

Inter-Caste Marriages in Tamil Nadu before and after 69% Reservation Policy (1990)

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ABSTRACT

All the caste-based discriminations in Indian society are mainly due to the practice of endogamy within the caste, which is an excellent blockage to social development as well as to establishing an egalitarian society. As in other states of South India, marriage within the caste is believed to be a sacred institution in Tamil Nadu, and hence, inter-caste marriages that can eradicate caste discrimination seem to be taboo in the view of many people. Incidence of such inter-caste marriages was very low before the enforcement of 69% reservation in this state, but it doubled within 33 years after that policy. The socio-economic and educational uplifts of deprived caste groups (BC, MBC/DNC, SC and ST) due to the implementation of this policy are behind this increase in the proportion of inter-caste marriages in recent years. The rate of inter-caste marriages has increased from 1.9% in 1990 to 3.8% in 2023, indicating society's upward mobility towards classlessness. Inter-caste marriages are more predominant among educated middle-class people in urban settlements than among poor people living in rural areas. Though the governmental schemes and legislations are in favour of out-caste marriages, in some cases, the boys and girls who attempt to follow inter-caste marriages are hacked to death by their parents or caste associations. This paper investigates the status of inter-caste marriages in Tamil Nadu before and after the 69% reservation policy.

Keywords: *Inter-Caste marriage, education, reservation policy, Tamil Nadu.*

Introduction

As confessed by Dr Ambedkar, the marital relationship between two different castes is considered the foremost system of insurrection that can bring social integration among people in society. In contrast to the usual marriage system, that has been a sacred event firmly rooted in the social culture of villages and towns wherein this seems to be the prime impressive family ceremony taking place in the presence of kindred, friends, and members of the caste in the locality, the society does not give much emphasis to inter-caste marriages as they have created some tensions that lead now and then conflicts between the members of both families or between both castes.¹ Whilst the traditional marriage is a happy family observance, which involves traditional practices unique to the caste and a ceremonial feast at the end, for all who have attended the function, and the members of the family as well as of caste cooperate with the couple in quite a few ways. Still, in inter-caste marriages, there are no such rituals in most incidents, and even the members of the family show some hatred towards the newlywed couple.² Marriage within the same caste is believed to be a cooperation between two families and thereby the entire caste in the village, which has been considered to be a social act instead of considering it a private act; on the other hand, inter-caste marriages, most of which have happened because of the desire of love, are not at all considered to be ideal marriage by the people of either caste. In most circumstances, inter-caste marriages have not been accepted as a domain of marriage because, here, two individuals contradict the foundations of the marriage rule of the society.³ Though this idea is to be deserted while attempting to establish an egalitarian society, one thing is true: inter-caste marriages cannot preserve the sense of common ancestors for the caste. Hence, the actual Hindu Notion would call a halt.⁴ The inter-caste marriages, for their part, violate the patriarchic society that

has more orientation towards men in maintaining caste purity, family status and power than the women, so the men-dominance that has been in the family and kinship would be altered very much. In this context, the Bhagavad Gita says that if anyone fails to get a proper match for their woman (daughters), lawless outcomes appear in his family, due to which the women would be corrupted. Hence, confusion about Varna arises, and because of this (confusion) the spoilers of the family and their ancestors fall and are deprived of pandas and libations, and they will dwell in hell forever.⁵ Instead of granting strength and recognition, inter-caste marriages lead to change and disturbances in the family situations within the clan, so there has been continuous resistance to such marriages in families, even if the Hindu Marriage Validity Act of 1949 legalizes inter-caste marriages throughout India. This is the reason why there has been constant resistance to inter-caste marriages in society and why there have been conflicts between the laws and customs regarding such marriages.

Social Transformation Towards Egalitarian Society

The political thinkers, for their part, seemed to find pretexts for caste hierarchy in India and for blunting the strict boundary of castes being retained forever. Only endogamy has retained the strict boundaries of every caste in society. If an egalitarian society has to be established, the endogamy of castes that have been in practice for thousands of years should be broken. Mobility between castes should be encouraged through inter-caste marriages. The meaning here is that the higher the proportion of inter-caste marriage, the higher the rate of change toward a democratic society. Because the inter-caste marriage has brought suitable genetic variations in children with more astuteness and reasoning, Sanjel (2013) says that exogamy is of better value for mankind not only from the genetic point of view but also from the economic point of view by mobilising upward or downward in the social stratification in the society.⁶ Acharya (2018), while discussing inter-caste marriage, argues that when a high-caste man marries a low-caste woman (Anuloma), and when a low-caste man marries a low-caste woman (Pratiloma), there have been many transitions in the occupations, wealth and prestige of the family.⁷ In the opinion of Kansakar and Ghimire (2008), in Western countries wherein individuals take precedence over family due to their freedom of thought, choice marriage is the usual norm. Still, in countries like India, Pakistan and Srilanka, this has not been sanctioned easily because there is strict endogamy in the caste system.⁸ Luintel (2018) suggests that marriage outside is feasible only when the boy and girl fall in love with each other and their minds can overcome the boundary of caste line to face all odds and stigma from society. Though such marriages occur by chance, choosing one's life partner is further influenced by their urban residence, higher education, good occupation, and middle-class economy.⁹ Winnie Joyee (2022) affirms that the reasons for the higher proportion of inter-caste marriage in recent years are the social situations like the groom's demand for a heavy dowry, low economic status of the bride's parents, and modern education supporting them to get good paying jobs,¹⁰ which make the people to stay away from their endogamous marriage within their caste and enable them to choose an alternative that is easy for their family conditions.¹¹ Therefore, even if not desired by many conservative families, no one in the society has protested against it.

