

Inter-Caste Marriages and Social Changes among Dhor Community in Karnataka: A Sociological Study

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Abstract:

Caste and Marriages are both integral and deeply rooted parts of Indian Society. These two are taken very seriously, especially in a patrilineal system of Kinship. It forms as a norm to marry within own caste and community and not harm the ritualistic system of endogamy. The forces of education, modernization, employment opportunities has led to increased social interaction and so given away the space for assimilation. This new phenomenon deserves a chance to study and understand its emergence, adoption and acceptance in the Dhor Community. The present study is structured at both urban and rural spaces in semi-structured interviews and concentrated on more urban response oriented and extracted from engaged participants of 240 respondents. The paper brings an understanding into social change of norms and open to change in community practices to suit individual needs and owing to flexibility resulting from social change due to transition seen in the urban setting.

Keywords: Scheduled Caste, Dhor, Marriages, Assimilation, Urban-practices, and Karnataka.

Introduction

Recent developments of technological advancements and flexibility of social interactions have resulted in relaxation of occupational and social interaction of dining and understanding to the concept of marriage and liberty. This is true especially in the urban context. However the practice of endogamy remains on the ground and it is continuing. The inter-castes marriages are occurring among individuals who could relate to social and civil movements that happened in the society and the sub-castes that are product of such movements in the Karnataka. A semi-structured interview during the field-work of doctoral thesis among the

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household of Dhor community revealed that number of marriages between individuals of distinctively different ranks in the local caste hierarchy have occurred. The couples involved in such irregular marriages face no special problems due to relaxation of community norms and open to social change.

Background

The Dhor is patrilineal and patrilocal community whose more prominent population lives in Northern Karnataka but seems to be scattered in various parts of Karnataka. The traditional occupation of the Dhor had been tanning. They have lived has a close-compartment social group. The imagination of exogamy was far for them. But, there seems to be an emergence of inter-caste marriages in large cities, it may not be in increase in trend but certainly influences some presence in the community. The historic glance on community and caste group rules bears significant understanding on the practice of endogamous ritual of marriage. In the separate settlement, “A close study of names of various minor units, the so-called castes, within groups reveals the fact that the bases of distinction leading to exclusive marking off of those groups were: first territorial or jurisdictional separateness; second, mixed origin; third, occupational distinction; forth, some peculiarity in the technique of one and the same occupation; fifth, sectarian differences; sixth, dissimilarity of custom; and last adventitious circumstances, suggesting certain nicknames” (Ghurye, 1957: 34).

“Each caste is sub-divided into many sub-groups which in their turn form a hierarchy within the caste. Thus the whole caste system is a very intricate structure which places social groups on innumerable and minute steps indicative of status and function. Each caste is endogamous group spread over one linguistic region.” (1953: 7).

Features of caste have been identified at all levels by Ghurye outlines the characteristics of a caste-society. These are the following:

1. Providing restrictions on marriage (Ghurye, 1957: 17).
2. Regulating restrictions on feeding and sexual intercourse (1957: 6).
3. Regulating communal life within what have been described as “small and complete social worlds in themselves, marked off definitely from one another though subsisting within larger society”. (1957: 5).
4. The assignment of the status of the group in the hierarchy (1957: 5).
5. Delimitation of civil and religious rights and privileges of the different sections (1957: 9).

The features of a caste-society dealt with more effective regulation of social and communal life and prescribed rules as regards, feeding, social intercourse and endogamy. (1957: 19).

Methodology

The present study is undertaken in the active clusters of Community that have been living since many generations who have engaged in both traditional and modern occupation. The interviews also reflect the responses of community leaders and elderly inside of the community. The 240 respondents have participated in the semi-structured interviews from separate settlements in rural areas to homogeneous settlement locality in urban locality of Karnataka. They have been purposively selected for the study from rural to urban from those that represented their clans as respondents. The study has been empirical analysis of responses and observational findings in the fieldwork settings. The Dhor findings through responses and observations are put through both in an elucidate format and data table.

Indian Families- love Marriages and Indian legislations

The Indian family as a strong, cohesive, integral and fundamental unit is a solid foundation of the Indian social structure. It has survived the test of time during several phases of social growth and transition such as industrialization, modernization and globalization. Regardless, of one's status and background in the society, for individual the family is the first place where one could look for everyday that is needed for his/her growth and development. The traditional joint family system, quite popular among the higher and predominant castes, is common in India while all forms of families-nuclear, extended and several other forms- exist side by side across the country (Sooryamoorthy, 2012).

Marriage is so important among Hindus that the decision to marry is rarely entrusted to the individuals involved. Marriage "arrangements" and "negotiations" are caste and clan concerns. "Love marriages," those, in which a man and woman decide to marry independently of family consultation, are regarded as anti-traditional and even dangerous (Fruzzetti, 1982). When a couple marries, their union is not one of individuals, but of lineages. Each marriage must be arranged in reference to rather strict rules of exogamy and endogamy, for each marriage is a public statement of a family's lineage's social and ritual status (Harman, 1987).

