

INTER-CASTE MARRIAGE IN UTTAR PRADESH: A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY OF SOCIAL CHANGE AND RESISTANCE

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ABSTRACT

Inter-caste marriage has long been regarded as a crucial indicator of social change in Indian society. Despite constitutional guarantees of equality and legal safeguards, caste continues to exert a strong influence on marital choices, particularly in states like Uttar Pradesh. This research paper examines inter-caste marriage in Uttar Pradesh as a site of tension between modern values such as individual choice and entrenched social structures rooted in caste hierarchy, patriarchy, and community control. Using a sociological perspective, the study analyzes patterns of acceptance and resistance, the role of family and community, gendered dimensions, and the impact of law and state intervention. The paper argues that while inter-caste marriages signify gradual social transformation, they simultaneously provoke strong resistance, revealing the persistent strength of caste in everyday social life.

KEYWORDS: Inter-caste marriage, Caste system, Social change, Resistance, Uttar Pradesh, Sociology.

I. INTRODUCTION

Marriage in Indian society is not merely a personal relationship but a deeply social institution regulated by caste, religion, kinship, and community norms. Traditionally, caste endogamy—marriage within one's own caste—has been a defining feature of the Hindu social order. Inter-caste marriage challenges this norm by crossing rigid social boundaries, making it a powerful lens through which to study social change.

Uttar Pradesh, India's most populous state, presents a significant context for examining inter-caste marriage due to its strong caste identities, rural dominance, and political mobilization along caste lines. While urbanization, education, and exposure to modern values have

increased the visibility of inter-caste marriages, such unions often face intense resistance in the form of social boycott, violence, and familial rejection. This paper explores the sociological dimensions of inter-caste marriage in Uttar Pradesh, focusing on the coexistence of social change and resistance.

II. Review of Literature

1. Louis Dumont (1970) emphasized caste endogamy as central to maintaining hierarchy based on purity and pollution.
2. M.N. Srinivas (1966) viewed social change in India as gradual, shaped by modernization and education.
3. B.R. Ambedkar (1936) strongly advocated inter-caste marriage as a means to annihilate caste.
4. Zelliott (2007) it underscores the urgent need for more effective enforcement of laws designed to safeguard inter-caste couples from violence and discrimination. She argues that although legal frameworks exist to protect the rights of individuals in inter-caste marriages, a significant gap remains between these provisions and their practical implementation at the grassroots level. Additionally, government initiatives and societal support systems for inter-caste marriages are still inadequate, allowing the difficulties faced by such couples to persist.
5. Studies by Kapur (2012) and Mohan (2020). These indicate that children born into inter-caste marriages may either develop a blended identity or experience confusion regarding their caste affiliation, influenced by their family relationships and the surrounding community context.

Recent sociological studies highlight that while inter-caste marriages are increasing, especially in urban areas, resistance remains strong in rural regions. Feminist scholars argue that opposition to inter-caste marriage is deeply gendered, with women facing stricter control and harsher punishment. Existing literature thus suggests a gap between legal progress and social acceptance.

III. Statement of problem

Inter-caste marriage in Uttar Pradesh, though gradually increasing in contemporary times, remains a deeply contested social phenomenon marked by stigma, resistance, and conflict. In a state where caste continues to play a decisive role in shaping social identity, economic mobility, and marriage practices, inter-caste unions directly challenge entrenched traditions and hierarchical social norms. Despite constitutional safeguards and legal recognition,

individuals entering into inter-caste marriages in Uttar Pradesh frequently face intense opposition from families, social ostracism, psychological stress, and, in extreme cases, violence. The consequences of such marriages extend beyond the couple, affecting family relationships, community dynamics, and broader societal perceptions of caste. This sociological study seeks to examine both the processes of social change and the forces of resistance surrounding inter-caste marriages in Uttar Pradesh. It aims to analyze levels of social acceptance and opposition, the psychological impact on individuals, the implications for family and community structures, and the potential of inter-caste marriages to challenge caste-based discrimination and inequality. Additionally, the study explores the role of legal frameworks, education, and modern communication in shaping attitudes and discourse around inter-caste marriages. By investigating these dimensions, the research provides insights into the evolving social landscape of Uttar Pradesh and highlights the broader implications of inter-caste marriages for social transformation and caste-based stratification.

IV. Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the prevalence and social context of inter-caste marriage in Uttar Pradesh.
2. To analyze societal attitudes toward inter-caste marriages.
3. To understand the forms of resistance faced by inter-caste couples.

