Unraveling the Changing Dynamics of Mate Selection in 21st Century:
A Content Analysis in Indian Perspective

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Background of the study

Beginning with the early nineteenth century and continuing to the present day a lot of changes have been taken place in the family formation and family values due to the modernization and industrialization. Modernization theory, according to Inkeles (1998), identifies four forces that induce societal change: (1) technological changes; (2) ecological changes, such as urbanization; (3) changes in the governance and institutions, such as laws; and (4) changes in the norms and values, such as greater individualism.

Modernization theory has another relevant dynamic process: *Convergence.* That is, as nations become more 'modernized', primarily because of increasing industrialization and affluence, they tend to converge in terms of these types of changes in production and consumption, ecology, social institutions, and values. With increasing economic level and industrialization, countries reject traditional values and traditional culture, and all countries inevitably converge toward a system of 'modern' values and increasing individualism.

There is substantial impact of these developments on the social institutions and the institution of marriage is not left unaffected of these societal changes. The twentieth century has witnessed of these changes than any previous century in the history of human species. The process of industrialization, urbanization, and secularization brought a lot of socio-psychological changes in the attitude and values of the people. The transmission of values, status and behaviours from one generation to the next were a central theme of concern to family sociologists over the last half century, but, these values appeared to be feeble and the context, like marriage, gradually became somewhat more personalized (Biblarz *et al.* 1996). Not only the changes in values and attitude were noticed, but the society also experienced the changes in the process of mate selection itself. Several researchers have argued that, although, tradition remains strong but the changes are underway in certain more urbanized and more educated population sub-groups (Gupta 1979, Lindenbaum 1981). Now there may be less control of parents in the decision of marriage of their children and there is more involvement of individuals in the finalization of their marriages.

Apart from that, one more change that has emerged in the process of selection is the choice of partner outside the known set of connections. Usually, the selection of mate was based on the informal spreading of words to the close relatives, neighbors, and friends and selection was restricted within the known network. But now, the recent technological developments, especially in urban areas, made young people able to select suitable mate outside their network. The matrimonial advertisements and matrimonial websites are providing plenty of choices to young people. Not only the children but also their parents are taking advantage of these developments and trying to utilize them while selecting a partner for their children. Some individuals also want to break away from tradition and marry out of caste and religion (FPAI, SCERT 1993, Sachdev 1997).

Along with the changing meaning of marriage and recognition of individuals with their own needs and expectations, there is a definite change in the definition of an ideal marriage partner too. Generally, social scientists have emphasized that the elements of race, ethnicity, religion, socio-economic status, age and personality characteristics strongly influence the choice of marriage partner. But present situation exhibit that once an individual becomes self decision maker or once he/ she gets well education and employment, there is less involvement of traditional and cultural factors and in such a case there could not be much difference in the process of selection as well as in the preferred characteristics of the prospective mate across different subgroup of the population because individuals start behaving in almost similar manner.

In India, till now, most of the studies on marriage were focused on levels, trends and differentials in age at marriage with the help of census or survey data. A very little amount of research has been carried out to explore the changing dynamics of mate selection. The paucity of information in this regard is one of the important reasons in this regard. However, it is important to discover that *what are the changes that are taking place in the present marriage market, who are making more use of the recent developments available in the marriage market in search of suitable partners, and whether there is any large differential in the preferred characteristics in the prospective mate across different group of population or not* after such type of changes in the society. This paper is an attempt in this direction and tries to test the hypothesis that along with the modernization, traditional roles are becoming a little weak and preferences in prospective mate are converging (almost similar), irrespective of socio-cultural background.

Data and methods

It is very difficult to test this hypothesis with the available census or survey data because they do not cover this aspect of union formation. In the absence of reliable data, the present study would like to use the data from classified matrimonial advertisements form the world's highest circulated newspaper daily- The Times of India to see the changes in present marriage market with the advent of modernization.

For our purpose we would like to gather the information from the authentic and reproducible classified data from the Times of India publications (Largest selling English news paper daily in the world in terms of circulation from India). The matrimonial advertisement data columns collected from January 2007 to June 2007 will form the basis of our research. We will focus only on the recent data in order to overcome the problem of representative ness because the volumes of classified data vary greatly over the years. We have also tried to capture the information for both prospective bridegrooms and brides across all the cultures and regions. In order to justify some of the results, we will try to get some qualitative data, collected from the field on the same issues, from some other surveys.

The present paper is new in the senesce that very little exploration is done on this issue using such type of matrimonial advertisement data. It will definitely give the fresh insight into the present marriage market and will unravel the changing dynamics of mate selection in 21st century.

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