The Causes of Marriage Change in South India*

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In much of the Third World the average age of women at marriage has risen at much the same time as marital fertility has begun to fall,1 a phenomenon observed in parts of the West during the late nineteenth century.2 An obvious question is whether the two movements are distinct, or whether marriage delay among women is merely one of the mechanisms employed to reduce total fertility. The Princeton indices,3 which show fertility as the product of the proportion of women married and their marital fertility, while being statistically correct, have probably encouraged some social scientists to regard a reduction in the time spent within marriage as a mechanism for reducing total fertility.

A considerable body of data collected both by a micro or quasi-anthropological approach and small-scale surveys in a rural area of the south Indian state of Karnataka (previously Mysore)4 allows us to explore the causes of marriage delay. The study area contains a population of about 5,000, half of whom live in one large village and the remainder in eight smaller villages. The location is over 125 kilometres west of Bangalore and well away from large towns or major irrigation areas.

Persistent rises in women’s age at marriage make both India as a whole and Karnataka suitable for such a study, even though the increase began from a younger age and Indian women still marry earlier than, for instance, in Southeast and East Asia. In the search for a baseline it is better to ignore the Census of 1931, as the recorded proportion of very young married women was unusually large, because of the rush by parents during the late 1920s to marry off their daughters before the passing of the Child Marriage Act (generally known as the Sarda Act) which attempted to prevent girls marrying before the age of 14 and men before the age of 18 years.5 Comparing the first quarter of the

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2 E.g. United States, Australia, Ireland.


century with 1971, the mean age of women at marriage in India rose from around 13 to 17 years and in Karnataka from 15 to 18 years. The fastest rise occurred during the 1960s, and this is believed to have persisted, or even accelerated, through the 1970s although no statistics on marital status by age are yet available from the Census of 1981. The later marriage pattern of Karnataka was typical of south India, although in Kerala mean age at marriage was 21 years by 1971, while in its progressive core, Travancore, it was 17.5 years by the beginning of the century. Between the beginning of the century and 1971 the mean age at marriage of men in India had climbed slowly from 20 to 22 years, but in Karnataka had risen hardly at all, perhaps by half a year from 24.3 to 24.8 years. There is some evidence that after 1961 it may have begun to decline slowly. Part of the explanation probably lay in the great age gap between husbands and wives in Karnataka, ten years in 1891, and still, in 1971, at seven years, the largest in India.

In the Seventh Round of the National Sample Survey only slight differences in marriage age were found between the two major religious groups (the only two represented in our study area), Muslim women marrying almost a year later than Hindu women, while the difference for men was 1.5 years. In the 1951–52 Mysore Population Study the difference was in the same direction but half the size for each sex in the ‘towns’ and for men in Bangalore City, while in the city Hindu women married slightly later than Muslim women. This reversal of the pattern among urban women has been confirmed in an analysis by the Registrar General’s Office, although the margins are small. Differences by caste in the National Sample Survey were negligible, but Driver recorded a faster move towards higher marriage ages among Brahmins in central India. By 1971, marriages for each sex in India occurred about 2.5 years later in urban than rural areas, while in Karnataka the margin was 2.2 years for women and 1.6 years for men. In the ‘Rural Plains’ (where our study area is located) insignificant differentials in marriage age by occupational status of the household were found in the Mysore Study, while in the city and towns (where 30 years ago most of the educated were living), women’s mean age at marriage was one year higher for those who attended Middle School and a further three years higher for those with High School education. The important point is that most differences are not large, and that the move toward later marriage among women has been general and not primarily a feature of only one sector of society.

Karnataka has been characterized more by very early marriage of women than by child marriage. Even during the early decades of the present century, in the overwhelmingly rural district in which the study area is located, only one per cent of 5 to 9-year-olds were married, and the numbers have been insignificant since the 1940s. The proportion of 10 to 14-year-old girls who were married fell from 25 per cent in 1901 to 20 per cent in 1921 and stabilized at around five per cent from 1951. In the Mysore Population Study, 42 per cent of women born between 1893 and 1902 had married before 13 years of age in the rural plains, compared with 18 per cent of those born between 1928 and

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7 Carried out in 1953–54.


13 Ibid. p. 99.

14 Census of India, Mysore State volumes, 1901–1961.
1932, while the analogous figures before 16 years of age were 83 and 72 per cent respectively. ¹⁵

By 1980, in our study area only one per cent of 10 to 14-year-old girls were married, 31 per cent of those aged 15–19 (somewhat understated because of a tendency for young married women to round their age to 20 years), and 82 per cent of those aged 20–24. Even in the smaller villages, which made up half the population, the proportions were 1, 36, and 92 per cent, respectively. For the first time, households were beginning to experience the presence of unmarried daughters in late adolescence and, in the larger village, even of young adult single females.

The changing nature of marriage

Amongst Hindus, marriage is a sacrament of transcendental importance. Traditionally, it has been assumed that marriages were not only arranged by families, but that there was an element of divine guidance. Widows were not supposed to re-marry because their marriage might well be reconstituted with the same husband in the next life, as it might have been in past lives. Widow re-marriage is still relatively less common than the re-marriage of widowers. This difference between the sexes has an important bearing on the marriage market, as will be discussed later.

That market has not been conditioned by the impulses of young men and women to marry, but largely by family decisions as to when to bring a new daughter-in-law into the household and when to change a son's status by allowing him to marry. In many societies a young bride is preferred, so that her personality can be moulded by both her husband and his parents. This is important in India, too, but traditionally it has not provided the main motivation for early marriage of women in the study area. That motivation was provided by divine sanctions against girls who failed to marry before menarche, and against the family that erred in this way. An English observer, reporting Mysore society at the end of the eighteenth century, wrote of the Brahmmins, "Unless a woman marries before the signs of puberty appear, she is ever afterwards considered impure,"¹⁶ and, of a merchant caste, that a girl 'must be married before any signs of puberty appear, for afterwards she is considered as being deflowered and incapable of marriage."¹⁷ However, it was clear even then, that some of the service castes were not greatly disturbed by breaking these rules. Child marriage provided an insurance against even precocious puberty. Even now, a major control over the age at marriage of women is provided by the fact that many families feel deep disquiet and guilt over the presence of an unmarried menstruating daughter in the household, an emotion that may be fuelled by an apprehension lest she become pregnant and unmarriageable, but which cannot be wholly explained in this way. The age of marriage of men has largely been determined by the commitment of families to provide daughters with a marriage (and, eventually, sons with land and other property). In rural Karnataka this was usually taken to mean that sons must remain single and work with their fathers to provide their sisters with the wherewithal for marriage until even the youngest sister had married.¹⁸

Two major changes are under way throughout most of south India. One is from a

¹⁶ Francis Hamilton Buchanan, A Journey from Madras through the Countries of Mysore, Canara and Malabar Performed under the Orders of the Most Noble the Marquis Wellesley Governor General of India for the Express Purpose of Investigating the State of Agriculture, Arts and Commerce: Religion, Manners and Customs; the History Natural and Civil and Antiquities in the Dominions of the Rajah of Mysore and the Countries Acquired by the Honorable East India Company (London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1807), vol. 1, p. 52.
bridewealth to a dowry system, and the other is a reduction in the proportion of all marriages between close relatives. Both have implications for age at marriage.

