

Changes in the Marriage Patterns of Northern and Southern States of India, 1971-2011

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Abstract

Marriage is a universal phenomenon in India. As the country has passed through significant changes in socioeconomic, cultural and demographic spheres in recent decades, it is reflected on marriage. This paper examines the changes in marriage patterns in northern and southern parts of India, two different regions in terms of geography, culture and demography. Singulate Mean Age at Marriage for women has increased in Northern region from 17.1 in 1971 to 21.4 in 2011, while in Southern region it has increased from 18.7 to 21.3. However, the age gap between spouses has decreased in Southern region over the three decades and in Northern region, it has not changed significantly. The proportion of ever-married women aged 15-19 years was higher in Northern region in 1971 but in 2011 it was lower as compared with Southern region although it has decreased in both the regions. The result of modernization, education and employment is reflected on the divorce rate. In 1991, 6.5 women per 1000 ever-married females were divorced or separated which reached 9.7 in 2011. Changes in marriage pattern have occurred in both the regions but the transition in northern region is rapid compared with the south.

Key words: Marriage patterns, age at marriage, marriage squeeze, divorce, north and south India

I. Introduction

In Indian society marriage is a universal phenomenon referred to as the legal union of persons of opposite sexes constituted by acts, ceremony or process and the legality of this union may be established by civil, religious or other means recognized by the laws. Marriage provides for the biological continuity of the society through procreations and also for its cultural continuity by providing a suitable atmosphere for socialization. There have been discernible changes in the pattern of marriages throughout the world. It has played a major role in determining the growth rate of a population through its linkage to marital fertility. Historically, changes in the pattern of marriages have played significant roles with respect to demographic transitions in many countries of Europe (Van de Walle, 1972). Several less developed countries experiencing slowdown in population growth rate demonstrate changes in marriage patterns (Das et al., 1998). In many societies, reproduction is primarily confined within marriage, changes in respect to marriage age and resultant reduction in the proportion of women remaining in the married state are directly linked to fertility and thus determine the future trend of demographic transition.

Universality of marriage and child marriages were the two predominant aspects in the historical feature of marriages in India. The practice of early and pre-puberty marriages was almost universal in northern India (Altekar, 1956). Even now, there are incidences of child marriages in the northern parts of India and in Rajasthan in particular. Various laws have been passed in India to

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prevent child marriages. According to the Child Marriage Restraints Act, 1978, the legal minimum age at marriage is 18 years for girls and 21 years for boys.

In India, there exists a large regional difference in age at marriage. South Indian women marry relatively late, particularly in Kerala and relatively early in the North, particularly in Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh (Visaria, 2004). Apart from the regional difference, there is a broader difference in female autonomy and demographic behaviour between north and south India (Dyson & Moore, 1983). In most parts of India, either north and south or Hindus and Muslims, families are basically patriarchal, patrilocal, and patrilineal, and the region is known for unequal gender relations (Altekar, 1962; Karve, 1965). Greater autonomy among recently married women in determining the timing of marriage and choice of partner, and greater egalitarianism among them in terms of educational differences with husband are attributes far more clearly observed in Tamil Nadu than in Uttar Pradesh, and presumably suggestive of more egalitarian relationships among younger cohorts of Tamilian women (Jejeebhoy et al., 2005). Development of new technology, economic progress and new patterns of educational and lifestyles changes are major factors playing a profound role to change the pattern of marriages. As time passes, the age at marriage, process of mate selection, aims and purposes of marriage, trends in divorce rates and the economic aspects of marriage have undergone a tremendous change. There are definitely serious consequences of the changing marriage patterns as the increasing age at marriage makes a difference in lowering the fertility rates (Kaur & Singh, 2013).

