

**Working Paper 494**

**Values Concerning Children  
and Fertility Behaviour:  
Method, Respondents and  
Preliminary Insights from the  
Field in Jharkhand, India**

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**VALUES CONCERNING CHILDREN AND FERTILITY BEHAVIOUR:  
METHOD, RESPONDENTS AND PRELIMINARY INSIGHTS FROM THE FIELD  
IN JHARKHAND, INDIA**

**Ujjwala Gupta\***

**Abstract**

*Tribals have always been identified by their distinct cultural heritage and hypothesized to have different demographic outcomes as compared to other social groups due to their much gender egalitarian social set up. The present paper is a preliminary understanding that attempts to explore and bring a level of understanding of the tribal demographic behavior. With these introductory insights from the field, the study tries comprehending socio-cultural background acting behind fertility as a demographic outcome among three tribal communities of Jharkhand.*

**Introduction and Background**

Evidently, much of the attention given so far has been to the statistical pattern of fertility and its developmental outcomes in the form of overcrowding of population by the demographers, and on the contrary, sociologists would see rather an individual aspect of the fertility which is "couple as a unit". A couple with its own level of education and income personalizes the hardship of bearing and rearing a child and hence, determine its level of fertility. The current paper, being part of the larger research study, which is based on a sample population of three tribes of Jharkhand, gives an introductory insight on the existing value of children that determines in what ways they adjust their fertility values and behaviour along with several other contexts of family and marriage system followed to shape ideal family size considering the gendered preference of children along with their birth order. The study uses field survey and observations of the traditional milieu behind family, children and fertility behavior in the frame of original Value of Children concept by (Hoffman and Hoffman, 1973 and Arnold et. al., 1975).

As Jharkhand, formerly part of Bihar, has been particularly the adobe of early primitive man holding its immense cultural heritage in terms of biology, language and its serene beauty. *Magahi, Sadri* and other tribal languages are the defined dialects of the state with its profound nearness to its original state. With the rampant mobility, as a result of heavy inward and outward migration, there is tremendous visible shift in the ethnic composition and cultural traits of the population. There is widespread awakening and social mobilisation through changes in occupational pattern, from hunting gathering to settled agriculturists, wage labourers to service category, that has brought about changes in the family system, mix of rituals, inheritance of property and aligning parent's value towards children, the marital pattern and relation, as well as, in modifying the fertility outcomes. The newly-formed state of Jharkhand has undergone transformation, not just structurally, but also in the form of social and

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cultural norms that has led to subtle shift in the family structure, marital bonds and parent-child relationship. The changes have represented emerging new value system for children.

Beyond the demographic surveys, diverse theoretical and methodological strategies have been drawn based on anthropological and small scale surveys which have concentrated on other aspects of fertility like indigenous perception of fertility, value of children, parent-child relation in terms of socio, economic, emotional and old age security gains for defining the optimal number of children in their family (Caldwell, 1999). Defining and measuring the value of children and its relationship with fertility has been argued by Fawcett and Arnold (1975) and Bulatao (1981). The changes in the preference of children and family system have been reflected in the changes that placed for the value of children with respect to each child that have an independent influence in the fertility changes. Value of children is comprehended by the family on the basis of their productive capacities which is linked to the economic or social structure of society like compulsory education, legal prohibition for employment of children, improvement in their survival rate, etc.

Marriage and family has undergone considerable changes in the value and norms with increased mobilisation of people and this has been called by Goode (1963b) as 'conjugal family' form where the optimal size of the family is determined by the marital relations, and hence, determining the value and relation with children. These changes in the mutual relations have crucial influence on fertility behavior and can be well observed in the present study on ethnic communities of Jharkhand.

