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Shifts in Age at Marriage in India between 1961 and 1971

THIS paper attempts an analysis of the census data on age, sex and marital status for 1961 and 1971 for an idea of nuptiality changes in India. For an indicator of nuptiality we take mean age at marriage as computed with the help of the methodology used by John Hajnal.¹ It may be noted that this methodology has been used previously² to show that mean age at marriage had increased from 13 years in 1891-1901 to 16 years in 1951-61 for females and 20 to 22 years between these two decades for males. This methodology enables us to derive from proportions of single persons of successive ages an estimate of the average length of life lived in an unmarried state. This estimate is taken to represent mean age at marriage.

For 1961, the state level tables on age, sex and marital status distribution based on 10 per cent sample are used here. For 1971, such detailed tabulations have not yet been published. So, the unpublished state level tables based on one per cent sample have been obtained from the Central Office of the Registrar General, for computing corresponding estimates for 1971.*

1. Hajnal, John, Age at Marriage and Proportions Marrying, *Population Studies*, Vol. VII, November 1953.

2. Agarwala, S. N., *Age at Marriage in India*, Allahabad, Kitab Mahal Publishers, 1962.

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During the period 1961-71, some changes have occurred in political boundaries of some states. For the purpose of this paper we have, however, confined our attention to 1961 boundaries and have reconstructed 1971 data in 1961 boundaries as far as possible. Figures for the states of Punjab and Haryana and the Union Territory of Chandigarh for 1971 have been combined to obtain comparable figures for the undivided Punjab of 1961. Similarly, Assam and Meghalaya data for 1971 have been added to make it comparable to that of Assam. Apart from this, we have not introduced any other adjustment for the purpose of this exercise.

All-India Results

The age at marriage has shown an all-round increase during the decade 1961-71. For the country as a whole the mean age at marriage has improved from 16.1 to 17.2 years for females, and from 21.4 to 22.2 years for males. The increase is evident in both rural and urban areas. The increase has been of a slightly higher order in urban than rural areas. The rural-urban gap has not changed substantially.

**TABLE 1-MEAN AGE AT MARRIAGE IN INDIA
1961 AND 1971 CENSUS COHORTS**

	1961		1971	
	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>
India	21.4	16.1	22.2	17.2
Urban Areas	23.5	17.9	24.3	19.2
Rural Areas	20.8	15.7	21.6	16.7

Marriage Age In Different Zones

Among the five zones into which the Census broadly divided the country, the mean age at marriage both for males and females is highest in the southern and lowest in the Central zone. It is notable that ranking of the zones according to mean age at marriage is identical for both the censuses. The maximum increase in mean age at marriage of females is from 16.4 to 17.8 years in the Western zone and the minimum from 14.7 to 15.5 years in the Central zone. Thus, the zone with the lowest mean age at marriage has also registered the simajitist increase. In the case of males, Western and Eastern zones recorded

the maximum increase (1.0 year) and the Southern zone, the minimum (0.6 year). The disparity between the zones in female mean age at marriage has tended in fact to widen somewhat.

TABLE 2—MEAN AGE AT MARRIAGE IN DIFFERENT ZONES

<i>Zones</i>	<i>1961</i>		<i>1971</i>	
	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>
Northern	20.7	16.3	21.4	17.4
Central	18.6	14.7	19.4	15.5
Eastern	21.5	15.9	22.5	17.0
Western	21.9	16.4	22.9	17.8
Southern	23.9	17.3	24.5	18.5

Further, we quote below estimates of mean age at marriage separately for rural and urban areas of each zone.

