

‘Inter-Caste Marriage in Contemporary India: a case of Akola district in Maharashtra’

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Abstract

Marriage and mate selection is one area where great deal is deeply embedded in the interests of people around the religion, ethnicity, geographical location, colour and most importantly ‘caste’ in the context of India. There are more than 6000 castes and within that each caste there are 15-20 sub castes in India. Each one of them have distinct characteristic features and no country in the world where there are so many divisions within the social groups unlike India. The reasons like race, religion and ethnicity, etc. are found behind the discrimination in other countries. While, caste system is a main reasons for various oppression's in India. In order to address the problem of caste based discrimination and to have the integration among the diverse communities, several provisions are being made through social justice and social welfare policies in India. Many social reformers have suggested to promote the inter-caste marriages in order to eradicate caste based discrimination and untouchability. The schemes and incentives are given by Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment at the centre and Social Justice and Special Assistance Department at the Maharashtra state to promote the inter-caste marriages. As a part of the eradication of untouchability, to promote & encouragement to inter-caste marriages.

Inter-caste marriages in India have increased little bit but at the same time atrocities on dalit boys and girls and honour killings in families across the society has also increased in some states of India. Therefore, it become important to study, how does the inter caste marriage between dalit and non-dalit is perceived in cities and in villages. This type of marriages are not only questioning the societal status quo but also breaking it and which also become the huge priority for atrocity to happen. Discussing about the inter-caste marriages is still seen as taboo in many parts of India. Still there is not societal acceptance of inter caste couples in many parts, in many cases they are not getting the support from the state and its institutions. This paper attempts to study the challenges and experiences of the inter caste couples and their views on (a) scheme to promote inter caste marriage and socio-cultural relations between castes, (b) perceptions about the intercaste marriage, and (c) new law to prevent the honour killings. It is based on the qualitative methodology and exploratory research design.

Keywords: caste discrimination, social justice, inter-caste marriages, honour killings.

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I. Introduction

The society and its social laws are important for anybody to understand the kind of life and social practices that prevail and become key characteristics of it to a large extent. Marriage and mate selection is one area where there is a great deal of embedded interests of whole lot of people around oneself that play major role in terms of religion, ethnicity, geographical location, colour and most importantly in the context of India ‘The Caste’. This research attempts to study the experiences of couples who have done inter-caste marriage themselves and have faced the consequences of the same Inter Caste Marriages fall in broadly two categories: Intercaste marriages within the pure Castes (From Brahman to Shudra). In other words, before, most of the inter caste marriages took place within the four Varnas - Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaishya, Shudra all the touchable amongst themselves. In the pre-independence period the marriages between the pure and impure or between touchable or untouchable were the rarest (Shah, 2001).

In many parts of the India today still there is caste discrimination still going on, in countryside the tea shops maintain the three tumbler system- one for dalit, one for non dalits and for the anonymous, in some parts of India barbers don’t serve Dalit customers and in many parts of India non dalit refuse to have the food prepared by dalits. (Gupta, 2004)

Despite this terrible contempt for dalits there are a number of non dalit women risking their lives and marrying the Dalits. This only symbolises that India’s greatest social revolution is underway.

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar focused on the role of marriage in social construction of caste system and provided an important understanding of the issue of women's emancipation in the Indian context.

As Babasaheb said, "Caste is endogamy and endogamy is caste". He also brought out how the origin and reproduction of caste rested on gendered violence (Rege, 2010).

In the context of India, "Caste" is the most important which plays a major role in terms of Marriage, where there is a great deal of embedded interests of whole of people with other factors like religion, ethnicity, geographical location, colour, etc.

According to Kannan (1963), who had done study on intercaste marriages, there have been very few studies on this issue and it needs attention. After reviewing the literature available, it is observed that intercaste marriages in India have increased but at a same time atrocities on dalit boys and girls, honour killings in families across the society has also increased in some states in India. The intercaste marriage means marriage outside one's own caste. In other words, it brings about the union of a man and woman belonging to two different castes. For a very long time caste marriage was the only acceptable form of marriage in India. No one made any protest anyone. But the situation has been changed now.