Most of the studies on fertility in India have noted that people are motivated to plan their family size based on the economic benefit they would derive from their children after spending in their childhood. The first of its kind in India was by Mamdani (1972) who explained that irrespective of the social class and caste differentiation, the perception of parents towards their children is dependent on economic gains and hence, serve as an insurance against any risk and old age. The actual fertility behaviour is determined by their perception towards children, experiences about ideal family size and the satisfaction with the number of living children (Dharmalingam, 1996). Desai and Alva, 1998 and James, (2000) viewed that land could influence the fertility pattern in a family and explained the importance of family labour for cultivating land, where land could also be considered as a substitute for children as an old-age security in the form of pure income effect that determines the quantity and quality of children. On the contrary, Sovani, 1948 and Valssoff, 1982 contradict that economic value of children does not determine the fertility of that area and there is no relation between fertility and occupational lineage or economic condition. Nandi et. al. (1978) argue that the costs associated with children, including both opportunity cost and direct cost as supposed by parents, are likely to differ on the basis of nature of family system, extended or unitary. Children of poor families are compulsorily made to participate in the work activities since their early ages and they are expected to provide economic security as well as a support to their old age. Along with these, other related social problems external to family wellbeing, poor couple tend to go for unfettered fertility choices (Das Gupta, 1992). Mohanty (2011) finds, reduction in fertility level was largely due to differences in child survival.

Evidently, most of the studies so far have been illustrating the changes in the line of economic and old age security where familial factors have played a pertinent role. The point to be noted here is that the changes in value of children and family system are a part of dynamic influence of

modernisation, free movement of people, realisation of the importance of education and increased individualisation. Consequences are seen in conjugal relations and their increased economic freedom that has its influence on fertility behavior. Hence, it becomes imperative to study from the sociological point the prelude to understand fertility behaviour from many other contexts including marriage, family system, indigenous means to birth control and others.

This paper is an introductory micro analysis of relationship between family-children which influences the fertility intention of couples. For this study, a mix of rural and peri-urban setting was chosen considering both limitations and advantages of the complex non-homogenous nature of the ethnic communities of Jharkhand. A quarter of the Jharkhand population is home to nearly 32 tribes, also locally called as *Sadan*, who live in constant harmony with ecology and community. Water, forest and land are the three major resources which demonstrates the identity of tribals. Owing to the rapid influx of population from outside, particularly from Central and North Bihar, there is diffusion of socio-cultural traits. With this harbinger of new values there arrives need to explore the pattern of fertility intentions.

### **Method of Data Collection**

The study was conducted in three districts of Jharkhand, a newly-carved state in the year 2000 from Bihar. Ever since, Jharkhand was well-known for its serene beauty, mines and mineral deposits. The state suffers from "resource curse" which refers to *paradox of plenty* where it has immense mineral resources but paradoxically worst of development, lawlessness and least economic growth. Some of the Tribal groups still continue to live a very simple life, traditionally near to the vicinity of hilly forest, topographically isolated from the mainstream population. UNDP (United Nations Development Program) and Government of India's district-level composite index was considered to select the districts for study. Measurement of this composite index was based on the following indicators: Standard of living (per capita monthly income), educational status, health and other development indicators. Using this index, determining the level of development, districts were identified and the concentration of ST population in these districts was chosen as the criteria for conducting this study. Three districts (Garhwa, Latehar and Paschimi Singhbhum), that showed its major concentration of different tribes, were selected as part of the study area. *Korwa* is a Particularly Vulnerable Tribe Group (PVTG) in Garhwa, as defined by the Government of India based on their level of agricultural technology, declining population, extremely low literacy, subsistence economy and inhabited in extreme geographical isolation, *Chero* tribe was considered as 'Neglected tribe' due to their insignificant numbers and very poor economic conditions in Latehar. They continued to remain isolated subsisting on marginal farm and wage labour. *Ho*, concentrated in Paschimi Singhbhum, were the 4<sup>th</sup> most numerous in terms of their spread and population in Kolhan division and constituted 10% of the total Scheduled Tribes of Jharkhand.

