

POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION
IN INDIA

Overview



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This booklet contains the Overview as well as a list of contents from the book, *Poverty and Social Exclusion in India*. To order copies of the full-length book, published by the World Bank, please use the form at the back of this booklet.

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The Report has been discussed with the Government of India, but does not necessarily bear their approval for all its contents, especially where the Bank has stated its judgment, opinion, or policy recommendations.

Abbreviations

DHS	Demographic and Health Survey
MGNREGS	Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme
NFHS	National Family Health Survey
NSS	National Sample Survey
NTFP	nontimber forest product
OBC	Other Backward Class
PESA	Panchayats Extension to the Scheduled Areas Act
RCH II	Reproductive Child Health Survey II
SC	Scheduled Caste
SHG	self-help group
ST	Scheduled Tribe

1

Overview

In India . . . we must aim at equality. That does not mean and cannot mean that everybody is physically or intellectually or spiritually equal or can be made so. But it does mean equal opportunities for all, and no political, economic or social barrier. . . . It means a faith in humanity and a belief that there is no race or group that cannot advance and make good in its own way, given the chance to do so. It means a realization of the fact that the backwardness or degradation of any group is not due to inherent failings in it, but principally to lack of opportunities and long suppression by other groups.

Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India* (1946)

Nehru would have been proud of India's stellar performance in the creation of a new economic system and its self-confidence relative to other nations, though not necessarily of the acquisitive society that goes against the collectivist spirit he espoused (Nehru 1946). There are other developments to be proud of as well. Poverty has declined among all groups; enrollments in schools have increased; health outcomes have improved; and fertility rates in many Indian states now resemble those of developed countries. Moreover, the 73rd and 74th amendments to the Indian Constitution that mandate the devolution of powers and responsibilities to rural *panchayats* (local governments) and urban local municipalities have set the agenda for local ownership of and participation in governance.

In parallel to these positive developments, rising inequality in India has been a subject of concern among policy makers, academics, and activists alike. The recent India poverty assessment of the World Bank (2011) shows that, when inequality is based on income rather than consumption measures, India is not so different relative to the

inequality levels recorded in countries such as Brazil and South Africa, countries commonly singled out as global outliers. In other words, if inequality in India is measured on the basis of per capita income, it stands among those countries with the highest recorded inequality rates. The report also decomposes inequality according to differences within and across states, according to urban-rural status, and according to levels of educational attainment.

In our report, we focus on social exclusion, which has its roots in historical divisions along lines of caste, tribe, and the excluded sex, that is, women. These inequalities are more structural in nature and have kept entire groups trapped, unable to take advantage of opportunities that economic growth offers. Culturally rooted systems perpetuate inequality, and, rather than a *culture of poverty* that afflicts disadvantaged groups, it is, in fact, these inequality traps that prevent these groups from breaking out.¹ Therefore,

cultural factors can play a role in sustaining inter-group *differences* in wealth, status and power. Where the mechanisms involved are self-enforcing this can be considered to be an “inequality trap.” Where such an inequality trap exists, it implies that subordinate groups are maintained at least in relative poverty, and that these are associated, in part, with culturally shaped behaviors, including endogenous preferences that can limit the prospects of poorer, or subordinate, groups. (Walton 2007, 2)

So, the question we ask in this report is: who has gained and who has not from India’s growth surge?

Well, then, why “social exclusion” and why not “inequality”? This is a question often asked by those who have read early chapters of this report. India is not alone in having social groups that have been traditionally excluded; yet, the structure of the caste system and its ramifications on employment, education, and the rules of social and economic exchange are distinctive and shared only with Nepal. Both caste and gender inequalities are rooted in a philosophical tradition that justifies these through religious texts that provide systematic rules for exclusion. This is what makes these inequalities particularly durable (Tilly 1999). And, for this reason, our report focuses not on inequality, but on exclusion.

The relevance of social exclusion has been incorporated into the development lexicon in a number of ways. The term “social exclusion” was first used in France in the 1970s to distinguish the excluded, who then comprised a wide variety of people: the disabled, suicidal and elderly persons, and abused children, among others (Silver 1994).

Since then, it has been used in the social science literature to distinguish from and add to the concept of poverty and to denote rules of exchange and practices that keep groups out; the term can also sometimes mean different things to different people. Globally, excluded groups tend to be ethnic or religious minorities that, by virtue of their distinct cultural practices, are considered the “other.” Social exclusion as a concept perceives the individual as an entity embedded in society and groups. The focus is thus not on outcomes such as increased consumption or income or education alone, but on relations that constrain individuals from achieving these outcomes (de Haan 1997). Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen (1998) calls these the “relational roots of deprivation,” whereby membership in a particular group (women, lower castes, indigenous people, or persons with disabilities) limits the “functionings” of individuals to acquire or use their capabilities.

Social exclusion is therefore not about outcomes alone, but about the processes that lead to these outcomes. De Haan (1997), for instance, calls income poverty only one element of social exclusion and refers to its eradication as a part of the broader agenda of social integration. This is because poverty focuses only on an absolute measure of individual well-being: income, consumption, or human development. In contrast, social exclusion focuses on processes or noneconomic means that exclude certain groups from equal access to basic goods and services that, in turn, determine their well-being. As a result, these groups have unequal access to labor markets and social protection mechanisms through formal and informal institutions. Even for people with equal levels of human capital and skills, there appears to be an important element of discrimination that is part of what one would define as social exclusion beyond purely economic considerations. Finally, exclusion involves unequal access to the full exercise and protection of rights and liberties, including, sometimes, the denial of basic human rights.

India is not alone in grappling with issues of social exclusion. While many other countries include similarly excluded minorities, the most relevant empirical evidence and conceptual clarity come from Latin America and the Caribbean and from Eastern Europe. Recently, the flagship report of the Inter-American Development Bank, as part of its annual series, Economic and Social Progress, focused on social exclusion. The report, *Outsiders? The Changing Patterns of Exclusion in Latin America and the Caribbean*, is a regional analysis of ways in which different groups have been excluded during a period of macroeconomic transformation (see Márquez et al. 2007). It documents the economic and welfare costs of exclusion, suggesting that inclusion policies be viewed as an investment rather than as a handout to the least well off in society. Inclusion policies are more than new

programs or new institutions to redress past injustices; they imply fundamental changes in the way decisions are made, resources are allocated, and policies are implemented in democratic societies.

In Eastern Europe and Central Asia, the focus on the Roma, for instance, distinguishes between poverty and exclusion (see box 1.1).

Box 1.1 Roma in Europe: A Large Ethnic Minority Excluded at High Cost

The Roma (Gypsies) number about 10 million–12 million people in Europe and represent the largest transnational minority in the region. The most significant representation of Roma is in Central and Eastern European countries, where, overall, the Roma account for the main poverty risk group, suffering from low educational attainment, high unemployment, and poor human development outcomes. One of the most frequent sites of Roma discrimination is the labor market, where even qualified Roma are discriminated against in favor of non-Romani applicants. In general, however, Roma lack sufficient education to participate in the labor market. A recent study across four Central and Eastern European countries—Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Romania, and Serbia—suggests that as little as 12.5 percent of working-age Roma in Bulgaria, Romania, and Serbia are educated at or above the secondary level (World Bank 2010). The low educational levels are reflected in employment rates of 60 percent, on average, relative to the majority population and, not surprisingly, much lower earnings. The study estimates an annual economic loss of €5.7 billion and a fiscal loss of €2 billion to the four countries as a result of reduced productivity and additional costs incurred to finance the social security of unemployed Roma. In fact, it warns that these losses will only increase over time as younger Roma join the working-age population.

The annual fiscal gains from investing in the education of Roma are significantly higher than the costs incurred even if all Roma people were to be educated (World Bank 2010). The Roma Education Fund is one such initiative, funding specific efforts that can make formal schools more responsive to the needs of Roma children (see Roma Education Fund, at <http://www.romaeducationfund.hu/>). The emphasis is on giving Romani children a good educational start by focusing on access to preschool and successful transitions into and through primary education. While the impact of the fund is yet to be assessed, funded projects reached about 30,000 Roma students in 2008, among whom 800 graduated.

Source: Roma Education Fund website, <http://www.romaeducationfund.hu/>.

