

**The Practice of Early Marriages among Females
in India: Persistence and Change**

R. B. Bhagat



(Established in 1956)
Capacity Building for a Better Future

INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR POPULATION SCIENCES
Mumbai, India
www.iipsindia.org

January, 2016

From the Editor's Desk.....

Greetings !!!

The International Institute for Population Sciences has taken initiative to bring out a series of working papers based on the projects / studies undertaken by the Institute. The main objective of the working paper series is to disseminate new research ideas, theoretical developments and methodological insights to the national and international research community as quickly as possible. The papers published under this series are peer reviewed by experts in the subject. We hope you will find the working papers interesting and useful.

Prof. H. Lhungdim and **Dr. Harihar Sahoo**
Editors, Working Paper Series

Editorial Team

Prof. F. Ram

Prof. H. Lhungdim

Dr. Harihar Sahoo

Dr. Palani Murugesan

Design and Layout:

Publication Unit, IIPS

Suggested Citation: Bhagat, R. B., 2016. "The Practice of Early Marriages among Females in India: Persistence and Change", Working Paper No. 10, International Institute for Population Sciences, Mumbai.

IIPS Working Paper No. 10

The Practice of Early Marriages among Females in India: Persistence and Change

R. B. Bhagat

Professor and Head

Department of Migration and Urban Studies

International Institute for Population Sciences (IIPS), Mumbai-400088

Email: rbbhagat@iips.net

January, 2016



(Established in 1956)

Capacity Building for a Better Future

INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR POPULATION SCIENCES

Deonar, Mumbai 400 088, Maharashtra, India

Tel: +91 22 42372400; Fax: +91 22 25563257

E-mail: publicationcell@iips.net

Website: www.iipsindia.org

The Practice of Early Marriages among Females in India: Persistence and Change

R. B. Bhagat

Introduction

Marriage age is a crucial demographic variable affecting fertility, infant and child mortality and the health of women. In India, marriage was not only universal but also child marriages have been practised in the past. Despite age at marriage has been rising, there has been a concern for the persistence of early marriages in several parts of the country particularly in the under-developed North Indian states known for a strong patriarchal system. Scholars believe that the practice of child marriages began only after 600 AD under the influence of the writings of *Dharmasutras* and *Smiritis*. These writings warned that the parents and the elders who keep an unmarried girl after attaining menarche would go to hell. Also, the importance of virginity was emphasised in the writings of *Dharmasutras*; it was considered to be a virtue in woman and the emblem of a good lady; it became a mark of respectability and a necessary qualification for marriage. Transgressing virginity also meant bringing disgrace to the family and parents. Thus, keeping a girl, who has attained puberty, became a cause of great anxiety for parents, which continues even now. Under the influence of religious writings child marriages, considered as *Kanya Dan* (gift of a daughter), spread faster and took deeper root in Indian society since 7th century onwards (Kapadia 1966). The practice continued unabated through the medieval time to British period. During the British period, child and pre-puberty marriages have experienced further degeneration leading to the practice of infant marriages. Kapadia (1966) opines that this was due to the excessive social importance given to the early marriages of daughters and treating such practices as a symbol of one's pride and prestige in the society. As Karve (1965) has mentioned, "A consideration of the peculiar position of women in the households will show that the custom of early marriage may have arisen out of the necessity of a patrilineal household to incorporate women from alien families as members of their households. An early transfer of a girl into her husband's household would ensure her loyalties. A girl would be bound by ties of companionship to the members of her husband's family long before she started her life as the wife of a person".

There has been a social norm guiding marriage age in most of the societies. However, with the beginning of civil marriages, marriage age has been brought under the legal domain. Before the 18th century, marriage was a clearly a religious affair in all countries of Europe. In Europe, civil marriage was conspicuously established by the French Revolution which made it even compulsory in the sense that it would not be possible to conclude a valid marriage in any way other than by a ceremony before a secular officer. Consequently age at marriage was also prescribed by law. For example, In France, the Civil Code (1804) prescribes that man must be 18 and woman 15 years of age at the time of marriage (Encyclopedia Britannica, 1965).

In India, child marriages had been banned as early as in 1894 when Mysore State forbade arranging or helping to arrange the marriages of girls who had not completed 8 years of age. Baroda Early Marriage Prevention Act of 1904 stipulated 12 years, a minimum age of the bride. Indore State in 1918 prescribed 14 years for boys and 12 years for girls as the minimum age for marriage (Goode 1965). The British Govt. passed the Child Marriage Restraint Act 1929, popularly known as *Sarda Act*, which prescribed 14 years for girls and 18 years for boys as the minimum age for marriage. Later, after independence the Child Marriage Restraint Act has been amended in 1949 and in 1978. According to the amendment of 1978, the minimum age for girls has been enhanced to 18 for girls and 21 years for boys. Further, the Child Marriage Restraint Act was replaced by *The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006*. The new Act made several new provisions to prohibit child marriages, but the minimum age of marriage remained unchanged. Under the law to prohibit child marriages, any marriage occurring below the minimum age is considered to be a cognizable offence. Despite these legislative efforts, early marriages continue to occur in India.

Demographers are mainly interested in age at marriage of women since marriage age is closely related to the level of fertility. Early marriage leads to higher number of children born in a woman's life in absence of contraceptive use. However, marriage age assumes more than demographic importance as women's status, life chances such as access to education, economic security and wellbeing are also related to the timing of marriage.

This study makes an attempt to understand the nature and magnitude of changes in age at marriage of women in India and states, and also tries to assess to what extent early marriages take place violating the legal stipulation of law?

