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Raising the age of marriage in 1970s India: Demographers, despots, and feminists

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SYNOPSIS

In this article, we explore forces that led to the increase in the legal age of marriage in India in 1978. In particular, we focus on the relationship between feminists and the population control interests within and outside India that propelled the 1978 change. We probe the relationship between age of marriage and other instruments of population control, closely tracing when and how demographers began to pay attention to using the legal age of marriage as a means of population control, and its growing consolidation as a policy measure within UN institutional agendas. We note the appeal of this measure against the backdrop of Emergency-era forced sterilizations in the mid-1970s and describe the technocratic means by which the 1978 amendment of the Child Marriage Restraint Act passed in the Indian parliament. While recognizing the hegemony of population control discourses, we offer broad distinctions between feminist and population control goals. In doing so, we offer an explanation of the seeming indifference of feminists to raising the age of marriage in this moment as compared to the avid feminist support, historically, for combating child marriage.

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Introduction

In the second decade of the twenty-first century, child marriage has become an urgent topic for global health and development activists. In May 2012, the US Senate even passed the International Protecting Girls by Preventing Child Marriage Act (S.414), channeling State Department funding into reporting and altering child marriages around the world.¹ This renewed attention to the topic is something of a resurrection, coming nearly eighty years after child marriage first drew international attention. In the first three decades of the twentieth century, social reformers and women's activists in several parts of the world, and particularly in India, fought persistently to raise the age of marriage. For the rest of the twentieth century, the topic did not spark the same feverish conversations as it did in the late 1920s.² Currently, as health and legal activists set about preventing child marriage around the world, it is useful to reflect on the relationship between two

key ideological interests that have shaped the trajectory of legal changes in the age of marriage: feminism and population control. This essay explores the relationship between feminists and population control advocates in the context of 1970s India, when a dramatic change in the legal age of marriage for girls took place. By closely following the intellectual history of the idea of raising the age of marriage as a policy measure, we explain how it can draw support for distinct, and not always consonant, reasons. In focusing on the 1978 moment when the age of marriage was dramatically raised for girls, we offer a fuller account of an important, but neglected, episode in Indian gender history.

In 1978, when the Indian Parliament raised the age of marriage to 18 years for girls and 21 years for boys, the measure created barely a ripple. Although the age of marriage for girls had been set at 15 years for nearly three decades, few legislators marked the moment as noteworthy. As a *Times of India* article observed: "Even though the measure [was] of vital social significance, the attendance in the chamber was poor," the debate was "lackadaisical," and "a bell had to be rung to draw in enough members to fulfill a

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quorum for passage" (1978, 1978). This lack of interest in the measure is mirrored in scholarly writing: only a handful of books and articles actually focus on this event (Bajpai, 2003; Forbes, 1979; Sagade, 2005). The neglect of this episode appears genuinely surprising when contrasted with the scholarly treatment of two prior occasions when the age of marriage was raised, in 1929 and 1891 – these are treated as watershed moments in Indian social history. Feminist historians of India may even agree that the loud debates leading up to the 1929 Child Marriage Restraint Act (CMRA or Sarda Act) and the polarized positions associated with the 1891 Age of Consent debates are among the most studied events in their field. This essay seeks to account for the relative silence among feminist historians and activists on the legal change in the 1970s, and the contrasting interests at stake in the 1920s and the 1970s.

Any effort to understand the 1970s historical moment must begin with an acknowledgement of the power of the discourse of population control in the era. Whereas women activists and social reformers had been vocal advocates for raising the age of marriage in 1929, during the 1970s it was professional demographers and policy makers who were the prime movers. Whereas the violence of forced sex and forced household responsibilities at an early age was what 1920s reformers sought to prevent, in the 1970s it was the specter of fertile girls contributing to booming population counts that occupied demographers' minds. India had become a veritable training ground for international population programs since its independence, and so the measure to raise the age of marriage was influenced by an international climate of alarmism around population growth. Indeed, we frame the lack of attention to the 1978 CMRA Amendment as evidence of the overwhelming acceptance of the imperative of population control in that time. So the questions we explore are: Just how did international population control initiatives take up the issue of age of marriage, and how did this discourse travel and become the impetus behind the 1978 law that raised the age of marriage in India? What is the relationship between the age of marriage and other instruments of population control? How did the political leadership and women's organizations within India react to this change? And perhaps most intriguingly, what does this moment tell us about the relationship between the history of feminism and the history of population control?

Feminist engagements with reproductive rights have long been entangled and confused with population control. During the first half of the twentieth century, advocacy for birth control provided ample opportunity for connection, and perhaps a complicity, among feminist, eugenicist and Malthusian goals. The biography of one of the most well-known feminist activists for birth control, Margaret Sanger, embodies that mixed legacy: her desire to prevent women from having to endure multiple pregnancies grew indistinguishable over time from her efforts to prevent the reproduction of people deemed inferior. Efforts to raise the age of marriage in India during the 1970s might arguably have led to a similar coalition— another convergence between feminist and population control interests inside India. Feminists had, after all, historically pushed hard on the question of child marriage, and women's organizations played a significant role in rallying behind the passage of the CMRA from 1929. Yet, Indian feminist activists were not among the vocal factions leading to raising the age of marriage during the 1970s. In this article, we explore this moment and the

significance of the apparent feminist indifference on the question of age of marriage.

Before we describe the intellectual history of the treatment of the age of marriage as a population control measure, a brief history is in order of the salience of the age of marriage as a social and policy question. Early marriage, or child marriage, was the centerpiece of raging debates in the 1880s and 1890s between reformers and religious orthodox figures in Indian urban centers. Particularly controversial was the age of marriage for girls, historically conceived as lower than the age of marriage for boys. In the 1891 case, the age of consummation of marriage – the age at which girls betrothed in childhood were required to join their conjugal home – was set down as 12 years. The 1891 measure ignited political hostilities between reformists and religious orthodox figures as well as antipathy towards the colonial state, which, according to some, had no right to intervene in customs affecting the "personal" realm. The colonial state, while apparently progressive, actually played an obstructionist role, inciting controversies that would allow it to fashion national elites as incapable of self-government. This logic was especially clear in the 1920s as the problem of child marriage in India came to be publicized, and the aspiring nationalist movement was especially keen to present India as a "civilized" nation-in-the-making (Sinha, 2006; Tambe, 2009). In 1929, after a committee conducted a massive survey demonstrating the problems of child marriage, and with vocal advocacy from women's groups, the CMRA set the age of marriage as 14 for girls and 18 for boys. It remained the same except for a minor amendment to 15 in 1949. For the next three decades, the CMRA remained the national legal standard for the majority of marriages. In a small minority of cases called "special marriages" – those not involving religious sanction – the age of marriage was raised to 18 for girls and 21 for boys in 1954, via the Special Marriage Act.³ In most cases of marriage, however, the age of marriage was set at 15 for girls and 18 for boys. In 1978, the CMRA was amended to increase the age of marriage to 18 for girls and 21 for boys. The story of why and how this dramatic measure passed mostly silently is our focus.

