Women's Participation in Selecting Spouse and Fertility Preferences in India

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Abstract: Marriage is a socially essential and vital event in the life of a person. Though the person itself decides the partner in the developed world; with increasing modernization and urbanization, the pattern of marriage is also changing in developing countries from arranged to self-selection mate. This study examines women's participation in the selection of spouse and fertility preference in India. The present study has utilized the data from the India Human Development Survey (2011-2012). The bivariate and binary logistic method have been performed to examine the participation in decision making of marriage and fertility preference. This study found that one-sixth of women have made participation in selecting their partner, and most of such women have two children but prefer to have one boy and one girl child to complete the family. While those women who did not participate in partner's selection, have three or more children and desired to have an additional child. This study provides enough evidence to show that choosing a partner may influence fertility behaviour.

*Keywords***:** Women Participation, Marriage, Fertility, Preference, IHDS-2, India.

Introduction

Marriage is the core of family life. After birth, probably the next important and vital event in the life of a person is his or her marriage (Ratra 2006). It is a way of controlling sex and fixing the responsibility of adult sexual meeting governed by society(Brien and Sheran, 2003). It is not only an essential condition for childbearing but also being the primary determinant of fertility (Bongaarts 1983), especially in a country like India. However, demographers and researchers have long back focused on fertility implications of marriage in the past (Bongaarts, 1983; Coale 1971; Weeks 1986). They showed that women who tend to marry early would likely to have more children because of the protracted period of exposure to become pregnant. But aspects related to marriage transition such as the process of selection of spouse have not been under consideration. Desai and Andrist (2010) have pointed out that very few women have little say or input into their marriage and choice of spouse.

In India, marriage below 18 years for women and below 21 years for men is prohibited by national law still one-fourth of the women are married before attaining the legal age (IIPS and Macro International 2007; Alexander, Garda, Kanade, Jejeebhoy and Ganatra, 2006). It is because of the consent of the daughters in selecting the spouse when they are young, which is negligible, which further motivates the parents got their daughter to marry early (UNICEF 2001).

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Many researchers pointed out that groom and bride barely know about their future spouse which is like a marriage between the strangers (Bott et al. 2003; Desai and Andrist 2010). But researchers at the same time found the changing marriage pattern due to moderation and globalization. These are triggered by increasing age at marriage, higher education, financial autonomy, access to media, and staying in an urban atmosphere (Alexander et al. 2006; Chandrasekhar 2010).There is a shift from an arranged marriage to love or self-selected marriage among younger than older cohorts and urban than rural residents (Jejeebhoy and Halli 2006).Young couples staying in urban areas are more likely to select their counterparts by indulging in love relationships, and even the determinants of spouse selection differ by gender (Malhotra 1991). Any boy or girl wants to marry the spouse of their level. In other words, education homogamy plays an essential role in the selection of their life partner (Borkotoky and Gupta 2016). Many studies in India has concluded the role played by parents in the selection of spouse (Sandhya 2013) but parents' education was not part of their integral research. There is strong preference of in-caste marriage for mate selection in India(Banerjee et al. 2013). Another study based on IHDS-1 data finds that the place of residence, women's education level, religion, caste and birth cohort emerged as the critical components of women's marital choice and marriage duration (South, Trent, and Bose 2016).

Since ages, it has seen that population who had been delaying the age at first marriage, likely to experience the decreased fertility rates. While age at marriage is lower among the traditional populations in Asia and Africa, high levels of fertility have been observed (Bongaarts 1983; Weeks 1986). In developing countries like India, the first child has significant consequences on the demographic character of the population (Rajaretnam 1990). Kumar & Danabalan (2006) had found that women with higher educational status than their husbands had reported having a higher marriage to first birth interval. In developing countries, fertility is higher among the illiterates, and after that, it decreases rapidly as some minimum level of education achieved — however, through women's desire to have fewer children and an increase in the level of contraceptive prevalence. There is a high chance of working outside homes among educated women, which further diminishes fertility levels (Cochrane 1979).

