

FOR FAVOUR OF PUBLICATION

Patna, December 22. The Hindu Succession (Amendment) Act (HSAA), 2005 aims at placing women on an equal footing with men in the case of inheritance rights with the hope that women will reap the benefits of property ownership. However, the law has had no significant negative impact on fertility rates when it comes to regions where preference for sons is prevalent, said Dr Nayana Bose, Associate Professor at Scripps College, US. She was delivering a talk titled “Reassessing the Relationship Between Women’s Empowerment and Fertility: Evidence from India” organised by the Asian Development Research Institute (ADRI) today.

Citing the case of Bihar, she said that women’s inheritance of land was at merely 8 per cent after eight years of the passing of the amendment as compared to 31 per cent in Andhra Pradesh. Despite understanding the value of ownership of land for their well-being, only 10 per cent women in Bihar wished to inherit land and 30 per cent women as compared to 80 per cent men are aware of the HSAA, as per the data shared by Dr Bose.

She further stated that women in Bihar are dissuaded from inheritance right owing to the ingrained belief in social and patriarchal norms where the parents and brothers do not want the female family members to inherit the land. There is also a lack of social support systems. Officials and institutions responsible for enforcing the law also adhere to these social practices. She called for the need of a holistic approach to address this lacuna by creating awareness and reducing social barriers to female education and employment.

Focusing on the effect of HSAA on five states of rural South India, Dr Bose has found that property rights reform increased fertility rate by 0.8 more children in these states, and there has been stronger preference for sons. Other findings stemming from this study revealed an overall improvement in women empowerment and health, decision-making, and fewer domestic violence cases.

Dr Ashmita Gupta, Member-Secretary of ADRI welcomed the speaker and also proposed a Vote of Thanks. Academicians, researchers and experts from India and various countries attended the talk in-person as well as virtually.

(Anjani K Verma)