We begin with an account of how the age of marriage emerged as a focus in demographic theories and population control measures. Our intellectual history points to the role of particular individuals from India whose scholarly networks facilitated the circulation of ideas about the age of marriage and population control. We next turn to debates within India, focusing on the role of Indian policy makers and activists. We examine the position of the Indian women's movement, the historic *Towards Equality* report of 1974, and its account of the issue of the age of marriage. We then focus on the forces preceding the passage of the 1978 CMRA Amendment, tracking the troubling turn that population control took in the mid-1970s under the Emergency. Even as we identify the strategic overlap in the objectives of Indian feminists and population control advocates in the 1970s, we comment on the hegemony of population control discourses and clarify the increasingly distinct conceptual positions taken by these two sets of voices.

Population institutions, the UN, and age of marriage

The idea that the age of marriage could be a part of national population policies first emerged in the 1950s, with debates

among demographers about whether postponing marriage could effectively reduce fertility. These discussions quickly catapulted to an international stage amid growing concern about world population growth and the establishment by the late 1960s of population institutions and agendas within the United Nations and its various specialized agencies. Influential demographers backed by the Milbank Memorial Fund and the Rockefeller and Ford Foundations, among others, theorized that a shift from high to low birth and death rates, as experienced historically in western industrialized countries, could be engineered in developing countries (Notestein, 1982; Notestein & Osborn, 1971). The *demographic transition theory*, bound to a development agenda, played a critical role in establishing a mandate within the United Nations for population policy-making and activities. Through elaboration of the theory, specific discussion on the relationship between age of marriage and fertility intensified.

This discussion coincided broadly with an internationalization of population issues largely driven by the work of the Office of Population Research at Princeton University and the Population Council.

Founded in 1936 through a grant from the Milbank Memorial Fund, Princeton University's Office of Population Research found itself in close proximity to The League of Nations' Economic, Financial and Transit Section, which relocated in 1940 from Geneva to the Institute of Advanced Studies in Princeton, New Jersey (Notestein, 1982: 664; Pauly, 1996: 6). Solicited and published by the League during World War II, the Office of Population Research conducted four demographic studies of Europe and the Soviet Union. Soon thereafter, the U.S. Department of State contracted the Office of Population Research to conduct similar studies for other parts of the world, particularly in Asia (Notestein, 1982, p. 665). In the transition from the League of Nations to the United Nations after the war, the Office of Population Research maintained an international profile through the production of such internationally focused studies and because its own director, Frank Notestein, became the first director of the UN Population Division (one of two UN bodies dealing with population matters that preceded the establishment of the United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA) in 1969 (p. 670). Situated within the UN Secretariat with a permanent staff, the UN Population Division under successive US-American leaders became the launch pad for plans to reduce population growth in the global South (Symonds & Carder, 1973). Among these strategies, raising the age of marriage became an attractive actionable item because it not only seemed less contentious than birth control, but it also had historical standing within international settings – the age of consent for sexual relations had been discussed as part of successive anti-trafficking conventions under the auspices of the League of Nations in the inter-war period.

Yet, the actual relationship between age of marriage and fertility was neither clear nor internationally recognized during the 1950s. Ansley J. Coale, a demographer at the Office of Population Research at Princeton University along with Frank Notestein, was one of the primary architects of the demographic transition theory. In his highly influential 1958 book written with Edgar Hoover, *Population Growth and Economic Development in Low-Income Countries*, Coale and

Hoover laid the groundwork for decades of World Bank policy insisting that slowing population growth was a necessary prerequisite to economic development – not the other way around. Supported by the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, the Milbank Memorial Fund and the Rockefeller Foundation, Coale and Hoover's book was hardly a call for raising the age of marriage. In fact, the authors, while accepting that age of marriage may not be insignificant to fertility differentials, did not feel that it could rise fast enough to “appreciably” lower fertility (p. 49). Coale and Hoover even gave voice to a critique that early pregnancy might lead to impaired reproductive ability, contributing ultimately to smaller rather than larger family sizes – early marriage, in other words, would not increase population. Indeed, during the 1920s when debate over the Sarda Act in India drew international attention and eugenic concerns about population quality predominated, the argument in support of the law claimed that early marriage led to maternal morbidity, infant mortality, and weak progeny (Committee, *India Age of Consent*, 1929: 164 & 168). The idea that delaying marriage would improve (rather than reduce) fertility undergirded these statements.

Two years later, however, Coale, along with co-author C.Y. Tye, made one of the most incisive interventions towards incorporating age of marriage as a part of population policy discourse. In a frequently cited paper, Coale and Tye (1961) acknowledged that no consistent relationship between age of marriage and completed family size had yet been found, but argued that all the while demographers had been looking in the wrong place. Even when the total number of children each woman bears does not change, the authors argued, postponing marriage (and, implicitly, childbearing) would slow population growth, especially in high fertility populations. Coale and Tye employed a mathematical model designed by Alfred Lotka to support their argument and further drew on empirical evidence comparing the population growth rates of two high fertility populations, each with different age patterns for reproduction – the Chinese in contrast to the Malays in Singapore, and the Hutterites in contrast to the Cocos Islanders. In both high fertility population comparisons, Coale and Tye demonstrated that the population with later patterns of childbearing experienced slower population growth. Published in the *Milbank Memorial Fund Quarterly*, the article provided powerful scientific backing for a policy of delaying marriage as a means of stemming population growth. The authors concluded:

our calculations suggest that postponement [of marriage] must be given serious consideration as a powerful supplementary component of population policy in the crucial decades ahead. Postponement would provide a substantial and immediate transitory reduction in the birth rates as well as a smaller permanent decline, and these would be in addition to, and perhaps even help to promote, further decline ultimately achieved through more prevalent and effective practice of contraception”.

