

Nuptiality in Rural Bangladesh

Introduction

THE fertility of a population is the consequence of a number of different, though interrelated demographic, economic and social factors. Marriage patterns differ from country to country on account of social factor (Bourgeois-Pichat, 1967). Various studies recognize the effect of age at marriage on fertility (United Nations, 1961; Coale and Tye, 1961; Agarwala, 1965; Sadiq, 1967; Dixon, 1976; Baldwin, 1977). However, Miranda (1980) observed that since age at marriage and age at consummation of marriage may be significantly different, increases in age at marriage resulting from fewer child-marriages cannot be expected to have any impact per se on fertility. It may be pointed out that the reported average interval between age at marriage and age at consummation is only 0.4 years, although it has been observed that this estimate suffers in general from mis-statement of ages and memory lapse (Bangladesh Fertility Survey, 1975 : 55). However, the reported average interval between age at marriage and age at consummation is not likely to be of any significantly longer duration.

In a country such as Bangladesh, where the rate of acceptance of contraceptives remains at a low level, age at marriage of women is one of the major determinants of future fertility. Marriage is often the most important factor which regulates the production of children. In most less developed countries marriage usually takes place at a relatively early age compared to the developed countries.

The present paper examines marriage customs, marriage patterns and marital dissolution in rural Bangladesh, based on data originating from a Bangladesh village, Sreebollobpur, situated in Comilla District¹, and on various

1. A discussion on the socio-economic and demographic background of Sreebollobpur is contained in Khuda, Shahidullah and Begum, 1980.

published materials. The study proposes to fill some of the knowledge gaps concerning nuptiality patterns in rural Bangladesh.

Data from Sreebollobpur

Nuptiality data in Sreebollobpur have been obtained from two sources : (i) households census, and (ii) marriage history. The household census covered all persons in the village. There were 1,466 persons, roughly one-half of whom were females. The household census collected information on the marital status and age at marriage (obtained indirectly from current age and duration of married life) of every person in the village. A detailed marriage history has been collected in a later phase of the study on a sample of persons. All households were divided into four landholding groups, according to the net cultivable land area of the households. A total of 167 households (roughly three-quarters of the total number of households in the study village) were selected for the purpose of the study, with proportional allocation to the size of the stratum. All ever-married males (261) and females (321) belonging to these households were interviewed. The male respondents were interviewed by the male investigators and the female respondents by the female investigators. The following types of information were obtained :

- (i) marital history,
- (ii) expenses incurred at the time of the respondent's marriage and the last marriage of the household, dowry items and sources of financing wedding expenses,
- (iii) selection criteria of bride and groom, and
- (iv) attitudinal questions relating to age at marriage and remarriage of women.

Various Published Material

Although the vital registration system was introduced in 1873 in Bangladesh by the British, it remains incomplete and unreliable. Constrained by the lack of reliable and complete vital registration system, most demographic studies rely on retrospective questioning to obtain current estimates as well as historical trends in the major demographic variables.

There was no direct question on the age at marriage in the enumeration schedule, which was used in the population censuses of the country in 1974 and 1981, or in any other study of national scope, with the exception of the Bangladesh Fertility Survey. Let us briefly recall some of the studies related to marriage in Bangladesh. Using the marital status data from the population cen-

suses of 1931 to 1961 Sadiq (1965) examined the incidence of marriage. Based on survey data covering four rural and two urban areas of the country, Obaidullah (1961) examined the extent of marriage and remarriage and the age at marriage of ever-married women.

Based on a sample from the 1961 population census, Afzal (1967) estimated the age at marriage of ever-married women. Using data from the Population Growth Estimation Experiment (1962-1965), Alam (1968) estimated the singulate mean age at marriage. Based on data from the National Impact Survey (1968-1969) Sirageldin *et al.* (1975) calculated the median age at marriage of currently married women and those who were married at least once. A national survey was conducted in April 1974 which looked into various aspects of marriage, such as the singulate mean age at marriage, proportions in the different marital status categories, etc. (BRSFM, 1977). Based on data originating from the continuous demographic surveillance system conducted by the Cholera Research Laboratory- in Matlab, Ruzicka and Chowdhury (1978) and Chowdhury, K. M. *et al.*, (1981) examined marriage and divorce. Shahidullah (1980), using the Bangladesh Fertility Survey data examined the nuptiality patterns in Bangladesh. Miranda (1980) assessed the current development of nuptiality in Bangladesh on the basis of statistical data from censuses, surveys and various village studies.

Marriage Customs

Very few studies have so far been conducted in Bangladesh to describe marriage customs among the people (see, for example, Jahan, 1975). Negotiated and monogamous marriage, with a few exceptions of polygyny is the common practice in Bangladesh. The proportion of polygynous marriage in Bangladesh is insignificant.

