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New Sociological Perspectives: Understanding Cross-Region Marriages and Their Children in Rural Haryana, India

Abstract

Haryana, in northern India, has a long history of a low female ratio and a gender regressive society. Men began to find it difficult to marry locally and hence brought wives from poor and distant locations. Cross-region marriages cross the customary barriers of village exogamy (marriage beyond one's own village), caste endogamy (marriage within the caste), language, class, and culture, and may necessitate a significant distance within India. They are arranged marriages that do not arise by the agency of persons brought together by the marriage, i.e., these are not love marriages. They entirely remove a woman from her family, geographical, linguistic, and cultural settings. In such marriages, the weight of adjustment falls entirely on the women, and society does not appear to 'accept' them as their own. There is a notable scarcity of writing on the children of such marriages. As the number of these marriages grows, it becomes vital to provide fresh scientific study evidence on the status of all these children by employing new and untested research techniques, concepts, and geographies. Presenting a thorough literature review and listing the research gaps identified by the researchers, this paper suggests conducting biographical research on adult children of cross-region marriages in southern Haryana's Mahendragarh district for a variety of reasons.

Keywords

cross-region marriages, women, adult children, Haryana, Mahendragarh

Nowe perspektywy socjologiczne: rozumienie międzyregionalnych małżeństw i ich dzieci z ruralnego stanu Haryana w Indiach

Abstrakt

Haryana to stan w północnych Indiach o regresywnej strukturze ludności i z długą historią niskiego współczynnika feminizacji. Deficyt kobiet sprawił, że mężczyźni zaczęli sprowadzać kandydatki na żony z biednych i odległych miejsc. Małżeństwa międzyregionalne przekraczają zwyczajowe bariery egzogamii wioskowej (małżeństwo poza własną wioską), endogamii kastowej (małżeństwo w obrębie kasty), języka, klasy i kultury i wymagają pokonania znacznej odległości w obrębie Indii. Są to małżeństwa aranżowane, kobiety zostają wyrwane ze swojego środowiska rodzinnego, geograficznego, językowego i kulturowego. Choć w takich małżeństwach ciężar dostosowania spada całkowicie na kobiety, to jednocześnie społeczność nie wydaje się „akceptować” ich jako swoich. W miarę jak rośnie liczba międzyregionalnych małżeństw oraz ich dzieci, niezbędne staje się

dostarczenie dowodów dotyczących statusu tych małżeństw i ich dzieci przez badania naukowe, wykorzystujące nowe techniki badawcze i koncepty. Na podstawie przeglądu literatury i listy luk badawczych, zidentyfikowanych przez innych badaczy, autor artykułu sugeruje przeprowadzenie badań biograficznych na dorosłych dzieciach małżeństw międzyregionalnych w południowym dystrykcie stanu Haryana - Mahendragarh.

Słowa kluczowe

małżeństwa międzyregionalne, kobiety, dorosłe dzieci, Haryana, Mahendragarh

Introduction

Over 70% of all rural workers in India are employed in agriculture, which is the driving force of the country's economy. The "green revolution" of the 1960s, led in India by MS Swaminathan, transformed agriculture into a contemporary industrial system through the adoption of technology, including the use of high-yielding variety seeds, irrigation facilities, pesticides, and fertilisers, which increased food grain production (Parayil, 1992). Because of its significant contributions, Haryana, a geographically tiny state in northern India, is now one of the richest states in the country. It accounts for only 1.5% of India's land area but generates 15% of its agricultural output, which has increased sevenfold since Haryana's inception in 1966¹. Gurgaon in southern Haryana ranked number one in India in IT growth and existing technology infrastructure (Damodaran, 2016). The average income earned per person is known as the Per Capita Net State Domestic Product (NSDP). At the time of Haryana's creation in 1966, the state's per capita income in current prices was barely Rs. 608. Since then, per capita income has multiplied many times over. The state's per capita income at constant (2011-12) prices is expected to be Rs. 179,367 in 2021-2022, representing an 8.3% increase (Economic Survey of Haryana, 2022). The state features a sizable network of highways suitable for motor vehicles, access to power, and significant urbanisation. It is also the state that is closest to the national capital of Delhi, and thanks to the economic strategies of previous administrations, numerous large industries, factories making cars and tractors, and other factors, even people in the rural areas enjoy prosperous economic conditions.