A 2005 report on multiple deprivations in Serbia and in Montenegro found a strong ethnic dimension to exclusion (World Bank 2005). It found that the Roma population, particularly those Roma residing in settlements, was among the most deprived. A detailed analysis of Nepal has, to a large extent, influenced the manner in which the government collects data and designs policies for people who have been historically and ritually excluded (World Bank 2006). Other important analyses of social exclusion have also influenced multilateral agencies and national governments and have, in turn, been influenced by national debates on the issue (see Baker 2002 on Uruguay, for example). In Brazil, Gacitúa-Marió and Woolcock (2008) find that the poor, especially Brazilians of African descent, have been systematically excluded from the economic growth process, despite laudable improvements in education levels and broad reductions in poverty. This exclusion has persisted (even intensified) over decades.

Addressing social exclusion for its intrinsic value is sufficient reason. Many studies have shown the instrumental value of addressing social exclusion (see Akerlof 1976; Scoville 1991). This report argues, however, that addressing social exclusion because exclusion is morally and socially unjust is reason enough. Moreover, mere ethnic or linguistic heterogeneity is not the same as exclusion. However, if such heterogeneity succeeds in keeping groups out, its exclusionary role plays out in the overall development outcomes of a country or a region. In India, as this report shows, substantially higher mortality among Adivasi children in the 1–4 age-group is affecting India's overall advances in lowering child mortality.

This report does not explore or adhere to any of the myriad formulations of social exclusion, which, by themselves, are conceptually challenging. In some sense, the focus is quite simple. It is based on the established existence of three axes of exclusion in India: caste, tribe, and gender. These axes, particularly caste and gender, have a normative foundation in historically grounded processes and are responsible for a number of unequal outcomes and processes. For instance, norms of son preference, derived from the value of sons in supporting their parents and in undertaking the rituals around parental death, are the foundation for a consistent neglect of female children and women in their reproductive years. Similarly, the occupational logic of caste has meant that the traditionally lower castes remain typed into traditional trades and jobs, making mobility difficult. The geographical and cultural isolation of tribal groups has meant that they are still difficult to reach and that their traditional patterns of landownership are at variance with new developments.

The overarching themes in this report revolve around three inter-related aspects: services, markets, and political spaces. In most countries, excluded groups face discrimination, lower access to health and education, and lower returns to education and assets. They are also more likely to be poor, and this likelihood is passed down through the generations. This is true in India as well, but there are some unique aspects of the Indian trinity of caste, tribe, and gender that lead to different processes and, hence, different outcomes. For instance, unlike countries in Latin America, where excluded groups face higher unemployment rates, open unemployment in India has been historically low, and the real labor market consequence of exclusion is allocation to low-level occupations and lower mobility. Excluded groups are less likely to participate in political processes in other countries as well, but, in India, this is a more nuanced process. Social movements representing excluded groups are much more potent, and affirmative action, which is fairly new in many Latin American countries, has been constitutionally mandated in India since the country's independence. Finally, the representation of excluded groups in political spaces has also been secured, although the chapters in this report show that the impacts of this representation on group welfare have been mixed.

Organization of the Report

The focus. Exclusion operates along multiple and interrelated dimensions. Because addressing them all would be an insurmountable task, this report does not attempt to do so. It does not, for instance, focus on exclusion because of religion or disability, though there is extensive research to show that these are important axes along which people face deprivation. Even in the case of caste, tribe, and gender, the literature is vast, multidisciplinary, and so prolific that it appears to grow every day. The evidence contained in this report builds on this vast academic and activist literature, but the report is by no means an attempt to provide a comprehensive survey of the evidence or even a review of all the issues involved. The fact that each of these groups is highly heterogeneous and that outcomes and processes differ by state and district and by type of caste or tribe makes the task even more challenging and generalizations that much more difficult.

The report focuses on three select groups that face exclusion in India. In addition to Scheduled Tribes (STs) and women, the report discusses outcomes among Scheduled Castes (SCs), even though recent data suggest that Other Backward Classes (OBCs) also fare poorly on some indicators.² There are three reasons for this. First, as we show in the report, SCs face structural inequalities that have a ritual

backing in historical processes such as untouchability. In contrast, OBCs do not face such historical deprivation. Instead, they comprise—and are defined so by the Constitution of India—as castes that are not SCs, but that are backward in most respects. Second, the issues related to OBCs, who were traditionally peasant cultivators, are different from those affecting outcomes among SCs and merit a separate analysis. Finally, National Sample Survey (NSS) data on OBC outcomes is available only after 1999–2000, meaning that it is difficult to monitor the performance of OBCs along a range of development indicators over time (for example, since 1983, as the report does for other groups). For all these reasons and because of the fact that this report deals with more deeply rooted structural inequalities, the focus is primarily on the outcomes among SCs. However, this should not suggest that caste can be conflated with SCs or that other caste-based issues are not important. Outcomes among OBCs are discussed wherever data are available. Similarly, even though exclusion by religion is significant, the issues affecting Muslims merit an entire analysis, and religion is discussed here only partially (in the context of the labor market).

For each group, too, the focus is on a subset of issues that offer some new insights. For SCs, the report focuses on poor labor market outcomes despite the expansion in education. For STs, it focuses on a distinct disadvantage in survival and on the correlates, which go beyond the health sector and include geographical isolation and the removal of tribals from their traditional lands and assets. For women, it focuses on poor health and survival outcomes, but also the disadvantage of women in the labor market and the vulnerability of women to violence within the family and insecurity in public spaces. Thus, even though there are missing variables in the analysis, it is our hope that, by deeply probing one or two of the kinds of exclusion faced by each category, we provide tools that can be applied to study other forms of exclusion or issues not covered in this report. The format of our analysis is such that we compare outcomes among one subgroup with outcomes among other subgroups. However, since the report also tracks changes in outcomes over time, the finer aspects of development reality are sometimes lost.

Objectives and data. The report is organized around three chapters, in addition to this overview, each one dealing with an excluded group: STs, SCs, and women. The objective is to provide a *diagnostic* of how the three excluded groups under analysis have fared along various development indicators during a period of rapid economic growth in the national economy. In seeking this objective, the report also addresses correlates and the processes that explain how and why these groups have fared the way they have over a period of time.

The report is not intended as a policy document, although some of the empirical findings lend themselves to policy conclusions.

Data for the report come primarily from multiple rounds of national-level household survey data (the NSS, the National Family Health Survey [NFHS], the Reproductive Child Health Survey, and the India Human Development Survey), as well as international surveys (Demographic and Health Surveys and the database of the Population Reference Bureau). Large national data sets, while allowing for national-level and, to some extent, state-level generalizations, do not allow analysis of outcomes below the state level or within group differences and processes. It is well known, for instance, that there is substantial diversity among SCs and STs even within states. This heterogeneity is widely known because of microstudies and ethnographic, anthropological, and journalistic accounts. While there is a rich body of such qualitative work in India, the results provide contextual specificity, but cannot be added up to paint an aggregate picture. Moreover, such studies or accounts generate results that are limited to one tribe, village, or state and cannot be generalized. Nonetheless, we do draw upon such studies, in particular, qualitative work commissioned for this report, to capture underlying processes and triangulate with the quantitative analysis.

A word on usage: the terms “Scheduled Caste (SC)” and “Scheduled Tribe (ST)” come from the Constitution Order passed in 1950, which contains the names of castes and tribes that are earmarked for special treatment, such as reservations in legislation, public sector employment, and government-run educational institutions. However, SCs and STs have taken names that signify both political assertion and a rejection of the previously accepted idioms that reduced them to “reserved categories.” For the purposes of the tables and graphs presented in this report, we use the terms “SC” and “ST” because these are standard administrative and survey categories. In the text, we use the terms *Dalits* and *Adivasis* (or tribals) interchangeably with SCs and STs, respectively.

Main Findings

During the period of rapid economic growth, what happened to entrenched group inequalities? Were there ways in which traditionally excluded groups such as SCs, STs, and women broke out of the traps or did the traps trump the opportunities? The report emphasizes that the changes wrought in the 20 years beginning in 1983 were complex, and social groups transformed themselves in different ways in response to new opportunities. For instance, far from being the immutable frame

that Weber (1958) seemed to suggest, “caste,” in fact, has evolved and mutated. Nonetheless, by no means are we seeing the annihilation of caste, as Ambedkar (1936) exhorted Indians to achieve.

