Chapter 8
Perceived life course of older generations and change across generations

8.1 Introduction

In chapters 6 and 7 we discussed about the perceived reproductive life course of women belonging to the younger birth cohorts by focusing on the events of menarche, marriage and birth of the first child. We also looked at Jejeebhoy’s (1995) definition of autonomy in chapter 7. The present chapter is based on the in-depth interviews of women belonging to the older cohorts in Bangalore. These older cohorts of women represent the mother’s generation in our study. We already have the background profile of the respondents in chapter 3, section 3.4.6. Also in chapter 3, section 3.4.5 the operationalisation of variables is discussed wherein we identified the similarities between cohorts and generations and how the older cohorts of women symbolise the mother’s generation in our present research. Along the same lines as chapters 6 and 7, the present chapter focuses on the perceived reproductive life course of women in the older cohorts that represents the mother’s generation. The main events in the perceived reproductive life course we shall focus on are the events of menarche, marriage and birth of the first child. Similar to chapters 6 and 7, greater stress is laid on how respondents themselves perceive the various aspects of their reproductive life course and what meaning is attributed to each of these aspects. The emphasis is thus only on the events that make up the reproductive life course of women and not on women’s autonomy and its different types as has been studied for the younger generation of respondents. This is largely due to the fact that the older respondents related to their perception of autonomy at the time of the interview, and not to their autonomy during their reproductive ages which is beyond the scope of this study. Sometimes the older respondents face are unable to remember clearly events that took place a long time ago. Responses are also affected partly by the present day situation in the lives of women in Bangalore. We observe recall error when women reflect on their perceived age at the occurrence of menarche, marriage and the birth of the first child. We often come across responses such as ‘in those days it was ok to marry at the age of 22. But for girls now I think it is a little early’. In this chapter first we discuss how women in the older cohort perceived their reproductive life course. Second this chapter also focuses on change across generations. This has been done by comparing the younger generation’s perception of their reproductive life course as discussed in chapters 6 and 7 to that of the older generation’s perception based on this chapter. Change across generations emphasises both the similarities as well as the differences.

This chapter is divided into three main sections, each of which deals with an event in the perceived reproductive life course. Section 8.2 deals with the event of menarche that marks the beginning of the reproductive life course. Section 8.3 discusses the event of marriage described as the union formation behaviour in the cultural context of Karnataka. In section 8.4 we discuss the event of first birth, which is the onset of motherhood. The conclusions of this chapter are presented in section 8.5.

8.2 Menarche: beginning of the reproductive life course

In this section we shall discuss the event of menarche in the reproductive life course of women in the older birth cohorts. We also compare the perceptions about this event by the older and younger
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generations conceptualised in the present study as generations of mothers (this chapter) and daughters (as indicated in chapter 6).

8.2.1 Perceived timing of the event

The respondents can be classified into three categories based on how they perceive their age at menarche to be i.e. early, late or on time. One category of respondents were those who had attained menarche at ages 14 and 15. These respondents perceive their age at menarche to be the right age when a girl should have her first periods. They consider it to be the right age mostly because their friends also experienced menarche at the same age. This emphasises the peer group affiliation and sense of belonging to the peer group. These respondents also said that their menarche was at about the same age as their friends. Gaining prior knowledge about it from friends who already experienced the event helped them to prepare for menarche.

"I had my first periods when I was 15 years old. It was a right age for me because I had seen all my friends attaining that stage as well. So it did not hit me as a surprise"

The second reason why respondents perceived their age at menarche at 14-15 as the right age was because at that age they considered themselves mature enough to cope better with the physical discomforts experienced during periods. Mental maturity acquired as a teenager helped them cope.

"It was a right age to have my first period at the age of 15. Everybody seemed to have it at that age. At that age a girl can cope better with the problems that come with periods like stomach ache, pain in the legs and such things"

"It was a correct age because by that time somehow we are mature. We were mentally matured. We were in our teens then and our outlook in life changed a lot. We know many things then"

Perception of ages 14-15 as being the right age at menarche in the mother’s generation was also because respondents considered themselves to be more responsible at such ages, mature in dressing up and presenting oneself in front of others. They stated that at these ages girls can even manage to clean the cloth used during their menstrual periods.

"My age was 14 when I had my first period. It was a right age because by that age you come to know about things. When you are 10 or 12 you won’t know anything. Those girls at that age do not know how to dress up and all. In our time our parents never used to teach us how to dress up and present ourselves. A girl by the age of 14 knows many things. My friends also had their period one or two months before or later. So it was natural for us to have our first period at the age of 14 in my time"

"A girl by the age of 14 knows how to clean the cloth used during menstruation and how to take care of herself. So it was a correct age for me"

Those respondents who had their first period at ages 11 and 12 perceived of their age as an early age to begin with menstruation. The main reason they gave was mainly because at that age most of their cousins, friends and classmates had not yet attained menarche. One respondent said that people had begun pitying her because she attained menarche early. She found it disturbing and she said that it was her relatives and friends who gave her the idea that it was a bad thing for somebody to attain menarche at an early age.
Another respondent who attained menarche at the age of 12 felt that it was an early age for her because she was unaware of many things at that age. She also thought that as a girl has to struggle with menstruation for a long time it is better if she attains menarche late. The usage of the term ‘struggle’ hints upon cultural restrictions and taboos surrounding menstruation as experienced by the older generation of women.

Attaining menarche at ages 11 and 12 is perceived as an early age also because some respondents considered themselves to be still playful at that age and not very responsible.

However one respondent who attained her first menarche at the age of 13 perceived it to be an early age because she thought that she was not mature enough to cope with the physical and the emotional changes that came about at that stage. She also associated it with her total ignorance about menarche and not being adequately told about the event by her family members. The respondent mentioned being dependent on her schoolbooks for information and knowledge about menstruation, which was very confusing for her.

When this category of women who considered their age at menarche as early was asked what according to them is the ideal age all of them responded that it was 14 and 15 years. We have observed above that these ages were perceived as being the right ages by respondents. The reason why they considered it to be the ideal age was because they thought that they would be aware and have knowledge about menstruation by the age of 14 and 15. As this respondent who had her first period at the age of 13 says:

One respondent stated that at her age of 11 she was a pre-adolescent, which was an early age for her. It is for this reason she regarded ages 14 and 15 to be the ideal ages when a girl should have her first menstruation.
A third category of respondents were those who stated their age at menarche as being a late age. One of them attained menarche at the age of 16 and the other respondent attained it at the age of 14. The respondent, who attained menarche at the age of 16, personally perceived of her age as a right age but thought of it as a late age because people around her thought it to be so.

"I consider my age to be an early age because the age of 11 is pre-adolescent. By the age of 14 and 15, a girl is properly grown up and has a shape and a different outlook. So having her first periods at those ages is ideal for a girl."

Another respondent who attained menarche at the age of 14 also considered her age as a late age because she compared herself to her classmates who had attained menarche at the age of 12. This respondent considered the age of 12 when all her classmates began menstruating as the ideal age when a girl should begin her first period.

"I had my first period when I was 14 years old. It was considered as a late age in my time. But personally I was happy as I thought that I was lucky to have it when I was 16 years of age. I could manage myself very well and also my school term was almost over. I had it during my holidays."

Across generations of daughters (see chapter 6) and mothers we observe a similar age patterning of the perceived timing of the event of menarche as early, late and on time. The older respondents indicated that their mental maturity as a teenager helped them to cope with the physical discomforts during menstruation. The younger respondents discussed about mental maturity in terms of their mental preparedness in accepting the event of menarche and at the same time having prior knowledge about hormonal and physical changes that come about with the onset of menarche. We observe change across generation in the type of sanitary protection used. While most of the women in the older generation mentioned the use of cloth, which had to be washed and reused, most of the younger respondents used sanitary napkins. In the younger generation, sex education in schools also provided adequate knowledge about menarche and mothers as sources of knowledge played a greater role, which was largely absent in the older generation.

8.2.2 Ceremony: Initiation to mark the transition

We shall discuss here about the ceremony to celebrate the onset of menarche. These ceremonies are considered as ‘rite de passage’ initiating transition from one life stage to another in the life course. We observe that ceremonies to celebrate the onset of menarche in a girl’s life are being lesser performed across generations. While in the younger generation none of the respondents mention having a ceremony, only 3 respondents in the older generation stated that a ceremony was held to celebrate their first menstruation. However, amongst the younger generation some of them said that they received special gifts from their grandmother or aunts when they attained menarche.

The respondents who had a ceremony in the older generation, however, said that it was a natural practice in their time. They also suggested that during those days it was common to marry off girls before they attained menarche. The girls would continue staying with their parents until they attained menarche after which they lived together with their husband. This was known as the practice of ‘gauna’. Thus menarche was considered as an important event in the life of a woman and hence
celebrated. For unmarried girls, celebration of the event of menarche declared to prospective eligible
men that the girl is ready for marriage. Thus the event of marriage would quickly follow the event
of menarche. These common practices in the past seem to have been followed closely as is evident from
words such as ‘principle’ and ‘Hindu custom’ expressed by one respondent.

‘In my time it was common for girls to be married before they began their first period. They were
still very young then. So until the girl begins her first period she stays in her parent’s house. After
she has her first period there is a ceremony and she would be then be ready to stay with her
husband and leave for her in-laws’ house. So it was then that the first night would take place’

‘When a girl came of age (attain menarche) in those days the girls have to get married. That was a
principle and a Hindu custom’

But in spite of the abovementioned common practices that were usually observed, most of the
respondents did not have a ceremony when they began their first menstrual period. The reasons they
gave were the educational background of their mother as well as other members of the family who
avoided publicly announcing that their daughter is grown up. By doing this they avoided
embarrassment caused to the girl. Some of the respondents considered their family background as
being intellectually progressive and forward-looking hence their family refrained from such type of
ceremonies.

‘It was a natural practice to have a ceremony during those days but it was not so in my house as
we were intellectually progressive. Many had joined the non-cooperation movement and they were
very forward-looking and more importantly they were well educated to do away with these ‘tribal
riots’ as my husband calls it’

‘My mother did not want to make a show of all that so I did not have any ceremony when I began
my first period. When a girl came of age (attain menarche) in those days the girl had to get
married. That was the principle and also the Hindu custom. But my mother did not like that. She
was an educated lady. She said that we should not have any ceremony like that and broadcast. She
also felt that it would be a very embarrassing situation for us’

Other respondents also cited reasons why they did not have any ceremony to celebrate the onset of
menarche in the following way.

‘I did not have any ceremony because my parents were not the orthodox and traditional type of
people’.

‘In our community there is no such custom of having ceremonies’.