Generally when a girl belonging to a Muslim family in rural Bangladesh attains puberty, she is put under *pardah* and her marriage is arranged by her family. The father and other male members of the family have the dominant say in the matter. Marriage arrangements require negotiations with others and are, therefore, handled by the male guardian of the girl.

The usual form of marriage is for the bride's family to seek out the bridegroom and carry on negotiations with the bridegroom's family. Once the terms and conditions are settled and other details worked out, the bridegroom's party consents to the marriage and the day of the marriage is fixed by consulting the religious calendar. It usually takes place on Friday. The time of the cere-

2. The Cholera Research Laboratory is now known as the International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease Research (Bangladesh).

mony is generally fixed between two prayer times, so that when the ceremony is over, the party assembled can bid farewell after saying the prayer together.

On the day of the marriage the bridegroom, with his party, usually consisting of male members only, goes to the bride's place. There, they are received by some respected persons from the bride's side. At the bride's house the bridegroom and his party sit at the outer court, which is decorated according to the financial capacity of the bride's family. The bride remains inside the house and the bridegroom is not yet taken inside, since he is still considered to be an outsider.

The formal ceremony is usually conducted by the *mullah*, who is generally the *Imam* of the local mosque.³ The consent is taken from both the bridegroom and the bride. Though a girl's consent is mandatory, yet it is only a mere formality. After the consent is given by both parties, the priest recites some verses from the Holy Koran and asks for the blessings of Allah on the marriage. The marriage is thus solemnized. This is usually followed by a customary ceremony involving food and other rituals at the bride's house. The food served may vary from light refreshment to a full meal, depending on the economic condition of the bride's family. The bridegroom is then taken inside the house, where he sits by the side of the bride. Here, some formalities have to be completed before the bridegroom leaves the bride's place for his residence accompanied by his bride.

The expense incurred on marriage vary, depending on the socio-economic condition of both sides, particularly that of the bride's family. In Bangladesh marriage is not so much between a boy and a girl as between two groups of relations. Dowry⁴ or *Joutuk* (as it is known in Bengali) is money, land or property, which a woman brings to her husband at marriage.⁵ The dowry depends on the economic and social status of the family as well as on the education and beauty of the girl. If the girl's family comes from a better background, the boy's side will not make heavy demands. Again, if the girl's father is rich, he may be willing to give a substantial amount as dowry. If the girl is educated, the dowry will be less, as is also the case if she is beautiful. The parents try to recover the money spent on raising their sons from the parents of the

3. The Imam leads the prayers at the mosque.

4. Although recently legislation has been passed banning dowry, its enforcement is only far from satisfactory.

5. A woman also receives dowry at marriage, although it is considerably less than what she brings to her husband at marriage. It may be pointed out that in the past the reverse was true. But, during the last twenty years or so the practice has changed. This may be due to the influence of the Hindu marriage customs, and that because of the gap between males' and females' marriageable ages and the age structure of the population, prospective brides are always in oversupply and, hence, their lower demand in the marriage market compared to males,

prospective daughter-in-laws at the time of marriage.

In most cases the bride's family, rather than the groom's, bears the greater expenses of marriage. This could be described as "groom-price". In Sreebollobpur we found that the groom generally receives some of the following dowry items; gold, cash, clothes, land, furniture, bicycle, radio and watch, while the bride usually receives gold and sarees. The items received by both the groom and the bride depend on some of the factors noted earlier, namely, the economic condition of the families to which the bride and the groom belong, etc. The main sources of financing wedding expenses in Sreebollobpur are family income and savings, borrowing and sale and mortgage of land.

The respondent in Sreebollobpur were asked to say the criteria on which the selection of groom and bride are based, and their responses are shown in Table 1. We find that over one-half of the respondents attach priority to the groom's employment status and his family background. The other criteria mentioned

TABLE 1—SELECTION CRITERIA OF GROOMS AND BRIDES BY SEX OF THE RESPONDENTS IN SREEBOLLOBPUR

	(%responses)		
<i>Criteria</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Both Sexes</i>
(a) Grooms			
1. Gainfully employed	33.5	25.9	26.0
2. Family Status	26.0	26.9	29.8
3. Education	19.2	13.3	15.9
4. Physical Attraction	11.6	17.6	14.1
5. Character	9.7	16.3	14.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
(b) Brides			
1. Training and skill in household work	27.4	24.3	25.7
2. Family Status	31.2	22.4	26.2
3. Education	8.1	14.4	11.7
4. Physical Attraction	18.9	28.2	24.2
5. Character	14.3	10.7	12.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

are the educational background, physical attraction and character of the groom. While selecting brides over one-half of the respondents reported attaching priority to the bride's training and skill in household work and her family background. About one-quarter of the respondents (more so among females than males) said they consider the physical attraction and the beauty of the bride as an important criteria in the process of selecting brides.

