CHAPTER V
CHANGE AND CONTINUITY IN FAMILY AND MARRIAGE STRUCTURE

The present chapter has been devoted to study a general overview of the family and marriage system as they exist for the Buddhists in Ladakh currently. The case study of two Buddhist families from different generation were elicited to provide a new perspective both in regard to what has changed, and what has remained the same, in relation to beliefs and practices of the traditional family and marriage pattern. The information gained from there will suggest the trends of change in the traditional Ladakhi family and marriage patterns in the near future.

Family system

The Indian family system has been a basic unit of socialization and forms a dominant institution both in the life of the individual and in the life of the community. (Mullatti, 1992). Families adhere to a patriarchal ideology, follow the patrilineal rule of descent, are patrilocal, have familialistic value orientations and endorse traditional gender role preferences. India, like most other traditional eastern societies is a collectivist society that emphasizes family integrity, family loyalty, and family unity. C. Harry Hui and Harry C. Triandis (1986) defined collectivism, which is the opposite of individualism as, “a sense of harmony, interdependence and concern for others” (Hui and Triandis 1986; Triandis et al. 1986;244). More specifically, collectivism is reflected in greater readiness to cooperate with family members and extended kins on decisions affecting most aspects of life, including career choice, mate selection and marriage (Hui and Triandis 1986; Triandis et al. 1988).

Historically, the traditional, ideal and desired family in India was the joint family system. A joint family includes kinsmen, and generally includes three to four living generations, including uncles, aunts, nieces, nephews and grandparents living together in the same household. These members eat the food cooked at one hearth, share a common income, common property, are related to one another through kinship ties and worship the same idols. The family supports the old; takes care of widows, unmarried and the disabled, assists during periods of unemployment; and provides security and a sense of support and togetherness (Chekki 1996; Sethi 1989).
With the advent of processes like urbanization, industrialization and modernization, younger generations are turning away from the joint family form. One way of showing these changes is that of associating nuclear family with the modernized and industrial form of society and in another case, joint family is associated with the traditional form of society. Thus, this type of transition from joint to nuclear is an example of a structural change since this involves systematic change in the role structure of family members through the process of differentiation (Singh, 1977). The concept of joint family where all the family members like aunt, uncle, cousins and grandparents live together contradicts with the concept of nuclear family. It does not demand geographical proximity or occupational involvement and does not have a hierarchical authority structure. In this section, an attempt has been made to analyse the family type that is prevailing presently in the selected areas. The change has been seen both in terms of structure and function of the family system.

**Ladakhi family system in the past**

Ladakhi family system of past, reflect the values of people dependent on the scarce land for their sustenance and for all their resources. A feature of Ladakhi society that distinguishes it from the rest of the state was the fraternal polyandry and inheritance by primogeniture until the early 1941, when these were made illegal by the Government of Jammu and Kashmir. The custom of inheritance by primogeniture, whereby only the eldest son inherits the father’s property and limited potential of the land available for cultivation also ensured that the land is not carved out in ever decreasing portions, making it unprofitable to cultivate. If family’s inheritance were continually split up, there would soon be tiny properties left which would be unable to support their owners. Ladakh, being low in industries and other extra sources of income, leaves no options for the brothers for stay together in their parents’ house where their labor is most welcome. Whatever the system of marriage and whatever the configuration of children may be, the land was just passed on to one individual. There was a kind of nuclear family system strangely prevalent and institutionalized in the past history of Ladakh. Ladakhi division of household as *Khanchen* and *Khang-bu* is a peculiar practice. *Khanchen* is a household where elder married son with his family lives and *Khang-bu* is the place where an old parent retires with their unmarried children. Ladakhi describe *khanchen* as the place of surplus production, which can support festival and sponsor monastic rituals, while *Khang-bu* merely has sufficient productions for its own survival. The *khanchen* is the place of reproduction,
while every household has enough land and livestock to support a family. Some of them, however, do have a significantly greater number of fields and larger houses. It is found in all Ladakhi villages that the *khanchen* is socially superior to the *Khang-bu.* (Pirie.2007;58). The practice of *Khanchen* and *Khang-bu* is very rare now. In the past, the extended family was the dominant family form. There were some families that would not divide as *khanchen* and *khang-bu.*

Studies of change in family structure are stymied by the paucity of historical data on family structure (Goode, 1963). It is hard to say how much changes in the family structure have occurred in Ladakh as the baseline data on the prevalent family types are lacking. Most of the studies conducted in Ladakh are after 1970’s and most of these are based on the premise that traditional form of Ladakhi system was the joint family and extended joint family. Our basic assumption in this study is also the same as it has been in other family studies, that is, the family system prevailing in the past was that of the joint family system and any deviation from that may be considered as a change in the family structure.

As mentioned earlier, for operational purposes, in this study, Morrison’s classification of family types has been taken into account as it has been found to be, more appropriate in analysing the family system in the selected area. According to Morrison, there are three types of families, Nuclear, Quasi-joint, and joint, on the basis of the conjugal pair. (The nuclear family consists of one conjugal pair; joint family consists of two or more conjugal pair with or without other relation. If joint family consists of two conjugal pairs and if husbands in the pairs are related as father and son, it is defined as Quasi-joint family) (Morrison, 1959).

On the basis of the data presented earlier in chapter 2, (Table 2.05) we get an idea of the family system which is presently prevalent in the selected areas. In general, data distributions show the preponderance of quasi-joint families in the Leh (urban area) and joint families in Sku-Markha. Apparently, one gets an impression from the data that the early differentiation of the traditional joint families into nuclear families was more pronounced in Leh (urban) as compared to Sku-Markha (rural). Our data analysis also shows that in spite of the numerous changes and adaptations to a pseudo-Western culture and a shift towards the nuclear family among the urban folks, the modified joint family which in other term is quasi-joint, is the most preferred family type prevailing in Ladakh. It is believed that the elder persons are the important members of the family and old age implies years of valuable experience and wisdom. They
remain a part of a family and community, so active that even in their eighties they are usually fit and participate in all spheres of life. This new type of family is more compatible in maintaining decent relationship with members of the family and is compatible with the new cash economy. It is very interesting to note that there are large number of joint families still prevalent in Sku-Markha. It was further revealed that the significant inflow of tourist, a large number of homestay facilities were opened in Sku-Markha, (rural) for which a joint family was of great help since more number of family members were required to maintain the guest house and to deal with the tourists. In such a situation, system of joint family and quasi joint have been found more appropriate than those of nuclear families. Moreover, the new cash economy through tourism has provided a means for better standard of living.

But in urban areas, there are few nuclear families that existed as a smaller component of the larger extended family system. Even the boundaries and rules governing the nuclear family are very different from the modern nuclear families. Therefore, a married man and his nuclear family is not completely independent from the parental extended family when he established his own new social and economic unit of production. The independence of his nuclear family is limited only to the subsistence agriculture and livestock. Their means of economic production was still dependent and secured through joint efforts with the other extended family members. In a small way, they produce most of what they consume. However, the materials for this production come mainly from collective property and labor. Therefore, the nuclear family, in many ways, may not survive as a completely independent social and economic unit in the traditional Ladakhi society. Similarly, the nuclear family was only partly independent in the spiritual world also. Many of the important spiritual, life-supporting ceremonies could only be conducted jointly by all the members of the entire extended family such as grandfather, father and first-born married son. As a result, all of these existing factors, makes the nuclear family assume less significance in the larger extended family pattern.

Many studies of the Indian society during the past sixty years have pointed out a decline in the traditional joint family system as a result of economic growth (Bailey, 1957; Kapadia, 1966; Lannoy 1971). The reason for the high proportion of the nuclear families in Leh (urban), are due to the sudden economic and technological growth in

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1 New economy in Ladakh includes recent growth of tourism related income. As this cash income is very fastly growing.
during the last two decades. Some believed that the spread of modern education and
growth of tourism has brought a shift from traditional joint family to nuclear family.
But this kind of structural change in family system is less visible in Sku-Markha (rural). One of the respondents stated “being living in a nuclear family setup, the familial and kinship bonds are still maintained. Even in the more modern and nuclear families in contemporary Ladakh, many functional extensions of the traditional joint family have been retained. So our concept of nuclear family is quite different from that which is followed in other parts of Indian subcontinent”.

