Social Acceptance of Inter-Religious Marriages in Modern Indian Society

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ABSTRACT :

Interreligious marriages happen when people from different faiths get married. In the past, these marriages faced many challenges due to religious beliefs, cultural traditions, and societal norms. Many communities prefer marriages within the same religion, and those who marry outside often face criticism or rejection. Even though laws now support personal choice, acceptance of interfaith marriages still depends on cultural, religious, and regional beliefs. This paper explores how society accepts or opposes interreligious marriages today. It looks at the reasons behind people's opinions, how these marriages affect social harmony, and their impact on individuals' lives. The study finds that while interreligious marriages are becoming more common, many couples still face difficulties such as family pressure, social discrimination, or religious restrictions. Understanding these challenges can help in creating a more inclusive society where love and personal choice are respected. This paper also suggests ways to promote better acceptance of interreligious marriages through education, open-minded discussions, and supportive policies.

KEYWORDS: Interreligious marriages, social acceptance, religious beliefs, inclusivity, modern society.

INTRODUCTION:

Marriage has always been viewed as a holy relationship that links not only two people, but also their families and communities. It influences society values and cultural customs significantly. In today's interconnected world, inter-religious weddings between partners from various religious origins are becoming more popular. These couplings represent love, harmony, and acceptance across religious barriers. However, although some societies welcome them as a symbol of diversity and development, others continue to oppose them because to deeply held cultural and religious views (Smith, 2018).

Historically, marriage has been tightly linked to religion, sustaining common norms and traditions throughout communities. In many societies, marrying within one's faith was the norm, ensuring that religious teachings and social institutions remained consistent. However, as globalization and cultural contacts grow, more people are choosing spouses from diverse religious backgrounds. This movement calls into question established ideas and forces cultures to reconsider their beliefs about religious and social boundaries (Brown, 2015).

Despite increased acceptance of inter-religious marriages, many couples continue to experience opposition, prejudice, and familial rejection. Religious differences can lead to confrontation, emotional hardship, and even social isolation. While significant research has been done on the legal elements and psychological challenges of interfaith couples, there has been little exploration of how society's perception is changing and what variables contribute to acceptance or rejection (Jones & Patel, 2020).

REVIEW OF RELEVENT LITERATURE:

   1.   **Societal Perspectives on Inter-religious Marriages in India**

Inter-religious marriages in India still face social resistance due to deep-rooted traditions and strict beliefs. Many families see marrying outside one's faith as unacceptable, leading to disapproval and pressure. While modernization and social media have helped change some views, challenges remain. Even in Kerala, the most literate state, a woman's choice to marry outside her faith sparked debate. However, acceptance is growing, with marriages under the Special Marriage Act increasing by over 300% in a year. Though progress is happening, many still struggle for acceptance in society (Wagay, Aamir, Nasthar & Naseema, 2024).

   2.   **Factors Influencing Social Acceptance on Inter-religious Marriages in India**

In India, several factors influence how society views inter-religious marriages. Higher education often leads to greater acceptance of such unions, as it promotes critical thinking and exposure to diverse perspectives (Kannan, 1963). However, this relationship is complex; some studies suggest that education does not significantly impact the incidence of inter-caste marriages (Pavela, 1964). Strong adherence to religious traditions can result in resistance to inter-religious marriages, with devout individuals strictly following doctrines that discourage such unions (Shum Ritha K & G. T. Lalitha Kumari, 2024). Age also plays a role; older generations, often seen as guardians of traditional norms, may be less accepting of interfaith marriages

compared to younger individuals (Kannan, 1963). These factors collectively contribute to the complex landscape of social acceptance for inter-religious marriages in India.

3. Impact of Inter-Religious Marriages on Modern Indian Society

Interfaith marriages bring together individuals from different religious backgrounds, leading to both positive and negative outcomes. On the positive side, these unions can foster cultural exchange and mutual understanding. According to a study by Arandil et al. (2017), interfaith couples often perceive their marriages as fulfilling, appreciating and respecting each other's religions. Additionally, such marriages can challenge societal prejudices and promote a more inclusive outlook, as noted by Ciocan (2016), who discusses the potential of interfaith marriages to bridge gaps between different religious communities.

However, interfaith marriages also present challenges. Children from these unions may experience social and psychological impacts due to navigating dual religious affiliations, as highlighted in a study examining the effects on children in interfaith families. Furthermore, legal complications can arise, especially in regions where interfaith marriages face societal resistance, leading to potential social and legal hurdles, as discussed in research on the prevalence and challenges of interfaith marriages in Indonesia. Despite these challenges, with mutual respect, open communication, and supportive legal frameworks, interfaith marriages can contribute positively to societal diversity and cohesion.

