CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

7.1 CHAPTER STRUCTURE:

The present research work has dealt with the changing intentions and management strategies of three subsequent generations regarding fertility. The work has also tried to understand how the cultural changes influence these intentions and their management. The researcher has tried to focus on intentions and management regarding conception, contraception, total birth control methods and unwanted pregnancies by women of three generations in a small town of Rajasthan.

The major objective of the present work has been to understand the changing fertility behaviour of women of three generations with special focus on the impact of culture on them. It also deals with how women of all generations have used their agencies to manipulate with cultural norms related to various aspects of fertility. Giddens’ theory of structuration has been employed here as theoretical framework and Fertility Intention Management Approach has been professed.

As the issues related to fertility are very sensitive and require in-depth probing, qualitative research methods like personal interviews, focused group discussions, observation and case studies have been used to understand the cultural dynamics in fertility behaviour. Coleman (2000) believes that, ‘Demography without numbers is a social waffle.’ However, qualitative data provides valid insight into an individual’s perception of reality and researchers have found the incorporation of individual level
perspectives useful for exploring influences and behaviour contributing to macro level patterns and trends in fertility. Hence, a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods has been deployed here. The work has offered the analytical interpretations of attitude and fertility behaviour of women across three generations through the analysis of their experiences and actions.

Section 7.2 discusses the major findings of the present research work. The Section throws light on the intentions and management behaviour of all three generations. It also deals with the continuity and changes in fertility behaviour as observed in the course of three generations.

Section 7.3 discusses the findings in the light of the theoretical framework drawn from Giddens’ theory of structuration.

Section 7.4 deals with yet another theoretical premise drawn from the theory of ‘Diffusion and Fertility Transition’.

Section 7.5 presents some concluding remarks on the overall work and Section 7.6 presents some suggestions for future research work in the same area of fertility behaviour.

7.2 MAJOR FINDINGS:

In order to understand changes in the lives of women across time, three subsequent generations have been studied. Generations situate life in a historical context and focus on life course development of individuals across biographies and historical times.
Through historical comparisons a researcher can identify broad processes that are shared but also to isolate those that differentiate and to analyze those that contrast in the patterns of fertility behaviour.

So over all, an attempt has been made here to understand the cultural dynamics in fertility intentions and management across three generations.

The work has also explored how the values and beliefs inherent in a woman’s cultural upbringing influence her attitudes regarding fertility.

A major challenge in the study of fertility intentions and their relation to actual management is to appropriately account for their cultural dimension. However, most demographic models that include the cultural dimension as a major determinant of behaviour, reduce culture to a list of traits to be added to other institutional and individual background characteristics. In this representation of culture, behaviour is guided by a system of discrete rules and beliefs in which individuals have been socialized.

This view of culture is not dynamic and is therefore unsuitable to explain value changes. In the present work, culture is regarded as a set of symbols and meanings that individuals manipulate according to circumstances. In other words, cultural constraints do not dictate or determine the fertility behaviour, but help in molding the norms according to one’s own strategy.

The very fact that ‘society is society’ hinges on the phenomenon that people reflexively construct structure and institutions within and through which to interact. As Goverde, et.al, (2000) states, “Human society is a human artifact.”
“Throughout history humans have structured their social lives to create order and reduce uncertainty.” (North 1997). Ginsburg and Rapp (1995) also state, “Individuals use their local system of social relations and logics to resist or challenge their circumstances in order to reframe them to their best advantage and that this is key to understanding how women deal with issue of reproductive behaviour.”

Women as individuals wield power in their own right which they exercise in their near exclusive domains. The question of female subordination and their simultaneous holding of power thus becomes a contradiction.

Though the authority of a society may declare that women are irrelevant, close attention to women’s strategies and motive indicate that even in situation of overt sex role asymmetry women have a great deal more power than conventional theorist have assumed. Freedman (1963) has also recognized that the neighbourhood, community or social milieu in which a couple live can affect their fertility behaviour.