In the process of the changing economy, however, it has also been observed that the joint family does not only structurally change but functionally as well. Today joint family is not only able to maintain the authoritarian relationship on the family members. Firstly, there have been changes in the decision making in the family affairs. Earlier it was restricted to the elders or the head of the household but younger members as well as women of the families have now power to make decisions in the family affairs. This is prevalent in all three types of family system be it joint, Quasi-joint or nuclear. Today women of nuclear families are taking more part in decision making process. Secondly, weakening of norms is another functional change Ladakhis are facing. Thirdly, independent outlook of the family members is another functional change stated by the respondents. Fourthly, there are some joint families which have lost the definition of common kitchen and common residence. The joint family in the changed economic scenario is structurally nuclear but functionally joint. The members of this type of family are sharing their income from all sources and adding it to the general income of the family. Thus, some joint families today in Ladakh may not necessarily live together under one roof and eat at the same hearth, but they are joint so far in their property, income and other economic interests are concerned. In addition to all these functions, family also teaches their children to learn and use the appropriate kinship terms such as words of relationship and respect to address their consanguine relatives and affinal kins, including friends and family of their parents, elderly, neighbour and acquaintances.

When the respondents were asked to express their views regarding whether or not it is advantageous to live in a joint family, as many as 71(73.96%) respondents of Leh stated that it was advantageous to live in a joint family, while 25(26.04%) believed that it was not advantageous to live in a joint family. On the other hand, in Sku-Markha (rural) the majority 86(87.76%) of them believed that it was advantageous to
live in a joint family and only 12(12.24%) believed that it is not advantageous to live in the joint family.

Those who find it advantageous to live in a joint family system gave various reasons for their response such as joint family provides financial security, work in the family is shared and it gives immense support during trouble times. Other reason given by the respondents is that staying in a joint family in the presence of elders, an individual always finds wisdom. Large number of respondents stated that everything is shared in a joint family be it joy, sorrow, laugh or pain. Apparently, there are a few who stressed on the disadvantages of residing in a joint family. Most significantly, these are lack of privacy, loss of individuality, interference of family members in various decision making, opinion of younger members not considered and lack of independent decision making. In an overall scenario people of Ladakh believed and supported joint family system and they very much felt that it was advantageous to reside in a joint family system. On the same, they were further asked to rank the some factors according to their order of preference as a part of their attitude towards a joint family

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sr. No.</th>
<th>Attitude towards joint family</th>
<th>Leh (Urban)</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Attitude towards joint family</th>
<th>Sku-Markha (Rural)</th>
<th>Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>As long as possible one must try to live within a joint family</td>
<td>1.06</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>As long as possible one must try to live within a joint family</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Children cannot be brought up properly in a nuclear family.</td>
<td>1.37</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Children cannot be brought up properly in a nuclear family.</td>
<td>1.12</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Joint family hinders the personal development</td>
<td>1.98</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Joint family hinders the personal development</td>
<td>2.28</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>One must set up a separate household immediately after marriage</td>
<td>2.49</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>One must set up a separate household immediately after marriage</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A set of four different kinds of statements were provided to the respondents and they were asked to rank these in order of their preference towards a joint family. A factor ranked first, was given a score of one while that ranked second was assigned a score of two. In the same way, the other factors were ranked and the scores were assigned according to their ranking position till the last factor, which was assigned the score of four. A mean score value was worked out for each of these factors separately for Leh and Sku-Markha. The lower the mean score value, the higher was the rank assigned to that factor.

The respondents of Leh (urban) ranked the following categories accordingly on the basis of their attitude towards joint family. They rated “as long as possible one must try to live within a joint family” (1.06) as their top priority and “one must set up a separate household immediately after marriage” (2.49) as bottom of the priority chart. They rated ‘children cannot be brought up properly in a nuclear family’ (1.37) at second place and ‘joint family hinders the personal development’ at third place (1.98).

In case of Sku–Markha (rural), same priorities are given by the respondents, but there was a difference in the mean score value. “One must try to live within a joint family” (1.00) was the top rank factor and “one must setup separate house immediately after the marriage” (2.75) was at the bottom of the chart. Second rank was assigned to “children cannot be brought up properly in a nuclear family” (1.12) and third rank was assigned to the “joint family hinders the personal growth” (2.28). In an overall analysis, it is quite evident that both in urban as well as rural sector, living in a joint family is highly desirable and setting up a new household immediately after marriage is looked down upon. The difference between the rural-urban is of same importance. A large number of people in urban sector believe that “joint family hinders the personal growth”, whereas on the other side, large number of respondents believed that child cannot be brought up properly in a nuclear family. To a certain extent, this attitude of the urban respondents is an indicative of an individualistic orientation and somewhere it can be one of the reasons for the increase of nuclear families in the urban sector. But what is contrary here is that inspite of large number of nuclear families in Leh, still a large number of respondents revealed that it was advantageous to live in a joint family type and as long as possible “one must live within a joint family”.

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FAMILY SIZE

The change in family in terms of numerical composition is also indicator of the structural changes from traditional joint family system to Nuclear and Quasi-joint family formation. It is generally an accepted view that traditional joint family setup usually has more members than the other types of family households, be it nuclear or Quasi-joint. Thus the numerical size of the family may be indicator of a particular type of family structure. In the present section, an attempt has been made to examine this aspect in relation to the family. Many religions, for example, Islam, Catholicism and Judaism encourage their followers to procreate and have many children. In recent times, however, there has been an increasing input of family planning and on account of that there is a decrease in total fertility rate in many parts of the world. At the same time, many countries with population decline offer incentives for people to have large families as a means of national efforts to reverse declining populations. Ladakh is one place in India that has got the lowest population rate area wise. It is only recently that there has been an increase in Ladakh’s population scenario otherwise Ladakh was the area with lowest inhabited population. In the present section, an attempt has been made to examine the family size of the households. The family size has been divided into four categories 2-4 persons in the family is considered as small family size and 5-7 members in the family as medium size, 8-10 as large family size and more than 10 as a very large family size.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S. No.</th>
<th>Size of family</th>
<th>Leh (Urban) (S)</th>
<th>Sku-Markha (Rural)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>2-4 persons</td>
<td>11(11.46)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>5-7 persons</td>
<td>60(62.50)</td>
<td>33(34.38)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>8-10 persons</td>
<td>20 (20.83)</td>
<td>53 (54.08)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>More than 10</td>
<td>5(5.21)</td>
<td>12 (12.24)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>96 (100.00)</td>
<td>98 (100.00)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

❖ Figures in brackets represent percentages

When asked the respondents about the size of household, the data clearly indicates that in Leh, the highest proportion (62.50%) of family households size varies from 5-7 persons (medium size), while 20.83% had a large family size, which comprises of 8-10 persons in the household. There are 11.46% respondents whose family size is small that is, 2-4 members in the family and only 5.21% respondents revealed that there are more than 10 members in their household. While on the other hand in Sku-
Markha (rural), a large number (54.08%) respondents revealed that they lived in a large size family (8-10 persons), followed by 34.38% whose family size varies between 5 -7 members in the household i.e. medium family size and there are 12.24% families with very large family size (more than 10 person). There is no household comprising of 2-4 members in their family in Sku-Markha.

In an overall comparative analysis of the Leh and Sku-Markha, it is clear that the majority of the households, in Leh have 5-7 members in their households (medium size family) while in Sku-Markha majority have 8-10 members in the household. Another quite evident feature in the urban area is that there are 11.46% families with 2-4 members (small size family) in their households and on the other side in Sku-Markha (rural area), there is not a single household with 2-4 family members in their households. Another quite evident variation seen in the Sku-Markha (rural area), is that there are 8.16% households having very large family size, with more than 10 members in the family whereas in the Leh (urban) there are only 5.20% families with more than 10 family members.