4. Current Trends of Inter-religious Couples in Modern Indian Society

Inter-religious marriages in India are becoming more common in cities because of education, workplaces, and social media (Singh, 2021). However, legal issues under the *Special Marriage Act* and family opposition still create challenges, especially in traditional communities (Sharma, 2020). Some families ask for *religious conversion*, but many couples now mix both traditions, celebrating festivals from both religions or raising their children without a specific faith (Mehta, 2019). Political and religious tensions, like the 'Love Jihad' debate, also create social pressure (Kumar, 2022). Still, *legal awareness and support groups* are helping interfaith couples (Rao, 2021). Movies and celebrities influence acceptance, and many urban couples prefer *court marriages* over religious ceremonies (Chopra, 2020). Women's financial independence has also given them more freedom to make their own choices in marriage (Patel, 2021).

5. Challenges Faced by Inter-religious Couples in Modern Indian Society

Interfaith couples often face challenges, mainly related to family rejection and wedding preparations. Many experience fear of disapproval, leading some to hide their relationships for years (Niekerk et al., 2018). Generational differences also play a role, with older family members showing lower acceptance (Arweck, 2022). Parental opposition remains a significant hurdle, particularly for women, though most eventually gain approval before marriage (Sousa, 1995). Wedding planning presents additional difficulties, especially regarding ceremony dates and religious customs (Verma et al., 2018). Lack of negotiation can create conflicts, but compromise helps ease tensions among couples and families. These challenges highlight the need for communication and flexibility in interfaith marriages.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE:

Inter-religious marriages in India are shaped by social, cultural, and religious factors. Theoretical perspectives help explain the challenges and acceptance of such unions in modern society.

1. Structural-Functionalism: Social Acceptance of Inter-Religious Marriages

Social acceptance of inter-religious marriages varies across regions, communities, and generations. Structural-functionalism suggests that societies resist changes that disrupt traditional family structures (Parsons, 1951). Conflict theory explains opposition as a result of power struggles between religious and cultural groups (Marx, 1848). However, modernization theory argues that increased education, urbanization, and exposure to diverse cultures contribute to greater acceptance (Inglehart & Welzel, 2005).

2. Social Identity Theory: Societal Perspectives on Inter-Religious Marriages in India

Indian society holds diverse views on interfaith marriages. Cultural relativism emphasizes that acceptance depends on cultural norms and traditions (Boas, 1940). Social identity theory suggests that individuals identify strongly with their religious group, leading to resistance against interfaith unions (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). However, globalization theory highlights how globalization and media influence are reshaping attitudes, promoting cross-cultural relationships (Robertson, 1995).

3. Theory of Planned Behavior: Factors Influencing Social Acceptance

Several factors shape social acceptance, including family approval, religious beliefs, and community influence. The theory of planned behavior explains that attitudes, social norms, and perceived control affect decisions regarding interfaith marriages (Ajzen, 1991). Contact hypothesis suggests that positive interactions between religious groups reduce prejudice and increase acceptance (Allport, 1954).

4. Assimilation Theory: Impact of Inter-Religious Marriages on Modern Indian Society

Interfaith marriages influence social integration and cultural change. **Assimilation theory** suggests that such unions promote cultural blending and reduce religious barriers (Gordon, 1964). However, some communities view them as a threat to traditional values, reinforcing social divisions (**Clash of Civilizations Theory**, Huntington, 1996). **Patriarchy theory** explains how interfaith marriages impact gender roles, as women often face more challenges in gaining family acceptance (Kandiyoti, 1988).

5. Secularization Theory: Current Trends of Inter-Religious Couples in India

With modernization, inter-religious marriages are increasing, particularly in urban areas. **Secularization theory** argues that religious influence on personal choices is declining in modern societies (Berger, 1967). However, caste and religious norms still play a significant role, often leading to family and societal resistance (**Caste Theory**, Fuller & Narasimhan, 2008).

6. Symbolic Interactionism: Challenges Faced by Inter-Religious Couples

Interfaith couples face family rejection, legal hurdles, and societal pressure. **Symbolic interactionism** explains how individuals navigate their identities and relationships within a religiously sensitive society (Mead, 1934). **Intersectionality theory** highlights how factors like gender, class, and religion

shape the experiences of interfaith couples (Crenshaw, 1989). The need for negotiation and compromise in wedding rituals and raising children further adds to their struggles (**Negotiation Theory**, Verma et al., 2018).

CONCLUSION:

Marriage in India has historically been about connecting two families rather than just two people. In many societies, even inter-caste marriages were forbidden, making inter-religious couplings more difficult. However, societal attitudes are changing, especially among the younger generation, which values personal pleasure over inflexible customs. Unlike in the past, where weddings were sometimes arranged or even coerced by families, today's couples select mates based on love and mutual respect. Interfaith marriages are becoming more prevalent, with couples celebrating both cultures and traditions. However, they continue to encounter substantial challenges, notably from family members who may oppose the union. To handle familial and societal pressures, these couples must negotiate, compromise, and communicate effectively. While change is visible, acceptance of interfaith marriages is still evolving, impacted by education, urbanization, and increased exposure to other ideas.

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