I still think that after a long and convoluted path, after many a stumble and wrong turn, a different kind of moment seems to be upon us . . . there is a sense of hope across the country, which I believe is universal. There is a momentum for change.

Nandan Nilekani (2008, 484)

Adivasis

The self-preferred term “Adivasi” is commonly translated as “original inhabitants,” and literally means *Adi*, beginning or earliest time, and *vasi*, resident of. There is active discussion around the question of “original inhabitant,” but this is not directly relevant to our report. According to the 2001 Census, the population of India includes 84.3 million STs, comprising 8.1 percent of the total population of the country. However, the proportion of STs has been increasing over census periods partly because more tribes are being included in the ST category and partly because of higher fertility rates in this category (Maharajna 2005). While the Constitutional Order declared that 212 tribes located in 14 states are STs, the Government of India today identifies 533 tribes as STs, of which 62 are located in the state of Orissa.³

Chapter 2 in this report focuses on the Adivasis or STs. In most analyses, this topic is addressed after the Dalits, but we have placed it first for analytical and organizational purposes. There are two reasons for this: tribal groups are not strictly within the caste system, and the bonds of rituals do not affect their relations with the world in general. Also the report shows that outcomes among Adivasis are among the worst, despite considerable variation across places of residence and tribal groupings.

Tribal groups in India are often conflated with castes, and “Scheduled Caste” and “Scheduled Tribe” are sometimes said in the same breath, although they are actually distinct social categories. As André Béteille writes (1998, 187): “Even the best ethnographers [in India] habitually confused tribe with caste, which, on any reasonable assumption, is a different kind of social category.” The major difference between SCs and STs is that, while the former were subject to historical, ritualistic discrimination, STs were excluded from the national context because of their physical isolation. Inhabiting topographically inaccessible areas, STs still face difficulties in accessing services such as health care and education. Even though they own

more land than SCs, a complex set of contravening forest laws means they are confronted by barriers in selling their produce from the land, perhaps explaining the high poverty rates among STs in rural areas. Most tribals therefore end up migrating, leaving their forest lands to work as casual laborers in urban centers.

The report focuses on two major markers of tribal deprivation: poverty levels, which are higher than the national average and in comparison with other groups (including SCs), and child mortality. We argue that the roots of Adivasi deprivation lie in two main factors. One, their physical segregation renders problematic the delivery to them of services such as health care and education. Two, their traditional dependence on land and forests and their widespread displacement from these areas have changed the nature of the relationship tribals share with their land. This, in part, may help explain rising poverty among STs in some states.

ADIVASIS: MAIN FINDINGS

Despite a decline in poverty rates, Adivasis in 2004–05 were 20 years behind the average. Poverty among STs (Adivasis) has fallen, but the gap between them and the average Indian is large and growing. The poverty headcount index for STs fell by 31 percent between 1983 and 2004–05, compared with a more rapid decline of 35 percent among SCs and an average overall decline in India of 40 percent (table 1.1). In 2004–05, a little less than half the ST population remained in poverty (44 percent), while, nationwide, the poverty rate had been reduced to almost one-quarter of the population (27.5 percent). STs in urban areas fared better than those in rural areas, with a lower poverty rate and steeper reductions since 1983. However, given the low share of tribal population in urban centers, ST poverty rates as a whole remained closer to the rural average. The relatively slower declines in poverty among STs also meant that they were increasingly concentrated in the poorest deciles of the population; their poverty levels in 2004–05 resembled poverty levels experienced by the average population 20 years earlier. More worryingly, in states with high tribal populations (more than 10 percent of total population), ST households exhibited poverty rates that were higher than the rates across the nation as a whole in 2004–05. In Orissa, almost 75 percent of ST households fell below the poverty line.

One should read these numbers while keeping heterogeneity in mind. STs are a highly diverse category, and the heterogeneity within the category is so striking that often the same surname may belong to different tribes in different states. Outcomes among tribals have also been shaped by the region in which they live. Development outcomes among tribals in the northeastern states, for instance,

Table 1.1 Poverty Rates: STs Are 20 Years behind the Average Population

population below the poverty line, %

<i>Location, social group</i>	<i>A. 1983</i>	<i>1993–94</i>	<i>B. 2004–05</i>	<i>% change (A, B)</i>
<i>Rural</i>				
ST	63.9	50.2	44.7	-30
SC	59.0	48.2	37.1	-37
Others	40.8	31.2	22.7	-44
All	46.5	36.8	28.1	-40
<i>Urban</i>				
ST	55.3	43.0	34.3	-38
SC	55.8	50.9	40.9	-27
Others	39.9	29.4	22.7	-43
All	42.3	32.8	25.8	-39
<i>Total</i>				
ST	63.3	49.6	43.8	-31
SC	58.4	48.7	37.9	-35
Others	40.5	30.7	22.7	-44
All	45.6	35.8	27.5	-40

Source: Staff estimates based on Schedule 1.0 of the respective NSS rounds and official poverty lines.

appear quite different relative to the outcomes among tribals in central India. We therefore keep the former out of the purview of this diagnostic and draw upon microstudies, where relevant, to explain processes that lead to deprivation among STs.

High child mortality is the starkest marker of tribal deprivation. Every monsoon season, the Indian media are rife with stories of child deaths in tribal areas, which are frequently reported as malnutrition deaths. Kalahandi District in Orissa, for instance, became a metaphor for starvation because of press reports dating back to the 1980s. Under-5 mortality remains a stark marker of tribal deprivation in India: nearly 96 tribal children die for every 1,000 live births, compared with an under-5 mortality of 74 per 1,000 for all India. ST children make up 12 percent of all children under 5 in rural areas, but account for almost 23 percent of deaths in the 1–4 age-group (table 1.2). For all other social groups, the representation of deaths is proportionate to the representation of the group in the population.

Previous analyses of the correlates of under-5 mortality did not find any difference with respect to what we already know: the effect of ST status is insignificant once we control for poverty; that is, poverty is the primary cause of excess child mortality among tribals. However, most analyses lump all under-5 mortality together. Our

Table 1.2 Adivasi Child Mortality Exceeds the Relative Population Share in Rural Areas

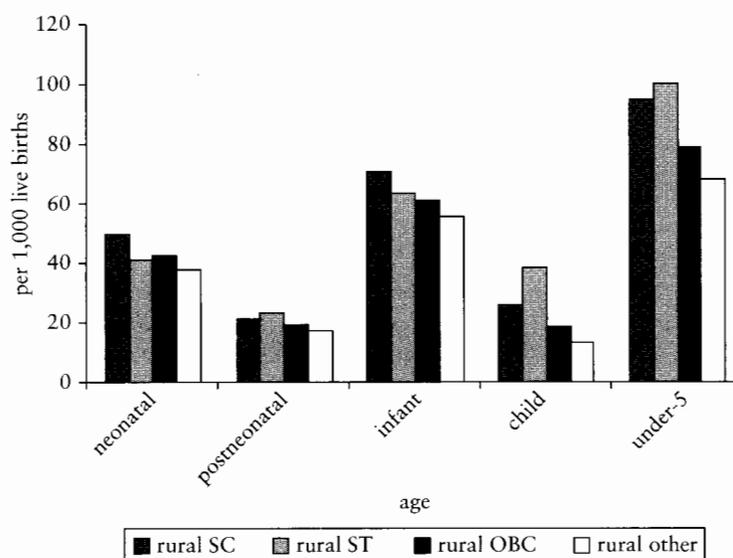
percent

Social group	Share of all children under 5	Share of child deaths age 1–4	Share of under-5 deaths
SC	21.6	28.1	24.6
ST	11.7	23.0	13.9
OBC	41.8	35.5	39.6
Other	24.9	13.4	21.9
Total	100	100	100

Source: Das, Kapoor, and Nikitin (2010), based on 2005 NFHS data.

Note: The table refers to children born during the five years prior to the survey in rural areas only.

Figure 1.1 Rural Adivasi Children: Lower Risk of Dying at Birth, but Greater Risk by Age 5



Source: Staff calculations based on 2005 NFHS data.

