

Changing Marriage Institution: A Study of Bhalavalikar Gauda Saraswat Brahmin Community in Dakshina Kannada District

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ABSTRACT

Social change is a universal phenomenon. Among the social institutions which have shaped the lives of human beings, marriage plays a significant role. Like other social institutions, the institution of marriage has also been experiencing profound changes. There has been an exponential change with regard to rules of marriage, the acceptable age of marriage, gender norms, child rearing practices, etc. The process of urbanisation, industrialisation, modernisation, western education, advancement of technology, and changes in the structure of family accelerated these changes. When compared to ancient period, the present outlook of marriage is much more liberalised. The present study tries to figure out how many changes that have taken place in the marriage institution of Bhalavalikar Gauda Saraswat Brahmin community in Dakshina Kannada district. Bhalavalikar Gauda Saraswat Brahmins are a sub caste of the larger Saraswat Brahmin Community which has migrated to South India including Dakshina Kannada District from North India in the 17th century. The study also focuses on the various factors that are responsible for the changes in marriage institution. The present study is based on field survey carried out in Belthangady, Bantwala, Puttur and Sullia Taluks of Dakshina Kannada district. The study is both qualitative as well as quantitative in nature.

Keywords: Marriage, Social Change, Modernisation, Urbanisation, Industrialisation, Bhalavalikar Gauda Saraswat Brahmin community.

INTRODUCTION

Marriage is a universal institution of all human societies even though the forms of marriage vary from one society to society depending upon the culture of that society. Marriage satisfies the biological needs of human being in a socially sanctioned way. According to Larson and Homan (1994), "Marriage is the most fundamental of human relationships as it forms the basis for establishing family relationships and rearing the next generation". According to Westermarck, "Marriage is a more or less durable connection between male and female, lasting beyond the mere act of propagation till after the birth of the offspring". George A. Lundberg defined marriage as "a set of rules and regulations, which define the rights, duties and privileges of the husband and wife with respect to each other". In the words of Kapadia (1966) marriage is "a socially approved union of men and women aiming at 'dharma', procreation, sexual pleasure and observance of certain social obligations". The present paper discusses the changing pattern of marriage among Bhalavalikar Gauda Saraswat Brahmin community.

Review of Literature

Kannan (1963) studied 149 inter-caste marriages in the city of Bombay. According to him the inter-caste marriages are steadily increasing in recent times and that has assumed a significant Component since 1956. The most important factors influencing inter caste marriages in Bombay are the age of the women at the time of her marriage, the freedom given to her to choose her partner, the range of female education, etc.(Kannan, 1963).

The study on inter-caste marriage Reddy et.al, (1984), shows that the scheduled caste has exhibited the highest tendency for inter-caste marriages when comparing to other castes. The Urban residence, education,

employment in modern occupation and middle class economic background have tended to be a set of attributes affecting the incidence of inter-caste Marriages. They further observed that inter-caste marriages take place at fairly advanced age rather than at the young age (Reddy et.al, 1984).

The study by Srinivasan et al, (2017), shows that India is still by and large a traditional society with rigid caste system. Caste system plays a very significant role in the selection of mates in marriages. To most Indians, it is difficult to think of marriage beyond the own caste. But it is quite heartening to notice that the force of the caste in marriage selection is gradually loosening over time as about ten per cent of the marriages in India are reported to be inter-caste marriages. They stated that it is a good beginning to completely eradicate the caste system in India. This change in the marriage pattern in India is mainly due to the impact of modernization, socio-economic development and globalization of Indian economy. Various socio-economic and demographic factors also contribute to the pattern of inter-caste marriages in India (Srinivasan, et al 2017).

The study made by Kaur, G. and Singh, S. (2013) indicates that changes are bound to occur and institution of marriage is also experiencing many changes. Technological, economical, new educational patterns and changes in life styles are major factors playing significant role in this change. With the passage of time the age at marriage, process of mate selection, aims and the purposes of marriage , trends of divorce rates and the economic aspects of marriage have undergone a tremendous change. There are definitely serious consequences of the changing marriage patterns as the increasing age at marriage makes a considerable difference in lowering the fertility rates. Various factors such as the social, economic, psychological, and technological and the legislative play a great role in the change of marriage institution. Though these new trends are observed today the importance of marriage has not diminished. Marriage is still universally practiced. Though its sanctity is affected a little, it is not reduced to the level of a mere civil contract. Hindu men and women are still emotionally involved in their marriages (Kaur G and Singh S, 2013).

