



# Cultural Differences and Negotiations in Inter-Caste Marriages: A Study in Bengaluru

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## Abstract

B R Ambedkar (1936) had suggested inter-caste marriages as one of the potential remedies to annihilate caste system. He later contradicted this stance in the latter half of his academic journey by comparing inter-caste marriages to 'force-feeding and artificial ways. Even after 80 years, the society is still divided between the effects of inter-caste marriages on the centuries-old caste system. Inter-caste marriage in the country was not a very common event till the 2000s after which its instances have been steadily increasing as per the reports from both the IHDS (2011) and NFHS (2005-2006). The more critical aspect of this uptrend of inter-caste marriage should be the interaction and negotiation of cultural differences among couples during the process of union. This qualitative study among 20 individuals (10 couples) in Bengaluru, looks into the various ways in which the inter-caste couples adjust their lifestyles, make decisions about their cultural practices and their children's socialization. The assumptions are laid in the backdrop of B. R. Ambedkar's work on the caste system and the study attempted to understand the subtle evolution of caste in the exogamous marriages. The study has also attempted to preempt the variety of bearings such inter-caste marriages can have on the future of caste system.

**Keywords:** Inter-caste marriage, Ambedkar, Gender Identity, Caste Identity, Cultural differences, Children in inter-caste marriage.

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## **1. Introduction**

Family is known to be the fundamental unit of any society. A substantial change to this microcosm would eventually reflect on the macro level (Carison, 1999). Similarly, the influx of inter-group marriages in a family (micro level) has had a macro impact; altering the conjugal relationships, cultural hierarchy, and the societal integration patterns. Hence any change in family structures should be essentially observed and studied in close quarters. Families and marriages in India have always been dominated by casteist forces (Dumont, 1966). But in recent times there has been a sharp increase in inter-caste marriages amidst social sanctions resulting in honour killings and such other hostilities towards exogamy. Andre Beteille (2007) points to the fact of rules regulating inter-caste marriage becoming weaker with time. The country also witnessed an all-time high of 11 percent of inter-caste marriages among Hindu marriages in 2005 (NFHS-III, 2005). Even though marriage decisions governed by caste seems to be a unique phenomenon of the Indian sub-continent, similar ascribed statuses like ethnicity, language (native) and nationality restricts marriages in other parts of the world. The practice of cultural exogamy is more widely referred to as mixed marriages or inter-marriages. Even though there is no fixed definition for mixed marriages, the widely used meaning is - mixed marriages are a union of individuals from two different races, nationalities, castes and religions (Bambawale, 1982). American Sociologists have undertaken voluminous research on different problems and social change that the inter-ethnic marriages have brought about. Similarly, Europe has witnessed multiple works on international marriages and its intricacies. India has had some noticeable pieces of research done by Pattersons (1920), Kannan (1963), Deshpande (1969), Bambawale (1982) in this area. The intricate question that we need to ask in India is what discourse sets in the Hindu families when it encompasses two strikingly different castes. The key aspect in such unions is hybridity and not homogeneity. Cultural diffusion, adjustments in lifestyles can be evident in every phase of such marriages. Families involved in negotiations through which the husbands' and wives' cultures interact, adjust and take the shape of a hybrid set in their practices. This effort concerns with the familial negotiations regarding culture

taking place in nearly 1/10<sup>th</sup> of the married population of the country and is essential to understand the interaction and acceptance of these diverse cultures. In summary, this is an effort to provide with empirical evidence of interaction and negotiation of cultures between families involved in exogamy and its impact on the marital lives of inter-caste couples.

