

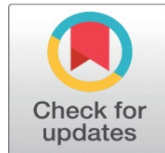
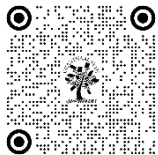
# THE PSYCHO-SOCIAL DYNAMICS OF INTER-CASTE MARRIAGES IN CONTEMPORARY INDIA: CHALLENGES AND IMPLICATIONS

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## ABSTRACT

Inter-caste marriage, though increasingly accepted in modern India, remains a significant social issue, with many families facing vulnerabilities and challenges due to caste-based differences. The practice of inter-caste marriage continues to provoke tension, sometimes leading to extreme consequences, such as honor killings, where individuals, especially couples, have been tragically killed by their own families. While inter-caste marriages are more widely accepted today due to educational and social progress, many individuals still face discrimination, violence, and social isolation because of their choices, particularly those from low socio-economic castes. This study aims to explore the psycho-social challenges faced by couples and family members and determining factors for the inter-caste marriages. Primary data is collected from the respondents from five districts of Haryana state and secondary data was collected from various sources such as research papers, books, newspapers, and online reports. The research analyzes the impact of inter-caste marriages and critically assesses the highlighted cases. It is found that the societal constraints surrounding inter-caste marriages are often enforced by parents, who view marriage not only as a marriage of two individuals but also as an alliance between families, focused on preserving financial well-being and social prestige. Despite the growing acceptance of inter-caste marriages, facts show that only about 05.00 percent of marriages in India are inter-caste, with similar statistics observed in regions like Haryana. Couples who engage in inter-caste marriages often face severe consequences, such as social ostracism, the loss of family support, and even violence. It is suggested that there is a critical need for increased security and support for inter-caste marriages. Government initiatives, Civil Societies, Non-Governmental organizations, and activist groups have a vital role to play in encouraging and protecting couples who make the brave decision to marry outside their caste, particularly those from low socio-economic castes and girls. Societal acceptance and stronger protective measures are necessary to reduce the risks faced by these couples.

**Keywords:** Inter-caste marriage, Motherhood, Scheduled Castes, Caste, Religion, Ethnography, Social Stigma, Honour Killing

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

India remains largely a traditional society, deeply influenced by a rigid caste system that significantly impacts the selection of marriage partners. For most Indians, the idea of marrying outside one's caste is still difficult to imagine. However, it is encouraging to note that the influence of caste in marriage decisions is gradually diminishing. Currently, about 10% of marriages in India are intercaste, marking a positive beginning toward the eventual eradication of the caste system. This shift in marriage patterns is a recent development, driven by modernization, socio-economic development, and the globalization of India's economy. States that are socio-economically developed, such as Punjab, Haryana, Assam, Maharashtra, and Karnataka, exhibit higher rates of intercaste marriages compared to more backward regions like Uttar

Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, and Rajasthan. It is expected that as modernization and socio-economic development continue, the incidence of intercaste marriages will increase.

The focus on **Inter-caste Marriages, Social Challenges, and their Impact on Indian Society**, particularly in **Haryana**, offers a compelling area of study, given Haryana's distinctive socio-cultural and caste-based dynamics. While intercaste marriages have been a growing phenomenon in urban areas, they continue to face significant resistance, especially in rural regions like Haryana, where caste identities are still strongly entrenched in social practices.

- **Caste System and Its Existence and Role in Haryana**

Like much of rural India, Haryana has a deeply entrenched caste system. Social hierarchies in Haryana are rigid, and caste identities are central to social organization and daily life. Marriages in Haryana are often arranged within the same caste, and marriages between different castes are historically rare, with strong social sanctions against intercaste relationships. **Caste-related factors** have a strong influence on marriage decisions. Inter-caste marriages between upper and lower caste individuals face more resistance due to deep-rooted caste hierarchies.

