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Factors Associated with Female Age at Marriage in Pondicherry

CARE for the girl child—the message aimed to propagate against the gender specific social evils, for instance, infanticide, child marriage, dowry, widowhood, illiteracy, in general to improve the low status of women in the society, gains momentum recently. Long back in 1971, a Committee on the status of women in India (CSWI) had been appointed by the Government of India to undertake a comprehensive examination of all the questions relating to the rights and status of women, in the context of changing social and economic conditions in the country and new problems relating to the advancement of women. As a first step, the Government of India is on the move to find the ways and means to improve the situation of female education, their employment opportunities and increase their age at marriage. Out of the various measures adopted by the Government of India to improve the status of women, the one which needs immediate attention is raising the female age at marriage. Since, marriage is the starting point, from which the process of spacing and stopping of births through family planning begins, the age at which a female marries thus becomes a matter of prime importance.

Age at Marriage in India

None can deny the fact that, over the years the male and female age at marriage is on the continuous increase. The recent National Family Health Survey (1995) shows a sharp decline (compared to 1971, 1981) in the proportion of married females in the age-group of 15 to 19 years. For instance, the percentage of females married in the age-group of 15 to 19 for India (excluding Assam), declined from 55.4 per cent in 1971 to 39.1 per cent in 1993. The mean age at marriage for females, has increased from 15.9 years in 1961 to 20.0 years in 1993.

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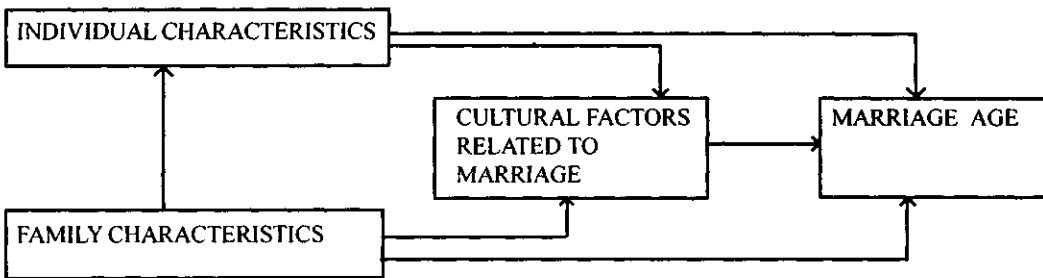
For males, the mean age at marriage has increased from 21.9 years in 1961, to 25.0 years in 1993.

Due to the increase in the age at marriage, there is a progressive reduction in the percentage of child marriages in India. For instance, in 1961 the percentage of married males and females in the age-group of 10-14 is 6.60 and 19.22 respectively, which came down to 2.30 and 6.59 respectively, in 1981.

Though, the Government can take the credit of increasing the marriage age, the fact that the practice of child marriage still exists in some States like Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh cannot be denied. Even today, 10,000 children are united even now in marriage on a particular day called "Akhyateej" in Rajasthan. Thus, the problem of early age at marriage in India, is very complex in nature. Its complexity lies in the historical moorings, traditional socio-cultural practices and other social problems like bride price.

To remove the child marriages that exist in some parts of India and to educate the people to marry at a later age, the Government of India has enacted Child Marriage Restraint Amendment Act in 1978, which prescribes the minimum age at marriage for boys and girls as 21 and 18 years respectively. But the legislation that has been framed and are in operation still now, has had only a slight effect on the marriage timing. Researchers in general, feel that the variation in the female age at marriage, may be due to the variation in the demographic, socio-economic and developmental variables. This paper examines the various factors that are associated with the female age at marriage in the rural and urban areas.

Conceptual Framework for the Study of Female Age at Marriage



The framework is composed of inter-related block of factors. It proceeds in sequential fashion from, Family, Individual, Cultural factors and Female Marriage Age. This explains that, the family and the individual characteristics will affect the marriage age directly and also indirectly, through the cultural factors related to marriage.