But over time, the state of Haryana has also continued to draw attention from throughout the country for its largely patriarchal and gender-regressive culture with a lack of girls in its population (see Table 1).

¹ The data appeared in Haryana Samvad report, 2018 [accessed: 6.6.2022] <http://haryanasamvad.gov.in/store/document/11%2012%201%20HARYANA%20SAMVAD%20NOV-%20JAN%202017-2018%20FOR%20for%20web.pdf>

Census Year	Sex Ratio (number of females per thousand males) in Haryana over the years
1901	867
1911	835
1921	844
1931	844
1941	869
1951	871
1961	868
1971	867
1981	870
1991	865
2001	861
2011	877

Table 1. Source: Primary Census Abstract, Haryana 2011

The overall sex ratio (number of females per thousand male population) in Haryana's entire history has never crossed the elusive mark of 900. According to the latest Census of India in 2011, the overall sex ratio of Haryana was a mere 877 females per 1000 males. This means that there are over 120 males per 1000 male population that would find it extremely difficult to get married locally, the situation often termed as the phenomenon of "marriage squeeze" by demographers resulting from highly masculine sex ratios at birth (Guilmoto, 2012; Hudson & Boer, 2002). The imbalance in the number of marriageable males and marriageable females in the marriage cohort (culture-specific age groups within which marriages are fixed) has been dubbed the "marriage squeeze," and it causes cases of complexity, anxiety, difficulties, and failure to find a spouse in the marriage market for both men and women (Mukherjee, 2015).

Some previous study on the causes of Haryana's low sex ratio has highlighted the following factors: (a) cultural preference for boys over girls (Kaur, 2008a) since boys are the ones who light the pyres of the deceased or take care of the old; (b) dowry required to obtain chosen grooms or to agree to the current "honourable" marital standards (Kaur, 2008b); (c) despite numerous strong restrictions in existence, easy access of private practitioners to "suitable technology" for female infanticide and foeticide techniques; (d) hypergamy, i.e. the pressure on parents to marry daughters into better status households; (e) girl child security, as rape threats are very real in Haryana, which has been dubbed the "rape capital" of India; it is also one of the reported reasons why girls leave school so early in

many parts of India; (f) women's lower value in wheat farming systems, which require less of their labour or where their labour is less visible than in paddy farming systems of Northeast India; and (g) kinship, marriage, and descent systems in which men inherit (Kaur, 2008b). The institution of monogamous, heterosexual marriage, which is pretty ubiquitous and obligatory in many regions of Asia, is directly threatened by unbalanced sex ratios (Mishra, 2013). By 2030, it is anticipated that more than 60 million males in China and India between the ages of 20 and 50 will be faced with the possibility of being single, putting Asia's custom of compulsory marriage in jeopardy (Economist, 2011). According to Kaur (2013), it is essential to remember that the marriage squeeze is affected by the social, economic, and political structure of marriage. Marriage shortages can occur in nations without an imbalance in sex ratios, as was the case in Japan (Knight, 1995).

Kaur (2013) observed the following repercussions of Haryana's high male sex ratio: (a) marriage squeeze; (b) surplus males, crime, and violence against women; (c) effect of marriage squeeze on marriage patterns and practices; (d) effects on men's sexual behaviour and health; and (f) effect on women's status and gender equity prospects. Since the mid-1990s, it has led bachelors to get rejected in their local marriage markets due to their landlessness, unemployment, lack of education, bad reputation or older ages, etc. Therefore, in response to the shortage of women in marriageable cohorts, the state of Haryana witnessed an increase in long-distance, cross-region marriages (Ahlawat, 2009; Chaudhry 2019b; Chaudhry & Mohan, 2011; Kaur, 2004, 2008a, 2012; Kukreja, 2018a; Mishra, 2013, 2018; Mukherjee, 2013, 2015) where rural men are breaking the traditional caste endogamy marriage norms (marrying within one's own caste group), sharing similar region and culture, village and territorial exogamy (extending over several villages). A cross-region marriage is one that traverses the traditional boundaries of caste, language, and state boundaries and entails long-distance migration within India, unlike the conventional marriage that conforms to caste and community norms within a relatively short distance (Chaudhry, 2021). These women often come from comparatively poorer eastern states such as West Bengal, Assam, Bihar, or Tripura.