TABLE 3—MEAN AGE AT MARRIAGE IN URBAN AND RURAL AREAS OF DIFFERENT ZONES

<i>Zones</i>	<i>Males</i>				<i>Females</i>			
	<i>1961</i>		<i>1971</i>		<i>1961</i>		<i>1971</i>	
	<i>Urban</i>	<i>Rural</i>	<i>Urban</i>	<i>Rural</i>	<i>Urban</i>	<i>Rural</i>	<i>Urban</i>	<i>Rural</i>
Northern	22.4	20.2	23.1	20.7	17.9	15.8	19.2	16.8
Central	21.4	18.1	22.5	18.7	16.7	14.3	18.0	15.0
Eastern	23.9	21.0	24.8	21.9	18.2	15.6	19.4	16.5
Western	23.7	21.0	24.4	21.9	18.3	15.7	19.5	17.1
Southern	25.0	23.5	25.7	24.1	18.2	17.0	19.6	18.1

For males, inter-zone differences in mean age at marriage in 1961 and also in 1971 are significantly larger than those for females, in both urban and rural areas. Rural, as also the urban, mean marriage age for females is the highest in the Southern zone and the lowest in the Central zone in 1971. It is notable further that between 1961 and 1971 the gap between the male and the female mean age at marriage for the country as a whole had declined somewhat from 5.3 years to 5.0 years (Table 1). For urban areas, the corresponding decline has been larger (from 5.6 years to 5.1 years) as compared to the one for rural areas (5.1 years to 4.9 years). This is a common feature of all the five zones.

Inter-State Variation

Using the same methodology we have computed mean age at marriage separately for males and females for 1961 and 1971 for the fifteen major states of India, leaving aside the union territories and certain other centrally administered areas.

TABLE 4—MEAN AGE AT MARRIAGE IN DIFFERENT STATES OF INDIA,
1961 AND 1971

	<i>Males</i>		<i>Females</i>	
	<i>1961</i>	<i>1971</i>	<i>1961</i>	<i>1971</i>
A. Major States				
Jammu and Kashmir	22.1	23.4	16.1	17.8
Punjab	21.6	22.4	17.6	18.8
Rajasthan	19.2	19.5	14.6	15.4
Uttar Pradesh	18.7	19.4	14.8	15.6
Madhya Pradesh	18.4	19.2	14.3	15.2
Bihar	18.6	19.9	14.7	15.5
Orissa	21.7	22.6	16.5	17.2
West Bengal	23.5	24.3	16.1	17.8
Assam	24.9	25.1	18.6	18.5
Gujarat	21.3	22.1	17.2	18.3
Maharashtra	22.2	23.3	15.9	17.5
Andhra Pradesh	21.9	22.6	15.4	16.4
Mysore	24.2	24.8	16.5	17.9
Kerala	25.8	26.3	20.1	20.9
Tamil Nadu	24.8	25.5	18.4	19.6
B. Other Areas				
Himachal Pradesh	21.3	22.5	15.8	17.5
Delhi	22.8	23.5	18.7	19.9
Manipur	24.4	24.8	19.8	21.1
Tripura	23.7	24.9	16.4	18.4
Goa, Daman and Diu	26.1	26.1	20.7	21.5

The state of Kerala among them records the highest mean age at marriage both for males and females for both these dates. At the other end, each of the corresponding estimates is the lowest for Madhya Pradesh. Barring exceptions, in both 1961 and 1971, the states with a higher mean age at marriage than the national average for males, have a higher mean age at marriage for females as well. The four centrally located states of Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Bihar have significantly lower ages at marriage than the national figure. Of the remaining eleven, in nine states including Jammu & Kashmir and Punjab in the north, West Bengal, Orissa and Assam in the east and the Southern states of Andhra Pradesh, Mysore, Tamil Nadu and Kerala, the mean age at marriage is much higher than the corresponding mean for the country as a whole. In Gujarat, the mean is higher for females but lower for males as compared to the corresponding national figure. For Maharashtra, on the other hand, it is higher for males but lower for females in 1961. For a clearer idea for the comparative position of different states, we categorise them into three groups, viz., (i) the states with significantly higher marriage age than the national average, (ii) states with age at marriage close to the national level and (iii) states with substantially lower age at marriage. In respect of both males and females and of both the dates, the states of Assam, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Mysore and Kerala fall in the first category. The second group comprises the states of Jammu and Kashmir, Punjab, Orissa, Gujarat, Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh. The remaining four states namely, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Rajasthan comprise the third group.

