



## CHAPTER 4

### NUPTIALITY

This chapter presents findings on marriage patterns from the National Family Health Survey. Marriage is important in its own right, and also because it influences fertility and population growth, affects the nature of family relationships, and is inextricably linked to the status of women. After examining current marital status distributions, this chapter considers age at first marriage, age at first cohabitation, and marriage between relatives. State differentials in age at marriage and the incidence of consanguineous marriages are also presented in this chapter. Before discussing the findings of the NFHS on marriage patterns in India, it is useful to describe the salient features of the marriage system in India.

#### 4.1 Marriage in India

Marriage is the basis of social life and is a matter of great importance in India. By that very fact, marriage is subject to strict rules and prohibitions. One of these rules, laid down by Hindu scriptures, is that marriage should take place as soon as the girl reaches puberty, or else the father or guardian commits a grave fault. If he finds a good bridegroom, the father may arrange her marriage even before puberty (Renou, 1959). Child wives are expected to live with their parents until puberty. Traditionally, virginity was highly respected, and was regarded as a sign of the elite and an index to high caste. Consequently, marriages with no possibility of suspicion regarding the virginity of the girl were considered most desirable. This is one of the reasons why even today parents are very concerned and anxious once their daughters attain puberty (Kapadia, 1966). According to Kapadia, a further impetus to prepuberty marriages was given by attaching social prestige to them. To have one's daughter betrothed before puberty was also considered a sign of one's affluence, influence or status. "Under the operation of these various forces early marriages became more popular, and with the passing of time the practice became so compelling that a departure from it was a matter of social disgrace" (Kapadia, 1966).

Various laws have been enacted in India to prevent child marriages. The Child Marriage Restraint Act, which is commonly known as the Sarda Act, was enacted in 1929 and was applicable at that time only to British India. Initially the Act placed restrictions on marriages of girls below age 12 and boys below age 15. However, in its final form, the Act specified the minimum age at marriage for females and males to be 14 and 18 years, respectively. Through an amendment of this Act in 1949, the legal minimum age at marriage for females was raised to 15. According to the Child Marriage Restraint Act of 1978, the minimum legal age at marriage in India is 18 years for women and 21 years for men. Registration of marriages is not compulsory in India.

Traditionally, divorce and separation have not been common in India. Marriage has been considered as a union of souls and not merely of bodies. Writing about Hindu marriage, Dass in his study on Rigvedic Culture observes: "It is more solemn affair in a man or woman's life, upon which depends his or her worldly and spiritual welfare and final emancipation from bonds that tie him or her down to the earth. It is certainly not a thing to be donned or doffed at one's pleasure. It is an eternal bond that binds two souls together for ever and each suffers for other's lapses and derelictions. It is not a contract with them, but a sacrament and there is no breaking

away or parting from the union" (as quoted by Goyal, 1988).

However, the proportion of widows has been relatively high in India because of the considerable age gap between husbands and wives, high levels of mortality, and restrictions on remarriage. Traditionally, remarriage is more permissible for men than for women. Remarriages among high caste Hindu women were socially prohibited, but such restrictions did not exist for low caste Hindu women (Agarwala, 1985). The restrictions on remarriages still prevail, particularly in rural areas.

Another facet of marriage in India is the dowry. The custom of dowry in the form of the presentation of gifts to the bridegroom by parents or guardians of brides has prevailed in India since ancient times. According to the Hindu *Dharmashastras*, among the eight forms of marriages, the most approved form, the *Brahma Vivah*, is that in which a maiden or virgin girl is decorated with ornaments and is given by her father to a suitable partner. The most emphatically denounced form of marriage is that in which money is paid to the father or kinsman of the bride by the bridegroom, in other words, where the bride is purchased (Prabhu, 1963; Kapadia, 1966). The custom of giving dowry may also be rooted in the desire of parents to show affection for their daughters who are married at a very early age (Hooja, 1969). These days, however, the dowry is a matter of status for the bride's family - the bigger the dowry and grander the ceremony, the greater the prestige to the family.

Although the practice is officially outlawed, a dowry is still expected in the majority of cases. For poorer families the marriage can become a huge financial burden. Many families are forced to borrow the money, either for the daughter's dowry or to stage a lavish ceremony and feast (or both), usually at high rates of interest. The system of dowry also perpetuates early marriages in that parents wish to have their daughter marry young, when less dowry is demanded.

## 4.2 Current Marital Status

Table 4.1 shows the current marital status of women by residence and age. Information on marital status comes from the Woman's Questionnaire, except for the information on never-married women, which comes from the Household Questionnaire. Table 4.1 contains similar information to Table 3.5, which also includes information for males and covers a wider range of ages. The percentages never married in the two tables differ slightly due to differential nonresponse among eligible women.

Table 4.1 suggests that marriage is virtually universal in India and that marriages in rural areas take place at relatively young ages. At age 15-19, 39 percent of women in India have ever been married. The proportions ever married at age 15-19 are much lower in urban areas (22 percent) than in rural areas (46 percent). Not only do the marriages take place at later ages in urban areas, the proportion of women age 35-49 who remain unmarried is also slightly higher in urban areas (2 percent) than in rural areas (less than 1 percent). The percent of ever-married women increases rapidly with age from 82 percent of women age 20-24 to 98 percent of women age 30-34. Only 1 percent of women age 35-39 remain unmarried. The proportions divorced and separated together account for less than 2 percent of the total sample of women age 15-49. Only 3 percent of women age 15-49 are widowed, and the proportion widowed increases with

**Table 4.1 Current marital status**

Percent distribution of women age 15-49 by current marital status, according to age and residence, India, 1992-93