The process of marriage has its importance and needs to be understood since it not only points the inception of reproductive life but also it reflects on family life. Jejeebhoy and others pointed out the benefits of self-selected spouse in their study of 13,912 married women aged 15-24 years in which they found that women having semi- and self-arranged marriages were more likely to communicate and interact with their husband as compare to family-arranged marriage (Jejeebhoy et al. 2013). Theories of demographic transition of familial change suggest that a shift from familial-arranged marriage to participation in selecting spouse can bring changes in the family passage and fertility (Caldwell 1982; Fox 1975; Mitchell 1971). The impact on the fertility of this change may be entirely different for the beginning of childbearing than for the end of childbearing.

In India, the role of women has been limited in many contexts, as discussed by many researchers. This study attempts to explore the choice of women in selecting a spouse and its linkages with fertility behaviour and preferences after the marriage in terms of number of children and their sex composition. It also explores the role of woman's parental education in her participation in the spouse selection.

Data and Techniques

For this study, we have used secondary data of the second round of the India Human Development Survey 2011-2012 (IHDS-2). IHDS-2 is a nationally representative, a multi-topic survey, which has been jointly carried out by researchers from the National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER), New Delhi and the University of Maryland(Desai and Reeve 2012). IHDS contains information regarding the proxy information on migrants as well as remittances from them, detailed income and employment data, morbidity and health expenditure, local crime, sexual harassment, gender relations and marriage history among other contextual health and economic research topics. The quality of this survey has always matched with other large-scale surveys like National Family Health Survey (NFHS)and National Sample Survey (Desai and Andrist 2010). The first round of these surveys was conducted during 2004-2005 and has become a premier public resource for researchers in India and abroad. The second round was undertaken during 2011-2012 and covered 42,152 households with a response rate of more than 95 percent. In this study, the total sample size of women in the age group 15 to 49 years is 39,459 in India.

Dependent Variables

According to the need for the study, the dependent variable has computed with the help of the two questions, the first question asked from the respondent 'Who have chosen your husband?' and the available response was 1. 'Respondent herself', 2 'Respondent and parents/ other relatives together', 3 'Parents /another relative alone', 4 'Other'. The second question asked from the respondent, 'Did you have any say in the selection of husband' and the response was in 'yes or no.' For computing the women participation, form the first question we have taken the response of women who have said 'Respondent herself' and 'Respondent and parents/ other relative together' and from the second question we have taken respondents who have said yes. So with the help of these two questions, we have made to a dependent variable having two categories namely women participated and women not participated in selecting a spouse for marriage.'

Independent variables

The independent variables included in this study are age at marriage, marriage cohort, place of residence, mother education, father education, religion, social group, regions of India, number of children, and desired number of children in association with the target variable. These variables have taken after an extensive literature search. Age at marriage and age of the respondent are categorized into four segmented such as below 15, 15-20, 21-25 and 25+ years. The respondent educational level of the household members as well as eligible women was available in the completed number of the years of schooling. However, to overcome the problem of the insufficient sample in each educational category, the education of respondent has been segmented into four groups viz. illiterate, 0-8 years, 8- 12 years, 12 and above years. The parent's education (Mother and Father) have also been taken, and classified into four groups viz. illiterate, Below 8 years, 8-10 years and 11 and more years for both Mother and Father. Religion has been segmented into three major groups viz. Hindu, Muslim, and Other; Caste/Tribe was classified into SC (Scheduled Castes), ST (Scheduled Tribes), OBC (Other Backward Class) and Other.

In this analysis, the regional breakdown by state corresponds to IHDS demarcations: North: Jammu and Kashmir, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Rajasthan, Uttarakhand; Central: Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh; east: Bihar, Orissa, West Bengal; Northeast: Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim, Tripura; West: Goa, Gujarat, Maharashtra; South: Kerala, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, and Andhra Pradesh and union territories. This entire region segmented with the help of the NFHS report. This study needs to analyze the sex-composition of children among women participated and not participated in spouse selection. For constructing the sex-composition of children, the information was available in form number of sons and daughter. With the help of this information, the sex-composition was made and grouped as one child (one son, and one daughter), two children (two sons, one son/one daughter and two daughters) and for three children (three sons, two sons/ one daughters and one son and two daughters). For fertility preferences, the information was available on total number of children and wantedness to the additional child/children. From these two questions fertility preference was made such as Desired=Achieved, Desired>Achieved, and Desired<Achieved.