Contextual effects are likely to operate on individuals through social interactions. These take place mainly in intermediate groups which are defined by spatial or social proximity, where the content of an individual’s social network is the product of her individual preferences and associated opportunities and constraints. (Huckfeldt 1983)

Family values also play an important role in determining the course of actions of individuals. It is essential to understand the household and family dynamics to grapple with lives of their members, particularly with regard to their fertility behaviour. (Patel 1990)
The beliefs and norms of family and community are reflected in an individual’s health decisions, behaviour is influenced by how a person thinks the community views his/her actions. That clearly means that individual is always aware about what is expected from him/her.

Recognition that fertility behaviour is strongly conditioned by culture is an essential first step towards future elucidation. (Cleland & Wilson 1987)

Thus, to a large extent woman’s life courses seems to be institutionalized and their roles standardized in way dictated by the cultural contexts. However, the extent of institutionalized and standardized patterns has steadily been on the decline across generations.

The present work has traced the changes in fertility patterns during the life course of three generations. Here the researcher has analyzed the impact of varying contextual circumstances on individual fertility behaviour by differentiating women according to their generation.

Every woman lives two genres. A mother-in-law in her later life achieved a social status and an identity because of changing times. This work has traced the evolution of sensibilities of women across generations since the late 1920s. It is the story of survival and growth of woman over a century, which epitomizes continuity and change. This work offers the analytical interpretation of fertility behaviour of these women through the analysis of their experiences and action.

The women unfold the events of their lives and chronicle the sequence of their attitudes and behaviour, their interpretations and judgments about them. They also give a detailed account of the protests and the struggle that they have undergone to magnify their voice overtime. In the present cross
generational study the researcher has faced constantly the issue of tradition vs. modernity.

- **Fertility Behaviour: Intentions & Management of Gen I**

It is generally assumed that in most of the families during the times of Gen I, some form of regulated environment prevailed. It appears that the family environment was guided more by family tradition and by the discretions of the family head/patriarch than by the liking, interest and choices of individual family members. The ‘culture of silence’ surrounding issues related to sex and reproduction used to prevent women from discussing their problems.

But, the present work throws light on a totally different dimension of the issue. Though, the ‘culture of silence’ was prevalent then and human lives were shaped by the unique social and cultural conditions that exist during those times.

But, that does not mean that women of Gen I were not aware about their surroundings. They very well knew about the norms of society, what they are expected to do and what they should not do. If they produced many children, that was not because of their unawareness of the means to stop reproduction, or even not because of the social pressure, or not because of lack of resources. They had their practical reasons for having many children as discussed in Chapter 4. Their fears related to child survival, their interest in a big family, the respect and honour associated with a large family in those days were some of the important reasons for the women of Gen I to opt for many children. They even knew the methods to keep a space between two children and practiced them very well. The women of Gen I also had an idea
about how to stop bearing children at all. They had their own mechanisms to control and direct their lives. They also knew what to do in the case of an unwanted pregnancy. The local culture provided many indigenous mechanism of its own to facilitate the women in every field related to fertility.

Though at times, their strategies failed to fulfill their intentions, but it is for sure that women used various direct and indirect mechanisms to direct their fertility according to their own intentions. For this generation, children were believed to serve as a kind of ‘insurance’ and could actually be a source of ‘wealth’. For a majority of people of this generation, children were an ‘investment’ rather than a ‘consumption unit’. As C. Chattopadhyay and Dutt (1995) comment, “In a country where most of the people neither get any old age pension nor have their lives insured, children are particularly an investment for old age.”

Women as individuals wield power in their own right which they exercise in their near exclusive domains. Though formal authority structure of a society may declare that women are irrelevant, close attention to women’s strategies and motives indicate that even in situations of overt sex role asymmetry women have a great deal more power than conventional theorists have assumed.

