

Widow Remarriage in six Rural Communities in Western India

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1 The purpose of the present paper is to put forward certain data relating to the incidence of widowhood and the practice of remarriage available from a demographic study of six rural communities earlier conducted by the author. * The study was conducted during 1954-55 and covered five districts of the then Bombay State and one district of the then Hyderabad State. It was extended to a total population of 37,292. This included 11,716 women of ages 13 years and above. The following paper is based on the data relating to the marital status of these women.

2 In Table No. 1, the women are shown classified into quinquennial age-groups and by marital status. It will be seen that there were very few unmarried women in the age group 23-27 and fewer still in the later age-groups, so that apparently everyone married before the age 23 and practically no one remained permanently unmarried - only 3 out of 3291 women in the age group 43 and over were unmarried. On the other hand, widowhood begins to make its appearance even in the youngest age-group and quite considerably in the age group 23-27. In this age group over 6 per cent of the women were widowed and this percentage steadily rose in the older age groups; in the age group 38-42, over 25 per cent were widowed and in the age group above 42 years, nearly 60 per cent of the women were widows. Finally, nearly 3 per cent of all the women were divorced or otherwise separated and this proportion was more or less the same in all the age groups from 18 to 42 years. In the following, we shall concentrate attention on the married and the widowed women.

3 Not all the women shown as married in Table No.1 were married without interruption. Some of them had been widowed and later remarried. Among the 7836 women shown as married there were 547 women thus remarried so that

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Table No. 1 : The marital status composition of women of ages 13 & above.

Present age	Unmarried		: Married		: Widowed		: Divorced & separated		Total
	Number	Per- cent- age	Number	Per- Cent- age.	Number	Per- cent- age	Number	Per- cent- age	
13-17	782	46.0	875	51.4	12	0.7	32	1.9	1701
18-22	141	7.8	1570	87.4	27	1.5	59	3.3	1797
23-27	17	1.1	1330	89.2	91	6.1	53	3.6	1491
28-32	4	<u>0.3</u>	1219	86.2	131	9.3	60	4.2	1414
33-37	2	0.2	794	79.3	167	16.7	38	3.8	1001
38-42	5	0.5	723	70.8	258	25.3	35	3.4	1021
43-	3	0.1	1325	40.3	1898	57.6	65	2.0	3291
All ages	954	8.1	7836	66.9	2584	22.1	342	2.9	11716

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the remaining 7289 women were married only once. On the other hand, there were also women who having been widowed and remarried, became widows a second time. There were 256 such women and they were naturally included among the 2584 widows shown in Table No.1. We might thus distinguish four categories of women as under :

Married only once	7289
Widowed only once	2328
Remarried.	547
Widowed a second time.	256

If we add these four categories together, we get what we might call women who were ever-married. In the same way, the last three categories added together give us women who were ever-widowed and the last two categories added together give us women who were ever-remarried. We might set out these categories as under:

Ever married.	10,420
Ever widowed	3,131
Ever remarried	803
Widowed a second time	256

In the above, if we relate the ever-widowed to ever-married we get an index of the incidence of widowhood. Similarly, if we relate the ever remarried to ever-widowed, we get an index of the practice of remarriage. Finally, by relating those who were widowed a second time to the ever-remarried, we get an index of the incidence of a second widowhood. The indexes are as under:

Ever/widowed/Ever married	30.06
Ever remarried/Ever widowed	25.65
Widowed a second time/Ever-remarried.	31.88

In Table No.2 we give such indexes for women in different age groups. It should be noted that the age-groups are based on the present age of women and that therefore the indexes shown in Table No.2 are not related to the age of the women at their first or second marriages or their first or second widowhoods. The incidence of widowhood is naturally higher in the higher age groups. Besides, the practice of remarriage is also more frequent in the younger age groups. These two put

Table No. 2 : Values of the indexes ever-widowed/ever-married, ever-re-married/ever-widowed, widowed second time/ever-remarried for various age groups.