Methodology and Data:

The mean age of marriage in a population by sex is one of most important indicators of change in the marriage timing. There are two ways to estimate mean age at marriage- i) direct method and ii) indirect method. Direct method has been used in various demographic surveys asking directly to married men and women about the age at which they have married. Direct question on age at marriage suffers from recall lapse on the part of the respondents as marriage registration is not complete in India. Also, many people do not even know their correct age in the absence of birth registration. In such situation reporting of age and also the age at marriage suffers from digit preference as such 10, 20, 30 etc. Further the direct question on marriage in sample surveys is also affected by mortality because only surviving men and women could report their age at marriage. In case of older persons it can grossly underestimate the mean age at marriage. Furthermore, in the younger cohort marriage experience is not complete for all of them. As a result the estimation of mean marriage age suffers from truncation effects. Because of these limitations, a direct question on age at marriage is largely not appropriate to study the trend and pattern in age at marriage in the Indian context. Indirect estimation of mean age at marriage is based on census data on age and marital status. Unlike direct measure which considers married population, the indirect technique takes into account never married population. Based on never-married population, proportion single is calculated by age-groups. Based on proportions single by age-groups, Singulate Mean Age at Marriage (SMAM)¹ is calculated using a method proposed by Hajnal (1953). Hajnal (1953) described proportions single as a tool for studying marriage habit, which embodies intrinsic advantage over other methods in the absence of marriage registration.

¹ In many communities, cohabitation starts not immediately after marriage but after the ceremony of *Gauna*. However, the difference between the age at marriage and age at *Gauna* is just 6 months (International Institute for Population Sciences (IIPS) and Macro International 2007:164).

This study uses proportion single and SMAM (hereafter called mean age at marriage) to study the marriage timing of female population in India and major states. The method is simple and for details of formulae and computation are as follows:

$$\text{Singulate Mean Age at Marriage (SMAM)} = \frac{\sum_{i=10}^{50} n S_x - S_k (K)}{1 - S_k}$$

Where $n S_x$ - Proportion single in the age-group x to $x+n$ (It begins with age 10 because Census of India considers everybody below age 10 as never married).

K - Upper limit of the age under which marriage occurs (generally 50 is considered in most studies).

S_k - Proportion single at age k .

n - Interval of age group

SMAM refers to average number of years lived in the single state by those who marry by certain age, say by age 50 (Hajnal1953). The method involves following assumptions:

- (i) Population must be closed to migration or its net effect should be negligible;
- (ii) There should not be any differential in mortality by marital status;
- (iii) The age pattern of marriage has not experienced any abrupt changes over time.

Analysis of Agarwala (1962) reveals that differentials in mortality and migration do not introduce any significant errors in the calculations of age at marriage. It is also useful for making comparison across groups and regions (Goyal 1982).

Trend in Female Age at Marriage:

According to Hajnal (1965) there are two distinct areas of marriage pattern namely i) European and (ii) Non-European marriage pattern. He pointed out that European marriage pattern was unique because of very high age at marriage and also a very high proportion of females ultimately remaining single. Non-European marriage

pattern, on the other hand, has been characterized by universal and low age at marriage of females. The European marriage pattern was not found in entire Europe, but was confined to Western Europe only. The age at marriage of female was found to be 30 years at some places in the eighteenth century (Hajnal, 1965).

India has been a country with low age at marriage, and also the marriage has been universal. Figure 1 shows that mean age at marriage among girls was just 13 years at the beginning of 20th Century. A century later, it has risen about 21 years- a very significant increase of 7 years. The figure also shows that there was a dip in age at marriage of girls in 1931 due to rush in marriages preceding the enforcement of Sarda Act (Agarwala 1962; Bhagat 2002). As per 2011 Census, the highest mean age at marriage of 22.5 years for females was found in Punjab superseding the position of Kerala until 2001 and the lowest of 19.4 years in Rajashtan.

The typical age pattern of marriage among females is depicted in Fig 2. It may be noted that about 3 per cent marriages took place in the age-group 10-14, sharply rose to 20 percent in the age-group 15-19 and 69 per cent by age 24. More than 90 per cent females get married by age 29, and only about 1 per cent remained spinsters at the end of their reproductive life (by age 50). Universal marriage is also evident in respect to the marriages of males. Men start marrying in the early 20s and finish off by age 34 (about 90 per cent married). The level of celibacy is about 2 per cent showing marriage is also universal among men. The difference in the

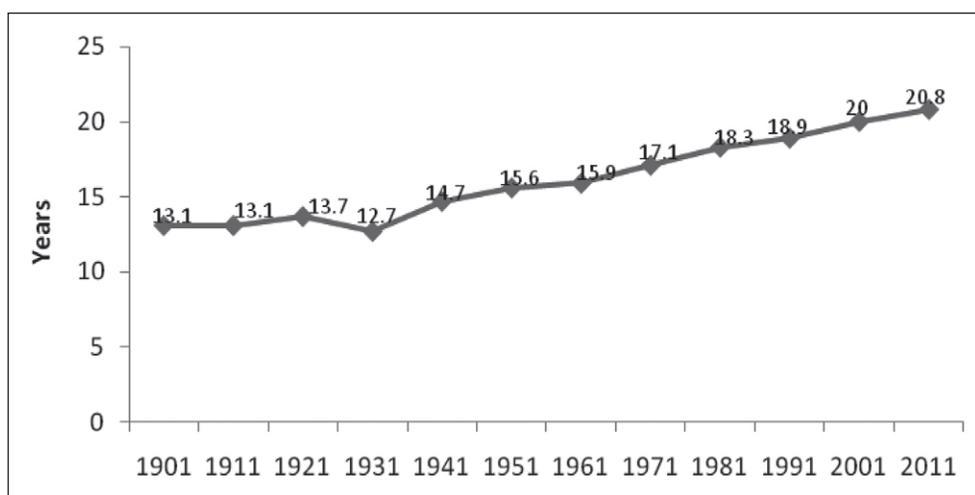


Fig 1: Singulate Mean Age at Marriage in India 1901 to 2011

age pattern of marriage between men and women is simply due to the practice of age based hypergamy believing that the husband should be older than the wife. Hypergamy has been a practice that motivated a woman's family to marry off their daughter in higher social standing than their own (Billig 1991).