[Coale & Tye (1961: 645–646)]

Other population and social scientists were reaching similar conclusions around the same time and later appearing articles all built upon Coale and Tye's work, using mathematical models to project the impact of raising marriage on population growth

or presenting new empirical evidence that supported the same conclusions. Sociologist Norman B. Ryder, for instance, presented a paper at the 1960 annual meeting of the American Sociological Association (Ryder, 1960) that began, like Coale and Tye's book, by recognizing that raising the age of marriage does not automatically lower "fecundity." Ryder (1960) also invoked Lotka's stable population model to explain why reducing the births of younger rather than older women had a greater impact on slowing population growth. Ryder went on to explain how increasing the age of marriage worked to instill a western style of economic and sociocultural development. Condemning the "kinship social security system" and models of shared responsibility for procreation among extended family, Ryder promoted "individualism" and nuclear families as keys to "purposive procreation" or "rational reproduction" (11). "A later marriage gives a young person a few premarital adult years in which to become committed to individual and societal rather than familial goals," he argued (10). Early marriage, according to Ryder, "deters capital formation," and western countries achieved high standards of living through "delayed gratification and prudential restraint" (9). Ryder's comments point to the intrinsic connection between population strategies of the time and broader, modernist goals and ideals. Indeed, anthropologists Nilanjana Chatterjee and Nancy E. Riley look back on India's population control history as "the domestication of modernity through a selective indigenization of modernity's core values" (2001: 811). Similarly, Carole McCann, in her analysis of the mid-twentieth century demography as hegemonic masculinity, discusses how fertility control measures had a lot to do with creating new kinds of subjects such as modern men and their modern wives, whose decision to form smaller families testified to their economic rationality and concern for the nation's welfare (Chatterjee & Riley, 2001: 817; McCann, 2009: 158). The works by Ryder and Coale and Tye mark a turning point after which raising the age of marriage became a significant topic within population science and policy circles.

Neither Ryder nor Coale and Tye invoked Malthus, the British economist and cleric whose famous *Essay on the Principle of Population* from the late 18th century theorized overpopulation. A few years later, however, at the 1965 World Population Conference in Belgrade, Malthus' name conspicuously arose within discussions on the age of marriage. Several papers presented at the conference cited a 1963 publication by J. William Leasure also appearing in the *Milbank Memorial Fund Quarterly*, which contended that Malthus advocated for an age of marriage around 27 or 28 as a "check" on population (Leasure, 1963: 420). The topic of the age of marriage decisively reentered the world stage at this point, hitched to population concerns.⁴ In addition to its influential publication, the Milbank Memorial Fund also sponsored meetings attended by permanent staff of the Population Division in which a perspective began to solidify that economic development on its own could not occur quickly enough to stem dangerously high rates of population growth in the global South (Symonds & Carder, 1973: 52). Several prominent U.S. demographers who propagated this view, including Coale, provided more than scientific contributions to the UN. Along with his colleague Frank Notestein, who directed the Population Division, Coale actively sought a mandate within the United Nations for population control policies and activities.

For example, Coale served on a United Nations Association of the USA panel, which in 1969 produced a report recommending an expansion of the UNFPA and a multi-pronged interagency approach by the UN to stem population growth (Symonds & Carder, 1973: 190). Thus, wearing more than one hat, Coale produced scholarship on the age of marriage that turned it into an actionable item to pursue towards the goal of population reduction while also cementing receptivity within U.N. circles to embark on a global population control agenda. Without this specific confluence of institutional change and new scholarly insight, the legacy of international debate on age of marriage might have stopped at mid-century U.N. discussions on child marriage as a form of slavery.

The Population Council, established in 1952 by John D. Rockefeller III, provided the linchpin for internationalization of population control. Under a policy of supporting "indigenous leadership and institutions in developing countries," the institution supported the establishment of demographic research and training centers in the global South, the first of which was founded in India in 1957. It further financed the first World Population Conference held under UN auspices in Rome in 1954 and provided fellowships to citizens of developing countries for training in demography, biomedical work in human reproduction, or family planning research and administration (The Population Council, 1978). According to a retrospective account of its early accomplishments:

Begun in the 1950s, the program made investments in human resources that would yield critical returns for the field in the years ahead. When world attention focused on population problems in the 1960s and 1970s, population specialists were already deployed around the world, largely because of the Population Council's efforts.

[The Population Council (1978: 27)]

S.N. Agarwala, who received a Population Council fellowship to study demography as early as 1955 (The Population Council, 1978: 180), played a prominent role in intergovernmental conversations during the mid-1960s.

Having studied the age at marriage in India under Coale's supervision at the Office of Population Research at Princeton University in the late 1950s, Agarwala presented at the second World Population Conference in Belgrade in 1965. In his paper, Agarwala ratcheted up pressure on developing countries to raise the age of marriage by boldly projecting that an increase in the female age at marriage in India to 20 would reduce the birth rate by 30% within one generation (United Nations Department of Economic & Social Affairs, 1966: 172). Even before the conference in 1964, Agarwala's projection appeared in a publication by the Planning Commission of the Government of India, *Yojana* or "Plan" (cited in Basavarajappa & Belvalgidad, 1967: 15; cited in Malakar, 1972: 297). Well poised to move the conversation on the relationship between age of marriage and population size across multiple borders, Agarwala appears to have played a pivotal role in drawing age of marriage into population discourse within international settings as well as onto the national planning agenda in India. He later would direct a major demographic research center in New Delhi and World Bank project to reduce fertility in Lucknow, India (Agarwala, 1966a: 1; Agarwala, 1974: 129).

Viewed by many in his field as an overestimate, Agarwala's calculations nonetheless seemed to provide the springboard for a new conversation among population scientists by the latter half of the 1960s centered not on whether raising the age of marriage would support the goal of slowing population growth, but on how quickly and by what extent. The *Eugenics Quarterly* (which changed title to *Social Biology* in 1969) published several articles by demographers reacting to Agarwala's projection. Like Agarwala, they presented their own quantitative analysis based on the assumption of an increase of female age of marriage to twenty. Less enthusiastic about the potential impact of such a measure, K.G. Basavarajappa, a demographer in Australia, and statistician M.I. Belvalgidad of Lady Hardinge Medical College in New Delhi, projected a decline of not more than 10% in the birth rate (1967: 25). Prem P. Talwar, a biostatistician at the University of North Carolina, suggested a higher immediate decline (around 25%) which would lessen over time (between 8 and 21%) (1967: 294). P. Krishan, a doctoral candidate at the International Population Program at Cornell University projected a 14% reduction within 28 to 29 years (1971: 201). Agreeing with Talwar, C.R. Malakar, from the Indian Statistical Institute in Calcutta, underlined that smaller increases in age of marriage (up to 17 years) would not significantly impact birth rates (1972: 301). Citing one another, the seminal work by Coale and Tye from 1961 and Agarwala's Belgrade paper, these demographers and statisticians used their numerical calculations to debate the prospects of slowing population growth by delaying marriage.