- **Spatial Distribution of Inter-Caste and Inter-Religious Marriages**

The patterns of inter-caste and inter-religious marriages differ across regions. In general, **Southern India** (especially Tamil Nadu and Kerala) shows higher rates of inter-caste marriages compared to **Northern India**, where caste remains more rigid. Similarly, inter-religious marriages may be more common in states like **Goa** and **Kerala**, which have a history of religious diversity, compared to more conservative states like **Uttar Pradesh** or **Bihar**. Inter-caste and inter-religious marriages are more common in **metropolitan cities** such as **Delhi**, **Mumbai**, **Bangalore**, and **Hyderabad**, where people from various backgrounds converge and form relationships in more diverse and cosmopolitan environments. These cities provide more opportunities for individuals to meet potential partners outside their immediate caste or religious circle. In **rural areas**, these marriages are significantly rarer due to entrenched social norms and the greater influence of family and community elders.

- **Determinants of Inter-Caste Marriages in India**

Several factors influence the likelihood of individuals opting for inter-caste or inter-religious marriages in India. These determinants include both individual factors and broader societal influences, which are explained as under-

**Caste System-** The caste system is a primary determinant in inter-caste marriages. Despite being officially abolished, caste plays a major role in shaping personal choices and interactions in India.

**Religion and Religious Identity-** Religion is a significant determinant for inter-religious marriages. In many parts of India, religion is deeply intertwined with identity, and marriage outside one's religion can lead to social exclusion or familial estrangement.

**Family and Social Expectation-** Family approval remains one of the most significant determinants of marriage in India. Families play a pivotal role in arranging marriages, and societal expectations often force individuals to adhere to caste and religious norms.

**Education Level and Mobility-** Education plays a crucial role in breaking caste and religious barriers. College students, for instance, are often more likely to meet people from different backgrounds, fostering cross-caste and cross-religion relationships.

**Urbanization and Globalization-** Globalization and urbanization contribute to the rise of intercaste and interreligious marriages. As cities grow and become more cosmopolitan, opportunities for individuals from different backgrounds to meet and form relationships increase.

**Marriage Laws and Inter-Caste/Inter-Religious Marriages-** Legal frameworks in India, such as the Special Marriage Act of 1954, allow individuals to marry outside their caste or religion without the need for religious ceremonies, providing a legal safeguard against caste and religious-based discrimination. This has made it easier for people to enter inter-caste and inter-religious marriages, especially in urban areas.

**Political Influence and Social Movements-** Political leaders and social activists have increasingly called for greater acceptance of intercaste and interreligious marriages, especially as a way to build social cohesion in a diverse society like India.

- **Statement of the Problem of the Present Research Study**

Despite growing support for intercaste marriages, especially among the younger generation, they continue to face numerous social, familial, and legal challenges. The challenges faced by intercaste married couples are not thoroughly examined, particularly from a critical social perspective. Hence, this study aims to fill that gap by investigating the experiences, struggles, and transformations associated with intercaste marriages, particularly the challenges and problems, which girls and scheduled caste family face in such marriages.

## **2. REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE**

**Kamble, P. (2023)** analyzed that Article 21 of the Indian Constitution guarantees fundamental rights to individuals, specifically Right to Personal Liberty. The study aims to investigate the dynamics of these marriages through in-depth case studies, providing a deeper understanding of the experiences of couples who face societal and familial resistance. The research helps in shedding light on how societal norms, family expectations, and legal frameworks intersect to impact the lives of those in inter-caste and inter-religious marriages, providing a thorough analysis of their struggles and triumphs in navigating these challenges.

**Kumar, A. (2024)** conducted a research study to explore that while increasingly presently, they are primarily seen in metropolitan areas and make up a small percentage of all marriages. Rural areas still predominantly feature same-caste marriages. With globalization, science, and technology shaping society, social institutions are evolving. People are increasingly avoiding traditional social norms in their personal and social lives.

**Rafiq, S. and Sen, R. (2024)** highlighted that in India, caste and religious customs have historically governed marriage decisions, and even today, inter-caste and inter-religious marriages are often viewed as deviations from tradition. Despite the legalization of inter-religious marriages through the Special Marriage Act, 1954, they remain socially unacceptable in many cases. It highlights the complex position mothers find themselves in, balancing cultural expectations with their emotional support for their children's choices in marriage.

**Wadekar, F.M. (2023)** conducted a study and exhibited that Caste and religion have been integral elements of Indian society for centuries, creating clear divisions between communities and often fostering tension, hatred, and social fragmentation. Marriages within the same caste and religion have traditionally been the norm in India, and the idea of inter-caste or inter-religious marriages has historically been viewed as a socially unacceptable and challenging proposition. These changes have led to an increase in acceptance of inter-caste and inter-religious marriages, though they remain a small percentage of total marriages.

