

MATRIMONIAL ADVERTISEMENT IN PUNJAB*

HARJIT AHLUWALIA**

The present study is the result of an analysis of 799 matrimonial advertisements (555 coming from males and 244 from females) which appeared in the Tribune¹ during the First quarter (January-March) of 1964. The sample includes people from all walks of life. There are some who are under matric, others are highly educated.

Then there are people in the income brackets of Rs. 100-200 to Rs. 3,000-4,000. People practising occupation from clerical to class I officers, and belonging to different castes (Brahmins as well as people from scheduled castes) are also found. The sample can thus be said to be fairly representative of the people of Punjab, at least of its urban inhabitants. The very sample rebuts the popular notion that only those people resort to matrimonial advertisements who do not stand chances of matrimony otherwise.

It is well known that the contents of advertisements are limited by space and cannot include details; only those qualities and traits are mentioned which are considered important in selecting a mate. An advertisement, it may be mentioned in passing, serves

only as an 'opener' (of communication) between the interested persons. Thus an advertisement *per se* warrants an analytical treatment only of those traits and qualities which are considered most important and are thus frequently mentioned.

The following traits have been analysed in a seriatim according to their frequency of listing in the advertisements.

Religion.—A very high percentage, i.e. 83.3% of the male advertisers and 73.77% of the female advertisers have mentioned their religion. Among the males who have mentioned their religion, 58.44% are Hindus and the remainder are Sikhs, except one advertiser, who is a Christian. 66.1% of the females who have mentioned their religion are Hindus and 33.9% are Sikhs. Among those who have not listed their religion, it could be inferred from the requirements put by them for their mates. It is significant to note that there are 3 males who have specifically mentioned to accept brides from other religious denominations also. One of them is a Sikh a 28 years old bachelor and son of a retired Military Officer, engaged in

*This paper is a revised version of one read at the section of Anthropology and Archaeology of the 53rd Session of Indian Science Congress held at Chandigarh during December, 1965—January, 1966.

**The author wishes to thank Mr. D. Kapoor, Lecturer, Department of Anthropology and Miss Kulwant Anand, Lecturer in the Department of Sociology, Punjab University, Chandigarh for their helpful guidance in writing this paper. The author also acknowledges his indebtedness to Prof. N. K. Bose and Dr. B. K. Roy Burman for going through the paper and offering valuable comments.

¹The newspaper selected for the present study is widely read in Punjab. It is fair to add that an attempt was also made to be fairly representative in arriving at certain conclusions by including the language newspapers, but it is regretted that on going through some of these dailies and monthlies which are published from Punjab, it was found that none of them carried matrimonial advertisements.

government service and earning Rs. 300/- per month. It may also be pointed out that between Hindus and Sikhs, inter-religions marriages do take place, but this has been found to be mentioned only in two advertisements; both clean shaven Jat Sikhs, settled abroad and desiring Hindu or Sikh brides. None of the females have advertised that they would marry outside their religious group.

Caste.—Next to religion, the caste has been most frequently mentioned. In the present sample, caste has been mentioned by 78.2% males and 70.9% females. 6.5% of the males and 12.5% of the females have not mentioned anything about caste (neither their own nor of the mate.) It might be inferred that these persons might not be concerned about the caste; they would accept brides or grooms from other castes also. In the remaining cases, the caste of an advertiser could be inferred from the required caste of a spouse. Among the castes which have been most frequently mentioned are, the Brahmin, Arora, Khatri (Hindu and Sikh), Jat Sikh and Sikh Ahluwalia. The frequency of listing of 'caste no bar', is equally good among the Hindus and Sikhs, high as well as low castes. 21.26% of males have clearly mentioned 'caste no bar'. Females are also not lacking in this respect. Among them 7% have categorically stated that they have no caste prejudices. This tends to show that inter-caste marriage are becoming more and more desirable in Punjab. It is pertinent to quote, 'Just twenty-five years ago, the instances of the inter-caste marriage were very few; and those individuals who dared to marry outside the caste had to undergo truly great hardships. Today the situation is altogether different. Not only has the prevalence of intercaste marriage become considerable, but

