

**DIALECTICS OF FEMALE  
LANDOWNERSHIP: A CASE  
STUDY IN DELTAIC ANDHRA,  
C.1866-2001**

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**ABSTRACT**

*It is well argued that unequal female landownership and lack of effective land rights are the most important factors affecting women's economic situation and persistence of gender gap. In this background, this article explores changing patterns of landownership of females historically with a contemporary relevance. An attempt is also made to understand the reasons affecting such a change in landownership in the village in general and castes in particular. Historically, it is understood that differences in landownership across castes by sex were attributed to varying marriage and dowry practices. The results indicate that most of the backward and scheduled castes started to emulate some of the marriage and dowry practices followed by forward castes. In spite of known and well documented evil effects of dowry and legislations against practice of dowry, it is observed that incidence of dowry is on rise in reality which is not a good solution for gender equality. In this background, an alternate policy solution is suggested by positively discriminating female buyers' with substantially discounted registration fees in land market transactions.*

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## Introduction

The unequal land rights in determining different caste and class groups in India has been a subject of much debate, however, its impact on women's status has generally escaped attention (Kishwar, 1987:95). Historically, on several counts such as the land re-distribution laws, Hindu law (old), sexual control of females, cultural practices of marriage, etc., the females had either no rights or unequal land rights (Agarwal, 1994: 198-248). Over the years, due to the active role of women organisations, NGOs, feminist activists and academia, some positive changes have directly or indirectly contributed to the cause of female land rights and however, there is a long march ahead to take place.

According to Agarwal (1994: 27), the case for women having independent rights in arable land rests on several inter-connected arguments which can be grouped into four broad categories: welfare, efficiency, equality and empowerment. Of the four, the first two i.e., the welfare and efficiency concerned with the women having some land in absolute terms, especially in a situation when they have little or none, the empowerment and equality arguments, are concerned also with women's position relative to men, and particularly with women's ability to challenge male oppression within the home and in the wider society.

The unequal land rights are primarily affected through inheritance rights and the practices of dowry were adequately studied<sup>1</sup> at a theoretical level by sociologists and social

anthropologists. Later, there were many studies covering aspects, which were briefed and discussed in Agarwal (1994). The academia, feminists and voluntary organisations have highlighted the problems in the existing laws and bargained with the States to amend these laws. Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Kerala have all amended the Hindu succession Act of 1956 in the direction of gender equality; and a few years ago the Andhra Pradesh government also initiated a programme to distribute land to low-income families in women's names (Robinson 1988).

Besides the positive strides taking place in the inheritance laws, these laws were hardly implemented. Besides the ineffectiveness of inheritance laws, we have very limited knowledge about the contribution of changing pattern of marriage practices in terms of marriages involving dowry and its incidence and female land rights. In this article, we make a modest attempt to empirically study the changing patterns of female landownership across castes in a deltaic village and also observe the inter-connections between female landownership and dowry practices.

## The Study Village <sup>2</sup>

For the purpose of the present study a village, Nandivada situated 10 kms away from Gudivada, a major municipality in Krishna district of Coastal Andhra was selected. The village was selected for various reasons. This village was supported by canal irrigation since mid-Nineteenth century under the Krishna anicut (dam) and thereby the commercial

elements of specialisation of paddy cultivation were evident in the village. Due to assured irrigation, the land market in the village got activated<sup>3</sup> leading to commercial agriculture as early as by the turn of twentieth century.

The village is a multi-caste village wherein we come across several important castes like the Kammas and the Reddies who were the dynamic peasant castes in Andhra. Also, we have the Brahmins, historically owning larger chunks of land in the village. Besides these Forward Castes (hereafter FCs), we have several Backward Castes (hereafter OBCs) of which Yadavas, Upparis (earth workers), Turpus, Nayi Brahmins (barbers) were numerically the dominant ones. The other OBCs whom we come across in the village were the Viswa Brahmins (Goldsmiths and carpenters), Gowda (toddy tappers), Haridasus, Kummari (potters), Padmasaalelu (weavers) and Rajakas (washermen). The village has a good chunk of scheduled caste (hereafter SCs) population namely, the Malas.

There had been a constant migration of castes (both ways) taking place in the village. We have some rough idea of migratory patterns in the village. Srinivas (1998) and Dasari (2004) revealed some of the patterns of migration of different castes in the same village over time. Among the out-migrants, the Brahmin families had been out-migrating from the village from early twentieth century onwards. Kamma families happened to be the net out-migrants of the village, however, both in-migration and out-migration of families is

taking place simultaneously. On the other hand, Reddies, Yadavas and the Turpus were the net-in-migrants of the village. The Turpus were the indigent migratory labour from the Northern Coastal Andhra and started to settle in the village permanently from first quarter of the twentieth century. The Yadavas have migrated from the neighbouring villages in and around the district. The prominent reason for their migration was assured irrigation coupled with demand for agricultural labour. Malas who were one of the early settlers of the village were attracting more of their families from the other parts of the district over time. In nutshell, except for Brahmins, both in-migration and out-migration of families is a common feature among all the castes. However, out-migration is over-powered by in-migration among the Kammas whereas among the Yadavas, Reddies, Malas it was the in-migration of families which was predominant.