A comparison of the criteria applied in the selection of prospective grooms and brides show that a higher proportion of the respondents reported "physical attraction" in the process of selecting brides than grooms, while a lower proportion of them reported "education" as a criteria for the selection of brides than grooms. This is quite understandable, because the physical attraction of the bride is considered more important than that of the groom.

Marital Status and Age at Marriage

In 1929 legislation prohibiting child marriage was passed for the first time in British India (D'Souza, 1979). The Child Marriage Restraint Act, also known as the Sarda Act, came into force in 1930 (Shahidullah, 1980; Miranda, 1980). The Act denned the minimum age at marriage of girls and boys at 14 years and 18 years respectively. The violation of the provisions of the Act was punishable. However, the Act met with resistance. In 1961 (over thirty years after the promulgation of the Sarda Act) the Government of Pakistan promulgated the Muslim Family Laws Ordinance. It provided for compulsory registration of all Muslim marriages. It also raised the minimum age at marriage to 16 years and 21 years for females and males respectively. However, due to the absence of a vital registration system the implementation of the provisions of the Ordinance became difficult, if not quite impossible. In 1976 the Population Control and Family Planning Division made a recommendation to further raise the minimum age at marriage to 25 years in the case of females and 28 years for males [Government of Bangladesh, 1976]. However, it should be stressed here that the prevailing norms and values are not in confirmity with the recommended higher age at marriage, especially among females. Table 2 presents a percentage distribution of marital status by sex and broad age groups in Sreebollobpur and rural Bangladesh. The table shows that the proportion of ever-married women was higher than that of ever-married men at all ages in rural Bangladesh and Sreebollobpur.

Bangladesh marriage patterns are characterized by universality of marriages. Table 3 shows the proportions of males and females at various ages, having remained unmarried. We find that the proportions of those remaining single have been on the rise over the years, especially at the younger age groups. In fact, the proportion among females aged 10-14 years remaining unmarried is catching up with the proportion among males in the same age group. We also

TABLE 2-MARITAL STATUS BY SEX AND AGE-GROUPS IN SREEBOLLOBPUR AND RURAL BANGLADESH

(% distributions)

Marital Status	Males (Age in years)			Females (Age in years)		
	10-14	15-19	20+	10-14	15-19	20+
(a) Sreebollobpur						
1. Currently Married	0	0	73.7	1.9	60.0	74.9
2. Never Married	100.0	100.0	22.0	98.1	38.2	2.0
3. Separated	0	0	0	0	1.8	0.6
4. Divorced	0	0	1.1	0	0	1.0
5. Widowed	0	0	3.2	0	0	21.5
(b) Rural Bangladesh						
1. Currently Married	0.7	7.9	84.6	9.3	73.8	78.8
2. Never Married	99.3	91.8	12.5	90.0	22.2	0.8
3. Divorced	0.0	0.1	0.2	0.6	3.0	0.9
4. Widowed	0.0	0.2	2.7	0.1	1.0	19.5

SOURCES : Sreebollobpur Household Survey, 1979.

Calculated from Table 5 p. 94 *Bangladesh Population Census, 1974 National Volume, 1977.*

find that while women are married by the time they reach 24 years of age, most men are married by the time they are 34 years old. In fact, the mean difference between husband's and wife's age at marriage is about ten years. The proportion of those aged over 44 years and remaining unmarried indicated the degree of celibacy⁶ present in a society. The table clearly shows that celibacy is virtually absent in Bangladesh. In most Asian societies, including Bangladesh, remaining single is considered disgraceful, especially among women, and economic consideration is not very important as a factor preventing marriage. At best, it might postpone marriage for some time but would hardly prevent it altogether.

The mean age at marriage in Bangladesh, as in the rest of the subcontinent, has been low. This becomes clear, if we look at Table 3 showing the propor-

6. Smith (1976) observed that celibacy is an European phenomenon. According to Mertens (1956) and Dixon (1971) celibacy is rare in most Asian societies.