even the difficulties the intercaste marriage couples have to face have become comparatively quite mild. With the spread of higher education both among the males and the females, intercaste and inter-religious marriages find greater favour amongst the younger generation. 'Indeed one could safely assert that the graph of intercaste marriages is steadily rising, never becoming a plateau much less declining' (Kannan, 1963: vii). It may also be added that another important factor which contributes to the intercaste marriages is the lack of suitable spouses.

Age.—The criterion of the greatest importance in the selection of a mate after religion and caste is age. 81.44% of the males and 75.82% of the females have mentioned their age. In some cases (4.14% of males), the age of the male could be inferred vaguely from the age requirements of the prospective brides as mentioned by the advertisers such as 'below 23 years' or 'between 18 and 23 years', it being implied that the male advertiser must be older than the required bride. Similar is the case with the 8.64% of the female advertisers who have not mentioned their ages. 14.42% of the males and 15.54% of the females have not mentioned anything about age, neither their own and nor of the mate.

The majority of the men are between 25 and 28 years, while the women are between 21 and 24 years. This is an indication of the rising age at marriage, which is a departure from the traditional age of marriage and as also form the Hindu Marriage Act², which mentions the minimum age at marriage as 18 years and 15 years for males and females respectively³. In another study, Aneja has also shown the lesser age at the marriage of girls as 17 years and 20 years in the years 1943 and 1953 respectively (1964:21)

²No.. XXV of 1955.

³Section 5 (iii) *Ibid.* See also the Special Marriage Act (No. 43 of 1954). The minimum age requirements under this Act are 21 years and 18 years for males and females respectively.

But the sample under study does not reveal any male and female upto and under the age of 20 years and 17 years respectively.

The upper age limit among the males is slightly above 40 years, and that too in a very few cases, and among women is 32 years with only one case of 40 years. This does not in any way suggest that there is also a tendency of late marriages; but the fact is that these persons are either widower/widow or divorcees seeking re-marriage.

Though a great majority both among the males and females have mentioned their age, yet only 11% of the males and 13% of the females have referred to the required age of the prospective bride or groom respectively. 40% of the males who mentioned the age of the prospective bride, have placed it between 19 and 22 years. There is only one case in which the age required is above 40 years. This advertisement is from a widower, who wants a widow for matrimony.

Similarly, the majority of the females who have mentioned the required age of the groom prefer the age between 25 and 30 years. It may be pointed out that while men seem to be more accurate in quoting the age of the bride, the women in general are not specific about the age of the spouse. Very often they have mentioned the required age as 'between 25 and 30,' below 30 or '25-35 years'.

Education.—Fourth in the frequency of listing comes education. While only 47.58% males mentioned their educational qualifications a very high percentage, as high as 90.16 of the females have described their educational achievements. This does not in any way mean that those of the males who have not mentioned their education are not educated or less educated, the occupation of a man often implies his educational level. On the other hand, as a majority of women are not

engaged in any occupation it becomes necessary, rather incumbent on their part to describe their educational qualifications as a premium to lure their would-be-mates (see also Anand, 1965: 62).

We have seen that a good number of males have not mentioned their education; 46.13% the males have given the expected educational qualifications of their prospective brides. It is found that the graduate brides are in great demand. On the other hand, we find there are only 16.36% females graduates (of those who have mentioned their education) as compared to 20.70% who have been asked for by the males. Next to graduation, comes the degree, M.B.B.S. Again there are to 10.55% of the males who have asked for qualified female doctors as against 5.45% who are available (the latter figures include B.D.S. also.) Here we find that the demand is more than the supply. Though we cannot make a rule out of this, yet one cannot but say that the advertisers do put a high level of expectation from the prospective spouses.