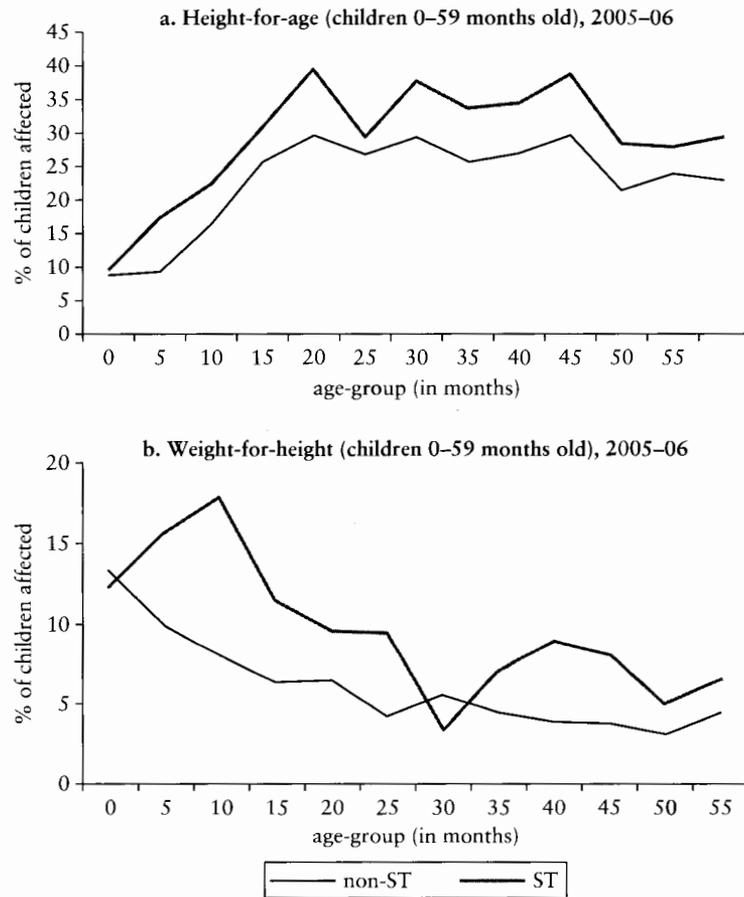
analysis finds that, *even after we control for wealth*, tribal children show a higher likelihood of dying between ages 1 and 4 than their nontribal peers. This comes through because we disaggregate under-5 mortality into its age-specific constituent parts. We find that the gap in mortality between rural Adivasi children and others appears after the age of 1 (figure 1.1). In fact, before the age of 1, Adivasi children face more or less similar odds of dying as other children; odds that

significantly reverse later. This finding has important policy relevance for two reasons. First, because it calls for a shift in attention from infant mortality or overall under-5 mortality to factors that cause a wedge between tribal children and the rest between the ages of 1 and 5. Second, because it means that, more than socioeconomic status, the problem of high child mortality is explained by tribal group status. Addressing poverty alone therefore may not help. Unless interventions reach these groups, India may not be able to meet its goal of reducing child mortality by two-thirds by 2015.

Demographic literature in India and elsewhere is quite consistent on the correlates of child mortality. Among the more proximate reasons are child malnutrition, the lack of immunization, and the poor health of tribal mothers. While immunization coverage has expanded significantly in tribal areas, tribal children remain at much greater risk of malnutrition; nearly 55 percent are underweight, compared with 42 percent among children in the nontribal population. The appearance of ST children starts becoming different within the first 10 months of birth with respect to the appearance of other children in terms of height and weight (figure 1.2). Mothers of tribal children are also much less likely to obtain health care. For instance, ST women are much less likely to receive antenatal or prenatal care from doctors. Only 40 percent received antenatal care in 2005, compared with 63 percent in the general population category. The reason this does not show up in differences in infant mortality is because of the traditional practices of birth spacing, feeding, and weaning that tribal mothers follow. More instructive, however, are the disparities in the treatment of illness among tribal children 3 years of age and below relative to other children. All-India data of the NFHS indicate that tribal babies are not more likely to become sick with diarrhea or respiratory disease, but are much less likely to be treated relative to other children.

Behind the proximate correlates are deeper institutional and historical processes that are responsible for Adivasi deprivation. At the core of these processes is the large-scale alienation of Adivasis from their traditional sources of livelihood: land and forests. The remoteness of tribal habitations creates added problems for service delivery and monitoring. Even where health centers exist, absenteeism is high, and health surveillance is difficult because of the frequent migration of tribal families. Unlike SCs, who have been effective in claiming some form of political representation, including nationally known political parties and leaders, the tribals exercise little voice over their own development, and their leadership usually consists of non-Adivasi elite. Finally, while the Indian government's response to vulnerability among STs has been proactive and has included a mix of

Figure 1.2 More ST Children Are Severely Stunted and Wasted within the First 10 Months of Birth, 2005–06



Source: Das, Kapoor, and Nikitin (2010) based on NFHS data.

constitutional measures, legislative enactments, programs supported by earmarked funds, and quotas in public employment and publicly funded education, the major problem has been implementation. We concur with a Planning Commission report arguing that Adivasi alienation and lack of voice are at the fulcrum of the tribal angst that India is witnessing today (see Government of India 2008).

IN SUMMARY

- During a period of relative prosperity for India as a whole, poverty rates have declined much more slowly among STs than

among other groups and particularly slowly in states that have large proportions of tribals.

- Health outcomes among STs, while showing more rapid progress in some respects than the rest of the population, are still poor. Convergence with other groups has occurred in only a small number of areas, notably in immunization coverage.
- Excess mortality among tribal children continues to be the starkest marker of tribal disadvantage and has its roots in a number of complex processes that involve the exclusion of STs.
- While laws and programs are in place to address the special disadvantages of STs, implementation is poor.
- The low participation of tribals in decision making and their alienation from land and forests are central to the continued exclusion of tribals from progress and development.

Dalits

The caste system has been the most predominant axis of ritually ordered exclusion in India, and Dalits fall at the lowest end of the caste hierarchy. The rules of the game in the caste system—to borrow a formulation of North (1990)—are rooted in a religiously sanctioned ordering of occupations described in ancient Hindu texts such as the *Manusmriti*.⁴ While drawing their origins from such texts, cultural and social attitudes toward SCs solidified over time, and the caste system was sustained more because of these deeply rooted practices than because of adherence per se to religious principles contained in the scriptures. Caste, however, is not the immutable frame that the Weberian stereotype suggests, but an institution that has been malleable to policy and changing opportunities. Recognizing the unfair disadvantage that certain castes have had through history, the Indian Constitution explicitly recognized those castes at the bottom of the hierarchy (the untouchables) as SCs. A comprehensive listing of SCs was drawn up for the purpose of targeting development programs, and a set of laws was implemented that mandated punitive action for acts of discrimination on the one hand and affirmative action in public employment and publicly funded education on the other. Chapter 3 focuses on Dalits, a term that has united the SCs in a process that is more empowering than the process of identification by individual names, which have been and continue to be associated with ritually impure occupations.

Several features of caste make the system exclusionary. The most important among these features is the hereditary passing down of occupations, making it especially difficult for SCs to break the cycle of exclusion and move up (Thorat 2007). Other features of the

system include norms of purity and pollution, the spatial segregation of residence, rules that prevent intermarriage and interdining, subordination through market transactions, and reliance on caste-based networks for coping. Such features reinforce exclusion as does the fear of being ostracized socially if one moves away from established practices. Processes of ritual discrimination and cultural devaluation are usually passed from one generation to the next, which then end up internalizing the processes (see Hoff and Pandey 2004).

Our report focuses on the exclusion of Dalits from two arenas: education and the labor market. It maps some of the changes over the last two decades and finds that Dalit men, in particular, have had the greatest convergence in educational outcomes with their upper caste counterparts. In employment, too, there are signs of change, and Dalits, who were always casual laborers, are now moving out of casual labor. However, the transformations are small, and they are more visible through localized evidence.