While inter-caste marriage seems to be anonymous for many people who believe that this has been a demolition of caste boundaries in society, some others do not bother about it and are ready to endorse such marriages that happen in their vicinity. History has shown us that for a long time, inter-caste marriage had been almost a neglected thing that would defame the couple's families as the society itself had protested its continuance forever. Still, people's attitudes have gradually changed to accept it as if nothing is grave in it. All who think like us suggest that inter-caste marriages seem to be unavoidable if the boy and girl in love have compatibility and their co-existence has not been an issue as they can break the myth and taboo without much hindrance. The inter-caste marriage thus renders itself guilty of a double weakness of honour killing in rural areas, though such incidents are fewer in urban areas, and of showing the vexation that it granted to them grudgingly. It cuts the couple off from the arena of family unison because two individuals who have different faiths and cultures cannot co-exist in a house. However, this revolutionary torrent would, in all probability, bring some mobility between the castes to blur the strict caste boundaries in society.

As to the fighting part of this struggle to reduce social prejudice, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar realized that social segregation, which has created difficulties in achieving Constitutional liberty, equality, and fraternity between the castes, is stabilized in the society by the practice of endogamy, and that inter-caste marriage is a suitable step to reduce caste-prejudice and untouchability issues and to spread the value of liberty, equity, and fraternity in the society.¹² According to him, since endogamy is the foundation on which the caste system stands, if marrying

within one's caste is attacked, the entire caste system will be smashed down; the right way to achieve this is inter-caste marriage, which alone can win over the fortified castle of castes in the society.¹³ Further, in the opinion of Ambedkar, the caste system of India cannot be eradicated through constitutional measures alone because it is deeply rooted in the psychological state of people. Hence, inter-caste marriage is the proper remedy to eradicate the caste system, without which no one will stop the evil of untouchability, inequity and discriminations based on castes.¹⁴ Swami Dhayananda Saraswathi, Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Basavanna also have the outlook that inter-caste marriage is the right choice to remove caste biases, prejudices, untouchability, and all kinds of discriminations from people's minds because the two individuals brought together by wedlock, would feel the pettiness of life beyond their caste and their family, will then try to accept their otherwise improper alliance.¹⁵ Some Dalits of Tirunelveli district state that the two individuals tied together by inter-caste marriage will feel a psychologically clean status even before their marital union and hence they will live long happily,¹⁶ but the media, which is under the control of dominant castes are propagating the concern that this is an evil intention of the couple to deprive their caste and that this life will not be a successful one.¹⁷

Unlikely Consequences

The essentiality of inter-caste marriage may be far more favourable than it can be expected from marriage within the same caste in the egalitarian point of view, as Dr Ambedkar believes in. The Dalits have taken up arms on its behalf. However, high-caste people everywhere are hesitating to follow this as they have visualized the dreadful consequences of inter-caste marriages in their vicinity. While Dalits are prostrated by the government's advances in promoting inter-caste marriages through the Special Marriage Act of 1954, the high-caste people who have been the real sufferers think that such marriages would bring many problems in their social institutions.¹⁸

The great body of conservative members in high castes, aware of the turn things centred on inter-caste marriage, are hesitating to follow this because if they allow their elder daughter or son to marry from an inferior caste, the marriage of the younger daughter or son would be put into a remote horizon as there has been many struggles to find a matching partner who has accepting exogamy of the elder of his/her spouse. On several occasions, owing to the inter-caste marriage of elder brother, the marriage of his younger sister or brother is delayed for many years; in some instances, nothing about the inter-caste marriage of elder brother or sister has been told to the family from which bride or groom has to be chosen because of guilty and insult in the attitude of the elder. It is often said that many people have sacrificed their love and inter-caste marriage for the well-being of their younger sister or brother; the guilty insult feeling behind the inter-caste marriage is far from being an individual's reaction under normal circumstances. Each caste is an ethnic group characterized by a unique lifestyle, traditions, customs, food habits, and other behaviours, and hence, the two individuals bound together by wedlock have to adjust to one another and compromise their feelings of all habits to lead their family life; in addition to this, the husband and wife have to compromise with other members of the family to lead the casual life because parents and other members of the family have confident expectation all the time. They wanted their children to listen to them. If there is an infringement in anything relevant to this, aversions arise among the family members, ending in disparity and dismay. It is natural that, keeping their safety in mind, many parents think that their son/daughter has chosen inter-caste marriage due to the wrong decision, which may be true, and conveys their children not to do inter-caste marriage, which is rather defaming their caste unison. When such parental opposition arises in the family, the son/daughter who cannot agree with their parents gets away from the family to marry the person who is supposedly to be the spouse, which is again a defame of the family and the entire family is hurt when such marriage has occurred against the yearnings of the family.

