SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The aim of the present research was to study socio-economic and demographic factors influencing age at marriage among four caste groups, handloom weavers in Dharmavaram town of Anantapur district, Andhra Pradesh. The category of castes covered in this study viz., Forward, Backward, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. This problem is important and innovative in this region for a number of reasons. This problem is very important for the country as a whole. Age at marriage in Andhra Pradesh is relatively very low among the Southern States of India and negligible efforts have been made to study this problem in this part of the state, the present investigation is an original effort. Several factors were examined here would be helpful in formulating suitable policy interventions to raise the age at marriage to the desired level.

METHODOLOGY:

Data for the present study were collected from 160 respondents (Husbands) from four caste groups, handloom weavers in Dharmavaram town of Anantapur district, Andhra Pradesh. The study area, Dharmavaram town consists of 32 Municipal Wards within a urban setting. From each ward 5 respondents were selected for the study by opting Stratified Random. The sample frame for study is the list of eligible couples in the age group of 15 to 50 years bearing
minimum three or more living children. It is also seen that only one couple is selected from each household.

The sample size is fixed as 160 among Forward, Backward, Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes groups. The procedure was followed to minimize the cost involved data collection and to benefit the existing rapport already established by the investigator in this area for the advantages of the study.

A relevant, appropriate and detailed interview schedule is used for the purpose of collecting necessary primary data from 160 respondents of different caste groups in the study area. Data for the present research was collected personally from the respondents using the interview schedule. Some of the question in the scheduled dealt with confidential information relating to women (Respondent's Wife) about the age at puberty etc., The survey was completed by the researcher himself with the help of another female investigator to collect data from the wives of respondents.

FINDINGS:

Age at Marriage: Past, Present and Future.

The study of age at marriage during the past, present and future (ideal) revealed that the mean age at marriage of both the males and females increased
significantly (1 percent level percent) over years. Ideal age at marriage also predicted further increase in age at marriage during the near future as well. The increasing in age at marriage from the past to the present was higher for females than for males. The age at marriage in the past, present and future and expected in future was considerably high got both the males and females among the Forward Castes followed by the Backward Castes, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. This confirmed the hypothesis of differential age at marriage across the four caste groups. An analysis of the age at marriage and family planning in the past revealed that the percentage of males who got married above the legal age at marriage (21+) was four times (67%) as high that of the females (1.7%) who married at the legal age of 18 years and above. Regarding the ideal age marriage for the boys and girls, 24.4 percent and 25 percent of the respondents suggested ages above the legal age at marriage for the boys (21+ years) and girls (18+ years) respectively. Thus it may be observed that a considerable proportion of the parents (Respondents) are expected to postpone the marriage of their to relatively later ages in future, which is a positive sign to check the population growth. But this may not be sufficient to make a dent in controlling the population.

Cultural characteristics and Age at Marriage:

The cultural characteristics considered for the study were caste groups like forward castes, backward caste, scheduled castes and scheduled tribes,
marriages with relatives and non relatives, type of family, type of marriage, sibling position, dowry and age at puberty. All these cultural factors have played a differential role in determining the age at marriage of the both husbands and wives, among the different caste group. For respondents, caste, occupation and education, and the amount of dowry received at the time of marriage were the major factors, which influenced their age at marriage uniformly among all the caste groups. Similarly, caste and type of relationship before marriage have also showed significant influence on the age at marriage of husbands among all the groups. However, type of family that, nuclear family was highly significant (91.9 percent level) in explaining variations in respondents age at marriage only among the backward castes, but not among the other caste groups.

For the wives, the difference of age between wife and husband found to be highly significant, 4-6 years (at 35 percent level) uniformly among all the cultural groups. In addition to this the influence of the religion was found to be highly significant (87.5 percent level) among the Hindus as compared to Muslims (13.5 percent level). The position of living children had also significant influence on the age at marriage of wives only among the four caste groups, which showed that these caste groups might have married strictly on the basis of order of birth. The amount of dowry has given also influenced the wife's age at marriage to some context, irrespective of their cultural background.
The above findings confirmed the hypotheses that the age at marriage of the respondents (Husbands) and wives would be early (i) when they are from lower castes rather than from upper castes, (ii) when they marry their relatives rather than non-relatives (iii) when the amount of the dowry received/given is less rather than high and (iv) when they are only children/first born rather than later-born. Further, the hypotheses is that wives who early puberty may marry at early age as compared to those who attained puberty at late age is proved in the present study uniformly among all the four castes groups. However, type of family, in which the husbands and wives have been reared before marriage did not show any difference in their age at marriage among all four caste group, except for the husbands of the scheduled tribes.

