‘We can think but we can’t do.’

Does increased Education lead to Greater Autonomy for Women?

The Aspirations of Young Female College Students in Coimbatore, Southern India and Societal Constraints

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Contents

Introduction
Setting out the Issues........................................................................................................1-4

Methodology
Undertaking Research in India..............................................................................................5-14

Chapter One: Women’s Schooling in India
Training Women for their ‘Special Duties’ in Life..........................................................15-21

Chapter Two: Work and Employment
Standing ‘on my own two legs’.........................................................................................22-35

Chapter Three: Marriage
The Fate of the Indian Marriage System............................................................................36-53

Chapter Four: Dowry
The Price of Dowry and the Costs of Educating Women.................................................54-68

Conclusion
‘We can think but we can’t do’.........................................................................................69-84

Bibliography.......................................................................................................................85
Introduction

Setting out the Issues

The spread of Western style schooling throughout the rest of the world represents a major phenomenon in the history of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and the increase of this type of education, in any particular nation, is interpreted as a symbol of its modernisation. Equally, women’s participation in development of a country is measured in part by statistics on female literacy and educational achievement, which are said to reflect their status and level of autonomy *vis-a-vis* men. The assumption is that ‘education’ leads to women’s realisation of autonomy, and greater equality in society. Indeed, figures on women’s education have been endorsed as cross-national indicators of gender equality and consequently, international surveys of women’s status include statistics on female literacy and years of schooling as a matter of course, side by side with figures on employment, health and political involvement.¹

The intention of our research was to question this taken-for-granted assumption that schooling lends women autonomy and improves their status, and look beyond the statistics to uncover a more detailed account of individual experience of both women’s education in India and the patterns of day-to-day life. Our findings are based on the interview data we collected from students studying secretarial practice at the Church of Southern India (C.S.I.) Technical and Vocational Training College for Women, in Coimbatore, the first college of its kind in South India, where Lucy taught English three years previously and was invited back, with Jackie, to carry out some research. There was a total number of 295 students attending the college. They were from a range of social and economic backgrounds, 135 were from an urban region and 160 were from a rural area. The majority, 207, were from households that earned less than Rs. 1,000 (approximately 20 pounds sterling) per week. Although the college was funded by Christian organisations, and was run by the C.S.I., only 139 of the students were practising Christians, the rest were either Hindu, 145, or Muslim, 5.²

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²All of the above figures were supplied to us by the principal of the college, Mrs Geetha Kennedy B.E. (Civil) M.I.S.T.E., M.I.E.
Since independence, Coimbatore, situated in Tamil Nadu in southern India, has grown steadily as an industrial city with a population of 917,155. It has a particular involvement in textiles and engineering and consequently is commonly known as the ‘Manchester of Southern India’. More recently its commercial sector has prospered, with many established businesses opening up new branches and other companies being attracted to what they recognise as a rapidly growing financial centre. Consequently, most of the students leaving the college expect to find work as secretaries relatively easily in local business.

We admit that our research is in no way ‘representative,’ rather it should be accepted as a case study of a particular women’s college, in a specific region of India that we had the opportunity to visit. By investigating literature on the subject, and comparing it with our own research, we hope to uncover some of the societal pressures and constraints that restrict women’s access to formal education, as well as the obstacles that stand in their path towards autonomy. Before we can successfully do this, however, we must clarify a number of terms which serve further to complicate the issue. Firstly, the terms education and schooling are generally employed as if they are interchangeable, yet when one considers them in detail, it is evident that each has a separate and specific meaning. Education has connotations of expanding people’s mental horizons, ‘leading them out’ of ignorance, whereas schooling has connotations of discipline and of training to a particular way of seeing the world.

The assumption of those who automatically draw a correlation between literacy and female autonomy is that what women receive is education, rather than schooling. Hence, their experience at school is thought to be mind broadening, and confidence building, whereas in reality it would seem that much of what women encounter is in fact schooling. At best, this might not affect a woman’s realisation of autonomy, and at worst might be described as hindrance. Thus it could be argued, the conjecture that schooling leads to autonomy arises from this mistaken use of the term education.

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4By the term ‘representative’ we refer to data which has been drawn from a large sample so may be used to make generalisations about the subject it alludes to

Likewise, the notion of autonomy is utilised in an unproblematic way. First of all, it is inferred that autonomy has a universal meaning, which Dyson and Moore describe as ‘the ability - technical, social and psychological - to obtain information and to use it as the basis for making decisions about one’s private concerns and those of one’s intimates.’ Yet authors such as Jeffery and Jeffery argue that in many parts of South Asia it is difficult to uncover local terms which have equivalent meanings. Moreover, the word generally has positive connotations in English, which fits with the notion that individuals should be free to make choices about their lives, but there is no reason why this holds true within a South Asian context. Indeed, the Jefferys would suggest that the closest word to autonomy they could find in the Hindi language was *azadi*, meaning freedom, and this was viewed in a negative light; it was a word associated with ‘loose women’ rather than individual fulfilment. Similarly, it was noted that the nearest analogue for Bijnor women were words indicating responsibility, which many saw as something to be avoided as much as possible. This corresponds with work done by Chicago anthropologists who found that unlike western culture, South Asian culture does not encourage individualism and self-expression. Instead people tend to be socialised within an environment of large joint households that encourages interdependence not independence. As a result Basu and Jeffery argue that: ‘Women may thus find it difficult to articulate a desired state of more freedom of action: this may make them more ambivalent about the possibility of more autonomous (and more responsible) action.’

Thus, if we recognise that people in non-western contexts have different experiences of education and have contrasting ideas about autonomy from ours, we must also acknowledge that it can not be assumed that attendance at school will lead to increased autonomy. Indeed, through our investigation of students at the C.S.I. Technical and Vocational Training College for Women, we found that there appeared to be alternative motives for these women attending college, other than to gain autonomy. Furthermore, even if they did have aspirations to some form of autonomy, there were a number of constraints inhibiting their attainment of it.

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Overview

Jackie begins with a review of our methodology, which among other things describes our experience of carrying out a research project in India; she examines both the satisfying times as well as the frustrating ones. In Chapter One, Lucy investigates the initial motives for women’s schooling in India, this gives us a foundation onto which we can build the main body of the project. Chapter Two, on work and employment, Lucy looks at women’s access, or lack of it, to paid employment and the role schooling may play in granting access. She reflects on the obstacles in the way of a woman gaining paid employment, such as the responsibility a woman has to fulfil her domestic role, and question another ‘given’ that paid employment leads to increased autonomy. Next, in Chapter Three Jackie analyses the institution of arranged marriage and looks at the ways in which its rules and regulations might undermine a woman’s qualifications and obstruct her achievement of autonomy. Additionally, she considers the emergence of ‘love marriage’ or self-arranged marriage, and asks if schooling has encouraged women to demand that they chose their own partner. Lucy examines the organisation of Dowry in Chapter Four and explores how the level of a woman’s education serves either to enlarge or lessen the amount her parents must give, and what the implications of this are for her relationship to her husband. To conclude, Jackie considers what options in life are available to students in reality compared to the ideals promised to them as a result of the spread of women’s education, and how they are dependent on their own immediate circumstances.
Methodology

Undertaking Research in India

Since ‘no researcher can demand access to an institution’¹ the first step in our project was to negotiate our way into the Church of Southern India Technical and Vocational Training College for Women with a written request to the director, Mrs. Williams. We were afraid that if she were to deny us permission to undertake research at her establishment, it was unlikely that we could have continued with the same subject as, at the time, we believed that Mrs Williams was our only viable contact in India. It was very important to obtain primary data that would provide as authentic an account as possible of the attitudes of young women in India and to gain a real feeling for the environment so we had a better understanding of their world view. Fortunately, we received a very positive and enthusiastic reply.

We considered the college to be an excellent location from which to embark upon our research for several reasons, especially considering that, like most social researchers, we were severely constrained by time and money. We had gained permission to stay within the grounds, which saved us great inconvenience in trying to find affordable accommodation in a city that not only receives very few tourists but is also very disapproving of young single girls living independently of parents or husbands. The college was used to entertaining foreign visitors, however, and thus we had a safe secure place to stay.² It was also extremely convenient to be residing with the students themselves as it saved a great amount of time that otherwise may have been lost in travelling time and failed appointments as it was not a problem to locate the missing interviewee and, if necessary, find a replacement. The fact that the college was English-speaking was an obvious benefit, as we have no knowledge of the one hundred and sixty languages spoken in India. We also felt it would be a distinct advantage to our research if the girls we interviewed were of a similar age to ourselves as we wanted to discuss their

¹Bell, Judith, Doing Your Research Project (Buckingham, 1993), p.52.
²We also had our meals prepared for us - a vital factor, as ‘Delhi Belly’ would not have been conducive to our research.
personal lives and thoughts. We hoped that they would find it easier to relate to people like ourselves rather than to a researcher who may have been of the same age as their parents and who may have had an inhibiting effect on the conversation. The students may have felt too embarrassed or intimidated to discuss intimate matters such as relationships with boys or their parents, but these are issues which can add real depth to interviews.

Choosing our Research Method

The interview as a method of research has been criticised with the suggestion that its formality ‘may mean that the respondent does not act “typically” [as their] perceptions of the interviewer may well affect replies’3. Thus it was critical that we create a relaxed environment to encourage a level of trust and naturalness. We did examine other possibilities of research methods but concluded, after discussing the matter with Patricia Jeffery, our project supervisor, that the interview was most appropriate to our project. Questionnaires had the advantage in that the forms could have been mailed, saving a large amount of money on air fares but the main problem with that was the language barrier. It was very likely that the students could have had some problems understanding a few of the questions and we would not have been there to clarify them. Completing the forms may have had to become a class exercise which could incur the danger of most answers being prompted by the teacher, or at least written with the view that she was going to read them, which would seriously affect the validity of the information. More importantly, the intimate nature of the enquiries required very careful handling of the situation and certain topics needed to be gradually brought in at the appropriate time in order to keep the conversation flowing and as natural as possible. Every discussion was likely to be different in terms of the order of questions and some areas would be talked about in greater detail by some girls than by others. Questionnaires simply would not offer this kind of flexibility or intimacy that was so crucial to the kind of research we wished to undertake. On more practical terms, we only had access to a small number of people but in most cases this method involves several short-answer questions which are

then transferred into statistics. With such a small sample the figures would be practically meaningless, as questionnaires require a cross-section of the population relevant to the research and a representative number of various groups, according to income or religion. In a country of such diversity as India, this was simply not possible.

As Judith Bell explains, ‘the great strength of the case-study method is that it allows the researcher to concentrate on a specific instance or situation and to identify, or attempt to identify, the various interactive processes at work [which] may remain hidden in a large scale survey’. Thus a three-dimensional picture is painted that will illustrate relationships and patterns of influences in a particular context. It is particularly appropriate for individual researchers who are working within a limited time-scale and utilises the methods of interviews and observation. Participant observation, however, is not feasible as the sole research strategy in this instance as the researcher has to be accepted by the individuals being studied almost as ‘one of themselves’. As Westerners, not only is there an obvious physical difference but we would also think and act differently and, since they would always be fully aware of our presence, this would generate a grave danger of changing the behaviour of the participants. However, it was possible to employ the method of observation in its looser definition by becoming as much a member of the community as possible to attempt to discover the true ethos of the college (as opposed to the one they tried to promote) by studying official and unofficial behaviour, both inside and outside the interview room, which we hoped would help present a truer picture of the data.

Having chosen the interview as the most appropriate method of research it was necessary to prepare preliminary questions and choose their overall structure. The reasons against using the structured interview have been previously examined in the section exploring the disadvantages in the use of questionnaires: for example, it was an attitudinal survey and we wanted to encourage the girls to express their feelings and opinions on matters that were important to them. However a completely unstructured interview would involve a lengthy period of time to analyse and may have resulted in too

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diverse a variety of information to bring together within the confines of the project. Thus, a semi-structured interview allows the respondent a considerable degree of latitude but ensures certain questions, or at least areas, are encompassed, with the aim of moulding the interview to fit with the response of the student, allowing the conversation to flow freely with very little interruption.

**Preparing for the Project**

Since we had no insight into how the students might reply or what they would be keen to talk about our archival research had to be as broad as possible, beginning with general reading to stimulate ideas for actual interview topics and help us decide which subjects it would be most useful to read for in-depth information, as well as providing a general background about the issues and culture itself. A lack of relevant material available in the University library made us almost completely dependent on CD ROM data such as Sociofile and we discovered it was necessary to keep expanding the boundaries of our research area as initial, fairly restricted, investigations proved to be fruitless. After running several searches we acquired a wealth of information using the Inter-Library Loan service, as the majority of the journals referred to were not available locally in either the University Library or the National Library of Scotland. Classifying the bibliography lists encouraged us to confirm our topic areas, although we were aware that this was still preliminary and that it was the final data received from the interviews themselves that would determine our final choice, requiring some subjects to perhaps be dropped altogether. The actual reading gave us a greater background knowledge, such as debate over the use of dowry, and knowing the problems that could be encountered helped inspire us to formulate particular questions that we hoped to bring into the discussions. Thus our research project began to undergo some clarification, having started off as a fairly vague study of the evidence for, and attitudes behind, the claim that women's education in India leads to greater autonomy.

The practical preparation of a case study in India, such as obtaining vaccinations, visas, and necessary medical equipment, proved to be the most time-consuming, and at
times frustrating, part of the project. Neither of us had the advantage of being able to
draw on savings in order to fund the trip and as a result an extensive period was spent
trying to prepare everything on a budget, such as locating the cheapest flight, as well as
consulting numerous grant directories in the hope of some financial assistance. Out of
fifty-two applications only one was moderately successful, although, thankfully, we did receive some help from the Sociology Department and Centre for South Asian Studies at Edinburgh University.

The Indian Interview Experience

We arrived at the college having had a week while travelling down to Coimbatore from Delhi to acclimatise and become accustomed to the ways of the country and its people. Our first exercise was to introduce ourselves and begin to develop a good rapport with the staff and students in order to make ourselves known around the college. This involved creating and maintaining a good impression as well as being very friendly at all times which, we were to discover, had negative as well as positive side effects. Part of Indian hospitality was to have everything organised for you which was very kind and sometimes very convenient but often it resulted in having too great a dependence on the actions and reliability of the organiser, which could be very frustrating when time was of the essence. One student, for example, invited us to stay with her and her family in a nearby hill-station but would not allow us to travel by ourselves. We had to wait days before we were able to return to the college. However it was an excellent opportunity to gain real insight into Indian family life and we certainly discovered the strength of opinion regarding the activities of young single women. Additionally, we also felt obliged to attend various social functions to which we were very honoured to have been invited but, although we thoroughly enjoyed the feasting and dancing, the occasions also required numerous long speeches which may have been of great relevance had they not been addressed in the Tamil language. Unfortunately `we could not refuse very many invitations if we were to maintain good relations with the college, which was critical to the success of the project. Conducting informal talks, for instance, not only allowed us the
experience of mock interviews, which gave us confidence as well as a better understanding of how the structure of the ‘formal’ interview should be shaped, but also possibly put the student more at ease and encouraged them to disclose greater information and personal opinions.