To understand the desired number of children and duration between children, the question was available in the form how many more children do you want to have (in addition to the child you are own carrying)? Moreover, another question is when you would want your next child to be born within two years, after', or do you have a preference. The number of children has segmented as one child, two children and three and more than three and duration for children as taken as it was available. However, to study the number of children in the reproductive period of women, a data as possible if you could go back to the time you did not have any children and could choose the number of children to have in your life, how many would that be? The available information was categorized as "no child, one, two, and three or more children."

The Bivariate and Multivariate techniques are applied to unit level data. These include chi-square methods to identify the association between the dependent and independent variables. The odds ratio has been calculated using the multivariate logistic regression model to assess the effects of independent variables on the dependent variable. To examine the reliability of these odds ratios, we have provided 95% confidence interval of the odds ratio. The whole data analysis has been carried out in SPSS version 22.

Results

Figure 1 shows that around 60 percent of the women have participated in the selection of the spouse in India. While figure 2. depicts the trend in the participation of women in selecting their spouse by marriage cohort in India. From the 1960s to the last decade, women participated in the marriage increases from 18 percent to 73 percent.

Now, we should have a look at the scenario of marriage decision in Indian states. It is necessary because every state has its own characteristics, including cultural hindrances in marriage decision making. IHDS-2 data provide us insights into it. Map 1 represents the scenario of women participation in marriage across Indian states. Map 1 depicts that North-eastern states women have high autonomy in marriage decision that includes the proportion to be higher than

90 percent in Manipur, Meghalaya, Nagaland, and Sikkim. Even more than 90 percent of women in one southern states too, i.e., Tamil Nadu has made its point while marrying. Remaining north-eastern and southern states of India have been lying in the range 60-90 percent of the percent women participation in the spouse selection for marriage, that shows that women in these states even put up their point while deciding their partner. On the other side, in Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh, less than 30 percent of women from even in the recent cohort participated in marriage, followed by the other in the central eastern regions of India states excluding West Bengal.

