MARRIAGE

It is through marriage that members of the opposite sex establish intimate and durable relationship in which certain rights, duties and interactions are socially prescribed and supported. The legitimacy of sexual gratification results into progeny which is also legitimatized. Marriage is treated as an important institution not only because it regulates the sex life of the society but also helps in the development of kinship ties which form the familial network.

The aims of Hindu marriage are said to be the dharma (duty), praja (progeny) and rati (pleasure). Though sex is one of the functions of marriage it is given third place, indicating that it is the least desirable aim of marriage. The Hindu thinkers regarded dharma as the first and the highest aim of marriage and procreation as the second best which makes it obvious that dharma dominated marriage. Marriage was desired not so much for sex or for progeny but for obtaining a partner for the fulfilment of one's religious duties. There are certain rites which must be performed for marriage to be complete. The main rites are: homa or offering in the sacred fire, panigrahana or taking the hand of the bride, and saptapadi, the bride and the bridegroom going seven steps together. All these rites are performed by
a Brahmin in the presence of the sacred fire and are accompanied by the recitation of vedic mantras. It is for these reasons that Hindu marriage is treated as a sacrament. It is considered sacred because it is said to be complete only on the performance of the sacred rites accompanied by the sacred formulae. Husband and wife as partners are expected to perform religious and social obligations. One is complementary to the other. It is through marriage that an individual is able to start his or her life in the 'Grihasthashrama', that is the life of an householder. (Kapadia, 1966).

If we look at the objectives of Hindu marriage, we notice that greater importance is given to religious and social obligations and least importance is accorded to personal gratification. A brief description of Hindu marriage helps us to conclude that marriage among Hindus is a sacrament and a permanent union to fulfil religious and social obligations. The Sikhs, being an offshoot of Hinduism are likely to hold the same meaning and attach sanctity to the marriage institution.

The marriage system of the Sikhs can be understood in the context of their religious background. Among the Sikhs, it is marked by two features: the scriptural authority on which the Anand Marriage Act is based and the social codes of
Marriage among Sikhs is a simple socio-religious ceremony and they shun elaborate Hindu practices. Belief in the horoscope, working out an auspicious day for marriage, presence of sacred fire, recitation of Mantras by a Brahmin etc. are not practised. According to the convenience of both parties, a marriage date is settled. Further, it does not accord a status of superiority to either of the parties in marriage. However, it is considered sacred and compulsory even for spiritual uplift. The civil marriage is not recognized and the marriage ceremony is considered a religious affair. It is neither a contract nor a secular business and it must be performed in the presence of Guru Granth Sahib. There is no ban on widow remarriage. However, deliberate bachelordom and prolonged virginity are looked down upon as social evils. Extra marital relations are strictly prohibited and considered as sin. In Guru Granth Sahib, there are a large number of hymns proclaiming the sanctity of the institution of marriage. All such hymns have spiritual and moral connotations. We can thus conclude that the Sikh religion also attaches the same importance and sanctity to the institution of marriage. Like Hindus, marriage is considered a sacrament, a religious affair, irrevocable

conduct drawn up by contemporaries of the Gurus and later savants and scholars of the Sikhs.
and indissoluble and a permanent union which is compulsory for everybody (Jyoti, 1983).

Namdhari Guru Ram Singh was conscious of the prevailing poverty in the land, therefore, he decided to save his disciples from costly marriage ceremonies and other expensive rituals. Accordingly, he initiated the "Anand Marriage" ceremony which could be performed at a nominal cost. Due to the efforts of the then Namdhari Guru Partap Singh, Anand Marriage Act* was passed by the government of India in 1909 (Ahlulwalia, 1965). Anand Marriage is performed in the presence of the Holy Granth amidst recitations of hymns from it. It is a simple ceremony and forbids expenses on cumbersome and superfluous items such as dowry, ornaments, costly robes, display of fire works, sumptuous feasts, entertainment programmes etc. This reform was not merely a social necessity to save the girl's parents from a tantalizing life-long mental agony and to remove the root cause of all female degradation, but also an economic urgency to prevent the unfortunate from falling into the iron clutches of the money lenders.