TABLE 3—PROPORTIONS OF MALES AND FEMALES WHO WERE NEVER MARRIED BY AGE IN SREEBOLLOBPUR AND BANGLADESH

Age -groups	Census, 1931	Census, 1941	Census, 1951	Census, 1961	P.G.E., 1965	Census, 1974	B.R.S.F.M., 1974	B.F.S., 1975	Sreebol- lobpur, 1979
(a) Males									
1. 10-14	0.87	0.95	0.98	0.98	0.99	0.99	1.00	1.00	1.00
2. 15-19	0.52	0.79	0.84	0.88	0.93	0.92	0.95	0.93	1.00
3. 20-24	0.33	0.42	0.46	0.50	0.52	0.60	0.66	0.62	0.81
4. 25-29	0.10	0.17	0.15	0.17	0.18	0.23	0.24	0.21	0.37
5. 30-34	0.05	0.05	0.06	0.05	0.03	0.06	0.06	0.05	0.14
6. 35-39	0.02	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.01	0
7. 40-44	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.01	0.01	0.02	0.01	0.01	0
8. 45-49	0.01	0.01	.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0
(b) Females									
1. 10-14	0.45	0.61	0.74	0.67	0.82	0.91	0.94	0.91	0.98
2. 15-19	0.05	0.16	0.11	0.08	0.13	0.25	0.32	0.30	0.39
3. 20-24	0.02	0.02	0.03	0.01	0.02	0.03	0.05	0.05	0.08
4. 25-29	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.02
5. 30-34	0.01	0.01	0.01	0	0	0.01	0	0	0
6. 35-39	0.01	0.01	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.03
7. 40-44	0.01	0.01	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
8. 45-49	0	0.01	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

SOURCES : Miranda, 1980; Khuda, Sahidullah and Begum, 1980.

tions of males and females remaining single at different ages. More than half of the girls in rural Bangladesh were married at the age of 13 years or less [Obaidullah, 1966]. Sirageldin, *et al.*, (1975) found that 42 per cent of all rural women in Bangladesh were married by the time they reached 12 years of age. Sadiq (1965) calculated the mean age at marriage was 13.9 years and 22.9 years for females and males respectively. Alam (1968) found that the mean age at

marriage was 14.9 years and 22.6 years for females and males respectively. Chowdhury *et al.*, (1981) found that the median age at marriage was 17.7 years and 26 years for females and males respectively. The singulate mean ages at marriage for males and females over time in Bangladesh is presented in Table 4. The mean age at marriage for both males and females in Sreebollobpur are higher than in Bangladesh as a whole.

TABLE 4—SINGULATE MEAN AT MARRIAGE BY SEX IN SREEBOLLOBPUR AND BANGLADESH

Sex	Census, 1931	Census, 1941	Census, 1951	Census, 1961	P.G.E, 1955	Census, 1974	BRSFM, 1974	BFS, 1975	Sreebollobpur, 1979
Male	19.0	21.5	22.4	22.9	22.9	23.9	24.5	23.9	26.6
Female	12.6	13.7	14.4	13.9	14.8	15.9	16.6	16.4	17.5

SOURCES : same as Table 3.

We find that the mean age at *marriage* of both males and females have been rising, though very slowly, over time. During the period 1931-1975 the mean age at marriage for males and females in Bangladesh has gone up by only 4.9 years and only 3.8 years respectively. In other words, the mean age at marriage has been rising, on an average, by only about 0.1 years per year. However, caution must be exercised with the interpretation of data on the singulate mean age at marriage. It is at best an indirect estimate of the actual age at marriage.

The respondents in the Sreebollobpur Marital History Survey, 1980 were asked a direct question on their age at first marriage. On the basis of this information the mean age at marriage for males and females in Sreebollobpur stands at 22.4 years and 13.0 years respectively. In the Bangladesh Fertility Survey, 1975 women were asked a direct question on their age at first marriage. Women born up to mid-forties were, on average, married before they reached their twelfth birthday and those born in the mid-fifties were married at around 13 years of age. There is, thus, a rising trend in the age at first marriage. This is also evident if we look at the age at first marriage by the year of their reported marriage. We find that the increase in the age at first marriage was only nominal till late fifties, but since the beginning of the sixties it is rising faster [Bangladesh Fertility Survey, 1975; Tables 5.3 and 5.5, pp. 50 and 52]. Shahidullah (1980), using the Bangladesh Fertility Survey data calculated the quartiles of age at marriage for age cohorts and found that 74 per cent of rural women are married at 14.6 years of age, and that the age at marriage for younger

women is higher than that of the older women. In a study of a Bangladesh village, Barkait, it was found that 25 per cent, 50 per cent and 75 per cent of all women aged 15 years and above were married at 12.3 years, 13.7 years and 15.7 years respectively. It also reported a rising trend in the age at marriage : 75 per cent of women aged 25-29 years, 40-44 years and 50 years or more, were married at 16.5 years, 14.3 years and 13.2 years respectively [Khuda, 1978; Table 4.9 p. 144.]

