



**Negotiating Marriage:
Examining the Gap between Marriage and Cohabitation in India**

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Introduction

Two connected observations often loom large in discussions about marriage in India. The first is that marriage for women on the sub-continent often occurs at a relatively early age, and this is cause for concern because early marriage is thought to disempower women by reducing their access to education and thrusting adult responsibilities on them early in life. The second observation is that marriage in India is more or less universal (see Tables 1 and 2) (Uberoi 1993), making the first issue all the more pressing.

Indeed evidence suggests that while the average age at marriage in India has been increasing for both men and women, increases have been fairly slow with much of the change coming through elimination of marriage for girls under 14 years of age rather than actual delays in marriage for older teenagers or women in their twenties. In a 30 year period spanning from 1961 to 1991, on average women's age at marriage increased only by about 3 years, from a mean age of 16 to about 19 years of age (IIPS & O.R.C. Macro 2000). In contrast, average age at marriage in neighbouring Bangladesh was delayed by a full year more during the same three decades (Islam & Ahmed 1998).

<Tables 1 and 2 about here>

It is instructive to examine this slow change in marriage in the context of rapid changes observed in other areas of Indian life. The economy has grown annually at a rate of 7-9 per cent over the past 15 years, and education has expanded rapidly for all segments of the society (Desai & Kulkarni 2008). Indian families have also undergone

rather dramatic changes, suggested by rapid declines in the Total Fertility Rate from 4.8 in the 1960s to 2.7 in recent years (IIPS & Macro International 2007). Thus this relatively slow change in the average age at marriage is somewhat of a puzzle and one worth examining.

Originating out of a long tradition of village studies, much of the classic research on marriage in India is characteristically structural and places an emphasis on detailing the rules associated with kinship and caste. Marital timing is tied up with questions such as who counts as a suitable marriage partner and whether there is a marriage squeeze. In this work, marriage is seen as often forming the key through which social relations are built, and the practises endorsed by those at the top of such hierarchies are conceived to have a determining influence on marital timing (Dube 1996, 2001, Dyson & Moore 1983, Karve 1965, Srinivas 1977, Uberoi 1993). Even when culture, in the form of norms and customs, is explicitly theorised to be the driving force behind changes in age at marriage, it is often treated as just another structure, as though a kind of static programme human behaviour (Retherford, et al. 2001). Despite the dynamism typically associated with culture, it has too often featured in these analyses as a kind of fossilised backdrop (Hammel 1990).

Accurately rendering the dynamism of culture in order to develop nuanced theoretical models for studying patterned behaviours related to marriage and family remains challenging, particularly in light of the privacy typically afforded issues so close to families. Families may act from a particular set of dispositions, or habitus, but their actions aggregate as patterns capable of continually modifying those dispositions. The corporate family in India is certainly no exception, and we think it serves as a useful site

for gaining a better understanding the slow pace of change in marital timing on the sub-continent.

Pierre Bourdieu (1977) first suggested that families can be understood as resting on systems of durable dispositions or *habitus*. The timing of a marriage, in these terms, is not a determination made by an aloof family in isolation from the community within which it is embedded, and neither is timing wholly determined by the imperatives of class, caste and kinship typical of that community. Rather, the corporate family can be usefully recognised as an embodied agent, which is able to negotiate between the often competing demands placed on it.

In deciding on an appropriate time to arrange marriage for their sons and daughters—particularly daughters—parents are faced with competing demands; some push toward an early age at marriage and others toward a later age. For instance, if finding a good match depends on the availability of eligible candidates, then the pressure to find a match only mounts as a girl gets older and the pool of candidates dwindles. In addition, much has been written about the ability of families to avert harmful rumours about a daughter's alleged promiscuity through early marriage, thereby maintaining family honour or *izzat* (Caldwell, et al. 1983, Caldwell, et al. 1998, Lindenbaum 1981).

Although it is important to recognise this downward pressure, it is equally important to acknowledge the rather formidable pressure against early marriage. The Indian state, for instance, has explicitly banned child marriage, which it defines as under age 18 for women and age 21 for men. Moreover, legal prohibition is reinforced in the print and image of a pervasive media, which itself is but one feature of a much broader social discourse.

Thus, the central problematic facing research on marriage timing in India can be posed as two related questions: (1) how is 'optimal' timing for marriage established? (2) How do families negotiate competing demands regarding appropriate age at marriage?

Gender Performance and Marriage Timing

This paper argues that in concert with examining the corporate family as an embodied actor, paying particular attention to the performative dimension of gender offers a useful means of studying marriage patterns in an Indian context. Goffman (1976) first argued that men and women engage in a visible display of gender where a stylised mode of interaction may indicate deference or dominance. Then, nearly a decade later, a provocative paper by West and Zimmerman (1987, 2009), entitled "Doing Gender" appeared to simultaneously echo the work of Bourdieu (1977) on practise while further elaborating Goffman's central insight on gender as a performance.

In "Doing Gender" West and Zimmerman relied on an ethnomethodological approach to argue for an understanding of gender, not as a finished or stable designation, but as an ongoing process which must be perpetually achieved. Thus, one cannot simply *be* a gender but must *do* gender and do it continually. Although she drew more explicitly from Bourdieu, this insight is also extant in Judith Butler's (1988) performativity theory and has taken hold in anthropology more generally under the banner of performance theory (Morris 1995). For instance, Steve Derné's (1994, 2010) conclusion based on fieldwork in northern India captures this theoretical perspective when he writes that 'in every interaction in which a husband gives his wife permission to go outside the home, he reconstitutes the normal state of affairs in which restrictions on women are necessary.'