Age	Marital status					Total percent
	Never married	Currently married	Widowed	Divorced	Separated	
<b>URBAN</b>						
15-19	78.2	21.3	0.1	0.1	0.3	100.0
20-24	31.8	66.4	0.5	0.2	1.1	100.0
25-29	8.9	88.1	1.2	0.3	1.4	100.0
30-34	3.1	92.2	2.6	0.5	1.7	100.0
35-39	1.7	92.4	4.5	0.2	1.3	100.0
40-44	1.9	88.1	8.4	0.3	1.3	100.0
45-49	1.6	82.8	13.9	0.3	1.4	100.0
Total	24.6	70.9	3.0	0.3	1.1	100.0
<b>RURAL</b>						
15-19	54.4	44.7	0.1	0.1	0.6	100.0
20-24	13.2	84.5	0.8	0.2	1.3	100.0
25-29	2.9	93.4	1.6	0.3	1.8	100.0
30-34	1.1	93.7	3.2	0.4	1.7	100.0
35-39	0.6	92.1	5.5	0.3	1.6	100.0
40-44	0.3	89.1	8.8	0.1	1.6	100.0
45-49	0.5	86.0	11.9	0.2	1.3	100.0
Total	15.3	80.0	3.2	0.2	1.3	100.0
<b>TOTAL</b>						
15-19	60.7	38.4	0.1	0.1	0.6	100.0
20-24	18.5	79.4	0.7	0.2	1.3	100.0
25-29	4.7	91.9	1.5	0.3	1.7	100.0
30-34	1.7	93.2	3.0	0.4	1.7	100.0
35-39	0.9	92.2	5.2	0.2	1.5	100.0
40-44	1.1	88.5	8.7	0.2	1.5	100.0
45-49	0.6	85.3	12.5	0.2	1.3	100.0
Total	17.9	77.4	3.1	0.3	1.3	100.0

age from less than 1 percent among women below age 25 to 13 percent among women age 45-49. The lower proportion of widows at younger ages may partly be due to lower mortality and partly due to the greater likelihood of widows remarrying in the younger age groups (Agarwala, 1985).

The proportions of women of different ages who are currently married in each state are presented in Table 4.2. Early marriages are common in Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh and Bihar where more than 50 percent of women age 15-19 are currently married. Marriages also occur relatively early in Haryana and Uttar Pradesh, where 40-44 percent of women age 15-19 and 88 percent of women age 20-24 are currently married. Women tend to marry late in Kerala, Punjab and in the smaller states of Goa, Manipur, Mizoram and Nagaland, with less than 15 percent of women age 15-19 in these states being currently married. In almost every state, the percentage currently married increases with an increase in the age of women up to age 25-29, levels off at age 30-39 and thereafter gradually declines, mainly because of the increase in

**Table 4.2 Percentage currently married by age**

Percentage of women age 15-49 who are currently married and percentage of ever-married women married more than once, by age and state, India, 1992-93

State	Current age							Total	Percent married more than once <sup>1</sup>
	15-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45-49		
<b>India</b>	38.4	79.4	91.9	93.2	92.2	88.5	85.3	77.4	1.6
<b>North</b>									
Delhi	18.6	69.5	92.4	95.3	94.4	91.8	84.1	74.3	0.6
Haryana	44.1	88.4	97.0	97.2	95.3	91.2	88.4	82.5	1.1
Himachal Pradesh	19.3	74.9	94.3	92.6	95.3	89.5	86.7	73.9	1.8
Jammu Region of J & K	18.0	62.9	91.9	94.6	94.2	90.7	88.4	68.7	0.9
Punjab	14.4	66.9	93.3	96.0	94.9	92.2	87.8	70.8	0.7
Rajasthan	38.3	87.5	97.9	97.2	96.0	93.1	90.4	81.3	0.9
<b>Central</b>									
Madhya Pradesh	61.9	88.7	94.1	94.2	95.0	95.0	89.0	86.9	2.5
Uttar Pradesh	39.6	88.0	96.8	96.3	95.3	92.0	88.6	80.8	1.6
<b>East</b>									
Bihar	50.3	88.6	95.2	96.1	93.1	90.6	86.0	82.9	1.8
Orissa	27.5	70.9	90.7	93.5	89.7	90.9	83.6	71.8	1.5
West Bengal	40.0	77.5	88.6	88.7	88.9	85.1	83.1	74.8	1.8
<b>Northeast</b>									
Arunachal Pradesh	28.6	75.8	88.8	91.3	90.2	87.8	82.7	72.0	2.1
Assam	31.0	60.9	80.5	87.2	86.8	78.3	77.5	65.5	2.0
Manipur	6.0	41.0	67.4	81.7	88.5	86.0	86.1	55.5	1.2
Meghalaya	18.3	61.0	84.4	88.1	85.6	83.9	77.0	64.8	2.0
Mizoram	9.2	40.8	70.0	80.2	92.8	85.6	81.7	56.6	2.8
Nagaland	11.3	50.6	75.1	81.3	90.5	81.2	88.9	61.0	0.4
Tripura	25.8	61.5	82.1	85.8	91.9	85.5	80.3	67.2	1.2
<b>West</b>									
Goa	3.1	28.8	68.3	86.2	90.9	85.6	81.2	55.7	0.3
Gujarat	22.0	74.5	92.3	95.2	94.4	89.1	86.6	73.9	2.1
Maharashtra	36.2	78.3	89.0	92.3	91.1	87.6	86.2	75.8	1.7
<b>South</b>									
Andhra Pradesh	52.2	85.7	92.3	91.9	89.1	84.3	81.4	80.1	1.6
Karnataka	37.0	72.8	89.7	90.0	89.6	81.9	79.0	72.8	0.4
Kerala	13.4	52.8	82.8	87.3	88.6	83.6	78.4	64.6	2.1
Tamil Nadu	24.4	71.4	88.2	88.8	89.2	87.1	82.2	71.5	0.9

<sup>1</sup>Ever-married women age 13-49.

widowhood at later ages.