The Indian government has addressed the problem of caste and untouchability through various constitutional safeguards. They have been recognized as historically deprived segments of the society. In Indian Constitution certain mechanisms are made to ensure that the fundamental rights are not violated. The directive principles of state policy authorize the state to protect this socially marginalized group from further discrimination in Indian society due to caste identities. Anti-discriminatory provisions include enactment of Untouchability Offences Act, 1955 (renamed as Protection of Civil Rights Act [PCR] in 1976) and the Schedule Castes and Scheduled Tribes Prevention of Atrocities Act (POA), 1989. There are various economic

schemes that have been announced from time to time. There are welfare grants and aids in the Government sectors. In addition with legal safeguards against discrimination, equal access to participation in public employment, education and politics are ensured through reservation of seats in government services, public educational institutions and Parliament and state legislatures for SC and ST in the elected bodies of local government, there are seats reserved for women also. Recently, the state governments have also introduced incentive for the inter-caste marriage couple (Sabharwal, 2010).

The Functioning and regulation of Marriage and kinship in the Community

The caste is the primary functional unit. It is the caste which supports, 1) Endogamous kinship group; 2) regulates caste council to regulate behavior and social relationship; 3) owns or creates community utility buildings. The present study helps us understand the very jurisdiction of such authority in the community changing beyond comprehension. While most of the rules remain alive and active in-terms of behavior of written and unwritten norms of pre-marital relations and participation in the community gatherings, including the contract of marriage that takes place in the community, where one Clan engage in contractual marriage with another Clan, the community assembly halls and those that regulate such community affair give their approval, blessings, and validate the bonding of two different Clans in the community, they bear their witness and help legally married adults in the court of law.

The recognition of such authority in the face of modernity, globalization and urban education in certain aspects of community are impacted. They also understand the fact that the very regulation of every clan member is absurd. By interfering in the personal lives of the new generation is violation of personal liberty and right to privacy. Henceforth, they are often understood to understand their statutory limitations in the society and also due to influence of cultural evolution, that they do not regulate such affairs with stringent, they do not get involve directly in certain cases, they send their understanding to change in caste norms by attending the wedding of the community and enjoy and engage in such occasions. But, they do remind the clans, that the very protection and help that they can seek in caste weddings will not be provided in inter-caste marriages in the community.

Giddens (2006) reports similar trends within the family. He thinks that there is now free selection of spouses, arranged marriages becoming less common, and that the rights of women and children are being recognized more than ever before. Arrange marriages are still a practice in the Indian family, although they are not purely arranged marriages. More often than not, such marriages take place after the spouses have found their partners on their own and then seek the concurrence of the

families concerned, ending up in 'arrange' marriages. What is emphasized here in these self-arranged marriages is the freedom to choose their own life partners.

FINDINGS AND CONSIDERATIONS

Table 1: Inter-caste Marriages in the Community

Response	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	31	12.90
No	209	87.10
Total	240	100.00

The above table outlines the response of the Clans and respondents that engaged in the interviews over the subject of inter-caste marriages in the Community. (12.9%) responded with Yes and (87.1%) responded with No.

Table 2: Belief of Community and Community Leaders to Inter-caste Marriage

Response	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Agree	119	49.60
Disagree	67	27.90
Indifferent	54	22.50
Total	240	100.00

The above table reflections the relaxed attitude and relaxation of community members on the traditional norms and restrictions placed on the marriage and social interactions in the community in the wake of transitional world. Around (49%) of respondents agree to inter-caste marriage; (27.9%) of respondents disagreed; and (22.5%) of respondents were Indifferent to such practices of Inter-caste marriage in the community.

Table 3: Assimilation of Communities Recorded Due to Inter-caste Marriages

Individuals and Communities	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Higher caste	20	66.40
Lower caste	03	8.30
Different Ethnic Group	02	6.00
OBC	04	13.30
Both Higher and Lower caste	02	6.00
Same caste	209	-
Total	240	100.00

The above table underlines the inter-caste and class marriages practiced in the community. (66.4%) married within higher caste; (8.3%) married within Lower caste and (6.0%) married with different ethnic group; (13.3%) married within OBC and (6.0%) married with both higher and lower caste in a peculiar case of established family.

Changes in the marriage practices and norms can be attributed to the followings:

1. The modern occupations have blurred the existence of such authority.
2. The relaxed social interaction and new form of cultural and educational awareness among youth.
3. Increased individual priorities and recognition of self-care.
4. Understanding parents and technological evolution that updates and invokes new knowledge and learning space among both parents and offspring and helps prioritization of individual choices and its benefits to both the Clan and existing family.

Conclusion

With no stringent regulation of in-built system of caste norms, the community is relaxing to the new norms and modernization of oldest social institution known as marriage. It will perhaps help community to successfully channelize community to casteless society but it should also be considered that the cases of such practices are relatively low and it can be impacted by the new laws and change in political structure or adverse change in the perspective and attitude of those caste that do not want such changes in their own community. Irrespective of such scenario's the Dhor community as accepted to change in marriage patterns by being much more considerate to modernity in community life.

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