Bridewealth and dowry are not antithetical. Both are forms of marriage payment which imply the making of arrangements and the provision of payments by persons other than the future spouses, with the almost inevitable consequence of a high degree of influence over the young couple after marriage. The true antithesis to both is the absence of both payments and arrangements by the older generation. The position is made more complex in India because gifts from the family of one of the partners generate reciprocal gifts from the other side, and alternating gifts may continue for a considerable period. Where dowry is paid, distinctions can be drawn between that which goes to the bride and that which is destined for her husband’s family, but, when she is entering a joint family, in the normal circumstances where her husband has much control over her property and where he forms part of a larger economic unit, such distinctions may mean little in practice. Even in north India, most marriage payments appear on balance to have been bridewealth, with dowry being an ideal type paid in royal marriages and by some devout Brahmans. However, an intensification of the practice of hypergamy (i.e. wives marrying socio-economically upward, usually in the same caste but sometimes between sub-castes, into richer or more esteemed families who require compensation for what would otherwise be a misalliance) during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries led to an inflation in dowries in north India, especially among the twice born (the Calcutta Brahmans of Rabindranath Tagore’s short stories of the 1890s worry a great deal about the cost of marrying daughters).

In south India there was no hypergamy, partly because of the high incidence of marriages between relatives, perhaps because of greater socio-economic homogeneity within castes, and possibly, as Dumont argues, because of an emphasis on the need for alliances. There are reports of the payment of considerable dowries (i.e. above the level of the ritually expected gold and saris to accompany the bride into marriage) by Brahmans in the city of Madras as early as the mid-1930s (perhaps influenced by the issue of paper currency), but elsewhere in the region we cannot find the practice reported until after Independence. During the 1950s it began to appear in Bangalore, and by the early 1960s dowries of some magnitude were reported in provincial towns and among the largest rival Brahmín landlords. In the study area the first dowry paid by a Vokkaliga (the major peasant caste) was in 1965. By 1980 most Harijans had ceased paying bridewealth and assumed that dowries would appear as the decade progressed.

The authors of two important studies have failed to realize that the important change in south India is the rapid move from bridewealth to dowry which may be encountered at different stages according to the village or caste examined. In the study area there is a large measure of agreement about the reasons for the surge of dowry through the community. Its coming is widely deplored and no one suggests that its practice is spiritually or socially uplifting, a form of Sanskritization. Instead, two reasons are given, both usually by each respondent.

19 See ibid. for the demonstration that this usually happens, at least at first, in the study area.
21 Tambiah, op. cit. in note 20; Barbara D. Miller, The Endangered Sex: Neglect of Female Children in Rural North India (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981) (which, in spite of its title, devotes considerable attention to south India).
The first is the affirmation that the marriage market has changed over a few decades from a surplus of potential husbands to a surplus of potential wives. We will examine this proposition later, but stress here that its truth is generally accepted in the study area and that there has been a reversal from a situation where the boy’s family actively sought a bride for him by going from house to house, to one where the girl’s family does this. In fact, among the younger marriages in the study area, the girl’s parents seem to have made the first approaches in only about half of all cases, but this is a considerably higher proportion than among the older marriages.

The second, affirmed by nearly everyone, can be considered a form of hypergamy (although not even anthropologists employ the term to describe what has happened in south India). Parents desire their daughters to marry educated men with urban jobs, because such men have higher and more certain incomes which are not subject to climatic cycles and which are paid monthly, and because the wives of such men will be freed from the drudgery of rural work and will usually live apart from their parents-in-law. In a sellers’ market, created by relative scarcity, there was no alternative but to offer a dowry with one’s daughter. The lead was given by the upper castes (who, some say, learnt the practice from the north) because they produced the first significant numbers of educated young men. Others add that, with increasing monetization and a growing desire for investment, it was inevitable that superior sons-in-law should be thought of as the best investment (even though, as shown below, there is debate about the extent to which there are returns from sons-in-law).

Traditionally, marriages to relatives have been preferred, and to a very considerable extent the parents of either the boy or girl could insist on such a marriage taking place. The preferred marriage was that of a man to his sister’s daughter (i.e. his niece) but nieces of a suitable age have often not been available. In fact, only 30 per cent of husbands and wives in the study area have been sufficiently closely related before marriage (one-third among Hindus and one-quarter among Muslims) for it to be possible to define the exact relationship. However, the proportion fell quite steeply as the ages of the spouses declined, showing clearly that the practice was becoming less common. In recent marriages (where the wife was less than 30 years or the husband less than 35 years old) only 20 per cent of marriages have been of this type. Half of all marriages between relatives were to first cousins (cross-cousin among Hindus and parallel-cousin among Muslims), but only six per cent were between uncle and niece.

Three reasons were given for the decline in marriage between relatives. The most common was the rise of dowry, with the temptation for the boy’s parents to seek a marriage outside the family, for the tradition persists that the cost of marriage between relatives must be small. The second was the same as the explanation given for the rise in village exogamy: a more heterogeneous society in terms of both education and wealth means that it is now more difficult to arrange an appropriate match and it is necessary to search through a larger population. The third is a growing belief that such marriages might produce sickly children, clearly a cultural import (probably affected both by north Indian and Western attitudes). Although marriages within the village are not frowned upon in south India (in spite of a lurking feeling that a daughter-in-law should not find it too easy to carry tales home and thus increase tensions between the two families), the wider search for potential spouses now proceeds much more often than not beyond the village, frequently, in the case of smaller castes, for 10 or 15 kilometres to the nearest


24 Although a further 38 per cent believe there was a distant relationship (sometimes merely because the family had obtained more than one wife from the same village).
villages populated by the same caste. It is said in the study area, and our statistics confirm the point, that marriage between relatives usually occurred at younger ages than that between non-relatives, partly because it had long been assumed and hence there were no delays, and partly because there was no apprehension about sending young girls off to alien households.

