5 Gender, family businesses and business families

In this chapter we turn to a less well-publicised social structure of accumulation – in all countries, but not least in India – the social construction of gender relations. This affects much more than the position of women in the *economy*, but we can usefully begin there. The economic position of women is institutionalised in many different ways: in the types of firms they mainly work for (petty, undercapitalised, illegal/informal, domestic), in the sectors of the economy where they are concentrated (notably agriculture), in the types of task they are assigned (particularly tasks with limited or no upward mobility, and those that require skills achieved with little or no formal education) and the types of contract they are given (casual). The proletarianisation of women has resulted in distinctive 'segmented labour market opportunities, largely different work rules and means of control, patterns of participation, compensation for skills and education and lower pay' (Albeda and Tilly 1994, p. 216). This affects the prospects for increasing female employment in secondary labour markets (that is, for services and clerical work and in the female professions such as teaching and nursing), and suggests the likelihood that increasing demands will be made on the State to regulate the terms and conditions of female participation. All of this narrative has been lifted from the 'gender history' of the pre- and post-war *American* economy. The eerie relevance of this to contemporary India testifies to the basic fact that patriarchal relations have always been a prominent feature of capitalism.[1]

But this is *not* to subscribe to the fallacy of 'viewing modernisation everywhere in the world today as essentially a replication of what happened … in Western Europe … and North America' (Madan 1997, p. 418), and for good reasons: India is different in many crucial respects,

[1] It is thus of lesser relevance to the mainstream project of the social structure of accumulation school in which the role of social structures in the periodisation of capital is stressed, and more relevant to our less ambitious project of characterising Indian capital.

and not just as regards the prospects for women's advancement.[2] Gender is integral to the economy in other ways, too, and it is not merely a labour market phenomenon.[3] For example, there is a hierarchy of power based on the male control of sexuality, which shapes the social structures of accumulation in ways that both cut across class *and* define the *capitalist* class. In this arena of power, young men are subordinated to older men – patriarchy in its original sense, the governance of male society by its elders. These 'male relations of patriarchy' – relations among men in which gender identity is important – have developmental and welfare consequences that actually reinforce the marginalisation and subordination of women in various ways.[4] By tracking these male relations of patriarchy we can better understand India's contemporary paradox of gender, involving the increased participation of women in the economy, and increased household assets, and yet at the same time, *increased excess female child mortality.* For this we need to describe the gender relations by means of which capital is controlled, and their implications for both development and well-being.

Just as feminist discourse has had to tread its way through the legal, political and analytical minefields of gender-essentialism,[5] so the study of male relations of accumulation cannot avoid a confrontation with both *essentialism* (the notion of an inherent 'masculinity') and *naturalism* (the idea that such relations are given by nature and biology). If the question of the impact of male relations of patriarchy on the economy has been posed at all, it has been done implicitly as part of a defence of the adaptive efficiency of the Hindu *family* against an occidental critique of it, based in turn on an orientalist ideology of the Hindu family as a developmental obstacle.[6] This defence has stressed the adaptability of the

[2] This has been the object of much high-quality research. Any selection is invidious but see Agarwal (1994); Bardhan (1993); Baud (1983); Kapadia (1995b), Krishnaraj and Deshmukh (1993); Mies (1986); Mencher (1988); Saradamoni (1985) among many others. Walby (1990) identifies six arenas through which patriarchal relations are construed and maintained: household production, wage work, the State, male violence, sexuality and cultural institutions. The sphere of the firm and of capital accumulation, the object of this chapter, is entirely missing.

[3] Clark 1993, p. 10.

[4] See Jackson (1999) for a general analysis of masculinity and work.

[5] See Chowdhury (1998) for her lucid exposition of the trade-off for political mobilisation between, on the one hand, unessentialist and nuanced conceptions of the female gender – and their consequence, which has been to fracture the Indian women's movement – and, on the other, the analytical impasse of an essentialist conception of gender as a homogeneous category, under which women could mobilise to claim basic rights.

[6] Madan (1997, pp. 422–6) calls it a 'deductive argument', but it is also a tangled one: economic growth is thwarted by, on the one hand, the disincentives to investment, work and discipline of co-parcenary property ownership, and on the other by the opposite – by the fragmentation of co-parcenary property. Less ambiguously, growth is threatened by the stunting effect of the non-meritocratic inheritance of occupational skills and the likely rise in the risk of failure, and also by the brake applied to the development of impersonal forms of trust (though this argument is set against one stressing the value of family support in risky ventures). More ambiguously, growth is threatened by the 'irrational' nature of either collective *or* authoritarian decision-making.

Hindu household to new combinations of capital and labour, and to the management of unindividuated property rights. While it has been sensitive to the role of the Hindu household in the reproduction of social inequality,[7] this defence has been gender-blind. It can be used as a 'text' that describes the roles of men.[8]

The Indian economy, however, is not organised only through households and markets, it is also organised through firms. The firm has been called an 'island of planned coordination in a sea of market relations' (Hodgson 1988, p. 178). If we dispense with 'supertrader' theories of firms as bundles of quasi-market contracts (as Amartya Sen does with consummate ease for Beckerian theories of that other non-market institution, the family),[9] we are left, according to the new institutional economics, with three other possibilities. The firm can be seen as either (1) a unit of authority in which principals devise optimal contracts for agents to maximise work in their own and their managers' interests at minimal supervision and transaction costs; (2) a social space where the entire calculus of transaction costs is not necessary; or (3) a set of norms and institutions to minimise uncertainty and opportunism. These rationales are not mutually exclusive, nor are they really empirically testable, or capable of being compared – a common fate of explanation in the new institutional economics. In all of them, however, something real – the firm – is dissolved into an abstract social space, a set of norms. It is as though firms did not exist as the building blocks of capital. Yet this is what they are, and they have a distinctive gendered character. In small-town India, firms are the concrete extensions into market exchange of the household – the unit of production and reproduction, which is *also* the unit of control over technology and money. As Gordon White put it, the firm is: 'a combat unit designed for battle in the market' (1993, p. 8).[10]

The links between this combat unit's gender relations at work and home have to be made empirically, and we will use material from the town of Arni in Tamil Nadu and from its surrounding villages.

[7] Madan 1997; Béteille 1997.

[8] The question of deconstructing 'hegemonic masculinity' has been recently answered (in an innovative way) by Jackson (1999) in relation to subaltern men and women and their work. Her arenas are labour markets and households.

[9] On the grounds of being simultaneously oversimplistic and based perversely on an assumption that markets are actually redundant. For, in expecting market-like equilibria of prices and quantities *without* all the institutional arrangements that go to make markets, markets are *both* central *and* redundant (Sen 1997, p. 454)!

[10] For Béteille 'the family has replaced caste as an agent of social control' (1997, p. 448). This is an assertion we would wish to dispute if 'society' is understood to include the economy – see Chapter 7. The family firm is as significant an arena for social control as are its kinship arrangements; the latter commonly being arranged to serve the former. Moreover, just as this unit of people may have a complex composition, so its associated unit of capital may proliferate into a complex portfolio of firms, mini-conglomerates with a rich taxonomy of forms of control and management. Their tactics of accumulation may not be fully understood from the analysis of any one of their components (an error not infrequently committed by field economists and revenue authorities alike).

Arni is 150 kilometres south-west of Chennai; still four hours by bus! Its official population in 1991 was 55 000, up from 39 000 in 1971 (but in the previous chapter we saw that the population of the 'organic' town is much larger, possibly double that). Five per cent of its population is agricultural and works its land from town. The economy is dominated by retail shops, mills (for rice and silk), by the workshop manufacture of gold ornaments, by the sale of fuel, by industries transporting people, by trade in commodities and by banking and informal finance. Its large firms have proved durable. The level of concentration in Arni's businesses is dramatic (see Table 1.4, p. 12). In 1973–74 the gross output of the top 10 per cent of firms (measured by their assets) was 13 times larger than that of all the firms in the bottom 50 per cent. The top firm had an output 4.5 times greater than that of the smallest 50 per cent of firms put together. By 1983–84 the figures were 66 times and 9 times, respectively. Ten years later they were 117 and 43 times; that is, an entirely different scale of local capital was being accumulated at the top.

But the vast mass of businesses are family firms with small labour forces (see Table 5.1). The average number of livelihoods (seven to eight per firm) has not changed much over the period 1973–93. The proportion of *purely* family firms (petty commodity producers and traders, key components of the intermediate classes) has risen from 28 per cent to 35 per cent over the 20-year period, while the proportion of family labour in the entire labour force has remained static at around a quarter.[11] The workshops and mills, however, have become increasingly 'satanic' over time, through the remorseless casualisation of the wage labour force. Between 1973 and 1993, casual labour increased from 23 per cent of all jobs to 57 per cent.