Let us examine the relationship between the age at marriage and economic condition of the people. Table 5 gives the mean age at marriage by landhold-

TABLE 5—MEAN AGE AT FIRST MARRIAGE FOR MALES AND FEMALES IN SREEBOLLOBPUR BY LANDHOLDING

<i>Landholding (in acres)</i>		<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>	<i>Mean difference</i>
1.	Landless	23.6	12.5	1.1
2.	0.01-1.0	22.3	13.2	9.1
3.	1.01-2.0	21.7	13.1	8.6
4.	Greater than 2 acres	22.7	13.2	9.5
Total		22.4	13.0	9.4

SOURCE : Sreebollobpur Nuptiality Survey, 1980.

ing size of males and females in Sreebollobpur. Among males the age at marriage is the highest among the landless. This is because on account of no assured source of regular income, the landless males are not placed favourably in the marriage market and, hence, the delay of about one year in finding suitable brides, compared to those belonging to the landed households. Among the landed males the age at marriage falls with an increase in the amount of landholding and then rises again. Among females, those belonging to the landless households have a lower age at marriage than those belonging to the landed households, and there is, practically no differential in the age at marriage among females belonging to various landholding groups. Cain (1978) found in Char Gopalpur, a village in Mymensingh, a positive relationship between the age at marriage and landholding. He observed that with an increase in landholding, the mean age at marriage for males falls slightly. The Bangladesh Fertility Survey, 1975 gives information on the mean age at marriage of females by their husband's occupation.⁷ It found that the wives of the tenant farmers had the

7. Miranda (1980) and Shahidullah (1980) made detailed analysis of differentials in nuptiality patterns by various socio-economic variables in Bangladesh, using the Bangladesh Fertility Survey data.

lowest average age at first marriage (12.8 years), while the wives of the professionals and technical personnel had the highest average age at first marriage (13.9 years) [Bangladesh Fertility Survey, 1975; Table 5.6, p. 54].

The respondents in Sreebollobpur were asked several questions relating to their attitude on the age at marriage. When asked whether girls are getting married at a later age now than before, over 97 per cent of males and females reported in affirmative, and we find no significant differential in their responses either by age or landholding. They were then asked to say the reasons for the delayed age at marriage of girls. Almost one-half of males and about two-fifths of females reported dowry as the main reason of delaying the age at marriage for girls and over one-quarter of them said that it was mainly due to the lack of suitable grooms for their daughters (Table 6).

TABLE 6-REASONS FOR DELAYED AGE AT MARRIAGE FOR FEMALES BY THE SEX OF THE RESPONDENTS IN SREEBOLLOBPUR

<i>Reasons</i>	<i>(% responses)</i>		
	<i>Ma'e</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Both Sexes</i>
1. Dowry	47.3	39.0	41.8
2. Lack of suitable groom	25.2	29.5	28.1
3. Higher schooling for females	17.4	20.3	19.3
4. Others	10.1	11.2	10.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

The respondents were asked to state the ages at which they prefer their sons and daughters to get married. Males reported a mean of 25.9 years and 16.2 years for sons and daughters respectively, while females reported 23.8 years and 14.6 years for sons and daughters respectively, indicating that males prefer a higher age at marriage for both sons and daughters : 2.1 years higher for sons than what has been reported by the female respondents and 1.6 years higher for daughters. We have seen that the mean age at first marriage of the male and female respondents in Sreebollobpur was 22.4 years and 13.0 years respectively. Thus, it appears that the respondents in Sreebollobpur prefer their children to get married about one to two years later than when they were married. Nevertheless, the important finding of the table is that people, on the whole, still prefer relatively younger ages at which their children should get married. This is because, as Miranda (1980) observed, "these attitudes are in turn built upon a socio-economic backbone, which makes marriage so crucial and decisive." Dixon (1976) observed that early marriage of non-income producing girls is considered by the heads of poor households as an ideal solution to their economic pressures.

The respondents were asked to say whether they had been able to get their daughters married at the age they prefer them to be married. A large majority of the respondents replied in the affirmative : males 85.5 per cent and females 62 per cent. Those who said that they were not able to get their daughters married at the age they prefer them to be married were asked to state the reasons for not being able to do so. Over one-half reported that it was on account of dowry payments, while about two-fifths of the respondents said that it was because of the non-availability of suitable grooms for their daughters (Table 7).

TABLE 7—REASONS REPORTED BY THE RESPONDENTS IN SREEBOLLOBPUR FOR NOT BEING ABLE TO GET THEIR DAUGHTERS MARRIED AT THE AGE THEY PREFER THEM TO BE MARRIED

<i>Reasons</i>	<i>(% responses)</i>		
	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Both Sexes</i>
1. Dowry	52.2	50.7	51.0
2. Lack of suitable groom	39.1	39.4	39.4
3. Higher schooling for girls	8.7	8.5	8.5
4. Others	—	1.4	1.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Marital Dissolution and Remarriage

The dissolution of marriage and remarriage determines the stability of marriage and subsequently affects the fertility of women. The dissolution of marriage may occur due to : (a) divorce, and (b) widowhood.