A novel 1961 study proposed by the Population Commission and carried out under joint UN and Government of India auspices in areas of Mysore (now Karnataka) significantly influenced conversations among demographers. *The Mysore Study* used a household survey for collecting data on fertility-related matters including age of marriage and knowledge and use of family planning (United Nations, 1961). The study provided an early methodological model subsequently employed by other countries to inform population policy. The results of the study confirmed that women who married later had, on average, a smaller number of children, and provided useful empirical ammunition to population strategists who sought policy change (Agarwala, 1966b; Basavarajappa & Belvalgidad, 1967; Chandrasekaran, 1986; Malakar, 1972).

Dissenting demographers

In spite of the growing momentum behind calls to raise the age of marriage both within international settings and the population sciences, two women demographers raised questions about the intent and assumptions behind such a call. Their voices revealed that not all demographers were content with the focus on numerical projected reductions in the birth rate using hypothetical increases in age of marriage. Malini Karkal (1968), who served as Senior Research Officer within the Family Planning Unit of the Demographic Training and Research Centre in Bombay, offered vociferous critiques of the priorities, if not the assumptions and projections, of other demographers. Putting into doubt the existence of a direct relationship between late marriages and low birth rates as theorized by Agarwala and others, Karkal interpreted the experience of reduced birth rates in those areas of the world where age of marriage also increased as a result rather

of “changes in the outlook of the society towards the role of women and consequently the impact of the society on the women themselves” (1968: 51). In full support of the 1929 Sarda Act, which Karkal (1968: 56) (quoting social worker Shakuntala Paranjpye) describes as a “humane measure” to “protect girls from forced sex life”, Karkal questioned proposals to raise the legal age of marriage for the sake of reducing births in India. She argued the measure would not make a significant impact for that purpose “unless accompanied by change in the educational level and occupational status of women” (Karkal, 1968: 56). In an announcement on her death in 2002, feminist activists from Forum for Women's Health in Mumbai fondly appraised Karkal's professional stance, which often ran counter to the mainstream of her field:

Dr. Karkal worked for many years at the International Institute for Population Sciences, Bombay. She was a demographer who looked at human beings and not merely the numbers counting them. She also constantly emphasized the importance of looking at quality of life rather than talk in terms of numbers while discussing the issue of population (<http://india.indymedia.org/en/2002/10/2215.shtml>, accessed on 30 October 2012).

Demonstrating Karkal's affinity to social change activism in the area of women's health, the announcement attests to her vigilance that feminist goals in reproductive health not be confused with the numbers-based logic of population control.

Although not directly connected to feminist women's health activism, Kumudini Dandekar, a demographer of the Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics in Pune, raised a similar critique in 1974. Her lack of enthusiasm for the Indian Ministry of Health and Family Planning's stepped-up efforts to pursue legislative change on age of marriage speaks volumes about the growing conflict between those who pursued a numbers-based population control agenda and those who centered the human rights and needs of women. Underscoring that “in fact, there is no definite relationship between birth rate and age at marriage,” Dandekar ambivalently commented that “there is nothing desirable or undesirable about present age at marriage, per se” (1974: 871). Like Karkal, Dandekar questioned the likelihood that legal measures to raise the age of marriage would, on their own and in the absence of other socio-economic measures, substantively lower birth rates. She observed:

It seems to us that further rise in the age at marriage can occur only with high motivation among women for a better life for themselves. This can lead to reduction in fertility. Such a motivation can come with better education, employment or general improvement in the level of living above a certain minimum.....If education and employment could be made available for a majority of women and if marriage was not depended upon for sheer subsistence, there will be a society in India that could be called progressive, and it will control the age at marriage as directed by social circumstances.

[Dandekar (1974: 871; 874)]

Karkal and Dandekar each refuted the assumptions and lines of argumentation made by Agarwala and other demographers who, among their evidence, often touted the

example of Ireland as a Catholic country that had achieved low birth rates by delaying marriage alone (presumably without the assistance of contraception). Karkal (1968) countered the Irish example with the Indian state of Kerala whose higher age of marriage did not correspond to lower rates of fertility. In a similar vein, Dandekar (1974) explained why the Irish example could not apply to the living and social conditions of India.

Age of marriage consolidated within UN population discourse

Neither the Rome nor Belgrade conferences produced a concluding document, but nearly a decade after the Belgrade conference, the format of UN conferences on population changed substantially. Reflecting the increased acceptance and institutionalization of population agendas within the UN, the UNFPA took over organization of later decennial conferences held in Bucharest (1974), Mexico City (1984), and Cairo (1994) in which government delegations from member-states met not merely for discussion but rather to produce policy recommendations and plans of action. These documents did not go so far as to specify a universal minimum age of marriage – since such a proposition was likely to meet resistance; there was a long history of conflict at the intergovernmental level when negotiating universal age standards for sexual activity (Tambe, 2011). However, regional conferences under UN auspices sometimes took different approaches. A UN seminar on family planning held for the Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East (ECAFE) in Jakarta, Indonesia in 1973, just ahead of the Bucharest conference, recommended that:

Governments which have not already done so ensure that the laws provide for a minimum age of marriage for women of not less than 16 years, for the registration of all marriages, and for the contracting of marriage only with the full and free consent of intending spouses.