Patriarchy and Accumulation I: Men[12]

Patriarchy among the business elite of Arni (made up of firms with (under)estimated present values of between Rs 33 lakhs (£50 000) and Rs 33 million (£500 000) in 1994) may be described well enough for our

[11] While all owners of capital are active workers, the composition of this workforce has changed with the entry of a small number of female family members of low caste.

[12] The field material used here comprises the 20 firms of the business elite (including rice and silk, fuel and transport) from a random stratified 6 per cent sample of 253 businesses, interviewed in 1994–95. The elite subset comprises forward and 'upper' backward castes: mainly *tulluva vellala agamudaiya mudaliars*, *saurashtrians*, *jains*, *naidus* and *chettiars*, and is disproportionately important in terms of assets, employment and gross output. We also use field material on nearly 100 leaders of institutions of collective action or trade associations interviewed in 1997.

Table 5.1 *Caste and gender in the business economy of a town in south India, 1973–93*

1973	No. of firms sampled: 93			workforce: 664		
	Family labour		Permanent		Casual Wage	
CASTE	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Forward caste/other	9	0	4	0	0.7	0
Backward caste	6	0	15	5	0.1	0
Most backward caste	6	0	14	8	6	4
Scheduled castes	3	0	0.1	0	3	6
Muslims	3	0	2	0	2	0
	27	0	35.1	13	11.8	10
1983	No. of firms sampled: 126			workforce: 1037		
Forward caste/other	3	0	2	0	0	0
Backward caste	12	0.3	17	3	3	2
Most backward caste	4	0	17	3	5	3
Scheduled castes	1	0	2	0	10	2
Muslims	3	0	3	0	2	0
	23	0.3	41	6	20	7
1993	No. of firms sampled: 253			workforce: 1955		
Forward caste/other	3	0.6	0.1	0		
Backward caste	10	3	7	2		
Most backward caste	5	2	4	0.5		
Scheduled castes	2	0.4	0.6	0.1		
Muslims	1.5	0.2	0.7	0.1		
Caste + gender unknown					57	
	21.5	6.2	12.4	2.7	57	

Figures in percentages of total workforce
Source: Basile and Harriss-White, 2000

purposes without needing to deconstruct either capital or men further. We start by focusing on them.

Table 5.2 models the life-cycle of members of a family business. Young boys are actively socialised into the management of capital from early ages. Not so girls. Though the business day peaks early, it has a sizeable stretch that is literally (and may be also figuratively) black, lasting into the night (long after school hours) to take advantage of the cheaper telephone rates after 9 p.m. Commercial contracts may also be made in special rooms at home – as happens, for example, in the silk trade. In this way the

Table 5.2 *Gender roles in family businesses*

Males	Females
Firm	*Household*
Management and control by male family members	Strategic control by men
Permanent labour force (clientelised, males)	Tactical control and socialisation by women
Casual labour force (sometimes unionised, males)	Female/child wage labour in domestic service
(largest single element of productive labour, deliberately casualised, female)	Occasional male labour in domestic service
Life-cycle	
Youth	*Formation*
(Work) shop and home-based socialisation into management of capital and labour	Home-based socialisation into management of household (children, food, ceremony)
Apprenticeship	Educated for marriage alliance
(sometimes elided with schooling)	
Skills, contacts, networks, individual and collective elements of reputation	
(higher education may be threatening)	
Entry in business	*Marriage*
As member of family firm, with division of tasks based on male authority	Durables in dowry crucial to groom's status in family firm
As 'independent' firm closely financed and controlled by male elders	Fungibles in dowry contribute to groom's starting capital
	Household reproductive labour
Death of patriarch	Production of male labour crucial (1) to power relations in division of property and (2) to size of family firm
Splitting of family firm	
Vulnerability of property rights, finance, conflict over sites and rights	
Consolidation of business	*Consolidation of household*
Growth of firm	Social work
Formation of conglomerates with brothers and sons	Management of household
Complex overlapping forms of ownership	Reproductive work
Subcontracting, casualisation of labour (especially female labour)	
Amassing of dowries for daughters	
Investment in land	

public political arenas of 'market' and 'State', conventionally considered as male space, are able to penetrate to the heart of domestic territory conventionally considered female.[13] Boys are allowed to watch contract-making there and to witness the compliant behaviour that reaps big returns later on, but girls are discouraged. The effects cannot be costed but we can see how implicitly costly it is in cases when fathers have died young. Not only is the household given an economic shock, but young sons are also deprived of this basic socialisation, and the upward track of the family's accumulation trajectory is jeopardised. Other kin or caste members sometimes substitute, but this is no longer seen by them as a duty; its costs make it increasingly dispensable. Youths serve apprenticeships with their fathers, or more commonly with their uncles. Unpaid over a period of years, they are gradually recognised to have gained skills, networks of contacts, and individual and collective elements of reputation (the lubricants of power that Bourdieu[14] has called social and cultural capital) in ways that reinforce the continuity of caste-based business. This is the more important because the crucible of the modern business network – school and college – does not yet perform this role. Young men's education is then sacrificed to the control of capital. Arni has been a good laboratory in which to see this process at work because, until 1999, it lacked further education facilities and young males had to migrate elsewhere for them. Only 6 out of 82 male members of business-elite family workforces had been allowed to gain degrees. There are two reasons for low levels of male education in the local capitalist class. One is that those who do have degrees are not seen to be using them in their family businesses. As pure investments, the returns are not obvious to elders. 'Will education mean bread?' they ask. The other is the risk of higher education to the integrity of family capital when young men in whom property has already been vested, so as to avoid tax, migrate out of family control to get a college education, thanks to the State's failure to provide higher education locally. This is what Sen might call an 'allocational error' (1997, p. 455), because the business elite is thereby seriously under-equipped for the technologies (information and other electronic technology) required for the next scaling-up of capital.

[13] See Chapter 4. So much for one of Weber's conditions for capitalism – the separation of the household from the place of work (1970/1994, p. 356). Just as domestic space is not exclusively private and female, so 'outside' is far from being exclusively public and male. The space of a town devoted to public activity is also gendered: within temples and cinemas, even within institutions of the State such as hospitals and schools, space is gendered to the point of segregation.

[14] Bourdieu 1984.

In this necessarily somewhat stylised account, young men have two alternatives: to be allowed to start on their own or join (part of) a jointly operated firm. Partnerships are still rather rare (and cross-caste partnerships are rarer) and when they occur they are temporary, one partner tending to supply labour and the other capital. It is extremely rare for fathers or elder brothers *not* to provide an enabling part of the starting capital and to have an influence on the management of capital afterwards. Subsequently, money is made available on privileged terms (often without interest) and swung between male family members' firms. This finance is important not only in itself but also as a credential and collateral for further informal and commercial credit arrangements. For these reasons, the partition of joint businesses can deprive firms of access to large pools of credit. Partition makes firms vulnerable: the business equivalent of the newly incoming north Indian bride. Bitter feuds can also erupt between brothers over the clarification of hitherto fuzzy property rights and component firms, and occasionally 'conglomerates' can crumble in their entirety. Just as important as finance is control over the rights to rent – or the transfer and 'inheritance' of – exact sites. Location is as significant an element in profit as are the labour process, repeated contracts and the prices of commodities.

Although the dowries of incoming brides have been very important to the capitalisation of the largest local units of capital – two generations ago[15] – their importance can be exaggerated. Dowries include substantial components of consumer durables or status goods such as *sarees*, which complement more fungible forms of capital like gold.[16] While marriage alliances do enable the transfer of resources, usually to bride-receivers, the cementing of business alliances with sons-in-law and other affines is less common, happening in only 20 per cent of the elite firms in Arni.[17] Even though tax law offers incentives for single, male ownership, and even though firms comply with those incentives on paper (to avoid tax and to profit from subsidised credit that is available to single-owner firms), the actually existing control of capital is through flexible cross-

[15] So the dowry is not a recent practice in this region.

[16] Dowries in the form of consumer durables are economic multipliers creating demand for these lumpy items and generating a system of market exchange in advertising, credit and trade to provide the goods concerned.