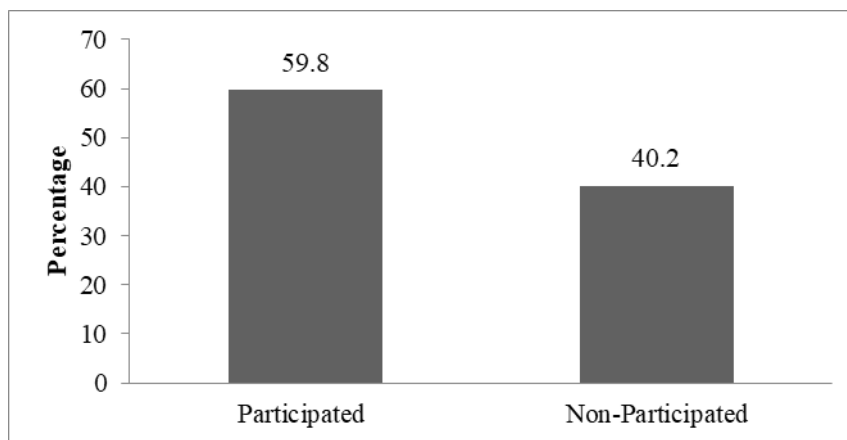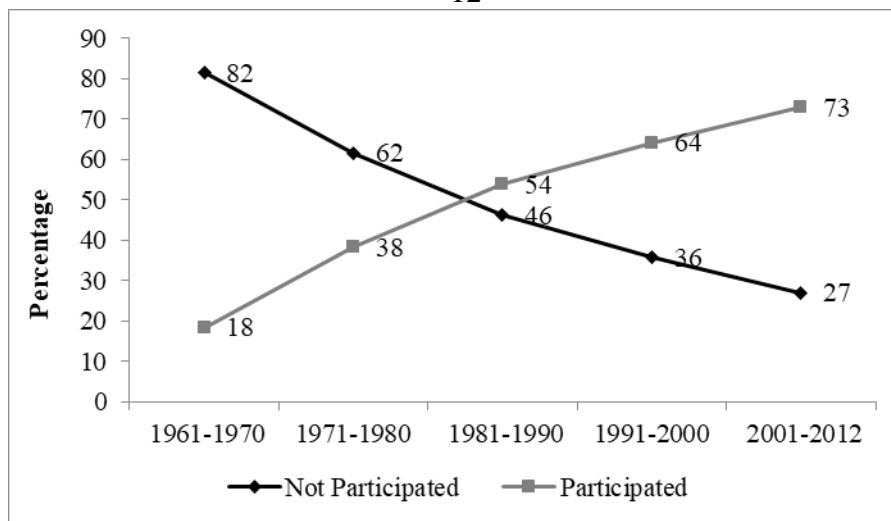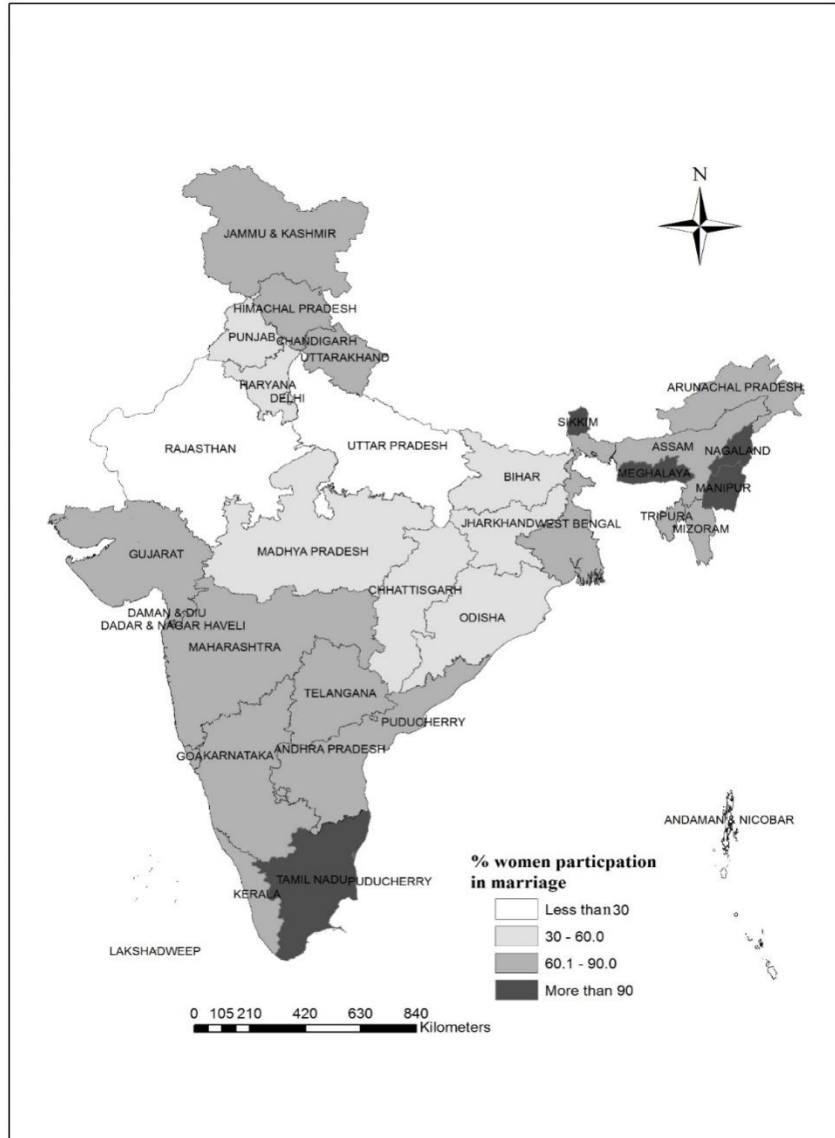Figure 1: Participation of women in the selection of spouse, India, 2011-2012

