

Towards a Sociological Understanding of Inter-religion Marriages: The Issues and Challenges

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In India where kinship ties are very strong and a large number of people continue to live in joint families. Marriage is not a bond between just husband and wife but bond between families and kinship networks. In inter-religion marriages most families oppose the decision of the young couples to get married. The level of resistance may vary from mild to very severe but most families oppose such marriages for various reasons. Since a couple intends to marry across religious lines and is well aware of the hornet's nest that may be aroused, they are cautious. Pre-marital difficulties begin from the very beginning. The period of courting which is the period of waiting till the final decision of marriage was taken, is very long and the couple tries to make all the possible efforts to win over the support of their parents as the consent of parents is very important. Though the institution of family and marriage is going through tremendous change in Indian society, still in most of our cases we had observed that couples tried to win over the support of their parents.

Therefore, the couples take a much longer period to get married when it comes to inter-religion marriage. It was generally observed that there was substantial time gap between the first meeting of the couple, liking for each other, decision to get married, getting married and announcement of the marriage. Considering that Hindu-Muslim marriages are the most difficult inter-religion marriages in India, the couples take much more longer when it comes to taking the decision to get married.

In modern times when society is undergoing tremendous changes where individualism is preferred over collectivity, not only the patterns of mate selection itself has undergone drastic change, but with changing circumstances, increased exposure to women give more opportunities for both sexes to intermingle at educational institutions and at economic institutions. Love marriages are quite common, but in case of inter-caste and inter-religious marriages we find societal reaction still so stirringly opposing such alliances during their initial contact, the companions find that there is an irresistible attraction between them – a common academic background, or a comparable economic status, or certain common interests and beliefs, or practices pertaining to different spheres of life, or physical beauty, etc, often a combination of various factors. This powerful mutual attraction gave the couple necessary impetus to meet again and again, enable them to understand each other as thoroughly as possible.

Apart from the cases where occupational and residential propinquity helped them to meet almost every day, special efforts were made by the spouses to meet very often and discuss matters of mutual interest. Such frequent meetings enable them to realize the problems that would arise out of an inter-marriage. For Babita Arora now Farhana Arfeen wife of Shakir Arfeen, "I met my husband in a business association and we were friends for four years then we decided that we will get married." Naturally the meetings were invariably clandestine till the time of marriage. The respondents' courting phase ranged from approximately a year to more than eight years, *and in one case it was 10 years*. Therefore, the commonest pattern amongst these love-lorn couples was to 'carry on courtship. For Payal now Payal Zaidi, wife of Zubain "we both knew each other from childhood. And decided to get married." Zubain "I could not think of somebody else, we had to wait long."

Women are never free from their social and moral obligations, there were many respondents who were first generation learners, their family backgrounds were liberal, they were motivated by their parents to study and make their careers, while studying they met their prospective husbands. Here again the socialization of women to be loyal to their family, made them take the decision that since childhood they have been taught that you have to be loyal to your man. Almost all the cultures teach women that her husband is her God, so this socialization along with fear of being in relationship with the man of the opposite community compelled women to strongly stick to their boyfriends. "Since my childhood my mother has been telling me that commitment is the integral a part of successful marriage. How can I cheat somebody? I cannot be loyal to anyone except him. *Meinne apni Maa ku bahut samjhaya mein dussrey aadami ko dokha kasse de sakti hoon? mein ye to kar sakti hoon ki mein kissi sey shaadi na karron per mein dokha nahin de sakti.*" Here the concern of respondent was that in patriarchy is she not going to win the trust and dignity of any man for her premarital affair, "I had no option I had to annoy my parents." For Manjari now Noor, "My parents came to know about my marriage, after I got married. So they could not prevent, but. They had lodged police complain against my husband, they tried their best to convince me, we really had tough time escaping, they were putting lot of emotional pressure on me to break the marriage."

Also once the decision is taken; marriage itself gets postponed for various reasons, specially the fear of reaction or non-acceptance by two families, i.e. family of the woman and family of the man, and their friends and relatives.