In order to have clear understanding regarding the changing composition of the family, the above table has been carefully examined. It is clearly indicative of the fact that the family size comprising of 2-4 persons are that of small households, mainly nuclear families and family size with more than 8 persons in the households are considered as large family size (quasi-joint or joint). In an overall comparative analysis, the majority of family size in both the places (urban and rural) Ladakh has more than 5 members as their family members. This is a clear indicative of the fact that maximum numbers of families present in both urban and rural parts of Ladakh are quasi-joint or joint types.

Whatever might be the type of family in case of Ladakh, Buddhists of the region are overriding with the issue of coexistence. A concern not to offend or upset one another is deeply rooted in Ladakhi society; people avoid situations that might lead to frictions or conflict. From the family and neighbors to members of other villages and even strangers, Ladakhis are aware that helping others is in their own interest. Mutual aid rather than competition shapes the economy. Cooperation is formalized in a number of social institutions. The families usually go to various people for cooperation in times of emergency.
Harsh climatic condition of Ladakh encourages close social ties and mutual interdependence, granting each individual a net of unconditional helpfulness and cooperation among the families which is essential for survival. The Ladakhis establish cooperative groups called Phasphuns. The families in the phasphun usually live in the same village, participate in group religious ceremonies, and worship a common God, though they are not necessarily neighbors and are not related. The mutual cooperation is carried out under the aegis of the ruling deity, who provides the link for the six to ten families in the group. Every family in the village belongs to a group of households that help each other at the time of birth, marriage and death. A phasphun is most active at the time of funeral. After death, the body is kept in the family house until the cremation, which takes place usually after 3 days or week, and the family does not touch it. The phasphun members have the responsibility to wash and prepare the body, from the moment of death until the body has been totally consumed by the fire (Hodge.1991:51-52).

If family is the basic unit of society then marriage stands at the foundation of family life. Unless two significant building blocks, (family and marriage) are healthy and unified, society itself cannot be unified and strong. Let us now move towards the marriage pattern among the Buddhists. In the next section, an attempt has been made to examine the marriage institution in terms of age at marriage, process of mate selection, and change in marriage practices and ceremonies in the selected area of study. In order to understand clearly the nature of marriage institution a brief description of the marriage system prevailing in the past has also been reviewed

Marriage system

Marriage in India is regarded as one of the most significant life-cycle rituals with certain societal expectations. In the traditional Hindu society, marriage was considered a sacrament and not a contract. 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. Stephen (1963) says that marriage is legitimate sexual union, begins with a public announcement which is undertaken with some idea of performance. Every society has some rules for determining the field of eligible, that is, who can marry whom. These rules, however, vary from one society to another, from one structure to another. Bahaullah said marriage is “a fortress for well being and salvation”. Kapadia, (1966) discusses
selection in marriage from three aspects namely; field of selection, the party of selection and criteria of selection.

There is no universal definition which adequately covers all types of marriage. According to Kapadia (1966), the primary aim of a Hindu marriage is ‘Dharmapraja’ (progeny, particularly sons) and ‘rati’ (pleasure). Furthermore, marriage is regarded not only as a union of two individuals, but also as the union of two families, making them almost like blood relatives. Although, there have been different forms of marriages observed in different societies, yet the modern era has evolved the monogamous pattern of contracting marital relationship. Marriages are religiously, economically, politically and socially oriented and they are generally arranged by the elders and extended family members (Chekki 1996). It has been observed that in traditional marriages, while contracting marriages, greater emphasis has been laid on some of the ascribed factors like religion, reputation of the family, physical appearance, and economic standing of the family etc. However, as a result of widespread education and economic independence and consequently freedom from parental authority, better job opportunity and new employment, avenues and influence of mass media as well as development of rational, scientific outlook, there appear some changes in the attitude and thinking of people.

**Marriage system in the past**

Fraternal polyandry and inheritance by primogeniture were common in Ladakh until 1941 when these were made illegal by the Government of Jammu and Kashmir, although they existed in the remote parts of Ladakh till late 80’s. As mentioned earlier, Polyandry had an economic basis; it derived from a desire to prevent the splitting of landholding which was already small. Although the system of marriage was polyandrous, yet monogamous and rare cases of polygyny marriages were also found. In general, marriages were endogamous in nature; however, some cases of hypergamy were also prevalent. The boys were generally married at the age of 19 to 24 years and girls by the age of 16 to 20 years. Among the Buddhist, marriages were always a religious affair and religious rites were followed on the wedding day and prior to it. Marriages in Ladakh were marked with elaborate ceremonies and wedding arrangements, which used to last for several days. Marriages were full of music, dance, joy and feasting. Suggested pairing is reviewed by the onpo (astrologer), who decides whether the couple is astrologically matched. If he approves, groom’s family begun a long series of courting rituals. The relatives of the groom take ‘Chang’
(locally brewed intoxicated drink made out of barley), tea, butter and other presents along with the ring to the bride's home. If the 'chang' and gifts were accepted, then the marriage took place thereafter. Wedding almost invariably occurred in winter, when there was more time for celebrations. Different tasks were divided among the members of phasphun and relatives. The wedding date was fixed on the auspicious day of the year in consultation with the astrologer or Onpo (astrologer) by the bride and bridegroom. On the first day, a grand feast would take place at the bride's house and on the second day, at the groom's place. After marriage, the bride lived with her husband. If there were no sons in the family, then they groom was brought in for the eldest daughter. Traditional marriages used to be mixed both arranged and by personal choice of the partners. Nevertheless, certain relationships were prohibited. Divorce, remarriage, and widow remarriage were all common among Ladakhis and they were very well recognized also.

Marriages in Ladakh are examples of social cooperation. Customarily, it is relatives and friends who cooperatively help the family members, as it is believed that marriage expenses are too heavy for one person to bear. They believe that just as the duty of shepherding goats and cattle, is rotated among the villagers, the same should be practiced in marriage. One of the respondents stated “it is his turn today and tomorrow it will be mine”. Each of the households of locality where marriage is going to take place contributes whatever little they can afford. Each household gets two yarkandi carpets and one table before the main feast, as they are laid for the guest, in the tent where the main celebration takes place. Wealth is clearly marked by the fact that the richer households are able to host the more elaborate social events. (Pirie.2007;6). Girl for the first time in her life covers her head with a turquoise studded Perak, which flows down below her shoulder. By custom, a mother hands her Perak down to her eldest daughter when she marries. This storehouse of the family wealth which remains the wife’s possession. This is an indication of the strong position of the women they have traditionally held in Ladakhi society (Norberg,1991).

In traditional agricultural society where the joint families economic survival depended heavily upon the ability of their family members to produce enough food supplies to feed members, the traditional Ladakhi marriage would occur at an early age. The girls were married between age of 16 to 20 years and boys were married off between the ages of 19-24 years.
Age at marriage: Age at marriage is a vital aspect as it is related to physical, emotional as well as mental growth of an individual. Marriage along with it gets a package of new responsibilities to be undertaken, and various social duties that have to be fulfilled by the individual. Marriage at an early age was a common practice in India in the past. The conformity of this practice is seen in the Census report of the 1961, where as many as 1,733000 males and 4,426000 females were married between the ages of 10-14 years during 1951-1961. The continuity of this practice was seen in many parts of rural Ladakh, where polyandrous form of marriages was common. In this kind of marriage the youngest brother sometimes would be around 10 years. But still early marriages in Ladakh were not so common and this can been seen in the work of Ribbach where he says:

"Namgyal was now eighteen, and according to eastern thinking, he had long been of a marriageable age. He could have married three or four years earlier but in his house they did not approve of early wedding. Namgyal was fond of Tashi Dolma who was from the neighboring house. They had grown up with one another and together they had played, driven goats into the mountains or collected firewood. Almost every day they met each other in the village or in the fields"(Ribbach.1986:59).

To know the current marriageable age about girls and boys, respondents were asked about the general trend regarding marriageable age of the males and females.