Several of the girls were hesitant at first as they worried about the consequences of their headmistress and principal reading the interview data before we reassured them that their confidentiality would be respected and that pseudonyms would be used. Since openness and honesty are essential characteristics of the relationship between the researcher and the interviewee, we encouraged the students to ask us any questions they wished to put to us. Although it was difficult not to disclose any information about ourselves, it was still necessary to maintain our respectability in their eyes, for example, on the subject of alcohol consumption which is, in any measure, very much disapproved of. However, in the instances of interviewing particularly strongly opinionated girls, we found it advantageous to be more open about our lifestyles as it would often provoke a defence of their culture and, to some extent, reasoning for their traditions. Developing a rapport and getting to know the girls helped considerably in enlisting students for interviews. Initially there was a great interest and we had several volunteers but gradually the novelty seemed to wear off and a major recruiting drive was required. This included several posters, announcements by the headmistress during their Assembly, and by ourselves at the beginning of their classes. We were unexpectedly invited to take a class, which proved to be quite successful as group discussions were held one of them comparing the lifestyles of Eastern and Western teenage girls as the students saw it. We continued social contact with the girls we had already interviewed and they would often encourage their friends to participate. However we discovered that a few may have been coerced as they had little knowledge of English or were painfully shy. If they were willing volunteers such problems could be overcome by the accompaniment of a more confident friend but we were aware that ethical practice requires the investigator to respect the individual's freedom to decline to participate in or withdraw from the research. In any case, reluctant participants, unsurprisingly, did not produce successful interviews.
The large majority of interviews took place in our own room at the college itself and the necessity of a specifically prepared environment became obvious when, at one time, we were spontaneously invited to interview particular people during a social visit to their home. These attempts were largely unsatisfactory as we had not met these potential interviewees before and had not had a chance to develop a rapport or gain their trust before asking what were fairly intimate questions. Thus we felt uncomfortable about conducting a formal interview and did not want to invade their privacy. However there were also disadvantages of being ‘on-site’ and in close proximity to the students. We could be subject, at times, to several interruptions from visiting friends, a blasting radio situated in a neighbouring dormitory, and our meals being brought to the room. Although we could be half-way through an interview, the cook, much to our bemusement, would absolutely insist on the girls leaving the room so that we could consume our food ‘immediately’. It was difficult to avoid such problems if we were to maintain good relations with the staff and the students In addition, our presence at the college seemed to cause quite a stir and we were obviously the topic of conversation as some girls seemed to know exactly what questions we were intending to ask, requiring us to change the structure to maintain the naturalness of the interview. It was not always possible to conduct the interviews under perfect conditions for, although we strongly encouraged single attendance, some students preferred their friends to accompany them. Often, heated discussions between them would break out and sometimes even result in the answers being changed, but fortunately this was extremely rare. We discovered the reason for the arguments was usually due to fear (before we reassured them) of damaging their reputations before us as they thought that we may disapprove of, for example, their desire for a ‘love marriage’. Although we were given the impression that some students were eager to please at first, others seemed to be rather disapproving of what they knew of Western culture and would defend their cultural position and often give reasons why. Thus they would respond favourably to being very gently ‘provoked’ by being given a greater insight into the lifestyles of young British women.
Overcoming Problems of Interview Research

The 'interviewer effect' was not entirely unavoidable as it was obvious we were from a completely different culture but it was often advantageous because students would explain situations in greater detail for our benefit and by doing so, we would be given an extra insight into their way of thinking.⁴ There were often times when the student would express an opinion utterly opposed to our own thoughts on the subject but it was only ethical to remain objective during the actual interview to try to avoid ethnocentricity as much as possible. Therefore, we refrained from comment as the purpose of the exercise was to obtain their views and not our own. Nonetheless, the fact that we did not always accept certain answers in our own mind also encouraged us to ask why - being careful to abstain from leading questions - they gave us those particular replies. The contrast of cultures also sometimes resulted in language problems as a few of the girls had some difficulty with their English and we suspected that their positive responses to questions were in actual fact simply indicative of a lack of understanding. However, our awareness of the problem ensured this small minority of data would not affect the validity of the entire project. With reliability in mind, the interviews were conducted under much the same conditions, but we did not desire to wholly control the data obtained and thus we were unable to ensure an equal amount of information on each topic. We were also dependent on the flow of conversation for the structure of the interviews. To record the discussions, we took turns in taking notes and actually asking the questions, and so that Jackie’s Scottish accent did not confuse the students, she was careful to enunciate her words. We decided not to tape record the interviews in the knowledge that for every hour of interview, about ten hours should be allowed for transcription which, for us, was not all practical. Instead, we took advantage of the fact that there were two of us and transcribed the conversation there and then. Using the relative freedom of the semi-structured interview style, we discovered some preliminary topics were not favourable to obtaining quality research material in every student's case, such as the media and whether or not it is likely to play a part in the emancipation of women. This was due to the fact

⁴The ‘interviewer effect’ is when the answers given by the interviewees may have been influenced by the interviewer’s presence.
that many of the village girls had never seen a television set or cinematic film and also, in
the instance of students who had, the effects of media were perhaps too subtle to discuss
in general conversation, especially with the younger girls. Instead, the topic was adapted
as a prompt for the comparison of cultural lifestyles as several of the girls had access,
albeit unofficial, to cable television.

Taking a Broader View

In addition to our use of interviews as a method of social research, we used several forms
of informal observation, such as studying Indian women's magazines, local and national
newspapers, television and film, and even advertisements to try and gauge an
understanding of the messages, if any, that were being put across by the media to which
the students may have been subject. With the use of British teenage magazines, we took
the opportunity of taking a class at college to discuss, in focus groups, cultural
comparisons, as we were interested to find out if the students were envious of others or
fairly content with their own situation. This was part of an attempt to obtain a look at
the wider picture of the cultural issues involved. Whilst in India, we contacted M.A.R.G.,
a market and research group, for information regarding surveys they had undertaken that
were relevant to our project, and they kindly supplied us with the results of a national
questionnaire that was given to university students. After we had analysed our raw
interview data by grouping together all the answers to the same questions in order that we
could identify the main themes, we sent our findings to several academics located
throughout India asking for their opinion on the matter.

We were fortunate enough to have the opportunity to interview young women
who had once been students of the C.S.I. Training College and were now making use of
their qualifications, or who had married, by extending our research to the inhabitants of
the Young Women’s Christian Association and through students whose elder sisters had
previously been taught by Lucy at the institution. This was very successful as it gave us
a clear insight into the difficulties encountered by young women having to face the
realities of life. Ideally, we would have liked to interview the parents of many of the
students, particularly their mothers, not only to enable us to have their perspective on, and reasons for their daughter’s education, but also to discover how much attitudes have changed in the past generation. However, this proved not to be possible due to restrictions in the duration of time that we had to undertake the research, as well as the inevitable language barriers that would have occurred. We were, though, allowed the ability to partake in some unofficial observation of family life thanks to the kind hospitality of the families with which we stayed, an experience we found to be very enlightening. We continued this practice of observance as we travelled by such methods as discussing issues of our project with fellow passengers on lengthy train journeys, and also witnessing the activities, dress and mannerisms of women in each of the states that we visited, of which we found great variety.

By travelling independently in India we believe, even as Westerners, that we gained insight into some of the difficulties that single young women would undoubtedly face without the support of their families. Our own experiences, combined with tales of caution from fellow travellers and Indians alike made us realise that the lack of freedom allowed to the students at the C.S.I. College was, at least in part, borne out of a concern for their welfare rather than merely a means of oppressing women. There were many parallels between our own and the student’s observations of society in India, for the division between East and West in terms of collectivism and individualism were not as defined as some would believe. On a very basic level, for example, many young Eastern women that we spoke to had a strong sense of self-identity, just as we, ourselves, had several social obligations and expectations in our own community. However, it is important not to over-emphasise these factors as there were significant differences in our own beliefs and aspirations in life to those of the students. Complete independence for women was often viewed negatively by our interviewees, but it was as important not to impose our own views as it is for Westerners as a whole to respect a different way of life.
Chapter One
Women’s Schooling in India

Training Women for their ‘Special Duties’ in Life

Historically, the major aim of female schooling has been to improve the ‘status’ of women, yet there are a number of conflicting interpretations of how their status should be measured, as well as who should benefit from any developments in their situation. The debate we wish to focus on in the following discussion, on the one side, relates to the arguments proposed by the Indian political reformers who believed that a woman’s status should be measured in accordance with her role as wife and mother, and that schooling should focus on women’s homemaker role which should not only benefit the household itself, but also the society as a whole. Along the same line, western educated men began to equate educated women with their ideal of the perfect wife, and so demanded that their future spouse should be educated to suit their needs. On the other side of the debate, were the proposals of the more radical elements of the reform movement who, rather than volunteering that women should remain in their traditional role as wife and mother, wanted to grant women the opportunity of being able to compete with men on equal ground; to achieve their status uniquely for themselves in terms of academic or career based achievement. However, as we shall see, this was met with much criticism, and was never fully accepted.

The Foundations of Women’s Schooling in India

The first girls’ schools, opened during the early nineteenth century, were initiated by English and American missionaries who were keen to convert their pupils to Christianity. This factor began to worry certain Hindu and Muslim political activists, who had previously ignored the plight of women’s schooling but who now made it one of their concerns. It appears that their primary interest was stimulated by the evangelical intentions of the missionaries, rather than a genuine commitment to providing adequate schooling for girls. Nevertheless, it prompted them to set up their own institutions and they soon realised the power of schooling in meeting political ends. For them, schooling was important for girls ‘because the family was the basic unit of society, and because women were an integral part of the family, society
could not be reformed without changing the social position of women, and this was to be accomplished through formal schooling.'\textsuperscript{11} Their main objectives, then, were to condition women to be ideal wives and mothers, who would enforce the importance of learning about Indian culture, so that they would raise better informed and well adjusted citizens for a future independent India. They intended to use women’s reproductive role - which not only involves giving birth to children, but also socialising them - to reform and educate the whole family and ultimately, improve the power of Indian society in the fight for independence.

However, the mere fact that a woman was educated was not enough. The \textit{type} of schooling she received had to be socially acceptable and not threaten the existing family structure of the male breadwinner and female housewife. She had to present herself as the archetypal mother figure who was capable of all her domestic duties as well as possessing adequate academic knowledge that would raise the family’s prestige and enable her children to develop, academically and socially. These aims were reflected in the organisation of the curriculum for girls, who had to study an alternative group of subjects from that of the boys - these included lessons in domestic science and needlework.

One example of a man who advocated specialised schooling for women was Keshhub Chandra Sen, founder of the Hindu political reform party the \textit{Brahmo Samaj}. The first establishment that he formed was part of the Indian Reform Association opened in 1870. Later in 1882 he opened the Victoria College for girls, with the express intention that they should train girls for their ‘special duties’ in life as wife and mother. In accordance with this reasoning, he limited the curriculum to arts subjects, domestic science, painting and needlework, recommending in addition that ‘the ideals of Indian womanhood would be taught,’ which were thought to be obedience, patience and chastity.

Initially, as men were dominant in the public sphere, and it was in their interest to educate women, they were in a good position to push for female educational establishments to be opened. An increasing number of female graduates, who consequently were more confident than their less educated contemporaries and, who had possibly gained the respect of the male activists interested in their cause, felt able to involve themselves in the campaign.

One such woman was Juanadanandini, the wife of Satyendranath Tagore, the first Indian member of the Indian Civil Service. She was accustomed to socialising with public figures and was able to voice her opinions both verbally and in writing as she had a number of articles published on issues relating to women. Yet, from a modern western perspective, these cannot be described as ‘feminist’ in any way. On the contrary, she reflected the mainstream attitude that feminine success resided in a woman’s competence in being the good wife and mother. This polemic was also apparent in the opinions of Radharani Lahiri, who campaigned with the Brahmo Samaj for ‘enlightened education’ for women. She maintained that, “housework is most important" and that a women must ‘also learn child care, because nothing is more important to her than this.’

The rise of western style education for men, in conjunction with the growth of a middle class, stimulated similar incentives for educating women to be better wives. Men who were products of British schooling were more informed about European culture and history than their predecessors, and accordingly demanded wives who were knowledgeable about the world. ‘An educated young man is no longer satisfied with the prospect of a wife who is to be the acquiescent slave of his desire and the begetter of children, but looks to her for intellectual co-operation and participation in the pleasures and joys of life.’

**Women’s Role in ‘Status Production’ and the Importance of Education in Fulfilling it.**

It would be wrong to be idealistic about the extent to which men actually altered their conduct towards women. Much of the history describing this change in attitudes is written by male historians, thus they could be accused of reflecting masculine bias: one which attempts to portray men in a positive light showing them accommodating their wives’ wishes. Moreover, if one searches beneath this romantic veneer, it appears that there were ulterior motives for wanting an educated wife. In order to understand these incentives one must first acknowledge the importance of the ‘status production’ role that a women plays within the household. This phenomenon is described by Hanna Papanek, in her article ‘Family Status Production: The 'Work' and 'Non Work' of Women’. She illustrates the types of work that women engage

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in to perpetuate and improve the family’s social importance. These include ‘support work’, e.g. entertainment of husbands’ colleagues and more importantly, the training of children socially and intellectually which is instrumental in forming the children’s future occupations and marriage opportunities. Essentially, each activity communicates an explicit message about the social situation of the family within the community. Further, Papanek adds that the social identity of whoever carries out the activities, is as important as what is actually done. Tradition dictates that this type of work must be carried out specifically by the woman of the house, therefore it is important that she achieves and maintains a creditable social identity.

As the status of schooling increased within Indian society, it became a tenable criterion by which to judge social standing and women came to be assessed on that basis. Thus, it emerged that if the woman of the house was educated it reflected well on the success of her status production work, and ultimately the social status of the whole family. So the schooling that a woman was encouraged to achieve was not necessarily to raise her personal status, instigated by a new push towards sexual equality, but, rather it to boost the social position of a particular household. This factor is remarked on by Papanek: ‘... family status production maintain[s] and enhance[s] the family’s social standing, although they do not necessarily enhance the woman’s status within that unit.’

As a result of both intellectual and status production demands of educated men, in certain middle class circles it became increasingly difficult to find appropriate husbands for daughters who lacked schooling. Evidence of this is found in an article in the Indian journal Jnanahur 1870, entitled ‘Strishiksha’ (Women's Education), which argued that:

soon it will be difficult to get bridegrooms for girls of upper and middle class Hindu families unless these girls are given some education ... a marriage between an educated man and an illiterate girl cannot be a happy one, discord and disagreement will naturally be the result of such a marriage.  

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A Move towards Greater Equality for Women

The arguments above tend to envisage female schooling as means of improving women’s status as wife and mother ultimately for the benefit of others rather than the woman herself. However, an element of the move to revise India’s ideals involved a new look at women’s situation within society and it could be argued that men began to show greater respect towards women, and were prepared to encourage and recognise their intellectual tendencies. As K.M. Kapadia explains:

The social injustice inherent in the Hindu social system began to be intensely felt and agitation against it began to gain strength all over the country... Mahadev Govind Rande ... put forth the idea of a national Social Conference to carry out collectively, and in an organised way, the social reform movement launched against social injustice and more particularly the inequality of the sexes.66

Linked to this is the alternative approach which advocated that women should be allowed to follow an academic career in their own right. Dwarakanath Ganguly resigned his membership of the Brahmo Samaj, specifically because he disagreed with Sen’s attitude towards women’s schooling which involved them following a gender specific curriculum. Ganguly formed his own group, the Samadarshi Dal and set up the Hindu Mahila Vidyalaya school offering equal schooling for men and women which entailed them learning the same syllabus. Indeed, it appears that he was successful as, in 1877, two of his female students Sarala Das and Kadambini Basu, were decreed capable of taking the entrance examination for Calcutta University, at a time when no university in Britain had opened its doors to women. In 1882 Kadambini Basu, successfully graduated with a B.A. as one of the first women to do so at Calcutta University, and went on to study medicine at the University. Although she passed all her final written papers, she failed one of the essential practical examinations, so instead of gaining the M.D. degree she was awarded a G.B.M.C. (Graduate of Bengal Medical College), consequently and was still able to practice.

Additionally, Ganguly began campaigning for women’s representation at the annual sessions of the Indian National Congress shortly after its formation in 1885. Consequently,

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six women attended the 1889 session, one of whom was Kadambini. Yet it was not long before Kadambini was viewed as ‘a threat to women from respectable homes.’

Through her success in mathematics and science examinations, where she competed on the same terms with men, she upset the dominant belief that women should not be exposed to the rigours of the scientific ‘male’ realm. Moreover, her participation in the male preserve of nationalist politics was a cause of further concern for certain conservative Hindus who launched a smear campaign against her. In an article published in the orthodox Hindu journal Bangabasi, she was accused of being a ‘fitting example of a modern Brahmo woman’, and although she was wife and mother, was named as a whore.

**Back to the Original Aims**

It would be reasonable to argue that the achievements of Saral Das and Kadambini were relatively unusual at the time, and that the predominant approach towards education for women was that it should have different aims and curriculum from men’s. The majority of those interested in the issue believed that the function of women’s education was ‘role socialisation’ which would reinforce the status quo by training women as competent wives and mothers, rather than equipping them with the knowledge and skills to compete with men in the academic world as well as the public sphere of work. Ultimately the aim was reform not fundamental change; to mould familial values and co-ordinate them with the rest of a developing modern society without altering the founding structure. As K. Chanana states, ‘...those who argued that women should be educated and trained for jobs, did not want them to do so at the cost of their traditional roles.’

As educational institutions for women developed, the philosophy on which they were based remained relatively constant: that there was something special about the nature of a female which may be damaged or destroyed with excessive exposure to education. Indeed successive Governments in the post-colonial era tended to lend support to this by arguing for a separate curriculum and educational philosophy for girls. Whereas boys were encouraged to

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study scientific subjects such as maths and physics, girls were confined to arts subjects and vocational activities connected to home life - to make ‘the home a work of art.’\textsuperscript{10}\textsuperscript{10} The 1948-49 \textit{University Education Commission Report} illustrates how the attitudes of the all-male committee were not very different from those voiced by Keshhub Chandra Sen of the \textit{Brahmo Samaj} at the turn of the century. Again they highlighted the significance of the mother figure within the family, especially her role of socialising the children in the correct manner. Later, the National Committee on Women's Education 1958 reported that there was a feeling to ‘a greater or lesser degree that some of the subjects taught to boys are not related to the aptitudes, interests and needs of girls.’\textsuperscript{11}\textsuperscript{11} Ultimately, one could argue that the roots of women’s education are firmly planted in the traditional ideals of a gendered Indian society. The repercussions of this are evident in the educational policies of the day, as well as in the wider society. In the following chapters we intend to examine the role education plays in the lives of young Indian women attending the C.S.I. college, and in particular we address the societal constraints that mould their lives.


