Youth and Marriage: A Study of Changing Marital Choices among the University Students in India

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ABSTRACT Each social group in the Indian context, whether it may be a caste or religion or tribe, has its own rules and regulations that define the practices of social relations within the group and outside the group. Marriage as a social institution establishes a social relation with the members of two families. It is largely regulated by the norms and values of the groups and society. In the same way, choice of marriage is also much influenced by caste and religious norms and values. Here, the individual preferences are constrained by the groups' norms. At this juncture, higher education has the potential role in shaping the marital choices of students. This study sets out to analyse the students' views on choices of marriage in a university campus by employing qualitative and quantitative techniques. It also attempts to explain the changing forms of marital choices and types of marriages in the university campus. For this study, extensive data was collected from 450 selected students from the University of Hyderabad (UoH) by using survey research questionnaires on marital choices among the students. In order to strengthen the reliability of the data, personal opinion on marital choices was drawn from 20 selected students from different caste and religious backgrounds by using open-ended questionnaire. The data analysis shows that the students' marital choices are still influenced by cultural factors like caste, religion, class, and family.

INTRODUCTION

Indian society is known for its diversities in terms of caste, religion, region, language and culture. These different diversities could be traced back to various historical and cultural settings. The norms and values of Indian society are relatively determined by the prevailing socio-economic and political conditions. Among various diversities in the Indian society, caste and religion play a crucial role in the social life of people. More importantly, the social and cultural lives of people are very much conditioned by the norms and values associated with one's caste and religion. For the question as to why caste and religion have been the basis of the everyday social life and practices of people, it is imperative for us to look into the contexts in which these practices had been legitimised and institutionalised.

Family and marriage are considered as the universal institutions of all societies. Every society, however, has its own rules and regulations in relation to family and marriage. At this juncture, people in the traditional Indian society tend to behave and act in accordance with the social norms and values that are enforced by the caste-ridden and religious practices. The caste ridden and religious values have been incorporated into the institutions of family and marriage. The Indian society re-produces the age-old customs and traditions of prevailing social structure through these institutions. The institutions of marriage and family do the important functions of the social systems such as socialisation, social recognition and security, and economic and emotional support. The customs and norms associated with marriage and family do not have any independent origin, but are the reflection of the respective cultural practices of the group. Each tribe, caste or religious community has its own rules and regulations with regard to marriage and family. The members of the group are expected to follow these rules and regulations that will curtail their individual choices and preferences. In this way, each group remains as a closed endogamous group in relation to marriage.

In the traditional caste structure, each caste group, regardless of higher or lower, strives to maintain their cultural status in the ritual caste hierarchy. There is a popular tendency among people that if one group maintains more distance and less interaction with other groups, the group may gain more social and cultural status in the caste structure. This is why, each social group has its own marriage rules and regulations to control social interaction and every day practices of its members with other groups. Given this background, it could be assumed that preference in the selection of a spouse is more group oriented than an individual affair.

Statement of the Problem

In India, the selection of spouses is largely bound within the similar caste, class, religion, and region. The practice of endogamy[1] has been the major form of marriage in the traditional Indian society. Even within the endogamous marriages, parents' choices are more valued in the selection of spouses for their daughters and sons. In this sense, parental arranged marriages are largely preferred to other forms of marital choices.

The process of industrialisation, the growth of urbanisation and the expansion of higher education have brought out widespread changes in the socio- economic structure of the society. These changes, in turn, have led to some considerable changes in the social institutions of marriage and family (Knox and Schacht 2009). There is also a close relationship between the attainment of higher education and changes in the perception on the selection of life partners. The university campus is one such a place that provides opportunities for students to imbibe different universal value systems. The university students have the freedom to practice the same in their marital choices too.

This paper attempts to explore the role of the university campus and its consequent impact upon the changing values and norms on the selection of marital choices among the students. The survey on "Youth Identity" was carried out at the University of Hyderabad for the purpose of exploring varying degrees of students' identity and its associated interrelationship with other related issues like caste, class, gender, religion, and students' association at the university campus.

Significance of the Study

In the modern society, social values and norms of a particular group or community are influenced and shaped by the changes happening within and outside the society. The modernisation process has brought about structural changes in the socioeconomic condition of the people. Their positional changes in society, in turn, have led to considerable transition in the social beliefs and practices associated with educational choices, marital choices, and lifestyle (Knox and Schacht 2009).

