DIVORCE IN A RURAL NORTH INDIAN AREA: EVIDENCE FROM HIMACHALI VILLAGE

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Divorce In A Rural North Indian Area: Evidence From Himachali Villages

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Abstract

Contrary to the existing belief in the rare occurrence of divorce in Indian society, particularly among the Hindus, the evidence from ten villages in Himachal Pradesh suggested that the incidence of divorce was comparable to the present-day levels in Western society. However, the factors responsible for high levels of divorce in Western society did not explain the prevalence of divorce in Himachal Pradesh. The main reasons for divorce were sexual maladjustment between spouses caused by early marriages of girls and large differences in ages of spouses. Therefore the mechanism that explains divorce in Indian situation is different from the one in the west. The study found that as the age at marriage increased and passed the average age of menarche, the level of divorce decreased. Differences in age of spouse, educational achievements of women and their husband and their caste also explained the variability in the incidence of divorce.

Introduction

Studies of divorce and separation are of importance to social scientists. While age at first marriage (more precisely age at entry into sexual union) has been identified as one of the intermediate variables of fertility which regulate fertility levels in various societies (Davis and Blake, 1955; Bongaarts and Potter, 1983), the prevalence of divorce and separation can also have substantial effects on fertility. When a woman divorces, she
ceases reproduction until she is remarried. Thus a high proportion of divorced and separated women will result in a low level of fertility (Hull and Hull, 1977: 50-54; Nag, 1980: 577; Nag, 1982). Not only will a woman cease producing children until she remarries but also she might take a considerable time to find a new marriage partner, and as a result a considerable period of her reproductive life will lapse without risk of reproduction.

One of the most important features of family life throughout the world, although far more profound in the west, has been the reduction in marital stability (Cherlin, 1981). While a plethora of studies have confirmed the above point and provided a range of explanations for this (see Gottman, 1994), very little is known about the level of divorce and its correlates outside the western world especially in India where one sixth of world’s population live. It is generally believed that divorce among Indians especially Hindus is a rare occurrence. However, the actual incidence of divorce among Indian population remains largely unknown mainly due to the unavailability of data on divorce. The single most important data source on Indian demography has been the census and Indian census does not ask a question on the occurrence of divorce during the life time of a person. Meanwhile, evidence from some localised village studies does suggest the occurrence of divorce among Indian population (Barremen, 1972; Gross, 1982; MacDorman, 1987; Pannar, 1975; Sharma, 1983; Singh, 1961) but there is little statistical evidence to indicate its incidence level that would enable to gauge the level of divorces among Indians. This paper on the one hand explores the incidence of divorce and on the other, and perhaps more important, looks into the relationship between the incidence of divorce and socio-economic variables. It also measures changes in the incidence of divorce over time.

Methods and material

The study area and its characteristics

The study area comprises of ten villages situated about 25-30 kilometres from Shimla town, the capital of Himachal Pradesh. The survey was conducted in 1988 over a period of eight months. These villages are referred as Himachali villages. The total population of Himachali villages at the time was 1431. The population ranged from 54 in the smallest village to 288 in the largest village. The combined population comprised of 732 males and 699 females.

Himachali villages were found homogeneous in terms of their religious composition as all the inhabitants (except one Muslim household) were Hindus. The population comprised of three main caste-groups: Brahmans, Rajputes and Sudras. Rajputes had the largest population (45 per cent) followed by Sudras (42 per cent) while Brahmans were the lowest in numbers (13 per cent).

Life in there, like in other villages in Himachal Pradesh, have changed dramatically. Since the creation of the state of Himachal Pradesh in mid 1960s by bringing together mountainous areas from north of Punjab state and centrally administered areas of Himachal Pradesh, many progressive steps were taken by the state government to gear up the process of social and economic development. Opening of new schools, hospitals, health centres, maternal and child health centre, drinking water supply and encouragement to grow fruits and vegetables were some notable progressive processes underway (see Singh, 1990).

