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The Invisible Half – Women’s Status in Palanpur

Dipa Sinha and Rosalinda Coppoletta^{*#}

Many studies that have looked at reasons for the wide inter-state variations in human development within India have identified the low status of women in North India compared to more open societies in the South of India as an important determining factor for North India’s continuing backwardness, especially in comparison with the Southern states (Drèze and Sen, 2002, Drèze and Gazdar, 1997, Ramachandran, 1997, Malhotra et. al, 1995). Women’s status has been seen as an explanatory factor for crucial demographic issues, especially in the context of differences in fertility levels in North and South India and the fertility transition in states like Kerala and Tamil Nadu (Jejeebhoy, 1991, Dyson and Moore, 1983).

While studying change in a rural society, as is the case with the Palanpur village study, it is therefore very interesting to also try and understand how women’s lives have changed. Drèze and Sharma (1998) based on the previous surveys in Palanpur village describe briefly the lives of women in Palanpur and the small differences observed caste-wise. It was seen that similar to other villages in that region, Palanpur was a deeply patriarchal (‘unequal’) society, where women had very little role to play in public life, were rarely seen outside of their homes, practiced ‘*purdah*’ and were very inaccessible to ‘outside men’¹. Literacy and workforce participation among women was also very low. Most women were married off at a young age, with repeated pregnancies and poor access to health care. Women usually do not get a share in property (either from parents or in-laws) and have few freedoms.

While planning the current survey in Palanpur village, it was felt that more systematic data must be collected on women’s lives². Understanding change in a society must include understanding not just of how farming practices have changed, employment patterns have transformed and incomes have increased, but also of how women’s lives have changed. The other changes that are being studied such as those mentioned above, of course pertain to women also. But, there are specific issues related to women and gender that need to be studied as well. At the same time, after initial visits to Palanpur there was a feeling that there was really nothing likely to be particularly surprising about women’s lives in the village. Everything seemed to fit in with exactly what was written about this based on the previous surveys – there were still very few women seen out on the streets, *purdah* was still practiced, very few worked outside the home for a wage, and so on. However, there were subtle changes that we slowly observed. For instance, there was a woman who had completed her post-graduate studies and was working as a teacher in the government school. There was another woman in Palanpur who was widowed and living with her parents and fighting a

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¹ On gender relations in North India also see the references listed in Drèze and Sharma (1998).

² In earlier Palanpur studies there have been a few visits by women to the village (including Sue Stern, Jenny Lanjouw and Jocelyn Kynch) but no extended data collection by women. This placed limitations on the access of past researchers to discussion with women in the village.

legal battle with her husband's family³ for her share in the property. She had the complete support of her parents. Many older women talked about how they could not even sit down or speak if their fathers-in-law were anywhere around. But now younger women, in spite of continuing to practice *purdah*, could sometimes give their opinion on household issues.

This paper is about the status of women in Palanpur based on interviews conducted with women and also some observations. The present paper provides only a broad overview, and a lot more data (both quantitative and qualitative) are available but remain to be analysed. Currently, the focus is on presenting some brief statistics in relation to women's status and arriving at issues that can be studied further. Although there is no systematic data collected in the earlier surveys on this issue specifically, there is rich qualitative information and anecdotal evidence that is available. Further, some information such as on schooling/literacy, employment status⁴, marital status and so on, is available from the household survey data. These data from the 1993 survey are used to make some comparisons. Such comparisons can also be extended to data from the previous rounds.

Along with the general household information that was collected during the study period, this paper uses data gathered from married women based on a specific women questionnaire. This questionnaire was asked only to *married or widowed* women in the village *aged 50 or less* since the focus was largely on reproductive and child health. Data related to 217⁵ married women aged 17 to 50 have been used in this paper (208 married women and 9 widowed women). Information was collected on birth history, women's work outside home, autonomy, mobility and domestic violence. Women having a child less than six years of age were also asked questions related to ante- and post-natal care, breastfeeding, child immunisation and participation in child care services. Data on age, education, family structure and so on were available from the household survey.

All the data related to these matters were collected by women researchers and therefore there was a fair degree of comfort in sharing information. However, it must also be mentioned that it was difficult to talk to women alone as often other family members (only women) would also be present. This was many times out of curiosity but also in case of younger and recently married women, there was almost always a 'chaperone' (usually the mother-in-law and sometimes a younger sister-in-law). This made it difficult to discuss 'sensitive' issues, especially those related to domestic violence, decision making within the household and so on. On the other hand, due to the extended time spent in the village the researchers developed a good rapport with some women with whom more personal discussions took place. And even if there were other women present, older women (those with children) were quite open about discussing many issues.

³ This woman's natal village is Palanpur whereas her marital village is a slight distance away in the same District. While she went to live with her husband's family post-marriage, after his death she moved back to Palanpur.

⁴ As mentioned in Drèze and Sharma (1998), there is a problem with employment data because this is mostly as reported by men in the family who might undervalue a lot of the work done by women. As will be seen later, this time round, we also asked the women directly on what work they did. Even this is not detailed enough to get a good estimate, but is definitely a step forward.

⁵ 13 women were interviewed later. However, these data are yet to be analysed. 6 women could not be interviewed as they were unavailable or not willing to respond.

