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Changes in Consanguinity and Age at Marriage

NO feature of the Indian caste society is more resistant to change than its institution of marriage" observed Sanghvi (1966). Two basic aspects of marriage, the practice of consanguinity and norm regarding female age at marriage which have been showing resistance for a long time have given way in the recent decades and absorbed changes which are probably irreversible (Caldwell *et al.* 1983,1989; Rao 1983; Srinivas 1978 and United Nations 1988). Tambiah (1975:124) compiled figures from earlier studies and reported that among the Tamils in Sri Lanka, nearly 70 per cent married relatives. This is the highest figure obtained for the Tamils. Among Indians in Malaysia (mostly Tamils) consanguinity was 20 per cent in the urban areas and 16 per cent in the rural (including estates) areas in 1981-82 (Tan and Jones 1990). Reviews of various studies showed prevalence of 13 per cent to 49 per cent consanguinity in south India and 20 per cent to 55 per cent in other populations of Asia and Africa (Hann 1985; Bittles 1990).

In south India, traditionally, the most desirable mate for a man has been his own sister's daughter or mother's brother's daughter (Driver and Driver 1988; Guruswamy 1986:195; Nair 1978: 121,131; Raju 1988 : 63; and Sushama 1989 : 107). However, such marriages are tabooed among a large majority in north India (Rao 1983). The Hindu Marriage Act 1955 prohibits marriage among relatives coming under *sapinda* relationship. (With reference to any person *sapinda* relationship extends as far as the third generation in the line of ascent through the mother, and the fifth in the line of ascent through the father. However the Act gives exemption to local customs) (Beri 1982:21). This is strictly followed in north India. In some other countries also marriages among certain relatives are prohibited by law. For example, the new marriage law of the Peoples' Republic of China prohibits marriage of the man and a women who are lineal relatives by blood or collateral relatives by blood (up to the third degree of relationship) (Engel 1984). In Japan, consanguineous marriages used to be common but now marriages of persons to the third degree of kin, which includes uncle/niece, aunt/nephew are prohibited and first-cousin marriages are discouraged (Hendry 1981 : 124). A marriage solemnised in Singapore shall be void if the parties are within the prohibited degrees of consanguinity or affinity (Ibrahim 1979 :10).

Age at marriage of females has been increasing in both India and Tamil Nadu State. The singulate mean age at marriage of females in India was 13.1 in 1901 and it increased to 18.3 in 1981. In Tamil Nadu, it was 15.3 in 1901 and went up to 20.2 in 1981 (Agarwala 1962: 63-64,90 and Registrar General 1985 : 37). These indicate an increase of about five years

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in the mean age at marriage over a period of 80 years. Legislations were brought in to prevent early marriages and the notable among them was the Child Marriage Restraint Act 1929 which fixed the minimum age at marriage of girls at 12 and boys at 15. The amendment in 1978 revised the minimum to 18 for females and 21 for males (Beri 1982 : 478; and Ramusack 1981). However, the effect of legislation on increase of age at marriage is questionable (Pathak 1980 and Srinivas 1977).

Srinivas (1978) argues that "conformity as well as departure from tradition is contextual. Even the rationalization for departures and conformities vary from one individual to another". There are sections of society that prefer consanguinity and early marriage even now, and, some others have changed towards non-consanguineous and late marriage. The changes in the practice of consanguinity, its relationship with age at marriage, especially of females, the contexts of conformity and departure from tradition were investigated through field studies in Tamil Nadu and the findings are discussed in this paper.

Material and Method

The data for this study were collected from a population of 41,000 from Vellore town (urban area) and a population of 52,000 from the rural area of K.V. Kuppan Block of the North Arcot district, Tamil Nadu, India, from 1986 to 1988. Initially, a household survey was done and all marriages that occurred during five years prior to the survey were identified. Keeping that information as base, another round of survey was undertaken to collect detailed information on the marriages conducted. Then details of marriages were collected prospectively as and when they had occurred during the next two years. Additionally, the reasons for consanguineous marriages, and the context of timing of marriages were explored through indepth study by women social scientists who were staying in the study areas.

