



# Determinants of Age at Marriage: A Sociological Analysis among Meitei-Hindus in Imphal City.

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## ARTICLE INFO

## ABSTRACT

This paper explores the relationship between age at marriage, socio-economic factors, and cultural norms. Education and occupation are highlighted as key aspects of Socio-economic factors that potentially impact the age at marriage. It seeks to bring out a relationship between cultural norms, socio-economic factors, and age at marriage among the Meitei Hindus of Imphal city. The age at marriage varies over time, influenced by cultural norms and Socio-economic factors. Both primary and secondary data are used, with more emphasis on primary data. The structured questionnaire is used to capture detailed information on these variables, exploring the links between cultural prescriptions, socio-economic factors, and age at marriage among 150 Meitei-Hindu respondents of Imphal. Socioeconomic factors strongly shape age at marriage among Meitei-Hindus, reflecting a shift toward delayed marriage driven by educational aspirations, career security, and modern priorities. At the same time, cultural norms such as Yek-exogamy and sibling birth-order expectations continue to influence marital decisions, though respondents negotiate these traditions with increasing flexibility.

**Keywords:** Cultural norms, socio-economic factors, age at marriage, Meitei-Hindus, Imphal City.

## Introduction

The age at marriage is a complex phenomenon influenced by a multifaceted interplay of biological, socio-economic, and cultural factors. While biological factors, particularly the fertility period, undeniably shape the potential age for procreation, the actual age at marriage exhibits considerable variation across different societies and time periods. This paper looks into the intricate relationship between cultural norms and socio-economic factors as key determinants of age at marriage among the Meitei Hindus of Imphal city.

This paper investigates the impact of socio-economic factors on the age at marriage by examining individuals' and their partners' education levels, occupation, and financial stability. It highlights the willingness of individuals to delay marriage for educational attainment and career stability, reflecting the value placed on these aspects. It also assesses the importance of financial resources, such as Awunpot, in marital timing decisions, revealing how modern priorities are shaping traditional practices.

Cultural norms are another crucial aspect explored in this study, particularly the practices of birth order and Yek marriage among the Meitei Hindus. The paper delves into the significance of adhering to sibling hierarchy, the influence of Yek marriage on partner selection. The generally accepted age for marriage, as identified in the study, reveals a trend towards later marriages, aligning with the emphasis on education, financial stability, and personal autonomy, marking a transition towards modern values while still respecting cultural traditions. The questionnaire was administered through interviews to a sample of 150 respondents residing in Imphal City to ensure comprehensive and detailed responses.

## Area and Population of Study

Manipur is one of the seven northeastern states of India, known collectively as the Seven Sister States. The state's geographical coordinates are between latitudes 23°83'N – 25°68'N and longitudes 93°03'E – 94°78'E, covering an area of 22,347 square kilometers. The capital city is Imphal.

According to the 2011 Census, Manipur has a population of 28.56 lakhs, up from 22.94 lakhs in 2001. The population comprises 1,438,586 males and 1,417,208 females, compared to 1,161,952 males and 1,131,944 females in 2001. This reflects a population growth of 24.50 percent over the decade, compared to 30.02 percent in the previous decade. In 2011, Manipur's population constituted 0.24 percent of India's total population, up from 0.22 percent in 2001. The sex ratio in 2011 was 985 females per 1000 males which was 974 in 2001. The literacy rate has improved to 76.94 percent, with male literacy at 83.58 percent and female literacy at 70.26 percent.

Hinduism is the predominant religion in Manipur, with 41.39% of the population adhering to it. Christianity follows closely with 41.29% of the population. Other religions include Islam (8.40%), Jainism (0.06%), Sikhism (0.05%), and Buddhism (0.05%). Additionally, 8.19% of the population identified with 'Other Religion,' and 0.38% stated 'No Particular Religion.'

The Meitei community is the largest ethnic group in Manipur. The Meiteis, an Indo-Mongoloid group, have a rich literary tradition and a written script. Historically, they have inhabited the central valley of Manipur, while the surrounding hills are home to the Nagas and other tribal communities. The Meitei community is an amalgamation of seven different clans: Angom, Chenglei, Khaba-Nganba, Khuman, Luwang, Moirang, and Ningthouja, each recognized as an exogamous unit called 'Salai.'

Among the primitive institutions of the Meitei, marriage is the most ancient and most developed one. According to Raghumani (1988), the most important ingredient of Meitei Marriage lies in the concept of Kujaba. It consists of four elements viz: the earth, the food grains, the cloth and the accessories. Kuiaba is an unavoidable act of marriage giving freely the daughter to another yek-salai (clan) without changing her own. It is the blessings for starting a new life by changing the head of the family from father to husband.

### Theoretical Background

The decision to marry and the corresponding age at marriage are outcomes of a dynamic process shaped by the socio-economic, cultural, and biological milieu. Social exchange theory suggests that human behaviour, including decisions about age at marriage, can be understood through the rational exchange of goods and services (Wallace & Wolf, 1986). Based on modernization theory, as society progresses, there has been shift in traditional families to nuclear units, reducing extended kin reliance. With rise in individualization in modern society, the familial factors or constraints have minimal influence and there has been rise in late, self-choice and conjugal marriages (Malhotra & Tsui, 1996). Further, according to "Relative Income Hypothesis" of Easterlin (1971), young men's marriage and fertility plans are influenced by their economic prospects, represented by the ratio between their earnings potential and their material aspirations. The husband's job opportunities, wage rates, and promotion speed determine the numerator, while the consumption standard of their family of origin determines the denominator. A high standard leads to higher expectations, and a low standard leads to lower expectations. Favourable economic prospects lead to earlier marriages and higher fertility, while pessimistic prospects delay marriage (Espenshade, 1985).

