

Gender, Education and Changing Marital Expectations among Educated Youth in Rajasthan: A Sociological Study

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ABSTRACT

Indian marriages were organized under patriarchy, family dominance, caste endogamy, and defined gender roles. Nevertheless, the expansion of education, urbanization, involvement of educated women in work, exposure to modern means of communication have made young generation rethink their views on marriage and family life. In this context, the present study seeks to explore the impact of education on changing gender marital expectations of educated youth in Rajasthan. The present study is based on primary data collected from 300 respondents belonging to different religions through structured interview schedule. This paper analyzes the attitudes of youth towards women's education, women's employment, dowry system, widow remarriage, divorce, role of family in decision making process in marriage and gender equality in marriage. The results of the study show that educated youth prefers equal marital relationship marked by mutual respect, educational compatibility and gender equality. In addition to this, the survey respondents emphasize the importance of parents' advice and family backing, which shows that traditional institutions retain their social significance in spite of evolving gender norms. Instead of superseding traditional norms, education seems to help people negotiate an adaptive process where modern and traditional norms coexist. This research makes a contribution to ongoing sociological discussions of gender, modernization, and transformation of the family as it shows that shifting marriage norms among educated youth can be seen as a result of developing hybrid types of gender relations.

Keywords: Gender, Marriage, Educated Youth, Rajasthan, Family, Modernization, Gender Equality.

Introduction

Marriage has always held a very important position in the Indian society, serving not only as a relationship between two people but also as a system for regulation of kinship relations, inheritance, social stratification, religious duties, and family continuity. Different from the West, where marriages are becoming increasingly individualistic as they are determined mainly by emotions, Indian marriages take place within broader family, caste and community networks. As a result, choice of partner, gender roles, division of household labor, and family power can be decided based on individual as well as societal values. However, over the past decades, dramatic expansion of education, economic growth, urbanization, globalization, and new means of communication have started to modify the social context in which young people build their marriages. These processes have led to substantial change in views on gender equality, education, employment, and decision-making within marriages while retaining many features of the traditional family structure.

Education is another very important factor that is causing these social changes. While higher education increases job prospects, it also opens up young people to new perspectives on issues of equality, individual freedoms, democracy, and self-respect. Educational institutions offer scope for interaction among individuals belonging to different castes, religions, or regions, leading to the development of more egalitarian perspectives about relations between people. This is why educated youth judge marriage based on compatibility of feelings, respect, and shared aspirations rather than only on traditional considerations like caste affiliation, family prestige, or money-based transactions. However, these shifting perspectives need not mean an abandonment of family systems. Instead, it seems that education facilitates a negotiation between traditional culture and modern values.

The concept of gender plays a very important role in this context of social transformation. In traditional Indian marriages, there has always been gender differentiation, where males have always taken care of the economic aspect of the family life, and women have focused on household activities. While such conventions still play an important part in some families, the growing level of education and employment among women has led to change in perception of gender roles in marriage. Today, many young women desire to get education, build their careers, make decisions about household issues and remain economically independent even after marriage. Likewise, the younger generation of males is more accepting of women's work than the older generation.

Although there is an emerging interest among scholars to understand evolving family patterns and marital behavior, very few empirical studies have been conducted to explore the role of education in gender-based marital expectations among educated youths in Rajasthan. Rajasthan is a special case to consider since the region experiences fast educational growth along with the presence of age-old kinship systems, castes, and families being involved in marriages. Thus, it provides great scope to learn about how educated youths cope with conflicting expectations about gender, family, and marriage.

The current research attempts to fill in this void by investigating the connection between education and evolving gender expectations among educated youths. Based on empirical findings from 300 individuals, the paper will explore attitudes toward education, employment of women, dowry system, widow remarriages, family power, and gender equality in marriage. In contrast to modernization being viewed as merely replacement of tradition, the paper proposes that education has helped create negotiated marital patterns where traditions exist alongside increased recognition of gender equality and individual freedom.

Literature Review

Marriage has been acknowledged for a long time as one of the most enduring social institutions, in terms of broader patterns of social organization, cultural tradition, and social change. Growing body of sociological work is arguing that in current societies, it is not possible to explain marriage in the same way as before due to globalisation, educational opportunities, emancipation of women, and development. Even though the institution of marriage still exists strongly in India, the norms of choosing the partner, gender roles, power and family relations have changed.