One of the important phenomenon associated with the marriage pattern is marriage dissolution. Divorce or dissolution of marriage is the final termination of a marriage, cancelling the legal duties and responsibilities of marriage and dissolving the bonds of matrimony between married persons. In most countries divorce requires the sanction of a judge or another authority in a legal process. Divorce laws vary considerably around the world. Divorce is not permitted in some countries such as Malta and the Philippines, though an annulment is permitted. In western countries, divorce does not declare a marriage null and void, as in an annulment, but it cancels the marital status of the persons. Where monogamy is the law, it allows one partner to marry another partner. Where polygamy is illegal, divorce allows the woman to marry another man. According to Census 2001, around 2 million women, i.e., 1 per cent of the ever-married women aged 15-49 are either divorced or separated. Though the proportion of divorced/separated women is small, the absolute number is huge (ORGI, 2008). Changing marriage pattern is mostly affected by industrialization and educational development. A substantial increase in divorce rates in East Asia shows a significant change in circumstances and attitude towards divorce in the countries. Earlier people remained in disharmonious marriages because of the social stigma, for the sake of children or to maintain family honour (Jones, 2010). Marriage dissolution rates and patterns vary across countries and over time. In the last three decades, divorce rates have been rising steadily in the East Asian countries.

In India the kinship system is not homogeneous across the country as Indian society is based on the caste system (Srinivas, 1962). Most marriages are still arranged by parents, although the proportion of self-selected marriages is increasing in recent years (Nanda et al., 2014). The history of arranged marriages reflects trends in gender and inter-generational relations. Traditionally arranged marriages placed considerable power in the hands of parents, particularly in the head of household. In the northern region, kinship pattern is based on three main characteristics. Firstly, marriage is exogamous which means that the spouse must be unrelated in kinship and should not be from the same place of birth or residence. Secondly, men get help and support from their own family members, especially from males. Thirdly, women do not have the right to inherit property nor can they transfer it to their offspring. However, in Southern India endogamous marriage system exists (Dyson, 1979). Women marry at younger ages in India so they cannot be easily cut off from their natal family and can also easily adopt the structure and values of the husband's family. One of the aspects of North Indian kinship system is that after marriage women cannot interfere in their natal family matters and also they have to fully dedicate themselves to their in-laws. The southern zone has its peculiar features which are different from those of the northern zone. Preferential

marriages with elder sister's daughter, father's sister's daughter, and with mother's brother's daughter are particularly prevalent in the southern zone. The main thrust of such a system lies in maintaining unity and solidarity of the clan and upholding the principle of return (exchange) of daughters in the same generation. Women in South India have a high status in society (Karve, 1965). Usually women are married to well-known persons from familiar households which are close to their parental homes and personal movements.

Marriage patterns reflect the basic difference in the status of women from different regions and communities (Karve, 1965). However, the extent to which these patterns are changing over time and most importantly how changes have occurred in recently is a key to assess the effect of programmes and policy implemented by the government. Various studies in the past explored the transition in one or two components of marriage pattern together. There is a need to assess the shift in various aspects of marriage patterns altogether. The objective of this study is to explore marriage patterns and changes in marriage patterns among successive cohorts of women in Northern and Southern region of India, two culturally distinct social systems.

II. Data and methodology

In India direct data on marriage and divorce are inadequate as registration of marriage is incomplete. On the other hand, census of India is conducted once in every 10 years by Registrar General of India and it provides information on various demographic factors like fertility, education, marriage, etc. Hence, census data are the only available source to provide information on entire population by marital status. It provides age-sex specific data on marital status for each census year. Socio-cultural tables have been utilized from the census data (1971-2011) for fulfilling the objectives. Information on marital status was collected for the first time in the 1881 census. From 1881 to 1931, the census of India classified the population into married, unmarried, widowed or widower. No information was collected regarding divorce till 1931 and a divorced person was entered as a widower. In 1941 census, the divorced person was reported separately. In 1951 Census, the marital status of the person was recorded as unmarried, married, widowed and divorced.