There is a synergy between performance theory and the classical social anthropology of M.N. Srinivas. Srinivas (1977) first identified the role of women as custodians of family status and caste purity and focused on the notion of *sanskritisation*, which he identified as the process through which castes manipulate their ritual status; they attempt to legitimise their upward mobility by embracing gendered practises such as prohibition of widow remarriage or by observing *purdah*. He also acknowledged that performances which attempt to manipulate or legitimate ritual status might also conflict with demands associated with modernisation and Westernisation. While Srinivas's work has been highly influential for several generations of scholars, it seems that his original insight on the performative aspect of caste mobility has been obfuscated by village studies, which largely emphasised the essential stability of caste structure.

But performance theory constitutes a departure from structuralism, and is currently enjoying wide application. In a highly controversial essay titled "Doing Difference," West and Fenstermaker (1995) argue that differences in terms of race, class and gender are performed and accomplished in local settings, and Schein (1999) argues that the Miao minority in China create performances of modernity in order to challenge their status as backward cultural conservators. For our purposes, performance theory allows us to focus on the way in which social actors use culture to fabricate meaning in their lives, while at the same time responding to the normative demands of their communities (Kaufman 2004).

We argue that a notion of scripts that frame actors' day-to-day behaviour, and yet are constantly modified as actors face competing demands, provides an interesting framework for a study of marriage in India¹. Yet travels across India reveal a broad

diversity in scripts and the way gender is performed. Purdah, or *ghunghat*, is probably the most visible marker or public performance of gender and it varies from a sari pulled over the face to render women virtually invisible in north central India, to a polite nod at segregation when an older relative is present in Gujarat, to a total absence of purdah in southern India. While purdah might be the most visible marker to an outsider, there are many other more subtle markers of gender segregation. In some parts of India, men and women regularly eat together, while in other parts, a gender segregated eating order is practised and it would be unthinkable for a young daughter-in-law to eat with her husband's father. Restrictions on women's physical mobility is a third marker of gender segregation. In parts of India, women must seek permission from family elders before venturing outside the home, even when visiting a health centre.

It is important to note that, as has been reported in a host of demographic studies on the multidimensionality of gender inequality, gender segregation is not necessarily consonant with inequality in the household (Kishor 2000, Mason 1986). For example, secluded women may retain considerable power in the household, and women with considerable freedom of movement may not find this freedom translating into control over economic resources. For our work, the focus on gendered performances, which denote seemingly 'natural' differences and become the basis for gendered segregation, is particularly important.

Linking of gender scripts to age at marriage must also be viewed in the historical context of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century conflicts between the colonial state which set itself up as the protector of Indian women and the nationalist movement, which needed to articulate an alternative construction of Indian women in order to deflect

the colonial discourse. The Opposition to the Age of Consent Act of 1891 represents the attempt to articulate such a construction (Heimsath 1962). This act set a minimum age for a 'consenting' bride to be 12. However, nationalist Indians viewed this as an attack on Indian religious autonomy, and a vigorous protest emerged led by a charismatic Indian politician, Lokmanya Balgangadhar Tilak. A subsequent increase of minimum age at marriage to 14 in 1929 in an act that came to be known as the Sharda Act also led to significant protests. Partha Chatterjee (1989, 1993) has written persuasively about the process through which the nationalist movement of the early twentieth century created a vision of Indian womanhood that was at once modest, decorous, spiritual and refined. This positioning of Indian women of refinement against their Western counterparts emerged as a response to the colonial state and a Western discourse which posited Indian women as dispossessed and subjugated. Tied up in the nationalist response to colonialism was create a kind of gendered script, the performance of which would mark a distinct Indian womanhood.

A resistance to the colonial construction of early marriage may have attenuated after sixty years of independence, but other practical concerns certainly persist. One of the greatest concerns for most parents is to arrange a marriage for their daughter in a 'good' family where she would thrive. While the definition of 'good marriage' may vary across families, there is a nearly universal concern that nothing should damage the value of a daughter in the marriage market. Popular literature, films and the annals of social science all emphasise a fear of women's sexuality, particularly among upper class and upper caste families, and suggest a girl does not even have to be sexually active to be labeled promiscuous. Simple contact and platonic friendship with the opposite sex can be

enough to damage her reputation and reduce her desirability to her prospective parents-in-law (Caldwell, et al. 1983, Caldwell, et al. 1998, Lindenbaum 1981).

Examining modernity in middle class urban India, Derné (2003) notes the persistence of male preference for modesty and femininity even under the onslaught of the global culture. Another study in Mumbai recorded young men's preferences for family-oriented, 'simple' wives who 'respect elders' (Abraham 2001). The common thread of these findings seems to be a preoccupation with women's modesty that does not allow deviation from the normative age at marriage for women, while it is far more easily permitted for men (Leonard 1976). Thus a long gap between puberty and marriage is seen as a risky period, encouraging parents to minimise this risk by arranging an early marriage.

However, this concern with women's sexual purity is neither universal nor predominant across class and geographic boundaries (Mendelbaum 1988, Papanek 1973). In line with Srinivas' notion of sankritisation, reification of women's modesty is the privilege of upper social classes, and higher caste status is often demonstrated through such reification (Dube 2001, Sharma 1980). Lower class and lower caste women rarely have the privilege of secluding themselves. Similarly, casual contact with men is viewed with much greater fear in certain areas of the country than others. We seek to better understand the role this fear of women's sexuality and immodesty plays in shaping marriage patterns via an examination of these differences across different cultural contexts. Fortunately for our purposes, India provides a fascinating laboratory of diverse practises, allowing us to examine whether early marriage is a part and parcel of other gender scripts which emphasise the importance of women's decorum and modesty.

Our focus on gender scripts emphasises a concern with public performance of modesty and implied control over women's sexuality but is quite distinct from other approaches which aim to measure women's empowerment, such as their control over resources or their general power in household decision making (Mason 1986, Mukhopadhyay, et al. 1988). In line with earlier work, we argue that the median age at first marriage is lower in areas and in communities where there is a greater concern with women's sexuality indicated by greater segregation of men and women into separate spheres (Desai & Andrist 2010). Yet while early marriage may be associated with scripts which prescribe greater gender segregation, it occurs within the context of a growing public consensus about the undesirability of child marriage. Parents are anxious to allow their daughters to mature before facing the pressures of married life, and they worry about curtailing the educational attainment of their daughters. Since education is one of the most important claims to modernity in India, early marriage is not something parents enter into lightly. One of the interesting ways of reconciling these seemingly conflicting demands may be to arrange an early marriage, but one which delays consummation.