## **3. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

The study is greatly significant in exploring various important psycho-social challenges faced by couples and family members and it is also an attempt to understand and examine the determining factors for the inter-caste marriages. This research is an attempt to insight the impact of intercaste marriages in India, particularly in Haryana. Apart from this, the study also highlighted various strategies and remedies, which are very helpful in addressing the problems and challenges, faced by couples and family members. Study can be more useful and guiding instrument for further research works in the study area.

## **4. OBJECTIVES**

- To examine the Psycho-socio and economic determinant and Condition of the couple and family of inter-caste marriages in Haryana.
- To analyze the impact of inter-caste marriages, particularly on Girls and Family members of Scheduled Castes.
- To suggest Social Work Support and Protective Measures to the victims of inter-caste marriages

## 5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND SELECTIONS OF TOOLS

Researcher has applied descriptive-cum-exploratory research design to the present qualitative and quantitative research study. Study is based on the facts and primary sources of the data, which is collected by the authors in their research studies, surveys and case studies. In addition to it, various books, reports and data from various online sources are also used in the study.

## 6. SUMMARY AND IMPORTANT FINDINGS

The family plays a significant role in either supporting or opposing intercaste marriages, particularly in conservative regions like Haryana, where caste remains a critical part of social identity. Family dynamics, shaped by both traditional values and evolving perspectives, directly influence the experiences of intercaste couples. The study highlights significant gender differences in the acceptance of intercaste marriages within families. The following points summarize the key findings based on the male and female respondents' experiences with familial approval or disapproval. A majority of respondents 54% indicated that their family members support intercaste marriages. 46% reported that their parents were against intercaste marriages. These findings suggest that male respondents are more likely to receive familial support for intercaste marriages, reflecting a comparatively more progressive attitude towards marriage choices, at least from the male perspective in these families. In contrast, only 19.33% stated that their family members accepted their intercaste marriage. A significant 80.67% reported that their parents and other relatives were opposed to their intercaste marriage. About the Overall Acceptance and Resistance, 36.67% respondents stated that their parents, family members, and relatives had accepted their intercaste marriages and conversely, a large majority of 63.33%, reported that their parents and family members opposed intercaste marriages. This overwhelming resistance suggests that intercaste marriages, though becoming more common, are still largely disapproved of in the broader familial and societal context, particularly in regions with deeply ingrained caste practices, such as in Haryana.

The data provided reveals a diverse range of opinions among both male and female respondents regarding their decision to marry outside their caste. These responses shed light on the emotional, psychological, and social dynamics of intercaste marriages. *About the Respondents' Views on their decision of Intercaste Marriage, it is explored that 45.33% believe that their decision to marry outside their caste was always the right one. This indicates a significant level of confidence among some male respondents in their intercaste marriages.*

- **Gender Differences in Views on Intercaste Marriage**

**Higher Confidence Among Men-** A higher percentage of men 45.33% expressed unwavering confidence in their intercaste marriage decision compared to women 55.33%, whereas; Women, especially in conservative settings like Haryana, may experience greater societal and familial pressure to conform to traditional caste norms, which could contribute to higher levels of doubt 27.33% and dissatisfaction 4.67%.

- **Present Status and Social Ground of Inter-caste Marriages in India**

In traditional Indian societies, marriage has historically been governed by religious and caste norms. Marriages are typically preferred within one's own religion or caste, and this practice is deeply embedded in Indian social structures. Marriage in India has long been viewed as more than just a contract between two individuals; it is a sacred institution, often seen as a lifelong arrangement that transcends the usual contractual bonds. The Hindu Marriage Act, 1955, for instance, underscores the sanctity of marriage, positioning it as a sacrament rather than a mere contract.

For generations, marriages have been arranged by family elders, taking into account the caste and religious backgrounds of the individuals involved. This system limits the choice of a spouse, often leaving the decision to the male elders of the family. As a result, love marriages or marriages outside of one's caste or religion have always been unconventional and are considered deviations from societal norms. According to data from *The Times of India* (January 2020–December 2021), around 100 cases of runaways, elopements, and abductions were reported, often related to inter-caste or inter-religious marriages.