To avoid unnecessary expenses on marriage and to have uniformity and simplicity, Namdharis are, further, forbidden

* There are, however, other scholars who do not attribute this act to Namdharis Guru (Jyoti, 1983).
to celebrate their marriage ceremonies at their homes. Specific day is fixed for the celebration of marriage at their religious place. All prospective brides and bridegrooms assemble on the specific day and mass marriage ceremony is performed for all the couples. The prospective couples take bath, and dressed in white are brought to the congregation where Asha Di Var (a religious song) is sung. Before the Havan ceremony is performed, the bride puts a woolen rosary around the neck of the would be bridegroom and also touches his feet.

At the site of the Havana, five men sit near a fire along with the prospective couples. They read hymns written by various Gurus and prescribed for the purpose. A sixth man puts a mixture of saffron, musk, sandalwood powder, sugar, ghee, and about fifteen other such things into the fire, while a seventh sprinkles water on the fire with some intervals. The ceremony lasts for about an hour. After Havana is performed, one person out of the five who were responsible for performing Havana, puts a little sugar and water in an iron pot and with the help of a two edged sword, called Khanda, churns the water and sugar slowly while others recite sacred hymns. This ceremony takes about half an hour and Amrit (divine nectar) is ready to be given to the couples. After the prospective couples are baptised with the divine
water, they go around the sacred fire while the priest reads four verses from the Holy Granth. The couples take a round along with the recitation of one verse which continues for four rounds. After the fourth round, a final prayer for happy married life for the couples is made. Looking at the practices followed by Namdharis at the time of wedlock, it can be concluded that while retaining their own procedure and practices different from Hindus, they follow some practices which are more akin to vedic form of marriages rather than Sikh marriage practices. Hence, there is a possibility of greater inter-community marriage participation.

An attempt has been made to investigate the nature and extent of marital assimilation that has taken place between the locals and the Namdhari ethnic group with the help of a set of questions.

Namdharis are living at Mandi for the last more than four decades, hence, a few marriages in the households are bound to take place. Nevertheless, to find out the empirical reality, the respondents were specifically asked whether any marriage ceremony has been performed in their households during this period. With the exception of 3 respondents, all replied in affirmative. To find out the extent of marital assimilation, the respondents both Namdharis and locals were asked whether they extended invitations to each other or not.
It is encouraging to note that a majority of the Namdharis and locals, 59.63 per cent and 61.47 per cent respectively, invited members of the other community at their marriage functions. Further, the background of the people who had extended such invitations vis-a-vis those who refrained from extending such invitations was probed. The tabulation of data reveals that respondents, irrespective of their ethnic affinity, who have higher educational qualifications, are engaged in occupations of higher prestige and who belong to higher income group are more likely to extend such invitations against those who have less education, low income and are engaged in occupations of low prestige. At the caste level participation, it was noted that Namdharis of higher caste group (Khatris and Brahmins) were more open in contrast to lower castes (Sunyaras, Ramgarhias and Chembas) which may be attributed to the fact that invitations were extended to the locals who also belonged to higher castes. So far as the locals were concerned, it was noted that Rajputs had some reservations in extending such invitations to the Namdharis, while others (Khatris, Brahmins and Guptas) had no such inhibitions. Physical neighbourhood also plays an important role in extending such invitations, that is, Namdharis living in localities where locals have over representation invite more locals in contrast to those Namdharis who are living in such localities where Namdharis have over representation. It
is clear from the above analysis that numerically locally
-dominated neighbourhood, caste and class variables influence
marital assimilation so far as extending invitation at
marriage is concerned.

To probe further such interacting situations, Namdharis and local respondents were asked to indicate
whether they were invited by the other community at their
marriages or not?

The data thus collected revealed that a majority of
the Namdharis and locals had admitted that they were invited
at the marriages of the other community. When background
factors of such respondents were compared with those who were
not invited, it was found that Namdharis of higher castes
were invited more in contrast to Namdharis of lower castes.
So far as locals were concerned, it was noted that Guptas
among the locals had over representation among such invitees
in contrast to other caste groups. Such variation can be
attributed to the fact that Guptas generally being
shopkeepers have greater business interaction with Namdharis
as a majority of the Namdharis are also businessmen. Thus
extending such invitations to the Guptas was but natural.

Regarding the class variables the tabulation of data
supported the former analysis that respondents with higher
education, higher income and higher occupational prestige are
more likely to get such invitations. Further, the number of locally dominated neighbours also plays an important role in receiving such invitations. In short, it can be concluded that to facilitate greater interaction, caste, class and neighbourhood variables contribute positively.

To find out the quality of interaction between the two groups of respondents, they were also asked to indicate the level of their participation at the marriage ceremony of the other group.

