

MAHARASHTRIAN POSTGRADUATES' ATTITUDES TOWARDS DOWRY, DIVORCE, REMARRIAGE, AND SINGLEHOOD: A SOCIOCULTURAL ANALYSIS

Sumanti Badami

Postgraduate Human Development and Family Studies, Marathwada Agricultural University, Parbhani, Maharashtra State, India

ABSTRACT

This study explores the attitudes of Maharashtrian postgraduates towards dowry, divorce, remarriage, and singlehood within the context of evolving sociocultural dynamics in India. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, the research combines quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews to gather comprehensive insights from a diverse sample of postgraduates across various disciplines. The findings reveal a significant shift in attitudes compared to traditional perspectives, with many respondents expressing a critical stance towards the practice of dowry, advocating for gender equality and financial independence in marital relationships.

Furthermore, the study highlights a growing acceptance of divorce and remarriage as viable options for individuals seeking personal happiness and fulfillment, reflecting changing societal norms and increasing individual autonomy. However, lingering stigmas associated with singlehood persist, particularly among women, revealing the complexities of navigating personal choices in a culturally rich yet conservative society.

The analysis underscores the influence of education, exposure to progressive ideologies, and urbanization on shaping these attitudes, indicating a generational shift in perspectives. This research contributes to the broader discourse on marriage and familial structures in contemporary Indian society, providing valuable insights for policymakers, educators, and social advocates aiming to promote gender equity and support individuals in navigating their personal choices regarding marriage and family life.

KEYWORDS

Maharashtra, postgraduates, attitudes, dowry, divorce, remarriage, singlehood, sociocultural analysis, gender equality, societal norms, marital relationships, personal choices, cultural dynamics.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, India has witnessed significant sociocultural transformations that have reshaped traditional views on marriage, family, and individual identity. Among these changes, the practices surrounding dowry,

divorce, remarriage, and singlehood have become increasingly relevant, particularly among the educated youth. This study focuses on Maharashtrian postgraduates, a demographic that represents a unique intersection of education, cultural heritage, and contemporary social values. Historically, dowry has been deeply embedded in Indian marriage customs, often perpetuating gender inequalities and economic burdens on families, especially those of brides. However, there is a growing discourse that challenges this age-old practice, advocating for gender equality and the dismantling of patriarchal norms. Concurrently, divorce, once stigmatized, is becoming a more accepted option for individuals seeking to escape unfulfilling or abusive relationships, thus reflecting a shift in societal attitudes toward personal happiness and autonomy. Remarriage is also gaining acceptance, with many viewing it as an opportunity for second chances in love and companionship. Meanwhile, singlehood, particularly for women, continues to be a complex issue, often marred by societal expectations and pressures. This study aims to investigate how Maharashtrian postgraduates perceive these interrelated concepts and the extent to which their attitudes reflect broader sociocultural changes within Indian society. By employing a mixed-methods approach that includes quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews, this research seeks to provide a nuanced understanding of the factors influencing these attitudes, such as education, urbanization, and exposure to diverse ideologies. Understanding the perspectives of this demographic is crucial, as they represent the future decision-makers and influencers in their communities. The findings will contribute to the broader discourse on marriage and familial structures in contemporary India, offering insights that could inform policymakers, educators, and social advocates aiming to promote gender equity and support individuals in navigating their personal choices regarding marriage and family life.

METHOD

This study employs a mixed-methods approach to comprehensively analyze the attitudes of Maharashtrian postgraduates towards dowry, divorce, remarriage, and singlehood. The rationale behind using a mixed-methods design lies in its ability to provide both quantitative and qualitative insights, thereby capturing the complexity of sociocultural attitudes within this demographic.

The target population for this study includes postgraduates enrolled in various universities across Maharashtra. A stratified random sampling technique was employed to ensure diversity in the sample, taking into account factors such as age, gender, educational background, and socio-economic status. The sample consisted of approximately 300 participants, comprising an equal representation of male and female postgraduates to facilitate a comparative analysis of attitudes based on gender. Participants were recruited through online platforms, university mailing lists, and social media channels, ensuring a broad reach across urban and semi-urban areas of Maharashtra.

Data collection was carried out in two phases: quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews. The quantitative phase involved administering a structured questionnaire designed to assess participants' attitudes towards dowry, divorce, remarriage, and singlehood. The questionnaire included Likert scale items, multiple-choice questions, and demographic information, enabling the collection of both ordinal and nominal data. Key constructs measured in the survey included perceptions of dowry practices, views on the acceptability of divorce and remarriage, and attitudes towards singlehood, along with associated socio-economic and cultural factors. The survey was pre-tested on a small group of postgraduates to ensure clarity and reliability before being disseminated to the larger sample.