V. Research Methodology

This study adopts a mixed-methods research design to examine inter-caste marriage in Uttar Pradesh, focusing on processes of social change and forms of resistance. The use of both quantitative and qualitative methods allows for a comprehensive sociological analysis by combining measurable data with in-depth personal and social perspectives. The research follows a descriptive and analytical design. It seeks to document the social realities of inter-caste marriages while critically analyzing patterns of acceptance, resistance, and transformation within families, communities, and institutions across Uttar Pradesh.

Sources of Data: Both primary and secondary data sources will be utilized. Primary data will be collected through surveys and interviews with individuals involved in inter-caste marriages, their family members, and, where relevant, community representatives. Secondary data will include academic literature, government reports, census data, legal documents, and previous sociological studies related to caste, marriage, and social change.

Sampling Method: A purposive and snowball sampling technique will be employed to identify inter-caste couples across selected urban and rural districts of Uttar Pradesh. This

approach is appropriate due to the sensitive nature of the topic and the difficulty in accessing respondents. Efforts will be made to ensure diversity in caste background, gender, age, and socio-economic status.

Data Collection Methods: Quantitative data will be gathered using structured questionnaires to assess levels of social acceptance, experiences of discrimination, and awareness of legal protections. Qualitative data will be collected through in-depth interviews and case studies to explore personal experiences, family dynamics, social resistance, coping mechanisms, and perceptions of social change.

Data Analysis: Quantitative data will be analyzed using statistical tools to identify trends and patterns related to social acceptance and resistance. Qualitative data will be analyzed thematically to interpret narratives concerning caste identity, social conflict, and transformation.

VI. Significance of the Study

The study of inter-caste marriage in Uttar Pradesh holds immense sociological significance as it provides critical insights into the dynamics of social change within a traditionally stratified society. Caste has long been a fundamental organizing principle in Indian society, regulating social interactions, occupation, and marriage practices. By examining inter-caste marriages, this study helps in understanding the extent to which rigid caste boundaries are being challenged and transformed in contemporary times.

One of the key significances of this study lies in its ability to highlight the role of inter-caste marriage as an agent of social integration and equality. Such marriages contribute to weakening caste-based discrimination and promote the idea of a more inclusive and egalitarian society. The study also sheds light on the factors that encourage or discourage individuals from entering into inter-caste unions, such as education, urbanization, economic independence, and exposure to modern values.

Furthermore, this research is important for analyzing the persistence of resistance and social barriers despite legal and constitutional support. By exploring the challenges faced by inter-caste couples, including family opposition, social ostracism, and violence, the study provides a deeper understanding of the gap between legal provisions and social realities. This can help policymakers identify areas where stronger implementation and protective measures are needed.

The study is also significant in terms of policy formulation and social awareness. Its findings can contribute to the development of more effective government schemes, awareness

programs, and institutional support systems aimed at promoting inter-caste harmony. Additionally, it can serve as a valuable resource for academicians, researchers, and social reformers interested in issues of caste, marriage, and social change.

In conclusion, this study is significant as it not only examines a critical aspect of Indian society but also contributes to the broader discourse on equality, human rights, and social transformation.

VII. Inter-Caste Marriage as an Indicator of Social Change

Inter-caste marriages in Uttar Pradesh are increasingly visible among educated, urban, and economically independent individuals. Factors contributing to this change include, Expansion of education, urban migration, Decline of joint family systems, Influence of media and social networking, Economic independence of youth, such marriages challenge caste boundaries and promote ideals of equality and individual freedom. For marginalized castes, inter-caste marriage can also serve as a path toward social mobility and dignity.

1. Resistance to Inter-Caste Marriage

Despite signs of change, resistance remains widespread and intense. Common forms of opposition include Family pressure and emotional coercion, social boycott by caste groups, Threats and physical violence, Honor-based violence, particularly against women, Intervention by caste panchayats or community elders, In rural areas of Uttar Pradesh, caste councils and kinship networks often act as informal enforcement mechanisms to maintain caste purity. Inter-caste couples may be forced to migrate or seek police protection to survive.

2. Gender Dimensions of Inter-Caste Marriage

Resistance to inter-caste marriage is deeply gendered. Women, especially from upper castes, face harsher consequences for marrying outside their caste. Their choices are seen as threats to family honor and caste status. Men, on the other hand, often receive relatively more acceptance, particularly when marrying women from lower castes. This gender imbalance reflects patriarchal control over women's sexuality and reproduction, reinforcing caste boundaries through marriage.