Table 5.03: Distribution of respondents on their views regarding the right age of marriage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sr. No.</th>
<th>Right age of marriage (in years)</th>
<th>Leh (Urban)</th>
<th></th>
<th>Sku-Markha (Rural)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>For Males</td>
<td>For Females</td>
<td>For Males</td>
<td>For Females</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>18-20</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>12(12.25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>21-25</td>
<td>1 (1.04)</td>
<td>6 (6.25)</td>
<td>47 (47.96)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>26-30</td>
<td>63 (65.63)</td>
<td>68 (70.83)</td>
<td>46 (46.94)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>30+</td>
<td>32 (33.33)</td>
<td>22 (22.92)</td>
<td>5 (5.10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>96(100.00)</td>
<td>96(100.00)</td>
<td>98(100.00)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figures in brackets represent percentages

The data presented in the table 5.03, clearly shows that there is a general upward trend in the age of marriage. As a result there is a significant increase in the age at marriage
for both males as well as females in both the areas. The present trend in the age at marriage shows that, out of total 96 respondents, the majority of them 65.63% preferred marriage between 26-30 years for males, while 33.33% respondents believed that marriage at the age above 30 years was preferred and there was only 1(1.04%) respondent who believed in getting males married at the ages between 21-25 years. However, in the case of females, the majority (70.83%) respondents stated that 26 -30 years of age was the right age for females to get married, followed by 22.92% respondents who believed that getting married after 30 years was right for females while there were 6.25% respondents who stated that 21-25 years was right age to get married for females. There was not a single respondent in favor of getting girls and boys married off between the ages of 18 to 20 years.

While on the other hand in case of rural Ladakh (Sku- Markha) there were 47.96% and 46.94% respondents respectively who revealed that marriage between 21 -25 years and 26-30 years was the right age to get married for males, and only 5.10% respondents preferred getting married after 30 years of age. In the case of females, the majority (64.28%) of respondents believed that 21-25 years was the right age for females to get married, and 22.45% respondent stated that 26-30 years is the best age for females to get married and only 1(1.02%) of respondents believed that above 30 years was the right age for females to get married. There were 12.25% respondents who felt that 18-20 is the right age for marriage for females.

From the above data, it is clear that there are variations in both the cases, (urban-rural and males-females). The age at marriage is high in case of Leh (urban) as compared to Sku-Markha (rural). In addition to above mentioned variation, the other important variation is that the age of marriage of males is relatively higher than that of the females in both the cases. Though the general attitude of individual’s regarding the shift in the early age at marriage has changed yet in regard to rural areas, until recently, early marriages, particularly of the females were observed in high proportion. The reason given by respondents for the shift in age at marriage in the urban part (Leh) are due to various factors like education, economic development, legislative provision and impact of mass media. Different factors responsible for a slow change in the rural area are due to low educational qualification, low economic development, religious and physical factors.

In an overall analysis, it has been observed that in general, many factors have contributed towards increasing the age at marriage but it appears that increased opportunities for the higher education have particularly influenced this trend in
Ladakh. The differential educational growth in urban parts seems to have affected the age at marriage more than in rural areas.

CHOICE OF MARRIAGE PARTNER

Process of mate selection

The process of mate selection not only ends with choosing a mate but includes criteria for the selection of mate and field of selection. Let us study each one by one. Choosing a mate is a problem that an individual’s share in every society. The choice of a marriage partner is one of the most serious decisions people face. In the past, this decision usually followed a long period during which people engaged themselves in more informal discussions. The selection of mate is a complex phenomenon as it involves not only the concern of the parents and other family members but sometimes of social groups as well. Thus, while selecting a mate, one is not so free to take a decision but has to keep these things in mind and observe certain restrictions which determine the selection. The process of preparation includes a requirement for parental approval of the choice of a spouse. Individuals might propose marriage to the persons of their own choice. However, once the choice is made, the parents have both the right and the obligation to weigh carefully whether to give consent to, and thus guide, their offspring in one of life's most important decisions. Obtaining parental permission for marriage reaffirms the importance of the bond between child and parents. It also helps to create a supportive network of parents in the often difficult first years of a marriage.

Our analysis based upon literature and responses taken from a few elderly respondents’ shows that, in the past it was the family head and elderly members of the family who would decide and had a say in the selection of a mate. Irrespective of area, caste and religious background, the selection of mate by and large was of the traditional type and the selection of authority was in the hands of elder members of the family. So the parents and an elderly member played a preponderant role in the selection of mate. As Ribbach states in his book;

Apart from the parents and grandmother there were two uncles who belonged to the phasphun and few other local family members. Pouring out many words and much chang they considered the question, to whom should Namgyal be wedded. He himself was not summoned to the meeting. To begin with Namgyal’s mother made ashy attempt to propose a marriage with Tashi Dolma. The two liked each other. But the others did not like the proposal because they believed that her father is only a small landholder. (Ribbach, Samuel. 1986:41-42).
One of the reasons given by elderly for this type of selection of mate was that, joint family was a dominant feature of the society at that point of time, so nobody could think of having their own house, as everyone had to depend upon the family for social and economic activities. Children happily accepted parent’s decision about the selected partner for them. Some believed that the system of polyandry was another reason for arranged selection of mate by parents, parents used to arrange the girl for their sons or visa-versa. So there was no space left for personal choice. These were the reasons considered for the arranged marriages held prior to 1980s.

The system of mate selection was not that rigid at that time, soon or later a personal choice of an individual was also recognized and couple was accepted happily in the household. There were a few cases of personal choices. Once parental permission was obtained, the marriage took place, requiring only the simplest of ceremonies. Depending on personal tastes, family resources, and cultural traditions, Ladakhi ceremonies run the gamut from small to large, including all manner of music, dance, dress, food and festivity. Marriage means more than partnering together, as it involved the social obligations and duties for those who are uniting together in this form of institution. Responses were collected regarding the basis of freedom of choice of marriage partner from the selected respondents.

Table 5.04: Distribution of respondents on the basis of freedom of choice of a marriage partner

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sr. No.</th>
<th>Freedom of choice</th>
<th>Lh (Urban)</th>
<th>Sku-Markha (Rural)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>By parental choice</td>
<td>18 (18.75)</td>
<td>46 (46.94)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Boys &amp; Girls personal liking</td>
<td>44 (45.83)</td>
<td>26 (26.53)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Both parents as well as liking of children</td>
<td>34 (35.42)</td>
<td>26 (26.53)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>96 (100.00)</td>
<td>98(100.00)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figures in brackets represent percentages

In general, it is revealed in the Table 5.04 that boys and girls personal liking is the most favoured practice of choosing a life partner in Leh (urban). It is quite evident from the table that, out of the total respondents of 96 in Leh (urban), a large number 44 (45.83%) respondents preferred ‘boys and girls personal liking’, 34(35.42%) respondents prefer ‘both parents as well as liking of children’ and there were
18(18.75%) respondents who believed that marriage partners should be chosen and finalized by parental choice.

On the other hand in Sku-Markha (rural), a large proportion, 46 (46.96%) of respondents believed that it was parents choice which was more important in selecting a mate and 26(26.53%) respondents each were in favour of a personal liking of the both the boy and girl and ‘both parents as well as liking of children’ while selecting a marriage partner for their children. It is evident that in urban area, there are large number of respondents who preferred personal liking of the children while in case of Sku-Markha it was still parental choice that finalizes the mate selection process.

The overall analysis regarding the issue of mate selection has undergone changes as compared to the years prior to 1980s in both the areas These changes in Leh (urban) may be attributed to increased age at marriage which enabled an individual to take decision on his or her own. At Sku-Markha (rural), in general, age at marriage is still lower (See table 3.03 in Chapter 3) and a large number of parents decide to whom their children can get married as compared to Leh. Another reason is the changed educational status which has certainly influenced the authority pattern in the settlement of mate selection in Leh (urban). There has been a rapid growth in the economic sphere and in the process of urbanization. There is a transformation of the people of Leh (urban) that might have led to change in their attitude regarding the selection of mate. Another reason can be due influence of legislation and awareness about polyandry. With the abolition of practice, the parental say has also declined as polyandry was based on the parent’s decision about the selection of mate. But on the other hand, in Sku-Markha (rural) a very few significant changes are observed. These may be due to less educational standards and less exposure to the outside world. Our analysis also confirms the observation made by Ross that it was the moral obligation of the parents to select mates for their children and children to accept their choice as majority of decisions are taken by parents and accepted by children (Ross, 1961).

