



Understanding the Inter-Caste Marriage Story in India

Prof. Ashish Ramesh Borkar^{a#} & ^{b*}Dr. Ravindra Vithoba Vikhar

^aOfficeting Principal &Head of Department of Sociology
Late P.M. Arts and Commerce College, Warthi Th-Mohadi Dist- Bhandara 441905

^bHead of Department of Sociology
Shri Govindrao Munghate Arts and Sciences. College, Kurkheda

Abstract:

Few couples in India are willing to disobey this strict societal norm because doing so can lead to intense communal animosity and even honour killings. The India Human Development Survey 2011–12 data analysis shows a negligible increase in this social incongruity since 1951 to reach 4.5% in 2012. The northeastern region has the highest prevalence (11.6%), whereas caste-ridden central India has the lowest prevalence (1.8%). Multivariate data show that when choosing a life mate, caste is less important when women are given the option. It is quite popular among women who chose their husbands independently and were acquainted with them for at least a year prior to marriage. Contrary to popular belief, education cannot encourage inter-caste unions. In Dalit (lowest social standing) households, the likelihood of an intercaste marriage is substantially lower than it is for households of higher castes. In order to encourage intercaste marriage, which has the potential to lessen the grip of India's caste system, persistent, targeted efforts are required.

Keywords: Inter-caste marriage India, India Human Development Survey, mate selection, caste system

Introduction

In India, where marriage is nearly common, there are several important factors to take into account while choosing a partner. Caste, religion, mother tongue, economic situation, and others are a few of the more significant ones. The most crucial of these is if the two merging families have a same caste. These parallels are said to be the foundation of a happy marriage. Contrary to class, caste is legislated rather than ascribed. It is predetermined at the moment of birth, and it cannot be altered later in life. It is also a fundamental part of Hinduism. As a result, it is firmly ingrained in Indian society and culture. Monogamy is the most common type of marriage, and divorce is not widely accepted by most tribes, which furthers the caste dynamics. Therefore, it is very important to carefully select a life mate. Inter-caste and inter-religious marriages are consequently detested and looked down upon by society (Srinivasan and James, 2015). Therefore, even now, arranged marriages are still preferred over other sorts,

particularly among parents and seniors (Banerji et al., 2013; Desai and Andrist, 2010; Jeejeebhoy et al., 2013; Mishra, 2013). While the younger generation may adopt it to receive parental support, the older generation prefers it to obtain social solidarity in trying times.

With the globalization and socio-economic development, social norms are supposed to loosen its noose. Increase in the level of education, change in place of residence, easy mingling with opposite sex, etc. opens the gateway for selecting a life-partner from another community. One of the famous Indian sociologists (Srinivas, 1955) noted back in 1955 that co-education is bound to make inter-caste marriages more common shortly. Further, he concluded that the caste system is bound to give way in the end, though it would be against the nature of things to expect untouchability to disappear overnight. A similar study (Kales, 2014) suggests that even today the caste system is prevalent mainly in rural India, which condemns inter-caste marriage, and the couple who tries to defy this norm faces dire consequences. Also, the sporadic incidences of honor killing, especially in caste-ridden north India, negate such inference. Many parents wish to send their children to modern schools and provide all modern facilities. But when it comes to mate selection, they would like to follow the traditional pattern of marrying within the same caste. Here the problem arises. Due to strong cultural importance put into the marriage and caste system embedded in the Hindu religion, inter-caste marriages (Baas, 2007) and marriages outside the same economic status groups are not common phenomena (Goli et al., 2013). Marriage outside the caste is considered taboo, although there are no restrictions on inter-caste marriage as per the Hindu Marriage Act (Trigunayat, 2014). Such a couple is out-casted, driven out of the parental home, and the worst cases lead to honor killing. At the backdrop of such socio-cultural settings, it is pertinent to know which type of female and male take the high risk of breaking this arduous social norm.

Although previous research exhibits existence of a preference for same-caste marriage in India until today (Banerjee et al., 2012; Dommaraju, 2016), traces of inter-caste marriage can be found far back in history (Banerjee et al., 2012; Chaudhry and Mohan, 2011). Cited reasons for (long distance) inter-caste marriage is the poverty and inability to pay the dowry demand at the native place (Chaudhry and Mohan, 2011: 317). Another study by Goli et al. (2013) concludes that education and economic status are two major factors contributing toward women's choice and freedom in the selection of a spouse from outside their own socio-economic group. But another study by Das et al. (2011) found education (of both women and men) to have a negative effect on inter-caste marriage, though the economic condition has a positive impact on it. However, studies suggest that today in Indian society we can see inter-caste marriages. Though mostly it is part of the city/urban culture, and they constitute a minor proportion of the total number of marriages (Ahuja and Ostermann, 2016; Das et al., 2011; Goli et al., 2013; Trigunayat, 2014). It is said that those who defied inter-caste marriage by violating the social norm had to face the consequences in terms of violence, social boycott, family boycott, and death of the boys and girls (honor killing) (Das et al., 2011). Research suggests a higher prevalence of inter-caste marriage among lower caste women (Ahuja and Ostermann, 2016) because interest in inter-caste marriage is rooted in a desire for upward mobility and governed by the principle of exchange (Ahuja and Ostermann, 2016). It is also substantiated by the findings that lower caste people

in rural North India evaluate their lives to be worse than higher caste people and this difference is not explained by poverty (Spears, 2016).