Table 4.2 also provides information on the percentage of ever-married women who have been married more than once. Overall, 2 percent of ever-married women in India have been married more than once. The proportion is low in all states, varying from 0.3 percent in Goa to around 3 percent in Mizoram.

### 4.3 Age at First Marriage

The description of marriage patterns can be sharpened by examining values of the Singulate Mean Age at Marriage (SMAM), which is calculated from the age-specific proportions never married for age groups 15-19 through 45-49 (Hajnal, 1953; Shryock and Siegel, 1980). Table 4.3 presents female and male SMAMs computed from the 1961, 1971, and 1981 Census, and from the NFHS, for India and the states. For India as a whole, female values of SMAM from the NFHS are 21.5 years in urban areas, 19.3 in rural areas, and 20.0 overall. On average, males marry 5 years later than females. Marriage ages are consistently higher in urban areas, with urban men marrying about two years later than rural men, and urban women also marrying two years later than their rural counterparts. Together, the Census and NFHS SMAMs in Table 4.3 also indicate how age at marriage has been changing in the country. Between 1961 and 1992-93, the SMAM for females rose by 4.1 years, from 15.9 years of age to 20.0. Over the same period, the SMAM for males rose by 3.1 years, from 21.9 to 25.0.

There are large interstate variations in SMAM. In almost every state, men marry later than women, and men and women marry earlier in rural areas than in urban areas. The female SMAM is lowest in Madhya Pradesh (17.4 years) and highest in Goa (25.1 years). Among the major states (states with a population of more than 5 million in 1991), the female SMAM is higher than 20 years in Kerala, Assam, Punjab, Delhi, Orissa, Tamil Nadu, Himachal Pradesh and Gujarat. On the other hand, the mean age at marriage for females is less than 19 years in Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh. The female age at marriage is relatively high in the northeastern states, particularly in Manipur. Similar differences across the states are also observed for the SMAM for males. The difference between the male and female SMAMs is relatively large (6-7 years) in West Bengal, Assam, Tripura, Karnataka and Kerala.

More detailed information from the NFHS on female age at first marriage is shown in Table 4.4, which shows the percentage of all women who were ever married by specified exact ages. The table shows a clear trend toward rising age at marriage, with especially large declines in marriage at very young ages. The proportion marrying before age 13 declines from 27 percent in the 45-49 age cohort to less than 7 percent in the 15-19 age cohort, and the proportion marrying before age 15 declines from 45 percent in the 45-49 age cohort to 17 percent in the 15-19 age cohort. Although marriages before age 15 have declined considerably, marriages before the legal minimum age at marriage of 18 years are still quite common. For instance, 54 percent of women currently age 20-24 married before age 18, and this percentage is much higher in rural (63 percent) than in urban areas (33 percent). Declines in age at marriage are less pronounced, but still large, at higher exact age cutoffs.

Table 4.5 shows the median age at first marriage<sup>1</sup> for females by age group and selected background characteristics. The median age at first marriage is used instead of the mean age at marriage (where both are calculated directly from reported ages at marriage) because the median, unlike the mean, is not biased by age truncation. (The survey interview marks the point

---

<sup>1</sup> Median age at first marriage is not calculated for age cohorts in which fewer than 50 percent of the women were married by the age that defines the lower boundary of the age group.

Table 4.3 Singulate mean age at marriage

Singulate mean age at marriage from selected sources, by sex and state, India, 1961-1993

State	NFHS 1992-93											
	1961 Census		1971 Census		1981 Census		Urban		Rural		Total	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
India	21.9	15.9	22.6	17.2	23.5	18.4	26.3	21.5	24.4	19.3	25.0	20.0
North												
Delhi	23.3	18.7	24.0	20.0	24.3	20.5	24.4	21.0	24.1	19.0	24.3	20.9
Haryana	U	U	20.9	17.7	25.2	17.9	24.4	19.9	22.6	17.9	23.1	18.4
Himachal Pradesh	22.2	15.6	23.5	17.8	24.2	19.1	26.1	22.3	24.9	20.2	25.0	20.4
Jammu Region of J & K	U	U	U	U	U	U	27.5	23.1	26.0	20.9	26.3	21.2
Punjab	22.6	17.5	24.1	20.1	25.0	21.1	25.5	21.7	24.6	20.9	24.8	21.1
Rajasthan	19.6	14.2	19.9	15.1	20.6	16.1	24.9	20.5	22.2	17.9	22.7	18.4
Central												
Madhya Pradesh	18.7	13.9	19.5	15.0	20.8	16.6	24.9	19.7	21.0	16.7	22.0	17.4
Uttar Pradesh	19.4	14.5	19.8	15.5	21.3	16.7	25.2	20.9	22.4	17.9	23.0	18.6
East												
Bihar	18.9	14.3	20.0	15.3	21.6	16.6	25.3	20.3	22.7	17.6	23.2	18.0
Orissa	21.9	16.4	22.7	17.3	24.3	19.1	27.2	21.8	25.3	20.4	25.6	20.7
West Bengal	24.3	15.9	24.6	18.0	26.0	19.3	27.6	21.8	25.0	18.1	25.9	19.2
Northeast												
Arunachal Pradesh	U	U	25.6	19.6	U	U	25.6	19.8	24.8	20.0	24.9	20.0
Assam	25.9	18.6	25.8	18.7	U	U	29.2	23.0	27.7	21.4	27.9	21.6
Manipur	24.8	19.9	26.4	22.2	27.3	23.4	29.0	26.5	28.0	24.2	28.3	25.0
Meghalaya	U	U	25.5	20.2	26.0	21.0	27.1	23.3	24.6	20.6	25.1	21.2
Mizoram	U	U	U	U	U	U	28.5	24.0	26.9	21.4	27.8	22.9
Nagaland	26.2	22.2	27.8	24.0	29.0	24.8	26.3	19.0	25.7	22.8	25.8	22.7
Tripura	24.1	16.3	25.3	18.4	26.8	20.3	28.6	22.4	27.1	20.9	27.3	21.2
West												
Goa	27.1	20.9	U	U	28.5	23.0	30.7	25.0	30.5	25.2	30.6	25.1
Gujarat	21.7	17.1	22.4	18.5	23.3	19.6	24.8	20.6	23.5	20.0	23.9	20.2
Maharashtra	22.6	15.8	23.8	17.6	24.4	18.8	25.8	21.0	24.1	17.9	24.9	19.3
South												
Andhra Pradesh	22.3	15.2	22.8	16.3	23.1	17.3	25.6	20.3	22.8	17.3	23.6	18.1
Karnataka	24.7	16.4	25.2	17.9	26.0	19.3	26.9	20.8	25.6	19.0	26.1	19.6
Kerala	26.6	20.2	27.0	21.3	27.5	22.1	28.7	23.2	27.9	21.7	28.1	22.1
Tamil Nadu	25.3	18.4	26.1	19.6	26.1	20.3	27.3	21.3	25.9	20.0	26.4	20.5