Chapter Two
Work and Employment

Standing on my own two legs

The dominant view that female education leads to women’s autonomy is generally based on the assumption that an educated woman will gain productive employment. The essential notion underlying this is that, due to her independent income, an employed woman is more autonomous than an unemployed woman, as she has the potential to support herself, and even remain single. This type of idea was primarily evident throughout western feminist writing which pushed for increased career opportunities for women during the 1960’s and 1970’s, in order to improve their position in relation to men. Such arguments have permeated the discourse of the development field, which was concerned that women had been marginalised within the development process in nations such as India. One way to integrate them that was suggested at the United Nations Conference of International Women's Year 1975, was to encourage female employment. Elson and Pearson argue that this approach is ‘based on the assumption that women's subordination - due to lack of job opportunities - can be ended by providing jobs.’

It is important that we reaffirm the differences, mentioned in the Introduction, between western concepts of autonomy and independence and South Asian notions. Essentially the two ideologies have their roots within contrasting approaches to individualism: the western viewpoint sees individual freedom in a positive light, while South Asian attitude believes it to be selfish as it undermines the importance of family values as well as the responsibility that goes with it. In the west several feminist writers promote the image of the ‘independent career woman’, fully in control of both her personal and public life, making decisions that put her needs above others. Few such women probably exist in reality, but it is still a condition which is aspired to.

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**Education for what?**

A direct criticism can be made of the simplistic correlation drawn between women’s education and employment. Krishna Ahooja Patel argues, in her article ‘Working Women in Asia Today - The Three Immobilities’, ‘it is important to consider the interaction between education opportunities, and training patterns’\(^2\) which complicates the belief that schooling will directly lead to employment for women. She highlights the factor, described in Chapter One, that from a very early age gender differentials within the occupational sphere are enforced with gendered curriculum i.e., one set of subjects for boys and a different set for girls. Essentially she argues that the type of education that someone receives is more useful to note than the mere fact that they are educated. This is important because the particular nature of education evidently affects the options open to an individual in their future, as the Indian Government’s intention to educate women to be better wives and mothers illustrates.

Yet the fact that girls often have a restricted choice of subjects at school, which may result in a limited range of career opportunities, is not the only obstacle in their way. Indeed, Patel continues by pointing out that even when women achieve the same results as men in the same subjects, they often fail to acquire gainful employment. ‘What remains obscure is the fact that even where women have received parity with men in acquiring qualifications such as engineering and architecture, i.e. Sri Lanka, their numbers are not proportionately reflected onto the employment scene.’\(^3\)

This suggests that there are reasons, other than to gain employment, that women are educated. Again, as was implied in Chapter One, the initial reasons for improving women’s access to education, that were voiced by Sen and others, not to enhance their employment opportunities, but rather to modernise and improve attitudes within the family. These advocates believed that by educating the mother the whole family could be improved. Alternatively, on a micro scale, educated men came to prefer educated wives, not only for intellectual stimulation but also because they had become a status symbol which reflected well on the family. So, the primary reasons for educating women were largely for the benefit


of others, rather than to improve female autonomy by giving potential access to paid employment.

Even if a woman gains a vocational type of education, such as secretarial training, it may not lead to any form of employment. Within Indian middle-class circles, it is generally the husband’s decision as to whether he allows his wife to work or not. Traditionally, Indian society condemns a man who permits his spouse to involve herself in productive employment outside the home, interprets it as a sign of incompetence on his part. He is supposed to earn enough to maintain a wife and family, so that his wife doesn’t seek paid employment. It is a better reflection on the family’s position in society, if only the man of the house is employed. If a woman wishes to use her qualifications and find work, she must first ask permission from her husband; if he does not give his consent it is better that she submits rather than shaming the family by having her own way. This is obviously a major obstacle in a woman's path to the supposed autonomy gained through employment, and the sequence of education leading to employment leading to autonomy is then broken.

**Does employment increase a woman’s degree of autonomy?**

Are we to suppose that working women, married or otherwise, enjoy greater autonomy than those who are unemployed? If we take autonomy to mean greater control over one’s resources and time, then we must investigate the experience of working women in relation to this. As hinted at above, more affluent households generally choose not to let their women work, yet within poorer communities there tends not to be a choice - the women must go out to work in order that the household can maintain itself. Indeed, as Annemarie Hafner points out in her article, ‘Women in the Economy of Independent India’, today it is not only women from the lowest socio-economic groups who have to work to maintain their household economically, but women from the urban middle class have been forced to work due to their worsening economic situation.44

Krishna Ahooja Patel describes this as ‘working to survive’ and argues that working is a ‘survival strategy’ rather than a ‘development strategy.’ \(^{55}\) By this she wishes to emphasise the fact that women's work, both productive (income earning) and reproductive (childbearing and rearing), is undervalued and still not recognised as ‘work’. Consequently it is neither ‘socially valued or economically rewarded.’ \(^{66}\) Similar assertions about the ways in which the type and nature of women’s work is both undervalued and misrepresented, are made by Caroline Moser in her book ‘Gender Planning and Development: Theory, Practice and Training.’ \(^{77}\) In it she argues that many development strategies have failed because they are based on a very limited view of the structure and division of labour within low-income households in developing countries. Dominating this perspective is the notion that most households are nuclear, and that there is a clear sexual division of labour within it, with the man as the ‘breadwinner’ and the woman as ‘housewife’.

Arguing that in many countries this is clearly not the case, Moser cites the error made within the argument that distinguishes between men's *productive* and women's *reproductive* role. In reality, Moser proposes that women play a ‘triple role’ within the household, which includes, *reproductive* and *productive* work as well as community managing (involving the allocation of limited resources such as water, housing and health care). Thus the assumption made by organisations such as the U.N., as well as feminist authors, that the reason women are subordinated is because they are not involved in productive work is distorted by the essential fact that many women take paid employment. Furthermore, given that women have a ‘triple burden’ within the household means that it is problematic to assert the claim that women will gain increased autonomy through productive work. Surely if already they have several responsibilities, it will be difficult for them to make claims for certain amounts of time. Ultimately, far from liberating women, productive work may result in added pressure on time and reduced freedom.

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The Case of C.S.I Training College

In the following section we intend to focus on our own research in order to relate the types of issues described above to the personal experiences of the women we interviewed. We aim to uncover how they interpreted the relationship between their particular mode of education and the opportunity for employment as well as the forms of obstacles which may stand in the way of their ambitions.

Belief that education will lead to a Career

It is no surprise that all the girls whom we interviewed expressed the desire to find employment when they left college, as all the courses at the C.S.I Training Centre are vocational. Consequently they envisaged a direct link between this type of education and the search for productive work. When asked what the main reason was for attending the course one student answered;

There is a good opportunity of getting a job after finishing. I am sure that I will get a job because it is a vocational course.

(Sohini)\(^8\)

Another student stated;

I want to go for a job. I think I can get a job easily. There is opportunity here, it's a training centre, not like other colleges [which have more academic concerns] (Gulabo)

As Krishna Ahooja Patel argues, in her article ‘Working Women in Asia Today - The Three Immobilities’\(^9\), several students recognised that there are variations in the type of education

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\(^8\) Pseudonyms have been used to protect the confidentiality of all the students of the college
one might acquire which may have negative repercussions in terms of finding a well paid job. They tended to be derogatory about highly academic qualifications, and favoured vocational courses such as they were taking.

 Degrees are a waste of time, you have to search and search for a job, but with this course you go directly to a job.  

(Celia)

If we have a degree, even in computing or accounting we may not get a job immediately  

(Fleur)

**Expecting or hoping for autonomy**

More affluent students were likely to declare aspirations for autonomy - in some form - and, like the feminists of the 1960’s, clearly believed that education would enable them to achieve it. The most common phrase we met with was ‘If I get a job I can stand on my own two legs.’ This expression seemed to have a number of interpretations, although, as shown in Chapter three to follow, all the interviewees foresaw that they would get married, therefore did not envisage that their education gave them the opportunity to remain single. Within marriage then, generally this would appear to mean that if a woman has a job, she is not so financially dependent on her husband. This was viewed as positive in that it would free her from such a vulnerable position in which he could treat her as he wished in the knowledge that she could not leave him. Furthermore, they were optimistic that their earning capacity had the potential for improving their negotiating powers within the relationship; they would be contributing to the household and therefore felt that they would be listened to when decisions were made over how the money should be spent. Some recognised it as a form of independence *within* marriage.

 So I can work and then I can have money - I won't have to ask my husband or mother-in-law for money...  

(Tina)

...now even for a single thing we are dependent on our parents then after we get married we are dependent on our husbands. If we get a job it’s easier.  

(Venkamma)

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To be free from everything we have education. They [women] must know their own mind, understand our country's problems, that's enough.... Education give girls more freedom. Without it they [women] have to depend on family and have to do what they say. With it [education] we can have more power. Your husband will listen to you more if you are earning. (Chinnamma)

Without education they [society] won't treat us properly. Education is important here, uneducated women are treated like a servant because they are not earning money. (Sohini)

Underlying these statements is the notion that if a woman earns she has the power and confidence to influence decisions made within the household. Decision making is recognised as an indicator of autonomy so in this scenario, autonomy was considered a desirable condition which could be achieved through earning power.

**Disbelief that neither Education nor Employment give Women autonomy**

Not all the students we interviewed were convinced by such a correlation drawn between education and autonomy, and some were cynical about the political rhetoric that enforced this ideal and believed that it did not correspond with reality. The statements below seem to imply that educated women are still not fully accepted by society.

Education is supposed to be giving independence but it doesn't happen in practice, because of the power of society. The views of the community have more power in real terms and have far greater effect on the girls’ lives.

(Margaret)

Education does not give women more freedom. They say this on stages - speeches on freedom - but it is not real. If a woman is educated, she gets treated badly, she gets gossiped about.

(Tina)

One of the reasons suggested to explain why paid employment may not improve a woman’s autonomy is due to the expectation that a woman finds employment in order to improve the
economic situation of her family, rather than for herself, and is expected to hand her money over to her husband. What is significant here is the assumption that it is the man who takes ultimate control over economic resources, thus undermining a woman’s access to autonomy.

The power will go to the man only - the man is looking after the wife. It doesn't matter if she is educated or earning money. Automatically the power goes to the man ... it's sad but what to do? Men have all the responsibilities e.g. money. Even if the woman works she will give the salary to her husband, she only has the power to make decisions about the children. (Gulabo)

If a woman is educated or working her husband will treat her better because she'll be earning money. Nowadays money is everything. People don't care about character they want money. Both husband and wife make the decisions on how to spend the money, but men have more power because of the culture, and habits. (Wazira)

**Disapproval of Autonomy**

The South Asian women that we interviewed expressed disapproval of the western individualistic ideal of autonomy discussed earlier, believing that it encouraged disregard for other people. For them it was important always to put others before themselves, especially when their family was involved.

This is exemplified in the following quotation:

Women should not have full independence, only the freedom that she needs, for example if she wants a love marriage, then society should help, support and accept her. Women should act according to their surroundings, they should not have full freedom. They should consider other people - men should also do this - should consider others and not disregard whatever people say, and do what they want. If they have full freedom, corruption happens, for example the female political leader in Tamil Nadu 'J.J' has gone power mad! (Angela)

The major force shaping their concerns was the role that gossip plays in social control. It seems that acceptance from one’s community was extremely important to these girls who
were keen to behave in an appropriate manner that would not be disapproved of by society. In their role as ‘status producers’, their main consideration is to maintain a high social standing for their family and household, and it is their relatives to whom they are answerable, should they misbehave.

A man can go out late at night, but a girl has to be back by six o'clock before it's dark... She has to be brave to face anything. She will get a bad name if she goes out or comes back after dark, neighbours will ask "Is she going for a job or going with men?" So she gets a bad name. I would like this to change. (Freesia)

We are very society minded. What they [people around us] think about us also matters very much. (Mary)

One can relate this aspect of social control to the issue involving husbands allowing or restricting their wife’s access to employment. As discussed earlier in affluent middle class families it is important that the man of the house appears to be capable of providing for his family. If his wife is known to be working gossip may spread accusing the husband of being inadequate, which would result in not only the man developing a bad name but the rest of the family also. Alternatively, as suggested in the above quotation, if a woman has to travel to work alone while she escapes the watchful eye of her family and neighbours, and becomes more vulnerable to accusations of misconduct, especially of the sexual kind. There need not be any proof of deviant behaviour, the very process of inculmination is sufficient to scar the woman, and consequently soil the family name. Thus the husband must judge whether or not it is acceptable for his wife to work in his particular community - his family's reputation must be prioritised over his wife's personal satisfaction.

A student's sister who finished her course at C.S.I Training College 2 years ago told us:

I have been working as a secretary and public relations officer for an export company in Coimbatore, but I resigned my job because I'm getting married next month. My husband told me that he didn't want me to work, so I stopped. I would prefer to help him with his work as he has
a busy job transporting goods which involves a large amount of travel. I don't mind giving up my job - I want to be a good wife. I will be expected to do all the cooking and housework, as well as look after my in-laws who I am going to live with.

(Ann)

I would resign my job if my husband says no - there is no other way. If he compels me to resign I will resign. I would never argue. (Rangamma)

If he [husband] says no I'll be staying at home. If I'm in a higher position, I'll request him [to go to work] but I won't fight. (Chinnamma)

We'll go for a job to get more money, but it's up to him - if he's interested in us going for a job. We won't fight about these sorts of things. (Venkamma)

If a man is rich, the man won't allow the wife to work - they have land so it does not matter. Greedy men will allow her to. The money she earns is not for herself - it is for her husband or mother-in-law. (Joanne)

Very few girls are career oriented. Some of them are changing, they want to go out to work, but it depends on the in-law situation. And some of them are scared of getting a bad name... It's not really the wife's choice - more that of the in-laws and the husband. (Margaret)

If the woman has some respect for her husband [which is essential] she will stay at home and look after the children and the house. (Katherine)

This also relates to the concern expressed through gossip, and indeed by some of the girls themselves, that if a woman earns more than her husband, she will dominate him.
Other people will say that she will dominate, as a man he must earn a lot of money. He'll come home and say "Don't go to work" but if she works hard he'll say "Sit" because she's earning more. She'll dominate if she's earning more money. Nobody will be able to change her, but most girls won't be like that. (Gulabo)

**Women’s endorsement of Motherhood as a Priority**

A more immediate worry voiced by the girls was that if a woman works, she may neglect her family, especially the needs of her children. Some girls thought that a woman should give precedence to the demands of her family, seeing that a career was unimportant by comparison.

My father does not allow her [mother] to work so she can be there for the family, when the children come home from school, but she would like to work. (Angela)

Men don't want women to work because they will neglect their family. They want educated women for prestige and status - for society's sake.... It is not good for a woman to work, it is most important to stay with her children until they are at least five years. Some women come away from their families even when their child is four months because their job will not give them leave. I don't like this, I would give up my job. I think that women should stay at home and attend to the needs of the husband and children. (Hannah)

Many husbands think that there is no need for their wife to work - if they [women] are working they are not able to look after the children properly or the family house. Only the woman has to look after the house, and do the cooking etc. She also has to make the children study. (Akkamma)

**Criticisms of Sexual Division of Labour**

Conversely, concern was expressed that a woman’s responsibility for housework and child care may reduce her degree of autonomy. If her husband does not ban her entirely from productive employment, so that she can concentrate on housekeeping, but allows her to develop a career she will still be expected to fulfil her duties within the house. One
interviewee told us of an example of a working female teacher who had just given birth to her first child which relates to the literature by Moser on the “triple role” of women.

It's a great burden for girls. One married teacher I know gets up at three o'clock in the morning to do the housework before starting work at eight thirty in the morning. (Akkama)

They [women] must finish all their duties first in the house. They [husband] won't help mostly, except for some small, small things. (Wazira)

The husband wouldn't help, it's not the way we [society] thinks. (Mary)

Very, very few men will help with housework. Those that do are educated men working the same hours as their wife, but he will not do very much. Most of them do not do it at all believing it to be women's work even if the wife works full time. (Hannah)

**Economic Incentives for Paid Employment**

It would be true to say that there was a clear sense of desire for employment expressed by most interviewees. However, simply to state that they all wanted to work is not sufficient, as it does not uncover any of the reasons for their aspirations, of which there may be any number of variations. If we consider the fact that these students originate from a range of social and economic backgrounds, and regions - both rural and urban - one may predict that we would encounter a gamut of motives for attending. The dominant catalyst was the economic position of the student's family. Poorer students indicated that they wished to help their parents financially when they found a job, especially those who had lost one of their parents, they felt obligated to support the rest of their family.