[United Nations (1974: 102 (a))]

On one hand, many population scientists did not consider an age short of 19 as having any significant impact on birth rates,⁵ and so the designation of 16 years as a minimum appears conservative. On the other hand, the adoption of a specific recommended lower age limit in the first place likely demonstrated the region's growing acceptance that, under western monitoring, international aid would increasingly depend on an outward display of political will to control population growth. Just a short while later, the first UN intergovernmental conference on population in 1974 concluded on a less definitive note, recommending "[t]he establishment of an appropriate lower limit for age at marriage" (United Nations Department of Economic & Social Affairs, 1975: 32 (f)). Twenty years later at the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo, the language had been further strengthened from "adoption" to "enforcement" of a minimum age of marriage. Paragraph 4.21 expounds:

Governments should strictly *enforce* laws to ensure that marriage is entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses. In addition, Governments should strictly *enforce* laws concerning the minimum legal age of consent and the minimum age at marriage and should raise

the minimum age at marriage where necessary. Governments and non-governmental organizations should generate social support for the *enforcement* of laws on the minimum legal age at marriage, in particular by providing educational and employment opportunities (emphasis added, UNFPA, 1995: 26, Paragraph 4.21).

Thus, from the mid-1960s onwards, age of marriage became an increasingly established feature of population discourse at the UN.

Indian population policy and the 1978 CMRA Amendment

The first rumblings of a potential change in the legal minimum age of marriage in India appeared in 1974. The Indian Ministry of Health and Family Planning issued a mass announcement predicting a long-term reduction of 15% in the birth rate should the minimum age of marriage for females rise to 18 years, and a reduction in 19% should the age rise to 20 years (Dandekar, 1974: 867). Clearly, projections by demographers had made their way into policy-making loci. In the same year, the *New York Times* reported another key development:

Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's Government is considering laws to raise the legal age for marriage in India. The objective is to reduce the number of child mothers, whose babies are helping to increase the population by an estimated 13 million a year.

[*The New York Times* (1974)]

The timing of Indira Gandhi's announcement – just a few days before the start of the UN World Population Conference in Bucharest – could not have been coincidental. Indeed, India's mere *intention* to do something about its population size signaled the country's acceptance and willingness to act on its "population problem." Since the Belgrade conference, much had changed on the international front. The U.S. government under Lyndon Johnson not only pledged to combat the "population explosion," but prioritized spending in foreign aid to control population growth over economic development (Symonds & Carder, 1973: 140). Elite and well-funded activism by the population lobby within the UN had made substantial inroads in establishing population as a specialized area of UN activity. Although the delegation from India to the Bucharest conference joined a global South bloc which insisted that population concerns not supersede those of economic development, Indian policies during the 1970s actually belied that rhetoric. International aid had become increasingly contingent upon the government's efforts to take action on its "population problem." Raising the age of marriage as a simple amendment to the long-standing Child Marriage Restraint Act (CMRA) from 1929 provided relatively "safe" political ground from which India could be seen taking such action.

When the legislative proposal to amend the CMRA appeared in 1974, it was formulated and promoted entirely within the executive branch, with no explicit acknowledgement of parallel feminist engagement on the issue. By the end of 1974, Ministry of Law officials had announced in both the upper and lower houses of parliament that a Government proposal to raise the age of marriage was in the works

(Republic of India, 1973; Times of India, 1974). After that, the issue reverted to central government bureaucracy and planning until it reappeared in 1976 as part of a National Population Policy (NPP) statement.

The NPP statement appeared in the midst of an infamous period in Indian history known as the Emergency rule, when Indira Gandhi's government suspended civil liberties and elections. The NPP statement, authored by the national minister of Health and Family Planning Karan Singh, mentioned raising the age of marriage as one plank of a troublingly ambitious policy to reduce the population growth rate from 35 per thousand in 1974 to 25 per thousand in 1984 (or a drop of 1.4%). Positing that "waiting for education and economic development to bring about a drop in fertility" was not a "practical solution," it identified population control as an end in itself. Ironically, Singh had just two years earlier in Bucharest famously stated that "development is the best contraceptive" while rallying alongside other global South countries against this very notion (Johnson, 1994: 114). Paragraph 5 of the NPP statement presented the benefits of raising the age of marriage thus:

[It] will not only have the demonstrable demographic impact, but will also lead to more responsible parenting and help safeguard the health of the mother and child. It is well known that early pregnancy leads to high maternal and infant mortality. Also, if women of our country are to play their rightful role in its economic, social and intellectual life, the practice of early marriage will have to be severely discouraged. The present law has not been effectively or uniformly enforced. It has, therefore, been decided that the minimum age of marriage should be raised to 18 for girls and 21 for boys, and suitable legislation to this effect will be passed. Offences under this law will be cognizable by an officer not below the rank of a Sub-Divisional Magistrate. The question of making registration of marriages compulsory is under active consideration (emphasis added, Singh, 1976: 310).

Interestingly, raising the age of marriage is named here as the first concrete measure the government would take, and other more controversial measures, such as the provision of monetary compensation for sterilization, group incentives for those who promote it, and even compulsory sterilization, are mentioned in Paragraphs 11 and 15 (Singh, 1976: 311–312). In practice, however, monetary incentives and compulsory sterilization were implemented much more speedily in the following year than raising the age of marriage, which did not occur until after the reigning government of Indira Gandhi was replaced. The 1976 Policy statement treated raising the age of marriage as a taken-for-granted detail of what had by this time become a monumental state program to reduce population growth by far more aggressive means. Indeed, the Policy even promised a constitutional amendment to freeze until 2001 representation in the lower house of parliament (the Lok Sabha) to levels determined by the 1971 census so that states would not have an incentive to increase their populations (p. 310).

On the ground, the population control measures taken during Emergency rule were dramatic: the central government undertook a notorious program to carry out forcible sterilization. Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's son Sanjay Gandhi

embarked on a zealous campaign of providing material incentives to rural men and women who underwent vasectomies and tubal ligations. The campaign, begun in April 1976, chalked up 8.3 million sterilizations, up from 2.7 million the previous year (Haub & Sharma, 2006:14). Field workers were assigned quotas, and there were numerous reports of field workers coercing rural men and women to undergo sterilization in order to enable them to meet quotas. These abuses provoked a severe backlash among observers, and cast a shadow over all subsequent government efforts at population control. The policy of forced sterilizations contributed to the fall of Indira Gandhi's government — it was severely repudiated at the polls in March 1977 (Hartmann, 1995: 251–252). The incoming Janata Party may have sought to overturn its practices by seeking less coercive population control measures. Hence, the measure to raise the age of marriage, proposed in the new lower house of parliament (Lok Sabha) dominated by the Janata Party, had an important political significance at that historical juncture: it signified the Janata Party's possible commitment to a different kind of population policy.