3. Role of Law and the State

The Indian Constitution upholds the principles of equality, individual liberty, and the right to choose one's life partner, thereby providing a strong legal foundation for inter-caste marriages. In this context, legislative measures such as the Special Marriage Act, 1954 play a crucial role by offering a legal framework that allows individuals to marry across caste and religious boundaries without requiring conversion or adherence to traditional customs. This

Act is particularly significant as it reinforces the idea of marriage as a personal choice rather than a socially imposed arrangement.

In addition to legal provisions, the state has introduced various incentive schemes to encourage inter-caste marriages and promote social integration. In Uttar Pradesh, such schemes provide financial assistance to couples, especially when one partner belongs to a Scheduled Caste. These initiatives are designed not only to support couples economically but also to challenge caste-based discrimination and foster a more inclusive society.

However, despite these progressive measures, the effectiveness of legal protection often remains limited in practice. One of the primary challenges is the weak implementation of laws, which reduces their impact at the grassroots level. Moreover, social bias within institutions, including law enforcement agencies, can hinder the fair treatment of inter-caste couples. In many cases, officials may be influenced by prevailing societal norms, leading to inadequate support or delayed action.

Additionally, inter-caste couples frequently experience fear and mistrust toward law enforcement authorities. Concerns about harassment, lack of protection, or even collusion with opposing family members discourage them from seeking legal help. As a result, many couples remain vulnerable despite the existence of supportive laws.

Thus, while the state symbolically promotes inter-caste marriage through legal provisions and incentives, the persistence of deep-rooted social attitudes often undermines the practical realization of these safeguards.

1. Prevalence and Social Context of Inter-Caste Marriage in Uttar Pradesh

Inter-caste marriage in Uttar Pradesh remains a relatively limited but gradually increasing phenomenon, reflecting both continuity and change within the social structure. Traditionally, the caste system has strongly emphasized endogamy, where marriages are confined within the same caste group to maintain social purity, hierarchy, and cultural identity. However, with the forces of modernization, such as education, urbanization, industrialization, and migration, there has been a slow yet noticeable rise in inter-caste marriages across the state.

The prevalence of inter-caste marriage varies significantly between rural and urban areas. In urban centers, where individuals are exposed to diverse social groups, educational institutions, and professional environments, the likelihood of inter-caste interaction and relationships is higher. Cities like Lucknow, Kanpur, and Noida provide relatively liberal spaces where traditional constraints are somewhat relaxed. In contrast, rural areas continue to

exhibit strong adherence to caste norms, with social surveillance and community pressure acting as deterrents to such unions.

The social context of inter-caste marriage is also influenced by factors such as education level, economic independence, and exposure to media. Educated individuals, particularly women, are more likely to challenge traditional norms and assert their right to choose their partners. Government initiatives, such as incentives for inter-caste marriages, especially those involving Scheduled Castes, have also contributed to a marginal increase in such unions.

Nevertheless, the overall prevalence remains low due to deeply entrenched social norms and fear of social ostracism. Family honor, community reputation, and cultural traditions continue to play a dominant role in matrimonial decisions. Thus, while inter-caste marriages are emerging as indicators of social change, their occurrence is still shaped by a complex interplay of structural constraints and evolving socio-cultural dynamics.

2. Societal Attitudes Toward Inter-Caste Marriages

Societal attitudes toward inter-caste marriages in Uttar Pradesh are deeply rooted in traditional beliefs, cultural values, and social hierarchies. Despite constitutional provisions promoting equality and prohibiting caste-based discrimination, a significant portion of society continues to view inter-caste unions with skepticism or outright disapproval. These attitudes are shaped by the longstanding association of caste with identity, social status, and community belonging.

In many communities, marriage is not merely a personal choice but a social institution that involves the collective interests of the family and caste group. Inter-caste marriages are often perceived as a threat to social order, as they challenge the established norms of endogamy and hierarchy. As a result, families may resist such unions to preserve their social standing and avoid criticism from relatives and community members.

However, there is a gradual shift in attitudes, particularly among younger generations and urban populations. Increased access to education, exposure to diverse cultures, and the influence of media have contributed to more liberal perspectives. Many young individuals now prioritize compatibility, mutual respect, and personal choice over caste considerations. Social media platforms and changing lifestyles have further facilitated interactions across caste boundaries, fostering acceptance to some extent.