The surprising feature of the Ladakhi social structure is that every girl invariably knows her future partner in life more or less thoroughly before the two are formally united in wedlock. A girl has full freedom to exercise her choice for a husband and if the proposal is one made by her parents, her approval to it is a necessary perquisite to the conclusion of a matrimonial alliance. A girl may make her own choice independent of her parents. Marriage among the Buddhist of Ladakh is a contract which can be dissolved when either party to it seeks the divorce. Another important factor involved in the process of Marriage selection is the criteria of selection of mate.
Criteria for selection of a mate

Everyone desires to choose a partner from among the most successful and attractive as well as compatible ones. This is considered as central to natural selection for better marriage prospects. The use of matrimonial advertisements is increasing and thus becoming an integral part of the mate selection process in India (Banerjee 1999; Das 1980; Nanda 1995). Advertisements are placed in the newspaper because it is likely to attract a wide readership. Screening is first done on the basis of photographs. Next, the young adults are allowed to meet and talk over the phone, and occasionally go out with a chaperone who is usually an adult family member who accompanies the young couple while they are trying to determine the person with whom they are most compatible or not. In case of Ladakh this kind of criteria of selection of mate is completely missing. Respondents were asked to rank order a given set of factors related to criteria for the selection of the life partner for boys and girls.

Table No. 5.05 : Distribution of Respondents on the basis of factors kept in view, while selecting marriage partner

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sr. No.</th>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>Leh (Urban) (Mean Score Value)</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>Sku-Markha (Rural) (Mean Score Value)</th>
<th>Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Caste/Religion Consideration</td>
<td>3.96</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Caste Consideration</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Education of partner</td>
<td>3.92</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Family status</td>
<td>3.96</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Family status</td>
<td>3.82</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Economic standing of family</td>
<td>3.88</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Economic standing of family</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Parental Choice</td>
<td>3.80</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Parental Choice</td>
<td>2.37</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Education of partner</td>
<td>2.34</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Good Temperament</td>
<td>1.12</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Good Temperament</td>
<td>1.17</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Physical Appearance</td>
<td>1.06</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Physical Appearance</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Horoscope matching</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Horoscope matching</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An attempt has been made to analyze the attitude of respondents towards the criteria for selecting a mate. A set of different factors such as good temperament, educational status of partner and economic standing of the family etc was provided to the
respondents and they were asked to rate as selection criteria for marriage partner for their children, in order of importance. A factor rated as most important was assigned a score of 4, while that considered as least important was given a score of 1. The factor which was rated as important was assigned a score of 3 and less important as 2. A mean score value was worked out for each of these factors in both the areas. The higher the mean score value, the higher was the rank assigned to that factor.

When analysis was done about the basic factors that are kept in mind while selecting a marriage partner, for the respondents of both urban and rural areas, revealed that ‘caste/religion consideration’ (3.96 and 4.00 respectively) tops the priority list while the ‘horoscope matching’ (1.02 and 1.00 respectively) stands at the bottom. ‘Education of the partner’ (3.92), followed by ‘family status’ (3.82), then ‘economic standing of the family’ (3.67), and ‘parental choice’ (2.37) were ranked second, third, fourth and fifth in cases of Leh (urban). While ‘good temperament’ (1.12), followed by ‘physical appearance’ (1.06) and lastly ‘horoscope matching’ (1.02) was placed at the bottom of the priority list. Whereas in case of Sku-Markha ‘family status’ (3.96), ‘economic standing of family’ (3.88), ‘parental choice’ (3.80), ‘education of partner’ (2.34) were ranked second, third, fourth and fifth in case of Sku –Markha (rural). While ‘good temperament’ (1.17) followed by physical appearance (1.02) and finally at last ‘horoscope matching’ (1.00). From the above analysis it is clear that the significant criterion for the selection of marriage partner in Ladakh is caste and religion consideration other than education of partner and economic standing of the family. Least preferred factors were physical appearance and horoscope matching which are of great importance in other parts of India. Good temperament and character of partner is significant parameter in selection of mate, and can be seen in Ribbach work:

“Boys character is always assessed. He knew that the noble fathers who desired choskyid to be their son’s bride were both deep in debt. Moreover, the son of the kalon was a licentious, dissolute character whose spending has brought his father into debt and misfortune. He had even stayed in the Leh prison because of some evil trick” (Ribbach.1986:49)

Field of selection

Field of selection while contracting a marriage varies from society to society, for some it is confined to one’s social group, class or caste and for some there are restriction on inter-religious marriages. Marriages outside one’s own groups are
discouraged to a great extent. There are some relatives with whom individuals cannot perform marriages at any cost but the degree of relation differs from community to community.

In general, the field of selection is restricted in two ways that is, through the endogamy of caste and the exogamy of gotra rules among the Hindus (Kapadia, 1966). Caste in the Indian context has very large influence in the marriage system; it exercises a tremendous influence over its members as it touches an individual’s life in all his or her relationships. Until recently breaches of caste endogamy were published by excommunication from the caste group and services which were refused on such occasions as marriages and funerals, when the need of cooperation is keenly felt (Ghurye, 1961).

When we talk about field selection in the Ladakh (selected areas of the study), caste and religion both play an important role in marriage system. Along with caste and religion, place of residence is also important field of selection of mate. The selection of spouses varies from matches within the villages to marriages in other villages considered culturally similar, particularly in terms of customs and dialect, so that the bride can adjust easily to the customs practiced there. Mothers have vested interest in having bride’s that their sons bring home because a forceful and quarrelsome daughter-in-law from a strange and unknown village could evict them from the main house once she gives birth to a child, whereas an amiable daughter in law could prove to be a powerful ally. Parents prefer that their daughters marry in a village that is nearby and with which their village has a history of marital exchange. The women from royal families or those from oppressed castes often travel long distances for marriages (Aggrawal, 2004:135).

It has been reported that in the past marriages were usually contracted within a caste group without any exception but there were few inter-religious marriages. The coexistences of two communities namely, Islam and Buddhism since the eighth century along with people belonging to different religions have been present in Ladakh. In recent times, relations between the Buddhist and Muslim communities have soured due to the petty conflicts motivated by political interest in 1989. Since then, cooperation and harmony has died down, but mistrust and prejudice on both sides continue to affect the relations, and all this, has limited their relations which has led to both sides boycotting each other. Marriages and any social exchanges between
these religious groups two are of rarest sight in Ladakh. Although there are a few cases of marriages of Buddhists with Hindus but there are recent cases of marriages between Buddhist and Muslim and Buddhist and Christians now found in Ladakh. In order to find out any change in regard to caste and religious endogamy, enquiries have been made regarding the observance of the rule of endogamy in any marriages held in the family household, before the year 1980 and after the year 1980 in the selected areas. The respondents have been asked about their views regarding the practice of endogamy in future, whether they would allow their children to marry outside their caste group.

When the respondents were asked about their views on the inter-religious marriages in their family in last 20 years, the majority 95(98.96%) of respondents stated that there had not been any cases of inter-religious marriages in their families, and just 1(1.04%) family reported inter-faith marriages in their families after 1980s, that too marriage between the Buddhists and Hindus. In case of Sku-Markha, there have not been any inter-religious marriages in the last 20 years.

From the above analysis it is clear that in Ladakh, marriage between different religions is a hard thing to find. There are no instances of intermarriage between Buddhists and Muslims, although a few cases have occurred in past where boy and girl have ran away together but then once they came back to Ladakh, they were separated by their respective communities. People revealed that they could still think of inter-religious marriages between Buddhists and Hindus but at no cost, they would allow their children to get married in Muslim and Christian communities. Inter-religious marriages and conversion became even more controversial after 1989 agitation, when Ladakh Buddhist Association (LBA) entered into a verbal agreement with the Ladakh Muslim Association (LMA), in Leh to ban these practices and punish those who defied their agreement by forcing them to leave Ladakh and threatening their families with excommunication. This treaty ensured, that in the events of love affair between a Buddhist and Muslim, each side is responsible for taking the prospective bride and groom back to their respective family and each will take upon the responsibility of stopping them going through with that marriage. They believe that marriages among the Buddhists are most compatible due to their cultural similarities. We can infer here that the religious endogamy plays a significant role as a
criterion for selecting a mate while on the other hand secular elements are given lesser importance.