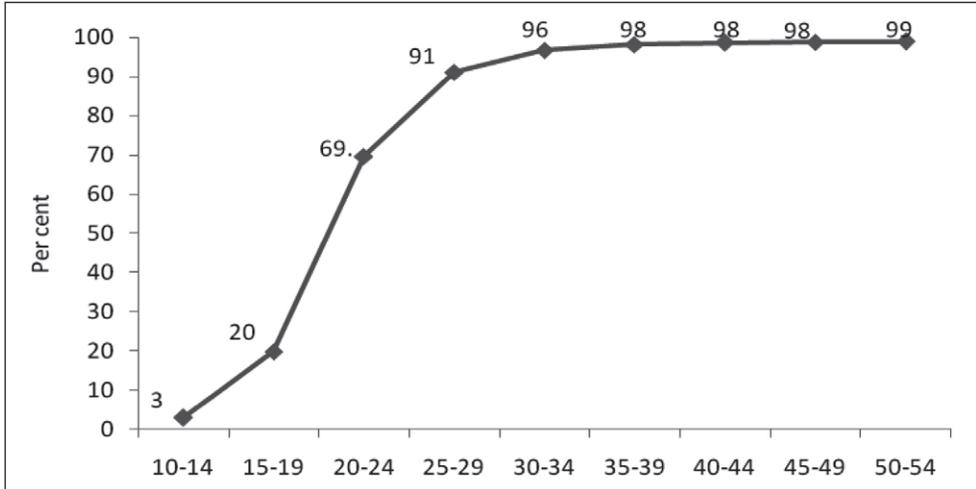


Fig 2: Percentage of Females Married by Age-Groups, India, 2011

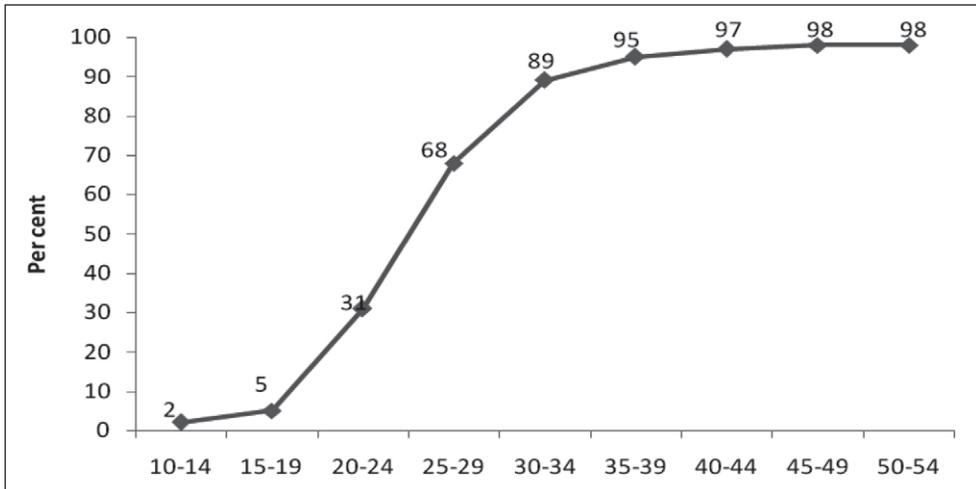


Fig 3: Percentage of Males Married by Age-Groups, India, 2011

Census Commissioners of British India considered it to be one of the reasons along with religious injunctions to marry off daughters before puberty for the wide spread practice of child marriages in the past in India (Bhagat 2002). The age gap

between spouses was also the part of this entrenched practice of hypergamy that influenced the gendered power relations and subordination of women in the family and household levels. The age gap in marriage age between men and women is normally about 5 years and this has not changed much in the recent decades rather increased in some parts of the country.

Table 1 shows that mean age at marriage of men and women for India for the census years 1991 to 2011 and for four selected states namely Kerala, known for high female education and social development, Punjab and Haryana, known for strong patriarchy and relatively higher economic development, and Rajasthan representing the lowest age at marriage among major Indian states. In 2011, the mean age at marriage among men was about 25.3 years in India compared about 20.8 years among women- a difference of 4.5 years which has been persisting over decades. On the other hand, in the state of Kerala the spousal age gap at the time of marriage is about 7 years as men married at the average age of 28.7 years compared to women married at the age of 21.7 years as per estimates based on 2011 Census data. The spousal age gap has increased from 5.5 years in 1991 to 6 years in 2001, and further to 7 years in 2011 in Kerala. Another characteristic feature of emerging marriage age pattern in India is that the average age at marriage of women stabilises at age 22 years as evident in the results from the state of Kerala. In 1991, the highest mean age at marriage of females in Kerala reached 22.3 years in 1991 after that it started falling slightly showing mean age at marriage of 21.7 years in 2011. This shows a larger number of younger women are available for marriage for older and older Kerlomite men. The pattern however has emerged differently in the state of Punjab showing an increasing trend in age at marriage reaching 22.5 years in 2011-slightly higher compared to the state of Kerala (21.7 years). Further, the spousal age gap is one of the lowest in Punjab i.e. men marrying on an average age of 25.5 years compared to women marrying at the average age of 22.5 years. These two states—one socially developed and another economically developed have not been moving in same direction as there has been greater pressure for postponing marriages among men in Kerala, however there is hardly such difference observed in respect with women. Table 1 also shows that mean at marriage for females was about 21 years in Haryana and 19 years in Rajasthan with a spousal gap of about 4 and 3years respectively in

2011. Thus, there are two characteristic features emerging in India's age pattern of marriage—one that marriage is universal and finishes off by age 29 for females and secondly mean age at marriage plateauing about 22 years as seen in Kerala. There is also a convergence in the age pattern of marriage among different states towards Kerala and Punjab. However, as mean age of marriage fall in between 19 to 22 years in most of the states and 99 per cent women get married ultimately, India continues to be a country with early and universal marriage pattern as per criteria of Hajnal (1965).