Various empirical studies also have explored theoretical and empirical links between socio-economic factors and age at marriage. Bartz & Nye (1970) suggested that lower social class correlates with earlier marriage in America.

Marini (1978) found that educational attainment is the most significant predictor of the timing of transition to adulthood and the assumption of adult work and family roles for both sexes, with a stronger impact on the age of marriage for females compared to males. Gulati (1969) studied how literacy, urbanization, and sex ratio affect the age at marriage in each Indian state. He concluded that the overall spread of education promotes later marriages more effectively than urbanization, and this effect is more pronounced among females than males. Patnaik (1985) found that higher female education levels lead to an increased median age at marriage. Bhargava & Saxena (1985) also claimed that women's education level is the main predictor of age at marriage variation. Kanitkar & Sinha (1985) noted a direct relationship between the age at marriage and the education levels of both the wife and husband.

Davis (1955) noted that during the transition to industrialization in Western societies, the necessity of having a job replaced the importance of land, leading to the postponement of marriage to older ages due to the need for apprenticeship and training in commercial and industrial roles. It is proposed that the combination of extended schooling providing more job opportunities and the desire for independence and self-sufficiency after marriage are the primary reasons for delaying marriage.

Waite & Spitze (1981) showed that higher parental resources reduce the likelihood of early marriage. Also, the time needed to accumulate resources of marriage costs in pre-modern Japan causes delay in marriages (Mosk, 1981). Concerning about the resource of marriage, among Meitei community, *Awunpot* has been one of the main resources required for marriage for the bride's family. At the wedding, the bride's family traditionally accumulates and offers various items, such as a bed, sofa, table, quilt, TV, kitchen necessities, and clothes, known collectively as *Awunpot*, to the newly married couple.

Cultural norms, the unwritten rules governing behaviour within any community, also exert a profound influence on marriage practices. In Sri Lanka, younger sisters among multiple siblings marry later (Malhuttra & Tsui, 1996). Every society also has norms that restrict the choice of marriage partners. For example, endogamy is the practice of marrying within a specific social group, caste, ethnicity, or religious community to preserve cultural identity, social cohesion, and the continuity of traditions and values within the group. According to traditional Meitei customs, marriages are forbidden between individuals with surnames sharing a common ancestor (Yek Marriage), preventing arrangements if the bride and groom fall into such prohibited categories.

Considering these viewpoints, this paper explores how socio-economic factors and cultural norms influence the age at marriage.

### Objectives of Study

- I. To analyze the influence of socio-economic factors on the age at marriage among Meitei Hindus
- II. To evaluate the role of cultural norms in marital decisions among Meitei Hindus.

### Methodology

To systematically investigate the relationship between cultural norms, socio-economic factors, and age at marriage among the Meitei Hindus of Imphal city, this paper relies on both primary and secondary data, with a greater emphasis on primary sources. A carefully developed questionnaire evaluates various dimensions, including education, occupation, required resources, parental roles, cultural norms, and the ideal age for marriage. Each question was designed to be clear and straightforward to minimize misinterpretation and ensure accurate responses.

The questionnaire was administered to a sample of 150 respondents residing in Imphal City. The data collection employed the interview method to ensure comprehensive and detailed responses. The analysis of primary data will be conducted using statistical processes such as classification, tabulation, percentage calculation, and correlation. This approach ensures a rigorous examination of how education, career stability, financial resources, and cultural practices influence marital timing among the Meitei Hindus, providing valuable insights into the interplay of modern and traditional factors in marital decisions.

### Education and Age at Marriage

Education is widely regarded as a crucial factor in determining the age at marriage, both for individuals themselves and their potential partners. A substantial majority of respondents, 104 (69.3%), believe that education significantly influences the age at marriage, indicating a strong perception that educational attainment plays a vital role in marital decisions. This is further evidenced by the fact that over half of the respondents, 117(78%), are willing to delay their age at marriage to complete their own education, and a significant portion, 130 respondents (86.7%), are open to postponing marriage if it allows their partner to achieve specific educational goals. This highlights the importance of education in shaping age at marriage.

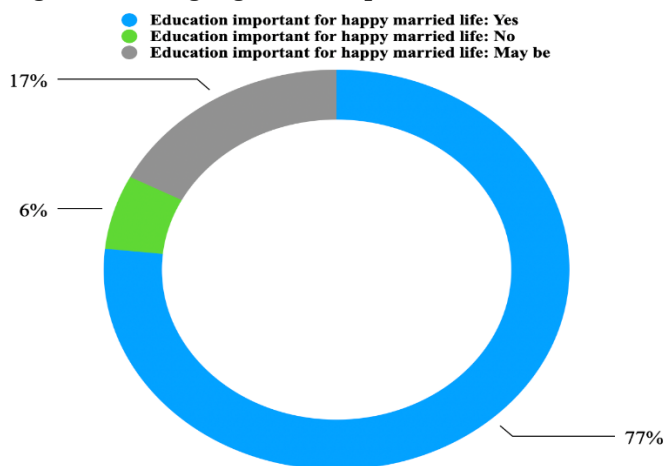


Fig. 1.1: Education important for a happy married life

When it comes to *educational expectations for partners*, an overwhelming majority (98%) prefer their future spouse to be educated, highlighting the strong emphasis placed on educational compatibility within relationships. However, most respondents (147,98%) consider having a similar educational background as a crucial determinant of marriage. Furthermore, the belief that education contributes to a happy married life is

shared by 76.7% ( 115 of respondents), reinforcing the value placed on educational achievement as a key determinant of a happy married life.

