The capacity for maintenance of continuity or homeostasis is the central theme of life. The continuity is maintained through urge for reproduction, the formation of new individuals, its growth and sustenance (Young 1971).

Pearl (1939) accounted the urge for reproduction as basic attribute of all living organisms and identified it in reality as an extension of the urge of survival. The expressive form of the urge for reproduction thus could be accounted as reproductivity or fertility. It could be measured quantitatively by birth rate. He emphasized that the term fertility "be used to designate the total actual reproductive capacity of pairs of organism, male and female, as expressed by their ability when mated together to produce individual offspring", while the fecundity was designated "as innate potential reproductive capacity of the individual or organism, as denoted by its ability to form and separate from the body mature germ cells".

Lorimer (1954) observed that the reproduction or the fertility was net effect of procreative tendency and that the tendency was to survive from birth to procreative ages. He differentiated fecundity from fertility as the capacity to produce living offspring. Montagu (1957) noted that the fecundity as the physiological capacity to participate in reproduction, while the fertility as the expressive form of fecundity in terms of performance and therefore measurable. Berclay (1958) defined fertility as an actual level of performance in a population which could be measured by the occurrence of number of live births. He also differentiated fertility from fecundity - the later one according to him was the potential level of performance.

Pearl (1939) noted that the urge for reproduction could not be expressed in human in its full strength due to several restrictive forces, out of which two, the legal and the hedonistic ones were accounted as of particular importance. Besides the above ones Pearl (1939) differentiated
eight biological variables, such as, (a) sexual desire (libido), (b) innate reproductive capacity with advancing age, (c) the span of reproductive life (menarche to menopause), (d) litter size, (e) frequency of coitus, (f) frequency of occurrence of pregnancy (pregnancy rates), (g) prevalence of contraceptive efforts and (h) reproductive wastage, as determining factors for causing variation in reproductivity or fertility in man. Interrelationships between one with the other and the influence of the indirect variables like economic circumstances, density of population, religion and nation, were also emphasized.

It will be apparent from the above that although Pearl (1939) has not covered some of the factors like menstrual cycle length, post widowhood celibacy, voluntary abstinence, and similar other factors affecting fertility, in spite of that his pioneer contribution is accredited as hallmark providing the basic framework for the understanding reproductive biology of man.

Human fertility from the demographic point of view with socio-biological connotation has been subject matter of large number of studies. Contributions of Curjel (1920); Carr-Saunders (1922); Roberts (1927); Gould (1938); Fordé and Enidcharles (1938); Ford (1945); Davis (1946, 1951); Farris (1950, 1951); Whelpton and Kiser (1950-1964); Lorimer (1954); Berclay (1954); Coale and Hoover (1958); Bebartă (1961); and Coale and Tye (1961) and others are notable and significant in this field.

Influence of socio-cultural factors (Andorka 1978), income (Moberg 1950-51; Stys 1957; Golberg 1960; Freedman 1963; Duncan 1965; Freedman and Coombs 1966; Bernhardt 1972), socio-economic status (Johnson 1960, Glass 1967); education (Edin and Hutchinson 1935; Mitra 1966; Moors 1974; Chaudury 1977; Bhuiya and Streatfield 1991); residence (Keyfitz 1952-53; Golberg 1959), employment of women (Stykos and Wellar 1967; Sweet 1970), religion and ethnicity (Day 1968; Long 1970; Mazur 1973; Roberts and Lee 1974; Leonetti 1978; Ahmed 1981; Finnas 1991) have also been taken into consideration in fertility differences.

