

INVOLVEMENT OF YOUTH IN MARRIAGE RELATED DECISION MAKING IN INDIA

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Abstract

In India marriage are typically family arranged in which parents are mostly involved in selection of potential spouses for their children. This paper tries to focus on the role and level of involvement of youth in spouse selection. Above 90 percent of the marriages are arranged in India and except for the southern states, majority of married young men and women meet their spouse on the wedding day. Women seems to be more worried and anxious about getting married as in contrast majority of the men are excited about getting married although there is hardly any interaction among couples prior to marriage, especially in Bihar, Rajasthan and Jharkhand. Odd ratios reveals that mothers education have a significant and positive relationship on the respondent's opinion regarding choice of marriage partner. However, unlike the mother's education, religion, caste and work status does not show any association with the respondent choice of partner. Respondents who often discuss their personal issues with their parents tend to select their marriage partner themselves or they have a strong opinion in spouse selection.

Keywords: Marriage, Youths, Decision, Spouse Selection

Introduction

Assuming that individuals make a decision to marry, two other decisions then have sociological relevance- "whom to marry" and "when to marry".¹ Marriage process needs to be understood in its own right since it not only signals the initiation of reproductive life but also because it reflects the way family life proceeds. Moreover when, whom, and how one marries, all have implications for gender relations within society.² In India, marriages complied with the principle of Hypergamy and in consideration of the social

¹ J. Joel Moss (1965)

² Mensch et al (2005)

and economic status of the spouses, they are mostly arranged. Caste, Natal charts gotra, family background, financial status of the groom, appearance character of the bride and the bridegroom are the most important facets of arrange marriage. The willingness of the parents and blessings of elders are important considerations in arranged marriage. Ross puts it as in India "love was not necessary as a basis for marriage selection, nor was courtship a necessary prelude for testing the relationship" (1961: 251).

Considering the universal nature of Indian marriage, little has been studied about the role of young people themselves in the decision making process of their own marriage. This autonomy impacts other spheres of young people's lives, as individuals as well as partners in marriage such as in decision making, self-confidence, contraceptive use, etc., is poorly understood.³ What is available on marital process, in Indian context, is mainly on marital age, consequences of early marriage such as early pregnancy and childbirth, dowry and violence within marriage⁴ but qualitative studies, to a certain extent, do throw light on marital decision making process.⁵ Recent evidence points to the fact that, of late more girls and boys are being involved,⁶ but factors or characteristics that encourage involvement of youth in their spouse selection and the impact of such involvement on their married life are poorly understood.

The traditional normative pattern of Indian marriage does not provide much opportunity to the prospective spouses to participate in the decision-making process of their own marriage. In many cases, they never see each other until the wedding day. A majority of young men and women in India are abided by the social norms and acquiesce to the social disciplines of traditional life. "Indian arranged marriage and family values" against "western style love marriages" has thwarted efforts to comprehend the nature of individual desire and the choice of marriage partners.⁷ As *Kalidasa*, the Indian poet, remarked that "young people seek pleasures",⁸ the Hindu system regarded mate selection by self-choice as undesirable and feared that freedom of choice might upset the process of adjustment of the bride in her new family. Modern law and legislation on marriages recognise free choice marriage but the weight of custom and tradition associated with the reproduction of the caste system works severely against it. Yet, the conditions of modernity such as law and rights, changes in the political economy and the emergence of urban cultures at marked variance from rural

³ CPOP,CPOP (2005)

⁴ Jejeebhoy and Sebastian (2003a); Jejeebhoy and Sebastian (2003b); ICRW (2003)

⁵ see for example Santhya, (2003); Haberland et al, (2001); George (1997)

⁶ Jejeebhoy & Halli 2006

⁷ Shalini Grover (2007)

⁸ Auboyer, (1965: 176)

cultures have no doubt a bearing on the possibility of aspirations for change in the private lives.⁹