The Indian marriage system is characterised by a disjunction between formal marriage and cohabitation and initiation of sexual activity. Historically, marriage was quite different from *gauna* or effective marriage where the bride was sent to her husband's home to begin a married life, and a gap between marriage and *gauna* has long been common for child marriages. Analysts recognise that this gap appears to serve a purpose. While Basu (1993) argues that the gap often plays an important, if incidental, role in delaying the age of first birth². Palriwala (1991) conceives of the family in a more instrumental manner and argues, based on field data collected in Rajasthan, that the gap is

often drawn out by the woman's natal family for the purpose of retaining their daughters' labour for household production, even while forging ties with the conjugal family.

In contrast, we suggest that women's fertility and labour productivity only amount to part of the story. More than a pretence for retaining valuable labour; more even than a means of ensuring a mature age at sexual initiation, this tradition may also be used by parents to ensure their daughters' education, thereby positioning themselves as modern and upwardly mobile. The groom's family must also acquiesce for the process to work, but frequently a desire for this obvious marker of modernity—higher education—is shared by both parties.

Data

Results presented in this paper come from the India Human Development Survey 2005, spanning 41,554 households over all 25 states and union territories of India (with the exception of Andaman/Nicobar and Lakshadweep). The survey was conducted by researchers from the University of Maryland and the National Council of Applied Economic research and was funded by the U.S. National Institute of Health. It was a nationally representative survey (Desai, et al. 2009) specifically designed to study various dimensions of gender relations and since the data are collected in structured interviews, considerable attention was directed to framing questions which would provide information that would meaningfully tap into women's experiences within the Indian context.

For this analysis, we restricted our sample to 27,930 ever married women age 25-49 for whom complete data was available. Results from 2001 Indian census indicate that

nearly 95 per cent of women are married by age 25 and restricting our sample to ever married women aged 25 and above allows us to minimise the selection bias due to the omission of women who marry late. These women were interviewed in their homes by female interviewers in the local language.

Marriage Patterns in Modern India

Given a lack of national information on marriage patterns in India we start with descriptive statistics from IHDS. Table 3 shows that average age at marriage varies considerably across demographic characteristics among ever married women aged 25 years and above in our sample. Regional differences in age at marriage are striking, with average age being 15-17 years in some states like Jharkhand and Madhya Pradesh and higher age at marriage in Punjab and Himachal Pradesh as well as in the southern states. Women in poor and less educated households often marry around 16 years of age while women from better off and more educated households get married around age 19-20 years. Average age at marriage is 18.6 years in metro cities and is considerably lower in less developed villages.

<Table 3 about here>

Not surprisingly many of the young brides were physically immature and had not attained puberty at the time of marriage. For instance, in Bihar and Rajasthan, states with earliest age at marriage, around 25 per cent of girls had not attained puberty at the time of their marriage. At the same time, a focus on formal age at marriage may well be mistaken

in a context where early marriage is not synonymous with early age at entry into a sexual union. As documented by many anthropologists, early marriage is often associated with a delay in consummation and the bride remains with her parents until a formal *gauna* or *bidai* ceremony occurs. States with very early age at formal marriage also follow the custom of a gap of a year or more between *gauna* and marriage. Table 3 indicates proportions waiting at least six months following the wedding before cohabitation. In Bihar about 75 per cent of women waited for six months or more to begin living with their husbands as did about 88 per cent of women in Rajasthan. As Figure 1 shows, this waiting period is often associated with the relative youth and immaturity of the bride and tends to decline as the age at marriage increases. But it is important to note that regardless of the age at which formal marriage occurs, average age at which cohabitation or effective marriage begins is barely about 18-19 years in many states and even younger in others (refer to Table 3).

<Figure 1 about here>

Table 3 indicates that the per cent not cohabitating immediately is highest for women who are illiterate (64 per cent) and lowest for college graduates (24 per cent). This seemingly contradicts our argument that the institution of *gauna* is used by families to pursue education; however this is a simple cross tabulation that does not control for conflating factors such as caste, place of residence, level of income and most importantly, for the purposes of this discussion age at marriage. One can expect that lower the age at marriage, higher will be the gap between age at marriage and age at cohabitation and

young brides are likely to use this gap to pursue higher education. This complex three-way association is more easily examined in a regression framework. Controlling for other variables (including age at marriage), we find that women who are more educated are more likely to have a longer gap between marriage and gauna (refer to Table 7). Table 7 also indicates that the age at marriage has a negative sign, which lends evidence to our hypothesis that it has an inverse relationship to age at cohabitation.

Most marriages are arranged. In spite of the Valentine's Day articles in English newspapers emphasizing the importance of love in marriage among urban elites, in our sample around 5 per cent of the women said they chose their husbands independent of their parents (see Table 4). The rest reported a variety of arrangements through which their families made marriage decisions. Most reported a very limited contact with their husbands before marriage; 68 per cent met their husbands on the day of the wedding or shortly before; an additional 9 per cent knew their husbands for a month before the wedding. Only 23 per cent knew their husbands for more than a month when they got married. While educated women are more likely to have a longer acquaintanceship with their husbands, as Figure 2 indicates, even among women with college education, a long acquaintanceship before marriage is not normative. It is important to note that while the IHDS data were only collected from women, meaning that much of the discussion has necessarily focused on women's choices, a similar story could also be told for men, who have limited contact with their wives before marriage.