‘Brahmins did not have the ceremony, only the rural people. The city Brahmins did not do it’.

We have observed in chapter 6 that respondents from the daughter’s generation also cited similar
reasons such as progressive family background, educational background of parents, caste membership
and religion and no wish to make a public announcement.

However, most of the respondents in the older generation said that they were given special care in the
form of special diet of highly nutritious food, healthy food items that help in making the hipbone
strong.
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The ceremony to mark the onset of menarche is celebrated in the following way by some of the respondents.

- The respondents were asked about their feelings about the ceremony. Out of the 3 respondents who mentioned having a ceremony to celebrate the onset of menarche 2 of them said that they had a nice and positive feeling about the ceremony. They talked about the special attention they received, special diet and the ample amount of rest.

- One respondent, who considers herself rebellious, protested against the ceremony. Thus the ceremony was restricted to only women in the household who performed a special ‘aarti’ and sweets were distributed. She mentioned not having a very good feeling about the ceremony as it was conducted against her wishes.

- The respondents in the older generation when asked whether their mother had any ceremony, most of them did not seem to know as it was not talked about. However, some respondents did mention that

   - ‘I did not have any ceremony but a special diet was given of ripe banana with ghee, which had to be taken the first thing in the morning on an empty stomach. It was highly nutritious’.
   - ‘Lots of sweets and rich food was given to me like ghee and raw eggs and also food with lots of oil. So these are all healthy food items that should be given to a girl at the time of maturity and these foods also make the hipbone very strong’.

The ceremony to mark the onset of menarche is celebrated in the following way by some of the respondents.

- ‘The day I got my period I was asked to sit separately in one part of the house. On the third day I was asked to wear a nice good dress and people were invited. They sang songs and gave me sweets. Then on the fourth day I took a bath and was given a new dress and people were invited for lunch. They gave me gifts and some sweets. Mehendi was put on my hands and everyone sang songs’

- ‘The first three days I was made to sit separately and not go to the different parts of the house. I had to drink water from a separate jug. I had separate clothes and I had to wash my own clothes. After the three days I was given an elaborate oil bath and in the evening neighbours were invited. I was decked up in a silk saree, jasmine flowers and jewellery. They put haldi, kumkum and flowers on me and they did the aarti. Special ladoos with popped rice and chakulis were made and that was distributed to all who came. Only females attended the function’

- ‘My grandmother wanted to have a ceremony where she wanted to invite a few people and I protested very strongly. So they finally restricted it to household women and a small aarti was done and some sweets were distributed. And no menfolk were allowed. I was not particularly pleased about the ceremony because I was not particularly made to feel that it was a happy event. And my mother was not around at that time which added to the misery. I was made to feel quite miserable because I was fairly young comparatively when I attained menarche’

The respondents were asked about their feelings about the ceremony. Out of the 3 respondents who mentioned having a ceremony to celebrate the onset of menarche 2 of them said that they had a nice and positive feeling about the ceremony. They talked about the special attention they received, special diet and the ample amount of rest.

- ‘That time we did not know so we accepted it as a good sign. We felt good because so many people came and gave gifts. So we took it as a positive thing and did not go against it at all. I felt shy when the gents came to know that I had my period. It was an accepted custom and we knew what to expect’

- ‘I knew that they do such things in the villages so I just went through the ceremony without rebelling against the elders. I liked the ceremony because the people gave me attention and the sweets and I was made to rest a lot’

One respondent, who considers herself rebellious, protested against the ceremony. Thus the ceremony was restricted to only women in the household who performed a special ‘aarti’ and sweets were distributed. She mentioned not having a very good feeling about the ceremony as it was conducted against her wishes.

The respondents in the older generation when asked whether their mother had any ceremony, most of them did not seem to know as it was not talked about. However, some respondents did mention that
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their mother had a ceremony while these respondents themselves did not have any ceremony. Here we observe ongoing changes affecting the course of events.

‘Oh yes she did have a ceremony but she never talked about it’

‘My mother had a ceremony and followed all restrictions but in my time my elder sister who is a doctor explained to amma that even menstruation is God-made so there is no need to follow any restrictions and ceremonies’

8.2.3 Knowledge and its sources

Some of the older respondents said that they did not know about menstruation until they themselves began their first menstrual period. While for others they knew about periods before they themselves attained menarche. The sources of knowledge were from school friends who began menstruating earlier, schoolbooks, awareness about menstruation and the menstrual cycle from mothers, grandmothers, elder sisters and cousins.

In the phase after the respondents had attained menarche they knew more about it mostly from their mother, grandmother and other older ladies in the family. At that stage it was not only knowing about menstruation but it was also about instructions, restrictions, advice and information to be taken into account during the menstrual days as well as generally after the girl has attained menarche.

Knowledge in the form of instructions were the various dos and don’ts that are expected of a menstruating woman. These were to be followed by women only during the days of their monthly menstrual period. Prescriptions were in the form of sitting separately from others in one room, not moving around in the house and being out of sight of elders when they offered pooja. Some respondents said that the way they were treated, as menstruating girls during those days, was similar to the type of treatment that the ‘untouchables’ received.

‘My father and uncle used to do pooja so when they used to walk past the room where we had to sit separately during our periods, we would be asked to go inside and not see them. We were not allowed to touch anyone or anything in the house. Food was given to us separately and we were not allowed to touch the water be it in the bathroom or in the kitchen or anywhere else. We used to stay inside one room and were not allowed to roam around freely in the house. They used to make us sit apart like an untouchable’

‘I was supposed to stay in one corner of the house, not use normal beds and cots. There was one special chatai (mat) and one raddi (useless) mattress given to me to sleep on. So for three days I used to have terrible pain from these things. Food would be served to us separately as if we were some untouchable’

Restrictions were in the form of limitations set on the respondents for example not being allowed to move around alone outside the house, need to obtain permission from parents before going out of the house, getting back home on time, not moving around alone after it is dark, avoid talking to boys and bringing them home. Respondents also talked about limitations on the type of dress to be worn. Some of the respondents had to change their way of dressing from frocks to half-sarees and some of them were not allowed to wear any sleeveless dresses when underarm hair began to grow. These restrictions were to be always followed once the girl attained menarche, irrespective of whether she was menstruating or not.
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The half-sarees were mostly preferred over other types of dress for girls who attained menarche because it is loose-fitting and did not reveal any part of the body.

Knowledge in the form of advice pertained to explanations on the use of cloth as sanitary napkins, how to wash them clean. One respondent also mentioned her mother advising her on wearing comfortable clothes during the days of the menstrual cycle.

Knowledge in the form of information was largely imparted by mother and grandmother to the respondents. There were explanations about what menstruation is, how attaining menarche made the girls eligible for marriage and able to bear children, how to be a respectable woman and how the respondent should behave after she has attained menarche. There was also information on personal hygiene and care that needed to be followed not only during the days of the menstrual cycle but always after a girl attained her menarche.
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When a girl attained menarche she was not only called a ‘big girl’ but she was also a ‘grown up girl’ who should be married off soon. One respondent said that both her mother and grandmother asked her to learn certain house work such as cooking, washing and cleaning the utensils as she was a grown up girl after she attained menarche. Attainment of menarche also indicates her eligibility for marriage and hence she was required to learn the household work. This was done to avoid the future in-laws of the respondent from blaming her own family about not teaching their daughter any housework.

'My mother told me that now you are grown up so you have to do certain work in the house like wash vessels, clean the house. My grandmother would say that I should start learning how to cook because I would be getting married soon. So before I went to my in-laws I had to learn to cook otherwise the in-laws might blame our family that I did not know anything and that they did not teach me anything'

Most of the time knowledge about menstruation that the respondents of the older generation, obtained was conveyed to them politely and nicely by their mother or grandmother. However for some respondents the knowledge that they acquired was not explained properly. They were in the form of ‘half-truths’ and ‘hidden facts’ as one respondent expressed it herself. She felt that they did not explain adequately because they themselves were embarrassed. As her mother was embarrassed to talk to her about menstruation she gave the respondent a book and asked her to read it.

'My grandmother told it to me nicely. After she told me about menstruation, I carried out the instruction on my own'

'I think my grandmother and aunts were a little embarrassed. I got to know things properly only when I went back to live with my mother. The things my mother was embarrassed to talk to me about, she told me to read a book. The instructions that I got were more to do with restrictions. They said various things and they did not explain things to me properly. They did not put it so explicitly. It was a kind of half-truth perhaps and hidden. I would say that things were told to me not at all in a rebuking way'

For some respondents they were not directly told about the instructions to be followed after they attained menarche. In this case they mentioned that most of the things were learnt by observing their mother, aunts, elder sisters and cousins in the family who followed certain restrictions during the days of their menstrual period. Thus most of the time nothing was discussed as regards menstruation and whatever that was told was naturally accepted without question. One respondent said that ‘there was no point in questioning because all the neighbouring households used to follow the same things as well as the ladies in the family’. Another respondent stated that the restrictions to be followed were known in the house as ‘rules in the house’. This respondent mentioned that she had to abide by the rules of the house.

'No one instructed anything. We learnt by ourselves by looking at what others did. I used to watch my mother and my aunts who did the same things during their period so I also followed what they did'

'My mother and grandmother observed dos and don’ts so we used to observe them and accept the things. Nothing was discussed much and we never used to question about why things were done. We followed suit because all the neighbouring families were also doing so, just like my sister and my sisters-in-laws'

'There was no instruction given. Everybody was made to know that these are the rules in the house. My elder sister had to follow and so too my mother. So there were no instructions. It was just a rule and everyone had to follow. So no special instructions were given'
When we compare knowledge and the sources of knowledge between the younger and the older generation we observe similarities and differences. We observe from the responses that the sources of knowledge across generations were largely similar. However, most of the respondents in the younger generation said that sex education in school was also a source of knowledge. In the younger generation it is also observed that mothers played an important role in imparting knowledge about menarche in comparison to women in the older generation. In the younger generation, instructions were less strict as compared to the older generation. Being treated like an untouchable was distinctly absent but some of the practices such as not moving around freely in the house, not entering the pooja room still persist. In the younger generation we also observe that women were instructed on aspects of personal hygiene, which was not found in the responses of the older generation. Amongst the younger generation, similar to the older generation, we observe that they too were restricted from going to the movies with friends and there were restrictions on mixing around freely with boys. However, other types of restrictions such as the type of dress to be worn were not a major issue amongst women in the daughter’s generation unlike the older generation. We observe a difference in the type of advice given across generations of mothers and daughters. In the younger generation knowledge in the form of advice was given to them mostly by the mother who explained about menarche and why it occurs in a woman’s life, unlike in the older generation. We find inter-generational similarities between mothers and daughters in the essential knowledge related to information on biological changes when a girl attains menarche. However women in the older generation also received other types of essential information from their mother and grandmother about how attaining menarche made girls eligible for marriage and able to bear children, being a respectable woman and expectations of proper behaviour from grown-up girls. In the younger generation we observe that menarche was viewed as a normal thing in a girl’s life. None of the younger respondents mentioned being considered as eligible for marriage by the elders in the family after they attained their menarche. Most of the women in the older generation felt that knowledge acquired about menarche was in the form of half-truths and hidden facts. Whilst amongst women in the younger generation they said that when the instructions were not properly explained to them, they looked it up themselves in the school books and women’s magazines to satisfy their curiosity.

