



Changing Dynamics of Marriage in India: A Sociological Study of Dating Apps and Intimate Relationships

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Abstract

Marriage occupies a convenient place in Indian society, steeped in religious, cultural, and family traditions. For generations, arranged marriages have dominated, with families leading partner choice based on factors like caste, religion, and socioeconomic status. In recent times, however, the institution has undergone notable shifts toward greater individual choice, evolving gender dynamics, and the impact of digital technology. Among these, dating apps stand out as a major catalyst, transforming how people form relationships and challenging long-standing matchmaking practices. This editorial explores the historical and contemporary landscape of Indian marriages, the growing influence of dating apps, and the opportunities and challenges they present.

Keywords- Marriage, family structures, relationships, mobile dating applications, social modernization, technology and culture

Introduction

In traditional Indian society, marriage has long been viewed as a sacred duty intertwined with religious, cultural, and familial expectations rather than purely personal preference.¹ Arranged marriages have historically prevailed, with families playing the primary role in selecting partners according to religion, caste, social standing, and economic compatibility.²

Recent decades have seen a gradual transformation driven by increased personal autonomy, changing gender expectations, and technological innovations. Dating apps have appeared as a powerful disruptive force, altering relationship formation and conventional matchmaking.^{3,4}

This piece examines the traditional foundations of Indian marriage, its ongoing evolution, the specific contributions of dating apps, and associated concerns.

1. The Traditional Indian Marriage Framework

Culturally and socially, marriage in India has been regarded more as a collective family responsibility than an individual decision. Families typically orchestrated unions, prioritizing alignment in caste, religion, financial stability, and social prestige. Parental approval was non-negotiable, and self-chosen “love marriages” were often viewed with skepticism or disapproval.⁵

From a Hindu perspective, marriage stands for a holy sacrament rather than a

mere contract. Wedding rituals symbolize the union of two families, carrying profound spiritual meaning. In this setup, personal choice and individual compatibility traditionally received limited emphasis.⁶

2. The Declining Dominance of Arranged Marriages

Although arranged marriages are still widespread, their prevalence is declining, especially in cities. Studies write down that in urban India, 30–40% of marriages now stem from personal choice rather than purely family-led arrangements.⁷

Key drivers of this transition include:

- **Education and career priorities:** Greater access to higher education, particularly for women, has led many young people to focus on professional growth before settling down.
- **Urbanization:** City life exposes individuals to diverse cultures and lifestyles, fostering more progressive attitudes toward relationships.
- **Media and internet influence:** Widespread digital connectivity has introduced latest ideas about romance, attraction, and compatibility over traditional obligations.⁸

3. Rising Age of Marriage

Legal measures such as the Child Marriage Restraint Act (1929, amended 1978) and the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (2006) proved minimum ages (18 for women, 21 for men) and supported delayed marriages. Combined with educational and career ambitions, this has contributed to later marriages across urban and semi-urban populations.^{9,10}

4. Greater Acceptance of Divorce and Non-Traditional Relationships

Divorce and live-in partnerships, once heavily stigmatized, are gaining acceptance amid rising financial independence and shifting gender norms. Urban divorce rates have roughly doubled over the past two decades. Judicial recognition of rights for couples in long-term live-in relationships has further eroded rigid traditional boundaries.¹¹

The Impact of Dating Apps on Indian Marriages

Platforms such as Tinder, Bumble, and OkCupid have gained substantial traction. They extend beyond casual dating to influence long-term partnerships and marriage trends, enhancing individual agency and reshaping social patterns.¹²

Key Influences

1. Broader Partner Pools

Dating apps overcome geographic, caste, religious, and community barriers, allowing users to connect with diverse prospects. This reduces dependence on family and community networks for matchmaking. Research suggests that around 40% of young Indians use these apps, with many long-term relationships progressing toward marriage.¹³

2. Focus on Compatibility

Unlike traditional arrangements that emphasize family status and financial security, users of dating apps prioritize emotional connection, shared values, and mutual interests. These fosters relationships grounded in personal chemistry and informed choice.¹⁴

3. Rise in Inter-caste and Inter-religious Marriages

Dating apps have contributed to a measurable increase in cross-community unions.

Couples who meet online are approximately 20% more likely to form inter-caste marriages compared to conventional routes, signaling growing societal openness.¹⁵

4. Career Focus and Delayed Marriage

By connecting people across age groups and lifestyles, these platforms enable young professionals to pursue careers while exploring relationships at their own pace.

5. Shifting Gender Dynamics

Dating apps empower women with greater control over partner choice. Features like Bumble's women-first messaging challenge patriarchal norms and promote more fair relationship initiation.¹⁶

Challenges and Concerns

Despite their advantages, dating apps introduce several issues:

1. Superficial "Swipe Culture"

Emphasis on photos often leads to quick, appearance-based judgments rather than deeper emotional evaluation, potentially weakening long-term bonds.¹⁷

2. Fake Profiles and Scams

Misrepresentation, catfishing, and financial fraud remain persistent problems, eroding trust and requiring stronger platform safeguards.

3. Commitment Hesitation and Casual Dynamics

The abundance of options can foster "paradox of choice," leading some users toward short-term relationships and difficulties with sustained commitment.

4. Safety Risks, Especially for Women

Reports of harassment, stalking, and offline harm highlight the need for improved safety features and user education.¹⁸

Conclusion

Indian marriage continues to evolve from a primarily family-driven institution toward one that balances tradition with individual autonomy. While arranged marriages have cultural significance, dating apps have accelerated modernization by widening choices, supporting inter-community relationships, and reducing gender roles.

Acknowledgements

The authors thank the editorial board of the Journal of Psychosexual Health for the opportunity to contribute this viewpoint.

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Cite this Article

"Dr. Anuradha Kumari" "Changing Dynamics of Marriage in India: A Sociological Study of Dating Apps and Intimate Relationships", Research Vidyapith International Multidisciplinary Journal, ISSN: 3048-7331 (Online), Volume:2, Issue:12, December 2025.

Journal URL- <https://www.researchvidyapith.com/>

DOI- 10.70650/rvimj.2025v2i12007

Published Date- 05 December 2025