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# The Rise of the Last Woman: An Analysis of Women's Independence in 21st Century Rajasthan

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INDEPENDENT STUDY PROJECT

The Rise of the Last Woman:

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An Analysis of Women's Independence in  
21st Century Rajasthan

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## **Abstract**

Research assembled around women's accessibility and accountability is most essential when considering possibilities for future development. Understanding that women of any society make grand impacts on their family and surrounding community, women's stories must be tracked as primary considerations of the development needs and changes of any society. This research focused on 21<sup>st</sup> century educated Rajasthani women's aspirations, challenges and development goals. The study revealed that "the new woman" in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is taking a new stance on self-identity and women's independence. Conditioned with multi-facet complexities, these independent mothers and daughters are claiming their right to literacy and labor. Multiple interviews and questionnaire sessions were conducted at the International College for Girls (ICG) and Binani Girls College; two all girls' undergraduate colleges located in Rajasthan. Although major focus was directed to ICG and Binani's student testimonies, for further exploration of women's independent status in Rajasthan women professors at these colleges and multiple work offices were also interviewed. In this focus group, the ages ranged between 16-19 and 20-37. All things considered, this dissertation supports the understanding that educated and self-sufficient women can and are contributing to mainstream development.

## **Introduction**

The growth of a nation relies on a woman's readiness and accessibility.

Acknowledging women's versatile roles and vitality to the continuation of any community, it is only logical that women are literate and are included in decision-making circles on matters that ultimately deal with them and their family. While women hold strong positions in their family, educated women have the capability to inspire new expectations of independence for future generations while still upholding traditional Hindustani family values. Education being salvation, a women's right to learn is an essential component to encouraging future generations of literate children.

As diverse of a country as India is, it would be difficult to depict a fair illustration of the total women's population. For this reason a focus state has been selected to specify and reason all findings at a focal point. Highlighting the stories of urban women from eminent cities known for its high literacy level would have been

trivial to the goal of this study. The goal of this research is to explore women's labor and literacy options notwithstanding traditional demands. While a state such as Dehli would clearly show proof of women workers and elevated school attendance from urban girls, focus will be directed to a more conservative state. Instead, the backward state of Rajasthan has been selected.

Compared to more developed states in India Rajasthan deals with low sex ratios, high child feticide and child marriage rates as well as low literacy rates. In spite of these complexities, the status of educated middle class women from this state will be represented in this study. Furthermore, considering the odds urban women in Rajasthan are up against it made this research more significant when monitoring these change agents' autonomy growth. In the process of searching for information on college educated women in Rajasthan, slim scholastic research has been done on these women's stories.

The state of Rajasthan was also selected for this study because of the lack of research and information presented on middle class women's education from this state. While it can be argued that the most disadvantaged women in Rajasthan are not women from the middle class, considering that most development initiatives' call for literate maternal communities, this study is imperative. Rural women suffer from many prohibiting challenges that can and have prevented many generations from gaining. However, with more likeness and accessibility to resources, urban women have the option to pursue higher degrees and literate their children enabling a more developed future. This study does not compare issues between rural and urban women because the results would have far too many inequitable factors. Nonetheless,

this study is to weigh literate women's options and to investigate what additional factors contribute to a Rajasthani woman's independence in a traditional patriarchal society.

The gathered information supporting the advantages and disadvantages of Rajasthani women are from stories Rajasthani women have suggested themselves. Statistical data of these women are supported by their ideals of how they identify themselves and with the help of the Institute of Development Studies (IDS), Jaipur. During this research women and girls between the ages of 16-37 were interviewed as well as handed questionnaires to fill with their most honest response. The group will be referred to as the Rajasthani respondent(s) through the course of the work. Questions for the questionnaire were inspired by Rhonda Lois Blumberg and Leela Dwarki's 1980 study on college educated women in South India. After review of their focus group's response, one can clearly identify a confidence difference between 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century attitudes and response amongst these two women groups. This 21<sup>st</sup> century research is to introduce educated women's contributions to India through the experiences of Rajasthan's literate women and girls. As suggested by interviewees from this study, in 21<sup>st</sup> century Rajasthan more women are assuming their roles in the classroom and are stepping into the professional arena.

The women who participated in this study were selected randomly. The only criterion to be selected to interview was that the interviewee must be a native of Rajasthan. Most of the women and girl students surveyed believe in the Hindu religion and are from the upper middle class. It may be understood from here on out that most of these undergraduate and graduate students have the option to pursue degrees

because of their economic backing. Focus schools, International College for Girls (ICG) and Binani Girls College tuitions vary and fees at these institutions multiply. Both institutions are private with little to no government assistance. Peculiarly, women and girl respondents from this sort of background seem to be eager to work, and this point will be elaborated on later in this study. Furthermore, it will be suggested that the new woman in this era thinks differently from traditional roles and is working to be economically independent.

By ways of self-examination, this study permits Rajasthani women to state their opinions of their options and what is perceived as prime in their lives. As implied by 19 year old interviewee Nivedita Singh Rathore<sup>1</sup> of Barmer, literate women in Rajasthan “should be highly educated and not bound by tradition, literate women in Rajasthan can keep up with traditions while also being literate; families want educated mothers.” The traditional boundaries Nivedita refers to is that of traditions mostly suggested pre-1992.

Before India opened its economy to the global market, fewer women were working outside of the household or being educated. In past years the idea of women’s education would completely work against societies’ greatest demand of the need for marriage. Popular superstition existed stating that if women were educated they were forced to suffer widowment. Traditions pre-1992 stated that women should abide by men and their families’ demands, leaving little room for a women’s reign.

It may be suggested that: “lacking education, women cling to tradition.”<sup>2</sup>

However it must not be persuaded that literate women should be sectioned away from

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<sup>1</sup> Nivedita Singh Rathore student, personal interview, November 11, 2011.

