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Chapter 6

‘I am different from my mother’
Menarche and marriage in daughter’s generation

6.1 Introduction

This chapter is the first one based on qualitative data collected through in-depth interviews of younger and older women in Bangalore. As has been discussed in chapter 2 (see section 2.3), the present research makes a distinction between the lived reproductive life course and the perceived reproductive life course. While chapters 4 and 5 examine the lived life course of women across cohorts, Chapters 6, 7, 8 and 9 focus on the perceived life course. The lived course across different cohorts is based on the secondary data analysis of the survey data, while the perceived life course is derived from in-depth interviews of women across cohorts. In Chapters 4 and 5 examine the first birth and union formation behaviour and studied how educational attainment of women influences the timing of these events across older and younger generations in Karnataka and the Netherlands. These chapters also lay emphasis on the universal and the context specific aspects of educational attainment and the timing of first birth and first union formation across generations as well as across cultures. Chapters 6, 7, 8 and 9 focus not only on the perceived reproductive life course through the events of menarche, marriage and the birth of the first child, but also distinguish the similarities and differences across generations. In the context of Karnataka, the influence of women’s higher educational attainment on their perceived life course explains generational change across both mothers and daughters. However in the case of the Netherlands only the daughter’s generation is studied. This enables us to conclude on the context specificity of generational change as well as universality observed cross-culturally by women’s higher educational attainment. Autonomy and its types as defined by Jejeebhoy (1995) have also been compared cross-culturally amongst the younger generation in Bangalore and the Dutch younger generation in Groningen. A brief description of the respondents is provided in chapter 3 (see section 3.4.6).

In the present chapter we shall elaborate on the two events of menarche and marriage amongst the younger generation of respondents in our study in Bangalore. The chapter is divided into two main sections. Each of these sections deals with a particular event in a Bangalore woman’s reproductive life course. Section 6.2 discusses the event of menarche defined as the beginning of the reproductive life course. The event of marriage is discussed in the section 6.3. Each of these sections is divided further into different subsections. Change across generations as perceived by the respondents themselves is presented in Section 6.4.

6.1 Menarche: beginning of the reproductive life course

The onset of the first menstrual cycle is the sign that the girl has entered puberty. The first menstruation is known as menarche. Menarche also marks the beginning of the fertile years in a woman’s life signifying her reproductive potential as she becomes biologically capable of bearing children. The event is often preceded by signs such as enlargement of the breasts and the uterus and the growth of pubic hair. Hence it is related with rapid physical growth and hormonal changes which influence the behaviour pattern of pubescent girls. Menarche usually occurs between ages 11 and 13 but it may begin sooner and in others it
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may be delayed, but very rarely beyond 16 years of age. The onset of menarche varies with the activity level of the girls and the nutritional status of girls (Bosch 2005, Riley et al. 2001).

In the cultural context of India, attainment of menarche by girls is considered a biological indicator that the girl is ready for the commencement of sexual relations. This is evident from the traditional practice of ‘Gauna’ that was commonly followed in the olden days. In this system, girls used to be married off at an early age but continued staying in the parental home without the consummation of marriage. However, when a girl attained menarche, the ceremony of Gauna would be performed and then the girl went to live at her husband’s house where she would begin her married life. The event of menarche is also a social indicator signifying the eligibility of the girl for marriage and the initiation of the search for a suitable marriage partner (Caldwell et al. 1983). Research findings by Hutter (1998) Hutter and Ramesh (2003) and Padmadas et al. (1999) illustrate that the two events of menarche and marriage follow each other very closely in the rural areas.

Though menarche is a purely biological event which is not influenced in any way by a woman’s higher education, this event is studied in the present research for the following reasons. As we are focusing on the reproductive life course of women the event of menarche initiates the beginning of the reproductive life course followed by the events of marriage and birth of the first child. In addition to this, menarche as an event has a social relevance. We attempt to determine the social relevance of such an event across generations of mothers and daughters in Karnataka. This research also pays attention to the ideational changes about menarche.

This section is divided into six subsections. Subsections 6.2.1 to 6.2.4 discusses the perceived timing of menarche, whether any ceremony was held to mark such an event, feelings about menarche before and after attaining it, knowledge about menarche both before and after attaining menarche and the sources of this knowledge. Subsections 6.2.5 to 6.2.7 elaborate on the different aspects of behavioural changes that are expected of girls after they have attained menarche, the perceived role changes as well as the perceived gains of the event of menarche by identifying the advantages and disadvantages that the event has brought about in the lives of the respondents.

6.2.1 Perceived timing of the event

Respondents were asked about their age at menarche and how they regarded their age at first menstruation. They were asked to categorise the timing of the event as early, late or right age, and the reason why they thought it to be so. We observe a clear pattern on the perception of respondents about their age at first menstruation. In this context we wish to distinguish between the perceptions of ‘ideal age’ and ‘right age’. If a woman assesses an event to have occurred at a ‘right age’, it means that she is mentally prepared for the event and that she considers the event to have occurred ‘on time’. We use the term ‘right age’ interchangeably with ‘age on time’. Respondents have widely used the phrase on time in the interviews to indicate events taking place at the right age. On the other hand, ‘ideal age’ refers to the preferred age at which the respondents would have wanted the event to take place.

Those women who attained menarche at ages 10-13 considered it an early age to have their first period, while those respondents who attained menarche at the age of 14 considered it to be ‘on time’. We were also interested in knowing the respondents’ view of the ideal age when girls should have their first period. The ideal age at first menstruation was perceived to be between ages 14 and 16 by the respondents. Interestingly, the ideal age perceived by those respondents whose age at menarche was between 14 and 16
years and who considered it as a right age, was also the same age – a coincidence for only this event and
not other events under study. The reason as to why respondents considered ages between 10 and 13 as an
early age for first menstruation was largely because of the difficulties they faced in coping with the
initiation of menarche at such an early age and due to the physical restrictions that were imposed on them
as soon as they attained menarche. This is illustrated in the following excerpts from interviews:

"I was too young to manage on my own. I did have an elder sister but then certain things I just had to
do myself. Things like washing, keeping oneself clean and all that." (Respondent who had her first
period at the age of 12)

"when I got it there were a lot of restrictions on me like I should sit in one place, I could not play all the
time….these made me feel that I have to be a grown-up girl and it’s too early to behave like a grown-up
girl" (Respondent who had her first periods at the age of 12)

Some respondents also considered their age at menarche to be early due to their ignorance about
menstruation. They also mentioned that they found it difficult to cope with.

"Girls during my time had their first periods when they were 14-15. I was too young to have it when I
was 12 years old. I was totally ignorant about the whole thing as everyone thought that I was too young
to know about it"

"It was difficult in the initial stage because I was studying. So it was difficult to cope with both.
Physically I underwent a lot of changes and in school there were studies. Then I also had to keep track
of the date of my next period"

Difficulty in managing emotions and physical changes that take place during menarche was an unpleasant
experience for some respondents.

"Age 12 I think was too young an age for me to have my first period. After all it is not only periods that
one has to manage but it is a whole lot of other things like emotions, physical changes etc all beginning
to happen at the same time. It is difficult to manage so many things and especially when everything is
so new. At that young age a person tends to be confused. I also underwent the same problem."

Related to the above response, other respondents too reasoned out why their age at menarche was an early
age:

"I was more of a kid than an adolescent girl"

"At the age of 10, I was just learning how to look after myself and had barely learnt to tie my shoe
laces"

"Suddenly I was a grown-up kid in the eyes of others"

"There were physical changes and I was conscious of it like breasts developing and I no longer looked
like a child"

Respondents who had their first period in the age group 14-16 mostly considered it to be a right age. It
was because girls were thought to be more mature and responsible at that age, and they already had prior
knowledge about menstruation. Thus they considered themselves to be mentally prepared.
During ages 14 and 15 most friends in school also attained menarche and thus respondents compared themselves with their friends and perceived their age at menarche to be a right age. The importance of a sense of belonging to the peer group is illustrated in the following:

> 'At that time all my other friends in school already began menstruating and some of my friends had their menstruation when I had mine. So I was well in the group.'

> 'Many of my classmates had their period when they were in the 7th or 8th. So it was kind of normal for me for our generation or age group.'

> 'Most of my classmates had it at that time and if I had not had it then I would worry about it.'