Literature review

Marriage in India is treated as an alliance between two families rather than a mere union of two individuals.¹⁰ Researchers and demographers' focus has been on the age at marriage and its implications on fertility. However other aspects of the marriage transition such as the involvement of youth on spouse selection process have been relatively neglected. What is available underscores that many young women and to a lesser extent young men have little, if any, input into the timing of marriage and choice of spouse.¹¹ Lack of participation in the process of spouse selection does not mean the prospective bride and groom disregard the importance of marriage. The seriousness with which the marriage ritual is taken by youth is all the more reason why they are not entrusted with the responsibility of making self-selection and why the parents' judgments are accepted.¹² Goode rightly observed the prevalent sentiments of the parents regarding individual mate selection. "The young person could not be relied upon to follow the rules exactly. With limited social experience and no opportunity to travel, he or she could not locate the few eligible persons to be found in a population of several thousand distributed among villages. Even if this was possible, the individual might not respond emotionally to the eligible person or be able to persuade them to agree to a marriage" (1963: 210). In some cases girls and boys barely meet their future spouses before marriage resulting in marriage of two strangers.¹³ But some women and men are choosing to defy marriage customs and marry late,¹⁴ or not at all.¹⁵ Still, there is social and family pressure to get married.¹⁶

Recent evidence indicates a decline in kin control and increase in a young woman's involvement in mate selection¹⁷ or atleast the arranged marriages in India are being transformed to a more consented model.¹⁸ A group of writers contend that the Indian family system is experiencing

⁹ Kalpagam U. (2008)

¹⁰ Kurian (1974); Cormack (1961); Shah (1961)

¹¹ Desai (2007); CPOP (2005); Santhya (2003)

¹² V. V. Prakasa Rao and V. Nandini Rao (1976)

¹³ Desai (2007); CPOP (2005); Cynthia Waszak et al, WHO (2003); Haberland et al, (2001); George (1997)

¹⁴ Zhao (2008)

¹⁵ Zhang and Gu (2007)

¹⁶ Li, S et al (2010)

¹⁷ Jejeebhoy and Halli (2005); Malhotra in National Academics press 2005; Jejeebhoy & Sebastian (2003a)

¹⁸ Banerjee (1999)

changes slowly yielding its rigidity to flexibility, exhibiting loss of firm grip over the traditional patterns of mate selection, and demonstrating the adaptive strategy of allowing freedom to the young to a certain extent.¹⁹ Moreover, good couple communication and self confidence in women play pivotal role in influencing family decision making including reproductive decisions, facilitating negotiation between spouses on use of contraception, limited family size and reduced risk of HIV through reduced extra marital sex.²⁰ For the few who select their own spouses overlooking the traditional norms, what are called “love marriages”, the change in the marriage practice reflects the aspirations for change by these men and women who have to negotiate between freedom and choice, social disciplines, patriarchal securities and domination, honour and shame, tradition and intergenerational mobility.²¹ Increasing age at marriage, education, economic independence, increasing access to western media and living in urban area are cited as playing a role in this transformation.²² However, some writers argue that the findings reveal no significant departure from the traditional method of mate selection under the present social conditions and observe that the Indian family system is maintaining its basic character adhering to traditional patterns of life.²³ In fact, one writer argues that Taya Zinkin's statement made in 1958 that "India is a country of arranged marriages. Only aboriginals and modern elite marry for love" holds true even today.²⁴

Objectives

The main objectives of the study are:

1. To explore the level of involvement of young people regarding their marriage decision of when and whom to marry.
2. To assess the factor affecting youths decision in selection of marriage partner.

Database and methodology

The study uses data from “The Youth in India: Situation and Needs” conducted to identify key transitions experienced by unmarried and married youth in India. The survey was conducted in 2006-07 in six states of India, representing different socio-cultural and geographic setting, namely – Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Rajasthan, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu.

¹⁹ Goode (1963); Gore (1969); Shah (1961); Ross (1961)

²⁰ Population reports (1998)

²¹ Kalpagam U. (2008)

²² Alexander et al (2006a); CPOP (2005); Mensch et al (2005); Lloyd and Mensch (1999); Singh, S. and Samara, R. (1996)

²³ Kurian (1961, 1971, 1974); Singer (1958); Vatuk (1972)

²⁴ Kurian (1971)

The study is being executed by the International Institute for Population Sciences, Mumbai, in collaboration with the Population Council, New Delhi and with financial support from the Packard and MacArthur Foundations. Respondents included 17362 unmarried women and 11522 unmarried men and 13912 married women aged 15–24 and, in view of the paucity of married men in these age, 8052 married men aged 15–29.