[17] Women are vehicles for the transfer of assets. It is illegal for women not to inherit ancestral property, but the law is ignored. Dowry (also illegal since the Dowry Prohibition Act of 1948) has been slowly but inexorably replacing bride price, and is being notoriously masculinised (the dowry controlled by bride-receivers rather than by the bride). However, this transfer of assets still does not usually lead to business links between givers and receivers. Increasing numbers of girls are being educated, even though this increases the size of dowry necessary. In elite firms almost as many girls as boys have university degrees. The reasons given for female education are to enable upwards mobility in status through strategic alliances (see also Heyer 1992), but also 'progress' and 'shame at our ignorance'.

generational configurations of agnates,[18] an average of four men in all. Usually they live in a single household, though a few work jointly but live separately. Irrespective of living arrangements, men negotiate authority based on the division of tasks and skills among them, while also deferring to authority based on age. Tasks are divided; they include accountancy, purchase, sales (and the negotiation and enforcement of contracts and credit relations) and the supervision of labour. Money and investment are supervised by the oldest family member. There has been little change since the 1960s when M.N. Srinivas (1966) observed of industrial entrepreneurs near Delhi that it was usual for a man to recruit his partners, managers and technical experts from among his close kindred, implicitly male kin. Part of the elders' task of managing the family firm involves 'guaranteeing the male line for at least three generations' (Dorin et al. 2000, p. 8).

These joint firms *can* be explained in transaction costs terms: as lowering the costs of acquiring, and the risks of keeping, trade secrets, information, accounts and trustworthy relations. Some business heads can actually calculate the transaction and opportunity costs of their male-family-based forms of management, and know how much cheaper they are than market alternatives. At the same time, family firms are *authoritarian* hierarchies of capital and labour. Information cannot be assumed to flow entirely freely inside such a firm. Nor can opportunism (at any point in the hierarchy) be assumed to be non-existent.

However, it is hard to rationalise in terms of transactions costs the practice of equal (implicit) returns to brothers regardless of their productivity, especially when reinforced by a hierarchy of rituals and a language of respect at work and by unequal status at home. The individual is subordinated to the family business at work and to the business family at home. Nevertheless, the gains from co-operation and compliance prevail, or else jointly managed male firms would not be so common. Factors such as a collective and individual interest in accumulation across generations, the security of employment, non-economic gains, and the deterrent effect of social and economic sanctions on alternative wage work combine to explain the prevalent supply of male labour at notional nominal rates, which are well *below* those of the labour market.[19]

The stylised firm we are considering here is often part of a small conglomerate in which a father and his sons, or a set of brothers, will jointly control and individually manage several firms or kinds of capital: land, trade, finance, property and transport – and these are all local. The 20 elite firms in Arni, from which this material is drawn, control between them the following assets (see Table 5.3): 19 textiles firms, 25 other trading

[18] That is, males related through the male line.
[19] Harriss-White 1996a, pp. 243–5.

Table 5.3 *Elite portfolios (assumed to be under-declared)*

West Bengal (1990) Bardhaman (largest 8 agribusinesses)*	Tamil Nadu (1994) Arni (largest 20 businesses)
140 acres of land	319 acres of land
15 large rice mills	17 rice mills
12 cold stores	19 textiles firms
2 oil mills	(>1000 looms)
13 trading firms	25 trading firms
? urban property + storage	>30 houses
8 non-agricultural industries (nails and screws/cardboard boxes, etc.)	>30 shops 3 cinemas
12 lorries	2 hotels (one with swimming pool)
	wedding hall
	35 lorries/buses
	12 cars
	all have satellite/cable TV

* Their subsidised loans from nationalised banks for technical upgrading are equal to 20 000 anti-poverty (IRDP) loans

enterprises (not including literally thousands of handlooms located in the environs), 17 rice mills, 319 acres of land, at least 30 houses and at least 30 shops, 3 cinemas, 2 hotels and a wedding hall, 35 lorries/buses and 12 cars. All had satellite or cable TV. One-fifth also acknowledged having 'substantial' investments in permutations of dowries, jewellery, finance companies (black), stocks and shares, and (international and male) travel and education. In contrast to the pattern of a quarter of a century previously, the elite of the 1990s did not use agricultural profits for their starting capital. However, they remain fascinated by land, which is largely exempt from tax and whose value appreciates inexorably in real terms. Many business families purchase comparatively large holdings, often managed professionally. While the transition from agricultural trade and agro-industry to non-agricultural trade does not pose insuperable obstacles, the transition from agricultural trade to non-agricultural *industry* is rare. This is a persistent failure we have found elsewhere in India throughout the last two decades.[20]

Combinations of family, firm(s) and farms are quite commonly organised in different ways. Where possible they are controlled by men. Land will be controlled by the oldest male. The tendency to diversity, complexity and uniqueness in the way portfolios of assets are arranged strength-

[20] See Harriss 1981 for North Arcot in the early 1970s; Harriss-White 1996a for Coimbatore in the early 1980s; Harriss 1993 for West Bengal in the early 1990s; and see Chapter 8 for an expanded discussion of this obstacle.

ens the resilience of local-level capital with respect to shocks and risk. It serves a similar purpose to tendencies to uniqueness in the activity combinations of individual firms (which was discussed in Chapter 3).

Over the last 15 years, two major changes in these little conglomerates have strengthened the networks in which male members are positioned. One is the strategic placing of members of trading households in the professions and the bureaucracy – from clerks in the Electricity Board to officers in the IAS – depending closely on the scale of the family's capital. A selective approach to education has proved tactically important, for almost all of these relatives have higher education attainment than those in trade. As a result, practically no firm of any economic significance is today unconnected to people with a direct personal stake in the State. Such a tactic involves surmounting entry barriers that take the form of 'fees' or 'deposits', often totalling several years of salary equivalent.[21] The low but stable (and stabilising) incremental income that a bureaucratic salary brings to the investing household is a less convincing explanation for such investments than one that points to the status it brings, and one that sees the relatively large investment as justified by the expectation of future returns from bribery. Trading families that position themselves for the latter reason then have access to a wide range of forms of 'primitive' accumulation (see Chapter 3), exploiting labour, consumers and symbiotic economic relationships between business, and the administration and the ruling political parties.

The local business elite has also come to be tenuously integrated – largely through professional employment – with the global diaspora (with kin in the United States, United Kingdom, France, Australia, Hungary, Sri Lanka, Malaysia and Saudi Arabia). But these are exceptions that prove a rule, for the elite's investments are mostly risk-averse and localised.

An increase in the age at marriage, and a general halving of completed family sizes within the space of a generation, have given rise to a *shortage of brothers*. This acts to hinder accumulation. The brother-shortage makes itself particularly felt in the length of time it takes to build a reputation with a network of contacts and therefore gain access to credit and set up a firm.[22] The lack of brothers will be particularly felt in young adulthood,

[21] See Jeffrey (1999) for examples among *jat* capitalists in Uttar Pradesh.

[22] It is also a complete recasting of the (admittedly inconclusive) argument that nucleation is associated with industrialisation and urbanisation (Madan 1997, pp. 428–34). Of the 20 elite firms, five are run out of nuclear households, averaging five members while 13 are controlled by joint households, with an average population of nine. The average household size in the rural region is 4.9 (Nillesen 1999). It is unclear why, when male family labour is so important, so many of the local elite business households have behaved, demographically, like the average unless the (low) possibility of business failure persuades families to be cautious in their fertility while success enables families to bring in more male distant relatives. There is scant evidence for this and much for joint families with components consisting of sons, their wives and two or three children.

often at the start of the life of a new firm. The largest of local firms are those based on households or families well stocked with sons or brothers.[23] It is likely to be this shortage of brothers that is driving new relations of governance in family businesses which involve the inclusion of affines (sons- and brothers-in-law) and their skills and money.

How do male relations of patriarchy affect markets and the local processes of accumulation? They are mutually reinforcing. Figure 5.1, the employment structure of a model family business, shows how labour 'markets' are structured to enforce the capacity to accumulate through patriarchal arrangements. There are three components of wage labour in a typical firm. Two are male: the permanent labour force or 'salariat' and male casual labour. The male salariat is *minimised* so as to limit employers' obligations towards labour under the Factories Act. Salaried work and permanent status are associated not with skill or even higher levels of pay, but with the level of trust involved in a task (for example, nightwatchmen), with caste (closer in rank to the owners' than is the casual labour force's) and location of origin (close-by).[24] This is the labour customarily entitled to primitive, arbitrary and paternalistic forms of 'occupational welfare' (feebly imitating formal sector welfare, for example, by helping with expenses for weddings or with the costs of sickness and sometimes with the cost of educating a worker's bright son). This labour has customary rights to annual perquisites and sometimes even a stake in the firm (parodying a dividend). At the same time, credit and debt are used to *immobilise* valued permanent employees, and to enforce loyalty. This male labour is never unionised. Theirs is a politics of patronage. The second component of the wage labour force, casual male labourers, relates to employers in a variety of ways. They may be seasonal commuters from their own land. Frequently, they are not really 'casual' at all, but they are not treated as permanent labour in the legal sense. Perquisites are rarer. The only advantage of casual labourers is trade union organisation, which employers try to resist, though (as we learned in Chapter 2) not always successfully. Owners can, however, weaken unions by encouraging the formation of a number of them, or by managing their agendas or deliberations (as we will see, in Chapter 7 on caste). Certain heavy and regular tasks, like loading and unloading, are invariably out-sourced and are provided collectively by men (described by one trader as 'ruined farmers') organised into work-groups according to their caste (low) and locality (nearby).