### **Sampling Technique**

Multistage sampling method was used for selecting the couple respondents from each ST group who, in general, share common socio-economic and cultural diversity but still continue to be mutually exclusive from each other. Four stages of sampling were -- The three districts of Latehar, Paschimi Singhbhum

and Garhwa in first stage. Three blocks were selected depending on high concentration of ST in the second stage -- Chaibasa (Paschimi Singhbhum), Ranka (Garhwa) and Manika (Latehar). Selection of villages, as third stage of sampling, was based on high, medium and low concentration of ST. Two Panchayats and four villages, two from each Panchayats, were selected for the study purpose. Villages were chosen purposively on the basis of their distance and access to PHC, the literacy rate and the nature of economic activity they are engaged in. From these ST groups, the elements (couples) were randomly chosen using Simple Random Sampling method from immunisation roster of Angan Wadi Worker (AWW) in order to reduce selection bias as the fourth and final stage of sampling.

The field survey was conducted on 180 married respondents. The field survey included both men and women to understand the personal and practical considerations with the interest of exploring the value concern towards children as well as investigation into the relationship between family influences on fertility intentions of the couple. The study, being on a sensitive issue and least talked about, also required an unconventional method to instigate. This initially brought a lot of complications and influenced the research methods which were used for the study. People refrained from talking on family planning, birth control and marital affairs, as it was considered a taboo and unethical to discuss. The data collection required much of informal talks to suit the explorative and talkative nature of the research, qualitative methods, like narrative interviews and participant observation, similar to the style of ethnography, were used. This was straighter, simpler and direct involving no artificial flavour.

The respondents were chosen randomly keeping in mind the number of households in each hamlet, locally called as *tola*. The study, thus, was based on the reported behaviour, attitude, values concerning children by men and women considering all the aspects that directly or indirectly affect fertility intention including marriage, family, children and contraception. As part of the study, the researcher had to stay intermittently for two-and-a-half months in the field to conduct personal interviews along with observations.

The interviews were conducted using local language, pre-tested, semi-structured interview schedule taking verbal consent from every respondent. Comfort and confidentiality of the respondents were specially kept in consideration by every means to minimise the problems endemic to research. Each interview usually lasted for an hour. In the light of the objectives, research schedule was so designed to assess the relationship between family and fertility; the value of children among ST couples.

The basic *unit of sampling* was currently married women in the age group of 13- 49 years with the eligibility criteria of -- currently living with husband and couple having at least one living child. The data was collected by personal home visits and sensitive questions were asked maintaining privacy of the participants. The respondents were asked to provide information on family size preferences, inter-personal relations, including communication and decision-making pattern for contraceptive usage, abortion, fertility history and values concerning children. Besides these, the questions on birth control and their methods remained very sensitive and personal. Besides these, informal discussions were also conducted with doctors, local service providers, traditional spiritual healers, Angan Wadi workers and traditional birth attendants, called as *chamaein* or *ghasin*.

## Preliminary Insights from the Field

### Family and Marriage system

Formerly, *zamindars* (landlords) *Chero* were presently petty landowners practicing settled cultivation primarily dependent on their land supplemented by wage earnings from manual labour such as agricultural labourers, wage labourers in mining and quarrying activities for their livelihood. Child labour was much commonly practiced due to the extreme poverty situation amongst them. Migration of *Chero* and *Ho* tribe males to neighboring states for wage labour at construction sites or factories was rampant and females engaging themselves in petty business or nearby manual labour tasks. However, *Korwa* males were especially engaged in activities within their own village areas as wage labourers, besides agriculture with the females engaged in managing their household. With their close inhabitation to forest, they also depended on forest produce for their livelihood and survival. Land and forest were the major economic resources as their individual ownership attained by clearing forest. *Korwa*, originally called as *Beonra*, continued to hunt and gather food along with practicing shifting cultivation in forest. With the ban on shifting cultivation and restricted forest use for hunting, *Korwa* had to deal with the real hardship for their survival. Poor fertility of land and low rainfall added to the nutritional deficiency among men, women and children. Some of the *Korwa* men/ women even worked as *dhangars* (servant) on annual basis to get payment in form of cash or kind. Tribes exhibited close association with forest for their livelihood as well as dwelling. Though they continued to worship ancestral spirits and the supernatural bodies; religion remained in a state of transition.