<b>Education and Age at Marriage</b>					
<b>Sl. No</b>	<b>Particulars</b>	<b>Responses</b>			
<b>1</b>	<b>Education important for a happy married life</b>	<b>Yes</b>		<b>No</b>	<b>May be</b>
		<b>115</b>		<b>9</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Education affects and influences age at marriage</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
		75	29	40	6
<b>3</b>	<b>Delay marriage to complete your education</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
		81	36	21	7
<b>4</b>	<b>Delay marriage to complete their partners educational goals</b>	<b>Yes (130)</b>		<b>No, does not matter</b>	
		<b>Yes, Always</b>	<b>Yes, Sometimes</b>		
		73	57	18	
<b>5</b>	<b>Expecting their partner to be educated</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Dont' Care</b>
		68	79	1	2

Table 1: Education and Age at marriage

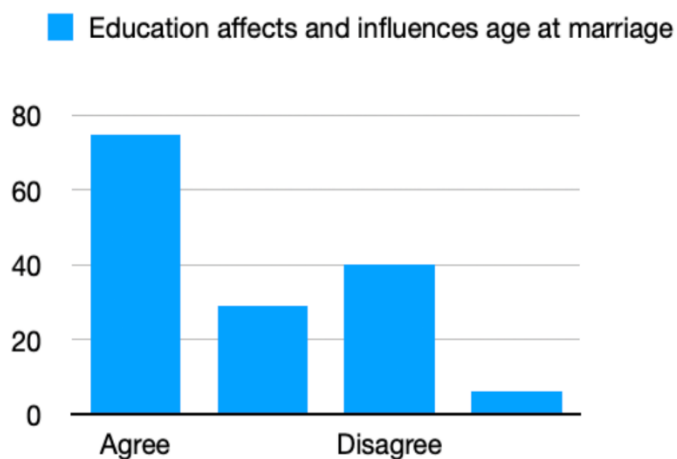


Fig.1.2: Education affects and influences age at marriage

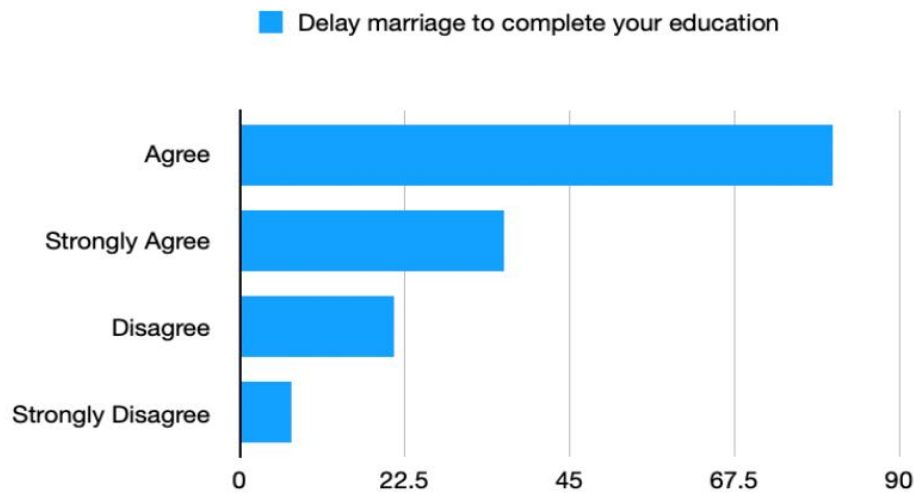


Fig. 1.2: Delay marriage to complete your education

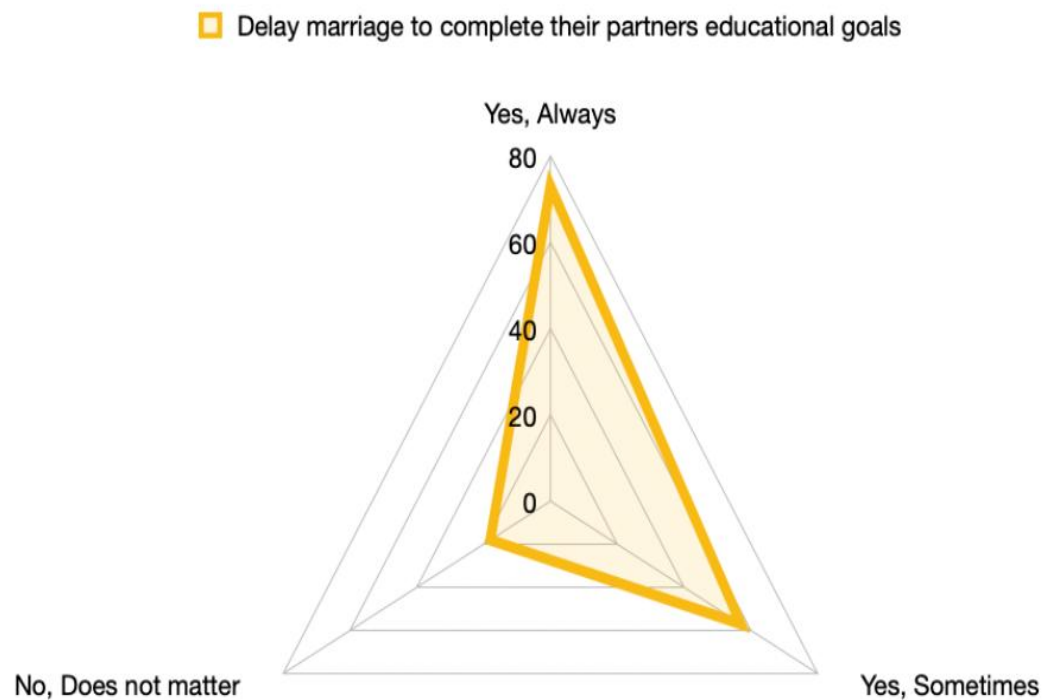


Fig. 1.3: Delay marriage to complete their partners educational goals

### Occupation and Age at Marriage

Occupation plays a significant role in the decision-making process regarding marriage among respondents. When considering job or occupation as a mate selection criterion, nearly half (69, 46%) of the respondents believe it is important, indicating that financial and career stability are valued in potential partners. Conversely, 23.3%, 35 respondents do not view occupation as a crucial factor, while (46, 30.7%) remain uncertain. This reflects a balanced perspective where occupation is important but not universally critical in mate selection.

Occupation and Age at marriage				
Sl. No	Particulars	Responses		
1	Job/Occupation as a criterion for Mate Selection	Yes	No	May be
