CHAPTER-I

INTRODUCTION
1.0 INTRODUCTION

Marriage as a social system is as old as private property. In ‘The evolution of state, private property and marriage’ by Frederich Engles, we find that marriage in human society evolved after man opted for settled agriculture and consequently the evolution of private property. In the primitive period there were different systems of marriage like communal marriage, polygamy as well as polyandry. Gradually different restrictions came into being. The system of monogamy is the latest tradition that has been built after evolution of the private property system. Though, the union between adult male and female was only natural the marriage between a man and a woman had cultural implications as well because this system of marriage was the kind of bond which gave rise to family, the primary unit of society. Cicero too explained marriage as “The first bond of society”. He also mentioned “The next, our children; then the whole family and all things in common”. “Marriage is not a union merely between two creatures -- it is a union between two spirits; and the intention of that bond is to perfect the nature of both, by supplementing their deficiencies with the force of contrast,” said F.W.Robertson.

Marriage has been expressed as a legalised sexual union between a man and a woman duly acknowledged and approved by society. Marriage involves not only two individuals but also two families, in terms of the bond it creates between the later. This in turn creates larger and deeper social ties.
In the past, there was a tradition of polygamy among the Bengali Hindu Brahmins known as "Kulin Pratha". With the change of our society the culture also changed and various personal laws have been enacted. During the last two centuries more or less monogamy has become the order of the day. From Murdock’s survey on societies, we find, the monogamous system of marriage had prevailed at all times with minor modification, if any.

To rule out the evil culture of polygamy and for better matrimonial life some protective measures for the Hindu spouse were adopted. The Hindu Marriage Act was passed in 1955. It is definitely an important achievement and it helped the Hindu brides a lot especially the poorer ones, and their families. Due to lack of awareness, and education, as well as poverty, – brides from rural areas however could not enjoy the benefit of the Act.

The conditions of a Hindu marriage as mentioned under section 5 of The Hindu Marriage Act 1955 are as follow:

"A marriage may be solemnized between any two Hindus, if the following conditions are fulfilled, namely:–

(i) neither party has a spouse living at the time of the marriage:

(ii) at the time of marriage, neither party – (a) is incapable of giving a valid consent to it in consequence of unsoundness of mind; or
(b) though capable of giving a valid consent, has been suffering from mental disorder of such a kind or to such an extent as to be unfit for marriage and the procreation of children; or
(c) has been subject to recurrent attacks of insanity or epilepsy;

(iii) the bridegroom has completed the age of twenty-one years and the bride the age of eighteen years at the time of the marriage;
(iv) the parties are not within the degrees of prohibited relationship unless the custom or usage governing each of them permits of a marriage between the two;
(v) the parties are not sapindas of each other, unless the custom or usage governing each of them permits of a marriage between the two;”

Section 5 is self-explanatory and so, it is easy to understand how the Act protects a Hindu spouse as well as his or her family and society as a whole.

Clause (2) of section 7 of The Hindu Marriage Act 1955 reminds how Hindus regard their marriage. Clause (2) of section 7 states :-

“Where such rites and ceremonies include the saptapadi (that is, the taking of seven steps by the bridegroom and the bride jointly before the sacred fire), the marriage
becomes complete and binding when the seventh step is taken”

1.1 PROBLEM:

In spite of this legal protection, Bengali Hindu parents of West Bengal cannot have a sound sleep because selection of a suitable mate is not easy. A person who cannot have more than a single spouse is likely to be a chooser and naturally, parents are very concerned. This is an important problem among educated middle class Bengali Hindu families in West Bengal.

In uneducated lower middle class Bengali Hindu families the parents are neither careful about their number of children nor about their children’s age at marriage or their future due to their socio-economic handicaps.

Again due to strong economic and educational base, good contacts within and outside the country mate selection for the children of the new-rich Bengali Hindu families is not very difficult. The protection afforded by the provisions of The Hindu Marriage Act is therefore more relevant to educated middle class households rather than rich and poor Bengali households.

Our society is actually dominated by the middle class Hindu families. They neither have a strong economic base nor do they have very good contacts. They are therefore very careful while taking any decision, and the
decision at the time of selecting a suitable mate is very important both for the parents and for their children.

As families are the constituents of our society and marriage gives form to a family – marriage plays an important role in change and continuity in society. Marriage is taken as the ‘fate’ and determine the ups and downs of a family’s status or that of a society. Marriage is the only institution where all characteristics of society are replicated sincerely.

1.2 THE CONCERN

Suitable selection of spouse for marriage is undoubtedly a burning problem of our Bengali Hindu society in West Bengal. Naturally, the problem has attracted the attention of the present researcher causing him to initiate a scientific investigative study into marriage in Bengali Hindu society. The present work also seeks to map change and continuity in Bengali Hindu society in West Bengal.

