

Marriage in Sri Lanka: A Century of Change

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*A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of
Philosophy of the Australian National University*

*Division of Demography and Sociology
June 1992*

Except where otherwise indicated
this thesis is my own work

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June 1992



Preface

The research data analysed in this thesis were collected in 1985-87 by the Sri Lankan Demographic Change Project (SLDCP), a joint project of the Demographic Training and Research Unit, University of Colombo and the Department of Demography, Australian National University (ANU). The project involved a broad examination of the long term causes of change in fertility and health behaviour using a mixture of anthropological and more orthodox demographic data collecting techniques. Sri Lanka is a fascinating laboratory for analysing demographic change. It has experienced a dramatic mortality decline this century with average life expectancy at birth rising from 35 years to over 70 years. The decline was particularly rapid in the late 1940s, when during an anti-malarial campaign, in a one year period 1946-1947, life expectancy increased from 43 to 52 years, a gain which had taken 50 years in Western countries (Petersen 1972: 560-562). In more recent times, and more gradually, fertility has also fallen to a total fertility rate of 2.3 in 1990 and a replacement level of two children per family can soon be anticipated. For South Asia, Sri Lanka's achievements are approached only by the Indian State of Kerala.

A distinguishing characteristic of Sri Lanka's fertility decline has been the contribution of changing marriage patterns. Most of the fertility decline before the late 1960s, and some of the later decline, can be attributed to a rise in the female age at marriage. Female age at marriage has risen elsewhere in South Asia but nowhere, even in Kerala, has it risen nearly so far or had a similar impact on fertility.

It was this contrast that most interested me about marriage in Sri Lanka. I had previously been involved in fieldwork in the South Indian State of Karnataka. While female age at marriage was rising there, pressures for early marriage were still strong and age at marriage remained much earlier than in Sri Lanka, even when controlling for education and other socio-economic factors. The contrast between Sri Lanka and India raised the question as to how to explain the difference in marriage patterns between the two, and whether India and other South Asian countries were likely to

move toward the Sri Lankan pattern of late marriage. To answer these questions required knowing a great deal about the circumstances of marriage, and what has changed, particularly in Sri Lanka.

The single most obvious difference between the circumstances of marriage in Sri Lanka and India is in the selection of the marriage partner. In India, what is striking is the extraordinary stability of the marriage system, as of the social system as a whole. The choosing of a marriage partner is very much a family matter, the major change being that some of the more liberal families consult the individuals concerned to a greater degree than formerly. In Sri Lanka, in contrast, marriage is in a state of flux; arranged marriage seems to be in the process of being replaced by love marriage. The change, however, is somewhat more complex than this, because historical and anthropological writings suggest that family involvement in marriage differed considerably by region and ethnic group, and according to the circumstances of the marriage. This would seem a fundamental change as in South Asia the responsibility of parents to arrange a child's, especially a daughter's, marriage is one of the most important of all duties. It is part of the fundamental series of obligations between parents and children, and others at the heart of South Asian society. If the parents do not undertake their duties to their children, why should the children undertake their duties in return, such as looking after their parents in the parents' old age? The breakdown of arranged marriage implies a major reorganization of society.

An explanation of the changes in Sri Lanka's marriage patterns requires dealing with a series of problems. The first is are the changes in female age at marriage connected to the changes in the processes of marriage, that is how a marriage partner is selected and what is required in a marriage? If they are related, how? Furthermore, how can the decline of arranged marriage in Sri Lanka be explained, and what does it indicate about larger changes in the society? If it is possible to answer these questions then there is the general issue of whether the lessons to be learnt from Sri Lanka have more general applicability. Do they explain why female age at marriage throughout Asia is rising? Do the changes that are occurring in Asia have similar causes to the late

female marriage age that has long prevailed in the West (where it does seem to be associated with independent marriage)? Do they help explain why the changes in marriage have, apart from Sri Lanka, been less in South Asia generally, than in the rest of Asia?

To examine these questions the thesis starts in Chapter 1 with an analysis of the determinants of marriage patterns and particularly age at marriage in the West. The West is relevant because female marriage age has long been late there, and the reasons for this have been discussed extensively in the demographic literature. It is of interest to know what there is in common between the rises in age at marriage in Asia and what has long been the situation in the West. It is also of interest to know whether the changes in marriage patterns are part of a more generalized change in Asian society toward the situation prevailing in the West, either in conscious imitation or because underlying conditions are becoming more similar.

Chapter 2 examines the changes in marriage in Asia in general and Sri Lanka, in particular. Section 2.1 starts with a general survey of marriage patterns in Asia and the explanations given in the literature for those patterns. This provides the context for an examination of marriage patterns in Sri Lanka in Section 2.2. Section 2.3 examines the writings of demographers on marriage patterns in Sri Lanka. Section 2.4 examines factors critical to an understanding of the changes which have taken place in Sri Lanka.

Chapter 3 outlines the methodology used in the Sri Lankan Demographic Change Project, while Chapters 4 and 5 present the results of the data analysis of the SLDCP's marriage component. Chapter 4 covers marriage patterns concentrating on changes in the female marriage age while Chapter 5 examines changes in the marriage process, specifically the replacement of family arrangement in marriage by self-selection. Chapter 6 draws together some of the threads particularly those between age at marriage and the nature of the marriage.

The comparison between marriage in Sri Lanka and in South Asia generally is cited a number of times partly because my interest in Sri Lankan marriage was sparked

by my experience in India, but also because it throws light on the changes in marriage in both Sri Lanka and South Asia. However, this is not to suggest that what has happened in Sri Lanka will necessarily be repeated elsewhere in South Asia. Indeed, it is argued in the thesis that the disparity in marriage between Sri Lanka and mainland South Asia reflects long-standing differences in the social order. It is not possible, therefore, to assume that the rest of South Asia will follow the Sri Lankan model. To the degree that the wider social and economic order in South Asia may move toward that prevailing in Sri Lanka, marriage may change but it would be unprofitable to speculate on the extent and speed of such changes.

Statement/Acknowledgements

The research data analysed in this thesis originated in a 1985-87 joint project of the Demographic Training and Research Unit, University of Colombo, and the Department of Demography, Australian National University (ANU). In organizing the project, carrying through the field work, and being a participant observer in the anthropological sense, the responsibility for the marriage section of the investigation lay almost entirely with me. The marriage part of the research is in this sense my own data and not the product of a collaboration where the roles of different investigators are blurred. In terms of association with the fieldwork, I spent much longer than the other principal investigators in the field and the micro-level observations and conclusions are largely drawn from my own experiences and fieldnotes. I have gained particular insights from marrying into Sri Lankan society, and from numerous discussions with Indrani Pieris, as my collaborator during 1985 and as my wife thereafter. Some of these discussions and observations continued during a subsequent period in Sri Lanka.

Comparisons are also made with the situation recorded during 1979-84 in Karnataka State in South India by a joint project of the Population Centre, Bangalore, and the ANU Department of Demography. During these years I fully participated in all field work, particularly that on marriage and social structure, writing two theses on aspects of the latter (Caldwell, B., 1981 and 1986; cf. also Caldwell, B., 1991).

I would like to thank my colleagues in the Sri Lanka Demographic Change Project, at the Demographic Training and Research Unit Dr. Indra Gajanayake (now at the Australian Institute of Health, Canberra) and Mr. Laxman Dissanayake; and at the ANU Department of Demography Dr. J.C. Caldwell, Mrs. Pat Caldwell (both now attached to the ANU's Health Transition Centre) and Dr M. Guruswamy (now at IIPS Bombay). I should also thank the interviewers; in 1985 Sudharma, Pushpa, Kumari, Rathnawathie, Chandra, Karunawathie, Kamanie, Mallika, Hemalatha, Vineetha, Ramani, Padmini, Suneetha, Bhadra, Wanninayake, Nimali and Kalyani and Indrani;

and in 1987 in addition to Indrani and Sudharma, Swarna Fernando, Thilakasiri, Sandhya, Chandani Jayaratne, Mallika, Sita Karunaratne, Chinta Perera, Padmini Weerasinghe, Ratnayaka, Wimal Dissanayake, Gerty Ukwattage and Jennifer Anthony. I am also grateful to the citizens of Bondupitiya, Loluwagoda, Maligawatta, Jumma Masjid Road, New Kelani Bridge (Sedawatta), Nugegoda, Welisara and Rahatungoda Tea Estate for their kind cooperation in the research.

In India, I would like to thank the staff of the Population Centre, Bangalore, headed by Dr. P.H. Reddy.

In Australia, I have a great debt of gratitude to the staff of the Demography Program at the Australian National University, and in particular my supervisors, Professor Gavin Jones, Dr. Geoffrey McNicoll and Dr. Ian Diamond for their generous advice. I must also acknowledge the helpful assistance of Dr. Michael Bracher and Dr. Gigi Santow. I should not forget to thank my friends particularly among my fellow students, including Dharma, Gamini, Lal, Sushama and Tetteh. I should single out Mrs. Wendy Cosford for her invaluable assistance.

Most of all I owe thanks to Indrani for sharing her deep understanding of Sri Lanka and for making it all worthwhile. Our son Chrishan has also made his own inimitable contribution in helping me to keep the writing of this thesis in proper perspective.

Abstract

The study is concerned with the determinants of marriage patterns in Sri Lanka. Female age at marriage has been rising since censuses began recording it in 1901, until now Sri Lanka has easily the latest marriage age in South Asia. Sri Lanka's late marriage age has been attributed to an economic and social context where incomes are low and unemployment is high, and where young couples usually establish an independent household sometime after marriage. Reduced access to land, as a result of population growth and rising expectations, has meant that it is increasingly difficult for the young couple to raise the resources to marry. It has also been noted that a shortage of grooms in the marriage market may specifically have encouraged a later female marriage age.

While these factors are important they do not adequately explain long-term changes in marriage patterns; for this it is necessary to examine these changes within the total context of changes in marriage. The most important such change has been a decline in arranged marriage and its replacement by self-selection in marriage. Arranged marriage has declined because marriage itself has changed in response to the increasing individualization of society. Marriage, and the rights and responsibilities that go with it, in the past involved not simply two individuals but also their families and even the wider community.

Marriage reflected a society in which an individual's status depended upon his membership of a wider group, generally based on kinship, the most important of which was the family. A marriage concerned all family members for it imposed obligations and, in return, gave rights for the families as well as the individuals marrying; for example, it might involve dowry, or influence the inheritance of family property, or create a useful alliance with another family. It also had implications for family status; it was important for instance that the individual came from a suitable family or caste. For the young to have disputed the family's right to be involved in the marriage would have been to dispute their place in the family.

This family-based society no longer holds. A new economic system has emerged which places a much greater emphasis on individual attributes, and in which achieved status counts for more than ascribed status. The family is much less important. Therefore, the members of the family place less pressure on other family members to behave according to the interests of the family as a whole. This applies, in particular, to the arrangement of marriage; the family members have less interest in arranging a marriage as its consequences matter less to them, and the young have less interest in having their marriages arranged, because what they gain in return is of less value.

The increasing individualization of society has also affected marriage patterns. In the past, the ties established by marriage were vital for an individual to be a functioning adult in society. The only role outside marriage was that of the monk, which was essentially available only for males. Marriage now is less a matter of establishing social ties and more restricted to forming a unit for raising children. Marriage is, consequently, less essential than before, and hence celibacy is more possible. The changes also mean that early marriage is less advantageous than previously. Where family considerations dominated over individual considerations the advantages of early marriage were greater than the disadvantages. For the family early marriage has certain advantages, ties with other families can be established earlier, the risk of an elopement is less, a younger bride is often more accepting of family authority, while there are few disadvantages; emphasis was placed on family attributes including family status, caste and property, all of which were independent of the age of the individual. For the individual too, the earlier they married the sooner they were accepted into full adult status. Now, however, that the family is less important, the advantages of early marriage for it are less relevant, while the advantages of later marriage are increasing. Most importantly, more emphasis is being placed on individual attributes, many of which, such as education, employment and especially experience and maturity, take time to accumulate, and thus encourage a later age at marriage.

In comparison to the rest of South Asia Sri Lanka's age at marriage was always somewhat later because pressures for very early marriage were never as strong; differences in family and kinship structure, in caste, and in the strength of the local community meant that early marriage was always less advantageous in Sri Lanka.

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Chapter 1

Introduction: the causes of marriage change

1.1 Why study marriage in Sri Lanka?

This thesis is concerned with marriage in Sri Lanka. Marriage is a topic of great interest to social scientists for it is fundamental to the formation of the family, arguably the central institution of society. It is within the family that socialization and, especially before the expansion of formal schooling, most education take place. In many societies, moreover, the family is not only a consumption unit but also the primary production unit, responsible, for example, for farming the family plot or operating the family shop. Ties created by marriage may also play a critical role in social organization.

Marriage has a particular interest for demographers because most societies sanction reproduction only within marriage. Consequently, the nature of the relationships established by marriage, particularly that between husband and wife, but also with other family members, will affect any decisions influencing fertility, such as whether or not to use contraception.

More directly, factors such as age at marriage, particularly of females, proportions married and the stability of marriage influence overall fertility, by determining the period during which it is socially acceptable for a woman to have children: this is of most importance where contraceptive usage is low. Significantly, changes in marriage patterns tend to be the first factor to reduce fertility. Western European fertility levels appear to have been constrained by a late age at marriage, especially of women, and high

proportions remaining celibate, for centuries before any decline in marital fertility which occurred mostly in the nineteenth century. In Asia there has been considerable evidence of rises in the female age at marriage contributing to declining fertility and to a large extent preceding declines in marital fertility, especially in East Asia but also in South East Asia and South Asia. An outstanding example of such change has been Sri Lanka which has moved from being typically South Asian, with early marriage, particularly for women, and low levels of celibacy, to an age of marriage high even by Western standards and apparently increasing celibacy. These marriage patterns led Kirk (1969:80-81) to refer to Sri Lanka as the Ireland of Asia. What is not certain is precisely why marriage patterns have changed, and whether the causes are related to those underlying the declines in marital fertility.

Demographers have written a great deal about marriage change but principally with reference to developed countries. Most of what has been written about marriage change in societies where fertility is primarily determined by the proportion of women married, is historical, being concerned with the European fertility transition. This is, indeed, the most interesting literature on the topic, though it inevitably suffers from its reliance on often scanty historical documentation and its inability to directly question the people concerned. The literature on contemporary change in developing countries, though being written at a time when researchers could still question those involved directly, is comparatively limited. The problem here seems to be twofold. First, the fertility impact of this 'marriage transition' is, in many countries, buried under wider changes in fertility resulting from changes in marital fertility. Secondly, the abundance of statistical data in comparison with historical Europe has encouraged statistical analyses of considerable sophistication, but

sometimes without the necessary follow-up consideration of what the results really mean.

A fully satisfactory analysis of marriage patterns should take a holistic approach recognizing that they are but one aspect of marriage and are likely to reflect more fundamental changes in the nature of marriage. To understand marriage patterns and other aspects of marriage properly requires answering such questions as why people marry, who makes the decision or has influence over it, what factors influence their decision, and what is the nature of the marriage relationship established. However, beyond their importance in helping to explain marriage patterns, these concerns are of great interest in themselves.

This thesis examines how social change has affected marriage as a whole in Sri Lanka, including the nature of the marriage union as well as marriage patterns. Particular emphasis is given to the conditions of marriage (what is regarded as necessary for marriage: for example, education, employment, housing), the arrangement of marriage (who decides on it and on what basis), and the marriage terms including the dowry and wedding arrangements.

Sri Lanka provides an excellent study area for such an investigation since marriage there has undergone far-reaching changes in recent years. Many aspects of marriage have changed from being typically South Asian to resembling Western marriage. Individuals, for example, are increasingly selecting their own mates rather than having them selected by their families.

This contrast between Sri Lanka and the rest of South Asia provides much of the study's interest. Whereas Sri Lanka has moved towards a Western model, marriage in the rest of South Asia remains in many ways the very antithesis of contemporary Western marriage.

South Asia has been distinguished by extremely early marriage for females, often around or even before puberty, generally a large age gap between spouses, near-universal marriage, great stability of marriage, very low levels of remarriage (among the Hindus even the widows are discouraged from marrying), high marriage payments (especially dowries) and arranged marriage. These characteristics of marriage are associated with the expectation that the young couple will live with the groom's family following marriage. There is, however, evidence of change especially in the cities and in the southern part of the region. Age at marriage is increasing, and in the cities the young are increasingly being consulted over their marriage partners though it is still rare for them to choose for themselves; against these trends marriage payments are rising in many areas. The changes, however, have gone much further in Sri Lanka than elsewhere. Because of this Sri Lanka provides an ideal case study to investigate the causes of marriage change.

Before the analysis of Sri Lankan data some aspects of the literature regarding marriage are discussed. Some is directly concerned with Sri Lanka but to place the discussion in a wider context and because the material on Sri Lankan marriage is patchy, it is necessary to examine the more general literature.

The literature regarding marriage in South Asia is given the main emphasis because Sri Lankan material can only be understood fully in the South Asian context, and because a major interest in studying Sri Lankan marriage patterns is the contrast they provide to the marriage patterns prevailing elsewhere in South Asia. The literature concerning European marriage is discussed, because Europe may provide parallel evidence for many of the changes that Sri Lanka is currently undergoing, and because arguably Europe provides a model towards which other countries including Sri Lanka are moving, consciously or not. Goode (1963:1-2), in a very

influential work on marriage, argues that the only common theme in marriage change is that all marriage systems are moving towards a Western model. His argument is based on the premise that there is no such thing as a traditional marriage system, marriage having differed greatly in different parts of the world, only modern marriages having common characteristics. European marriage is also significant because many of the issues concerning marriage patterns are found in its literature.

1.2 Why marriage was delayed in Europe: Malthus and the value of prudence

The literature with which we are most concerned is that dealing with why European marriage was late and why celibacy levels were high. This literature is interesting in its own right, but, more importantly for this thesis, it raises a number of issues concerning the relationship of marriage patterns with other aspects of marriage. The first writer to discuss these issues, in particular the factors delaying European marriage, was Thomas Malthus in his celebrated *Essay on Population*, originally published in 1798 and greatly enlarged subsequently.

Marriage played a critical role in Malthus's theory of population. Malthus (1970) argued that one of the keys to humankind's wealth and prosperity was the principle of population: that ultimately, no matter how industrious humans were, unless they restrained population growth, their numbers would tend to outrun food supplies. Population grew by geometrical progression with human populations doubling in less than 25 years if unchecked, whereas agricultural production at the most only grows arithmetically, once all the good agricultural land is tilled, because of diminishing returns. Malthus said that population growth was restricted in two ways: by positive checks and preventive checks. Positive checks were essentially increases in death rates resulting from high population growth, such as famine, disease, and warfare. Preventive checks were ways by

which population growth could be reduced; the only one Malthus approved of was through marriage. All other positive and preventive checks involved either 'vice' or misery. Marriage could affect population growth by either being delayed or not occurring at all because those concerned prudently decided to wait until they had the necessary funds. Malthus's primary message was that though governments could not force people to delay marriage they could encourage people to be prudent. Private property was essential because people needed to be assured that their prudential forethought would accrue to their advantage. Equally the poor should be denied any right to support because such rights would discourage any prudent behaviour on their part and thereby condemn them and others to misery.

Malthus's emphasis on the principal means by which fertility should be controlled being marriage, rather than the use of contraception within marriage, reflects the unrespectability of the few contraceptive methods available such as condoms or *coitus interruptus*. It is also significant, however, that Malthus saw prudence as the cardinal virtue, the abstention from marrying until one had the resources to support a family at the accustomed level of living and which one's peers regarded as respectable. Malthus made no reference, as would a modern family planning advocate, to limiting children to a number which could be properly looked after by the parents. Under Malthus's scheme, if one were able to support dependants, one could marry early and have many children, and, if one were unable to support any dependants properly one should not marry at all. There was no concept, of the type familiar to modern demographers, of an ideal number of children. Although this point may seem minor, it is pertinent to a major source of disagreement among demographers: this is the degree to which changes in marriage can be interpreted as part of the demographic transition.

1.3 Was the European marriage pattern part of a multiphasic response to population growth?

As noted above, changes in female age at marriage and the proportions marrying have often preceded changes in marital fertility. This has been the case in Sri Lanka as well as a number of other Asian countries, and was the case - although often with a major gap in timing - in Western Europe. It is not clear, however, why this should be so.

Hajnal (1965) pointed out that at the time of the great decline in marital fertility, Western Europe was already marked by a pattern of late marriage and high proportions who never married. This pattern he called the European marriage pattern, which he contrasted with the East European and non-European patterns of early and universal marriage. Hajnal was uncertain as to why the European marriage pattern had developed though he offered a number of suggestions which are examined below. What was certainly absent was a clear link between falls in marriage rates and changes in marital fertility.

Davis argued that such a link exists, referring to both sets of changes as being part of a multiphasic response to population growth. Faced with rapid natural increase, 'families tended to use every demographic means possible to maximize their new opportunities and to avoid relative loss of status' (Davis, 1963:362).

In some ways Davis's concept is an extension of Malthus's preventive checks. Whereas Malthus argued that marriage could be used to avoid impoverishment and to keep people living at the standards they felt proper to their station in life, Davis noted that there were a number of ways people could avoid poverty such as migration, contraception and abortion in addition or as alternatives to changing their marriage behaviour. Which way they chose depended largely on their circumstances. He noted, for example, that one solution for agricultural populations was to migrate to

where work was available in the cities. Where such a solution was not possible, in more remote areas where people had few contacts with the cities or when there was little demand for their labour, people would have to use other solutions. Davis noted that the rural population's historical mechanism for responding to population pressure was the postponement of marriage. He noted (1963: 355-6):

They did this, of course, not as a deliberate effort to reduce fertility or to solve the population problem, but as a response to the complexity and insecurity of the new requirements for respectable adult status.

Davis seems to equivocate over whether delaying marriage or practising contraception were conscious alternatives. The general implication of his argument is that delaying marriage is simply an alternative to contraception (or migration) : Davis noted that town people who had access to contraception used it in preference to delaying marriage. Similarly he commented (1963 : 361) that one reason for delaying marriage was 'because it was likely to lead to several children'. Yet elsewhere he seemingly dismissed the idea that delaying marriage was merely equivalent to practising contraception as in the remark quoted above, as well as in a comment that

It is commonly claimed that the Irish postponed marriage or migrated as an alternative to practicing birth control within marriage. However, as Glass has noted data from the 1946 census show class differences in marital fertility. Furthermore, a decline of 25 per cent occurred in overall marital fertility between 1911 and 1946. Couples in Ireland, as elsewhere in Europe, were apparently taking to birth control...

Although Davis apparently did not regard it as important whether or not couples were consciously delaying marriage to reduce their overall fertility, other demographers have treated this distinction as being critical.

The Princeton study of the European fertility transition treats changes in marriage patterns as having essentially different origins from changes in marital fertility. The study's leader, Ansley J. Coale, argued

that the downturn in marital fertility was marked by a conscious desire to control fertility, whereas before, although marriage itself might be delayed, there was no conscious attempt within marriage to restrict the number of children, a situation that Louis Henry referred to as natural fertility. According to Henry (cited in Coale, 1969: 7),

control can be said to exist when the behaviour of the couple is bound to the number of children already born and is modified when this number reaches the maximum which the couple does not want to exceed; it is not the case for a taboo concerning lactation, which is independent of the number of children already born.

Coale remarks:

When birth control first appears among the married, fertility is usually reduced initially among women of high parity, and among women over 35 or 40. This tendency clearly shows that voluntary birth control is usually employed at first to avoid children in excess of the number the couple wishes. A deliberate restrictive motive is implied by the age pattern of the change in fertility. On the other hand, it is highly dubious that if a couple gets married when the bride is 26 instead of 25, the purpose is to reduce the number of children they will have by one. It seems more plausible that couples postpone marriage because they do not command the resources conventionally needed for marital union in the Western European stem family tradition (Coale, 1969 : 7).

I_m is a standardized index representing the proportion married in the childbearing ages and indicating the extent to which marriage is contributing to the achievement of the highest possible fertility. Coale (1969:9) notes that differences in I_m

may be the result of major underlying differences in social structure, such as systems of inheritance, that may have influenced family relationships without any direct association with the number of children people want, or any change in their attitude toward the range of permissible behaviour. We know that the control of marital behaviour has developed both in populations characterized by late marriage and a substantial proportion of spinsterhood on the one hand and in populations in which marriage is virtually universal and at an early average age on the other. The development of low values of I_m in Western Europe apparently preceded the reduction of marital fertility by a century or two, and has not occurred yet in some countries of eastern Europe. Consequently England had a birth rate that was lower after 1910. However, marital fertility in the two populations began to decline at about the same time, and at about the same pace, and the higher birth rate in Hungary was caused by the consistently higher proportion marrying.

Marriage patterns, thus, were the result of factors quite extraneous to any desire to control fertility, and often were very local in origin. When, however, the fertility transition occurred, it happened right across Europe, suggesting a change of a totally different order, perhaps a change in ideas and a new way of looking at families and children.

A number of writers have disputed this conclusion. For example, Andorka (1986: 332) comments on Coale and Watkins (1986) that the Princeton authors

... seem to accept the existence of non-parity specific and socially controlled birth control in predecline societies. In my opinion this implies that couples in such societies were able and, if necessary, willing to practice birth control. The methods available may have been less efficient; therefore couples were less assured of being able to stop fertility definitively and more willing to use birth control at the beginning of a marriage. Moreover, the motivation to practice birth control may have been less strong or the exigencies arising from the economic and social conditions may have been less severe than in the late nineteenth century.

Thus I would adhere to the minority view among demographers that the spread of birth control and the decline in fertility beginning at the close of the nineteenth century in most of Europe were not an innovation but an adjustment to the changing economic and social conditions, in the sense of Gosta Carlsson (1966). Acceptance of this viewpoint means that earlier fluctuations in fertility, such as those demonstrated by E.A. Wrigley and R.S. Schofield (1981) for England from 1541 to 1871, ought to be investigated using the same approach as for the more recent large-scale decline in fertility.

Andorka notes that Coale does not totally reject the possibility of parity-related limitation in earlier times, but only suggests that where most people did not do so, subpopulations that did so would have been overwhelmed.

The evidence, however, seems to be against Andorka. It is perhaps significant that J.A. Goldstone (1986), in a reanalysis of Wrigley and Schofield (1981) referred to by Andorka above, convincingly argues that before 1750 almost all changes in marriage rates reflected changes in the proportions ever marrying rather than in the average age at first marriage,

which was almost unchanged throughout the period (1541 - 1750) at the very high age for women of 25 to 27.

Goldstone (1986:15) argues that during periods of low wages many of the poorer people were unable to accumulate, or even to anticipate accumulating, sufficient resources to marry. He also notes an alternative argument: that marriage was restricted to those with access to a limited number of ecological niches - generally landholdings.

Irrespective of which is the correct explanation for people not marrying, marriage patterns were determined by couples not marrying rather than delaying their marriages. This counts against the argument that falls in marriage rates were contraception by another name. If people wished to control their number of children but did not have an efficient means of contraception to do so, it might make some sense to delay marriage. However, the same argument can hardly be made for not marrying at all. Only in recent times has there been evidence of a sizable proportion of the population who did not wish to marry, and this is hardly likely to be the case in rural societies which provide few alternative lifestyles and where there has historically been very little evidence of anyone desiring to remain single for a lifetime. It was not to avoid having children that people did not marry, it was because they could not afford to marry.

This is not, however, to say that population growth does not affect marriage patterns. Even in Goldstone's example, although proportions marrying may not have reflected a desire to control family size, the wage levels which apparently determined nuptiality rates did reflect the pressures of population growth. Wrigley and Schofield (1981:439) suggested that the pre-industrial English economy could sustain a population growth rate of roughly 0.5 per cent per annum without adverse effects on real

wages. When population growth was above this figure, wages fell, and, as a consequence, rates of marriage fell. If the density-dependent nuptiality control (ecological niche mechanism) holds true the explanation is that population growth was in excess of the number of niches available and marriage was automatically delayed or prevented and fertility fell.

In some senses changes in marriage patterns and marital fertility are alternatives. If marital fertility falls sufficiently to reduce population growth, some of the conditions that prevented or delayed marriage may no longer apply. Similarly, if falls in marital fertility are a response to population pressures, they may be forestalled by changes in marriage patterns. It has been noted by Paul Demeny (1972:165) that in the Austro-Hungarian empire in the nineteenth century, in provinces where values of I_m were lowest, I_g values (marital fertility) tended to be higher. However, Chojmacka (1976) found this not to be true in the same period of Russia, where marital fertility tended to be marginally higher in areas where I_m values were higher. Nevertheless the argument has been pursued further by Botev.

Botev (1990) notes that Eastern Europe, in particular the Balkans, was characterized by what Hajnal termed the East European marriage pattern, with early and universal marriage, and yet underwent not long after the West an even more rapid transition in marital fertility. Botev argues that Eastern Europe's rapid population growth created strong pressures on available resources 'calling for a rapid response from the population' (1990: 121): they could not wait until changes in marriage patterns affected the birth rate, but had to reduce marital fertility immediately; changes in marriage patterns have a delayed effect on fertility whereas changes in marital fertility have an immediate effect. Western Europeans, in contrast, were under less immediate pressure and were able to reduce fertility by delaying marriage, a course of action which was

preferred to reducing marital fertility, because contraception posed greater challenges to the traditional value system.

What is not clear from the argument, as Botev notes, is why marital fertility should fall in response to population pressures. Pressures on resources meant that parents could not support so many children and had less to pass on to them, but Botev does not clarify the decision-making process that then led the parents to have fewer children.

It is also not clear why the age at marriage was so high for so long in the West. Botev suggests that there had been population pressures in the West for a long time, whereas in Eastern Europe such pressures only occurred at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries. However, even if population pressure influences age at marriage, it cannot be the only factor; it seems likely, as Malthus noted, that, in pre-industrial economies, except where marriage rates responded to population pressures, population growth would quickly outrun the growth in productivity of which the economy was capable. It would be surprising if this had not been the case in Botev's area of study, the Balkans. It certainly appears to be the case in other parts of the contemporary world, as in Bangladesh which has long been very densely populated but which has had a very low female age at marriage. Furthermore, as noted above, the evidence does not fit Western Europe very well either, for, if Goldstone is correct, the proportion married, but not the age at marriage, seems to have been affected by population pressure. In the United States where land was freely available, age at marriage was lower than in Europe though still late by the standards of South Asia, a phenomenon less conspicuous, however, in nineteenth-century frontier Australia. An explanation for the higher age at marriage in Western Europe must take into account the underlying social and economic structure.

1.4 Was late marriage in Europe simply a reflection of the dominance of the nuclear family?

The most commonly advanced reason for Western Europe's late age of marriage, apart from population pressure, is the expectation that a new couple will establish an independent household. As Macfarlane (1986) notes, Malthus's concept of the preventive check depended upon his assumption that new couples would require the resources necessary to establish and support an independent household. Hajnal is representative of more recent demographers:

In Europe it has been necessary for a man to defer marriage until he could establish an independent livelihood adequate to support a family; in other societies the young couple could be incorporated in a large economic unit, such as a joint family. This, presumably is more easily achieved and does not require such a long postponement of marriage. This line of argument seems especially convincing if the larger economic unit is such that the extra labour is often felt to be an economic asset. A system of large estates with large households as in Eastern Europe might thus be conducive to a non-European marriage pattern, while small holdings occupied by a single family and passed on to a single heir would result in a European pattern. If this reasoning has substance, the uniqueness of the European marriage pattern must be ascribed to the European stem-family. (The term stem-family was coined by Le Play in describing the type of family organization in which land descends to a single heir, the other sons going elsewhere) (Hajnal, 1965 : 133).

Thus, under the stem family system, the oldest son would be able to marry early, though, normally, he waited until he inherited or was given control of the land. The other sons would have to wait until they had found their own livelihood and could establish a new household. Under a joint household the sons could marry much earlier because the family would provide them with a livelihood and they would continue to share their family's household. Whereas the stem-family is based on the concept of primogeniture, where the oldest son inherits most or all of the family property, the joint family provides each son (rarely the daughters too) with a share of the family inheritance.

In general it is true that in those areas where new couples are expected to be independent marriage is late, while areas where joint

families are common often have early marriage. Nevertheless, there are problems with simply correlating age at marriage with family structure. Hajnal himself notes (1965 : 133) the difficulty of generalization about family systems in Europe and elsewhere at different times. He notes that 'there have been large estates and joint families in some regions of Western Europe in the Middle Ages and beyond'. While these areas may have had lower ages of marriage, a straightforward connection between the two is probably too simple. As Hajnal remarks (1965:133),

Presumably it would be possible to have a system in which each couple is in principle an independent economic unit, but in which early marriage is made possible by arrangements to provide for the couple until they achieve complete independence. Katy mentions such arrangements among Jews in Eastern Europe. [Homan describes] arrangements of a related kind in medieval England.

The impact of family structure will depend, in part, upon the wider social and economic context. In some economic circumstances, for example, it may be in the interest of both stem and joint families to provide early marriage. Botev (1990), for example, notes, of Sklar's attribution of early and universal marriage in the Balkans to the joint family, that early marriage was practised equally in Yugoslavia where the joint family was common and in Bulgaria where it was not; though Hajnal (1965:101) indicates that age at marriage was indeed slightly earlier at least in Serbia than in Bulgaria, a suggestive situation in view of the fact that joint families formed a greater proportion of all families in Serbia than in Bulgaria. Dixon (1978:465) notes that both Ireland and Japan had a form of stem family with primogeniture, yet Ireland had a very high proportion of its population never marrying whereas Japan had a very low proportion of celibacy. Clearly, other factors are involved in each of these situations. Dixon argues with regard to Japan's and Ireland's level of celibacy that the availability of industrial work and the comparative wage levels between the sexes as well as community attitudes were important factors.

There is, however, a more fundamental difficulty in seeking a simple correlation between family structure and the marriage pattern. The formal structure of the family does not adequately describe the nature of the relationships within the family and how the structures of authority and decision-making within the family work in practice: for example, who really makes decisions, and who, and to what degree, has influence or veto rights over decisions such as marriage. In part, this is a matter of economic circumstances but the problem goes deeper than this.

This point may be illustrated by reference to the different conclusions drawn by a number of historical demographers, mostly connected with the Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure, and some social historians, with regard to the history of the Western family (Anderson, 1980). It had generally been assumed that the modern stem family was a comparatively recent artefact. Maine (1863), for example, argued, in the nineteenth century, that the progress of modern history was one from status to contract. By this he meant that in earlier times the individual was subordinate to the family and community, and that his position and relationship with others was ascribed by birth according to the family he was born into. In modern society a person's position was achieved and relationships of any kind were governed by contract.

Historical demographers have cast doubt on this view by revealing the extraordinary stability of Western family structure over several centuries. Social historians, including Ariès (1962), Shorter (1976), Stone (1977), and Flandrin (1979) however, argued that, while formal structures may have remained largely unchanged, family and other relationships have altered radically from being patriarchal and community-oriented to being individualistic. Thus, if these writers are correct, Western Europe has changed from the type of social relations that writers since Maine have regarded as typical of the joint family to the relations typical of the stem

and nuclear families without the formal family structure significantly changing.

The joint family does not seem to have been universal in so-called traditional societies. As Dixon (1971 : 228) points out, in many societies in South East Asia 'the simple conjugal family has been traditional'. Yet these societies have had many traits held to be characteristics of joint families, such as strong family ties as well as universal and relatively early marriage.

The explanation is probably that, just as marriage patterns are the outcome of a number of diverse elements, so too is family structure. Among the elements affecting family structure are the prevailing sentiments or values, forms of inheritance, the social and economic context, and prevailing social models of ideal behaviour. Various values seem to exist independently of family type. Values which emphasize kin and family links and parental authority undoubtedly encourage the development of joint families, but the actual formation of such families largely depends on the existence of suitable material conditions. This is particularly clear in India where the joint family is strongly favoured as representing ideal values such as respect for one's elders and, in particular, parents, fraternal solidarity and placing family ahead of all other considerations including one's own private selfish interests. Only a minority of Indian families, though, are actually joint families. This is partly because conflicts between brothers and their wives often outweigh any perceived benefits from living jointly: this is especially so after the older generation, particularly the patriarch, has died. However, even where the patriarch is still alive and where brothers and wives are compatible, the material conditions may not allow for a joint family or it may not be advantageous. Joint families are generally found among land-owners and to a lesser extent among merchants; such groups have the means to support and provide

accommodation for a large family. Furthermore, living together in an organized household has advantages in managing the farm or business. Many families, for instance, prefer to have a family member perform or supervise certain tasks. Since the family members are part of a common family with a common budget it is unlikely that they will shirk their duties or cheat since not only would it be contrary to their family duty but it would be of little benefit to them.

Material conditions are also important in giving the older generation some control over the younger generation: this is closely related to the nature of inheritance. As noted above, stem families are closely connected to inheritance by a single heir, usually the first son, in which case it is termed primogeniture. In such a case, the other brothers are unable to marry unless they can find an alternative livelihood, at which time they move out. It would be difficult for them to bring a wife to live on the family property as she would be intruding in what was not hers; it would belong in future to the inheriting brother and his wife. In these circumstances, there is little advantage even in the present in creating such a joint family for they would be helping to build up property to which they can later have no access. In the case of a joint family, not only are all family members provided with a livelihood which enables them to marry, but they have every right to live on what will eventually become their property. In the meantime, however, it is in the interests of all, especially the older generation, for the land to be kept together, to ensure that it is farmed efficiently and that the older generation is looked after by all. Furthermore, the promise of inheritance will concern the younger generation more with the future welfare of the whole family.

The type of inheritance system of course is not an important consideration if there is no or little property to be inherited. In this case the various aspects of inheritance which encourage or discourage the formation

of a joint or stem household do not count although they may condition the outlook of the whole society.

The formation of joint or stem family households can also be affected by the existence of a social model favouring one or the other. In India the joint family is regarded as the ideal family representing the ideal values noted above such as filial and fraternal duty. It also represents the model of the landowning family which constitutes the heart of the Indian landowning village, and to which the poorer landless villagers, particularly of the lower castes, can only aspire. In Europe, in contrast, the model families were the stem and nuclear families. Primogeniture was practised by landowning families of Europe largely to preserve their positions within the class system: in India this was not necessary as the caste system preserved the social hierarchy, and accordingly social status was less dependent on wealth. In Europe the younger sons were encouraged to join the church or the military and at the very least not to marry unless they could command a position that was worthy of their families. The model to be followed was that of stem and nuclear families.

Thus, the actual type of family system in existence depends upon a number of conditions. The difficulty in determining whether family type affects age of marriage and the incidence of marriage is in part that the factors which affect family structure can directly affect marriage patterns. The system of inheritance which strongly affects the establishment of stem or joint households will also have a direct influence on age of marriage. If, for example, all sons stand to inherit, age at marriage is likely to be lower irrespective of whether family structure is joint or nuclear. Similarly, values which encourage independent households, such as an emphasis on husbands and wives as companions, may also encourage a smaller age gap between spouses and consequently a higher female age at marriage. Values

which emphasize the fraternity of male kin, which is associated with joint households, may do the opposite.

Nevertheless, it seems undeniable that there is a direct relationship between family structure and marriage patterns; but this too is complicated for it is a two-way relationship. Family structure affects marriage patterns by institutionalizing features which effect marriage patterns. If, for example, the strength of the conjugal bond is closely related to age at marriage, the influence of family structure on that bond will affect marriage age. A characteristic of joint families in India and elsewhere is that of arranged marriage. An often expressed preference is a bride who will do as she is told and not talk back to her betters, especially her in-laws, and who will not cause division within the family, such as by inciting her husband against his brothers. In such situations a younger bride may be regarded as more likely to accept family authority. Conversely, marriage patterns can affect family structure. If for other reasons, a wide age gap exists, this itself may weaken the conjugal bond and hence the wife's ability to influence her husband to establish a new household. Indeed, if the wife is too young she may need to be in a joint household to be trained as a wife. Finally as Laslett (1977:107) has noted, the size of the generation gap between when parents and children marry will, depending on mortality, affect the possibility of having several generations in one household. If children marry late, the older generation may already be dead by the time their grandchildren are growing up.

There is perhaps a more important point emerging from the discussion of the circumstances in which different family structures arise. If the type of family is a consequence of a number of factors, including both sentiments or values and also other more practical and material circumstances, it follows that some joint families may have more in common, at least in terms of values, with some stem families than with

other joint households. This is also true for stem families. Joint families in Sri Lanka seem to have more in common with nuclear families there, than with joint families in India. Social historians like Stone, Aries, Flandrin and Shorter assert that families of whatever type may have shared more in common at any one time than each type maintained over time. This view is probably exaggerated in that it underestimates the continuities in the value system of the European family. Smith (1981) demonstrates that many aspects of the English family were similar in the sixteenth century and the nineteenth century and even today. Nevertheless, even this indicates that European joint, stem and nuclear families may not have been representative of such families elsewhere. In particular, joint families in Western Europe may have had more in common with stem families there than with joint families in Asia.

For this reason, and also because the circumstances in Europe before the Industrial Revolution were very different, the European experience is not a perfect parallel to what is happening to marriage patterns in the contemporary Third World.

1.5 The underlying conditions responsible for marriage delay and celibacy in Europe

Although Europe may not provide a satisfactory parallel to contemporary change to marriage patterns in the Third World, discussion of the literature concerning it has raised a number of significant and relevant points. The balance of evidence does not imply that delays in marrying or never marrying were consciously used to control fertility. There was, however, probably an indirect tie to population growth. Greater population densities can create conditions which make people delay marrying, sometimes permanently. This is not, though, an inevitable consequence of population growth: it depends on the right conditions. Macfarlane (1986:

323) points out that Malthus's preventive check depended on the existence of four preconditions:

an accumulative ethic which justified and glorified the endless pursuit of gain; the ranked, but mobile society which meant that people were constantly scrambling up and down a ladder of fortune; private property which was protected by government and law; and a generally elevated standard of living which would give people that taste for bodily comforts which would tempt them to forgo immediate sexual gratification and delay marriage until they could afford it.

Put in another way, Malthus was saying that the material and family system that he advocated was the natural corollary of what today would be called market capitalism. Where capitalism flourishes, he argued so will the particular set of traits he analysed.

Malthus (1970: 268-9) did indeed regard the preventive check as being a corollary of capitalism. He argued that only where individuals were free to benefit from the full implications of their decisions, good or bad, would individuals behave prudentially and delay their marriages until they could support a family. This required the existence of private gain secured by the existence of a free and impartial legal system. It also required the state not to interfere and distort the market by providing assistance in the form of poor relief, thus enabling the imprudent who had married early to evade the consequences of their decision.

As Macfarlane notes, this argument assumes the capitalist preconditions that those who make the decisions are the beneficiaries of any gains and losses thereby encountered. Malthus dealt with this point in arguing the need for secure protection of private property and against the poor law.

However, it also assumes the existence of nuclear or stem families rather than joint families, wherein an individual determines when he or she marries, and where the couple pays for and receives the benefits of children themselves. The preventive check would work only if those who decided the timing of marriage were the same as those who would benefit from or suffer

the consequences of the marriage. In theory, this could occur in a joint family too: arguably, if a wider range of people participate in the marriage decision the impact of the marriage could affect the same people. It seems unlikely, though, that the actual balance of gains and losses would be equal for all family members.

In a joint household, however, the older individuals who have decisive influence in arranging a marriage are likely to gain more from the benefits of the marriage - the extra labour, services and companionship - than they would suffer from its costs, as in sharing resources including property, and income. The most obvious example is the division of inherited property. A more prosaic example is the one given by Caldwell (1982: 227) where the food for an extra child is taken from the total amount dished out to children rather than from that allocated to all family members.

Macfarlane (1986:36) argues that the preventive check depends upon marriage being expensive and in particular children being a net economic loss: this loss has to be made up by other gains, mainly the advantages of companionship of the spouse and children. Macfarlane, like Smith, argues that in England, and to a lesser degree elsewhere in Western Europe, there is little evidence of children having contributed to their parents' economic well being, even in the parents' old age; indeed, contrary to Malthus's fear that assistance granted to the poor might have encouraged early marriage, it might have delayed it since, by providing assistance to the old, it reduced their dependence on any support from their children. Children after early childhood were economically independent of their parents, many working as live-in apprentices and servants. It seems logical that if marriage and children were a net economic benefit, as Caldwell (1982) argues for pre-transitional societies, people would marry as early as possible, all else being equal. Only when their value was questionable would there be reasons for delaying marriage.

1.6 The economics of the family and delayed marriage

This brings us back to the question of whether delayed marriage was only birth control by another name. Where children are a major economic loss, families may tend to restrict their number of children and where they are a major economic gain, they may tend not to restrict them. Where, however, they are only a marginal cost or benefit, other factors become more important. Western marriage was delayed not because children were a great economic loss (they could after infancy be apprenticed or sent as servants to live and work with other families) but because the actual cost of establishing and supporting a new household was so great. In economic terms the fixed cost of establishing and running a household was high but the marginal cost of each extra child was not. It was not until the couple had saved enough money to establish, and were earning enough to maintain, a household that they could marry. Some of the waiting period was used for training as in apprenticeship, but that this was probably not the major factor in delaying marriage is indicated by the large number who failed ever to marry, presumably because they always lacked the necessary resources. That there was a high cost in establishing a household but thereafter a low marginal cost for each additional child is supported by the pattern of delayed marriage followed by a total absence of restrictions with consequent relatively high marital fertility, and certainly no concept of an ideal number of children.

The nature of women's work contributed to the high establishment cost of the household. Before marriage many women worked outside the house but after marriage they would normally stop to look after their new family. The reason for this was probably social expectation and pressure though it also reflected the type of work deemed acceptable for women, and that which was available. Much of the work outside the family was difficult for a married woman. The biggest source of employment for women was as

household servants, who were expected to live in the household; and such work was primarily suited to the unattached. Much of what work was available could be done within the family, such as cottage industry work like spinning and weaving. Women could also grow vegetables and tend some domestic animals such as dairy cows and pigs.

Once she had given up outside work to become a housewife, looking after additional children was probably not a great economic cost though it undoubtedly increased the work demands on the woman. It meant that, if the family were to have a reasonable income, it was important that the husband earn enough to support them both. However, the wife's loss of income was partially compensated by her household production which reduced the need to buy outside products, and which could even bring outside income. It is probably significant that the wife's household production provided much of what was needed by infants, thereby reducing the marginal cost of each additional child.

Marital fertility rates only fell when each child became a heavy net loss. In such a situation the family began to restrict its total number of children. This situation occurred in Europe towards the end of the nineteenth century, especially after the introduction of compulsory education. Mass education made children expensive partly through its direct costs and partly by making children dependants. Children had, after early childhood, been expected to largely support themselves, for example, as live-in apprentices and servants; now the parents had to support them.

This increase in the marginal cost of children was the product in the long run of changes in the economy. The demand for labour outside the family increased while the possibilities for home production fell. In many industries home-based production became less important as in weaving and spinning, while others, such as minding dairy cows and pigs, became less

possible as the population urbanized. These economic changes, coupled with changes in social attitudes to women working, eventually encouraged married women to work after bearing children.

1.7 Do differences in the age gap of marriage partners in the West and in Asia reflect underlying differences in the nature of marriage?

This chapter has concentrated on what explains variations in Western marriage patterns although the thesis's primary concern is with changing marriage patterns in contemporary South Asia and in particular Sri Lanka. The major differences between South Asian and Western marriage patterns were South Asia's low levels of celibacy, and its much lower female age at marriage, often around or even before the age of puberty. In contrast to the women, men in South Asia, even in rural areas, married at ages not very different from those of the West. Consequently, the age difference between husband and wife in South Asia was much greater than those of the West. Though Hajnal (1965: 134) noted that a small age gap was a feature of the Western marriage pattern comparatively little attention in the literature has been given to why this is so. There has been perhaps a Western tendency to regard a minor age gap as natural and assume that it is unnaturally large age gaps that need to be explained. There has also been a concentration on the comparatively minor differences within a society, as in the overall age at marriage, rather than on the cross-culturally much more significant age difference between the sexes at marriage. This is because changes in marriage age within a society can be correlated with other documented changes such as those in real wage rates and population growth. Yet changes in wage rates are primarily significant for the male age of marriage because men are normally expected to be the principal wage earners, while in terms of fertility it is female age of marriage that is important.

This raises the question why the ages at marriage of the two sexes changed together in Europe. It is true that a woman sometimes did raise some of the money toward establishing a new household but arguably this was mostly the consequence of her having to wait for her marriage rather than a cause of it.

Another factor that could encourage a relationship between male and female age at marriage is a marriage squeeze: a shortage of unmarried males of the right age forces females to delay their marriages because of the lack of available grooms. That this does not seem to be a critical factor here is suggested by the high proportion of men and women who have never married.

The important factor appears to be that Europeans preferred a small age gap at marriage. In many societies especially in Asia and Africa there is little obvious connection between the age at which men married and the age at which women married. A man was expected to be old enough to be a mature husband and a father but the same was not expected of a woman. Indeed, a young age of marriage for women might be regarded as an advantage for it implied that she would accept her husband's and his family's authority, and her duties. In such circumstances factors which affect the age of marriage of one sex need have little effect on that of the other.

In the West a small age gap at marriage was preferred because marriage was a partnership of two fairly equal individuals: an important aspect of this was that they were establishing an independent household. In an independent family the husband and wife both had important responsibilities within the family; each had to be able to make the necessary contributions for the family to be successful. In a joint family marriage was not a partnership in the same sense, for the young bride was entering her

husband's household in which she would become a very junior member. She had few responsibilities except to obey her mother-in-law and, rather than contributing her part to her marriage, was expected to work in the interests of the whole family. In such circumstances she did not need the maturity to make an independent contribution either as a wife or as a mother. Her mother-in-law would make the necessary decisions. Rather, youth was felt to be an advantage because she would more readily accept instructions.

This, however, is a somewhat circular argument. While the nature of the independent household may have necessitated a more mature bride, it is equally true that an older female age at marriage may have made an independent household more viable. A younger age of marriage may have necessitated the couple staying with the family while the bride learnt how to cope with the duties expected of her.

1.8 Are late marriage and high celibacy rates a reflection of how marriage decisions are made and by whom?

This brings us to how the decision to marry is made. The distinctive aspect about the decision to marry in the West was that it was up to the individuals concerned to decide who they would marry and, perhaps more importantly, when they would marry. In South Asian societies individuals have generally had little control over whom they marry and when they marry. In Western societies, in contrast, individuals usually had virtually total control over whom they married, though parents might occasionally show their disapproval if the proposed spouse was deemed to be of bad character or came from the wrong class or religion. Macfarlane (1986: 330) claims that at least as early as the twelfth century in England individuals in most classes decided for themselves whom they would marry. It has been pointed out that some of the richer landowning families especially in France did arrange marriages but this seems to have been an exception; significantly their children married very early (Hajnal, 1965: 115). More

commonly, parents exercised control over those whom their children courted and vetoed unsuitable matches, though after the age of majority, when most marriages occurred, even such restrictions weakened. This presumably was especially so where the children supported themselves or lived away from home, for example as live-in servants or apprentices.

Even where restrictions on marriage and courtship did exist, marriage, in theory at least and normally in practice, was perceived as two mutually consenting parties agreeing to a marriage partnership. Equally importantly, the time when sons or daughters married was their own decision, and the family could not decide that it was time for them to marry. Although there might be some stigma on celibacy, for instance being an elderly spinster, concerns about age at marriage were rarely that someone was leaving it too long but much more commonly that they were too young to have a proper understanding of what they were doing and too imprudent, the very fears expressed by Malthus. It was this lack of pressure that allowed the female marriage age to be so late in Europe and also made possible its high rates of celibacy. Furthermore the lack of arranged marriage meant that there was no way of ensuring that everybody married.

The interesting question is why there was no pressure on females in Europe to marry young and why there was in South Asia. It seems to be that in Europe marriage primarily was not a family responsibility. It was an individual's responsibility to decide whether or not to marry, to find a mate, and to establish a new household, though the family might provide guidance. In Asia these were family decisions.

1.9 When do families favour early marriage?

As to why these responsibilities were individual in the West and family in South Asia, one explanation is that in South Asia it was generally a family responsibility to marry their daughters off before doubt could be

cast on their morality; in Western societies morality was primarily an individual concern. Yet this is not truly an explanation, for it does not explain why in South Asia a family is held responsible for its members, but in the West is not. The family structure seems to have been what it was simply because it was. A deeper explanation requires acceptance of a deterministic framework yet such a framework is likely to be affected by the prevailing family structure. The most obvious deterministic framework is an economic one. It is possible that Europeans were willing to accept daughters or sons making their own decisions over whom to marry because it had little effect on their family. By the time they married most individuals were largely self-supporting, taking little economically and contributing little to their families of origin. To marry they needed and expected little from their families.

In South Asia the families were intimately involved because decision to marry would directly affect them. They would have to pay many of the costs but also receive many of the benefits of the marriage. The question, then, is if the families do have a decision over the marriage date, what economic factors affect whether they favour an early or late marriage. If children are of little or no net value, there will be little reason for families to press males to marry or to have more children. Rather it would be more sensible to encourage them to become independent financially and leave the decisions concerning marriage to them, as is the case in the West. Where children are more valuable the family has an economic interest in children and in the timing of the marriage. In such situations it does seem that families have very great control over the arrangement of marriage including the timing of marriage. What is of interest in such situations is that a very early age of marriage is commonly encouraged for females but not for males. If children are valuable, both young men and women may be encouraged to have them as early as possible. One possible reason is that a woman's

fertile period is restricted to the years between fifteen and forty, whereas a man's is not. It is therefore important, especially for her husband and her new family, for her to marry early if her potential fertility is to be realized.