The first block consists of familial characteristics of the population, which includes parents' education, parents' occupation, family type, religion and caste. In the next block the individual characteristics are considered. The variables that are included in this block

are:

- (i) the age at menarche,
- (ii) duration of marriage,
- (iii) education,

- (iv) occupation,
- (v) childhood place of residence, and
- (vi) order of birth of the individual.

The third block relating to the cultural factors consist of age difference between the spouses, relationship of spouses i.e., whether consanguineous or non-consanguineous, type of marriage i.e., whether arranged or love marriage, matching of horoscope, fixation of dowry amount/ amount spent on marriage and the role of the bride in the decision making regarding the selection of groom.

The final block shows the dependent variable, the marriage age. It gives an idea about the age at which female are married in the different socio-economic and demographic contexts of the study area. The operation of family and individual characteristics in influencing the marriage age can be explained as below:

For instance, if the parents are highly educated then they will be in a position to understand the disadvantages of early marriage and hence, may postpone the marriage age of their daughter. Moreover, they may give a chance to their daughter to decide her marriage age and even if they decide, will definitely seek the opinion of the daughter, which to an extent will pave way for increasing the age at marriage. Similarly, if the female is educated, then she will be in a position to think of the advantages of the late marriage and hence may postpone her marriage. Further, her education will also help her to come out of the old tradition of consanguineous marriage and to seek for better spouse outside her circle, which will generally take its own time and thereby automatically postpone her marriage age. Thus, the family and individual characteristics of the community/society affects directly as well as indirectly the female age at marriage

The influence of the cultural factors on age at marriage can be expressed that, as the community/society still holds its grip on the traditional attitude regarding marriage age, lower will be the female age at marriage. For instance, the prevalence of dowry in the society makes the parents to settle the daughter's marriage soon, since it is felt that, as the age of the girl increases, her value in the marriage market declines and hence they have to pay higher dowry in order to settle her marriage. Moreover, the traditional belief of the society towards matching the horoscope, delays the marriage age of the female in case the girl has any bad luck or "thousam" in her horoscope. This may be due to the fact that, the girl with bad luck or "thousam" has to be matched with the boy who has the same type of "thousam" in his horoscope. This searching process takes its own time and hence may delay the marriage age of the female. Thus, the cultural factors related to marriage will influence the marriage age of the female. In brief, this conceptual framework defines a chain of influence whereby the social structure affects the female age at marriage.

Selection of the Study Area

In the Indian context, studies in demography, in general, focus mainly on states as unit of observation rather than the Union Territories. With this idea, the Union Territory of

Pondicherry is selected as the place of research. The selection of this Union Territory in particular is mainly due to the reason that it was under the French Regime for a long time and hence would be interesting to know the people's attitude towards various demographic issues and age at marriage in particular. Within the Union Territory of Pondicherry, there are four districts namely, Pondicherry, Mahe, Yanam and Karaikal. Among these districts, Pondicherry district occupies a greater percentage of area (293 sq km) followed by Karaikal, Yanam and Mahe in the order. Hence, this district is selected as the unit of observation to study the problem stated earlier, among the four districts of the Union Territory of Pondicherry.

Since, the aim of the research is to study the rural and urban variations in the female age at marriage, it is decided to select a commune which is completely rural and a commune which is completely urban. Hence a rural commune is selected for the study among the rural communes of Pondicherry district on the basis of the following criteria:

- (i) a commune with low proportion of rural population served by educational amenities, and
- (ii) a commune, where the proportion of rural population served by the approach of pucca road is low.

With the knowledge that the commune which satisfies the above criteria will still hold its rural tradition, Bahour commune is selected. The percentage of villages served by educational (69.05) as well as well as the approach by pucca road (54.76) in Bahour commune is low as compared to rest of the communes. On the other hand, the Pondicherry commune, which enjoys the highest priority of being the headquarters of the Union Territory of Pondicherry, is selected to represent the urban commune.