Finally, the age at marriage should be seen in the perspective of marriage decision-making. A point that must be emphasized is that marriages are still arranged. In the study area, 50 marriages have taken place over the last two years, but in only one have the spouses made the decision on their own. Elopement is still a cause of scandal and, to the young, of excitement. Many parents now aver that they consult their children before a final decision. In the case of daughters this means little more than informing them, with one exception: a girl still at school, and who has not reached menarche, may occasionally object that her education would be halted and may find some support within the family. Parents arranging the marriage of a son in his mid-twenties are increasingly likely to give him some veto power, especially if he has secondary school education or they lack property to act as a lever.

The extent to which the situation is misunderstood by outsiders is shown by the use of the English term, ‘arranged’. Parents are not primarily choosing a wife for their son, with the added qualification that she should suit them. They are primarily acting as the principals in selecting their daughter-in-law, the next female generation of the stem household, and it is that role which will determine the timing of the marriage and the characteristics of the girl. The most common reasons given in the study area for the timing of the marriage of a son is that some change in the household, such as the mother becoming ill, meant that more women to assist were urgently needed. It is nowadays also increasingly hoped that, as they grow older, the young spouses will be found to suit each other. Over half a century, the older couple have moved increasingly toward regarding the frequency of sexual relations between the younger couple, the time at which their daughter-in-law weans her children, and whether the younger couple practise birth control, as areas from which they should at least partly abdicate from power. There is also a growing concept that their grandchildren are foremost their children's children. Amongst the educated urban middle class similar attitudes are beginning to emerge with regard to marriage, but in the villages there is, as yet, little abdication of authority in this area.

This, then, is the context within which the rising age at women's marriage must be studied. Over a quarter of a century, the circumstances of rural marriage have been changed by two major transitions: that from bridewealth to dowry, which has been rapid and traumatic, and that towards marriage with non-relatives, which has been slower and caused much less concern.

The passing of child marriage

The virtual disappearance of marriage of girls before puberty and the lengthening gap between puberty and marriage appear, in the study area, to be two distinct phenomena and will be treated as such in the analysis. One reason for maintaining the distinction, at least from the viewpoint of a demographer interested in fertility, is that sexual relations between marriage and menarche cannot result in a conception. Another is that nearly every respondent in the study area maintains that such relations do not occur and never have. In this sense, child marriage is a marriage contract rather than a marriage, and sexual relations are prohibited until after a second ceremony following menarche

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55 Loc. cit. in note 4.
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(sobana which allows prastha or consummation). Some doubt is thrown on whether this really has always been the case by the determination of reformers to legislate for an age of consent, first set at ten years by the Vidyasagar Act in 1860 and later raised. Even when a Hindu girl has reached menarche before marriage, consummation of the marriage is not supposed to take place for several months until an auspicious time marked by a further ceremony (again the sobana or prastha). There is much apprehension about the possibility of her giving birth earlier than a full year after marriage, for only a period of twelve months provides clinching evidence that she was a virgin at marriage. In the study area, 95 per cent of Muslim marriages were consummated within 24 hours but among Hindus the median delay was three months, with only 25 per cent of couples having sexual relations within the first month.

Although child marriage has never been universal in south India, there have been strong supports for it. From the viewpoint of the bride's parents it ensures marriage before menarche, which once insured against divine disapproval and now insures against paying the dowry increases which mount from menarche onward (itself a sign that an unwed girl who has attained puberty can already be classed as damaged goods). From the viewpoint of the boy's parents it means that the daughter-in-law is still young and pliable, and that their son is no longer restless because no thought has been given to his marriage. When the marriage was one between relatives, especially one arranged by parents who had lived in the same joint household, the marriage had probably been envisaged for years and it was a relief to all involved to have the matter finally settled.

Yet child marriage over the last decade or two has almost disappeared in the study area. One reason—the obverse of the advantage cited above—is the smaller number of marriages between relatives. Others are connected with the payment of dowry, the fact that the search for a suitable spouse is now undertaken by the girl's rather than the boy's family, and by the increasing frequency of the need to obtain a degree of consent from the boy. Given that the latter is likely to be a young man well in his twenties, and that he may have visited the cinema several times (the situation in the study area for such young men) it is increasingly difficult to get him to accept a girl of immature appearance and the inevitability of waiting for years to consummate his marriage.

However, there are other forces—unrelated to these specifically south Indian changes, and hence operating right across the country—which militate against child marriage, and, in some cases, against marriage at menarche as well.

Child marriages were more important when mortality was higher and hence more capricious at all ages. Parents felt strongly that they should have fixed all their children's marriages before death, and also that they should have seen their grandchildren. A rise in expectation of life at birth of perhaps 20 years in Karnataka over the last 40 years has reduced this pressure. They were also more important, given that a family would usually try to marry its daughters before arranging the marriages of its sons, when women bore children from menarche to close to menopause—even where daughters married at 12 years of age, a daughter born to a woman 44 years old might preclude her son born when she was 18 from marrying before he was 38 years old, or alternatively involve an undesirable decision that he should marry before one or more of his sisters. The family planning programme (nearly half the women in the study area are now sterilized by their 35th birthday) is increasingly reducing this pressure. The century-old

26 Socially it is a marriage, and re-marriage after widowhood preceding menarche is discouraged (hence Gandhi's concern with virgin widows).
28 In 1982, of young men of marriageable age in the study area, half had been to the cinema during the previous month (half at places outside the local area where there was a 'tent cinema'), while half of the marriageable young women (aged over 15 years) had been to the cinema within the previous 6 months.
legislative fight against child marriage hardly had an immediate effect in the village, but there has undoubtedly been a cumulative effect, especially in convincing influential people who tend to proffer advice (especially as many people of this kind appear now to include the move against child marriage as one of the aims of the struggle for Independence).

However, all these changes now tend to be subsumed into the single attitude that pre-menarchic girls are immature. They are unsatisfactory as wives and daughters-in-law. They are ignorant not only because of their tender years, but also because their early marriage will have disrupted any schooling. There is also an awareness that society has changed. Because of schooling (and the majority of girls now receive some schooling) and the only partially related spread of concepts of child-dependency, child wives are unlikely to be worked as hard as was once the case, and, in alternations between their home of origin and their marital home, they are likely to spend a greater proportion of their life before menarche in the former.