The third component of the labour force, casual female labour, contrasts strongly with all this. There is none at all in pure trading firms,

[23] While a household is a unit for commensality, a family is a property grouping of households of men related by a common male ancestor.

[24] Particularly noteworthy in the case of clerks dealing with accounts who are the most likely to be locked into subordinate relations of patronage.

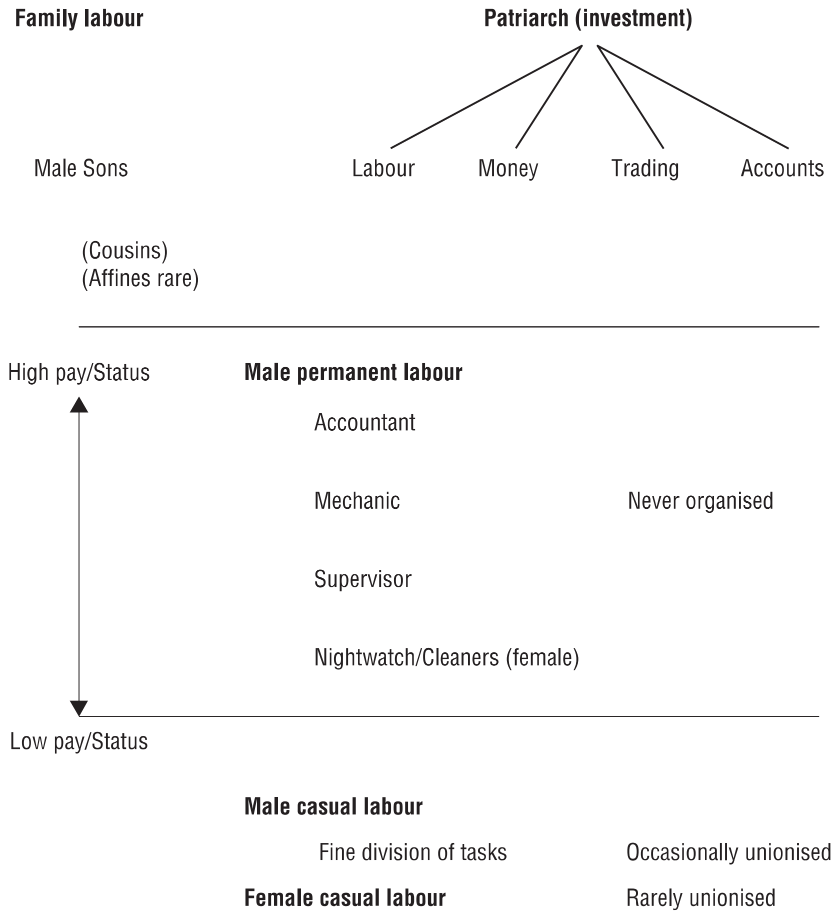

Figure 5.1 Division of labour in a family business

although they amount to 38–75 per cent of the workforce in businesses involving the processing of products.[25] They are, and have always been, quite deliberately casualised. Attempts to organise women politically (in ways other than caste, locality and kin, which structure recruitment) are ruthlessly squashed. Very few indeed are allowed to belong to trade unions.[26] As well as being subordinated politically, they are subordinated economically (through lower wages unjustified by any gendered productivity differentials) and sometimes physically (through sexual harassment). In another field study we found that the larger the firm, the higher the proportion of the total labour force composed of female casual labour. And the larger the firm, the more biased towards profit is the distributive share. Labour organisation and casualisation were heavily structured around gender. Both could be happening simultaneously in a given firm. In firms where female labour was concentrated, the largest relative

[25] Between 1997–99 about 10 women were recruited as permanent salaried labour in retail shops in this town.
[26] See also Baud 1983, p. 132.

wage share nevertheless still went to men. We also found male solidarity (organised through a plurality of unions) had more visible outcomes on pay and conditions than either female solidarity (organised around recruiters and supervisors), or male–female solidarity (organised, if at all, through each factory).[27]

Markets other than labour also operate to the disadvantage of women. Women are debarred from access to formal bank credit, both by explicit bank rules and by other barriers; for example, not owning appropriate collateral. Male control of capital and property is underwritten by the State. The licensing of a female trader requires not her name in the State's register of licences, not even that of her husband, but that of her *father*. Furthermore, incremental change in techniques and technology tends to displace female labour,[28] though computing may yet prove exceptional in this regard.

Patriarchy and Accumulation II: Women

While female agricultural labour is being increasingly proletarianised, and as agriculture is being feminised, real female agricultural wages have not tightened in the way male wages have, because women are unable to commute to wage work in town (see Table 5.4). They are prevented from doing this by their prior responsibility for domestic work at home. As a consequence, women's wage rates in town are considerably higher than are women's agricultural wages, because the supply is drawn from within a tight radius. Just under half the urban wage labour force is female and is restricted to weaving, yarn-twisting, rice-milling, construction, sanitary work and waste disposal.[29] Drawn from the lower castes, female wage workers are often the principal income earners (despite the employers calling their wages 'pin money'). Women's wages for jobs with the same kind of effort and skill as those done by men vary from 40 per cent lower (in thread workshops), through to 60 per cent lower (in rice mills), to 75 per cent lower (in twisting factories).[30]

[27] The distributive share is the relation between total wage costs and profits. The study was in Coimbatore District (Harriss-White 1996a).

[28] See Harriss and Kelly (1982) for all-India evidence in rice and oil-milling. With respect to silk, the evidence is much more place-specific. Many thousands of livelihoods have been created in handloom weaving over the last 15 years, but loom technology has *retrogressed*. Labour is biased towards men and children (increasingly prised away from schooling) who can put in the long hours, free from the mandatory call of household maintenance work (Nagaraj et al. 1996).

[29] This varies greatly across India. According to the 1991 Census, however, in north-west India in intermediate-sized settlements like this one, female participation amounts to only 5 per cent of the population (Kashyup and Guha 1997, p. 89).

[30] Since the labour process is sex-sequential (male and female tasks being interdigitated, or sequenced), rather than sex-segmented (goods produced by either male or female labour), it is difficult to calculate the separate productivities of each sex. (In fact, I do not know whether this has ever been done.)

Table 5.4 *Casual labour rates: northern Tamil Nadu: 1973–74 to 1993–94*

	1973–74 Rs		1993–94 Rs			
			Current Rs		Constant Rs	
	M	F	M	F	M	F
Av. daily agricultural wages (weeding/ transplanting)	2.7	1.4	20	8	3.4	1.4
Av. daily urban wages (rice milling)	3.3	1.7	30 to 35	20	5.1 to 5.9	3.4

Deflator: 0.17 (consumer price index for agricultural labour).
Sources: Hazell and Ramasamy 1991, p. 201 for 1973–4; field surveys for 1993–94

Educated women have economic niches in clerical jobs in local government and a toehold in the professions (medicine and teaching). It is very rare to find a woman lawyer or member of the police force, and there is just one female supervisor to be found among the 20 elite firms. Those with other skills such as accountancy and computing work in other towns in organised-sector firms (in Vellore and Ranipet) but not in local businesses, where being female is the greatest entry barrier of all (the rare exceptions are always mentioned as flouting norms). Since fieldwork was finished in 1997, at least two training centres in computer keyboard skills have arrived, creating a significant demand for training the daughters of rural elite families. This is indeed a silent revolution, at present connected with status enhancing hypergamy and exogamy on the marriage 'market',[31] not with demand for local labour.

From 1983 to 1994 the contribution of unwaged female family members to the total workforce rose strikingly, from 0.3 per cent to 6 per cent (see Table 5.1). This trend has been confined to women from Backward and Most Backward Castes, especially those over 40, who have embarked on the part-time management of small businesses (such as fruit and vegetables, meat and gold). Widows and abandoned women leave trade as soon as their children leave home or enter the labour market. While a few of the wives of agrarian capitalists have created – and dominate – a surreptitious subsector of rural chit fund credit specially for women,[32] in the elite urban family businesses there is little evidence of female entrepreneurship over the last 25 years. One business is formally owned by a woman but managed by men. Another woman has been foiled by the

[31] Hypergamy means marriage to someone of superior status. Exogamy means marriage outside the community or village.
[32] See Colatei and Harriss-White 2002b. Chit funds are rotating credit institutions where the manager takes a commission and where members contribute regularly, with one member taking the fund each round.