Information from 450 eligible women (who are currently married) are collected, with the equal representation from the rural (225) and urban (225) areas of Pondicherry. Muthialpet ward (east) within Pondicherry commune is selected randomly for the objective of studying the urban areas. From the Bahour commune, two villages namely Selimedu and Kudiiruppupalayam are selected randomly to obtain the sample of 225 eligible women. From the survey, the following socio, economic and demographic variables are collected and are measured separately for the rural and urban areas (Table 1).

The variable, parental background, takes into account both education and employment of the parents and the procedure adopted for the computation of this variable is given in Appendix 1. The average age at marriage for the above mentioned explanatory variables are given in Tables 2 and 3, respectively for the rural and urban areas. One way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) is applied to understand whether there is any significant difference in mean age at marriage between various categories of the explanatory variables.

The results of ANOVA show that, in the rural areas, except the variables like type of marriage, religion and caste, a significant difference is observed in the age at marriage between various categories of rest of the selected variables. In case of urban areas too, almost the same picture prevails, except in case of the variables like female birth order and type of marriage, where the age at marriage is not found to be statistically different between their various categories.

TABLE 1 : EXPLANATORY VARIABLES AND THEIR MEASUREMENTS BY RESIDENCE

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Measurement</i>	
	<i>Rural</i>	<i>Urban</i>
Age at Menarche	<= 12 > 12	<= 12 > 12
Female's Birth Order	1 other than 1	1 other than 1
Duration of Marriage	<= 15 > 15	<= 15 > 15
Female's Childhood Place of Residence	Rural Urban	Rural Urban
Religion	Hindu Muslim Christian	Hindu Muslim Christian
Caste	Forward Backward Most Backward	Forward Backward Most Backward
Female's Education	Illiterate Educated (below Middle) Educated (Middle and above)	Illiterate Educated (below Middle) Educated (Middle and above)
Relation between Spouses before Marriage	Consanguineous Non-consanguineous	Consanguineous Non-consanguineous
Age Difference between Spouses	<= 4 > 4 and <= 8 > 8	<= 4 > 4 and <= 8 > 8
Female's Family Type before Marriage	Nuclear Non-nuclear	Nuclear Non-nuclear
Type of Marriage	Arranged Love	Arranged Love
Bad Luck in Female's Horoscope	No Yes	No Yes
Female's Opinion regarding the Spouse before Marriage	Not consulted Consulted	Not consulted Consulted
Female's Occupation	Unemployed Employed (traditional) Employed (modern)	Unemployed Employed (traditional) Employed (modern)
Parent's Socio-Economic Score	Low (<= 2) High (> 2+)	Low (<= 4) High (> 4 +)
Total Amount Spent on Marriage	<= 3000 3001-8000 8001 +	<= 100000 100001-200000 200001+

TABLE 2 : CORRELATES OF FEMALE AGE AT MARRIAGE : RURAL

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Female age at marriage</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig. of F</i>
Age at Menarche			
<=12	16.69(125)		
>12	17.63 (100)	10.76	.0000
Female Education			
Illiterate	17.15(144)		
Educated (below middle)	17.35 (28)		
Educated (middle & above)	19.53 (53)	14.75	.0000
Female Occupation			
Unemployed	17.39(148)		
Employed (traditional)	17.41 (59)		
Employed (modern)	20.17(18)	7.08	.0010
Female Family Type before Marriage			
Nuclear	17.84(116)		
Non-nuclear	16.95 (109)	13.30	.0003
Female Birth Order			
1	16.75 (79)		
other than 1	17.77(146)	15.76	.0001
Type of Marriage			
Arranged	17.41 (201)		
Love	17.38 (24)	0.01	.9266
Relation between Spouses before Marriage			
Consanguineous	16.96(121)		
Non-Consanguineous	17.93 (104)	15.67	.0001
Seen Husband before Marriage			
Yes	17.36(174)		
No	17.59 (51)	0.59	.4445
Parents Socio-Economic Score			
Low(<=2)	17.13(152)		
High (2+)	18.00 (73)	10.93	.0011
Religion			
Hindu	17.42(192)		
Muslim	17.28 (18)		
Christian	17.40 (15)	0.05	.9540
Caste			
Forward	17.84 (56)		
Backward	17.31 (122)		
Most Backward	17.15 (47)	2.06	.1303