Surprisingly, the role of the mother in these cases remains largely invisible. Despite the intense societal pressure on mothers to ensure their children follow the expected norms, they are rarely mentioned in police reports or media coverage of such incidents. The violence, both physical and emotional, is typically dealt with by male members of the family, reflecting the patriarchal nature of these communities.

The table, given below provides a clear picture of the current social realities surrounding intercaste marriages in Haryana, and how factors like family support, education, and social context contribute to either the success or failure of these marriages.

**Table-1.1. factors Responsible for Inter-caste Marriages and Their Impact**

Factor	Impact on Intercaste Marriage	Social Response
<b>Family Support</b>	Positive family support leads to fewer social and emotional challenges.	In supportive families, couples experience smoother integration.
<b>Parental Opposition</b>	Strong disapproval can result in familial estrangement, emotional trauma, and sometimes violence.	Resistance often leads to marital stress and social isolation.
<b>Education Levels</b>	Higher education fosters open-mindedness and a greater acceptance of intercaste marriages.	Educated parents and children are more likely to accept intercaste marriages.
<b>Social Norms (Rural and Urban)</b>	Urban areas are more accepting of intercaste marriages due to progressive values.	Rural areas are less accepting, and caste remains a significant factor.
<b>Honor and Social Stigma</b>	Caste-related stigma persists, leading to social exclusion and the threat of honor-based violence.	Couples often face harassment or rejection from their communities.

**1) Role of Intercaste Marriages in Social Change-** There are various important roles of Intercaste Marriages in Social Change, which are very much instrumental in bringing up-liftmen and awareness towards breaking unrealistic and unethical societal norms. It can be understood from the discussion, as given below-

- **Eradicating Caste-Based Discrimination-** Intercaste marriages are often seen as a potential tool to break down caste hierarchies. They challenge the rigid social divisions that the caste system perpetuates.
- **Cultural Assimilation of the Urban and Rural Areas-** In metropolitan cities, intercaste marriages are becoming more normalized, but rural areas remain resistant. Social structures in rural India continue to be heavily influenced by caste considerations, and same-caste marriages still predominate.

**2) Challenges Faced by Intercaste Couples**

- **Family and Social Reactions and Familial Pressure-** Families may disapprove of intercaste marriages, leading to emotional distress for the couple. Disapproval can result in strained relationships with parents or even disownment.
- **Legal and Institutional Barriers-** Although laws like the Special Marriage Act exist to facilitate intercaste marriages, practical challenges such as cumbersome legal procedures, lack of awareness, and bureaucratic hurdles often prevent couples from fully benefiting from legal protections.
- **Caste-Based Violence-** In some cases, intercaste marriages lead to violence, both from the couple's families and the community. Honor killings and physical violence remain real threats in certain areas of India.
- **Identity and Belongingness and Intergenerational Tension-** Intercaste couples often struggle with questions of identity and belongingness. This can be particularly challenging for individuals who are deeply embedded in their traditional caste identities.
- **Reduction in Caste-Based Discrimination-** With increased intercaste marriages, there is hope for a reduction in caste discrimination over time, particularly in urban areas.
- **Nation-Building and Caste-Free Society-** If intercaste marriages continue to rise, they could gradually contribute to the dismantling of the caste system. A society that embraces intercaste marriages may lead to stronger social cohesion and greater equality.

**3) Social Challenges Faced by Inter-caste Couples in Haryana- Inter-caste Couples**

- **Parental Opposition-** One of the most significant barriers faced by intercaste couples is the disapproval of their families. Families in Haryana often impose strong pressure on individuals to marry within their caste to preserve family honor, traditional values, and social status.