U: Not available

**Table 4.4 Age at first marriage**

Percentage of women married by specific exact ages, by current age and residence, India, 1992-93

Current age <sup>1</sup>	Percentage ever married before age:						Percent never married
	13	15	18	20	22	25	
<b>URBAN</b>							
15-19	1.8	5.5	NA	NA	NA	NA	78.2
20-24	3.9	10.9	32.6	52.5	NA	NA	31.8
25-29	5.9	16.1	40.9	59.9	73.5	86.5	8.9
30-34	6.8	16.9	46.2	65.1	78.1	89.3	3.1
35-39	8.9	20.8	51.9	69.8	81.5	91.4	1.7
40-44	11.9	25.6	56.1	73.6	85.0	92.9	1.9
45-49	13.6	27.9	59.2	77.2	87.4	94.4	1.6
20-49	7.4	17.9	44.9	63.7	75.8	84.6	11.0
25-49	8.6	20.2	49.0	67.4	79.7	90.1	4.1
<b>RURAL</b>							
15-19	8.6	21.3	NA	NA	NA	NA	54.4
20-24	14.9	32.0	62.8	78.8	NA	NA	13.2
25-29	18.1	38.0	71.2	84.7	91.8	95.8	2.9
30-34	22.2	41.5	74.6	87.4	93.8	97.2	1.1
35-39	24.7	44.9	77.8	88.8	94.8	97.6	0.6
40-44	27.0	47.6	79.8	90.8	96.5	98.5	0.3
45-49	31.6	51.6	80.8	91.0	96.3	98.5	0.5
20-49	21.2	40.4	72.4	85.5	91.8	94.5	4.4
25-49	23.4	43.4	75.8	87.9	94.2	97.2	1.3
<b>TOTAL</b>							
15-19	6.8	17.0	NA	NA	NA	NA	60.7
20-24	11.8	26.1	54.2	71.4	NA	NA	18.5
25-29	14.7	31.8	62.6	77.7	86.6	93.1	4.7
30-34	17.6	34.2	66.2	80.7	89.1	94.9	1.7
35-39	19.9	37.6	70.0	83.1	90.8	95.7	0.9
40-44	22.4	40.8	72.4	85.3	92.7	96.5	1.1
45-49	26.7	45.1	75.0	87.3	94.0	97.5	0.6
20-49	17.2	33.9	64.5	79.2	87.1	91.6	6.4
25-49	19.1	36.6	68.0	81.9	89.9	95.1	2.2

NA: Not applicable

<sup>1</sup>The current age groups include both never-married and ever-married women.

of age truncation.) For example, in the 20-24 age cohort in Table 4.5, the mean age at first marriage will ultimately be influenced by marriages that occur in this cohort after the survey. But the median age at first marriage for the cohort will not be so affected, because more than 50 percent of the women in the cohort married before age 20, implying that the median is determined before the survey occurred. It follows that the variation in median age at first marriage by age cohort, from oldest to youngest, reflects a trend over time that is not biased by age truncation.

The median age at first marriage increases steadily from 15.5 years for women in the 40-49 age cohort to 17.4 years in the 20-24 age cohort, a rise of 2.0 years. The median age at marriage is higher among women who are currently living in urban areas than among those



currently living in rural areas, but both groups show a similar decline across cohorts. Indeed, the decline has been slightly greater in urban than in rural areas. Urban women marry about three years later than rural women.

The median age at first marriage is higher the more educated the woman is, with the median among women who have completed high school exceeding the median among illiterate women by six years. There are also differences by religion, with Christians and Sikhs marrying four years later than Hindus. There is no difference in the median age at first marriage between Hindus and Muslims in any of the age groups. The differences in the median age at marriage by caste/tribe are moderate. The median age at marriage for women age 25-49 is lowest among scheduled caste women (15.0 years), and highest among non-SC/ST women (16.3 years), with scheduled tribe women marrying, on average, about half a year earlier than non-SC/ST women.

States differ considerably in the median age at first marriage (Table 4.6). At least half of women age 20-49 married at or below age 15 in Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, and Andhra Pradesh. Only in a few smaller states (Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland and Goa) and Kerala is the median age at marriage 20 years or higher.