A majority of both the locals and Namdhari has only formal participation on marriage occasions of each other. Only in some individual cases it was noted that they had participated to an extent of extending a helping hand on such occasions. However, a majority of them made their presence felt, gave a few gifts and accepted the food offered on such occasions.

It is interesting to note that neither the locals nor the Namdhari had any inhibition regarding eating together. An attempt was made to probe the reasons responsible for less active participation at the marriages. As the marriages of the Namdhari are generally performed at their Gurudwara, there was hardly any occasion for the locals to extend helping hand. Similarly, Namdhari being ignorant about
typical local marriages, also refrained from actively participating. Following the locals, the Namdharis have now started organizing reception parties after the marriage ceremony. The locals are now participating more actively which is an encouraging sign for greater interaction.

Change is a natural phenomenon. The human beings have the capability to adopt and adjust to the new surroundings to the extent that they do not lose their identity. To be accepted in the local community, the immigrants not only try to discard certain practices which make them conspicuous but also try to accept certain practices which would facilitate greater interaction with the host community. Similarly, the local community keeps in view the new exigencies, discard certain practices which may be time consuming and may accept new practices which have become the fashion of the day and in certain cases they also accept certain practices of the immigrant community if they feel that such practices are in line with the overall changes taking place in the region. The process of assimilation can be precipitated if the Namdharis after discarding their conspicuous practices which were unique to them, have started accepting certain practices of the locals. Assimilation is faster if the locals are generous in accepting certain practices of the Namdharis. It is in this context that an attempt has been made to find out the
level of assimilation between locals and Namdharis. Namdharis were asked whether they had discarded any of their marriage customs and picked up the marriage customs of the locals? The locals were also asked questions on the same lines.

Approximately one-fifth of the Namdharis and more than one-third of the local respondents admitted that they had discarded some of their marriage practices. Namdharis have identified the practices like folksongs sung, some dishes to be cooked at the time of marriage which they have discarded after coming to Mandi. Similarly, a few Namdharis have identified certain practices such as local food, dowry system, reception parties etc. which they have picked up from the host community. It is interesting to note that only a few vocal and relatively better placed Namdharis reacted to this question and were able to identify the practices they have discarded and picked up. The very fact that a majority of the Namdharis, though continuing with old practices, has not resented acceptance of certain marriage practices of the locals by a few relatively better placed Namdharis, indicates a positive direction in the process of assimilation.

The locals have also identified certain practices like traditional Shenai Badan elaborate engagement ceremony, ladies sangeet and town endogamy which they have discarded. They were also of the opinion that certain practices like
dowry system, caste endogamy, elaborate feasts, time spent on the marriages etc. are not being observed now with that much sanctity. If we look at their responses, it becomes clear that the type of marriage practices which have been discarded and the rigidity of observing certain customs which has been laxed can not be attributed to their interaction with the immigrant Namdharis but is due to over all changes taking place in Himachal Pradesh. On the other hand, when they were asked to identify new practices which they have picked up, they identify certain practices like marriage being performed in the temples. Now the marriage ceremonies are not elaborate and are a simple affair. These respondents identified Namdharis as the source of such changes. As Namdharis generally celebrate their marriages at their Gurudwara and which are a simple religious affair, the locals have picked up this good point and instead of Gurudwara they have started marrying in the temples. This practice has saved a good number of local people from the evil practices of dowry and vulgar display of their riches by following elaborate marriage ceremonies. This trend though limited to a few local respondents, is a positive indication of assimilation. However, we notice that Namdharis are picking up bad practices from the locals which the locals are tending to discard. This may be attributed to the fact that a majority of the locals is continuing with their old practices and due
to their enthusiasm to be acceptable and being absorbed in the local community, the Namdharis have picked up the common practices of the local people. This is further supported when local respondents identified certain practices of the locals e.g. local food habits, dowry and community lunches which Namdharis have picked up from the local population.

