

EARLY AND CHILD MARRIAGE

Exploring Education, Work and Marriage

Mary E. John
PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR



CENTRE FOR WOMEN'S DEVELOPMENT STUDIES

An autonomous research institute supported by the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR)

25 Bhai Vir Singh Marg (Gole Market), New Delhi - 110001

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Executive Summary

Introduction

Globally and India are witnessing a new strong focus on child marriage as a “harmful practice” in very recent years.

International agencies, the state and organisations on the ground have become extremely active in efforts to end child marriage.

India has the largest numbers of those who marry before the age of 18 years.

This study seeks to contribute to the growing literature on the subject, with a special focus on the lives, experiences and views of young women in the early years of their marriage.

The spheres of education, work and marriage are central in the exploration of the factors that are affecting women’s life chances and their age at marriage.

Chapter one provides the historical context; Chapter two explores the twenty-first century revival of interest; Chapter three looks at relevant macro data and introduces the respondents of the study; Chapter four examines experiences and views on education; Chapter five focusses on work, labour and employment; Chapter six examines women’s views and experiences of marriage; and the final concluding section raises questions for further exploration.

Chapter One – the Historical Context

An extraordinary legacy of dense scholarship in the colonial period on child marriage has been followed by a retreat of interest after independence.

Most remarkable is that the 19th century of the “social reform of women” turns out to be simultaneously the history of the emergence of the “child” with child marriage at its heart. It is suggested that the notion of the “child woman/woman child” be used to evoke the complexity of this new subject.

Major flashpoints and controversies between imperial power and Hindu militant nationalism, liberal reformers, feminists and anti-caste crusaders till the 1930s raised

the minimum age of marriage from the Age of Consent controversy of 1891 (when age of consent was raised from 10 to 12 years) to the Sarda Act of 1927 (which raised the age of marriage to 14 years for girls and 18 years for boys).

After Independence, child marriage is only a sporadic issue in the new developmental context of the state. Following the National Emergency in 1978, for reasons that are explicitly referred to as a measure of population control, uncontroversial legislation raises the minimum age of marriage to 18 years for girls and 21 years for boys. This is the legal situation till the present day.

Child marriage is no longer the problem of the “self” – middle class India – but its “others” – the poor, rural and backward regions, so-called lower castes, Muslims.

Two cases – the Ameena case of 1990 and the Bhanwari Devi case of 1995, (the first directly and the second only tangentially) deal with the problem of child marriage during this period. Thus, till the twenty-first century, child marriage is not a major issue at the national level.

Chapter Two – Child Marriage in the Twenty-first Century

Following international conventions on the Rights of the Child and various UN Reports, a new focus on child marriage in India becomes discernable from about the second decade of the twenty-first century.

Over the last decade several studies have emerged drawing primarily from demography and the use of different national and state level data sets.

Unfortunately, the Indian story suffers from the sheer lack of studies from other fields – sociology and anthropology, education and labour, gender and sexuality.

The association between trends in underage marriage and poverty, lack of education, health, violence and other indicators of disadvantage are complex.

By turning child marriage into a “cause” with negative consequences, and leaving age largely unaddressed, much of this complexity is lost.

Elements of the new focus in the 21st century include that of the law (the Prevention of Child Marriages Act) and policy, especially schemes such as conditional cash transfers with 18 years as the right age for marriage. The chapter looks at the existing

secondary literature in the sphere of the law and of policy to establish gains and limitations.

Chapter Three

The principal argument of this report is that child marriage in contemporary India needs to be reframed. It is not – as currently presented – a unique social norm to be found and eradicated from certain groups and regions, the “others”. Marriage as an institution and hierarchical structure in India has been evolving and adapting.

Rates of underage marriage have been declining significantly in recent years and are now largely confined to girls in the age group 15-17 years. Such marriages might be better described as early or as adolescent marriages. These trends need to be reintegrated within the larger institution of compulsory marriage in India for a better understanding and perspective.

This chapter examines existing national data sets to set a contemporary context for the study – principally Census 2001 and 2011, and the National Family Health Survey 4 (2015-16) and 5 (2019-20). With the aid of Graphs and Tables, changing trends are described, both nationally and for the states and districts of the study. An all India district map provides a map of the prevalence of marriage before the age of 18, showing a concentration in certain districts in the east, west and south of India. All data sets corroborate that marriage among women and girls have been declining, if at differential rates. Disaggregation by wealth/poverty, by urban/rural location, by caste, by religious community and by education, reveal the concentration of early and child marriage among the very poor; among the so-called lower castes and Scheduled Tribes; and in rural locations. There are no differences between Hindus and Muslims at the national level, while at the state levels there may be – and there is no one pattern. Educational levels of attainment reveal that while rates of early marriage decline from primary to secondary levels of schooling, marriage before 18 only disappears with higher education.

With the assistance of macro data (Census, National Family Health Survey (NFHS)), the present study is essentially a micro level study in three states – West Bengal in the East, Rajasthan in the West and Telangana in the South. These are all relatively high prevalence regions, corresponding to backward regions in the country. Within these, a high prevalence rural district was chosen – Murshidabad in Bengal, Sawai Madhopur in Rajasthan and Mahbubnagar in Telangana, and by contrast the urban district of the respective state capitals – Kolkata, Jaipur and Hyderabad. Villages were

chosen in terms of accessibility, urban sites a mix of a slum cluster and neighbouring middle class locality. Sites were small to enable in depth interaction over a period of six months during 2018-19.

200 respondents were chosen per site who had married in the last ten years. These were the subjects of a survey, whose main themes focused on their education, work and marriage. For in depth interaction, a purposeful selection of 40 women (with as much diversity as possible across social characteristics) were chosen per site with the help of semi-structured interviews. The samples were by no means representative of their districts and results were checked against secondary data. Nonetheless marriages below 18 years were clustered around 15-17 years. Child marriage cases – before puberty – were outliers, in consonance with national data.

Chapter Four – Education

NFHS data on the relationship between age at marriage and education shows that underage marriage only disappears with higher education. The all India modal level of attainment is secondary education.

In the micro study, many questions were asked on the subject of education to the respondents in the survey and in the interviews, such as on how many years they studied, why they stopped, reasons for discontinuation and so on.

There was considerable variation within and across ages at marriage, and across the sites. Some of the major issues that emerged were the following:

Middle school was the modal level of education in most of the rural sites especially amongst those who had married below 18 years – hence much lower than the national average of secondary schooling.

Looking back at their childhood and educational experiences, respondents spoke mostly with regret – those who had not studied beyond middle school said that they were not interested at the time in education, were drop outs, with financial constraints featuring in several sites. Only in Murshidabad was marriage the most prominent reason for ending education. Most women believed it was their “choice” at the time to end their education.

Rather than take these views at face value, these are regions where education is failing women.

Chapter Five – Work

The world of work for women in our sample consisted of unpaid labour in households coupled with low levels of paid work.

Labour at home, taking up most of the day, was a burden, laden with responsibilities, yet nonetheless largely taken for granted by the respondents, regardless of their age at marriage.

Women who had married at younger ages had more responsibilities and less family help than those who had married later.

There were hardly any opportunities for paid work in rural sites other than agricultural work, seasonal migrant work (more so in Mahbubnagar least so in Murshidabad) and at all ages of marriage.

Urban sites offered some jobs from the poor to the middle classes.

The greatest loss in jobs after marriage was amongst the middle classes (graduates who were at home) compared to the poor who had to find some paid work out of necessity.

This picture mirrors the macro data – women at higher ages of marriage are engaged in less paid work than others according to NFHS. They also have more assistance in their daily household work according to our micro study.

Chapter Six – Marriage

The chapter on marriage ranges far and wide. The main points are the following:

Discussions on marriage complicate previous views on education: Education in relation to marriage is tenuous, women change their views that one could never have “too much” education. Husbands are as poorly educated as wives in resource poor families and among marginal groups, at times even less educated. Even among the middle classes there are “mismatches” at the level of education.

Though employment and financial security trump all other considerations, in fact economic insecurity and lack of choices are widespread.

In the context of marriage women (across the spectrum) said that “marriage is work” – if only for this reason it would be better to postpone it.

A major topic for our respondents is love versus arranged marriages. In West Bengal, where love marriages are part of the social fabric, many regretted their choices later and the pressure to marry once the relationship was discovered. There is widespread approval for arranged marriages in all sites and at all ages of marriage, it being seen as the only way to minimize risk and hopes for family support. To choose a husband is to be isolated. Young women are likely to have affairs if not married in time – this is a popular discourse even in sites where hardly any choice marriages are in evidence and bolsters the idea that marriages cannot “wait”.

In spite of an elaborate set of criteria about what constitutes a “good match” and a “good husband”, the respondents had little to say about their husbands, who did not feature in their accounts of their everyday lives.

Marriage is the subject of considerable anxiety as women’s inevitable destiny, more than the subject of desire or aspiration. Romance is few and far between and sexuality hardly a positive topic of discussion.

In Lieu of a Conclusion

This section draws from the highlights and findings of the previous chapters. Here are some of the main themes for further exploration:

Age: Age is a tricky concept in the Indian context. Most respondents, even those not certain about their age, have internalised 18 years as the right age of marriage due to public discourses. This study corroborates national data in that 15-17 years is the most prevalent age of marriages before 18, i.e. these are adolescent rather than child marriages. Reproductive and health risks at such ages are not primarily due to age at marriage, but are the result of a complex set of factors, where cause and consequence are interrelated. This needs much more attention.

Marriage: More focus is needed on marriage as a compulsory institution of Indian society that continues to be hegemonic even when age of marriage is rising. The elementary structures of marriage in contemporary India are social, economic, sexual, reproductive, caste and community based, among others. Early marriage is its underbelly, not its “other”.

The interlocking nature of **education/work/marriage** is complex yet it ensures that marriage continues to be compulsory at all levels of society and ages at marriage. "Arranged" marriage continues to be its dominant form and structure.

Poverty, more than culture, shapes early marriage in contemporary India.

Women's agency needs to be re-examined. Our respondents displayed "too much" agency in the sphere of education in claiming that ending their education was their decision rather than the consequence of the systemic failure in schooling; they displayed practically no agency in the reproduction of everyday life in housework; and they expressed widespread disapproval of sexual agency and self-choice marriage.

Education, work and especially marriage need to become sites of transformation if compulsory marriage and its underbelly early marriage are to change in the direction of women's greater life chances and empowerment.

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Thank you all.

Introduction

This report is concerned with the phenomenon of early and child marriage. At the time when the study was first envisaged scholarly work on contemporary trends was few and far between. Hence it was thought of as a study that would fill a lacuna especially in a context where interventions on the ground by the state and NGOs were proliferating. However, studies have since emerged, from the pioneering landscape study by Nirantar in 2015, to state studies such as the one on Andhra and Telangana (Kannabiran et al 2017), to many reports by organisations over the years.

This study is particularly concerned with the voices and experiences of young women in the early years of their marriage in select sites both urban and rural. The rural sites were chosen because they were high prevalence districts according to national data such as Census 2011 and NFHS 4, while the respective state capitals were chosen by way of contrast. The framing question of this study is the relationship between the question of age and the institution of marriage in contemporary India. As subsequent chapters will show, chronological age and its significance raises many questions in a context like ours. Furthermore, how should we think about child marriage as a single designation for all forms of underage marriage? As others have suggested we need different terminologies such as early marriage or adolescent marriage given the nature of the phenomenon at this moment in historical time. Moreover, we are proposing compulsory marriage as a framing institution for approaching underage marriages in our country. Child marriage (however named) should not be seen as an isolated phenomenon, a social norm unaffected by other forces but rather as the underbelly of compulsory marriage in a context where age at marriage is slowly rising, the proportion of underage marriages reducing in most regions, while compulsory marriage remains hegemonic.

In this study we have looked at the experiences of women in education, in their working lives along with their marriages. We were interested in the connections between education, work and marriage, and whether their interlocking nature might provide a better account for the status of compulsory marriage and the continued if declining presence of early marriages.

Chapter 1 provides a historical background to the study. It shows how child marriage first became a concept in the 19th century, and a principal site for the social reform of women. The childwoman / womanchild is double edged way of thinking about a phenomenon like child marriage in a context where they are simultaneously addressed

or thought of as women. Indeed, it is only very recently that the special presence of the child at the heart of the social reform of women has been noted and new research is emerging to look at the child and questions of age. The chapter traces the large literature on child marriage in the colonial period after which it retreats from view with independence and only emerges sporadically.

Chapter 2 explores the re-emergence of child marriage as a problem in the twenty-first century. As a result of this new focus on the elimination of child marriage, the spheres of the law, state policy and demography are the most visible sites of new efforts and new research. This chapter reviews these efforts and major studies around it, to note both the advances that have been made but also their uneven nature. Much remains to be understood about the phenomenon of child marriage in the new millennium.

Chapter 3 provides the setting for the current study. It does so with the help of national data sets, that of Census 2011 and the National Family Health Survey 4, 2015-16. The districts of the study are introduced and data pertaining to early and child marriage are provided. The nature of the study, based on survey data of 200 households in each site where a marriage was conducted in the last ten years, and a smaller purposeful sample for more in depth interviewing are discussed. Basic background information about the respondents is then provided. These are not representative of their region in any statistical sense but nonetheless are found to broadly follow trends outlined in larger data sets.

Chapter 4 introduces questions of education, first through a select set of studies. Against the background of national data sets on education, the voices of the respondents both in the survey and in the subsequent interviews are represented and analysed. It turns out that the modal level of education in the rural sites is that of elementary education, far below national averages and the levels of higher education that are seen to enable higher ages of marriage. The respondents recall their experiences of schooling and their regrets at not having studied further, among other issues. It is the failure of education rather than simply a push to marry early that should be held accountable.

Chapter 5 looks at labour, work and employment in the lives of the respondents. Once again national data sets the perspective, where higher ages of marriage actually correspond to fewer women entering occupations for paid work. This chapter examines the world of unpaid work, and shows that women who have married early have greater responsibilities overall in everyday housework than those who have

married later. Moreover, it is among these (who are mostly the working poor) that paid work is greater, which in rural areas amounts to agricultural and seasonal construction work. Most women complain about the lack of work opportunities as well as the role that husbands and in-laws play after marriage when they are against women working outside the home.

Chapter 6 explores the institution of marriage and its intersections with age at marriage through the survey and in the interviews. All the women have internalised the idea that 18 is the correct age at marriage, especially in the rural sites, and even among those with little or no education. Various approaches to marriage – being married too soon or otherwise, the world of husbands and choosing a husband, the considerable emphasis on arranged versus choice marriages and so on are examined here. Marriage is destiny in the eyes of the respondents and the biggest break from their prior lives is that marriage is work, a burden and responsibility for which they were not always prepared.

The conclusion ties together the major issues that emerge in the context of the overarching frame of compulsory marriage, and raises questions for further reflection.

Chapter - 1

Setting the Historical Context

This chapter provides some historical context to the current report on early and child marriage. Interestingly, the nineteenth century was the period for the first “invention” of the very term “child marriage”. Although the period from the nineteenth century up to the 1930s is densely hatched with a rich literature, something changes decisively with independence and even more so with the onset of a new moment of Indian feminism in the 1970s. Once the defining “social evil” of a colonised people, child marriage transmutes into the problem of the “other”.

1.1 Introductory Remarks

Most current studies of present-day trends of child marriage in India, be they demographic, statistical or qualitative in scope, begin with a short introductory historical section. They frequently evince an obligation to go back to pre-colonial, if not pre-medieval, times to look for the root cause of child marriage. The simple point I would like to make here is that we lack the means to embark on a pre-colonial history of child marriage, when the term did not exist and we are fundamentally hampered in how to approach the question of age and notions of childhood. In saying this, I should add that India is by no means alone here since child marriage is taken for granted – or, to put it differently, does not exist as an idea or a concern – in most parts of the world for a very long time.

It should not be surprising to discover that child marriage hardly crops up in the literature on households and gender relations in the ancient period. Kumkum Roy has pointed out that whereas early Indian textual sources describe the ritualistic aspects of marriage in considerable detail, the epics (the Mahabharata and the Ramayana) focus on marriage for its critical social and political purposes, namely the acquisition of new kin alliances between royal families (Roy 2014).

At its best references to age are extremely fleeting even in the better known texts. K.M. Kapadia in his book on Hindu Marriage has a chapter on “age at marriage” in which he cites from various Brahmanical sources and writers to try to figure out when marriages took place in ancient India and whether there were changes over time. A textual reference in the Ghryasutras (700–300 BCE) to the consummation of marriage

within three days of the rites being performed compared with references in the Dharmasutras (300–100 BCE) that the right time to give away a daughter in marriage is when she is “still naked” (i.e., pre-pubertal) makes him believe that marriage before puberty for Hindu girls cannot be firmly dated. But he is careful to add that such prescriptions need not imply that this was actual practice, which once again does not lead to any conclusions about trends or customs. Kapadia has other points to make: Since marriage was all about the transfer of authority over a woman, from the father to the husband, “it should hence take place before a girl reached the age when she might question it” (Kapadia 1966: 142). Kapadia cites several texts, especially from the sixth century CE, that mention – in passing – marriageable ages for the girl of 8, 9 or 10 years, including statements that a Brahman who married a girl beyond this age would lose his caste and her parents and brother would go to hell. He also believes that caste endogamy would have promoted early marriage, as the father of the girl would be on the lookout for a groom from within a relatively narrow field of selection. The husband was to be older, by anything from 3 to 10 years or more. It became a matter of prestige for girls to be sought after in marriage from a “tender age”, and with the passage of time, any departure was a matter of disapproval if not social disgrace. Kapadia then makes a huge leap from Brahmanical texts to cite major figures from the pantheon of social and religious reform in the nineteenth century who married very young girls: Ramakrishna Paramahansa married a girl of 6, M.G. Ranade a girl of 8 and D.K. Karve a girl of 9 (Kapadia 1966: 146). There is also a chapter on Muslim marriage but which is quite general in scope, concentrating mainly on polygamy and with no particular discussion on the Indian situation. Buddhist texts are never referred to.

A brief look at a popular mythological figure like Sita would, however, indicate that we would be on treacherous terrain if we were to make any attempts to come up with substantive notions of childhood and adulthood in pre-modern times. It may be true that two of the most popular heroines of the epics are remembered as adult women – Sita and Draupadi (Kumkum Roy, personal communication). But too much cannot be read into this. The anthropologist Irawati Karve quotes the following lines by the character Rama in an eighth-century Sanskrit drama *Uttara Rama Carita (After the Rama Story)* by Bhavabhuti, when Sita was about to be exiled in the forest by the King: “the loved one was fed and clothed (in my family) since she was a child, in youth she was never separated from me and now I am handing her over to death like a pet bird to a butcher” (in Karve 1968: 73). Equally telling, according to Nabaneeta Dev Sen, is that the many later stories of Sita that were written or sung by women begin with Sita’s birth, not Rama’s. Sen’s project has been to collect these “alternative Ramayanas” that range from sixteenth-century narratives by Chandrabati in Bengal

and the Telugu writer Molla to the countless songs of village women across the country in contemporary times. So, once again, a note of caution is required when we approach the numerous folk songs that she has interpreted from across present-day rural India, where Sita is evoked as a foundling, an orphaned girl child. Such songs invariably go on to the travails of child marriage, with giving-away songs lamenting the loss of her home and the hardships that await among the in-laws, including domestic abuse. Sen quotes from a Telugu song sung by rural women in Andhra as follows: "The tiny girl is only as tall as seven jasmine flowers... Such a child is being given away in marriage to Rama today" (Sen 2008: 585). Notice, moreover, that Nabaneeta Sen's many Sitas not only traverse the historical swathe from the sixteenth century to the contemporary but cut across quite distinct regions.

Irawati Karve, in her well-known treatise on *Kinship Organisation in India* (third edition 1968) also, without reflection, refers briefly to Brahmanical texts from early India in order to then discuss her well-known thesis about the huge significance of different kinship practices drawing from anthropological accounts of her own time. In patrilineal households where a girl came from an alien family, early marriage was a necessity, a matter of ensuring her loyalty (Karve 1968: 73). Karve's study of kinship patterns is well known for her discussions of the major divide between the north and the south. Northern India has exemplified marriage to a stranger with significant status differences between wife givers and wife takers – even the village of the bride is considered inferior to the village of the groom. Both girls and boys were generally married when they were children; the girl remained in her home, made occasional visits to the in-laws, and moved permanently only after her first menstruation with a "gauna" ceremony (Karve 1968: 126–127). Compare this description with what Karve says about Dravidian practices in the southern parts of India. Marriage in the south was not about seeking new alliances but strengthening existing bonds, often with permitted relatives. It does not symbolise separation from the father's house for the girl. The future husband is "the cross-cousin and the playmate of his future wife, not her lord and master" (Karve 1968: 242). This raises an interesting set of questions. After all, in the south too, marriages have been strictly arranged by families and also at early ages but with no consideration of the desires of girl or boy. Yet the tone adopted for the south by Karve in this classic text on kinship is one of comparative ease, naturalness and even a certain egalitarianism compared with the relentlessly oppressive situation of the girl from the north. I raise this as a question not so much of how accurate this description of marriage practices in the South may be but rather to show how it is the north that has occupied the standard position in anthropological discussions of kinship practices, whose very harshness makes the south seem so much

better in contrast. Here, age appears as less of a criterion than such claimed differences in marriage patterns.

This is not the most satisfactory way to begin an account of child marriage in India, given all the challenges that I have drawn attention to. Instead, we have to explore a modern entry point: the much-cited social reform of women from the early nineteenth century.

1.2 The colonial period

It is surely remarkable that much of the social reform initiatives that centred on women during the long nineteenth century were primarily about the child. However, until very recently, there has been next to no discussion of the idea of childhood in this history. I believe that we need to ask ourselves why to this very day we continue to speak of the social reform of women, when in fact the subject of this reform was invariably the child. Although such a history remains to be written, some beginnings have been made. My own strategy has been to glean from existing research as to when and how age became as much of a problem as the status of women. Without doubt, the institution of marriage came to be seen as being at the heart of what ailed Indian society in the eyes of the British colonial rulers, an opinion echoed by many Indians in the course of that century and beyond. We will see how this concern with marriage came to be indistinguishable from that of child marriage.

In her more lyrical account of “coming of age in the nineteenth century”, Ruby Lal has observed that she “felt it necessary to reconceptualise the woman question as the question of the girl child/woman for a number of reasons” (Lal 2013: 36). In a world where women – whether young or old – could do nothing on their own (here she is citing James Mill’s references to Manu) or, in other words, where women lived as lifelong dependents, the separation of a distinct stage called childhood was practically impossible. She emphasizes the namelessness of this imbricated condition where woman and child kept collapsing onto one another. Her resolution of the problem was to deploy the idea of playfulness gleaned from Urdu textual sources on the one hand and an oral history of coming of age on the other (her book centres on the life memories of Azra Kidwai, born into an aristocratic Lucknow family in the early twentieth century) which offer Lal an opportunity to recover spaces beyond male control. This contrasts with other accounts considered below, which are dominated by all kinds of control. Rather than being in a state of namelessness, the child wife is inexorably talked about, fought over and contested and becomes everyone’s problem. However, I have developed the notion of the child/woman dyad as a double bind –

that of the child/woman and the woman/child, which I believe to be not just historically apt but perhaps even for thinking about the strange and elusive nature of the relation between women and age. So yes we could say that women have not been allowed to be children beyond the first years of life, but equally that women have never been allowed to be adults either, but infantilised even in later years.

There are many strands, events and famous men (and thereafter many women) associated with a history so focussed on marriage and the child/woman – woman/child. Feminists and scholars of social history have been quite active since the 1970s in making some of this history more widely available. A major shortcoming is the considerable unevenness in regional terms, although this is beginning to get redressed. As a result, school textbooks across the country since at least the 1960s feature icons from colonial Bengal, like Raja Rammohan Roy and Pandit Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar, while the achievements of Jotirao Phule in the western region of colonial Maharashtra are only now beginning to be better known.

1.2.1 Beginnings in colonial Bengal

The social reform period stretches from the late eighteenth century to the first decades of the twentieth century. It is during this period that we can track how child marriage became not just the name of a problem but the biggest problem ailing Indian society, able to capture all that was wrong about us as a people. Two regions stand both together and apart in this history and have prominent commonalities and differences – that of colonial Bengal on the one hand and the western region of the Bombay Presidency, now roughly the region of Maharashtra, on the other. The critical difference between the two is the centrality of caste in the western region compared with the relative blindness towards caste in accounts dealing with colonial Bengal.

Most historians begin their account of the period of social reform in India with the long drawn-out debate over the practice of sati or widow immolation in colonial Bengal between the 1780s and 1830. According to one influential account, if one looks closely at the three decades of controversy over whether and how to ban sati, as the debates unfolded between British colonial officials, Indian pandits and reformers like Rammohan Roy, the woman herself does not feature in these discourses, which are rather about whether sati as a practice is sanctioned in ancient religious scriptures (or *shastras*). This was a debate about religion as scripture, not about women (Mani 1998). The significance of Lata Mani's study was to replace linear accounts of modernisation or the emergence of women's empowerment with the frame of a

colonial discourse that relied on Hindu scriptural injunctions for any consideration of reform. (Indeed, in the light of the discussion above on child marriage in pre-colonial times, we have seen how this injunction to look for roots of contemporary practices in Brahmanical scriptural texts continues unabated.) In a study concentrated on examining the complex interpretative traffic between British officials and pandits over what exactly the *shastras* permitted by way of widow immolation, Mani mentions how colonial representations typically reinforced the victim status of such women by infantilizing her. She was invariably rendered as a “tender child” even though their very own statistics challenged such a claim (Mani 1998: 32). It would seem that, when cases of sati were brought up and enumerated, sati was not a practice that affected the child widow as much as the mature or older person, who was quite often in impoverished circumstances (Yang 1989). Although no details are provided, 16 was set as the age below which sati could not be permitted, indicative therefore of the new connections that were now being forged between considerations of age and, quite possibly, an unprecedented notion of consent, one that somehow fell back on “ancient tradition” in order to be authentic.

Sati was a very specific phenomenon undertaken by small numbers in certain parts of Bengal and to a lesser extent elsewhere, gaining hugely in global publicity because of the extreme violence associated with it. The less sensational practice of ritually enforced widowhood was much more widespread, certainly amongst upper castes. A very significant number of women in the Indian population were found to be widows (i.e., seen to no longer have the protection of a husband). As Janaki Nair has put it, the law against widow immolation may have “saved them from the pyre, but condemned them to a living death” (Nair 1994: 61). Here, one can quite unambiguously see how ideas of the (girl) child came to be constructed through the plight of child widows, which grabbed the attention of reformers, especially those who may have never left their natal homes. In cases where the marriage had not been consummated, sexual innocence, the status of childhood and the loss of patriarchal protections could coalesce into a perfect symbol of victimhood. Widowhood was not just very common but, practically speaking, a phase in the life cycle of women where husbands were older. In several instances where such men themselves died early, the wives left behind were little more than children. Brahmanical laws decreed that widows remain chaste. As one commentator put it,

Irrevocably, eternally married as a mere child, the death of a husband she had perhaps never known left the wife a widow, an inauspicious being whose sins in a previous life had deprived her of her husband, and her parents-in-law of their son, in this one (Carroll 2007: 114–115).

Lucy Carroll seems to be quite certain that not just enforced widowhood but also child marriage were purely upper-caste customs, confined to a minority (less than 20% of the population). As we shall see, others have not always agreed, nor is this entirely supported by historical evidence.

One strand in the history of child marriage in India therefore begins with the figure of the (upper caste) child widow, and reform led by Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar in Bengal took the shape of demanding the legal possibility of her remarriage. Pandit Vidyasagar was as concerned with child marriage and girls' education, urging in 1850 that girls be at least 11 years old for marriage and boys 18. In 1861, the British declared in the just-formulated Indian Penal Code that sexual intercourse to a girl below 10 would be considered rape. Although laws for widow remarriage were first proposed in 1837, they took until 1856 to be passed. Differences in caste practices do make an entry: One of the reasons for initial opposition was that "such a law would lead the Hindus of upper castes and classes to be confused with the inferior castes and tribes among whom remarriage was common" (Nair 1994: 60). Others have pointed out that this law, for all its positive intentions, had unintended negative effects on precisely those castes and communities for whom remarriage had not been an issue. This is because the new law introduced certain provisions that effectively curtailed the more open remarriage practices among these non-elite castes (Chowdhry 1993; Carroll 2007). In retrospect, it might appear odd that the very practice of child marriage achieved some measure of acknowledgement first via its tragic outcome in the significant presence of child widows. But on further reflection, this is quite understandable, given that child marriage per se had yet to attain the status of a problem. Since the widow had lost her patriarchally sanctioned source of protection, she could be viewed as an abjected figure, isolated and deprived for no fault of her own. The child widow thus invited considerable sympathy if not intervention, and the younger she was, the greater the identification with her plight. It took almost a century of social reform for child marriage itself to enter the fray of legislative action.

A much larger preoccupation that spanned several regions in colonial India, more so in the south, is that modern childhood is most closely entwined with ideas of education and schooling. What may be unique to the Indian situation is that colonial education introduced what became one of the most important aspects regulating a girl or woman's subsequent marriage, including her age at marriage. In the Indian context, it was education that was decisive for affecting when a marriage takes place; in other parts of the world, it was work. More attention needs to be paid to the realm of education and its ramifications for thinking about changes in the institution of

marriage. Matters relating to girls' education were for a long time as controversial as the more publicly fought over issues of marriage and widowhood. Because this is much less systematically explored, I am suggesting that further research is needed on the changing relationship between education and marriage both in the colonial context and thereafter.

In his study of Western education in colonial India, Sanjay Seth has asked why the subject of female education was a matter of constant discussion when the actual numbers of girls and women in education were so miniscule, "in staggering disproportion to the number of girls affected" (Seth 2007: 129). As late as 1882, there were just six girls in college, over 2000 in secondary schools, and 124,000 in mixed primary schools, mainly in the Presidencies of Bengal, Madras and Bombay. He goes on to say that by the end of the nineteenth century there was in fact widespread agreement in favour of the idea of women's education but this did not result in a significant increase in numbers since women were burdened with being the bearers of Indian culture for the incipient nation (Chatterjee 1989) and a Western education was inappropriate for such women. These so-called obstacles, however, run considerably deeper, once the links with marriage are brought into the picture.

In the early years of social reform in the nineteenth century, the education of girls was not on the British colonial agenda. The British were concerned with using Western education as a training ground for Indians who could be incorporated into the lower rungs of the administrative system, and English-educated Indians were preferred for government appointments. Such Indians – it should be obvious – were entirely men. Wealthy Indians themselves took the first steps before the government stepped in, beginning with the establishment of the Hindu College in Calcutta in 1816. The first teachers to explicitly approach girls in their homes were missionaries or, more commonly, the wives of missionaries. Geraldine Forbes has discussed the specific interest in teaching women and girls, which led to their opening the first girls' schools where native Christian women were also brought in as school teachers (Forbes 1986, 1996). Thus was established the Calcutta Education Society for the promotion of girls' education, although families were initially hesitant to send their girls. Even the patronage of Indian gentlemen and the presence of Brahmin pandits on the staff did not suffice. Other regions of the country under colonial rule, notably western and southern India, fared much better. The extensive documentation undertaken by S.S. Bhattacharya and his colleagues provides a more differential picture – it would be wrong to think that it was mainly colonial educators who took upon themselves the burden of women's education since increasing initiatives came from indigenous intellectuals, "local notables" and "monied people" (Bhattacharya and others 2001:

xxvii). Rekha Pappu has shown how social reformers emerged among both Muslims and Hindus, each addressing their own communities, privileging the education of their respective elites, looking for sanction in religious texts, and ultimately finding justification for regeneration through women's reform (Pappu 2015; see also Chakravarti 1998; Minault 1998). Among the most interesting consequences of education was the emergence of a new genre of writing by middle-class women in the form of autobiographies. These offer the most remarkable accounts of their marriages as children and the often extraordinary lengths to which they went to acquire another life in the "inner quarters" (Karlekar 1991; Sarkar 2001; Chatterjee 1993).

1.2.2 A different framing in western India

There has been as much scholarship if not more on western India than the better-known Bengal example when it comes to social history more broadly and questions relating to women's reform more specifically. However, for reasons that probably have to do with Calcutta being the seat of colonial power, Bengal has retained its dominance in histories of social reform. One of the interesting aspects of scholarship on the region that now falls broadly within the state of Maharashtra is that accounts of reform foreground structures of caste as much as those of gender when discussing what ails Indian society. It is instructive to contrast otherwise very similar themes pertaining to women's status – the home and gender segregation, purdah and seclusion, the public/private dichotomy, marriage and bearing children and so on – in works dealing with Maharashtra (Kosambi 2007; O'Hanlon 1994; O'Hanlon 2014; Deshpande 2002; Chakravarti 1998) with those on Bengal (e.g., Chatterjee 1993; Sinha 1994; Sarkar 2001; Sarkar and Sarkar 2007). It is immediately clear that the problems of women in a region like Bengal are discussed in largely gendered terms (at least when it comes to its *bhadramahila* middle-class upper-caste woman) but that in Maharashtra the story can only be told through the working of gender and caste together and for all women, whether "high" or "low".

One early sign of this difference can be vividly seen in the belated discovery of the pioneering efforts of Jotirao Phule and his wife Savitribai. There is now a burgeoning literature on Phule, including some translations of his writings, although equal attention has yet to be paid to the extraordinary life and work of Savitribai, who is unfortunately folded in as a "wife" into accounts of the man who was the first to be called a Mahatma. Unlike Raja Ram Mohan Roy or Pandit Vidyasagar, who came from upper-class and caste backgrounds, Phule was born into an agricultural caste, a

shudra. Thanks to having a father who was a building contractor, he was able to complete a school education. Phule's translator G.P. Deshpande makes the interesting comment in his introduction that whereas other reformers were influenced by "the rather weak English branch of European liberalism" (Deshpande 2002: 3), Phule had read Thomas Paine's *The Rights of Man*. Phule established a school for *shudr-atishudra* (shudra and dalit) girls in 1848, the first of its kind anywhere in India. His father was shocked and, fearing a backlash from upper castes, threw both him and his new wife out of the house. Phule continued undeterred with other sources of support, from missionaries and the British state. Another school was opened in 1851 for girls from all castes. Many of his other actions, such as throwing open the family well to untouchables, were equally revolutionary, and not just for his time. Interesting, too, is that the terminology used by him and his followers was not that of social reform but rather of social justice. Phule's agenda in establishing the Satyashodak Samaj (truth-seeking society) was to promote a society that was egalitarian when it came to labour, gender and caste by resisting Brahmin hegemony and abolishing shudra and dalit slavery.

Other scholarship on Maharashtra focusses on social reformers in cities like Pune and Bombay who appeared much closer to their Bengal counterparts and were quite conscious of caste conventions under Brahman leaders like M.G. Ranade, R.G. Bhandarkar and others. Meera Kosambi has described the views of someone like Bhandarkar, who sought to placate opponents to women's education by portraying it as a kind of "patriarchal convergence". Education was "a window in the prison house" that would not disturb her place in the home or the discharging of household duties, a very limited modernising position (Kosambi 2007: 151). This is a harsher rendering of Partha Chatterjee's "nationalist resolution of the women's question", whereby social reform was successfully contained by making the educated woman the bearer of Indian tradition in the cultural battle against colonial rule (Chatterjee 1989). For all his conservatism, Bhandarkar was an interesting nineteenth-century figure since he was a reformer, a Sanskritist and a historian rolled into one. He was one of those on the constant lookout for determining just when practices like child marriage (i.e., pre-pubertal marriage) first emerged or found sanction in ancient scriptural texts (Bhandarkar 1924). His tendency was to find fluidity in practices in these texts – so the same father who invited severe censure for not marrying his daughter before puberty was also allowed to keep an unmarried daughter in his home. She could also decide later to choose a husband of her own.

Meera Kosambi describes how in the nineteenth century the education of women had been strongly proscribed under Brahmanical norms – it was frequently said that to

gain an education was to invite the worst fate of widowhood. Literate women (even daughters of pandits) were seen as potentially subversive by evading household control to engage in immoral relations with non-domestic men. Social reformers therefore went to great lengths to show that education lent itself to being contained within an evolving family structure for upwardly mobile newly educated men who needed literate wives. Kosambi quotes B.G. Tilak, the conservative and revivalist who, while sharply opposed to the liberal reformers on many issues, including that of child marriage, gave his sanction to a certain form of female education – training to become good wives and mothers, which allowed for primary schooling. She neglects to add that in his view, primary education was but a beginning – education is fulfilled only in the marital home, which he likened to a workshop where the actual training takes place. “By the age of 15 or 16 years a woman should be well trained at housework and this training will never be available in a school as much as at home. *The marital home is the ‘workshop’ of female education*” (cited in Kosambi 2007: 157; emphasis added). Only when they were assured that schools would pose no threat to the primary socialisation of the reproductive family form did they participate in promoting a limited form of education for women.

1.3 The Rakhmabai case

What then of the institution of marriage and the question of child marriage? The first major case relating to child marriage that became a matter of national and international controversy, inviting even the intervention of Queen Victoria herself, was the Rakhmabai case that unfolded in the 1880s. Much has been written about this case and from several perspectives (Heimsath 1964; Masselos 1992; Chandra 1998; Chakravarti 1998; Kosambi 2007). The Rakhmabai case is truly remarkable for several reasons. It pitted the colonial state and its British laws against the complex and multi-layered realm of so-called Hindu law, which encompassed both codified laws and caste-based systems of adjudication. Rakhmabai herself was an unusual example of a woman who, though born into a shudra-caste family whose traditional occupation was carpentry, had witnessed urbanisation, upward mobility and the benefits of Western education, thanks to the combination of financial security and liberal reformist ideas that characterised her larger familial context in Bombay. Yet, as was customary in those times (possibly also as a mark of taking on Brahminical practices as an aspect of rising social status), she had been married in 1875 at the age of 11 to one Dadaji Thakur, who, while staying with his maternal uncle, was expected to be groomed by way of education until the time was right for them to live together. However, this did not happen, as Rakhmabai in subsequent meetings found him

incompatible and would not live with him. In 1884, after various unsuccessful efforts, Dadaji, rather than resort to caste adjudication, issued a legal notice for restitution of conjugal rights under British law; this was the year which saw the initiation of reform in the realm of child marriage. Rakhmabai refused to yield even when the judgement went against her; the matter went on appeal, and various aspects of Hindu law, British law and caste practice were drawn upon by opposing sides until by 1888 a financial settlement was proposed whereby Dadaji relinquished his rights over her. During the court case, Rakhmabai even took it upon herself to write two letters in English about her condition to the *Times of India*, from which it is worth quoting:

My English readers can hardly conceive the hard lot entailed upon Hindu women by the custom of early marriage...The treatment which even servants receive from their European masters is far better than falls to the share of us Hindu women. We are treated worse than beasts..." (cited in Kosambi 2007: 266).

Here was a case in which identifiably feminist protest was articulated using the most powerful analogies of colonial domestic servitude and animal cruelty to evoke maximum sympathy. While detractors could see in Rakhmabai only the baneful consequences of Westernised education, hers was a case of a bad marriage to an undesirable man lower in status, yet sanctified by both Hindu and British law. It took until 1891 for the underlying question of child marriage in Hindu law to be subjected to some reform. But that moment belonged to yet another case, one that shook the public world of Calcutta.

1.4 The age of consent controversy

This section deals with what could, in retrospect, be described as the processes that made possible the first major legislation concerning child marriage, namely the Age of Consent Bill of 1891, under conditions of colonial rule. The story is a remarkably complex one, bringing in players from different regions of the country. It involved considerable controversy precisely because it pitted those who were prepared to approach the colonial state for change in matters of social reform, here having to do with consent to sexual intercourse (whether inside or outside of marriage), against those who believed that nationalist strivings demanded a break from this kind of petitioning to an alien state. This moment has been approached from different perspectives by scholars and continues to be a matter of ongoing investigation.

By the 1880s, as a consequence of widespread public debate, writing and networking across the subcontinent, reformers in the Bombay Presidency took up in earnest the issue of child marriage. It was not a Hindu but a Parsi – Behramji Malabari – who began the actual process of petitioning the imperial state with his “Note on Infant Marriage in India”, written in 1884, along with another note on enforced widowhood. Notice therefore the use of the term “infant”, not even that of “child”. His Note draws on the common perception that traditional upper-caste Hindu marriages could be performed much before puberty (indeed even in infancy) through an alliance between families in which no notion of consent was even conceivable (which could also include the groom). However, such marriages were consummated upon reaching puberty through a second ritual – the *garbhadhan* or impregnation ceremony – after which it was common for the bride to move to the groom’s house and begin her new life with all its attendant sexual, reproductive and household duties as wife and daughter-in-law.

Malabari’s Note in 1884 referred to infant marriage as an evil worse than infanticide since it entailed lifelong misery and – for both the wife and husband – ill health and disease, loss of studies for the husband, sickly children, “a wreck of two lives grown almost old in youth” (cited in Kosambi 2007: 278). These arguments were used by many others in the subsequent campaign, ranging from Jotirao Phule to Pandita Ramabai (in her treatise *the High Caste Hindu Woman*, Sarasvati Ramabai 1887), and also by a small number of the very first feminists of Maharashtra (Anagol 2007). Phule forwarded two Notes of his own, written in English. Interestingly, in his “Note on Infant Marriage”, Phule emphatically questioned the false universalism of the “enlightened Hindu of Bengal” whose suggestions are “not universal and [not] applicable” to the “ignorant shudra-atishudras”, “downtrodden aborigines” where a young wife could be worked harder “than an American slave”, a bridegroom’s family ruined by indebtedness, or conjugal incompatibility due to early marriage end with the girl’s suicide. Although this certainly called for higher ages of marriage for both boys and girls, it also required change through a non-Brahmin education (Deshpande 2002: 193–194). On the other hand, Phule went on to say, Brahmin women suffer from the degeneracy of the Brahmanical institution of marriage, where a man is allowed every excess of polygamy and lust, but after his death, the wife must endure the severest strictures of widowhood, including being forced into prostitution to survive. Widows and widowers should both be allowed to remarry or both be prevented from doing so. Phule thus put forward a differential picture constituted by caste/gender/labour which was responsible for the direct victimisation not only of the Brahmin widow but also of uneducated oppressed shudra-atishudra people with their own equally disastrous marriage practices. His views should also be seen as a

corrective to those who believed that child marriage was only an upper-caste custom. He asked that the girl be at least 11 and the boy 19. In spite of his radicalism, this age gap would indicate how differently childhood was perceived even in his own thinking when it came to boys and girls. Malabari's Note demanded that the age of the girl be raised from 10 to 12 years.

Scholars like Tanika Sarkar and Meera Kosambi have described at some length the enormous opposition this move invited – first in the western region by nationalists like Tilak and subsequently in Bengal. Opponents to raising the age saw this as a direct affront to shastric injunctions as well as to local caste practices and castigated reformers for painting a grossly exaggerated picture of the evils of the Hindu custom of infant marriage. Indeed, their articulation went to considerable lengths to describe infant marriage as a marvellous Indian institution, the core of our culture, for which no apologies were required, least of all the intervention of an alien colonial state. The scriptures, it was said, made it clear that menstruation implied the death of the embryo and hence a marriage which took place after puberty would bring dishonour to the ancestors and family lineage. Puberty itself signalled the birth of a woman's sexual desire, which – it was also said – would be out of control if not already contained within the institution of a legitimate marriage. These undeniably caste-based sanctions could be redescribed such that ideas of female sexuality operated as a hinge between norms of *culture* in the form of religious sanction and *biology* represented by the female body at its first menarche. Sexual intercourse and the birth of children (especially sons) were mandatory duties that were entailed by marriage. These were the descriptions of the institution of Hindu marriage at the heart of the controversy – which reformers were prepared (to a certain degree) to question but which had to be defended by those in opposition.

Sarkar has described how the Bengal Presidency was thrown into a frenzy of support for the anti-reformers, for whom the Age of Consent controversy crystallised into the birth of militant nationalism. Large numbers gathered in mass protest in public places, the first of its kind in colonial India. Alternate scriptural views that mentioned higher ages of cohabitation after puberty, newly evolving scientific conceptions of the female body, and eugenic notions of breeding a stronger race of children (i.e., other views of "culture", "nature" and moral entreaties) were variously drawn upon by those in favour of reform.

According to Sarkar, it was only the Phulmonee case of 1891 that dramatically ended the stalemate. Phulmonee was a girl married at the age of 11 by most accounts to a man around 30 years of age – sexual intercourse was so violent that she suffered

from severe bleeding, leading to her death (Sarkar 2001). Some contemporary observers have anachronistically called it a fatal case of marital rape. (Given that the Indian Penal Code of 1860 stipulated age 10 as the minimum age for sexual intercourse, the husband was finally let off.) Change happened at a different level. As Sarkar has gone on to elaborate, the dead body of Phulmonee caused the carefully crafted and aestheticized image of the doll-like infant wife celebrated by Hindu revivalists to collapse. After the Phulmonee case, several other cases involving injury or the death of child brides came to receive more attention, including news reports from different parts of the country.

In 1891, the Age of Consent Bill was passed, raising the age of consent for sexual activity on the part of a girl whether within marriage or outside of it from 10 to 12 years. Geraldine Forbes has commented that this was a compromise since it did not prevent families from forming a marriage alliance at an earlier age and then wait for its consummation when the girl was 12 (Forbes 1979: 410). Himani Bannerji, in her careful analysis of the judgement, has made the further observation regarding what consent actually amounted to here: Consent had little to do with notions of a girl's right to choose; this was rather about the right of legal guardians to alienate a woman's body to a man, whether as husband or client (Bannerji 2001).

Both the details of the Phulmonee case and the battles surrounding the passing of the Age of Consent Bill would imply that it is quite unclear what place, if any, can be accorded to notions of consent understood as women's agency in the passing of this Act. *I would like to suggest that the Age of Consent Bill achieved something else – it should be seen as the first critical moment in the invention of girlhood in India, in which the question of caste that was so central in western India could be dissolved into that of a battle over national culture.*

1.5 Age in the wake of the Age of Consent Bill

Radhika Singha has offered a number of insights into how the Age of Consent Bill came to be focussed on age itself, when the colonial government had steered away from such a mode of approaching marriage until then. Much of the debate between officials, reformers and their many opponents rested on bringing together sexual intercourse within and outside marriage (i.e., the child wife and the prostitute) within the same law and on the use of a puberty test or the onset of menstruation as a better "fact" to assess readiness for sexual relations than age. Interestingly, however, the very "facticity" of puberty suffered on two counts: First, medical officials believed that

India's hot climate led to earlier manifestations of puberty than in Europe. Second, reformers added that puberty itself could be manipulated, so to speak, through an unnaturally early onset of sexual relations. Radhika Singha cites Dagmar Engels to show that ultimately the British were only keen to prove the "superiority" of their race against the "degeneracy" of the subject Indian population. (In 1885, Britain had raised the age of consent for prostitution to 16.) Singha makes the more significant point that it was precisely in the longer-term interests of the reformers to make age alone their criterion:

A uniform and higher age would detach the state of female minority both from the physical changes of puberty and from the life-cycle event of marriage, and put it more definitively within the grasp of legislative enactment. The orthodox accurately perceived the threat (Singha 2003: 24).

In other words, neither "culture" (marriage rituals and scriptural injunctions) nor "nature" (puberty and menstruation) was to determine girlhood. Rather, the more arbitrary question of age (which need not bear any relation to social consciousness or community practice) should be the basis because it could lend itself to further legal reform. This in turn called for setting up a state apparatus to record dates of birth rather than a more medicalised mode of regulation, as Janaki Nair has argued in her study of Princely Mysore.

Ishita Pande is another scholar to have explored the question of age in the history of social reform, if from a more critical perspective. In her work on the child wife (e.g., Pande 2012, 2013a, 2013b), Pande argues that the status of the child has been largely taken for granted in Indian historiography. The critical category that circumscribed age in the colonial Indian context, she suggests, was that of sexuality, and she even speaks of an age-stratified sexual system. This was exemplified in the Age of Consent Bill, where even though the controversy was always being discussed in terms of infant and child *marriage*, the form that the Bill took was consent to *sexual intercourse*. In her essay on the Age of Consent controversy, Pande makes the same argument as that of Radhika Singha but comes to a different conclusion. Deliberating on how it is neither bio-medicine nor religious scripture but age (a statistical artefact and not a reality) that becomes the basis for deciding the break between the girl and the adult woman (Pande 2012), she articulates her critique of this dependence on age:

the presumed universality and incontrovertibility of the "child" defined exclusively with reference to chronological age, continues to obfuscate the use of age-categories and concepts of childhood...what, specifically, are the

problems being tackled, above and beyond an assumed consensus on the need for the sexual protection of the digitally defined child?" (2012: 223)

Sexual protection was certainly at the heart of the Age of Consent Act. At this moment then, girlhood came to be defined as the age prior to the onset of sexual relations (from which the girl child had to be protected by the force of criminal law) and by 1891 such age was identical, whether it be for the consummation of marriage or for prostitution. However, it is unclear whether what was therefore set into law was a rigid age/sex system. Girlhood did not remain some kind of fixed category, precisely because questions of age not only changed but also diversified. Debates over marital and non-marital sex for girls (and, to a lesser extent, for boys) in the changed contexts of the first decades of the twentieth century rendered notions of girlhood unstable, subjected as they were to complex and contradictory forces that were international as much as local.

A further word about the consequences of the passing of the Age of Consent Act would be relevant. Tanika Sarkar has made the extremely important observation that for the generation of nationalists who had seen the failure of their efforts to anchor an emergent nationalism with the cultural symbol of non-consensual infant marriage, their subsequent move was to shift focus to a seemingly safer figure, that of the mother (Sarkar 2001). It is this symbol that becomes so central in subsequent debates and writings from the turn of the century all the way to its contemporary revival as *Bharat Mata* (Mother India).

This chapter has opened up some of the challenges in thinking about child marriage in India historically. While I have been particularly critical of those who have attempted to provide a pre-colonial history of child marriage, there is considerable evidence that child marriage becomes nameable during the colonial era when it turns into one of the most controversial issues for reformers and nationalists alike. In providing a regionally differentiated account, I have also attempted to deconstruct the ways in which caste appears and disappears in existing histories of social reform and folds into battles over women as placeholders for an embattled national culture. A figure like Phule brought to life a different language of social justice and viewed caste as a kind of double structure, one with disastrous consequences for both Brahmin and shudra/atishudra women (and men). Phule's legacy unfortunately was largely lost after his death. Influential accounts of "women" in the battle over national culture at the turn of the nineteenth century do not refer to this strand of political and social struggle. (It required the twentieth-century leader Babasaheb Ambedkar to revisit Phule's binary view of caste and introduce a new frame, that of graded inequalities.)

By the time the first women's organisations are formed in the early twentieth century, child marriage has fully arrived in the public eye and indeed comes to acquire an enormous international reach. This marks a new moment in the history of child marriage in India.

1.6 The "second social reform"

A recent exploration of the wave of social reform initiated in the early decades of the twentieth century by newly formed women's organisations has been aptly called the "second social reform" by Bhaswati Chatterjee (2016). The time is that of the 1920s when India saw momentous transformations – the ravages of the First World War and its fallout for colonial subjects within the British Empire, the rise of political nationalism and the entry of Gandhi, growing Hindu–Muslim communal strife, a new phase in anti-caste movements and the role of Ambedkar, the beginnings of communism on Indian soil with labour and peasant movements. The so-called "women's question" and social reform efforts appeared to have beaten a retreat from the end of the nineteenth century. However, the 1920s also saw the growth of the first major women's organisations in India, ranging from the All-India Muslim Ladies Conference based in Lahore (1914), the Women's Indian Association (WIA) based in Madras in 1917 and the subsequent network-based All-India Women's Conference (AIWC) in 1926 with branches across the country. These were women who were the direct heirs of nineteenth-century social reform – and who had access to education, fathers or husbands with reformist ideals, and often professions of their own, such as teachers or doctors. A major defining feature for those who wished to be active in public life was the contrast and conflict between the "social" and "political" (i.e., between activities that focussed on social inequities that required petitioning the imperial British state and participation in anti-colonial struggles and political non-cooperation against this very state).

This context has been sketched out in order to better grasp the significance of a new phase of organising by women who now registered their presence both as individual leaders (women like Sarojini Naidu and Rajkumari Amrit Kaur) and as a collective force. Their political affiliations could be Gandhian, liberal or communist in orientation and their backgrounds ranged from wealthy cosmopolitan and the occasional royal household to more modest middle-class families. The WIA included non-Indians like Margaret Cousins. Not everyone came from conventional upper-caste backgrounds – Muthulakshmi Reddy was the daughter of a devadasi. She trained to be a medical

doctor, going on to become the Madras Presidency's first woman legislator (Forbes 1996; John 2000). The issues before them continued to be mainly those of girls' education and marriage reform, and the internationally linked demands of women's suffrage and political representation on the new councils were now also on their agendas, all of which were in tension with nationalist campaigns of non-cooperation with the imperial state.

By the 1920s, primary schooling had become more widespread, taking different forms in different regions of the country, from zenana schools in Bengal to co-educational possibilities in Madras, although even here girls were withdrawn from boys' schools when they reached puberty (Chanana 2001). The lack of female teachers was often a major constraint in many regions. By this time, the idea of female education had been reframed as necessary for the advancement of the modernising middle-class family. Educated husbands needed literate wives – indeed, in some accounts, this would prevent such men from preferring the companionship of courtesans (Chanana 2001). However, it remains quite unclear from these accounts as to when and how education affected norms of marriage and its timing, given the ongoing convergence between ideas of female sexual purity and chastity and the claim that education's purpose was to create better wives and mothers.

This was the situation within which women's groups renewed the campaign against child marriage to bring it above the age of 12 for girls. Child marriage had once again been in the air during the 1920s, also influenced by ongoing debates over the right age of consent and questions of trafficking that were being raised by the League of Nations (Ramusack 1981). Ashwini Tambe has shown that a focus on child marriage reform alone would yield a distorted account of the interlocking workings of the age/sex system that shaped notions of childhood and more specifically of girlhood in the colonial context. She also mentions in passing that other criteria for thinking about childhood, such as the Factory Acts of the 1890s that dealt with child labour, or matters of property ownership would have been less central for girls. Samita Sen (2021), however, has suggested that the parallel reform of child labour and of marriage needs more exploration for their possible linkages. The importance of Tambe's intervention lies in opening up the comparatively neglected sphere of non-marital sex (in a historical context where prostitution was legal and highly regulated by the British colonial state). She presents a puzzle in that the age of consent for non-marital sex for girls from the turn of the twentieth century became higher than that for marriage, reaching the age of 16 in 1929 when the Child Marriage Restraint Act was passed. In Britain, the opposite tended to be the case: sexual activity for girls deemed "unchaste" tended to be lower than for those who were "chaste". Tambe's

answer is to show the range of factors at play: international pressures over anti-trafficking were as much at work as were persisting references among nationalists to Hindu tradition and scriptural injunctions regarding marriage. First, there was greater repugnance to the idea of sex outside marriage (often conflating “immoral” sex – a code term for prostitution – with pre-, extra- or non-marital sex). Second, in a context where marriage was meant to be arranged by the family, raising the age of consent for non-marital sex made it easier for families to criminalise acts of choice on the part of daughters (Tambe 2009). On their part, staunch nationalists could continue to press for the acceptability of low ages of marriage. My only caveat regarding this very significant analysis (which I believe continues to be relevant for periods well beyond the colonial) is that it is not clear how such a complex mix of standards “solidified girlhood” (Tambe 2009: 396). The different treatment of marital and non-marital sex rendered girlhood more fuzzy across age, given such significant contrasts between the idea of sexual activity for girls within and outside marriage. Indeed, it stretches the figure of the child-woman in such a way that in conservative discourses the “child” could be married under parental consent but only “women” engage in non-marital sex.

According to Mrinalini Sinha’s magisterial and densely hatched study *Spectres of Mother India: The Global Restructuring of an Empire* (Sinha 2007), the fortunes of women’s organisations’ ongoing concerns over child marriage were fundamentally recast by as innocuous a matter as the publication of a book. In 1927, the American journalist Katherine Mayo – with assistance and backing from British officials – wrote *Mother India*, which was something of a diatribe against the degenerate social and sexual practices sanctioned by Hinduism, especially child marriage. A mix of opinions, reportage and citations from hospital records was used to bolster claims about the extremely unhealthy condition of women and children at the hands of Hindu men. Its aim was to prove that Indians were unfit for self-rule and required the ongoing civilising mission of the British. The book became a sensation, sold millions of copies across the globe and spawned massive debates and counterattacks. Gandhi famously referred to it as a “drain inspector’s report”.

Whereas most Indians reacted predictably and condemned the book, women’s organisations, according to Sinha, did something quite interestingly different. They agreed to the “facts” – indeed, they themselves had been pushing for reform in the lives of women and girls – but turned Mayo’s conclusions on their head. When told that raising the age of marriage went against the precepts of sacred texts, women leaders retorted, “we want new *shastras*”. The fault for the poor condition in the lives of women and so many in India should not be simply laid at the door of our evil

customs but demonstrated the incapacity of the British who were unwilling to heed the demands for change by their subject people. The British themselves were the ones failing India and its women.

Before 1927, various efforts at further legal reform in child marriage were invariably defeated. But this changed in 1927 when a new Bill was tabled to raise the Age of Marriage for girls from 12 to 14 years (originally proposed by Rai Sahib Harbilas Sarada). The Sarada Bill saw a much more positive reception in the wake of the storm created by the publication of *Mother India* a few months later. The Bill was passed in 1929 as the Child Marriage Restraint Act (CMRA, also known as the Sarada Act), which set the age of marriage at 14 for girls and 18 for boys. Geraldine Forbes has referred to women's organisations' role in the passing of this Act, their formulation of the issues, door-to-door campaigns, coordinating across all kinds of groups from different regions of the country, and their tireless petitioning of the government as a "rite of passage into a world where every act had a political meaning" (Forbes 1996: 83). Sinha has emphasized that women's organisations made it a point to take everyone along in their agenda, including Muslim organisations. This made women under the CMRA genuinely universal subjects, thus transcending the hard realities of separate personal laws based on religion (Sinha 2007). Anti-caste organisations, especially from the anti-Brahmin movement in South India who had led unique campaigns for gender equality such as Periyar's (E.V. Ramasamy Naikar) call for Self-Respect marriages, pledged full support (cited in Sinha 2001). The uniqueness of this collective achievement of solidarity across castes and communities lay in the absence of anything similar within the nationalist movement, especially in the run up to the creation of separate electorates in 1932. Muslim women members of the AIWC presented their petition in support for the Sarada Act against the views of certain Muslim leaders, stating:

We, speaking also on behalf of the Muslim women of India, assert that it is only a small section of Mussalman men who have been ... demanding exemption from the Act. This Act affects girls and women far more than it affects men and we deny their right to speak on our behalf" (cited in Forbes 1996: 89).

This is a major moment when the question of Muslim girls is brought into the women's movement of the time, such that Muslim women were able to represent themselves. Notice how readily women were now resorting to the language of rights in their demands. Forbes goes on to say that women's organisations did not stop with the passing of the Act and petitioned for registration of all births and marriages so that it

would not be a dead letter. However, it cannot be said unequivocally as to whether the new law improved the situation on the ground, at least not immediately – there was rather a sharp rise in child marriages (including among some of those who had joined the petition in its favour) when it became known that the Bill would soon be passed into law.

Before concluding this section, a word or two about the significant fact that the CMRA was not just about girls but also raised the marriage age of boys to 18 years. Ishita Pande has argued that this Bill was therefore more genuinely about the childhood of both genders and departed from a prior focus on the girl-child alone. (However, going by the Notes on Infant Marriage of the 1880s, especially those of Malabari and Phule, the problem of child marriage for both girls and boys did receive some attention, even if not in the final Age of Consent legislation.) Pande believes that considerations of the health and education of sons, with some references to the ostensible golden age of brahmacharya thrown in (and not only to the more widely cited complaint against the oppression and exploitation of girls), played their part in the further development of the age/sex system through the passing of the CMRA (Pande 2013b). An updated patriarchy within the modernising joint family with its systems of inheritance did need to “sort boys from men”.

1.7 The modernising impulse: The case of the princely state of Mysore

Yet another glimpse into the multifaceted career of child marriage has been made available in a state that was outside direct British colonial rule: the southern state of Mysore. Thanks to the scholarship of Janaki Nair, another frame is discernible, where, unlikely though it may seem, it is under Princely rule that an “enlightened modernity” with a strong legal machinery and an efficient bureaucracy took centre stage, including in the realm of social reform (Nair 2012:13). One of the issues where this was played out, though with limited success, was that of child marriage in the region. The backdrop was constituted by the developments that have just been discussed, from Malabari’s Note of 1884 to the Sarda Act of 1929.

Nair’s carefully reconstructed history begins with the 1894 Regulation to Prevent Infant Marriages among Hindus, promulgated by the Dewan of the Princely State. According to this new law, no marriages could be conducted with girls below the age of 8, which was now a criminal offense, inviting imprisonment of up to 6 months and a fine. The Dewan cited the high prevalence of child widows in the official statistics of 1881 and 1891 (whose roots, he said, lay in the practice of child marriage) for seeing

the legislation through, in spite of considerable opposition on both religious and caste grounds, and a distinct lack of enthusiasm among the Princely State's legislators. However, rather than take the route of civil law and declare such marriages void, it was brought under the purview of criminal punitive action – hence the child marriage of a girl less than 8 years old was now in the strange situation of being licit but criminal.

Notice that it was marriage itself and not age of consent to sexual intercourse that was at issue here. Moreover, the strictures included marriage with men above the age of 50 years, so that age difference also found its way into legislation. Nair describes the lengths to which local officials went about their duty on this matter. The chapter in her book on the history of Mysore dealing with child marriage begins with an account of emissaries of the law, along with the local village headman, landing up at the door of a very poor Madiga family in Bangalore district and submitting an order that the marriage of their daughter be stopped. When the Madiga father (having no idea about the law or any interest in it) refused, the matter was brought to the notice of the local magistrate to prove how seriously the state machinery took this new legislation, and the family was fined. In the next few decades, the regime in Mysore went to considerable lengths to prosecute cases, in ways quite unheard of in regions under direct colonial rule. Nair, however, is quick to note that intentions here had less to do with women's rights than with maintaining the patriarchal family with the right kind of age difference between husband and wife, in order to be in tune with modernity and its social and economic requirements.

Matters changed at the time of the passing of the Sarda Act of 1929 which, as we saw, raised the age of girls from 12 to 14 years and of boys to 18 years. Even though a similar bill was introduced in Mysore and was narrowly passed, the new Dewan Mirza Ismail pronounced that, according to public opinion, "more harm than good" would ensue if such a bill were made into law (Nair 2012: 238). Finally, a revised formulation was enacted which focussed on age of consummation for girls at 14 rather than actual marriage, which could be earlier. Nair suggests that this retreat had less to do with a weakening of the Mysore state in the 1930s or the Muslim identity of the Dewan.

This was not a decision in favour of some unadulterated "tradition", much less a decisive stance against social reform through legislation. It was instead a recognition that the molecular changes first inaugurated in the 1890s were adequate, and further transformations would warrant social changes on a scale that the government was unprepared to undertake (Nair 2012: 142).

The story of the child wife in Princely Mysore was therefore one of modest but actionable legislation, in line with its larger modernising drives, and not one of constructing autonomous rights-bearing subjects.

Interestingly, several other Princely States enacted similar laws during this period. The Princely State of Baroda stipulated the age of 12 as the minimum age of marriage for girls in 1904, and Indore came up with 14 for boys and 12 for girls in 1918 (Goode 1965).

What happens from the 1930s in the larger colonial context to the question of child marriage as an end to colonial rule begins to appear on the horizon?

1.8 Child marriage in the imagined nation to be

The 1930s in colonial India were tumultuous years of political mobilisation when independence appeared to be more and more a reality. As several scholars have explored, Hindu–Muslim tensions and rivalries also played on a situation where Muslim personal law came much closer to British law and offered more rights to women by virtue of its contractual nature, spanning matters of consent, property rights, divorce and maintenance. Hindu laws (as we have already seen in the above discussions) were indeed far worse for women, offering little to no legal status to wives as individuals or to daughters as heirs, except under matrilineal practices in regions like Kerala. The less virulent face of Hindu–Muslim conflict in a climate of growing communalisation was “to press for law reform within their respective personal laws ostensibly to elevate the status of women” (Flavia Agnes 2001: 68). Thus, during the 1930s, changes in Muslim laws were passed on issues of maintenance and divorce; changes in Hindu laws were passed on issues of property, whose purpose may have been to bring greater uniformity within their respective disparate community domains rather than any genuine regard for women’s rights.

One place to look for the subsequent focus on child marriage is in a forward-looking document produced by women leaders on the eve of independence, namely the Report by the Sub-Committee under the Congress leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru, known as *Women’s Role in a Planned Economy* (WRPE), prepared in 1938 by one of 22 sub-committees planning the future nation state (Shah ed. 1956; Chaudhuri 1995). A decisive shift in perspective and orientation is visible in the very structure of the report, where the first chapter is on the political rights of the future woman citizen followed by a long chapter on economic rights and property rights and then a chapter

on education. The chapter on marriage and family comes close to the end. It is clear that economic rights – rights to employment, even the recognition of housework as work – have gained in centrality, thanks to a strongly visible socialist bent. Education, it is said, has been too narrowly linked with earnings so that only men have been encouraged to gain access beyond primary schooling, thus perhaps marking a new link between education and marriage. Figures in the WRPE on education that looked at the period between 1931 and 1937 indicated two things: large gaps in enrolment between boys and girls, which got worse from primary education onwards but, on the other hand, a much greater rate of increase in schooling for girls than boys over the years. Child marriage, in the context of education, was called one of Indian society's "evils" holding its women back and was also discussed briefly in the chapter on marriage and family. Age of marriage must, they recommended, be gradually raised to 18 for both parties and any marriage below 12 declared void and a cognisable offence. The mood of the report, looked at as a whole, was buoyant about what a planned economy would grant its women citizens – with economic and political rights in place, "backward customs" like child marriage were expected to no longer pose a major challenge and would be dealt with via punitive legal measures. It is unclear, in the terminology and frames employed by this report, whether an age/sex system was centrally at work in the desire to raise the age of marriage to 18 years for both boys and girls. It could well be that the idea of such a system may not be adequate for thinking about further developments in the construction of childhood and adulthood and even less so in the time following independence.

1.9 What is the story with independence?

Against this rich tapestry of the colonial era when child marriage was all too often a major flashpoint and took over the public sphere more than any other issue, we now enter a different time of nation building and development. This period suffers in a review of this nature because secondary literature is far more uneven compared with the work of historical scholarship. There are significant decades of India's post-independence history such as the 1950s and '60s that exist in a kind of epistemological vacuum. From the perspective of movements such as the women's movement, this has led to the somewhat misleading notion of a "silent period" (Neera Desai 1986), as the nationalist generation acquiesced to the new vision of development and progress and accommodated themselves in anticipation of better times. There is sufficient scholarship on the fate of the Hindu Code Bill passed in several fragmented parts in 1955 and 1956, which brought in monogamy, maintenance, divorce and certain rights of inheritance to Hindu women. Anticipated by the Law Minister B.R.

Ambedkar as a ratification of the gender and caste equality needed to provide a solid basis for the new nation, the fragmented version that finally emerged upset him so deeply that he referred to the Constitution as having been built “on a dung heap” and he resigned from his position in the new government (Ambedkar 1995). However, I would suggest that, taking a long view from the time when the status of Hindu women was seen by leaders like himself to have been a matter of so much iniquity (with child marriage amongst the most shameful (Ambedkar 1979)), one cannot only be disappointed with the form that the Hindu Code Bill took, as commentators like Archana Parashar also have been. Parashar raised the question as to how a generation of legislators inheriting a British legal apparatus acquired the capacity to take over the sphere of “sacrosanct religious laws,” making them more modern and uniform, while “compromising on the achievement of complete sex equality” (Parashar 1992: 143). I would make the opposite point: The very recognition of the incomplete equality – or the inequality – of women in the final form of the Hindu Code Bill inaugurated a process of secularisation by having located Hindu women within the frames of liberal rights rather than those of religious injunction. It took over one and a half centuries for such a momentous shift in frameworks to achieve some legal sanction, in this case from a fledgling nation state, even if the journey was hardly complete or a simple linear one.

In 1949, minor legislative change was introduced into the CMRA, raising the age of girls to 15 years. Under the Special Marriages Act of 1954 where marriage required no religious affiliation, minimal ages at marriage were set at 18 for girls and 21 for boys. None of these has attracted the attention of scholars or commentators.

1.9.1 *Towards Equality and the Marriage Act of 1978*

In the absence of other secondary literature, it is necessary to move forward to 1974. This is the year that saw the publication of *Towards Equality: Report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India* by the Department of Social Welfare of the Indian Government. Envisaged by the state as a prosaic duty to the UN Year for Women of 1975, a report destined to gather dust on some departmental book shelf, *Towards Equality* – while fully sticking to the terms of reference given to it and maintaining the style and format of a government report – was nonetheless explosive in its contents. It was certainly deeply transformative for its authors, who considered themselves nationalists and “the beneficiaries of the equality clauses of the Constitution” (Mazumdar 1979). As many are now aware, this text was replete with shocking findings that completely disoriented a new generation of activists and social scientists who had assumed that Nehruvian development would have yielded some progress for

women too. However, barring improvements in literacy and educational attainments, on most other counts – from overall sex ratios to employment and political participation – the jolt was that trends were declining and that such declines continued into the 1950s and '60s. Were women effectively turning into a minority in the new nation, they asked (Sharma and Sujaya ed. 2012 (1974))?

And yet, in the midst of discussions on culture, family and law, population and fertility (some of which displayed quite conventional positions), child marriage – or, it should rather be said, age at marriage – did not occupy a significant place for the Committee on the Status of Women in India (CSWI). In the demographic chapter, there were two small tables on child marriage, where the authors do mention that the 1971 Census was the first census to directly ask ever-married women their age at marriage (although the results were not available in time for the Report). Commenting on trends from 1901 to 1971 for both men and women (based on estimations computed from age distribution and marital status), they noted that while average age at marriage for men remained higher, the rate of increase for women had been considerably greater: male ages rose from 20.2 to 22.2 years while women's rise was from 13.2 to 17.2 years (Sharma and Sujaya ed. 2012: 16).

Barely two pages were devoted to "age at marriage" in the 50-page chapter "On the Socio-cultural Setting of Women's Status" in *Towards Equality*, which offered an interesting mix of opinions, analysis and recommendations. Notice that the CSWI nowhere suggests that child marriage was a problem of the past, one that had been successfully resolved. Acknowledging that it was a serious issue, especially in rural areas where their data showed 13.8% of women were married in the 10- to 14-year age group, they went on to say that a "redeeming" feature of child marriage in India was that customarily consummation takes place only after puberty. Particularly noteworthy was their comment that low age of marriage was related to the near-universality of marriage in India, making this a matter "to be entertained from their birth or early childhood. Early marriage is accompanied by seemingly easy solutions for a number of problems" (Sharma and Sujaya 2012: 60). In this list, they included rules of caste endogamy and the dangers of girls' choosing otherwise if they were older; preserving women's purity in the face of the impossibility of repudiating motherhood; scarce familial resources in a situation where girls are not financially supporting the family, resulting in an early transfer of the girl to the in-laws; the need for more time for girls to adjust to the new home; and the ongoing low ages of marriage among Scheduled Castes who move and work outside their homes, leading to "helplessness in protecting their women from the lust of men from upper castes who have economic power over them" (Sharma and Sujaya 2012: 61). The Report

briefly noted that low age of marriage was responsible for population growth, low standards of health for women and high mortality in the child-bearing age. (In the absence of any supporting source of evidence, it is likely that this information came from international bodies.) By way of looking for improvements, they proposed the following: education for girls in rural areas and for the “lower strata” in urban areas (they mentioned in passing that, among the urban middle classes, the need for employment for boys had raised their age at marriage and so in turn raised those of prospective wives). In the chapter on law, they said that they would not recommend rendering early marriages void as this would create more problems than it would solve. Rather, they supported the right for girls to repudiate a marriage on attaining majority, whether or not it had been consummated, and recommended that courts not provide any relief if a marriage had been made in violation of age requirements. Registration of marriages was another effective check (including for bigamous marriages), although failure to do so cannot invalidate a marriage (Sharma and Sujaya 2012: 86).