<Figure 2 about here>

Yet despite the popular stereotype of women who are coerced into arranged marriages, about 65 per cent felt their wishes were considered in selecting their partners. One of the most striking changes in the data we examined regarding Indian marriage patterns is the extent to which the bride's consent is sought when making marriage arrangements. Table 4, for example, indicates that women between the ages of 25 and 30 were more likely to report having a say in choosing their spouse (24 per cent) and less likely to report being involved in an arranged marriage without their consent (35 per cent) than women from earlier birth cohorts. Indeed, nearly 6 per cent of women between the ages of 25 and 29 arranged their own marriages, as opposed to 4 per cent of women between the ages of 40 and 49.

<Table 4 about here>

While women appear to be more inclined than older cohorts to emphasise for themselves their choice and efficacy in determining their marriage partner, one can still argue that entrenched marriage patterns make some choices more probable than others. In parts of India, especially in the north, the practise of exogamy prevails. As demonstrated in Table 5, in the northern states of Punjab, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh, women who married in the same village or town numbered barely 5 per cent. An even smaller percentage of women from these states reported marrying cousins or close relatives. In contrast to the north, women in the south may not only be encouraged to marry within the natal village, custom may prescribe that marriage to a close cousin or uncle is preferred.

In Tamil Nadu, for instance, nearly 27 per cent of women married within the same village or town, and about 30 per cent of women reported marrying a close relative.

<Table 5 about here>

Gender Performance and Marriage

If age at marriage is a component of a gender script that views early marriage as a marker of decorum and propriety, we would expect it to coincide with other markers of gender performance. Specifically, we highlight the relationship between age at first marriage, on the one hand, and the practise of purdah, a gendered eating order during meal times, and the extent of restrictions placed on women's mobility.

Purdah or ghunghat is probably the most visible marker or public performance of gender. In the IHDS, women responded yes or no to the question, 'Do you practise ghunghat/purdah/*pallu*?' While only about half of women between the ages of 25 and 49 reported they practised purdah, Table 6 demonstrates marked regional variation. Dividing India into northern and southern halves by the Satpura Hill Range, purdah practise is nearly ubiquitous in the northern states of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Bihar. Indeed 94 per cent of women claimed to practise purdah in Rajasthan and in the state of Bihar nearly 88 per cent of women claimed to practise. In contrast, women in south India practised purdah far less. In Tamil Nadu only 10 per cent of women claimed to practise it.

<Table 6 about here>

Slightly less visible to public scrutiny are the behaviours of households associated with meal time; and in some parts of India, a gendered eating order is followed. The IHDS asked women, 'When your family takes the main meal, do women usually eat with the men? Do women eat first by themselves? Or do men eat first?' The options 'eating together' and 'varies' were coded together, while the options 'women first' and 'men first' were coded together. In the northern state of Gujarat only about 4 per cent of women reported that their household practised an eating order. Thus while there is a less discernable north-south pattern in eating order, the percentage of families who ate separately during meal time was highest at 91 per cent in the northern state of Bihar. Neighbouring Uttar Pradesh followed with nearly 70 per cent of women reporting they practised an eating order with their families.

Finally, restrictions on women's physical mobility are yet another marker of gender segregation. We examined the prevalence of women seeking permission from family elders before leaving the home alone to visit health centres, friends or the local bazaar. For each of these three destinations interviewers asked women, 'Can you go alone?' (yes or no)³. 66 per cent of respondents could travel unescorted to the local health centre (Desai, et al 2010), while 74 per cent of respondents could go to a friend's home alone. At 80 per cent, most women reported being able to travel alone to the local market or *kirana* shop. Table 6 shows a dichotomous mobility variable, where women were counted as mobile if they could travel alone to all three destinations. 59 per cent of all women fit these criteria, and 13 per cent reported they could not travel alone to any of the three destinations. In Bihar, about 30 per cent of women reported being able to travel

unescorted to all three destinations, and in sharp contrast, 70 per cent of women in the North-East reported being similarly mobile.

Figures 3, 4 and 5 graph state specific markers of gender performance by age at marriage. As the trend line indicates, the states with greater emphasis on gender performance are also states with lower age at marriage. In results not reported here, we have undertaken multivariate analysis using hierarchical linear models which control for women's age, education, household economic status and place of residence (Desai & Andrist 2010). Even after controlling for these factors, the district level gender performance indicators seem to be significantly associated with age at marriage.

These results suggest that in regions where gender segregation is more prevalent, early marriage is also preferred. This bolsters our argument that for women, early marriage is part of a pattern in which seclusion, segregation and modesty mark claims to refinement and status.

<Figures 3, 4 and 5 about here>

Competing Claims of Gender Performance and Modernity

In our theoretical discussion we noted that families are faced by competing demands of gender performance and modernity. Whereas Srinivas' notion of sanskritisation points to a process of leveraging caste status through emphasizing behaviours associated with women's modesty and decorum, claims based on modernity emphasise such things as attaining high levels of education and a protected childhood. How families resolve the contradictions between these demands is an interesting

empirical question and is the focus of our analysis. We suggest that a lengthy gap between marriage and cohabitation may be one avenue through which these competing claims may be resolved. Thus one might expect variation in the gap between marriage and gauna to be associated with the level of education women report. Specifically, we argue that, net of other factors, women with high levels of education will tend to be women who report an extended gap between marriage and gauna. That is, the marriage-gauna gap allows families to project an impression of decorum and modesty for their daughters, while allowing them to attain higher levels of education.

In what follows we use ordinary least squares regression to analyse this gap between marriage and cohabitation, and how it might vary by women's education levels⁴. Thus our principle explanatory variable is the eligible women's education level, broken down into five discreet categories: 'illiterate,' '1-4 years,' '5-9 years,' '10-11 years,' '12 and some college,' and 'college graduate.' The category 'illiterate' is dropped from the model and used as the reference category.