Age group	Ever-married (E.M.)	Ever-widowed (E.W.)	Ever remarried (E.Rem.)	Widowed twice (W.T.)	$\frac{E.W.}{E.M.}$	$\frac{E.Rem.}{E. W.}$	$\frac{W. T.}{E.Rem.}$
13-17	887	27	15	-	3.04	55.55	-
18-22	1597	61	35	1	3.82	57.38	2.86
23-27	1421	167	83	7	11.75	49.70	8.43
28-32	1350	221	100	10	16.37	45.25	10.00
33-37	961	238	78	7	24.77	32.77	8.97
38-42	981	333	106	31	33.94	31.83	29.24
43 -	3223	2084	386	200	64.66	18.52	51.81
All ages	10420	3131	803	256	30.06	25.65	31.88

together make the resulting proportion of the existing widows much smaller in the younger age groups than in the older age groups. Of course, to this we must also add the women who after remarrying became widows a second time. The incidence of second widowhood in most of the age groups is close to the incidence of the first widowhood but is naturally lower than the latter; this is because the age at remarriage would be later to the age at first marriage.

4 The incidence of widowhood is governed by rates of mortality and the age at marriage. We have no direct information on the rates of mortality affecting the women under consideration or their husbands. Rates of mortality are however known to have declined considerably in recent years, and we would expect that this would reduce the incidence of widowhood particularly in the younger age groups. Another development favourable from this point of view is the advancement of the age at marriage. We might furnish direct evidence on this point by examining the ages at marriage of the women under consideration. In Table No.3, we give the distributions of the women in each age group according to their ages at first marriage. In order to facilitate comparison between different age groups, the Table shows, for each group of women, the proportion which had married on or before each specified age. It is evident that the age at marriage is advancing. Thus of the women of age 43 years and above, 71.2 per cent were married before age 13, while in the age group 13-17 only 34.0 per cent were married before age 13.

5 The combined effect of the advancing age at marriage and the decline in mortality on the incidence of widowhood may be seen from the Table No.4, where we give a classification of the women in each age group according to the age of the first widowhood of those who thus suffered. Again, to facilitate comparison between the different age groups, the Table shows for the women in each age group, the proportion of those who were widowed for the first time at or before the given age. A small but a steady advance in the age at widowhood is evident. Thus, of the women in the age group 43 and over, 4.56 per cent were widowed before age 13 and 14.43 were widowed before age 23. The same percentages for the women in the age group 23-32 are 1.59 and 9.96 respectively.

6 We might next turn attention to the other phenomenon, namely, the remarriages of widows. In Table No.2 we have shown what proportion of the ever-widowed women

Table No. 3 : Age at first marriage of evermarried women

Age at marriage Present Age.	Years								Total percent- age of ever- married women	Per- centage of un- married women	Total No. of ever- married women	Total No. of women including unmarried
	8 below	10 below	11 & below	12 & below	13 & below	14 & below	15 & below	16 & below				
13 - 17	11.4	20.5	25.3	34.0	41.5	-	-	-	52.1	46.9	887	1669
18 - 22	13.5	28.1	34.8	46.8	56.3	63.8	70.9	78.7	91.9	8.1	1597	1738
23 - 27	17.1	30.7	37.6	49.2	57.8	64.8	74.3	84.3	98.8	1.2	1421	1438
28 - 32	21.5	39.4	45.8	59.9	66.5	73.2	79.5	88.1	99.6	0.4	13 50	1354
33 - 37	24.1	40.9	48.5	60.5	65.4	72.7	79.8	88.4	99.8	0.2	961	963
38 - 42	26.2	43.5	50.5	66.4	72.6	77.7	82.0	90.0	99.6	0.4	98 1	986
43 -	28.5	50.0	56.6	71.2	76.4	82.4	88.0	93.4	99.9	0.1	3223	3226
All ages	20.8	37.2	43.6	56.4	63.2	69.6	75.7	82.5	91.6	8.4	10420	11374

Table No. 4 : Percentage of women widowed up to a given age from among the ever-married women in the 4 age-cohorts.

Age at widowhood ----- Present age	Upto 12 :		Upto 22 :		Upto 32 :		Upto 42 :		43 and over		Total No. of ever-widowed : women :		Total No. of ever- married women	
	No. of widows	Per cent widow- ed	No. of widows	Per cent widow- ed	No. of widows	Per cent widow- ed	No. of widows	Per- cent widow- ed	No. of widows	Per- cent widow- ed	No. of widows	Per- cent widowed		
13 - 22	31	1.25	88	3.54*	-	-	-	-	-	-	88	3.54	2484	
23 - 32	44	1.59	276	9.96	386	13.93*	-	-	-	-	386	13.93	2771	
33 - 42	53	2.73	206	10.61	451	23.22	576	29.66*	-	-	576	29.66	1942	
43 -	147	4.56	465	14.43	824	25.57	1376	42.70	2081	64.57*	2081	64.57	3223	
All ages	275	2.64	1035	9.93	1749	16.78	2426	23.28	2081		30.05	3131	30.05	10420