For the purpose of this study, Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Haryana, Punjab, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand were considered as north Indian states due to their geographical location. As the state of Uttarakhand was created in the year 2000, the data for Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand have been combined to maintain the uniformity under the northern states. The four states of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu were obviously included as southern states. The rest of the central, western and eastern Indian states were excluded for the purpose of the study. National level indicators were also calculated to make a comprehensive comparison by including all the states and union territories of India. Since 1991 Census was not conducted in Jammu & Kashmir and so for this year indicators could not be calculated for it.

To examine the marriage pattern of any population, one important aspect is the average age when men and women marry. To measure this, we used Singulate Mean Age at Marriage (SMAM). The latter is the average length of single life expressed in years among those who marry before the age of 50 years.

$$\text{SMAM} = A - D/C$$

A is the person-years lived in a single state and calculated as

$$A = \sum_{a=0}^{49} S_a + \frac{1}{2} S_{50} * 50$$

Where S_a is the proportion of singles in age group a

D is the number of person-years lived by the proportion not marrying and calculated as $D = 50 \cdot B$

Where B is the proportion remaining single at age 50

$$B = (S_{45-49} + S_{50-54})/2$$

And C is the proportion ever marrying by age 50

$$C = 1 - B$$

This method involves the following assumptions: (i) the population must be closed to migration or its net effect negligible; (ii) there should not be any differential in mortality by marital status; and (iii) the age pattern of marriage has not experienced any abrupt change over time.

To measure the marriage dissolution, we used the general divorce rate which is defined as number of divorces per 1000 population aged 15 years and above. To observe the marriage pattern, other indicators used are the proportion of females married in the age group of 15-19 years which represent marriages in early ages, and the proportion of unmarried females remains the same in the age group of 35-39 years.

III. Results and findings

Mean age at marriage for men and women

Mean age at marriage is an important indicator to observe the change in the pattern of marriage and also a significant determinant of fertility, especially in India where the birth takes place under wedlock. Table 1 presents the estimates of SMAM for Southern and Northern states from 1971 to 2011. In almost all the states there has been a substantial increase in the age at marriage from 1971 for both males and females. There is an increase in the female age at marriage in North Indian states like Rajasthan and Haryana where girl child is considered as a burden and the status of women is not good. The lowest mean age at marriage of 16.34 years was observed in Rajasthan in 1971 which increased to 19.7 in 2011. In 2011 also, the position of Rajasthan was the lowest among the states considered for the study. In Northern region all the states have gone through the increase in female age at marriage from 1971 to 2011 and all the states have reached the mean age at marriage of above 20 years and above the national average except Rajasthan. Jammu & Kashmir has the highest mean age at marriage of 24.4 years in 2011. However, these differences in mean age at marriages also persisted in the different southern and northern states of India. One of the important changes which occurred in mean age at marriage is that in 1971 the mean age at marriage for females of southern states was higher than northern states but this was no longer the case in 2011. In this year all the Northern states have a higher female age at marriage than the Southern states except Rajasthan i.e., changes in the northern region have taken much faster as compared with the southern region. The regional difference in mean age at marriage for females may be explained by the larger difference in female autonomy and demographic behaviour between northern and southern states of India (Dyson & Moore, 1983).

In the case of mean age at marriage for males, India rose from 22.6 years in the year 1971 to 25.4 years in 2011. In the last five decades, men from southern region marry at higher age compared with the northern men. Mean age at marriage for northern region has increased by 4.5 years in the last five decades (it was 20.6 years in 1971, which reached 25.1 years in 2011). In the last fifty years, the gain in SMAM for the southern region is 1.8 years. In the year 1971 southern region had a higher age at marriage (24.9 year) in comparison with northern region (20.6). The gap in SMAM has declined over time between both the regions. In the southern region, Kerala ceases ??? first position with the highest mean age at marriage for men (28.8 years) in the year 2011, followed by Tamil Nadu (27.3 years) and Karnataka (26.9 years). Among southern states, the minimum age at marriage is in Andhra Pradesh over all the five decades 6 it was 22.8 years in 1971 while in 2011 it reached 25.5 years. Among the northern states, Rajasthan had the lowest

average age at marriage among men with 23.1 years in 2011, which was earlier 20 years in 1971. However, in Jammu Kashmir men married at the age of 27.3 years in 2011, which was the highest in Northern region.

