

MATE SELECTION IN INTER-RELIGIOUS MARRIAGES: AN INDIAN PERSPECTIVE

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This paper deals with inter-religious marriages in India, which are very uncommon due to the Socio-cultural bonds of caste and religion. Traditional India frowns on self choice in marriage. Inter-religious marriages between Hindus, Muslims and Christians are discussed in the light of Socio-cultural, economic, socio-psychological and ecological factors. The concept of romantic love and its implications have been analysed in the case of 200 respondents, who have opted for self choice inter-religious marriage.

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Introduction

Inter religious marriages are not common in India, but are found to occur in urban industrial areas. Even though they occur in small numbers, they have a trend setting effect due to modernization.

A number of factors narrow the range of conscious choice in marriage. This range includes factors and forces of a wide variety and yet basically they are not different from those involved in any other aspect of human behaviour and social phenomenon. On this background we can therefore, reasonably say that there are three broad perspectives under which this entire spectrum of mate-selection could be examined. The factors underlying these perspectives accordingly may be classified thus:

(1) Socio-cultural and economic factors operating on an institutional plane.

(2) Socio-psychological factors — manifesting in inter-personal interactions and group organizations.

(3) Ecological factors, operating in the content of urbanization and industrialization.

Besides these factors, there are certain ideals and ideologies that have crept in self selection in marriage. One of the major criteria is —romantic love.

Romantic love was confined to the feudal royalties and other feudal aristocratic

strata, even in Western Society in the late 18th and early 19th Century. The aristocrats were more actively interested in winning love from their ladies. In those days love was not viewed as a 'boy meets girl' phenomenon; it was expressive of masculine valour, ardour, adventure and, most important, chivalry. Romantic love became a fact of wider social implication only when the ideology of individualism became a dominant force and further when industrialization and urbanization began to make their headway. At a later stage, the mass media of communications assumed immense proportions and today they are obviously the most powerful agencies in the diffusion of the creed of romantic love.

The American Situation

In the American sociological literature on the theme of romantic love, we come across various characteristic strands of thought. According to authors like Blood (1963) and Rubin (1970) romantic love can become the greatest element in a decision or action relating to self choice. Landis and Landis (1963) emphasise that the novelty of extreme differences in background or personality make-up of individuals is sometimes believed to be conducive to romance.

Another facet of romantic love is that it is chiefly limited to premarital rather than marital relations. It is a phenomenon con-

nected with courting in the strict sense of the term, when "two people become attached to each other by virtue of purely personal qualities, all other considerations being thrown to the winds." (Davis and Associates, 1950:587).

It is with William Goode (1959) that we come across a typically clear sociological analysis of this phenomenon. He views love in a broad perspective, and makes it abundantly clear that if the factors of wealth, occupation, caste, age, or religion do not substitute for love, they nevertheless constitute the social framework within which it operates. Goode also feels that the importance of love has been exaggerated in popular literature.

American authors like Reiss (1972) brought a socio-psychological approach to bear on the theory of romantic love. According to him the four processes that occurred one after the other after meeting proceed towards a love relationship which he termed the "wheel theory." He did point out that the wheel can turn in a negative direction and unwind, that is the relationship can weaken when differences in opinion, taste and competing interests clash.

Apart from all these characteristically American approaches to the sociological interpretation of romantic love, the most fundamental point to be noted is that with the present mood of mass romanticism the idea of love has been institutionalized and in falling in love situations, popularity and personal characteristics have replaced older criteria for the selection of the mate" (Lopata, 1973:7).

The Indian Situation

When we consider the situation in India, where a system of arranged marriages predominates, we observe that various social patterns exist to prevent romantic love from disturbing the traditional arrangements de-

signed by the elders. Love is viewed as either catastrophic or more or less completely irrelevant in the traditional structure. In these societies the romantic behaviour is not conceived as a part of the ordinary process of mate selection and quite often those who fall in love have to brave storms of wrath. No other theme is more popular than love versus social tyranny in the Indian films and film songs!

It is on this background that we have to note that all the marriages under our study are hundred per cent self choice love marriages. At the same time it must be emphasised that these marriages cannot be explained away as the sheer triumph of romantic love.