In India, particularly since caste and religion are basic criteria in the selection of a mate in the kin-oriented choice, self-choice and love-match are looked upon with complete disapproval. Besides that, parental objection becomes more severe with the pressure from the religious group. Another important factor used to dissuade couples from such marriages was that it becomes very difficult for the younger siblings of both girls and the boys, and more so in the case of girls to get married if the older brother or sister has had an inter-religion marriage.

"There was a lot of pressure on my husband from his natal family to get married as his parents were aware that he was having an affair with a non Muslim girl and they were against to this idea. They did not want him to marry her; therefore they use to call him back often to his native place on one pretext or other. It became difficult for him to deal with the family pressure they put on him. Therefore we married in 1993,

but being the eldest child in the family, I did not disclose this to my family since I had two younger siblings to get married”, Babita Arora now Farhana Afreen. Acceptance of such marriages by wider society is not easy although such marriages generally take place within the higher socio-economic levels with relatively high education background yet ; endogamous marriages enjoy social approval where as such marriages have to face discrimination from the society.

After deciding to get married most couples tried to persuade their parents and siblings to grant them permission to get married. The process often took a lot of time and persuasion. Some couples were fortunate enough to get the support of their parents and here too, the girl’s parents took much longer to accept the marriage or even with the decision of their daughter to get married, some of them did not accept the marriage at all.

The reasons for the opposition by the parents of our respondents in all phases-beginning from courting to the final performance of the marriage ceremony are many:

Since the boy and girl belong to different religions, not only they do not have the approval of the parents but, often by strong reaction from the families, relatives, friends of the two communities involved follow and if it happens to be a Hindu-Muslim marriage the reactions are even stronger. Hindus/Sikhs and Muslims are seen as opposite to each other in terms of culture, traditions, religion, food habits and also politically they are seen as majority versus minority. Thus falling in love with a person of the “opposite” religion or culture may be easy because opposites attract each other but the decision to get married is the most difficult one and getting the approval of the parents even more difficult. Everybody dissuades the couple from getting married. For Babita Arora now Farhana Afreen, “I think such marriage should happen. This is because there is misconception about Islam. Other people have no knowledge about Islam. Earlier I thought that Muslims are bad, they eat meat and they marry more than once, which is not true. Thus such marriages should happen, to bring the two communities together and remove all the stereotypes which people of both communities have about each other.”

Socially after the marriage, the couple generally face boycott. They are isolated by not getting invited by their families, relatives and friends for any rituals, festivals, functions etc. At times this opposition becomes so strong that in one case the parents had completely disowned the daughter and she was not invited for the weddings or the festivals as well as the worst happened when she was not even informed about the death of her father. Furthermore, in many cases the couple loses the sense of belonging and develops a kind of insecurity. Marriages which are not arranged by parents are usually not always supported by the parents.

The parents of the couple also face the problem of isolation from their religious community. They are generally held responsible for breaking of norms set up by the religion. In addition to this they carry the guilt feeling as they get caught in the conflict of loyalty between their community and their children. For Preeti, “I am sure that they would not be happy with my inter-religious marriage. Even after Seven years whenever my neighbors inquire about my whereabouts from my mother she has no answer. My mother calls me and asks; tell me what should I tell them? They cannot stop gossiping and complaining. I do not think that there would be some improvement in their thinking over the years.”

The fact is that all inter-religion marriages are love marriages or self-arranged marriages and generally do not have the approval of the parents and the society as opposed to marriages arranged by parents within the caste and within the religious community. The degree of disapproval may vary from one case to the other and may be minimal in celebrity marriages. In such cases the celebrity status of one or both partners over-rides religious differences of the partners.

In arranged marriages the families and close relatives are a great source of support and provide stability to arranged marriages by parents. But that is not the case in inter-religion marriages such couples are almost totally deprived of family support. Furthermore, important questions need to be addressed by the couple before they get married; these are the questions posed by parents, relatives, siblings and friends. What will be the future of their children? Will the society accept them? What will be the death rituals for them? Will it be a cremation, burial, electric cremation or organ donation?