Impact of these activities was visible at the time of the survey. All the school-age children (5 years and over) and born after 1975 were enrolled in schools and had either completed primary education or were in the school. There was also increasing faith in modern medicine among people especially women. Increasing number of women were visiting various health facilities to seek treatment for themselves and their children. As a result, mortality especially, infant and child mortality was falling. Estimated infant mortality rate of 82 per 1000 live births was considerably lower than the national average for India (110 per 1000 live births) in 1983 (Singh, 1990).

Economic situation was also improving as a result of a move from subsistence agriculture to horticulture and vegetable farming. Economic prosperity was visible from the possessions of people. Television, bio-gas [3] and basic furniture which were rarely present in an average Indian rural household, were widely owned by these villagers. Furthermore, small and single story houses were being replaced by much larger double storied houses. Villagers reported that all these signs of prosperity were of a recent origin and emerged after 1970s.

[1] This assumes that all births take place within marital unions except for the women who conceived before getting the divorce.

[2] The lower fertility of divorced women compared with women of the same age who had never divorced was documented by McDonald and Sontosudarmo (1976: 38) in Yogyakarta.

[3] Bio-gas is generated from cattle-dung and used as cooking fuel.
Among social conditions, literacy, education and changing role of women were most important. Expansion of education came with the opening of new schools while the need to educate sons for the first time arose from preparing them for urban jobs, education of daughters sprang from a demand for educated daughters-in-law created by education of male children. These early impetuses for the emergence of education were coupled with people's desire for status improvement. One of the ways to improve one's social status was to extend network of relations with educated and wealthy families and the best path to achieve this goal was to educate children and to arrange their marriage with educated spouse.

Education also brought changes in the role and activities of women, particularly of daughters-in-law whose main activities in the past, some 20 years ago, were to work in the fields, fetch fire-wood and take cattle for grazing; but now they also slot in an additional responsibility to help their children with school work, take them to the health centre for treatment and clean them. These new activities have made the whole family a much closely knit and egalitarian unit (Singh, 1990).

The data

Data were collected by employing a quasi-anthropological approach in the tradition of micro-demography (à la Caldwell). This approach complements the large scale survey method to understand the nature of a phenomenon at the micro level. Data collection process consisted of 'village census', 'in-depth interviews with ever-married women' and 'informal discussions and follow-up' observations. After the village census, in all, 340 ever-married women were identified and 338 of them were asked a range of questions of their marriage histories. Two of the women were too old and unable to respond to our questions.

Marriage in Himachali villages was considered a ritualistic celebration with the use of Vedic mantras (hymns from the ancient Hindu religious writings) by the family priest. The first marriage of a person was performed in this manner. The second and subsequent marriages were informal and did not involve any consideration of ritualistic celebration and religious merit. My key informants, who provided insights towards understanding the cultural norms and customs related to marriage and its forms, also told that not only was the divorce and separation an usual occurrence but it was also acceptable for divorcees and widowed to remarry. I was warned that some of the respondents may report being married only once as they may perceive my question on 'number of times have they been married' as if I was asking about 'the marriage' that took place with ritualistic celebration. This was taken into consideration and question on number of marriages of a woman was rephrased.

While the questions on age at the time of first and subsequent marriages, dates of these events and marital status were asked in a structural questionnaire, further probing and open ended unstructured dialogues were used in an informal manner so that an accurate information was obtained. Unstructured questions and recording of observations continued throughout the period of the fieldwork. Residence in the villages and household visits at a number of social occasions proved useful in the collection of data. All these and help from 'key informants' enhanced my knowledge about the village community, their life style, customs and practices. This also helped in re-phrasing questions on 'divorce and separation' and subsequent generation of more plausible information. Here is an example of the way rephrasing enabled to obtain reliable data:

Original question: How many times have you been married altogether?
Answer: 'One'.
Probe and re-phrasing of the above question: 'The initial marriage is a traditional marriage performed by the priest with Vedic mantras while the subsequent marriage is called a reet. Is this your traditional marriage or reet marriage?'
Answer: My traditional marriage did not last long. This is my reet marriage.
Question: So, how many times have you been married altogether?
Answer: 'Two'.