Aim

It is our aim therefore, to find out what are (1) the main factors that tilt the balance in favour of these inter-religious marriages and (2) what are the various factors and facets that are seen to be conducive to inter-religious marriages. Before we analyse and present the data, we shall briefly outline the methodology.

Methodology

This empirical study is of an intensive nature and therefore, limited only to a very small number of people. In it, a thorough investigation of the group is carried out, regarding the problem under study, certain extraneous factors like race, nationality differences which might vitiate proper analysis of results have been omitted. Further by taking into account the three conspicuously divergent religions of India that is Hinduism, Christianity and Islam, the sample has a larger sub-groups. This has also enabled us to include a larger sample survey than that attempted in previous works in this field. The setting chosen is Pune — a fairly uniform urban area. Social strata-wise also the sample is more homogeneous

as it belongs to the middle class salaried group.

We have restricted the study to the geographical area of Pune City. Historically Pune, situated at the confluence of Mula and Mutha rivers is "the city of Peshwas and was once the Capital of a great Empire" (Patel, 1955:2). It is likely that the socio-psychological hold of caste continues to linger in the life of Poona, than in a metropolitan centre like Bombay. Until very recently Pune was beyond doubt a distinctive provincial town. But its face began to change due to the onslaught of rapid industrialization in the 1960s. This has resulted in drawing people from different castes and creeds closer, thereby reducing the traditional pre-industrial residential caste barriers. Today "Pune has a mixed complexion. In short as Pundlik (1970:25) observes "Poona provides an ideal social and cultural setting for a problem which has important implications for the encounter between tradition and modernity."

One hundred male and 100 female respondents belonging to the earlier mentioned three religious groups were chosen from the records of the registrar of marriages. Caste among Hindus, sects among the Muslims and denominations among the Christians have not been assessed as independent variables. The criterion for the selection of the sample were (1) Both the spouses were respondents, (2) A preference for a salaried group and not businessmen or industrialists, so that they could be fitted into the various shades of middle class, (3) Holding the S.S.C. or an equivalent examination certificate, (4) Inter-religiously married and (5) Married by self-choice that is a love-marriage.

Interview and questionnaire were tools of enquiry. The questionnaire was drafted in English.

Analysis:

We begin our analysis with the discussion of socio-cultural and economic factors which

operate on an institutional plane..

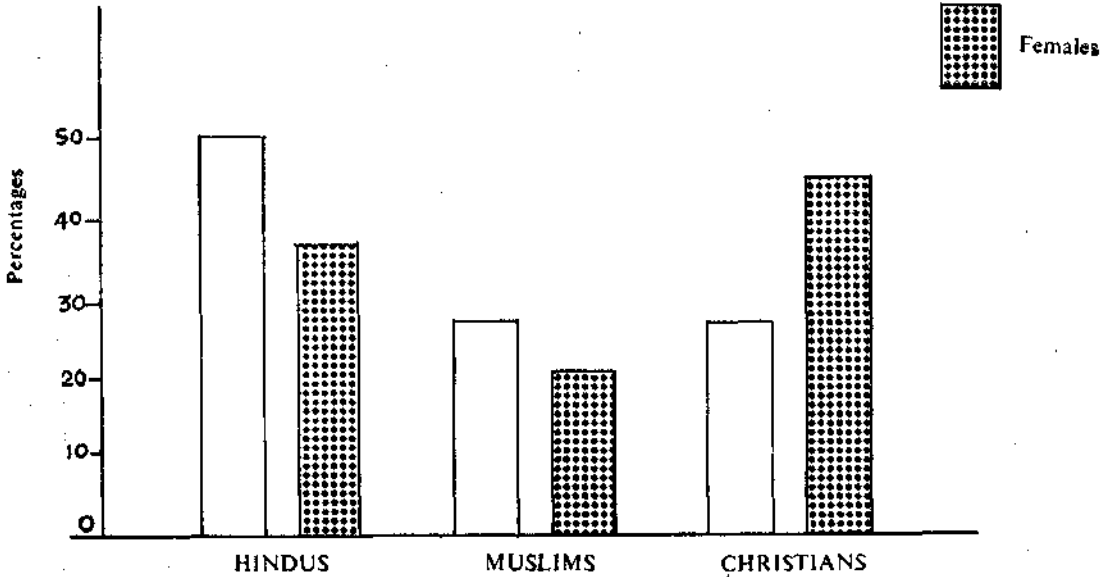
It is a very well-known fact that Indians practice religious endogamy. Undoubtedly those who marry in this unconventional manner are prepared to accept to some degrees the consequences of such a marriage, right from the beginning, that is, from the time the choice of a mate is made.