The median age at marriage exhibits a consistent gradual rise from the oldest to the youngest cohorts in all states except Rajasthan and the smaller states of Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Nagaland. However, even these five states have exhibited a rise in

Background characteristic	Current age					20-49	25-49
	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-49		
<b>Residence</b>							
Urban	19.7	18.8	18.3	17.8	17.1	18.4	18.1
Rural	16.5	15.9	15.6	15.3	15.0	15.7	15.5
<b>Education</b>							
Illiterate	15.5	15.3	15.2	14.9	14.7	15.1	15.0
Lit., < middle complete	18.0	17.1	16.9	16.7	16.6	17.1	16.8
Middle school complete	19.1	18.7	18.3	18.4	18.1	18.6	18.4
High school and above	NC	21.7	21.4	21.0	20.8	NC	21.3
<b>Religion</b>							
Hindu	17.2	16.4	16.1	15.8	15.4	16.1	15.9
Muslim	17.2	16.4	16.0	15.8	15.5	16.2	15.9
Christian	NC	20.4	20.5	19.9	19.4	NC	20.0
Sikh	NC	20.4	19.6	18.9	18.8	NC	19.5
Other	18.8	17.7	18.1	16.7	16.1	17.7	17.1
<b>Caste/tribe</b>							
Scheduled caste	15.9	15.3	15.2	14.8	14.5	15.2	15.0
Scheduled tribe	16.4	16.1	15.8	15.6	15.6	15.9	15.8
Other	17.8	16.8	16.5	16.2	15.7	16.6	16.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>17.4</b>	<b>16.6</b>	<b>16.3</b>	<b>15.9</b>	<b>15.5</b>	<b>16.4</b>	<b>16.1</b>

NC: Not calculated because less than 50 percent of the women have married for the first time by age 20

**Table 4.6 Median age at first marriage by state**

Median age at first marriage among women age 20-49 years, by current age and state, India, 1992-93

State	Current age					20-49	25-49
	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-49		
<b>India</b>	17.4	16.6	16.3	15.9	15.5	16.4	16.1
<b>North</b>							
Delhi	19.7	18.7	18.5	18.5	17.2	18.6	18.3
Haryana	17.1	16.4	16.2	15.9	15.8	16.3	16.0
Himachal Pradesh	19.7	18.6	17.9	17.2	16.6	18.2	17.7
Jammu Region of J & K	NC	19.1	18.3	16.7	16.4	18.6	17.8
Punjab	NC	19.8	19.1	18.8	18.7	19.5	19.0
Rajasthan	15.9	15.2	14.9	15.1	15.0	15.2	15.0
<b>Central</b>							
Madhya Pradesh	15.4	14.9	14.5	14.3	14.0	14.7	14.5
Uttar Pradesh	16.4	15.6	15.2	15.0	14.5	15.4	15.1
<b>East</b>							
Bihar	15.8	15.4	14.9	14.6	13.9	15.0	14.7
Orissa	18.5	17.4	17.0	16.2	15.9	17.0	16.6
West Bengal	17.3	16.6	16.4	15.8	15.1	16.3	16.0
<b>Northeast</b>							
Arunachal Pradesh	18.5	17.9	18.2	18.2	18.9	18.3	18.2
Assam	18.7	17.6	17.2	16.8	16.2	17.4	16.9
Manipur	NC	22.1	21.5	20.5	19.8	NC	20.8
Meghalaya	NC	19.1	18.4	19.0	19.4	19.3	19.0
Mizoram	NC	21.9	20.4	20.9	21.1	NC	21.0
Nagaland	NC	21.0	19.3	20.0	20.1	NC	20.1
Tripura	18.9	17.8	18.1	16.9	16.3	17.6	17.2
<b>West</b>							
Goa	NC	24.1	22.5	21.0	20.0	NC	21.7
Gujarat	19.1	18.3	18.2	17.6	17.4	18.2	17.9
Maharashtra	17.5	16.6	16.4	16.1	15.3	16.4	16.1
<b>South</b>							
Andhra Pradesh	15.9	15.4	15.2	15.0	14.6	15.3	15.1
Karnataka	17.9	16.9	16.6	16.6	16.2	16.8	16.6
Kerala	NC	20.6	20.3	19.6	19.0	NC	19.8
Tamil Nadu	19.3	18.7	18.6	18.0	17.1	18.3	18.1

NC: Not calculated because less than 50 percent of the women have married for the first time by age 20

the median age at marriage among the younger cohorts. The increase in the age at marriage has been the greatest in Goa, where the median increased from 20.0 years for the women age 40-49 to 24.1 years for the 25-29 age cohort, a rise of more than four years. The difference in the median age at marriage between the youngest and oldest cohorts is also more than two years in Himachal Pradesh, Jammu, Orissa, Tripura, Delhi, Assam, Manipur, West Bengal, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu.

“ In the NFHS, respondents were asked about their knowledge of the legal minimum age at marriage for males and females in India. Table 4.7 presents the percentage of women who reported correctly the minimum legal age at marriage in India, according to selected background characteristics. Perhaps because of its weak enforcement, the legal minimum age at marriage

**Table 4.7 Knowledge of minimum legal age at marriage**

Percent distribution of ever-married women age 13-49 who correctly know the minimum legal age at marriage for males and females, by selected background characteristics, India, 1992-93