		69	35	46
2	Waiting for Personal Job to Marry	Yes	No	May be
		77	23	50
3	Waiting for Partner's Job to Marry	Yes	No	May be
		47	36	66
4	Importance of Financial Stability for a Successful Marriage	Very important	Somewhat important	Not important
		125	25	0

Table 2: Occupation and Age at marriage

The importance of *career stability* is further highlighted when respondents were asked about waiting for personal job security before marrying. A majority (77 or 51.3%) would delay marriage until they secure a personal job, underscoring the significance of personal financial stability, while 50, 33% of respondents are not certain. In contrast, when considering their partner's job, 47 or 31.3% respondents would wait, but a larger portion (66, 44%) are unsure. This variability suggests that while personal job security is a priority, the partner's career stability impacts marital timing differently, with many respondents holding flexible views on this matter.

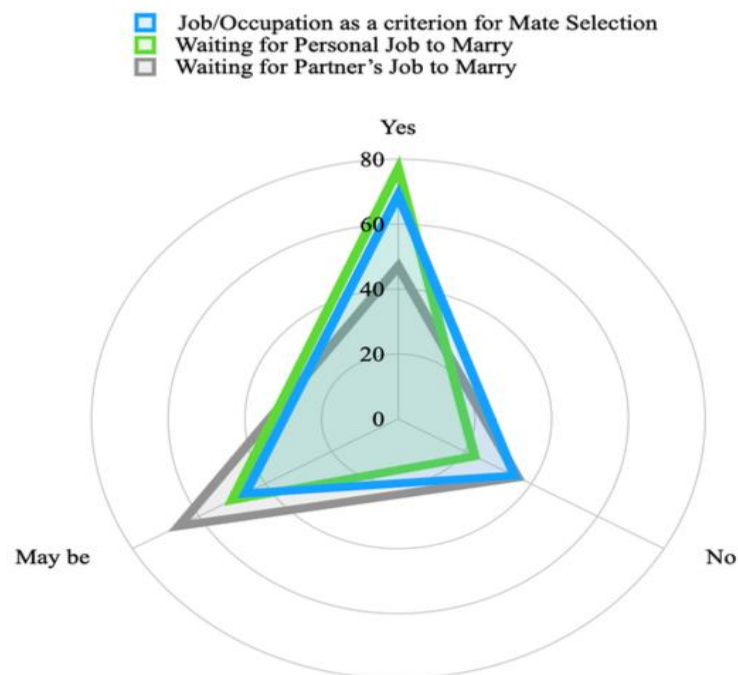


Fig. 2.1: Occupation and Age at Marriage-I



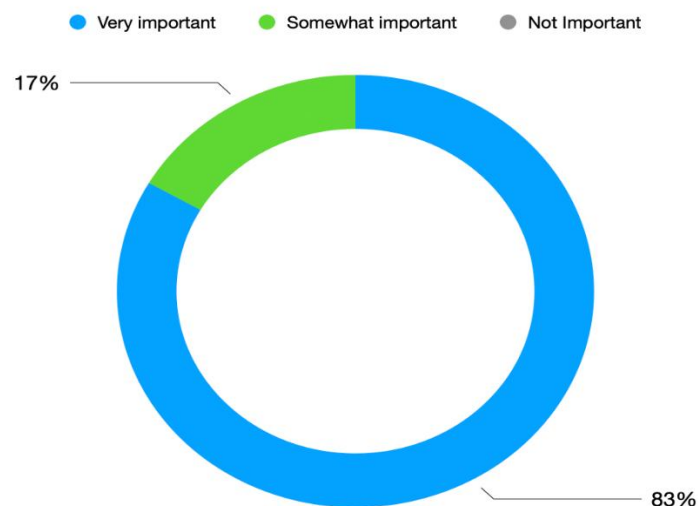


Fig. 2.2: Importance of Financial Stability for a Successful Marriage

## Required Resources for Marriage

### A. Awunpot

In the Meitei community, Awunpot traditionally plays a significant role as a resource required for marriage. However, the impact of Awunpot on the age at marriage appears to be a topic of considerable debate. While 29.3%, 44 of respondents believe that Awunpot influences the age at marriage, a larger segment (42%, 63) does not see a clear connection between Awunpot and the age at which people marry. Additionally, 27.3%, 41 respondents remain uncertain about its effect. This division in perceptions suggests that while Awunpot remains a valued tradition, its direct influence on marital timing is not universally acknowledged.