At this context, universities offer a social space where students from different multicultural backgrounds are exposed to different ideologies, educational practices, and cultural practices. Here marital choices of both men and women at the university campus undergo considerable changes. Their opinion on marital choices is constrained by the choices between particularism and Universalism[2]. At this background, the study attempts to analyse the cultural and social significance of their marital choices.

Objectives

This study has the following objectives.
1. To map out the changing perception of youth in the selection of their life partners.
2. To examine the interrelationship between different forms of identities based on caste, class, gender, religion and region and their roles in shaping their choices in selecting their life partners.
3. To highlight the emerging trends in the selection of spouses among the university students.

METHODOLOGY

This study demands a university campus that maintains different forms of diversities among the student community so that it will be feasible to collect plurality of perceptions of students. For this purpose, the University of Hyderabad (UoH), Hyderabad in India was selected.

This study is based on both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The survey method was employed to collect quantitative data from the students. For this purpose, the stratified sampling technique was employed to select the stu-

dents from different social categories- Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), Other Backward Classes (OBCs), and General (GEN)[3]. 450 students were selected from these categories in proportion to their total numbers. The category-wise students selected for the study are as follows: STs- 60, SCs- 85, OBCs- 143, and GEN- 162. Even the number of men and women students was decided in proportion to their total numbers(Men- 283; and women- 167). The respondents also include the students from different programmes of study like IMS (Integrated Master Studies), MA, MSc, MPhil, and PhD.

A detailed questionnaire with close-ended questions was distributed among these 450 students to collect quantitative data on their opinion on different types of marital choices. In order to strengthen the reliability of the data, some qualitative data was collected from 20 students (Men- 10 and women- 10) through a questionnaire with open-ended questions. The purposive sampling technique was used to select these 20 students. The data analysis was done by converting the quantitative responses of the students into a percentage. And the results of the quantitative data were supplemented by the qualitative data in the data analysis.

Changing Trends in the Indian Marriage System

The Oxford Dictionary defines marriage as "*a formal union of a man and a woman, typically as recognised by law, by which they become husband and wife*". Murdock (1949), an anthropologist, defines marriage as "*a universal institution that involves a man and a woman living together, engaging in sexual activity, and cooperating economically*" (Cited in Coontz 2005). Marriage is an arrangement in which two adults of the opposite gender have an emotional relationship and a legal commitment to each other according to the law of the state (Knox and Schacht 2009).

Many scholars have defined the term 'marriage' from different perspectives- economic, biological, and emotional. In developing countries, where many women do not work outside their homes, marriage is arguably the single most important determinant of a woman's economic future (Cited in Banerjee et al. 2009:1). From the economic perspective, this institution ensures the production and distribution of goods and services, as a legal institution, it provides social control, as an emotional institution, it provides emotional support and stability and as a biological institution it promotes procreation (Knox and Schacht 2009). Marriage and family, therefore, have been the important aspects in the lives of human beings because of its multiple social, economic and emotional functions.

In the Indian society, tribes and caste groups follow the practice of endogamy whereas villages, clans, and the gotra are closely associated with the practice of exogamy[4]. Among tribes spouses will be given some freedom to select, though within their group, their life partner and their choice of individual preference will be given some priority. Though marriage for love is common among tribes, they will never allow marriages outside their own group.[5]

Even though it is said that the practice of endogamy is being followed among various caste groups, some restrictions are allowed in exceptional circumstances. Hypergamy and hypogamy[6] are the two exceptions. This is to say that caste groups are not following isogamy. Among caste groups, parents' choices are more preferred to individual choices. Here, the spouses do not enjoy the freedom of choice in selecting their life partners. In case of women, restrictions are more in the selection of their life partners when compared to their male counterparts. Thus, it becomes clear that the choices in marriages are very much guided by caste and religious norms and regulations.

The modernisation process has brought about certain changes in the traditional caste structure and the transformation of the village economy. Though it is a fact that the caste system has not fully adapted to the changing conditions, there are some considerable relaxation within the caste rules and regulations and its associated gender roles, thereby some changes in caste and religious restrictions on marriage. This is not to suggest that individuals are getting married outside of their own groups and that they enjoy their freedom of choice in selecting their life partners or companions. More importantly, it could be more visible in newspaper matrimonial columns and online matrimonial websites where the demands on the choice of spouses would be within their own castes, class, religion, and region. Despite this, there are certain modern institutional spaces that offer enough room for the selection of individual life

partners cutting across caste, class, religion, and region.