Compared with the unambiguous if not strident tone that the CSWI adopted in other chapters on employment, political rights and education and even their unilateral stance on the absolute need for a uniform civil code, the discussion on child marriage in *Towards Equality* displayed a mix of views, where a sympathetic rendering of the reasons for the persistence of child marriage, especially among the rural poor and Scheduled Castes, predominated. What a major shift, then, from the campaigns of the colonial period!

In October 1978, the legal reform measure that had already been formulated in the Special Marriages Act of 1954 became the law of the land for all marriages – 18 for girls and 21 for boys – and this has not changed since then. According to Geraldine Forbes (Forbes 1979), whereas the 1891 Age of Consent controversy had more to do with whether the British government had a right to interfere in Hindu social customs, and the CMRA of 1929 was used as proof that Indians and women’s organisations more specifically were deeply concerned with changing certain social practices, the 1978 law was related to population policies.

In one of the few studies to have looked more closely at the circumstances surrounding the 1978 Act, Rajani Bhatia and Ashwini Tambe examined the 1978 legal reform measure, an issue that, as they put it, “barely created a ripple”. In their view, what propelled this action on the part of the Indian state was an interplay of forces whose dominant contenders were international and local population control experts.

As they put it quite sharply, by contrasting this moment to all the campaigning for the CMRA Act of 1929,

[w]hereas the violence of forced sex and forced household responsibilities at an early age was what the 1920s reformers sought to prevent, in the 1970s it was the spectre of fertile girls contributing to booming population counts that occupied demographers' minds (Bhatia and Tambe 2014: 2).

If indeed the earlier legislations of the colonial period were instrumental in putting in place a certain kind of age/sex system, what kind of updated version might the new 1978 Act have inaugurated?

Bhatia and Tambe track with some care the setting up of various organisations such as the Miliband Foundation, the Population Council in the US, and the UN divisions concerned with population policies, all of which promoted research during the 1960s which sought to demonstrate correlations between higher ages of marriage and reduced fertility. (They note in passing how different such arguments were from those made during the colonial period, where it was maternal morbidity, high infant mortality and weak progeny that were reasons for raising the age of marriage.) In India, S.N. Agarwala in 1965 made a projection that an increase in age of marriage to 20 years for women would reduce fertility by 30%, and many others added to the research with estimates of their own. The only dissenting voices, it would appear, came from women demographers like Malini Karkal and Kumudini Dandekar, who argued that merely raising the legal age of marriage to reduce births was unlikely to yield results – it was rather women's educational and occupational status that needed to be improved (in Bhatia and Tambe 2014: 5). By 1974, raising the age of marriage to 18 for girls and 21 for boys had made its way into ministerial discussions and was announced in 1976 as part of the new National Population Policy, midway during the National Emergency of 1975–77. (See also Sagade 2005.) It was precisely after the lifting of the Emergency in 1977, when the backlash of the forced sterilisation measures of those years contributed to the fall of the Congress government under Indira Gandhi, that age at marriage appeared as a particularly safe instrument for population control, leading to its passage in 1978 with hardly any public discussion and little negative fallout.

Bhatia and Tambe have certainly put their finger on one aspect of the new constellations within the world of development and ideas of modernisation (especially during the so-called Cold War years) that connected young married girls to Third World population explosion and that highlighted fertility and child bearing rather than

sexual activity as the problem that needed attention. *Indeed, one might be tempted to posit the suppression of the kind of age/sex system suggested by scholars of colonial India, like Ishita Pande, in defining girlhood which was now replaced by a population-centric framing of Third World women/girls whose fertility rates were now what most needed examination and regulation.*

1.9.2 Age at Marriage and the Middle Class

At the same time (and certainly from the Indian side), there is more that needs to be understood about why age at marriage did not figure as it did in the colonial period or why it figured quite differently for a new generation of feminists. First of all, it is necessary to recall who was at the heart of the social reform measures from the nineteenth century onwards. This was overwhelmingly the child wife and widow, vividly described by Pandita Ramabai in her *High Caste Hindu Woman* and by B.R. Ambedkar in his 1916 essay on caste, as the Brahmin girl who suffered the worst iniquities and whose practices castes lower in the hierarchy sought to imitate (Ambedkar 1979). We have seen how the age/sex system of the colonial period was constitutively if differentially marked by caste and class, as discussed in regions like Bengal and Maharashtra. This still implied that upper-caste girls (whether marked or unmarked) were the quintessential subjects of social reform. In ways that have not been sufficiently taken note of, the intervening century, especially after independence, wrought fundamental changes in the life of this now modernising girl, especially if she was urban and middle class, whose very modernity ensured that her upper-caste status became increasingly invisible. The *Towards Equality* report recorded not just improvements in literacy rates and educational access but a narrowing of gender gaps in higher education for this class of women/girls. Whereas their mothers may well have been married off early and grandmothers even before puberty, urban middle-class girls in the 1970s would, in all likelihood, complete high school *as part of contemporary social norms* and a significant proportion go to college after graduating. In the decades to follow, these proportions rose steadily. A silent social transformation in conceptions of childhood and girlhood was therefore being achieved in upper-caste middle-class society, emblematic of their distinct class location, one that awaits further exploration from the world of scholarship. For this class, puberty did not mean being taken out of school to be married off. There appears to be a hiatus in several accounts of girls' education that see only continuities between the early twentieth-century ideologies of sexual control when primary schooling was the upper limit for the majority and contemporary educational trends, which have expanded and diversified enormously. We shall have occasion to return to these in the chapter on education. (Chanana 2001; Kumar 2010).

Furthermore – and signs of this were already visible in the WRPE and in *Towards Equality* – the very framework for thinking about the status of women had undergone a profound shift. It was not so much tradition and culture (undergirded by regimes of sexuality) that was at the root of women’s inequalities but the failures of development, especially for the rural poor, who constituted the majority (see also John 2014). The strongest correlations in the minds of this generation of feminists and social scientists for persisting low ages at marriage were therefore poverty and backwardness. *From having been the colonial subject of reform par excellence, child marriage transmuted quietly into the problem of the "Other"*. Once again, the age/sex system is pushed into the background. The discriminated young girl child found a different frame in the newly emerging field of women and development in the 1970s, when economists and demographers became acutely concerned about deep gender biases in Indian households and families, especially among the rural poor. These were visible in the newly discovered declining sex ratio and excess female mortality, and deficits in nutrition and health care rendered girls into an endangered sex from their very first years of life (Bardhan 1974; Mitra 1979; Sen and Sengupta 1983; among others).

A new phase of the women’s movement asserted itself with campaigns against dowry deaths and custodial rape in the late 1970s and early ‘80s (Kumar 1993; Gandhi and Shah 1992; Kannabiran and Menon 2007). Further issues came to the fore as the women’s movement grew. These included the lack of value accorded to women’s work in the context of widespread poverty and related questions of development; political participation at local and national levels; legal reform with violence and the conflicted status of religious personal laws occupying a critical place; educational access and discrimination; health, nutrition and the declining child sex ratio. Before long the movement was facing the challenges of caste, religion, minority status, sexuality, disability, militarism and so on. With some regional exceptions, early marriage did not occupy a prominent place on this long list, even while the movement expanded, diversified and was transformed as an increasingly institutional phenomenon, whether in higher education or in non-governmental organisations.

This is not to say that child marriage was never an issue in succeeding decades. Child marriage did on occasion become a public matter as the twentieth century wound to a close, in a time when countries like India were embarking on a new economic ideology marked by changing priorities of the state in development, expanding global markets and what is now being referred to simply as “neo-liberalism” in the twenty-first century. During the 1990s, as the following two instances amply demonstrate, child marriage gained in national publicity in highly localised ways but always as the

problem of “others”. The first could be put down to the problems of impoverished Muslim families in Hyderabad, and the second to rural backwardness in the arid state of Rajasthan.

1.9.3 The Ameena Case

One of the more well-known public campaigns was the Ameena case (1991), which involved a young Muslim girl (possibly not more than 11). Ameena lived in the old part of Hyderabad city, who was married off by her parents to a much older West Asian Sheikh and sought to be saved from her plight through the custody of the state (Sunder Rajan 2003). In a long closely argued essay on this particular case, Rajeswari Sundar Rajan highlights how it came to assume the proportions of a national crisis. Another commentator, Abida Samiuddin, has described how Ameena’s father was an extremely poor auto-rickshaw driver with eight children, including six daughters, who could not resist a marriage proposal from Saudi Arabian citizen Sheikh Yahya al Sagish, who was all of 60. The marriage was solemnised in two days, and as Samiuddin puts it “the child was forced to leave behind her home, her country and more than that her incomplete childhood” (Samiuddin 1995: 131). Ameena’s story unfolded during the flight from Hyderabad to Delhi since her sobbing, which the older man sitting next to her was unable to quell, attracted the attention of fellow passengers and then that of the flight attendant Amrita Ahluwalia. After landing in Delhi, the Sheikh was taken into police custody, and Ameena was brought to a Nari Niketan (women’s shelter home) and then shifted to a children’s home after protests by women’s organisations.

According to Jameela Nishat, whose organisation Shaheen Resource Centre has been active in the old city of Hyderabad since the 1990s, it should be understood that the practice of marrying local Muslim girls from poor families to cash-rich men from the Middle East was a well-known one, harking back to the 1970s oil boom and subsequent labour migration from Indian shores to “Gulf” countries. Nishat saw these marriages as running in parallel along with men’s search for employment, often enabling further migration by family members of the bride. Not all of them were poverty-stricken child brides feeding the depredations of old men (personal communication, February 2018). It is not necessary to dwell in any detail on the development of the case, which was studded with high drama, as the state, the flight attendant herself, and Ameena’s parents sought custody over her in a critical situation involving a foreign national, and in which women’s organisations like the All-India Democratic Women’s Association (AIDWA) in Delhi played a very important role. In

the end, Ameena showed no interest in pursuing her case, the Sheikh jumped bail and fled the country, and the child bride went back to her parents to live in Hyderabad.

At one level, this was a clear case of a child marriage (although her documents made her out to be older), well within the jurisdiction of the new CMRA that stipulated 18 years for a girl. But Muslim voices were quick to claim that the CMRA did not apply to them since it contravened the autonomous realm of Muslim personal law according to which child marriage is permissible under the Sharia. Abida Samiuddin has provided her own refutation of such a defence, quoting Quranic verses to show that, even in situations where a daughter is a minor, this case violated the role of the father as guardian. She also argued against the claim that personal law has precedence over the Indian Penal Code and said that this case would be best understood in its socioeconomic context whereby Arabs are happy to obtain docile Muslim wives from poor Indian families while the parents get to receive *mehr* and promises of jobs for their sons in the Gulf (Samiuddin 1995:134–137). Rajeswari Sunder Rajan makes the interesting point that for all the differences between the child bride Ameena and the old woman Shah Bano (an older woman divorced by her husband who sought maintenance through the courts), the route taken in the Ameena case contained very similar ingredients to the much larger crisis of the mid 1980s that surrounded Shah Bano – namely, a beleaguered Muslim identity caught in the crosshairs of religious personal law, gender justice and the nation state’s investment in uniform laws, in the face of which the Muslim woman/girl herself can only retreat from the situation and drop her initial claim. Therefore, the Ameena case too suffered from overdetermination, as what began as a case of child marriage transmuted into the communalisation of gender.

1.9.4 The Bhawari Devi Case

Yet another major incident during the 1990s had an even more complex if not oblique relationship to child marriage. The state of Rajasthan in the year 1984 set up an innovative Women’s Development Programme (WDP) in several districts, where village level *sathins* or women animators were trained to organise rural women on a range of issues. The WDP was held up as a model in the development world and achieved considerable publicity and appreciation, including from the World Bank. One of its distinctive features was the training in skills of communication and consciousness raising received by the sathins, invariably from poor low caste and often illiterate backgrounds, who became local leaders in their respective villages over the years. Even so, by the early 1990s, the programme was in severe danger of losing its special élan as it suffered appropriation by the state and exploitation of its “voluntary”

workers for carrying out all its schemes and programmes, from health and education to social issues (Saheli and others 1991).

Rajasthan is a state known for having very high rates of child marriage and at very young ages, often including both bride and groom. According to Dipta Bhog, who worked with the WDP in the district of Jaipur in the late 1980s, child marriage was common among several agricultural castes and Scheduled Castes (Dipta Bhog, personal communication, February 2020). She recalls that child marriage was understood at the time as an economic issue (rather than a matter of women's rights, much less one of sexual honour) and not as something to be dealt with legalistically. They were particularly opposed to the sensationalist media coverage of mass child marriages during festivals like Akha Teej, considered an auspicious time for conducting weddings. Instead, child marriage was approached occasionally and strategically, especially in situations where more urbanised boys (and on occasion girls) did not wish to go ahead with a betrothal conducted many years ago. WDP activists then assisted in the subsequent negotiations or annulments. Several sathins were in fact "single" women from a broken child marriage. But in no way did all these efforts to keep the needs and interests of such girl/women in mind lead the WDP to initiate campaigns against child marriage as such. It was the Rajasthan government that changed the face of the programme into one where stopping child marriage figured among a long list of sathins' duties as "voluntary" state functionaries.

Kanchan Mathur, from the Institute of Development Studies at Jaipur, has provided a much-needed context for what came to be the well-known struggle of the sathin Bhanwari Devi. Mathur refers to the many issues around "extreme violence" – rapes, domestic violence, dowry murders, labelling women as witches, discrimination towards girls and so on – that featured in the training of the sathins (Mathur 2019). It is telling, I think, that child marriage does not feature in the list of issues treated as violence against women. Mathur reports about a meeting held by one of the sathins Bhanwari Devi as early as 1986 in her own village. Women like herself, who had married their children before puberty, agreed to postpone the *gauna* – the time when the girl went to her in-law's home, commonly undertaken right after the girl menstruated for the first time – and wait until later for the boy and girl to begin living together as husband and wife (2019: 62).

In 1992, the government called for a campaign against child marriage shortly before the festival of Akha Teej. Sathins were asked to prevent such marriages by convincing villagers against the practice. When Bhanwari Devi came to hear of a case in her own village of Bhatari by Ram Karan Gujjar, whose daughter was just 1 year old, she

reported it to the local authorities in spite of a lack of local support, including none from the local state legislator (Member of the Legislative Assembly). On the day of Akha Teej, both the Sub Divisional Officer and Deputy Superintendent of Police arrived at the village to stop the marriage, which nonetheless took place clandestinely the following night at 2 a.m. Bhanwari suffered boycotts and then was punished for her action in a horrifying way. She was gang-raped by five men, including the father of the infant bride, in the presence of her husband, who had first been severely beaten up.

As we have seen, child marriage had certainly figured in certain strategic ways in the work of the sathins, many of whom had themselves been married before puberty or had conducted such marriages for their daughters. This was true for Bhanwari herself, who was someone who had established herself over the years as an activist on a range of issues, including the most personal ones. According to Kalpana Kannabiran, her gang rape was “punishment” not for her feminist organising but for carrying out her job as a sathin working for the government, one that invited police action. Drawing on fact-finding reports conducted by women’s organisations after the rape, Kannabiran believes that

for Bhanwari, the problem of child marriage was not one of dichotomised conflict, but a predicament fraught with contradictions and multiple perspectives, something she could recognize because of her own belated awareness of the problem... To intervene in this situation with the brutal might of the state and attempt to handle it with police action, disintegrates and disables a carefully crafted political programme... (in Kannabiran and Menon 2007: 142–143).

Notice therefore the strong caution over bringing police action and criminal liability into the politics of addressing child marriage, a warning that is as relevant as ever in the twenty-first-century reliance on the punitive powers of the law.

Bhanwari’s rape case became a major rallying point for the women’s movement, especially by organisations and feminists based in Delhi – but what the campaign centred on was the absence of justice for the sathin. Bhanwari Devi became not just nationally but internationally known. Child marriage was the mere context and largely forgotten – all the reports have focussed mainly on the rape and its aftermath. The perpetrators were acquitted by the Rajasthan High Court in 1995 with the shocking verdict that such a rape could never have happened: She belonged to a caste lower than the accused and it could not have occurred in her husband’s presence. She and

her husband were thus branded as liars, leading to their further alienation from the village. Her case is remembered to this very day because it was in its wake that sexual harassment and violence at the workplace received the attention of the state and the women's movement. Local activists in Jaipur also recall that Bhanwari Devi was by no means the only sathin to be "punished" for her actions with rape – this had happened before, when local women activists confronted existing power structures, such as the mining lobby in Rajasthan. In other words, Bhanwari Devi was another victim of a backlash, even though in this instance she was actually acting in the service of the government (Bharat, Vishakha, personal communication, May 2018). Hence, the very organisation Vishakha that had played a key role in the training of the sathins also gave its name to feminist legal efforts to put in place what came to be known as the Vishakha guidelines for sexual harassment and violence at the workplace, the first of their kind in India. Bhanwari became a renowned name, a poor rural woman from a marginalised caste, whose protracted struggle against a casteist and patriarchal judiciary gave India its nationally and internationally acclaimed guidelines for fighting workplace sexual harassment. It is another matter that, as Jenny Rowena has pointed out (Rowena 2017), the Vishakha guidelines have so far been used only for setting up complaints committees and redressal mechanisms in formal spaces of employment and higher education, quite remote from the world of informal labour and voluntary service that governed Bhanwari Devi's life.

This chapter effectively began as a story of the "self" – through representations of upper-caste child/women and the rare voice speaking for the so-called lower castes and untouchables – a story that, on several occasions, rocked imperial power and interrupted an emergent nationalism with the demand to raise her age at marriage. Many accounts today render the history of social reform in somewhat tepid tones, as a very narrowly conceived agenda of social change. I do not think this is quite borne out by the range of scholarship available on this period, one that is constantly in a state of further revision and expansion, especially in light of having recast the subject of this period as the child/woman. In any case, why should one expect a whole lot more from a time that became so dominated by the battles between imperialism and nationalism? What needs much more attention, it seems to me, is to note how highly truncated the story of gender transformation has been and how much remains to be said about the period following independence. The upper-caste subject of social reform became invisible within the new nation, and one of the dimensions of this invisibility is that child marriage turned into "history" for this caste-class of modern womanhood. Stalwarts of the women's movement of the 1970s, like Vina Mazumdar, have frequently spoken about how as "daughters of independence" they took the equality clauses of the Constitution for granted (Mazumdar 1979). This generation

effortlessly conceived of themselves as adult daughters of the new India, certainly no longer as child victims of traditional customs. Alongside, as we saw, the newly developing nation and a reborn women's movement resignified and marginalised child marriage as the problem of the "other", contained within agendas to address poverty, fitfully recognised as an ongoing practice in "backward" regions and groups. As I hope to demonstrate in this report the basic structures of marriage across castes that I call compulsory marriage has barely been addressed.

Something has changed with the new millennium. Suddenly, or so it would appear, child marriage – or, as some would rather call it, early and child marriage – has made a nationwide comeback among organisations in India. Chapter two will discuss aspects of this new contemporary moment.

By way of a provocation, this opening chapter on the long and chequered nineteenth- and twentieth-century history of child marriage in India concludes with the following doubt, raised by one of the most well-known historians of women in modern India:

"What none of these proponents of marriage reform has ever questioned is whether or not raising the age of marriage can improve the status of women and begin the social change thought necessary for modernisation. Since the mid-nineteenth century, it has been assumed that a later age of marriage would guarantee an improved social status, but there has been little evidence of this simple formula." (Forbes 1979: 417).

Chapter - 2

Child Marriage in the Twenty-first Century

This chapter dwells on the ways in which the theme of early and child marriage has re-emerged as a subject of research and intervention in very recent years in India. The first chapter provided a historical overview, beginning with the colonial period when child marriage became the new name for marriage itself, with campaigns around age becoming major flashpoints of controversy. After Indian independence we saw further that the subject of child marriage retreated, including when the women's movement entered a new phase from the late 1970s. No longer the subject of intense debate much less conflict, it moved towards the margins in organising and public life, and when it did emerge, it was the subject of the "other". Early marriage was not highlighted in the *Towards Equality Report* that became something of a foundational text in the fields of social science research on women as well as in much activism and policy intervention. The 1978 CMRA bringing 18 and 21 years as the minimum ages for marriage for girls and boys was passed with little attention being paid to this by feminists and no signs of opposition from anyone.

The present chapter will be exploring how best to approach signs of a fresh interest in the subject of child marriage in twenty-first century India, which has also spawned new research, much of which is as recent as the preparation for this study. The challenge facing this chapter is quite an odd one. At one level, we are dealing with an old, old problem, that takes us back centuries to everything that used to come under the 'social evils' of Hindu tradition, and subsequently to Muslim practices. After independence, when agendas of development became the overarching frame for policy and action, child marriage found sparse mention as a direct consequence of poverty itself or as a custom among particular social groups or in certain backward regions. So, one might be tempted to wonder, is there really anything more that needs to be said on the subject?

At another level, there is indeed much to be understood in this twenty-first century about marriage as a basic institution of Indian society and the persistence of young ages of marriage among large sections of the population. Notice, for instance, that the Indian story recounted in Chapter One is overwhelmingly a history of legal reform and not a social history of marriage. To put it most provocatively, *I would like to suggest that the problem in India has less to do with the ongoing presence of child*

marriage in our midst than with the extremely uneven resources available for engaging with it. In Chapter One we stumbled upon the fact that what to this very day is called the social reform of women was, with the benefit of hindsight, largely about the child (the child widow, the infant wife, the young girl overcoming all odds to attend school). When the subject of women became a focus from the late 1970s to the present day – and she has indeed seen a lot of public attention lately – when and how has her age been a matter of concern?

Consider, for instance, the ways in which violence became a springboard for women's groups in the late 1970s. The national campaign against rape in 1980 was built around the figure of a young Adivasi girl Mathura. Mathura was raped by constables in the very police station to which she had been brought by her brother. In their Open Letter to the Supreme Court of India asking that the case acquitting the policemen be reopened, law professors Upendra Baxi, Vasudha Dhagamwar, Raghunath Kelkar and Lotika Sarkar presented the facts of the case as follows: "Mathura, a young girl of the age of 14-16, was an orphan who lived with her brother Gama, both of them labourers. Mathura developed a relationship with Ashok, the cousin of Nushi at whose house she used to work, and they decided to get married." (Baxi and others 2008: 267) In fact, it was because the brother of Mathura disapproved of her relationship and sought to bring a case against Ashok, that she was brought to the police station in the first place. However, nowhere does the Open Letter dwell on the age of Mathura (though it is mentioned more than once) and she is variously referred to as a woman or a girl, but never as a child. This letter was written in 1979 after the CMRA of 1978 had raised the age of marriage for girls to 18 and boys to 21, though the case itself had taken place in Maharashtra some years earlier. In fact, the burden of the letter is that her past sexual history had no bearing whatsoever on the rape by the policemen. Nor was the rape treated as more heinous because of her age, and there was no discussion as to whether she was a minor. Does this mean that women as the subjects of a new phase of organising for rights were given the default identity of being adult? Could this be why it is only after a new interest in the rights of the child found a place (itself a complex recent phenomenon that has emerged through international and local processes) that this in turn devolved into the current focus on early and child marriage?

Pressures appear to have been created between international bodies and the Indian state, with further effects in the field of research as well. When we look at different disciplines and fields in the social sciences, unevenness is at its peak. Demography – with its central focus on fertility and health -- has not just taken the lead in current approaches to child marriage but is providing the most extensive coverage, as we

shall soon see. As we will see in subject chapters, sociological studies on marriage and family, explorations in the fields of sexuality, scholarship on education, and approaches to women's work and employment that ought to be as critical for any understanding of the persistence of child marriage in contemporary India are lacking in comparison. Thus, statistical analyses today have been providing most of the insights, and this has been a mixed blessing, leaving something of a vacuum at other critical levels of interpretation. There are several organisations and groups – some older and some quite recent – who, in different regions of the country appear to be addressing early and child marriage, though in diverse ways.

This chapter will examine those areas where efforts to engage with child marriage in the new millennium have been most palpable so far – law reform, state policy, and, when it comes to research, the work of demography. These are undoubtedly distinct if not disparate domains. Yet, in each of these, we can see, directly if not more indirectly, the effects of state-led and international agendas, working in increasing congruence. In order to guard against misunderstanding, this is not being said in a tone of dismissal, but it is being said critically. What we know at this point of time and most of what has been achieved so far is due to these efforts and interventions, from the pressure of international covenants and the desire to give more teeth to the law, to the epistemologies of large numbers. Demographic scholarship is now mining India's data sets to tell us what kind of problem we are dealing with (often in comparison with other regions) and why child marriage should be "eliminated" or "ended" (terms that invariably figure in the titles of reports). What can we learn from such studies and where does one encounter their limits?

2.1 Law and the Girl Child

The sphere of the law continues to occupy a prominent place in the twenty-first century context, which has seen a revival of interest in early and child marriage. Chapter One already showed the trajectory taken by the Indian state in the legal domain with the passing of the Child Marriage Restraint Act (CMRA) in 1978 legislating 18 and 21 years as the minimum ages of marriage for girls and boys respectively. The first scholarly book length study on child marriage in contemporary India published in 2005 by Jaya Sagade was the outcome of her PhD research some years earlier. In a workshop on child marriage conducted in Kolkata in early 2018, Sagade recalled that when she chose this topic for her Ph.D. there was little interest among legal scholars or feminists. The book revisits the history of legislation from the colonial period before explicitly referring to the rationale that historians like Geraldine Forbes

had already remarked upon regarding the 1978 amendment. Sagade quotes from the objects and reasons of the 1978 Act as follows:

“The question of increasing the minimum age of marriage for males and females has been considered in the present context when there is an urgent need to check the growth of population in our country. Such an increase in the minimum age of marriage will result in lowering the total fertility rate on account of later span of married life. It will also result in more responsible parenthood and in better health of the mother and child.” (cited in Sagade 2005: 46)

Sagade believed that these were sufficiently important grounds (unlike the critique offered by Bhatia and Tambe discussed in Chapter One). Sagade’s book was published just before further amendments were made to the CMRA (leading to the amended Prevention of Child Marriages Act (PCMA) of 2006, which will be discussed shortly), and she anticipated many of the new provisions. Her main criticisms of the CMRA focussed on the mildness in its provisions for punishment, which, she contended, betrayed the lack of seriousness on the part of the State in actually tackling child marriage. Under the CMRA punishment took the form of simple imprisonment for up to three months for bridegrooms above the age of 21 years, and for guardians and those involved in conducting the marriage. The offence became cognisable for a period of one year in case anyone wished to conduct a police investigation (this came in response to reports of suicides among child brides in Gujarat) even while the marriage nonetheless remained valid. Sagade went on to ask why, after all this passage of time, it is not possible to take what she thinks ought to be the next step, namely, to declare such marriages void, if not voidable. This is not a simple question and, as we shall come to see, has been at the heart of much subsequent debate in recent years.

Where Sagade’s study is particularly useful is in the chapters that address various dimensions of personal law in relation to the complex legal scenario regarding child marriage in India. According to her, the CMRA should be universally binding, such that personal laws are amended to be in consonance with it, but this has not been consistently applied in all cases. There are discrepancies in the Hindu Marriage Act (HMA) when it comes to grounds for divorce which in 1976 had been set to below the age of 15 years and hence needed to be revised to under 18. As was seen in the Aameena Case in Chapter One, Muslim personal law (MPL) has been particularly complex terrain, made more intractable by the fact that it is not codified, and even more challenging in a growing climate of communalism. Sagade, however, adds that

unlike HMA, MPL is clear about the notion of consent, since marriage is a contract, and, at least from the time of puberty, would be illegal and void if performed without the consent of both parties. It has been possible to make claims that under the MPL, puberty (sometimes said to be around 15 years) is the age at which a girl is competent to marry of her own consent, without requiring the permission of parents. Below this age, a marriage might be valid but could be declared void on attaining puberty if the marriage had been contracted by a guardian other than her father or father's father. (Sagade 2005: 79) As critics are quick to point out, the age of 18 years does not find mention in the MPL, unlike in the Hindu Marriage Act. Interestingly, in the HMA consent is not defined positively but rather negatively – if one is of unsound mind the marriage is voidable at the option of the other party; and secondly if the consent of either party to a marriage was obtained by force or fraud, the marriage would be voidable (Sagade 2005: 77). Nowhere in the HMA has the consent of the parties to a marriage been made an essential condition. Her study points to various other lacunae in related laws, all of which add up to a lack of resolve on the part of the state to take the issue of child marriage seriously. While Sagade's book has been called a socio-legal study of child marriage, it is not an accident that the greatest emphasis throughout is on the law.

In 2006, the Indian state came out with the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (PCMA) meant to overcome constraints in the CMRA. It offered a new kind of architecture with provisions dealing with prevention, protection and the prosecution of offenders. Child marriage became both cognizable and non-bailable, and Child Marriage Prohibition Officers were to be appointed in every state to ensure protection of victims, the prosecution of offenders and to sensitise and create awareness in the community. Punishments were enhanced to up to two years imprisonment and a fine of up to 100,000 rupees. A new step was to make child marriage voidable, that is, to allow "children in the marriage to seek annulment of marriage". The Act enables child marriage to be voidable at the option of the contracting party who was a child at the time of the marriage. If the petitioner is a minor at the time of filing the petition, it can be filed by a guardian on behalf of the minor. Such children were to be provided support, aid and rehabilitation, and children born of such marriages were considered legal and to be provided for. Anyone can report a child marriage whether before or after it has been solemnised. It has been said that knowledge about the law is largely weak or not perceived as a threat. (Nanda and others 2016; Kannabiran et al 2017; Ghosh 2011a). Some commentators see a limitation in the PCMA (eg. NCPCR and Young Lives 2017; MV Foundation 2018) because it fails to declare child marriages invalid outright. The State of Karnataka in 2017 went ahead on its own to make the PCMA void ab initio, and Haryana has very recently followed in February 2020.

This issue has been a matter of dispute for some time, and requires much more careful and nuanced discussion. Many believe that it is in fact better that it be left to the girl or her guardian to go in for an annulment or not, which is what the PCMA allows for. Such a position would look rather to the agency of the girl herself and her capacity to say no to child marriage. For example, Partners for Law and Development (PLD) has raised concerns about the call for criminalization and no-exception laws in relation to under-age marriages especially in cases where young people marry by choice, contending that such a move (criminalization and no-exception) will be especially harmful for girls and boys in contexts of inter-religious and inter-caste alliances. (PLD n.d.)

2.1.1 Criminal Law Amendments and Child Marriage

One indication of the kind of legal thicket that surround marriage in India is the vexed matter of whether the Indian government should have a law that makes the registration of a marriage compulsory. It is not sufficiently known that beyond the many diverse forms of authority (lay, civic, religious) which play their part in governing marriage in our context, registering a marriage itself takes quite different forms, when it happens at all. (Muslim and Christian personal law have registration built into their wedding ceremonies, but not Hindu personal law.) In 2006 the Supreme Court directed all the state governments to enact laws for the compulsory registration of marriage. Among the several reasons propounded, gender justice was one, including that such registration would be a protection from child marriage, forced marriage, trafficking in the guise of marriage, bigamy and so on. In a perceptive study, Gayatri Solanki has shown that compulsory marriage registration “remains an inadequate tool to ensure administrative uniformity, increase women’s access to legal rights, reform conjugality and secularise marriage.” (Solanki 2015: 220) In particular, taking the example of the Rajasthan Compulsory Registration of Marriage Bill 2009 (and a similar enactment in Kerala), contradictions between the law on child marriage and compulsory registration became amply evident. How, indeed, can a child marriage that is considered illegal be registered in the first place? While Rajasthan in the end allowed that such a registration would have evidentiary value (even to enable it to be declared null and void later), Kerala, after going back and forth, decided to retain the ruling that parties have to be minimally 18 and 21 years for state registration. According to Solanki “the issue of how to successfully balance the prevention of child marriage in law with protecting the economic and legal rights of parties to child marriage remains unresolved.” (Solanki 2015: 233)

Recent years have seen considerable legal amendments being made, often done in quick succession on a range of issues relating to child rights, child marriage, the legal age of consent for sex/sexual activity, and the criminalisation of child sexual abuse. Curiously, it is whenever such laws have been amended or new ones brought into existence, that different views relating to child marriage have come to the fore. In 2012 the legal age of consent for sexual activity for girls was raised from 16 to 18 years in the context of the newly created Prevention of Child Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, among whose most problematic provisions was the mandatory reporting of any sexual activity by anyone below the age of 18, regardless of whether it was consensual or not. Many groups were surprised by this particular clause. It brought out dissension between some child rights groups and several women's groups, with the latter not wishing to see consensual sex between adolescents criminalised. In the much debated and publicised 2013 Criminal Law Amendment Act concerning rape, the marital rape exception clause was retained, to not treat sexual intercourse by a man with his wife as rape, unless the wife was below 15 years of age. This created a contradictory situation for women, based on their marital status. For an unmarried girl below 18 years of age, any sexual activity would be considered as an assault, even if the sex was consensual. On the other hand, for a married girl aged between 15-18 years, non-consensual sex would not be considered a crime. Such a situation seemed to propel India right back to the colonial and nationalist views discussed in Chapter One, where conservatives were only too ready to retain lower ages of marriage together with higher ages for non-marital sex in the years preceding the passing of the Sarda Act in 1929.

In October 2017 ongoing discrepancies between different laws were addressed by the Supreme Court such that "sexual intercourse or sexual acts by a man with his own wife, the wife not being 18 years, is rape" (cited in Pratiksha Baxi 2017). From a legal perspective these amendments were seen to "harmonise" the age of consent with laws on child marriage, child sexual abuse and juvenile justice. A flurry of articles appeared in the press after the October 2017 judgement (Baxi 2017, Kumar 2017; Agnes 2017; Mehra 2017). Many of them harked back to the colonial period of legal reform, recalling the contexts of the Phulmonee case and the Sarda Act. Pratiksha Baxi saw the situation where a wife below 16 could not prosecute her husband for rape as an injustice reminiscent of the colonial period, made worse by the fact that aggravated forms of marital rape had also been excluded. She argued not only that the prevalence of child marriage today be seen as a failure of governance, but that all child marriage be considered forced marriage. Krishna Kumar in his newspaper article "Gone Girl" concurred (Kumar 2017) Flavia Agnes, however, argued that there

was considerable confusion over the role of the law in relation to child marriage, and that a large part of the confusion lies precisely in the transformed context of the present time compared to the colonial period. Persisting low ages of marriage in her view were not because of “tradition” but were rather the consequence of poverty, and would see an improvement with better standards of living. Agnes cited elopement cases of underage girls as well as the views of several activists who saw a class and caste bias in the way that the law was being used against child marriage. (Agnes 2017). Madhu Mehra also weighed in acknowledging the need to harmonise discrepancies in criminal law regarding non-consensual sex with a wife below the age of 18, without having to change the 2006 Prevention of Child Marriage Act discussed earlier. According to her, the 2017 Amendment should not affect the PCMA of 2006 by making any marriage below 18 illegal or, in criminal language, make all under age marriages amount to statutory rape. “The judgment, if interpreted in light of the child marriage law, would only strike at non-consensual sex with an underage wife as rape” (Mehra 2017). Mehra goes on to allude to the current “socio-economic realities”, which, however, have hardly been subjected to any serious exploration.

According to Saumya Uma, the judiciary used to adopt a flexible approach in the case of choice marriages of minor girls. Where girls are between 15-18 years of age, the notion of “age of discretion” (which has an older colonial history in relation to guardianship and the custody of minors) has been deployed by the courts where a case of kidnapping and abduction has been brought against the boy by the parents of the girl. Uma cites several cases involving girls under 18, who had been sent to a remand home under protective custody and where parents demanded that she be returned to them. The courts determined the wishes of the girl, granting her the agency and right to be with the husband of her choice. (Saumya Uma 2012: 196-199). In one particular case in 2012 that she cites, the Delhi High Court upheld the marriage of a 15 year old Muslim girl against the wishes of the parents and in her favour. Interestingly, this invited different responses from feminists. The Bharatiya Muslim Mahila Andolan (BMMA) opposed the ruling, calling for the codification of Muslim personal law and that it be brought in consonance with the PCMA. Indira Jaising said that such cases should be considered under Constitutional provisions and not personal laws. Flavia Agnes supported the judgment and agreed with the idea of ‘age of discretion’ against the powers of parental control. (in Saumya 2017: 199-200). But as Uma Saumya goes on to say, it is not as though the courts have been consistent -- other cases have been dismissed outright, or no allowance made for the age of the girl such that any marriage below 18 is treated as “child marriage” and hence an offence.

More recently, Latika Vashist has argued that the more liberal approach towards age of discretion has not been the dominant view in Indian law courts. In particular, she notes the effects of the Amendments to the Rape law of 2013, before which age of consent was 16 years, but more importantly prior to which judges had discretion in matters relating to rape sentencing. Post 2013 under the changed statutory requirement, according to her, there is little room for judicial discretion in cases involving consensual sexual relations where the girl is below the age of 18 years. "In the name of protecting young girls, the amendment has tightened the noose of sexual governance by family, community, the police, the law and the state, stripping minor girls off all sexual agency and turning young boys in consensual sexual relationships with minor girls into rapists who deserve no mercy." (Vashist 2019: 82)

Drawing on nationwide consultations with organisations engaging with the PCMA in their interventions on child marriage, Partners for Law and Development (PLD) have noted how infrequently young girls themselves have used the law in order to exit an unwanted marriage conducted against their wishes before they were of age. Indeed, the PCMA has been a tool in the hands of family members more than any other group, and usually to bring back a daughter who has entered into a marriage of her consent while not yet 18 years. PLD has gone on to question the extremely counter productive consequences of having raised the age of consent for sexual activity among young people to 18 years. In their words:

The capacities for marital obligations in society and in law entail far more responsibility and are very different in nature compared to what is involved in sexual activity and exploration. The age of sexual consent is currently the same as the minimum age of marriage for girls, exposing young couples to the dangers of punitive carceral responses. This is not what the PCMA envisaged. The first and most urgent step in relation to early marriage is to reduce the age of sexual consent from 18 years. (PLD 2019: 27)

At this stage, I would like to say that there is something misguided in seeking stronger forms of criminalisation through the law when there does not exist the necessary understanding of what is undergirding early marriages at the present time, and we are even less well informed about the actual conditions under which the situation would improve for the girls themselves. *What can be said without much ambiguity is that recent amendments to the law across the board have had the effect of making equivalent sexual consent and marriage in relation to a girl's age, and that too in the twenty-first century of the Indian nation.*

Far too few researchers are engaging with how the PCMA is actually working in different regional contexts, especially in relation to other laws such as POCSO, where all under age sexual relations require mandatory reporting. Anecdotally, organisations that are locally active indicate quite contrasting situations, say in a state like Rajasthan with much more rigid social structures compared to West Bengal, where caste endogamy appears more flexible. What role can, for instance, the Child Protection Officers be expected to play when rumours of an under age marriage come their way? What is the future of those in the state of Karnataka after 2017, who suddenly discover that their marriage is now invalid, thus leaving them with no recourse to any legal protections? What assurance can be given that when the law makes an underage marriage invalid, the children born of such a marriage, in a country like India, will somehow retain full legal rights? In what contexts does an awareness of the law actually make a difference?

2.2 State Policy

Beyond the legal sphere (which has clearly received some attention from the women's movement, child rights activists and others), the state has been quite active in the arena of policy (but with much less public visibility or discussion). I do not know whether any direct links can be drawn between the invention of a new governmental figure that appeared in the final decade of the twentieth century and heightened concern for early marriage. SAARC nations declared 1990 to be the Year of the Girl Child. Not unlike what transpired with the International Year of Women in 1975, SAARC then went on to extend the time frame and to pledge the period up to 2000 as the decade of the girl child. One way of gauging the agendas of this period is through the kinds of researches that came to be sponsored. The then Department of Women and Child Development under the Ministry of Human Resource Development set up a central coordination committee across twenty-two women's studies centres in the country in the mode of a national project that hoped to provide a common picture about the condition of the girl child in India. This larger project did not materialise in published form. However, the West Bengal study did get published (Bagchi, Guha and Sengupta 1997). Based on a survey and case studies, the book *Loved and Unloved: The Girl Child in the Family* concentrated on the socio-economic status of girl children and their mothers in both rural and urban contexts, along a range of parameters – health, education, work and so on. Children from the age group 6-18 years from 600 households were surveyed. What is extremely telling is that in all the data presented, their marital status is not a topic of discussion, even though there are indications (when menstruation is being explored for instance) that

some of the girls were already married. (It should be noted that West Bengal is among those states with the highest rates of early marriage.) The overarching findings focussed on the kinds of biases mothers and frequently the girls themselves evinced, often cutting across class and caste, even though many mothers at the same time wanted their daughters to have better futures. Early marriage is not absent, but is more in the nature of an unaddressed element in this West Bengal story of the girl child “pre-conditioned to see herself as a sojourner in her parents’ home. She is told from childhood that her husband’s house is her true home and that she will be married as soon as she grows up.” (Bagchi and others 1997: 206)

One issue in particular did take precedence as the decade of the girl child wound to a close, but it was not child marriage. Against the backdrop of prior studies about “the endangered sex”, came startling discoveries of practices of female infanticide in certain districts within the states of Tamil Nadu and Bihar in the 1980s, and soon thereafter the rise of what was first called female foeticide and later gender biased sex selection. Already in 1990 Amartya Sen made headlines with his essay “One hundred million women are missing.” (Sen 1990) The figure of the woman decidedly gave way to that of the little girl, pre-pubertal, invariably depicted and iconised with pig tails and in school uniform. Indeed, the girl child has become most closely identified with efforts to address “missing women”, now uniformly referred to as missing girls, whether due to excess female mortality or pre-birth sex selection.

Other policy interventions may have more actively focussed on child marriage, whether in the realm of population, women, children and youth. In one study report on child marriage, as many as 96 policies and schemes have been identified across the country which have some bearing on early marriage (Srinivasan and others 2015). The better known ones include the National Population Policy 2000, the National Policy for the Empowerment of Women 2001, the National Youth Policy 2003 and its more recent version in 2014, the National Plan of Action for Children 2005, the National Policy for Children 2013, and the National Plan of Action for Children (NPAC) 2016. In several of them the elimination or abolition of child marriage is listed as an aim. The NPAC 2016 said that it would reduce the prevalence of child marriage to 15 % by 2021. Meanwhile the Ministry of Women and Child Development drafted a National Strategy Document on the Prevention of Child Marriage in 2013.

It provides broad guidance to state and district governments to help them shape their interventions to end child marriage. It adopts a holistic and ecological model and envisions a comprehensive approach to child marriage involving partnerships within and between the Centre, State, voluntary

organizations, families and children/adolescents themselves. This document outlines strategic directions to prevent child marriage under each thematic area including law enforcement, access to quality education and other opportunities, changing mind-sets and social norms, empowerment of adolescents, knowledge and data management and development of indicators that can be monitored. These need to be implemented by various stake holders including the central government, state governments, local self-governments, civil society and non-governmental organizations using convergent and multi-dimensional approaches (Ministry of Women and Child Development, 2013 cited in NCPCR and Young Lives 2017).

However, for reasons not mentioned but which in all likelihood have to do with the change in government with the 2014 national elections, the policy has yet to be finalised and enter the public domain.

Among the many schemes that have been launched both at the central and state level, some of which address the needs of adolescent girls, are conditional cash transfer schemes (CCTs) for the girl child. These are basically variations of the Girl Child Protection Scheme first launched in 1992 by the Tamil Nadu government under the Chief Ministership of Jayalalitha in the face of the re-emergence of female infanticide during the 1980s. In these schemes at various stages in the life of a daughter, beginning with her birth registration, certain amounts of money are put into a state fund in her name. If she completes school and remains unmarried at the age of 18 a lump sum would be received by the girl. With names such as Apni Beti Apni Dhan, Dhanalaxmi, Ladli, and so on, such schemes were invariably burdened with various conditionalities and eligibility criteria, and came to be popularly known as *dahejor* dowry schemes. Many were begun only to be dropped some years down the line, with the possibility of a new one being brought in, both at the central and state levels. Curiously, reviews have shown a scrambling in the very purpose of these schemes (Sekher 2012; Nandi and others 2016). Initially envisaged as an intervention to prevent child marriage or delay marriage till 18, they became also known as schemes meant to address the missing girl child, and to encourage families not to go in for sex selective abortions. Various state governments have started yet another slew of fresh conditional cash transfer schemes with a clear and explicit focus to delay the age of marriage to 18 years for girls, such as Kanyashree and Rajshree in West Bengal, Kalyana Lakshmi and Shaadi Mubarak in Telangana, Chandranna Pelli Kanuka in Andhra Pradesh and Rajashree in Rajasthan. Notice that the very names of these schemes connote marriage rather than the "daughter" more common before.

In a perceptive study conducted in 2018 in select villages in Telangana and Andhra four years after the establishment of schemes in Telangana and only a few months into its beginning in Andhra, U. Vindhya, Nilanjana Ray and Ujithra Ponniah brought out various dimensions of CCTs that echo prior studies (Vindhya and others 2019). It should be noted that these schemes have very quickly become quite well known and even popular, especially in the case of Telangana where a sum of Rs 100,000 would be paid to the girl's mother (from financially poor families) upon demonstrating through documentary proof that the marriage had not taken place before the age of 18 years. (However, just how proof of age and age at marriage could be unambiguously determined where registration is so low or open to manipulation is another problem that this study acknowledged.) Vindhya and her co-researchers were in no doubt that the scheme has found beneficiaries. However, it was not so clear as to whether it is actually addressing child marriage, and even less, whether it is changing perceptions of gender. As they conclude:

The perception that the CCT scheme is for rendering financial assistance for marriage expenditure to poor families seems to be more predominant and primary rather than it being viewed as a measure to curb child marriage. Furthermore, the promise of money appears on the surface to increase the value of women, but seems to be also associated with negative fallouts such as reinforcing dowry and marriage expenses being borne by the bride's family. If early marriage of girls is considered as a gender disempowering phenomenon, then provision of financial assistance by the state seems to be primarily addressing poverty alleviation and not gender inequality. (Vindhya and others 2019: 63)

The overall picture that emerges from this range of policy responses at the level of the State is therefore one that is fitful, and at times somewhat confusing. A plethora of policies and attendant schemes can be identified, but they are often short-lived, with agendas that appear to slide in and out. In particular, what needs more exploration is how policies themselves are made to address rather different problems in the course of their creation and deployment, such as those related to the adverse sex ratio and early marriage. Even where reducing child marriage is the clear aim, there are few signs that the attitude towards the girl has changed. One might in fact be tempted to ask whether an unintended fallout of such schemes is to underscore that girls are indeed a burden, lacking in value, for whom therefore financial compensation is required. Least of all, I might further add, has marriage as an institution come into the picture in any way. In fact, in the study by Vindhya and her colleagues just cited, young girls themselves were found to have developed a greater

interest in their marriage, what with money now coming their way thanks to their very own “elder brother” (*anna* in Telugu) the Chief Minister!

Policies that directly address child marriage have therefore had the effect of reinforcing the idea that girls lack value and equally that a girl’s future lies in her marriage. *Notice therefore that both at the level of recent amendments to the law and in the directions taken by policy, it is marriage at eighteen that is being reinforced and regulated.* Indeed, there may be an even larger problem with the way in which conditional cash transfer schemes emphasize 18 years as the “right” age at marriage, let alone “rewarding” the family at the time of marriage itself. Why should any scheme for the empowerment of girls be tied to her marriage? Why not shift attention to her education instead, fully subsidising girls from secondary schooling to higher education without marriage being in the frame in the first place? There are indications that the government of Rajasthan is considering such a move (Shobhana Boyle, personal communication, June 2020).

We have already seen how, in her study of child marriage, Jaya Sagade castigated the law machinery of the Indian state for not challenging the basic validity of child marriage below the age of eighteen. She argued that there are several international human rights instruments that are sufficient to do so, and also that there is enough social science data to make a case. Her book relied largely on epidemiological research findings available to her at the time, which were overwhelmingly about the negative impact on a girl’s reproductive health if she were to have children below the age of eighteen. Sagade added that to the extent that such information is limited within India, the experience of other countries on the ill effects of child marriage could be brought to the notice of the court. (Sagade 2005: 95). These kinds of arguments – that is to say, the strong focus on international covenants and further more to an international literature – appear to be quite characteristic of the twenty-first century moment in India that has seen fresh attention being paid to early and child marriage.

2.3 Demography in an International Frame

The new visibility around early and child marriage in India today has much to do with international demands of various kinds, including UN led conventions. October 2013 saw the first ever resolutions on child, early and forced marriage adopted at the UN Human Rights Council. A follow-up resolution at the UN General Assembly in 2014 called for the elimination of child, early and forced marriage as part of the post-2015 development agenda. Interestingly, even though India rejected this resolution and

refused to sign, different kinds of interventions have since emerged. The Sustainable Development Goals of 2016 have a Section that deals with gender discrimination and inequality, where section 5.3 is devoted to child marriage (the other sub-sections being on domestic and sexual violence, female genital cutting, women's unpaid care work, reproductive health, and women's representation in parliaments and managerial positions). The UN Secretary General now has to report on an annual basis as to what advances have been made in order that the goal of elimination be reached by 2030. This is what was reported in 2017:

Child marriage is declining, but not fast enough. Around 2000, nearly 1 in 3 women between 20 and 24 years of age reported that they were married before 18 years of age. Around 2015, the ratio was just over 1 in 4. The decline is driven by an even steeper reduction in the marriage rate among girls under 15 years of age during that period. (Source: Report of the Secretary-General, "Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals", E/2017/66)

One of the early major documents to set the tone for subsequent reports was that produced by UNICEF in 2005, called *Early Marriage: A Harmful Traditional Practice*. (All subsequent documents by UNICEF have dropped early marriage and only use child marriage as their terminology.) It begins as follows:

Marriage before the age of 18 is a reality for many young women. In many parts of the world parents encourage the marriage of their daughters while they are still children in hopes that the marriage will benefit them both financially and socially, while also relieving financial burdens on the family. In actuality, child marriage is a violation of human rights, compromising the development of girls and often resulting in early pregnancy and social isolation, with little education and poor vocational training reinforcing the gendered nature of poverty. (UNICEF 2005: 1)

The document went on to declare that since children are not able to provide free and full consent as per the understanding of the Declaration of Human Rights, child marriages cannot have legal effect. The main section of the report offered statistical analyses from across the globe to provide a picture of trends, including links with fertility, contraceptive use, spousal age difference, polygyny, and violence. Maps, graphs and tables compared a range of countries, in which India invariably figured at the higher end, with only Bangladesh and several African nations (such as Chad, Niger, Mali etc.) having higher rates of child marriage.

In 2012 UNFPA published their report *Marrying Too Young: End Child Marriage* (2012). This too was a compendium drawn from health surveys from countries where such data was available, in a frame that saw child marriage as both a violation and a deterrent to development. Considerable focus was placed on the large numbers, and to some extent on disparities and inequalities. The concluding chapter rang alarm bells by offering a forecast for the future based on population growth trends. In a section called "No Time to Lose" the report concluded as follows:

The majority of girls affected by child marriage are living in South Asia and in sub-Saharan Africa. ...Over a 20-year period (2010–2030), a total of 130 million girls in South Asia alone are likely to marry or enter into union as children. This analysis is based on trends in the population dynamics from the past 15 years and assumes no change in the prevalence of child marriage estimated for 2010 through to 2030.

The implications are staggering, and demand swift action. First, strong commitment is needed from all parties to eliminate the practice of child marriage. Even at lower rates, the absolute number of girls likely to marry before age 18 will remain high as a result of population growth. Extra efforts will therefore be required to sustain the reduction in the total number of girls affected by child marriage. Second, even under the best possible scenario, it should be assumed that some girls will marry before age 18. This will demand action on an array of issues around sexual and reproductive health for which societies, governments and communities in particular, should be prepared. (UNFPA 2012: 45)

In 2014 UNICEF brought out a brief 8 page document *Ending Child Marriage: Progress and Prospects*, that has been frequently cited since. (UNICEF 2014) A pie chart highlighted that almost half of all child brides worldwide reside in South Asia and one-third in India (South East Asia and the Pacific contributing another 25%), with much smaller proportions from several African nations, South America and the Caribbean. India is the only country to find individual mention and contributes by far the most numbers of any country. It too concluded with prognoses for the future, while offering different scenarios based on a range of possible rates of decline in child marriage in future years. Estimates were offered right up to the year 2050, in which differential population growth and possible accelerated rates of decline could result in relative shifts from South Asia to a situation where it is sub-Saharan Africa that has the largest proportion and numbers of child brides. (UNICEF 2014: 7)

Notice how these reports amalgamate what are actually quite distinct issues: Marrying below 18 is invariably first announced as a human rights violation, an absolute right that does not allow any room for consent below that age. This is usually followed by saying that while parents may think that an early marriage for their daughter is a good thing, their beliefs are wrong. Topping the list of what is wrong are fertility and health consequences in marrying below 18. Even these are quite different. A higher level of fertility is not in and of itself a harmful practice for a particular mother – rather it is part and parcel of “populationism”, the belief that it is the excessive number of people on the planet that is the primary cause of a host of global ills. This belief, coupled with all kinds of dire predictions, has carried enormous power since Malthus and then Ehrlich’s “population bomb”, and the UN reports discussed above are clearly reviving this fear in a major way, with Africa and South Asia as primary danger zones. (It is another matter that European and white populations are currently worried about the opposite phenomenon – too few births, and the negative consequences of population decline.) Unlike the notion of an absolute right which must be equally honoured whether the child in question is an infant, a ten year old, fifteen or seventeen, the health implications of a pregnancy does not carry absolute consequences – it not only varies by age, but is equally affected by a host of other factors, notably how well nourished the mother is and the kind of ante-natal care available. Finally, the idea that an early marriage in and of itself robs the child of education and employment opportunities does not automatically hold, and depends on much else.

What are the latest figures when it comes to early and child marriage? Table 2.1 draws from UNICEF’s global data base as of February 2020, which is annually updated from sources around the world. I have focussed on India and its major neighbouring countries for which data is available (China reports no child marriage), and some regional summaries. The data for India is that of the latest round of the National Family Health Survey (NFHS 4) of 2015-16 (which will be discussed in greater detail later).

(T1) Table 2.1: Child Marriage in South Asia Compared with Other World Regions, 2013-19

(Percentage of women married before ages 15 & 18, and Percentage of men married before age 18)							
South Asian Countries (arranged in order of Col 3)	WOMEN				MEN		
	<i>Married before 15</i>	<i>Married before 18</i>	Ref Year	Data Source	<i>Married before 18</i>	Ref Year	Data Source
<i>Col 1</i>	<i>Col 2</i>	<i>Col 3</i>	<i>Col 4</i>	<i>Col 5</i>	<i>Col 6</i>	<i>Col 7</i>	<i>Col 8</i>
Bangladesh	22	59	2014	DHS 2014	4	2011	DHS 2011
Nepal	7	40	2016	DHS 2016	10	2016	DHS 2016
Afghanistan	4	28	2017	ALCS 2016-17	7	2015	DHS 2015
India	7	27	2016	NFHS 2015-16	4	2016	NFHS 2015-16
Bhutan	6	26	2010	MICS 2010			
Pakistan	4	18	2018	DHS 2017-18	5	2018	DHS 2017-18
Myanmar	2	16	2015	DHS 2015	5	2015	DHS 2015
Sri Lanka	1	10	2016	DHS 2016	--		
WORLD REGIONS (arranged in order of Col 3)							
West & Central	13	39			4		
Least Developed	12	38			6		
Sub-Saharan	11	35			4		
Eastern &	9	31			5		
South Asia	8	29			4		
Middle East &	3	17			–		
East Asia &	1	8			–		
World	5	20			–		
Indicator definitions:	Percentage of women aged 20 to 24 years who were first married or in union before ages 15 and 18. Percentage of men aged 20 to 24 years who were first married or in union before age 18.						
Source:	UNICEF global databases, 2020, based on Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS), Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) and other nationally representative surveys.						

Notice the variation in Table 2.1 in rates for marriage below 18 years from Afghanistan in the West to Bangladesh and Myanmar in the East. Both Bangladesh and Nepal – going by the kind of data sets available – have higher rates than India, while Pakistan

and Afghanistan are significantly lower. Sri Lanka, a country which in any case has much better social and economic indicators than the rest of South Asia, has the lowest in the region. For all countries marriages below age 15 years are minimal, as is marriage for boys below 18 years.

A major collaborative study between the International Centre for Research on Women (ICRW) and the World Bank (with funding from the Bill Gates and Melinda Gates Foundation) has ventured into estimating the “economic costs of child marriage”, which they openly say needs to be considered beyond standard concerns of gender inequality. (See, amongst several publications brought out by the World Bank, Quentin Wodon and Ali Yedan 2017, Quentin Wodon, Chata Male and others 2017). The study covered 19 countries, and included Nepal and Bangladesh, but not India. These were their conclusions: By far the greatest costs were due to greater fertility with lower ages at marriage. If “child marriage and early child bearing were eliminated completely, the benefits that would accrue by 2030, simply from the reduction in population growth, would exceed USD 5 trillion”. (Wodon and Yedan 2017: 8) Much of this would come from budgetary savings with less pressure to provide a range of public services to fewer children and their mothers. Compare this with their findings in relation to women’s decision making power: Here they were unable “to make definitive conclusions about the impact of child marriage on women’s agency” (Wodon, Male and others 2017: 6). Nonetheless, this did not prevent them from adding that should a lack of decision making lead to higher fertility then the economic impact would indeed be substantial.

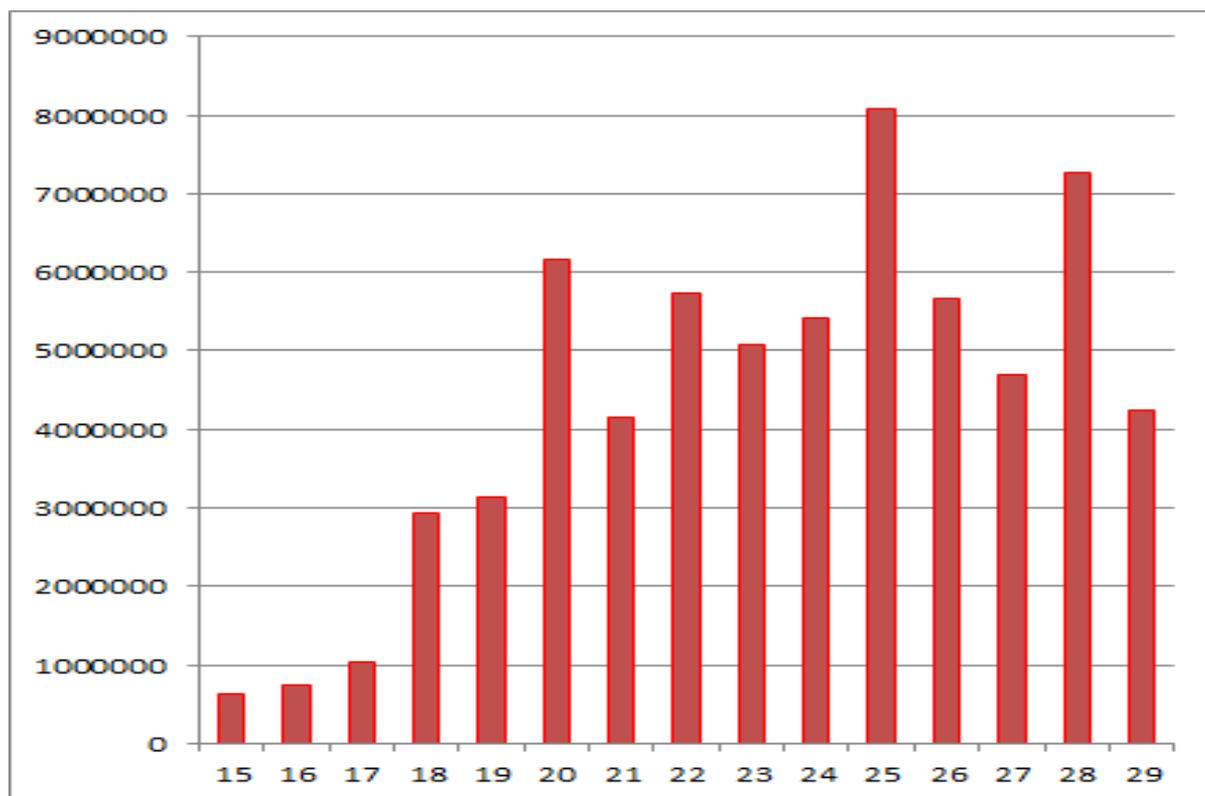
This is the kind of international staging that appears to have set in motion several responses in India.

2.4 Measuring Early and Child Marriage in India

In the welter of statistical reports on early and child marriage that have been coming out in very recent years, it is imperative to begin by asking about the nature of the data and the data sources available. One of the first questions one would have expected to see explored in current studies is the issue of age itself, but curiously this is not much discussed. Chapter One provided a historical context for thinking about the emergence of age rather than stages of life as a guiding concept in modern societies, with the Indian colonial context witnessing a protracted contest over the age of the child wife. How would conceptions of the significance of, say, knowing how old one is, when one was born and when married translate into reporting age to

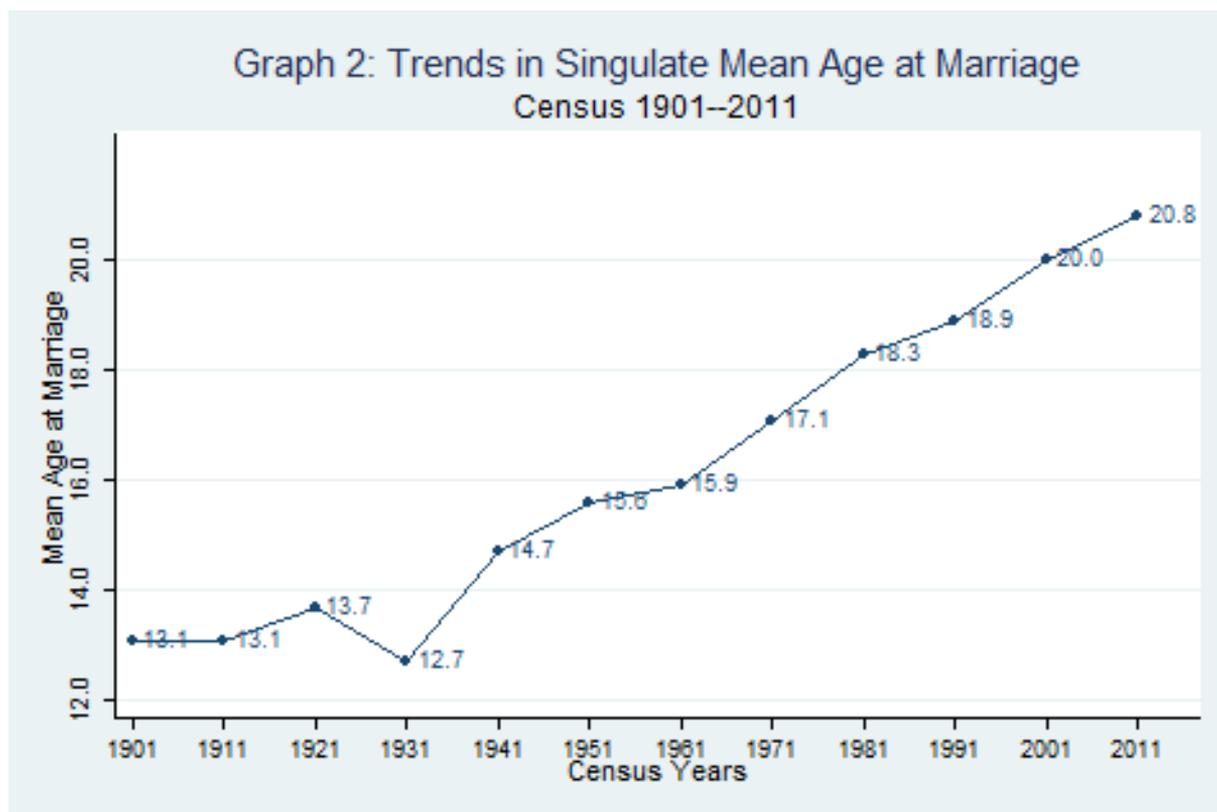
enumerators collecting data, and how much has changed in more contemporary times? This has been a subject of some reflection in relation to the history of the Indian Census during the colonial period, where data on age threw up several peculiar patterns compared to “normal distributions”, that in turn led to conjectures of various kinds. Thomas Alborn has discussed a situation where many did not know their age and Brahmans in particular did not wish their age to be known, and where there were implausible spikes among adolescents and the elderly (Alborn 1999). Consider how much more complex all this might become when one is dealing with reporting on age at marriage during the course of the twentieth century when legal ages of marriage underwent major transformations. Graph 2.1 gives data on the absolute number of married women in India in the most recent Census 2011 by reported ages. Notice the almost three fold jump in the reported number of married women from age 17 to 18 years. This could be interpreted in more than one way – families might well be waiting for their daughters to reach the legally permissible age of 18 before solemnising a marriage, or there could be some degree of more deliberate misreporting as well. Notice also that ages like 20 and 25 (multiples of 5) show unusually high numbers, which is more indicative of not knowing one’s exact age in the first place.

(F1) Graph 2.1: Absolute Numbers of Married Women in India by Age, Census 2011



According to R. B. Bhagat, (Bhagat 2016) directly asking respondents about their age at marriage suffers from several shortcomings – there may be a recall lapse, especially in the absence of marriage registration as well as birth registration. In such situations people have what are called digit preferences (such as 10, 20 or 30). Among older cohorts mortality may affect the count and among young cohorts there is what is called the truncation effect, since, even if unmarried at the time of the survey, they may well marry soon thereafter. He has therefore followed a method attributed to the demographer John Hajnal called the indirect method whereby it is the proportion of single women at different ages that is used to determine the singulate mean age at marriage (SMAM). (See Bhagat 2016: 4 for more details). Other authors simply work with different measures of average such as mean or median ages of marriage.

(F2) Graph 2.2: Trends in Singulate Mean Age at Marriage for Women, Census 1901-2011



Graph 2.2 (adapted from Bhagat 2016) depicts singulate mean ages at marriage over the course of more than a century based on the Census. It shows a noteworthy dip in 1931 attributed to the effect of the Sarda Act of 1929 which raised the age of marriage for girls to 14 years and led to a rush of early marriages before the law took effect. Otherwise the picture appears to be one of a steady increase in the SMAM by over 7 years from 1901 when it was 13.1 years to 20.8 years in 2011. This is not explained further – one is left to surmise that this upward creep is due to what the literature likes to call the forces of modernisation. Mean ages at marriage, however, are too broad to be of much use when it is the proportion of those who marry at very young ages that is at issue, since we do not know how much dispersion there is.

Age at marriage and patterns of child marriage are measured in different ways according to the possibilities and limitations of different data sources, on the one hand, and the pressure to conform to international standards of measurement, on the other. Some reports refer to the *incidence* of early or child marriage, while others speak of its *prevalence*. These terms actually derive from the medical study of epidemiology (disease), where incidence refers to the number of fresh cases in a given

period, whereas prevalence refers to all cases at a given point in time, whether old or new. One may wonder whether this terminology is the most apt for measuring rates of marriage.

One report by the National Centre for the Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) and Young Lives, (NCPCR 2017) has taken the route of trying to use the incidence of child marriage, which they have defined as the number of ever married persons who were married before attaining the legal age of marriage (18 years in the case of girls and 21 years in the case of boys) among the total population of that particular age group. Different age groups can be considered here. Their effort at capturing incidence boils down to a way of assessing more recent trends, and does not conform to the epidemiological definition. In countries like India with an older history of very early marriage, it can be argued that it is important to look at some kind of measure of child marriage across different age groups that are well below the legal age of marriage. Changing trends among different age groups might provide clues about how notions of childhood and adolescence are undergoing certain developments of their own.

Most other reports, however, follow the nomenclature of prevalence, which also bears little relation to the epidemiological definition. The most widespread use of the term prevalence is the one calculated as the percentage of persons who are married before the age of 18 in the age group of 20-24 for girls and before the age of 21 years among the 25-29 age group for boys (making allowances for the different legal ages of marriage for boys and girls in the Indian context.) One of the much cited advantages of this particular measure of prevalence is that it is retrospective. In other words, it is able to overcome the problem of truncation mentioned earlier, where attempts to measure incidence among very young cohorts at a particular point in time could lead to significant levels of undercounting. It also has the advantage of dealing with age groups of men and women who are within the legal ages of marriage, and who therefore do not have to admit to a currently illegal act. At the international level, the definition of child marriage follows the United Nations' definition where a child is defined as 'every human being below the age of 18 years'. The rate of prevalence of child marriage as per the UN definition is the proportion of those married before the age of 18 among women (or men) in the age group of 20–24 years. The numerator is therefore the number of women married below the age of 18 who are currently in the age group of 20-24 and the denominator would be the total number of women in the age group of (20-24). An alternative measure in India in relation to the Census has been to look at the number of women married below the age of 18 years in the last four years prior to the Census (Goli, ActionAid 2016; Sanjay Kumar 2017).

As already mentioned earlier on, collecting data on marriage and age at marriage is difficult to do. There can be misreporting, under reporting and so on, though it is hard to surmise whether there would be more under reporting at very young ages compared to ages closer to the legal age. The strength of the Census is that it would be the most reliable source at the district level and for different age groups, even if it does not provide the measure of prevalence that has become the international standard. Neither can it provide incidence rates of early marriage, if by that is meant a clear picture of new cases relative to the previous Census. NFHS has been coming out at irregular intervals so that while it does provide prevalence data based on the international definition, we have to contend with the absence of regular data over time. The most recent NFHS 4 has massively expanded its sample size to make its district level data more robust, but this is not the case for previous rounds. But even with NFHS 4 there may be a problem with the size of the sample when it comes to measuring something like child marriage, which would not be evenly distributed across households. On the other hand, NFHS offers some variables for analysis, including at unit level, while highly prized Census data, such as its occupational categories, come out very late (detailed occupational data has not even been published for Census 2001).

2.5 Select Statistical Reports on Child Marriage

Apart from UNICEF and UNFPA, a whole range of organisations have brought out or commissioned reports on child marriage in recent years – the Population Council, the International Centre for Research on Women (ICRW), Plan Asia, the Planning Commission, the National Commission for the Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR), Action Aid, The World Bank, among others, along with a few individually authored studies (eg. Bhagat 2016, Desai and Andrist 2010, Sanjay Kumar 2017, Sanjay Kumar 2020). A small number of regional studies have also emerged (eg. Chakravarty 2018, Kannabiran and others 2017) With very few exceptions (eg Nirantar 2015, Ghosh 2011a,b,c; Sen and Ghosh 2022) the approach is demographic and statistical.

National reports such as those by ICRW, Action Aid, NCPCR and so on, tend to have similar overall structures even if they present their data and arguments differently. What can be confusing is that it is not obvious what exactly their statistical findings are and what inferences are being drawn from other studies. Some have discussed causes for early marriage (drawing from other studies, which are often micro studies, or studies from other countries altogether) even before presenting their own findings.

Others begin with statistical pictures of prevalence (or incidence) before moving on to correlations with different socio-economic characteristics, and then further, to probable causes and consequences. Reports draw from different data bases and quite often from more than one, depending on what was available at the time of its preparation. Thus the ICRW report by Padmavathi Srinivasan, Nizamuddin Khan, Ravi Verma, and others titled *District-level study on child marriage in India: What do we know about the prevalence, trends and patterns?* conducted in association with UNICEF (Srinivasan and others 2015), mainly draws from the District Level Household Survey (DLHS) 3 of 2007-08, supplemented by Census 2001 and 2011. This report worked with prevalence data measured in the standard way as the proportion of women in the 20-24 year age group who have married before 18 years. The ActionAid report *Eliminating Child Marriage: Progress and Prospects* by Srinivas Goli (2016) is based on the Census, along with supplementary data from IHDS and NFHS. Some of its analysis is based on a simple measure of the proportion of all those married before age 18 years, while using the prevalence measure for other data sources where feasible. Another major study by Young Lives and NCPCR undertaken in 2017 argued for the exclusive use of Census data and came up with their concept of incidence of early marriage across different age groups. In November 2018 they brought out another much shorter study based on the initial unit level data of NFHS 4 (NCPCR 2018).