TABLE I
CROSS TABLE SHOWING MATE SELECTION

Male	Hindu Females	Muslim Females	Christian Females	Total Male Respondents
Hindu	—	10	40	50
Muslim	19	—	5	24
Christian	18	8	—	26
Total Female Respondents	37	18	45	100

In this sample Hindu males are the largest group. Next to that are the Christian males (26) and last come the Muslim males (24). Amongst females the largest group is formed by Christian females (45) then the Hindus (37) and then the Muslims (18). When considered demographically Hindus in India being in a majority naturally form the largest group than the two minority groups. Amongst the females Christian women form the majority since they are allowed to mix freely with men than either Hindus or Muslims. Besides that, Christians, who have an undertone of Westernised culture initiated during the British regime have greater freedom in their choice of a mate. The smaller incidence of Muslims can be indicated thus: (1) the religious group has a greater control on the actions of their youth as they believe that true marriages embrace the believers only. Thus the Islamic belief in Dar-al-Harb and Dar-al-

HISTOGRAM 1
Showing respondents who choose Inter marriages



Islam* is unshakable at least on the theological level. The Purdah system has helped to segregate the women and their social and cultural interaction is restricted. This confines the Muslim women to their homes, naturally resulting in limited expression to self-choice in marriage.

As a group, the Muslims, compared to both the Hindus and Christians are educationally backward. Once again, comparatively speaking, they are conservative and are less exposed to the forces of reformism, modernization and westernization. Muslims, due to the monolithic structure of Islam, were more tradition oriented and could not cut a new path.

It is very significant that the two minority religious groups i.e., Christians and Muslims who are considered to be rigid in their religious attitudes have not married freely amongst themselves. This in itself shows how religion plays a significant role in mate selection even when one marries inter-religiously. (That is — one marries or selects a mate, who is less religiously adhered to his own religion so that some amount of religious harmony is achieved in the home.)

Age was not one of the important deciding factors in an inter-marriage for there were 10 per cent 'wife older' marriages and 7 per cent marriages wherein the husband

* In the Muslim constitutional Law the World is divided into Dar-al-Islam and Dar-al-Harb. 'Abode of Islam' is that which is already under Islam rule; 'Abode of War' is that which is not, but which actually or potentially, is a seat of war for Muslims until by conquest it is turned into 'Abode of Islam'.

was 11 to 23 years older than the wife.

Education has played some part and except for a few respondents, the educational qualification of husbands and wives are more or less equal. Incidentally in our sample the Hindu women are better educated than either Muslim or Christian women. (Hindus 18.90 per cent graduates 27 per cent Post-graduates and 10.8 per cent doctors, 2.7 per cent Engineers and 13.5 per cent, S.S.C. The rest had S.S.C. with diploma in nursing/teaching and some were Secretaries).

Colleges are mostly co-educational in Pune and college campuses are meeting ground for the younger generation of males and females, who would otherwise be restricted from mixing freely. In India, the college life is in fact, considered to be the spring time of freedom, a release from the tighter control of the society symbolized by the family.

Besides the level of education, the place of education is of equal importance in providing the necessary background for friendships. A college or University campus could be a beginning to friendships that may ultimately lead to the lasting tie of marriage. Similarly organizations to which the respondents belonged as students was an important factor in bringing about the love marriage. The collected data revealed that 80 per cent men and 63 per cent women had belonged to various associations such as atheletic club, dramatic club, music society, student's union, and a political party. They had met their life partner in one of these places.

Ecological Factors

The next important factor is the ecological one. This factor includes important considerations such as —

- (a) Residential Propinquity
- (b) Occupational Propinquity,

TABLE 2

MODE OF MEETING THE SPOUSE

Mode of meeting the spouse	No. of couples
Were neighbours	10
Were co-eds.	11
Were at work together	36
Through common friends	15
At one of the clubs	2
At any other place from that mentioned above	26
TOTAL:	100

The significance of residential propinquity for mate selection retains its hold in the case of 10 per cent of the sample, but a majority have found their partner in life away from their residential area, because of social-religious restrictions.

