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**SOCIO-CULTURAL ANALYSIS OF MARRIAGE: INTROSPECTION INTO  
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**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

**SOCIO-CULTURAL ANALYSIS OF MARRIAGE: INTROSPECTION INTO MATRIMONIAL ADVERTISEMENTS**

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**ABSTRACT**

The family has been and continues to be one of the most important elements in the fabric of Indian society. Marriages in India are essentially endogamous in nature and an integral part of this family system. It is the approved social pattern whereby two and more people establish a family which involves not only the right to conceive and rear children but also a host of other obligation and privileges affecting a good many people. In the early days trend of arrange marriage between two eligible male and female was under strict control of both side families. Later the society changed and the prospective brides and grooms started choosing their own life partners irrespective of caste and religion boundary and involved into love marriage system. Beside the flow of love marriage, the trend of arrange marriage did not turn sublime rather continued silently. Matrimonial advertisements are gaining prominence in the realm of marriage partner selection process, which is mainly used for seeking wider options and exercising personal choices. Using newspapers as a medium for finding a life partner is indeed a widely prevalent practice adopted in India in recent times. The present research work introspects into the questions related to the socio-cultural components in matrimonial advertisements and allied issues. Finding shows that Hindu marriage system is still compassionate about age old ethnic quality, racial identity, caste system and religious issues so far matrimonial advertisements are concern.

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**INTRODUCTION**

The family has been and continues to be one of the most important elements in the fabric of Indian society. The bond that ties the individual to his family, the range of the influence and the authority that the family exercises make the family in India not merely an institutional structure of our society but accord give it a deep value. The family has indeed contributed to the stability to Indian society and culture (Rao, 2013). Marriages in India are essentially endogamous in nature and an integral part of this family system. It is the approved social pattern whereby two and more people establish a family which involves not only the right to conceive and rear children but also a host of other obligation and privileges affecting a good many people. Marriage is therefore, a group's approved mating arrangements, usually marked by a ritual of some sort (the wedding) to indicate the couple's new public status (Pearson, 2010). The influences of western education and socio-economic transformations have led to enormous change in the existing pattern of choosing one's life partner and marriage practices in India (Goli, et al, 2005). As a result, modern day concept of marriage and allied socio-cultural issues

has undergone a rapid change in terms of pattern, process, and ideologies due to interventions of globalization.

In the early days trend of arrange marriage between two eligible male and female was under strict control from both side of the families. In such a traditional process, marriages were arranged within same caste after meeting the requirements of age, income occupation and family background of both the families. The heads of the family used to lead the process with little or no information provided to the bride and groom. Later the society changed and the prospective brides and grooms started choosing their own life partners irrespective of caste and religion and involved themselves into the system of love marriage. In this case knowing the partner personally before marriage indeed helped the couple to justify their level of compatibility. This cross border system of love marriage had to go through a lot of stress to achieve the social acknowledgement. Instances in liberal urban areas were well accepted but in conservative rural areas couples had to face strong isolation from their families and local governing bodies. Beside the flow of love marriage, the trend of arrange marriage did not turn sublime rather continued silently. Recently higher degree of instances of divorce and separation mainly in love

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marriage indirectly helps to thrush upon age old arrange marriage system. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century era print and electronic media has inevitably guided the pathway of social change with no alternate. The role of mediator to connect the families of the prospective brides and grooms is suffering a paradigm shift with the help of internet and website.

This research is carried out depending on the matrimonial advertisements published in the ‘Telegraph’ English daily which is regularly being published from Kolkata. Only Bengali brides and grooms who are spreaded over 19 administrative districts of West Bengal (Stretching from Himalayas in the North to Bay of Bengal in the South) is the basis of study area selection.

**Table No. 1** Common Cultural Themes

Common Cultural Themes: Marriage in Traditional and Industrialized Societies		
Characteristics	Traditional Societies	Industrial (and Post-industrial) Societies
What is the structure of marriage?	Extended (marriage embeds spouses in a large kinship network of explicit obligations)	Nuclear (marriage brings fewer obligations toward the spouse’s relatives)
What are the functions of marriage?	Encompassing	More limited (many functions are fulfilled by other social institutions)
Who holds authority?	Patriarchal (authority is held by males)	Although some patriarchal features remains, authority is divided more equally
How many spouses at one time?	Most have one spouse (monogamy), while some have several (polygamy)	One spouse
Who selects the spouse?	Parents, usually the father, select the spouse	Individuals choose their own spouse
Where does the couple live?	Couples usually reside with the groom’s family (patrilocal residence), less commonly with the bride’s family (matrilocal residence)	Couples establish a new home (neolocal residence)
How is descent figured?	Usually figured from male ancestors (patrilineal kinship), less commonly from female ancestors (matrilineal kinship)	Figured from male and female ancestors equally (bilinear kinship)
How is inheritance figured?	Rigid system of rules; usually patrilineal, but can be matrilineal	Highly individualistic; usually bilinear