For a job - to help my family. My father is a Coolie he gets very tired from his work... My family is very poor, I was the only one in the family to come to college. (Rebekah)
To get a good job [to] brighten [my] future life. My father died when I was very young, my mother died last June after being sick for one year.

(Nanjamma)

Evidently, these students viewed the opportunity of attending college, with the prospect of a ‘good’ job as their only route out of the poverty trap their family was caught in. The notion that these particular women enrolled at the college with a view to some sort of personal gain - such as achieving greater autonomy - seems alien within this context.

I don't want an education to get freedom, but to help people, I'm not interested in money for personal use, but for family problems. (Wazira)

Clearly, for these students, the essential factor in deciding whether or not they should find paid employment is economic. In some households, it is obligatory that the woman works in order that its members can maintain themselves. However, as quoted earlier, Hafner argues that increasingly wives are encouraged to find employment due to rising standards of living and consumerism. The girls recognised this phenomenon within their communities.

Nowadays no husband will say he doesn't want his wife to go to work, but they must finish all their duties first in the house. (Wazira)

Today, families want to earn more, so they [men] allow their wives to work. (Akkamma)

All gents like their wives to work in an office. Most think they have to work to lead their life happily. (Kamalamma)

Every woman should work. It's helpful for our families and the woman herself... I would like to continue work after marriage because sometimes there will be money problems. (Freesia)

I will work if my husband allows. It depends on financial necessity to be allowed. (Fleur)
If men are satisfied with their wage alone, then they will discourage women from working, similarly if they don't want to raise their standards of living. (Katherine)

**Employment as a Last Resort - in Calamity**

Finally, a dominant motive for achieving qualifications that open up employment opportunities, is to gain *security* within marriage, the idea being that no marriage is one hundred percent guaranteed to be successful, even with parental support. Furthermore, a death or injury in the family may economically endanger it, especially if it is the man of the house who is injured or dies. In either situation it is possible that a woman may be left on her own to cope. If she is well qualified and able to find a well paid job, the likelihood of her surviving is much higher than if she had no education. Such concerns were voiced by our interviewees:

Education is the only thing you can proceed [sic] with. You can't depend on money, but there is security in education. Education is good to have if the marriage goes wrong or if the husband can't work. She [wife] will have to do both - work and bring up the children. (Mary)

It's important for women to be educated so she can be independent and support herself if she is left in the lurch by her husband. (Freesia)

It's important because girls have no security, he [husband] might be going behind her back. Having an education can help this situation if a woman is left on their own, she can support herself. (Katherine)

Possibly this idea was promoted by the college itself, to portray the training it was giving in a positive light, as Mrs Kennedy (the principal), made similar assertions.
Education gives security, not total independence... The qualification a girl achieves provides her with security, there are so many accidents in this world, it is possible that her husband may be injured, or of course leave her.

Conclusion
While all the girls expressed that they would find a job, and gave this as the main reason for attending a vocational college, they voiced different expectations of how their involvement in paid employment would result in them gaining autonomy within their marriage. Some argued that their earning power would give them more decision-making power, believing that their husband would take more notice of their opinion if they were contributing to the household. Others were more cynical that this would happen to any significant extent, primarily due to the power of gossip which restricts behaviour, but also because of the expectation that a woman should hand over her wages to her husband who assumes control over them. Several girls actually voiced disapproval of a western or feminist concept of autonomy for women, arguing that women should consider others before themselves. This notion appears to be reflected throughout wider society in the view that working women may dominate their husbands. Consequently, most accepted the belief that it should be the husband who decides whether or not his wife should work. Such an ideal somewhat undermines the degree to which a woman’s employment can be viewed as a reflection of her independence within marriage, and appears to give it secondary importance. Indeed, this is reaffirmed by several girls who stated that a woman’s primary responsibility should be to her husband and family. On the other hand, a number of girls highlighted the problems that a woman might encounter because of the pressure put on her to fulfil the housewife role in spite of engaging in paid employment. Ultimately, partly as a result of the above considerations, it seems that economic incentives are the strongest factor in deciding if a woman should find paid work, which was illustrated especially by the poorer students. Likewise, acquiring a qualification for employment was interpreted as a safety-net for extreme situations, rather than an instrument towards the realisation of autonomy. Although it could be said that the existence of this safety-net enables a woman to assert her rights within marriage, free from the anxiety of being totally helpless should her husband leave her. In the following chapter, we focus on the
institution of marriage and consider if education has affected female students’ attitudes, and expectations of their future spouse, and their role within the partnership.
Chapter Three
Marriage
The Fate of the Indian Marriage System

The Tradition of Deference

According to the literature, education for women has brought about tremendous changes in Indian marriage and in family ideals and practices. Previously, the Indian ideal of marriage, the joint family system, seclusion within the home and consequent economic helplessness, all conspired to make it impossible for the woman to realise herself as an individual. In *Marriage and Family in India*, K.M. Kapadia describes how women were brought up from childhood to believe that they existed only in relation to men as a daughter, wife or mother, and hence, moulded their whole life on a pattern designed essentially to please men. Marriage was a social duty toward the family and the community, and there was little idea of individual interest. An Indian simile describes how, as a river merging itself into the ocean loses it’s identity, so a wife was supposed to merge her individuality with that of her husband. Her only concern in life should be to see that all services needed by her spouse were properly performed by her: the satisfaction of her husband being the sole joy of life. Sexual matters in Indian marriage did not play a dominant part. On the contrary, demands of personal gratification and pleasures were to be subordinated, and the marriage made a success by means of compromise and adjustment. In addition, the social background of the authoritarian joint-family, and caste, with its domination over all spheres of life, also allowed no opportunity for the recognition of any personal factor, individual interests or aspirations in the relations between husband and wife.

In the opinion of mainstream reformist thinking, women’s’ education produced better mothers and homemakers who were more capable of attending to the needs of all the family, and as more men began to be educated themselves, they began to view education as a desirable quality in a wife. *Women, Education and Family Structure* has illustrated how college educated men today want to marry ‘women of understanding’ who are able to distinguish right from wrong. As Steve Derne explains, ‘Given the fact that
many husbands prefer to marry women with at least some education it is not surprising that some fathers do support their daughters’ education\textsuperscript{11} and see a high school education as an essential attribute of marriageability. While fathers are interested in providing a daughter with skills to attract a suitable partner, mothers are more concerned with their skills in the experience within marriage itself. Women in traditional India have been described by many, including Kapadia and Anees Jung, as being hopelessly ignorant of the world around them and having no means of attaining the rights secured for them by legislation. As the husband was the centre of all her activities and interests in life, there was no question of raising a word against him, even when he was found to be ill-tempered, vicious, diseased or a drunkard. Among Helen E. Ullrich's informants, women who married before puberty felt handicapped by their own lack of knowledge and encouraged their daughters to obtain more education before getting married themselves. They hope their daughters will be more mature, have more opportunity to be economically independent if need be, become more self-confident and have a better sexual adjustment. As the young women learn how to defend or even assert themselves against their husband and in-laws and receive emotional preparation for the more intimate side of the relationship, through reading books about the subject, the resultant decreased fear and increased knowledge causes sexuality to become much more important in marriage. Such assertiveness has encouraged women to remain no longer in the background, as was traditionally the case. Compared to their mothers - who treated their husbands as their own personal gods - educated women today express their opinions, even on such matters as when to bear children. They also express their disappointments more openly and readily than previous generations and some will even expect to share decision-making and be dissatisfied if there is no companionship in their marriage since they now expect their primary support to be from their husbands and not their sisters-in-law as in their mothers’ day.

\textbf{Education as a Liability rather than an Asset}

However, such a lack of the deference, which was so highly esteemed in the traditional role of an Indian wife, was not approved of by prospective husbands and in-laws and, ironically, fathers of daughters who were educated ‘too much’ could actually find difficulty in attracting a suitable groom. It was evident that their principal responsibility for daughters was considered to be arranging a good marriage, and that this took priority over concerns with their daughters’ educational achievement. Not only were some women considered to be ‘too educated’, but also too old. Prolonging schooling delayed the age of marriage, which was traditionally at or before puberty, to around eighteen to twenty-five years of age. One of the traditional reasons for arranging the marriage of a girl while she is young is the fear that their daughters might not be able to control their sexuality since "many believe it is almost impossible for a young woman to avoid having sex after reaching the ages of twenty or twenty-two"22, particularly if she is at college and under the impression that she is free from restrictions and control. It is a fact that virginity and 'purity' are considered to be a prerequisite for any daughter-in-law, having sex will severely damage the marriage chances for a girl. Even if she does not "go astray", if she merely talks to a boy, Indian society will still view her with suspicion. In addition to this, parents are concerned by their daughters having to face sexual harassment at, or travelling to and from, college - instances of which are regularly publicised in the Indian press. Pitilessly, in Indian society it is the victims of sexual assaults who suffer severe damage to their reputations. It is, therefore, assumed that a single women in her mid-twenties is not likely to be a virgin and it becomes more difficult to arrange a marriage: the level of dowry demanded by the family of a potential husband will sometimes be raised to compensate for the likelihood of the woman having something wrong with her which prevented an earlier marriage.

It can be argued, of course, that education can also lower the level of dowry on the assumption that the women will gain paid employment and be able to make her own financial contribution to the household. The positive and negative effects of education upon the matter of dowry will be explored in further detail in the following chapter, but the main reason fathers educate their daughters is to advance their position in social

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standing which results in a higher level of dowry being expected by their future spouse. It is expected that a woman’s husband should be older and more educated than herself. The more educated a son is, the greater the dowry demanded, as his family expect a return for their financial investment in his schooling based on the assertion that the boy will be certain to find well-paid employment. Thus, the more education that a girl receives, the greater the cost of the dowry incurred, a factor of which fathers are well aware. The argument that a well-educated girl could also find well-paid employment allowing her to contribute to the household in this way, as an alternative to the payment of dowry, has not yet been fully accepted by the families of the husbands. Although the girls themselves are aware of the career prospects made available to them by modern education, potential suitors of 'career women' (usually those with college degrees) complain not only that they are too old and independently-minded, but also that they are unwilling to devote all of their time to housework. The prevalent view of society is that a wife's domestic responsibilities should be her main concern, and, although some education is necessary to help her fulfil this role, it should not be at the expense of her duties within the home. Fathers see their responsibility as providing a docile, obedient, hard-working home-maker, and they worry that unlike school graduates, college educated women are not adequately deferential enough to satisfy needs; particularly the wishes of the mother-in-law who expects to be served without protest or complaint, whatever difficulties arise. The husband and his mother certainly do not expect his wife to fight to get her own way. This expectation of subservience is partly the reason for the a wife to have an older and more educated husband, but this can drastically restrict the pool of eligible males from which a suitable husband can be found. Families who were actually keen to encourage their daughter's education and career may not have anticipated such marriage complications as, for example, the actual physical scarcity of well-educated men in their area who were not already married by the time their daughter was ready for a husband. There are, of course, certain cases where the wife is more highly educated than the husband, but these are rare and often the result of a marriage which is arranged at infancy.

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33 This issue is discussed with greater depth in Work and Employment, chapter two.
The Impact of Education on the Marriage System

Overall, as Helen E. Ullrich explains, the production of well-educated, career-oriented women implies more independent, less docile and subservient wives and daughters-in-law. Thus, although husbands do want an educated wife, her interests should be secondary to his and so she should pursue a career only if it fits with the husband's own employment interests and the lifestyle of his family. From the perspective of the in-laws, a woman's educational achievement, however professionally oriented, enhances her marriageability and not her employability status. Her personal aspirations are not considered relevant. Therefore, although there may be a changed ideology with respect to women and higher education, this does not seem to be the case in terms of the patrifocal family structure and its associated values. Nonetheless, the impact of education has certainly brought a few challenges, and even changes to the existing system, even though it was originally introduced to aid the rapid development of the nation state.\(^{44}\)

Many Indian families had a more conservative response, as they were aware of the socially problematic aspects of female education and were careful to send their daughters to the ‘right’ schools, such as the C.S.I. Training College For Women in Coimbatore, as well as ensuring they were married before being considered too old and too educated. Still, it is widely agreed in the literature that the increased emphasis on women’s education coincided with several factors greatly beneficial to the position of women in Indian society. This involved an increase in the age of women at marriage which was a positive occurrence for a number of reasons already discussed, as well as the fact that child marriage often prevented study beyond early primary schooling. This period of education expansion has also witnessed a rise in the number of women who have never married, which is partly connected to large-scale overseas migration, the rise of exogamy and the entrance of females into the labour market.\(^{55}\)

Paid employment allows women to support themselves should their marriage remain unarranged, or should they choose to pursue a career. Although the majority of students featured in the literature assume marriage is a goal, there are a sizeable number who would also like to combine a career with their role as wives, daughters-in-law and mothers, an aspiration

\(^{44}\) Refer to chapter one, entitled *Women’s Schooling in India.*

\(^{55}\) Exogamy is the term used to describe marriage outside one’s own caste.
often dependent on material paid employment outside the home. This type of work can undermine the traditional joint family and even encourage the support of the husband in terms of domestic duties, often against the wishes of his parents. A greater threat to the joint family is the increasing preference of educated women to reside within nuclear families, which allow greater freedom and individuality as elders no longer have to be consulted in every household matter. The couple are able to develop their own views and the compatibility of husband and wife takes priority over the compatibility of the whole family. Such companionship is crucial in allowing the discussion of differences to avoid severe conflict and even breakdown. Due to increased assertiveness and economic independence, it can be argued that, increasingly, it becomes an option for women to leave the family altogether, whatever the structure of it, as they would have the means to support themselves. It is said that this possibility has helped to promote greater equality within the home, with family members helping with domestic duties such as shopping, cooking or child-care. However, the likelihood of this occurring largely depends on the suitability of marriage partners, a matter over which parents remain in control. The prevention of love marriage, along with the continuation of dowry and maintenance of differences in age and educational achievement between a couple preserves the authority over - and subservience of - the woman.

So, is the patrifocal system experiencing a real and dangerous challenge, or are women still socialised into the belief that being a good wife and mother is their principal responsibility and that their own interests should be sacrificed in the interests of the family and wider community?
The Case of the C.S.I. Training College

All across India it is the concern of the father to arrange his daughter’s marriage into families of suitable status; this is both a primary duty and a necessity for maintaining the family’s honour. The daughter’s settlement in a prosperous family not only goes a long way to ensuring her happiness, but, because social contacts remain important in everything from obtaining paid employment to receiving credit, it is highly advantageous to marry sons from high-status families. As it is likely his daughter will have financial security against widowhood and he will have a very good relationship with his in-laws, a father is most comfortable when arranging the marriage himself, rather than risking the outcome of a ‘love’ marriage. This situation is not guaranteed, of course, which results in the ‘marriage market’ being very competitive, and much importance is placed on the selection. Although there was never any autonomous decision-making in a daughter’s choice of marriage partners, the girl was expected to participate in the selection process, albeit very discreetly, for, if she refused a potential partner, the parents would have to give a viable excuse, such as a clash of horoscopes in Hindu marriages. It was considered bad form to gain a reputation for refusing a suitor. When finding suitable bridegrooms became difficult (due to increased exogamy and overseas migration) and compulsory high-school education for females gave girls increased confidence and assertiveness, daughters began to insist on particular requirements being met. It even reached the stage that, in some instances, college-educated girls wanted to choose their own partners. Thus, education could initiate changes which transfer the power for arranging marriages to the couple themselves. However, this is only likely to occur among upper class university graduates, and was certainly not the case at the C.S.I. Training College For Women.

The Demand for ‘Love Marriage’

Many of the girls we interviewed did like the idea of ‘love’ marriage (which, curiously, is a phrase used only in India, where it is falsely assumed to be the antonym of an arranged marriage) and some even claim to want one themselves. However, when probed further, they admitted that they would in actual fact have an arranged marriage, for fear of offending their parents. Marriage carried out in defiance of parents was romanticised due to the assumption
that family interference makes the building of close understanding between couples very difficult.

Love marriage is better - before marriage you can understand the person. In arranged marriages you only meet the man once before but in love marriages you can talk freely. I would like to have a love marriage, but they [parents] will not allow, they are very strict. I would be afraid of my parents to have a love marriage. (Rangamma)

Love marriage is better. We will be able to understand each other and know all the strengths and weaknesses of his character. We don’t know this about a man if it’s an arranged marriage. I want a love marriage but I know my parents won’t agree. In arranged marriages, if there is any fight, the wife will run to her mother’s house and fight from there. If it’s a love marriage she will have to fight her own battles. I will have an arranged marriage - after three years my parents will start looking [for a partner] for me. (Indira)

Married women in South India (as opposed to the North where ties are often harder to sustain) benefit a lot from support given by their natal families and thus suffer greatly when it is withdrawn, as in the case of self-arranged marriages. This is a situation that the girls are very aware of and keen to avoid.