In urban settings, individuals seek to select spouses from similar class background, i.e., economic status. They look for family status, occupation, educational qualification, place of residing, and other personal choices. These different criteria are now newly added while selecting life partners. Actually, this does not lead to any form of inter- caste or inter- religious marriages. Rather, these various class or economic criteria are still operating within the framework of caste and religious norms in relation to marital relations.

The caste system and the joint family system are the traditional pillars of the Indian society. Parental arranged marriages are the most prevalent form of marriage system among all communities in the Indian society. The hierarchy-ridden Hindu society strictly follows and practises the endogamous marriage system. People want to be endogamous in addition to considering social class, regional and linguistic backgrounds. Religious affiliation is also strictly followed in addition to caste regulations in the selection of spouses. Hypogamy is totally discouraged among Hindu religious groups, whereas hypergamyis considered to a limited extent since it may lead to structural imbalance.

Industrialisation and modernisation processes have effected changes in the structure and outlook of the basic social institutions like marriage and family. The joint family system has been broken into a nuclear family, and the functions and role of the family have become more professional. Dubey (1980) analysed in his article how the changes in subsystems such as economy and technology result in changes in the traditional structure of the family and marriage. He further argued that the industrial and technological advancements have brought out changes in the basic functions of the family. It is considered that an unmarried person is said to be incomplete.

The ethnic diversity of Indian society shows certain customs and rules related to marriages and it varies in relation to religion, community, and region. The caste complexities and its related social life structure are prevalent more among the Hindu communities. In Indian society, Hindus follow strict rules and regulations of marriage compared to other communities like Muslims and Christians. The various forms of marriages among the Hindus include endogamy, exogamy, hypergamy, and hypogamy. Caste endogamy is very important and more relevant among the Hindus in India. Endogamy is a rule or essence of caste which means an individual must marry within his own group. The purpose of practicing endogamy is to maintain racial purity and group solidarity of their caste group (Singh 1988). Singh has highlighted the marriage and family system of Rajputs. She identified in her work that Rajputs strictly follow the caste endogamy. Marrying outside the caste is still a taboo among them and it creates a lot of social criticism, sufferings and even punishments.

Banerjee et al. (2009) empirically analysed how the non-economic factors such as caste and status are considered in marriage markets especially among the middle class Indians. They highlighted the changes happened in both family and marriage such as attitudinal changes, wife works outside the home, husband share household works, changes in arranged marriages. They also discussed the traditional marriages, love marriages and inter caste and inter religious marriages in India. They argued that marriages in present day are a combined form of both arranged and love and they called it a semi arranged marriage. Their field study highlights the fact that among educated people there is a higherpreference for love marriage especially among graduates. But this study could not find answers to the question as to why the educated people are supporting love marriage. They say that marriage is always a family matter or parents' responsibility. They also spoke about the merits of arranged marriages- wishes of parents to gain social approval, common belief that arranged marriages are more likely to be successful and long lasting and it provides security and stability, response to family and social pressure and the belief that parents are more experienced to choose partners for their kids. In love marriage, there will be a chance to know each other and the freedom to choose the life partners.

Furtado and Theodoropoulos (2008) analysed how education affects caste and ethnic attachments. They proposed that education could affect inter-caste and inter-ethnic marriages. As like interracial marriages, inter-caste marriages are also relatively rare. They argued that preference for marriage within one's race may change the relative importance of cultural adaptability, assertive matching effect, and other important matters. Educated people may better adapt to

different cultures, making them more likely to marry outside of their ethnicity.

Exogamy is the system of marriage in which certain group of persons who are related or who believe themselves to be related either by blood or kinship are forbidden to intermarry. In India among the Hindus the social groups practising exogamy are family, prohibited kin, clan, gotra, sapinda.[7] Singh (1988) highlighted that the parental control in marriage continues to be strong in practice and self-choice marriage and partner selection are rare in India. In India, the majority of both men and women have the tendency to choose their partner from their own religious groups. In a survey report on *attitude and perceptions of educated, urban youth to marriage and sex,* it has been found that 58 percent of their young respondents were in favour of arranged marriages, and 41 percent supported the idea of choosing the partner by own choice.