We include controls for caste, tribe and religion to mitigate the conflating effects of differential marriage and gauna patterns associated with these groups. As women living in an urban setting may be more inclined to seize upon and enact the prescriptions of scripts associated with modernity, we include a dichotomous variable indicating whether the eligible woman lived in an urban setting. As we have demonstrated throughout this paper, regional diversity in India is substantial. While states in India operate as administrative boundaries, they also approximate cultural and linguistic boundaries. Thus we attempt to control for the conflating effects of that diversity by adding state dummies to the model. Finally, because we know age at first marriage is

associated with the gap between marriage and gauna, we add age at first marriage as a control variable to the model.

After adding controls, the results indicate that higher education is associated with longer gaps between marriage and cohabitation. Note that this is not simply a wealth effect. Other variables measuring socioeconomic status and urban residence do not appear to be correlated with the gap between marriage and gauna once controls are added. It is only higher education that lengthens this gap.

Discussion

A son or daughter's marriage is often a pivotal moment for an entire family, and the timing of this event is likely to receive careful thought and planning. Economic considerations certainly influence the timing of marriage. For example, increased expenses associated with a daughter's marriage may lead families to postpone the marriage long enough to accumulate the necessary resources (Caldwell, Reddy, and Caldwell 1983). The timing of a daughter's marriage may also hinge on the marriage market, or the depth of the pool of eligible bachelors (Kaur 2004). Although these frameworks have proven useful, they are incomplete because, on the one hand, they suggest Indian families act in strictly economically rational terms, and on the other, what families actually do to influence the timing of marriage disappears altogether. In this paper, we have argued for an expanded notion of agency; one which acknowledges that families are simultaneously bound by the demands of dominant scripts and relatively free to negotiate the way in which they respond to such demands.

What happens when the demands associated with one script seem to preclude one's ability to meet the demands of another? What happens when a woman is encouraged to retain respectability through an early marriage, even when an early marriage might preclude her ability to attain higher levels of education? The way in which this dilemma is often resolved is illustrated in a recent *National Geographic* article profiling child brides (Gorney 2011). In it, Shobha Choudhary, a 17 year-old girl from rural Rajasthan, discusses her marriage at 8 years old and her desire to pursue a college education. To achieve this goal, she believes she must delay gauna; yet at the same time, she is adamant that she cannot delay cohabitation forever and risk disgracing her parents.

Shobha's dilemma illustrates the central argument in this paper: namely, families are expanding the gap between marriage and gauna as a means of negotiating these competing demands. While families are certainly impacted by dominant scripts pertaining to appropriate enactments of gender, sexuality, and modernity, their response has not been to either choose early marriage or late marriage. Instead, families have opted to have it both ways by often continuing to participate in early marriage while delaying the age of effective marriage or gauna. Adopting this theoretical orientation, then, can be seen as a move to bring the family back in as a central author of the social processes in which it finds itself immured.

Using survey data, we have demonstrated the usefulness of this theoretical perspective. We have shown that families very likely continue to be engaged in a process of sanskritisation, which M.N. Srinivas (1977) identified over thirty years ago. The data demonstrate the continuing pervasiveness of early marriage, purdah practise, restricted mobility for women and gendered eating order in India, suggesting that families continue

to find it useful to enact these ‘traditional’ scripts in order to legitimise—or position themselves for—upward mobility. At the same time, families continue to run up against demands which push for greater education. The results demonstrate that the gap between formal marriage and gauna is positively associated with the level of education for women, suggesting that this gap is being adapted as a means of increasing educational attainment and ‘doing’ modernity⁵.

This paper joins recent scholarship, which grapples with understanding processes of social change in India. For instance, other studies have also focused on changing marriage patterns, and have demonstrated that parent-arranged marriages are increasingly incorporating consent from the bride and groom (Banerji, et al. 2008). As we have argued, while marriage patterns in India are certainly changing, and while they are certainly capable of continued change, we think it would be inaccurate to view these changes as evidence that India is incrementally moving toward Western-style marriage patterns. The process which involves negotiating the gap between marriage and gauna is far more dynamic than any process suggested by the notion of westernisation.

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Footnotes

1. 'Scripts' as a theoretical concept bears notable resemblance to other work done on marriage patterns in India. Most recently, in her study of marriage norms in Allahabad district in Uttar Pradesh, U. Kalpagam (2008) makes use of the related concept of 'social disciplines.'
2. Basu specifically writes about the period *aoni-jaoni*, a term mostly used in Rajasthan. We would like to thank the referee for pointing out that *aoni-jaoni* refers to a period after the *gauna*, and not the period between the wedding and *gauna*. While this is an important distinction, we think Basu's argument might be relevant to the gap between marriage and *gauna* as well.
3. A preceding question asked the respondent whether she needed to acquire permission to travel outside the home. In cases where women reported they did not need to acquire permission, interviewers often failed to ask whether she could "go alone" to a particular destination. Because it is impossible to know whether women who did not need permission to go out were allowed to travel alone, we have opted to drop these records from the analysis. In total, there were 2,379 such cases.
4. The IHDS obtained information about first and second marriages. This analysis is restricted to age at first marriage.
5. Interestingly, the benefit of using of this gap to increase educational attainment has also been noted by some activist groups, and delayed cohabitation is seen as one of objectives of programs such as *Doosra Dashak* in Rajasthan.

Table 1.
Singulate Mean Age at Marriage of Women in India and
Bangladesh, 1961-2001

	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001
India*	16.1	17.2	18.4	19.3	17.2
Bangladesh**	13.9	--	16.6	18	--

sources *1961-2001: *International Institute for Population and O.R.C. Macro 2000;*
IHDS 2001

***1961-1991: Islam & Ahmed 1998*

Table 2.
Percentage of Married Women Ages 20-24 in Various
Developing Regions

Eastern/Southern Africa	66
Western/Middle Africa	79
Eastern Asia	46
Former Soviet Asia	54
Caribbean/Central America	56
South America	51
Middle East/North Africa	55
All India	77
Rural India	83
Urban India	63

Source: Mensch, Barbara S., Susheela Singh, and John B. Casterline. 2005.