However, though the view is commonly expressed that a woman's primary duty is to bear children, this does not seem to be the reason given for early marriage, at least in South Asia. Much more common is the belief that a wife who is relatively mature might challenge the authority structure of the family. According to Caldwell's (1982) wealth flow theory, these authority structures are essential if the older generation, that is those who in such societies control the marriage decision, are to benefit from the labour of the children. In the most extreme cases, the family might break up.

Even if early female age at marriage benefits the family into which a woman is marrying it seems likely that it is not beneficial to her natal family. If the extra labour was useful parents might wish to delay their daughter's marriage to profit from her work; however, a delay might reduce her potential value to the family into which she is marrying, and thus she might not be able to marry as well as she would have, thus reducing the value of marriage to the family; or her family might have to pay a larger dowry or accept a smaller brideprice. Furthermore, it is proverbial wisdom that a daughter-in-law can be made to work much harder than an indulged daughter, so a girl whose labour may be valuable to her husband's family may be economically marginal in her own family.

1.10 Why is male marriage generally later than female marriage in family-oriented societies?

Nevertheless, if it is worthwhile for females to marry early, why is this not also true of males? After all the earlier the son married the sooner there would be grandchildren. Only when their value was questionable

would there be reasons for delaying a boy's marriage. A possible reason may be a belief that a man needs to be mature enough to be a husband. Maturity in this sense included being old enough to place the wider interests of the family before the couple's own selfish desires or interests.

An important factor is undoubtedly that a woman is seen as achieving her full potential earlier than a man. Her duties, childbearing, household work and often the more menial farm labour, though laborious, are generally less dependent upon physical strength than the man's, and therefore she is seen as ready for marriage at an earlier age. It is only when ideas or practices about what is required for their particular duties change, that the relative ages of marriage are likely to alter.

Also, if a boy is contributing to his family's welfare, his family may not want him to marry too early. Even in a society where additional children contribute to family well-being, it may not be advantageous for the parents for their son to marry too soon. If he does so, his primary responsibility may eventually be to his wife and children and their responsibility to him, even if immediately following marriage they live jointly with his parents. Besides, if the generations were too short, the younger generation might challenge the authority of the older generation more than otherwise. Thus while it might benefit the older couple to keep the female generations short, it is to their benefit to keep the male generations long.

1.11 Summary: Is Asia moving toward the European marriage pattern?

In summary, the marriage patterns of Asia, particularly South Asia, and Western Europe reflect two very different societies. One is based on the family, the other on the individual. Where the family is the central social fact, decisions regarding marriage will reflect the interests of all the family

members and not simply those of the individuals directly concerned. Where the individual is central it will be his or her interest that is paramount, though they may continue to be influenced by the attitudes of the family. Although actual marriage decisions may be affected by practical factors, age at marriage for females has generally been earlier in Asia where the family has control because it has been in the interest of the family members that it be so. Furthermore, age is a less important factor for the family than it is for the individual. Finally, the older members of the family do not need an extended period to learn who would make a good marriage partner and who would not. A family-oriented society is associated with universal marriage in part because the family's resources can be used to ensure that everybody marries, but, more importantly, in such a society social existence depends upon family roles. Individuals, for example, are not properly adults until they have married and become parents and eventually grandparents. In an individual-based society where status is largely achieved, such considerations are much less important. Economic factors are clearly important. Where family property is central to its members' well-being and status, marriage is likely to be used strategically to preserve and, it is hoped, augment such property. Where wage employment predominates, individuals can become more independent of their families. Similarly, where security of property and life, and personal well-being, especially in old age, are less dependent upon other individuals within the family, those having influence within the family can afford to take a more relaxed attitude to the activities of its members.

While economic changes may make it possible for a greater degree of individualism to develop, they do not by themselves ensure it. Some of the South Asian communities which have become most dependent on earnings from wage labour have experienced less change in age at marriage than other South Asian communities which depend little on such earnings. The

communities dependent on wages tend to be poorer and less well educated. The essential requirement for an increased acceptance of individuals and their right to determine their own future, is, perhaps, an ideological one.

The critical questions for this thesis now are whether Asian marriage is moving toward the European model and more specifically whether Sri Lankan marriage is moving from the South Asian model of very early marriage toward a more Western model; and if this is so, what are the factors behind this change?

CHAPTER 2.

Marriage in an Asian society

2.1 A Survey of Marriage in Asia

2.1.1 The transformation of Asian marriage patterns

Asia, once stereotyped as consisting of unchanging peasant societies, is increasingly characterized in terms of rapid economic growth and social change. Its marriage patterns, which were once seen to be typical of peasant societies with early (particularly for females) and universal marriage, are now changing rapidly with age at marriage apparently rising almost everywhere. Smith, Shahidullah and Alcantara (1983: 11) note that, in all ten countries covered by the World Fertility Survey in the Asia and the Pacific region, female age at marriage is increasing. However, they also note, that with well over 90 per cent of older women marrying, there are few signs yet that Asia is moving towards the Western pattern of less than universal marriage. While female age at marriage is generally rising, actual marriage ages differ greatly, with South Asia, excluding Sri Lanka, being characterized by much earlier marriage than Southeast Asia and particularly East Asia (Smith et al., 1983: 7).

The limited evidence that the proportion never marrying is changing has led most studies of Asian marriage patterns to concentrate on age at marriage. This focus has generally been on female age at marriage since this is what is changing most radically, and is important in terms of fertility, and of gender relations and family structure. The studies tend to fall into two principal categories: studies of changes in marriage ages, which look at region wide factors such as economic change and rising education levels; and studies examining the diversity in marriage ages between

countries, which generally focus on underlying sociocultural differences. In this section both types of study will be discussed commencing with one of the former.

2.1.2 The correlates of Asian marriage patterns

Rindfuss, Parnell and Hirschman (1983) have examined age at first birth (in Asia normally closely related to age at first marriage), using a multiple regression analysis for Asian countries with separate variables for birth cohort, country-ethnicity, rural-urban birth and education. The authors (1983 : 263,268) remark that, even controlling for the other variables, there are sizable differences by country-ethnicity. Muslim and Hindu women in their sample tend to marry 2.5 to 3 years earlier than women from Confucian societies. Similar cultural groups (which they term ethnicity) as measured by religion in different countries often, but not always, have more in common with each other than with different cultural groups in their own countries: Muslim women, for example, in Sri Lanka, Malaysia and Indonesia had identical mean age at first birth (Rindfuss et al., 1983: 268).

The other variable they tested that was significant was education. This not only explained some of the differences between countries, but, more importantly, explained, except for Hong Kong, all the difference by birth cohort in age at first birth. The effect of education was almost identical for most countries and ethnic groups; except for Malaysians and Sinhalese, age at first birth was 2.64 years higher for women with more than primary education, than for women with no education. For the Sinhalese, however, the effect was twice as large at 5.41 years (Rindfuss et al., 1983: 264).

Although Rindfuss and colleagues identify the importance of education on age at first birth they do not explain why it has had this impact, simply noting that education has been identified in the general

education literature as having 'similar modernizing effects on individual behaviour in diverse settings' (Rindfuss et al., 1983: 268). They do try to be more explicit with regard to the concept of a shared cultural heritage, but their data are inadequate for this purpose. They restrict themselves to suggesting that an important factor in earlier marriage among Hindus and Muslims is the emphasis that those communities put on female virginity at marriage (Rindfuss et al., 1983: 270).

A major limitation of the Rindfuss, Parnell and Hirschman study is that Sri Lanka was the only South Asian country covered. There is thus no comparison with the very early marriage pattern of most of the subcontinent: the Hindus, for example, who are included in the sample, the Tamils of Sri Lanka and Malaysia, are probably not representative of the early-marrying northern parts of South Asia where the majority live. A more fundamental weakness of their approach, however, is the lack of an overall theory of the determinants of marriage change: we may know which variables affect marriage but we still do not know why and how certain variables affect marriage patterns.

2.1.3 The importance of sociocultural factors in explaining Asian marriage patterns

This criticism also applies, as the author acknowledges, to Peter Smith's¹ survey of Asian marriage (P.Smith, 1980), which places more emphasis than Rindfuss et al. on the underlying sociocultural differences explaining pre-existing differences in marriage patterns. Smith notes that even in the early twentieth century there were already major differences in proportions of females married as measured by Coale's index of first marriage ranging from above .900 in South Asia to below .800 in the Philippines (P.Smith, 1980: 65-66).

1 Now known as Peter Xenos

As P. Smith remarks, the lack of earlier data precludes a certain answer as to whether these patterns are the result of earlier change or underlying sociocultural differences; but other evidence suggests the latter. P. Smith (1980: 71) notes that the major regional difference in marriage patterns concerns the age at which the population begins to marry. Among females this age is around 10 years in South Asia, 13 years in Southeast Asia, and 18 years in East Asia. A similar age range and pattern is true of males. He suggests that these differences reflect the broad sociocultural differences influencing nuptiality. Smith does not identify the relevant sociocultural differences, noting that it remains to be determined why the spatial pattern prevails.

P. Smith (1980: 80) also finds that most of the small differences in proportions never marrying have traditional roots. He notes (1980 : 77) that Sri Lanka, Burma and the Philippines have slightly higher celibacy rates than other countries, particularly those in South Asia such as Bangladesh: he suggests that religious and secular ideology combine to provide a role for the celibate in these societies. Significantly, the priests of the prevailing religions in the three countries, Buddhist and Catholic, are celibate. It could equally be argued, though, that it was because roles outside the family were permissible, that a celibate priesthood was acceptable. In India, for instance, such a concept was almost inconceivable, though priests are very careful to control their sexuality within marriage. Significantly, in Buddhism (but not Catholicism), unlike Hinduism, marriage is a civil rite.

Smith has little to say about the causes of changing marriage patterns beyond what the writers already discussed have said. He notes that rising levels of education seem to be strongly associated with increasing age at marriage (P. Smith, 1980 : 85), and that the labour force participation of women is important with regard to female marriage rates. But the empirical relationship between participation rates and fertility (and by

implication marriage rates) 'is problematic, and even the direction of causation is sometimes unclear' (P.Smith, 1980: 83). He also tests for the effects of urbanization on age at marriage. He finds, as did Rindfuss et al., that the evidence is unclear.

Smith does not attempt to explain why or how these variables affect marriage patterns. The data available for this type of study 'preclude anything more than exploration of specific propositions' (P.Smith, 1980: 60). He implies (1980: 60, 91), in any case, that a proper explanation of changing marriage patterns would involve a theory of marriage transition, but notes that no such adequate theory exists. P.Smith (1980: 60) cites Becker's (1973; 1974; 1981) theory of marriage, where within a market each individual seeks to maximize his or her advantages by marrying individuals with the most desirable characteristics, or if it is in his or her interests by not marrying at all. Smith comments that, as a theory, it seems to have little apparent grounding in sociological realities (P.Smith, 1980: 91). This probably does the study less than justice as Becker's theory is at times quite stimulating in its attempt to link the different aspects of marriage. Nevertheless, it often does seem to posit the obvious, and, in its applications, rarely seems to explain the great complexity of marriage patterns found in different societies.

P.Smith (1980: 91) remarks that a proper theory of marriage transition would be very difficult to develop because of the empirical complexity of the data. He suggests that such a theory would have to take the family as the pivotal institution. He notes that Caldwell identifies as a central aspect of the demographic transition

a reversal of the longstanding traditional pattern of within-family intergenerational transfers of wealth and resources toward parents from children. This reversal in the system of parental incentives is tied in turn to changing affective and economic roles and relationships within the family, and thus to changes in the family's composition and structure, including fertility (P.Smith, 1980: 91).

A comparative theory of marriage transition might involve combining this with a decision-making model.

The next theoretical step might be to tie together more explicitly the affective revolution or surge of sentiment stressed by Shorter, what Caldwell calls emotional nucleation, the social-structural revolution outlined by Goode, and a more sociological informed and constrained theory of household choice. What may emerge is a theory of marriage involving outcome-optimizing choices on the part of individuals or their parents, conditioned by intra-family emotional dynamics as well as key elements of social structure, and particularly by intergenerational relations and resource transfers (P.Smith, 1980: 91).

Such an empirically based model would require considerable local-level research (P.Smith, 1980: 92). A model of marriage transition of the type described by Smith would effectively be a model of marriage as well: to understand fully the factors causing marriage change one must understand the very nature of marriage, why it exists and all the forces that affect it in each particular society. This would avoid the problem inherent in many analyses of marriage transition (e.g Rindfuss et al., 1983) of explaining changes in marriage patterns in terms that are incompatible with their explanations of pre-existing marriage patterns. The earlier marriage patterns are generally treated as being the result of traditional social structure whereas changes in marriage patterns are attributed to individual variables such as education and urbanization with little attempt to relate the two or to explain how the social structure and particularly the variables explain marriage patterns.

Unfortunately, the empirical complexity of marriage and society pointed out by Smith probably does mean that a model of marriage and marriage transition is impossible; even the precise definition of marriage can differ greatly between societies. In some of the matrilineal groupings of Kerala, the conjugal marriage of the West could hardly be said to exist (cf. Leach, 1971; Fuller, 1976). Such differences in the definition of marriage are particularly relevant to Sri Lanka.

Nevertheless, even if a general theory of marriage may be unattainable, it would be worthwhile to try to explain marriage within a single society and, where appropriate, to suggest parallels with what is happening in other societies.

2.1.4 The feasibility and desirability of Asian marriage

A writer who has examined the determinants of marriage patterns, if not with a comprehensive theory of marriage, at least with 'a framework for analysing variations in marriage patterns', is Dixon (1970, 1971) who found that three variables accounted for most of the observed variation in the timing and quantity of nuptiality. These she termed the desirability of marriage, the feasibility of marriage, and the availability of mates. According to Dixon, the desirability of marriage is determined by the need for children or alternatively the availability of non-familial opportunities such as gainful or prestigious employment for women. It can be measured by assessing the costs and rewards of marrying early or late or never. The feasibility of marriage is determined by expectations regarding economic and residential independence and the availability of land or income and savings. It can be measured by the relative ease with which residential norms can be met. The availability of mates is determined by the sex ratio between age groups from which spouses are drawn, and the method of selection: arranged marriage promotes earlier marriage than does free choice. It can be measured by assessing the relative ease of finding a partner. Dixon regards availability of mates as being the least significant of the three variables, being important mainly at the margin.

Dixon (1971 : 230) argues in essence that marriage was historically earlier in Asia than in the West because marriage was more feasible and desirable. Marriage was more feasible in Asia for a couple's given level of resources because they were not required to be independent, often living

with one of the families and almost always receiving considerable assistance. The lack of independence also meant that marriage was more desirable because it was expected by family and community and because there were few alternatives available. For example, even when economic opportunities were available community pressures often prevented women from exercising them. Dixon (1971: 226) contrasts Asia with the West where a newly married couple has to have the skills, resources and maturity to establish an independent household, thus ruling out early marriage and in some cases marriage altogether. Furthermore, the lack in the West of a lineage system and of ancestor worship removed much of the compulsion to marry common in other societies.

Dixon's analysis suffers from being a comparative regression at a single point in time; consequently it conflates factors in time which should be separated out. Dixon's concept of feasibility covers both the available resources and household structure. While the extreme lack of resources may affect the ability to marry in any situation nevertheless household structure must be given primacy. The economics of the situation can only be understood within the context of the prevailing family system.

This point comes out in Dixon's prediction of likely developments in marriage patterns. She (1971: 230) argues that age at marriage is now increasing in Asian countries because new constraints, such as land shortages, unemployment and urban crowding, are appearing while simultaneously marriage is becoming less strongly required as arranged marriage breaks down. While she emphasizes the role of the family in her contrast of Asian and Western marriage patterns, her analysis of changes in Asian marriage patterns essentially ignores the role of the family. The breakdown of arranged marriage is not simply a matter of the assistance the family gives to the young couple. Arranged marriage is associated with marriage payments, joint budgets and households, and economic assistance,

all of which influence whether the couple has the resources, skills and maturity for married life. Dixon has consequently failed to address one of the critical questions of marriage change in Asia, why the family's role in marriage has changed.

An additional concern with Dixon's framework is that it is more obviously applicable to celibacy (never marrying) than it is to age at marriage. Dixon argues that the desirability of marriage can be measured by assessing the costs and rewards of marrying early or late or never. While quite clearly desirability in this sense might affect whether people marry or not, it is not clear why it should determine whether they marry early or late. The problem comes back to the multiple regression model used by Dixon. It is much simpler to use proxies that measure whether it is worth marrying or not than to use ones that measure when it is worth marrying.

The timing of marriage may be more closely related to the feasibility of marriage, but even this is not clear-cut, since Goldstone (1986) has shown that in pre-industrial England factors involved in the feasibility of marriage had more impact on proportions never marrying than on the age at marriage of those who did.

The essential problem with Dixon's approach is that it is a theoretical framework for the analysis of marriage patterns rather than a proper theory of marriage. As such, it does not deal with the root causes of what determines marriage patterns, that is how the marriage pattern reflects the nature, role and process of marriage within a particular society. In particular, descriptions of marriage such as Dixon's generally treat marriage simply as a straightforward contractual relationship between two autonomous individuals. Dixon discusses the role of the family as it affects the feasibility and desirability of marriage, as though the family is an

external, if important, player, when, in truth, in family-based societies, it is likely to be central to the marriage relationship.

In societies where one's position is essentially determined by the family into which one is born, families are not peripheral to marriage, simply making marriage more feasible or desirable; they are integral. When a bride marries she is not simply marrying a husband; she is in effect marrying his family. In many societies, especially those where joint families predominate, it is a common statement that a woman is concerned not with who her husband will be but who her mother-in-law will be. In such societies women often have very different roles from men and a woman is likely to be under the authority of and owe allegiance to her mother-in-law rather than to her husband and children while the husband has allegiance to his father and brothers. For the groom, too, marriage means entering into a relationship not just with a wife but her family as well.

An important aspect of this is marriage payments such as dowry which not only can make marriages more feasible but give the bride's family continuing rights and considerations as well as obligations in the marriage. Marriage payments can help to create virtually permanent ties of relationship between two families, ties which may continue into the next generation. In such circumstances, the tie between the two families is an essential part of the marriage, and it is not surprising that families commonly arrange the marriages themselves, determining not only who would be a suitable marriage partner for the individual marrying and for the family as a whole, but also which would be a suitable family to marry into.

The close tie between marriage and family in family-based societies means that any explanation of marriage change which treats the family as essentially extraneous, facilitating or encouraging marriage, does not

adequately explain the changes that are occurring. The changes which affect marriage patterns are much more fundamental than is implied by concepts such as the feasibility and the desirability of marriage. Marriage in Asia has been moving from a position where it deeply involved the families to one where it is accepted as primarily being the responsibility of individuals.

Changes in marriage patterns reflect fundamental changes in the nature of marriage, particularly in the aims of marriage and in involvement of the family in marriage. These points are explored below with reference to marriage in Sri Lanka.

2.1.5 What is the relationship between age at marriage and the age gap in marriage?

Casterline, Williams and McDonald (1986) have pointed to the importance of understanding the causes of the age gap between the spouses in explaining changes in age at marriage. They note, following Hajnal (1965), that not only is non-Western marriage generally earlier than Western marriage but the difference is much greater for females than males and that consequently the age gap between marriage partners is much larger.

Casterline et al. (1986: 354) suggest that there are three possible explanations for age differences at marriage:

1. that these differences express explicit preferences regarding the age gap;
2. that they are the coincidental by-products of independently determined ages at marriage of men and women;
3. that they are determined by the age structure

On the basis of World Fertility Survey (WFS) data they argue that neither age structure nor independently determined age gaps can explain the strong association between the marriage ages of the two sexes and hence that the only possible explanation is that there is indeed a strong preference for particular age gaps (Casterline et al., 1986: 360-363).

The particular age gap preferred in a society can be attributed to the kinship structure and the status of women; in patriarchal societies the age difference is relatively large, with the husband commonly being ten years or more older. Where the status of women is higher age differences are smaller (Casterline et al., 1986: 374).

Casterline et al. (1986: 369) emphasize that outside forces will affect age at marriage only to the degree they influence the factors within the family, particularly the position of women, with a direct influence on age at marriage. They note that Goode (1963) argued that a smaller age gap is a consequence of the Westernization of family formation, though they question Goode's claim that a desire for a small age gap is universal among the young, as some societies set great store by young brides.

The relationship between apparent status of women and age at marriage is not always straightforward; just as the status of women can affect the age gap so too it is plausible than the reverse can hold (Casterline et al., 1986: 374). Casterline et al. also note that the status of women in sub-Saharan Africa is, on many criteria including schooling participation, economic independence and freedom of movement, higher than in North Africa, West Asia and South Asia, yet its age differences are large. They suggest that status outside the household is less important than inside, as reflected in internal household relations, most importantly with the husband (Casterline et al., 1986: 371).

The general argument has some merit but the specific case of Africa is suspect. The large age gap in African marriage reflects the general weakness of the marriage relationship in Africa rather than specifically the low status of women in the household. In many Asian countries a large age gap partly reflects a belief that a woman should be subordinate to her husband and his family. In Africa the conjugal relationship is often so weak that each wife, but not her children, is virtually independent from her husband. To the woman it is more important that her husband is financially well off and well respected, attributes commonly associated with a later age, than that they should have a close conjugal relationship. To the husband and his family what matters most is that the wife should be a good strong worker and have many fertile years ahead of her.

Casterline et al. (1986: fn.21, 368) point out that variation in age at marriage is greater for males than females within countries but greater for females between countries. This means that within countries the male age at marriage is the critical factor for variations in the age gap at marriage but between countries the female marriage age is. This, they say, suggests that men's marriages are subjected to a much more diverse set of influences than are women's which are more constrained by sociocultural factors. Within a particular country sociocultural factors dictate that women should marry at a common age; however the preferred age differs greatly between societies. Men's age at marriage differs more within societies but not between societies because it involves a wider set of factors such as earning an income.

In Dixon's terms women are more affected by the desirability of marriage, men by the feasibility of marriage. Women are generally much more constrained by sociocultural factors than are men. The concept of chastity and its relationship to the honour of the family, a very important concept in many societies, inevitably applies to women and not to men. It

may be that it is part of a complex of ideas where women become subservient to the interests of men and the families into which they marry. It is certainly connected with the fact that women are more closely related to the family which is regarded as the central pillar of traditional values, values which women are expected to pass on to their children; whereas men are much more involved in the outside and more modern world.

2.1.6 South Asian marriage patterns and their relationship to the kinship system

Before consideration of the Sri Lankan situation, marriage in India should be examined. Any analysis of Sri Lankan marriage must take the Indian situation into account because, not only are the two neighbours, but they share much in common, much of Sri Lankan culture having ultimately derived from India: the two principal ethnic groups, the Sinhalese and the Tamils, claim originally to have migrated from India and the two main religions, Buddhism and Hinduism, originated in India. However, the surveys examined above have, with the exception of P. Smith (1980), excluded India: significantly India was not included in the World Fertility Survey. In this regard a particularly relevant article covering many of the interests of this thesis is one by Dyson and Moore (1983).

Dyson and Moore (1983: 42-43) identify the existence of two separate demographic regimes in India: a northern model with high fertility and mortality rates and a high sex ratio; and a southern model which is much lower in all respects. Most importantly, in terms of the thesis, age at marriage is earlier in the North than in the South.

Dyson and Moore (1983: 43-47) explain the two demographic regimes in terms of the kinship system and its effect on female autonomy. They argue that North Indian and South Indian kinship are fundamentally different. North Indian kinship involves three key principles: marriage is

exogamous with only non-relatives marrying; males generally co-operate with agnates, particularly brothers; and females do not inherit. Society is, in effect, divided into rival patrilineages. The consequence is to cut young wives off from their natal families and to ensure that they have very little say even over decisions directly concerning them. Marriage, itself, becomes

dominated by the search for intergroup alliances, and women usually have no choice in the matter. The wife-givers are socially and ritually inferior to the wife-takers, and dowry is the main marriage transaction; at the extreme, marriage transactions may resemble trafficking in females. The fact that the in-marrying female comes from another group means that in some ways she is viewed as a threat: her behavior must be closely watched; she must be resocialized so that she comes to identify her own interests with those of her husband's kin; senior family wives tend to dominate young in-marrying wives (Dyson and Moore, 1983: 44).

The strong emphasis on the patrilineal family and on patriarchy requires that women and especially their sexuality be carefully controlled to uphold the honour of the family. It also requires that husbands and wives should not be too emotionally attached as this could threaten the unity of the patriarchal family if the couples were to go against it. The consequence is that women are almost totally segregated from men to the extent of forming their own female specific communication network (Dyson and Moore, 1983: 44).

The southern kinship system differs in each of the three principles operating in the north: the ideal marriage involves cross-cousins; males tend to co-operate with affines, men to whom they are related by marriage; and women may sometimes inherit (Dyson and Moore, 1983: 44). Not only are the links between the family into which the bride marries and her natal family much stronger, but they are based on a relationship of equality. As a consequence she herself achieves much greater autonomy. Whereas northern kinship is built around the patrilineage, in southern kinship affinity is as important as descent in social organization. Consequently,

Female chastity is less important, and both the woman's sexuality and her personal movements are less rigidly controlled. Women interact with their natal kin more regularly than their counterparts in the northern system, and there is less need to repress and resocialize females in their affinal home. Indeed, nuclear families are often established at marriage. Affective ties between husband and wife represent no social threat to the descent group. And daughters are much more likely - along with sons - to be on hand to render parents help and support in later years. Finally, communication networks are less sex specific, and there is less social restriction on female occupational choice (Dyson and Moore, 1983: 44-45).

In agrarian societies a person's control over his or her life is largely dependent on kinship, family, and marriage relationships:

Thus cultural practices - such as those of the north Indian system - that tend to constrain or erode the personal links between a married woman and her natal kin directly diminish the woman's autonomy. If, at the same time, norms of avoidance make it difficult for the woman to establish affective links within the household into which she marries, she is left socially almost powerless (Dyson and Moore, 1983: 45-46).

Dyson and Moore (1983: 47-48) point out that even if they are correct with regard to the influence of kinship on female autonomy, the kinship system itself may be determined by more fundamental causes such as the requirements of an agrarian economy and in particular the value of the labour in rice-based farming systems. But it is difficult to show any causal connections or clear spatial connections: consequently they suggest that it is more realistic to use culture as the primary determining factor for their analysis.

This raises the question, however, whether both female autonomy and the kinship system are independently linked to the requirement for female labour in rice farming, that is, they are both symptoms of the economic system rather than one being the cause of the other. It is true that there are rice growing areas in South Asia, such as Bangladesh, where women play only a small part in cultivation, but these may be exceptions, though large ones, due, for example, to overriding religious requirements.

Dyson and Moore (1983: 48) argue that the northern kinship system means that early marriage for women is preferred. It helps protect their

chastity, cuts them off from their families, and makes them more likely to accept the structure of authority in their new families, and weakens the husband-wife bond. It also reduces the burden to the family of supporting daughters who after marriage will not contribute to the family, nor will their children. Finally, it will lengthen the child-bearing period for the birth of sons, a very important consideration in a patrilineal society where the transmission of property depends on male heirs. These factors making for early marriage were either absent or much weaker under the southern system.

Many of the arguments that Dyson and Moore put forward are reasonable, but their ethnographic description is often erroneous. While their description of North India is reasonably accurate their description of South India is not. Even if cross-cousin marriage is favoured it is a gross exaggeration to describe the South Indian descent group as endogamous. The most commonly favoured marriage in South India, depending on caste and region, is matrilateral cross-cousin, that is with mother's brother's daughter², the favoured uncle-niece marriage, that is with the sister's daughter, is arguably in kinship terms equivalent to this type of marriage: both involve the uncle using his rights over his niece to marry her himself or into his family while the alternative patrilateral cross-cousin marriage to father's sister's daughter is often banned. This allows marriage in one direction only: one family gives brides to the other but never receives brides; consequently the daughters' descendants and any property accompanying them are dispersed. Dyson and Moore's emphasis on the strength of relations between affines is exaggerated: this certainly applies to their statement that

2 The favoured uncle-niece marriage, that is with the sister's daughter, is arguably in kinship terms equivalent to this type of marriage: both involve the uncle using his rights over his niece to marry her himself or into his family.

males are at least as likely to enter into social, economic, and political relations with other males with whom they are related by marriage (i.e. affines) as they are with males with whom they are related by blood (i.e. descent) (Dyson and Moore, 1983: 44).

They go too far in arguing that 'female chastity is less important, and both the woman's sexuality and her personal movements are less rigidly controlled' (Dyson and Moore, 1983: 45). It is a very relative argument. Attitudes to female freedom are somewhat more relaxed in the South than in the North but this does not mean that families do not take female chastity very seriously: a girl who is regarded as too free, for example who talks to boys, will be subject to village gossip and innuendo and may very well become unmarriageable as a result. Nor is it true that 'affective ties between husband and wife represent no social threats to the descent group' (Dyson and Moore, 1983: 45). The patrilineal joint family is favoured in the South and although it may be somewhat less common than in the North the possibility of the wife's influence on the husband threatening the unity of the family and particularly his relationship to his parents is regarded very seriously. It is certainly not a society marked by 'some independent control by females of their own sexuality - for example, in the form of choice of marriage partners' (Dyson and Moore, 1983: 45). Arranged marriage is virtually universal even in Kerala where female autonomy is acknowledged to be particularly high.

However, the authors are not entirely unaware of the gap between their description of the southern system and empirical reality, for they note in a footnote that in practice the contrast

between certain features of northern and southern kinship may not always be quite as marked as the ideal-typical descriptions imply. Of course, choice of marriage partner for southern females is often nonexistent, and chastity is prized in the south as well as the north. Thus ... the difference between northern and southern system is often a subtle one of degree (Dyson and Moore, 1983: 57,fn31).

But these minor inconsistencies go to the very heart of their description; what is the value of their model if it does not accord with reality? The reason why it does not may be that it is not a description of South India but of Sri Lanka. Dyson and Moore acknowledge that their schema 'derived most directly from the work of Nur Yalman' (Dyson and Moore, 1983: 56,fn 23), specifically from his book *Under the Bo Tree, Studies in Caste, Kinship and Marriage in the Interior of Ceylon* (1971). While it is true that they do acknowledge a number of other authors, notably Karve (1965) and Dumont and Pocock (1957), these works are more concerned with the principles of kinship organization than with true ethnographic description. The latter, with regard to South India, seems to be entirely derived from Yalman.

According to Yalman, in the remote areas of the Kandyan highlands, the kinship system is bilateral with both matrilineal and patrilineal cross-cousin marriage; there is a strong tendency to endogamy; marriage rites are very weak: significantly among the Buddhist Sinhalese marriage is a civil ceremony, not a religious rite as it is among the Hindus of South India; dowry is minimal, affines are strongly linked; and the young have a high degree of discretion over marriage. Significantly, whereas arranged marriage is still dominant in South India, in Sri Lanka it has largely given way to love marriage.

While Yalman relates his findings to South India, his understanding of social systems essentially derives from Sri Lanka. Indeed, part of the very interest in Yalman's description is that it is not true of India nor, from my experience, does it entirely apply to coastal Sri Lanka, but these issues are examined below. Furthermore, Yalman does not argue that the Dravidian kinship prevailing is necessarily associated with bilateral kinship, only that it can be and is so in the Kandyan region that he is studying. Indeed, in South India, outside Kerala, it is generally associated

with a patrilineal system. Dyson and Moore's acceptance of Yalman's description may be related to Moore being a specialist on Sri Lanka, while Dyson may be more at home with North India than with South India.

While Dyson and Moore are not always accurate about South India much of what they say is applicable to Sri Lanka. The kinship system does seem to promote affinal interests and thus prevent women from being cut off from their natal homes; and it may give them a measure of autonomy. Nevertheless, kinship systems by themselves do not explain how family relations work. The South Indian society that I have experienced (excluding Kerala) is in many ways closer to North Indian society than it is to Sri Lankan society. In particular, the organization of the family in Sri Lanka is quite distinct from that in South India and has different implications in terms of marriage, even though the formal kinship structures are similar. Furthermore, one cannot study the precise influence of kinship on family relations in South Asia without taking into account such a central social institution as caste, or ignoring the impact of the economic system.

Because Dyson and Moore have failed to address the problem of how the kinship system interacts with other factors, their model seems very static. It is difficult to see how marriage patterns, as well as fertility and mortality rates, change.

2.2 Marriage Patterns in Sri Lanka

2.2.1 Age at marriage

In this section marriage and marriage patterns in Sri Lanka are examined, starting with an examination of trends in Sri Lankan marriage patterns, followed by a review of the explanations given by various authors for the patterns, and finally a look at the various factors in Sri Lankan history that might be involved.

The primary source for information on Sri Lankan marriage trends is the census. Table 1 lists the singulate mean age at marriage as recorded by the censuses from 1901 to 1981.

Table 2.1 Singulate mean age at marriage (SMAM) by sex, 1901-1981.

Census year	Male	Female	Difference
1901	24.6	18.5*	6.1*
1911	26.9	19.9	7.0
1921	27.5	20.6	6.9
1946	27.0	20.7	6.3
1953	27.2	20.9	6.3
1963	27.9	22.1	5.8
1971	28.0	23.5	4.5
1981	27.9	24.4	3.5

Notes: * Fernando (1975) records the female SMAM for 1901 as 18.1 with an age difference of 6.5.

Sources: 1901-1921 census figures - Dixon, 1970: 205.
1946-1981 census figures - Nadarajah, 1986: 100.

Apart from the decade 1901 to 1911, male age at marriage appears to have risen little, but female age at marriage has been rising almost continuously, though apparently at a slower rate between 1921 and 1946, and then at a faster pace. As noted by Fernando (1975: 185) and Dixon (1970: 202), the early figures, particularly 1911 and 1921, are probably somewhat overstated. The report of the 1911 census noted that

the mean female age is probably higher than is actually the case as there is a tendency to over-state the age of the bride at the registration of a marriage, on account of legislation - imperfectly understood, but recognized as existing - as to the age at which girls can marry. In many cases the parties have contracted marriages according to their own religious rites and customs, or lived together as husband and wife for years before registering their marriage (Denham, 1912: 350).

The Census Commissioner, Denham (1912: 323), thought, perhaps optimistically, that, since the 1901 census had been the first at which information on marriage had been obtained, enumerators probably entered people in customary unions as married. He believed that by 1911 the

enumerators had, in his words, become more civilized and thus refused to countenance customary unions as marriage. The problem was apparently also true of the 1921 census (Ranasinha, 1946 Vol.1: 192). The impression is given not only that the 1911 and 1921 censuses grossly overstated the age at marriage, at least of females, but that the 1901 census may also have overstated it to a lesser extent³.

The censuses since 1946 seem to have been more accurate for they have recorded customary marriages and registered marriages separately (Nadarajah, 1986: 90). Depending on the degree to which the early census figures were distorted upwards, age at marriage of both sexes seems to have risen further and for females at a somewhat steadier rate than is recorded in the official census figures.

3 Dixon has made a correction for this problem: 'In order to remove at least a minimal number of customary marriages from the ranks of the unmarried in the earlier censuses, it was assumed that the proportion unmarried at all ages had not changed between 1921 and 1946, and that the unmarried population was thus inflated in the earlier years by at least the difference between the 1921 and 1946 figures (64.7/61.3 for men, and 54.3/51.7 for women). The proportions of men and women never married within the different age groups in the earlier years were then reduced by these amounts', to obtain the estimates shown in Table 2.2. This correction, as Dixon notes, is a highly conservative one and assumes that misreporting of marital status was equal across all age groups. The assumption is probably fair, for in 1963 the proportion of married persons reporting their unions as customary was 20 per cent at ages 20-24 and exactly the same at ages 40-44 (Dixon, 1970: 202-204). This reduces the calculated SMAM slightly. Dixon (1970: 204) notes, however, that the revised percentages in 1901, 1911 and 1921 may still be too high.

Table 2.2 Singulate mean age at marriage by sex, 1901 - 1921

Year	Census		Revised	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
1901	24.6	18.5	24.0	18.3
1911	26.9	19.9	26.1	19.7
1921	27.5	20.6	26.9	20.3

Source: Dixon, 1970: 205, Table 8.3.

Nevertheless, it is fairly clear that, although age at marriage was much lower than it is currently, it was already higher than it is in any other country in South Asia today. Hence, in regional terms Sri Lanka was in marriage, as well as geographically, already an outlier. This raises Smith's point, mentioned earlier, about whether such a pattern reflected even earlier changes in marriage patterns or pre-existing socio-cultural variations (P.Smith 1980: 65-66). The evidence suggests that both are, to some extent, true.

According to the 1911 census commissioner, Denham, female marriage negotiations among the Sinhalese had been expected to commence immediately following puberty, while Tamils and Moors (Muslims) were often married before puberty (Denham, 1912: 347). That is, marriage had been expected to take place considerably earlier, depending on how lengthy the negotiations were, than the census indicated was the case in 1911. A more recent writer has commented that

most people in Ceylon consider a girl who has attained puberty or the first menstruation to be a woman. She is expected to shed her childish ways and learn to play the role of an adult woman, for she is now marriageable. The majority of the village girls of the last generation were married between the ages of 13 and 19, and a similar proportion would be found even today (Siriwardena, 1963: 160).

The last comment is factually incorrect, but the point Siriwardena is making remains. The emphasis on puberty stressed by both Denham and Siriwardena is expressed in Sinhalese culture by elaborate and very expensive puberty ceremonies symbolizing that a girl has come of age and is marriageable.

Denham's comments that Sri Lankan marriage had been early and universal is supported by the early writers. John Davy, writing in 1821, commented that

Old bachelors and old maids are rarely to be seen amongst the Singalese, almost every man marries, and marries young, and the wife not of his own but his father's choice ... When a young man has reached the age of eighteen or twenty, he is considered marriageable, and it is the duty of his father to provide him with a proper wife ... (Davy, 1969: 213).

Davy noted that the father was content if among other things the bride was younger than his son. Robert Percival, writing in 1803, remarked that 'they are in general even regularly married at twelve' (Percival, 1803: 181-182).

Nevertheless, this earliness by Western standards should be kept in perspective. Percival was probably exaggerating the earliness of Sinhalese marriage with most sources supporting Denham (1912:327), that the Sinhalese preferred marriage immediately following puberty. This was later than was true for other groups in South Asia, where the almost universal preference was for prepubertal marriage. The point is brought home by Lindenbaum (1981: 395-396) who discusses a rise in female marriage in Comilla District, Bangladesh, from infancy last century to post-puberty now.

This raises the question whether a rise in the age at marriage from infancy is comparable to rises in marriage after puberty. That is, what is meant by marriage, and are infant marriages the same phenomenon as later marriages? It is unlikely that very early marriages would involve connubial relations⁴. Infant marriages are essentially a contractual arrangement between families. Nevertheless, very early marriage should not be dismissed too easily. As noted before, Asian marriage concerns more than conjugal relations; marriage concerns families as much as individuals, and to ignore changes to very early marriages may be to ignore important changes in the nature of the marriage relationship, as well as the factors determining marriage and hence marriage age. Furthermore, any move

4 Singh (1990), however, has found in Himachal Pradesh in Northern India that some prepubertal marriages were "proper" marriages including cohabitation and sexual relations.

from very early marriage to later marriage, even if it is still relatively early, must affect the role of individuals in determining their marriages. A very early marriage is, in effect, a statement that the family comes first, while individual concerns are very much secondary.

A second question which needs to be considered concerns the nature of changes to very early marriage and to somewhat later marriage; and whether the same underlying causes are involved. There are many factors involved, some of which are much more important at some ages than they are at others.

2.2.2 The age gap between spouses has been greatly reduced

Several further points need to be made about Sri Lankan marriage patterns. The first is that the age gap which was between six and seven years has, in recent years, halved, to, in 1981, three and a half years. This has major implications for the nature of the conjugal relationship. As Selvaratnam notes of societies with large age gaps, 'the woman's already subordinate position at the time of her marriage is further compounded by the additional advantage her husband has accrued with his age and experience' (Selvaratnam, 1988: 17). Such a relationship of subordination is unlikely to be conducive to a close conjugal relationship.

2.2.3 Variance in female age at marriage has increased

The second point is that variance in female age at marriage, the span over which women are likely to marry, has greatly widened. In contrast the variance of male age at marriage, which was much greater, has reduced slightly, and in this respect the two sexes have become much more similar. Dixon points out that

Male marriages were *more* concentrated and female marriages *less* concentrated in the postwar years than at the turn of the century, bringing

the index of concentration⁵ for the two sexes closer together. In 1901 slightly over one-quarter of the men married within the five years surrounding the median of 23.3 years, whereas almost three-quarters of the women married in the period surrounding the median of 17.2 years. By 1963 the I_{C5} for both men and women was slightly over one-third with, of course, marriages occurring on the average much later (Dixon, 1970: 214).

David Smith (1980: 6-8) has also commented that the distinctive female age pattern of marriage in Sri Lanka and the Philippines is the wide age range over which marriages take place. He notes that in most Asian countries a later age at marriage has meant that everyone delays their marriages by a certain number of years but that at the ages when marriages are concentrated, there is the same intensity as before. In Sri Lanka and the Philippines, however, marriage delay has led to a greater dispersal of marriage as some people have delayed their marriage much more than others.

Smith et al. (1982: 27) argue that 'at the other extreme, Sri Lanka's dispersed pattern of marriage ages probably reflects not only its level of economic development but also its considerable cultural diversity'. These factors are undoubtedly important. Age at marriage does vary by ethnic group, even controlling for other factors. As already noted, the 1911 Census Commissioner Denham commented that Tamil and Muslim women tended to marry before puberty, and Sinhalese women after. Similarly, economic development has resulted in greater socio-economic diversity in the population and this is likely to have affected the ages at which people marry; though Dixon (1970: 275) notes that differentials in age at marriage between groups of different socio-economic status are surprisingly small.

Why should economic development cause the female age at marriage to become more diverse but not the male? It may represent a change in the

5 The index of concentration I_{C5} is derived from period statistics, showing the proportion of first marriages before age 45 falling within a five-year age range centred on the median.

factors affecting female marriage, in particular less community and family pressure for early marriage; in the absence of such pressures other factors are likely to determine the marriage age.

It may also reflect a change in the nature of the relationship between the two marriage partners. In the past a woman was regarded as marriageable at a particular time, irrespective of when a specific man was marriageable. If a potential groom was not ready for marriage, another groom was chosen. Marriage was, after all, arranged, very often between people who were not acquaintances. Now, however, marriages are generally self-selected, love matches, between individuals who not only are acquainted but may have been engaged for years. This means that a woman's marriage age is more likely to be affected by the age at which a man marries; it also means that she can afford if engaged to delay her marriage. However, it is not simply love marriages which have become more diverse. Formerly, arranged marriages took place when it was thought that the boy and girl were old enough to marry. Now arranged marriage is likely to occur when the parents become worried that their offspring will never marry; by this time they may have real difficulties in getting them married at all. It is not surprising, therefore, that the diversity of ages has also become much wider. Clearly, though, the factors responsible for the increased diversity of female marriage are likely to be related to those responsible for the delay in female marriage.

2.2.4 Is celibacy increasing?

The third point about Sri Lankan marriage patterns that requires discussion is the level of celibacy. In the discussions of Asian marriage patterns above, only brief reference was made to celibacy because in almost all Asian countries marriage continues to be virtually universal. Sri Lanka, however, is a partial exception to this generalization. The proportion of

bachelors aged 40-44 has generally been around 10 per cent in recent censuses and the proportion of spinsters in the same age range around 3 to 5 per cent. These rates, though low by Western standards, are high by Asian standards, except for the Philippines.

The evidence is that celibacy rates have not varied greatly from their present levels for either sex for a considerable time. It is, however, difficult to be precise about this. In the earlier censuses many of those customarily married were not included as married, which gives the impression that the proportion of celibates has fallen substantially. The Census Commissioner of 1921 argued that, if the census were corrected for this factor, marriage would be nearly universal (cited in Sarkar, 1957: 72-73). Dixon comments that 'If this is indeed the case, there has been a considerable increase in the propensity to forgo marriage altogether as well as to postpone it' (Dixon, 1970: 209). She concludes on the basis of the inadequate and contradictory evidence that there probably 'has been some rise in celibacy during the century along with the delayed marriages' (Dixon, 1970: 209).

Apart from the difficulty of interpreting earlier data on celibacy there is also a problem concerning more recent data. During the 1970s there was a very rapid increase in female age at marriage. It might be expected that this would lead to an increase in female celibacy, but, without knowing the precise reasons for the increase in the marriage age, it is very difficult to say. The problem is largely that only when a cohort has finished marrying (theoretically when they are all dead) can it be said precisely how many will eventually marry. In practice, of course, demographers usually choose a cut-off date for measuring celibacy, say 40, 45 or 50 on the basis that few women marry after this date, and those few who do are largely irrelevant in terms of the demographers' prime interest, fertility. In this study the data used were mostly collected in 1985 and some in 1987. The relevant cohorts

are just approaching these cut-off dates. Most of the literature discussed refers to much earlier data.

Trussell (1980), in an analysis of age at first marriage for Sri Lanka based on the Sri Lanka Fertility Survey of 1975, used a variation of Coale's marriage function. This method in theory can predict fairly accurately not only age at marriage but the ultimate proportion marrying. The c value, the proportion who ever marry, was found among female to be 0.825 for the 20-24 cohort, 0.968 for the cohort aged 25-29, 0.932 for the cohort aged 30-34, 0.968 for the cohort aged 35-39, 0.959 for the cohort aged 40-44, and 0.981 for the cohort aged 45-49. Trussell remarks: 'In Sri Lanka there is no smooth pattern, but the estimate of c is smallest for the younger cohort. The cohort 25-29 is seen to be an anomaly; if it is omitted one obtains a smoother trend' (Trussell, 1980: 21).

If the 30-34 cohort is excluded there is little evidence of change, before the youngest age group, the 20-24 cohort, which is, as Trussell acknowledges, suspiciously low. He remarks: 'one might suspect that the estimated value of c for the youngest age group is too low, that, for example, more than 82.5 percent of women aged 20-24 in Sri Lanka will eventually marry' (Trussell, 1980: 21). Trussell suggests that in the absence of adequate data to estimate c as in this case, to estimate the mean age at marriage arbitrary levels can be set: for Sri Lanka he suggests the more plausible 0.90, or even 0.95. Clearly the evidence for a trend in celibacy is not strong. Trussell's calculations of c values using ten-year cohorts show few signs of a trend: c for the 20-29 cohort was 0.969, for the 30-39 cohort 0.955 and for the 40-49 cohort 0.970 (Trussell, 1980: 22).

The very high c value for the 20-24 cohort may, if correct, indicate a rapid change in proportions ever marrying or it may represent the impact of a period event, such as severe economic problems making it difficult to

marry or the effects of a marriage squeeze causing a shortage of grooms. It has been argued that both these circumstances existed in the early 1970s immediately before the Sri Lanka Fertility Survey. To some extent, the women involved may have been merely delaying their marriage rather than not marrying at all.

More recently Fernando (1985), in a comparison of the 1971 census, the 1975 WFS and the 1981 census, has found signs of an imminent rise in spinsterhood with the proportion of never married females rising in all age groups, with particularly large rises in the 30-34 and 35-39 year age groups. He notes, in particular, that the four Southwestern low-country districts of Colombo, Kalutara, Galle and Matara all have particularly high never married rates, a state of affairs he attributes to their having been subject to Western influence since the sixteenth century (Fernando, 1985:289), which if correct indicates a remarkable time lag. It is possible that the rates simply reflect the economic conditions of the early 1970s which afflicted these districts particularly badly. While De Silva's (1990) analysis of the 1982 CPS suggests that the proportions of females never marrying is by Asian standards a comparatively high 10 per cent, it nevertheless shows little change by cohort.

The two countries with reasonably high levels of celibacy, Sri Lanka and the Philippines, are also the countries with a wide dispersal of marriage ages; this may suggest that the two traits have similar causes. Perhaps the lack of family and community pressures to marry, or a greater reliance on self-selection, is largely responsible.

2.2.5 Marriage stability

The fourth point concerning marriage patterns is marital stability which has not been discussed until now because with the exception of Malay and Indonesian marriage (see Jones, 1980), Asian marriage is generally

fairly stable. This is particularly true of South Asia. In India marriage is a sacrament, which is the central event, at least of a woman's life, and is indissoluble. Once she is married the bond cannot be broken, even by death: hence the concept of *sati* in which the widow burnt herself to death on her husband's funeral pyre, and the concept of the virgin widow. There is a common concept that men and women are married in successive lives, through reincarnation, also known as transmigration of souls. It is true that the ban on widow remarriage was most strictly adhered to among the higher castes, but even where widow remarriage was allowed, generally only the first marriage was blessed as a sacrament and it alone was regarded as the true marriage.

In Sri Lanka among the Buddhists marriage is not a sacrament, though there does seem to be some concept that husband and wife can be married in successive lives: this is said to have been true in the case of the Buddha. The statistical evidence generally indicates that marriage is fairly stable. The census in 1981 listed per 10,000 persons aged 15 years and over, only 23.5 males and 37.5 females as divorced, and 18.7 males and 25.6 females as legally separated (Nadarajah, 1986: 98). The divorced were slightly up on the 1971 census but the legally separated were slightly down. These figures are so low that they must reflect legal concepts rather than true rates of separation. World Fertility Survey figures indicate somewhat higher, though still reasonably low, figures for separation and divorce. Of all women the Sri Lanka World Fertility Survey (SLWFS) showed 87.7 per cent of first marriages undissolved, 6.2 per cent dissolved by the death of husband, and 6.1 per cent dissolved by divorce or separation (Dept. of Census and Statistics, 1978: 66). In all, about one marriage in twelve failed. The report of the SLWFS (Dept. of Census and Statistics, 1978: 64) notes that there is little sign of an increase in marriage dissolution.

The report comments on remarriage that

the number of women in later unions is quite low. ... 96.0% of all ever-married women have been married only once; 4.0% have been married twice; and a negligible percentage (0.1%) have been married three or more times. Even for women married 30 or more years age, these percentages are respectively 89.4%, 10.1% and 0.5%.

Detailed analysis ... indicates that 33% of those whose first marriage was dissolved have remarried. It appears that these re-marriages tend to occur within about five years of the dissolution (Dept. of Census and Statistics, 1978: 67).

The Sri Lanka Demographic and Health Survey (SLDHS) found even lower levels of divorced and separated, indeed just over half that found by the SLWFS: this difference may be due to the SLWFS covering all ever married women whereas the SLDHS was restricted to the 15-49 age range, excluding older women who had been subject longer to the risk of divorce and separation. SLDHS (Dept. of Census and Statistics, 1988: 20) recorded 91.4 per cent of ever married women 15-49 as currently living with their husbands, 3.8 per cent as widowed, 6.3 per cent as divorced, and 3.2 per cent as separated.

These data sources may underestimate divorce and separation. To be divorced or separated is not very respectable in Sri Lanka, and women may be reluctant to admit to it. Women who have remarried in particular may be reluctant to admit that their current marriage is not their first. Many of the respondents in the Sri Lankan Demographic Change Project, which this thesis analyses, complained about marital problems but few admitted to being separated. Because of social pressures women might complain about marriages but be reluctant to actually separate or to report if they do.

The writings of anthropologists and of early travellers indicate greater instability than shows up in census evidence. The anthropologist, Edmund Leach, wrote of the village of Pul Eliya, which he studied in 1954, that the common-law marriage, which most villagers practised, was so unstable, uncertain even, that it was difficult to distinguish between

marriage and promiscuous mating, and that, as a result, most people had been married more than once.

However, Leach remarks that, in addition to common-law marriage, there were two other forms of marriage. One of these was the registered marriage, the only legally recognized form of marriage. This form of marriage was indulged in only by those individuals who had political ambitions. The Pul Eliya villagers had a theory that no one could get appointed to any kind of government office - such as village headman, Vel Vidane, Village Committee Member - unless he had registered his marriage' (Leach, 1971: 91).

The third and sociologically more significant form of marriage was a type of ceremonial marriage, which differed from the common-law marriage in that it was really a kind of formal alliance between families, symbolized by the payment of dowry. Significantly it was much more stable, and the divorces that did occur were much more bitter:

... instead of simply setting up house with a lover, a man may go through a very elaborate marriage ceremonial which includes the use of formal matchmakers, expensive feasting for assembled kinsmen, and in some cases, the formal bestowal of dowry on the bride by the bride's parents.

Marriages of this type are numerically in a minority, but they include most of those which are sociologically important. In general, the arrangement and the staging of such formal marriages are matters for the parents of the couple concerned, and it is they who bear the expense. Such marriages form part of the strategy of village politics, the main issues at stake being the transmission of property from one generation to another. Expensive formal marriages are confined to the relatively wealthy; they can be thought of as political alliances with kinsmen on either side assembling *en masse* to witness the treaty of friendship. But the parties concerned are likely to be rivals and potential enemies rather than natural companions. It is significant that when such marriages end in divorce, as they sometimes do, the quarrel becomes a *cause celebre* and a source of long-standing bitterness between whole groups of kin. In contrast, the more casual type of marriage can break up without anyone commenting on the matter at all (Leach, 1971: 90-91).

The type of marriage has no implications for inheritance:

In both types of unions, marriage, if it can be called such, establishes the inheritance potential of the children. Every child is an heir to both its recognised parents individually, no matter what form of marriage they may have been through. But the formal type of marriage does more than that, it establishes a relation of affinity between two sets of kinsmen, and it is this alliance aspect of the union which receives ritual emphasis (Leach, 1971: 91).

Leach is describing the Sinhalese, but Denham (1912: 335), in his report on the 1911 census, found a similar distinction among the Tamils.

