

MARRIAGE WITHIN THE KIN: EXAMINING THE CHANGING TRENDS OF CROSS-COUSIN MARRIAGES IN KISHTWAR

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Abstract: Marriage as an social institution helps to establish a kinship bond in the society and are performed according to the prescribed rules of the society. In some cultures, it is performed outside the kin group while in others it is performed with a set category of kins like cross-cousins. Over the past few decades, however, marriage patterns have undergone significant changes worldwide. This paper explores the shifting dynamics of marriage, especially including the decline of traditional marriage, the culture of marrying cross-cousins, the rise of alternative forms of partnerships, and the factors influencing these changing patterns in the Kishtwar district of Jammu and Kashmir. The paper analyses the social, cultural, economic, and technological drivers that have contributed to this shift and discusses the implications for individuals, families, and society as a whole. These changing marriage patterns can be helpful to gain insight into the evolving nature of human relationships and adapt the societal frameworks.

Keywords: Kinship, Marriage, Cross-cousins, Patrilineal, Matrilineal, Patrilateral, Matrilateral

I. INTRODUCTION

Marriage is a social and legal union between individuals that establishes rights and obligations between them, as well as between them and their families. While the specifics of marriage vary widely across different cultures and societies, some common elements include legal contract, social recognition, cultural and religious rituals, procreation and family formation. The definition and understanding of marriage can vary significantly across cultures, and contemporary debates often focus on issues such as same-sex marriage, polygamy, and the evolving nature of marital relationships.

About kinship and marriage Robin Fox (1966) has argued that it is the basic study in the social sciences because these are the most basic social bonds. He further argues 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 the commonest definition, "kinship is simply the relations between kin", i.e. persons related by putative or fictive consanguinity. 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. Mating with any person who is socio-culturally defined as members of one's group is usually 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 others primarily related by consanguinity. In addition to this universal prohibition, most society forbid sexual relations and marriage between certain other culturally recognized biologically kinsmen. (Fox, 1966)

Cousins are the children of a parent's sibling. There are four types of cousins: father's brother's son/daughter (FBS/D), mother's brother's son/daughter (MBS/D), father's sister's son/daughter (FZS/D), mother's sister's son/daughter (MZS/D). Of these FBS/D and MZS/D cousins (where the two sibling parents of the child belong to the same sex) are called parallel cousins, and MBS/D and FZS/D cousins (where the two sibling parents of the child are of opposite sex) are called cross cousins. (Mair, 2006)

Hindu mythological records demonstrate that cross-cousin marriage was common in ancient Hindu society. For instance, Krishna and Rukmini were married, his son Pradyuman wed Kakudvati, Rukmin's daughter (Rukmini's brother), Arjuna and Subhdra were married, Abhimanyu wed Sasirekha (the daughter of Subhdra's brother Balarama), and Sehdeva wed his cross-cousin Vijaya, daughter of Dyutimat. (Kapadia, 1947)

This paper is an attempt to study and understand the Kinship and Marriage structure among the Hindu community in the Kishtwar district of UT 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 continuity and the changes in the practice of cross-cousin marriages in the Kishtwar district.

Kishtwar is one of the districts of the UT of Jammu and Kashmir and it comes under Jammu province of the region. Society in Kishtwar is simple in nature and the villages of the region were largely self sufficient earlier but this is getting eroded by the passage of time. As change is unavoidable, society is also undergoing a shift of kinds. In recent years, modernity is spreading gradually and has an effect on every aspect of life. This favoured the change in kinship system and also in the marriage preferences in the region. One can find that the lineage is traced through male line and consanguinal relations and relatives occupy more importance than affinal relations and relatives. 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. (Sharma, 1995)

This paper deals with the continuity and change in the practice of cross-cousin marriage and has also looked into the change in the structure of marriage. In the changing world, modernization forces play a great role in bringing the change within the structure. On the other hand, tradition plays an important role in the continuity of old practices and customs of cross-cousin marriages. The base of social change is change in the thought process in humans. It may refer to the notion of social progress or socio cultural evolution, the philosophical idea that society moves forward by dialectical or evolutionary means. It may refer to a paradigmatic change in the socio-economic structure. With the impact of modernization forces, the society of Kishtwar is in a state of transition and is shifting slowly and gradually towards modernity. Education as a modernization force though brought some changes in the traditional notion of cross-cousin marriages, but that too on a very small scale.

