

A. K. Roychoudhury

The Incidence of Affinal Marriages in Different States of India

THE relationship between individuals is said to be affinal, if it arises out of matrimony and the marriages between them are known as affinal marriages like those with elder brother's widow (EBW), younger brother's widow (YBW), wife's sister (WS), son's wife (SW), wife's mother (MW) and father's wife or step mother (FW). Isolated reports on the prevalence of affinal marriages in some communities of India are found in the literature but they are not sufficient to make any general conclusion about their incidence in different parts of the country. If quantitative data of such marriages in different States are available, they may throw some light on the pattern and prevalence of affinal marriages in Indian populations,

As a part of the 1961 Census, the Government of India conducted a survey of 587 villages in order to know the incidence of consanguineous and affinal marriages in different States and Union Territories. All the households in each selected village were investigated and information regarding consanguineous and affinal marriages for all the married persons in each household was recorded.

A monograph entitled 'Marriages with Consanguineous and Affinal Relations' (Census, 1961) showing the results of 330 villages has been published in March, 1974. In this monograph, communities having records of consanguineous and affinal marriages are enlisted for all the States and Union Territories except for Delhi and Lakshadweep. Against each community the frequencies of diffe-

rent types of consanguineous and affinal marriages are given. Using these records consanguinity rates and inbreeding coefficients of main religious communities and tribes in different States and Union Territories of India have been determined (Roychoudhury, 1976) and the incidence of affinal marriages will be presented in this paper.

The Data

The records of different types of affinal marriage for all the communities in each State and Union Territory were collected from the monograph (Census, 1961) and they were arranged in a tabular form. Another monograph (Census, 1971) supplied the total number of marriages surveyed in each community of the selected villages of all the States excepting Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Kerala, Punjab and West Bengal. Relevant data for these states were obtained from the Office of the Registrar General, New Delhi.

When the survey was conducted in 1961, the names of some States and their compositions were different. The States which were known as Madras, Mysore and NEFA (North Eastern Frontier Agency) have been renamed as Tamil Nadu Karnataka and Arunachal respectively. The records of Assam State given in the monograph actually represent present Assam, Mizoram, Meghalaya and Nagaland taken together; similarly those of Punjab represent the Punjab and Haryana.

In this paper all the communities under survey in each State and Union Territory were classified into main religious communities (Hindus, Muslims, Christians, etc.) and tribes for which the percentages of affinal marriages were calculated (Table I).

Results

There are three types of affinal marriage prevalent in India, namely, the marriages with wife's sister, elder brother's widow and younger brother's widow. In majority of the States, the most frequent kind of affinal marriage among the Hindus and Sikhs is that with wife's sister followed by the marriage with elder brother's widow. The marriage with elder brother's widow in preference to that with wife's sister is very much practised by the tribes and Buddhists in Arunachal. Similar tendency, though at a lower degree, is observed among the tibals of Andhra Pradesh. The marriage with younger brother's widow is very rare in all States except for Arunachal and Punjab.

The percentage of affinal marriages varying between 2.5 and 4.6 was found among the tribals and Buddhists in Arimachal, Hindus and Sikhs in the Punjab and the tribals in Andhra Pradesh. But the incidence varied from 1.0% to 1.8% among the Hindus in Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Orissa and among the Christians and tribals in Manipur. In other States and Union Territories, the incidence of affinal marriages was less than 1%. There was no incidence of affinal marriages among the Hindus in Maharashtra and Tripura.

The incidence seems to be lower among the Muslims than among the Hindus. Not a single case of affinal marriage was observed among 388 and 562 Muslim marriages surveyed in Bihar and Kerala, respectively. The number of marriages surveyed in Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Rajasthan and West Bengal varied from 60 to 80. It is possible that owing to small number of marriages surveyed in these States, the incidence of affinal marriage was not found among the Muslims.

