

# Social Conditioning and Endogamous Practice among the Konkani Brahmins in Kochi

**Libina K. Sebastian**

Doctoral Fellow, Dept. Of Sociology, SSUS, Kalady

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**ABSTRACT:** *There are broadly two types of marriage in a caste centered Indian society, which are endogamous and exogamous. Endogamy, the most accepted form of marriage in our society for decades is critically examined here with the empirically collected data. Triangulation method and methodology is used to interpret the details. Konkani Brahmins, one of the most populated in a migrant community in Kochi, practices endogamy strictly to maintain cohesion and solidarity among the community members. It is an attempt to shed light on the social conditioning of endogamous marriage alliances rigidly initiated among the Konkani Brahmins and their attitude towards interfaith marriages.*

**Key Words:** *Endogamy, interfaith marriages, and Konkani Brahmins*

For Patricia Uberoi, marriage is a critical institution (Grover, 2011), recognized as a crucial and life-changing event for most Indian women irrespective of their social and economic background. The women are considered to be the vehicle for carrying cultural norms and religious values from generation to generation. Endogamous marriages have such a vital role in continuing religious beliefs and practices. Caste endogamous marriage or marriage within the group is an accepted form of marriage for caste segregated societies like ours. Endogamous marriage is a fundamental indicator of group cohesion and solidarity, and also of social isolation from other groups (M.Gordon, 1964). 'Purity of blood' could be ensured by avoiding exogamy so far. It is believed that marriage within the group maximizes the chance that the children raised within the marriages will recognize their parent's shared identity and carry that identity forward into the next generation (Rosenfeld, 2008). Moreover, religious and caste envisioned values perpetuate through imposing strict rules in connection with the basic social institutions. The special importance of marriage is why the taboo against marriage to outsiders has historically been so strong and why changes in the pattern of religious, caste and clan endogamy over time have much to discuss the social conditioning of the communities.

While many castes in Kerala have been delinked from traditional occupations and moved out of their original habitats, it is in the field of marriage that caste continues to structure the lives of people. Matrimonial columns in the newspapers or caste-based matrimonial sites on the internet show how caste still governs our lives. The family plays a vital role in maintaining the caste system alive by everyday rituals like worships, food, and marriage rites. The research is conducted to scrutinize how far the Konkani Brahmins could be maintained their cultural and religious identity by practicing endogamy so strictly.

Historical analysis implies that Konkani Brahmins were forced to flee their homeland in the country's southwestern coast. There are pieces of evidence to prove that stray members of the Konkani had their settlement in Kochi since the early parts of the 13<sup>th</sup> Century A.D. Konkani community had to leave Goa, while Allaudin Khilji attacked. Furthermore, the capturing of Goa by the Portuguese was a turning point in the history of the Konkani Brahmin community. The Portuguese called upon them to enter into Christianity and followed a policy of religious persecutions. This compelled the Brahmins to move further southwards and the main body is settled in Kochi (Nithya, 2014). There is another version of fleeing that owing to certain religious disputes some Saraswats from Sasasti were forced to leave their native country Konkani and traveled southward they came to the territory of Thiru Kochi Kingdom. They formed themselves into a community which they named *Konkanasastha Mahajam* and later came to be known as Konkani Brahmins. They are divided into certain sub-castes such as Gowda Saraswat Brahmins, Chittapur Saraswat Brahmins, Chitpavan Brahmins, Rajpur Saraswat Brahmins, etc. The native speakers of Konkani dialects migrated to the western coast of India, have influenced by the local culture at places where the community settled to a large extent. Therefore, there is a diversity within the community that is very specific to the region.

The Brahmin in Kerala were stratified into certain communities and each community possesses their rituals and practices. Even then, they had a unique feature, which was vegetarianism. The majority of the Konkani

Brahmins, who has been living in the Kochi seashore is Gowda Saraswat Brahmins. They were located in the seashores so that they had included fish in their meals often. The Kerala Konkins had to give up fish-eating to establish as Brahmins. They wanted to establish own temples and started worshipping their Kuladevatas in homes and settlements. They also did it to uphold Brahmanical identity so far.

The culture of Kochi has been flourished with the development of trade and commerce in the region. Mattancherry, the area is marked with a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-linguistic group of people living harmoniously for decades. Most of the communities settled in the area are traders and a handful of communities were absconded from the northern part of India and to be settled in the area of Pachalam, Mattancherry, and Fort-Kochi. They all claim the identity of Brahminism and maintain the purity of rituals in the contemporary period.

### **Theoretical and methodological protocol**

Community studies enhanced as a prominent area of sociological and social anthropological studies in the colonial and post-colonial India. Indian society witnesses a large number of diversities, each factor has been closely analyzed, whereas, marriage as a social institution is an area to the largest amount of research. Conceptualizing family, marriage, and divorce as a demographic phenomenon in the past, the increasing divorce rate, unwed parenthood, living together relationships, etc. have been grist for the western social science mill.