As regards the females, it may be said that they are not specific about the type of groom they need. With regard to education, only 11 out of 244 female advertisers, have mentioned the educational level of their prospective grooms. Among them, there again a majority of females are not very specific in this respect; they have given several preferences as "M.B.B.S., post-graduate, engineer or highly educated". But the medically qualified girls have been found to be most precise and specific. They have demanded none else than physicians.

Personal Appearance.—Aneja has hazarded a guess that a time will come when males will be publishing their photographs along with the matrimonial advertisements (1964: 21). She had perhaps in her mind, that many persons would describe their physical looks

in the advertisements. But, according to Anand, 'the personal appearance of the men is not listed as frequently as that of women' (1965:67). From the sample under study, we find that only 34% of the males have mentioned their physical appearance ranging from 'tallness', 'handsomeness', 'smartness' to 'fair complexion'. Only two persons have referred to their 'short stature' (not a favourable trait) and three about their defects, such as 'right leg artificial' 'right arm amputated' and 'blind'. It is interesting to note that these persons have taken a very realistic approach and seem to be liberal towards their prospective brides. One with 'artificial leg' who it appears is quite well off—a practising doctor with landed property, has put in 'no bars'. Others have not mentioned anything but for the 'blind', who has required the bride to have 'spirit of service'.

The 68% male advertisers are very much concerned with the physical appearances of the prospective brides. 75 males have asked for 'beautiful' wives, some have asked for 'beautiful', "very beautiful", "good personality", "pretty", and "white complexioned" brides.

Only 26 males (4.68%) have asked for photographs. Some of them have asked for photographs on a returnable basis. It may be mentioned that the males belonging to this category enjoy good social and economic status.

50% of the advertisements coming from women described their personal appearance as 'fair', 'tall', 'slim', 'good looking', 'healthy' and 'attractive features'. In some of the advertisements, height in feet and inches has also been mentioned, thus implicitly demanding the prospective groom not to be any case less than the height of the female. Three of the females have also listed their defects: 'one eye artificial', 'defective hearing and speech', and 'slight squint in left eye'.

Strange and surprising though it is, the physical appearance of the males as desired by females is not listed as frequently as that of the latter by the former. The figure is as low as 3% of the females; only this small number of females have mentioned the physical qualities of the prospective grooms. The qualities mentioned for the males are only 'handsomeness' and 'height'.

Only 1% of the females have demanded photographs of the males.

Occupation.—Occupation as a factor for matrimony has been primarily mentioned by the males. The occupation is suggestive of two things: social status as well as income, and it is no wonder that more importance is attached to the latter than to the former. 88.29% of the males and 37.7% of the females (fairly high percentage as compared to Niehoff's, whose calculations are 62% and 11% for males and females respectively: 1958-82) have mentioned their occupation. The latter figures show the changing attitude of females. Traditionally a Hindu woman is not supposed to earn or engage herself in any employment, and no parent ever utilises the money earned by their daughter.

A majority of the persons who have mentioned their occupations are engineers, closely followed by businessmen and officers in the Armed Forces. These three occupations in order of frequency of listings are again followed by government executives, lecturers and doctors. It may be pointed out here that 26.94% males have not specifically mentioned their ranks though they have often mentioned as 'government service' or 'service', etc. The way, such persons have put in the facts and figures, shows that they belong to middle or lower middle class or to a low rank (may not be the lowest), of the hierarchy of services.

Only 8.11% of the male advertisers have mentioned the desired occupation of their partners.

The profession of lady doctors is preferred mostly by the persons who are doctors themselves. There are some persons, who simply want their would-be-brides to be 'employed', never bothering about the occupation. Also, when we look back at educational particulars we find that there are 23.05% males who want educated brides and more so with professional qualifications. Some of these persons no doubt desire employed brides, but still a majority of them while listing preferential professional qualifications have not mentioned anything regarding their employment or occupation. Perhaps the professional qualifications of the female provide an insurance for any unforeseen and unfortunate eventuality when the 'wife' may have to earn.