'Trends in the Timing of First Marriage among Men and Women in the Developing World'

The Population Council Working Paper No. 202. for other developing countries.

Census of India, 2001, Table C-2 for India

Table 3.
Marriage and Cohabitation Patterns by Selected Characteristics for Women
Ages 25-49

	mean age at marriage	% not cohabiting immediately	mean age at cohabitation
Full Sample	17.4	51.0	18.0
Woman's Age			
25-29	17.6	48.0	18.1
30-39	17.4	50.0	18.0
40-49	17.3	53.0	18.0
Woman's Education			
Illiterate	16.1	64.0	17.0
1-4 standards	17.1	45.0	17.5
5-9 standards	17.9	40.0	18.3
10-11 standards	19.5	33.0	19.8
12 and some college	20.7	31.0	20.9
College graduate	22.6	24.0	22.8
Place of Residence			
Metro cities	19.3	31.0	19.5
Other urban area	18.5	44.0	19.0
More developed villages	17.2	54.0	17.8
Less developed villages	16.5	56.0	17.3
Income			
Lowest quintile	16.5	56.0	17.3
2nd quintile	16.7	55.0	17.4
3rd quintile	17.0	54.0	17.7
4th quintile	17.6	48.0	18.2
Highest quintile	19.0	40.0	19.4
Social Groups			
Other High Caste Hindus	18.4	41.0	18.9
OBC	17.2	55.0	18.0
Dalit	16.5	55.0	17.2
Adivasi	17.1	54.0	17.7
Muslim	17.2	50.0	17.7
Other religion	20.8	30.0	21.1

Table 3 (contd).
Marriage and Cohabitation Patterns by Selected Characteristics for Women
Ages 25-49

States			
Jammu and Kashmir	18.9	57.0	19.3
Himachal Pradesh	18.6	28.0	18.9
Uttarakhand	17.6	27.0	17.8
Punjab	19.7	37.0	19.9
Haryana	17.4	74.0	18.3
Delhi	19.2	45.0	19.6
Uttar Pradesh	16.1	72.0	17.5
Bihar	15.2	75.0	16.6
Jharkhand	17.4	54.0	17.9
Rajasthan	15.8	88.0	17.4
Chhattisgarh	16.0	87.0	17.1
Madhya Pradesh	16.0	59.0	17.0
North-East	20.6	37.0	20.8
Assam	19.5	31.0	19.6
West Bengal	17.5	16.0	17.6
Orissa	17.9	13.0	18.0
Gujarat	18.2	69.0	18.9
Maharashtra, Goa	18.1	20.0	18.2
Andhra Pradesh	15.9	71.0	16.5
Karnataka	17.7	66.0	18.2
Kerala	20.9	21.0	21.0
Tamil Nadu	18.8	36.0	19.0

source: Desai, et al. 2010

Table 4.

Distribution of Marriage Types for Women Ages 25-49

	<i>Type of Marriage</i>			
	self- arranged	jointly- arranged	parent-arranged with consent from the respondent	parent-arranged with no consent from the respondent
Full Sample	4.96	34.96	22.21	37.86
Women's Age				
25-29	6.20	33.94	24.44	35.43
30-39	4.75	35.14	22.68	37.43
40-49	4.39	35.44	19.85	40.31

source: Banerji, Martin and Desai 2008

Table 5.
Percentage of Endogamy and Marriage to a Relation for
Women ages 25-49, by State

	% of women married within the same village	% of women married to a close relative or uncle
Full Sample	13.70	11.70
States		
Jammu and Kashmir	23.10	20.50
Himachal Pradesh	10.50	0.40
Uttarakhand	7.70	0.80
Punjab	4.80	1.00
Haryana	2.90	1.50
Delhi	18.90	1.80
Uttar Pradesh	5.30	5.10
Bihar	6.10	5.80
Jharkhand	8.40	6.10
Rajasthan	10.50	2.00
Chattisgarh	6.90	1.10
Madhya Pradesh	10.40	4.10
North-East	41.80	2.60
Assam	27.40	1.20
West Bengal	20.40	3.60
Orissa	17.00	9.20
Gujarat	8.30	2.90
Maharashtra	12.20	26.20
Andhra Pradesh	16.70	29.40
Karnataka	11.70	23.20
Kerala	27.60	2.70
Tamil Nadu	27.10	29.50

source: Desai, et al. 2010

Table 6.**Mean of Gender Performativity Variables for Women Ages 25-49, by State**

	% practising purdah	% men and women who eat separately	% of women who are less mobility
Full Sample	54.80	34.36	43.67
States			
Jammu and Kashmir	76.40	20.08	44.68
Himachal Pradesh	44.60	10.59	23.86
Uttarakhand	44.50	40.37	31.10
Punjab	32.30	23.07	36.56
Haryana	80.70	9.88	39.58
Delhi	43.20	14.16	27.63
Uttar Pradesh	87.10	70.05	51.80
Bihar	88.10	90.64	70.27
Jharkhand	58.60	53.94	59.72
Rajasthan	93.90	42.67	59.08
Chattisgarh	57.60	46.65	59.15
Madhya Pradesh	92.70	48.80	53.70
North-East	27.80	4.78	30.38
Assam	67.60	33.46	51.23
West Bengal	69.50	25.00	40.21
Orissa	63.70	60.11	38.28
Gujarat	75.70	4.48	23.83
Maharashtra	37.50	17.54	22.52
Andhra Pradesh	12.30	7.44	33.00
Karnataka	11.90	26.46	38.30
Kerala	14.70	8.81	24.31
Tamil Nadu	9.70	14.74	25.38