On 22 February 1978, the *Times of India* reported that a bill to raise the age of marriage by amending the 1929 CMRA had been "okayed" after a "lackadaisical debate" by India's lower house of parliament. The age minimums for marriage proposed by the union government appear to have evoked little, if any, resistance. Some members of parliament suggested even higher minimum ages. However, debate in India's upper house of parliament suggests that one aspect of the Act — making child marriage a cognizable offense — encountered greater questioning at least from some states (The Times of India, 1975). Until this point, the law did not rule child marriage a cognizable offense, meaning that police could not investigate or arrest, without a court-issued warrant, those persons whom they found involved in arranging a child marriage. The reasoning used by lawmakers for keeping child marriage a non-cognizable offense had been that the state wanted to prevent police harassment of individual citizens and also not interfere too deeply in the personal lives of citizens. However, as a result, the law against child marriage was weakly enforced: marriages often took place well before police could secure a warrant, and were then declared indissoluble; the accused parents were content to simply pay a fine or go to jail for a short period of time while the marriage remained valid.

Only one state in the country had put in place the stricter measure of making child marriage a cognizable offense: Gujarat, where in 1964, a committee (the Pushpaben Committee) enquiring into suicide rates established that child marriage was the cause of a high rate of suicides among girls. As a result, Gujarat had declared all offenses under CMRA to be cognizable. Their example was noted and praised by the influential Committee on the Status of Women (CSW), which recommended in 1974 that the Central Government emulate the example of Gujarat. The CSW, whose positions we will elaborate in the next section, called for "all offenses under the Child Marriage Restraint Act be made cognizable and Special Officers be appointed to enforce the law" (CSW — Synopsis, 1975: 43). However, the 1978 CMRA Amendment only introduced the offense of child marriage as cognizable in a weak sense and under specific conditions: police could investigate complaints from the public and submit reports to magistrates, but did not

have the authority to arrest the offender or to stop the solemnization of marriages without obtaining permission from magistrates (for details, see Sagade, 2005: 50).

The passing of the CMRA Amendment, despite its new and dramatic age requirement of 18 years, was not widely hailed by population experts as a victory. It is worth recalling that even at the height of international advocacy to raise the age of marriage in order to reduce birth rates, proponents of the measure regarded it as a soft approach, at best a complement to birth control. Raising the age of marriage provided policymakers with a relatively safe issue – a benign measure in contrast to Sanjay Gandhi's coercive approach – from which to launch an incremental approach to more contentious and hardline means to reduce births. Even S.N. Agarwala, outspoken on the issue of marriage age in the early 1960s along with his doctoral advisor, Ansley Coale, moved quickly to inciting a harder line and pushing for more intrusive, and invasive, measures. In 1966 working at a Demographic Research Centre in New Delhi, Agarwala (1966a: 1) had direly warned that too many reproductive age people were having unprotected sex:

...only 2.4% of reproductive age couples are contraceptive users, instead of the 65% who would have to use completely efficient contraceptive means in order to reduce the present birth rate of 40 per 1,000 to 25 per 1,000 by 1975: this indicates the vast size of the problem.

By the mid-70s, however, while working as director of a World Bank Project in Lucknow, Agarwala evaluated with regret that the country's efforts to increase sterilization acceptors had fallen to "only 1.3 equivalent sterilizations" in 1973–1974 from 3.4 million the previous year (Agarwala, 1974: 129). Indeed, advances in contraception research and the emergence of the pill and the IUD during the 1960s, the passage of a liberal abortion law in India in 1971, as well as increased commitment by both the Indian and U.S. governments to a population control agenda, changed the context of policy-making in one short decade. The issue of age of marriage was subordinated to an array of family planning measures judged to be far more effective in reducing population growth.

Feminist responses to the CMRA Amendment of 1978

If the CMRA Amendment was not viewed as a crowning moment for population control advocates, neither was it a victory for feminist voices. Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of the 1978 passing of the CMRA is the utter lack of debate and civil society engagement. Feminist voices, which were increasingly a part of national political and academic conversations in this decade, were conspicuously absent. Significantly, feminist activists had brought up the topic of age of marriage within the historic 1974 report *Towards Equality*, a comprehensive account of women's economic, social, political and cultural statuses in India. This 353-page text has been frequently read as a landmark publication, a platform representing the positions of women's organizations and advocates of the time. It was authored by a group of prominent women academics (including Lotika Sarkar, Vina Mazumdar, Leela Dube, Urmila Haksar, among others) appointed in 1971 to form the Committee on the Status of Women (CSW). Their goal over the next three years was to survey and make recommendations

for improving the major indices of women's well-being in the country. If we analyze *Towards Equality* closely, we see that the report acknowledges the *desirability* of raising the age of marriage to remove the disparity with the legal age of discretion (not at all for its potential impact on reducing population growth), but it does not clearly lay it out as an urgent policy agenda item. As the Committee put it:

"When the legal age of marriage in case of a female is below the age of discretion she cannot be expected to form an intelligent opinion about her partner in life. The policy of law which permits the marriage of a girl before she is physically and mentally mature is open to serious question. Child marriage is one of significant factors leading to the high incidence of suicide among young married women in India. Therefore, increasing the marriage age of girls to eighteen years is desirable."

The fact that the CSW does not explicitly recommend legal changes in age of marriage is a striking omission, given that the purpose of the report was to offer concrete recommendations. (Its only explicit recommendations relate to making offenses under the CMRA cognizable and to employ specially trained officers to enforce it.) Instead, the CSW carefully constructs a view distinct from more hardline advocacy of population control. "Family planning is now the most heavily documented and evaluated among all major programs of the Government of India," the CSW writes, even suggesting in a footnote that the government's preoccupation with family planning verges on excessive: "The importance attached by the Government to this kind of research is indicated by the fact that in spite of the heavy volume of research data available on family planning, this Committee was also asked to undertake case studies on family planning. The Committee, however, felt that this was not necessary" (CSW – Full Report, 1974: 323). While acknowledging the historical convergence between feminist interests and that of the family planning movement, the CSW points to misplaced priorities in the family planning movement:

Propagators of the family planning movement in India have been keen to emphasise the improvement in the status of women as one of the direct consequences of acceptance of family planning. The birth control movement in India, from its inception, was associated with the feminist movement, and women's organisations were among the first to start a voluntary campaign for the spread of birth control techniques among women. Even now they are active partners of the Government's programme to persuade more and more women to accept family planning methods. Recent researches in this field however make it extremely difficult to establish such an a priori relationship. All recent studies seem to agree more on the obverse of the relationship, viz. that improved status of women, with rise in the age of marriage, education, employment, better living conditions and greater general awareness, have a direct impact on the adoption of family planning methods.