- **Honor and Social Stigma-** The concept of "family honor" is particularly strong in Haryana, and intercaste marriages are sometimes viewed as dishonorable, leading to estrangement, emotional trauma, and sometimes even physical violence against the couple.
- **Social Exclusion and Impact on Children-** Intercaste couples often experience exclusion from their communities. In rural areas, where caste identities are more rigid, intercaste marriages can lead to complete social isolation.
- **Physical and Psychological Violence and Honour Killing-** The emotional and psychological toll on intercaste couples can be significant and Honor killing happens in majority of the cases, when **this is particularly true when the marriage involves an upper-caste person marrying someone** from a lower caste.
- **Gender Differences in Perceived Caste Challenges-** The data reveals that male respondents seem to face fewer caste-related challenges in arranging their children's marriages compared to female respondents. This could be because societal pressures regarding caste tend to affect women more intensely.
- **Impact of Caste on Family Dynamics and on Next Generation-** The fact that a significant portion of both male 57.33% and female 66% respondents did not answer the question reflects a degree of uncertainty or avoidance. This could point to the fact that, while caste continues to influence marriage decisions, many families may not yet have to confront these challenges directly, or they may choose to avoid discussing the issue altogether.

This study points to the need for greater societal acceptance, emotional support, and legal protection for intercaste couples, particularly women, who continue to face greater social stigma and familial resistance.

#### 4) Legal and Government Initiatives and Social Policies

- **The Special Marriage Act, 1954-** This Act allows for the registration of intercaste and interfaith marriages without the requirement of religious ceremonies, offering legal protection to couples. However, the implementation of the Act remains slow, and many couples face bureaucratic hurdles, lack of awareness, and even hostile officials.
- **State Government Initiatives and Protection of Judiciary and Police to the couple and Victims-** Some state governments have attempted to promote intercaste marriages through incentives and awareness campaigns. However, these policies often face resistance at the ground level, particularly in rural areas where traditional norms hold stronger sway.
- **Awareness and Education Programmes-** There are a lot of targeted awareness programs in Haryana to educate people about the benefits of intercaste marriages, its legal aspect and the personal rights of couples.

#### 5) Suggestions and Application of Social Work Practice in serving the victims of violence and Criminal Activities against Couple and family members

- 1) **Community Awareness and Education-** Social Work Practice can play an important role in raising awareness about caste-based discrimination and promoting intercultural relationships in communities may slowly change societal perceptions.
- 2) **Research and Advocacy-** Social Work Practice can play in counseling and advocacy can help highlight the negative effects of caste-based marriage practices and contribute to policy reform.
- 3) **Government and NGO Support-** Working to bring more structured support for inter-caste marriages through legal protection and awareness campaigns could make a significant difference.
- 4) **Eradicating Caste-Based Discrimination-** Working on as a potential tool to break down caste hierarchies and challenge the rigid social divisions that the caste system perpetuates.
- 5) **Sensitization workshops-** Sensitization workshops for all administrative and police personnel should be conducted regularly to ensure continuous education and awareness. These workshops aim to enhance understanding, improve skills, and promote better practices in their respective roles.
- 6) **Peer Learning and Feedback-** Encouraging peer-to-peer learning and offering spaces for feedback and group reflection on how to improve daily practices.

- 7) **Case Studies-** Analyzing real-life situations to help personnel understand practical applications of the concepts they are learning.
- 8) **Human Rights and Legal Frameworks-** Social Worker should educate the people on national laws, human rights conventions, and the ethical obligations they must follow in their work.
- 9) **Cultural Sensitivity and Diversity Awareness-** Social Worker should build awareness about the different communities they serve, and how to approach diverse groups with respect and empathy.

## 7. CONCLUSION

Intercaste marriages in Haryana are shaped by complex familial dynamics and social attitudes. When families exhibit positive maturity and open-mindedness, intercaste marriages face fewer hurdles. However, in cases where families are strongly opposed, couples may endure significant emotional and social challenges. Education remains a crucial tool in transforming familial and social attitudes, enabling greater acceptance of intercaste marriages and fostering a more inclusive society. While Haryana's society is shifting, the pace of change remains slow, and intercaste couples continue to navigate a complex web of social, familial, and caste-related obstacles.

The growing acceptance of intercaste marriages will likely depend on a better adaptability to the and the combination of continued education, urbanization, and the changing views of younger generations. In nut-shell, it is concluded that, while intercaste marriages may be growing in prevalence, the enduring influence of caste on familial and societal expectations remains a significant challenge. More efforts are needed to challenge these prejudices, particularly for future generations, so that individuals can freely marry without being constrained by the barriers of caste.

## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

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