Table 1: Singulate Mean Age at Marriage and Spousal Age Gap, India and Selected States			
Census Year	Male	Female	Spousal Age Gap
INDIA			
1991	23.7	18.9	4.8
2001	24.6	20.0	4.6
2011	25.3	20.8	4.5
Kerala			
1991	27.7	22.3	5.4
2001	28.0	21.9	6.1
2011	28.7	21.7	7.0
Punjab			
1991	24.2	20.9	3.3
2001	24.6	21.5	3.1
2011	25.5	22.5	3.0
Haryana			
1991	22.7	18.7	4.0
2001	23.5	19.5	4.0
2011	24.6	20.9	3.7
Rajasthan			
1991	21.0	16.8	4.2
2001	21.9	18.1	3.8
2011	22.8	19.4	3.4

Correlates of Female Age at Marriage:

In India, marriage has been a relationship between two families rather than two individuals. To what extent this characteristic feature has been changing is a

matter of debate, but it is sure that individual choices are increasingly exercised with rising education and urbanisation of Indian society. The rise in age at marriage of females from about 13 years at the beginning of 20th Century to about 21 years in the early 21st Century is a sign of this change. This rise has been associated with significant increase in female literacy and education and also urbanisation. The female literacy in India rose from less than 10 per cent in 1951 to 65 per cent in 2011. Female literacy also reached up to 92 percent in Kerala, 71 per cent in Punjab and 52 per cent- the lowest in Rajasthan in 2011. Similarly, there has been increasing urbanisation of Indian society- rising from 17.2 per cent in 1951 to 31.1 per cent in 2011 (see Fig 4). More people now live in metropolitan cities than any time before. According to 2011 Census, there are 53 million plus cities in India where 40 per cent of India's urban population lives.

Rising level of education and urbanisation has been bringing about increased geographical mobility of women for attending school and colleges than before. The mate selection process has been going through a change as family relationship changes. Although most of the marriages are arranged by parents, consent of children has become increasingly important. There are also instances of individual assertions of self choice in marriages but these cases are extremely few for a large Indian society with a billion plus population. The family continues to be a moving force and parents consider their duty in arranging marriages of their children. However, daughters are still considered to be liability (*paraya dhan*) and earlier they are married better it is. As the family is strongly entrenched in caste and religion, outside marriages are frowned upon because it creates a strong sense of fear among parents and close relatives about losing their prestige and goodwill. A thinking also prevails that the future marriage prospects of their wards would be doomed if the rules of endogamy are broken. Thus, the pressure to marry off daughters continues in spite of rising education and urbanisation. As a consequence although child marriages have almost disappeared as practised during the British period, early marriages continue to occur among females and finish off quickly by age 29. As could be seen from Fig 2 that 23 per cent marriages of females have occurred below age 19 at all India level which goes as high as 33 per cent in the state of Rajasthan in 2011. Early marriage deprives females their access to education, push them to early child bearing and various other risks of maternal and reproductive health problems (Raj et al 2009).

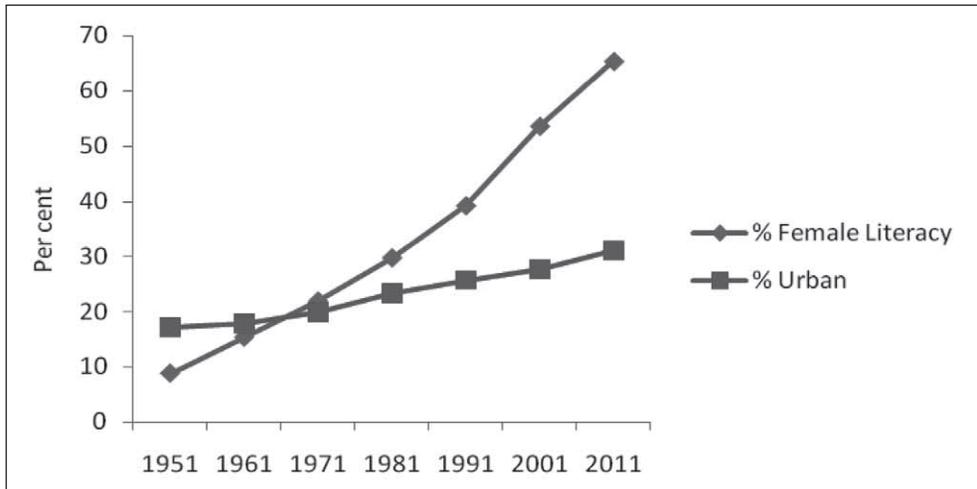


Fig 4: Rising Literacy and Urbanisation, India, 1951-2011

One of the negative consequences associated with rising level of education and urbanisation has been increasing dowry or groom price which is paid in cash or various kinds to the groom's family by bride's parents. Several studies show that the practice of dowry has been increasing and spread to several parts of India where traditionally bride price was practised (Caldwell, Reddy and Caldwell 1983; Billig 1992; Bhat and Halli 1999; Srinivasan 2005). Dowry has also acquired such a notorious proportion that it is not just demanded at the time of marriage but also after marriage. As a consequence, it has become a heinous practice leading to mental and physical abuse of wives, and in many cases burning or murder of women if the demands of the groom's family are not met (Dalmia and Lawrence 2005). Although dowry prohibition act exists since 1961, it is hardly effective in checking this menace.

The pressure to marry early persists with rising dowry and marriage expenses in several parts of the country. Studies show that the amount of dowry is positively related to the level of education (Zachariah 1984). This means that more the girls are educated, parents have to give more dowry. This also indicates that the so called modernization of Indian society associated with rising education and urbanization has no effect in reducing dowry unlike European countries (Anderson 2001). A positive association of dowry with education makes matrimonial operation double expensive. It discourages female literacy and education because parents realise

that the consequence of educating daughters will amount to a high demand of dowry. In such situation, early marriage is one of the reasons resulting in big drop in the enrolment of girls (relative to boys) accounting large drop outs at the middle and secondary stages particularly in less developed states like Bihar, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh etc (Kamath 1985; Chugh 2011).

There are number of socio-economic factors responsible for rising dowry such as rising material aspiration and consumerism, sanskritisation², low work participation of women compared to men leading to their devaluation, and demographic factors namely the marriage squeeze (more women than men in marriage market) operating against women (Rao. 1993; Bhat and Halli 1999; Dalmia and Lawrence 2005).