Source: Pearson Education, 2010 (Marriage and Family, Chapter-10)

**Study Area**

Matrimonial advertisements are gaining prominence in the realm of marriage partner selection process, which is mainly used for seeking wider options and exercising personal choices (S. Shukla, et al, 2007). Anandabazar Patrika group is one of the leading Kolkata based media house in eastern India, particularly in West Bengal with huge circulation of English and Bengali news dailies, entertainment channels and magazines.

West Bengal is a hub of diverse culture and rich social background. Moreover marriage is a prolonged institutional concept on which Bengali people keep an unputdownable trust.

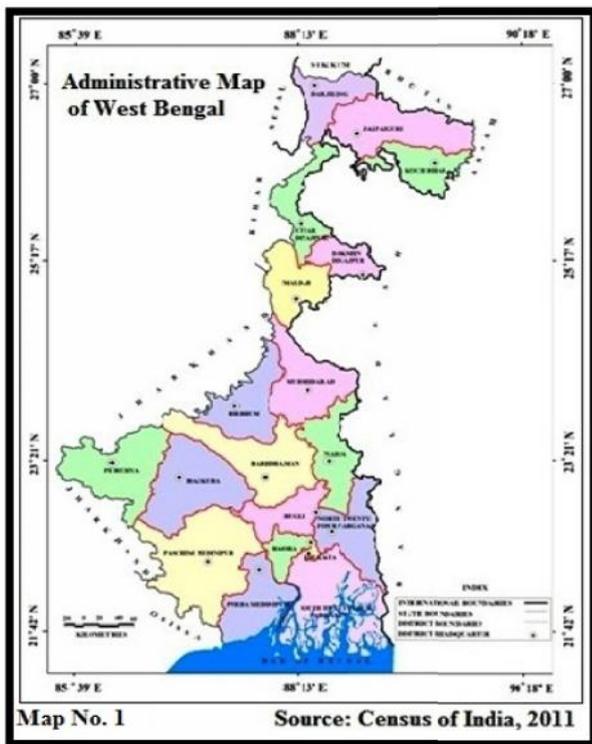
**Objectives**

Following objectives are taken into consideration to justify the research questions raised in this paper

1. To evaluate the socio-cultural aspects of marriage being reflected from matrimonial advertisements published in the Telegraph newspaper.
2. To understand the balance of demand and supply factor in the present day marriage marketing context.
3. To justify how autonomous women are to select their own spouse.

**MATERIAL AND METHOD**

The present research work is a systematic analysis of both secondary and primary data to achieve the stated objectives. The secondary data was collected on a stratified random sampling basis from the telegraph news paper matrimonial advertisement section on every Sunday during the period of May 2014 to April 2015. However, 150 ‘Bride wanted’ and 150 ‘Groom wanted’ advertisements which totals 300 sample size was taken into consideration to complete the sampling process. Telegraph news paper library in the Anandabazar Patrika office was also consulted as a secondary data source and collect any further relevant information. On the other hand total 100 men and women were interviewed randomly to understand the trend of their marriage perception through a scheduled questionnaire process. A graphical model of matrimonial advertisement cross section profile was drawn to understand the demand and supply factor correctly. Simple statistical and mathematical techniques were applied to

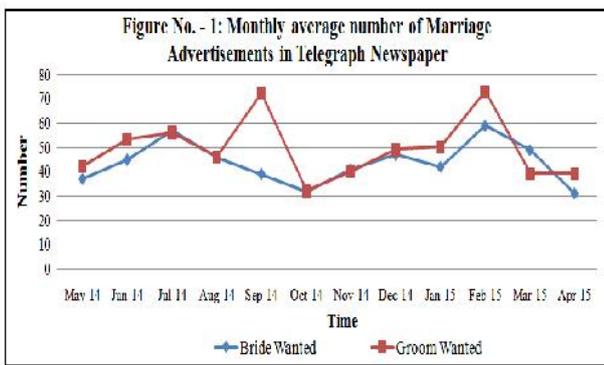


understand the research problem and justify the stated objectives. Map info software was used to prepare the location map of West Bengal.