In a survey published in 2019 and conducted over two years, 130,000 Haryana brides were found to be 'bought' from other states as the local media looks at such marriages from either trafficking or "bought with money" point of view (Singh, 2019). Regarding this perspective on these marriages, social scientists reject it. They claim that such unions are "arranged" between areas, showing a trend of rural, frequently illiterate individuals connecting across geographical and cultural boundaries (Kaur, 2004). A network forms when a single marriage happens and is followed by other marriages, not all of which are necessarily happy ones.

By doing extensive secondary research, this study highlights the current literature on women and children in cross-region marriages in north India and recommends newer sociological perspectives to examine this phenomenon. This report also identifies the research gaps and key research questions identified by earlier researchers, which could be beneficial to certain other younger scholars wishing to explore this field of study. It is suggested that “biographical research” on adult children of cross-region marriages be conducted using sociological concepts such as self, the generalised other, significant other, and stigma borrowed from the Symbolic Interactionist paradigm in order to better understand the current status of children and possibly lead to urgent policy formulations. For a number of reasons, a different geography of southern Haryana, specifically the Mahendragarh district, is also recommended.

Locating Women and Children in Cross-Region Marriages: A Literature Review

The burden of adjustment in cross-region marriages lies on the women who are brought into a culture generally more patriarchal than their own (Mukherjee, 2013). They enter a different place, an unknown culture, and a strange community, in which not many of them have any networks of support other than their husbands. After getting married, a woman abandons her *pihar* (natal village/home) and her *piharwale* (natal relatives), who are “one’s own,” to live with strangers at her *sasural* (marital/in-laws’ home) (Chaudhry, 2019a). According to the *kanyadan* (gift of a maiden/virgin) philosophy, she is given in marriage from her father to her husband, making her a *paraya dhan* (someone else’s property). According to Chaudhry (2019a), the distant or cross-regional bride is more likely to experience physical abuse and beatings at the hands of her husband than the local bride. She is financially and socially dependent on her spouse in many ways, which prevents her from making the choice to leave him. It would be impossible for her to travel anywhere. For a woman, even going to her birthplace requires permission from her husband and more significant affinal relatives, as well as arranging someone to help with the housework while she is away and supervising her in her birthplace’s remote village. In her research on Bengali bridal diaspora, Kaur (2010a) finds that there are two reasons for a cross-regional bride to migrate for marriage from Bengal or other such places: poverty and dowry. Data shows that most women married out are from poor rural or urban working-class families. They are frequently forced into marriage with less-than-prosperous males who may also have additional disadvantages, such as being older than they are, having previously been married, being alcoholics, being widowers with numerous children, or having some sort of physical impairment.

Another reason that Kaur (2010b) points out is the unattractiveness of the local grooms for cross-regional brides. Significantly, the long-distance marriages that these women enter into are “dowry less” and even the marriage expenditure is taken care of by the needy groom, thus saving the ‘honour’ of her parents who must be willing to marry their daughter off anyhow. Marrying daughters at the appropriate age is a matter of honour for most Indian families (Mishra & Kaur, 2021). Women, too, might choose this as a migration strategy to move to more desirable locations, taking it as a livelihood strategy for themselves (Kaur, 2004).

For women in Haryana, it is customary to wear a “veil” or *ghoonghat*. Every time they encounter a man who is older than their husband, they cover their faces with a *duppatta*. Haryana’s cultural landscape has traditionally included the *ghoonghat*. Women who practice face covering are regarded as being obedient and responsible. It is also seen as a sign of respect for elders. A “veil” covering their faces is as foreign to cross-regional brides as their husbands. They do not usually have it in their houses with their mothers. They must observe other ladies doing it in order to learn how to do it. To build their own social capital, they must also learn other cultural norms and practices. The food is also distinct. Vegetables, rice, and wheat are consumed along with milk, ghee, and other dairy products in Haryana, which is mostly a vegetarian society. Women from Bengal or Tripura typically include chicken or fish in their regular diets. They find it quite challenging to alter their diets after such a long time.