I. Sex Ratios

Table 1: Sex Ratios in Palanpur

| Year of Survey | Female-male ratio |
|--|-------------------|
| 1957-58 | 0.87 |
| 1962-63 | 0.87 |
| 1974-75 | 0.85 |
| 1983-4 | 0.93 |
| 1993 | 0.85 |
| 2008 | 0.98 |
| Source: Updated from Drèze and Sharma (1998) | |

The ratio of females to males ('sex ratio') in any given population is a sensitive indicator of the status of women in that society. For most of the world, it is seen that the sex ratio usually favours women⁶, as the life expectancy for females is in general higher. However, India has had a history of low sex ratios, with fewer females compared to males. A reversal in this trend has been seen since 1991. The sex ratio in India was 927 females per 1000 males according to the 1991 Census and went up to 933 in 2001 and 940 in 2011. This is because of an increase in the female life expectancy in the last few decades. However, what is worrying is that the child sex ratio (ratio of number of females per 1000 males among children under six years of age) has been decreasing (Census 2011). In Palanpur as well it was seen that the

sex ratio is very low, with the female-male ratio being lower than the Indian average, indicating the poor status of women in the village. During the different rounds of survey from 1957 to 1993, the female-male ratio was around 0.86 (i.e. 860 females per 1000 males). The only exception was 1983-84, where a much higher female-male ratio of 0.93 (930 females per 1000 males) was recorded. While Drèze and Sharma (1998) draw attention to this upward blip, this was not investigated much further. They suggest that this could be because of sex-selective migration. The 2008 survey also finds a high female-male ratio of 0.98, which is closer to that of 1983-84, than any of the other survey years.

While we initially hypothesised that this could also be because of sex-selective migration, a look at child sex ratios⁷ indicates that this probably needs further study. Normally, child sex ratios globally are around 950⁸. At birth while more boys than girls are born, it is hypothesised that as females have a greater chance of survival, this ratio tends to improve in favour of girls (John et. al. 2008). In Palanpur the female-male ratio among children under six years of age is currently 1.12 i.e. there are more girls than boys under six years of age. In 1993, the child female-male ratio in Palanpur was very low at 0.75⁹. Drèze and Sharma (1998) based on earlier surveys in Palanpur also mention that “... *age-specific female-male ratios strongly suggest that child mortality rates are much higher among girls than among boys, a common pattern for this region.*” Watine’s (2008) analysis for Palanpur shows that 220 out of 268 females born between 1993 and 2008 survived (i.e. 82.1%), whereas in the case of males, 214 of 244 born survived (i.e. 87.7%). Further, on most other aspects in Palanpur (literacy, work, mobility) stark gender inequality is still observed. However, some more analysis is required to better understand these higher sex ratios. It could just be that it is a coincidence and not a trend. Other than neglect of females, especially in access to food and health, one of the reasons given for the trend towards declining child sex

⁶ Except in some Asian countries – a phenomenon that has been called one of “missing women” (Sen 1990) showing deep gender inequalities in Asian societies.

⁷ Child sex ratio is the number of girls for 1000 boys among population aged less than six years of age.

⁸ The child sex ratio in India according to the 1991 Census was 945 which fell to 927 in 2001 and a further low of 914 in 2011. According the Census 2011, the child sex ratio in Moradabad is 903 and overall sex ratio is 909.

⁹ The data for 1983-84 and earlier rounds of survey have not yet been analysed for this aspect. This is something that will be done in the future.

ratios is the increasing practice of sex-selective abortions¹⁰. In Palanpur, we did not get to know of the existence of such a practice or any case where this was done¹¹.

II. Literacy and Schooling

Among important factors that give women a voice and agency within the family and the community are female education and women's participation in the work force. While education has an intrinsic value in itself, it is also well established that female education, even more than male education, has a positive effect on the well-being of the entire family, especially of children. This is because women are the primary care-givers in a family and an educated woman can take informed decisions, has a greater role in decisions of the household and is able to access available public services better. In this manner and other ways, increased maternal education is seen to have a major influence on reduced child mortality. Further, education is seen to have an impact not only through the characteristics of the individual mother but also through the educational level of the society as a whole (Caldwell 1979, Ware 1984, Kravdal 2003).

Palanpur has seen a tremendous increase in literacy rates since the 1957-58 survey. While the male literacy rate increased from 18% in 1957-58 to 58% in 2008, the female literacy rate increased from almost nil (1%) to 23% during the same period. However, in absolute terms this is still very low. Further compared to the recent Census data (2011) as well, it seems as if Palanpur is behind the rest of Uttar Pradesh. The literacy rate of Uttar Pradesh according to the provisional results of Census 2011 is 69.7% with 79.2% males and 59.3% females being literate¹² (Census 2011).