The women of Gen I knew the community expectations from them, but still they even had the idea about manipulating their own ways while satisfying the values of community pertaining to fertility.
• **Fertility Behaviour: Intentions & Management of Gen II**

Fertility decisions are made not only in relation to the couple’s own marital and familial aspirations, but also with regard to the social environment in which children are raised. There came many changes in the society which influenced the lives and decisions of Gen II. The conditions which tend to discourage couple from having large families include the general scarcity of goods and services, limited opportunity of a good education and subsequent employment and the dowry dominated marriage market.

Gen II women’s perceptions of their changing society and the influence of FPP is important to understand in this regard. The women’s statements reveal their awareness of the social and economic transition they were undergoing and their interest in family size limitations; which was bolstered by a strong family planning programme. Though the shifts in economic and social circumstances were not large, in conjunction with the strong FPP, they constituted a powerful force for change in attitudes, ideas and behaviour of these women.

After a serious examination of all conditions, women themselves started taking hold of their lives, whether it was related to the number of children to have, when to have and what to do if not to have. Chapter 4, 5, and 6 present an account of the transitional phase women of Gen II were going through. On the one hand, they had the age old values and beliefs which supported high fertility and on the other hand they had the opportunity structure to have knowledge and access to small size family. The women of Gen II had started considering about the number of children they should have. It was no more, a constraint always which forced a woman to behave accordingly. Women had their own logics, own desires and own ways of manipulating the
occurrence of circumstances in such a way so that not to tamper with the existing social norms and not to hurt the elder generation of the family. Fortunately, they started getting access to the advanced techniques to regulate the fertility behaviour also. Coupled with this, was the increasing awareness propagated by government through media and increasing power of women in relation with the spouse and increasing say in decisions.

Though, one caveat is that even if circumstances were ideal, deeply ingrained traditional values posed a challenge for women of Gen II to have an access to their reproductive rights. Traditional beliefs about childbirths coupled with misconceptions and fear of medical institutions, had led many women to maintain reliance on indigenous methods of conception and contraception. But still, a good number of women started using the institutional facilities that were easily available for them.

- **Fertility Behaviour: Intentions & Management of Gen III**

Material and emotional interdependencies between generations characterized the traditional family of Gen I and Gen II. The patterns of interdependence was such that the child’s dependency on parents was desired early in the child’s life to be reversed later when parents become dependent on the child in their old age.

Material interdependencies have decreased with increased affluence in the present times. Yet emotional interdependencies do not decrease. In fact, it has even increased for Gen II and Gen III leading to a greater emphasis in urban contexts on children’s psychological value. Children are considered to be precious as they are the one who strengthen the marital bond and even provide companionship to the parents. The importance of economic or
utilitarian reasons decreases, as parents already opt for only one or two children and do not expect any return from the children in the old age also.

Gen III is moving from a natural fertility society to one of deliberate control over family size, in which the principal goals of reproductive strategies with regard to both limiting and spacing fertility are to ensure the quality of children’s upbringing in the face of tight economic and time constraints and to protect mother’s and children’s health.

This change is accompanied by a weakening of codes of behaviour that sustain high fertility and that are set and enforced at the community and wider family levels, and by the emergence of individual level fertility limitation strategies and behaviour.

In traditional societies, a decision about precise timing of motherhood rarely put a woman in any dilemma since traditional societies had predefined roles set for a married woman. However, with the various changes in circumstances and opportunities, women these days have to face the situations in which the decision of childbearing needs to be taken after a very careful evaluation of the circumstances.

Compared to the past, women are more involved in decision making in urban families. Equalitarian intra-family relations, with increased shared decision making, communication and role sharing between spouses are associated with lower level of fertility.

The changes in fertility behaviour are subsequently related to the rising aspirations of younger generations towards consumption, the increasing importance attached to the quality of life, an increasing taste for leisure and
the rise of post materialist values such as self-realization and freedom of speech.

Women surrounded by supportive conjugal kin, and presumably less subject to reproductive competition from sisters-in-law, may feel less compelled to bolster their social position through demonstrated fertility and eventually, more supported in their decision to retire from childbearing quite early than their previous generation. The description given in Chapter 4, 5, and 6 bring to the fore the same practical realities associated with the live for Gen III.