These differences in average age at marriage may be attributed to socio-cultural factors among these states. A variety of factors like education, type of family, caste, religion and economic status have been identified as directly or indirectly responsible for the difference in age at marriage in different settings (Das et al., 1998).

Table 1: Singulate mean age at Marriage in Northern and Southern states, India, 1971-2011

States	1971	1981	1991	2001	2011
Women					
North India	17.1	17.9	18.4	19.8	21.4
Haryana	17.3	18.2	18.9	19.7	21.1
Himachal Pradesh	17.9	19.1	20.3	21.7	22.6
Punjab	20.1	21.1	21.0	21.6	22.7
Jammu & Kashmir	18.0	19.7	n.a.	23.1	24.4
Rajasthan	16.3	17.0	17.3	18.5	19.7
Uttarakhand & Uttar Pradesh	16.6	17.8	18.1	19.7	21.0
South India	18.7	19.6	20.1	20.7	21.3
Andhra Pradesh	16.9	17.6	18.3	19.4	20.7
Karnataka	18.2	20.0	20.1	20.9	21.2
Kerala	21.1	21.8	22.3	21.9	21.9
Tamil Nadu	19.6	20.3	20.9	21.4	21.8
India	17.8	18.7	19.3	20.2	21.0
Men					
North India	20.6	21.7	22.2	23.5	25.1
Haryana	20.7	21.8	22.8	23.6	24.8
Himachal Pradesh	23.1	23.9	24.5	25.8	26.7
Punjab	23.3	24.1	24.3	24.7	25.8
Jammu & Kashmir	23.7	24.5	n.a.	26.7	27.3
Rajasthan	20.0	21.1	21.3	22.1	23.1
Uttarakhand & Uttar Pradesh	19.9	21.3	21.9	23.5	24.7
South India	24.9	25.6	26.0	26.1	26.7
Andhra Pradesh	22.8	22.2	23.5	24.2	25.5
Karnataka	25.1	25.9	26.2	26.8	26.9
Kerala	26.8	27.3	27.8	28.2	28.8
Tamil Nadu	26.0	26.1	26.4	26.8	27.3
India	22.6	23.4	23.9	24.8	25.4

* Figures for India include all states and union territories.

Age gap between the spouses

Based on the age gap between partners, there are three types of marriages: age hypergamy in which men are older than their partner; second, age homogamy in which similarly aged partners marry; and last, hypogamy in which brides marry younger grooms. In the case of India, the popular pattern is age hypergamy which exists. Since men are expected to be 'the provider' or breadwinner, they should be mature enough to carry their responsibility. The age gap between spouses is determined by socio-cultural factors prevailing (Casterline et al., 1986). The difference in SMAM between the spouses (males minus females) is provided in Table 2 from 1971 to 2011.

The age gap between the spouses has not changed much for India in the last four decades. It decreased from 4.9 years in 1971 to 4.4 years in 2011. The gap between spouses is greater in southern region as compared with the Northern region. In the latter initially the gap increased till

1991 and after that it decreased. In 1971 it was 3.5 years and increased to 3.8 years in 1991, after that it has decreased by 0.1 years. Grooms from Himachal Pradesh married brides who were 5.2 years younger in 1971. But in 2011 they married brides who were younger on an average by 4.1 years. Also in northern region, Jammu & Kashmir experienced the fastest decrement in the age gap from 5.7 years in 1971 to 2.9 years in 2011. Other states from this region did not experience much difference. Karnataka had the highest age gap of seven years between spouses in southern region in 1971, followed by Tamil Nadu (6.4 years) and Andhra Pradesh (six years). Kerala had the lowest age gap of 5.7 years in 1971. All the states in the Southern region experienced a decrease in age gap between spouses in the last four decades except Kerala which was the only state in which the age gap between spouses increased from 5.7 years in 1971 to almost seven years in 2011 and from the previous table age at marriage for females decreased in the last two decades. These two observations show that a larger number of younger women were available for marriage for older men (Bhagat, 2016).