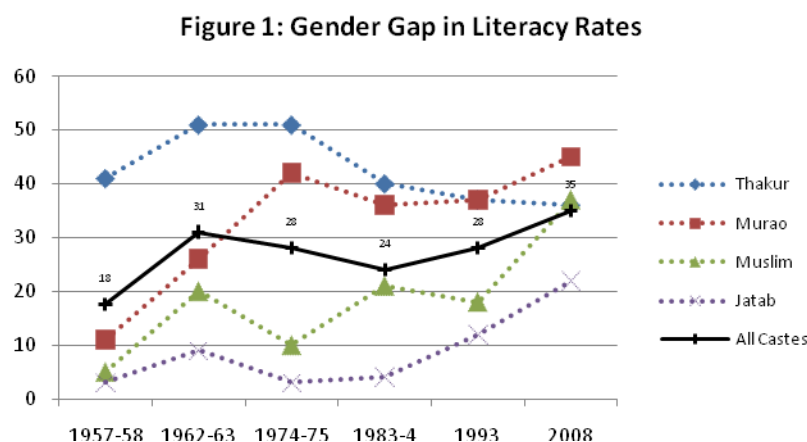
While there is in general a slower rise in the literacy rate in Palanpur than elsewhere, what is of significance to this paper is the 'gender gap' in literacy rate. The 'gender gap' in literacy rate is the difference between male and female literacy rates and can be seen as an indicator of how much women are catching up with men. As seen in the figure below, while the gender gap in literacy rates came down between 1962-63 and 1983; it has increased since then. The gender gap in the literacy rate in 2008 is of 35 percent points which is even higher

¹⁰ Census data has also shown that the areas where the child sex ratios have been worsening are in fact areas that are prosperous and also have shown improvements in female literacy. Another factor that is seen to be contributing to the aggressive 'family planning' programme of the governments and the resultant two child norm leading to a situation where people do not want more than two children and at the same time want to make sure at least one of them is a male child (Jones et. al. 2008). One does not yet witness the 'two-child norm' being so prevalent in Palanpur. Maybe, this is also one of the reasons for the village not showing declining child sex ratios. At this stage, all of these are speculative explanations and further analysis is required before anything definitive can be said.

¹¹ Abortion is of course a highly sensitive issue and not something that we would expect to be easily told about. The survey did not include any direct questions on this. The female researchers also spent much less time in the village than the males, to develop the kind of rapport for such sensitive information to be shared. However, even in the time spent in the village such a rapport was established with some of the women in the village. From conversations with these women, the impression was that the access to ultrasound was still very low for women in the village compared to other areas. Access to any kind of ante-natal care is also very low. So it is quite unlikely that sex-selective abortion is rampant. The only instance of abortion that was shared was the case of a woman who decided to abort her child as this was her sixth pregnancy and she felt that they were too poor to afford another child. She secretly got an abortion done, without even informing her husband. In this case, the fetus was a male.

¹² The corresponding figures for Moradabad are as follows: 66.8%% male literacy rate, 49.6% female literacy rate and 58.7% overall literacy rate.

than what it was in 1962-63. This indicates a continuing deep gender bias in access to education in Palanpur¹³.



A caste-wise break-up of the data shows that while the gender gap has narrowed for the Thakurs and the other castes, it has widened for the Muraos and Jatabs. It is the low female literacy among these castes that is also keeping the overall literacy rates low. While access to quality schools is one of the issues for low literacy, it is interesting to further study these caste-wise differences in literacy rates, especially gender gaps in literacy rates in Palanpur (Also see Appendix Table 1).

To get an indication on the level of education among women and how this has changed over time, in Table 2 below, we look at the highest level of education completed among married women in the age group of 17-50. This is based on the data collected from the women themselves during the round on women's status and related issues. In this region the marriage convention is that normally a woman is married to a man and after marriage, the woman leaves her parental village and is incorporated in her husband's family. Since these data are restricted to married women, they mostly pertain to women who lived outside Palanpur during their schooling years. These data could therefore be seen as reflecting happenings outside Palanpur, where these women were educated and also marriage choices of Palanpur families over other families. However, they still throw some light on the changes taking place in schooling among women. We see that the percent of women with no schooling shows an increasing trend as the age-group increases. While there are very few of these married women who have had any schooling, most of those who have completed primary schooling are in the youngest cohort of 17-24, showing a positive trend of more girls in school and for longer¹⁴.

Further, looking at boys and girls aged 14 to 17 years it is seen that the percent of those who have never been to school has drastically fallen (Appendix Table 2). Only 6.9% of boys in the age group of 14 to 17 years and 31.7% of the girls in the same age group have had

¹³ 'Gender gap' in literacy rates in Uttar Pradesh and Moradabad based on Census 2011 is around 20 percent points.

¹⁴ 9 out of the 14 women educated till class 5 and 13 out of the 20 educated more are Thakur showing a recent trend of sending girls more to school could in that way be restricted only to Thakur girls.

no schooling at all (compared to 84% in the higher age groups, see Table 2)¹⁵. However, the gender gap still persists.

Table 2: Schooling among Palanpur (married) women in the age group of 17 to 50

| Age group | | 17-24 | 25-31 | 32-38 | 39-50 | Total |
|-----------------------------------|---|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Schooling | | | | | | |
| No schooling | % | 74.5 | 83.9 | 92.2 | 86.4 | 84.3 |
| | N | 38 | 47 | 47 | 51 | 183 |
| Till 5th class | % | 7.8 | 10.7 | 2.0 | 5.1 | 6.5 |
| | N | 4 | 6 | 1 | 3 | 14 |
| Higher than 5 th class | % | 17.7 | 5.4 | 5.9 | 8.5 | 9.2 |
| | N | 9 | 3 | 3 | 5 | 20 |
| Total | % | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| | N | 51 | 56 | 51 | 59 | 217 |

III. Women and Work

Women's participation in the workforce is also seen to increase the social status of women by making their contribution to family income more visible. Further, women who work for an income have greater access to resources, more independence and have greater exposure to the outside world. All these factors contribute to women's agency, thereby also having a positive influence on child health. This has been seen to be especially true in the case of the influence of women's employment on female mortality resulting in a decrease in the gender differential in child mortality (Murthi, Guio and Drèze 1997).