So the obvious question here would be, are there any significant differences in these reports, whether in terms of their data sources or their modes of analyses? There is, indeed, considerable overlap and convergence, even when not explicitly stated. Since several of these reports came out around the same time, they hardly refer to one another. Each one of them begins from the surmise that there has not been sufficient analysis of existing data sets especially at the state and district levels.

The ActionAid study used absolute numbers to show firstly that India is way ahead: According to Census 2011 India has a total of over 100 million persons who married below the age of 18 (regardless of their current age), Bangladesh being a distant second at under 30 million. 85% are girls. 100 million under 18 years of age marriages in India in the entire population as of 2011 would therefore be something of a stock figure. The same study also showed that seven states -- Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal, Rajasthan, Bihar, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh had the highest proportional shares (in that order), which is obviously affected by their respective population sizes.

The ICRW report, the ActionAid study and the essay by Sanjay Kumar offer district level maps of India based on their respective sources of data. The district map of the ICRW study was based on DLHS data 2007-08, and the prevalence of under 18 in the age group 20-24 years among women. It displays considerable variation across the country, including significant contrasts within a particular state, with high prevalence clustering in the east, west and south. Such clustering is equally evident in the ActionAid study, which uses Census data based on the number of under 18 years marriages in the last four years since the time of the Census, i.e. during the period 2007-11. This will be discussed in the next chapter. The district wise proportions for all girls (rural and urban) based on Census 2011 is provided in Map 3.1. The ActionAid study also gives maps for those married by age 15, and all maps are disaggregated by urban and rural location. Though there is still some clustering in each of these maps, the proportions drop sharply for those who have married by 15 years (the average being just 3.1%) compared to the all India average of 17.2% for those below the age of 18 years in Census 2011. Urban locations drop even further. The IHDS 2011-12 data set for those in the 20-24 age group yields higher proportions, but here too the difference between those marrying by age 15 years (6.6%) and below 18 (36.2%) is huge (Desai and Vanneman 2016).

What makes district wise disaggregation important rather than simply remaining with state level figures is that several districts become visible for their higher proportions of early marriage in states with overall low average prevalence (such as certain districts in Gujarat in the West, Arunachal Pradesh in the North East or Karnataka in the South). The ICRW report authors were particularly surprised to find southern districts being included, given the overall pattern of better social indicators among southern states including those pertaining to gender.

Sanjay Kumar (2017) has been particularly concerned in his article to measure the decline in child marriage, which has been very significant in recent decades – whether this be measured from Census 2001 to 2011 or the NFHS rounds 3 (2005-06) and round 4 (2015-16). The declines range from 21-50% over a decade across all states. But there are differences as well – in the Census 2011 estimate Rajasthan has the highest rates while for NFHS 2015-16 the initial published results placed West Bengal in the highest position. (This has since been corrected with revised data to Bihar, closely followed by Bengal.) Sanjay Kumar's main worry, however, has to do with limitations in the sample size in the NFHS at the district level, and whether this has repercussions for actual differences in the shares of higher and lower prevalence districts in both these data sets.

The 2017 report on Child Marriage by Young Lives for NCPCR stands apart from the rest because of the way it has chosen to use a certain notion of incidence of child marriage, based entirely on Census 2011. It is not clear how incidence is being defined, and probably the term should not have been used in the first place. For instance, incidence figures are initially introduced according to the following definition: percentage of ever-married girls currently below the age of eighteen and of boys below the age of 21, which at the national level are 1.32% for girls and 1.9 % for boys. The reason for these small percentages is that the denominator is the entire population. So it could certainly be asked as to how useful such figures are. At the same time, one might compare the NCPCR absolute figure of 5 million married girls who were below the age of 18 years at the time of Census 2011 with the ActionAid report's figure of over 85 million women married below the age of 18 in the entire population, also taken from the same Census. (The figure given by Sanjay Kumar of all those women who married below eighteen years in the last four years prior to the Census 2011 is 6.5 million.) We could think of these three absolute figures as different snapshots for capturing early/child marriage in India. The NCPCR figure is clearly oriented towards current practices but would certainly suffer from truncation effects, while the Action Aid figure is heavily weighted by older women. More useful in the NCPCR report are the figures given for proportions of those married within very young age groups such as 10-14 years, 15-17 years for girls – namely 2.9 and 10% respectively, and for boys within the age groups 10-14 years, 15-17 years and 18-20 years which are 1.6, 3.3 and 11.2 % respectively for Census 2011. (NCPCR 2017: 38 ff.) Their district level analysis pretty much corroborates the map of 3.1, where several districts from states such as Meghalaya and Arunachal Pradesh join the more well-known high prevalence states like Rajasthan and Bihar. Rajasthan consistently has the highest rates of incidence whether for boys or girls, and for all age groups, with several districts topping the list repeatedly.

But there is one important issue that the NCPCR study foregrounds by virtue of the way incidence is defined in the case of boys, which is to use the legal age of 21 years and not the international gender neutral definition of 18 years to measure under age marriage. The fact that the incidence figures calculated based on Census 2011 in this report are actually higher for boys than for girls based on legal ages is striking, if hard to fathom, and calls for further verification. In the case of the NFHS, the prevalence figures based on male ages at marriage are not higher than for girls but are nonetheless significant. The NCPCR study discusses the higher male under age marriage rates as though this somehow indicated that boys are even worse off than girls. The point that needs to be made here is a rather different one: In a situation where there is an invariable age difference in conventional marriages between men

and women (in the region of 5-7 years), an argument can surely be made for looking at below legal ages for men rather than the international figure of 18 years. The reason to do so is quite simply that efforts to raise the age of marriage for girls would be blocked if male ages of marriage remained much the same, especially those under the legal age.

The issue of changing trends has already been brought up. Long term trend analysis of the kind given in Graph 2.2 showed singular mean ages of marriage rising from pubertal levels at the turn of the century to over 20 years in 2011. Given the limitations of the Census, similar long term trends are harder to compute for measuring child marriage, and survey data sets like DLHS and NHFS were first introduced during the 1990s. Prevalence figures of early marriage based on all the four rounds of the NFHS also reveal declines (from 1992-93 to 2015-16). A definite shortcoming in almost all reports is that no explanations are provided for the declines, as though these are simply to be expected with the passage of time. To make things more complicated, trends are not always decreasing over the entire period at the state level as the ActionAid study points out, and rates of decline also vary. While on the whole, states with very high levels of prevalence in 1992-93 show ongoing declines, a small number reveal a mixed pattern of increases and decreases, though in all cases there are overall declines from the 1990s to the most recent rounds of either NFHS or DLHS. In the next chapter we will look briefly at current data from the Census and NFHS.

Among the most recent reports to come out at the time of writing this book is the one prepared by Young Lives for NCPCR in November 2018 (NCPCR 2018). It is more in the nature of a fact sheet than a report, and is the first to be based on unit level data of NFHS 4. Like other studies that used the initial data sets released through NFHS 4, it suffers from the small technical drawback in that revised data released showed that Bihar moved to being the number one state followed closely by West Bengal. The report offered snapshots of underage marriages as well as teenage pregnancies, largely corroborating the significant declines from NHFS 3 already discussed. For reasons that are not entirely clear, much of the report is centred on prevalence rates for the age group 15-19 years, that is, on those within this group who have married before the age of 18 years. Perhaps this choice was made in order to capture the most recent declines in the youngest cohorts. They come up with a national average of 11.9% under age marriages in this group. However, there are problems in choosing an age range which would suffer from truncation effects (those not married below 18 years at the time of NFHS survey might yet marry before 18). There could be other objections relating to the size of the sample for this age group.

2.6 Demographic Explanations

Along with providing a picture of patterns and trends across the country at different state or district levels, all the reports are concerned with establishing causes and consequences, whether through statistical analyses of correlation or by citing other studies. Questions of urban and rural differences, regional conditions and the socio-economic backgrounds of the married women themselves – based on poverty/wealth measures, education, caste, religion and so on – are deployed. Here an important distinction would be between characteristics that pertain to individuals and those pertaining to regions. The former is easier to establish than the latter. This is brought out in the ICRW study, which sought to establish correlations between the socio-economic conditions of particular districts and levels of prevalence of early marriage. Some measures such as the presence of health committees or improved sources of drinking water went hand in hand with lower rates of underage marriage, but, quite counter intuitively, levels of schooling and literacy were negatively correlated with marriage at the district level. Their conjecture was that in such districts, poorer less literate families were invested in the labour of their daughters and therefore married them off later compared to families who married their better educated daughters early for “cultural reasons”. Nor did greater proportions of Scheduled Caste or Scheduled Tribe populations in a given district show signs of being significantly correlated with higher proportions of early marriage. (Srinivasan and others 2015: 53-54)

On the other hand, individual or household characteristics correlate in much more straightforward or predicted patterns. Srinivas Goli has shown this through both simple proportions (from NFHS data) and regressions (on IHDS data). There are correlations by levels of poverty, by caste (Scheduled Castes followed by OBCs, with upper castes having lower rates), by literacy and levels of educational attainment and much higher rates for rural compared to urban location. As far as religion is concerned there are no differences between Hindus and Muslims, while Christians and Sikhs show very much lower rates of early marriage. The ICRW study showed that there is very little difference in the rate of early marriage for women who were illiterate and had up to primary levels of schooling – it is in fact only among those with graduate levels of education that early marriage is no longer found. There is next to no discussion of work and labour in relation to early marriage in the major reports discussed so far.

2.7 Causes of Early Marriage

All reports address themselves to the causes of early and child marriage. The curious thing here, however, is that none of the major data sets such as the Census or NFHS (or DLHS) can be used to determine the cause of early marriage. All that such data sets are useful for is to look at patterns of correlation, as discussed above. So reports are quite ready to draw from all kinds of micro level studies, and that too from all over the world, to make claims about causes. These take the invariable form of a long list -- economic, social, and cultural reasons of various kinds. Economic considerations basically argue that a daughter is in the nature of an economic burden on her family and therefore her transfer to another family through an early marriage is the way of obtaining relief. Dowry only adds to this burden – the younger the age of the girl and the less educated the boy the lower the dowry. This then is seen to be the route taken by poor families. Social causes are often attributed to the low levels of education of parents who in turn do not see much need to educate their daughters either. Cultural reasons range all the way from the social norms of particular communities for whom early marriage is the only practice they know; to the special value placed on virginity and the purity of girls before marriage. This leads to fears of loss of honour should marriage be delayed much beyond puberty, all of which is compounded by anxieties of sexual violence. Various regionally specific religious festivals are also mentioned that are auspicious occasions for marriages to take place, or very specific marriage practices such as marrying sisters at the same time, marrying both a brother and sister into the same family, or consanguineous marriages (marrying permitted relatives such as cross-cousins or maternal uncles). Some reports also add that crises caused by a range of factors – from natural disasters, farmer indebtedness, to civil wars and geo-political conflicts -- have a negative impact on marriage practices, with girls being married at younger ages than was the case before. While some reports provide evidence of all these causes from other studies (including from other countries), this is not always the case. This means that some reports exhibit an air of vagueness when it comes to this section compared to all the statistical analyses.

Allowing for some misgivings here, let me also say that there is something truly remarkable about the extensive reasons that – however well-rehearsed and even stereotypical– are thus listed out. Surely one must pause over the extraordinary range of the kinds of influences that are associated with early marriage and its persistence. Between the ongoing effects of tradition and culture, the endemic constraints of poverty, the deep disadvantages of disparate levels of rural development, the

heightened costs associated with marriage, absent or unsatisfactory provisioning of schooling and education, norms of sexuality, honour and growing fears of violence against girls, a whole host of local and global conflicts and crisis events, and the heightened effect of all of these on social groups that are already vulnerable, one should at the very least acknowledge the enormous challenges that are involved in engaging with early and child marriage.

But there are also obvious shortfalls with such lists, especially in the statistical reports. First of all, the picture provided is invariably static in nature, and all these reasons are never in themselves the subject of any detailed discussion. Secondly, the limitations of demographic analyses that turn correlations into causation become particularly palpable here. For example, what at a more precise level is the relation between education and marriage, and in what direction does causation work? Are girls being taken out of school to get married or might they be just dropping out of a pointless education only then to be married off? When cultural reasons are given considerable importance, a characteristic shared across classes, then how does one account for variations in the age of marriage by those who share the same “culture”? Are considerations of modesty and honour not central to the socialisation of middle class girls for whom the right age of marriage is set much higher? If puberty has been so critical in the history of marriage, how does puberty figure today, especially when age at puberty has been falling? What makes rural and urban location so significant in the Indian case? The institution of marriage itself hardly figures in most reports, and remains largely in the background. Moreover, even though economic factors are usually the first to be mentioned and poverty much highlighted, such a basic structural condition hardly gets further attention. More generally, an enumeration of causes does not help much in providing explanations for changing trends in different regions of the country.

Those studies that explore people’s own perceptions through more qualitative field based analyses (of which there are very few) can be insightful here. One such would be the work of the sociologist Biswajit Ghosh who has written extensively on rural Malda district in West Bengal, among the poorest regions in the state, with large proportions of disenfranchised social groups by caste and among Muslims. Through focus group discussions with different “stakeholders” – mothers, fathers, elders and daughters – even the standard list of familiar causes acquires traction in the light of the different emphases offered. These are visible in Table 2.2. Notice how different the order of preferences is for daughters compared to all the others.

(T2) Table 2.2: Perceptions of Four Groups of Stakeholders about Early Marriage of Girls

Order of Preference of Causes	Fathers (%)	Mothers (%)	Elders (%)	Daughters (%)
1 st	Poverty (94)	Marriage is Essential (100)	Poverty (94)	Lack of Awareness (100)
2 nd	Marriage is Essential (92)	Poverty (91)	Marriage is Essential (93)	Lack of School (93)
3 rd	Lack of Awareness (82)	Lack of Awareness (87)	Lack of Awareness (86)	Lack of Proper Road (92)
4 th	More Dowry Later (73)	More Dowry Later (86)	Fear of Elopement (81)	Poverty (76)
5 th	Security of Girl (66)	Security of Girl (67)	More Dowry Later (71)	Illiteracy (71)
6 th	Fear of Elopement (65)	Fear of Elopement (67)	Security of Girl (69)	Large Family (72)
7 th	Illiteracy (65)	Illiteracy (62)	Illiteracy (63)	More Dowry Later (40)
8 th	Large Family (40)	Large Family (58)	Large Family (35)	Security of Girl (20)
9 th	Lack of School (26)	Lack of School (30)	Lack of School (31)	Fear of Elopement (10)
10 th	Lack of Proper Road (26)	Lack of Proper Road (30)	Lack of Proper Road (31)	Marriage is Essential (10)

Based on Source: FGD Data, Ghosh 2011a.

But Ghosh is not therefore providing us with a simple story of new role models and positive change through the agency of adolescent girls, though that is where he places greatest emphasis. The hope directed towards education by girls is particularly poignant. One of the case studies Ghosh highlights is that of the daughter of a daily wage labourer who was the first in her locality to pass class ten, only to become unmarriageable with “too much education” and not enough dowry for a “suitable” match. What happens when there is no alternative to marriage, asks Ghosh, and their worlds have so little to offer? (Ghosh 2011a, 2011b, 2011c)

2.8 Consequences

When it comes to the consequences of early marriage in the current crop of reports on child marriage the picture that is painted is usually uniformly dire, and along a range of parameters, from health to violence, social isolation and overall disempowerment. But it is often not clear on what kinds of data sources or studies

some of the claims are based. As we already saw from the World Bank and ICRW studies conducted on multiple countries by Quentin Wodon and his team on the economic costs of underage marriage, the only indisputable costs that could be established were fertility and health related, while on other counts, such as violence, decision making and work there were few indications that age at marriage was a critical vector. In other demographic reports too, health and fertility are the major focus and for both the mother and the child, with the problems of child birth below the age of eighteen particularly emphasized. Much of the concern here dovetails with prior studies of reproductive and child health. By far the sharpest associations in the past have been between early marriage and fertility. This concern over population growth takes us back to the discussion in Chapter One regarding the 1978 CMRA law in India, as well as the “populationism” discussed earlier on in this chapter.

A growing literature in India has focussed more specifically on the health aspects of early marriage. Interestingly, this literature has shifted focus from the prior one on fertility, probably because of rapid declines in fertility in several states in India, which have not gone hand in hand with equal declines in early marriage. This stands in considerable contrast to the ICRW and World Bank study mentioned before. In other words (and this is not dwelt on in this literature), the small family is being increasingly realised even among poorer populations and regions (like West Bengal, Andhra and Telengana) so that the earlier link between child marriage and greater fertility has been weakening. What remains as a very central focus now is that in the Indian context marriage is followed immediately by child-bearing, and this is particularly true of early marriages. Adolescent growth is put at risk biologically with child bearing before the age of 18, along with risks to the child, a theme that was discussed in Chapter Two. Thus, for instance, an adolescent may even lose weight during a pregnancy, far from gaining any. Several studies have therefore been dwelling on the significance of age for childbearing (eg. Santhya and others 2010; Jejeebhoy 1998; Santhya and Jejeebhoy 2003; Raj and others 2009.)

In a study published in 2003 analysing data from NFHS 1998-99 and a few other available studies, Santhya K.G. and Shireen Jejeebhoy from the Population Council focussed on “married adolescent girls’ sexual and reproductive needs”. On the one hand, they conclude that “for large proportions of young women, marriage and childbearing occur before physical maturity is reached, and are accompanied by malnutrition, obstetric risks, lack of decision making, and mobility to acquire pregnancy, contraceptive, and other reproductive health services, and with little autonomy over sexual and reproductive lives” (2003: 4376). Notice, however, their careful formulation: Under age marriage is *associated* with major deprivations – from

lack of nutrition to lack of health services, rather than making the claim that it is the principal *cause*. *Once again one must probe further – are these not links that establish that it is the most vulnerable that marry early while those who are economically better off marry at higher ages, whose correspondingly better health indicators speak to their wealth status and access to health care more than mere age?* Age occupies a contradictory place in their analysis – in one place Santhya and Jejeebhoy say that it is younger cohorts (especially in South India) who display more decision making in their marriages than older cohorts. But soon after they say the opposite – older women, even uneducated ones, have a more enhanced decision making authority than an adolescent, even one who has completed secondary education. In a later study based on a sample of their own, Santhya K.G. and others (2010) repeated the emphasis on the risks and vulnerabilities faced by women who marry before 18 years compared to those who married later. But once again, their results are not uniform – they found no differences in everyday decision making or what they called “self-efficacy” (which might be likened to an individual sense of self or agency) across age, though on other counts like communication between spouses and sexual violence differences were significant. A word of caution here: One needs to be particularly circumspect in interpreting survey based results dealing with sensitive issues in marital relationships including violence. Room must be given for the fact that better educated women from non-poor backgrounds would be much more circumspect in their answers compared to their poorer less educated counterparts. Even though this study aimed to control for various parameters such as education and wealth, it is unclear to what extent this is achievable when in fact early marriage in their sample was so strongly skewed by illiteracy, rural location and poverty. Basic issues of health and nutrition are particularly hard to disaggregate from underlying conditions of deprivation.

As Srinivas Goli, Anu Rammohan and Deepti Singh remark in their study of women’s nutritional status, “the ramifications of early marriage and early child-bearing are more severe in the Indian context, given the burden of poor pre-pregnancy anaemia and undernourishment among the women and poor access to health-care” (Goli and others 2015). This brings in the question of the larger context within which to assess how important age per se is when dealing with questions of women’s health and nutrition. After all, as we saw in Chapter Two, there has been some disagreement over the specific contribution of age in the health risks associated with teenage pregnancy. In any case, the disadvantage of biological age ceases with the age of 18 years, or one might be tempted to say, with marriage at 17 years, allowing for pregnancy and child birth by 18. In the Indian context, it is only too well known that poverty is the major reason for the malnourishment of huge proportions of our population, (compounded by gender biases towards women), and it is poor women

who form the largest proportions of those who marry early. In the study of Srinivas Goli and others on women's nutritional status just cited, it was only marriage at ages of 25 years and above where women's thinness (as a measure of under nourishment) showed the most significant decline, after controlling for other socio-economic variables. This is an extremely high age of marriage for India, which is not only well above the biological and legal benchmark of 18 years, but is associated with urban middle class life styles and corresponding marriage markets.

Perhaps because small proportions among the non-poor are also found to be marrying early, the need to tackle poverty does not figure significantly when it comes to what needs to be done in most reports. References to the empowerment of girls abound but these are invariably couched within the frame of overcoming "tradition and culture" in order to delay marriage till 18 years. Stringent implementations of the law are always demanded. Changing mindsets through education and especially through media and communication strategies are the most foregrounded in the sections dealing with the role of interventions. But what exactly changes for a young girl who reaches the age of eighteen and is then married, if other considerations remain the same? Apart from biological arguments about the physiological maturity of the female body to bear children without undue risks, it remains to be demonstrated as to what else would improve in a girl's life and why. Reports dealing with India certainly need to be much more circumspect about making the case that from the age of 18 women's chances for autonomy and choice in marriage increase, along with greater economic and employment opportunities. In fact, none of the studies remark on the fact that women who marry at younger ages in India have higher work participation rates than those who marry above 18 years.

2.9 Where Do We Take the Knowledges of Demography?

Having reflected at considerable length on the insights of demographic studies it is necessary to step back and try and take stock. There is absolutely no doubt – India has by far the largest absolute number of women who have married before the internationally stipulated age of 18 years. This fact alone ensures that India will always figure as a standalone country in global reports, unlike regions like sub-Saharan Africa, the Caribbean, or South Asia more generally. But what consequences follow from this, and how should the population size of a country like India, that is poised to becoming the most populous country in the world, be brought into the picture? More than ever before, it is really important as to how one goes about

interpreting big numbers, at a time when the analysis of such numbers carries so much authority.

As we have seen, there are clear indications that the older links between child marriage and fertility (also discussed in Chapter One) have gained even more traction in the new millennium. The present chapter has provided examples from reports of UNICEF and UNFPA replete with alarming predictions about future trends. What they were suggesting is that child marriage was somehow the main cause of population growth, quite apart from all the problems that attach to “populationism”. The World Bank added its weight by estimating that child marriage resulted in an enormous economic cost, for reasons directly emanating from fertility and health. As we saw, this economic cost was measured in terms of *savings to public health investments with fewer births*. Here I would like to pose a query: Most third world states are investing far too little in public health, according to basic international norms for such spending, India included. Regions characterised by higher levels of early marriage are amongst the poorest, with the worst outreach when it comes to even basic health facilities. A highly problematic – indeed unethical -- interpretation of the World Bank study would be to simply push women in such contexts to marry later, all the while preparing to cut back even more on the already meagre investments in health. How can this be justified? Secondly, in countries like India (and in others like Bangladesh) the situation is actually unexpectedly curious – fertility rates are declining considerably and small families are increasingly being realised in practice, *including in the very regions where higher rates of child marriage persist*. In an online news portal *The Wire* demographic and population experts Srinivas Goli and Neha Jain have demonstrated in no uncertain terms the “fallacy” in current talk of high fertility and population growth, whether by Indian state leaders or the international aid community. As of 2020, India’s total fertility rate (TFR) is down to 2.2, just 0.1 point from what is known as the population replacement level of 2.1. In direct contrast to the alarmist predictions about future trends that we saw in UNICEF and UNFPA reports, they estimate that India will stabilise at a TFR of 1.7 children per mother by 2050 (Srinivas and Jain 2020). Demographers should in fact be giving this much more attention and comprehensively delink the ongoing tendency to equate marrying too young with population explosion.

Another extremely critical issue concerns the ways in which associations between underage marriage, adolescent pregnancy and the health outcomes of mother and child are being selectively analysed. As recently as 2019 a study published in the *Lancet* uses a lot of very ambiguous language coupled with highly sophisticated statistical techniques to establish the “social, biological, and programmatic factors

linking adolescent pregnancy with early childhood undernutrition” using NFHS 4 data (Nguyen, Scott, Neopane, Tran, Menon 2019). In spite of using the careful language of “associations” between adolescent pregnancy, poor living conditions, poor health services, low levels of education, undernutrition in the mother and factors such as stunting in the first born child, and in spite of several caveats in the conclusion about directions of causation between an adolescent mother, poverty and the health of her baby, their diagrams and final recommendations make it clear that the principal “cause” is somehow the adolescent pregnancy itself. This is their interpretation:

Children born to adolescent mothers are at risk of being undernourished. Adolescent pregnancy is related to child undernutrition through poor maternal nutritional status, lower education, less health service access, poor complementary feeding practices, and poor living conditions. Policies and programmes to delay pregnancy and promote women’s rights could help break the intergenerational cycle of undernutrition through many routes. (Nguyen and others 2019: 1).

As I have argued in a published response, their article “is about rigorous methods chasing a flawed hypothesis. ... As it turns out, the poverty of the mother plays the greatest role of all by far both in relation to her undernourishment and that of her child, but they never emphasize this. All the authors concede in their concluding discussion is that their cross-sectional design (using data from a single time period) reduces causal inference. For example, becoming pregnant early might lead to reduced education or wealth; however, a woman from a poor background and lower education might be more likely to become pregnant early. Surely the best way to break the intergenerational cycle of undernutrition ... would be to pick the factors that are playing the strongest role in perpetuating it. In this case it would be to address the poverty of the mother – which could be done in a myriad of ways, beginning with the most direct method of nutritional programmes for girls and women through a range of institutional mechanisms from anganwadis to schools. However, the authors choose to concentrate only on delaying the age of pregnancy, even though this is the weakest link of all” (John 2020). Though they mention “women’s rights” rather loosely, there is no discussion of what its ramifications might be in meaningful terms.

My own research on the same data sets clearly establishes that age at marriage (followed by child bearing) is less significant than levels of poverty when it comes to the nutritional status of mothers and their children. In the Appendix to this report, for those who are interested in the actual numbers, the results of multivariate logistic regression models have been provided in two Tables 7.1 (in relation to the mother)

and 7.2 (in relation to the child). Notice how inconsequential age at marriage is in relation to anaemia. Anaemia is one of the principal causes of maternal mortality in India, due to excessive blood loss at the time of child birth. Notice further that as much is gained in child stunting if the mother just moves out of the lowest poverty quintile as marrying when she is at least 21 years or more, with everything else remaining the same. Srinivas Goli, Rammohan and Singh's study mentioned earlier in this chapter showed that it was only when women married at the age of 25 that their poor health indicators reduced to a significant degree (Goli and others 2015), and the *Lancet* study referred to above says as much as well.

I would therefore make the case that much more attention needs to be paid to the social and economic conditions characterising regions and groups with a high prevalence of under age marriage. The Indian story is full of regional variations. Unfortunately, the existing demographic reports say far too little about these regions and what makes them distinctive. Some picture of the regional economies in those zones where large proportions are marrying early is therefore required. For example, agrarian economies structured by poor peasant households unable to sustain themselves through self-cultivation, supplemented by largely male seasonal wage work in agriculture and migration to near and distant cities is a widespread reality in large swathes of India, and would broadly "fit" the very regions that also record higher than average proportions of early marriage. Even some non-poor families in such contexts who may own land (and are hence to be found in better off economic quintiles in NFHS surveys) may be highly constrained in terms of avenues of upward mobility and advancement, whether via the "pathways" of education or opportunities of employment. But none of this features in any report. These are critical considerations which will be more fully addressed in Chapter Four.

In some reports the terminology of "hotspots" has been deployed (once again drawn from the repertoire of the study of disease) as a way to set apart those districts with the highest rates, where girls are considered more vulnerable. Here a word of caution is needed. A "hotspot" is usually referred to in epidemics because of the fear of spread if not contained, thus placing people at risk. But when districts are being called hotspots in the context of child marriage this is not the danger. The single most significant finding that remains unanalysed when it comes to India's large numbers is the rate of decline in the proportion of underage marriages overall. While it is true that there were anomalous increases in some instances, and some degree of misreporting should be allowed for, longer term trends showed considerable declines. More specifically, all data sources show that along with such declines (whether it be according to declines from Census 2001 to 2011 or from NFHS 3 (2005-06) to NFHS

4 (2015-16)), the biggest shift has been from marriages conducted by or before age 15 years to those under 18. To repeat what I said earlier, child marriage in twenty-first century India is effectively becoming late adolescent marriage. Narrowly defined biological health risks due to age alone (compared to other factors) when it comes to child-bearing cease with the age of 18. What implications would such changes have in the worlds of child-women?

One must examine declining trends in the light of the huge array of reasons for early marriage that have been routinely provided, to the point of becoming something of a stock in trade in existing studies. All the causes – economic, social, cultural, sexual – which are experienced as multiple and interlocking constraints by families, such that marrying off one's daughter should be done well "in time" to secure her future before leaving it "too late", are, therefore, not static. But the way these causes tend to be presented is as though they were timeless and traditional, when this is palpably not the case. Furthermore, a very common tendency is to use the statistical presence of early marriage among some non-poor families in high prevalence rural districts to claim that these practices are ultimately "cultural", once they are not fuelled by sheer poverty. It is not quite clear what is meant by this, especially when the institution of marriage itself is so rarely under discussion. When it comes to notions of women's empowerment (measured in this literature by decision making, by violence, by employment opportunities and so on) there is no simple scale of greater empowerment along higher ages at marriage. This is a very critical issue that will be addressed further in subsequent chapters, one that is far more complex than these kinds of studies seem to allow for.

This is why, to go back to my remarks at the beginning of this chapter, I believe we need to press further into those disciplinary and thematic domains that so far have not been sufficiently yoked to the question of understanding child marriage in contemporary times. This chapter began with looking at the trajectories taken by law and policy to address child marriage. International and local players are pushing to make any marriage below 18 a criminal offence. We also saw the mixed fortunes of state policies, including the ways in which conditional cash transfer schemes to curb child marriage reinforced the devaluation of a daughter, who now represents a burden that the state will compensate for at the time of her marriage, if conducted at the right time. *Both law and policy have been converging to produce the normative girl from poor families who must somehow overcome vulnerability by delaying her marriage at least till she is 18.* This has been bolstered by the statistical production of this new "other" – in the twenty-first century she is an adolescent in terms of her age, who may have never been to school or may even have a secondary education,

but who must be prevented from marrying as a “child” under the laws of the land and according to international covenants. As an “other” she remains fixed and static, rarely provided the necessary context that is shaping her life chances, waiting to be granted the right kind of agency by state actors and NGOs.

This chapter has focussed on recent concerns around early and child marriage. Against this background the next chapters will concentrate on the empirical research that we conducted – with suitable macro data for the micro data of the study.

Chapter - 3

Context Setting for the Study

3.1 Introduction

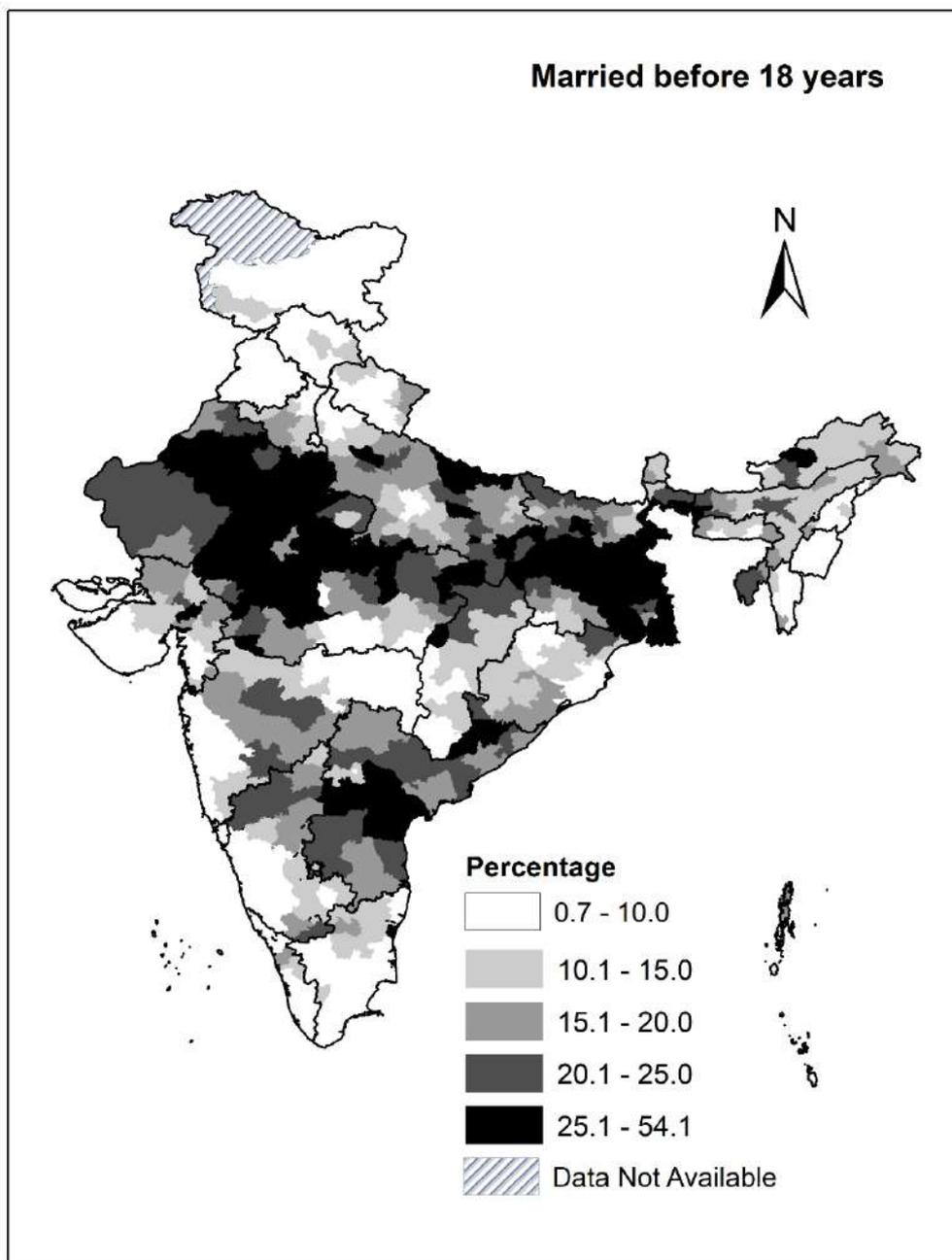
As the introduction and Chapter two have indicated, the current concern in countries like India about the prevalence of child marriage is part of a twenty-first century global moment. Several studies have been undertaken in recent years by organisations as well as individuals, and newer ones continue to emerge. This study was conceptualised as an empirically oriented research project that would draw from different kinds of sources, with a focus on the contemporary situation.

The following Map has used data from Census 2011 and provides an all India district wise picture of those who have married below the age of 18 in the last five years leading up to the Census, that is between 2007-2011. The all India average is 17.2%, and districts range from a low of 0.7 % to a high of 54.1%. High prevalence districts are those above 25%, which are coloured black. Notice that there is a concentration of such districts in the eastern region (select districts of West Bengal and Bihar), in the western region (mainly in Rajasthan), and in the south (Telangana and Andhra.)

The Census should be the first port of call, given the nature of its data which covers all households and is therefore the most robust source of information available.

Broadly speaking, high prevalence districts correspond to regions which are considered "backward" by conventional socio-economic indicators. However, as other studies have noted, there are no unique correlates between regional characteristics and ages at marriage. One of the early studies brought out by ICRW found that levels of literacy and schooling at the district level did not correlate with age at marriage, nor did proportions of Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe populations (Srinivasen et al 2015). It would appear that regional patterns and differences are complex, and would be the product of a whole range of factors, some of them historical, some social and economic. This study is less interested in finding "root causes" for these regional variations than in placing the question of marriage within its requisite context. More importantly, this study is more concerned with tracking change in the present time. Even so-called backward regions are not isolated pockets outside of larger developmental processes.

(F3) Map 3.1: District wise Percentages of all Women Married below 18 years in the Period 2007-11, Census 2011 (S. Goli and Md. Juel Rana)



3.2 Choice of Sites of the Study: Using Census Data on Age at Marriage

Given the clustering of high prevalence districts in the West, East and South of India, three states were chosen for this study – Rajasthan, West Bengal and Telangana respectively. Within these, one rural high prevalence district was chosen. By way of a contrast, the district corresponding to the respective state capital was the second district to be chosen. Sawai Madhopur and Jaipur in Rajasthan, Murshidabad and Kolkata in West Bengal, and Mahboobnagar and Hyderabad in Telangana were the choices. Rural districts were purposively sampled from among the very high prevalence districts in terms of their accessibility for study. The choice of state capitals was made again purposively in order to capture the other end of the spectrum in comparison to rural districts – that is to say, an urban district with corresponding levels of development, socially and economically. The Tables below provide first pointers regarding the variations in age at marriage in the states and districts chosen for the study in comparison to the India average using Census data.

(T3) Table 3.1: Singulate Mean Age at Marriage (SMAM) for India, selected states and districts, 2001

	Total			Rural			Urban		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
India	22.5	24.8	20.2	21.9	24.1	19.6	24.0	26.3	21.6
Rajasthan	20.4	22.1	18.5	19.7	21.4	17.9	22.3	24.1	20.3
West Bengal	23.0	26.0	20.0	22.2	25.1	19.2	25.1	28.0	22.0
Telangana	21.7	24.2	19.3	20.8	23.2	18.4	23.4	25.9	20.9
Jaipur	21.0	22.7	19.1	19.2	20.7	17.5	22.7	24.4	20.6
Sawai Madhopur	19.8	21.5	17.9	19.2	20.9	17.4	22.1	23.9	20.1
Kolkata	25.9	28.3	23.1	-	-	-	25.9	28.3	23.1
Murshidabad	21.4	24.2	18.5	21.1	23.9	18.2	23.4	26.3	20.4
Hyderabad	24.0	26.4	21.5	-	-	-	24.0	26.4	21.5
Mahbubnagar	21.2	23.8	18.5	20.9	23.4	18.2	23.6	26.2	20.9

(T4) Table 3.2: Singulate Mean Age at Marriage (SMAM) for India, selected states and districts, 2011

	Total			Rural			Urban		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
India	23.3	25.4	21.0	22.7	24.8	20.5	24.4	26.6	22.1
Rajasthan	21.4	23.1	19.7	20.8	22.4	19.1	23.1	24.8	21.3
West Bengal	23.1	26.0	20.1	22.4	25.2	19.5	24.5	27.5	21.6
Telangana	23.2	25.5	20.9	22.6	24.9	20.2	24.0	26.4	21.7
Jaipur	22.2	23.8	20.5	20.7	22.2	19.1	23.5	25.2	21.8
Sawai Madhopur	21.3	23.1	19.3	20.8	22.6	18.8	23.1	24.9	21.1
Kolkata	25.7	28.2	23.1	-	-	-	25.7	28.2	23.1
Murshidabad	21.8	24.3	19.2	21.5	24.1	18.9	23.0	25.5	20.4
Hyderabad	24.5	26.8	22.2	-	-	-	24.5	26.8	22.2
Mahbubnagar	22.6	25.1	20.0	22.3	24.8	19.6	24.1	26.7	21.6

(T5) Table 3.3: Percentage of population married below specified age in India, selected states and districts, 2011

	% females married below 16			% females married below 18			(Currently married women between 2007-11)		
	Total	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban
India	3.07	3.86	1.41	17.24	20.79	9.78	37626730	25488352	12138378
Rajasthan	10.49	12.52	4.04	31.58	35.87	17.99	2305576	1752726	552850
West Bengal	5.73	6.74	3.30	29.24	33.84	18.23	3255894	2296301	959593
Telangana	3.08	4.18	1.48	19.29	25.27	10.57	1065565	631920	433645
Jaipur	11.02	18.60	3.52	30.86	46.23	15.64	232111	115526	116585
Sawai Madhopur	12.28	13.80	5.33	36.77	39.95	22.20	45573	37399	8174
Kolkata	2.00	-	2.00	11.03	-	11.03	121355	0	121355
Murshidabad	10.22	11.02	6.71	41.60	43.59	32.85	269772	219737	50035
Hyderabad	0.98	-	0.98	6.72	-	6.72	110489	0	110489
Mahbubnagar	5.49	6.05	2.35	27.78	29.99	15.52	123891	104966	18925

Census 2011, Calculated using the number of currently married population of last 5 years (marital duration: 0-4 years)

Tables 3.1, 3.2, and 3.3 provide snapshots of the states and districts chosen using Census data from 2001 and 2011. Mean age at marriage is one of the standard indicators in comparing trends in age at marriage. The indicator used in Tables 3.1 and 3.2 is called the Singulate Mean Age at Marriage (SMAM). It is defined as the

average length of life as a single person (i.e. who has not married at the time of the survey) expressed in years among those who marry before the age of 50. It is a synthetic indicator calculated from the marital status categories of men and women aged 15 to 54 on the date of conducting the census or survey. Table 3.1 provides SMAM data at the all India level, for the three states and for the respective districts as on 2001, for men and women, disaggregated by urban and rural location, while Table 3.2 provides the same data for 2011. Notice that the all India SMAM has increased by almost one year for women, that is from 20.2 in 2001 to 21 years in 2011. The three states have distinct trends – while the SMAM for women in the three states is less than the all India figure for women, in the case of West Bengal the difference is negligible for the year 2001. Interestingly, West Bengal has seen practically no change from 2001 and 2011 while both Rajasthan and Telangana have seen a significant rise of more than one year from 2001 to 2011, albeit from lower figures. Urban figures are significantly higher including the urban figures for the predominantly rural districts of Sawai Madhopur, Murshidabad and Mahbubnagar. Figures for men have been provided by way of comparison – here too there are variations, with Rajasthan showing the lowest SMAM figures and West Bengal having values outstripping the all India average.

For the purposes of this study, Table 3.3 provides information available from the Census with regard to underage marriage – for all India, and for the relevant states and districts. Since 2001, the Census has been reporting on the proportion of those who have married below a certain age in the last five years (including the year of the Census). For Census 2011 this translates into the proportions of those who have married below 16 years and below 18 years between 2007-2011. Notice that the figures for those who have married at or before 15 years are in double digits in the case of Rajasthan only. These figures have become extremely small in urban contexts. With the exception of Rajasthan, then, Census data is already pointing to a very significant aspect in the current pattern of underage marriage: most of these marriages are happening in the age group of 15-17 years. While the universal definition of a child is anyone below the age of 18 years, the vocabulary that is more appropriate here would be adolescent marriage or early marriage rather than child marriage. The proportions of marriage below the age of 18 in the last five years leading up to 2011 in rural areas is particularly high in Rajasthan (note that rural Jaipur has a proportion of 46.23% that is higher even than that of rural Sawai Madhopur with 39.95%). In terms of total figures for the districts, Murshidabad has the highest prevalence at 41.60% followed by Sawai Madhopur and Mahboobnagar. Jaipur district has an unusually high prevalence for a district that contains the state capital, perhaps due in some part to the fact that it has a numerically significant rural

component, with neighbouring districts also having a high prevalence. Hyderabad and Kolkata districts have no rural components. In the case of Jaipur, even its urban component is on the higher side compared to Kolkata or Hyderabad (which has the lowest). Note also that urban Murshidabad has characteristics of high prevalence.

The major disadvantage with Census data is that it is not possible to work at the unit level. Hence in this study the most frequently used secondary data source is that of the National Family Health Survey, and the NFHS 4 2015-16 in particular.

3.3 National Family Health Survey

The National Family Health Survey is a representative sample survey that was initiated in 1992-93 and has become the most important source of data on health and reproductive matters. From 1992-93 five rounds of NFHS have been completed, the most recent being NFHS 5 2019-2020. It focusses on women in the age group 15-49 years. The fourth round NFHS 4 conducted in 2015-16 is the single most important source of contextual data for this study. NFHS 5 was undertaken in 2019-2020, which meant that it had to be conducted during the pandemic. Its unit level data was released in July 2022, and it has only been incorporated at specific points. We have therefore relied on NFHS 4 conducted in 2015-16 for providing a representative sample background for the present study, allowing for a time gap between when it was conducted and the time when primary data collection was undertaken, namely during 2018-19. It is with NFHS 4 that the total sample size expanded over five fold to almost 7 lakh respondents such that, as we shall see, it has become possible to provide information down to the district level. The main focus of NFHS is health related data. It provides data on age at marriage, and since it is possible to work with this data at the unit level, we are able to calculate age at marriage at different ages, and use the standard definition of the prevalence of early and child marriage as the proportion of those in the age group 20-24 who have married before the age of 18 years. Age at marriage can be cross tabulated with the background characteristics of the respondents. Given the strong focus on health related data, NFHS also has its limitations when it comes to social and economic variables. Much smaller samples are sometimes drawn upon regarding specific topics. For example, only 15% of the respondents have been questioned on women's occupational status, and there are just two questions on education – mean years of schooling and educational attainment. In spite of these limitations, NFHS will be the single most important source of secondary data for this study, as the following tables and subsequent tables in the rest of this report will attest.

Table 3.4 provides a state wise picture of marriages within the age group 20-24 years at different ages across all the major states of India using NFHS 4. Those with higher than average figures than the national average of 26.8% marrying below 18 have been marked in yellow. Confidence intervals have been provided along with sample size. When it comes to a number of smaller states the figures are not robust. This snapshot has been provided to give a comparative picture of the rates of the three states that have been chosen for the study – Rajasthan, West Bengal and Telangana in comparison to other high prevalence states such as Bihar, Jharkhand, Arunachal Pradesh, Tripura, Madhya Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh, and lower prevalence states across the rest of India. Notice that this data coming from NFHS 4 mirrors the map at the beginning of this chapter using Census data.

(T6) Table 3.4: Marriage rates of women in age group 20-24 at or below different ages: States of India, NFHS 4

	Below 15	15-17	At 18	19-20	21 and above	Never Married	n
India	6.6 [6.4, 6.7]	20.2 [20, 20.4]	10.9 [10.7, 11]	18.2 [18, 18.5]	10.2 [10, 10.4]	33.9 [33.7, 34.2]	1229 66
Andhra Pradesh	7.2 [6.5, 7.9]	25.8 [24.6, 27]	13.1 [12.2, 14.1]	18.9 [17.8, 20]	8.5 [7.7, 9.2]	26.6 [25.4, 27.9]	5086
Arunachal Pradesh	7.4 [3.6, 14.7]	16 [10, 24.8]	8.5 [4.3, 16]	12.4 [7.2, 20.7]	7.3 [3.5, 14.5]	48.3 [38.5, 58.3]	96
Assam	8.3 [7.3, 9.3]	22.5 [21, 24]	10.4 [9.3, 11.5]	16.2 [14.9, 17.5]	7.6 [6.7, 8.6]	35.1 [33.4, 36.9]	3020
Bihar	12.5 [11.9, 13.2]	29.9 [29, 30.8]	14.8 [14.1, 15.6]	19.1 [18.3, 19.9]	7.2 [6.7, 7.7]	16.4 [15.7, 17.2]	9567
Chandigarh	0.8 [0.1, 7.1]	11.9 [6.8, 20]	5.2 [2.2, 12]	8 [4, 15.4]	8.5 [4.4, 16]	65.6 [55.6, 74.4]	97
Chhattisgarh	2.6 [2.1, 3.2]	18.8 [17.4, 20.2]	12.8 [11.6, 14]	20.2 [18.8, 21.7]	10.5 [9.5, 11.7]	35.1 [33.5, 36.9]	2980
Goa	3 [1.1, 8.4]	6.7 [3.4, 13]	3.9 [1.6, 9.5]	7 [3.6, 13.4]	7.5 [3.9, 13.9]	71.8 [62.8, 79.2]	115
Gujarat	6.8 [6.2, 7.5]	18.1 [17.1, 19.1]	10.6 [9.8, 11.5]	18 [17, 19]	9.7 [8.9, 10.5]	36.8 [35.6, 38.1]	5454
Haryana	4 [3.4, 4.8]	15.4 [14.1, 16.7]	10.3 [9.3, 11.4]	22.5 [21, 24]	14.9 [13.7, 16.2]	32.9 [31.3, 34.6]	3097
Himachal Pradesh	0.9 [0.4, 2.2]	7.7 [5.7, 10.3]	9 [6.9, 11.7]	16.8 [13.9, 20.2]	17.7 [14.7, 21.2]	47.8 [43.6, 52]	543
Jammu & Kashmir	1.6 [1, 2.5]	7.1 [5.8, 8.7]	4 [3, 5.2]	10.3 [8.7, 12.1]	10 [8.4, 11.8]	67.1 [64.4, 69.7]	1209
Jharkhand	8.7 [7.7, 9.7]	29.2 [27.6, 30.8]	13.1 [12, 14.3]	16.9 [15.6, 18.2]	6 [5.3, 6.9]	26.2 [24.7, 27.7]	3226
Karnataka	4.9 [4.3, 5.4]	16.6 [15.6, 17.5]	10.3 [9.5, 11.1]	18.5 [17.5, 19.5]	10.6 [9.8, 11.4]	39.2 [38, 40.5]	5774

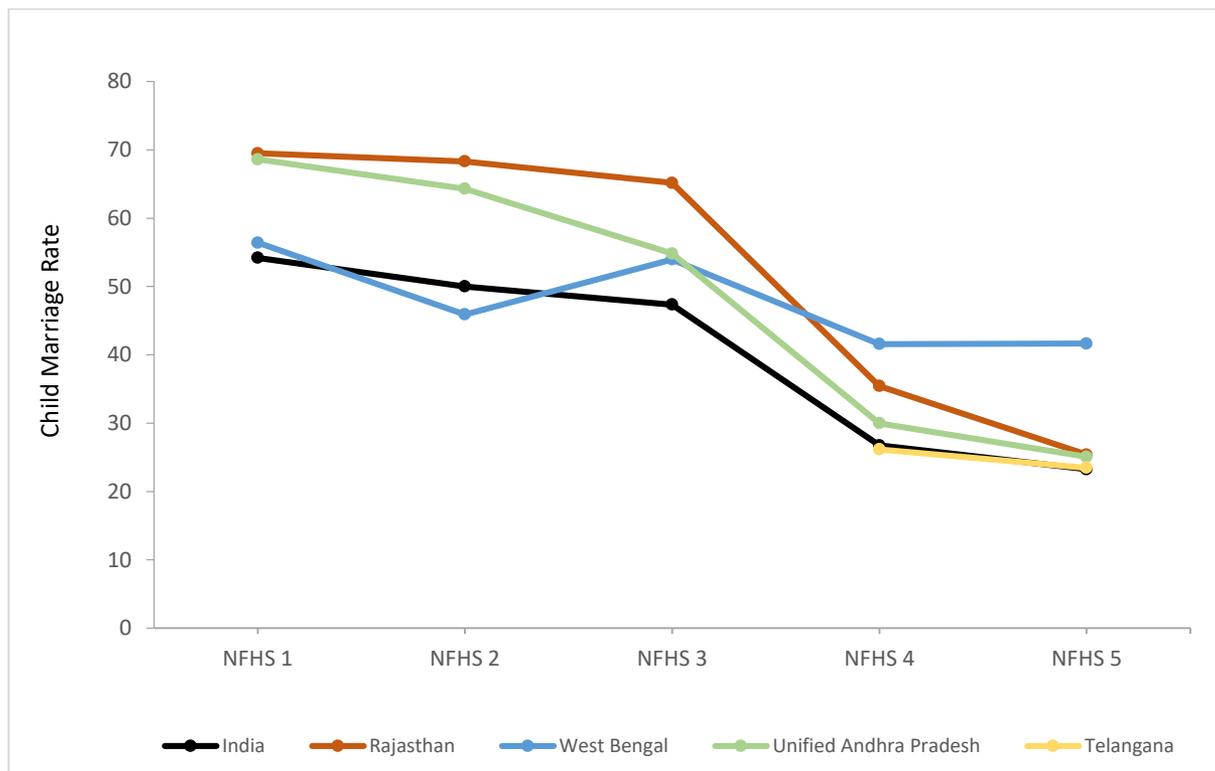
Kerala	0.4 [0.2, 0.8]	7.2 [6.3, 8.2]	7.4 [6.5, 8.5]	17.3 [15.9, 18.8]	14.8 [13.5, 16.2]	52.8 [50.9, 54.7]	2655
Madhya Pradesh	8.3 [7.7, 8.9]	24.1 [23.2, 25]	12.1 [11.4, 12.8]	20 [19.1, 20.8]	8.7 [8.1, 9.4]	26.8 [25.9, 27.8]	8115
Maharashtra	5.6 [5.2, 6]	20.7 [20, 21.5]	10.5 [9.9, 11]	17.7 [17, 18.4]	11.5 [10.9, 12.1]	34 [33.2, 34.9]	1175 8
Manipur	1.7 [0.6, 5]	12 [8, 17.5]	8 [4.9, 12.9]	16.1 [11.5, 22.2]	11.1 [7.3, 16.5]	51 [43.9, 58.2]	186
Meghalaya	3.9 [2.2, 7]	13 [9.5, 17.4]	6.7 [4.3, 10.2]	14.6 [11, 19.3]	8.1 [5.5, 12]	53.7 [47.8, 59.4]	281
Mizoram	2 [0.5, 8.2]	8.9 [4.5, 16.8]	6.1 [2.7, 13.3]	13.6 [7.9, 22.3]	6.5 [2.9, 13.8]	62.9 [52.6, 72.2]	91
Nagaland	2.6 [0.9, 7.5]	10.7 [6.4, 17.5]	6.5 [3.3, 12.4]	13.5 [8.6, 20.7]	9 [5.1, 15.4]	57.7 [48.9, 66]	127
Delhi	3 [2.3, 3.9]	11.3 [9.9, 12.8]	7.3 [6.2, 8.6]	18.9 [17.1, 20.7]	10.7 [9.3, 12.1]	48.9 [46.6, 51.2]	1879
Odisha	3.4 [2.9, 4]	17.9 [16.7, 19]	10.6 [9.7, 11.5]	18.6 [17.5, 19.8]	10.2 [9.3, 11.1]	39.4 [37.9, 40.8]	4275
Punjab	0.7 [0.4, 1.1]	7 [6.1, 8.1]	7 [6, 8]	15 [13.7, 16.5]	14.2 [12.9, 15.6]	56.2 [54.3, 58.2]	2510
Rajasthan	12.2 [11.5, 13]	23.2 [22.3, 24.2]	11 [10.3, 11.7]	18.9 [18, 19.9]	8.9 [8.2, 9.5]	25.8 [24.8, 26.8]	7171
Sikkim	3.5 [0.8, 14]	11.5 [5.2, 23.6]	6.3 [2.1, 17.4]	9.3 [3.8, 21]	10.2 [4.3, 22]	59.3 [45.3, 71.9]	51
Tamil Nadu	2.8 [2.5, 3.2]	13.5 [12.7, 14.2]	8.6 [8, 9.3]	18.2 [17.4, 19.1]	13.5 [12.7, 14.2]	43.4 [42.4, 44.5]	7974
Tripura	9.5 [6.8, 13.2]	23.5 [19.3, 28.3]	11 [8.1, 14.8]	16.5 [13, 20.9]	8.8 [6.2, 12.3]	30.6 [26, 35.7]	342
Uttar Pradesh	5.8 [5.5, 6.1]	15.3 [14.8, 15.8]	9.6 [9.2, 10]	19.4 [18.9, 20]	10.9 [10.5, 11.3]	39 [38.3, 39.6]	1997 0
Uttarakhand	2.2 [1.5, 3.3]	11.6 [9.8, 13.6]	7.8 [6.3, 9.5]	19.7 [17.4, 22.1]	13.9 [11.9, 16]	44.9 [42, 47.8]	1094
West Bengal	9.1 [8.6, 9.7]	32.5 [31.6, 33.4]	13.5 [12.8, 14.2]	15.5 [14.8, 16.3]	7.8 [7.3, 8.3]	21.6 [20.8, 22.4]	1008 7
Telangana	7.1 [6.4, 8]	19 [17.8, 20.3]	11.1 [10.2, 12.1]	17 [15.9, 18.2]	11.6 [10.6, 12.6]	34.1 [32.6, 35.6]	3922

3.3.1 State wise Trends across different Rounds of NFHS

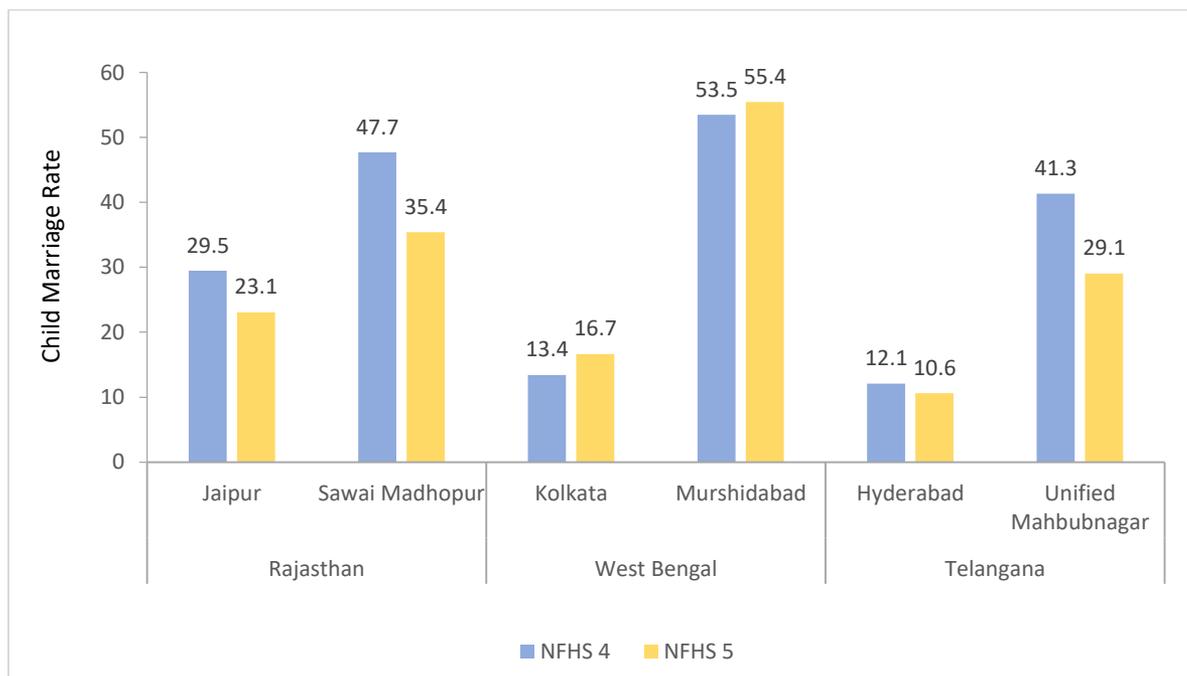
This study concentrates on the contemporary period, so much so that most of the data analysis will concentrate on NFHS 4. However, it would be interesting to provide some information on trends over time across different rounds of the NFHS from the first round in 1992-93 to the latest round of NFHS 5 in 2019-20. This is only possible at the state level since district level data could only be provided from NFHS 4 onwards with its expansion in sample size. The Figure 3.2 shows trends in marriage below 18 years among those in the age group 20-24 years at the time of the survey (the standard international definition) at the all India level and for the three states West

Bengal, Rajasthan and “unified” Andhra Pradesh. “Unified” Andhra was necessitated because the state of Telangana was created out of erstwhile Andhra Pradesh in 2014 and so it would not be possible to have longer term trends before NFHS 4. The trends for Telangana for NFHS 4 and 5 have also been given. Since these are higher than average prevalence states their values are above those of India, with the exception of Telangana which comes very close to that of India. Note the variations in the trends for each state in earlier rounds (till NFHS 3) after which all states with the exception of West Bengal display significant declines. While Rajasthan had by far the highest trends till NFHS 3 it declines quite sharply after that. West Bengal on the other hand shows fluctuating trends but little change in the most recent rounds, so much so that it is now the number one state with the highest prevalence rates. In fact, West Bengal registered a slight increase in its prevalence rates in NFHS 5. All the other states – Rajasthan, Andhra, and Telangana show a strong convergence to the all India average in recent years, a departure from earlier trends including those of Census 2011 discussed a little earlier. Bear in mind that mean ages of marriage have been rising in all states if at differential rates. The case of West Bengal seems to indicate a state where smaller proportions of young women and girls are crossing the age of 18 years in a context of increases in the age of marriage compared to the other states. We will revisit this at the conclusion of the study to see what light, if any, the field study may throw on this. Figure 3.3 is a graph showing district wise trends for the only two points in time possible – namely from NFHS 4 to NFHS 5 which is a short period of barely five years with NFHS 5 taking place during the covid 19 pandemic. Here too the districts of both Kolkata and Murshidabad show a slight increase compared the decreases in the other districts.

(F4) Figure 3.2: Trends in Prevalence in Marriage below 18 years in the 20-24 years Age group, NFHS I to NFHS 5



(F5) Figure 3.3: Trends in Select Districts NFHS 4 to NFHS 5



We now move onto NFHS 4 data at various levels of analysis since this forms the background for the field based study.

(T7) Table 3.5: Marriage rates of Women in the Age Group 20-24, at or below different ages, NFHS 4 (2015-16)

		Below 15	15-17	At 18	19-20	21 and above	Never Married	Total
	India	6.6	20.2	10.9	18.2	10.2	33.9	122966
U/R Residence	Urban	3.6	13.9	8.8	16.2	11.5	46	41486
	Rural	8.1	23.4	11.9	19.3	9.6	27.8	81480
Religion	Hindu	6.9	20.5	11	18.5	10.2	32.8	97624
	Muslim	5.9	20.9	11	17.9	9.6	34.7	18820
	Christian	3.7	13.6	6.7	12.7	10.3	52.9	2535
	Sikh	1	6.8	6.6	16.3	15.3	54	1981
	Other	6.8	18.6	10.2	16.1	10.6	37.7	2006
Caste	SC	7.5	21.8	11.3	18.6	9.3	31.5	25789
	ST	8.4	24.6	12.1	18.1	8.2	28.6	11677
	OBC	6.7	19.6	11	19.2	10.7	32.7	53109
	Others	5	18.2	9.8	16.4	10.8	39.8	32391
Economic Status	Poorest	13.1	31.5	13.2	17	5.6	19.6	19666
	Poorer	9.4	26.9	12.8	18.5	7.6	24.8	24486
	Middle	6.4	22	11.8	19.7	10	30.1	26522
	Richer	4	15.5	10.7	19.7	11.7	38.4	27177
	Richest	1.7	7.8	6.4	15.8	15	53.3	25114
Education	No Education	25.2	24	13.2	17.9	6.3	13.3	16800
	Primary	21.3	24.3	13.7	18.5	6.1	16	12994
	Secondary	9.9	18.4	13.4	22	10.6	25.7	61737
	Above Secondary	1.2	2.7	3.5	10.9	13.2	68.5	31435

Table 3.5 demonstrates the advantages of being able to work at the unit level, compared to Census data. This Table provides a disaggregated picture of prevalence data for marriage at different ages for those in the age group 20-24 years at the all India level, when the size of the sample is sufficiently robust, and so can be disaggregated for background characteristics. The last column mentions the sample size. Approximately 1.23 lakh respondents at the all India level are in the age group 20-24 years. Out of these, 33.9% were not married at the time of the survey. 6.6% have married below the age of 15 and 20.2% married between the ages 15-17. This gives us the figure of 26.8% as per NFHS 4 of women who have married before the age of 18 in the age group 20-24 years. Not unlike the data from the Census here too we see that the proportion of girls marrying at very young ages is quite small, leaving a concentration of adolescent underage marriages. It is possible of course to

disaggregate further – 3.8% from this group married at or below 13 years; 2.7% at 14 years; 4.4% at 15; 6.6% at 16 years; 9.1% at 17 years; 10.9% at 18 years; 10.3% at 19; 7.9% at 20 and 10.2% at or above 21 years. Going by these figures, note the clustering between 17-19 years where around 30% of marriages of those in the 20-24 age group took place.

Table 3.5 provides disaggregated information by various background characteristics – urban/rural location; religion; caste; poverty/wealth status and education, thus enabling cross tabulation by ages at marriage. As would be expected, urban India has much smaller proportions marrying at younger ages. In urban India 3.6% married below 15 years and 46% urban women were still single out of the age group 20-24 years. The equivalent figures are 8.1% and 27.8% in rural India. When it comes to the religious affiliation of the respondents, Christians and Sikhs have significantly smaller percentages of underage marriages and higher proportions who are unmarried in the 20-24 age group. For their part, the Hindu and Muslim categories are close to identical in terms of proportions marrying at different ages – 6.9% Hindu women have married below the age of 15 compared to 5.9% Muslim women. In terms of caste there is a graded quality to the differences, with Scheduled Tribes at the lowest end, followed by Scheduled Castes, Other Backward Classes and then Others – however these gradations are not stark. (A word about the category Other, which is a complex residual category. Only the category ST constitutionally includes any religious affiliation. It is unclear to what extent non-Hindu respondents would have reported their caste, and hence they would be part of the category Other. It should not therefore be assumed that the category Other refers only to upper castes.) Greater differences can be found across wealth status which is measured by quintiles ranging from the richest 20% of the overall sample to the poorest 20%. The poorest quintile report 13.1% marriages below the age of 15 compared to 1.7% amongst the richest. The data on educational levels are the starkest of them all – even more so because there are hardly any differences between those who are illiterate and those who have been to primary school. We will reserve further discussion of these in the chapter on education.

(T8) Table 3.6: Marriage rates of women married below 18 for India and selected states, Select Indicators, NFHS 4

		India	Rajasthan	West Bengal	Telangana
Total		26.8	35.4	41.6	26.2
Residence	Urban	17.5	20.3	28.1	16.3
	Rural	31.5	40.4	47.3	35.8
Religion	Hindu	27.4	36.0	40.4	27.2
	Muslim	26.7	34.5	44.1	17.0
	Christian	17.3	-	17.3	32.5
	Sikh	7.7	19.5	-	48.0
	Others	25.4	8.7	45.4	-
Caste	SC	29.3	37.1	45.7	24.8
	ST	33.0	40.9	45.1	40.9
	OBC	26.3	38.1	35.4	27.1
	Others	23.2	23.6	40.5	13.9
Wealth	Poorest	44.6	49.5	55.7	56.0
	Poorer	36.3	51.3	51.0	42.3
	Middle	28.5	39.6	38.5	35.9
	Richer	19.5	27.2	25.6	17.9
	Richest	9.5	16.9	10.1	10.9
Education	No education	49.3	57.3	56.3	55.6
	Primary	45.7	50.2	63.0	54.6
	Secondary	28.3	33.5	42.6	32.0
	Higher	3.9	9.6	3.5	4.1

Table 3.6 provides disaggregated information by background characteristics at the state level for women in the age group 20-24 years who have married before the age of 18 years (the standard measure of prevalence). Compared to the India averages, the three states show almost invariably much higher proportions at all levels, with West Bengal reporting the highest, followed by Rajasthan and then Telangana. Within the high prevalence states, once again the wealth and educational categories stand apart from the rest, and there is almost a convergence here across all the three states amongst the poorest and the least educated.

Table 3.7 gives the break up across age groups of marriages for all the districts of the three states chosen for the study. The purpose here is to locate the districts that have been chosen for further study from among the rest of the districts of their respective states. The districts chosen for the study have been marked in yellow.

