

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

**MARITAL PRACTICES AMONG A GROUP OF MUSLIM
COMMUNITY LIVING IN COASTAL ODISHA****Mir Azad Kalam* , Manideepa Dutta
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Abstract: *The present study aimed to find out the marital practice among a Muslim community living in the coastal region of Odisha. The people were believed to migrate to this region about 125 years ago. A total of 173 households were sampled from 255 households from the village. Around 282 ever-married women were interviewed using a well-tested schedule. Data related to marriage practice has been collected. In-depth interviews were conducted to understand the participant's perspective about the culture, marriage practices. Results showed around 87% of marriages were conducted within-group. Around 11.3% of marriages were consanguineous marriages. Majority of the participants (31.3%) reported that 'purity in blood' was the reason for marrying cousins followed by 'maintaining peace' in the family (21.9%). The study suggests a reliant relationship between culture and marriage patterns among the study population.*

Keywords: Culture, marriage, inter-marriage, Mirzapur, Odisha.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The relationship between culture and marriage patterns had an ambivalent relationship for a long time [1, 2]. Culture as well as religious beliefs of a population strongly determines the marriage pattern even in the twenty-first century [3, 4]. Marrying within the same religion, same community, same culture is highly preferred [5], and marriage outside the same group often faces social ostracism, even targeted for 'Honor killing' [6]. According to the India Human Development Survey (IHDS) (2005) around 5.82% of marriage took place outside the same group, and varies according to the place of residence, religion, region of residence, etc [7]. Urban place of residence showed 2.9% inter-religious marriage compared to 1.8% in the rural areas. Christian community showed 3.5% of the married outside the religion, followed by 3.2% of the Sikhs, 1.5% of the Hindus, and Muslims showed the lowest percentage of marriage outside the religion, around 0.6%. State wise variation in inter-caste marriage has also been found in India, for example, Punjab

showed 7.8% inter group marriage, followed by Jharkhand (5.7%), Andhra Pradesh (4.9%), Bengal (0.3%), Chhattisgarh (0.6%), and Rajasthan (0.7%) [7]. Dhar (2013) observed that even today, mostly in the rural areas inter-caste marriage is condemned, and the couple who tries to defy this norm faces dire consequences [8]. It has been found that the migrant populations are strictly prohibited to marry outside the community mostly because of cultural differences as well as storing the cultural identity [4]. For example, the *Parsi* population who migrated from Iran has historically maintained this endogamous nature of marriage, since the 1970s [9]. Several earlier studies found the migrants tried to maintain solidarity and kin relations among themselves by practicing marriage within as well as among the cousins [10].

The marriage within blood relatives i.e., consanguinity, is highly preferred among the Muslim community around the world. According to the recent estimates, around 10% of marriages are contracted between blood relatives and the prevalence of such marriage varies with region, culture, language, and religious beliefs [11, 12, 13, 14, 15]. The major reason behind the practice of socially embedded consanguineous marriage ranges from property inheritance to parental influence, economic benefit and maintaining familial compatibility [15, 16]. For example, Kalam and Roy (2014) found how the cultural practice of consanguineous marriage impinges on family relationships from both the parent- siblings and cousin-couples perspective [12]. Sharma et al. (2020) found religion and region of residence found to be the major determining factor of consanguineous marriage in India [17]. The parents generally believe that consanguineous marriage provides social security, helps the participating families to become close with each other, and offers a familiar environment to the couples whereas couples opined that marrying a cousin creates a psychological discomfort during the initial period of marriage [13].

Under these circumstances, the present study aimed to understand the marriage pattern among the population of coastal village Mirzapur of Balasore district of Odisha, India.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present demographic study was conducted on a group of Muslim community residing in coastal village Mirzapur of Chandipur panchayat of the district of Balasore, Odisha. This particular village was located at the coastal region of the Bay of Bengal, beside the river Buribalam. The villagers traced their origin from the different region of Midnapur district of the state of West Bengal and migrated around 125 years ago, and they were homogenous in nature. The people of this community know Bengali language because of their close proximity with the Bengali linguistic group from the ancestral population, and *Odia* language has been used for official, educational and functional purpose.