Stevens, Owenr and Schaefer (1990) argue that high school, college and universities are efficiently designed institutions for propagating homogamy with respect to educational attainment, and it sorts the population by means of characteristics such as socio-economic background, general intelligence, and values and attitudes. Education brings modern ideologies in the choice of partners and it brings more changes in their private life than public life.

Numerous cases were reported in newspapers where the eloped young couple from different caste or religious background had been killed or they committed suicide. The attitudes towards new ideologies and the generation gap, and religious or caste commitments are also some of the reasons for this.

Upadhyay and Gupta (2013) have analysed in their paper the role of rapid global changes like urbanisation, migration, increasing educational opportunities and technological advancement and their impact on the institution of marriage all over the world. The above factors have brought about radical changes in the basic institutions like marriage and family. Even though the traditional values and customs still have significant influences on age at marriage, choice of partner and dowry, a small number from the young population are involved in the decision-making process in the matter of marriage and choice of partner.

Colleges and universities are the modern educational institutions where we could see students from various social, economic, cultural and regional backgrounds. All the students get an opportunity to interact with each other. The students are getting good exposure to various confronting modern ideologies that are in conflict with the traditional values and customs.

Significantly, the role of caste and religious ideologies would tend to lose its importance to some extent in the social life of students within the campus. One of the crucial aspects of students' life at the campus is the changing values and notions towards selecting their life partners. The changing values and notions are the result of exposure to modern values and the democratic space available at the campus.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Parental Choices in the Selection of Spouses

In the Indian context, religion and caste have largely determined the role of parents in relation to the selection of partners for their children. Parents have the responsibility over their children till they get married. The selection of the right partners for their children by the parents is regulated by the prevailing norms, and the values of their respective groups and communities to which they belong.

In the case of women, their individual preference is highly restricted. However, with the increasing participation of women in higher education, they enjoy some freedom to select their life partners. But, again their freedom of choice is restricted within the boundaries of caste and religious norms. Their choice of partners, therefore, will be within the similar religious or caste backgrounds. If the woman belongs to urban cities, she will also consider the class background of the bridegroom's family.

Table-1: Category-wise response to the parents' choice in marriage

Category	No	%	Yes	%	Total	%
ST	36	60	24	40	60	13
SC	46	54	39	46	85	19
OBC	73	51	70	49	143	32
GEN	98	60	64	40	162	36
Total	253	56	197	44	450	100

Table-1 explains the opinion of students from different categories on parental choice in mar-

riages. From the Table it is clear that around 56 per cent of students are not preferring parental choices, rather want to select their partners of their own choices while 44 per cent of them would like to marry the persons of their parental choice.

The different categories of students who have replied negatively to the parental choice of marriage are as follows: GEN-60%, OBC-51%, SC-54%, ST-60%. More than 50 per cent of students from each category would like to select marital partners of their choices. It may imply that the students want to break the traditional family norms and assert their freedom of choices in relation to their marriages. But the question of whether they will select their partners within similar or different background needs to be answered. For this, the qualitative data shows that 65 percent of students (13 out of 20) want to choose their life partners either from their caste, religious or regional backgrounds. Therefore, we may conclude that the social identity of the student still plays a crucial role in marital choices.

Live- in Relationship or Cohabitation

It is a living arrangement in which an unmarried couple live together in a long term relationship that resembles a marriage. In India, it is socially and morally unacceptable, though it is not recognised as illegal. The Supreme Court has framed some criteria for live-in relationship as a part of the Domestic Violence Act, 2005. Some of these criteria include pooling of financial and domestic arrangements, entrusting the responsibility, sexual relationship, bearing children, socialisation in public and intention and conduct of the parties.[8]

Any marital relationship between two individuals should be socially sanctioned by the members of the respective community and group. This social recognition is very important for individuals to live in the group/community. A formal marriage provides the couple a special social status, prestige, new responsibilities, and social security. The formal recognition of the marriage by the community members is a precondition to become a full member of the group.

Live-in relationship is a new form of marital arrangement prevalent mostly in more advanced cities of western countries. It is very new to India though there are some exceptional cases in urban centres. As suggested by Dumont (1970),

the concept of holism is more celebrated in India as opposed to the western notion of individualism. The notion of holism even applies to marriage practices as well. In Indian marriages, it is not the two individuals who unite together; rather it is the group of members and families who come together and conduct the ceremony.