Traditional sociological perspectives assumed that modernisation as a process will undermine traditional family structure and enhance the individual's autonomy. Goode (1963) posited that modernisation through industrialisation, urbanisation and education will favour nuclear families, freedom in choice of a spouse, and weakening role of parents in marriage. Although some parts of this hypothesis proved to be empirically true, the future studies showed that modernisation does not create homogenous social change. On the contrary, traditional institutions often change to fit new economic and cultural conditions.

Giddens (1992) extended this perspective with the notion of transformation of intimacy. As per Giddens, modern relationships become more based on communication, emotional satisfaction, mutual trust and negotiated commitment than being social obligations. Thus, the institution of marriage changes into something which is based on reciprocity and equality, not social obligation. Similarly, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) pointed out that processes of individualization make individuals formulate their own decisions about life including marriage, but at the same time create new possibilities for negotiations and uncertainties in intimate relations. These theories are highly applicable in regard to the situation of the educated youth as their life is influenced by both traditional family values and individualism.

In the Indian case, marriage still remains a family institution even with the socio-economic changes taking place. According to Uberoi (2006), the Indian marriage has proved resilient by

accommodating modernization while maintaining its cultural base. Family involvement, kinship duties, and community considerations still play an important role in marriage decisions despite the high level of educational achievement. However, education has helped broaden the scope for individual choice, compatibility, and gender equality in marriage. Modernization has not brought about the abandonment of the arrangement but rather a blend of both arrangements.

Research done by Allendorf & Pandian (2016) shows that educated Indians attach importance to companionship, compatibility, and communication in marriage while at the same time valuing parental advice in choosing spouses. The research findings show that the assumption of modernization leading to individualization is oversimplifying things. Marriage comes out as a negotiated institution with the mixing of traditional authority and individual choice through constant interaction between generations.

Gender and education is another subject which has come under increasing scholarly scrutiny in recent years. Education has been consistently linked with stronger support for women's freedom of choice, delayed marriages, increased work force participation, and more equitable relationships within the household. In their study, Desai and Andrist (2010) point out that education shapes gender norms through greater availability of information, greater economic prospects, and promotion of democratic values in families. Likewise, Jeffrey and Jeffrey (2020) have found that rising education among Indian youth has resulted in changing views on marriage, work, and family obligations; however, social norms still play an important role in shaping individual decisions.

Educated women have become one of the most powerful forces behind changing views of marriage. As women get more and more educated, they can build successful careers, gain more freedom of choice in relation to marriage, and resist traditional gender hierarchies. At the same time, there has been a realization among educated men of the need for educated partners who would be able to add value to family life not just in economic but also intellectual terms.

Nonetheless, several practices pertaining to marriages have continued to pose problems from the sociological perspective. The practice of dowry continues to be one such issue which exemplifies the co-existence of legality and traditionality. Even though the younger generations of Indians are against the practice of dowry in society, its prevalence continues to highlight the complex relationship between cultural values, economic expectations and gender discrimination. Likewise, people's views on widow remarriage, divorce and inter-caste marriages indicate that the process of modernisation has affected various facets of marriage differently.

However, despite the progress made by sociologists in studying the process of changes in the sphere of Indian marriage and family relations, not enough research has been carried out on the role of education in shaping gender-specific expectations regarding marriage among educated Indians in the state of Rajasthan. Rajasthan is a sociocultural environment characterized by swift education and traditional kinship, caste and patriarchal family organization. Therefore, Rajasthan presents an empirical base for studying the role of education in shaping gender relations among young people.

In this regard, this study makes its contribution to the body of literature insofar as it brings together both empirical information drawn from educated youths along with sociological theories related to modernization, gender, and changing family roles. Instead of seeing traditional and modern perspectives as polar opposites, the study contends that the expansion of education in society has helped in creating negotiable gender relationships where there is coexistence between a desire for equality, autonomy, and respect along with family responsibilities.

