and Susan Wadley (1977) demonstrate. North India follows the pattern of plough agriculture in which men do most of the labor in cultivation and women have more secluded lives, while in South India, women in the lower class have greater roles in rice cultivation and tend to have more freedom of movement and higher status relative to men than they do in North India.

In South India these differences in female status are strongly organized along class lines. Helen E. Ullrich (1977) shows that in one village, while upper caste Havik Brahmin women may legally own land, they are not allowed to manage it; authority rests primarily in male hands--before marriage, with fathers or other male relatives; after marriage, in the hands of husbands. When a husband dies, authority passes to a son or son-in-law. On the other hand, relative to men, poorer caste Divarus women as a group have more economic power and are able to engage in many economic decision-making roles, such as borrowing money or managing land. Ullrich argues that since the wealthier woman's family hires others to work for them, she is reared to be dependent on others, and since the Divaru woman's labor is essential to their family, she is reared to be more independent.⁹

This economic independence or dependence can be a major factor in causing many dowry deaths. For example, S. Krishnamurthy (1981:19) argues that, in Delhi between 1976 and 1978, women who were economically dependent on their husbands comprised the highest number of cases of homicides and suicides, while economically independent women were less likely to be victims of homicides or suicides.

Increasingly, dowry deaths and harassment involve well educated women with jobs which could theoretically support them. But instead, they are just bound workers under the control of their husbands and in-laws, often only receiving bus fare to travel to and from work. Their wages are just one more way for

their husbands to receive what are essentially dowry payments. Some of the dowry death cases in India collected for this research involved just such situations.

CONCLUSIONS

Dowry deaths in India are a consequence of the intense competitive expansion of capitalism within the intricate web of hierarchical relations--the widening gap between the rich and the poor, the intensification of gender stratification, as well as India's subordinate status in the world market. In this extremely competitive environment, dowry demands are one method of attempting upward mobility.

Dowry demands are just one of the attempts for men to raise their status, at the expense of women. For example, although males and females have increased in similar proportions in the general populations since 1911, there has been an increase in the percent of men in the labor force while there has been a decrease in the percent of women in the labor force.¹⁰

The overall effect of increasing dowry patterns and even female seclusion in groups attempting upward mobility in India is to make greater opportunities available for men by reducing the probability of competition from women. In this way, educational, occupational, and other resources are concentrated on men.

Maintaining seclusion for many women all through their lives, requiring that marriages be from within the caste and approved by the male caste leadership, not allowing divorce for either men or women, and not permitting widows to remarry--these are all ways in which many upper or upwardly mobile castes control reproduction and maintain strict caste endogamy. In the very competitive expansion of capitalism in India, caste endogamy is a major way that upper castes maintain and expand their positions. By effectively secluding women from competing with men in the public economic arena, most caste resources can be channeled, into maintaining or expanding the positions of men in the most powerful families or into upward mobility attempts by men in other families.¹¹

Significant reversal of dowry death patterns in India will involve changing the hierarchical relations of production which cause the deaths; numerous Indian women's groups and others are working energetically toward this aim. The work of these groups also helps increasing numbers of women successfully reconstruct their own lives and become a part of this continuing struggle.

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The fieldwork was stimulated by an Indian sociologist whose family had experienced what he suspected was a dowry death. As a male and a member of his community, he felt unable to address the issue directly, but felt that an outside woman might help him in his efforts to better understand and change the circumstances causing such tragedies. He and his wife encouraged me that, although I am not a specialist in Indian culture, I could contribute to the growing Indian analysis of the problem. His wife, my major research assistant and teacher, helped make this research possible.

Particular thanks goes to the women of Vimochana in Bangalore who generously shared their time, experiences, and analysis in helping me gain a better understanding of dowry-related problems in India. They helped me appreciate more deeply how economic dependency, whatever its specific forms, is a common burden shared by women, and men, in both our countries. Thanks is also expressed to Central Missouri State University for support of my sabbatical leave.

Notes

1. An earlier draft of this paper was presented at the annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association, November 18-22, 1987, Chicago, Illinois.
2. These two deaths were documented by me in 1987 in South India. The field research (February through May) included participant observation of members of one community (caste) during two months in the city of Bangalore and during one month in a smaller, more rural location in Tamil Nadu in an area occupied by community members and where these deaths occurred. All references to that community have been altered in such a way as to respect the desire for confidentiality expressed by my informants.

The research also included interviewing members of women's groups in Bangalore who are working to counter violence against women and obtaining some dowry death case studies from them. It also involved collecting materials from public records, including census, police, and newspaper sources. Supplemental published materials were obtained in Britain, primarily at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London.
3. From "The Joplin Globe," Joplin, Missouri, Sunday, October 19, 1986.
4. Directly or indirectly, the numerous scholars who have related gender stratification to the relations of production have been influenced by Frederick Engels' (1972) argument that the status of women relative to men is influenced by relations of production on both the macro-societal and family levels. Engel's work in turn was the result of his long collaborative work with Marx and was based on notes left by Marx before his death.
5. See Engels (1972) for a comprehensive theoretical analysis.
6. One indicator of the great economic pressure inside India is the fact that India is a major exporter of labor in the world. For example, in the early 1980s, over 280,000 Indians went to the Arab Gulf States to work. Another indicator of the pressure from the world market and of India's subordinate position in it is the fact that out of 379 transnational corporations with assets of at least two billion dollars, 312 were homebased in five wealthy countries--the U.S. (178 companies), Japan (46), the United Kingdom (40), West Germany (23), and France (23). There are only five poor countries that are home bases of transnational corporations--a total of ten companies, two of which are located in India. (From The New State of the World Atlas, Michael Kidron and Ronald Segal. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1984, Charts #31 and #32.)
7. While this interpretation of the caste system as well as the history of India have been basically written by its upper castes--and by the Brahmin scholar priests even more than by the Kshatriya kings--it is obviously not an interpretation shared by all members of lower castes, as Joan Mencher (1974) so clearly shows.

8. According to Joanna Liddle and Rama Joshi (1986:27).
9. In another cultural context, Dorothy Remy (1975) described how in predominantly Muslim northern Nigeria upward mobility for working class men often results in increased seclusion for their wives, following the model of the Hausa ruling class which totally secludes women.
10. Sivard (1984:34) also points out that labor force participation for both men and women between 1960 and 1980, down from 44% to 41% for women and from 91% to 85% for men, indicates how the intensification of capitalist development has affected both sexes.
11. As Dickeman (1975 and 1976) suggested, patterns of seclusion and infanticide might also be related to reproductive success. Approaching the same data, but with a different orientation, a historian has documented the role of female infanticide in maintaining the social and economic dominance of a prosperous caste in Gujarat, North India (Clark 1976).

The unfavorable sex ratio for women is certainly another reflection of the subordinate status of women in India--poor nutrition and neglect are as much factors as are infanticide and other overt patterns such as dowry deaths. In 1901, there were 972 women per 1,000, men while the 1981 census still documented only 934 women per 1000 men. In only one state--Kerala--is the sex ratio favorable to women, and that is the state where women have highest literacy rates and where infant mortality is the lowest, reflections of a more equitable access to resources than in other states.

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