State in her attempts to become a silk merchant. Both a licence and bank credit were refused on the grounds of her sex.[33]

Women in business families perform three kinds of unremunerated reproductive roles. First they reproduce, and look after capital-managing male labour. Second, though increasingly rarely, they help to provide food as part of the wage paid to labour in kind. Third, daughters are married strategically to fix commercial contacts (see pp. 160–1 in Chapter 6).

As we concluded in an earlier study of intra-household food allocation,[34] women are positioned according to a paradigm of service and subordination through work. Not only do men have direct control over female labour and bodies within the household, but also the extraction of surplus through labour 'markets' is intensified by female subordination. The differentiated forms of this subordination were put to us vividly by a local CPM leader: 'Well-to-do women watch TV and do some welfare. Only in this generation can a mother-in-law and daughter-in-law sit together to watch TV. Working-class women toil in the factories. There is no interaction' (from an interview in 1997).

Nor do women play a role in public culture or local collective life, except at the very margins, in the sex-segregated international social service clubs (such as the Lionesses – the women's wing of the Lions Clubs). There, the material resources they handle are not abundant. Instead, their role is modest: buttressing the prestige of male Lions and Rotarians by acts of cross-class philanthropy (for example, school uniforms and kits for poor children). Women are but tiny minorities in just a few caste and trade associations and trade unions. Where women form an important minority in the workforce (as in tailoring, sanitary work and to a lesser extent in goldsmithing) their corporate affairs are managed by men, just as the interests of labour are frequently managed by capital. Leaders of all the caste associations in Arni declared that the laws providing for the female inheritance of property were honoured in the breach and 'over-ridden'. We heard of five cases of property inheritance by women reported from among about 50 000 women and girls. The way urban civil society is organised reinforces patriarchy in the market economy.

It is the State, not the market, that has provided opportunities for the relative economic empowerment of women, through education and through employment as clerks,[35] (elementary) teachers and sanitary

[33] Although we were unable directly to research the gender ideologies underpinning the gendered institutions of accumulation, we encountered the notion of male responsibility entitling men to specific kinds of male indulgence (see Jeffrey (1999) on 'whisky and chicken' get-togethers in north India).

[34] B. Harriss 1990.

[35] There is a 'kind of quota' for women here. At the national level, in the public sector, 16.5 per cent of jobs were held by women in 1997 (Reserve Bank of India 1999, pp. iv–46).

workers. The importance of the last category accounts for the fact that no less than 45 per cent of employees in the municipality are women. Yet, women are still conspicuous by their absence from the higher echelons of the administration. There is a very live tension in low-caste families between the education of girls (in order to prise open public-sector employment and enable upward mobility), and the costs of providing dowries for educated girls together with the income forgone while a girl is being educated above the fifth standard (year). The net result of this tension is to make scheduled caste adults increasingly 'anti-girl'.

Does the State pose a challenge to patriarchy? Not a big one. As Agarwal shows (1994), employment by itself is a weaker element in the economy than command over assets. But it is the only thing to which all but the most exceptionally placed women may aspire.

So the role played by gender in the accumulation of capital involves power based on the male control of both male labour and male and female sexuality. This patriarchal power cements the division of male family labour in the firm and ranks their status in the family. It shapes individual rights to property and collective access to the state. It is a significant force for wage labour at work and controls its entitlement in times of need. Patriarchal power structures the entry into markets and the roles played by women as producers and traders. The exercise of this power meshes with that expressed in other social structures of accumulation, with important consequences for development.

Implications I: Development

The way family businesses are controlled has a number of consequences for development, both in the sense of growth and accumulation, and in the sense of well-being. First, the specialised set of male authority relations through which the managerial labour-owning capital is socialised tends to suppress competition between firms, and the pattern of control of branches by brothers qualifies non-competition further. Local purchasers are well aware that they face at best a collusive oligopoly in important sectors of the urban economy and the oligopolists are quite frank about it; for example, 'We co-operate. We have separate networks but we run the *x* business together here'; 'Our relatives control all the prices of *q* in this town'. The capture of a market, or of a sector of labour, avoids intra-family competition and conflict. Second, small units, umbilically attached to others by kinship and finance, use labour that is unprotected and exploitable, just as it is in putting-out arrangements, job-working and subcontracting, which are all commonplace contractual arrangements. These forms of production and trade are ways of avoiding both the Factories Acts' regulation of labour and the Commercial Taxes' regulation of output. So accumulation is enhanced at labour's expense and tax obligations to the State are minimised, depriving it of resources.

Hence, patriarchal control of business is not allocatively efficient. Amartya Sen has theorised households as sites of 'co-operative conflict',[36] suggesting that the co-operative element is productive while the conflictual element is distributional and takes place primarily between the genders. But both co-operation and conflict are actually at work in production, and conflict between male management is threatening. Partition is as vulnerable a moment in the development of a firm as is start-up, because of the problems presented by the equitable division of property, finance and market shares. So, within the business family, relations between men are carefully, almost naturally, constructed so as to nurture co-operation and *control* – control over other, mostly younger, men. It is by means of this control over men that control over capital is concentrated. This patriarchal governance is *allocatively* inefficient, with contradictory and complicated consequences. First, capital is controlled, but less efficiently than it might be if women were able to work on terms commensurate not even (yet) with men, but merely with their education. Meanwhile, under-educated sons are put in charge of computers and use them suboptimally, and highly computer-literate, young local women are not employed. Technical change is discouraged. Yet the result of this allocative and technical inefficiency may be *adaptively* efficient because the local economy is more labour-intensive than it otherwise might be.[37] The need to keep capital under tight patriarchal control leads to only low-risk diversifications, local in space and narrow in their commodity composition. Strangers are generally still not welcome to co-operate.[38] Yet there is nothing much in the competitive environment to require the professionalisation of management, which family labour can easily undercut.

As a result, local capitalists are generally successful in keeping women economically disenfranchised as owners of the means of production or

[36] Sen 1990, 1997.

[37] As Esther Boserup noted in 1970, and still now, technical change in a given sector is masculinising. Skilled categories of work are dominated by men (Boserup 1987, pp. 69–76). Boserup argued that both demand and supply factors play their roles in this. Employment regulations for women increase their cost while the inflexibility of modern industrial discipline is incompatible with the rearing of children (1987, pp. 110–17). See Harriss and Kelly (1982) for all-India evidence of (subsidised) technological upgrading, increased operational scale, concentration of ownership and the masculinisation of wage labour in rice and groundnuts; Harriss and Harriss (1984) for common consumer goods; and Stanley (2002) for a case of the mechanisation of gold ornament-making in Arni. With respect to handloom silk-weaving, even though loom technology has *retrogressed*, labour is biased towards men (Nagaraj et al. 1996).

[38] Fukuyama 1995, p. 336.

trade, except on a petty scale.[39] By contrast, the State plays an ambivalent role. On the one hand, it empowers women (as it empowers scheduled castes) through offering them livelihoods. On the other hand, it prevents women from owning the means of production and entering business, and denies them access to formal credit. Change in all these respects is complex and its direction appears to be dominated by men.

We would not wish to do more than speculate on how distinctively 'Indian' these male patriarchal arrangements are. In his treatise on *Trust*, Fukuyama distinguishes France, Italy, Taiwan and Hong Kong from the United States, Germany and Japan on the basis of general levels of trust. The first group, being societies with *low* levels of trust, have economies with a preponderance of relatively small-scale firms based upon male family labour. Even in large corporations and public companies, the promoter family's shares constitute a large proportion, indicating their influence over management, and professional managers are comparatively rare. The 'glass ceiling' on accumulation constituted by family forms of accumulation is associated with decentralised and flexible, network-based forms of economic organisation. India is very conspicuous by its absence in *Trust* but would belong to the low-trust group.[40] With respect to the Chinese commercial diaspora, Greenhalgh (who examined family firms as part of her critique of the revisionist emphasis on (Confucianist) culture to explain rapid capitalist development in East Asia) found *inter alia* the same kind of structuring of male family labour as we have described here. Authority is vested in male 'elders' with females severely subordinated and exploited in the effort to keep production costs low, confined to non-managerial and part-time work and excluded from inherited property relations.[41] So in neither of these respects is India distinctive, even if the complex and dynamic outcome of the workings of all the significant social structures of accumulation gives the Indian economy its character. India's distinction relates to the demographic consequences of family businesses.

Implications II: Well-being

Male relations of patriarchy did not at first sight seem a *development* issue, and certainly do not seem directly an issue of *well-being*. However, we have seen that the former notion was false, and the latter is also false, on two counts. First, the reinforcement of patriarchal relations in the class

[39] As with the entry of low-caste women into part-time management of fruit and vegetable stalls, and of widowed or abandoned women as petty traders in the Municipal Market.

[40] Fukuyama 1995.