**Martimonial Advertisement**

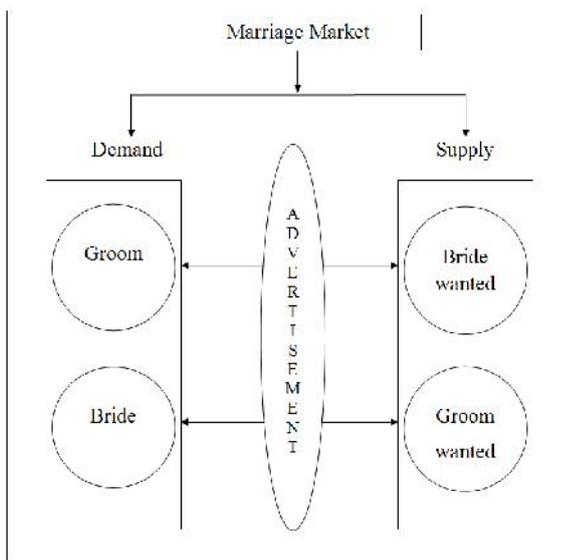
Matrimonial advertisements are compared to a placement office, where people register in the hope of finding a position commensurate with their qualifications. Using newspapers as a medium for finding a life partner is indeed a widely prevalent practice adopted in India in recent times.

This method, however, is a distinct departure from the established traditional pattern of mate selection (Murty and Rao, 1982). The Telegraph Newspaper matrimonial advertisement shows a fluctuating trend of marriage advertisement, where ‘Groom Wanted’ profile portrays slightly higher demand curve than bride wanted (Figure No. - 1).



Source: Primary survey from the Telegraph (Calculated by the Author)

With the advent of westernization and the resultant secularization and modernization processes in India, a newest form of market came into being which is known as ‘Marriage Market’. A widespread marketing of marriage proposals and advertising the biographical details of the aspiring brides and grooms has opened up a new dimension. So far advertisement is concern, it is broadly categorised into two types i.e. ‘Bride Wanted’ and ‘Groom Wanted’.



Source: Designed by the Author

Any randomly selected advertisement contains basic socio-cultural information which includes caste, age, height, stature, skin colour, education level, occupation etc. which may be termed as supply factors of marriage market. Later half of the advertisement contains desired qualities of the bride or groom, which may be termed as demand factor of the marriage market. This overall interrelationship and personal profile exchange over the matrimonial advertisement page can be explained in the following cross section Figure of marriage market :-

**RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

**Age Group**

The timing of first union merits investigation not only because of the close temporal link between marriage and onset of childbearing, but also the age when men and women marry has implications for the organization of family life and for gender relations within society (Mensch, et.al, 2005). Age factor is an important criterion for the couples to live happily ever after. It mainly emphasis on the adulthood, as in; child marriage (below 18 years for women and 21 years for men) is not legally entertained. Research shows a trend of late marriage among men and women. Brides below 25 years (31%) tend to marry early whereas grooms tend to marry even more lately (37% during 31 – 35 years and 9% above 35 years). Only 3% grooms were found below 25 years (Table-1) in the advertisements. Age of marriage is influenced by several social norms and expectations with changing globalization and rising educational attainments. Men are now postponing marriage because of greater expectations about job status and employment stability and the material possessions needed to form a household. On the other hand women are delaying marriage because of shifting gender role. (Mensch, et.al, 2005).

**Age Difference**

Age difference between bride and groom is also an important social factor. A woman, who is chronologically of same age with a man, is considered to be older in terms of mental age. Thus, in marriage system a preferred age difference is well established. In an organised system of marriage through matrimonial advertisement, it is observed that 72% brides demand 5 to 8 years of age difference whereas 45% grooms demand this age difference (Table-2). In case of arrange marriage, same age or older brides are also found but very rarely. Younger wife is expected to be respectful, dutiful, submissive, and soft spoken to her older husband and other members of the family.

**Stature**

Topinard’s classification of stature, which is generally accepted as racial classification, comprises four groups: - Tall (above 170cm), Above Average (165cm-170cm), Below Average (160cm-165cm) and Small (below 160cm). Bengali men and women are generally not tall in stature. 44% of the brides are short and only 22% of them are tall. Whereas 45% grooms are above average and 35% are tall. The most observable factor is that in the demand column brides are liberal about grooms’ height (95% did not mention) whereas grooms are very specific

about it (65% did not mention). This fact clearly indicates the conventional dominance of grooms over the brides in matrimonial advertisements (Table-3).