By 2001, the numerical strengths of the castes have undergone substantial change for the reasons stated earlier (Table 1). In 2001, Malas account for nearly one-third (31.4 per cent) of the total population of the village. Yadavas and Upparis take the next place to Malas in terms of numerical strengths constituting 19.91 and 10.18 per cent of the village population. From among the FCs, Reddies and Kammas account for 7.77 and 7.03 per cent of village population, respectively. A multi-caste village would facilitate us in understanding different cultural practices across these castes that in turn affect the gender relations. Also, the gender relations

have to be understood in the gamut of whole lot of changes taking place in the society hence, we have selected a village wherein the dynamism was introduced through canal

irrigation and some of the policy measures of the State like land reforms did leave an impact in the village.

**Table 1 : Caste-wise Distribution of Households and Population in Nandivada, 2001**

Caste Name	No.of HH	% to total HH	Population	% to Total Population	Size of the HH
FCs	143	20.97	463	18.93	3.24
Reddy	50	7.33	190	7.77	3.80
Kamma	61	8.94	172	7.03	2.82
Komati	16	2.35	53	2.17	3.31
Kapu	10	1.47	32	1.31	3.20
Brahmin	6	0.88	16	0.65	2.67
OBCs	321	47.07	1172	47.91	3.65
Yadava	128	18.77	487	19.91	3.80
Uppari	73	10.70	249	10.18	3.41
Turpukapu	30	4.40	115	4.70	3.83
Nayibrahmin	29	4.25	105	4.29	3.62
Kvelama	23	3.37	83	3.39	3.61
Gowda	12	1.76	44	1.80	3.67
Rajaka	10	1.47	39	1.59	3.90
Kummari	6	0.88	15	0.61	2.50
Muslim	4	0.59	13	0.53	3.25
Vbrahmin	3	0.44	11	0.45	3.67
Padmasaaleelu	2	0.29	7	0.29	3.50
Haridasulu	1	0.15	4	0.16	4.00
SCs	218	31.96	811	33.16	3.72
Mala	208	30.50	768	31.40	3.69
Madiga	10	1.47	43	1.76	4.30
ALL	682	100	2446	100	3.59

Source: Survey Data, Nandivada, 2001.

### Methodology

The objectives of the study are set as follows:

1. To analyse the changing land ownership pattern of castes by sex in the village for nearly a century and half (1866-2001).
2. To analyse the changing patterns of marriages and dowry practices across castes over time and their impact on changing landownership by sex.
3. To analyse the land transactions by caste and sex in the village during the post-1970s period.
4. To document dialectics of land transfers by caste and sex, and suggest some possible ways to attain equal female land rights.

The first objective of the study is primarily addressed by analysing the land data available from the Survey and Settlement registers. The British Government had undertaken assessment of lands under the Ryotwari Settlement<sup>4</sup> for the purpose of land revenues. These assessments were generally undertaken every 30 years. For Nandivada village, such Survey and Settlement Registers were available for 1866, 1900 and 1929<sup>5</sup>. Similar data are available for the year 2001 from the village adangal maintained by the Village Administrative Officer of the village. The Survey and Settlement Registers account for the total geographical area of the village that includes both government and private lands of the

village. The Government lands include the channels, roads and paths, tanks and ponds, burial ground and unoccupied lands. The private lands include the titled private cultivable lands and the village residential area called the gramakantam. All these lands are divided into several survey numbers. In some cases each survey number is further divided into sub-survey numbers. In the case of titled private cultivable land, each plot of land (falling under these survey numbers) contains information of full name of landowner (pattadar), nature of land (wet / dry), tarams<sup>6</sup>, revenue assessed basing on taram (in Rupees), and the extent (in acres).

Over the years, the total geographical area in these Settlement Registers was not constant. There was an increase of 36.21 acres to 203.42 acres between 1866 and 1900, and 1900 and 1929, respectively. From 1929 onwards the geographical area of the village remained constant at 2915.07 acres. The discrepancy prior to 1929 might have been due to the under-assessment of lands. This was the reason the survey numbers of Nandivada village were re-organised in every Settlement Register prior to 1929. Over the years, private ownership as a percentage of total geographical area has been increasing and this was especially so between 1866 and 1929 implying greater demand for land. Also, most of the unoccupied assessed lands in 1866 i.e, 401.92 acres in the village were occupied by 1900.

In our analysis, we focus on titled private cultivable land (hereafter landownership or

village land). These lands were the patta lands which were assessed for their land revenues to be paid to the government. These lands were owned by two kinds of landowners namely, the individual pattadars and the joint pattadars. Individual pattadars were those who solely own the piece of land, whereas the joint-pattas were owned by two or more persons. Since we do not have any idea about the shares of ownership on a piece of joint patta land by the joint pattadars, we have equally divided every joint patta land amongst its joint pattadars. A pattadar might own lands in different survey numbers and hence his ownership of land was arrived by adding all his lands across different survey numbers. This procedure was followed for every pattadar. Thus, we have ownership of land in the village by individual landowners or pattadars by summing up all his ownership (individual and joint patta ownership) in the village.

