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Social Change and Family Planning: A Study of Backward Classes

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The impact of the family planning (FP) programme over the years is showing varying impacts on fertility across regions and population groups in India. While it has been strongly argued on the one hand, the success of FP is becoming increasingly a regional phenomenon (Srinivasan 1995; Rayappa and Lingaraju 1995), on the other, it is often, emphasized that the process of fertility decline in India is being negated by the low effect of FP among weaker sections, most of whom live under conditions of poverty. Evidently, the success stories of FP in Kerala and Tamil Nadu and in many other smaller regions like Mandya district in Karnataka, highlight that the success of FP is largely due to its diffusion, which has been greatly facilitated by regional social factors (Bhat and Rajan 1990; Kishor 1994; Bhat and Raju 1994). During the last 30 years, scores of studies have stressed that wide differences exist in FP adoption across religions and caste groups and the variations always have been markedly higher among low castes and Muslims (weaker sections) (Driver 1963; Mandelbaum 1974; Zachariah et al 1994). A study conducted in three districts of Karnataka during 1979-80 notes that FP acceptance and intention to use contraception in future were not only significantly lower among backward classes (BCs) and Muslims, but the desired family size too was higher among them (Rao et al 1986).

More recently, the results of India's first-ever National Family Health Survey (NFHS), conducted during 1992-93, indicate that the current use of contraception in the country is relatively lower among SCs, STs, and Muslims (IIPS 1195). The NFHS also reveals that the mean number of children born and the ideal family size desired are comparatively higher among them. It is important to note that the weaker section is mainly a configuration of BCs, SCs, STs and Muslim communities who, together, comprise nearly two-thirds of the country's population. Low acceptance of contraception among these communities would certainly have a significant impact on the prospects of FP performance and on the process of fertility decline too. Therefore, in the context of strengthening efforts towards accelerating the process of fertility decline among the Vulnerable groups for achieving the national demographic goals, evaluation of FP practice's among these communities has assumed greater importance in recent years. While several factors could have contributed to the low acceptance of contraception among weaker sections, our aim, in this exercise, is to analyse the Process of FP diffusion among BCs in relation to the influence of caste and

changing social conditions. We, in the first instance, review the social underpinnings of caste on the diffusion process of FP, followed by an analysis of a case study of six BC Communities of Uttara Kannada (UK) district, a highly forested region in Karnataka.

Two factors have been very frequently mentioned in the context of low acceptance of FP among weaker sections, viz., (a) the existence of strong apprehensions in these communities that the adoption of FP methods will lead to smaller family size which, in turn, may adversely affect their social and economic security in life, particularly during illness and old age, and it may also lead to serious health problems; and (b) adoption of uniform FP strategies, notwithstanding differences in socioeconomic conditions across the population groups in the country. Adoption of FP, being voluntary in India, it is necessary that significant changes must occur in the fertility attitudes of the people towards adoption of the small family norm, and 'social acceptance of FP methods for producing greater results in FP. It is argued that this approach has been lacking in FP strategies, especially towards weaker sections, which has resulted in lower acceptance among them. Interestingly, even in regions Or among populations where FP has achieved a great success, it was preceded by processes Of social adoption of the small family norm, attitudinal changes and popular acceptance of FP This raises the question: What are the means through which social acceptance of FP is achieved? Or, how does diffusion occur in FP? And, why is this process slow among weaker sections?

Creating Conditions for Acceptance of FP

There are a number of ways in which popular acceptance of FP can occur (1) effective delivery of FP services, intensive FP campaign through mass media, organized movements about FP adoption, and intensification of FP campaign as has been done during the Emergency in India, and (2) increased inputs in FP, as in the case of India Population Project districts and Matalab of Bangladesh, etc. The diffusion in FP can also occur spontaneously because of improvement in living conditions which, in turn, may lead to changes in perception about large family size. In addition, social and cultural changes taking place within the community too contribute to such diffusions.

It would, however be unwise to attribute the diffusion of FP to any one factor, especially when several factors operate simultaneously in the community. Nevertheless, the diffusion is operated mostly through social channels, as the population of the country consists of a large number of illiterates. This being the cast, FP information is conveyed to the population mostly through interpersonal communication, which is very effective when taking, decisions about FP adoption. This raises a further question: Which is the prominent social channel

that can contribute to diffusion of FP? Everrett M Rogers (1973: 100, 105 and 266), while conceptualizing the dissemination process of FP, states that the social structure wig have greater influence on the spread of FP adoption, because, such changes occur in the social system. Furthermore, he argues that while homogeneous groups facilitate, free and easy flow of information about FP, heterogeneous groups, segregated by social norms, statuses and hierarchy, inhibit free flow of communication about FP adoption and hamper the process of FP diffusion.

Obviously, caste being a major actor in the social system, particularly in rural communities, its influences are strong and manifold on the diffusion process of FP. First, it serves as a crucial channel for communicating FP messages and initiating changes in fertility attitudes. Secondly, the FP campaigns effect dissemination in different ways across caste groups according to their socio-economic and cultural status in the community, and their position in the hierarchy can facilitate and expedite, or impede the process of FP diffusion. Thirdly, caste differentiation's can lead to disparities in accessibility, utilization and in the quality of health and FP services in the community, which, in turn, can hamper the process of FP diffusion. Finally, when the community is predominated by same caste members or homogeneous groups, it facilitates the process of social acceptance of the small family norm and also accelerates the diffusion of FP.

Speedy Acceptance of FP by High Castes

It is widely recognized that the high castes have high socioeconomic status and greater cultural adaptability to innovations and interventions, which, in turn, quickly induce changes in their fertility attitudes during the FP campaign. The high caste members are mostly literate, economically better-off, have better access to health, transport and communication facilities, and have greater exposure to the outside world. Hence, adaptation of the small family norm and diffusion of FP would occur much earlier, and at a faster rate among them. In contrast, the inherent socio-economic conditions among low castes (i.e., BCs, SCs, STs) make them less susceptible to interventions and innovations. They are largely illiterate, economically weak, highly concentrated in rural areas, deprived of opportunities to outside exposure, have less access to health and communication facilities, and their fertility attitudes are strongly influenced by superstition and cultural factors. Therefore, the process of FP diffusion would be relatively slower in taking root among them. Our analysis of the success story of FP in Mandya district of Karnataka, brings out that the Vokkaligas, the dominant peasant caste of the region, were the first to adopt the small family norm, and acceptance of FP methods was quite fast among them. It, however, was disseminated much slowly among the low castes (Bhat and Raju 1994).

One should recognize here that, in recent years, health and family welfare services have expanded significantly, particularly in rural areas, with the establishment of a larger number of primary health centres, and the intensification of Maternal and Child Health (MCH) services. This apart, several developmental and welfare programmes have been launched, 'by both government and voluntary agencies, for improving the socio-economic conditions of the weaker sections, during the last few years. These programmes relate mainly to providing such basic needs as supply of drinking water, providing housing and sanitation facilities, supply of essential commodities at subsidized rates, expansion of primary and adult education, creation of employment opportunities, agricultural and animal husbandry development, land reforms and a host of other financial assistance schemes. It should be noted that effective delivery of FP and other welfare programmes to the weaker sections can be constrained by certain organizational and peripheral problems like lack of adequate communication and transport facilities, and poor coverage of benefits due to their high participation in the labours-force, interior location of houses, etc. It is important to note here that rapid societal changes are occurring simultaneously in the population due to a variety of reasons, such as greater opportunities for social exposure and inter-community relations, rise in income levels as a consequence of diversification of economic activities, expansion of communication facilities and mass media, etc. Consequently, these factors take different forms in initiating changes in fertility attitudes and FP adoption among weaker sections. This implies that the process of adoption of FP among BCs has to be studied in relation to societal changes (Cleland 1994).