In India's population, sex ratio- i.e., females per 1000 males is unfavourable to females. As per 2011 Census, India's sex ratio was 942. It seems that there is a scarcity of women in the total population, but in the marriage market this would be true when men and women marry at the same age. However, this is not true in India as the spousal age gap is about 5 years at the present. On the other hand with increasing population and declining mortality, the younger cohort will be larger than older ones, and if women tend to marry older men then there will be surplus women in the marriage market. This phenomenon is typically called the marriage squeeze (Rao 1993).

According to Bhat and Halli (1999) the declining mortality also drastically reduced the number of widowers in the population who once accounted for about one-fifth of the annual supply of bridegrooms. They also believe that as a result of decline in fertility, the marriage squeeze against females will ease substantially by the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, and that marriages of men will begin to be delayed more than those of women. However, the estimates based on 2011 Census show that the marriage squeeze against women continues to persist, but easing out slowly.

² Sanskritisation is a process of social change emulating the practices of higher castes by the lower castes. The term was coined by famous sociologist M.N. Srinivas. Dowry was the practice of upper caste escalated first in Bengal at the beginning of 20th century as Bengali parents wanted an educated and employed son-in-law in government services. From Bengal it spread to other parts of northern India. In South India, dowry originated among educated urban Brahmins and spread to rural areas and among the lower castes (Bhat and Halli 1999).

Table 2: Indicators of Marriage Squeeze, India and Selected States, 2001 -2011

Country/ States	Overall Sex Ratio (F/M)*1000		Sex Ratio Marriageable Age Group (Females15-24/ Males 20-29)		Sex Ratio Never Married (Females 15-24/ Males 20-29)	
	2001	2011	2001	2011	2001	2011
INDIA	932	942	1020	1013	1072	1094
Kerala	1058	1084	1111	1058	964	886
Punjab	875	895	990	935	1259	1121
Haryana	860	878	939	934	1131	1111
Rajasthan	920	928	1039	1054	1261	1377

Table 2 presents some important indicators of marriage squeeze- such as sex ratio (F/M) of marriageable age group and sex ratio among the never married population. As women marry, on average, men of about 5 years older (see Table 1 for India), the indicators of marriage squeeze is defined accordingly. It may be observed from Table 2 that sex ratio is highly unfavourable to females in the states of north-west India namely Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan. These states are also known for strong patriarchal norms and values (Dyson and More 1983). Among states, Haryana has the lowest over all sex ratio of 878 females per 1000 males in 2011 showing there is a huge deficit of females in the total population, but when we look at the marriageable group, the sex ratio improves hugely to 934 and among never married, there is a large surplus of females with a sex-ratio of 1111 females per 1000 males in the marriageable age group. Thus, the marriage squeeze against women persists in Haryana even at a very low level of overall sex ratio. The same situation is found in most of the states including Punjab and Rajasthan.

However, Kerala shows that marriage squeeze has reversed against males. In 2011, among the never married marriageable group, only 886 females were available per 1000 males; although in total population females outnumber males in Kerala. As the squeeze has turned against males, male age at marriage has been rising almost a year per decade, whereas female age at marriage has shown a bit declining during the decades 1991-2001 and 2001-2011. On average, Kerala men marry at the age of 29 years compared to women at the age of 22 years. The spousal gap in marriage age in Kerala has increased to 7 years- one of the highest in the country. It seems that reversal in marriage squeeze against women

to men in Kerala put a cap on rising age at marriage on females generating a new pressure with increasing supply of eligible men in the marriage market. The story of most of the other states including the states of north-west India namely Haryana, Rajasthan, Punjab is different with a strong presence of patriarchy and adverse sex ratio. These states still experience female marriage squeeze associated with rising dowry. The pressure to marry continues but there is a slow rise in age at marriage of females as well.

Marriage is not only have but also universal with extremely low level of celibacy (2 %) and spinsterhood (about 1 %) in most of the states and country further, once married there is a strong pressure from family and kins to keep marriage intact as the incidence of divorce and separation is extremely low in India (1 divorce/separated per 100 currently married women as per 2011 Census). The pressure to marry early, universal and a very low dissolution through divorce and separation has been a stable feature of the institution of marriage in India over the last several decades. This impelled some researchers to call it a golden cage compared to many western countries showing an increasing level of live-in relationship and a high divorce rate (Srinivasan and James 2015).

In a marriage system characterised by caste endogamy but accompanied by a strong hypergamy based on age, economic status and education, marriage squeeze is considered to exert a strong influence on the prevalence of rising dowry and a simultaneous devaluation of the status of women. Such combination of factors and processes endures a marriage institution that is early, universal and stable (see Fig 5).

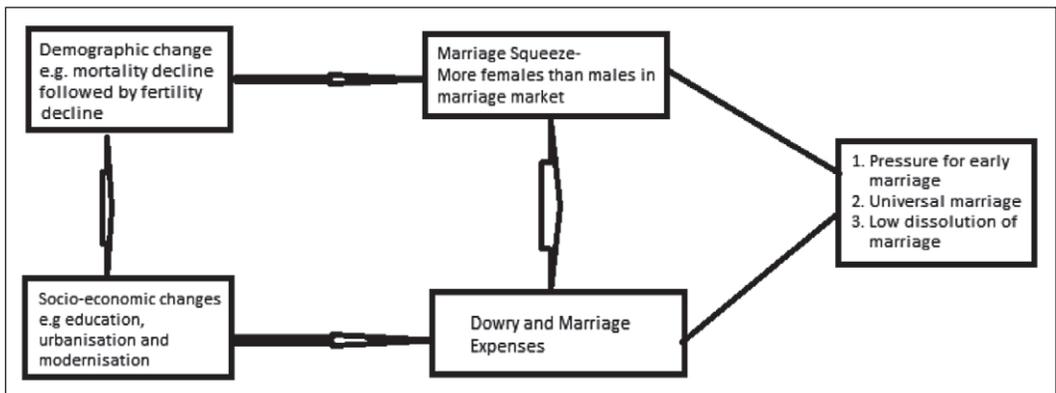


Fig 5: A Conceptual Model Explaining Factors Influencing Marital Union of Females in India

Child Brides:

Demographically children are considered those who are below the age 14, but as per legal provisions under the Prohibition Child Marriage Act child marriages are defined if contracted at age below 21 for boys and below age 18 for girls. In the beginning of twentieth century most of the states including Kerala have the mean age at marriage of female below 18 years. A century later, most of the states show the mean age at marriage of females above 18 years. Child brides, defined as those females who married with present age below 18, declined up to 5.3 per cent as per latest census of 2011³. In terms of absolute number, the figure of child brides was 5.1 million for the country as whole in 2011.