Data has been collected on marital status, marital types, and marital distance along with socio-demographic information on 282 ever married women residing in 173 households, selected randomly from 255 households of the village. The village was surrounded by other religious communities but small in number. Both groups were living side by side for a long time and have functional and economic relations with each other. Only the Muslim households were selected for the study. For the purpose of the study, we are presenting only the information related to the practice of marriage and its perspectives. The participants were asked whether they were married within same group or not. Marriage within same group was classified as ‘within group marriage’ and a marriage that has been contracted with other group was categorized as ‘outside group

marriage'. If the answer was affirmative, then they were asked whether they were married with blood relatives or not. Similarly marrying cousins were categorized as 'consanguineous marriage' and 'non-consanguineous marriage'. These were further cross-checked with the help of pedigrees. These were further cross-checked with the help of pedigrees. During the fieldwork, Total number of 12 in-depth interviews were conducted among both the males and females of age between 19-56 years to understand the perception of the villages about the group and marriage pattern. This work was a part of the fieldwork has been conducted in the month of December, 2019. During the fieldwork, participants' consent was taken to conduct the survey, interviews, in-depth interviews smoothly.

3. RESULTS

Marriage pattern in the studied village

Table 1 showed that 86.53% of marriages were conducted within the same group living in the same villages or from their ancestral villages; and the 13.47% of the marriages were outside the own group.

Table 1: Number of marriage pattern in the studied village

<i>Marriage pattern</i>	N = 282 (100.0)
Within the group	N = 244 (86.53)
Outside the group	N = 38 (13.47)

(Figures in parenthesis indicate percentage)

In-depth interviews reveal that marrying within the same group helps to maintain solidarity among them and helps each other during the time of crisis, as they were migrants in this region. A male participant of 40 years of age, daily labor by occupation opined, '*...we are coming from another state, no one is here for our purpose, only our people help us in the time of crisis. I believe it is better to marry within the group that helps both families of the same group...*'

A female participant of age 45 years said, '*...marrying in culture is very important and it helps to maintain familial peace as well as members strong connection with each other. On the other hand, outside marriage creates many problems such as problems of in-laws etc.*'

A female participant of age 28 years said, '*...during the time of my first pregnancy, i was afraid. I did not know what will happen. my mother-in-law who is my maternal aunt help me a lot. If she is not my own people, it would not be possible to expect anything from them...*'

Consanguineous marriage among the studied village

The observation described in Table 2 depicts that 11.35% of the marriages were consanguineous marriage and rest was non-consanguineous marriage.

Table 2: Consanguineous marriage among the studied village

Marriage pattern	N=282 (100)
Non-consanguineous marriage	N = 250(88.65)
Consanguineous marriage	N = 32(11.35)

(Figures in parenthesis indicates percentage)

Table 3 showed different types of consanguineous marriage among the participants. It was found that 56.25% of marriages were parallel cousin marriage and 37.75% of consanguineous marriage was cross cousin marriage. Among the cousin marriage 18.75% of marriage occurred with father's brother's daughter (FBD), 37.75% were constituted with mother's sister's daughter. The table also showed 21.88% of marriages were conducted with father's sister's daughters (FSD) and 15.63% of the cousin marriages were conducted with mother's brother's daughter (MBD). The table also showed around 3.0% of the marriages was conducted with uncle niece and 3.0% marriages were occurred between aunt-nephew.

Table 3: The prevalence of consanguineous marriage

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Type of consanguineous marriage	N = 32 (100.0)
Parallel Cousin Marriage	N = 18 (56.25)
Fathers' Brother's Daughter (FBD)	N = 6 (18.75)
Mothers' Sister's Daughter (MSD)	N = 12 (37.5)
Cross Cousin Marriage	N = 12 (37.5)
Fathers' Sister's Daughter (FSD)	N = 7 (21.88)
Mothers' brother's <u>Daughter</u> (MBD)	N = 5 (15.63)
Others	N = 2 (6.25)
Uncle niece marriage	N = 1 (3.13)
Aunt nephew marriage	N = 1 (3.13)

(Figures in parenthesis indicates percentage)

Table 4 showed majority of the participant around 31.0% reported that maintain purity in blood is the major reason of marrying cousin followed by maintaining peace in the family (21.9%).

Table 4: Reasons reported for marrying cousins

Reasons reported for marrying cousins	N=32 (100.0)
Maintaining purity in blood	N = 10 (31.3)
Maintaining peace in the family	N = 7 (21.9)
Maintaining social solidarity	N = 7 (21.9)
Fear of unknown mate	N = 5 (15.6)
Keep property within family	N = 3 (9.4)

(Figures in parenthesis indicates percentage)

In-depth interviews reveal that consanguineous marriage helps to maintain blood purity and familial peace in the family.