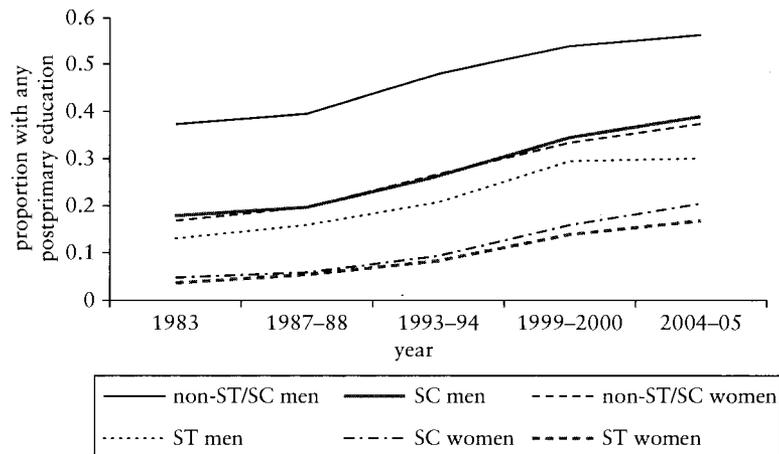
DALITS: MAIN FINDINGS

Over time, there has been a transformation in the situation of Dalits. The report shows that there has been a huge expansion of education among Dalit men. This is correlated with some labor market changes as well. However, perhaps the most visible transformations have been in the political arena, where Dalit parties have won state elections. Microlevel evidence also shows that there is much greater group confidence and ability to assert oneself in public spaces. In fieldwork conducted for this report, Surinder Jodhka, professor at Jawaharlal Nehru University, returned to two Haryana villages after nearly 20 years and found that, with the exception of a small number of Dalits in the scavenging community, Dalit families no longer engaged in traditional caste occupations.

“In other words, they no longer see themselves as being a part of the social order of the caste system,” writes Jodhka (2008, 27). “This has also given them a sense of independence and political agency.” Based on a survey of Dalits in two blocks in Uttar Pradesh, Prasad (2009) found similarly far-reaching changes. Anecdotal evidence also confirms the transformation that has occurred among Dalits. However, despite this, the national data that aggregate the broad outcomes show only small changes. The changes have been more significant among Dalit men than among Dalit women, and the latter have continued to show extremely poor education and labor market outcomes.

There has been an impressive expansion of education among Dalit men, but belief systems still militate against the success of Dalit students. Education has historically had a ritual significance in that

Figure 1.3 Change in Postprimary Education, by Caste and Gender, 1983–2005



Source: Calculations based on five-year NSS rounds on the population aged 15–59.

it was the preserve of the upper castes and reflected an elaborate ideology that excluded Dalits from its pale. This has begun to change, especially among SC men, whose educational attainment above postprimary has grown at a pace similar to that of non-SC/ST women (figure 1.3). Nonetheless, even today, upper caste parents may not allow Dalit students to sit with their own children or to eat together, and other such issues are common in some parts of the country (Nambissan 2007). Historical stereotyping also affects the performance of Dalit students. Some years ago, Hoff and Pandey (2004), using controlled experiments with Dalit junior high school students in a village in Uttar Pradesh, found that beliefs shaped by a history of prejudicial treatment can have a significant impact on children's responses when opportunities are presented to them.

Dalits are slightly more likely to participate in the labor force compared with non-SCs/STs, but these effects are stronger among rural women than among other groups. The analysis in this report looks at labor force participation rates separately for rural and urban areas and men and women. Among men, there is little variation; most men, regardless of caste status, report themselves employed. However, Dalit and Adivasi women in rural areas show much higher labor force participation rates than other rural women. The ethnographic evidence also points to the lower mobility restrictions on Dalit and Adivasi women, which, if combined with higher poverty

rates, makes it more likely that these women work outside the home.

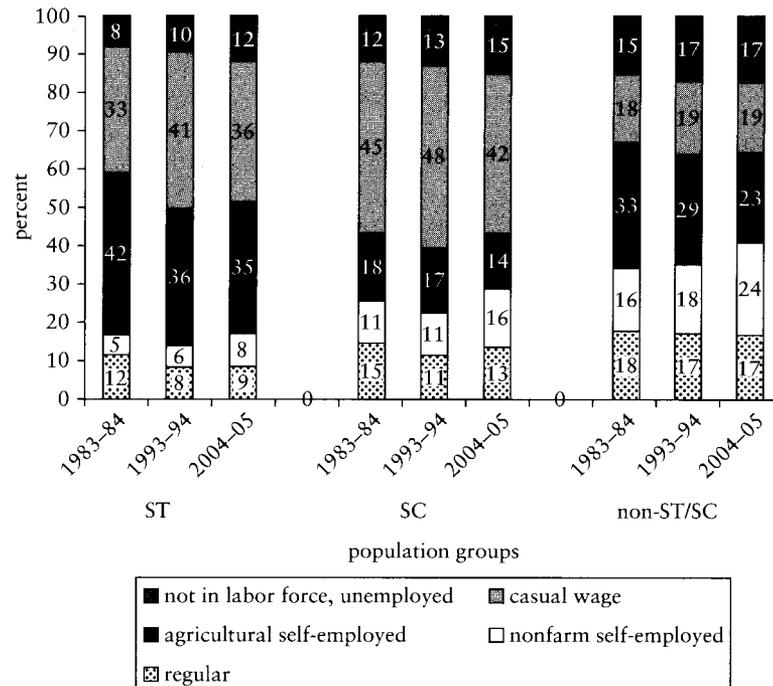
For the most part, Dalits do not own land and have historically been workers in the fields of landed castes. In 2004–05, according to NSS data on usual principal status, over 41 percent of Dalit men and 20 percent of Dalit women were engaged in casual labor compared with, respectively, 19 percent of non-SC/ST men and 8 percent of non-SC/ST women. Their landless status also excludes the Dalits from the large employment category of farm-based self-employment, and, within casual labor, the Dalits mostly remain farmworkers. At the multivariate level, too, the main Dalit effect is in the assignment to casual wage work. Predicted probabilities calculated from multinomial regression models that estimate the assignment of Dalit men to various employment groups show that Dalit men do not look so different from other men except that they are much more likely to be casual laborers.

While many have received the benefits of public sector employment, Dalits still lag behind non-Dalit/Adivasi/OBCs in regular salaried work and in nonfarm self-employment. The difference between Dalits and non-Dalits in regular salaried work is not huge, because, overall, salaried work forms a small proportion of all employment. At the univariate level, against about 17 percent non-SC/STs/OBCs, a little over 13 percent of Dalits are regular salaried workers. However, as the report shows, the real differences are not in the proportions of Dalits and non-Dalits in regular salaried work, but in the kinds of jobs the Dalits land even within salaried work. The assignment to low-end jobs in the salaried market leads to wage differentials as a result mainly of occupational segregation.

Despite the changes, aggregate data indicate that Dalit men continued to be in casual labor over the 20 years beginning in 1983. Shifts in labor force activity among Dalits show, overall, a slight decline in casual labor and a slight increase in both nonfarm self-employment and opting out of the labor force. Over the 20 years or so beginning in 1983, while the proportion of Dalit men in casual labor declined slightly (from 44.6 to 41.7 percent) and in nonfarm self-employment increased slightly (from 11.0 to 15.6 percent), these changes were small (figure 1.4). Dalit men are restricted to menial, low-paying, and often socially stigmatized occupations, while upper caste groups are concentrated in preferred occupations. Among women, the major change is the fact that they have moved out of casual labor, but are also withdrawing from the labor market.

In general, while SCs were represented proportionately to their population overall at each employment level within central government services, they were vastly overrepresented in the least skilled

Figure 1.4 A Small Labor Market Transition among Dalit Men: Out of Casual Labor into Self-Employment



Source: Staff calculations based on 2004-05 employment-unemployment schedule NSS data.

Note: Statistics pertain to men between 20 and 65 years of age.

occupational categories at the lowest employment level. In 2006, almost 60 percent of the sweepers in central government ministries were SCs (table 1.3), indicating that SCs are more likely to undertake ritually unclean, manual work, although qualitative and small-area studies indicate that this is changing in many places. Recent work suggests that there is also subtle stereotyping along caste lines in private sector hiring. New research establishes empirically that SC applicants face particular difficulty in passing through the screening questions (such as those on family background) set up by prospective employers (Thorat and Attewell 2007; Jodhka and Newman 2007).