### **1.1 B R Ambedkar on inter-caste marriages**

Ambedkar takes the credit for pioneering the subaltern perspective in India. Through his works, he has tried to explain the mechanisms, genesis, development of caste system and ways to annihilate the anomaly. Along with abolishing sub-castes, he believed inter-dining and inter-caste marriages as key to the abolition of caste (Ambedkar, 1916). He and many other Dalit activists have for long urged and believed inter-caste marriages as the primary means to curb the caste system. Dalit literature in the works of Siddalingaiah (1997), Devanura Mahadeva (1988) for long has portrayed such inclinations towards boundary crossings. But the most notable reversal came from Ambedkar himself. He explains his contradiction in his reply to Sant Ram who incidentally withdrew the invitation for Ambedkar to address the Jat Pat Todak Mandal in Lahore (1936) because of the rather revolutionary content of Ambedkar's speech. In his reply, Ambedkar argues that the real remedy for caste system is not inter-caste marriages but to destroy the belief in the sanctity of *shastras*. He believed that the actions of the people emerged from the religious doctrine they adhered to, and hence the root of the social evil rests in doctrine and not solely in practice. He advocated that caste is not a wall of bricks but a mental notion (Ambedkar, 1936). It is an important task to delineate and observe if the present day urban inter-caste couples have been able to break this mental hurdle in their inter-caste unions within the ambit of Hinduism. The pertinent question we end up having regarding inter-caste marriages is, whether caste is drifting away from the institution of marriage or if caste is evolving for it.

### **1.2 Genesis and history of inter-caste marriage in India**

The Lingayat literature bears testament to the fact that the first recorded inter-caste marriage in India happened as early as the

12<sup>th</sup> century. India in those times was said to be struggling at the hands of casteist forces. The abject discrimination, the practice of untouchability was rife. The Bhakti Movement had emerged as one of the pioneers to voice dissent against the social stratification based on one's caste of birth or gender. It was then a social reformer named Basavanna (1105 - 1167 AD) who worked as a minister in the court of King Bijjala of the Kalachuri Dynasty in present-day Karnataka carried out the first ever recorded inter-caste marriage in India. The literature talks about how Basavanna helped in forming the inter-caste union of a Brahmin woman named Kalavati and a man who belonged to the cobbler caste named Sheelavanta in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. It was considered a radical step concerning individual liberty in 12<sup>th</sup>-century caste-ridden India. This pioneering social work was ironically also the first recorded case of honour killing (Karnad, 1993). The couple was executed by elephant stamping for their 'crime' of opting for an inter-caste marriage. In this way, through Bhakti movement India saw the emergence of inter-caste marriages (Panhalkar, 2013).

Over the years many reform movements pledged to increase inter-caste marriages like Sathya Shodak Samaj, Arya Samaj, and Brahmo Samaj. In the south, Periyar and the self-respect movement advocated vociferously for inter-caste marriages as a solution to end caste-based discrimination. Reformers like B R Ambedkar, Jyotibha Phule, Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Dayanand Saraswathi echoed for the cause, but the Indian family mindset remained relatively silent to the reformatory calls. Once India sought independence on the lines of liberal ideals of equality and justice, the caste-based historical in corrections had to be set right. Accordingly, in 1954 the Special Marriage Act was passed by Indian government under Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. The Act states that 'No marriage would be nullified on the grounds of caste or other sectarian divisions within the religion of Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism or Jainism.' (The Special Marriage Act, 1954). It provides the legal opportunity to register inter-caste marriages officially and successive governments since then have also announced various monetary awards and appreciation for inter-caste marriages through schemes like "Dr Ambedkar Scheme for Social Integration through Inter-Caste Marriages"<sup>1</sup> which provides a monetary sum of 2.5 lakh rupees to the couple (Empowerment,

2013). Many state governments like Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Rajasthan, Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh have been providing monetary benefits for inter-caste marriage as it is considered to be one of the better ways to reduce social prejudices, caste-based hostility, and discrimination. However, the simultaneously operating conservative belief states that the distinct cultures of the individuals would not blend after marriage and are treated like eugenics as Ambedkar termed it (Ambedkar, 1916). This debate on the nature of status negotiations after an inter-caste marriage is analysed in this study.