Figure 2: Participation of women in the selection of their spouse by marriage cohort, India, 2011-12

Map 1: Women's participation in spouse selection by states of India, 2011-12

Results from the multivariate logistic regression presented in Table 1 that depict odds ratios for women participation in selecting the mate by various background characteristics. Before applying this statistical technique, all the independent variables has been checked for association using chi-square mechanism and found to be significantly associated with the dependent variable in this study. The table illustrates that there are 3.38 times higher odds of participation in selecting spouse among women aged 26 or more. Urban women have significantly higher odds in choosing the mate than their counterparts. The higher the respondent education as well as her mother's education, the higher the odds of getting chance of the respondent in mate selection. Muslim women have higher odds to get the opportunity to participate in choosing as compared to Hindu women. OBC women have lower odds as compare to SC women in the mate selection. As compare to northern India, women of other regions have higher odds in choosing their partner except central India.

Table 1: Logistic regression of women participated in selecting spouse by selected background, India, 2011-2012

Background characteristics	Exp (β)	95% C.I for EXP(β)	
		Lower	Upper
Age at marriage			
Below 15®			
15-20	1.840***	1.709	1.981
21-25	2.711***	2.455	2.993
26 or more	3.386***	2.816	4.073
Place of Residence			
Rural®			
Urban	1.188***	1.126	1.252
Respondent Education			
Illiterate®			
0-8 years	1.535***	1.444	1.632
8-12 years	2.261***	2.109	2.424
12-15 years	3.827***	3.430	4.269
Mother Education			
Illiterate®			
Below 8 class	1.238***	1.144	1.339
8 -10 class	1.546***	1.364	1.752
11+ class	2.040***	1.549	2.688
Father Education			
Illiterate®			
Below 8 class	0.994	0.929	1.063
8-10 class	0.983	0.909	1.062
11+ class	0.920	0.818	1.034
Religion			
Hindu®			
Muslim	1.207***	1.119	1.303
Other	0.898*	0.809	0.997
Caste/ Tribes			
SC®			
ST	0.959	0.870	1.058
OBC	0.687***	0.644	0.733
Other class	1.005	0.938	1.077
Regions			
North®			
Central	0.710***	0.662	0.761
East	1.301***	1.212	1.397
Northeast	6.170***	5.277	7.215
West	2.977***	2.753	3.220
South	7.434***	6.878	8.035

Note: ® Reference category; Level of significance***$p<0.001$, **$p<0.01$, *$p<0.05$
SC (Scheduled castes) ST (Scheduled tribes) OBC (Other backward class)

Table 2: Percentage distribution by number of children and women's participation in spouse selection, India, 2011-2012

Women	0	1	2	3+	Mean	N
Participated						
Age at marriage						
Below 14	2.7	8.4	29.5	35.9	2.4	1615
15-20	8.5	18.2	36.9	36.4	2.0	15128
21-25	14..8	32.8	39.3	13.1	1.6	4846
26 or more	25.4	36.4	31.0	7.2	1.3	1018
Total	9.9	20.9	36.5	32.7	1.9	22607
Not Participated						
Age at marriage						
Below 14	3.7	7.3	17.7	71.7	2.5	3404
15-20	6.7	10.7	27.4	55.2	2.3	11755
21-25	13.3	25.0	36.2	36.2	1.9	1508
26 or more	21.3	34.6	27.6	27.6	1.5	204
Total	6.7	11.3	26.0	56.0	2.3	16871

Table 3: Percentage distribution by fertility preferences and women's participation in selecting spouse by, India, 2011-2012

	Desired=Achieved	Desired>Achieved	Desired<Achieved
Participated			
Age at marriage			
Below 14	3.3	0.8	95.9
15-20	8.6	4.1	87.3
21-25	14.5	7.0	78.5
26 or more	23.8	8.5	67.7
Total	**9.9**	**4.5**	**85.5**
Not Participated			
Age at marriage			
Below 14	3.8	2.5	93.6
15-20	5.9	4.3	89.8
21-25	13.0	6.6	80.4
26 or more	18.4	8.9	72.7
Total	**6.1**	**4.1**	**89.8**

Table 2 shows the percentage distribution number of children by women participation in selecting of the spouse. The two-thirds of women who have participated in marriage decision have two or fewer children with total 1.9 mean number of children whereas 80 percent of women who did not participate in their mate selection have at least two children with total 2.3 children on average. Marriage in early ages in any of the group directly related to higher the number of children in the future.

