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MARRIAGE-AGE AND POPULATION GROWTH

¹Mamta Rani

¹Assistant Professor

¹Department of Geography

¹Nagendra Jha Mahila College, Laheriasarai, Darbhanga, Bihar, India

Abstract: Age- sex structure is one of the most important characteristics of population composition. Almost all population characteristics vary significantly with age. Age statistics form an important component of population analysis, as most of the analysis is based on age-sex structure of the population. The usefulness of age data is more noticeable when it is cross classified by variables like marital status, literacy educational attainment, economic activity which vary with age in different patterns. Apart from purely demographic concerns, the age- sex data structure is required for age specific analysis of data for planning, scientific, technical and commercial purposes. The dependency ratio, which is the ratio of economically active to economically inactive persons, is dependent on age composition. India has one of the largest proportions of population in the younger age groups in the world. 35.3% of the population of the country has been in the age group 0-14 years at the Census 2001. 41% of the population account for less than 18 years of age. Census 2001 data on marital status of persons show that out of over a billion population of the country, 513 million (49.8%) have reported as 'Never married', mainly due to high proportion of young people. The 'Married' constitute about 45.6% of the total population.

Index Terms - Marriage, Population, India, Sex-Structure.

Introduction

Marriage and fertility are interconnected aspects of population. Birth rate and death rate are also closely related to the age of marriage. Marriage is essentially a social institution having religious sanction and closely associated with cultural characteristics of the people. In societies where sexual permissiveness is not rampant, "mortal fertility rates and general fertility rates" are virtually the same. They differ in permissive societies. Age at marriage is an important determinant of total fertility, contraceptive practice being another. In our societies our almost the entire reproductive span is used for reproduction due to early marriage, and rising the age of marriage and then providing contraceptive protection from exposure to the risk of pregnancy are the most important measure to reduce the adverse effect of demographic transition. To understand the role of marriage and fertility in increasing the rate of growth of population, it's essential to assess the mean age at marriage.

The name of Shree Har Vilas Sharda after when the "Sharda Act" fixing the legal minimum ages for boys and girls was passed, will always be remembered in this connection. The legal minimum ages of marriage for boys and girls in India, effective in different years are given in the table shown below.

Table 1.1

Legal minimal ages of marriage for males and females in India

YEAR	MALE	FEMALE
1929	18	13
1955	18	15
1958	19	15
1978	21	18
1991	21	18
2001	21	18
2011	21	18

Source of table: *Demography and population studies, written by O.S.Srivastava, concept publishing, New Delhi, 1996 and Google.*

Practically the above mentioned age restriction is not in vogue. Marriages continue to be performed contravening the legal minimum ages in India. Table below gives year wise practical ages of marriage practiced in India.

Table 1.2

Mean age at marriage for males and females in India

Mean age at marriage for			
YEAR	MALES	FEMALES	
1891	19.60	12.50	
1901	20.00	13.10	
1911	20.30	13.20	
1921	20.70	13.70	
1931	18.60	12.70	
1941	19.90	14.70	
1951	19.90	15.60	
1961	21.60	15.80	
1971	21.90	15.80	
1981	22.20	17.20	
1991	24.20	19.00	
2001	27.00	19.00	
2011	27.50	19.00	

Source: *As mentioned in table 1.1*

From pursual of the above table, we find that with the progress of time the mean age at marriage is going up slowly but steadily after 1951. Social reforms, education, increase in general awareness, role of mass media, etc. have played considerable role in this affair. Despite of the combined effects

of these factors, there are certain marked differences on the basis of regions, religions and state of education. The position as is obtained by current research as under :-

- Mean marriage age for illiterate girls - 13.04 years
- Mean marriage age for girls with primary education – 15.08 years
- Mean marriage age for girls with middle school education – 18 years
- Degree holder girls – 20.05 years
- Post graduate girls – 23 years

The above figure has been quoted on the basis of mean computed on liberal basis. In the study region, more than 80% girls get married at the age of 17-18 years. This is even below in down trodden family. As the number of people of this group is more than 60% of the total people of the study area. So, its impact should be computed in different way.

Now we should think over the fact that what is the effect of mean age at marriage on the production of children. Dr.S.N.Agrawal, a noted demographic analyst has calculated that the birth rate may decline by half in the period of 20 years if no woman is allowed to marry and have children before age of 19 years. Later he revised it to 30% decline in 30 years.

I.Z.Hussain at Lucknow University has calculated that if mean age of marriage in U.P rises from 13 to 17.50 the birth rate per thousand per thousand will fall by three points. If the age rises to 22.50 then the birth rate will fall by 33.80 per thousand.

It is also argued by many scholars that if the age at marriage is high then fewer children will be born. There are certain biological reasons for this – the walls of uterus become a little hard and does not accept the fertilized ovum easily, the quality of ovum also deteriorates in later years. Generally, a woman of India can produce 14 to 15 children during her entire productive span between 15 and 45 years of age and so in North Bihar also if production spans, which has gone up to 52 years, the of more birth becomes imminent. As per few studies done regarding this, its effects on the number of children born can be judged.

The aspect dealt above cannot be taken as final finding. Control of the rapid rate of growth of population depends upon the combined effect of several factors. Better education and higher incomes have ensured that incidence of child marriage has come down in Bihar and so in North Bihar Plain. The findings of the National Family Health survey – 4 (NFHS-4), conducted in 2015-16, shows a steady decline in child marriage.

The stated concern of the study was to find ways to break the “intergenerational cycle of undernutrition”. Surely the best way to go about breaking such a cycle would be to pick the factors that are playing the strongest role in perpetuating it. In this case, it would be to address the poverty of the mother, which could be done in a myriad ways, beginning with the most direct method of nutritional programmes for girls and women through a range of institutional mechanisms from Anganwadis to schools. However, the authors choose to concentrate on delaying the age of pregnancy, even though this is the weakest link of all. In fact, age only begins to have some real significance when pregnancies are delayed to ages of 25 and above, which is true of only a minuscule proportion of women in India.

The article is unusually generous in its use of the usual scholarly caveats, but leaves itself open to being co-opted by larger agendas driven by the doctrine that “over-population” is the root of all evil in poor countries.

By educating girl child, empowering girls, rallying the wider community to stand up for girls' rights providing girls and their families with income opportunities, petitioning government and encouraging supportive laws for child marriage can be remarkably reduced and population growth will be reduced as much as never before Child Marriage Act, 2006 will be the most effective measure in the reducing number of child marriage and so maintaining the population ratio to a satisfactory level.

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