Gender also plays a crucial role in shaping attitudes. Inter-caste marriages involving women often face greater opposition due to patriarchal norms that emphasize control over women's choices and sexuality. Additionally, marriages involving lower-caste partners, especially

when the male belongs to a lower caste, tend to attract stronger resistance due to perceived threats to social hierarchy.

Overall, societal attitudes toward inter-caste marriages in Uttar Pradesh are characterized by a duality-while traditional views continue to dominate, especially in rural areas, progressive attitudes are gradually emerging, indicating a slow but ongoing transformation in social consciousness.

3. Forms of Resistance Faced by Inter-Caste Couples

Inter-caste couples in Uttar Pradesh often encounter multiple forms of resistance that reflect the deep-rooted nature of caste-based social norms. This resistance can manifest at various levels, including family, community, and institutional structures, creating significant challenges for couples who choose to marry outside their caste.

The most immediate and intense form of resistance typically comes from the family. Parents and relatives may oppose inter-caste marriages due to concerns about social honor, cultural compatibility, and fear of societal backlash. In many cases, couples face emotional pressure, threats, and even physical confinement to prevent them from proceeding with the marriage. Women, in particular, are more vulnerable to such coercion due to patriarchal control over their decisions.

At the community level, resistance is often enforced through social sanctions and collective actions. Caste panchayats or local community groups may impose penalties such as social boycott, exclusion from community events, and economic restrictions on families that support inter-caste marriages. These measures are intended to discourage others from defying traditional norms and to maintain social conformity.

In extreme cases, resistance can take violent forms, including harassment, assault, and honour killings. Such acts are driven by the belief that inter-caste marriages bring dishonor to the family and community. Although legal protections exist, the implementation of these laws is often inconsistent, and victims may face difficulties in seeking justice.

Institutional challenges also contribute to resistance. Couples may encounter bureaucratic hurdles in registering their marriages or obtaining protection from authorities. Lack of awareness about legal rights and support systems further exacerbates their vulnerability.

Despite these challenges, many inter-caste couples continue to assert their rights, supported by legal frameworks, civil society organizations, and changing social attitudes. Understanding these forms of resistance is crucial for developing effective policies and interventions aimed at promoting social equality and protecting individual freedoms.

VIII. Findings

The study highlights the following key findings: Inter-caste marriage is increasing but remains socially contested. Acceptance is higher in urban and educated settings. Resistance is strongest in rural areas and among dominant castes. Women bear disproportionate social and physical costs. Legal measures alone are insufficient without broader social change.

IX. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Conclusion: Inter-caste marriage in Uttar Pradesh represents a critical site of struggle between tradition and modernity. While such marriages signal gradual social transformation and challenge caste hierarchies, persistent resistance reveals the deep-rooted nature of caste and patriarchy. True acceptance of inter-caste marriage requires not only legal protection but also changes in social attitudes, education, and community structures. As Ambedkar emphasized, dismantling caste requires breaking its foundation—endogamous marriage—and inter-caste unions remain central to this process.

Suggestions: Inter-caste marriage in Uttar Pradesh represents a significant marker of social transformation within a traditionally stratified society. Rooted in the rigid framework of caste hierarchy, matrimonial alliances have historically reinforced social boundaries and preserved status quo. However, in recent decades, factors such as urbanization, education, economic mobility, and increased exposure to modern values have contributed to a gradual shift in attitudes toward inter-caste unions.

From a sociological perspective, inter-caste marriage can be viewed as an instrument of social change, challenging deep-seated norms of purity, hierarchy, and endogamy. It reflects the growing assertion of individual choice over collective authority, particularly among younger generations. The influence of legal provisions and state support schemes has also played a role in encouraging such marriages, thereby promoting ideals of equality and social integration.

Despite these progressive trends, resistance to inter-caste marriage remains strong, especially in rural areas of Uttar Pradesh. Family pressure, community sanctions, and in extreme cases, violence such as honour killings continue to pose serious challenges. Caste panchayats and local power structures often act as custodians of tradition, reinforcing social conformity and discouraging deviation from established norms.

The coexistence of change and resistance highlights the complex nature of social transformation in Indian society. While inter-caste marriages signify a move towards a more egalitarian social order, persistent opposition underscores the resilience of traditional values

and social control mechanisms. Therefore, a comprehensive sociological study must examine both enabling factors and barriers, including gender dynamics, regional variations, and the role of policy interventions. In conclusion, inter-caste marriage in Uttar Pradesh serves as both a catalyst for and a reflection of ongoing social change, while simultaneously revealing the enduring tensions between modernity and tradition.

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