source: Desai, et al. 2010

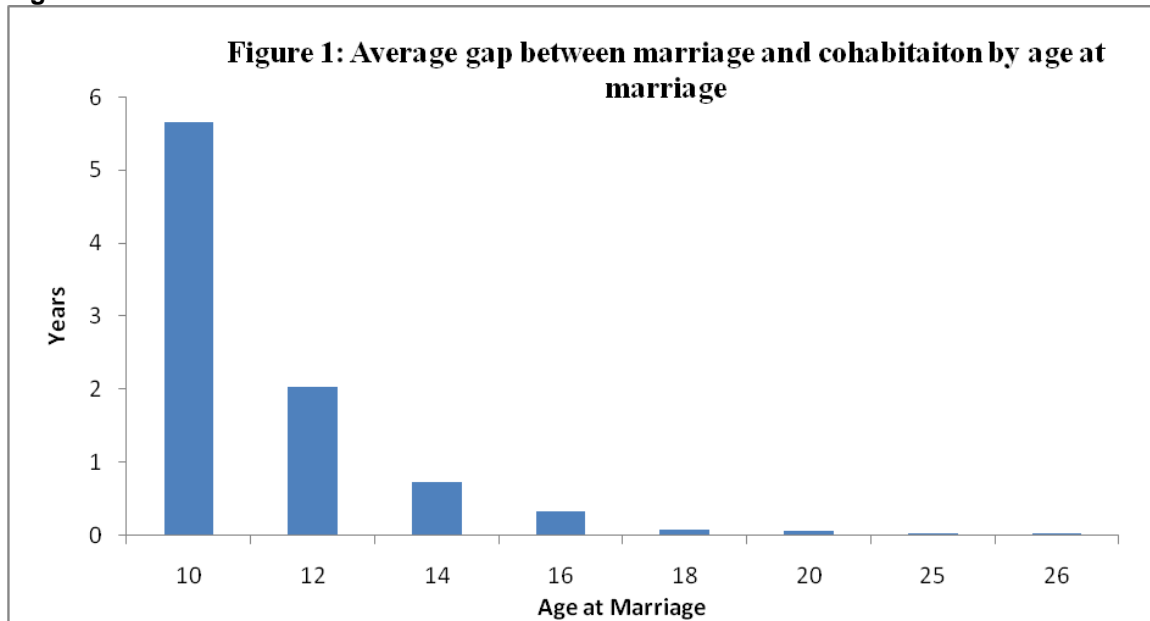
Table 7.
Coefficients from Ordinary Least Squares Model
Predicting the Gap between Marriage and
Cohabitation

	Coefficients	Std. error	
Women's Education			
Illiterate (reference)			
1-4 years	-0.0988	0.03	**
5-9 years	-0.0191	0.02	
10-11 years	0.167	0.03	**
12 and some college	0.295	0.04	**
college graduate	0.643	0.04	**
age at marriage	-0.177	0.002	**
income	0.012	0.01	
urban	-0.0511	0.018	**
Social Groups			
High Caste Hindu (reference)			
OBC	0.213	0.02	**
Dalit	0.080	0.02	
Adivasi	0.021	0.03	
Muslim	-0.207	0.03	**
Other religion	0.233	0.08	
States			
Jammu and Kashmir (reference)			
Himachal Pradesh	-0.104	0.11	
Uttarakhand	-0.377	0.09	**
Punjab	-0.151	0.09	
Haryana	-0.029	0.09	
Delhi	-0.098	0.09	
Uttar Pradesh	0.395	0.07	**
Bihar	0.422	0.08	**
Jharkhand	-0.293	0.08	**
Rajasthan	0.781	0.08	**
Chhattisgarh	0.033	0.08	
Madhya Pradesh	0.099	0.08	
North-East	0.016	0.09	
Assam	-0.051	0.08	
West Bengal	-0.336	0.08	**
Orissa	-0.369	0.08	**
Gujarat	-0.035	0.08	
Maharashtra, Goa	-0.324	0.07	**

Andhra Pradesh	-0.513	0.08	**
Karnataka	-0.296	0.08	**
Kerala	-0.015	0.08	
Tamil Nadu	-0.330	0.08	**