In the traditional society the selection of partner for marriage was the duty of the parents or guardians only. The most important value was chastity in earlier societies. Premarital and extra marital relations were not allowed. Love was the consequence of marriage between man and woman and marriage was not the consequence of love. With the advent of liberalism and urbanization, many changes have occurred in the Indian society. Pre-marital sex and extra- marital sex relationships which were totally absent in earlier society have gradually become common in present times. Now- a -days the young generation are not in favour of parental choice for the selection of their life partner. Moreover, there are no restrictions in marriage system regarding the choice of life partner as things have become easier for the young generation by the new legislations. Thus, the attitude of people has been increasingly changing towards the rules of endogamy and exogamy (Saini, 2022).

Objectives of the Study

1. To analyse the changes found in the system of marriage among the Bhalavalikar Gauda Saraswat Brahmins.
2. To examine the factors responsible for the changes in marriage system of the Bhalavalikar Gauda Saraswat Brahmins.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Selection of the Study Area: The present study is about the marriage system of Bhalavalikar Gauda Saraswath Brahmins of Dakshina Kannada district. Since the Bhalavalikar Gauda Saraswath Brahmins are in highest number in Sullia, Puttur, Bantwala and Belthangady taluks of Dakshina Kannada District, the study is carried out in these four taluks of Dakshina Kannada district of Karnataka State.

Sample of the Study: The sample for the present study is taken from the four taluks of Dakshina Kannada district. When comparing to other taluks of Dakshina Kannada district as well as other districts, the population of Bhalavalikar Gauda Saraswat Brahmins are more in Sullia, Puttur, Belthangady and Bantwala taluks. Therefore, 200 respondents have been selected from these taluks on the basis of Simple Random sampling method.

The following table shows the distribution of sample size of the present study.

Table No. 1 Distribution of Sample size

S1 No	Name of the Taluk	Respondents	Percentage
1	Belthangady	20	10
2	Bantwala	47	23.5
3	Puttur	61	30.5
4	Sullia	72	36
	Total	200	100

Source: Field Survey 2025

The graphical representation of the above table is given below.

Graph No. 1 Distribution of Sample Size



Table No. 1 shows the sample size of the respondents selected from four Taluks of Dakshina Kannada district. Out of 200 respondents 10 per cent of the respondents are selected from the Belthangady taluk, 23.5 per cent from the Bantwala taluk, 30.5 per cent from the Puttur taluk, and 36 per cent of the respondents selected from the Sullia Taluk.

Age Category of the respondents

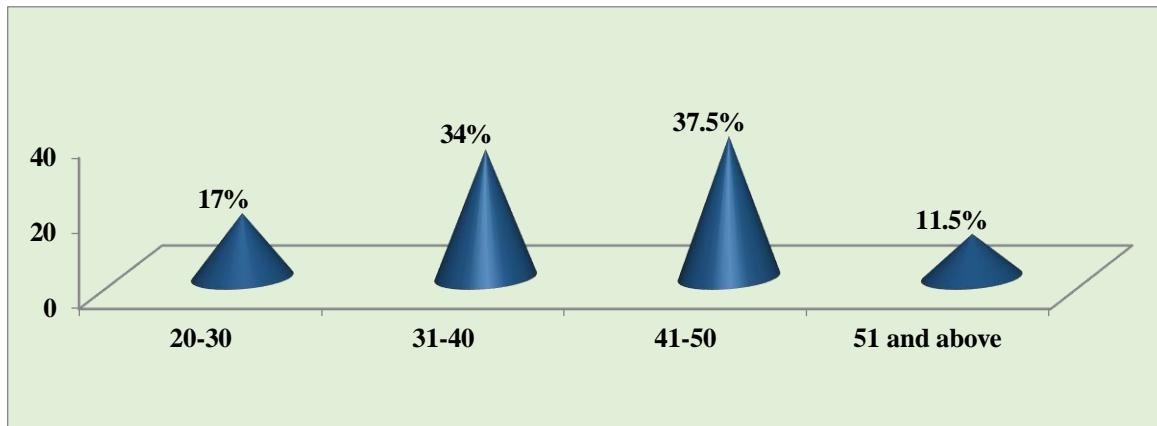
Table No. 2 Age of the respondents

S1 No	Age group	Respondents	Percentage
1	20-30	34	17
2	31-40	68	34
3	41-50	75	37.5
4	51 and above	23	11.5
	Total	200	100