I like only arranged marriage. If we love a person, but he’s a bad man, we’ll be left alone. If it’s arranged, we can tell our parents and they’ll help. Take my father’s brother - his daughter had a love marriage, and her parents left her alone. She’s not happy. (Sonia)

I will have an arranged marriage. I like the idea because if there are future problems, then my parents will help. In a love marriage, when the child did not ask [her parent’s permission] her parents did not support her. (Gulabo)

The parents may still love their children and prefer to stay in contact with them if they have a ‘love marriage’, but feel bound by societal tradition and gossip to reject them, resulting in the alienation of sons as well as daughters, due to the loss of respect that the love marriage has brought on the family. For this reason it is likely that parents will sever contact with their offspring if they engage in a self-arranged marriage.

I want to have an arranged marriage to secure future support from parents. I don’t like love marriage - my brother has one and is suffering. We can’t help him because society will say bad
words against him. He is frightened and ashamed to meet my parents. They have no contact.

(Angela)

In love marriages, parents are not interested in [a] child’s problems. They give no support. I would be worried what people would say about me if I had a love marriage, because those that do are not treated well by society. They are neglected. My parents had a love marriage - my Dad’s parent’s rejected him. My parents split up. Love marriage is not stable.

(Tina)

Love marriages happen sometimes but it is not allowed by Indian society. Other people solve problems of arranged marriages, even the court will not help solve problems of love marriage but it will in arranged marriages.

(Nanjamma)

Even if parents were to give their blessing to their off-spring’s self-arranged marriages, the interviewees had a realistic approach to the matter. As students in an all-women college, they have little or no opportunity to meet suitable young men, nor is there any tradition of dating in India because of the assumption that it will lead to pre-marital sex.

I’ve talked to a Dutch girl, Helga, and she told me that most Western girls do everything with a guy or guys before marriage. Here, only virgins are accepted for the marriage market. They are exiled from society if word gets out [that she is not a virgin]! It is greatly looked down upon.

(Bella)

If you have a love affair, you get a bad name - even your lover won’t marry you.

(Fleur)

Therefore, most young people continue to rely upon, and trust, their parents to find them suitable spouses.

I really like the idea of love marriage. Love marriage is really nice because you can choose. But I don’t think it would be possible for me to have a love marriage as I never meet any men - that is, even if my parents would allow me to choose my own partner. They wouldn’t allow me because they would worry that the man would divorce me. Most love marriages end in divorce in England. In India we only marry once - and that is for life. Although I like the idea of love marriage, I don’t mind that my parents would choose my husband as I like them very much and I trust their judgement. They will have peace of mind if they choose my husband for me.

(Carol)
We don’t have that much of an idea [about men]. We can’t select the best person because of our age. Parents have more experience about life and about people. I’d rather my parents chose. (Gulabo)

Parents know our standard - we can’t select a good person as they can select. (Sonia)

Fear of a disastrous love marriage where no parental support is offered may keep women from having a love marriage without the consent or participation of their parents, but this is not wholly due to a lack of self-esteem and confidence or mental slavery, as many still feel entitled to a say in the final selection.

A girl can demand certain qualities, she can say to her mother and father what type of man she wants but she trusts her parents. (Akkamma)

My father will take a selection of men who he thinks are suitable and then I can pick one among them. (Sohini)

I will meet the man before I get married. Somebody brings a proposal, they [parents] think about it. If I say no, then I won’t get married. I get the final say. I can suggest someone, they [parents] might accept. (Mary)

In arranged marriages, the parents of the boy will come to the girl’s house for tea and biscuits. She will usually be about twenty years old. They come to see if they like. If they do, there will be one year for the families to get to know each other. The girl will decide within one year whether she wants to marry the boy or not. Some girls at college, because they are educated, will want to choose themselves. There is usually an objection if her parents are uneducated, but most parents that are educated will allow love marriages. Uneducated parents have a very narrow world view, and want the same life as themselves for their children. Educated parents have a more open, broader view. (Katherine)

Although some parents do not oppose love marriages in theory, they would be very unhappy if their child married out of their own caste. Thus, a love marriage is acceptable - yet only as so long as it is with the right person.
[My mother] wouldn’t allow a husband of a different caste or a different religion. She would, though, allow a love marriage if he was the same religion and caste. My sister had a love marriage to a close relation - that’s why my mother allowed it. Mother chose him. (Putlibeu)

Thus, a match might be initiated by the couple who meet, but it will be formally arranged by the parents if they are approving. They may even have subtly encouraged the particular ‘love’ match in the first place, as Prabhavathy’s mother did, viewing it as an appropriate one.

The Need for a ‘better’ Husband

Parental opposition and their lack of support and encouragement within the majority of love marriages should not be dismissed solely as proof of their tyranny but more a concern for their child’s well-being...

Some parents allow love marriages as long as the man has a good job and a good character. The problem is that girls get close [to men] and find their characters afterwards. Parents are very [concerned] about their daughter having a husband of good job and character.66 (Freesia)

...as well as their own.

If she selects a life partner, they [parents] will think that he [husband] will ignore them. He’ll spend all the money for his own sons and daughters...Very few [love marriage partners] help their mother and father-in-law...In India, parents are depending on their children to be with them [in old age] - so they won’t allow them to choose a life partner. (Wazira)

Nonetheless, this situation still perpetuates the patrifocal system. It is a common assumption that Western society is highly atomised with family ties loose and fragile. The need to avoid this scenario in India involves the provision of legitimate space for the participation in household affairs by the family and even the wider community. This is contrasted with the West where marriage is considered to be an alliance between two individuals which concerns no-one else. The opposition to individualism and concern with the wider effects on the family and community, is part of a greater dichotomy concerning East and West where the

66 This is, of course, also very common in the case of Western parents’ concern, as well as their children’s’ desire for their approval in choice of marriage partner.
traditional is set against the modern, the community against the individual, and compromise set against divorce. We discussed with one student the fact that thirty per cent of marriages in the United Kingdom end in divorce:

The arranged marriage system is much better. The parents spend a long time making a match. Also, the girl goes in with low expectations and therefore must adapt to make the marriage work. The wife tries very hard to adapt, and make it work. Western women don’t try at all, or, at least, not enough. It’s too easy to say “push off!” Indian women accept the marriage as their fate, their destiny. Some will try to persuade their husbands, but not too much. Thus, unlike Western women, they will not go in [to marriage] with too high expectations. They will go into marriage with very low expectations, thus they will not be disappointed. They’re more likely to be very pleased if their husband turns out to be very reasonable. Not every marriage is bad but you have to work hard at it to make it work. (Bella)

In arranged marriage, they don’t argue as much because they make sure that the man has a higher status - so it works better. (Celia)

The majority of students at the college are very accepting of the traditional higher status of the husband within marriage and the authority that it commands as they feel it is in their own best interests to do so.

I would prefer a slightly higher educated man so he can take care of me, in material, and most of all, in spiritual matters. (Hannah)

Men should be more educated because they are going to lead the family. He will be taking all the responsibilities, like money. Even if the woman works she will give the salary to her husband...

My father makes the decision in my parent’s marriage - they will discuss matters through. Like my mother, my father studied to twelve grade also. Even though they have equal education he has more power because he is a man. Mother is happy with the situation. (Gulabo)

So it appears that some of the girls do not have the confidence in themselves to rely on their own judgement, although they also know what is expected of them - and what the community will approve of.
Women are very proud, so they want a man who has a better education than they have. They will be ashamed otherwise... But then that situation just wouldn’t happen in arranged marriage - they would continue searching for a higher educated or better qualified husband.  

(Katherine)

If the girl’s [qualifications] are higher then...she’ll hate her husband for being less educated. If they go to a party, for example, if his social status is less than hers, it’s bad! In India they want all women to be under men - under the husband. They should marry equally or under men only.  

(Celia)

It is not only woman but men themselves who feel pressurised by the community to conform to the ‘ideal’ - some more than others.

It depends on the personal character if the husband wants a more or less educated [than himself] wife or not.  

(Katherine)

Some men don’t like other men to have wives more educated [than the husband] but others don’t mind. In arranged marriages men will have an inferiority complex if the wives are more educated than themselves because of these people [those that don’t accept female superiority]. It’s a habit of this world; women would not feel inferior in the same situation.  

(Gulabo)

Since men command authority in the relationship on the basis of having a better education, it is assumed that women will do so too in the same situation, which is not acceptable as it does not correspond with the traditional views of deference on the part of the wife.

If a woman is studying more than her husband then the man would not like to marry her because she will not respect him. She will treat him like a servant... Because she brings in more money, she feels she has more power... Women should obey the husband. He will help her, and will make her very happy. Women shouldn’t order men - only if something is needed very urgently then they should say “Please go and do this”  

(Tina)

Nonetheless, as many commentators have argued, increased education does, in some cases, lead to less acquiescence of this wifely requirement of subservience.
I don’t think it’s important for the husband to have more education than the wife. It should be equal. If it’s not, it brings more problems. (Freesia)

I won’t marry a man with more education - only, the same level. If he’s above he will keep us like a slave - say he is superior because he has studied more. Women who don’t have patience, and who have more education than their husband, will treat their husband badly. It’s okay for a husband to have more education, but it’s better to be the same. (Putlibai)

A minority of the students claimed they would assert their rights with their husbands in order that they could have more control over their own lives, but explained they would only take the argument so far. They were not prepared to jeopardise the marriage, however strongly they felt about the matter.

Men prefer women who are uneducated as they can have more control over them. Women who are educated have more power in their marriage, they demand more. (Sohini)

Women can manage all problems but we will make problems through bad decisions. They [men] have money, power to do everything, but we don’t. He can manage - he has power. If she tries, elders will see that woman and will think she is preaching to the man. We will not fight! We’ll discuss what we are both saying and then we’ll see which is better. If we fight he’ll be very angry with me for doing so. It shows there is no understanding between he and me. (Venkamma)

We [women] have the willpower to manage, but our decision isn’t good. We get confused. We have to let him make more decisions - but I will take decisions - I have equal rights in life! I’ll tell him how but if he won’t accept, I’ll drop the matter. It’s very dangerous to fight. If you fight more, he’ll tell you to leave. (Chinamma)

The girls had learnt that it was not a good thing for the Indian wife to fight.

Why do Western women want it so much their own way? They argue too much. Men do have the power in marriages in India, yes, but some women, especially educated women will try hard to persuade her husband in matters such as letting them work [outside the home]. Me - I will try and put a brain in his head! But if he is arrogant or not reasonable at all, I will give in. That is the way of Indian women - to give in. [our emphasis] Most Indian men are reasonable, but not all of them. (Bella)
It’s not good for the family for a wife to have a higher status, so it’s more peaceful if the husband earns more. Even if he’s not educated more, society likes him to be above. She’s not bothered whether she’s above or below. I’ll say, “you’re my husband - I’ll be devoted to you”. (Wazira)

They knew they should, and knew they had to, put the expectations and interests of men and wider society before those of their own.

In my community, the men should be more educated than his wife. Only some persons allow their wives to go out to work so that, if only their husbands are going out to work, then the man can still tell the wife what is going on in the world. Education is not the most important thing to a wife in her marriage partner - understanding is more important. I won’t mind a partner who is equal or below me as long as my partner has understanding and can discuss matters of the world. But in a rural area, there would be a prestige problem, and I would prefer a man to be more educated. Husbands will have an inferiority complex to have a better educated wife. They want to have supreme power and they’re scared that women will overrule him. Women do not have an inferiority complex. Culture and traditions just make women like that. (Violet)

Thus, overall, it appears that education does not give rise to the opportunity for compatibility within marriage if true compatibility is only achieved through an equal status. However, there is a strong desire for a suitable level of agreement between husband and wife in order that they can discuss matters of the world, although it is expected that the husband will have the final say. It is perhaps possible that women’s demand for increased understanding is not only proof of the ability of education to provide a greater degree of autonomy - at least to an extent - but also, is, in reality, the most they can ask for. Most importantly, it is the most they want to ask for.

The women of today do express themselves - however, like their mothers, they also regard their husband as their own personal god.

I want my husband to be well educated so someone can be there to clear my doubts. I’m a human being. I will have some faults, so someone must be there to correct me, to guide me. (Angela)
In order to realise if education has really changed attitudes or not, it is important to understand the experience of the students’ mothers. It is possible that they too voiced their opinions, for, in reality, it is often the case that attitudes, such as subservience, are questioned on a day to day basis. Although the common assumption is that, a generation ago, women were silent and obedient, there is evidence in the literature that they made an effort to affect important decisions made within the household. Sylvia Vatuk gives an example of a *khandan* which is a somewhat variant form of the typical patrifocal family where “women could exert considerable influence within their families, and women of strong personality often dominated intra-family decision-making. They could even act in opposition to their husbands’ wishes if they had the support of natal kin living in the same household or close by, or if they had property or income at their disposal.” Similarly, Kapadia considers that, in the past, ’if a wife who had committed adultery was provided for and allowed to resume her authority and rights as a wife after her next menstrual period, it is too much to suppose that a wife who was a little quarrelsome, rebellious or harsh was superseded.’

**The Realistic Approach of Students to Marriage**

It appears that the ideals of the students have changed from those of their mothers, since they now often desire their own choice of partner - as long as they receive parental approval. However, this aim to achieve a greater level of understanding and compatibility has, in some instances, been accomplished in arranged marriage, albeit within the overarching patrifocal system. Nonetheless, it is a patriarchal structure that enforces the subordination of women and the dowry system, which itself can lead to the death of over a thousand women in Delhi alone each year due to the inability to meet increased demand by their husbands and families for further payment. It must be said that the girls are not oblivious to the problems of arranged marriage.

> The Hindi marriage is like bringing the lamb to the slaughter...Even girls who are educated are not looking forward to marriage. They are scared of it.  
> (Margaret)

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77 Regrettfully, the restrictions of our research, by way of time period as well as language problems, did not allow us to obtain raw data on this subject.

78 Kapadia, 1955, p.96-97
Even if women want to change the marriage system, they don’t have the power. If they did have the power, they should only marry someone they love. They shouldn’t be forced. There are too many suicides because of this. (Fleur)

They are, though, even more aware that having a ‘love’ marriage is not a practical option that is available to them: not only is it not yet accepted by society, but, also, those that do enter into such an ‘agreement’ are generally in a worse situation than those who have an arranged marriage.

Love marriage is not bad exactly, if it works out it’s good. Generally, though, I look around and I don’t see love marriages working out. (Mary)

In the present situation, it can be argued that women’s relationships with men are often based on fear and inequality, and thus it is difficult to envisage a partnership based on trust, respect and friendship lasting beyond the ‘honeymoon’ period of sexual attraction.

In love marriages there will be many problems in their life. (Kasturbai)

Most love marriages fail. Partners in love marriages try to impress each other - then it doesn’t work. (Akkamma)

Love marriage is not good - he’ll only see her money [dowry]. He wants her body, and then he’ll go. He won’t look after her. (Celia)

I’m not interested in love marriages. I don’t believe men, I can’t trust them. (Wazira)

Fear of the unknown, of the harsh world outside the boundaries of familiarity, makes the students unwilling to give up the security of parental support. This is through no fault of their own as, due to the structures of society, most have not been socialised with the skills - and conviction - to do so.
Love marriages are okay if they [students] are educated and older, but it’s difficult if they are very young. Also, others will not have concern to help them. Only if they understand. If they can stand on their own feet, I like love marriage - as long as they are mature enough. (Katherine)

With such an unattractive alternative, it appears the girls have no choice but to enter into arranged marriages, for, although it could be described as “little more than a meal ticket and security blanket”\(^9\), at least the partner will be socially and economically on a par with, and accepted by, the family.

Since there are cases of failure in both love and arranged marriages, marriage itself as an institution has sometimes been seen as a means of oppression and there has been an assertion of the need for alternatives of marriage. Yet, it is difficult to discover other options that are available to the young women of the C.S.I. Training College. Giddens, in his ‘Transformation of Intimacy’, predicts the increase in short-term, cohabititative relationships which last only as long as both partners are satisfied with the situation, thus avoiding the bonds of marriage. However, not only does this appear to have detrimental effects on the upbringing of children, it is unlikely that Indian society is prepared for such a scenario. Prevailing attitudes would not give young Indian women or men the credit of having the maturity and responsibility necessary for relationships like Giddens describes. In any case, the students are aware that it is not possible to live alone as a young woman, not only due to the dangers of violence and sexual harassment, but also due to the strong disapproval that would be expressed with the assumption of immorality. Rather, it appears advantageous to approach the question of women’s options not in terms of their independent economic options, such as an equitable labour market, access to well-paying jobs, a share in the family’s assets and a half-share of husbands’ earnings following divorce, should this be possible. Nevertheless, marriage need not necessarily be viewed solely as a negative institution. In a letter to \textit{Manushi}, Pramudini Pradhan argues that the practice ‘has been evolved to impose discipline on the sexual behaviour and sustenance of [the] human race...[since]...individuals tend to behave in a way that benefit themselves and tend to forget the social responsibilities.’ She goes on to state, ‘we no more believe that marriages are sacrosanct. But we cannot ignore the importance of marriage as a social institution...Till now

\(^9\) Rasna Warah, in a letter to \textit{Manushi}, No. 83, p.37.
we have not come up with any alternatives to marriage which will give better life to both women and men in society. Thus, given the inequalities existing in India in the present moment, it seems that until the situation changes, an arranged marriage is the best ‘option’, if not the only option, made available by contemporary society. Considering that this is the first generation of females to be educated on such a large scale, it remains to be seen if their protests will eventually result in a change in the views of their community.