This paper draws on the data of married men aged 15-29 and married women aged 15-24 only. Bivariate analysis and Logistic regression is employed to determine the correlates of youth's involvement in marital decision-making. To cover the given objectives the study includes youth's age at marriage, type of marriage, choice of partner, interaction with spouse before marriage and approval of parents. The study also shows the effects of social and cultural determinants on the role of youth's in marriage practice.

Analysis

Socio-economic profile

Majority of the respondents in this study belongs to age group 20-24 for married women and 25-29 for married men. Respondent from rural areas are the highest and maximum is from Rajasthan. Overall respondents were mostly Hindus belonging to OBC category. Majority of the men respondent have completed 8-11 years of schooling. However, for women respondent majority of respondent who didn't receive any formal education are found highest in Rajasthan, Bihar and Jharkhand. Similarly for both fathers and mothers education majority of the respondent didn't receive any formal education. Gender differences are quite wide in case of work status where majority of the respondents are engaged in paid work both before and after marriage. Majority of the respondents from Maharashtra, Bihar, Jharkhand and Rajasthan belongs to non-nuclear family. However, the difference among respondents belonging to nuclear and non-nuclear family in Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh is minimum. Considering the peer connectedness before marriage, it is found that above 90 percent of the respondents have same sex friends which decreases to 20 percent when asked about having opposite sex friends. It is relatively low in Rajasthan.

Age at marriage

Sociological analysis of marriage usually points out that age at marriage varies with the type of society and, therefore, reflects the stage of industrialization and urbanization.²⁵ Table 2 depicts that women marrying before legal age is significantly high in all the six states with Bihar recording highest percentage and Tamil Nadu lowest. Rajasthan shows very low

²⁵ J. Joel Moss (1965)

percentage of men are married above 21 as compared to other states. However, 80-90 percent of the respondents including both married men and women are aware of the legal minimum age at marriage for girls and boys. Literature highlights the fact that the motivation for a parent involved in mate selection to marry a daughter off early is that girls are thought to be compliant in the choice of spouse when they are young.²⁶

Marital Process

Arranged marriage is a normative in our country. Except for Tamil Nadu all other states have shown that above 90 percent of the marriages are arranged. Percent of love marriage in Rajasthan is significantly low for both married men and women (below 1 percent). Parents seeking opinion of their wards about their like and dislike of the boy/girl has shown higher percentage than regarding their opinion about the preferred age at marriage. Interestingly it is found that marriage partner according to respondent's choice is higher for married women than married men in states of Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra and Jharkhand. However, choice of partner considering both parents and respondents choice is comparatively low in all the states. Although gender gap is wide but majority of the respondents approved the girl/boy chosen by their parent and very few disapproved their parent's choice. Similarly considering parent's response to the choice of respondent shows that there is almost an equal distribution of parents who agreed and parents who disagreed. A wide north-south differentiation has been highlighted as 20-30 percent of the respondent in Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh knows their spouse very well before marriage which is only 2-3 percent in Bihar and Rajasthan. Very few percentage of respondents were unhappy about getting marriage. However, the percentage differs as most of the men are excited about getting married while women are anxious/scared.

Factors affecting marriage related decision making among youths

Table 3 shows the result of logistic regression analysing the respondent role in selecting the partner for marriage. Age at marriage shows a significant relationship with the choice of partner. Keeping all the variables constant, it is found that women married at 18 and above age are more likely to give their opinion regarding the partner selected for marriage. Similarly men married at age 21 and above are more likely to select their partner compared to those men married below the legal age. Respondent from rural areas are less likely to give their opinion regarding selection of marriage partner. Apparently except for Muslims, respondents from other religions are

²⁶ UNICEF (2001 b)