## **2. Data and methodology**

The qualitative research design was employed within a social constructivist paradigm for the study. A total of 10 inter-caste married couples were studied. It includes the marriages between 'upper caste' men and 'lower caste' women and vice versa. All the couples were married for more than two years, and the operational definition for inter-caste marriages included male-female marriages that occurred across major caste distinctions, and this excluded the sub-caste marriages. The reason for exclusion of sub-caste marriages was because the reactions would be much more tamed, and the challenges and dynamics arising from sub-caste marriages are not as severe as the inter-caste marriages where major caste boundaries are crossed. The study attempted to understand the various communication efforts made between both the spouse's culture and its translation into practice. In-depth interview was the primary research tool used. The core research question was to understand the negotiations regarding their respective culture within their inter-caste marriage. The respondents are from Bengaluru. The city being an urban metropolis has witnessed a surge in its migratory population in the younger age group (Census, 2001). The migration to Bengaluru has been primarily motivated by access to quality educational services and/or to seek jobs in the city (Maiti & et al, 2012). These two factors have resulted in Bengaluru turning into a multi-cultural city. The widening of opportunity window<sup>2</sup> and the liberal philosophy has resulted in an increase of mixed marriages (including inter-caste marriage) in the city (Social Welfare Commission, 2018). Hence, the region is an

appropriate sample area. On an individual level the respondent's biodata, upbringing styles, values, and beliefs held close were noted. On the marriage front, the traditions followed during their wedding ceremonies, and various cultural negotiations in their post-marital life were enquired. Hypergamy<sup>3</sup> and Hypogamy<sup>4</sup> distinctions have also been studied to see the intricacies of gender and caste in the process.

### 3. Pre-marital negotiations

The familial negotiation regarding cultures in an inter-caste marriage is a perennial process. The couples involved in inter-caste marriages are usually based on their choice and not arranged by their families. The onus to resolve the cultural differences amicably rests on the couples. The courtships last longer in choice-based marriages than the typically arranged marriages in India and were evident in all the couples interviewed. The courtship period is also when the couples discuss and plan their marital lives. The phase is even more crucial in an inter-caste marriage where the strikingly different cultures of the couple have to be accommodated under one roof. All the respondents reported that they spent more time together planning their post-marital lifestyle and adjustments. The courtship duration ranged from two years up to six years and was in contrast with the short duration of courtships in arranged marriages. Bambawale (1982) in her study of an inter-religious couple in Pune points out to the importance of these frequent meetings in courtship period which enabled the couples to realise and plan for the complexities that would emerge out of their inter-marriages.

Ms. Sandhya (Reddy Caste) said,

*"We used to spend 2-3 hours a day sitting in parks and discussing how our married life will be. My husband used to say his parents will find it tough to accept me if I consume meat even after marriage. So I agreed that I will stop consuming non-vegetarian food. We also discussed housing, but since his parents seem to be liberal, we decided to live with them."*

Like the example above the place of residence, food habits and kinship adjustments at in-laws house were some of the common topics of discussion. This period provided the couple time and opportunity to negotiate their cultures. The couple usually arrived at a consensus.

### **3.1 Wedding arrangements**

The initial acceptance and convincing of nuptial families is a tedious ordeal, and on many occasions, the parties might have abject resistance to the marriage. Multiple researchers have comprehensively covered the different kinds of reactions of nuptial families. When both families agree to meet, the wedding arrangements are discussed. This meeting in most inter-caste marriages is also the first instance of the interaction of the distinct cultures of both the families. The process usually involves complex discussions, arguments, and negotiations in deciding the customs to be followed for the wedding. Matters such as the cuisine style which has to be followed for food preparation, the bridal and groom's attire, rituals to be followed, place of marriage and many other cultural arrangements come into scrutiny and are also reasons for contestations. Among the respondents, nine couples had opted for religious marriages, and among them, three couples took part in civil marriage followed by a religious one. The religious marriages were partly due to the parent's insistence and social acceptance. Only one couple opted for a marriage without any rituals and adopted the wedding style which is famously known as 'Mantra Mangalya<sup>5</sup>'. The acceptance of ritualistic marriages was a reversal of the trend from the inter-married (inter-religious and inter-caste) couples observed by Kannan (1966) and Bambawale (1982) who had mostly opted for civil marriages, whereas here a majority of the respondents had opted for religious marriages. This could point us to the confluence that the social acceptance for inter-caste marriages might have increased over the years in urban spaces. But we need to tread this path in caution until we have macro findings. The wedding arrangements of both the Hypogamy and Hypergamy marriages were observed to understand the dynamics of caste hierarchy and the results were surprisingly similar.