Parents, relatives and friends scare the couple and especially the girl if she is marrying a Muslim, they tell her things like, “Talaq” (divorce) is so easy amongst the Muslims, what is the guarantee that you will not be divorced.” Furthermore, since polygamy is permitted to Muslims and religion permits them to marry up to four wives; “do you want to be one of the four wives?” Renuka argues with her aunt and grandmother, both of whom she is very attached to, as they brought her up. Says she: “they talk about Muslim having four wives but I know Hindus who have two wives. One of them proposed to me too! Does that mean all Hindus are like that? My aunts tell me about sheikhs in the gulf having four wives, but what do I have to do with the sheikh’s four wives? I know Nasim (my husband) won’t marry again. What do I have with Muslims being violent? Nasim isn’t. He’s hotheaded but not with me. I am very happy with him.”

Conversion is a very important issue in inter-religion marriages and more so because of its legal implications, i.e. loss of one’s inheritance rights after conversion. Whether you are a Hindu or a Muslim, you lose your inheritance rights after conversion. Another important question that is posed is a legal question. Legally on conversion, one loses one’s inheritance rights in parental property. Many couples did report that they had not claimed their share in ancestral property due their interreligious marriages, the actual reason quoted by majority of couples was that they wanted to live life on their own terms and conditions For Urvashi wife of Anees P. Vijapur, “Property matter has not come so far. But in Hindu’s family daughter does not get anything .So there is no question of property. My husband side, property is undivided. Both of us don’t think about these things.” Loss of inheritance is used as bargaining power to dissuade couples from getting married.

In one case conversion became an issue and came in the way of a Hindu-Muslim marriage. We came across a Hindu boy and a Muslim girl who were having a love affair for many years. When they decided to get married, the parents of the girls insisted that the boy should convert to Islam. But he refused and the marriage did not take place.

Also conversion is generally not favored by the society. One acquires one’s religion at birth i.e. one is born into it. You cannot change it and if it is meant to be used as an easy way to get married there is even greater opposition. Sometimes, such couples are even treated as outcasts, alienated and disowned by the society except if they belong to the elite class. For Sanjana Rawat now Zoya Khan, “My parents tried to convince me to leave him after my marriage. They don’t like him and wanted me to give him divorce and start my life again. They wanted that I should forget everything. For me they wanted to leave this place also and go to an unknown place where we would start our life again.”

Family friends, relatives, everybody tells the couple who decides to get married that such marriages are very taxing, emotionally and socially. Couples described the societal opposition they have faced because of being in an inter-religion marriage. The Muslim interviewees as well as those who had converted to Islam for marriage reported encountering prejudicial remarks or attitudes from their spouse's relatives. After the marriage negative remarks from in-laws are even more pronounced than at the point of time they learnt of their son or daughter's intention to marry a Muslim. Usually after the marriage, even where in-laws have grudgingly or gradually accepted the marriage, there is cordiality and civility in interaction. After marriage, remarks of a communal nature from in-laws tend to be occasional. Jasmeet comments about her Father, "he thinks that Muslim can marry more than one wife. They divorce easily. Even though his impression about Muslims has now improved, he is not ready to accept this." It should also be noted that some parents have cut off their relations, or maintain very limited, relation with their son or daughter after the inter-religious marriage. In these cases, while parents may continue to hold strongly negative views about their son-in-law's or daughter-in-law's faith, the scope for expressing such sentiments is limited. After the marriage, mostly a sibling, cousin, or another member of the extended family who are the chief perpetrators of prejudicial comments and attitudes. The following examples reflect interviewees' experiences in this regard. For Jyoti now Nargis, "my parents had only one problem that in a Muslim family men did two or three marriages but my parents did not know why this was done. It is done when a girl can't give birth to a baby and for this, a girl allows her husband to marry again."