1.59 times (married men) and 1.71 times (married women) more likely to have a strong opinion in choosing their partner for marriage compared to Hindus. Again men belonging to General and OBC category and women from OBC category are more likely to have a choice in partner selection compared to the SC and ST category. However, neither religion nor caste shows any significant association with youth's decision in choice of partner. Increase in mother's education level have a significant and positive relationship in selection of marriage partner. Involvement in economic activity prior to marriage confer autonomy for boys in selection of their spouse. Similar findings are found among men who discussed with their parents issues of friendship, romantic relationship and other growing up issues are 1.41 times more likely to have their opinion which selecting their partner compared to men who does not discuss with their parents. Similarly women are 1.35 times more likely to have their opinion in selection of spouse compared to them who does not interact with their parents. Goode is convinced that India exhibits a number of changes in family relations and concludes that "even in mate selection choices, the winds of change may be felt, and there is a movement in the direction of giving greater freedom to the young. This change is especially important because the Hindu arranged marriage was the keystone to all the other family patterns that characterized Indian society for so long" (1963: 207-208).

Conclusion

Findings reiterate the fact that traditional custom of early age at marriage especially for women continues in India. Over 90% of the marriages are arranged and though the young people, with wide regional disparity shown in participation of youth in marriage related decision making. However, Tamil Nadu shows some discrepancy with reference to the age at marriage and involvement of youth in selection of spouse. Study says that more men than women, are being involved in marriage related decision making. Most of the marriage takes place with the approval of the parent. But a trend of involving youth in selection of spouse could be seen as half of the parents agree to the boy/girl selected by their wards. This again holds true as majority of youth approves the partner chosen by their parents and very few rejects their parent's choice. However a clear north-south difference could be seen as above 75 percent of the marriages in Bihar, Jharkhand and Rajasthan are taking place between two almost strangers meeting on the wedding day which is comparatively less in southern states. The practise of endogamy (marriage between close relative and notably cross cousin), and isogamy (status equity between the bride's family and the groom's family) in southern states could be a probable reason behind such results.

Higher age at marriage and mother's education appeared as a significant and positive determinant in allowing son/daughter's participation in selection of partner. Interaction with parents brings in more autonomy in spouse selection among youths. Findings emphasise the need for programmes for, not only young people's education but also to improve that of their parents, especially mother's. Although the role of youth in marriage related decision making has gained more acceptances, research is yet to be fully established in studying the casual link between their autonomy in marriage related decision making and its impact on later marital life which could strengthen inter spouse relationship through better interaction and communication and contribute to better sexual and reproductive health of the married couples.

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Appendix

Table 1 - Socio-demographic profile of Married men and Married women in India

Individual characteristics		Tamil Nadu		Andhra Pradesh		Maharashtra		Rajasthan		Bihar		Jharkhand	
		MM	MW	MM	MW	MM	MW	MM	MW	MM	MW	MM	MW
Age respondent of	15-19	0.2	16.0	1.0	28.4	1.6	77.1	9.0	26.7	5.7	36.0	4.3	35.3
	20-24	18.5	84.0	27.6	71.6	28.4	22.9	35.8	73.3	34.7	64.0	35.1	64.7
	25-29	81.3	NA	71.4	NA	70.0	NA	55.2	NA	59.6	NA	60.6	NA
Place residence of	Urban	49.4	40.1	46.1	44.5	47.5	46.3	33.5	39.9	49.1	48.5	48.1	38.5
	Rural	50.6	59.9	53.9	55.5	52.5	53.7	66.5	60.1	50.9	51.5	51.9	61.5
Religion	Hindu	90.3	89.2	85.6	83.6	81.2	78.6	90.7	84.1	86.4	85.6	86.4	75.5
	Muslim	6.1	7.4	8.8	7.5	11.8	11.6	8.2	14.4	13.6	14.4	13.3	13.1
	Others	3.6	3.4	5.7	8.9	6.9	9.9	1.1	1.5	0.0	0.0	11.8	11.4
Caste	SC	25.3	27.9	21.9	22.3	17.5	16.5	21.3	19.3	21.8	20.6	15.7	16.4
	ST/VJNT	2.8	0.7	7.1	5.8	18.0	11.3	13.9	9.3	2.1	0.1	24.2	20.6
	OBC	71.0	70.1	48.0	50.0	28.0	26.6	49.3	53.1	61.4	65.8	47.1	52.2
	General	0.8	1.3	23.0	21.9	34.1	41.5	15.4	18.2	14.6	13.5	12.9	10.7
	DK/No Caste	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.4	4.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.1
Education	No schooling	6.0	9.7	18.6	27.3	9.1	13.8	15.9	46.0	25.7	51.6	23.4	47.0