The diversity of life styles and general aspirations these days means that there is a fair degree of variance in terms of how priorities across the life course are worked out at the individual level and ‘having kids’ while still a priority often comes after having met some other priorities or ‘pre-conditions’.

- **Fertility Behaviour: Continuity & Change:**

Hence, it can be said that the fertility intentions of women of all three generations are forced under the influence of their attitudes and subjective norms related to the behaviour. And external and personal events affect preference both in terms of the number of children to have and by the stage of life in which to have them.

The research concludes that even when all women do act on their reported intentions to limit child bearing by using various mechanisms, women of all three generations do so in fundamentally different ways.

The present work depicts a picture not of the comparison of three generations’ fertility behaviour, but the continuity in fertility behaviour
which is lying beside the perceived changes. As mentioned in Chapter 4, 5, and 6 through the quotes of respondents. Women of previous generations envy the better conditions of women of present times. They very clearly express that if they had had such facilities to space and abort, their life would have been much easier. However, they had tried to manage their fertility career to their best even in the constraints of limited means and opportunities to do so.

The present work has linked the threads of intentions and management of three generations. It is very important to note here, that the strong but unexpressed desires of women of one generation get an expression in the times of next generation. For example, women of Gen I wanted to stop at 5-6 children, but had to bear more than that due to some practical reasons and demands of their time. But this desire find an expression in the times of Gen II, who in turn wanted to stop at 2-3, but had to bear more than that, again due to some practical circumstances. Women of Gen II wanted to avail the newly available methods for contraception and abortion, and this desire of them found an expression in the time of Gen III.

In other words, the researcher has realized that the success in management of fertility intentions and a better environment to execute the management for each generation, owe the previous generation for it as the previous generation has always supported those practices which they could not practice in their own times. And this is a privilege for their next generation. As many women of Gen III themselves have confessed the importance of the role of the support and positive environment they found from their mother-in-law in successfully following their fertility desires. This continuity of a desire for managing their life on their own terms (sometimes even without
the support of the spouse) has been the biggest support for women of each generation to successfully manage their fertility behaviour in a small town.

7.3 UNDERSTANDING THE FINDINGS IN THE LIGHT OF THE PROPOSED THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK:

Central to all discussion of the social field is the quest of human agency. In the present work also fertility intentions and management by women is understood in the light of women’s agency. That is why, Giddens’ concept of agency and structure has been used for theoretical framework.

This can be better understood under the umbrella of Giddens’ various concepts related to structuration like agency, structure, duality, dualism, time and space etc. as Giddens’ structuration is used for theoretical understanding of the present work. The major findings will be discussed under its premise.

The relation between agency and structure is among the most pervasive and difficult issue in sociological theory. Some of the major issues seem difficult to understand but can prove to be most helpful in interpreting the agency and structure interplay as well as fertility behaviour across generations. These are:

1) the ways the actions of individual agents are related to the structure of society. 2) The way these actions are structured in everyday life. 3) The way the structured features of actors are reproduced over time.

In other words, there is a quest to understand how individual fertility behaviour is related to the widely accepted cultural norms which are regenerated with each generation.
To understand it better, the various concepts given by Giddens need to be clarified beforehand. Giddens’ (1984) structuration theory explains the reciprocal relationship between the social structure and the individual agency across time and space in the individual life course. This theory deviates from the one way relationship between the macro and micro levels and stresses on duality of structure. The duality of structure suggests the interdependence between structure and agency and also studies their recursive nature.

Structure is what gives form and shape to social life, but it’s not itself the form and shape. Structure exists only in and through the activities of human agents. (Giddens 1984.) Kabeer (1999) explains agency as one of the three distinct dimensions of power along with resources and achievements. Agency is the ability to choose, define and act upon goals. Resources encompass the potential or enabling factors that allow women to exercise agency and achievements are the outcomes of the exercise of choice.