Respondents were asked about what they consider as the ideal age of menarche. Most of them considered ages 14 to 16. During these ages girls are in their 8th and 9th standard in school. The reasons why they consider it to be ideal are because by age 14, girls are more mature and responsible and they understand the reason why restrictions are imposed on them after menarche.

> 'The girls in the 6th std are less mature. They are not really free because parents impose restrictions and say “don’t go here, don’t do this, don’t do that”. At that age girls will be wondering about the sudden changes. But if the girl is in her 8th or 9th standard or age 14 or 15 and she has her first periods I think it is good. The girl feels more at ease as she will be knowledgeable about what will happen.'

(Respondent who had her first period at age 11 but considers age 14 or 15 as an ideal age)

Another respondent who also considers the age of 14 as an ideal age stated:

> '14 years is an ideal age as one is more mature and I think that one’s preoccupations are less juvenile then. So a girl tends to accept periods more naturally at the age of 14 than when she is a girl of 12 years'

Another respondent associated the age of 14 as an ideal age and being mature enough to argue about the restrictions that are imposed, not just blindly following them:

> 'According to me the ideal age is when the girl is 14 or 15 years old. The girl is mature enough by that age. At that age she does not blindly follow anything and everything that is told to her. She can argue about which restrictions she wants to follow and those with which she disagrees'

Some respondents considered the age of 14 as an ideal age because they feel that by that age the girl understands her own body and the other physiological changes:

> '14 years is an ideal age as that is the time when I could understand my body and the other physiological changes. It also helps in adjusting to new situations'
6.2.2 Ceremony: initiation to mark the transition

Women were asked whether any ceremony was held to celebrate the event of menarche. However, none of the respondents who were interviewed had any ceremony to celebrate their first menstruation. One respondent explains the reason why ceremonies to celebrate menarche are slowly becoming less common:

“You see in the cities no one has such ceremonies. Perhaps in the villages and small towns people still follow. Don’t you think people will laugh if someone in the city invited people to a ceremony to mark the first time their daughter has her period”

Other reasons cited by respondents for the absence of ceremonies was because of the educational background of their family, their Christian faith, that the ceremony was not common in the respondent’s caste or because some parents were adverse to publicity that these ceremonies brought:

‘Caste plays a big role. In our caste people are educated so my parents knew about it. So I had no ceremony’

‘I guess our family is a bit advanced. No ceremonies were held for my cousins and me’

‘We are Christians so we do not have any ceremony’

‘My father did not like all these ceremonies. He saw it as a type of publicity. Thus my parents decided that they will not have a ceremony for me or later for my sister’

Even though no ceremony was held for any of the 16 respondents to celebrate first menstruation, 2 respondents stated that they received gifts from their grandmother and aunt.

‘No I did not have a ceremony but my grandmother gave me a gift. Everybody was very nice and understanding’

‘I received one gift from my aunt when I got my first period’

6.2.3 Feelings about menarche

In this subsection we shall discuss respondents’ feelings about menarche both before and after they attained menarche. Most of the respondents knew about menarche and the menstrual cycle before they themselves experienced menarche. However, they have different views about it. Most of them who knew about menstruation never thought of it as being ‘ongoing’ and that it ‘comes back every month’. They also mentioned not knowing about the heavy bleeding and only thought of it in terms of ‘spotting’.

‘I never liked it and I used to think that it must be some injury to the body and that is why the bleeding takes place’

‘I had some strange notion that it would be much less. I used to think of it in terms of spotting and not such heavy bleeding that I have every month. I also had no idea that it would last 4 days and that it occurs regularly every month’
Feelings of the respondents about menarche after they reached menarche were more related to the accompanying physical discomforts and pain every month. But in spite of the pain and the discomfort, some women felt a sense of pride in becoming a woman. Some respondents felt very happy about being in the ‘same league as their mother and their grandmother’, while some others felt happy becoming a woman. Other feelings attached to attaining menarche were related to a sense of relief for some.

6.2.4 Knowledge and its sources

In this subsection we focus on the respondents’ knowledge about menstruation both before and after they attained menarche. We also explain the sources of this knowledge, who told them about menstruation in both the phases before and after attaining menarche. We also focus on what was told to women about menarche after reaching the event and how was it communicated to them.

Some of the respondents said that they did not know about menstruation until they themselves began their first menstrual period. While for others they knew about menstruation before they had it. The sources of information varied from school friends, school books and sex education in school. Mothers, grandmothers, elder sister and cousins were the other common sources of information.

In the phase after the respondents had attained menarche their sources of information were their mother, grandmother and other elderly ladies in the family. At this stage it was not only knowledge about menstruation but it was also as regards instructions, restrictions, advice and information that had to be kept in mind during the days of the menstrual cycle as well as generally after the girl has attained her menarche.

Hence based on the responses, knowledge about menstruation is categorised into instructions, restrictions, advice and information. However, sometimes these categories overlap. The categories are as follows:

- instructions as regards the dos and don’ts expected of a menstruating woman,
- restrictions that are forms of limitations imposed on the respondents after attaining menarche
- advices which pertained to explanations and suggestions on aspects of menstruation and the menstrual cycle and
- information which was based more on general aspects of menstruation and which was considered as essential knowledge

The different forms of knowledge can be distinguished into two broad types. The forms of knowledge such as instructions and advice are those that need to be observed only during the days of the menstrual cycle. While the other forms of knowledge such as restrictions and information were applicable and to be observed at all times.

Below are examples of instructions in the form of dos and don’ts expected of a menstruating woman:
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There were also instructions on personal hygiene that should be followed on the menstrual days:

- ‘My mother did not allow me to move freely about the house on the days of my period. We were not supposed to go into the pooja room and on those days we should not do any pooja. We were given normal food but we were made to sit separately from others and not allowed to enter the kitchen’
- ‘I was instructed by my mother not to mix around with guys, to play less and avoid jumping’

The advice given to the respondents was in the form of explanations about menarche:

- ‘My mother told me basically how often it would occur, why it occurs every month. She told me about the cycle, that women become pregnant, and bear children. So she told me that when I have my periods I have to be careful and cautious’

In addition to mothers who explained many of the things, some respondents stated that their aunts explained about the dos and the don’ts to be followed.

- ‘My aunt she explained to me in a very friendly way as to what to do and what not to do. Certain things like how I need to be very careful, what are the things that are not to be done, what are the things not to be eaten during that time’

Restrictions set on the respondents were limitations that were to be always followed both inside and outside the house after girls’ attained menarche and not only on the days of the menstrual cycle.

- ‘I was restricted from going to the movie with friends’

Apart from these there were also restrictions about not mixing around with boys which was a restriction common for all respondents after they reached menarche. Restrictions were described as ‘warning’ and ‘a note of caution’.

- ‘About mixing around with guys my mother just gave me a warning that I should know what I was now. She said that now you have become a woman and you should know your limitations’
- ‘…was a caution note about not to mix around freely with boys’

Knowledge in the form of information was about general things passed on from mothers to their daughters which mostly consisted of essential knowledge about menstruation and the menstrual cycle. Some of this essential knowledge pertained to explanations about the menstrual cycle, curiosity surrounding the event and the biological changes that come about with the event.
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'My mother told me about general things because she did not want me to be stressed about them’

'My mother explained to me the biological changes and also explained that it was part of growing up’

Most of the times what we observe from the responses is that the knowledge imparted by mothers is not elaborated in greater detail. As one of the respondent pointed out:

'I was instructed by my mother not to play with boys. The explanation for it was not given to me for a long time until I reached the 9th or the 10th std and then I read about it in my biology book. I also discussed the same with my friends in school and got to know why we had been restricted from playing and mixing around with guys’

Another respondent said that she was not told the ‘whole story’ by her mother but just given a warning to not mix around with guys after she attained menarche.