	1-7	40.9	28.4	31.9	34.5	26.6	28.6	26.6	26.0	24.8	22.2	26.1	26.0
	8-11	37.6	45.5	32.7	28.8	44.0	42.2	35.9	19.9	32.9	19.5	34.3	21.5
	12 & Above	15.5	16.3	16.7	9.4	20.3	15.4	21.6	8.1	16.5	6.8	16.1	5.5
Fathers education	No schooling	50.8	40.1	69.6	63.1	40.9	31.8	57.3	50.4	47.5	48.6	49.8	50.1
	1-7	27.0	31.0	19.5	22.4	36.2	33.9	18.3	18.0	19.6	14.0	23.4	18.1
	8-11	18.8	23.3	7.9	9.9	17.4	26.2	17.2	22.7	24.8	25.0	20.3	24.8
	12 & Above	3.4	5.5	3.0	4.6	5.5	8.1	7.3	8.8	8.1	12.3	6.5	7.0
Mothers education	No schooling	66.9	63.0	84.3	81.5	72.2	62.0	88.4	87.2	84.0	81.7	85.5	84.9
	1-7	21.3	23.8	11.4	14.3	20.9	28.3	6.6	6.4	9.3	10.1	9.2	8.9
	8-11	10.6	11.5	3.5	3.4	5.8	8.5	4.2	5.0	6.3	7.1	4.9	5.4
	12 & Above	1.2	1.8	0.9	0.8	1.1	1.1	0.9	1.4	0.4	1.1	0.4	0.7
Individual characteristics		Tamil Nadu		Andhra Pradesh		Maharashtra		Rajasthan		Bihar		Jharkhand	
		MM	MW	MM	MW	MM	MW	MM	MW	MM	MW	MM	MW
Work Status (Paid Work)	Before marriage	1.1	41.9	2.6	19.9	1.5	22.2	2.1	18.2	4.3	23.0	4.7	20.5
	After marriage	1.8	17.2	3.4	22.8	5.0	34.8	22.5	41.1	14.3	28.1	17.0	37.1
	Both before and after marriage	97.0	40.9	94.0	57.3	93.5	43.0	75.5	40.7	81.4	48.9	78.2	42.4
Type of family	Nuclear	41.5	36.8	40.2	44.0	22.3	23.8	26.8	30.0	28.2	28.7	26.7	32.0
	Non-Nuclear	58.5	63.2	59.8	56.0	77.7	76.2	73.2	70.0	71.8	71.3	73.3	68.0
Peer Connectedness (pre-marital)	Have same sex friend	96.6	97.1	99.0	97.1	98.7	96.1	95.8	94.4	96.9	97.8	93.5	96.9
	Have opposite sex friend	28.1	22.5	22.6	10.4	28.8	14.6	8.2	6.2	19.0	5.7	25.3	14.6

Source: Youth in India Situation and Needs 2006-2007

Note: MM - Married Men (15-29), MW - Married Women (15-24), NA – Not Applicable

Table 2 – Distribution of married men and married women in the involvement of marriage process and related decision making

