

Research Paper



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CROSS-COUSIN MARRIAGES AMONG HINDUS: A STUDY IN KISHTWAR DISTRICT OF J&K

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ABSTRACT

Marriage is a social union or legal contract between the people that creates kinship and its definition varies according to different cultures. The present paper has attempted to study and understand the Kinship and Marriage structure among the Hindu community in the Kishtwar district. Kinship and institution of marriage are about the basic facts of life. In the commonest definition, 'kinship is simply the relations between kin', i.e. persons related by putative or fictive consanguinity. Marriage is a social union or legal contract between the people that creates kinship and its definition varies according to different cultures. 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 general as well as 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.

KEY WORDS: Marriage, Kinship, Affinity, Consanguinity, Cross-Cousin Marriage

DISCUSSION

This paper has attempted to study and understand the Kinship and Marriage structure among the Hindu community in the Kishtwar district. 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. It has further explored the continuity and the changes in the practice of cross-cousin marriages in the Kishtwar district.

Kishtwar is one of the districts of the state of Jammu and Kashmir and it comes under Jammu province of the state. Kishtwar is largely agriculture based, thus making it simple in nature. The villages of the region were largely self sufficient earlier but this is getting eroded by the passage of time. Hence it can be established 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 favoured the change in 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. Government and private educational institutions perform the

task of providing education to the young ones. Marriages are mostly preferred and performed between the known ones. The most preferred alliance for marriage is cross-cousins. Both matrilineal and patrilineal type of cross-cousin marriages are practiced.

About kinship and marriage, Fox¹ (1966) argues 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 or sexual relationship 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.

It may be true that siblings, for example, don't mate, but what is to stop cousins from mating? If cousins were to have children, then our descent groups could become, after the first generation, self-sufficient as far as reproduction was concerned. This is quite true, but for some reason such groups tend to prohibit, or at least avoid, marriage within the group. They believe as if they were all indeed *real* brothers and sisters; this is how often they express the prohibition. Not all societies follow this practice, however, and some do indeed encourage the marriage of cousins thus turning the group in on itself.ⁱⁱⁱ

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.^{iv}

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.^v Budhayana^{vi} however permitted cross cousin marriage beyond Narmada as a peculiar cultural trait of the people of that region. According to Richards origin of *mamera* (MBS/D) type of cross cousin marriage lies in the system of inheritance. In matriarchal societies, daughters inherited mother's property and sons inherited maternal uncle's property. According to Rivers and Ghurey^{vii} the origin of cross cousin marriage lies in the practice of dual organization that is dichotomous division of the population into two exogamous groups, according to which a boy of one group has to marry a girl of other group. In South India also there are many castes which have dual organizations in practising cross cousin marriages. But this does not mean that cross cousin marriages require the dual organisation always. This is evident from the marriage practices of *Garasias* in Gujarat and *Rajputs* in Rajasthan which at one time practised cross cousin marriages though they had no dual organizations.

In every society, exogamous rules also apply to same group larger than the nuclear family. It is the systems that restrict marriage to persons outside the specific groups. In Hindu society marriage between members of same gotra and lineage are prohibited. One must marry outside his own family and kinship group, the groups of which believe that they have descended from one common ancestor and they are consanguinally related. The exogamous rules are essential to the existence and functioning of family. When marriage is forbidden with certain categories of kinsmen, it is preferred with other categories of relatives who are not culturally defined as being kinsmen. Under this category the cross cousin marriage, that is, marriage with mother's brother's child or father's sister's child is the preferred type of marriage. In India such marriages are prevalent in Kuki tribe of Manipur, among the Gonds of Madhya Pradesh and Orissa, 54 percent of marriages are of this type. Similar customs are prevalent in Oran, Khasi, Kadar, Mikir of Asom and Bhils of Madhya Pradesh. The tribes like Gonds, Bhunjia, Oran, Koya, Didayi,

Ho, and Kolha, of Orissa practice cross-cousin marriage.^{viii}

Present paper is an attempt to explore 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.^{ix} 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.

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 analyse the continuity and change in the institution of culture of cross cousin marriages among the Hindus of Kishtwar district.

The universe of study was comprised of Kishtwar town of Kishtwar district. A total of 50 households were chosen purposively for the study from the town. Sampling method was used to conduct the fieldwork in which a portion of people were drawn from a larger population. A sample is a part of the population which is studied in order to make inferences about the whole population. In defining population from which sample is taken, *target population* and *sampling frame* is identified. Target population includes all the units for which information is required whereas sampling frame is the operational definition of the population that provides the basis for sampling. Sampling frame reduces the number of total population and gives the *target population*.^x

The sample was drawn with the help of purposive sampling method in which researcher purposely chooses persons who, in his judgement about some appropriate characteristic required of the sample members, are thought to be relevant to the research topic and are easily available to him.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Field data 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 also reveals 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 hierarchical 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 whereas 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 whereas 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 whereas 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.

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