**Age Difference
between Spouses**

<=4	17.18(44)		
>4 but <=8	16.97(114)		
>8	16.25 (67)	11.67	.0000

**Bad Luck in the
Female Horoscope**

No	17.10(200)		
Yes	19.92 (25)	62.67	.0000

**Whether Consulted
Girl's Opinion before
Marriage**

No	17.69(103)		
Yes	17.74(122)	4.20	.0416

**Total Amount Spent
on Marriage**

<=3000	17.06(87)		
3001-8000	17.38(72)		
8001+	17.91 (66)	3.89	.0219

**Duration of
Marriage (in yrs)**

<= 15	17.60(164)		
> 15	16.89 (61)	6.52	.0114

**Female Childhood
Place of Residence**

Rural	17.38(211)		
Urban	19.25 (14)	3.87	.0503

Note : Figures in brackets represent the respective sample sizes.

However, the conclusions drawn on the basis of an explanatory variable may be different when it acts along with a set of other explanatory variables in explaining the variation in the age at marriage. Hence, in order to understand the importance of these variables when taken together in explaining the variation in the age at marriage, Discriminant Analysis is applied.

An Analysis of Female Age at Marriage Using Discriminant Technique

In the study population, it is observed that there is a difference in between the rural (17.41 years) and urban (19.79 years) female age at marriage. Moreover, within the rural and urban areas itself, few have high and others have low age at marriage. For instance, in rural areas, the age at marriage ranges from 13 to 23, while in urban areas it ranges from 15 to 27 years of age. With this, to an extent it can be pointed out that, the two groups may be having different socio-economic and demographic characteristics, which might have resulted

TABLE 3: CORRELATES OF FEMALE AGE AT MARRIAGE : URBAN

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Female age at marriage</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig. of F</i>
Age at Menarche			
<=12	19.24 (100)		
>12	20.23 (125)	6.81	.0097
Female Education			
Illiterate	17.49 (37)		
Educated (below middle)	18.42 (65)		
Educated (middle & above)	21.21 (123)	49.32	.0000
Female Occupation			
Unemployed	18.72(154)		
Employed (traditional)	21.14 (30)		
Employed (modern)	23.06 (41)	56.72	.0000
Female Family type before Marriage			
Nuclear	20.95 (99)		
Non-nuclear	18.88(126)	32.90	.0000
Female Birth Order			
1	19.65 (207)		
other than 1	19.85(160)	0.23	.6302
Type of Marriage			
Arranged	19.75 (207)		
Love	20.22 (18)	0.44	.5076
Relation between Spouses before Marriage			
Consanguineous	18.20 (80)		
Non-Consanguineous	20.67 (145)	45.78	.0000
Seen Husband before Marriage			
Yes	19.93 (205)		
No	18.35 (20)	5.67	.0183
Parents Socio-Economic Score			
Low (<=4)	18.64(118)		
High (4+)	21.06(107)	47.94	.0000
Religion			
Hindu	19.76 (205)		
Muslim	18.33 (9)		
Christian	21.64 (11)	3.53	.0310
Caste			
Forward	20.32(124)		
Backward	19.20 (82)		
Most Backward	18.89 (19)	4.99	.0076

Age Difference between Spouses			
<=4	21.85 (13)		
>4 but <= 8	19.78(153)		
>8	19.36 (59)	4.12	.0175
Bad Luck in the Female Horoscope			
No	19.44(179)		
Yes	21.15 (46)	13.74	.0003
Whether Consulted Girl's Opinion before Marriage			
No	18.52 (81)		
Yes	20.51 (144)	27.87	.0000
Total Amount Spent on Marriage			
<= 100000	19.29(110)		
100001-200000	20.22 (58)		
200000 +	20.32 (57)	3.35	.0368
Duration of Marriage (in yrs)			
<=15	20.23 (179)		
>15	18.09 (46)	22.33	.0000
Female Childhood Place of Residence			
Rural	18.23 (98)		
Urban	20.99(127)	65.84	.0000

Note : Figures in brackets represent the respective sample sizes.

in differential female age at marriage. Therefore, to know the effect of the selected explanatory variables in discriminating the female age at marriage, the use of discriminant analysis becomes unavoidable.