* These percentage figures cannot be compared because women of the given age-cohort are not fully exposed to widowhood up to the given age.

in each age group had already remarried. The proportions were seen to be higher in the younger age groups than in the older age groups. This is because, the widows in the younger age groups would more often have been widowed at an earlier age leaving a greater desire and a larger possibility of remarriage. To appreciate this point fully, it is necessary to examine the data on remarriage tabulated by both the present age of the women concerned and the age at their first widowhood for in order to remarry the woman should have been widowed early enough and sufficient time should have passed for her to have already remarried. This is done in Table No. 5. Here, the ever-widowed women are classified according to their present age and also their age at widowhood. The Table then shows, for each such group of women, what proportion of women had already remarried. The Table is analytically important and we should examine it more closely.

7 It is obvious that the age at widowhood is greatly relevant as far as the remarriage is concerned. Thus among the women who were widowed before the age 13, as many as 87.4 per cent had remarried. On the other hand, among those who had been widowed after age 42, none had remarried. It is possible of course that some of those who were widowed after 42 would still remarry. Some of these had been widowed now over ten years and had not yet remarried. But some others had been widowed only recently and might still remarry. But we have no concrete evidence.

8 The effect of the passage of time on the possibility of remarriage is naturally better seen among women who were widowed at an early age, say, before 13. Let us examine this group more closely. In the following is a relevant extract from the Table :

<u>Present age</u>	<u>Per cent remarried</u>
13-22	83.3
23-32	93.0
33-42	90.2
43-	86.1

Thus the percentage of remarried rises from 83.3 in the initial age group 13-22 to 93.0 in the next age group 23-32. This may be the effect of the passage of time. What is meant is that some of the widows in the first age group have not been widowed long enough to yet remarry and that some of them would remarry in due course. If the remarriage habits do not change with time and the mortality rates do not change with marital

Table No. 5 : Percentages of the remarried among the ever-widowed in the 4 age cohorts, widowed at various ages.

Age at widowhood	Below 13		13 - 22		23-32		33-42		43-		Total	
	No. of widows	% re-married	No. of widows	% re-married	No. of widows	% re-married	No. of widows	% re-married	No. of widows	% re-married	No. of widows	% re-married
13 - 22	31	83.3	57	47.3	-	-	-	-	-	-	88	56.8
23 - 32	44	93.0	232	57.3	110	8.4	-	-	-	-	386	47.4
33 - 42	53	90.2	153	69.2	245	15.0	125	2.5	-	-	576	31.9
43 -	147	86.1	318	61.8	359	16.1	552	2.0	705	-	2081	18.5
All ages	275	87.4	760	60.5	714	14.2	677	1.4	705	-	3131	25.6

status the percentage of remarried may either increase from one age group to the next (due to remarriages at later ages) or may remain the same after an age. But in the present case the percentage of remarried does not go beyond 93.0 and in fact in the next two age groups it comes down systematically to 90.2 in the age group 33-42 and to 86.1 in the age group 43 and above. It may connote a possibility that the widows in the higher age groups were widowed in an earlier era and that in those days the practice of remarriage was not quite so common as it seems to be at present.

9 There seems a similar possibility in the next group of widows, namely those who were widowed between ages 13 and 22. In the following is a relevant extract from the Table :

<u>Present age</u>	<u>Per cent remarried</u>
13-22	47.3
23-32	57.3
33-42	69.2
43-	61.8

Obviously many of the widows in the youngest age-group 13-22 had been widowed only recently and not enough time had passed for them to remarry. Only 47.3 per cent in this group therefore appears to have remarried. But undoubtedly some more would remarry in due course. This is evident from the manner in which the remarried percentage increases to 57.3 and 69.2 in the next two age groups respectively. However, the percentage then declines to 61.8 in the last age group of 43 and above. For reasons stated in the earlier paragraph this decline may connote that the remarriage was less common in the earlier era than it is in the recent times.

10 If the argument in the above two paragraphs is acceptable, we might put forward what might be called estimates of the extent to which the widow-remarriage is frequent at present. We might put it down as under:

<u>Age at widowhood</u>	<u>Percent expected to remarry</u>	
	<u>In the era represented by women of age 43 and above</u>	<u>In the era represented by women of 13-22</u>
Below 13	86.1	93.0
13-22	61.8	69.2
23-32	16.1	16.1
33-42	2.0	2.5
43-	-	-

The first column above is of course taken down straight from the second line from the bottom in Table No. 5. The manner in which the second column above is built is also obvious - it is built out of the maximum percentages in the several columns of Table No. 5. The reason for this choice is already explained above. We might add here a further word of explanation. What the second column may represent is not the actual remarriage rates to which the widows among the women of present age group 13-22 will be subject. It may represent the possible remarriage rates in recent years. If the trend continues in future the widows among the women of the present age group 13-22 might be subjected to even higher remarriage rates.

