

‘COURTSHIP AND MARRIAGE AMONG INTERMARRIED COUPLES IN NEPAL’

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ABSTRACT

The present paper examine the courtship and marriage among intermarried couples in Nepal. The study focuses on how the intimacy was developed? What were the factors that attracted toward each other? How long courtship lasted? What types of marriage respondents had?. The study was conducted in Kathmandu valley. The valley includes three districts that are, Kathmandu, Lalitpur and Bhaktapur district. Information was collected from 210 women who were in intermarriage by using snowball technique. In the study, it is found that most of the couples met each other through common friends. 28.57 per cent of the couples’s courtship lasted for two years and above before marriage and 54.76 per cent of the couples had marriage by elopement.

Keywords: intermarriage, courtship, couples, marriage, Nepal.

INTRODUCTION

Marriage is an important life event to the people of Nepal. It is not only a union of two individuals but of two families, their caste, religion and culture. Nepal is a country with multi-ethnic groups, religions, castes and culture; therefore, different forms of marriages are in practiced. The different forms of marriages are arranged marriage, preferred marriage, elopement marriage, capture marriage, forced marriage, exchange marriage etc (Bista 1965; Majupurias 2009; Subedi 2010). Arranged marriage is the most common form of marriage where parents have different consideration in selecting mates for their children (Ahuja 1993). Mate selection is an important process, but societies around the world differ considerably in how they negotiate the marriage. Most of the Asian countries including Nepal do not have the open courtship systems that are common in western countries. Instead many factors such as caste, religion, income, values promote traditional mate selections (Benokraitis 2014). Therefore, young men and women have very little freedom in selecting partners for them and expected to marry within their own castes and religions. Moreover, in Nepali societies endogamy is the common practice

therefore marriage is always seen in terms of prescriptions, preferences, proscriptions and taboos (Sharma 2007).

The process of mate selection and marriage practically vary from one ethnic group to another and different rules are in vogue for different communities according to their own traditions (Majupurias 2009). Among the Hindu high castes Brahmins and Chhetries arranged marriage is the norm and it is the responsibilities of the parents to negotiate and finalized marriage. The youths of these castes have rare opportunity to involve in a courtship process. On the other hand, the institution of courtship is unique among the various ethnic groups of Nepal. In Limbu caste the institution of courtship known as *dhan nach* (rice dance) is common. It provides potential marriage partners an opportunity to exercise freedom of choice in the selection of partner (Jones 1977). Similarly, the institution of *rodi* is found among Gurungs. A *rodi* is an association of young boys and girls, who gather in the evenings for entertainment, mostly dancing and singing. The main purposes of *rodi* are recreation and pre-marital socialization which sometime lead to marriage (Messerchmidt 1976). Although, *dhan nach* and *rodi* provide opportunity to young boys and girls to developed friendship but limit the area of selection. Despite this young boys and girls are getting more involved in choosing their partners however parents are reluctant to surrender complete authority. Thus, parents continue to play important roles in the marriage decisions of their children in Nepal (Vidya 2008).

Nepal is undergoing social and economic change including an increase in formal education, wage work, government services, mass communication and transportation, infrastructure and exposure to outer world. These changes have dramatic impact on the family, age at marriage, individual choices in marriage behavior especially with regards to participation in spouse choice, late marriage, intermarriage and divorce (Gupta 1996; Allendorf and Ghimire 2012). The educational institutions, work places, mass communication and transportation, exposure to foreign countries make possible to come into contact with people of different places, castes, religions and nations. This help to developed pre-marriage friendship and courtship between two individuals of different backgrounds resulting into intermarriage i.e. marriage between people of different backgrounds such as race/ethnic, religions, castes or other differences. Bambawala (1977) classifies four types of intermarriage

1. Inter-racial/ethnic marriage is the marriage between people of different races or ethnic groups.
2. Inter-religious marriage is the marriage between people belonging to different religion.
3. Inter-caste marriage is the marriage between people of different caste.
4. Inter-national marriage is the marriage between people of different nationalities.

In the light of above discussion present paper focuses on the pre-marriage contact (courtship) and marriage among the intermarried couples in Nepal.

METHOD OF RESEARCH

The present study is descriptive in nature. It was conducted in the Kathmandu valley. Kathmandu valley is comprised of the three districts i.e. Kathmandu, Lalitpur and Bhaktapur districts. The universe of the study was women who were in intermarriages. For the proposed study 210 women who were in intermarriages were selected by snowball technique. Data were collected from the respondents with the help of pre-tested interview schedule.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

To understand the background of the respondents' socio- economic and demographic variables such as: age, caste, religion, education, occupation, family income and types of family organization were analyzed