<sup>2</sup> Maslak, Mary Ann and Singhal, Gayatri. *Gender and Education The Identity of*

clinging to their family ties. Although her legal position has been greatly improved, the Hindu woman, except in Westernized circles, is still bound by ancient traditions of behavior that emphasize her submission, obedience, devotion, and absolute dedication to her husband and his every wish.<sup>3</sup> Blumberg and Dwarki's observations were premature in the instances of understanding women's sovereignty as this study was prepared pre-1992. And since this time though women are still receptive of their husband's wishes, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century women are taking into account their own wishes also.

Nonetheless, when considering how a woman perceives her place in the world she most often considers the impact it will have on her family. It is difficult for an educated woman to adjoin her personal incentives, with her ambitious aspirations and family values. These three components in her life all may be very important to her and can be extremely difficult to juggle and too risky to ignore. While the new woman inspires to be self-sufficient and economically independent, her aspirations are admirable but her challenges are severe. Nonetheless, no matter what her aspirations entail, marriage is considered to be a must in India.<sup>4</sup> Bearing in mind that most women even in 21<sup>st</sup> century India can't escape their eventual fate of marriage, these women however have modern demands.

As indicated in one questionnaire form, a 27 year old married respondent implies, "Now-a-days people respect educated women and want them to climb the

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*educated women in India: confluence or divergence?*. (Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, Volume 20, Issue 5, Available online 2008), <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09540250701829961> (accessed September 15, 2011) quoted from *Toward Equality* (Government of India 1974: 234-235).

<sup>3</sup> Blumberg, Rhonda Lois. Dwarki, Leela. *India's Educated Women: Options and Constraints*. (Hindustan Publishing Corporation (India) Dehli, 1980), 65.

<sup>4</sup> Lodha, Swati. *Why Women are what they are (The Pioneering Book on Self Management for Women of India)*. (Fusion Books, 2004), 52.

leader of success.” This could be attributed to the growing confidence women have achieved from themselves. While much progress for women’s autonomy and suffrage has been made and is still being worked on, literate women in India have come a long way and their stories must be tracked as they are the last of the developed community to rise.

### **Pre-21<sup>st</sup> Century Ideals of Women’s Independence and 21<sup>st</sup> Century Standards**

In order to understand the significance of this study, one must explore the challenges of women’s independence and suffrage in India up to date. The topic of women’s literacy as a tool to liberate her independence was mildly discussed for many years. Many believed women’s literacy was irrelevant to the escalation they envisioned for their communities’ best future. In the State of Education in Bengal (1836) William Adam wrote: “A superstition feeling is alleged to exist in the majority of Hindu families, principally cherish by the women and not discouraged by the men, that a girl taught to read and write will soon after marriage become a widow.”<sup>5</sup> For the reason women weren’t educated in school or had no careers outside of home making during this time, women depended on men for economic comfort and therefore was socially summoned to abide by their husband’s and his family’s wishes. There were no real advances in female education until the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century when the government offered financial support.<sup>6</sup>

It is not reported of how many girls attended school during this time; however it can be imagined that there weren’t 100% participation. Much skepticism was sure

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<sup>5</sup> Geraldine Forbes, *Women in Modern Indian, The New Cambridge History of India*, (Cambridge University Press, 2009), 33.

<sup>6</sup> Geraldine Forbes, *Women in Modern Indian, The New Cambridge History of India*, (Cambridge University Press, 2009), 35.

to have loitered in such places where new schools for girls were established because of girl's need in the household. But the boundaries of the early nineteenth century had been stretched considerably by the early twentieth century. By the 20<sup>th</sup> century women were ready to design a curriculum and set up schools for girls.<sup>7</sup> The first schools established were either all girls or all boys' schools. The feature of co-educational institutions didn't come about until the late 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Separation of the two genders may have been influenced by religious, caste and classism views. Referencing the diversity within India's multiple religious, caste and class groups, slim highlight of historical perspectives will be considered from the Hindu, middle class prospective as respondents represent this group. As explained by a respondent from this study on behalf of the Hindu religion, during the Vedic Period (1500 BC – 6000 BCE) women were thought to be equal to men. Men of this time believed religious ceremonies could not be completed without women. Even the women of this time who were considerably taught religious facts by men, eventually composed their own "Vedas" (Vedas meaning knowledge, it represents the best of all knowledge in the eyes of the Hindu).<sup>8</sup> But, during the rise of the Smriti Period (composed around 500 BCE); the Hindu society began to follow new quests which lead to great inequalities between men and women. The period instructed that a woman in her young years should be dependent on her father, as a middle aged woman should be dependent on her husband and as elder women dependent on her

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<sup>7</sup> Geraldine Forbes, *Women in Modern Indian, The New Cambridge History of India*, (Cambridge University Press, 2009), 35.

<sup>8</sup> Facts-about-India-.come, "Vedic Age", <http://www.facts-about-india.com/vedic-age.php>, (accessed December 6, 2011).

son. This umbrella like protection was not helpful to women's independence and has left marks on women's identity.

In her self-management book, Swati Lodha explains the 20<sup>th</sup> century women's identity through two groups; women in a web and women with a well within. A woman in the web is groomed to make the one and only achievement in her life marriage. Majority of work done by a woman in a web-like cooking, washing, cleaning, is unproductive. It comes to zero. That is why the work done by a woman is not given any importance.<sup>9</sup> Though college educated women seek to educate themselves, it does not necessarily mean they are excluded from the impact of the web effect. A few Rajasthan graduate respondents admittedly stated that they returned home to be housewives because of their devotion to their families.

Generations past, women seem to be voiceless in some instants even when they are educated and it is difficult to tell whether they are quite because they have nothing to say or whether the impact of their families' perception withholds her from being expressive. During Blumberg and Dwaraki's study on female college graduates from Bangalore University in 1980 they found that the graduates covered their opinions. Naming one's salary fairly accurately seemed to be a standard procedure for members of the sample group. The opinions of family members on various issues were expressed with little hesitation. However, questions that sought the young woman's own opinion did cause some difficulty.<sup>10</sup> While this study is conventional considering the social status of women in India during the 1960's, it can be suggested

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<sup>9</sup>Lodha, Swati. *Why Women are what they are (The Pioneering Book on Self Management for Women of India)*. (Fusion Books, 2004), 48.