[41] Greenhalgh 1994.

controlling local capital has effects on the welfare of women. These effects are theorised as positive for women workers (in the upwardly mobile subaltern classes) but negative in the heart of the business class. Second, this male-biased concentration of capital with adverse implications for female welfare has a class logic to it which is obscured by the analytical attention paid to income.[42] Let us explore these issues.

The patriarchal governance of small-scale capital has consequences for the most extreme aspect of well-being – life chances themselves. What is without doubt a demographically audacious extrapolation is entirely consistent with a growing literature in Indian economic demography. The under-15 sex ratio (female/male (FMR))[43] for the 66 children of the elite firms in Arni is 784 (*including* five households with a combined total of nine boys and 23 girls). In other words there are fewer than eight girls for every 10 boys. If these households were statistically representative, it would seem that one in five girls from the town's elite have been denied life. This is an extremely low FMR. The 2001 Census, while reporting a reduction in anti-female sex bias in the population as a whole, finds that the juvenile sex ratio has deteriorated dramatically from 947 in 1991 to 927 in 2001, and in the most prosperous States of the north-west it has dropped to exceedingly low levels: 820 in Haryana and 792 in Punjab.[44] Sex-selective scanning and abortion (unreported in the rural environs) was mentioned matter of factly in the town as an ingredient of modernity by 1997. Prior to the late 1990s the mechanism of culling would have been neglect in infancy rather than infanticide, which has never been reported there.[45]

Satish Agnihotri, who has investigated the effect of 'prosperity' on the differential well-being of the genders in a compendious study of the sex ratio at the district level throughout India, gets close to the materialist argument being put forward here in his charitable observation that elite female disadvantage is more a case of 'men gaining more in the wake of prosperity than females being discriminated against'(1997, p. 250); that is, before he himself shows this interpretation to be false at the all-India level. In fact, we are witnessing what I have elsewhere called 'gender-cleansing'.[46]

There are three economic explanations for gender-cleansing. They rest on the assumption of utility-maximising families (households) allocating resources between the genders purely according to differential returns. The

[42] This class logic can operate irrespective of other ways in which the economy is regulated; for example, by religion and caste.
[43] Females per thousand males.
[44] Athreya 2001.
[45] See George (1998) on infanticide generally and George et al. (1992); Chunkath and Athreya (1997) on its practice in Tamil Nadu; and *Frontline* vol. 16, no. 23, 19 November 1999 for evidence of the growing incidence of female foeticide in Tamil Nadu.
[46] Harriss-White 1999b.

three factors stressed are female labour participation (for which there is systematic data); dowries (for which there is hearsay evidence), and changes in marriage patterns (for which there is only case material from field economics). We will look at these competing explanations.

Taking *labour market participation* first, the *orthodox* hypothesis explaining the paradox of 'gender-cleansing' in wealthy families is that wealth is associated with the withdrawal of women from economic participation (first from wage work and then from the external sphere altogether). This double seclusion is said to be in the interest of the status of the household. Wealth and seclusion are then accompanied by an increase in the incidence and the size of dowries, and – in the 'female-friendly' south – by the diffusion of north Indian marriage patterns. As a result, the economic costs to families of women rise, going up the scale of family wealth, and their economic benefits fall. With this changed equation, so does their relative status,[47] and so do their chances of being allowed to be born, to live at all or to live to adulthood. Agnihotri assumes such a logic at work; he recasts this process, cross-sectionally as a 'Kuznets curve' with a U-shaped relationship between adverse female life chances and household wealth.[48] *Improvements* in FMRs associated with increasing wealth are supposed to be reflected in the reinsertion of women into upper professional segments of the labour market (from the returns from which women are expected to gain increased intra-household entitlements). Though this is testable on an all-India scale with the help of proxy variables (land) for 1961, 1987–88 and 1992–93, the results have cast doubt on the Kuznets relationship hypothesised by Agnihotri. In 1961[49] in north India alone, female disadvantage intensified with increasing wealth until the FMR reached a minimum of 870, after which it began to be reduced; and renewed female labour participation was significant in the explanation of reduced female disadvantage among the elite (see Figure 5.2). However, the scale of landownership at which female disadvantage started to be reduced was 24 acres (10 hectares) – above which we are talking about only a minute fraction of the population. In south India in 1961, though the lowest FMR was higher – at 930 – there was no U-shaped relationship at all, and female labour participation (which is higher than in north India) did not explain the change in the FMR. In the two more recent periods[50] there are no

[47] See evidence for rural elite female disadvantage in Heyer (1992), Kapadia (1994) and Wadley (1993); and for urban evidence see Vera Sanso (1995).

[48] After Kanbur and Haddad 1994.

[49] From 1961 Census data on household composition and landholdings (Agnihotri 1997, pp. 250–93).

[50] Using NSSO round 43 for 1987–88 and round 50 for 1992–93 for per capita expenditure and adult and child FMRs (Agnihotri 1997).

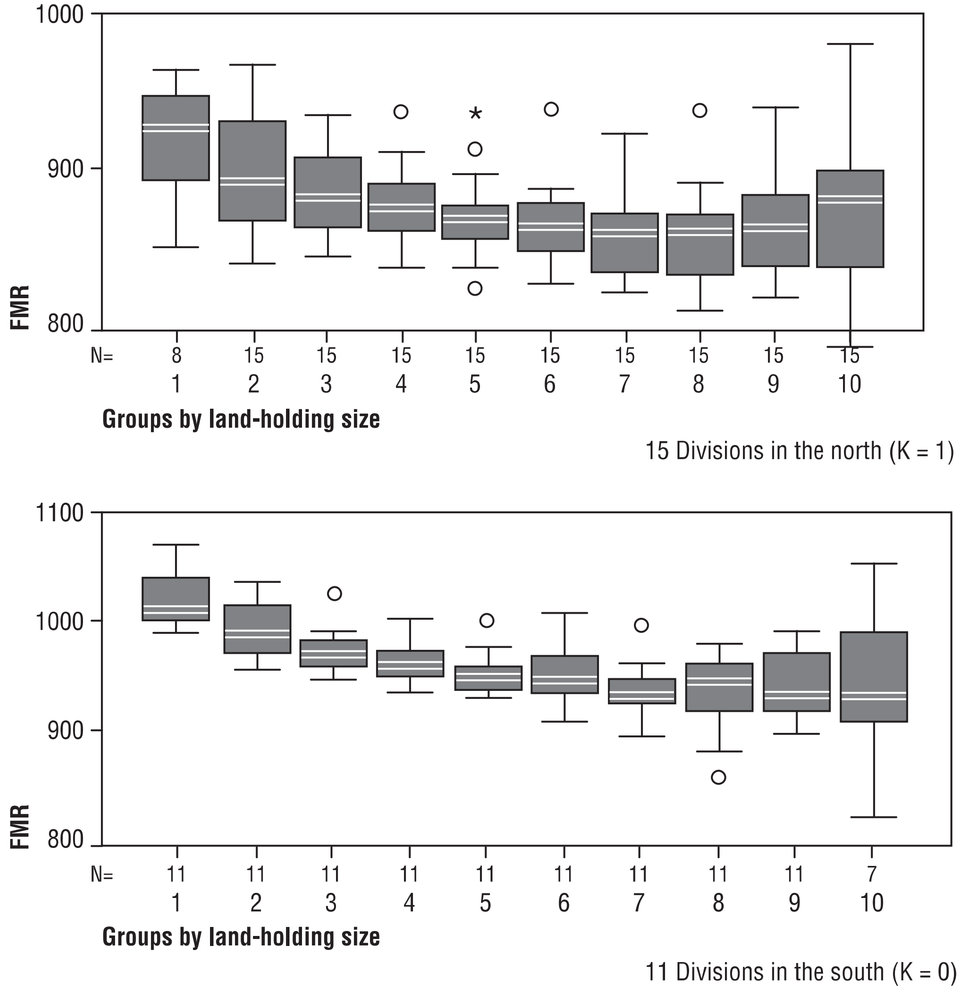

Figure 5.2 Female–male ratio by landholding groups
Source: 1961 Census, Household Economic Tables, Part III: Tables B-X to B-XVII: FMRs for all–age groups for households engaged only in cultivation (Agnihotri 1997, 2000, p. 282).

U-shaped curves to be found; instead, there are continuously negative relationships for both urban and rural sub-samples (see Figure 5.3). A steeper slope characterises urban subsets compared with rural ones and, in the highest per capita expenditure category in south India, a very low local FMR of below 900 is found.

The relative impacts of female labour participation and wealth have been modelled for rural south India.[51] Landless labouring households are hypothesised to strategise their gender composition according, first, to the marginal costs of rearing a girl, and second, to differentials in labour

[51] Nillesen and Harriss-White 2002.