Keeping the above arguments in view, we have selected six BC communities of Uttar Kannada (UK) district, viz., Halakki and Kare Vakkals, Kumri and Kunbi Marathis, Siddhi and Gavli for their low status in the local caste hierarchy and poor socio-economic conditions. Since the main objective of this study is to analyse the process of FP diffusion among BC communities, it raises the following questions, which need to be answered. They are:

(a) How backward are these groups in terms of the availability of basic facilities, and certain important socioeconomic and demographic characteristics?

(b) What is the status of FP adoption in these communities? Is it socially accepted?

(c) Whether FP and MCH services, and other welfare programmes are effectively delivered to these groups? Are there any constraints?

(d) Are there any diffusion effects of FP operating in these communities? If so, what are the motivating factors behind this process?

Perhaps, it would have been more appropriate had we included a few households of high castes too in the sample, but, due to paucity of time and other constraints we restricted the collection of data only to BC households. Nevertheless, it is possible to draw comparable inferences through qualitative observations. The study assumes that the motivation generated by FP programme efforts and other agencies are normal in the district, because the FP programme has evolved uniform strategies, and hence, this aspect has been excluded from the analysis.

Before we analyse the primary data, it is important to highlight the main features of the population in UK district because of its geographical setting and environmental conditions. UK, being located in the central tract of Western Bhats, is bounded by the Arabian Sea on the west, by Goa on the northwest, north by Belgaum district, northeast and east by Dharwar district, southeast by Shimoga district and the southern tip by Dakshina Kannada district (DCO 1984). It is endowed with abundant rainfall, high concentration of forests, hills and valleys, besides other natural resources, such as power-generating rivers, seashore, rich minerals and wild animals. The gentle undulating hills merge to the cast with the Deccan plateau at an altitude of 500 meters with the crest-line failing only at about 600 meters height. The hills move up to the sea, and the coastal strip is relatively narrow. Topographically, the district is somewhat in an irregular shape. The district has three distinct zones: (a) the coastal belt comprising Ankola, Bhatkal, Honnavar, Karwar and Kuta talukas; (b) the central belt or the Malnad region comprising the hills and valleys of Sahyadri range which include Siddapur, Sirsi, Supa and Yellapur taluks, and this zone constitutes more than 50 percent of the geographical area of the district; and (c) the plains or maidan region which includes the two taluks of Haliyal and Mundgod. The district was part of the erstwhile Bombay State prior to the reorganization of states, in 1956, and historically, it has been ruled by many dynasties.

Agriculture has been the main source of livelihood of the people in the district, by fishing and forest-related activities (DCO 1984). But, the area available for cultivation in the district is significantly lower than the state average and the agrarian structure of the district is predominated by marginal and small farmers (Table 1) Although the district has been the source of major hydroelectric power generation, hosts the naval base in the state, is the location for the first ever atomic power plant in the state, and has a national highway of the state passing through it, the region is highly backward in terms of industrial development and infrastructure facilities (GOK 1978). Particularly, transport and communication facilities are very poor in the district, as a little more than 50 percent of its villages have either all-weather or fair-weather roads, and nearly 50 per cent of

the villages that are not linked by a road facility in the state, are located in UK district itself (Table 1).

Table 1: Socio-economic Indicators of the District and State

Indicators	U.K. District	Karnataka State	Year
Geographical area (sq. km)[1]	10291	1917191	1991
% Area under forest (hectares) [2]	80.9	16.1	1988-89
% Cultivable area (hectares) [2]	11.2	55.1	1988-89
Average annual rainfall (m.m) [2]	2836	1189	1901-70
Population [1]	220260	44977201	1991
% Urban population [1]	24.1	30.9	1991
% Population growth rate [1]	13.6	21.1	1981-91
Crude birth rate [1]	24.9	28.0	1984-90
Population density (sq. km) [1]	119	235	1991
Village population size (average) [1]	624	971	1981
% Villages with less than 500 population [1]	65.2	41.7	1981
% Hindu population [3]	85.7	85.8	1981
% Scheduled Castes [1]	7.5	16.4	1991
% Scheduled Tribes [1]	0.8	4.3	1991
% Kannada spoken as mother tongue [4]	55.9	65.1	1981
% Rural female literacy [1]	51.3	34.7	1981
Rural female marriage age (years) [1]	20.9	18.6	1981
% Couples protected by FP methods [1]	43.9	52.4	1993-94
% Landholdings less than 1 hectare [2]	63.1	36.4	1985-86
% Female rural main workers [1]	19.8	27.6	1991
% Male rural main workers in primary sector [1]	76.6	82.3	1991
% Female rural main workers in primary sector [1]	83.6	89.0	1991
% Villages connected by all-weather/fair-weather roads [1]	55.5	72.8	1993
Number of villages not connected by a road [1]	81	171	1993
Average rural population per fair price shop [1]	4153	2279	1991-92

Source: ([1]) ISEC and CTD 1995, ([2]) GOK 1991, ([3]) DCO 1986, and ([4]) DCO 1987

Poor Communication Facilities

This district is exposed to diverse cultures of neighbouring regions, has varied environmental attributes, and the population is more heterogeneous in terms of

caste composition and language (GOK 1985). The population density of the district is not only the lowest in the state but is also characterized by a high concentration of rural population and smaller-population size villages (Table 1). Population settlements in the hilly and forest regions, a to some extent, in the coastal areas are distinguished by isolated and a highly dispersed pattern of houses, each settlement having a separate name and caste identity. Settlements are mostly located near agricultural land or in forest terrains, which are sometimes not easily accessible because of poor communication facilities (DCO 1984).

The trend in population growth rate between 1901-91 in the district indicates that it has always been much lower than the state as a whole, except during 1951-61 (ISEC and CTD 1995). This lower rate is attributed largely to malaria and other epidemics and to a continuous stream of high out-migration during the early decades in the district (DCO 1984). Furthermore, the crude birth rate in the district is much lower than in the state as a whole (Table 1). The two crucial social indicators, literacy and age at marriage in the district are much higher than the state average. However, couples protected by FP methods in the district are lower than in the state as a whole. Majorities of the population in the district are Hindus, but, the regional language, Kannada, is spoken by about 56 percent of the people as mother tongue, a much lower proportion than in the state as a whole (Table 1). Lastly, it should be noted that although the district is characterized by three different topographic zones, large variations exist in the socioeconomic conditions of the people across taluks and villages (DCO 1984).