Leach's description of customary marriage and ceremonial marriage emphasizes a point made before, that, where the family is involved in marriage, it is not peripheral, in the sense of simply facilitating marriage, but is central to the very nature of the marriage. The ceremonial marriage more obviously involves the two families because it is essentially an alliance between them. The consequence for the family of the break-up of the ceremonial marriage is clearly much greater than that of a customary marriage. Leach does not discuss how the families ensure the longevity of these ties but presumably they put more pressure on the marriage partners to stay together and more of their own resources into making sure that it is in their own interest to do so: significantly dowry was given only in the case of ceremonial marriages.

The distinction between ceremonial and customary marriages may give the impression that, whereas ceremonial marriage is essentially a matter between families, customary marriage is solely the concern of individuals: this is a simplification of the true situation. People may have a certain freedom of initiative within their marriage but only if they act within the limits set down by their families. Leach's student, Nur Yalman (1971) makes essentially this point. He, like Leach, distinguishes between the more formal marriage arranged by the family and the customary marriage with, apparently, little formal arrangement. Whereas Leach distinguishes between the two on the basis that the former involves family alliances and the latter does not, Yalman emphasizes that customary

marriage involves two partners who are already related, that is, are already in close alliance, whereas the more ceremonial marriage involves marriage to someone outside the kin group, that is, who is being brought into close alliance. Yalman, in essence, argues that the key characteristic of Sinhalese marriage, as distinct from simply sexual relations, is that it places the individual and his or her family in a relationship of alliance to the family into which he or she marries. If the family does not recognize this relationship, then, in effect, no marriage has taken place. If the marriage partner was already related, the question of recognition did not arise, for he or she was already a member of the kindred. Yalman concludes:

In kinship terms, therefore, the reason why a marriage ceremony may be omitted among close kin is that structurally nothing happens. The particular relationship is already in existence since it is implied by the kinship of the rest of the relatives and the cross-cousin rights and obligations (Yalman, 1971: 172).

It should be noted that cross-cousins were the preferred marriage partners. Cross-cousin marriage means marrying the mother's brother's child or father's sister's child; parallel cousin marriage, which was banned, involves the father's brother's child or mother's sister's child. Yalman claims that sexual relations were permitted between cross-cousins before marriage (Yalman, 1971: 172) though I know no Sinhalese who believes this.

The marriage only needed to be formally recognized where no relationship of alliance already existed, that is where two unrelated people were marrying. According to Yalman (1971:207-208), the marriage ceremony had the effect of putting the marriage partners into the relationship of cross-cousins. Yalman notes that while Leach does not describe his concept of the kindred, all marriages in Pul Eliya were supposed to occur within the *variga* which acted as a single status group, in which all members were regarded as relatives and presumably in a relationship of alliance. Provided the interests of the family were not

endangered by a marriage outside the status group it allowed a degree of discretion to the young. In Sri Lanka the demand for more direct family involvement in the marriage is very likely to come from the younger generation if they deem it to be in their interest.

Yalman, unlike Leach, does not discuss whether customary marriages are marked by a greater degree of instability than are the more ceremonial marriages. What he does say is that matches without children tend to be much more unstable than those with children. However, what surprises Yalman, in contrast to Leach, is not the instability of marriage, but rather its relative stability, at least once children are born, despite any apparent strong impediment to divorce.

It may seem surprising that in a society with such formal ease of marriage and divorce, with marriage payments, a system of property rights for women, no unilineal descent groups, and with both polyandry and polygyny, there should be such stability in the domestic unit. Two important reasons explain the seeming inconsistency:

(a) The tasks and domestic roles of men and women are distinct and so specifically allocated that each partner is quite clear as to what his rights and obligations are. No more can be demanded. In this respect the *ge* is well isolated from purely personal difficulties unless these happen to be great enough to upset the basic rights and obligations.

(b) Great sexual freedom is granted to both partners. The criminal nature of adultery (when it occurs within the same caste) is minimized (Yalman, 1971: 186-187).

Nonetheless, even if Leach exaggerated the instability of marriage and Yalman is correct that marriage is more stable than might be expected, the impression given is very different from that which I gained in my field work. The two writers may have overstressed the instability of customary marriage to contrast it with the more formal type of marriage. Nevertheless, even if this is so, there seem to be significant differences between Kandyan Sinhalese society which Leach and Yalman are describing and lowland Sinhalese societies where most of my fieldwork was conducted.

Denham (1912: 335), in his report on the 1911 census, noted that Kandyan marriages were much more likely to end in divorce than those of the general community (predominantly low-country Sinhalese and Tamils) a difference he attributed simply to marriage regulations. It seems more likely that the Kandyan Marriage Ordinance reflected practice, than that practice reflected the ordinance, for only a minority of marriages were registered at this time.

Earlier writers, too, have remarked, sometimes in horrified tones, on the instability of Sri Lankan marriage. The most interesting of all the early European travellers to Ceylon was Robert Knox who lived for 20 years in seventeenth century Ceylon as a prisoner of the King of Kandy. On his return to England in 1681, he published under the auspices of the Royal Society a remarkable book, a virtually complete ethnography of Kandyan Sinhalese society of the time. Knox's account of Kandyan society is generally sympathetic but, as a Puritan, he disapproved of the impermanence of their marriages:

But their Marriages are but of little force or validity. For if they disagree and mislike one the other; they part without disgrace. Yet it stands firmer for the Man than for the Woman howbeit they do leave one the other at their pleasure. They do give according to their Ability a Portion of Cattle, Slaves and Money with their Daughters; but if they chance to mislike one another and part asunder, this Portion must be returned again, and then she is fit for another Man, being as they account never the worse for wearing.

Both Women and Men do commonly wed four or five times before they can settle themselves to their contentation. And if they have Children when they part, the Common Law is, the Males for the Man, and the Females for the Woman. But many of the Women are free of this controversie, being Childless (Knox, 1981 [1681]: 248).

Somewhat more recent writers on the Kandyans have made similar comments. John Davy (1969: 214), in 1821, noted that among the rich there were trial marriages, while the poor parents were merely asked to part with their daughters. Little concern was paid to chastity and infidelity was

easily forgiven unless it involved a man of low caste, in which case the woman would be divorced (Davy, 1969: 215).

However, the dichotomy suggested earlier between unstable Kandyan Sinhalese marriage and stable marriage elsewhere may be too simple. Denham's comment that, among lower-caste Tamils, marriage was easily dissolved (Denham, 1912: 335), has already been noted. Similarly, Percival found that Knox's description of sexual licence applied equally to the low-country Sinhalese (Percival, 1803:176).

More recent accounts of low-country society have also noted the existence of an informal customary marriage along with the stricter formal marriage system. Leonard Woolf's novel, *The Village in the Jungle* (1974), drew upon his experience at the turn of the century as a British Administrator in Ceylon; in it he described life in a remote low-country village in Hambantota District.

In towns and large villages there are especially among people of the higher castes, many rigid customs and formalities regarding marriages always observed. It is true that the exclusion of women no longer exists; but young girls after puberty are supposed to be kept within the house, and only to meet men of the immediate family. A marriage is arranged formally; a formal proposal is made by the man's father or mother to the girl's father or the mother. There are usually long negotiations and bargainings between the two families over the dowry. When at last the preliminaries are settled and the wedding day arrives, it is a very solemn and formal affair. All the members of each family are invited; the bridegroom goes with his friends and relations to the house of the bride, and then conducts her in procession, followed by the guests, to his own house. Much money is spent upon entertaining, and new clothes and presents.

But in the villages like Beddagama, these customs and formalities are often not observed. The young girls are not kept within the house; they have to work. The young men know them, and often choose for themselves. There is no family arrangement, no formal proposal of marriage; the villagers are too poor for there to be any question of a dowry.

And yet the villager makes a clear distinction between marriage and what he calls concubinage. In the former the woman is recognised by his and her families as his wife; almost invariably she is openly taken to his house, and there is a procession and feasting on the wedding day: in the latter the woman is never publicly recognised as a wife. Marriage is considered to be more respectable than concubinage, and in a headman's

immediate family it would be more usual to find the women: recognised wives than 'unrecognised' wives. And though in the ordinary village life the 'unrecognised' wife is as common as or even more common than the 'recognised' wife, and is treated by all exactly as if she were the man's wife, yet the distinction is understood and becomes apparent upon formal occasions. For instance, a woman who is living with a man as his 'unrecognised' wife cannot be present at her sister's wedding. When a man takes a woman to live with him in this informal way, the arrangement is, however, regarded as in many ways a formal one, a slightly lower form than the recognised marriage. The man and the woman are of the same caste always: there would even be strong objection on the part of the man or woman's relations if either the one or the other did not come from a 'respectable' family (Woolf, 1974: 36-37).

There would appear to be a dichotomy between a formal style of marriage, often involving an arranged marriage and dowry, and a much less elaborate customary marriage which tends, because it affects fewer people, to be less stable. The formal marriage prevails among the more powerful and richer people of the village and among the towns, especially of the low-country. The customary marriages prevailed, according to Leach and Yalman, among the poor, the majority, in the villages, or at least in the poor and remote villages where they worked. I am not attempting to identify how common customary marriages are at present, but the evidence implies that they were very common in the past, even in the low country, and that the traits of customary marriage, including instability, were also found in more formal marriages.

Clearly, this is a matter which concerns much more than whether statistical sources reflect the true level of marital instability in Sri Lanka; it also concerns the nature of marriage itself. It has important implications for the processes of marriage and consequently for all aspects of marriage patterns. The stability of Sri Lankan marriage appears to be linked to the social and economic context within which a marriage takes place.

Marriages are likely to be more stable if there are major implications in terms of family relationships or property rights, and especially if parents have a high degree of influence over the lives of the young. Yalman (1971:277) suggests that one reason why low-country marriages may have

been stabler than Kandyan ones was because the low country was under Roman-Dutch law, under which the properties of bride and groom were merged into a single estate, while under Kandyan law the property remained separate. It seems somewhat questionable whether official property laws had much influence over family behaviour in this respect, but they may have reflected pre-existing differences in the social systems. Another factor that may be important was the comparatively greater availability of land, particularly *chena* (land used for shifting cultivation), in Kandyan areas as well as some of the remoter parts of the low-country such as Hambantota District about which Woolf (1974) wrote. The greater availability of land would have reduced the control of the parents over the younger family members, while the value of the land that the family already held would have been diminished, thereby reducing the value of marriage alliances as part of a strategy for protecting or enhancing family property. Yalman notes that in the village of Terutenne, people argued that marriage ceremonies were all newfangled inventions:

In the times of the Kandyan kings there was no arrangement or ceremony at all. One merely went to the mother of the girl who took one's fancy and asked for her daughter as a companion during the *chena* season. If one found that she did no work, she would be sent promptly back. There being no formal marriage there was no divorce (Yalman, 1971: 168).

One of the changes which has occurred is increasing population pressure which has reduced the availability of *chena* and consequently increased the value of land, and hence given the family a greater interest in the marriage and in particular in ensuring its stability.

In my own data there is little evidence that marriage was particularly unstable, even in the lifetime of the oldest respondents. The explanation may be that the Western Province, the location of seven of the eight field sites, was one of the most densely populated parts of the country where land

was at a premium. It is also possible that if the survey had included larger numbers of Kandyan Sinhalese the results might have been different.

If the arguments above are correct, the increase in love marriage presumably reflects a diminished interest of the parents in the marriage (discussed in Chapter 5) and has not been associated with an increase in the instability of marriage. There may be a time-lag involved, but a more convincing explanation is that there is more to keep the partners together. Yalman's statement concerning customary marriage that if the young bride did not work she would be sent back, indicates that while there were few impediments to customary marriage there was little also to maintain such marriages. This is probably not true nowadays, for a great deal is now required of both the groom and the bride. They should both be educated and the groom should preferably hold a job for which education is a prerequisite. Increasingly it is expected the bride should hold such a job and even when she does not work, she will be expected to manage the household, a duty that is considerably more complex than it was formerly. It is now expected, for example, that a wife will do many things once done by the husband, especially if the husband has to spend considerable periods away from the household, for instance, working according to fixed hours; a surprisingly common occurrence in coastal Sri Lanka is that the breadwinner boards during the week in Colombo and only returns home to the family on weekends. The wife has also taken over specific responsibilities such as looking after the family's health and helping with the children's education, tasks that would once have been left to the husband or parents-in-law, or simply neglected. The decline in arranged marriage has not been associated with increasing instability of marriage because while the choice of the partner may matter less to the family it is increasingly important to the groom.

Since my data provide little evidence of marriage instability either at the time of the survey or in the past, the causes of marriage instability and of changes in it are not explored in the data analysis in Chapters 4 and 5.

2.2.6 Polygamy

The final aspect of marriage patterns which needs to be examined is polygamy. Polygamy may seem to be a slightly esoteric topic in a country where levels are low but in fact it is quite relevant to the issue of the nature of marriage in Sri Lanka and its relationship with marriage patterns in general.

Currently both forms of polygamy, polygyny (one man with more than one wife) and polyandry (one woman with more than one husband) are rare in Sri Lanka, but neither is unknown. Polyandry is illegal whereas polygyny is legal only under the Muslim marriage code. Previously, however, both appear to have been more common. The literature is relatively scant concerning polygyny but for many early writers polyandry constituted their principal interest in Sri Lankan marriage.

Joao Ribeiro, a seventeenth century Portuguese writer wrote:

Their marriages excite laughter. A girl makes a contract to marry a man of her own caste (for they cannot marry outside it), and if the relations are agreeable they give a banquet and unite the betrothed couple. The next day a brother of the husband takes his place, and if there are seven brothers she is the wife of all of them, distributing the nights by turns, without the first husband having greater right than any of the others. If during the day any of them find the chamber unoccupied, he can have access to the woman if he thinks fit, and while he is within no one else can enter. She can refuse herself to none of them; whichever brother it may be that contracts the marriage, the woman is the wife of all; only if the youngest marry, none of the other brothers has any rights over her; but if there are two, up to five, they are satisfied with one woman; and the woman who is married to a husband with a large number of brothers is considered very fortunate, for all toil and cultivate for her and bring whatever they earn to the house, and she lives much honoured and well supported, and for this reason the children call all of the brothers their fathers (Ribeiro, n.d: 54).

Knox wrote more soberly:

In this Country each Man, even the greatest, hath but one Wife; but a Woman often has two Husbands. For it is lawful and common with them for two Brothers to keep house together with one Wife, and the Children do acknowledge and call both Fathers (Knox, 1981 [1681]: 248-249).

As Ribeiro's account, in particular, shows, the Western writers were much more shocked (and enjoyed being shocked) by a woman having more than one husband than a man having more than one wife.

A more informative account of polyandry is given by Davy:

Though concubinage and polygamy are contrary to their religion, both are indulged in by the Sinhalese, particularly the latter: and, it is remarkable, that in the Kandyan country, as in Tibet, a plurality of husbands is much more common than of wives. One woman has frequently two husbands; and I have heard of one having as many as seven. This singular species of polygamy is not confined to any caste or rank; it is more or less general amongst the high and low, the rich and poor. The joint husbands are always brothers. The apology of the poor is, that they cannot afford each to have a particular wife; and of the wealthy and men of rank, that such a union is politic, as it unites families, concentrates property and influence, and conduces to the interests of the children, who, having two fathers, will be better taken care of, and will still have a father though they may lose one (Davy, 1969: 214-215).

Polyandry, hence, is a form of strategic alliance between two brothers, and their wife, with the purpose of preserving or promoting their assets.

More recently Yalman lists the same reasons as given by Davy for polyandry but observes that he did not find a single case of polyandry among the wealthy (Yalman, 1971: 112). He remarks that polyandry can be a satisfactory arrangement:

the main obligations of a wife are in the nature of housekeeping, and these are easily shared if the men can get on in the first place. Second, with the deep cleavage between the sexes there is no particular emphasis on the special and private emotional attachments between individual men and women to which Westerners are accustomed. Third, it is of no small importance that two men together can better support a wife than one man alone, with fewer children into the bargain and rather more prosperity and well-being for all. In Terutenne, the poor are sufficiently poor to take this economic issue into consideration (Yalman, 1971: 109).

Yalman observes however that polyandry has become rare, and he suggests two reasons: one moral, that it was disapproved of, especially by

the urban upper classes and officials; and the second, more practical, that its confinement to the poorest had reduced its prestige (Yalman, 1971: 109-110).

Yalman also notes that polygyny is rare. He argues that the reason for this is that few men can afford two wives and secondly that marriage alliance requires such extensive co-operation with one's affines that 'it would be difficult to share one's attention between two sets of in-laws. Their demands would soon come to conflict' (Yalman, 1971: 114). Indeed, he notes that in all the cases of polygyny he knew, the men only took one set of obligations seriously and ignored the families of the lower-status wife. When a man had more than one wife, they were kept entirely separate, often in different villages, indicating that polygyny is not truly an acceptable marriage.

Polygamy is of interest because of what it reveals about the nature of marriage. The fact that polygamy could exist at all indicates that the conjugal relationship was not particularly important, and that concepts of romantic love did not underlie the marriage relationship, even where the family did not take an active role in arranging the marriage. The writers referred to above all discuss the advantages and disadvantages of polygamy in terms of its implications for inheritance and relations of alliance. Polygyny was rare because it had little practical advantage. It would have meant a man dividing his resources, including time, in maintaining relations with two competing sets of affines, when it was better to concentrate on building up relations with the most powerful set. It would have caused complications with regard to the wives and their children over access to family resources and inheritance. In Africa where polygyny is important, property considerations are not a major impediment because land is held communally and therefore is not subject to individual

inheritance. Polyandry where it did exist also had practical causes, the desire usually by two brothers to avoid the division of family property.

The decline of polygamy raises the issue of whether this indicates a strengthening of the conjugal relationship. Clearly an important factor is the simple point that polygamy is illegal, except under the Muslim marriage code. However, in the Kandyan areas where it was banned in 1859, it long continued to be practised (Jayasuriya, 1976: 327). After all until very recently many marriages were not officially registered; the law, consequently, has probably been less important as a legal sanction than as a statement of official opprobrium. This means not only that polygamy is discouraged but that even where it exists it may not be admitted to. In my field experience, there were only a few examples of polygamy including a very small number of polyandrous cases. Particularly in the latter situation people were reluctant to admit to it, and we did not press them on it. Their reluctance seemed to be due less to its legal status than to the fact that it was no longer socially accepted and polyandry, in particular, was subject to some ridicule. The polyandrous cases were only found amongst the oldest respondents.

The social attitude to polygamous marriage partly reflects Western attitudes as exemplified by Rebeiro's comment that 'their marriages excite laughter' (Ribeiro, n.d: 54), but felt more influentially by the British administrators and missionaries. But contemporary attitudes to polygamy may also reflect changing notions of the nature of marriage; a shift toward a stronger conjugal relationship in marriage. Such a shift should not be exaggerated. Even love marriages often seem to lack a close emotional union. Significantly, the decline in polygamy in Sri Lanka seems to have preceded the rise in love marriages. Perhaps a more important point is that marriage is increasingly becoming a true partnership where the wife works with the husband much more closely and takes a greater responsibility for

family decisions. This requirement would make a polygynous marriage very difficult. Polygamy is not discussed in the analysis of my data because its occurrence is so rare that there is little to analyse.

The discussion of marriage patterns above covers Sri Lanka's population as whole, with little reference to inter-ethnic differences, and much of the discussion has been concerned with the Sinhalese, as their numerical dominance largely explains the overall patterns. The minority groups generally marry somewhat earlier than the Sinhalese, have lower celibacy, and have stabler marriage. According to the Sri Lankan World Fertility Survey of 1975 the mean age at marriage of those women who had married by age 25 and were currently aged 25-49, was among the Sinhalese 18.6, Sri Lanka Tamils 17.5, Indian Tamils 17.2 and Sri Lanka Moors (Muslims) 16.5 years. For those aged only 25-29 it was among the Sinhalese 19.5, the Sri Lanka Tamils 18.0, the Indian Tamils 18.2, and the Sri Lanka Moors 16.5 (SLWFS, 1978: 62). Since only those who married by age 25 are included the actual mean age at marriage for the cohort is considerably understated.

2.3 Explanations of Sri Lanka's Changing Marriage Patterns

2.3.1 The marriage squeeze

The discussion of writings concerning Sri Lanka's changing marriage patterns concentrates on two authors, Dallas Fernando and Ruth Dixon.

Fernando has argued that the principal explanation of the rising age at marriage in Sri Lanka is a marriage squeeze. Marriage squeezes occur when the numbers of marriageable males and females are not equal. The classical situation would be where a war has decimated the male population (who make up the armies), as happened in the Soviet Union after the Second World War, or where large-scale emigration or immigration has

occurred which is sex-selective, as happened to the Southern European population in Australia in the 1950s. Marriage squeezes can also happen if there are differential mortality rates by sex, different rates of remarriage by sex (as in India) and most importantly differentials in the marriage age for the two sexes in a rapidly growing population. In this situation younger cohorts will be much larger than older ones, and, if the age gap is large, there will be a surplus of potential female marriage partners. This situation can be aggravated if, added to this, there is a steep mortality decline in the period between when the males were born and when the females were born. This is precisely what happened in Sri Lanka where a major anti-malaria campaign and other changes in the health system in the late 1940s brought a dramatic fall in mortality (see Meegama, 1967, 1985; Jones and Selvaratnam, 1972: 19-25; Gray, 1974; Nadarajah, 1976: 127-9). Fernando (1975: 183) notes that, according to apparently reliable registration figures, the crude death rate fell from 20.2 per thousand in 1946 to 14.3 per thousand in 1947. As a result of rapid population growth and perhaps too of better health, during 1942-46 there were 608,799 male live births whereas during 1947-51 there were 721,175 female live births, a discrepancy subsequently widened by the higher mortality rates to which the males were subject during their initial years when high mortality still prevailed.

Even with a growing population, a marriage squeeze on women would not occur if there were higher female mortality, a higher proportion of males than females remarrying, sex-selective migration, and polygyny. All these factors were operative in varying degrees before the 1950s but they now either are insignificant or have actually reversed and become factors actively contributing to a marriage squeeze.

Previously high mortality meant that there were larger numbers of widows and widowers than now but widows rarely remarried while widowers did. As Dixon (1970:242) notes, lower mortality rates mean that

this is much less important now. Counteracting this, the number of divorced and even separated men remarrying has increased, but, as these states are still comparatively rare in Sri Lanka, the increase has been more than counterbalanced by the fall in the supply of eligible widowers. Secondly, female mortality rates were formerly higher than male mortality rates but since the 1950s this has been reversed (Langford, 1984). Thirdly, until the 1930s there was large-scale immigration, mostly of labourers for the plantation sector. Since Independence in 1948 this immigration has been reversed with repatriation: 313,000 Indian Tamils were repatriated in the 1970s under the Sirima-Shastri Pact of 1964. The original immigration and to a lesser extent the repatriation were characterized by a high proportion of males; thus migration changed from contributing to a male surplus to accentuating a male shortage. A final factor is the decline of polygamy, whereas in Africa polygyny, with men having more than one wife, allows a very large age gap to persist even in a rapidly growing population. However polygamy seems never to have been a major factor in Sri Lanka and the two forms of it, polygyny and polyandry, may have partly counteracted each other.

In the absence of external conditions loosening the marriage squeeze, the squeeze can be overcome either by a large number of women not marrying at all, or by a reduction in the age gap between the two sexes at marriage, or by a mixture of the two. A reduction in the age gap would reduce the influence of the increase in the size of age cohorts between the births of the males and those of females. After all, if females married males of the same age the problem would not exist.

Fernando's argument (1975) is essentially that as a result of the post-war anti-malaria campaign and the accompanying spectacular decline in mortality, the cohorts marrying in the early 1970s were subject to a very severe marriage squeeze. He appears to take the view that the squeeze was

mostly subsequently overcome by a narrowing in the age gap at marriage brought about by a rise in the female age at marriage, and to a smaller, but indeterminate degree, by a rise in permanent celibacy. It is still very difficult to predict what the ultimate level of celibacy will be.

To substantiate his case Fernando calculated the marriage squeeze by comparing the number of males in an age group to the number of females five years younger, approximately the age gap which prevailed before the marriage squeeze, as reproduced in Table 2.2.

Table 2.2 Males per 100 females in various age groups by census years

	Census years							
	1901	1911	1921	1946	1953	1963	1971	1981
M (20-24)								
-----	88.6	114.8	111.1	103.7	116.4	88.3	95.3	95.1
F (15-19)								
M (25-29)								
-----	112.1	106.2	99.6	97.9	99.7	85.1	75.9	84.3
F (20-24)								
M (30-34)								
-----	70.7	87.2	86.4	91.2	84.5	95.9	79.5	89.6
F (25-29)								
M (35-39)								
-----	153.4	108.6	115.7	128.3	124.1	109.2	104.2	76.4
F (30-34)								
M (40-44)								
-----	67.3	101.4	95.2	88.0	86.5	83.4	87.7	86.8
F (35-39)								
M (20-34)								
-----	90.4	102.3	99.0	97.9	100.2	89.3	84.2	89.7
F (15-29)								
M (20-44)								
-----	94.3	103.3	101.3	101.1	101.7	91.1	87.5	87.0
F (15-39)								

Sources: 1901-1961 figures Fernando, 1975 : 181.
1971-1981 figures Fernando, 1985 : 286.

The most useful figures in Table 2.2 are the ratios using the broad age groups, $M(20-34)/F(15-29)$ and $M(20-44)/F(15-39)$, as the marriage squeeze in a narrow age group can be easily overcome if there are available males in neighbouring age groups. The figures have the further advantage of being 'quite reliable since broad age groups are involved and age-misstatement can be considered to be minimal' (Fernando, 1975: 182). The low ratios of 1911 and 1981 and to a lesser extent 1963 correspond to a period during which the marriage age gap dramatically narrowed as shown in Table 2.2. The 1981 ratio of 87.0 for the broad age group $M(20-44)/F(15-39)$ is virtually unchanged from the 1971 ratio of 84.9. For the youngest age group $M(20-24)/F(15-19)$, in the 1981 census, however, the squeeze seems to have virtually passed. In the next few years the squeeze should largely disappear as a steady decline in the birth rate (see Table 2.3) reduces the margin of the younger cohorts over the older ones.

Table 2.3 Total fertility rates (TFR) in Sri Lanka for selected years.

Year	TFR
1953	5.3
1963	5.0
1971	4.2
1981	3.3

Source: De Silva, 1986: 27.

Fernando does not speculate on the long-term impact of the marriage squeeze; but Muhsam (1978) suggested that the marriage squeeze may, by changing women's experiences and expectations, have a long-term effect on nuptiality, and much else.

Thus, in Sri Lanka, all of a sudden, 5, 6 or 7 percent of the women will not be able to find husbands, if both sexes maintain the traditional marriage pattern which had proved to ensure practically universal marriage to all men and women, even in the presence of a structural disequilibrium of the marriage market. It is true that only some 10 cohorts will be affected by

this situation to its full extent. But the women of these cohorts will certainly create an upheaval in behaviour patterns which cannot remain without repercussions at a future time when the cyclical squeeze has long disappeared or, at least, been considerably softened. The excess women must be expected to remain unmarried and have a strong inclination of penetrating into the labour market and many of them will eventually find employment. Once women will have conquered some positions on the labour market, they - as well as their younger sisters and daughters - will not easily relinquish these positions... Thus, the participation of women in the labour force is liable to become a permanent feature and the subsequent and long-term repercussions of this on nuptiality and fertility cannot even be guessed (Muhsam, 1978: 302).

The marriage squeeze probably played a role, at least in the short term, in forcing the female age at marriage up, in increasing celibacy, and in reducing the age gap between marriage partners, but it seems to have merely accentuated trends that have been under way since before 1900. Female ages at marriage were rising long before the marriage squeeze. It is more difficult to be precise concerning celibacy but it is very likely that it too was increasing slowly before the marriage squeeze had its effects. While most of the reduction in the age gap has occurred since the squeeze began, there are other reasons for expecting the age gap to lessen.

Dixon (1970) found little correlation between the marriage squeeze and marriage patterns. Dixon (1970: 312) employed data collected before the height of the marriage squeeze, but nevertheless noted that there was a shortage of males. This, however, had been overcome by a higher remarriage rate of widowers than of widows, to the degree that there were more bachelors than spinsters.

She notes that the supply of males is not a good predictor of celibacy or age at marriage; rather where celibacy was high and the marriage age late for one sex, this was also true for the other. Thus Colombo which has a surplus of males had late marriage and high celibacy levels for females as well as males, and not early rates as the marriage market might have implied (Dixon, 1970: 245). As yet, there had been little reduction in the

average five-year age gap between spouses, but Dixon (1970: 243-245) suggests that it might as the marriage squeeze tightened.

Significantly, Fernando (1985: 285-286), in a more recent article, downplays the role of the marriage squeeze on changes in age at marriage, and places more emphasis on economic factors stressing, in particular, how the economic difficulties and high unemployment of the 1970s delayed marriage. Similar arguments have been put forward by Abeyesekere (1982:196), Hannenberg (1987) and Gombrich and Obeyesekere (1988:196). The writer who has pursued the argument most thoroughly, however, was Dixon (1970).

2.3.2 Dixon and the declining feasibility of Sri Lankan marriage

Dixon (1970: 310-311) argues that the primary factor explaining the late age at marriage in Sri Lanka and the increase in age at marriage this century is that marriage has become less feasible. She attributes the original relatively high age at marriage to an ideal household arrangement, where the young married couple should live separately from the parents. This delayed the commencement of the marriage search until the bride had acquired housekeeping skills and the maturity to manage a household, and the groom was earning his own living; after all sons who are already earning can bring larger dowries and daughters with special abilities may require smaller ones. The increase this century, she suggests, is due to increasing financial obstacles, due, in particular to the subdivision of agricultural land as a consequence of the population increase which has made it difficult to accumulate dowries for daughters, as well as to low incomes and unemployment.

She has identified many of the elements involved in the increases in age at marriage but she has placed too much emphasis on problems of feasibility in delaying marriage, and consequently understated the

importance of other factors. In comparison to other countries in the region marriage in Sri Lanka was less feasible; land is being subdivided and unemployment is a major problem. In my experience, however, few people give the lack of alternative employment as a reason for delaying marriage. Similarly, Dixon refers to a suggestion by Ryan (1952: 366) that the difficulties of raising dowry might be delaying marriage, but Ryan observed that neither the cost of dowry nor the proportion paying dowry seemed to be increasing. Dixon argues that it is becoming more difficult to finance dowry for such reasons as land fragmentation and the increasing cost of living. My own experience is that, in contrast to India, dowry is not commonly cited as a reason for delaying marriage. In India where marriage is much earlier respondents often refer to dowry destroying a family's fortunes but the claim is never made in Sri Lanka.

Difficulties in establishing a household have affected marriage rates, particularly in times of severe economic difficulties as in the early 1970s when many marriages were delayed. But the relationship between the feasibility of marriage and age at marriage is not simple: the long-term rise in the age at marriage cannot primarily be related to problems in the feasibility of marriage. Since the early 1970s employment levels, especially in the towns, have increased and there are greater opportunities to work overseas, particularly in the oil-exporting countries of the Middle East; many young men and women work overseas to raise the money to buy or build a house. Yet there are few signs of a significant fall in age at marriage. This suggests that the factors leading to a rise in the age at marriage are more complex than simply specific obstacles in the way of early marriage. There are, indeed good reasons for families and individuals now to prefer later marriage.

A more common reason given for delaying marriage than the lack of the inheritance or dowry or employment, is a desire for permanent

(generally government) employment, preferably clerical but also manual. This is a new requirement and, especially for arranged marriages, relates as much to the desirability of marriage as to the feasibility of marriage. A single man with a permanent job is regarded as being a particularly desirable groom, and is much more likely to be approached with marriage offers than a man who lacks such a job. A man who has the prospect of getting a permanent job may well wait until he has one before he or his family considers marriage because he will then be in a much better bargaining position. Permanent employment has prestige and, at least to a limited extent, provides access to the privileges of the Westernized elite.

Dixon herself alludes to the advantages of delaying marriage when she points out that a bride with housekeeping skills may require a smaller dowry and a groom with a job command a larger dowry. However, by tying these requirements very closely to the difficulties of establishing a nuclear household she implies that these requirements are simply obstacles to early marriage when they are, in fact, essential to what is desirable in a bride or groom.

It is true that the joint family is not the expressed ideal as it is in India, and most families wish eventually to establish their own household. However, most young couples initially live with the parents of one of the partners, until they have the resources to establish their own household and often for much longer. The tendency to establish a new household on marriage may reflect Sri Lanka's late age at marriage as much as the late age reflects the need to establish a new household. The important point is that even if they do not establish a separate household, the young couple, in contrast to similar couples in India, for example, are regarded as being a separate family unit, even if they are living in the same house, and are consequently expected to have the maturity and independent resources to manage a family. Moreover, because they are regarded as a separate family

unit there is no pressure for a less mature bride who would not threaten family unity.

The result of Dixon tying the requirement of a more accomplished couple to the need to establish an independent household is that she underestimates the degree to which the requirements have changed. What is needed to manage a family is greater now than formerly; a mother must take greater interest in the family's welfare than before. Similarly, what is required of a groom, such as a good job, is more stringent than it was. Consequently, while Dixon recognizes that the maturity and ability of the bride and groom delayed marriage before the rise in marriage ages she understates the role that it had in those changes.

While Dixon regards problems in the feasibility of marriage as the principal reason why age at marriage has risen in Sri Lanka, she also says that marriage has become less desirable. She notes that in the past marriage was desirable, 'in a society where social interaction is centred so strongly on kinship networks, the unattached person suffers particularly from a condition of social isolation' (Dixon, 1970: 292). An unmarried woman may be criticized for being stubborn in rejecting marriage proposals brought by her parents or for being undesirable, and she may be subjected to gossip as being a loose woman (Dixon, 1970: 295). It can be difficult for an individual to live alone; for a man to do so is not regarded as proper, and a woman may have difficulties in finding employment, particularly a good job, especially if she has been withdrawn from school to be trained as a housewife (Dixon, 1970: 298). Female employment is generally only found among the poor, being seen as a painful necessity rather than an alternative to marriage (Dixon, 1970: 299).

The desirability of marriage is lessening; rising female education rates means that women have access to better paid and more prestigious

employment, and work may come as an alternative to marriage. Education is also changing aspirations toward a more genteel life style (Dixon, 1970: 311-312). The reduction in mortality is reducing the advantage of early marriage as more children are surviving to adulthood (Dixon, 1970: 311). Dixon argues (1970: 311) that marriage was always less desirable in Sri Lanka than in other countries in the region since Buddhism placed less emphasis on reproduction than Hinduism and Islam. She notes in particular the limited sanction in Buddhism against celibacy; spinsterhood may be attributed to bad *karma* (bad actions in previous lives will be punished in this life), but it does not imply eternal damnation which, she says, is the case in Hinduism and Islam (Dixon, 1970: 296).

Nevertheless, Dixon believes that marriage is still regarded as desirable in Sri Lankan society and what prevents it from being early or universal there is simply, as noted earlier, that it is not feasible because of the requirement for residential and financial independence.

Dixon's division between the desirability and feasibility of marriage seems artificial. Furthermore, even if one accepts her division she places too much emphasis on the feasibility of marriage and too little on the desirability of marriage. She treats desirability as essentially important in explaining why marriage was early in the past and as having comparatively little impact on changes in contemporary marriage patterns. Far from changes in the desirability of marriage having no role in the changes in marriage patterns, they are central.

When people are asked why they or their children married at a certain time they rarely answer that they did not have the resources or they could not find a mate. They are much more likely to answer that this was the proper time to marry. Such an answer is difficult to interpret. It could simply be a rationalization for changes forced on them, but the evidence

suggests that it is more than this: desired age at marriage has changed in response to very real factors concerning what is regarded as the necessary level of maturity of the bride and groom. The bride and groom need to be capable of handling and manipulating a much more complex world than was the case formerly.

2.4 What are the Critical Factors which Need to be Examined for an Understanding of Sri Lanka's Marriage Patterns?

2.4.1 Explaining both pre-transitional and post-transitional marriage

It is useful now to examine the forces in Sri Lankan history and society which may help explain why Sri Lankan marriage was already fairly late in the nineteenth century, and why age at marriage has increased throughout this century. First an examination of the underlying socio-cultural conditions may help to explain why age at marriage seems to have been comparatively high before modern changes, and whether the socio-cultural conditions provided a favourable environment for the marriage age to rise. Then some of the historical factors that have impinged on marriage, as on much else, are examined. Finally, there is an examination of how economic factors influence marriage and particularly changes in marriage. I am moving from factors that have the greatest impact on pre-transition marriage patterns to those more closely involved in changing marriage patterns. Each of the factors to be examined is relevant for both the pre-transition and post-transition marriage processes.

2.4.2 The kinship system

The first and most obvious socio-cultural factor influencing marriage is the kinship system. Sri Lanka has what is called in the anthropological literature (Dumont, 1953: 34; Keesing, 1975: 107-110), a Dravidian

marriage system after the Dravidian-speaking populations with which it is commonly associated⁶. This system distinguishes between kin and affines, giving a very prominent role to the latter. By doing so it helps the young bride to retain links with her family, and indeed the system generally involves a continuing relationship with rights and obligations on both sides. This relationship is very likely to be continued into the next generation with further marriages.

Dravidian kinship systems also seem to be involved with smaller family units. There is no necessary reason why this should be so. Provided property is not diffused but kept in a single line either patrilineal or matrilineal, it would be perfectly possible to have unilineal descent systems of the type often identified with large families. This, indeed, seems to be implied by Dumont's (1953, 1957) model of the Dravidian kinship system where he emphasizes the movement of brides between parallel descent groups. Dumont appears to assume that brides moved in only one direction between these groups, either patrilaterally or matrilaterally, as is normally the case in South India but not in Sri Lanka. His argument also emphasizes the classificatory nature of the kinship system. A person is an aunt not because she is a particular individual but because structurally she is. She may not be the father's sister but the father's brother's daughter. She is structurally the same because she is a woman who has married out (in a patrilineal system) of the lineage, and is of the same generation. The emphasis on the classificatory aspects of the kinship system emphasizes the role of lineage; everyone in the same descent line will be kin, everyone in descent lines into which someone from ego's line has married will be affines.

6 Note, however, that the majority population in Sri Lanka, the Sinhalese, speak a non-Dravidian language.

Yalman argues (1971: 358) that Dumont's emphasis on the lineage structure is unnecessary and, in fact, fails to explain Kandyan society with its bilateral inheritance at all. He comments that

It is important to understand that the features of South Indian kinship to which he draws our attention are not intrinsically associated with any lineages at all. On the contrary, the functioning of the system is most clear in systems such as the Sinhalese where the categories of kinship are not submerged in lineal groupings (Yalman, 1971: 357).

Yalman insists Dravidian kinship terminology contains 'no lineal emphasis at all, but only rules regarding the interconnections between categories' (Yalman, 1971: 357).

Yalman argues that, contrary to Dumont's claim that the Dravidian kinship system contains a continuing alliance between two lineages, it actually reflects the claims that brothers and sisters have with regard to each other:

What Dumont calls affinity I would translate as rights and obligations between brothers and sisters. This permits us to see the mechanism of transfer more clearly. If we consider the claim of the cross-cousins upon each other as marriage partners, we can detect that these claims are part of the claims that a man has over his sister's children and the counterclaims of the sister upon her brother's children. It is the previous claims of the parents which the offspring reiterated as their rights upon each other. Let us further observe that in the South Indian context the claims of the brother on the children of his sister are simply a further statement of his claims upon her person. The brother has an important voice in the marriage of his sister, because her marriage has important side effects upon his status; it also brings in as part of the enclosed endogamous circle a person (cross-cousin) with whom he will have to cooperate (Yalman, 1971: 358).

Thus brothers and sisters as children of the same parents retain residual rights over each other, partly because what happens to one has implications in status for the other. In a sense they retain family ties even when they have married out. To the extent that there is an alliance it is between brothers and sisters, and between brothers-in-law, not between lineages. New cross-cousin marriages will continue this alliance into the next generation but it is an outcome of the relations between siblings rather

than a separate entity. Yalman (1971: 358) accuses Dumont of reifying affinity, treating it as equivalent to a lineage which is a corporate group (and as such an actual institutionalized structure with property and offices), whereas affinity merely consists of relations between persons or groups of persons.

A consequence of the rights of brothers and sisters over each other is, 'a centripetal tendency ... Smaller and smaller circles of endogamy form purer and purer circles of kin who may be permitted to claim - at least in their own minds - higher ritual status' (Yalman, 1971: 359).

Yalman's arguments have had some critics. Obeyesekere argues that Yalman (1962) attributes too much to a terminological system which he insists cannot regulate human behaviour, that is he reifies the terminology.

The neatness of the terminological system has attracted many anthropologists - Morgan, Rivers, Levi-Strauss, Murdock, Dumont, to mention a few. The most recent exposition comes from Yalman. Yalman's hypothesis commits the fallacy of deducing behavioural regularities from a terminological system. According to him the *function* of the terminology is to 'regulate marriage and sexual relations inside bilateral and largely endogamous "kindreds" '. It is difficult for us to see how a terminology regulates marriage in this sense. Regulation of marriage is done by human agents in an action context. Yalman goes on to say that the terminology implies 'a prescriptive bilateral cross-cousin marriage rule. In this respect the terminology is highly systematic, and all the terms imply bilateral cross-cousin marriage, and such marriage is essential if the categories of kinship are to be kept in order' ... To assume that such marriages are essential if the categories of kinship are to be kept in order, is to imply that Sinhalese get married in order to keep their kinship categories in proper shape. This is an empirical, not a *prima facie* theoretical issue. Empirically there is no *prescriptive rule* enforced in action unanimously by the Sinhalese. It is true that all marriages are between cross-cousins in the terminological sense, even marriages with total strangers, who after marriage are designated as consanguines (Obeyesekere, 1967: 248-250).

Obeyesekere's principal criticism is that Yalman is suggesting that kinship categories guide human actions when, in fact, it is human actions that are reflected in kinship terminology. Obeyesekere (1967: 251-253) argues that contrary to Yalman no special emphasis is placed on the marriage of cross-cousins. The only emphasis is that sentiment favours the

marriage of close relatives and only cross-cousins are eligible. More distant relatives who are parallel cousins will be re-defined as cross-cousins. While the terminological system is undoubtedly flexible, the argument seems slightly unfair and even disingenuous. Yalman too was stressing the rights that brothers and sisters have towards each other rather than simply terminological systems, and he recognizes that among more distant relations the system has a strong fictive element. Furthermore, the statement that among close relatives only cross cousins could marry surely reflects the fact that within the kinship system cross-cousins are defined as potential mates and parallel cousins are not.

It is more important that Yalman overemphasizes the bilateral nature of the kinship system. It is true that in the Kandyan areas marriage may be either with matrilateral cross-cousins (mother's brother's daughter) or patrilateral cross-cousins (father's sister's son). The bilateral nature of the Sri Lankan marriage tends to undermine any lineal aspects, and the bilateral nature of Kandyan inheritance helps break up the property of any corporate group thus undermining the lineage system. In South India where marriage tends to be either patrilateral or matrilateral, and property is inherited either patrilineally or more rarely matrilineally, a lineal system is more possible.

But in reality South India, like Sri Lanka, lacks a genuine lineage system, in the sense that Africa has one. More relevantly its family system is marked by smaller families and less of a tendency towards joint families than is the case in North India where the Dravidian kinship system does not prevail. The emphasis on affinal links, perhaps deriving from the continuing rights of nuclear family members especially brothers and sisters over each other, seems to be an important factor in this. Strong affinal links are in conflict with the very concept of the joint family which depends upon emphasizing kin links, the unity of the male members of the lineage in

opposition to outsiders including affines. Furthermore, the support that a woman's relatives give to her will reduce her subservience in her new household, because a major factor in a woman's subservience to her new household is her total dependence physically and emotionally on a household in which she is an outsider. Most importantly the very concept of strong relations between brother and sister undermines much of the emphasis on female inequality found in Northern India.

All these factors are relevant to marriage patterns. The stronger rights of the girl within her natal family as well as the greater status in general accorded to females may mean that, potentially at least, a girl has a greater right in decisions regarding her future welfare including her marriage. While the female marriage age is early this is likely to remain a potential only, but as female age at marriage rises this is likely to become a factor in its own right in further forcing up age at marriage and even allowing celibacy. That is her family may allow the girl to veto potential marriages and even leave it to her to make her own decisions on marriage; in such cases the family is also likely to retain its own veto rights.

2.4.3 The joint family

Furthermore, the fact that a woman maintains particular rights within her own family even after marriage may also mean that she has a place within her family if she needs it. This is related to the fact that the kinship system seems to discourage joint families. In the large patriarchal joint family there seems to be no role for the unmarried adolescent daughter. The stability of the family is dependent upon the unity of the men under the authority of the patriarch, and on the subservience of the women and children to the men, and to the women's mothers-in-law. An adolescent daughter would threaten this because she, unlike the other women, is not an outsider, she is a member of the family as part of her

birthright. She could not be treated as an interloper who needed to earn her right to be in the family (mostly through bearing male children), but not to do so would create anomalies in the treatment of other women, including the girl's mother. The emotional mother-daughter link might have an egalitarian tinge threatening the authority structure of the family, and, even more dangerously, create a rival network to the dominant male ties. This is a particular danger in societies where female and male roles are strongly segregated. In such situations women are likely to be restricted to the house while men are in control of the relations with the external world. This can serve to make the women very isolated but it can also serve to make the men feel outsiders in their own homes. This is prevented in the joint household by ensuring that the women are rivals with little in common. A rising age at marriage can threaten this situation. In Sri Lanka even when men theoretically have authority, the real locus of power, over domestic matters at any rate, often seems to lie with the women, mothers and daughters.

The joint family has other implications for marriage patterns. Where there are no joint families, married couples may be expected to establish their own households. This is likely to require a greater degree of maturity and hence an older age of both husband and wife. Secondly, there may be less pressure in favour of a large age gap between husband and wife to discourage too close an emotional relationship which might challenge the unity of the joint family. Conversely, the age gap may equally be an outcome of a weak emotional relationship as the cause of it; if the joint family effectively discourages a strong emotional relationship in the first place, there may be no wish among the groom or bride for a partner who is a genuine companion, for which a small age gap may be an asset. Thirdly where the young couple are likely to be independent, residentially at least,

the kin are more likely to leave decisions concerning marriage until they have reached an age when they can give their opinions.

The emphasis placed here on the joint family as an intermediary factor in the influence of kinship structures on marriage patterns raises the point that the existence of joint families cannot be attributed solely to the kinship structure. Joint families are much more common in South India than in Sri Lanka, even if they are rarer than in North India, though both South India and Sri Lanka have Dravidian kinship systems. Precisely how common the joint family is in each of these cases depends on how the joint family is defined. Apart from the quantitative question of precisely how many nuclear units of each generation there are residing in the family there is a question of how the family functions. So far I have emphasized an overriding patriarchal authority as an essential trait of the joint family. Nuclear units which reside jointly but function as separate units are probably not true joint families: those families which appear to be joint families in Sri Lanka are not joint families in the same sense as the ones existing in North India.

The existence of joint families is also affected by factors which are to some extent independent of the kinship system, including notions of the ideal family, female chastity, and religion. The joint family is regarded in India, but not generally in Sri Lanka, as the ideal family. The joint family represents the ideals of family unity, particularly fraternal solidarity in the face of all possible adversity. It also represents respect for the elders and even for the ancestors. The family is a whole which should not be divided. The existence of the joint family as an ideal is doubtless partly due to the nature of the North Indian kinship systems, but in South India its existence as an ideal, independent of the prevailing kinship system, is an important factor in promoting its existence. Its existence has been promoted by the prestige of North India in the South as the North has long been regarded as

the heartland of Indian and particularly Hindu Culture. The strongest factor promoting the ideal of the joint family is its identification as the ideal Hindu family. This is expressed in the Hindu epic the *Mahabharata* where the five Pandya brothers represent all the noble Hindu values, including that of placing the interests of the whole above those of the individual; this is linked to the Hindu belief that desire is the root of all evil and disorder derives from self-interested actions. The association of Hinduism with the joint family is reinforced by the fact that the family worships as a unit. In a Hindu household, there is a shrine to the gods including the family gods before whom each day the eldest woman in the household does obeisance .

Hinduism as a religion is very closely linked to the prevailing social order in India. Just as it provides the justification for caste (cf. Dumont, 1980) it also underlies the joint family. Each of the major rites of passage such as birth, puberty, death and above all marriage, are religious rites which mark an individual's passage through life and in particular through the life cycle of the family. Indeed Hindus assign various stages to a man's life including a stage during which he should be a family man.

In Sri Lanka, unlike South India, the joint family is not the ideal. The reasons for this primarily relate to Sri Lanka's political and cultural separation from India and above all, to its religion. Although the majority ethnic group of Sri Lanka's population, the Sinhalese, claim to have originated in North India, believe in a religion which was born there and speak a language that is closely related to the languages of North India, they do not look to it for a model of behaviour. Indeed the Sinhalese, who tend to perceive Sri Lanka as a citadel preserving the original purity of Buddhism both from the revival of Hinduism in India, and from the corruption which it has suffered elsewhere, are much more likely to regard themselves as preserving the ideal society.

Buddhism, moreover, unlike Hinduism, is not really in conformity with the ideals underlying the joint family. It is in many ways a very individualistic religion: salvation or Nirvana, the release from the cycle of rebirth, must be obtained by each individual separately. Unlike Hinduism, Buddhism almost entirely ignores the family. The family does not worship as a unit but each person undertakes religious duties on an individual basis. Buddhist monks have only a limited role in family rites, for example, having a minor role in funerals and none at all in marriages. Symbolically, whereas all Hindus including priests are expected during their lives to have family responsibilities, Buddhist monks are expected to completely cut themselves off from all family responsibilities. Sri Lankan Buddhism has no equivalent to the Hindu *Mahabharata* with its emphasis on brotherly valour but emphasizes rather the simple pious stories of the Buddhist *Jataka* with their stress on self-denial.

2.4.4 Female autonomy

Buddhism may also affect family structure by its influence on the status and autonomy of women. In Hinduism a woman does not have a separate religious role from that of her family; it is even said that for a woman her god is her husband. In Buddhism, as noted, each person worships and performs good deeds separately. There is a much greater acceptance of the autonomy of women, if not of their total equality: admittedly a particularly devout elderly woman of my acquaintance gives as her reason for performing good deeds her wish to be reborn as a man. Buddhism, again unlike Hinduism, does not emphasize marriage and childbearing as the central religious duties of a woman. It is perhaps significant that in Sinhalese Buddhism women can be nuns just as men can be monks, a position which excludes family responsibilities including marriage. In reality, even though being a nun is religiously sanctioned, there is much less social approval for a woman being a nun. The proper

ordination ceremony for nuns died out probably in the late tenth century, and has never been revived according to legitimate religious traditions. This does not, however, stop there being women who perform the role of nuns (Gombrich and Obeyesekere, 1988:274)

The values associated with Buddhism run counter to the values on which the joint family is based, the meek acceptance of patriarchal authority. Furthermore, the emphasis on individual identity lends some legitimacy to the concept of individuals having a role in decisions concerning marriage.

The emphasis on female autonomy and individuality may also influence notions of female sexuality. In India, as in a number of Middle-Eastern countries, any suggestion of sexual interest, or even of too much forwardness, can destroy the reputation of a girl and of her family. Consequently, it is important to ensure a girl's chastity and to ensure that no occasion occurs which could give rise to gossip. This is a major reason, as noted above, for early marriage. If marriage is very early then it will almost certainly be arranged; furthermore, the girl may virtually be forced to marry into a joint household because at that age she is not capable of performing without assistance a role as wife and mother. Hence the strong emphasis on female chastity serves to emphasize the joint family and arranged marriage as well as an early age at marriage.

What are the overall implications of these various sociocultural factors on marriage and marriage patterns? By emphasizing the differences between Sri Lanka and India, I am not suggesting that Sri Lanka was unique in having a highly individualistic society in which women were accorded an equal place, virtually akin to a Western society. Ascribed status was, as in India, very important and behaviour was strongly guided by community expectations. Women's roles, in particular, were tightly

restricted, and they were expected on the whole to fulfil their duties to be wives and mothers. But some of the reasons for very early marriage in India were missing in Sri Lanka, and some of the impediments to rises in the age at marriage and even to celibacy, were missing. The kinship system, family structure and religion all acted to allow a more independent role for men and particularly for women. There was much less emphasis on the need to marry very early to prevent young men and especially young women from being too independent, and there has been much less resistance to changing circumstances in which the young play a part in the decision when to marry and even if they will marry at all.

The following section concentrates on historical factors more closely related to change in marriage. These factors are mostly related to Sri Lanka's colonial and post-colonial contact with the outside world, and its response to them.

2.4.5 A non-traditional society

Sri Lanka has had a very long history of contact with the outside world. Its geographical position has meant that it has been at the centre of the great trade routes crossing the Indian Ocean since ancient times. Trade connected it to the Indian subcontinent to the north, to Southeast Asia and more distantly to China and the Middle-East.

Because of this central position, Sri Lanka had very early contacts with Europeans first as traders (including Marco Polo) but later as colonizers. Coastal Sri Lanka had an unusually long period of colonial rule, over four hundred years, more than twice as long as most other parts of South Asia. From the early sixteenth century until 1948 coastal Sri Lanka was ruled successively by the Portuguese, the Dutch and the British. In the interior the Kandyan, in contrast, retained their independence until 1815 when they were conquered by the British.

The colonial period was marked by the development of an export economy based on plantation agriculture. Ceylon had long been famed as the source of cinnamon but this was overshadowed in the nineteenth century with the development of modern plantation agriculture; with coconuts and rubber on the lowlands and coffee and later tea in the Kandyan highlands.