It took Renuka 10 years to get the consent of her mother to marry Nasim. Her family's opposition to her marrying a Muslim was very strong. Even two days after her marriage, her aunt and grandmother told her, "What have I done! Have I lost my senses allowing you to marry a Muslim. They still says things about Muslims, they have four wives, they beat their wives." In one another case Anjuman earlier Shashikala's father still refuses to speak to her. Her mother and sisters would visit her where she lived with her husband, though they did not like the Muslim colony Zakir Nagar, Okhla in which she now lives. "They keep asking me to move out of that locality." She often is taunted that she is living among dirty people, who have no sense of hygiene and cleanliness. They also want her to look "modern" and stop wearing salwar kurtas, I often argue with my mother why she does not have same objection for sister when she complies with the tradition and culture of her in-laws.

Another respondent Anis remembers a slip-of-the-tongue from his Hindu mother-in-law. "Once my mother-in-law used the word kathua without realizing what she was saying.

Samira, who feels Indian society as a whole is anti-Muslim. She says, that her friends and relatives unconsciously tell that you are not typically Muslim, "I hear these attitudes voiced by my acquaintances every day. They have no problem saying such things in front of me because they always make it a point to add: we're not talking about your husband. He can hardly be called a Muslim! He's a Hindu!" Interestingly, many of those in the sample who have married Muslims consciously make the distinction between the stereotype Muslim and the person the 'typical Muslims.' Usually intended as a compliment, Muslims to whom this statement is made find underlying assumption insulting. "You aren't like other Muslims; you're not really a Muslim. They would tell Faizan, 'you are hardly like a Muslim. What they left unsaid was, 'you're fine, you're alright. You're not like 'them', you're like us.'" As he says wryly, "I'm quite used to being called a 'good Muslim.'"

Three couples acutely experienced the threat of violence (in 1992-93) post Babri Mosque demolition riots. Alka and Sageer had applied for court marriage at Tees Hazari Court. Alka house in West Delhi locality and they were attacked twice by an RSS-led mob. She heard them shout, asking her father to keep her under his control otherwise he would face serious consequences. Her father had an heart attack, he was hospitalized. Alka had already done Nikah and legally she was wife of Sageer. Sageer had to flee to escape the wrath of a Hindu communalists. Alka family was also threatened. Though she went back briefly, she could not bear to stay on there; she shifted for a while to a relative's home in Mumbai. While she and Alka had always planned to migrate to the Canada after court marriage, now this plan has become a certainty. "The RSS doesn't want Hindu-Muslim unity, so we'll have to go," says Alka simply. She says "The RSS won't let us be together. I have converted, but we want to have both kinds of marriages. And let our children imbibe the best of both religions."

One sphere of activity where couples faced discrimination was of residence. In the Western society it is an accepted norm that a son sets up an independent home after marriage. But in India, due to the sentiments of the traditional joint family system, the son invariably brings his bride to his parental home. In mixed marriages the daughter-in-law is, therefore, sometimes an unwelcome member to the household, especially in such cases, couples were forced to look for independent or neo-local residence, since there is lack of support to such marriages. Life becomes difficult, and more so in communally charged atmosphere such a marriage becomes source of alienation. The societal opposition increases many fold.

Purchasing a house or renting an apartment, if it was in a non-Muslim area is not easy. For example, Kusum Verma could move into the flat she and her husband bought, registered in her name because "no one would give it to a Muslim." Couples also reported discrimination or at the very least, curiosity, from neighbors and acquaintances, in subtle and not-so subtle forms. When people came to know one of the partners is Muslim. Many couples who were looking for rented accommodation in predominantly Hindu dominated areas reported that the landlords refused on the pretext of not renting their house to "non-vegetarians", instead of openly refusing it to such a couple. One respondent informed that the couple tried to get accommodation in a society and were on the verge of shifting there when the residents of that area became aware of their inter-religion marriage and objected to their staying as they feared it could lead to communal clashes. So when they had no other option left, but to shift to a Muslim dominated area of South Delhi.

