

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) through survey research questionnaire 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.