While information on the main and subsidiary occupations of all members of the family was collected along with the general information for the household, which was usually provided by an adult male, during the 'women's round', all women in the reproductive age were also asked about whether they did any work outside the home. Women's work is usually underestimated because a lot of the work that women do is not seen as constituting 'economic' or 'productive' activities. One of the ways to overcome this is to do a time-use survey. However, this is a very tedious process requiring a lot of time. To accurately capture time-use, such a survey would also have to be conducted at different times of the year, as there may be a lot of seasonal variation. Alternatively, we tried to get an idea of all the activities that a woman does during a day and the time spent on each of these. However, we found that even this was extremely difficult as although women were able to some extent list what they did, rarely were they able to tell us the number of hours spent on each of the activities.

While visiting the houses or walking around in the village, we usually found women busy doing something or the other. We seldom saw women just sitting around and talking or resting, while we did see men in groups gossiping, drinking or having a smoke together. Women were either cooking, washing the animals, preparing the animal feed, collecting

¹⁵ As we study basic and not higher education, the lower threshold of 14 is also acceptable, corresponding to the gap of the end of the 8th class where most of the girls drop out of school. When doing robustness checks by taking only girls aged 15 to 17 or 16 to 17, the percentage of those who have gone to school is even lower, so there does not seem to be a bias due to the fact that some girls of this age still go to school.

dung, making dung cakes, washing clothes, cleaning the home, caring for young children but not just sitting ‘free’. While we realised that it is difficult to capture all of this, we tried to do better than regular surveys by at least getting an idea of all the work they do for which they have to go outside the house. Further, in the sample of households where daily diaries were maintained, we tried to ensure that women’s activities were also recorded. This data have yet to be analysed.

In this paper, we present only the data related to the work (paid and unpaid) done by women outside the household. Of the 217 women interviewed, only 41 said that they were engaged in any kind of paid work in the last one year. Of these 25 did work for which they were paid in kind and the remaining 16 were paid in cash. Therefore about 19% of the women were engaged in paid work¹⁶. The workforce participation rate for women in Uttar Pradesh was also 19% according to the Census 2001.

Among women who did any paid work, the highest were among Jatabs (15), followed

| Work | Freq. | Percent | Cum. |
|--------------|-------|---------|------|
| No paid job | 176 | 81.1 | 81.1 |
| Paid in kind | 25 | 11.5 | 92.6 |
| Paid in cash | 16 | 7.4 | 100 |
| Total | 217 | 100 | 100 |

by Muraos (10) (Appendix Table 3). Only two Thakur women reported ever having done any paid work. Of which, one was the village health worker (‘ASHA’) appointed under the government’s National Rural Health Mission and the other was working as a teacher (‘*siksha-mitra*’) in the school. The Jatab and Murao women were mainly involved in

agriculture labour, while some Jatab women also went along with their families for a few months in a year to work in the brick kilns.

IV. Marriage and Fertility

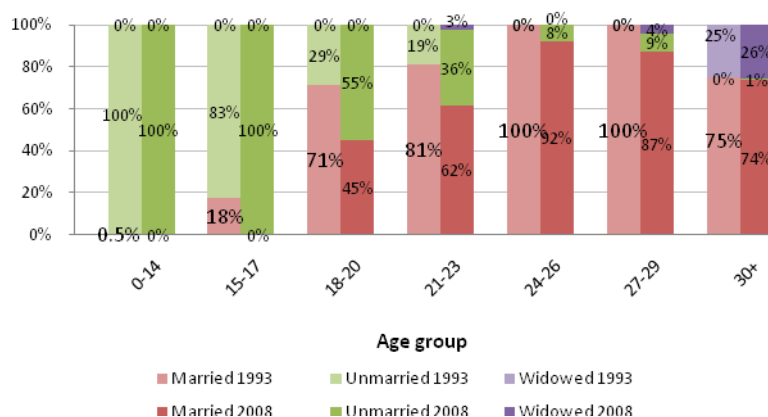
The age at marriage, especially for women is still quite low in India and in Uttar Pradesh. According to the NFHS-3 data, 53.4% of all women aged 18-29 in rural India were married by the age of 18. The corresponding figure for rural Uttar Pradesh was 59.4% (IIPS, 2007). Age at marriage has an impact on fertility and also women’s autonomy. Standard marriage practices such as caste endogamy, village exogamy, hypergamy, and patrilocality¹⁷ still remain in Palanpur as in most parts of rural North India. Most marriages are still decided without asking for the consent of the girl. While the parents still made the decision on who their daughter should marry, in some cases women did mention that their parents would ask them for their consent before finalising the match. However, this does not yet mean that the girl and boy get to meet and talk before the marriage, as is now happening in the case of ‘arranged’ marriages in urban India. One change that people did mention was that now there was a ‘greater’ demand for ‘educated’ girls, especially among Thakurs and this was one of reasons why parents felt it was important to send their daughters to school.

¹⁶ Further information on the exact nature of work that women were engaged can be got from the detailed diaries that were maintained for a sample of the households. These data are yet to be analysed.