Another respondent Rizwana Khatoon married to Hindu husband, Naresh reported that when they lived in a predominantly Hindu area, since she did not wanted to stay in Muslim Mohalla, "to avoid any resentment, I wore a Managsutra and Kumkum, my neighbors rarely talked to me. Though I visited their home on festivals and accepted prashad." If she didn't, they would attribute it to her being a Muslim. They laughed behind her back. This seemed more bearable but at times, they were openly non-cooperative and their children jeered at my husband and called him names, she was really upset on such occasions.

Farhana, a Muslim married to Jigar Patel, a Gujarati Hindu, remembers the person at whose institute she taught journalism telling her that she and her parents would rot in hell for marrying a non-Muslim. As she says, all this made her want to move out and they have since moved into a more mixed colony.

Amir and Suman are modern couple residing in a multi-cultural housing society “Nobody knew at first that Amir was a Muslim. One day when his grandfather came from the village to live with us, people found out that he was Muslim. They turned quite cold.” Recalls Suman, so they would pass remarks such as, ‘why have you put on these Muslim songs?’ Whenever played a ghazal cassette, or ‘why are you wearing this miyabhai color?’ if I wore green.

Arti now Amina’s isolation is perhaps the most extreme. The isolation is compounded by the fact that she lives with her ‘typically Muslim’ father-in-law in a lower-middle class Muslim locality in Delhi. She says, “I had never thought my best friend would change, though she did support me in my marriage, she came to our house recently. She’s a Jain, and I felt awful that she did not touch anything we offered her expect fruit and water. But I can understand-I too wouldn’t have done so in earlier times, when I was a teenager. I too, used to think that Muslims are dirty.”

Societal opposition encountered in the everyday or routine experiences of living life as an inter-religious couple is, in a sense, different from the violence and threat to life and property experienced at the time of riots. But as mentioned earlier a Hindu-Muslim marriage itself sometimes becomes a provocation for violence, and even where it doesn’t, the kind of hostility it arouses is itself a threat to the fundamental right to lead one’s life peacefully. The routine discrimination must be placed in the context of the increasing communalization of Indian life and polarization between communities. Such communalization and polarization, needless to say, is significantly accelerated and exacerbated with incidence of riots. After the Hindu-Muslim riots of 1992-93, communalizations at the workplace, school or other social spaces in general has increased. The 1992-93 riots and (to a lesser extent) the 2002 Gujarat riots directly affected numerous interviewees, their families, and children.

One couple acutely experienced the threat of violence. Mohammad Ali married to Usha Ben was visiting Baroda soon, after 2002 Gujarat Riots, the house where he was staying was attacked twice by an RSS-led mob, after the post-Godhra violence. His wife heard them shout, Mohammad Ali ‘ko baahar nikalao,’ (bring Mohammad Ali out) as she fled to a Hindu neighbor’s home. His Hindu (now converted) wife’s relative’s family was also threatened. Mohammad Ali and his wife could not bear to stay on in Baroda and came back to Delhi.

Couples described the societal opposition they have faced because of being in an inter-religious marriage. Societal opposition encountered in the everyday or routine experiences of living life as an inter-religious couple is, in a sense, different from the violence and threat to life and property experienced at the time of riots. But as mentioned earlier a Hindu-Muslim marriage itself sometimes becomes a provocation for violence, and even where it doesn’t, the kind of hostility it arouses is itself a threat to the fundamental right to lead one’s life peacefully. The routine discrimination must be placed in the context of the increasing communalization of Indian life and polarization between communities. Such communalization and polarization, needless to say, is significantly accelerated and exacerbated with incidence of riots.

It needs to be mentioned that not all couples of discrimination faced as a result of being in an inter-religious marriage. Also, several of the interviewees categorically mentioned that they have faced no problems being married to someone from another faith. Yet it should be pointed out that some (though not all) of these very interviewees also narrated particular incidents of discrimination. Arguably, these interviewees do not consider such isolated incidents as typifying ongoing societal opposition. Societal opposition and discrimination is most pronounced in the case of Muslims and those married to Muslims, It also seems to be more acute in the case of women generally, and women married to Muslims in particular. This is possibly explained by the fact that, regardless of whether the woman has converted or not, a woman marrying into another religion is perceived as having gone over to another faith. In contrast, the same is not assumed of men marrying into another religion, unless they have categorically converted and display visible markers of their new faith.