Table 2 presents the percentage distribution of marital status by sex and age groups in Sreebollobpur and rural Bangladesh. The table reveals important aspects in inequality between males and females in Bangladesh. In Sreebollobpur the proportion of males and females aged twenty years and over who are currently married is quite the same. The proportion divorced is also the same, although the proportion widowed among females is higher than among males. In Bangladesh a higher proportion of males aged 20 years and over the currently married compared to females in the same age group. On the other hand, the proportions divorced and widowed among females are higher than among males. Using the Bangladesh Population Census, 1974 data it has been found that the proportions currently married among females reaches its peak at ages 25-29 years and then starts to decline. By the time a woman reaches the end of her reproductive life, the proportion remaining currently married declines to about three-fifths and this reaches only about 20 per cent among women aged 65 years

or more. Among males the proportion currently married reaches its peak at around age 35 years and stays at this level till about 60 years of age, after which it declines slowly (Miranda, 1980; Table 10 ; 29). A similar picture is obtained if we look at the marital status distribution of the population covered by the Bangladesh Fertility Survey [Bangladesh Fertility Survey, 1975; Table 5 2 • 49]. Other studies also point out the same sort of pattern [Khuda, 1978; Obaidullah 1966; Ellickson, 1975]. This is indicative of the fact that while men can and do marry at all ages, women cannot.

A man whose wife dies is more likely to be remarried than for a woman who loses her husband. These men often marry women who are much younger than themselves. This, again, implies that the older women are not likely to be remarried. "Functionally and culturally, market is male oriented and male dominated in line with the overall organisation of society; in addition, it is structurally a 'bridegroom's market' in the sense that, due to the gap between males' and females' marriageable ages and the age structure of the population prospective brides are always in oversupply" [Miranda, 1980 : 30]. Besides, since husbands are usually older than their wives by about ten years, exposes them to higher mortality risks and, hence, a higher proportion of widowhood among females than among males. Arens and van Beurden (1977) and Cain (1978) analyze the welfare implications for the widows and observed that widows lack security and status, especially if they have no surviving sons to look after them.

It has been found in Bangladesh that the lower the age at first marriage, the higher is the proportion of marital dissolution. About one-half of the women who were married at less than ten years of age had their marriage dissolved : 29.7 per cent through divorce/separation and 19.6 per cent through widowhood. In contrast, only 13.4 per cent of women married at ages 15 years, and above had their marriage dissolved : 6.9 per cent by way of divorce/separation and 6.6 per cent by way of widowhood [B. F. S., 1975; Table 5.8 : 56].

It has been found in Bangladesh that the dissolution of marriage is negatively related to the level of education of women. While about one-quarter of the first marriage of illiterate women was dissolved, it was only about 9 per cent among those with educational level beyond primary schooling. This also holds true by education of husbands [B. S. F., 1975; Table 5.9 : 57].

The differential in marital dissolution by husbands' occupation in Bangladesh shows that the wives of the unclassified plus unemployed group had the highest proportion of first marriage dissolution (27.9 per cent), followed by those married to the landless labourers (24.0 per cent), while it was the lowest (12.7 per cent) among women whose husbands were in clerical and service occupations [B. F. S., 1975; Table 5.9 : 58].

A Muslim woman can and, in fact, do get remarried, if the marriage is dissolved on account of divorce or widowhood. In Sreebollobpur 84 per cent of all ever married women were married only once and about 16 per cent of them were

married more than once. Over four-fifths of the ever-married women in Bangladesh were married only once, while about 13 per cent of them were married more than once. Sixty per cent of women whose first marriage was dissolved remarried. Age at first marriage is negatively associated with the number of marriages [B. F. S., 1976; Table 5.10; 59]. Ruzicka and Chowdhury (1978) found that 1.7 per cent of the widows and 15.4 per cent of the divorced women were remarried. Chowdhury, K. M. *et al.*, (1981) reported that 1 per cent and 15 per cent of widows and divorced women respectively were remarried. Using the Bangladesh Fertility Survey data, Shahidullah (1980) found that a higher proportion of rural women in the older age groups were married more than once compared to the relatively younger women.

The median age of rural women whose first marriage ended in divorce was 14.4 years. In contrast, the median age of rural women whose first marriage ended in widowhood was 26.2 years (Shahidullah, 1980). In rural Bangladesh social pressures exert more strongly against the remarriage of widows than that of divorce women. Added to this, is the relatively old age of the widows and since most of them are likely to have one or more children from the previous marriage, they find it difficult to get remarried. This explains why the remarriage of widows is a relatively rare phenomenon in rural Bangladesh.