Srinivasan and James (2015), after insightful inquiry, at last, came to a decision that inter-caste marriages are abhorred by the refusal of authorities of the caste institutions,¹⁹ in support of which Banerji et al. (2013) argue that arranged marriages are preferred over the other modes of weddings in the society.²⁰ Abstain from this, especially inter-caste marriage, is dismaying and considered to be an insult to this family, on the ground that the sinners of the family (inter-caste couple) do not participate in social functions like marriages, village festivals, cultural festivals and the like.²¹ This sort of family stigmatization is noted in several areas of Tamil Nadu immediately after the inter-caste marriage. However, sooner or later, this trend is discontinued so that the family members have started to take part in all kinds of social gatherings as usual.²² Regarding the caste dominance in inter-caste marriage, Desai and Andrist (201) mention that upper caste wife has dominated her low-caste husband and his parents in the house, because of which she is rejected by the family members and even by her husband

during the post-nuptial life, and because of this reason many low caste parents do not permit their son or daughter to marry high caste spouse.²³ In many families, children after their inter-caste marriage leave their parents and lead independent lives somewhere away from their residence, which is an implausible consequence of such marriages in houses wherein the parents do not allow their children to do this marriage and the children are against the cravings of the parents in the matter of their marriage.

Historical Lines of Inter-caste Marriage in Tamil Nadu

Historians have proved that during the Sangam Era (300 BC-300 CE), the marriage system in Tamilakam was, as confessed by Thamizhachi Thangapandian, based only on endogamy that permitted marriage between the members of the same caste²⁴ and inter-caste marriage, if happened somewhere unfortunately, was considered to be a wrong-doing for the execution of which the village administrator or the King punished the couple. The same trend continued during the post-Sangam era (300-500CE), and Kalabhra interregnum and the reign of Pallavas (275-879 CE). When the Bhakti movement emerged during the 7th-9th century, the Saiva and Vaishnavite saints had delivered their teaching among the people that caste discrimination is a wrong-doing on whatever ground because God created all of us equally from Himself and has maintained us without disparity and we all will be absorbed again into Him; therefore, the concern of caste disparity will be an inhumane practice. The earliest attempt at inter-caste marriage, as recorded in Tamil literature, was made by the ruler *Narasimha* Pallava (630-668CE), who loved the artisan caste girl *Sivakami* without caste disparity. Still, their marriage was not accepted by his father, *Mahendravarman I*, because that girl belonged to an inferior caste and their marriage, if it happened, would be a sin to the royal blood. Another evidence of inter-caste marriage comes from the Chola dynasty wherein the princess *Kundavai* – the elder sister of the king *Rajaraja I* (947-1014 CE) – fell in love with the *Vanniya* (SC) soldier “*Vandhiyadevan*”, and then they got married and lived as husband and wife.²⁵ It is said that *Rajendra Chola I* (1012-1044 CE) had married *Tribhuvana Mahadeviyar*, who was a Devadhasi girl attached to a Siva temple in Tanjur and carried her in a car in a procession all through his country, which is another example of inter-caste marriage in Tamilakam. The story of *Amaravathi*, who was the daughter of *Kulothunga Chola II* (1133-1150CE) of *Gangaikonda Cholapuram*, is another legend concerned with inter-caste love issue, in which the princess *Amaravathi* was in love with the poet *Ambikapathi* who was the son of poet *Kambar* - a member of *Occhan* caste (a scheduled caste) in Mayiladudurai district of Tamil Nadu; their marriage was denied by the King only because the *Kambar*’s son was a *Dalit* and not a king equal to him, and hence he ordered to slaughter *Ambikapathi* to death. The folktale of *Ambikapathi-Amarapathi* has reached the minds of almost all the people of Tamil Nadu as it was the well-popular incident of honour killing that happened here because of the affair of inter-caste love in the 12th century.

Another incident of inter-caste marriage that has been popular folklore among the public is the story of *Madurai Veeran*, who was a contemporary of *Thirumalai Nayaka* (1584-1959 CE) who ruled Madurai country during 1623-1659CE.²⁶ *Madurai Veeran* was born to a Chemman couple (*Arunthaiyar*) and loved *Bommi*, who was a daughter of the King *Bommanan* (a playwright in the Salem area), in consequence of which *Bommanan* attempted to kill *Madurai Veeran* and hence the couple took refuge in *Tiruchirappalli* that a *Chola King* ruled.²⁷ Having married *Bommi*, *Veeran* again married *Vellaiyamma*, who was a court dancer with whom *Thirumalai Nayak* had some affair; as revenge for it, the King ordered to kill *Madurai Veeran* by slaying his left hand and right leg. *Madurai Veeran* has been worshipped as a village deity in many places in the *Madurai*, *Virudhunagar*, *Salem*, *Nammakkal*, and *Ramnad* districts of Tamil Nadu. The Colonial Government did not attempt to change the tradition of marriage that had been the rule for thousands of years, so the age-old system had been in practice till *E.V. Ramasamy* started the self-respect movement to reform the society with the light of Western knowledge and awareness of human rights among the people. In the meantime, the colonial rulers did not control Europeans who attempted to marry Indian Women while staying in India, which was a menace at that time.