Coming back to Giddens who deeply reformulated the notions of structure and agency; emphasizing that action, which has strongly routinized aspects, is both conditioned by existing cultural structures and also creates and recreates those structure through the enactment process. (Walsham 1993)

Action and structure cannot be analyzed separately, as structures are created, maintained and changed through actions, while actions are given meaningful form only through the background of the structure: the line of causality runs in both directions making it impossible to determine what is changing what.

In this regard Giddens defines structure as consisting of rules and resources involving human action: the rules constrain the action, the resources make it possible.
Structuration theory aims to avoid extremes of structural or agent determinism. The balance of agency and structure is referred as the ‘duality of structure’. According to Giddens, the existing dualism in the understanding of social system should be reconceptualized as a duality, as they are the two facets of a single phenomenon. Dualism means that general conditions and people’s perception are two independent phenomena while duality means that they together constitute the medium as well as the outcome of recursive social practices.

In other words, social structure makes social action possible and at the same time the social action creates those very structures. Agency is human action. To be human is to be an agent. Agents’ knowledge of their society informs their action. Giddens defines, ‘ontological security’ as the trust people have in social structure; everyday actions have some degree of predictability thus ensuring social stability. This is not always true, though as the possession of agency allows one to break away from normative actions and depending on the sum of social factors at work, they may instigate shifts in the social structure. The dynamics between agency and structure makes such ‘generative action’ possible. Thus agency can lead to both the reproduction and the transformation of society.

Giddens also talks about time and space through which he means that everyone still continues to live a local life and the constraints of the body ensures that all individuals at every moment are contextually situated in time and space. Time and historical context specific conditioning explain how members of a particular generation shape, their lives and give meaning to their own biographies.
In the light of above discussion the basic thesis of the present work can be understood. The present work which deals with the way cultural dynamics play a major role in determining the fertility intentions of women, also presents a clear picture of how women manipulate their own mechanism to manage their fertility according to their desires within the sphere of community norms and family values.

People who live in the same community tend to learn similar things. They interpret their experiences similarly—or at least within a fairly restricted range and they then behave similarly again within the range of what is considered by others with whom they interact to be appropriate behaviour.

Women of all three generations have quite a good knowledge of what is expected from them. They are well aware of the social structure and social system. Still, they use their agency to manipulate their actions in the same structure with the help of the resources available in the structure. The general conditions of women’s lives and their own perception are not two independent phenomena; they together constitute the possibility of the reproduction as well as the transformation of society. This is quite visible with the transition in fertility behaviour Indian society is going through.

7.4 SOCIO-CULTURAL CHANGES, DIFFUSION AND CHANGES IN FERTILITY BEHAVIOUR:

Most available models of reproductive changes assume that ‘fertility decline is a largely rational process’ driven by ‘the desire for smaller families’ (Bulatao 2001) that is individual intentions about number of children that motivate action-drive the transformation from one demographic regime to another. However, relatively few studies of fertility change really examine
those desires for smaller families, or any of the other systems of meaning that should—according to the theory—lie behind falling birth rates.

Beliefs and preferences are transmitted across generations by the family and by local society. Thus, culture tends to evolve slowly over time in society, but can also suddenly shift as new information becomes more widely diffused.

Typically, low fertility is a cultural value that originates in the more privileged classes and then diffuses throughout society. In each community and social group there are innovators who are the first to experiment with a new idea or technology. They tell their friends and family who are the secondary adopters. The mass media may speed up the process.

Even in the times of mass media and modern means of communication, community norms and direct personal communication remain highly influential when the individual develops her attitudes towards family formation or when it comes to fertility related processes of social learning.

The dynamics in fertility decline is partially self sustaining, through diffusion mechanisms. Diffusion mechanism imply that fertility decline is affected by a self feeding process in an environment where fertility is coming down, people may be encouraged to reduce fertility. People perceive their fertility as ‘too high’ compared to other groups they tend to emulate. 1) People do perceive difference in fertility behaviour across groups. 2) People tend to emulate ‘progressive groups’. 3) Groups that have been associated with faster fertility decline are respected and occupy a high position in the social scale. 4) Reversibly, laggards (high fertility groups) are socially looked down upon as backward.
Bernardi distinguished four ways in which social interaction influences reproductive preferences; namely- social learning, social pressure, subjective obligation and contagion.