The respondents in Sreebollobpur were asked to say whether they support the remarriage of women, and their responses are contained in Tables 8 and 9. A higher proportion of males support the idea of remarriage of women than females (Table 8). This is, since women are generally more conservative in their outlook than men. The sex differential may also be explained by the fact that since the remarriage of women means more competition for females ;>nd more choice for males, more males support the idea, of remarriage of women than

TABLES—PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS IN SREEBOLLOBPUR BY SEX AND LANDHOLDING, WHO EXPRESSED THEIR SUPPORT TO REMARRIAGE OF WOMEN

Landholding groups (in acres)	Male		Female		Both Sexes	
	support	do not support	support	don't support	support	do not support
1. Landless	75.6	24.4	57.4	42.6	65.1	34.9
2. 0.01-1.0	81.6	18.4	58.9	41.1	69.2	30.8
3. 1.01-2.0	80.3	19.7	50.7	49.3	64.9	35.1
4. > 2.0	97.7	2.3	67.8	32.2	80.4	19.6
Total	82.8	17.2	58.3	41.7	69.3	30.7

TABLE 9—PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS IN SREEBOLLOPUR BY BROAD AGE-GROUPS AND SEX, WHO EXPRESSED THEIR SUPPORT TO REMARRIAGE OF WOMEN

Age-group	Male		Female		Both sexes	
	support	do not support	support	do not support	support	do not support
1. upto 29 years	75.6	24.4	61.0	39.0	64.4	35.6
2. 30-39 years	88.2	11.8	62.1	37.9	76.2	23.8
3. 40 years +	82.3	17.7	53.5	46.5	66.1	33.9
Total	82.8	17.2	58.3	41.7	69.3	30.7

females. However, the interesting point that emerges from the table is that, on the whole, a large majority of the respondents (over two-thirds) favour the idea of remarriage of women. This was not expected, because it is generally believed that people in Bangladesh still hold conservative outlook regarding the remarriage of women. If we look at the differential by landholding, we find that the size of landholding is generally positively related to the respondents' supporting the remarriage of women. However, respondents (in fact of both sexes) belonging to households with cultivable land areas ranging between 1.01 and 2.0 acres do not conform to the pattern. This is possibly due to the fact that a large proportion of respondents belonging to such households belong to older age groups. Table 9 shows that the proportion of respondents (both among males and females) supporting remarriage of women rises as age advances and then falls with a further rise in age.

TABLE 10—CONDITIONS UNDER WHICH THE RESPONDENTS IN SREEBOLLOPUR WOULD SUPPORT THE REMARRIAGE OF WOMEN

Conditions	(per cent responses)		
	Ma'es	Females	Both sexes
1. Provided the woman is young	66.3	46.7	54.8
2. Provided the woman has no child	24.7	45.6	37.0
3. Provided the woman has few children	5.5	0.5	2.6
4. Provided the woman has no son	—	2.8	1.6
5. Under any condition	3.5	4.4	4.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Those who had expressed their support to the idea of remarriage of women were asked to say under what conditions they would support it. Surprisingly enough, the proportion supporting the remarriage of women without attaching any condition is very low. Most respondents would support the remarriage of women only under special circumstances. Over one-half of the respondents said that they support the remarriage of women, only if they are young; about two-thirds of males and less than one-half of females (Table 10). That is, a large proportion of the respondents feel that only if a woman is young and her marriage is dissolved, she should get remarried. The sex differential reflects the attitude of males, who prefer to see younger women available in the marriage market. Over one-third of the respondents support the remarriage of women, only if they have no child. A widow or a divorcee with children finds it difficult to get remarried.

Conclusions

The present study has been concerned with a number of issues related to marriage in rural Bangladesh, based on data originating from a Bangladesh village, Sreebollobpur and various published materials.

Marriage is almost universal. Permanent celibacy is virtually absent in Bangladesh. The proportion currently married is quite high. The age at marriage remains low, although slowly rising over time. However, the finding from Sreebollobpur suggest that people still generally prefer a relatively low age at marriage. The slight rise in the age at marriage of females may be due to : (a) higher costs associated with dowry payment, (b) lack of suitable groom, and (c) higher schooling for females.

At any age the proportion of females whose marriages are dissolved are higher than that of males. This is because while men can and do marry at all ages, women cannot. This is due to the male oriented and male dominated marriage market, age structure of the population, etc. The incidence of widowhood is higher than that of divorce. That is, marital disharmony is relatively little and can be explained by social values which discourage divorce. Most people support the remarriage of women only under special circumstances.