Method of analysis

Although, a sample of 338 women was a small sample by demographic standards and results obtained from an analysis of such a sample could be somewhat misleading, it nonetheless provided some opportunity to document a pattern in divorce in Indian population that was otherwise almost unknown. Given the small sample size, analysis was restricted to calculation of means for various marriage cohorts of women and cross tabulations of ever divorced women by various independent variables.
Analysis of variance was also applied to obtain F ratios and to test the significance of relationship between divorce and independent variables.

**What is divorce?**

Divorce, defined as the lawful dissolution of jural ties established at marriage, may occur relatively infrequently, even though separation and other breaches in conjugal relations occur relatively frequently. In western societies, divorce is a legal phenomenon that results from a lengthy separation of spouses. Meanwhile in India, where marriages are ritualistic celebrations that require no legal formalities, divorce is loosely defined. A divorce in Indian context does not necessarily be a legal divorce. It can be permanent separation and can be obtained through village panchayat (informal judicial system that sorts most village matters without the interference of structured judiciary).

**Socio-economic correlates of divorce**

Gluckman (1950) mentioned that the stability of jural relations established by marriage is correlated with the presence of patrilineage. He argued that where the principle of father-right prevailed, as among the Zulu, there was a complete and final transfer of women into their husband's lineage (from which their children obtained their legal rights); he suggested that this fact accounted for the virtual absence of divorce in such societies. Since Gluckman's initial reflections, there has been many studies that have documented association between divorce and other variables. Some of the variables that are closely associated with divorce are age at marriage, education level of women, children born before marriage, ethnic background, and women's work participation rate.

An inverse relationship between age at marriage and marital disruption has been documented in a range of studies (Booth and Edwards, 1985; Hull, 1988; Kiernan, 1986; Martin and Bumpass, 1989; Moore and Waite, 1981; Teachman, 1986). The most notable explanation for this relationship is the maturity and competence for marital roles. In addition to this, Hull (1988) argued that the relatively high divorce levels in Indonesia were largely accounted for low age at marriage that provided very little opportunity for prospective couples to communicate with each other before their marriage and play a role in the decision of their marriage.

A negative association has also been identified between education level of women and likelihood of divorce. Women with lower education level are found to have a higher risk of divorce than their counterparts who have relatively higher education (Houseknecht and Spanier, 1980; Martin and Bumpass, 1989).

Children born before marriage also influences the probability of divorce among women. Women who had become mothers before their marriage tend to have a less stable marriage (Martin and Bumpass, 1989). The probability of divorce gets even higher when the husband of the woman is not the father of the child that was born before marriage (Furstenberg, 1976; Teachman, 1983, 1986). This is largely because a husband does not want to shoulder the responsibility for someone else's child.

Demographers have also identified the relationship between ethnicity and marital dissolution. It has been argued that some ethnic groups embody the characteristics that enhance the probability of divorce while others reduce the occurrence of divorce. For example, American blacks (usually known as African Americans) have higher divorce rates than American white population (Martin and Bumpass, 1889; Wilson and Neckerman, 1985). While the variations in the probability of divorce among various populations may not be the outcome of community per se rather different conditions that are unique to a community and that may influence the stability of marriage.

Women's work participation level also explains variations in the level of divorce. It has been widely reported that higher level of women's work participation leads to higher levels of divorce. This was supported by Lee (1980) who found an increase in divorce rate in Japan being associated with the increased work participation rate for women. Cherlin (1981) argued that this may not be the cause for divorce but what it may do is to make easier for women to divorce if they are working in gainful employment.