Table 1: Socio-economic and demographic profile of the respondents

S.No	Characteristics	Husband	Wife
	Age (at present)		
1	15-24	20 (9.52)	42 (20.00)
2	25-34	96 (45.72)	105 (50.00)
3	35-44	56 (26.67)	40 (19.04)
4	44and above	38 (18.09)	23 (10.95)
	Totals	210 (100)	210 (100)
	Caste		
1	Upper caste	68 (32.38)	65 (30.95)
2	Janajati	132 (62.86)	137 (65.24)
3	Lower caste	6 (2.86)	6 (2.86)
4	Foreigners	4 (1.90)	2 (0.95)
	Total	210 (100)	210 (100)
	Religion		
1	Hindu	154(73.34)	139 (66.19)
2	Buddhist	31 (14.76)	45 (21.43)
3	Christian	15 (7.14)	21(10.00)
4	Other religion	10 (4.76)	5(2.38)

	Total	210(100)	210(100)
	Education		
1	Illiterate	12(5.71)	27(12.86)
2	Up to primary	48(22.86)	48(22.86)
3	Up to 10 th	53(25.24)	55(26.19)
4	Up to 12 th	37(17.62)	39(18.57)
5	Graduation and above	60(28.57)	41(19.52)
	Total	210(100)	210(100)
	Occupation		
1	Housewife	-	120(57.14)
2	Private job	53(25.24)	27(12.86)
3	Government job	28(13.33)	-
4	Working abroad	40(19.04)	2(0.95)
5	Business	56(26.67)	31(14.76)
6	Other occupation	26(12.38)	29(13.81)
7	Not applicable	7(3.34)	1(0.48)
	Total	(210)100	210(100)
	Income (in NRS)		
1	Up to 20,000	44(20.95)	
2	20,000-40,000	64(3.48)	
3	40,000-60,000	49(23.33)	
4	60,000 and above	53(25.24)	
	Total	210(100)	
	Types of family		
1	Nuclear	143(68.09)	
2	Extended	11 (5.24)	
3	Joint	56 (26.67)	
	Total	210 (100)	

Percentages are given in the parentheses

Table 1 reveals that 50 per cent of the respondents were between the age group 25-34 years as compared to 45.72 per cent of the respondents' husbands. As far as caste is concerned majority

of the respondents and their husbands were from *janajati* caste i.e. 62.86 per cent and 65.24 per cent respectively. Furthermore, majority of the respondents (66.19 per cent) and their husbands (73.34 per cent) were Hindus. Table also shows that level of education is higher among respondents' husbands as compared to respondents. Majority of the respondents were housewives while most of the respondents' husbands were engaged in business. Moreover study found that 30.48 per cent of the respondents had monthly income between 20,000-40,000 and live in nuclear families.

Table 2: How respondents came to know each other?

Categories	No of Respondents	Percentage
Study together	37	17.62
Through friends	38	18.09
Through family or relatives	23	10.96
Neighbors	36	17.14
Working together	26	12.38
Internet/ phone	17	8.09
Other places	33	15.72
Total	210	100

Table 2 depicts that, 17.62 per cent of the respondents met their partners while studying together while 18.09 per cent of the respondents knew each other through their common friends. 10.96 per cent of the respondents met their partners through their family members or relatives like siblings, cousins, uncles and aunties, etc. whereas 17.14 per cent of the respondents were neighbors. 12.38 per cent of the respondents met while working together. Only 8.09 per cent of the respondents knew each other through Internet/Phone. 15.72 per cent of the respondents met at other places like; religious centers, music classes, marriages etc. From the table it is found that, most of the respondents met their partners through common friends.

Table 3: Factors that attracted couples

Factors	No. of the respondents	Percentage
Love	55	26.19
Personal qualities	118	56.19
Other factors	37	17.62
Total	210	100

Table 3 shows that, 26.19 per cent of the respondents considered love as the main factor that attracted them toward their partners while 56.19 per cent of the respondents were attracted toward their partners because of their personal qualities. Further, 17.62 per cent of the respondents were attracted toward their partners by the other factors such as socio-economic status, likeness of other caste and culture, companionship etc. From the above table it is revealed that, personal qualities are the main factor that attracted respondents toward their partners.

Table 4: Duration of friendship before marriage

Duration of friendship before marriage	No of Respondents	Percentage
Less than month	16	7.62
1-6 months	36	17.14
6 months – 1 year	48	22.86
2-3 years	50	23.81
4 years and Above	60	28.57
Total	210	100

Table 4 shows that, 7.62 per cent of the respondents married their partners within a month of knowing each other. 17.14 per cent of the respondents knew their partners for 1-6 months before marriage. 22.86 per cent of the respondents knew their partners for 6 months to 1 year. 23.81 per cent of respondents and their partners were friends for 2-3 years. 28.57 per cent of the

respondents knew their partners more than 4 years. From the table it can be concluded that, respondent’s courtship mostly lasted for four years and above before marriage.

Table 5: Was friendship known to their parents?

Categories	No of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	106	50.48
No	104	49.52
Total	210	100

Table 5 shows that, 50.48 per cent of the respondents’ families knew about their friendship prior to marriage whereas 49.52 per cent of the respondents’ families did not know about them. Despite knowing about their relationship by the parents the respondents were compelled to run away because of the caste and culture differences. On this ground one of the respondent’s states, *“in our society it is impossible to come with proposal for khatri girl by a Rai boy because of caste and culture difference. As society will not permit so, it was better option to run away”*.