By the Special Marriage Act of 1882, the India Government under British authority had legalized marriages between different castes and between different religious sects in India while giving provisions for traditional marriage systems that were followed for hundreds of years; this act, however, instead of encouraging inter-caste marriages, had accepted the marriages as such without denial. In Tamil Nadu, the effort of *E. V. Ramasamy*, who trusted that if a man develops his self-respect, he will involuntarily develop distinctiveness. Thereby, he refused to be led by conspirators, came to service for oppressed castes in 1925, and annexed himself with the Self-respect movement that was started by *S. Ramanathan*, a Congress Politician of Madras Presidency,

for rescuing the deprived castes from all sorts of discriminations.²⁸ Through the self-respect movement, also known as *Arivu Viduthalai Iyakkam* or *Suya Mariyathai Iyakkam* in Tamil, he spoke to Tamilians, who gathered in meeting, that it is *Suya Mariyathai* which is valuable to us more than our life and its protection is the birthright but not political freedom.²⁹ Ramasamy had urged his followers to perform self-respectful marriages wherein arranged marriages are replaced by love marriages not confined by caste and not officiated by Brahmin priests.³⁰ The first self-respect marriage was conducted under the presiding of Periyar on 8th December 1929; in this ceremony, *Guruswamy* (a writer of the Tamil Magazine *Kuthoosi*) wedded *Kunjitham*, who was a woman leader of that movement.³¹ Periyar also requested his followers to marry young widows whose husbands had died at a young age, and their earlier marriage was child marriage, because of which many learned men wedded widows as witnessed from the marriage of *Sivagamy Ammaiyar* with a member of that movement.³² *Chidambaram Chettiyar*, the maternal uncle of the present DMK leader *Veeramony* married a widow named *Rengammaal* on 14 July 1934 by self-respect marriage.³³ After independence, the Government of India under Jawaharlal Nehru enacted the Special Marriage Act of 1954. It enforced it in India, according to which “*No marriage would be nullified on the grounds of caste or other sectarian divisions within the religion of Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism or Jainism*” so that inter-caste marriage can be registered officially. In 1957, *Kalampur Annamalai* and *Madhavan* of DMK party moved a bill regarding the enactment of Self-respect marriage to the Assembly. However, it was rejected by the Congress Government based on the request of *Venkataraman* (a Brahmin).

On 27 November 1967, when C. N. Annadurai was the chief minister of Tamil Nadu, his government enacted the Self-respect Marriage Validity Act of 1967, and it got the assent of the President of India on 17 January 1968, which is considered to be the first legalization of inter-caste marriage in Tamil Nadu.³⁴ This act is now called the “Hindu Marriage (Madras Amendment) Act of 1967”, section 7A of which recognized that “*Suyamariyathai (self-respect) and Seerthiruttha (reformist) marriages are lawful when solemnized in the attendance of friends, relatives or any other person by exchanging garlands or rings or by tying of a mangalasutra or by an avowal in a language understood by both parties that they accept each other to be their spouse*”. In 2013, soon after the launching of “*Dr Ambedkar Scheme for Social Integration through Inter-Caste Marriages*” which has provided a monetary sum of 2.5 lakh rupees to the couple, the Tamil Nadu Government has also followed that scheme in this state. It provides the legal opportunity to register inter-caste marriages officially and announces various monetary awards to those whose marriage is inter-caste. However, on 15 April 2015, the Hindu reported that the Central Government had not sanctioned Rs. 2.5 lakhs for any couple of inter-caste marriages from Tamil Nadu so far, even if they applied to that Government in the proper channel.

Status of Inter-caste Marriage in Tamil Nadu

India Human Development Survey (IHDS) for 2011 states that the prevalence of inter-caste marriages in India was about 10%, of which 4.97% of women married to low caste men (hypogamy) and the remaining 5.03% of women married to high caste men (hypergamy). Estimates from the International Institute of Population Science (IIPS) confirm that in Tamil Nadu, about 97.04% of people prefer marriage within the same caste. In comparison, 2.96% of people had such out-caste marriage for life,³⁵ which is comparatively low, while the National level is considered. K. Srinivasan, the Director of IIPSC, confesses that the Southern States of India have lower inter-caste marriages than the northern states because these people keep their cultures more static and do not like to change their traditions easily. This is found to be valid with the present investigation that out-caste marriages in this state are 3.8% which is less than the inter-caste marriages in India as a whole (10%), and in the states of Punjab (21.35%), Meghalaya (25.0%), Goa (26.7%), Kerala (21.34%), Haryana (17.16%), Manipur (18.33%), Tripura (17.8%), Maharashtra (17.79%), Bihar (4.6%), and Karnataka state (4.6%) but higher than in Chattisgarh (3.38%), Rajasthan (2.36%), Madhya Pradesh (3.57%), and Jammu and Kashmir (1.67%).

The present study (Table-1) reveals that inter-caste marriage is almost zilch among the scheduled tribes as they have their religious faith, traditional living in small huts in remote places and do not mingle with people of other castes, which is also observed in the works of Saroja (1999) and Uplaonkar (1995).³⁶ Figures of this table further state that 0.9% of MBC/DNC girls and 0.6% of SC girls were married to high caste men under BC categories, 0.54% of BC girls and 0.36% of SC girls were married to MBC/DNC boys, and 0.84% of BC girls, and 0.56% of SC MBC/DNC girls were married to SC boys; in most cases, the inter-caste marriages are love marriages that happened without consent of parents (74%) and in others (26%) the marriage has happened with the consent of parents. Further, about 98.5% of BC girls, 99.1% of MBC/DNC girls, and 98.6% of SC girls were

married to grooms of their caste, and their marriages were, even if love marriage, happened with the consent of their parents, family and caste members. In the last 33 years (1990 -2023), there has been an upward mobility of inter-caste marriage from 0.6 to 1.5% in BC castes, from 0.4 to 0.9% among MBC/DNC castes, and from 0.3 to 1.4% among the SC castes in Tamil Nadu; this ensures the development of the social condition in Tamil Nadu, but the extent of such a development is shallow compared to Northern states of India.