There is a need to distinguish between child marriages and the incidence of child brides. Child brides are those whose marriages were solemnised in the present age of below 18, while child marriages could be ascertained for any present age. For example according to NFHS-3 the prevalence of child marriages was 45.6 percent among currently married women in the age group 18-29 who married before age 18 (IIPS 2007). From the view point of policy and programme intervention, child brides need more serious attention and support.

Among the states, Rajasthan known for the higher prevalence of child marriages has shown a significant decline of child brides from about 13 per cent in 2001 to 8 percent in 2011 (Fig 6). This is indeed a remarkable achievement in eradicating child marriages from the country. Does it mean that India's social structure has changed drastically? However, if we compare India with the historical level of age at marriage and spinsterhood in European countries, this is not so. The pressure to marry early continues in India with the burden of marriage squeeze, rising dowry and low level of education of females. With marriage squeeze turning against male in Kerala, not only mean age at marriage of females has shown a decline after reaching age 22 years but also there is some rise in the proportion of child brides

3 In census marriages reported below age 21 for boys and below 18 for girls pertain to marriages actually happened in the age group 10-21 and 10-18 respectively as census reports entire age-group 0-9 as never married irrespective of any marriages occurred. In the estimation of child marriages, marriages refer to ever married which includes the divorce/separated and widowhood also.

(see Fig 6). This is a serious issue so far the status and autonomy of women is concerned in the state of Kerala known for higher female literacy and education.

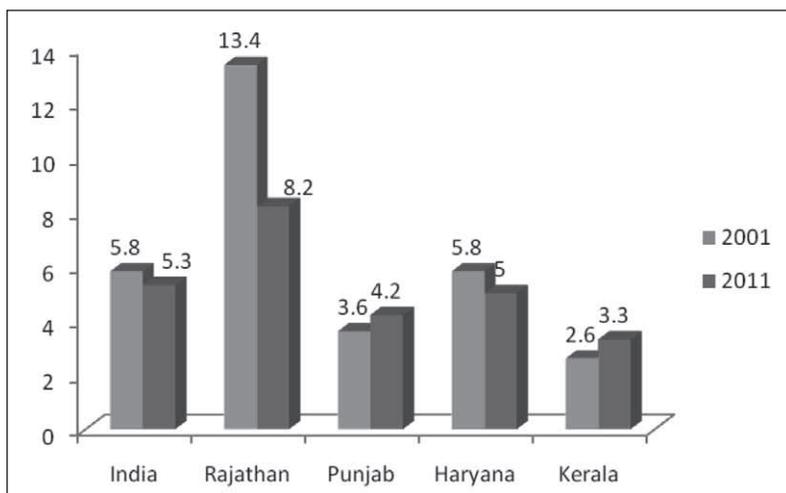


Fig 6: Percentage of Child Brides in India and Selected States, 2001 and 2011

Some other states like Punjab, West Bengal, Gujarat, Maharashtra and Goa also have witnessed an increase in the proportion of child brides during 2001 to 2011. All these states are relatively advanced with fertility level either very close to replacement level or even below it. The increase in the proportion of child brides

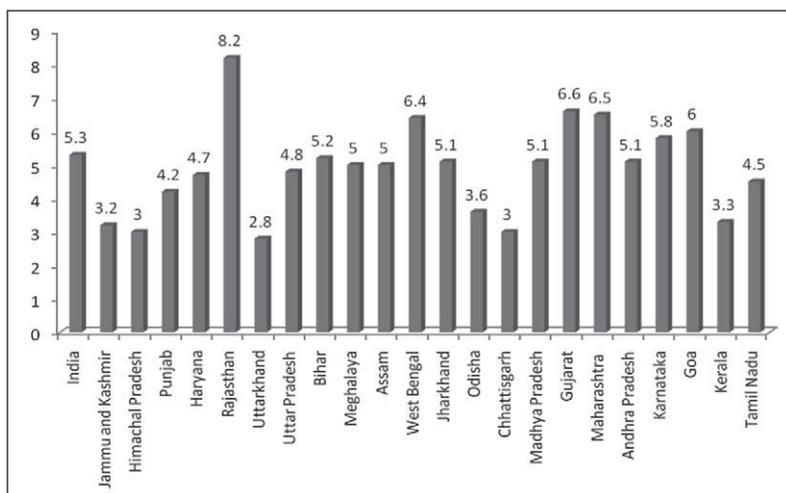


Fig 7: Percentage of Child brides in Different States and India, 2011

ranged from about 1 to 2 per cent in states of West Bengal and Gujarat to about 4 per cent in the states of Maharashtra and Goa. Figure 7 shows the proportion of child brides was lowest in the states of Uttarkhand, Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Kerala, Chattisgrah and Odisha (about 3 per cent). These states have a relatively higher age at marriage and low child marriages in the past. Chattisgrah and Odisha are two states with a high tribal population who are known to have married late than the general population in the past (Bhagat and Unisa 1991).