### Family, kinship and Household structure

Family, being the smallest form of social structure, served as a means of production and consumption bonded with socio-cultural-economic and religious affairs. Tribal societies were patriarchal and patrilineal in nature with men as the heads in every household and sons as getting inheritance and succession rights of land and house. Men were the controller of the resources, reproduction and consumption of the goods. Till son/ sons attained maturity and gets married, they co-reside with the natal group, building their own structure and establishing own economic unit. Lately, they controlled the entire resource of the family till the parents grow very old. Property was divided among sons equally but the eldest son was entitled to get a little more than the rest which are called *jethans*. The land, as a productive unit, induces sons and their natal to stay in the same house. Daughters, or their in-laws family, do not have any say on inheritance and succession of land rights. In cases where daughters being widow or divorced, got indirect land rights in the form of just maintenance. Among *Chero*, with the influence of Hindu religion, the customary practice of dowry, which is a price paid in exchange of son during marriage, daughters get the movable property whatever her father could afford was newly introduced.

The kinship pattern of *Ho* was actually a model relationship and was based on parentage and marriage. Their idea was that parents and children are related by blood through the means of reproduction which even extends up to cousins and not just siblings. They also consider the decent is patrilineal where only men were responsible for the lineage. Thus, marriages even amongst cousins, were also not outlawed. Marriages, thus, create a new bond and relations, not just between couples but

also between the two clans. *Ho* society was based on kinship relations and so they categorise the consanguine relatives on the basis of their age, lineage, sex, affinity and place of residence and the cordial relations are maintained through constant hospitality, feast, invitations, food, service, mutual respect and many similar things.

Usually, most of the families were nuclear or extended nuclear where married couples stay with their parents within the same compound but separately. The independent living units of these tribes were called as *Dera* which had very few tangible things along with a *chulha* where they cooked and ate. Father, mother, unmarried children and siblings stayed and worked together but food was cooked separately. Daughters were sent off to her husband's house after marriage and old parents remained behind with their son who took their liability in old age.

At family level, division of labour was clearly defined where females did all household chores, male earned livelihood and elderly took the duty to take care of children and the domesticated animals and poultry. Besides all these, women also engaged themselves in wage labour as well as in agricultural activities to participate in economic run of the family. *Ho* women were hard-working and contributed to their family income along with working on daily chores. They took part in rituals, social and religious affairs but did not take the liberty to be involved in traditional political structure. Some women were well-educated and held good government positions. Women, even being illiterate, remain engaged in several other economic activities like making rice beer (*Hadia*), wall painting, rope making, weaving leaf cups and plates called as *dona pattal*, wage labour.

Women did not have access to many religious affairs, especially in worship of ancestors and spirits. Only the eldest son of the family would get the authority to worship ancestors as being *Mukhiya* (head) of the family. Opinion of women in major decision making in any issue was not sought. At instances of marital conflicts, women possessed no liberty to seek divorce; in extreme cases, the Panchayat decided the fate of married couples. If woman still sought divorce, she had to pay *bayahur* or compensation whereas if the husband sought divorce, he might not have to give compensation to the woman. This instigated poor condition of women in family and society. However, tribal society, which were though historically considered gender balanced and provided substantial autonomy to women folks, were now observed to have undergone pervasive transition with prominent gender biasness.

### **Marriage System**

Marriages were usually endogamous at community level and exogamous at the *Killi* (clan) level. Usually, the bride remained patri-local by residence. Monogamy was a ruled practice but men were still allowed for marrying, or keeping with or without marriage, other women. Actually, men had no limit on how many wives they could keep for themselves. Both men and women had the rights to seek *Chuta Chuti* (divorce) from each other in front of the village Panchayat in extreme cases. Widow re-marriages were followed but not very much well accepted among *Chero*, instead this took place based on family convenience, if having an unmarried younger brother or cousin of her late husband. In second marriages, either be of a widow or divorced, there is no customary of bride-price again. Child marriages were quite rampant earlier. But now the marriage age for boys has varied from 18 to 20 years and for girls it varies from 14 to 18 years. However, among *Korwas*, some instances of child marriages were

also observed. In case the girl got married at an early age, she was not sent to her husband's house to prolong the period of reproduction and this was performed by a ritual called as *Gauna*. Marriage (*Biyah*) usually took place by negotiation and it came first from the boy's side through a *bisuthia* (go-between) but at the same time love marriages were also permitted. Groom's family had to pay the bride a price called *Dali paise*. With recent socialisation and diffusion of Hinduism, the customary practices, like dowry, was introduced in *Chero* marriages which was a replaced contrary form of bride price.