The consequences of these developments are that, while Sri Lanka is not a rich country, it does not have a true peasantry isolated from the outside world, as is still true of many of the rural areas of the mainland subcontinent. This is especially true in Sri Lanka's low country where this study was concentrated; and where a majority of Sri Lankans live. While agricultural income and more often home-grown food are important for many families, few are totally dependent upon it. Most importantly, wealth from traditional agriculture as distinct from the proprietorship of a plantation has rarely been the basis of great wealth.

The shrinking role of traditional agriculture owed much to the development of the plantation sector. The two rarely competed directly. The plantation sector was geared to export whereas traditional agriculture was entirely domestically oriented, growing mostly food crops such as rice. The two forms of agriculture grew different crops, were territorially segregated and had essentially separate work forces; the plantations imported their own labour force of Indian Tamils.

While plantation agriculture may not have directly competed with traditional agriculture, it affected it indirectly. It supported an economy in which traditional agriculture had only a very minor role. The indigenous population of Sri Lanka benefited from plantation agriculture in that a few families had capital in some of the smaller plantations (particularly in coconuts), by the provision of services to the plantations and to the planters,

the infusion of money into the economy, by the government's provision of infrastructure for the plantations and by the benefits of the government's increased tax revenue. The benefits to government revenues were particularly important for they allowed a large government sector with an unusually extensive range of services, for a developing country. In particular they provided an extremely impressive system of education and health care. The state became a major source of jobs and largesse.

Inevitably, such far-reaching economic changes have had a major impact on Sri Lankan society and more specifically on marriage. One of the most important ways in which economic change has affected social institutions is by replacing the traditional village-based social hierarchy with a modern town-based one. In the peasant societies that still dominate much of South Asia each village is in many ways a separate social universe with its own elite based on the ownership of land, and on ascribed status such as that derived from membership of a particular caste. Now, however, the Sri Lanka village elite cannot compete in social standing with the new urban elites where position is based on their access to the new sources of income and education.

A number of factors can be suggested to explain these changes, which have been much more thoroughgoing than elsewhere in South Asia. An important factor is simply the sheer wealth resulting from the plantation sector. Local agriculture did not provide access to similar wealth. The local elite lost prestige as it could not compare in wealth to the town elites, and it also lost its control over the village as an increasing proportion of the labour force worked outside the village.

Village elites in Sinhalese areas probably never had the same hold economically over the villages that they had in neighbouring India. Moore points out that there is a very small landless population dependent on

agricultural employment provided by the village elite. He does not speculate on why this is so except to note that such a class is found in the Tamil and Muslim areas of northern and eastern Sri Lanka, and that it 'conforms to the more hierarchical and traditional nature of the Sri Lanka Tamil and Muslim social structures' (Moore, 1985: 188).

The weakness of the Sri Lanka village elite is not purely economic. There are a number of other important factors. A key factor here is geography. Sri Lanka's very high population density, especially in the Southwestern lowlands, meant that villages had much greater contact with each other and with the towns than would have been the case in a more sparsely populated country.

Moreover, Sri Lankan villages, especially in the wetter parts of the country (the wet zone), are not generally nucleated, but tend to be widely dispersed with houses scattered here and there. The reason for this is probably principally ecological. In regions where farming is heavily dependent on a limited amount of irrigated land tied to a few water sources villages are tightly concentrated round those sources. This is the case in most of South Asia but is not true of Sri Lanka where high and relatively even rainfall means that there are many water sources.

The lack of village nucleation seems to have weakened village identity as well as the village elite's hold over the village. In a sense when there are no clear cut boundaries with neighbouring villages the village has less of an identity. Villagers have less concern with what occurs in their village because what happens in the next village is also important to them. The elite too is likely to have interests in neighbouring villages. Perhaps it is significant also that each house has much greater privacy. Not only are houses more dispersed but they are surrounded by their own gardens of ornamental and food trees and many even have their own well or at least

easy access to one; in India one of the main occasions for village gossip is while the women are queuing to draw water from the well. The greater privacy may reduce the impact of community attitudes, for people can to some extent ignore them. It is perhaps also important that each household is largely self-sufficient; with their own fruit trees including jack-fruit, breadfruit, coconuts and mangoes, households can provide much of their needs.

Perhaps an equally important factor is the comparative weakness of the caste system in Sri Lanka, at least amongst the Sinhalese; the Muslims claim not to believe in caste at all. Sri Lanka's caste system is superficially similar to India's with a hierarchy of castes each with their traditional occupation. Caste, however, has much less of an impact on an individual's life. It is important in the choice of a marriage partner but is of limited significance elsewhere. It is noteworthy, for example, that Sri Lanka does not have either Brahmans or Harijans (untouchables), who provide the top and the bottom of the caste hierarchy in India, nor do they have a strong concept of pollution. The absence of these factors removes some of the more salient aspects of caste. Its importance was greater in the past but there are reasons for believing that it was never as all-pervading as it is in Indian society. The major difference between the Sinhalese and the Indian caste systems is that amongst the former the system lacks a religious basis. Buddha never rejected caste outright but he did regard it as irrelevant to attaining enlightenment. One did not need to be a Brahman to know the truth. In effect, Buddhism distinguishes between that which is eternal where true knowledge lies and the everyday reality or rather illusion in which people operate. The former is permanent and majestic, the latter impermanent, tawdry and the source of desire and disappointment. Caste is relegated from the sacred to the profane world in which we operate. This does not mean that caste and religion were entirely separate. The main

Buddhist fraternity of monks in Sri Lanka, and indeed the only one until the nineteenth century, the Siyam Nikaya, still restricts ordination of monks to the Govigama, the highest and largest caste, constituting about half the population. Worship, however, has always been open to members of all castes equally.

The full distinction between Buddhism as a religion and caste as a secular activity seems to have been comparatively recent. The nineteenth century was marked by what has come to be called the Buddhist Revival Movement, which grew out of an attempt to counter the activities of Christian missionaries. Part of the strength of the missionaries was that through their schools they offered access to Western knowledge and to jobs such as clerks in the towns. The Buddhist Revivalists responded not by stressing non-Western values but by adopting much of the organization and approach of the missionaries, setting up schools, printing presses, Sunday schools, the Young Women's Buddhist Association (YWBA) and so forth (DeSilva 1981:346), and by presenting a Buddhism more in sympathy with Western rationalism, supposedly close to the original Buddhism cleansed of impurities such as caste.

The Revival Movement's approach to caste was influenced by the fact many of their key supporters came from a number of lower castes which had taken advantage of the economic changes wrought by colonialism to a much greater degree than did the dominant Govigama caste. A major role in the movement was performed by a new Buddhist fraternity, the Amarapura Nikaya, established by members of these castes and open to all irrespective of caste background (Malalgoda, 1976:87-105).

The lack of a religious sanction for caste weakened the hold of the traditional elite over the village population; just as their economic hold was weak so too was the ideological justification for their position. In Sri Lanka

there is little correspondence between caste and occupational structure. While to some degree all castes were always concerned with agriculture they were also expected to carry out their caste occupation. There is little sign of this today. Sri Lanka has no trace of the Indian *jajmani* system by which castes provide farmers with their services in exchange for a share of the harvest grain (see B.Caldwell, 1991), though the system clearly once existed (cf. Knox, 1981: 205). This is presumably a sign of increased commercialism but also of the lack of religious sanction. In India a major factor which maintains the system is that the castes provide not just secular services but ritual services as well.

2.4.6 The requirements of marriage have changed as a village-based society has been replaced by a town-based society

This discussion may have appeared to stray from my topic, changes in marriage, but it is in fact relevant. Changes in marriage in Sri Lanka are closely tied to the replacement of an agrarian village-based society by a commercial Western-oriented town-based society. Whereas, formerly, marriage was principally conducted within guidelines relevant to a village society, the guidelines are now those of the town. The main concern was that the marriage partner should be from a family of equal or higher status. Where land was valuable, or in short supply, marriage became part of a strategy to maintain, or preferably expand, access to land. Marriage could be early because, as Dixon indicates, it was very feasible; all that was needed was access to land, which was generally obtainable especially in areas where *chena* shifting cultivation was practised, and accommodation, which could either be with one of the spouses' families or in a simple house easily constructed with village materials.

More crucially, early marriage, particularly early female marriage, was desirable in the village, because the household greatly valued its reputation. On it rested not only the family's status but also its ability to

achieve its aims, particularly in matters such as marriage where a desirable match could gain access to land and influence. To protect its reputation, particularly as a source of potential marriage partners, it was necessary to ensure that no gossip sullied the family name; this meant that it was advantageous to marry off daughters early so that there could be no question concerning their virginity, but more specifically to prevent any cross-caste liaisons. While caste lacked the religious sanction that it had in India, cross-caste relations were taken very seriously and are still, among many, a cause for concern.

Furthermore there were advantages in marrying daughters as early as possible in the village context, where links with allied families were valuable, and where there was an advantage in having many young men, including sons-in-law, to call upon if physical violence threatened or simply to help with farming. Most importantly of all, there were no good reasons not to marry daughters early. The tasks of being a wife and mother were regarded as ones to be learnt on the job; no special training was needed and a girl was ready as soon as she reached puberty.

For men early marriage was less desirable. Virginity was not a concern nor even cross-caste miscegenation. Men were not regarded as being internally polluted as were women nor were they ultimately regarded as responsible for the offspring of illicit unions. With men normally establishing separate households after marriage, or at least a separate economic unit, the families may have preferred them to marry later so that they could contribute their labour for longer. This may also have been true of young women but other considerations would have been of overriding importance.

However, while early female marriage was regarded as advantageous in the Sri Lankan village in the past, nevertheless, the advantages involved

were less than among neighbouring societies in the region. This was true of concerns about sexual morality, caste, maintenance of the family structure and mortality and the influence of the community on family and individual behaviour. Similarly, there was less concern that a bride be young enough to readily accept the authority of the family, as the Sinhalese family structure was less patriarchal and hierarchical than generally in South Asia. The lack of a strong advantage in early marriage, and the subsequent further weakening of the community, help to explain the extent of change in marriage patterns. There was less resistance to the forces pushing age at marriage up.

The rise in the age at marriage is explained by the replacement of one set of factors by another set more relevant to the new society. The factors that were necessary for a good marriage in the village, caste, family name, modest behaviour, are increasingly being replaced by factors more relevant to the new social hierarchy such as occupation and education.

An important distinction between the new factors and the old ones is that the new ones tend to concern the individual rather than the family. In the village, provided the family was of suitable caste and name, and the girl or boy was of suitable character, the marriage could go ahead at a fairly early age. In the new context, the groom preferably has a permanent job in a high-status occupation and is highly educated. Even if he does not meet these demanding criteria he should, at least, have a job. Increasingly, it is preferred that the bride too has a job and that she is educated, so that she can be a suitable marriage partner to an educated husband and a good mother to her children. The concept of a mother needing to be educated to be a good mother is an interesting one. In the past there was less emphasis on motherhood as such than on fulfilling a woman's role in the household. Now, however, a mother is seen as having a particular duty in assisting her children with their education and looking after their general welfare. This

reflects the demands of the modern society where success depends on individual capability, particularly education. It involves a reorientation of the family downwards with much more emphasis being placed on the needs of children.

These changes mean that a low age at marriage is no longer mandatory. It is not relevant to the factors that are important now, which require a higher age at marriage. It takes time to accumulate the necessary skills, education and jobs, but not only time is needed: the new attributes required are also associated with a changing concept of maturity. For example, for a woman to be able to get a job, and be a good mother and wife, she now needs to be educated but also to have an element of maturity and an understanding of the world, qualities associated with a woman of twenty-five or thirty, not a girl of fifteen.

2.4.7 The participation of the family in marriage and its impact on age at marriage

Perhaps, however, the most fundamental change has been in the process of marriage. In the past, families had a very prominent role and were vitally concerned in the process of marriage. Their interests were directly involved for marriage concerned both property and status. Furthermore, their participation in the marriage was vital: Yalman (1971) argued that if the marriage was not recognized by kin it did not truly constitute a marriage.

Nowadays however, families are increasingly less actively involved in marriage. There is less pressure from the community on them to ensure an early marriage age. Their interests are less actively involved, though they would act to prevent an unsuitable marriage. Their active involvement too is less required. Marriages do not depend as they did formerly on family resources including dowry. Now it is what the couple themselves bring to

the marriage that is more important. The greatest assistance a family can give its children for the future is to equip them to make their own choices, rather than to organize their future lives.

Changes in the process of marriage and in age at marriage are in part a result of the same factor, the lessened pressure on the family to marry young women early. To some extent changes in the process of marriage are themselves due to the rise in the age at marriage. People who are older are generally in a better position to, and more likely to demand to, choose for themselves. Nevertheless the acceptance of the right to make decisions concerning marriage must in itself affect age at marriage. If a family leaves the marriage choice to a son or daughter it is likely to provide less assistance in establishing a new household, thereby affecting the feasibility of marriage. More indirectly the nature of the marriage search itself is likely to affect age at marriage, partly because the family's criteria for a search are likely to be more explicit and the resources at its disposal, relatives, marriage brokers etc., for the search are greater, so the marriage search is likely to be undertaken more quickly. Furthermore an arranged marriage does not require a period of courtship as love matches do. Love matches tend to have a longer period of engagement than arranged marriages but the impact of this on age at marriage is not straightforward: arranged marriages can, and often do, involve a period of engagement while waiting for a suitable time to marry. This can be a very long wait notably if the marriage is agreed to at a very early age, for example in Northern India parents may agree upon marriage when the marriage partners are still children; in Sri Lanka, however, the wait is unlikely to be so long. The marriage was always after puberty. Nowadays a marriage is unlikely to be agreed upon unless the two partners have the necessary attributes such as a good job. The question of the feasibility of marriage should not be a matter of concern. With love matches, however, arrangements may take a long

time: a couple may get engaged long before they are ready to marry. For the man this may have little effect on his age at marriage, he will marry when he has the necessary job, when it is feasible and when he is regarded as having the necessary maturity much as in an arranged marriage. For the woman though the effect may be greater; in an arranged marriage she would be able to marry virtually when the match is made but in the love match she will have to wait until her intended has the necessary attributes, especially the job. This has two implications. First, it may act to increase the female marriage age. Secondly, even if it does not, it should increase the linkage between the male marriage age and the female marriage age. That is, as male age at marriage rises and falls so should female age at marriage.

2.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, an adequate explanation for changes in marriage patterns has to examine marriage in its total social context. Doing so should help prevent too much concentration on short-term fluctuations and too little on long-term processes. Temporary economic problems, for example, can very easily be emphasized at the expense of long-term social changes. Dixon's explanation of Sri Lankan marriage, for example, places too much emphasis on the economic feasibility of marriage, and not enough on what she calls the desirability of marriage. The feasibility of marriage may have been the major determinant of marriage patterns in Europe but it is not of the changing marriage patterns in Asia or other non-Western societies. Europe already had a society where late marriage and non-marriage were acceptable, and, in the case of late marriage, preferred. The ability to marry depended on the access of the marriage partners to resources which, in Europe, were affected by often highly inequitable inheritance, and by the importance of very uncertain wage labour.

The situation in Asia was very different; marriage was more feasible for inheritance tended to be more equitable and because families were more involved in marriage. Although there has been a change in the feasibility of marriage in Sri Lanka while age at marriage has been rising, it is directly related to longer-term changes in the desirability of marriage. The feasibility of marriage has been affected by the reduced involvement of the family in marriage, but this is the outcome of changes in the desirability of marriage.

The term desirability, however, is a misleading one. Dixon's framework implies that desirability and feasibility have the same explanatory status, when in fact, desirability is a much more complex concept. Feasibility, in essence, merely relates to the economics of marriage, desirability relates to much deeper issues concerning marriage and society in general. It raises such questions as why people marry and how this is related to family and kinship structure.

What has happened in Sri Lanka, and to, a lesser extent, in much of Asia, is that an older age at marriage is now desirable, or at least a younger marriage age is no longer desirable. It is not a question of fluctuations in the feasibility of marriage, for, as Goldstone (1986) has shown for pre-industrial England, fluctuations in the feasibility of marriage tend to be associated with changes in the proportion marrying rather than changes in the age at marriage. Significantly, there has been little change so far in the proportions never marrying. This may change in Sri Lanka as the feasibility of marriage becomes more important as a consequence of the change in the desirability of marriage.

In this chapter a wide range of possible links between marriage patterns and underlying social changes have been discussed. In the remainder of this thesis, the data from the field survey in Sri Lanka are

analysed to explore these issues in more detail, and in particular to study marriage within its social context, to examine what factors influence the individual, and the family's role in making decisions regarding marriage. As changes in the role of the family seem to be central to developments in marriage patterns, the data are also used to examine why the family has been so involved in marriage decisions and why this is changing.

Chapter 3

Methodology

3.1 The micro approach

The causes of demographic change were investigated in Sri Lanka by a collaborative research program between the Department of Demography, the Australian National University and the Demographic Training and Research Unit, University of Colombo. I developed and researched the marriage theme within this study.

The total research program was primarily concerned with the long term causes of change in fertility and health behaviour, and the study of marriage which I undertook was regarded as an appropriate related module. It was felt that the most appropriate way to study such change was a community level micro-approach, combining an anthropological participant observation study and in-depth interviews, with a more structured survey-style questionnaire and census. The different elements complemented each other: participant observation gave the investigators a first-hand insight into the overall social context within which people had to organize their lives; the in-depth interviews gave insights into the problems with which individuals had to deal on their own, and as members of families; while the more structured interviews, and the census, of ultimately over 12,000 persons, provided a basic demographic overview of the communities, as well as a base for testing statistically many of the findings of the study.

The more common approach in demography, the sample survey using only a structured questionnaire, was seen as inadequate on its own, given the research program's essential concern with the investigation of causal explanations of change over time. In particular, it was felt that over-

reliance on sample surveys had placed too much emphasis on short-term and essentially simple explanations.

Sample surveys are invaluable if what is required is overall levels and rates, differentials between groups and above all statistical associations; but they do not explain these statistical associations, differentials, levels or rates. The explanations for these are normally provided by the logical intuition of the analyst often from a very limited understanding of the society in question. If the logical connection is simple and straightforward this approach may be reasonable, but if it is not, as the previous chapter argues is the case regarding the causes of change in marriage patterns, it is inadequate.

A case in point is the statistical association between education and a late age at marriage. This is an association that shows up in many surveys (e.g. Rindfuss et al., 1983) but which is rarely explained, presumably being regarded as either too simple or too complex to explain. It cannot be too simple, for, as noted in the previous chapter, the relationship between education and age at marriage is complex, being multidirectional and mediated by other factors. Moreover, the relationship between education and age at marriage is, partly as a consequence of its sheer complexity, likely to differ according to context, particularly between societies. Analysts who do not properly know the specific social and historical conditions, which can be very complex, may misinterpret the meaning of particular statistical associations and, in particular, may leave out important intermediate variables and ignore multidirectional causation. Furthermore, there is an understandable quest for the most parsimonious explanation in data produced from the very limited number of questions asked in the typical survey, as a result of limited budgets and the understandable desire to interview as many people as possible, because larger numbers increase the likelihood of statistically significant correlations; in this quest complex

relationships may be ignored in favour of simple ones. This may be reasonable if the simple relationships are the true ones but it is dangerous if they are distortions.

This problem is increased by the understandable desire for generalizations applicable beyond the particular society being studied. It occurs in an acute form in such international surveys as the World Fertility Survey (WFS) which, though possessing many admirable qualities and having led to many illuminating analyses, can, as a result of using a basically standardized set of questions, be insensitive to local conditions: pretesting is restricted to whether questions work, that is get suitable answers, rather than whether they are suitable questions. This problem is worsened by the fact that many of the analysts were not involved in collecting the data and have very little knowledge of the societies concerned. Furthermore, multipurpose surveys often lack a sharp focus on any specific issue.

The tendency of sample surveys to simplify in the search for generalizations, added to a desire for easily defined and quantifiable variables, for which sample surveys are ideally suited, often emphasizes economic factors and ignores local factors which are more social, historical and ideological in nature. It is not possible to comprehend the changes that have taken place without understanding the interplay of social, ideological and economic forces at the local level.

While it may be possible to redesign a sample survey to be more sympathetic to local circumstances with greater local knowledge and more extensive pre-testing, it will still tend to lose much of the complexity of the local situation. A particular failing of sample surveys in analysing the local situation is their tendency to atomize, since sample surveys are by their nature addressed to particular individuals. Typically, they ask these

persons questions such as their preferred age at marriage, which treat them as though they are autonomous individuals free to behave as they like. In reality, the proper questions may be how is the marriage decision made, who has an input into it, and what factors are taken into account? These are not only complicated questions to ask, but an individual may not be in a position to answer, being only consulted after the real decision had been made. This may be true not only in the case of an arranged marriage but even in the case of a love match, if it is made clear that it is time for an individual to marry.

The sample survey, by itself, is particularly inadequate for studying change. Sample surveys are essentially a cross-sectional analysis of relationships or levels at a particular moment. They do not tell us what the situation was like in the past. The dangerous temptation is to assume that what is associated with differentials now explains change over time. For example, because age at marriage is lower now among the less educated, and both age at marriage and education were lower in the past, it is easy to assume that rising education levels explain rising age at marriage. While there may be some association, this is unlikely to be the main explanation. More to the point, the association itself does not explain the causal connection between the two. A good example of this is the relationship between employment and age at marriage. As Dixon (1970) says, in the short term, age at marriage may decrease as employment increases, for marriage becomes more feasible. In the long term, though, as societies become more dependent on wage labour, the very relationship between age at marriage and employment is likely to change. After all, long-term changes in the level of demographic characteristics are generally much greater than any continuing differentials in these characteristics between segments of the population.

The sample survey is especially inappropriate for studying long-term change in marriage, for over time the very definition of marriage can change; indeed changes in marriage patterns are largely due to changes in what is desired in marriage and hence in what marriage is. Whereas once love marriages would have been regarded as elopements they are increasingly accepted as genuine marriages provided the family approves. Formerly, a love match was not acceptable as it was essentially a relationship between two individuals, whereas a marriage then was regarded as involving the family too. In Chapter 2 differences were noted between customary and formal marriage in the degree of family involvement, and what is expected of the marriage. The increasing registration of marriage has added the new element of government recognition into the definition of marriage.

The one element that truly defines marriage is social acceptance, which in Sri Lanka, unlike the West, depends on family approval. But the social acceptance of marriage is not always clear. A marriage might start off with an elopement, being met first with total opposition, then be granted grudging acceptance by one family and then the other, perhaps following the birth of a child, and ultimately full approval. At what stage it becomes marriage depends upon who is judging. When a partnership becomes a marriage is complicated by the fact that marriages which are not accepted are likely to be much briefer than those which are, raising on another level the question as to whether they are genuine marriages or not. The sample survey is, consequently, not an appropriate way of investigating what is really meant by marriage in the society.

The research team believed that a proper investigation of the process of social change underlying Sri Lanka's demographic transition required more than simply a sample survey with a questionnaire; it required an in-depth investigation of all the interlocking factors that are involved in social

change. Inevitably, this meant study at the level of the local community, for only at this level can the precise interplay of the various forces be appreciated. The disadvantage of the approach was that the findings cannot be claimed to be scientifically representative of the country as are sample surveys, but the team felt that this loss was small compared to the gains. This point is addressed below.

3.2 Investigating the social context within which individuals conduct their lives

The study involved a number of different but related elements. First, the investigators participated as much as possible in community life, to acquaint them with the various factors that affected community members. The investigators found it much easier to participate in the life of the two rural communities than in the more urban areas, largely because they are more genuine communities: people are more interested in visitors, are always hospitable, and there is a more active community life, including ritual life. It also helped that we had points of contact. In the first village studied we were based at the village temple which we reached early in the morning and left often late at night. In the other village we had a house, in which the interviewers stayed, and at which the investigators stayed when we were not interviewing people or participating in village activities. It may also have been significant that we had the active support of the local authorities. In both villages the village headmen regularly called in on us to find out how the work was going. The most difficult area in which to participate in daily life was the urban middle-class area of Colombo. There was little sense of community, many important aspects of daily life occurred outside the local area, there was no equivalent to the village headman, and, above all, there was some suspicion of inquisitive outsiders. The urban slums were in an intermediate situation. Environmentally, they were much the most difficult areas to work in, one area being largely flooded during the

investigation, but they have a much stronger sense of community, and are generally friendlier than the middle-class areas. Admittedly, this friendliness can sometimes be frightening; in one area in which the team worked, heroin trafficking was rife and there were a number of characters in whose presence I felt distinctly uneasy. This criminal presence meant that, while we had permission to work in the area, the police kept something of a watch over our activities, for our protection but perhaps also to ensure that our work was not an elaborate cover for criminal activities.

While community participation is valuable in giving the investigator a feel for local life, it is no substitute for a deep understanding of family and community life, and more particularly for the experience of social change. Such understanding and experience exists in abundance in the inhabitants of those communities, it is a matter of how to tap it. After all, one of the advantages of studying the demographic transition in countries such as Sri Lanka is that much of it has occurred over people's lifetimes. Unlike the case of the West, one is not entirely dependent on historical documentation, it continues in people's memories. What the respondents have to contribute is particularly important when discussing the relationship between the social structure and demographic variables, a relationship which is fundamental to the investigation of Asian marriage but is often taken for granted.

3.3 Using the respondents as investigators

Demographers, like most social scientists, generally question people about certain characteristics and attributes which the investigator regards as significant, but rarely ask what the respondents themselves believe to be significant. The respondents' answers are to be analysed, and therefore they should not form part of the research design. It is felt that the respondent's explanations are subjective and particularistic, related only to that

individual's specific circumstances. It is up to the analyst to determine the true meaning behind the interviewee's statements, through the use of statistical correlations and the other methods available to the social sciences. It is frequently felt that only thus will generally applicable models and generalizations be obtained.

However, such models only inform us about relationships that were true when the survey was taken and not earlier, and are systematically biased against the local and particularistic. General models, to the extent that they are true, can only explain part of the change that has taken place, and they tell us very little about the process of change. Moreover, much of the apparent subjectivity of the answers provided by the respondents often reflects the inadequacies of the surveys, rather than of the respondents. If, for example, a question concerns the immediate circumstances of marriage, then the answers are likely to be much more diffuse than if the question addresses the process of marriage, on which there is usually broad agreement.

The other often cited reason for not taking the respondent too much into confidence is the need in a scientific endeavour not to influence the respondent's behaviour and beliefs. Apart from philosophical questions about defining social science as science in this sense, the value of what can be learnt from respondents far outweighs any problems of contamination.

Generally respondents have a great deal of commonsense and insight to contribute about the major factors, social and physical, affecting behaviour in their society, and also about what they see as having been the major developments promoting social change. This does not mean that the investigator can simply sit and listen and later write up what he or she has heard, as analysis. The investigator has an important role both in eliciting the information from respondents and in ultimately determining what it

means. This may sound not very different from what has just been criticized as treating respondents as simply objects for analysis rather than as agents able to interpret their own society. It is, though, a more subtle and sympathetic type of analysis than the more orthodox analysis commonly practised.

While the respondents have a much more extensive experience of their society than the investigator will have, it will often be anecdotal, rarely systematized, and possibly contradictory. Usually, but not always, considerable probing is necessary to obtain their experiences, but the probing should not be random, it should be informed by the investigator's understanding of what he (or she) is trying to discover, or otherwise the investigator will simply ramble in often interesting but essentially circular discussion. The investigator's understanding of what he is trying to discover needs to be informed by what he has learnt from his participation in the life of the community, a critical interpretation of what has been heard from previous interviews, previous reading of the literature concerning the local society, and, above all, what he knows concerning demographic theory and the theory of social change.

Clearly what is critical is how the investigator uses his knowledge. If he uses it in an unsuitable way, he can predetermine what he finds despite protestations to the contrary from the respondents, that is the investigator commits the error of, in effect, making the respondents agree, or misinterpreting what the respondents have to say. An example of this is the case of marriage squeeze. Before working in Sri Lanka, I was involved in the field work of the Indian Research Project conducted by the Demography Department, Australian National University and the Population Centre, Bangalore. This project investigated the causes of demographic change in South India also using a micro-approach. When we asked about the rising age at marriage, and increasing dowry, the most common reason cited was a

shortage of grooms for women to marry. A number of writers have tended to assume that this is not the genuine explanation: what the respondents are expressing is a socially perceived shortage arising from shortage of desirable men. In the past within each caste there was relative homogeneity with little difference between grooms and there was little difficulty in finding a suitable groom for a woman. Indeed, it was the woman who was in demand for her productive and reproductive capabilities, that is her ability to work hard and to bear many children. Now, the situation has changed with every family desiring an educated son-in-law with a good job and links to the city. Thus, many families with nubile daughters are competing for the hands of a few very desirable men. While there is some truth in this argument, it too easily dismisses the arguments of the respondents. There is indeed a shortage of grooms. With a large age gap between marriage partners and falling mortality, South India has moved from a situation in which the marriage market favoured the brides to one in which it favoured the grooms at much the same time as when age at marriage and dowries began to rise (cf. Caldwell et al., 1988: 80-107).

However, it would be simplistic to conclude that only the marriage squeeze was involved. Sri Lanka has had a marriage squeeze similar to that of South India, yet respondents rarely cite the shortage of men as a factor in delaying age at marriage or in increasing dowry. The reasons for this are discussed in Chapter 4. Where a less intensive study might have stressed the superficial similarities, the micro-approach indicates that the respondents in South India are correct when they cite the shortage of men as a factor in delaying female marriage and that the respondents in Sri Lanka are correct when they do not cite groom shortage as a factor in delaying marriage.

To be sure the meaning of what the respondent has related is not being misinterpreted, the investigator needs to consider carefully what

exactly it does mean, to compare it with what has been learnt elsewhere, to follow it up with supplementary questioning either with the original respondent or with others, and, most importantly, to find whatever alternative evidence is available. A very useful exercise is to outline possible hypotheses to the respondents themselves. While this might appear to be a case of leading the respondent, in my experience, while a respondent might agree to simple statements, when presented with a whole hypothesis, he or she will often have very sensible and pithy things to say.

3.4 In-depth interviews

In the Sri Lankan survey two sorts of in-depth interviews were conducted. The first type was by the investigators themselves. It was very flexible, following up any leads that seemed useful to obtaining an overall picture of the society and of social change. Interviews were conducted with a wide range of people to gather a diversity of views. The second type was conducted by the project's interviewers. This was generally more restricted, being guided by a list of probing questions prepared by the principal investigators. Although the interviewers were not meant to be restricted to this list, inevitably there was some tendency this way, though the better interviewers would follow up interesting leads. Furthermore, the principal investigators sat in on as many interviews as they could, directing the interviews in directions that promised value. They also read all transcripts after the completion of the interviews and discussed with the interviewers their precise meaning and implications. This encouraged the interviewers to be more adventurous in their interviews.

These interviews were family interviews. The wife should be present if at all possible but any family member was welcome. The marriage histories, as well as the other topics with which the survey was concerned, were collected for all members of the family and each explained their roles

with regard to each marriage which had occurred. While the presence of other family members might restrict personal confidences, my experience was that respondents were remarkably candid. If the interviews were restricted to individual people, a distorted picture of reality would have emerged. Important decisions are not made in isolation; they are made in consultation and often reflect pressures from other people, particularly family members, in a way that interviews with all the family members could to some extent reproduce. Furthermore, family members were usually quite prepared to express different opinions about what had occurred and comment on each other's responses.

The two types of in-depth interviews, those conducted by the principal investigators and those conducted by the interviewers, were complementary. The interviews conducted by the investigators provided many of the new leads for further investigation by the interviewers. This allowed for exploration of more specialist areas, for example, in the case of health, with midwives, and, in the case of marriage, with marriage brokers. Since the investigators were either foreigners or Sri Lankan social scientists their interviews created more interest and generally drew in a greater range of people with more to contribute. While there was a certain loss of confidentiality, this was more than made up for by the wide range of views presented.

The interviews conducted by the trained interviewers also provided ideas. The sessions sat in on by the investigators and the reading of transcripts and follow-up discussions between the interviewers and the investigators were extremely instructive. These interviews also complemented those conducted by the investigators by revealing general patterns. Thus, if a particular hypothesis arose from previous interviewing, discussions between the investigator and the interviewers, or from some other source, this could be explored through the more general in-depth

interviews. If there was little support for the hypothesis it could be rejected or modified; if there was support for it, it could be further investigated.

3.5 The survey component

Besides the in-depth interviewing a number of techniques were retained from more conventional demographic approaches. All the families were questioned using lengthy structured interviews, which included a basic census for determining matters such as population structure, family composition, background variables such as ethnicity, religion, education, age at marriage, proportion celibate, and proportion divorced or separated. Additional questions concerned various aspects of the central themes including marriage. For example, there was a specialized investigation concerning the marital intentions of all unmarried people aged over 16 years and their families; unmarried women over 30 years of age and unmarried men over 35 years of age were asked about the factors which had led to them to delay their marriage more than usual, and about their future intentions; and women over 60 were asked about how marriage and other conditions in their youth differed from current conditions. Even the structured interviews had some of the characteristics of the unstructured in-depth interviews. Questions were open-ended and interviewers were encouraged to write down all answers and to follow up any interesting points that might arise.

The survey component grew over time, as questions concerning hypotheses formulated as a result of the in-depth work were added to the questionnaire. This helped to show how widely shared were particular attitudes and characteristics, and to cast light on new areas that the in-depth interviews suggested were linked to specific topics of interest. Adding questions to the survey also helped to test hypotheses implied by the in-depth interviewing: the reverse of the normal procedure where the analyst

tries to explain observed correlations. The procedure of adding questions to the survey has the disadvantage that many questions cannot be run for the earlier research areas. The analyst had to take this into account.

A second by-product of the expansion of the survey component was that the interviewers tended to reduce their in-depth questioning. This was an inevitable response to the fact that many of the topics were now covered in the survey, and that the interviewers were getting more experience of focusing on the critical issues. While the survey component of the investigation grew, the interpretation of the survey material still depended critically on the in-depth interviews and the experience of the investigating team in the field.

Regarding marriage, the main additions to the survey were sections on why unmarried women over thirty and men over thirty-five had delayed marriage, more questions on the process of marriage, and questions to older women on what had changed particularly in marriage over time.

3.6 The sample

The census and survey covered all families in the survey areas. The in-depth interviews by the trained interviewers were conducted in every second household.

This means, in terms of sampling, that within survey areas the survey was not a representative sample, for it attained complete coverage. Thus, there is no question of confidence limits or how representative the sample is of the survey areas. To the degree to which it was properly asked, and in this I have great confidence, it is a total description of the survey area.

The real question is to what extent the experience of the survey areas represent that of Sri Lanka. The project did not seek to reveal what the

overall situation in Sri Lanka was with regard to marriage patterns or with regard to fertility and mortality rates. It sought to explain what was known to have occurred in a country which had long possessed good statistics. Consequently a representative sample was not sought. Rather the project chose survey areas in which the causes of social and institutional change could be investigated. The localities chosen were concentrated in Sri Lanka's South-West, the part of the country which most clearly shows the effects of social and economic changes.

Nevertheless, even if the sample was not a scientific one, it was approximately representative of much of the country. The South-West contains half Sri Lanka's population. More significantly, all the principal ethnic and religious groups were covered and the survey areas were chosen so as to cover the three sectors of the population, urban, rural and estate, as well as poor and better off. While the research areas were not scientifically representative of Sri Lanka's population, the collection of census materials means that it is possible to compare the demographic patterns of the areas to the overall and regional rates in Sri Lanka. As the next chapter expands on these rates, it will suffice to note that the aggregated data from the surveyed areas surprisingly closely approximated those of the more scientific samples and the main differences can be explained relatively easily using the data gathered by the micro-approach.

3.7 The nature of proof in the micro-approach

A critical question concerning the micro-approach concerns the question of representativeness just discussed. While the micro-study should reflect the realities of its study area it cannot be proved that it is representative of the region or country it is in. But its quantitative data approximate those from structured survey approaches, and it is perhaps of

more critical importance that the causal explanations provided by the micro-surveys in very different and far-apart areas are in broad agreement.

On another level the question of proof concerns how a particular finding in the micro-survey can be shown to be true. For example, the analyst might argue that a particular pattern of behaviour, such as age at marriage, is explained by a particular factor, perhaps the organization of the family or kinship system or the economy. In using information from a sample survey the analyst would not try to prove such an assertion. All that is necessary to prove is that there was a statistical association between age at marriage and family structure and that it is logical to assume that there is a causal connection. The analyst cannot, and generally does not, try to prove that his or her connection is the right one. The analyst of the micro-study is, in a sense, going further in arguing that this particular approach helps to isolate particular causal factors. Unfortunately, ultimate proof of the kind desired is probably impossible in the social sciences. In physics or the other hard sciences where the objects of study are innately simple and can be studied in laboratory conditions, it may be possible to say that something is caused by something else. In the social sciences, the objects of study, such as people and social and economic institutions, tend to be so complex, and the relations between them so complicated, that it is impossible to be certain of the causality of a particular relationship. The analyst is restricted to trying to explain the principal relationships. This is a matter of judgement both in the analysis and in obtaining the material on which the analysis is based. In a sense, the problem for the analyst of a micro-survey is that much of the analysis occurs at the stage of the data collection, and depends on the judgement of the investigator. Analysts are inevitably affected by their preconceptions, some deriving from their own society and education and some deriving from their reading of the literature. Such difficulties are

impossible to avoid for it is the analysts' background and the literature that determine the key questions they want to investigate.

Analysts have to be aware of the difficulties in what they are attempting to do, and has to be able to support their case by supplementary evidence. For example, findings in in-depth interviews might be supported by evidence from structural interviews, or from documentary evidence. Most importantly, the findings of the study will be supported or not supported by further studies.

The problems just discussed of proof using the micro-approach are not a particular disadvantage of the micro-approach. The nature of the micro-approach means that the analyst has to face problems inherent in proving causation in the social sciences. The analyst of statistical data can unconsciously simply avoid the issue.

3.8 Undertaking the project

The project was directed by a group of investigators from the Australian National University and the University of Colombo including Professor J.C. Caldwell, Dr. Indra Gajanayake, Mrs. Pat Caldwell, Mr. Laxman Disanayake and myself. In January 1985 a team of fifteen young women who had recently graduated in the social sciences were recruited and training began. In February the first of the research sites, the village of Bondupitiya, was chosen. This was a fortunate selection for the initial part of a project of this kind involves very considerable supervision and continuing training. Many of the interviewers had had previous experience in survey work but of a very different kind from what was being employed here. They were used to asking a limited range of questions quickly and hurrying on to the next interview. Here, they had to learn to be patient to listen to what the respondent was trying to articulate and to seek the truth by asking sensible and rewarding follow-up questions. Inevitably this was

difficult: significantly the best interviewers were generally those with no previous experience. The village was also a fortunate choice for the first research work because, as noted, villages are among the easiest places in which to conduct field work. People are friendly, easy to talk to, and interested. There are fewer diversions from research. For the supervisors, it is easy to find the interviewers, as the villagers almost invariably know where the interviewers are.

Supervision mostly involved reading the incoming questionnaires and discussing them with the interviewers, and sitting in on as many interviews as possible. Reinterviews were also arranged for a sample of the households. Training took place in much the same way, by way of example in interviewing and discussion of completed interviews. It was supplemented by sessions at the end of each day, and sometimes at lunch, when findings were discussed, problems that interviewers had had were reviewed, and observations that the investigators and the interviewers had made were listened to and discussed.

The interviewers were largely unchanged until the end of the survey. This meant that they built up a wealth of experience, and developed a team camaraderie. As the survey continued, the investigators could afford to indulge more in their own interviewing. Nevertheless, a fairly close supervision was kept on the interviewers at all stages.

The interviews were conducted in Sinhala. The interviewers translated them into English but were also encouraged to provide the original Sinhala version as well for later cross-checking. As not all the investigators spoke Sinhala, some of the interviewers had also to act as interpreters in their presence. Few problems were encountered in this. A substantial amount of discussion in English also took place. The data from the structured interviews were coded at the Australian National University.

A fairly similar procedure was followed in the 1987 survey of a tea estate in the Kandyan highlands. A new team of interviewers was recruited. Two of the interviewers from the former team participated, who, as well as conducting their own interviews, helped in the supervision of others.

The major problem in this survey was that many of the respondents were Tamil with limited ability to speak Sinhala, whereas the interviewers were Sinhalese, only some of whom spoke fluent Tamil. In the sensitive political circumstances of the time, there were good reasons to be concerned that a Tamil interviewing team might have raised suspicions among the mostly Sinhalese officials of the area. There had been a number of acts of sabotage in the area which had been attributed to Tamils from Colombo. Our problems were greatly reduced by the fact that one of the investigators, Dr. Guruswamy, a non-Tamil Indian national was able to speak Tamil fluently. His presence helped both with the interviewing and in giving confidence to the respondents, who were very aware of being a minority surrounded by a Sinhalese majority: memories were still strong of the 1983 riots in which many Tamils were killed.

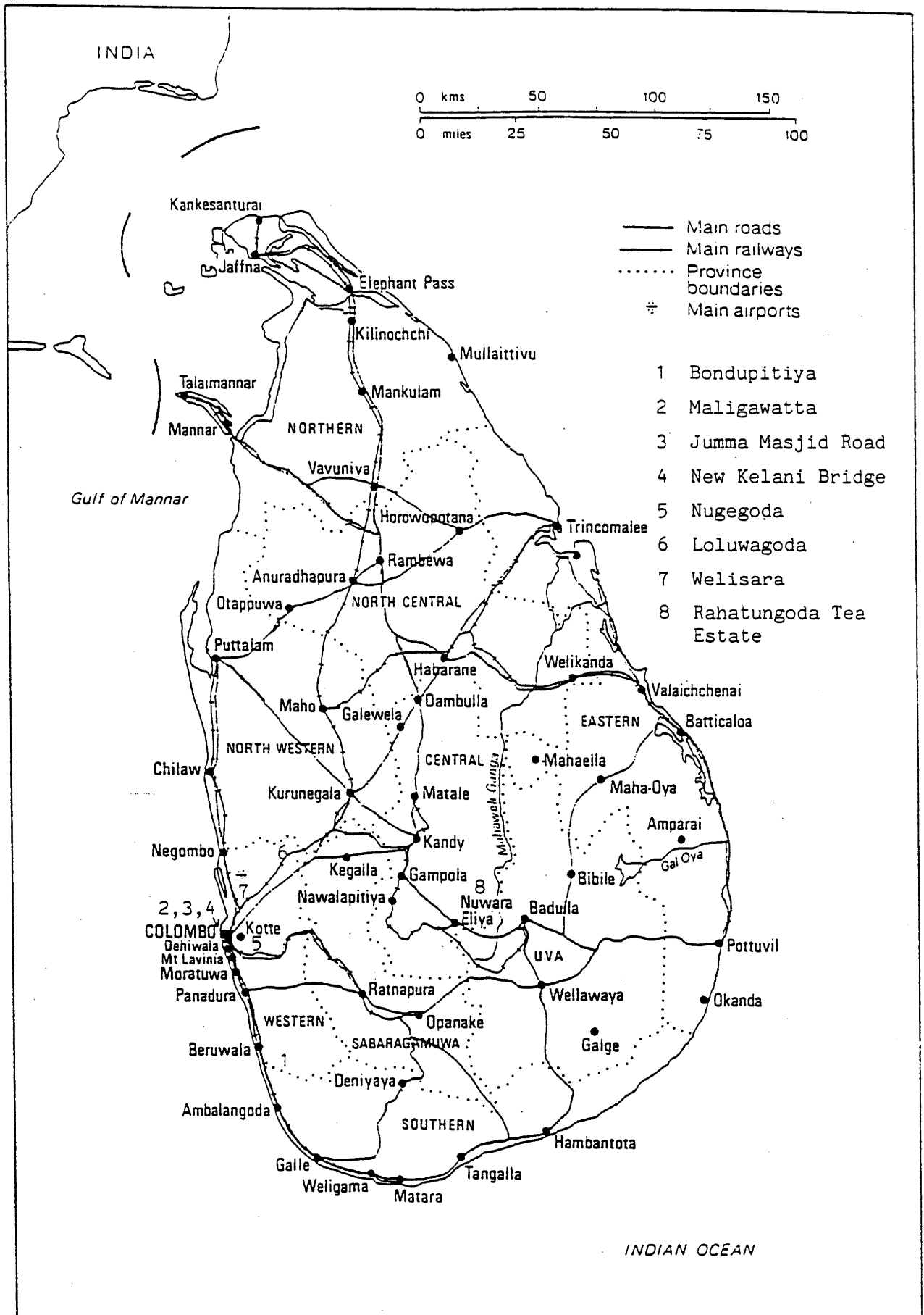
Besides the problems of interviewing, the other main problems were logistical. For the rural areas, we had to provide housing and to some extent transport. In one area we recruited a nightwatchman to guard the interviewers' house.

Other problem areas were mapping and logistics. Before any interviewing, all areas were mapped. Good mapping is essential in a field study to ensure that everyone who is supposed to be questioned is questioned. This is just as true where the entire population is being studied as where a random sample is being used. The only way to ensure that this actually happens is to prepare detailed maps, or otherwise households will

inevitably be overlooked by interviewers. Such households are likely to include a disproportionate number of the more isolated and the poorer households; this is especially so in Sri Lanka where houses are often very dispersed and there is no obvious street pattern. The project employed two geographers from the University of Colombo to prepare detailed maps, based on a framework provided by existing aerial mapping. The maps proved to be very accurate in the field, but we subjected them to a system of continuous rechecking on the ground, sometimes adding households previously hidden or removing a deserted house or a ruin.

My work in the project concentrated on the nature of the marriage transition. From the beginning of the project, I had been involved in determining what appeared to be the major questions that needed answering concerning the marriage transition. Initially, the need to supervise and train the interviewers in the field meant that questions on marriage that I developed could only be asked in conjunction with the other themes of the project. Later I was able to conduct more focused interviews on what was happening and had happened to marriage. In this endeavour, I worked with Indrani Pieris (now my wife), whose knowledge, not only of Sinhala, but more especially of her society, was of great assistance. This work helped me to understand a society other than my own and the role of marriage within it. More particularly, it assisted, in conjunction with the other investigators, in formulating questions for the interviewers' in-depth interviews, and for a greatly expanded section on marriage in the structured interview, with more questions on the process of marriage and more on the changing conditions of marriage.

Map 1 Sri Lankan Field Sites



3.9 The research areas

The 1985 research was conducted in seven locations in Western Province (see Map 1) in Sri Lanka's South-Western Low-Country (as opposed to the Up-Country Kandyan areas which before 1815 were under the rule of the Kandyan kingdom). The low-country is the most densely populated part of Sri Lanka with about half of Sri Lanka's population in approximately one-sixth of its area. It is the part of Sri Lanka which has been most subject to foreign influence, first in the form of trade and later the colonial rule of the Portuguese, Dutch and British. Not surprisingly, it is the area which shows most clearly the effects of social and economic change. The Western Province is Sri Lanka's commercial heartland and includes Colombo and extensive commuting areas as well as prosperous rice and cash crop areas (principally rubber, coconut and cinnamon).

The Western Province's population is principally Buddhist Sinhalese but there are also significant populations of Muslim Moors and, in Colombo, Tamils and Burghers (a group claiming descent from the earlier Dutch and Portuguese conquerors). The religious composition is similarly mixed. The majority of the Sinhalese are Buddhist but a significant number, especially north of Colombo, are Catholic. Similarly, the Tamils are mostly Hindu but have a large Catholic minority. The Moors are Muslim and the Burghers are mostly Protestant. Language is also split, with the Sinhalese speaking Sinhala, the Tamils and the Moors speaking Tamil, and the Burghers English.

The limited number of survey areas possible in an in-depth study meant that a random selection of field sites would have been meaningless. The sites chosen had to be reasonably representative of Sri Lanka's population while at the same time being possible to survey. This last requirement involved a number of issues.

One of these was that it could be mapped. The project required good maps. These were much easier to obtain where previous aerial mapping had been conducted, and could be updated on the ground. This was a limiting condition but not a major one as aerial mapping had been extensive though not total.

A more important limiting condition related to the political condition of the country. While we were in Sri Lanka intensive fighting was occurring in the North and the East of the country where the Sri Lankan Tamil population was concentrated. Tamil rebels were fighting the Sinhalese dominated government and army for a Tamil homeland. Work in these areas would have been impossible: this was one reason why a representative sample would not have been possible even if we had wanted to conduct one. Even in the area where the project was concentrated there were problems. In 1983 there were bloody anti-Tamil riots in Colombo and the major towns in this region in which upwards of two thousand people may have been killed: the precise number is unknown. There was continuing resentment between the Sinhalese and the Tamils. There was strong pressure from the University, reportedly originating in the security services, not to recruit Tamils, on the grounds that we would be used as a front, by seditious elements. Our interviewers were Sinhalese, although we gave preference in the Estates study to those who could speak Tamil. In the circumstances, it is very likely that Tamil interviewers may have been looked upon with suspicion by Sinhalese and by government officials. It would have been difficult interviewing in Tamil areas with a Sinhalese interviewing team who could not speak Tamil. More importantly though, it is very likely that government officials would have been suspicious of our motives in interviewing in a Tamil area, in view of the 1983 riots and of the situation in the north and the east.

These difficulties of working in Tamil areas, combined with the lower Tamil proportion in the South-West, meant that Tamils were slightly under-reported in the region covered by the 1985 survey. This, however, was partially compensated for by our 1987 survey of a tea estate (Rahatungoda) in Nuwara Eliya District, Central Province in the Kandyan Highlands, where the majority of the population were Tamil. The net effect of our sample was that Indian Tamils who dominate the estates were somewhat overrepresented whereas Sri Lankan Tamils who dominate the population of the North and the East were underrepresented. In the circumstances the seven areas chosen were as representative of Sri Lanka's diverse ethnic and religious composition as was possible (Table 3.1 and Table 3.2). The main difference from the wider population was the overrepresentation of Moors (Muslims). This was the consequence of choosing a slum site in Colombo (for analytical purposes in the Table it is divided into two - Jumma Masjid Road and Maligawatta) where Muslims were highly represented.

The seven field locations were chosen in part to ensure that the major ethnic and religious groups were represented and in part to ensure that the major living conditions were represented. At the final stage of choice a random selection was made from localities listed in the previous census. Two villages were chosen as being reasonably typical of the South-west. The villages provide an interesting contrast, one - Bondupitiya - being a mixed caste village with a high proportion of the lower caste, the other, Loluwagoda, consisting predominantly of high caste Govigama, who make up about half Sri Lanka's Sinhalese population. An urban slum was selected partly because it was a distinctive environment but also because it was typical of areas in which Muslims live. A squatter area, New Kelani Bridge, with a much lower proportion of Muslims, was seen as a useful contrast to the slum. It was also the one area to have a sizable proportion of Tamils. Nugegoda was seen as representative of the middle-class areas of

Colombo. Welisara was selected as representing the extensive community areas surrounding Colombo, and also for its high proportion of Christians.

Table 3.1 Religious distribution (per cent) of the population in the seven survey areas in Southwest Sri Lanka, 1985

Religion	Area						
	Bondu- pitiya	Maliga- watta	Jumma Masjid Road	New Kelani Bridge	Nuge- goda	Loluwa- goda	Welisara
Buddhist	100.0	11.3	17.9	57.1	85.3	95.6	43.7
Hindu		3.2	3.5	14.4	0.1	-	5.3
Muslim		83.2	78.4	14.7	2.2	0.5	5.2
Catholic		1.1	-	9.0	8.8	2.8	39.3
Protestant		1.1	0.1	4.8	3.6	1.1	6.5
Total	2305	1160	737	1498	1705	1704	1847

Source: Primary analysis of Sri Lankan Demographic Change Project, 1985.

Table 3.2 Religious distribution (per cent) of the survey population compared with the Southwestern region (1981) and Sri Lanka (1981)

Religion	Survey ¹	South West Region ²	Sri Lanka ²
Buddhist	66.8	75.2	69.3
Hindu	3.5	4.7	15.5
Muslim	17.3	7.0	7.5
Catholic	9.8	11.7	6.9
Protestant	2.6	1.3	0.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: 1 Primary analysis of Sri Lankan Demographic Change Project, 1985.
2 Department of Census and Statistics, 1986

The total survey population was 10,956 distributed between 1,974 households. Of the two villages, one, Bondupitiya (population 2,305) was located to the south of Colombo in a mixed rice, rubber and cinnamon growing area. Many people in the village had jobs in the tourist resorts along the coast or in Colombo, often staying in Colombo during the working week and returning home on week-ends. The other village, Loluwagoda (population 1,704), north-east of Colombo, is primarily concerned with the production of coconuts and coconut products. Both had predominantly Buddhist Sinhalese populations.

Although the term urban slums is used here for two of the areas, Maligawatta and Jumma Masjid Road (populations 1,160 and 737), and middle class for another, Nugegoda (population 1,705), this should not give the impression that these areas are uniformly poor or well-off. In Sri Lanka, neighbourhoods tend to be fairly mixed with rich and poor often living next door to each other. The main differences are that the slums are characterized by crowdedness, poor environmental conditions (the main slum studied is subject to flooding) and distinctive occupational and ethnic composition. Many of the slums' inhabitants work in trade whereas people in the middle class area are more likely to work in high-status white collar jobs. The occupations are closely related to the ethnic composition. The slums have, as noted, a high proportion of Muslims who are mostly found in commerce, whereas the middle class area has a high proportion of Sinhalese and particularly Burghers who gravitate towards clerical positions. The squatter area (population 1,498), in contrast, is more uniformly poor, consisting largely of recently arrived immigrants. It has a very mixed population. The commuting area (population 1,847) lies just to the north of Colombo. It is a prosperous area with a high proportion of Christians.