The BC communities are widely dispersed all over the district with varying population concentrations of each caste across geographical zones, taluks and villages (GOK 1985). This being a case study, we have collected primary data form a random sample of rural household belonging to six selected BC communities, viz., Halakki and Kare Vakkals, Kumri and Kunbi Marathis, Siddhi and Gavli, living in environmental conditions in the district. Villages with settlements of communities were selected on the basis of their population concentrations in the taluks. Halakki Vakkals are largely concentrated in the coastal belt, Kare Vakkals in the hilly taluks, Kumri and Kunbi Marathi castes, mostly in the hilly taluka of Yallapur and the maidan taluks of Haliyal and Mundgod. Halakki households were selected from two villages in Honnavar taluk; Kare Vakkals from three villages in Siddapur Kumri Marathis from two villages, one each in Siddapur and Sirsi taluks; Kunbi Marathis from one village in yallapur taluk; Siddhis from four villages, three in Yallapur taluk and one in Haliyal taluk, and Gavlis from two villages, three in Yallapur taluk and one in Haliyal taluk; and Gavlis from two villages in Haliyal taluk. As many as 12 villages were selected because of the highly dispersed pattern of settlements all over the district. However, only those households having Ever Married Women

(EMW) in the age group 15-49 years were included in the sample, as they constitute the main target group in FP and MCH programmes. The EMW were interviewed through a predesigned schedule covering information on socio-economic and demographic characteristics and FP acceptance of the women. In all, the sample consisted of 132 women (EMW) -27 from Halakki Vakkals, 35 from Kare Vakkals, 24 from Kumri Marathis, 10 from Kunbi Marathis, 20 from Siddhis and 16 from the Gavli community. In addition, a few qualitative observations were also recorded, which facilitated the drawing of inferences from quantitative data. The fieldwork was done during January 1996.

Although these communities are exogamous in nature, occupying different positions in the social hierarchy, and living under diverse geographic and economic conditions, it is possible to group them on the basis of their cultural backgrounds and social settings. This step was felt necessary for making meaningful comparisons in the analysis and it is also important because the community's acceptance of FP depends a great deal on its cultural background and social setting. We have classified them into two groups: (a) peasant castes which include the other four communities. It is said that Halakkis and Kare Vakkals are indigenous communities of the region, peasants by tradition, speak Kannada as their mother tongue and have strong social and agrarian relationships with the high caste Havyaka Brahmins. Being suppliers of agricultural labour, they have not only been traditional cultivators of Havyaka Brahmins' lands but have also lived mostly in proximity to their settlements. Also, they have similar religious and cultural practices, and are ascribed with special status in the local customs and social ceremonies of the high castes. Thus, it is evident that Halakkis and Kare Vakkals constitute a socially homogeneous group and hence, we have classified them as peasant castes. Moreover, the two castes together comprise numerically a predominant group in the local population. [1]

Traditionally Nomadic Tribes

However, an understanding of the historical background of the four splinter communities (i.e., Kumris and Kunbi Marathis, Gavlis and Siddhis) brings out that they originally belonged to Konkan and Maharashtra regions and continue to speak Marathi, Konkani and Urdu at home (GOK 1985). [2] Traditionally, these communities were nomadic tribes wandering in forests and living in a closed system. Moreover, they lived by cultivating forest lands and hunting or by cattle tending. It is only in the last 30 to 40 years that these groups have become permanent settlers as agriculturists and farm labourers, and in the process become exposed to other castes and the urban world (Palakshappa 1976). Apparently, unlike Vakkal castes they are numerically smaller and do not easily participate in the social life of the local population. In view of their different

historical backgrounds and social settings, we have grouped them as peripheral castes.

(a) Household Characteristics

First, let us discuss a few household characteristics of EMW of peasant and peripheral castes, which are indicative of their social and economic conditions. The data indicate that about two-thirds of the houses are of semi-pucca type, half of the families live in two or more living room-space houses and three-fourths of the households have an exclusive room for cooking among both the caste groups, This is consistent with the local pattern (Table 2a). Interestingly, most of these houses have been built in recent years, and at own cost. However, housing facilities are still inadequate, considering that ha 'If of the households live in single-room houses and in non-nuclear families; while the average household size is more than six, bathroom and toilet facilities are totally lacking in the houses among both the groups. About 60 percent of the households, as a whole, have electric facility and, by caste groups, this facility is much higher among peripheral castes than peasant castes. This difference between them is mainly due to a larger number of free electric connections provided to the peripheral castes by the state government under the Bhagya Jyoti scheme. Three-fourths of the households as a whole have access to safe water for drinking. Open well is the major source of potable water, especially among peasant castes and in coastal and hilly areas. On the whole, it suggests that housing conditions are somewhat better in the study area that the state averages in rural areas (ISEC and IIPS 1995) and reflect the hanging quality of life among these groups.

Table 2a: Household Characteristics of Ever Married Women (EMW) Age 15-49 by Caste Groups (percentages)

Housing Characteristics

Characteristics	**Peasant Castes N = 62**	**Peripheral Castes N = 70**	**Total N = 132**
* *Type of house:*	67.7	72.8	70.5
Semi-pucca	32.2	27.1	29.5
Kachcha			
Living space in houses:	48.4	50.0	49.2
1 Room	33.9	38.6	36.4
2 Rooms	17.7	11.4	14.4
3 or more rooms	75.8	78.6	77.3
Separate room for cooking	45.2	72.9	59.8
Electrified houses			
Source of drinking water:	82.3	37.2	58.3
Open-well	0	10.0	5.3

Bore-well Public tap Pond/lake/stream	0 17.7	21.4 31.4	11.4 25.0
Non-nuclear families	55.2	50.0	47.7
Average household size	6.4	6.9	6.7

* Semi-pucca house: Tiled roof, mud wall and mud or cement floor.

Kachcha house: Thatched roof, mud wall and floor.

Agriculture and casual labour are the prime sources of subsistence for both the groups (Table 2b). While nearly every second household is landless and one-third of the families are dependent solely on wage labour among peripheral castes, dependence on little land and wage labour is substantially higher among peasant castes. Nine out of ten households among peasant castes own land. Their landholdings are smaller and mostly rain-fed, which force them to go for wage labour outside their own farm. This should not mean that there is no economic differentiation among BC communities, as sharp differences do exist in their economic levels, which vary in relation to the geographical settings. We have not collected data on household income but significant differences have been observed in wages earned and economic opportunities across regions, which, to some extent, explain their economic differentiations.