The custom of keeping son-in-law was also prevalent if the bride's father had no male child. Bride price was settled if the relation was agreed upon by both sides before marriage which was in the form of pots of rice beer, cash, kind, cattle and cloths. *Biyah* (Marriage) was fixed only if the bride price was agreed upon and paid in full. *Dolkhadi* was the oldest form of marriage practiced among *Korwas* where bride was brought to a close relative and bridegroom pays full amount of bride price, then the marriage ceremony took place. A woman could ask for divorce from her husband before a village Panchayat on the grounds of his cruelty and impotency, whereas, a woman could also be separated for her childlessness, laziness and extramarital relations. However, the practice of women seeking divorce was not encouraged by the society.

Among *Ho* tribes, traditional elopement form of marriage was practiced, where a boy or a girl attaining marriageable age had all freedom to choose his/ her life partner whom they met either in the village fair, called as *magha mela* or weekly local market (*Haat*). If they wished to settle down, a *duttam* was arranged to fix their marriages settling the bride price, ornaments, *Haria* (rice beer) and a pair of cattle. The girl had the freedom to withdraw from a marriage and get separated in case she was not finding compatibility and can settle with some other man. Additionally, consanguineous, or the cross cousin, marriage was also a prominent feature among *Ho* tribes which they considered essential to preserve the same gene pool.

## Education

Literacy among *Chero* and *Korwa* tribes were poor as compared to that of *Ho*. With continued emphasis on education by Government and external influence through urbanisation there was observed slow improvement in spread of education including female children as well. In addition to the formal institutions by the government, there were blooming private educational institutions established by religious groups. A large number of children attended government schools as non- government schools required parents to pay unaffordable tuition fees. This restricted them in pursuing education in non-government schools irrespective of their location being rural or peri-urban regions. Most of the educational schemes were still a long way to reach. *Ho*, being one of the major tribes of Jharkhand and better in developmental standards, availed the benefits under major welfare schemes especially for the educational programs. Villages had schools where children benefitted with the reading materials, stipend and other resources as a support. Most of the women remained uneducated, however, notably few from *Ho* tribe also managed to receive higher education and obtain Government services.

Nevertheless, even when parents gradually recognised the importance of education and enrolled their children to schools, it was actually left to the childrens free will to attend along with performing domestic works. School drop-outs was high especially among girl children during the

cultivation season to support parents in agricultural activities and also to get into wage employment at an early age to economically support parents through earning. In spite of all this, of late *Ho* community was able to develop its own *Ho* script which is also implemented as a language in college education.

Children of *Korwa* tribes were noticed wedged in the long intergenerational vicious cycle of hardship with lack of minimal standard of life possibly because of their primitive modest nature and geographically-isolated inhabitation. The proficiency rate, especially among females, was lower as compared to the other two tribes in the study. The school-going rate and drop outs were very high among *Korwas* due to their abject poverty situation and also their low affordability to private schools. Still, besides the normal government schools, there were private schools supported by Christian missionaries. Government-run schools required external tutoring with professional focus that remained unaffordable to parents.

### **Values Concerning Children**

As in any other society, birth of a child was considered a very auspicious event among tribal couples, family and their entire community followed by celebrations and feast. Children were welcomed and loved a lot; they enjoyed all the necessary freedom to play with their age group children. Children among them were valued and considered as a hope for the future of the family as well as their community. Both male and female children were valued equally. Sons were treated as originators and female children as creator and nurturer of their progeny. So, both of them were cared for and given attention until a year or two and since mother's went out for work deep inside forests to gather wood and tubers, children were left under the care of elders of the family and older siblings. Older children carrying their younger siblings were a common sight during the daytime.