Therefore, the caste issue in Hindu society continues to be a crucial factor in recent matrimonial advertisements (Table-5).

**Table No. 1** Age Group

BRIDE (N = 150)					GROOM (N = 150)				
FACTORS	SUPPLY	%	DEMAND	%	FACTORS	SUPPLY	%	DEMAND	%
Age Group	25	31	-	0	Age Group	25	3	-	24
	26-30	50	-	12		26-30	51	-	30
	31-35	18	-	17		31-35	37	-	5
	> 35	1	-	7		> 35	9	-	1
	-	-	NM	64		-	-	NM	40

M = Mentioned, NM = Not Mentioned. *Source:* Primary survey from Telegraph (Computed by the Author)

**Table No. 2** Age Difference

BRIDE (N = 150)					GROOM (N = 150)				
FACTORS	SUPPLY	%	DEMAND	%	FACTORS	SUPPLY	%	DEMAND	%
Age Difference	-	-	< 5	22	Age Difference	-	-	< 5	52
	-	-	5 To 8	72		-	-	5 To 8	45
	-	-	> 8	6		-	-	> 8	3

M = Mentioned, NM = Not Mentioned. *Source:* Primary survey from Telegraph (Computed by the Author)

**Table No. 3** Stature

BRIDE (N = 150)					GROOM (N = 150)				
FACTORS	SUPPLY	%	DEMAND	%	FACTORS	SUPPLY	%	DEMAND	%
Stature	Tall	22	-	-	Stature	Tall	35	Tall	5
	Medium	34	-	-		Medium	45	Medium	7
	Short	44	-	-		Short	20	Short	13
	-	-	NM	95		-	-	NM	65
	-	-	M	5		-	-	M	35

M = Mentioned, NM = Not Mentioned. *Source:* Primary survey from Telegraph (Computed by the Author)

**Religion and Caste**

So far the most important socio-cultural representation of marriage is religious factor. In the newspaper almost cent percent advertisements (93% bride and 96% groom) were from Hindu Bengali citizens. Muslim and other religion marriage advertisements were very few (Table-4).

**Skin Colour**

Colour is the most striking superficial characteristics of human divisions. Three colours are most universally accepted by anthropologists and ethnologists (J. Sen, 2011). Cuvier divided the human groups into three races according to colour of skin: - Caucasian (White), Mongoloid (Yellow), and Negro (Black).

**Table No. 4** Religion

BRIDE (N = 150)					GROOM (N = 150)				
FACTORS	SUPPLY	%	DEMAND	%	FACTORS	SUPPLY	%	DEMAND	%
Religion	Hindu	93	-	-	Religion	Hindu	96	-	-
	Muslim	5	-	-		Muslim	4	-	-
	Secular	2	-	-		Secular	0	-	-
	-	-	M	2		-	-	M	2
	-	-	NM	98		-	-	NM	98

M = Mentioned, NM = Not Mentioned. *Source:* Primary survey from Telegraph (Computed by the Author)

The Indian caste system is a social hierarchy which traditionally divides people into four main categories, based on a descending order of Hindu ritual purity (J. Sen, 2011). The four major categories of caste or *Varna* are: - *Brahmins* (Priests and Teachers), *Kshatriya* (Rulers, Warriors and often Landlords), *Vaishya* (Merchants and Bankers), and *Shudra* (Artisans). In early days, inter caste marriage was socially prohibited but nowadays westernization effect and love marriage system has washed off this caste barrier.

Indian’s skin colour varies from light yellow to black, where Bengali people appear brown in this range. Research shows that skin colour of bride is an important factor in marriage, but in case of groom the issue is not that significant. While clarifying the supply status of the bride, 58% specified themselves as fair, but while demanding the groom’s skin colour, 93% bride dare not mention any specification. Bride and her family in beforehand are well convinced about any skin colour of the groom. A complete contradictory situation is observed in case groom’s profile. 85% grooms do not specify their skin colour but very specifically demand (57%) the bride to be fair. Therefore it is evident that in case racial aspects of marriage grooms are again dominant over the brides (Table-6). In the marriage market, appearance of the bride has been widely explored in multi dimensional way. Presentation of the bride to the neighbouring faces and words has been among the prime concern of the groom’s family.

Inter caste marriage is socially well accepted and thoroughly advertised in matrimonial (45% in case of Bride and 55% in case of Groom). On the other hand, 15% bride and 17% groom have specified their choice for intra caste marriage. A few even (12% bride and 11% groom) demand for higher caste family to get married with.