Dalits also seem to have lower returns to education. Our report suggests that, while all men benefit from education, Dalit men in rural areas who have completed primary education or postprimary education are less likely to be employed. This may perhaps reflect,

Table 1.3 The Representation of Dalits in Government Jobs, 2006

<i>percent</i>	
<i>Group</i>	<i>SCs</i>
A	13.0
B	14.5
C	16.4
D (excluding sweepers)	18.3
Sweepers	59.4
Average across groups A–D, excluding sweepers	24.3
Average across groups A–D, including sweepers	15.6

Source: Calculated from data of Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances, and Pensions (2009).

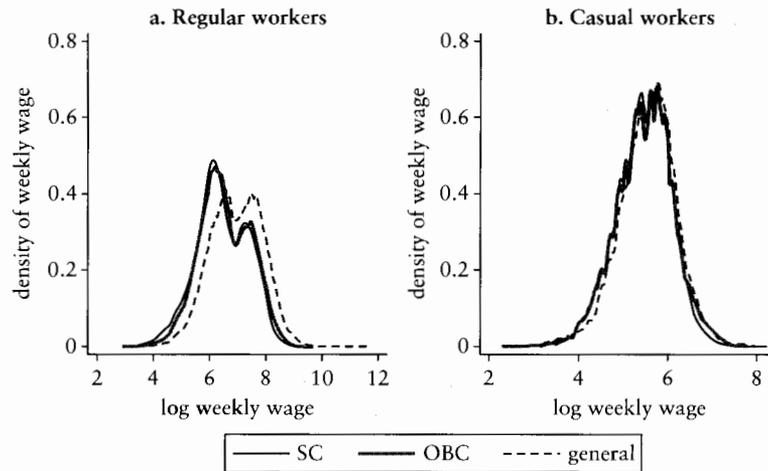
Note: Data pertain to central government services as of January 1, 2006 and exclude two ministries. Group A indicates the highest level, and Group D, the lowest.

first, that all men with education in rural areas are penalized, second, that Dalit men feel these effects especially if they have postprimary education, and, third, that the growth of jobs in rural areas does not keep pace with the increase in the supply of educated Dalit men. In urban areas, while all men show a much higher likelihood of participating in the labor force if they have education, the effects among Dalit men are not statistically significant.

The wage differentials between Dalits and others are a testimony to the continued disadvantage of Dalits in the labor market. The influence of caste affiliation on wages is a much noted feature of the Indian labor market (see, for example, Banerjee and Knight 1985; Das 2006; Unni 2001). Kernel density plots of wages by social group in 2004–05 largely bear out the expectation that SC workers in regular jobs are less likely to hold the more well paying jobs. The distribution of regular wages for general caste workers lies to the right of the distribution for SC and OBC workers (figure 1.5). Oaxaca-Blinder decompositions of wage differentials indicate that nearly 60 percent of the wage gap between SC and general caste workers is caused by unobserved factors or cannot be explained by human capital endowments.

Glass walls? Occupational segregation can explain much of the Dalit disadvantage in the labor market. The concentration of Dalits in casual work or in low-pay occupations compared with other groups is linked to relative differences in educational level, but this is only part of the story. Das and Dutta (2008) propose the notion of glass walls, whereby occupationally slotted castes cannot leave their traditional trades or jobs. Castes are clustered around occupations, whether by choice or compulsion. Microlevel studies, for

Figure 1.5 Wage Differentials between Dalits and Others Are Higher in Salaried Work than in Casual Work



Source: Das and Dutta (2008), based on NSS data, 61st round, 2004–05.

instance, point to the possibility that small-scale Dalit entrepreneurs, especially in rural areas, are being prevented from moving out of caste-based occupations into self-employed ventures through social pressures and ostracism (Thorat 2007). There is also a possibility that people may not want to leave their caste networks because they may be advantageous in responding to new opportunities (Munshi and Rosenzweig 2005; Kishwar 2002).

The issue of Dalit entrepreneurship has been in the national discourse for some time. Despite impressive microlevel studies of Dalit entrepreneurship, the national data do not seem to capture a shift into self-employment. It is also likely that the national data of the NSS date back to 2004, while changes that we are unable to capture may have taken place in the last six or seven years. Using the 61st round of the NSS, we find that Dalit men seem, overall, less likely to have their own enterprises, but self-employment is rare among most men in India, and the hurdles for small (often household) enterprises are well documented, most recently by Kishwar (2002) and Nilekani (2008). It seems that, in rural areas, Dalit men have a huge disadvantage in self-employment. This could be caused as much by the fact that self-employment is rare in rural areas and that, where it exists, it may be ancillary to agriculture, and Dalits typically do not own land. Equally, however, rural Dalit men have fewer social networks and less access to credit, markets, and raw materials than

their urban counterparts. In a study on Dalit entrepreneurship commissioned for this report, Jodhka and Gautam (2008) find that, while those who venture into nonfarm activities are able to circumvent caste norms, significant barriers exist in accessing networks, particularly social networks that would enable access to credit. Poor access to networks reflects in national data as well. Only 12 percent of SC households had access to three contacts in the formal sector in 2005 compared with 26 percent among forward caste households (see chapter 3, figure 3.6).

There are cracks in the glass walls, but relative disadvantages remain. In sum, we find evidence of subtle changes in education outcomes and the labor market among the Dalits, particularly Dalit men. However, these changes appear to be mostly cracks in the glass wall. Mobility among the Dalits is constrained largely because of the poor initial conditions Dalits face (for instance, lack of assets and poor access to markets).

IN SUMMARY

- There has been some convergence in education outcomes, particularly in postprimary education, between Dalit and non-SC/ST men. However, while the advance has been impressive, Dalits still lag behind because of their low starting points. Dalit women, in particular, do worse, faring only marginally better than Adivasi women.
- Dalits are slightly more likely to participate in the labor market. However, they remain largely in casual jobs. Over time, there has been only a slight shift away from casual labor into nonfarm employment among men. More Dalit women, however, seem to be withdrawing from the labor force, perhaps on account of more education or social mobility.
- The picture that emerges in the employment options for educated Dalit men is more complex. In rural areas, education mostly hampers the employment opportunities for Dalits, mainly because there are few regular salaried jobs available. In urban areas, too, the combined effects of caste and education indicate that SC men have fewer chances (relative to other groups) of exiting casual labor and moving into regular salaried jobs if they have postprimary education. This may be a corollary of an increasing supply of educated SC men over time, thereby creating a system of job rationing among SCs, who cannot compete in the nonreserved salaried job market.
- The wage differentials between Dalits and others are a testimony to the continued disadvantage of Dalits in the labor market. Differences in access to occupations—or glass walls—are

an important determinant of the wage gap. Recent research suggests that there is subtle caste-based stereotyping in private hiring.

- In addition to new economic opportunities, Dalit solidarity movements and affirmative action policies have helped the Dalits claim political space. In this, they have been more successful than other excluded groups.

Women

While gender per se is a relational category, and men are arguably disadvantaged along some indicators in some areas (for example, health and mortality), our report focuses on women—who, in India, are an excluded category—in major development outcomes and processes.⁵ Female disadvantage is well documented and finds its rationale, as does the caste system, in Hindu law books (Deshpande 2002). It plays out in several spheres of economic and social life: women's lower labor force participation and wages relative to men, poorer health and education outcomes, less voice in the political or general public arena, and less access to markets. In an infamously Indian pattern, we find that, in terms of sex ratios, India lags behind many countries at the same income level. This represents stark testimony of female disadvantage and the disincentive for parents to have daughters, although there may be evidence of an incipient turnaround in some parts of India (Das Gupta, Chung, and Shuzhuo 2009). Yet, when girls and women do survive, they do better today than did the girls and women of the generation of their mothers, which is another way of saying that key indicators of gender equality are improving if one discounts the “missing women” (Sen 1992). The absolute levels of the indicators, however, continue to be poor, especially for Dalit and Adivasi women, who suffer from multiple disadvantages.

Chapter 4 focuses on select outcomes among women. In particular, it addresses women's survival disadvantage both in childhood and in their reproductive years, as well as some of the processes, such as marriage, that mediate women's access to markets, services, and spaces. In addressing women's voice and agency, the chapter also looks at an oft-omitted variable: women's vulnerability to violence or threats of physical harm in the home and outside the home. It correlates the likelihood of experiencing violence with a number of human development outcomes among women and their children.