Methodology

For this study, a quantitative approach would be used to investigate the effect of education on the transformation of marital expectations regarding gender issues among educated youths in Rajasthan. The nature of this research would be descriptive and analytical because it seeks to find out how education influences people's perception about marriage, gender relations, family life, work opportunities for women, and marriage practices. In addition, the research will rely on sociological theories such as modernization, gender relations, and family changes.

In order to carry out the empirical research, data would be collected from a group of educated young men and women who live in Rajasthan through the use of an interview schedule. A total of 300 individuals formed the sample size. This sample would be selected considering the diversity in terms of religion, education level, and socioeconomic status so that different marital attitudes among educated youths could be determined. The interview schedule would consist of demographic and attitudinal

variables including spouse selection, parent's role in marriage, education and employment of women, dowry, widow remarriage, divorce, family, and gender equality. The questionnaire was designed following an exhaustive search of sociological literature and was revised after discussions with experts and pilots to make it clear and have valid content.

Face-to-face interview was the method used for data collection so as to improve quality and avoid missing information. The participation in the study was voluntary, and the subjects were briefed on the goals of the research prior to conducting the interview. No confidential information is present in the data collected, and ethical issues connected with informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation were respected during all stages of the research.

Data analysis was conducted with the help of descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages. Patterns prevailing in the marital attitudes of respondents were detected. After that, the results of the data analysis were interpreted with the use of sociological theories of modernization, gender, and family changes. In addition to mere statistical description, this study includes theoretical explanation of how educational expansion leads to changes in gender roles in marriage based on empirical data and existing literature.

Results and Discussion

• Education and Gender Equality in Marriage

According to the findings from the study, it can be seen that education has become one of the leading determinants of gender expectations of educated youth in Rajasthan. Educated youth are now perceiving the institution of marriage as a relationship based on mutual respect, co-operation and responsibilities as opposed to gender hierarchies. The findings show that education has resulted in acceptance of active participation of women in making decisions, educational ambitions of women and egalitarian perceptions of relationships.

Among all findings, the perceptions of dowry have been the clearest indication of change in gender attitude. According to the survey, 55.67% (n=167) of respondents see no need for dowry in modern marriages while only 13.33% (n=40) consider it necessary. 24% (n=72) of respondents find acceptable the presence of dowry but only in certain situations while 7% (n=21) are not sure about their attitude. It appears that young educated people reject the commercialized marriage and perceive relationships as being based on equality, respectability and mutual compatibility. However, the fact that a considerable number of respondents still conditionally accept the institution of dowry shows that traditional social practices persist notwithstanding the spread of education.

The results of the research match those of Dube (1997) who asserts that through education, the patriarchal norms get weakened gradually due to the rising awareness about women's rights and equality. Likewise, Desai & Andrist (2010) state that the level of education has a positive correlation with more egalitarian views on marriage, decision-making and gender relations. There is also empirical evidence for the decreasing normative acceptance of dowry among the educated generation though the existence of dowry can be explained as the result of interrelationship of culture and economic factors.

Gender norms changes can be observed from the respondents' attitudes towards widow remarriage. The majority (69.67%, n=209) were in favor of widow remarriage whereas only 30.33% (n=91) were against the idea. The result illustrates the increased understanding of women's rights to reconstruct themselves after the loss of husband and indicates an increasing awareness of gender equality within the family. Despite widow remarriage faced social prohibitions in many regions of India before, the educated respondents perceived widow remarriage as something related to their own dignity and personal freedom. These findings correspond to modern literature which states that the education leads to the development of humanitarian attitudes to family relations and challenges.

Overall, the results have shown that the impact of education on gender roles and relations has been immense but it has neither abolished family institutions nor completely transformed gender expectations. On one hand, there is more and more advocacy of equality, freedom of women, and responsibility in marriage, and, on the other hand, there is understanding of the role of families and culture in society. It is obvious that the combination of both modern and traditional views on the world can be interpreted as a process of negotiated gender modernization.