The location of the wedding was predominantly according to the convenience of the upper caste family. In cases where the marriage was arranged as a simple affair in a temple, the deity of the temple was also a topic of debate. It always was to be the family deity of the upper caste family. Ms Nayana belonged to the Kannadiga Vokkaliga caste, and she had married Mr. Ramesh who belonged to the Tamil Iyengar caste. Ms Nayana explains the wedding conundrum:

*“His (husband’s) family belongs to Iyengar caste. So my in-laws and my husband demanded to my father that the marriage should happen in Dharmasthala only as it was their family deity. But my father always wanted my marriage to happen in his ancestral family deity temple. When he spoke to my mother-in-law, she was hell-bent on the marriage happening in Dharmasthala Manjunatha temple. My father was sad that he could not do the one thing that he had planned for my wedding. Then my father had to give up, and we then arranged a bus for all my relatives to travel from Bengaluru to Dharmasthala.”*

Similar pressure was exerted in Hypogamy marriages as well. We can see the social hierarchy dictating the choice of place of marriage on multiple occasions.

The cuisine of the food prepared had come into serious deliberations among the families. This was especially visible when one of the spouses belonged to a Brahmin family and other from a non-brahmin family. The Brahmin families insisted the food be prepared in accordance with *sathvik*<sup>6</sup> style, which also meant no use of onion and garlic<sup>7</sup>. Brahminical recipes are considered ‘more pure,’ and families decided the menu accordingly. The catering contract was also provided to caterers who belonged to the same upper caste as the Brahmin families believed the food to be polluted if prepared by cooks belonging to other castes. Ms Meghana (Brahmin) was married to Mr Vamshi (non-brahmin). Explaining the complexity with food she says,

*“My family members do not dine with other caste members. We have separate *panktis*<sup>8</sup>. So it was a huge problem to combine both the families for dining. So we arranged for food to be served in our *matha*<sup>9</sup> for the people*

*of my caste. For people from his caste, we served food in the marriage hall."*

The request to maintain the purity of upper caste had to be held in mind all through the marriage ceremonies. Along with inter-caste marriages, Ambedkar initially emphasized inter-caste dinners as a primordial practice for the Annihilation of caste. It can be said that his dream of social equality of inter-dining is not a reality even in an urban setting after a century since his works were published.

The rituals and customs opted were an interesting space for contestation and the families' decisions were rather symbolic of their perceptions of each other's social hierarchy. The *Kanyadana* where the bride is passed on as donation/gift by her father to the groom was performed in the upper caste style even when the lower caste did not have such practices. The practice of *Kashi yatra* where the groom has to be requested by the bride's father to marry her was also followed as usually done by the upper caste families. The upper caste family determined even the posture that is to be adapted while tying the *mangalsutra* (sacred yellow thread) and the groom tied the knots adhering to the posture stipulated. The caste of the priest administering the wedding and other rituals performed belonged to the caste of the bridal family. When Ms Vanita Rao, (Madhwa Brahmin) married Mr Karan (ritually lower Vokkaliga caste) the entire marriage took place according to the Madhwa Brahmin style with a Madhwa priest administering the wedding. At no point was Mr Karan's family allowed to be involved in any of the processes and this had led to sour feelings between the two families since then. This is how Mr Karan explains as to how the marriage process went about:

*"Vanita's family is very orthodox and strict Brahmins. They were reluctant to the marriage. So we had to lie to them by saying that I was born a Brahmin but was adopted by a Vokkaliga family in my childhood. Then at the time of marriage, I was made to undertake Brahmana Deeksha<sup>10</sup> and was ritually adopted by a Brahmin couple. My entire family was not allowed to come on stage where the ritual was taking place. When I had to lie that my real parents were my adopted parents, many of my relatives*

*were furious and cried. It was very painful but I had to convert to Brahminism to marry."*