Table 2b: Landownership and Source of Livelihood, etc. (percentage)

Characteristics	**Peasant Castes N = 62**	**Peripheral Castes N = 70**	**Total N = 132**
Landownership: Landless Less than half an acre More than half to two acres More than two acres	8.1 35.5 30.6 25.8	45.7 10.0 22.9 21.4	28.0 22.0 26.5 23.5
Households cultivating land on lease	21.0	21.4	21.2
Primary source of livelihood: Landless labour Own farm and casual labour Own agriculture Others	9.7 79.0 4.8 6.5	31.4 42.9 8.6 17.1	21.1 59.8 7.8 12.1

Areca Nut Provides Regular Employment

Paddy and areca nut are being extensively cultivated, mostly by high castes, in the hilly areas, and agricultural labour is in great demand there. Areca nut,

although a perennial crops, is highly labour-intensive and hence, provides regular employment to both men and women among BC communities in the region. Wages offered are much higher here in view of the high commercial price of areca nuts. As it has been reported, currently, wages paid to the male workers in the hilly region vary from Rs. 50 to Rs. 75 per day and Rs. 30 to Rs. 45 for females. Because of this, it is said, that there has always been an inflow of large-scale seasonal migrant agricultural workers (of BCs) to the hilly taluks from coastal and plains regions, a common feature of the district (DCO 1984). Another marked difference among BC community households in the hilly region is raising of areca crop in their small lands, which were cultivated till recently mostly by high castes (local Brahmin). Of course, acquiring landownership through tenancy reforms and encroachment of forest lands, and steep increase in the market price of areca nuts have greatly contributed to this change among the BC Communities. In the study population, it has benefited Kare Bakkala, Kunbi Matathi and two sects of Siddhi (Hindu and Christian) families, which have become owners of land. This apart, BC communities in the hilly forest region derive considerable income from the collection of minor forest products [3], which are sold to local dealers in the village. It should be noted here that collection of minor products from the forest and marketing have been legally commercialized in recent years. Collection and processing of these commodities not only enhance family incomes, because of good commercial prices, but also engage all members of the household, including children. Social afforestation has been extensively taken up in recent years in the hilly taluks absorbing substantial labour-force from the BC groups.

Conspicuously, in coastal and plains-area villages, the three communities (i.e., Halakki Vakkals, Muslim Siddhis and Gavlis) we interviewed are economically poorer than their brothers in the hilly region. This is mainly because in these regions there is surplus farm-labour; employment opportunities are limited and wages are comparatively lower. While paddy is extensively cultivated in the coastal belt, which is mostly unirrigated and availability of land for cultivation is limited in comparison to its population concentration, agriculture provides only seasonal employment to Halakki Vakkals. Wages offered in the coastal region vary from Rs. 30 to Rs. 60 for males per day, and Rs. 20 to Rs. 35 for females, which are very low considering the high cost of living in this region. There are other sectors, such as construction, transport and allied activities, which provide jobs to Halakki Vakkals to a certain extent. More recently, prawn cultivation, which is being extensively introduced in the coastal belt, too, has been absorbing considerable labour-force from their households, particularly females. But, all these jobs, as has been reported by the respondents, provide them only marginal employment.

Rain Dependent Agriculture Provides Limited Employment

The plains region is a dry belt and agriculture here has been affected by drought Paddy and other foodgrains are the principal crops of the region. These are rain dependent and provide only limited employment to BC communities. Labour wages in this area vary from Rs. 20 to Rs. 40 for males per day, and Rs. 15 to Rs. 25 for females, considerably lower than in the hilly and coastal regions. Here, the Muslim Siddhis and Gavlis are mostly landless and, apart from agriculture, they have been marginally engaged either in public works, quarrying, or social forestry and animal husbandry. It is said that the Siddhis have been going to the neighbouring state, Goa, in recent years in search of jobs and for earning better wages during the non-agricultural season.

The case of Gavlis needs some mention in view of the changes in their traditional occupation. The Gavlis, who are traditionally pastoral, primarily depended on buffalo and cattle tending for their livelihood until recently, by utilizing forest resources for grazing the animals. It is said that the local forests, which had rich resources for cattle grazing, were unrestrictedly used by them. This contributed to substantial erosion of forest resources over the years (Gadgil and Guha 1992). Consequently, with stringent restrictions imposed on deforestation activities in recent years, they were prevented from grazing animals in the forests. Thus, faced with acute shortage of fodder resources, many Gavlis gradually lost their cattle wealth and have been forced to take up other occupations marginalizing their traditional occupation.

Livestock assets have considerable socioeconomic significance for rural communities, and, therefore, we collected data on the livestock owned by the households. it is observed that animal rearing has been mostly confined to tending cattle and buffaloes. in particular, by those who own land, irrespective of caste groups. The cattle are used mainly for purposes of cultivating their own land, manure and the household's milk consumption, except in Gavli households, which derive substantial income from animal husbandry activities. Many respondents pointed out that poor weather conditions and lack of appropriate fodder resources in the region do not encourage the poor to take up animal rearing. Poultry keeping is taken up by a majority of the households mainly for purposes of household consumption and for religious functions. Kunbis have a taboo against eating tended animals and, therefore, do not keep poultry. The data on certain basic consumer goods in the household, such as radio, watch and cycle, indicate that the weaker sections can now afford to buy these items and they serve as important means of exposure to processes of social change (Table 2c). The data also reveal that access to consumer goods is on the increase among BC communities, as more than one-third of the households have

all the three basic durables, and another one-third households among both the groups possess at least one item.

Table 2c: Possession of Consumer Durables in Households

Characteristics	Peasant Castes N = 62	Peripheral Castes N = 70	Total N = 132
Type of durables:	33.9	42.8	38.6
Radio, bicycle and watch/clock	30.6	34.3	32.6
Either a radio, bicycle, watch/clock or combination of items	35.5	22.8	28.8
None			

(b) Characteristics of Women and Children

We shall now examine the conditions of women and children, which are crucial for achieving social acceptance of FP. The sample, as a whole, consists predominantly of currently married women; of the 62 EMW from the peasant group, 57 are currently married, four are widowed and one is separated; and among the peripheral castes, except one woman who is separated, the remaining 69 are currently married. Expectedly, the position of EMW among both the groups is characterized by exceptionally high illiteracy-with the overall literacy around 22 percent; fairly young in age composition-mean age being 28.5 years; very low marriage age-mean age at marriage being 15 years; and high participation in labour-force-with 68 percent reporting as working (Table 3a). However, the peasant women are slightly ahead in literacy levels; on an average older by one year in age; and marry a year later than their sisters of the peripheral castes.

Table 3a: Individual Characteristics of ENW By Caste Groups

Literacy, Occupation and Demographic Characteristics

Characteristics	Peasant Castes N = 62	Peripheral Castes N = 70	Total N = 132
% Literates	24.2	17.1	21.5
% Participation in labour-force:	66.1	70.0	68.2
% As landless labourers	19.5	42.9	32.2
% On own farm/cattle tending	31.7	40.8	36.7
% As wage labourer and on own farm	48.8	16.3	31.1
Mean current age (years)	29.0	28.0	28.5
Mean effective age at marriage (years)	15.5	14.5	15.0

Age at formal marriage: % Before puberty % At puberty % Within two years of puberty % More than two years after puberty	3.2 11.3 41.9 43.6	22.9 7.1 37.1 32.9	13.6 9.1 39.4 37.9
Mean number of live births*	3.2	3.4	3.3
Mean number of child death per woman*	0.25	0.48	0.37

* Excludes women without at least one live birth.