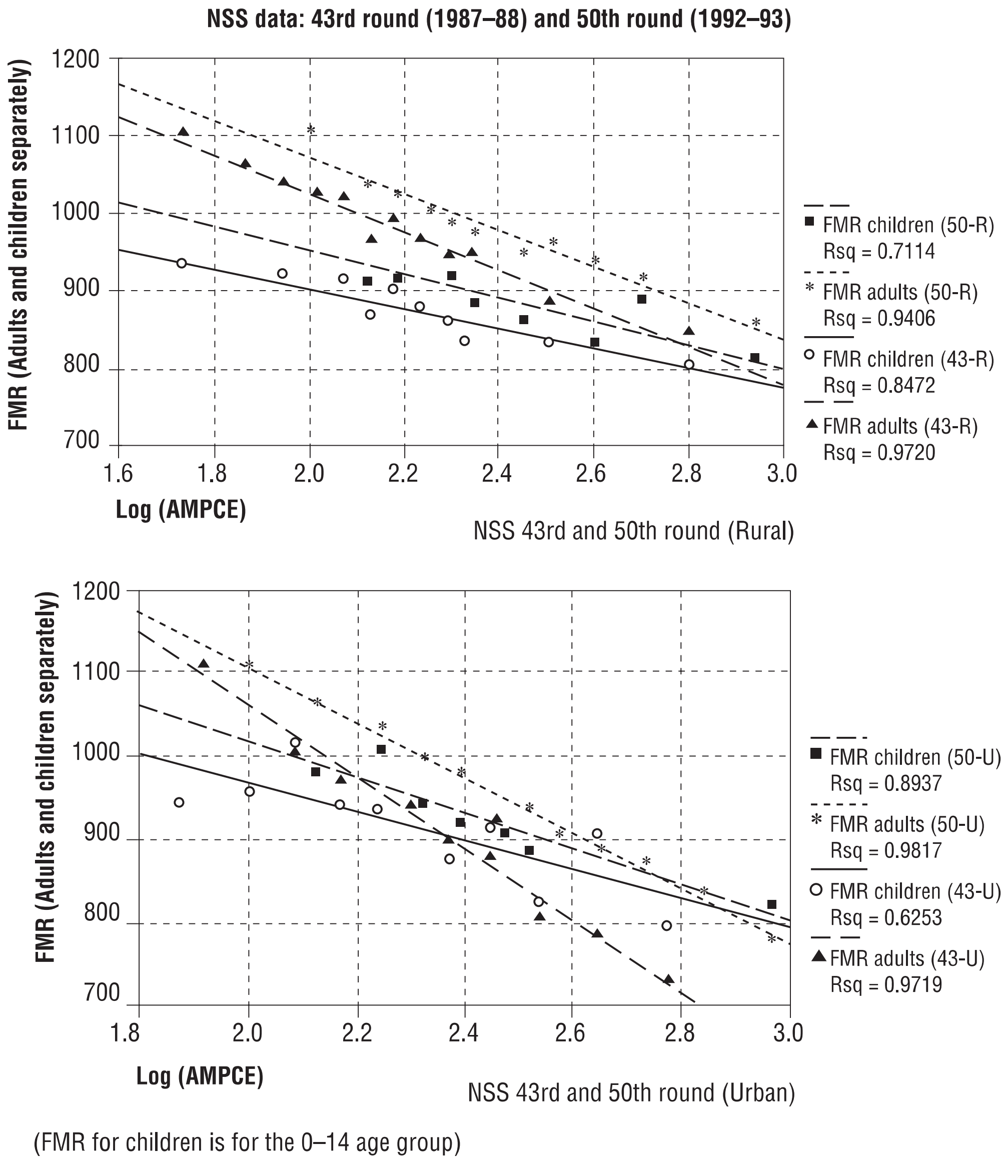

Figure 5.3 Female mortality rate–per capita expenditure relationship
Rsq = 'R squared'. This is a common index of the explanatory power of a regression line.
NSS refers to the 'National Sample Survey'.
FMR is the female-to-male sex ratio.
AMPCE is average monthly per capita expenditure.
Source: Agnihotri 1997/2000, p. 293

market returns. Often girls are at a survival advantage in labouring households, but in landless households in 8 villages in northern Tamil Nadu, all within two hours' bus drive from Arni, the survival differential between the genders converges with increases in assets. It would appear

Table 5.5 *Child sex ratios in villages in the Ambedkar and Tiruvannamalai districts (girls under 7 per 1000 boys) 1993–4*

	8 villages: 1993–95		4 villages: 1981–82	
Aggregate	856	(n = 1030)	1013	(n = 463)
Scheduled caste	886	(n = 413)	982	(n = 123
Caste	750	(n = 399)	1007	(n = 269)
Landless	952	(n = 397)	969	(n = 192)
Landed	730	(n = 633)	1053	(n = 271)
Landed caste	645	(n = 352)	1100	(n = 231)

The data have been tested for age misreporting. It is assumed that random error is insignificant. Summing the disaggregates will not equal the totals because of the category ‘other’ (Muslim, Christian, etc.).

that households without land, but with other kinds of assets do provide unwaged domestic productive work for which women are valued.[52] But in landed households the *opposite* obtains; as total assets increase so too does the survival differential (see Table 5.5). Not only has the sex bias appeared in villages where it was absent 10 and 20 years ago, but child sex ratios are lowest in the *landed* caste households of the local non-scheduled, agricultural castes.[53] Reports of the recent emergence of infanticide have organised their explanation around caste (either ‘traditional’ infanticidal castes – scheduled castes and *kallars* in Tamil Nadu, for instance – or upwardly mobile ‘backward’ agrarian castes (for example, *gounders* and *naickers*)).[54] But in the villages around Arni, caste does not furnish the explanation of excess female child mortality – the key factor is assets. Prosperity reduces the survival chances of girls, not when it is in the form of income but when it takes the form of property.

Another economic explanation concerns *dowry*, widely thought to be a disabling economic burden. In the absence of systematic widespread evi-

[52] In this instance agricultural work by itself does not tilt the survival chances towards women and girls (Nillesen and Harriss-White 2002). Mothers may take male children to work with them, leaving girls neglected at home (Nagaraj 1986). Or, if female labour force participation is complementary to demand for on-farm or domestic (weaving) labour of sons, then increases in female labour unaccompanied by increased returns may result in drops in the relative mortality of boys, thereby widening the differential (Foster and Rosensweig 1999).

[53] See Nillesen 1999. The lowest child FMRs at the block level in Tamil Nadu – which is a microcosm of India – is 645 (Harriss-White 1999b). These are compensated for by blocks with ‘Keralan’ ratios exceeding 1000.

[54] Even research that puts caste as central has an economic explanation at its heart, see respectively Sundari and Thombre (1996), Visvanath (1996) and George et al. (1992).

dence on dowries or dowry-related savings, at best it is possible to infer from differences in the amounts of expenditure and savings following the births of male and female children that reductions in current expenditures are made when girls are born (see Subrahmaniam 1996, for instance). Parents of girls start to save in the anticipation of future lumpy expenses. The greatest of these is the transfer of property at marriage. Some arguments relating dowries to the economy are entirely speculative. For example, the idea that the dowry is the price for scarce men under conditions of population growth[55] assumes men cannot take brides of ever younger ages and lower castes. The idea that it is the price for the groom's education[56] assumes that elite grooms have a costly education, which we have seen is not always the case. The notion that the dowry is a productive resource in investment tactics ignores its common form of consumer durables. Locally it is justified as an insurance premium for the services provided by kin to ensure marital 'harmony' or dispute resolution.

On *changes in marriage patterns*, Judith Heyer, in her analysis of the reproductive strategies of rural elites in the region of Coimbatore, shows how hypergamy, dowry and open-ended gifts connected with the bride's reproductive cycle are deployed to establish connections and contacts useful for agriculture and trade. The system, she concludes, is 'driven by brides' families' in a micro politics of interest. Further north, another village study has revealed how the landowning elite has selectively adopted certain features of the north Indian kinship system (not only dowry, but also hypergamy and exogamy) while retaining the distinctively south Indian feature of consanguinity.[57] Consanguinity makes sure accumulation is kept within a very close circle of kin. Village exogamy means a reduction in the close and immediate support that can be given to a young bride. Within one generation, dowry has risen from being a feature of 45 per cent of marriages to 80 per cent of them. Dowry was concluded to be part of a 'pick-and-mix' tactic of kinship consistent with growing female disadvantage.

In north India, the combined use of hypergamy and dowry in accumulation long predates the modern era, and was seen, together with female infanticide, as an attribute of caste.[58] But hypergamy and dowry are now

[55] See Pisani and Zaba 1997, in Agnihotri 1997, p. 275.

[56] See Kapadia 1999, p. 15.

[57] Consanguinity in south India involves marriage between cross-cousins or uncles and nieces. In the same region, SC marriages are increasingly taking a distinctly more Dravidian form over time. See Harriss-White 1999b.