**Table No. 5 Caste**

BRIDE (N = 150)					GROOM (N = 150)				
FACTORS	SUPPLY	%	DEMAND	%	FACTORS	SUPPLY	%	DEMAND	%
Caste	Bramhin	32	-	-	Caste	Brahmins	37	-	-
	Kshatriya	28	-	-		Kshatriya	19	-	-
	Vaishya	22	-	-		Vaishya	25	-	-
	Shudra	12	-	-		Shudra	11	-	-
	NM	6	NM	28		NM	8	NM	19
	-	-	Intra Caste	15		-	-	Intra Caste	17
	-	-	No Caste Bar	45		-	-	No Caste Bar	55
-	-	Same/Higher Caste	12	-	-	Same/Higher Caste	11		

M = Mentioned, NM = Not Mentioned. *Source:* Primary survey from Telegraph (Computed by the Author)

**Table No. 6 Skin Colour**

BRIDE (N = 150)					GROOM (N = 150)				
FACTORS	SUPPLY	%	DEMAND	%	FACTORS	SUPPLY	%	DEMAND	%
Skin Colour	Fair	58	-	-	Skin Colour	Fair	12	-	-
	Medium	11	-	-		Medium	1	-	-
	Dark	5	-	-		Dark	2	-	-
	NM	26	NM	93		NM	85	NM	43
	-	-	M	7		-	-	M (Fair)	57

M = Mentioned, NM = Not Mentioned. *Source:* Primary survey from Telegraph (Computed by the Author)

**Table No. 7 Appearance**

BRIDE (N = 150)					GROOM (N = 150)				
FACTORS	SUPPLY	%	DEMAND	%	FACTORS	SUPPLY	%	DEMAND	%
Appearance	Pretty Beautiful	58	-	-	Appearance	Handsome	27	Pretty Beautiful	43
	Pretty Homely	9	-	-		-	-	Pretty Homely	18
	Pretty Smart	5	-	-		-	-	Pretty Smart	2
	Pretty Slim	8	-	-		-	-	Pretty Slim	10
	-	-	-	-		-	-	Pretty Homely Slim	4
	-	-	M	10		-	-	Only Homely	12
	NM	20	NM	90		NM	73	NM	12

M = Mentioned, NM = Not Mentioned. *Source:* Primary survey from Telegraph (Computed by the Author)

**Table No. 8 Education**

BRIDE (N = 150)					GROOM (N = 150)				
FACTORS	SUPPLY	%	DEMAND	%	FACTORS	SUPPLY	%	DEMAND	%
Education	< Graduate	4	-	-	Education	< Graduate	4	< Graduate	5
	Under Graduate	20	-	-		Under Graduate	39	Under Graduate	12
	Post Graduate	64	-	-		Post Graduate	25	Post Graduate	11
	Others	3	-	-		Others	4	Educated	40
	NM	9	NM	83		NM	28	NM	32
	-	-	Educated	6		-	-	-	-
	-	-	Highly Educated	11		-	-	-	-

M = Mentioned, NM = Not Mentioned. *Source:* Primary survey from Telegraph (Computed by the Author)

Research shows that a bride has to be pretty beautiful (43%), homely (18%), smart (2%) and slim (10%) against the demand of the 27% handsome grooms. As per the trend 58% brides mentioned themselves pretty beautiful and 90% did not mention any specified appearance criteria from the grooms (Table-7).

### Education

During the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, Bengali society had an extraordinary fascination for the *Bilet ferot* (returning from England) native students. Quality of education pursued from the prestigious institutions there in England like Oxford and Cambridge University had a special dignity in the colonial Bengali society. Educational status of the prospective groom therefore used to put on extra weight in the marriage process. Since then and even from forgotten past education status of bride and groom reflects their family culture and values. Nevertheless, cultural background of the family is inversely related with the education status. Thorough scanning of the

marriage advertisements shows that 64% of the brides are post graduate, 20% under graduate and only 4% are below graduate. 11% bride demands their groom to be highly educated and 83% did not mention about it. The most important and notable factor is that education status of Bengali women is very high. Long years of educational attainment therefore act as catalysis of tendency of late marriage among women.

On the other hand 39% grooms are under graduate, 25% post graduate and 28% did not mention their educational how about. But noticeably 40% grooms mentioned their brides to be educated just (Table-8). In case of education status brides enjoy a better edge over the grooms so far the research findings are concern.