- **Changing Gender Norms and Marital Practices**

These results show that the expansion of education has affected respondents' attitudes towards gender equality as well as their attitude towards some traditional practices associated with marriage that have traditionally been a sign of patriarchal society organization. Attitudes towards divorce, remarriage, family structure, and inter-caste/inter-religious marriages show that educated young people tend to value individual dignity and choice and at the same time recognize the significance of social cohesion and family ties. It is shown that gender change in marriage includes more than just attitudes toward women and goes beyond the normative framework of marriage.

The attitude towards remarriage in the event of a divorce is another indicator of shifting attitudes regarding gender roles. The results of the questionnaire showed that 67.33% (n=202) of the participants were in favor of remarriage after divorce whereas 32.67% (n=98) were against it. This is an indication of the growing acceptability of remarriages and that young educated individuals now perceive marriage as a voluntary bond and not an obligatory institution of society. Remarriages indicate a consideration of personal well-being and happiness which was not seen before in the context of marriage within patriarchal societies. Similar conclusions have been drawn by Giddens (1992) in his discussion about how today's intimate relations are more about satisfaction and negotiation than institutional obligation.

The attitudes towards the organization of families are yet another example of both continuity and change. While many modernization theorists often assume that people tend to embrace the nuclear family type, the current research suggests that there is still an appeal to joint families. As many as 53.00% (n = 159) of the sample were against the idea that the nuclear family was a preferable form of the family type, while 31.67% (n = 95) agreed with the idea and 15.33% (n = 46) were uncertain. The results reveal that young people who have been through education still consider the aspects of emotional security, intergenerational assistance and responsibility that come with the joint family life.

This view is supported by Srinivas (1966) in his theory that the Indian family institution has a high level of adaptability despite the speed of modernization. Shah (1998) is also supportive of this viewpoint when he states that social change alters the patterns of authority and interaction in families without destroying kinship ties. The present results are an extension of this viewpoint in that education promotes democracy within families but retains the significance of the institution of family.

Another observation of change is the attitude of youth regarding the boundaries of the caste system in marriages. Unlike the past generations where the caste system was very strict in determining who one could marry, the young generation is very flexible and ready to accept individual compatibility as opposed to caste alone. Although social acceptance of inter-caste marriages was inconsistent, education became the most significant determinant of marital success along with good character and mutual understanding.

The same trend was also found in regards to opinions about inter-religion marriages. Respondents were more cautious in their responses compared to those about inter-caste marriages, indicating the persisting impact of religion and the cultural context in which marital decisions are made. However, education seemed to foster a more accepting attitude than those traditionally fostered by conservative cultural norms.

Overall, it can be concluded from the findings that educated youth is reinterpreting traditions of marriage through negotiation rather than rejecting the traditions. Patriarchal norms regarding divorce, widows' remarriages, castes and family domination are increasingly questioned, but they still have an impact on social behavior through culture and familial obligations. The simultaneous existence of progressive attitude and traditions shows that the transformation of gender roles within marriage takes place slowly and inconsistently. Education does not remove cultural traditions, but helps young generation to reinterpret them in accordance with changing realities.

The results thus contribute additional evidence for the core thesis of this research paper. The gender-specific expectations about marriage of educated young people in Rajasthan cannot be understood using a binary division of tradition versus modernity. Instead, such expectations indicate an ongoing dynamic process of negotiated social change where education serves to open up possibilities for gender equality and personal freedom, while family remains an institution that offers cultural validation, emotional comfort, and social continuity. Such trends demonstrate the adaptability of Indian marriage and shed light on wider sociological discussions of modernization and family change.

- **Education, Women's Autonomy and Emerging Marital Expectations**

Education turned out to be one of the most influential factors determining the expectations of the interviewees concerning the role of gender in their future marriages. According to the results of the research, educated young people view their wives not only as mothers and spouses, but as equal partners, who have education, work, and make joint decisions, and all of these factors help stabilize the marital relationship. The participants viewed education of their potential wife as a sign of compatibility, good communication skills, financial stability, and good upbringing of children, and thus, education has turned into an important indicator of the appropriateness of marriage.