Results and Discussion

There were 2815 marriages in the rural areas and 1089 in the urban areas during 1982 to 1987. Of these, first marriage for both bride and the bridegroom were 2758 (98 per cent) in the rural and 1049 (96.3 per cent) in the urban areas. All these marriages were arranged by the parents or elders in the family. Only these marriages are considered in this analysis.

The mean age at marriage of females was 18.6 and 19.6 in the rural and urban areas respectively and those of males were 25.9 in the rural and 26.3 in the urban areas. While the means for females were slightly lower than the 1981 census figures of Tamil Nadu, the means of males were very close to the Tamil Nadu level (Registrar General 1985 : 37).

Changes in Prevalence of Consanguinity

Prevalence of consanguinity of the current study and a previous study conducted in the same areas is given in Table 1. The first study covered all married women in the year 1969-70 (Rao and Inbaraj 1977). It showed that, in the rural areas nearly half and in the urban areas about one third of the marriages were consanguineous whereas the current study showed that a little more than one in three marriages in the rural areas and nearly one in four in the urban areas were consanguineous. Undoubtedly, consanguinity has decreased both in the

rural and urban areas; however, the reduction is more marked in the rural than the urban areas.

TABLE 1: PERCENTAGE OF CONSANGUINITY IN 1969-70 AND 1982-87

| Type of Marriage | 1969-70* | | 1982-87" | |
|-------------------------|----------|-------|----------|-------|
| | Rural | Urban | Rural | Urban |
| 1. Consanguineous | 46.9 | 29.1 | 35.6 | 25.1 |
| (a) Uncle-niece | 15.8 | 6.6 | 9.5 | 4.8 |
| (b) First Cousin | 24.8 | 17.5 | 20.6 | 15.4 |
| (c) Beyond First Cousin | 6.3 | 5.0 | 5.5 | 4.9 |
| 2. Non-Consanguineous | 53.1 | 70.9 | 64.4 | 74.9 |
| Number studied | 11628 | 8998 | 2758 | 1049 |

*All married women surveyed in 1969-70 (Rao and Inbaraj, 1977)

**All marriages occurred during 1982-87 in the same area

Rao *et al.* (1971) studied about 25,000 households in the same urban area, Vellore town, in 1968-69 and reported 30.1% consanguinity. When the married women were classified according to marriage cohorts, they found 30.2%, 31.4% and 31.0% consanguinity among those married before 1950, 1950-59 and 1960-69 respectively. So there was little change in the prevalence of consanguinity for a long time in the urban area and the reduction in the current study should have happened after 1970. Rao *et al.* (1972) found consanguinity of 47.2%, 50.5% and 49.0% respectively for women who were born in 1930 and earlier, between 1931 and 1945, and in 1946 or later in these rural areas. So there is evidence to believe that the reduction recorded in the current study is of recent origin in the rural areas also. Prevalence of not only overall consanguinity but also each type of consanguinity is lower in the urban than in the rural areas. First cousin marriages were more common than uncle-niece marriages. This is probably because niece of suitable age might not be available for every uncle or the available niece might not be suitable match for an educated uncle or *vice-versa*. When fertility was high each woman had many children, the eldest daughter's daughter would be old enough to marry her mother's younger brother. This was also facilitated by the fact that, in a family, women married earlier than men. When fertility was controlled, there was shortage of nieces of marriageable age for an uncle, even if the age at marriage remained the same.

Undoubtedly, the study areas had experienced a fall in the birth rate. The area under study had a crude birth rate of 36 in the rural areas during 1969-74 and 24 in 1986 showing a reduction of 33% and in the urban area it was 38 in 1969-74 and 21 in 1986 disclosing a decrease of 45% (Rao and Inbaraj 1977a). In the whole of Tamil Nadu state, the crude birth rate was estimated to be 36.3 in the rural areas and 31.1 in the urban areas for the period 1970-72 (Premi 1982 : 43). They were 24.1 in the rural and 23.0 in the urban areas in the year 1986 (Registrar General 1988:14). These indicate a reduction of 34% in both the rural

and urban areas of the whole state between the two periods. While the reduction in the study rural areas is very close to the state level, the reduction in the urban areas is higher than the state level. This is mainly due to high initial birth rate in the study urban area.