'About mixing with guys my mother just gave me a warning....but the whole story was not told although she warned me about this’

Some respondents have mentioned that it was not fully explained why they were restricted from entering the pooja room and this would make them feel bad. A respondent described her feelings and compared herself to boys:

'I used to feel bad about not being allowed to enter the pooja room on the days I have my period. I used to wonder about why it should be so and would also compare myself to the guys. I used to think that guys had an easy life whereas girls had to bother about the date when the period would come and the date when it would be over’

Another respondent mentioned that soon after she attained menarche she was not allowed to be close to her father which used to bother her considerably. She stated that she learnt the reason why by observing others around her:

'I was not even allowed to be physically close to my dad which used to bother me very much. But gradually within a short time of about 6 months I got used to it. I saw this type of behaviour around me and gradually realised that it is not only me and that everybody is subjected to more or less the same treatment’

While another respondent stated that she was curious to know many things with regard to menarche which was not explained to her by her mother. So she looked it up herself in the books that were at her home. She said:

'I thought that the physical changes that came about after I attained menarche were a part of my growing up. If there were any questions I would go to the books that were lying around in the house. My mother had pointed both me and my brother in the direction of books which were very nice because it saved her the embarrassment of answering certain things but would also give us more knowledge’
6.2.5 Expected behavioural change

The different categories of knowledge seem directly or indirectly to influence behavioural changes that are expected of the respondents after they attained menarche. In the theoretical framework expected behavioural change is elaborated in the form of norms that are the rules and expectations by which a society guides the behaviour of its members. Norms are age-graded as well as status-based (Settersten and Mayer 1997, Settersten 2003). Age-graded norms refer to how women of particular ages should behave whereas the status-based norms refer to how a menstruating girl should behave in comparison to a non-menstruating girl. A menstruating girl might be required to follow certain restrictions like not moving around the house or not entering the kitchen during the days of her menstruation. But these norms are not applicable to girls who have not yet attained menarche. Thus norms are both proscriptive i.e. ‘which behaviour is unacceptable’ and prescriptive i.e. ‘which behaviour is acceptable’ (Settersten and Mayer 1997, Hagestad 1990).

The expected behavioural changes derived mostly from restrictions that were imposed on the respondents. The restrictions thus become the normative behaviour which the respondents are expected to display after they have attained menarche. The restrictions have already been mentioned in the previous subsection, for example not entering the pooja room, not being allowed to pray or to visit the temple. These were related to restrictions as regards purity and pollution:

‘We were not allowed to do pooja for 5 days. After the 5 days we have to wash our hair and cleanse ourselves and then do pooja’

Other forms of restrictions were about going out and returning back home before it is dark, not playing and talking with boys.

‘If I did not come back home by 6 in the evening my mother or grandmother would be standing outside the house as they would get worried. Then they would ask me why was I late, I was also not allowed to move around freely or talk to boys’

One respondent also mentions that she was expected to be more feminine in the way she conducted herself:

‘I was no longer allowed to jump or play much! I was asked to be more feminine in my ways’

For some respondents, not being allowed to go out as often as they would have liked to, had an affect on their free time activities.

‘I was never allowed to go anywhere after dark. But with my interest in star-gazing this was a severe problem. So then I had to go out star-gazing with my brother and after five minutes he would drag me back home’

‘The only restriction was that I could not go for a swim’

The expected behavioural change was also brought about by the physical changes accompanying menarche. The physical changes as mentioned by the respondents were development of breasts, facial and
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armpit hair. All this made the respondents conscious of their looks and influenced their way of dressing. Respondents mention discarding clothes that were tight.

‘There were physical changes like breasts forming and facial hair. I used to feel conscious a lot’

‘It was a bit of an embarrassment. In fact I used to refuse some dresses if they were tight because I used to feel conscious wearing them. I used to feel quite odd’

It is also interesting to hear from the respondents about how they coped with the physical changes that came about. Some of the respondents felt very conscious about themselves, while some developed a kind of shyness and attempted to hide the physical developments.

‘It was difficult coping with the physical changes. Most of the time I was conscious that nothing should show. But most of the time I was trying to hide. The school uniform was nice because it did not show anything’

‘I developed a haunch back as I was always trying to hide my breasts whenever I wore a sports t-shirt every Friday’

However, none of the respondents mentioned having any restrictions on the type of dress to be worn. Except one respondent who stated that she was not allowed to wear trousers as her parents did not like it.

‘No special type of dress was to be worn after I had my period’

‘There was no restriction on any particular type of dress to be worn after we matured. We had that liberty in the house’

‘My parents didn’t like me wearing trousers. So that was the only restriction. I used to wear frocks, midis and skirts’

The general restriction about clothes as mentioned by the respondents was that they should not wear revealing, tight-fitting and body-hugging clothes.

‘We always had certain restrictions on wearing revealing clothes, tight dresses and body-hugging ones. We could wear jeans, tops, blouses and on special occasions we could wear a half-saree’

On the one hand, the physical changes caused bodily discomfort while on the other hand women were extra cautious and careful on the days they had their period. One respondent summarised her views in the following way:

‘I used to have pain in my legs and stomach. Because of all this discomfort I never used to run around and play. I was also conscious of staining my dress when I had my period’

6.2.6 Perceived role change

The perceived role changes can be categorised into three types. It is the respondents’ perceived role change for herself, perceived role change for her parents and perceived role change for others.
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Role change perceived by respondent

All respondents who were interviewed mentioned that their role indeed had changed after attaining menarche. Respondents mentioned that they became shy and conscious and some even mentioned withdrawing and becoming very quiet. At this stage friends usually began to take precedence:

‘I had become a very shy person, a very quiet person and also very conscious. I was more attached to my friends and any amount of time spent with my friends would be restricted’

Some respondents mentioned that they began thinking of themselves as ‘female and started having thoughts of marriage, becoming a mother, or even being called the lady of the house’.

‘I particularly began thinking of myself as a female. Before I had never thought of marriage and nor anything about my future. After I had my period I began thinking that eventually I would be married one day and would have a house and be the lady of the house. All female thoughts’.

‘I would think of marriage often. I think all girls have these thoughts at that age.’

One respondent spoke of her perceived role change as being aware of herself and her power as a woman to attract men:

‘I became aware of my power as a woman, my power of being able to attract the opposite sex and the hormonal changes along with the physical changes that I had. It was a wild time for me’.

Some respondents mentioned of finding it difficult to cope with the physical changes as well as the accompanying emotional changes. With the event of menarche respondents considered themselves as becoming both mentally and physically mature and experienced crushes and infatuation with guys.

‘I felt shy looking at guys and even talking to them. I was in a co-education school. This period of becoming mentally and physically mature also had its own share of crushes and infatuations’

‘I am sure I could have avoided a couple of crushes. I should say that I was having a serious relationship with my boyfriend at that time. I mean I could have essentially avoided that. At that time I did not know and thought that the whole world was at my feet. Yes, things like that certainly affected me after I began menstruating’

Perceived role change for her family

All respondents mentioned of experiencing role change in their family after they attained menarche. In other words, the onset of menarche meant that there was a change in their role as seen by their family members. For most respondents the role change that they experienced was a change from girlhood to adulthood. One respondent talks of her role change for her family as a changeover from girlhood to womanhood. Adulthood, for these respondents meant taking up responsibilities in the house, exhibiting matured behaviour and keeping distance from male cousins. In the case of the respondent who considered her role change in the family as stepping into womanhood after she attained menarche it was largely to do with taking on womanly duties like cooking, learning to do the pooja and helping mother in the kitchen.
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Another respondent also said that her role change into womanhood was from the emotional point of view, as her family members considered her eligible for marriage.

Most of the respondents attributed adulthood to taking up responsibilities in the house and helping mother when guests come to the house. However for none of the respondents whom we interviewed were responsibilities burdened on them. Respondents mentioned being able to choose to take up responsibilities in the household whenever they liked. But for most of them the stage of sharing responsibilities in the house and helping mother coincided with the stage after they reached menarche. Some of the responses that illustrate the above are summarised as follows:

- ‘I considered myself an adult after my first period. I myself began to take responsibilities in the house when needed like when we have guests at home I would help my mother with some household work’
- ‘I was more of an adult at the age of 12 because I had reached menarche probably I was required to do a lot of things about the house like housework, general running of the house, filling in gaps when things were not running smoothly for some reason’
- ‘In terms of responsibilities bestowed on me it was not until I was old enough in my life or till I was married. Till then there was practically no responsibilities on me. The only responsibilities that I ever took were those on my own initiative’

At this stage what is also observed is the shift into gendered roles between brothers and sisters which in most of the cases is not overtly practised. One respondent mentioned about this.