Table 1: Mixed marriages and same-caste marriages in Tamil Nadu.

Sl. No	Caste group of boys	% of girls in the caste groups				Year	
		BC	MBC/DNC	SC	ST	1990*	2023
1	BC	98.5	0.9	0.6	NP	0.6%	1.5%
2	MBC/DNC	0.54	99.1	0.36	NP	0.4%	0.9%
3	SC	0.84	0.56	98.6	NP	0.3%	1.4%
4	ST	0	0	0	100	0.0%	0.0%

[* Data collected from 1000 households randomly selected from each of Kanyakumari district, Tiruchirappalli district and Dharmapuri district; n=3000]

While analyzing the inter-caste marriage within the same caste groups (Table 2), it is clear that about 4.9% of marriages in BC, 4.7% of marriages in MBC/DNC and 3.9% of marriages in SC happened between different castes within the same caste group whereas 90.9% of marriages in BCs, 94.4% of MBC/DNC, and 94.7% of SC happened within the same caste in Tamil Nadu. The proportion of such inter-caste marriages within two different castes of the same caste group is relatively higher than the inter-caste marriages between two different caste groups because caste councils and such marriages legally permit marriage between certain castes to be of the same caste. For instance, inter-caste marriages between *Kallar*, *Maravars*, *Sambanad Maravars*, *Karumaravars*, *Kootapal Kallars*, and *Thevars* are permissible in many areas of Central Tamil Nadu; likewise, inter-caste marriages are allowed among *Vellala Gounder*, *Nattu Gounder*, *Narambukkatti Gounder*, *Tirumudi Vellalar*, *Thondu Vellalar*, *Pala Gounder*, *Poosari*, *Gounder*, *Anuppa Vellala Gounder*, *Kurumba Gounder*, *Padaithalai Gounder*, *Chendalai Gounder*, *Pavalankatti Vellala Gounder*, *Pallavellala Gounder Sanku*, *Vellala Gounder*, and *Rathinagiri Gounder* in Tamil Nadu. So is the inter-caste marriage between the *Hindu Nadar*, *Christian Nadar*, *Christian Shanar*, and *Christian Gramani*, considered *Nadars*. The MBCs allow inter-caste marriages between *Maruthuvar*, *Navitar*, *Mangala*, *Velakatalavar*, *Velakatalanair* and *Pronopakari* castes. Similarly, marriage is freely allowed between different castes of *Arunthathiyars* (*Chakkiliyar*, *Arunthathiyar*, *Madaris*, *Adi Andras*, *Pagadais*, *Madigas* and *Thotis*). This is why the higher proportion of inter-caste marriages between the different castes within the same caste group. Here, inter-caste marriages are the maximum among BCs, followed by MBC/DNC and SCs, as shown in Komal Sahai's work (2021).

Table 2: Marriages within the same caste and between different castes within the same caste group in Tamil Nadu.

Sl. No	Inter-caste Marriage type	Percentage
1	Marriage within the same caste of BC	90.9%
2	Marriage between different castes within BC	4.9%
3	Marriage within the same caste of MBC/DNC	94.4%
4	Marriage between different castes within MBC/DNC	4.7%
5	Marriage within the same caste of SC	94.7%
6	Marriage between different castes within SC	3.9%

Socio-economic and Educational Status and Inter-caste Marriage

Among the families in which inter-caste marriages have occurred in Tamil Nadu, about 0.76% of families are poor, 2.28% of families are of medium status, 0.67% of families are high status, and 0.09% of families are highest in their social status (Table-3). As Komal Sahai (2021) has proved in her studies,³⁷ here the rate of inter-

caste marriages has decreased from medium-status families to highest-status families irrespective of castes, and this is also low among the poor families; this is because of the reason likeness and unlikeness do not sprout in minds depending on their family status, as demonstrated by Banerjee *et al.*, (2013).³⁸ Among the couples whose marriage is out-casted, in 0.78% of cases, both the husband and wife are below the higher secondary level education; in 1.9% of cases, both have equal education at graduate or postgraduate level; in 0.66% of cases, the husband has higher education level than his wife, and in 0.46% of marriages the wife is educationally advanced than her husband. The results of our study are similar to those of Furtado (2012)³⁹ who had established that equal education of both husband and wife is positively correlated with the acceptance of spouses from other castes and hence the higher rate of inter-caste marriages among the people of equal educational levels than the other educational statuses. Again, more girls prefer boys with higher educational levels than their own, as Desai and Andrist (2010) proved.⁴⁰ The rate of inter-caste marriages is the maximum in families where parents' education is less than higher secondary level (1.23%), followed by parents with graduation (1.02%), parents with technical education (0.83%), and parents with post-graduation (0.72%). In this context, Komal Sahai (2021) found that there is a negative relationship between inter-caste marriage and parent's education level, which is also found to be correct in this study. Beegle *et al.* (2001) and Banerji *et al.* (2013) have also come to a similar conclusion that low educational levels of parents let the children make decisions in choosing their spouse according to their wishes if the children are more educated than the parents and hence is higher the prevalence of inter-caste marriages in the families.⁴¹