Table-2-Gender-wise response to live-in relationship

Gender	No	%	Yes	%	Total	%
Men	138	49	145	51	283	63
Women	96	57	71	43	167	37
Total	234	52	216	48	450	100

Table-2 explicates the students' attitude on live-in relationship without formally getting married. 48% of the students have agreed with the notion of live-in relationship, whereas about 52% of the students are not in favour of the relationship outside the institution of marriage. Though a considerable number of students have replied in favour of live-in relations, formal and social recognition of the marriage is still highly preferred by the students (48%). There is also a gender difference in the case of live-in relationship. Here, around 57% of women students are not in favour of live-in relationships while this is 49% in the case of men students. The data implies the fact that the women students are more bound to accept the traditional value that marriages should be approved by the society at large. It is testimony to how the formal institution of marriage is highly regulated by society.

On the question of a living together relationship some students have replied as follows:

Shamna, a woman student doing MA History says:

"This relationship involves greater risk, so personally I can't agree with such a relationship".

Anees, a female student doing MA English, has replied:

This kind of relationship does not need any support from family and community. But I do not have any courage to do so because I do not want to go against my community."

Though some students, both men and women, have replied positively to the living together relationship, they do not want to practise the same in their own life. Their perceptions are still constrained by various factors like family cus-

tom, community sanction, caste, and religious regulations. Thus we can conclude that the living together relationship is not a predominant form of marital choice among university students in India.

Inter- Caste and Inter- Religious Marriages

In India, caste and religious communities follow the practice of endogamy in order to prevent the entry of members of other groups to maintain its purity and avoid the problems emerging from the social and cultural differences. Each caste and religious group has its separate rules and regulations in relation to marriage. Among different caste groups, there is a hierarchical order with different status and privileges. Each caste group strives to maintain its social status and privileges through established social relations with other groups.

Marriage is one of the social institutions that establish new social relations with the families of other groups. The marital relation with the groups of other castes is perceived as a threat to the social honour of the group. With this perceived tendency, every caste group promotes the practice of caste endogamy to protect its social honour and status within the society. If any member of the group flouts this rule, he or she and their families would be ostracised from the community. Thus, marriage and social honour are closely interlinked with each other. Due to this reason, honour killing[9] of a young married couple is taking place in some parts of the country.

Marriage in the Indian context, therefore, is not an individual affair, but a group affair which is more associated with social status, honour, and the privileges of the group. The rules and regulations, thus, relating to marriages are enforced upon the group members by the respective group or community. The endogamous form of marriage has been more popular among caste groups and other communities like tribes. Here, the individual preferences and choices in marriage are submitted to community norms and values and mostly endogamous marriages are practised. Even in the case of religious groups, the endogamous marriage is still preferred more. Every religious group seeks to maintain its specific social and cultural differences through promoting marriages exclusively within the group itself.

Table-3-Gender-wise response to Inter-caste marriage

Gender	No	%	Yes	%	Total	%
'Men	77	27	206	73	283	63
Women	47	28	120	72	167	37
Total	124	28	326	72	450	100

Table-3 explains students' opinion on inter-caste marriage. According to the Table, it is clear that 72% of students have positively replied in favour of inter- caste marriages while only 28% of them are disagreeing. It confirms the point that there is not much difference of opinion among men and women students with regard to inter- caste marriages since 73% of male students and 72% of female students are in favour of inter-caste marriages.

Table-4-Gender-wise response to Inter-religious marriage

Gender	No	%	Yes	%	Total	%
Men	208	73	75	27	283	63
Women	128	77	39	23	167	37
Total	336	75	114	25	450	100

Table-4 reports the students' views on inter-religious marriage. About 75% of students have disagreed with the inter-religious marriage. Only 25% of the students have agreed to marriage within the religion. Again, it seems to imply that the religious value system with regard to endogamous marriages relatively does not play a major role in deciding students' choices of their partners. Among the students women are comparatively more in favour of inter-religious marriages. This fact can be drawn from the Table that about 73% of men and 77% of women are in agreement with inter-religious marriages.