References

1. Afzal, M., 1967, The fertility of East Pakistan women. In : V. C. Robinson (ed.), *Studies in the Demography of Pakistan*, Pakistan Institute of Development. Economics, Karachi.
2. Agarwala, S. N., 1965, Effect of a rise in Female Marriage Age on Birth Rate in India, paper presented at the *UN World Population Conference*, Be'grade.
3. Alam, S. I., 1968, Age at marriage in Pakistan, *Pakistan Development Review*, 8(3).
4. Baldwin, C. S., 1977, Policies and realities of delayed marriage, the cases of Tunisia, Sri Lanka, Malaysia and Bangladesh, *PRB Report*, 3(4).

5. Bourgeois-Pichat, J., 1967, Social and Biological determinants of human fertility in non-industrial society, *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 3(3).
6. Cain, M. T., 1978, The household life cycle and economic mobility in Rural Bangladesh, *Population and Development Review*, 4(3),
7. Chowdhury, K. M. et al., 1981, *Demographic Surveillance System, Matlab, Vol. 7, Vital Elements and Migration- 1978*, I. C. D. D. R. (B), Dacca.
8. Coale, A. J. and Tye, C. Y., 1961, The significance of age patterns of fertility in high fertility population, *Milbank Memorial Fund Quarterly*, 39(2).
9. Dixon, R. B., 1971, Explaining cross-cultural variation in age at marriage and proportions never marrying, *Population Studies*, 25(2).
10. ____ 1976, The roles of rural woman : female seclusio economic production and reproductive choice. In : Ronald G. Ridker (cd.), *Population and Development : the Search for Selective Interventions*, Johns Hopkins U. P., Baltimore and London.
11. D'souza, S., 1979, Nuptiality patterns and fertility implications in South Asia, *Seminar on Nuptiality and Fertility*, Bruges : IUSSP.
12. Ellickson, J., 1975, Rural women. In : *Women for Women, Bangladesh, Dacca*.
13. Govt. of Bangladesh, Population Control and Family Planning Division, 1916, *Bangladesh National Population Policy*, Dacca.
14. Govt. of Bangladesh, Census Commission, 1977, *Bangladesh Population Census, 1974, National Volume*, Dacca.
15. Govt. of Bangladesh, Ministry of Health and Population Control, 1978, *World Fertility Survey : Bangladesh Fertility Survey, 1975*.
16. Govt. of Bangladesh, Bureau of Statistics, 1979, *Statistical Yearbook of Bangladesh, 1979*, Dacca.
17. Jahan, R., 1975, Women in Bangladesh. In : *Women for Women, Dacca*.
18. Khuda, B., 1977, Value of children in a Bangladesh village. In : J. C. Caldwell (ed.), *The Persistence of High Fertility*, the Australian National University, Canberra.
19. ____, 1978 Labour Utilization in a Village Economy of Bangladesh, *Ph.D. Dissertation*, The Australian National University, Canberra.
20. ____, Shahidulla, M. and Begum, S., 1980, *Sreebollobpur ; Socio-economic and Demographic Background*, Study of Reproductive Behaviour, Working Paper 2, B. I. D. S., Dacca.
21. Khuda, B., 1981, Economic value of children in rural Bangladesh, paper presented at the *Symposium of Fertility Decline in Less developed Countries*, Intercongress, 1981 of the International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences (IUAES), Amsterdam.
22. Miranda, A., 1980, *Nuptiality in Bangladesh*, DERAP Publication No. 95, The Chr. Michelsen Institute, Bergen, Norway.
23. Mertens, W., 1965, A Comparative Study of World Nuptiality Patterns, *unpub. Ph.D. Dissertation*, University of Chicago, Chicago.
24. Obaidullah, M., 1966, *On Marriage, Fertility and Mortality*, Demographic Survey in East Pakistan, 1961-62, Part Two, I. S. R. T., Dacca University, Dacca.
25. Ruizicka, L. T. and Chowdhury, A. K. M., 1978, *Demographic Surveillance System—Matlab, Volume Five : Vital Events, Migration and Marriages—1976*, Cholera Research Laboratory, Dacca.
26. Sadiq, M., 1965, Estimation of nuptiality and its analyses from the census data of Pakistan, *Pakistan Development Review*, 5(2).
27. ____, 1967, Effect of change in age at marriage on births and population growth, paper presented at the *Seventh Pakistan Statistical Conference*, Dacca.

28. Shahidullah, M., 1980, *Differential Nuptiality Patterns in Bangladesh*, Institute of Statistical Research and Training, University of Dacca, Dacca.
29. Sirageldin, I., *et al.*, 1975, Fertility in Bangladesh : Facts and fancies, *Population Studies*, 29(2).
30. Smith, P. C., 1976, As'ian nuptiality in transition, a paper presented at *the Seventh Summer Seminar in Population*, East-West Population Institute, Honolulu.
31. United Nations, 1961, *The Mysore Population Study*, New York.