**Identification of Castes of Land Owners:**

Identifying the landowners for their castes by the method of recall memory was not possible because the landownership data pertain to 1866. Some of the names are so common across several castes and sometimes the same name recurs in the same family over generations. Also, identifying the caste of the landowner from his caste title was not possible since most of the landowners do not have these titles<sup>7</sup>. Hence, we have attempted to identify the castes of the landowners from their surnames.

**The Concept of Surname :** In Andhra, irrespective of caste and religion (both among the Hindus and Christians), every Telugu family has a surname. According to Bala Gangadhara Rao (2002), the evolution of surnames in Andhra can be categorised broadly into three categories. One, the names which were derived from the village names called the oori perlu, two, the names derived from the occupation of group of people and three, named after the famous persons in the lineage. Therefore, if we try to identify castes through surnames across different parts of Andhra, there would be overlapping of castes across surname, In other words, a particular surname might occur in more than one caste. However, when we try to identify castes through surnames in any specific village, normally there exists a one-to-one correspondence between caste and surname, of course with a few exceptions. From the Survey and Settlement Registers of 1866, 1900, 1929 and village adangal 2001, land transactions data 1929-38 and 1971-2001 and the village census survey (2001), we have identified 713 distinct surnames across 22 castes. Except for 19 surnames, rest of the surnames had one-to-one correspondence to caste. From all this we understood that there is an undisturbed one-to-one correspondence between surname and caste in Nandivada.

The second objective of the study, that is, changing pattern of marriages and dowry practices over time was addressed from the data collected from 103 sample households of the village. For this purpose, data were collected on nature of marriages, dowry of

heads of households and their sons and daughters from the sample of 103 households which were drawn from a total of 690 households of Nandivada in 1998. In all we have come across 211 marriage alliances, which were analysed. The third objective of the study is addressed by analysing the land transaction data 1971-2001 collected from the sub-registrar's office, Gudivada.

### **Caste and Changing Female Landownership, 1866, 1900, 1929, 1971 and 2001**

Landownership by sex had undergone a substantial change in Nandivada between 1866 and 2001. In 1866, females owned no land and opened their account in 1900 with a meagre stake of 2.74 per cent of the village land. By 1929, their ownership had improved to 9.16 per cent of the village land. There was a substantial improvement in female landownership between 1929 and 1971 from 9.16 to 31.33 per cent of the village<sup>8</sup> (Table 2).

When we analysed female land ownership across the social classes, the FC women had better access to land than the OBCs and SCs (Table 2). From among the FCs, it were the Kammas and Reddy women who enjoyed better access to land. All along, the female landownership of Brahmins was much lower than most other castes in the village<sup>9</sup>. When enquired about the factors contributing to rise in female landownership between 1929 and 1971, we came across two important factors. Firstly, the Land Ceiling Act<sup>10</sup> contributed to the transfer of property in the name of females so as to comply with the

ceiling limits under the act. This was the first best option available before the largest size-class owners than transferring the lands under some binami (fictitious) names. This was the reason we see that the female landownership of Kammas rose from 10.82 to 36.83 acres between 1929 and 1971 (Table 2). This argument was supported by several case studies that we have collected from the field. On the other hand, we rarely come across large farmers<sup>11</sup> especially among OBCs and SCs also account for around 25 per cent of female landownership in 1971. Thus, fear of implementation of Land Ceiling Act was not the sole reason for rise in female landownership between 1929 and 1971. In the case of marginal and middle size-class families, the question of complying with the ceiling limits does not arise. The other factors that had contributed to the rise in female landownership between 1929 and 1971 were the changing nature of marriages, dowry practices and its growing incidence which we shall analyse in the ensuing sections.

In all, we have two categories of castes in terms of landownership between 1970 and 2001. One, the castes that sold lands and two, the castes that bought lands between 1970 and 2001. Brahmins, Kammas and Reddies belong to the former category whereas Yadavas and Malas belong to the latter category. In such a scenario, it is interesting to analyse land transactions by sex between these two categories of castes and the dialectics thereof. We have attempted this issue in detail by analysing the data collected from the Sub-Registrar's in the later section.



**Table 2 : Percentage Distribution of Land Ownership Across Castes in Nandivada 1866, 1900, 1929, 1970 & 2001**

Caste Name	Landownership in the Village Land					Female Landownership within Caste				
	1866	1900	1929	1970	2001	1866	1900	1929	1970	2001
FCs	88.4	84.5	85.1	80.9	63.7	0	3.2	9.7	33.1	37.2
Kamma	42.0	57.7	57.5	40.2	29.9	0	3.9	10.8	36.8	38.7
Reddy	19.7	5.9	8.8	28.4	26.3	0	2.6	7.4	25.0	36.1
Brahmin	26.7	18.2	17.1	7.0	4.0	0	2.0	6.6	16.3	16.9
Others	0.0	2.7	1.6	5.3	3.6	0	0	7.8	37.0	27.4
OBCs	9.6	13.0	11.7	15.7	27.6	0	0	6.4	23.9	27.3
Yadava	2.1	3.5	5.6	8.3	16.7	0	0	6.3	20.5	27.6
Uppari	0.1	3.2	2.0	1.3	2.9	0	0	11.2	51.2	25.2
Turpus	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.2	1.5	-	-	83.9	93.1	19.9
Others	7.2	4.6	2.7	2.5	2.9	0	0	1.2	26.7	21.2
SCs & STs	2.0	2.5	3.2	3.4	8.7	0	0	4.6	22.9	25.6
ALL	100 (1952.84)	100 (2172.30)	100 (2492.97)	100 (2512.84)	100 (2512.84)	0 (2512.84)	2.7	9.2	31.3	33.4

Source: Survey and Settlement Register, Nandivada, 1866.