Discussion

Affinal marriage is very frequent among the Jat community of Punjab. Marriages with wife's sister, elder brother's widow and younger brother's widow are prevalent among the Hindu and Sikh Jats. The most common type of marriages is that with wife's sister. Marriages with wife's sister and elder brother's widow are generally practised by Brahmin, Chamar and Kumhar communities. One solitary example of marriage with step mother was recorded among the Kamboha (Sikh). This marriage appears to be an aberrant in terms of the customary norms of this community (Census, 1961).

Out of 16 tribal communities studied in Arunachal 11 were found to practise marriage with elder brother's widow indicating great prevalence of affinal marriage among the tribal communities. The frequency of marriage with elder brother's widow was high among Adi-Gallong and Hill Miri communities (Census, 1961). There is a general custom among the Nagas and some other tribes (Adi, for example) that in case of the death of a husband, the widow 'cannot marry a stranger, but must marry her late husband's brother' (Elwin, 1969; Roy, 1960). Probably, this custom leads to high proportion of marriage with elder brother's widow among the tribal communities. Besides Arunachal, the tribals in Andhra Pradesh practise marriages with elder brother's widow and wife's sister.

The consanguinity rates of the main religious communities in different States (Roychoudhury, 1976) are shown in a separate column of Table 1. It is noted that the Hindus and Sikhs in Punjab, the tribals in Arunachal and the Hindus in Assam have higher rate of affinal marriages than that of consanguineous ones. The correlation coefficient ($r = -0.1964$) between affinal and consanguineous rates was not found to be significant.

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References

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TABLE 1—INCIDENCE OF AFFINAL MARRIAGES IN DIFFERENT STATES OF INDIA

States/ Communities	Total marriages	Affinal marriages* (%)			Total	Consanguineous marriage** (%)
		EBW	YRW	WS		
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Andhra Pradesh						
Hindus	2,396	0.38	0.08	0.96	1.42	34.8
Tribals	204	1.96	0.49	1.47	3.92	52.0
Assam						
Hindus	1,071	0.09	—	1.03	1.12	0.8
Bihar						
Hindus	4,628	0.28	—	0.19	0.47	0.8
Gujarat						
Hindus	2,583	0.42	0.04	—	0.46	0.4
Muslims	735	0.14	—	.14	0.27	40.0
Jammu and Kashmir						
Hindus	713	0.14	—	1.68	1.82	1.0
Muslims	3,230	0.34	0.09	0.03	0.46	18.6
Karnataka						
Hindus	1,266	—	—	0.16	0.16	30.3
Kerala						
Hindus	3,566	0.06	0.03	0.67	0.76	12.7
Tribes	601	—	0.17	—	0.17	63.7
Madhya Pradesh						
Hindus	2,598	0.85	0.04	0.46	1.35	3.2
Orissa						
Hindus	1,008	0.60	—	0.40	1.00	4.2

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1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Punjab						
Hindus	1,958	1.28	0.61	2.71	4.60	0.7
Sikhs	2,168	0.78	0.27	1.38	2.49	1.4
Muslims	327	—	—	0.92	0.92	1.2
Rajasthan						
Hindus	363	—	—	0.28	0.28	16.2
Tamil Nadu						
Hindus	16,535	0.06	—	0.16	0.22	31.8
Muslims	983	—	—	0.30	0.30	34.2
Christians	1,041	—	—	0.29	0.29	17.6
Uttar Pradesh						
Hindus	4,910	0.77	0.06	0.12	0.96	0
Muslims	1,231	0.32	0.08	0.08	0.49	14.7
West Bengal						
Hindus	1,963	—	—	0.36	0.36	0
Arunachal						
Tribals	1,013	3.26	0.20	0.69	4.15	3.1
Buddhists	108	3.70	—	—	3.70	6.5
Himachal Pradesh						
Hindus	980	0.10	0.10	1.22	1.43	0.1
Manipur						
Christians and Tribes	1,045	0.38	0.10	0.96	1.44	10.6
Pondicherry						
Hindus	465	0.22	—	—	0.22	28.8
Tripura						
Muslims	693	0.43	—	0.43	0.86	5.2

*For abbreviations, see text.

**Source : Roychoudhury (1976); "—" stands for no incidence.