**Divorce in India**

Most societies in India, being patrilineal societies, offer little possibility of divorce. A woman, once married, moves to her husband's house and submerges herself into her husband's family. Evidence from the census data suggests a very low incidence of divorce in India's population (Table 1). Throughout the census years since 1951 the proportion of divorced women in India's population has remained less than one per cent.
However, the evidence drawn from some localised anthropological studies shows divorce to be a normal routine of life and indicates its considerable prevalence in some sections of the population (see Berreman, 1972: 161; Gross, 1982: 77-84; Parmar, 1975: 66-67; Singh, 1961: 27). Why did these studies report a considerable level of divorce in some villages and why did the census result suggest such a low incidence? These questions are perhaps answered by a short time lag between divorce and remarriage. In other words, most women whose marriages ended with a divorced were remarried immediately after divorce. Data in Table 1 reveals that even in Hisachali villages where more than 17 per cent women were divorced at least once, the percentage of divorced in the total population was less than one per cent.

Table 1: Percentage of divorced women among all women at the time of census or survey in rural areas of India, Himachal Pradesh, and study village cluster.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date of Census/Survey</th>
<th>India</th>
<th>Himachal Pradesh</th>
<th>Study Villages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Divorce in Himachali villages

In all, out of 338 women, 58 have been divorced at least once. This accounts for about 17 per cent of all married women. Although, this level is considerably lower than the levels experienced in the west, data computed according to marriage cohorts reveals that the incidence of divorce in Hisachali villages was comparable at least until 1960 (see Table 2). There is a clear evidence that divorce in Hisachali villages was considerably high and started decreasing only after 1960. While about 30 per cent of the women married during the period 1951-1960 were divorced at least once, only 13 per cent women married during the period 1971-1980 and a mere three per cent of those who were married during the period 1981-1988 were divorced at least once by the year 1988.

Table 2: Percentage of ever-divorced among ever-married women and mean age at marriage according to their marriage cohort, Himachali villages, 1988.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year of Marriage</th>
<th>Percentage Divorced</th>
<th>Mean Age at Marriage</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1950 and Before</td>
<td>26.4</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951-1960</td>
<td>29.8</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961-1970</td>
<td>14.1</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971-1980</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>16.9</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981-1988</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Ever-Divorced</td>
<td>17.2</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>338</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Above evidence about a decrease in the incidence of divorce in Hisachali villages raised a question about the truncation effect. It is possible that some women whose marriages were arranged during the period 1971-1980 and 1981-1988 might seek divorce in the future and thus, this may increase the percentage of divorced among these two cohorts of women. The likelihood of this possibility is, however, difficult to test as the sample is too small to administer a likelihood test. It is, however, possible to paint a picture in this regard by looking into the mean age at marriage and mean age at divorce (first divorce) of women. Data in Table 3 reveal that mean age at marriage for ever-divorced women was considerably lower than the mean age at marriage for all women. Clearly, those women whose marriages ended in a divorced were married much younger than their counterparts whose marriages survived (see also Table 2). Furthermore, these tables also reveal that not only was mean age at marriage for ever-divorced women lower than for women who had never-divorced but the mean age at divorce, for ever-divorced women, was also considerably lower than the mean age at marriage for never-divorced women. This finding suggest that divorce was occurring due to the very young age at marriage of girls.

Association of divorce with various socio-economic variables was investigated in order to seek answer to the question that what explains divorce in Hisachali villages. Association of divorce with age at marriage, educational levels of women and ethnicity were discovered but variables

[5] In Hisachali villages a girl moves to her in-laws' house immediately after marriage. It is unlike the situation in some other parts in north India where a girl stays at her parent's house after marriage until a gauna ceremony which sometimes can be performed after two to three years of marriage. She moves to her in-laws' house after the gauna has taken place.
such as women's work participation and children before marriage could not be included in the analysis because the study area was exclusively rural; and not only was there hardly any woman employed outside agriculture and horticulture but there was also complete absence of premarital conception and motherhood at the time of survey. There were, however, two important variables that could have influenced the marital stability in the study area. These variables were husband's educational level, and differences in the age of spouses. These variables seemed important because in the past the study area was characterised by large differences in the age of marrying couples and uneducated women were predominantly married to uneducated husbands (Singh, 1990).