¹⁷ i.e. A young woman is married to a boy of the same caste (‘caste’endogamy’), in another village (‘village exogamy’), preferably to a family of somewhat higher status (‘hypergamy’) and after marriage, she leaves her parental village and is incorporated in her husband’s family (‘patrilocality’). In Palanpur these practices apply to all castes (with some exceptional cases) (Drèze and Sharma, 1998).

A lot of factors influence when a daughter is married off (dowry, number of siblings and rank, network, schooling etc.)¹⁸. With respect to age at marriage, although the average age at marriage is still low, it is slowly increasing in Palanpur. Even though the age at marriage was not directly asked in the 1993 survey, the marital status of all village inhabitants was reported. The figure below indicates that there is a change in the age at marriage between 1993 and 2008. In 1993, 18% of Palanpur girls aged 15-17 were married

Figure 2: Marital status of Women in Palanpur (1993 and 2008)



(one girl aged 15, one 16 and 5 aged 17 among the 40 girls in this age group) whereas none of the girls in this age group was married in 2008¹⁹. Such a difference is also seen in the 18-20 and 21-23 age groups. 71% of girls aged 18 to 20 were married in 1993 compared to 45% in 2008, and 81% of girls aged 21 to 23, compared to 62% in 2008. Around age 24, more or less all girls are married, Palanpur girls have left the

village for their in-laws' houses and the only women left of this age group in the village are more or less recently married women.

In the present survey, women were also asked for their age at marriage. Based on these data of age at marriage as reported by the women themselves we can see that there is an increase in the mean age at marriage. While the mean age at marriage for women who are

| age group | Mean | Std. Dev. | Freq. |
|-----------|-------|-----------|-------|
| 17-24 | 17.78 | 1.79 | 51 |
| 25-31 | 17.41 | 1.89 | 56 |
| 32-38 | 16.35 | 2.26 | 51 |
| 39-50 | 16.17 | 1.88 | 59 |
| Total | 16.91 | 2.06 | 217 |

currently in the age group of 39-50, is around 16.2, the mean age at marriage for women in the 17 to 24 age group was 17.8. Looking at a caste-wise breakup it is seen that the mean age at marriage is highest among Thakur women, followed by those in the 'Others' groups and the Muraos with the lowest mean age at marriage being amongst the Jatabs. Interestingly, it is also

seen that while the mean age at marriage is 18.5 for literate women, it is only 16.6 for illiterate women indicating that schooling/education might be an important factor determining the age at marriage (Appendix Table 4).

The fertility rate in the village also still seems high. It is quite common to have four or more children. Not many women use contraception²⁰. Some of them are sterilized²¹, some of

¹⁸ Thus, a late marriage can also just mean that the parents were too poor to marry their daughters all at once and needed time to collect the money for the youngest one. But even then, one could argue that her later marriage – even if undesired – may give her more bargaining power and autonomy as she is not a teenager anymore.

¹⁹ This compares unmarried girls in Palanpur (as it would be difficult to know precisely at what age they were married and left the village) to newly married women who came to Palanpur. It could mean that parents in Palanpur like their boys to marry young girls and send their own daughters later, but qualitative data suggest there is no such difference in age at marriage in Palanpur and in the villages around.

²⁰ We don't know much about condom usage among men. The local 'doctor' did inform us that he also sold condoms and that some men in the village bought them.

them still wanted children and thus did not use contraception, and some of them use contraceptive pill or condoms. The mean age at first pregnancy (miscarriages included) is 19.5 years. This corresponds to the average for rural India (19.5) when comparing with NFHS data (IIPS, 2007).

Table 5: Age at pregnancy, No. of pregnancies and No. of children, Palanpur 2008

| Variable | Std. | | Obs | Min | Max |
|------------------------|------|------|-----|-----|-----|
| | Mean | Dev. | | | |
| Age at first pregnancy | 19.5 | 2.4 | 208 | 14 | 32 |
| Number of pregnancies | 4.2 | 2.8 | 217 | 0 | 15 |
| No. of living children | 3.1 | 2.0 | 217 | 0 | 9 |

Women in Palanpur have had on average 4.2 pregnancies and 3.1 living children. As the sample mostly includes women still in the ‘child-bearing’ age, this cannot be seen as a representative figure. To arrive at actual fertility rate an age-wise analysis will have to be conducted using demographic tools. While this is yet to be done, for now, we look at these indicators for different age groups of women. First we see that although there is a rise in the age at marriage, the age at first pregnancy does not seem to have increased over time, as it is around 19 years of age for all age groups of women.

That the number of living children is higher for older generations as seen in Table 6 is mostly a life-cycle, and not a cohort, effect. The data for the women aged 39-50 suggest that the average total number of children for women in Palanpur is around 4.7. This is more than the Indian average of 4.0 and even more the rural India average of 4.33 (mean number of children ever born to women aged 40-49 years in 2005-2006, NFHS) (IIPS, 2007).