Consanguinity and Age at Marriage

The relationship between consanguinity and age at marriage, especially proportion married early is presented in Table 2. In this context, early marriage is defined as a marriage conducted earlier than age 18 for females and 21 for males. These cut off ages were chosen because the legal minimum age at marriage is 18 for females and 21 for males (Beri 1982: 18). In the rural, 44% of the consanguineous marriages were early for females compared to 32% among non-consanguineous marriages. In the urban areas, 43% of the consanguineous marriages were early compared to 25% of the non-consanguineous marriages. Among the consanguineous marriages, the percentage of early marriages in rural areas was very close to that in the urban areas. However, this is not* true among the non-consanguineous marriages. Therefore, the difference in early marriages between the rural and urban areas is due to non-consanguineous marriages. This suggests that urbanization not only reduces consanguineous marriages but also early marriages among the non-consanguineous. Males who married early formed a very small proportion. No significant difference was found in the percentage married early (males) either between the rural and urban areas or between the consanguineous and non-consanguineous marriages. This statement holds good even if the cut off point is shifted to age 25 for males.

TABLE 2: CONSANGUINITY AND PERCENTAGE MARRIED EARLY

| <i>Consanguinity</i> | <i>No. of marriages studied</i> | | <i>% Women married before 18</i> | | <i>% Men married before 21</i> | |
|-------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------|----------------------------------|--------------|--------------------------------|--------------|
| | <i>Rural</i> | <i>Urban</i> | <i>Rural</i> | <i>Urban</i> | <i>Rural</i> | <i>Urban</i> |
| 1. Consanguineous | 981 | 263 | 44.0 | 42.7 | 5.6 | 3.2 |
| (a) Uncle-niece | 262 | 50 | 43.6 | 52.1 | 7.3 | 2.1 |
| (b) First Cousin | 568 | 162 | 43.7 | 39.0 | 5.4 | 1.9 |
| (c) Beyond First Cousin | 151 | 51 | 45.6 | 44.9 | 3.4 | 8.2 |
| 2. Non-Consanguineous | 1777 | 786 | 32.4 | 24.7 | 4.9 | 3.7 |
| All marriages | 2758 | 1049 | 36.5 | 29.2 | 5.2 | 3.6 |

Consanguinity, Early Marriage and Couple Age Difference

Two aspects considered important in arranging a mate for a girl which have profound influence on timing of marriage and consanguinity are the age difference between the spouses and the marital distance (the distance between the natal and marital home of the woman).

Usually a bridegroom is preferred to be five years older than the bride. Singh (1990 : 153) found that brides were always younger than the bridegrooms in his study area in north India and noted that nobody could give any explanation for such practice. One of the reasons for marrying an young girl is to keep hierarchy of power relations between the spouses in the desirable order. Boys and girls are socialised to give respect to elders. When the wife is younger than the husband, she is deemed to be in a subordinate position and hence maintenance of proper power structure within the family. Moreover, people believe that girls grow faster than boys and so an young woman is selected to make it easy for the man to exercise authority over her. She learns to obey not only the husband's parents but him as well (Srinivas 1984:25).

Consanguineous marriages have large age difference between the spouses. In the rural areas consanguinity was 34 per cent when the age difference between the spouses was 4 years or less and it was 38 per cent when the age difference was 10 to 14 years. In the urban areas 23 per cent was consanguineous marriages when the age difference was 4 years or less and it was 33 per cent when the difference was 15 years or more. The relationship is clearly brought out in the urban areas compared to the rural areas. Table 3 gives the percentage of women married early classified by consanguinity and the difference between the ages of the spouses. Whatever be the age difference, the percent married early is higher in consanguineous marriages than in non-consanguineous marriages in both the areas. However, the percent married early, increases sharply as the age difference widens for both groups of consanguinity. Moreover, the difference in the percent married early between the two consanguineous groups widens as age difference increases. Specifically, the percent married early with age difference of 10 years or more is considerably higher in consanguineous marriages than in non- consanguineous marriages. In fact more than two thirds of the consanguineous marriages with an age difference of over 10 years were early in the rural areas. Again a little more than half of all consanguineous marriages in the urban areas with an age difference of 10 years or more were early. Thus with increasing age differences between the spouses, a higher proportion of early marriages are consanguineous.