Diffusion theories emphasize the role of elite educated women in exploring other women to new ideas about fertility control. According to these theories, elite educated women develop a heightened awareness of the opportunity cost of child bearing, learn about western contraceptives and become empowered to adopt them. They, then act as sources of information, social support and social pressure that diffuse their new lifestyles and ideas to other women. (Montgomery et al 1993)

Fertility decline is the consequence of the increased prevalence of attitudes and behavior that were previously very rare or absent in the population i.e. they are innovative and their increased prevalence is the consequence of the spread of these attitudes and behaviour from some segments in the population to others i.e. a diffusion process. Fertility decline is the consequence of the spread of innovative birth control technology. The spread can be spontaneous or directed.

The process of urbanization and industrialization, exposure to western culture through mass media and the official policies supporting modernization, industrialization and globalization led to the creation of a new semi-urban Deoli which differs markedly from traditional groups in terms of education, occupation, life styles and values. And this introduction to the new ways of life has changed the fertility behaviour of women of Deoli also.
Hence, it can be said, that it is not mere information on birth control, but is the sum total of one’s interaction within community that makes one take a progressive decision like the acceptance of contraceptive use. Interventions by social institutions do constrain but seldom without some room for couples to exercise their ingenuity and volition. (Patel 2006)

All human beings are knowledgeable agents. That is to say, all social actors know a great deal about the conditions and consequences of what they do in their day-to-day lives.

The knowledgeability of human actors is always bonded on the one hand by the unconscious and on the other by unacknowledged conditions/ unintended consequences of action.

7.5 CONCLUDING REMARKS:

This work presents a unique perspective. It is assumed that women have come a long way since a century back. Each generation in particular culture faces different insights and challenges. Therefore, the generation challenges are very culture specific.

This study has made an attempt to study not only fertility behaviour as based on women’s intentions for having children, their knowledge and use of contraceptives etc. but has also focused on how family partnership are played out and managed when the reproductive intentions of two generations under one roof do not coincide. A key barrier to the realization of a woman’s reproductive choice is her inability to overcome disagreements within her own household.
While the impact of modernization on women’s status appears to be ambivalent at best, there is evidence that women themselves are becoming more aware of and challenging gender based subordination. Women are exposed to and can access some of the perceived advantages of a modern life, yet are also aware of the limitations of being able to change their own situation.

Coale’s (1973) model of three preconditions for fertility decline is worth mentioning here. He asked what perceptions of the world were necessary if people were to consciously limit their fertility.

1. Accept calculations, planning and choice as valid. (and thereby turn away from fatalism or the sense that God or the stars predetermines everything.)

2. Perceive the advantages of having fewer children

3. Know about and be able to master effective contraceptive technology.

Coale argues that fertility decline can only occur once total number of children enters the ‘calculus of conscious choice’. Knodel (1986) also identifies ‘deliberate stopping’ with the ‘intent to limit family size’. That is fertility falls because couples think about their fertility and choose to limit the number of children that they bear. Intentional action thus plays a central role in fertility regulation.

7.6 SUGGESTIONS:

- A distinction between male and female roles in terms of relative power is considered the norm throughout the society. Power relations between spouses have reproductive consequences for fertility
behaviour. As intrafamily relations become more equalitarian with increased communication and role sharing between spouses, fertility decreases. Thus, an analysis of importance of husband-wife communication in determining the fertility behaviour can be made.

- Fertility behaviour is a dynamic phenomenon and with changing nature and structure of society, the approach to study this behaviour should also incorporate the emerging issues, which have potential to affect the fertility behaviour.

- Women’s lives in varying material conditions, *i.e.*, the social, economic and political also vary in terms of the behaviour expected of them. The material conditions interact with norms of women’s behaviour in a society. It is important to analyze how they operate, especially with regard to fertility.