- Caste and religious endogamy have remained a salient feature of Indian culture. Caste endogamy among Hindus which was once started for maintaining purity of blood, has resulted into a number of social problems like polygyny, mismatching dowry and forced spinsterhood. According to the dictates of Sikh religion, the followers of Sikhism were not expected to follow caste endogamy but were asked to observe religious endogamy only. However, a number of scholars have indicated that the Sikhs also observe caste hierarchy and prefer to retain caste endogamy. This is more true in case of Sikhs of higher castes (Marenco, 1976; Singh, Harjinder, 1977 and Randhawa Indra quoted by Jyoti, 1983). The Namdharis were also asked by their Gurus to do away with the caste restrictions. However, we notice a clear cut division among the Namdharis based on caste. The higher caste Namdharis normally marry within their own caste and Namdharis of lower castes have their own caste endogamy. The general restrictions regarding caste endogamy started giving way to
inter caste marriages in modern urban India. This change has been attributed to the influence of west on the Indian culture; however the change has not spread to each and every corner of India; and to this traditional township. It is in this context that we have to view marital assimilation between the locals and Namdharis.

To find out favourable or unfavourable opinion of the locals and Namdharis, the respondents were asked to indicate whether they were in favour of inter-community marriages. Once marital assimilation takes place, assimilation at other level would follow automatically which indicates that restrictions on inter-community marriages are very strong and they can be removed slowly and steadily. It is for this reason that we asked the respondents to indicate not only their opinion in favour of inter-community marriages but also whether they would like to take or give their daughters to other community.

A significant proportion of Namdharis as well as the locals, 49.11 per cent and 44.95 per cent respectively, were in favour of inter-community marriages. It is interesting to highlight that the majority of these respondents in both the groups were highly educated and belonged to higher castes. Among the locals, the Khatris who belonged to dominant caste group at Mandi, were more in the favour of inter-community
marriages. On the other hand, among Namdhari, again Khatris were quite vocal in giving their positive opinion in favour of inter-community marriages.

If we limit our analysis to these respondents who have favoured inter-community marriages, it is very encouraging to note that the locals do not suffer from any superiority complex. In other words approximately 94 per cent of such respondents would be willing to accept and give daughters. In contrast to this though a majority of the Namdhari would give and take daughters from local community, a significant percentage (27.27 per cent) preferred to accept the daughters of the local community overtly indicating their superior position because accepting the daughters of the lower caste

Table No. 6.1: Percentage distribution of the respondents in favour of inter-community marriages.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Namdhari</th>
<th>Locals</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>27.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give and take both</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>72.73</td>
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Note:- 57 Namdhari and 60 local respondents were not in favour of inter-community marriage hence they were not considered.
or class is an accepted form of marriage among Hindus as well as among Sikhs. In traditional India, caste endogamy was no doubt the rule, hypergamous marriages were also allowed. This significant minority group, no doubt, indicated positive opinion in favour of inter-community marriages, yet showing reservations to accept inter-community marriages on equal footing is not a positive indication for marital assimilation.

Let us extend this point a little further. Both Namdharis and the locals are patrilineal and patrilocal, hence daughters who are married in the family, assume the caste and religion of her husband. If the daughters of the local community go on accepting husbands from Namdhari community and there is no reciprocal relationship, such a situation instead of precipitating the process of assimilation may create some irritants for the local community and may become a source of tension.

Since 1947 when Namdharis started coming to Mandi, ten inter-community marriages have taken place. In five cases local girls have been married to Namdhari boys and in equal number, Namdhari girls have accepted local boys as their husbands. It is interesting to note here that all these ten marriages were not arranged by the parents but were based on mutual volition i.e. love relationship between the partners.
It would be of some significance to point out here that all the inter-community marriages which have taken place, are confined to higher castes among the locals as well as among Namdharis with the exception of only one. People of higher castes among Namdharis and locals have not only shown favourable opinion for inter-community marriages but even have gone for inter-community marriages.

The above analysis helps us to conclude that marital assimilation at the inter-community level is facilitated by the caste and class variable i.e. Namdharis of higher castes are being accepted more in comparison with Namdharis of lower castes because locals are mostly from higher castes i.e. Brahmins, Khatris, Rajputs & Guptas. Similarly Namdharis who are better educated and economically well-placed, are more acceptable to the locals for marital relations than Namdharis of lower class and lower occupations.