Table 6: Age at first pregnancy and No. of living children by age-group, Palanpur 2008

| Variable | Age at first pregnancy | | | No. of living children | | |
|-----------|------------------------|------|-------|------------------------|------|-------|
| | Std. | | Freq. | Std. | | Freq. |
| age group | Mean | Dev. | | Mean | Dev. | |
| 17-24 | 19.2 | 1.7 | 45 | 1.1 | 0.7 | 51 |
| 25-31 | 20.1 | 2.5 | 54 | 2.7 | 1.6 | 56 |
| 32-38 | 19.4 | 3.0 | 50 | 3.7 | 1.7 | 51 |
| 39-50 | 19.4 | 2.3 | 59 | 4.7 | 1.7 | 59 |

Among women aged 39-50, Thakur women did not only marry older but they had their first child on average at age 20, whereas Muraos had the first child at age 19 and Jatabs at age 17.5. Muslims and others were closer to Thakur, between 19.5 and 19.8 years. Caste is therefore associated with age at marriage and thus age at first pregnancy. The number of total

²¹ Kanti, a young Thakur woman, discussed her sterilization with us. Before the pregnancies, she used contraceptive pills her husband gave her. After having two boys, she wanted a girl so they did a third child but after this new boy they decided not to have children anymore and to get sterilized. She was informed of this government program through the ANM (Auxiliary Nurse Midwife) who came for the polio drop for her children, and talked with village women about it. She is happy with that and it was not only her husband's decision.

living children is also higher for Jatab women (5.8) than for Muraos (4.6) or Thakurs (4.1) (Appendix Table 5).

V. Autonomy, Decision Making, Mobility and Exposure to Media

In order to assess how household decisions are made and also to understand some direct indicators of ‘autonomy’ some further questions were asked to women on decision making within the household, mobility, domestic violence, exposure to media and so on. Defining and measuring ‘autonomy’ or ‘empowerment’ is a complicated issue. For many feminists, the value of the concept lies precisely in its ‘fuzziness’” (Kabeer, 2000). The terms used in the literature are many and sometimes not well defined. The most frequently used word of “status of women” is also defined differently depending on the authors (Mason, 1986). Some focus rather on the *prestige*, i.e. the respect or esteem accorded to women because of their gender, whereas others concentrate on women’s *power* or *empowerment* and *freedom*. We focus on the term women’s *autonomy*, defined as “the extent to which [women] have an equal voice in matters affecting themselves and their families, control over material and other resources, access to knowledge and information, the authority to make independent decisions, freedom from constraints on physical mobility, and the ability to forge equitable power relationships within families” (Jejeebhoy, 2000).

It is however important to keep in mind that talking about “the” status of women is not always appropriate as it is a multidimensional concept (Mason, 1986 and 2005), spanning the social, economic, political and psychological sectors. Some women may have more power in the private sphere and less in the public one whereas for others it would be the other way round. Therefore, we present the different indicators on which data were collected, separately without trying to construct one indicator of women’s autonomy.

a) Economic decision-making: An important aspect of women autonomy is whether they have a control over how the household resources are spent. As seen in the table below, whereas 3 out of 4 women say they have a say in household expenditures and 88% do get cash in hand, only 8% have any land in their name and only 18% have a bank account.

b) Mobility: In the traditional vision, a woman is not allowed not go out alone and should be accompanied either by her husband or by someone else of her in-law family. It is still a fact that most women in Palanpur do go out of their house relatively rarely. We asked women whether they could go alone to a list of commonly visited places. The place where women can most often go alone is the village temple (70%), followed by the village doctor (62%), relatives or friends in the village (61%) and fields outside the village (53%)²². One woman out of two can go alone to visit her parents (49%) but this variable has the characteristic that it is different for every woman in the village and some parents may live quite far away. The places where fewest women can go alone are the health centre outside the village (33%), the local market in the village (31%) and the shrine or market outside the village (21%). The main determinant of mobility seems to be caste. As expected, Jatab women are most free to go where they want to in almost every category. As expected also, Thakurs are at the bottom of the list in terms of mobility, except for the category temple in the village (where obviously Muslims rarely go) or health centre outside the village. One Thakur woman out of two can go

²² Women would go to fields outside the village to take meals to workers, to do farm work, to gather/cut grass for the cattle. Since there are very few households in Palanpur which have toilets women also have to go to the fields to relieve themselves.

to relatives or friends in the village whereas almost all Jatab women can do so. Putting together the data on all the different places, 16% of women can go nowhere alone (mostly newly married women). But it also shows that every case is different, and that the distribution within the village is not extreme – women who can go everywhere vs. women locked in their own house – and that a lot of intermediate cases do exist.

Table 7: Indicators of Autonomy among Women in Palanpur, 2008

| Indicator | Percent of Women (of 217) |
|---|---------------------------|
| Economic Decision Making: | |
| Have a say in spending | 74% |
| Have cash in hand for expenses | 88% |
| Have land in own name | 8% |
| Have a bank/post office account in own name | 18% |
| Mobility (can go the following places alone) | |
| Local market | 31% |
| Village doctor | 62% |
| Fields outside the village | 53% |
| Relative's house | 61% |
| Village temple | 70% |
| Nearby shrine | 21% |
| Parents' house | 49% |
| Health centre | 33% |
| Domestic Violence (Ever beaten by husband) | |
| beaten regularly | 11% |
| beaten sometimes | 36% |
| beaten rarely | 7% |
| never beaten | 46% |
| Exposure to Media (Ever) | |
| Read newspapers | 6% |
| Listens to radio | 26% |
| Watches TV | 34% |
| Ever gone to cinema | 11% |
| Participation to civic life | |
| Been to government office (outside or in Palanpur) | 14% |
| Voted in last elections | 78% |

