

J. R. BEDFORD'S STUDY OF FAMILY INCOME AND EXPENDITURE, 1849*

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FAMILY budget surveys are known to have been initiated in India by G. F. Shirras in 1921-22. On the international plane, we know of the 1853 Belgian survey on which Ernst Engel based, in 1857, his famous law of consumption patterns. But not so well-known is the fact that J. R. Bedford, a British Officer in India, had conducted a study of monthly income and expenditure of a hundred families in Chittagong (now in Bangla Desh) for 1849. The following is a focus on the Bedford study in respect of theory, methodology and other substantive aspects of consumption.

Bedford published the paper under the title "Contributions to the Statistics of Bengal, Income, Expenditure and Food" in the Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1853.^{1A} Later G. Plowden reproduced almost the entire paper in his famous Salt Enquiry Report of 1856.¹ Later, in 1870, The *Indian Economist* too reproduced and referred to the same.⁷

The paper may be divided into three parts, (i) theoretical explanation of the nature of his enquiry; (ii) Family budgeting in money terms and (iii) Consumption in real terms. For Bedford, however, these three parts are just different aspects of the same theme.

Regarding the date of the studies: H. S. Houthakker⁴ supplies a documented table of world surveys of Household Expenditure Patterns in his contribution commemorating the centenary of Engel's Law (*Econometrica*) in 1957. The earliest one he mentions is, as we all know the 1853 Belgian survey. For India, it is 1921 G. F. Shirras's Working Class Budgets of Bombay.³ B. P. Guha, writing on "Family Living Surveys in India" in the *Indian Labour Journal* (Jan. 1972) subscribes to the view that Shirras was the starting point for this country in this subject.² George J. Stigler does mention at least two studies made by David Davies and F. M. Eden during 1790's in England, but considers them rather superficial.⁵ He (Stigler) reproduces Engel's percentage composition table with the note that it "contains some errors".

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