It showed the upper caste family's bargaining leverage when it came to *shastras*. There is enormous pressure on the lower castes in cases like Mr Karan to accept the rituals and traditions of the upper caste at the time of marriage. It must be noted that Mr. Karan despite belonging to a dominant caste-like Vokkaliga, had no say in the wedding arrangements. The wife admitted that her family viewed Vokkaligas ritually lower due to the general perception that they are 'hardcore non-vegetarians.' In many cases, the lower caste families felt the upper caste families were benevolent enough to allow the marriage to happen hence did not want to bargain for their traditions and gave in. The consultation with lower caste families was absent in most cases as the upper caste family did not even deem the lower caste family 'worthy of consultation' as reported by Ms Annapurna who was from a Lingayat family marrying a Rajput. Even when the upper caste family consulted with the lower caste's family, they settled upon the customs prescribed by the upper caste as their rituals were felt to be comprehensive and ritually superior. It also was an acceptance of the cultural hierarchy of the upper caste and involving in a coerced cultural adjustment process. As wedding is a social event, the intent for cultural imitation is also very evident in the arrangements made for both the hypogamy and hypergamy marriages.

Among all the cases, one hypogamy marriage was an outlier. The customs and rituals of both the families were rejected and the couple opted for a simple temple marriage. Ms Anvita who belonged to the Lingayat caste married Mr Sandesh of Besta (fisherman's) caste. Mr Sandesh is an IITian<sup>11</sup> and works freelance for government civil works. Ms Anvita works as a software engineer in an MNC. Their marriage was along the lines of 'Mantra Mangalya.' This is what Mr Sandesh had to say about their wedding:

*"We believed it is mindless to spend all the life savings on one or two days of your life. Also, the educated and people who had money should get married in a simple manner so that the rest of the society can follow them".*

It is interesting to note that this was also the only instance where the educational and income attributes of the bride and groom were also similar. There is an apparent hint to probe into the bargaining power women and men garner in cultural discourse when they have similar educational and occupational attributes in relation to their spouse. Exchange theory of Merton (1941) explains the different bargaining power an individual can develop by acquiring valuable economic, educational resources and use them for negotiations in an inter-group marriage. For example, a lower caste man who is relatively better educated and financially better off than his upper caste companion can have better bargaining power in the decision making with regard to cultural practices. At this important juncture, it is vital to appreciate the relevant observations of Ambedkar as he believed that people would not undergo any amount of social change with mere mass inter-caste marriages unless they stop believing in the sanctity of *shastras*. Playing to the taunts of Ambedkar, all the marriages, except one, was administered with Hindu rituals founded in the sanctity of *shastras* performed by priests of their own castes. Each of the wedding arrangement was also closely affiliated with either of the families and none disembarked completely. This inflates Ambedkar's argument that inter-caste marriages are artificial if they do not come out in strong condemnation of *shastras*.

#### **4. Post-marital negotiations**

Cultural diffusion between the spouses takes place interactively after marriage. The distinctions in food habits, worship, language and socialization of children are some of the notable spaces of contestation. The cultural practices of families after marriage were studied to see if the same pattern of cultural imitation was carried forward.

##### **4.1 Worship**

The form of worship is primordial to understand the particular manifestation in the life of the inter-caste couple (Bambawale, 1982). Ambedkar (1936) notes how Hinduism is witness to multiple forms of worship carried out by different castes within its ambit giving rise to parallel ways of celebrating one single festival.

Women coming from the upper caste or lower caste had a tough time asserting their natal festivities to be followed in their nuptial house. It must be noted that all the respondents were present in the neolocal<sup>12</sup> residence. Meanwhile, on most occasions, the lower caste husbands were still not accepted in the upper caste's family as the in-laws viewed the sons-in-law as the distancing factor from their daughters. Hence there was hardly any common emotion evoked through festivities as the festivals celebrated by the couple were predominantly the festivals of the husband's family. This snub by the upper caste families in celebrating festivals is what Ambedkar calls as the 'lack of consciousness in mind' (Ambedkar, 1936, pp 60) among Hindus. He was essentially emphasizing the fact that festivals are celebrated in multiple variations by different castes in Hinduism thus failing to bring in any cultural unity. In practice, the couples could not celebrate festivals in similar patterns as they had practiced them differently in their native families. Similar patterns were also evident in Bambawale's work, where usually one of the spouses was not called for the festivities in upper caste. Ms Vinuta (Smarta Brahmins caste) has married Mr Shankar (Mudaliar caste) has this to say about her dilemma about festivities,