c) Domestic violence: Domestic violence is a whole topic in itself and has been studied by many (for e.g. Eswaran and Malhotra 2009). 54% of women in Palanpur said that they have ever been beaten by their husbands, among which 11% said that this happened *regularly* and 36% *sometimes*. It is hence far higher than the rural India average of 36.1% and the Uttar Pradesh average of 42.4% (NFHS 3, IIPS 2007). This could also be because of better reporting in this study. About 12 women did not answer the question. However, given that it is such a sensitive topic, it is surprising that so many women accepted to talk openly about it. It is nevertheless plausible that among the 46% who said there were never beaten, some of them actually were and either did not count slaps or sexual violence to “hit or beat”, or

actually did not want to talk about it. When looking at the current numbers for domestic violence, one hardly can imagine how it could be worse. However, qualitative data suggests that women indeed used to be beaten more often earlier. Or the type of domestic violence could have changed. As Yasmin, 74 years old, says: “Before [women] were beaten by their mother-in-law and by their brothers and sisters-in-law. Now only husbands beat.”

d) Exposure to Media: Women were asked whether they read a newspaper or magazine, listen to the radio or watch television and if they did how frequently they did so. 14 women (6%) said that they ever read the newspaper, of which one does it every day and 3 at least once a week. 57 women (26%) listen to the radio, most of them (40 women) almost every day. 74 women (34%) watch television, half of them almost every day, 16 of them at least once a week and 21 less than once a week. We also asked the women whether they had ever gone to a cinema hall or theatre to see a movie and only 24 women (11%) said they did. On TV women mostly watched daily serials (‘soaps’) or Hindi films, and on radio listened to songs from Hindi films. Although they did not watch ‘news’ or other informational programmes watching TV gave them an exposure to the ‘outside world’. Some women also told us that they got to know about immunisation, child care and so on from the advertisements on the radio.

More than half of Palanpur women are not exposed to media at all. One out of five has access to one type of Media, one out of five to two types, and the remaining 5% of the women to three or four. It has to be kept in mind that possession of a television or a radio is correlated with wealth and often with higher caste, as it can be expensive. Furthermore, a significant percentage of televisions and radio was acquired through dowry²³.

e) Civic life: 78% of Palanpur women voted in the last elections (panchayat elections), which is quite a high participation rate. When asked if they have ever been to a government/panchayat office in their village, or in a government office outside the village, 86% of them said no. Only 2 have ever been there in the village and 29 outside the village. The women were also asked whether they had ever attended a gram sabha or any such meeting in your village or ever gone for a public meeting / political meeting / rally outside the village, but there were no positive answers for the first question and only two for the second one. There was a whole section about women’s participation in any kind of associational activities, including self-help groups, mahila mandals and so on. But none of the women reported being part of any association.

VI. Conclusion and Issues for Further Research

This work focused on presenting an overview of the status of women in Palanpur based on various indicators such as education, age at marriage, mobility etc. Women in rural north India are known to have very little autonomy. Based on whatever little data are available from the previous Palanpur surveys it is seen that while there has been a positive change in women’s status, it is probably not as much as is seen in other aspects of village life. Two aspects in which the change can be seen statistically is the age at marriage which has increased and schooling among girls which has also increased significantly. On the other hand while there are no comparable data, it is still clear that on aspects such as mobility, freedom from threat, decision-making etc. women’s lives are still very restricted. The same can be said also with regard to participation in the workforce and property rights.

²³ The consumption data do contain detailed information about this, but have not been studied yet.

The study needs to be further updated by including data for some women who were interviewed later, case studies and discussions with women and girls of different age groups. All these data are available and will be analysed in future.

Further research is also required to understand how changes in the economy such as higher incomes from non-farm occupations, more men working outside village, greater exposure to the outside world through television and media have affected women's status. For each of the aspects presented in this paper explanatory factors need to be studied (for e.g. what explains the rise in child sex ratios, what are the factors affecting a girl's schooling, what influences age at marriage, what are the factors that result in greater autonomy for women and so on). It would also be interesting to study how public policy and public institutions (schools, health workers/centres, scholarships etc.) have contributed to women's lives. Finally, how the status of women affects other outcomes such as child health and nutrition also need to be studied.

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Appendix Table 1: Literacy Rates in Palanpur among different castes; 1957-8 to 2008

| % of literates (7+) [Male] | | | | | | |
|-------------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|--------|------|-------------------|
| Caste | 1957-58 | 1962-63 | 1974-75 | 1983-4 | 1993 | 2008 |
| Thakur | 41 | 59 | 62 | 48 | 56 | 75 |
| Murao | 11 | 29 | 42 | 37 | 39 | 65 |
| Muslim | 5 | 20 | 10 | 23 | 20 | 52 |
| Jatab | 3 | 12 | 3 | 4 | 12 | 28 |
| Kayasth | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| Other | 14 | 33 | 26 | 23 | 38 | 58 |
| All Castes | 18 | 34 | 34 | 30 | 37 | 58 |
| % of literates (7+) [Female] | | | | | | |
| Caste | 1957-58 | 1962-63 | 1974-75 | 1983-4 | 1993 | 2008 |
| Thakur | 0 | 8 | 11 | 8 | 19 | 39 |
| Murao | 0 | 3 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 20 |
| Muslim | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 2 | 15 |
| Jatab | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 6 |
| Kayasth | 67 | 50 | 67 | 100 | 100 | 100 ²⁴ |
| Other | 0 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 8 | 28 |
| All Castes | 1 | 3 | 6 | 6 | 9 | 23 |