Although definitions of endogamy and exogamy may include a normative component, the demographic data used here are limited to consideration of the stated religious preference of currently married husbands and wives. It deserves mention at the outset that the distribution of husband's and wife's religious preference does not necessarily correspond to religious preference at the time of courtship or marriage. Spouses may convert to create endogamy after marriage. (Heaton, 1990). Bumpass (1970) encompasses that a model of interfaith marriage that includes similarity in socioeconomic status, ethnicity, group size, and geographic distribution as independent variables. He has used different variables to analyze exogamy as well as endogamy. In his perspective, these are a dichotomous social phenomenon to address. Blau (1977) emphasizes that the structural tendency for the out-group interaction in a smaller group is constrained, which could be cogent for practicing endogamy. Caste or clan endogamy maintains a group cohesion and group interest as well.

### **Methodology**

The methodology makes the research scientists and to be generalized. The paper has focused on the socio-cultural religious and economic aspects regarding endogamous practices among the Konkini Brahmins in Mattancherry. In the hierarchical division of caste, Brahmin occupies the topmost position with some sort of privileges. Hence, the Gowda Saraswat Brahmins, a frivolous group among the Konkins were left out of the exclusive Brahmin group, for the reason of including fish in their usual diet. Those who belong to the community importunes vegetarianism for recent years. So here it is analyzing the attitude towards endogamy and the social conditioning of the community members regarding interfaith marriages. The attitude of community members towards maintaining class status and endogamy are closely analyzed.

Exogamy, marriage with the people who belong to another religion or caste occurs evenly among the educated and employed youngsters. This includes marriage with Christians, Muslims, Sikhs, and Sindhis. There are a couple of instances of marriage with foreign nationals. The study also focuses on the repercussions of exogamy on the children of the couple, when the children lack community socialization and lack of bonding within the community. The community spirit is fuelled by imposing clan or caste purity and the privileges they have enjoyed should be maintained by practicing endogamy as well as other rituals.

Kochi is diversified with 38 caste communities come under various religion. The universe for the study is Pachalam, Mattancherry, and Fort Kochi in Ernakulam District. Where there is a considerable population of Konkins. The population of the study is Konkini Brahmins. Triangulation methodology is devised in the research. Both qualitative and quantitative methods are used to collect field data on social reality. Variables to be considered are education (a professional course or Arts and Science), income and employment sector (Government, Private, Self Employed), size and structure of the family.

### **Conceptual framework**

Symbolic capital is a kind of social obligations that are themselves embedded with potential for prestige. Pierre Bourdieu as a reputation for competence and an image of respectability and honourability (Ihlen, 2018). The symbolic capital is created on the basic link between power and social relations; here it is social position and prestige of the society or community. All other capitals include economic, social and cultural capital are apprehended with the symbolic capital. The social status of in-migrants is evinced with the

cultural and symbolic capital, which they have possessed and maintained for generations to attain social recognition within the migrated social sphere. The migrated Brahmin communities like Tamil Brahmins retain their own social, cultural and linguistic fetishes to differentiate from other so-called upper caste communities. Aryan- Dravidian features placed as dichotomous binaries to address the symbolic capital of the communities. Konkani Brahmins are the community withholding relatively Aryan feature so far. According to David Swartz (1997), Bourdieu extends the idea of capital to all forms of power, whether they be material, cultural, social, or symbolic (Desan, 2013). In his perspective, the classes are not the derivative products of a structure or mere dichotomous relations within the economic structure, rather, they are a form of accumulated history. The symbolic capital and cultural capital is worth considering in analyzing the social conditioning of exogamy among the upper castes in the area. Symbolic capital importunes the privileges and prestige of the community, while the social status is adleptated.

**Attitude towards ‘Community as an endogamous Unit’**

The intermarriage literature has been more equivocal on the issue of the relative strength of racial endogamy compared to educational and religious endogamy, especially since the foremost studies of marriage patterns in the western societies (Heaton, 1990).

Caste exogamy is considered as a social issue by the community. Majority of the respondents consider interfaith marriage as a social issue. The reasons for considering inter-caste marriage as a social issue is the notion of the purity of the castes, and the individual instances of divorce or separation after inter-caste marriage. Among the Konkani Brahmins, a widely accepted notion is that most of the inter-caste or inter-religious marriages end with the separation of the couples. They could put forward a couple of cases from their area to clarify the issue. The younger generation of the community which is exposed to the rising social media and social networking sites have extended contacts. Circle of friends and acquaintances does not limit to school and colleges alone. Social networking sites have provided a new venue for the youth to make contacts and new friendships. The romantic movies empathise the love marriages or interfaith marriages, which has been had intensive influence over the youngsters. The extensive use of mobile phones with internet access often works as a great medium of communication for inter-caste romantic relationships. The social media contacts are limitless and beyond the parent’s control.

