

TOUCHABLE-UNTOUCHABLE INTER-CASTE MARRIAGE AND FERTILITY IN INDIA

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More than a score of studies over the past thirty years have tended to show that the effects of intercaste marriage in India and the United States are similar. The purpose of this paper is: 1) to determine the effects of touchable-untouchable, high-low intercaste marriages on fertility in India and 2) to identify demographic factors of intercaste married couples in India.

Two hypotheses are suggested: 1) intercaste couples will have lower fertility than intracaste couples; and 2) in intercaste marriages, fertility will be lower when the husband is a low caste untouchable, than when the wife is a low caste untouchable.

METHOD. The analytical sample included 49 intercaste couples, 49 high caste couples, and 49 low caste couples in India. All were aged 21 or more at the time of marriage, legally married, with the wives exposed to fertility risk for at least ten years. The couples were located by the referral or "snowball" technique, from the Lucknow, Kanpur, Allahabad, Agra, Raipur, Ludhiana, Banaras, Lakhimpur-Kheri, and Delhi areas of north India. They were intensively interviewed from 1970 to 1977. The lack of randomization in sample selection demands caution in generalizing. Moreover, the "snowball method leads to a homogenous sample, since referents are likely to know others like themselves who have intermarried. Since marriages between high caste touchables and low caste untouchables are relatively rare in India, the referral method is the only practical way to locate intercaste couples. Many of these marriages are performed in civil courts, in temples with a few friends, or in private homes with a few people. No uniform records are kept for such marriages. Since the sample was limited to only a few large urban and industrial areas of north India, inferences should be limited to these areas.

RESULTS. The dominant pattern of intercaste marriage in the sample is between low

caste (untouchable Harijan) males and high caste (touchable) females. The minor trend (5 cases) is between high caste males and low caste females. These intercaste marriage patterns parallel those of an earlier study (Das 1971a).

The mean number of children born to intercaste couples (1.5) is much lower than high caste couples (2.4) and low caste couples (3.5).

TABLE 1
FERTILITY DIFFERENTIAL FOR INTER-CASTE AND INTRACASTE MARRIAGES

Fertility Level	Inter-caste	High caste	Low caste
Above mean	.29	.45	.63
Below mean	.71	.55	.37
Total	1.00	1.00	1.00
N	49	49	49

TABLE 2
MEAN FERTILITY OF INTERCASTE AND INTRACASTE MARRIAGES

Marriage Type	Couples	Mean Fertility
Intercaste		
Husband high	5	1.8
Wife high	44	1.5
High Caste		
Brahmin	19	2.0
Kshatriya	16	2.5
Vaishya	14	2.9
Low Caste		
Chamar	21	3.1
Dhobi	13	3.6
Bhangi	15	3.8

Results in Table 1 support the hypothesis of lower fertility for the intercaste married couples, as compared to intracaste married couples. The data also show that fertility is perhaps slightly lower in intercaste marriages of a low caste husband with a high caste wife, but the number of cases is too low to allow a test of statistical significance, and the question remains in doubt (Table 2). However, intercaste marriages in which the husbands are older than the wives have a higher rate of fertility than marriages in which the wives are older than husbands (Table 3).

TABLE 3
FERTILITY OF INTERCASTE MARRIAGE
BY HUSBAND'S CASTE LEVEL AND
AGE COMPARED TO THOSE OF WIFE

Husband's Caste	Age	Couples	Mean Fertility
High	Older	4	2.0
	Same	1	1.0
	Younger	0	
Low	Older	5	1.6
	Same	26	1.9
	Younger	13	.6

TABLE 4
FERTILITY OF INTERCASTE MARRIAGE
BY HUSBAND'S CASTE AND EDUCATION
COMPARED TO THOSE OF WIFE

Husband's Caste	Education	Couples	Mean Fertility
High	Higher	0	
	Same	2	2.0
	Lower	3	1.7
Low	Higher	41	1.5
	Same	2	1.5
	Lower	1	1.0

The effects of differences in education between husband and wife in intercaste unions is not sufficiently established by the data in Table 4, because the great bulk of the cases concern the lower caste husband with a higher education level than that of the higher caste wife. Education differences permit no meaningful comparison.

DISCUSSION. The prediction was that intercaste married couples are more likely to have lower fertility than intracaste married couples in India, and empirical findings tentatively support this hypothesis. Results of this study paralleled findings that Jewish mixed marriages (in which only one partner was Jewish) had fewer children than homogamous couples (Goldstein and Goldscheider, 1968:167; Goldscheider and Uhlenberg, 1959:351-372; Sly, 1970:443-459; Sinnott

and Marshall, 1971:588-601). This is also true of Protestant-Catholic marriages, in which the fertility of the intermarried was lower than that of homogamous marriages of Catholics or Protestants (Kiser and Whelpton, 1958:1327).