Rural-Urban Differences

Between the rural and the urban sectors the mean ages at marriage for both males and females are significantly higher in urban areas than in rural in all the states and at both the dates. Generally, the urban-rural differences are smaller than in the country as a whole in states with higher age at marriage and larger in states with lower age. The differences in all the five states with higher ages at marriage, are smaller than the corresponding difference for the whole country in respect of both males and females and of 1961 and 1971, with the only exception of West Bengal in respect of females. Of the four states with significantly lower mean ages at marriage. Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh have larger and Bihar and Rajasthan lower differences than the corresponding national figures.

AGE AT MARRIAGE IN URBAN AND RURAL AREAS OF
DIFFERENT STATES

<i>Major States</i>	<i>Males</i>				<i>Females</i>			
	<i>1961</i>	<i>1971</i>	<i>1961</i>	<i>1971</i>	<i>1961</i>	<i>1971</i>	<i>1961</i>	<i>1971</i>
<i>Urban</i>	<i>Rural</i>	<i>Urban</i>	<i>Rural</i>	<i>Urban</i>	<i>Rural</i>	<i>Urban</i>	<i>Rural</i>	<i>Rural</i>
Jammu and Kashmir	23.5	21.7	25.4	22.8	17.1	15.9	19.8	17.3
Punjab	23.2	21.1	23.9	21.8	19.0	17.2	20.3	18.3
Rajasthan	20.3	19.0	21.0	19.1	15.7	14.4	16.3	15.0
Uttar Pradesh	21.4	18.2	22.5	18.8	17.0	14.5	18.3	15.1
Madhya Pradesh	21.4	17.8	22.5	18.4	16.1	14.0	17.6	14.7
Bihar	20.9	18.4	22.4	19.5	16.1	14.5	17.1	15.3
Orissa	23.1	21.5	24.0	22.5	17.0	16.5	17.6	17.2
West Bengal	25.0	22.8	25.8	23.6	19.2	15.2	20.5	16.8
Assam	25.4	24.9	26.7	24.8	19.1	18.5	20.1	18.3
Gujarat	22.9	20.6	23.7	21.3	18.4	16.8	19.5	17.9
Maharashtra	24.1	21.2	24.6	22.4	18.2	15.1	19.4	16.6
Andhra Pradesh	23.3	21.7	24.0	22.1	16.6	15.1	18.0	15.9
Mysore	25.4	23.8	26.1	24.3	17.9	16.0	19.5	17.3
Kerala	27.1	25.6	27.2	26.1	20.9	19.9	21.6	20.7
Tamil Nadu	25.5	24.5	26.2	25.2	18.7	18.2	20.2	19.3

The range of inter-state variations in mean age at marriage has increased between 1961 and 1971 more significantly for males than for females. The range is consistently greater for rural than for urban areas. It is notable that the range has tended to increase for the rural but to decrease for the urban areas.

It is interesting further to note that there is significant inter-state variation in the size of rural-urban difference in mean age at marriage in respect of both males and females. In 1961, the difference in respect of males was one year at the minimum in Tamil Nadu but as much as 3.6 years in Madhya Pradesh followed by 3.2 years in U.P. In 1971, it was again one year at the minimum in Tamil Nadu but 4.1 years at the maximum in Madhya Pradesh followed

by 3.7 years in Uttar Pradesh. In respect of females, the difference in 1961 was only 0.5 year in Tamil Nadu as also in Orissa but as much as 3.1 years in Maharashtra and 4.0 years in West Bengal. The difference was only 0.4 year in Orissa but as large as 3.2 years in Uttar Pradesh and 3.7 years in West Bengal in 1971.