As the issue of dowry plays an important part in the whole marriage scenario, the next chapter will go on to explore the topic in greater depth. We will consider the nature of modern dowry, and the social problems it has caused, investigating the inevitability of providing dowry and the ways in which the qualifications possessed by a woman may serve to increase or decrease the payment.

\cite{10} Manushi, No. 83, p.39.
Although dowry was declared illegal in 1961 with the Dowry Prohibition Act the custom remains widespread throughout contemporary Indian society. It is generally viewed in a negative light, blamed for causing much physical and mental distress to both the bride and her parents. Indeed Srivinas has described the institution as ‘literally a burning problem,’ referring to the cases of supposed suicide or murder, initiated by the pressures of dowry demands, in which the wives are found burnt to death after being dowsed in Kerosene. For example, six hundred and ninety women died of burns in Delhi alone between January 1st and November 1st 1983. Evidently, the pressures placed on the bride and her kin are immense, so the amount of dowry demanded is of great concern to those involved. We wish to address this worry in the following discussion and relate it to the measure of dowry that a woman must provide the groom’s kin with when she marries, as well as the ways in which the level of her education might serve to reduce or increase it. Ultimately we intend to link these debates to the question of whether girl’s education leads to autonomy for women, and consider if the institution of dowry undermines this possible correlation.

The Changing Nature of Dowry through History

In his paper ‘Some Reflections on Dowry,’ Srivinas describes modern dowry as consisting of:

large sums of cash frequently amounting to a few lakhs (one hundred thousand) of rupees - transferred along with furniture, gadgetry, costly clothing and jewelry, from the bride's kin to the groom's kin. In addition, the bride's kin have to meet all the expenses of the wedding including travel expenses of the groom's party.

However, it appears that dowry has not always assumed this character and that it is important that we grasp an understanding of the nature of modern-day dowry as distinct from pre-colonial dowry.

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Pre-Colonial Dowry: Northern and Southern Systems

Srivinas emphasises that we must distinguish modern dowry from pre-British dowry. The Pre-British system consisted of two ideal types, one predominantly shaping the practices in the north, and the other conditioning practices in the south. Dyson and Moore label the north as incorporating Gujarat, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya, Punjab and Haryana, and the south as Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Maharashtra.¹

According to Srivinas, traditionally the northern system is characterised by hypergamy in which a bride must marry a man of a higher status than herself in order to increase her own status. This both reflects and results in status asymmetry between the bride's kin and the groom's. Traditionally, the girl is ‘gifted’ to the groom according to a practice termed kanyadan, furthermore she must be accompanied by a subsidiary cash offering or Dakshina which was the dowry. Other items, Stridhna, were donated to the bride, at or after the wedding, by her natal kin or by her husband, and these were her property, at least in practice. Theoretically, both families benefit from the union, the girl's kin improve their status, while the boy's kin receive cash, jewelry etc., in the form of a dowry. The presentation of dowry is integral to this process; it provides the opportunity for the bride’s kin to improve their status as the quantity presented reflects on their social standing. Additionally, it is given in the hope that their daughter will be treated well by her in-laws, in spite of her inferiority.

By contrast, status asymmetry was missing in the southern practice, and consequently so was dowry, as marriages were essentially isogamous.⁵ This custom was supplemented by a liking for cross-cousin and cross-uncle and niece marriage, a practice where, in its purest form, a girl is expected to marry either her mother’s brother’s son, or her mother’s brother, though in practice the link between the bride and groom is rarely so simplistic, as the term cousin is employed generally to refer to distant cousins or even close friends of the family. Accordingly, rather than a one way payment of dowry, an exchange process occurred, whereby the groom’s family paid a bride price, generally saris and jewelry,

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¹Dyson, T. and Moore, M. ‘On Kinship Structure, Female Autonomy, and Demographic Behaviour in India,’ Population and Development Review 9, no.1, (March 1983)
⁵Isogamy is a marriage system in which the bride’s family has the same power and status as the groom’s.
to the bride's family who then reciprocated by providing gifts and hospitality at the wedding. Furthermore, marriage stimulated an on-going exchange relationship between ‘affinal kin.’

**Modern Dowry**

Today the two systems are not quite so distinct. Modern dowry, as described by Srivinas above, exists throughout India and is typified by the northern method of one-way dowry payment from the bride's family to the groom's, a totally new development in the south. This relates to the element of status asymmetry in modern marriage, described in the previous chapter on marriage, when the bride must be not only socially inferior, but intellectually inferior also. Srivinas argues that the evolution of dowry in the south, was caused by the ‘forces let loose by British rule such as monetization, education and the introduction of the organised sector.’

Similarly, Professor Scarlett Esptein identifies four important variables which initiated the move to a dowry system. Firstly, increased wealth which lead to more lavish weddings; secondly, women were no longer allowed to work on the land, and were viewed as being more ‘demanding’ or dependent, so instead of representing an asset that the groom’s family should compensate her family for, she became a liability (consequently her family had to compensate the groom's.) Thirdly, greater male education had become costly for parents, so they felt justified in asking for money from the bride's kin, especially as she would be benefiting from his earnings. Finally, low caste people imitated higher caste Brahmins, by practicing a dowry system, in the hope of raising their social status. This was labeled by Srivinas as Sanskritising.

The withdrawal of women from the fields meant that a woman's only ‘career’ or chance of a secure future, was to marry a wealthy man, and as there were few, her kin had to offer cash and expensive commodities to her prospective husband’s kin, in order to ensure her marriage. Srivinas stresses that character of these presentations differs from the dowry given in former times. He argues that ‘modern dowry is not Dakshina or Stridhan,’ these were modest amounts by comparison to the ‘substantial if not huge sums’ given today. Moreover, whereas Dakshina and Stridhan were ‘volunteered’ by the bride’s kin, contemporary dowry is ‘demanded’ by the groom’s kin. Similarly, while Stridhna was

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formerly perceived as women’s property, Srivinas would question if this is respected today. A contemporary wedding is regarded by Srivinas as an event when the groom’s family can acquire coveted material objects of modern technology such as a video cassette recorder or a fridge. He labels this aspect of dowry as the ‘cargo cult’, which he views in a negative light, along with the entire modern dowry process. ‘What it [dowry] leads to is certainly the impoverishment of the girl’s parents, and it does not always buy security for the girl. There is no guarantee that it will prevent the groom’s parents from making new demands on the bride’s.’

Through his criticism, Srivinas appears to be suggesting that modern dowry, as opposed to pre-British dowry is based on greed and growing materialism in present-day Indian society, and that today’s dowry is the major cause of the maltreatment of women. This form of argument has been condemned by Madhu Kishwar for being ‘extremely misleading and useless in combating dowry.’ She maintains that such an analysis remains popular as it represents a mode through which lectures can be given against the supposed greed inherent in dowry, which avoids serious consideration of the real questions involved such as the unequal distribution of property between sons and daughters at the time of inheritance. This issue requires evaluation of familial and conjugal relations aimed at discovering ways to restructure and redistribute property control in a more egalitarian way. In a later article, Kishwar reaffirms her argument, proposing that the real problem with dowry does not lie in the wealth itself, but in who controls it. Women are not expected to control wealth but to surrender it to their husband or brothers. Accordingly, a wife is not treated as an individual who governs her own life and possessions but as an ‘asset’ herself who must perform a number of functions, of which bringing wealth into the household is one.

Dowry as Women’s Inheritance?

An explanation which is often cited in favour of the requirement for dowry is that it acts as an instrument through which daughters can receive their share in parental assets. Underlying this polemic is the assumption that while a son is expected to remain in direct contact with his

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9Srivinas, M.N. (1984) p.15
10Srivinas, M.N. (1984) p.28
parents, from whom he will inherit, by contrast a daughter effectively ends her membership of her natal family when she marries. Consequently, a wedding is considered to be the suitable occasion for a woman to acquire whatever she can. Some authors such as J. Goody and S.J Tamiah, therefore describe dowry as a pre-mortem inheritance which women receive when they leave their parental home.\textsuperscript{13} Ursula Sharma disagrees with them, arguing that they are ‘stretching the term inheritance too far’ as women do not acquire a fixed portion of property, because the amount of their gift is arranged in accordance to the marriage market, and therefore is subject to change.\textsuperscript{14} Furthermore, dowry is presented to the husband’s family, and is usually controlled by his parents, so it can not be described as ‘inheritance’, as the transaction occurs essentially within the same generation. More importantly, the girl has little or no say in what happens to the dowry, so it can hardly be viewed as her property. ‘Contrary to the dominant ideology and the terminology of traditional Hindu law, dowry property is not women’s wealth, but wealth that goes with women. Women are vehicles by which it is transmitted rather than its owners.’ \textsuperscript{15} Likewise, Madhu Kishwar asserts that when a large quantity of cash is presented as part of the dowry, it is typically offered to the son-in-law, his father, or other senior male members of the family, and it is uncommon that the money given is in the daughters name. Other dowry items presented, such as jewelry, which are theoretically hers, may be taken over by her in-laws, and even incorporated into her husband’s sister’s dowry.

...dowry is not in fact a daughter’s fair share nor is it a way of compensating her for a lack of inheritance rights...A woman has little say in deciding how much money is to be spent on her dowry and the wedding celebrations. Nor does she have any control over how that money is to be allocated...they[bride’s mother and father] would do better to put the money in the bank as a fixed deposit in trust in her name.\textsuperscript{16}

\textbf{Dowry as Compensation?}

As Srivinas and Prof. Scarlett Esptein indicated earlier, dowry may be considered as a form of ‘compensation’ given to the groom's kin in exchange for taking on the responsibility of a

\textsuperscript{16}Kishwar, M. \textit{Manushi}, no.34, (1986) p.4.
dependent woman. This is what Srivinas defines as ‘the doctrine of perpetual dependence of a woman: when unmarried she is dependent on her father, after marriage, on her husband and when widowed, on her son.’ In a similar manner, Kishwar argues that ‘women are viewed as economic liabilities to be passed on from parents to husbands.’ A ‘cost-benefit ratio’ type of analysis, developed by Comaroff, is employed by Ursula Sharma to evaluate how marriage payments are viewed as a form of compensation. According to Comaroff, ‘dowry compensates the groom’s family for the addition of a dependent, non-productive member, whilst bride wealth compensates the bride’s family for loss of an active productive member.’

If we relate this type of argument to the question of whether a woman’s education increases or reduces the amount of dowry supplied, we might expect that the donation would decrease if her education gives her the potential to earn wages. However, in reality the outcome is more complicated. Van der Veen proposes that in some regions of India, it is feasible that a bride with a respected earning ability, by way of academic achievement, will be able to marry well with a lower dowry than a girl with no qualifications although it will not eradicate the payment entirely. Murickan counteracts this argument by illustrating that in certain areas throughout India the woman’s level of education does not affect the amount of dowry she must give. Sharma accounts for contradictions in the ‘cost-benefit’ ratio theory by evaluating the economic donations made by women in relation to those made by men. She argues that it may be viable to argue that the spread of dowry has been preceded by a deterioration in ‘women’s capacity to contribute to the household income compared with that of men, even though there has not been any diminution of women's economic capacity.’ Consequently women remain essentially dependent on men, as it would not be possible to earn enough to maintain the household on their own. Moreover, it is unlikely that they have control over the money that they gain, so we would be mistaken if we imagined that their wages would give them any type of independence.

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18Kishwar, M. Manushi, no.34, (1986) p.9
From this perspective even educated or working women are viewed as economic liabilities, or dependents, who therefore require a dowry at marriage. Observations made by a number of authors appear to confirm Sharma’s analysis of the phenomenon of educated or employable women presenting dowry. For example, Mukhopadhyay and Seymour emphasise that the higher the level of education a girl has achieved, the larger the dowry she should be expected to bring.

Given that dowry demands increase with the educational achievements and hence future job opportunities of the potential husband, the family of an "M. Tech" daughter from a prestigious institution may have to be extremely wealthy to afford dowry which they can expect the family of any potential husband to demand.  

The significant factor, which Sharma hinted at, is the level of the man’s wage. Considering that a woman is seen as a dependent, it follows that the parents of a well-paid man will feel that any woman who marries him will be benefiting considerably. Therefore, they will feel justified in asking for a dowry to ‘compensate’, regardless of the woman’s potential to earn. This has been explored by Steve Derne who argues that ‘dowry is based on what a boy can expect to earn (and thus how well he can help the girls' family) not on what a girl's education costs.’

**Inequalities inherent within the marriage system**

Compounding this issue is the imperative that a husband should be older and more educated than his wife. Again this aspect has been explored in detail in Chapter three on marriage, but its significance requires us to re-examine it here. In relation to dowry, it means that the more a girl is educated, the higher up the social scale her parents must look for her future partner, and thus the larger the dowry will be. As Derne puts it: ‘This imperative creates further dowry problems for the father who seeks to arrange the marriage of a daughter who has a college degree.’ Madhu Kishwar also investigates this issue, highlighting the problem of girls aging while they remain in education which again increases dowry.

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24Mukhopadhyay, C.C. and Seymour, S. (Ed.’s) (1994), p.120
Even if she has acquired more education or a better paid job, these are not always considered sufficient compensation for the age handicap. The dowry for a highly educated daughter is likely to be larger rather than smaller because the amount of dowry is calculated according to the market value of the prospective son-in-law.  

Ultimately, Derne contends that fathers are inclined to restrict their daughter’s education, and through their actions men perpetuate the ‘existing patrifocal family structure and ideology.’ This constitutes gender-differentiated family roles in which women's primary duties are in the private sphere of the home, while men’s are in the public world of work.

If we relate these considerations to the issue of female autonomy, and the role education might play in achieving it, it seems that equation is somewhat unbalanced. How can it be possible for a girl who is educated to achieve any sense of autonomy, if her parents are required to supply an increased dowry, given that dowry is founded on the notion that a woman is dependent on her husband? It follows that if a woman’s parents have to offer a larger amount, she is still viewed as a liability which her future husband has been worthy enough to take on. Ultimately, as Derne argues, the custom of dowry appears to maintain the patriarchal family with all the gender inequalities that exist within it. Considering the strength of these structures it is difficult to envisage how education could lend women autonomy within the household.

27 Kishwar, M, Manushi, no.34, (1986) p.4
The Case of C.S.I Training College

The custom of dowry was accepted as being prominent within the communities that our interviewees lived in, though most of them acknowledged that the system is in theory illegal, but was difficult to combat in practice mainly as a result of social pressures.

Dowry is only abolished in books and words. (Angela)

Dowry is illegal but the law is not enforced. The government is not interested. Usually girls’ parents don’t report people who ask for dowry because they are ashamed—the girl is seen as unlucky if they have to give a dowry. (Fresha)

Disapproval of Dowry

The majority of the students that we interviewed were disparaging about the dowry system and, like Srivinas, connected it with greed and horror stories of ‘dowry death’ which they had encountered in the media.

There was one girl whose parents-in-law asked for a dowry and when her parents refused, the girl was beaten up by her in-laws. She was suffering so much that she hanged herself. (Tina)

Dowry is an important thing in our culture. I don’t like dowry, it causes ill-treatment, because of it wives are committing suicide. It [dowry] goes to the husband’s house - they will torture her and she will die. (Sonia)

No one should try to get a dowry, it’s because of dowry that girls are dying or not getting married at all. (Kamalamma)

My family don’t pay dowry. They [groom’s family] are asking one or two lakh [hundreds of thousands] rupees. It is very expensive, they are asking too much, it causes problems. (Rangamma)
The main criticism directed towards dowry corresponds with Srivinas’ concerns that its material value has become more important than the value of human life. Curiously several respondents proposed that giving dowry was like ‘selling a girl’, despite the fact that the dowry goes in the same direction as her. We can only assume that by this they meant that in the process of evaluating the amount of dowry, a girl is effectively given a price tag, yet instead of her parents receiving the payment, they receive a bill from the groom’s kin. Ultimately they must pay the price for having their daughter taken off their hands. This corresponds to our earlier discussion of compensation whereby the groom’s family must be compensated for taking on another female dependent. Essentially, the system was perceived as demeaning for women.