However, recent data regarding *Awunpot as necessity for establishing a new family* reveals a shifting perspective on its necessity. Only 11, 7.3% of respondents view Awunpot as essential for establishing a new family, while a majority (79, 52.7%) do not see it as crucial, suggesting that other factors may hold greater significance in modern marital decisions. Despite this, a notable 39.3% of respondents remain uncertain about Awunpot's importance, indicating a continued, albeit evolving, relevance of this tradition.

### B. Importance of Financial Stability for a Successful Marriage

The importance of *financial stability for a successful marriage* is strongly affirmed by the respondents. An overwhelming majority (125, 83.3%) consider it to be very important for a successful marriage, while the remaining 25, 16.7% view it as somewhat important. Notably, no respondents indicated that financial stability is unimportant, highlighting the universal recognition of economic factors as crucial for marital success. This consensus underscores the significant role that financial stability plays in ensuring a stable and fulfilling marriage. The data indicates a clear consensus among respondents on the importance of financial stability before marriage. An overwhelming majority, 134, 89.3%, prioritize *saving money* over getting married immediately, with 52% (78) agreeing and 37.3% (56) strongly agreeing with this stance. This strong preference underscores a common belief that achieving financial security is crucial for a stable and successful marriage, outweighing the urgency to marry without adequate financial preparation. Only a small fraction of respondents (16, 10.6%) disagree or strongly disagree, highlighting that the emphasis on financial readiness is widely supported.

## Parent's Role and Age of Marriage

### A. Impact of Parents' or In-Laws' Occupation and Financial Situation on Marriage

The data indicates that the Socio-economic factors of parents and in-laws does not significantly influence the age at marriage for most respondents. A majority (106 or 70.6%) do not consider their parents' or in-laws' occupation and financial situation as crucial for a successful marriage, with 55.3%(83) disagreeing and 15.3%(23) strongly disagreeing. Only a small portion (26.7% agree and 2.7% strongly agree) believes that these factors are important. This suggests that the financial and occupational status of the families involved may not heavily impact the timing or perceived success of marriages among the Meitei Hindus in Imphal City. It highlights a potential shift towards individual or couple-centric decision-making in marital matters, where personal attributes and mutual understanding take precedence over traditional socio-economic considerations.

Parents' Status and Role and Age at Marriage					
Sl. No	Particulars	Responses			
1	Initiator of Marriage	You and your partner	Your Parents	Both	
		82	0	68	
2	Parents' Rights to Decide Age at Marriage	Yes	No	May be	
		12	95	42	
3	Desire for Educated In-Laws	Yes	No	May be	
		95	3	51	
4	Parents' or In-Laws' Occupation and Financial Situation required for Successful Marriage	Agree	Strongly Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
		40	4	83	23

Table 3: Parents' Status and Role and Age at Marriage

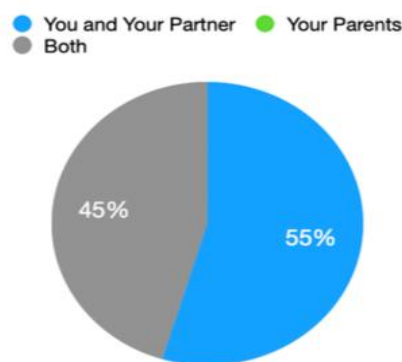


Fig.3.1: Initiator of Marriage

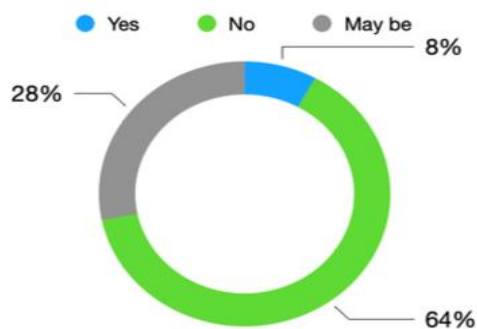


Fig. 3.2: Parents' Rights to Decide Age at Marriage

### B. Desire for Educated In-Laws

Furthermore, there is a clear preference for educated in-laws, with 63.3% (95) of respondents expressing a desire for their in-laws to have an educational background. This indicates that while the financial status of parents and in-laws might not be a significant factor, their educational attainment still holds considerable importance in the broader family context. Only 2% (3) respondents do not care about the education of their in-laws, while 34% (51) remain uncertain. This preference for education within the family suggests that while financial stability is essential for immediate marital success, educational background is valued for maintaining intellectual and cultural compatibility within the extended family, potentially influencing the overall marital satisfaction and stability.