Overage bachelors in Haryana are known as *chade*, a term that also alludes to clubs or sticks, hinting at the propensity of these men towards physical and sexual aggression similar to their Chinese counterparts who are known as *guang guner*, meaning naked branches (Mishra, 2018). In north India, while marriage is thought to grant people social adulthood, bachelors enjoy a prolonging of youth since they have not yet assimilated into the home responsibilities associated with a householder’s existence (Jeffery & Jeffery, 2010; Osella & Osella, 2006; Parry, 2005). Similar to this, Mishra and Kaur (2021) map the effect of gender inequality on intergenerational relationships in north India using the concept of multiple biological clocks to comprehend the effects that gender inequality and the male marriage squeeze have on “overage” unmarried sons and their ageing parents, as well as the intergenerational contract between them within the family-household. Families in north India are under tremendous stress as a result of the disruption to household formation brought on by the lack of available brides because the family-household unit is the most crucial institution for the elderly’s care and security (Mishra & Kaur, 2021). Unmarried sons’ families deal with worries about their incapacity to organise marriages, the division of home chores, the continuation of the family line, and the neglect of the elderly.

A cross-regional marriage is not simply a problem in India. Taiwanese and South Korean governments have only lately begun to recognise ‘foreign wives’ as immigrants worthy of consideration. There has been a spike in financing new programmes in recent years to address the ‘foreign bride problem’ (Taiwan) or the ‘international family issue’ (South Korea) (Bélanger, Lee & Wang, 2010). Due to a lack of marriageable women in China and South Korea, two nations with low sex ratios, drastic methods are being used to get females (Kaur, 2004). These women are also more likely to endure domestic abuse than other local brides since there is no one in their relationship to take their side. Such women experience a loss of mobility, independence, and social safety networks (Kaur, 2013).

Researchers have employed sociological ideas such as intimacy and agency to better comprehend the condition of cross-region brides. In her doctoral research on the lived experiences of regional and cross-regional brides in a village in western Uttar Pradesh, Shruti Chaudhry (2016) uses Duncan’s (2014) notion of agency as relational and constrained to show that women’s agency, particularly in situations of marital crisis, is not independent but dependent on and mediated by other individuals (mainly male kin). Their contact with natal relatives is crucial in preserving affinal ties through gift-giving at festivals and participating in life-cycle rituals, and in crisis and conflict – marital disputes, breakdown, and widowhood (p. 159). Via an emphasis on the everyday lived reality of the marital relationship, Chaudhry (2016) contends that women’s violence is acceptable, but women may learn ways to resist or survive, and they can feel intimate with husbands and find support in tiny everyday gestures of intimacy.

Inter-caste marriages are not accepted in regional weddings and may end in honour killings/violence. According to Prem Chowdhry (2005), it is paradoxical that society is accustomed to inflicting tremendous punishment on their own young who violate conventional marital standards by bringing in local women of other caste groups to “permit” faraway women from various areas with unknown caste groups. *Majburi*, the requirement or compulsion felt by most males to marry, was linked to the tolerance of cross-region marriage, and *majburi* was used as a rationalisation for the violation of caste standards in marriage. Furthermore, these cross-regional marriages are accepted since they do not challenge the village’s local power hierarchy unlike the local inter-caste unions (Chaudhry, 2016). According to Reena Kukreja, families who get such wives are ostracised by both the extended family and the local kin group (Kukreja, 2018a). The long-distance character of these unions discourages queries about the bride’s caste, allows for easy fabrications about their caste, and thwarts the challenges to the caste system offered by local inter-caste marriages (Kukreja, 2017, pp. 18-22). The North Indian type of ethnoracism (racism propagated against an ethnic group) regards these brides as “internal outsiders” and demonstrates prejudice and negative attitudes, including real instances of physical assault

(Kukreja & Kumar, 2013). The introduction of the term “gendered colourism,” which refers to prejudice against lighter-skinned women, generates and reinforces extra othering of brides. Despite the fact that India is primarily a tropical nation with a mostly dark-skinned populace, casteism associates dark complexion with low caste or ‘untouchable’ status, hence with primitiveness, uncleanness, and ritual impurity (Ayyar & Khandare, 2013). Such prejudices are arguably passed down to the offspring.

Some academics disagree with Kukreja’s conclusions on caste status and prejudice towards interregional brides. According to Mishra (2013), caste differences between partners play a significant role in cross-regional weddings, not because they constitute a basis for discrimination but rather because they require cross-region brides to conform to new caste customs after marriage. Chaudhry (2019b) aims to challenge the notion that cross-region brides’ ambiguous or diverse caste status is completely meaningless in the caste-restricted rural communities where they marry. In Barampur, the village where she conducted her research, she discovered a discourse on caste that was based on idioms of purity conveyed via food exchanges, disparaging remarks about skin tone, and a reluctance to accept offspring of interregional couples in marriage.