- ‘The role change was not so implicit. I have an elder brother and passively it so happened that more responsibilities were expected of him outside the house while more responsibilities were expected of me inside the house. When we had exams and our mother was ill, it was me who was expected to do the housework suggesting that whatever else I do, I would have to keep the house running whether I have exams or not’

One respondent perceived of her role change for her family as a transition to womanhood:

- ‘I would say that I moved into womanhood and not adulthood. When I say womanhood I see it as being divided into certain stages. So moving from stage to the other i.e. me beginning with my period is a part of womanhood’

The same respondent discussed about the role changes that she experienced at home. She clearly stated that her family members considered her a ‘grown-up girl, a mature girl’:

- ‘All the family members used to say yes she is a grown-up, mature girl. I used to hear them say ‘you are the elder one in the family, already mature and you don’t know how to cook, you help me in doing this work’

Another respondent who saw her role change from girlhood to womanhood in emotional terms pointed out that:
However from the above response we also get to know that the role transition was not a sudden transition but came about slowly as is indicated by the respondent’s words, that it ‘sunk in slowly’.

The other respondents did not perceive any role change in their family after they attained menarche. Most of these respondents thought that all girls have a similar type of role change as they themselves have in their own family. But some respondents did think that it is dependent to a large extent on the religion that the families follow as well as the tradition in the family and the girl’s upbringing.

**Perceived role change for others**

The physical changes that came about with the onset of menarche made the respondents feel very shy and conscious not only of themselves but also in the presence of boys.

‘I felt shy looking at guys and even talking to them’

The stage after attaining menarche was mentioned as ‘growing up years’ by the respondents. Some respondents felt that in those growing up years they were the topic of discussion amongst boys.

‘There were many cases of me and my friends hearing comments from guys and also they would sometimes accidentally bump into us and touch us’

‘In our time we used to date a lot. Yes, guys did pass comments and tried to physically touch us. Some girls did have some very bad experiences’

One of the respondents also mentioned the trend of going out on dates:

‘I had a very big crush then and I really liked this guy. We used to date a lot. At that time everything seemed so rosy I was even thinking of getting married to the guy. But it was just a fling in those teenage years. Some girls did have some bad experiences going out on a date or falling in love’

Another respondent recounted the commotion whenever she cycled to school because of guys passing lewd remarks at her.

‘I used to cycle to school and guys used to pass remarks about me. Then my elder brother would cycle along with me. Later on my friends joined me and we cycled to school together’

### 6.2.7 Perceived gains of the event

In this subsection we intend to examine the question whether attaining menarche has brought about any gains in the form of advantages and disadvantages for the respondents. Some of these were perceived as
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gains during the days of the menstrual cycle while other advantages applied to the girl for the times to come after she reached menarche.

**Advantages**

Most of the respondents did not identify any advantage behind attaining menarche and they associated menarche more with the disadvantages that have come about. However some respondents have mentioned advantages such as having ample amount of rest during the days when they were menstruating, having less work at home and being given good food.

| ‘No advantages. I associate attaining menarche with disadvantages only’ |
| ‘I had a lot of rest, good food, not much work at home as mother knew that I was having my period’ |

Some respondents found the discussion with their mother and friends about periods as advantageous:

| ‘I became much more free in my interaction with my mother. I could discuss many things with her’ |
| ‘At school with friends we used to discuss about the dates of our periods and our experiences with menstruation. It was nice to share about it in the group of friends’ |

One respondent said that she got to know about the reproductive system and sexual development:

| ‘I got to know how a woman gets pregnant, about sexual development and about the reproductive system of a woman. I now have more knowledge about such matters and I knew why we had to go through the period for 5 days’ |

**Disadvantages**

The disadvantages that the respondents experienced during menstruation in comparison to the period when she had not begun menstruating was largely the physical discomfort accompanied by the stomach pain and cramps and loss of freedom.

| ‘I used to get pain in my legs and sometimes it was during the exams. I regard it as a disadvantage as I would not be able to study because of the severe pain’. |
| ‘It is tiredness and the uncomfortable feeling’. |
| ‘It is the physical discomfort. Planning everything that you do around that date, that is the disadvantage. I felt it as a burden that every month I had to plan it and make sure that I had the pads and all that. There was a loss of freedom in some sense that can be considered a disadvantage’. |

The next event in the reproductive life course of women that we shall focus on is the event of marriage.
Chapter 6: Menarche and Marriage in Daughter’s Generation

6.3 Marriage: union formation behaviour

Marriage is an event that often brings about a marked change in the lives of most women. Marriage in all cases brings about a change in place of residence when a woman leaves the parental home to begin residing with the husband and in-laws. The marital status confers on women the position of a wife. Simultaneously she takes on the roles of a daughter-in-law, sister-in-law and a co-sister. Thus marriage brings about a new network of relationship, which is built around the woman in which she often has to adjust and compromise.

6.3.1 Perceived timing of the event

In this subsection we focus on how the respondents assess their age at marriage. They were asked to classify it as early, late or on time. We also asked the respondents why did they thought so and to cite reasons for their assessment. Respondents were also asked to identify the ideal age for girls to marry and the reason why such an age is considered ideal.

The interviewed respondents can be classified according to their age at marriage into three categories respectively. The first category consists of those women who married at ages 24, 25 and 26. These respondents considered their age at marriage to be the right age and that it was the ideal age for girls to marry. Respondents regard ages 24 to 26 as the right age specially because they would have completed their studies and worked for sometime. These women consider their short working career as enabling them to be financially and individually independent:

‘It was an appropriate age on time because by that time I had finished my education and also had a job. So I was working which gave me financial independence. I was also independent and I attained a certain level of maturity before I got married’ (Respondent married at the age of 25)

Results of the secondary data analysis in chapters 4 and 5 have also revealed that across birth cohorts there is a rise in the age at marriage and high educated women delay marriage until ages 24 and 25 after which less delay is observed. The respondent just touched on the topic of maturity. However in some of the later responses we shall observe how women considered themselves to have become physically and emotionally mature by these ages. They consider that maturity before marriage helped them in their marital relationship. Physical maturity can be described as the ability to bear children while emotional maturity can be seen as the ability to make adjustments and compromises:

‘I was mature enough to bear children and looked forward to having a family of my own. So my age was a right age to marry’ (Respondent who married at age 25)

‘I think my age was a right age because at that age one can adjust and compromise much better than when it is too early or too late. When a woman gets married too early then it is easy for a man to dominate her and when she marries at the age of 28 or 30 then she is too fixed in her ways which makes adjustments and compromises difficult’ (respondent who married at age 24)

Another respondent suggested the opposite i.e. not being completely mentally matured at 24 or 25 enables easier adjustments. According to her, 26 is a late age for girls to marry because they are over-aged:
Further some respondents considered their age at marriage at 24 years to be normative of middle-class families.

‘At the age of 25 when I got married I think I could adapt to any place. But once a girl is over-aged i.e. after the age of 26 it is difficult to go to a new place and adjust to the life of her husband. By that age she has set rules in life and wants everything to be done accordingly. When she is below 25, she can adjust, as she is not completely mature. So I feel that 25 was a right age when I could accept everyone in my life and also adjust to their lifestyle’ (Respondent married at the age of 24)

Those respondents who had a relationship prior to marriage perceived their age at marriage between 24 to 26 years as the right age enabling them security after marriage because of the already secured job situation of both the respondent and her partner.

‘For me personally the age of 24 was the right time. For girls from middle-class families it is the right age to get married. I call this the right age because from that age a girl learns how to cope with things, how to understand and learn to take up responsibilities’ (Respondent married at the age of 24)

The age of 24 was perceived as the right age as some respondents associated it with finishing studies and enjoying life before getting married. The following respondent considered 24 years both as the right age for herself as well as the ideal age for women to get married.

‘Because I had finished my studies, I had lived my life as a student and then I enjoyed my work and then got married. So 24 was an ideal age when all girls should marry. For example my elder sister got married just after she finished her studies. She has general complaints that she did not get to enjoy her life and that she got married early’ (Respondent married at the age of 24)

The second category consists of respondents who married at ages 27, 28, 29 and 30. With this group are respondents who considered their age to be late age for marriage:

‘I had just completed my PhD and we both were going steady for a long time. I consider it as a right age because I was almost stable with a job and my husband was also stable with a good job. This gave us both the security to embark on the path of marriage’ (Respondent who married at 26 years)

‘We knew each other and we both had good jobs. That gave us the security and we thought of marriage. It was the right age for me’ (Respondent who married at age 25)

One respondent considered her age as late age because she had been working for a fairly long time after completing her studies. She also thought that the delay in her marriage also brought about the delay in childbearing.
Another respondent considered the age of 24 as an ideal age for girls to get married. She says:

> ‘Because I started working immediately after my studies so there was this long gap. I was just working and working. I feel that it would have been better if I had married earlier because my responsibilities would also be fewer. Now I am 34 and my oldest child is 5 years old. I feel that my children are still young while I have become old. So I am late’

A second perspective, shared within this category belongs to respondents who viewed their age at marriage as the right age but it is the people around them such as their parents and relatives who consider it to be a late age. Here the society labels the ages after 29 as a late age for girls to get married. According to a respondent who married at the age of 29:

> ‘I was comfortable with the age at which I got married but a lot of people around me were worried and made remarks like oh my God she is already 29 and going to be 30 and she is not married’

Late age at marriage is also observed to be a personal choice of the individual woman and some respondents revealed how they deliberately delayed their marriage.