<sup>10</sup>Blumberg, Rhonda Lois. Dwaraki, Leela. *India's Educated Women: Options and Constraints*. (Hindustan Publishing Corporation (India) Dehli, 1980), 45

that the new woman in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is much more aware and expressive. The new woman who Lodha would consider holding the well within, listens to her mind and has an instinct to oppose. When she feels deprived or suppressed, she has the strength to defy; she knows when to say no.<sup>11</sup> And a woman's role in her independence can lap over into her maternal essences. Furthermore it can be examined that she will pass on her expressive mindset to her children, which can counteract a new generation of self-sufficient and independent thinkers. Without much influence from her family, a 27 year old Rajasthan respondent stated that she will persuade her daughter to continue her education because of the liberation she has gain from her own education.

Family planning is a goal congruent with developmentalist feminism's notion of the autonomous individual. It is indispensable to bringing about women's control over their fertility.<sup>12</sup> Progressive woman must stress their right to choose whether they have children and how many children are suitable to her families' lifestyle. Women should also have the means and necessities to take care of their children. Though this is seen as a solution to many child-borne issues, for generations women have had little say on issues that even involve their children and it still remains a problem. From here further, it is imperative that educated women in 21<sup>st</sup> century India understand that they hold the future of India in their decisions and must act accordingly.

As indicated by Geraldine Forbes, the rise of 20<sup>th</sup> century women are educated and they are demanding educated daughter-in-laws. The first generation of educated

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<sup>11</sup> Lodha, Swati. *Why Women are what they are (The Pioneering Book on Self Management for Women of India)*. (Fusion Books, 2004), 62.

<sup>12</sup> Saunders, Kriemild. *Feminist Post-Development Thought...Rethinking Modernity, Post-Colonialism, and Representation*. (Zed Books London and New York, 2002), 177.

women found a voice: they wrote about their lives and about the conditions of women. The second generation acted. They articulated the needs of women, critiqued their society and the foreign rulers, and developed their own institutions.<sup>13</sup> In the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, more women are assuming their roles in work places and are making allowances for self-development; in the second half of the 21<sup>st</sup> century it can only enable greater women's movements.

During Blumberg and Dwarkis 1980's study, they questioned the following about their South Indian group: In what ways do Indian women expect to use their newly acquired higher education? What problems are encountered when, and if, they take up jobs? What kinds of jobs are available to them? In what ways are tradition and modernity are or aren't being reconciled?<sup>14</sup> For the Rajasthan research these perspectives were also considered. The overall reference of reasoning for growth in independence was education.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century education is viewed as making a woman more rather than less adaptable to her role in the new family she is wedded into. Rajasthani respondents feel that education will not cause them to challenge their traditional expectations, but will enable them to better handle their role requirements.

Generational differences definitely apply when considering ideas around family values, identity and economic independence and some attention must be directed here. 18 year old Nivedita Sing Rathore of Barmer<sup>15</sup> speaks for the group as she states, "Our generation has seen many changes through clothing styles, freedom to

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<sup>13</sup> Geraldine Forbes, *Women in Modern India, The New Cambridge History of India*, (Cambridge University Press, 2009), 61.

<sup>14</sup> Blumberg, Rhonda Lois. Dwarkis, Leela. *India's Educated Women: Options and Constraints*. (Hindustan Publishing Corporation (India) Dehli, 1980), 38.

<sup>15</sup> Nivedita Singh Rathore student, personal interview, November 11, 2011

have fun and party, dating, better education and colleges, and better hygiene and sanitation standards; girls situations are improving.” 20 year old Karnika Kumari<sup>16</sup> of Bundi suggests that government policies and media have changed people’s awareness and mentality about education and more families are enacting on the opportunities. It is evident that women’s impropriety to learn has forced more generations of literate women, however society’s slow reaction may have always dampened such progress.

When suggesting the benefits of women independence, placing large focus on comparisons between male and female ambitions is obstructive. Women’s independence and self-identity factors simply explore the vitality in neutral partnerships and that gender equality and respect should be tantamount in order to reap the benefits of the development process. Before economic expenses, women will always call for the presence of their families, but this should not suggest that they are dependent. Most Rajasthani respondents have acknowledged major support of their education from their individual societies; however they suggested always being compared to their male counterparts even though literacy for both groups has expanded. South Asia not only reached 90% enrollment—up from 72% in 1991—but also had the region’s greatest gains in gender parity with 95 girls enrolled per 100 boys, up from 77 girls per 100 boys in 1991.<sup>17</sup> Women’s development would amplify if expectations of roles of both sexes change; but shifting traditional attitudes is tough. The following chart does not solely suggest the difference between male and female literacy, but it moreover implies the improvements in urban Rajasthani female’s literacy and gives this research statistical backing.

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<sup>16</sup> Karnika Kumari student, personal interview, November 11, 2011.

<sup>17</sup> Development Asia. “Making the Grade? Analyzing the state of education across Asia, from grade school to trade school”. April-June 2011.

3.1 (B) Literacy Rate-Rajasthan since 1951 (Urban) <sup>18</sup>

Year	Persons		Males		Females	
	Effective#	General	Effective#	General	Effective#	General
1951	8.50	-	13.88	-	2.66	-
1961	18.12	15.21	28.08	23.71	7.01	5.84
1971	22.57	19.07	33.87	28.74	10.06	8.46
1981	30.11	24.38	44.77	36.30	14.00	11.42
1991	38.55	30.79	54.99	43.96	20.44	16.31
2001	60.41	49.02	75.70	61.34	43.85	35.64

**The Year 1992 and its Implications on Women's Employment**

When India became a part of the global market economy, it enabled women to work because of the financial demands on items. As prices heightened so did the number of women obtaining job opportunities. More jobs were available and with the estimated amount of people working, predictable wages and taxes were also posed. With more people paying taxes and item expenses increasing, women are needed to contribute to financial challenges.

