

Marriage and Kinship Patterns among Hindus in Kishtwar District

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ABSTRACT

Marriage and Kinship are the basic facts of life of any individual. Marriage is a relation of one or more men to one or more women which is accepted by custom of law and includes certain rights and includes certain traditions and obligations. Marriage is one of the all inclusive social institutions. Marriage is a foundation of society which can have distinctive implications in various societies. Its motivations, capacities and structures may contrast from society to society, however is available everywhere as an establishment. Its functions and forms may vary in different social settings, but is present everywhere as an institution. The paper has endeavoured to examine and comprehend the practice of cross-cousin marriages among the Hindus in Kishtwar district. The study was undertaken to look at the structure of family and kinship relationship and institution of marriage in the Kishtwar district of Jammu and Kashmir. The study has specifically looked into the practice of cross-cousin marriages among the community and has tried to explore the various kinship ties prevalent among them. Further attempts have been made to explore the continuity and the changes in the practice of cross-cousin marriages in the Kishtwar district. The study was undertaken with the objectives to look into the kinship and marriage structure among the Hindu community in Kishtwar. The study also attempts to explore the various forms of cross-cousin marriages among the Hindu community in Kishtwar district and to understand the changes occurring among Hindu community in terms of cross-cousin marriages in Kishtwar.

1. INTRODUCTION

For the understanding of any aspect of social life of a particular society, it is essential to have thorough knowledge of their system of kinship and marriage. Kinship and institution of Marriage are about the basic facts of life. Fox (1967) argues that it is the basic study in the social sciences because these are the most basic social bonds. He has further argued that the study of kinship is also the study of what man does with the basic facts of life i.e. mating, gestation, parenthood, socialization, siblingship etc. In all societies people are bound together in groups by various kinds of bonds. The most universal and the most basic of these bonds is that which is based on reproduction and inherent human derive, and is called kinship.

The present study is about the practice of cross-cousin marriages among the Hindus in Kishtwar district. The study through the analysis of cross-cousin marriages has understood the kinship and marriage structure in the said area and has explored the changes and the reasons for continuity in the practice of cross-cousin marriages among the different caste groups in the Kishtwar district. It also explored the different forms and rules of cross-cousin marriages and the changes it has brought in the kinship terminology. The practice of cross-cousin marriages was seen both in the rural and urban sectors in order to analyse its prevalence. The unique feature of this study area was the practice of cross-

cousin marriages among Hindus and this has made the researcher to explore the area. Kishtwar is a district of Jammu and Kashmir state in the North-west India. The population of this district is 2,31,037.(Census,2011) Two major communities of this district; Hindus and Muslims are in the proportion of 42 and 58 percent respectively (Kotwal,2000).

Children of parent's siblings are called cousins. There are four types of cousins: *chachera* i.e. father's brother's son/daughter (FBS/D), *mamera* i.e. mother's brother's son/daughter(MBS/D), *fufera* i.e. father's sister's son/daughter (FZS/D),*mausera* i.e. mother's sister's son/daughter(MZS/D). Of these *chachera* and *mausera* cousins (where the two sibling parents of the child belong to the same sex) are called parallel cousins, and *mamera* and *fufera* cousins (where the two sibling parents of the child are of opposite sex) are called cross cousins. Of these two forms of cousins, cross cousin marriage was practised in ancient Hindus society as shown by Hindu mythology records, though according to MacDonnell and Keith, parallel cousin marriage was also sanctioned (Kapadia, 1947).

Usually in any social group, mating or sexual relationship with any person who is socio-culturally defined as members of that particular group is forbidden. Because of the universality of the general prohibition between parent and children and between brother and sister, the nuclear family and all other domestic in-groups are related in one form or the

other primarily related by consanguinity. In addition to this universal prohibition, most society forbid sexual relations and marriage between certain other culturally recognised biologically kinsmen (Ahuja, 1999). However, not all societies follow this practice, and some actually encourage a cousin's marriage, which makes the group return to itself. A consanguineous marriage is defined as a union between two individuals who are related as second cousins or closer (Bittles, 2001). Among Hindus of North India, there is avoidance of a consanguineous union, but in the area under study shows an exception where cross-cousin marriages are practiced by Hindus in urban as well as in rural area which makes the study more significant.