(T9) Table 3.7: Marriage rates of women in age group 20-24 at or below different ages: Districts of Rajasthan, West Bengal and Telangana

		Below 15	15-17	At 18	19-20	21 and above	Never Married	Total
	India	6.6 [6.4, 6.7]	20.2 [20, 20.4]	10.9 [10.7, 11]	18.2 [18, 18.5]	10.2 [10, 10.4]	33.9 [33.7, 34.2]	122966
	Rajasthan	12.2 [11.5, 13]	23.2 [22.3, 24.2]	11 [10.3, 11.7]	18.9 [18, 19.9]	8.9 [8.2, 9.5]	25.8 [24.8, 26.8]	7171
	West Bengal	9.1 [8.6, 9.7]	32.5 [31.6, 33.4]	13.5 [12.8, 14.2]	15.5 [14.8, 16.3]	7.8 [7.3, 8.3]	21.6 [20.8, 22.4]	10087
	Telangana	7.1 [6.4, 8]	19 [17.8, 20.3]	11.1 [10.2, 12.1]	17 [15.9, 18.2]	11.6 [10.6, 12.6]	34.1 [32.6, 35.6]	3922
States	Ganganagar	5.1 [3, 8.5]	13.9 [10.2, 18.7]	9.7 [6.6, 13.9]	21.6 [17, 27]	13.6 [9.9, 18.4]	36.2 [30.6, 42.3]	258
Rajasthan Districts	Hanumangarh	5.2 [2.7, 9.7]	17.9 [12.8, 24.4]	9.4 [5.9, 14.8]	21.5 [15.9, 28.3]	13.6 [9.2, 19.6]	32.5 [25.9, 39.9]	171
	Bikaner	9.2 [6.1, 13.7]	24.2 [19.1, 30.1]	12.8 [9.1, 17.8]	18.5 [14, 24.1]	8.6 [5.6, 13]	26.7 [21.4, 32.8]	231
	Churu	15 [10.8, 20.3]	21.4 [16.5, 27.4]	13.5 [9.6, 18.7]	20.2 [15.4, 26.1]	7.1 [4.4, 11.4]	22.8 [17.7, 28.9]	219
	Jhunjhunu	7.1 [4.6, 10.9]	16.7 [12.7, 21.6]	8 [5.3, 11.9]	17.5 [13.4, 22.5]	12.1 [8.7, 16.5]	38.6 [33, 44.5]	273
	Alwar	13.9 [10.7, 17.8]	27 [22.7, 31.8]	11.6 [8.7, 15.2]	19 [15.3, 23.3]	9 [6.5, 12.4]	19.6 [15.9, 24]	370
	Bharatpur	14.8 [11.1, 19.5]	22.5 [18, 27.8]	12.2 [8.9, 16.6]	19.9 [15.6, 24.9]	5 [3, 8.2]	25.6 [20.8, 31]	282
	Dhaulpur	8.7 [4.8, 15.3]	26.6 [19.4, 35.3]	17.6 [11.8, 25.6]	16.9 [11.1, 24.7]	7.3 [3.8, 13.6]	22.8 [16.2, 31.3]	119
	Karauli	27.6 [21, 35.3]	22.2 [16.3, 29.6]	8 [4.6, 13.6]	16.1 [11, 22.9]	3.6 [1.6, 8.1]	22.5 [16.5, 29.8]	151
	Sawai Madhopur	21.3 [15.5, 28.6]	26.4 [19.9, 34]	14.8 [9.9, 21.4]	15.9 [10.8, 22.6]	4 [1.8, 8.6]	17.7 [12.4, 24.7]	151
	Dausa	12.5 [8.3, 18.5]	27.6 [21.3, 34.8]	11.3 [7.3, 17.1]	17.6 [12.5, 24.1]	7.3 [4.2, 12.4]	23.8 [17.9, 30.8]	167
	Jaipur	9.7 [7.7, 12.3]	19.7 [16.8, 23]	8.7 [6.7, 11.1]	16.9 [14.2, 20]	8.9 [6.9, 11.3]	36.1 [32.5, 39.9]	645
	Sikar	8.2 [5.7, 11.7]	16 [12.4, 20.4]	10.5 [7.6, 14.3]	21.8 [17.7, 26.6]	10.3 [7.5, 14.1]	33.1 [28.3, 38.4]	333
	Nagaur	16.2 [12.6, 20.6]	26 [21.5, 31]	9.2 [6.5, 12.8]	19.5 [15.6, 24.1]	8.8 [6.2, 12.4]	20.3 [16.3, 25]	329
	Jodhpur	11.9 [9, 15.6]	22.7 [18.8, 27.3]	17.4 [13.9, 21.6]	16.4 [13, 20.5]	8.1 [5.7, 11.4]	23.4 [19.3, 27.9]	371
	Jaisalmer	13 [6.6, 24.1]	35.4 [24.4, 48.2]	16.1 [8.8, 27.6]	18.1 [10.2, 29.9]	7.3 [2.9, 17.3]	10.2 [4.7, 20.8]	61
	Barmar	12.3 [8.5, 17.5]	34.4 [28.3, 41]	10.5 [7, 15.4]	25.5 [20.1, 31.8]	5.3 [3, 9.3]	12.1 [8.3, 17.2]	212
	Jalor	4.5 [2.3, 8.6]	27.9 [22, 34.7]	14.1 [9.9, 19.9]	23.9 [18.3, 30.5]	8.9 [5.6, 13.9]	20.7 [15.5, 27.1]	190
	Sirohi	6.5 [3.1, 13.1]	24.4 [17.2, 33.5]	8.3 [4.3, 15.2]	22.7 [15.7, 31.6]	12.2 [7.2, 19.8]	25.9 [18.4, 35]	108
	Pali	12.1 [8.5, 17]	19.2 [14.6, 24.8]	7.4 [4.7, 11.6]	20.1 [15.4, 25.8]	10 [6.7, 14.6]	31.2 [25.5, 37.5]	228
	Ajmer	16.8 [13, 21.6]	18.2 [14.2, 23.1]	7.5 [5, 11.1]	15.9 [12.2, 20.6]	8.8 [6, 12.6]	32.8 [27.6, 38.4]	292
Tonk	27 [20.6, 34.4]	20.3 [14.7, 27.3]	8.8 [5.3, 14.4]	14.7 [10, 21.1]	6 [3.2, 11]	23.2 [17.3, 30.4]	160	

	Bundi	14.7 [9.1, 22.7]	20.5 [13.9, 29.1]	8.1 [4.2, 15]	18.8 [12.5, 27.4]	7.7 [4, 14.5]	30.2 [22.3, 39.5]	108
	Bhilwara	27 [21.8, 33]	30.2 [24.7, 36.3]	9.2 [6.1, 13.6]	9.9 [6.7, 14.4]	5 [2.9, 8.6]	18.7 [14.2, 24.1]	240
	Rajsamand	18.6 [12.6, 26.7]	25.8 [18.8, 34.4]	8.6 [4.7, 15.1]	19 [13, 27.1]	12 [7.2, 19.1]	16 [10.4, 23.7]	120
	Dungarpur	3.9 [1.7, 8.7]	25.5 [19, 33.3]	14.4 [9.6, 21.2]	24.2 [17.8, 31.8]	10.7 [6.6, 16.9]	21.3 [15.3, 28.7]	144
	Banswara	5.5 [3, 9.9]	22.8 [17.3, 29.4]	13 [8.8, 18.7]	25.2 [19.5, 32]	11.7 [7.8, 17.2]	21.8 [16.4, 28.3]	185
	Chittaurgarh	24.4 [17.7, 32.5]	29.2 [22, 37.7]	8.9 [5, 15.2]	17.2 [11.6, 24.7]	9.1 [5.2, 15.5]	11.2 [6.8, 18]	129
	Kota	5.1 [2.8, 9]	14.6 [10.4, 20.1]	7.7 [4.8, 12.2]	21.4 [16.4, 27.6]	11 [7.4, 16.1]	40.1 [33.6, 46.9]	208
	Baran	10.1 [6.2, 16]	23.6 [17.5, 31.1]	10.4 [6.5, 16.4]	22.6 [16.6, 30]	10.9 [6.8, 16.9]	22.4 [16.4, 29.7]	151
	Jhalawar	7.4 [4.1, 13]	28.9 [22.1, 36.9]	11.9 [7.5, 18.3]	16.6 [11.3, 23.6]	8.5 [4.9, 14.4]	26.7 [20.1, 34.6]	143
	Udaipur	9.8 [7.1, 13.6]	30.6 [25.8, 35.8]	14.6 [11.2, 18.9]	17.8 [14, 22.3]	8.4 [5.8, 11.9]	18.7 [14.9, 23.3]	329
	Pratapgarh	5 [2, 11.8]	36.2 [27.1, 46.4]	13.5 [7.9, 22.1]	18.6 [12, 27.9]	12 [6.8, 20.3]	14.7 [8.8, 23.4]	94
West Bengal Districts	Darjiling	4 [2, 8.1]	17.8 [12.9, 24.1]	7.9 [4.8, 12.8]	17.5 [12.6, 23.7]	14.5 [10.1, 20.4]	38.3 [31.5, 45.6]	182
	Jalpaiguri	7.1 [4.9, 10.2]	27.4 [23.1, 32.1]	8.3 [5.9, 11.5]	19.8 [16.1, 24.2]	10.5 [7.8, 14.1]	26.9 [22.7, 31.7]	372
	Koch Bihar	14.7 [11.1, 19.3]	27.1 [22.3, 32.5]	12.3 [9, 16.6]	17.5 [13.5, 22.3]	10 [7, 14]	18.5 [14.5, 23.4]	292
	Uttar Dinajpur	4.8 [2.9, 7.8]	34.9 [29.8, 40.3]	13.1 [9.8, 17.2]	17.9 [14, 22.5]	8.2 [5.6, 11.7]	21.3 [17.1, 26.1]	318
	Dakshin Dinajpur	14.8 [10.1, 21.1]	30.3 [23.7, 37.8]	11.7 [7.6, 17.6]	16.4 [11.5, 22.9]	9 [5.5, 14.4]	17.8 [12.7, 24.5]	164
	Maldah	14.1 [11.1, 17.9]	42.6 [37.9, 47.5]	11.2 [8.5, 14.6]	13.8 [10.8, 17.5]	3.5 [2.1, 5.8]	14.8 [11.7, 18.6]	410
	Murshidabad	14.4 [12.3, 16.9]	39.1 [36, 42.3]	10.5 [8.7, 12.7]	15.9 [13.6, 18.4]	2.9 [2, 4.2]	17.3 [14.9, 19.9]	908
	Birbhum	12.5 [9.6, 16.2]	38.7 [34, 43.7]	11 [8.3, 14.5]	14.1 [11, 17.9]	8.2 [5.8, 11.3]	15.5 [12.2, 19.4]	392
	Bardhaman	3.8 [2.8, 5.3]	37.4 [34.3, 40.5]	14.9 [12.7, 17.3]	12.5 [10.5, 14.8]	7.9 [6.4, 9.8]	23.5 [20.8, 26.3]	929
	Nadia	12.8 [10.2, 16]	30.3 [26.4, 34.4]	16.4 [13.5, 19.9]	12.4 [9.8, 15.6]	7.9 [5.9, 10.6]	20.2 [16.9, 23.9]	508
	North 24 Parganas	8.7 [7.2, 10.6]	27.8 [25.2, 30.6]	12.8 [10.9, 14.9]	14.3 [12.3, 16.6]	10.5 [8.8, 12.5]	25.9 [23.3, 28.6]	1057
	Hugli	6.8 [5, 9.2]	25.1 [21.7, 28.8]	13.9 [11.3, 17]	19.3 [16.2, 22.7]	6.9 [5.1, 9.3]	28 [24.5, 31.8]	579
	Bankura	9.2 [6.6, 12.7]	29.8 [25.3, 34.8]	20.7 [16.8, 25.2]	17.5 [13.8, 21.8]	5.9 [3.9, 8.9]	17 [13.4, 21.3]	352
	Puruliya	9.2 [6.4, 13.1]	34.5 [29.3, 40.1]	16.6 [12.8, 21.2]	21.4 [17.1, 26.4]	5.8 [3.7, 9.1]	12.5 [9.2, 16.7]	299
	Haora	4.1 [2.8, 6.1]	21.5 [18.3, 25.1]	9.8 [7.6, 12.5]	18 [15, 21.3]	10.2 [7.9, 12.9]	36.5 [32.6, 40.5]	568
	Kolkata	3.4 [2, 5.6]	10.1 [7.5, 13.4]	8.5 [6.2, 11.7]	11.9 [9.1, 15.4]	14.6 [11.5, 18.4]	51.5 [46.7, 56.3]	410
	South 24 Parganas	12.6 [10.8, 14.7]	36.2 [33.4, 39]	14.3 [12.3, 16.5]	16.9 [14.8, 19.2]	7.7 [6.3, 9.4]	12.3 [10.5, 14.4]	1109
	Paschim Medinipur	9.7 [7.6, 12.2]	43 [39.2, 46.8]	15.9 [13.3, 18.8]	9.9 [7.8, 12.4]	6.5 [4.9, 8.7]	15.1 [12.6, 18]	665

	Purba Medinipur	5.4 [3.8, 7.6]	38.6 [34.7, 42.6]	20.7 [17.6, 24.2]	17.4 [14.5, 20.7]	4.8 [3.4, 6.9]	13.1 [10.5, 16.1]	575
Telangana Districts	Adilabad	7.3 [4.8, 10.9]	22.6 [18.2, 27.7]	10.9 [7.9, 15]	17.1 [13.3, 21.8]	11 [7.9, 15.1]	31.1 [26.1, 36.5]	300
	Nizamabad	6.5 [3.8, 10.7]	18.4 [13.8, 24.2]	12.9 [9, 18.1]	15 [10.8, 20.5]	15.3 [11.1, 20.8]	31.9 [26, 38.4]	214
	Karimnagar	5.1 [3.4, 7.7]	8.2 [5.9, 11.3]	8.2 [5.9, 11.2]	22.4 [18.7, 26.7]	17.6 [14.3, 21.6]	38.4 [33.8, 43.1]	421
	Medak	13.5 [10.3, 17.6]	22.7 [18.6, 27.5]	8.2 [5.7, 11.7]	19.6 [15.7, 24.2]	8.7 [6.1, 12.3]	27.2 [22.7, 32.2]	337
	Hyderabad	2.4 [1.4, 4]	9.7 [7.6, 12.3]	12.9 [10.4, 15.8]	15.8 [13.1, 19]	11.7 [9.4, 14.5]	47.5 [43.6, 51.5]	609
	Rangareddy	8 [6.2, 10.2]	15 [12.6, 17.7]	11.1 [9.1, 13.6]	14.7 [12.3, 17.5]	11.4 [9.3, 13.9]	39.8 [36.3, 43.4]	739
	Mahbubnagar	10.4 [7.5, 14.4]	30.9 [26, 36.3]	12 [8.9, 16.2]	14.2 [10.7, 18.6]	7.4 [5, 10.9]	25 [20.5, 30.1]	311
	Nalgonda	12.7 [9.5, 16.7]	28.2 [23.6, 33.3]	13.3 [10, 17.4]	17.4 [13.7, 21.9]	8.4 [5.9, 12]	20 [16, 24.7]	331
	Warangal	2.6 [1.3, 4.9]	25.1 [20.7, 30]	8.3 [5.8, 11.8]	18 [14.2, 22.5]	16.1 [12.5, 20.4]	30 [25.3, 35.1]	336
	Khammam	6.1 [4, 9.3]	26.3 [21.7, 31.3]	13.4 [10.1, 17.6]	17.5 [13.7, 22.1]	7.9 [5.4, 11.4]	28.8 [24.2, 34]	324

From the above Table 3.7 one can see that the high prevalence districts chosen are not necessarily those with the highest prevalence rates. In the case of Rajasthan for instance, the districts of Karauli, Tonk, Bhilwara and Chittaurgarh have higher rates than Sawai Madhopur. In West Bengal, Maldah has higher rates than Murshidabad. In Telangana Mahbubnagar does have the highest rates of marriage below 18 years, though Medak and Nalgonda are close. Once again, the purpose here was to choose a high prevalence district that need not be the highest in its respective state, but would offer advantages of access for the purposes of the primary study.

Given the smallness of the sample size at the district level, it is not possible to disaggregate further by way of background characteristics in the 20-24 age group. The next set of Tables 3.8a, Table 3.8b and Table 3.8c have therefore enlarged the sample to all those in the age group 18-49 years at the district level (thus netting in older women as well) in order to gain a window into background characteristics among those who marry below the age of 18 years. Hence it should be emphasized that no comparison is possible between these figures and previous ones. These have only been provided in order to see what role urban/rural location, caste, wealth and education may be playing, in order to provide a context for the primary data of the present study. Even here there has been a further merging of groups as indicated – under religion Hindu and Muslim are the main focus, under caste SC and ST have been clubbed, and under wealth status the bottom 40% and top 40% have been clubbed in the interests of obtaining a sample size that was sufficiently robust.

(T10) Table 3.8a: Women married below 18 in the age-group 18-49 for selected districts of Rajasthan by background characteristics, NFHS 4

District		Jaipur				Sawai Madhopur			
Background characteristics		Married below 18 (%)	CI	n (Weighted)	n (Unweighted)	Married below 18 (%)	CI	n (Weighted)	n (Unweighted)
Total		45.15	[43.45, 46.86]	3291	2065	64.28	[60.78, 67.63]	753	968
Residence	Urban	33.94	[31.72, 36.23]	1693	982	44.65	[36.85, 52.73]	150	216
	Rural	57.03	[54.59, 59.44]	1597	1083	69.15	[65.33, 72.71]	603	752
Religion	Hindu	44.52	[42.76, 46.30]	3025	1909	66.4	[62.61, 69.98]	633	808
	Muslim	55.77	[49.34, 62.01]	235	137	55.4	[46.16, 64.28]	114	154
	Others	*	NA	NA	NA	*	NA	NA	NA
Caste	SC/ST	52.55	[49.34, 55.75]	934	582	67.08	[61.61, 72.13]	307	396
	OBC	52.58	[49.83, 55.32]	1268	815	67.26	[61.89, 72.20]	319	408
	Others	30.14	[27.48, 32.94]	1089	668	50.11	[41.48, 58.74]	128	164
Wealth	Poor	59.47	[55.20, 63.60]	524	353	72.6	[67.92, 76.83]	385	487
	Middle	59.47	[55.65, 63.18]	651	425	65.35	[57.92, 72.11]	172	223
	Rich	37.19	[35.15, 39.27]	2115	1287	46.89	[39.96, 53.94]	195	258
Education	No education	71.35	[68.56, 73.99]	1066	686	78.59	[74.47, 82.21]	434	554
	Primary	65.71	[61.07, 70.08]	426	269	61.98	[51.84, 71.17]	96	125
	Secondary & higher	24.77	[22.83, 26.82]	1799	1110	37.48	[31.35, 44.03]	223	289

Note: * Percentage not shown; based on fewer than 25 unweighted cases

(T11) Table 3.8b: Women married below 18 in the age-group 18-49 for selected districts of West Bengal by background characteristics, NFHS 4

District		Kolkata				Murshidabad			
Background characteristics		Married below 18 (%)	CI	n (Weighted)	n (Unweighted)	Married below 18 (%)	CI	n (Weighted)	n (Unweighted)
Total		27.5	[24.42, 30.82]	749	742	59.48	[56.81, 62.09]	1327	907
Residence	Urban	27.5	[24.42, 30.82]	749	742	44.34	[38.86, 49.96]	307	183
	Rural	-	-	-	-	64.04	[61.04, 66.93]	1020	724
Religion	Hindu	27.42	[23.25, 32.02]	399	424	56.96	[52.93, 60.91]	590	397
	Muslim	27.58	[23.13, 32.52]	349	315	61.49	[57.92, 64.95]	737	510
	Others	*	NA	NA	NA	-	-	-	-
Caste	SC/ST	39.13	[29.25, 49.99]	84	159	62.21	[55.89, 68.13]	240	161
	OBC	23.37	[16.74, 31.62]	125	85	57.94	[50.08, 65.43]	158	107
	Others	26.65	[23.09, 30.56]	540	498	59.03	[55.83, 62.16]	929	639
Wealth	Poor	25.2	[15.49, 38.24]	56	75	68.34	[64.94, 71.55]	763	535
	Middle	35.22	[28.57, 42.50]	180	236	60.85	[55.23, 66.20]	303	211
	Rich	25.04	[21.47, 28.99]	513	431	32.01	[26.62, 37.93]	261	161
Education	No education	58.92	[49.51, 67.73]	111	151	67.2	[62.35, 71.72]	385	269
	Primary	38.06	[28.05, 49.20]	80	106	76.25	[70.85, 80.91]	276	192
	Secondary & higher	19.74	[16.64, 23.26]	558	485	48.05	[44.27, 51.86]	666	446

Note: * Percentage not shown; based on fewer than 25 unweighted cases

(T12) Table 3.8c: Women married below 18 in the age-group 18-49 for selected districts of Telangana by background characteristics, NFHS 4

District		Hyderabad				Mahbubnagar			
		Married below 18(%)	CI	n (Weighted)	n (Unweighted)	Married below 18 (%)	CI	n (Weighted)	n (Unweighted)
Total		31.47	[28.87, 34.18]	1178	766	45.9	[41.90, 49.96]	589	697
Residence	Urban	31.47	[28.87, 34.18]	1178	766	28.04	[19.75, 38.17]	91	115
	Rural	-	-	-	-	49.18	[44.79, 53.58]	498	582
Religion	Hindu	31.65	[28.52, 34.94]	807	479	46.94	[42.78, 51.15]	548	648
	Muslim	31.12	[26.29, 36.39]	322	265	25.33	[11.90, 45.99]	25	31
	Others	*	NA	NA	NA	*	NA	NA	NA
Caste	SC/ST	33.79	[27.66, 40.52]	207	140	48.01	[40.11, 56.01]	151	179
	OBC	36.48	[32.85, 40.26]	650	438	46.83	[41.84, 51.88]	380	447
	Others	19.83	[15.81, 24.57]	321	188	34.43	[23.33, 47.53]	58	71
Wealth	Poor	*	NA	NA	NA	48.72	[42.39, 55.09]	237	274
	Middle	42.34	[34.13, 51.00]	131	100	51.61	[44.05, 59.11]	168	199
	Rich	29.24	[26.53, 32.11]	1024	651	37.02	[30.32, 44.27]	184	224
Education	No education	52.78	[46.01, 59.45]	211	176	50.42	[44.99, 55.84]	326	384
	Primary	68.1	[58.37, 76.47]	101	65	57.9	[42.43, 71.96]	42	49
	Secondary & higher	21.98	[19.34, 24.87]	866	525	36.97	[30.84, 43.55]	221	264

Note: * Percentage not shown; based on fewer than 25 unweighted cases

On the whole these figures are self-explanatory. Though not comparable with previous data sets, and with background characteristics having been grouped in the ways indicated, these figures are only meant to be indicative of characteristics within the districts. Rural Sawai Madhopur has the highest overall proportions of those marrying below 18 years followed very closely by rural Murshibadad and then at a somewhat lower level by rural Mahbubnagar. As before, the indicators that lead to the biggest contrasts are those of education and levels of poverty/wealth. Notice however that our grouping has lessened the distance between wealth/poverty in this rendering (the lowest 40% and the highest 40%) compared to those with no education and those with secondary education or more. It is with education and poverty that the greatest differences are seen across all the sites. Caste also shows expected differences though to a lesser extent. Interestingly, in the case of religion with Muslim populations being significant in West Bengal and Telangana, and less so in Rajasthan, while in Murshidabad the proportion of women marrying below 18 is greater among Muslims than Hindus, the reverse is the case in both Telangana and Rajasthan.

3.4 The Local Sites of the Primary Study

Moving to the primary study, the location of specific sites for carrying out the primary survey followed up with select interviews posed several challenges. The size of the sample from each state was set at 400 – equally distributed from the rural and urban districts. The primary respondents were women who had married in the last ten years to the time of the survey conducted over a period of six months from end of 2018 into 2019. Given the sensitive nature of the study, building rapport in an atmosphere of trust was a primary consideration already at the survey stage, and we achieved mixed results. These took on different dimensions in the city compared to villages. In the rural contexts, we chose areas within each district where organisations with a known record of working on women’s issues had been active since many years. However, we expressly did not wish to engage in research in those villages where a particular organisation was active, since this would unduly bias the views of respondents. Two or at most three villages or village clusters were chosen with the following characteristics – at least 20 kms from the nearest town, having a high school within 5 km radius, and with a population size such that it was possible to obtain the requisite sample of 200 respondents who had married in the last 10 years from these villages. In the interests of maintaining anonymity the names of the villages are being withheld. In the case of the urban contexts the criteria for choosing a particular site were the following – a slum or slum cluster where access for interaction was possible, and with neighbouring middle class colonies to ensure a mixed sample by way of class characteristics. Here too questions of access were complex and had to be mediated – either with the help of organisations, RWAs or local political leaders. It should be clear that while every effort was made to obtain mixed samples by class, caste and

religion, these cannot be considered representative in any statistical sense in terms of proportions of the population. This will be come up for further discussion and elaboration in the course of the report. In the meanwhile, these are relevant as they constitute one kind of context for the survey and its data.

Methodologically, it is necessary to pay attention to the fact that this study was conducted with young wives in the early years of their marriage. Every emphasis has been placed on their views and opinions. Full respect was given to what they had to say, the degree to which they wished to share their experiences and thoughts, including when they wished say very little or nothing at all. This study reveals the extremely critical nature of marriage in the lives of women in the early years and at all ages, as we shall see in subsequent chapters. Gaining access to women at this stage of their married lives is difficult enough, expecting them to speak “freely” is even more problematic as an expectation. This is an issue that needs much more reflection in the field of research and thinking on marriage.

3.5 Introducing the Survey questionnaire

The primary study conducted in six sites is based on a survey of 200 women respondents in each site who have been married in the last 10 years from the time of conducting the survey. The survey tool was administered by field investigators working in pairs who spoke directly with the respondent once she was identified, the broad subject of the study was shared and she consented to be surveyed. To the extent possible the respondent was interviewed in private, but this was not always possible when other family members wished to be present. The survey questions were overwhelmingly of a nature as to lend themselves to quantification, though in a few cases open-ended questions were also posed which were subsequently coded. Questions pertained to the family background of the respondent, education, work, marriage and her current familial and household context. The survey questionnaire was initially prepared in English and translated into Hindi, Bengali and Telugu. All the survey answers were inputted, cleaned and further analysed in Delhi. The primary tabulated data in the report have been obtained from the surveys.

3.6 Background characteristics of the respondents

Below are offered a series of simple Tables that provide some of the background characteristics of the survey respondents.

Tables 3.9 a, b and c provide age related information about the respondents of the survey – their age distribution, the number of years they have been in the locality and their age at marriage for each of the districts.

(T13) Table 3.9a: Age related characteristics of the Respondents, West Bengal

		District			
		Kolkata		Murshidabad	
Age of Respondent		N	%	N	%
	Less than 18	1	.5	16	7.2
	18	3	1.5	19	8.5
	19-21	28	14.1	58	26.0
	22-24	37	18.6	78	35.0
	25-27	36	18.1	36	16.1
	28 and above	94	47.2	16	7.2
	Total	199	100.0	223	100.0
Years in Locality	<=1	5	2.5	18	8.1
	2-5	36	18.1	86	38.6
	6-10	50	25.1	98	43.9
	11-15	30	15.1	0	0.0
	16-20	19	9.5	7	3.1
	21-25	29	14.6	11	4.9
	26-30	16	8.0	2	.9
	> 30	14	7.0	1	.4
	Total	199	100.0	223	100.0
Age at Marriage	Less than 15	20	10.0	27	12.1
	15-17	50	25.0	115	51.6
	18	28	14.0	36	16.1
	19-20	31	15.5	19	8.5
	21	8	4.0	12	5.4
	22-25	27	13.5	12	5.4
	Above 25	36	18.0	2	.9
	Total	200	100.0	223	100.0

(T14) Table 3.9b: Age Related Characteristics of Respondents, Rajasthan

		District			
		Jaipur		Sawai Madhopur	
Age of Respondent		N	%	N	%
	Less than 18	2	.9	1	.5
	18	3	1.4	7	3.4
	19-21	21	9.5	49	23.9
	22-24	62	28.2	77	37.6
	25-27	61	27.7	55	26.8
	28 and above	71	32.3	16	7.8
	Total	220	100.0	205	100.0
Years in Locality	<=1	19	8.7	29	14.1
	2-5	101	46.1	93	45.4
	6-10	77	35.2	83	40.5
	11-15	2	.9	0	0.0
	16-20	3	1.4	0	0.0
	21-25	11	5.0	0	0.0
	26-30	4	1.8	0	0.0
	> 30	2	.9	0	0.0
	Total	219	100.0	205	100.0
Age at Marriage	Less than 15	8	3.6	23	11.2
	15-17	34	15.5	67	32.7
	18	26	11.8	34	16.6
	19-20	59	26.8	51	24.9
	21	20	9.1	9	4.4
	22-25	50	22.7	20	9.8
	Above 25	23	10.5	1	.5
	Total	220	100.0	205	100.0

(T15) Table 3.9c: Age related Characteristics, Telangana

Age of Respondent		Districts			
		Hyderabad		Mahbubnagar	
		N	%	N	%
	Less than 18	0	0.0	9	4.7
	18	2	.9	17	8.8
	19-21	39	18.3	39	20.2
	22-24	55	25.8	62	32.1
	25-27	52	24.4	44	22.8
	28 and above	65	30.5	22	11.4
	Total	213	100.0	193	100.0
Years in Locality	<=1	21	9.8	17	8.3
	2-5	80	37.4	68	33.2
	6-10	60	28.0	98	47.8
	11-15	11	5.1	1	.5
	16-20	12	5.6	9	4.4
	21-25	17	7.9	8	3.9
	26-30	10	4.7	4	2.0
	> 30	3	1.4	0	0.0
	Total	214	100.0	205	100.0
Age at Marriage	Less than 15	12	5.6	28	14.4
	15-17	47	22.0	70	35.9
	18	25	11.7	38	19.5
	19-20	45	21.0	38	19.5
	21	24	11.2	7	3.6
	22-25	42	19.6	13	6.7
	Above 25	19	8.9	1	.5
	Total	214	100.0	195	100.0

To reiterate again, the survey sample cannot be directly compared to any of the secondary data sets including those at the district level. We sampled extensively among women who had married in the last ten years in a small cluster of villages in the rural sites, and in the urban sites in a large slum and neighbouring middle class colony. Moreover, the criterion of having been married in the last ten years yielded a certain kind of age distribution that neither compares to NFHS' age distribution of 15-49 years nor to standard definitions of underage marriage among those currently 20-24 years. That is why the national data sets have been provided by way of reference points in this study. What the primary data offers is illustrative and not representative of young women in the early years of their marriage.

Ages varied from girls as young as 16 years to women in their 30s. The West Bengal sites displayed the greatest age range – as many as 7% below 18 years in Murshidabad, while 47% were 28 years and above in Kolkata. In the other sites the number of those below 18 years was miniscule – the vast proportion being between 18-27 years of age. The information on the number of years in their current locality is indicative of their years in the marital home in the rural sites – with an exception in the case of Mahbubnagar, where small numbers have clearly married within their own villages, probably indicative of consanguineous marriages with relatives close by. In the urban contexts there were a few more with a greater number years in the same locality, in some cases indicative that they were in the locality of their birth.

The information on age at marriage in these tables is clearly of central interest to our study. In spite of the fact that these are not representative samples proportions and ranges are not in contradiction to secondary data trends. Given the age range we would expect these to be larger than those in NFHS 4 Table 2.7 which after all gave us age at marriage at different ages among those in the 20-24 year age group. And in most cases our figures are indeed greater – very much more so in the urban sites while in the rural sites the figures are somewhat larger. In the West Bengal sites 10% in Kolkata and 12% in Murshidabad have married below 15 years in the survey sample while those marrying between 15-17 years are 25% in Kolkata and 52% in Murshidabad. In Rajasthan, the equivalent figures for marrying below 15 years were 3.6% in Jaipur (much smaller than the Table 2.7 figure) and 15.5% in Sawai Madhopur; while in Telangana the figures were 5.6% in Hyderabad and 14.4% in Mahbubnagar. Most underage marriages as in West Bengal took place in the 15-17 year age group – 15.5% in Jaipur (once again much less than the NFHS figures) and 32.7% in Sawai Madhopur. In Telangana 5.6% in Hyderabad and 14.4% in Mahbubnagar married below 15 years and 22% and 35.9% in the age group 15-17 years. West Bengal was unusual in that the modal figure for age at marriage at 18 or above in the rural site was 18 years while that for Kolkata was above 25 years. In the other sites the contrasts were not as stark – 19-20 years was the most common age range for those marrying at 18 and above in both Jaipur and Sawai Madhopur. In Telangana these were also the figures in both Hyderabad and Mahbubnagar, but a close second in Hyderabad was in the age group 22-25 years.

The next set of Tables 3.10 a, b and c, and 3.11 a, b and c provide the caste and community characteristics of our survey samples.

(T16) Table 3.10a: Religion of Respondents, West Bengal

		District			
		Kolkata		Murshidabad	
		N	%	N	%
Religion					
	Hindu	173	86.5	152	68.2
	Muslim	26	13.0	71	31.8
	Total	200	100.0	223	100.0

(T17) Table 3.11a: Caste of Respondents, West Bengal

		District			
		Kolkata		Murshidabad	
		N	%	N	%
Caste	General	102	52.6	132	59.5
	OBC	10	5.2	25	11.3
	SC	82	42.3	59	26.6
	ST	0	0.0	6	2.7
	Total	194	100.0	222	100.0

(T18) Table 3.10b: Religion of Respondents, Rajasthan

		District			
		Jaipur		Sawai Madhopur	
		N	%	N	%
Religion	Hindu	175	79.5	197	96.1
	Muslim	31	14.1	8	3.9
	Sikh	14	6.4	0	0.0
	Total	220	100.0	205	100.0

(T19) Table 3.11b: Caste of Respondents, Rajasthan

		District			
		Jaipur		Sawai Madhopur	
		N	%	N	%
Caste	General	80	36.9	12	5.9
	OBC	72	33.2	102	50.5
	SC	51	23.5	40	19.8
	ST	14	6.5	48	23.8
	Total	217	100.0	202	100.0

(T20) Table 3.10c: Religion of Respondents, Telangana

		District			
		Hyderabad		Mahbubnagar	
		N	%	N	%
Religion	Christian	6	2.8	3	1.5
	Hindu	160	74.8	154	75.1
	Muslim	48	22.4	48	23.4
	Total	214	100.0	205	100.0

(T21) Table 3.11c: Caste of Respondents, Telangana

		District			
		Hyderabad		Mahbubnagar	
		N	%	N	%
Caste	General	25	12.4	25	12.8
	OBC	98	48.5	96	49.2
	SC	50	24.8	41	21.0
	ST	29	14.4	33	16.9
	Total	202	100.0	195	100.0

The above Tables 3.10 and 3.11 have an interrelated aspect. Many of the Muslim respondents did not provide their caste details and hence have been included in the General category under caste – General therefore includes both Hindu upper caste, Muslim upper caste and those Muslims who did not provide us with their non-upper caste information. Hindu predominates in all our sites including in Murshidabad which happens to have a majority Muslim population – in our search for mixed population villages more Hindus were netted in. Scheduled Tribes were only significant in the Telangana sites. OBCs were a minority in West Bengal (which happens to correspond to the demography of this state) while they constituted almost half the sample in Hyderabad and Mahbubnagar (an overrepresentation).

The secondary data based on NFHS earlier in this chapter gave us the religion and caste wise break ups across ages of marriage – we saw that while at the all India level there is no significant difference between Hindus and Muslims in early marriage (with Sikhs and Christians having lower rates), different states also had different patterns – more Muslims had early marriage in West Bengal while the reverse is true in Rajasthan and Telangana. Caste wise there is a small but steady increase in the rates of early marriage as we move from upper castes to OBCs and to SCs and STs. We rely on the NFHS findings rather than to attempt to calibrate our small numbers any further. Other characteristics of the sample will be approached in the subsequent chapters on education, work and marriage. To anticipate, we found that both in the data and in

the self-descriptions of the respondents (including in the interviews, of which more shortly) economic contrasts – poverty and middle class status – were emphasized with caste and community folded in, especially when it came to the factors shaping their marriage prospects. It would have required a much larger sample size to be able to determine with any plausibility the specific role played by caste and community in our study in a statistical sense.

3.7 Introducing the sub sample of interviews for further texture – women’s voices

We now come to the final aspect of the context setting exercise of this report, namely the interviews. The survey sample brought us about 200 respondents from each site – a total of 1200 overall. Survey questions (even open-ended ones) can only yield so much. We therefore chose about 40 respondents from each site to conduct a more detailed semi-structured interview. Here the interviewees were chosen with an eye to maximum diversity – from the tiny number who had actually married as children before puberty to those who had married in their late twenties. We were not always successful in our initial choices – women were not available when we returned after three months to interview them, and some refused to make time or were prevented from doing so by other family members. Interviews were recorded with the permission of the women present (on occasion others also participated). Where possible, interviews with women were followed with a selection of interviews with mothers-in-law. In Hyderabad where challenges in conducting follow up interviews in the slum cluster were encountered, new women were also interviewed from the same locality even though the full information based on the survey was not available. As will be evident in subsequent chapters many spoke only the minimum – it is a sign of the readiness of many others when their situations as young brides were already so vulnerable – that they said as much as they did.

With this information about the context and nature of our research tools we now move to the chapter on education.

Chapter - 4

Education

4.1 Scholarship on Education

Krishna Kumar is one of India's leading educationists. In a significant article, "Culture, State and Girls: An Educational Perspective" (Kumar 2010), Kumar has delivered an extraordinarily powerful negative indictment of education in relation to girls. He believes that a genuinely childhood-centric education is incompatible with the kind of culture that girls in India have already imbibed well before they enter the school gates for the first time. As he outlined it, this is a culture with ancient Indian roots, reworked during the colonial period by Hindu nationalist ideas, to which the Indian state has accommodated itself, such that little girls already know that their future is to be wives and mothers. This means that girls and boys do not enter primary education similarly. While boys from labouring families experience a break from their unacknowledged family labour when they enter school, the story for girls, according to Kumar, is quite different:

Their involvement in the family's work starts in childhood and continues throughout the school-age years, but never receives acknowledgement. That is what it means to grow up female: to learn to work and live without being acknowledged.... These negative proclivities are established by a routinised rearing system which compels girls to curb their child-like agility and restrain their physical movements and gaze. Giving priority to others' wishes and cultivating readiness to accept guilt and to feel a sense of shame are among the qualities girls are required – and not merely encouraged – to imbibe since long before puberty brings in a still harsher regime (Kumar 2010: 79).

Kumar goes on to argue that the notion of socialization is an inadequate concept for grasping how this happens since socialization presumes modern ideas of freedom and dignity in a process that smoothens the tension between differentiated individuals and society. His preferred term is cultural imprinting, whose force on young girls stands in complete contradiction to the notions of autonomy and creativity necessary for learning.

No bleaker version of the double bind of the child-woman could have been scripted – as someone who could never be a child but also never be an adult, if by adult one implies some sense of recognition and self-worth if not autonomy. If we were to ask ourselves what modern childhood might mean in the case of girls, Kumar's response

for contemporary India seems to be that there is none. Marriage during childhood is the norm, and in the middle and wealthier classes, girls “escape” early marriage while nonetheless having imbibed the “wisdom” of what their ultimate futures will be. The value in Kumar’s account is that he does not shy away from naming universal early marriage and subsequent motherhood as a basic structural force of Indian society today. His views and those of other educationists like Karuna Chanana who have made similar arguments ought to be taken seriously by all those concerned with child marriage and by those who are looking instrumentally at education as a means to delay age at marriage to that of 18 to satisfy legal and reproductive health requirements.

I am less sure, however, about the totalizing mode in which Kumar constructs his normative claims about the child-woman, which in any case seem to assume that clear norms of childhood are fully in place in Western contexts but absent in India, where we remain imprisoned by our ancient culture. Childhood, including notions of adolescence, has been highly contested and conflicted terrain over the course of its invention. It would also have been helpful to know more about what a differently oriented education policy could be doing to counter these imprinting processes. Are schools ready to actually address the institution of marriage in India and how would they do so? Are we sufficiently well served by the overly simple notion that the control of sexuality is at the heart of this institution (see Chanana 2001)? What more must schools be taking on that families are unprepared to do? What support can students expect to receive from their schools and teachers if they do not follow conventional gender scripts?

What is most visible in much of the scholarship on schooling is an ongoing focus on primary or elementary education. Important studies such as those in the edited volume by R. Govinda (2011), *Who Goes to School? Exploring Exclusion in Indian Education*, demonstrate why educationists have continued to focus on elementary education in a paradoxical situation. Tremendous additions in enrolment every year go hand in hand with the all-too-familiar story about those for whom education seems to have no necessary place in their lives. The compulsions for boys to add to the family income or for girls to help at home continues to produce “dropouts” at the primary stage of schooling itself. In these discussions, early marriage does not figure – girls are dropping out and then kept busy with work at home. It is only in the last few years or so, perhaps in response to the current pressure to address child marriage, that connections between early marriage and education are being made.

Something of this new interest in early marriage can be seen in the work of Shanta Sinha, who is well known as a campaigner for the abolition of child labour and now calls child marriage “sanctified subjugation”. In a characteristic earlier essay where child labour is central, Shanta Sinha and Amuluya Reddy displayed some impatience

with the language and framework of dropouts, which place the blame on the poverty of the parents or on macroeconomic structures. Such children, they said, should rather be called “push outs” since it is institutional insensitivity and “the limitation of the [school] system to rise to the expectations of the faith the poor parents have reposed in the system that results in children getting pushed out” (2011: 197). A recently launched report of the MV Foundation, with which Sinha is associated (MV Foundation 2018), is based on interviews with girls married below the age of 18. Its tone is particularly strident: their first recommendation is that the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (PCMA) must be amended to make all marriages below 18 void. In this report, in considerable contrast to the prior studies of “push outs” where schools were held responsible for low enrolments, families are castigated for forcing their daughters into child marriage, as though sole responsibility rested with them rather than being shared with schooling or indeed the world beyond. More constructive is the kind of programmatic demand placed on the system of education, which is spelt out in some detail: the establishment of high schools, and corresponding infrastructure and financial support for girls, in all villages.

This small selection of studies on education in the context of early marriage is meant to set the tone for our exploration of the data of this study, both macro and field based. Education presents a particular challenge because at the one end have been recent trends of what is being called the massification of education (including higher education) with all India trends of even gender parity at the undergraduate level. These trends include the entry of hitherto marginalised groups and first generation learners including women students. However, as we shall shortly see, the situation in the field sites (with the exception of the middle class respondents in the urban sites) exhibits little of this aspirational trend. I believe that the depressed status of education in many families needs to be better grasped in the context of early marriage.

4.2 What National Data Say

The National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) periodically conducts smaller surveys on specific themes and one of these concerns the costs of education. Table 4.1 provides a snapshot view at the all-India level of different reasons for dropping out or never enrolling among boys/men and girls/women in the age group of 5 to 29 years (thus spanning the larger proportions who enter primary schooling all the way to the smaller numbers in higher education)

(T22) Table 4.1: Major Reasons for Never Enrolling/Dropping Out, Age Group of 5 to 29 Years, 71st Round, NSSO 2014

Never enrolled	123	445	568	78.4	1.1
Major reason never enrolling/ dropping out	Male	Female	Total	%Female	%Total
Not interested in education	6,518	4,790	11,308	42.4	21.9
Financial constraints	6,100	4,155	10,256	40.5	19.9
Domestic activities	1,233	7,160	8,393	85.3	16.2
Economic activities	7,015	1,041	8,057	12.9	15.6
School-related reasons	240	939	1,179	79.6	2.3
Level completed	1,224	1,256	2,479	50.6	4.8
Failed	1,160	881	2,040	43.2	3.9
Preparing for competitive exams	328	176	504	34.8	1.0
Girl student – Marriage	0	2,706	2,706	100.0	5.2
Girl Student - School-specific	0	52	52	100.0	0.1
Others	1,855	2,260	4,115	54.9	8.0
Total	25,797	25,860	51,657	50.1	100.0

Adapted from the 71st Round National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) Report and Unit-Level Data, Education in India January–June 2014 on Social Expenditure in Education.

%Female calculated out of Male+Female; %Total calculated as proportion of Total

While financial constraints are a big obstacle for both boys and girls and “not interested in education” is in all likelihood a euphemism covering a host of institutional ills that lead to “push outs”, the starkest gender divides are in dropping out for “economic” activities and for “domestic” work. Marriage figures only marginally for girls. It is very likely that when it comes to the much-cited associations between levels of education and age at marriage, it is the educational system that is failing the youth rather than that girls in large numbers are being forcibly pulled out of school in order to be married off.

Against this background, what do our data sources say, and what pictures emerge? Let us first revisit Table 3.5 from Chapter Three that provided a snapshot of the social characteristics of respondents in NFHS 4 by age at marriage.

Here is the percentage wise break up at different levels of education by age at marriage among those who married in the age group of 20-24 years in 2015-16.

(T23) Table 3.5a: Age at Marriage and levels of Education (NFHS 4, 20-24 years)

		Below 15	15- 17	At 18	19-20	21 and above	Never Married	Total numbers
	India	6.6	20.2	10.9	18.2	10.2	33.9	
Education	No Education	25.2	24	13.2	17.9	6.3	13.3	16800
	Primary	21.3	24.3	13.7	18.5	6.1	16	12994
	Secondary	9.9	18.4	13.4	22	10.6	25.7	61737
	Above Secondary	1.2	2.7	3.5	10.9	13.2	68.5	31435

Note first of all that the sample size of respondents in this group is about 1.2 lakhs. At the all India level according to NFHS 4 for this female age cohort in the age group 20-24 years, 13.7% have had no education (are illiterate), 10.5% have primary schooling, 50.2% secondary schooling and 25.5% some form of higher education. Thus half of this population have a secondary level of education, approximately one fourth have attained higher education, and smaller proportions are either illiterate or have only reached primary levels.

Notice further that there appears to be no significant difference in the age wise distribution of ages at marriage for women who have no education or just primary levels of education. Close to 50% of women who did not go to school or who only gained primary levels are marrying below the age of 18 years. However, as many as 28.3% of women who have completed class 10 (secondary schooling) are also marrying before 18 years. This provides an indication of the complex relationship between education and marriage. It is only with access to higher education that underage marriage effectively becomes insignificant at 3.9% with a large proportion of 68.5% in this cohort (20-24 years) unmarried at the time of the survey.

Given the extraordinary weight that is placed on education as the “solution” to early marriage, more attention is needed with regard to the following: What are the dimensions of the association between age at marriage and levels of education? In an overall context where the direction of causation is usually to make early marriage the cause of drop outs/lack of schooling, what other relationships are in evidence? How significant is the relationship between age of marriage and schooling compared to other factors?

The last question can be opened up with the help of the following Tables 4.2 and 4.3. This data has been taken from NFHS 5 (2020-21) to provide us with the latest data available and in the age group 15-30 years of ever married women, in order to be able to disaggregate further without loss of robustness. This is therefore a larger data set

than the previous one which concentrated on those in the age group 20-24 years. Different levels of education have been cross tabulated by different background characteristics -- age at marriage (below 18 years, 18-20 years and 21 years and above), economic quintiles from the poorest 20% to the richest 20%, urban/rural place of residence, caste, religion, and the three states of our study (West Bengal, Rajasthan and Telangana.)

(T24) Table 4.2: Descriptive Statistics (in %), NFHS 5 (Age group: 15-30, row percentages)

Variables	No education	Primary	Secondary	Higher
Age at Marriage				
Below 18 ®	23.78	16.41	56.15	3.67
18-20	13.09	10.74	62.12	14.05
21 and above	7.60	5.75	45.76	40.89
Economic Status				
Poorest	26.11	15.58	54.63	3.68
Poorer	13.39	11.59	66.07	8.96
Middle	7.63	7.88	67.68	16.81
Richer	4.13	4.95	63.43	27.49
Richest	1.70	2.15	49.44	46.71
Place of Residence				
Urban	5.60	5.75	56.55	32.10
Rural	12.85	9.71	62.33	15.11
Caste				
Others	6.44	7.00	60.39	26.18
SC	12.50	10.17	61.42	15.91
ST	18.13	11.58	59.61	10.68
OBC	10.39	7.81	60.42	21.38
Religion				
Hindu	10.20	8.04	60.32	21.44
Muslim	14.21	11.51	62.22	12.06
Christian	6.89	7.44	56.64	29.03
Others	6.32	6.45	62.00	24.73
States				
Others	5.73	6.02	62.20	26.04
EAG states	15.09	9.84	58.70	16.37
Rajasthan	14.65	11.48	54.77	19.10
West Bengal	6.59	11.79	68.43	13.19
Telangana	11.39	4.97	57.39	26.25

Notice that (similar to the previous data using NFHS 4) that the attainment of secondary schooling is the largest category, but notice further that by this round, over

half of those marrying below 18 years have attained a secondary level of education. The biggest differences are at the level of higher education at the top end and those with no education or primary education at the bottom. So, it is amongst those who marry at or above 21 years of age that as many as 40.89% have attained higher education, and this is only a little less than the richest quintile at 49.44%. At the lowest levels of education, relative privilege by caste, urban location and especially by economic status is starkly visible in the very low proportions of women with no education or who have only attained primary schooling.

The all-important question of the relative significance of these background characteristics – that is to say, the kind of weight they are playing is very important, and we will come back to this repeatedly. After all, it is the interplay of various factors – poverty, residence, caste, religion, region, along with marriage practices that would shape educational decisions. In much of the current focus on age at marriage as a cause if not root cause of various harms to women, and a major impediment to their chances for a better life, the association of ages at marriage with schooling can easily be turned into a causative relationship. Table 4.3 provides a regression analysis of the previous Table 4.2 to help isolate the relative significance of the different factors holding others constant.

(T25) Table 4.3: Multinomial Logistic Regression Estimates: Relative risk ratios of Women's Educational Attainment by Age at Marriage and other variables in India, NFHS 5 (Age group: 15 – 30)

Variables	No education vs Primary	No education vs Secondary	No education vs Higher
Age at Marriage			
Below 18 (R)	1.00	1.00	1.00
18-20	1.16[1.12,1.21]***	1.82 [1.77, 1.87]***	4.9 [4.66, 5.16]***
21 and above	0.98 [0.93, 1.03]	1.87 [1.8, 1.94]***	16.05[15.18,16.96]***
Economic Status			
Poorest	1.00	1.00	1.00
Poorer	1.47 [1.41, 1.53]***	2.5 [2.42, 2.58]***	5.25 [4.84, 5.68]***
Middle	1.8 [1.71, 1.89]***	4.69 [4.51, 4.87]***	16.98 [15.67, 18.39]***
Richer	2.08 [1.95, 2.22]***	8.18 [7.77, 8.6]***	54.22 [49.79, 59.05]***
Richest	2.21 [2, 2.44]***	14.07 [13.01, 15.21]***	192.07 [173.05, 213.18]***

Place of Residence			
Rural	1.00	1.00	1.00
Urban	1.04 [0.99, 1.09]	1.33 [1.28, 1.39]***	1.23 [1.17, 1.29]***
Caste			
Others	1.00	1.00	1.00
SC	0.82 [0.77, .86]***	0.58 [0.56, 0.61]***	0.41 [0.39, 0.44]***
ST	0.68 [0.64, .73]***	0.56 [0.54, 0.59]***	0.42 [0.39, 0.45]***
OBC	0.81 [0.77, .86]***	0.73 [0.7, 0.76]***	0.73 [0.7, 0.77]***
Religion			
Hindu	1.00	1.00	1.00
Muslim	0.68 [0.65, 0.72]***	0.42 [0.41, 0.44]***	0.19 [0.17, 0.2]***
Christian	1.73 [1.59, 1.88]***	1.53 [1.43, 1.64]***	1.5 [1.36, 1.65]***
Others	1.08 [0.98, 1.18]	0.79 [0.74, 0.86]***	0.48 [0.44, 0.54]***
States			
Others	1.00	1.00	1.00
EAG states	0.66 [0.63, .69]***	0.55 [0.54, 0.57]***	0.82 [0.78, 0.85]***
Rajasthan	0.7 [0.66, 0.75]***	0.28 [0.27, 0.29]***	0.36 [0.33, 0.38]***
West Bengal	2.04 [1.85, 2.25]***	2.28 [2.09, 2.48]***	3.15 [2.78, 3.56]***
Telangana	0.37 [0.33, 0.41]***	0.4 [0.38, 0.43]***	0.69 [0.64, 0.76]***
Constant	0.81 [0.75, 0.88]***	1.67 [1.57, 1.78]***	0.03 [0.02, 0.03]***
N	213655		
LR chi ²	78761.02***		
Log likelihood	-207921.8		
Pseudo R ²	0.16		

Standard Errors are in parenthesis

While all factors are significant (with the exception of age at marriage at 21 years and above for attaining primary education) the numbers indicate the extent to which economic status dominates all the rest. Age at marriage alone appears to be very significant only when reaching 21 years, and for higher education, whereas even moving out of the lowest poverty quintile at any level of education is more significant. Interestingly, once economic status is kept constant rural/urban location are no longer as significant, though community and caste status continue to matter.

National level data offers limited avenues for further analysis, in relation to age at marriage.

4.3 Survey Data on Education

We now move to our survey data followed by the voices from the interviews. A series of questions about the respondents' level of education, why they stopped their education, how much more education they wished to attain and so on are offered below. Here the smallness of the numbers does not allow for further disaggregation by other factors, which is where the national level analysis becomes all the more relevant.

The first set of Tables offers a picture of levels of education by site of study for each of the states disaggregated by those marrying below 18 years and 18 and above.

(T26) Table 4.4a: Educational Status, West Bengal

West Bengal		District							
		Kolkata				Murshidabad			
		Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years		Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
	Illiterate	11	16.2	6	4.8	8	5.5	8	10.7
	Primary 5	22	32.4	15	12.0	30	20.5	5	6.7
	Middle 8	24	35.3	18	14.4	66	45.2	16	21.3
	Class 10	10	14.7	22	17.6	27	18.5	15	20.0
	Class 12	1	1.5	21	16.8	14	9.6	20	26.7
	Class 12+	0	0.0	43	34.4	1	.7	11	14.7
	Not Reported	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
	Total	68	100.0	125	100.0	146	100.0	75	100.0

(T27) Table 4.4b: Educational Status, Rajasthan

		District							
Rajasthan		Jaipur				Sawai Madhopur			
		Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years		Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
	Illiterate	9	21.4	8	4.5	18	20.0	15	13.0
	Primary 5	9	21.4	20	11.2	21	23.3	20	17.4
	Middle 8	12	28.6	31	17.4	26	28.9	23	20.0
	Class 10	3	7.1	23	12.9	8	8.9	12	10.4
	Class 12	2	4.8	36	20.2	5	5.6	14	12.2
	Class 12+	3	7.1	59	33.1	5	5.6	26	22.6
	Not Reported	4	9.5	1	.6	7	7.8	5	4.3
	Total	42	100.0	178	100.0	90	100.0	115	100.0

(T28) Table 4.4c: Educational Status, Telangana

		District							
Telangana		Hyderabad				Mahbubnagar			
		Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years		Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
	Illiterate	15	25.4	2	1.3	46	46.9	25	25.8
	Primary 5	16	27.1	15	9.7	16	16.3	12	12.4
	Middle 8	2	3.4	14	9.0	11	11.2	1	1.0
	Class 10	15	25.4	31	20.0	16	16.3	19	19.6
	Class 12	6	10.2	42	27.1	6	6.1	21	21.6
	Class 12+	2	3.4	51	32.9	3	3.1	19	19.6
	Not Reported	3	5.1	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
	Total	59	100.0	155	100.0	98	100.0	97	100.0

There are both commonalities and differences between the sites. Beginning with the rural sites, notice that illiteracy (never having been to school) is extremely significant in Telangana (Mahbubnagar) at 46.9% for those marrying below 18 years and 25.8% for those marrying at higher ages. Compare this with West Bengal (Murshidabad) where just 5.5% of the rural respondents who have married below 18 years have never been to school – it is slightly higher among those marrying above 18 years and even in urban Kolkata the proportion of illiterates among those marrying below 18 years is higher at 16.2%. Sawai Madhopur is in between – 20% are illiterate among those marrying below 18 and the equivalent figure for Jaipur is 21%. If there are considerable variations in terms of never having been to school, what is remarkable is that in both Murshidabad and Sawai Madhopur among those marrying before 18 years, the modal level of education is middle school (class eight). This is especially

pronounced in Murshidabad – at 45.2% compared to 28.9% in Sawai Madhopur. Only in Telangana (Mahbubnagar) do we have a picture of high proportions of illiteracy and primary schooling co-existing with middle school (class eight) and high school (class ten) at 16.3% for those marrying below 18 years. With the exception of Mahbubnagar, we have to contend with the fact that the highest level of school access available to the respondents marrying before 18 years effectively stopped at the elementary school level. Practically all the respondents (again with the exception of Telangana) reported going to the local government school (when they did go to school) and in the state medium of education. Higher ages of marriage are, as one might expect, associated with higher levels of education. This is most pronounced in the urban centres, skewed as they are by middle class respondents.

Breaking this down further reveals that the association between higher education levels and age at marriage becomes significant only at the highest levels of education, Class 12 and above. This mirrors what we saw in the national level NFHS data, and it is true across all the sites. For Kolkata, the proportion of respondents who had completed Class 12 was 1.5% of those married below 18 while it was 16.8% of who married at 18 and above. Among those married at 18 and above, 34% were educated beyond Class 12. For Murshidabad, respondents educated till Class 12, were 9.6% of those married below 18, against 26.7% of those married at 18 and above. Less than 1% of women married below 18 had education beyond Class 12, while almost 15% of those married at 18 and above were educated beyond Class 12. For Jaipur, the proportion of those who had education till Class 12 was 4.8% of those who married below 18, and 20.2% of those who married at or above 18. Further, the proportion of respondents educated above Class 12 was 7.1% of those married below 18, and 33.1% of those married at and above 18. In the case of Sawai Madhopur, the proportion of those educated till Class 12 was 5.6% for those married below 18 and 12.2% for those married at and above 18. The proportion of those educated beyond Class 12 was 5.6% for respondents married below 18, and 22.6% for those married at and above 18. For Hyderabad, the proportion of those having education till Class 12 was 10.2% of married below 18, against 27.1% of those married at and above 18. Further, among those married below 18, only 3.2% had education beyond Class 12 but among those married at and above 18, 32.9% were educated beyond Class 12. For Mahbubnagar, 6.1% of those married below 18 were educated till Class 12, while this was true for 21.6% of those married at and above 18. Only 3.1% of those married below 18 were educated beyond Class 12 as compared to 19.6% of those married at and above 18.

4.4 Educational Status of Parents of the Respondents

How does the pattern of education and levels of education of the respondents compare with that of their parents?

The following set of Tables 4.5, 4.6, 4.7 provide basic information on the levels of education of the fathers and mothers of the respondents.

(T29) Table 4.5a: Educational Status of Father, West Bengal

	District											
	Kolkata				Murshidabad				Total			
	Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years		Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years		Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Illiterate	28	38.9	22	17.3	76	52.4	26	37.7	104	47.9	48	24.5
Primary 5	26	36.1	35	27.6	36	24.8	17	24.6	62	28.6	52	26.5
Middle 8	13	18.1	16	12.6	17	11.7	15	21.7	30	13.8	31	15.8
Class 10	4	5.6	11	8.7	7	4.8	7	10.1	11	5.1	18	9.2
Class 12	1	1.4	8	6.3	5	3.4	1	1.4	6	2.8	9	4.6
Graduate	0	0.0	22	17.3	3	2.1	1	1.4	3	1.4	23	11.7
Post Graduate	0	0.0	7	5.5	1	.7	2	2.9	1	.5	9	4.6
Technical or professional	0	0.0	5	3.9	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	5	2.6
Total	72	100.0	127	100.0	145	100.0	69	100.0	217	100.0	196	100.0

(T30) Table 4.5b: Educational Status of Mother, West Bengal

	District											
	Kolkata				Murshidabad				Total			
	Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years		Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years		Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Illiterate	51	70.8	47	37.3	76	52.8	33	45.8	127	58.8	80	40.4
Primary 5	11	15.3	20	15.9	40	27.8	24	33.3	51	23.6	44	22.2
Middle 8	9	12.5	14	11.1	21	14.6	12	16.7	30	13.9	26	13.1
Class 10	0	0.0	17	13.5	4	2.8	3	4.2	4	1.9	20	10.1
Class 12	1	1.4	7	5.6	2	1.4	0	0.0	3	1.4	7	3.5
Graduate	0	0.0	18	14.3	1	.7	0	0.0	1	.5	18	9.1
Post Graduate	0	0.0	3	2.4	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	3	1.5
Technical or professional	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Others	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Total	72	100.0	126	100.0	144	100.0	72	100.0	216	100.0	198	100.0

(T31) Table 4.6a: Educational Status of Father, Rajasthan

	District											
	Jaipur				Sawai Madhopur				Total			
	Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years		Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years		Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Illiterate	16	45.7	37	22.4	46	52.3	49	43.4	62	50.4	86	30.9
Primary 5	5	14.3	27	16.4	12	13.6	15	13.3	17	13.8	42	15.1
Middle 8	7	20.0	22	13.3	15	17.0	13	11.5	22	17.9	35	12.6
Class 10	5	14.3	25	15.2	8	9.1	20	17.7	13	10.6	45	16.2
Class 12	2	5.7	21	12.7	0	0.0	7	6.2	2	1.6	28	10.1
Graduate	0	0.0	19	11.5	5	5.7	4	3.5	5	4.1	23	8.3
Post Graduate	0	0.0	11	6.7	0	0.0	1	.9	0	0.0	12	4.3
Technical or professional	0	0.0	2	1.2	2	2.3	4	3.5	2	1.6	6	2.2
Total	35	100.0	165	100.0	88	100.0	113	100.0	123	100.0	278	100.0

(T32) Table 4.6b: Educational Status of Mother, Rajasthan

	District											
	Jaipur				Sawai Madhopur				Total			
	Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years		Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years		Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Illiterate	33	82.5	87	50.3	81	91.0	99	86.8	114	88.4	186	64.8
Primary 5	2	5.0	26	15.0	4	4.5	11	9.6	6	4.7	37	12.9
Middle 8	3	7.5	20	11.6	2	2.2	4	3.5	5	3.9	24	8.4
Class 10	1	2.5	13	7.5	1	1.1	0	0.0	2	1.6	13	4.5
Class 12	0	0.0	14	8.1	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	14	4.9
Graduate	0	0.0	8	4.6	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	8	2.8
Post Graduate	1	2.5	2	1.2	1	1.1	0	0.0	2	1.6	2	.7
Technical or professional	0	0.0	2	1.2	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	2	.7
Total	40	100.0	173	100.0	89	100.0	114	100.0	129	100.0	287	100.0

(T33) Table 4.7a: Educational Status of Father, Telangana

	District									
	Hyderabad				Mahbubnagar				Total	
	Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years		Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Illiterate	43	72.9	62	40.5	81	87.1	65	67.7	251	62.6
Primary 5	6	10.2	20	13.1	6	6.5	15	15.6	47	11.7
Middle 8	4	6.8	9	5.9	1	1.1	4	4.2	18	4.5
Class 10	4	6.8	25	16.3	5	5.4	6	6.3	40	10.0
Class 12	2	3.4	13	8.5	0	0.0	6	6.3	21	5.2
Graduate	0	0.0	17	11.1	0	0.0	0	0.0	17	4.2
Post Graduate	0	0.0	1	.7	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	.2
Technical or professional	0	0.0	5	3.3	0	0.0	0	0.0	5	1.2
Total	59	100.0	153	100.0	93	100.0	96	100.0	401	100.0

(T34) Table 4.7b: Educational Status of Mother, Telangana

	District											
	Hyderabad				Mahbubnagar				Total			
	Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years		Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years		Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Illiterate	52	88.1	86	55.5	93	97.9	87	91.6	145	94.2	173	69.2
Primary 5	6	10.2	20	12.9	2	2.1	5	5.3	8	5.2	25	10.0
Middle 8	0	0.0	14	9.0	0	0.0	1	1.1	0	0.0	15	6.0
Class 10	1	1.7	16	10.3	0	0.0	2	2.1	1	.6	18	7.2
Class 12	0	0.0	7	4.5	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	7	2.8
Graduate	0	0.0	7	4.5	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	7	2.8
Post Graduate	0	0.0	4	2.6	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	4	1.6
Technical or professional	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Total	59	100.0	155	100.0	95	100.0	95	100.0	154	100.0	250	100.0

When it comes to parents we can see the relative advances made by daughters in relation to both their parents across the sites. Only in the urban sites are there small but significant numbers of parents who have studied beyond secondary education – these are our middle class respondents. Elsewhere we see much higher proportions of parents who have never been to school, more so among mothers than fathers, with higher proportions among parents whose daughters married before the age of 18 years. Interestingly, the proportion of illiterate parents is lowest in West Bengal, including among mothers in Murshidabad compared to Rajasthan and Telangana. Indeed, in Telangana mothers in our sample were overwhelmingly illiterate. In other words, West Bengal reveals longer histories of access to education, if only at primary levels and Telangana on the other hand reveals the relative recentness of access to education for girls in our sample. Modal levels of education are just primary levels

among parents including those who married their daughters at 18 years and above, compared to the modal characteristic of middle school that we saw among our rural respondents. Thus, even though we found the levels of education among rural respondents in particular to be below the national average of national level data, nonetheless these are improvements – to varying extents – over what their parents could access a generation ago.

4.5 Experience of Education from Interviews:

What did the respondents have to say about their education in the interviews? First of all, the respondents did not have much to say about their education and experiences of schooling. At one end, there were those who spoke very briefly but said that their education was “good”, saying little further. Half of the women in Kolkata mentioned school as “fun”, “the best part of life” and went on to say how their teachers were good and they enjoyed their classes. At the same time, most of these respondents from Kolkata did not complete schooling. In comparison, it was a third of women in Murshidabad who had positive things to say, most at higher levels of education. In Jaipur, 80% of women gave such favourable accounts of school across different levels of education, while in Sawai Madhopur it was 50%. The respondents in Telangana were least forthcoming - a third in Hyderabad, and half in Mahbubnagar briefly said their schooling experience was good. However, only women at the highest levels of education in the urban districts and in Mahbubnagar described their educational experience in any meaningful detail. In many instances, it was as though the respondents were looking back at their childhoods as a time that was set apart from their present lives, to be remembered with simple nostalgia, but without texture.

In rural districts, illiterate women said there were no schools in their village or girls were not allowed to study by their families. In Sawai Madhopur, women said it was still not common for girls to be sent to school. There were accounts of walking or cycling long distances to school. Midday meals were only mentioned in Murshidabad. In Sawai Madhopur and both districts of Telangana, women said in villages schools till Class 8 or Class 10 were available and they could not or were not allowed to travel outside to get further education. In these three districts, women also spoke of the bad state of government schools and the distinction between government and private schools as marking economic status as well as gender discrimination in education. In Mahbubnagar, the distinction between English/Telugu medium was also significant to mark these differences.

“Nobody wants to study” said a respondent from Murshidabad, R.D., who studied up to class four, was Hindu Scheduled Caste, and married at the age of 20 years. No one in her family or in her locality had studied beyond class 7-8, and she did not see any

changes to this very day. She helped with housework at home, cooking at the very young age when her mother went out to sell dung cakes.

Another interviewee, D.N. (Murshidabad, Hindu upper caste, married at 16, Income 7000), said she didn't go to school after Class 7 because the teacher used to hit her. Moreover, she had to do agricultural work and chores assigned by her father and she didn't feel like studying after that. Others said that there were no schools when they were growing up, or had started only recently. However, the general disinterest in education impacted women differently when they were from better-off families. A middle class woman from the same district was determined to study despite most people around her dropping out and was encouraged by her family:

"I thought I have to study. When I went to High School, very few students reached that level in our village in those times. Passing the Madhyamik Examination was a big deal then. I targeted passing this. At that time pass-fail system was there. Many of our friends discontinued after class 7 or 8. Two or three of us passed the exam. After that our guardians also took interest in our studies." (S.M., Murshidabad, Graduate, Married at 19, Hindu SC)

In Sawai Madhopur, it was common for women to speak of a childhood spent in poverty, domestic and other responsibilities with no education. Most of the women who were illiterate described having considerable domestic responsibilities such as taking care of younger siblings, domestic chores, collecting firewood etc. Some women at the lowest levels of education spoke of working on other's fields for money or paid domestic work.

I have not been educated at all. We were very poor and childhood was sad. I started working at home and looking after my younger siblings. I had to help my mother. The school was also not good. No girls attended the school. I don't know the reason why they didn't go. I wanted to study and I went to school one day, but the master there told me to go away and after that I never went back. (R.B., Illiterate, Married at 18).

My childhood was poor. I never saw milk when I was a child. We used to take 'chhachh' from others, make chhachh rabri and eat. I went to a government school. We did not have the money to go a private school. My family was very poor. They used to work as labourers on other people's farms. In my childhood, I used to work, go to school, make cowdung cakes, give water to the buffaloes. I have studied till Class 8. I got married when I was in Class 9....How could I have studied further- we did not have money..." (L.B., Class 8, Married at 17).

S.G. (Married at 19) could only study till Class 5 because the school was too far. Her father passed away when she was very young and her mother could only send her to

the government school nearby. Her brothers also had the same level of education. She speaks of the lack of quality education available for poor families like hers: "I don't know anyone among my relatives who has been educated. My people want to educate the children, want them to progress and have better lives and earn money. But where is the money to give education. If one wants to send the children to Karauli then one needs money isn't it? The standard of education in government schools here is not good."

Curiously, several interviewees recalled their childhood as a "wonderful time" (S.D., Murshidabad, Class 12, Married at 22, Hindu SC, Income Rs.7000) even though this respondent recalled a childhood spent in extreme poverty, days when there was nothing to eat, only "some fried atta mixed with water". She wanted to study further, but the family's financial situation made it difficult. She walked 15 kms to school every day, and remembers that walking with friends could be fun. No girls in her wider family had studied beyond class 10, even though everyone believed in the importance of education. Some of the boys had managed to go on to graduate in college, even study engineering in one or two cases. But with poverty looming, girls in her locality did not study beyond class ten, and marriages were arranged soon after. "What can a girl do in a poor household?"

The experience of schooling was more often about the time spent with friends and playing than education itself. Childhood was often associated with freedom and fun by a considerable proportion of respondents across districts. It was more common for women at higher education levels and better off backgrounds to make such claims, but by no means exclusive to them. Often women who grew up in poverty and had responsibilities as children, would also look back to their childhood as a happy time. P.K. from Murshidabad (Muslim upper caste, Income Rs.10000) studied till Class 6 and was married off at the age of 14. She recalls her school days as a "good time" where her schedule involved school, private tuitions, playing with friends and cousins as well doing domestic chores. Her mother was ill and sometimes she had to miss school to take care of household work but she says she liked it when she had to miss school: "I was happy on those days because I did not like to go to school. I thought I would be able to play all day. I would do one or two domestic chores or I would be able to avoid the chores. I would swim in the pond for hours. I was delighted in those days." Since women were looking back from their current life situation, the more idealistic aspects of childhood came forth more frequently. Women described this freedom of childhood in comparison to the "responsibilities of married life" and how life before marriage was far better.

Thus, poverty itself was not necessarily considered hardship, especially in rural districts. It was violence, illness, death, conflict that would be reported as hardship. (Yet women most commonly cited "being poor" as the main reason for discontinuation

of education and early marriage). In urban locations, most women managed to reach higher levels of education, despite such situations. R.J. (Class 10, Married at 18, Private school teacher) from Jaipur had to work to fund her education because her father passed away when she was seven years old: "I could not study further due to our financial problems, because my mother did not have much money. I worked as a labourer to earn money for my education, for transport costs and for household expenses."

S.J. (Hindu OBC, Income 15000) who grew up in Hyderabad and got married at 21, said she could not study beyond Class 12 due to financial problems. Her father abandoned the family and her mother worked as a domestic worker to raise the children. Her grandmother took care of household work, so that she and her siblings could go to school. Two women in Kolkata who had similar family problems managed to get educated till Class 12 or more with the help of NGOs. In another case, M.P. (Class 12, Married at 22, Hindu upper caste, Private Tutor, Income Rs.45000) was able to complete her schooling because of financial help from her then boyfriend (later husband).

4.5.1 Voices from the Interviews: Gender Discrimination in Education

The absence of gender discrimination in education was claimed by 66% in Kolkata, 50% in Murshidabad, 75% in Jaipur, and over 50% in Sawai Madhopur of the respondents. This included women at the lowest levels of education in each location. There are often contradictions in the narratives, where women say they were treated the same as or even equal to brothers, but later report that brothers had better education. Gender discrimination in education was reported by very few in Mahbubnagar. Most of those without education said it was poverty more than anything else. In Hyderabad, discrimination in education was reported by some women much more clearly than elsewhere, though the majority denied there was any discrimination. Some women even at higher education levels reported discrimination. Three women with little to no education said they were expected to do the family's agricultural work while brothers were sent to school. Others were not allowed to study beyond a point because their families believed they will be married and the returns on the expenditure on their education will not be reaped, while sons will take care of them. A few of these women (even those with higher education levels) held on to this belief themselves, saying the same for their daughters.

In Kolkata, women said "this mentality is a thing of the past" and argued things had changed for them. A few stated that they were allowed to study farther than was the norm for girls at the time in their families, and that their education encouraged others in family to educate daughters. In Murshidabad, it was more common (70%) to say

norms of women's education in their families have now changed and women's education is valued, i.e. they faced discrimination but in their children's generation it is not the case. In Jaipur, women at the lowest levels of education said the same. Half the women in Sawai Madhopur said women's education is valued in their families, and about a third reported a positive shift in their community's approach to women's education over time. Some women educated till Class 8 said that their parents didn't want to educate them further because of limited economic resources and got them married instead. In Hyderabad, 25% said that women's education is valued in their families – a few said that girls are not usually allowed education in their communities but their parents pushed for their education against community norms. In Mahbubnagar, 20% said that women's education is valued in their families. Like Sawai Madhopur, they said economic distress meant parents could not think too much about educating daughters.

70-75% of women in districts of Rajasthan and Telangana said their parents wanted to educate them much as possible. In Jaipur, most of them had completed Class 12 or more but in the remaining three districts many of those with very little or no education said so. Educated fathers seem to make a difference in Jaipur – some of the women at the highest levels mentioned that fathers allowed them to study beyond the community norms, and ensured their degree was completed before marriage.

What more can we say about this layered relationship between education and marriage ages? The next set of Tables attempt to fill out this picture for each of the states.