The number of women who have mentioned their occupation is 92 i.e. 37.7%, which is reflective of the high educational level and progressiveness. Among the women who have mentioned their occupation, is a great majority of teachers, which is perhaps the most respected occupation for women.

No doubt a good number of women (as compared to men) have mentioned the preferred occupation of their prospective spouses, but most of them have simply mentioned as 'well settled' or 'well established'. From among the females who have mentioned the occupation of their future grooms, a majority have utilised the services of an engineer or doctor or class I officer or lecturer'.

However, it may be stated that doctors, engineers and class I officers are in good demand. A comparison of the relevant figures again reveals that in both the cases (of males and females), the demand is more than the 'supply', in case of good and fascinating jobs

that command prestige in our society, e.g., doctors, lady doctors, engineers (males) and class I officers (males).

Family Status.—Close to the frequency of listing of occupation, comes the reference to high family status. 20% and 35% of the male and female advertisers respectively, have described their family status. There is only one case in which a man has mentioned his family as 'simple' one, whereas there are 4 cases among the females who have mentioned their family status as 'middle'. The family-quality most often listed by both men and women is 'respectability'. Some of them, of course, have emphasised economic position and high social status of their family. 9% and 32% of male and female advertisers respectively, have gone to the extent of mentioning the occupation and even income of their fathers and brothers. One male has also mentioned 'brother and sister, both M.B.B.S.'

The family status required of the spouse has been mentioned by 10.24% males and 2.3% females. It is quite obvious that females have emphasised their own family qualities and have not shown any interest in the men's families.

It is quite interesting to note that one of the Sikh advertisers—a 25 years old I.A.F. officer has put 'no bar' to the family status of the woman: 3 others have preferred 'poor families'—all of them suffering from one or the other disability (for matrimonial purposes), one of them being parentless, others are of advanced age.

The rest of the advertisers who have referred to the family status of their mates have used attributes like, 'respectable and cultured' 'well connected', 'high' and 'decent'.

Income.—This trait has been mentioned by 48.65% and 8.61% of the male and female

advertisers respectively. Out of the males who have mentioned their monthly income nearly 50% fall in the income group ranging from Rs. 100 to Rs. 400. Among the females there is a preponderance of the middle and lower middle income group. It is significant that quite a good number of males and few females are in the income categories which are thought to be quite high in India. There are also 7 persons among the males who earn more than Rs. 4000 per month, all of them in foreign countries.

Regarding the income of the prospective grooms, it may be added that this is the only factor, which has been mentioned very sparingly and hesitatingly. Only 2 females have mentioned the income of their prospective grooms as 'above Rs. 250' and 'Rs. 600'. The majority of the women have required their would-be-groom to be 'well settled' or 'well established'.

Though 8.11% of the males have mentioned the desired occupation of their prospective brides, yet none has asked for any specific income level.

Dowry.—Though legally the dowry system stands abolished in India, yet one cannot deny its wide prevalence among all classes of people. The majority of the advertisers in the present sample have not said anything regarding dowry. The male advertisers have shown more inclination towards change with 22.52% who listed 'dowry immaterial' or 'no dowry'. This category includes males from all walks of life in the sample. On the other hand only 4.5% of the females have put in such phrases as 'no dowry', 'dowry seekers to please excuse'. 5.32% of the females have also hinted at dowry by such terms as

'decent' or 'excellent marriage'. Only 3.7% females have held out prospects of a 'simple marriage'. 6 males have desired 'simple marriage'. All these are in the income group of Rs. 150-200, except 2, one of whom is a widower and the other one is suffering from a physical disability. Only one male has asked for an 'excellent marriage', much depending upon his imagination as to what he means by 'excellent'.