Re-survey and Settlement Register, Nandivada, 1900.

Re-survey and Settlement Register, Nandivada, 1929.

And Adangal, Nandivada, 2001

Note 1: Others in FCs include Kapus, Komatis, Velamas and Rajus

Others in OBCs include Agnikula kshatriyas, Viswa Brahmins, Gowdas

Haridasulu, Kummari, Muslims, NayiBrahmins, Padmasaaleelu, Rajaka and Perika

Note 2: Given in the parentheses are the village land in acres for the respective years.



### Changing Pattern of Marriages and Dowry by Caste and Sex

There are three broad ways in which the female landownership would have an impact. a) inheritance rights b) marriage and dowry practices and c) land transactions due to upward / downward economic mobility of the household. The first two are addressed through the field survey conducted in 1998 which would give leads and enhance our understanding in tracing the factors responsible for rise in female land rights in Nandivada.

**Nature of Marriages in Nandivada:** The marriages prior to 1970 were predominantly used to take place within the close relatives. However, the degree at which the marriages used to take place within the close relatives

varied across social classes prior to 1970 (Table 3). The FCs recorded a lesser proportion of marriages among the close relatives in comparison with the OBCs and SCs. In the post-1970 scenario, the gap between these two sets of groups reduced and in general the marriages among the close relatives had considerably declined. In a study conducted by Caldwell (1983) in a South Indian State of Karnataka, the decline in marriages among relatives was attributed to three factors. One, the rise of dowry motivated boy's parents to seek a marriage outside the family. Two, matching education and wealth led to a search for marriages outside the close relatives. Three, a belief that marriages among close relatives produce sickly children led to marriages outside close relatives.

**Table 3 : Percentage Distribution of Marriages Among the Close Relatives Reported in Nandivada**

Caste	Prior to 1970	1970-85	1985-1997
FCs	39.0 (18)	25.0 (16)	9.7 (31)
Kamma	36.4 (11)	25.0 (12)	23.1 (13)
Reddy	25.0 (4)	0 (2)	0 (9)
Others	66.7 (3)	50.0 (2)	0 (9)
OBCs	61.5 (13)	28.1 (32)	12.1 (33)
Yadava	50.0 (2)	15.4 (13)	0 (5)
Uppari	75.0 (4)	40.0 (5)	27.3 (11)

(Contd...)

**Table 3 (Contd...)**

Caste	Prior to 1970	1970-85	1985-1997
Turpus	60.0 (5)	25.0 (4)	12.5 (8)
Others	50.0 (2)	40.0 (10)	0 (9)
SCs	53.3 (15)	22.2 (9)	25.8 (31)
STs	100.0 (1)	100.0 (3)	33.3 (9)
ALL	51.1 (47)	30.0 (60)	17.3 (104)

Source: Survey Data, 1998.

Note 1: Same as in Table 2.

Note 2: Same as in Table 2.

Note 3: Figures in parentheses are the respective total number of marriages.

**Marriages Involving Dowry in Nandivada:** It was very much pronounced in the literature the 'dual role' of dowry - as a pre-mortem bequest and as a market clearing price (Anderson, 2007). In India, Dowry Prohibition Act of 1961 attempted to distinguish between the two components of the payment: that which was a gift to the bride and that which was transferred to the groom and his parents. The aim was to abolish the groom price component but allow the bridal transfers to remain intact (Caplan, 1984).

The above arguments are further supported by analysing marriages that involved dowry over time. Except for a small discrepancy of FCs, all the other social classes

had experienced a rising trend of marriages involving dowry (Table 4). In case of FCs, there was a marginal decline in the proportion of marriages involving dowry between the period prior to 1970 and 1970-85. The rise in proportion of marriages involving dowry among the OBCs and SCs was much sharper between periods prior to 1970 and 1970-85 than 1970-85 and 1985-97 (Table 4). Especially between 1985 and 1997, about 96.8, 93.9 and 74.2 per cent of marriages among the FCs, OBCs and SCs involved dowry indicating the prevalence of dowry in most of the marriages as we moved towards the recent periods (Table 4).