[58] Clark 1983. That castes use female infanticide, hypergamy and dowry for advancement is evinced by the Rajput village of Devra in Rajasthan, where, according to the Times of India News Service (June 1999), *all* female infants have been killed at birth for the last 110 years, one who escaped rendering this practice newsworthy.

extensive, rampant and linked to class. The south is following suit. In the booming knitwear industrial cluster of Tiruppur in south-central Tamil Nadu,[59] the ideal in male behaviour is the self-made man, unfettered by shackles of kin and caste, whose reputation is based on acquired rather than ascribed qualities and whose profits are based on skill. There the dowry is deployed as a substitute for the capital a man would hope to get from his father. On this, Karin Kapadia comments that dowry 'is the most public acknowledgement of a man's worth that he is likely to experience', a public calculation of his 'achievements' (although marriages actually take place in the anticipation of achievements – at least in business); 'it *is* modernity'(Kapadia's italics, 1999, pp. 17–18). If *this* is modernity, then the public signalling of the economic status of bride-givers is *also* modernity. Kapadia concludes that 'forms of modernity' (in this case gender discrimination through dowry) 'may appear to be continuations of tradition when they actually are new meanings' (1999, p. 10) (in this case the appropriation of the kinship system of north India in the interests of capital accumulation).

Although it is hard to demonstrate these relationships rigorously on a large scale, it is clear that a range of material patriarchal logics is likely to be relevant to the life chances of women. From the perspective of the class interests of business families, however, two qualifications need to be added.

First, consider the relation of women's dowries to the total assets controlled by males. Among the rich, if income is derived from a *salary*, the ratio of a given dowry (to be paid for daughters) to *assets* is likely to be relatively high, and the conventional cost/benefit calculus may indeed account for sex discrimination. However, in a propertied household, the ratio of dowry to assets is likely to be lower to the point that it is implausible as an explanation for gender-cleansing.

Indeed, we find that in Arni the escalation of dowries is *not* commensurate with the escalation, entirely uncelebrated in the literature on sex bias, in the value of property accumulated and controlled by males. Elite households in Arni would rather betray the value of their total investments than give systematic information about dowries given and received – and the former was a well-guarded secret. However, we do know the range and types of investments and major acts of consumption – enough to know that the firm we studied was in most cases merely a component in these families' portfolios. Leaders of local caste associations gave us dowry norms and we can take their upper limits as characteristic of the dowries of the elite. We also have estimates (which are without doubt on

[59] Studied by Chari 2000.

Table 5.6 *Arni: dowries, 1994*

Caste/trade	TVAM[a]	Saurash-trian	Barber	Tailor	Auto-rickshaw driver	General
Gold Sovereigns	20–70	10–50	3–10	7–10	5	
(Upper Rs value)	260 960	186 400	37 280	37 280	18 640	
Fridge						12–23 000
Scooter						22–36 000
TV (black and white)						10 000
TV (colour with home theatre)						15–30 000
Motorbike						60–70 000
Moped						15–25 000
Low-estimate consumer durables						49 000
High-estimate consumer durables						103 000

Note: A 'large dowry' is therefore estimated at Rs 260 960 + 103 000; that is, Rs 364 000
[a] TVAM = *Tulluva vellala agamudaiyar mudaliar* (dominant backward caste)

the low side) of the present net value of the firm we studied from the elite household's investment conglomerate.

The dowry norms are caste-specific. Local leaders of several caste associations – notably castes that Mattison Mines (1984) terms 'artisan merchants' (*senguntha mudaliars, lingayats* and *naidus*) – denied that dowries were given, though individual members of these castes acknowledged the practice. The dowry norms for the merchant elite specify combinations of gold sovereigns and consumer durables (such as a fridge, scooter or moped, and a TV with 'home theatre' (video)). In Table 5.6 details for dowries in the mid-1990s have been listed. A 'large' local dowry in 1994 might have comprised Rs 2.6 lakhs in gold and Rs 1.03 lakhs in kind: Rs 3.6 lakhs in total (then over £7000). If we apply these dowries to the daughters of present elite owners and divide the current (low estimate of) remaining assets between the total sons of the elite, we find that the *average (low-estimate) value of inheritable assets per male is 12 times the value of the average (high-estimate) value of transferable assets per female.* This puts paid to the widely held idea of dowries as being in any sense economically equivalent pre-mortem inheritances.

There is a further irony. Acts of male agency (for instance, deciding to let girls achieve high levels of education, refusing the duty to maintain unmarried daughters, encouraging them into employment and into undowered marriages, actively supporting a wife to enter trade, and so on) are unusual, secular kinds of market engagement. They could well intensify rather than neutralise the gender imbalance in the control of capital. With the reinforcement of male control over capital as it grows, the greater the absolute size of the unit of capital and thus the smaller the ratio of dowries to business assets. The smaller the ratio between dowries, plus the costs of female education on the one hand, and productive, commercial and finance capital on the other, the relatively less of a liability are women. When class is factored in, in the propertied elite, the larger the dowry, the less powerful the case for dowry as the material explanation for gender-cleansing.

Second, consider the capital-managing labour requirements of the family firm. As fertility rates fall, the need for male family members in these family-managed capitalist firms persists and intensifies, and the relative economic usefulness of their women declines. This is another material disincentive for daughters in business families. However, although this seems a powerful explanation, it is always possible to use daughters and sisters to draw male in-laws into firms with a male deficit. Alternatively, professional managers can be hired, though the latter's costs are greater than any kind of family labour. It has to be concluded that in the absence of *ideology*, neither the gendered transfer of assets between generations nor the gendering of the division of labour explains such acute female disadvantage in life chances.[60]

We are left with the argument that although the severity of bias in the juvenile sex ratio is quite class-specific, gender-cleansing has to be accounted for by gender ideology. This is also Agnihotri's conclusion. The north Indian 'pattern' of anti-female discrimination is spreading southwards by means of 'cultural circulation', rather than through changes in the economy. It is taking the 'prosperity route' (that is, it is occurring first in a class that can deploy the psychologically distancing 'technical' mechanism of sex-selective abortion,[61] as opposed to the malign neglect or deliberate culling of girls after birth). From this class it 'seeps into the substratum', where children are beginning to be reported in the records of primary health centres as dying from 'social causes'.[62] These are agrarian classes where girls have never been culled before.

[60] Further factors are possible. While education and dowries are calculable expenses, business assets can fluctuate, especially after their partition. The need to cushion this element of uncertainty could be yet another justification for the unequal control of capital between the genders. Another explanation impossible to verify *ex ante* and therefore tending to be circular, is the lack of female support when 'hard times' threaten the business of brothers.

[61] Estimated to now account for 0.5 per cent of potential births in India (and as many as 5 per cent in Korea) (Dasgupta and Bhat 1995).

[62] See Chunkath and Athreya 1997.

To conclude, it is not just trends and terms of male and female participation in the economy here, but the position of women in the gendered structure of productive assets and the gendered process of capital accumulation – resulting from what appears to be an intensification of male-patriarchal relations – that is associated with their mortal loss of relative status. This intensification may be due to the halving of completed fertility within a generation, but of even greater importance is the independent diffusion southwards of a culture of female inferiority. Dowries can then be seen as an opportunistic means of accentuating male control by appearing to compensate women for it.

In *the absence of* a quite fundamental delegitimation of male and male–female relations of patriarchy, and of changes to the control of capital,[63] and given that labour markets are heavily segmented *within* each gender, for work alone to empower women from wealthy households, it has to involve that kind of social interaction that is 'an antidote to seclusion and its adverse consequences' (Agnihotri 1997, p. 285). Work will not even be a palliative if it is not outside the domestic arena. Glove-stitching at home will not do. In towns like Arni and in its environs, it is 'the State' rather than 'the market' that has supplied such work, though the State's longstanding and limited emancipatory role in this regard is now threatened by liberalisation.[64] It is now not Indian kinship practices, so much as Indian capitalism mediated by ideology, that endangers women. Women are statistically most at risk in the richest households, and have become more at risk as time has passed. The increasing relative exclusion of women from the ownership of capital is perhaps the greatest and most far-reaching irony in India's economic development.

[63] Bina Agarwal has argued both carefully and controversially that they are necessary for *rural* India. See Agarwal (1994) and Razavi (1999) for summaries of the arguments for and against.

[64] Between 1994–97 (the latest figures), while employment in the public sector contracted by 2 per cent on aggregate, the loss of jobs in central government, local bodies and parastatal institutions concealed a 15 per cent increase in employment in state governments. So far, employment for women has held up, growing from 15 to 16.5 per cent over this period (Reserve Bank of India 1999, pp. 20, iv–46; tables IV–36).