The state’s leadership seems unwilling to acknowledge the issue, much less resolve it. For them, it is irrelevant; nonetheless, it would be inaccurate to draw conclusions about this problem based on the experiences of a small number of brides.

According to Sonali Mukherjee (2013), there is a widening gap between those who follow traditional marriage laws and do not favour the newly established laws of importing spouses and those who do. Due to strong patriarchal and caste ideologies, the majority of Haryana society does not view these arrangements as marriages in the traditional meaning of the word. Non-acceptance, however, only exists on a moral and social level; it has nothing to do with legitimacy or legality. These unions are legal, and the offspring are the successors (Mukherjee, 2013). However, it could be challenging for such kids to get moral and social acceptance.

These undocumented cross-regional unions’ first generation has started to appear. According to Kukreja (2018a), children of interregional marriages face ‘othering’ on several levels in their social milieu, whether it be in the ‘safe’ haven of their homes or in public areas such as playgrounds, schools, or the community as a whole. Such children, she says, have two distinct burdens. Cross-border brides and their children face discriminatory behaviours from early childhood that extend into their adult life (Kukreja, 2018b). Having a mother of uncertain social and caste background can become a hindrance in more ways than one. The inability of such marriages to do anything towards uplift the status of men is substantiated by the lack of recognition in the offspring of such alliances (Chowdhry, 2005). Mishra (2016) discovered in her research in Haryana that

cross-regional spouses' children denied going through any challenges as a result of their moms' caste status. Sons ascribed their issues to, for instance, a lack of education, an unstable source of money, drunkenness, and other things. She contends that similar issues are experienced by the great majority of young single men in Haryana and are unrelated to the mothers' caste (2016, p. 233).

In Barampur, the setting of Chaudhry's PhD thesis, cross-region brides had the same status as spouses and mothers, their children were accepted as legitimate, and their sons had the same inheritance rights as sons of regional brides. The term "children of *Chamar* (lower caste) women and Jat (upper caste) men" was used to refer to children in Barampur as well as to lower caste members who had dark skin. Children were married into similarly structured households, producing a sort of sub-caste, according to Blanchet's research on inter-regional marriages in eastern Uttar Pradesh (2005). On a related topic, Kaur (2004) expresses worry concerning the likelihood of offspring from cross-region marriages marrying and asserts that this will be the true indicator of whether such unions are acceptable. It becomes vital to determine if women manage to actually effect change by producing changes in marital patterns in the following generation, or whether they merely adapt and assimilate in one generation to contribute to patriarchal patterns of the husband's culture. She hypothesises that the marriage chances of cross-region wives' children may vary: while a daughter's mixed caste status may be disregarded while arranging a marriage, this may not be the case for a son (Kaur, 2004). Kaur tells us of parents in such unions who felt they would have to either organise their sons' unions in families of other such couples or return to the mother's community to find a mate (2012, p. 86).

In her conclusion, Kukreja (2018b) claims that due to colonial and racist discourses of eugenics and scientific racism, these offspring (children of the cross-region marriage) are treated as "second-class" members of their parental communities and are thus perceived as a threat to the homogeneity and quality of dominant peasant Hindu caste groups. Their capacity to socialise within the kin group and community is negatively impacted, which has a long-term effect on their life choices and mental health. The kids also appear to repeat the ethnoracist and culturally chauvinist attitudes of their parental communities towards their mother ethnic groups through a blatant rejection of and contempt for the maternal culture, including language, food, and customs (Kukreja, 2018b, p. 394).

Mukherjee (2013) writes that there is a tendency on the part of people who do not engage in such marriages to look down upon these children by labelling them as people of 'low social esteem' and the couples live on the margins (p. 50). The security of these migrating women and their children, as well as the allocation of funds to enhance their

political, economic, and social lives in Haryana society, require urgent policy recommendations. A deeper understanding of these marriages is crucial (Mukherjee, 2015, p. 94).