**Table 4 : Percentage Distribution of Marriages Involving Dowry Across Castes in Nandivada**

Caste	Prior to 1970	1970-85	1985-1997
FCs	83.3 (18)	75.0 (16)	96.8 (31)
Kamma	100 (11)	83.3 (12)	100 (13)
Reddy	75.0 (4)	50 (2)	89 (9)
Others	33.3 (3)	50.0 (2)	100 (9)
OBCs	38.5 (13)	68.8 (32)	93.9 (33)
Yadava	0 (2)	76.9 (13)	100 (5)
Uppari	25.0 (4)	60.0 (5)	90.9 (11)
Turpus	60.0 (5)	100 (4)	87.5 (8)
Others	50.0 (2)	50.0 (10)	100 (9)
SCs	13.3 (15)	66.7 (9)	74.2 (31)
STs	0 (1)	0 (3)	44.4 (9)
ALL	46.8 (47)	66.7 (60)	84.6 (104)

Source: Survey Data, 1998.

Note 1: Same as in Table 2.

Note 2: Same as in Table 2.

Note 3: Figures in parentheses are the respective total number of marriages.

**Structure and Quantum of Dowry:** Having seen the rise in the number of marriages involving dowry in Nandivada, we shall address some of the issues pertaining to dowry, such as the quantum and structure of dowry. The latter is useful in understanding the empowerment of females by way of their landownership through dowry<sup>12</sup>. How does this vary across castes and time points is a very important investigation to make some policy prescriptions for the future. There has been an argument that the dowry is a mechanism

through which the property of the household is being partitioned for the female children.

We have made an attempt to understand how the family property is being divided overtime by using the participatory method. From the qualitative information available from the village we have the following observations. During the colonial period there was high degree of discrimination between males and females in terms of division of landownership cutting across all castes as

we have already noticed in Table 2. However, things have started to change over the years due to monetisation of the economy and development of various markets themselves creating a market for marriage. This had resulted in giving some dowry in the form of land or cash to the females across various social classes, however, this varied across social classes by way of their economic power and cultural practices. In this direction, the Kammas started to give reasonably a better share of property to their females over time. In the recent times, some of the Kamma families started to give more than the equal share of property to females anticipating that the male children would get any way the better dowries and if we give a better dowry to the daughter we would get a better alliance for her. This kind of a notion has become more prevalent among the Kammas and Reddies to some extent.

Among the OBCs and SCs, even though dowry had become prevalent and the quantum of dowry had risen over time, equal division of property had not picked-up

momentum. From among the FCs, even though the Brahmins had greater access to lands historically, equal division of property by sex did not take place. This was a case of varying levels of gender discrimination across castes which can be attributed to some inherent practices that are governed by caste rigidities, varying cultural practices of the families within caste and also varying economic mobilities of castes and families.

The average dowry of the FCs was higher than the OBCs and SCs which would have been obvious for the reasons of the FCs' better access to economic resources (Table 5). However, we see that the OBCs and SCs are relatively improving in their quantum of dowry overtime much faster than FCs. This reflects the upward economic mobility of the OBCs and SCs leading to a rise in dowry amounts. However, we are unsure in what proportion a female is getting her share of property in comparison with her brothers. Hence, the above analysis reflects only the absolute rise in the dowry amounts over time.

**Table 5 : Some Patterns of Dowry Across Castes in Nandivada**

Caste	Prior to 1970			1970-1985			1985-1997		
	Number of Marriages	Average Dowry (₹)	Highest Dowry Reported (₹)	Number of Marriages	Average Dowry (₹)	Highest Dowry Reported (₹)	Number of Marriages	Average Dowry (₹)	Highest Dowry Reported (₹)
FCS	18	252604	1022318	16	311813	2301276	31	235877	1672056
Kamma	11	378283	1022318	12	378478	2301276	13	325864	1672056
Reddy	4	73177	120000	2	180000	360000	9	245962	677920
Others	3	31017	93051	2	43635	87270	9	95811	260891
OBCs	13	18909	150000	32	38104	169179	33	43325	296000
Yadava	2	0	0	13	60669	169779	5	46517	180000
Uppari	4	3385	13540	5	37633	120000	11	48080	120000
Turpus	5	16455	33524	4	44153	137226	8	13898	31470
Others	2	75000	150000	10	6585	28939	9	61897	296000
SCs	15	10187	120000	9	35412	109471	31	23171	129571
STs	1	0	0	3	0		9	2899	15529
ALL	47	105223	1022318	60	108784	2301276	104	91215	1672056

Source: Survey Data, 1998.

Note 1: Same as in Table 2.

Note 2: Same as in Table 2.

Note 3: Dowry is quantified as follows:

The present value of land in 1998 is calculated as the extent of land in acres multiplied by 1, 20, 000 since an acre of land was sold at an average price of Rupees 120000 per acre in 1998.

The present value of cash in 1998 is calculated at an interest rate of 12 per cent compounded annually which is generally taken as an arbitrary discount rate for financial purposes.

The empowerment of females can be partially addressed through the structure of dowry. There is a trend towards rising proportion of land in the dowry in the village; however, the social classes vary differently from this trend in terms of structure of dowry. As per the FCs, there is a rising trend in the landed part of dowry. OBCs and SCs have noticed a fall in the landed portion of dowry during 1970-85 (Table 6), even though there was a sharp rise in the quantum of dowry during the period prior to 1970 to 1970-85 (Table 5). The fall was much sharper among the SCs. The landed portion of dowry is important in the sense that females would have at least ownership rights that would empower them to some extent. However, we are not sure that whether these ownership rights would guarantee effective land rights or not.