WOMEN: MAIN FINDINGS

India has made substantial investments in human development, and the changes are evident. Today, most Indian families would not be able

to identify with the anachronistic *Laws of Manu*, which laid down the lower status of women. Indian women are now much more visible in public spaces and in positions of authority; fertility rates in several states are now below replacement levels and are similar to levels in developed countries; contraceptive prevalence is much higher than even a decade ago; and maternal mortality, while at stubbornly high levels across South Asia except in Sri Lanka, is showing a decline that is greater in India than in other countries. Also, there seems to be evidence of an incipient turnaround in reported son preference at least in some parts of India.

Yet, the roots of gender inequality are still strong and affect a range of outcomes among women. Despite the strides in education and health, many outcomes are worse in India than in neighboring Bangladesh and relative to some other countries at a similar income level. The Human Development Index brings this to public attention annually. Female disadvantage is most starkly apparent in the lower survival chances of infant girls compared with infant boys. India and, to a lesser extent, Nepal are the only two countries in which the survival rate among infant girls is lower than the rate among boys (figure 1.6). Declines in mortality rates overall have occurred more slowly in India than in Bangladesh and Nepal. Finally, the rate of progression of girls through to secondary school is much lower in India than in Bangladesh, although the latter spends a smaller proportion of gross domestic product on education (Das 2008). But, as in other areas, in gender inequality, too, India is highly heterogeneous and Adivasi, Dalit, and Muslim women tend to show much poorer outcomes than other women. There are also large regional variations in most of these indicators.

Adverse child sex ratios in many Indian states have received considerable attention, but is there evidence of an incipient turnaround? The strong preference for sons among Indian families plays out in the neglect of daughters and, over the last few decades, in the selective abortion of female fetuses. This has led to massive outrage; Amartya Sen (1992) famously drew attention to the missing women in China and India. Das Gupta, Chung, and Shuzhuo (2009) draw comparative evidence from the Republic of Korea to show that the fertility preference for sons is declining and that this may well be followed by better childhood sex ratios in some parts of India, which could be on the cusp of a turnaround. Similar evidence is provided by John et al. (2008), who have carried out research in some of the districts with the poorest childhood sex ratios in India.

At the core of this preference for sons seems to be a number of cultural practices, including the taboo against receiving financial help from daughters or considering daughters as old age insurance.

Figure 1.6 Only in India and Nepal Is Infant Mortality Higher among Girls than among Boys



Source: Selected Demographic and Health Surveys, 2003–06.

Together with high dowry rates, this implies that daughters are perceived as a net loss in economic terms. In such a scenario, the easy availability of technology that detects the sex of the child allows families to abort female fetuses. However, not all states fare so badly. Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Kerala, and West Bengal show better indicators. In Haryana and Punjab, the sex ratios are so adverse that there is now a shortage of marriageable women, and families with sons have to import daughters-in-law from across the country and across caste lines. Whether these trends will have longer-term consequences is yet to be determined (Kaur 2004).

Despite many positive demographic outcomes among women, childbearing remains a high-risk event. Indian women face a 1 in 70 risk of dying in childbirth. This falls at the high end of the global spectrum, and other comparators have much better outcomes. For instance, Chinese women face a 1 in 1,400 risk of maternal death, while the risk among Vietnamese women is 1 in 280. Within India, there is considerable variation across states, and some have done worse than others over the first few years of the new millennium. Assam, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Rajasthan, Uttaranchal, and Uttar Pradesh together accounted for about 65 percent of all maternal deaths in 1997–2003 (Registrar General 2006). Childbearing is entangled with many cultural factors such as the early age of marriage, which, combined with poor access to health care, may be responsible for large numbers of maternal deaths. The government is cognizant of the slow pace of decline in maternal mortality overall, and the National Rural Health Mission has put in place several interventions to address the issue (Registrar General 2006).

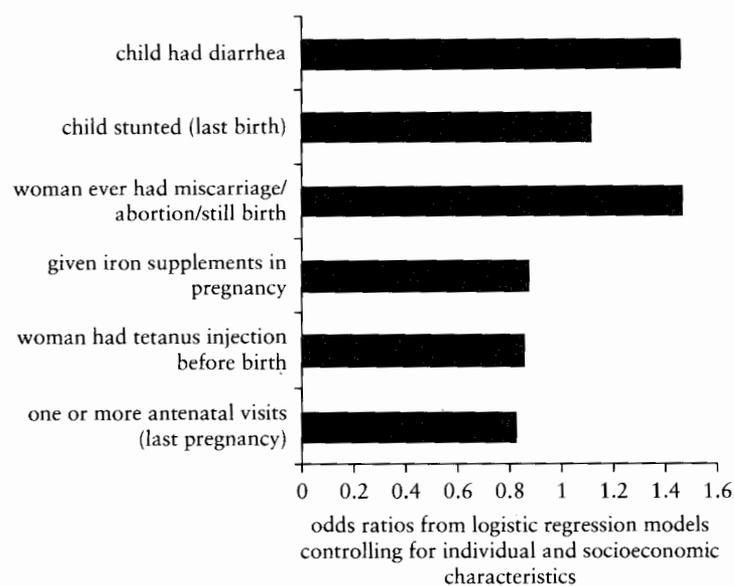
Less than half of Indian women receive complete antenatal care, and 60 percent of all childbirths take place at home. A majority of the women who give birth at home feel it is not necessary to deliver in a formal medical facility. The public health system has agonized over the low demand for maternal health services; cultural and behavioral factors have been blamed (see Basu 1990). Medical practitioners often cite ignorance as the reason for the poor outcomes among women (Khandare 2004). It is true that, among the women who gave birth at home, a majority felt that to give birth in a medical facility was not necessary (see chapter 4, table 4.3). However, the low demand for health care may also be triggered by gaps in supply, the inability to reach a health center in the moment of need, and the lack of information on whether the health centers would be open.

Violence could be one of the omitted variables that explains why many women do not access reproductive health services. According to the 2005 NFHS, over one-third of Indian women reported that they had experienced spousal violence at some point, and about one-fourth

had experienced violence in the previous year. Violence against women is a marker of extreme inequality in gender relations, and addressing the problem has an intrinsic value because it has important implications for human rights, but addressing it also has an instrumental value. Nearly 81 percent of the women who reported that they had never experienced violence also said that they had received antenatal care; in contrast, only 67 percent of those who had experienced violence had received antenatal care. At the multivariate level, after controlling for wealth quintile, educational levels, and other background characteristics, one finds that the experience of spousal violence increases the odds of non-live births, lack of antenatal care, lack of iron supplements and tetanus shots before delivery, stunting among children under the age of 5, and diarrhea for the last child to be born in families (figure 1.7). Our report also highlights the fact that access to land, assets, and education among both men and women and campaigns to change attitudes that condone violence could go a long way to addressing the prevalence of spousal violence.

The labor market is one of the most important sites of gender inequality. Women's visibility in the high-end urban labor market in India is much greater today than it was a decade ago, but this is far

Figure 1.7 The Experience of Violence Is Associated with Worse Outcomes among Women and Their Children



Source: Staff calculations based on 2005 NFHS data.

from representing a trend that may be considered general. Female labor force participation rates have remained low; only 40 percent of women are employed in full-time work (NSS 2004–05). The stagnation in female labor force participation is driven mainly by rural areas; urban areas have seen a 7 percent increase, from 20.3 percent in 1993 to 21.8 percent in 2005. There is also considerable diversity by state and by caste and tribal status. Women in the more rapidly growing regions where the norms of female mobility are more liberal, such as the south and west, are much more likely to be employed than are women in the central states. Similarly, SC and ST women participate more in the labor force out of necessity; the latter mostly take up self-employment in agriculture, while SC women undertake casual labor.

Entry into the labor market, rather than wages, is the critical marker of the employment trajectories of Indian women. This is because most Indians do not work for wages anyway, and self-employment is the default option where it is economically feasible. Casual labor is the option of last resort. In a pattern peculiar to India and much of South Asia, education lowers the likelihood that women will participate in the labor force. Two arguments have been articulated to explain the low labor force participation of Indian women. The first is a supply-side argument according to which the supply of secure well-paid jobs for educated women is low. Hence, educated women, who also belong to the higher socioeconomic strata, prefer to opt out of the labor force rather than accept low-status (manual) jobs. The second is a demand-side argument that rests on the cultural mores and values of status and seclusion in the region; this may prevent higher-status households from allowing women to work or demand jobs. Family honor in most parts of India, for instance, requires that women be restricted to the home, thus affecting the ability of women to work outside the home (Chen 1995).