The proper time to marry

Of the younger married persons (men under 35 years of age and women under 30), the median ages at marriage were 24 for men and 18 for women (depressed somewhat by the truncation effect that not all marriages in the cohort have yet taken place)—not dissimilar from the figures for the rural population of the whole State. There are some differences in age at marriage by caste and socio-economic status (closely related in the study area). Median ages for recent women’s marriages are 15 for Harijans, 17 for Vokkaligas (the main peasant caste), 18 for Jains and Muslims, and over 20 for Brahmins. Amongst men the ages are around 23 or 24 years for Harijans, Vokkaligas and Muslims, 25 for Lingayats and Jains, and 28 for Brahmins. However, all the differences among women and most among men can be explained by education. When asked what was the best age to marry, men gave a median age of 25 (60 per cent actually said 25). One-sixth of women said soon after menarche, and the remainder gave a median age of 18 years (three-quarters providing an age slightly older than that at which they had actually married). Amongst those in the same age range not yet married—younger on the whole but with somewhat higher levels of schooling—men still opted for 25 years but women for 20 years. It is clear that there are no substantial pressures from the younger generation to change men’s age at marriage, but there are upward pressures on women’s.

The attitude toward the proper age and circumstances of women’s marriage varies little by generation. There is no longer much evidence of any feeling of religious or moral transgression in failing to marry a girl by menarche. There are still strong feelings about the disaster that would befall the girl and her family if she were to become pre-maritally pregnant, and a related belief that it is irresponsible not to begin marriage arrangements at menarche, and highly irresponsible to leave a girl who has reached puberty at school. Parents with daughters at secondary school are keen that they should attain the SSLC (Secondary School Leaving Certificate, awarded after three years of secondary schooling, and two years before the university entrance examination) and increasingly apprehensive that menarche will occur before the examination—if that does happen, girls are usually removed from school even within days before the examination (exceptions being the Brahmin and certain other educated families).

Nevertheless, there is a keen awareness that the arrangement of a woman’s marriage takes time and that the difficulties and the resulting prolongation of the unmarried state after menarche increase each year. It is abundantly clear that, as long as the girl is kept at home and efforts towards match-making are under way, neither her parents nor those
of prospective grooms are much disturbed by this delay. The reasons include those which have led to the abolition of child marriage. Girls aged 14 or 15 years are immature as daughters-in-law and as wives. They often lack responsibility and may lack strength. Young adult men are now often reluctant to agree to a marriage with such a bride. However, there are two additional arguments that are now voiced most frequently. First, giving birth to a child at such an age may hurt both child and mother, and may make it difficult or impossible to bear any more children. Secondly, such young mothers are often unsuited to rearing the household’s children. The latter complaint is itself a sign of change – that the mother-in-law has at least partially abdicated from a position of absolute female authority.

This does not mean that the older generation who are responsible for the arrangements are usually ready as yet to think in terms of waiting until the girl is 19 or 20 years of age before taking action. To some extent they are deterred by the prospect of rising dowry, but their overwhelming fear is that no husband may be found at all. They also fear the possibility that their daughters will not remain virgins, and both they and their daughters fear gossip on this point, whether true or not. Such gossip may badly damage the chances of a good marriage not only for a girl but also for her sisters. There is also a related economic problem. A girl who has reached menarche is usually withdrawn from agricultural field work, especially paid work for other households which is so important for the lower castes, and cannot resume such activities until after marriage.

In the case of men, there is a mechanical case against their marrying younger, namely that their parents are usually anxious to marry off all their sisters first (not strictly adhered to if the age gaps are too great). But there are other arguments. Most families feel that a man who married much before his 25th birthday will be sexually immature and that such early drains on his sexual strength will have permanent effects on his physical strength. One of the reasons most commonly put forward for a large age gap between spouses is that this is a necessary mechanism for giving husbands sufficient dominance to resist their wives’ sexual demands. Most also feel that he will make an immature husband, unsuited to heading a nuclear family (or a segment of this kind within a larger family), and, as brides’ ages increase, likely to be too close to his spouse’s age to keep her under control or always to defer to his mother’s wishes against those of his wife.

The arguments against older marriage for men are not felt as strongly as any of the other situations but include two that most families make. First, men’s sexual powers begin to wane after about 30 years of age and steeply after 35. As a man becomes older, too much sexual activity drains him physically, affecting his other activities, while women have much greater capacity for sexual activity.29 It might be noted that widowers are not expected to bring such youthful vigour to their marriages. Secondly, such an old age at marriage carries a risk that the parents will die either before the marriage can take place or before the grandchildren are born. There is also some fear among parents that their son will become morally dissolute, and some apprehension among ageing but single young men that people will begin to tease them for not having really reached a man’s estate.30

Ideas in the community about what is happening to ages at marriage are fairly clear, namely that there has been a long, persistent and continuing rise in women’s age at marriage, and that men’s marriage ages displayed an upward trend that has probably


30 Srinivas, op. cit. in note 22.
halted, and may even have reversed, during the last decade or two. There is evidence, referred to above, from census analysis, that in Karnataka men's mean age at marriage may have peaked around 1961 and have since fallen slightly.

The reason given widely for the peaking of men's age at marriage is that sons, by their mid-twenties, are growing restless to attain a man's full estate by marrying. It is also quite frequently added that in the past young men did not grumble about being denied marital sexual relations, but that the cinema and other urban or external influences are changing this position and that parents are beginning to take such complaints into account. The continued rise of the women's age at marriage is explained by the increasing difficulty of finding suitable grooms. However, many respondents also mention the impact of education. They tend to take it for granted that girls who have been to school for any length of time should marry later, but find it hard to explain why. In fact, in the study area, primary schooling delayed women's marriage by one year and secondary schooling by a further two years. Until menarche, the main reason is that schoolgirls are not likely to be withdrawn in order to marry; beyond menarche, when most girls have been withdrawn from school, the chief cause is probably the delay arising from a greater difficulty in deciding upon an appropriate match for a girl of such qualifications. Secondary or tertiary, but not primary, education delays men's marriage, partly again because of the problem of matching, but partly so that such educated young men can become established.

Is there a marriage squeeze?