- Now-a-days, educated brides also want to utilise their education and thus want to earn money to be independent. In such cases if the grooms try to restrict the bride’s liberty, dissatisfaction and thus family disturbance starts.
In the past, brides’ parents would try to arrange marriage with suitable grooms without bothering to settle their daughters in jobs. Then actually the brides took ‘marriage’ as a career. But now the career concept has been changing gradually. Many brides are showing interest in engaging in gainful employment now-a-days. Would we then expect the employed brides agreeing to marry unemployed grooms in the near future?

Parents are confused about the future of their highly educated daughters. Highly qualified brides may not be the choice. In most cases, the grooms might apprehend personality clash. So, even the highly qualified grooms are sometimes found to prefer simple graduate brides. Again the graduate grooms also prefer brides of lower educational qualification.

Besides the above-mentioned bias that could be, the following cases may also be relevant in this context. There may be problems in case of marriage between:

- a bride of high income group and a groom of low income group.
- a well-natured, educated, beautiful bride and an introvert educated groom.
• a bride from an established businessman's family and a groom from a simple service man's family.
• a bride from a highly educated, cultured family and a groom from a simple family.
• a bride of a nuclear family and a groom of a joint family.
• a working girl and a businessman.

However, the present worker will try to evaluate the change of values and preferences over generations in connection with matrimonial alliances. The study may have significant role in guiding both the bride seeking parents as well as the groom seeking parents properly. Usually, women demand for equality, but during mate selection they are often found to prefer grooms of higher income, better social position as well as greater physical abilities. Again, the present nuclear family culture has enforced parents to prefer a girl child rather than a boy child. This is because, after marriage, a tendency of neglecting and ignoring the parents by their beloved sons is often found in our society.

The present worker is sure that his counterparts in other language and income groups would find similar problems and situations in their respective societies. Hence, the gravity of these problems can hardly be over emphasised.

Therefore, it is clear that the main emphasis of this research is to evaluate the change and continuity in the Bengali Hindu society through
marriage relationship. In order to find empirical data, we would concentrate on the matrimonial advertisements in the Bengali newspapers. Of course, the centre of interest is the Bengali Hindus in West Bengal and their social framework from the point of view of matrimonial alliances. Though the Bengali Hindus are available also in Tripura, Bihar, Orissa, Delhi, Mumbai and all other states, the present researcher could not take all such cases. But the advertisements given by the advertisers of other states for suitable Bengali Hindu brides or grooms in Anandabazar Patrika, a highly circulated Bengali newspaper published from Calcutta is considered for the study. Bengali Hindus of West Bengal are considered in this study because they are dominant* in West Bengal.

We may begin by pointing out that prior to the introduction of modernisation in India, its social organisation revolved around the institution of castes. Caste was then the actual controller of all social behaviours. People were very conservative because of lower literacy rate and poor social awareness. Caste group of India are said to be endogamous and marriage within the group is controlled through the exogamous-clans or gotras. Marriage among different caste groups of the Bengali Hindus specially the upper caste ones are generally regulated by clan exogamy within the framework of caste endogamy which has been described by C.D. Darlington* in 1943 as “combination of inbreeding and outbreeding in parallel”. Genetic importance of the above type of marriage pattern was observed by C.D.

* Statistical Abstract of West Bengal
Darlington in 1943 as “the endogamous caste system has preserved a store of variation if released by free crossing or recombination, might well enable us to reconstruct the whole genetic range of mankind”. The concept of clan exogamy within caste endogamy, however, fades out in Bengal with the practice of inter-caste marriage.

Through a network of kins the families of potential spouses were known to each other so that when appropriate time for arranging marriages arose, the contacts between the interested parties were established either directly or by match makers. However, introduction of modern forces into the lives of Indians necessitated new forms of social behaviour. This tendency was accelerated with the rapid pace of industrialisation and urbanisation taking place in India after it achieved independence from the British colonial rule.

Old social institution changed their forms and expanded their boundaries to make way for and accommodate the new. Thus as a consequence, while caste did not totally loose its importance in the settlement of marriages, new factors such as physical attractiveness, education, income, occupation which hitherto had remained not so significant, gained in importance in the mate selection process. Marriages still continued to be arranged; however, this arrangement is initiated many a

* Gangopadhyay, Bela 1964 : Marriage Relations among certain Castes of Bengal.
times through such non-traditional means as matrimonial advertisements that appear in the classified section of the daily newspapers.

In no country except may be in Egypt* does one find marriages being fixed through matrimonial advertisements in newspaper columns. Matrimonial advertisements specially on Sundays are becoming increasingly popular so much due to which newspaper dailies are using several pages in advertising for the promotion of matrimonial columns. Thus matrimonial columns are increasingly becoming an integral part of the mate selection process in modern India and needs to be sociologically studied to bring out its significance in the society that is in the making.