### C. Initiator of Marriage

The data indicates a clear shift towards individual autonomy and mutual consent in marital decisions among Meitei Hindus in Imphal City. A majority 54.7% (82) of respondents believe that the decision to initiate marriage should come from both partners, with an additional 45.3% (68) feeling it should be a joint decision between the couple and their parents. Notably, no respondents consider that parents alone should initiate the marriage process. This modern perspective underscores the importance of mutual agreement and personal choice in marriage, reflecting broader socio-economic trends that prioritize individual rights and partnership equality.



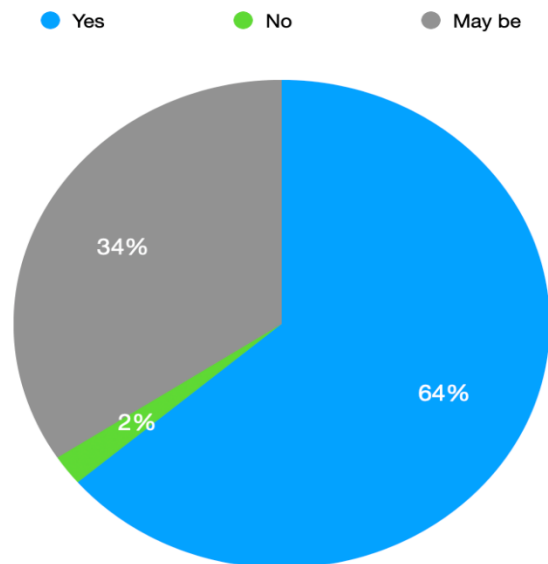


Fig.3.3: Desire for Educated In-Laws

■ Parents' or In-Laws' Occupation and Financial Situation required for Successful Marriage

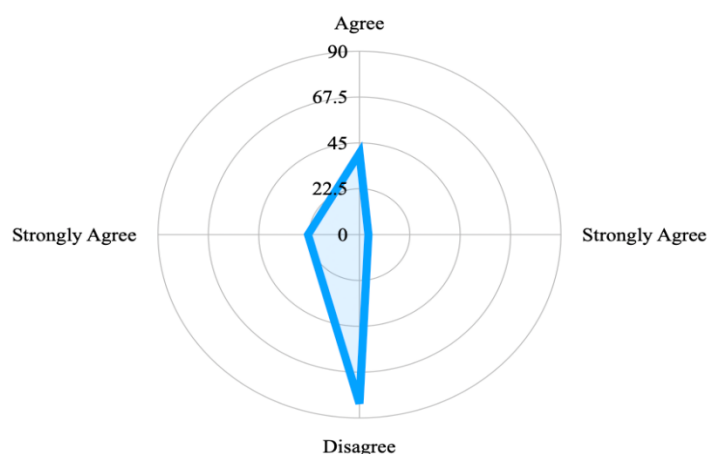


Fig.3.4: Parents' or In-Laws' Occupation and Financial Situation required for Successful Marriage

#### D. Parents' Rights to Decide Age at Marriage:

In terms of parental influence on the age at marriage, the data further supports the trend towards individual autonomy. A strong majority ( 95 or 63.3%) of respondents do not believe it is the parents' right to decide their children's age at marriage, while only a small fraction 8%(12) agree with parental decision-making in this regard. Additionally, 28%(42) remain uncertain, indicating some variability in opinions. These findings highlight a significant movement away from traditional practices where parents played a central role in marital decisions, towards a more contemporary approach that values personal choice and self-determination. This shift aligns with the increasing emphasis on education, career stability, and financial independence as crucial factors influencing the age at marriage.

#### Cultural Norms and Age at marriage

##### A. Yek Marriage

Cultural norms significantly impact the age at marriage among the Meitei Hindus, particularly in relation to the tradition of Yek marriage. A substantial majority of respondents 54%(81) believe that avoiding *Yek marriage*—marriage between individuals with shared surnames linked to a common ancestor—is crucial for a good married life. This reflects the enduring influence of cultural norms on marital decisions, highlighting how traditional practices continue to shape contemporary attitudes toward marriage. The primary rationale for avoiding Yek marriage, cited by 63.3% (95) of respondents, is to prevent inbreeding and ensure health and societal benefits, rather than simply adhering to tradition or promoting societal unity. This focus on health and practical benefits underscores a pragmatic approach to cultural norms in marriage.

Despite the strong preference for avoiding *Yek marriage*, opinions on its impact on marital decisions are mixed. A relatively balanced view emerges regarding the *decline in marriage opportunities due to Yek Tinnaba*, with 30.7%(46) of respondents willing to wait for a partner from a different Yek and a similar proportion 33.3%(50) remaining uncertain. This variability suggests that while cultural norms are important, they are not the sole determinants of age at marriage. The overall perspective reflects a tension between traditional cultural practices and individual preferences, indicating that while cultural norms play a significant role, they are navigated with consideration of personal and practical factors in the context of marriage.