In the study area, a ceremony is conducted when a girl attains puberty (Venkatalakshmi 1984). Sometimes, after the ceremony, the parents of a relative man, approach through intermediaries the parents of the girl, with the marriage proposal. Without any valid reason if the parents of the girl reject the offer, it is a great embarrassment for both the families and also a shame to the parents of the man. Almost in all such instances the parents of the girl agree to the proposal even though the man is older than the girl by several years. So early consanguineous marriages take place with a large age gap between the spouses. In most of the consanguineous marriages there was no need to spend time to search for a mate. It is also true that consanguineous marriages occurred early as they were already fixed by the elders when the man and the woman were children and the marriage ceremony was conducted as soon as the girl attained puberty and the family gathered enough resources to meet the expenses. In very rare cases non-consanguineous marriages occurred early. For instance, if the parents of a girl did not want her to marry a particular relative (man) they might pre-empt it by marrying her to another man as soon as possible.

TABLE 3: PERCENTAGE MARRIED EARLY (FEMALE) BY CONSANGUINITY AND AGE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE COUPLE

| <i>Consanguinity</i> | <i>Age Difference</i> | | |
|----------------------|-----------------------|------------------|------------------|
| | <i>< 5 years</i> | <i>5-9 years</i> | <i>10+ years</i> |
| <i>Rural Areas</i> | | | |
| Consanguineous | 19.6 | 40.3 | 68.9 |
| Non-consanguineous | 15.9 | 30.0 | 52.6 |
| Difference | 3.7 | 10.3 | 16.3 |
| <i>Urban Areas</i> | | | |
| Consanguineous | 13.5 | 50.0 | 51.7 |
| Non-consanguineous | 10.6 | 26.1 | 39.6 |
| Difference | 2.9 | 23.9 | 12.1 |

In urban areas, where men and women are educated, the woman should be sufficiently educated to match the education of the man. The need to educate the girl delays marriage and reduces the age gap. However in seeking a mate for a woman through matrimonial advertisements in the newspapers, which is certainly a departure from tradition, the traditional age gap of 5 years was preferred (Rao and Sudarsen 1978). No doubt, these result in non-consanguineous late marriages.

Consanguinity, Early Marriage and Marital Distance

Marriage is arranged within the same caste and usually a mate is preferred within the same village or from nearby villages. Guruswamy (1986 : 106) reported instances of daughter living a few yards away from her parental house in Tamil Nadu village. It is the desire of every parent, especially the mother of the girl, to have the daughter's home nearby so that they can visit each other frequently. The mother is always anxious about the welfare of her daughter. The behaviour of a girl in her marital home directly and indirectly contributes to the honour and shame of her natal family. Guidance can be sought for by the girl and given by the mother if she is married and settled within a short distance. So it is preferred to have marriage alliance within a short distance. This is in complete contrast to the villages in north India where village exogamy is the rule (MacDorman 1987 : 108 and Singh 1990:121). Village exogamy helps to increase non-consanguineous marriages, which upholds the principle of *sapinda* in mate selection. Singh (1990 : 175) found that, in a Himachal Pradesh village, a girl was chosen from a sufficient distance so that any adjustment problem that she had in her marital family would not easily reach her parents. Miller (1981: 162,163) pointed out that among higher social groups there was generally a greater distance between the bride's natal village and her village of marriage, higher frequency of exogamous

marriages, and lower and shorter duration of visits to her natal village than among people of lower social status.