In the study area it is believed by everyone that potential wives were once scarce and now are in surplus. In fact, among the population as a whole the sex ratio is 105 males per 100 females, slightly above the ratio that has characterized Karnataka for most of the last 100 years and typical of the whole country.31 However, such ratios are an appropriate test only when men and women marry at the same age. When women marry at younger ages, a surplus of potentially marriageable young women is added to otherwise reasonably equal numbers; in fact, this is the mechanism that allows a substantial level of polygyny in many societies.22 Furthermore, in a growing population, where each age group is larger than the preceding older one, this surplus can be considerable, rising with the rate of growth of the population. In the study area, if we compare the numbers of single women over 15 years of age with those of single men over 22 years old (assuming the current seven-year age gap between spouses), there is a surplus of women amounting to 29 per cent. This ratio tends to exaggerate the problem, because more single men emigrate than women. Such emigrants, even in the city, remain members of the rural marriage market (as our urban interviews confirmed), because the parents who arrange the marriages remain in the countryside. For this reason, the statistics for larger areas, such as the whole State or country, provide better measures of the extent of the marriage squeeze.

This situation has developed over a few decades. The ratio in Karnataka (Mysore) of never-married men aged 15–54 to never-married women aged 10–44 (the upper limits of the age ranges are of little significance because of near-universal marriage) was 1.38 in 1931, similar to the position at the beginning of the century, but by 1961 it had dropped to 1.19 and by 1971 to 1.01. In India as a whole, for those three dates, the ratios were

31 Mitra, op. cit. in note 6, vol. 1, p. 376.
1.25, 1.12 and 0.93 respectively. Even in Karnataka, if we adopt a more realistic age gap between spouses for that State (seven years), there was a surplus of marriageable women already by 1971. This surplus is slightly increased by including widowed and divorced women and assuming a re-marriage rate of 33 per cent (in the study area the re-marriage rate for both men and women had been similar during a limited period preceding the study), and increases still further if we employ estimates (calculated for all India) of re-marriage rates among the widowed of 33 per cent for women and 66 per cent for men.33

The situation is that of a classic marriage squeeze. During the last half-century the expectation of life at birth has approximately doubled with a resultant broadening of the base of the age pyramid. Comparing the censuses of 1931 and 1971 for the whole country,34 the number of females aged 10–19 (the group containing most brides) was ten per cent larger than that of males aged 20–29 (the group containing most grooms) in 1931, but 30 per cent larger in 1971. Comparing the total number of females over ten years of age with that of males over 15 years of age (the all-India age gap between spouses is smaller than that of Karnataka), there was a surplus of 12 million females in 1931 compared with 20 million in 1971. The key to the situation is that these populations contained a surplus of widows who had not re-married over widowers who had not done so, a margin which was around 16 million both in 1931 and 1971 (a stability that attests to declining mortality). If we subtract this number from our previous surpluses, we find that a deficit of four million females in 1931 was converted to a surplus of four million in 1971.

There is, then, much truth in the popular belief that potential brides were in short supply a generation or two ago, and that this situation has reversed comparatively quickly to yield a surplus. This is the result of declining mortality during a period when the birth rate remained relatively high and the age gap between spouses considerable, and of a substantial surplus of unmarried widows over unmarried widowers. The latter is a product of three factors: greater discouragement of re-marriage for widows, slightly higher mortality among women, and, most significantly, the age gap between spouses which results in women being widowed earlier than men on the average.

Putting off marriage beyond menarche

A generation ago the major problem in investigating the rising age at marriage of women would have been the passing of child marriage and the number of girls whose marriages were delayed until near or at menarche. This is no longer the case. Nearly all families in the study area believe that attempts to marry daughters should begin at menarche and should be successful as soon as possible. Therefore, the explanation of the continuing rise in women’s age at marriage (now on average at least four years beyond menarche) must lie in the time taken in achieving that success. We now possess detailed information about that process for half the families in the nine-village area. We discussed the subject separately with married children and their parents, and discovered that there were few differences between them about the facts of each case. We shall examine the assessment of the general situation in the community, the specific comparison of the reasons for differing marriage ages between daughters and their mothers, and the extent of delay in the marriages of the younger generation.

33 P. N. Mari Bhat and R. Kanbargi, ‘A preliminary note on levels, trends and differentials in widow and widower remarriage in India in the twentieth century’ (Bangalore: Population Research Centre, Institute for Social and Economic Change, 1981), mimeographed, pp. 29ff. The authors estimated the absolute number of re-married widows in 1971 as 1.2 million and re-married widowers as 1.4 million with an average age at re-marriage of 29 and 40 years respectively. Of widower re-marriages, 60 per cent were levirate marriages to relatives.

34 I.e. pre-partition and post-partition India, but this makes a negligible difference to this type of analysis.
In terms of community attitudes, a point of great significance is that the proper time for a girl to marry is slowly rising above the age of menarche. It is often expressed in the form of relief that it took a year or two to arrange the marriage, and that no attempt was begun until menarche. The reason given is the girl's immaturity, but people admit that the age regarded as the threshold of maturity is slowly rising. Half of all reasons given relate to the dangers of having children immediately after menarche, mostly to both the mother's health and that of the child, the danger in the former case often being cited as the possibility of death or the inability to bear more children. Other reasons given are that a very young wife can neither work sufficiently hard nor responsibly enough as a daughter-in-law, nor adequately care for her husband or children. There is a subtle change in these latter concerns, because once the mother-in-law managed all these matters absolutely. Such changes in attitude are not likely to lead to a radical rise in women's age at marriage. Nearly everyone reports fears that a much longer delay might mean that no suitable husband, and sometimes no husband at all, could be found, and many point out that they could be found only by paying higher dowries. This is reported to be a relatively new but increasing problem. The supplementary reasons are fear of sexual immorality, and an even greater fear of gossip suggesting it, whether well founded or not. There is also some belief in declining fecundity.

Nevertheless, when discussing specific marriages in the community, around nine-tenths of all explanations are mechanical rather than social ones. There is almost equal stress on the admittedly interrelated problems of surplus females and the difficulty of finding husbands and on rising dowries and the trouble in marshalling resources. Some also argue that girls with substantial schooling usually do and should marry later, although, of the 177 brides of the last decade where the history of the marriage was examined in detail, only 16 continued schooling until menarche, 12 left immediately while, in only three of the remaining four cases was their continuation at school said to have postponed their marriage. In about one-tenth of cases marriage postponement was explained by children's protests about either marriage at that time or the chosen husband. A small minority talked of changed attitudes towards dependence and the concept of childhood mostly parents with some education. A few blamed the cinema, but most said it was new ideas, essentially beneficial ones, from the outside world.