Table 2: Age gap between spouses* in Northern and Southern states of India, 1971-2011

States	1971	1981	1991	2001	2011
North India	3.5	3.8	3.8	3.7	3.7
Haryana	3.4	3.6	3.9	3.9	3.7
Himachal Pradesh	5.2	4.7	4.2	4.1	4.1
Punjab	3.2	3.0	3.3	3.1	3.1
Jammu & Kashmir	5.7	4.8	n.a.	3.6	2.9
Rajasthan	3.7	4.1	4.0	3.6	3.4
Uttarakhand & Uttar Pradesh	3.4	3.6	3.8	3.8	3.7
South India	6.2	6.0	5.9	5.4	5.5
Andhra Pradesh	6.0	4.6	5.2	4.8	4.8
Karnataka	7.0	6.0	6.1	5.9	5.7
Kerala	5.7	5.4	5.5	6.3	6.9
Tamil Nadu	6.4	5.8	5.5	5.4	5.5
India	4.9	4.8	4.6	4.6	4.4

* Age gap between spouses is the difference between the singulate mean age at marriage for males and females. Figures for India include all states and union territories.

Marriage squeeze among females

In India due to the universality of marriage, women with severe physical condition or disability were likely to remain single (Jones, 2010). India has passed through the situation of marriage squeeze for females due to a decline in fertility (Bhatt, 1999; Verma, 2003). The singlehood at the later ages or the percentage of never married females at age group 35-39 years describes the situation of marriage squeeze along with change in the pattern of marriage. There has been a substantial increase in never-married women in the age group of 35-39 years from 1971 to 2011 in almost all the states which reflects a change in the situation. Rajasthan has the lowest and Jammu & Kashmir has the highest percentage of never married females in North zone 0.49 and 3.04 respectively. In the case of southern India, Kerala has the highest and Andhra Pradesh has lowest percentage of never married females in the age group 35-39 years in 2011 with 3.46 and 1.30 respectively. Kerala is a paramount state in terms of literacy rate having the highest proportion of never married females in all the four decades hovering around 3.4 per cent to 3.9 per cent.

Women in the age group of 35-39 years are those who are close to the end of their reproductive capacity. In 2011, the states of Kerala, Karnataka, Jammu & Kashmir and Tamil Nadu had a higher percentage of never married females in the age group of 35-39 years than the national average (Table 3). Overall, Kerala had the highest and Rajasthan has the lowest percentage of never married females in the age group of 35-39 years. In the past when fertility was high and sex ratio at birth was normal, women remained single mostly because of the

unavailability of grooms since they were more in numbers compared with males. But an increase in the proportion of single females in the age group of 35-39 years in the last two decades shows a change in the attitude regarding marriage. This is the result of modernization and increase in the education of women. The proportion of single women in the higher age group is high among women who attained higher education (Kashyap, 2015). A woman remains single with high education or with a higher position in professional life because she is unable to find an eligible groom with equal qualifications. A few decades ago, marriage was the most important and compulsory event in a woman's life. Also it was important that girls should marry at right ages. But the increasing proportion of singlehood in the age group of 35-39 years shows the beginning of change in the perception towards marriage. Although the proportion was only 1.8 per cent in 2011 but 7,59,983 women were single in this age group.