Appendix Table 2: Schooling of boys and girls aged 14 to 17 (included) in Palanpur 1993 and 2008

| | | 1993 | | | 2008 | | |
|-----------------------------------|-------|------|-------|-------|------|-------|-------|
| Children 14-17 | | Boys | Girls | Total | Boys | Girls | Total |
| Schooling | stats | | | | | | |
| No schooling | % | 34.6 | 88.7 | 61.1 | 6.9 | 31.7 | 17.2 |
| | N | 19 | 47 | 66 | 4 | 13 | 17 |
| Till 5th class | % | 20.0 | 7.6 | 13.9 | 24.1 | 36.6 | 29.3 |
| | N | 11 | 4 | 15 | 14 | 15 | 29 |
| Higher than 5 th class | % | 45.5 | 3.8 | 25.0 | 69.0 | 31.7 | 53.5 |
| | N | 25 | 2 | 27 | 40 | 13 | 53 |
| Total | % | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| | N | 55 | 53 | 108 | 58 | 41 | 99 |

²⁴ There is only one Kayasth family in the village now

Appendix Table 3: Outside work by Women in Palanpur: Caste-wise and Age-wise

| Outside work | stats | No paid job | Paid in kind | Paid in cash | Total |
|-------------------------|-------|-------------|--------------|--------------|-------|
| By caste | | | | | |
| Thakur | % | 96.9 | 0 | 3.1 | 100 |
| | N | 62 | 0 | 2 | 64 |
| Murao | % | 80.4 | 11.8 | 7.8 | 100 |
| | N | 41 | 6 | 4 | 51 |
| Jatab | % | 50 | 33.3 | 16.7 | 100 |
| | N | 15 | 10 | 5 | 30 |
| Muslims (Dhobi,Teli) | % | 84.4 | 9.9 | 6.2 | 100 |
| | N | 27 | 3 | 2 | 32 |
| Others | % | 77.5 | 15 | 7.5 | 100 |
| | N | 31 | 6 | 3 | 40 |
| By age group | | | | | |
| 17-24 | % | 92.2 | 5.9 | 1.9 | 100 |
| | N | 47 | 3 | 1 | 51 |
| 25-31 | % | 76.8 | 17.9 | 5.4 | 100 |
| | N | 43 | 10 | 3 | 56 |
| 32-38 | % | 72.5 | 15.7 | 11.8 | 100 |
| | N | 37 | 8 | 6 | 51 |
| 39-50 | % | 83.0 | 6.8 | 10.2 | 100 |
| | N | 49 | 4 | 6 | 59 |
| Total | % | 81.1 | 11.5 | 7.4 | 100 |
| | N | 176 | 25 | 16 | 217 |

Appendix Table 4: Age at marriage in 2009

| By | Mean | Std. Dev. | Freq. |
|------------------|-------|-----------|-------|
| Caste | | | |
| Thakur | 17.61 | 2.03 | 64 |
| Murao | 16.69 | 2.14 | 51 |
| Jatab | 15.90 | 1.92 | 30 |
| Muslims | 16.47 | 1.34 | 32 |
| Others | 17.20 | 2.22 | 40 |
| Education | | | |
| IL | 16.60 | 1.99 | 181 |
| RW or R | 18.50 | 1.68 | 36 |

Appendix Table 5: Age at first pregnancy and No. of living children by Caste, Palanpur 2008

| Women aged 39-50 | Age at first pregnancy | | | Nb of living children | | |
|------------------|------------------------|-----------|-------|-----------------------|-----------|-------|
| Caste | Mean | Std. Dev. | Freq. | Mean | Std. Dev. | Freq. |
| Thakur | 20.0 | 1.9 | 22 | 4.1 | 1.6 | 22 |
| Murao | 18.9 | 2.0 | 12 | 4.6 | 1.4 | 12 |
| Jatab | 17.5 | 2.4 | 6 | 5.8 | 2.6 | 6 |
| Muslims | 19.5 | 2.1 | 11 | 5.2 | 1.7 | 11 |
| Others | 19.8 | 3.4 | 8 | 5.1 | 1.1 | 8 |
| Total | 19.4 | 2.3 | 59 | 4.7 | 1.7 | 59 |

Appendix Table 6: Mobility among women in Palanpur, caste-wise

| Can go alone to: caste | a) local market in the village | b) doctor in the village | c) fields outside village | d) relatives or friends in village | e) temple in the village | f) shrine or market outside | g) visit her parents | h) health centre outside village |
|---|--------------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------|----------------------------------|
| Thakur | 25% | 56% | 27% | 48% | 73% | 14% | 42% | 36% |
| Murao | 20% | 55% | 73% | 51% | 80% | 29% | 49% | 27% |
| Jatab | 47% | 83% | 90% | 97% | 100% | 27% | 63% | 23% |
| Muslims | 38% | 69% | 56% | 59% | 9% | 16% | 53% | 41% |
| Others | 38% | 60% | 43% | 70% | 78% | 20% | 48% | 38% |
| Total | 31% | 62% | 53% | 61% | 70% | 21% | 49% | 33% |
| Total no. of women (/217) allowed to go | 67 | 135 | 116 | 133 | 152 | 45 | 107 | 72 |