> ‘I was very clear that I did not want to get married when I was 25 or 26 or younger. But when my parents really started looking and nothing clicked that was time they began to get worried. Because the guys whom my parents thought were ok were already married. In that sense my choices were limited’ (Respondent who married at the age of 29)

> ‘I was not ready to get married and secondly I just kept postponing it. Later on I realized that there was no use of postponing and I had already become old’ (respondent who married at the age of 30)

Sometimes marriages are delayed in pursuit of higher education and because of the inability to combine marriage and education at the same time. One respondent who got married at the age of 30 after the completion of her PhD considers it as the right age for marriage.

> ‘For me it was the right age. My marriage got delayed because I was not emotionally ready to deal with a man in my life when I was doing my PhD. It was not an easy time because things were not going well. It is very complicated when one begins with a professional course of some kind to separate two different things. I was not ready for marriage because of the complications that could come up dealing with people who have been brought up differently and who grew up differently with different ideas. The age of 30 was perhaps the age I could get married as I had completed my PhD by then’

This respondent indicated that the delay came about because she was pursuing further studies till the age of 30. In this case also the delay in the age at marriage was purely the respondent’s personal preference which she herself considers as a right age.
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Two other respondents state that their age at marriage at the age of 30 was the right age for them:

‘For me the age of 30 was the right age because I built up my career as a doctor, had completed my education and at the age of 30 I found myself both mentally and physically capable of sharing responsibilities with a man in my life’ (Respondent married at the age of 30)

‘I consider this age as the right age given my career stability, my financial independence and the right mental set-up to bond with a man’ (Respondent married at the age of 30)

The third category of respondents consists of those who perceived their age at marriage as early age. There was only one respondent who considered her age at marriage at 21 years as early age at marriage:

‘At that age one does not have a career or professional degree. For that one needs to qualify and the age of 21 is too young an age. At that age one is very susceptible to being hurt emotionally. It is also the age at which one is in danger of taking on someone else’s perception of life. I had a lot of fear that I will be stamped out i.e. my personality will be non-existent. And I will become useless because I have not yet got the experience i.e. I did not have a career’

6.3.2 Process of groom selection

In this subsection we will discuss about how was a match was made between the respondents and their husbands. We also focus on the required qualities of the man whom the respondents wanted to marry and whether these criteria were communicated to the parents or relatives before the search for the groom began. We also try to find out how long it took to conduct the search for a suitable man.

Matchmaking

In most of the cases, the parents of the respondents arranged the match for them. Family and friends also helped in the match making by giving information about suitable eligible men. Some respondents had a love marriage and had a steady relationship with the man way before marriage. The search for a suitable man lasted an average 6 months to 2 years before the marriage actually took place. In between this time the respondents indicated that they met many eligible men based on their list of criteria that they wanted in their husband. In most cases the respondents met all the men that had been short-listed by their parents and based on the meeting could either reject or approve of the match. Sometimes however it would be the respondents who rejected the match and sometimes it would be the prospective men who would reject the proposal. In cases where the match had been agreed on by both the respondent and the prospective man, the parents of both sides would then take over the matter. The parents would then meet and plan the wedding. This case study summarises the process of matchmaking in a nice way.

‘I met at least 3 other guys whom my daddy had short-listed. My husband is the 4th one whom I had met. My daddy got to know of him from a friend of his who worked in the same organisation. My father had my bio-data and that uncle had his son’s bio-data. My bio-data was shown to him and then he came to meet me in church. After meeting each other we agreed. Then the parents took over and the marriage was fixed. The groom hunt went on for nearly 2 years before I got married. There was a proposal and it was someone who had done his Ph.D. But I did not like his looks. So I told my parents that I don’t want to marry him. Another proposal was from a pastor in the church. I did not want anybody like that. When the proposals came my parents used to tell me. I used to reject the proposals, which I did not like, and in some cases the guys did not like me so they rejected my proposal’
Out of the total of 16 respondents, 8 of them selected their husband themselves. They considered their marriage to be a love marriage. In these cases the match had to be agreed on by the respective parents before the marriage took place. These respondents mentioned that their parents did not object to the respondents’ individual choice. These respondents also stated that their parents did not search for a suitable groom for them. Nevertheless there was pressure from parents to get married. As the following response illustrates:

‘I was on the verge of completing my PhD and we both were going steady for a long time. He also had a good job and so we decided to go ahead and marry. I was also being pressurised at home by my mother and my grandmother about getting married soon’

One respondent mentioned that she married her cousin because they loved each other but there was no custom of consanguineous marriages in her community:

‘We liked each other. He is my cousin. From many years we really liked each other. My parents did not have any problems because they knew him all their lives since he was born and his parents felt the same about me. There were obstacles but there was no resistance. They used to say if cousins get married then you will have children who are mentally retarded. He is 9 years older than me and people were always talking about this vast age gap. I was 21 and very young which everyone pointed out’

Another respondent discussed how the match making took place in a love marriage:

‘We both knew each other for the past 6 years before marriage. We have been studying together. We decided to get married once we were settled. We made our choice known to our parents and then they agreed and then we got married. There was no groom hunt going on for me’

Hence we observe that in marriages that were arranged by the parents, women largely had a say in the whole matchmaking process and selection of a suitable man for marriage. The respondents were always allowed to give their opinion and consent to the different proposals that were short-listed by their parents. Thus the respondents had the freedom to accept or reject the match after meeting and talking to the individuals personally. However, parental consent is something which is considered very important. We observe this even amongst respondents who had a love marriage. In all cases respondents had communicated their criteria to parents before they began searching for their right partner.

**Required qualities in the man**

In this section we shall discuss about the required qualities in the prospective groom which are commonly sought after. The required qualities in a man differed between the match arranged by parents and relatives or a match based on a love relationship. Most commonly the criteria mentioned for matches that were arranged are that the man should be educated, well employed and should have a good family background. Apart from these, the other required qualities were specific to the respondents based on their personal likes and dislikes. Men who drank and smoked were often not preferred while men with particular occupations such as doctors, engineers and gazetted officers were preferred as well as men with certain physical attributes such as height.
The preferences about the attributes of the man whom they wanted to marry were different amongst the respondents who had a love marriage. In such cases respondents mentioned that the required qualities that they were looking for were more of emotional qualities such as the man being a caring person, understanding, compatible, responsible and being supportive. A common preference was that the man had a secure job.

At this juncture, we turn our attention to the marriage ceremony.

6.3.3 Ceremony: initiation to the transition

Most of the respondents did not elaborate much about their marriage ceremony. However all respondents stated of having a legal marriage. Legal marriages are registered marriage. The fact that not much was said about the ceremony could indicate that the ceremony in itself does not mean much to the high educated urban women who were interviewed. The responses illustrate that legal i.e. registered marriages are a necessity in addition to the traditional marriages. All respondents irrespective of whether they are Christians or Hindus mention of having a legal marriage. All the interviewees stated that their wedding ceremony was a simple traditional wedding, an Arya Samaj wedding. For the respondents who are Christians the wedding was a normal church wedding. The wedding customs and traditions followed were however largely community-specific.

For all the respondents, tying the ‘tali’ or the ‘mangalsutra’ formed an important part of the wedding custom and tradition irrespective of the respondents’ Christian or Hindu faith. This could be because of the fact that most of the respondents that were interviewed were from the southern states of India where
tying the ‘mangalsutra’ or the ‘mangalya’ forms an important part of South Indian weddings. Apart from this, the Hindu respondents also took the seven steps around the ‘fire God’ known as ‘Saptapadi’.