Though women were able to work, additional struggles rouse as income disparities amongst genders soon became an issue. Social drags shaped around 1992 women workers have not stop women from working and has permitted more support for mother workers in post years. To gain recent perspectives on mothers working outside of the home, a few responses from a range of alternative age females were

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<sup>18</sup> Smt. Dr. Manju Vijay and Shri Jitendra Kumar, *Some Facts About Rajasthan 2009*, Directorate of Economics & Statistics, Rajasthan, Jaipur, 54.

asked the following question in the research questionnaire: Under what conditions, if any, should a mother work outside the home? Please explain.

Respondent's Age and Martial Status	Response	Education and Occupation or Mother's Education and Occupation
16, Not Married, Not Engaged	"If it's her dream and she is willing to do the job."	Occupation: Student Education: M.A. and M. Ed. Occupation: Government teacher
19, Not Married, Engaged	"Not any condition."	Occupation: Student Mother's Education: Graduate B.A. Mother's Occupation: Housewife
27, Married	"She should work under all conditions because the family members (can) respect her and (she can) learn to manage things (better)."	Occupation: Research Assistant at IDS, Jaipur Mother's Education: M.A. B.Ed. Mother's Occupation: Housewife
31, Separated	"I believe working outside gives an individual a chance to know the world around; if (the) child is big enough then mother should work outside."	Occupation: Sr. Asst. Prof. at The IIS University Mother's Education: Secondary Mother's Occupation: Housewife

Upper class women seem to always be more independent because financial gains are already earned for them. Lower class women are also independent since they have always had to earn for themselves. For the lower class, there is always a greater financial need there. Their work, which in Rajasthan is typically agricultural work or labor in urban sectors; it can be seen as a part of their life and with great financial hardship in most villages all members of the community must work. Conversely, middle class women are sectioned off as the most independence deprived group.

The middle class women interviewed and asked to participate in the questionnaire seem to be liberated and eager to work with 50% of undergraduate respondents suggesting that they are willing work after their undergraduate studies because of financial hardship, 40% without financial hardship said they will work after they complete their undergraduate studies and 10% said they do not plan to work at all. The Hindustani families' tradition does not assert that women cannot work, however through the traditional family's eye; it proposes that the Indian wife or mother is not as devoted to her families' needs and can bring about much stress to the worker. A families' demand for a mother and wife can be tiresome and balancing the two is quite difficult.

### **Women's Force of Autonomy: Education and Jobs**

The idea of "marry-up" seemed not to greatly affect Rajasthani respondent's thoughts about marriage as it once did for past generations. The term represents a woman's need to marry into an economically sustainable family. Family's would marry their daughters to a wealthy man specifically for financial support because she wasn't able to gain for herself. This situation may be true for some women who would still rather have their husbands gain economically for the household instead of being employed. With 90% interest in gaining for themselves or contributing to the total family, the Rajasthani respondent group seemed to be very involved in embracing their economic and didactic autonomy.

Work ethic and interest can depend on a women's family and friend's influence. ICG respondents stated that most of them attend ICG because they

followed their friends. 19 year old interviewee Ayushi Bhadu<sup>19</sup>, native of a village near Sri Ganganagas, suggested that she was told about ICG by a friend.

Understanding that education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is important, as she would often state, Ayushi works hard to pursue her undergraduate degree despite her mother neglecting her own education. With complications at home surrounding the separation between Ayushi's parents; mother never having attended college and her father a college graduate who no longer supports Ayushi, the interviewee then emphasized the importance of the maternal uncle. She states that she is very close with her uncle and that he has also encouraged her to continue on her journey. Though support has been indicated, Ayushi sometimes finds it hard to deal with the pressures of striving in school and the reality of her families' needs. Nonetheless, Ayushi strongly accentuates education has changed her situation.

Mrs. Sulekha Ojha<sup>20</sup> age 37 of Jaipur suggests that a mother gives 100% on the home front and in her profession. She clarifies the issue of a mother working outside of the home and says troubles also loll in the matter of someone watching the children. Mrs Shleka explains whether it be a traditional with multiple generations in the household or a nuclear family with one couple and children, a mother is suppose to take full responsibility for her children in the Hindustani family. She continues to explain that one can't ignore her kids however work is satisfaction and it is all just a great balance. All things being equal, having a job increases a woman's autonomy.

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<sup>19</sup> Ayushi Bhadu student, personal interview, November 11, 2011.

<sup>20</sup> Sulekha Ojha professor, personal interview, November 11, 2011

But it is clear that women will not necessarily choose a job over marriage. Rather, they will struggle to balance the conflicting demands of work and family.<sup>21</sup>

At every level, the Rajasthani respondents would emphasize the importance of their family and for those who were eager to work, they would also express their concerns with working. When asked about the significance of their family and choices been mapped around the family, 19 year old Ruchi Rankaurat<sup>22</sup> of Nagaur conditions the following benefits of Hindustani family involvement: parents will make the right choice for their daughter because they know their daughter best and parents should have first preference in the decisions a women makes in life. Ruchi's thoughts were not foreign to other interviewees. The bulk of interviewees preferred to place their families at the head of their list of things to satisfy and that it was one task that must be checked off every time otherwise one could feel guilty for disappointing her family. Surrounding this topic interviewees were then asked whether they would marry into a family that ignored their zeal to work, 22 year old Kanika Bhanot of Bikaner advocates her stern decision to work and implies "I am still going to work if my husband's parents don't want me to. I want to be an independent girl."<sup>23</sup>

When asked about adjustments in marriage educated women must make, the group didn't talk much about the adjustment's their family members can make around accepting potential or current work schedules. They more so heightened the importance of their literacy and because this factor they are able to conduct their lives in their own liberating way. Yet, self-improvement can only be made within the

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<sup>21</sup> The Economist. "Asia's Lonely Heart's: Why Asian women are rejecting marriage and what that means". August 20-26,2011, 19.

<sup>22</sup> Ruchi Rankaurat student, personal interview, November 11, 2011

<sup>23</sup> Kanika Bhanot student, personal interview, November 11, 2011.

confines of family in some cases. The Rajasthani respondents moreover implied that women need cooperation on the home front; they need to be temperamentally strong and suggest that education can always help solidify things.