Table 6: Types of marriage

Types of marriages	No. of Respondents	Percentage
With the consent of parents	69	32.86
Elopement	115	54.76
Other type	26	12.38
Total	210	100

From the table 6 it is clear that 54.76 per cent of the respondents had marriage by elopement followed by marriage with the consent of the parents (32.86 per cent) and other type of marriage (12.38 per cent). The other type of marriage include marriage with the consent of husband’s parents, with the consent of wife’s parents, arranged by parents or children, arranged by political party and by force. Thus it is revealed that, majority of the respondents had marriage by elopement despite their families knew about their friendship. Elopement marriage is not always intermarriage. It can also be within caste (Nepali 1965).

Table 7: Patterns of intermarriage

Husband	Wife	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Upper caste	<i>Janajati</i>	51	24.29
<i>Janajati</i>	Upper caste	50	23.81
<i>Janajati</i>	<i>Janajati</i>	83	39.52
Other	Other	26	12.38
Total		210	100

Table 7 shows that, 24.29 per cent of upper caste males had married *janajati* females and 23.81 per cent of *janajati* males had married to upper caste females. 39.52 per cent of marriage was contracted between *janajati* males and *janajati* females while 12.38 per cent of the respondents were from other categories. This category includes the marriage between upper caste males and upper caste females (3.80 per cent), upper caste males and *dalit* females (0.45 per cent), *janajati* males married to *dalit* females (2.38 per cent), *dalit* males married to upper caste females (0.45per cent), *dalit* males married to *janajati* females (1.42 per cent), foreign males married to Nepali females (1.90 per cent), Nepali males married to foreign females (0.95per cent), *dalit* males married to Muslim females (0.95 per cent). Above table reveals that, majority of the intermarriages were between *janajati* males and *janajati* females as compared to other castes.

Table 8: Types of intermarriage

Categories	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Hypergamy	116	55.24
Hypogamy	94	44.76
Total	210	100

Table 8 shows that, 55.24 per cent of marriages were hypergamous marriages while 44.76 per cent of marriages were hypogamous marriages.

Table 9: Religion after marriage

Religion (After Marriage)	Husband		Wife	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Follow Same Religion	183	87.14	149	70.95
Adopted Husband/Wife Religion	7	3.34	17	8.09
Follow Both Religion	10	4.76	28	13.34
Follow New Religion	10	4.76	16	7.62
Total	210	100	210	100

Table 9 highlights that, 70.95 per cent of the respondents and 87.14 per cent of the respondents' husbands follow their own religion after marriage. On the other hand, 8.09 per cent of the respondents and 3.34 per cent of the respondents' husband' had adopted their partner's religion. 13.34 per cent of the respondents and 4.76 per cent of the respondents' husbands follow both religions and 7.62 per cent of the respondents and 4.76 per cent of the respondents' husbands follow new religion after marriage. Above table reveals that, majority of the women have made adjustment to their religion after marriage.

Table 10: Intermarriages in family

Intermarriages in the family	No of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	132	62.86
No	78	37.14
Total	210	100

Table 10 shows that, 62.86 per cent of the respondents had intermarriages in their families as compared to 37.14 per cent of the respondents who did not have intermarriages in their family.

Table 11: Is there any change in relationships with parents and other family members after intermarriage?

Categories	No. of the respondents	Percentage
Yes	50	23.81
No	160	76.19
Total	210	100

Table 11 reveals that, 23.81 per cent of the respondents' relationship with their parents and other family members had changed after intermarriage whereas 76.19 per cent of the respondents did not have any change in their relationship after intermarriage.

CONCLUSION

The present paper deals with the courtship and marriage among intermarried couples in Nepal. As far as socio economic and demographic profile of the respondents is concerned, it is found that exactly half (50 per cent) of the respondents were between the age group of 25-34 years while 45.72 per cent of the respondents husbands were in this age group. As far as caste is concerned majority of the respondents and their husbands were from *janajati* caste. Furthermore, majority of the respondents and their husbands were Hindus. Table also shows that level of education is higher among respondents' husbands as compared to respondents. Majority of the respondents were housewives while most of the respondents' husbands were engaged in business. Moreover study found that most of the respondents had monthly income between 20,000-40,000 and live in nuclear families.

Furthermore, study reveals that most of the respondents met their partners through common friends and personal qualities are the main factor that attracted them toward each other. It is also found that, respondent's courtship mostly lasted for four years and above before marriage. It is interesting to know that majority of the respondents families knew about their friendship prior to marriage, despite this majority of the respondents had marriage by elopement. Study also highlights that, large number of intermarriage was between *janajati* males and *janajati* females as compared to other castes. As far as types of intermarriage is concerned majority of the marriages were hypergamous. Further study depicts that, most of the women had made adjustment to their religion after marriage. Biswakarma (2013) opines that, intermarriage in the family is also a motivating factor to go beyond the caste and religion barrier. Thus, majority of the respondents had intermarriages in their families. At the end it is also found that,

intermarriage did not affect the relationship of the respondents with their parents and other family members. Thus, study found that families are accepting intermarriage in Nepal.

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