Manners and Behaviour

Manners, accomplishments, etc. have been found 10th in importance. 15% of the females in describing themselves have listings in these categories as against only 1.26% of the men. Only one of the females has asked for a 'vegetarian teetotaler' husband. For women, 'cultured', 'accomplished' and 'homely', are the most popular attributes. Some of them also are desired a 'talented', 'knows dance and music' 'interested in fine arts', 'sweet' and 'adjustable temperament' and 'aesthetic tastes'.

4.5% of the males who have specified the characteristics of the brides have used such terms as 'accomplished' and 'homely'. A few have also required 'moralist', 'sociable' and 'vegetarian' brides. The attributes which very few of the males have mentioned for themselves are 'cultured and enthusiastic', 'brilliant', 'non-smoker' and 'teetotaler'.

It may also be stated that 11.32% of the males and only 2 females have mentioned as 'girl's merit only consideration' or 'boy's merits only consideration' respectively. One can say that perhaps such persons are more concerned with the personal qualities of the spouse rather than the traditionally important factors.⁴

⁴The attributes which were considered important in the past for the settlement of a marriage have been put forward by Dubois as 'that which chiefly concerns the young man's family is the purity of the caste of his future wife. Beauty and personal attractions of any kind count for nothing in their eyes' (1924:213).

'Early Marriage'.—Yet another specification which is of considerable importance is 'early marriage'. A fairly high percentage of females i.e. 16.31% as compared to 7.4% of the males has asked for an early marriage. The average age of these advertisers comes to be 23 years and 27.85 years of the females and males respectively. This again fits in with our result of the age factor of the advertisers.

Domestic Achievements.—20.9% of the females have mentioned their domestic achievements. It appears that the women advertisers consider their household accomplishments to be more important than the men do, since only 1.8% of them have specified such qualifications. This is perhaps suggestive of the fact that this qualification is taken for granted in females and by tradition also she is thought to be 'well versed in household affairs'.

Other Allurements.—In order to emphasise their qualifications and increase the chances of matrimony some of the advertisers have also listed as 'having property' or about their 'bright prospects'. 13% of the male advertisers belong to this category and while the majority of them have mentioned about their possessions, some having given figures as 'owner of lakhs, besides car and property' and 'owns urban/rural property'. Next to property, 20 persons have listed their 'bright prospects', while some have also referred to dubious qualifications like 'insurance for Rs. 7,000', 'paying wealth tax' and 'promotion due'. Only one of the females has referred to the 'wealth' of her father.

The 'Foreign' Label.—Today, in India, people are engaged in a frantic scramble for anything which is 'foreign'. 'Foreign' as a qualification or symbol of status has been mentioned by 10.81% and 2.2% of the males and females respectively. While 66.7% of the males (who belong to this category) are

settled in foreign countries, the remainder have either described themselves as 'going abroad', or 'foreign trained' or 'working in a foreign firm'. One has even mentioned 'sisters and relatives in foreign' and has preferred a 'foreign-settled' bride. A majority of them have laid more stress on the personal qualifications of the brides, such as physical traits and education. 60% of them have neither mentioned their own caste nor of the prospective bride. 30% of them have categorically mentioned 'caste and dowry no bar', while only 10% have mentioned their caste or the caste to which the prospective bride should belong.

As in other cases, here again the females have shown not even the slightest tinge of 'progressiveness'. Two females while mentioning their own caste have not mentioned anything regarding the caste of the male, while the remaining females have specifically demanded Jat Sikhs.

The Hindu (not the Sikhs) believe that a marriage of a person born under the influence of Mars (*Manglik*) to a non-*Manglik* has a disastrous end. This superstition still persists in spite of education. 2.52% and 3.28% of the males and females respectively have either specifically required their spouses to be *Manglik* or else have stated themselves to be *Manglik* implying thereby that the spouse should also be one. Two of the females have even demanded horoscopes.

Marital Status.—Marital status has also been mentioned by both males and females, of their own and of their future spouse. Only 3.24% of the males and 2.46% of the females have mentioned their marital status.