FACTORS INFLUENCING DECISION MAKING:

Persons who made first proposals for marriage in decision making were considered as important in decision making on marriage of the husbands. Husbands got married at 22-23 age group (at 45 percent level). When their parent and close relatives have first proposed their marriages against similar initiation made by the parents (39.4 percent) and Maternal Aunt/Uncle (23.1 percent) form four caste groups. This variable explained that 43 forward castes, 99 backward castes, 13 scheduled castes and 5 scheduled tribes. Thus
marriages of the children tend to place at younger ages if the parents are the final decision-makers.

In the present study 6.25 percent of the husbands and 28.30 percent of the wives married below the prescribed minimum legal age at marriage. When enquired about the persuaders for their early marriage, they were detailed that availability of suitable match, reduce the burden to parents and maintain the family leads to marry early. Majority of the wives 62.70 percent and husbands 93.75 percent married at prescribe ages by the legislation and a few of them also persuaded marriages lately.

Among the husbands and wives who married late (21+) and (18+) years respectively the age at marriage was low for those who mentioned parents and close relatives than themselves as responsible for their late marriage. However this trend was observed among the scheduled caste and scheduled tribes, but not among the forward and backward castes. Thus, forward and backward castes parents have played relatively greater role to marry off their children late. Consanguineous type of relationship before marriage (young ages and also disputes regarding the marriage with the proposed bride from relatives) and unemployment/poor economic conditions to maintain family were the important reasons stated by the husband for their late marriage. In the case of wives, who
married late reported love marriages and intercaste marriages for non-availability of good alliances as important reasons for their late marriage.

Socio-Economic characteristics and Age at Marriage:

Education, occupation and economic status of the husbands, their parents and parents-in-law were considered as the socio-economic characteristics under this section. For wives education is also examined. Further, the cumulative effective of the above variables on age at marriage was examined by developing socio-economic conditions index separately, for the husbands, their parents and parent-in-laws. Besides, these, the need for help from a female member in the husband's household were also examined in this section. In general, it was found that all these socio-economic variables have profound influence on age at marriage of both the husbands and wives.

From the above analysis it was found that the need for help from a female member and socio-economic condition of the husbands together account for influencing the age at marriage among the four caste groups. However, the contribution of these two variables together in explaining the variable among the forward and backward caste groups. Of these, two factors, the need for help from a female member in husband's household was found to be more influential
than the socio-economic conditions of the husband's in explaining the variance in their age at marriage.

Thus, the hypotheses confirmed here are that the males and females may marry at higher ages (I) when they are more educated than the less educated and (ii) when their parents are socially and economically better off than those whose parents are socio-economically at lower levels. Further, if males (husbands) are engaged in higher occupational categories as well as possessing higher economic status they may marry at higher ages and vice-versa. In case of females (wives), if they had worked before marriage their marriage may occur late compared to those who had not worked before marriage.

Demographic characteristics and Age at Marriage:

Year of marriage, age difference between the husband and wife, and the demographic variables discussed under this section in the main body of the chapters. Year of marriage, which was calculated retrospectively on the basis of duration of marriage, showed a positive association with the age at marriage of the spouses among the four castes groups but not for the husbands. While marriage age difference between the spouses showed a positive relationship with the husband's age at marriage 4-6 years (35 percent) from four caste groups. The existence of positive relationship for the husbands revealed that generally male prefer young wives. Places of longer residence in towns prior to the
marriage has a significant positive influence on wives' age at marriage irrespective of their social background.

Age at Marriage and Fertility:

This influence of wife's age at marriage on their fertility behaviour showed that in general there exists a significant inverse relationship between them. In the total population, marriage was the number of live births for the wives, whose age at marriage was 10 years less and was as high as 12 percent which declined 1-3 years for the wives who got married at 18 years above. However, cross-cultural analysis showed that the decreases in live births as a result of increases in age at marriage (14 years to 18+ years) was very high for the forward, backward and scheduled castes as compared to the scheduled tribes. However, the decreases in live births were statistically significant only among the schedule tribes but, not among the forward and backward caste groups. Thus in general, age at marriage of females has a negative association with their fertility levels.

Age at Marriage and Family Planning:

The positive relationship between the wife's age at marriage and family planning was statistically significant (60.6 percent) among the total population. But the above data reveals that Vasectomy and Tubectomy are the most popular
methods known to the entire respondents irrespective of their castes. It is clear from the above figures that the level of knowledge of various methods corresponds to the differential emphasis given by the official machinery in India's family planning programme. Thus the family planning programmes has succeeded in bringing knowledge of various methods of family planning to literate, semi-literate and illiterate people in the country. This is an achievement by itself.