### Case Studies

- **Christian respondent**
  
  > The wedding ceremony was a usual church wedding. He tied the tali and then we had a reception

- **Hindu respondent**
  
  > It was a normal wedding ceremony. People were invited and it was a nice occasion. In my wedding the customs and traditions were not followed that strictly. The main things were done which are tying the Mangalsutra and the seven steps before the fire God.

### 6.3.4 Feelings about being married

After discussing about the wedding ceremony we now go on to discuss the feelings of the respondents about being married. The respondents were asked to reflect on their feelings about being married in the first few days or months after the wedding. The aim was to obtain an idea about some of the inherent changes that come about with the event of marriage and at the same time to determine the importance of marriage in the life of a woman.

Reflecting back on the feelings that the respondents had about being married, most of them expressed feelings of relief, sense of belonging to the husband and security as the predominant feelings:

- **My mother was struggling and my father had already passed away. My sister was married and she stayed in Surat. It was a torture for me to be shown to every boy and he would reject me because I wore glasses. I thus wanted to have my own life and I was looking forward to my married life. It was something that I wanted and it really happened**

- **On the wedding day, the time he tied the tali, I felt that I belong to him. I felt very nice and I felt very secure**

However not all respondents felt relief. One respondent mentioned about her feelings of fear and uncertainty on being married. She says that she had this feeling because she hardly interacted with her husband before her marriage:

- **I was scared as I did not know my husband and I was scared about how he was as a person**

The respondents who had a love marriage had a different feeling about being married. These respondents discuss about feeling happy because of sharing life with the man whom they loved while some expressed happiness about the transition in their friendship from friend to marriage partner. Such expressions reflect the hierarchy of social needs propounded by Maslow (1970).

- **I had to deal with my work life as well as my personal life. It was happiness at sharing my life with the man whom I loved. So life was different after getting married**

- **For me marriage was an extension of our friendship. My husband and I knew each other for such a long time and getting married was a very happy event in both our lives**
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Other feelings that were expressed were related to the marriage age being either early or late. For example, the respondent who married at the age of 29 indicated her fear of incompatibility with her husband as she had already a set personality and her own likes and dislikes. She also feared that she was incapable of adjusting and adapting in comparison to the time when she was younger.

"I just thought that it would all work because I was already 29 at that time when I married. I feared that the ideas about who I am and what are my likes and dislikes were more formed so I hoped that it really would work. When you are younger you tend to kind of adapt your likes and dislikes to that of your husband because your likes and dislikes are not so clearly pronounced yet. When one is younger one tends to be more adjustable and adaptable."

Another respondent who married at the age of 21 considered it an early age to marry. She mentioned that getting married at such a young age brought her feelings of being ‘trapped and burdened’ with family responsibilities and that she had to carry the ‘seal of marriage’ on her forehead. She said that she felt that she was not mature enough to enjoy her marriage at that young an age. The respondent left her home country after her marriage and returned back to India with her husband three years after their marriage. According to her:

"I felt trapped because I was going away to a country where I did not know anybody and the day after I got married I felt burdened about having to wear a saree, having to put the bindi on my forehead, be a good daughter-in-law, take up household responsibilities. I used to wonder why I should carry the seal of marriage on me when my husband has not changed physically at all. Even though he is the person whom I liked and wanted to marry, I did not have take time to enjoy the marriage."

6.3.5 Knowledge and its sources

Knowledge has been categorised into three types based on the responses from the respondents. They are instructions, advice and information. These categories have been defined in subsection 6.2.4. Mothers were mentioned as being the most important source of knowledge as regards the instructions, advice and information about marriage.

In most cases mother gave the instructions in the form of dos and don’ts expected from a married woman. In some cases it was also the mother-in-law who gave the instructions: These instructions were especially related to thinking about others rather than thinking about oneself only and the dos and don’ts about being a married lady as revealed in the responses below:

"My mother gave me basic instructions like stop thinking about yourself from now on. And start thinking about others and be good."

"Instructions like married women don’t cut their hair, married women should always wear a bindi, married women don’t stand and talk to some cousins and males all the time, married women should be more worried about bringing the snacks and keeping it and playing hostess."

Knowledge in the form of advice was given by mother and it concerned being a good wife and a good daughter-in-law, to prioritise husband and household above career and to be adjustable and compromising.
Knowledge in the form of information was mentioned by respondents as being obtained from their mother. Information about sex was one of the things that the respondents said that their mother discussed with them after the marriage was fixed but the information was not in detail.

One respondent who had an age difference of 9 years with her husband mentioned being instructed by her aunt.

Another respondent states that being higher educated and having a working career enabled her to compare herself with her husband for whom marriage did not matter the same way as it did to her:

Marriage thus marks not only an important event in a woman’s life but it is also considered as a transitory phase in the life of a woman. Marriage also brings about certain expected behavioural changes. Sometimes these expected behavioural changes are marked changes that are part of married life when compared to the time when the woman was not married. In the following section we shall study about expected behavioural changes for a married woman.

### 6.3.6 Expected behavioural change

In the previous subsection we have discussed about the instructions as regards the dos and the don’ts for a married woman. These instructions throw light on some of the norms regarding behaviour after marriage. For example, an instruction such as ‘thinking about others rather than thinking about oneself only’ would mean that the woman is expected to behave in an adaptable and accommodative manner with her husband. Thus the knowledge in the form of instructions, advice and information are indirect ways of putting across the expected behavioural changes.
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The most common expected behavioural changes voiced by most of the respondents were shouldering responsibilities both inside and outside the house and being adjustable and accommodative.

‘There were responsibilities and they were much more than before I was married. Responsibility of looking after the house, taking care of the cooking and buying things for the house’

‘I had to change some of my feelings where I had to adjust to my husband’

‘Since I was married I began having that responsibility and knowing another person better and change accordingly. If you cannot accommodate that person in your routine then you have to change yourself. That change happened like getting up early, taking responsibility of the household, cooking’

However, the behavioural change was not very welcome in all the cases. Sometimes had adjustment problems and some respondents mentioned that adjustments in the initial stage were difficult:

‘I was very bad at cooking so I had to learn it. Getting up, getting the household work done on time and then going to work were initially very difficult’

‘Initially I found it hectic because I had to do so many things quickly but as time went by it became more normal’

‘As my husband is a doctor sometimes he used to get calls from patients even in the night and at odd hours. It took me sometime to get adjusted to that’

But some respondents have also mentioned that the new responsibilities after marriage did not cause much difficulty unlike other newlyweds:

‘Since I was helping my mother in all these things before my marriage I never found it to be a burden or a new responsibility.’

The types of responsibilities and the degree of adjustment depended on whether the respondents lived together with their in-laws or stayed on their own with their husband. For the respondents who stayed with their in-laws shouldering responsibilities and making adjustments were portrayed as being a good daughter-in-law:

‘I was forced to participate in the religious functions taking place at home by my mother-in-law. There was no question of whether I wanted to. My mother-in-law is a widow. So I had to stand together with my husband at any function and not with my mother-in-law’

‘I also had to please my in-laws. We can take advantage of our parents and say ‘No I cannot do this and I cannot do that’. To our in-laws we cannot say that. I had to somehow really satisfy my in-laws, my husband and my parents. A girl just cannot sideline her husband and ignore her parents or she cannot just sideline her husband and ignore her in laws. It is like you have to please everybody’

The other expected behavioural changes were in the form of being emotionally dependent and in the case of respondents who were not working at the time of marriage being financially dependent on their husband:
One respondent who neither resided with her in-laws nor joined her husband and continued to stay with her parents for a year after marriage. There had been no expected behavioural changes from her as a married woman. Hence she states that life for her was very much the same as before she was married:

‘I was still living in my parents’ house. I continued to lead fairly the same kind of life that I used to lead before I was married’

Thus we observe that the instructions, advice and information given by the mother to the daughter are reflected in the form of behavioural change that is expected of a married woman.

### 6.3.7 Perceived role change

Perceptions of role change as a married woman can be divided into three categories (see section 6.2.6). First is the role change perceived by the respondent for herself. Second is the respondent’s perception of her role change for her parents and the third category concerns the perceived role change for others being a married woman. In the third category we discuss perceived role change for in-laws. We shall discuss all the three categories of perceived role change separately in the following subsections. We shall also focus on how the respondents attribute their education and working career to their perceived role change for as a married woman.