8.2.4 Expected behavioural change

The knowledge and the sources of knowledge led to behavioural change that was expected of the older respondents after they attained menarche. Most of these expected behavioural changes were certain restrictions imposed on women after they attained menarche, which are similar across generations of daughters and mothers. These restrictions were forms of normative behaviour that the respondents had to follow after they attained menarche. Some of the expected behavioural changes that arise due to restrictions pertained to not entering the pooja room and not visiting the temple during the days of menstruation. The other changes were the restricted lifestyle in the form of segregation and idea of pollution that the respondents were required to follow in some families. One respondent in the older generation said that the reason given to them about the segregated lifestyle and pollution was to ensure that the menstruating girl gets rest during the days of her menstruation. Some respondents thought of such segregation as the treatment given to untouchables. However, these types of expected behavioural changes were to be followed only during the days of menstruation and not on other days. By comparison, there were other expected behavioural changes in the form of restrictions which were required to be followed always once a girl attained her menarche irrespective of the days of her menstrual cycle. In the generation of daughters as well as mothers, mostly these were restrictions related to meeting, talking and playing with boys.
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We assumed that the segregated lifestyle and confinement inside the house could cause a disruption in school life and that there would be school dropouts in the older generation. However we saw that school dropouts and interruption in studies were not common amongst respondents of the older generation with the exception of just one woman. She said that it was not only staying indoors that made her drop out of school but it was also that her family was arranging for her marriage at the same time.

The younger generation has been more expressive in their views about the expected behavioural changes that came about in their lives after they attained menarche due to various restrictions imposed on them. The expected behaviour of not staying outside the home after dark often affected favourite activities of some of the respondents such as stargazing and swimming.

Apart from the expected behavioural changes due to restrictions both older and younger respondents have also mentioned expected behavioural changes resulting from physical changes that came about when girls attain menarche like development of breasts, facial and underarm hair. These physical changes led to norms in the ways of dressing up such as the type of dress to be worn. Some respondents said that they switched from wearing frocks and skirts to wearing half-saree (lengha). This was because it is a loose fitting dress and covers the body. However, in their later teens they moved away from the half-saree to the normal saree. Women in the younger generation were restricted from wearing revealing, tight-fitting and body-hugging clothes.

These physical changes have also been mentioned as causing physical discomfort and embarrassment. Also respondents in the younger and the older generations became largely shy and conscious. Some of the physical discomforts mentioned by respondents in the older generation were the usage of homemade napkins, which needed to be washed clean. Respondents stated that these discomforts were a form of change in their lives and they also talked about devising strategies to overcome some of these discomforts. Some of the strategies, which we can observe from the responses below, are ‘holding the books in front while walking’ and ‘developing a haunch back’. We also observe women in the younger generation developing similar strategies to hide their physical changes.
8.2.5 Perceived Role change

The societal expectations of role change required women to be shy, and conscious, as menarche was an indication that the girl was ready for marriage. However these expected role changes are revealed to be largely dependent on the respondents’ family type and family background. In this subsection we focus on the perceived role changes of the respondents after they attained menarche. The perceived role changes can be categorised into three types. They are role change perceived by the respondent herself, perceived role change for her parents and perceived role change for others.

Role change perceived by respondent

Some of the older respondents considered themselves, after attaining menarche, as grown up and were thus required to act and behave in a mature way. For another respondent she had become shy. She also mentioned that in those days girls were appreciated if they were shy.

"I was grown up and so I had to act and behave like a grown up. I was also matured”

"In those days the girls were appreciated if they were shy so it was natural for girls to be shy then”

All respondents mentioned that the pain and physical discomfort associated with menstruation affected them personally. They were in the form of stomach, back and leg aches that some of them had before every menstrual period.

"I did not like the pain in my stomach, back and legs pain, which I had before every period. I also used to feel tired and thus found it a nuisance and I was very much irritated by it”

Attaining menarche was also a sign of growing up as it brought about maturity for some respondents, which prevented them for being close to their father. One respondent who wanted to continue studying was withdrawn from school and attaining menarche for her parents meant that she was ready to be married off.

"My periods were a sign of growing up. I was matured, shy and conscious. I could not be so free with my father anymore”

"I had a lot of desire to study further. But as I was the eldest daughter in the family and when I matured at the age of 14 my parents discontinued my studies and I was forced to marry. If I had not been married off then I would have continued my studies”

For another respondent she changed from a vivacious and vibrant person to a subdued and covert person. She felt that she was affected psychologically because of the physical and emotional changes as well as the restrictions that were imposed on her after she attained menarche.
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The perceived role changes in the lives of the respondents were not always taken for granted. Some respondents talked about some emotional conflicts and arguments with their mother while one respondent stated that she just followed the examples of her elder cousins and sisters who were her role models.

Being shy was also a perceived role change for the respondents in the younger generation. In the older generation, respondents associate their attaining menarche to physical pain and discomfort, which have affected them personally. By comparison women in the younger generation perceived their role change as being more feminine and entertaining thoughts about marriage and becoming a mother. Other perceived changes were having crushes and being infatuated with guys and being unable to balance the physical and emotional changes.

Perceived role change for parents

Some of the older respondents mentioned that their parents considered them as mature and grown up after they attained menarche. So the perceived role change that the respondents had for their parents were more to do with taking up family responsibilities such as helping their mother in the house work and kitchen and learning to cook. As one respondent put it:

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\text{I just accepted the restrictions that were imposed on me. I was a very vibrant and effusive kind of person but after my first period I think I became subdued and kind of covert. Psychologically I must have been affected a lot.}
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For some respondents the perceived role changes for the parents came about in their realisation that they should prepare their daughter for marriage. Attaining menarche in those days was an indication to get the girl married off soon. Some of the respondents said that the groom hunt for them began as soon as they attained menarche and one respondent said that she had to discontinue her studies as her parents considered her to be of a marriageable age.

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\text{"It means a matured girl, it means a girl who is ready to be married off. My parents did not think of marrying me away immediately as I did my highest education till SSLC. But it was ready to be married off, as I was a big girl after I had my periods. So I learnt some of the household work like helping mother in the kitchen, learning to cook and all such things"}
\]

For some respondents the perceived role changes for the parents came about in their realisation that they should prepare their daughter for marriage. Attaining menarche in those days was an indication to get the girl married off soon. Some of the respondents said that the groom hunt for them began as soon as they attained menarche and one respondent said that she had to discontinue her studies as her parents considered her to be of a marriageable age.

\[
\text{"My mother began saying that I was no longer a girl and that I was ready to get married. So as soon as I began my period my mother and my grandmother started telling friends to look for a good, educated boy for me"}
\]

\[
\text{"I already felt that I was mature. I was looked at as a girl ready for marriage. My parents started looking for a match for me and I left school"}
\]

However in some families, education of the girl was given priority and not their marriage. For such respondents their school career was not affected. A perceived role change for the parents was their assumption of responsibilities in the family as an elder daughter while one respondent stated that about taking care of the elderly was a change in her role as her perceived role change for her parents.
Perceived role changes for parents differed with the family background and place of residence as has been mentioned by some of the respondents. It differed between joint families and nuclear families and between friends or cousins staying in the villages and those that stayed in the towns and the cities. In joint families the perceived role changes were more about taking care of the elderly and less about helping out with house work. Those that lived in the villages the perceived role change for their parents was regarding their daughter as being ready for marriage and thus they were often not allowed to study further. As one respondent recounted:

> Across generations of mothers and daughters, older respondents perceived of their role change for their parents as being a grown up and mature after they attained menarche. However, amongst the younger generation we observe that respondents make a clear distinction of their perceived role change for their parents as a changeover from girlhood to womanhood and girlhood to adulthood. The younger respondents also discuss about gendered roles of adulthood as a perceived role change for parents, which has not been mentioned by women in the older generation.

Perceived role changes for others

The others here include everyone who is not a part of the family. Most of the older respondents mentioned that because of the physical changes taking place they had begun to look older and mature compared to their pre-menarchal days. Due to the physical changes guys in their co-ed school and men in the street used to pass comments and make fun of them very often. The respondents mentioned a change in the way men looked at them due to the physical changes.

> Guys were commenting, people started looking at me in a different way. Those days I used to be very beautiful. So I would make heads turn when I walked by

> Girls grow up once they start menstruating. I suppose people do know. Because of the physical changes people would view us differently

Some respondents have mentioned that in family gatherings, elders used to tease them often about being eligible for marriage. The respondents had also begun to get conscious of their looks and there ways of dressing. As this respondent revealed:

> Grandparents started looking at me as a girl who is now ready for marriage. I became conscious of dresses and also my looks. Elders began teasing me saying that I was ready for marriage.
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Across generations of mothers and daughters, most of them said that because of their physical changes they had begun to look older and mature. The respondents mentioned a change in the way men began to look at them due to the physical changes. Respondents in the younger generation also talked about going out on dates with boys.

### 8.2.6 Perceived gains of the event

In both younger and older generations the ample amount of rest with special diet, care and attention during the days of the menstrual period were perceived gains. For the older generation their restricted and segregated lifestyle enabled them to rest which was in the form of sleeping a lot and not participating in the household chores.

*Some respondents found the event of menarche to be an advantage because it signalled their transition from childhood. They also said that this event had made them eligible for marriage which was perceived as a gain in itself.*

> ‘There was a lot of rest which I got when I sat in a separate room. Otherwise I was asked to go out and get things, wash clothes, sweep and swab, roll chapathis for the whole family. I used to like the rest that I got during the days of my periods’

> ‘I knew that my childhood was over and from then on I had to behave like a grown-up. I knew that after some time I would get married which was a nice thing’.

In the younger generation menarche was related more to adulthood status in life than girls’ eligibility for marriage. Some of these respondents felt their attaining menarche brought about a closer relationship with their mother by facilitating discussion about issues on menstruation and clarifying doubts about it, which did not take place earlier. Some of the younger respondents also considered their knowledge about reproductive system and reproductive development as an advantage after they attained menarche.