Just as there are some difficulties in distinguishing between slum and middle-class areas the distinction between rural and urban areas is less

in Sri Lanka and especially in the South-West than it is in most other Asian countries. For example, the villages were not nucleated but stretched hither and thither between rice fields and plantations of rubber and coconuts. They had little sense of geographic identity. More importantly, many people worked outside the village community either on a daily basis or actually residing for long periods at their place of work, often coming home for weekends. Others depended on outside income. Only a minority were dependent on agricultural income. For an outside observer many of the urban areas, though clearly urban, had something of a rural character. For example, just as many rural households are surrounded by their gardens and fruit trees so too are many urban ones. This lack of a clear distinction is particularly true of the commuting area which has characteristics of both urban and rural areas.

In 1987 a further survey was conducted in the up-country above Kandy. This site consisted of a tea plantation, Rahatungoda Tea Plantation (population 1,290), with the workforce either working on the plantation or providing services to them (e.g. shopkeepers). The tea estates were founded about a hundred years ago in the sparsely settled mountainous areas above the rice fields of the Sinhalese. Many, like the one studied, replaced earlier coffee plantations which had been destroyed by disease. The English owners recruited Tamil labourers from South India for their workforce. Low-country Sinhalese now fill many of the managerial postings and also are most of the shopkeepers, while up-country Sinhalese contribute some of the tea pickers. The tea estates are of interest because they were subject to early fertility declines (Langford,1981,1982), even though their mortality levels are not, by Sri Lankan standards, low. In terms of marriage their very different economic and social circumstances are a valuable comparison for the analysis of lowland marriage, though it is important to remember their different histories and cultural origins.

Table 3.3 Religious distribution of the population in Rahatungoda Tea Estate, 1987.

Religion	Percentage
Buddhist	30.0
Hindu	68.8
Muslim	0.9
Christian	0.3
N	1290

Source: Primary analysis of Sri Lankan Demographic Change Project 1987.

3.10 Conclusion

Subsequent to the completion of the field work, the structural interviews were coded for statistical analysis. While the use of a probing list meant that parts of the in-depth material could have been coded, this was felt to be an inappropriate form of analysis for the purpose of these data, which were collected to show people's behaviour in their total context. Therefore, these interviews were simply transcribed and used to construct a file on the families, which in turn was studied intensively for patterns and relationships.

In conclusion, the micro-approach was selected as the most appropriate way of examining long-term social change at the local level. This approach involved a combination of participatory observation, in-depth interviewing and a more structured survey to give many of the advantages of the more orthodox survey, such as information on prevailing rates in the survey areas and of the anthropological approach, a greater insight into local forces affecting behaviour. It has the disadvantage of not indicating representative overall rates but this was not the aim of the project. It also has the potential disadvantage that it is more dependent on the judgement of the analyst but if it is successfully undertaken, its value should more than outweigh any potential shortcomings. The qualitative material,

gathered from censusing and surveying almost 11,000 persons in 1985, and over 12,000 by 1987, provided an adequate base for testing statistically many of my conclusions about Sri Lankan marriage.

Chapter 4

Patterns of first marriage

4.1 A new marriage system

The Sri Lankan marriage system differs greatly from that described by the nineteenth-century writers and even from that prevailing in most of contemporary South Asia. Sri Lanka has been transformed from a society in which marriages were arranged by families and relatives to one in which they are based on the individuals' own selection.

The Sri Lanka Demographic Change Project revealed that marriage patterns were also very different from the early descriptions. Marriage was very late for both sexes, with, in the main sample, a singulate mean age at marriage for men of 28 years and for women of 24 years. These results were consistent with the 1981 Census's 24.4 years (Nadarajah, 1986 : 100) for females. It should perhaps have been slightly higher, since in the Southwest marriage is a little later than average, but this is counterbalanced by the survey's weighting towards the smaller ethnic groups which have a slightly lower age at marriage.

This late age at marriage is not a recent occurrence. Tables 4.1a and b show life-table estimates of the quartiles of cohorts from the 1985 and 1987 samples. Use of the life table is dictated by the need to account for the experience of people who were still unmarried at the time of interview. A simple calculation of the ages at marriage of people of a particular age who have already married will understate true ages at marriage to the extent that people may continue to marry beyond their current age group: while people who are still unmarried in their forties, for example, are unlikely ever to marry, people in their early twenties may well marry at a later date.

For each cohort, the proportions married by each exact age were derived from age-specific first-marriage probabilities which themselves were calculated by relating the number of marriages at that age to the number of people initially at risk (estimated as the number of never-married people at the beginning of the age group minus half the never-married people who were interviewed at that age) (Elandt-Johnson and Johnson, 1980: 156-158).

Table 4.1a Life-table estimates of ages by which 75, 50 and 25 per cent of the age cohort had ever married - Southwest

Current age	Year of marriage ¹	1st Quartile	Median	3rd Quartile	N
Males					
15-19		**	**	**	624
20-24		24.0	**	**	571
25-29	1985	23.7	27.4	**	551
30-34	1980	24.1	27.5	31.2	425
35-39	1975	24.8	27.8	31.4	347
40-49	1967	24.8	28.0	31.4	465
50-59	1957	24.7	27.3	31.1	340
60-69	1947	25.2	27.7	31.5	202
70+	1937	25.5	28.5	35.0	109
Females					
15-19		**	**	**	615
20-24		19.8	**	**	622
25-29	1980	19.4	22.4	27.2	463
30-34	1975	19.9	23.5	29.1	413
35-39	1970	18.9	22.0	26.7	372
40-49	1962	18.2	21.1	25.2	461
50-59	1952	18.3	20.9	24.5	330
60-69	1942	18.5	20.8	24.1	207
70+	1932	18.0	20.5	24.1	119

Notes: 1 Approximate median year of marriage; values shown only when more than 50 per cent married.

** Fewer than this proportion married.

Source: Primary analysis of Sri Lankan Demographic Change Project, 1985.

Table 4.1b Life-table estimates of ages by which 75, 50 and 25 per cent of the age cohort had ever married - Estates

Current age	Year of marriage ¹	1st Quartile	Median	3rd Quartile	N
Males					
15-19		**	**	**	51
20-24		**	**	**	64
25-29		24.4	27.0	**	39
30-34	1982	26.8	28.8	**	36
35-39	1977	25.1	28.4	31.4	45
40-49	1969	24.9	27.8	32.7	78
50-59	1959	23.0	25.5	28.3	42
60+	1945	21.9	26.3	31.3	19
Females					
15-19		**	**	**	61
20-24		21.2	**	**	58
25-29	1982	21.1	24.3	**	58
30-34	1977	21.5	24.2	28.0	44
35-39	1972	20.5	25.0	28.8	52
40-49	1964	18.1	21.6	24.6	73
50-59	1954	18.1	21.4	24.2	37
60+	1939	16.8	19.2	21.5	24

Notes: 1 Approximate median year of marriage; values shown only when more than 50 per cent married.

** Fewer than this proportion married.

Source: Primary analysis of Sri Lankan Demographic Change Project, 1987.

As Table 4.1a shows, in Southwest Sri Lanka, even for those who were over 70 years of age, the median age of marriage for males was 27.5 years and for females 20 years, figures which are much higher than those prevailing even today in most of South Asia. Indeed the male age at marriage has hardly changed at all; if anything it has declined slightly. Female age at marriage, however, has risen continuously until the 25-29 age group, though the earlier rise was comparatively slow. Similarly, the 1987 survey in the tea estates (Table 4.1b) also found a very late age at marriage. The picture presented in Tables 4.1a and b is consistent with the movement of the singulate mean age at marriage as derived from the census (Table 4.2).

Table 4.2 Singulate mean age at marriage (SMAM) by sex in census years 1901-1981.

Census Year	Males	Females	Difference
1981	27.9	24.4	3.5
1971	28.0	23.5	4.5
1963	27.9	22.1	5.8
1953	27.2	20.9	6.3
1946	27.0	20.7	6.3
1921	27.5	20.6	6.9
1911	26.9	19.9	7.0
1901	24.6	18.5*	6.1 ¹

Note: 1 Fernando (1975) records the female SMAM for 1901 as 18.1 with an age difference of 6.5.

Sources: 1901-1921 census figures, Dixon, 1970: 205
1946-1981 census figures, Nadarajah, 1986: 100

For the purposes of comparing the project's findings with those recorded by the census it should be noted that the oldest cohort recorded here, those over 70 years of age in 1985 and 1987, would have been marrying approximately 50 years earlier on average, that is in the early to mid-1930s. Therefore, even discounting the difficulties with the marriage question in the early censuses, the first relevant census for a comparison is the 1946 census. The censuses are in agreement with the project findings that, over this period, age at marriage for males was relatively unchanged but that for females initially rose slowly and then more rapidly. The 1981 Census SMAM figure does not reflect the recent dip in female age at marriage recorded in the project's 1985 sample, but then the census was earlier and the SMAM is for all current ages, and so is a relatively imprecise measure. However, the very high age at marriage for the 30-34 age group is corroborated by other evidence, namely the 1975 Sri Lankan Fertility Survey (SLFS). The SLFS found a SMAM for females of 25.1 years, slightly higher than that found by the Sri Lankan Demographic Change Project or by the 1971 and 1981 censuses, but this is in keeping with the fact that it

was taken when our latest marrying cohort, the 30-34 age group, were most frequently marrying.

This rise followed by a recent modest fall in the female age at marriage is not quite the end of the story. An examination of proportions married by age indicates that far from the female age at marriage falling back to previous levels it has begun to rise again, or at least the fall has levelled off.

Table 4.3 is complex to interpret, not least because of the problem of small numbers, especially on the estates. Nevertheless, a few observations can be made. First, for coastal females, the proportion married by age 19 drops gradually in the older age groups before falling sharply from age group 35-39 (40%), to age group 30-34 (29%), then rises for age group 25-29 (36%) before falling again for the 20-24 year olds (31%). The same pattern seems to show up at older ages with almost as high a proportion of 25-29 year olds not having married by age 24 as of the 35-39 age groups, raising the question whether it is a marriage bust among the 30-34 age group or a marriage boom among the 25-29 year olds. In the estates, interpretation is more difficult because of smaller numbers. Nevertheless, clearly the proportions of females married by specific ages have fallen, and seem to have stabilized around 19 per cent for those married by age 19.

The dramatic changes in female marriage are brought out graphically in Figures 4.1 and 4.2 which show the proportions of women married by exact ages in the Southwest and estate samples respectively. Figure 4.1 reflects the unusual circumstances of the mid-1970s in the marriage trends of age cohort 30-34, whose median year of marriage was approximately 1975. However, it is also clear that there has been a continuing decline in the proportion married by exact age, with the youngest age groups being no more likely to marry than the 30-34 year olds. This pattern implies that

two forces are at work, one, perhaps economic, which influences whether specific cohorts can marry when they desire, and the other more complex, perhaps relating to underlying changes in the very context of marriage influencing what the desired marriage age is. It was the former force that explains the aberrant position of the 30-34 year cohort, the latter which explains the overall pattern.

Table 4.3 Proportions of women married by age (selected age groups)

Age	Age groups								
	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45-49	50-59	60-69	70+
Southwest									
19	31	36	29	40	42	47	45	46	49
24	-	69	60	70	73	81	78	78	81
29	-	-	79	87	92	93	93	91	90
N	612	456	404	369	243	211	322	199	99
Estate									
19	19	19	18	25	29	61	40	55	50
24	-	59	59	54	79	87	81	90	100
29	-	-	84	81	90	100	86	100	100
N	58	58	44	52	42	31	37	20	4

Source: Primary analysis of the Sri Lankan Demographic Change Project, 1985 and 1987.

Figure 4.1. Life-table estimates of proportions married by exact ages: Women 15+, Southwest.

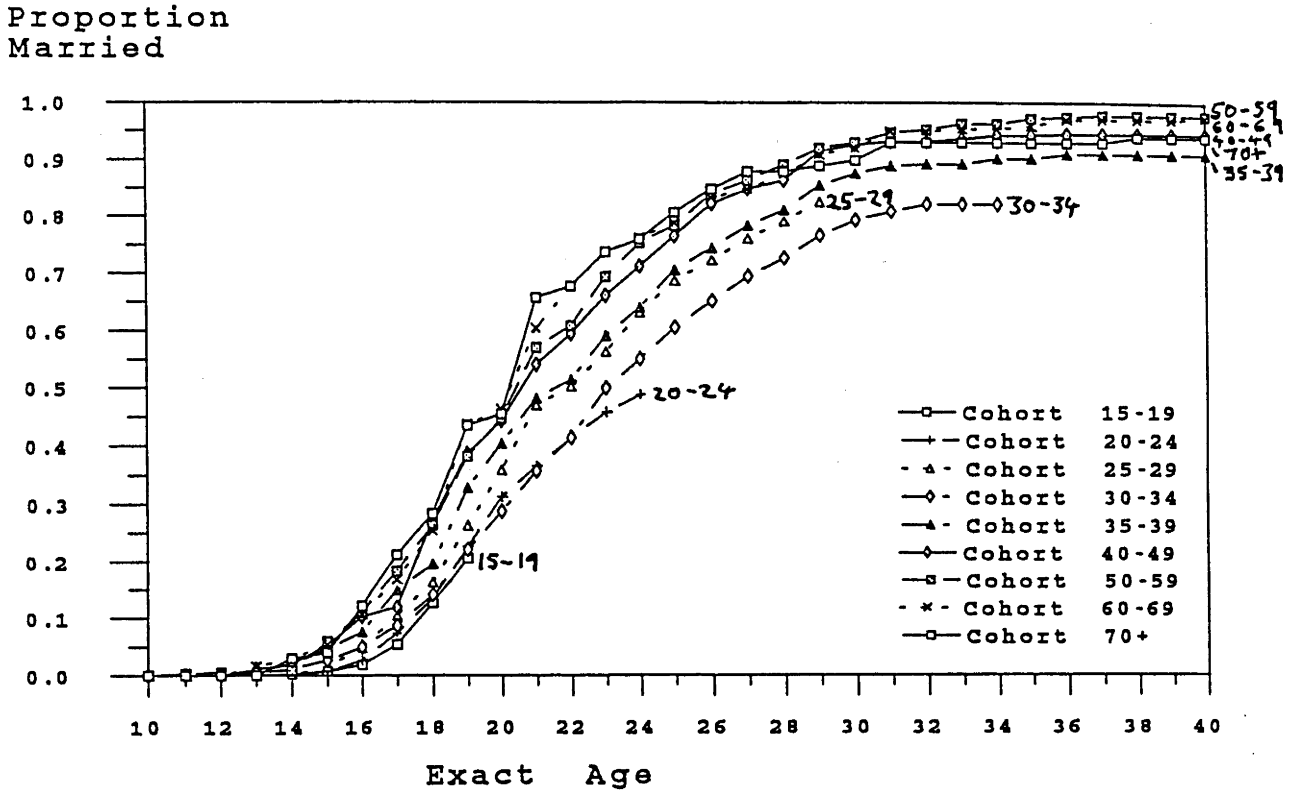


Figure 4.2. Life-table estimates of proportions married by exact ages: Women 15+, Estates

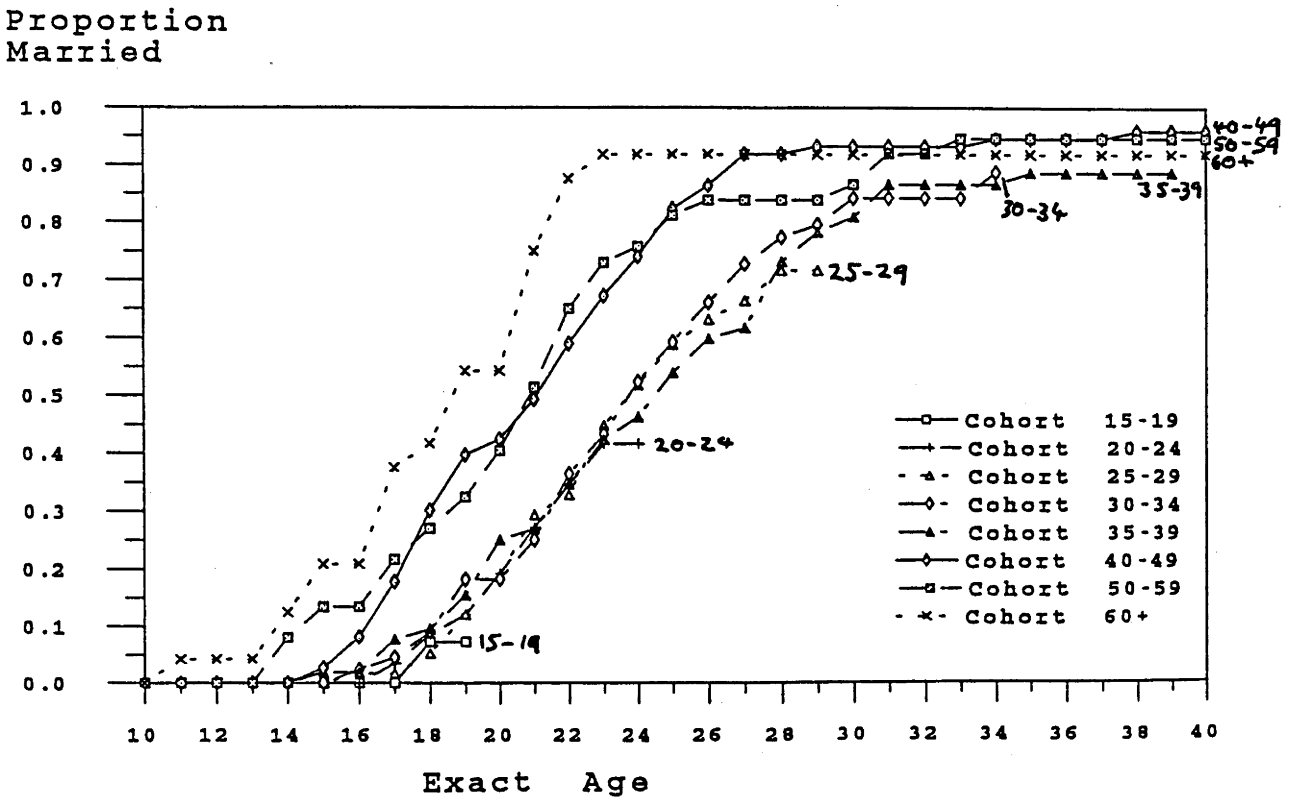


Figure 4.2, for the estates, reveals quite a different pattern of change. There are two distinct patterns of marriage, with cohorts aged 40+ marrying much earlier than their younger sisters, and daughters. This implies some quantum change, a shift perhaps from a social context where it was not acceptable to delay a daughter's marriage even if it was in the family's material interest to do so, to a situation where it is acceptable. This is consistent with the evidence. Significantly, the long-term change in marriage patterns seems to have been associated with the collapse of arranged marriage in the Southwest but not in the estates. These points are investigated in depth below.

Just as the proportion married by age is declining, so is the ultimate proportion married. The increasing numbers of young unmarried women may well be making spinsterhood at later ages more acceptable, and changes in the probability of marriage at younger ages probably do affect the overall probability of ever marrying.

4.2 Marriage squeeze as an explanation for the rise in female age at marriage

It was noted earlier that Fernando (1975) and others have claimed that the rise in the female age at marriage is a consequence of a marriage squeeze brought about by a rapid decline in mortality in the late 1940s. It has been argued in this thesis that, although the marriage squeeze probably has had a short-term role in forcing female age at marriage up, possibly in encouraging celibacy, and almost certainly in reducing the age gap at marriage, it seems to have merely accentuated trends that have been under way since at least 1900, according to both the censuses and earlier writings.

The evidence from the project tends to support this contention, that the marriage squeeze has been a contributing factor to changes in marriage patterns but is by no means a sufficient explanation for these changes.

Table 2.2 in Chapter 2 lists the sex ratios for various marrying groups as indicated by the census. There are difficulties in interpreting such ratios for a survey population which in no sense is a closed population as Sri Lanka effectively is. Nevertheless, for purposes of comparison the ratios for the research population are provided in Tables 4.4. and 4.5.

Table 4.4 Males per 100 females by age groups in which marriages mostly take place in survey areas (i.e. females 5 years younger than males)

	Approximate median year of marriage	Coastal Ratio	Coastal N		Estate Ratio	Estate N	
			M	F		M	F
M (20-24) ----- F (15-19)	1990	92.7	573	618	104.9	64	61
M (25-29) ----- F (20-24)	1985	88.4	551	623	67.2	39	58
M (30-34) ----- F (25-29)	1980	91.6	425	464	63.8	37	58
M (35-39) ----- F (30-34)	1975	84.3	348	413	102.3	45	44
M (40-44) ----- F (35-39)	1970	73.1	272	372	57.7	30	52
M (45-49) ----- F (40-44)	1965	78.9	194	246	118.6	51	43
M (20-34) ----- F (15-29)	1985	90.9	1549	1705	78.7	140	178
M (20-44) ----- F (15-39)	1980	87.1	2169	2490	78.5	215	274

Source: Primary analysis of the Sri Lankan Demographic Change Project, 1985-1987.

Table 4.5 with the sex ratios by religion has been included because each religious group to a large extent acts as a closed marriage market. Even the Christians, who belong to the one religious group not closely identified with a particular ethnic group, nevertheless generally marry only other Christians. However, the numbers in the smaller groups are so small that they must marry outside the research area. Though the necessity for doing this is less, this would also apply to the larger religious groups.

Table 4.5 Males per 100 females by religion in survey areas

	M(20-24)/F(15-29)	N		M(20-44)/F(15-39)	N	
		M	F		M	F
Coastal						
All	90.9	1549	1705	87.1	2169	2490
Buddhist	88.1	992	1126	85.2	1404	1648
Hindu	123.5	63	51	109.0	85	78
Muslim	89.1	286	321	84.5	376	445
Christian	102.0	206	202	95.5	300	314
Estate						
All *	78.7	140	178	78.5	215	274
Buddhist	81.2	39	48	73.2	60	82
Hindu	78.3	101	129	80.4	152	189

Notes: * Including Muslims and Christians.

Source: Primary analysis of the Sri Lankan Demographic Change Project, 1985-1987.

Tables 4.4 and 4.5 show ratios similar to those of the general population as in Table 2.2 in Chapter 2. It is much harder to determine whether the sex ratios have affected age at marriage. The correspondence is not perfect in the research area between the sex ratios for the five-year age groups as listed in Tables 4.4 and 4.5 and proportions married by age in

Table 4.3: women who were 35-39 years old had a particularly adverse ratio, yet married earlier than younger age groups. Nor is the correspondence obvious for the five-year age groups in the census. However, as Fernando (1975) notes, broader age groups are probably more meaningful, as women in the narrow age groups can marry men from the age groups adjacent to the one five years older than them. At this level the marriage squeeze probably has had some effect. In general, overcoming the worst of the marriage squeeze does seem to be associated with a narrowing of the age gap. Where the squeeze appears worst in the survey, in the estates, the age at marriage has increased most, particularly among women. As Table 4.5 shows, the estate Hindus who have an especially late age at marriage have a sizable surplus of women, whereas the early marrying coastal Hindus have a surplus of men; but small numbers and sample variation mean that caution is required in interpreting these figures. A higher proportion of men than of women would have left the estates to find work in the towns and elsewhere, as there is much less work for men than for women on the estates; however, the communal riots of 1983, when many Tamils in Colombo and other towns were killed or lost their houses and property, caused many emigrants to return to their homes, thereby reducing this effect. The decline in the female age at marriage between the 30-34 year age group and the 25-29 age group indicated in Table 4.1, may be the result of a relaxation in the marriage squeeze.

Nevertheless, it is clear from Table 4.1, as well as from earlier censuses, that age at marriage was rising before the marriage squeeze and that while the marriage squeeze has been much less intensive for the younger age groups, age at marriage has not recently fallen significantly. Indeed, Table 4.3 indicates that, following a short-term decline in the age at marriage from age group 30-34 to age group 25-29, it has risen again among those aged 20-24.

This suggests that, even if the marriage squeeze were responsible for a short-term fluctuation in female age at marriage during the 1960s and 1970s, other forces were involved in the longer-term rise in the age at marriage. Significantly, in the project's in-depth interviewing, the difficulty of finding grooms was very rarely cited as a reason for not marrying or marrying later in Sri Lanka, even in the estates where the marriage squeeze has been severe. This was in sharp contrast to my previous experience in South India where it was by far the most commonly cited reason for marriage delay. Jones's findings for Malaysia approximate the Sri Lankan situation:

In summary, the marriage squeeze has undoubtedly contributed to the rise in the age at marriage for Malay and Indian women since 1957. But its effect should not be exaggerated. The rise in age at marriage for men as well as women during this period indicates that the main reason in the case of women must have been changes in norms about the suitable age at marriage, which were no doubt linked to the fundamental social and economic changes which had occurred in Malaysia since independence (Jones, 1980: 283).

As noted in Chapter 2, Fernando in a more recent article places more emphasis on economic factors than on the marriage squeeze. This argument is also favoured by a number of other writers including Dixon (1970) and Gombrich and Obeyesekere (1988:196).

4.3 The economy and marriage

Since independence the Sri Lankan economy has been marked by periods of economic stagnation. In the early 1970s the problems were acute and the problem of youth unemployment was a major factor in the 1971 uprising led by the People's Liberation Front, known by its Sinhalese initials as the J.V.P. [1]. In 1973-74 there were serious food shortages. Consequently, many families found it more difficult to finance marriages

[1] In 1989 there was a resurgence of J.V.P. activity.

and many couples were less able to take on the responsibility of supporting a family. In Dixon's (1970) terms, marriage had become less feasible.

The economic feasibility explanation for the rise in age at marriage has the advantage over the marriage squeeze explanation in that it applies both to the recent fluctuations and to the long-term rise in the age at marriage. As noted earlier, Dixon (1970) regarded the long-term rise in the age at marriage as being due to a gradual reduction in the feasibility of marriage. On this basis, the early 1970s was a particular crisis in an already chronically difficult condition.

There are considerable attractions in the argument that financial difficulties, and particularly delays in obtaining employment, were the essential reasons for the delay in marriage both in the long run and particularly in the 1970s. When we asked 313 unmarried women of sixteen years and over what attributes they required in a future husband, virtually all the women who expected to marry listed a job. Of the women, 37 did not expect to marry. Of the remaining 276, 221 (80 per cent) replied that a groom would have to be securely employed, and 42 (15 per cent) said they should be securely employed and have a good character. Four respondents said that he should be a professional, a businessman or a landowner, two said that he should be able to provide daily food, six that they had already chosen and one that he should be approved of by the family. That is, 269 out of 276 answers involved the ability of the groom to support the family. Of the other seven, the six who had already chosen their grooms were almost certainly waiting until the groom had a suitable job, and in the remaining one, where family approval was desired, that would be unlikely unless he had a job.

The emphasis on the need for a groom to be employed is presumably a new constraint on the age at marriage. Once, in a more agrarian Sri Lanka,

it would have been up to the families of the bride and groom to provide them with a suitable livelihood. Often they would live with the family after marriage. Even without family support, employment was not a problem. An individual could work on the land of his family or of his affines through marriage, labour for other farmers, or undertake shifting cultivation (known in Sri Lanka as *chena* or *hena*) on unclaimed land in the forest. Agricultural labour tends to be seasonal but it does not involve an initial period of unemployment while waiting for one's first job, as do many non-agricultural occupations, nor is it as sensitive to economic downturns.

The average age at which men are first employed has risen because nowadays education is much longer in duration than it was previously and because obtaining non-agricultural jobs often involves a lengthy period of prior unemployment. Time spent by males in studying should have had less effect on age at marriage than time spent unemployed as most men have always married later than the period that is generally occupied by study. Education, however, is likely to delay the commencement of the search for a job, and the sort of jobs made available by education are scarcer than other jobs.

Unemployment increased in the early 1970s, especially amongst the educated. Table 4.6 shows unemployment for 25-29 year olds as registered in the census.

Table 4.6 Unemployed males aged 25-29 in Sri Lanka

Age	Year and per cent unemployed		
	1963	1971	1981
25-29	6.3	14.0	12.6

Source: Nadarajah, 1986 : 108.

While overall unemployment figures are not particularly high by international standards and seem not to affect more than a small proportion of marriages, the figures probably understate the problem. Unemployment is much higher in the 20-24 age groups than in the 25-29 age group as is indicated by Table 4.7 for the survey. Moreover, unemployment in the mid-1970s was probably higher than in 1971 or 1981. Many of the jobs that are available are lowly paid and have little security. Bauer and Grosse (1982) have argued that in Sri Lanka age at marriage is more affected by level of income than the employment status of the groom. Our interviews demonstrated that the key factor is less the actual income than the degree of permanency of the job, though the two are related.

Nevertheless, even given that the employment problem may have been greater than that indicated by the figures, it is hard to demonstrate that delayed employment has led to later ages at marriage. There seems to be a general correspondence between male unemployment and female age at marriage. Both rose steeply between 1963 and 1971 and then levelled off. However, the direct effect of male employment should be on male age at marriage. As Casterline, Williams and McDonald (1986:359) point out, in all 28 countries in which men's age at marriage was asked in the WFS, including Sri Lanka, male age at marriage had a greater variability than female age at marriage, presumably because it was more subject to external factors such as employment. Yet, as Tables 4.1, 4.2 and 4.3 indicate, male age at marriage in Sri Lanka has changed remarkably little over time, while it is female age at marriage that has changed. While most women insisted that a groom would have to be employed, very few in the in-depth interviews said that their own marriage had been delayed by the lack of an employed man. There were a few examples of men who said that they did not want to marry until they had regular jobs for otherwise their parents would have to support them; but the examples were surprisingly few. More common were

cases of women saying that they did not want to marry until they themselves had a job, but this seemed to be a case of changing aspirations rather than the feasibility of marriage.

Another way of looking at the relationship between employment and age at marriage is to examine differences between communities. Table 4.7 lists age at marriage by area and Table 4.8 employment status for males by age group and area. There is an apparent correspondence in the coastal areas between employment by age and average age at marriage but in the estates employment is very early but marriage is late. While there are some factors specific to the estates, which are examined in Section 4.9, it seems that the economics of marriage is more complex than the issue of feasibility. This can be seen by examining the ways feasibility could affect marriage.

Table 4.7 Age at marriage by area (for age group 30-39)

	All	Rural	Urban poor	Middle class
Southwest				
Male	27	27	25	27
Female	22	23	19	24
Estate				
Male	28			
Female	24			

Source: Primary analysis of the Sri Lankan Demographic Change Project, 1985 and 1987.

Table 4.8 Employment status by age - Males (per cent)

	Ages				
	15-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39
Coastal					
All areas					
Employed	19	66	87	94	95
Not employed	35	29	13	6	5
Students	46	5	0	0	0
(N)	(621)	(563)	(542)	(420)	(345)
Rural					
Employed	15	52	82	92	97
Not employed	35	41	18	8	3
Students	50	7	1	0	0
(N)	(231)	(164)	(182)	(146)	(119)
Poor urban					
Employed	31	79	90	98	93
Not employed	48	20	10	2	7
Students	21	1	0	0	0
(N)	(190)	(188)	(198)	(121)	(95)
Middle class					
Employed	13	66	88	93	96
Not employed	23	28	12	7	4
Students	64	6	0	0	0
(N)	(200)	(211)	(162)	(152)	(131)
Estates					
Employed	28	76	90	92	91
Not employed	24	19	8	8	9
Students	48	5	3	0	0
(N)	(50)	(62)	(39)	(37)	(45)

Notes: 1 Employed means all paid work.

2 Rural consists of Bondupitiya and Loluwagoda, Poor urban of Maligawatta, Jumma Musjid Road and New Kelani Bridge, Middle Class consists of Nugegoda and Welisara.

Source: Primary analysis of the Sri Lankan Demographic Change Project, 1985 and 1987.

4.4 The cost of marriage

The principal ways in which economic change could have affected the feasibility of marriage are in raising the costs of marriage itself, and raising the costs of establishing and maintaining a household.

The major expense in the marriage itself is usually the dowry, and for many families this can be a heavy burden, and in some cases does delay marriage. The precise effect of dowry on marriage depends, however, on the specific purpose of dowry in the society, and on the family's and individual's attitude to dowry. In South India where I worked previously and which has a similar marriage squeeze to Sri Lanka, dowry serves as a rationing mechanism by which the groom's family is able to demand a very large dowry, especially if he is regarded as desirable (cf Caldwell, Reddy and Caldwell, 1988: 80-107). The bride's marriage is delayed while her family raises the resources necessary for the often-exorbitant dowry. The consequence of this is to raise the female age at marriage and squeeze the age gap between the marriage partners, thereby re-establishing the equilibrium in the marriage market.

In Sri Lanka, apparent evidence that dowry might have similar implications is provided by the fact that the highest proportion of families paying dowry was among the Sinhalese who have a later marriage age than Muslims or low-country Tamils. Yet, unlike in India, there is little evidence that dowry has delayed marriage or that it has acted as an intermediary rationing mechanism.

With a very few exceptions the only individuals in the project to suggest that the costs of marriage and dowry were significantly delaying marriage were Muslims and estate Hindus. C. (Household No. 8020), and L. (HH No. 8029), estate Hindus, both cite dowry as a major factor delaying marriage. In C.'s family this has affected the sons as well as the daughters; since the sons have had to delay their own marriage while raising dowry for their sisters. Few others, even of the estate population, mentioned dowry as a significant factor in delaying marriage. Most estate families regarded the principal factor delaying marriage as being the importance of female earnings to household income which meant that parents were reluctant for

their daughters to marry too early. Where women's earnings are more important than men's there seems to be little need for the bride's family to use dowry as an incentive for marriage.

Dowry was most often cited as a factor delaying marriage among Muslims. For example, R.B. (Household No.2015) has not been able to raise a dowry for her two unmarried daughters. She says that they are now too old to marry according to the usual age at marriage for Muslims. The problem is that they do not have any relatives to help them; if they could afford to pay a dowry, her daughters' age would not be a problem. She is not suggesting, however, that girls need a dowry to marry but only that they need a dowry once they are past the normal marriage age. Indeed, Muslims are less inclined to pay dowry than other communities in Sri Lanka. In the project's 1985 sample 44 per cent of Muslims had not paid any dowry compared to 34 per cent of Buddhists and 27 per cent of Christians. Many of those who had done so paid very small dowries. The fact that dowry is not universal indicates that it is not operating as a rationing mechanism, delaying female marriage, to overcome a marriage squeeze; rather it has the function of ensuring that all daughters ultimately marry, and thus is an indicator of the importance of marriage in Muslim society.

Among the Sinhalese, dowry seems to have quite a different purpose and hence different implications for marriage patterns. As Goody and Tambiah (1973) have noted, for the Sinhalese dowry is essentially a form of inheritance, where the daughter inherits her share at marriage. This interpretation of dowry as inheritance is in keeping with the evidence provided by Leach (1971:135-6) and Yalman (1971:174) that daughters who receive dowry are not generally entitled, as they would otherwise be, to a share of the family property.

The equivalence of dowry to inheritance among the Sinhalese is also supported by the fact that dowry is often paid even in the case of love marriages, unlike the situation among the Muslims and the Tamils. This is also a sign that love marriage is more acceptable among the Sinhalese. P. (Household No. 1009) commented that at first her parents did not like her marriage, but three months after the marriage she and her husband went to see her parents and were given some dowry.

If dowry is simply a form of inheritance, it should have little impact on marriage. Consequently, it is not surprising that unlike the situation in South India, dowry does not seem to have increased in line with the marriage squeeze. A complicating factor here is that with increasing female participation in the labour force before marriage, many brides are contributing to their own dowries, though strictly speaking Sri Lankans distinguish between this and dowry proper.

The proportions of the respondents who have received dowry vary little by cohort when controlled for marriage type, family-arranged or self-arranged. There is not the same pressure in Sri Lanka as in India on parents to ensure that their daughters are married. This is related to a much greater emphasis in India on preventing premarital sexual contacts, perhaps a result of the fear of cross-caste miscegenation. Sri Lankan parents are able to wait until a suitable match comes along without having to offer large inducements in the form of a dowry to a potential groom. Indeed, most families today prefer a more mature woman with education and qualifications to an uneducated docile adolescent, who would once have been regarded as an ideal bride. A family will provide what dowry it feels able to, and what it feels should be the daughter's share of the patrimony. Dowry is a less important consideration in the marriage, than the bride's own attributes including her ability to earn an income.

This is not to say that among the Sinhalese, dowry has no implications for marriage patterns; it does, but the mechanism involved is not feasibility. The impact is in terms of what it implies for the overall economics of marriage. Whereas in India, dowries are hardly feasible but still have to be raised, for the Sinhalese dowries do not raise particular problems regarding feasibility, but they do nevertheless affect the economic equations involved. In India families have little choice but to raise the necessary dowry, while in Sri Lanka, among the Sinhalese at least there is a choice. Families are able to consider whether early marriage or marriage at all is advantageous to the individual and also to the family. To the degree that dowry raises the cost of the marriage without compensating incentives to marry, it reduces the attractions of marriage. There is a certain similarity between this reduced advantage and feasibility, in that, for instance, in a short-term crisis such as occurred in the 1970s marriage becomes less attractive. Nevertheless, the difference is important if we are to understand marriage trends in Sri Lanka. In our sample only 3 per cent of married women gave problems with dowry as a factor in delaying marriage; this would be expected if the direct impact of dowry on marriage, feasibility, is unimportant. There is some evidence that the indirect impact of dowry through its effect on the economics of marriage may be greater; this is implied by the greater rise in the age of arranged marriages than of love marriages, the opposite of what would be expected if marriage was a matter of feasibility. If marriage is not in the interests of the family they may be increasingly reluctant to be involved in it. D. (HH No. 6033), who believes that economic and social problems, by which she apparently means dowry and caste, will act to delay marriage in future, concludes that the consequences will be more love marriages. E. (HH No. 1031) sees the significance of dowry not in its effect on age at marriage but on the degree of control it gives parents over marriage. Her parents could not influence their daughter's marriages because they could not afford, or were not willing to

undergo the sacrifice required, to pay for a matchmaker or to give a dowry. The issue of arranged and love marriage is examined in Chapter 5. If dowry, however, needs to be understood in terms of economic cost, it needs to be examined in terms of the total assistance provided by families to their children.

4.5 The cost of establishing a home

The second factor mentioned in the feasibility of marriage was the cost of establishing a household, including a house and furniture. The increased expense of doing so, as well perhaps as a reduced willingness of the family to provide assistance, may have reduced the feasibility of marriage. In practice there is little sign of this being the case. While most Sri Lankan couples will eventually establish their own households, as shown in Table 4.9, most still initially reside with the parents of one of the two partners. This inevitably weakens the nexus between marriage and the ability to establish a new household.

Table 4.9 Domicile immediately after marriage, Southwest¹

Type of domicile	Per cent
With husband's family	35
With wife's family	29
Married couple alone	35
Married couple plus children of previous marriage	0
With non-relatives	1
Other - unspecified	0
N	1989

Notes: 1 Female respondents only.
2 Question not asked in Bondupitiya.

Source: Primary analysis of Sri Lankan Demographic Change Project, 1985.

The period of residence with parents and the reasons for separation were asked in Welisara (the commuting area north of Colombo). This area had the highest proportion in the survey of couples who had established their own residence on marriage: of female respondents 49 per cent did so as against 36 per cent for the six areas including Welisara where domicile after marriage was asked.

Table 4.10 can be interpreted as meaning that a majority of the newly married couples either do not live with their parents or do so for less than six months but it would be more accurate to say that those who need parental support in establishing themselves can stay with their families for the required periods. The figures, moreover, in effect overstate the separation of many households. Even where a young couple build their own house, it is very often on land shared with the house of the parents or close relatives. The parents are able to assist them not only with the house site but with many of the other needs encountered in establishing a new house.

Table 4.10 Duration of residence with parents of either husband or wife following marriage

Duration	Per cent
Did not live with parents	49
Less than 1 year	10
1 - 2 years	14
3+ years	13
Still living in parental house - parents dead or absent	4
Still living with parents	10
N	408

Source: Primary analysis of Sri Lankan Demographic Change Project, 1985.

The project's data gave little indication either that domicile with parents following marriage was linked to the need for economic support or

that young couples were increasingly being denied a place in the family home. The project found that in Southwest Sri Lanka there was little difference in domicile following marriage by age cohort, age at marriage, type of marriage (arranged or love match), education or area of residence. The lack of variation by age cohort and particularly by education does not suggest that Western ideologies are driving Sri Lankan society towards the nuclear family and neolocality. If this were happening, one would expect younger cohorts to be more likely to live separately from the beginning than older cohorts, and more particularly one would expect any change to begin with the more educated who are most subject to outside influences, but there was very little differential by age or education. Most surprising for the outsider is the finding that there is no variation in residence by type of marriage. This is probably more significant for what it indicates about the different marriage types than what it says about different household structure. Nevertheless, it implies that any ideological differences with regard to marriage type have little impact on household structure. The explanation seems to be that the joint family has never been an ideal in Sri Lanka and that the complex households that exist are not equivalent to the patriarchal joint families of India but are more equivalent to a collection of conjugal units. These units are linked by kinship but live together essentially for pragmatic reasons rather than because living together is the ideal.

The pragmatic reasons for starting married life with parents cover much more than simply feasibility. The lack of variation in initial residence by age at marriage and area strongly suggests that the difficulty of establishing a household is not the essential reason for living with the larger family. If it were, one would expect a higher proportion of those who marry early to live with their families. Similarly, one would expect to find a higher proportion of those living in the urbanized areas residing with their

parents than in the rural areas where land for house sites is more available and rents are cheaper.

Outside the estates, where housing is allocated by the estate management, difficulties in establishing a household were never raised in the interviews as a reason for delayed marriage. Nor was the feeling widely expressed that the young lived with the parents after marriage out of economic necessity. A cursory glance at the situation in Sri Lanka offers a clue as to why this might be so. A couple outside the towns is generally able to acquire land relatively cheaply, or even is given a block of land, either by their families or by the government which makes blocks of land available for house building. On this they will initially build a hut, and as they acquire income, housing loans being rare in Sri Lanka, they will commence building a much larger house: a common sight in Sri Lanka is a half-completed mansion with the family living in one room or in a hut next door. Given that this is so, the question arises why some younger families do live with the older generation; what determines residence and what are the implications of this for marriage?

The primary reasons for living with the parents are partly sentiment, in that it is the correct behaviour, and partly because it is convenient not having to establish a household immediately, and it provides a useful socialization period while the groom and bride learn what is expected of them and get to know each other's families. Moreover, there are often some pragmatic advantages in living with the family. During the early period of marriage, young couples generally have accumulated few possessions and are materially much better-off if they live with their parents; this is particularly so as many more expensive goods such as a radio or a well enrich the lives of not just the owners but the whole household. Living with the older generation also provides advantages in household management and particularly child care. Cooking and other household duties can be

shared, and the grandmother or another relative can help look after children. This is especially valuable to couples where the wife is in paid employment outside the home. Finally, many young couples live with the older generation until the latter's death because the house is their share of the inheritance. In return, the parents are looked after in their old age.

Hence, while the relationship between parental accommodation and feasibility of marriage is more apparent than real, parental accommodation does have real economic and other advantages particularly for the younger generation and ultimately for the older generation. Indeed, in view of the practical advantages of being in a joint household, it is surprising that more couples do not stay with their families. Respondents were asked in Welisara and the estates why they moved out of the parental house.

The figures for Welisara are included in Table 4.11. The figures for the estates have been omitted because the population is dependent on the whims of the estate management, and the young couple move out when they have been allocated a house in the estate lines.

Table 4.11 Why did the couple move out?

Reason	Per cent
Bought a house	12
Built a house	17
Rented a house	11
Parents gave a house	2
Built a separate room onto parents' house	1
Accommodation provided by employer	7
Necessary for economic advancement	4
Wanted to live near job/business	12
Parental home overcrowded	9
Family discord	8
Wanted to live on their own	14
Don't believe in living with in-laws	2
Parents moved away	1
N	142

Source: Primary analysis of Sri Lankan Demographic Change Project, 1985.

The table is ambiguous as the stated reasons do not always tell us what the underlying reasons are. Essentially though, it indicates that most people stay in the household while the benefits outweigh the costs, that is while it is convenient and practical. People move out when they can afford to, but more importantly when the inconveniences of living together outweigh the advantages. For example, the advantages of company, mutual possessions, and childcare come to mean less as the younger family grows, as they build up their own possessions and as children grow older and need less care, while the disadvantages increase, such as the house becoming too small and too crowded, with the potential, at least, for a rise in household conflict concerning issues such as authority, favouritism and especially household expenditure.

Sri Lankan residential patterns reflect, then, pragmatic concerns within the particular institutional constraints that operate. While the feasibility of establishing a new household is one element in these concerns, it is not the primary element.

The implication of this discussion is that the feasibility of establishing a household is not the primary factor delaying marriage. People are able to marry, for, if they wish to, they can live with their families, or they can live separately if they are prepared to live austere.

4.6 Family assistance and marriage

That the feasibility of marriage is not the primary factor delaying marriage in Sri Lanka is also suggested by a comparison of the ages at which arranged and love matches take place. In Table 4.12 age at marriage is measured by the proportion married under 20, 20-25 and 25+ years of age, for men currently aged over 40 who married before 40 (to avoid the truncation effect), for men currently aged 25 to 39 who married before 25, and for men aged 25 to 29 who married before 25; the figures are for

Southwest Sri Lanka only, as type of marriage data for males on the estates are not available. If feasibility were a major problem in marriage, one would expect that those who had family support, as is the case in arranged marriages, would marry earlier, but the data indicate that men who had arranged marriages married later than men who had love marriages; the difference for women is marginal (see Table 4.15) but for this analysis it is the men's figure which is important.

The arrangement of marriage seems to delay marriage rather than to advance it. Arranged marriage may be less feasible than love marriage, requiring as it does expensive marriage ceremonies, large dowries and so on; arranged marriage is also increasingly being used as a last resort for those who find it hard to arrange their own marriages. Nevertheless, the principal explanation for the lateness of arranged marriage must be that families do not desire earlier marriage. It is the reason for this that needs to be uncovered.

Table 4.12 Age at marriage for arranged and love marriages for various age groups who married by selected ages - Southwest, males

Age at marriage	Arranged %	Love %	N %
Aged 40+ who married before age 40			
under 20	48	52	33
20-24	53	47	208
25-29	54	46	323
30+	63	37	235
Aged 25-39 who married before age 25			
under 20	18	82	66
20-24	25	75	298
Aged 25-29 who married before age 25			
under 20	14	86	36
20-24	24	75	124

Source: Primary analysis of Sri Lankan Demographic Change Project, 1985.

This is not to deny that the feasibility of marriage is an important factor in some circumstances. It is, no doubt, a factor preventing some marriages, especially in situations of extreme economic stress such as existed in the 1970s. In this sense it is a limiting factor but it is not the primary factor influencing the timing of the majority of marriages.

4.7 Socio-cultural factors in the timing of marriage

If the feasibility of establishing a household and the marriage squeeze are not the principal determinants of changes in the timing of marriage what is or are? The sections which follow examine a number of possible factors that influence decisions regarding marriage timing.

Among the most difficult factors to deal with are social cultural causes. These involve the whole belief system or ideology that people have, as members of a society or a community; as was outlined in Chapter 2, such beliefs inevitably influence social institutions such as marriage. For example, beliefs concerning female status and autonomy have important implications for how marriages occur and the timing of marriage. Similarly beliefs which require the protection of the purity of castes or families from corruption through mixing with lower castes or families may encourage early marriage to prevent undesirable liaisons.

What constitutes a particular belief system is a rather amorphous concept. Equally, it is difficult to say who precisely holds it. The characteristics probably most closely associated with a particular set of beliefs are religion, ethnicity, and, in the modern context, education, though in a society such as Sri Lanka, most people share many basic concepts.

This analysis uses religion rather than ethnicity as an index of people's beliefs, as ethnicity is a sensitive question in Sri Lanka and, following the 1983 riots, the project opted to ask only religion and caste but

not ethnicity. This is not a major problem for the analysis, as in Sri Lanka religion and ethnicity are closely linked: all Buddhists are Sinhalese and most Sinhalese are Buddhists; all Hindus are Tamils and most Tamils are Hindus; and all Moors are Muslims and most Muslims are Moors. Christians provide the only real difficulty.

Tables 4.13a and 4.13b list age at marriage by cohort and religion. It is clear that religion has long been, and continues to be, a strong predictor of age at marriage especially for females. The explanation of this is, in part, that other socio-economic characteristics linked to religion are associated with late marriage, such as education: Christians and Buddhists have higher levels of education and marry later than Muslims. The causal links here, though, are not obvious. Increasing rates of education are associated with rising ages at marriage; but religion itself does seem to have an independent effect on both the level of education and age at marriage. Many Muslim parents, for example, do not see the need for education as they regard marriage as being more important for a girl than education.

N.K. (Household No. 2019) notes that, according to Muslim custom, girls have to stay with their parents until the parents arrange their marriages. She says that, after reaching menarche, girls do not go to school, with the result that they do not hope to get jobs and their only expectation is marriage. Consequently, she herself married 'without delay'. But times are changing, and she has decided that her daughters will go to school even after menarche. A.W. (Household No.2027) gives a father's perspective: according to Muslim custom, parents must arrange the marriages of the children. Otherwise 'they cannot receive God's pleasure'. So the parents take great care of their daughters and do not send them to school after menarche. If they want to go anywhere they must be accompanied by a chaperone. 'The girls are protected under the parents' care at all times'. They conclude 'Muslim parents do not consider that girls should be

educated. The parents want to protect the girls until their marriages'. A.X. and his wife (Household No.2029) comment that, among Muslims, girls are protected very carefully. After a girl has reached puberty, her parents decide to remove her from school. Then they decide to marry off the girls as soon as possible. Clearly, too much education would endanger a girl's reputation and consequently her ability to marry, and is furthermore unnecessary for a girl's future role as a wife.

Table 4.13a Age by which 50 per cent of the population had married - using a life-table, Southwest

Age	Religion							
	Buddhist	N	Hindu	N	Muslim	N	Christian	N
Males								
15-19	-	409	-	22	-	112	-	81
20-24	-	355	-	20	-	113	-	83
25-29	28.2	360	25.6	23	25.3	101	-	67
30-34	27.8	277	26.9	20	25.9	72	27.9	56
35-39	28.1	228	25.7	13	28.5	53	27.0	53
40-49	28.5	314	24.7	14	26.7	67	27.2	70
50-59	27.5	249	25.5	11	26.2	45	28.5	35
60-69	27.7	145	29.5	5	28.3	20	26.9	32
70+	28.0	89	-	1	31.0	3	30.5	16
Females								
15-19	-	395	-	17	-	126	-	77
20-24	-	410	20.7	25	21.9	112	-	75
25-29	22.9	321	19.2	9	20.2	83	24.1	50
30-34	24.6	277	20.0	12	21.7	62	23.0	62
35-39	22.7	245	23.0	15	19.1	62	23.0	50
40-49	21.4	305	17.0	18	17.3	62	23.8	76
50-59	21.1	242	20.0	5	18.6	42	21.5	41
60-69	21.0	150	18.0	3	17.0	23	21.3	31
70+	20.5	93	-	0	18.0	11	21.3	15

Source: Primary analysis of Sri Lankan Demographic Change Project, 1985.

Table 4.13b Age by which 50 per cent of the population had married - using a life - table, Estates

Age	Religion			
	Buddhist	N	Hindu	N
Males				
15-19	-	18	-	32
20-29	27.3	29	27.3	74
30-39	27.8	25	29.1	56
40-49	28.7	21	28.4	58
50+	23.5	16	26.1	50
Females				
15-19	-	21	-	41
20-29	23.3	27	24.9	88
30-39	23.5	34	25.8	60
40-49	19.5	20	21.7	54
50+	18.0	17	21.1	7

Source: Primary analysis of Sri Lankan Demographic Change Project, 1987.

The precise causation involved in education and age at marriage may depend on the nature of the marriage process. Where young men or women arrange their own marriages, as amongst Sri Lanka's Christians, their religion may influence age at marriage through education: religion may help to determine the likelihood of a boy or a girl attending school which, in turn, may influence their behaviour with regard to marriage. In contrast, where the parents are primarily responsible for arranging marriages, as is still true of Sri Lanka's Muslims, then religion may independently determine both the education of children and their marriages.

Whether or not these arguments are correct, causation is necessarily complicated and multifaceted. Religion and ethnicity are associated with sets of beliefs that have important implications for age at marriage. Chapter 2 contained a discussion of how concepts regarding the need to preserve the purity of castes are associated with early marriage which is a

way to prevent cross-caste liaisons. These beliefs exist in Sri Lanka among both Tamils and Sinhalese but they are strongest among the former. Among the Sinhalese, cross-caste affairs might lead to estrangement from the family, but they do not lead to the family itself being ostracized as still occurs among Tamils and in India. For the Sinhalese, unlike the largely Hindu Tamils, caste is primarily a social institution with little religious justification. Buddha, himself, ignored caste, regarding it as unimportant. In Hinduism, caste has divine origins as is stated, for example, by the *Rigveda* (cf. *Hindu Scriptures* 1966:10), the earliest and most authoritative of the Hindu scriptures, and is based on a concept of religious pollution whereby the higher castes are less polluted than the lower castes. In effect, their blood consists of different substances. Sexual activities, especially across caste lines, endanger the purity of the girl and, through contact with her, the family and community. It is vital to ensure the girl's purity, and, if this is not done, to break all contact with her. Such concepts are much weaker in Buddhist and Christian Sinhalese society and therefore so is the need to ensure female chastity and correct marriage.