### **Marriage Legitimacy**

In South Asia and China marriage remains near-universal, with 98% of men and women tying the knot.<sup>24</sup> Divorce, though rising in some Asian countries, remains comparatively rare in India and China.<sup>25</sup> Though there are many different traditions in Asia, traditions in South Asia and China seem to be extremely pennant.

Surveys by Pew Global Research (PGR), a social-research outfit in Washington, DC, show that Muslims in South and East Asia are more likely than Muslims elsewhere to say that families should choose a woman's husband for her.<sup>26</sup> This insight of Muslims however was not developed during this hands-on research. This is because Muslim women and girls were not apparent during the random selection of interviewees and respondents for this study. Nonetheless, PGR's proposition could be noted as a great reference of the popular and conservative culture demands in the south of Asia. A more intriguing, if less noticed, argument was that traditional family values were stronger in Asia than in America and Europe, and that is partly accounted for Asia's economy success.<sup>27</sup> With more unified families in South Asia and China than anywhere else in the world it seems that this grand

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<sup>24</sup> The Economist. "Asia's Lonely Heart's: Why Asian women are rejecting marriage and what that means", August 20, 2011, 9.

<sup>25</sup> The Economist. "Asia's Lonely Heart's: Why Asian women are rejecting marriage and what that means", August 20, 2011, 9.

<sup>26</sup> The Economist. "Asia's Lonely Heart's: Why Asian women are rejecting marriage and what that means", August 20, 2011, 18.

<sup>27</sup> The Economist. "Asia's Lonely Heart's: Why Asian women are rejecting marriage and what that means", August 20, 2011, 9.

partnership could be the root of respect of both party's autonomy however that issue continues to linger.

Rajasthani respondents who were not yet engaged or married all preferred to allow their parents to select their husband for them. Nonetheless, most undergraduate respondents seem to not be married. Between interviews conducted at the two institutions, there was an even exchange of interviewees who were either eager to get married in the future or not eager at all. Ayushi stated during her interview when asked about marriage arrangements, "My mother and maternal uncle will find my husband for me but right now I am not interested in marriage, I want to live my life."<sup>28</sup>

The salient characteristic of many traditional marriage systems is that women- especially young women- have little independence.<sup>29</sup> In South Asia, brides are taken into groom's family and are tied to their husband's family.<sup>30</sup> However education, literacy and sex-selection maybe a causing factor for future changes in marriages and even tradition. So far, the trend of marriage rates decreasing has not affected Asia's two giants, China and India. But it is likely to, as the economic factors that have drive it elsewhere in Asia sweep through those two countries and its consequences will be exacerbated by the sex-selective abortion practiced for a generation there. By 2050, there will be 60 million men of marriageable age than women in China and India.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Ayushi Bhadu student, personal interview, November 11, 2011

<sup>29</sup> The Economist. Asia's Lonely Heart's: Why Asian women are rejecting marriage and what that means". August 20-26,2011, 18.

<sup>30</sup> The Economist. Asia's Lonely Heart's: Why Asian women are rejecting marriage and what that means". August 20-26,2011, 18.

<sup>31</sup> The Economist. Asia's Lonely Heart's: Why Asian women are rejecting marriage and what that means". August 20-26,2011, 18.

When 18 year old Nidhika Jain<sup>32</sup> of Udaipur was asked about qualities she wishes for in her future husband, she stated the importance of the following traits: him holding a good job, good name in society, and that he has a family that accepts a wife who works. With Nidhika being a descendant of the Jain family, she explains that an educated woman is accepted in her culture and that all families of this culture encourage girls' education. In understanding the imperative nature in marriage, one must question happiness in marriage and practical possibilities of being independent. 19 year old interviewee Monika Rajpurohit strongly suggests "I don't want to get married because I can't be independent but I know I have to do it because it is in my future; you can't fight fate."<sup>33</sup>

Compared with Westerners, Asians are more likely to agree that women's happiness lies in marriage. They are more likely to say women should give up work when they get married or have children, and more likely to disapprove of premarital sex.<sup>34</sup> When interviewees were asked about the topic of happiness and marriage, the following specific question was asked "Do you think a girl who does not marry can lead a happy life or that she cannot? Please explain." Opinions differed and the top responses are as follows:

- Yes. An educated woman can always be content with her achievements.
- No. She can't live a happy life.
- Yes. I can live my life happy without marriage because I am a self-dependent girl.
- No. Because she wants family members who care for her.
- Yes she can. She can meet her other dreams and goals with her family.

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<sup>32</sup> Nidhika Jain student, personal interview, November 11, 2011

<sup>33</sup> Monika Rajpurohit student, personal interview November 19, 2011

<sup>34</sup> The Economist. "Asia's Lonely Heart's: Why Asian women are rejecting marriage and what that means", August 20 2011, 18.

Overall, from the responses gained over half of the respondents believe a girl can be happy without being married. Moreover, it is not suggested that marriage cannot bring happiness however it must not prevent independence. As long as the husband and his family accepts the wife's choice to work, continue with education or be a house-manager, the Rajasthani respondents believe they can have happy marriages. Women who are typically considered independent are well educated, and have the confidence to support their opinion. Education helps in adjusting to marriage; educated women are more understanding and more broad-minded.<sup>35</sup>

### **Child Protection, Maternal Authority and Paternal Seniority**

The main function of marriage in most traditional societies is to bring up children (romantic love has nothing to do with it).<sup>36</sup> Numerous studies show that illiterate women have high levels of fertility and mortality, poor nutritional status, low earning potential, and little autonomy within the household. A woman's lack of education also has a negative impact on the health and well being of her children. Multiple studies show that infant mortality is inversely related to mother's educational level. Additionally, the lack of an educated population can be an impediment to the country's economic development.

In parts of South Asia, wives may not ever take their children to hospitals without getting their husband's permission.<sup>37</sup> The fact of not being able to ensure the health of one's own child is a completely alternative direction away from women's

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<sup>35</sup> Blumberg, Rhonda Lois. Dwaraki, Leela. *India's Educated Women: Options and Constraints*. (Hindustan Publishing Corporation (India) Dehli, 1980), 80.