In mixed-caste families, the wife's income is 32.7%, the husband's income is estimated to be 44.63%, and the parent's income is 22.67%, from which we can infer that girls prefer out-caste husbands who can earn more. Komal Sahai (2021) also agrees with this point. The economic status of both wife and husband's families is equal in 38.3% of marriages, the husband's family is wealthier than the wife's family in 34.9% of marriages, and the wife's family is wealthier than the husband's family in 26.8% inter-caste marriages; However, equality is expected in many cases, many women choose men of elite family status for their marriage. Zafar (2013) has shown that many girls enjoy material wealth in their husbands' houses and prefer to live in wealthy families or marry a man who earns well in his career.⁴² Further, inter-caste marriages are most prevalent in middle-class families (2.23%), followed by below-poverty-line families (0.8%), low-class families (0.58%), and high-class families (0.09%). Economic deficits and matters of dignity are chief forces that compel the backward classes to prefer out-caste marriages in many cases; this is also a reason for the incidence of the high rate of such marriages in people below the poverty line and low class, but the love affair is behind the inter-caste marriages of most high-class families. In this context, our result is very similar to Banerji *et al.* (2013) and Komal Sahai (2021), who have proved that many out-caste marriages happen for "marrying up" or "exchanging attributes" to get dignity and wealth for happy living. Out of 3.8% of inter-caste marriages in Tamil Nadu, 1.24% occurred in rural areas, while the remaining 2.56% occurred in urban areas in towns and cities. While analyzing the truth behind this difference in the rates of inter-caste marriages, Komal Sahai (2021) suggests that the rates of such marriages are not at all statistically different between rural areas and urban areas of India, and the higher incidence of inter-caste marriage in urban settings is due to higher population size than in rural areas. Desai and Andrist (2010), therefore, assume that urban areas do not necessarily have a higher rate of inter-caste marriage. Still, the present study shows a relatively higher incidence of out-caste marriages in urban areas because of more chances for the mingling of different castes in city life. Otherwise, the result agrees with the finding of Komal Sahai (2021).

Table 3: Social, educational and economic conditions of inter-caste marriage couples in Tamil Nadu.*

Sl. No	Social status of Couples	Percentage
1	Highest	0.09%
2	High	0.67%
3	Medium	2.28%
4	Poor	0.76%
Educational Status of Couples		
1	High education of Bride	0.46%

2	High education of the groom	0.66%
3	Equal Education	1.9%
4	Poor education (Below 12 th std.)	0.78%
Educational Status of the Couple Parents		
1	Below 12 th Std.	1.23%
2	Under Graduates	1.02 %
3	Post Graduates/ Professional degree holders	0.72%
4	Technical education	0.83%
Relative Percentage of Income		
1	Wife's income	32.7%
2	Husband's income	44.63%
3	Parent's income	22.67%
The economic status of Wife's Family		
1	Equal status	38.3%
2	Higher than the Husband's family	26.8%
3	Lower than the Husband's family	34.9%
Assets of Wife's Family		
1	Below poverty line	0.8%
2	Low class	0.68%
3	Middle class	2.23%
4	High class	0.09%
Residence in Rural/ Urban Setting		
1	Rural areas	1.24%
2	Urban areas	2.56%

[* Data collected from 1000 households randomly selected from each of Kanyakumari district, Tiruchirappalli district and Dharmapuri district; n=3000]

While tracing inter-caste marriage during 1951-2021 under the Indian scenario, Ashis and Ravindra (2023) state a negligible proportion of inter-caste marriage (less than 0.2%) in early 1951. It grew further to 4.5% in 2021 due to the influence of Governmental schemes and supporting legislation in addition to the activities of voluntary organizations.⁴³ In support of this, Desai (2010) and Dommaraju (2016) say that there was a preference for marriages within the same caste in the third quarter of the 20th century. It continued till the early 2000s,⁴⁴ opposed by Chaudhary and Mohan (2011), who suggest that inter-caste marriage was not uncommon in the earlier decades even if this was not socially approved then.⁴⁵ In this context, Srinivas (1956) has pointed out that there has been a rapid increase in inter-caste marriages in India since 2015 because of the introduction of co-education in schools and colleges that allowed girls and boys to interact with each other and enabled them to act on their wishes to select spouses from inferior or superior castes.⁴⁶ The truth may be different because co-education would not cause the high incidence of inter-caste marriage, and even if it could support the interaction between boys and girls, all such interactions would not end in marriage so ever. One thing is evident in this context that outcastes marriages in society are almost not considered because- (1) those who try to defy the family norms would face unlikely upshots (Kales, 2012), (2) those who have faith in the traditional marriage would not like to stay away from marrying in the caste (Dhanda, 2012), (3) some people do not like to marry from a family whose economic status is sub-standard to their status (Goli *et al.*, 2013), (4) most people think that this has been considered taboo that will breach the cultural settings of caste (Vishwanath & Palakonda, 2011), and (5) the girl and boy have to

take high risks to break the social norms that have been maintained everlastingly (Ashish & Ravindra, 2023).⁴⁷