Source: Field Survey 2025

The graphical representation of the above table is given below.

Graph No. 2 Age of the respondents



Graph No. 2 indicates the age category of the respondents selected for the present study. Out of 200 respondents, 17 per cent of the respondents have been taken from the age group of 20-30 years, 34 per cent of the respondents have been selected from the age group of 31-40 years, 37.5 per cent of the respondents have been selected from the age group of 41-50 years and 11.5 per cent from the age group of 51 and above years.

Tools and Techniques of the study

The present study is based on both primary as well as secondary sources of data. The prime objective of the paper is to analyse the changing patterns of Marriage in Bhalavalikar Gauda Saraswat Brahmin community. Therefore structured Interview Schedule consisting of both closed form and Open ended questions is used to collect data regarding the changing pattern of marriage in the community. Secondary data has been gathered from books, journals and other related studies.

DISCUSSION

As mentioned earlier, the institution of marriage has undergone a massive change in the recent years. Some of the changes which have changed the attitude of the youth towards marriage and its norms in the Bhalavalikar community are described as follows.

Changes found in the Forms of Marriage: Even though in the traditional Bhalavalikar community, monogamy was the major form of marriage yet there were cases of polygamous marriages. But in the modern society, polygamous marriages have severely declined and monogamy is strictly followed by the members of the community.

Changes found in the process of mate selection: During the filed study, the respondents opined that in earlier days, parents usually selected the spouse and there was hardly any say of the girl and boy. But now-a-days due to various factors like increasing education of women, industrialisation, urbanization, economic independence of women, etc., women are also consulted in marriage matters. Moreover, in the modern society boy and girl meet each other and try to know the views of each other before marrying. Apart from this, the marriages which were earlier held by middlemen are now replaced with matrimonial agencies and the advertisement by newspaper and various social networking sites.

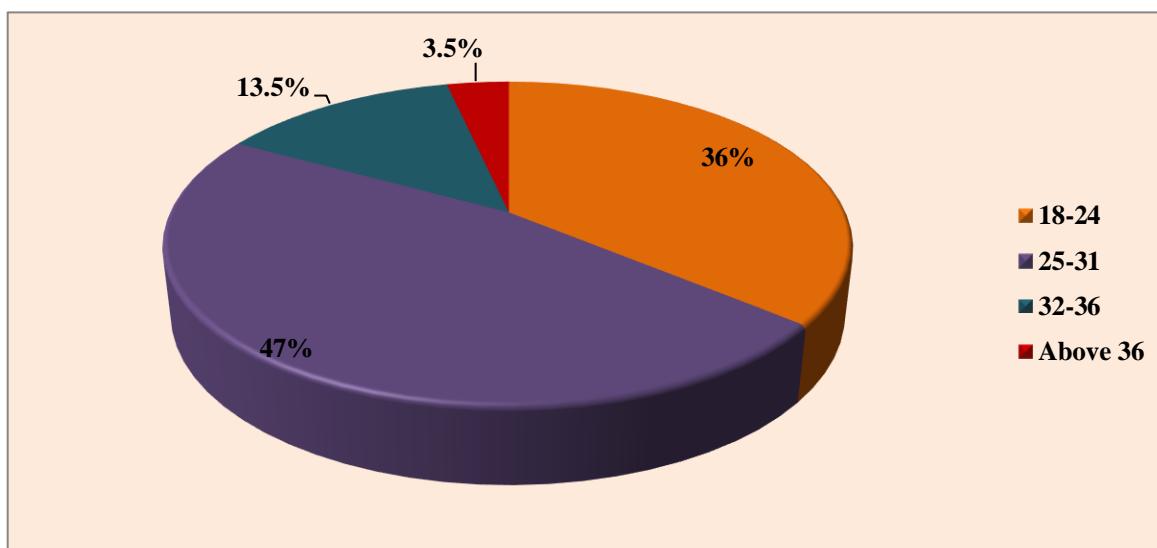
Changes found in the Age at Marriage: In traditional India, Child marriages were very common. But the cases of child marriages are decreasing over the period of time. The government of India has increased the marriage age of girls to eighteen years and twenty-one years for boys. While discussing with the respondents, they opined that traditionally both boys and girls in the Bhalavalikar community used to get married at an early age. In the modern days there is a big change due to the importance being given to higher education of girls and due to their economic advancement. The study indicated that the girls in the community are busy in their studies and therefore marriages get delayed in 24-30 years. This change towards late marriage is mainly associated with the socio economic changes that enhance the status of women by increasing educational as well as employment opportunities.