However, there are strong beliefs that exogamous marriage tends to increase with increasing education. The stigma attached to interfaith marriage is high as individuals tend to go out of the state or town for the education they tend to meet new people and thus marry outside the caste. There is also an opinion that in modern days’ community youth tend to choose partners suitable to their profession and status. Fractions of the population strongly believe that education has no role in the tendency for inter-caste marriage. Education is just an element. This opinion is supported by the instances of inter-caste marriage by the less educated youth in the community.

The diagram, which has given below (figure 1) represents the relationship between the exogamous preferences and education. Which evinces that the educational qualification or cultural capital of a person or a community is not at all closely related to the interfaith marriages.

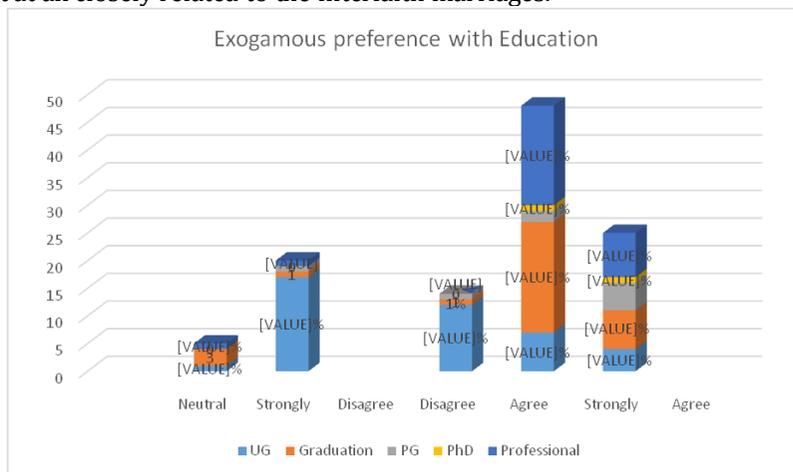


Figure 1.

Graduates tend to disagree more with the notion of interfaith marriage, there is 29% of the respondents who are graduates tend to disagree. This is however against the popular notion that increasing educational

qualification leads to exogamy rather than endogamous marriages. Some instances of inter-caste marriage tend to occur due to the check on the social status of the partners. Some professionals do state the preference of partners practicing the same profession. Even parents of the youth prefer partners for their children from the same profession as they opine that marriage tends to be successful and if the partner belongs to the same clan, the marriage will be more successful. However, the stigma that girl with higher educational qualification tends to have superiority in marriage tends to exist. Some of the female respondents even responded that many marriage proposals tend to fail due to their increased educational qualification. Change in the above stated stigmas is essential to bring about change in the community. The economic status of the families has been had a direct relationship in entering to the conjugal affairs. The social and cultural capital are frivolous in communal sentiments regarding marriage, customs, and tradition. The inter-caste marriages with the other Brahmin communities are accepted in some way, Nevertheless, changes in the cultural and religious rites have been addlepatated with the hierarchical division within the Brahmin caste. Most of the interfaith marriages of the Konkin girls are converted. When the girl is converting to Konkin Brahmin from other Brahmin castes, the conversion of religion as the custom of Arya Samaj should be followed. An initiation ceremony should be held and the new follower of the religion should be converted.

**Gendering Inter-faith marriages**

Marriage is, among other things, an important economic decision. Sorting in families impacts children outcomes and long term inequality (Fernandez and Rogerson (2001), Fernandez (2003). In developing countries, where many women do not work outside their homes, marriage is arguably the single most important determinant of a woman's economic future. In India, the setting for this study, several studies have shown that marriage is indeed taken as a very serious economic decision, managed by parents more often than by prospective spouses.

Leela Dube, the noted feminist anthropologist, has argued that women play an important role in maintaining caste boundaries through the preparation of food and in maintain caste boundaries(Chakravarti, 2018). The role of women in practicing the pollution and purity among the upper castes is believed to be linked to what is ingested- dining and serving occupy key positions.

The principles of casteinvolve a clear distinction between the domestic space/ home and the outside world. the domestic space is usually occupied by the female members in the family, who are more expected to socialization and religious believes to perpetuate purity and caste restrictions in their everyday lives. According to Uma Chakravarti (2018), women investment in the practice of the caste system is not confined to marriage according to norms of their families and communities or to maintaining the purity of the food and rituals, which is related in maintaining its power in the economic and public domain. Among the Konkin Brahmins, the joint families hold more orthodox approach to the interfaith marriages, nevertheless, most of the elder female members in the family disagree to owe an interfaith marriage within their household. The men are more diplomatic and they asked the female members to share their thoughts and take a neutral position somehow. Different forms of marital alliances affect women's access to kin-based support, and consequently, their ability to negotiate within the affine unit is widely discussed in sociology. The respondents are keen about the post-marital kin relations and support.