*"We celebrate mainly his (husband's) side festivities. But since I have two daughters, I have ensured that they attend both side festivities and take part, so that they have the first-hand experience of both cultures. I take them to my in-law's place, and we help them out in Ganesh Chaturti. Other times I take them to my parent's house for my side festivities."*

The families tried to secularize the children by providing exposure to festivals and customs of both the parent's family, but in practice, the festival celebrated by the family at home was of only the husband's. There was an attempt to secularise, but it was the wife usually sacrificing her cultural fragments. This reinforces the view of inter-caste marriage as a form of stratification.

#### **4.2 Food habits**

Food habits are the most frequently experienced cultural difference between the inter-caste couples. The ingredients of sambar powder, type of vegetables, types of pulses, use of meat, the order of

servicing, the posture of seating all provided multiple facets for distinctions. The place of residence initially played an important role in the direction of these adjustments. When the woman was marrying into a large joint family, or with in-laws, she was subtly coerced to adopt the food habits of the in-laws which meant even consuming non-vegetarian food over time. In all the cases interviewed, the union was between a meat eater and a non-meat eater. For many couples, the conflict was resolved well before the marriage, by deciding to move to a neo-local residence. Ms Smitha (Smarta Brahmins) has married Mr Sharan (Mudaliar caste). This is how the couple managed to resolve the conflict regarding food habits.

*“I am a vegetarian, and he used to consume non-veg. I was very clear that I will not have non-veg or cook non-veg at home. I also told him, he can continue eating non-veg and I have no problem. We both had agreed upon this aspect as it was crucial for both our comforts. We also decided to expose our children to have food from both cuisines. They started eating non-veg right from childhood. The freedom of choice was provided all along. Even to this day, I am particular that non-veg is not cooked in my kitchen. For which, we have a separate pantry to cook non-veg on a different floor.”*

The above situation is an example of familial negotiations regarding conflicting food habits and the confluence of different practices in their neo-local household. At other times when the neo-local residence was not possible, wives had to adjust with meat being cooked at home. It was found that the wives also learned to cook meat and started consuming meat even when they had come from strict orthodox vegetarian families. The conflicts regarding food were resolved amicably, but the wives had to sacrifice and adjust much more compared to the husbands. Ms Nayana, (Kannadiga Vokkaliga caste) had married Mr Ramesh (Tamil Iyengar caste). Ms Nayana who was an ardent meat eater at the time of marriage has mentioned how she had to quit consuming meat after marriage. Ms Nayana also ensured their son was a vegetarian. She says,

*"Yes definitely the responsibility is on the wife, it has to be the woman who has to give in and adjust. The male ego will not let them adapt. The women are the key to any family, especially in inter-caste."*

The above statement from Ms Nayana resonates the intensity of accommodative behaviour the wives have to exhibit in marriages and more so in inter-caste marriages. The larger understanding is that the negotiations are highly gender-skewed against the women and the emerging overall pattern was that the cultural hegemony found at the time of wedding was not transferred into their marital lives. The cultural negotiations were very subtle and not marred by conflicts but overtly one-sided. Wives at different times readily and sometimes compelled to adopt the husband's culture in their daily lives. The phenomena could not be attributed to the patrilocal residence as even when the couples were residing in neo-local residence, the patriarchal leaning was found.

### **4.3 Socialisation of children**

It has remained an enigma for inter-caste couples on how to socialize their children. Beliefs, values, and traditions are primarily passed on by the primary group of family (Ambedkar, 1936). When the family is split between two distinct cultures, the decisions taken in socialising the child is very crucial for the future of the child and the caste system. This issue is seen as a minefield for conflict among couples as each of the spouses has their own subjective affiliations when making decisions for their child.