4.6 Further Survey Data on Education

(T35) Table 4.8a: What did you do after stopping education? West Bengal

District								
West Bengal	Kolkata				Murshidabad			
	Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years		Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Helped with housework at home	21	35.6	32	26.7	30	21.1	18	26.9
Nothing to do	11	18.6	9	7.5	7	4.9	9	13.4
Engaged in paid work	13	22	53	44.2	8	5.6	8	11.9
Married immediately	14	23.7	16	13.3	96	67.6	29	43.3
Any other	0	0	10	8.3	1	0.7	3	4.5
Not Reported	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	59	100	120	100	142	100	67	100

(T36) Table 4.9a: How many years gap between education and marriage? West Bengal

West Bengal	District							
	Kolkata				Murshidabad			
	Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years		Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years	
N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
no gap	14	25.5	11	9.7	109	76.8	36	54.6
>1 year	13	23.6	13	11.5	8	5.6	12	18.2
up to 2 years	5	9.1	13	11.5	5	3.5	2	3
up to 3 years	7	12.7	20	17.7	5	3.5	5	7.6
up to 5 years	8	14.6	20	17.7	5	3.5	4	6.1
greater than 5 years	8	14.6	36	31.9	10	7	7	10.6
Total	55	100	113	100	142	100	66	100

(T37) Table 4.10a: How much more education did you want to attain? West Bengal

West Bengal	Kolkata				Murshidabad			
	Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years		Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Primary 5	0	0	0	0	2	1.7	2	3.5
Middle 8	1	2.9	0	0	2	1.7	2	3.5
Class 10	23	65.7	10	16.4	44	37.3	10	17.2
Class 12	2	5.7	4	6.6	33	28	8	13.8
Graduate	7	20	17	27.9	29	24.6	22	37.9
Post Graduate	0	0	10	16.4	1	0.9	8	13.8
Technical or professional	0	0	17	27.9	3	2.5	3	5.2
Others	2	5.7	3	4.9	4	3.4	3	5.2
Total	35	100	61	100	118	100	58	100

(T38) Table 4.11a: Discontinuing with Education, West Bengal

	District							
	Kolkata				Murshidabad			
	Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years		Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years	
N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
Failed	3	5.5	9	10	11	8	6	10.5
not interested	9	16.4	21	23.3	9	6.6	4	7
financial problems/parents could not afford	24	43.6	32	35.6	14	10.2	13	22.8
Health problems	1	1.8	4	4.4	1	0.7	1	1.8
family problems	3	5.5	2	2.2	4	2.9	1	1.8
Puberty	0	0	0	0	1	0.7	0	0
Marriage	10	18.2	9	10	80	58.4	23	40.4
School Related problems	4	7.3	5	5.6	6	4.4	5	8.8
Household chores/child care	0	0	0	0	5	3.7	4	7
paid work	0	0	3	3.3	3	2.2	0	0
Others	1	1.8	5	5.6	3	2.2	0	0
Total	55	100	90	100	137	100	57	100

(T39) Table 4.12a: Who decided that you should stop your education? West Bengal

	District							
	Kolkata				Murshidabad			
	Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years		Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years	
N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
Self	21	38.2	63	69.2	76	55.5	38	66.7
Parents or Elders	12	21.8	13	14.3	26	18.9	6	10.5
Both parents and self	17	30.9	13	14.3	11	8	5	8.8
Husband or in laws	2	3.6	2	2.2	23	16.8	8	14
Teachers or Schools	2	3.6	0	0	0	0	0	0
Others	1	1.8	0	0	1	0.7	0	0
Total	55	100	91	100	137	100	57	100

Rajasthan

(T40) Table 4.8b: What did you do after stopping education? Rajasthan

	Jaipur				Sawai Madhopur			
	Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years		Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Helped with housework at home	13	37.1	63	38.2	43	56.6	60	68.2
Nothing to do	0	0	6	3.6	5	6.6	0	0
Engaged in paid work	10	28.6	53	32.1	6	7.9	10	11.4
Married immediately	10	28.6	34	20.6	18	23.7	13	14.8
Any other	2	5.7	9	5.5	4	5.3	5	5.7
Total	35	100	165	100	76	100	88	100

(T41) Table 4.9b: How many years gap between education and marriage? Rajasthan

	District							
	Jaipur				Sawai Madhopur			
	Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years		Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
no gap	8	30.8	34	21.3	11	19.3	11	15.3
>1 year	4	15.4	15	9.4	8	14	3	4.2
up to 2 years	4	15.4	19	11.9	13	22.8	4	5.6
up to 3 years	3	11.5	15	9.4	9	15.8	7	9.7
up to 5 years	1	3.8	28	17.5	9	15.8	23	31.9
greater than 5 years	6	23.1	49	30.6	7	12.3	24	33.3
Total	26	100	160	100	57	100	72	100

(T42) Table 4.10b: How much more education did you want to attain? Rajasthan

	District							
	Jaipur				Sawai Madhopur			
	Below 18 years		18 and above		Below 18 years		18 and above	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Primary 5	1	3.7	14	9.5	1	1.9	3	3.9
Middle 8	3	11.1	2	1.4	7	13.2	9	11.8
Class 10	5	18.5	10	6.8	20	37.7	12	15.8
Class 12	10	37	24	16.3	15	28.3	10	13.2
Graduate	2	7.4	38	25.9	7	13.2	23	30.3
Post Graduate	1	3.7	15	10.2	1	1.9	8	10.5
Technical or professional	2	7.4	27	18.4	2	3.8	9	11.8
Others	3	11.1	17	11.6	0	0	2	2.6
Not Reported	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	27	100	147	100	53	100	76	100

(T43) Table 4.11b: Discontinuing with Education, Rajasthan

	District							
	Jaipur				Sawai Madhopur			
	Below 18 years		18 and above		Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Failed	0	0	8	5.5	9	14.5	4	5.5
not interested	7	21.9	22	15.2	2	3.2	8	11
financial problems	4	12.5	15	10.3	9	14.5	9	12.3
Health problems	2	6.25	13	9	5	8.1	4	5.5
family problems	3	9.4	8	5.5	3	4.8	2	2.7
Puberty	1	3.1	3	2.1	0	0	0	0
Marriage	7	21.9	34	23.5	4	6.5	6	8.2
School Related problems	4	12.5	15	10.3	17	27.4	20	27.4
Household chores/child care	3	9.4	13	9	12	19.4	17	23.3
paid work	0	0	5	3.5	1	1.6	2	2.7
Others	1	3.1	9	6.2	0	0	1	1.4
Total	32	100	145	100	62	100	73	100

(T44) Table 4.12b: Who decided that you should stop your education? Rajasthan

	District							
	Jaipur				Sawai Madhopur			
	Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years		Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Self	7	21.9	47	32.9	24	38.1	31	41.9
Parents or Elders	7	21.9	45	31.5	22	34.9	20	27
Both parents and self	15	46.9	41	28.7	11	17.4	19	25.7
Husband or in laws	3	9.4	9	6.3	5	7.9	4	5.4
Teachers or Schools	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Others	0	0	1	0.7	1	1.6	0	0
Total	32	100	143	100	63	100	74	100

Telangana

(T45) Table 4.8c: What did you do after stopping education? Telangana

	Hyderabad				Mahbubnagar			
	Below 18 years		18 and above		Below 18 years		18 and above	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Helped with housework at home	12	21.8	38	25.3	13	21.7	14	21.9
Nothing to do	4	7.3	14	9.3	14	23.3	18	28.1
Engaged in paid work	23	41.8	61	40.7	20	33.3	22	34.4
Married immediately	12	21.8	31	20.7	12	20	7	10.9
Any other	4	7.3	6	4	1	1.7	3	4.7
Total	55	100	150	100	60	100	64	100

(T46) Table 4.9c: How many years gap between education and marriage? Telangana

	District							
	Hyderabad				Mahbubnagar			
	Below 18 years		18 and above		Below 18 years		18 and above	
N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
no gap	13	33.3	27	18.8	14	25.9	8	13.8
Up to 1 year	5	12.8	15	10.4	5	9.3	9	15.5
up to 2 years	7	18	18	12.5	5	9.3	4	6.9
up to 3 years	5	12.8	21	14.6	6	11.1	14	24.1
up to 5 years	3	7.7	27	18.8	15	27.8	8	13.8
greater than 5 years	6	15.4	36	25	9	16.7	15	25.9
Total	39	100	144	100	54	100	58	100

(T47)Table 4.10c: How much more education did you want to attain? Telangana

	Hyderabad				Mahbubnagar			
	Below 18 years		18 and above		Below 18 years		18 and above	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Primary 5	0	0	0	0	1	2.4	3	5.6
Middle 8	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Class 10	3	9.7	10	8.6	12	28.6	7	13
Class 12	7	22.6	10	8.6	13	30.9	7	13
Graduate	16	51.6	35	29.9	8	19.1	22	40.7
Post Graduate	0	0	23	19.7	1	2.4	4	7.4
Technical or professional	5	16.1	27	23.1	2	4.8	9	16.7
Others	0	0	12	10.3	5	11.9	2	3.7
Total	31	100	117	100	42	100	54	100

(T48) Table 4.11c: Discontinuing with education, Telangana

	Hyderabad				Mahbubnagar			
	Below 18 years		18 and above		Below 18 years		18 and above	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Failed	2	5.4	10	12.2	0	0	5	8.9
not interested	5	13.5	6	7.3	6	12.8	4	7.1
financial problems	3	8.1	17	20.7	11	23.4	9	16.1
Health problems	1	2.7	10	12.2	0	0	3	5.4
family problems	6	16.2	6	7.3	2	4.3	4	7.1
Puberty	1	2.7	1	1.2	3	6.4	1	1.8
Marriage	8	21.6	14	17.1	11	23.4	10	17.9
School Related problems	3	8.1	5	6.1	2	4.3	3	5.4
Household chores/child care	3	8.1	4	4.9	7	14.9	9	16.1
paid work	0	0	1	1.2	2	4.3	0	0
Others	5	13.5	8	9.8	3	6.4	8	14.3
Total	37	100	82	100	47	100	56	100

(T49) Table 4.12c: Who decided that you should stop your education? Telangana

	Hyderabad				Mahbubnagar			
	Below 18 years		18 and above		Below 18 years		18 and above	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Self	16	44.4	44	56.4	14	29.2	26	48.2
Parents	18	50	17	21.8	22	45.8	20	37
Both parents and self	2	5.6	14	17.9	6	12.5	8	14.8
Husband in laws	0	0	2	2.6	4	8.3	0	0
Teacher/Schools	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Others	0	0	1	1.3	2	4.2	0	0
Total	36	100	78	100	48	100	54	100

4.6.1 Discontinuing Education

To draw out the most important findings from the survey: When asked about why they stopped/discontinued their education, in the rural sites it is only in Murshidabad that the dominant answer is marriage, (46.2% as compared to Kolkata where it is 9.5%) – within Murshidabad, almost 60% of those married below 18 reported marriage as the reason for discontinuation of education, and 40% of those married at 18 and above reported the same. For Sawai Madhopur the most reported reasons were the inaccessibility of schools (14.6%), household work (14.1%), financial problems (8.8%). These reasons were reported by similar proportions across age at marriage – however, in Sawai Madhopur, breakdown by age at marriage shows that failing is reported by a higher proportion for those who married below 18 (14.5%) than at or above 18 (5.5%), and not interested in studies was reported by more of those married at or above 18 (11%) than below 18 (3.2%). Across age at marriage, marriage is reported by similar proportions (ranging from 17-23%) in the case of each district. In Hyderabad, financial problems were reported as the reason for discontinuing education by more of those married above 18 (20.7%) than below 18 (8.1%). For those married at and above 18, other important reasons were health problems (12.2%) and failing (12.2%). Those married below 18 reported family problems (16.2%) and not interested (13.5%) as the most common reasons (other than marriage). In Mahbubnagar, the most reported reasons by those married below 18 were marriage and financial problems (each 23.4%), followed by household work (14.9%) and not interested (12.8%). In the group married at and above 18, the reasons were marriage (17.9%), household work (16.1%), financial problems (16.1%), and failing (8.9%).

Clearly therefore, with the exception of Murshidabad, a complex mix of reasons crowd into the question of why their education ended when it did.

The vast majority of respondents wanted to study further. Interestingly, this including several of the middle class respondents in the urban sites – ranging from 65% in Hyderabad to as much as 90% in Murshidabad. In rural sites, respondents reported that they wished to have studied till class 10 or 12 (even among those who had no experience of schooling or reported that they were not interested in studies), whereas urban sites reported graduation and professional courses.

What happened after their education elicits a parallel set of responses. What is important is that these complement the differences in the reasons given for stopping their education.

For Kolkata, after stopping education, the most reported route was paid work (36.7%), followed by helping with housework (29.4%), and then marrying immediately (16.7%). Paid work was reported by 44.2% of those married at 18 and above as compared to 22% for married below 18. Helping with housework was only slightly higher for those married below 18 (35.6%) than at 18 and above (26.7%). The category of “married immediately” across ages of marriage, shows a higher proportion for below 18 (23.7%) than at 18 and above (13.3%). In Murshidabad, similar to what was said in answer to why they had stopped their education, the most reported life course was “married immediately” (59.8%), followed by “helped with housework” (23%). The former was reported by a slightly higher proportion of those married below 18 (67.6%) than at 18 and above (43.3%).

In Jaipur, the most reported reasons were housework (38%), paid work (31.5%) and married immediately (22%). These are similar across ages of marriage. In Sawai Madhopur, the most reported were housework (62.8%), while being married immediately was a distant second (18.9%), with some small differences across age at marriage. (Housework was reported by 56.6 % of those married below 18%, and 68.2% of those married at and above 18. “Married immediately” was reported by 23.7% of those married below 18 and 14.8% of those at and above 18).

In Hyderabad, the most reported was paid work (41%), followed by helped with housework (24.4%), married immediately (21%) – these hold true across ages of marriage. In Mahbubnagar, most reported paid work (33.9%), followed by “nothing to do” (25.2%) and helped with housework (22%) and then married immediately (15%). The first three are similar across ages of marriage. Married immediately after stopping education was reported by 20% of those married below 18, and 10.9% of those married at and above 18.

Notice therefore, the range of experiences across urban and rural sites and across states that followed education: Marriage predominates in Murshidabad, paid work in

Kolkata and in both Hyderabad and Mahbubnagar, domestic work in Jaipur and Sawai Madhopur.

4.7 Voices from the interviews: On discontinuation and what after education

The vast majority of views from the interviews corroborated that women discontinued their education, across sites, levels of education and ages at marriage. In Murshidabad – where 75% of those interviewed said so -- these included three women who completed their graduation (they wanted to go on to a Masters or B.Ed). Nearly 70% of the women in both Jaipur and Sawai Madhopur said that they had to discontinue their education. This included women at the highest levels of education and married above 18. In Hyderabad, 70% of the respondents said they had to discontinue their education, while this was 50% in Mahbubnagar. In the latter, this included women at the highest levels of education. In all the districts, some women could complete education after marriage, while others had to discontinue later due to pregnancy. A few women were still studying after marriage.

In the three rural districts and to some extent in Jaipur, women reported that it is commonly believed education can be allowed up to a certain point, that marriage should occur at a certain age, and education can be resumed in the marital home.

Across districts, order of birth often made much difference in the level of education girls in the same family could achieve. In a few cases it was the mother's illness which required those women who were the eldest daughters to take up domestic responsibilities. Elder daughters often did not get to study much or at all:

Being elder in the family and as my mother was working alone, I was helping her and could not go to school...One of my younger sisters completed Class 5, and the last sister is pursuing Class 10. (R.H., Hyderabad, Illiterate, Married at 16, Hindu ST, Income Rs.24000)

I have not been educated at all. I did not want to study, I didn't have the brains for education. There was a school in our village. My parents wanted me to study but I did not. My younger brothers and sisters have studied.... Earlier education was not given much importance. It is not that the girls did not study in my village, even some of the boys were not educated (M.G., Sawai Madhopur, Illiterate, Married at 10)

On the other hand, M.D. (Murshidabad, married at 25, Hindu upper caste, Income Rs.18000) completed her MA in history, even though her elder sisters studied up to Class 6 and 7:

My eldest sister was quite older than I was. Back then girls were married off at a young age. Besides our financial condition was not very good, and my father had the pressure of marrying his four daughters off. So he couldn't wait much longer in their case. In my case, after all of them got married, I wanted to study further, and by then my father had no more daughters to marry off, so the pressure had decreased.

Whether or not marriage was the reason for discontinuation of education, it was always looming as the ultimate destiny in the lives of these girls. G.R. (Mahubnagar, Hindu SC, Income Rs.49000), educated till Class 12 and married at 16, said her parents never expressed any particular concern about her education but "they used to discuss that after I completed Class 10, they wanted me to get married." Even for women who were educated at higher levels of education and were married later, marriage was the only future. Regarding her educational aspirations, S.P. (Murshidabad, Graduate, married at 21, Hindu OBC, Income Rs.22000,) said: "It didn't matter what I wanted. Everyone at home would tell me that they would get me married as soon as I graduate [...] when I was studying for my graduation, my marriage was fixed. That became a sort of de-motivation for my studies, but I still had not given up. I knew I had to complete my BA somehow." At times, women were allowed education beyond the norms of their circles, but marriage proposals would start coming in and education could not be prioritised beyond a point. N.T. (Kolkata, Class 8, Married at 14, Hindu OBC, Income Rs.23000), who is a domestic worker, was the only girl in her family to go to school and said that she was "very good at school" but could not study beyond Class 8 because "then my marriage proposals started coming in, actually they started coming when I was in 5th standard. But I got married after 8th standard."

These views were not limited to the previous generation, but were reflected among the interviewees as well. Some in Murshidabad, but more commonly in Rajasthan and Telangana felt that marriage could not be delayed beyond a point and in general, education of girls was not viewed as something that could override marriage. In Rajasthan and Telangana, some women said daughters should be educated till a point (say Class 12), and then in-laws can decide about their education and employment.

In Sawai Madhopur a woman said: "In the village, people generally think that the girl should be educated till 12th or maybe till BA. After that she should get married, and then the burden of her education is with her in-laws" (S.H., Graduate). Similar narratives emerged in Murshidabad and Mahubnagar. This re-emerges when women talk about their daughters' education in Rajasthan and Telangana.

4.7.1 West Bengal

At times, the voices from the interviews are able to provide a somewhat different angle on our survey data. So, in the interviews undertaken in Kolkata and Murshidabad, the most commonly reported reason for discontinuing education was financial problems of the family. Recall that in Murshidabad in particular, "marriage" was the dominant answer from the survey. In the interviews, respondents shared that their parents were invested in their education but did not have the means to support it, and often this meant they were married early.

T.G. from Kolkata (Class 10, Married at 17, Hindu upper caste, Income Rs.18000) believed it was gossip about her relationship with her prospective groom that led her family to get her married, otherwise they wanted her to get further education. She managed to pass her Class 10 exams after marriage but could not go further due to pregnancy. Later on she also says that in any case she could not have studied much further, as her family could not afford it – which is possibly true for many other women, but gets lost in the narrative of "more education would be better." In Murshidabad, some respondents, especially elderly women claimed that if girls were doing well in education they are not married early; it's when they keep failing in school/college or when they drop out, that they are then married early. The dangers of elopement were also a consideration. However, S.D. (Murshidabad, Class 10, Married at 22, Hindu SC, Income Rs.7000) said women in her circle had to marry after 10th because of poverty and later husbands decide if they can continue – she said it was poverty, not marriage itself that was the barrier to education. From the respondents' interviews, financial problems are claimed by women across a range of economic situations – "poor" is relative here. So those who had childhoods with barely enough to eat (one said she stopped going to school because midday meals were discontinued) and a woman who couldn't go for B.Ed. because her parents sold lands to fund her brother's education would all say "financial problems."

Women even at the lowest levels of education take responsibility for the discontinuation of their education saying that their parents wanted them to study but they chose to drop out. This was more common in Murshidabad. Women only hold their family situation accountable for the discontinuation of education when their financial problems were due to or accompanied by other hardships, i.e. parent's death/illness, or an alcoholic, violent father. R.M (Kolkata, Class 8, Married at 17, Hindu SC, Income Rs.8000) had a violent, alcoholic father who would hit her when she tried to go to school. She wanted to study further, and had even competed in sports at the national level. However, in the face of violence, she had to stop going to school and give up the sports club her school had sponsored her for. Yet she is grateful for what she could achieve and said "I got more opportunities than my friends."

The reporting of an arranged marriage as the reason for discontinuation was less common in both districts of West Bengal. In some cases in Kolkata, women agreed to their family's wishes out of "respect" or "consideration" (a sense of obligation) for allowing them to get an education. For A.M. (Class 10, Married at 15, Hindu SC, Income Rs.7000) the fact that she was the first girl in her family to be allowed to go to school meant that she felt obligated to agree to her father's decision to get her married. S.B. (Class 7, Married at 14, Muslim upper caste, Income Rs.15000) was dependent on mother's family as her father had abandoned the family and her uncles married her off as soon as they could. Yet she claims that "I decided to drop out though my family wanted to educate me further."

Others were cases of self-choice marriage. Either it was because they were being forced into an arranged marriage that they eloped, or their love affair was discovered and they were forced to marry their lovers – in both situations women were made to discontinue education for marriage but told that it was their fault for falling in love ("If I agreed to an arranged marriage, I would be allowed to study as much as I wanted"). Most of them married below 18 and thus did not complete schooling.

It was more common in Murshidabad than Kolkata that in cases of love marriage, the husband did not allow further education when women wanted to continue. D.S., a Hindu upper caste woman from Murshidabad, travelled a long distance for high school because she wanted to study science and her school did not have science teachers. She eloped at 17 when she was in Class 11 because her family was trying to arrange her marriage and after a gap year resumed education with the permission of her husband and mother-in-law but had to drop out because her husband was suspicious and controlling:

I got admission and started going to tuitions. As the tuitions increased, the problems increased along with it. My husband used to doubt or suspect me (of having an affair), if I was even 5 minutes late...After 2-3 months, I left my tuitions. And I couldn't manage alone at home because science was difficult. Then I failed in my Higher Secondary and my family scolded me for it. Then I didn't continue

Mothers and mothers-in-law in both districts claimed that it is young people who are choosing to marry early while parents want to push for education. They mention specifically that they are willing to wait to marry daughters till they are 18, and get them educated because of the government schemes in their state. A marriage registrar of Murshidabad pointed out that because of the Rupashree scheme, marriage happens after 18 but immediately after 18, as soon as they get the money.

4.7.2 Rajasthan

Among those interviewed in Rajasthan, most women said that education had to be subordinated to marriage, one way or another.

Some directly said that women were allowed education up to a certain level in order to find good husbands. However, those with lower economic backgrounds said it was a choice between education and marriage, as a mother-in-law said: "Getting a good husband is destiny. If you are poor and have spent all the money in education, where is the money for marriage? Where is the money to give for a boy from a good house?" They don't have the means to educate daughters beyond a point hence they think 10th or 12th; and some pointed out that villages don't have schools beyond 8th or 10th and it is not possible for girls to travel or live outside to complete education. It was also common for some women, and their mothers-in-law, to say they or their daughters "don't have the brains" for studying or would not study despite best efforts. Clearly schools or their environment don't have much to offer to young girls, but these problems of the education system are pinned onto personal abilities and will. It is clear that education is not stimulating or meaningful in any sense when M.B. from Sawai Madhopur (Class 8, Married at 18) said: "I think there is no point in education. One just goes together with friends to school. The mind is not on studies, but with friends."

In Jaipur, frequently women said that their parents encouraged their education but got them married because a good match came their way:

My parents had a lot of aspirations about my education. They wanted me to go further in life and become something, but it could not happen. My aunt and uncle brought a marriage proposal because they found a good match. (P.M., Class 12, Married at 20)

Some wanted to continue after marriage but their husbands/in-laws did not allow them to. For the rest, it was a combination of disinterest in education and the community norms regarding women's education. Those with lower levels of education often said they didn't like studying and would run away from school.

My father worked as an RCC construction worker and mother used to do domestic work in another house. I remember my mother used to send us to school but I was not interested, used to hide and just wanted to play. Often I would go with my mother for cleaning and sweeping. Mother wanted us to attend Gurumukhi classes but I was not interested at all. For this, Mother used to hit and scold me but I still did not like reading and learning at all. Now I want to get educated but cannot...My mother used to say read and write

something, so that you can get some job and your life will be settled. (R.K., Illiterate, Married at 17)

Discontinuation of education however did not necessarily lead to early marriage. N.M. (Muslim) had an arranged marriage at 21 but studied till Class 7, even though her school had education till Class 10 because she was not interested and her family also believed this level of education was acceptable for her. K.G. (Sikh) and N.G. (Hindu), both were married at 23 but studied till Class 3 and Class 12 respectively, because they were not interested in further education.

On the other hand, some women had to give up education so that their husbands could study. C.P. was married at 13 but sent to her marital home some years later. In her family all the girls were allowed to study till Class 12 but not beyond that. She wanted to get a Masters degree but said "If I had not been married, then I would have gone for higher studies. My husband is also studying. I had to give up my education so that he can continue with his education." This was also true in Sawai Madhopur. R.O. (Class 12, Married at 18) had to discontinue her Bachelor's degree in the second year because of marriage and expressed frustration that her husband has "spent half his life preparing for entrance exams." S.H. completed her BA degree even though her parents were uneducated. When she got married her husband did not have a job and according to her, there wasn't much emphasis on education in her marital family. She encouraged her husband to resume his education and she worked on the farm and in the house to ensure he could do so.

Similar to Jaipur, the most common reason for discontinuation in Sawai Madhopur was arranged marriage. Here too women would claim that their parents wanted to educate them and then say their parents got them married. K.T. (Class 10, Married at 18) recalls a good school experience and quite unusually in this district, some job aspirations tied to her education: "Teachers were good in my school. I used to go with my friends, 4-5 of us, talking and laughing all the way. We used to talk about what questions will be asked in school, what will happen in school, what work we would have to do at home. I wanted to complete my studies and prepare to get a job. I could become a nurse or a madam at *anganwadi*." She wanted to study beyond Class 10 but could not do so because of arranged marriage: "My parents believed that a daughter can study as much she wants. But then they got me married and sent me to my in-laws. Here, my in-laws did not want me to study further....There was no point in telling my parents that I don't want to get married. They wouldn't have listened or agreed."

In this district, some women also said they could not continue because the school or college was too far. Unlike West Bengal, very few cited financial difficulties as the reason for discontinuation. Across all these reasons, a few always take responsibility,

saying they decided to drop out due to the conditions of the family. Of those with no schooling in Sawai Madhopur, most took responsibility saying that their parents wanted them or tried to send them to go to school; only a few said their parents didn't bother. One woman claimed that she chose not to go to school because she wanted to care for her siblings out of love, even though her parents wanted to educate her:

My childhood was good. I studied and played. I used to feel most happy while playing. I have memories of my friends. I used to go with my friends to get firewood. I did not go to school because I had to look after my younger brothers and sisters. I loved them, so to look after them, I did not go at all. It is not that anyone told me not to go to school, it was I who didn't want to go. I didn't go to school even for a day, my name was not even registered. My parents wanted to educate me, I could study however much I wanted. But I did not go at all, what could they do. (L.M., Illiterate, Married at 18)

In general, education was not considered important in their immediate environment. It was more common for women to say no one around them studied or considered education important and hence they did not choose to go to school either:

My childhood was very good. I am not educated. I went to school in Class 1 and 2 and after that I did not go. I didn't feel like going. I was more interested in playing than studying. My parents wanted me to go to school but I was not interested. [...] Many children around me did not go, so I didn't go either." (J.T., Class 2, Married at 21)

Her brother also left school when she did, both are not educated but some of her cousins have completed school, some have completed BA.

As in Murshidabad, interviewees in Sawai Madhopur said that if girls don't study, they are married earlier; if they study, they are allowed to complete education and marry later. "In the village, if the girl has completed Class 10 and does not want to continue her education, then she is married. In such a situation, it is important that an exact age be fixed and marriage should happen after that." (S.Y., Post graduate, Married at 23)

So it is claimed. But often girls cannot study because of poverty or because high schools are not nearby. S.L. (Married at 17) said she "left studies" after Class 8 because there was no school in the village beyond that and no girl in the village studied beyond Class 8. Her brothers were educated further in private schools but she was not "because of poverty." She went on to say quite contradictorily that "girls have early marriage because they leave their studies. This is because of poverty. Those who study get married later." These contradictions in trying to describe their experiences at the intersections between poverty, discontinuation and marriage (early

or not) were frequent. Women would claim that parents wanted them to study but got them married, and then justify it by saying they were poor or did not have “the brains” to study hence further education was not possible anyway.

I studied till Class 8. I wanted to study more but my parents were poor and we were four sisters. They could not educate me further. They did not have the means.... I wanted to study till 12th Class, i.e. complete my studies but my parents got me married. My parents wanted to educate me but I did not have the brains to study. I was weak in Maths, but was okay in all other subjects. That is why there was no possibility for me to continue my education.” (S.M., Class 8, Married at 18).

The narratives of older women bring out the widely held belief that delaying education for marriage is not considered feasible because of the fears of elopement/pregnancy due to change in puberty norms (dharam byah) and the possibilities of meeting boys when they go to school/college. These fears need to be examined with some care. Are these based on actual experiences, when there were next to no cases of choice marriage or elopement in our survey and the women themselves did not mention any actual cases? In ways that need more exploration such commonly expressed views take the form of a discursive truth that will always elicit public agreement.

However, even for women who had some years between stopping their education and marriage, the reason for marriage is that they were not studying and just sitting at home. M.T. completed Class 12 but could not go to college because it was 33kms away from her village. She was married at 22 years because “I had left studies, so my parents got me married. If I had not left studies, then no one would have said anything. But when one is sitting at home, then one has to get married. People in society start commenting.”

4.7.3 Telangana

Here is an interesting view on education and marriage in the rural site of Mahbubnagar that speaks of the different pressures at work in a time of modern ideas about the right age for marriage:

Girls should study at least till graduation. Then she will come of age for marriage. Here in the village, they don’t understand this. If a girl is at home for very long, they keep taunting us about her marriage. Marriage is the end goal for anyone. In villages once a girl reaches puberty, they keep asking about the girl’s marriage if they see her not doing anything. If she is studying they will not say anything. (G.A., Class 7, Married at 15-16)

In both districts of Telangana, the most cited reasons for illiteracy were economic and family problems; followed by disinterest, and then discrimination. Illiteracy did not lead to marriage below 18 in all cases.

For the rest, the most common reason reported for discontinuation in Hyderabad was lack of interest, followed by economic problems. Only very few said that they had to discontinue education due to arranged marriage. A few said it was because schools beyond 8th or 10th were not available in their village. M.S. (Hyderabad, Class 12, Married at 25, Hindu SC, Income 32000) belonged to a poor family, her father was a mason and her mother a daily wage labourer. She managed to study till Class 12 despite considerable constraints:

I got my primary education near my house. For high school, I had to travel three kilometres by bicycle. It was difficult when the bicycle gave trouble. If it rained, we would get drenched in the rain. Sometimes we missed the morning prayers, and as punishment, we were beaten up by the Physical Education teacher. Our teachers also used to punish us for not doing our homework.

In Hyderabad, it is interesting to see that a common reason for educating girls happens to be the risk of a marriage going bad:

My mother wanted us to study well. She used to say that once girls get married, who knows how the husbands will be? So she did not want us to depend on our husbands. In my community girls' education is not given much importance because the girl goes to her mother-in-law's home. If parents spend money on getting their daughter higher education, they will get nothing at the end. So it was not considered important. But my mother encouraged us to study. (L.K., Class 10, Married at 29, Hindu OBC, Income Rs.15000)

Yet daughters are educated only up to a point because the parents don't get returns on expenditure on education. This was quite a common line of thinking even among the young women in this district – they thought the same for their daughters. *In a rare instance when jobs are mentioned and not only marriage, M.J. (Class 10, Married at 17, Hindu OBC, Income 19000) said that a girl should be educated till graduation, because "if you spend all your money on the girl's education, how will you survive? Anyhow, she will be sent to another family after marriage. We will provide education only if they get a job."*

In Mahbubnagar, arranged marriage was the highest reported reason for discontinuation. It was common for girls to be married right after completion of Class 10 or 12, whatever practices a particular family/community followed. And if girls dropped out or failed, they were married off after that. *As we will see in the next*

chapter, it is in Mahbubnagar that young women were labouring in the fields alongside or after their education.

My brother studied, my sisters didn't. The conditions were bad, my sisters laboured with my mother. They sent me and my brother to school. I am the youngest....I wrote my 10th exams after marriage. They got me married because dowry and wedding costs would increase. (L.R., Class 12, Married at 16, Hindu OBC, Income Rs.10000)

Besides arranged marriages, common reasons for discontinuation were disinterest and economic problems – these were usually true for women with little to no education.

“My father even touched my feet to request me to go to school but I didn't want to at that time. I thought if I go to study, then money will be spent on me....Now my kids' school books are in English and I don't know English at all. If someone could teach me, I am willing to learn and study.” (G.N., Illiterate, Married at 15, Hindu OBC, Income Rs.7000)

In our sample, women from the Lambada community, a group that falls under the Scheduled Tribes, had no education and were married right after puberty – usually around 12-13 years of age. Most cited extreme poverty as the reason for never having been to school. In some cases their brothers were educated, while they were illiterate. What appeared to change the outcome was economic status – two women from this community who were educated had parents who were farmers, as opposed to agricultural labourers (one of these women had an educated father, but the other had illiterate parents).

It was only those with considerable means who could educate daughters outside the village. M.H. (Graduate, married at 18, Hindu upper caste, Income Rs. 21000) studied in her village till Class 10 and then completed her graduation in Mahbubnagar in the government co-educational college. In order to do so, she and her sisters rented rooms near their college in the town and therefore could complete their education. This option was not available to most. Even in the face of considerable constraints, those from better off caste-class groups could more easily manage to complete the desired level of education as the following account brings out:

Being the only daughter to my parents, they wanted me to complete at least graduation. My brothers wanted me to study higher education. I used to go for work in cotton picking. After some time, my elder brother got a government job, so he asked me to study and not work in the fields...After my graduation, I was looking for B.Ed. course admission. Meanwhile, my mother fell ill. Thus I was staying at home to take care of my mother. During this one year gap of my academics, I prepared for B.Ed. and got a seat in Tirupathi government

college. But I was not sent there to study since it was far away from my hometown. I joined here in a private college. Then marriage got fixed. (R.E., Graduate, Married at 22, Hindu OBC, Income 60000)

4.8 Who decided to stop education? What the survey says

Remarkably, in the case of West Bengal, the majority of respondents reported “self” in both Kolkata (57.8%) and Murshidabad (59%). In both districts, the proportion of those reporting “self” was higher for respondents married at 18 and above than those married below 18 – with the gap much higher in the case of Kolkata. In Kolkata, “self” is reported by 38.2% of those married below 18 and 69.2% of those married at 18 and above, i.e. almost double. For Murshidabad, it is 55.5% for the below 18 group, and 66.7% for 18 and above. In Rajasthan for both districts, similar proportions of respondents reported self, parents and “both parents and self”. This largely holds true across ages at marriage, the only noticeable difference is that 46.9% of respondents married below 18 in Jaipur reported “both parents and self”. In the case of Telangana, for Hyderabad, the most reported is self (52.6%) followed by parents (30.7%). Breaking this down by age at marriage, this continues to hold true for those married at and above 18; but for those married below 18, parents (50%) account for slightly more than “self” (44.4%). For Mahbubnagar, most report parents (42.3%), followed closely by self (38.5%). This is different when divided by age at marriage - for those married below 18, parents (45.8%) continue to be more significant than self (29.2%); but for at and above 18, self (48.2%) is reported more than parents (37%).

So while there are variations across the sites and across ages of marriage, what is remarkable – even if this is an answer to a survey question – is that significant proportions of respondents believe that it was their decision to stop their education when they did. This is particularly noteworthy in the case of Murshidabad – recall that the survey yielded the largest proportions of respondents who said that they married immediately after their education. Even though parents play a comparatively greater role among those marrying below 18 years, the fact that so many respondents believed that agency was theirs when it came to how much education they had, is very noteworthy.

The voices from the interviews mentioned above provide an insight into how the respondents conceived of their agency. Unless explicitly forced by other family members (such as an alcoholic father), respondents saw themselves as making choices even in conditions of extreme poverty. It was their decision and not forced upon them by family members said many. Very few spoke explicitly about a larger ethos of lack of interest, even long distances to get to school did not count.

4.9 Could respondents study after marriage?

This is an important aspect of the complex relationship between education and marriage. Not all respondents had to end their education completely with their marriages. But as one might expect, this possibility was largely confined to those who had completed schooling or begun higher education. In the case of West Bengal, 15.7% in Kolkata and 14% in Murshidabad could study after marriage. In Kolkata, the majority of these acquired graduate, post-graduate and professional education. In Murshidabad, the majority acquired Class 12, graduate, and professional education. In Rajasthan in particular the numbers were greater – so it was not uncommon for education to resume after marriage. About a quarter in Jaipur and nearly 30% in Sawai Madhopur could study after marriage. In Jaipur, the majority of these acquired graduate, post-graduate and professional education. In Sawai Madhopur, the majority acquired Class 12, graduate, and professional education. In Telangana, 14.6% in Hyderabad and 24.6% in Mahbubnagar could study after marriage. Of these, most reported studying up to a graduation (53.8% in Hyderabad, 63% in Mahbubnagar).

Concluding Remarks

This chapter has presented the views of young women in the early years of their marriage, asking them to look back at their experiences and views on education. The survey brought out clearly that elementary education is still the norm in most rural sites. Compare this with national level data where moving beyond secondary education is the watershed and where the majority are attaining secondary education. Thus this is a story of failure by the educational system in these sites and for these women.

Women remembered their years of education with the lens of memories of childhood and of regret in many cases. They should have been more interested and they should have studied more they said. To be poor means to be illiterate, to have studied for fewer years than they would now have liked, to be disinterested and to drop out. Most significantly, women ascribed “choice” to themselves when it came to how they ended their education – this is evident both in the survey and in the interviews. Only in extreme situations of poverty, or the breakdown of the family due to illness and death, alcoholic fathers and so on did women allow that other forces were at work. What can we make of this kind of agency ascribed to themselves?

Furthermore, most of our respondents said that they wanted to study “more” – whether they had never entered a school or whether they had advanced degrees in higher education such as an MA. Small proportions were indeed able to study further after their marriages, but these were mainly confined to those who had completed

high school or had an undergraduate degree. Clearly, from their current locations as young brides they placed strong weight – in the context of asking them to recall their experiences of education – on the meaning of education, which only heightened the strong sense of regret that they did not make more of it when they were younger.

The subject of education will reappear in the chapter of marriage and add further dimensions to their story, ones that complicate the sometimes overly simply narrative that more education could only be better. In the meantime, we can see early marriage as a “consequence” that follows “naturally” when education fails.

It is necessary therefore to conclude with the failure of education – whether of schools, of levels, of holding the interest of the student rather than with the views of Krishna Kumar with which this chapter began, for whom Indian culture already imprinted a girl’s destiny long before she enters the school gates.

Chapter - 5

Work

Fleeting references have been made to work, labour and employment in relation to marriage and early marriage. It can safely be said that the relationship between labour, work and age at marriage is the least explored in our context. This is no ordinary “gap”. Across the world, ages of marriage rose when significant proportions of women became part of a work force that received wages and even more so when extended years of schooling and training were prerequisites in the search for jobs and livelihoods. This is the story of adolescence and adulthood normalized in Western contexts during the twentieth century; the Indian situation could not be more different. Low work-force participation rates among women in twenty-first-century India is an issue that somehow has eluded public attention more generally and especially in the literature on early and child marriage.

5.1 The case of child labour

A good indication of the lack of links between age at marriage, marriage itself and questions of labour and work can be seen in discussions on child labour. Moreover, the issue of child labour demonstrates a very different approach to the whole question of childhood compared with what has become such a major focus in the realm of marriage. Although child labour is a major theme with a legacy that goes back to late-nineteenth-century colonial India, it appears to have gained fresh visibility in the Indian context in the last quarter of the twentieth century. Thus, it predates the new twenty-first-century focus on early and child marriage. One of the first things that is striking is that the very concept of child labour is a matter of hot debate. Articles and books are structured around different views, and much of the writing on the subject is carried out in a spirit of strong disagreement. One way of making a link between child marriage and child labour would be via the very definition of a child. If no child below the age of 18 can give consent to marriage, then such a marriage, by definition, must be considered forced marriage. Any labour within such a marriage would then be forced labour (not unlike slavery that has been banned by international conventions). Those opposed to child marriage in principle can thus find further ammunition by rendering it as forced labour under international conventions.

But others question the very structure of these new conventions around the rights of the child. In the context of the enactment of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), it is telling that those sections dealing with child labour have been the most contentious. Vasanthi Raman, for instance, has argued that it is precisely here that

the Eurocentric bias of the new child rights discourse is most visible. "In many third world settings children's work is considered valuable not merely for the economic contribution they make towards their own and the family's survival and viability, but also because such work has its own place in integrating children into the family and wider kin and community networks" (Raman 2000: 4057). Another social scientist, G.K. Lieten, has asked: How should child labour be defined? Is all work done by children a problem? He argues that it is wrong to have a single definition of child labour and that the tendency to place all children not in school – whom he calls "nowhere children" – within the category of potential or actual child labour is a mistake. According to him, it is necessary to disentangle different situations, especially the hazardous, largely urban-based exploitation of children from other kinds of work such children may be doing as part of socialization within their families, especially in rural contexts (Lieten 2002).

But Neera Burra cannot agree, and she makes a gendered analysis to underscore her point. First of all, she finds the very distinction between child labour and child work suspect – a distinction that is endorsed by the International Labour Organization and the World Bank – where it is only child labour which must be opposed as it interferes with children's development and especially their schooling. She goes on to say that such a distinction is particularly problematic when it comes to girls. It is girls whose schooling is curtailed and who are engaged in "invisible" unpaid family work related to households – from collecting water and fuel to housework and sibling care (Burra 2005; Burra 2001).

In the midst of this contentious literature where the very question of what counts as child labour remains open to different views and definitions of the problem, it was all the more instructive to discover how the question of age is addressed. The upper limit for legislation on child labour has been set at 14 years, a significantly lower level than that of marriage. Much of the debate on child labour has been connected to the push for making the education of children compulsory and universal. Here we can see the possible legacy of elementary schooling as a focus of policy attention – we saw in the previous chapter that elementary schooling does not address the prevalence of early marriage. The extraordinarily long and, until very recently, unsuccessful effort to enforce the right to education in India as a state-sanctioned fundamental right to all children was focussed entirely on elementary education until class eight, when children would be in the region of 14 years. The contrast with the push to end child marriage is palpable where the age of 18 years, as we saw, exposed the need to look to secondary levels of schooling and beyond. Curiously, at the very time when legislation on child marriage has sought to become more stringent, the most recent amendment of the Child Labour Law (in 2016) has allowed for non-hazardous work, including family and household-based work, by children below the age of 14. All of this has

made for few connections between those engaged in child labour and those concerned with child marriage.

Scholars like Neera Burra who have been at the forefront of writing and advocating on the subject on child labour have also paid some attention to the girl child in this context. Most of the focus in the literature on child labour has been on boys since it is they who predominate within the definition of labour for remuneration. In order to draw attention to girls, Burra compares feminist arguments about the invisibility of women's domestic work with the work assigned to girls at home, which keeps them out of school. Just as feminists have argued that women need to be brought out of the private sphere into the public world for their empowerment, so too must girls be disengaged from housework in order to gain an education, which is currently being denied to them. The equation of being female with the labour associated with the home is yet another version of the child-woman that we have been encountering so extensively throughout this book. Burra makes the further assumption that schooling is the pathway to a life outside the domestic sphere, a common but erroneous assumption in the Indian context. Yet again, the very low work participation rates of women remain completely unacknowledged. But Burra does make a link with child marriage in her account of the work of the MV Foundation in Andhra Pradesh, whose efforts to combat child labour involved postponing the marriage of girls. Organizing girls – now described as adolescent girls – who were working or out of school to make them go back to school also led to organizing them to resist being married before the age of 18. According to MV women staff, as cited by Burra, it was easier to get parents to participate in programmes against practices of bonded labour than to change marriage practices (Burra 2001). Whatever the efficacy of these programmes, the effort seems to be one of keeping girls in school, although it is not clear what new avenues of employment would be available to them after they turned 18. There is also a definite limitation in the frameworks adopted: while the whole discussion on child labour is located within the conditions of survival besetting poor households who are dependent on the contributions of children, the discussion on marriage is framed in terms of "cultural stereotypes" and "deep seated beliefs, traditions and mindsets", where people basically suffer from "false consciousness" (Burra 2001).

5.2 Women's work and child marriage

A major reason why efforts to address early and child marriage are so flawed is that the realm of women's relation to work has hardly been examined in this context. An important exception would be an essay by Deepita Chakravarty (2018), and the volume "Love, Law and Labour: Child Marriage in West Bengal", brought out by the School of Women's Studies, Jadavpur University (Sen and Ghosh eds., 2021). Her main point of departure is that since West Bengal is an average performer when it

comes to literacy or poverty, it is the lack of economic opportunities for women (i.e., gainful employment with adequate remuneration) that accounts for the fact that West Bengal has such high proportions of girls marrying below the age of 18. Her essay offers crucial historical and contextual underpinnings, which are complex and contradictory. After all, as we saw in Chapter 2, Bengal was at the heart of the social reform struggles focussed on child marriage during the colonial period. So, first, it would appear that the version of cultural nationalism that was promoted during the reformist period in colonial Bengal was able to expand its normative place in the decades that followed, one that not only glorified female domesticity within the home but that reached beyond the urban middle classes to the rural and working poor. Equally crucial, the nature of agricultural production, on the one hand, and industrial stagnation and decline, on the other, became forces of effective exclusion for women in the realm of work. In rural Bengal, women are predominantly engaging in small home-based activities (such as a popular form of embroidery known as *katha* stitching), and urban cities have been attracting disproportionately large numbers of young migrant girls to work in middle-class homes as domestic servants. None of these forms of work or employment requires any relationship with schooling and all are perfectly compatible with early marriage (Chakravarty 2018). We will come back to these issues when we look at our own case studies across states.

The paradoxes that characterize the exceptional situation in urban Kolkata, where girls in the age group of five to nine years outnumber boys among child workers, might in turn throw some light on the much larger paradox that characterizes women's work in India, once the institution of marriage, especially early marriage, is brought into the picture. Deepita Chakravarty and Ishita Chakravarty have been trying to make sense of Kolkata's girl child workers in a series of studies (Chakravarty and Chakravarty 2008, 2013, 2016) and so has another investigation by Samita Sen and Nilanjana Sengupta (Sen and Sengupta 2016). This is effectively a story of reversal – from the early twentieth-century colonial period when child-wives from well to do families were looked after by elderly servants to the contemporary period when highly educated affluent metropolitan women (married at appropriately adult ages, who might be housewives or pursuing careers) could be served by full-time live-in girl children. Poverty, poor quality of schooling, histories of migration, and contracting work opportunities for both working-class men and women have resulted in a situation where the inequalities of age and gender have made paid domestic work by far the leading sector of urban employment for women in Kolkata, quite supplanting an older feudal culture of male servants (Ray and Qayyum 2009). Kolkata also has significant rates of early marriage compared with the much lower rates in other Indian cities, and patterns of decline have been much less pronounced. In their survey of domestic workers in two working-class squatter settlements in Kolkata, Samita Sen and Nilanjana Sengupta found that early marriage "interrupted" the life cycle of young unmarried girls who were working for little more than bed and board and who then

returned after motherhood to work part-time in more than one household. Furthermore, there was little change in age of marriage across three generations in spite of protestations by respondents that they wished to marry their daughters later (Sen and Sengupta 2016: 181–184).

By way of a contrast, other studies, such as by Madhumita Dutta, have offered a more favourable account of migrant young (in their early twenties) women from rural Odisha and Tamil Nadu, who savoured their few years of employment in a Chennai Nokia factory before its abrupt closure in 2014 (Dutta 2021). Notice however, that all of them had completed at least 12 years of schooling or had begun a college education when compulsions – usually hardship and poverty in the family, especially when fathers did not manage to be “breadwinners” – brought them into the world of mobile phone assembly. Just how complex the world of factory life becomes can be further glimpsed in a recent study by Tamil Nadu’s Council of Child Welfare: In those towns and cities in Tamil Nadu where the prominence of factory work has created the sense of abundant work opportunities for a young growing migrant workforce, they found that more than half of the cases of underage marriages among local girls were “love marriages” with this class of male factory workers. In rural districts, however, almost all the underage marriages were arranged by families among poorer castes (Murugesan, Rajan and Kumarbabu 2019). How, then, do we view these examples of youth, work, love and marriage in the “modern” context of factory life and its attendant cultures? Some marriages may be underage, others not.

All of these very specific and somewhat isolated examples make it abundantly clear that women’s relation to work and employment is in a peculiar crisis because marriage has been so naturalized (or considered so central to Indian culture) as to make women’s large-scale exclusion from gainful employment go unnoticed. India’s employment market is markedly characterized by the most exploitative of conditions and low levels of remuneration when it comes to women. For the majority, there are no jobs waiting at the end of their school years, whether urban or rural. In ways that are hardly paid attention to, the only qualification for a “good” marriage is the right kind of education, and these very qualifications need not have any job prospects. In order to correct the widespread assumption that higher ages at marriage bear a positive correlation with employment opportunities, Table 4.1 gives us a rudimentary picture based on National Family Health Survey (NFHS-4) unit data. Note that NFHS asks only very minimal questions about occupation to a smaller sample of respondents.

(T50) Table 5.1: Occupational Status by Age of Marriage Groups in India, NFHS 4, 2015–16

States and indicators	Married below 18 years	Married between 18 and 20 years	Married by 21 years and above	Total	N
Not working					
Rajasthan	66.2	72.1	75.1	69.7	3,045
West Bengal	74.3	84.8	77.6	77.8	5,306
Telangana	42.1	58.8	62.4	50.7	1,357
India	65.2	73.5	74.4	70.2	61,329
Professional/Technical/Managerial/Clerical					
Rajasthan	0.7	0.9	4.2	1.4	61
West Bengal	0.8	1.2	9.5	2.4	162
Telangana	1.4	4.8	12.5	4.4	117
India	1.1	2.2	7.0	3.0	2,609
Sales/Services					
Rajasthan	2.8	1.7	2.7	2.4	105
West Bengal	5.4	2.7	4.3	4.5	305
Telangana	8.0	8.0	3.8	7.3	195
India	5.0	4.1	4.8	4.6	4,061
Agricultural					
Rajasthan	22.4	18.8	14.2	19.8	863
West Bengal	6.9	4.9	4.1	5.9	400
Telangana	37.6	19.9	15.0	28.3	758
India	21.3	14.4	9.1	16.0	14,005
Skilled/Unskilled Manual					
Rajasthan	8.0	6.4	3.7	6.7	293
West Bengal	12.5	6.4	4.6	9.4	644
Telangana	10.9	8.5	6.3	9.4	251
India	7.4	5.7	4.7	6.2	5,394

Source: National Family Health Survey (NFHS 4), 2015–16, Ages 15 to 49 years. The summation of all types of workers and non-workers is 100%. N denotes weighted sample size.

Table 5.1 offers break-ups for very broad categories of employment (not working, professional work, sales, agriculture and manual work) among respondents in the 15–49 year age group, disaggregating among those who married below 18 years, between 18–20 years and 21 and above. Information has been provided at the all-India level and for the three states of our study. The first shock would be that the majority have never worked for any kind of remuneration: 70.2% at the all-India level. Agricultural work is the highest category overall (and there are major differences between the three states), and small proportions are to be found in the other sectors, including the most modern ones. But – even more surprising – the proportion of those not working *increases* at higher ages at marriage (associated with higher levels of education). West Bengal (a state with one of the lowest rates of employed women) has a somewhat different pattern because the greatest proportion of women not employed is in the 18- to 20 year age group. The stigma attached to agricultural and manual labour is

evident too – it reduces at higher ages at marriage (which in turn are associated with higher standards of living). Only tiny proportions of married women in professional sectors see an increase in employment at higher ages at marriage. *It is therefore a matter of some urgency that careless if not irresponsible claims of how eliminating child marriage will lead to better employment opportunities for girls must be critiqued. Whatever might be the situation in other parts of the world, this is most definitely not the Indian story.*

5.3 What does the Survey data Say?

Before examining employment patterns among our respondents, we begin our discussion with the ubiquity of unpaid domestic work in their lives. What are their responsibilities? How much help do they get from other family members? What difference does early marriage make? It should be emphasized once again that the survey data is too small a sample to be representative of larger trends, and this would be even more true of the interviews which were chosen for their diversity. The survey data, as mentioned in chapter two is meant to provide a local picture of young married women and what they have to say, and so the numbers are relative to their respective localities. They should be read in comparison to one another and against the backdrop of the state level trends that the national data can offer. The extremely limited nature of the national level data also adds to the value of the primary data, while at the same time being a critical reference point. The Tables below provide a picture of the domestic work all the respondents were engaged in and whether this was their sole responsibility or they received help from others.

When respondents were initially asked whether they received any help from others in carrying out domestic work, many said yes – most of all in the rural sites (Murshidabad 95% ; Sawai Madhopur 90.5% and Mahbubnagar 85.8%) but also in the urban sites, with the exception of Kolkata (Kolkata 59%; Jaipur 94.5% and Hyderabad 89.3%). But on further probing, these initial responses turned out to be rather misleading, especially when respondents were asked about the kind of help they received for specific spheres of responsibility – cooking, cleaning, childcare, buying rations, getting fuel, water and so on. The Tables 5.2 a, b, and c tell their own story.

(T51) Table 5.2a: Unpaid Domestic work and family help, West Bengal

		District													
		Kolkata				Murshidabad				Total					
		Below 18 years		18 and Above 18 years		Below 18 years		18 and Above 18 years		Below 18 years		18 and Above 18 years		Total	
Tasks	List of who helps	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
In Cooking Meals	No help	47	65.3	60	48.4	75	51	37	50.0	122	55.7	97	49.0	219	52.5
	Husband	2	2.8	9	7.3	10	6.8	1	1.4	12	5.5	10	5.1	22	5.3
	Mother in law	13	18.1	19	15.3	48	32.7	26	35.1	61	27.9	45	22.7	106	25.4
	Domestic helper	0	0.0	19	15.3	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	19	9.6	19	4.6
	Others	10	13.9	17	13.7	14	9.5	10	13.5	24	10.9	27	13.6	51	12.2
	Total		72	100.0	124	100.0	147	100.0	74	100.0	219	100.0	198	100.0	417
In Cleaning and Washing	No help	55	76.4	63	51.2	102	69.9	45	60.8	157	72	108	54.8	265	63.8
	Husband	2	2.8	4	3.3	7	4.8	2	2.7	9	4.1	6	3.0	15	3.6
	Mother in law	7	9.7	12	9.8	21	14.4	14	18.9	28	12.8	26	13.2	54	13.0
	Domestic helper	1	1.4	33	26.8	1	.7	1	1.4	2	.9	34	17.3	36	8.7
	Others	7	9.7	11	8.9	15	10.3	12	16.2	22	10.1	23	11.7	45	10.8
	Total		72	100.0	123	100.0	146	100.0	74	100.0	218	100.0	197	100.0	415
In Child care	No help	56	80.0	75	67.0	72	56.3	38	64.4	128	64.6	113	66.1	241	65.3
	Husband	3	4.3	9	8.0	10	7.8	6	10.2	13	6.6	15	8.8	28	7.6
	Mother in law	5	7.1	11	9.8	27	21.1	9	15.3	32	16.2	20	11.7	52	14.1
	Domestic helper	0	0.0	4	3.6	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	4	2.3	4	1.1
	Others	6	8.6	13	11.6	19	14.8	6	10.2	25	12.6	19	11.1	44	11.9
	Total		70	100.0	112	100.0	128	100.0	59	100.0	198	100.0	171	100.0	369
In Shopping or getting rations	No help	43	67.2	57	52.8	25	17.9	13	18.1	68	33.3	70	38.9	138	35.9
	Husband	10	15.6	34	31.5	64	45.7	33	45.8	74	36.3	67	37.2	141	36.7
	Mother in law	6	9.4	10	9.3	7	5.0	5	6.9	13	6.4	15	8.3	28	7.3
	Domestic helper	0	0.0	2	1.9	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	2	1.1	2	.5
	Others	5	7.8	5	4.6	44	31.4	21	29.2	49	24.0	26	14.4	75	19.5
	Total		64	100.0	108	100.0	140	100.0	72	100.0	204	100.0	180	100.0	384

In collecting water or fuel	No help	46	83.6	48	72.7	31	27.7	10	16.9	77	46.1	58	46.4	135	46.2
	Husband	3	5.5	5	7.6	51	45.5	30	50.8	54	32.3	35	28.0	89	30.5
	Mother in law	3	5.5	7	10.6	5	4.5	5	8.5	8	4.8	12	9.6	20	6.8
	Domestic helper	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
	Others	3	5.4	6	9.1	25	22.3	14	23.7	28	16.8	20	16.0	48	16.4
	Total	55	100.0	66	100.0	112	100.0	59	100.0	167	100.0	125	100.0	292	100.0

(T52) Table 5.2b: Unpaid Domestic work and family help, Rajasthan

		District													
		Jaipur				Sawai Madhopur				Total					
		Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years		Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years		Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years		Total	
Tasks	List of who helps	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
In Cooking meals	No help	10	23.8	33	18.6	35	38.9	38	33.3	45	34.1	71	24.4	116	26.9
	Husband	11	26.2	31	17.5	4	4.4	2	1.8	15	11.4	33	11.3	48	11.3
	Mother in law	5	11.9	55	31.1	36	40.0	57	50.0	41	31.1	112	38.5	153	36.2
	Domestic helper	0	0.0	3	1.7	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	3	1.0	3	.7
	Others	16	38.1	55	31.1	15	16.7	17	14.9	31	23.5	72	24.7	103	24.4
	Total		42	100.0	177	100.0	90	100.0	114	100.0	132	100.0	291	100.0	423
In Cleaning and Washing	No help	12	28.6	58	32.8	42	46.7	47	41.2	54	40.9	105	36.1	159	37.6
	Husband	9	21.4	15	8.5	2	2.2	2	1.8	11	8.3	17	5.8	28	6.6
	Mother in law	5	11.9	45	25.4	32	35.6	51	44.7	37	28.0	96	33.0	133	31.4
	Domestic helper	0	0.0	9	5.1	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	9	3.1	9	2.1
	Others	16	38.1	50	28.3	14	15.6	14	12.3	30	22.7	64	22.0	94	22.2
	Total		42	100.0	177	100.0	90	100.0	114	100.0	132	100.0	291	100.0	423
In Child care	No help	6	14.6	18	11.4	33	38.8	50	50.0	39	30.9	68	26.4	107	27.9
	Husband	13	31.7	40	25.3	6	7.1	5	5.0	19	15.1	45	17.4	64	16.7
	Mother in law	9	22.0	38	24.1	30	35.3	29	29.0	39	31.0	67	26.0	106	27.6
	Domestic helper	0	0.0	1	.6	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	.4	1	.3
	Others	13	31.7	61	38.6	16	18.8	16	16.0	29	23.0	77	29.8	106	27.6
	Total		41	100.0	158	100.0	85	100.0	100	100.0	126	100.0	258	100.0	384
In Shopping or getting rations	No help	4	9.5	12	6.8	10	11.1	14	12.2	14	10.6	26	8.9	40	9.4
	Husband	22	52.4	78	44.1	42	46.7	63	54.8	64	48.5	141	48.3	205	48.3
	Mother in law	4	9.5	27	15.3	7	7.8	6	5.2	11	8.3	33	11.3	44	10.4
	Domestic helper	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
	Others	12	28.6	60	33.9	31	34.4	32	27.8	43	32.6	92	31.5	135	31.8
	Total		42	100.0	177	100.0	90	100.0	115	100.0	132	100.0	292	100.0	424
In collecting water or fuel	No Help	11	26.2	49	29.2	44	52.4	48	43.6	55	43.6	97	34.9	152	37.6
	Husband	10	23.8	25	14.9	3	3.6	8	7.3	13	10.3	33	11.9	46	11.4
	Mother in law	7	16.7	45	26.8	23	27.4	42	38.2	30	23.8	87	31.3	117	29.0
	Domestic helper	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
	Others	14	33.3	49	29.2	14	16.7	12	10.9	28	22.2	61	21.9	89	22.0
	Total		42	100.0	168	100.0	84	100.0	110	100.0	126	100.0	278	100.0	404

(T53) Table 5.2c: Unpaid Domestic work and family help, Telangana

District															
		Hyderabad				Mahabnagar				Total				Total	
		Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years		Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years		Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years			
Tasks	List of who helps	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
In Cooking meals	No Help	26	44.1	69	44.5	23	26.4	35	38.5	49	33.6	104	42.3	153	39.0
	Husband	13	22.0	26	16.8	4	4.6	2	2.2	17	11.6	28	11.4	45	11.5
	Mother in law	11	18.6	35	22.6	31	35.6	30	33.0	42	28.8	65	26.4	107	27.3
	Domestic helper	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
	Others	9	15.3	25	16.1	29	33.3	24	26.4	38	26.0	49	19.9	87	22.2
	Total		59	100.0	155	100.0	87	100.0	91	100.0	146	100.0	246	100.0	392
In Cleaning and Washing	No Help	37	62.7	78	50.3	25	28.7	36	39.6	62	42.5	114	46.3	176	44.9
	Husband	2	3.4	9	5.8	2	2.3	3	3.3	4	2.7	12	4.9	16	4.1
	Mother in law	10	16.9	26	16.8	31	35.6	26	28.6	41	28.1	52	21.1	93	23.7
	Domestic helper	0	0.0	1	.6	2	2.3	1	1.1	2	1.4	2	.8	4	1.0
	Others	10	16.9	41	26.5	27	31.0	25	27.5	37	25.3	66	26.8	103	26.3
	Total		59	100.0	155	100.0	87	100.0	91	100.0	146	100.0	246	100.0	392
In Childcare	No help	24	41.4	40	27.8	10	12.8	14	17.1	34	25.0	54	23.9	88	24.3
	Husband	13	22.4	40	27.8	10	12.8	11	13.4	23	16.9	51	22.6	74	20.4
	Mother in law	10	17.2	34	23.6	22	28.2	16	19.5	32	23.5	50	22.1	82	22.7
	Domestic helper	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
	Others	11	19.0	30	20.8	36	46.2	41	50.0	47	34.6	71	31.4	118	32.6
	Total		58	100.0	144	100.0	78	100.0	82	100.0	136	100.0	226	100.0	362
In Shopping or getting rations	No help	8	13.8	18	11.8	3	3.4	4	4.4	11	7.6	22	9.1	33	8.5
	Husband	33	56.9	83	54.2	29	33.3	28	31.1	62	42.8	111	45.7	173	44.6
	Mother in law	8	13.8	13	8.5	26	29.9	23	25.6	34	23.4	36	14.8	70	18.0

	Domestic helper	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
	Others	9	15.5	39	25.5	29	33.3	35	38.9	38	26.2	74	30.4	112	28.9
	Total	58	100.0	153	100.0	87	100.0	90	100.0	145	100.0	243	100.0	388	100.0
In collecting water or fuel	No help	28	51.9	82	58.6	24	28.9	26	29.5	52	38.0	108	47.4	160	43.8
	Husband	13	24.1	30	21.4	13	15.7	9	10.2	26	19.0	39	17.1	65	17.8
	Mother in law	4	7.4	10	7.1	15	18.1	16	18.2	19	13.9	26	11.4	45	12.3
	Domestic helper	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
	Others	9	16.7	18	12.9	31	37.3	37	42.1	40	29.2	55	24.1	95	26.0
	Total	54	100.0	140	100.0	83	100.0	88	100.0	137	100.0	228	100.0	365	100.0

As one can see from the above Tables 5.1 a, b and c not only were the proportions of those not receiving any kind of help higher than what was initially reported, those married before 18 on the whole had less help than those at higher ages. Mothers-in-law (when it came to tasks such as cooking and cleaning) and husbands (mainly visible in tasks such as buying groceries) were prominent helpers from the family. In fact, in the urban sites the majority did not have any help in major tasks such as cooking, cleaning and looking after children in Kolkata and Hyderabad – the exception here was Jaipur. As one might expect, paid domestic help was only reported in urban areas among the middle classes married at higher ages, especially in Kolkata. In the rural sites Murshidabad respondents reported more help than in Kolkata, but even here as much as 70% were solely responsible for all the cleaning and washing among those married before 18 years. Sawai Madhopur respondents bore much more responsibility for housework than those in Jaipur, again more so in cleaning and washing and more so among those married early. Only in Mahbubnagar was the picture somewhat reversed – women married at 18 or after reported less help than those married earlier. Mothers-in-law and to a lesser extent sisters-in-law offered more help in Mahbubnagar leaving 28.7% solely responsible. (Note that it is here that the respondents were most engaged in paid work in agriculture and construction, as we shall see shortly).

5.4 Daily Housework – Voices from the interviews

In the sample of those interviewed in Kolkata, most women performed the majority of domestic chores in their households. On an average, women managed 6-7 hours of sleep; with a few reporting 5 hours of sleep, and one slept regularly for barely 3 hours. The daily tasks included cleaning the house (sweeping and mopping), washing dishes, washing clothes (usually by hand), cooking all meals. Half the women reported having to collect and carry water every day. A few mentioned grocery shopping. Middle class women only did cooking on their own (besides child care). Women with paid work did their housework before and after their jobs; in the case of domestic workers, they also did their housework in between their work in the homes of others.

In comparison, women in Murshidabad appeared to have more time for sleep and rest – whether this be due to the materialities of rural life or the fact that so few were engaged in paid work. Most went to bed around 9-10pm and woke up around 6am. Their daily schedule involved cleaning their homes, washing dishes, and cooking. A few spoke of having to do unpaid and unacknowledged agricultural work for their families.

Most women in Jaipur reported waking up at 5-6 am, and going to bed around 9pm – some reported later bedtimes (11pm or midnight). The commonly reported daily tasks were cleaning the house, washing dishes and cooking. A quarter of the women mentioned having to fill and store water; one described how tedious this task was. A couple had to take care of cows for their family's agriculture/dairy business. Middle class women only did cooking and child care related work; one only had child care.

In Sawai Madhopur, the common schedule for women was to go to bed by 9-10pm and wake up at 4-5am. Their everyday tasks included cleaning their houses, washing dishes, and cooking. Washing clothes was mentioned occasionally. Collecting and storing water was mentioned as something that took up time. Many women reported agricultural work on their own farms – harvesting, taking care of cattle, making cow dung cakes.

Most women in Hyderabad reported sleeping around 10 pm and waking up around 6am. Those who worked at the vegetable markets (*mandi*) woke up at 4 am instead, and began their housework after coming back from the *mandi* around noon or so. Daily tasks included cleaning their houses and porches (porches were specifically mentioned by most), washing dishes and clothes, and cooking. Storing water was mentioned by less than a fifth of the women. Some middle class women – not all- did only cooking related work.

Most women in Mahbubnagar reported sleeping around 9-10pm and waking up at 5-6am. The daily routine required them to clean their houses, wash dishes and cook. A few mentioned having to collect water, and firewood. Elderly women/mothers-in-law described their domestic routine when they got married as much more strenuous, even though the domestic tasks were similar. They did seem to have more agricultural work, but otherwise it was not clear if it was harder domestic work or how they remembered it in relation to what they now observed.

It should be emphasized here that it was not easy to get the respondents to talk about their daily chores. These were not a matter of thought – especially in the rural sites – and respondents had to think hard about their routines, when they got up or went to sleep. This was not work but simply life, to be endured as part of being married. Just how much help women received was also not something they appeared to give much thought to. The significant difference was for those who were also engaged in paid work and were therefore juggling many tasks and responsibilities, and also in urban sites such as Kolkata where the enormous burden for newly wedded women (at whatever age) in poor households was palpable to themselves.

5.4.1 Childcare

Given the age group of these women, their children were of younger ages and usually needed much time and attention but even here it was rare for women to go into detail. A few in each district would say it was too much work leaving them with no time to rest.

In Kolkata, those with babies and toddlers had to care for them constantly. Poor working class women often had to wait for a family member to take care of their baby to get anything done. Most women with school going children reported bathing and feeding them, preparing their lunchboxes and getting them ready for school. It was common for them to drop and pick up children to and from school; a third reported taking/bringing children to tuition or other classes and a few mentioned helping with or supervising homework. Middle class women often mentioned “spending quality time” with their children, while poor women with low levels of education hoped for better futures for their children.

The majority of women in Murshidabad had children, and child care took up a lot of their time. Almost half spoke of having to bathe, feed children and put them to sleep throughout their day. A few mentioned taking them to and from school and tuition classes. A third mentioned helping with or supervising homework.

In Jaipur as well, since many had young children, bathing, feeding and getting them ready for school took up much of their time. A few reported taking children to school, and very few mentioned homework. Women with babies and toddlers – especially those from working class backgrounds – said that their children take up most of their day, leaving them no time to rest or do anything else. One woman, who married very young, was particularly unhappy about being stuck at home taking care of the baby all day. On the other hand, a middle class woman with babies reported being relatively comfortable as she had no other responsibilities and could rest whenever the children were asleep. If women had elderly and/or ill parents-in-law, this increased their daily care burden as well.

In Hyderabad, childcare for most women involved preparing tiffins, getting children ready for school and dropping them to school. Fewer women had babies/toddlers in this sample. Even elderly women/mothers-in-law reported cooking and preparing tiffins for husbands and grown children.

Childcare was generally not mentioned in detail by women in Sawai Madhopur and Mahabubnagar. Those with school going children mentioned bathing, feeding and getting

them ready for school. Those with babies/toddlers were more occupied with childcare. A few mentioned helping children with homework.

Even here, when the care of children is a more publicly acknowledged responsibility, and when child care both at very young ages and school going children is such an onerous responsibility that requires being constantly prepared to be there, many of our respondents did not dwell on this aspect of their daily work. In fact, in some instances, their exhaustion and stress was more visible at the time of taking the survey and interview, given that this was time away from their duties.

5.4.2 Rest, leisure and help with housework

In Kolkata, mothers-in-law helped in cooking for around a quarter of the women in the interview sample; just one said that her mother-in-law did all the housework. Occasionally sisters-in-law and husbands were reported to share cooking or cleaning tasks. Fathers-in-law and husbands in some cases helped with children, particularly taking them to school, tuitions etc. Two working women left children with their mothers when they went to work. Only two women mentioned having domestic help, but for all the middle class women it was evident that they had paid domestic workers. Around half the women said they could find time for rest – usually half an hour to an hour (this is contrast to other districts, especially rural districts where women have more time). Some said it was only when children had holidays, and one said she went to her mother's house in the afternoons to rest. A few women also mentioned taking breaks to surf the internet on their phones, or watch television. One mentioned taking breaks to "chat" with women around her and repeatedly justified this saying "no one can work continuously."

A third of women interviewed in Murshidabad said that their mothers-in-law did almost all the housework or helped with most of it. One had a domestic helper. One woman said she had to send her child to a relative's house for a few hours 2-3 days per week to be able to get some rest. Overall, two-thirds of women said they could find time during the day to rest – 2 hours up to 4-5 hours.

Two thirds of women in Jaipur reported they had time for rest or leisure- at least two hours. It was often women who worked full time and had to do all the housework as well, who got no rest. A third of the total respondents reported having someone to help – most often mothers-in-law, and husbands. Four women who had full time jobs had no help. (One middle class woman said she had instructed her family to not speak to her in the mornings, just so she could have some peaceful time before starting the day)

Most women in Sawai Madhopur said they could find time for rest in the afternoons – usually 2 hours or more. Those who did not get much time to rest usually mentioned that it was because of children, some because of farm work or paid work. Women working on farms said that they had no time to rest during the harvest months. Mothers-in-law were the only ones who provided some help – however, this was usually with family agricultural work, and occasionally childcare. Many of the mothers-in-law went out for “lavani” (harvest-related) work as well.

Two thirds of women in Hyderabad said they could find time to rest during the day – those who specified duration would say around 2 hours or sometimes more. Some said they could only get rest when children had days off, or when they went to their natal homes. Regarding help with housework, it was most often mothers-in-law, followed by husbands (the latter was usually true for middle class women). Only two mentioned having domestic helpers. A few had mothers-in-law who were employed, so they had to do all the housework on their own. There were a few (7 out of 51) women who were employed but had no help with housework at all.

Two thirds of women in Mahbubnagar said they could rest during the day – 2-3 hours or more. Those who did agricultural work could only rest during the day in the summers. One who did tailoring work in the day complained about lack of sleep or rest; while two others doing the same said they could take time off when they pleased. Most respondents in this district did not report having help with domestic work. Just three women said all the housework was done by a female family member -- mother-in-law/mother/grandmother. Two others said mothers-in-law were of some help, while one said her in-laws took care of children.

To summarise this section of the interviews, when explicitly asked about their daily work and responsibilities, we can see that women in large part did not think this was worth dwelling upon. Many hours spent on the daily reproduction of life and that of their families did not seem to count as being of value. We will have occasion to return to this theme in the chapter on marriage.