When I asked if such marriages should be prevented or allowed, only 2 out of 500 people said that it should be not allowed. While under Indian law The Special Marriage Act assists the right of inter faith couples to marry, but they are prevented in Leh by the capillary arms of the state who are either Buddhists or Muslim Ladakhis. This is reflected in Sara’s work

As part of a larger strategy of conflict- avoidance, Muslims stressed that they discourage inter-religious marriages. Indeed, the Imam told that he would not perform Nikah for an interfaith couple, and that he had made speeches discouraging Muslim men from marrying Buddhist women (Smith.2009:209).

When asked from a Buddhist monk about the conflict between the Buddhists and Muslims, the monk responded:

In Ladakh, the Muslims are growing, Buddhists are feeling insecure, but in no way can we now balance this. We have to accept the reality. The Buddhist, no matter how much they feel insecure, this cannot be prevented. We Buddhists can never stop the growth of Muslim population. The future of Buddhists is not very good. Muslims may not have strong intention to increase their population in Ladakh in order to suppress Buddhists, but it is growing intentionally because of traditional beliefs. Buddhists believe that growing population of Muslims will lead to demographic changes in the long run.

It is not only religion that plays a significant role in marriage practices but caste system, which Buddhists deny also, influences the criteria of mate selection.

**Inter caste marriages:** Buddhism, being considered as a casteless religion attracts Dalits and Scheduled Castes for the conversion of their religion. Every year people are converting to Buddhism intentionally or unintentionally. But there are even divisions in Buddhism as well on the basis of their occupation. Buddhist are divided into four Strata’s, Botos are commoners, rest three Mons (musician), Garas (the smiths), and Bedas are considered as lower caste among the Buddhists of Ladakh. Though all of them enjoy the status of Scheduled Tribes, but within communities there are divisions based upon occupations. Despite the Constitutional guarantee of “Prohibition of discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth” under Article-15 of the Indian constitution and “Abolition of untouchability”
Act under Article-17, Mon (musician), Gara (the smiths), and Beda are victims of many violations in Ladakh. Moreover, Ladakhis are more conscious about caste when it comes to marriages and social rituals. There are many cases of conflict due to inter-caste marriages in Ladakh. Once in a while, caste differentials would be superseded by romantic love affairs, generally in the case of women from the oppressed castes marrying into upper caste (Aggarwal, 2004:160). Such families have been subjected to excommunication when love affairs lead them to breach the ultimate taboo.

The caste wise analysis of the respondents show that in Leh (urban), the majority 95(98.96%) of respondents were not in favor of allowing their children to marry in the other caste while there were 1(1.04%) respondents who favoured of inter-caste marriages. On the other hand in Sku-Markha (rural), not a single respondent was in favor of allowing their children to marry in the other caste. In an overall analysis, it is revealed that caste endogamy is still very prominent feature in the Ladakhi society.

At the outset, it is important to note with the exception of one, others answered in the affirmative regarding not allowing the inter-caste marriage of their children. The reason given by the sole respondent who favoured inter-caste marriage was related to changed educational and occupational outlook. Individuals of lower caste are doing well in various fields and some of them have achieved high ranks in educational and economic fields. In the case of non preference of inter-caste marriages, the reasons attributed are their low social status and upper caste social boycott and fear of excommunication. One of the respondents revealed that a few years, back a girl eloped with a low caste boy and got married. The situation in her family was worse than the death of any member of the family. Friends and relatives used to visit their house to console the family, her mother stopped eating and drinking. Relatives and friends pressurized to boycott their daughter, virtually the family boycotted her. The news spread like wild fire; the life of the boy was in threat.

They believed that there might be chances of inter-caste marriages in the coming future with the spread of education and economic development. As it is said that education liberates the mind from the fitters of ignorance, narrow thinking, superstitions and prejudices; so in the near future there may be an increase in inter-caste marriages and that may give way to structural changes in the marriage pattern.
WAYS OF ACQUIRING A MATE

Formal path of marriage: A marriage among Ladakhis is not an ordinary practice but involves various socio-cultural aspects. Marriages in Ladakh are full of music, dance and feasting. Marriages are usually initiated by the boy's parents where the father and maternal uncle of the boy visit the girl's parents to ask for their agreement for the match. Relatives of the groom take Chang, butter and khataks along with the ring to the bride's home. If the gifts and the proposal are accepted, lamas are consulted to select an auspicious date and then marriage takes place a few months later. Broadly, there are four ways of acquiring mates for marriages observed in the past: Pagma (patrilocal marriage), Magpa (matrilocal marriage), Voluntary elopement and Bride Abduction.

Magpa: If there are only daughters in the families, then the parents and relatives look for a groom for the eldest daughter or the only daughter. Magpa is brought by bride to her house. In a Magpa marriage, it is daughter who is the heiress and the mistress of the household when her father dies. She has the right to take decision concerning property and decision regarding the marriage of children as well as education of children. If there is a quarrel she has the right to throw him out of the house and choose a new husband. However, it also happens that a competent and hard working Magpa will win both respect and decisive influence in the affairs of the house and family. If there are many brothers then one of the brother marries into another household that is, Magpa particularly if there are more than three brothers, or else one of them enters the monastery as a monk and is looked after by them.

Voluntary elopement: Another alternative form of marriage is a voluntary elopement. If a courting couple decides to get married, but the girl’s parents would not accept her current boyfriend to be her future husband or that her parents try to force her to accept another young man or an older man against her will, she has the option to voluntarily flee with her lover to his parents’ home as a traditional way of getting married to the man of her choice. The other kind of elopement is when a person is marrying for a second or third time (due to death or divorce) or the individuals involved are poor. In contradiction to the regular form of a marriage

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2 White muslin scarf, which is presented as a mark of respect. Such scarves are supposed to have magic power if consecrated by a lama.

3 In this type of marriage, the groom is known as Magpa and he retains his title for lifetime.
transacted in conformity to the prevailing custom as described above, a clandestine marriage is performed when the parties are inclined to avoid expenses of many dinners and parties which are incidental to regular Pagma form of marriage. The third situation is when the girl has been engaged to a boy she does not like and her parents, to avoid embarrassment, permits her to have her own way. The girl in such cases is carried to the house of a relative of hers who arranges sending over the girl to the boy’s family. The boy’s father visits the girl’s house the day following the nuptial night with a present of chang and seeks forgiveness which is not readily given and the process is to be repeated until the girl’s parents relent. Then alone the seal of confirmation is affixed on the marriage (Kaul, 1998:141-142).

**Bride abduction or Kidnapping:** Ladakhi society recognizes bride abduction or kidnapping as another alternative way of marriage. The bride abduction involves the kidnapping of a girl by the prospective husband without her personal consent and her family’s approval. The prospective husband always receives assistance from a small group of his close male relatives or male friends during the bride abduction. The bride kidnapping preferably takes place while the girl is away from her home and alone by herself. As soon as the bride is brought to the home of the prospective husband’s family, his parents are under obligation to secure and send two messengers to inform her parents of the girl’s abduction and the hopeful husband’s intention to marry her. When the girl’s parents receive the news, they have two options to pursue. The first option is for the parents to go to the abductor’s house and demand the release of their daughter immediately, if they do not find him and his family suitable. Her parents’ physical presence and strong demand or objection at the abductor’s family home could lead to the immediate release and safe return of their daughter back to her family. The second option is simply to accept the abduction of their daughter as an alternative way for their daughter and her prospective husband to get married, if they find or have a strong belief that the abductor is a good person and husband, and his family is suitable for her.

If a voluntary elopement or bride abduction leads to marriage, it would be accepted by the two families and community at large as a proper marriage after the formal negotiations are agreed upon and completed. The recognition of such couple’s marriage would end any remaining bitterness or disputes. Also, the affinal ties of mutual cooperation between the two respective families and clans would be
established. Finally, the couple’s married life would proceed as if it was conceived in the normative path.

The above discussed four ways of acquiring mates were famous forms of marriage in the past.