Consequently, age at marriage has generally been earlier among Tamils than among Sinhalese, even controlling for factors such as education. The other major group of Sri Lanka's population, the Moors (Muslims), also have an early age at marriage, which seems to be due to a belief in the need to control female sexuality, related, not to the need to maintain the purity of one's blood, but to family honour.

Socio-cultural beliefs thus mean that Tamils and Moors should marry earlier on average than Sinhalese. This is generally the case in the coastal area, but it is not true in the estate survey, as Table 4.13 shows, where Tamil Hindus have the highest marriage age of any group. The need to prevent any suggestion of premarital affairs is clearly no longer ensuring early female marriage in the estates. While parents in India are paying

ever higher dowries in a desperate effort to get their daughters married (see Caldwell, Reddy and Caldwell, 1988: 80-107), in the estates, as in the rest of Sri Lanka, there has been a passive acceptance of rises in the female marriage age.

One reason for the difference is related to the composition of the estate population. The Tamil Hindus of the estates consist primarily of low Harijan (untouchable) castes. While these people are conscious of caste with regard to each other, nevertheless pollution infringements cannot and do not have the same impact as they have in the higher castes. In India these castes have a reputation for being laxer about infringements than the higher castes.

There are also economic reasons why pressures for a lower female age at marriage may have been weak in the estates. First, a boycott of the family, though serious, does not threaten them economically as it would do, for example, in a village community where landowners and labourers are part of the same community. The estate management consists of outsiders who are not concerned with community affairs. More importantly, women are now the main income earners and young men and their families are scarcely in a position to reject a young woman simply because she is above the preferred age for a bride, as she is financially much more important to them than they are to her. Hence, while there were influences encouraging earlier marriage, they were not strong enough to prevent the rise in the age at marriage when countervailing trends appeared.

Countervailing trends were particularly strong in the estates, especially among the Tamil Hindu population. This population was badly affected by the economic problems of the 1970s, a time of virtual famine on the estates. The Tamils had little access to resources including help from relatives living away from the estates; and the estates suffered an acute

accommodation shortage which was particularly bad for the Tamil population who had no access to alternative land or accommodation elsewhere. Furthermore, as Table 4.5 indicates, the marriage squeeze seems to have been extremely tight on the estates. Perhaps most importantly, the Tamil Hindus were particularly dependent on the earning power of the women who worked as tea-pickers, as the men found it difficult to get alternative work off the estates because of discrimination, language problems and lack of contacts.

Clearly, socio-cultural factors, as represented by religion and ethnicity, are important in understanding continuing differentials in female age at marriage in Sri Lanka and also in explaining why age at marriage for females was previously early. They do not, however, explain the rise in the age at marriage except in the negative sense that some factors holding age at marriage down, such as the emphasis on female chastity, were weaker than elsewhere in South Asia. The factors that explain the rise in age at marriage have to be found elsewhere.

4.8 Education and age at marriage

The marriage squeeze and the feasibility of marriage have already been discussed as possible factors and have been found to be inadequate to explain the long-term rise in the age at marriage. One factor, however, which is undoubtedly of significance is education. Indeed, a number of writers have attributed the rise in the age at marriage in Asia and in Sri Lanka largely to rising levels of education (Tilakaratne, 1978; Ogawa and Rele, 1981; Rindfuss et al., 1983).

As Table 4.14 shows, as education levels have risen, so has age at marriage. In Southwest Sri Lanka, when controlled by education the female marriage age has risen only marginally, while the male age at marriage has fallen marginally. The greater rise in the female age over male age and the

consequent reduction in the age gap parallels the greater rise (from a lower base) in female education levels, though, presumably, given the same education level, the female marriage age will always remain somewhat lower than the male marriage age. The very high levels of education in Sri Lanka for both males and females partly explain Sri Lanka's very late age at marriage compared to the rest of South Asia. However, this is not true of the estates where marriage is late despite limited schooling.

Unfortunately, the figures for the estates are based on small numbers and have had to be grouped into much larger categories both for age and education. The numbers for some groups, notably the younger males with no education, are still too small even after grouping to be reliable[2]. The figures show that there has been some rise in marriage ages, particularly for females, even while holding education constant, though this may be affected by the need to use wider categories. The situation in the estates appears to be related to a distinct set of circumstances where the daughters' earnings from tea picking constituted such a large proportion of the family income that the families were reluctant to surrender it, where there was an acute accommodation shortage, and where a particularly tight marriage squeeze prevailed.

However, while education may be closely related to the rise in the age at marriage, the causal linkage is not clear. Even if education is an underlying cause of changes in the marriage age, it may well work through a number of intermediate factors such as employment. The difficulty in tracing the causal links is not only that a number are likely to be involved, but they are likely to be different in kind, some affecting aspirations, others being more direct in their effects.

[2] The categories were chosen with an eye to getting useful figures for the more important female age at marriage - the problem being that female education rates are much lower than the equivalent male rates.

Table 4.14a Median age at marriage by cohort and education - Southwest

	Education									
	0		1-3		4-6		7-9		10+	
	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
Male										
15-19	-	44	-	70	-	115	-	158	-	237
20-24	-	34	-	59	-	119	-	104	-	246
25-29	24.5	31	24.4	65	25.4	99	25.2	125	-	216
30-34	26.0	13	23.7	34	25.8	81	26.5	104	29.5	179
35-39	28.0	18	25.9	28	26.3	66	26.6	86	29.2	142
40-49	27.3	21	26.3	45	27.6	104	27.6	112	28.8	163
50-59	22.7	21	25.6	44	27.2	102	27.7	96	29.4	65
60-69	25.7	16	27.6	30	26.9	64	27.7	44	30.0	38
70+	25.3	17	26.3	14	27.5	32	28.8	29	32.5	9
Female										
15-19	-	63	-	67	-	113	-	149	-	224
20-24	20.0	54	20.8	66	21.0	124	21.1	92	-	275
25-29	19.6	45	19.8	42	25.4	91	21.3	87	25.4	194
30-34	20.8	29	21.0	44	25.8	87	23.2	82	27.3	166
35-39	18.7	42	20.5	36	26.3	87	21.0	70	25.3	131
40-49	18.0	56	19.0	66	27.6	122	20.9	83	25.0	129
50-59	19.4	79	19.3	52	27.2	96	21.1	62	24.3	39
60-69	19.0	60	21.1	26	26.9	63	21.2	44	27.0	15
70+	19.4	57	19.5	15	27.5	15	21.0	17	26.0	10

Source: Primary analysis of Sri Lankan Demographic Change Project, 1985.

Tilakaratne (1978: 190) suggests that the explanation for the impact of education is that higher levels of education have increased 'the aspirations of a large number of educated youth for wage employment. In the absence of employment opportunities this situation leads to postponement of marriage'. That is, the rise in the marriage age is a result of the joint effect of two factors, one, education raising aspirations, and two, the lack of jobs. This is, in effect, a variation on the concept of the feasibility of marriage. It is not simply that marriage has become less feasible but that higher aspirations brought about by education have changed the standards by which feasibility is measured. If the individual is to accept anything less

than wage labour, then the family will have wasted their investment in his or her education. Ogawa and Rele (1981: 227) emphasize the direct influence of education in preventing people from marrying (students are unlikely to marry) and the greater opportunities education gives women to follow alternatives to marriage.

Table 4.14b Median age at marriage by cohort and education - Estates

Age	Education					
	0		1-3		4+	
	%	N	%	N	%	N
Male						
15-19	-	0	-	9	-	41
20-29	24.9	11	25.5	21	-	70
30-39	28.3	5	27.5	15	28.9	61
40-49	28.0	7	28.0	10	27.7	63
50+	24.0	10	26.3	18	26.0	37
Female						
15-19	-	10	-	19	-	33
20-29	21.3	26	23.9	42	26.8	48
30-39	22.8	26	27.8	24	24.7	46
40-49	18.8	25	23.0	15	22.9	35
50+	20.8	45	20.0	7	21.5	12

Source: Primary analysis of Sri Lankan Demographic Change Project, 1985.

Evidently education is a two-way thing. It delays men's age at marriage because it delays their obtaining employment, and therefore reduces the feasibility of their marriages. Education also delays women's age at marriage because it increases their ability to obtain modern employment, and, therefore, makes it more feasible for women not to marry.

While the relationship between employment and education is important in understanding the influence of education on age at marriage,

education is actually a better indicator of age at marriage than employment by itself, indicating that other connections between education and age at marriage must also be important. Indeed, the relationship between age at first employment and age at marriage may partly be through education.

One of the main impacts of education on age at marriage may be that it legitimates new modes of behaviour. It changes a person's place in society, and their relationship to their family and to others. Of particular relevance here is how these changes are reflected in the processes of marriage. There seems to be a *prima facie* case that such changes should lead to a rise in age at marriage. Educated children are likely to expect and to be granted a say in deciding when they will marry; this is especially true of those able to support themselves by working in prestigious occupations obtained as a result of education. They gain more say over their marriage, while simultaneously there is less incentive for the parents to pressure them into marrying early. But it is not simply a matter of those who are educated being granted more say in their own marriage; part of the reason why they are granted it is that the parents themselves are different. Parents who want to educate their children are more likely to expect their children to act independently than those who do not. Those parents who deny education to their children often do so precisely in order to prevent their child, often a daughter, from becoming headstrong, stubborn and unwilling to accept authority.

These factors suggest that those who are more educated have more control over their own marriages. The right of veto or even the right to arrange one's own marriage may tend to delay marriages; after all, one of the main reasons for arranged marriage in South Asia is to ensure that girls marry before their reputations can be questioned. Thus, one would expect a higher level of education to be associated with a later age at marriage, and both with greater individual control of marriage. This should especially be

so if parents who want educated children are also parents who expect an element of independence or maturity, an element which comes not just through education but also through age.

While age at marriage is linked to level of education, as shown in Tables 4.14a and b, the link through control over marriage is more difficult to demonstrate. The survey found that for women there was only a marginal difference in age at marriage by whether the marriage was an arranged or a love match; in contrast to men whose love marriages were on average earlier (see Table 4.12). In Table 4.15 age at marriage is measured by the proportion married under 20, 20-25 and 25+, for women currently aged over 40 who married before 40 (to avoid the truncation affect), for women currently aged 25 to 39 who married before 25, and for women aged 25 to 29 who married before 25. The two broader groupings, over 40 and 25 to 39 both show that for females a higher proportion of early marriages were arranged than were later marriages. The difference seems to be explained partly by ethnic-religious groupings and partly by education. Ethnic-religious groups where arranged marriage prevails, such as the Muslims and the Hindus, tend to marry earlier than groups where love matches prevail. Similarly, arranged marriage is slightly more common among the less educated who marry earlier. It might be noted that the ethnic groups who marry earlier tend to have lower levels of education. Since ethnicity-religion logically precedes education and age at marriage, the factors which mean that some groups favour education may be related to the factors which make them more likely to accept late marriages and love matches.

Table 4.15 Age at marriage for arranged and love marriages for various age groups who married by selected ages - Southwest and Estates (Females)

Southwest					
Age at marriage	Arranged	%	Love	%	N
Aged 40+ who married before age 40					
Under 20		69		31	435
20-24		62		38	322
25+		59		41	180
Aged 25-39 who married before age 25					
Under 20		42		58	242
20-24		39		61	129
Aged 25-29 who married before age 25					
Under 20		25		75	150
20-24		28		71	130
Estates					
Aged 40+ who married before age 40					
Under 20		95		5	58
20-24		87		13	52
25+		88		12	17
Aged 25-39 who married before age 25					
20-24		59		41	32
25+		62		38	55
Aged 25-29 who married before age 25					
20-24		45		54	11
25+		61		39	23

Source: Primary analysis of Sri Lankan Demographic Change Project, 1985 - 87.

There is little to indicate that the move from arranged to love matches is responsible for the change in the age at marriage. Indeed, the association of arranged marriage with early marriage is weaker than might be expected considering that one reason for arranged marriages commonly given is that young girls are unable to choose an appropriate groom. While this raises the question for whom the groom is appropriate, the family or the girl, it is undoubtedly true that for very young girls there is a question

whether they have the necessary maturity to make such a decision. Moreover, for females in the narrow age group 25-29, age at marriage is younger for love matches than for arranged matches, a relationship that is contrary to what would be expected from the influence of ethnicity and education.

There are several factors at work here. There is little pressure now for marriage to be early. The pressures for early marriage were, it seems, always less than elsewhere in South Asia because of the weakness of caste, and differences in religious ideology and society. Significantly, such pressures as still exist are expressed in the project's in-depth interviews by the Muslims and to a lesser extent the Tamils but very rarely by the Sinhalese.

While arranged marriage is no longer being employed to achieve early marriage, it is increasingly being used for late marriage, that is to marry those who have failed to find partners or who would have difficulty in marrying. One characteristic of Sri Lankan newspapers is the matrimonial advertisements. Very commonly these are for people who are in danger of becoming too old to marry, for example, women approaching 40 years of age. Hence it is logical that, whereas age at marriage was previously earlier for arranged matches, it now seems to be earlier for love matches.

Nevertheless, the striking point about the age of arranged matches as against that of love matches is not that the relative timing of the two has changed but that they are very similar overall. This suggests that we may be misunderstanding arranged marriage and its influence on age at marriage. Changes in the processes of marriage are important in explaining changes in age at marriage, but the causation involved is more complex than a simple dichotomy between arranged and love marriages, and in this context the very terms arranged and love match are misleading. The terms

imply that the two types of marriage are polar opposites, when, in practice, they have much in common. Except for convention, family-arranged and self-arranged might be more appropriate. Changes in age at marriage are not so much influenced by a shift from arranged to love matches as by the responses of both forms of marriage to the same changes in the social and economic contexts.

If the greater freedom provided by the ability to choose one's own spouse brought about by education does not help to explain the rise in the female marriage age, what then is the link between education and a later marriage age? The link probably lies in changes in what is required in a marriage partner, especially a wife, changes in which education has played a major part. These changes have affected all marriages irrespective of how the choice is made, whether it is made by the family or the couple's own choice.

The impact of education may not be on the degree of control exercised by the young over their marriages but on what is required of them for marriage. Education is associated with a shift from the ascribed attributes dominant in traditional society, such as family and caste status, to the achieved status prevailing in modern urbanized society, as, for example, is associated with a high-prestige job. Education is the key to succeeding in this society while simultaneously it serves as a marker of the social graces and social status. It is as a consequence of this change in what is required of the marriage candidates that age at marriage has risen.

Education is thus part of a much larger reorientation of society: village-based society in which ascribed status was critical has gradually been replaced by a more outward-oriented society in which achieved status is increasingly important. This change has been accompanied by a transformation in what is desired in marriage partners.

In the past, marriage was early primarily because there was little to restrain it from being early. Individual attributes were unimportant, except for those which reflected upon family status such as female morality, which favoured an earlier marriage age. What mattered was the family's economic resources and its status. Family status and resources were matters essentially irrelevant to the age of the bride and groom. For females in particular there were few factors holding back age at marriage while there were advantages in early marriage. The bride was not expected to be educated or particularly mature. What she needed to know could be learnt through experience, with the assistance of her mother-in-law and her mother. Marrying early allowed her to bear more children; the ability to bear many children was an advantage as the cost of rearing children was low and child mortality was high. For males it was not quite as straightforward as this; a slightly older age at marriage was preferred. While financially the whole family might support the marriage, the family's overall financial ability depended on the number of able-bodied adults, particularly males, working. Furthermore, even if the family accepted initial responsibility for helping the new couple, the groom was expected to be primarily responsible for supporting his family. The groom's support for his new family would inevitably reduce the support he provided to the family as a whole. Nevertheless, the delay was not great, as in an agricultural community adults were able to contribute fully at a relatively young age.

The change in age at marriage has less to do with a reduction in the family contribution to marriage than to changing requirements in marriage. Nowadays, family status and family property are less important than in the past. Increasingly, financial well-being and status are dependent upon acquired characteristics, particularly education, which inevitably involve a lengthy period while they are being acquired. This, as Dixon pointed out,

will delay the period before first employment with consequences for the feasibility of marriage. More importantly, it means that families are unable to make a considered decision with regard to marriage until after the desirable characteristics have been acquired. The most important attribute, education, takes many years to acquire; it will be even longer before a suitable job is obtained. This is not so much a matter of the feasibility of marriage as of maximizing one's bargaining position. Only where it is possible to demonstrate that a man has achieved a desirable position will a woman's parents be willing to accept him as a desirable person for her to marry. It is only then that the young man's parents will be able to obtain an optimal bride for him. Thus, those who have jobs are able to marry not because it is feasible for them to do so but because they are desirable grooms.

What is true of the male is also true of the female. Her age at marriage is similarly delayed because she is expected to have characteristics that were not required of a bride earlier. As the family has become more involved in the outside world beyond the local community, so too has the wife's place in the family changed. Previously, a wife's role in the family was well defined: she was expected to perform housework, and give due deference to her husband, mother-in-law and mother. She nurtured her children, but, beyond that, did not give them special attention, though the situation among the Sinhalese was not as extreme as in the Indian joint family where too much affection for the children would be seen as endangering the interests of the family as a whole. Children grew up quickly and were soon helping their parents. Now, however, the well-being of the family and of the family members depends much more strongly on what they can achieve. Whereas previously the standing of individuals depended upon the standing of their families, now the situation has reversed with the standing of the family reflecting that of the individuals

who constitute it. The family's role has become in effect that of enabling its individual members to achieve their potential: the mother of the children has a vital role in assisting them to do so. Clearly, there is a strong element of feedback involved. Young girls need to acquire certain characteristics so they can assist their children in turn. The mother's increased interest in her children extends to other spheres and she is now expected to keep a much closer watch on her children's health than previously, and take them to the newly available health clinics if required.

The new emphasis on a specific set of achieved characteristics has had the consequence of raising the age at marriage: for marriage, males are preferred who are educated and have a good job (itself associated with higher levels of education), while females are preferred who are educated and have a certain maturity, a quality which males have long been expected to have. The change in what is expected of females, the respectability of the jobs made possible by education and an element of Dixon's feasibility of marriage, rising expectations also associated with education, have meant that having a suitable job has also increasingly been seen as desirable for females, as it has long been in the special circumstances of the estates. This has the combined effect of encouraging the girl's family to delay her marriage until she has acquired a job, and once she has done so, reducing the motivation of the family to marry off one of the family's breadwinners. Complicating this is the fact that the acquisition of a job will give the young woman much greater control over whom she will marry and over the timing of her marriage.

However, it is too simple to see the changes that have taken place merely as a result of the time needed to acquire the desired attributes, for there has also been a change in the net gain from marriage for families and individuals. In the past, families had much to gain from early marriage, particularly for females. An important element here was a morality which

encouraged early marriage before gossip of any kind could arise, and a desire to prevent liaisons with unsuitable partners from other castes or lower status families in general. An alliance with another family, and particularly with a useful son-in-law, was also an important advantage. In return there was little to be gained from delaying the marriage especially as the other family normally preferred a younger bride who was more likely to have an unsullied reputation and be able to bear more children.

There was less pressure to marry males early because there was less to be gained from doing so. Their reputation was much less at threat. Furthermore, the family had little to gain economically if a son was to marry too early. While he would eventually need grandchildren to help look after him in his old age, his marriage, especially if arranged, would require considerable assistance from the family and would divert his labour away from helping his family of origin: that is he would have to support his family of procreation.

The major change has been a reduction in the gains from the early marriage of females whose position has in some ways become more like that of the males. There is now little pressure concerning female morality. Indeed, there is virtually total acceptance of unmarried girls and women living with their families or alone until quite late ages and there is even some acceptance of spinsterhood. A major part of the change has been that undesirable marriages, from the parental viewpoint, are no longer the disaster they were formerly, and, in particular, families are less worried about their daughters eloping with men from low castes or low-status families. The reasons for this are complex but they have much to do with breakdown of the local community and its replacement by a new town-based hierarchy in which achieved traits, especially education, have a much greater role. Furthermore, there is little desire on the groom's side for a young bride. They, too, prefer a more mature and preferably educated

bride. There is little value in a daughter marrying early to establish a useful alliance as these are much less useful than they used to be.

The economic advantage of marriage has also changed so as to discourage families arranging early female marriage. In the past, a delayed marriage meant that families had the perceived disadvantage of having to support a daughter without having the advantage of a useful son-in-law or alliance with his family and also without all the children, especially sons, she could have borne who could participate in daily activities and help look after the senior generations as they grew older. Now these advantages have less value while the disadvantages have grown. One particular disadvantage is the assistance that has to be given to the younger generation when they marry. The most obvious example of this is the dowry, for, as discussed earlier in this chapter, the family has to provide a dowry without getting much in return.

More important than the dowry is the assistance that families have to provide after marriage. The family is expected to give support if the younger couple encounter difficulties including economic difficulties, particularly if the marriage is arranged in which case it is their responsibility to ensure that it is a successful marriage.

The effect of these changes is less to encourage families to actively seek later female marriage than to cause them to disengage themselves from active participation in promoting marriage altogether. This is of particular relevance to the arrangement of marriage as is discussed in the Chapter 5.

One factor with the potential for encouraging the family to more positively favour later marriage is an increase in the economic contribution by unmarried daughters to the family. Among poorer families women have worked before marriage, but more prosperous families have long preferred

women not to work in outside employment. However, with the increase of factory and especially clerical employment, this has changed and women's employment has become much more respectable. One of the characteristics of contemporary Sri Lanka is the large number of young women who work, especially in the growing textile industry. A majority of Sri Lankans working in the Middle East are women; mostly as domestics.

But the economic attraction for the family of women's labour should not be overstated. Even with the increase in female labour, unemployment is still high and young women, like young men, often find it very difficult to find a suitable job. Secondly, even if the girl gets a job, the family may not benefit much materially. Amongst the Sinhalese the children of the family are not expected to contribute greatly to the family before marriage, the parents bearing most of the household expenses.

Indirectly, though, there are significant economic benefits accruing to the parents from working daughters, in that the young woman contributes to her own dowry, though this may not reduce the amount that parents have to contribute; and, even if she does not contribute much to her parents, at least she bears much of her own expenses. The possibility of employment has also opened up new avenues of independence for women, not necessarily from marriage altogether, but also as more authoritative figures within marriage. Many women now prefer to delay their marriages until after they have acquired employment, in part to gain more experience of the outside world, but also because their husbands might well prevent them taking up such employment after marriage.

The changing economics of marriage in the low country thus means that families are no longer pressing the young to marry early. In contrast, the changing economics of marriage in the project's up-country sample in

the tea estates has meant that it is in the family's interest to actively delay marriage.

4.9 Difficulties of marrying on the estates

Women are the major earners in estate families; the prime demand for labour in the estates is for tea plucking, work traditionally done by women. This means that there are few economic advantages for a woman's own family in marrying her off early. Her income makes an important contribution to the family. What is more, a later age at marriage does not seem to be related to the need to pay a higher dowry on the estates. Men, after all, will not be expected to support their wives but rather will be supported by them.

K. (Household No.8323), for example, argued that, although girls should marry at around 18 years and boys at 20 so that they would be able to have children early for old-age support, parents' desires for their children's earnings were delaying marriage. Similarly, V. (Household No.8162) remarked that parents are delaying girls' marriages because they want the girls to finance their own weddings as much as possible. Some parents do not even think of getting their daughters married as they want to live on the girls' earnings. V. commented: 'That is why some of the girls elope and get married. How long can anybody wait?'. His point is highlighted by the case of R. (Household No.8136), two of whose daughters had eloped. While R. said his daughters had remained unmarried because nobody wanted to marry them, and somewhat contradictorily added that anyway the suitors that did come were bad characters and their horoscopes did not match, it was clear that he had made little effort to marry them. The neighbours said that he had only been interested in the girls' earnings, and suggested that he had let the girls elope so that he would not have to spend anything on their weddings. S. (Household No.8380) insisted that he

had tried to arrange his own daughters' marriages but noted that some parents are only interested in living on their daughters' earnings. His daughters claimed to the contrary that his only efforts were in drinking their earnings.

Even daughters who do not directly contribute to family income can do so indirectly by looking after siblings while others in the household work. These are among the reasons given as to why J.'s (Household No.8309) and T. L.'s (Household No.8073) marriages will be delayed. Sometimes, however, other factors force the parents' hand. M. (Household No.8327) explained that, although his daughter was earning an income, he had to arrange her marriage as her mother was dead and no one could look after her.

Thus female employment in the estates is acting to delay marriage. A young woman who is unemployed, however, is almost impossible to marry off, even though it may be in the parents' interest to do so. L. (Household No. 8359) said that her daughter P. is often sick and cannot work much so she does not expect her to marry soon; her other daughter K. does not want to marry because her earnings are needed to support the family but her mother says they are trying to arrange her marriage.

While it is in the economic interests of the girls' families to delay their marriages there are some dangers in doing so: one is that they will not be able to arrange an advantageous match. This is likely to be a bigger disadvantage from the girl's point of view than her family's as they expect little help from their daughters after marriage, and family alliances are not so valuable in the proletarianized society of the estates where family property is of little value, and residence, work and other activities are controlled by the estate management. There is a disadvantage, however, in that, if the marriage is unsuccessful, they may have to take responsibility

for their daughter; though this may not be an economic disadvantage if she continues to work.

S. (Household No.8380) philosophized that:

Some parents are not initially interested in getting daughters married (because they earn money) and they do make sincere efforts. Later on, when they finally realize that the daughters have to be married, it is too late and the girls remain unmarried. People come, have a look at the girl and go away because no one wants to marry a girl who is too old.

It was basically a problem of childbearing:

There are many girls who are older than boys and they cannot find suitable partners. If a girl is older than the boy, he will be in his prime when she has attained menopause. Such a marriage will lead to incompatibility. There will be no problem in having sex, but childbearing will not be possible.

According one of the project's investigators, Lakshman Dissanayake, people in the estates cited the best age for a female to marry as between 20 and 25. A woman over 25 had less chance of a young husband and most probably she would have to marry a man over 35; therefore, the parents prefer to arrange their daughter's wedding before she is 25. Clearly, though there are many marriages after 25, the decline in the age gap suggests that not all the women are marrying much older men; indeed there were a number of examples of women marrying younger men.

It is apparent that the importance of women's earnings means that men's families will accept them even at an older age. Indeed there is some evidence that it may encourage men to marry earlier, resulting in a narrower age gap. A. S. (Household No.8007) remarked that when his mother died they lost their main source of income and that the family was subjected to much hardship. Eventually he wanted to marry, and asked his father about it, as it would help the family economically, as well as help his sisters, because it is better if there is a woman to look after girls. Admittedly the age gap between A.S. and his wife was a lengthy eight years.

While the importance of female earnings is apparently the principal factor explaining why the female age at marriage is so late now, it does not fully explain the dramatic rise in the female marriage age. Presumably, female earnings have always been important though they may have become more important as difficult economic times on the estates and discrimination against Indian Tamils off the estates mean that Tamils have found it increasingly hard to find full-time employment. The marriage squeeze has been an important factor, being particularly sharp in the estates, but it does not seem to be a complete explanation: there are signs that the worst of the squeeze may be over but little sign as yet of a significant fall in the female marriage age. Secondly both male and female marriage ages have risen in the estates though the rises were greater among females.

A second major factor has been a shortage of accommodation. One household head A. (Household No.8039) commented that a number of his sons and one daughter were of marriageable age, and that he had arranged their marriage with relatives. The problem was that they still had not found places to live. He thought it would be difficult for all the sons and their wives to live in one house as it was already crowded. He said that all the sons would get married as soon as they found accommodation. Similarly, M. (Household No.8046) says her daughter R. still has not married at 35 years because they are poor and do not have a place for her to stay; she lives with a relative in Colombo. If she could get her house repaired, she would bring R. back and arrange her marriage. This may be an excuse, however, for as is examined below, there are advantages for the household in not marrying daughters.

The most important factor, apart from the increasing importance of female earnings, has probably been the reduced concern about elopements with inappropriate men. While this is still a worry it is no longer enough to override the benefits of keeping the girl at home.

4.10 Interim findings and the importance of relating marriage patterns to wider issues of marriage

This chapter has examined a number of the various suggestions that have been put forward to explain Sri Lanka's rising age at marriage. It has found that the existing hypotheses either fail to explain long-term change adequately or fail to explain all the facts.

A particularly relevant argument in the Sri Lankan context, that the marriage squeeze has encouraged a higher female marriage age, does help to explain recent fluctuations but it does not explain much more fundamental long-term change. The most commonly cited reason for the changes in the age at marriage, Sri Lanka's prolonged economic crisis and its effect on people's ability to marry, what Dixon (1970) calls the feasibility of marriage, again has immediate attractions but fails to explain all the facts. This factor should have had a greater impact on the male marriage age than on the female marriage age, yet it is the latter that has risen most, particularly in the last few years.

There is little evidence that male age at marriage has fluctuated in line with employment opportunities. Indeed, what stands out about trends in age at marriage is their long-term consistency as opposed to the short-term fluctuations typical of the job market. There seems a stronger correlation between age at marriage and education, which itself is associated with a later age at first employment, than between age at marriage and employment itself.

Another questionable argument associated with feasibility is that Asian marriage was early compared to Western marriage because where marriage was a family concern families both organized the marriages and supported the young couple, who often were incorporated into the wider family, and did not need to acquire independent means to marry. In Sri Lanka, family assistance does not seem to have stemmed the rise in the

marriage age, for the average age of arranged marriage is rising as fast as that of love matches, or faster. Yet it is only arranged marriage that is associated with family assistance. This may indicate that families simply have much less ability to ensure the future welfare of the new couple than they did previously, and concern for the future welfare of the couple is really a question of choosing the most appropriate marriage partner; but it is not a matter of the feasibility of marriage.

After all, many young couples live with their parents until they are financially able to move out. Even then a large initial investment is usually not necessary as they are provided with land by the parents and they are usually willing to live in very straitened circumstances, often in a ramshackle hut, until they can afford to build a more permanent home. Similarly dowry does not seem to be a major factor in reducing the feasibility of marriage in Sri Lanka.

Having noted the inadequacies of changes in the marriage market and financial difficulties in marrying as explanations of the rise in the age at marriage, I examined a number of the factors which the project data indicated were correlated with differentials in the marriage age. Continuing differentials in age at marriage by religion and ethnicity were noted, a point that might be related to the particular emphasis placed on female chastity by some groups. However, while religion and ethnicity are important in explaining continuing differentials within the population they do not explain long-term change in age at marriage. In contrast, the rise in levels of education does appear to do so. It is not simple to explain why education should do so, but it has been suggested here that the answer lies in the process of marriage, and particularly in what is required of the marriage partners.

Finally, it was suggested that there has been an overall change in the whole economics of marriage, what the family itself gains from early marriage. In the past early marriage brought substantial benefits to the family but now marriage often brings substantial costs. The clearest example of this was found in the estates where families are now heavily dependent on the earnings of the female members, and, in the absence of strong pressures to the contrary, families are understandably reluctant to marry off their daughters and thereby face the risk of impoverishment.

These changes in the attributes required for marriage and in the economics of marriage have implications for aspects of marriage beyond age at marriage, in particular how marriage is arranged. I have examined the basic factors that seem to have been involved in the changing age at marriage and identified changes in the requirements of marriage and in its economics, as the key determinants; it is now necessary to relate the changes that have taken place in marriage to their wider social and economic context. In particular, Chapter 5 examines how marriage partners are chosen and what criteria are used. This has required an examination of marriage within the context of the family, for, only by understanding the structures of authority within the family, what is expected of each individual as a member of the family and what they can expect in return, is it possible to comprehend how and for what reasons decisions are made regarding marriage and family matters in general.

Chapter 5

The process of marriage

5.1 Arranged marriage has declined dramatically

The most dramatic change in Sri Lankan marriage in recent years, and the one which even more than its high age at marriage sets the marriage regime of Sri Lanka apart from its neighbours in South Asia, is the shift from arranged to love marriage. This transformation shows up sharply in the project's data on respondents' year of marriage.

It is evident from Table 5.1 that the proportion of marriages that are 'love matches' rose continuously until the 1980s. In Southwestern Sri Lanka it has risen from quite low levels for those who married before 1940 to the great majority amongst those who married in the 1970s and 1980s. In the Estates the changes have been more recent but the trend is clear nevertheless with love matches rising from negligible proportions to a point where they are challenging the previous norm, the arranged marriage.

This chapter examines why arranged marriage has given way to love marriage, concentrating on the economic and social context within which the changes have taken place. It focuses on how decisions with regard to marriage are made, and relates this to the nature of family structure and the kinship system in Sri Lankan society. It looks at what individuals within the family perceive their duties to be with regard to others, and how they seek to discharge them and what they expect of others. It notes the influence of cultural and religious concepts on these duties and obligations, and how new ideologies are modifying this influence. It also examines, with regard to family and kinship organization, what are the interests of the parties involved, and how these are changing in response to changes in

external, particularly economic, conditions. Where appropriate, comparisons are made with the situation in Karnataka State in South India where I worked previously.

Table 5.1 Type of marriage by year of marriage - females.

Age	Marriage Type		N
	Arranged %	Love %	
Southwest			
Before 1940	73	27	92
1940-1949	70	30	209
1950-1954	63	37	139
1955-1959	66	34	187
1960-1964	60	40	206
1965-1969	43	57	238
1970-1974	37	63	287
1975-1979	29	71	341
1980-1985	32	68	470
Estates			
Before 1950	94	6	31
1950-1959	93	7	42
1960-1969	87	13	54
1970-1974	67	33	33
1975-1979	59	41	41
1980-1987	62	38	74

Source: Primary analysis of Sri Lankan Demographic Change Project, 1985 - 87.

Much of the discussion in this chapter is concerned with how the economics of marriage is influenced by institutional factors such as the family and kinship organization. In Section 5.13 it is noted that these socio-cultural features themselves may reflect more fundamental economic realities, such as the most appropriate societal organization given a particular economic system such as rice farming; in Marxist terms the superstructure, of which social organization forms a part, reflects the economic base. However, this is a matter which I do not explore in depth,

because, in the present state of knowledge, it would involve mostly pure speculation.

5.2 What is meant by arranged and love marriage?

The discussion of the increase in love marriage raises questions about precisely what arranged and love marriages are, and more generally what marriage itself is. These are points which are discussed throughout this chapter and which were to some extent discussed in Chapter 2.

Love marriage means one in which couples make their own choice, whereas in an arranged marriage the parents make the choice; but the difference is rarely as simple as this. Marriage, after all, is a social institution which, to be regarded as legitimate, has to be accepted by society. What we are interested in are changes in what society considers legitimate marriage. This has particular implications for the young couple in making their choice in a love marriage. What was in the past, and still is in the estates, considered an elopement, may now, in the low-country, be considered a legitimate marriage; Table 5.1 does not distinguish between elopements and love marriages. The difference between love marriage and arranged marriage in Sri Lanka must be kept in perspective; while Sri Lankans regard the difference as important, what is being discussed is not the difference between a completely atomized society where individuals make choices with complete autonomy from their families, and another where families make decisions without consideration for the interests of the young.

Not surprisingly, in a situation of transition from one marriage type to the other, there is very considerable overlap between the two types of marriage. In particular, most couples who have love matches first consult their families who will normally investigate the prospective marriage partners and their families very carefully before giving their consent, much

as they would in an arranged marriage. Welisara couples who had love matches were asked whether parents agreed to the marriage (N=214): 86 per cent answered that they did, 12 per cent that they did not, and 2 per cent that they had accepted it after the marriage had taken place. In the estates, the figures are virtually identical (N=64): 86 per cent of parents agreed, 12 per cent did not, and in one case, 2 per cent, the husband's family only agreed. The choices of the young couple are examined by the older generation, and indeed the parents would be likely to nip in the bud any prospective match to which they were opposed. Similarly, but less often, the young could be consulted on arranged marriages. Respondents in Welisara and the estates who had had arranged marriages were asked whether they had fully agreed with the decision (N=149): 95 per cent said they had, while only 5 per cent said they had not. In the estates (N=163), the acceptance of the parents' proposals was even greater with 99 per cent saying that they agreed and only one respondent saying that she did not. Acceptance of the parents' decision, however, is not the same as consultation, as is indicated by the high acceptance on the estates, where it is evident to the fieldworker that there is much less consultation with the children over their marriage choices than in Welisara. Furthermore, few people are willing to say that their current marriage is a mistake.

A more meaningful question was whether respondents had vetoed any marriage arrangements made for them. In the low-country this question was asked in Maligawatta, Jumma Masjid Road, New Kelani Bridge, Nugegoda, Loluwagoda, and Welisara. As Table 5.2 shows, 31 per cent of women in the low country and 22 per cent of women in the estates with arranged marriages had rejected grooms; presumably a higher proportion could have done so if they had wished.

Table 5.2 Number of proposed matches vetoed by women in Southwest and Estates

	Southwest	Estates
No. of proposals	%	%
None	69	79
1	14	12
2	8	2
3 or more	9	9
N	796	207

Source: Primary Analysis of Sri Lankan Demographic Change Project, 1985 - 87.

'Arranged marriage' does not imply total family control nor 'love marriage' total individual control: what are being distinguished are family-initiated marriage and self-initiated marriage. There has been gradual movement along a continuum from where families consult very little with the children to one where the children consult little with the parents, the actual shift from the family initiating the marriage to the individual doing so, being only one point on such a continuum. At present while the children may be increasingly initiating the marriage, the family continues to take a close interest in it. A love marriage in which the family's interests are not taken into account is an elopement, not a marriage.

Nevertheless, given that the distinction between arranged and love marriages should be kept in perspective, Sri Lankans do recognize important differences between the two. While family sanction is still required for a love marriage, it is nevertheless regarded as less of a family affair and the family is likely to be less directly involved in it. In particular, the family is less likely to provide a dowry, though it often still does, and it is less likely to offer support for the young couple, especially important when the young couple are starting off and in the case of marital problems. However, even where it does not pay dowry, the family is still likely to pay for the marriage celebration.

Thus, there is an important difference between arranged and love marriage, with arranged marriage being much more a family concern than is love marriage. Nevertheless, love marriage still requires the sanction of the family and society to be regarded as a marriage.

5.3 Are the rise in the female marriage age and the decline of arranged marriage linked?

A comparison of Table 4.1 in Chapter 4 and Table 5.1 indicate that a number of the sharpest rises in the proportions of love matches have followed particularly sharp increases in the age at marriage: for example, for Southwestern Sri Lanka the large rise in female age at marriage between the 40-49 year age cohort and the 35-39 year age cohort (approximate median years of marriage 1967 and 1975 respectively) is paralleled by a sharp rise in the proportion of love matches. The linkage, assuming there is any, is probably not through the increase in love marriages leading to a later age at marriage. As indicated by Tables 4.12 and 4.15 among younger cohorts, couples whose marriages are arranged are on average slightly older than couples who choose for themselves. It may simply be that the rise in the age at marriage means that families are having to accept that the young are mature enough to exercise more choice.

The linkage may also reflect the risk factor involved; the longer a family delays arranging a marriage for a son or daughter the greater the chance that he or she will meet a partner. When we asked respondents over 16 years who were unmarried, their intended type of marriage, 61 per cent said an arranged marriage and only 30 per cent a love marriage; the remaining 9 per cent saying that they either did not expect to marry or did not want to. Clearly many of those expecting an arranged marriage would end up selecting their own partner. The explanation is probably that those expecting a love match are those who have already met their intended partner. Those who have not will generally answer according to what is

socially expected, that is an arranged marriage, even though many will eventually choose their own partners; the answers may have been influenced by the setting in which they were asked, as most of the unmarried lived with their parents. Once those who are unmarried meet someone they wish to marry, among the Sinhalese, at least, their parents will generally agree; if they do not accept love marriages the young may simply elope without consulting the older generation. In Chapter 4 a number of examples were given, especially from the estates, of the latter situation. For example, V. (Household No.8162) noted that many parents were reluctant to marry off their daughters as they were living on their earnings from tea plucking, and commented: 'that is why some girls elope and get married. How long can anybody wait?'

This risk factor that the longer an arranged marriage is delayed the greater the likelihood that an individual will meet their own partner, along with the greater use of arranged marriage as a marriage of last resort, explains why arranged marriages are now slightly later than love marriages even though the greater concentration of arranged marriages among the less educated might lead one to expect the opposite.

The reasons why arranged marriage was being delayed in certain periods, notably the 1970s, was partly financial. In societies where marriage is arranged, both the right of the family to arrange the marriage and their duty to find resources for the dowry, the wedding ceremonies and the setting up of the young couple are part of the same process. When there are economic difficulties and the family has insufficient resources they may prefer to defer marriage rather than bring inadequate resources to it. The point came out very clearly in the research in which I was involved in South India: see Caldwell, Reddy and Caldwell, 1988 on the reaction of the marriage market in South India to famine and drought. One way out, for both the person seeking marriage and also the family, is a love marriage

which is accompanied by a much lower transfer of resources. If the advantages of arranged marriage have not increased while the costs have, it may economically be sensible for the family as well as the individual to accept a love match. Table 5.1 gives some support to this interpretation with the decline in arranged marriages during the difficult 1970s followed apparently by a slight increase in the 1980s when economic conditions improved.

However, difficulties in funding arranged marriage do not fully explain the longer-term changes in the age at which arranged marriages take place; if the costs of marriage affect the supply of marriage partners it would be expected that a lower transfer of resources would be accepted as adequate. This should allow the age of arranged marriages to return to its previous level. This has not happened, which suggests that there are more basic reasons for the changes in age at marriage and marriage type. Of course while a reduction in transfers may allow arranged marriage to revert to an earlier age it would also reduce the attraction of arranged marriage over love marriage.

The deeper connection between age at marriage and marriage type may be that the factors underlying the rise in the marriage age are also largely responsible for the increase in love marriage. Chapter 4, for example, identified as one of the major explanations given for the rise in the marriage age the increasing importance of individual-level attributes over family-level attributes. This also has important implications for the effectiveness of the family or the individual for choosing the most appropriate marriage partner for the family and the individual. Section 5.4 examines how changes in Sri Lankan society and economy have affected the family's hold over the individual, the individual's and the family's interest in arranged and love marriage, and the advantages of the individual and the family as the initiators of the search for a marriage partner.

5.4 Why did the young accept the arrangement of their marriages in the past?

The changed circumstances refer to the situation described in Chapter 2: in Sri Lanka a local community- and family-oriented society was replaced by a wider largely urban-oriented society in which the individual had a greater role. A socio-economic system had emerged where advancement depended less on family status and wealth and more on the individual's qualifications, particularly educational ones and to a lesser extent ability. Family influence, for example in obtaining a position and in politics, is still much more important than is generally the case in Western countries, but the influence is increasingly that obtained through informal networks, such as old boys' networks, rather than ascribed traits such as family status or caste. The result is that arranged marriage is less advantageous for all concerned than it used to be.

It is conventional to regard the arrangement of marriage in terms of parental control over children and the breakdown of arranged marriage as being a response to the breakdown of that control. But this is too simple a picture of what has happened. It is true that the family's control over the means of production is much weaker than it was; family land has become much less important while wage labour is increasingly available. Work off the family farm has long been available; yet the project's figures indicate that the pronounced increase in love matches has been comparatively recent. Even before the great expansion in wage and salary labour it was possible for the young to get access to *chena* plots of land for swidden agriculture, yet at least in the project areas there seems to have been very little self-selection in marriage before about 50 years ago. In the estates, where employment has long been provided by the estate management and not by the family, most marriages are still arranged.

A number of anthropologists have commented that, in the past among the Kandyan Sinhalese at least, marriage was often relatively informal, but this does not mean that it was not arranged, simply that the arrangements and the search for the partner were minimal. Where the family had little property at stake or where the most suitable partners were known and indeed were likely to be close kin, a long search and complex arrangements were unnecessary. This situation is quite different from love marriage where the responsibility for choosing their own partners is left to the young.

In economic terms, the young now have a much longer period of total dependency on their families than formerly: their employment, and thus economic independence, has been delayed while they receive the education and training on which their future depends. Yet the areas where the young are dependent on their parents longest as indicated by employment status, the middle-class areas of Nugegoda and Welisara and the villages of Bondupitiya and Loluwagoda, have comparatively low levels of arranged marriage compared to the poor urban areas and the estates where economic dependence is less.

In Table 5.3 the proportion who are family dependent, as defined by their status as either not employed or full-time studying, is compared to the proportion of arranged marriages. For the latter a total figure is given, but, as this is affected by past conditions and age structure, a figure for those aged under 30 is also provided. On balance, where the young are more dependent on their family, there are fewer arranged marriages, not more.

Table 5.3 Employment status by ages - males, and the proportion of arranged marriages - females.

	Proportion family dependent (%)			Proportion arranged marriage (%)	
	15-19	20-24	25-29	All ages	<30
Middle Class N	87.5 (200)	33.7 (211)	12.3 (162)	39 (716)	17 (140)
Rural N	84.8 (196)	48.2 (164)	18.1 (182)	49 (708)	21 (185)
Poor Urban	68.9 (190)	21.3 (188)	10.1 (198)	52 (699)	37 (286)
Estates N	72.0 (50)	24.2 (62)	10.3 (39)	75 (281)	59 (68)

Source: Primary analysis of Sri Lankan Demographic Change Project, 1985 - 87.

The explanation, in part, is that while the period of total economic dependence on the parents may have lengthened, once the period ends the young have a more complete independence than before. They depend less on family property or assistance as they are able to get their own jobs based on their own qualifications. But it would be wrong to interpret the shift to love marriage simply as a weakening in the economic control of parents over their children.

In the project's in-depth interviewing no respondents implied that they did not have a love marriage because they were economically dependent on their families. Some did say that they did not receive a dowry because they had married contrary to the family's wishes, some that they had a love marriage because of family opposition, and very few that they had to delay their marriages because they lacked the resources to marry. Where the young were economically dependent on their families this could

have acted to prevent love marriages, but there is little empirical evidence for this.

What had changed was not that the young were taking advantage of a new found economic independence to marry as they wished, but that the whole social and economic system of which arranged marriage was part, had broken down. In the past not to have an arranged marriage would have meant being cut off from the whole network of kinship links on which village society was based, and having to forgo the advantages arising from arranged marriage.

5.5 Not to have an arranged marriage would have meant social and economic isolation

In a status based society, such as Sri Lanka was, an individual's social identity was based on his or her position as a member of a family. It might have been possible to be economically independent undertaking *chena* agriculture but to do so would have meant isolation from the vital social and economic ties of village society.

Many of the social and economic institutions in village Sri Lanka depended upon kinship links and to be cut off from them would have resulted in a loss of important social and economic support. Family alliances, for example, were of considerable importance to the individual family members. In almost any activity an individual was likely to require assistance, and the support of a network of families and individuals linked by marriage was likely to be of critical importance.

The most important source of support for the individual, however, was the family itself. Not to accept an arranged marriage would have been seen as denying family responsibilities; the family would not have been obliged to fulfil its responsibilities in return.

One such responsibility was dowry. In addition, where reciprocal obligations were met, the family would also provide assistance with accommodation and eventual help in starting a new household, providing land and so on. Finally, it would take responsibility for the marriage both in trying to overcome problems that might arise in the marriage and in taking care of the consequences if the marriage broke up.

Tables 5.4a and 5.4b list the answers given to the question on the disadvantages of love marriage to the young couples concerned. To simplify the interpretation the answers have been grouped into what seemed to me the most appropriate categories. Economic and accommodation problems have been grouped with lack of family support on the basis that there is a causal link between the two. There was remarkable agreement between the main sample and the estates on the nature of the major disadvantages of love marriage. Most respondents referred to the lack of assistance from parents, and, to a lesser extent, financial problems apparently arising from the break with the parents, though some mentioned other factors such as the lack of dowry and marital discord arising presumably from the result of inappropriate selections made by the young and the lack of support from their families.

There are a few minor differences: in the estates there is much less reference to dowry indicating that dowry is smaller but suggesting also that other issues are more important. There are interesting differences between answers within each of the categories. For instance, in the estates more respondents answered that, if the marriage broke down, the families would not help them whereas in the low-country the emphasis was solely on the possibility of receiving less assistance from the families, the difference implied being that the break between parents and children is more absolute in the estates.

Table 5.4a Disadvantages¹ in love marriages for couples - Southwest²

Disadvantage	No.	per cent	
No family support/ economic & accommodation problems	353	53	
Some parents don't help them	140	21	
Must solve own problems	121	18	
Economic problems	86	13	
If marriage fails no family support	6	1	
Estranged from the family	52	8	
Estranged from parents	35	5	
Parents and relatives will disown them/ be antagonistic	9	1	
Parents' anger	8	1	
No dowry	26	4	
No dowry	18	3	
Husband may reproach wife for lack of dowry	7	1	
Husband's parents will be antagonistic because there is no dowry	1	0	
Marital problems	98	14	
Marital discord	59	9	
They may choose unsuitable partner	32	5	
Marital discord after early years	5	1	
Cross-religious marriage may cause discord	2	0	
Cross-caste marriage	6	1	
They may marry across caste	6	1	
Problems	6	1	
Problems unspecified	6	1	
No basic problems	130	19	
No disadvantages	128	19	
None if patient and understanding	2	0	
Total	(671)	(100)	

Notes: 1 First responses only.

2 Loluwagoda and Welisara only.

Source: Primary analysis of Sri Lankan Demographic Change Project, 1985.

Table 5.4b Disadvantages¹ in love marriages for couples- Estates

Disadvantage	No.	%
No family support/ economic & accommodation problems	125	32
Some parents don't help them	58	24
Must solve own problems	36	15
Economic problems	9	4
No property from parents	5	2
Lack of accommodation	2	1
Estranged from the family	22	9
Estranged from parents	15	6
Parents and relatives will disown them/ be antagonistic	7	3
No dowry	3	1
No dowry	3	1
Marital problems	40	17
Marital discord	13	5
They may choose unsuitable partner	10	4
Marital discord after early years	7	3
Marriage breakdown/divorce	5	2
Husband may abandon wife	5	2
Cross-caste marriage	3	1
They may marry across caste	3	1
Problems	17	7
Problems unspecified	14	6
Malicious gossip	3	1
No basic problems	29	12
No disadvantages	28	12
None if patient and understanding	1	0
Total	(239)	(100)

Note: 1 First responses only.

Source: Primary analysis of Sri Lankan Demographic Change Project, 1987.

The argument that love matches were rare in the past because of the importance of the assistance provided by families may seem to differ only marginally from the argument that it is the family's hold over the children that forced them to have arranged marriages. Nevertheless, there are important differences. First, the concept of the family's hold over the children implies an element of coercion which may not be there, for many of the younger generation prefer arranged matches even when they have the means to marry independently. Secondly, the concept implies that there is a pent-up desire for love marriage merely held back by coercion whilst in fact it is changes in the society which have led to the demand. Thirdly, even the poor, whose families could not afford to pay dowry, did not have land to give and could not provide accommodation, still preferred arranged marriages simply for the less materialistic of the reasons mentioned above.

Marriage has changed because the structure of society has changed. The advantages brought by arranged marriage are much smaller for all concerned than they used to be. Family ties are less central to the lives of individuals than previously. The family itself is economically less important, but, even where this is not the case, other family ties are less significant. Family alliances and other kinship-based links are much less important than they were formerly. Much of this change is due to the decreased importance of local institutions where kinship ties were critical. Now, governmental, bureaucratic and political organizations are much more important than they were, though local influence can still matter, for example, in procuring a position.

The reduced localism is also important in what the family can achieve in terms of the marriage itself. Where ties between families are strong the family is able to exert considerable pressure in the interests of its member; in particular it may be able to exert pressure to maintain the marriage. The converse of this ability to press the other family in the interests of the

individual is that the family and ultimately the individual may also receive such pressure with the family feeling obliged to perpetuate a marriage regarding which it has entered into commitments with another family. Individuals consequently may feel that they are not free to live their own lives.

A Family, however, can less effectively apply pressure where the other family takes the ties less seriously and where less pressure from the local community, for example through gossip, is exerted. A major contributory factor to the reduced importance of the local community here is that an increasing proportion of marriages involve families who live far apart, and indeed the young couple may live away from both families.

The other factor reducing the value of family support is simply that the more material assistance is less valuable than it was; in particular, access to farm land is of much less significance. Housing, however, especially in the towns, may be an exception to this generalization.

The overall reduction in the value of arranged marriage for the young has not so much unleashed a pent-up desire for love marriage but simply undercut the assumption that arranged marriage is the only correct form of marriage and allowed the young to become more experimental in regard to marriage. It has also altered, in a sense, the bargaining positions of the young versus the old. The old have had to become more accommodating to the wishes of the young simply because the young now have less to lose if they do not comply.

A distinction should be made between the situation in the low-country and the situation in the estates. The description given above of what seems to have happened applies principally to the Southwestern sample. In the estates, although the economic hold of the older generation over the younger generation is weak in that employment is provided by the

estate management, society is much more local than in the southwest. The young are much more subject to local pressure and society is less likely to accept a love marriage as genuine. This localism also means that many of the advantages of arranged marriage remain. The family, for example, can use its links with the other family to help sort out problems concerning the marriage. Consequently, the old need not be so accommodating of the interests of the young as in the low country. One consequence seems to have been that the older generation have been able to put their interests first and hence have chosen to delay arranging their daughters' marriages. This in turn should lead to a reduction in the advantages of having their marriages arranged for the younger generation, but at present seems mostly to be leading to increased bitterness among the young that their parents are not fulfilling their responsibilities.

This discussion concerning the reduced value of arranged marriage for the young in the low-country raises a second point. While the advantages of arranged marriages for the young have lessened, families have, it seems, become more accepting of love marriages.

5.6 Families now accept love matches as genuine marriages

Many of the factors which have reduced the value of an arranged marriage for the young couple have also reduced the value of arranged marriage for their families. Families consequently are more willing to accept love marriage.