[CSW – Full Report (1974: 322)]

The report then goes on to critique the government of India's overwhelming support of family planning at the

expense of other public health programs, its compulsory imposition of sterilization following abortion, and complications in the provision of birth control that harmed rather than improved the health of women (CSW – Full Report, 1974, pp. 326–330). The combined recommendations in *Towards Equality* on birth control, sterilization, and abortion display a cautious stance towards the Government's intensified approach to population control that points to areas of potential conflict, rather than overlap, with feminist goals.

At this point, it is worth rehearsing more general feminist conceptual trepidations about population control, and acknowledging the contributions of Indian feminists to this perspective. Population control approaches have historically focused on meeting numerical targets, and treating the control of women's fertility as a means to those ends. They also have, in a Malthusian vein, targeted the poor and used material incentives to garner compliance – in effect, placing coercive pressure on the poor to reproduce less. Feminist advocates have called for approaches that treat women as ends in themselves, and for providing women with resources to make healthy decisions – whether for or against childbearing. Even when feminist objectives to raise the age of marriage in the 1970s appear on the surface to match those of the Indian government, the broader goals defining the intentions behind those objectives do not. Feminists in 1970s India increasingly expressed skepticism towards the overzealous promotion of population control and the pursuit of feminist objectives within that frame. Their specific concerns played a large role in growing feminist critiques of population control articulated within international feminist networks built during the following decade (such as in meetings of the IWHM – International Women's Health Movement and of DAWN – Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era). This critique of population control became firmly established in the 1980s through the advocacy of activists within India and beyond, and in concert with movements for reproductive justice.⁶

In keeping with such reservations about population control, the discussion of the age of marriage in the CSW report appears framed within the general context of the well-being of girls and women. The report notes important differences between rural and urban women, and broadly describes a context in which marriages were occurring later:

According to [estimates on the average age at marriage], the average age of marriage for males has increased from 20.2 during 1901–11 to 22.2 during 1961–71. In the case of females, the comparable figures are 13.2 and 17.2. In other words, during these seven decades, the average age at marriage has gone up by two years in the case of males and by four years in the case of females.

[CSW – Full Report (1974: 23)]

At the same time, the report notes that a low age of marriage for girls remained a problem in rural areas. While the mean urban age of marriage was 19.2 years, in rural areas, it was 16.7 years (CSW – Full Report, 1974: 23). The Committee notes that among low caste rural women, early marriage was often perceived as a social necessity since it served as a protection against “the lust of upper class men who wielded economic power over them” (CSW – Synopsis,

1975: 27). Among urban middle and upper class women, the Committee notes, the age of marriage of girls ranged between 16 and 24 years. Given that over 75% of the country lived in villages, though, it was likely that the majority of Indian girls in the 1961–1971 decade were married below the age of 18. The Committee recognizes the problem of low age of marriage in rural areas as being tied to social and economic pressures. “Early marriage and lack of education constitutes a vicious circle, affecting population growth and the health of the mother and the child and the status and education of girls” (CSW – Synopsis, 1975: 27). This broadly-worded statement shows that Indian feminists of this time articulated the needs of girls while also acknowledging a political context in which the benefits of curtailing “population growth” had primacy. They understood child marriage, perhaps like child labor, to be a symptom of economic deprivation – for which there were no simple legal punitive solutions. In many ways, then, the CMRA Amendment was barely an accession to the demands of women's rights advocates and it is not surprising that feminists offered little explicit support for the measure.

When reflecting back on the 1978 amendment to the CMRA, the feminist legal scholar Jaya Sagade impugns legislators for not taking seriously “the social consequences of child marriage” (2005: 46). She reflects that “had education, employment, and personality development of young girls been the objects behind prohibiting child marriages along with concern for their reproductive health, *instead of fertility control*, the percentages of child marriages probably could have been reduced substantially.” On the whole, she concludes, “women's experiences had no space in the area of law-making” (Sagade, 2005: 47). She views the amendment as a halfhearted effort that did not get to the core of the problem. In particular, she faults the measure for not declaring all child marriages void, and for not declaring child marriage to be cognizable offense under all circumstances.

Writing shortly after passage of the 1978 amendment, historian Geraldine Forbes contrasts the small number of feminist voices in the 1970s with the formidable activism in the 1920s of women's organizations towards the passage of the 1929 Sarda Act. In the 1920s, as Forbes notes, several organizations, including the Women's India Association, the National Council of Women in India, and the All India Women's Conference (1979: 416) lobbied in support of the bill. Compared to this moment, the level of agitation in the 1970s certainly appears weak. Jaya Sagade employs a similar contrast, surmising why women's groups supported the 1929 Act. Although there were many elite social reformers with no understanding of patriarchal oppression who pushed for the CMRA, she notes that women's organizations recognized they had a stake in such a law and rallied in support of its objectives. Widespread and open discussion on the issue likely left enough space for them to imagine the Act as a means to gender justice, if not at least to improve the lives of young girls and women. In the late 1970s, on the other hand, the top-down nature of the introduction and passage of the CMRA Amendment provided limited opportunity for civic engagement. The Indian government had since 1974 already expressed its intention to change the law, and the issue had taken its course within government and law-making bureaucracies. Understood by all as a policy measure driven by a

Government determined to reduce population growth women's organizations did not hold as great a stake in its passage.

Conclusion: CMRA shifts in historical perspective

When viewing the course of age of marriage legislation across twentieth century India, a shift becomes clear: from concerns about forced sex for girls towards reducing population. The earliest measures to regulate the age of marriage focused on the age at which girls were forced to cohabit with their husbands, and in effect, consummate their marriage.⁷ In the 1890s, when social reformers participated in a public debate about child marriage, it was the age at which girls were required to leave their natal homes to consummate their marriage that was discussed. The public revulsion in this moment was focused on unwanted sexual encounters: the key protagonists, Rakhmabai in Bombay state (a 21 year old who refused to join the husband to whom she had been betrothed at age 11), and Phulmoni in Bengal (an 11 year old who died from vaginal hemorrhage after forced sex with her betrothed) were both female figures who garnered considerable public sympathy for being trapped into early marriage. Social reformers at the time accomplished an increase in the age of consummation of marriage from 10 to 12 years as a means to protect "young girls from sexual abuse within the institution of marriage" (Sagade, 2005: 35). In the 1920s, legislative initiative to restrain child marriages also aimed to prevent early sexual encounters. As Sagade (2005) notes,

The major reason to prevent child marriages was to give protection to young wives who suffered enormously due to forcible sexual intercourse with them by their husbands....(37)...These changes were aimed at treating women more humanely and were basically informed by a form of protectionism. (42)

Eugenicist concerns were increasingly influential: the Age of Consent Committee advocating for the CMRA drew on medical arguments that early sexuality impeded fertility and deteriorated the health of the mother. The Committee's case for delaying marriage, then, was related in part to preserving the health of the incipient nation.