Conclusions:

There has been a considerable rise in age at marriage of females from about 13 years during the first decade of the twentieth century to about 20 years in the first decade of twenty-first century in most of the states of India, but the pressure to marry early continues in Indian society. The pressure to marry early is exerted by rising dowry, marriage squeeze and the age old tradition of hypergamy not only limited to social status but also to the factors associated with age, education and economic status. On the other hand, although female literacy has been rising rapidly, the level of education among women is extremely low along with low work participation rate. In such situation, daughters are considered to be a liability while marriage is viewed as the possible avenue of economic security of a woman. Thus, in Indian society early marriages have deep rooted psyche embedded in social structure. It seems that late marriages have been occurring probably by default—i.e., inability to marry due to lack of suitable match, and inability to pay dowry and rising cost of marriage. It is true that rising level of education has played some role but its association with rising dowry and lack of job opportunity of women, as evident in low work participation in urban areas, discourages many parents to educate their daughters and also compel them to marry off at the earliest. The case of Kerala shows that the upper limit of mean female age at marriage could rise up to 22 years thereafter declines as female marriage squeeze turned against males. This has also led to a rise in the proportion of child brides in Kerala. It is worthwhile to note that in Indian situation marriage squeeze, be it against females or males, continues to exert pressure for the early marriage of girls primarily due to its interaction with cultural norms of hypergamy based on age, education and economic status. As factors like marriage squeeze and hypergamy operate within

the structure of caste endogamy, this further exacerbates the pressure to marry at the earliest. Furthermore, the pressure to marry early co-exists with universal marriage and its negligible dissolution by divorce. This feature of the institution of marriage has been viewed as golden cage for Indian women unlike many countries in the west where individual freedom, personal advancement, and self actualisation are the real motives for entering into or getting out of marriages. Indian women in fact have suffered from the age old burden of traditional norms of patriarchy moulded through economic and demographic changes. Child marriages, *Sati Pratha*, restriction on widow marriages, female infanticide, female foeticide, bride burning and dowry deaths are numerous practices observed in the past as well as in the present. It will be euphemistic to describe Indian women in the golden cage, while they are in fact in iron fetters.

REFERENCES:

Agarwala, S.N. (1962) *Age at Marriage in India*, Allahabad: Kitab-Mhal Publishers.

Anderson, S. (2001) "Why Dowry Payments Declined with Modernisation in Europe but are Rising in India," Working Paper 2001-07, Center for Economic Research, Tilburg University, The Netherlands.

Bhagat, R. B. and S. Unisa (1991) "Religion, Caste/Tribe and Female Age at Marriage in India: A Study Based on Recent Census Data", *Journal of Family Welfare* 37 (1): 17-22.

Bhagat, R.B. (2002) *Early Marriages in India: A Socio-Geographical Study*, Delhi: Rajat Publication.

Bhat, P.N. Mari and Shiva Halli (1999) "Demography of Brideprice and Dowry: Causes and Consequences of the Indian Marriage Squeeze", *Population Studies*, 53 (2): 129-148.

Billig, Michael (1991) "The Marriage Squeeze on High-Caste Rajasthani Women", *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 50 (2):431-360.

Billig, Michael (1992) "Marriage Squeeze and the Rise of Groomprice in India's Kerala State", *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, 23 (2): 197-216.

Caldwell, J.C., Reddy, P.H. and Caldwell, P. (1983) "The Causes of Marriage Change in South India", *Population Studies*, 37 (3): 343-361.

Chugh, Sunita (2011) *Dropout in Secondary Education: A Study of Children Living in Slums of Delhi*, NUEPA Occasional Paper 37, National University of Educational Planning and Administration, New Delhi.

Dalmia, Sonia and Pareena G. Lawrence (2005) "The Institution of Dowry in India: Why It Continues to Prevail", *The Journal of Developing Areas*, 38 (2): 71-93.

Goode, W.J. (1965) *World Revolution and Family Patterns*, London: Colliner-Macmillan Limited.

Goyal, R.P. (1982) "Nuptiality Trends and Differentials", *Population of India*, Country Monograph Series No. 10, ESCAP, United Nations, pp. 109-133.

Hajnal, J. (1953) "Age at Marriage and Proportions Marrying", *Population Studies*, 7 (2): 111-136.

Hajnal (1965) "European Marriage Patterns in Perspective", in Glass and Eversley (eds.), *Population in History*, London: Edward Arnold Publisher, pp. 101-146.

International Institute for Population Sciences and Macro International (IIPS, 2007) *National Family Health Survey 2005-06*, India, Vol. 1, IIPS, Mumbai.

Kamat, A.R. (1985) *Education and Social Change in India*, Bombay: Somaiya Publications Pvt. Ltd.

Kapadia, K.M. (1966) *Marriage and Family in India*, London: Oxford University Press.

Karve, I. (1965) *Kinship Organization in India*, Bombay: Asia Publishing House.

Rao, V. (1993) "Dowry Influence in Rural India: A Statistical Investigation", *Population Studies*, 47 (2):283-293.

Raj, Anita, N. Saggurti, D. Balaiah and J.G. Silverman (2009) "Prevalence of Child Marriage and its Effect on Fertility and Fertility-Control Outcomes of Young Women in India: A Cross-Sectional, Observational Study", *The Lancet*, 373(9678): 1883-1889.

Srinivasan, K. and K.S. James (2015) "The Golden Cage: Stability of the Institution of Marriage in India", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 50 (13):38-45.

Srinivasan, Sharada (2005) "Daughters or Dowries? The Changing Nature of Dowry Practices in South India", *World Development*, 33(4): 593-615.

Zachariah, K. C. (1984) *Anomaly of the Fertility Decline in Kerala*, Washington, D.C.: World Bank.

Appendix 1

Singulate Mean Age at Marriage (SMAM) and Proportion Singles in Selected Indian States, 2011