<sup>36</sup> The Economist. Asia's Lonely Heart's: Why Asian women are rejecting marriage and what that means". August 20-26, 2011, 18.

<sup>37</sup> The Economist. Asia's Lonely Heart's: Why Asian women are rejecting marriage and what that means". August 20-26, 2011, 18.

independence. Mrs. Sulekha has been married for 12 years and has a 9 year old daughter and an 11 year son. She believes working gives her an identity and that she can provide her children more resources. She believes coming out of her home enables her to better prepare her kids because of the lessons she has learned.

Karnika<sup>38</sup> suggest that women work to be independent and economically secure for their children. Less common issues but issues none the less that some women deal with is divorce, widowment and separation and women must be able to protect their children through the duration. Radhikaa Sogani<sup>39</sup> is proof of the work of a well established working mother. The 21 year old student from Jaipur is a member of ICG's 2011 graduating class and is currently furthering her education in Human Development. Both being doctors, her mother and father separated when she was a toddler because of what Radhikaa calls "closed minded in-laws". Radhikaa's mother was not interviewed for this study; however Radhikaa spoke on behalf of her mother when questioned about her mother's thoughts around women's independence. She advocates that women who aren't economically independent are the burden of someone else. These women have to listen to their sponsor and find it difficult to break away from conservative patterns.

### **Financial Expenditures**

Women's independence in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is essentially wrapped around the idea of the importance in being economically independent. This outlet of independence allows women in Rajasthan and India moreover to be more liberal than they have ever been. The 21<sup>st</sup> century's token title for a housewife is "house

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<sup>38</sup> Karnika Kumari student, personal interview, November 11, 2011

<sup>39</sup> Radhikaa Sogani student, personal interview, November 11, 2011

managers” insisting that this can be seen as a form of independence. It is not argued that it is not independence; however it still expects women to be reliant on their husband. Obviously, most the Rajasthan respondents’ mothers worked at home. After the family has discussed its budget, though with most authority in the breadwinner’s corner, housewives then have the authority to manage family finances. The roles in which women have made payments have been the case for many years. But 21<sup>st</sup> century independence does not solely suggest being able to spend the money her husband has earned in the way she believe it should be spent. It lies in her economic independence to gain for herself.

D.I.N.K. (which is an acronym for Double Income No Kids) explains the situation of nuclear families that live more luxurious lives because of two incomes. Because basic house needs are usually met by men, a women’s work is considered in some cases because additional support for luxuries. In this 31 year old respondent’s case where there is no financial hardship in her family, her income is not seen as a second income and is hardly contributed to her family as financial assistance.

Of course, this condition of one who deals with no economic hardship is the lavish version of a women’s economic gain. For a woman who lives without much economic stability, she is expected to contribute and most Rajasthani respondents agreed that they are willing to assist their family’s financial needs. In many cases, the matter-of-fact of women not being economically independent and with little economic backing in the family, they then resort to loans. Established to aid expenses, loans can fundamentally place these women in debt. Debt obligations not being a solution for any gender, family and largely any society, women must work and earn

their own money. The following chart indicates work fields that the Rajasthanis respondents said they were most interested in and the predicated economic profits in these fields:

### 13.2 Finances

#### Net State Domestic Product of Rajasthan by Industrial Origin at Constant<sup>40</sup>

Sector	2006-07	2007-08
Transport and Communication	2358690	2573822
Other Transport & Storage	295366	319869
Communication	338912	406792
Rea Estate, Ownership of Dwellings, Legal and Business Services	547889	577080
Public Administration	357798	396757
Other Services	823192	870116

#### **Tradition vs. Modernity**

Women are embracing their independence of decision making through modern outlets. Such options to search for love include newspaper advertisements, online sites and even work places. In India, traditional arranged marriages are being challenged by the online dating (shaadi.com claims to be the world's largest matrimonial service) and by "self-arranged marriages", hybrids in which the couple meet, fall in love and agree to marry—but then let the two families fix everything up,

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<sup>40</sup> Smt. Dr. Manju Vijay and Shri Jitendra Kumar, *Some Facts About Rajasthan 2009*, Directorate of Economics & Statistics, Rajasthan, Jaipur, 54-56.

as in traditional arranged marriages.<sup>41</sup> An engaged 19 year old respondent announced her results when stating her use of Facebook; the American based social networking site:

I am engaged. My fiancé and I know each other from our childhood. Our families know each other very well. We love each other. He liked me for the last 6 years, but he couldn't tell me. I also couldn't tell him I like him. Before 1 year we contacted on Facebook and he proposed to me and I said yes. We will marry when we are able to and will live a happy life.<sup>42</sup>

Considering arranged marriages, a woman with the prestige and self-confidence inspired by a college degree is more likely than a less-educated daughter to feel bold enough to enter into such talks with elders.<sup>43</sup> In current day, more teens are dating. As indicated by one Jaipur native, a tour around the city of Jaipur can show young couple meet ups in such places as malls, parks coffee shops and movie halls. Though parents aren't aware in most cases, these young ladies' liberation proves their acknowledgement of self-identity and much confidence. As much as it can be understood that parents would rather select their daughter's mate, 21<sup>st</sup> century parents should not ignore the growth of their daughter and should in turn respect her for it.

At ICG, one professor confessed that many call center associates would come to the college to recruit recent graduate. This pulls potential wives away from marriages or new wives away from families. Without spending as much time with their family, women are pulled from their traditional family settings and waiting on

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<sup>41</sup> The Economist. Asia's Lonely Heart's: Why Asian women are rejecting marriage and what that means". August 20-26, 2011, 20.