With continued government's emphasis on school education as well as progressive development in understanding towards the relevance of education, parents felt obligated to send their children to *Anganwadi centers* (AWC) and primary schools. Most of the parents expected to give at least basic education to their children as much as they can afford so that they can rise from their present parental standard of hardship and poverty. No matter education still had a long way to attain priority over other activities of their life. Especially, during the season of paddy cultivation (*Ropa*) girl children were engaged and had to skip school to join hands in economic activity by working as construction workers or even selling *Haria* (rice beer) during the market days to support parents in economy activity. Along with these, girl children were also expected to support in the daily domestic chores like fetching water, cooking, taking care of younger siblings, etc. Children are not pressurised by parents to attend school or even disciplined for attention towards studies or dropping out of school. Remaining illiterate did not matter much for parents either.

Typically, *Ho* tribes adhered to the traditional practices of marriage and mate selection. There was lesser gender biasness among their children. Children, once attained maturity, were free to select their sexual partners and get settled marrying them. Parents did not impose restrictions, on either girls or boys, in going to market places or village fairs or engaging in pre-marital sexual relationship. *Ho* society, even though being patrilineal by nature and composition, accepted both male and female children in the family equally with enthusiasm. Female children were much eagerly awaited as being

parent's first preference. Both, sons and daughters, had relevance in the family as well as for the overall clan. Male child is expected so that land inheritance and the family name could be carried forward and also sons are expected to be a security in old age. Whereas, daughters are considered as an economic advantage to the family such as even before marriage girls support family not just in domestic chores to her mother but she also engages herself in wage work and supports her parents economically in running the family. At the time of marriage, exchange of daughter takes place in lieu of bride price where parents get cash or kind. Daughters maintain continuity of the family and also support in domestic chores as well as economic activities at their in-laws house. Children are valued as a source of joy, not just for the family and couple themselves, but also for their community. Birth of a child proves that the couple is not barren and hence, strengthens the marital bond amongst them.

Due to significant influence of different religions and other external forces like urbanisation, spread of modern culture, etc. traditional practices and customs have been replaced by new belief system and practices. This has been the root cause of bringing an imbalance in the historically-based egalitarian social set up. Among *Chero* tribes, a girl child was not as welcomed as a boy child due to the transformation in marriage practices and inclusion of groom price, called as dowry, which involved exchange of money and kind as a price offered for a groom to accept a girl as his bride. This kept parents in additional psychological stress to save money in order to pay off the price settled during marriage negotiation of their daughters. Thus, daughters usually receive most of their share from her father's property during their marriage. Hence, son/ sons later become the heir of the father's immovable property. In none of the tribes daughters are the inheritors of land. Additionally, practices like performance of last rights by sons also show resemblance to the Hindu religion among *Chero* and hence, every couple was expected to have at least one male child. However, several other religious rituals, especially those involving worship of ancestral spirit, were restricted only to males among all the three tribes which promoted them to have male children in their family composition.

### **Fertility Behavior and Value Concerns for Children**

Most of the couples agreed that fertility was most often a marital obligation and they had to bear and rear children at appropriate stage of married life rationalising the number and sex of children. The couples still agreed that children are the "*Gift of God*" but the number of children to have should be to the extent they could manage and not just guided by sentimental values. Very few still accepted that they should try to beget as many children as possible, but such cases were few. Parenthood was a major milestone of one's married life and hence, nobody wanted to remain childless.

The tribal population was widely dispersed and each tribe was quite distinct from one another for several reasons based on their ecological and environmental circumstances of habitation as few resided in hilly mountains or plains or inside forests. Birth of a child was a joyous moment for all the tribal communities equally as it proved the fertility power of the couple and removed the stigma of barrenness on them. It enhanced the status of the parents from just being a couple and added to the continuity of their clan name. It was observed that the natural fertility was higher to the extent of 5+ children among *Chero* and *Korwa* tribes due to their extreme backwardness while *Ho* tribe showed a lower tendency of having many children, especially among newer generation who desired to restrict the

number of births up to 3. However, the previous generation of *Ho* tribes still had 5+ children as they considered bearing a child was the responsibility of a woman in marriage. Hence, restricting child birth was considered an offense.