For the same, the discriminant analysis is used keeping the urban and rural female age at marriage as the dependent variable. Here, the low age at marriage refers to the marriage within 17 years and the age at marriage above 19 years are termed as high. Thus, keeping, the age at marriage as low and high, discriminant analysis is applied separately for the rural and urban areas.

Results of Discriminant Analysis

As a first step in deriving the discriminant function, the means and standard deviations of all the explanatory variables are calculated, pertaining to those of low and high age at marriage.

The difference between the mean values for the two groups i.e., low and high age at marriage, for all the explanatory variables, are given in Tables 4 and 5. In order to find out the significance of the difference in means of all explanatory variables, Z test is used and the significance of the difference in means are tested at 1 and 5 per cent level of significance. This procedure is adopted separately for rural and as well as for the urban areas.

TABLE 4 : GROUP MEANS OF THE DISCRIMINATING VARIABLES FOR THE EARLY AND LATE AGE AT MARRIAGE: RURAL

<i>Discriminating Variables</i>	<i>Group</i>		<i>Z - value</i>
	<i>Group 17 or less</i>	<i>Group 19 +</i>	
Age at menarche (v 1)	0.7000	0.9310	3.6900*
Female's birth order (v2)	0.5539	0.7931	2.7126*
Duration of marriage (v3)	1.3385	1.2414	1.0669
Female's childhood place of residence (v4)	0.0077	0.0690	1.2640
Religion (v5)	1.2077	1.1035	1.1647
Caste (v6)	1.9692	1.7586	1.4953
Female's education (v7)	0.3692	0.9655	3.4043*
Relationship between spouses before marriage (v8)	0.3846	0.7931	4.6582*
Age difference between spouses(v9)	0.9385	1.3448	2.8049*
Female's family type before marriage (v10)	0.5692	0.2759	3.0871*
Type of marriage (v 11)	1.1000	1.000	3.7793*
Bad luck in female's horoscope (v 12)	0.0308	0	5.8908*
Female's role in decision making about spouse (v 13)	0.5692	0.5862	4.1132*
Female's occupation (v!4)	0.3000		1.9034
Parental background of female (v!5)	0.2539	0.2069	3.3071*
Total amount spent for marriage (v!6)	0.8308	0.5862	2.8946*

Note : * refers significance at .01 level.

In the rural areas, as shown in Table 4, significant differences are observed, in the group means of variables such as, age at menarche, female education, relationship of spouses before

marriage, the age difference between spouses, female's family type before marriage, bad luck in the female's horoscope, female's role in decision making about her partner and the parents socio-economic status, between those with low and high age at marriage. Among these variables, the marriage type and the age difference between the spouses contradicts the general belief that, those who had love marriage will have higher age at marriage and the age difference between the spouses being higher, lower will be the age at marriage. Further, in case of rural