Dowry is too bad. It’s like selling a person.  
(Tina)

Most girls have to pay, this should not happen. They [husband’s family] think of dowry more than the girl.  
(Gulabo)

I don’t like dowry. It’s like selling a daughter. If he [husband] is loving money, he [husband] will not love a woman properly.  
(Angela)

The dowry system is very, very, very, bad! If they [men] really want to marry us they should get to know our character. Dowry has become the most important thing and they do not recognise the girl’s character.  
(Joanne)

The dowry system is like selling a girl. Many families-in-law send the girl back home - even with children if no dowry is paid.  
(Hannah)

Inevitability of Dowry Payment

Although most of the girls condemned the institution of dowry, several admitted that their parents would have to pay dowry for them. Non-payment was not an option if parents wished to find an approved partner for their daughter within the marriage market, described above, where high status men are much sought after and consequently can demand however much they like.
My father doesn’t agree [with dowry] but has to pay. (Lakshimi)

In our area there is a big system, my family says that they will pay for me but I don’t agree with it. But to be able to get married we have to give dowry. (Chinnamma)

A number of girls conceded that they could think of some justification for paying dowry. Fundamentally, this related to the importance given to high social standing which, as suggested earlier, dowry would enable them to achieve. Associated with this is the significance of peer pressure in society. They described the fear of being gossiped about by relatives, friends and neighbours if not enough, or no dowry was given, which would bring shame upon their family. Ultimately, dowry was viewed as a small price to pay to improve and ensure the good name of the family.

My mother has to pay a dowry to my future husband. I think that it’s quite worth it. We are very society minded. I’ve heard of cases without dowry, and people talk, they think there’s something wrong with you. A fair amount of dowry is worth it if you can stand on what you agree upon. It’s worth paying dowry because it conforms with the way people think. For the sake of the family, it’s better that way. (Mary)

Belief that education will reduce the cost of Dowry

A number of respondents suggested that there was an inverse relationship between education and dowry. Several ways in which education was perceived to lessen the burden of dowry were proposed. Firstly, it was suggested that if a woman is collecting a wage, her parents-in-law may acknowledge that she is able to contribute to the household and so will not feel such a need to be ‘compensated’. Consequently they may demand a reduced amount.

In some places, like Coimbatore, it helps that a woman has an education in that it will lower the dowry price. (Akkamma)

If the girl is educated, and able to work then it lowers the dowry. (Fresha)

If a woman is educated, it rather reduces the dowry because she’s got the potential to work. Quite a few families do accept that. (Mary)
Evidently, this issue relates to the notion of ‘compensation’, which arose in the literature above, in that it views dowry as a form of payment given to the in-laws to reimburse them for taking on another ‘dependent’.\textsuperscript{29} The students we talked to seemed to think that a woman could escape the label of dependency if she contributed economically to the household, thus also escaping a large dowry. Although as we discovered above, the way in which this works in practice is not so straightforward, and must be investigated in relation to the husband’s earning capacity.\textsuperscript{30}

Secondly, our respondents argued that if a girl is well qualified, she may be able to find a job which pays enough for her to earn the initial dowry payment, thus shifting the responsibility from her parents onto herself. This aspect was not mentioned in the literature we encountered, thus appears to be a relatively unusual phenomenon. It would seem that traditionally it was the bride’s father who was expected to provide the dowry, and there was no question that anyone else should consider helping him, least of all the bride herself. If one contemplates the role gossip plays in social control, it is surprising that such a deviance has escaped criticism, yet it emerges that certain of these girls foresaw that they would aid their father in presenting a dowry.

If a woman is educated, and can earn her own money, then her parents shouldn’t have to pay dowry as it [her wage] is traditionally for supporting dowry. (Fresha)

When women get educated, they can get a job so they can save for their dowry. (Hannah)

If a girl is going to work, then she can save for her dowry. (Violet)

In a more abstract sense, some students believed that education allowed women to question the issue of dowry, and gave them the confidence to stand up and fight against it.

If every girl thinks the dowry should stop, they should learn and be bold to fight. (Fresha)

However, when one reflects on the various forms of education, or should we say \textit{schooling} that exist, many of which tend to restrict personal thought rather than encourage it, one begins...
to wonder how effective a woman’s experience at school will be in developing her self esteem. Furthermore, considering the strength of the institution of family and the practice of dowry, it seems unrealistic and naive to believe that any individual could attempt to combat them, no matter how confident he or she may feel.

**Disbelief in the notion that education would reduce Dowry**

In contrast to the above discussion, we found that a minority of the students we interviewed were cynical about the idea that education could diminish the amount of dowry that a woman would have to present. This accords with Sharma’s argument that we must review the contribution a woman has the potential to make in relation to the potential earnings her husband is likely to make. Only then can we predict her chances of reducing or eradicating her dowry price.

> Education doesn’t lower a dowry, people talk about it, but that’s not the situation. (Hannah)

> Doctors and engineers have to give dowry, it doesn’t matter if the girl is a doctor herself. (Akkamma)

These statements are founded on the notion that more education entails more dowry. Derne’s discussion on the obligation for women to marry a man with a higher social, economic and academic status than herself is relevant here; parents are faced with two options: either reduce their daughters education and lower her dowry, or increase her education and raise her dowry. This issue was advanced by the C.S.I, T. and V. Training College students who argued that this consideration could serve to limit a woman’s education, as education represents one of the factors exacerbating the level of dowry.

> A Woman must look for a higher status husband which means that there is more dowry to be paid.

> In rural areas, a poor father suffers a lot if he gets his daughter educated to a certain level. He feels that he must find a man to the same or better level, and thus the boy’s family will demand a high dowry as compensation for their investment into the son’s education, or him having his own business. There is little dowry demanded if the girl is little educated as she will seek a lower status man. Dowry restricts the girl’s chances of education. [So] she is given just a small amount - just

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31 Refer to discussion in the Introduction on differences between the definitions of education and of schooling.
enough to teach her children...People would rather pay dowry than pay for education. This has to change. Dowry is stopping girls’ education. (Violet)

It [dowry] causes problems for poor people. They don’t want to study because of it [can’t afford to] thus they won’t get a well paid job.
(Joanne)

Injustice of dowry for educated/working women and Justice of it for uneducated women
As well as questioning the theory that education would lead to a smaller dowry, some students also expressed a sense of the iniquity inherent in the system. They felt it was unfair that while the high costs of a boy’s education could be employed as a bargaining tool, raising the level of dowry his parents could demand by way of compensation, the expense of a girl’s education was not considered as a viable reason for limiting the amount. They felt that they had put much time, money and effort into acquiring qualifications, which could enable them to contribute to their future household making them less of a financial liability, and they wanted their in-laws to recognise this by reducing dowry.

When we are married and if we are earning money, we give the money to him[husband] only, so why should we give him dowry?...We are educated, so we don’t want to give dowry. (Venkamma)

Parents of a son will say, “We’ve spent a lot of money on him, we want to get it back”, but a girl’s parents can’t do the same. (Wazira)

The boy’s family say it’s the girl’s family’s problem if they have invested a lot of money into her education, they don’t let it stop them asking for a high dowry price. (Violet)

While a number of girls felt that since they had gone some effort to acquire an education they should be exempt from dowry, their uneducated counterparts should not.

If a woman doesn’t have many qualifications then she should give dowry. (Venkamma)

If a woman is not earning, she should have to pay dowry, or if she has studied up to tenth standard.
Conclusion

To conclude, although the majority of our interviewees disagreed with the practice of dowry, arguing that it was greedy and demeaning to a woman, most acknowledged the difficulties of avoiding it. The entire marriage system revolves around the provision of dowry, given that a woman must marry a man of a higher status and so therefore must compensate for the apparent inconvenience she will cause to her in-laws. Moreover, if society discovers that a woman has married without taking dowry, she will be highly disapproved of and gossiped about. Considering the importance placed on achieving acceptance from members of the community, it is not surprising that this acts as an incentive to donate a dowry. Educational qualifications were thought to reduce dowry payment by some students, as it was imagined that their in-laws would recognise their potential to find paid employment and so contribute to the household economy. Others, while not envisaging that their education would reduce or eradicate the demand for dowry, foresaw that their capacity to earn a wage gave them the opportunity to aid their parents in saving for it. Some students voiced stronger opposition to the argument that education can decrease dowry, and believed instead that it might increase it. Finally, a number of interviewees were annoyed that educated women should have to give dowry. They highlighted the fact that their parents had spent a substantial amount of money on their education which would enable them to find paid employment, and contribute to their future household. As a consequence they felt that they should be exempt from providing a dowry. Aside from these issues, the fact remains that most of the girls we interviewed will have to take a dowry with them when they marry which seems to suggest that women are still thought of as dependents who need to be compensated for. In relation to the question of autonomy, this would appear somewhat to undermine a woman’s chance of obtaining any type of recognition of her rights or acknowledgment of her opinions given that although she has the ability to provide for her family, she is still seen as a liability.
Conclusion

“We can think but we can’t do.”

On the face of it, the girls’ actions are, or will be, within the patriarchal structure. While they were studying for a vocational course, specifically leading to paid employment, many continued to emphasise the primary importance of education in improving women’s role as wife and mother,. This corresponds to the original aim of the educational reformers during the nineteenth century, referred to throughout our discussion, who were keen to educate women specifically because they were viewed as the key socialisers within the family. It was thought that by educating women, the whole family would benefit. Today this aim seems to have changed very little, and was reflected in the attitudes of the girls we interviewed who frequently expressed their intention to use their knowledge to teach their own children.

Of course it’s important for women to be educated, because the family depends on the women, because it’s the mother who gets to talk to the kids. Only if the ladies are educated, will they be able to pass knowledge down to the younger generation.
(Mary)

If we are educated, then we can understand all sorts of things, also we can help our children to develop properly.
(Chinamma)

It is still important for women to be educated, so that she can teach her children and the people around her.
(Freesia)

It follows then that opportunities opened up by education outside the private sphere, for example paid employment, seem to be reduced and only appear to be viewed as an extended duty of a woman in her role as wife and mother. The primary reasons for women’s involvement in paid employment were not to enhance her own economic position, but rather to support the household in an era of rising standards of living, and increased economic pressures. Consequently, her efforts are only acknowledged within the boundaries of the
traditional gendered role, in terms of the benefit they have on the family, such as increased income. Indeed, as we have seen in Chapter Two on ‘Work and Employment’, if a woman’s career presents some type of threat to her primary role, or if it appears to undermine her husband’s status, she may be asked to resign her position.

I would like the girls to be self-employed--work from home by vocational training -- so that they can maintain a standard of living for their family. (Violet)

However, education may improve a woman’s situation and status as a homemaker within a patriarchal system, a theme evident throughout Chapter Three on ‘The Fate of the Indian Marriage System’. This was evident throughout the themes outlined in the marriage chapter. Affluent and well educated men expressed the wish for their wives to be educated, not only so that they are more able to educate the children, but purely for status enhancement of the household. Inevitably, as educated wives came to be regarded as archetypal wives and mothers, their status and sense of self-worth within that role increased. Moreover, given that a primary way in which women improve their status is by marrying a man of a higher social standing than themselves, and as education is a requirement demanded by such men, it follows that education can heighten a woman’s own status through being able to marrying up the social scale.

Girls are very keen to get a degree but don’t go out to work, they stay as a housewife... Men don’t want women to work because they will neglect their family...Women want to be educated for prestige... Girls are educated so that they can get a good husband. Often education is just a status thing. It helps them get married. (Hannah)

Nevertheless, it appears that education, or schooling, may open their minds to alternative ways of life, outside the patriarchal structure. Firstly, in a very basic way, the girls themselves believed that education had improved their social awareness, and had given them a degree of confidence to know right from wrong in wider society, as well as in their immediate
environment. As a result, they felt that they would be more able to voice an opinion when decisions were being made within their marriage.

They [women] should know their own mind, understand our country’s problems—that’s enough.

(Sonia)

Only when we [women] are educated will we know what to do, how to live, to stand on our own two feet. Only then will she understand herself, go out of herself... She will also be able to understand outside influences, if not then struggle, struggle[referring to the basic quality of life]. Only if they [women] learn something, then they can go out of their home, go out of them selves...If they learn they gain self confidence... Before education I used to say yes to everything, even when I couldn’t do it, now I have the confidence to say no. Education adds some strength, faith, belief. It encourages self-worth.

(Katherine)

Education removes their naiveté and innocence about certain things, such as how to defend their rights in arguments with the in-laws.

(Hannah)

If I’m not having an education, I can’t communicate properly with people, I won’t have any confidence. With education, you can discuss - but if I’m not educated there’s no chance.(Wazira)

Education gives women the freedom to think, it tells her that she’s as free as a man. (Mary)

Indeed certain students appeared to be aware of India’s societal problems, though it must be stressed that their knowledge may not have been taught at school or college as part of the curriculum, rather the learned skill of being able to read gave them the opportunity to improve their general knowledge from literature. Alternatively their parents may have encouraged them to take an interest in current affairs,

There is corruption at all levels. But if I’m not a lawyer I can be against it, but it’s dangerous as people will hire hit men. You can’t talk about politics in India.

(Angela)
More specifically, it appears that education could have opened the girls’ minds to alternative ways of life, other than being a wife and mother as well as provide them with the incentive to realise their goals and defend their rights. “Alternatives” that our interviewees pointed to included focusing on their career and remaining single, having the option to leave an unhappy marriage if it became intolerable, or avoid having to present a dowry. They specifically equated their ability to achieve these aims with access to education.

Education is good for women it enables them to get high positions in the government, and elsewhere.  
(Sohini)

If I get the opportunity to open a company I would, but you need a lot of money. I’ll try to get higher status [position] - as much as I can I’ll try in my life.  
(Kamalamma)

I would like to do a further degree by correspondence. I would like to get a high position if I can manage it.  
(Chinamma)

Marriage

I don’t really want to get married at all, I would rather concentrate on my career. If I get married, then children will follow, and then I will have to take care of them, I would have give up my job anyway  
(Sohini)

I don’t really want to get married, I want to be free to study. I don’t want to get married for at least another seven or eight years, until I am twenty-eight years old.  
(Celia)

I would like the chance to live on my own, not to have to get married.  
(Fleur)

Dowry

When we are married and if we are earning money, we give the money to him[husband] only, so why should we give him dowry?...We are educated, so we don’t want to give dowry.  
(Venkamma)
Parents of a son will say, “We’ve spent a lot of money on him, we want to get it back”, but a
girl’s parents can’t do the same.
(Wazira)

As we inquired further, however, it became apparent that the girls were in fact very aware of
societal constraints that would inhibit their realisation of these alternatives. These included a
number of factors, firstly their fear of dangers awaiting them in the outside world, which
whether real or imagined, evidently would restrict their movements and especially their access
to paid employment.

We feel this world is very horrible...there is no security outside the gate. (Hannah)

Women cannot be sales representatives as they are too shy. How can a woman go out? It’s very
dangerous if they have to travel- it’s not like your place. (Celia)

It’s very hard for women to get promotion. The highest position she can get in my company is
general manager...So even though I am capable of the responsibility, there is no promotion
because I am a woman. I had been in the job the same length of time as one man, who was not so
successful in terms of getting a job, but he got promoted. I think that the only reason for this must
be because I’m a woman.
(Margaret)

More significantly, we found that the force that gossip plays in social control represents a
major inhibitor of the girls’ activities. As we have seen, gossip may affect a man’s decisions
to allow his wife to work. He may fear that he will be viewed as inadequate in his duty as the
sole provider for his wife and family. It is certainly likely that the neighbourhood will
consider the man to be unable to keep control of his spouse, as she herself will be subject to
sexual gossip and rumours if she insists on going outside of the home to obtain paid
employment. Thus, her actions can reflect badly on both of them if she does not conform to
the stereotypical wife and mother - her ‘true role’ in society. Additionally, as discussed
within Chapter Three, although several girls liked the idea of a ‘love marriage’ or a ‘self-
arranged marriage’, they realised that they would never be able to have one themselves due to
the various pressures that their parents, as well as society, would put on them. Even at what
would be the initial stages of forming a relationship, they are restricted as there are controls placed on them regarding any communication with boys. This not only stopped them from having any sort of friendship with boys, but also made them unconfident about being able to ‘understand’ them properly. We interpret this as meaning that they feel wary of their ability to communicate with boys. In addition to this, some girls appeared to be quite afraid of men, and consequently it would seem that even if they had the option of choosing their own partner, they would not feel confident enough to do so.

I don’t blame them [girls] for being reserved- girls not talking to boys- considering that men are so harassing and aggressive.  
(Hannah)

I think if we speak to boys we could understand them, but parents wouldn’t allow, they’ll think badly of us. We can’t speak to them as we will get a bad name, but I would like to. Boys aren’t even allowed to come to my house, my father is very strict.  
(Sonia)

As it is, if girls are caught speaking to boys they are ostracised immediately by their family and society, and this would have detrimental effects on her chances of getting married, so generally they feel speaking to boys presents too great a risk.