#### Role change perceived by respondent

All respondents equally agree with the fact that their role had changed following the event of marriage. The most commonly perceived roles were that of a role of a wife. The importance of the role changes was expressed as ‘lady of the house’ and by the addition of ‘Mrs’ before the name. The respondents considered themselves as mature and confident in their actions and behaviour in their roles of a wife and a daughter-in-law:

‘I was more mature in the way I behaved and talked. I was not the same as I was before marriage. Before marriage if I went to somebody’s house with my parents even if I don’t speak to them people really do not bother. They ask the parents. But after marriage they ask me directly. There are so many questions, which we are forced to answer and we have to answer sensibly. So I had to think twice before my in-laws and to answer other people’s questions’

Some of the respondents also considered themselves as being more responsible in the role of a wife:

‘When I was unmarried I would just come home and take my own time to take a good rest. When I wanted to sleep I would just go to bed. But after marriage I have to wait for my husband to come back home. It is not the same as it was before marriage’

‘I was very lazy before. I used to get up late. I have lost my comfort now. Now life is not the same anymore after marriage’
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Making adjustments, adapting to the likes and dislikes of the husband and making compromises were perceived as the other changes:

‘Compromises had to be made. Sometimes I compromised and sometimes it was my husband who did’

‘It took me sometime to know my husband, about his likes and dislikes’

‘Before marriage I was quite carefree, I used to do what I wanted. After marriage it is not so. I have made adjustments in my life like not going out, spending time with friends’

Another perceived role change experienced by the respondents was maintaining the balance between professional and personal life as both respondents and their husband hold jobs:

‘I had to take care of the household as well as work well and continuously study to keep up with developments in my field of study. I also have patients and sometimes I am called up in the middle of the night for which I have to be always willing. Sometimes the same happens with my husband also and then he adjusts well. Marriage has made me balance things more, which was not there before when I was not married’

The effects of education and working career on the perceived role change for the respondents themselves are also indicated. Respondents indicated that their responsibilities are equally shared and they get respect from their husbands because of their education and a working career. Women perceive their working career as a source of their financial independence which makes them more secure and enables them to be less submissive to their husband.

‘If I had not been working and educated probably I would have been more submissive. If I would be sitting at home maybe even my husband would not have respected me as much as he does now. That’s what I feel. I too am working so any arguments that crop up between me and my husband I tell him immediately that even I am working. I tell him that even if he does not give me any money I can manage on my own as I am working. I feel that a woman has to work so that she is more secure. And husbands also feel that they cannot play the fool kind of thing and take the wife for granted’

For another respondent her higher education has given her confidence in herself and also to take decisions about how to spend her money. Higher education has provided her information on sexual relationships and knowledge about childbearing. Her workplace enables her to meet and interact with many people:

‘My educational background helped me a lot. It helped me to be more confident in myself that is I know what I do will be the right thing. I have told my husband that he may have some of what I earn otherwise I can spend in any way I want and there should be no control in that type of my freedom. I also knew about sex, the safe days and about childbearing. In my workplace I happen to meet people with similar backgrounds so I know what they have faced and how they have gone through it. So I become aware of what will happen. I am better informed about how I can adjust with my in-laws, my husband and my parents. I also learn how they manage their households and come here to work’

The respondents felt that their education has made them more capable of dealing with changes after marriage which requires them to be more adjusting, compromising and adaptable. Respondents mentioned that their higher education enables them to better communicate, understand and interact with their
husband. Most of the respondents consider their higher education as a key factor in bringing about a compatible relationship, sharing and discussing things with their husbands.

‘My education has enabled me to communicate well with my husband. He is also well qualified so we understand each other and are able to share things like politics, films and all. Definitely high education has helped. So I did not have great problems with adjusting to our different working hours, adapting to his likes and dislikes. He too has made adjustments with me’

Perceived role change for parents

All respondents have mentioned that the frequency of visits to their parents has reduced with each passing year of their married life. Thus the role of being a daughter becomes less pronounced with the event of marriage. The visits have been affected largely by the distance and sometimes by the burden of family responsibilities as well as the demands of their professional career.

‘My parents lived in Rajasthan so I used to visit them once yearly. My husband’s job did not allow him to take leave so often and hence we could not visit them more often’

‘I was in another country. I visited my parents much more after I came back to give birth to my first child. It was after a gap of one year that I visited my parent’s house after marriage. My sister she lives in Madras so she visited my mother in Bangalore every 3-4 months’

‘I used to visit my parents once every month when we were in the same city. Now it has become less frequent with so many commitments at home. I find it difficult to go and visit them. Now it is once in every 4 or 5 months’

However some respondents who stayed in the same city as their parents visited them often.

‘My workplace was very near to my parents’ house. So I used to visit them often’

‘I visit my parents for a weekend once in 15 days as they live here in Bangalore. We visit my in-laws for one weekend in the next 15 days’

Most of the respondents regarded marriage as an event that distinctly brought about their transition to womanhood which was a transition felt across generations of mothers and daughters. Some respondents indicate their perceived role change for their parents from a daughter to that of a wife of their son-in-law. This transformation of the role from a daughter to wife was reflected in their being treated as a ‘lady’, ‘a responsible woman’.

‘Marriage did make me a woman. It was a transition from adulthood to womanhood’

‘My parents considered me a married woman’

‘My parents started to look up to me, as I am now a responsible woman’

‘I was now R is G’s wife. So they started to treat me like a lady’

In some instances, the role of a wife and a daughter-in-law was given more importance than the role of a daughter which made one respondent feel a sense of not belonging to her natal family after her marriage.
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For many in spite of the perceived role change from that of a daughter to that of a wife the respondents were still important members of their natal household. For important family decisions they played the active role as a daughter and member of the natal household. The respondents indicated that they had a voice in important family decisions and hence were not considered as outsiders after marriage.

Respondents who stay near their parent’s house did not perceive any role change for their parents after marriage. They felt so because of the frequent visits and active participation in the household matters of the natal family.

Some respondents perceived of their role change for their parents in terms of providing monetarily for her natal family before marriage as opposed to providing for her new family after marriage.

Perceived role change for others

There are also perceived role changes for others after marriage. The others here are the parents-in-law and the friends. Marriage brings with it a number of other relationships than that of a wife and a daughter-in-law. These could be that of a sister-in-law or a co-sister. Hence the respondents perceived of role changes for others after attaining the status of a married individual. In the following subsection we shall focus on the perceived role change for others after marriage as indicated by the respondents. Here we refer to the in-laws.

When asked about what their role change for others has been after marriage, most of mentioned their role change as a daughter-in-law for their parents-in-law. Some of the respondents also perceived their role
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change in relation to their friends and some even experienced a role change for members of the husband’s family in the new role of a sister-in-law and a co-sister.

The role changes as perceived being a daughter-in-law related to care giving, showing concern for the in-laws and taking up responsibilities in the family. Sometimes the vast age difference between the mother-in-law and the daughter-in-law made adjustments difficult.

The respondents indicated that their educational backgrounds as well as their working career were largely responsible for their perceived role change for others. Respect from in-laws, being consulted for decision making by the in-laws and confidence in decision making are mentioned by some of the respondents as the attributes of their higher education on their perceived role change for their in-laws.

As a daughter-in-law some of the respondents were expected to attend all the family gatherings, religious ceremonies and spending vacations. Often the excuse of workload in the office and important meetings were used to evade being present at all the family gatherings in the in-laws house.
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6.3.8 Perceived gains of the event

In this subsection we shall focus on the gains of being married. Gains have been operationalised as the advantages and the disadvantages of the event of marriage in the life of a woman. Thus the gains of being married are studied in comparison to the time before marriage. We also study whether higher educational attainment and the working career contributed to the advantages and disadvantages being a married woman.

Advantages

Two advantages that were commonly mentioned by almost all the respondents were the social status as a married woman and the physical proximity with their husband. These two aspects were considered as great advantages in comparison to the time when the respondents were not married or in comparison to their unmarried friends.

The social status as a married woman ensured wider social acceptance and respect in society. It made the respondents feel safe, secure and confident about themselves. These indicate esteem needs through recognition status according to Maslow’s hierarchy of needs (1970). Most of the respondents have also attributed greater independence and freedom in moving around alone because of their status of a married woman in society. Though these fall in the category of safety needs, being married facilitated social mobility and freedom. Hence greater independence and freedom in moving around alone reflect the esteem needs of these women.