There are disagreements among the researchers regarding the predilection of inter-caste marriages among people of different castes. Chaudhary and Mohan, while investigating the inter-caste marriages in Bihar, proposed that family poverty and high-dowry demand of the grooms of the same caste would force the brides to select their spouses from low castes.⁴⁸ Goli *et al.* (2012) argued that women's education gives them the skill and capability to choose their spouses superior to their economic and caste status. However, Das *et al.* (2011) have shown it to be false because there is a negative relationship between out-caste marriages and education, even if the economic status is the same.⁴⁹ Jeejeebhoy *et al.* (2013) state that inter-caste marriages are so common in city culture as educated women like to choose their spouse according to their wishes,⁵⁰ which means that many city-dwelling women do not listen to their parents and they take their marriage decision without consent of their parents, but which is disproved by Aneja and Kaul (2005) who found that the proportion of inter-caste marriage in city life is deficient compared to the total population size in Delhi city.⁵¹ It needs no argument to show how Dalit women are attracted towards high caste men⁵¹ as Tiwari (2013) has described that Dalit women have a desire for upward mobility through their marriage to high caste men, using which many low caste people in northern India have evaluated their status equal to high castes.⁵²

Acceptance of Inter-caste Marriages

Owing to the strict adherence to the endogamy of the caste system, 96.2% of people in Tamil Nadu have their marriages in the same caste. In comparison, 3.8% of people have followed inter-caste marriages. Among the inter-caste marriages (Table-4), in 1.69% of cases, the choice of spouse is decided by the bride/groom; in 1.78 % of marriages, the spouse is chosen by friends of the bride/groom; in 0.24% of marriages, parents and relatives choose the bride/groom and in 0.09% of marriages the parents choose the bride and groom. Komal Sahai (2021) has shown that in 62.83% of inter-caste marriages, the parents and relatives have chosen the bride and groom, which is disproved in this study because here, the parents and relatives of the bride/groom choose a spouse only 0.24% of inter-caste marriages. The brides and grooms, along with their friends, decide most inter-caste marriages as their parents do not participate in most marriages. In this aspect, our ideology follows the line of investigation made by Allendorf and Thornton (2015) and Banerjee *et al.* (2013).⁵³ As we have mentioned above, parents of brides and grooms never approved for 1.69% of inter-caste marriages, parents of both brides and grooms approved for 0.37% of marriages, parents of brides approved for 0.92% of marriages, and the parents of grooms approved for 0.82% of inter-caste marriages in this state. Basu (2015) concludes that it is the guilty feeling of aversion from endogamy compelling the parents not to allow their children to do inter-caste marriage, and it is that which is forcing them not to attend the marriage of their children.⁵⁴ Bidner and Easwaran (2015) reveal that in many incidences of inter-caste marriages, the parents of the bride and groom approved and conducted arranged marriages half-heartedly because of the realization that their only son or daughter had fallen in love with a guy of another caste and if they oppose their otherwise incompatible marriage, their son/daughter would get out of the house permanently to marry that guy or commit suicide.⁵⁵ Here, many parents of brides (0.92%) and grooms (0.82%) approved the inter-caste marriage of their son/daughter only with the fear of death or running away from the house, as reported by respondents in this study.

Among the inter-caste marriages (3.8%), about 3.3% were love marriages. In comparison, 0.5% were arranged marriages conducted by parents and relatives, from which it is clear that here, most of the inter-caste marriages happened without parents' consent. According to Banerji (2008), the opt for inter-caste marriage is mainly in love between the boy and girl. The intensity of desire for such marriage depends on the strength of their love bond, which decides whether the love will be broken or continued in marriage and whether the existing marriage tradition will be thrown out or continued.⁵⁶ Dugar *et al.* (2012) explain that the rate of arranged inter-caste marriages in our community is relatively low because there is always a disparity between two different castes involved in the marriage, and they have to adjust mutually to execute this marriage.⁵⁷ Again, about 2.20% of couples live in the house of the groom's parents as a joint family, 1.26% of couples live in the house of the bride's parents, and 0.34% of couples live alone far away from the bride and groom's parents. Though many inter-caste marriages occur without the consent of parents and even without their presence, after that marriage, within a year, many parents of grooms accept the couple to live together in the same house as they think that missing their son is an actual loss to them and it cannot be resolved in whatever way; this is found to be confirmed with the works of Komal Sahai, (2021).

Fathers of some brides reported to us that their only daughter has married an out-caste due to her love affair, and they have included their son-in-law in the house to gratify their daughter; if they did not allow this, they would have lost their only child in the hands of death. Some fathers have reported that, because of the inter-caste marriage of their elder daughter/son, the marriage of the younger daughter/son has been delayed for a long time, and it is for that reason that they did not allow the couple to live in the house. This confirms that even if the parents try to accept the mixed-caste couples in the house, situational burdens threaten them not to invite the couple inside the house, as remarked by Bidner and Eswaran (2015) and Gadgil and Rao (1994).⁵⁸ This work also reports that in 1.46% of mixed caste families, the wife is adjusting to the husband, in 1.20 families, the husband is adjusting, and in 1.14% of families, both the husband and wife are mutually adjusting to each other (Table 4). Mander and Prasad (2014) noted that in several mixed-caste families, the husband cum wife relationship is disturbed when the high caste feels some discomfort with living with the low caste some years after that marriage;⁵⁹ 11 such incidents were reported to us by the respondents of this study. Breaking the tradition by adopting choice marriage most often results in internal consequences in the individual and family relationships (Dhar, 2013),⁶⁰ leading to discrimination, estrangements from families, and divorce of any of the spouses (Twamely, 2013).⁶¹ Even family counselling does not work for this in Indian situations, though it has been fruitful in Western countries.