The occupational factor has a marked significance for more than 50 per cent of the women who had worked before marriage and had met their spouse at the place of work. Incidentally it is worth mentioning that women married men who had a better income and status than themselves. (Ramanamma and Bambawale, 1978). Similarly the data also revealed that women who worked invariably married men nearest to their own profession. Sundal and Mc Cormick's study (1951) also supports this finding.

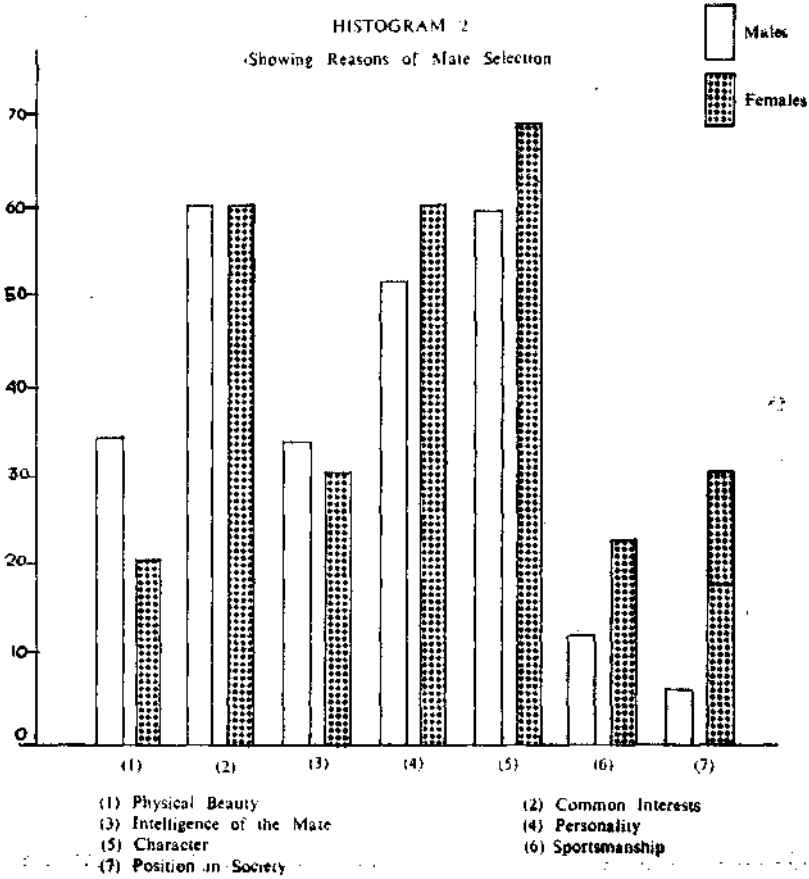
In self choice, the practice of voluntary and mutual choice of spouses is of prime concern to the partners. It is generally held that such a selection of a mate could take place between those who are acquainted with the social characteristics of each other. It is also believed that the standards of choice are not built up after meeting a person, but they are built up gradually over the years. Barber (1953) feels that ideas on this subject are acquired since one's childhood and from an early age children are unconsciously influenced by the kind of playmates they are encouraged

to be friendly with and even by the type of adult friends their parents choose.

Socio-psychological and Inter-personal Factors

Interpersonal and factors of socio-psychological dimensions play their part when a couple comes to know each other more intimately. By 1950, American Sociologists had developed some formulations regarding social and psychological forces which contributed to the phenomenon of inter-marriage. These formulations centre around the concept of homogamy. Burgess and Cornell (1939), Burgess and Wallin (1943) find that mate selection is homogamous.

Burchinal (1963) called homogamy — endogamy or assortive mating, but Winch (1955) questioned it. He put forward the theory of complementary needs and indicated that the need of mate selection is based on the psychic make up of an individual engaged in mutual choice, and the basis of this choice is unconscious. Ktsanes reworked Winch's theory and found that the tendency to select a spouse unlike self in the total emotional make up far exceeds the tendency to select a spouse like self. Kerckhoff and Davis surmised that a significant contribution of complementarity in mate selection process is assessed through value consensus. The responses of the respondents are represented in Histogram 2.