Rationale of Study

The consequences arise out of the inter-caste marriages on the public and private lives of the couples are not explored properly in the available literature. There is no study available on the selected caste groups on inter-caste marriage in the selected locality and government incentives provided to inter-caste marriage. There is some news in which it is said that honour killings are increasing and are more in rural areas as compared to urban areas. So, it become important to study, how does the inter caste marriage between Dalit and Non-Dalit is perceived in cities and in villages. This type of marriages are not only questioning the societal status quo but also breaking it and which also become the huge priority for atrocity to happen. Sociologists classified the intercaste marriage into two categories, one is Hypergamy (Anuloma) and other is Hypogamy (Pratiloma).

In Hypergamy i.e. Anuloma, it is a form of marriage which allows a man of higher caste/varna to marry a woman of lower Caste/Varna. And in Hypogamy i.e. Pratiloma, is form of marriage, it allows men of lower caste or varna to marry women of higher caste. The intercaste marriage is becoming very popular in the modern Indian Society. The government also legalised the intercaste marriage under Hindu Marriage Act, 1955. When we discuss Indian marriages with a shade of intercaste union, it sounds like taboo to the majority even this day (Corwin, 1977; Malhotra and Trivedi, 1977; Saroja, 1999).

In North India, Marriage among close blood relatives is virtually prohibited. In contrast, marriage among the blood relatives is common practice in South India.

Due to following factors it has strong influence in paving the way for more intercaste marriages, (i) Increasing Urbanization,

(ii) Education,

(iii) Employment of women.

Socio-economic development and globalisation of the Indian economy has also contributed to the changing trends in the marriage patterns.

According to a recent report of the All India Democratic Women's Association (AIDWA), urban women in India have started to rebel and choose mates outside the 'arranged marriages' and caste commandements (Helfer, 2011). This has led to increase incidences of 'honour killings' of young brides and grooms.

Literature available on inter-marriages in India is mostly descriptive and not based on any nationally representative surveys with direct questions on mixed marriages (Kannan, 1963; Kapadia, 1966; Corwin, 1977; Das et al., 2011).

In book, *Gendering Caste; through the feminist lens* Chapter on Caste and Gender in Contemporary India, Uma Chakravarty writes,

Certain castes which are numerically strong and have gained economically are feeling empowered. Others, which were of high status and had wielded power in past, are feeling threatened by the loss of their power in the past, are feeling threatened by loss of their power and dent in their unstated reservations in the political system and in educational institutions in the past. The entire structures of class and caste linkages are being reworked under new social processes.

We can find out after post independent and after introduction of constitution, reservation system, the development in castes is happening but simultaneously, upper caste and upper women have get the advantages of history and which continue to add enormous social power. And due to this, with Globalization there are new opportunities are opening up for development but it also going to increase the gap between the castes.

We must recognize that it is not just reservations or caste based electoral board politics that is keeping caste alive but rather the very factors that we have just mentioned: unequal performance of labour and the endogamous marriage system, which still bounds /binds production and reproduction together.

The importance of endogamous marriage, in cementing, holding blood within a bounded group, keeping one group distinct from other, was recognized by Ambedkar.

'The real remedy for breaking caste is inter-marriage. Nothing else will serve as solvent of caste', he emphasized. Thus, the problem of the bounded nature of the circulation of women is explicitly tied to the formation and persistence of caste.

The larger matrix of family culture too needs to be addressed because it is within this that particular castes enact their everyday rituals of worship, marriage rites and food.

In the book, *Dalits in Modern India; Vision and Values*, there is one Chapter on Ambedkar's Daughters: A Study of Mahar Women in Ahmednagar District of Maharashtra by Traude Pillai-Vetschera. Here, author is talking about the marriages in Ahmednagar District in Maharashtra, how the marriage patterns of each cast is changing. Caste ranking is depends to a large extent on by control the sexuality of the females. In each community through the rules and regulations on female sexuality, in that there are very strict rules are on high caste females and less on low caste, by which kept it above and tradition bound to women. Similar is the case of women is all other caste groups and community. In the same chapter, author further also discussed on cross-cousin marriage and dowry instead of bride price, divorce, widow remarriages, and high caste brides, etc. The marriage practices within Mahar Caste community are shared in this chapter, many other caste communities in Maharashtra also. According to author, nowadays, arranged marriages are often happened in the families from distant villages but no longer cross cousin marriages. One section is about the inter-caste marriage and how the situation in Maharashtra is changed, A number of educated Mahar boys are married to high-caste girls. Dalit girl don't marry to high caste boys, which is practically not possible, as the type of Hypergamous anuloma marriage would be more acceptable than hypogamous pratiloma marriage.