5.5 Paid Work from the Surveys

(T54) Table 5.3a: Did you have paid employment before marriage? West Bengal

	District							
	Kolkata				Murshidabad			
	Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years		Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years	
West Bengal	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
No Occupation	45	65.2	63	49.6	141	95.3	61	81.3
Agricultural labour	1	1.4	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Cultivator and animal husbandry	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Artisans	0	0.0	1	0.8	0	0.0	1	1.3
Industrial worker	0	0.0	1	0.8	0	0.0	0	0.0
Construction worker	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Professional or executive services	0	0.0	10	7.9	0	0.0	0	0.0
Clerical Services	1	1.4	3	2.4	0	0.0	0	0.0
Sales Employee	1	1.4	3	2.4	0	0.0	0	0.0
Own Trade or Business	4	5.8	3	2.4	0	0.0	1	1.3
Education teacher or assistant	1	1.4	18	14.2	0	0.0	6	8.0
Home based work	3	4.3	4	3.1	2	1.4	2	2.7
Personal Service	10	14.5	4	3.1	1	.7	2	2.7
Social Service	3	4.3	15	11.8	4	2.7	2	2.7
any other/no occupation/seeking employment	0	0.0	2	1.6	0	0.0	0	0.0
Sub Total Workers	24	34.8	64	50.4	7	4.7	14	18.7
Total	69	100.0	127	100.0	148	100.0	75	100.0

(T55) Table 5.4a: Did you have paid employment after marriage? West Bengal

	District							
	Kolkata				Murshidabad			
	Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years		Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
West Bengal								
No Occupation	47	65.3	62	49.2	141	95.3	68	90.7
Agricultural labour	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Cultivator and animal husbandry	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Artisans	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Industrial worker	0	0.0	1	.8	1	.7	0	0.0
Construction worker	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Professional or executive services	0	0.0	9	7.1	0	0.0	0	0.0
Clerical Services	1	1.4	1	.8	0	0.0	0	0.0
Sales Employee	1	1.4	1	.8	0	0.0	0	0.0
Own Trade or Business	3	4.2	14	11.1	2	1.4	1	1.3
Education teacher or assistant	0	0.0	14	11.1	0	0.0	1	1.3
Home based work	2	2.8	3	2.4	3	2.0	1	1.3
Personal Service	15	20.8	12	9.5	0	0.0	2	2.7
Social Service	3	4.2	9	7.1	1	.7	2	2.7
Housework	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
any other/no occupation/seeking employment	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Sub Total Workers	25	34.7	64	50.8	7	4.7	7	9.3
Total	72	100.0	126	100.0	148	100.0	75	100.0

(T56) Table 5.3b: Did you have paid employment before marriage? Rajasthan

	District							
	Jaipur				Sawai Madhopur			
	Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years		Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Rajasthan								
No Occupation	24	57.1	96	53.9	68	75.6	88	77.2
Agricultural labour	2	4.8	2	1.1	6	6.7	8	7.0
Cultivator and animal husbandry	1	2.4	1	0.6	9	10.0	6	5.3
Artisans	0	0.0	1	0.6	0	0.0	0	0.0
Industrial worker	0	0.0	3	1.7	0	0.0	0	0.0
Construction worker	1	2.4	0	0.0	1	1.1	1	0.9
Professional or executive services	0	0.0	3	1.7	0	0.0	0	0.0
Clerical Services	0	0.0	4	2.2	0	0.0	0	0.0
Sales Employee	1	2.4	2	1.1	0	0.0	0	0.0
Own Trade or Business	2	4.8	22	12.4	2	2.2	3	2.6
Education teacher or assistant	0	0.0	28	15.7	0	0.0	3	2.6
Home based work	8	19.0	12	6.7	2	2.2	2	1.8
Personal Service	1	2.4	0	0.0	0	.0	0	0.0
Social Service	2	4.8	4	2.2	1	1.1	2	1.8
any other/no occupation/seeking employment	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	0.9
Sub Total Workers	18	42.9	82	46.1	22	24.4	26	22.8
Total	42	100.0	178	100.0	90	100.0	114	100.0

(T57) Table 5.4b Are you currently in paid employment? Rajasthan

	District							
	Jaipur				Sawai Madhopur			
	Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years		Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
No Occupation	29	69.0	127	71.3	59	65.6	82	71.3
Agricultural labour	0	0.0	0	0.0	5	5.8	6	5.5
Cultivator and Animal Husbandry	0	0.0	0	0.0	18	20.9	20	18.2
Artisans	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Industrial worker	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Construction worker	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	1.2	3	2.7
Professional or executive services	0	0.0	4	2.3	0	0.0	0	0.0
Clerical Services	0	0.0	3	1.7	0	0.0	0	0.0
Sales Employee	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Own Trade or Business	6	14.3	13	7.5	4	4.7	3	2.7
Education teacher or assistant	0	0.0	9	5.2	0	0.0	0	0.0
Home based work	2	4.8	14	8.0	1	1.2	0	0.0
Personal Service	1	2.4	2	1.1	0	.0	0	0.0
Social Service	4	9.5	5	2.9	0	0.0	1	0.9
any other/seeking employment	0	0.0	1	0.6	2	2.3	1	0.9
Total	42	100.0	174	100.0	86	100.0	110	100.0

(T58) Table 5.3c: Did you have paid employment before marriage? Telangana

	District							
	Hyderabad				Mahbubnagar			
	Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years		Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Telangana								
No Occupation	30	50.8	79	51.0	39	39.8	49	50.5
Agricultural labour	13	22.0	2	1.3	24	24.5	11	11.3
Cultivator and animal husbandry	4	6.8	0	0.0	24	24.5	15	15.5
Artisans	1	1.7	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Industrial worker	2	3.4	2	1.3	0	0.0	0	0.0
Construction worker	2	3.4	3	1.9	7	7.1	4	4.1
Professional or executive services	1	1.7	12	7.7	0	0.0	1	1.0
Clerical Services	0	0.0	6	3.9	0	0.0	0	0.0
Sales Employee	0	0.0	11	7.1	0	0.0	0	0.0
Own Trade or Business	1	1.7	8	5.2	2	2.0	13	13.4
Education teacher or assistant	0	0.0	20	12.9	0	0.0	2	2.1
Home based work	1	1.7	3	1.9	0	0.0	0	0.0
Personal Service	2	3.4	1	0.6	1	1.0	0	0.0
Social Service	1	1.7	7	4.5	1	1.0	1	1.0
any other/no occupation/seeking employment	1	1.7	1	0.6	0	0.0	1	1.0
Sub Total Workers	29	49.2	76	49.0	59	60.2	48	49.5
Total	59	100.0	155	100.0	98	100.0	97	100.0

(T59) Table 5.4c: Are you currently in paid employment? Telangana

	District							
	Hyderabad				Mahbubnagar			
	Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years		Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years	
Telangana	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
No Occupation	39	66.1	125	80.6	31	31.6	42	43.3
Agricultural labour	0	0.0	0	0.0	24	24.5	7	7.2
Cultivator and Animal Husbandry	0	0.0	0	0.0	34	34.7	29	29.9
Artisans	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Industrial worker	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	1.0	0	0.0
Construction worker	4	6.8	0	0.0	3	3.1	3	3.1
Professional or executive services	0	0.0	3	1.9	0	0.0	0	0.0
Clerical Services	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Sales Employee	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Own Trade or Business	3	5.1	7	4.5	3	3.1	8	8.2
Education teacher or assistant	1	1.7	16	10.3	1	1.0	6	6.2
Home based work	0	0.0	1	0.6	1	1.0	0	0.0
Personal Service	2	3.4	1	0.6	0	.0	0	0.0
Social Service	10	16.9	2	1.3	0	0.0	2	2.1
any other/no occupation/seeking employment	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Sub Total Workers	20	33.9	30	19.4	67	68.4	55	56.7
Total	59	100.0	155	100.0	98	100.0	97	100.0

These Tables based on survey questions yield a mixed story. The bleakest picture comes from the rural sites – the vast majority in Murshidabad and Sawai Madhopur said quite categorically that they had no jobs, and moreover, that there were no jobs to be had. (This picture changed a bit during the interviews.) In Murshidabad, as many as 95.3% of those married below 18 and 81.3% married at 18 and above said they had never had paid work of any kind. In Sawai Madhopur the equivalent percentages were 75.6% and 77.3%. A different picture emerged in rural Telangana, where 39.8% of respondents married below 18 and 50.5% of those married at 18 and above had not worked before their marriages. In Mahbubnagar paid work before marriage basically meant working on family land as a cultivator or as an agricultural labourer – almost half the survey sample who had married before 18 had worked in agriculture in their homes before they were married. This matches their experiences with schooling – with no or low levels of schooling (as we saw in chapter four) respondents in Mahbubnagar worked for their families before their marriage. The proportion of those marrying at 18 or above in Mahbubnagar was 26.8%. Not even one respondent in Murshidabad reported working

in agriculture, while small numbers in the Sawai Madhopur sample did so. The numbers of other kinds of paid work in the rural sites were very small – such as home based work, self-employment, teaching and so on, whether they were married before 18 years or after. Teaching jobs among the very few in the rural sites were confined to those who had married later.

The urban sites present a more complex picture – both among the poorer communities and in the middle classes. In the urban sites, about half of the respondents had not worked for payment before their marriage, and with little difference in terms of age of marriage. Only in Kolkata had 65.2% of those who had married before 18 years not worked compared to 49.6% of those married at 18 and above. Among those who had married before 18 years, paid domestic work was the largest category in Kolkata, petty self-employment in Jaipur and in Hyderabad agricultural work – as cultivators or labourers (indicative of having migrated from villages where they engaged in this work before their marriages). For those married at 18 or above in our urban sites, urban occupations especially among the middle classes are visible in our survey samples. Teaching – whether part-time, or as an assistant or giving tuition – was the single largest occupation in Kolkata (14.2%) and Hyderabad (12.9%) but not in Jaipur (5.2%). Other occupations in Kolkata for young unmarried women who married at 18 or above were small numbers in professional services, or working in offices or beauty parlours. In Jaipur there were fewer options – some home based work and self-employment compared to Hyderabad where teaching, a few respondents reported working as sales employees, having professional jobs, or being in self-employment.

What happens after marriage? Keep in mind that in the rural sites (with a small exception in Mahbubnagar) marriage meant moving away from their natal families and localities altogether, whereas this was not necessarily the case in the urban sites.

Interestingly, West Bengal – whether urban or rural, whether before or after marriage presents the least change overall. Respondents in Murshidabad said that their present situation was just as bad – there were no jobs now either. Again, no one reported working in agriculture. If anything, there were even fewer women among those who had married at 18 years or above who now had jobs. In Jaipur, marriage and moving into a new family meant a drop in employment opportunities, especially among those who had married at 18 years or above. A smaller number were now in teaching jobs or found some sort of self-employment. In Sawai Madhopur, it is clear that after marrying into their new families, and whether at younger or somewhat older ages, while many reported that they did not work, a few were now engaged in agricultural work – whether as labour in other fields or, more commonly, as cultivators in their own. In Mahbubnagar,

agriculture dominates – especially as cultivators – and at all ages of marriage. So women move from their natal families to their rural in-laws in Mahbubnagar where some only report housework, while others work with their families in agricultural labour alongside all the new responsibilities in the marital home. Only tiny numbers of other occupations are mentioned. In Hyderabad, the drop in employment opportunities is even sharper and especially for those who had married at 18 years or above. Whereas before their marriages, some women marrying before 18 years had been engaged in agricultural work, this disappears with their new urban lives completely. A few work in service occupations or in self-employment. Among those marrying at 18 years or above, teaching remains the only significant source of employment, if only for a few.

5.6 Paid Work: Voices from the interviews

In an effort to gain as much as possible from those women who were employed, the interview respondents were oversampled if they were employed. The proportion of women with paid work in the interview sample were 63% in Kolkata, 32% in Murshidabad, 45% in Jaipur, 5% in Sawai Madhopur, 37% in Hyderabad, 60% in Mahbubnagar. Telangana is the only case where more women had paid work in the rural district than in the urban district. More than age of marriage, it was stage of marriage and socio-economic background that decided whether women had paid work. Quite often it was not marriage itself but children that led women to quit working. In urban contexts, those from lower economic backgrounds usually resumed work after a few years due to economic necessity. Women who had not worked before also took up paid work to improve their children's lives. These were women who had the least or no help with childcare or other work. Home-based work was more common, especially when children were young. Middle class women despite having help were less likely to return to work; some would take up online or other work that could be done at home. In rural contexts, more women were seeking work – preferably home-based, or for those with some education, government jobs.

5.6.1 Kolkata

Two-thirds of the respondents in Kolkata had paid work of some kind. Most of the women who had paid work were those from lower economic backgrounds and at lower education levels. Women married below 18 usually had not worked before marriage. Out of these, those working after marriage were mostly domestic workers, cooks and so on. A few were working as teachers or in offices/organisations.

One interviewee M.L. (Class 9, Married at 16, Hindu SC, Income Rs.7000) was determined to provide a better life for her sons and hence began working after marriage:

Before marriage I have never worked. I was studying. But when my sons were growing up I realised I have to find my work. Then domestic work was the only work available. There is no other work.

Another woman T.Y. (Class 5, Married at 14, Hindu SC, Income Rs.23000) helped her father with work before marriage but after marriage was not allowed to work outside:

There is no work. It is really a problem. At my parents' place in Diamond Harbour, there is at least some work of embroidery. I also worked there for a few years. I didn't get to sit at home, I helped my father. This is not available here. Sometimes I collect *saree* and blouses from local tailoring shops and do the fall and *pico* work, but there is no continuous flow of work here. Most of the Hindustani people of this area are working in houses. But we don't do that. Some people of my extended family are also working as domestic helpers but in our family we don't work in other houses. The new generation of daughters-in-law will not work as domestic helpers, their husbands won't allow them. Like my husband didn't allow me to work as a domestic helper... I got the option to work in some offices, to carry files and all. But my family did not allow me, they said it's odd if the bride of the family goes out to work. I will only get jobs according to my degree. I am not educated much.

N.B. (Class 12, Muslim Upper Caste, Income Rs.1.5 lakhs) eloped before turning 18, right out of school. She was determined to have a career after marriage and had various kinds of jobs:

I have had interviews for many kinds of jobs and I cracked the interview every time, be it in sales, or be it as a team leader, be it as a consultant, be it as a teacher, be it as a receptionist and so on. My first job was in sales as a consultant, then I became a team leader, then I did not have an office job for a while, at that time I was offering private tuitions. Then I joined this school as an accountant in the office. Then gradually I became the vice-principal, and I used to take activity classes like dancing, personality development and grooming. Within 6 months I became the principal of Kidzee. I joined this school in November as an accountant, and by April I became the principal. So it is a big achievement for me. I mean I can do any kind of job once I get the hang of it, if someone offers me a job that requires a 24 hour involvement, I am more than willing to do it if my family allows me to. I can do any kind of job, I just want to be able to enjoy my free time to the fullest. I don't want to depend on anyone for my enjoyment. I want to be able

to spend my own money as I wish, if my son asks for something when I go shopping with him, I want to be able to give him that without having to wait for my husband to come home.

In the group of women married above 18, most working class women had to change the nature of work to home-based work after marriage due to restrictions by husbands and families. A few were domestic workers, caregivers and held similar jobs after marriage. Others had to stop working due to pregnancy and small children, but said they planned to return to work later - they had held jobs such as salesgirls, factory workers, nursing etc. One of the interviewees, D.P. (Class 12, Married at 19, Hindu Upper Caste, Income Rs.13500) discussed how her career plans were thwarted by her husband and marital family (despite the fact that she had eloped with the person of her choice):

After marriage I have started doing these jobs. I already told you that I refused many offers immediately after marriage. I got a chance to join the Police force. But my husband was not willing to allow me to join a six months' training immediately after marriage. My parents wanted to establish a dance school for me where I could teach dance. But again my husband interrupted... I have been working as a cook for last 5 years. This time as well my in-laws tried to create problems. After one year of my marriage my daughter was born. I want to do something better for my daughter's future. So, I need more money. I even threatened my husband that I would divorce him [if he didn't let me work].

Of those married above 18, only one middle class woman worked as a lecturer before and after marriage. One had taken a break due to pregnancy. Another was allowed only home based tuitions.

I thought this is suitable for me because my husband will not allow me to go out for work. So I decided I will earn from home through tuitions. Along with earning, this job will provide me with experience also. I will be in touch with my education. This experience will help me teach my own children. If I leave this, I will forget everything I have studied. (M.P., Class 12, Married at 22, Hindu Upper Caste, Income Rs.45000)

The rest had either never worked, or switched from school teaching or office jobs to business, online ventures etc. Respondent M.Y. (Post graduate, Married at 24, Hindu Upper Caste, Income Rs.30000) had to quit her job at a call centre because of her marriage. She now works from home as a tuition teacher and has an online business on the side:

I used to work at a Reliance call centre. I had to resign from my job. Because my in-laws' house was in Krishnanagar, so it was not possible for me to work regularly in Kolkata. Moreover, my in-laws didn't want to let me work, so I resigned. But Krishnanagar is a suburban area. The ambience in a suburb is very different from that in a city. I lived there for 8 months. Then I gave an interview for a job in Kolkata, and I got the job in Amazon. So I gave it as an excuse for us shifting to Kolkata, and my husband's business was also here, and it was physically exhausting for him to travel every day, so we rented this place here, and it's been 4 years now that we have been living here.

Though all of them were not employed at present, most of the working class women said that it was common for women around them to undertake some kind of paid work. One section of these women said that their husbands did not allow them to work outside the home. In some working class areas, there was also stigma about women's character if they worked outside the home. The common narrative was that as young wives, men could control their mobility and decisions but when they had children, women chose to take up paid work for their needs. An ICDS teacher from the area corroborated this, saying often families sent out young daughters to work (parlours, tailors, malls, coffee counters, event management, offices, nursing, call centres) but husbands did not. However, men were less suspicious of their wives once they had children, and allowed them to work.

5.6.2 Murshidabad

Nearly a third of women in Murshidabad had some kind of paid work, a surprising finding since hardly anyone reported working in the survey. It was usually home-based work (stitching, bidi making), or those with some education offered tuitions from home. The discrepancy with the survey seems to have occurred because some of them have been listed as housewives. For those married below 18, before marriage usually women had work like bidi making or domestic work. After marriage they had similar work. For women married at and above 18, most had not worked before marriage and those working after marriage were offering home tuitions. Unlike Kolkata, only a few said they were not allowed to work outside – most of those who wanted to work said it was not available. A few said that their children were too small for them to go out for work.

Bidi making was undertaken by Muslim women, nearly all married below 18. Most of them had been doing this work before marriage as well, often starting when they were very young. One such woman, J.L. (Married at 17, Muslim Upper Caste, Income 12000) had been educated till Class 12, and still did this work. Another respondent, P.B. (Class 9, Married at 17, Muslim Upper Caste, Income 15000) never worked but her mother-in-law

used to make bidis till the men in the family told her to stop because they had started earning better.

S.W. (Illiterate, Married at 18, Hindu Upper Caste, Income Rs.5000) worked as a domestic worker before and after marriage but had to stop due to illness. She said it was common for men to be unemployed and women were breadwinners. However, this was not evident in the interview sample.

In this region mostly women are the bread winners of their family. They work as domestic help in the houses of rich people. Mostly women only are employed, most men don't work. A few women work sometimes as construction labourers.

A middle class woman gave a completely different picture:

Some women teach in nursery schools, some learn tailoring. A girl in this neighbourhood attends a doctor's chamber. These are exceptions. There is no universal scope of earning for all the women here. There are 7 or 8 women who go out to work out of hundreds of village women. (S.M., Graduate, Married at 19, Hindu SC, Home tuition teacher)

Only one or two mentioned working on their own farms, but not as paid work. H.M. (Class 8, Married at 16, Muslim Upper Caste, Income Rs.11200) said that agricultural work is usually undertaken by unmarried girls, as married women have too much housework and often small children.

Earlier when the onion crops used to come straight to the house, I used to supervise the whole process, keeping the records of the sacks, how many sacks each person is handling, paying each of them according to their work, etc. Now I don't have to do that anymore, the farm has a bigger space, so everything is done there, I don't have to go there. [...]The unmarried girls work with the crops, they get 10 rupees for each sack of onions they cut. In our family, women don't do that kind of work. [...] They also have to do all the household chores. Like my sister-in-law, who lives next door, she has a small child, she can't get any time to rest during the day, she has to ask me to keep an eye on her child even if she wants to take a bath.

D.M. (Class 10, Married at 17, Hindu Upper Caste, Income Rs.8000) was the only woman who said she did seasonal agricultural work. She had never tried to find paid work but said, "now that the season of onion crops is approaching, there is going to be some work for women. I can get Rs. 10 for each sack of onions I can cut, which I can use to buy whatever I like." The only woman who had full time work was M.O. (Class 12, Married at

17, Hindu SC, Income Rs.17000). She had not worked before marriage but now worked at a petrol pump.

Among women married above 18, only two women had worked before marriage (nurse, teacher) but were now housewives. Most women at higher education levels did not work before marriage, and some of these offered tuitions after marriage – nearly all of these were married above 18. Some were also applying for various government jobs. S.D. (Class 12, Married at 22, Hindu SC, Income Rs.7000) helped her husband in his tuitions and travelled 15km by cycle to Berhampore to get training in stitching:

Before marriage, I only learnt computer, swimming, dancing.....I have to go to Berhampore to learn stitching. I have to go 15km by cycle, so that I can earn some money on my own. I go in the morning, then after the class, I have lunch at my mother's place. Then I come back in the evening with my husband....If you walk around in this village, you will see how much poverty is prevalent. There is no job in the village, no facility for training women for some kind of home-based income. That's why I have to go so far on cycle despite being a woman. Everybody has to go far for work. In this village, every woman does some work, barring some newlywed women.

5.6.3 Jaipur

Around half the women among those interviewed in Jaipur had paid work – most were from lower economic backgrounds. Of those with the highest levels of education, half had paid work and half did not after marriage.

The most common work for women was home-based work – half of them were married below 18. A handful of women from working class families worked outside (sweeper in office, cook, vegetable shop) – they were married below 18. In the interviews, these women do not mention working before marriage (neither paid nor own agricultural work).

The proportion of women doing paid work could likely be more than what is reported in the survey. In quite a few cases, women are listed as housewives but engaged in home-based work. Most of them said their husbands don't allow them to go outside for work; two switched from other jobs (ayah, school teaching) because they had children.

During day time, I rest and go to work to the house of my husband's brother's wife. I pack tiffins and am paid Rs. 150. My husband does not allow me to go outside for work. I feel women should also have better economic conditions. (M.V., Class 5, Married at 18)

I do embellishment work... I have worked for two months in a beauty parlour but then my husband didn't allow me. The atmosphere in the house was not good. I didn't get any money from the parlour, I had only learnt how to do the work. (C.P., Class 12, Married at 13)

N.M. (Class 7, Married at 21) did home-based embellishment work before and after marriage; however, now she did this with her husband and was not paid separately.

I work for 8-10 hours for 'aara taari' work. I help my husband at work. We earn around Rs.10-12000 per month. There is no separate payment for me as I am only a helping hand to my husband. I never searched for any work other than this. I used to do tailoring before marriage and still I am doing that.

Of those married at or above 18, a few had worked in factories or as daily wage labourers but had discontinued due to pregnancy and for raising children. Most of the Sikh women were married above 18 and did not even take up home-based work as their husbands refused to let them work at all, although a few were doing home-based work before marriage. This was true even when their mothers-in-law and/or unmarried sisters-in-law were domestic workers.

My husband does not allow me to go outside for work. Once I brought thread cutting work at home, he got so angry that he tried to set it on fire. He said I earn enough to feed you well. He further said that I have married you, so I will not allow you to go to earn after marriage. He does not stop me from sewing work because I told him it is my hobby. (R.K., Illiterate, Married at 17)

I want to earn money but my husband tells me to sit at home since I get you everything you need. In our family, it is not considered good to go outside to work. (K.K., Class 12, married at 21)

Women with more education discontinued work after marriage much more often – usually after pregnancy. All were married at or above 18. Almost all of them had worked as school teachers. Unlike other districts, none of them reported offering tuitions at home – one who wanted to do so said her family thought it was just her way to escape household work and hence wouldn't allow her. Only a few women with high levels of education were still working after marriage – most as teachers/lecturers; one had some kind of online work and another was an office assistant.

I am teaching B Pharma in Akashdeep College. I didn't search for any other job because I have to look after my children as well. My job is good and I can't go for a job at a far distance. I get good payment.... One person's income is not enough

to meet expenses. Most families are living in rented houses. Look at us, we have to build our house on our own. It is not possible with only one of us earning. (H.N., Graduate, Married at 26)

Like Kolkata, it was usually working class women who were seeking work and most of them said that they would prefer to find home-based work. While some women wanted to work out of need, others said if women work, men tend to sit idle and waste money. Some even said such men (alcoholic/violent) force wives to earn – so working women can actually end up with worse matches than those who have no paid work.

5.6.4 Sawai Madhopur

Hardly anyone among the interviewees in Sawai Madhopur had paid work – three were daily wage labourers in construction, one helped out with her husband's shop and one did tailoring at home. It is not very clear from the interviews, but appears that they did not work before marriage. Two mentioned doing agricultural work and one had home-based work before marriage but not after. Quite a few (roughly a quarter) mentioned currently working on their own farms, but were not paid for it. Only those who were daily wage labourers were married below 18.

I do some stitching on the machine, I stitch bush-shirts, shirts and lehengas. I can't think of more work. I get enough stitching work. I stitch for about 3-4 hours in a day. Other than this, I also have housework to do. The change that I would like to see is that women should work and not be dependent on their husbands. If they don't earn there are problems. They have to ask for money from their husbands, for even small things- even Rs. 10. But if they are earning, they can buy whatever they want with their earnings. (F.M., Class 12, Married at 19)

The most common paid work available was harvest/weeding (*avan*) which is seasonal and paid about 200-250 rupees a day. However, it was usually older women (MILs) who did this work; it was also caste-specific – “poor Bairwa women do this work.” Some women from Gujar and Meena communities said women in their castes would not do paid work of any kind.

Around a third said they wanted work but no opportunities were available, including for educated women. One said there should be work options for less educated women that do not require so much hard work (agriculture/construction), given their domestic workload. Overall, most women did express willingness to work and many complained that there was no information or help regarding work opportunities from the government

or otherwise – some mentioned efforts to talk to the *sarpanch* and even ministers who visited about creating employment for them but to no avail.

My husband doesn't have a job. Earlier he was studying, now he just keeps applying for jobs. He is now driving a tempo and earns Rs. 200 for a day, which is just not enough to run the house. There are no jobs or opportunities for women. We complete our housework and just sit. Life is very difficult. (A.B., Class 8, Married at 15)

There are no women in my neighbourhood who are working, they all do housework. Even if they go to the farm, it is their own farm. There are no work opportunities for women here. I also want to work, maybe at an anganwadi. (M.T., Class 12, Married at 22)

Women should have a job, even if it is small. They should work so that they don't have to listen to comments and suffer disrespect in their marital family. They shouldn't have to hear that she doesn't work. The jobs can be in anganwadi, or in a parlour or maybe some stitching work. But there should be some work. (T.R., Class 8, Married at 20)

I feel that a woman should also earn. How much can a man do alone. There are so many expenditures in a household - especially related to children. If a woman earns, she will contribute to the household. It is difficult to run a house on one income, two people earning is much better. (S.G., Class 5, Married at 19)

I want life to become better, living style to become better. I have some education, so I want some job opportunities to be available. What is the point of studying if nothing is available. (M.Z., Class 10, Married below 18)

Some (including educated women) suggested that *papad/achar* making would be ideal, if such units could be set up and work outsourced to their homes.

There are no women in my neighborhood who work for money. There are no work opportunities available here. It's a rural area and so there are no opportunities. I am trying that there should be some opportunities available. I am studying and if I study further, then I can maybe start some work which will help me as well as help me give work to other women here, so that they can also earn money. Maybe I can start a small 'achar' (pickle) packaging unit. I can start at a small scale and

then increase it. I can start from home, then employ 1-2 women and then maybe then employ more. (N.J., BA Student, Married at 17)

5.6.5 Hyderabad

Around a third of the total respondents amongst our interviewees had paid work. Most of those with highest levels of education (Class 12 and more) did not have paid work after marriage. Here in particular the respondents did not want to talk about their work and mostly provided very brief information.

Women married below 18 usually had worked before marriage and continued to do so after marriage – these were poor women in low-end jobs. Those who were from rural backgrounds did agricultural work before marriage and were now working as daily wage workers in vegetable markets, construction, maids and rag pickers. A few were domestic workers or factory workers before marriage, and either continued with these or similar jobs. Very few had stopped working after marriage due to children, but were looking to resume work.

It is very hard work. We have to search in the garbage, have to bend a lot. Sometimes dogs bite us, we see some snakes in the bushes. Sometimes people chase us away. If we don't find enough bottles for the day, our husbands scold us. We will have to starve that day. Sometimes we just drink tea and sleep. I start by 5am and work till around 1-2 pm. We don't eat till we return home, we usually have tea around the place where we work. By time we reach home and cook it is around 3pm. We usually have only one meal in a day. We go to work in autos which cost us around 20 rupees. If it is too dark, we wait till it gets bright and start working. We work in groups of 3-4 people. My sister-in-law and I work together. (N.L., Illiterate, Married at 16, Hindu ST (Lambada), Income Rs.15000)

Among women who were married above 18, those who had worked before marriage were usually OBC women with Class 10 or 12 education, from urban, lower middle class families, not poor. They had worked in schools, supermarkets or had home-based work. After marriage they were still working in different jobs- office attendants, MCH employee, tailoring. Only a few of these were not working after marriage.

However, many women of this social profile had not worked before marriage but were seeking work now. Tailoring seemed to be a common route for these women – two were doing such work and a few were learning stitching. Another woman said her husband would only allow her to do a government job.

Before marriage, I concentrated on my education. After marriage, my husband told me that if I wanted to get any job, I should try for a government job. Otherwise, I should take care of the house. At home, there were restrictions on women going out for work. Family elders, especially men, say that they're working and earning money why should women go out and work. Women should study and get a government job. They should not work in malls, cloth shops etc. (S.I., Class 12, Married at 17, Hindu OBC, Income Rs.21000)

Most middle class women were not working – all were married at or above 18. Usually those who worked before marriage were teachers/lecturers. Only half of them continued after marriage. A few had not worked before marriage either. One respondent R.T. (Postgraduate, Married at 27, Hindu Upper Caste, Income Rs.70000) who had never worked said the following:

I had plans to work after my completing my education, but I got married and realized that I should give priority to my children and family rather my career. I personally took this decision by looking at the way children, youngsters, and elderly people behave in their daily lives. Whatever the weird things we witness in society are basically outcomes of the way we were brought up. What we are increasingly seeing in our daily lives is the loss of the values we have been set up for centuries. It is a big mistake. Nowadays, younger children are not respecting elders like before, not listening to parents, not looking after elderly parents. All this comes from the way they are brought up with social values. All these kinds of incidents made me think carefully about my children's life in the coming years and I decided that my children should not grow up without the social and moral values which are necessary for leading good and decent life. This also makes them good citizens so that they can make others better.

5.6.6 Mahbubnagar

Around 60% of the respondents were engaged in paid work of some kind. The most common was agricultural work in combination with migrating for construction work in off seasons. At higher education levels, those with Class 12 had paid work after marriage but those with graduation or more did not.

Of those married below 18, women who worked before marriage had been agricultural or construction labourers. Women who had been agricultural labourers before marriage continued to do so after. Some construction workers continued to do the same work after marriage but a few switched to other jobs (tailor, ASHA worker and cultivator).

Of women married at or above 18, those who worked before marriage were cultivators and did the same work after marriage. Two women had been nurses before marriage - one continued with this, and the other switched to tailoring to take care of children.

I got married so I stopped working as ANM, because I had to go to some city or another village. Then I had children and I got into family life full time and I couldn't get back to it. I even wanted to apply for some government jobs but could not. I feel it is good working at home as a tailor, because as a nurse I have to work a 12-hour shift and come back and do housework as well. Now that I work from home, I can attend to things at home. The money from the tailoring work I do is not enough but I somehow adjust. (R.L., Class 10, Married at 19, Hindu OBC, Income Rs.35000).

Those who were married at and above 18 and had not worked before marriage, after getting married, one became a tailor, another anganwadi teacher, and one was running a medical store. A few had high levels of education but had never worked before or after marriage.

Unlike other rural districts, out of those not working, hardly anyone said they were looking for work.

Concluding Remarks

The world of work for women was unpaid work coupled with low levels of paid work. Work and labour in the household – where women who had married early held more responsibility and less help from family than those who had married at higher ages – is not a source of value or satisfaction for women in our sample. Even though the everyday tasks of labour and reproduction of the household took up most of their time and responsibility, with child care woven into the numerous other daily chores, this was not something they elaborated on, or had given much thought to. It was part of the anxiety of getting married into a new home, but taken for granted by the majority.

Remarkably, our sample mirrors the all Indian data on paid work at different ages of marriage. More women were working who had married before 18, invariably from poorer classes and castes. There is considerable variation across the sites. In the rural sites options were very few or even absent – there were no opportunities outside of agricultural work. Only in Mahbubnagar were significant numbers working as agricultural labour or in their family farms both before and after marriage, and even at higher ages of marriage. Some women who had reported themselves as housewives in the survey were found to be taking up home-based work (bidi rolling among Muslims in Murshidabad, embroidery). Only a tiny number among the more educated had jobs as teachers.

The urban sites presented a more complex picture – domestic work in Kolkata, home based work, self-employment and some service jobs. The biggest drops in work after marriage were in the urban sites and among those with higher levels of education. So the graduates in our sample were mostly at home. It is amongst the poor where work is a necessity that some kind of jobs had to engaged in – labouring in vegetable markets, home based work, self-employment, domestic work, and so on.

Many said that there were just no jobs to had. Others placed the onus on their husbands and family who did not want them to work outside the home. So women in our sample are living lives of unrecognised labour, with the work burden being highest among those who have married early. Work will come up again in the subsequent chapters.

Chapter - 6

Marriage

6.1 Age at marriage in contemporary India: Some sociological texts

In order to set a context for this chapter on marriage and the significance of age, let us begin with a brief look at the prior literature on marriage in India. The obvious fields to go to for studies on marriage are the disciplines of sociology and anthropology. Locating early and child marriage within the larger frame of the institution of marriage in India, however, turns out to be quite disappointing because age at marriage has, very curiously, been marginal in the sociological literature on contemporary marriage practices in India. This makes for a double challenge: On the one side, there is such strong pressure to eliminate child marriage but without a substantive picture of the nature of marriage in present-day India; on the other, studies of marriage today have rarely seen age as being critical to their inquiries. There are always exceptions, of course, and one of them would be the anthropologist Leela Dube. A much-cited essay, "Caste and Women", which she wrote in 1991, is in the nature of an overview about how she saw caste operating on women through kinship relations. In a section dealing with marriage and sexuality, there is a short discussion on early marriage in the context of her views regarding the centrality of women's greater sexual impurity and consequent vulnerability compared with men in the maintenance of caste boundaries. "Caste imparts a special character to the process of growing up female" (Dube 2008 [1991]: 471). On the one hand, upper-caste women are much more vulnerable, according to Dube, to permanent pollution than lower-caste women. But she then provides the following differential picture when it comes to early marriage:

In traditional terms it is the marriage of a virgin with full rites within the acceptable limits of connubiality which sacralises and sanctifies the girl's sexuality. It makes her a full member of her caste and thus a complete person.... It is significant that while castes and families who can afford to keep their girls secluded and protected tend to marry them off after puberty, other castes who require that their daughters work in the fields or away from home prefer to marry them before puberty" (Dube 2008: 473).

There appears to be a certain tension between, on the one hand, the declaration of upper-caste women's greater vulnerability to pollution by virtue of their upper-caste

status coupled with the capacity of such castes (today?) to marry off their daughters later and, on the other, so-called lower castes who feel unable to provide their working daughters with any other viable protection than a pre-pubertal marriage. These contradictory statements (which are rather formulaic and all too brief since it is also not clear what regions or time periods are being referred to) are indicative of the nature of the challenge in thinking about marriage practices and forms of control as these have been evolving in contemporary times, especially in relation to age. This is where the absence of a historical account is a severe stumbling block, one that would better show how “traditional” practices such as child marriage become subject to very different processes of change depending on, among other things, one’s location in a caste and class hierarchy. So while upper-caste women are ostensibly subjected to more stringent norms of purity, their privilege also translates into entering marriage markets later than working castes do. These issues were already flagged in Chapter 1.

For its part, a classic textbook like Patricia Uberoi’s *Family, Kinship and Marriage in India* (1993) has no essays that address age or childhood, and neither of these terms appears in the index. Rather, issues of the difference in marriage practices in the north and south, changes in the joint family system, the inequalities between wife-givers and wife-takers, the “social evil” of dowry, and so on appear to have constituted the canon of marriage studies from anthropological and sociological perspectives. Interestingly, some of the more historically oriented essays that show changes over time point to some of the peculiarities of the marriage market structured by hierarchy and hypergamy in a modern economy, such that dowry inflation, for instance, went hand in hand with higher levels of education, urbanization and new jobs. Although age is not mentioned in Ursula Sharma’s important essay on the subject of dowry (which included the shocked discovery of dowry deaths by women’s organizations among urban middle-class families in the 1970s and ’80s), one can presume that this “social evil” took place when ages of marriage were higher and competition for grooms was greater (Sharma 1993). The reason to pause over this is that so many reports on child marriage have emphasized the avoidance of larger dowry payments as a major reason for marrying their daughters early. However, if higher dowry payments are a consequence of the modern competition among families for social prestige, in which women become the instruments, then perhaps a prior question would have to be asked of those who at this time are marrying with smaller dowries. Could it be that they are simply not able to compete in these kinds of inflated marriage markets, or does a younger age actually work as compensation for not having more to offer financially? In any event, then, shouldn’t the primary problem be the negative consequences of this modern institution of dowry as much if not more than those who marry too young? When we come to women’s views on dowry in our study we will see that dowry has become something difficult to talk about and yet ubiquitous. It is surely

noteworthy that one of the earliest campaigns of the women's movement in the 1980s in India was against the giving and taking of dowry, which, however, ran aground before the decade came to a close. (See Basu 2005 for an excellent overview.) Some thought that this battle might actually be misplaced in contexts where daughters received next to no inheritance, but the larger story (yet to be adequately told) is that energies flagged as this "modern monster" (to use M.N. Srinivas's evocative phrase) just kept getting bigger and fatter, openly flouting whatever existing laws were in place. (It is also worth noting in passing that Ursula Sharma believes that similar changes, and similar negative consequences, have attended the inflation of bridewealth in those countries in Africa known to practice it.)

A much more recent collection of essays on marriage is *Marrying in South Asia: Shifting Concepts, Changing Practices in a Globalising World*, edited by Ravinder Kaur and Rajni Palriwala (2014). What is valuable in the editors' introduction is their effort to spell out what kind of institution marriage is. Whether arranged by others or chosen for love by the individuals marrying, marriage "is an alliance in structuralist and political terms", establishing ties between two social groups such as family-households, lineages or clans, and has implications for the continuity and boundaries of these groups and for inheritance and status, access to resources, care and support. As a fundamental social institution, "it is part of the espoused social values and cultural beliefs cutting across many classes, communities and regions in South Asia. The inequalities of marriage, domesticity and society remain interwoven, and as with all institutions, particularly those that pervade society and have a hegemonic sway, marriage excludes, it marginalises those who fall outside its parameters or never enter it" (Kaur and Palriwala 2014: 4–5). One element that this comprehensive description could have highlighted more in our context is that marriage is not just hegemonic but is buffeted by a profound compulsory force that is almost universal. Diverse practices, greater class differentiation within caste-based alliances, and the possibilities of resistance or the greater acceptability of separation, divorce and remarriage can be accommodated here. The editors conclude with a question: Beyond the claims of the English speaking world, are there trends towards "the democratisation of marriage as more people choose their own partners through pre-marital courtship, and [terminate] unhappy marriages through divorce?" (Kaur and Palriwala 2014: 20).

Once again, however, age is not foregrounded by Kaur and Palriwala in their introduction. Interestingly, age comes up in two of the essays in their volume, one on Bangladesh and one on India, which use demographic trends in their analysis. Both the essays have provocative arguments to make. The essay on Bangladesh concerns a country that has even higher prevalence rates of early marriage than India but that is treated as an

"anomalous outlier". This is because its fertility patterns are considerably lower than what would be expected in a context where early marriage is a norm; furthermore, levels of education do not fit standard demographic predictions. In fact, this essay uses existing secondary data to show that it is very difficult to establish any simple links between early marriage, stronger patriarchal structures and greater control over the lives of women. Although the authors Sajeda Amin and Maitreyi Das are obviously in favour of later marriage, they see interventions in the economic aspects of marriage, especially the association of dowry prevalence with poverty, as having more positive outcomes for women (Amin and Das 2014). The second essay, by Lester Andrist, Manjistha Banerji and Sonalde Desai, deals with India and builds on their prior research on marriage using Indian Human Development Survey data (Desai and Andrist 2010). The arguments in the present volume take forward their notion of "gender scripts", and theirs is one of the few demographic studies to actually provide a more dynamic view of marriage practices and marriage timing. Their point of departure is what looks like a mismatch between developments in the field of education in recent decades, where there has been so much expansion in girls' schooling and even access to higher education, and the relatively slower rise in mean ages at marriage. In their view, early marriage is part of a gender script or gender performance, along with practices such as seclusion, and gender segregation. This is how they set up the problem: Families today may be in a dilemma over wanting more education for their daughters (to appear more modern) while having to contend with fears relating to modesty and sexual purity (i.e., so-called culture and tradition), apart from pressures of finding a good match, which would dwindle as girls get older (Andrist et al 2014).

I believe these are very significant considerations and, within the limits of the vocabulary of tradition and modernity, speak to contemporary conflicts over Indian girlhood and womanhood. But rather than simply refer to gender scripts as they do, the necessary context would be better described as one where marriage is treated as compulsory, structured by a marriage market variably affected by an extraordinarily complex set of factors, including education. But we do not (yet) have an adequate description or analysis of this kind of compulsory marriage market in all its regional, caste and class ramifications. The resolution offered by Andrist, Banerji and Desai is that aspiring families achieve a nice alignment of modernity with tradition by conducting the marriage ceremony early and then leaving a considerable gap to allow the young wife to be educated up to college before she actually moves into her in-law's home with the corresponding *gauna* ceremony. But only certain castes in Rajasthan are currently known for these kinds of child marriages, and all indications show that they are on the wane. Moreover, the advancements in education are more uneven as we have seen in the chapter on education. What is needed is a more nuanced exploration of changing trends in education

and age at marriage, including the distinct possibility that some wives do continue with their education after they are married, as we have seen in our sample. As we saw in the chapter on education, girls may go all the way to secondary school and still have no future other than an underage marriage. Nevertheless, this essay provides one kind of dynamic model for thinking about the relationship between contemporary marriages and the significance of age and indicates that contradictory pressures might be at work when it comes to marriage timing. Such models have been quite lacking so far.

A contemporary ethnographic study of marriage practices among lower castes in a slum in New Delhi by Shalini Grover shows how such studies can offer insights into persisting trends in a contemporary urban context, even though age at marriage is not directly addressed. All that the study has to say on age is the following: "The legal age for marriage in India is 18 years for girls and 21 years for boys. In actuality, girls [in this study] are married between the ages of 15 and 18, and boys between 20 and 25" (Grover 2011: 32). Here then is an effective account of an urban version of adolescent marriage. Grover goes on to dwell on what makes arranged marriages hegemonic even in a context where women might be employed and where secondary unions are not uncommon. So-called love marriages (between adolescents, who may have known each other since childhood) are rarer, not because they are less stable but because women in such relationships cannot rely on crucial natal family networks in times of need. As Grover puts it, "an arranged marriage guarantees post-marital support as well as a crucial entitlement to refuge" in situations where, although husbands have been chosen for their supposed breadwinner role, women have to contend with physical violence, alcohol-related abuse, sexual jealousy and conflict over money within unequal marital relations (Grover 2011: 202–203). It is quite likely that the lens of marriage timing would have added further insights into these very same marriage practices if only to indicate why higher ages of marriage or remaining single is unlikely to find a place in such a world, but this was not its focus.

Similar studies that explore change in rural contexts such as U. Kalpagam's very interesting discussion of aspirations among women in a village in Uttar Pradesh also look for such change in terms of questions of choice. Marriage by choice versus marriage according to traditional norms is the frame through which she recounts the views of both older and younger women from different castes in a context where it would be obvious that more education, growing desires for financial independence and especially the desire to escape village life through making a good match in the nearby city of Allahabad would have definite repercussions on the age at which marriages would take place. But this is not commented on – rather, young women's tendency to still wish to leave it to parental

responsibility to find a marriage partner, even as they negotiate more freedom for themselves, is at the heart of Kalpagam's inquiries (Kalpagam 2008).

One more example of new scholarship on marriage, *Conjugality Unbound: Sexual Economies, State Regulation and the Marital Form in India*, co-edited by Srimati Basu and Lucinda Ramberg (Basu and Ramberg eds. 2015), provides further clues as to how age may have escaped the frameworks of those at the cutting edge of present-day research. While never losing sight of the marriage form, the editors set out to "dethrone the reigning definition of marriage as a relationship between reproductively oriented self-evident men and women" (2015: 6). They ask: when a man wishes to marry his male lover in front of family and friends, or when an online Quikr advertisement asks for a female companion for the chairman of a multi-national company who would be "wife-like", what forms might these be? Their introduction and several of the essays have to do with non-heteronormative conjugalities, divorce among Muslim women, the devadasi married to the goddess, and love marriages against caste and familial authority. However, without intending to do so, these modes of investigation leave the "norm" somewhat unaddressed. It is assumed that it is enough to refer to the state-centric and reformist mode of standardized marriage, one that is patrilineal, monogamous and heterosexual. They go on to say that "it is not unsurprising that socially marginalised people continue to reach for and implicate themselves in a form that reproduces hierarchies of gender and caste even as it confers legitimacy. A wife may be an abject form of social personhood in relation to a husband, but she is not socially dead in the way that a widow, a lesbian, or a prostitute is" (Basu and Ramberg 2015: 10). Their central question is: Can – and should – marriage be reclaimed in non-normative relationships and by non-normative subjectivities? Age might have but does not appear as a vector that either normalizes or destabilizes the marital form, and child marriage is all but absent. Although age was not in their frame, this book is immensely helpful in thinking further about the hegemonic quality of compulsory marriage in contemporary India.

Current studies on marriage – many of them clearly marked by feminist concerns – thus indicate that the question of age largely remains a challenge for future work.

What might our field study tell us? As we shall see, age turns out to be a complex phenomenon, whose significance is often not easy to determine.

6.2 Age at Marriage: What does the survey say?

In an initial set of questions on questions of age and age at marriage, we can see a relatively straightforward set of relationships. The first set of Tables 6.1 below give an idea of the significance and knowledge of the date of their marriage for the respondents in the survey. Bear in mind that the marriage for the majority was in the last ten years from the time of the survey.

In West Bengal, it is noteworthy that less than half the sample of those married below 18 years remembered the full date of their marriage and it is only slightly over 50% in the case of those who married at 18 years or above. In Kolkata remarkably similarly less than half of the sample of those married below 18 knew the full date of their marriage, and it is only among those married at 18 and above that 72% knew these details (which, considering that this contains the middle class segment of our study, is not very high.) One surmise is that this may be due to the significant number of self-choice marriages/elopements (as we will see shortly) compared to the pattern of arranged marriages in the other sites. The pattern in Rajasthan is quite different. Very few have no memory whatsoever of their marriage date or year – in Jaipur the vast majority could recall the full details, while in Sawai Madhopur more than half knew the full details, while others remembered the year. In Telangana, the information is more mixed – in Hyderabad while among those marrying below 18 years 27% had no memory of the date of their marriage this was 35% in Mahbubnagar.

(T60) Table 6.1a: Knowledge of date of marriage, West Bengal

	District							
	Kolkata				Murshidabad			
	Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years		Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Don't know	19	26.4	17	13.4	12	8.1	4	5.3
Know full date of marriage	30	41.7	92	72.4	58	39.2	43	57.3
Know month and year	4	5.6	3	2.4	26	17.6	9	12.0
Know year	19	26.4	15	11.8	41	27.7	18	24.0
Know month	0	0.0	0	0.0	10	6.8	1	1.3
Know date and month	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	.7	0	0.0
Total	72	100.0	127	100.0	148	100.0	75	100.0

(T61) Table 6.1b: Knowledge of date of marriage, Rajasthan

	District							
	Jaipur				Sawai Madhopur			
	Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years		Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Don't know	0	0.0	4	2.2	2	2.2	1	0.9
Know full date of marriage	38	90.5	162	91.0	52	57.8	77	67.0
Know month and year	0	0.0	1	0.6	1	1.1	5	4.3
Know year	4	9.5	11	6.2	34	37.8	32	27.8
Know date and month	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	1.1	0	0.0
Total	42	100.0	178	100.0	90	100.0	115	100.0

(T62) Table 6.1c: Knowledge of date of marriage, Telangana

	District							
	Hyderabad				Mahbubnagar			
	Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years		Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Don't know	16	27.1	8	5.2	34	34.7	17	17.5
Know full date of marriage	37	62.7	142	91.6	48	49.0	73	75.3
Know month and year	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	1.0	1	1.0
Know year of marriage	6	10.2	5	3.2	14	14.3	6	6.2
Know season	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	1.0	0	0.0
Total	59	100.0	155	100.0	98	100.0	97	100.0

But if the date of their marriages occupied a variable place in the lives of these women, answers were more predictable when it came to asking them about what they considered the right age for marriage. But once again, whether they felt ready when the time of their marriage arrived and whether they felt that they were married too soon elicited more variable replies within a broadly predictable pattern.

The corresponding Tables are given below for each state:

(T63) Table 6.2a: The right age of marriage according to the respondent, West Bengal

Right Age of Marriage	District							
	Kolkata				Murshidabad			
	Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years		Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
less than 18	0	0.0	0	0.0	6	4.4	0	0.0
18	19	27.9	16	13.6	75	55.6	40	56.3
19	1	1.5	2	1.7	7	5.2	2	2.8
20	9	13.2	14	11.9	29	21.5	13	18.3
21	9	13.2	7	5.9	6	4.4	4	5.6
22-24	7	10.3	9	7.6	9	6.7	7	9.9
25-29	19	27.9	53	44.9	3	2.2	5	7.0
30 and above	4	5.9	17	14.4	0	0.0	0	0.0
don't know	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Total	68	100.0	118	100.0	135	100.0	71	100.0

(T64) Table 6.2b: The right age of marriage according to the respondent, Rajasthan

Right Age of Marriage	District							
	Jaipur				Sawai Madhopur			
	Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years		Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
less than 18	2	4.8	0	0.0	3	3.3	0	0.0
18	10	23.8	27	15.5	60	66.7	60	52.6
19	1	2.4	1	0.6	6	6.7	11	9.6
20	15	35.7	20	11.5	16	17.8	29	25.4
21	5	11.9	24	13.8	3	3.3	6	5.3
22-24	6	14.3	53	30.5	2	2.2	5	4.4
25-29	3	7.1	45	25.9	0	0.0	3	2.6
30 and above	0	0.0	4	2.3	0	0.0	0	0.0
don't know	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Total	42	100.0	174	100.0	90	100.0	114	100.0

(T65) Table 6.2c: The right age of marriage according to the respondent, Telangana

Right Age of Marriage	District							
	Hyderabad				Mahbubnagar			
	Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years		Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
less than 18	2	3.4	4	2.6	6	6.5	3	3.2
18	9	15.5	12	7.9	35	38.0	21	22.6
19	2	3.4	3	2.0	6	6.5	6	6.5
20	28	48.3	33	21.9	27	29.3	21	22.6
21	5	8.6	17	11.3	8	8.7	12	12.9
22-24	2	3.4	37	24.5	4	4.3	14	15.1
25-29	10	17.2	41	27.2	6	6.5	16	17.2
30 and above	0	0.0	4	2.6	0	0.0	0	0.0
don't know	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Total	58	100.0	151	100.0	92	100.0	93	100.0

The clearest difference here is between the urban and rural locations – in the rural locations of Murshidabad, Sawai Madhopur and Mahbubnagar the modal answer is 18 years as the right age of marriage (only in Mahbubnagar do an equal number give 20 years among those marrying at 18 years and above). Thus the official discourse of 18

years as the minimum age at marriage slides into being the right age – and at all ages. This is a matter we will return to later, in the context of views from the interviews. Only in the urban context do higher ages appear more frequently – this is particularly pronounced in Kolkata where respondents (whether underage or otherwise) gave 25-29 years as their preferred age, while in the other urban sites 20 years was more common.

The next set of Tables give us a glimpse into whether the respondent felt ready for marriage and, relatedly, whether they felt they had been married too soon. Predictably, overall, a higher proportion said they were ready to be married or did not marry too soon, when they were married at 18 and above. But even here the variations are quite significant – in the West Bengal survey sample when it came to Kolkata surprisingly the majority at all ages of marriage said they were ready at the time of their marriage (72% among those marrying below 18 and 78% of those marrying at higher ages.) In Murshidabad there was a considerable difference – a little over half among those marrying below 18 said they were ready, while 81% said so among those marrying at higher ages. In all the other sites a smaller proportion felt ready among those marrying below 18 years, from a low of 24% in Sawai Madhopur to above 50% in both Hyderabad and Mahbubnagar. Among those marrying at 18 and above the proportions varied from the vast majority (88% in Sawai Madhopur and 80% in Hyderabad) to 66% in Mahbubnagar. Note that these were views given during the survey. How does this change when it comes to being asked whether they had married too young? This is answered in the set of Tables 6.4 below.

(T66) Table 6.3a: If the respondent felt ready for marriage, West Bengal

	District							
	Kolkata				Murshidabad			
	Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years		Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Yes	51	71.8	98	78.4	80	54.1	61	81.3
No	20	28.2	27	21.6	68	45.9	14	18.7
Total	71	100.0	125	100.0	148	100.0	75	100.0

(T67) Table 6.3b: If the respondent felt ready for marriage, Rajasthan

	District							
	Jaipur				Sawai Madhopur			
	Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years		Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Yes	16	38.1	130	73.9	22	24.4	101	87.8
No	26	61.9	46	26.1	68	75.6	14	12.2
Total	42	100.0	176	100.0	90	100.0	115	100.0

(T68) Table 6.3c: If the respondent felt ready for marriage, Telangana

	District							
	Hyderabad				Mahbubnagar			
	Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years		Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Yes	32	54.2	122	79.7	49	53.3	63	66.3
No	27	45.8	31	20.3	43	46.7	32	33.7
Total	59	100.0	153	100.0	92	100.0	95	100.0

(T69) Table 6.4a: If the respondent believed she was married too young, West Bengal

	District							
	Kolkata				Murshidabad			
	Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years		Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Yes	61	84.7	62	49.6	112	76.2	28	37.3
No	11	15.3	63	50.4	35	23.8	47	62.7
Total	72	100.0	125	100.0	147	100.0	75	100.0

(T70) Table 6.4b: If the respondent believed she was married too young, Rajasthan

	District							
	Jaipur				Sawai Madhopur			
	Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years		Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Yes	36	85.7	47	26.7	71	78.9	16	13.9
No	6	14.3	129	73.3	19	21.1	99	86.1
Total	42	100.0	176	100.0	90	100.0	115	100.0

(T71) Table 6.4c: If the respondent believed she was married too young, Telangana

	District							
	Hyderabad				Mahbubnagar			
	Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years		Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Yes	44	74.6	44	28.8	71	72.4	50	51.5
No	15	25.4	109	71.2	27	27.6	47	48.5
Total	59	100.0	153	100.0	98	100.0	97	100.0

It is quite remarkable that in all the sites the majority felt that they had married too young among those marrying below 18 years. So while they were apparently “ready” to marry at the time, many of them later felt that they had married too soon. The proportions are lower and there is much more variation among those who marry at higher ages – as few as 14% in Sawai Madhopur and over half the sample at 51.5% in Mahbubnagar.

6.3 Age at Marriage: What do the interviews say?

Regarding age of marriage, the responses were largely standard in their focus on physical and reproductive health, as well as the mental capacity to handle the responsibilities of marriage. Either they would cite doctors as scolding women who got pregnant too young, or there was the fear of a complaint being filed, else it was government schemes related to age of marriage. Several women in each district said early marriages limited the age of enjoying life as one is burdened with responsibilities. Essentially marriage is the end of anything fun in life.

Most women across age of marriage in Kolkata said they would have preferred to marry later in the absence of familial and social pressures – some also said they would have married a different person. In Murshidabad, this was usually a general statement about early marriage as wrong. Of their own lives, most women said they were ready for marriage even when it was below 18 and unlike Kolkata, very few said they would have wanted to marry later. In Sawai Madhopur, respondents uniformly mentioned that if married below 18, “the police will arrest us.” Most said they would have liked to marry later, either because they wanted to enjoy the freedom of unmarried life for longer, or because they believed it would allow them time to get further education. A few said one is more “mature” and therefore better capable of dealing with the pressures of marital life – the “mental torture” of marriage as one put it. Social pressure does not allow for this and hence early marriage continues.

It is one and the same thing to get married late or early, If one is married early, then you are not sent to the marital house for a year two. If you are married late, then you are sent immediately.... Everyone should get married but there is only unhappiness and tension after marriage. Before marriage, a girl is happy at her parents’ place. After marriage she can’t go to her parents’ place. She is just tied to the house. She can’t go out anywhere. (S.R., Class 5, married at 18)

If we get married early, we have to suffer all our lives. Early marriage is getting married before 18. In our family, 15 years is considered late. If a girl marries at 20 years, elders in our family say that is old and they will say, ‘how can she have kids?’ etc. It never happens that a girl is married later than 15. One girl was 20 years, when she got pregnant, she took tablets to abort it and this made her infertile. No one knows if this is true. If a girl is nearing 20, and then she marries and doesn’t have kids soon enough, these are rumours people will just spread. If a girl can’t have kids in 2-3 years, the man will get married a second time. If a man is really, like really, I mean really good, he will go to the doctor and get checked if the couple is unable to have kids.” (F.R., Illiterate, Married at 14, Hindu SC, Income 5000)

Though we will have the occasion to look at women’s views on marriage in the context of the interviews in much more detail shortly, here is a further sample of views by women at different ages which ties the problem of early marriage with the burden of housework and labouring in the new home. Interestingly (a topic we will come to later), the predominant idea is that marriage marks the beginning of a life of labour, it would be better to postpone this to the extent possible:

"You shouldn't get married at a young age. You can't live a free life once you get married. You have to do loads of chores the whole day, you can't get up at 9 anymore. And you should learn to do all the household chores, otherwise your in-laws would taunt you." (S.U., Murshidabad, Class 7, Married at 20, Hindu SC, Income 13000)

"You have to adjust with so many new people at a very early age, you have to cook for them, and you have to look after them, which you are not capable of at that age." (N.T., Kolkata, Class 8, Married at 14, Hindu OBC, Domestic worker, Income 23000).

"If she marries underage, there will be problems in conceiving. She will be unable to deal with family responsibilities. She has to work in her marital home." (M.N., Murshidabad, Class 12, Married at 17, Muslim upper caste, Bidi maker, Income 11000)

"One should only think about marriage after 17-18 years of age. One gets caught in the home after marriage. The age of playing and fun can't be enjoyed as after attending to household responsibilities all day long, one gets too tired to do anything new." (B.V., Jaipur, Class 8, Married at 16, Child Care Taker)

"I think the only advantage of late marriage is that the unmarried girl is free from doing daily household chores." (N.G., Jaipur, Class 12, Married at 23)

"If she gets married at a later age, she will know how to cook for her family, how to look after the house etc." (K.T., Sawai Madhopur, Class 10, Married at 18)

"She has to cook for her mother-in-law and father-in-law, clean the house, wash the clothes of so many people. In her own house she can shout at her mother while doing the work, but cannot shout at the mother-in-law and other family members. There are many responsibilities like cleaning the house, sweeping the front yard of the house, taking care of husband and his siblings and they ask to go for agricultural work. The neighbours will poke that your daughter-in-law doesn't know how to do the household work. Being young in age, it will not be possible for her to do this work." (S.A., Mahbubnagar, elderly woman, Hindu SC)

What both the survey and the interviews yield is the way in which, on the one hand, a public discourse around the right age of marriage and marrying too young has been

extensively internalised by the respondents. Keep in mind that especially in the rural sites these are women many of whom have had little exposure by way of education. However, the scoldings of doctors, talk of the law, and government schemes among others have done their work to make marrying below 18 “wrong”. Side by side, women can also be heard to be attaching the question of age to their own experiences of marriage – its burdens if not its “tortures”. Marrying at younger ages therefore translates into having to bear these burdens too soon, rather than postponing them. It is interesting that in our sample even older women such as mothers-in-law who would have played their part in securing underage marriages for their sons in several cases, spoke out more often that it was a good thing that times had changed and this change included later ages at marriage compared to their own time.

6.4 Choice of husband and kind of marriage: What does the survey say?

We now turn to a set of questions relating to the questions of choice of husband – whether arranged or for love, whether known before hand or not. The survey offered a few glimpses into this while the interviews dwelt on this matter at great length. Tables 6.5 respond to the question as to whose decision was decisive in choosing the husband – self, parents and so on; Tables 6.6 answer when was the first meeting with the husband, and Tables 6.7 were about whether they accepted the first proposal received.

(T72) Table 6.5a: Decision of choosing husband, West Bengal

	District							
	Kolkata				Murshidabad			
	Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years		Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Self	38	52.8	68	53.5	28	18.9	18	24.0
Self and Parents	5	6.9	11	8.7	26	17.6	15	20.0
Parents and relatives alone	29	40.3	35	27.6	77	52.0	35	46.7
Marriage bureau	0	0.0	11	8.7	12	8.1	5	6.7
Village elders	0	0.0	2	1.6	1	.7	2	2.7
Others	0	0.0	0	0.0	4	2.7	0	0.0
Not Reported	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Total	72	100.0	127	100.0	148	100.0	75	100.0

(T73) Table 6.5b: Decision of choosing husband, Rajasthan

	District							
	Jaipur				Sawai Madhopur			
	Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years		Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Self	6	14.3	16	9.2	1	1.1	3	2.6
Self and Parents	4	9.5	23	13.2	2	2.2	17	14.8
Parents and relatives alone	32	76.2	128	73.6	84	94.4	93	80.9
Marriage bureau	0	0.0	2	1.1	2	2.2	2	1.7
Village elders	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	.0	0	0.0
Others	0	0.0	5	2.9	0	0.0	0	0.0
Total	42	100.0	174	100.0	89	100.0	115	100.0

(T74) Table 6.5c: Decision of choosing husband, Telangana

	District							
	Hyderabad				Mahbubnagar			
	Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years		Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Self	8	13.6	19	12.3	8	8.2	8	8.3
Self and Parents	1	1.7	2	1.3	7	7.2	7	7.3
Parents and relatives alone	49	83.1	109	70.3	78	80.4	74	77.1
Marriage bureau	0	0.0	16	10.3	0	0.0	0	0.0
Village elders	0	0.0	3	1.9	2	2.1	2	2.1
Others	1	1.7	6	3.9	2	2.1	5	5.2
Total	59	100.0	155	100.0	97	100.0	96	100.0

(T75) Table 6.6a: First meeting with husband, West Bengal

	District							
	Kolkata				Murshidabad			
	Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years		Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years	
First meeting with husband	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
At the time of marriage	16	22.5	9	7.1	21	14.7	7	9.5
At the time of engagement	9	12.7	20	15.7	66	46.2	36	48.6
Allowed to meet before marriage was arranged	3	4.2	18	14.2	12	8.4	9	12.2
Known through education	3	4.2	12	9.4	2	1.4	2	2.7
Known since childhood	10	14.1	21	16.5	19	13.3	7	9.5
Known through common friends	21	29.6	32	25.2	15	10.5	7	9.5
Social Media	3	4.2	5	3.9	0	0.0	3	4.1
Other	6	8.5	10	7.9	8	5.6	3	4.1
Not Reported	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Total	71	100.0	127	100.0	143	100.0	74	100.0

(T76) Table 6.6b: First meeting with husband, Rajasthan

	District							
	Jaipur				Sawai Madhopur			
	Below 18 years		18 years and above		Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years	
First meeting with husband	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
At the time of marriage	24	57.1	45	25.6	72	80.0	82	71.9
At the time of engagement	2	4.8	28	15.9	6	6.7	19	16.7
Allowed to meet before marriage was arranged	6	14.3	70	39.8	1	1.1	10	8.8
Known through education	0	0.0	2	1.1	0	0.0	2	1.8
Known since childhood	6	14.3	16	9.1	1	1.1	1	0.9

Known through common friends	2	4.8	5	2.8	0	0.0	0	0.0
Social Media	0	0.0	3	1.7	4	4.4	0	0.0
Other	2	4.8	7	4.0	6	6.7	0	0.0
Total	42	100.0	176	100.0	90	100.0	114	100.0

(T77) Table 6.6c: First meeting with husband, Telangana

	District							
	Hyderabad				Mahbubnagar			
	Below 18 years		18 years and above		Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
First meeting with husband								
At the time of marriage	7	12.1	11	7.1	23	23.7	24	24.7
At the time of engagement	5	8.6	17	11.0	0	0.0	2	2.1
Allowed to meet before marriage was arranged	19	32.8	77	50.0	39	40.2	43	44.3
Known through education	1	1.7	3	1.9	0	0.0	2	2.1
Known since childhood	20	34.5	20	13.0	28	28.9	19	19.6
Known through common friends	3	5.2	7	4.5	6	6.2	3	3.1
Social Media	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Other	3	5.2	19	12.3	1	1.0	4	4.1
Total	58	100.0	154	100.0	97	100.0	97	100.0

(T78) Table 6.7a: Accepted the first proposal received, West Bengal

	District							
	Kolkata				Murshidabad			
	Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years		Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Yes	44	65.7	63	52.5	108	73.0	35	47.3
No	23	34.3	57	47.5	40	27.0	39	52.7
Total	67	100.0	120	100.0	148	100.0	74	100.0

(T79) Table 6.7b: Accepted the first proposal received, Rajasthan

	District							
	Jaipur				Sawai Madhopur			
	Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years		Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Yes	20	47.6	59	33.5	84	93.3	108	93.9
No	22	52.4	117	66.5	6	6.7	7	6.1
Total	42	100.0	176	100.0	90	100.0	115	100.0

(T80) Table 6.7c: Accepted the first proposal received, Telangana

	District							
	Hyderabad				Mahbubnagar			
	Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years		Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Yes	50	86.2	114	74.0	65	71.4	54	58.1
No	8	13.8	40	26.0	26	28.6	39	41.9
Total	58	100.0	154	100.0	91	100.0	93	100.0

Tables 6.5 deal with who does the “choosing”. Kolkata stands apart from all the other sites – more than half at all ages of marriage claimed that theirs was a “self” choice marriage. In all the other sites self-choice (or love or elopement as these are variously described, about which more in the interviews) are in a clear minority. They are practically non-existent in our sample in Sawai Madhopur (just a total of 4 respondents overall), while in other sites there is not much difference by age of marriage in different sites – Murshidabad has the highest after Kolkata at 19% for those marrying below 18 and 24% for those marrying at 18 and above, while the equivalent figures for Jaipur are 14% and 9%, Hyderabad 13% and 12% respectively, and Mahbubnagar 8% for both. Thus West Bengal as a whole displays a different picture from the rest considering the relatively higher proportion in the rural context of Murshidabad.

These trends are mirrored in Tables 6.6 when respondents first met their husbands, though there is considerably more variation here. This set of tables provides a glimpse of changing trends across regions – from the strictest practice of only seeing the husband at the time of the marriage itself, to being allowed to meet before hand, from knowing the husband from childhood as a “traditional” practice of consanguineous marriages (in

Telangana – such as maternal uncles or cousins), to meeting through school or common friends (most common in Kolkata). Sawai Madhopur is the most rigid or traditional site where the vast majority only meet their husbands at the time of marriage (thus adding to the finding from the previous tables of the near absence of choice marriages). Elsewhere the practice of meeting before hand is gaining ground – in urban contexts like Jaipur and Hyderabad and in rural Mahbubnagar and across ages of marriage.

Tables 6.7 look at whether (as far as respondents were aware) their husbands were their first proposal. In the context of the anxiety around marriage (mostly expressed in the interviews) it is interesting that a significant proportion of marriages appear to have been with the first proposal received, though with considerable variation across sites. Differences across ages of marriage were not very large, though proportions were invariably higher for those marrying below 18 years. Once again Sawai Madhopur stands apart with over 90% across ages of marriage claiming that this was their first proposal. Elsewhere it is much more mixed – interestingly Jaipur has the lowest figures (34-50%) while elsewhere it varied from 60-85% in Hyderabad and Mahbubnagar, and 50-70% in West Bengal. This means that with the exception of Jaipur, a majority of marriages are based on the first official proposal as far as the respondents were aware. We will revisit this in the context of the interviews.

6.5 Arranged or for Love? What the interviews say

When it came to the interviews the topic about which respondents had the most to say was that of their views on “arranged” or “love” marriages – whether their own or what should be the practice. It is in the context of the interviews that more elaborate views were expressed (not always consistent) and certain themes predominated.

Patterns of marriage: the dominance of Arranged Marriages

When women were asked to describe how marriages take place around them, the usual response was to describe the arranged marriage process. Self-choice marriage, even when believed to be common, is framed as an anomaly – still outside the norm. *Underlying the various views of these processes is the idea that marriage is a risk, an unknown, uncertain yet inevitable future.* Thus the two modes of marriage and all aspects of the process are understood in terms of the possible things that can go wrong and minimising these risks. Despite fear as the dominant emotion associated with marriage, most women continue to view it as necessary, or at least inevitable. This was evident

when some women in each district would say quite bluntly that women have to suffer in marriage in any case, if they marry later at least the suffering can be delayed.

Self-choice marriages were significant only in West Bengal. Elsewhere, such marriages were not at all common in the immediate circles of these women but in general they believed they were on the rise and might be accepted if they followed caste norms. The general belief was that the woman's caste identity is absorbed into her husband's caste – so often when couples eloped, the boy's family would accept the marriage but girls in such situations had to be prepared to be shunned by their families entirely.

6.5.1 West Bengal

Kolkata

Corroborating the quantitative survey, the interviews also indicate that Kolkata stands out in having more choice-based marriages than arranged ones. Many of the interviews were about self-choice marriages, given their paucity in other locations. Unlike other districts, the patterns of arranged marriage varied widely, mainly on account of socio-economic class (caste and religion show much less impact), as discussed subsequently. Among the poorer economic classes, where arranged marriages occurred below 18, there were very rare instances of marriage right after puberty. In the case of middle class families in our sample, arranged marriages occurred well above 18, and often comparatively "late" when women were usually in the mid to late twenties – with women having a say, or finding online matches. The case of one respondent, A.M. (Class 10, Married at 5, Hindu SC, Income Rs.7000) represents a unique instance of child marriage in the present time, especially in an urban context. She belonged to a poor family, was married as a child but was sent to the marital home when she was a teenager, well after puberty. She was deeply critical of this decision as she spent her childhood marked as a married girl, having to do all the corresponding rituals. At the same time this robbed her of the experience of the wedding since she was too young to remember or enjoy any of it. Expectations about marriage as young women were often centred much more on the wedding itself – so even women in self choice marriages who were more or less satisfied with their married life, would regret not having a grand wedding more than anything in their narratives.

It was less common for women to have self-choice marriages with the approval of their families and once they entered into a relationship they felt the pressure to marry. A few women rejected proposals of arranged marriages and went on to choose their husbands; two eloped when families tried to fix their marriage. In other cases, marriages happened

below 18 when love affairs or plans to elope were discovered and families got these girls married to their lovers immediately. Almost all the women who had early choice-based marriages said they would have preferred to marry later if their families had not pressurised them into getting married. Those who eloped also said that the plans of fixing their marriage by their families pushed them to marry sooner than they would have liked.

I fell in love. After two years of courtship, the two families got together and fixed the marriage. If my family members had assured me that they would marry me to this very boy of my choice after a few years, I could have continued with my education as far as I wanted and would not have got married so early. Nobody gave me that assurance. (G.P., Class 8, Married at 17, Muslim upper caste, Income Rs. 28000)

Well at that time I had some family pressure, but I won't say I was forced to make such a bad decision. I was young and I made a bad choice. Of course parents scold sometimes but that should not be the reason to elope with someone. It was not even a relationship of that sort. Yes I liked him, we fell in love with each other but leaving home just happened out of nowhere. Actually what happened is my parents got to know about our love, and they were taking me away to my mother's home, which I could not accept as I didn't want to leave this place where I was born and brought up. That made me take this kind of decision. (P.Y., Class 10, Married at 13, Hindu upper caste, Income Rs.47000)

As someone who eloped as early as 13, P.Y. went to discuss why such a situation was common in her surroundings:

The kind of restrictions the family puts on them, that is one trigger. Also in this age they grow a certain sexual desire - that has to be kept in mind as well. So maybe they get physically involved and then they have to get married because of family pressure. This happens very often here.