The above histogram shows the qualities that attracted the respondents to their spouses at the time of mate selection. Thus a majority of the respondents were attracted to their spouses due to common interests, personality and character, physical beauty and intelligence of the mate. It is generally believed that physical beauty is the most important factor in attracting a mate. Burgess and Lock (1953) state that a person of opposite sex possess different degrees of sex appeal. Good looks, no doubt, play a major role in attracting the spouse but when this factor is carefully weighed only 1/5th of the women respondents and 1/3rd of the men were spellbound by the partner. Yet we find that this was not the only or the decisive criteria for selection.

We found that greatest importance in mate selection has been given to the character of the mate. Both male (61 per cent) and females (68 per cent) clearly stated that it was of the greatest importance as the future was dependent on it. Character in the Indian context means morals — which puts a premium on sexual fidelity. Similarly we find another important factor pointed out by the respondents is common interest which is an important factor in selection of a mate. An individual tries to seek an 'ideal mate'. By an 'ideal mate' we mean, 'that preconceived combination of emotional, physical and social characteristics that is embodied in one's personal image of the kind of person he would like to marry.' (Lantz and Synder, 1969:210).

Personality attracted 50 per cent males and 61 per cent females. It must however, be conceded that this term, is rather ambiguous. Respondents largely meant that personality is the identity of an individual as a total whole. It does not mean just physical beauty, smartness, conversational charm and other external aspects of a person, but a little bit of all the characteristics which makes a person "uniquely indi-

vidual."

This study has borne out most of the formulations of American sociologists. But we find a concensus of all these factors in the Indian setting. These factors seem to work simultaneously or successively to influence an individual in self choice of a mate.

Conclusion

Romantic love with extreme differences in background as emphasised by Landis has been proved in our study, because the couples had different religious background which in itself is a case of extreme differences in background. Davis's hypothesis that two people become attached to each other by virtue of purely personal qualities, like beauty, personality, intelligence, and character, seem to be true in the Indian situation, while religion and caste are "thrown to the winds."

Goode's analysis of romantic love which cuts across caste, age, religion is also borne out in this study.

Also it has been shown in this study that love has played a decisive role in mate selection. Yet it must be pointed out that the evidence we have collected as above indicates that the romantic ideal mate is not just a sudden discovery. It has some roots, some history, which may date back to the school, and the college days, which constitute one important phase in socialization.

Age did not emerge as the absolute criterion for choice of mate. It seems that the difference in age is waived if other factors are found compatible. Thus the importance of arranged marriage is not present in self choice marriages.

It can be said that common interest as well as academic record play a certain role in mate selection. Besides education, common hobbies during the college years seem to have their share in the choice of

a mate. Character is an important factor in the final choice of a mate, which shows a traditional bias.

Another traditional value is physical beauty of the mate, which has been appreciated particularly by males.

Intelligence is a modern value, which has found importance in choice in the case of men as well as women.

One of the significantly different findings compared to the American data is that occupational propinquity and not residential propinquity has emerged to be of greater

importance in mate selection. This has great implication for the contemporary Indian urban scene.

Finally we can say that of all the various factors mentioned in our study, no single factor was solely responsible for mate selection, but two or more factors together played a part in the final choice. Most of the American values in self choice — love marriage seem to be applicable in the Indian model. This we believe, is because of westernization and to a degree on modernization.

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The challenges of inter-religious couples are therefore a lot more complex, running a lot deeper. After some research and analysis, I could finally boil down the often not so easy to define range of possible challenges of inter-religious couples to these fundamental five.Â

Patience and acceptance: There are always moments in an inter-religious marriage when differences in beliefs are probably really irresolvable. Such situations are inevitable. It's not always easy to think outside the box you've lived in since birth.Â

I am a Medical doctor and a Christian. I have always desired to marry an Indian girl since I was old enough to talk. My mother is a single mom. She has not objected to my idea but she says she will be comfortable if she is a Christian too. Inter-caste marriage (ICM) is a marriage between spouses of different ethnicities and castes. Caste is a form of social organization based on Hindu religious belief and has been practiced from the early time in India. The origin of the caste system is in Hinduism, but it affected the whole Indian society.Â

India is still more or less a traditional society with rigid caste and religious system. Caste and Religion play 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.