Table 3: Percentage of women who never married at ages 35-39 in Northern and Southern states of India, 1971-2011

State	1971	1981	1991	2001	2011
North India	0.54	0.20	0.31	0.60	1.01
Haryana	0.11	0.13	0.28	0.39	0.71
Himachal Pradesh	0.54	0.57	0.70	1.17	1.64
Punjab	0.39	0.39	0.39	0.55	1.20
Jammu & Kashmir	0.96	0.99	n.a.	1.60	3.04
Rajasthan	0.16	0.13	0.17	0.41	0.49
Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh	0.25	0.17	0.32	0.60	1.00
South India	1.11	1.05	1.42	1.66	2.01
Andhra Pradesh	0.36	0.37	0.50	0.76	1.30
Karnataka	0.91	0.90	1.29	1.60	2.10
Kerala	3.74	3.44	3.93	3.88	3.46
Tamil Nadu	0.67	0.75	1.14	1.50	1.87
India	0.77	0.62	0.90	1.32	1.80

* Figures for India includes all states and union territories.

The problem of early marriages among females

In ancient time it was believed that if two persons are known to each other right from childhood, it enhances their understanding and affection. Hence, parents decided the marriages of their children at early age, although the girl continued to live with her parents until she attained puberty. But as time passed, this practice vanished and the consequences of early marriages have been realized by the society. The first movement against child marriage was started in late nineteenth century. In 1894 child marriage was banned in Mysore state when marriages were arranged for girls who had not attained the age of eight years. From then, many acts regarding child marriage have been passed. Baroda Early Marriage Prevention Act, 1904 specified 12 years as the minimum age for a girl's marriage. The British Government passed the Child Marriage Restraint Act, 1929 under which the minimum age for marriage was 18 years for boys and 14 years for girls. Later the Child Marriage Restraint Act, 1978 was amended. According to it the legal minimum age of marriage was fixed at 18 years for girls and 21 years for boys. In 2006 The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006 replaced this act. Under it the legal age at marriage was the same but arranging any marriage below the legal marriage age is considered a crime.

Teenage marriage is also an indicator of women's status in the society. In Indian patriarchal society, girls are not taken as assets and boys get importance in the family. India alone accounts for one-third of the world's total child brides (United Nations, 2014). While the proportion of ever-married women in the age group of 10-14 years has decreased, the proportion of ever-married females in the age group of 15-19 years still remains high. Which indicates a shift of child marriages from the age group of 10-14 years to five year later age group of 15-19 years. After increasing the legal minimum age for marriage of girls to 18 years and for boys to 21 years in

1978, the proportion of child marriages has decreased in the country and the percentage of females ever-married in the age group of 15-19 years has been declining from 56.3 per cent in 1971 to 19.85 per cent in 2011. Almost all the states have a substantial decline in the proportion of ever-married females in the age group of 15-19 years (Table 4). Rajasthan had the highest and Jammu Kashmir the lowest proportion of ever-married females in the age group of 15-19 years in 2011. If we see zone-wise, Andhra has the highest percentage of ever-married females in the age group of 15-19 years in 2011 with 21 per cent. In Uttar Pradesh teenage marriage decreased by 56.9 percentage points from 73.2 per cent in 1971 to 16.5 per cent in 2011. Interestingly, in Northern region all the states experienced a decrease in teenage marriage. Punjab reached 10.4 per cent in 2011 from 22.5 per cent in 1971. In southern region, Kerala with highest female literacy, teenage marriage reached 12.7 per cent in 2011 from 19.0 per cent in 1971. Since child marriage has never been universal in Kerala (Caldwell et al., 1982), it had the minimum teenage marriages in all the five decades among southern states. In the recent census, Kerala has the lowest teenage marriage in the south region but higher than Punjab, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand from north region. Though the minimum legal age of marriage is 18 years for girls and 21 years for boys in India, still many girls are married before the age of 18 years. This is because, girls are seen as an economic burden and they are treated as someone else's asset as they are given to someone in marriage (Suresh Lal, 2015). Poverty and marriage expenses such as dowry may lead a family to marry off its daughter at a young age to reduce these costs (Abbhi et al., 2015). Poor educational opportunities for girls, especially in rural areas, increase girls' vulnerability to child marriage. Girls who do not reach the age of 18 years are neither physically nor mentally ready to enter into marriage. The social, physical as well as mental consequences of early marriage for girls show the image of India in poor light.