Marriage, birth and death are significant in the life of an individual. Marriage grants him a new social status and society accepts from the partners to assume adult roles to meet social obligations. Birth in the family not only helps to replace the dying population but also allocates new role obligations to the parents. Death terminates individual social interaction as well as makes place for others to perform roles appropriate to the vacant positions so that
familial and social functions continue. These events are also significant for the society which works out an elaborate set of rules and regulations determining who will marry whom. It is through marriage that newly born are granted social recognition. Though all the three events have social significance, birth of an individual is more important for the family and kinsmen as it demands reallocation of different kinship network of relationships, and extension of family tree, hence it becomes more often an intra-family event. The married partners are expected to have sexual union for the sake of procreation. Sexual intercourse should not be indulged in for the sake of sensual pleasure. Depending upon the family tradition, the birth of a child is celebrated. In Northern India there is a bias in favour of male child, hence as and when a male child is born, a number of ceremonies are performed to celebrate the event. Though such celebrations are mostly confined to family and kinsmen, yet to share happiness and new social status, the parents share these celebrations with their friends and acquaintances also.

Realising the importance of the event of birth in a family following a marriage, we decided to probe the nature and extent of inter-community network of relations. Do the respondents invite the members of other community to celebrate the birth or birthdays or they treat it only as
intra-family or intra-community event. Such an enquiry was carried on with an assumption that interaction between communities on such occasions would further facilitate assimilation.

It is a common practice among the locals to celebrate birthdays of the family members in an elaborate manner. On such occasions, the family invites kinsmen, friends and other known persons. They are treated in a gathering and sweets are sent to all the known families. To get a comparable picture we first asked our Namdhari respondents whether they celebrated birth or birthdays in the family. A majority of the Namdharis respondents (70 per cent) responded in affirmative. Out of these, a few admitted that only after coming to Mandi, imitating the locals they have started making such events as social rather than just family affairs.

Namdharis were reminded of the teaching of their Gurus that they should have a simple life and asked to state why they have picked up such practices of the locals? They hesitantly admitted that when they were invited by the locals on such occasions, they were also required to extend such hospitality to the locals, hence a sense of reciprocity has prompted them to imitate the practices of the locals, which is very encouraging sign of assimilation.
It was noted that in contrast to 21 per cent local respondents, more than 88 per cent of Namdhari respondents have extended such birthday invitations to the locals. It is important to highlight here that Namdhari respondents who extend such invitations to the locals came from upper and upper middle classes. Further Namdhari respondents living in areas numerically dominated by locals had higher representation among the Namdharis who extended such invitations in contrast to those who were living in localities numerically dominated by Namdharis.

When the background factors of the locals who extended invitations to the Namdharis were explored, it was noted that they belonged to the lower middle class. It is interesting to note that upper and upper middle classes of the locals were conspicuous in not extending such invitations to the Namdharis whereas it is the upper and the upper middle class of the Namdharis who extended invitations to the locals on birthdays. Such a discrepancy may be attributed to the fact that the upper classes of the local respondents considered such events as only family affairs and extended invitations to only close friend circle. However, the lower middle classes of the locals because of their business dealing with the Namdharis had greater interaction with them, hence extended them invitations on such occasions. It is very
discouraging to note that in contrast to 88 per cent of the Narndharis, only 21 per cent of the local respondents extended invitations to people from other communities. However, all those local respondents who extended invitations to the Narndharis, received invitations from Namdharis when they had such occasion in their families. Further, approximately 78 per cent of the Namdharis admitted that they have extended birthday invitations by the locals.

The above discussion helps us to conclude that respondents with higher caste background had been interacting more in comparison to respondents who had lower caste background. The Khatri caste was a "dominant group" both among Namdharis and locals, therefore it was quite obvious that Khatris of both the communities would be interacting more in comparison to other castes. The second factor which had been facilitating assimilation was class variable. The respondents, both Namdharis and locals, who had higher class background, had been interacting more whereas lower class group had confined itself to its own group. The factor such as numerically local dominated physical neighbourhood had also played an important role in facilitating greater interaction between the members of two communities. The greater interaction leads to personal network of relationship. A relationship involves a series of
interactions between two persons or categories of people. An interaction means "such incidents as individual 'A' shows behaviour 'X' (Hinde 1979). Out of these interactions, relationships emerge. A relationship exists only when the probable course of future interactions between the participants differ from that between strangers. The nature of interaction (Goffmen, 1975) is influenced by social definitions, values and norms. A relationship, therefore, can never be fully understood in isolation from the social context. The quality of the relationship is affected by the past experiences the persons have had in the group in which they grew up and by the norms and values prevalent there (Hinde, 1979).

The interaction between the Namdharis and locals had been helping both of them to understand each other's point of view resulting into Namdharis picking up locals' customs, norms and values and discarding their own. However, it was not a one way relationship but a two way process in which it was found that locals had also started discarding their own customs, norms and values and picking up from the immigrant group.