<sup>42</sup> Student. Personal interview, November 19, 2011

<sup>43</sup> Blumberg, Rhonda Lois. Dwaraki, Leela. *India's Educated Women: Options and Constraints*. (Hindustan Publishing Corporation (India) Dehli, 1980), 40

the family because most workers work over night. Karnika<sup>44</sup> of Bundi states that family plays a big role and that women who work the night shift don't pay much attention to their family and that women are suppose to bind families. Spending so many nights at the call centers, it has been posed that more workers are having relations with each other. Considering the traditional non-exception of having children outside of wedlock percentages of contraceptives are increasing in South Asia. The Institute of Development Studies, Jaipur to date have not tracked the exact rate however a representative at the institute confirmed when asked for this study that it is becoming an issue and those actions are being considered in their data.

With all other modern trends of relations happening, no cohabiting has been tracked in India at all and was definitely not represented by the Rajasthani respondents. Among multiple transitions into modernity, ego clashes are also pulling modern women away from tradition and more families are pulling away from traditional family settings to nuclear households. The effects of modernity have in many ways promoted women's independence. While it is not suggested that modern women should reframe from assisting their love ones if that is all that traditions entails, it is suggested though that through the growing pains of these new women open respect should be established.

### **Analysis**

Throughout this study, it would've been insignificant to compare and contrast response from different age groups or even colleges. As further analysis was not given above, this section is for mere thought concepts giving the cultural facts and

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<sup>44</sup> KarnikaKumari student, personal interview, November 11, 2011

scholastic factors stated. Making an allowance for unenthusiastic sequel components to women's expansion towards independence, the following has been measured.

The decision to keep students segregated by gender in schools seems to have prolonged ideals of man and woman's differences. Though the establishment of schools has been beneficial for many students and families in the 21st century, the decision may have counteracted the disbelief in mutual friendships between majority male and females in India. Instead, emphasis had been directed to males' roles as husbands and females' roles as wives. This analysis cannot be fairly posed on the complete country between gender relations; however it is evident in this research that the young ladies only sought males as fathers, brothers, or potential husbands.

In search of an understanding for gender disparities over years, a meeting with a representative from IDS was conducted. The 37 year old respondent is married with one daughter and had been an employee at IDS for several years. She pursued post-graduate studies in London and returned to her home of Jaipur to work. She expressed her thoughts about co-educational institutions versus either all girls or all boys' institutions. As she explained she attended all girls' schools until her graduate education, she further implied that she initially do not send her daughter to an all girls school because of the "reality of immaturity and shock students face in their graduate years at co-educational universities." It can be analyzed that Indian students who attend school with the opposite sex for the first time in their adulthood lose sight of mutual friendship with the opposite sex which depletes the idea of man and woman equality. In a society that takes pride in arranged marriages, it would be difficult to establish friendship before relationships. Lost in transition in many ways, women

overtime found it difficult to cultivate an identity outside of the identity pre-prescribed to them.

Individuality importance was vital to this study and the jaunt aspirations of these students must be pointed out. While a small note of compare and contrast between ICG and Binani students must be stated, ICG students seemed eager to travel not just out of their city to attend ICG but across borders to continue their studies. Students at Binani seem to not be receptive of these sort of independent adventures however they did mention having interest in travel with friends and family. Influenced by family member's stories and with the experience of already traveling for school, the ICG students were open to a new scene of independence. Considering that Binani is more so a community college, girls who attend the institution maybe comfortable and obviously not accustom to outside exploration. Curiosity may also be attributed the student's living situations. With experience of already leaving in a new setting in a hostel versus home with family, ICG students have previously learned how to deal with homesickness if it were to become a problem and already are accustom to not seeing their family members daily. This analysis however does not provide any focus differences between the students as they all study similar subjects and are interested in promoting their family's tides and self-importance.

Furthermore, while there seem to be no major differences in responses from one age group compared to another there was a bit of difference in marital status' responses and insight. The only two young ladies who were engaged and still practicing their undergraduate studies among the other students surveyed who weren't married or engaged were the only respondents who believed that a woman cannot

lead a happy life without being married. Elder women from the surveyed group seem to agree with the unmarried and unengaged cohort of students who weren't yet deeply involved in the love scene. Possibilities for reasoning may be that the older respondents have experienced the realities of marriage and support women being happy single in order to earn happiness in marriage. This statement doesn't suggest that these respondents aren't happy in their marriages but it can explain the realistic thoughts of reasoning behind love thought through and not simply taught through. Universally, as all soon to be wedded or newlyweds are excited about the affair, when teen respondents announced their engagement these respondents seem to be swamped in the beautifications of marriage. The engaged teen respondents also stated in their response that they do not plan to work. This statement alone proves that these students potentially have not come to face realistic matters in life and it has further eradicated their independence and has in turned promoted their reliance on another person.

### **Conclusion: A Woman is Simply a Human Being**

Given the unavoidable patriarchal system that surround independent Rajasthani women, the stories researched from these ladies ought to be shared. The universal statement of women's literacy stands true that "*when you educate a man you educate a person, but when you educate a woman you educate a family.*" In this study Rajasthani women have planted their stories of their autonomy and covet for recognition. Education is frankly a women's only way out of any detrimental situation. Indian women overall have used education as a tool to unbolt hierarchal

standards. Gender disparities aid inequality of is not kin to social sustainable development.

Understanding the role of importance family play in India, this factor should definitely be taking into consideration. However, women's esteem must also be referenced. Shifting from traditional family values is not an advocacy project in this research. It must be understood that according to current demands; families' have to be more flexible and considerate of women's new aspirations, priorities, challenges and necessities.

Respondents in this study reference their literacy as a promise for tomorrow. Ensuring economic security and confidence endorsement, literate Rajasthani women are positioning themselves to be self-reliant. This autonomous attitude enables them to generate a subsequent cohort who too can be invested in equality. Conditioned with multiple roles, shine must not neglect the reality that a woman is simply a human being. She must be respected and treated as such.