11 It is also evident from the above data that the rates of remarriage depend much upon the age at widowhood. The rates of remarriage are much higher among women widowed at a younger age than among those widowed at an older age. This was expected. The reasons for this appear two-fold. In the first instance, with older age, it just becomes too late to remarry. Secondly, women widowed at an older age more often have children from the first marriage. Therefore psychologically, remarriage is less strongly desired. Also emotionally and because of many practical considerations, the children from the first marriage prove a positive handicap for remarriage. In the following, we shall examine the influence of the children by the first marriage on the rates of remarriage.

12 While considering the influence of the children by the first marriage, we might neglect groups of women who were widowed either at too young an age or at too late an age, the former because few among them would have children by the first marriage and the latter because remarriage is anyhow rather uncommon among them. Thus among the women who were widowed before age 13, only one had reported a child from that marriage. On the other hand, among the women who were widowed after age 42, none had remarried; in fact, even among the women who were widowed after age 32, only a small number had remarried. We might therefore neglect these groups of women, namely, those who were widowed either before the age 13 or after the age 32 and concentrate attention on the middle groups.

13 In Table No. 6, we have classified the two groups of women, namely, those who were widowed between ages 13-22 and those between 23-32, according to the number of children they had from the first marriage. The women

are also classified, as before, according to their present age. For each category of women we then show what proportion of them had remarried. It will be obvious from the Table that the number of children from the first marriage has a very large influence on the rates of remarriage. In particular, the difference between having no child and having some children is very large, the marriage rates being almost double when there are no children from the first marriage.

14 The Table also shows that for any category of women such as those who were widowed between 13-22 and had no child from the first marriage, the rates of remarriage increased upto a point as the present age increased. This is what we had earlier termed the effect of the passage of time. There, we had also suggested that we might take the maximum rate of remarriage to indicate the proportion of women in each category who would remarry in due course. We might bring together such maximum rates from Table No. 6.

Expected rates of remarriage for women with age at widowhood 13-22 and 23-32.

	Age at widowhood	
	13-22	23-32
Number of children from first marriage		
None	80.6	45.0
1	46.5	20.4
2 or more	57.0*	12.1

15 In Table No. 7, we give the distribution of the remarried women according to age at remarriage.

Table No. 7 : Remarried women according to their age at remarriage.

<u>Age at remarriage</u>	<u>No. of women</u>
- 13	4.06
13 - 17	38.27
18 - 22	34.05
23 - 27	12.67
28 - 32	6.52
33 - 37	3.69
38 and above	0.74
Total	100 = 803

* Sample size is too small and hence percentage is not necessarily reliable.

Table No. 6 : Percentages of remarried widows widowed at 13 to 22 years and 23 to 32 years when they had the specified number of children.

No. of children Present age	Age at widowhood 13 - 22						Age at widowhood 23 - 32					
	0		1		2 +		0		1		2+	
	Per- cent re-married	Total ever-widowed	Per- cent re-married	Total ever-widowed	Per- cent re-married	Total ever-widowed	Per- cent re-married	Total ever-widowed	Per- cent re-married	Total ever-widowed	Per- cent re-married	Total ever-widowed
13 - 22	60.0	35	31.25	16	-	4	-	-	-	-	-	-
23 - 32	69.2	146	38.5	52	29.6	22*	45.0	20	-	23	-	64
33 - 42	80.6	98	38.7	31	58.8	17*	27.6	29	20.4	49	11.0	155
43--	65.2	198	46.5	71	67.0	49*	22.7	66	18.7	75	12.1	190
All ages	69.2	477	41.2	170	49.4	62	27.8	115	16.3	147	9.8	409

* Samples are too small in size and percentages may not be necessarily reliable.