Table 3 shows the percentage distribution of fertility preferences by women participated in selecting spouse Around 10 percent of women among those who have participated in mate selection have equal number of desired and actual number of children whereas 85 percent of participating women have surplus number of children actually what they desired. On the other hand, nearly 90 percent of women among the non-participating group have more children than they had desired and only six percent of women had equal number of actual and desired number of children.

Table 4 shows the percentage distribution of the desired number of children and time to the next child by women participation in selecting their spouse. Among those who participated inmate selection, 26 percent reported the desire to have more children, which is much higher as compared to women who did not participate in marriage. The sixty percent of women who have participated in spouse selection have the desire to have an additional child; 36 percent have the desire for two more children. On the other hand, among women who have not participated in mate selection, 55 percent want to have one more child and rest desired for two or more additional children. More than one-third of women among both the participated and non-participated group need an additional child after within two years.

Table 4: Percentage distribution by desired numbers of children and time to have them by women's participation in selecting spouse, India, 2011-2012

Women	Yes	Additional Desired Number of Children				Duration for Children			
		1	2	3+	N	Within 2 year	Later	Up to God	N
Participated									
Age at marriage									
Below 14	13.3	67.8	31.0	1.2	40	23.7	34.3	42.1	107
15-20	72.3	60.0	34.8	5.1	1145	30.8	36.4	32.8	2668
21-25	12.8	59.4	37.8	2.8	591	32.1	41.8	26.1	1321
26 or more	1.6	60.0	38.3	1.7	142	36.3	34.0	29.7	295
Total	25.8	60.1	35.8	4.2	1918	31.3	37.7	31.0	4391
Not Participated									
Age at marriage									
Below 14	3.3	54.3	39.4	6.3	149	32.2	39.1	28.2	276
15-20	62.9	54.8	36.3	8.9	755	33.7	41.8	24.5	1506
21-25	28.1	54.8	34.3	10.9	147	26.7	44.9	28.4	335
26 or more	5.7	64.8	35.2	0.0	24	31.6	38.6	29.9	41
Total	19.2	54.9	36.6	8.6	1075	32.7	41.8	25.5	2212

Table 5: Percentage distribution of women participated in selecting spouse by preference of children in her reproductive period, India, 2011-2012

Number of children	Number of Children		Number of Sons		Number of Daughters	
	Percentage	Total	Percentage	Total	Percentage	Total
No child	0.6	242	0.6	195	2.2	764
One child	4.7	1852	67.8	23498	84.6	28916
Two children	63.7	23927	29.5	10141	12.6	4419
Three or more children	31.0	11616	2.1	744	0.7	252
Total	100.0	37637	100.0	34578	100.0	34351
Participated						
No child	0.4	67	0.7	147	2.5	497
One child	6.1	1432	76.9	15257	87.5	16996
Two children	71.5	15435	20.8	4017	9.3	1894
Three or more children	22.0	4695	1.5	281	0.6	128
Total	100.0	21629	100.0	19702	100.0	19515
Not participated						
No child	0.9	175	0.4	48	1.6	267
One child	2.5	420	54.3	8241	80.3	11920
Two children	52.2	8492	42.3	6124	17.4	2525
Three or more children	44.4	6921	2.9	463	0.7	124
Total	100.0	16008	100.0	14876	100.0	14836

Table 5 shows the percentage distribution of women participation in selecting their spouse by preferred number of children by sex composition. Overall, the majority of women prefer to have two children (64 %). Among those who participated in marriage, 72 percent desired to have two children; on the contrary among those who did not participate in marriage only 52 percent wants two children and a higher proportion (44 percent) of women desires for three or more children. Among all the women who want to have only one child, 68 percent desired to have a son while 85 percent of women wanted to have only one daughter. A higher proportion of women (42 percent) who did not participate in marriage desired to have two sons than those who participated in their spouse selection.