Interestingly, there were some instances of parents/parents-in-law having early self-choice marriages as well. At times, even when marriages were arranged they were conducted sooner than planned because the young girls were spending too much time with their prospective husbands. Guarding against sex outside marriage was therefore a central aspect in these early marriages. *Notice especially, that the pressure to marry did not come – as accounts from other parts of India have highlighted so often – from the threat of violence, but rather from the need for social and sexual respectability.*

Murshidabad

Murshidabad also had a proportion of self-choice marriages but compared to Kolkata, these were fewer. *At the same time, this rural site stands apart from our other rural sites – nowhere else were cases of so-called "love marriages" part of social life in a village.* In the interviews we were able to select about one-third self-choice marriages, the remaining two-thirds being arranged marriages – half of which were below 18. The reason for early arranged marriages was uniformly reported to be poverty – women said their families were too poor, and they agreed to whatever was decided to lessen this burden. In fact, some said that government schemes related to age of marriage are inconsiderate of poor people, as it is so difficult for them to support many daughters for long periods of time. This was also compounded by the idea that men prefer younger brides, and they would not get married at all if they waited. Muslim matchmakers pointed this out specifically, but similar ideas were expressed by women from other social profiles as well:

Neighbours gossip if the girl remains unmarried. Villagers say that the girl is becoming aged, she will not get a groom any more, and she is looking bad. I heard these things were being said about me. When I was doing my graduation, villagers asked me when I would get married; I am looking like a grandmother. I crossed 20 then. I got married at 22. (S.M., Graduate, Hindu SC, Home tuition teacher)

Marriage itself in any event was not open to negotiation as their future destiny -- some admitted they were forced to agree, while others said they gave into social pressure. The latter were usually relatively better off women at higher levels of education. Across social groups, the social pressure for marriage was emphasised as the main reason in addition to poverty – keeping daughters unmarried was not possible because of gossip about their character, suitability for marriage and the respect of the family.

6.5.2 Rajasthan

Jaipur

Arranged marriage was practically universal in Jaipur among those interviewed. Moreover, women's beliefs across the social and economic spectrum were overwhelmingly in favour of arranged marriages. The very small number of self-choice marriages was reported at the extreme ends of social groups – the very poor with little education (below 18) and the rich at the highest levels of education (above 18). Though we harbour some doubts about reporting of age of marriage among some of our respondents (we believe that several gave their age as 18 years even though they may

have been a year or so younger), around a third of the arranged marriages were admitted to have been held below 18. Thoughts on whether arranged or choice marriages are better were quite mixed – among the middle classes, some held onto the importance of maintaining traditional marriages while others believed that couples having a say in their marriage was rational, though very few openly approved of self-choice marriages. Among the poor, the belief was that self-choice marriages would not turn out well and these women were almost entirely in favour of arranged marriages.

Sawai Madhopur

As already seen from the survey, Sawai Madhopur had only arranged marriages. Age at marriage was not always reported accurately due to fear of legal consequences.

Unique to Rajasthan was the practice of marriages being undertaken together – such as siblings or sisters being married in one ceremony. Community marriages were common among the economically disadvantaged. For those who were relatively better off, it was a mark of status to have individual weddings for their daughters. Most women said they were not interested in getting married and decisions regarding their marriage were taken entirely by their families. Some said they would have preferred to study further rather than marry so early. Meeting the prospective groom before marriage and seeking the opinion or consent of the girl was rare. It was only reported among urban, middle class women with high education levels but even for them, this was not always the case.

My 'tauji' (uncle) asked for my consent before settlement of marriage. In the beginning I refused but uncle said 'are you older than me'? Then I kept mum! Before marriage I did not meet my husband. (C.P., Class 12, Married at 13)

My parents asked for my consent, but they never arranged a meeting nor did they show me his photograph. Before marriage, we had not seen each other. The engagement was done after I saw his photograph and talked to him on the phone. (M.M., Post Graduate, Married at 18)

Although women recall their fears and uncertainties about marriage – or even reluctance to get married – they considered their experiences an improvement over the near-universality of child marriage in the previous generation. A mother-in-law from Sawai Madhopur said this: "I was not asked about my marriage. In those days no one asked. One understands that talks of marriage are going on -- that the girl has become 13-14 years old. I used to feel shy and go far away so that I wouldn't be able to hear that talk. I could not even say no to the parents. Now girls say no to marriage and say that they don't want to get married at that time."

Thus young women believed that they had as much liberty about marriage as society would allow. Community norms and pressures would simply not permit their families to keep them unmarried for longer and beyond a certain age, they would not get suitable matches at all. For poor families, the economic burden of keeping daughters unmarried was a significant pressure. In Sawai Madhopur, some older women (mothers-in-law) believed it is better to marry them as “adults” (which may or may not conform to the legal definition of 18 years) because their specific requirements can be taken into consideration. At times, people would not accept the marriage that had been arranged when they were children, or would face significant marital conflict. One young woman mentioned that in her village, the Panchayat had recently passed an order that the prospective couple should meet each other and decide about marriage, not the parents.

6.5.3 Telangana

In both districts of Telangana, the sample of interviews appeared to have overwhelmingly arranged marriages – even though there were small proportions in the survey, and women reported self-choice marriages in known circles. As we saw in the survey, the practice of consanguineous marriage was still prevalent (around 20% in our interview sample) though this practice was reported to be less common than in the previous generation. In Hyderabad, predominantly marriages were arranged, at whatever age. In most cases, the decisions regarding marriage were entirely taken by the family. A few said they tried to resist being married early, one citing extreme measures such as attempting suicide. In several cases, women described their marriage as having “happened suddenly” – too soon in their lives, and too quickly from the offer of marriage to the actual wedding being held. The strongest version of this came from very poor communities among women from the Lambada community, a Scheduled Tribe. They indicate that they were neither conditioned adequately to expect being married so soon, nor were they given enough time to prepare. But versions of this narrative were expressed at higher ages of marriage as well. In Mahbubnagar, most respondents had arranged marriages, of which a third were reported as underage. Some said they were allowed to meet and their opinion was asked, but for the most part, the decision was eventually taken by the family:

“During arranged marriages, they ask us our opinion but we can’t say no. If we say no, they won’t force us to get married but they ask us if we love someone and accuse us of having an affair. They say, “if there is no affair, why would you say no?” I didn’t like the match at the time of marriage but I didn’t say no. No girl says no” (F.R., Illiterate, Married at 14, Hindu SC, Income Rs.5000).

A few said that since they were married to a blood relative and knew him, they were not anxious about marriage. Some also mentioned the practice of "Illararikam" i.e. matrilocal marriages, which usually happened when a family had no sons and "needed a man." Even in these matrilocal marriages, where the major disruption of having to move to the in-laws home did not take place, the married life of women was not necessarily satisfactory.

In both districts, women often said they were not ready for marriage but were "convinced" by the family. This was particularly true if a proposal came their way because families pushed them to believe that another good proposal might not come and they would lose their chance at a good marriage. In other cases, it was believed that refusing a proposal can suggest that there is "something wrong" with the girl and thwart possibilities of further offers. Even highly educated women said they did not know or think much about marriage but went along with familial expectations and decisions. *There was much emphasis on the need of having the support of the family if and when there are problems in marital life. Marriage was talked about as a dangerous but inevitable future, and having the security of parental and community support was critical.* This was especially emphasised in relation to ideas about "arranged vs. love" marriage. Even when women considered that choosing a partner was acceptable, they would insist that the families should be convinced, otherwise one has no support if there are problems in married life.

A nearly identical response was given by women from different socio-economic strata in Hyderabad:

In my view, arranged marriage is better than love marriage. If it is an arranged marriage, my parents and my husband's parents, and relatives will help and support us, during difficult times. In case, we, the husband and wife have any contention over any issue, they come and discuss the problem with us and solve the matter. If it is a love marriage, whenever we seek help from them, they will question us instead of helping us. (A.T., Class 10, Married at 18, Hindu OBC, Income Rs.17500)

If it is an arranged marriage, if any unexpected thing happens, elders will take care of it. If it is a love marriage, and if you are in trouble, no one comes forward to help you. You'll be in trouble. So, arranged marriage is better than love marriage. (A.P., Illiterate, Married at 12, Hindu SC, Income Rs.43000)

Arranged marriage is better. Because, before the marriage, elders see all the things and discuss the pros and cons, settle the marriage. In the future if we face any

problems, they will help and resolve these. (R.H., Illiterate, Married at 16, Hindu ST, Income Rs.24000)

A respondent S.O. had an inter-caste self-choice marriage, as did her siblings and even her parents. Although she supports "love marriage", she also held the same view of arranged marriages as expressed above:

I believe that love marriages are good because we will know each other and the partner's behaviour, so that we can understand each other. Arranged marriages are also good, because there will be elders' support in everything. (S.O., Class 5, Married at 18, Hindu upper caste, Income Rs.15000)

In Mahbubnagar too, women expressed similar ideas about having the family's support in arranged marriages, and across ages at marriage and levels of income:

Arranged marriages are better. Because, if we face any trouble in our married life, our parents and relatives will help us. Whereas couples who have love marriages do not get any sort of help. (P.S., Class 10, Married at 18, Hindu ST, Income Rs.13000)

If someone falls in love, they should convince their parents and get married. In love marriages, the couples show off their love during their dating, after getting married their true colours come out. In an arranged marriage, there will be support from one's parents. (U.B., Class 12, Married at 16, Hindu SC, Income Rs.17000)

I think love marriages are not good. Because, if they face any trouble or problems after marriage, nobody will help them. Whereas in an arranged marriage, all the family members and relatives will help us. (R.E., Graduate, Married at 22, Hindu OBC, Income Rs.60000)

Arranged marriage is better. Because, in case husband leaves or has another marriage without telling anyone, or something unexpected happens in future, our parents will support us and take care of us. (E.K., Illiterate, Married at 18, Hindu OBC, Income Rs.11500)

At times anticipating problems is the only idea of marriage. As one interviewee M.E. (Class 7, Married at 21, Hindu ST) said, she had no hopes or wishes about her marriage, rather "I just had fear". Thus she also believed:

Arranged marriage is better. If we face any problems in our life in the future, parents help us. If we have a love marriage, they say that "you only got married according to your wish, bear it and sort it out."

6.6 Questions of Consent

The changes reported in practices of marriage were that now the prospective couples are allowed to meet, their consent is taken into account and that dowry and the cost of weddings had gone up drastically. However, while it was a common idea to all districts that things have changed now as the daughter's choice/consent is taken into account, and couples are allowed to interact before marriage – this was not reflected significantly in the actual experiences of most of the women who had arranged marriages. Women married 8-10 years ago would claim these changes had happened, as did those married as recently as 2-3 years ago, even when none of them had these options and families did all the deciding in their cases – clearly this "now" where things have changed does not actually arrive.

I was not consulted; my opinion was not taken in the selection of the boy, neither was he shown to me. After marriage I met him for the first time. After the engagement, I only saw him. It did not occur to me that the boy was not shown to me [...] In my parents' time, boys and girl could not see each other. Now, these things have changed (P.M., Jaipur, Class 12, Married at 20, married 2 years ago)

My mother informed me about the marriage so I did not say much. I didn't even ask to see or fix a meeting with the boy. At that time I did not understand much, thus I followed whatever my parents said. If it had happened now, I would have had a say. Now everyone is getting married according to their choice but mine was an arranged marriage (R.K., Jaipur, Illiterate, Married at 17, married 10 years ago)

I got married 4 years ago. I didn't have any thoughts about marriage - my parents told me to get married and so I did. I was not consulted and neither was my consent taken. There was no question of seeing the boy or girl. My parents said that my daughter will never do anything against our wishes. Now, things are changing. The boy wants to see the girl and the girl wants to see the boy. They are getting married to whom they like. (S.G., Sawai Madhopur, Class 5, Married at 19, married 4 years ago)

R.T. (Hyderabad, Postgraduate, Married at 27, Hindu upper caste, Income Rs.70000) when asked if her family sought her consent for her marriage said: "Yes, of course they did. In fact, they asked all our sisters. They have never gone against our wishes. We have this freedom since our childhood. They raised us like that." But later on she contradicted this when discussing the process of deciding her match:

"In our family system there is no meeting of the girl and boy when fixing their marriage. Only parents and relatives go and look at the girl and boy and they decide the marriage. We have nothing in our hands to select the boy or girl. This is the age-old practice that my family has been practicing since long. So, we have strong faith in our parents' actions in regarding our wellbeing."

6.7 Self-choice marriages

In Kolkata, as already mentioned above, almost all the respondents said that in their family and social circles, choice-based marriages were common and in the case of elopements, families accept these marriages sooner or later. Despite this prevalence of self-choice marriages and their validity in the views of the respondents, there is a common idea that such marriages are often irresponsible and do not last. Most of the women, including those who had early self-choice marriages, believed that depictions on TV and social media, and the use of mobile phones cause young people to get carried away and choose the wrong partners. It was common to hear of young people defying their parents to marry their lovers, and threatening or attempting suicide to get them to agree. It was sexual desire that drove young people into underage marriages, said one mother-in-law, adding that people should "date or even go on a holiday but don't marry" (B.K., mother-in-law, Hindu SC, Income Rs.25000). The respondents believed that teenagers often make these decisions based on short periods of acquaintance and do not take the practical aspects of marriage into account. Thus they argued that self-choice marriages should also take place at a certain age, after a considerable courtship period and based on practical criteria such as house ownership, employment and so on. They would often contradict this by saying that better education levels at present had enabled women to choose their partners and thus better marriages were taking place. Overall, the idea was that self-choice marriage may be better but creates problems when the decision is not well thought out. It is important to note that quite a few of these women regretted their early self-choice marriage, and were faced with "the realities of marriage" (the responsibilities, early motherhood, adjusting with in-laws, less attention from the husband, lack of freedom). *However, as we can see from the quotes below, the vulnerabilities of "choice" are often blamed on an "early" marriage even among those who married above 18.*

My married life is going okay now. I mean I can't say it has been very good. At the beginning it was fine but then we started having many fights. Then I got pregnant and had a baby, my mother-in-law had warned me against having the baby right now, it was only after 3 years of my marriage my baby was born, I was only 21 years old back then. [...] Now I can feel it was a mistake. Earlier if we had a fight I didn't have to think much, but now that I have the baby, I have to think over so many things (N.B., Class 12, Married at 17, Muslim upper caste, Income Rs.1.5 lakhs)

Till today, I cannot do anything. I contribute much more money than my husband to run the family. I have to save money for my daughter. I cannot give everything. When I bought this room, I had this bed only. I bought fan, light, fridge, TV – each and every thing. My husband did not contribute a single penny. Now, my husband always tries to restrict my activities. I do not have any independence even to call someone. When I receive any phone call from a wrong number, he thinks that I know that person. If I did not marry early, my parents could have arranged a better husband for me. Late marriage always gives you such option. When I complain to my parents, they say that it was my choice. (D.P., Class 12, Married at 19, Hindu upper caste, Income Rs.13500)

I always wanted to be loved by my husband. But now he loves me less. I don't understand him anymore. I feel something has changed (A.K., Graduate, Married at 21, Muslim OBC, Income Rs.36000)

Murshidabad was similar to Kolkata in that self-choice marriages were considered common and accepted by families and the community in general. There was also a narrative of self-choice marriages as irresponsible and impulsive - people lose interest in each other or find someone else and hence these marriages don't last. The media and technology were blamed for generating sexual curiosity among teenagers, which led them into early marriages. Unlike Kolkata, most women believed that arranged marriages were better because they were more likely to work out and one had familial support if they did not.

The dominant narrative in Rajasthan and Telangana was that arranged marriages are responsible and more likely to last. Unlike Bengal where references to caste were few and far between, here it was deeply entrenched within the structures of caste endogamy and shame, respect for parents and being ostracised by the community. In Rajasthan, there were fewer instances of known cases of self-choice marriage in the immediate

circles of the respondents. In Sawai Madhopur, the fear of elopement was widely referred to even though there was no evidence of self-choice marriage or elopement as a common occurrence in our sample, as we already saw in the survey data.

Some respondents from Jaipur said that in the case of elopement, sons do not face as much opposition but daughters are shunned by their families:

In our community if a boy has a love marriage then it is accepted but if a girl falls in love then it is opposed. If she still goes ahead and has a love marriage she is kicked out from the home and all relations with her are ended (B.V., Class 8, Married at 16).

Hyderabad and Mahbubnagar did report a few known instances of self-choice marriages. Against the small number of actual instances known to a respondent, what is of interest is the notion that "love marriages" were now increasingly common, if not the new norm. Often respondents said that the majority of marriages at present were self-choice even though they could not point to many examples in their own circles. Rural respondents would often say this was because young people were sent to cities for education and mingled freely. However, unlike West Bengal, these marriages were stigmatised especially if they were inter-caste.

R.Y. (Class 12, Married at 18, Hindu OBC, School Teacher, Income Rs.18500) had an inter-caste marriage and was cut off by her parents:

Ours is an inter-caste love marriage. We got married in Arya Samaj, Saidabad. I belonged to Yadav community (BC) and he is Scheduled Caste. We had been in love and wanted to get married. But my elders had disagreements about caste, they had arguments. From his side, his mother did not accept our love. But his elder brother stood by us and helped us in getting married. My parents also did not accept our marriage. But my husband and I went against their wish and got married with the help of his elder brother. Currently, my parents are not in contact with me because I got married against their wish. They refuse to talk to me.

Some of the respondents expressed strong sentiments against self-choice marriage. When asked if they knew people who had "love marriages" or what their thoughts about this they said:

I do not have such friends. There are no love marriages among my relatives. But I do maintain distance from such people who had a love marriage without

convincing their parents. (V.J., Class 8, Married at 20, Hindu OBC, Tailor, Income Rs.15000)

I feel disgusted [by love marriages]. It is good to obey one's parents. When I see such couples I feel it's very cheap, I worry why such things are happening in this world. Children should get married to the person chosen by parents. Even society will look down upon those who have a love marriage (N.L., Illiterate, Married at 16, Hindu ST, Income Rs.15000)

Quite a few were adamant that they "would not accept inter-caste marriage of children" (E.M., Class 4, Married at 16, Hindu SC, domestic worker). A.D. (Illiterate, Married at 21, Hindu OBC, Industrial Worker, Income Rs.14000) had an arranged inter-caste marriage because her husband lied about his caste, and her bad experience led her to believe her children should marry within the caste:

I will prefer that my children marry in my caste. I will not accept a love marriage. Even if my children love somebody and try to convince me, I will not accept it. Because, I have had a bad experience with my life as I had an inter-caste marriage. I don't want my children to suffer like me.

Notice that in the example above, inter-caste and love marriages are run together, precisely because they both lead to being isolated. The loss of support of the family and community was the main concern. "Honour killings" were mentioned rarely.

One thing is clear that families don't want to give their children outside of their caste. Second, they think that it is safe and secure for their children within the caste. Because if you have an inter-caste marriage then you will not get own community support and people will treat you differently. You will almost be kept outside of community activities. This is the major concern that everyone considers. (R.T., Postgraduate, Married at 27, Hindu upper caste, Income Rs.70000)

There were a few instances of filing charges by the parents of the girl if these self-choice marriages were underage elopements as a ploy to stop them – but at times if the daughter was to be put into a government rescue home, the case was withdrawn. The contradictions of the discourse of family support for arranged marriages are evident in the following:

Divorce never happens, no matter what. They don't even go the police. Elders settle and compromise the fights among the couple. Divorce is not even a thought that comes across. Because when a girl is abandoned, her life is ruined but a man

can marry in a month after a separation. It is possible that a woman can take care of her kids and herself, if she has a job but society will not leave her alone and will treat her badly. There is no value for women without a husband. Even if the husband is a drunk, unemployed and abusive and it is the wife who works hard and provides for the family, the woman has to stay with him and he is not blamed for anything.” (R.L., Mahbubnagar, Class 10, Married at 19, Hindu OBC, Income Rs.35000).

Taken together, certain patterns stand out – the dominance of the system of arranged marriages emerges not just in those sites where it is numerically the norm if not universal, but also by the bolstering of the denigration of marriages based on “love”, whether by respondents themselves as in Kolkata or, more commonly, by a generic discourse about the rise of irresponsible love marriages that flout caste norms and that result in the isolation of the couple from family support, so crucial in times of hardship. Secondly, being married too young is woven into these accounts – often due to pressure from the family, whether it be arranged or for love. This is even said by those who married above 18 years.

At this stage in sharing the views of our respondents we must address a lingering question: Even allowing for the dominance of the arranged marriage in their thinking, what about matters of desire when it comes to marriage? Surely there should have been more expressions around the aspirations that marriage might entail, fantasies of a better future. It is striking that several women “mistook” our questions around expectations from marriage to hopes of a grand wedding, the one day in their lives when they would matter in their world. Even allowing for the way in which sexual respectability would prevent young married women from speaking more positively about desire and romance, we believe we need to take quite seriously what is coming through in these accounts: Women, in the early years of their marriage, are expressing their anxieties more frequently than their happiness, their sheer unpreparedness for what marriage has brought than any fulfilment.

We will return to these themes again – especially in the next section on husbands.

6.8 Husbands: Survey data

A section of the survey of our respondents dealt with the backgrounds of their husbands – their education and employment especially. The results were surprising. Women were very reticent in giving this kind of information. It is not that they were unaware of their

husband's backgrounds – as the views from the interviews will shortly indicate there is now an elaborate set of criteria when it comes to choosing the right husband, even when these break down in conditions of poverty. The Tables 6.8 a, b and c provide the educational levels of husbands and Tables 6.9 a, b and c their employment.

One might have expected that husbands display relatively higher levels of education than their wives. However, this was not the case. Notice that education up to middle school is the modal level of education, just as we found among our women respondents. The only exception is Telangana (again not unlike the case among the women) where class 10 was more common. But in Telangana (mirroring the situation among women) illiteracy was also significant, especially in Mahbubnagar. Moreover, the picture only changes marginally for husbands with wives who married at 18 and above. The majority have only school education, and in urban sites (clearly reflecting the presence of a section of middle class respondents) some husbands are graduates or have some kind of technical or professional degree. *We might say that the failure of education (outside of the middle classes) in these areas is by no means confined to girls but is universal.* Therefore, while educational access has indeed been expanding by leaps and bounds, especially in the last decades and gender gaps have reduced or even disappeared in some parts, backward regions and poor urban localities have yet to be participants in this upward trend to any significant degree.

(T81) Table 6.8a: Educational Background of Husbands, West Bengal

Husband's Level of Education	Kolkata				Murshidabad			
	Age at marriage				Age at marriage			
	Below 18		At 18 and above		Below 18		At 18 and above	
	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
Illiterate	11	15.70	15	11.50	17	12.00	9	11.10
Primary 5	19	27.10	12	9.20	44	31.00	16	19.80
Middle 8	23	32.90	23	17.70	32	22.50	17	21.00
Class 10	10	14.30	15	11.50	16	11.30	9	11.10
Class 12	4	5.70	12	9.20	11	7.70	13	16.00
Graduate	1	1.40	29	22.30	4	2.80	7	8.60
Post Graduate	0	0.00	4	3.10	2	1.40	2	2.50
Technical or professional	0	0.00	16	12.30	1	0.70	1	1.20
Others	-	-	-	-	1	0.70	1	1.20
Missing	2	2.90	4	3.10	14	9.90	6	7.40
Total	70	100	130	100	142	100	81	100

(T82) Table 6.8b: Education Background of Husbands, Rajasthan

Husband's Level of Education	Jaipur				Sawai Madhopur			
	Age at marriage				Age at marriage			
	Below 18		At 18 and above		Below 18		At 18 and above	
	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
Illiterate	6	14.30	5	2.80	5	5.60	3	2.60
Primary 5	10	23.80	10	5.60	6	6.70	6	5.20
Middle 8	11	26.20	34	19.10	20	22.20	32	27.80
Class 10	5	11.90	22	12.40	14	15.60	12	10.40
Class 12	5	11.90	29	16.30	13	14.40	16	13.90
Graduate	4	9.50	34	19.10	15	16.70	19	16.50
Post Graduate	0	0.00	23	12.90	3	3.30	6	5.20
Technical or professional	1	2.40	19	10.70	14	15.60	21	18.30
Others	0	0.00	2	1.10	0	0.00	0	0.00
Total	42	100	178	100	90	100	115	100

(T83) Table 6.8c: Educational Background of Husbands, Telangana

Husband's Level of Education	Hyderabad				Mahbubnagar			
	Age at marriage				Age at marriage			
	Below 18		At 18 and above		Below 18		At 18 and above	
	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
Illiterate	15	25.40	10	6.50	39	39.80	15	15.50
Primary 5	10	16.90	14	9.00	11	11.20	10	10.30
Middle 8	8	13.60	13	8.40	7	7.10	3	3.10
Class 10	12	20.30	32	20.60	21	21.40	21	21.60
Class 12	5	8.50	23	14.80	8	8.20	16	16.50
Graduate	7	11.90	26	16.80	7	7.10	18	18.60
Post Graduate	1	1.70	10	6.50	0	0.00	1	1.00
Technical or professional	0	0.00	20	12.90	0	0.00	10	10.30
Missing	1	1.70	7	4.50	5	5.10	3	3.10
Total	59	100	155	100	98	100	97	100

The employment scenario that emerges for young men in the rural sites is equally disheartening, while the urban story among the middle classes offered a more stable and predictable picture. In the rural sites while some husbands were primarily engaged in agricultural labour, many more were construction workers (which covered various forms of wage labour including migrant labour.) Smaller numbers engaged in some form of self-employment. The patterns varied across sites. In Kolkata, apart from construction work, smaller numbers spoke vaguely about husbands who had some kind of business (such as tea shops or fish/meat shops), or worked as autorickshaw drivers, electricians, or sanitation workers. In Murshidabad work opportunities for men were few and far between outside construction or mason work (as migrant workers) – others were jute mill workers, or helped in shops. The better off were often shop owners. In Jaipur owning a shop (dairy, grocery, mobile, cloth, pharmacy) or business (dairy, furniture, textiles) was most common among middle class respondents, followed by professional jobs as in banking, finance or some kind of corporate job). Among the working classes construction work, factory work (gemstones and jewellery), were frequently reported with fewer working as welders, drivers or sweepers.

Sawai Madhopur reflected a very similar picture of very few options outside of construction and migrant labour – the interesting difference was the presence of a few with jobs in the railways (as gangmen or technicians) with several being unemployed and

looking for work, including husbands who were students sitting for qualifying examinations for government jobs. Hyderabad's middle class interviewees had husbands who were software engineers or who were in corporate jobs, some were sales personnel. Working class husbands could be autodriviers, helpers in all kinds of offices, shops (especially mobile stores), and once again construction work as masons, painters, tile-stone workers. In Mahbubnagar we encountered husbands who combined jobs – as cultivators in combination with seasonal migration for construction work, agricultural workers who were urban migrants when no rural work was to be found, and a few in jobs such as drivers.

Indeed, in Mahbubnagar even among those who had married wives at higher ages, considerable proportions were reportedly construction workers in the rural sites. Thus only the urban sites offered more variation – whether among the middle classes or among the working poor. The sharp contrast with the respondents themselves discussed in chapter five stands out clearly – men find some kinds of jobs however poorly paid, while women have very few options, and even lose their jobs after marriage.

(T84) Table 6.9a: Employment background of husbands, West Bengal

Husband's Occupation	Kolkata				Murshidabad			
	Age at marriage				Age at marriage			
	Below 18		At 18 and above		Below 18		At 18 and above	
	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
Agricultural labour	-	-	-	-	28	19.70	14	17.30
Cultivator and Animal husbandry	1	1.40	0	0.00	5	3.50	5	6.20
Artisans	-	-	-	-	6	4.20	4	4.90
Industrial Worker	1	1.40	1	0.80	4	2.80	4	4.90
Construction worker	6	8.60	9	6.90	46	32.40	15	18.50
Professional or Executive Services	0	0.00	27	20.80	3	2.10	4	4.90
Clerical Services	2	2.90	7	5.40	-	-	-	-
Sales Employee	5	7.10	8	6.20	5	3.50	4	4.90
Own Trade or Buisness	18	25.70	38	29.20	25	17.60	19	23.50
Education Teacher or Assistant	0	0.00	4	3.10	2	1.40	3	3.70
Home based work	1	1.40	0	0.00	-	-	-	-
Personal Service	14	20.00	7	5.40	-	-	-	-
Social Service	22	31.40	24	18.50	15	10.60	7	8.60
Any other	0	0.00	2	1.50	2	1.40	2	2.50
Missing	0	0.00	3	2.30	1	0.70	0	0.00
Total	70	100	130	100	142	100	81	100

(T85) Table 6.9b: Employment Background of Husbands, Rajasthan

Husband's Occupation	Jaipur				Sawai Madhopur			
	Age at marriage				Age at marriage			
	Below 18		At 18 and above		Below 18		At 18 and above	
	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
Agricultural labour	0	0.00	1	0.60	0	0.00	1	0.90
Cultivator and animal husbandry	1	2.40	0	0.00	3	3.30	5	4.30
Artisans	1	2.40	8	4.50	2	2.20	2	1.70
Industrial Worker	2	4.80	15	8.40	4	4.40	13	11.30
Construction Worker	10	23.80	17	9.60	34	37.80	36	31.30
Professional or Executive Services	1	2.40	29	16.30	2	2.20	4	3.50
Clerical Services	1	2.40	11	6.20	4	4.40	4	3.50
Sales Employee	6	14.30	28	15.70	5	5.60	8	7.00
Own Trade or Business	8	19.00	46	25.80	12	13.30	14	12.20
Education Teacher or Assistant	1	2.40	2	1.10	0	0.00	4	3.50
Social Service	8	19.00	18	10.10	10	11.10	9	7.80
Any other/No occupation/Seeking	2	4.80	3	1.70	13	14.40	13	11.30
Missing	1	2.40	0	0.00	1	1.10	2	1.70
Total	42	100	178	100	90	100	115	100

(T86) Table 6.9c: Employment Background of Husbands, Telangana

Husband's Occupation	Hyderabad				Mahbubnagar			
	Age at marriage				Age at marriage			
	Below 18		At 18 and above		Below 18		At 18 and above	
	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
Agricultural labour	-	-	-	-	9	9.20	4	4.10
Cultivator and Animal Husbandry	-	-	-	-	37	37.80	24	24.70
Artisans	0	0.00	4	2.60	1	1.00	0	0.00
Construction worker	11	18.60	14	9.00	24	24.50	11	11.30
Professional or executive services	2	3.40	36	23.20	0	0.00	7	7.20
Clerical Services	1	1.70	9	5.80	0	0.00	2	2.10
Sales Employee	3	5.10	19	12.30	0	0.00	1	1.00
Own Trade or Business	28	47.50	42	27.10	12	12.20	24	24.70
Education teacher or Assistant	1	1.70	2	1.30	2	2.00	2	2.10
Personal Service	0	0.00	1	0.60	4	4.10	5	5.20
Social Service	11	18.60	22	14.20	6	6.10	10	10.30
Any other	2	3.40	6	3.90	3	3.10	7	7.20
Total	59	100	155	100	98	100	97	100

6.9 Choosing a husband: Voices from the Interviews

Having provided such brief glimpses into the educational and employment characteristics of husbands from the survey, where only very limited information is possible, what more did respondents have to say when they were interviewed? Curiously but perhaps predictably, women were much more ready to speak in general about the criteria of a “good” husband than to speak about their own individual case.

6.9.1 Criteria for marriage: the Husband and his family

What came through in the interviews most strongly, is that compared to the past, the vetting of matches was said to be more thorough, and the efforts to meet certain criteria are quite assiduous. For the previous generation, a match within the caste/community that was recommended by community members would be accepted without looking into any other details. Now women reported that there is some concern towards determining

the comfort and happiness of the daughter, based on pre-set parameters. Some believed that in tight-knit rural communities in the past, details of the families in each community were generally known and therefore there was no need to investigate any further. As matches are found further from home, especially in cities, it becomes necessary to devise other ways to verify the information about prospective matches. A few women in Murshidabad also said that at present the age gap between couples had reduced compared to previous generations.

However, as we have seen on several occasions before, a public discourse about change for the better is one thing, while actual experiences were often quite different.

6.9.1.1 Kolkata

Across all districts, arranged matches were found through family and relatives. In Kolkata, marriage websites and other online modes were also common in middle class families. Marriage brokers were exclusive to Muslim families. At times, these marriage brokers were the route to “convert love marriages into arranged marriages”, i.e. they suggested matches to families when the couple in question was already in a relationship. *The main criteria for choosing a groom were his job, home ownership, and sometimes family size. But notice that these have been manipulated under conditions of poverty and need:*

Firstly [what matters is] gotra, then financial situation of the family and the boy. In my case these things were not there. My parents were not in a position to give dowry. So there was no pressure of dowry from my husband’s side. My husband was a bus helper that time. My uncle said he was very hard working. He thought it’s a small family, only two brothers. If both can work together than they will do something in future. They preferred this proposal because it’s a small family and based in Kolkata. In villages women have to do many things from boiling paddy, farming to other domestic work. So the city is better than this. They did not have any demand so the final things related to marriage were confirmed within one week. (M.L., Class 9, Married at 16, Hindu SC, Income Rs.7000)

They just wanted an assurance about whether the boy was capable of working or not. I got married to a Nepali family. My father was a bit against this marriage, because of the caste but my mother and my elder brother wanted me to get married in this family only. (N.T., Class 8, Married at 14, Hindu OBC, Income Rs.23000)

My uncles enquired about his family. They found that the groom is a well behaved person and does not have any bad habits. He has his own house. His economic condition is stable. (S.B., Class 7, Married at 14, Muslim upper caste, Income Rs.15000)

Caste was not mentioned by most – except in middle class Brahmin households. Religion continued to be significant but there were instances of Hindu-Muslim marriages which had been accepted by families. Of two Muslim women married into Hindu families, one was asked to convert – she had married into a Balmiki (SC) family.

Another noteworthy absence among poorer families was that of the education of the husband. It was simply not a criterion in the first place.

Education levels were mentioned only by middle class women; some also mentioned "culture of the family." The following accounts of middle class women who had arranged marriages illustrate how they had the space to have specific criteria and take time to find matches accordingly, (although they did not have the choice to not marry at all, as discussed later).

I got married at the age of 30. I couldn't find a suitable partner till then. I didn't want to settle down in a village after marriage, I always wanted to stay in the city. I got too many proposals from those who stay in villages. But I didn't want that, so I had a late marriage. We finally got to know about my husband's family from newspaper matrimonial ads and we contacted them. We basically look for the groom's financial condition, if he owns a house or not, if he has a job or not. Caste is not a boundary for us, except Muslims. (I.R., Class 10, Married at 29, Hindu upper caste, Income Rs.15000).

Our family was not quite okay with a boy doing a private sector job. They had much faith if a boy was doing a government sector job. But as you know, our times and their times are different. For me, I didn't want anyone who was doing a PhD like me and who was not settled yet. I didn't show any interest towards those guys. Although there were couple of guys who were doing their PhD and were quite good, I didn't proceed further as I felt that if both of us were in the same situation, we might have trouble adjusting with each other. For me, another criterion was, the guy should be settled in Kolkata as I was doing my PhD here and didn't want to discontinue. Later I was teased as I was told that I was looking for all those criteria rather than a good boy. I selected one of them and I married that guy. I didn't get the chance of meeting a lot of them as I was concerned about those things. Apart from this, we saw how the family is; what others in the

family do. Other family members from my family were also involved actively while these things were going on. Everyone liked him and also the family. (T.K., PhD, Married at 27, Hindu upper caste, Income 2 Lakhs)

Of those who had self-choice marriages, women usually met their lovers in school, tuition classes, or their neighbourhood; and kept in touch via mobile phones. Their reasons for choosing a husband usually centred either on physical attraction ("smile", "style"), or more often on the "character"/ "behaviour" they observed – they said the men they chose were very attentive and caring towards them and others, which indicated their suitability as husbands. Unlike other districts where physical characteristics and looks are emphasised as criteria, the respondents in Kolkata would often say "looks don't matter, the person does." Physical/sexual attraction was downplayed for the most part across the board. One young Muslim woman who had an early arranged marriage spoke of her husband not living up to her ideas of physical attraction and described what she found attractive in men, mentioning Bollywood actors. This woman was interviewed in the presence of her unmarried friend, who kept giving inputs about how her husband was very controlling and how she was disappointed with him.

6.9.1.2 Murshidabad

The criteria for arranged matches in Murshidabad were employment, house, family background and the "character" of the boy. Character usually referred to whether the prospective groom consumed alcohol, tobacco and drugs; and if he had any love affairs. Caste was not discussed but religion was somewhat important, though it appeared to be not as rigid as elsewhere. In addition, the dowry demand also determined if a match could go ahead. Self-choice marriages were based on physical attraction and/or similar ideas of emotional connection ("caring", attentive, behaviour). There were a few instances of women being followed and pursued till they gave in – but this was not reported as a problem, but was rather as an indication of how interested the man was.

It was quite noticeable however, that beyond generalities, women in Murshidabad were actually ignorant or unwilling to say much about the specific conditions and background of their husbands and his family. Regarding arranged marriages, most women were often not clear about what the criteria for their marriage was. They did however offer some insight into general patterns of how matches were chosen in their communities/families. Usually it was economic criteria of employment, income and land holding. Notice once again that education of the husband barely registered.

Here we mostly consider whether the boy is good looking or not, whether he has a good income or not. We also look for a boy who is the only son in the family. If the boy's family holds some land, it also can be considered as a good proposal. (S.S., Class 9, Married at 16, Hindu SC, Income Rs.18000)

For the poor, at times the criteria were even more limited:

The girl's family asks what job the groom does. Maybe he is a mason, then they will ask how frequently he comes home, whether he gives his wages to his family or not and whether his character is good or bad. They verify with the neighbours. Sometimes they marry their girls off even to a bad groom with a hope that he will change after marriage. (P.K., Class 6, Married at 14, Muslim upper caste, Income Rs.10000)

My father wanted to get me married to a good man, a handsome one. He said he doesn't care whether he has agricultural land or not, and he did that. They had come to this house; they saw the house, the garden. People in this family are good, that's why they agreed. (D.M., Class 10, Married at 17, Hindu upper caste, Income Rs.8000)

A few women were aware of how their marriage was arranged. M.K. (Class 4, Married at 21, Muslim upper caste, Income Rs.11000) said when her father went to see her husband he enquired "mainly about livelihood, monthly income, family size etc. I do not know whether my father asked anything about education or not. [A small family is one that] comprises 3 to 4 persons. My parents say that a small family is good." She also mentioned that she was asked about her education, "My present husband and his brother went to my house with a marriage proposal. They asked many questions to me, mainly regarding education." Another woman said education of the prospective wife is asked even among poor families because of the government schemes:

In earlier times, people did not even ask about education. Nowadays if the boy or the girl is not educated, marrying them off would be troublesome. Nowadays, boys and girls are receiving various benefits from the government like Kanyashree, Yuvashree or Rupashree. Even poor families are able to give education to their children. (P.K., Class 6, Married at 14, Muslim upper caste, Income Rs.10000)

However, education did not appear to be a deciding factor in fixing marriages for the women interviewed. Unlike urban districts, education of the groom was not a criterion even for women who had higher levels of education. For instance, J.K. had completed

the second year of her BA degree, but she said her family only had economic considerations in mind for her marriage:

Someone I could stay happy with. They should at least have a bathroom, rooms, balcony, a bit of land. That's it. (J.K., Class 12, Married at 21, Muslim OBC, Income Rs.10500)

Even more interesting is that the views on education here overturn some of the more general claims made about education when they were asked about their own education as discussed in chapter three earlier in this report. Recall that women regretted not having studied further, blaming themselves for not have paid more attention as children to their schooling, and said rather glibly that there were no problems in studying further. There was no such thing having too much education, and more education could only translate into better marriages. In the context of discussing their husbands and marriage prospects, however, some felt that education cannot overcome class-caste disadvantages and will not lead to better marriages for women from disadvantaged backgrounds. H.M. (Class 8, Married at 16, Muslim upper caste, Income Rs.11200) said "However educated she might be, a girl from a farmer's family will get married into a farmer's family only, she cannot uplift her social status through marriage."

G.B. (Class 12, Married at 15, Muslim OBC, Income Rs.6000) was adamant on completing her schooling and laid it down as a condition of her marriage, despite the fact that she didn't have much of a say in the decision of her marriage. Yet when it came to criteria for marriage, she said that education of the groom "is important for the rich, not for the poor." In her circles, "Firstly they consider what the boy's income is and whether he is working or not. It is because if he doesn't own a lot of property currently that's okay but he will make money for the future if he does any job. Secondly, he should not be an alcoholic. Thirdly, they consider the family, whether it is small or big. People want to get their daughter married in a small family." When she was asked if a girl would marry someone less educated than her, she said "We can't make such choices, as we are very poor. It is true. We have to adjust within our limitations. One friend who is pursuing an engineering degree wants to marry someone who is equally educated like her. And another friend said she wants to marry someone who is educated but not highly educated, she wants someone who has passed 10th standard. There is another friend of mine, who has married in the same way like me. It was not her but her parents who decided her marriage."

However, this was not limited to poor women who had completed schooling. Education of the groom was not particularly important even for middle class women with graduate and post graduate degrees, so long as they were earning well:

My parents always wanted me to get a job, and be financially independent, so they wanted for me someone with financial stability as well, who could run the household steadily. They didn't want anything else. (R.S., Post graduate, Married at 22, Hindu OBC)

They got to know that he works somewhere outstation, he has no addiction, so they liked him. They knew he has studied till class 10, still he has a good job, he is smart in every aspect, he has no addiction. Well the marriage was fixed, but I was still studying, so they agreed to wait until I finish my graduation. I got married after one year. (S.P., Graduate, Married at 21, Hindu OBC, Income Rs.22000)

An aspect that emerged in Murshidabad among a few interviewees (but not Kolkata) was that educated women were preferred for marriage because then she can help the family financially. The mothers-in-law of two women, who were graduates, clearly said that they chose these girls because they believed that they could get jobs to help run the family – in one case, because the son was unemployed.

6.9.1.3 Jaipur

In Jaipur, matches were found through relatives with caste, employment, home ownership and "looks" as primary criteria. Finding economically well-settled boys within their caste groups was the priority. Some women said in their communities, men with rented houses were not considered. Almost all women mentioned that matching physical attributes (skin colour, height, build) was also important. Middle class women mentioned that education was now becoming an important criterion. For some, the family size was also a consideration – bigger families meant more labour for the daughter after marriage; yet some felt joint families were more "secure" in terms of the safety of daughters.

In this site, unlike West Bengal, interviewees had more to say about education. There was a common belief that highly educated boys were scarce, hence they demand higher dowries (this was repeated in Sawai Madhopur too). So if girls were highly educated and wanted equally educated matches, their dowry would be higher. However, women's accounts of how their marriage was decided did not bring this out. Some women did say if their sons acquired education, they will ask for more dowry. A few also believed that when with very little education women are married to educated men, they face humiliation.

My husband is 8th pass and I am uneducated. He verbally abuses me and says that I am uneducated, why did he marry me, etc. (R.B., Illiterate, Married at 18)

For poor women, it was primarily economic criteria (besides caste):

[When I got married] I was only 13 years old, too young. My parents' economic condition was not good. I was told that you have to go once to your in-laws and then come back to home. While searching for my husband, the caste, clan, quality and job were considered. Economic status was looked into. My husband's family was better in comparison to my family. (C.P., Class 12, Married at 13)

In searching for a boy my family checked that the boy does not drink much, is not violent and the family is good. In our community, land and property are not really focused on. If the boy lives on rent then the marriage does not take place. A working boy is preferred; whether his looks are good and the family's economic condition is also considered. (H.K., Class 9, Married at 18)

Women who were from the lower middle classes with better education levels at times married men with less education because they fulfilled other criteria:

For marriage we search for a boy of the same caste. We do not marry within the same clan. We also see the family background, look for own house and do not see the land. There should be a residence in the village, even if he is living on rent in town. The boy must be working. My husband was earning a little bit by doing gem stonework. But I said that this does not matter as I said that I am working. He was an orphan therefore my family members were reluctant as there is no property like land etc. My husband has not even passed Class 10. Then I said that I am educated and even the husband of my elder sister is only 8th class; even then he is earning well and has his own house. [...] I liked him only because I thought that he will not put restrictions on me after marriage (N.K., Post graduate, Married at 25)

In our community while searching for a boy, his caste and clan is important. He should not be alcoholic, his family should be good; property and residence are also seen. For example, my husband does not drink, he has studied up to class 8th but his nature was good thus I liked him the most (K.R., Class 10, Married at 16)

Contrast this with middle class women at high education levels, where education of the potential husband is emphasised:

In our caste while searching for a boy one looks at the caste and family background. Educational status is most important and the boy's education should

not be less than the girl's education. The boy should have higher education. His financial status is also seen and he should not live in rent, but should have his own house. Looks of the boy matter a lot. Looks and education level both matter. It is not necessary for the boy to be good looking if the girl is, but it is important that the boy's educational level should be such that he can earn well. (L.P., Post graduate, Married at 28).

While searching for a match for me, caste was a priority. I am 12th pass so the boy should also be equally or more educated. My family also considered that he should be employed. His family's financial condition was not so important because if the boy is earning then the family can survive well and I was also earning. (N.G., Class 12, Married at 23)

My family members did not give much importance to the income of the boy; they did not even consider the property, land etc of the boy. They did not ask anything about the boy. My father had thought that he is educated and works in a bank, thus will live in Jaipur. So he was really interested. Everybody is basically from the village, but now living in an urban set up has become trendy (H.N., Graduate, Married at 26).

Interestingly, some Gujar women mentioned that their families only consider boys who have completed Class 12, even though these women had lower levels of education:

To find a good boy for the daughter, the house, family and small family size are seen. Education is also considered. Whether the boy is working or not is seen. If the boy has completed Class 12, then the marriage is fixed. Caste, clan, economic condition etc are seen. A rich family is not necessary for getting married but he should have his own house (A.G., Class 5, Married at 19).

Yet at the highest education levels, even for middle class women, education levels were not always matched. If the potential groom was educated enough and had a stable job that was more important. Further, a small family and the comfort of the daughter were important considerations:

My father mainly saw that the boy is working and not sitting idle. Earlier importance was given to family and not to the boy but now the boy is important; many things have changed now as the boy should be a good earner. Money is significant in all aspects of life. Earlier family was prioritized much more than a government job of the boy and it was seen that the daughter gets married in a reputed and valued

family but many times the girl was caught in family responsibilities for the whole of her life. Today, parents think that my daughter's husband should be the best person and he keeps in a way that my daughter wants to live and thus both live happily (D.R., Post graduate, Married at 23)

While searching for a boy, his financial condition is seen, own residence, how much he earns, what is his salary and what job he is in. Then his family background is explored as to what type of family it is; is there any family problem; whether it is small or big family. Many think that they will not marry their daughter into a large family/ joint family set up. Also, it is seen that the daughter may not adjust well in the village, thus a city/town boy is searched for. Height and colour are also considered i.e. they should look good together. I had seen everything like his height, colour and health. Even his hair. Like the husbands of both my sisters are good-natured, but not so fair in colour. Height and health of boys are very important (S.Y., Post graduate, Married at 23)

Notice therefore how criteria evolve among better off families in urban Jaipur. Education becomes more significant, but even here it can wobble at times when the girl is more educated and what ultimately matters is some financial stability. Notice also how frequently the size of the family is mentioned – natal families are aware of the burden of household work that awaits in the new home. We will have more to say about this later.

6.9.1.4 Sawai Madhopur

In Sawai Madhopur, the primary criteria were caste, employment, house, family background ("good, respectable"), and family size. The idea of a good match was focused on similarity in looks, education and status. Some extended this to compatibility ("similar in thinking") and the absence of conflict. Education was emphasised frequently, especially if girls were educated.

Expectations differed starkly for disadvantaged classes/castes.

I wanted a good husband and a family, even if it was a little poor. My grandmother fixed the marriage. When looking for a groom, it is seen that *he will keep the girl well and not make her work as daily wage labourer*. Everything depends on the situation - how poor they are. It is also seen that the boy is good, the family is good and has some land. (H.B., Class 1, Married at 16)

I got married a year and a half ago. When looking for a boy, my parents saw to it that the family should be good, it should not be a very big family, *there should be sufficient to eat*, the boy should have a job. (J.T., Class 2, married at 21)

For some caste-class groups, land ownership was also considered. Some women also said having a water source or having toilets in the house were criteria that their families considered. These were often criteria in poor families, where it was common for sisters to be married together to save money and this meant adolescent marriage of the younger sister. Clearly at these young ages, any characteristics of the groom (who is likely an adolescent too) could not be considered much. Here we have a rare case of an actual child marriage:

I got married when my sister was getting married. I really did not know what was going on at that time. My marriage was arranged by my parents. When looking for a match, my parents saw the boy, his family and the land owned by the family (L.G., Class 6, married at 4)

I got married in 2011. I was 13 years old at that time. My elder sister was getting married and so my family wanted me to get married at the same time. I did not have a say in it. The wish and happiness of my family is my happiness. It was a poor household and that's why two sisters got married at the same time. When looking for a suitable boy, it is seen whether the boy is good, whether the family is good, they have farmland or not, a source of water, how many members are there in the family (A.L., Class 7, Married at 13)

I got married about 9-10 years ago. The boy, family, land, his job, water, house with good rooms- all these are points to be considered before arranging a marriage..... When my daughter has studied till class 10th-12th, then I will look for a match. In our caste, we are poor. There is nothing in the house- there is barely food to eat, there is no money- what will we see. (R.B., Illiterate, Married at 18)

This idea of being too poor to have extensive criteria to marry daughters emerges in quite a few cases. The following account brings out the limited choices women from poor families have:

Nothing much happened at my wedding. We were poor. I did not think much about marriage, I just thought that the household should be good and there should be enough to eat after marriage. But some money had to be given at the time of the wedding and there was some expenditure also. I just prayed that some money

should come from somewhere so that my parents don't have to suffer humiliation. I just kept hoping that some money comes in time for the wedding. My marriage was an arranged one. It was arranged by my father. It was seen that the boy should not be an alcoholic and should not be a gambler. Parents always want that their daughter goes to a good house with land etc. But it's all destiny. My father saw the boy, saw that he had some land and had some food. Caste is also seen and gotra is matched. There has been no change in the tradition. Earlier also all this happened and now also this is happening. Just very recently my cousin got married, and it was very similar to what happened at my wedding. Looking for an educated boy has problems as they ask for a lot of money -- 4-5 lakhs. But if we are poor, from where will we arrange so much money. In such a case, the wedding is also expected to be very good -- good food and other things. But, if the boy is from a similar background, then they understand the problems. Expectations of spending or a lavish marriage will not be there. (L.B., Class 8, married at 17)

Poverty, therefore, is a strange kind of equaliser where it would be a mistake to have aspirations for improvement through marrying into a better off family. As several women told us, what matters are the basic necessities – food to eat, not too far to go for bringing water. More education in a groom only meant the demand of more dowry which was an impossibility. The story becomes different for those who are already upwardly mobile. Education thus becomes important for better-off women who manage to study beyond Class 12 – even then they are married while enrolled in their undergraduate degrees and continue education after marriage:

When looking for a boy before fixing the marriage, it is considered whether the boy is good, if he is educated, is the family good, is their behaviour good. Whether they have land or not is not taken into account as much as whether that their behaviour is good or not. That is found out by the way they talk and also from the neighbours. (N.J., Married at 17, Currently studying in BA 2nd year)

I got married a year ago. My parents looked for an educated boy because I was educated. Everything has turned out as I had hoped and expected. I got the opportunity to complete my studies in my marital home. This time I will complete my final year and they have said that I can prepare for any entrance exam also if I want. They looked for a boy who was educated, one who did not have any bad habits like drinking. He should also have land and property, his caste should be the same as ours. (M.R., Married at 19, BA Student)

I had thought that I will continue my education after marriage. I have been able to do that. I used to hope that there would be no problem of water in my marital home, but that's exactly what happened. I have to get water from such a distance!! My parents had looked for the match. When looking for a match, they saw that the family should be good and that he should be educated (R.W., Married at 18, BA student)

However, in the face of widespread unemployment, having a job was more important for some. Further land holdings are considered an important backup in case jobs are not found:

I did not want to get married at that time. But my father had 7 brothers who also had daughters who were younger than me. Some of them had started working. Now in our family, unless the elder sister gets married, it's not possible for the younger ones to be married. I was at a marriageable age. So, my parents said that if the boy's family does not continue my education, they will ensure that I get educated from home if I wanted to continue studying. The boy was good, the family was good and thus the marriage was proposed. I feel that if a girl wants to study and start earning so that she is independent, then she should be allowed to do so. She should not be told to get married. God knows what kind of family she will get later. At least she will not have to depend and ask for money- even if it's only Rs 2. She will not have to kill her wishes. She also has a right to buy and do what she wants. When looking for a boy - we see the family, and the boy. We ensure that he has no bad habits like drinking etc. The family should have land and have respect in the society. Caste and gotra is also seen. He should be of the same caste and should have land - these things are seen by everyone. We see that the boy has land so that if by chance, in future, he does not have a job, then at least this land will help him sustain the family. (S.H., Graduate)

6.9.1.5 Hyderabad

In Hyderabad too, caste (including "*gothram*") was the first priority. Within the same caste group, employment and income, home ownership, character/habits and family background were considered primarily. Middle class families were also focused on property and economic status overall. In recent years, equality in the education and employment status of the bride and groom were also deemed important.

For women from poor families, caste, employment and assets (land/own house) were primary:

My husband is my relative; he is my maternal uncle's son. They wanted a good boy who will take care of their daughter and earn money. Looks do matter. They look at the job and assets he has. We get married in our own caste i.e. Lambada. (N.L., Illiterate, Married at 16, Hindu ST, Income Rs.15000)

My family chose my husband because he is from the same caste, they have their own house in the city, and he has a good character. (R.N., Graduate, Married at 16, Hindu SC, Income Rs.15000)

Some however said character was primary:

One of my maternal uncle's sons was under consideration but they rejected him. They looked for someone who has a good character. Income was never a criterion for them. They just wanted a good person without any vices. My maternal uncle's son was having an affair with another girl, that's the reason why they rejected him. (D.B., Class 9, Married at 18, Muslim OBC, Income Rs.12000)

They wanted the boy to be good and caring. They wanted him to have his own house. They didn't think income and education to be essential. (Z.B., TH7381, Class 8, Married at 25, Muslim, Income Rs.40000)

S.V. (Class 10, Married at 16, Hindu SC, Income Rs.48000) was from a rural background and her parents were farmers, so despite getting some education she was prepared to be married to a less educated man and have a life of agricultural labour:

I have completed class 10 but I used to think that I may get a husband from an agricultural background. I may even have to indulge in labour work. But I got one who has completed Class 10 and plays first class cricket.

Some cited community specific trends. N.S. (Class 12, Married at 21, Hindu OBC, Income Rs.35000) belongs to the barber caste of her region, where she said men only study till Class 10 as they have to enter the traditional profession. Therefore, usually women have more education than the men they marry within their caste.

It was only urban women at the highest education levels who could have specific criteria about the husband they wanted:

I got this proposal through one of my father's friends from his village. I was very particular about a "software husband" only. Criteria for my family were education,

the most important thing is salary, good family background. (G.U., Graduate, Married at 20, Muslim OBC, Income Rs.70000)

I got married at the age of 27 years. Since 21 years of age, I got proposals but kept on declining them. The reason behind that is I did not know about marriage and family, and society too. So, I kept on postponing it. There was one aunt whom I know well. She proposed me to that boy. So, he liked me and it happened like that. I started talking to him before the engagement, so I came to know him well. Then, engagement, and marriage.....I had a dream that I wanted to get married to a rich person. A secure job holder, and good character person. I wanted a person who is equal in age to me. We are Brahmins, Caste is important, (K.P., Graduate, Married at 27, Hindu upper caste)

Initially I didn't want to get married immediately after my Masters, but I wanted to finish my Ph.D. But since my parents told me that it is a good match and good family, I agreed. It was also the promise that my husband's family made before marriage that she can study even after marriage. With this flexibility I felt happy that I can pursue my education. I then agreed to go for marriage. Basically, families consider firstly good family background, then job, and family's financial situation. Especially in our caste Brahmins, the family background is very important. Sometimes they don't even take into account the boy's employment and family's financial status, but they want a good family. These kinds of marriages still happen in our area. (R.T., Post graduate, Married at 27, Hindu upper caste, Income Rs.70000)

Similar to Rajasthan, respondents in Telangana also believed that educated girls have to pay higher dowry, especially if they want to marry educated boys. This idea was much stronger in this state, though hardly anyone dwelt on their own experiences (a few cited examples of people around them). M.S. (Class 12, Married at 25, Hindu SC, Income Rs.32000) said that for this reason parents sometimes don't let daughters study beyond a point. Some women belonging to Scheduled Tribes also reported that in their communities more education means higher dowry.

Further, it was common for women in Telangana to say that more education can lead to conflict in marriage ("ego problem"), either because highly educated girls don't adjust to normative expectations ("act superior"), or simply because men feel threatened by an educated wife. Note how different these accounts are from the standard views expressed by respondents that we mentioned earlier – that more education could only be a good thing.

There will be some competition, ego problems between them, those things lead to problems. If girls acquire higher education, they challenge their husbands. Sometimes girls undermine the husband. Because of these things, some people are getting divorced. (M.J., Class 10, Married at 17, Hindu OBC, Income Rs.19000)

If a girl has higher education, it is difficult to find a boy who has completed the same level of education. In case someone is found, there is no guarantee that he will agree to marry that girl. Somehow or the other it will become a problem for her. They will have ego problems. At the basic level after seeing the bio-data, she will be rejected if she has higher educational qualifications. (B.S., Post graduate, Married at 26, Muslim OBC, Income 1 lakh)

Higher levels of education may raise some problems. In-laws might think that if the daughter-in-law is highly educated, she might not obey them. Boys think that if girls acquire higher education, they won't listen to their husband. Among my relatives, there is a proposal pending due to this dilemma. The girl they are considering for their son has completed higher education in the city. So, they are wondering whether she will be able to mingle with all other family members, whether she will listen to the family or not. That proposal is still pending (R.E., Graduate, Married at 22, Hindu OBC, Income Rs.60000)

Yes, people say that educated girls don't know housework. It is true because girls will not have time to learn household work when they are studying. But the work load waits for them in their in-laws' house after marriage, they have no escape from housework (R.L., Class 10, Married at 19, Hindu OBC, Income Rs.35000)

6.9.1.6 Mahbubnagar

In Mahbubnagar criteria were similar, except here property requirements were focused on agricultural land owned. Further, the larger rural community continued to have a significant role (not just the immediate family):

"Parents ask their relatives and neighbours if they know of possible matches in the same caste. If they come to know of any proposal, parents along with a few village elders go to see the bride or bridegroom. Then they have a final talk about dowry and date of marriage. If both parties agree, the marriage goes ahead." (G.R., Class 12, Married at 16, Hindu SC, Income Rs.49000)

In the rural context, the earning capacity of the potential husband was given priority over his education, even when women had completed Class 12, or sometimes more. Additionally, some mentioned whether or not one would have to do agricultural work, and not marrying girls too far from the natal house – the latter has to do with the fears about how girls will be treated if married to unknown/unfamiliar families as a respondent discusses below:

Some relatives saw me and they brought it. It was the first match that came for me and it got finalised. They had a lot of land, he worked in the city and they fixed it. There might be a chance that I could have gotten a better match if my parents waited for another one. But they didn't as they thought the man was good and he can earn well. My husband has studied till ninth standard. His father died when he was in eighth standard, so he had to quit school and find work. He started working in Mumbai. He got me educated because he couldn't complete his education (L.R., Class 12, Married at 16, Hindu OBC, Income Rs.10000)

It was according to my family's wishes. Everyone told me that it was a good match and that he is an RMP doctor. They also told me that you won't get a match with a man who has a better job and convinced me that I should get married. So, I got married. They also said, "You will be close to home and the man's family won't send you to work in the farm". It doesn't matter if I liked him or not, they told me to get married and I agreed. (R.V., Class 12, Married at 23, Hindu OBC, Income Rs.8000)

They see if the wealth is enough, if the boy is good and how the family will treat the girl. People from my caste don't have lands. We don't usually look for it. We look at the house too; a one room house is not preferred. We don't go outside our districts. We don't give girls that far. My family really liked this match and they thought we will not get such a good match and got me married (B.M., Class 12, Married at 15, Hindu OBC, Income Rs.25000)

My brothers enquired about everything. Firstly, his character, and then job, property, if he is within the caste. If there are any divorced or widowed in the family. Whether they have their own house or not, agriculture land, a well or borewell (R.E., Graduate, Married at 22, Hindu OBC, Income Rs.60000)

My cousin is a graduate but she got a husband who is a daily wage labourer. Her husband doesn't let her go outside. That husband is good but doesn't let her go anywhere. There is no importance placed on education in our families, what

matters is whether they will look after the girl well or not. Some people see wealth and prosperity; some look for character only. In my family they see how the couple will be together. We give the girls based on trust and faith that she will be treated well but sometimes they enquire from the neighbours and their friends (B.B., Class 4, Married at 14, Muslim OBC, Income Rs.10000)

When a girl is ready for marriage, before even seeing or considering a girl, people ask about her educational qualifications. When they know that she is well educated, people will suggest a well-educated boy. But if the boy has lot of assets and wealth and is good, they give the girl off and the man's education doesn't matter. And these matches happen between known people or in close networks where one's close friend is a friend of the family or an acquaintance. If a girl is given off to some unknown family whom no one knows there is always a danger of the unknown, there were cases where the marriage went sour and the couple separated. To avoid all that, they find someone that they know or are familiar to the people that the girl's family knows. We can be secure and even ask them to help if some problem comes up. First they consider the boy – his job, his nature. Then they look at the family – members of the family, what do they do, do they have wealth and property, their house and their position in society. If they don't have all these, their standing in society and the boy's nature is considered. We also see the girls in the boy's family, we don't care for the brothers in the family. But if the boy has sisters we want to know how they are. When looking for a girl, they see if she is obedient, will do all the house work. The main thing is the girl should be obsequious and never ever talk back. Husbands are generally confused to choose a side – wife's or mother's – and stay silent and remain mute (R.L., Class 10, Married at 19, Hindu OBC, Income Rs.35000)

Marrying within the caste/community was more important than matching education levels as N.E. discussed with reference to her sisters:

If you take the example of my own sisters, they have studied till graduation but their husbands could complete only class 6. If the girl is well educated and gets married according to her parents' wishes, it is good. But if she goes against their parents to marry, then the parents land in trouble. Then the parents will say, "We got her educated and she did this to us." Won't they say it or not? They should get educated but they have to be obedient. Now look, my sisters have degrees but didn't they marry uneducated men? They couldn't say no, so they married the men my parents chose. (N.E., Illiterate, Married at 20, Muslim OBC, Income Rs.23000)

F.R. (Illiterate, Married at 14, Hindu SC, Income Rs.5000) never went to school but her husband completed Class 10 and works as a daily wage labourer. Since he is irresponsible and does not provide enough, she feels education is not a good indicator of a husband's ability to provide:

People with money will search everywhere for a good match and get them married to a good boy. But beggars like us, we marry anyone we get. For a girl who is educated they will search for an educated boy. But if the girl is not educated, they look for a boy who is hard working and earns. I had so many dreams about marriage. But see what happened with me now? I thought, he is an educated man and he will take care of me good but that did not happen. It is an arranged marriage and we didn't have the courage at that time and at my age to have a love marriage.

Contrast the above experience with this one: A middle class upper caste woman said her father insisted that the potential groom should hold property as well as a government job:

I was in the last fourth year of my B. Pharmacy and I got the match. I got some 2-3 matches before that but they were rejected. I rejected some. My dad wanted a boy with a government job and with wealth. I didn't like some. Some men said I was fat. They were worried that if I am that fat before marriage how fat will I get after marriage. Some men were not good looking at all and some I liked but my dad didn't think they are in well settled jobs. One had a software job with good money but it was in Bangalore where the living costs are high and he didn't have land, so my dad rejected him. Around 5 or 6 acres or more land is good and government jobs. We can never know if a boy is good or not in arranged marriages. Even in enquiries, it will not be evident at all. You know what happens really, the boy is the worst fellow but people around will say he is the greatest boy ever to live. That is why my dad insists on government jobs and property, because after marriage if he turns out to be a bad guy there is the security of the money from the job and wealth. I saw him properly when they came to look at me. I didn't get the chance to talk to him. That boy's family sent the word that they liked me and my family asked me. But actually I said no because he looked short and had a paunch. But my father really liked the match and they cajoled me a lot to marry him. They said that the tummy will be here now and it can go tomorrow, that I shouldn't throw away a good future for a silly thing like that. We only look for matches in the same caste; we never consider looking into some other castes. They even check 'gothras' (T.M., Graduate, Married above 18, Hindu upper caste)

What do all these interviews tell us in relation to the survey data? Ideas of education undergo a shift when the education of the husband is brought into the picture. We see that husbands are not doing much better than wives especially in the poorer classes, in some instances they may be doing worse. More significantly, amongst the poor in most sites the education of the husband matters little in settling a match, other criteria – especially earning capacity matter much more. There were several instances from the interviews where wives were better educated than husbands, especially among Muslims. In several instances respondents mentioned their "dreams" before marriage – among the poor these were all too often broken. In the middle classes more women are doing advanced degrees while men are doing professional degrees. Women dwelt at some length in the context of their marriage on the contradictory dilemmas of education – when reflecting on their childhood years they spoke univocally about how they wished they had studied further (see chapter three) and saw no problem in being more educated. Here they noticed how more education might make no difference if one was poor (the daughter of a farmer would end up the son of a farmer) and in a more complex vein, more education could make them unsuitable – being unwilling to carry out domestic labour, being stubborn and having an "ego" leading to conflicts with husbands and his family, and so on. The very positive idea of further education leading to more maturity, autonomy and so on comes into conflict with not being sufficiently compliant and ready to fulfill a dependent role.

On the other hand, while employment and financial security feature prominently in all lists of desirable characteristics in a husband, this more stereotypical formulation sits ill with the fact that such large proportions of husbands are engaged in the most arduous, unrewarding and exploitative occupations such as agricultural labour, and various forms of daily wage work. The following section has tried to provide a flavour to this prevarication around husband's occupation, especially among the working poor.

6.9.2 Husband's Occupation: Voices from the Interviews

When respondents talk about their own marriage and married life, hardly anyone mentions the occupation of their husband. It is striking how often even something like their daily routine does not mention the husband at all, though presumably the husband's working hours would determine the woman's routine quite significantly. It is only when the husband has unusual working hours that it is mentioned. Otherwise, it is usually "husband goes to/comes from work". But in a significant proportion of interviews, it is not mentioned at all. It makes one wonder – is it an outcome of the general reticence of the respondents where they said the bare minimum about their lives? Or is it that

marriage is much more about work and managing the everyday than any meaningful conjugal relationship despite all the elaborate talk of the “matching” of criteria and some emerging emphasis on compatibility?

In the urban districts, as the survey attests, middle class interviewees had husbands with corporate, banking and other similar jobs. For women from lower economic backgrounds, in Kolkata husbands might run a small store or were drivers. S.B. (Class 7, Married at 14, Muslim upper caste, Income Rs.15000) who mentioned “stable economic condition” as one of the reasons her husband was chosen, said her husband was earlier a tailor but now worked as a driver. M.L. (Class 9, Married at 16, Hindu SC, Income Rs.7000) said her family considered her husband hard working and hence chose him – he was a bus helper at the time of marriage and now ran a tea shop. In Jaipur, poor women most often mentioned their husbands as having construction related jobs within the city (but no one spoke in any detail). In Hyderabad, some of the professions of husbands mentioned by women of lower economic classes were drivers (commercial, autorickshaw), mall employees, courier company employees, running a store. One interviewee, S.T. (Married at 25, Class 10, Muslim OBC, Income Rs.21000) said her husband was chosen because he was working in a courier company and her family wanted a “hard working person, who could earn money, should look after the family well, and education was not a priority.” In some cases, women mentioned that they married less educated men because their families chose them on the basis of their employment. A.T.’s family (Married at 18, Class 10, Hindu OBC, Income Rs.17500) chose her husband who had, “land, property, he was less educated and working in a shopping mall by the time of marriage” but said “I wished my husband would be an educated and well behaved person. In contrast, I got a husband who does not have much education. But, he is a well behaved person and takes care of me.” In another instance, T.N. (Married at 26, Post Graduate, Muslim OBC, Income Rs.40500) who holds an MSc degree in Physics and a B.Ed. degree is married to a driver, even though she “never wanted a person whose profession is driving”. She explains the reasons for accepting her family’s choice:

[I wanted] a job holder, even if in the private sector. But that did not happen. I agreed to an arranged marriage by elders. So, in the future, if something goes wrong they will take care of it. My sister-in-law has completed graduation, she got many proposals and refused because she wanted to marry a well-educated person. Finally, she accepted a person who completed his Hindi-pundit course and got married on the pretext that he would find a job. He was staying in his in-laws’ house and preparing for government jobs as a Hindi-pundit teacher. He took the exam and could not get selected. Thereafter, he never started working. She and

her parents waited for four years, got divorced. So, all these experiences made me accept [the current husband's proposal].

In rural areas, women from better off families were married to men who had their own lands and were primarily farmers. In Murshidabad, unemployment among men in the district was widespread, according to S.D. (Class 12, Married at 22, Hindu SC, Income Rs.7000): "Even in a middle-class family like ours very few men are there with government jobs, most of them are unemployed." She said that often people could find work in Behrampore. Her mother-in-law mentioned that construction related work, house painting, masonry and some agricultural work were available for men if they went to Behrampore. Of those who had work in Murshidabad, it was usually construction related, or driving. Jobs were also unstable and men switched to whatever became available. P.B.'s (Class 9, Married at 17, Muslim upper caste, Income Rs.15000) husband used to work as a mason, often going to other villages but was now an e-rickshaw driver. H.L.'s (Class 12, Married at 18, Hindu upper caste) husband was earlier a delivery person for an online ordering service but now worked in a jute mill. Middle class women at higher levels of education who had self-choice marriages said that their families had been looking for government job holders. M.D. (Post Graduate, Married at 25, Hindu upper caste, Income Rs.18000) had an arranged marriage and her husband was a primary school teacher. P.N. (Class 12, Married at 18, Hindu upper caste, Income Rs.8000) highlighted how her husband's stable government job was more important than his income: "They considered only his educational qualification. Back then he used to work in the civic police, he used to get a monthly salary of only Rs.1800 rupees. They didn't consider any of those things. He still works as civic police, but the salary is higher now."

In Sawai Madhopur, very few women mentioned their husband's occupation. Quite a few women however said unemployment among men was widespread. This was true for educated men as well. A.B. (Married at 15, Class 8) said her family chose her husband because he was studying at the time and they assumed he would find a good job upon completing his education. However, he could not find a suitable job: "My husband does not have a job. Earlier he was studying, now he just keeps applying for jobs. There are no responses. He is now driving a tempo and earns Rs. 200 for a day which is just not enough to run the house." Among the middle classes, some women mentioned having farm lands, so their husbands were likely working in agriculture. Those who were from poor families had husbands who were masons, migrant workers and drivers. B.N. (Married at 18, Class 8) and S.Z. (Married at 20, Illiterate) mentioned their husbands were masons. Both women also said that they were satisfied with their married lives, as they had "good husbands" and "good families." S.Z. went on to say that her husband hits her sometimes but she is better off in her married life because she had to work as a domestic worker in

her parents' house due to financial problems. M.B. (Illiterate) and her husband both worked as seasonal migrant workers in Delhi: "When I live in Delhi, I go for daily wage work. The work I do there is 'chinai and plaster'....What my husband earns is not enough. I earn about Rs. 300 per day and he earns Rs. 500 per day."