**Table 5.06: Distribution of respondents on the basis of types of marriage in the present**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sr. No.</th>
<th>Types of Marriage</th>
<th>Leh (Urban)</th>
<th>Sku-Markha (Rural)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Pagma</td>
<td>50 (52.09)</td>
<td>29 (29.59)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Magpa</td>
<td>26 (27.08)</td>
<td>22 (22.45)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Voluntary elopement</td>
<td>20 (20.83)</td>
<td>47 (47.96)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>96 (100.00)</td>
<td>98 (100.00)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

❖ Figures in brackets represent percentages

The examination of above table shows that the general trend remained the same, as no cases of Bride Abduction or kidnapping was reported. Out of the total 96 respondents of Leh (urban), a large number (52.08%) of respondents revealed that, it is Pagma way of acquiring a mate which is the most popular, followed by Magpa (27.08%), and there are 20.83% respondents who highlighted voluntary elopement was one of the ways of acquiring a mate in Leh (urban). Whereas on the other hand, in Sku-Markha (rural), out of total 98 respondents, 47.96% respondents revealed that, it is voluntary elopement form of marriage that dominates the marriage pattern, followed by Pagma marriage, where a large number (29.59%) of respondents still believe in acquiring a mate through this way and there are 22.45% respondents who stated that Magpa way of acquiring mate was prevalent in Sku-Markha.

In an overall analysis, it is clearly evident that the most popular type of marriage ceremonies in Ladakh are Pagma but in the rural part of Ladakh, marriages by elopement are evident in quite a large number. One of the reasons for voluntary elopement in rural parts can be low economic status of the families. In order to escape from the regular expensive ceremonies, voluntary elopement does not involve any cost.
CEREMONIES

Traditional marriages were arranged one in which parents figure prominently, but a proposal materializes only after the girl’s consent has been obtained for it. If a girl’s parents approve of a proposal, then the boy side has to then send chang, the ceremony being called tichhang, in confirmation thereof this makes a formal proposal for the girl’s hand. Acceptance of these presents by the girl’s side connotes implicit agreement which is subject to the approval of the relation.

Under the usual Hindu custom, the girl’s side has to play the subservient role whereas under the Ladakhi custom, it is the other way round and the boy’s side has to entertain the relatives of the girl’s side several times. At the ‘nynchang’ which conforms to the betrothal ceremony, the presents from the bridegroom to his would be mother-in-law have to be decided. Besides cash presents, the other items comprises of tea, butter, dried apricots, rice, meat, khataks and the indispensable chang. The groom also sends some ornaments to the bride. If the girl’s father at this point of time breaks the engagement he has to make good of all the expenses incurred by the boy’s father in negotiating the marriage.

Then comes the trabschhang, the discussion feasts or more appropriately discussion chang. The occasion offers opportunity for the friends and relatives of the two sides to discuss in advance the course of the wedding feast and other necessary arrangements to be made. In Ladakh, the bride’s mother must be paid for bringing up and nourishing the bride (Ribbach.1986:61).

It is the eldest daughter or the eldest son for whom a nuptial feast is given. Other children are wedded with minimum ceremonies, generally through a sanctioned nocturnal voluntary elopement with chang on the following day.

When the bride leaves her home, the g.yang-’gugs rituals are performed to prevent the affluence of the household from leaving with her. In her in-laws’ house, she is often seen as an outsider, whose intrusion can be dangerous for the unity and harmony of the family. Hence, the certain rites are executed at the threshold to cleanse her of any impurities before she can enter the new house. The journey from her own house to the other has transformed her from a source of fortune to a symbol of pollution (Aggarwal.2004:136).

Grand feast usually does not follow immediately after the wedding party is also organized. It depends on the household when they want to treat the whole community. Sometimes they give this feast after one year and sometimes even after the first birth.
of a child. Because they do not want to give two parties, (post-wedding party and party for the birth of first child) so they often celebrate both and give one grand party. Also, as the house cannot hold the large numbers of guests, this festive takes place outside in an open ground or in the fields where a large tent is pitched. The particular feature of this feast is that the relations and phasphun as well as close neighbors contribute their promised contribution and help the wedding family to have less the burden of the family in which the wedding is taking place. The presents given are beer, rice and mutton, vegetables and other items.

After all the festivities are over, there is one last party left. That is nyendro to which all the relations and neighbours and phasphun members are invited who have served in any way during the wedding festivities. As a reward for their services, all these helpers are now treated with great hospitality. At the end of the feast, each receives special thanks from the host and some loaves of bread and dough for house. With that, the wedding festivities end (Ribbach.1986:98-103).

**Bride price, Dowry and Divorce**

When the girl’s family accepts the boy’s marriage request, the formal negotiations begin between the two families through the groom’s and the bride’s families regarding the bride-price. The bride price is refundable if the marriage gets disrupted and dissolved in the event bride is found to be responsible for the cause of their marriage breakup. There is no such dowry system in Ladakh, but the bride’s dowry is considered as a gifts and a smaller financial token in a much less amount than the general trend in India. The purpose of the dowry is to assist the newly wedded couple in starting their new married life together in the groom’s extended parental house. Guests give some money or khatak into the brides hands on the wedding day. The money that the bride accumulates serves as a reserve funds for her future. The eldest daughter receives the bulk of pots, pans and vessels, as well as her mother’s perak. Exchange of gift is reflected in Ribbach’s lines as:

> According to ancient Ladakhi custom, the price of the mother milk should be a good quarter of the rinto. Give me 60 zo and then young Namgyal may take the girl. You can see what a bride-rope she carries with her. Such a dowry has not been seen in lower Ladakh since ancient times. They ate, drank and sang first the men and then women and girls. As soon as the men had recovered their voices the bargain over the price of the mother milk began again. After a great deal of argument and negotiations they agreed. (Ribbach,1986:54)

Interestingly, it is boy’s side that has to take care of all the expenses and has to pay the girl side for taking away the girl from her parents. Recently, there have been cases
where girl's parents had given a car to a bride as wedding gift. But then the Ladakh Buddhist Organization (LBA) has made it a rule that no girl would take car or any other expensive gift with her as it might one day take a shape of dowry system and would become a burden for those parents who could not afford to spend much on weddings.

**Divorce:** Ladakhi parents strongly want their sons' and daughters' marriages to be happy and successful. By giving the freedom of choice to their children, they hope that the marriages of their children would be more successful and divorce could be avoided. This is one of the important reasons why Buddhist parents allow their children a freedom of choice to choose their own marriage partners but still divorces occur often in the Ladakhi society. A man can divorce his wife if she proves to be infertile and unfaithful or if he quarrels with her, irreconcilably. Frequently the wife divorces the husband if he treats her badly. The old kings Law lays down that the guilty party responsible for breaking up the marriage must pay the other, some compensation (Ribbach.1986). If it is the wife who seeks the divorce, she has to return to the husband the part of the dowry or a bride price contributed by him. In the event of the husband seeking the dissolution of the marriage, he has to let the wife take away all her dowry including the part contributed by him.

All cases of divorce are referred to and decided by local elders, only the rarest are taken to court. There are remarriages both for the boy as well as the girl after divorce. In case she is a widow, then she is also free to remarry, if she chooses so. Buddhist girls have the choice to marry, remain a spinster and spend her life in her father’s house or to enter a monastery as a nun.

While discussing the various patterns of marriages in Ladakh, there were seen some changes in certain practices while some of them were practiced as being done earlier. To get more insight about the changes and continuity in the family and marriage practices, two case-lets are discussed below;

**CASE -I:** Mr. Namgyal is 60 years old and Mrs. Namgyal is 58 years old. The Ladakhi marriage of Mr. & Mrs. Namgyal, took place in Markha village when Mr. Namgyal was 19, and Mrs. Namgyal was 17-year-old. They lived in the same village, and had known each other for many years before their private courtship began. In fact, it was their brief courtship which led them to make their final decision that they
would be happy together as a married couple. They chose the voluntary elopement path to get married because it was the best option available to them. They did not like the formal marriage request because it required a large amount of money. In addition, both the families were financially not very strong, and lacked the money to help initiate the process of formal marriage. They chose voluntary elopement, whereby Mrs. Namgyal was brought to her maternal uncle’s house, from where she and Mr. Namgyal eloped at night. Next day Mr. Namgyal’s father visited the girl’s father’s house with a present of chang and sought forgiveness. It is then that the seal of confirmation was affixed on the marriage. They did not receive any gift from friends and family members as there was no feast given after their elopement.