The groom's dowry preferences to land or cash vary across families and castes. Likewise, from the bride's side willingness to give dowry in land or cash varies across families and castes depending on the family's economic position, progressive ideas and its cultural practices. For instance, when the OBCs and SCs were acquiring lands in the post-1970s in Nandivada, which was historical in most of these families, they would not have preferred to part with that land by giving some parts of their lands as dowry to their daughters. Hence, we found major portion of the dowry comprised cash among OBCs (55.7 per cent) and SCs (84.9) during 1970-85. Later, when the OBCs and SCs started to move upwards in the economic ladder by acquiring good chunk of village lands during 1985-97, the landed

portion of the dowry rose to the extent of 58.3 and 60.1 per cent, respectively (Table 6). Hence, changing structure of dowry is dependent on economic mobilities and processes taking place within the castes.

There were cases wherein some grooms demand cash as dowry and buy lands in their own village with the cash that they received as dowry. In such cases, there are likely chances that the land would be bought in the name of the groom than the bride. Hence, the empowerment of females would be at a stake when the cash portion of the dowry is predominant.

By and large, all the social groups share some common patterns in terms of their moving from the marriages within the close relatives to out-side marriages, rise in the proportion of marriages involving dowry and rise in the quantum of dowry. The reasons for rising female landownership between 1929 and 1970 which we have seen in Table 2, was due to a transition in the dowry practices which we have noticed in Table 4. The reasons for the peasant castes exhibiting relatively larger proportion of female land ownership in 1970 was due to an exogenous factor i.e., Land Ceiling Act of 1960s and 1970s. But, the structure of dowry in terms of land and cash proportions was dependent on the economic mobility of the social groups and also the cultural factors that are specific to these groups. In the gamut of all these above changes, we shall analyse the land market transactions in post-1970s primarily to address the issue of empowerment of females by landownership in a relative sense.

**Table 6 : Percentage Devolution of Dowry Across Castes**

Caste	Prior to 1970			1970-1985			1985-1997		
	Land	Cash	Total	Land	Cash	Total	Land	Cash	Total
FCS	43.0	57.0	100	51.4	48.6	100	61.5	38.5	100
Kamma	44.1	55.9	100	48.5	51.5	100	68.0	32.0	100
Reddy	41.0	59.0	100	100	0	100	73.2	26.8	100
Others	0.0	100	100	0	100	100	0	100	100
OBCs	61.0	39.0	100	44.3	55.7	100	58.3	41.7	100
Yadava	-	-	100	38.0	62.0	100	77.4	22.6	100
Uppari	0	100	100	63.8	36.2	100	66.9	33.1	100
Turpus	0	100	100	67.9	32.1	100	0	100	100
Others	100	0	100	0	100	100	53.9	46.1	100
SCs	78.5	21.5	100	15.1	84.9	100	60.1	39.9	100
STs	-	-	100	0.0	100.0	100	0	100	100
ALL	45.0	55.0	100	48.3	51.7	100	60.8	39.2	100

Source: Survey Data, 1998.

Note 1: Same as in Table 2.

Note 2: Same as in Table 2.



### Land Transactions by Sex (1971-2001)

Now we shall understand the implications of land transactions by sex that are dialectic in nature. The transactions that we have analysed are predominantly the commercial transactions, which were collected from the sub-registrar's office. Of the four kinds of transactions (sales, gifts, mortgages and redemptions), we have analysed sales and gifts that cover 97 per cent of the total area transacted. Of these two, gifts account for 13 per cent of the total area transacted. Of the gifts, some portion of the gifts might be transactions pertaining to dowry and the others might be transactions other than dowry<sup>13</sup>. Thus, the transactions by way of dowry do not account for a good chunk of land transactions.

We have already seen that FCs have been alienating their lands in the village during the post-seventies period (Table 2). Among the FCs, when the males alienated 383.86 acres of land, the females alienated 53.36 acres of land during 1971-2001. Thus, males alienated relatively more land than females as far as FCs were concerned during 1971-2001. In case of Reddies, when males alienated 116.07 acres, it was the females who acquired 60.04 acres of

land (Table 7). Thus, FC females seem to be better-off than their males in terms of land transactions during 1971-2001. On the other hand, among the OBCs and SCs, males acquired nearly three times more land than the females (Table 7) relatively favouring males than females in the land market transactions.

If we broadly categorise, the FCs as the ones that were alienating lands and OBCs and SCs as the ones who were acquiring lands, we find two patterns in terms of land transactions by sex. The FC females, even though alienating their lands, they were better-off than their males whereas OBC and SC females were worse-off than their males in the land market transactions. Thus, the gender differences vary across different social groups and particularly the gaps were increasing among the weaker sections over time. From among the FCs, if we analyse the patterns of land transactions across different time points, they do not follow the general pattern. For instance, between 1991 and 2001, among the Kammars when the males acquired 18.23 acres of land, the females alienated 30.38 acres of land which was a reversal process to the general pattern.