Sri Lankans, themselves, seem to have no doubts that the principal factor in the increase in love marriage is that families are no longer actively attempting to prevent love matches. When we asked women over 55 years why there were fewer love matches in the past, in Southwestern Sri Lanka (Welisara only) 55 per cent of respondents replied that in those times families did not allow girls to go out unchaperoned (see Table 5.5a).

Table 5.5a Reasons for few love marriages in the past - Southwest¹

Reason	%	No
Girls were not allowed to go out unchaperoned	55	42
Young people had less freedom	19	15
Few opportunities for girls and boys to meet	4	3
Girls did not go to jobs	1	1
Children feared parents	6	5
Girls obeyed their parents	4	3
Girls were not educated	9	7
Did not know	4	3
Total	100	79

Note: 1 Welisara only.

Source: Primary analysis of Sri Lanka Demographic Change Project, 1985.

Most of the remaining answers also emphasized the lack of freedom given to the young and the unlikelihood of their forming relationships beyond those which their families created. Answers in the estates similarly emphasized the lack of freedom given to the young though there was less emphasis on chaperonage (Table 5.5b). There are a number of reasons for this latter difference, first that estate girls used to marry very early so chaperonage was less necessary, secondly that, as most girls worked, chaperonage would have been difficult (one possible reason for the former early marriage age), and thirdly that family and community attitudes were stricter and that therefore the young obeyed their families anyway, and hence chaperonage was of only secondary importance. When the women were asked the converse question, why love marriages had increased, they overwhelmingly said that the young today had more freedom (Table 5.6).

The somewhat greater range of answers given in the estates may indicate that the questions were asked and coded slightly differently though the survey went to considerable lengths to avoid leading questions, accepted open-ended answers and standardized the survey approach and coding. The

main reason for it is that love marriage is still less acceptable in the estates than it is in the low country. Whereas the answers in the Southwest are overwhelmingly in terms of the young nowadays being allowed more freedom, there was more emphasis in the estates on the young not following tradition and parents not being able to control their children, though the answer that children have more freedom is common here too. Many of the additional answers are in terms of tradition and authority. That the estate parents are less willing to accept love matches is indicated by the much lower level of love marriages in the estates as compared to the low-country sample (see Table 5.1) despite the fairly late age at marriage nowadays in the estates.

Table 5.5b Reasons for few love marriages in the past - Estates

Reason	%	No
Young people had less freedom	22	13
Girls obeyed their parents	17	10
Girls were not allowed to go out unchaperoned	17	10
Few opportunities for girls and boys to meet	12	7
Children feared parents	8	5
Girls did not go to jobs	7	4
Parents protected young people	3	2
Girls were not educated	9	7
Did not know	12	7
Total	100	59

Source: Primary analysis of Sri Lanka Demographic Change Project, 1987.

An important sign of this increasing acceptance of love marriage by families and by society is that what defines marriage is changing. Whereas in the past marriage was defined in terms of mutual rights and obligations not only of the two individuals but also of the individuals with their families and between the families, it is now increasingly seen simply in terms of the two individuals themselves.

Table 5.6 Reasons¹ for the increase in love marriages, women over 55 years - Southwest² and Estates

Reason	%	No
Southwest		
Girls are allowed more freedom	42	33
Girls and boys both have more freedom	29	23
Girls go to school and tuition	18	14
Girls are disobedient	4	3
Girls go to jobs where they meet boys	2	2
Girls want to choose their own partners	1	1
More opportunities for girls and boys to meet	1	1
People are more lustful now	1	1
Don't know	1	1
Total	100	79
Estates		
Girls are allowed more freedom	7	4
Girls and boys both have more freedom	22	13
Girls go to school and tuition	8	5
Girls are disobedient	5	3
Girls go to jobs where they meet boys	5	3
Girls want to choose their own partners	2	1
More opportunities for girls and boys to meet	10	6
People are more lustful now	1	1
Parents cannot control their children	10	6
Girls and boys go to school	5	3
Girls leave home to work	5	3
Girls are educated, understand more	2	1
Young people are no longer protected	2	1
Young people do not respect tradition	2	1
Young people are influenced by films	2	1
Don't know	1	1
Total	100	59

Note: 1 First responses only.
2 Welisara only.

Source: Primary analysis of Sri Lanka Demographic Change Project, 1987.

A love marriage would not have been regarded as a marriage but only as an elopement because it did not meet the criteria of a true marriage. A marriage involves certain rights and obligations between bride and groom and in a family-based society between those individuals and their families themselves. The family would not have accepted a love marriage because such a marriage would have implied that the family's interests were secondary to the individual's interests, and therefore would not have entered into the reciprocal rights and obligations involved. In the past, marriage payments were a very important sign of the recognition of marriage; now they are increasingly seen as peripheral to marriage, with dowry simply the bride's share of her family's inheritance.

5.7 The responsibilities of parents to children has changed to encompass more than marriage

The changes that have taken place whereby in the low country the young are now allowed greater freedom, were expressed by the respondents in terms of changes in family responsibilities. There seems to have been a subtle alteration in exactly what is meant by family responsibilities. Parents continue to regard themselves as being responsible for the future welfare of their children but precisely what is concerned in this responsibility has changed; there have been corresponding changes in what the young owe their parents. In the past, and to some extent still, among the Muslims and the estate population parental responsibility meant for boys primarily a livelihood and for girls a good marriage. Now it increasingly means education and to a lesser extent a good job. The change has been most marked for girls. Interestingly, when women over 55 years were asked why age at marriage used to be earlier, two principal reasons were given: first that parents wanted to be free of responsibilities and second that girls did not have education. Parents now cannot simply fulfil their responsibilities by arranging marriages for their daughters. In the

estates the former reason was not given, probably because the respondents did not recognize any change in the family's responsibility with regard to marriage.

The change in the family responsibility is a strong theme in the project's in-depth interviews. A. in Bondupitiya (Household No.1005) comments that her mother married at 13 because in those days 'parents were not educated and they wanted to be freed from the responsibility of their children'. She says of her own children (two boys and two girls) that, as long as the children are willing to study, she and her husband will pay for their education. She adds that their main expectation is for their children to obtain higher education and to have successful lives.

L. (Household No.7171), a widow living with her three daughters, son and adopted son, also aspires to get good jobs for her children. She paid for their education herself, so she wants to see them benefit by it. Later she hopes to get them married. Her own marriage was a result, she says, of her parents' wish to be free from their responsibilities, so they decided to get her married. They gave her a dowry of three houses, one-and-a-half acres of land, furniture, gold jewellery and clothes. What stands out in L's example is that, whereas her parents seem to have seen their responsibilities to her as arranging her marriage with a large dowry she sees her responsibilities primarily as providing for her children's education and jobs and only secondly in terms of marriage.

A similar case is that of G. (Household No.5045). When asked what were the future hopes of her husband and herself, she said their only hopes were for their children's futures: to give them a good education, to make them good people and to arrange their marriages. In S.'s case (Household No.1001) her parents' concept of their responsibilities apparently had changed so radically that they wanted her to delay her marriage as they

hoped she would go to university. However, the changed nature of parent-children relations meant they had to accept her decision to marry. She expected that her own daughter would not marry until she was 25, because S. and her husband wanted their daughter to be educated and to get a job. They expect to give her a good education in the place of dowry. S. comments that if children have love affairs parents may not object, 'but they want them to have good habits and the ability to manage a family'. Her comments emphasize the point that parents now see their primary duty as equipping their children for life rather than marrying them off. Education is important not only for obtaining a better life through a good job and marriage but also because it makes the individuals better people, more able to manage their lives and their families, and it gives them good habits. The emphasis is very much on individuals rather than on the interests of the families. Of course, if the individual achieves high socio-economic status, that will reflect well on the family.

The interpretation given is subjective, being based on what is implicit rather than explicit in the statements of the three women, and reflects to some degree the nature of the questioning in the interviews which focused on the women's hopes for the future, and the circumstances of their marriages. A number of comments indicate that parents' expectations, or what they see as their responsibilities, have changed. A.S. and his wife D.S. (Household No.5035) want to give their girls a good education so they can have a good standard of living in the future. D.S., herself, however, could not continue her education because her parents did not believe that a girl needed to be educated for work. Similarly, Mrs P.'s parents (Household No. 5033) took her out of school at grade 5 because they believed that girls did not need an education. In contrast to A.S. and D.S., the P.s took their daughter R. out of school because they wanted her to marry; however, this

was after grade 10. R., herself, says she wants to give her daughter higher education.

Judging from these examples, parents in the past did not believe that girls needed to be educated. The reason given by A.S. and D.S. for parents not educating daughters was the belief that girls did not need to be educated for work. In part, this, no doubt, was simply that jobs for women requiring education did not exist, but more fundamental was a belief that women should not get jobs anyway and that therefore educating girls was a waste of time.

Moreover, education for girls was perceived as having serious drawbacks. S. (Household No.5025) said of her mother A.P. aged 85 years in 1985 that in her youth she did not receive much education because in those days girls were very protected and restricted. If a girl fell in love it would bring shame on her family so she was kept at home and could not study.

The risk lay both in the girl not being directly under the eye of the family and in education itself. It was unnecessary for girls to go to school but, worse, schooling tended to inculcate unsuitable ideas. Educated children tended to be more assertive, less obedient to parents, and, in due course, to husbands, and to become cut off from family - more independent. This argument is largely speculative, for, even though such views exist in many countries including India, they are not now prevalent in Sri Lanka. It is true that, when we asked women over 55 years what changes had caused age at marriage to rise, one answer was that education makes girls more independent, but the view that this was a bad thing was virtually never expressed.

Some Muslims and Tamils were sceptical of the value of education for girls but they never claimed that the values inculcated by education of girls

were morally bad, though it is implicit in some of their statements. For instance, A.W. (Household No.2027) said that

according to Muslim custom, parents must arrange the marriages of their children. Otherwise, they cannot receive God's pleasure. So the parents take great care of their daughters. They do not send the girls to school after menarche. If they want to go anywhere they must be accompanied by someone. The girls are protected under the parents' care at all times. Muslim parents do not consider that girls should be educated. The parents want to protect the girls until their marriages.

That is, for girls, marriage is more important than education and, to the extent that education conflicts with this objective, it must be secondary. The implication is that, if girls attended school, questions might be raised about their virtue and that, anyway, education is of little use for girls as the jobs made available by education, which would be outside the home, would be in conflict with the role of a married woman. There is no reference to whether the ideas inculcated by education are contrary to a Muslim woman's role but equally there is no suggestion that they in any way enhance it.

What is striking about such views is not that they exist but that they are so rare and when they are expressed it is in such a muted form. Most Sri Lankans including virtually all Sinhalese, nowadays, see no conflict between education and marriage and indeed would not regard education as conflicting with a woman's role, either as a wife or otherwise, but as enhancing it. A common statement by the respondents was that education made a person a better person. W.P. and G.P. (Household No.5045) said that their only hopes were for their children's future: to give them a good education, make them good people, and arrange their marriages. Education is regarded as necessary nowadays for a good life, good habits, and a successful future, whereas marriage itself, though desirable, is no longer wholly the family's responsibility.

The more important difference is not between those who regard education as bad and those who regard it as good, but between those who regard it as necessary and those who regard it as unimportant. Quite a common reaction in the in-depth interviews to the question as to why the child left school, especially among the poorer families, was that the child was not interested in schooling. Though there may be little point in sending a child to school if he or she will simply play truant, this attitude seems to indicate that the family is not very interested in encouraging the child's education. Similarly, a number of families said that a child could not go to school because he or she had to work or help look after the younger children. While for the poor this undoubtedly has some validity it again indicates that education is accorded a low priority by these families. Surprisingly few respondents, however, felt this way and there was general acceptance that families should provide what education they could.

When we asked respondents 'what is more important for girls, a good marriage or good education?', the overwhelming majority said a good education. In Southwestern Sri Lanka (Welisara only), of 347 respondents who answered the question, 26 per cent said that marriage was more important, 61 per cent that education was, 11 per cent that they were equally important (or unimportant), while 1 per cent insisted that a job was more important than either (clearly this percentage would have been much higher if the question had explicitly allowed for this possibility). In the estates the percentage was curiously even higher: of 248 respondents, 17 per cent regarded marriage as more important, 74 per cent education as more important, and 9 per cent said that they were equally important. The very high figure in the estates seems surprising in view of the low levels of education actually prevailing there. From another point of view it may not be so surprising. While every girl on the estates is expected to marry eventually, her marriage will not fundamentally alter her life: she, after all,

is likely to be the main income earner in the household. In contrast, education could potentially be the passport to a better life; the fact that this does not happen may simply indicate that the opportunities are not there. To go beyond primary school in Tamil medium, for example, it is necessary to go to the nearby town and most parents are reluctant for girls to do so. Furthermore, achieving good grades is likely to require expenditure, particularly on private tuition that few families can afford. While her education may benefit the girl, it will not benefit her family who often depend on her income.

The general acceptance of the primary importance of education is indicated by Table 5.7 on 'what is more important to a girl: marriage or education?'. It might have been expected that the less educated would have been less oriented to education but there is very little sign of this. A similar proportion of the less educated to that of the highly educated emphasize the importance of education. Perhaps it is the uneducated who truly know the value of education, or perhaps the strategic marriage to obtain a truly desirable groom retains its importance most among the better educated, who can hope to obtain such a match. Above all the belief in education demonstrates the virtually universal orientation of the respondents to the new urban-based society, in which education is a vital attribute; and the fact that the old traditional village-based society no longer exists.

Table 5.7 What is more important to a girl: marriage or education, by years of education of her parents

Southwest¹

Education of Head Male of Household

Girls' Needs	0-6		7-9		10+	
	No	%	No	%	No	%
Marriage	10	19	24	25	42	27
Education	35	67	58	60	98	64
Equal importance	7	13	14	14	12	8
Good job	0	0	1	1	1	1
Total	52	100	97	100	153	100

Education of Head Female of Household

Girls' Needs	0-6		7-9		10+	
	No	%	No	%	No	%
Marriage	20	20	33	34	37	27
Education	69	69	52	54	83	61
Equal importance	10	10	11	11	15	11
Good job	1	1	0	0	2	1
Total	100	100	96	100	137	100

Estates

Education of Head Male of Household

Girls Needs	0-3		4-6		7+	
	No	%	No	%	No	%
Marriage	15	25	15	16	4	11
Education	41	68	71	77	25	71
Equal importance	3	5	5	5	4	11
Good job	1	2	1	1	2	6
Total	60	100	92	100	35	100

Education of Head Female of Household

Girls Needs	0		1-3		4+	
	No	%	No	%	No	%
Marriage	9	24	6	21	3	7
Education	26	70	18	64	35	80
Equal importance	2	5	3	11	6	17
Good job	0	0	1	4	1	2
Total	37	100	28	100	44	100

Notes: The respondent is the head female of the household.

¹ Welisara only.

Source: Primary Analysis of the Sri Lankan Demographic Change Project, 1985 and 1987.

While there is little difference by education level in the importance placed on whether a girl needs education or marriage more, there is a striking difference when the question is cross-tabulated by religion (Table 5.8).

Table 5.8 What is more important to a girl: marriage or education, by religion

	Buddhist		Religion Hindu		Muslim		Christian	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Southwest (Welisara)								
Girls' Needs								
Marriage	36	23	9	50	7	39	40	26
Education	104	66	6	33	9	50	94	61
Equal importance	15	10	3	17	2	11	19	12
Good job	2	1	0	0	0	0	1	1
Total	157	100	18	100	18	100	154	100
Estates								
Marriage	5	7	31	21				
Education	59	82	106	71				
Equal importance	5	7	10	7				
Good job	3	4	2	1				
Total	72	100	149	100				

Note: The respondent is the head female of the household.

Source: Primary analysis of the Sri Lankan Demographic Change Project, 1985 and 1987.

Muslims, and especially Hindus, in Southwestern Sri Lanka, place much more emphasis on the importance of marriage for a girl than do Buddhists or Christians. On the estates, however, Hindus are almost as likely as Buddhists to emphasize education over marriage. The figures in Welisara are in keeping with the much higher proportion of arranged marriages amongst Muslims and Hindus; they support the statements from

the in-depth interviews in which Muslims emphasize the importance of marriage over education, as they show in withdrawing daughters from school so that nothing can happen which would affect their marriageability. Again, though, caution is required. In the estates, where arranged marriage is prevalent, few parents rate marriage over education. Moreover, when the same question on what is more important for a girl was cross-tabulated by whether the household head's marriage had been arranged or was a love marriage, those who had had love marriages favoured education only marginally more than those who had arranged marriages. Surprisingly, there is very little difference in answers to the question by the education of the head and head female of the household, indicating the overwhelming acceptance of the primacy of education.

In brief, the decline in arranged marriage in the low-country apparently is evidence of a shift from a situation where the family's primary responsibility was to ensure that children married well to one where its primary responsibility is to ensure that they have the attributes, especially education, necessary to prosper. In contrast to the low-country, in the estates, marriage is still predominantly arranged and parental responsibility is still primarily concerned with marriage. This is admittedly a responsibility that they are apparently increasingly reluctant to fulfil as indicated by the rising marriage age and the comments noted earlier about the failure of some parents to put the interests of their children ahead of their own. The question that needs to be answered is why did concepts of responsibility change in the low-country but not in the estates?

One answer is that there was much less concern with female morality and with the necessity for marriage within the same caste in the low-country than in the estates, which allowed families to withdraw from making decisions concerning marriage. To some extent this is true in that estate parents express much more concern about the dangers of daughters

eloping and the risks of unsuitable marriages though this may also reflect the fact that there are economic advantages for them in keeping control of their children's marriages. It is also true that in the low-country historical and anthropological writings indicate there were greater concerns in the past about unsuitable marriages across caste lines or with lower-status families within the same caste. There clearly has been an important change in the pressure exerted on the family regarding the protection of family status. In the past a family that failed to ensure that its reputation was intact was subjected to heavy censure and even social ostracism by the local community. Nevertheless, this point should not be overemphasized. As discussed in Chapter 4, Sri Lankans in general and the Sinhalese in particular never seem to have placed as much emphasis on sexual morality or correct marriage in terms of caste and family status as is the case elsewhere in South Asia. Although the estate population is largely of Indian origin they too place less emphasis on these points, presumably because of their predominantly low-caste composition. Significantly they have been willing to delay their daughters' marriages and thereby risk elopement so this would not seem an adequate explanation as to why arranged marriage has declined in the low country but not on the estates.

A more important explanation for the change in the family's perception of its responsibility to children in the low country has been the increased importance of individual attributes. This reflects the increasing weakness of concepts of family and caste as well as the emergence of a social hierarchy in which social and economic success depends to a much greater degree than previously on the individual's own capacity. In the old situation the greatest assistance that could have been provided to an individual by his or her family was direct assistance in gaining a livelihood often through access to family property and assistance with a marriage, which itself depended upon family resources and status. In the new

situation the family can only assist indirectly by enabling the individual to get the attributes necessary to be successful, especially education.

5.8 It is no longer appropriate for families to arrange marriages

The implication for marriage is that it is not necessary for families to arrange marriages any longer. To achieve a desirable marriage no longer depends specifically upon what the family can bring to it. Hence, it is not necessary for the family to be actively involved in organizing the marriage. Nor does the family have to be involved to protect its reputation and hence the possible marriages of other family members.

Furthermore, the family is no longer in a particularly good situation to determine marriage. The very nature and purpose of marriage has changed from one in which family interests are dominant to one in which individual interests are, and partly as a consequence of this, the family is no longer in such an advantageous position *vis a vis* the individual to determine who would be the ideal partner.

In the past the attributes which mattered were ones which the family was best placed to determine, matters like family background, and caste status, as well as a man's reputation; particularly as the young were not in a good position to determine many of these matters themselves. After all, dating and courting were virtually non-existent. While conditions were not as restrictive as in India, too much contact with the opposite sex was discouraged in case it led to gossip or, worse, elopement: these, of course, are the reasons why chaperonage existed. The earlier age at marriage also meant that those marrying were less experienced concerning the attractions of marriage partners.

Marriages are increasingly concerned with the conjugal relationship, so it is sensible that the couples themselves do the choosing. Table 5.9 lists

responses to the question 'What are the advantages in love marriages for the couple?' By far the most common answer is that the young choose a compatible partner, somebody they can understand, with the only other significant answer in favour of love marriage being that it gives the young greater independence, allows them to plan their own lives and, in the estates, gives greater freedom of choice. The estate population was largely in agreement with the low-country population on most answers. In line with their lower proportion of love marriages, a higher proportion of the estate population could see no advantages in love marriages. Unlike the low-country population no one in the estates could see no disadvantages in love matches. Thus the prime perceived advantage of a love marriage for the young couple is that they are better able to choose a compatible partner.

Table 5.9a Advantages of love marriages for the young couple - Southwest¹

Advantages	No.	Percent
Compatibility/ can understand each other	551	82
Independence/can plan their own lives	62	9
Good if they are compatible/depends on their character	8	1
No dowry	8	1
No problems/no more problems than an arranged marriage	5	1
Can have a better life than parents/ no problems if they are rich	4	1
No advantages	35	5
Total	673	100

Notes: The respondent is the head female of the household.

1 Loluwagoda and Welisara only.

Source: Primary analysis of Sri Lankan Demographic Change Project, 1985.

The need for the young to spend much more of their lives outside their local communities has made it more difficult for their families to choose suitable partners for them. In a local community families can use

their local knowledge and contacts to choose an appropriate marriage partner but today individuals often exist in very different contexts from the rest of their families. A highly educated young person may well be in a much better position to choose a marriage partner than his or her family members; the other family members, particularly the older ones, may well not have the requisite knowledge and experience to choose a suitable bride or groom. One reason why arranged marriage may be more common in the estates is that the marriage pool is so localized that the family will know virtually all the potential candidates, but this is not the case in the Southwest.

Table 5.9b Advantages of love marriages for the young couple - Estates

Advantages	No.	Percent
Compatibility/ can understand each other	162	67
Independence/can plan their own lives/ freedom of choice	26	11
Good if they are compatible/depends on their character	4	2
No dowry	3	1
No problems/No more problems than an arranged marriage	0	0
Love marriages seem to work better than arranged marriages	1	
Can live away from parents	1	
Can prosper if they work hard	1	
Can spend their earnings on themselves, not give to parents	1	
No advantages	36	15
Total	242	100

Note: The respondent is the head female of the household.

Source: Primary analysis of Sri Lankan Demographic Change Project, 1987.

The acceptance of love marriage has become self-reinforcing. Once it has become accepted and even desirable to choose one's own partner, arranged marriage has tended to become the preserve of those who find it

difficult to marry and those who have much at stake, particularly property; this type of marriage has much in common with the family alliance that has always been associated with arranged marriage. People without property will very likely find it easier to marry a desirable spouse through a love marriage than an arranged marriage.

However, while the conjugal relationship has become more important, the aims of Sri Lankan marriage still differ significantly from what increasingly are the aims of Western marriage, as exemplified by the phenomenon of the yuppies. The modern love marriage of Sri Lanka, while a somewhat romantic notion, is essentially related to having children. The prospective groom should be a good potential father and the bride a good potential mother. Their families will have interests in these aims too and will want to veto any partners who are judged to be undesirable by these criteria.

The increased importance of individual attributes has meant that families are in a weaker position to arrange marriages than earlier and have less need to do so: there is less advantage nowadays to be gained from arranging a marriage. This is clearly true for the young, who can get what they desire in a marriage partner more effectively through a love marriage. What they lose through having a love marriage, the active involvement of the family in the marriage arrangements and in support provided after the marriage, is less important than it was. Not only do the young want it but the parents, and society, are willing to accept love marriage. Why so many families no longer feel the need to be involved in marriage, or even prefer not to be involved, can be understood in terms of the changing overall costs and benefits of arranged marriage for the family.

Reference has already been made to the advantages and disadvantages of love marriages for the young (Tables 5.4 and 5.9).

Respondents were also asked what were the advantages and disadvantages of love matches for parents; the results are shown in Tables 5.10 and 5.11. In these tables all answers have been included (on the left hand side) but to facilitate interpretation they have also been grouped into larger categories (on the right-hand side).

The responses indicate that families are increasingly finding that the costs of arranging a marriage exceed the benefits. In Table 5.10 four principal disadvantages of love marriages for parents are given: that an unsuitable partner may be chosen; that parents will be worried if the couple have problems; that young people who have love marriages do not provide assistance; and that love marriages indicate rejection by their children and this is a cause of shame.

As was noted above, concerns that an unsuitable partner may be chosen are less relevant now than they were. The dangers in choosing a wrong match, especially with regard to caste and family status, are much less than they were, and family property is less significant to material and social success.

Social changes as well as the general change in the socio-economic system also mean that family support is much less important than it was. This is true of both the assistance provided by families to children and assistance provided by children to parents, as is shown by the fact that two of the principal answers as to the disadvantages of love matches to parents were that they are unable to assist the young and that the young will not assist them. The reduced significance of family assistance lessens the advantages of arranged marriage for the young and make them less inclined to accept the disadvantages of arranged marriage, particularly family interference and the selection of a spouse who may meet family criteria but not their own. It will also lessen the advantages to parents of arranged

marriages while not reducing their economic and emotional costs, especially the assistance that they are now committed to providing to the young couple. Few families would probably conceive of the equation in such crude terms, and most would be willing to accept the responsibilities involved in arranging marriages if required, but these underlying realities mean that families are more willing to accept the desire of the young for love matches.

The one response that may be impervious to such change is the answer that love marriage implies for the parents rejection by children or shame. While this answer is undoubtedly affected by outside community attitudes, and changes therein, it would seem to be much more concerned with intra-family relations. This may be the critical factor which determines whether the conditions exist which allow for love marriage. Despite its apparent immutability, concepts of shame may be affected over time by the overall advantages and disadvantages of love marriage.

Significantly, rejection by children or shame is a more common answer in the estates where family structure is tighter, on the Indian model, and where love marriage is less accepted and less common. It is clear from the in-depth interviews in the estates that this is where the greatest ill-feeling concerning love marriage exists. The reason for this may be that the young have much less to lose from love marriage than the old; as noted in Chapter 4, the earnings of the daughters can be a major contribution to household income. Furthermore, many of the elderly in the estates suffer from poverty and isolation; this is reflected in the particularly high number of respondents in the estates who cited the principal disadvantage of love marriage for parents being that young people do not help them. Where the parents have little to lose, shame may be less of a factor in preventing love marriage.

Table 5.10a Disadvantages of love marriages for parents - Southwest.

Disadvantage	N	%	N	%
Unsuitable partner may be selected			189	28
Parents distressed by cross-caste/ cross-religious marriages	17	3		
Can't check caste/religion/property	28	4		
Parents disappointed in hope for good match	57	8		
Can't check horoscopes	5	1		
Have to help if they marry poor persons	16	2		
Marriage may fail, parents have to support/son/daughter/grandchildren	61	9		
Have to help with marital problems	5	1		
Worried if couple have problems			154	23
Parents worried if young people have problems	129	19		
Worry about children's future	11	2		
Parents unable to interfere/solve couple's problems	10	1		
Parents worry that daughter might be deserted/mistreated	4	1		
Rejection by children/shame			118	17
Ashamed/can't face children	23	3		
Antagonism from children	10	1		
Not much contact with children/ grandchildren	1	0		
If couple live with parents, discord between generations	1	0		
Parents distressed by children not consulting them	44	6		
Parents disappointed at children's ingratitude /disobedience	8	1		
They will be sad/angry	34	5		
Young people do not provide assistance			58	9
Young people don't help them	58	9		
In-law problems			9	1
Incompatibility with in-law family	7	1		
May have to bear whole burden of supporting couple if parents-in-law reject them	2	0		
Dowry/property problems			2	0
Disappointed in hope for dowry	1	0		
Property and dowry problems	1	0		
Family duties not fulfilled	5	1	5	1
No disadvantages	140	21	140	21
Total	678	100	678	100

Note: The respondent is the head female of the household.

Source: Primary analysis of Sri Lankan Demographic Change Project, 1985.

Table 5.10b Disadvantages of love marriages for parents - Estates.

Disadvantage	N	%	N	%
Unsuitable partner may be selected			50	21
Parents distressed by cross-caste/ cross-religious marriages	19	8		
Can't check caste/religion/property	0	0		
Parents disappointed in hope for good match	8	3		
Can't check horoscopes	0	0		
Have to help if they marry poor persons	3	1		
Marriage may fail, parents have to support/son/daughter/grandchildren	19	8		
Have to help with marital problems	1	0		
Worried if couple have problems			45	19
Parents worried if young people have problems	35	15		
Worry about children's future	3	1		
Parents unable to interfere/solve couple's problems	6	3		
Parents worry that daughter might be deserted/mistreated	1	0		
Rejection by children/shame			67	29
Ashamed/can't face children	19	8		
Antagonism from children	2	1		
Not much contact with children/ grandchildren	8	3		
Parents distressed by children not consulting them	13	6		
Parents disappointed at children's ingratitude /disobedience	2	1		
They will be sad/angry	14	6		
Loss of respect from society	8	3		
If children don't marry according to custom parents will die early	1	0		
Young people do not provide assistance			43	18
Young people don't help them	43	18		
Dowry/property problems			1	0
Disappointed in hope for dowry property and dowry problems	1	0		
Family duties not fulfilled			0	0
Family duties not fulfilled	0	0		
No disadvantages	27	12	27	12
Total	233	100	233	100

Note: The respondent is the head female of the household.

Source: Primary analysis of Sri Lankan Demographic Change Project, 1987.

While the costs of love marriage have declined for parents there are also certain benefits as outlined in Table 5.11. For parents the main advantages of a love marriage are that it is less expensive and, in particular for parents of the bride, that no dowry is involved, that it frees parents of responsibility for the marriage, and that, provided the young people are happy, the parents will be happy too.

The reduction in responsibility is largely self-explanatory. If the family does not arrange the marriage it has less responsibility for the consequences if it goes wrong. Marriage in this case belongs to the realm of the individual rather than to that of the family.

Table 5.11a Advantages of love marriages for parents - Southwest.

Advantage	N	%	N	%
No dowry/less expensive			302	45
No dowry	130	19		
No dowry/wedding expenses	151	22		
Less expensive	21	3		
Less responsibility			215	32
Freed of responsibility	178	26		
No blame if marriage not successful	5	1		
Not asked for help by family	3	0		
No worries	29	4		
Happy if young people happy			90	13
Happy if young people happy	90	13		
Young people can live well and help parents			3	0
Young people can live well and help parents	3	0		
Depends on circumstances			1	0
Depends on circumstances	1	0		
No advantage			64	9
No advantage	64	9		
Total	675	100	675	100

Note: The respondent is the head female of the household.

Source: Primary analysis of Sri Lankan Demographic Change Project, 1985.

Table 5.11b Advantages of love marriages for parents - Estates.

Advantage	N	%	N	%
No dowry/less expensive			70	29
No dowry	16	7		
No dowry/wedding expenses	48	20		
Less expensive	6	2		
Less responsibility			49	20
Freed of responsibility	41	17		
Not asked for help by family	7	3		
No worries	1	0		
Happy if young people happy			29	12
Happy if young people happy	29	12		
Young people can live well and help parents			12	5
Young people can live well and help parents	12	5		
Depends on circumstances			1	0
Depends on circumstances	1	0		
Don't have to arrange marriages			4	2
Don't have to arrange marriages	4	2		
No advantage			76	32
No advantage	76	32		
Total	241	100	241	100

Note: The respondent is the head female of the household.

Source: Primary analysis of Sri Lankan Demographic Change Project, 1987.

The differences between the Southwest sample and the estates are not large in terms of the relative importance attributed to the principal advantages of love marriage. The big difference is in the much higher proportion in the estates who can see no advantages, an answer that reflects the points made above regarding the disadvantages of love marriages for parents.

The responses concerning the advantages of love marriages for parents imply that they are felt less deeply than are the disadvantages of love marriage. It is only when the disadvantages count for little that the advantages make themselves felt.

In summary, it may be said that arranged marriage has declined because it is no longer in the interests of the young to maintain it, and, more importantly, because it is no longer in the interests of the old to seek actively to maintain it if the young do not desire it.

5.9 The registration of marriage as a force for legitimating love marriage

A factor that should not be underestimated in legitimizing love marriage has been the registration of marriage. Until recently, marriage in Sri Lanka generally did not involve legal sanction of the state. Marriage was in essence a matter simply of whether the family and the society recognized it as such.

The introduction of the registration of marriage by the European colonial masters meant that for the first time the state was involved in the recognition of marriage. The consequence of this has been to allow couples 21 years and over (Jayasuriya, 1976: 320) to register their marriages contrary to the wishes of their parents. Nowadays families and society accept, albeit begrudgingly, registered marriage as real marriage, although they may still refuse to associate with the newly married couple.

In this area the reaction in Sri Lanka has been very different from elsewhere in South Asia. In India, for instance, the registration of marriage is regarded as of little importance by anyone other than bureaucrats and demographers; yet in Sri Lanka, the registration of marriage is increasingly felt to be a necessity. Several reasons can be suggested for this difference. One is that the breakdown of the local community, which has gone much further in Sri Lanka than in India, has brought with it a greater acceptance of state authority at the individual level. This may explain why in Pul Eliya, the remote village studied by Leach (1971), and, in Terutenna, the equally remote village studied by Yalman (1971), both in the 1950s,

marriage registration was not taken seriously, whereas in the project's 1985 sample in the low country it was.

A second reason is that marriage among Sri Lanka's majority Buddhist community is not a religious rite as it is among Hindus who form the majority religious community in India. Because, among Hindus, marriage involves a religious rite, the state's recognition of marriage must remain secondary, indeed virtually irrelevant. In contrast, where marriage had not received the imprimatur of religious sanction, the sanction of the state is likely to count for more.

The critical point, though, is that, if a registered marriage were perceived to be totally contrary to the interests of the family, they would undoubtedly not have accepted it. The acceptance of the registration of marriage as to some extent legitimizing marriage is an indication that the relationship of the family to marriage is changing, and that families are accepting marriage as being primarily an individual concern.

5.10 The influence of family structure on changes in the arrangement of marriage

So far, I have dealt with changes in the comparative advantages and disadvantages of love and arranged marriages and how this has resulted in the decline of arranged marriage in Sri Lanka. I now deal with the specific question why arranged marriage has declined so much further and more dramatically in Sri Lanka than elsewhere in South Asia. To do this, a much wider view of what determines the overall advantages of a particular type of marriage is necessary.

An obvious factor that reduced the advantages of arranged marriage was the amount of commercialization in Sri Lanka. However, as other South Asian regions such as Gujarat, Bombay and Kerala have had long histories of comparable commercial development but have not experienced

similar changes in their marriage systems, this cannot have been the key determinant.

More important has probably been the much stronger emphasis elsewhere in South Asia on female sexual morality which in India is related to the much greater emphasis on ascribed status particularly as pertaining to caste. Parents want to control their children's (or at least daughters') sexuality, thus inhibiting the development of courtship institutions needed for self-selection in marriage. Even more important is the great concern to the parents as to who is actually chosen as the marriage partner.

Though concern about sexual morality and about ascribed status are undoubtedly important, it is unlikely that they are the entire explanation for the weakness of arranged marriage in Sri Lanka compared with other parts of South Asia. Almost certainly pre-existing differences in family structure are also important. The decline of arranged marriage was discussed in Section 5.8 in terms of the net benefits of arranged and love marriage to the older and younger generations. The precise benefits and costs of arranged marriage in this situation depend upon the overall structure of the family. Arranged marriage seems to have broken down to a much greater degree than elsewhere in South Asia because of a number of economic and ideological changes superimposed on top of a social system, particularly a family system, that was always different.

The reason why the family and the couple in Sri Lanka now have little to gain from marriage is partly that economic changes have led to the decline of the family as the primary unit of production and hence families are no longer so concerned about whether their son-in-law or daughter-in-law will be a productive member of the household. However, the nature of family relations also has a major bearing on the advantages of arranged marriage for the older generation. In Sri Lanka the old seem always to

have gained comparatively little in material terms from the marriages of their children. In the Sri Lankan family, or at least the Sinhalese family, nowadays the emphasis is on the individual, whereas in India the emphasis is more on the individual being a part of a larger whole, the joint family. Apart from the greater acceptance of love marriage, family members generally seem to have more autonomy in Sri Lanka than in India. Field work in South India indicated that most families expected unmarried sons and especially daughters to give all their earnings to their parents, who had responsibility for the family budget. This was even true of married children while they were still living in the same household. When the children wished to buy something, or rather when the children needed something, the family would buy it. From the viewpoint of the family it was not the children's money to keep. The family provided all and in return the children were expected to provide all they had to the family. In a sense it was not theirs to dispose of, as what they had was due to their family's efforts. The family provided for them as its wards and they in turn served to advance its interests. From the parents' viewpoint it is not unreasonable to say that the child does owe the family everything as an individual's position in an Indian village is largely a consequence of family property and family status. Furthermore, to allow children to keep their earnings would not only allow frivolous expenditure - any expenditure which did not advance family interests - but was positively dangerous in that it might allow loose living: any behaviour which did not strictly conform to family morality.

In contrast, among the Sinhalese, families generally expect children to keep part or all of their income. What the children contribute to the family budget is left largely to them. Not surprisingly, this is to some extent affected by circumstance and income but not wholly. For example, if a family is having economic difficulties, an older child might assume responsibility for feeding and educating some of his or her younger siblings

rather than directly contributing to the family budget. Furthermore, the testimony of the old suggests that this is not a recent change.

While the outcome might seem the same there are different implications. First, there is a recognition involved in Sri Lanka of individual autonomy. The children assist the family not because it is their duty but because they wish to. Secondly, the expenditure of the older sibling is directed towards assisting the younger siblings rather than the family. It is the individuals who are being assisted, not the family. Thirdly, there is a difference in terms of who owes whom what. In South India, the family provides for all and the individual members owe all they have to the family. In Sri Lanka, it is, in a sense, the family which must be grateful for having been relieved of some its burden. Furthermore, the younger siblings who are the beneficiaries of their older siblings' largesse are in debt to them and not to their families.

Unfortunately the economic independence of individuals was not a point that the in-depth interviews concentrated on, although it was a matter I explored by participant observation and discussion. It was, however, a point examined by Yalman (1971: 97) who remarked of the Kandyan Sinhalese that

A notable feature of the Kandyan family arrangements is that each married individual has a private income. This private income, usually in the form of grain, is stored in private granaries to which only the spouse has access.

He adds (1971: 103) that

the unit of food consumption in the Kandyan village consists of a wife, unmarried children, and a husband. It always has separate granaries and it has a separate cooking place. Every married woman has her own pots and separate cooking place. The cooking area is private and other women may use it only with express permission. All else may be shared, but granaries and cooking may never be shared. Thus the nuclear family, the basic commensal group, is the most clearly drawn cell in the village. It is referred to as the *ge* in Sinhalese.

These descriptions are in striking contrast to the Hindu joint family where property is held in common.

There are two implications in this for the arrangement of marriage. The first is that the acceptance of the right of the individual to his or her own income implies some acceptance of the right to choose one's own partner, and, secondly, that there were few direct gains from the control of children's marriages. What was gained was very much according to children's own volition. If the children strongly desired a love match, then it was not in the parents' interests to resist it. An arranged marriage was more costly still for them once they could no longer ensure that the children supported them. It was more in their interests to maintain a good relationship with their children so that the latter would assist their parents out of a sense of obligation.

This helps to explain some of the differences between the estates and the low country in terms of attitudes to arranged marriage. In the estates arranged marriage was of much greater benefit to the parents not simply because of the value of female labour but also because, as an Indian immigrant community, the earnings of all family members were retained by the family as a whole.

5.11 Who is the family?

The issue of the responsibilities, rights and interests of the family in regard to the young raises the question whom or what is meant when referring to the family. In this thesis the interests of the individual have been contrasted with those of the family, yet the family itself consists of a number of individuals, each with their own interests. Certain of the family members, particularly the parents, have much greater responsibilities and interests in family concerns, such as marriage, than others. They also have much more say in family decisions including arranging a marriage. Many of

the questions directed to respondents regarding arranged marriage were for this reason put in terms of the advantages and disadvantages for the parents and the young couple. Nevertheless, it would be oversimplifying matters to identify the family purely with the parents because all family members have an interest, and even some input, in the decisions of the family.

However, who has an input into marriage decisions clearly is important in terms of how the family's interests are perceived and implemented. Differences in how the marriage decision is made may influence the family's involvement in marriage and even age at marriage. Arguably there are important differences in this regard between Sri Lankan families and the Indian families, and possibly between Sri Lankan families now and formerly.

In Section 5.10 it was noted that the Sinhalese lack an extended joint family of the type that is an ideal in India. Individual family members have considerable autonomy particularly in financial affairs, and for the income they provide the family, the family is in many ways indebted to them. This autonomy of action is associated with the lack of a strongly centralized patriarchal authority. While the parents, particularly the father, ultimately bear responsibility for the decisions made, the views of, at least, the immediate family members are taken into account, as they all have an interest in the decision. The seriousness with which their views are considered will reflect their seniority within the family; siblings older than the individual marrying will be more carefully consulted, especially if they are educated and regarded as having something useful to contribute. This is particularly so if they are contributing economically to the family. The input of the males is perhaps taken most seriously but the views of the females of the family, particularly the mother but also daughters, are considered as they are regarded as being better judges than the males of

what a daughter needs or what is desirable in a daughter-in-law. The situation is probably somewhat different where family property is involved, but this is less important than it was. The grandparents and more distant relations are not normally involved in the initial marriage negotiations but it is polite to invite them to the formal meeting where the intended groom and his family or the family of the intended bride come to the family house. This is when the final decision on whether to go ahead with the marriage is made. The relatives are, however, expected to be on their best behaviour and not to interfere.

The difference between this situation and what in my experience prevails more generally in South Asia is the greater say given to the more junior members of the family, and the relatively little attention given to grandparents and more distant kin. These are two sides of the same principle; a family system where each nuclear unit is essentially autonomous. Parents and children retain various responsibilities toward each other after marriage and all have an interest in family property but they do recognize the essential separateness of the conjugal unit including decisions concerning the marriage of grandchildren. The relative autonomy seems in part to be related to lack of lineage system but it is possible that when landed property and family status were more important and the local community stronger the grandparents and more distant kin had more reason to be concerned and were more involved.

Where grandparents and especially more distant kin are involved in marriage they will inevitably place more emphasis on family concerns than on individual ones. They will be much more concerned with issues of property and status than with the individual *per se*. The immediate family is also concerned with family issues but they have a more direct concern with the interests of the individual too. It is the immediate family who will have to bear the direct costs of any assistance the young couple require, and

it is therefore in their interests to ensure that the young couple are compatible.

Because the immediate family bears most of the cost, they may be more willing to accept a love marriage, than the grandparents and more distant kin, who may get many of the family's benefits from arranging a marriage while having to contribute little to their costs. Thus the involvement of grandparents and more distant kin may favour arranged marriage. Their greater stress on family-level attributes over individual-level attributes also increases the advantages of early marriage.

5.12 Dowry and parents' responsibilities to their daughters

There are strong parallels between the responsibilities expected of family members in Sri Lanka and India and their respective dowry systems. According to the Concise Oxford Dictionary a dowry is 'property or money brought by a bride to her husband'. Goody regards it not so much property or money brought by a woman to her husband as something given by the woman's family to her on her marriage. He writes (1973: 1-2):

Dowry can be seen as a type of pre-mortem inheritance to the bride, bridewealth as a transaction between the kin of the groom and the kin of the bride.

Goody identifies the essential characterizing trait of dowry not as the fact that it goes from the bride's family to the groom's family but the fact that it goes from her family to her. Dowry was arguably the bride's protection if the marriage went wrong.

In practice, though, dowry does not always work this way. As discussed earlier, in an area in the South Indian state of Karnataka where I have worked, dowry was unknown until a few years ago and is now paid to the groom's family because it is difficult otherwise to obtain a suitable partner. While the bride may get some gifts from her family and from the

groom's, there is little pretence that the major dowry payment, which consists nowadays largely of cash, is for the bride, rather it goes directly to the groom and his family. It is a sort of groom price, the incentive needed to get him and his family to agree to the marriage.

Of course, all of India is not necessarily in the same situation as Karnataka: dowry in Kerala, as with many other institutions, seems to approach the Sri Lankan situation, and it is possible that among the higher castes of North India, where dowry has long existed, dowry is different. Dowry in Sri Lanka can have some Indian characteristics but it generally seems closer to the situation described by Goody with the dowry more likely to go to the bride herself. Dowries are more moderate and approximate more closely the likely share of the family's inheritance. In Karnataka, dowries vary greatly according to what is required to achieve a particular match. If the girl is too mature, ugly or handicapped much more may have to be paid than otherwise. If a particular match is to the family's advantage they may be happy to pay even if it is at the expense of other family members. The amounts paid may frequently have little relevance to the family's overall wealth or capacity to pay. Some daughters may receive far more in dowry than others who will have to accept what are for them undesirable marriages while the sons may be impoverished. In Sri Lanka there is a much closer awareness of what an equitable dowry is, with families giving a reasonable but not exorbitant amount, in comparison to the amounts given in Karnataka.

One sign that Sri Lankan dowry is regarded in many ways as equivalent to a pre-mortem inheritance is that although dowry is more likely to be paid for an arranged marriage than for a love marriage, since a love marriage involves an implicit declaration of independence from the family, nevertheless many parents do pay it even in the case of love marriages, sometimes after the marriage has taken place; though in this

case it is more a mark of affection than of duty. According to Leach (1971: 135-136) Sri Lankans see a direct equivalence between dowry and inheritance:

The theory behind dowry-giving is that a daughter rates with her brothers as an heir to the parental estates but, if a *diga* - married daughter can be given her potential share of the inheritance in the form of cash or jewellery or other moveables, then she will have no further claim on the parental land. Ideally, land should be transmitted to male heirs only. Dowry-giving, as an important institution, tends therefore to be confined to those social classes which are sufficiently affluent to be able to hold a part of their assets in ready cash and other moveables.

The different nature of the dowry system in Karnataka and Sri Lanka is inseparable from the other differences in the nature of family responsibility and family structure. The very concept of female inheritance implies the breakup or absence of a continuing lineage, or, at least, of a joint family. Each couple's position is based not on their membership of a particular family but on what each as an individual inherits from a particular family. Yalman's comment can be noted that the Kandyan Sinhalese family is based on the *ge*, the unit of husband and wife, in contrast to the more hierarchical and patriarchal joint family of India.

The structure of the family helps determine who benefits from dowry. Only where the young couple have their own property separate from the family is it meaningful to talk of dowry as being what the bride's family gives to help set up the new family. Only where the new bride herself can retain her own property can one speak of pre-mortem inheritance. Where there is a joint family it is very questionable whether the bride would have any significant say as to its disposal. While in theory it might be expected that dowry would be returned on divorce, in practice, in Karnataka, there was little suggestion that this would happen as few families would admit to being at fault.

The difference is not a matter of delineating who really benefits from the dowry, it is also a question of the individual's relationship to the family. Patriarchal corporate families, such as joint families, regard individual family members, especially females, as wards of the family. The dowry is paid not to the daughter directly but to the family into which she is marrying; in return that family will take responsibility for her. In the circumstances it would be illogical if the dowry were to be paid directly to the bride. In contrast, where individuals are primarily responsible for themselves it would be illogical if the dowry were paid to the family and not to the individual.

There are other more practical reasons too why the groom-price type of dowry is not paid in Sri Lanka since many of the reasons for it simply do not operate in the Sri Lankan circumstances. There is much less concern about the age of the bride, in part because it is a less status-based society and matters such as female virginity are seen less as signifying the exclusiveness of certain social groups. Besides, marriage is simply less essential, not least to the family. As has been discussed, the family now has fewer advantages to gain from a good marriage and less direct interest in such a match because of the diminution in family production and the decline of the local community. In this situation dowry is much more a matter of what the family owes their daughter.

5.13 Are the structural differences between the Sri Lankan family and the Indian family new or are they ancient?

Many of the differences between the situation in Sri Lanka and in India are not merely responses to different circumstances, but involve basic structural differences in the societies and the families within them. The question remains, though, whether these structural differences that distinguish India, where arranged marriage still prevails, from Sri Lanka, where it has largely broken down, are recent or are age old. The answer to

this question must be that both are true. Sri Lankan society has always been different but it has also changed a great deal.

The changes in Sri Lankan marriage as compared to India would not have been so radical had Sri Lankan society not been so inclined in this direction in the first place. Sri Lanka society in general and Sinhalese society in particular never had a corporate family of the type constituted by the joint family. This is apparent from the description of the anthropologists, particularly Yalman and Leach writing in the 1950s of especially remote and presumably traditional villages; Yalman suggests that the low-country Sinhalese might be more patriarchally inclined but this is evidently only a tendency. Yalman makes the interesting point in this regard that the Sinhalese family has never, unlike the Hindu family, been a unit of worship:

The Kandyan pattern of undivided tenure, then, may be said to resemble, in its general features, the Dayabhaga type of joint estate. But the particulars are quite different. The Hindu joint family is normally joint in worship as well. The Kandyan case is merely a matter of undivided property: there are no family idols, and those who have undivided property do not worship in common. Furthermore, the Kandyans allow their daughters much more extensive claims to inheritance than is the case in Dayabhaga law (Yalman, 1971: 102).

Hence the ideological basis for the joint family was essentially missing.

While historical writings indicate that Sri Lankan marriages were arranged in the past, they also indicate, as was discussed in Chapter 2, that the tight patriarchal family was never a feature of Sri Lanka, and, in particular, that the young, including young women, had much more independence. Knox (1981), for example, writing in the seventeenth century, frequently referred to the freedom of Kandyan women, which he saw as licentiousness. While their original marriages may have been arranged, Knox indicated they had considerable freedom in their behaviour.

Furthermore marriage was unstable in a way untypical of joint family societies.

Significantly, Knox's (1981: 248) description of dowry among the Kandyans approximates Goody's definition of dowry as pre-mortem inheritance:

They do give according to their Ability a Portion of Cattle, Slaves and Money with their Daughters; but if they chance to mislike one another and part asunder, this portion must be returned again, and then she is fit for another Man, being as they account never the worse for wearing.

The writings of other early authors also indicate the lack of a joint family. Percival in 1803 commented that

The natives of Ceylon are more continent with respect to women, than the other Asiatic nations; and their women are treated with much more attention. A Ceylonese woman almost never experiences the treatment of a slave, but is looked upon by her husband, more after the European manner, as a wife and companion (Percival, 1803: 176).

While not all writings suggest that the position of women was as high as portrayed here, it was clearly better than in most of South Asia. Percival's comment strongly supports Yalman's point that the basic constituent of the Sinhalese family was the conjugal bond rather than the corporate family.

While it is evident that the Sri Lankan family and, in particular, the Sinhalese family, has long been quite different from the Indian family, the evidence indicates that there have also been important structural changes within the Sri Lankan family. While the Sri Lankan family has long been more based on the conjugal unit than the Indian family, it is clear that it too has become more individualized with increasing acceptance of the rights of the children to decide for themselves. In a sense the Sri Lankan family has moved further in a direction in which it was, in comparison to the Indian family, already more inclined.

5.14 Why was Sri Lanka different?

A number of questions remain to be answered including why families were organized as they were in Sri Lanka, and why family structures differed so greatly between Sri Lanka and neighbouring areas of South Asia, questions which could be rephrased as what determines family structure in a given society, and why have family structures been changing in Sri Lanka?

These are impossible questions to answer. It is impossible to say definitely what the situation was in the far distant past, nor can one ultimately say what preceded what. While differences in the economics of marriage between Sri Lanka and India may be due to differences in family structure, family structure itself is influenced by economics. While it is difficult enough to try and identify what might underlie very particular differences in society, it is much harder to try and explain what lies behind whole social systems, and there is a danger of resorting to vague and hypothetical generalizations; so I am restricting speculation in this regard to citing one suggestion by Goody.

Goody (1973) distinguishes between societies which are characterized by what he calls diverging devolution, marked by individual private property, typically the case in Asia and Europe, from societies where productive assets are communally owned, as is largely true of sub-Saharan Africa. In the latter, societies are marked by large lineages which own virtually all property, and through which access to land is gained. Because access to land is through the lineage, women in patriarchal societies can be left, when their partners die, without access to resources, except through their children, and may have to return to their own lineages to be able to support themselves. This is not a major problem except as far as it involves uprooting, as such societies tend economically and socially to be fairly egalitarian.

Goody sees an association between these societies and an economic context where almost all inputs involve human labour, and economic surpluses are small. Very often their agricultural systems are based on root crops which are not suited for cultivation employing animal power. Provided a person has access to land, which is generally fairly plentiful in these societies, what he or she produces is not greatly different from what another does. There is, thus, only a small differential in material living standards between individuals and more importantly there is only a small surplus which can be appropriated by a ruling princely or bureaucratic class.

In contrast, societies marked by diverging devolution generally have agrarian systems that are based on grain, which is easily storable and therefore appropriatable, use animal power extensively, have large potential surpluses, and are generally land-hungry. Consequently, families and individuals are marked by striking differences in social and economic status. In these circumstances there is greater pressure towards exclusiveness in status and control of resources, especially land. Perhaps as a consequence of this and of the need to retain the fruits of one's investments such as in irrigation, there was a move to private ownership, since communally owned lands could be redistributed to individuals who had not previously farmed the land. Whereas the lineages or clans which controlled land in communal societies were all-encompassing in that all members born into the lineage had rights to all the land owned by lineage, private property divided. Lineages tended to dissolve into corporate families. Property was owned by an individual or his family, and on his death or earlier was divided among members of his family.

Goody sees the result as placing greater responsibilities on the family to ensure the economic and social well-being of children. For sons this was usually done through inheritance on the death of the household

head; for daughters it was often done by dowry or what Goody calls pre-mortem inheritance.