There were a total of 8 linguistic variables among the respondents. The language preferences were found to follow the similar fate as customs. The wife had to learn the language of her husband's family and was made responsible to teach the child the same. The children of inter-caste married couples were also overtly pressurized (by social isolation) to learn and speak in the language of the husband's caste. Ms Anita and Mr Sundar would converse in Kannada and their 5-year-old son also followed their footsteps. But it turned into an issue when Mr Sundar's extended family visited them and did not attempt to converse with the child and had subtly isolated him. Ms Anita who did not know the basics of Tamil was pressurized to learn. The language was necessary to keep her son

part of the extended family during conversations. This she says created a sense of outsider feeling for her and their son. The need for the child to learn the language of both the families to get along and communicate was built up for all the couples who came from different linguistic backgrounds.

When couples practice different food habits (especially meat and non-meat diet), it becomes a tricky situation to pick what their children should consume. It was found that all the children followed the food habits of their paternal family. They consumed meat if their father's family did so and abstained from meat if their father was from a Brahmin family. The reasons for the same need further scrutiny. All the upper caste men said that they would be observing the rites of passage for their son, i.e., performing ceremonies for the child, like '*Upanayana*'<sup>13</sup>. There was a strong adherence to the paternal instincts in terms of child's freedom of faith.

The official caste registration of the child is a symbolic message about the lineage emerging from the cultural negotiation. In all families except one, the caste attributed to the child in school records was the same as father's caste. This was the pattern in both hypergamy and hypogamy marriages. When interviewed Ms Nayana said, '*Kottahennukulakkehoragu*' (*the married woman is out of the family/lineage*). Implying that after marriage the wife and the child takes the caste and lineage of the husband. This was similarly echoed by all the woman interviewed. Ambedkar (1936) rightly questions the Chaturvarna system of Arya Samajists and its applicability to a woman. He asks if Chaturvarna system is really based on vocational merit, and should birth not take forward the caste of a woman even after marriage. Mr Sanjay and Ms Vani's family was the only family that refused to provide any caste to their son. The couple asked their son to write 'Hindu' in the space specified for 'caste' in his school records. The couple felt secure with the decision. It must be noted that the couple was also respected on both sides of the family for their success in their careers. This social affirmation could have been the reason for their freedom in rejecting the affiliations of both the castes.

There is also legal ambiguity about the caste to which the child of an inter-caste couple should belong. One of the recent and famous

examples is of Rohit Vemula where his father V Mani Kumar belongs to the Vaddera (OBC), and his mother belongs to the Mala (Dalit) caste. Even though the legal battle is debatable, it is crucial to focus on the line of arguments that emerged from the case. The petitioner argued that Rohit Vemula was not a Dalit as he would take up his father V. Mani Kumar's Vaddera (OBC) caste status and not his mother's alleged Mala (SC) caste.

*"Seeing that normally a child inherits the caste of his/her father and in view of this matter Rohit would be treated as an OBC person." (Roopanwal, 2016)*

This initial argument came under immense criticism for its casteist-patriarchal leaning. (Dechamma, 2016). It took a tedious legal battle for Rohit's mother to claim that as she was separated from her husband, Rohit grew up with her and his upbringing was inclined towards her caste (Dalit Mala) and Rohit has to be considered a Dalit. The final 108-page report submitted to MHRD Ministry by Justice Roopanwal argues that Rohit's mother's SC certificate cannot be merited due to other irregularities. The proceedings failed to clarify a larger question as to what caste the child would be conferred in an inter-caste marriage. On a similar line, the Andhra Pradesh High Court in 2016 promulgated that, "Caste of a child born to inter-caste couple could depend upon the circumstances in which the child was brought up..." (Ashok, 2016). Likewise, it is a tedious and ambiguous predicament to scrutinise the pattern of upbringing for each inter-caste family to decide the caste of the child. And it clearly shows the lack of consensus on the judicial front, but at the familial level, the inter-caste couples have clearly accepted the patriarchal leanings.