The data on marriage practices indicate an interesting pattern across caste groups (Table 3a). While childhood and pre-puberty marriage is mostly absent among peasant castes, it continues to persist among peripheral castes, and in particular, is rampant among Gavlis. About half the women among peasant castes are married within two years of puberty, and we were told, that the earlier practice of bride-price in marriages has been replaced by payment of dowry in a big way among them apparently due to the influence of high castes (Hatti and Ohlsson 1985). The payment of bride-price is still widely prevalent among all the peripheral castes, except Kumri Marathis, who have adopted the practice of dowry. As a whole, nearly one-fifth of the women are married before puberty and another 40 percent within two years of puberty among peripheral castes. Inter-kins marriage is common among all the communities, but, consanguineous relationship is restricted only to marriage between cross-cousins. The practice of uncle-niece marriage is a taboo in this region, unlike in other parts of Karnataka. In terms of economic roles, the only differentiation is, while the women from peasant as well as peripheral castes work both in their own land and on others lands, the incidence of peripheral castes working on others' land is greater, since they have a higher percentage of landlessness among them. The mean number of children ever born per woman as a whole is 3.3, which is slightly higher than the state average (ISEC and IIPS 1995) and very much similar between the two groups. But, child mortality seems to be relatively higher among peripheral groups than peasant groups, with the average child death per woman at 0.25 and 0.48 respectively.

Better Vaccination Coverage of Rural Children

Regarding maternal and child health services, we restricted collection of data only to the last live birth occurring in the past four years preceding the survey and antenatal services to women who are currently pregnant, so as to make it comparable (Table 3b). A majority of women (80 percent) among both groups have been examined during pregnancy. Of course, variations exists across the caste groups in injections against tetanus toxoid, and using iron and folic acid tablets-at 65 percent and 78 percent among women of peasant and peripheral

groups, respectively. Access to child delivery under health facilities and immunization of children against six common childhood diseases, viz., tuberculosis (BCG), diphtheria-pertussis-tetanus (DPT), polio, and measles, are expectedly much lower. While three-fourths of the women have delivered their babies at home, little more than half the deliveries have been assisted by trained attendants (including trained dais). Apparently, the proportion of deliveries in health institutions-at 34 percent-and deliveries being assisted by trained attendants-at 75 percent-are much higher among peasant castes than among peripheral castes, at 18 percent and 66 percent respectively. Among the children who have completed their first birthday (or survived for more than one year), about 54 percent have been fully vaccinated, one-fourth partially vaccinated, and about one-fifth left unvaccinated by any dose against BCG, DPT, polio and measles. The percentage of children fully protected against BCG, etc., among the two groups, are almost similar. The proportion of not-vaccinated by any dose is much higher among the peasant group. Evidently, the data indicate relatively better vaccination coverage of children against BCG, etc., than NFHS results in rural areas of the state (ISEC and IIPS 1995).

Table 3b: MCH Services for Last Birth of EMW during Past Four Years and School Enrollment of Children of 6-14 Years (percentages)

Characteristics	**Peasant Castes**	**Peripheral Castes**	**Total**
	N = 26	**N = 40**	**N = 66**
Examined during pregnancy*	80.8	80.0	80.3
Received tetanus toxoid injections and iron and folic acid tables	65.4	77.5	72.2
Place of delivery: At home In institutions	N = 23 65.6 34.8	N = 38 81.6 18.4	N = 61 75.4 24.6
Delivery attended by: Relatives & Untrained Dais Trained Dais Health Personnel	34.8 30.4 34.8	55.3 15.8 28.9	47.5 21.3 31.2
Vaccination of last child (above 1 yr)	N = 16	N = 32	N = 48
(BCG, DPT, Polio and Measles) Fully immunized Partially immunized Not immunized	56.3 12.5 31.2	53.1 31.3 15.6	54.2 25.0 20.8
Children attending school (6-14 years) Male ** Female **	72.6 78.4 68.1	69.4 75.0 64.4	71.0 76.6 66.3

* Includes current pregnancies. ** Peasants (M = 37, F = 47), Peripherals (M = 40), (F = 45)

The data on enrollment of children in schools show that about two-thirds of the children of 6-14 years have been attending school among both groups (Table 3b) Which is similar to the state average (ISEC and IIPS 1995). The proportion attending school among male children is 10 percent higher than female children-the proportion being 76 percent and 66 percent respectively. While, on the one hand, this indicates improving literacy standards of the BCs, relatively lower rate of school enrollment among girls, on the other hand, points to the perpetuation of discrimination against female education among rural communities. It is important to note that lower school enrolment of females is due mainly to a much higher proportion of dropouts among 11-14 years (ISEC and IIPS 1995). When we enquired about this bias against female children, many women said that this was the age when a girl would be normally withdrawn from school to assist in household chores, taking care of younger siblings and tending cattle, etc., so that they could increasingly participate in the work-force to contribute to the family income. At the same time, they have the inherent notion that higher education is not that important in life for a girl, as she would be married off to another household where she would be routinely taking up household duties. Also, it is true, to some extent, that educational facilities above primary level, particularly in the hilly region, are mostly located far from their settlements and at inconvenient places, and obviously parents feel insecure and face problems about sending grown-up girls to school without adequate transport and other infrastructure facilities and hence, they are withdrawn from school.

Awareness about sterilization methods, in particular female sterilization, is universal among both groups (Table 4a). Little more than half the EMW, as a whole, know about both sterilization and the three officially sponsored spacing methods viz., IUD, Oral Pill and Condom, and another one-fourth are aware of female sterilization and at least one spacing method. Importantly, knowledge about different methods of FP is more widespread among peasant women of the peripheral group-with awareness of both sterilization and the three spacing methods being at 69 percent and 40 percent among the former and latter groups respectively. It is interesting that awareness of FP methods is somewhat similar to the state pattern (ISEC and IIPS 1995).

Table 4a: Awareness and Adoption of FP, Desired Composition of Ideal Family Size etc., of EMW

Knowledge of EMW about FP by Caste Groups (percentages)

Methods	**Peasant Castes N = 62**	**Peripheral Castes N = 70**	**Total N = 132**
Aware of sterilization methods and	69.4	40.0	53.8

IUD, Condom & Oral Pill			
Aware of female sterilization methods and either IUD, condom or oral pill	17.8	30.0	24.2
Aware of only female sterilization	9.7	21.4	15.9
Aware of all sterilization methods	3.2	8.6	6.1

We have excluded women without at least one living child from the analysis of FP acceptance, since the use of contraception before the birth of the first child is generally absent among rural communities. Acceptance of FP as a whole is about 55 per cent, which suggests that the small family norm is gaining social acceptance among BC communities (Table 4b). Consequently, the rate of FP adoption is very much on par with the state average (ISEC and IIPS 1995). Variations in FP acceptance are apparent when we examine the data on a few background characteristics. Acceptance of FP is much higher not only among peasant castes but also among nuclear families, those participating in the labour-force, women aged above 25 years and women having three or more children. Nevertheless, acceptance of FP among peripheral castes is around 50 per cent, indicating that it has made inroads into the interior settlements and communities. Higher acceptance of FP among peasant families is due to their better social advance in comparison to the position of women of the peripheral castes, as we have already noted earlier. Comparatively, much higher acceptance of FP among nuclear families than joint families is because women in joint families are generally young, as daughters-in-law, and they would not have reached the desired composition of children. Notably, we have argued elsewhere that adoption of FP among women in nuclear families and those participating in the labour-force among rural communities would be relatively higher (Raju and Bhat 1994). Contrarily, literacy seems to be unimportant in the acceptance of FP among the sample communities, variation in FP acceptance between illiterates and literates being negligible.