16 We have so far discussed three factors which affect the practice of remarriage. They are: The age at widowhood, the number of children from the first marriage and the present age of the women concerned. The first two factors affect remarriage directly. The third factor merely checks whether sufficient time had been allowed for the widow to remarry if she wanted to. All the three factors are however in a sense personal. They affect decisions regarding remarriage in a personal way. There remains the overriding influence of custom and tradition. As is well known, the Hindu society is divided into a number of castes and the customs and traditions regarding marriage vary greatly between different caste groups. In order to examine to what extent they influence remarriage, we give in Table No.8, certain remarriage rates for a number of caste groups. For such a comparison to be valid, it would be necessary to remove the influence of the three factors mentioned above. However, to do this would be computationally rather complicated. Among the three factors mentioned above, the age at widowhood is the most important. Also as it itself, depends upon the age at

Table No. 8 : Percentage of remarried widows in different caste groups.

<u>Caste Group</u>	<u>Total No. of widows</u>	<u>Percentage remarried.</u>
Advanced caste Hindus	808	10.4
Intermediate Hindus	816	25.9
Scheduled caste Hindus	392	41.1
Backward Hindus	478	32.2
Non-Hindus	281	27.0
Lingayats	354	32.4
Total	<u>3131</u>	<u>25.6</u>
	*****	*****

marriage and as the age at marriage is likely to be different in different castes, the composition of the widows by the age at widowhood is likely to be different in different caste groups. Therefore, we propose to keep separate the categories of the widows according to

the age at widowhood and compare the remarriage rates in different castes. Even here, we might confine attention to only two categories of widows, namely, those who were widowed before age 13 and those who were widowed between 13-22, for, it is in these categories of widows that in the majority of cases, remarriage seems desired on personal grounds. In Table No. 9, we give the remarriage rates for these two categories of widows in different caste groups. The caste groups are broad and

Table No. 9 : Percentage of remarried widows in different castes, widowed at age below 13 and at ages 13-22 years.

Caste Group	Widowed at			
	Below 13		13 - 22	
	No. of widows	Per cent remarried	No. of widows	Per cent remarried
Advanced caste Hindus	44	43.1	165	32.7
Intermediate caste Hindus	88	95.4	174	57.5
Scheduled caste Hindus	41	100.0	111	75.7
Backward Hindus	18	94.4	114	84.2
Non-Hindus	15	100.0	74	71.6
Lingayats	56	94.6	86	59.3
Total	262	87.4	724	60.5

each group includes a number of castes having different marital patterns. Still it will be obvious that except in the group of advanced castes among Hindus, no bar on remarriage as such prevails. Remarriage of women who were widows before age 13, is almost universal in all other caste and religious group. Even among advanced castes of Hindus 43 per cent of such widows were remarried. It is worth examining whether the remarriage

trend among the various advanced castes is changing. It may provide an explanation for the changing trend of remarriage.

17 In conclusion, we might note that in the rural society covered by our investigation, by and large what seems to govern the remarriage of widows are the personal factors such as the age at widowhood and the number of children from the first marriage. Remarriage seemed less common among advanced castes of Hindus and a close scrutiny of the trends of remarriage in this caste group seemed worth following.

SUMMARY

The purpose of the present paper is to assess the extent of widow-remarriage and the factors affecting it in six rural communities of Western India. Total number of women of age 13 and above covered by the sample is 11716. Among them is observed a steady but regular fall in the extent of widowhood at younger ages.

The effect of age at widowhood, number of children born from first marriage, and the present age of women on remarriage is examined. The effect of caste on remarriage is also analysed, though further study is necessary to arrive at useful results.

Widow remarriage depends largely on the age at widowhood. Widows widowed at ages below 13 remarried to the extent of 93 per cent in the recent past. They married to the extent of 86 per cent in the era represented by women of ages 43 and above. When widowed at ages 13 to 22 years, 69 per cent remarried in the recent past and 60 per cent were remarried among women of ages 43 and above. 15 per cent remarried when widowed at ages between 23-32 and only 1.4 per cent were found remarried when widowed at ages 33-42. None remarried if widowed after 42 years of age.

The number of children from the first marriage has also a large influence on the rates of remarriage. In particular the difference between having no child and having some children is very large, the marriage rates being almost double when there are no children from the first marriage.

The other factors like custom and tradition prevalent in the various castes of the Hindu society are also expected to be important. In order to examine the effect of 'caste' on remarriage it is necessary to remove the influence of the three factors mentioned above. In this procedure the size of the sample in each category dwindles down to a large extent. Hence the effect of caste on remarriage is considered by eliminating only one important factor, namely, the age at widowhood. It is found that widow-remarriage is less common in the advanced castes of Hindus.