In both mothers’ and daughters’ generations in our study, respondents viewed physical discomforts such as stomach ache, pain in the legs and backache during the menstrual days as disadvantages. Restricted lifestyle and loss of freedom were some of the other disadvantages. In the older generation value-loaded words such as ‘nuisance’ have been used to term some of the physical discomforts faced. Scheduling journeys, trips and outings on the days of the menstrual period was also considered disadvantageous.

> ‘It was a nuisance I would say’.

> ‘I would feel uncomfortable during the few days and had to worry about travelling and other things. If my period was due I had to plan ahead. I would carry some protection or wear the sanitary cloth and go. Sometimes I used to avoid visits like going to the temple’.

Table 8.1 and 8.2 gives us a summary of the differences and similarities in perceptions, in the event of menarche across generations of mothers and daughters respectively.
Table 8.1 Summary of differences in perceptions across generations of mothers and daughters about the event of menarche

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mothers’ Generation</th>
<th>Daughters’ Generation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perceived their mental maturity to have helped in coping with the physical discomforts</td>
<td>Perceived their mental maturity to have prepared them mentally to accept the event of menarche</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cloth was mostly used as a protection during the days of the menstrual period</td>
<td>Sanitary napkin was used as a protection during the days of the menstrual period</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge regarding menstruation was mostly obtained from books</td>
<td>Sex education in school was an important source of knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mothers were less involved in imparting knowledge about menarche</td>
<td>Greater role of mothers in imparting knowledge about menarche</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ceremonies were performed to celebrate the event which stressed a ‘rite de passage’</td>
<td>There were no ceremonies but some respondents received special gifts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls were considered eligible for marriage, sometimes this led to disruption of their education</td>
<td>Women were allowed to pursue higher education irrespective of attaining menarche</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restrictions regarding pollution were strictly followed</td>
<td>Restrictions regarding pollution were less strict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change in clothes to be worn by girls after they attained menarche which was from frocks to half-sarees</td>
<td>There were no restrictions in the types of clothes to be worn after the girls attained menarche</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls after menarche were considered ‘big’ and ‘grown-up’ who should be married off soon</td>
<td>Girls perceived a change from girlhood to adulthood and womanhood after the event of menarche</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge about menarche was transmitted mostly in the form of hidden-facts and half-truths</td>
<td>Greater interaction and discussion about menstruation and the menstrual cycle provided more knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls were begun to be prepared for marriage with the occurrence of this event</td>
<td>The event was considered as a normal thing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most of the expected behavioural change was normative</td>
<td>Expected behavioural change was less standardized</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most of the respondents mentioned that they accepted the restrictions imposed on them unquestioningly as everyone followed suit</td>
<td>Women mentioned being rebellious and often argued about the restrictions imposed on them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived gain of the event of menarche was happiness about getting married soon after</td>
<td>Perceived gain of the event of menarche was related more to adulthood status so that as young adults they could do many more things than before</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 8.2 Summary of similarities in perceptions across generations of mothers and daughters in the event of menarche

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Similarities across generations of mothers and daughters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Those respondents who did not have the ceremony attributed it to their progressive family background</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Special care and special diet during the days of the menstrual period</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Limitations like not talking to boys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Information on personal hygiene</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Essential knowledge after menarche such as biological changes similar across generations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Perceived role change for others e.g. boys was similar across generations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- The advent of menarche enriched relationship of the respondents with their mother across generations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Physical discomfort during the menstrual period was perceived as a disadvantage across generations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Restricted lifestyle and loss of freedom with the event of menarche was another perceived disadvantage of the event across generations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 8.3 Marriage: union formation behaviour

The next event that we focus on is the event of marriage which marks the beginning of union formation behaviour.

#### 8.3.1 Perceived timing of the event

In the older generation those respondents whose age at marriage was between ages 22 and 25 viewed their age at marriage as a right age for them to marry. They also considered such ages as ideal ages for girls to marry. One reason for such a perception was because friends and members of the peer group also got married at similar ages. At such ages women also considered themselves as being physically and mentally ready marriage. They also considered themselves as being capable of shouldering responsibilities of the household, husband and children at these ages. One respondent also suggested that her mental maturity enabled her to choose her life partner.

> ‘At the age of 24 my friends also got married during that time only. I had developed physically and mentally. I was ready to get married and take the responsibility of looking after husband and children’

> ‘From age 22 onward, I was mentally mature. So I was also mature to choose my life partner’

Another respondent associated freedom with marriage in comparison to the time before she was married. Thus she perceived her age of 25 at the time of marriage as a right age that facilitated her to enjoy her newfound freedom.

> ‘At that age (25 years) you can be free. I had the freedom, which I did not have before marriage. So my marriage at that age was a nice thing as I could enjoy my freedom’

From most of the responses it was evident that women in the older generation were neither allowed to pursue higher studies nor have a working career. The commonness of the situation was expressed as such:
Older respondents said that they were not allowed to pursue higher education and work. Thus marriage was considered to be the only alternative for these women of marriageable ages. Some of the respondents found marriage to be the best option.

"During those days it was not so natural to be highly educated and it was also not natural for women to work. Hence most of the education is over by the age of 24 and if women are not allowed to work then I think marrying is the best option. I also think that at the age of 24 the mental maturity is also there to marry and be in charge of a household."

We observe that some respondents were stopped from pursuing higher education while others were not. Those respondents who were allowed to pursue higher education could decide their age at marriage. We observe this trend to be applicable to only a handful of respondents in the interview sample. These respondents decided when they should marry and as such saw their age as a right age. Some of the responses were:

"I did not want to get married early. I saw my sister suffer after her marriage. I thought that I would complete my studies, look after myself, do what I want to and then get married"

"I had aimed for post-graduation and that I did before I got married"

The opportunity to complete a particular level of higher education and work for sometime before getting married was seen as an advantage for some women. Thus they considered their age at marriage a right age. These same respondents also pointed out that their socialisation kept the idea of marriage alive, which indicates that marriage was a necessity in spite of women's higher education.

"We were socialised to not forget marriage altogether"

Here we observe two different dynamics occurring at the same time. On the one hand women reveal their preference about the timing of marriage while on the other hand the event of marriage was not something to be forgone totally. However, being employed was not viewed in a favourable light by society at large.

"During those days only widows or women in financial trouble used to work"

Another category of respondents are those women who consider their age at marriage as a late age. Their age at marriage was 28 years, which was solely their own decision. For some respondents the late age of marriage was attributed to their position as the eldest sibling in the household and hence they were required to carry out familial responsibilities of contributing to the family income by working prior to marriage. This indirectly delayed the respondent’s age at marriage.

"I think my age of 28 years at marriage was a trifle late. I took this as a conscious decision for various reasons. I am the eldest in my family and my father had retired, so for a few years I wanted to help them financially at least while my other younger siblings were getting settled"

Another respondent compares herself to her friends who got married immediately after completing their college education while she married much later. Hence she considers her age at marriage at 28 to be a late age.
A third group of respondents consists of women who were married at the ages of 18 and 19. These women viewed their age at marriage as an early age as they considered themselves too young and lacking knowledge of people and life in general. These women also expressed their wish to pursue higher education, meet and interact with different people which was cut short by the event of marriage in their lives.

One respondent said that she was frustrated about her early age at marriage:

"Because 18 is just so young an age. At that age one does not know anything about life. That time I used to spend all my time studying. So I thought at least after 2-3 years it would be nice because I would then study in college and would meet so many different people. I thought that I would have a little more knowledge about things. So it was an early age for me to get married."

We also observe that some perceptions on the timing of marriage have changed with the passage of time. Some of the responses below illustrate this point:

"Now it is too early. Then it was alright to marry at the age of 19"

"In those days it was ok to marry at the age of 22. But for girls now I think it is a little early"

These respondents referred to two perspectives of time. One was how they viewed their age at marriage while the other was a comparison with the present time.

Change across generations is observable when we compare this older generation of women with that of the younger generations as described in chapters 6 and 7. While respondents in the older generation perceived ages between 22 and 25 as a right age to marry, respondents in the younger generation perceived ages 24 to 26 as right for marriage as well as the ideal ages. However, the younger respondents perceived the age of 22 as an early age for girls to be married. Opinions about the right age for marriage differ across generations. Whilst in the younger generation it was related to emotional maturity and ability to make adjustments and compromises, in the older generation it was related to maturity in selecting their life partner from their parents “shortlist” of potential husbands.

8.3.2 Marriage matchmaking

Generally the parents of the respondents arranged the match. For some respondents their grandmother arranged the marriage match for them. Girls were considered to be ready for marriage by the age of 17. Hence the search for a suitable man would be initiated around the age of 17 or 18. In most cases the search took place 1 year to 4 years before the actual wedding took place.

"My grandmother started looking for a groom for me after my first PUC, which was my pre-university. I was then 17 years old. They told so many people, if you find any suitable boy then us know"
Horoscope matching was an important requirement in most of the arranged marriages.

'Horoscopes were compared. After they matched my husband and his family members came to see me'.

In the matchmaking process the information about the eligible man was given to outsiders as well as members of the family. But the information given by family members was considered to be more reliable. Prior knowledge and interaction with the groom’s family and the groom were important.

'We knew their family. My uncle’s wife was his sister. So all of them had seen me and my family knew him'.

'My grandmother told my father that he was a good match and if we rejected this match then maybe I would not get someone as good match as this'.

After the selected proposals were shown to the respondents they had the liberty to either reject or accept the proposal. Sometimes the respondents were rejected and sometimes they rejected the proposals when they did not like the man or his family background.

'I used to reject when I saw a guy whom I did not like or if I did not like his family situation. Sometimes I would be rejected as well'.

In arranged matches the first step involved the parents and other elders in the household approve the potential candidate according to the stated criteria by the woman herself. After this the man along with his family came to see the prospective bride. In some cases matching the horoscope took place before the family saw the girl and sometimes it was at a later stage after the selection. The girl and boy also saw each other before the match would be fixed. One respondent mentioned that it was considered less important for the woman to see the man whom she would be marrying to while it was very important for the man to see the woman whom he would be marrying. Only after both the families approved of match was the marriage fixed.

'It was my husband’s brother who came to know of me. Then they came and asked my grandmother and then they saw the horoscopes. The horoscopes matched and then their family members and my husband came to see me. They liked me and the wedding date was fixed'.