Table 4b: FP Acceptance among EMW by Background Characteristics

Characteristics	**% Acceptors**	**N**
Total:	55.3	123
Caste group: Peasants Peripherals	62.5 49.3	56 67
Family type: Nuclear Others	61.2 48.2	67 56
Literacy: Illiterates Literates	56.0 52.2	100 23
Participation in work-force:	69.0	87

Worker Non-worker	22.2	36
Age group: 15-24 25-35 35-49	22.7 73.3 73.5	44 45 34
Living children: 1-2 3 and above	29.6 75.4	54 69

Variations in FP acceptance are understandable, mainly because it is almost universally by terminal methods, and non-acceptors are considerably younger than acceptors. Among the total 68 acceptors, 62 have accepted sterilization methods, in particular, female sterilization. This apart, it is clearly evident that, among both caste groups, the mean number not only of total living children but also of male children of non-acceptors is much lower than that of acceptors (Table 4c). Which means, non-acceptors are still to achieve the desired sex composition of children, particularly, sons. Of course, greater parental preference for sons than daughters is a common feature in India, especially among rural communities (Cain 1993; Raju and Bhat 1995). Moreover, of the total 64 non-acceptors, one is widowed and 10 are secondary sterile cases. Excluding this group, most of the other non-acceptor women said that they certainly intended to adopt FP sometime in future, perhaps when once the desired composition of children was achieved. Keeping this in mind, we asked both acceptor and non-acceptor EMW to mention the composition of the ideal family size couple could have these days, to elicit information on their fertility attitudes. The data demonstrate clear differences in fertility attitudes between peasant and peripheral groups (Table 4d). Conspicuously, the popular slogan of FP that one son and daughter make a happy family seems to have percolated among peasant castes, since about two-thirds of the women among them mentioned this as the ideal family-size composition. Comparatively, not only the desired composition of ideal family size but also preference for sons is much higher among peripheral groups. One observed inconsistencies between the composition of children they had at present and the ones desired by them. When we pointed out to EMW about these contradictions, many women, particularly belonging to the younger age group among peasant castes, said that although a woman personally would like to have a much smaller family size, preferably consisting of a son and a daughter, various social and family pressures operate against her fertility interests, such as opposition from elders and spouse, against limiting children and adoption of FP, compulsions to have at least one son, and birth order of male and female children which, in turn, result in a higher number of births. We also observed a growing tendency among the younger women, that if one child was male from the first two births, they would be willing to accept FP operation sooner. Similarly, older women admitted that the family size they had was

certainly higher than their household resources could bear. But this was because they had been less exposed to the idea of adoption of a small family norm and FP practices. It was only during the last ten years that they had realized the need for a small family and FP adoption.

Table 4c: Demographic Characteristics of Sterilization Acceptors and Non-acceptors by Caste Groups (Currently Married Women-CMW)

Acceptors			
Characteristics	**Peasant Castes**	**Peripheral Castes**	**Total**
	N = 28	**N = 29**	**N = 57**
Mean current age of CMW	31.4	33.8	32.6
Mean number of male children	1.8	1.8	1.8
Mean number of female children	1.7	1.7	1.6
Mean number of total children	3.5	3.5	3.5
*Non-acceptors**			
	N = 20	**N = 34**	**N = 54**
Mean current age of CMW	26.2	23.9	24.7
Mean number of male children	0.8	1.4	1.2
Mean number of female children	1.4	1.0	1.2
Mean number of total children	2.3	2.5	2.4

* Excludes women without at least one living child.

Table 4d: Desired Composition of Ideal Family Size of EMW by Caste Groups (percentages)

Methods	**Peasant Castes N = 62**	**Peripheral Castes N = 70**	**Total N = 132**
1 son + 1 daughter	67.7	34.3	50.0
2 sons + 1 daughter	6.5	28.6	18.2
2 sons + 2 daughters	1.6	25.7	14.4
Any sex-one child	6.4	0	3.0
Any sex-two children	4.8	2.8	3.8
Others	12.9	8.6	10.6

The women of BC communities, particularly those belonging to peasant castes-Kumri Marathi and Siddhi groups-not only work as labourers in the farms, but also serve as maid-servants and Dais during child birth and for providing post-natal services in the households of high castes. This facilitates their exposure to processes of social change, resulting in the gradual dissemination of the acceptance of the small family norm from high castes to them. When we asked

about the main reasons for accepting FP, many women said that motivation to adopt FP had emerged as a viable solution, because of their poor economic conditions and smaller landholdings because of land distribution among siblings. In this context, they pointed out that members of high castes have adhered to much smaller family size although they are economically much better off than loaf castes. It has also been argued that, in a predominantly agricultural community, landholding size will have a significant influence on a couple's fertility decisions (Clay and Johnson 1992).

We also sought information on how frequently EMW listen to radio, view television programmes and visit cinema theatres, to asses the extent of their exposure to mass media and FP messages. As the data highlight, EMW from both groups are greatly exposed to radio, not only in terms of intensity of listening but also to FP messages (Table 4e). It should be noted that although no household in our sample owned a television set, women could view television programmes in houses of their neighbours mostly belonging to high castes. About half the sample EMW see television programmes occasionally and such viewing is significantly higher among peasant women, who have, perhaps, better access to such facilitates in their neighbourhood. Only about one-fourth of the EMW as a whole, go to see films in theatres, very occasionally, and this practice is relatively lower among peripheral castes-20 percent. About one-third of the EMW from peasant group are aware of FP messages advertised in the three media viz., radio, television and posters at public places. This awareness is, however, much lower among peripheral castes at eight percent. Significantly, the knowledge of FP messages relayed on radio and exhibited through posters are much higher among both groups-more than 50 percent. Thus, it is evident that BC women are being increasingly exposed to FP messages, advertised in different media and awareness is certainly widespread among peasant castes.

Table 4e: Exposure of EMW to Mass Media by Caste Groups

Media	**Peasant Castes N = 62**	**Peripheral Castes N = 70**	**Total N = 132**
Listening to radio:	80.6	94.3	87.9
Daily	16.1	5.7	10.6
Occasionally	3.3	0	1.5
Never			
Viewing television:	72.6	32.9	51.5
Occasionally	27.4	67.1	48.5
Never			
Visiting cinema theatre:	30.6	20.0	25.0
Very occasionally	69.4	80.0	75.0
Never			
Aware of FP message on radio	6.4	35.7	22.0

Aware of FP message on radio + posters	58.1	55.7	56.8
Aware of Fp on radio + television + poster	29.0	8.6	18.2
Not aware of FP message on media	6.4	0	3.0

(d) Benefits from Welfare Programmes and Constraints

Among the various development programmes that are in operation for "of weaker sections, our data suggest that granting landownership through reforms, facilities relating to housing such as free house or site, financial and material assistance for house building, free electric lighting, food supplies at subsidized rates through green ration cards, and provision of loans from banks and co-operative societies for agriculture, animal husbandry and other income-generating activities are the few programmes which have significantly benefited the sample household (Table 5). The data also bring out striking differences between the two caste groups in the type of benefits accrued. While a majority of households among the peripheral castes have benefited from housing programmes, green ration card facilities, and bank and co-operative loans, the percentage of families benefiting from these programmes, particularly housing, is relatively less among peasant groups. But, the Vakkal households have greatly benefited from land reforms. Other benefits, such as maternity allowance for pregnant women among landless labourers, Training Rural Youth in self-employment (TRYSEM), Astrada Vole (Non-conventional Chulha) too have been provided, but to only a few families among both groups.