Consanguinity is often seen as a valuable tool for strengthening economic, political and social ties between family members. In other words, kinship builds up "social capital" within a family. By uniting different lineages according to the rules of patrilineal affinity, blood-related marriages strengthen the bonds between family members, reduce the possibility of conflict within a family, and consolidate both property and power. Theoretically cross cousin marriages can be distinguished as: bilateral, matrilineal and patrilineal (Fox, 1967). Bilateral cross cousin marriage systems are a form of direct exchange marriage in which two lineages or families establish permanent alliances and exchanges through marriages to each other's women. Matrilineal cross-cousin marriage is where ego marries with mother's brother daughter. The third type, patrilineal cross-cousin marriage is where ego marries with father's sister's daughter.

Marriage preferences are found in all societies, but prescriptions are confined to those exhibiting what Levi-Strauss called "Elementary Structures of Kinship". Elementary structures are not just unusually strong preferences for marrying specific close relatives, but global systems of classification, whereby prescriptive relationship terminologies divide up a person's entire kinship universe into marriageable and non-marriageable categories. The marriageable category may include cross-cousins, but is not limited to them. Further, marriage systems can be of many forms. They can be reciprocating when two groups exchange women; they can be circular when a large number of groups intermarry and, on balance, each group receives as many women for wives, as it gives out women in marriage to other groups; they can be asymmetrical when certain group give out significantly more women in marriage than they receive, while other groups receive more women than they give (Strauss, 1999).

Morgan (1868) made a significant contribution to the study of kinship. He found two broad categories of kinship terms; the classificatory and descriptive systems of kinship terms in different societies of the world. Under classificatory system, the various kins are included in one category and are referred to try the same term. The descriptive terms of kinship emphasis the speaker's exact relation towards a particular person, with whom she or he is addressing.

2. METHODOLOGY

Research methodology is a way to systematically solve the research problem. It may be understood as a science of studying how research is done scientifically. Various steps are adopted by the researcher in studying his research problem along with the logic behind them. (Kothari, 2004)

Present study was conducted by using of the Malinowski's approach to anthropology. His approach to anthropology was based on functionalism and culture. Functionalism ascribes meaning, function, and purpose to the elements within a whole. Culture defines that whole, and it constitutes the entity in which the various functional elements act and are interdependent. Malinowski's understanding of functionalism was in large part derived from a system of balanced reciprocity that he observed while conducting fieldwork. Structural functionalism, is a framework for building theory that sees society as a complex system whose parts work together to promote solidarity and stability. Cross-Cousin marriages in the Kishtwar contribute to the culture of that area and hence forming a structure of that society. The study has attempted to find out that how the structure of cross-cousin marriages is functioning and promoting solidarity.

Exploratory and descriptive research designs were used in the present study. Exploratory research method was used to explore and find out the genesis of the cross-cousin marriage in Kishtwar. Descriptive method was used to describe their socio-economic life, their living and their working conditions. Exploratory research method was used to examine and find out the origin of the cross-cousin marriage in Kishtwar. Present study has also made use of the structured interview schedule in which a set of questions were prepared in advance to particularly seek the answers. Before interview schedule, a pilot study was conducted to be acquainted with about the loopholes left in construction of the Interview schedule

Interview Schedule consisting of both the open and closed ended questions was used for gathering information. Interview schedule is the finest way to find out useful, accurate information effectively. It is a research tool or an instrument for collecting data whereas interviewing is a method of data collection. It is comprised of a list of questions that researcher asks the interviewee, with follow-up questions which need respondents to answer in their own words. On the other hand, closed ended questions are the fixed choice questions. They necessitate the respondent to choose a response from the options provided by the researcher (Ahuja, 1999).

In the present study, the data was collected from both primary and secondary sources. The primary data collection was done through the field work in which interviews were conducted with the help of interview schedule along with the non-participant observation method. The observation method is the largely used method especially in studies relating to behavioural sciences. In a way we all observe things around us, but this sort of observation cannot be considered as not

scientific observation. Observation becomes the method of data collection and a scientific tool for the researcher, when it provides a formulated research purpose. It is systematically planned and recorded and is subjected to have a check and control on validity and reliability. Under the method of observation, the information is sought by mode of investigator's own direct information without asking the respondent. When the observer observes by making himself a member of group, he is observing so that he can experience what the members of the group experiencing, then the observation is considered as the participant observation. But when the observer observes as a detached representative without his personal participation to experience through participation what others experience, the observation of this type is often termed as non-participant observation (Ahuja, 1999).

3. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

This paper is a detailed investigation about the different forms of cross-cousin marriages by the respondents belonging to the different castes in rural and urban areas of Kishtwar district. In the present study, kinship terminology which is being used to designate both affinal as well as consanguinal kins has also been studied. For the present study, respondents belonging to the different caste groups i.e. Brahmins, Rajputs and Scheduled caste were studied in both rural as well as urban setting.

Although, respondents of the study belonged to different age groups, but an effort was made to select the respondent within the age-group of 46-65 because this age group confirms the information regarding the preceding as well as succeeding generation. Age of the respondents helped to look into the practice of cross-cousin marriage at the generational level and to explore the changes present in the institution of cross-cousin marriages. The respondents interviewed mainly comprised of the head of the family i.e. males and the women were taken into consideration where males were not present at the time of interview or had expired. Since Kishtwar is also a patriarchal society and is also known for the traditional outlook, therefore, lesser number of females participated and responded to the questions being asked. Less participation of females was seen more in the rural area as compared to urban areas.

Socio-economic profile of any society can also be assessed by the educational level of the people of that society. Maximum number of respondents were literate which is a good social indicator. Data shows that the literacy rate in Kishtwar is good which is also supported by the Census report of 2011.

As the study was conducted in two settings (rural and urban), it was observed that in rural area the level of literacy increases as one moves up in the caste hierarchy. In other words, castes which are placed higher in the caste hierarchy also have a good educational status. On the other hand, no such phenomenon was observed in urban sector. Infact, urban

area of Kishtwar shows a better educational status of lower castes also.

In the urban area Brahmins preferred less cross-cousin marriages than rural Brahmins where as urban Rajputs had a higher number of cross-cousin marriages when compared with rural Rajputs. The reason may be that the rural Brahmins were more traditionally bound to their customs and traditions. Despite of the fact that the education level of rural Brahmins was quite good but this factor of social change has not affected their tradition of the consanguineous marriages. Other reasons for the less number of cross-cousin marriages in urban sector are their contact with the other outer cultures, modernisation forces, better transportation etc. On the other hand, in rural sector, the homogeneous nature of the society contributes towards the tradition bound practices.

The variation in the practice of cross-cousin marriage among different castes in different sectors of the same society shows the continuity of the practice at one time and the changing nature of the same at another time. Respondents which show a greater number of cross-cousin marriages argue that the consanguineous marriages promote in-group solidarity keep the status of women in a better condition and also sometimes help to keep the property intact within the group. Studies on the consanguineous marriages also suggest some similar type of explanations regarding the higher prevalence of cross-cousin marriages.

Selection of the mates is an important aspect of the institution of the marriage. The mechanisms developed for the selection of mates vary widely from society to society. Societies which prescribe cross-cousins marriages follow some marriage rules for the selection of mates. Some marriage rules for the mate selection includes matrilineal cross-cousin in which a man marries his mother's brother's daughter, while a woman marries her father's sister's son or it can be patrilineal cross-cousin marriage in which a man marries his father's sister's daughter, while a woman marries her mother's brother's son. It was found in the present study that a majority of respondents have done matrilineal type of cross-cousin marriage than patrilineal cross-cousin marriage both in rural and urban areas. On the further analysis of data it was found that in both (rural and urban) sectors, the matrilineal type of cross-cousin marriage was practiced more than the patrilineal cross-cousin marriage. Patriarchal nature of society contributes towards a maximum number of matrilineal types of cross-cousin marriage. Homans and Schneider (1955) in their study have also argued that if jural authority is in the father (or his lineage), the preferred marriage will be with the mother's brother's daughter.

Households in the society of Kishtwar are joint in nature. indicates that the basic structure of the society of Kishtwar is still traditionally bound. On the further interpretation of the data in rural and urban sectors it was observed that in the urban sector, structure of family is changing from joint to nuclear. According to data, rural sector of Kishtwar has a maximum number of joint families than the

urban sector. The factors which contribute in the more joint structure of the family in rural area are: family as a productive unit, homogenous structure of the society, more value for the traditions, fulfilment of economic and spiritual needs, higher division of labour, social insurance, keeping the property within the family.

