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## INTER-RELIGIOUS AND INTER-CASTE MARRIAGES IN INDIA

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### Abstract:

*Inter-caste marriage is a term used in South Asia and Middle-Eastern countries for a marriage where the couple are from two social groups, e.g., different races, clans or castes. It is related to exogamy, where marriage is allowed only outside of a social group, and opposed to endogamy.*

*Caste and religion are integral components of Indian society since the time immemorial. These two systems create water tight compartment between communities and bring division, hatred and tension among various social groups. Marriages within the same caste and same religion is the norm of the Indian society. To think of marriages between different castes and different religions is a difficult and socially unacceptable proposition. Recently the process of modernization, democratization and development has brought lot of positive changes in Indian society. The major objectives of the present paper is to understand the spatial patterns and determinants of inter-caste and inter-religious marriages in India. The study uses the data of third round of National Family Health Survey (2005-06) having sample size of 43102 ever married couples. It is found that about 10 percent of the total marriages in India takes place between different castes while only 2.1 percent marriages are inter-religious.*

### KEY WORDS:

Caste, religion, marriage, India.

### INTRODUCTION

Inter-caste marriage is mostly caused by love. It has been increasing in India especially because of the varieties of religious faiths and sects of the Hindu faith there. In India, religions each have their own rules relating to marriage, as rules exist for the conduct of marriage itself. When two people from different social groups marry, it is an inter-caste marriage.

In India, inter-caste marriages were publicly encouraged and supported by politicians such as C. N. Annadurai, former Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, and social activists such as Periyar E. V. Ramasamy, Raghupathi Venkataratnam Naidu and Manthena Venkata Raju.

Out of all traditions, Sri Lankan Tamils are known to have an anti-inter-caste marriage outlook. In Tamil society, for example, a higher caste member may not ever marry a lower caste member without the slightest cause of havoc. [citation needed] This is becoming an increasing issue in the West including UK, Germany, Canada, and France, as many violent acts reported against Sri Lankan Tamils are usually over inter-caste marriages. [citation needed] The East London Brawl in 2011 was due to a higher caste marrying a lower caste Indian. [citation needed] Only the current generation can save this increasing stereotype by eliminating the caste system and marrying different castes. This allows caste mixing.

The concept of caste system and religious discrimination are like a bane on the path of India's progress. For centuries Indian society has been divided on the basis of caste system and religion (Malhotra et al, 1977). The problem of caste system was so deep rooted that it took years for the Indians to come out of

#### INTER-RELIGIOUS AND INTER-CASTE MARRIAGES IN INDIA

that idea. Even today also India is struggling to come out of this social menace. History reveals that efforts have been made by various social reformers and individuals whose name doesn't appear in the pages of history to make India free from the clutches of caste system, untouchability and race discrimination. And when we talk about Indian marriages, which are inter-caste and inter-religious, it seems like a taboo to most of the people. But in order to eradicate the caste system and race discrimination, it is important that there should be inter-caste and inter-religious marriages. Marriages are regarded as the most important social custom and the best means to remove the barrier of caste system. Today in Indian society though we can see inter-caste marriages but mostly it is part of the city culture and they constitute a minor proportion of the total marriages. The rural parts of the country is by and large dominated by the same caste marriage and still have a long way to go in terms of accepting inter-caste marriage.

Kannan (1963) studied 149 inter-caste marriages in the city of Bombay. He found that inter-caste marriage is steadily increasing only recently and that has assumed a significant component since 1956. The age of the women at the time of her marriage, the freedom given to her to choose her partner, the range of female education are some of the important factors influencing the inter-caste marriages in Bombay (Kannan, 1963). A study based on matrimonial advertisement data shows that, in a section of the families, the caste barrier is being changed and people come forward for inter-caste marriages. The friends and relatives in most cases play all foul means to stop such unions; but this tendency to oppose inter-caste marriages registered in West Bengal, have increased from 700 in 1955 to 5800 in 1969. Brahmins which are at the top of the caste hierarchy are most opposed to inter-caste marriages. Kayasthas, Baidyas and other Hindus are increasingly becoming more liberal towards inter-caste marriage. Also post graduates are most liberal for inter-caste marriage as compared to under graduates and graduates (Sarkar, 1970).