However, when we sought explanations of beliefs in each family where a daughter married at a later age than her mother why this had happened, the role of schooling and increased dependence was mentioned in about 30 per cent of all cases although only four per cent explained it mechanically in terms of the girl still being at school. The single most important cause given was the problem of finding an acceptable level of dowry and raising the money for it (in 35 per cent of households) and that of finding a husband, given the shortage of potential bridegrooms, in the other 35 per cent, although most maintained that the two issues could hardly be separated.

In the marriages of all wives still under 30 years of age we examined the reasons for postponement. The reason why the search for a husband began later than had been anticipated was usually later menarche. Once the search had begun, the first serious attempt at negotiations led to marriage in three-fifths of all cases, although not always immediately. In most cases of failure the reason was the inability to agree about dowry payments, although daughters' views on the match were crucial in two cases and adverse information about the boy's character in another. Dowry is higher, and often marriages cannot be arranged at all, if there have been sexual indiscretions among any female members of the girl's family, or any criminal or socially disapproved behaviour in the family, or if the girl's complexion is dark. In one-fifth of marriages four or more possible husbands had been considered. Although it is now part of the folklore of the area that once the boys' families scoured the countryside seeking scarce wives while the situation
is now reversed, the first formal approach was made by the boy’s side in 60 per cent of all cases, although it is clear that this figure is much lower than it was a quarter of a century earlier. The go-betweens were nearly always relatives, although parents were the major actors in only two-thirds of all cases.

Change in men’s age at marriage

The community is well aware that there has been no radical change in men’s marriage age. Most parents oppose any significant downward change in the age at which their sons marry on the grounds that they would then be too immature to be a husband or father – again, an interesting view if the new couple is to be embedded, as is usual, in a joint family – and that premature regular sexual activity would reduce the amount of work they could do and endanger their health. On the other hand, they are apprehensive of delaying their sons’ marriages into their late twenties because the community will begin to regard them as immature and the right bride and the desired dowry will be harder to secure. There is a remarkable consensus that a man should marry at about 25 years. Nevertheless, many specific marriages were delayed: some because of problems in completing education or training or becoming established in a non-agricultural job; in a small but growing number because the sons demurred at their parents’ first choice; and in most because of problems encountered by the prospective bride’s family in raising money for dowry and wedding expenses. Nevertheless, the average age of men at marriage in both this community and in Karnataka State has probably been falling slowly for 20 years. The reason given in most cases for a slightly premature marriage is that a good opportunity occurred. A greater selection of potential wives is now available than a generation ago, and dowries offered, in contrast to the earlier period, can be very tempting. Some parents also seize the opportunity because they feel their sons are becoming sexually restless – often alleged to be caused by new social influences, especially the cinema – and fear that they will acquire a reputation as a rake.

The dynamics of marriage change

We now have most of the evidence in hand to explain the marriage trends noted at the beginning of the paper, and the explanation is almost certainly valid for most of mainland South Asia. First, some of the rise in average age of women’s marriage is statistical rather than biological. Hindu marriage with child brides was not consummated – according to religious fiat, and probably mostly in practice at least during the present century – until menarche. Strictly, sexual relations are delayed until a ceremony which occurs about three months after menarche, or, in the case of post-menarcheal marriages, three months after marriage (sobana or prastha). Child marriage has all but vanished as a result of imported social disapprobation, related largely to concepts of dependency and childhood (as the pejorative term ‘child’ marriage indicates) and of radical changes in the nature of marriage itself.

The underlying causes of these radical changes are demographic rather than social, although the exact form taken by subsequent developments did depend on the available social models. Before the persistent mortality decline following World War II, the expectation of life at birth was low (under 30 years in 1931), as was the rate of population growth (under one per cent per year during the 1920s and somewhat over one per cent during the 1930s) with a resulting age pyramid with steeper sides and more similarity

35 Loc. cit. in note 18.
between the numbers in adjoining age groups (at least in the age range 5–34 years) than during the last quarter of a century. Even so, a marked age difference between spouses at the time of first marriage would, before the Second World War, have provided an excess of potential brides, but for two factors. The first reason is India’s well known high sex ratio: 105 males per 100 females recorded in the Census of 1881, varying little until the Census of 1951 when a figure of 106 of was recorded, and thereafter slowly deteriorating until 1971 when the value was 107. In Karnataka (Mysore), as in the rest of the South, the situation was better until 1951, with ratios of 102 in 1881 and 103 from 1921 until 1951; thereafter the ratio, as in every other southern State except Kerala, began to rise, reaching 105 in 1971.38 The second reason is the large number of unmarriageable widows, a product of a substantial age gap between spouses, high mortality and discouragement of widow re-marriage.

The smaller number of females in the population has long been a matter of interest and concern. In every census during the last hundred years (especially that of 1901) attention has been drawn to this, and reasons suggested. Interest mounted with the detailed work undertaken by Pravin Visaria on the Census of 1961.37 The disparity in numbers arises from higher mortality of women, and in various studies it was shown that females were relatively neglected (together, in north India, with infanticide of girls at an earlier period in some social groups).38 The neglect was related to the nature of marriage, and sex ratios were highest precisely in those areas where hypergamy (marrying women to men higher in the social scale by providing large compensatory dowries) was commonest.39

During the last 30 years the deficit of potential brides has turned into a surplus in India as a whole, and also in Karnataka. From the point of view of parents of marriageable daughters, a sellers’ market quite literally became a buyers’ market. The response was a transition from bridewealth to dowry, a change rendered easy by the models provided of Brahmanical and royal marriages in ancient literature40 and by the earlier move to widespread dowry in north India. Indeed, the movement to dowry has been described for another area in southern Karnataka and has been attributed solely to cultural change, to Sanskritization.41 The evidence from the present study is very different. In nine villages we have not found a single case of parents of daughters praising the change or explaining it in any way other than necessity; they haggle for the minimum dowry required to obtain the son-in-law upon whom they have set their eye. Subsequently, they are, of course, proud of their daughter’s new husband and of the fact that they managed to put together such an impressive dowry and to provide such a lavish marriage. The only Sanskritic touch may be the way the change occurred over time – from the higher to the lower castes. But this may well be largely explained by the order in which the decline of mortality occurred, by the relative levels of education and wealth needed to identify new solutions

36 The provisional results of the Census of 1981 indicate that this trend may have been arrested and provide a ratio of 104, B. K. Das, Director of Census Operations, Karnataka, Census of India, 1981: Series-9, Karnataka, Provisional Population Totals: Paper 2 of 1981 (Bangalore, 1981).
39 Khatriya castes of Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Punjab and Haryana.
40 Tambiah, loc. cit. in note 20, p. 68ff.
41 Epstein, op. cit. in note 22.
and to adopt them, by the danger of socially innovating unless the way has been shown by those at higher levels in society, by the order in which considerable numbers of educated young men in each caste became available, and by the strength of the feeling that their daughters should not be subject to agricultural drudgery. The educated are well aware that all morality does not favour high dowries and lavish weddings; the government of independent India disapproves of both and has proscribed the former and attempted to limit the latter.