By the 1970s, population control interests, which had supported research and development on contraception, drove a stronger conceptual wedge between sexuality and fertility. It was fertility, in isolation, that preoccupied the Indian Planning Commission. The concern was no longer that early sexuality impeded fertility, but that early fertility impeded development. Indeed, as seen from our analysis of the phrasing of the 1976 Population Policy Statement, population control became an end in itself that even superseded development. In her gendered analysis comparing mid-twentieth-century demography transition theory with that of Malthus, Carole McCann underlines this difference:

...the [demographic transition] theory's persuasive power did not rely primarily on the referential status of demographic data but on the underlying racialized and imperial (heteronormative) gender logics that organized its narrative. ...Demographic narratives of the "Third World" inscribe Europe's past in its present. Each nation's

location along the graph marked its progress from backward to modern. As with Malthus, demographic measurements continued to symbolize the status of men within the ranks of its fellows. In this case, the scale of modernity is calibrated by fertility rather than sexual civility.

[McCann (2009:160)]

The decoupling of sexuality from fertility occurred as the age of marriage became less and less about the issue of girls' consent and more about their future procreative practices. The very reason that women's groups originally became vested in the issue receded significantly from view.

In some respects, the 1929 and 1978 measures to raise the age of marriage were similar: they were both successful because they mobilized the biopolitical logic of managing and counting life in order to ensure the health of the nation as a whole. The 1929 CMRA had to cite the health and future of a budding nation in order to secure the support of a range of legislators (Whitehead, 1996). The 1978 measure was far more clearly engineered as a top-down measure to accomplish national development. It was their orientations that were counterposed: the 1929 measure was broadly pro-natalist in the way it conceptualized the role of young mothers, whereas by 1978, the fertility of young mothers was unreservedly viewed as a threat. In fundamental ways, then, both anti-natalist and pro-natalist measures placed the needs of the nation, as imaginatively constructed, before the needs of the individuals whose emotional, sexual and reproductive lives were at stake.

Another respect in which both measures were similar is that they were oriented towards an audience beyond India — in particular the prestigious realm of inter-governmental activity. As seen from analyses of the 1929 moment (Sinha, 2006; Tambe, 2009) both measures had an outward orientation of demonstrating the country's "civilizational adequacy" — in the first case to the League of Nations, and in the second case, to the UN bodies focused on population control. This essay demonstrates how closely aligned Indian population control policies were to the intellectual positions of the international population control establishment. Indeed, Indian demographers and the Indian example contributed in vital ways to the treatment of the age of marriage as a technocratic measure aimed at reducing population growth, rather than a measure focused on expanding life chances and preventing forced sex for girls. Although a western gaze was operative in both cases, a shift occurred from an overwhelming focus on brown, potentially adolescent girls to brown, potentially over-fertile girls who could be threats to the future of the nation. In the first case, the Indian state was called upon to protect vulnerable girls from harms related to forced sex, and in the second to control their fertility. What is clear is that any analysis of the age of marriage has to take into account the interests of the state and intergovernmental agencies. The twentieth century case of India is a reminder of how the seemingly well-meaning focus on early marriage among girls is tethered to interests that have nothing to do with girls themselves. In the contemporary context of increasing conservative attacks on women's sexual and reproductive rights, it is sometimes tempting for feminists and neo-Malthusian population policy experts to align themselves more closely in a united defensive stance. However, it is

clear from our study that such a rapprochement can paper over important differences between these two groups.

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Endnotes

¹ For examples of organizations advocating on this topic, see publicity by International Center for Research on Women, <<http://www.icrw.org/preventing-child-marriage>> and MSH (Medical Sciences for Health) and the US Global Health Initiative, <http://blog.msh.org/2012/06/01/us-senate-passes-child-marriage-prevention-act-global-momentum-to-protect-girls-growing/>.

² See Sinha (2006, Duke University Press) for an account of the international controversy in the 1920s.

³ As Mody (2002: 225) notes, however, such marriages were not only few but stigmatized — they were viewed as “unholy,” unlike the dominant form of arranged marriages, which secured the approval of family, extended kin, community, and religion. The higher age of marriage for “special marriages” is not surprising given that the marriages in question were typically those cases carried out against the wishes of parents and community. Not only was it easier and less controversial to raise the age for this practice, it actually served the interests of parents to set the legal age high, since parents could more easily treat marriage matches that they did not arrange as illegal. For more on how parental prerogatives were preserved by the law, see Tambe (2009) “The State as Surrogate Parent: Legislating Nonmarital Sex in Colonial India, 1911–1929” *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth*, 2:3, 393–427.

⁴ Earlier in intergovernmental arenas, age of marriage was featured in the 1920s' League of Nations discussions on anti-white slavery, and in the 1950s' UN discussions on abolishing slavery, the latter of which eventually led to the 1962 UN Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage, and Registration of Marriages.

⁵ As C.R. Malakar from the Indian Statistical Institute explains, “...for an increase in age at marriage of 2 years from 15 to 17, the CBR [crude birth rate] reduction seems to be insignificant.... It appears there is a critical level below which postponement of marriage will not reduce the fertility index to a significant extent. However, if the mean age at marriage changes from 15 to 19 years, the CBR falls by 11%, the NRR [net reproduction rate] by 9%, and the TFR [total fertility rate] by 10%, approximately” (Malakar, 1972: 300–301).

⁶ We thank one of the anonymous reviewers of WSIF for urging us to account for such feminist critiques of population policies.

⁷ The practice of child marriage typically was a two-stage process, with betrothals occurring before puberty and the actual move from the natal to the conjugal home taking place after puberty.

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