It will be interesting to follow up the couples and observe the relationships choices the children from inter-caste marriages make when they grow up. It will be of immense importance to understand if inter-caste marriages have the potential to change the casteist force or propel it in a different manner. The transmission of culture to the next generation holds potential to answer the future of caste system in Indian society. The practices imbibed, language preferences, caste identity in official records, and the pattern of their children's marriages held cues to the patriarchal leaning of the

caste system. More importantly, this denotes the rebirth of caste system even in an inter-caste family.

## 5. Conclusion

The study of inter-caste marriages in India has been few and inadequate. Previous studies can be grouped into two categories. The first section of this paper contains the studies on the factors influencing boundary crossing and the second section contains the studies on the apprehensions for lack of stability in inter-caste marriages. The present study tried to cater to the research gap of what transpires in inter-caste marriages after the union. The study using qualitative tools captured the discourses and cultural negotiations emanating out of their married lives. The sample included marriages between 'upper caste' men and 'lower caste' women and vice versa to understand the dynamics of cultural hierarchy. The family reactions and societal support for the marriage was analyzed to see the acceptance level of the marriage. It was seen that there was definite opposition from at least one side of the family, and this most often was from the higher caste. The weddings primarily took place with the higher caste rituals and customs; showing a high coercive intent for cultural imitation, whereas the same cultural adjustments were patriarchal in their enclosed and personal marital lives. The customs, rituals and festivals practiced in their houses predominantly were of the husband's traditions. This showcased the lack of bargaining power for women even in choice-based inter-caste marriages. The crux of this bargaining power was seen to be present in families where women had completed their desired level of education and were employed. Future work needs to be in the direction of how regular income flow helps in bargaining power and decision making possibilities to women. Negotiations regarding cultural differences were seen to be on an equal level on the surface but casteist-patriarchal forces operated beneath. The wife and children latently were inheriting the caste affiliations of the husband. Finally, the most important component was concerning the attitudes, beliefs, and identities transferred to the children of inter-caste couples. The children were provided with the caste identity of the husband's family in all the official records. The cultural practices imbibed

were also from the husband's family, irrespective of Hypergamy and Hypogamy type of marriages. The study found that inter-caste marriages which are seen to be the answer for casteism is again providing an opportunity for caste to continue in a newer and subtle form to the next generation by re-invoking the caste identity of the children in official as well as in practical life. Ambedkar's words are a testimony to the current times when he advised, "The real method of breaking up the caste system was not to bring about inter-caste dinners and inter-caste marriages but to destroy the religious notions on which the caste was founded" (Ambedkar, 1936).

## Endnotes

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- <sup>1</sup> Dr Ambedkar Foundation, an institution under the Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment runs this dedicated central scheme. It is mandatory that at least one of the spouses has to be from a Schedule Caste (SC) to avail the reward amount.
  - <sup>2</sup> Opportunity window – chances of meeting an individual.
  - <sup>3</sup> Hypergamy– Marriage between an upper caste man and a lower caste woman
  - <sup>4</sup> Hypogamy – Marriage between an upper caste woman and a lower caste man
  - <sup>5</sup> Mantra mangalya – a simple form of marriage introduced by famous Kannada Poet Kuvempu where the marriage takes place without performing any rituals.
  - <sup>6</sup> Sathvik diet- is a diet based on foods in Ayurveda and Yoga literature that contain sattva quality (guna).
  - <sup>7</sup> Usage of Onion and Garlic is considered to give rise to vices among Brahmins.
  - <sup>8</sup> Panktis – seating arrangement based on castes
  - <sup>9</sup> Matha – religious place of worship for Brahmins
  - <sup>10</sup> Brahmana Deeksha – is a process undertaken to convert a non-brahmin into a Brahmin. The person has to be adopted by a Brahmin family for him to be accepted into the Brahmin community.
  - <sup>11</sup> IITian – a student or alumni of Indian Institute of Technology.

12 Neo-local residence - is a type of post-marital residence in which a newly married couple resides separately from both the husband's natal household and the wife's natal household.

13 Upanayana - is one of the traditional saṃskāras (rites of passage) that marked the acceptance of a student by a guru (teacher) and an individual's entrance to a school in Hinduism

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