The hedonistic attitude of human for the reduction of fertility has been well accounted phenomenon in all advanced societies due to a number
of factors namely the diffusion of differential knowledge and practice of birth control and its implementation on the one hand, and delayed marriage, growth of education, high income level, the increase in number of unwanted births concerning induced abortion, natural foetal wastage, lactational amenorrhoea, the frequency of longer infecundability or sterility, prolonged breastfeeding, celibacy, sexual abstinence, widowhood or separation, spacing of children, decline of infant mortality on the other. Contributions of Stix (1940); Guttamacher (1952); Ford (1952); Eaton and Mayer (1954); Blake (1955); McKeown and Brown (1955); Devis and Blake (1956); Riemer and Whelpton (1958); Chi-Hsian (1958); Becker (1960); Tietze (1961); Henry (1961, 1982); Shapiro and Perrin (1964); Eversley (1965); Carlsson (1966); Wrigley (1966, 1969); Glass (1968); Shapiro (1970); James (1970); Shorter et. al., (1971); Perez et. al., (1971); Stanhope and Hornbrook (1974); Westoff (1975); Simon (1975); Lauretin and Benoit (1976); Chowdhury et. al., (1976); United Nation (1976); Cochrane (1979), Jain et. al., (1979); Laing (1980); Westoff et. al., (1982); Bicego et. al. (1991); Guz and Hobcraft (1991) and others are significant in this respect.

Fertility survey in India dates back to Census operation 1911. In the subsequent periods, contributions of Jain (1939); Sarkar (1944); Mandelbaum (1954, 1974); Dandekar and Dandekar (1953); Das Gupta et. al., (1955, 1963); Sovani and Dandekar (1955); Dandekar (1959); Driver (1963); Agarwala (1966, 1970); Chakravorty and Malakar (1967); Srivastava (1969); Bhowmick et. al. (1970 c); Freed and Freed (1971); Wyon and Gorden (1971); Chakravortti and Chakravortti (1974); Mukherjee and Devi (1982) are notable in this regard.

In addition to the above works of Sen (1953); Ray (1954); Rakshit (1962); Pakrasi (1966); Bhowmick et. al. (1967, 1968, 1969, 1970, a & b, 1971); Pakrasi et. al., (1967, 1973, 1981); Chakravorty (1970); Rakshit (1972); Chakravortti and Veeraju (1973); Devi (1975); Moulak (1975); Poddar (1975); Kulkarni and Joshi (1979); Garg et. al. (1981); Sidhu (1986) and others have provided firm background for the understanding of the fertility behaviour of the Indian couples.

It will be apparent from the above that the fertility of Indian couples in their different socio-economic strata as well as in different
geographical background have been subjected to meticulous investigations. In addition to the above, contributions of Chandrasekaran and George (1962); Roberts (1954); Sinha (1958); Dutta (1961); Mukherjee (1961); Nag (1962, 1965 a and b); Rele (1962, 1963); Potter et. al. (1965 a and b); Saxena (1965, 1969); Basuvarajappaa and Belvalgidab (1967); Kumar et.al. (1967 a and b); Talwar (1967); Nag(1970); Ambannavar (1975); Sharma (1978); Banerjee (1980), Basu et. al. (1980); Barua (1983, 1987); Talukdar (1983); Padmanabhan (1984); Bazarbaruah and Phookan (1986); Banerjee and Banerjee (1988); Sharma and Khan (1990); Das and Das (1992) and Das (1992) have provided the deep insight to the understanding of the several problems related to differential fertility in India.

Pakrasi, Banerjee and Das (1976), and Pakrasi, Banerjee and Halder (1980) have already provided a general compedium on differential fertility in India from the socio-biological point of view.

It would be apparent from the foregoing presentation, that the main emphasis on the fertility study or survey in India was laid to find out differential fertility in terms of socio-economic status, geographical location, major cultural and demographic variables associated with high or low reproduction and the effect of deliberate limitation of reproduction. Influence of biological factors as determinants of expressed difference in fertility specially in the contemporary urban set up of Bengal are yet to receive much attention. Attempt of Sarkar (1951, 1967); Pakrasi (1975) for Bengal and Omran et. al. (1976) for South Indian are no doubt notable in this context.

In consideration of above mentioned ideas in the present work an attempt has been made to study the reproductive life of the Bengalee females (mothers) living in an urban set up like Calcutta in terms of different biological factors like age at menarche, marriage-conception interval, pregnancy outcome, reproductive wastage, child mortality and age at menopause on the background of different socio-cultural variables like age at marriage, caste affiliations, educational attainments and socio-economic conditions.