Table 4: Percentage of females ever married at ages 15-19 years in Southern and Northern states of India, 1971-2011

States	1971	1981	1991	2001	2011
North India	65.5	53.3	43.5	27.3	17.8
Haryana	61.1	47.8	34.8	24.8	16.6
Himachal Pradesh	51.0	31.9	16.0	9.3	9.2
Punjab	22.5	13.6	12.4	11.0	10.4
Jammu & Kashmir	50.3	28.7	n.a.	11.5	8.7
Rajasthan	75.9	64.7	56.2	41.2	28.8
Uttarakhand & Uttar Pradesh	73.4	61.0	47.0	26.6	16.2
South India	42.7	34.4	28.2	22.1	18.3
Andhra Pradesh	68.4	57.5	46.4	32.3	21.0
Karnataka	50.3	36.8	27.9	20.4	20.5
Kerala	19.0	14.6	11.5	13.3	12.7
Tamil Nadu	27.3	23.2	18.1	15.7	15.1
India	56.3	44.2	35.7	24.9	19.9

*Figures for India includes all states and union territories.

Divorce trend

Divorce is one of the important and unpleasant aspects of marriage. It is looked upon as a social stigma though the law permits a couple to separate ways on mutual grounds. In India, it is still a major social taboo and divorce seekers have to undergo several ordeals in order to get separated from each other. In earlier days, in spite of the existence of a radical disparity between spouses, either of the two was expected to compromise with the other so that their marital bonding survived. In most cases, women were forced to adjust to the unbearable post-marital conditions for the welfare of the family, children and even for her, as she was hardly open to any means of earning her own livelihood.

With the advancement of time, spread of education and campaigns of human rights activists, divorce has become a way to break free from the marital clutches for many women. Nowadays, couples facing difficulties in equating their levels of compatibility they find divorce as a way to get rid of the unpleasant relationship in order to renew their life afresh. In fact, a steady increase in the rate of divorce has been noticed in the Indian metropolis (Ramachandrappa, 2012). Divorce in India is a long legal procedure whose period of prosecution takes at least six months. India has a different divorce law for different religions. Almost all the religions have their own divorce laws which are used. There are separate laws for inter-caste or inter-religion marriages. Divorce laws for Hindus are described in Hindu Marriage Act, 1955. It is also used for Sikhs, Buddhists and Jains as they don't have their own separate marriage and divorce laws.

Table 5: Divorces rates (number of divorces per 1,000 ever married females) in Northern and Southern states of India, 1971-2011

States	1991	2001	2011
North India	1.6	3.1	4.3
Haryana	0.9	2.1	3.4
Himachal Pradesh	4.4	5.0	5.6
Punjab	0.9	3.5	6.5
Jammu & Kashmir	n.a.	5.0	7.3
Rajasthan	2.0	3.3	4.8
Uttarakhand & Uttar Pradesh	1.5	2.9	3.6
South India	10.8	12.9	14.5
Andhra Pradesh	11.0	11.6	13.9
Karnataka	5.9	9.9	11.8
Kerala	20.3	19.9	19.6
Tamil Nadu	9.6	13.3	14.7
India	6.5	8.6	9.7

*Figures for India includes all states and union territories.