Interviewees reported disparaging comments from government and public officials. Preeti remembers an incident when She went to a reputed hospital, while she was at the registration counter, receptionist asked her about the name of her husband. As Preeti responded the receptionist, “*Hore Koyi Nai Millya si*” meaning you did not find anybody else, she commented angrily in Punjabi. Even the friends did not always support. In another case close friend who was against his friend (Muslim) marrying a Sikh girl, informed police that a boy and a girl have eloped “and are hiding in a hotel. Though this action of this particular friend evoked strong reaction from their friends and colleagues since all of them were taken to police station and threatened, I have seen the officials’ face change colours immediately on reading my name. Once an airport official asked me ‘in mein Kya dekha aapne? [What did you see in him]. That makes me furious and angry. At times I react but at times I have to tolerate if I am accompanied by my children.”

The workplace was another arena where discrimination was experienced. Mr Rehman a social activist-and researcher describes how his being married to a Hindu drew objections from other Muslims in his own organization One reason why he faced strong opposition was because his wife Niki wears a bindi and keeps Karva Chauth fast (hindu ritual when a married woman fasts for the long life of her husband).

Several interviewees did categorically state that having a Hindu or Muslim spouse did not create any problem for them during the communal violence. One spoke of the psychological impact, fear of violence, some experience of life being disrupted during riots, or anxiety about safety if riots were to break our again. A few also emphasized that they did not feel insecure as a Hindu-Muslim couple but they are scared of the communalization of the society After the Hindu-Muslim riots of 1992-93 and 2002 Gujarat riots communalizations at the workplace, school or other social spaces in general has increased. These riots directly and indirectly affected numerous interviewees, their families, and children. The general atmosphere in the society has increased the level of communalization, in fact after 2002 society has bi-polarized and Ashish Nandy had mentioned that Gujarat riots 2002 have partitioned the minds of people. For Akbar, the experience shook his faith in his Left ideals, and, at the time, he felt betrayed by his friends for not helping enough. He says, “For me it was as if my friends were standing out there, seeing me in danger and not helping. Now I realize they couldn’t have helped.”

Others drew attention to the fact that they would not conceal their identities as Muslims or partners in a marriage with a Muslim, and many couples agreed that there was no point living in fear or anxiety. Though they had no problems during riots. They did mention experiences such as having to relocate themselves during the time or the possibility of being affected by violence.

Sanyogita a Hindu married to a Muslim says the only thing that worries her is “ what if riots break out again, as they had in 92-93. My husband and his family will suffer because of me.” After the Gujrat riots, her parents are scared. She says, “They’ve told me, if anything happens, let people think you are a Kutchi. But I am very clear that if anybody asks me, I shall say who I am.” Sama, who converted to Islam after marrying Suhail feels that, among other reasons, safety is one reason why one partner in such marriages converts. After September 11, her mother was scared for her as she now lives in a predominantly Muslim area, and asked her to come home to her parents’ Hindu locality, saying ‘They’ll kill you. They won’t trust you.’ Atishi confesses that sometimes she does worry along those lines. She has converted to Islam after marrying Sagir feels secure in the Muslim area where she now lives, but has started feeling unsafe in some other areas in the city. She remembers an incidence at the time of her court marriage and the ruckus created by BJP volunteers at her natal home. “When Godhra was on, I was so terrified.”

Seema Shaikh worries about her son being targeted. Her family is discussing dropping his father’s surname from his name, but both she and her husband are against it. But given the communal climate of the times, she worries.