The present study was undertaken with the objectives to look into the Kinship ties of the people who enter the institution of cross-cousin marriage and also to find out various forms of cross cousin marriages among the Hindu community in Kishtwar district. The study also tried to understand the changes occurring among Hindu community in terms of cross cousin marriages in Kishtwar and finally to find out the factors and reasons responsible for these changes.

II. METHODOLOGY

The present study has made use of the structural functional approach to understand the practice of cross cousin marriage among the Hindu community in the Kishtwar district of Jammu and Kashmir. The study through structural functional approach tried to look that how the practice of cross-cousin marriages has created a kinship structure and how the structure is functional for the society. The proposed study also tried to analyze the continuity and change in the institution of culture of cross cousin marriages among the Hindus of Kishtwar district.

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.

According to Malinowski, functionalism attempts to describe the parts institution play within the interrelated whole of the culture. Thus according to functionalism, institutions of a culture operate to gratify the needs of individuals and that of society as a whole. The current research hence will try to investigate this dimension of Malinowski's functionalism. According to Malinowski, every aspect of culture has a function of its own. They all are interrelated and interdependent. Culture accomplishes the need of man through cultural institution and every aspect of culture has a function. The study through structural functional approach tried to look that how the practice of cross-cousin marriages has created a kinship structure and how the structure is functional for the society. The study in addition has analyzed the continuity and change in the structure and in the culture of cross cousin marriages among the Hindus of Kishtwar district. (Malinowski, 1944) Several factors contribute to the decline of traditional marriage and the changing attitudes and values associated with it:

- **Changing Gender Roles:** Over the past few decades, there has been a significant shift in traditional gender roles. Women's empowerment, increased education and career opportunities for women, and the pursuit of gender equality have led to more egalitarian relationships within marriages. As a result, the traditional division of labor and roles within marriages has become less common.
- **Delaying Marriage:** In many societies, people are choosing to delay marriage and focus on personal and career goals first. Factors such as higher education, financial independence, and changing societal norms have led to a trend of marrying at later stages in life.
- **Individualism and Self-Fulfillment:** Modern societies often prioritize individual happiness and self-fulfillment. As a result, people may be more selective in choosing a life partner, seeking personal compatibility and emotional satisfaction over traditional societal expectations.
- **Diversity and Inclusivity:** As societies become more diverse and inclusive, there is a growing recognition and acceptance of different forms of relationships, including same-sex marriages and non-traditional family structures.

- **Economic Factors:** Economic considerations also play a role in the decline of traditional marriage. High costs associated with weddings, housing, and raising children can deter some individuals or couples from getting married.
- **Technology and Communication:** The digital age has influenced how people meet and connect with potential partners. Online dating and social media have changed the landscape of dating and courtship, impacting how relationships form.

It's important to note that while traditional marriage may be declining in some regions and societies, it is not universally the case, and traditional marriage practices still hold strong in many cultures. The changes in attitudes and values towards marriage reflect the dynamic nature of human relationships and the evolving social landscape. As societies continue to evolve, the concept and practice of marriage are likely to adapt accordingly to meet the needs and preferences of individuals and communities.

III. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

In the light of above mentioned factors some of the important findings of the study are as under:

The study reveals that changes are also coming in the family structure and joint family is now breaking down into nuclear family and hence there is a shift from joint family system to nuclear family system. Data shows that modernization forces are bringing in change within the family structure and families are moving from joint to nuclear. But the nuclearization of family is not affecting the cross-cousin marriages. There were maximum numbers of cases of cross-cousin marriages among nuclear families whereas an equal number of respondents from joint family were married to their cross-cousin. Therefore, it became clear that though modernization forces are bringing in change in terms of joint to nuclear but the nuclearization process has not affected the practice of cross-cousin marriage.

There is an orientation towards family culture and the nature of family is patriarchal. Essence of continuity is evident in the orientation and nature of family. Society has great respect for age, tradition and sacred symbols. The nurturing of relationships, tolerance, social harmony and hospitality is paramount. Family has a collectivist culture and ideals of humility and self-denial is respected. Tradition is based around family and respect for elders and respect for tradition is highly valued. Caste is the basic social structure of Indian society and hence also constitutes the basic feature of the society of Kishtwar.