REMARIAGE DES VEUVES DANS SIX COMMUNAUTES RURALES
DE L'INDE OCCIDENTALE

(R é s u m é)

L'auteur a cherché à mesurer l'ampleur du remariage des veuves et l'influence des facteurs en cause dans six communautés rurales situées dans la partie occidentale de l'Inde. Le sondage a porté sur 11,716 femmes de plus de 13 ans. On note, dans ce groupe, une diminution nette et régulière du veuvage aux jeunes âges.

L'auteur étudie l'effet de l'âge au moment du veuvage, du nombre des enfants nés du premier mariage et de l'âge des femmes lors de leur remariage. Il analyse aussi l'effet de la caste dans ce domaine, mais de nouveaux travaux sont ici nécessaires avant d'arriver à des résultats utilisables.

Le remariage des veuves dépend beaucoup de leur âge au veuvage. Au cours des dernières années, les veuves dont le mari est mort avant qu'elles aient 13 ans se sont remariées 93 fois sur 100 (ce nombre tombe à 86 pour les femmes ayant 43 ans et plus lors de l'enquête). Les femmes devenues veuves entre 13 et 22 ans se sont remariées 69 fois sur 100 au cours des dernières années (60 fois sur 100 pour les femmes ayant 43 ans et plus). Les femmes, devenues veuves entre 23 et 32 ans, ne se remarient que dans 15 pour 100 des cas; ce chiffre tombe à 1,4 pour 100 quand elles deviennent veuves entre 33 et 42 ans. Aucun remariage de veuve de plus de 42 ans n'a été observé.

Le nombre des enfants du premier mariage a aussi une grande influence sur les taux de remariage. Il y a, en particulier, une grande différence entre le fait d'avoir quelques enfants ou de ne pas en avoir du tout : dans ce dernier cas, les taux de remariage sont presque deux fois plus forts.

D'autres facteurs comme les coutumes, la tradition des diverses castes de la société hindoue peuvent jouer un rôle important. Pour pouvoir analyser l'effet de la caste sur le remariage, il faut écarter l'influence des trois facteurs ci-dessus. La taille de chaque sous-échantillon diminue alors dans une grande proportion. On doit donc procéder en n'éliminant qu'un seul facteur, à savoir l'âge lors du veuvage. On constate que le remariage des veuves est moins répandu dans les castes supérieures des Hindous.

Une enquête en France sur le choix du conjoint

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Les objectifs

Parmi tous les rites de passage qui jalonnent le déroulement d'une vie, le mariage revêt une importance particulière, non seulement pour l'individu, mais pour la société. Pour autant que de l'union des couples dépendent l'avenir du groupe, et son existence même, toutes les sociétés connaissent des règles très strictes en ce qui concerne le mariage. Une immense littérature sociologique et ethnologique étudie l'ensemble de ces règles ou interdits dans les communautés les plus diverses.

Les sociétés modernes n'échappent pas à cette loi générale. Mais elles sont beaucoup plus peuplées, et ouvertes à de larges courants de mobilité géographique et sociale, et l'on peut se demander si l'emprise du groupe ne s'est pas desserrée, au point que les individus disposent d'une liberté beaucoup plus grande et presque totale pour choisir un conjoint.

La question est importante à plus d'un titre. On se rapprocherait en quelque sorte de l'hypothèse, faite par la génétique de population, de l'existence de la panmixie, où les mariages se font au hasard dans l'ensemble de la population. Mais cette hypothèse n'est pas en concordance avec les faits réels, notamment à cause du choix du conjoint, correspondant à "l'assortative mating" étudié par les Anglo-saxons, qui ne se fait pas au hasard. Les conjoints peuvent choisir leur partenaire, parmi les personnes qui leur ressemblent, ou bien éviter d'épouser des personnes qui ont des caractères communs avec eux, physiques ou psychologiques. Dans un cas comme dans l'autre, choix "positif" ou choix "négatif", la distribution des gènes dans la population se trouve affectée, et l'étude de ces phénomènes requiert un examen approfondi.

Le sociologue et le démographe ne sont pas moins concernés. Les contraintes extérieures, conscientes ou inconscientes, qui agissent sur les individus, font partie de l'ensemble des déterminismes sociaux qui régissent l'organisation et l'évolution de la société. Si le choix du conjoint s'opère à l'intérieur de groupes plus ou moins étendus, les valeurs propres et les idéaux de ces groupes se perpétuent de manière plus ou moins étroite et durable au cours des générations, et la constitution de la famille, comme le mouvement naturel de la population s'en trouvent affectés.