

Economics Seminar, Indian Statistical Institute, New Delhi.

SPEAKER: Tarun Jain, University of Virginia

TITLE: Where there is a will: Fertility behavior and sex bias in large families

TIME: 5:00-6:30 P.M.

DAY & DATE: Monday, 15th December 2008

PLACE: Seminar Room 2

Abstract:

Boys and girls in India experience large differences in survival and health outcomes. For example, the 2001 Census reports that the sex ratio for children under six years of age is 927 girls per thousand boys, an outcome that has been attributed to differences in parents' behavior towards their sons and daughters. Most studies rely primarily on cultural factors or biases in economic returns to explain these differences. In this paper, I propose an explanation where bequest motives drive fertility behavior that generates sex-based differences in outcomes even when parents do not explicitly prefer boys over girls. In India's patrilocal rural society, women do not inherit property and heads of joint families aim to retain assets within the family lineage for future generations. I hypothesize that this leads heads to bequeath more land to claimants with more sons, in turn generating a race for sons among adult brothers seeking to maximize their inheritance of agricultural land. I confirm this theoretical prediction using panel data from rural households in India. This strategic fertility behavior implies that girls have systematically more siblings compared to boys, and hence receive smaller shares of household resources, offering an explanation for sex-based differences in outcomes.

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