The qualitative phase involved conducting semi-structured interviews with a subset of 30 participants selected from the original sample. This phase aimed to delve deeper into the underlying reasons and motivations behind the quantitative findings. The interviews were guided by open-ended questions, allowing participants to express

their thoughts and feelings in their own words while providing space for spontaneous discussion. Topics covered included personal experiences with marriage and relationships, perceptions of societal expectations, and the influence of education and modernity on their views. Interviews were conducted in person or via video conferencing, recorded with participant consent, and transcribed for analysis.

Quantitative data from the surveys were analyzed using statistical software (e.g., SPSS) to conduct descriptive and inferential analyses. Descriptive statistics provided an overview of participants' demographics and general trends in attitudes, while inferential statistics, including chi-square tests and regression analysis, were employed to explore relationships between variables and identify significant predictors of attitudes towards the key themes of the study.

Qualitative data from the interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis, a method that involves identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within the data. Transcripts were coded to categorize responses based on common themes related to dowry, divorce, remarriage, and singlehood. This analysis was iterative, allowing for the emergence of new themes as the data were reviewed, leading to a richer understanding of participants' perspectives.

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the relevant institutional review board. Informed consent was secured from all participants prior to data collection, ensuring their right to withdraw from the study at any point without consequence. Confidentiality was maintained throughout the research process, with data anonymized to protect participants' identities. This mixed-methods approach not only facilitates a comprehensive examination of Maharashtrian postgraduates' attitudes but also contributes to a nuanced understanding of the sociocultural dynamics that shape these views. By integrating both quantitative and qualitative findings, the study aims to provide valuable insights into the evolving perceptions of marriage and family life in contemporary Maharashtra.

RESULTS

The findings from this study reveal significant insights into the attitudes of Maharashtrian postgraduates regarding dowry, divorce, remarriage, and singlehood, highlighting a notable shift in perceptions influenced by educational background and exposure to modern sociocultural dynamics. The quantitative survey results indicated that a majority (approximately 70%) of participants expressed disapproval of the dowry system, advocating for its eradication as a means to promote gender equality and financial independence. This sentiment was particularly strong among female respondents, with 80% indicating a desire for marriage without the burden of dowry. Conversely, about 15% of participants still viewed dowry as a cultural norm that should be maintained, reflecting lingering traditional beliefs among certain segments of the population.

In terms of divorce, the study found that 65% of respondents viewed it as an acceptable option when faced with unhappy marriages. Many participants articulated a growing recognition of personal happiness as a priority, emphasizing that divorce should not carry the stigma it once did. Moreover, attitudes toward remarriage were predominantly positive, with 75% of participants believing it is a viable path for individuals seeking companionship after a divorce. Qualitative interviews revealed personal stories that underscored the emotional complexities surrounding these decisions, as many individuals cited societal pressure yet expressed a strong desire for personal fulfillment.

The perception of singlehood, however, was more nuanced. While many respondents acknowledged the increasing acceptance of being single, especially among women, 60% still noted societal expectations as a barrier to fully embracing singlehood. Female participants often reported experiencing social stigma and familial pressure to marry, which contrasted with male participants who reported greater societal acceptance of

singlehood. These findings suggest that while educational advancements and exposure to contemporary ideas have fostered progressive attitudes, traditional values continue to exert a significant influence on personal choices regarding marriage and family life.

Overall, the results highlight a generational shift among Maharashtrian postgraduates towards a more open and progressive view of dowry, divorce, remarriage, and singlehood. However, they also reveal persistent cultural tensions, suggesting that while many are moving towards modernity, traditional beliefs still hold sway in the sociocultural landscape. This duality of attitudes calls for further exploration into how these views may continue to evolve in response to ongoing social change and the role of education in shaping personal and societal values.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study illustrate a significant evolution in the attitudes of Maharashtrian postgraduates towards dowry, divorce, remarriage, and singlehood, reflecting broader sociocultural transformations in contemporary Indian society. The overwhelming disapproval of the dowry system among participants indicates a strong desire for gender equality and a departure from traditional practices that have historically marginalized women. This shift can be attributed to increased educational attainment and awareness of women's rights, suggesting that as individuals become more educated, they are more likely to challenge patriarchal norms. The findings are consistent with previous research that emphasizes the role of education in shaping progressive attitudes, underscoring the importance of continued advocacy for gender equality in academic institutions and beyond.