One of the reasons for lower fertility in intercaste married couples may be the alleged instability and poor adjustment that result from the differences in caste identification of the spouses.

In India, many modern and liberal people believe that intercaste marriages should be accepted. (Such marriages are legally permitted in India.) However, as they know the problems entailed in this basic change, they are not always willing to pioneer it. All of the intercaste marriages were against the wishes of the high caste parents, although the low caste people tended to be more tolerant of these marriages. In most cases, high caste people had found the expected opposition from their families at the time of the marriage.

In addition to the operation of psychological and sociological variables, Bresler (1961:17) suggests that biological factors in the mixture of different racial and ethnic genes may account for lower fertility in high-low caste married couples.

The results did not support the hypothesis H_2 that low caste husband-high caste wife marriages were more likely to have fewer children than high caste husbands-low caste wife marriages. However, the data suggest that the fertility may be slightly lower in intercaste marriages which involved low caste husband-high caste wives than intercaste marriages which involved high caste husband-low caste wives.

Most of the high caste women respondents reported that they planned a small family because they were aware that the children if intercaste marriages are always considered Shudra (low caste) and may suffer, as do their parents, the restrictions and deprivations of the Shudra caste. By marrying low caste men of high achievement level, high caste women of low achievement level tended to raise their achievement level, but to lose their higher ascription status (Das, 1971a:25). Though low caste husbands may decide to have more children because

om their point of view their children would be attaining a higher ascription status, the wife is the one who finally decides whether to have or not to have children.

Conversely, low caste women who married high caste men were not so concerned about the consequences which their children might suffer. They felt they were raising their ascription level by marrying men of high castes. They were not careful in using contraceptives and reported that they wanted more children.

The low caste women who married high caste men were aware of the special provisions granted to the "backward" caste by the Indian constitution. They realized that even if their children were considered Harijans (Shudras or untouchables) they would have no problem in giving them high school or college education because government scholarships were available to "backwardcaste" students. Also, in the agencies of central and state governments, one post in eight of those filled by competitive examination was reserved for backward castes. Standards and age limits were adjusted to their proper education. Thus, high caste husbands-low caste wives would be encouraged to have more children than the low caste husbands-high caste wives. Since Harijan women came from large families, they may tend to have more children.

The data on differentials in fertility and intracaste marriage in India indicates that fertility is generally higher among low castes than among high castes. Therefore, the higher fertility among Harijans may also be due to their lower socioeconomic status. They seem to have fewer opportunities for other forms of entertainment due to their economic handicaps (Das, 1971b:232).

Other variables, such as education, occupation, place of nativity, religion, community size, "intercourse variables," "conception variables," and gestation variables" may affect fertility (Davis, 1955:33).

The data suggested that in India intercaste marriages in which the husband was older than his wife had higher fertility than those in which the wife was older than the husband. This may be due to recent changes in childbearing which have occurred in age cohorts 15 to 19, 20 to 24, and 25 to 29

years (Bogue, 1969:683). All of our women respondents were below 30 years of age. The lower fertility in Indian intercaste marriage in which the wife was older than her husband may also be attributed to the fact that eight women who married low caste men had become pregnant before their marriage. Hence, they delayed having additional children due to feelings of guilt.

The data showed a strong inverse relationship between the amount of educational attainment and the level of fertility. Marriages in which a high caste husband had more education than his low caste wife had lower fertility than those in which a wife had more education. Conversely, marriages in which a low caste husband had more education than his high caste wife had higher fertility than those in which the wife had more education.

CONCLUSIONS. The analysis of intercaste and intracaste marriages in India suggests that the intercaste marriages result in lower fertility. When the intercaste marriage is between low caste men and high caste women, the mean number of children born is comparatively lower than the mean number born to high caste husband-low caste wife. An increase in intercaste marriages could contribute to a reduction in population growth. Moreover, as intercaste marriages increase in number, they could help to eliminate caste distinctions, discrimination and segregation. As India gradually moves toward industrialization and urbanization, however, the traditional caste system will increasingly become unstable as secular norms oppose and replace older Hindu religious norms. Thus, some of the factors affecting the fertility rate of intercaste married couples will cease to operate as tolerance increases and discrimination decreases.

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