The situation is not simple. The size of the dowry moves steeply with the desirable qualities of the son-in-law in a way that bride price did not for daughters-in-law. Furthermore, desirable qualities are defined to an astonishing degree by the extent of modern education and the access of the bridegroom to an urban occupation (Westernization rather than Sanskritization), as well as the amount of property owned. The problem is that the rise in modern education occurred at about the same time as declining mortality began to have a real impact on the marriage market. Many – but not most – of the families ascribe greater importance to the growth in availability of prospective bridegrooms who were not illiterate farmers or agricultural labourers than to the change in the balance of the sexes when explaining the rise of dowry. Education is almost certainly not the fundamental source of change, as is shown by the fact that peasants' sons who have had little or no education can demand considerable dowries, although this is a relatively recent phenomenon. Nevertheless, education is largely the way of ordering the new marriage market.

There are questions which are difficult to resolve with regard to the marriage market. Families who do not seem to be particularly oriented towards children, and certainly not towards daughters, will borrow impoverishing sums, or sell vitally needed land to secure superior husbands for their daughters. They go still further. They are giving their daughters more schooling, as is shown by the declining sex differentials at every level of education, even though such investments cannot be offset against the amount of dowry. Rather the schooling is explained as the minimum qualification for securing an educated husband and as a necessity for helping children with their schooling, being an efficient wife and housekeeper, and looking after the whole family's health. The parents are adamant that they secure little from their daughter's marriage, only the knowledge that she will not toil as her mother did, and that, if she has an urban husband, she will be spared farm work and the vicious seasonal cycle and alternation from wet to drought years that rural life entails as well as securing a regular monthly income. They almost certainly underestimate their gains. Probably the two largest ones are negative. First, if they were not to borrow to the limit – and some do not – they would lose social esteem which, in settled rural societies where most pleasures are social relations, is all important. A good marriage, a large dowry and a fine wedding are talked about by the parents for the rest of their lives. Secondly, south Indian parents guarantee the economic well-being of their daughters even after marriage. If a married daughter's husband fails to support her adequately, then her parents must supply food grains or a milch buffalo or cow so that she can sell milk. Such a situation is not only an economic burden but also the source of much social embarrassment and is to be avoided at all costs. Yet is seems likely that there are greater positive advantages than are usually admitted. A family's social horizons are broadened by the link, even through a daughter, with the exciting urban world; one needs connections just to be able to participate at all in such non-traditional life. Younger children may be sent to the urban household for further education. However unorthodox help from married daughters may be, it is probably given on a larger scale than most families will readily admit – periodic visits home (including those for the birth of children) provide one avenue. Educated sons-in-law can give advice and
may help in dealings with bureaucrats or in private negotiations. They may also give assistance to their wives’ parents if the latter are clearly in need during old age.

What effect has the growth of a dowry had on the society and on the position of women?

Perhaps the first point to make is that dowry and wedding expenses are not a reviving fund, little more that a book entry. Where such a situation is found is among pastoral peoples of the African savanna where a single bridewealth payment can take the form of a herd of cattle, sometimes equivalent to a century’s income per head, and where lineages, large enough to have a similar number of young and women, pay young man’s bridewealth expenditure with the cattle they have just received from the marriage of a young woman of the lineage. Most of the expenditure in India now comes from the girl’s side, but half of it may not be dowry but wedding costs where the expenditure is dispersed among the merchants and service castes of the community. The dowry is not a simple transfer from the parents of the girl to those of the boy. Much of it is retained by the younger couple, although more traditional parents of bridegrooms can demand a share and the existence of stem and stem-joint families can result in an upward leakage. Furthermore, dowry is not offset by the payment of marriage expenses—the changing marriage market has seen to that. Thirty years ago the bridewealth, and the much more expensive wedding costs, in the study area were very largely paid by the bridegroom’s family, the wedding being held in their house; now by far the greater share is borne by the bride’s family and the locale of the wedding has moved to their house. That dowry is not seen as a reviving fund, and does not act as one, is evidenced by the determination of the family not to marry children of the opposite sex alternately, but to marry all the girls first. Already families in which all children are daughters are being relatively impoverished compared with those in which all are sons—they sell more land and borrow greater amounts for marriages. At a time when all children are beginning to be something of an economic burden, the transition is occurring more rapidly in the case of daughters. It is probably no accident that, even in south India, changes in the sex ratio showed a deteriorating situation as regards females between 1951 and 1971: by three per cent in Tamil Nadu, and by one per cent in Karnataka and Kerala. Relatively, boys were being fed and cared for better than girls—not because of a negative emotion, such as hatred of daughters, but because of the more positive awareness of where the family’s safety and priorities lay.