In Mahbubnagar, most middle class women were married to cultivators. Some others had husbands who were in the army, one was a registered doctor, another a private school teacher. Among the poor, seasonal migration for work was common – those who worked as agricultural labour in the village or had small land holdings would migrate to Mumbai in the off-season to work as construction workers. In most cases, husband and wife would migrate and work in the city together (which is likely why there were hardly any such women in the interview sample). G.R. (Class 12, Married at 16, Hindu SC, Income Rs.49000) described her schedule as follows:

I wake up at 5:30 am and clean the porch and wash my face and clean all the utensils, then cook food, then take bath and go for labour work. If I do not find work on a particular day, I wash clothes, clean the house, then go to the nearest forest and bring firewood. In Mumbai, I wake up at 7am and clean the utensils and take bath, then cook food for all and send my husband to work. Then I have my breakfast and leave for work. I return home at 7pm. In Mumbai, there isn't any rest during the daytime.

For those from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, even educated men did not necessarily have jobs corresponding to their education. P.S. (Married at 18, Class 10, Hindu ST, Income Rs.13000) said her husband holds a B.Ed. degree but works as an auto-rickshaw driver.

The above accounts are from the few interviewees who actually were ready to say something about their husband's occupations. Fleeting references among poorer respondents of having not much say in marriage negotiations, of hoping to move into a household where there would be enough food to eat and the bare necessities available, give us a glimpse of the enormity of economic resourcelessness in poorer families. Many of these – though not all – marry early.

Notice also that what are sometimes described as local cultural practices – siblings being married together as in Rajasthan, or consanguineous marriages in Telangana, are frequently practices among the poorer groups, as a means of cutting marriage costs and dowries. Here too these often mean that the younger sibling marries very young, or that

the niece or the cousin whom she has known since childhood is also married sooner rather than later.

6.10 Dowry

Brief references have been found in the interviews about the prevalence of dowry. In this section we will look at how respondents dealt with the question in the context of the survey and subsequently what little they had to say in the context of the interviews.

A series of Tables 6.10 to 6.14 tell their own story, whether dowry was involved, the forms it took, costs of marriage and the hardship this represented for their natal families. Practically everyone said that dowry had increased from the previous generation, an unsurprising finding. Whether dowry was involved had a minority saying yes in Kolkata among those marrying before 18 years – bear in mind that over half of these were self-choice marriages. But even Murshidabad had small but significant numbers (27% among younger ages 38% among those marrying at 18 or above) who said theirs was a dowryless marriage. Some of these again would have been self-choice marriages. In the other sites the vast majority had to pay a dowry – only in Mahbubnagar among those who married below 18 years did a significant number -- 32% -- say no dowry was involved. There was not much difference across ages of marriage in a given site with the exception of Mahbubnagar, where it was clearer that a younger age at marriage could mean being able to marry without a dowry.

(T87) Table 6.10a: Whether dowry was involved, West Bengal

	District							
	Kolkata				Murshidabad			
	Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years		Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Yes	20	30.8	51	45.9	104	72.7	43	61.4
No	45	69.2	60	54.1	39	27.3	27	38.6
Total	65	100.0	111	100.0	143	100.0	70	100.0

(T88) Table 6.10b: Whether dowry was involved, Rajasthan

	District							
	Jaipur				Sawai Madhopur			
	Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years		Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Yes	36	87.8	164	94.3	80	90.9	102	89.5
No	5	12.2	10	5.7	8	9.1	12	10.5
Total	41	100.0	174	100.0	88	100.0	114	100.0

(T89) Table 6.10c: Whether dowry was involved, Telangana

	District							
	Hyderabad				Mahbubnagar			
	Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years		Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Yes	50	86.2	106	72.1	63	67.7	81	85.3
No	8	13.8	41	27.9	30	32.3	14	14.7
Total	58	100.0	147	100.0	93	100.0	95	100.0

Because respondents appeared uneasy or unable to talk about how much dowry was involved, a much more limited set of questions (with multiple answers) asked about the form that it took – land, cash, jewellery and/or other items (such as household goods). The Kolkata sample gave the fewest answers, as did those marrying at 18 or above in Murshidabad. Proportionately more were willing to give these very preliminary answers in the other sites. Jewellery was more readily acknowledged, and land least of all.

(T90) Table 6.11a: Forms of dowry given, West Bengal

Forms of dowry given	District							
	Kolkata				Murshidabad			
	Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years		Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Land	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	1.0	0	0.0
Cash	17	81.0	16	32.0	68	70.8	31	70.5
Jewellery	15	71.4	42	84.0	80	83.3	41	93.2
Other	1	4.8	1	2.0	28	29.2	14	31.8
Total	21	100.0	50	100.0	96	100.0	44	100.0

(T91) Table 6.11b: Forms of dowry given, Rajasthan

Forms of dowry given	District							
	Jaipur				Sawai Madhopur			
	Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years		Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Land	0	0.0	0	0.0	2	2.5	0	0.0
Cash	14	38.9	62	38.0	55	67.9	54	52.9
Jewellery	29	80.6	143	87.7	28	34.6	54	52.9
Other	19	52.8	124	76.1	54	66.7	68	66.7
Total	36	100.0	163	100.0	81	100.0	102	100.0

(T92) Table 6.11c: Forms of dowry given, Telangana

Forms of dowry given	District							
	Hyderabad				Mahbubnagar			
	Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years		Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Land	3	6.1	6	5.4	1	1.5	3	3.7
Cash	42	85.7	88	78.6	51	75.0	65	79.3
Jewellery	27	55.1	72	64.3	51	75.0	69	84.1
Other	10	20.4	37	33.0	27	39.7	38	46.3
Total	49	100.0	112	100.0	68	100.0	82	100.0

When it came to costs of marriage, again only some were willing to answer this question, and we can only surmise how accurate it might be. Those who did not answer said that they did not know. Most surprising of all is that in the rural sites especially, even marriages happening below 18 years had significant rates of dowry, running in some cases to over 2 lakhs. In these sites, among those marrying at 18 or higher either did not answer or appear to have given inaccurate answers. In the urban sites the pattern was, if anything, the other way around – less reporting or lower amounts among those marrying at younger ages, while the vast majority of those marrying at 18 or above reported in Jaipur (70%) and Hyderabad (64%) amounts above 2 lakhs. The middle classes in these two urban locations (much less so in Kolkata) were quite ready to report paying dowry even if the exact amounts remained unspecified.

(T93) Table 6.12a: Cost of marriage, West Bengal

Cost of marriage	District							
	Kolkata				Murshidabad			
	Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years		Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Rs 500 or less	3	12.5	1	1.7	1	1.1	0	0.0
Rs 5000 or less	6	25.0	6	10.2	0	0.0	1	1.9
Rs 50,000 or less	7	29.2	14	23.7	22	25.0	15	28.8
Rs 100,000 or less	1	4.2	9	15.3	30	34.1	16	30.8
Rs 200,000 or less	3	12.5	13	22.0	24	27.3	5	9.6
more than 2 lakhs	4	16.7	16	27.1	11	12.5	15	28.8
Total	24	100.0	59	100.0	88	100.0	52	100.0

(T94) Table 6.12b: Cost of marriage, Rajasthan

Cost of marriage	District							
	Jaipur				Sawai Madhopur			
	Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years		Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Rs 500 or less	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Rs 5000 or less	0	0.0	1	0.6	1	1.1	0	0.0
Rs 50,000 or less	9	22.5	11	6.7	15	17.2	10	8.8
Rs 100,000 or less	3	7.5	20	12.1	20	23.0	28	24.8
Rs 200,000 or less	12	30.0	17	10.3	21	24.1	28	24.8
more than 2 lakhs	16	40.0	116	70.3	30	34.5	47	41.6
Total	40	100.0	165	100.0	87	100.0	113	100.0

(T95) Table 6.12c: Cost of marriage, Telangana

Cost of marriage	District							
	Hyderabad				Mahbubnagar			
	Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years		Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Rs 500 or less	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Rs 5000 or less	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	1.3	2	2.4
Rs 50,000 or less	4	7.7	18	13.8	9	11.5	6	7.3
Rs 100,000 or less	7	13.5	13	10.0	16	20.5	11	13.4
Rs 200,000 or less	23	44.2	15	11.5	22	28.2	16	19.5
more than 2 lakhs	18	34.6	84	64.6	30	38.5	47	57.3
Total	52	100.0	130	100.0	78	100.0	82	100.0

In a final question related to dowry and costs of marriage, respondents were asked whether these costs represented hardship to their families. Predictably fewer in Kolkata said so since self-choice marriages involved little or no costs from their natal homes. Overall, the majority said that it did – overwhelmingly so in Telangana, followed by Murshidabad and then Sawai Madhopur – where only over half the respondents said that it represented hardship.

(T96) Table 6.13a: Economic hardship for the family due to marriage expenditure, West Bengal

	District							
	Kolkata				Murshidabad			
	Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years		Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Yes	24	52.2	36	39.1	100	82.0	55	79.7
No	22	47.8	56	60.9	22	18.0	14	20.3
Total	46	100.0	92	100.0	122	100.0	69	100.0

(T97) Table 6.13b: Economic hardship for the family due to marriage expenditure, Rajasthan

	District							
	Jaipur				Sawai Madhopur			
	Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years		Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Yes	30	73.2	113	66.1	54	60.7	62	54.9
No	11	26.8	58	33.9	35	39.3	51	45.1
Total	41	100.0	171	100.0	89	100.0	113	100.0

(T98) Table 6.13c: Economic hardship for the family due to marriage expenditure, Telangana

	District							
	Hyderabad				Mahbubnagar			
	Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years		Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Yes	49	89.1	103	73.0	82	92.1	83	90.2
No	6	10.9	38	27.0	7	7.9	9	9.8
Total	55	100.0	141	100.0	89	100.0	92	100.0

It would be hard to know how much weight can be placed on these findings – what did young wives know about their dowries or the financial costs of their marriages when they often claimed that they knew so little about their prospective husbands or about marriage negotiations in the first place? Self-choice marriages in Kolkata and less so in Murshidabad may have involved low if any dowry and little by way of marriage costs. Among the urban middle classes in Kolkata only a few reported much by way of dowry including at higher rates. Only in Hyderabad and Jaipur did the majority of middle class women openly acknowledge dowries even though they significantly underreported the actual amounts involved.

6.10.1 Dowry in the interviews

Though women in the interviews were not forthcoming, what they had to say mirrored the information from the survey. The increase in dowry and cost of weddings at present was quite considerable among most of those interviewed except Kolkata. At times, the only problem reported with marriage was the cost of getting married. While we have already seen that dowry was not common in Kolkata but some respondents in the interviews reported being forced to pay dowry after having a choice-based marriage, or

being harassed for it. In arranged marriages among the middle classes, one respondent believed dowry demands had escalated in recent times. Women in Murshidabad reported dowry more commonly than Kolkata, and especially among the poor. A marriage would be fixed only if the dowry demand was agreed to. Holding weddings at a larger scale was also a pressure across classes.

In Rajasthan, dowry is necessary even in the case of community marriages which are held for very poor families. For better off families, dowry and marriage expenses are higher for educated girls, especially if they marry educated boys.

In Telangana, especially Hyderabad, the financial burden of marriage was emphasised much more. As compared to the previous generation where dowry was not common, the present system of marriage involved very high dowry across all social groups. Even those at the lowest economic status had significant dowry payments. A woman who was a rag picker by profession reported that her family paid two lakh rupees as dowry.

6.11 "Likes" and "Dislikes" in Marriage: Survey Data

In an experimental open ended pair of questions in the context of the survey, respondents were asked what they liked most or disliked most in their marriages. Some were tightlipped and said the equivalent of "nothing" or "everything", others answered what they considered to be the "right" answer. Answers were grouped as seen in Tables 6.14 and 6.15 below – notice at the outset that there was much more variation on the subject of dislikes rather than likes!

(T99) Table 6.14a: What the respondent liked most about being married, West Bengal

	District							
	Kolkata				Murshidabad			
	Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years		Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Marital family	22	31.9	25	23.1	54	38.0	26	36.6
Husband	13	18.8	28	25.9	36	25.4	19	26.8
Children/Motherhood	7	10.1	16	14.8	14	9.9	10	14.1
Housework and responsibility	1	1.4	3	2.8	12	8.5	1	1.4
Freedom and agency	0	0.0	2	1.9	0	0.0	1	1.4
Nothing	18	26.1	16	14.8	7	4.9	6	8.5
Everything	8	11.6	17	15.7	16	11.3	8	11.3
Other	0	0.0	1	.9	3	2.1	0	0.0
Total	69	100.0	108	100.0	142	100.0	71	100.0

(T100) Table 6.14b: What the respondent liked most about being married, Rajasthan

	District							
	Jaipur				Sawai Madhopur			
	Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years		Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Marital family	11	26.8	57	33.3	31	34.8	43	37.4
Husband	7	17.1	61	35.7	35	39.3	49	42.6
Children/Motherhood	5	12.2	14	8.2	6	6.7	5	4.3
Housework and responsibility	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	1.1	0	0.0
Freedom and agency	2	4.9	12	7.0	3	3.4	5	4.3
Nothing	8	19.5	11	6.4	10	11.2	5	4.3
Everything	5	12.2	5	2.9	1	1.1	2	1.7
Other	3	7.3	11	6.4	2	2.2	6	5.2
Total	41	100.0	171	100.0	89	100.0	115	100.0

(T101) Table 6.14c: What the respondent liked most about being married, Telangana

	District							
	Hyderabad				Mahbubnagar			
	Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years		Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Marital family	1	1.7	21	13.9	17	18.1	19	22.1
Husband	17	28.8	44	29.1	23	24.5	24	27.9
Children/Motherhood	29	49.2	69	45.7	35	37.2	24	27.9
Housework and responsibility	0	0.0	1	.7	1	1.1	1	1.2
Freedom and agency	0	0.0	2	1.3	3	3.2	2	2.3
Nothing	7	11.9	9	6.0	12	12.8	8	9.3
Everything	0	0.0	1	.7	3	3.2	6	7.0
Other	5	8.5	4	2.6	0	0.0	2	2.3
Total	59	100.0	151	100.0	94	100.0	86	100.0

(T102) Table 6.15a: What the respondent disliked most about being married, West Bengal

	District							
	Kolkata				Murshidabad			
	Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years		Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Lack of freedom and agency	11	16.7	21	17.5	14	11.5	8	12.5
Lack of financial independence	2	3.0	1	.8	0	0.0	1	1.6
Parents-in-law and marital family	9	13.6	24	20.0	27	22.1	10	15.6
Housework and responsibility	7	10.6	15	12.5	11	9.0	3	4.7
Husband	2	3.0	10	8.3	17	13.9	6	9.4
Early marriage and motherhood	1	1.5	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Late motherhood	0	0.0	0	0.0	2	1.6	1	1.6
Domestic violence	1	1.5	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Lack of facilities	7	10.6	8	6.7	5	4.1	6	9.4
Nothing	23	34.8	39	32.5	46	37.7	27	42.2
Everything	3	4.5	2	1.7	0	0.0	2	3.1
Other	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Total	66	100.0	120	100.0	122	100.0	64	100.0

(T103) Table 6.15b: What the respondent disliked most about being married, Rajasthan

	District							
	Jaipur				Sawai Madhopur			
	Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years		Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Lack of freedom and agency	5	12.2	36	21.4	1	1.2	8	7.2
Lack of financial independence	3	7.3	9	5.4	0	0.0	1	.9
Parents-in-law and marital family	3	7.3	15	8.9	6	7.2	8	7.2
Housework and responsibility	9	22.0	23	13.7	6	7.2	7	6.3
Husband	5	12.2	19	11.3	7	8.4	7	6.3
Early marriage and motherhood	0	0.0	5	3.0	15	18.1	2	1.8
Late motherhood	1	2.4	2	1.2	2	2.4	3	2.7
Domestic violence	1	2.4	2	1.2	0	0.0	0	0.0
Lack of facilities	6	14.6	10	6.0	12	14.5	22	19.8
Nothing	7	17.1	46	27.4	34	41.0	52	46.8
Everything	1	2.4	1	.6	0	0.0	1	.9
Other	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Total	41	100.0	168	100.0	83	100.0	111	100.0

(T104) Table 6.15c: What the respondent disliked most about being married, Telangana

	District							
	Hyderabad				Mahbubnagar			
	Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years		Below 18 years		18 and above 18 years	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Lack of freedom and agency	2	3.8	13	8.8	4	4.3	6	6.6
Lack of financial independence	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	1.1
Parents-in-law and marital family	6	11.3	32	21.6	18	19.4	18	19.8
Housework and responsibility	2	3.8	4	2.7	5	5.4	4	4.4
Husband	12	22.6	26	17.6	13	14.0	7	7.7
Early marriage and motherhood	1	1.9	2	1.4	0	0.0	2	2.2
Late motherhood	9	17.0	11	7.4	3	3.2	2	2.2
Domestic violence	6	11.3	2	1.4	1	1.1	1	1.1
Lack of facilities	5	9.4	10	6.8	2	2.2	3	3.3
Nothing	8	15.1	45	30.4	29	31.2	32	35.2
Everything	2	3.8	3	2.0	5	5.4	4	4.4
Other	0	0.0	0	0.0	13	14.0	11	12.1
Total	53	100.0	148	100.0	93	100.0	91	100.0

In Tables 6.14 the most frequent answer in West Bengal about what they like most was the marital family (ranging from 23-36%) followed closely by the husband. Curiously, children and motherhood found little place. Small but significant numbers said that they liked “nothing”. In Rajasthan husbands took precedence, except in Jaipur among those who married below 18 years for whom in fact “nothing” was second to the choice of the marital family. In Telangana it was children, especially in Hyderabad where at all ages of marriage half of the respondents gave this as their preference – only in Mahbubnagar were the numbers somewhat less and equally shared with husband as their preferred choice.

Let us compare these with Tables 6.15 on their “dislikes”. As already mentioned, there were many more kinds of dislikes – from lack of freedom and agency, housework and responsibility, lack of facilities, early marriage and motherhood and so on. The single largest proportion (ranging from 27% to almost 50%) refused to be drawn in and said that there was nothing to dislike. Others however were more forthcoming – lack of freedom and agency figured in all the sites and sometimes more so among those married at 18 and above, which is particularly telling. Others spoke out against their marital families, their husbands, and again across ages of marriage. Early marriage hardly figured except in Sawai Madhopur. Only in Hyderabad did respondents mention domestic violence to any significant extent.

What should we make of such views? It is important not to discount “politically correct” answers – surely some would have genuinely found some degree of contentment. But it is equally if not more likely (especially going by the experience of conducting both the survey and the interviews) that young women in the early years of their marriage were unwilling to speak out with any degree of openness about their situation when asked in such a bald form. It is particularly significant that many complaints were shared across ages at marriage. At the same time these kinds of answers are only in the nature of a brief glimpse.

It is in the interviews, therefore, that – at least at times – it was possible to get a better sense of what they hoped for and what they realised.

6.12 Hopes about marriage: What the Interviews say

West Bengal

In both districts of West Bengal, women who had early arranged marriages said they were too young to have expectations about marriage, they did not know or understand enough about what marriage meant and just went along with what their families wanted. All they thought about was playing, and managing their school work: “I didn’t hope for anything from my marriage, because I didn’t even want to get married at that time. I was busy being a teenager. I wanted to study, I wanted to play. That’s all I wanted at that time.” (R.M., Kolkata, Class 8, Married at 17, Hindu SC, Income Rs.8000). In Murshidabad, most women did not have clear ideas or expectations about marriage (their desires centred on having a grand wedding). They just always knew they had to go to another house one day, it was a given:

As soon as a girl reaches the age of 14-15, her parents are only concerned about her marriage. They think that she is at a marriageable age now, we must get her married as soon as possible. Otherwise, people will start talking about it. People will harass her on the road, and it is too much of a risk to keep her unmarried any longer and so on. (S.D., Murshidabad, Class 12, Married at 22, Hindu SC, Income Rs.7000)

Those who had thought about marriage had fears and anxieties based on what they observed in their surroundings. Here are two examples:

When my uncle's daughter got married, there were a lot of problems. At the beginning of the marriage, they made it look like the boy was very good but he turned out to be completely different. At that time, I used to think this is how all marriages must be. What if my husband also turns out to be like this, what would I do then? I might run away, I would think. But after marriage, I understood that the same thing doesn't happen to everyone and gave up the idea of running away. I am quite fine here." (N.D., Kolkata, Class 12, Married at 28, Hindu SC, Income Rs.36000).

In my area, I have seen that husbands beat their wives. That is why I was scared. Some women committed suicide because they were tortured by their husbands and mothers-in-law. I was uneasy. I thought I will remain single and do my work. That was a better option. So I was not ready for marriage, I have been forced into this marriage. (T.Y., Kolkata, Class 5, Married at 14, Hindu SC, Income Rs.23000)

It was only middle class women in Kolkata with higher levels of education who could wait and take their time to decide about their husband. Even so, it was often about fulfilling a norm rather than something they wanted: "I never hoped for anything from my marriage. Every girl should get married and that is a social norm. So I also got married." (I.R., Kolkata, Class 10, Married at 29, Hindu upper caste, Income Rs.15000). Though there was not a heavy pressure for them to marry, it was an ever present expectation which they knew they had to ultimately fulfil, said T.K. (Kolkata, PhD, Married at 27, BKS221, Hindu upper caste, Income 2 lakhs).

Rajasthan

Women in Rajasthan did not necessarily hold clear hopes and expectations of marriage. Most said they did not know anything, and just followed what they were told – all they knew was they *had to* get married. Since marriage was inevitable, their thoughts were

more anxious and fearful than hopeful – what kind of husband and family they would find, how they would have to behave, how they would fit into their marital family and so on. In Sawai Madhopur, women were particularly anxious about leaving their homes for the marital home:

“Life was good before marriage. We used think that we were better off at our parent’s house and did not want to go to our in-laws’ house.” (P.H., Illiterate, Married at 16).

“When I came to know I was getting married, I became really worried. I did not understand much about marriage, I was very young. I would cry about it. I did not know how I would live after marriage. I used to cry here [marital home] as well; I began to understand after about 5-6 years of marriage.” (R.B., Illiterate, Married at 18)

In Jaipur, some mentioned TV or observing people around them to get any idea of what marriage was about as they felt clueless about what to do when they were married. A few had hopes that the ideal husband would be loving, understanding and not too controlling:

Regarding married life, I had only one thing in my mind that my husband should have a similar mindset to mine. He should not have any problem with respect to my roaming around, meeting and chatting with friends, irrespective of gender. Many men restrict their wives from speaking to other boys, even if they are school or college friends. The husband should not restrict his wife in any way, that’s the main thing. (S.Y., Post graduate, Married at 23)

Telangana

In Hyderabad, usually thoughts about marriage had to do with the absence of violence, alcoholism and economic struggles. The imagination of married life was tied to what these women observed in their vicinity as girls. So one who saw her parents constantly in conflict was terrified of marriage, while another witnessed her sister’s happy marriage and believed “that is how all marriages are.” What stood out was how much the mother-in-law’s “torture” was mentioned in this district, though always as a general fear, not from their experiences. A group of young unmarried girls primarily understood marriage in terms of responsibilities and taking care of everyone; and the possibilities of violence. It was common for women to say that while finding a match, they do not prefer joint families because of the anticipated ill-treatment by mothers-in-law (unlike Jaipur, where joint families were considered more secure as opposed to living alone with the husband).

In Mahbubnagar as well, the dominant thoughts about marriage were negative – alcoholic/violent husband, harassment by in-laws. A few women spoke of rosy ideas of love and companionship:

The wishes and dreams about marriage before marriage are all limited to our imagination as it is in cinema. We learn and hold high expectations from watching movies only. In real life, responsibilities hit you after marriage. (R.L., Class 10, Married at 19, Hindu OBC, Income Rs.35000).

6.12.1 Marital Life: What the interviews say

Across all districts, women did not often go into detail about problems (or their absence) in marital life. Unless there were extremely distressful situations, they either said one gets used to it, or that this is what they were taught to expect from marriage, it is not unusual. In effect, marriage was difficult (“torture” was used often in English translations for all districts) but necessary. Yet quite a few were unprepared for the realities of marriage, even those who start with low expectations.

Kolkata

In general, women in Kolkata were able to express their disappointments with and problems in marital life more clearly than elsewhere. Almost all women spoke of some idea of “understanding” and “compatibility” as what they believed was central to a good marriage (besides economic resources, but that was mentioned in other ways). Across age of marriage and economic class, roughly half the respondents reported a happy marriage, or at least a content married life. These women of course had different criteria for what they believed was a happy marriage. There were some for whom the absence of violence, or merely being provided for adequately was a happy outcome. However, for the most part, those with good marriages spoke of husbands who were supportive, considerate of their needs and desires, shared responsibilities and were not controlling – again this included women from different economic classes and across ages of marriage. Problems with marriage were reported with respect to violence, mistreatment, having children too soon and facing health problems due to early pregnancy, and economic problems – these were usually reported by those from poorer economic backgrounds. Some of the women who eloped were unhappy and regretted their decision, saying that husbands change after marriage. With the exception of middle class women at the highest levels of education, women spoke of how realities of marriage are different from what they had imagined or been promised. The new rules of the marital home and expectations

of marital families were difficult to adjust to. The sudden onslaught of responsibilities and the range of restrictions imposed on their lives were unexpected and overwhelming for most. Statements such as “after marriage there is nothing to life” or “life stops moving after marriage” were made by some.

Life stops moving after marriage. After giving birth, the woman’s responsibilities grow, especially for a family like us because we live separately. I have to take care of my household tasks as well as my children. These responsibilities are time consuming. Considering all these, I cannot say marriage has advantages. For us, we have to produce off-springs within one or two years of marriage, otherwise there will be all kinds of talk.” (A.M., Class 10, Married at 15, Hindu SC, Income Rs.7000).

Even for women married above 18, they would describe the problems in terms of being married too young. A.K., who had a self-choice marriage at 21, said:

I was ready at that time to get married. I thought marriage is a lot of fun. But now when I am getting older, I realise that my parents were right about me. They told me back then that it was not the right age to get married. It was early. As I am getting older, I can feel that I am not completely aware of myself. I am a very stubborn person. I always disagree with my husband even if he says something for my own good. This creates a misunderstanding. But if I was older, I would listen to him I guess.” (A.K., Graduate, Married at 21, Muslim OBC, Income Rs.36000)

This notion about the capability to adjust and listen as what is required for a good marriage is reiterated in other districts by the same profile of women – educated, married above 18, usually middle class. These women do not necessarily blame or question the nature of marriage. Rather, they try to justify it as normal and make it about acquiring the ability to adapt to whatever is expected of them. They are made to believe that unless a marriage is marked by extreme misery, one should not complain.

Murshidabad

In Murshidabad, given that marriage was usually considered unavoidable, the expectations about marriage are very limited – women here did not complain or express disappointment with married life as much as in Kolkata. Around half reported good marriages or at least largely satisfactory ones. A few reported abusive marriages, or severe restrictions by husbands. More often, their expectations were focused on better

economic conditions— better earning, bigger house, better lives for their children. Some would speak about the burden of marital responsibilities: “I don’t like the pressures of family life, want to go back to the freedom of unmarried life. Family life is a botheration” (P.B., Class 10, Married at 17, Muslim upper caste, Income Rs.15000). Their disappointments came out indirectly. When asked about their married life, women suggested it was satisfactory or at least as good as what can be expected of marriage. However, when asked if women could live without marriage or what they would do if they were not married, their answers were about freedom (including financial independence), travel and enjoying life. Women who married well above 18 were usually from better off families and at the highest education levels – they described a good married life and would mention problems that other women faced but claimed they never did (pertaining to pressures of housework, ill-treatment and so on). However, in response to other questions, most of these women spoke of a lack of liberty regarding how they lived their lives, and often of too much control especially by mothers-in-law. Yet all of them would go on to say it was not “too bad” and something they had adjusted to.

Jaipur

In Jaipur, unhappiness with married life was largely expressed when there was domestic violence and/or ill-treatment by in-laws. Very few women spoke of restrictions or lack of freedom. The challenges of married life were focused on the onslaught of responsibilities, adapting to the culture of a new household.

After marriage, responsibilities increase as one is expected to do a job and take care of children as well. If I get another life, I would not marry at all. (N.K., Post graduate, married at 25)

As in other districts, for lower economic groups, changes expected in married life had more to do with improvement in their economic conditions. Across classes and age of marriage, some women said they had expected to travel and enjoy life more after marriage which did not happen; yet others were disappointed with the lack of time and attention from their husbands. Middle class women with higher levels of education who were married at relatively higher ages did at times have clear ideas and expectations of marriage. Yet they did go on to say that marriage is about adjustment.

I wanted to get married when I did and I was ready for marriage. I believed it would join my family to another. I knew I would have to adjust with the new family.... Earlier we live in a filmy world, later on it is not there. One is responsible for the family, for in-laws and thus one has to adjust accordingly. Some manage to adjust while others do not. (J.S., Post graduate, married at 26)

Sawai Madhopur

In Sawai Madhopur, quite a few women said they got what they wanted from the marriage, especially if economically comfortable or married into economically better families. Then they appeared to be satisfied with their married life and didn't consider much else. Economic conditions are at the centre of their expectations.

The situation of my family was so bad that I did not have any expectations from my marriage. I just wished for a good husband, and that I should get food and live peacefully. My expectations have been fulfilled. One just needs peace and food. Who needs money and other things. One should not be humiliated and disrespected. No one beats me here. I am loved here as much as I was loved in my parents' house. I get food. (L.B., Class 8, Married at 17)

At the time of my marriage I was from a very poor family. Now the situation has changed. We have earned money and now have got land. Earlier we did not have anything in the house, but now we have everything. (M.I., Class 8, Married at 13)

Before marriage, I had hoped that my husband keeps me well. Now, I want that my husband gets some time to rest -- he works so hard. He is the only earning member in the house. My situation has changed after marriage. We were very poor in the beginning. Then he took up work outside. We have now made a house. (H.B., Class 1, Married at 16)

Of married life, women said that it brought responsibilities and worries which were not present earlier but they did not necessarily express this as unusual or troublesome. (This seems somewhat incongruent given how often women here said they were worried before marriage about adjusting into a new family.)

Telangana

In both districts of Telangana, a marriage was considered unquestionably bad when the husband was irresponsible (not earning, alcoholic, etc) and/or abusive. For the poor, it was an improvement in economic conditions that was the primary concern about married life. Most said they were satisfied with their marriage. Some mention adjusting to the new family culture. The main change was the household responsibilities and labour they were now inundated with. In Hyderabad, a few said they were distressed when they were

forced to do housework or scolded by mothers-in-law for housework – usually when women were married too young but not necessarily so.

After marriage, I have faced many problems in my marital family. My mother-in-law tortured me. She used to ask me to wash piles of clothes and utensils. Whenever they asked for tea, I had to provide it to them. Life was full of household responsibilities. Then I could not bear all this. So I moved out of the joint family and started living as a nuclear family with my husband.” (V.P., Class 10, Married at 18, Hindu SC, Income Rs.12000)

Women at times said it is better to be unmarried than have a bad husband but society won't let you be, or life before marriage was better but it is still better to be married. One respondent said if there was no societal pressure, one should not get married even at a later age because:

Life was better before marriage because we could take our own decisions. If we didn't work, our parents didn't say anything. There were not many responsibilities. But after marriage, it all depends on the husband. We have to listen to him, otherwise there are clashes that might lead to bigger problems. (A.D., Illiterate, Married at 21, Hindu OBC, Income Rs.14000)

Most spoke of the increase in responsibilities as an expected and obvious part of marriage. What they did hint at more frequently was conflict with mothers-in-law. The interviews in Hyderabad show a stark difference in how daughters-in-law and mothers-in-law speak – very brief answers by the former and very detailed ones by the latter. It was evident that young women did not wish to or could not speak freely.

For instance, the following is an extract from R.A.'s interview (Class 10, Married at 21, Hindu SC, Income Rs.15000) about her daily schedule and her marriage:

I usually wake up at 6am and clean the porch, and vessels, cook food, then wash clothes. If water comes, I need to store it. This is my routine. Again in the evening, the same work has to be repeated and I cook dinner. During the day after lunch, I rest for two hours.

Q. Can you explain about your marriage, how it happened and when?

This proposal was brought by one of my close relatives. From the groom's family one person came to my home and saw me. Later, all his family members came

home. *Pelli Choopulu* (betrothal) happened and they decided the date for engagement. The wedding was held at a function hall.

Q. What are the things under consideration while searching for a groom?

Good family, should have own house. If he does not have any job, he should be a person of good character.

Now here are her mother-in-law's responses to similar questions about her life:

Work

What should I tell you, I was busy with a life full of work. We had two buffaloes, so, I had to collect buffalo dung and it was about one basket. I had to take it and throw it in the farm where it was taken to my village boundary. I had to bring some buffalo dung to apply to the walls and floor in the house. I had to sweep the front yard of the house and clean the vessels, wicks, water pot and remove the ash from the mud stove and apply fresh mud to that mud stove and I had to draw the water from well for our daily needs. Apart from that, I don't know whom should I go to for agricultural work? I had to search for agricultural work. If I found work, immediately I had to come home and cook some roti and eat and go to work. While coming back, I had to bring some Roselle (*Hibiscus sabdariffa*) and firewood from the field and wages from the landowner. After coming back home I had to pound the grains for that night to cook and for next day also. It was our routine work. After completion of all the work I went to sleep and I wouldn't know when it was morning.

Marriage

My father fixed my marriage with him [her husband] by seeing their relatives' land and my father believed that the land belonged to him. After two months my father realized that they have cheated my father and married me. The family responsibility was on his aunt. She didn't give me food and she gave me only gruel. I didn't find a piece of rice in the gruel. I don't have the right to tell them "I want rice". If I got one or two grains of rice in the gruel I felt happy.

Q: Did you take care of your mother-in-law?

I didn't have a mother-in-law; I only had the aunt-in-law. I just had to listen to her. If I started eating she would start scolding me that, "you are eating now, is it possible to go work and earn some wages"? I had to go to work without eating. After reaching the field, I used to eat the roti and take water from the pond. The landlord might send me back from work if I was late. I was very much afraid of that and would quickly go to work without eating.

In Mahbubnagar as well, some described married life as "too much responsibility, quarrels, burdens" but most women did not consider this unusual or unexpected.

He [husband] roams outside after work. He comes home only to sleep...My life has changed after marriage. It's just going on like this. I don't like it that much, it is just kids and housework." (R.V., Class 12, Married at 23, Hindu OBC, Income Rs.8000)

One woman spoke of how difficult it was to having to suddenly adjust in a new house:

It was all so sudden. It was all new here. I didn't know anyone here. It felt like jail here after marriage. I was so scared before getting married and after too. I couldn't/didn't talk to anyone for long." (B.M., Class 12, Married at 17, Hindu OBC, Income Rs.25000)

More often, women would speak in general terms about how marriage brings a sudden onslaught of intense domestic labour and the mental distress due to the pressures from in-laws to perform endless domestic work, and do it to their satisfaction. In this district, the interviews often involved multiple respondents when elderly women (family or neighbours) joined in. When a young woman spoke of how marriage entailed too much work, older women sometimes concurred but often, they would take a scolding tone to say "so do you expect to just sit around." Thus "complaining" about married life or housework in itself carries too much weight -- women might be considered irresponsible, lazy, bad wives or mothers and so on. The moral weight of bearing housework with "strength" also conditioned these narratives.

Others said that they had no autonomy and had to do whatever the husband and in-laws told them. Often this would be followed by something to the effect "but you get used to it":

I didn't expect that I would end up in a village. I thought I will live in the city and I could out to parks, picnics and movies but now in the village there is nothing much to do. I thought I will work but I didn't expect to have a child so soon. Before marriage, I had a narrow mind but now my mind has broadened. I used to cry

about every little thing but my husband would tell me that I shouldn't take everything the elders say so seriously and they speak from experience. My mentality has changes after marriage. I learned social cues and appropriate behaviour with my relatives because it becomes important to be social and respectful in certain ways after marriage. These things seemed very burdensome but now I have become used to them. I am happy after marriage. (T.M., Graduate, Married above 18, Hindu upper caste).

For those who did not have economic problems or violence, they considered their marriage happy but expected more – better life, more enjoyment or freedom. Some were disappointed by the lack of attention from husbands:

I wasn't ready for marriage. I was really worried about how marriage will be. I understood marriage and its complications after getting married. My life has been ruined by marriage. For one year, it is all hunky-dory, it will be for every girl I think. Husbands are nice to wives in the first year of marriage. Once kids come into the picture, we get to see the real troubles and difficulties (see stars in the day). Husbands start ignoring us and we live like strangers under one roof. (L.R., Class 12, Married at 16, Hindu OBC, Income Rs.10000)

6.13 Marriage as Work

The accounts of women about their routine and housework were extremely brief, as we saw in chapter four on work. They would just list off their daily tasks, almost in an identical fashion – indicating to what extent housework is taken for granted. It was rare for women to express emotions about their work. Across all the districts, there were only a handful of women (less than 10 of over 200 interviewed) who said domestic responsibilities exhausted them, or that they were tired all the time – usually it was women with newly born babies and with no one to help. A few said their baby and other housework took up all their time and they had not a moment of rest.

However, the sense of being overwhelmed and exhausted by housework came up frequently, as we have already seen in the interviews where domestic work would frequently emerge in "other" contexts. Most often, this was expressed when women were asked how marriage changed their lives – "responsibilities" and "work" were the predominant responses. Similarly, the few women who expressed ideas of life without marriage were focused on freedom from this relentless work and control.

Life before marriage was good. There was no work. Now there is a lot of work, there are lots of problems and tensions. We start thinking of so many things - how

will we manage the house, how will we look after the children, where will we educate them, etc. (R.W., Sawai Madhopur, BA student, Married at 18)

After marriage, I felt that I shouldn't have got married. I realised that marriage is hard, all that work, oh my god, I was not equipped to handle all that and that big family. (A.W., Mahbubnagar, Married below 18, Hindu upper caste)

6.13.1 Preparation for marriage

When discussing criteria for marriage, young women as well as elderly women (mothers/mothers-in-law) mentioned family size, saying that at times they look for small families to marry their daughters into, so that their workload is less. Thus it is taken for granted, that upon marriage, the daughter-in-law will be responsible for the majority of the household work and for taking care of the entire family.

She needs to adjust in the in-laws' house, like cooking and chores. It might be different from her parents' home and she needs to accept it. (S.T., Hyderabad, Class 10, Married at 25, Muslim OBC, Income Rs.21000)

Certainly, it is quite telling that women's imagination of marriage is so overwhelmingly shorn of all romance and often not about anything else but of going to the marital house to do all the housework! N.K. from Jaipur, who completed her MA and is an office assistant, was married at 25. Observing marriages around her, she had to confront her idea of marriage: "I understood that marriage would be a responsibility, and I will have to manage a household."

Women go into marriage with the idea that the work now dumped on them is normal as E.K. (Mahbubnagar, Illiterate, Married at 18, Hindu OBC, Income Rs.11500) said: "Responsibilities are common to all married women. So it is not different for me. It is normal."

Some would say they didn't know much about marriage, but knew how to do all the household work required for marriage.

In a focus group discussion with young, college-going, unmarried girls in Hyderabad, the interviewers asked them what their idea of marriage was and all five girls said something about "responsibility"! One of them said: "I feel marriage is a responsibility because he

is not the only person in the family to take care of, we have to take care of his whole family. First and foremost, I should take care of him and his parents.”

Some women mentioned the ability of a girl to do household work as one of the criteria for marriage. While considering a woman for marriage, people look at “how she is as a person, if she knows household chores as well as being educated, how is her relationship with people within and outside her family.” (S.P., Murshidabad, Graduate, Married at 21, Hindu OBC, Income Rs.22000).

Just as girls grow up hearing that marriage is their ultimate destiny, their young minds are also instilled with the idea that they must learn household work, especially cooking, to be fit for marriage:

My mother used to tell me to learn how to cook food. At that time I was in Class 7 and 8. She used to teach me how to cook food as in my future life I would have to cook too. Then sometimes I would ask my mother, “where do I have to go?” I didn’t understand at that time, thus my mother would explain to me that you will get married, you will have to go to the in-laws’ house, and listen to whatever your mother-in-law tells you. Then I wondered what a mother-in-law is. My mother explained that just like my mother-in-law, you will have one when you get married one day. After this I started understanding a little that I am growing and becoming an adult and started asking my mother how to cook good food. (J.P., Jaipur, Graduate, Married at 26)

This training is considered significant for women to survive the early years of their married life. H.E. (Mahbubnagar, Class 10, Married at 19, Muslim upper caste, Income Rs.35000) believed girls should be married at 21 because “after finishing her studies, she will get time to learn housework. When a girl is studying, parents don’t teach her housework. If she is married right after her education, and she says she doesn’t know housework, it will be unacceptable to the in-laws.”

“Problems” with marriage – work!

Thus too often, one of the main problems with marriage in women’s experiences was the endless work that marriage brought.

Rather than marriage bringing them a sense of support or fulfilling ideas of love and romance, the most obvious meaning of marriage in the lives of women was that *marriage is work*. They often spoke of life before marriage as freedom - having control over their

time and choices. Marriage in contrast meant that had no control over their time, or their choices and decisions - neither larger life choices, nor choices about their everyday life. Some women spoke of very direct control when they said they had to follow whatever their husband and marital family wanted, and had no autonomy.

The bad aspect of marriage is that one has to live without one's parents. One cannot do things as per one's own choice, has to work all the time and compromise in all things. (K.R., Jaipur, Class 10, Married at 16, home-based stitching work)

It is not merely the labour but how much their every day is controlled by their marital families, and having absolutely no space to refuse or negotiate, or even to express their frustration:

For a woman, there are work related problems as I never did household chores in my home. I could express anger at my mother but now I have to adjust to the situation. (D.S., Murshidabad, Class 11, Married at 17, Hindu upper caste)

A few across different ages of marriage spoke of how they were "scolded" frequently for not doing their housework as expected:

After marriage, I feared my mother-in-law a lot. I didn't know how to manage the house. There are many household responsibilities. If you don't do the work, in-laws shout at you. You do not face such things at your mother's house. (P.V., Hyderabad, Class 5, Married at 13, Hindu ST, Income Rs.8000)

At my parents' house I could be relaxed. Here I get scolded for everything, if the work is not done or anything. It was breezy and easy there. I can scold them there and do whatever I want. Here it is not like that. (R.V., Mahbubnagar, Class 12, Married at 23, Hindu OBC, Income Rs.8000)

Some young women did not express their being under control so directly but as the sense of duty to the marital family, the husband, the children, which meant that their lives were automatically dictated by what others needed. R.L. (Mahbubnagar, Class 10, Married at 19, Hindu OBC, Income Rs.35000) said despite being tired, she woke up to "an internal alarm", so ingrained is domestic responsibility in the minds and bodies of these women: "The sleep is not enough for me but I wake up as if an internal alarm rings. Some days I feel too tired and sleepy, I sleep in the afternoon for half an hour." Talking about segregation during menstruation in her natal home, she said, "Here I don't follow it because the work at home will stop. I wish I had to be kept separate here too for five days, I would be so free and have no work too."

Being entirely responsible for household work was sometimes tied to the idea of adulthood. N.G. (Jaipur, Class 12, Married at 23) had worked outside home in a beauty parlour before marriage but her sense of becoming an adult was tied to her domestic responsibilities after marriage: "I felt I have become an adult only after I was married. I had much more responsibility. I felt if I don't do the work, then who will do it." However, for others, responsibility of the household is not accompanied by any control within the household – which is why the only difference between life before and after marriage is the greater amount of work. The transfer from one house to another, without any chances to do anything outside the home, essentially meant even more work and responsibility:

There is hardly any difference between childhood and youth. It's just that after I have come here, there is more responsibility. (K.B., Sawai Madhopur, Class 7, Married at 20)

Life at my parents' house was the same as life is here. I used to work there and I work here. (R.I., Sawai Madhopur, Class 8, Married at 10)

Even for middle class women, despite the help they can afford, the workload of married life can be overwhelming. T.K. (Kolkata, PhD, Married at 27, Hindu upper caste, Lecturer, Income 2 lakhs) brought out the pressures faced by "working women" and indeed discussed how the freedom to work outside the home can become a pressure, when the burden of household work lies entirely on the wife. As much as she believed in women's right to have careers of their own, she was troubled by how this works against the woman if her employment and earnings are an expectation from her husband:

A boy shouldn't expect that his bride should be willing to do a job because a girl will have to take a lot of responsibilities when she goes to her in-laws' house. I think everyone will accept the fact that there is a lot of difference between a working wife and a working husband, in terms of family responsibilities, in terms of expectations etc. A girl might face too much pressure due to familial responsibilities and leave her job which she has been doing for a long time. For example, I recently heard that one of my seniors has left her post-doc owing to her child's responsibilities...Now if her husband tells her that he had married her because she was doing that job and now she would have to continue, then that is a kind of pressure.

Thus even for socio-economically privileged groups, housework falls almost entirely on women by default. Speaking of couples in highly educated middle class circles like hers,

a consultant from Jaipur, highlighted the struggles of the first year of marriage which she believed is a test for both partners. In her view, while women expect that husbands give them the same attention as they had before marriage “boys expect that soon after marriage, the wife should look after the entire family and the household suddenly” (D.V., Jaipur, Postgraduate, Married at 28). Expectations of women within marriage across social groups then centre on household work, even though the nature of such work will vary significantly with social location. With regard to men helping out or sharing work when they have working wives, one interviewee from Hyderabad shared her relatives’ experience about the man being mocked for helping with housework: “Women have to cook after coming from outside, feed the child. Men don’t understand that she also needs some rest. My aunt’s husband used to do the work and he would cook for his wife, after she came from the office, he gave her tea. He cleaned and washed the clothes. No one in my village including my father respects him. Even my father says, “what kind of a man is he?” (P.R., Hyderabad, Hindu SC).

The following is an exchange about the burden of work between two neighbours who were sitting in on an interview in Mahbubnagar (in R.V.’s interview):

Young woman (interviewee’s neighbour): Housework is a lot of trouble for us. When you get a husband, it brings us troubles only, all we have to do is his work.

Old woman (interviewee’s neighbour): If you get married to cook, you should cook for your husband and do work for him. If you want to be like you were at your house without work, that’s not right. Then the husband will say why get married then. Will husbands ever cook like our mothers do?

Interviewer: Why shouldn’t husbands cook?

Old woman: Why should they? They will say “why did we get married then?”

Young woman: Some husbands are loving towards their wives, do they cook?

Old woman: No matter how much husbands love their wives, cooking is our responsibility.

Young woman: In villages, daughters-in-law are tortured a lot.

Interviewer: How are they tortured?

Young woman: They are forced to do all the housework.

Old woman: If you don’t do housework, then what are you here for? To herd donkeys?

Thus, the burden of work in marriage was not always expressed in terms of women's own experiences but a general comment on what marriage necessarily entails. This was particularly evident when asked about age of marriage, whether or not they were married "early."

Ideas of early/late marriage tied to work

Besides physical and reproductive health, one of the arguments against early marriage that emerged repeatedly was that it is an onslaught of work which a young girl cannot handle, and if she does not know household work, she is mocked and criticised by her marital family. While these are expressed as ideas about what a young bride cannot handle, these accounts actually indicate the burden of work that marriage brings in general. The imagination of marriage is centred on *all* the work that *has* to be done – as one mother-in-law put it, marriage is all about work and responsibilities with "no chance to escape."

Concluding Remarks

This chapter has ranged far and wide on the subject of marriage – from age at marriage, choice of husband, arranged vs love marriages, dowry, the respondents' likes and dislikes about marriage, young women's hopes and anxieties.

In the context of these discussions questions of education and work (as these came out in the previous chapters) have undergone some changes. Education turns out to be a very tenuous criterion in finalising marriages – among the poor it matters little, and even amongst the better off, employment and financial security trumps education. A husband's education often was no better than that of wives, and not infrequently it could be worse. The failure of education is therefore by no means confined to women but universal across gender. Even though economic security and husband's employment figured so largely in what constituted a good marriage, in actuality women were not forthcoming about their husband's occupations. In the rural sites depending on class/caste backgrounds husbands were agricultural labourers and seasonal migrants, while better off families have land for cultivation. But women hardly dwelt on this. In some instances they referred to widespread unemployment, even in non-poor families where husbands were looking for better jobs but were having to take what they could find. Even in the middle class contexts where engineers and corporate jobs figured frequently, there could be "mismatches" at the level of education, or job insecurity. As will be reflected in the

conclusion, matchmaking in the sense of matching levels of education, family and so on breaks down frequently.

Whereas women had little to say when they were directly asked about their daily household responsibilities, it assumed a much larger place in their accounts when asked what changes with marriage. "Marriage is work". Younger women spoke more readily about the harder time with all their current responsibilities, and refer to the "torture" of married life, while better off middle class women resort to the language of "adjusting" to their new lives. Yet for everyone marriage is destiny.

Women had a lot to say about love versus arranged marriages. Arranged marriages were a very clear preference across the sites, and even in West Bengal with its high proportions of self-choice marriages there were more expressions of regret than of any satisfaction or happiness. In the other sites where actual incidents of love marriages were very few, nonetheless a powerful discourse was frequently referred to of the dangers of relationships and affairs if marriages were not arranged in time, and indeed conducted early if need be. Given the considerable anxiety and fear that accompanied thoughts of marriage, the arranged marriage was the only way to minimise risks – even when things went wrong, family support could be called upon. It was not the threat of violence that hung over love marriages but rather the isolation it implied. So relationships had to be redeemed through sexual respectability in marriage (often conducted too quickly for the respondents). While some acceptability was present in West Bengal where self-choice marriages and elopements were concerned, elsewhere the respondents themselves (and not just older women) were clear about their disapproval and across all ages of marriage.

The next chapter will bring these concerns together to ask once again what difference does age at marriage make?

In Lieu of a Conclusion

This report began by setting a historical context for the current revival in addressing child marriage as a harmful practice, to use the language of the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals. Undoubtedly, child marriage was so named in colonial India in order to identify a problem that became a critical site of reform for over a century. Marrying girls before they attained puberty was a widespread practice in families that were upper caste and part of a newly emergent middle class, as well as among the poor and working castes. Ages of marriage for girls as well as boys rose over the course of the twentieth century in the context of transforming educational and professional access for the middle classes, about which too little is known. After independence, child marriage in India receded from public view, and was no longer a subject of intense controversy and change. When it was addressed rather sporadically, it was the problem of the "other" – those identified as poor and backward, or as marginalised groups.

It is in the twenty-first century that child marriage gets foregrounded in the context of intense international interest. India has the largest numbers of girls who marry as "children" – that is, before they are 18 as per international and national conventions. Law is the principal means to ensure that girls who are married before 18 years can be subjected to legal prohibitions, and state policy has variously created schemes to delay marriage till the age of 18. During this period, demographic studies emerged to track changes in the age of marriage, and the causes and consequences of marrying too soon.

Whatever the insights such studies provided, this report has also shown that existing research on the subject of early and child marriage has been extremely uneven. This is particularly evident in the spheres of education, work and in explorations of the institution of marriage itself. Very few studies have foregrounded the experiences and views of women within marriage. Hence this study was envisaged as one that would address women's experiences and views in the early years of their marriage in sites where the prevalence of marrying early was high – West Bengal, Rajasthan and Telangana, both rural and urban. Women's views were elicited across different classes, castes and communities and across ages at marriage.

Before addressing substantive issues, it should be emphasised that this kind of study has been a methodological challenge. Gaining access to women's voices in the early years of their marriage is fraught with difficulties. While our study was conducted with full consent and in a context of trust and rapport, this made us only more aware of the many hurdles involved in attempting to draw out how women negotiate these early years of married life, when they are most vulnerable. Not only was access often difficult, but we need to qualify to what extent women can speak "freely" and "authentically" given the very

conditions in which they find themselves. This is a subject which needs much more reflection.

In this conclusion that is not a conclusion, an attempt is made to draw from this study in order to take stock of where we are in thinking about early and child marriage. As we will see there is much – too much – that is unknown or poorly understood. A set of interrelated themes will be presented that have emerged either directly or indirectly in the course of this report, based as it is on the voices and experiences of respondents in the early years of their marriage.

Age: Age has been an unusually tricky concept in the Indian context. We found that several of our respondents did not know their age with any accuracy much less their date of birth. This makes it all the more surprising and significant, that in the absence in rural India of strict notions of chronological age in particular, nonetheless the markers of age are there, one way or another. 18 years was pronounced by the vast majority as the right age to marry – this they had internalised from doctors, the law and fears of arrest, and from government schemes. 20 years was too old to marry several said. Much of this internalised talk of age was bolstered by “what people” would say if one did not marry “in time” – loss of face for the family, fears of allegations of having an affair that prevented one from being married.

Many of the existing agendas to end child marriage are driven by concerns about health and reproductive risks when marrying and having children “too soon”. Here there are some very important caveats. Firstly, we have seen that underage marriages are mostly happening between the ages of 15-17 years, marrying younger than this is now confined to a small minority. Actual pre-pubertal child marriage has all but disappeared according to national data and in our field study. Secondly, it came as surprise to discover that NFHS data and several other studies do not support the idea that marrying below 18 years inevitably carries harmful health consequences for women, especially as mothers of young children. NFHS 4 data on wasting and stunting in women and children (see the Appendix) show that age at marriage is of much lower significance than poverty. Yet studies persist in treating it as the “root cause” of all the disadvantages that surround young women. What is a cause is in fact as much the effect of other causes – lack of healthcare, nutrition, economic hardship and so on, and at best it is one of many causes of the disadvantages women face and not necessarily the most significant one.

When asked directly, as we have seen, respondents said that marrying below 18 was “wrong”. In the context of discussing education, they somewhat glibly claimed that there was no problem in having more education and most of them wished to have studied further. However, we also saw that this claim suffered something of a setback in the

context of discussions of marriage – there could be “too much” education and mismatches with husbands were common, especially among the poor and the marginalised. Only a small number of middle class women in Kolkata were prepared to “wait”.

Once again, it was in the context of talking about marriage, that respondents said that delaying marriage was a good thing because one could thereby defer the “torture” – the burdens and responsibilities – of marriage. To enter marriage was to enter a life of labour, without “fun”.

How then should we be thinking about age? What significance should it carry in relation to all the many factors that are affecting women’s life chances – poverty, work, health care, nutrition, education, sexuality, among others?

Existing research does not support the notion that the most significant factor affecting women’s life chances and their empowerment is age, because the institution of marriage itself remains largely unaddressed.

Marriage: Hardly discussed in the literature on child marriage is the institution of marriage itself and what we have called compulsory marriage. We would like to suggest, based on our study, that early marriage can only be more satisfactorily addressed in the context of a better understanding of marriage itself, and at all ages. As we have already said before, our study faced methodological challenges and constraints by concentrating on women in the early years of their marriage. Yet we believe that this very focus provided us with evidence of the structure of this institution itself, given how unprepared they were to take on this institution, and not just those who were marrying too soon.

Here is a very cursory list of its “elementary structures” in our present-day context

Compulsory marriage is not to be confused with forced marriage.

It is a capacious multi-layered concept encompassing the near universality of marriage in India, so-called “arranged” and “love” marriages, with or without consent, including non-normative ones.

Unlike child marriage, compulsory marriage is not declining and continues to be hegemonic. For women in our study, regardless of age, marriage is destiny, a societal demand that cannot be refused.

It is the most dominant institution of social meaning, making those who wish to be single anomalous. The principal subjects of our study were young married women. Only a tiny number could conceive of the idea of not being married.

Marriage in the Indian context is the principal source of economic security for women (whether realized or not), bolstered by dowry payments and a pervasive gender division of labour. Indian women spend enormous hours of their daily lives on (unpaid) domestic labour, alongside very low levels of paid employment rates. This is well mirrored in the views of the respondents of our study – on the one hand they took their domestic labour largely for granted, but on the other hand had much to say about the meaning of marriage “marriage is work, and at times it is torture.” Paid work was few and far between, especially following marriage.

Marriage is the site of sexual respectability, such that sexual activity outside marriage is stigmatized. Sexual activity within marriage was barely alluded to in our study. As we have seen, a powerful discourse has been created around the idea that love affairs will simply run amok if marriages are not arranged in time. In West Bengal, while love affairs are significant including in rural sites, any whiff of a relationship must be immediately turned into a marriage. It is sexual respectability and not the threat of violence that is key. In other sites, in spite of the sparse incidence of love matches, the discourse of the problem of escalating love affairs enjoyed widespread acceptance. While there is elaborate discussion of the general requirements of a “good” husband, husbands themselves are largely absent in accounts of their daily lives.

Marriage is the only institution for bringing a pregnancy to term and having children of one’s own. This is not something that even required any comment, and completely goes without saying. We expected our respondents to speak positively about their children, whether very young or school going. But motherhood does not appear as a rewarding experience, with the exception of respondents in Hyderabad, for whom it was what they “liked the most”.

Caste and community continue to play a pre-eminent role in the reproduction of marriage. In our study there are some interesting variations – caste is explicitly referred to in Rajasthan and Telangana, but occupies a more invisible space in West Bengal at least among the so-called lower castes.

What is unique to India is not the practice of child marriage but that compulsory marriage continues to flourish in all its variety, hierarchy and monotony, updating itself continuously. Underage marriages are not the “other” of middle class India, but its underbelly, and share many of its features.

Of particular interest is the strong place that arranged vs. love marriages play in Indian public life and in the discussions and views of the respondents, for whom arranged

marriages are the overwhelming “choice”, in order ensure family support and prevent the isolation that a so-called love marriage will surely entail.

Surely marriage is the site of desire, of fantasy and aspirations. These figure sporadically – in women’s memories of the grand wedding they had dreamed of, in the first accounts of love marriages in West Bengal, and in a few of the more measured expectations of the most well-placed middle class and upper caste respondents. The most overwhelming experiences women shared in these early years of their marriage was anxiety, of being unprepared – imaginations of a happy marriage came from popular culture rather than their own lives.

Education/Work/Marriage

This study had initially envisioned a strong interlocking relationship between education, work and marriage, that could be tracked at different levels of social life, but this was not neatly forthcoming. Education was a site of failure in the rural sites especially and also among the urban poor to some extent (especially those who had migrated to cities). The modal level of schooling in rural sites was middle school (i.e. some form of elementary education provided by government schools) and this level was shared with husbands. Thus, education in our study, not only but especially among those marrying before 18 years, is not just below the national average of secondary education, but well below access to higher education, the critical watershed when marriage below 18 years becomes insignificant. Education made no difference among the poorer classes in arranging matches, and often included lower levels of education among husbands. Even amongst the upwardly mobile and the middle classes who are part of the massive expansion in education (including into higher education) education enjoyed a mixed place, and there were “mismatches”.

Many wanted jobs but there were hardly any options outside agriculture and seasonal migrant work in the rural sites. Urban India had more options but we found that fewer women were working after marriage, and especially so among the urban middle class respondents.

How then do we envisage the relationship between education, work and marriage, one that is making marriage as compulsory as it has ever been?

Poverty vs Culture

Much of the existing literature refers to the problem of child marriage as being the result of social norms held by certain communities that are mistaken in their views and hence need to be corrected through training and communication. Our study leads us to question

such an approach. As it is, age at marriage is not static but has been increasing over time in response to a host of factors. If a century ago child marriage was led by the dominant classes and castes so that the new middle classes were at the heart of social reform, the situation has vastly changed today. We have observed that it is those in backward areas and in the margins of social hierarchies where early marriage is found and poverty is increasingly the dominant context. Of course, poverty is a vague term – it needs to be understood as a condition of resourcelessness and of living with vulnerabilities that make early marriages a strategy of survival for families, when later marriages are beyond their horizon of possibility.

What should we call these marriages? The Nirantar study (Nirantar 2015) proposed notions of early or adolescent marriage rather than child marriage. How might we give a term such as the adolescent more concrete meaning? The terminology of child marriage however continues in the light of international covenants and definitions of the child, such that any marriage below 18 becomes a violation of the rights of the child.

Agency

Many organisations today have changed their focus from a narrow and reductive attention to age and delaying marriage to 18, and have adopted the terminology of “agency” as a better guide for action in the field. “Agency not age” is a popular slogan.

What, then, of the agency exemplified and expressed by the respondents of our study?

In the realm of education we saw how our respondents ascribed too much agency to themselves. They believed it was their choice when they didn’t study more, dropped out or showed disinterest. Only extreme experiences of poverty or hardship, or the breakdown of family life with alcoholic fathers or the death of a mother constituted reasons to place responsibility elsewhere.

In the realm of work, we saw how onerous daily housework could be, leading to the exclamation “marriage is work”. But respondents largely took this for granted, and nowhere was it a source of value or self-worth. We might say that women were full of agency in the realm of the reproduction of the family, and yet it figured little, except as a source of anxiety and complaint. Such views are reflected across the country in contemporary debates on paid and unpaid work.

Finally, we have listened to the views of respondents on arranged and love marriages. There were more expressions of regret in self-choice marriages than declarations of contentment or happiness. Moreover, the discourse referred to above shows unequivocally that respondents subscribe to views of the negative effects of sexual

agency on the part of adolescents. This is why marriages need to be contracted in time. In any case it is better to leave the decision to the family in order to maximise social and economic security in one's marriage, and the support of family when things go wrong.

How might we square "our" notions of agency with these views? Moreover, how do structures fit in even with our notions?

Regional Variations

A word or two about regional variations in our study – West Bengal, Rajasthan and Telangana. Figure 3.2 from chapter 3 illustrated changes in the prevalence of marriage before 18 years. While we are not in a position to explain these trends definitively, we can certainly draw attention to issues that require further investigation.

The state of West Bengal has overall shown little change in the prevalence of underage marriage, even though here too ages of marriage have risen. It has now the highest prevalence in the country. Our study has shown that love marriages are common, and this is bolstered by other studies (Sen and Ghosh 2021). Even as these are largely accepted, sexual respectability is ensuring that a love affair must be either prevented or lead to an immediate marriage. Thus we see the phenomenon of a significant number of adolescent marriages, both love and arranged. Educational levels outside the urban middle classes show the least generational improvement compared to other sites. Our rural site has the least proportion of women in paid work, corroborating other studies (Chakravarty 2018).

The state of Rajasthan, according to NFHS trends, has shifted in the years from NFHS 3 when it was the state with the highest prevalence rates. In our rural site it is difficult to ascertain if reporting of age at marriage is always accurate, so underage marriages might still be occurring more often than reported. However, it is certain that the state has moved away from infant/child marriage to adolescent marriage. There were also more cases of women studying after marriage than in the other sites. Side by side, the sites in Rajasthan demonstrated that the process of fixing a marriage is controlled by families and communities in much more stringent ways than in other sites of our study, giving the appearance of a modernising "tradition", to which women are giving their consent.

The state of Telangana is converging with the national average according to NFHS figures. Telangana was perhaps the most complex state in our study, and presented some of the biggest challenges in terms of gaining access to and rapport with respondents. Our data showed the most improvement in levels of education of the respondents compared to

their parents, even while illiteracy remains significant among both the respondents and their husbands. While age of marriage has been increasing, some respondents mentioned that misreporting and the fudging of documents was frequent. Those who did wait till 18 to receive money as per government schemes often did so because this could help fund their dowry, again supported by other studies. (U. Vindhya et al 2019). A district like Mahboobnagar may well be the poorest in our study – visible in the relatively high rates of agricultural and migrant labour common to women, before and after marriage, (whether as paid work or on their family farms). (See also Kannabiran et al 2017) And yet considerable proportions held educational levels of Class 10 and 12 in both rural and urban districts.

The biggest lesson that our study demonstrates across all the sites, both urban and rural, is that early marriage and its variations must be reintegrated within the framework of compulsory marriage, while recognising the forces that are maintaining its compulsory nature. Unless the elementary structures of marriage are loosened marriage will continue to be women's anxiety laden destiny, and forces will continue to make those who are most vulnerable seek elusive security through an early marriage. Education and work are the sites that are vitally in need of attention, where failure is rife, if women's life chances are to be expanded, within and outside marriage. The institution of marriage itself needs to be the subject of intense scrutiny for its ongoing hierarchies and oppressions across and within gender and age – it is much in need democratisation. Women are unprepared for marriage – the better placed learn to "adjust" to the peculiar combination of responsibility and dependency, while most of our respondents suffer endless labour without the rewards of self-worth or happiness.

We are clearly invested in expanding women's life chances including in the realm of marriage. If age alone is too limiting a mode of intervention, what more needs to be done to both expand real choices for women (outside marriage too) and in improving conditions of life within it?

Appendix

(T105) Table 7.1: Maternal Health Associations with Age at Marriage in India

Variables	BMI		Anaemia
	Normal vs. Underweight	Normal vs. Overweight	
Age at marriage			
<18 years †	1.00	1.00	1.00
18–20 years	1.07 [1.05, 1.08]***	0.87 [0.86, 0.89]***	1.02 [1.01, 1.04]**
21 years and above	0.96 [0.93, 0.98]***	0.91 [0.89, 0.93]***	0.96 [0.95, 0.97]***
Economic status			
Poorest †	1.00	1.00	1.00
Poorer	0.79 [0.77, 0.80]***	1.78 [1.72, 1.84]***	0.88 [0.87, 0.90]***
Middle	0.59 [0.57, 0.60]***	2.83 [2.74, 2.92]***	0.84 [0.82, 0.85]***
Richer	0.44 [0.42, 0.45]***	4.29 [4.16, 4.44]***	0.79 [0.77, 0.81]***
Richest	0.27 [0.26, 0.28]***	5.95 [5.74, 6.16]***	0.75 [0.73, 0.77]***
Women's education			
No education †	1.00	1.00	1.00
Primary	1.02 [1.00, 1.05]	1.06 [1.04, 1.09]***	0.94 [0.93, 0.96]***
Secondary	1.07 [1.05, 1.09]***	0.95 [0.93, 0.97]***	0.90 [0.89, 0.92]***
Higher	0.92 [0.89, 0.96]***	0.81 [0.79, 0.84]***	0.82 [0.80, 0.84]***
Place of residence			
Urban †	1.00	1.00	1.00
Rural	1.17 [1.15, 1.20]***	0.73 [0.72, 0.74]***	0.98 [0.97, 1.00]*
Caste			
Other †	1.00	1.00	1.00
Scheduled castes	1.10 [1.07, 1.13]***	0.82 [0.81, 0.84]***	1.15 [1.13, 1.17]***
Scheduled tribes	1.35 [1.31, 1.39]***	0.61 [0.59, 0.63]***	1.38 [1.35, 1.41]***
Other backward classes	1.07 [1.04, 1.09]***	0.86 [0.85, 0.88]***	1.09 [1.08, 1.11]***
Don't know	1.01 [0.96, 1.05]	0.90 [0.87, 0.94]***	0.94 [0.91, 0.97]***
Religion			
Hindu †	1.00	1.00	1.00
Muslim	0.98 [0.95, 1.00]	1.17 [1.15, 1.20]***	0.88 [0.87, 0.90]***
Christian	0.63 [0.59, 0.67]***	1.24 [1.19, 1.30]***	0.77 [0.75, 0.80]***
Others	0.89 [0.85, 0.94]***	1.08 [1.04, 1.12]***	1.02 [0.98, 1.05]

States			
Others †	1.00	1.00	1.00
Empowered Action Group	1.12 [1.10, 1.14]***	0.82 [0.81, 0.83]***	0.89 [0.88, 0.91]***
Rajasthan	1.26 [1.22, 1.30]***	0.56 [0.54, 0.58]***	0.71 [0.69, 0.73]***
West Bengal	0.91 [0.88, 0.94]***	0.92 [0.90, 0.95]***	1.47 [1.43, 1.50]***
Telangana	1.43 [1.36, 1.50]***	1.21 [1.16, 1.26]***	1.09 [1.05, 1.12]***
Constant	0.39 [0.37, 0.40]***	0.23 [0.22, 0.24]***	1.42 [1.38, 1.46]***
Number of observation	469251		5,04,689
Likelihood-ratio chi-squared	71348.53****		6959.39***
Log likelihood	-436309.04		-351488.82

Note: 95% confidence intervals were given in the parentheses; † Reference category; *** $P < 0.001$, ** $P < 0.01$, * $P < 0.05$. BMI, body mass index.

(T106) Table 7.2: Child Health Associations with Age at Marriage in India

Variables	Stunting	Underweight	Wasting	Anaemia
Age at marriage				
<18 years †	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
18–20 years	0.94 [0.92, 0.96]***	0.98 [0.96, 1.00]*	1.07 [1.04, 1.10]***	1.04 [1.02, 1.07]***
21 years and above	0.85 [0.83, 0.88]***	0.89 [0.87, 0.91]***	1.07 [1.04, 1.10]***	0.94 [0.91, 0.96]***
Economic status				
Poorest †	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Poorer	0.85 [0.83, 0.87]***	0.83 [0.81, 0.85]***	0.89 [0.86, 0.92]***	0.93 [0.90, 0.95]***
Middle	0.70 [0.68, 0.72]***	0.66 [0.64, 0.68]***	0.79 [0.77, 0.82]***	0.93 [0.90, 0.96]***
Richer	0.55 [0.53, 0.57]***	0.54 [0.52, 0.56]***	0.75 [0.72, 0.78]***	0.80 [0.78, 0.83]***
Richest	0.44 [0.42, 0.46]***	0.41 [0.39, 0.43]***	0.67 [0.64, 0.71]***	0.79 [0.76, 0.83]***
Women's education				
No education †	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Primary	0.86 [0.83, 0.88]***	0.87 [0.85, 0.90]***	0.97 [0.94, 1.01]	0.88 [0.85, 0.90]***
Secondary	0.67 [0.65, 0.68]***	0.72 [0.70, 0.74]***	1.00 [0.97, 1.03]	0.76 [0.74, 0.78]***
Higher	0.49 [0.47, 0.51]***	0.50 [0.48, 0.52]***	0.92 [0.88, 0.96]***	0.66 [0.63, 0.68]***
Place of residence				
Urban †	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Rural	0.94 [0.92, 0.97]***	0.88 [0.86, 0.91]***	0.92 [0.89, 0.94]***	0.95 [0.93, 0.98]***
Caste				
Other †	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Scheduled castes	1.28 [1.25, 1.32]***	1.20 [1.17, 1.24]***	1.04 [1.00, 1.07]*	1.15 [1.11, 1.18]***

Scheduled tribes	1.17 [1.13, 1.22]***	1.36 [1.31, 1.41]***	1.37 [1.31, 1.42]***	1.27 [1.22, 1.32]***
Other backward classes	1.15 [1.12, 1.18]***	1.12 [1.09, 1.15]***	1.03 [1.00, 1.06]*	1.06 [1.04, 1.09]***
Religion				
Hindu †	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Muslim	1.09 [1.06, 1.12]***	0.99 [0.96, 1.02]	0.93 [0.90, 0.96]***	1.09 [1.06, 1.12]***
Christian	0.85 [0.79, 0.91]***	0.76 [0.71, 0.82]***	0.80 [0.74, 0.87]***	0.60 [0.56, 0.64]***
Others	1.00 [0.94, 1.05]	1.00 [0.94, 1.06]	0.98 [0.92, 1.05]	1.08 [1.02, 1.14]**
States				
Others †	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Empowered Action Group	1.15 [1.12, 1.18]***	1.14 [1.12, 1.17]***	0.96 [0.93, 0.98]***	1.01 [0.99, 1.04]
Rajasthan	1.02 [0.98, 1.06]	1.03 [0.98, 1.07]	1.08 [1.03, 1.13]**	1.01 [0.97, 1.05]
West Bengal	0.74 [0.71, 0.77]***	0.83 [0.80, 0.87]***	0.95 [0.90, 0.99]*	0.82 [0.79, 0.86]***
Telangana	0.79 [0.74, 0.84]***	0.90 [0.84, 0.95]***	0.83 [0.77, 0.89]***	1.15 [1.08, 1.22]***
Constant	1.04 [0.99, 1.08]	0.96 [0.92, 1.00]	0.33 [0.31, 0.35]***	1.83 [1.75, 1.91]***
Number of observation	2,12,658	2,12,658	2,12,658	1,97,803
Likelihood-ratio chi-squared	12573.58***	11310.26***	1092.61***	2927.01***
Log likelihood	-130792.4	-128817.1	-105812.3	-127730.9

Note: 95% confidence intervals were given in the parentheses; † Reference category; *** $P < 0.001$, ** $P < 0.01$, * $P < 0.05$.

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