TABLE 5 : GROUP MEANS OF THE DISCRIMINATING VARIABLES FOR THE EARLY AND LATE AGE AT MARRIAGE : URBAN

<i>Discriminating variables</i>	<i>Group means</i>		<i>Z-value</i>
	<i>Group 17 or less</i>	<i>Group 19+</i>	
Age at menarche (v1)	0.4138	0.6500	2.9160*
Female's birth order (v2)	0.6552	0.7700	1.5143
Duration of marriage (v3)	1.3276	1.0600	4.0203
Female's childhood			
place of residence (v4)	0.1724	0.8100	10.0187*
Religion (v5)	1.0517	1.1900	2.1261**
Caste (v6)	1.6552	1.4600	1.7298
Female's education (v7)	0.8103	1.7700	9.0075*
Relationship between spouses before marriage (v8)	0.4138	0.8400	5.6851**
Age difference between spouses (v9)	1.3448	1.1200	2.5689**
Female's family type before marriage (v10)	0.8276	0.3600	6.7269*
Type of marriage (v11)	1.0690	1.1100	0.8912
Bad luck in female's horoscope (v12)	0.1379	0.2900	2.3548**
Female's role in decision making about spouse (v13)	0.4310	0.7700	4.3435*
Female's occupation (v14)	0.0690	0.9100	8.9500*
Parental background of female (v15)	0.1552	0.6800	7.8239*
Total amount spent on marriage (v16)	0.6035	0.8500	1.8696

Note : *Refers significance at .01 level.

**Refers significance at .05 level.

areas, it is observed that, those who belong to the higher order births and whose cost of marriage is high, show high probability of having late age at marriage.

The group means for urban areas show that, except for variables like female order of birth, caste, type of marriage and the cost of marriage, rest of the variables are significantly different for the two groups i.e., between those with low and high age at marriage. The variables with significant difference in group means reveal that those with high menarche age, low duration of marriage, who spend most of the childhood days in an urban area, who belong to other than Muslim community, being highly educated, with non-consanguineous relation before marriage and a low age-gap between spouses, will be with high age at marriage. Further, those who are from a nuclear family, having bad luck in the horoscope, have a major role in deciding their partner, engaged in professional work, having parents with high socio-economic status, also belong to the group with high age at marriage. Thus, the observed differences between the means for urban and rural areas reveal, whether a female will marry at an early or late age, with respect to the selected explanatory variables. In addition, to know which combination of variables seem to discriminate in a better way between the two groups i.e., low and high age at marriage, further results of the discriminant analysis are discussed separately for rural and urban areas.

Results of Rural Analysis

The classification result shows that, 93 per cent of the grouped cases i.e., low and high age at marriage are correctly classified (Table 6). Among the two groups, the percentage correctly classified is highest for those with low age at marriage, than who married at a later age.

TABLE 6 : CLASSIFICATION RESULTS OF THE EARLY AND LATE AGE AT MARRIAGE : RURAL

<i>Actual group</i>	<i>No. of cases</i>	<i>Predicted group membership</i>	
		<i>0</i>	<i>1</i>
Group 0 (age at marriage < = 17)	130	126 (96.9%)	4 (3.1%)
Group 1 (age at marriage > 19)	29	7 (24.1%)	22 (75.9%)

Per cent of 1 "grouped" cases correctly classified : 93.08 %

Eigen value = 1.86

Chi - Square = 159.85 ($p < .001$)

Canonical Correlation * 0.8066

In order to understand the contribution of these exploratory variables to the determining scores on the function, the standardised canonical discriminant function, is used. The

standardised canonical discriminant function tells, larger the magnitude the greater is that variable's contribution in discriminating low and high age at marriage. The results show that among the selected sixteen variables for the analysis, ten variables have come out as the significant discriminants of the low and high age at marriage. The discriminants of the low and high age at marriage in the respective orders are, female's bad luck in the horoscope, female's occupation, female's education, relationship of spouses before marriage, menarche age, type of marriage, age difference between spouses, female's childhood place of residence, female's family type before marriage and the female's role in deciding the choice of her partner.

The highest canonical correlation of .81 shows, the measure of association between the discriminant function and the age at marriage is high. Similarly, the eigen value of 1.86 and the wilks lambda of .35, represent that this function is the powerful discriminator and the group means (centroids) are quite far away from each other.

Results of the Urban Analysis

The classification results of the low and high age at marriage for the urban areas show that the percentage of grouped cases correctly classified is about 86 per cent (Table 7). Among the two groups i.e., low and high age at marriage, the percentage correctly classified is highest for those with high age at marriage, than who married at an early age.