Author introduces a new discussion here, the acceptance of males and rejection of females, from lower caste, some people think of future, according to that they feel that if my daughter married to lower caste person, her child will get reservation benefits, and he will later take care of his mother, which means we taken care of our girl up to now, after this its responsibility of her husband and later on their child, in this way my daughter will remain happy and will have everything and no worries, as according to tradition at last girls have to leave the houses and there after she and her husband's family take care of her. Kumar is called it 'fair skinned Aryan sex bombs' and a danger of one sided inter-caste marriage in which the whole intention is about to future entitled to benefits of reservation. This is point, where it can be seen in two ways, one way either jealously towards the development through the reservation, other way is step towards disturbing the reservation policy. everything and no worries, as according to tradition at last girls have to leave the houses and there after she and her husband's family take care of her. Kumar is called it 'fair skinned Aryan sex bombs' and a danger of one sided inter-caste marriage in which the whole intention is about to future entitled to benefits of reservation. This is point, where it can be seen in two ways, one way either jealously towards the development through the reservation, other way is step towards disturbing the reservation policy.

Major Objectives of the Study

- To understand the views of inter-caste couples on inter-caste marriage
- To Study the hardships and challenges faced by inter-caste couples before, during and after marriages

Methodology

The nature of the research project demanded a Qualitative approach and exploratory research design. A qualitative research methodology and exploratory research design was adopted. Open ended questions were formulated to collect data from the respondents. Case study method was used to collect data from the inter-caste couples. Interviews were conducted among other stakeholders using semi-structured interview guides.

Selection of Respondents:

The initial selection of respondents was based on the record of inter-caste marriage available with the government of Maharashtra.

From the list of inter-caste marriage, the available couples in Akola district were selected as the first preference. If suitable and sufficient number of respondents was not available, other localities were added in the process.

Results and Discussion - Voices of Intercaste Couples

When intercaste couples were asked to give their views and opinions on socio-cultural relations, schemes and also to share their experiences and challenges they have to face after getting married and their perceptions about intercaste marriage, honour killings and new law related with it, they have given diverse opinions, views and openly shared their experiences.

31 year of old Sapna, who belongs to Teli Pardesi (caste-community), have done M.A. B.Ed. She is a school teacher at School of Scholars and she teaches Sanskrit. Regarding socio-cultural relations, she told that she was living with and around Thakur, Patil, Mali, Phul Mali, Sutar, Boudh, Teli communities at her native place. Patil and Teli communities were numerically dominant while there was only one Boudh (Buddhist) family which left that place after a few years. She had a good relation with these communities. These various caste groups were

allowed to enter the houses; there were no restrictions or avoidance in terms of dining together, entertaining, entering temple or worshipping Gods and Goddesses. The behaviour of the people within community was good towards each other. Just one person belonged to Patil community was alcoholic and used to do drama, but other community people did not bother much about it.

One of the Patil Community's families had the mentality of caste hierarchy and to some extent they observe some extent of avoidance. There is no good relation between her caste (Rajput, a dominant and upper caste group) and her husband's caste (Mahar- a Dalit caste who converted to Buddhism). At her home, they were asked not to have relationships with this caste and just to keep the friendship outside family relations. There was opposition against inter-caste marriage from her community. The both castes don't dine together. Nevertheless, there is no restriction in performance of ritual and ceremonies and worshipping gods and goddesses together.

Here, we can get the idea that her community has lots of rituals and mainly these rituals are practiced by females than male members. Due to inter-caste marriage she got to know about the new community and experienced new cultural practices in Buddhism which binds the family together. She looked quite happy while expressing her views.

Similar kind of views about the social-cultural relation with different caste groups are expressed by 24 years old Pooja who belongs to Brahmin community. She is in her final year of B.A. She is a housewife and completing her education. She is living in the neighbourhood of Pardesi, Mang, Muslims and Boudh Community groups. According to her, there is no restriction in entering anyone's house; there are no restrictions in terms of dining together, entering a temple and worshipping god and goddess. She doesn't have any memory of conflict/violence etc between her caste community and other community.