From Tables 3 and 4, it may seem that university students are more in favour of inter- caste and inter- religious marriages. But, it only reflects their opinion. There is no guarantee that all those who are in favour of these marriages will practise the same in their actual life. Actually, this implies the fact that university students are aware that individuals should be free to choose their partners irrespective of their caste and religious backgrounds, and that religion and caste should not be the hindering factors in selecting their life partners. This does not mean to say that the students who support this would

go for inter- religious or inter- caste marriages. If we analyse the weekly matrimonial columns published in daily newspapers, it is easily visible that the educated young individuals look for their partners within the similar caste, sub- caste, religion, and class backgrounds. Even the matrimonial websites across the country will show the same phenomenon. Moreover, some caste groups have their own matrimonial sites. All these will be enough to substantiate the foregoing arguments. From the qualitative data, we would like to highlight the following perceptions of some students on inter-religious marriages.

Ayesha, a Muslim woman doing MA Sociology mentioned:

"Inter-religious marriages will lead to the loss of their parents and community support".

Sunita, Hindu woman doing MA Sociology, said:

"Inter-religious marriages are more complicated as it involves lack of family support and recognition from their own religious community".

Naveen, a MA Political Science student replied:

"Religion should not have any role in regulating the marital relation between two individuals, because marriage involves a relationship between two individuals, but not between the religions".

It highlights the fact that the perception of the women students on marital choices is mostly constrained by religious norms and values, whereas the perception of men students in selecting their life partner is comparatively less constrained by religious values.

Region-based Cultural Variation in the Choice of Marriage

From the qualitative data, we could find that there is a great variation in the choice of marriage among students of different regions. The students of Hindu religion from Odisha and Tamil Nadu states have agreed that religious norms and values should be followed and choice of marriage also should be within one's own caste and religion. They still follow the conservative ideas in terms of marital choices.

Ajay, a Hindu student from Odisha, answered:

"There should not be any close relation between two friends of different religious backgrounds as non- married couple. It is against our culture and is a threat to our cultural norms and values".

Similarly, Anitha, a Hindu woman student from Tamil Nadu, replied:

"Any relation as a non- married couple between members of different faiths is very bad. Inter-religious marriage itself is a complicated and problematic one. The inter-religious, non-married couple make it more complicated than the earlier one. Religious purity is very much necessary for a family life".

Both Ajay and Anita also want their close friends to be from similar religious backgrounds due to the reason that they will feel more comfortable with friends of similar cultural and religious backgrounds. Most of the Hindu men and women students from the state of Odisha and Tamil Nadu are completely against inter- caste and inter- religious marriages.

In the case of marriage, they are giving much preference to their social and cultural values rather than individual choices. They are of the opinion that marriage between members of different religions or caste would create many complications within their individual and family relations as it is difficult to adjust with each other.

Moreover, they feel that a social sanction from the respective caste or religious group is necessary in the case of marriage as it would provide them with social security and recognition from the society. The same phenomena are not reflected in the case of Kerala that has a different social and cultural history. Mostly the students from Kerala are in favour of inter- caste and inter- religious marriages. They are looking at marriage as an individual affair which involves only two individuals. For them, there is no role of religion and caste in choosing marital partners. This can be inferred from the answers given by the students from Kerala.

Asha, a Hindu woman student doing MA Sociology, highlighted:

"Individuals are free to choose their partners irrespective of their religious background. Religion is a constructed institution and there should be any role of religion in selecting life partner".

Malathi, a Kerala Hindu woman doing MA Comparative literature, noted:

"There will not be any progress if we follow religious values in choosing our partner".

To the question as to spending time with persons of different caste or religion as non-married couple, Asha has answered:

"Individuals are free to interact with anyone whom they like irrespective of their caste and religion".

Malathi has pointed out:

"If people are from different cultural backgrounds, there will be an exchange of knowledge and this will give them a different perception on social life". Thus, it becomes clear that choice of marriage differs in terms of region-based cultural backgrounds.

Despite this, there is also a difference of opinion on marriage choice within the particular region based on one's religious background. Kerala Muslim women, for instance, consider marriage as a community or a group affair in which there is no place for individual preference in the selection of his or her life partner. They give much preference to their religious values in the case of marital practices. The inter-religious marriages are not preferred by the Kerala Muslim women. It is more visible from their answers.

Sharmila Begum, a student of MA linguistics, opined: "Every marriage is a contract. It is not between two individuals, but two families of the similar religious groups. So, marriage within own religion would be better in order to avoid problems". She also mentioned: "Spending time with a person of another religious background as a non-married couple is not suitable for our culture. Even I cannot agree with that. That is why, women are getting married before 16 years of age in our religion".