TABLE 7 : CLASSIFICATION RESULTS OF THE EARLY AND LATE AGE AT MARRIAGE: URBAN

<i>Actual group</i>	<i>No. of cases</i>	<i>Predicted group membership</i>	
		<i>0 *</i>	<i>/</i>
Group 0 (age at marriage <-17)	58	48 (82.8%)	10 (17.2%)
Group 1 (age at marriage > 19)	100	12 (12.0%)	88 (88.0%)

Per cent of "grouped" cases correctly classified : 86.08%

Eigen value = 1.44

Chi - Square = 134.47 ($p < .001$)

Canonical correlation = 0.7686

As in case of rural areas, the high canonical correlation of .77, reveals that, the measure of association between the discriminant function and the female age at marriage, is relatively high. While, the function with the largest eigen value of 1.44 shows it is the most powerful discriminator, the lowest wilks lambda of .41 denotes that the group centroids are greatly separated and very distinctly relative to the amount of dispersion within the groups. On this ground, it is observed from the Table 8 that, the variable, female's childhood place of residence plays a significant role in discriminating the groups of low and high age at marriage. This is

TABLE 8 : STANDARDIZED CANONICAL DISCRIMINANT FUNCTION COEFFICIENT FOR THE EARLY AND LATE AGE AT MARRIAGE

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Standardized Discriminant Function Coefficients</i>	
	<i>Rural</i>	<i>Urban</i>
v1	0.34504	0.26656
v2	—	0.22690
v3	—	-0.33646
v4	0.17449	0.39160
v5	—	0.13640
v6	—	—
v7	0.46962	0.24992
v8	0.44412	0.24865
v9	0.25581	-0.26851
v10	-0.17477	—
v11	-0.22985	—
V12	0.79061	0.21795
V13	-0.17258	—
V14	0.52060	0.22059
V15	—	0.22059
V16	—	—

Note : (1) v1-v16 refers to variables as mentioned earlier.

(2) blank space (—) refers, that those variables are not statistically significant in discriminating the early and late age at marriage.

followed by variables like duration of marriage, age difference between the spouses, menarche age, female's education, relationship of spouses before marriage, female's order of birth, female's occupation, female's*bad luck in the horoscope, parental background and religion, in the respective orders, that exert high discriminating power between the two concerned groups.

Discussion

As child marriages and pre-puberty marriages are negligible in Pondicherry, the age at which a girl attains her menarche, has a significant role to play in determining her marriage age. Thus, the girl who attains her menarche at an early age, will be having greater chance to be married at an early age, since her chances for getting alliance for marriage is high. This will not be the case with those, whose age at menarche age is delayed. The positive influence of age at menarche on the marriage age, as shown by the discriminant result, clearly supports the importance of considering this variable, in analysing the female age at marriage.

Duration of marriage, an indicator of the generation i.e., young or old, exhibits a negative influence on the female age at marriage. Generally people belonging to older generation will have misconceived ideas regarding the late age at marriage and hence may favour early marriage for the females. On the other hand, people of present generation due to the effect of modernisation will have a favourable attitude towards late marriage and hence may delay the marriage of their daughter.

The childhood place of residence has a significant role to play in affecting the marriage age of the females. For instance, who stay in the rural for most of their childhood days, will retain the ideas and values of those areas, which would reflect in their approach towards the social issues like marriage age.

Female's order of birth in her family also determines her marriage age as shown by the discriminant result. Generally in the tradition of South India, the eldest child will be married first and then the rest. Hence females of first order will be having early marriage age than those belonging to the later orders since, the eldest female has to be married and has to clear the way for others to enter the marriage market.

Arranged marriages (type of marriage) are traditionally decided by the parents and the role of the girl in deciding her partner will be less. In that situation, her age at marriage may be low as compared to those who select their partner themselves.