Divorce or separation was not common in the Indian society but the trends in the last two decades show that divorce rates are increasing. Table 5 shows that in almost all the states have a substantial increase in divorce rate. Earlier girls were dependent on their parents and after the marriage on their husbands. But in recent decades a change has taken in terms of women's education and their working status. Now more women are going for higher education and working in various sectors. The proportion of women enjoying higher position in their career has also increased. Hence, their role in the modern society is changing which also affects the traditional marital relations (Hussain, 1983). In the past two decades, divorce rate has increased. In 1991, 6.5 women were divorced or separated per 1000 ever married women, while in 2011 there were 9.7 women who were divorced or separated per 1000 ever married women. The southern states are experiencing more divorces as compared with the northern states. In 1991 the divorce rate was 1.6 for northern region which has now reached 4.3 in 2011. In the southern region, 10.8 women were divorced or separated per 1000 ever-married females in 1991 and it reached 14.5 divorced or separated women per 1000 ever married women in 2011. In Kerala divorce rate seems to be decreasing, i.e., it was 20.3 in 1991 while in 2011 it reached 19.6 which is still the highest among all the northern and southern states, followed by Tamil Nadu which had 14.7 divorced or separated women per 1000 ever married women in 2011. Karnataka is the state with the highest gain in the divorce rate from 1991, it increased by 5.9 points in three decades. In northern India, Jammu Kashmir (7.3) has the highest divorce rate and Haryana (4.3) and Uttar Pradesh (4.8) had the lowest in 2011. Kerala, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu had the divorce rate more than the national level (9.7) in 2011. With the spread of women's education, they are getting the privilege to work and earn for their own living. Well-paid women are even at the advantage of supporting their own children. So if a woman undergoes unbearable mental and physical torture, she can now easily move away from the marriage without giving much thought on the post-divorce financial condition.

Divorce seems to be more socially acceptable in recent times as it emerges as a more common issue in the modern world. With the increased rate of divorce, the pace of emotional instability is also quickening. Children get more affected by the separation of parents.

Conclusion

In the past few decades, Indian marriage system has experienced changes as a result of socio-economic development and rise in education and employment. Change in attitude and perception towards traditional norms of marriage, increase in self-selected marriages and increase in divorce/separation have been observed (Kadi, 1987; Singh, 1992). There has been a significant improvement in mean age at marriages for both men and women. The SMAM for females rose by 3.2 years in the last four decades. For north India for females it rose by 4.3 years and for south India by 2.6 years from 1971 to 2011. Teenage marriages have declined and the proportion of unmarried women in the age group of 35-39 years has increased. The southern region is having an almost double the proportion of single women in the age group of 35-39 years than the northern region. In India universal marriage remains the norm. Although there has been a decline in the proportion of ever married females in the age group of 15-19 years, it is still high in some parts of the country (Bhagat, 1993; 2002). With the advancement of women's education and raising awareness of the negative health outcomes of early marriage, implementing and enforcing strict laws against child marriage practice, promoting civil, sexual and reproductive health rights for women and provision of economic opportunities for girls and their families, child marriage has decreased over the period of four decades. In developing countries like India, divorce is considered highly stigmatizing and undesirable event (Choudhary, 1988). In spite of the difficulty in getting it, marriage dissolution is increasing. The number of divorced or separated women per 1000 ever-married women has reached 9.7 in 2011 from only 6.5 in 1991. All the states from the southern region are experiencing the high rate of marriage dissolution. However, the northern region is also experiencing an increase in divorce rates from the first two decades of twenty-first century. Other studies have also found that, despite the stigma attached to divorce in Indian society, divorce rates are on the rise (Gore, 1968; Singh, 1988). Although the divorce rate in India is the lowest compared with the developed countries, legal divorce is more common in urban areas and in rural areas the incidences of separation are more prevalent. As the world is getting smaller, globalization is bringing about the trade of cultures and ideologies. There has been a significant change in the attitude towards marriage in modern India. Due to the presence of a workaholic environment in common households, marital incompatibility is the obvious consequence. Spouses hardly get time to share their thoughts and affections with each other and a growing dissatisfaction instigates the sacred marriage to turn into a grim divorce.

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