Table 3: Mean age at marriage and divorce for ever-divorced women according to their marriage cohort, Himachali villages, 1988

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year of marriage</th>
<th>Mean age at marriage for ever divorced</th>
<th>Mean age at divorce</th>
<th>Total divorced</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1950 and before</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951-1960</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>10.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961-1970</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>16.8</td>
<td>11.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971-1980</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>18.1</td>
<td>12.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981-1988</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>19.3</td>
<td>13.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Ever-Divorced Women</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>16.8</td>
<td>11.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

F ratios: *Significant at 0.01 level.
#Significant at 0.05 level.

Results in Table 4 provide the association of divorce with a range of independent variables namely: age at marriage of women, level of education of women, age differences of spouses, level of education of spouse and caste. While age at marriage and age differences of spouses show strong relationship with divorce (significant at 0.01 level), other variables appear less significant.

Women married youngest were most vulnerable to get a divorce. As shown in the above table, women who were married before 13 years of age were almost five times more likely to get a divorce than the women whose marriage took place between 13 and 15 years of age. As a whole, 58.3 per cent of the total women were divorced among those whose marriages took place before they reached their 13th birthday. This compares with the 12.5 per cent of the women being divorced among those whose marriage took place at 13-15 years of age.

Table 4: Percentage of women who have ever been divorced according to some characteristics, Himachali villages, 1988

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Number of women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age at marriage</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;13</td>
<td>58.3*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13-15</td>
<td>12.5*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;15</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No education</td>
<td>19.2#</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Up to 5 years</td>
<td>16.9#</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 5 years</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of education of spouse</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No education</td>
<td>28.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Up to 5 years</td>
<td>29.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 5 years</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caste</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brahman</td>
<td>18.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rajpute</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scheduled Castes</td>
<td>21.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age difference of spouse</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt; 5 Years</td>
<td>8.5*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-10 Years</td>
<td>17.1*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;10 Years</td>
<td>59.6*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

F ratios: *Significant at 0.01 level.
#Significant at 0.05 level.

Source: As for Table 2.

Results in Table 4 provide the association of divorce with a range of independent variables namely: age at marriage of women, level of education of women, age differences of spouses, level of education of spouse and caste. While age at marriage and age differences of spouses show strong relationship with divorce (significant at 0.01 level), other variables appear less significant.

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Education level of women was also found related with the marital status but the relationship was nowhere as significant as the age at marriage. While about 19.2 per cent of women were divorced among uneducated women, the percentage of divorced was slightly lower (16.9%) among those who had at least five years of education. Interestingly, women who had more than five years of education were ever divorced.

Relationship between divorce and husband's education was explored. But, the results are inconclusive as the proportion of divorce was almost equal among women whose spouses had no education or more than five years of education. There is, however, an interesting point that there was no woman whose spouse had more than five years of education who had ever been divorced.

Ethnicity as measured in terms of the castes (Brahman, Rajpute, Scheduled Castes) of the women also revealed a significant relationship with marital stability. Rajpute women had the lower probability of divorce than Brahman and Scheduled Caste women. These differences, however, are very small and insignificant to warrant any special explanation.
is, perhaps an element of small number of cases among Brahmans that might have also influenced the results.

Age differences of spouses was found to be significantly related with the probability of divorce. Age difference in this paper refers to unidirectional difference. This means husband’s are older that their wives. In no instance was a wife older than her husband. A strong positive correlation was found between age difference of spouse and divorce. Women who were younger than their husband’s by at least ten years were at least seven times more likely to be divorced than the women who were younger to their husband’s by less than five years. What seems to be operational here is the compatibility and maturity between spouses. Marriages of young girls to older men resulted in physical incompatibility and forced sexual intercourse that frightened the young bride and motivated her to escape from her husband’s house and return to her parent’s house.