The second point is that a massive readjustment process to the marriage squeeze is already under way. The change in sex ratios, even though they are occurring somewhat more rapidly among the young than among the whole population, will make only a marginal difference. However, the narrowing of the age gap between spouses will make a very great difference. It is probable that the gap in Karnataka is already being closed by at least one year per decade and that this process will continue for the rest of the century. The reason is that brides’ ages are being raised, and that the most important cause is the difficulties encountered in marrying them: the shortage of husbands, the increasing delays in agreeing to ever-mounting dowries and finding means of meeting them, and the increasing educational and occupational heterogeneity in the society, which means greater problems in arriving at a suitable match. At the same time, bridegrooms’ ages are not rising. One reason is that there is a ceiling beyond which young men are unwilling to remain without a wife and without being head of a family, even if at first only a segment of a larger family. This is being reinforced by social change with a growing emphasis on marital sexuality and a weakening of parents’ absolute control of sons’ marriage ages.\textsuperscript{42} It is also reinforced by a reluctance of the older generation to postpone the birth

\textsuperscript{42} Caldwell et al., ‘The determinants of fertility decline…’, \textit{loc. cit.} in note 4.
of grandchildren, especially the establishment of a continuing male line. Nevertheless, the main reason is almost certainly the temptation to secure an advantageous marriage in terms of the quality of the bride and the size of the dowry when this is offered. These temptations are occurring ever more frequently as the surplus of potential brides builds up. Thus, dowry provides a powerful mechanism in South Asia, unlike the rest of the Third World, for mitigating the impact of the marriage squeeze. Nevertheless, the non-demographic effects are likely to be very great, tending towards a negation of every one of the benefits believed to accrue from the substantial age gap. Where brides are older and closer to the bridegrooms in age, they will probably fit less readily into the extended family, and their emotional bonds with their husbands will probably compete more with the bonds between husbands and their mothers. Wives and husbands will probably move further toward joint decision-making.

The third point is that fertility in the study area has been declining slowly for two decades, as has been the case generally in south India, and perhaps later and less generally in north India. This change is probably already helping to reduce the dimensions of the marriage squeeze, but it may be decades before its impact is more important than the reduction in the age gap between spouses.

Marriage delay and fertility decline

We will now return to the original question. Is it a coincidence that fertility decline and the deferment of women's age at marriage are occurring at the same time, or is the deferment of marriage just one more device, paralleling the deliberate control of marital fertility and perhaps at first being more acceptable to a traditional society, for controlling overall fertility?

The latter question is the easiest to dispose of. In an examination of a decade's marriages among a population of 5,000 persons, marriages largely characterized by brides marrying later than their mothers did, we did not find a single case of the marriage being explained or justified in terms of a smaller final family size, or even of young parents having fewer children on their hands while they were establishing themselves. Indeed, it is widely felt that a woman who marries two or three years after menarche will probably be more fecund because her reproductive powers will not be impaired by early damage.

The delay of women's marriage has been brought about by a marriage squeeze caused by a decline in mortality that steepened after the Second World War. In contrast the fertility decline resulted from a reduction in the net value of children and was accelerated by a family planning programme that provided a mechanism which allowed a quick response to these changed circumstances. Indeed, the decline in fertility will ultimately be one mechanism for reducing the pressure on women to marry later.

Nevertheless, the two processes are far from being unrelated. Mortality decline is partly a product of imported medical technology that has been instrumental in the elimination or reduction of a number of infectious diseases. It is also the product of economic growth and complex social and political changes. Since Independence in 1947, Indian governments have placed an emphasis on rural health services. They have placed even more emphasis on schooling, and the evidence in the study area is that the education of mothers has been a more important determinant of child survival than has access to

43 Ibid.
health services (a finding which is not unique to India). In an area where the impact of parents' income on child mortality is relatively slight, mothers with no schooling lose 20 per cent of their children within five years of the child's birth, compared with 13 per cent for mothers with elementary schooling, and 11 per cent for those with secondary schooling. Social and political changes have produced greater equality within the family, and this, together with increasing commercialization, has made it more likely that in times of food shortage the rationed household food stores will be supplemented by additional supplies from the market. These are exactly the changes in the family economy which have made fertility decline inevitable, and they are central elements in the mortality decline.

The declines in mortality and fertility are the products of profound, world-wide changes during the last half century. One could even plausibly argue that the leap forward in medical technology, and even more the means and will to distribute the new technology to rural populations of the Third World, were part of the same process of creating a global economy and society as that which made the independence of India inevitable. The synchronous movements are very far from accidental.

Each change sets in movement new changes. The steep rise in dowry, as well as the educational costs and the withdrawal from labour imposed by the need to make girls suitable wives for the scarcer husbands—especially those with the desirable qualities produced by the growth of non-agricultural employment, has rendered the birth of girls much less economically advantageous than used to be the case in south India. Stronger emotional links between husbands and wives, partly a product of shrinking age gaps, and the increasing threat that they will withdraw from stem or stem-joint families, render sons, too, less economically advantageous to patriarchs. Thus, the marriage squeeze will certainly contribute to sustaining fertility decline. The later marriage of daughters makes it more difficult to keep the joint family together, with the sons unmarried, until all the girls are safely placed in marriage. Ultimately, the family planning programme, by placing an upper limit on women’s age at reproduction of perhaps less than 30 years, will do something to solve this problem. In the meantime, it will become increasingly necessary to marry sons before all their sisters are married.

Thus, the postponement of women's marriage is not a mechanism at the individual, family or social level, either consciously or unconsciously, for controlling fertility. Rather the postponement of marriage and the control of fertility are products of the same complex of changes. Nevertheless, the fertility transition will ultimately be one of the forces reducing the pressure toward rising women’s ages at marriage and rising dowries. As yet, the increase in women’s age at marriage has done little in rural areas to reduce fertility levels. However, marriages have now been delayed to the point where further delays will almost certainly result in reducing fertility and in providing daughters with greater veto powers over their marriage arrangements (thus, perhaps, delaying marriage even further). Furthermore, wives are now becoming sufficiently old to play a more important role in making decisions about fertility control, a significant point, as there is an element of the position of women as well as the cost of children in some of these decisions. Of even greater demographic and social significance is the fact that the squeeze has

46 Caldwell et al., 'The determinants of fertility decline...', loc. cit. in note 4.
48 Loc. cit. in note 18.
49 Caldwell et al., 'The determinants of fertility decline...', loc. cit. in note 4.
proceeded to the point in the study area, and doubtless elsewhere, where some of the single women may not marry at all. One-sixth of the women aged 20–24, and three per cent of those aged 25–29, are still not married. Parents have talked for years of the fear that their daughters might not marry, but now it is likely that families and societies will have to accommodate themselves to a spinster class, as, almost certainly prior to the transition period of the present century, they accommodated themselves to bachelors.\textsuperscript{50}

The rise in women’s age at marriage is almost certainly self-sustaining in that, as the society becomes more accustomed to unmarried girls beyond the age of menarche, there will be less concern about the situation. One result will be a greater likelihood of girls staying on at school, which will itself be a further force for raising the age at marriage. The reduced age gap between spouses is already producing, at least in the context of rural India, a somewhat more companionate marriage, and that change too will not be easily reversible.

\textsuperscript{50} The Census of 1911 showed five per cent of men over 40 years in the District as never married.