**Occupation**

The most decisive and unavoidable factor of marriage is economic stature and occupation status of the groom. If the bride is meant to be the most elegant then the groom is certainly meant to economically self dependent. Although recently a woman’s economic contribution to her family has been a must and indeed a need for economic sustainability.

widely but inter religion marriage is yet to get acknowledged.

- Late marriage is evident among young Bengali generations. Men are now postponing marriage because of greater expectations about job status and employment stability and the material possessions needed to form a household. On the other hand women are delaying marriage because of shifting gender role.

**Table No. 9 Occupation**

BRIDE (N = 150)					GROOM (N = 150)				
FACTORS	SUPPLY	%	DEMAND	%	FACTORS	SUPPLY	%	DEMAND	%
Occupation	Teacher	13	-	-	Occupation	Business	13	-	-
	Student	15	-	-		Private Job	44	-	-
	Private Job	22	-	-		Govt. Job	35	-	-
	Govt. Service	24	-	-		NM	8	-	-
	NM	26	-	-		-	-	-	-
	-	-	Fixed Option (Teacher)	8		-	-	Working Women	26
	-	-	Multiple Option	17		-	-	Non Working Women	3
	-	-	Well Established	30		-	-	NM	71
	-	-	High Income	31		-	-	-	-
	-	-	Service	14		-	-	-	-

M = Mentioned, NM = Not Mentioned. *Source:* Primary survey from Telegraph (Computed by the Author)

**Table No. 10 Dowry**

BRIDE (N = 150)					GROOM (N = 150)				
FACTORS	SUPPLY	%	DEMAND	%	FACTORS	SUPPLY	%	DEMAND	%
Dowry	-	-	-	-	Dowry	-	-	No Demand	21
	-	-	-	-		-	-	NM	79

M = Mentioned, NM = Not Mentioned. *Source:* Primary survey from Telegraph (Computed by the Author)

The statement is well sustained by the 13% teachers, 24% government job, and 22% private job status of the brides. So far the bride’s demand is concern, 30% specified groom to be well established or must be having high income (31%). 14% specified grooms should be service holder. Against the demand of the bride, 44% grooms are found to have private job, 35% government job holder, and 13% businessman. Working women (26%) are most preferred whereas 71% did not mention any such. Therefore it is evident that women are quite demanding about the job profile of their partner. Whereas men are yet to be mentally prepared to accept their wife are working outside home (Table 9).

**Dowry Demand**

Dowry system is legally banned from Indian society. Several laws are protecting bride’s family as a safe guard against any such demand from groom’s family. Research shows that dowry issue is not at all raised from any side to avoid legal affairs. Nevertheless, 21% groom boldly stood up against dowry demand (Table 10).

**Major Findings**

- Matrimonial advertisement is a recent trend in marriage system. Daily news papers across west Bengal and India are coming up as a marriage mediator and transecting a huge marketing economy.
- Hindu marriage system is still compassionate about age old ethnic quality, racial identity, caste system and religious issues. Although inter caste marriage is practised

- Male centric dominance is prevalent in the marriage system, at the same time women are also putting up strong opinion about their preferences.
- Grooms are inclined more towards external beauty of the bride whereas brides are choosy about the education, occupation and family background of the groom.
- With increasing demand of matrimonial advertisement, marriage market is no more restricted within print media rather spreading all over web media also.
- Socio-cultural criteria of demand and supply of bride and groom vary enormously while comparing the actual details of the bride or groom with that of printed qualities in the advertisement. Therefore matrimonial advertisement is nothing but a showcase.
- Dowry demand might go silent in the advertisement to escape legal issues but practically most often it is practiced indoor widely.
- Age difference between bride and groom is a socially determining factor. A woman, who is chronologically of same age with a man, is considered to be older in terms of mental age. Thus, in marriage system a preferred age difference is well established.
- Desire to avail all types of social, cultural and economic qualities in a single human being are never achieved. Happy married life demands psychological factors too work at its apex.

## CONCLUSION

Marriage system in India has undergone a rapid change in recent times. Western influence and globalization of culture has directly affected traditional Indian culture. Right to equality of women with men has established a balance in the society. Higher education persuasion of women has helped them to raise voice against biased system of marriage which used to imprison themselves for life. Therefore, equal say and share of both men and women in the present day marriage system has helped society to get advanced in a balanced way. Matrimonial advertisements in news papers will suffer threat to some extent in near future due to rapid advent of internet and website culture and rapid transformation of traditional India into a digital India.

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