The relationship between marriage and a range of independent variables is clear from the above description. What has emerged is that age at marriage and age difference of spouses are two most important variables related to divorce in Himachali villages. Other variables such as level of education of women, level of education of spouse and caste do show some relationship but they have an insignificant power to influence divorce. What seems more important in this regard is the point that less than five years of education does not make much difference to divorce. However, more than five years of education does play a role. Furthermore, ethnicity as a predictor seems to be less important largely due to the universality of low age at marriage in the past.

**Discussion**

In this paper there are two main findings: First, marital stability in Himachal Pradesh had increased over the years against the general instability in western marriages; and, second, the pathway for the relationship between marital stability and various socio-economic variables seems much different in the study area than in the west.

What has happened in Himachali villages in the recent past is the increasing emphasis on education including female education an increase in the age at marriage of women and narrowing of the age difference between spouses (see Singh, 1996). These changes have impinged on the marital stability and made marriages to last longer than ever before.

Mechanism of relationship between divorce and age at marriage different in Himachal Pradesh than in the western countries. Probability of divorce for women marrying at a young age in the indicates immaturity in the marital relationship and incompetence marital roles (Booth and Edwards, 1985). Young partners are infatuated with their desire for sex and romance. Once the romantic diminishes from the relationship and when they fail to shoulder responsibility of the family their marriage crumbles.

In Himachali villages the low age at marriage of women causes large difference between spouses. These differences are so large that average age at marriage for girls (who divorces) is less than 13 y while the average age at marriage for their spouses is more than 24 y (Singh, 1990). Physical immaturity among girls who are forced cohabitation by their spouse leads the dissolution of marriage.

**Conclusion**

Despite the problems in the collection of data for ever-divorced wo and the problem of the small sample of women, this paper has highl the incidence of divorce in Himachali villages and illuminated s underlying factors. Clearly, the incidence of divorce until 1960s comparable in Himachali villages with the Western societies that known for high levels of divorce. After the 1970, there has been decline in the incidence of divorce.

Early marriages of girls causing large differences in ages of spouses subsequent sexual maladjustment emerged as one of the leading fa in the considerable level of divorce in the study area. Once the age for girls increased and the age gap between spouses dece sexual maladjustment almost disappeared, subsequently reducin extent of divorce.

Educational achievements of women and their husbands’ were nega related with the incidence of divorce and thus contradicted the we school of thoughts that suggests a higher incidence of divorce with h level of education (Martin and Bumpass, 1989). What had happen Himachali villages was that the educational expansion had led t increase in age at marriage and more importantly undermined necessity to marry off girls at an early age. Education had also crea sense of status consciousness among parents who now consider di as a social problem and a sign of primitive marital practice (Singh, 19!
Ethnicity of women also appeared with divorce. While a particular caste did not influence the occurrence of divorce, the age at marriage and the level of educational achievement varied according to the caste as people belonging to various caste groups had different behavioural patterns.

What can be said in the nutshell is that divorce was considered a normal part of life cycle and an inevitable outcome of early marriages. In Himachali villages, its level remained comparable with the western levels until the age at marriage for women passed well above the age of puberty (that is 14 years of age), expansion of education and reduced difference in the age of spouses were also important catalysts in achieving the low divorce level.

Finally, while the evidence is there for the considerable incidence of divorce and its decreasing levels over the years in Himachali villages, a clearer conclusive picture of the Indian population in this regard requires more village studies from other parts of the country and also an analysis of large demographic surveys. There is clearly a need for data on the incidence of divorce in India in order to fully understand this neglected marital aspect of Indian population.

Acknowledgement

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