Kishtwar society comprises of different caste groups i.e. Brahmins, Rajputs, S.C. etc. From the field data, it was found that some respondents belonged to the Brahmins category, some to the Rajput and some to the S.C. category. The practice of cross-cousin marriage was not restricted to any caste category but was found among all the caste groups. A significant observation from the data indicated that the practice of cross-cousin marriage was higher among the Brahmins and the practice of marrying other than cross-cousin category was higher among the schedule caste category. As one move from Brahmin to S.C. category in a hierarchal order, the incidences of cross-cousin marriages were decreasing and other than cross-cousin marriages were increasing.

Regarding the choice of mate selection, there is continuity in the traditional culture. Love marriages as a modern phenomenon are very less accepted by the traditional families and are given a tradition outlook by performing them in an arranged manner. Field data indicated that majority of the respondents were favouring marriage in a traditional fashion. The data supported the argument regarding the continuity of the traditional values regarding the choices of mate selection. Previous trend shows that in the parental generation of the respondents, marriages were generally arranged and same trend is followed by the succeeding generation which is an indicator of continuity of the traditional values. Further it was found that those who were favouring arranged marriages, maximum of them were married with their cross-cousin whereas those who were in favour of love marriages, also were married with their cross-cousin. It is therefore indicated that whether marriages were arranged or love marriages, the choice of mate selection was somewhere restricted to cross-cousins, which is again an indicator of continuity of the practice of cross-cousin marriage.

One thing which is noticeable here is that there is difference in the views regarding priority of mate selection and actual marriage done by the younger generation. As the marriages are mostly arranged by the elders, so somewhere the first preference is given to the cross-cousin as marriage partners for their sons/daughters, hence keeping the practice in continuity.

Another dimension in the cross-cousin marriage is the patrilineal and matrilineal type of cross-cousin marriage. Patrilineal type of cross-cousin marriage involves the marriage with FZD where as matrilineal type of cross-cousin marriage is that type where ego marries with the MBD. Both type of cross-cousin marriages are practiced in Kishtwar but there is presence of **preferential matrilineal cross-cousin marriage and prohibited patrilineal cross-cousin marriage**. The cases of marriage with MBD are slightly more than the marriage with FZD. This statement is supported

by the field data which clearly shows that maximum number of respondents have done matrilineal type of cross-cousin marriage where as small but significant number of respondents have done patrilineal type of cross-cousin marriage. Same trend was noted in the parental generation of the respondents also. Difference between patrilineal and matrilineal cross-cousin marriages is very less in parental generation when compared with the cases of ego's generation, which is an indicator of change. Continuity in the above said dimension of cross-cousin marriage can also be witnessed in the views of respondents regarding the preference of marriage of their sons/daughters.

Another dimension for the study of continuity and change is in the form of marriage. 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. Such a system exists when there is an unreciprocated flow of women going in one direction and a flow of goods going in the opposite direction. This asymmetry can exist despite the fact that the people themselves view the marriage relationships as symmetrical or reciprocally balanced. It can also exist without there being any recognition of the asymmetry in the form of a kinship rule of preferential marriage.

Marriage can be either symmetrical where the wife givers are also the wife takers or it can be of asymmetrical type where there is an unreciprocated flow of women going in one direction. Field data reveals that out of the total respondents taken; almost all were favouring asymmetrical type of marriage where as only 05% respondents were exclusively favouring symmetrical type of marriage. With the in-depth interviews with the respondents, it was found that the symmetrical marriages were done in earlier past. Reasons for such kind of marriage were to strengthen the group solidarity. In-group sphere was limited and such kind of matrimonial alliance was very helpful in strengthening the group solidarity. But now the scenario has got changed and such kind of matrimonial alliance is generally avoided. Education, contact with outer culture has influenced this type of marriage. Now-a-days people prefer to marry in an asymmetrical way to broaden their in-group sphere. Some respondent were also of the view that symmetrical type of marriages somewhere influences both the families in the time of crisis, so it is generally avoided.

To conclude, it can be said here that cross-cousin marriages in the said area are fulfilling the functions of the society of the Kishtwar, as this type of matrimonial alliances brings the solidarity and harmony among the people, and with the changing world changes are also coming in the culture of cross-cousin marriages.

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