Shalini Grover( 2011) pointed out that the kinship inflected by scriptural authority and upper-caste norms, marriage is an irrevocable, conceived as a gift from her natal to her conjugal home. These customs are directly related to the class position and caste hierarchy.

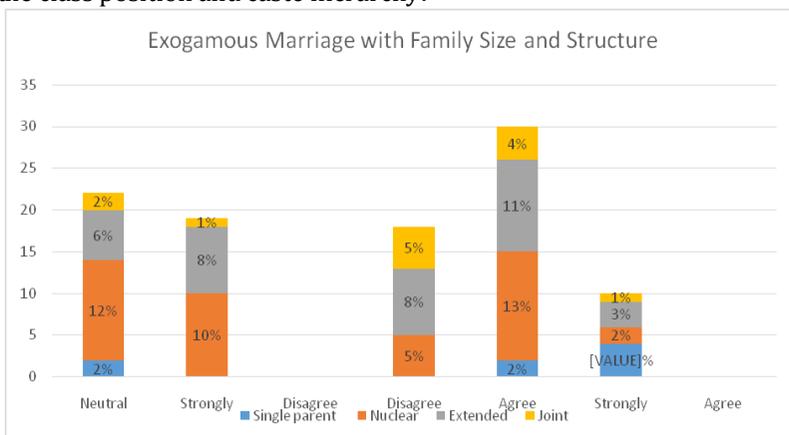


Figure 2

There is an accepted notion that the joint family system enriches more communal and clan solidarity among the members than nuclear or single parented folks. The diagram gives a clarion explanation to the formerly stated perception, which is the religious and caste-based outlooks are conditioning within the larger family system. The notion of purity of caste is quite high among the youth. This often tends to be the major reason for the opposition to inter-caste marriage. Few of the respondents consider inter-caste marriage as a new trend and increasing with the influence of social networking and other means of communication. Youth also maintain attitudes that inter-caste marriage bring social humiliation to the family. The couple's parents, family, and friends are subject to informal means of social control such as gossip and taunts. The family and the married couple are ostracised. The medium of reference for the family also often remains with the name of the couple and from which caste the partner is from.

It is also found in the study that more than the majority of the people out of a hundred respondents belong to the middle class in economic status. There are around one-third of the respondents agree with the exogamous marriage, moreover, a handful of them got married to the persons belonging to different caste and religious groups. Only proper educational qualification and employability of the youth can bring about changes in the economic status of the community. The economic status of the families must be scrutinized before both families entering the marriage vows. The class position and economic status should be played as a sub-caste for the community. The Brahmanical patriarchy remains intact because men and women uphold the principle of endogamous marriages, even in urban India, as we can see all around us in the way marriages are carefully arranged to uphold material and status interests (Chakravarti, 2018).

### Conclusion

The notion that interfaith marriages tend to increase with education is proved to be right. Attitudes that inter-caste marriage occur due to increasing educational qualification is still prevalent among the working Konkin youths. Among the community like Konkin Brahmins, who are in-migrants to the area, has been having rigid communal bonding and common hearth or community festival to intensify the spirit of ethnicity. They also tend to withdraw from interfaith marriage due to the negative impact on the children of the couple. The negative impact includes exclusion from the community, removal from the religious rituals and the restrictions on inter dining during festivities.

This attitude is supported by the facts that a near majority of the respondents oppose the acceptance of interfaith marriage. But it should be considered that male respondents considered exogamous marriage as a way to bring in new members in the community. Moreover, the broad congruence between caste and class has continued to be contemporary times. Economic Position of the family and privileges confront the class of the family within the community and society. The occasions of childbirth and ceremonial dining resemble the natal family assets even among the urban communities.

In Kerala, the interfaith or inter-religious marriages are treated as a progressive initiative among the educated and professionalized youth, who are acknowledged as a conflicting group with the conservative religious norms. Normally, without objective accounts regarding the divorce rate among the interfaith marriages, which is presented as interfaith marriages have higher divorce rates, thus the proportion of same-faith marriages increases with marital duration. The marriage is a serious affair to all religion and each has its norms and rites to follow regarding marriages. The choice and preference of the marriage should be vested on the individual and the individual should not be prey to the societal forces and peer pressures. The endogamous marriage pours communal sentiments to the offspring, while the secular values or faith in pluralism hits the heights in exogamy.

This is a common notion that there should be a dichotomy of the family arranged versus love marriage, which is firmly established in both the public imagination and social science understanding. The striking feature regarding the caste system in modern India is flexibility in occupation and social interaction, however, caste endogamy has been had clutches over the social institutions in our lives even in the contemporary age.

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