There is a shortage of literature on inter-caste marriage, possibly due to the lack of data, or the controversies surrounding it, though it is a very pertinent and complex social issue in the Indian context. There are scattered ethnographic studies that, by their very nature, are not generalizable. Studies are primarily conducted in pockets and with small sample sizes. Further, some of the works (Das et al., 2011; Goli et al., 2013; Jejeebhoy et al., 2013) that cover the entire country and have large-scale data are not free from limitations. These studies have mainly investigated the prevalence of inter-caste marriage across different socio-economic strata, and region, but they try to assess the factors responsible for inter-caste marriage, including those variables that actually do not have a corresponding effect on inter-caste marriage. Hence, the present paper is a humble attempt to address unexplored areas in this regard. The overall aim is to investigate the level and trends of inter-caste marriage from 1951 to 2012 and its spatial variation in prevalence, and its determinants.

Methodology

The present study used data from the India Human Development Survey 2011–12 (IHDS-II), a nationally representative, multi-topic survey of 42,152 households. The survey interviewed women who were interviewed in the previous IDHS (2005) survey, or ever-married women in the age group 15 years and over. It surveyed total 39,523 women within this age group. Hence, the year of marriage for these women dates between 1951 and 2012. Out of these many samples, 29,596 non-tribal Hindu women are retained. Because the caste system is a mostly Hindu-religion feature, it is not possible to say with certainty about its prevalence in other faiths. Similarly, tribal population is outside the caste system and is therefore outside the scope of this study. Further, 133 women whose information on inter-caste marriage is missing were removed from the analyses. Thus, the analyses are related to 29,463 women aged 15 years and over. As IHDS-II provides a nationally representative and large sample data-set, it allows a robust statistical exploration on one of the very critical social issues, such as inter-caste marriage, and draws meaningful conclusions. However, it is not possible to do a state-wide analysis because of the small sample size for some of the states. Nevertheless, an attempt is made to analyze at the regional level. The study first presents levels and trends of inter-caste marriage from 1951 to 2012 by using a line graph with a linear trend. Spatial variation in prevalence of inter-caste marriage is presented as the bi-variate table with the chi-square test. To see the factors associated with inter-caste marriage, the bi-variate cross-tabulation is done and chi-square tests performed. To find out the determinants of inter-caste marriage, binary logistic regression is run. The number of cases in different categories of some variables may not add up to the whole total, due to the missing cases. The entire statistical exercise is performed in the SPSS-20 software package.