Marriage Characteristics		Tamil Nadu		Andhra Pradesh		Maharashtra		Rajasthan		Bihar		Jharkhand	
		MM	MW	MM	MW	MM	MW	MM	MW	MM	MW	MM	MW
Age at marriage	Below 18	0.8	28.9	9.4	66.2	3.2	36.5	37.7	75.9	28.7	82.0	24.4	80.6
	18 - 21	25.7	58.7	32.4	29.2	29.1	55.4	34.0	19.1	34.2	15.3	34.1	15.9
	Above 21	73.5	12.4	58.2	4.6	67.7	8.1	28.3	4.9	37.2	2.7	41.6	2.7
Knowledge about legal age at marriage	Boys	95.7	87.9	94.2	86.4	97.1	87.7	92.4	79.1	90.6	74.7	85.9	60.9
	Girls	98.9	97.0	94.4	87.3	97.2	92.5	92.1	80.3	91.0	77.6	86.5	63.6
Type of marriage	Arrange	79.6	80.8	94.0	91.6	94.9	94.2	99.5	99.2	97.9	97.8	93.9	90.9
	Love	20.4	19.2	6.0	8.4	5.1	5.8	0.5	0.8	2.0	2.2	6.1	9.1
Parents asked	Preferred age at marriage	76.5	56.8	67.1	21.3	59.7	28.2	17.4	14.4	23.5	5.7	31.8	9.5
	Like the girl/boy	90.4	80.8	93.4	76.3	95.5	60.1	39.7	37.6	50.0	17.8	70.6	36.0
Choice of partner	Respondent choice	46.8	64.5	29.2	46.5	44.2	59.3	11.4	7.7	23.9	20.7	29.4	62.1
	Parent's choice	51.7	33.3	26.3	40.6	32.6	33.3	63.6	90.1	61.5	76.8	67.6	36.4
	Both	1.5	2.2	44.4	12.9	23.3	7.4	25.0	2.2	14.7	2.4	2.9	1.5
Involved in decision making	Approved the girl/boy chosen by parents	54.4	85.5	50.0	90.3	57.3	86.9	46.2	63.3	44.6	57.9	68.1	55.6
	Said no to boy/girl chosen by parents	11.9	21.1	15.8	11.2	17.7	15.1	1.6	11.6	9.8	3.5	9.5	7.0
Parents response for girl/boy chosen by respondent	Agreed	52.8	56.5	47.0	64.1	54.3	54.6	42.9	44.1	40.3	63.1	64.6	68.3
	Disagreed	44.2	42.1	47.0	35.5	40.4	42.0	50.0	55.9	50.0	36.9	30.3	30.3
	No response	3.1	1.4	6.0	0.5	5.3	3.4	7.1	0.0	9.7	0.0	5.1	1.4
Interaction with spouse before marriage	Meet on wedding day	21.2	36.1	44.8	44.2	51.4	61.0	83.3	83.1	88.5	91.7	76.8	78.7
	Know somewhat	40.8	32.0	31.6	29.2	35.8	24.7	14.4	12.9	7.6	5.2	15.5	11.9
	Know very well	38.0	31.9	23.6	26.6	12.8	14.3	2.3	3.9	3.9	3.2	7.6	9.4
Feeling about getting married	Excited	77.0	31.1	53.3	19.2	72.2	33.3	63.7	21.6	50.4	10.9	53.2	18.2
	Nothing special	16.9	15.1	39.0	23.7	21.8	25.3	29.8	24.8	38.1	18.7	31.4	14.8
	Anxious/Scared	5.2	53.3	6.9	56.2	4.7	35.0	5.8	51.6	10.1	68.4	12.4	63.9
	Unhappy	0.9	0.4	0.8	0.9	1.3	6.4	0.7	2.0	1.4	2.1	2.9	3.0

Source: Youth in India Situation and Needs 2006-2007

Note: MM - Married Men (15-29), MW - Married Women (15-24), NA – Not Applicable

Table 3 - Logistic Regression Analysis showing factors affecting Youth's participation in Choice of Partner for Marriage

Variables		Odds Ratio	
		Married Men (MM)	Married Women (MW)
Age at Marriage of the respondent	Below 18 [®]		
	18 and above		1.74***
	Below 21 [®]		
	21 and above	1.79**	
Place of Residence	Urban [®]		
	Rural	0.70*	0.87*
Religion of the respondent	Hindu [®]		
	Muslims	0.41	0.62
	Others	1.59	1.71
Caste of the respondent	SC [®]		
	ST/VJNT	0.47	0.38
	OBC	1.56	1.17
	General	1.51	0.67
Mother's education	No schooling [®]		
	1-7	1.86**	1.08***
	8-11	1.35***	1.60***
	12 & Above	1.72***	2.96***
Work Status of the respondent	Before marriage [®]		
	After marriage	0.52*	1.03
	Both before and after marriage	1.16	1.11
Interaction with parents (friendship, romantic relationship, growing up issues)	Never [®]		
	Sometimes/Often	1.408***	1.346**

Note: 1. [®] is the reference category in the logistic regression.

2. *** is the coefficient which is significant at one percent level of significance.
3. ** is the coefficient which is significant at five percent level of significance.
4. * is the coefficient which is significant at ten percent level of significance.