Research Gap in Literature and Questions Raised For Future:

A Compilation

There is a wide research gap on children of cross-region marriages in Haryana. They have become the centre of sociological research on cross-region marriages only recently. Some of the major questions raised by researchers and suggestions provided for future research on the topic of children of cross-region marriages over the years are the following:

1. Ravinder Kaur (2004, 2008a, 2008b, 2010a, 2010b, 2012, 2013)
 - Will there be differences between marriage patterns in girls and boys born in cross-region marriages by girls being absorbed locally in the marriage market?
 - What makes out-marriage among Bengalis a more common survival strategy?
 - Are Bengalis more accepting of marriage outside the community and are Bengali women more easily assimilated than brides in other communities?
 - Are these and other such marriages pointers to the breaking down of rigid boundaries of caste, culture, and community?
 - What could be the meaningful support structure mechanism for cross-region brides?
2. Paro Mishra (2013, 2016, 2018, 2021)
 - If the phenomenon of cross-region marriage continues unabated, is there a possibility that the children of cross-region couples may form another sub-caste altogether?
 - Will there be a gender-based variation in the marriage prospects of boys and girls born of cross-region marriages, with girls getting absorbed locally in the marriage market and boys being forced to venture out like their fathers?
 - Will cross-region marriages decline in numbers if the sex ratio goes up over time?
3. Shruti Chaudhry (2016, 2019a, 2019b, 2021)
 - What effects do cross-region inter caste marriages have on caste for the next generation?
 - What does the flexibility of social stratification and hierarchies tell about marriage across regions? Which have greater resistance and which have greater permeability?

- What are the factors that affect people’s decisions on long-distance marriage migration?
4. Prem Chowdhry (2005)
- Would women be able to prove that their marriage had occurred in the time of a crisis?
 - Will the children be socially recognised and accepted?
 - In the coming years when the children grow up, will there be tensions and conflict regarding their inheritance rights?
5. Reena Kukreja (2017, 2018a, 2018b, 2021)
- Do daughters marry equal or lower rank males within approved sub-caste groups or do they enter traditionally preferred hypergamous alliances?
 - Whether and, if yes, how do discrimination tendencies recur or are interpreted differently to result in new exclusions in a variety of life outcomes, such as school success, employment prospects, marriage, or inheritance rights?
 - Does the father offer unconditional love to both the male and female offspring, or does the father’s prejudice come through in how he interacts with them?
 - How long-term is the psychological well-being of these children?
 - How do Dalit brides from different regions fare? Are these Dalit brides being trained to follow the discriminatory “caste customs” of the ruling castes toward the local Dalits? Or are they required to “adapt” to prejudices that are directed at them?
 - Do cross-regional brides have access to and may get the same rights and benefits as local brides do?
 - What effects do inter-caste or cross-regional marriages have on the children of such unions?
 - Given the distance between their parents’ homes, are children eligible to assert their entitlement to inherit their father’s property?
 - What is the state of mind and body of cross-region brides?

Suggested Research Methodology and Sociological Concepts on Children

Geography: Haryana has 22 districts divided into six administrative divisions. Mahendragarh is its southernmost district part of the Gurugram administrative division and has more than 350 villages (Census of India: Haryana, 2011) (see Figure 1).



Figure 1. Source: <https://www.wikidata.org/wiki/Q684019> [accessed: 15.5.2022]

For the new research, a focus can be placed on the Mahendragarh district specifically for the following reasons: first, there is a significant lack of research in the Mahendragarh district on cross-region marriage. Second, cross-region marriages are usually seen as ‘rich Haryanvi men’ marrying ‘poor women’, but Mahendragarh is one of the poorest districts of Haryana as proved by per capita income of district data released in 2011-2012 by the state government. Its per capita income was just Rs. 54,835 with the state average of Rs. 106,000. Third, the district has recently seen an increase in the number of cross-region marriages as reported by various daily local newspapers. Fourth, the southern parts of Haryana, including the Mahendragarh district, are dominated by the ‘Ahir’ community/caste population. The region is in fact known as ‘Ahirwal’ or the abode of Ahirs. They are predominantly a cattle-herding and agriculture-based community. The northern and central parts of Haryana are dominated by ‘Jat’ communities and the literature on cross-region marriages has largely focused only on the ‘Jat’ community so far. Fifth, Mahendragarh had the second lowest child sex ratio (0-6 age group) in the entire country, only after the Jhajjar district of Haryana, with 778 females per 1000 males in 2011. The district saw a dip of 40 points in its child-sex ratio data within a span of ten years. The situation of sex ratio in the district is really worrying.