General Perceptions about the Inter-caste relations and Inter-caste Marriages

Vishal Tayade, 34 years of old, belongs to Mahar caste community, he has done B.Com. He was engaged in the work of money lending. He talked on his perceptions about the inter-caste relations and Inter-caste marriages. It has been revealed from the response that the friends and close circle of the respondent advised the respondent not to break the conventional custom of marrying from his own caste group. There was no support for the respondent to go for inter-caste marriage. Rather, they value the marriage within the same caste community.

This may be either due to fear of conflicts in case of inter-caste or they themselves are promoters of arranged marriage. They want that caste difference and purity should be valued and it should be protected through arranged marriage within the same caste/community. We come across literate people also who does not encourage inter-caste marriage as for example the teacher of the respondent and does not help promote or support inter-caste marriages.

Madhuri Wande, a 24 years old woman is belonged to Kumbi Patil (caste –community), which comes under OBC category. She has taken education up to 12th and now she is a housewife. She shared her views on perception about the inter-caste relations and inter-caste marriages. Her elder sister has also done inter-caste marriage. When she was sharing her views about this, she becomes little bit emotional. She in her childhood, like other children, did not know about all these concepts of marriage and everything. But as she grew up she started understanding many things, within her family first marriage was of her sister and which was an inter-caste marriage. Right from that incident, she has been witnessing the situation at her home, how the relatives behaves and talks, how the parents are blamed, taunting on parents by relatives and relatives boycotting her family. She has witnessed her parents crying. Very often the people of her community would gossip about the marriage of her sister. This has an impact on her and she has decided that if her parents are sad today because of her elder sister's act of inter-caste marriage then she will not go for inter-caste marriage in future. She explicitly narrates the reason behind the annoyance of the community members over her sister's act.

The respondent informs that her family and the community around were expected that her sister, being the eldest one in the family, to follow the family and community tradition and go for an arranged marriage with a community boy. The community members perceived that her parents did not give the required 'Sanskar' (Values/Ordination) to her sister for which she took such a decision. For violating the tradition of community by her eldest sister, her parents are suffering from shame and faced derogatory remarks from community members.

Scope and Limitation of the study

This Study will contribute in the formulating the policy and laws related with the inter-caste marriages in Maharashtra in general and India in particular.

- The geographical location is one limitation whereas the study only focuses on Maharashtra and cases which belong to this region only.
- The Research only focuses on Inter-caste marriages.

- It focuses on the responses of the couple involved as to understand the hardships if they have gone through.

II. Findings and Conclusion

According to the views of the respondents, they have good relations with other caste/communities living nearby them. They learned and got to know about different social and cultural practices of their spouse's families, they are happily living together. Some couples are staying alone as due to oppose of both families, they missed their relatives. To some couples society shown the acceptance but to some couples the acceptance from society took a very long time. Some couples had the tough opposition from girl's families like her father and uncle, brother, as many of them have given life threats to couples, attacked also, emotional blackmailing was done, in some cases they are treated like outcaste from society, asked to live the hometown locations, villages. Many couples families and relative left the communication and any kind of relation with the couples just because they choose to marry outside caste community.

Some couples were not getting the room for rent in many areas just because they are intercaste couples. Many of respondents were the beneficiaries of the scheme to promote the intercaste marriage; they have shared their experiences about the scheme. According to them, if the required documents are ready then one can easily get the benefits of the scheme, the process of application for it, also simple and easy. Many suggested that the process should be made online, so, that it will help the people and there can be no chances of corruption. There was lack of awareness among the respondents about scheme and Atrocity laws.

There were recommendations given by the intercaste couples for the new law for prevention of honour killings. According to them, the law should be strict and punishments should be given to those oppose the marriage, parent counseling should done, police protection the government should not just increase the money of incentives but also should concentrate on giving the employment opportunities and shelter like housing for the couples. Mostly the youth who opt for is educated one, so as per educational qualifications they should be given jobs. For uneducated youth the vocational training or skill based training should be done. To encourage and promote the awareness about the intercaste marriage, the felicitation of couples with proper introduction and relevance of intercaste marriage as step towards social integration such messages should be send within the society.

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