STATES	SMAM 2011		Proportion Single 10-14		Proportion Single 15-19		Proportion Single 50-54	
	MALE	FEMALE	MALE	FEMALE	MALE	FEMALE	MALE	FEMALE
Andhra Pradesh	25.40	20.60	0.98	0.97	0.96	0.79	0.01	0.00
Assam	26.81	21.24	0.99	0.97	0.96	0.77	0.02	0.02
Bihar	23.72	19.54	0.98	0.97	0.94	0.73	0.00	0.00
Delhi	26.20	22.48	0.99	0.98	0.97	0.90	0.01	0.01
Jharkhand	24.60	20.24	0.98	0.97	0.94	0.74	0.01	0.01
Goa	28.50	23.90	0.97	0.96	0.96	0.87	0.03	0.03
Gujarat	24.26	20.80	0.97	0.96	0.92	0.79	0.02	0.01
Haryana	24.65	20.95	0.98	0.97	0.95	0.83	0.02	0.00
Himachal Pradesh	26.62	22.45	0.98	0.97	0.97	0.90	0.02	0.00
Jammu & Kashmir	27.24	24.32	0.98	0.97	0.96	0.91	0.02	0.00
Karnataka	26.83	21.04	0.98	0.97	0.96	0.79	0.01	0.01
Kerala	28.70	21.70	0.99	0.98	0.98	0.87	0.02	0.03
Madhya Pradesh	24.05	20.39	0.98	0.97	0.93	0.78	0.01	0.00
Chhatisgarh	24.60	21.18	0.98	0.98	0.96	0.85	0.00	0.00
Meghalaya	25.60	22.10	0.99	0.97	0.96	0.81	0.03	0.02
Maharashtra	25.53	20.80	0.97	0.95	0.94	0.80	0.01	0.01
Odisha	26.88	21.93	0.98	0.98	0.96	0.85	0.01	0.01
Punjab	25.56	22.53	0.98	0.96	0.96	0.89	0.02	0.00
Rajasthan	22.85	19.46	0.97	0.89	0.95	0.71	0.01	0.00
Tamil Nadu	27.20	21.80	0.99	0.97	0.97	0.84	0.01	0.01
Uttar Pradesh	24.24	20.87	0.98	0.97	0.95	0.83	0.02	0.00
UttarKhand	26.03	21.97	0.99	0.98	0.97	0.89	0.02	0.00
West Bengal	25.49	19.90	0.98	0.97	0.95	0.71	0.02	0.02
INDIA	25.30	20.80	0.98	0.97	0.95	0.80	0.02	0.01

Appendix 2

Percentage of child brides among females (age-group below 18)

States	2001	2011
Andhra Pradesh	6.3	5.1
Assam	4.4	5.0
Bihar	8.4	5.2
Delhi	2.6	2.8
Jharkhand	7.0	5.1
Goa	2.4	6.0
Gujarat	4.0	6.6
Haryana	5.8	4.7
Himachal Pradesh	1.9	3.0
Jammu and Kashmir	4.5	3.2
Karnataka	4.4	5.8
Kerala	2.6	3.3
Madhya Pradesh	7.8	5.1
Chhattisgarh	3.8	3.0
Meghalaya	3.8	5.0
Maharashtra	2.7	6.5
Odisha	3.0	3.6
Punjab	3.6	4.2
Rajasthan	13.4	8.2
Tamil Nadu	4.0	4.5
Uttar Pradesh	6.8	4.8
Uttarkhand	2.6	2.8
West Bengal	5.8	6.4
India	5.8	5.3

Note: Census considers everyone in the age-group 0-9 as unmarried. As such marriages below age 18 are those occurred in the age-group 10-18.

International Institute for Population Sciences

International Institute for Population Sciences was established in 1956 by the UN, Government of India and the Sir Dorabji Tata Trust as a premier institute for training and research in Population Studies for developing countries in the Asia and Pacific Region. It is the training centre for population studies for the ESCAP Region, recognised by the United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA). Now the institute is an autonomous institution under the administrative control of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India. It offers regular academic courses, at graduate and post graduate level; conducts research and training programmes; and provides consultancy to Government and Non-governmental organisations. The Institute was awarded deemed university status in 1985 and since then the PhD programme also initiated at the institute.

Besides teaching regular courses, the Institute has from time to time, conduct short-term courses for various organizations covering various demographic and health themes and issues. The courses have been sponsored by the WHO, Department of Family, Asian Development Bank, Nordic Centre, Johns Hopkins University and so on. The University Grants Commission (UGC) sponsored refresher courses have also been organized at IIPS.

The Institute conducts research using its own resources, and through external funding. The externally funded projects are usually initiated at the request of the concerned agencies. These are generally large-scale surveys, requiring primary data collection. It is worth mentioning the technical support given by ORC Macro International (formerly ORC Macro) at all the four rounds of the National Family Health Surveys (NFHS) and that of the East-West Centre, Honolulu, USA in the first round. Another major project undertaken by the institute is the District Level Household and Facility Survey (DLHS – RCH), conducted since 1998 at the behest of Ministry of Health and Family Welfare with World Bank funding.

Prof. F. Ram

Director & Senior Professor

About the Author

Professor R. B. Bhagat is currently Professor and Head, Department of Migration and Urban Studies, International Institute for Population Sciences (IIPS) (Deemed to be University), Mumbai. He holds Master Degree in Geography from the Centre for the Study of Regional Development, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi and PhD in Demography from University of Bombay. He was a recipient of UGC Research Award during 2002-03.

Prof Bhagat was actively associated with Working Group on Urbanisation set up by International Union for the Scientific Study of Population, Paris, (IUSSP), attended and presented paper in its several meetings held at Salvador (Brazil) 2001, Bellagio (Italy) 2002, Minneapolis 2003, Paris 2005, and Marrakech 2009. He was a member of the IUSSP committee on Demography of Armed Conflict during 2006-2010.

He was Co-coordinator of the Environmental Information System (ENVIS) on population, settlement and environment at IIPS funded by Ministry of Environment and Forests, Government of India, and a Co-ordinator of Concurrent Evaluation of National Rural Health Mission, funded by Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Govt. of India. He has also worked as a resource person/expert in various projects related to the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs and Ministry of Human Resources, Government of India. He also worked as consultant to UNESCO-UNICEF India Initiative on Migration, Consultant to International Organisation of Migration (IOM), Member, Scientific Committee, Global Migration Network of Columbia University, and Advisor, Yale University Project on Climate Change and Communication. He has been teaching Post Graduate students and guiding M.Phil and PhD scholars. His area of interest includes issues related to population, urbanization, migration and environment. He has also worked in the areas of evolution of demographic data and construction of social identities.

Vision Vision “To position IIPS as a premier teaching and research Institution in population sciences responsive to emerging national and global needs based on values of inclusion, sensitivity and rights protection”.

Mission “The Institute will strive to be a centre of excellence on population, health and development issues through high quality education, teaching and research. This will be achieved by (a) creating competent professionals, (b) generating and disseminating scientific knowledge and evidence, (c) collaboration and exchange of knowledge, and (d) advocacy and awareness.”