After the wedding, the newly wedded couple returned to begin their new life in the patrilocal residence of Mr. Namgyal’s parents. Today, they live with their elderly mother who is 80 years old; it is their turn to provide the residence and care to their elderly mother as a way of keeping the Ladakhi tradition of caring for the elders during the old age. Although they would like to see their children practice the same and pass it on to the next generation, yet they did not expect their children to care for them when they are old, knowing that with the changing times, the practice of living together will slowly wither away. For his elderly parents (mother and his late father), it was their decision to live with them and their children and grand children in the same household as an extended large Ladakhi family rather than shifting into Khang-bu. The Namgyal extended family consisted of four different generations which included Mr. Namgyal’s elderly mother, Mr. & Mrs. Namgyal, their two sons and two daughters-in-law as well as three grand children. It is interested to note that after increased inflow of tourists for nearly two decades, Mr. & Mrs. Namgyal and his sons still manage to keep their large Buddhist family system together without breaking it up into many small nuclear families. Their wish was to keep it going as long as they could, despite the multiple challenges faced by them. However, they know that once they are no more, their joint family will break into nuclear ones.

The roles and responsibilities in the Namgyal family are divided among the family members. Mr. & Mrs. Namgyal work full time outside of the house in the fields. Mrs. Namgyal’s elder son and daughter-in-law helps in maintaining the homestay while younger sons work as travel guide with tourist and younger daughter in law takes care of the household chores and duties such as cooking, cleaning, laundering etc. The important task of passing the knowledge of their Ladakhi Buddhist culture and
disciplining the children is divided among Mr. & Mrs. Namgyal and to Mr. Namyal’s mother, who stay with children all the day as they are small. Their sons believe that to live in a joint family with their grandmother and parents have been very advantageous. The greatest contribution to the success and stability of the Namgyal’s family was their countless time and effort to provide discipline, imparting education of the Buddhist culture, day care, and supervision of their grandchildren. With the Great Grandmother staying home all day to provide day care for children, Mr. and Mrs. Namgyal Sons and Daughters-in-law could go to work outside of the house without giving it a second thought and bring in the necessary income to support their large extended family.

Mr. Namgyal believes that all of them have been living joyfully with peace and happiness till now. There have not been any instances of quarrel in the family but Mr. Namgyal is quite aware that this won’t go for long. Their sons and daughters-in-law have been to Leh quite a number of times and their conservation reflects that people in Leh are happier and have better livelihood. Issues such as education of their grandchildren have started to come up and one of their sons had stressed on educating their children in a private school in Leh. For Mr. Namgyal it has been a matter of worry as he believes that may be it an indication of transforming the joint family into a nuclear families.

He believed that one of the things that have changed over the period of years in marriages is that there is no more bride abduction being practiced. He states that the practice of bride abduction made us look like uncivilized to the outside world and he was happy about it not being practiced now. In case of family system, according to him, the size of the household has also decreased. He very proudly flaunt that he has fathered seven children but younger generation like his own sons, prefer to have only two or three children. According to him, a less number of children have been one of the main reasons for low enrollment in monastic life.

CASE II: Mr. & Mrs. Lotus are descendants of Leh Town. They had the opportunity to complete high school and college here. They met each other in college, and decided to get married right after they completed their education. They were in their early twenties when they got married. Unlike Mr. and Mrs. Namgyal, they picked the formal wedding path as their marriage option, and went through the formal Ladakhi marriage ceremony. Bride price and dowry were exchanged between the two families.
of Mr. Lotus and Mrs. Lotus. After the wedding, they lived with the parents of Mr. Lotus and siblings till the time their elder daughter was three years old. Then they moved out of his parents' home to establish a new nuclear family of their own. As a grown up son and daughter-in-law, they consulted parents and gained their approval before moving out to settle on their own. The Lotus household is now a nuclear family. It consisted of Mr. & Mrs. Lotus and their two young daughters. The ages of their daughters are five and ten. Both go to school. Mr. Lotus works as a Government contractor and Mrs. Lotus is a housewife. They lived with their large extended families before, so they understood the advantages and disadvantages of the two types of family systems. In terms of personal preference, the nuclear family system was better one for them and for their daughters. Lack of direct physical contact offers their nuclear family system more privacy, independence, freedom, peace of mind and choices to arrange their household and set their own lifestyle according to their desires. Unlike the traditional Buddhists family system, Mr. & Mrs. Lotus handled equal shares of the household chores as well as the care, nurture and discipline of their children. They also had an equal amount of power and responsibilities both inside and outside of the home. All aspects of their nuclear family and marriage generally reflected their beliefs and acceptance of the best of both the cultures. They preferred to keep their nuclear family system, and had no plan to return to the Buddhist extended family model, but Mrs. Lotus complains of being left alone all the day, while kids and Mr. Lotus are away for school and work respectively. She also misses the company of her Mother-in Law, and she had to handle major chunk of household work, which she believes becomes tiring sometimes.

According to Mr. Lotus, there are many changes that have taken place in the marriage institution such as “there are very few ceremonies left, only few elderly can sing those traditional song, young generation like us are not even learning them, leave about our children’s. I wonder what will happen in next ten-fifteen years, our traditional marriages will look like one of the North Indian wedding parties, with nothing of traditional touch left to it”. According to him, marriage parties have been a case of showing off their wealth and their family status, the more you have the more you show. According to him, there have been decrease in the number of feasting days; it
has come down to 1 or 2 days of celebrations. But one thing which he stressed was the number of expensive gifts one receives on the wedding party. He is worried about the time when his daughter would be of marriageable age. About family system he says that there is surely an increase in nuclear family system.

Based on the responses given by the respondents both in the selected areas (rural and urban) of Ladakh on certain questions related to family and marriage patterns and the qualitative analysis of the case-lets one can suggest that there is a change observed in family as many of the families have moved away from joint families to quasi-joint and nuclear setups but by and large, the marriage pattern has retained some of the traditional ceremonies and practices. Though their presence has been observed less with well to do families who seem to be acquiring an elite structure. This may show our confirmation of our hypothesis that the institutions of family and marriage have more or less remained intact.

To conclude, one may say that in contemporary Ladakhi society, Ladakhis consider marriage as a social and cultural obligation. Marriages are viewed as a means to attain the basic qualities of family unity, family togetherness, family harmony, family cohesiveness and sharing of common family goals, values attached to a way of life. In Ladakh, virilocality is the preferred practice, but uxorilocality is permitted, especially when there was no male heir to carry on the family’s name. Most women welcome uxorilocality, at least verbally, for they feel they have a better and secured status in their parents’ home. The post marital residential pattern in Ladakh is generally patrilocal in which a woman must leave her birthplace and adjust to life in the dwelling of her husband’s family. While choosing mates, it is customary for individuals to marry within their religion and caste and locality. Reason articulated for non preference of inter-caste marriages is the fear of excommunication of caste is maximum. Most of the marriages in rural parts of Ladakh are arranged to a greater extent while love marriage takes a lead in urban. Typically in rural parts, parents or kin select a prospective pool of eligible partners who have been screened by them first to ensure a similar social, cultural, educational, and economic background. Educational qualification and good temperament of the partner and family status are
qualities taken into consideration by the respective parents on both sides and the partners.

This is surprising at one hand majority do not favor caste system but at the same time that same majority does not favor inter-caste marriages between different caste especially marriage with the lower caste. This paradox among the Buddhists is a complex phenomenon to understand, that needs to be answer. It can be said that at personal level they want to get rid of the system but societal pressure does not allow them to do so. The fundamental question lies here is that who is this society then? Who forms society? Does it comprise of middle and lower caste or of those elites class who are ruling them. This paradox takes us back to the Marxist time, where the Marxian view is briefly summarized in Marx's expression where he states that "the ideas of the ruling class are, in every age, the ruling ideas." These ideas are considered as manifestation of class interests and are linked to the power structure, which is identified with the class structure.