Muddy waters: an income effect or a discouraged worker effect? The literature on women's labor force participation, particularly in developed countries, indicates that women's employment decisions are often contingent upon the employment status and earnings of husbands (see Cohen and Bianchi 1999). Das (2006) finds that the education and wages of husbands do lower the probability of employment among women. Moreover, after controlling for the incomes of husbands, one finds that women's postprimary education shows a positive correlation with women's labor force participation. In fact, it takes the form of a "U," with high labor force participation among uneducated women, the lowest labor force participation among women who have completed primary education, and rising labor force participation among women with postprimary education.

Thus, women with higher education may perhaps stay out of the labor force because of an income effect, but this conclusion is muddied by the lack of jobs that these women would want to take. In the absence of regular salaried jobs, the only options available to educated women, especially in rural areas, are low-status, low-paying manual work, such as work on family farms or work as petty vendors, domestic servants, or day laborers. In the face of such unsuitable employment opportunities, households decide to withdraw female labor if there are other earning members. (If women are household heads, they are more likely to be employed.) Because educated women are usually married to educated men and are likely to have some financial resources, they stay out of the labor force instead of accepting poorly paid jobs as casual wage workers.

Inequalities in wages and opportunities are an additional disincentive for women to work. While wages have risen in the aggregate for all over the last 10 years or so, lower wages among women compared with men are an added disincentive for women to work outside the home. Women's nominal weekly wages are, on average, 71 percent of men's wages in regular salaried work and 56 percent of men's wages in casual work (NSS 2004–05). Oaxaca-Blinder decompositions conducted on the wages of male and female casual workers in Bangladesh and India indicate that unobserved factors account for over 70 percent of the difference in wages (Das 2006; World Bank 2008). Of these unobserved factors, a large proportion are likely to be accounted for by discrimination. Low and unequal wages and the concentration of these in agricultural labor and in "female" occupations are added disincentives for women to work outside the home.

Counting aspirations: Indian women clearly want to work outside their homes. One of the explanations for women's low participation in the labor market is that they would prefer not to work, given the pervasive culture of seclusion, especially in states where women's employment rates are low (see Das 2006). We find quite the reverse in women's responses to the question in the NSS about why they did not work outside the home. Over 89 percent of the women are doing only domestic work say they are obliged to do so. One-third say they would accept paid work, in addition to their household duties. Clearly, their household responsibilities are paramount, but the majority say they would like regular part-time jobs in, for example, dairying or tailoring. Of these, almost 60 percent cite the lack of finance and credit as the most important constraint on finding the work they desire (table 1.4). Further analysis using 2005 NFHS data suggests that less than 40 percent know about the existence of credit facilities; of these, only 10 percent had actually applied for the credit. To a large extent, this may explain why women

Table 1.4 Three in Five Women Cite Lack of Credit as a Reason for Not Doing the Work They Want

<i>percent</i>	
<i>What do you need to facilitate the work you want?</i>	<i>Share</i>
Nothing	4.24
Finance and credit	58.50
Raw materials	3.68
Assured markets	7.58
Training	15.63
Accommodation	0.87
Other	9.50

Source: Staff calculations based on the 61st NSS round, 2004–05.

Note: The sample consists of women who are currently doing household chores, but who say they would also like to do market work.

are so poorly represented in nonfarm employment and why they are transitioning so slowly out of agriculture.

Voice and visibility can change the outcomes among women. Data of the 2005 NFHS indicate that, at home, women do not have much voice in major decisions. For instance, they are least likely to participate in decisions about major household purchases and more likely to participate in decisions regarding their own health care or visits to their own families. Mandatory legal provisions reserving seats in legislatures for women have enabled women's participation in public spaces. However, the evidence on whether this has helped improve outcomes among a majority of women is mixed.

One of the factors that hinders women's visibility and voice is the threat of physical harm and lack of security outside the home. Threats to women's security also influence the ability of women to access markets and services and claim spaces for themselves. This is an area in which policy can have a huge effect. Making public spaces safe for women is a major step forward in enhancing women's access to these spaces.

IN SUMMARY

- Women today are doing better than their mothers' generation along a range of outcomes that include health, education, voice and visibility, and, to an extent, participation in the urban labor market.
- There are large inequalities among states in most areas of women's status and gender equity.

- Poor access to reproductive health means that too many women die unnecessarily in childbirth.
- Violence against women is a strong correlate of a number of poor outcomes among women and their children.
- Despite a period of dramatic economic growth, labor force participation rates among women virtually stagnated from 1983 to 2004–05. This is driven especially by rural areas.
- Heterogeneity across social groups is pronounced, and especially Dalit and Adivasi women are left out of nonfarm self-employment.
- Women appear to be stuck in farm-based employment; a major reason why they are not transitioning into nonfarm self-employment is their poor access to credit facilities.
- Over time, women's voice and agency both in the home and in public have increased, but the extent to which this has impacted aggregate outcomes is unclear even at the local level.

Common Themes

This report has several common themes and messages, as follows:

- First, it shows that, while growth has touched everyone, it has not done so equitably; traditional hierarchies have remained stubborn against growth. In the aggregate, STs appear to have done more poorly than other groups; they show the slowest pace of improvements in a range of areas.
- Second, although caste seems to be reinventing itself in response to economic opportunities and is far from a static stereotype, we find that SCs are still held back by, among other factors, their initial disadvantage and lack of social networks.
- Third, female disadvantage in India persists despite high rates of economic growth. Women are dying unnecessarily both in infancy and in motherhood; the outcomes are poorer among Dalits and Adivasis.

At its root, exclusion can be explained by inequality in opportunities, inequality in access to markets (for example, labor and credit), and inequality in voice and agency. Voice and agency have played out in different ways among all three groups (Adivasis, Dalits, and women), but are particularly salient drivers of exclusion. For instance, violence against women is not merely a variable that explains some of the poor outcomes; it is also a mechanism of control. Among the Adivasis and, in the past, the Dalits, militancy has represented a form of voice and assertion.

India is not alone in grappling with serious challenges in reaching its most excluded populations. In other countries as well, this challenge is a formidable one. An Inter-American Development Bank report on Latin America states that “inclusion is not just about changing outcomes, but crucially about changing the processes that produce and reproduce exclusionary outcomes” and that “in order to make normative changes effective, institutions must change the ways in which they operate, hire employees, and enforce laws and regulations. This in turn materializes as changes in the implementation of programs and policies” (Márquez et al. 2007, 14).

The Indian Constitution has set the stage for almost unparalleled affirmative action and other forms of positive actions. These have been translated into laws, programs, and procedures. Yet, the combination of identity politics, the inflexibility of the systems that seek to promote inclusion, and the attendant poor implementation have resulted in patchy impact, affecting some groups more than others. To describe the real challenge is to state a truism: the implementation of policies and the reform of institutions are the key to ensuring that economic growth becomes more equitable.

Notes

1. Coined by anthropologist Oscar Lewis, the term ‘culture of poverty’ refers to a unique value system of the poor. It was Lewis’s belief that the poor are socialized into believing they deserve to be poor, leading to low aspirations, low effort and inability to escape poverty.

2. For instance, improvements in antenatal care have been particularly slow among OBC women.

3. See <http://www.tribal.nic.in/index.asp>.

4. The Hindu hierarchy is said to have evolved from different parts of the body of Brahma, the creator of the universe. Thus, the Brahmans, who originated from the mouth of Brahma, undertake the most prestigious priestly and teaching occupations. The Kshatriyas (from the arms) are the rulers and warriors; the Vaishyas (from the thighs) are traders and merchants; and the Shudras (from the feet) are manual workers and servants of other castes. Below the Shudras and outside the caste system, the lowest in the order, the untouchables, engage in the most demeaning and stigmatized occupations (scavenging, for instance, and dealing in bodily waste).

5. It is acknowledged, however, that male-female differences along a range of indicators need to be considered, and more so if one is thinking of designing interventions to *lessen* the gender gap.

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