Further, it is revealed from the survey that respondents showed a lot of support for the progressive practice of marriage which elevates the status of women in society. It can be noted that out of 300 respondents, 69.67% (n=209) were supportive of widow marriage, while 30.33% (n=91) were against the idea of widow marriage. The distribution in terms of religion also indicates that widow marriage was favored by people belonging to all the three groups, i.e., 76 Hindus, 65 Muslims, and 68 Sikhs supported widow marriage. In this way, it can be stated that educated youth rejects the social stigma attached to being a widow and sees widow marriage as a valid form of restoring dignity and social acceptance.

Participants also showed relatively progressive views on the issue of inter-caste marriage, although again, differences were found. In favor of inter-caste marriages stood nearly 49.00% (n = 147), while opposing them stood 51.00% (n = 153). It can be noticed that community-wise there is a higher number of people who supported inter-caste marriage among Hindu participants (66 participants), in comparison with Muslims (61 participants) and Sikhs (58 participants). This very close difference between the supporters and opponents is sociologically meaningful as it shows that the traditional caste structure continues to affect preferences when it comes to marriage, even with increasing education. These results cannot be considered as an absolute rejection of any kind of social change.

Women's changing position is also shown by their aspiration towards higher education. It can be seen from the results of the research that 31.67% (n = 95) of the respondents regarded higher education as an opportunity to get employed, while only 4.00% (n = 12) associated higher education with any other factors. This shows that education becomes valuable not only for personal growth but also for financial independence. Such aspirations become especially important for women since employment increases their bargaining power in the marriage and promotes their participation in family decision-making.

The findings of the current research corroborate the theoretical perspective of Desai and Andrist (2010) in the view that higher education makes women more empowered by providing them better chances to be employed and participate in family decision-making. Likewise, Jeffrey and Jeffrey (2020) noticed that education changes the marital aspirations of young people in India through promoting more accepting attitudes to women's career, postponed marriage age, and shared domestic tasks.

Theoretically speaking, the theory of the transformation of intimacy developed by Giddens (1992) could be considered a suitable interpretive approach to the findings obtained in the present study. The respondents became inclined to evaluate their marriages in terms of communication, companionship, respect, and common goals rather than gender hierarchy. Nevertheless, they still acknowledged the necessity of gaining approval from the family members and maintaining cultural continuity. Thus, the findings do not confirm the thesis according to which modernization substitutes traditional family organization. On the contrary, it may be assumed that education fosters negotiation of gender equality since egalitarianism emerges in the context of permanent family ties.

Overall, the findings provide convincing evidence that education has become one of the strongest driving forces behind redefinition of the woman's status within marriage. Even though patriarchal norms continue influencing certain forms of marital behavior, educated youth tend to foster the woman's educational success, economic independence, and equal dignity. In other words, the findings prove that gender expectations of educated youth are indeed a product of negotiated modernization.

- **Gender Equality, Marital Decision-Making and Social Change**

There is clear evidence from the study that educational attainment has made a great impact on the perception of gender equality and marital decision making. Rather than seeing marriage as a social institution under complete patriarchal control, educated youth now prefers relationships that involve mutual respect, collaboration, and joint responsibilities. However, the findings also suggest that this change of perception has not totally erased traditional family values. Instead, the respondents tried to

harmonize individual autonomy with the collective interests of their families through a process of gradual social adaptation.

Views about dowry are a perfect indicator of increasing gender awareness among educated youth. As the survey showed, 55.67% (n=167) see dowry as unnecessary in modern marriage while only 13.33% (n=40) consider dowry necessary. 24.00% (n=72) respondents thought that dowry can be justified in certain conditions and another 7.00% (n=21) respondents were neutral on this question. From community-wise analysis it can be seen that the respondents were opposed to dowry in all religions communities including 59 Hindus, 54 Muslims and 54 Sikhs.

The above results indicate that the educated youth view marriage as a bond of equality and companionship and not as one that entails any form of financial exchange. The decreasing prevalence of the acceptance of dowry is attributed to increasing awareness of women's rights, changes in law and justice towards gender issues. There have been similar findings made by Desai and Andrist (2010). They have indicated that education helps to foster equal attitudes towards marriage and does away with the patriarchal traditions. Education according to Dube (1997) is a crucial tool when it comes to undermining traditional practices that perpetuate gender inequalities. The above findings support this through showing that increase in education levels in Rajasthan has led to decrease in the normative acceptance of dowry.