One respondent indicated that her higher education and working career did not contribute at all to her perceived role change for others after her marriage:

‘Because I am a working lady I can take up the pretext of work and not visit them for Christmas. My in-laws have always told my husband that if I come home tired he should help me in some of the housework’

‘I cannot be present at certain religious festivals or family gatherings as I have my job here and I cannot take leave so often. During such times my absence is not interpreted as showing lack of interest but it is that I have my job and that I cannot leave’

‘My education and job does not have anything to do with myself being a relationship manager. It is not connected at all. Because even if I had been illiterate the minute I get married my role changes for everybody including my own parents’

‘I feel society respects individuals for two things. One is for their socio-economic status and the second is their marital status’

‘After marriage I felt I had more independence than before I was married. I also felt safe, secure and confident after marriage’

‘I was independent before my marriage but after marriage that sense of security is much greater. I get respect from all as a married woman’

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Marriage sanctioned the physical proximity with the husband. Lying together, moving around together, touching each other were no longer a restriction. Also discussions about sex and other events surrounding reproduction were no longer considered taboo.

'It is certainly advantageous for a woman after her marriage in our society. But talking about certain things like sex, marital life, contraception, pregnancy and childbirth becomes much easier and acceptable’

'The advantage is that of the physical proximity with my husband i.e. we can live in the same place and there are no restrictions on us moving around together or in terms of touching each other. I was sharing the same space with my husband and that was very important. In society you are given a very important position if you are a married woman’

Some other advantages were in the form of wider social acceptance because of the status of wife and occupying the rightful position beside the husband in all religious ceremonies. One respondent stated that the position of a wife in the Hindu customs and tradition ‘carries a lot of weight’. Also married women are invited for certain festivals and ceremonies and are preferred over widows and unmarried woman to conduct poojas.

'Married woman in India in our Hindu tradition carries a lot of weight. As a married woman I was invited to certain functions and I could do certain things, which the widows and unmarried woman were not allowed to do. Also I could stand beside my husband as a couple for poojas and ceremonies in the house’

Most of the respondents have also mentioned that they found a friend in their husband with whom they can share, discuss and interact and advise, unlike with any other friend before. The cooperation they shared inside and outside the house was also perceived as an advantage.

'I found a friend in my husband with whom I can share everything. Before my marriage I did share with my sisters in law but there were some things I did not share with them. Now it is much easier. There is a lot of household work but then my husband helps me a lot. I do not have to do the things alone’

'I have someone to tell about what is happening in the office, I have someone to tell and share. In other areas also I have someone to advise me’

All respondents mentioned that their higher education and working career facilitated compatibility, interaction and discussions with their husband.

'If I had not been educated or stayed at home then I would not have anything to talk about with my husband. Maybe only things related to cooking or food or TV programmes that is it. But because I am working I know what is happening outside, what is happening in the office and I have something to talk about at home’

Some respondents have indicated that their higher education took them to different places and staying away from home, helped them to adjust and compromise and equipped them with the ability to take up responsibilities in married life. Thus their educational background has made them aware of problems and ways to adjust to such problems.
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A working career has given the respondents both financial as well as individual freedom in moving around alone and driving. Working career as one respondent stated has given her a ‘certain status in the society’.

Disadvantages

Most of the respondents could not identify any disadvantages of being married. However there were some respondents who named a few disadvantages. One respondent said that her career was negatively affected by marriage, as everyone began to regard her as the wife of so and so and not as an individual person in her own right. For other respondents balancing their professional and personal life was difficult and that was considered a disadvantage of marriage.

Other disadvantages were related to leaving the parental home which a respondent called a ‘place of comfort’, and the ‘stereotypes’ imposed on her in the role of a daughter-in-law who abides by all her duties.

Some respondents also mentioned that they could not interact and spend time with their friends as much as they used to do before marriage as a disadvantage. While some of them also stated their inability to decide on certain things as they used to do before marriage and trying to ascertain their husband’s reaction to such decisions as disadvantages:

‘If one has no education one is not aware of problems. I think I can shape things in my own terms at least like informed choices. The choice is backed up with some kind of rationale that is based on some information that I have. The information is accessible because I am educated and I am able to analyse’

‘My educational career took me out of my house as I stayed in a hostel and studied for some years. That way I could interact with many people, meet many people and also learn many things about life. It has also helped me to adjust and compromise in my married life’

‘My working career has made me an independent woman. I drive my own car and can go out on my own, and I am not dependent on anyone’

‘Marriage has negatively impacted my career. I was seen as the wife of someone and it was so disgusting. I consider it a disadvantage’

‘Initially it was difficult to balance my going out to work and looking after the home together’

‘Being physically removed from my place of comfort. The other disadvantage is stereotypes that are associated with marriage which were subtly imposed on me. Like as a daughter-in-law I had to see that the food is cooked on time, the lunch carrier is packed. It is all associated with duties’

‘I could not go out with my friends too often or I could not do other activities that I was used to, like reading. Because of the household work it has become a rela limitation to my reading books’

‘I cannot just decide a lot of things on my own. I have to think about what will be the response from my husband and the effect on my husband because of my decisions’
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6.4 Perceived changes: ‘I am different from my mother’

In the preceding sections we presented the changes perceived by the respondents by comparing themselves to their mothers, focusing on the events of menarche and marriage. All respondents have mentioned vast changes that have taken place over the passage of time as regards menarche and marriage. However, these changes are felt to be more far reaching where menarche is concerned.

Menarche is no longer perceived as a signifying event in a girl’s life. Hence we observe that no ceremonies are performed to celebrate the event as well as the absence of customs and traditions related to the event, in contrast to older women as described in Chapter 8. The research findings of Hutter et al. (2002) reveal that it is still prevalent in the rural areas in Karnataka. Girls in the younger generation feel that they were more knowledgeable about menstruation and the menstrual cycle before they themselves reached menarche. They feel that sex education in school is an important source of knowledge enabling them to satisfy their curiosity about the event, as mothers were generally embarrassed to talk and discuss about the event with their daughters. Comparing themselves to their mother, most of the respondents mentioned that their mother did not have prior knowledge about menarche before they attained menarche. Thus it came as a shock and surprise to them. Differences also exist with regard to the restrictions followed in the daughter’s generation in comparison to their mother. Respondents feel that the restrictions are less strict because people have started living in towns and cities that are influenced by modernisation. Break up of the joint family system is also a major factor as nuclear families adapt their rules to suit the needs of household members. Some of the respondents said that their mothers were treated as an ‘outcaste’ or an ‘untouchable’ during the days of the menstrual cycle due to the strict rules, while for the respondents themselves it was a normal thing without many restrictions to be followed unlike their mother. Some of the respondents also mentioned that their mothers were considered eligible for marriage as soon as they had reached menarche, while in the younger generation they were encouraged to pursue higher education and work before they were considered eligible for marriage.

Perceived change across generations have also been cited as regards the event of marriage. Respondents feel that things have changed vastly since their mother’s time. The most common change that has been prevalent is the change in the customs and traditions observed during the marriage ceremony. Marriage ceremonies in the past days used to be very elaborate, sometimes stretching for three days, whereas at the time when the respondents got married only necessary customs and traditions were followed and the wedding lasted 2-3 hours. The respondents feel that their own marriage ceremony was more adapted for the sake of convenience in comparison to the fanfare wedding in their mother’s time. The system of dowry was a common phenomenon in their mother’s time while it was not so when these respondents got married. Arranged marriages were common during their mother’s time while love marriages became popular later on. Respondents have also indicated the changes that have come about in the whole concept of being a wife across different generations. They said that in their mother’s time the traditional role of a wife involved taking care of the house and the family, a role which no longer prevails in the respondent’s generation. This change the respondents feel, has come about mostly because of the accessibility of higher education for all and especially for women. Similarly, being higher educated also facilitates their participation in the workforce and to have a working career. Whilst the mother’s generation had to content themselves with the housework and looking after the in-laws, the respondents indicate that in their generation working outside the house has become essential. Change is also distinct in the role of husbands as has been indicated by the respondents. Husbands in the mother’s generation commanded respect and did not cooperate in the household work, whilst in the generation of the respondents husbands are supportive and cooperative in both the house as well as outside it. Respondents also observe that not all
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things have undergone change across generations. Some aspects such as the importance and the respect given to married women in the society still remain more or less the same when compared to their mother’s generation.

In the next chapter we shall focus on the event of motherhood and different types of perceived autonomy amongst the younger generation of women in Bangalore.