Though it is quite safe and justifiable to presume that those who have not mentioned their marital status must be bachelors/virgins as the case may be, yet we find that there

have been some persons who have mentioned themselves as bachelors and virgins. The percentage of divorcees among the females is higher than among the males. On the other hand, the widowers are more than the widows in the sample. The figures regarding re-marriage of divorcees, widowers and widows are quite significant to show the change that has indeed been brought about in their attitude towards re-marriage, particularly in the case of widows whose re-marriage was looked down upon formerly (see also Anand, 1965: 89; Aneja, 1964: 20—21)

It is interesting to note that in the case of this factor, people are very much realistic and justified in their demands as compared to other factors like occupation and education, where high aspirations are made from the prospective mates. This is manifested from the fact that the persons of advanced age, widowers, widows, and divorcees demand persons of similar marital status. Very rarely a widower or widow has demanded a virgin or a bachelor, if he or she has, due consideration has been given to age (of the advertiser as well as of the would-be spouse).

'Only Son', 'Only Daughter'.—This trait has also been mentioned in the advertisements. Perhaps, the advertiser adds this as a qualification, since it is the prevalent view (and of course a truth), that the 'only son' or 'daughter' is to the sole owner of the property of his/her ancestors. By marrying such a spouse, one can easily become a coparcener to the 'sole ownership'. 9 females and 5 males have mentioned of their being 'only daughter' or 'son' respectively. None of the advertisers has desired of this trait from a mate.

Area Preference.—Close to the bottom of frequency of listings, comes preference for a mate from a specific area: people having

their own values about different areas. Only 10 males and 3 females have either considered this as a trait important enough to list for themselves or else wanted the spouse from a certain area. Most of the advertisers belonging to this category are from West Punjab of pre-partition days, which now forms West Pakistan.

Conclusions.—The study of matrimonial advertisements shows the following results :—

- (i) In almost all respects, males are less conservative than females. Though most of the advertisements come from the parents or guardians of the persons under advertisement and the present study reflects the behaviour of the parents or guardians more than that of the persons advertised, yet we can expect more progressive results, if the concerned persons are left to their own selection.
- (ii) There is an emergent attitude to disregard the caste-rules, particularly the root one, its endogamous nature.
- (iii) That there is a definite rise in the age of marriage of both males and females, which is 25 years and 21 years respectively.
- (iv) Education has come to be the most preferred trait for women.
- (v) The occupations which are preferred most by the females for their prospective spouses, in order of preference are doctor, government executive (I.A.S., P.C.S. and class I officers) and engineers, while lady doctors are preferred most by the males, who are themselves doctors.
- (vi) Men show great concern with the personal appearance of women.
- (vii) Widows are not looked down upon as mates as they were in the recent **past**.

- (viii) The traditional concepts of selecting a mate are changing and are being substituted by personal qualifications, such as age, education, physical appearance and occupation. disability (social or physical), the more liberal he or she becomes about his/her mate's qualifications, and conversely the more one possesses 'good points', one's demands from the prospective mate tend to mount higher.
- (ix) The more a person suffers from any

REFERENCES

- Anand, Kulwant (1965) "An Analysis of Matrimonial Advertisements", *Sociological Bulletin*, Bombay: Sociological Society: (March '65) pp. 59-71.
- Aneja, Nirmala (1964) "Matrimony Through Advertisements", *Social Welfare*, Delhi : Publications Division: Vol. XI, No. I, pp. 20-21.
- Dubois, A. J. A. (1924) *Hindu Manners, Customs and Ceremonies* (Translated), Oxford : Clarendon Press : (Third Edition).
- Kannan, C. T. (1963) *Intercaste and Inter-Community Marriages in India*, Bombay : Allied Publishers.
- Niehoff, Arthur (1958) "A Study of Matrimonial Advertisement in North India": *Eastern Anthropologist*, Lucknow: Ethnographic and Folk Culture Society: Vol. XII, No. II (Dec, 58-Feb. '59, pp. 73-86.