**Table 7 : Decadal Net Gain / Loss of Land by Sex Across Castes in Nandivada, 1971-2001**

Caste	1971-80		1981-90		1991-2001		1971-2001	
	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females
FCS	-130.38	-18.28	-177.25	-4.77	-76.23	-30.31	-383.86	-53.36
Brahmin	-25.25	-5.44	-37.36	-7.48	-2.93	1.32	-65.54	-11.6
Kamma	-115.77	-27.89	-83.71	-23.6	18.23	-30.38	-181.25	-81.87
Reddy	3.29	19.43	-52.23	28.88	-67.13	11.73	-116.07	60.04
Others	7.35	-4.38	-3.95	-2.57	-24.4	-12.98	-21	-19.93
OBCs	72.61	38.58	102.24	22.71	45.76	20.49	220.61	81.78
Yadava	8.77	14.84	62.62	20.15	64.74	38.52	136.13	73.51
Uppari	20.52	4.48	23.25	3.21	-3.63	-5.86	40.14	1.83
Others	43.32	19.26	16.37	-0.65	-15.35	-12.17	44.34	6.44
SCs	25.07	12.4	38.85	18.22	34.49	5.8	98.41	36.42
All	-32.7	32.7	-36.16	36.16	4.02	-4.02	-64.84	64.84

Source: Index II, Sub-Registrar's Office, Gudivada.

Note 1: Same as in Table 2.

Note 2: Same as in Table 2.

### Policy Measures

We have thought about a way in which the State should introduce some registration laws that would positively discriminate females in land transactions, so that the landownership of females would improve leading to their empowerment. Every land transaction has a cost by way of registration fee which earns substantial revenues for the State Government as well as for village Panchayats. A part of the fee that is collected goes to the panchayat and the rest goes to the State exchequer. Presently, in Andhra Pradesh, the fee on the land transaction is calculated on the basis of the book value or actual value of the transaction whichever is the highest. Generally, all the transactions go by the book value except under extra-ordinary circumstances where the book value is generally lower than the market value. There were cases where small plots are registered at a higher price than the prices in the book value if there was a proposal from the Government to acquire the lands. In those cases the owners of such lands deliberately register some plots of land at a higher rate than the book value so as to bargain and claim a higher rate of compensation from the Government. In practice most of the transactions go by the book value. For instance, in Nandivada, the book value of an acre of land is ₹ 120000 in 1997. These book values are revised perpetually by the department of Registrations. When a person buys an acre of agricultural land, he needs to pay 12 per cent as registration fee<sup>14</sup>, which amounts to ₹ 14400. Here, we suggest some kind of positive

discrimination for the females in registration fees that would enhance the female landownership which would have all the desirable benefits that were discussed by Agarwal (1994).

We argue a case for lowering of registration fee for the female buyers. This should result in a substantial gap in registration fee between males and females. Even though this cuts the exchequer of the State, it brings in desirable change which has more socio-economic value than the loss of revenue. Logically, this would always force the male member of the household to get the land registered under the name of the female so as to reduce his expenditure in registering the land / property. In this context, we urge for a detailed theoretical and intellectual discourse to tinker with the registration fees and other possible alternatives in bringing desirable changes to bridge gender gap.

### Summary and Conclusion

Historically, females had unequal land rights in land due to land re-distribution laws, Hindu Laws, sexual control of females, marriage practices, etc. Over the years, women organisations, NGOs, feminist activists, academia were addressing this problem. In order to understand the changing female landownership historically, we have relied on Survey and Settlement Registers of a village, Nandivada in a Deltaic Krishna district of Andhra Pradesh. We have also analysed the data at a dis-aggregated level by taking caste as an analytical variable.

As per the first Survey and Settlement Register 1866, females owned no land in Nandivada. In 1900, they owned a meagre 2.7 per cent of the village land. It was between 1929 and 1970, the female landownership increased from 9.2 to 31.3 per cent. The female landownership in 1970 varied across different castes implying the role of caste in determining the gender relations. The rise in female landownership between 1929 and 1970 was attributed to two agents of change: One, fear of land reforms in 1960s and 1970s. Two, transition in marriages from within the close relatives to outside marriages before 1970s and after 1970s, which also led to rising practices of dowry in marriages. This was noticed across all social groups in Nandivada. The intensity and quantum of dowry had noticed a considerable rise among the OBCs and SCs than the FCs. However, FCs had the practice of dowry much earlier than the OBCs and SCs. When we have analysed the structure of dowry in terms of land and cash, the FCs had shown a rise in land portion, which was one of the responsible factors for the rise in female landownership. On the other hand, OBCs and SCs had low proportion of land element in their dowries during 1970-85 whereas they have improved their landed proportion during 1985-97. The structure of dowry seems to have a bearing on the economic mobility of social groups. When the OBCs and SCs started to buy more lands in the village during post-seventies they started to give dowry in land. Thus, among the OBCs and SCs, proportion of land in dowry increased between the time periods 1970-85

and 1985-97. Even though OBCs and SCs were buying lands in the post-seventies, the benefits did not percolate to females initially; it was only during the latter period (1985-97) there seem to be some benefits to females via the practice of dowry. However, we do not have any clue in what proportion the property is generally divided between male and female children of a household, which is important in understanding female empowerment in a relative sense.