Three years in particular, viz. 1951, 1971 and 1991 are considered. The advertisements published on Sundays of April of each of the above mentioned years corresponding to the last Sunday of Chaitra* and the first Sunday of Baishakh of Bengali Almanac are taken into account as the cases of study. Thus two dates of each of the above mentioned three years i.e. six dates in total are taken under consideration. The dates are 08.04.1951, 15.04.1951, 11.04.1971, 18.04.1971, 14.04.1991 and 21.04.1991. Analysing the data extracted from such cases, an individual, as well as a comparative study will be made in respect of the above three years. This will give us an


* The last month of the Bengali Almanac. The other months are in order : Baisakh, Jaistha, Ashar, Shravan, Bhadra, Ashwin, Kartic, Agrahayana, Poush, Magh, and Falgun.
insight into the way the society is changing slowly but surely, and yet somehow, continuity persists.

The matrimonial advertisements are collected from Anandabazar Patrika, the highly circulated Bengali daily in West Bengal. Each advertisement is treated as a sample of study. Not a single sample of each of the dates mentioned above is neglected. Thus, 1953 samples in total are studied.

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Advertisements in Anandabazar Patrika taken under consideration for study

A casual glance over the matrimonial advertisements makes one aware of the fact that most of the advertisers have laid down in their advertisements certain important traits like personal appearance, age, education, caste, occupation etc. Different tables are prepared and logical interpretations with graphical representations are made on the basis of the facts and figures extracted from the samples under consideration.
1.3 LIMITATIONS

Most of the studies on marriage of different ethnic groups and even cross culture marriages had been undertaken by anthropologists who concentrated on rites and rituals and socio-cultural aspects of marriage rather than the economic and aesthetic aspects of the same. The present study is concerned with an enquiry into the various aspects of marriage including the later aspects too. This would enable one to develop a paradigm of understanding marriage holistically.

This is a study on the value system of Bengali Hindu society in West Bengal as reflected in the choice of brides and grooms. Although one cannot foresee the future, yet every one gives his best effort to ensure better future for their children. A successful future depends to a large extent on the selection of suitable mates for their children. This is of utmost importance to the guardians who sometimes put up matrimonial advertisements to have wider choice. However, in spite of all these data we can only have a glimpse of the Hindu society in West Bengal from these advertisements. Because, till now at least 90% of the marriages are not settled by such matrimonial advertisements. Most of the guardians who put in matrimonial advertisements, belong to the urban educated middle class families*. So this study cannot be a comprehensive one although there can be a good approximation from such advertisements. Nevertheless it is always better to have some kind of approximation than having none.


12
Then it can be assumed that though the target is to determine the change and continuity in the Bengali Hindu Society of West Bengal, the present worker will be able to draw an exact picture of the change and continuity of the society comprising of the educated middle class Bengali Hindu families of Calcutta and its adjacent urban areas. Because the population characteristics of the region from where the newspaper (i.e. Anandabazar Patrika) is published, would be reflected in the advertisements*. As Anandabazar Patrika is published from Calcutta only, the mentality of the educated middle class Bengali Hindu families of Calcutta and its adjacent urban areas is expected to be reflected in these. The coverage is lacking in rural areas not only in case of the poor but also of the village-rich, where most marriages are performed among relatives, popularly known as Palti-Ghar.

So, this study dose not claim to generalise the universe, but only tries to look into the intricate details of the social choices of Bengali Hindu house holds in shaping their children's future.

To reach to the objective of the study, the present researcher was cautious about not widening the field of investigation. The coverage is on educated middle class Bengali Hindu families in West Bengal specifically in Calcutta and its adjacent areas who have given advertisements in Anandabazar Patrika on Sundays i.e. on 08.04.1951, 15.04.1951, 11.04.1971, 18.04.1971, 14.04.1991 and 21.04.1991. Due to the constraints (time as well as resources) of an individual researcher, the samples were

chosen in a modest way which would be feasible to tackle. The work therefore concentrates on the advertisements in Anandabazar Patrika on the few above mentioned dates.

1.4 EXPECTED OUTPUT

It is needless to mention that the present worker has just touched the tip of the iceberg. But the findings of the thesis would not only be a pattern recognition but also it would throw light on socio-economic and other aspects of the educated middle class Bengali Hindu households, to choose the policy-options.

It is expected that the work would highlight the significance of marriage other than meeting up the biological needs of the spouses. It is a holy institution. For peaceful co-habitation, there are yet factors other than the interest to fulfil the biological need. This work is also likely to predict how and when the present concept of 'family' would be changed and a new concept would be in force.

As we observe the trend of a society towards the nuclear family culture than the joint family culture, the parents have largely concentrated their attention to their own small family consisting of one or two children. So, the parents have become very conscious during selection of mates for their children. Every parent throws no stone unturned to utilise the opportunity properly. Considering the preference of traits, change in
mentality of the parents as reflected in the advertisements, one can easily observe the trends of the present society in connection with the matrimonial alliances. A guideline can also be emerged from the observations which will surely help a section of the Bengali Hindu parents in West Bengal to choose suitable mates for their children. The findings may be treated as a result of the research work which may assist specifically the confused parents at the time of selection of suitable mates through matrimonial advertisements in newspapers.