'During those days the girl and the boy used to see each other before the marriage was fixed. It didn’t matter whether we saw the boy we see or not. It is the girl that they have to see. It is a custom that the girl must be seen. They were very particular in seeing the girl, her family background, horoscopes and all that. Then the marriage takes place'.

Usually the girl and the boy would hardly interact before getting married. Most of the respondents whose marriage was arranged mentioned that they had met their husband only once before marriage.

'He came to see me and that was the only time that we met each other'.

'In the time since my engagement I did not talk to him. Also after 2 months I even forgot his face. I met him again on the day of our wedding'.

Respondents who selected their husband themselves did not have to go through the stages which respondents in arranged marriages underwent. However family approval was an important thing.
Irrespective of whether the respondents selected their husband themselves, the groom hunt was inevitable.

Irrespective of whether the respondents selected their husband themselves, the groom hunt was inevitable.

Having a similar profession and fewer restrictions imposed by the family to mix with members of the opposite sex were facilitating factors in respondents’ own selection off their partner. The following respondent reveals how she met her husband:

Change across generations is observed in the prevalence of love marriages wherein respondents themselves selected their marriage partner. It was much less in the older generation in comparison to the younger generation. In the older generation girls in most of the cases said that they were considered ready for marriage by the age of 17. Hence the search for a suitable man would be initiated around age 17 or 18. In the younger generation this took place on an average between 6 months to 2 years later. Amongst women in the older generation horoscope matching was an important requirement in most of the matchmaking, while this was not so predominant amongst respondents in the younger generation.

8.3.3 Required criteria

In the following paragraphs we focus on the criteria required in the man whom the older respondents wanted to marry from the respondents’ own perspective. As most of the marriages were arranged marriages, thus the selection of eligible men proceeded with a set of criteria in mind. Most of the respondents revealed that they did not set any criteria for the man whom they wanted to marry. So they never mentioned any criteria to the parents and other elders in the family when the groom hunt began. This was largely because of the normative behaviour of giving the parents and elders the upper hand in the selection of an eligible man.

As parents selected the eligible man for their daughter, in most of the cases the most important criterion for them was that the person should have a secure and a decent job. Men in government jobs for example bank employees and engineers fitted the criteria. Other common criteria that were sought were men who resided in the city, men from a nuclear family with a good family and economic background. Caste membership was another criterion that was strictly followed and men with physical disability were not considered eligible.
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Some respondents also stated that their parents and grandmother had a strong preference for men who were educated. Well-educated men were scarce in those days, as revealed by some of the respondents.

"My parents were looking for a person with a decent job and they were against getting me married into a joint family. That the man should be of our caste was important."

"My parents wanted me to be married off in the city only and also to get me married into a nuclear family. So this match had all the things that my parents wanted and thus the match was fixed."

"My parents saw some physical disability in one person who was selected. So they were not interested in him. I did not even see him."

However some respondents indicated that they did have a set of criteria which they wanted in their husband. They said that these criteria were communicated to their parents before they began searching for an eligible man. For these women the foremost criterion was that he should have a good job. Men with government jobs were preferred.

"The groom should be educated that was what my grandmother was looking for. This man was educated and at that time it was very difficult to get educated men with a good job. He was at that time in the bank as a probationary officer. So my grandmother said that if I wanted to study later I could but that I should marry now."

"My parents themselves had some criteria for the man whom I should marry. They wanted him to have a good job and to be educated. Few men were educated in those days. As no proper match came, I continued studying while the groom hunt was going on for me. So I was educated by the time I got married."

Being from a good economic background, educated and having a good job were the other criteria. Women also communicated their dislikes about the man whom they would not want to marry.

"He should not be in the military but commercially established. He should be from a good economic background. I did not want a man who drank and went to clubs."

"I told my parents I would marry a man who had a good job and better educated than me."

Differences between the two generations can be observed as all respondents in the younger generation made their criteria known to their parents before the search for the eligible man began. Most of the older respondents revealed that they did not mention any criteria about the man whom they wanted to marry at the beginning of the search. This was largely because of the prevailing normative behaviour of giving the parents and elders the upper hand in the selection of an eligible man. Women in the younger generation generally found that emotional qualities were important criteria in the man whom they wanted to marry in addition to preference for men with secure jobs.
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8.3.4 Ceremony: initiation to mark the transition

All respondents had fond memories of their wedding ceremony. Most of them said that the ceremony was a traditional Hindu wedding ceremony lasting for three days. Hindu marriages followed the Vedic rites according to the customs and the traditions specific to people of different castes and subcastes. Wedding customs also differed across different regions of India.

On the other hand, there were other respondents who said that their wedding ceremony was a simple Hindu marriage. In comparison to other weddings that were lavish and grand, for some respondents their wedding was a simple one lasting for a day. They also indicate that the ceremony was simple and detailed rituals and customs were not followed. However Hindu marriage with Vedic rites was a common thing followed by everyone. In comparison respondents in the younger generation did not give much information or elaborate about their marriage ceremony. We also observe from the responses that fewer customs and rituals were followed by the younger generation and registration of marriage is as important as the social marriage amongst this generation.

8.3.5 Feelings about being married

Here we shall discuss about how the respondents felt after being married, as marriage is an important event in the lives of women. From the sections above we already get a picture of how restricted some of the women were after they attained menarche. They revealed that they were neither allowed to pursue higher studies nor were they allowed to have a working career. They also mentioned that marriage for them was the only option without any alternatives. Hence it is interesting to focus on their feelings about being married when marriage was their only option.

The importance of the event of marriage in a woman’s life is revealed by the following response from a woman belonging to the older generation. According to this respondent if a girl of marriageable age was not married then people around her would think that the girl has some problems because of which her marriage proposal was rejected by eligible men. Thus these girls would not go out of the house much.

While happiness at being married was one of the predominant feelings amongst almost all the respondents in the older generation, feelings of relief, belonging to the husband and security were the predominant feelings amongst women in the younger generation. Happiness was mentioned by some older respondents as a ‘natural feeling’, while some of them felt happy at the prospect of beginning a new life. Some of them perceived themselves as being the responsibility of their parents hence being married reduced to a great extent the responsibilities of the parents and that made the women happy.
Some respondents also experienced relief and mental security about being married in comparison to women who were not married.

‘I felt mentally secure now that I have someone for a lifetime’

‘Good I suppose. Because we both liked each other and certainly we both liked being together. In spite of the small problems we had we really were not bothered. It was great fun being together and it was a big relief as well being married. I was married at the age of 28, which was late, by the standards those days. So I used to hear a lot of comments from relatives and others. Even my parents used to hear about them. It became quiet after I got married’

Some respondents in both generations shared feelings of fear and apprehension because of little interaction with their husband after their match was fixed. Some of the older respondents also described their bad impression of city men as being a cause of the fear.

‘I was very apprehensive at first. I had met him just once before and then there were all these horrible stories of city men who drink and beat up their wives. So I was a little worried’

‘I was so scared about what will happen in my life later. I sat in fear thinking about my future’

Some respondents also began feeling important that they were called the ‘lady of the house’ and that the house was their ‘domain’.

‘It was nice to be the lady of the house, making rules in the house, arranging things in the house. I felt so important’

‘After marriage I always had to wear the saree and sometimes when his sisters and brothers would come over I had to be at my best, cook food, keep the house clean and also do elaborate puja. My husband did not help me in any of the kitchen activities. So I was responsible for everything’

### 8.3.6 Knowledge and its sources

Most of the respondents indicated that their mother was the most important source of knowledge as regards the dos and don’ts expected of a married woman. In addition to the mothers, mothers-in-law and grandmother were also the sources of knowledge. Hence the type of knowledge differed with the respondent’s closeness to the abovementioned sources of knowledge. Mothers were the closest in affinity and their instructions were on a personal level as regards adjustments and compromises to be made, behaviour etiquette with husband and in-laws.
The need to keep up the family name was an important instruction given by mothers to their married daughters. Sometimes it was indirectly conveyed in the form of ‘try to adjust as much as possible’ and other behavioural codes of conduct, while at other times the instruction was explicit:

- ‘My mother told me to behave well and not to quarrel’
- ‘My mother she told me that I should be a good wife to my husband. I should not quarrel and should always keep my voice very low. She told me to try and adjust as much as possible as that is rewarding at the end’

Some respondents considered the knowledge as regards the dos and the don’ts to be followed as instructions while some considered them to be advice. The following respondent considered the instructions from her mother as ‘advice of the olden days’.

- ‘My mother has always instructed me. Even today she will always say “try to cope, be nice, don’t be rude, always try to compromise, don’t do this and don’t do that. As a girl I should be good and all that. My mother has never instructed me to rebel as she still holds the values of the olden days. So her instructions are the advice of the olden days’.

In addition to mothers being the source of knowledge some respondents said that they were instructed by their grandmother. Respondents also mentioned that they were not as close to their grandmothers as they were to their mother. This is also indicated by words such as ‘less communication’ and ‘less interaction’. Hence due to less interaction and communication the instructions about the dos and don’t expected of a married woman were also minimal in comparison to the instructions received from mother.

- ‘My grandmother said a few things and that is all. Not much. At that time they never used to talk freely so just the minimum was told. That I should listen to whatever my husband says and that I should look after him’

Respondents also reported that their mother-in-law gave instructions. These were largely instructions based on codes of conduct and adaptation to the lifestyle in the house of the in-laws. Below is an example of an instruction from a mother-in-law to her daughter-in-law (i.e.) the respondent.

- ‘My mother-in-law asked me to have good relations with everyone and please everyone. When I visited my native place the first time after marriage my in-laws also came along with my husband and me. One day when we planned to visit the mother of my mother in law. That day I had to wear two plaits. My mother-in-law told me that when I go back to Bangalore I should not make wear my hair in two plaits’

For this respondent maintaining good relations and pleasing everyone constituted the codes of conduct whereas instructions pertained to restrictions on a particular type of hairstyle after marriage.
Some respondents also said that they were not instructed about the dos and the don’ts but most of it was learnt through observing how their elder sisters and sisters-in-law in the house behaved.  

“There were no instructions. Generally I observed what my elder sister and sisters-in-law who came into my family did. I learnt from them.”

We thus observe that across generations of mothers and daughters, the mother has been an important source of knowledge explaining the dos and the don’ts expected of a married woman. However we observe a difference in the type of knowledge received from mother across the generation. Some of the young respondents mentioned that their mother discussed with them and imparted information on sex and sexual relationship with their husband after their marriage was fixed. However they have also said that this type of information was not a detailed in nature. Most of the other knowledge in the form of instructions, advice and information was similar in both the older and younger generations.