The children of such couples face very difficult problems and at times, there is no one to fall back on because there is no support system for such couples. The school also plays a very important role in the lives of the children of inter-religion marriages. As earlier mentioned if the school provides a secular environment, the children learn secular values and respect the decision of their parents to get married in spite of belonging to different religions. But schools which promote fundamentalist ideologies make the adjustments of children of such inter-religion marriages more difficult. The riots also affected children strongly, especially children who were in their formative years. Preeti, whose husband is a Muslim says, “My children have had a tough time everywhere. I sometimes didn’t realize it. The other day my son was telling me that after the Batla House incident, he felt his standing among his schoolmates had suddenly gone down. He is 12 years old” Her son didn’t feel he was under threat, but he “was neither here nor there” and has become more conscious of being a Muslim. For both her sons, she says, “Being half-Hindu and half-Muslim, and living through the communal atmosphere definitely created an identity problem.” I feel even more scared because my son is of mixed parentage. If he had been totally Muslim, then at least Muslims would have defended him-if, god forbid, such a situation ever arose. If there’s a Partition-like situation again, where will he go? Suppose a riot breaks out while he’s in college-I keep imagining these things.

It was difficult to ‘arrange’ marriages for the children of such mixed marriages because of this dual identity. It was even more difficult to find a match for the girls than for the boys. As we have seen in the case studies, there were quite a few children even boys of inter-religion couples who could not get married. It creates a sense of ‘double loss of identity’ as in one of the cases of inter religion married couple’s family. They had a dual identity or loss of identity when they were still young and after the divorce of their parents and change of their names it was a case of almost a second loss of identity for them. These boys did not easily mix with everybody, they had both moved away from home and desperately wanted to marry but could not find suitable matches. They both wanted to get married to Hindu girls because they, along with their mother, were now part of the Hindu fold. As mentioned earlier, they also had Hindu names and their father’s name had been dropped from their names after their parents’ divorce.

The charged communal atmosphere of the country has also affected the law making bodies of states. A law enacted in Madhya Pradesh states that the couple who are adult and want to marry will have to take permission from their respective parents otherwise legal action will be taken against them. This law is challenging the Special Marriages Act and curtailing the freedom of the adult couple who want to marry each other. It will make inter-religion marriages more difficult in our society. With such communal polarized society couple belonging to different religions will never get permission from their parents and specially from the parents of the girls, for inter-religion marriage.

Not only that most families oppose inter-religion marriages but also try their best to prevent it. In such cases, therefore, the bride giving family and the bride receiving family have very little interaction with each other and they almost view each other as “enemies”. The question of family support for the couple therefore does not arise. This is a major concern for the girl and boy when considering marriage into another religious community. The girl and boy love their families and expect the same from them. But when they do not get that love and support from the family, some give up the idea of getting married outside their religion while a few others go ahead and get married without family support. But this is a great source of stress, anxiety, agony and pain for the couple involved. Marriage in India is not an event but it is a lifelong relationship between husband and wife and between families. When such support is missing in the case of inter-religion marriages it can create and aggravate the social as well as psychological problems for the couple. The level of socio-psychological stress is often very high in such marriages and researches into this dimension will substantiate this point.

The chances are that over a period of time the husband’s family will accept the bride but the wife’s family finds it more difficult to accept the son-in-law who belongs to a different religious community and more so if he is a Muslim. Our study reveals that in most cases where conversion had taken place the marriage was more easily acceptable to the husband’s family. But, the girl’s family often became more distanced from their daughter after the marriage of the daughter especially if she was converted to Islam. But, where a registered marriage had taken place the resentment from the husband’s parents persisted over a longer period of time. But the marriage was more acceptable to the parents of the bride if a registered marriage had taken place. On the other hand as mentioned above, the parents of the boy agreed to the marriage and accepted it more readily if conversion of the girl had taken place. It is precisely to win the support of the boy’s family with whom she had to live and interact for the rest of her life that conversion was seen as a way to adapt to the family of in-laws but the emotional price she has to pay for this is too much- ties with her parental family are often totally severed. If the parents were to accept a registered marriage, most couples said that they would have preferred a registered marriage. Family support is, therefore, one of the main issues in inter-religion marriages. The children would be better adjusted and happier and contribute more to the secular ethos of the society if their respective families and society at large were to support them.

And, there would be many more of such marriages if parents and close relatives provided the necessary social support which they provide to marriages within the caste and within the religious community.

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