#### The main objectives of the study are,

1. To analyse the extent, pattern and spatial distribution of inter-caste and inter-religious marriages in India.
2. To discuss the determinants of inter-caste and inter-religious marriages in India.

#### DATA AND METHODS

The data from the recently concluded National Family Health Survey (NFHS-III, 2005-2006) has been used for the present study. The NFHS-3 was a nationally representative sample survey of 99260 ever-married women ages 15-49. It was conducted in all the 29 states of India. Information about caste of the husband and wife were also collected during the survey. This study analyzes caste information of 32160 Hindu couples. Caste system is mostly prevalent among Hindus though this information was also collected from other religious groups. The couples belonging to other religious groups have been removed from the analysis though their caste information is also available. The information collected on caste is grouped into three categories namely Scheduled Caste (SC), Other Backward Classes (OBC) and Others (which includes all the higher castes). The ascending order of Class hierarchy in India is SC, OBC and Others but schedule tribe (ST) is not included in this hierarchy. ST is excluded from this study as it reflects more of a community rather than a caste. If a woman belonging to higher caste marries to a man belonging to lower caste and a woman belonging to a lower caste marries to a man of higher caste, then it is considered as inter-caste marriage. In other words if a woman marries to a man other than her own caste is considered as an inter-caste marriage. Similarly all the religions are divided into 5 categories namely Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Sikhs and Others.

INTER-RELIGIOUS AND INTER-CASTE MARRIAGES IN INDIA

Table 1: Percent distribution of inter-caste marriages in India and states

State	Women marry men			Total inter - caste marriages	Total
	of same caste	of lower caste than her caste	of upper caste than her caste		
<b>India</b>	90.1	5.1	4.8	9.9	30601
<b>North</b>	91.0	5.2	3.8	9.0	3177
Delhi	88.4	5.6	6.0	11.6	536
Haryana	82.7	11.0	6.3	17.3	526
Himachal Pradesh	89.4	6.0	4.7	10.6	537
Jammu and Kashmir	98.1	1.9	0.0	1.9	162
Punjab	77.5	11.9	10.5	22.5	285
Rajasthan	97.7	1.4	0.9	2.3	654
Uttaranchal	91.6	4.3	4.1	8.4	439
<b>Central</b>	92.2	4.4	3.4	7.8	7391
Chhattisgarh	96.8	0.7	2.4	3.2	535
Madhya Pradesh	96.5	1.9	1.7	3.5	1132
Uttar Pradesh	91.4	5.0	3.6	8.6	4968
<b>East</b>	91.4	4.7	3.9	8.6	2710
Bihar	95.3	2.1	2.6	4.7	617
Jharkhand	87.9	5.5	6.6	12.1	346
Orissa	86.1	7.5	6.4	13.9	670
West Bengal	90.5	5.9	3.7	9.5	1040
<b>North-East</b>	82.8	10.0	7.1	17.2	1976
Arunachal Pradesh	81.8	13.1	5.1	18.2	99
Assam	83.2	9.3	7.4	16.8	376
Manipur	82.2	12.7	5.1	17.8	1006
Meghalaya	75.0	10.7	14.3	25.0	28
Mizoram					
Nagaland	84.3	5.1	10.7	15.7	178
Sikkim	86.1	7.7	6.2	13.9	209
Tripura	81.6	10.9	7.5	18.4	293
<b>West</b>	83.0	6.4	10.6	17.0	4592
Goa	71.6	15.8	12.6	28.4	278
Gujarat	86.3	6.3	7.4	13.7	672
Maharashtra	82.3	6.4	11.3	17.7	3157
<b>South</b>	91.9	4.3	3.8	8.1	9236
Andhra Pradesh	92.4	3.3	4.4	7.6	3487
Karnataka	83.5	9.8	6.7	16.5	2138
Kerala	78.7	14.6	6.7	21.3	356
Tamil Nadu	97.4	1.3	1.2	2.6	2991