Table 5: Beneficiaries of Welfare Programmes among EMW Households by Caste Groups (percentages)

Benefits	**Peasant Castes N = 62**	**Peripheral Castes N = 70**	**Total N = 132**
Landownership: Acquired through tenancy reforms Acquired by encroachment Acquired by both Non-beneficiaries	64.5 0 16.1 19.4	22.9 24.3 0 52.8	42.4 12.9 7.6 37.1
Housing: Beneficiaries of free house site Beneficiaries of free house Received house building loan, etc. Non-beneficiaries	4.8 0 16.1 79.0	57.1 14.3 5.7 22.9	32.6 7.6 10.6 49.2
Beneficiaries of free electric lighting facility at the house	24.2	72.9	50.0
Beneficiaries of green ration card	70.9	82.9	77.3

Beneficiaries of loans from banks, co-operative societies, etc.	45.2	67.1	56.8

Another welfare component that has significantly benefited the BC families, irrespective of caste groups, is the provision of midday meal to school children at primary and nursery levels, and babies enrolled in Anganwadi centres. The impact of this on primary education is distinctly visible in the high percentage of school enrollment of children of the ages 6-10 years among both caste groups. Besides, residential and boarding facilities have been provided by the social welfare department for school-going children at a few places, but, they are mostly available to Gavlis and Siddhis. Recently, youths-both boys and girls-belonging to Siddhis are being specially selected for training in athletics and sports by the Sports Authority of India for their physical potential, which has given them more exposure to educational facilities. Similarly, youths from the Halakki Vakkal caste are being encouraged to take courses in adventure activities, by a few voluntary organizations. Apart from this, a few voluntary agencies have been involved in the socio-economic development of the BCs in the region. These, of course, are concentrated specifically among Halakki Vakkals, Siddhis and Gavli communities.

The above data indicate the proportion of beneficiaries of welfare programmes among the two caste groups. This should not, however, mean that the benefits have been effectively administered or the delivery of benefits is free from obstacles, Constraints are many, but we shall briefly note a few important points which throw some light on both operational and peripheral aspects of the development programmes. For instance, many respondents among peasant families said that although the community benefited from land reforms, the landholdings have become small (leas that an acre in most of the cases and a few guntas in some cases) as a result of land fragmentation among siblings, and they do not have adequate economic and infrastructure resources to improve agriculture. It was also pointed out that granting of welfare components to beneficiaries involved too many procedural formalities which many BC people failed to comply with. That is, BC communities, mostly working a farmers and casual labourers, cannot afford to run around, losing time and wages, to satisfy official procedures and hence, sometimes people did not take any initiative to avail of the benefits.

The Halakki Vakkals in the coastal region and the Siddhis and Gavlis of the plains region live under relatively poorer hygienic sanitary conditions than the other caste' and their household size is much larger for the living accommodation available in their houses. Halakki Vakkals, whose settlements (sample) are located in the low-lying agricultural fields (on the national highway connecting Bombay and Mangalore) pointed out that their houses were water-

logged during the rainy season. Most of the houses are *Kachcha* and have no electric facility, and water is scarce both for drinking and washing, as the water available within the settlements is salin. Women, in particular, face greater hardships in fetching potable water available from distantly located facilities. Although, houses of Gavlis are mostly semi-pucca, they are accustomed to live culturally along with the their animals. The Gavli houses do not have a front door, animals are kept untied at the entrance and people have to enter the house from the left side through a small wicket-type gate. We were told that many developmental agencies have tried in vain to change their living practices by educating them about health hazards of unhygienic living and by providing common cow sheds, but the community could not adapt to changes.

The settlements of the Kumris and Kunbi Marathis have good water resources through ponds lakes, which could be developed to irrigate the community lands. But, neither the developmental agencies nor the communities have taken any initiative to exploit the water resources of their settlements, which could have immensely benefited them. Interestingly, in one of the Kumri Marathi settlements, it was mentioned that the community cannot use water from the twin ponds (Kere) which are located at an easily accessible place, since a local monk has advised them not to use water from the two ponds to maintain the purity of the water, as this was meant for worshipping the diety whose temple was situated right on the bank of ponds. Being scared of the gods and the monk's advice, the community has stopped using water from the ponds since four-five years. We also saw unutilized public bore-wells at a few places, particularly in the hilly region, because, either they had been poorly maintained or the community members did not utilize water form bore-wells, having been accustomed to using open-well water.

Extensive Use of Indigenous Medical Facilities

A majority of the women are happy with the sterilization method. There were no complaints of serious health complications from family planning operations except in a few stray cases (minor instances). Irregular family visits by health personnel and non-availability of immediate medical attention and lack of quality in services in health centres and public hospitals were very common complaints of the respondents. In this context, many women said that their families have been seeking medical care from private facilities for general problems to save time, and for speedier and better services. This, however, depended on the economic background of the families concerned. They avail FP adoption and MCH services mostly from public health facilities. At the same time, during the course of our field work, we came to know that people in the region, especially the low castes, extensively use the services of traditional health-care practitioners, quacks and ojhas. (Mantravadis and Tantriks) for

curing certain common aliments. Some of this include medication during pregnancy, maternal care and for infants (locally known as Chavi), treatment of Balagraha (evil spirit possessing the children below eight years), medication for aborting unwanted pregnancies and jaundice, snake bites, etc., and setting of fractured and dislocated bones, etc.

We have noted, earlier, about the inaccessible location of higher education facilities in the hilly region. The situation is not much different for primary education, as children in the hilly region walk approximately one to three kilometers to reach schools, with poor road facilities. This problem is very severe in peripheral caste settlements, especially during the rainy seasons, because they have to cross flooded streams. It is important to mention here that while a primary school existed well within one of the Kumri Marathi settlements until three years ago, it has now been shifted to another location on the initiative of the high castes to provide easier access to the facility for their children. Lastly, Halakkis and Kare Vakkals and Gavlis of the study settlements have been representing to the local Gram Panchayat about their problems. Notably, two members of these communities are working as Presidents, which perhaps may facilitate effective delivery of welfare components to the BC communities.

The foregoing discussion has brought out that the six selected BC communities of UK district as a whole continue to live in low levels of socio-economic conditions in respect of many of the indicators we have considered above. But, certain changes have been taking place in the living conditions of these communities. These are crucially linked to their existence in the geographical zone they belong to, i.e., whether it is the coastal, hilly or plains region. This is, because, the three zones vary significantly in terms of availability of employment opportunities in farm and non-farm sectors, wages earned, other natural resources, and, to some extent, benefits received from welfare programmes. The BC communities living in the hilly region are economically better off compared to their brothers in coastal and plains regions, irrespective of the caste groups they belong to i.e., whether peasant or peripheral castes because of the regular employment in agriculture, higher wage rates and income generated from collection of forest minor produce.