8.3.7 Expected behavioural change

In response to the question ‘what changes came about in your life after you were married?’, behavioural changes are amongst the most relevant changes. The expected behavioural changes are revealed in the respondents’ comparison of their life before and after marriage such as:

“Not much had changed. But when compared to the time when I was not married yes life had changed. I had begun being responsible and taking responsibilities, cooking, looking after my husband.”

“I became a little more responsible because I had to look after the house, look after my husband, do the cooking and shopping. At first I did not know anything because I never helped in the kitchen or with any household work in my grandmother’s house”.

Expected behavioural changes are those changes that follow naturally when a woman makes her transition from unmarried to married status. Some of the expected behavioural changes after being married were the duties of a daughter-in-law, shouldering domestic responsibilities, managing home and finance of the household. Some of the expected behavioural changes were elaborated in the following way:

“As a daughter-in-law whenever I visited my in-laws I used to do housework and assist my mother-in-law”

“There were changes in the form of managing my own house, my own finances. In addition to this I had to manage a house and a family taking on the responsibilities of a married woman”

“Responsibility as a daughter-in-law”

“Taking care of the house, shouldering domestic responsibilities”

We observe a similarity in the abovementioned expected behavioural changes when we compare the older generations with that of the younger ones. The older women perceived these behavioural changes to be a natural course of transition for married women moving from the status of singlehood to marriage. Most of these older women described their transition to a married status with words such as ‘feeling important’, ‘being the lady of the house’ and considering the house as their ‘domain’.

The younger respondents have stated explicitly that the expected behavioural change after marriage depended on whether or not they stayed with their in-laws. For those who stayed with their in-laws,
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the expected behavioural change had much to do with making adjustments and shouldering responsibilities as a daughter-in-law. For those who did not work at the time they were married change for them meant being emotionally and financially dependent on their husbands.

Thus in comparison to the expected behavioural changes that followed naturally, some of the older women found that there were other changes which they did not expect in the least after their marriage. This was partly due to the social and cultural norms prevalent during those times. Some of these were husband’s encouragement to continue with higher studies and take on a job, husband sharing the household work which gave the wife more freedom after marriage.

8.3.8 Perceived role change

Role change perceived by respondent

The perceived role change that the respondents themselves experienced because of the event of marriage in the older and younger generations was predominantly that of assuming the role of a wife. Older respondents commonly described their role in terms of the various duties of a wife such as taking care of the household and looking after one’s husband, summarised in the following way:

'I felt more responsibility. At that time my brother-in-law also stayed with us so I had to look after both my husband and his brother. I used to get up in the morning then cook for the whole family and also pack tiffin for my husband and my brother-in-law. Then after coming back home, from work I used to cook the dinner’

Respondents considered themselves as mature and capable due to which they were able to shoulder responsibilities and carry on the duties of a wife. Thus these respondents considered their transition to a married status as a big transition.

'I was more mature, talked properly and politely, unlike before marriage when I used to laugh and joke a lot’

'Marriage brought about more maturity in me than when I began menstruating’

'Marriage taught me to take on responsibilities. Manage the household and doing everything in the house myself made me confident as well’

Some of the older respondents also found marriage to be a liberating experience and they perceived a change in that they became free and independent after being married.
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Another respondent summarised her liberating experience of being married in the following way:

‘I became very positive because I went into a nice family. My husband was also very nice. We travelled a lot together and I could do many of the things which I like. I was free and independent’.

‘There was no restriction on my behaviour or physical movement because my husband was supportive’.

Similarly some respondents spoke about their role change when they got married. They became a companion for their husband. These respondents also said that they were allowed freedom outside the house. For one respondent, she found that although she was allowed freedom outside the house, her freedom was very much restricted within the house. She described her dual role change after her marriage in the following way:

‘Marriage opened to me a great new world. I could go out more often than what I used to do before when I was a student staying with my mother. While I was a student I had to be back home by 5:30 and used to spend the rest of the evening with my family at home. But after marriage we both went out very often and there was no restriction on the time to get back home. All the restrictions disappeared. It was a very liberating experience for me’

Most of the other respondents also said that they experienced companionship of the husband after marriage, which is similar to the younger women’s perceived role change for themselves after marriage. These were having to make adjustments and compromises after marriage such as managing the house and going out to work at the same time. Both older and younger respondents stated that they were not used to managing household work before marriage and thus managing the house and going out to work were a big role transition for them.

Amongst the younger generation making adjustments and compromises in married life was a perceived role change for themselves. Others found that their perceived role changes from that of an unmarried daughter to that of a wife and more responsible adult. As all the respondents in the younger generation were working women, they perceived their role change after marriage in terms of maintaining the balance between their professional and personal life. We also observe the influence of education and working career of women in the younger generation on their own perceived role change. Some achieved a compatible relationship with their husband through better communication and understanding which they developed as a result of higher education. The influences of higher education and working career are also indicated by the equal sharing of responsibilities with the husband and getting respect from their husband. Their working career gave them financial independence which brings about feelings of being secure, more confident and less dependent on their husband.

Perceived role change for parents

For most of the respondents across generations of mothers and daughters, their interaction with parents became less after marriage. At times distance between the two places of residence played a role in the reduced amount of interaction. Some respondents also said that their visits to parents also suffered a
setback and became less in frequency. Both older and younger women have stated that they felt a
distance in their personal relationship with their parents and siblings mostly due to the large distance
between the natal home and the marital home. This is how some of the older respondents perceived
change for their parents:

- "Initially I visited them often but later it became less because of the distance between Bombay and
Bangalore. The closeness also somewhat became less"
- "I became a little aloof in the household matters in my parents’ home. Aloof in the sense that in the
past they used to ask for my opinion and now since I am away that changes. My involvement in
their matters has also decreased"

Respondents perceived a role change for their parents because the former’s role evolved from a
daughter to a married woman, an observation which was valid across generations. Respondents
mentioned some of their perceived role change in the following way: being treated as a married lady, a
responsible person and constantly being advised by their parents to be and act like a mature person.

Some of the older respondents said that their relationship with their mother and other elder female
members of the family changed after the respondents were married. They felt that they could discuss
with them about the different aspects of personal relationships such as childbirth and contraceptive
pills which they could not discuss earlier or were considered too young.

- "Something like discussion about childbirth and conception were normal topics of discussion now
when we all meet for family gatherings"
- "...we could discuss about contraceptive pills"

However across generations of mothers and daughters some of them mentioned that there was no
change in their perceived role for their parents even after being married. They said that there was no
difference in the attitude of their parents towards them and they continued to be treated like their
daughter.

Below is the response from an older respondent indicating her unchanged role as a daughter for her
parents.

- "No, nothing changed. My parents saw me as they always did. I used to write letters to them visit
them often and stay with them for some days"

Several younger respondents said that there was no role change for parents after their marriage and
that they continued to be important members in their natal household as a daughter and participated in
important family decisions in their natal family. Some of the younger respondents who stayed close
by to their parents did not perceive any role change in their parents’ eyes.

One of the older respondents who is from a matriarchal family mentioned that she did not perceive any
role change for her parents after her marriage largely because of the matriarchal tradition where the
woman maintains close ties with her mother’s family even after her marriage.

- "Not much changed because ours was a matriarchal family. So I used to go to visit my parents very
often. During my husband’s leave we used to stay with my parents"
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Most of the younger respondents perceived a role change for their parents where financial contribution was concerned. After marriage they contributed financially to their husband’s family their natal family were the recipients before marriage.

**Perceived role change for in-laws**

The role of a daughter-in-law is one of the predominant perceived role changes for in-laws as perceived by both the older and younger respondents. Most of the respondents mentioned that they did not live with their in-laws after marriage. Thus during the occasional visits to the in-law’s house, respondents indicated that they assisted their mother-in-law in the household activities.

> ‘When I visited my in-laws I used to help out with housework and assist my mother-in-law in household matters’

Some of the respondents considered sharing activities in the household with their mother-in-law as womanly duties. A respondent perceived a role change for her in-laws as being more ‘womanly’ than what she used to be before she was married.

> ‘I was considered as more womanly like sharing household tasks, discussing about childbirth with mother in law. All this was not possible when I was not married’

A common thread can be found in the perceived role change for in-laws amongst both the older and younger respondents. They said that their role change as a daughter-in-law made them more mature and more respectable being a married woman. As has been indicated by some of the older respondents:

> ‘Marriage was considered important during those times. And people used to give respect more to a married woman’

> ‘I got more respect as a married woman. I was considered as more matured in comparison to the times when I was not married’

The younger respondents suggested that their educational background and working career influenced their perceived role change for their in-laws. They indicated that they were respected by their in-laws and consulted for decision making by in-laws. Respondents said that their in-laws considered them to be confident and knowledgeable in taking decisions because of their educational background and working career. This is observed to be a difference between the older generation of respondents and the younger ones in this research. Some of the younger respondents also mentioned that as daughters-in-law they were expected by their in-laws to attend all family gatherings, religious ceremonies and to spend vacations with the in-laws. These respondents often used their workload in the office as an excuse to not attend all family gatherings.

Respondents both young and old who stayed with their in-laws after marriage found that they had to make adjustments and compromises. One older respondent who had a working career after marriage mentioned that due to her in-laws being at home she could enjoy her working career.

> ‘As we stayed with my in-laws I had to adapt myself to their habits and tastes. I made a lot of adjustments and compromises. I am thus supposed to be a good one. But my mother-in-law being at home has enabled me to work’
8.3.9 Perceived gains of the event

Most of the older respondents perceived the independence that they gained from being married as one of the most important advantages of being married. This independence according to them was related to their uninhibited physical movement to go out alone or with friends and to the movies. The opportunity to move around freely according to these respondents was not available when they were not married. According to them:

‘There was more independence after marriage. I was free to come and go without asking for any permission’

‘I was independent in doing things. This was not possible when I was with my parents. During those days we were not allowed to be with friends for a long time after college was over. So we could not go for movies and all. All this was now possible after marriage’

The older respondents found that motherhood and its joys as a result of marriage was another gain of marriage. They considered their marriage as facilitating their motherhood and thus attributed it as an advantage of marriage.

‘My daughter is a boon. That is the only advantage I feel about marriage’

‘Marriage gave me the joys of motherhood’

Across generations of both mothers and daughters, respondents said that achieving social status through marriage was a perceived gain because they were respected as a married woman in social circles, and addressed as the wife of someone. The companionship of their husband and physical proximity with their husband were the other perceived advantages cited by both older and younger respondents. By companionship, respondents meant sharing, discussing, interacting with their husband. However, the younger respondents in addition to companionship they have also mentioned their husband’s cooperation in matters relating to both outside and inside the household. Physical proximity was discussed differently by the older and the younger respondents. The older women mentioned it in terms of physical support as well as emotional and financial support.