By providing for all the children, the family risked, however, dissipating its property, the basis of the family's prosperity. One solution was to exclude land from dowry as in North India, though this means that there is a very considerable problem of finding enough other resources to pay for dowry. Goody (1973: 21) suggests that where land was included in dowry, as in Sri Lanka, then one would expect to find close connubium as in Sri Lanka's cross-cousin marriage.

Goody's argument is plausible but unprovable. If correct, it suggests that there is a relationship between the economic base and the family structure, a point which few people would challenge, but that such a relationship must be very general with the constraints set by the economic context allowing for a considerable variety in family structures. Furthermore, the relationship posited must be highly speculative.

The specific interest of Goody's thesis for us is its relevance for Sri Lanka; nevertheless, the Sri Lankan case may be evidence of a weakness in his argument. Goody, in his search for information from which to generalize, is often forced to rely on very weak or localized data. In writing about dowry in India, especially South India, Goody has relied very heavily on Nur Yalman's *Under the Bo Tree* (1971) which is essentially about Sri Lanka and the extension of which to South India is itself rather speculative. This may account for his reference to South India as long having a system of dowry including land (Goody, 1973: 21), when, according to my own experience and others' evidence, dowry is a new phenomenon in South India, has few of the characteristics of a pre-mortem inheritance, and never includes land. To this extent, Goody's characterization of dowry as simply being pre-mortem inheritance is grossly oversimplified. Indeed, much of the

seamless universality of Goody's characterization comes from referring to isolated examples in often far different places when few places have all the characteristics which he attributes to his two systems, one marked by diverging devolution, and the other by communal land ownership.

It is not possible to say precisely why Sri Lankan and Indian social and family structures were as they were but it is fair to say that they existed within a number of economic and environmental constraints. As noted by Goody, the existence of a grain-based agrarian system, no doubt, did set certain limitations on their societies. It encouraged a stable social system with tightly controlled families. The differences were also important. The relatively greater availability of land in Sri Lanka, especially for *chena* cultivation, may give greater economic independence to the young and almost certainly reduces the pressure on the family regarding inheritance and protecting the interests of the young. In this sense it may make for a looser family structure.

It is also possible that environmental factors influence family structure indirectly. One factor making for a tightly controlled family is pressure from the local community. If, for example, the behaviour of the young, especially of daughters, can affect the reputation of the family as is the case in India and was the case in Sri Lanka, then the strength of the local community is of critical importance. In addition, a strong local community is likely to increase the need for family alliances so that the family will be able to exert greater pressure when needed. This, in turn, will increase pressure for greater control over family members and particularly over marriage. The weakness of the local community in Sri Lanka was probably in part due to the dispersion of villages there in contrast to the nucleated villages common in India. The contrast may relate to the different ecology: in Sri Lanka's wet zone water is freely available for irrigation and other purposes, and villages can be dispersed with houses

being located just above the fields which the householders farm, while in India villages were much more likely to be dependent upon tanks (earthen dams for irrigation) and were generally compactly located adjacent to the tanks and the irrigated area. Furthermore, the relatively open landscape of India may have made warfare a greater problem and therefore encouraged nucleation for easier defence.

Apart from any overtly economic factors, the other important determinants of the nature of family structure in Sri Lanka and India are ideology and history. Important ideological influences include religion, caste and the concept of the ideal joint family.

As was discussed in Chapter 2, in comparison to Hinduism, Buddhism, at least as now interpreted, places more emphasis on the individual than on the household. In Buddhism it is the individual's relationship to the truth which is important. While this concept is an element of Hinduism, there is more emphasis in Hinduism on institutional relationships. Buddhism's greater emphasis on the individual reflects the concept that everyday reality is an illusion, a concept which Buddhism shares with Hinduism but on which it places more stress; thus the social institutions which are very important in our everyday world are ultimately not important. Caste, for example, in Sri Lanka is accepted as part of the everyday world but not, as in India, as integral to the very essence of the individual. While in theory in orthodox Hinduism individuals of even the lowest caste could hope to obtain enlightenment, in practice they would be unlikely to as in their very nature they would lack the necessary spirituality. In Sri Lanka membership of the main Buddhist order of monks is restricted to the Govigama caste, but this is never justified in spiritual terms but solely by the argument that society would not, in the past, have given the proper respect owing to monks, to members of the lower castes, even though as monks they are in theory free of caste. While this is no

doubt a rationalization, it is a rationalization that in India would not have been needed; in Sri Lanka, unlike India, caste is essentially a secular rather than a religious concept.

Similarly, Buddhism places less emphasis than Hinduism on the family. For Hindus, as Yalman (1971: 102) notes, the family is a unit of worship, with a god's room and specified gods to whom the family as a whole owes allegiance; in Sri Lanka worship is essentially an individual concern. The major family rites in Sri Lanka, apart from funerals, do not involve religion; most importantly, marriage is a purely secular affair, unlike in India where it involves a religious rite. Buddhism's emphasis on the individual helps to explain the acceptance in Sri Lanka of love marriage.

Ideological concepts are not restricted to religious beliefs. Caste, for example, involves a notion of pollution which, though related to religious beliefs, cannot be reduced to religion. Similarly, though the joint family is in India a religious ideal, it is also associated with secular success in that only a prosperous community such as well-off landowners could fully implement the model.

So far the differences between Sri Lanka and India have been emphasized yet it is the similarities on which the comparison is based. To a large extent there is a shared common culture between Sri Lanka and the rest of South Asia, especially India: the main ethnic groups, the Sinhalese and the Tamils, originally emigrated from India; Buddhism and Hinduism originated there. Both Sri Lanka and India have caste, a concept which is found in its true sense only in South Asia. The kinship systems of Sri Lanka and South India both use Dravidian kinship terminology. Finally, Sri Lanka has borrowed many of its ideal concepts from India, reflecting the high prestige of the civilization there as the home of Buddha and the Hindu gods.

The points being suggested here have been put very succinctly by Tambiah (1973: 137-139), who argues that India and Sri Lanka represent a dominant and a variant within one family. He notes that the Sinhalese and other peoples of Sri Lanka are ethnically Indian in origin, and speak languages that are derived from the major Indian Indo-Aryan and Dravidian languages. Tambiah regards the major contrast between the Sinhalese and India as being the former's espousal of Buddhism:

it has been suggested that it is their very espousal of Theravada Buddhism that in large part explains various aspects of their social structure and organization, including such matters as family and kinship structure, inheritance customs, the secular nature of marriage, the degree of equality between the sexes, the permissibility of divorce etc. Indeed it could seriously be suggested that the liberalization of Sinhalese and Burmese society as for instance evidenced by greater property rights given woman, the loosening of social forms such as unilineality and joint family towards bilineality and conjugal family is directly related to two features of Buddhism. Firstly, unlike Hinduism and its prime officiants, the Brahmins, there is little religious legislation by Buddhism and its monks on, and ritual concern with family and kinship practices and norms; secondly since the destination of the Buddhist search is said to be *individual* salvation, the religion is alleged to encourage a weakening of social groupings like the joint family, to emphasize the distribution of property to all children of both sexes alike, to devalue ancestor worship and preoccupation with male heirs. It would take us too far afield if we investigated in detail the relation between Hinduism and Buddhism to their respective social structures, but what can be conceded here (without suggesting a causal link) is that there certainly is a fit between the structure of Theravada Buddhism and the social organization of the societies in which it prevails, especially when we keep in view the contrasting relation between Hindu religion and the society which it informs (1973: 138-139).

Regarding inheritance, Tambiah notes that

All these societies fall within a belt of double transmission of property to males and females, but the Sinhalese and Burmese go to a step further from India in general and give females equal rights with males in regard to inheritance of patrimonial property, including land (1973: 139).

The moderate degree of scepticism implicit in Tambiah's remarks concerning the causal role of Buddhism relates to the fact that some of the traits distinguishing the Sinhalese from the Indian model are also found among Sri Lanka's Tamil community, implying that this is simply part of the shift from the dominant to a deviant model.

This section commenced with a discussion on whether the greater changes in Sri Lankan marriage patterns compared to the Indian situation are essentially responses to new circumstances or whether they reflected deeper structural differences in the Sri Lankan families themselves. In the long run such a distinction is slightly artificial as family structure will inevitably respond to new circumstances. The Sri Lankan family, particularly the Sinhalese family, has long been structurally different from the Indian family. This section examined the factors that have influenced family structure in both countries.

The distinction between family structure and responses to new circumstances makes greater sense when discussing change. A number of reasons have been discussed in this chapter as to why the family's behaviour concerning marriage has changed. Economic changes have reduced the parents' control over their children, and more importantly reduced the parents' advantages when achieving control over their children. The economic changes, along with the political changes initiated by colonialism, have helped to create a new social hierarchy in which tight family control is less advantageous and necessary than formerly. These changes involve responses to new circumstances rather than changes in family structure, though the responses themselves must affect the nature of the family.

Other factors, most importantly new ideologies, have possibly had a more direct effect on the structure of the family. The new political and economic context provided conditions conducive to new ideologies, which in turn, probably assisted political and economic change. For the family, the most important of the new ideologies was the concept of the individual. Newly imported ideologies from the West emphasizing the individual challenged group-level concepts such as the family and caste. The best example of this change is probably the concept of the family itself.

The idea of a romantic marriage is a powerful one, implying as it does the overriding commitment of two individuals to each other. The concept of romance was not entirely missing in the past - there are stories of generally unrequited love - but it was rarely felt to have anything to do with marriage which involved more practical concerns. Marriage was for having children and extending the family, not for the shallow egotistical desires of two individuals, hence the distinction between marriage and elopement. In practice, love marriages are generally very practical themselves and have more the nature of self-selection (within limitations) than of romance. Significantly, Sri Lankans, even those who have love matches, seem to regard the purpose of marriage as essentially to have a family rather than to form a long partnership between two individuals. Nevertheless, the concept of the romantic love marriage is a powerful force legitimating their own marriages.

Here ideology seems to have affected the very nature of family relationships rather than simply the way the family chooses to operate. Nevertheless these ideologies did not operate in a vacuum. They could not have had the effect that they did if the political and economic conditions had not been conducive to such changes. Ideology, however, has had an important facilitating role for the changes that have taken place.

The acceptance of these new ideologies was made easier by their harmonizing with already existing beliefs. Buddhism itself implicitly emphasized the individual, but this has been greatly reinforced by the developments of the last century-and-a-half starting with the Buddhist Revival Movement of the nineteenth century and the Western emphasis on the individual.

5.15 Summary: why arranged marriage is losing its influence

This chapter has discussed the possible reasons for the decline in arranged marriage in Sri Lanka. It has compared Sri Lanka's situation with neighbouring India where a similar decline has not so far occurred. A number of reasons were highlighted including a reduction in the control of parents over children, and especially the interest and advantages of the parents in doing the choosing. It was argued that what had really changed was what society and families were willing to accept as marriage. In the past, individual-initiated marriages would not have been accepted as marriages but would have been regarded as elopements. It was stressed in this regard that even now only those self-initiated marriages acceptable to the parents are fully recognized by the parents, though some marriages which occur against the parents' wishes are later grudgingly accepted by them, but rarely receive full support, and may falter as a consequence.

To phrase the changes in terms of how the respondents understood what had happened it would probably be best to say that children had changed. Parents still have a responsibility to ensure the future of their children but how they do so has become less direct, mainly because what is required cannot be directly achieved and because the families' own interests are not directly involved. In the past the parents were responsible for ensuring that their children, especially sons, had a livelihood and, especially daughters were suitably married. They fulfilled these duties by providing employment, usually on the farm, access to land, inheritance, arranging marriages, dowry if required and support in times of need. In return, the children were obliged to obey their parents and offer them what assistance they could. It was logical that this should be the case as children's position in society was simply a reflection of the larger institutions including the family to which they belonged, thus the family had to have responsibility for them. Furthermore, the family's own interests were at stake, for the

members of the family were among its prime assets. This was especially the case where the family was the unit of production.

Nowadays, however, a child is not simply an extension of the family and the other institutions of society, such as caste into which he or she is born, but depends increasingly on an achieved status. This is itself dependent on such markers as education. Admittedly, in the past there was some role for achievement but it was generally closely associated with ascribed status. For example, a young woman from a high family was expected to have a good moral reputation, it being up to her family to ensure that it stayed that way to protect the family's own status. Furthermore, the family now has less economic interest in the child, and the latter in the family, than formerly was the situation, as most people now work outside the family unit.

The consequence of these changes is that families now take a less direct interest in marriage, and indeed in determining the future of their younger members in general. The family itself has much less at stake in their future and less to offer and hence is more willing and able to accept that children are capable of making the appropriate decisions themselves. The appropriate decision itself, however, is no longer the same as it would have been previously. Now, it is much more important that the couple are compatible and capable individuals than the extent to which their union is in the interest of their families.

Changes in marriage are part of a general change from a localized society based on the family and other status based on the family and other status-orientated institutions such as caste, to a town-based more individualistic society. The chapter examined why the changes that had taken place were so much greater in Sri Lanka than in Sri Lanka's nearest neighbour and the country with which Sri Lanka has most in common,

India. It was suggested that this reflected partly the extent of economic changes in Sri Lanka: significantly even comparatively poor people depend for a large proportion of their income on the cash economy whereas similar families in India are likely economically at least to be much more isolated.

Even more basic than such differences in the economy were pre-existing structural differences. Although these too might have some economic basis it was argued that differences in ideology were important: in particular, a greater stress in Hinduism than in Buddhism on the unity of the family. Also the seemingly greater emphasis in Buddhism on the individual was reinforced by Western ideologies stressing individualism which found a readier acceptance in Sri Lanka because they were more compatible with the pre-existing social ideology. Hence in Sri Lanka less emphasis was always placed on the family than in India, a tendency which was reinforced by Sri Lankans' more rapid acceptance of imported ideologies.

The reasons for the change in how marriages were organized were complex. No simple explanations are offered here for what happened but rather indications as to what seemed to be the most important factors. The emphasis here has been on the continuities, that what has happened owes much to the past, and indeed that many features that applied in the past still apply in the present even though superficially the situation has totally changed. For example, while arranged marriage is being replaced by love marriage, close parental supervision is still expected.

Nevertheless, while the continuities are important they should not blind us to the very real changes that have taken place. The initiative in marriage has shifted from the older generation to the younger generation, a shift Sri Lankans regard very seriously. In particular, they regard love marriage as being qualitatively different from arranged marriage, and as

indicating a very different relationship between parents and children. It is qualitatively different in that love marriages are regarded as being emotionally closer than those between couples with arranged marriages, though, as has been emphasized, this should not be exaggerated: marriage is not yet primarily for love, and of course there are exceptions to this dichotomy on both sides with some couples with arranged marriage being particularly close, and others with love marriages being more distant. It implies a different relationship between parents and children because it means that parents and children are to a considerable extent independent of each other and cannot automatically rely on each other for support. Nevertheless, comparatively it would seem individuals always had a greater degree of independence than was the case in India.

Having examined the changes in the process of marriage, whether marriage is arranged or not, and, if it is, how, what the families and others are expected to contribute including dowry, and, most importantly, what is required in the bride and the groom, I wish now to examine the relationship between the process of marriage and age at marriage. As was noted at the end of the Chapter 4 there are good reasons to expect that the processes should influence age at marriage, and, as commented on at the beginning of this chapter, there does seem to be some empirical relationship, though it is not a hard and fast one since, while age at marriage has increased overall, it has at times declined while love marriage has continued to increase. This point is discussed in Chapter 6.

Chapter 6

Conclusion: marriage patterns, an aspect of marriage

6.1 Introduction

The previous chapters have examined various aspects of marriage in Sri Lanka, concentrating, in particular, on age at marriage and the process of marriage. The chapters examined the factors and forces involved in decisions concerning marriage, and how and why these have changed. This chapter ties together some of the loose strands before discussing what we have learnt overall about marriage in Sri Lanka, South Asia, and more generally.

6.2 Age at marriage and the process of marriage.

The two preceding chapters have dealt first with why age at marriage has risen and secondly with why arranged marriage has declined. This section discusses how the two aspects of marriage are related.

There is not a simple direct relationship between age at marriage and type of marriage: changes in age at marriage do not simply reflect changes in marriage type, nor can changes in marriage type be said just to reflect changes in marriage age. While changes in marriage type have been dramatic with a continuous increase in the proportion of love marriages, changes in age at marriage have moved in a comparatively halting way with a general rise being countered occasionally by downward fluctuations. Furthermore, the project data shows little direct relationship between age at marriage and type of marriage: those females currently entering arranged marriages marry in fact slightly older than females currently

having love marriages, and males entering arranged marriages are considerably older than males entering love marriages.

Nevertheless, there is a link between changes in marriage patterns and changes in the processes of marriage. When marriage type is controlled by current age the project's data indicate that in the past arranged marriages were somewhat earlier among women, but not men, than love marriages; whereas now among the Sinhalese the opposite seems to be the case.

The relationship between marriage age and marriage type has changed because the nature and purpose of Sri Lankan marriage has changed as a consequence of fundamental changes in Sri Lanka's society and economy. Formerly, an individual's position was largely synonymous with that of his or her family; position within society and well-being depended upon family ties. Membership of the family determined an individual's status including caste status as well as access to family-controlled resources. A person had little option but to observe the feelings of the family members, particularly of the elders. It was also in his or her interests to do so for, with the social system as it was, the interests of the individual were normally felt to be virtually identical with those of the family. The aims of marriage reflected this. A successful marriage was not with a person to whom the individual was attracted; this was a mere infatuation, at best a youthful folly, and at worst a disaster. A successful marriage was one which would benefit the long-term interests of the family and of the individual within it. This required that the marriage was with an individual who would fit into the family, would work hard but often more importantly would strengthen the family's links with other families, a link as vital to the individuals concerned as to the families, in societies where one required support from others for protection and to advance one's interests.

In the circumstances it was logical that the family should control marriage, to protect its interests and that of all the family members. This was especially the case as the family was much better placed than the individual to choose the person with the attributes it desired. It could use the knowledge of all its members as well as what it could learn about the other family and the potential marriage partner through its contacts. The older members also had the experience and the managerial responsibility to be better able to assess just what additions the family needed. Finally, only the family could provide what was necessary for a marriage to be a marriage: recognition, marriage payments, access to land and family support. To paraphrase Yalman, a marriage without active family involvement and recognition was not regarded as a genuine marriage because it did not bring all the benefits of marriage.

It was also logical in the circumstances that marriage especially for females should be early. As noted in Chapter 4, it was primarily family attributes which mattered for marriage, especially in the case of females. There was little need to wait until the individual had acquired a particular attribute before marriage. There was also little need for a period of socialization and education in how a married woman and to a lesser extent a married man should behave. These could be directly learnt from the parents or parents-in-law and besides, less acquired knowledge was required than is now the case. This point comes out very clearly in attitudes to childcare and assisting children with their education. There is now a much stronger belief that a mother has an important role in these two matters and that only an educated woman can fill these roles, whereas earlier these matters would have been left to those who knew better (especially the old who were deemed to have acquired much experience), or would simply have been regarded as unnecessary.

Conversely there were advantages for the family in the marriage being early. One of these was the early establishment of a useful family alliance. Secondly, where a woman's primary duty was regarded as being reproduction and where many children were seen to be advantageous, as was apparently the case in Sri Lanka (see Ryan:1952), and mortality was much higher than it is currently, many families preferred early marriage. Even though it may not directly have been in the interests of a woman's own family, if early marriage were preferred by the families of eligible males, then the failure of a woman's family not to accept an early marriage would have meant running the risk of having to accept a less advantageous marriage for both the young woman and her family.

In addition to these direct operational advantages of early marriage to the family and to the individual, equally important or even more important in South Asia, though perhaps to a lesser extent in Sri Lanka, was an ideology of early marriage. By such an ideology is meant a whole complex of ideas concerning latent female sexuality, the need to prevent a young woman exercising too much self-will, the need to submerge her identity into the family before she can express too much independence, the need to prevent undesirable liaisons especially those which might result in the mixing of incompatible blood (cross-caste marriage), as well as the need to avoid malicious gossip that would affect her reputation as well as that of her family. All these concepts meant that a prudent family would want to marry her off before any such risks arose.

Thus, there existed in South Asia, though to a more limited extent in Sri Lanka, a social and economic environment in which it was in the interests of the families and to a considerable extent of the individuals concerned for the families to control marriages and for those marriages to be early. Of course, this explanation refers more to why marriage in the past was arranged and early rather than to why arranged marriage specifically

was early. Clearly, though, a specific reason for both arranged and early marriage was to ensure appropriate marriages. Arranged marriages helped ensure early marriage before any question of morality could arise, though this was less important in Sri Lanka than elsewhere in South Asia. Conversely, where marriage was to be early and when even slight familiarity between the sexes was frowned upon, the consequent underdevelopment of courtship meant that love marriage was effectively meaningless. Young men and women were not in a position to know enough about each other for a suitable match, though, even if they did acquire this knowledge, they would undoubtedly have received short shrift.

There is apparently also a link between age at marriage and type of marriage in that love marriage is associated with a smaller spousal age gap, though the cause of the link is arguable. One reason is that suggested by William Goode (1963: 236, 336), that love marriage involves a desire for a stronger conjugal relationship which can only be met by a smaller age gap. A second reason is that in love marriage, in contrast to arranged marriage, individuals have to choose partners from among those whom they meet. According to the situation, these may well be of a similar age, as, for example, if people meet at work or in an educational institution which they are entering at the same time. Thirdly, when arranged marriage is used as a marriage of last resort parents are likely to step in earlier for females, for example in their late twenties, than for males, perhaps in their late thirties. All three factors probably exist in Sri Lanka but they imply quite different relationships between the age gap and type of marriage. The conjugal relationship explanation implies that the nature of the marriage determines the age gap, the context within which marriage partners are selected explanation that a particular type of marriage selection determines the age gap, and the last chance explanation that the age (rather than the age gap) determines the marriage type. Assuming that male age at marriage is fixed

by the prior need for employment, then the first two explanations suggest that marriage type determines female age at marriage as a consequence of the age gap (though for very different reasons) and the last reason suggests that it is the individual's age which is associated with a particular age gap which determines marriage type. The relative importance of these reasons has probably changed. In the past the conjugal factor may have been more important, not because those having love matches feel any less strongly today but simply because parents may see marriage as less of an unequal relationship and therefore no longer simply assume that a large age gap is correct; though marriage in Sri Lanka has probably long been less hierarchical than in India. Secondly, the use of arranged marriage as a final act of desperation has undoubtedly increased as parents no longer take quick action when the daughter is young. Hence, there may well have been a reversal in causation from marriage type influencing marriage age to marriage age influencing marriage type. The implication of this is that the continuing large age gap in arranged marriages does not indicate that the nature and purpose of arranged marriage remains unchanged. In contrast to the time when marriage was arranged and early, there now exists in Sri Lanka an environment where there is diminishing advantage in arranged marriage for the individual and even for the family, and in which there is very little advantage in early marriage.

The breakdown of a localized society and its replacement by a wider society, where success is dependent much more on achieved status, and in whose institutions kinship has a much smaller role, has meant that there are few advantages to arranged marriage for either the younger generation or their parents. Equally these changes have meant that there are few advantages and very considerable disadvantages in early marriage. The ideology of early marriage, which was always much weaker in Sri Lanka than in the region generally, has been rendered virtually irrelevant by the

social changes which have taken place: particularly the weakening of the local community which has meant that families are now less likely to be socially excluded for transgressing local morality or the interests of the community.

The weakening of the local community does not mean that any sense of community has ceased to exist, but merely that the community has become much less intrusive. This is partly because it much less constitutes the whole of an individual's life, for much more of an individual's life is spent outside the local environment and even when located in the local environment the individual is much more dependent on outside institutions. The weakening of the local community is also, in part, because the community is no longer as politically organized as it was, though again it was always less so than elsewhere in South Asia. In South India, village life is largely built around the local politics led by the powerful men of the village. This is not the case in Sri Lanka. The equivalent landowning class is much weaker, for most families own some land, and more importantly the interests of all reside increasingly outside the village. Neither the organizational structure for concerted action nor the motivation any longer exist, as the actions of individuals do not by and large threaten the interests of the community as a whole.

Apart from reducing the enforcement of the ideology of early marriage, the weakening of the local community has also meant that family alliances have lost much of their former value. This, plus the fact that family production is much less important than formerly, means that there is much less advantage for both the older and the younger generations in the family in retaining its control over marriage. The consequent lessened importance of family status in marriage and the increasing importance of acquired attributes has meant that early marriage is no longer as advantageous as it was. The reduced importance of family and local

considerations has also meant that families are in a much weaker position to arrange marriages. They no longer have the requisite knowledge nor the ability to swing the deal either through influence or through what they themselves can provide to the match.

On one level these changes mean that both arranged and early female marriage are less advantageous. On another level it means that the close relationship between age at marriage and type of marriage has broken down. In the past, when families controlled marriage, female marriage was early. Now, even when families control marriage, female marriage is not early because it is not in the family interests that it be so. The direction of causation between type and age at marriage has changed. In the past when marriage was to be to a person specified by the family this ensured that it was early, while now it is increasingly because the young have failed to arrange their own marriage by the expected age that the family has to become involved in marriage at all.

The ease with which Sri Lanka, in contrast to the rest of South Asia, has moved from one model of marriage, where marriage was family-arranged and for females early, to one where self-selection and late marriages prevail, is related to the comparative weakness of the constraints, particularly ideological ones, on late marriage in Sri Lanka. Female marriage was never as early as elsewhere in South Asia, because both the non-ideological factors such as family alliance, and the ideological factors such as the fear of sexual transgressions, always were less in Sri Lanka. The non-ideological factors were less because Sri Lanka had long had a less localized society and because the kinship system emphasized intra-family rather than extra-family linkages. The ideological factors were also less, partly because the lesser importance of the local community meant that they had never been enforced with the vigour prevailing in India, for instance. But the main reason is probably that Buddhism did not

emphasize the dangers of female independence, accepting a fairly independent status for women and not being overly worried about any likely consequences such as cross-caste miscegenation.

The non-ideological factors may have been the primary immediate influence making for less arranged marriage and a later female marriage age but it was the weakness of the ideological constraints which allowed this to happen. In India and the rest of South Asia the non-ideological factors have been changing too in the same direction though not generally as far as in Sri Lanka, but changes in type of marriage and age at marriage have been held back by the greater resistance of ideological impediments concerning fears of uncontrolled female sexuality. The greater emphasis there on caste purity seems to be an important factor in this.

6.3 Why has marriage changed in Sri Lanka?

Marriage patterns are indivisible from the larger processes of marriage and marriage change which are themselves aspects of the larger social processes in the society. Age at marriage has changed because society itself has changed and accordingly the nature of marriage within it. Because social processes are so complex, generally multidimensional, and often ambiguous, it is very hard to tie down the exact relationships involved, and equally it is very hard to make predictions about the future.

It has been argued here that Sri Lanka has shifted from a position where society was much more family and community based to one where it is based on the individual. This is the shift that Maine (1863) was discussing in the move from status to contract and Tönnies (1955) described as the shift from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft*. A consequence of the shift has been that the aims of marriage and what is wanted in a marriage partner have changed. In a society based on the family, family interests and family authority were predominant. A marriage had to contribute to

the family's interests or at least not undermine them. Hence, a marriage partner had to be someone who would accept the primacy of family interests, and the structures of prevailing authority within the family and the community, and whose family had the right status and could provide material and other benefits. It was also important that a bride could assist the family interests by having children who would contribute to the family's labour force and security; it should be noted that the family as a whole, including the parents who made the decision, received the benefits of any grandchildren but it was the couple themselves who had to bear any direct burden.

In the new society based on the individual, increasing emphasis is being placed naturally on what is important for the individual rather than what is important for the family. What the individual brings to the marriage partnership is much more important than what he or she brings to the family as a whole. The young must be able to manage on their own, a circumstance that requires an element of maturity and preferably skills, education and a job. The previously important requirements of family level attributes is much less important. Family status as distinct from individual status is much less important than it was. Family alliances similarly count for less in the much larger, less localized world that now prevails. Most importantly, the individual has less to contribute to the family than previously. Family property, particularly land, is of much less significance than it was, and outside income, which individuals earn through their own jobs, much more important. Thus, the shift from a family-based society to an individual-based society, or in Maine's (1863) terms from a society based on status to one based on contract, appears to have been the driving force in the transformation of marriage in Sri Lanka.

Nevertheless, an understanding of the nature of marriage requires more than a simple "status-contract" dichotomy. No society completely fits

either of the two stereotypes. India was in Chapter 5 characterized as an example of a family-based society (it also served as Maine's classic example of a status-based society), while Western societies may be regarded as particularly individualistic societies (Maine's contract-based societies), but it would be grossly misleading to suggest that the individual is or was absent in India or the family was absent in the West. In all societies both status and contract are important, what is being discussed here is where the emphasis lies. If India and the West do not and never have fitted the stereotypes, Sri Lanka certainly does not.

Sri Lanka has moved from a position where family was more important to one where the individual is but again this is a comparative point. The family was never as dominant in Sri Lanka as in India while it remains more important than it is in the West. It is precisely because the family was willing to concede a larger role to the individual that marriage in Sri Lanka has changed as much as it has.

Apart from the fact that no society fits the simple stereotype of being totally family-oriented or totally individualistic, too simple a dichotomy understates the complexity of human society. Most importantly though, it tells us very little about why society was as it was and why it is changing. What is of interest is not that there has been a shift towards a more individualistic society but why this is happening, and what underlay the previously more family-oriented society and the new more individualistic society. In this sense the dichotomy of family and individual-oriented societies is less important than the underlying processes involved. The thesis has examined a number of these processes with regard to Sri Lanka.

The thesis has identified as being crucial to an understanding of the transition in Sri Lankan marriage, the nature of kinship and family structure in Sri Lanka and how this has interacted with changing economic

structures and new ideologies. Marriage is no longer early or arranged because the factors which underlay early and arranged marriage no longer exist. The family has less to gain from controlling marriage or from pursuing early marriage, and those marrying have less to gain from their families being involved in the marriage. Social and economic success is much less dependent on the family, its prosperity and reputation and on the ties it has with other families. Success now depends much more on individual achievement and qualifications such as education. Consequently what matters for marriage is not what individuals can contribute to the wider family but what they can contribute to the marriage partnership.

Under the new conditions, early female marriage is not an advantage. While a younger bride might be an advantage for the husband's family she would not be able to contribute as much to the partnership as a somewhat older bride. For the family, a younger bride was more likely to have an unblemished reputation, accept family precedence and authority, and ultimately bear more children. For the partnership an older, more mature and probably more educated woman can provide guidance when the family is no longer interested, and can do things that were not thought to be important in the past such as looking after the family's health and assisting children with their schoolwork.

Furthermore, having as many children as possible is less in the couple's interest, especially nowadays. The larger family, especially the parents, gained many of the benefits of children while leaving most of the burden to the couple. Nowadays children are much less of a benefit to the family as well as the couple, while their costs have risen. They are less of an advantage for many of the reasons that early and arranged marriages are no longer an advantage. Since family property is less important there is less need for the labour children can provide on the farm. The lessened importance of family property means that the family cannot easily

appropriate the labour of the young, for the off-farm earnings they get are more visible, being in the form of money and almost always paid directly to those who provide the labour. Furthermore, the new urban economy requires education for economic and social advancement, thus greatly raising the costs of children while simultaneously reducing the time they have available for family use.

However, it is not simply a matter of recent changes. The advantages of children were always less in Sri Lanka than elsewhere in South Asia because family obligations were different. In Sri Lanka, each married couple was regarded as a separate economic unit and even children were usually allowed to retain any cash income they earned. In the past this did not matter so much because the costs of children were less and because on the family farm the input of their labour could be easily appropriated, but, as a consequence of the changes mentioned above, it does matter now.

Just as early female marriage is not an advantage, arranged marriage is not either. The families now receive little benefit from controlling marriage while the costs of the assistance provided in arranged marriages are very considerable. Similarly, for the younger generation the advantages of arranged marriage are now much more limited. The family links accompanying arranged marriage are often more onerous than useful while the families are not in a particularly useful situation to select the marriage partners the young themselves want.

The kinship and family structure is closely connected to the advantages and disadvantages of marriage and hence the degree of family involvement in marriage. The thesis has identified, as being crucial to an understanding of the transition in Sri Lankan marriage, the nature of kinship and family structure in Sri Lanka and how this has interacted with changing economic structures and new ideologies. As discussed in Chapter

5, in a traditional society the kinship system determines most social relationships, who are kin, affines or strangers, as well as the inheritance of property and offices, and how the old and the young will be provided for. The way kinship did this has profound implications for marriage. In Sri Lanka the kinship system emphasized marriage very much as a family concern but otherwise gave the children a comparatively high degree of personal autonomy. The kinship system emphasized marriage within a restricted group of relatives, often cross-cousins. The kinship structure is built round the balancing concepts of kin and affines. There are two types of people with whom an individual has links in the same generation, those who are their brothers and sisters¹ whom they cannot marry, and those who are their cross-cousins: father's sister's child and mother's brother's child. If a person marries a non-relative the new spouse will be classified as a cross-cousin but the preference is certainly for marriage to true cross-cousins. Cross-cousin marriage helped to prevent the dispersion of family property and protect family status. Land could be inherited by daughters as well as sons so concerns about the breakup of family property were very real. Thus marriage was a family concern but there was no suggestion of a patriarchal joint family, and the individual family members including women had a high degree of independence. As family property could be inherited bilaterally there was no real corporate property and hence little basis for a patriarchal joint family or lineage. The patriarchal family was further undermined by cross-cousin marriage, which was probably an attempt to prevent family property from being dispersed. It meant that daughters were brought back into the family or at least retained their links with their natal families through one or more of their children marrying back into their families. By doing so it undermined the basis of the patriarchal family as it exists in the northern parts of South Asia, sustained by the rigorous exclusion of the daughters of the family and the breaking as much as

1. Including parallel cousins - father's brother's child and mother's sister's child.

possible of all links to the women's natal families. Only then could the men legitimately claim to be the permanent nucleus of the family, the women being outsiders except as wives or mothers. Where women could claim a stake in the family by birth the men's claims for sole supremacy were unsupportable.

Consequently, a fair degree of independence was left to individual units; this is presumably why the young were allowed to retain their own earnings. Hence, the potential for greater individualism was built into the kinship system. The lack of a joint family meant that there was much less pressure for a daughter-in-law to know her place, and hence one less reason favouring very early marriage. When concerns about preserving the family's property and status became less important as a result of economic changes and the decline of the local community, there was little advantage to the family in remaining directly involved in marriage. The family retained its veto over the marriage to the extent of ensuring that the chosen marriage partner was a suitable match who would enhance the standing of the family, but otherwise they were happy to leave the choice to the individual.

The increasing individualism of recent times is reflected in the kinship terminology. As Stirrat (1977) has noted for the village of Wellagoda, but which is more generally true of the kinship terminology of the low-country Sinhalese, kinship terminology is changing so that instead of cross-cousins being identified as potential affines they are increasingly being referred to by the terms for brother and sister which, by implication, excludes them from marriage. Hence marriage is coming to be perceived in kinship terminology not as a union which brings two families or the members of one family together but as a union of unrelated individuals. This change in kinship terminology is presumably a sign that the old terms were no longer in agreement with modern realities; the economic and social

basis of the old kinship system no longer existed. The principal requirement underlying the old system, the need to prevent the dissipation of family property, is less important than the need to marry a person with the right characteristics.

In summary, changes in marriage patterns in Sri Lanka are an aspect of a shift from a localized family-based society to a wider more individualistic society. This change itself reflects the interests of the members of the community, who now have little to gain through localized institutions including the family, and more to gain by concentrating on their own interests within the newer and much larger community centred on the towns. The changes in Sri Lanka have been more radical than elsewhere in South Asia because the supports of the older family-based society were always weaker in Sri Lanka. Fewer people had an interest in maintaining family control largely because of pre-existing differences in family and kinship structure.

6.4 Why is Sri Lankan marriage late even by the standards of the West?

So far I have discussed why marriage patterns have changed in Sri Lanka and particularly why female age at marriage has been rising all this century and perhaps longer. What I have not dealt with properly is why age at marriage is as late as it is, to the degree that it is now later than in many Western countries.

The economic problems of poverty and high unemployment coupled with rising expectations, and a new environment in which marriage is no longer an essential part of social life, provide the essential context for very late marriage. In these circumstances marriage is less feasible in Dixon's terms than it was in the past when aspirations were less, or than it is in the contemporary West where the means are greater. In Chapter 4 it was

argued, however, that financial problems were less important in delaying marriage than were increasing advantages to the individuals and to their families in delaying marriage. Part of the explanation here is that achieved individual attributes increasingly count for more than ascribed family attributes. Since achieved attributes depend on the family there is little reason to delay marriage. In contrast, achieved characteristics have to be acquired and often demonstrated. It is not enough to acquire an education, it is also important to show that it can be put to good use in the acquisition of a suitable job with the appropriate income and status. Where the economy is depressed and unemployment is high but education and especially a modern job is seen as the passport to the modern world, for both men and women marriage can in such circumstances be delayed a very long time indeed. The situation has changed from one where there is little reason for marriage to be delayed to one where there is very little reason for it not to be delayed, often almost indefinitely, except for the risk of not marrying at all. Even the danger of remaining permanently celibate is reduced by the fact that a marriage can usually be arranged if need be, especially as there is now very little opprobrium regarding older brides.

A good example of the acceptance of delayed marriage is the number of couples who often court for years before finally having a love marriage, usually after the husband, at least, has got a job. Their reasons for delaying so long are partly financial: they need a sufficient income; but even more importantly in the Sri Lankan context where family approval is still necessary, the bride would not get permission to marry a groom who did not have a suitable job. Many modern couples also like to delay their marriages until they have had more experience of the world, that is until they are ready to marry. There is surprisingly little worry about the risks of delaying marriage for there are much stronger pressures in Sri Lanka, than in the West, on engaged couples to marry, no matter how long the period of

engagement is. It is felt to be a responsibility which if broken not only is unfair to the other party but also shows a lack of moral fibre. A long delayed marriage is also possible because if the worse does happen and an engagement is broken, arranged marriage remains as a final possibility.

6.5 What do the changes in Sri Lankan marriage indicate about marriage and particularly marriage change generally?

This study commenced with an examination of the literature concerning marriage patterns in the West and in Asia. It noted the difficulty of comparing Western and Asian marriage patterns, for Western marriage in comparison to Asian marriage tended to be much later particularly for women, with a higher proportion never marrying at all. The explanations given for variations in marriage patterns within the West and within Asia tended to be quite different. Variations in Western marriage patterns were generally explained in terms of the couple's ability to economically support a household, whereas in early-marrying Asia, variations in marriage were explained more in cultural terms, when the young should marry. Dixon (1970: 79) noted that there was a stronger correlation between female age at marriage and differences in indicators of the feasibility of marriage in the West than in Asia whereas there was a stronger correlation between female marriage age and indicators of desirability of marriage in Asia than in the West; a complicating factor was that the direction of the correlations differed between Asia and the West. Indicators of economic development were associated with early marriage in the West and late marriage in the East but this was probably more a sign of the inadequacies of Dixon's indices than anything else.

One reason for the greater importance of feasibility as a reason for delaying marriage in the West was the need to establish an independent household. To establish a household of the required standing took a great deal of resources especially when the young were expected to do this on

their own. Laslett (1977) has described how the young of both sexes spent considerable periods before marriage working to save up for marriage. Hajnal (1965: 132) has even suggested that the very considerable capital accumulation that must have been involved is one reason for the Western economic revolution of the last few centuries. The absence of available work meant that many couples had to put off marriage or even never marry at all.

In contrast, it has been claimed that, in Asia, couples were not obliged to establish a new household from their own resources and hence the lack of resources was not a major factor delaying marriage. Specific reference (e.g. Davis, 1955: 33-39) has been made to the existence of the joint family, where the couple lived with the husband's or much more rarely the wife's family, following marriage; and to arranged marriage, where the family paid the costs associated with marriage. The point relates primarily to the cost of establishing a household but the problem of sustaining a household is also important. However, the difficulty here, too, was less in Asia than in the West. The young often worked on their family's land, or land to which their families had access, and would normally inherit part of any land their families had, partible inheritance being the norm in Asia. The Asian emphasis on the family as against Western individualism meant that a person could not be denied access to property which was his right as a member of the family, provided he observed his family obligations.

There is much validity in these points but certain reservations should be made. As Dixon (1971: 228) points out, parts of Asia never had the joint family and yet they too fitted Hajnal's non-European model of early and universal marriage, though marriage was probably not as early as where the joint family did exist. Furthermore, as Reddy (1991) has pointed out for India, there is little evidence that joint families are associated with early marriage. Reddy notes (1991: 253) that the

available evidence shows that age at marriage is lower in nuclear than in joint families and that wives and children far from being a liability are an asset and the need for female labour is more acute in nuclear than in joint households.

Far from marriage being a burden to the groom and his family, it was actually a net benefit. Reddy remarks (1990:264):

The assumption that age at marriage is low in joint families because the husband does not have to support a wife and family does not appear to be true. In the agrarian societies that Davis talks about, a wife works hard both in the household and in the field, and earns not only for her own needs but also for others in the family. Westermarck knew about this double burden of the farm wife when he wrote: 'Indeed far from being a burden to a man, wife and children are frequently a source of prosperity (1921). ... Similarly, children in agrarian societies work long and hard, and do not become a liability to their father'.

Reddy, admittedly, is referring to the family structure of the parents rather than to whether or not the young couple will establish a new independent household. Nevertheless, his basic point holds, that marriage may bring many economic advantages. In Karnataka, families complained about the costs of marrying, particularly the difficulties of paying for dowry and expensive weddings, which were usually associated with large dowries (see Bradford, 1985). But they did not regard being married itself as involving major costs since both husband and wife worked if necessary, though they did accept that young children are no longer the economic benefit that they were.

In Sri Lanka the expenses of the marriage itself are less, in that dowries tend to be smaller and weddings less expensive, but the cost of being married may be somewhat greater. Nevertheless, the cost of marrying and being married does not seem to be the basic factor delaying marriage. Even where all possible family assistance is provided, age at marriage is rising. The clearest, though atypical example of this, is on the estates. Here, women were the main breadwinners and, from the male point of view, and that of their families, early marriage was beneficial. Indeed, the point comes up in several of the interviews that a son had

married because a woman was needed to help support the family. In this case it was the families of the girls that were reluctant for them to marry early.

While the specific economic circumstances of the estates were unusual, even elsewhere the cost of marriage was not the primary factor delaying marriage. Early marriage for females or males is no longer seen to be in the interests of either the two individuals concerned or their families, for the reasons outlined earlier, most importantly that they have not yet acquired the characteristics that are now preferred in marriage partners.

This raises the question why early marriage was preferred in Asian countries in the past. The most commonly cited reason in the literature is rather ambiguously termed socio-cultural factors (e.g. P. Smith, 1980). The most important single factor cited is the desire to protect the purity of daughters and thereby the reputation of the family. While this does seem to be an important factor, it is by no means sufficient. Even in societies where concerns about female reputation are not so strongly felt, marriage was nevertheless reasonably early, though perhaps not quite as early as in societies where it was felt strongly.

A second factor which could be considered as coming under socio-cultural factors is the preference felt in many Asian societies, for a young bride who would be more easily 'moulded' into the family. This also is an important factor but even where this was not so in Asia, marriage was still earlier than the Western norm.

Apart from suggesting that marriage is more feasible in Asia than in the West, Dixon has also argued that it was more desirable. Desirability as a concept has much in common with socio-cultural factors, in that the latter help determine whether marriage is desirable. Dixon, though, has

something more concrete in mind and writes more from the individual's point of view about whether it is worth marrying early, or marrying at all.

Dixon (1971: 229) refers to marriage as being particularly desirable in Asia for three basic reasons:

- (a) the need to have children, who, unlike in the West, provide income not expenses, in societies where mortality, particularly infant mortality, is high;
- (b) the social isolation of the celibate where few others are celibate;
- (c) the lack of alternatives for women, especially where women lack access to high-prestige wage labour.

It is less that the unmarried are socially isolated, for, in comparison to Western society, they have extensive networks of family and more distant kin to interact with, than that there is no accepted role for the unmarried adult. Similarly, even where acceptable work was available, marriage was nevertheless expected and was often early.

The most basic factor to which Dixon's points relate is that the whole organization of society was based on the family and only by being married could one effectively participate in it. In this circumstance, marriage was to the advantage of both the individual and the family. Sri Lanka shows this very clearly. Only when the family orientation of society broke down could the individual or their families consider late marriage or even non-marriage. This is the essential difference between Western and Asian marriage. In Asia the family was central and hence marriage was early and universal, while in the West it was not and hence other factors came into play. A choice between whether to marry or not was possible. In Asia such a choice would have been impractical.

This raises the question if Asia is moving towards the European model of whether to marry or not and whether the same factors are involved. There are some signs that marriage is becoming more of an individual choice; after all arranged marriage is on the decline, and even celibacy is becoming a possibility. In Sri Lanka, for instance, it will be interesting to see whether the higher proportions not marrying in their twenties and thirties will translate into higher numbers not marrying at later ages or ever.

Nevertheless, Asia has not yet arrived at the Western situation. In Sri Lanka, for example, the family has withdrawn from direct involvement in marriage but indirectly its presence is still there, and the family will intervene if it feels its interests are being infringed, for instance if an unsuitable marriage partner is chosen. If the child of the family is unable on his or her own account to find or attract a suitable partner, the family will also intervene to organize a marriage. Furthermore, the Sri Lankan family is still much more involved in marriage and in the life of the individual than is the case in the West. Especially when the marriage is arranged by the family but even when it is not, the family provides considerable support to the individual in times of need. Family members assist each other and depend on each other to a much greater extent than in the West. To this extent marriage is still not a completely independent decision. Most people are still expected to marry, but to obtain the most desirable marriage partner marriage delay is now acceptable.

If the reason why marriage was earlier and more universal in Asia than in the West was because society was more family-oriented, the question is why has Asian society changed? It is not so much that Asia has acquired the individualistic society of the West, though this may happen eventually, but that the individual rather than the family is now at the centre of society. This is an apparent contradiction but there is an

important difference in emphasis involved. What has changed is not that family and kinship structures have broken down leaving individuals on their own but that changes in the external economic and social context have reduced the sphere over which the family has sway. This has consequently led to changes in how individuals and families make decisions.

Changes in the economic and social context have meant that a much greater role has had to be conceded to individual attributes than was the case in the past. It has also meant that what the family can bring to the marriage is much less important than was the case in the past, and it has meant that the family is in a much weaker position *vis a vis* the individual than formerly to choose a marriage partner or to negotiate an advantageous marriage.

This helps to explain why age at marriage has risen almost uniformly in Asia even though family structure in Asia varied from the joint to the nuclear family, and even though there is little evidence that family structure has changed greatly. There has not been a sudden shift from the joint family to the nuclear family. Many parts of Asia, including Sri Lanka, or at least the majority community, the Sinhalese, never had a fully developed joint family, yet age at marriage was much earlier than it now is. There is little evidence in Sri Lanka that family structures differed greatly in the past, and considerable evidence that, while there seem to be some signs of change in kinship, as indicated by shifts in kinship terminology, these so far are minor.

Nevertheless, to say that marriage patterns have changed across Asia irrespective of family structure, and to say that changes in family structure have not greatly contributed to changes in marriage patterns is not to say that family structure is irrelevant to the subject. The structure of the family and of the kinship system has had an important role in influencing

marriage change not because they themselves have altered, though ultimately this must happen, but because they are important mediating factors in determining the influence of external changes on marriage decisions.

Age at marriage, particularly for females, increased for joint, stem and nuclear households because external circumstances meant that such an increase was in the interests of family and individual irrespective of family type. Nevertheless, particular family types meant that the advantages of early or later marriage were greater in some societies than in others. In Sri Lanka, for example, the comparatively loose Sinhalese family, where children were allowed to keep separate budgets and did not have to contribute to the household, meant that there were fewer advantages for the family in being directly involved in marriage. It also meant that many of the features that made early marriage advantageous were relatively weak. Children contributed less and therefore the desire to have many children was less of a reason for marrying early. To some extent the family always was less dominant than in much of Asia, and therefore family attributes did not matter quite so much and individual attributes mattered more.

In contrast to the Sinhalese families, Tamil parents in Sri Lanka still retain greater control over their children, and the children are still expected to contribute to their families. Hence the parents retain strong incentives to control their children's marriages. In the particular context of the estates, however, this has not led to the families favouring early marriage but on the contrary late marriage. While external factors may be ultimately responsible for whether the family is at the centre of the social system, and hence what the role of the family in marriage is, some family structures encourage greater family involvement in marriage than others. In general in such societies early marriage will be advantageous, though the last example was an exception because of the unusual economic context. In

particular, tight joint families will generally result in more family involvement in marriage and earlier marriage than looser family structures.

What does the comparison between Asia and European marriage tell us? It suggests that the primary factor distinguishing Western marriage from Asian marriage is not that marriage is less feasible in the West than it is in Asia but simply that it is less necessary for the individual and for his or her family. Hence, there is little reason for the family to be involved and hence also financial considerations can become a factor. Another reason why financial considerations have been of relatively little importance in delaying marriage in Asia is simply because marriage was in the past financially advantageous for all concerned. The lack of assistance provided by parents to children in Western marriage is itself a sign of how little there is to be gained by close family involvement in marriage, and how long this has been the case.

This raises the question to what extent family and kinship structure can be treated as autonomous variables from the surrounding economic and social order. Ultimately, there must be interaction between the two and the Western family and marriage systems seem to be an example of this. The fact that parents did not need many family members to protect family property and the fact that children were not needed for old age support probably did demonstrate the underlying impact of a secure political and social order and a comparatively developed capitalist economy where investments could be made in property and not simply in children in contrast to the situation in less secure areas. Also the Western economic and social system was to some degree an outcome of its family structure, as is suggested in Hajnal's comment that one reason for the West's economic development may have been the capital build-up due to both future marriage partners saving up over several years for marriage.

Asia, however, has not yet arrived at this stage. Family and kinship structure, and the economic and social order, are still largely autonomous variables. It is still possible, therefore, to speak of how the family and the individual approach decisions regarding marriage given the prevailing economic and social conditions. The economic and social conditions have changed markedly in Asia and hence how the family and the individual approach such decisions has changed.

Asia, however, has not yet reached the position where the individual is entirely autonomous. Marriage is being delayed because it is to the advantage of both the family and the individual that this should be so. In the long run, Asia may move to the Western position where marriage is increasingly unimportant, at least to the spouses' families of origin. This is why, up until now, marriage in Asia has been delayed but proportions never marrying have not yet risen to Western levels. Ultimately, with the declining family interests in marriage and the collapse of arranged marriage, Asian marriage may move towards the Western pattern in this aspect of marriage as well.

6.6 A theory of marriage

To conclude it is appropriate to consider what contribution this thesis has made to a theory of marriage. Chapter 2 referred to P. Smith's (1980: 60, 91) argument that the weakness of most analysis of marriage transition is the lack of a theory of marriage transition; he dismisses Becker's theory of marriage as ignoring sociological reality. He suggests that a useful theory of marriage transition would have to start with the family. Smith (1980: 91-92) suggests that the theory would involve individuals or their parents choosing the most advantageous options given the nature of family ties, the overall social structure, and intergenerational resource transfers. He argues that the empirical support for this theory building requires a

microlevel approach to quantify intra-family resource transfers over the family life cycle, and how these transfers are modified by the marriages of the children.

The elements that Smith has identified in his approach seem sensible. Marriage is, after all, for creating family links, either in a new family, or as an extension of an existing family. Thus it is of vital concern to the natal families of the marriage partners, though the direct involvement of these families will depend upon the extent to which their immediate interests are at stake. The degree of family involvement in marriage, who makes the decisions, and what is expected of individual members of the family are vital issues in the explanation of changes in marriage patterns. The age at which people marry or whether they marry at all is directly related to what is expected of an individual or what he or she can expect of others, most importantly in the family.

In this study there has not been a specific attempt to quantify intergenerational resource transfers over parents' and children's life cycle and how the marriages of children modify these transfers as Smith recommends, but the general issues concerned have been examined. It would be extremely difficult to quantify resource transfers in the way that Smith desires. Nevertheless, it is clear from this study that what individuals in various family roles can expect from other members of the family, during the course of the family life cycle, is of profound importance in terms of the family's involvement in marriage. Given the pre-existing family structure and kinship system, and the associated rights, obligations and expectations, with the desire of each individual to optimize the advantages, including resource flows, open to him or her and to the family as a whole, the changes which have occurred in Sri Lanka's marriage patterns have been a rational response to the external changes that have taken place. Female age at marriage has risen, in part, because it is no

longer in the interests of the families to be involved in marriage, nor is it in the children's interest for them to be so involved.

Nevertheless, while this thesis has looked at some of the issues raised by Smith as being essential to a theory of marriage, I do not claim to have produced a model of the marriage transition. The definition of marriage varies greatly between societies and it is consequently difficult to fit marriage easily into a theoretical framework. Much of the change in marriage patterns is a result of changes in precisely what marriage is; where it was once primarily an aspect of inter-family and intra-family ties it is now essentially a relationship between two individuals.

The aims of this thesis are to explain marriage in one country, Sri Lanka, in a way that takes into account the fact that marriage is not simply a matter of demographic statistics, but must be understood in terms of its overall social and economic circumstances; and to interpret the implications of those findings in the wider regional and global context. I believe the major value of this study lies not in what it contributes to a theory of marriage transition but in showing specifically how marriage patterns in Sri Lanka have changed as the perceived interests and families have changed in response to the impact of external circumstances on pre-existing family and kinship systems.

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