The number of cross-region marriages in Haryana is said to be more than one hundred thousand but district-wise details are not available. Neither is the data available

to the state government. Only local media have been reporting that the number of such cases has been on the rise in the Mahendragarh district lately. It is assumed that each village of Mahendragarh has around 5-10 cases of such marriages. ‘Snowball sampling’ could be used to reach the subjects of the research in case we are not able to locate them on our own.

Concepts: For the new research, various concepts can be drawn from the symbolic interactionist paradigm. To begin, the study methodologies employed so far to investigate cross-region marriages have been either ethnographic or longitudinal studies conducted over time; however, symbolic interactionism is classified into numerous categories which have not been employed yet, including pragmatic, feminist, phenomenological, and constructionist approaches. The reflexive, gendered, and situational aspects of human experience are emphasised by contemporary symbolic interactionists. They investigate the role of language and different meanings in interpersonal interactions (Gubrium & Holstein, 2000). Because it is impossible to research experience directly, symbolic interactionists investigate how narratives, which are linked to discourse systems (interviews, tales, rituals, and myths), portray experience. These representational acts are narrative constructs. The meanings and patterns of ordinary experience are always represented in story form. The interaction between the person and society is viewed as an interpretive process that takes place via the use of meaningful symbols (such as language). A human being learns about the world and himself/herself largely through interpretations that are mediated and bound by interaction (Konecki & Kacperczyk, 2020).

Second, if the new research concerns the lived experiences of children (adult children aged 18 years and above) of cross-region marriage, concepts such as ‘self’ and ‘other’ coined by sociologists Mead (2015), Cooley (1902) and others (Goffman, 1997) in Symbolic Interactionists seem more logical to use to really understand the unique experiences of adult children from their subjective biographical experiences. It will lead to a better understanding of how adult children create their “self” and how “the generalised other” and “the significant other” contribute to that knowledge. It will also provide us information about their lived experiences of “being stigmatised” because of their perceived difference. Some concepts are briefly presented below:

1. Mead’s reflexive self and the generalised other

In symbolic interactionist social psychology, the idea of “the self” is crucial (Hewitt, 1997). G. H. Mead made significant contributions to our understanding of the social self, which is universally acknowledged. Mead believed that being conscious of oneself as both an object and a subject at the same time constituted the definition of the self. He saw it as the secret to unlocking all of human nature’s immense intellectual and cultural

abilities. He stressed the dialogical nature of the “I” and “me” statements. Mead also employed the idea of “me” to provide a window into key facets of the self in addition to serving as a dialogical partner. Mead defines “me” as a socially organised, conscious self-image that we construct by viewing ourselves through the eyes of the other, while “I” is a spontaneous response of the person to the social context, it is a source of innovation and creativity. He views the process by which social experiences are permanently integrated into the ego (through the “me”) and recreated by the “I” as such (Da Silva, 2007). Thus, selves are organic, developing social products.

Mead first used the phrase “the generalised other” to refer to a stage after taking on the part of the other where the other is another recognisable individual or group of individuals. According to Rock (1979), significant others alone are insufficient to account for a person’s social action reference points. However, these more distinct “others” might still be crucial to the development of the generalised other. Mead speaks of the process through which the community exerts influence over its members and its individual members through the generalised other, which enters as a determining factor in the individual’s thinking. She also makes reference to the attitudes of the entire community. Since it is important to embody the other rather than only perceive it, one can see the generalised other as a component of an internal dialogue within oneself.

2. Cooley’s looking-glass self and primary groups

Mead and Cooley have a lot in common because they both made contributions to the social-self theory, which has several elements. The social-self perspective marked a significant shift in how people viewed individuals, society, and culture (Wiley, 2011). We often absorb what we believe to be other people’s perceptions of us, according to Cooley (1902). This was his “looking-glass self.”

Cooley made a connection between the idea of the primary group, primarily friends and family, and the individual through the looking glass. His hypothesis was that this process, especially in the early years, is most active in the primary group (Wiley, 2011). He stated that sensing one’s own self is the self’s most fundamental and distinguishing quality.

According to Perinbanayagam (1975), the idea of the primary group has only been partially used as a potent explanatory variable in sociology. Cooley suggests a tangible and dynamic group of individuals—other selves—who provide a self with the elements and variety of life. They play a crucial role in how someone develops their social character and beliefs. Some of Cooley’s examples of the primary groupings were the family, the children’s playgroup, and the neighbourhood associations. Members of the primary

group take part in self-definition, defining what is real, and defining what is important (Berger & Kellner, 1971).