We know that during 1971-2001, FCs were alienating their lands wherein the FC males alienated 383.86 acres of land. On the other hand, the FC females alienated only 53.36 acres of land. Thus, the land market transactions during 1971-2001 favoured females than the males among the FCs. However, the story is not that simple. When we analysed these transactions at a dis-aggregate level during 1991-2001, we found that among the Kammas, when males acquired 18.23 acres of land, females alienated 30.38 acres of land, which was reversal pattern to the general pattern of FCs. During 1971-2001, the OBCs and SCs in the village were acquiring lands. Among the OBCs, when males acquired 220.61 acres of land, females acquired only 81.78 acres of land. Similar pattern is also noticed among the SCs during 1971-2001. Thus, land market transactions favoured males than females among the OBCs and SCs.

It is in this context we suggest a policy that would positively discriminate females in the land market transactions so that the gaps

in terms of landownership by sex can be corrected. We address the issue from the buyers' side so as to make the model simple and also anticipating the practical problems in its implementation if we make the model so sophisticated and complex. We suggest some registration laws have to be amended in terms of registration fees by positively discriminating females buyers. In other words, when a female is a buyer, the registration charges have to be lowered substantially so that there would be an incentive for registering the property in the

name of the female than the male. The paper strongly argues for amending the registration laws by positively discriminating the females in terms of registration fees given the evidences of dialectic patterns of ownership by sex. This would streamline the unequal property rights by sex to equality or even reverse the present ownership, which is desirable. In this context, we urge for a theoretical and intellectual discourse on lowering registration fees for female buyers as a vehicle to gender equality.

### Notes

- 1 For a good discussion on these issues, see Goody and Tambiah (1973).
- 2 For a detailed description of the village, see Srinivas (1998), Dasari (2004).
- 3 Studies by Rao (1985) and Stone (1984) facilitate fairly better understanding of how irrigation activates the land market and the other three agrarian markets such as output, labour and credit markets.
- 4 According to this settlement, every registered holder of the land is recognised as its proprietor and pays rent direct to the Government. He is at liberty to sub-let his property, or to transfer it by gift, sale or mortgage. The Government cannot eject him so long as he pays the fixed assessment. The ryot, under this system is virtually a proprietor on a simple and perfect title, and has all the benefits of a perpetual lease without its responsibilities, inasmuch as he can, at any time, throw up his lands, but cannot be ejected so long as he pays his dues: he receives assistance in difficult season and is not responsible for the payment of his neighbours.
- 5 For 1900 and 1929, these were called the Re-survey and Settlement Registers.
- 6 The settlement department divides the soils into series according to the commonly recognisable soil types, sub-divides series into classes with reference to their mechanical composition, and the classes are further divided into sorts or grades with reference to their chemical and physical properties and other circumstances affecting

their fertility. In addition to this, villages are grouped according to their situation with reference to proximity to markets, communication facilities and climate. This grouping is independent of soil fertility. Tarams for different plots of lands are arrived at taking these two aspects into consideration. For details see Baden - Powell (1896: 61)

- 7 Yanagisawa (1996) had attempted to trace the castes of the 26 villages in the Lalgudi Taluk of the Trichinapally district of Tamil Nadu for the Survey and Settlement Registers 1865 and 1925. He was successful in identifying the pattadars for their castes for 77.4 per cent of the total geographical area of these villages by following method of tracing the castes from the caste titles.
- 8 Gough (1981:208-9), on examining land records in Kumbapettai village of Tamil Nadu found that in 1952, 19.4 per cent of all registered landowners were women (including both widows and non-widows). This represented a notable increase over 1827 when there were no female registered landowners in the village, land shares were generally held in joint estates by male heirs; and women had rights in only maintenance. It also represented an improvement over 1897, when 12.2 per cent of registered owners were women; by then the partitioning of extended joint family estates had become more common and land had begun to be registered in individual names. Also, as land shares became individual property, men sometimes gave small plots to daughters as dowry.
- 9 A study by Kapadia (1995) states that the gender inequality among the Brahmins was higher when compared with the other castes in terms of ownership rights, work, both social and economic freedom.
- 10 In Andhra, the first round of land ceiling act came into effect in 1961 which had not marked any substantial effect. On the other hand, the second Ceiling Act which was published in 1971 and came into effect in 1973 was a more serious one in its implementation.
- 11 A class-wise analysis of landowners reveals that there were hardly any large farmers belonging to OBCs and SCs historically in Nandivada unlike Kammas, Brahmins and Reddies (Srinivas,1998).
- 12 Arunachalam and Logan (2008) cite evidence from the survey on status of women and fertility indicating that brides report having more say over how their dowry is used when dowry is in the form of jewellery, gold or silver compared to cash. We assume that if the dowry is in the form of land, it would lead to higher degree of empowerment than dowry being in the form of jewellery, gold or cash.

- 13 Index II does not give the micro details of gift. It is mentioned as gift which is more or less a general term. Even though, the actual registration gives the details of the transaction, they are not generally reliable.
- 14 The registration fees are different across States, and change over different time periods.

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