Diversification of Sources of Employment

It is common among Halakki Vakkal caste members of the coastal region, who are mainly marginal farmers and work as agricultural labourers, to go to the hilly areas to work in the areca-nut farms for better wage rates and job opportunities after harvesting their paddy. In recent years they have been marginally engaging in cultivation too, which is being extensively introduced in the coastal belt. Similarly, Siddhis (both in the plains and hilly regions) have begun to move,

during the lean agricultural session, to neighbouring Goa in search of employment opportunities and for better wages. In the case of the pastoral caste, Gavlis, who traditionally lived on tending cattle, depending solely on local forest resources for grazing cattle, have been forced to change their occupation, because of non-availability of grazing resources in the local forests, after restrictions being imposed by government on deforestation activities. Except Gavlis, no other group has taken to animal husbandry. Access to certain basic consumer goods, such as watch, cycle and radio, is on the increase among BC communities. These serve as crucial means of exposure to processes of social change.

The conditions of women among the sample BC communities, as a whole, are characterized by high illiteracy, very low age at marriage, relatively younger age composition, high participation in the labour-force mostly in agriculture, and a little more than three average live births per woman. However, women of peasant castes are slightly ahead of their sisters of peripheral castes with respect to these characteristics. Childhood and pre-puberty marriage practices are almost absent among all the BC groups, except Gavlis who still persist with the earlier practices. Interestingly, the earlier practice of bride-price in marriages has been replaced by dowry in a big way among peasant castes, obviously because of the influence of local high castes, but all ,the peripheral castes have continued with bride-price, except Kumri Marathis.

The coverage of MCH services are more or less satisfactory among both the BC caste groups, as the data are consistent with the state pattern. The proportion of children fully vaccinated against BCG, DPT, polio and measles, is relatively higher than the state average. School enrollment of children at the primary level is almost universal among both the BC caste groups, but, their education above primary levels is characterized by high drop-outs in ages of 11 - 14 years, particularly among girls.

Popular Acceptance of FP by Women

Awareness about female sterilization methods is universal among EMW of both the BC caste groups, but knowledge about the three officially sponsored spacing methods, i.e., IUD, oral pill and condom is significantly higher among peasant women. Although official figures show a much lower rate of FP acceptance in the district, our data reveal that FP adoption among the selected BC communities, as a whole, is very much on par with the state average at 55 per cent. The data highlight variations in FP acceptance caused by a few background characteristics. In particular, they suggest that FP adoption is considerably higher among peasant women than among women belonging to peripheral castes. FP acceptance by women belonging to the peripheral group is by no means low at around 50 per cent. Not surprisingly, adoption of FP is almost solely by terminal

methods, specifically female sterilization methods. Non-adopter women are not only relatively younger in age but also have smaller family size and less number of sons than acceptors among both the caste groups, indicating that non-acceptors are yet to achieve the desired sex composition of children before adopting FP. Furthermore, most of the non-adopters have expressed willingness to adopt FP some time in future. The data point to marked differences in fertility attitudes between the women of peasant and peripheral groups. The data also indicate that the FP programme has been able to bring about perceptible changes in the fertility attitudes of BC communities living in remote villages of the district towards adoption of the small family norm. Apprehensions and false notions about adoption of FP, particularly female sterilization, are gradually disappearing among BC groups, as women are readily accepting sterilization now, indicating popular acceptance of FP by them.

With respect to accruing benefits from welfare programmes, the data suggest that peripheral castes being mote landless, have significantly benefited from housing-related programmes, green ration card facilities and loans from financial institutions in comparison to families belonging to peasant castes, who however, have greatly benefited from land reforms. The other important component that has immensely benefited all the BC communities is the provision of mid-day meal for primary and pre-primary school children and babies in Anganawadi centres. This has had a significant impact on the improvement of primary schooling among them. It is also true, that several operational and peripheral problems of development, such as lack of resources among BC communities to improve agriculture, absence of initiative among people to seek benefits from welfare programmes because of complicated official formalities involved in granting benefits, etc., are acting as a brake on the effective delivery of welfare programmes.

It is generally assumed that FP acceptance among BC communities would be relatively lower. The analysis has shown that FP has been fairly successful among the selected BC communities, in spite of their poor economic conditions and social backwardness. Evidently, the available data presented in Table 1 show that socio-economic indicators of the district are either below or around the state average, although the district receives much higher rainfall and has a lower population growth rate than in the state as a whole. It is thus obvious, that widespread acceptance of FP among the BC communities is rather due more to factors of social change and diffusion of awareness of FP than to the impact of social or economic development. The factors that facilitate diffusion of FP across BC, communities in the region may be identified as follows:

1. Persisting poverty conditions and economic differentiation across the communities vary according to geographical zones within the district.

2. Changing living conditions among the communities, because of rising wage rates, diversification in economic activities and benefits accruing from such welfare programmes as MCH services, primary schooling, housing facilities, distribution of essential foodgrains at subsidized rates through green ration card and landownership through tenancy reforms, etc., have all contributed to the process of FP diffusion.

3. Substantive change has occurred in the fertility attitudes of women belonging to these groups towards small family norm as a result of their increasing exposure to processes of social change and cultural practices of local castes.

It must be recognized that processes of social change across BC communities in the region can be understood in the context of low caste members adopting the cultural practices of high caste members, i.e., social and economic change occurring among high caste members have an effect on BC communities. This is evident among women of peasant castes, Kumri Marathi and Siddhi castes of the peripheral group. This process of social change has been well conceptualized by Srinivas (1972) and subsumed under '*Sanskritization*'. Thus, of late, this process also seems to be valid in the case of the adoption of FP practices. The change in fertility attitudes across the BC groups is a result of motivation generated by the acceptance of the small family norm by high castes, as the BC communities are significantly influenced by their exposure to high castes. Furthermore, we observed that women, particularly those belonging to peasant, Kumri Marathi and Siddhi castes, are becoming increasingly aware of the greater hardships involved in rearing and caring for children, the rising cost of living wide difference in the wages between male and female workers, social ridicule by community members for having larger families, economic tensions caused by the growing addiction of males to alcohol, etc, All these factors together motivate them to accept sterilization. Evidently, a few women admitted that they had accepted FP much against the desire of their spouses. The study concludes that social change in confluence with greater exposure of women to FP practices and MCH services, and benefits accrued from welfare programmes have initiated a change in their fertility attitudes towards adoption of the small family, which have gradually disseminated BC communities.

Finally, what does this exercise offer policy makers? It suggests that FP acceptance has to be analysed in relation to social changes occurring across different communities and regional factors which are important for achieving success in FP. This kind of analysis may help in formulating community - and region-specific strategies for those groups and areas where FP is lagging behind and facing difficulties in securing social acceptance of different contraceptive methods.

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1. Evidently, the second BCs Commission survey report of the state has also included them under the same caste group (GOK 1986).

2. The Siddhi community (historically of South African origin) comprises three subgroups, belonging to Hindu, Muslim and Christian religions. Marathi (or Are Marathi version) is spoken by the Gavlis, Kumris and Kunbi Marathis, Konkani by Hindu and Christian Siddhis and Urdu (local version) by Muslim Siddhis as mother tongue.

3. Commodities such as Myristrica-malabarica, Sapindustrifuliatus, Greiniacambogia, Emblica-officinalis, Terminallia-chebula, Acaciaconcinna, Artocarpus-lakoocha, Cinnamomumzey-lanicum, Madhukindica, Myristica-fragraus, Garainia-indica, Vateria-indica, Ochrocarpus-longifolius etc.