3. Goffman's concept of stigma

Stigma is a quality that communicates discounted stereotypes. Since Goffman's early development of the idea, psychological and social psychological research has studied how stigma acts at the micro level, limiting the well-being of stigmatised people (Clair, 2018). Goffman defined stigma as a severely disparaging characteristic, such as one's skin colour, body size, criminal record, or battles with mental illness, in his seminal book *Stigma* from 1963. For him, stigma is an all-encompassing aspect of social life that complicates ordinary micro-interactions; the stigmatised can be varied by interacting with those who do not share their stigma, and those without a certain stigma may belittle, overcompensate for, or try to ignore the stigmatised "at least in some connections and in some phases of life" (Clair, 2018, p. 319). Goffman's fundamental insights on the phenomenon continue to serve as a source of inspiration for contemporary sociological research on stigma, which has led to the development of measures to better understand how various aspects of stigma—such as courtesy stigma, structural stigma, or internalised stigma—shape the social relations and inequalities experienced by various groups (Clair, 2018).

Methods: The significance of biographical research increased in the last decades of the twentieth century when it started to develop rapidly (Kaźmierska, 2018). A biography is a true narrative of a person's life written by another person after extensive research on the subject. It strives for a balance between fact and interpretation. A biographical analysis based on the circumstantial reconstruction of a sequence of biographical experiences shows how and in what way the behaviours might have been produced (Czyżewski, 2013, p. 2). The term "narrative interview" was first coined by Fritz Schütze and is firmly grounded in members' everyday competencies to narrate their own experiences with particular features of a research procedure (Riemann, 2006). Interviews are an important research tool. Semi-structured interviews in particular allow research participants to talk in some depth and give space for participants to go on narrative tangents, choosing their own words. It is necessary that a sufficient trust relationship develops between the researcher and the informant before and during the interview. There should be a mutual understanding that the researcher does not know very much about the interviewee's relevant experiences and events which are of interest in this context, otherwise, there would be no point in telling the story (Riemann, 2006). The theory is that the interview can be effectively guided by the subject's memories and that a narrative interview can be used to recreate the internal form of sedimentation of experiences that the subject was involved in (Schütze, 1983, 1987). Qualitative biographical study acknowledges that

an individual's biography may always be viewed as a construct, but not only. Its primary focus is on researching individual patterns of processing social and milieu-specific experiences. Elżbieta Hałas, on the other hand, writes biographical reports, which, while recommended by symbolic interactionists (Blumer, 1969; Denzin, 1970), do not provide access to those aspects of the social process on which Symbolic Interactionism focuses its attention, namely current communication processes as a mutual interaction (1981). Symbolic Interactionism has undoubtedly provided significant motivation for study on the link between biography, identity definitions, and transformations (Piotrowski, 1985). What is the need to do biographical research on children (adult children aged 18 years and above) of cross-region marriages? The need is to learn the subjective biographical narratives of the adult children of cross-region marriages in rural India so that the questions raised by the researchers above about whether and how patterns of 'othering' and discrimination repeat themselves can be answered. Marriage patterns in the cases of boys and girls can also be analysed based on their life experiences. New scientific research evidence is needed to be built on the children such that needed policy recommendations to the government could be recommended based on proper research findings.

Conclusion

The state of Haryana, where cross-region marriages are supposed to be the highest in numbers, does not seem to consider them a 'problem'; rather, it is considered a solution to the problem of the lack of marriageable girls. State politicians during the assembly elections repeatedly ask for a vote from the people in the name of 'bringing wives from far for their unmarried sons'. Thus, it does not make sense right now for asking a remedy to this problem from the government. Yet the new research on children of cross-region marriage could come up with scientifically researched evidence and suggested policy recommendations for the government so that some steps and initiatives are taken to better the situation of both women and children of cross-region marriages. More and more district and state-level government officials need to be oriented and included in the research process so that their misconceptions and suggestions are taken into consideration. Local non-governmental organisations and other socially influential organisations could also be involved in inclusionary policy formulation. Elected village councils and leaders could be critical to making sure women and children are assimilated and accepted socially in their villages by everyone. Village gatherings, i.e. *panchayat* meetings, could be called to discuss their problems at the village level. Local print and TV media could also be included to message the larger audience about the well-being of such families.

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