Background characteristic	Percentage who correctly know legal minimum age at marriage:		Number of women
	For males	For females	
<b>Age</b>			
13-19	15.8	27.5	9447
20-29	21.2	34.2	35424
30-39	20.9	35.2	27122
40-49	17.3	31.2	17784
<b>Residence</b>			
Urban	38.9	57.3	23455
Rural	13.0	24.7	66322
<b>Education</b>			
Illiterate	7.4	16.2	56656
Lit., < middle complete	26.7	50.1	16475
Middle school complete	42.8	67.1	6508
High school and above	63.0	79.3	10138
<b>Religion</b>			
Hindu	19.6	32.5	73648
Muslim	14.8	31.4	10806
Christian	30.9	49.6	2142
Sikh	33.3	41.3	1673
Jain	59.8	78.3	428
Buddhist	29.9	48.9	734
Other	9.5	21.3	345
<b>Caste/tribe</b>			
Scheduled caste	12.5	22.8	10970
Scheduled tribe	7.5	15.5	7934
Other	22.3	36.8	70872
<b>Total</b>	<b>19.8</b>	<b>33.2</b>	<b>89777</b>

is not widely known among women in India. Overall, only one-third of respondents can correctly identify 18 as the legal minimum age at marriage for females, and only one-fifth can correctly identify 21 as the legal minimum age at marriage for males. The provisions of the law are better known in urban areas, where 57 percent of the respondents can correctly identify the legal minimum age at marriage for females, than in rural areas, where only 25 percent know the legally mandated minimum age for females. Knowledge of legal minimum age requirements also varies by literacy and educational attainment. Sixty-three percent of women with a high school education or above know the legal minimum age at marriage for males, and 79 percent know it for females. In contrast, only 7 and 16 percent of illiterate women correctly specify the legal minimum age at marriage for males and females, respectively. Jain women are most likely to know the minimum legal age at marriage for males and females, with Hindu and Muslim women least likely to know about the legal age requirements for marriage. Knowledge about the legal minimum age at marriage is also relatively high among non-SC/ST women than among scheduled caste and scheduled tribe women. For every group of women shown in Table 4.7, the legal minimum age at marriage for males is less well known than is the legal minimum age

at marriage for females.

Legal minimum age requirements for marriage are best known in the high literacy states of Kerala, Delhi, Himachal Pradesh, and Mizoram, where between 55 and 65 percent of women can correctly identify age 18 as the legal minimum age at marriage for females (Table 4.8). Less than one-quarter of women know the minimum legal age at marriage for females in Assam, Bihar, Arunachal Pradesh, Orissa, Manipur, Nagaland and Madhya Pradesh. Interestingly, knowledge of the minimum legal age requirements is not widespread in Manipur and Goa, the two states with the highest mean age at marriage for females (25 years, see Table 4.3). Thus the fact that a large majority of women in Manipur and Goa are married after attaining the legal minimum age at marriage apparently reflects social norms and economic conditions more than knowledge of the legal minimum age at marriage. In every state, the legal minimum age at

Table 4.8 Knowledge of minimum legal age at marriage by state		
Percentage of ever-married women age 13-49 who correctly know the minimum legal age at marriage for males and females, by state, India, 1992-93		
State	Percentage who correctly know legal minimum age at marriage:	
	For males	For females
<b>India</b>	19.8	33.2
<b>North</b>		
Delhi	50.5	65.4
Haryana	27.5	40.9
Himachal Pradesh	28.9	56.3
Jammu Region of J & K	21.0	33.9
Punjab	33.0	41.1
Rajasthan	18.0	26.9
<b>Central</b>		
Madhya Pradesh	15.9	24.6
Uttar Pradesh	17.7	26.9
<b>East</b>		
Bihar	12.8	18.9
Orissa	6.5	19.1
West Bengal	10.7	31.6
<b>Northeast</b>		
Arunachal Pradesh	3.7	19.0
Assam	3.8	18.8
Manipur	5.1	20.9
Meghalaya	13.7	27.7
Mizoram	28.4	54.7
Nagaland	16.9	23.8
Tripura	5.6	28.2
<b>West</b>		
Goa	24.7	35.9
Gujarat	23.6	33.7
Maharashtra	31.4	49.1
<b>South</b>		
Andhra Pradesh	27.0	38.0
Karnataka	23.7	40.9
Kerala	27.6	65.3
Tamil Nadu	19.6	38.9

marriage is better known for males than females.

#### 4.4 Age at First Cohabitation

Table 4.9 shows median ages at which the respondents started living with their husbands. The age at first marriage (Table 4.5) and the age at first cohabitation given in Table 4.9 may differ because formal marriage is not always immediately followed by living with the husband,

Table 4.9 Age at first cohabitation with husband								
Percentage of women who started living with husband by specific exact ages, and median age at first cohabitation with husband, by current age and residence, India, 1992-93								
Current age <sup>1</sup>	Percentage who started living with husband before age:						Percent never cohabited	Median age at first cohabitation with husband
	13	15	18	20	22	25		
<b>URBAN</b>								
15-19	0.8	4.5	NA	NA	NA	NA	78.2	NC
20-24	1.8	8.3	31.3	52.0	NA	NA	31.8	19.8
25-29	2.3	12.4	39.3	59.3	73.3	86.4	8.9	18.9
30-34	2.7	12.7	44.1	64.2	77.8	89.2	3.1	18.4
35-39	3.8	15.4	49.5	69.1	81.2	91.3	1.7	18.0
40-44	5.1	19.8	53.1	72.5	84.6	92.8	1.9	17.6
45-49	5.2	20.8	55.8	75.6	87.1	94.1	1.6	17.4
20-49	3.1	13.5	42.8	62.9	75.5	84.5	11.0	18.6
25-49	3.5	15.3	46.7	66.5	79.4	90.0	4.1	18.3
<b>RURAL</b>								
15-19	2.7	14.6	NA	NA	NA	NA	54.4	NC
20-24	4.8	21.9	58.1	77.1	NA	NA	13.2	17.2
25-29	5.9	26.1	65.8	82.4	91.0	95.5	2.9	16.6
30-34	6.5	27.2	68.6	85.2	93.0	96.8	1.1	16.4
35-39	8.0	29.7	71.2	86.7	94.1	97.3	0.6	16.2
40-44	8.6	31.8	73.0	88.4	95.6	98.2	0.3	16.1
45-49	9.9	34.3	73.5	87.9	95.1	98.0	0.5	16.0
20-49	6.7	27.1	66.6	83.3	91.0	94.2	4.4	16.5
25-49	7.4	29.0	69.6	85.5	93.3	96.9	1.3	16.3
<b>TOTAL</b>								
15-19	2.2	11.9	NA	NA	NA	NA	60.7	NC
20-24	3.9	18.0	50.6	70.0	NA	NA	18.5	17.9
25-29	4.9	22.2	58.3	75.9	86.0	92.9	4.7	17.1
30-34	5.4	22.9	61.3	79.0	88.5	94.5	1.7	16.9
35-39	6.8	25.4	64.7	81.4	90.2	95.5	0.9	16.7
40-44	7.5	28.1	66.8	83.3	92.0	96.2	1.1	16.5
45-49	8.6	30.7	68.7	84.6	93.0	97.1	0.6	16.3
20-49	5.6	23.2	59.7	77.4	86.5	91.3	6.4	17.0
25-49	6.2	25.0	62.9	79.9	89.2	94.8	2.2	16.8