Relationship between consanguinity and marital distance is not in the same direction in the study areas. In the rural areas, when the marital distance was short (less than 5 km) 47.7% were consanguineous marriages and when the distance was long (more than 40 km) 30.4% were consanguineous, indicating higher chance of consanguinity among short distance marriages. On the contrary, in the urban areas, 19.6% were consanguineous when the distance was short while 29% were consanguineous when the distance was long suggesting higher chance of consanguineous marriages when the distance was long. It is possible that male migrants in urban areas married relatives from their rural areas which were far away.

Percentage married early classified by marital distance and consanguinity is given in Table 4. In the rural areas among consanguineous marriages, about two in five were early marriages and there was not much variation over marital distance. Among non-consanguineous marriages there was a reduction in the early marriages when the marital distance was high. In fact, nearly two in five marriages were early when the distance was less than 10 kilometres and it was a little more than one in four when the distance was greater than 40 kilometres. In the urban areas the percent married early was considerably low when the marital distance was 40 km or more compared to lower distances. In rural areas, early consanguineous marriages cut across all marital distances and in urban areas percentage married early has negative relationship with marital distance. Possibly, urbanization leads to higher age at marriage and long marital distance.

TABLE 4: PERCENTAGE MARRIED EARLY BY MARITAL DISTANCE AND CONSANGUINITY

| <i>Consanguinity</i> | <i>Marital Distance (in km)</i> | | |
|----------------------|---------------------------------|--------------|------------|
| | <i>< 10</i> | <i>11-40</i> | <i>41+</i> |
| <i>Rural Areas</i> | | | |
| Consanguineous | 44.1 | 46.7 | 41.3 |
| Non-consanguineous | 37.1 | 30.8 | 27.9 |
| Difference | 7.0 | 15.9 | 13.4 |
| <i>Urban Areas</i> | | | |
| Consanguineous | 48.6 | 52.5 | 30.7 |
| Non-consanguineous | 26.5 | 27.8 | 20.8 |
| Difference | 22.1 | 24.7 | 9.9 |

One reason for short marital distance was the limited mobility of the population especially in the rural areas. Most villagers hesitate to move out of the village or nearby

areas till they are forced to do so. In the rural areas 76 per cent and in the urban areas 35 per cent of the households were staying in the same place for more than 25 years or for many generations. Moreover, the relatives were not scattered over a long distance. So when an alliance was sought for a girl, generally, the choice was from short distance.

Consanguinity, Early Marriage and Education

Undoubtedly, literacy and education are associated with the timing of marriage (D'Souza 1981:130; Rao *et al.* 1972; United Nations 1990: 188). Srinivas (1989:89) while arguing on the link between female education and marriage stated that parents wanted their daughters to get only so much education as would give them the utmost advantage in marriage market. In his view, colleges and universities provided respectable waiting places for girls who wished to get married. In certain quarters in urban area, girls with urban jobs were preferred as brides, and the prerequisite for urban job was education (Srinivas 1989 : 90). Similar views on urban jobs were expressed by villagers in Karnataka (Caldwell *et al.* 1983).

Evidence of inverse relationship between female education and consanguinity is present in the study areas, that is, less educated women are more likely to marry consanguineously. In the rural areas, when wife had no education, consanguinity was 33 per cent and when she had 13 years of education or more it was 19 per cent. In the urban areas, the consanguinity was 26 per cent for those with no education and 11 per cent for those with 13 years of education or more. So consanguinity is very low among the highly educated.

Table 5 gives the percentage of wives married early classified by her educational level and consanguinity. This clearly provides evidence that education and non-consanguinity have suppressing effect on early marriages. At every level of education, in both the rural and urban areas, the percentage married early was higher among the consanguineous marriages than non-consanguineous marriages. In the rural areas, in consanguineous marriage, the percentages married early among those with no education and those with at least four years of education were very close. So unless the girl had at least 5 years of schooling, she had a higher chance of marrying early. On similar arguments, in urban areas unless a girl completed at least 10 years of schooling she had a higher chance of marrying early. In general, education up to 10 years may be necessary to reduce early marriage.