The following table shows the age at marriage of women in the community.

Table No. 3 Age at marriage of women

Sl No	Age at marriage	Respondents	Percentage
1	18-24	72	36
2	25-31	94	47
3	32-36	27	13.5
4	Above 36	07	3.5
	Total	200	100

Source: Field Survey 2025

Graph No. 3 Age at Marriage of Women


The Graph No.3 reveals the age at the time of women's marriage. The study shows that 36 per cent of the respondents married between the age group of 18 to 24 years. 47 per cent of the respondents married between the age group of 25 to 31. Another 13.5 per cent married between the age group of 32 to 36. Remaining 3.5 per cent married late that is after 36 years. Majority of the respondents married after 25 years of age which indicates that women are giving importance to higher education and employment.

The incidences of late marriages are not only limited for women but also found among the men of the Bhalavalikar Gauda Saraswat Brahmin community. The major reasons for this trend is lack of girls within the Bhalavalikar Gauda Saraswat Brahmin community, educational qualification of women which is higher than men, better employment of women, etc.

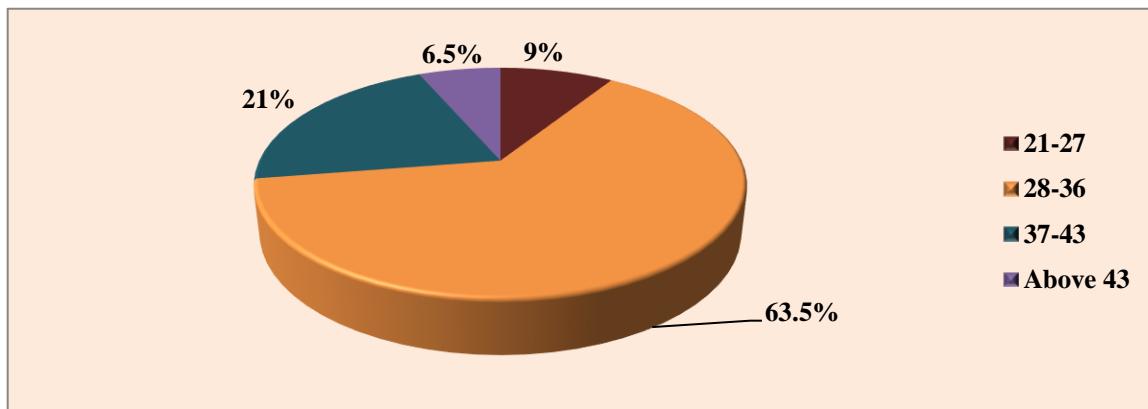
The distribution of men on the basis of their age at marriage has been shown in the Table No. 4.

Sl No	Age at marriage	Respondents	Percentage
1	21-27	18	9
2	28-36	127	63.5
3	37-43	42	21
4	Above 43	13	6.5
	Total	200	100

Source: Field Survey 2025

The graphical representation of the above table is given below.

Graph No. 4 Age at Marriage of Men



The above graph shows the age at the time of men's marriage. The study shows that 9 per cent of the respondents married early between the age group of 21 to 27 years. 63.5 per cent of the respondents married between the age group of 28 to 36. Another 21 per cent married between the age group of 37 to 43. Remaining 6.5 per cent married late that is after 43 years. Majority of the respondents married after 28 years of age which indicates that even men are also marrying late. Thus, the study indicates a marked rise in the marriageable age of both men and women in the Bhalavalikar community.