NA: Not applicable  
 NC: Not calculated because less than 50 percent of women in the age group 15-19 started living with their husbands by age 15  
<sup>1</sup>The current age groups include both never-married and ever-married women.

which generally does not occur until after the *gauna* ceremony<sup>2</sup>. In the country as a whole, the median age at first marriage is about 8 months earlier than the median age at first cohabitation with the husband. As the median age at marriage has risen and early marriages have become less popular, the difference between the age at marriage and the age at first cohabitation has been reduced. In urban areas, the difference is negligible.

#### 4.5 Marriage Between Relatives

Table 4.10 provides information on marriage between relatives. For both social and biological reasons, marriage between relatives has implications for fertility as well as mortality and morbidity of the couple's children. For example, Bittles et al. (1992) found a positive association between consanguinity and fertility in 19 out of 22 populations. They also found that mortality was significantly higher among children of marriages between blood relatives than among other children. In analyzing the relationship between inbreeding and demographic rates, it is important to control for socioeconomic variables because of a tendency for marriages between relatives to be more common in lower socioeconomic groups whose fertility and mortality are higher primarily for socioeconomic reasons. Such a refined analysis is infeasible in this report, however, and will have to await further studies.

Table 4.10 indicates that overall 10 percent of ever-married women in India married a first cousin (on either their father's side or their mother's side). In addition, 4 percent married a second cousin, uncle, or other blood relative, and 2 percent married a brother-in-law or other non-blood relative. Thus, consanguineous marriages are not very common in the country, accounting for 14 percent of the marriages of ever-married women age 13-49. The percentages marrying a close relative vary only slightly by age, being somewhat more common in the younger cohorts, particularly among women age 13-14. This may reflect a tendency for these marriages to occur at a young age, that is, the age difference may reflect selectivity rather than a trend over time. Interestingly, however, urban women are somewhat more likely than rural women to have married a close relative, contrary to the general pattern observed elsewhere (Rao et al., 1972; Rao and Inbaraj, 1977; Khat and Houry, 1991). The relatively high prevalence of consanguineous marriages in urban areas may be due to the urban concentration of Muslim women, who are particularly prone to marry relatives.

Consanguinity does not vary much with literacy and education, although women with at least a high school education are less likely to have married a close relative. As mentioned earlier, Muslim women are more likely to have entered into a consanguineous marriage than are non-Muslim women. Twenty-seven percent of Muslim women married a blood relative. Consanguineous marriages are also relatively high among Buddhists, and such marriages are particularly low among Sikhs and Jains. Consanguineous marriages are less common among scheduled tribes (10 percent) than among nontribal groups (around 15 percent).

---

<sup>2</sup> After marriage the bride often returns to her parental home until the *gauna* ceremony, which usually occurs when the bride is considered to be mature enough to begin cohabitating with her husband. The difference in the age at formal marriage and the age at first cohabitation with the husband is often large for women who marry before menarche.

**Table 4.10 Marriage between relatives**

Percent distribution of ever-married women by relationship to current (last) husband, according to selected background characteristics, India, 1992-93

Background characteristic	First cousin			Other blood Uncle relation	Other blood Brother-in-law	Other non-blood relation	Not re-lated	Miss-ing	Total per-cent	Number of women	
	Father's side	Mother's side	Second cousin								
<b>Age</b>											
13-14	10.1	5.4	0.3	2.0	2.6	0.6	0.4	78.6	--	100.0	352
15-19	6.1	5.7	1.1	0.8	2.8	0.4	1.9	81.2	0.1	100.0	9095
20-24	5.8	4.9	0.9	1.0	2.5	0.5	1.6	82.9	0.1	100.0	17983
25-29	5.3	4.3	1.0	0.9	2.3	0.5	1.4	84.2	0.1	100.0	17442
30-34	4.9	4.2	0.9	0.8	2.2	0.5	1.4	85.0	0.1	100.0	14660
35-39	5.9	4.6	1.0	1.0	2.4	0.4	1.6	82.9	0.1	100.0	12461
40-44	5.4	4.4	1.1	1.0	2.5	0.3	1.2	84.0	0.1	100.0	9748
45-49	5.3	4.5	0.8	1.0	2.0	0.4	1.1	84.8	0.1	100.0	8036
<b>Residence</b>											
Urban	5.7	5.0	1.1	0.9	2.9	0.3	1.8	82.2	0.1	100.0	23455
Rural	5.4	4.5	0.9	0.9	2.2	0.5	1.3	84.1	0.1	100.0	66322
<b>Education</b>											
Illiterate	5.8	5.0	0.9	1.0	2.3	0.5	1.2	83.3	0.1	100.0	56656
Lit., < middle complete	6.3	4.5	1.1	1.0	2.7	0.4	1.9	82.1	0.1	100.0	16475
Middle school complete	4.6	4.8	1.0	0.9	2.5	0.4	2.1	83.7	0.1	100.0	6508
High school and above	3.5	2.7	0.8	0.7	2.3	0.2	1.8	87.9	0.1	100.0	10138
<b>Religion</b>											
Hindu	4.8	3.9	0.9	1.0	2.3	0.4	1.4	85.2	0.1	100.0	73648
Muslim	11.3	10.1	1.5	0.4	3.5	0.6	1.4	71.1	0.1	100.0	10806
Christian	4.8	3.7	0.7	1.1	2.6	0.2	1.1	85.9	--	100.0	2142
Sikh	0.6	0.6	0.2	0.1	0.9	0.8	3.0	93.8	0.1	100.0	1673
Jain	1.0	2.6	0.7	--	1.2	--	1.9	92.5	--	100.0	428
Buddhist	11.2	5.7	0.1	0.1	2.3	0.9	2.9	76.9	--	100.0	734
Other	4.9	3.6	--	0.2	2.4	0.3	1.6	86.5	0.6	100.0	345
<b>Caste/tribe</b>											
Scheduled caste	5.5	5.0	1.0	1.6	2.4	0.6	1.3	82.5	0.1	100.0	10970
Scheduled tribe	3.8	3.7	0.3	0.4	1.5	0.3	0.9	88.9	0.1	100.0	7934
Other	5.7	4.6	1.0	0.9	2.5	0.4	1.5	83.2	0.1	100.0	70872
<b>Total</b>	<b>5.5</b>	<b>4.6</b>	<b>0.9</b>	<b>0.9</b>	<b>2.4</b>	<b>0.4</b>	<b>1.5</b>	<b>83.6</b>	<b>0.1</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>89777</b>