In the rural areas the difference in the percentage of early marriages between the consanguineous and non-consanguineous groups does not show any clear gradient over education but in urban areas it does. It is the highest for the women with no education and the lowest for the women with at least 10 years education. This confirms the fact that spending long years at school reduces the chances of early marriage.

Existence of relationship between husband's education and consanguinity is also investigated. In the rural areas the highest consanguinity of 37 per cent was observed when the husband's education was 6 to 8 years and it decreased to 32 per cent for those with education of at least 13 years. In the urban area, they were 34 per cent and 15 per cent respectively. The relationship is clearer in the urban than in the rural areas. The effect of education of husband and consanguinity on early marriage of women is examined through

Table 6. In both the areas, in every education category the percent married early was higher in the consanguineous group than in the non-consanguineous group. In the rural areas, the gradation in the percent married early over various education categories in the consanguineous group is not spectacular except between no education and primary (1-5 years) education categories. It is very clear that an education of at least 10 years of schooling does reduce early marriages dramatically even in urban areas. Comparing Table 5 with Table 6 it was found that, although the pattern of percentages was the same in both the tables, they were lower in Table 5 than in Table 6. Perhaps education of females acts on reducing early marriage of females more effectively than education of males.

TABLE 5 : PERCENTAGE MARRIED EARLY BY EDUCATION OF WIFE AND CONSANGUINITY

| <i>Consanguinity</i> | <i>Percentage Married Early</i> | | | |
|----------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------|------------------|------------------|
| | <i>NIL</i> | <i><5 years</i> | <i>5-9 years</i> | <i>10+ years</i> |
| <i>Rural Areas</i> | | | | |
| Consanguineous | 47.1 | 48.9 | 35.6 | 39.3 |
| Non-consanguineous | 36.6 | 30.6 | 33.0 | 24.1 |
| Difference | 10.5 | 18.3 | 2.6 | 15.2 |
| <i>Urban Areas</i> | | | | |
| Consanguineous | 52.5 | 47.5 | 46.2 | 21.3 |
| Non-consanguineous | 34.3 | 33.7 | 31.2 | 11.3 |
| Difference | 18.2 | 13.8 | 14.0 | 10.0 |

TABLE 6: PERCENTAGE MARRIED EARLY (WIFE) BY EDUCATION OF HUSBAND AND CONSANGUINITY

| | <i>NIL</i> | <i><5 years</i> | <i>5-9 years</i> | <i>10+ years</i> |
|--------------------|------------|--------------------|------------------|------------------|
| <i>Rural Areas</i> | | | | |
| Consanguineous | 51.0 | 44.1 | 42.0 | 41.4 |
| Non-consanguineous | 32.2 | 36.2 | 34.2 | 29.1 |
| Difference | 18.8 | 7.9 | 7.8 | 12.3 |
| <i>Urban Areas</i> | | | | |
| Consanguineous | 58.5 | 52.4 | 45.6 | 29.8 |
| Non-consanguineous | 39.8 | 35.6 | 27.4 | 17.4 |
| Difference | 18.7 | 16.8 | 18.2 | 11.4 |

TABLE 7 : MULTIPLE CLASSIFICATION ANALYSIS OF FEMALE AGE AT MARRIAGE ON EDUCATION, CONSANGUINITY, AGE DIFFERENCE AND MARITAL DISTANCE