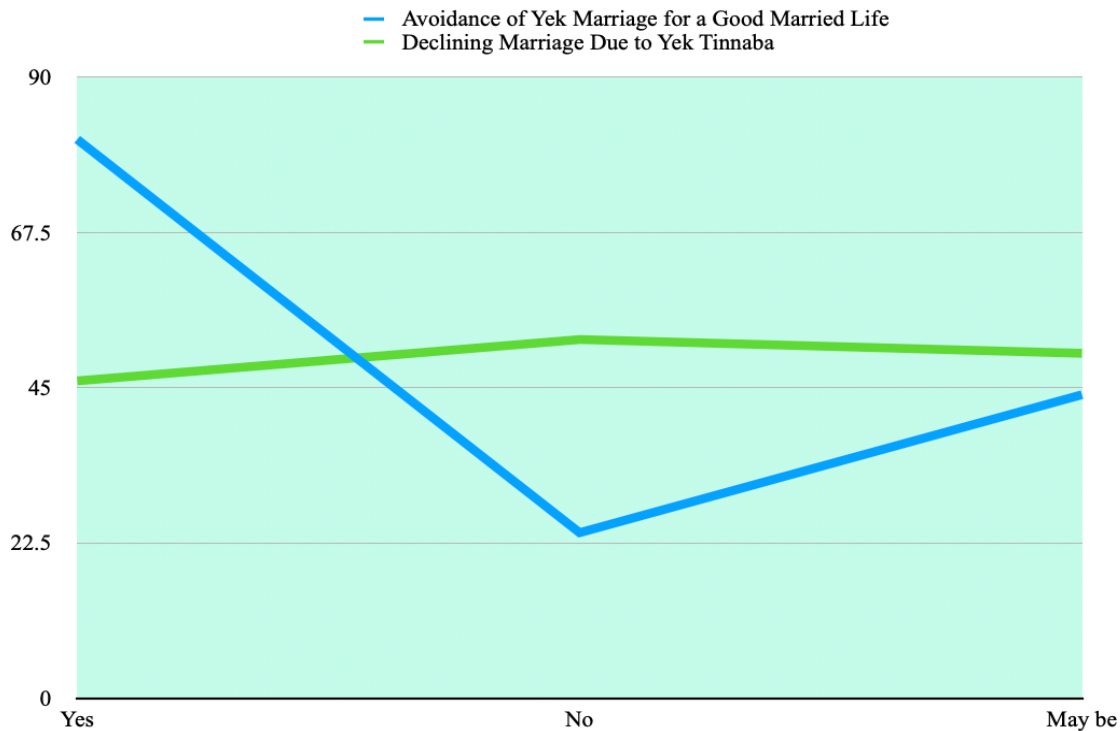


Fig.4.1: Avoidance of Yek Marriage for a Good Married Life and Declining Marriage Due to Yek Tinnaba

Cultural Norms and Age at Marriage: Yek Marriage					
Sl. No	Particulars	Responses			
1	Avoidance of Yek Marriage for a Good Married Life	Yes	No	May be	
		81	24	44	
2	Declining Marriage Due to Yek Tinnaba	Yes	No	May be	
		46	52	50	
3	Importance of Avoiding Yek Marriage	It is our tradition	It prevents inbreeding and confers many benefits	It is one of the means of uniting different Yek of our society	Do not care
		22	95	4	25

Table 4: Cultural Norms and Age at Marriage: Yek Marriage

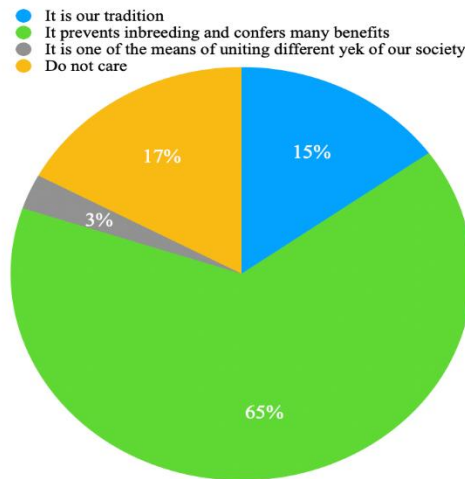


Fig. 4.2 :Importance of Avoiding Yek Marriage

### B. Birth order

The relationship between cultural norms and age at marriage among the Meitei Hindus in Imphal City shows a nuanced approach to traditional practices. Adherence to the cultural norm of marrying according to *sibling birth order* reveals a divided perspective. While 32.7% (49) of respondents follow this practice, a larger proportion 41.3%(62) do not, indicating a significant variability in how strictly this norm is observed. This suggests that cultural practices around birth order may not uniformly influence marital decisions across the community. However, the practice of waiting for elder siblings to marry before proceeding with one's own marriage holds more sway, with 45.3%(68) of respondents adhering to this sequence. This reflects a notable commitment to the cultural expectation of respecting sibling hierarchy in marital timing. Nonetheless, with 30%(45) of respondents remaining uncertain about this norm, there is room for flexibility and individual variation in how these cultural norms are applied in modern marital decisions.

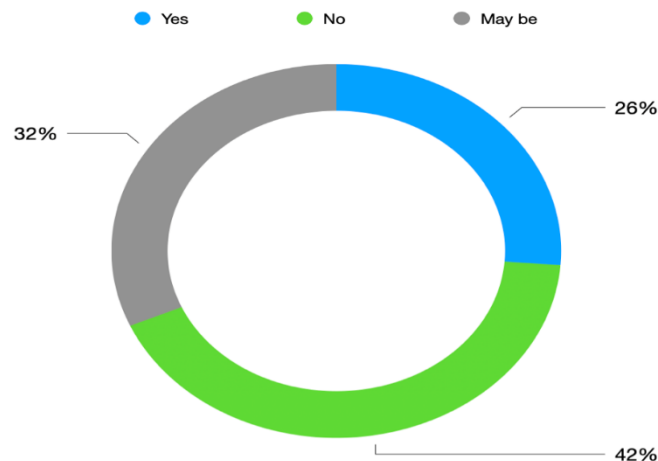


Fig.5: Marriage According to Sibling Birth Order

Cultural Norms and Age at Marriage: Birth Order				
Sl. No	Particulars	Responses		
1	Marriage According to Sibling Birth Order	Yes	No	May be
		49	62	39
2	Waiting for Elder Siblings to Marry	Yes	No	May be
		68	37	45

