

Some Aspects of Fertility of the Mahatos of Midnapore, West Bengal

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INTRODUCTION

Increasing population is a major problem in the world as well as India today. According to 1991 census the population in India, goes up 844 million and the birth rate is 2.3 percent per annum. For limiting the pressure of population growth the Government of India since 1950's has formulated an official policy with an aim to control the rate of growth of population. Though the population growth in India declined from 24.80 percent during 1971-1981 to 23.50% during 1981-1991, it is not sufficient to check the population explosion. The growing population stands a challenge for World community. It is influenced by either migration or by fertility and mortality trends which has also great influence towards the progress and growth and development of population in a country. The factors like biological and socio-cultural responsible for the fertility which influence the population growth.

The Mahatos are the backward caste in West Bengal. The main economy of the Mahatos is agriculture. Most of the population is directly or indirectly employed in agriculture.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The data for the present study were collected from the village Barakhuli, district Midnapore, West Bengal situated about 25 K.M north of Midnapore town. Altogether 126 couples were interviewed for the collection of data. For this purpose only those couples who were ever married with at least one live birth are considered. The ever-married women were of below 15 to 50+ years age group considered for the present study. For the information on fertility the wives were interviewed mainly but husbands and the other members of the family were also interviewed wherever necessary. For the collection of data on age at marriage, age at menopause and age at first delivery also retrospective method was followed. To confirm the age at

marriage, age at first child birth some related questions such as –after how many years of puberty she was married, after how many years of marriage the first child was born etc. were asked to the women. Similarly for the age at menopause, it was asked after how many years of the last childbirth her menstruation stopped. This method in the present field was proved to be very useful.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

One of the important determinants of fertility is marriage. Age at marriage is the beginning of the reproductive span of a women's life. Thus any change in age at marriage can influence in increasing or decreasing the reproductive life.

The age at marriage of the Mahato women ranges from 10 to 24 years. 70.36% of women are found to get marriage below 18 years of age (Table 1). The mean age at marriage is 15.95 years.

In India age at marriage is comparatively low. Several studies have been conducted in this field. Agarwala has pointed out that if all Indian women get married after the age of 19 years there would be a 30 percent reduction in the birth rate (cited from Bhenede and Kanitkar).

The range of the age at menopause varies between 40 to 48 years and the average is 42.40 years. The mean age at menopause is 42.40 years. (Table 2).

The mean age at menopause of the Mahato women is almost similar to the rural Bengali

Table 1: Distribution of women according to age at marriage

Age at marriage (in years)	No. of women	Percentage of women
10-14	27	21.43
15-19	87	68.73
20-24	12	9.48
Total	126	99.99
Mean age at marriage	15.95	

Table 2: Distribution of women according to age at menopause

Age at menopause (in years)	Total population	
	No. of women	Percentage of women
40-42	28	66.67
43-45	10	23.80
46-48	4	9.52
Total	42	99.99
Mean age at menopause	42.40	

women around Calcutta which is 42 to 44 years observed by Agarwala (1977).

The age at first childbirth of the Mahato women ranges from 13 to 29 years (Table 3). The mean age at first childbirth of these women is 19.85 years. The higher age at first childbirth corresponds with higher age at marriage.

The mean age at first childbirth of the Mahato women is almost similar to the Assamese Muslims 18.37 years, which was observed by Das et al (1989).

Table 3: Distribution of the women according to age at first childbirth

Age at first child birth (in years)	Total population	
	No. of women	Percentage of women
13-15	10	7.94
16-18	52	41.26
19-21	40	31.74
22-24	11	8.73
25-27	11	8.73
28-30	2	1.59
Total	126	99.99
Mean age at first childbirth	19.85	

Table 4 shows that the Mahato women have given birth to a maximum of eight children. The mean fertility of these women is 3.53. The present findings is closer to the findings of Driver (1963) among the Brahmin women of Central India, that is 4.3 and that of Singh (1979) among the rural women of India which is also 3.3.

The age specific fertility of the Mahato women (Table 5) show that the mean fertility increases with the increase in age groups. The reasons for this trend is that the women of younger age group have experienced just a few years of married life and have not completed their fertility period and the younger women

Table 4: Distribution of women according to number of live births

No. of live-birth	Total population	
	No. of women	Percentage of women
1	19	15.08
2	19	15.08
3	24	19.04
4	29	23.02
5	14	11.11
6	14	11.11
7	4	3.17
8	3	2.38
Total	126	99.99
Mean number of live-birth	3.53	

Table 5: Distribution of age-specific fertility

Age group (in years)	No. of women	Total population No. of live-birth			Age-specific fertility
		Males	Females	Total	
15-19	3	1	3	4	1.33
20-24	18	15	14	29	1.61
25-29	28	44	30	74	2.64
30-34	14	19	23	42	3.00
35-39	13	22	31	53	4.07
40-44	11	33	14	47	4.70
45-49	12	34	27	61	6.77
50+	27	58	77	135	5.0
Total	126	226	219	445	3.53

have experienced the modern family planning devices which were not available to the older women in the past.

Table 6 shows the number of the live birth among the completed fertile women. Among the Mahato women, it is 5.00.