| <i>Variable</i> | <i>Rural</i> | | <i>Urban</i> | |
|-------------------------------|--------------|--------------------------------------|--------------|--------------------------------------|
| | <i>N</i> | <i>Adjusted Mean Age at Marriage</i> | <i>N</i> | <i>Adjusted Mean Age at Marriage</i> |
| <i>Wife's Education</i> | | | | |
| Nil | 1059 | 18.3 | 297 | 19.1 |
| 1-5 years | 527 | 18.4 | 125 | 18.7 |
| 6-8 years | 575 | 18.6 | 162 | 18.7 |
| 9-10 years | 321 | 18.9 | 178 | 20.0 |
| 11-12 years | 77 | 19.9 | 102 | 20.7 |
| 13+ years | 28 | 22.5 | 69 | 23.2 |
| (Beta) | | (0.17) | | (0.35) |
| <i>Husband's Education</i> | | | | |
| Nil | 447 | 18.5 | 146 | 18.9 |
| 1-5 years | 529 | 18.3 | 130 | 19.0 |
| 6-8 years | 627 | 18.6 | 157 | 19.0 |
| 9-10 years | 698 | 18.6 | 229 | 19.8 |
| 11-12 years | 170 | 18.5 | 115 | 20.5 |
| 13+ years | 116 | 19.3 | 156 | 20.0 |
| (Beta) | | (0.07) | | (0.15) |
| <i>Consanguinity</i> | | | | |
| Yes | 908 | 18.2 | 239 | 18.9 |
| No | 1679 | 18.8 | 694 | 19.9 |
| (Beta) | | (0.09) | | (0.12) |
| <i>Age Difference</i> | | | | |
| Up to 4 years | 562 | 20.2 | 264 | 21.2 |
| 5-9 years | 1381 | 18.6 | 457 | 19.3 |
| 10+ years | 644 | 17.1 | 212 | 18.2 |
| (Beta) | | (0.35) | | (0.32) |
| <i>Marital Distance</i> | | | | |
| Up to 10 km | 997 | 18.4 | 307 | 19.5 |
| 11-40 km | 1042 | 18.6 | 237 | 19.6 |
| 41+ km | 548 | 18.8 | 389 | 19.7 |
| (Beta) | | (0.05) | | (0.02) |
| Multiple R² | | 17.8% | 37.7% | |

Note : All variables are significant except Marital Distance in urban area.

To find the influence of consanguinity on age at marriage after controlling other variables, multiple classification analysis was employed and this considered mean age at marriage instead of the proportion married early (Andrews *et al.* 1973). The results of the analysis (Table 7) give the extent of effect of education of wife, education of husband, consanguinity, marital distance and difference between ages of spouses on female age at marriage. The total variation on female age at marriage explained by these variables is 17.8 per cent in the rural areas and 37.7 per cent in the urban areas, indicating that female age at marriage is determined by many other factors than these. However the relative position of the variables were brought out clearly. The adjusted mean age at marriage of all classes of all variables of the rural areas were lower than the corresponding means of the urban areas, confirming that urban life contributed to increase in age at marriage. Moreover, these means of all classes were higher than the minimum legal age at marriage of 18 years except when the age difference between the spouses was 10 years or more. The adjusted mean was the highest when the wife had education of 13 years or more, in both the areas however, such women were very small in number. All the variables contributed independently and significantly to age at marriage except marital distance in the urban areas. Comparing the betas, it was inferred that education of wife contributed more than education of husbands. In both the areas, the mean was nearly two years higher when the wife had at least 10 years education compared to no education. Although consanguinity had independent effect it was very small. The age difference between the spouses contributed the highest in the rural areas and wife's education in the urban areas.

Preference of Consanguineous Marriage

The advantages of consanguineous marriages are many. It is easy to maintain reciprocal kinship obligations traditionally followed by the society such as gifts at the time of marriage. The wealth including property and jewellery may not go outside the large family. It facilitates ease of adjustment of the girl in the in-law's house especially, in the case of uncle-niece marriages, the girl knows the family of the man right from childhood. Moreover, in this case, the mother-in-law of the girl is her grand mother. So friction between the mother-in law and the daughter-in-law may be less and therefore the chances of ill-treating the girl by the in-laws are less. If the girl is not properly taken care of by the man's family, the parents of the girl can use their right as relatives to question the man's family. It helps promote better inter-personal relationship. A great additional advantage is the mother of the girl can go and stay in her daughter's house for a few days which may not be possible if the boy is not a relative. Moreover, at old age the grand daughter's house is a secure place to stay if married consanguineously. When a girl has physical handicap, a man from the relatives is selected for her, because relatives not only understand her but sympathetic towards her. The demands for dowry and gifts, in terms of cash and kind, will not be exorbitant as they are fully aware of the economic status of the girl's family. The cost of wedding is also less.