Discussion

Using the secondary data from the IHDS, this study makes a unique attempt to address the extent and nature of participation in selecting the spouse and also tries to explore its effects on the fertility behaviour and fertility preference during the reproductive period. Although other studies have documented the relationship between the recent gains in delayed marriage (Malhotra 1997; Singh and Samara 1996), increasing participation of the individual in the selection of spouse (Allendorf and Pandian 2016; Yabiku 2005) and other studies have questioned the universal applicability of such urbanization and industrialization perspective in explaining marriage trends(Desai and Andrist 2010).The result indicates that women participation in marriage or their say in the selection of spouse is around 60 percent which has increased from 42% in 2004-05 (5% marriages were self-arranged, and 37% were jointly

arranged with parents) (South, Trent, and Bose 2016).From the last to the recent marriage cohort, there is an increasing pattern in women participation in their partner for marriage. This reflects the change in the perception of the parents, along with an increase in age at marriage and education level of the person over the period.

The level of education, age at marriage, caste, religion, and place of residence in the spouse selection has an essential role as our study points out. These results are in line with the earlier studies by Banerjee et al., (2013); Borkotoky & Gupta, (2016); South et al., (2016). Except this we have explored the role of parent's education in the selection of spouse. In earlier studies, parent's role has been the center of study, but it was not explored how it impacts. Our study indicates the nature of role as we have found that mother's education of woman plays a vital role in spouse selection. It is because if the mother of the women is educated, it impacts the growth of the child in terms of her education, her freedom to decide a life partner, and her choice in other walks of life. Our findings also depict that women participation in marriage affects fertility behaviour too. Those women who have participated in marriage decision had less mean number of children and have less desire for higher number of additional children as compared to women who did not take part in their mate selection.

Our results are mainly in line with the studies that have reported that personal choice in mate selection impacts the fertility, and subsequently helps in fertility reduction. This study casts some light on the differences between the fertility behaviors concerning decision in opting a spouse. It also clearly points out that there is a shift in mate selection through the generations and suggests that women's freedom to choose their life partner has improved in recent days. The increased level of education, opportunities in the job market, and upbringing in modern society have reflected in higher participation in the selection of the spouse and even more inclination toward the self-selection. The findings from "Youth in India" also confirms the same that among the females who were looking for marriage, want to choose their partner themselves, especially it is highest among the girls who were more educated and/or employed (IIPS and Population Council 2009). The younger married women who had a self-selected mate will probably have the better relationship with the spouse and have the sense of self than the individuals who had a solely family-organized marriage (Jejeebhoy et al. 2013).

This study also has some limitations as it restricts only to explore the perception of women's participation in spouse selection and how the marriage pattern is changing along with the marriage cohort. This study has shown women perspective on fertility and preferences to have children in her reproductive span. The study is not able to find the men viewpoint of participation in marriage and also fertility preferences. The questions are arising out of this study point out the need for further research into the changing arrangements of mate selection and their impact on family formation. As our society is moving rapidly towards providing more and freedom to women in the process of participation in marriage by women would entirely change in many aspects leaving behind the traditional behaviour of the society toward the mate selection. Future research in the area would shed more light on the fertility change and its limiting behavior from the point of male perspectives.

Conclusions

Despite the limitations, our study has made a significant attempt in understanding the emerging generational changes in women's participation in selecting their spouse and its implications on other social behavior in the Indian context. The finding from this study has clearly highlighted that there is a change in women participation in selecting the spouse from 1960s to 2000, and selection of the spouse is affected by education, places of residences and religion. A theorized by-product of the modernization process is that, though the outlook of the future marriage market and the mechanism of mate selection are expected to change, it is more likely that desperate family formation patterns across diverse societies will converge on an increasingly homogeneous set of characteristics: later marriage, choice-based marriage partners, nuclear family living arrangements However, changes in women participation in selection spouse will also revolutionize the fertility behavior of women.

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