Kishtwar society has also a high degree of pure-generalized or asymmetrical exchange which also has no fixed structure and the exchange occurs in a wider social sphere resulting in the formation of a larger kin structure with an essence of solidarity. Solidarity is characterized by a set of related components like trust (the belief that the exchange partner will not exploit the actor), affective regard (positive feelings for, and evaluations of, the partner), social unity (perception of the relationship as a social unit, with actors united in purpose and interests), and feelings of commitment to the partner and the relationship. It was also observed that the asymmetrical type of exchange was more preferred and practiced in rural sector than the urban sector. Respondents claim that the reasons for the prevalence of higher degree of asymmetrical marriages in Kishtwar are as they contribute in the formation of a larger kin group and bring more unity among the kin members.

Terminology is a kind of expression which provides an idea to any individual about which the terminology is related. In kinship studies, kin terms are the expressions which help us to designate an individual. The terminology suggests us about the groups in the social circle and the relationship of the individual with those groups. Kinship terminology is the system used in languages to refer to the persons to whom an individual is related through kinship.

In the present study, both (classificatory and descriptive) type of kinship terminology was observed. Out of the total sample a maximum number of respondents were using both classificatory and descriptive terms for the members of kin group. Data shows that in the urban sector of the Kishtwar classificatory terms are less used than the rural area. Changes in the kinship terminology have also been witnessed over the time. Traditional kinship terminology is no longer in use and parents, kin members, and in-laws are called in a modern way. For example, *baaji or bobji* is the traditional terminology for father which has now been replaced by daddy ji or papa. Similarly for mother '*Baay*' or Ama was used which has now been replaced by mummy ji. Similarly, for the in-laws, terminology is used same as for maternal uncle and aunt. For example, male ego would call his father-in-law as 'maama ji' and 'maami ji' for mother-in-law where as female ego would call her father-in-law as 'fufa ji' and 'bua ji' for mather-in-law. Factors responsible for such change in terminology are contact with outer culture and modernization. Impact of mass-media also plays a great role in bringing such change. Use of modern terminology has not influenced the culture of consanguinal marriages.

The present Kishtwar society is simple in nature. The villages of the region were largely self sufficient earlier but this is getting eroded by the passage of time. One can see that the solidarity of the villages is gradually shifting from mechanical solidarity to the organic solidarity. As change is inevitable, the society also exhibits a kind of transition. Modernity is now reaching slowly and gradually and its impact is visible in all spheres of life. This also resulted in change from joint family system towards nuclear family. The lineage is traced through male line and girls do not inherit parental property. Consanguinal relations and relatives occupy more importance than affinal relations and relatives in Kishtwar. Marriages are mostly performed and preferred between the known ones. The most preferred alliance for marriage is cross-cousins. Both matrilineal and patrilineal type of cross-cousin marriages are practiced. Different caste groups comprise the Hindu society of Kishtwar. Practice of marriage with cross-cousins is almost present in all castes both in the rural as well as urban areas.

From the data collected and after analysis, it can be argued that consanguineous marriage are linked to distinctive reproductive behaviour, one can therefore find that the consanguineous marriages have led to lower ages for marriage, lower ages at first birth and higher levels of fertility in the region.

4. CONCLUSION

It can be argued that consanguineous marriages are much advantageous for the preservation of tradition, the consolidation of family structure and property and strengthening of the family ties as has been argued by the respondents. It can be said that higher is the rate of consanguineous marriages in any society, higher would be their in-group solidarity. Although, among the major populations so far studied, it has been observed that highest rate of consanguineous marriage is associated with low-economic status, rural residence and low educational status. But in the present study, consanguineous marriages were not confined to any economic group or any particular caste and were practiced by all occupational groups. It was also observed that the groups which practice consanguineous marriage have a greater control over the resources such as land and wealth which make the group stronger in the society. Preference of consanguineous relations for marital bond shows the essence of traditional values and culture among the people of Kishtwar and support the fact of continuity of the practice of cross-cousin marriage. The practice of cross-cousin marriage is still there but is now in a transition phase. With the changing world and contact with outer culture, the choice of mate selection is changing. Education, employment and transport also act as changing forces for the said practice.

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