### **Recommendations for Further Study**

Women's independence is broad and continual study is needed in order to keep up with women's latest constraints and profits. The following topics maybe studied to further understand variations of women's literacy and independence in Rajasthan:

- Ethical variations between girls who study under Hindi medium education system versus girls who study under English medium systems
- Explorations of possible focus differences between girls who attend all girls' institutions versus co-educational institutions
- Migrate village families' attitudes towards education and girl's independence

- Families' response to independent mother's expense and any inquiries or proceedings pertaining to her expenses

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## **Appendix**

### *The Sample Questionnaire*

Hello,

My name is Anita Foster. I am an American student studying in India for the semester. In India, I attend the School of International Training World Learning (SIT) where we venture many aspects of sustainable development and social change efforts in the country. This month all participating American students have the opportunity to do a month study on a wide range of topics. My research focuses on 21<sup>st</sup> century college-educated women's aspirations, challenges and development goals. In America I attend Spelman College, a liberal arts women's college whose greater focus is to impact the total global community. I am motivated by my eagerness in practicing and teaching the importance of women's empowerment. I would appreciate if you could take time to respond to my survey so that I may obtain the best understanding I can of college-educated women in Rajasthan. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Anita C. Foster  
SIT student

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### Education

What subjects do/did you study in college?

What influenced you to study these subjects?

### Present Activity

1. Are you at present:

married  widowed  unmarried  separated

If married:

(a) Husband's education:

(b) Husband's occupation:  
expect

(c) With regard to living  
arrangements are you:

independent  
 with husband's family  
 other (explain)

2. Is it the custom to accept dowry in your community?

yes  no  other (explain):

3. Are you at present:

considering post-graduate studies  
Specify:

considering post-graduate work  
Specify:

not considering post-graduate studies  
Specify:

currently working  
Specify:

currently doing post-graduate studies  
Specify:

currently seeking employment  
Specify:

4. Please explain which family member have most strongly influenced decisions about your education.

5. How does the above family member(s) feel about a girl attending a co-educational college? How does the above family member(s) feel about a girl attending an all girl's college?

If unmarried:

(a) Are you engaged?

yes  no

(b) If engaged, when do you  
to be married?

(c) If engaged, please give future  
husband's education:

(d) If engaged, please give future  
husband's occupation:

6. Suppose your family was very well off and your family experienced no financial difficulties, would you:

\_\_\_prefer to work    \_\_\_prefer not to work    Explain:

7. **If you are now employed**, please indicate in the boxes below how your family members feel about you working. **If you are NOT now employed**, please indicate in the boxes below how your family members feel about your seeking employment:

<p>Father</p> <p>___strongly encourages</p> <p>___mildly encourages</p> <p>___does not mind</p> <p>___minds somewhat</p> <p>___prefers I stay home</p> <p>___other (specify) :</p>	<p>Mother</p> <p>___strongly encourages</p> <p>___mildly encourages</p> <p>___does not mind</p> <p>___minds somewhat</p> <p>___prefers I stay home</p> <p>___other (specify) :</p>
<p>Brother 1 (eldest)</p> <p>___strongly encourages</p> <p>___mildly encourages</p> <p>___does not mind</p> <p>___minds somewhat</p> <p>___prefers I stay home</p> <p>___other (specify) :</p>	<p>Brother 3</p> <p>___strongly encourages</p> <p>___mildly encourages</p> <p>___does not mind</p> <p>___minds somewhat</p> <p>___prefers I stay home</p> <p>___other (specify) :</p>

<p style="text-align: center;">Brother 3</p> <p>___strongly encourages</p> <p>___mildly encourages</p> <p>___does not mind</p> <p>___minds somewhat</p> <p>___prefers I stay home</p> <p>___other (specify) :</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Sister (s)</p> <p>___strongly encourages</p> <p>___mildly encourages</p> <p>___does not mind</p> <p>___minds somewhat</p> <p>___prefers I stay home</p> <p>___other (specify) :</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Husband/husband-to-be</p> <p>___strongly encourages</p> <p>___mildly encourages</p> <p>___does not mind</p> <p>___minds somewhat</p> <p>___prefers I stay home</p> <p>___other (specify) :</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Mother-in-law/potential mother-in-law</p> <p>___strongly encourages</p> <p>___mildly encourages</p> <p>___does not mind</p> <p>___minds somewhat</p> <p>___prefers I stay home</p> <p>___other (specify) :</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Father-in-law/potential father-in-law</p> <p>___strongly encourages</p> <p>___mildly encourages</p> <p>___does not mind</p> <p>___minds somewhat</p> <p>___prefers I stay home</p>	<p>Describe feeling of other influential family members not mentioned above:</p>

___ other (specify) :	
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8. **If you work**, how much financial assistance are you contributing to your family (or husband’s family) per month? **If you do not work but expect to work**, how much financial assistance do you plan to contribute to your family (or husband’s family) per month? Please explain.
  
9. Under what conditions, if any, should a mother work outside the home? Please explain.
  
10. What do you think are the major adjustments an educated woman will have to make in marriage? Do you think that education helps or hinders in making these adjustments? Please explain.
  
11. Do you think a girl who does not marry can lead a happy life or that she cannot? Please explain.
  
12. What would you say society thinks about educated women?
  
13. What is your hope for your future children?
  
14. If you could do anything you wanted to in the next two years, what would you choose to do?
  
15. What do you do in your spare time?

Statistical data

Please add the following data about yourself; DO NOT SIGN YOUR NAME.

Age \_\_\_ Religion \_\_\_ Father’s job\_\_\_ Father’s education\_\_\_

Mother’s job\_\_\_ Mother’s education\_\_\_ Caste\_\_\_ Sub-caste\_\_\_

No. of brothers\_\_\_ Their education\_\_\_ No. of sisters\_\_\_ Their education\_\_\_

Please indicate which family members live in your household:

\_\_\_Mother \_\_\_ father \_\_\_grandfather \_\_\_grandmother \_\_\_brother(s)

\_\_\_sister(s) \_\_\_uncle(s) \_\_\_aunt(s) \_\_\_cousin(s) \_\_\_mother-in-law

\_\_\_father-in-law \_\_\_brother(s)-in-law \_\_\_sister(s)-in-law

What class you consider your family a member of?

\_\_\_ Upper class

\_\_\_ Upper middle class

\_\_\_ Lower middle class

\_\_\_ Lower class

\_\_\_ Other (explain)

Please leave any additional comments and thank you for participating.