Education is supposed to be giving independence but it doesn’t in practice. It’s because of the power of society... The views of the community have more power in real terms and have far greater effect on the girls’ lives such as gossip about their relations with boys.  
(Hesther)

If they [girls]are seen talking to men by elders they will be given a really hard time.  
(Margaret)

Yet, even if a girl decides that she would rather not get married at all, and instead live on her own or with female friends, she is met with societal disapproval. This condemnation relates to the view expressed earlier in the marriage chapter, that a woman’s sexuality needs to be controlled. The implication of a woman living on her own is that she is sexually deviant, as her unmarried state signifies that she is free from the control of their father, brother or
husband, and so represents a threat to society. Furthermore, for many, the fact that she is single suggests that there must be something ‘wrong’ with her which stopped her from being able to marry, so she is looked down on by her community.

I would prefer to stay single, but society will not allow a girl to be alone. My parents will not always be alive [to look after me] so I don’t have any choice.

(Angela)

Only brave women live separately. The neighbours will think badly of her, it’s very difficult for women to live on their own. She can’t live without marriage otherwise they’ll [society] will think that she has a bad character.

(Wazira)

It’s not possible for a woman to have a house without a husband no-one respects you-that’s our culture.

(Freesia)

It appears that landlords themselves are unwilling to rent out their property to unmarried women, probably because of the same attitude towards single women discussed above. Ultimately, the landlord may believe that he would risk losing his good name if he were to allow single women to stay in his property.

I’m looking for a house with my sister Pamela to rent, but it’s very difficult. They [landlords] won’t give houses to unmarried girls in case they bring home boyfriends.

(Hannah)

Likewise, although the majority of the girls, and their parents, disagreed with the practice of dowry, and believed that their ability to provide for their future family by gaining paid employment should be a sufficient contribution, they were obligated to present a dowry payment. This was partly because of the social stigma one would otherwise receive, but also because the system had made it impossible to get married without one.

My father doesn’t agree [with dowry] but has to pay.

(Amala)
In our area there is a big system, my family says that they will pay for me but I don’t agree with it. But to be able to get married we have to give dowry.

(Chinamma)

Alternative lifestyle patterns of the kind that many of the students in Coimbatore dream about are, in some ways, a fact of life for upper-class university educated young women. Vibhu Patel acknowledges the distinction between these females and the girls at the C.S.I. Training College. ‘As I happen to interact mostly with young females who are defining the existing patriarchal order in one form or the other the level of consciousness is different and they respond differently.’¹ A study by M.A.R.G. (Market And Research Group) of university students gave the impression of very determined young women, who know what they wanted from life. Male students are even beginning to perceive them as a threat and potential rival in the job market with one man claiming that ‘your girlfriend of today could grab your job tomorrow’.² The poll showed that more girls than boys have made career their prime objective in life and that few were willing to give up employment once they had become married. Other magazines, such as Femina, also feature career-minded young women who assert that they will never marry a man who insists that they give up their career.³ Nonetheless, it is obvious that gender differences purvey even in the upper echelons of young Indian society because, while only 17% of female students surveyed by M.A.R.G. agreed with the statement: ‘Girls should not work after marriage’, exactly double the number of male students also considered educated women to be ‘housewife material.’⁴ Even parents agree with this trend of female employment for they see the practical advantages involved. One father considered that women ‘must be in a position to support herself if the need arises. Today, relationships are not as stable as they used to be, people opt out quicker. The options for women are many more [both in comparison with the past and other levels of society]...I feel it is my duty as a father to prepare them for the real world.’⁵ A young

¹Quoted from a letter received from Vibhu Patel in a response to the preliminary findings of our project. ²From an interview with Sameer Vital in an article entitled, ‘The New Generation’, India Today, January 31, 1994, p.80, which featured a survey researched by M.A.R.G.. ³From an interview with Kirti Kanitkar, who achieved one of the highest grades in her college, featured in Femina, August 8 1995,p.24. ⁴Taken from a survey among 1,365 students in Bombay, Delhi, Madras, Calcutta, Mysore, Nasik, Allahbad and Cuttak, featured in India Today, January 31, 1994, p.74. ⁵Femina, August 8 ,1995, p.23.
woman featured in the survey, who did not intend to get married until she had found paid employment, echoed his sentiments, ‘I have to be on my own. What if he ditches me.’ Nevertheless like the majority of University students, she still participates in dating and is in fact ‘going steady’ with another male student. The girls at the C.S.I. Training College are well aware of this activity among city girls.

Girls from Madras will have a completely different outlook on life from us. The city has a huge effect on girls. They will want to find her own partner. She will have lots of boyfriends, she may even have a child, or an abortion, but once she has had her fun she will ask her parents for an arranged marriage. (Margaret)

Although she admits that this is an uninformed assumption, it is actually very close to the truth except for the fact that very few University female students approve of pre-marital sex. This is despite a great amount of social interaction with males, such as discotheques and restaurants. This may be because sexual honour is still crucial to a girl’s chances in the career market as well as the marriage market. This is something that is not as likely to affect males, which is reiterated by their far greater acceptance of sexual relations before marriage as well as their slightly smaller desire for an arranged marriage compared to the overwhelming 72% of female students polled by M.A.R.G. However it is likely that such ‘arranged marriages’ will involve the personal selection of a partner while ensuring that the choice has the approval of parents - or, it could be that parents are far more respectful of their daughter's wishes in the search for a suitable partner. Some of the students associated with Vibhu Patel have married husbands less educated than themselves, the basis of their marriage being romantic love, mutual respect and a sense of co-operation for each other's, and children's, development. However, although there may indeed be some truth in Patel's claim that young women are becoming ‘increasingly defiant about choice of their life-partner, career, employment [and] dress code’, and are ‘less touchy about gossip and believe in [a] “take -it-easy” policy’, it would be wrong to assume strong individualistic tendencies of the women -

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6India Today, January 31 1994, p.79.
7Only 18% of female students polled approved of pre-marital sex, a finding featured in India Today, January 31, 1994, p.80-81. Again, gender differences are evident, as 48% of male students approved of sexual relations before marriage.
whatever their level of education. As she explains, ‘taking a break from career to look after one's loved ones [such as children, ailing parents] is not a big deal if we are not a part of the rat-race.’ Yet they know they are still serving their own best interests: since nurturing their family, maintaining their own respectability and gaining paid employment in order to cope should the need arise to support themselves, are all attempts to ensure security. As India Today proclaims ‘Students do not want to change the world anymore. They want to manipulate it.’

The main difference between upper-class women educated in Universities of large metropolitan cities and middle and lower-class students of the C.S.I. Training College is the degree of confidence possessed, a factor which affects their level of aspirations. Kandiyoti describes how ‘patriarchal bargains do not merely inform women's rational choices but also shape the more unconscious aspects of their gendered subjectivity, since they permeate the context of the early socialisation, as well as their adult cultural milieu.’ The M.A.R.G. poll showed that forty per cent of students in both small and metropolitan cities were taking job-related courses. ‘Among the well-off, computers were the rage... The poorer ones contented themselves with learning typing and shorthand. But they all agreed on one point: a simple degree is not enough [training for a job is an important requirement].’ All the young women appear to be very practical about life and are aware of it's limitations.

Women could solve problems but people are not giving her the chance. This is not good, but a single person can not change the situation. If I could change it I would. I want men and women to have equal power. Men should not tell anything, should not interfere in women's work, independence... but women will not like to have those powers. People won't agree with independent women, with women who don't ask their husbands. Society won't like it, won't allow her to change. Even parents won't allow. It's very difficult for a single person to change. She can't do it.... We can think but we can't do.

(Gulaboo)

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8Letter from Vibhu Patel
9India Today, January 31, p.74.
The students tend to realise that they must concern themselves with their own immediate circumstances and recognise the difference between the ideal and reality.

Education does not give women more freedom. They say this on stages - speeches on freedom etc., but it is not real. If women are educated, she gets treated badly, - gossiped about. Never in India are men and women treated the same
(Tina)

Certain people say men and women are equal, but it doesn’t happen in real life
(Freesia)

In India we (women) are not having freedom fully. Freedom is only in books but not in Tamil Nadu. If a girl is separated, it is bad news. A girl can not live freely
(Angela)

One disparity we noticed between ideology and practice in India was the portrayal of everyday life in television advertising, which was often very Westernised and romantic, featuring a young couple very much in love although obviously not married. Among the people we interviewed, the general consensus seemed to be the opinion that, along with films and ‘Bollywood’ productions, this activity was purely fantasy and escapism, and in no way represented real life.¹¹

Thus, the girls are under no illusions about the restrictions they face but take a practical approach to dealing with them. Deniz Kandiyoti thoroughly explores this issue in her article 'Bargaining with Patriarchy', in which she describes how women strategise within a set of concrete restraints which Kandiyoti identifies as patriarchal bargains. ‘Different forms of patriarchy present women with distinct “rules of the game” and call for different strategies to maximise security and optimise life options with varying potential for active or passive resistance in the face of oppression.’¹² She argues that the key to the reproduction of classic patriarchy lies in the operations of the patrilocally extended household, and indeed, the

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¹¹The term ‘Bollywood’ is used to describe the film industry located in Bombay.
students all stress the importance of family members in their lives - and of their dependence on them for financial security. They accept that such reliance involves sacrifices.

In our country everyone has to depend on their parents, and then, after, our children. (Gulabo)

Once you're married, 'til you're dead, you always have to report to your in-laws... they can exert a lot of pressure (also) once you're married you must obey your husband. (Margaret)

Of course, it is hoped that a young woman will outlive her in-laws and have a family of her own, in which, if she has the status of a mother-in-law, she will command subordination of a woman of the next generation. This specific situation is discussed by Kandiyoti and she describes how ‘the deprivation and hardship she experiences as a young bride is eventually superseded by the control and authority she will have over her own subservient daughters-in-law.’ However, she goes on to argue that ‘The cyclical nature of women's power in the household and the anticipation of inheriting the authority of senior women encourages a thorough internalisation of this form of patriarchy by the women themselves.’

If this were the case, this apparent awareness would surely be evident in the strong desire for a male child to ensure that they can inherit such a position. Nonetheless, such an ambition did not seem to be apparent. Of those that could specify preference of their children's gender, it was equally split between sons and daughters and they made no reference to the issue in hand. One imagines, though, that such an awareness would come about much later, certainly after she had suffered at the hands of her own mother-in-law, once she had become married. Kandiyoti's stress on the ‘anticipation of achieving power’ portrays this factor as a cause of women not resisting the patriarchal structure where it seems to be more of an effect, almost a consolation - at least as far as the girls of the C.S.I Training College are concerned.

However, the students, having accepted the importance of their role as wife and mother, did perceive education to be the key to improving their position albeit within their

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13Kandiyoti, D., 'Bargaining With Patriarchy', p. 279
accepted role, particularly if it leads to the opportunity to make a financial contribution other than dowry.

Education removes their naiveté and innocence about certain things, for example, how to defend her rights in arguments with the in-laws

(Hannah)

Without education, they [society] won't treat us properly. Education is important here [in Coimbatore] Uneducated women are treated like a servant here because they are not earning money.

(Sohini)

Education give girls more freedom. Without it, they have to depend totally on family and have to do what they say. With it, we can have more power. Your husband will listen to you more if you are earning.

(Sonia)

Education is more important to get money. If we have money they (men) will respect us. If we don't have money, they won't... To make women for studying - that is part of freedom.

(Venkamma)

In fact some of the students view education as a means to manipulate their role in terms of achieving a higher social status within their 'career' of marriage.

Men want educated women for reasons of prestige. This is good for a girl. Girls are very clever and this gives them opportunity.

(Hannah)

Education will give me more power. I can get a better husband - more educated.

(Rangamma)

Despite these ambitions, the students, although understanding that society expects them to look to their family as their first source of security, also realise that it is very wise to be financially prepared, should extenuating circumstances arise. They can not rely on any welfare benefit being provided for them.
He [my father] says it is important to study well. If he dies - then what to do? Because of education we can manage ourselves.

(Shanti)

Education is good [to have] if the marriage goes wrong, or if the husband can't work. She [the wife] will have to do both - work for money and in the house.

(Mary)

Sometimes they will get more respect from their husbands, sometimes not. We can't expect others to help. We have to stand on our own two legs.

(Joanne)

The ability to earn, however, is seen solely as a 'safety net', to be used only as a last resort when the family fails to support them, not when the women chooses not to be dependent. They are all too well aware that their society does not allow independent women and thus it is not in their own best interests to become so.

It's dangerous to fight. If you fight more, he'll ask you to leave.

(Chinamma)

On this line, Kandiyoti argues that the women believe it is also in their own children's best interests not to protest and that their daughters should be deferential also. ‘The cyclical fluctuations of their power position, combined with status considerations, result in their active collusion in the reproduction of their own subordination. They would rather adopt interpersonal strategies that maximise their security through manipulation of the affections of their sons and husbands.... women become experts in maximising their own life chances.’¹⁴ She suggests that socialisation of daughters in this way is not due to manipulation, but a practical action, with their long term security in mind. However, we found some students at the C.S.I. Training College to disagree with such thoughts, believing that it was time for change.

India is too fragmented. People are not willing to communicate with each other, [or] other cultures. Only education will change this, but people have to learn themselves.... Some women want equality, others don't have the confidence in themselves. When they are small, they are treated as if they are unable, so they believe so when they grow up. That is why we have to encourage girls, to convince them they are capable... The [mother's] way of socialisation of her daughter will have much influence when she becomes a mother herself and socialises her own children. It is more important for the mother to socialise her children as she has stronger links with the child. [Katherine]

A lot of women think women are a soft touch - many of them are, that's the problem. They do just say ‘yes’ and let people walk all over them. Indian women are not assertive enough. (Margaret)

All the students expressed a desire for their children, particularly their daughters to receive a good level of education.

I would educate my daughter to at least the level of B.Sc.. I would like her to have a degree, but it's up to her. (Mary)

Some students recognised the importance of the socialisation of boys as well as girls in attitudes to women's oppression.

Things are only changing slowly, but as more generations are educated, women's status, in terms of equality with men, will improve. We will teach our sons and daughters equality. (Amala)

However, it remains to be seen if this turns out to be true, given such societal pressures to conform to the 'norm'. Kandiyoti was not referring to college girls, but to married women, and the students admitted themselves that they would not protest too greatly against their husband's wishes. Thus, what if husbands refuse to allow their children to be taught such views?
It is also important to realise at exactly what level women's autonomy is desired by the students. Both Eastern philosophies and Christian education emphasises the importance of collective interests over individual ones.

Women should not have full independence, only the freedom that she needs. For example, if she wants a love marriage, then society should help support and accept her. Women should act according to her surrounding She should not have full freedom. They should consider other people - men should also do this - should consider others and not disregard whatever people say and do what they want... if they have full freedom, corruption happens. (Angela)

They also emphasise the necessity of a women's role as a proper wife and mother for the benefit of all society, which is also generally accepted by the students.

It's important for women to be educated, so she can stand on her own leg - at least up to the end of high school so she has knowledge of the world around her - her rights and status. I would like the girls to be self employed - work from home by vocational training, so they can maintain a standard of living for their family - a sewing machine for example, or herself start her own institution... The wife should submit herself to her husband but some family's wives are like slaves. Really bad ill-treatment - that's not fair. We feel that husbands should discuss family decisions with us, but they don't, and go ahead anyway: Women can't do anything, even choose material for a new sari without their husband's permission and approval of choice of fabric. This should change for this reason, women should be educated, then couples can discuss matters. Illiterate women have no say, they take their husband's wishes as a golden rule. If women are educated they (husbands and wives) will consult each other and take each other's feeling into consideration. Only some men realise the need for give and take. It's very difficult to attitudes. It takes time. (Violet)

We can summarise that not only do we as westerners have a different conception of autonomy and a contrasting opinion of it from the young women attending the C.S.I. training college, but there are also variations in definition within India itself. As stated in the Introduction, the general western ideal of autonomy reflects the individualistic nature of society, and thus views the right to individual choice in a positive light. By contrast, social scientists have encountered difficulties in finding equivalent meanings of the western notion of autonomy in several local Indian dialects, leading them to the conclusion that individual decision making is neither commonplace nor highly regarded. Yet as we have seen in the Conclusion, the west - South Asian contrast is not so distinct in reality and it is vital that we note the differences in the definition of autonomy within the South Asian context. The young female university students that Vibhu Patel and M.A.R.G. interviewed were predominantly
from upper-class backgrounds and large cities such as Bombay. They live in a cosmopolitan urban environment and are likely to be open to a wider range of influences than the women living in the relatively small city of Coimbatore. It is no surprise then that the Bombay University students expressed positive aspirations of autonomy, whereas the C.S.I. students were, on the whole, wary of assertion of individual choice. From this we can ascertain that there may be influences, other than education, such as living environment, that shape an individual’s realisation of autonomy. Ultimately, we can conclude that in the South Asian context, given the complicated nature of autonomy, combined with the various influences that may inhibit or encourage it, the assumption that increased education leads to greater autonomy for women is far too general a statement.
Bibliography