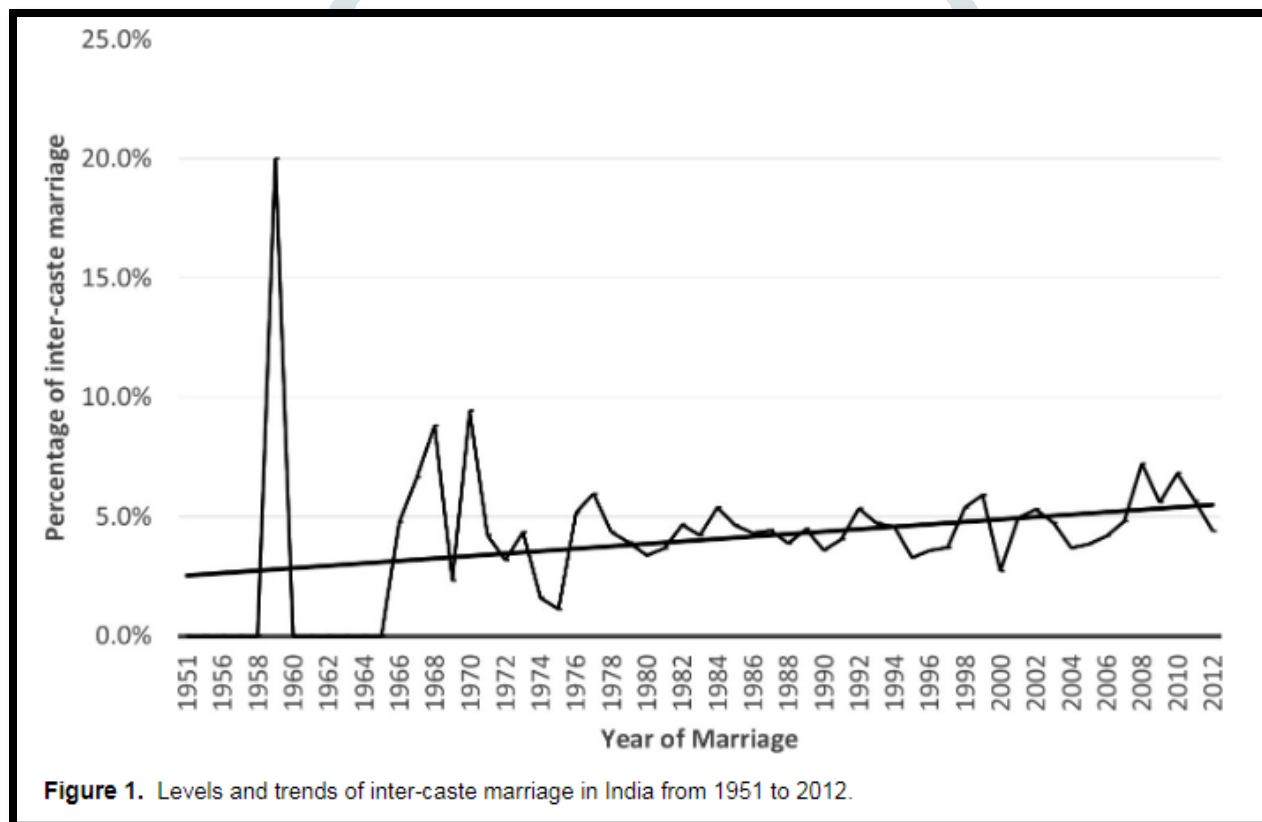
Only variables that relate to the period of marriage are used in the current study. However, it is assumed that after marriage, neither the caste of the household nor the education of women has altered. After being married, it's not typical for women in India to finish their formal schooling. As a result, before getting married, women had to reach a certain degree of education. In addition, unlike class, caste is a rigorous structure, as a woman's marriage

does not affect the caste of the household she enters. Therefore, the household's caste and level of education directly relate to and have an impact on intercaste marriage.

Results

Inter-caste marriage: levels and trends

IHDS-2011–12 data provides information on marriages taking place from 1951 to 2012. The survey data reveals three distinct periods of inter-caste marriage in India: 1951–1978, 1978–1994, and 1994–2012 ([Figure 1](#)). The first period shows an extremely erratic pattern, the percentage of inter-caste marriage varying between zero to as high as 20%. In the second period, the variation is somewhat insignificant. During this period the percentage of inter-caste marriage hovered around 4.7. After that, in the third period, the trend is again erratic. However, the fluctuation during the later period is smaller than the first period. In the third period, it varied between 2.5 to 5.2%. Due to the significant fluctuations in the percentage of inter-caste marriage by single year data, we fitted a linear best fit line. The linear pattern shows a steady rise in the inter-caste marriage to attain slightly above five % by the year 2012.



From the total sample who belong to Hindu religion and non-tribals, 4.5% were found to have married across another caste in India during 2011 to 2012 ([Table 1](#)). A study by [Goli et al. \(2013\)](#) based on the IHDS-2005 data estimated inter-caste marriage to be about 6.1% in 2005. Whereas, another research based on National Family Health Survey 2005–2006 shows the percentage of inter-caste marriages as about 10%, of which 4.97% of women married men of a lower caste, and another 4.95% of women married men of a higher caste ([Das et al., 2011](#)). The variations between the present study and the earlier study on IHDS-1 might be because of the differences in retaining the sample size, whereas the difference with later work might be due to the sampling design effect, as these two large-scale studies have pretty different sampling designs. Whatever may be the level of prevalence of

inter-caste marriage, it is certain that amidst stringent social norm it exists in some extent, so further investigation is required.

Table 1. Percentage distribution of women by inter-caste marriage in 2011–2012.

Marriage status	Frequency	Percentage
Not same caste	1,336	4.5
Same caste	28,127	95.5
Total	29,463	100.0

inter-caste marriages as about 10%, of which 4.97% of women married men of a lower caste, and another 4.95% of women married men of a higher caste (Das et al., 2011). The variations between the present study and the earlier study on IHDS-1 might be because of the differences in retaining the sample size, whereas the difference with later work might be due to the sampling design effect, as these two large-scale studies have pretty different sampling designs. Whatever may be the level of prevalence of inter-caste marriage, it is certain that amidst stringent social norm it exists in some extent, so further investigation is required.

