

## AGE AT MARRIAGE AND FERTILITY—A SAMPLE STUDY IN THE RURAL UTTAR PRADESH

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THE present paper is devoted to the study of the fertility curve as a function of the age at marriage. Since marriage remains the only channel practically of all the births, age at marriage and duration of married life are likely to be the significant factors in governing the reproductive achievement of a woman. Secondly, as child-bearing is the sole responsibility of the fair sex, it is the age at marriage of the wife rather than that of the husband that the fertility is more related to. Consequently, fertility rates are calculated in relation to the age at marriage of the wife.

Universality of marriage and early marriage are the two most outstanding features of the Indian society. According to the Census Report of U.P. 1951, of all the females in the state, 64 per cent. were married, widowed or divorced, and in the age-group 15-24, all the females, with the exception of some 11 per cent., were married at one or the other time.\*

It is important to mention here that among most of the Indian communities the actual marriage is restricted merely to the observation of certain rituals involved in matrimonial ceremony, and, with the exception of a short visit of four to seven days just after marriage, which, too, is absent in many communities, the girls reside in their parents' house. It is only after the *gauna* ceremony that the bride goes to live with her husband and the partners enter the effective conjugal relations. Age at marriage, therefore, here refers to the age at *gauna* which actually marks the beginning of the consummation of marriage.

According to the figures of our investigation which covered 1336 females randomly selected from the whole of the rural Uttar Pradesh and who were married at the time of enquiry, 80 per cent. of the total wives were married below the age of 16 of whom at least one-tenth entered the conjugal lives when they were not even 12, and by 19, with the exception of a few, nearly all the females were married. The average age at marriage works out at 14.1 years.

These rates suggest that our girls become wives at an age which is hardly considered a marriageable age in most of the European countries, where the median age of marriage of girls marrying during 1950-54 has been found to be between 23 and 25.<sup>1</sup>

\* Census of U.P. (India) Part I-A. Main Report, p. 337.

<sup>1</sup> *Recent Trends in Fertility in Industrialized Countries*, U.N. Publication, 1958, p. 52.