Departure from Consanguinity

One of the reasons from non-consanguineous marriages is the preference for higher quality husband for a girl. If a girl is educated, then it is necessary to search for a groom who is at least equally educated and having a good job. If such a groom is not available among

relatives, search has to be made outside. To search for and fix such a man takes more time and so the age at marriage goes up. (For this reason may parents do not give higher education for girls as it is difficult to find a more educated boy within their caste as her connubial circle narrows down) (Srinivas 1978). In the point of view of the man's family, the higher the value of the man the higher the amount of dowry asked for. So they prefer a non-relative girl whose parents are willing to give more dowry and meet the cost of wedding than to a relative girl whose parents are not rich enough to do so. Thus the desire for a large dowry is another reason for not having consanguineous marriage. Although legislation against dowry exists in the form of the Dowry Prohibition Act 1961 with amendments up to 1984, it is not only ineffective but also the various provisions are difficult to implement (Venkataramaiah 1987 : 38-39).

The belief that consanguineous marriages result in producing children with defects or lead to repeated abortion is yet another reason for resorting to non-consanguineous marriages. This is also used as a scapegoat to reject the claims Of the relatives.

Leads to Future Direction

Education is spreading rapidly among both males and females. Dowry is spreading very fast even to castes and groups which were not traditionally demanding and taking it (Caldwell *et al.* 1983; Caplan 1984 and Srinivas 1984). It looks as though hardly any marriage will take place without dowry. Right from the birth of daughter parents worry about dowry. Lakshmi (1989) reported that in Bombay, a man donated his kidney to get money, to save it for paying dowry of his daughters who were 6,4, and 3 years old. The condition of marriage squeeze similar to what was described by Caldwell *et al.* (1983) and Kadi (1987) is present in Tamil Nadu and the study areas. So non-consanguineous and delayed marriages will be on the increase.

Age at marriage will increase but not celibacy. Sushama (1989 :123) pointed out that, in Kerala, never-married women were not looked down upon but in Tamil Nadu it is not so. The proportion of life-time never-married women will not increase much, thanks to the introduction of non-traditional ways of match making and wedding celebration. A minority of persons who were interested in higher education and pursuit of higher occupational goals at an age when all others got married, advertise through matrimonial columns of dailies for a suitable mate. An analysis of matrimonial advertisements in a leading English language newspaper in the south India showed that females asking for grooms were more than males seeking brides. Moreover, the average age of male advertisers was 31.3 and of females 27.0. They included persons of all major religions but belonged to high educational and occupational categories (Rao and Sudarsan 1978). Similar findings were reported by Das (1980) from north India. Alliances made through such methods will be non-consanguineous and with long marital distance.

Organizations have sprung up (separately for each caste and religion) which help in introducing suitable brides and bridegrooms to their parents either individually or collectively. Parents can communicate with those organizations and get details of suitable grooms for their daughters. Middle class families contact these organizations to locate prospective grooms for a daughter. Then the parents of the girl proceed with the usual

enquiries and discussions through 'go-betweens'. Some of these organizations periodically arrange meetings of prospective brides and grooms along with their parents. These are attended by a large number of families of lower middle class and the poor. In those meetings women and men are introduced one by one to the mass gathering through public address system. Those who are interested in a particular match, meet in the same place to discuss about suitability and selection.

New hope to those who could not afford the accelerating cost of wedding is provided by some religious and social establishments. These institutions conduct mass marriages, some annually on a low cost budget (Raja 1991). They provide wedding dress for the poor bride and the groom and free feast on the day of mass marriage in which nearly 200 weddings take place. Parents take advantage of such non-traditional facilities and conduct marriages in large numbers. Such establishments started in temples and big cities have also spread to towns. These help reduce the never-married, increase non-consanguineous marriages' age at marriage and marital distance.

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