A female participant of age 36 years of age, daily labour by occupation said, '*...marrying a cousin is marrying within our people, known to each other which creates social and familial comfort zone...*'

A male participant of age 56-year fisherman by occupation said, '*...due to my fishing occupation, I have to stay outside from my home. During this time if someone very known my family, psychologically helps them during my absence. Marrying cousin is the best option in this situation...*'

A female fishing-net weaver of age 35 years said, '*... I am daily labour, I have four children and my mother-in-law who is also my maternal aunt take care of them, and as a result, I worked tension-free in the work place...*'

4. DISCUSSION

Marriage patterns and preferences, and that too within a local boundary vary widely from culture to culture, and community to community starting from the early century to the present time. Generally, tribal communities are characterized by endogamous form of marriage (endogamy). India is a country with multiple ethnic groups diversified by geography, language, religion, and caste or *beradari* boundaries, and it has been found that the majority of the ethnic group mostly practiced an endogamous form of marriage [18]. In India, ethnic endogamy as a practice to entrench clan, community, or tribal boundaries has been around for many years and continues to date [8, 19] and violations of such kind of endogamy are often punished by social ostracism or often resulted into honour killings [6,20,21]. In India, the inter-group marriage was found to be 5.82% according to the India Human Development Survey (2005) [7]. Honour-based killing i.e., killing for social prestige in India has often not been registered in many cases. MHA (2018) reported around 30 cases of honour killing has been recorded in 2018; there were 288 cases registered between 2014 and 2016 with a

motive of the honour-based killing [6]. Many social organizations such as *Khap* panchayat also support this kind of honour-based killings [6]. That might be one of the reasons of less the number of inter-caste marriages in India. On the other hand, inter-religious marriage in Indian socio-political situation is more critical than inter-caste marriage. The study of IHDS (2005) found only 2.21% women had married outside their religion. Among the religious groups, Christians showed highest rate of inter-religious marriage, around (3.5%) and Muslims showed the lowest rate (0.6%) [7]. In this context, the present study found negligible inter-religious marriage. It was observed that Muslims were more inclined to marry with Muslims compared to the Hindus [5] to maintain religious harmony in typical socio-political circumstances. The study population, having a migrant and minority status show strong preference to marry within the same religion, and particularly within the group to maintain social security and harmony. This corroborates that intra-ethnic marriage is often presented as a mainstay of ethnic boundary maintenance [22]. According to Cerroni-Long (1984), cultural minorities usually found to be threatened by an opposed majority, and make efforts to preserve their identity and solidarity by vigorously emphasizing cultural traditions by practicing marriage within the same group [19]. Some ethnic communities are more interested to protect their blood, and thus no admixture is entertained within the community [23]. Kalam et al. (2020) observed the pattern of marrying within the group was highly prevalent among the migrant and minority *Bihari Hindu's* than the native *Bengali Hindu* majority, living adjacently in Kolkata city of West Bengal [13]. Similar findings have been reported by Basu (1992) in the marriage pattern of two groups of populations migrated from two different cultural regions of the country and living in the same region of New Delhi [3]. Cultural identity and maintaining group solidarity is found to be the dominant reason behind choosing a partner from the same group [3]. However, among the study population showed little percentage of marriages outside the group might be due to long cohabitation and socio-economic interaction and cultural assimilation.

Marrying cousins is highly prevalent among Muslims around the world and India is not an exception [15,24]. In India, the prevalence of consanguineous marriages varies depending on the region, culture, and religious practice [11-15].

The present study showed similarity in prevalence of consanguineous marriage with Indian context. Many studies found migrant status of a population shows higher prevalence of endogamy as well as marriage with cousins. For example, Wahab et al., (2006) found consanguineous marriage within group in both natives and migrants was dominant among the Afghans [16]. The migrant population shows a higher prevalence of consanguineous marriage compared to the native residents [7, 25]. Living in a coastal environment is one of the major problems in livelihood. Very little security both in terms of economic as well as social has been maintained for those people living in this region. In this situation, marrying within-group as well as with cousins provides additional security that helps to maintain social and economic security in the communities.

To maintain the situation, the cultural practice of a community shapes the structure of marriage; deviation from this structure will result in social ostracism. In conclusion, it can be said that a community has to adopt several measures that have been shaped by cultural practice to maintain social and economic security and to maintain a cultural identity for a long time. Among the study population, the preference of marrying within-group and among cousins reflects the association of cultural practice and marriage pattern.

5. CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors of this paper do not have any conflicts of interest.

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