‘I could count on my husband to help me out at any time of the day and night. He is a completely dependable friend. Financially we were able to do better than when I was earning alone’

‘It was having my husband as a companion. We discussed when I should conceive our first child’

However, the younger women mentioned physical proximity in terms of physical contact with husband such as ability to live together, moving around together, touching each other, which was no longer a restriction. The event of marriage was also perceived as an advantage by the younger respondents as it enabled them to discuss certain issues about sex and other reproductive issues which were no longer considered taboo.

The influence of the respondents’ educational background on perceived advantages across generations has been observed to be similar. They mentioned their educational background as enabling them to be at a par with their husband and that it facilitated better interspousal communication and interaction. One of the older respondent nicely summarised it as follows:
In a similar way, the respondents’ educational background is perceived to have given them confidence in interaction and communication with people after marriage, joining a new family and sometimes going to an altogether new place. Some of the older respondents mentioned that their knowledge about various topics and ability to express themselves were useful skills.

The influence of women’s working career on the perceived gains amongst women in the older and younger generations has been observed to be similar. Women across generations mentioned that their working career brought them financial independence. Older respondents saw their financial capability as an advantage because they could provide financial support to their in-laws.

The younger respondents have mentioned both financial independence as well as having individual freedom to move around alone as an advantage of being a married woman.

In comparison to the perceived advantages of marriage, for some respondents marriage proved to be a disappointment in that numerous adjustments had to be made and responsibilities to be shouldered.

One respondent described how marriage was a disadvantage for her in the following way:

Amongst the younger respondents the loss of individual identity because of being known as someone’s wife was a perceived disadvantage of marriage. Some of the respondents said that moving away from the natal home because of marriage was a disadvantage because they considered their natal home as a place of comfort. The inability to take decisions solely for oneself and less interaction with friends due to marital life was also perceived as disadvantages. Working women in the younger generation found it difficult to balance personal and professional life which was a disadvantage.
Tables 8.3 and 8.4 give us a summary of the differences and similarities in perceptions, in the event of marriage as seen in the eyes of generations of mothers and daughters respectively.

### Table 8.3 Summary of differences in perceptions across generations of mothers and daughters about the event of marriage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mothers’ Generation</th>
<th>Daughters’ Generation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Early age at marriage was perceived as the right age</td>
<td>Late age at marriage was perceived as the right age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reasons for perception of right age:</td>
<td>Reasons for perception of right age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Being physically and mentally ready for marriage</td>
<td>• Emotional maturity and ability to make adjustments and compromises</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Capable of shouldering responsibilities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• They were not allowed to pursue higher education or a working career so marriage was the best alternative according to them</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most marriages were arranged by parents (Arranged marriages)</td>
<td>In addition to arranged marriages, respondents also selected their own marriage partner. Prevalence of love marriage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most of the respondents did not set any criteria for the man whom they wanted to marry. Criteria was set by parents and elders in the family</td>
<td>All respondents stated their required criteria before the search for eligible man began</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criteria mostly concerned men with secure jobs, men in government jobs e.g. bank employees and engineers</td>
<td>Criteria concerned emotional qualities e.g.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social marriage usually lavish</td>
<td>- He should be caring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None of the respondents mentioned a registered marriage</td>
<td>- Compatible relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marriage gave women freedom</td>
<td>Social marriage was usually simple Importance of registration of marriages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Predominant feeling was happiness at the prospect of beginning a new life</td>
<td>Sense of belonging to the husband</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling of fear and apprehension due to little interaction before marriage</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling of being important. The house was perceived by most of the respondents as their domain</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother explained behaviour and etiquettes expected of a bride and daughter-in-law</td>
<td>Mother imparted information on sex and sexual relationship with husband</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of protecting the family name was an important instruction by mother</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Most of the women shouldered responsibilities within the house

Women described their role as a wife and various duties of a wife

Marriage as a liberating experience; change freedom and independence

Gains by advantage:
- independence that they gained from being married
- Motherhood being enabled by the event of marriage
- Physical proximity with husband in terms of physical, emotional and financial support
- For those working, work made them financially able and to financially support the in-laws family

Gains by disadvantage:
Adjustments and compromises after being married

Most of the women shouldered responsibilities both inside and outside the house
- For those who did not work at the time of marriage, they were emotionally and financially dependent on husband

Saw their role as a wife and a companion of the husband

Education and working career enabled compatible relationship with husband
Equal sharing of responsibilities with husband and getting respect from husband

Working career brings about feelings of being secure, being more confident and less dependent on husband

Gains by advantage:
- Higher education and working career facilitating compatibility between husband and wife, interaction and discussion with husband
- Physical proximity with husband in terms of physical contact such as ability to live together, move around together
- Enabled discussion about sex and other reproductive issues which were considered taboo when unmarried
  - Being married and having a working career enabled financial independence and individual freedom in moving around alone

Gains by disadvantage:
- Loss of individual identity by being known as the wife of someone
- Women found it difficult to balance personal and professional life after marriage
Table 8.4 Summary of similarities in perceptions across generations of mothers and daughters in the event of marriage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Similarities across generations of mothers and daughters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Perception of late age at marriage is based on peer group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Some of them had the choice to delay marriage but not to forgo it altogether</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Women mentioned feelings of relief and mental security on being married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Mothers instructed about adjustments and compromises to be made, instructions about being a good wife and being a good daughter-in-law were common across generations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Transition to married status brought about shouldering of responsibilities, managing the house and finance of the household</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Social status as a married woman yielded wider acceptance and respect in the society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Influence of working career as enabling financial independence in married life as advantageous was similar amongst older and younger women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Moving away from natal home because of marriage was a perceived disadvantage</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

8.4 Birth of the first child: beginning of motherhood

The birth of the first child is the next event that we focus on in the perceived reproductive life course of women. In this section we shall study the event of motherhood that commenced with the birth of the first child in the reproductive life course of the older cohorts of women.

8.4.1 Perceived timing of the event

Women’s perception of their age at first birth as early, late and right age differed. For example, all women who had their first child at the age of 23 did not perceive it to be a right age while some perceived it as a late age. Hence we do not find a fixed age patterning amongst the older generation of respondents. This could be a result of recall error and subjective bias in perceiving one’s age at first birth while subconsciously comparing it with the current trend. However, amongst the younger generation of respondents the fixed age patterning of age at first birth is distinctly observable. The median age at first birth in the older generation is 23 years in comparison to 29 years amongst women in the younger generation.

Usually ages 23 and 24 are perceived as right ages for women in the older generation to become first-time mothers, while amongst women in the younger generation these ages were 25-28 years. Here we observe a distinct shift in the perceived right age at first childbearing across generations of mothers and daughters. The older respondents stated that ages 23 and 24 were common ages of first childbearing in their time. Hence these women perceived their age as a right age in keeping with the first childbearing trends in the society in those days. Respondents who had planned the birth of their first child as well as those who mention the event as a natural consequence of marriage both perceived their age as the right age. In the younger generation almost all first births were planned and women have emphasised more on the physical and mental readiness to bear children as an important criterion in their perception of the right age to become mothers.

One respondent in the older generation who had her first child at the age of 26, personally considered her age at motherhood to be the right age because she was mentally and physically capable of bearing a child at that age. She relates her later age at marriage to her later ages at first childbearing. This respondent said that the age of 26 was however considered as a late age by many in those days. She also mentioned that she was late in comparison to her friends who married early and had a child early.
Those respondents who had their first child at ages 30 and 31 years, across generations of both mothers and daughters, perceived of their age as a late age. Older respondents related these ages to the societal norms which prescribed these ages to be late while they themselves perceived it as a right age. Some of them compared themselves with their friends who had their first child early and thus perceived their own age at motherhood as late. There were also some others who mentioned deliberately delaying the birth of their first child until they had a more settled life.

In the younger generation, perception of ages above 28 as late ages were based on potential complications that could arise during pregnancy and health risks for the mother and the child. Distinct differences are also observed across generations of daughters and mothers in perceptions of ideal age at motherhood. Amongst the older generation, the perception of ideal ages could be influenced by the present day trends surrounding first childbearing. However concrete conclusions cannot be drawn from the responses of the older generations. Chapter 6, section 6.2.1 provides a detailed discussion of the difference between ideal age and right age. Women in the older generation perceived the age of 25 as an ideal age to become a mother, while women in the younger generation perceived the age of 30 as the ideal age. These ages are considered to be age deadlines from the societal as well as health perspectives of the mother and the child. Some of the younger respondents also stressed that the ideal age for first child birth is dependent on when the girl gets married.

8.4.2 Ceremony: initiation to mark the transition

Most of the respondents in the older generation indicated that a ceremony was performed after the birth of the child. These ceremonies were sometimes performed on fixed days (such as the 10th or the 11th day) while some were performed after some months. For some respondents it was a cradle ceremony while for others a pooja and feast were held to celebrate the birth of the baby. We also observe that these ceremonies and celebrations varied with the religious background of the respondents.

In the younger generation these ceremonies were in the form of a naming ceremony or some other small ceremony. Unlike ceremonies in the older generation that followed immediately after the birth of the child, ceremonies in the younger generation usually took place on the 6th or 9th month after the birth of the baby.

8.4.3 Knowledge and its sources

In this section we shall focus on knowledge and the sources of knowledge on motherhood both before and after the respondents became mothers themselves. Based on the responses, knowledge can be categorised into instructions in the form of dos and don’ts to be followed after the birth of the child and advice on certain issues of motherhood like childcare and bringing up children. Mothers played
an important role instructing and giving advice on motherhood in the older generation in addition to other family members such as grandmothers and aunts. In the younger generation, most women said that their mother as well as their doctor was the main sources of knowledge on motherhood. However, in both the generations most women also mentioned of gathering knowledge from books, magazines and articles in the newspaper as well as learning by experiencing motherhood themselves. One respondent in the older generation also stated that studying home science at school helped her to manage her motherhood better.

Across generations, instructions as regards dos and don’ts were in most of the cases about the type of food that should be eaten and those that should be avoided while breastfeeding and in the period immediately after giving birth to a baby. These instructions were usually based on ‘local knowledge’ and community specific ideas about motherhood. Knowledge in the form of advice was mainly on breastfeeding practices, care of both mother and child and massaging the baby to encourage the development of strong bones. Most of these advices were also based on local knowledge imparted by mother, grandmother or other aunts in the family. In the younger generation some respondents also said that doctors gave them advice on breastfeeding. Some of the advices in the older generation were as follows.