Table 5: Cultural Norms and Age at Marriage: Birth Order

### Ideal Age for Marriage

The majority 52%(78) of respondents consider 30-35 years old as the generally accepted age for men to get married, with a smaller proportion 44.7%(67) accepting the 25-30 years range. This indicates a tendency towards later marriage for men in the community. Further, the majority 84%(120) of respondents believe that 25-30 years old is the ideal age for most people to marry, with a small portion of 10%(15) respondents considering 30-35 years old as ideal. This reflects a general preference for marrying in the late 20s to early 30s. These findings on Meitei community show a preference for later marriages, with the majority considering 30-35 years as ideal for men and 25-30 years for women, reflecting a trend towards marrying in the late 20s to early 30s. This indicates a societal shift towards prioritizing educational attainment and financial stability before marriage.

Ideal Age for Marriage					
Sl. No	Particulars	Responses			
1	Generally Accepted Agent marriage for Men	Under 25 yrs.	25-30 yrs.	30-35 yrs.	Over 35 yrs.
		2	67	78	2
2	Generally Accepted Agent marriage for Women	Under 25 yrs.	25-30 yrs.	30-35 yrs.	Over 35 yrs.
		8	126	15	0

Table 6: Ideal Age for Marriage

### Conclusion

The paper highlights the significant influence of socio-economic factors, particularly education and occupation, on the age at marriage. Education emerges as a critical determinant, with a substantial majority of respondents recognizing its role in marital decisions. This is evidenced by the willingness of individuals to delay marriage for their own or their partner's educational pursuits, underscoring the value placed on educational attainment. Furthermore, while educational compatibility with partners is highly valued, having a similar educational background is not deemed essential. Occupation also plays a pivotal role, with career stability being an important factor for many respondents. Financial stability is universally recognized as crucial for a successful marriage, with a strong consensus on the necessity of saving money and securing job stability before marrying. The role of traditional practices such as Awunpot is seen as evolving, with a significant portion of respondents not viewing it as essential for establishing a new family, indicating a shift towards modern priorities.

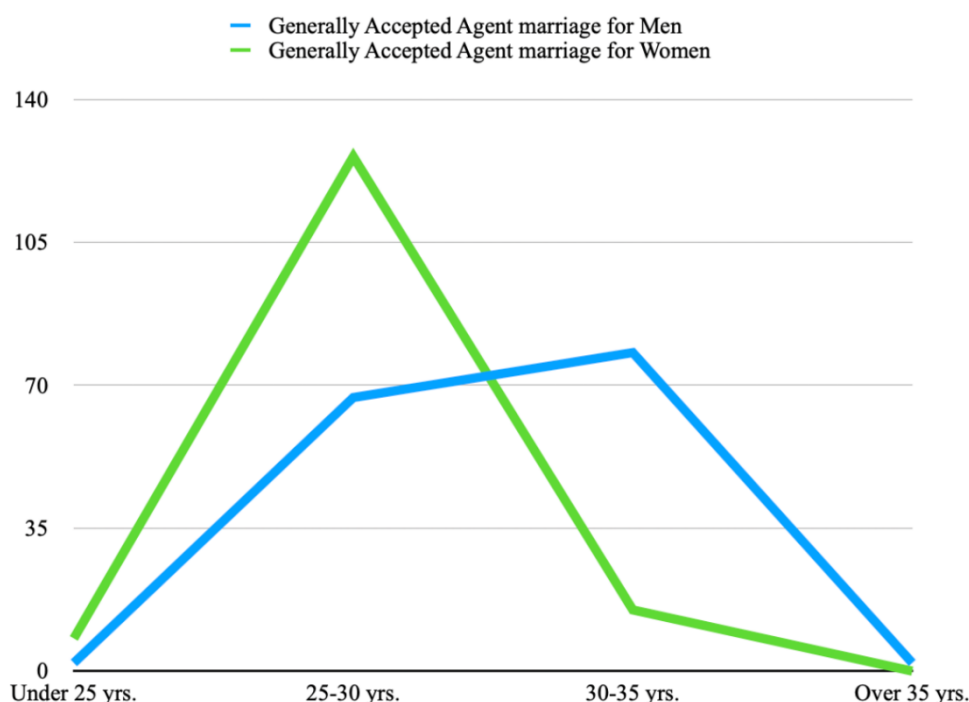


Fig. 6: Ideal Age for Marriage

Cultural norms continue to influence marital decisions, though they are navigated with a mix of adherence and flexibility. The practice of avoiding Yek marriage to prevent inbreeding and ensure societal benefits highlights the enduring impact of cultural traditions. However, opinions on its impact on marriage opportunities are mixed, reflecting a balance between traditional norms and personal preferences. The adherence to sibling birth order in marriage decisions also varies, with a notable commitment to this cultural expectation but room for individual variation. The generally accepted age for marriage reflects a trend towards later marriages, with preferences for men and women marrying in their late 20s to early 30s. This shift aligns with the emphasis on education, financial stability, and personal autonomy, marking a transition towards modern values while still respecting cultural traditions.

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