Spatial variation in prevalence of inter-caste marriage

India is a vast country with significant regional variation in all aspects of human civilization. As such, it is pertinent to also review the regional difference in the prevalence of inter-caste marriage. It is found (Table 2) that the inter-caste marriage is notably (11.6%) higher in the northeastern region of India, whereas it is minimal in central India. This pattern is very similar to the earlier study by Das et al. (2011). The regional variation in inter-caste marriage also reflects the existing social norm. The Khap panchayat is an active social institution in central India known to be against inter-caste marriage, as such inter-caste marriage is much lower in this region. On the other hand, northeast India is known to be more liberal, and the caste system is not strongly followed, possibly due to intermingling with a large proportion of the tribal population. Further, as expected, intercaste marriage is at a minimum in less developed villages of India. This indicates the persistence of a stringent caste system in the less developed villages, for which women/men are afraid of crossing the accepted social norm. Further, arranged marriage is the norm in such areas, and the question of inter-caste marriage hardly arises. Surprisingly, compared to the women in the metros, the women in other urban areas are slightly more inclined toward inter-caste marriage. This may be due to the following two reasons. First, in metros, people are too engrossed with hectic daily work schedule and have minimal social interaction. Whatever interaction they have is also within their caste or class only. As a result, metro areas do not provide much scope for inter-caste marriage. Second, in small urban areas, people are comparatively less busy and have more social interactions across a range of population, which provides sufficient ground for inter-caste marriage. A significant rural and urban dichotomy is apparent in inter-caste marriage. Inter-caste marriage is much higher in urban areas than in metro areas.

Conclusions

Positive views are a clear step toward diminishing caste hierarchy, which will eventually lead to caste assimilation, but negative attitudes are a strong evidence of the social gap between the various groups. Additionally, the best way to eliminate this pervasive social ill is through inter-caste marriage. The research being done shows that inter-caste

marriage has been around for a very long time. However, both its trends and its present state are not very positive. Contrary to popular assumption and expectation, education does not appear to encourage intercaste marriage; rather, giving women the freedom to select their life mate will probably encourage intercaste marriage. In order to lessen the grip of India's caste system, persistent, targeted efforts must be made to promote intercaste marriage.

References

1. Ahuja A and Ostermann SL (2016) May 2015. Available at: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2626656>. Baas M (2007) 'Arranged Love': Marriage in a transnational work environment. IIAS Newsletter, 45.
2. . Banerjee A, Duflo E, Ghatak M, et al. (2012) Pontificia Universidad Catolica De Chile, Instituto de Economia.
3. Banerji M, Martin S and Desai S (2013). India Human Development Survey Working Paper No. 8. Chaudhry S and Mohan TD (2011) Of marriage and migration: Bengali and Bihari brides in a U.P. village. Indian Journal of Gender Studies 18(3): 311–340.
4. Das K, Das KC, Roy TK, et al. (2011) Dynamics of Inter-religious and Inter-caste Marriages in India. Available at: <http://paa2011.princeton.edu/papers/111281> (accessed 26 April 2016). Desai IP (1954) Caste and Family. Economic and Political Weekly, February 1954, pp.249–254.
5. Desai S and Andrist L (2010) Gender scripts and age at marriage in India. Demography 47(3): 667–687. Desai S, Vanneman R and National Council of Applied Economic Research, New Delhi (2018) India Human Development Survey-II (IHDS-II), 2011–12. ICPSR36151-v2. Ann Arbor, MI: Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research [distributor].
6. Dhanda M (2012) Runaway marriages: A silent revolution? Economic and Political Weekly XLVII(43): 100–108. Dommaraju P (2016) Divorce and separation in India. Population and Development Review 42(2): 195–223.
7. Goli S, Singh D and Sekhar TV (2013) Exploring the myth of mixed marriages in India: Evidence from a nation-wide survey. Journal of Comparative Family Studies 44(2): 193–206.
8. Jeejeebhoy SJ, Santhya KG, Acharya R, et al. (2013) Marriage-related decision-making and young women's marital relations and agency, evidence from India. Asian Population Studies 9(1): 28–49. Kales MZ (2014) Attitude of civil society towards inter caste marriages. Scholarly Research Journal for Humanity Science & English Language I(II): 265–269.
9. Narzary and Ladusingh 599 Srinivas MN (1955) Castes: Can they exist in India of tomorrow? Economic and Political Weekly 7(42): 1230–1252. Srinivasan K and James KS (2015) The golden cage: Stability of the institution of marriage in India. Economic and Political Weekly 50(13): 38–45
10. Tsujita Y and Oda H (2012) Caste, land, and migration: A preliminary analysis of a village survey in an underdeveloped state in India. Institute of Developing Economics Working Paper No 334. Vishwanath J and Palakonda SC (2011) Patriarchal ideology of honour and honour crimes in India. International Journal of Criminal Justice Sciences 6(1&2): 386–395.
11. Yakkaldevi A (2014) Inter-religious and inter-caste marriages in India. Research Directions 1(8)