Changes Over 1961-71

The increase in mean age at marriage over the decade 1961-71 has been shared by both the sexes in all the states with a minor exception of Assam in respect of females. There has, however, not been any significant change in

TABLE 6-RANK POSITION OF DIFFERENT STATES IN RESPECT OF MEAN AGE AT MARRIAGE OF MALES AND FEMALES—1961 AND 1971

Rank Order High to low	Males		Females	
	1961	1971	1961	1971
1.	Kerala	Kerala	Kerala	Kerala
2.	Assam	Tamil Nadu	Assam	Tamil Nadu
3.	Tamil Nadu	Assam	Tamil Nadu	Assam
4.	Mysore	Mysore	Mysore	Mysore
5.	West Bengal	West Bengal	West Bengal	West Bengal
6.	Maharashtra	Jammu & Kashmir	Punjab	Punjab
7.	Jammu & Kashmir	Maharashtra	Gujarat	Gujarat
8.	Andhra Pradesh	Andhra Pradesh	Orissa	Jammu & Kashmir
9.	Orissa	Orissa	Jammu & Kashmir	Maharashtra
10.	Punjab	Punjab	Maharashtra	Orissa
11.	Gujarat	Gujarat	Andhra Pradesh	Andhra Pradesh
12.	Rajasthan	Bihar	Uttar Pradesh	Uttar Pradesh
13.	Uttar Pradesh	Rajasthan	Bihar	Bihar
14.	Bihar	Uttar Pradesh	Rajasthan	Rajasthan
15.	Madhya Pradesh	Madhya Pradesh	Madhya Pradesh	Madhya Pradesh

the ranking of states according to mean age at marriage. No state has changed over from one to another of the broad categories specified earlier. However, there has been some shifting in rank positions within the first two categories. For instance, in the first category, Tamil Nadu and Assam had interchanged their ranks in second and third positions in respect of both males and females.

In the second category, Maharashtra and Jammu and Kashmir interchanged their ranks between the first and second positions in case of males, and Orissa moved from third to the fifth position and Jammu and Kashmir and Maharashtra from the fourth and fifth positions to third and fourth positions respectively in case of females. In the third category, the ranking is the same for 1961 and 1971 in respect of females but for males, Bihar moved up from the third position to the first position displacing Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh.

The increase recorded over the decade, it is among the states, the largest for Jammu and Kashmir in respect of both males and females; amounting to 1.7 and 1.3 years respectively. At the other end, Assam recorded the smallest increase of .2 year for males and a decrease of .1 year for females. Substantial increases have been reported also for Bihar, Punjab, West Bengal and Maharashtra. In all the states, except Bihar and Orissa, the increase in mean age at marriage has been greater for females as compared to males. The increases have been marginal also for Rajasthan and Kerala.

TABLE 7—EXTENT OF INCREASE IN MEAN AGE AT MARRIAGE IN DIFFERENT STATES DURING 1961-1971

<i>States</i>	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>
Jammu and Kashmir	1.3	1.7
Punjab	0.8	1.2
Rajasthan	0.3	0.8
Uttar Pradesh	0.7	0.8
Madhya Pradesh	0.8	0.9
Bihar	1.3	0.8
Orissa	0.9	0.7
West Bengal	0.8	1.7
Assam	0.2	—0.1
Gujarat	0.8	1.1
Maharashtra	1.1	1.6
Andhra Pradesh	0.7	.10
Mysore	0.6	1.4
Kerala	0.5	0.8
Tamil Nadu	0.7	1.2

It may also be noted that the difference between the male and female mean ages at marriage is generally somewhat smaller in 1971 than in 1961. Only in the case of three of the fifteen states, namely, Bihar, Orissa and Assam has this difference been enlarged somewhat. Among the other states, the reduction

has been as large as 0.8 year in the case of Mysore and 0.9 year in the case of West Bengal.

In conclusion, we find that there has been an all-round increase in age at marriage of both males and females in all the states and also in rural and urban parts of each state over the decade 1961-71. For the country as a whole the mean age at marriage for females has gone up from 16.1 to 17.2 years and for males from 21.4 to 22.2 years over this decade. Kerala continues to hold the first position and Madhya Pradesh the last position in regard to mean age at marriage of both males and females. The rural-urban differences in mean age at marriage appear to have increased somewhat for both males and females. The difference in the male and female mean age at marriage has generally tended to decrease over the decade.