Table 4: Acceptance of inter-caste marriages by couples' parents in Tamil Nadu. *

Sl. No	Who decides the bride or groom?	Percentage
1	Bride / Groom	1.69%
2	Parents	0.09%
3	Parents and Relatives	0.24%
4	Friends of Bride/ groom	1.78%
Whether parents approved this marriage or not?		
1	The parents of bride approved	0.92%
2	Parents of the groom approved	0.82%
3	Parents of both bride and groom approved	0.37%
4	Neither the parents of the bride nor the groom approved	1.69%
What is the type of marriage?		
1	Love marriage	3.3%
2	Arranged marriage	0.5%
Is the couple living with their parents or not?		
1	Living with the parents of the groom	2.20%
2	Living with the parents of the bride	1.26%
3	Living alone	0.34%
Wife/husband adjusts to the family.		
1	Wife adjusts	1.46%
2	Husband adjusts	1.20%
3	Wife and husband adjust	1.14%

[* Data collected from 1000 households randomly selected from each of Kanyakumari district, Tiruchirappalli district and Dharmapuri district; n=3000]

Honour Killing in Society

The past of all hitherto existing society has witnessed several murders of naive people for the reason of their inter-caste marriage by the name of family honour with the faith that it would buy back the repute of the family.⁶² Orthodox people, who have a strong faith that out-caste marriage is a deviation from their tradition and has to be prevented in whatever way, impolitely decided to kill either male or female or both who have fallen into a mixed-caste love or marriage. In some cases, the girl who has fallen in love with a low-caste boy is requested to abandon her love by the family members. If the girl resists their words and plans to go away with her lover, she is killed by her own family to protect their family's dignity. In yet other cases, the boy who loves their daughter is killed by the girl's family and disposed of safe and sound without the girl's notice. In another type of honour killing, if a high caste girl has eloped with a low caste boy and they married authentically, the girl's family or caste members kill the boy in a secure place and dispose of his body carefully to bring their daughter back to their house. However, in some incidents, both the boy and girl are killed intentionally and disposed of without the knowledge of the boy's family. Some incidents of honour killings have been reported to police, who in turn take suitable action against criminals who have committed it without mercy.⁶³ The Outlook India (30 June 2023) reports that there were 195 cases of honour killing in Tamil Nadu in 2023; in most cases, the girl belonged to a high caste, and the boy belonged to a low caste, or the girl's family or caste killed both. The rate of honour killing in Tamil Nadu is relatively higher than in most states of India, from which we can conclude that caste adherence is more severe in this state than in other states.⁶⁴ Komal Sahai (2021) argues that the lack of educational awareness and devotion to the caste system are the main reasons for committing such honour killings in India. The only way to come out of this is to promote education to create awareness about human feelings among the people and promote inter-caste marriages with governmental support schemes.

A considerable part of the Constitution of India and the Indian Penal Code (IPC) is protecting the subjects from honour killings all through India since the society has faced several such incidents while the people are of the faith that caste-related endogamy has to be preserved in the caste. To be sure, the Constitution of India forbids any attack on the liberty of people using its articles 15, 17, and 21, preventing violations in the form of honour killing. While Article 15 prohibits the discrimination of any citizen on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or birthplace, article 17 prohibits the untouchability of any form between castes or religious groups, as its practice in any form is forbidden. Article 12 guarantees all persons the right to life and Liberty, irrespective of their citizenship. Honour killings are believed to be brutal crimes of homicide under the IPC section 299, 300, 301, and 302. Several honour killing cases are already referred to base on these Acts as they are sufficient to protect various human rights, including the right to life. Besides these, the Special Marriage Act of 1954 provides people's rights to marry anyone residing in India, irrespective of religion or faith, followed by either party and to perform the intended marriage. The Hindu Marriage Disabilities Removal Act of 1946 declares the validity of marriages between Hindus belonging to the same caste or different castes. The National Commission for Women states that an intended marriage of any kind by the couple has to be protected and preserved in society, and anyone who committed the crimes should be punished by penalizing the acts of crimes.⁶⁵

Conclusion

Inter-caste marriage is an interesting social institution that can eradicate all the caste-based discriminations in society. This practice can break the tradition of endogamy within the caste and dispel the inequity between different castes in society, leading to egalitarianism. In the ethnicity of the caste system in Tamil Nadu, much emphasis has been given to marriage within the castes so that people have the faith that endogamy should be preserved in the castes all the time. Therefore, the rate of inter-caste marriages is relatively low compared to marriage within the caste, and the deviations from this are considered to be parodies of the tradition. The rate of inter-caste marriages has increased from 1.9% in 1990 to 3.8% in 2023, indicating society's upward mobility towards classlessness. The frequency of inter-caste marriages was shallow before the enforcement of 69% reservation in this state; after that, it doubled within 33 years after that policy. The socio-economic and educational uplifts of deprived caste groups (BC, MBC/DNC, SC, and ST) due to the implementation of this policy are behind this increase in the proportion of inter-caste marriages in recent years. These marriages are more predominant among educated middle-class people in urban settlements than poor people in rural areas. High education of the parents of brides and grooms has negative relationships with inter-caste marriages, and most of the inter-caste marriages are love marriages which occur without the consent of parents. Higher education, good

jobs, medium social status, middle-class economy, and the urban settlement of bride and groom are behind their motivation of love marriage with other caste spouses. The increase in the rate of inter-caste marriages indicates the social development in this state during the supposed period. However, the actual development is much below that of the northern states of India, wherein inter-caste marriage is about 5-23%. Therefore, political measures are necessary for this state to increase inter-caste marriages.

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