The fact that 24.00% of the respondents still accepted dowry in specific conditions shows that cultural practices are not quickly done away with as modernity takes over. Instead, there are some traditional practices that affect the marital behavior regardless of ideological differences.

The results regarding family organization too highlight the adaptability of change within marriages. The majority of respondents (53.00%; n = 159) felt that the nuclear family structure need not necessarily replace the joint family form whereas 31.67% (n = 95) favored the former and 15.33% (n = 46) were undecided on the issue. This reveals the importance which educated youth place on emotional support, economic collaboration and generational harmony provided by joint families. While education does encourage individual freedom, modernization was not equated with detachment from families by respondents.

These results too confirm the arguments put forward by Srinivas (1966) that the Indian family systems have considerable adaptive potential. Instead of being dismantled by forces of modernity, family forms change through adapting themselves to the educational, occupational and gender expectations. As has been noted by Shah (1998), modernity changes family ties but not the responsibilities towards kins. The current results strengthen the above mentioned conclusions in the context of respondents' seeking equality in marriage along with family involvement.

In summary, the data collected shows that education has turned out to be a very effective agent of change in the process of transforming the gender relations in Rajasthan. People now recognize the importance of women's dignity, equality in marriage, and refusal from practices like dowry. At the same time, they do not neglect the importance of the unity of their family and shared responsibilities, which shows that new marriage values come through negotiation rather than conflict. Thus, the results prove the key claim of this research regarding negotiated modernity in the process of gender equality formation.

Conclusion

The current research study highlights the impact of education on changes in gender-related expectations of educated youth in terms of marriage in Rajasthan. It becomes clear from the findings that education is now considered one of the main determinants of the change in attitudes towards marriage, gender equality, and family relations. Despite the fact that marriage still remains a socially significant institution, educated youth tends to consider it on the basis of such principles as respect, compatibility, equality in education, and equality in responsibilities.

Educational success positively affects the formation of progressive attitudes towards many traditional aspects of marriage. So, 55.67% (n = 167) of respondents do not consider dowry to be a mandatory element of marriage, while 69.67% (n = 209) of respondents accept widow remarriage, and 67.33% (n = 202) approve remarriage after divorce. All these results show that educated youth understands women's rights and respect their individuality and dignity during marriage. However, 53.00% (n = 159) of respondents continue to prefer joint families to nuclear families.

A third notable finding pertains to the existence of both progressive and traditional values. Whereas individuals expressed growing support for education, employment and equal involvement of women in making marriage decisions, they did not fail to acknowledge the significance of guidance from

parents, the unity of the family and culture. Thus, it becomes clear that modernization of educated youth cannot be considered either a linear or a homogeneous process. Rather, the growth of education enables the emergence of a process where traditional values are selectively interpreted in accordance with the new socio-cultural situation.

Theoretically, the findings do not fully confirm the predictions of classical modernization theory, according to which family authority gradually fades away. Rather, the data collected empirically seems to corroborate contemporary sociological theories of marriage developed by Giddens (1992), Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002), and Uberoi (2006). Marriage among educated youth in Rajasthan is becoming a dialogue between equal partners, whereas still maintaining strong ties with the institutions of the family and community.

Firstly, the primary significance of this paper is shown in its demonstration that education has not merely substituted conventional marriage norms with modern individualism. It has produced a sort of compromise approach to gender roles wherein equality, independence, and individual needs coincide with persistent family obligations and cultural traditions. The theory of negotiated gender modernity proves to be much more appropriate for the analysis of the current marital transformations than theories implying a simple process of transitioning from tradition to modernity.

There are some weaknesses of the research under discussion. Its results are obtained through interviewing respondents from Rajasthan and thus cannot be directly applied to other parts of India. Further research may use a comparative method by studying various regions of the country or conducting longitudinal studies on this subject matter.

On the whole, it can be said that from the perspective of this study, education has emerged as a critical force that has been contributing to the transformation of gender relations within marriage in contemporary Rajasthan. Instead of being responsible for the erosion of the institution of marriage, the process of gaining education has enabled it to adapt to changing times through fostering equality, respect, and joint decision making without undermining the larger significance of family in society.

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