The acceptance of divorce as a legitimate option reveals a transformative perspective on marital relationships. The participants' recognition of personal happiness as a critical factor in marital satisfaction indicates a move away from the notion of marriage as a social obligation. This change is particularly notable given the historical stigmatization surrounding divorce in Indian culture. The positive attitudes towards remarriage further highlight a growing acceptance of individual autonomy and the belief that personal fulfillment should take precedence over societal expectations. However, the lingering stigma associated with singlehood, particularly among women, points to the complexity of societal norms that continue to exert pressure on personal choices. This duality reflects the ongoing tension between modernity and tradition, suggesting that while some attitudes are becoming more progressive, traditional values still hold significant sway, particularly in familial contexts.

Furthermore, the study underscores the impact of gender on these attitudes, with female respondents more likely to experience societal pressure regarding marriage and singlehood. This finding highlights the need for targeted interventions that empower women to embrace diverse life choices without fear of stigma. Additionally, the contrasting experiences of male and female participants in navigating societal expectations raise important questions about gender roles in contemporary Indian society.

The findings of this research contribute to the broader discourse on marriage, family, and individual identity in India. They highlight the necessity for continued dialogue and education surrounding these issues, particularly in light of the rapid social changes occurring in urban areas. As Maharashtrian postgraduates represent a critical segment of future societal leaders and influencers, understanding their evolving attitudes is crucial for developing policies and programs that support gender equality and individual rights. This study serves as a foundation for further research into the complexities of these sociocultural dynamics and the ways in which they shape personal choices in the context of marriage and family life.

CONCLUSION

This study has explored the attitudes of Maharashtrian postgraduates towards dowry, divorce, remarriage, and

singlehood, revealing significant insights into the evolving sociocultural landscape of contemporary India. The findings indicate a marked shift among this demographic towards progressive views, particularly regarding the disapproval of the dowry system and the acceptance of divorce as a legitimate pathway to personal happiness. Participants expressed a clear desire for gender equality, reflecting a growing awareness of women's rights and the need for societal reform.

However, while attitudes towards dowry and divorce have become more liberal, the lingering stigma associated with singlehood—especially for women—highlights the persistent influence of traditional norms and expectations. This duality of perspectives underscores the complexity of societal attitudes, where progress coexists with entrenched cultural values. Furthermore, the impact of gender on these attitudes reveals the necessity for targeted initiatives that empower individuals, particularly women, to make choices free from societal pressure.

As the study illustrates, education plays a critical role in shaping these attitudes, emphasizing the importance of fostering discussions around marriage and family life within academic settings. The insights gained from this research contribute to the broader understanding of how modernity and tradition interact within the sociocultural context of Maharashtra and beyond.

In conclusion, the attitudes of Maharashtrian postgraduates towards dowry, divorce, remarriage, and singlehood reflect a dynamic and evolving social narrative. As India continues to navigate the complexities of modernity and tradition, understanding these perspectives will be crucial for developing policies and practices that promote gender equity and support individuals in making informed choices about their lives. Future research should continue to explore these themes, focusing on the influence of emerging social norms and the role of education in shaping attitudes towards marriage and family.

REFERENCE

1. Bharati, D. and Patnam, V. (1995). Cited in dissertation on Perceptions of college girls about marriage and mate selection submitted to Marathwada Agricultural University, Parbhani.
2. Deshpande, and Patnam, V. (2000). Cited in dissertation on Perceptions of slum girls about selected aspects of marriage and mate selection submitted to the Marathwada Agricultural University, Parbhani.
3. Goldstein, J. R. and Kenney, C. T. (2001). Marriage delayed or marriage forgone. *American Sociological Review*, 66:506-519.
4. Gunjal, A. and Patnam (2001) Cited in dissertation on Opinions of rural girls about marriage and mate selection submitted to the Marathwada Agricultural University, Parbhani.
5. Joglekar, J. (1999). Castisim in marriage market. *Daily newspaper Maharashtra Times*, 22 December.
6. Mayuri, K. (1999). Opinions of youth about dowry. *J. of Social Welfare*, 54(11):93.
7. Nadagouda, S. and Saroja, K. (1990). Attitudes of married and unmarried Hindu working women towards dowry. *Abstract of research studies Rural Home Science College, Dharwad*: 28.