Generally in South Indian joint families, elders of the family, for instance, grand parents will be having more say in deciding the marriage age of the female than her parents. Thus, the elders or grand parents with the age-old customs will be showing much interest in settling their grand daughter's marriage soon. And this may result in the early age at marriage of the females from non-nuclear families. The negative influence of the type of family before marriage on female marriage age as indicated by the discriminant result clearly supports the above discussion that, females from non-nuclear families will have lower marriage age than those from nuclear families.

In India, it is a custom that the boy should be of older age than the girl at the time of marriage. Generally, the parents look for a girl who is young so that she can adjust with the family well. With this intention they may go for a higher age-gap between the boy and girl, which results in early female marriage age.

It is further noted that, there exists a positive influence between the relationship of spouses before marriage and the female marriage age. The process of marriage arrangements in terms of matching the horoscope, fixing the dowry amount, will be faster and easy in the consanguineous marriages, which may result in the early age at marriage. On the other hand, in case of non-consanguineous marriages, since the people of both sides are not known to each other, the marriage arrangements will take its own time, thereby delaying the marriage age. Hence, a change in the parents attitude regarding the selection of spouse from outside their relation, will definitely mark an increase in the female marriage age.

The impact of education and occupation, seems to play a significant role in altering the female age at marriage. Once a female is educated, then automatically her marriage will be postponed. Further, if she is employed in a better position, due to her exposure to the outside world, she may be in a position to comprehend the evils of early marriage and hence may delay her marriage.

It is generally felt that if the parents are highly educated and employed in a better position then, for the welfare of their daughter, they may postpone her marriage age knowing the problems related to early marriage. Moreover, they may also prefer their daughter to have a high social and economic status like them and hence may try to provide her with better education and like her to be employed before marriage. On the other hand, in case of parents

of low socio-economic status, due to the absence of above mentioned desires, will try to settle their daughters' marriage as early as possible.

Female's role in deciding about her spouse, an indirect measurement of her status in the family shows a negative influence on her marriage age. It indicates that, if she has higher status in the family, then the chance for her to express her opinion against early marriage to her parents will be more, which in turn may result in the late age at marriage. On the other hand, females with lower status in their family, as indicated by the discriminant results, will have lower age at marriage, since the possibility to express their opinion against early marriage is less.

The variable, female's luck in the horoscope brings out the society's belief in matching the horoscope at the time of marriage. Any sign of bad luck or "thousam" in the girl's horoscope, reduces her value in the marriage market drastically and thereby creates room for the increase in her marriage age. Though urbanisation is expected to bring a favourable change in the people's perception regarding various social issues, the belief in the horoscope for fixing the marriage alliance still holds its grip. The discriminant result shows that, the marriage age for females with bad luck in their horoscope will be higher than those who do not have the same.

On the whole, from the above discussion of the discriminant results it can be concluded that, in case of both rural and urban areas, cultural variables play a major role in determining the female age at marriage in addition to their individual development, in terms of the educational attainment and work status. For instance, the significant role of horoscope in deciding the marriage age of the females in both rural and urban areas, as revealed by the discriminant analysis, clearly shows the influence of culture on the age at marriage.

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Appendix 1**Parental Background Index**

To estimate this index the variables that are considered are the Educational Attainment and the Occupational Status of the father and mother. The measurement of these variables along with their coded values are given below:

Educational Attainment:

- Illiterate - 0
- Educated upto 8th std. - 1
- Educated above 8th std. - 2

Occupational Status:

- Unemployed - 0
- Employed in non-professional work - 1
- Employed in professional work - 2

These coded values are kept the same for both father and mother. The index is formed by adding up the Educational Attainment and the Occupational Status of the parents i.e., father and mother. And the total score of this index ranges from 0 to 8. For the sake of comparison, the total score has been divided into low and high separately for the urban and rural areas. For the urban areas, the total score has been divided into two as, 'less than or equal to 4' and 'greater than 4', to represent the low and high socio-economic status of the parents, respectively. In case of rural areas, the total score of 'less than or equal to 2', is considered as low status while 'greater than 2', represents parents with high socio-economic status.