*’I also remembered some things from my practicals in my home science classes’.*

Across generations, instructions as regards dos and don’ts were in most of the cases about the type of food that should be eaten and those that should be avoided while breastfeeding and in the period immediately after giving birth to a baby. These instructions were usually based on ‘local knowledge’ and community specific ideas about motherhood. Knowledge in the form of advice was mainly on breastfeeding practices, care of both mother and child and massaging the baby to encourage the development of strong bones. Most of these advices were also based on local knowledge imparted by mother, grandmother or other aunts in the family. In the younger generation some respondents also said that doctors gave them advice on breastfeeding. Some of the advices in the older generation were as follows.

*’My mother advised me about the types of food that I should avoid while breastfeeding my child. Some of those food lead to stomach ache for the child so they should be avoided’*

*’My grandmother taught me how to give an oil bath to the child and also massage the child everyday before bath. She told me that it is good for the bones of the baby’*

Those respondents in the older generation who had a good education considered their education to be helpful in bringing up their children. They also said that their educational background was useful in selecting relevant advice from the various advices given to them.

*’A lot of people tried to advise me. But most of what I really followed came from books and from my mother. Some of the advices were outright silly while some of them were very sensible. So being educated the sensible ones I took’*

*’My high education gave me analytical and logical abilities. I was able to take what should be taken and just reject the rest’.*

In the younger generation all respondents said that their educational and working careers facilitated knowledge awareness about a variety of aspects as regards childcare, vaccination and upbringing of children. Higher education provided them with book knowledge while through interaction with workplace colleagues these respondents learnt about balancing their working career with motherhood.

### 8.4.4 Expected behavioural change

Similar to the younger respondents, motherhood is perceived by the older respondents as a greater transition in their lives than marriage. Motherhood led to certain behavioural changes, some of which were behavioural change expected by the society and members of the family. Similarity across generations is also observable as women were expected to be attentive and shoulder responsibilities of childcare. These often led to social restrictions in the movement of these respondents. Attending to the needs of their child also resulted in loss of sleep. The younger respondents also mentioned loss of autonomy and sacrifices made as a mother. Some of the working women in the older generation
similar to the working women in the younger generation said that they were expected to schedule work and other tasks according to the requirements of the child, taking leave too often from work and staying back at home when the child is unwell. These various commitments and expected behaviour of a mother largely affected working women’s career prospects in both generations. Here are some of the responses of the older generations.

‘I had to take leave from office often when she was unwell. Having a baby also restricts movement. Before I was pregnant I could accompany my husband to many places but after the baby was born it was inconvenient’

‘Once I had a baby I had to see to her well-being. I can’t take off at a moment’s notice. So a lot of restrictions do come in. I also had to always schedule my work and my tasks and my time as per the baby’s requirements’

‘Perhaps careerwise I would have done much better if I did not have a child’

However, older respondents mentioned familial support in the period after the birth of their child as all respondents stayed at their parents’ house for the birth of their first child. This is distinctly different from that of the younger respondents.

‘I was more responsible and alert than before. The first 5 months after delivery I was at my parents’ house so I learnt from my mother many things which I think I would have never learnt on my own. It also gave me a lot of rest and I was pampered. But after I came back to my house it was a little tough at that time to look after the baby and the house’

8.4.5 Perceived role change

Role change perceived by respondent

Most of the respondents across generations perceive their role change for themselves as becoming more responsible than what they used to be before becoming a mother. They also discuss about balancing roles as a homemaker, working woman, wife and being a mother. These different roles were managed by being adjustable and compromising in nature, which helped them become balanced personalities. To quote an older respondent how she perceived of her role change for herself.

‘I also became a very balanced personality. This I could feel when I was managing both the household as well as my daughter single-handedly’.

Out of the 15 women who were interviewed in the older generation 5 of them did not work at all and they were full-time housewives. Thus amongst women who had a working career some of them did mention having role conflicts and guilt feelings in leaving the child at home and going out to work which was similar to the predicaments faced by working women in the younger generation. Mostly parents or in-laws came over to stay and take care of the child while women went out to work. It was mentioned as a way of coping with the role conflict, across generations of mothers and daughters. However the younger respondents said that crèches and day care centres cater to their need for help in childcare.

Perceived role change for in-laws

Some of the older respondents mentioned that their role as a daughter-in-law changed after the birth of their first child. They mentioned of getting more importance after the birth of their first child. This
importance in some cases was also influenced by the sex of the child that was born. The birth of a grandson in some cases made the in-laws much happier than the birth of a granddaughter.

> 'My in-laws were very happy to have a grandson’

> 'Actually my mother-in-law was a little disappointed when I gave birth to M because she was hoping for a baby boy’

Many respondents have also mentioned that their importance in the in-law’s family had increased irrespective of the sex of the child.

> 'My in-laws were happy and took good care of me after my delivery’

Most respondents in the younger generation mentioned that their in-laws showed respect, adoration and happiness for the birth to their grandchild.

### 8.4.6 Perceived gains of the event

Most of the older respondents said that they gained self-confidence and courage when they became mothers. These women relate motherhood to an enhancement in their personality.

> 'As my daughter grew up I got a lot of support from her. I also got a lot of confidence from her. My other complexes of not being much educated in comparison to my co-sisters were overcome because of this confidence’.

> 'In one sense I got a lot of self-confidence looking after my child and being responsible for him in all ways possible’.

While younger respondents mention of the confidence gained in being a mother was facilitated both by their educational and working career.

Across generations of mothers and daughters, women stated that they obtained more respect when they became mothers compared to the time when they were married but without their first child. These women referred to status enhancement in the society by means of motherhood. Younger respondents also said that motherhood brought about a feeling of contentment and satisfaction. For some of the older respondents, motherhood was a natural indicator of maturity and responsibility which was perceived as an advantage.

For most of the respondents across generations of mothers and daughters, the disadvantages of motherhood were largely in the form of restrictions in physical movement and loss of sleep in the growing up stage of the child. Younger respondents also mentioned loss of personal freedom and loss of personal space as added disadvantages of being a mother. Both older and younger respondents discussed attention to the child, which hampered their leisure-time activities. Working mothers across generations talked about the difficulties in managing work and motherhood. Some of the housewives in the older generation mentioned the transition from being independent and doing things on their own to a dependency on husband and the responsibilities of motherhood as disadvantages.

Table 8.5 and 8.6 gives us a summary of the differences and similarities in perceptions, in the event of first birth across generations of mothers and daughters respectively.
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Table 8.5 Summary of differences in perceptions across generations of mothers and daughters about the event of first birth

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mothers’ Generation</th>
<th>Daughters’ Generation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ages 23 and 24 were perceived as the right age for first childbearing</td>
<td>Ages 25 to 28 were perceived as right age for first childbearing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some of the first births were planned while some were a natural consequence of marriage</td>
<td>All first births were planned and respondents emphasised more on the physical and mental readiness to bear children as an important criterion in planning for their first child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perception of late age was related to societal norms</td>
<td>Perception of late age was related to risks of complications during pregnancy and other health reasons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideal age of motherhood was perceived as 25 years</td>
<td>Ideal age of motherhood was 30 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ceremonies followed immediately after the birth of the child</td>
<td>Ceremonies were held usually in the 6th or 9th month after the birth of the baby</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother and other elder family members such as grandmothers and aunts played an important role instructing and giving advice on motherhood</td>
<td>Mother as well as the doctor were mentioned as the main sources of knowledge on motherhood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local knowledge and community-specific ideas about motherhood were predominant as instructions</td>
<td>In addition to local knowledge doctors too advised</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Received familial support in the period after the birth of the child, most of them stayed at their parental home after their first delivery</td>
<td>Managed mostly by themselves and most of them did not stay at their parental home after their first delivery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental help was available in taking care of the child</td>
<td>In addition to parental help women also found that creches and daycare centres cater to their needs for childcare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role as a daughter-in-law changed after the birth of the first child - Gaining more importance after the birth of the first child - Sometimes this importance was influenced by the sex of the child, whether it was a boy or a girl</td>
<td>Sex of the child did not influence the importance received after the birth of the first child - They were in general respected and adored irrespective of whether they were mothers or not</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most of them mentioned gaining self-confidence and courage after being a mother Motherhood was seen mentioned as enhancing their personality</td>
<td>Confidence to be a mother was enabled by women’s educational background and working career</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motherhood is advantageous as it is a natural</td>
<td>Motherhood as advantageous in bringing about</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 8: Perceived Life Course of Older Generations and Change across Generation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>indicator of maturity and responsibility</th>
<th>feelings of contentment and satisfaction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>For those who did not work they perceived their transition to motherhood as a disadvantage because they changed from being independent to being dependent on their husband after the birth of the child</td>
<td>Loss of personal freedom and loss of personal space were perceived as disadvantages of motherhood</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8.6 Summary of similarities in perceptions across generations of mothers and daughters in the event of first birth

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Similarities across generations of mothers and daughters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Perception of late age was similar i.e. age 30 and above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Apart from other sources of knowledge, most women gathered knowledge about motherhood from books, magazines and newspaper articles as well as by learning from experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Types of food that should be eaten and avoided while breastfeeding the child remained the same</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Educational background and working career were helpful in bringing up children and also facilitated women’s knowledge awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Motherhood was perceived as greater transition in women’s lives than marriage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Women were expected to be attentive and shoulder responsibilities of childcare. This was similar across generations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Working women were expected to schedule their work and other tasks according to the requirements of the child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Working women mentioned that their career prospects were affected to some extent by the birth of their child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Balancing different roles as a homemaker, working woman, wife and mother was similar across generations of mothers and daughters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Role conflicts of working women across generations were similar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Obtaining parental help and external help were ways of coping with these conflicts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Most women mentioned getting more respect because of the birth of their first child in comparison to the time when they did not have a child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Disadvantages of motherhood were largely in the form of restrictions in physical movement and loss of sleep</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Difficulty in pursuing leisure-time activities was perceived as another disadvantage of being a mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Working mothers amongst both the older and the younger generations experienced difficulties in managing both work and motherhood as a disadvantage</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

8.5 Conclusion

This chapter focuses on the intergenerational changes between the older and younger generations in our study. While the older generation represents the generation of mothers, the younger generation represents the generation of daughters in our study. The intergenerational changes are relevant as we observe the events of menarche, marriage and the birth of the first child in the reproductive life course of women. The differences and the similarities between generations are summarised for each of the events in separate tables. However, we should take into account that the perceived life course of older respondents is influenced to a certain extent by the present trends of perceived life course. In the next chapter we shall discuss the perceived life course of women interviewed in Groningen and compare them to the younger generation of respondents in Bangalore.