The spacing between two children was commonly between 1.5 to 2 years which point to the fact that women hasten to complete their family size. This, however, also points towards the high unmet need of family planning and deficient awareness of spacing child birth. Fertility remained absolutely an area where men did not show their participation but they exercised their control in the preference of gender of the children. Among *Cheros* and *Korwas*, inhabited in remote hilly areas, parents remained vulnerable to child mortality, which also made couples not to restrict their number of children to keep additional children as a replacement in case of child loss. Awareness regarding immunization and management of neo-natal and early childhood diseases in the community, continued to lack. Added was the malnutrition, related to abject poverty and isolated geographical inhabitation of *Korwas* and *Cheros*, which surrounded children in absolute misery of frequent diseases like diarrhoea, malaria, fever, cough, scabies, jaundice, typhoid, pneumonia leading to deaths. Most of the couples were guided by the concept that once married they will surely have children and the number of children they would have, rest depends on the health and well being of their children.

## Conclusion

As the objective of this paper was to outline the method implemented to understand the social dimensions behind the fertility choices of the tribal couples, as well as to gain a preliminary insights from the field, three of the tribal communities were chosen based on the level of their overall development. *Ho* was the fourth major tribe of Jharkhand, which has relatively progressed over a period of time; *Cheros*, historically once been *zamindars*/ landowners, were now a much neglected tribe, slowly dissolving into Hinduism with an idea that this would uplift their social status, had been under hardship subsisting with very slow progress; *Korwas*, who were enumerated as Primitive Vulnerable Tribe Group (PVTG), had been undergoing abject poverty and underdevelopment. The preliminary insights from the field suggested that while the tribes are considered homogeneous in their behaviour and conditions, understanding precisely varied from one another which was reflected in their developmental pattern as well as in their nature of fertility values. It was found that fertility values were in favour of high fertility in the past when couples preferred more than 5 children, but progressively it was about three children. Couples from *Korwa* and *Chero* tribes continued to have a larger number of children due to several factors such as high child mortality, gender preference towards male child, religious expectations and so forth. The tribes preferred both male as well as female children -- male children for lineage to continue and old age security; and female children for economic advantage, supplementing household income through female labour wages. However, the so called gender egalitarian social setup of tribes was observed to progressively undergo transformation as a result of influences of religion, modern living due to free movement to urban areas for employment and education. The extent of diffusion of cultures varied differently across the tribes but certainly the basic kinship and family system has undergone modification from a collective form of living to more of extended or nucleated form which keeps them aware to consider smaller family size with expected gender composition. All together, it can be

concluded that socio-cultural considerations hold a strong relevance behind the fertility decision-making process in the life of a couple.

## Discussion

The fertility behaviour, as conceptualised (by Hoffman and Hoffman, (1973) and Arnold et. al., (1975), included the role of traditional milieu behind the reproductive decision making. It takes into account the micro-cultural aspects which determine the family composition. The study uncovers its relevance with the findings that suggest the value of children for a couple is influenced by a juxtaposed set of factors (Caldwell,1999) like the primitive ideas of son performing family rituals after them, inheritance of immovable property to male offspring only, as a marital responsibility of a woman giving them social assurance in the husband's life as well as family and several others which makes them to decide the adequate family size and gender composition in their family. The present findings of the study gives ample evidence to support (Goode, 1963b) that the diffusion in culture due to frequent mobilisation has brought changes in family structure from collective living to more of conjugal living style and hence, shows its immediate impact on fertility when couples plan to restrict child birth to minimize their family size which would enable them to fulfill the aspirations for their children. This diffusion of culture has also shown its negative impact in increased gender misbalances in the traditional gender equilibrium of the tribal society (Maharatna, 2011). At the same time, among *Chero* and *Korwa* tribes, fertility continues to remain high. The potent reason behind these are extreme poverty, where every child, either a boy or a girl, is looked upon as a support mechanism to family's income as well as an insurance towards any possible child loss situation (Mohanty, 2011 and Das Gupta, 1992). The findings also reveal the deterrent situation of women in their family in taking decisions independently on the reproductive affairs; men, however, do not play an active role but exercise their control over women's sexuality as well as in fertility.

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