Driver (1963) reported that the women who

Table 6: Distribution of women with completed fertility according to number of live-births

No. of live-birth	Total population	
	No. of women	Percentage of women
1	1	2.38
2	-	-
3	4	9.52
4	12	28.57
5	9	21.43
6	10	23.81
7	4	9.52
8	2	4.76
Total	42	99.99
Average live birth	5.00	

have completed their reproductive life, the average live birth of these women are 6.4. Bhende and Kanitkar (1992) found in their study that the completed fertility of the Indian women is between five to seven. In this study the present findings is almost similar to the Indian women.

Table 7 shows the educational status of the couples. In this study, it is shows that there is inverse relationship found between education of the couples and fertility among the Mahatos. The illiterate couples shows the highest average number of live births and the lowest average number of live birth found among the graduate couples.

When the educational standard of husbands and wives are considered separately, it is found that fertility of the women is decreasing with increasing level of educational status of the husbands.

Various studies are conducted in this field. M.M. Patnaik (1984) in his fertility study among the scheduled caste of Bihar found that the mean fertility is the highest (6.30) for the illiterate group of wives and it is 3.46 for the wives having higher education. Bhowmick et.al (1970)

also found similar results.

Considering the occupational status and fertility (Table 8), it is revealed that the women with cultivator husbands have the highest number of live-births. The lowest average number of live-births has observed among the office employees.

Various works conducted in this field. Agarwala (1988) found that while cultivators and laborers gave birth to 7.4 children those who were engaged in service and other professions had only 6.6 children. Driver (1963) shows also the similar results.

Considering the relationship between family type and fertility (Table 9) the present study shows a higher average number of live births in joint families than in nuclear families. M.M.Patnaik (1985) in his fertility study shows that among the upper caste, backward caste and scheduled caste group's fertility in joint family is higher than nuclear family. Lorimer (1954), Davis (1957) and Karkal (1975) show the similar results. On the other hand Mahadevan (1985) found reverse results.

From the above discussion, it is clear that

Table 7: Distribution of the couples by educational status and number of live-births

Husbands' educational status	Wives' educational status											
	Illiterate		Primary		High School		Matric		Graduate		Total	
	No. of couple	Av. L.B	No. of couple	Av. L.B	No. of couple	Av. L.B	No. of couple	Av. L.B	No. of couple	Av. L.B	No. of couple	Av. L.B
Illiterate	49	4.13	8	3.88	1	3.00	-	-	-	-	58	4.12
Primary	5	4.60	3	3.67	2	3.00	-	-	-	-	10	4.00
High. School	1	4.00	8	3.73	25	4.00	-	-	-	-	34	3.61
Matric	-	-	5	2.50	8	3.00	1	2.00	-	-	14	2.28
Graduate	-	-	-	-	-	-	5	2.20	2	1.50	8	2.00
P.G.	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	2.00	1	1.00	2	1.50
Total	55	4.40	24	3.31	23	3.39	10	2.05	3	1.33	126	3.53

Table 8: Distribution of the couples by occupational status and number of live-births

Husbands' occupational status	Wives' occupational status							
	Non-worker		Cultivator		Office employee		Total	
	No. of couple	Average live-birth	No. of couple	Average live-birth	No. of couple	Average live-birth	No. of couple	Average live-birth
Non worker	-	-	2	4.50	-	-	2	4.50
Cultivator	20	4.05	12	4.08	-	-	32	4.06
Business person	16	4.03	-	-	1	3.50	17	4.00
Office employee	32	2.06	-	-	5	1.60	37	2.38
Others	28	4.42	10	4.00	-	-	38	4.31
Total	96	3.49	24	4.08	6	1.92	126	3.53

Table 9: Distribution of women according to family type and number of live-birth

Age group of women (in years)	Nuclear family			Joint family			Total		
	No. of women	Live-birth		No. of women	Live-birth		No. of women	Live-birth	
		No.	Average		No.	Average		No.	Average
15-19	-	-	-	3	4	1.33	3	4	1.33
20-24	6	8	1.33	12	21	1.75	18	29	1.61
25-29	16	46	2.88	12	28	2.33	28	74	2.64
30-34	10	31	3.1	4	11	2.75	14	42	3.0
35-39	10	40	4.0	3	13	4.33	13	53	4.07
40-44	6	25	4.16	5	22	4.4	11	47	4.7
45-49	9	42	4.67	3	19	6.33	12	61	6.77
50+	7	32	4.57	20	103	5.15	27	135	5.0
Total	64	224	3.5	62	221	3.56	126	445	3.53

fertility rate increases with decreasing of educational level and occupational status. Not only education and occupation other variable – such as age at marriage, age at first conception, age at first childbirth also related with the effect of fertility.

KEY WORDS Fertility. Ever married. Menopause. Education and Occupation.

ABSTRACT Fertility performance of the Mahato people of Midnapore, West Bengal has been studied. The Mahato women show lower mean age at marriage than India's perspective. 70.36% of the Mahato women are found to get married before 18 years of age. Fertility is found to be inversely related with the educational, occupational status of the couples of the Mahato people. Fertility is also found to be higher in joint families than nuclear families.

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