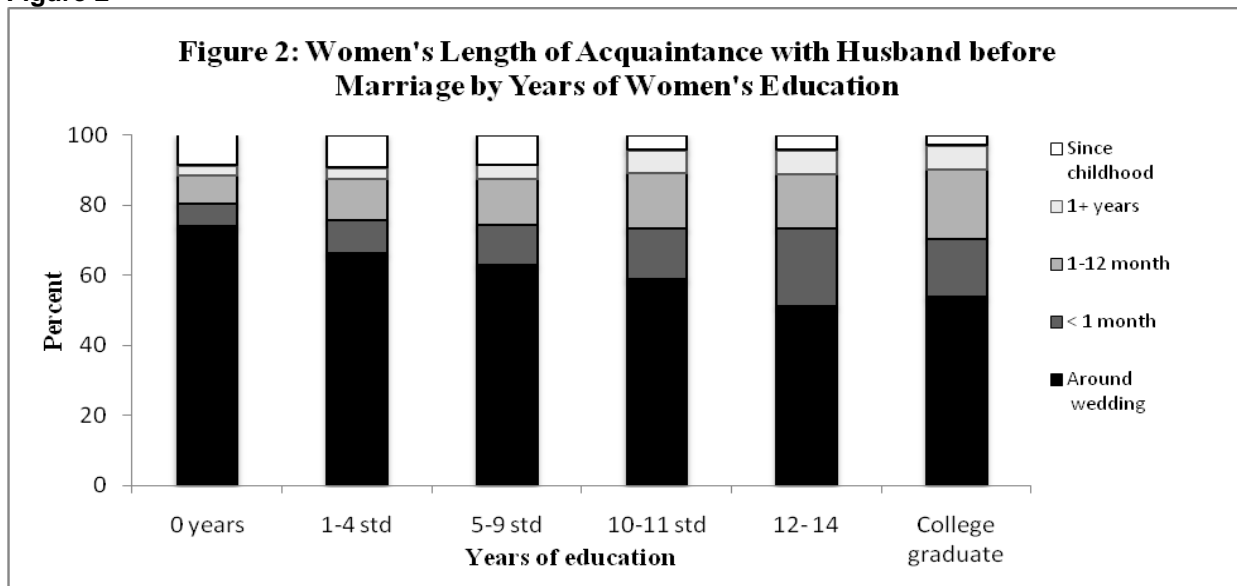
$p \leq 0.01$

Figure 1



source: Desai, et al. 2010

Figure 2



source: Desai, et al. 2010

Figure 3

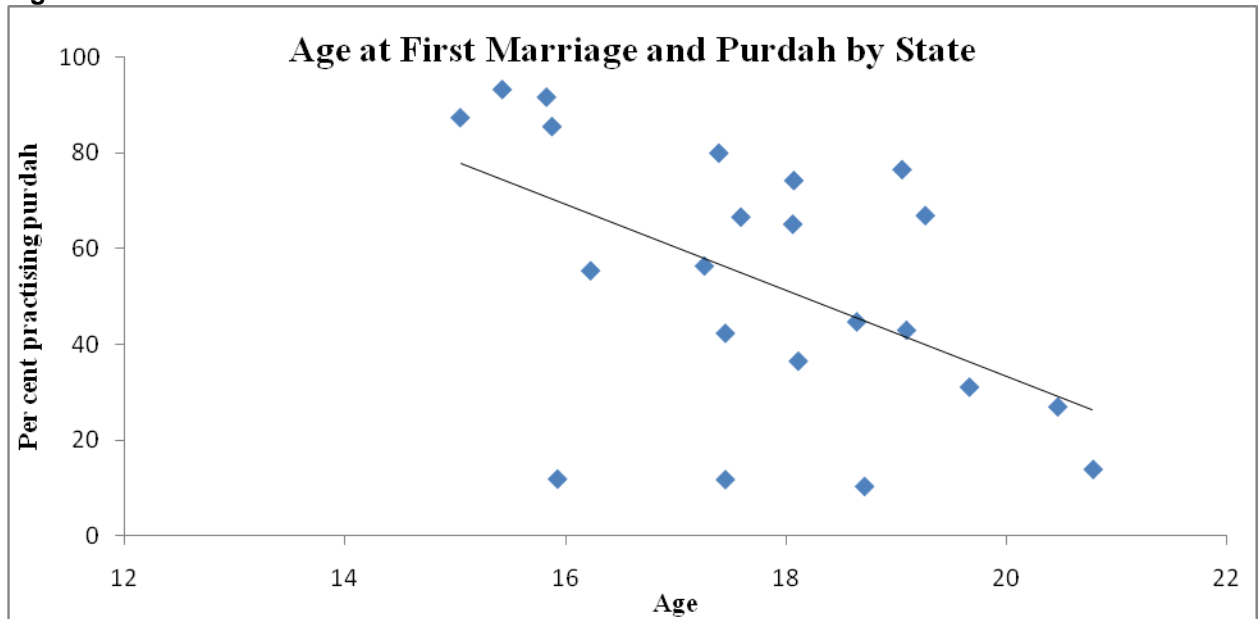


Figure 4

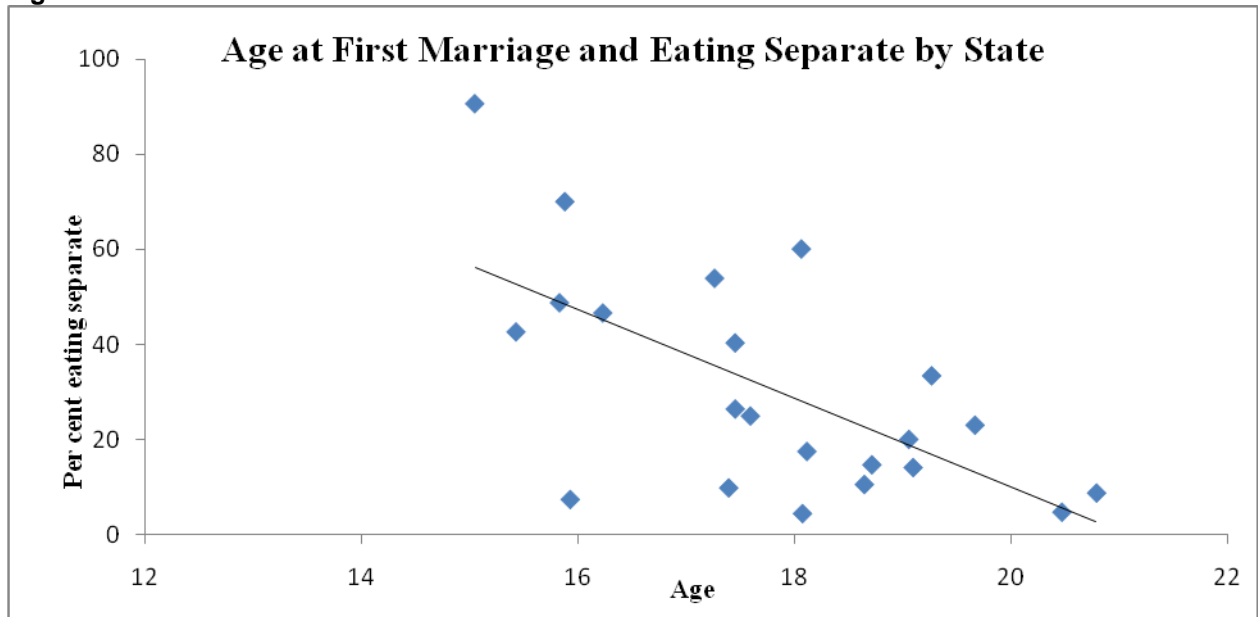


Figure 5