-- Less than 0.05 percent

Marriage between close relatives is more common in the southern states (with the exception of Kerala) and in Maharashtra (Table 4.11). By far the largest proportion of ever-married women age 13-49 who have married a blood relative are in Tamil Nadu (47 percent), followed by Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka (35 percent each) and Maharashtra (25 percent). The incidence of consanguineous marriages is less than 10 percent in all other states except Goa. Previous studies have also observed considerably higher levels of consanguinity in South India than in North India (Kapadia, 1958; Sanghvi, 1966; Roychoudhury, 1976; Bittles et al., 1991). In every state, consanguineous marriages are mainly between first cousins, either on the father's side or on the mother's side. Uncle-niece marriages are rare everywhere except in Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh.

**Table 4.11 Marriage between relatives by state**

Percent distribution of ever-married women by relationship to current (last) husband, according to state, India, 1992-93

State	First cousin		Second cousin	Uncle	Other blood relation	Brother-in-law	Other non-blood relation	Not related	Missing	Total per-cent
	Father's side	Mother's side								
<b>India</b>	5.5	4.6	0.9	0.9	2.4	0.4	1.5	83.6	0.1	100.0
<b>North</b>										
Delhi	1.9	1.6	0.8	--	1.9	0.4	3.4	90.0	0.1	100.0
Haryana	0.4	0.3	0.3	--	0.8	1.4	6.0	90.8	--	100.0
Himachal Pradesh	0.2	0.3	0.3	--	0.5	0.6	1.0	97.0	--	100.0
Jammu Region of J & K	3.4	3.5	0.7	0.4	1.8	0.3	6.4	83.5	--	100.0
Punjab	0.4	0.5	--	--	0.7	0.9	2.4	95.0	--	100.0
Rajasthan	0.5	0.5	0.3	--	0.6	0.3	0.8	96.6	0.3	100.0
<b>Central</b>										
Madhya Pradesh	2.0	2.0	0.1	--	0.8	0.3	0.7	94.0	0.2	100.0
Uttar Pradesh	3.9	3.2	0.4	--	1.3	0.9	1.1	89.2	0.1	100.0
<b>East</b>										
Bihar	2.2	2.2	0.3	0.3	1.2	0.5	0.5	92.7	0.1	100.0
Orissa	2.8	2.1	0.6	0.2	1.3	0.5	1.5	91.0	0.1	100.0
West Bengal	2.6	1.8	0.5	0.1	1.2	0.2	2.9	90.7	--	100.0
<b>Northeast</b>										
Arunachal Pradesh	0.6	2.3	0.1	0.9	5.0	0.5	4.5	86.2	--	100.0
Assam	0.6	1.0	0.1	--	0.4	0.5	0.7	96.7	--	100.0
Manipur	1.5	0.6	--	--	2.6	0.2	0.2	94.9	--	100.0
Meghalaya	1.9	0.4	0.1	0.3	0.8	0.3	0.8	95.4	--	100.0
Mizoram	0.1	0.2	0.2	--	0.4	--	0.3	98.9	--	100.0
Nagaland	0.7	0.8	--	--	1.1	0.8	1.0	95.6	--	100.0
Tripura	0.6	0.8	0.5	--	0.9	0.2	4.0	92.9	--	100.0
<b>West</b>										
Goa	6.3	3.5	0.5	0.3	3.8	0.1	0.7	84.8	--	100.0
Gujarat	2.3	2.1	0.4	0.1	0.8	0.1	0.8	93.3	0.1	100.0
Maharashtra	12.9	7.6	0.3	0.2	4.4	0.3	2.4	71.7	0.1	100.0
<b>South</b>										
Andhra Pradesh	14.5	10.5	1.6	4.2	4.2	0.2	1.2	63.5	0.1	100.0
Karnataka	10.6	16.5	2.0	0.6	6.0	0.5	1.0	62.8	--	100.0
Kerala	3.7	2.7	1.1	--	1.8	0.2	1.4	89.0	--	100.0
Tamil Nadu	13.6	10.8	6.4	7.4	8.3	0.4	1.3	51.8	--	100.0

-- Less than 0.05 percent