Changes found in the fertility rate: The late marriage in the community makes considerable difference in lowering fertility rate in the community. During the filed survey majority of the respondents opined that they prefer small size family.

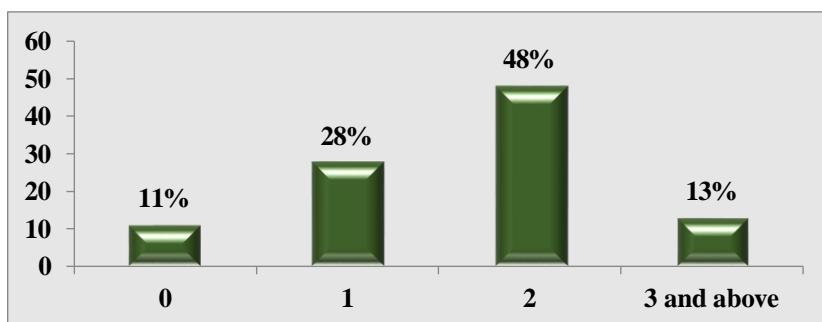
Table No. 5 Fertility Rate

Sl No	Number of Children	Respondents	Percentage
1	0	22	11
2	1	56	28
3	2	96	48
4	3 and above	26	13
	Total	200	100

Source: Field Survey 2025

The graphical representation of the above table is given below.

Graph No. 5 Fertility Rate



The graph No. 5 depicts that the Bhalavalikar Gauda Saraswat Brahmins generally follows the small family norm in the study area. From the sample selected, 49 per cent have reported having two children, and 28 per cent have only one child. 13 per cent of the respondents (who are above age of 50 years during the field survey) have reported having three and more children. There are 11 per cent of cases of families having no children.

Changes found in the rules of marriage: Like other Hindu communities in India, Bhalavalikar Gauda Saraswat Brahmins also follow the rules of Endogamy and Exogamy. The study revealed that though traditionally Bhalavalikars are exogamous at the gothra level, the restrictions are not strictly followed now-a-days. Some of the respondents opined that some have married girls from the same gothra. It shows that there are cases of gothra endogamy among the Bhalavalikar Gauda Saraswat Brahmin community. Gothra endogamy and caste exogamy are taking place due to lack of girls in the community and due to love affairs of the girls and boys belonging to the same gothra and different caste groups. The study shows that rigidity of caste system has decreased in the community.

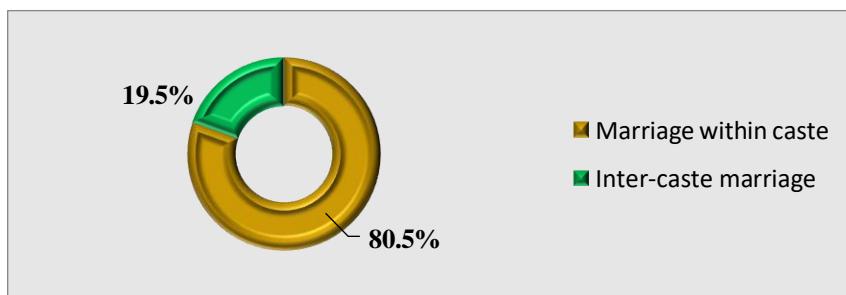
Increase in the practice of Inter-Caste Marriage: Caste plays a dominant role in the selection of mates in most of the Indian marriages. Bhalavalikar Gauda Saraswat Brahmins are not exceptional to this. During field survey, most of the respondents said that earlier it was difficult to think of marriage beyond their own caste group. But now-a-days the rigidity of the caste system in marriage selection is gradually decreasing and the number of inter-caste marriages are increasing. Today both boys and girls get many more opportunities to meet each other and they have more freedom to select their own life partner. This trend is mainly due to the impact of modernization, lack of girls within the community, socio-economic development, urbanisation, and industrialisation. The range of women's education and economic independence of women also contributed to increase in inter caste marriages within the community. The following table shows the practice of inter-caste marriages in the community.