INTER-RELIGIOUS AND INTER-CASTE MARRIAGES IN INDIA

**Table 2: Percent distribution of inter-religious marriages in India and stat**

State	Inter-religious marriage		Total
	No	Yes	
<b>India</b>	<b>97.9</b>	<b>2.1</b>	<b>42183</b>
<b>North</b>	<b>97.8</b>	<b>2.2</b>	<b>4469</b>
Delhi	97.8	2.2	634
Haryana	98.1	1.9	591
Himachal Pradesh	98.5	1.5	583
Jammu and Kashmir	99.3	0.7	445
Punjab	92.7	7.3	682
Rajasthan	99.3	0.7	881
Uttaranchal	98.1	1.9	534
<b>Central</b>	<b>98.8</b>	<b>1.2</b>	<b>9354</b>
Chhattisgarh	99.4	0.6	859
Madhya Pradesh	99.2	0.8	1655
Uttar Pradesh	98.7	1.3	6067
<b>East</b>	<b>98.7</b>	<b>1.3</b>	<b>3814</b>
Bihar	98.8	1.2	733
Jharkhand	94.4	5.6	607
Orissa	99.0	1.0	970
West Bengal	99.7	0.3	1589
<b>North-East</b>	<b>96.8</b>	<b>3.2</b>	<b>4581</b>
Arunachal Pradesh	90.8	9.2	357
Assam	97.9	2.1	746
Manipur	92.4	7.6	2048
Meghalaya	93.3	6.7	330
Mizoram	98.8	1.2	330
Nagaland	98.5	1.5	1846
Sikkim	91.9	8.1	406
Tripura	97.3	2.7	403
<b>West</b>	<b>96.6</b>	<b>3.4</b>	<b>6623</b>
Goa	98.7	1.3	541
Gujarat	98.2	1.8	842
Maharashtra	96.3	3.7	4697
<b>South</b>	<b>96.8</b>	<b>3.2</b>	<b>11650</b>
Andhra Pradesh	95.3	4.7	4452
Karnataka	97.2	2.8	2983
Kerala	97.9	2.1	620
Tamil Nadu	98.4	1.6	3347

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Table 1 shows that in India the percentage of inter-caste marriages is about 10 percent out of which in 4.97 percent cases women marry to men of lower caste and in another 4.95 percent cases, the women belong to lower caste but husbands belong to higher castes. Generally it is expected that with more development and education, the force of caste factor becomes weak and thereby increases the incidence of inter-caste marriages. The southern region of India is socio-economically more developed than other regions of India. So, applying the same logic inter-caste marriage is expected to be more in the southern region than other parts of India. But our analysis shows that inter-caste marriage is only 9.71 percent in southern part of India. It is found that inter-caste marriage is highest in western region (17 per cent). Some states are showing more than 20 percent inter-caste marriages. For instance inter-caste marriage in Punjab is 22.36 percent, in Meghalaya it is 25.00 percent, in Goa it is 26.67 percent and in Kerala it is 21.35 percent. The states showing very low percentages of inter-caste marriages are Jammu and Kashmir (1.67 percent), Rajasthan (2.36 per cent), Chhattisgarh (3.38 per cent), Madhya Pradesh (3.57 percent),

#### INTER-RELIGIOUS AND INTER-CASTE MARRIAGES IN INDIA

Bihar (4.60 per cent) and Tamil Nadu (2.59 per cent). The states having moderate to high inter-caste marriages are Haryana (17.16 per cent), Manipur (18.33 per cent), Tripura (17.81 per cent), Maharashtra (17.79 per cent) and Karnataka (16.47 per cent).

#### CONCLUSION

India is still by and large a traditional society with rigid caste system. Caste plays a very important role in the selection of mates in marriages. To most Indians, it is difficult to think of marriage beyond the own caste. But it is quite heartening to notice that the force of the caste in marriage selection is gradually loosening over time as about ten percent of the marriages in India are reported to be inter-caste marriages. This is a good beginning to completely eradicate the caste system in India. This change in the marriage pattern in India is a very recent phenomenon due to the impact of modernization, socio economic development and globalization of Indian economy. Various socio-economic and demographic factors also affect the pattern of inter-caste marriages in India. There is a significant spatial variation in the pattern of inter-caste marriages. There seems to be higher inter-caste marriages in socio-economically developed states like Punjab, Haryana, Assam, Maharashtra and Karnataka in comparison with the socio-economically backward states of northern India namely Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar and Rajasthan. It is expected that the incidence of such inter-caste marriages will increase with degree of modernization and socio-economic development. There is need to glorify, give media exposure and encourage such marriages in order to reduce the caste barrier prevalent in Indian society. India will require long time yet to come when the marriage system in India will be completely free of caste discrimination.

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