It implies that still religious norms and values constrain the individual choices on marriage among university students.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, though both men and women students in the university are relatively in support of inter-caste and inter-religious marriages, they do not want to agree to live-in relationship without any formal or legal approval from their communities. It clearly indicates that formal approval to the marriage is highly valued among students. If we broadly look at the data, it can be inferred that about two thirds of university students have replied positively to inter-caste and inter-religious marriages. In their actual life, however, they do not want to practise the same. Most of them want to marry within their similar caste or religious groups. The growing number of individuals who prefer to marry within their own castes and regions at matrimonial columns in newspapers and online matrimonial sites would subscribe to this argument.

Here, it is interesting to note that caste and religious identities are not largely approved by the university students in the case of marital choices. This may imply the irrelevance of caste and religious factors in marital choices. But in actual life this cannot be practised by the students due to caste and religious norms being at the centre in regulating their marriage choices. The women students are less supportive than their male counterparts of inter-religious marriage and live-in relationships. Here, it becomes apparent that despite getting exposure to university culture women students are still holding traditional values and norms in the selection of their partners. They seek to follow the norms of the traditional social systems and look at marriage as a group or a community affair than an individual affair.

Among the students of UoH, parental choice has been given much priority in the selection of their life partners. Their choice is mostly from their own caste and religious groups. Overall, we can conclude that though university campus provides some space in favour of marriages outside the traditional structure, it cannot be said that caste and religious identities are completely ignored in the case of marriages. There are some changes among university students that will dilute the caste and religious consciousness to some extent by approving marriages outside their caste or religion, though they may not follow the same in their practical life. However, from the data analysis, it is true that the cultural norms and values sanctioned by caste and religion hold a major role in regulating the marital choices among the university students.

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NOTES

1 It is a practice of marital relation in which members of a particular social group are expected marry within their own group.

2 Particularism vs Universalism is a dilemma of whether one should act in accordance with the universal values or the one that favours the actor's interest. It is one of the five pattern variables explained by Parsons (1951) in his book '*Towad A General Theory of Action*'. These pattern variables are the dilemmas faced by social actors in any social situation and the choices between the types of value- orientation. The social system offers solutions to these dilemmas (Gerhardt 2011). Similarly, the university students also will face the same dilemma in the case of marital choices. It is the dilemma of whether to follow one's caste, class, or religious values or the universal values in selecting their marital partners.

3 There are the four categories used by the Indian government for implementing government progrmmes and reservation policies. SCs are the lower caste groups who occupy the lowest position in the traditional Hindu caste hierarchical order. STs are the various tribal groups who are isolated from the mainstream society and follow distinct social and cultural practices. OBCs are the socially and educationally backward classes who occupy the middle position in the caste hierarchy. General category includes upper castes families and upper strata of OBCs.

4 It is the custom of marrying outside their own groups and communities. It is exactly opposite to the practice of endogamy.

5 See Majumdar and Madan (1956) for further information on different forms of marriage practices among Indian tribes. In their book 'An Introduction to Social Anthropology', they identified eight formsof marriages practiced among the Indian tribes.

6 Hypergamy is a form of marriage in which a man who belongs to higher social group marries a woman of lower social group. It is known as 'anuloma'. Hypogamy is opposite to hypergamy where a woman of higher social status marries a man of low social status. It is also known as 'pratiloma'.

7 Gotra refers to a group of individuals from three or more generations who identify themselves to the same ancestor. Sapinda means the particle of the same body. According to the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955, a Sapinda consists of members of five generations from father's side and three generations from mother's side (From http://www.yourarticlelibrary.com/society/rules-of-mate-selection-in-hindu-marriages-essay/4371/). Clan is a kin group or the descendants of a common ancestor. Clan lineage is traced either from father's side or mother's side (From http://sociology.about.com/od/C_Index/g/Clan.htm).

8 From <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/what-is-live-in-relationship-sc-to-frame-guidelines/1/327292.html > (Retrieved 18 April 2014).

9 It is the practice of killing those spouses who marry outside their castes. This is mostly done by the family members of the spouse, who normally belong to upper caste and is married to a lower caste boy or girl, in order to compensate the loss of reputation and honour to the family and the community as a whole. It is also a vengeance against the dishonorable act. This kind of inhuman practice is widely sanctioned by 'Khap panchayat' (Village caste assembly or association). It is more prevalent in the parts of north Indian states where Khap panchayats are stronger.

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