Table No. 6 Practice of Inter-caste marriage

Sl No.	Marriage	Respondents	Percentage
1	Marriage within caste	161	80.5
2	Inter-caste marriage	39	19.5
	Total	200	100

Source: Field Survey 2025

Graph No. 6 Practice of Inter Caste Marriages



The above graph shows that 80.5 per cent of the respondents married within their own caste. 19.5 per cent of the respondents married from other castes. The study indicates that though the numbers of endogamous marriages are more among Bhalavalikar Gauda Saraswat Brahmins, the incidents of inter-caste Marriages are also increasing. This change clearly shows that the structure of marriage among Bhalavalikar community is in the process of transformation.

Changes found in the stability of Marriage (Increase in the cases of Divorce and widow re-marriages): In the traditional society, the institution of marriage was considered quite stable and hardly any divorce was noticed. Moreover, in the earlier days divorce carried a considerable stigma and the pressure for the sake of the children and also for the sake of appearances and family honour, marriage was very strong. Now due to factors like legislative measures, education, technological advancement and more awareness has changed the stability in the institution of marriage (Goody, 1973).

Though there are a few cases of divorce in the community, it is also permitted on the grounds of adultery, impotency or maladjustment. Traditional ideas about widow remarriage and the ill-treatment of widows are not

prevalent in the community. Widows are not regarded as inauspicious; they are permitted to participate in all the religious and social functions. Though there are no restrictions for widows and divorced to marry again, the cases of re-marriage of divorced and re-marriage of widows is few among the Bhalavalikar community.

Changes in Economic aspects of Marriage: In the traditional society, marriage was considered as a religious ceremony. But now-a-days it is considered as a social or a civil ceremony. During the field visit respondents opined that people spend lavishly on marriage particularly for decorating marriage halls, arranging grand lunch, music orchestra, video-shooting, photography, etc.

Factors responsible for changing marriage patterns in Bhalavalikar Gauda Saraswat Brahmin community:

Education: Education has played a significant role in changing the traditional customs, role of women in a marriage and decline in the rigidness of caste system and religion while selecting a mate for marriage. On the whole, education helps in changing the mind-set of the younger generation who become more open-minded when compared to the earlier generations. During the field study majority of the respondents opined that due to their higher education, the younger generation do not care about castes. Moreover, higher education among the youth leads to better employment opportunities which give more power and freedom to exercise their choice in selecting a mate for themselves.

Economic factors: Changes in marriage institution are clearly related to the economic factors also. The remarkable increase in employment opportunities, increasing urbanization and involvement of women in economic activities outside the home contributed to the changes in marriage system. The women's work outside the home has boosted her self-respect and self-confidence. These developments have affected the institution of marriage (Kapadia, 1982).

Legal factors: The legislative actions taken by the government in the last 50 years or more has contributed significantly to change the nature of institution of marriage. The important laws which brought about changes in marriage system are Dowry Prohibition Act, 1971, Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006 and Hindu Marriage Act, 1955. These laws are related to: (i) age at marriage (ii) field of mate selection (iii) number of spouses in marriage (iv) breakage of marriage (v) dowry to be taken and given (vi) remarriage. Legislations have not only abolished child marriages but also fixed the minimum marriageable age for boys and girls as for girls are 18 years and boys 21 years. The legislations have also made clear the selection in marriage that is, who should marry whom. They have also legalized inter-caste and inter-religious marriages and have made provision for registered marriages. Legislations have made provisions for divorce. Equal rights are conferred on men and women in this regard (Rao, 2004). Legislations have also specified the conditions of divorce.

CONCLUSION

Change is universal and the institution of marriage is also experiencing many changes. Educational, economical and legislative measures are major factors playing profound role in this change. With the period of time the age at marriage, process of mate selection, increase in divorce rates and the economic aspects of marriage have undergone a tremendous change. Though these changes are observed today the importance of marriage has not diminished. It is still practised universally. Though its sanctity is affected a little, it is not reduced to the level of a mere civil contract. Men and women in the Bhalavalikar Gauda Saraswat Brahmin community are still emotionally involved in their marriages.

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