WOMEN IN INTERRELIGIOUS MARRIAGES – A CASE STUDY IN KERALA

SHANI S S

ABSTRACT

Marriage is one of the most important social institutions in our society and has been integrally linked to religion and religious values. Further the institution of family too is organised around religion thereby making all the three institutions inseparably connected. Hence arranged marriages were considered to be socially acceptable and a prevalent norm in our society since ancient times. Marriage outside the caste and religion were beyond the normal order and considered as a ‘deviant’ behaviour. The favourable environment created by globalisation, urbanisation, modernisation, co-education, etc; the situation has changed and people started marrying outside their caste and religion albeit strong oppositions from many quarters. In this paper author tries to depict the experience of women in Kerala, who married outside their religion without their parents’ consent. Author tried to explore operation of patriarchy, power and gender justice in interreligious marriages. Data has been collected through interview guide and interview schedule from sixty women from different religious background. This study explores the social reality of interreligious married women and its impacts on social and economic life of them. Despite the fact that, the progress of modern education and other developments in Kerala; interreligious marriages are still a taboo and not an appreciable one and also considered as the violation of traditional norms, values and customs. The negative impact of interreligious marriages are seems to be having high among educationally backward and economically deprived couples. Forceful conversion of women and denial of their rights are common in interreligious marriages. Religion, religious leaders and political parties plays a significant role among poor interreligious married couples and their children. This study unravels the multiple realities of interreligious marriages in Kerala.

Key words: Conversion, Dowry, Gender Justice, Interreligious Marriages, Kerala, Religion.
INTRODUCTION

Generally mate selection is governed by two rules exogamy and endogamy; endogamy means marriage within the group and exogamy means marriage outside the group. In this study author is focused on interreligious marriages, which is an exogamous marriage. Interreligious marriages are the one of the most significant phenomena in contemporary times in India.

Social structure of India is a very complicated one. The social structure is “essentially an interrelated system of caste, family and religion” (Ghurye 1950:3 Cf. Bambawale 1982). Consequently marriage, religion and family are inextricably connected with one another in Indian situation (Bambawale 1982). “The family, which grows out of marriage, is itself a stabilizer of the marriage institution together with the property customs. Other potent factors in marriage stability are pride, vanity, loyalty, duty, and religious convictions” (The Urantia Book n.d)

‘Marriage’ and ‘religion’ are the two important social institutions in our society. And these two institutions has strong bond in the another major institution called ‘family’. In other words we can say that marriage, religion and family are interdependent on each other. Any violation or departure from these institutions creates hatred, stress, and conflict between the individuals, communities and societies. So we can say that these institutions are “sensitive” in nature.

However, the institution of marriage is associated with a set of taboos restrained certain social restrictions and prohibitions based on the respective religious faiths of the people. ‘Marriage’ is considered as the most holy union and ordinance having spiritual grace and considered as a divine bliss leads to solemn obligation to bind by an oath and prayer of the family, society and two souls of inviolable union; and at the same time marriage outside the caste or religion without parental consensus is considered as a mere sexual liaison.

Each religion has its own forms of ceremonies and rituals in marriage. This marriage institution in the real sense is the basis of family. Family helps maintaining social traditions which embody various types of rites observed by the people for generation after generation and any deviation is considered to be an act against convention. Naturally a run-away marriage or a marriage through a violation of the societal order of status and rank carrying dishonour to the family is an undertaking of scorn and disdain (Kannan 1963)

“Marriage was considered primarily a complex of obligations, religious and moral on the one hand and social and economic on the other” (Mehta 1970), so ‘mixed marriage’ or ‘intermarriages’ are taboo and seems as deviant (Mokashi 1982) in Indian society. Religion and family discourages interreligious marriages. So a number of problems have to be faced by the couples who married outside their faith and who wish to marry outside their religions. Marriage itself is tough on its own, and on top of that, having to deal with “interreligious”
issues add a whole other dimension, especially when the concerned parties have strong religious affiliations at a personal level (Kannan 1963).

Golden (1953), in a study conducted in America pointed out that “in intermarriages, instead of being encouraged in the direction of marriage, friends and relatives of the couple exert pressure to discontinue the relationship”. Kannan (1963) explains that when compared to inter caste marriages opposition is high for interreligious marriages. Bumpass and Sweet (1972) note that interreligious couples have different basic values and receive minimum support from friends and relatives, as family and societal honour is considered as linked to such marriages. In some cases, children who tend to overcome such disapprovals are often considered as “dead” or disowned” by parents.

DEFINITIONS OF INTERRELIGIOUS MARRIAGES

Cavan (1971) defines “Religious intermarriage as marriage of members of two religions whose values are sufficiently different that one or both religions perceives its values to be threatened”

According to Yinger (1968), “Interreligious marriage is the product of the degree of religious heterogeneity in the marriage pair and in their social networks”

Peterson (1986), defined “interreligious marriages as marriages between any two people from such diverse religious backgrounds that their differences in religious values are possible causes of conflict”

The definitions on interreligious marriages say that, it causes conflict and also threatened to religious values. So we can check what the major three religions of India says on Interreligious marriages

RELIGIONS VIEWS ON INTERRELIGIOUS MARRIAGES

Islam: Islam opposes interreligious marriages but in certain conditions Islam allows Muslim men marrying non-Muslim women and brings their offspring as Muslims. A Muslim man can marry a woman who follows monotheistic religions for example Jewish, Christian and Sabian women is lawful (But their children must raises as Muslim). But it strictly prohibits Muslim women marrying Non-Muslim men. According to existing social customs and traditions, a man takes his wife into his own household, but not vice versa. After sometimes women converted into her husbands’ religion because she is under the control of him and his family. Forbidding Muslim women from marrying non-Muslim men can also be viewed as a political strategy, because if a woman is under the influence of a non-Muslim husband, she may leave Islam for his religion and their children may not be raised as Muslims.

Hinduism: In traditional Hinduism interreligious marriage is unacceptable. There is little commingling even in the various castes of the religion, let alone with other religions. The four caste (Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaisyas and Sudras) do not associate socially or inter marry.

Christianity: Like Hinduism and Islam, Christianity also opposes interreligious marriages. According to Christianity, marriage is not a human construction and does not depend on human social institutions for its character and essential nature. Marriage between a Christian
and anabaptised person is not sacramental. Like Islam this religion also fear about the children’s religion

Inter religious marriages historically have been an ideological dilemma as well as a threat to the different religious groups. Each religion teaches brotherly hood and acceptance of others but when carried it into a logical conclusion of marriages creates a peculiar situations. One of the main reasons the organised religious body oppose interreligious marriages, may be they lose their followers (Bambawale 1982)

When compare to all other “mixed” unions, interreligious marriages and inter caste marriages pose serious social relational issues as it challenges the existing traditional norms, customs and values by the ‘union’ of two individuals from the two different religions/caste. Marriages in India are generally arranged by elders and extended family members, kin, etc, it is same everywhere in rural as well as urban, educated upper / middle class as well as uneducated lower class because; it is socially, economically, politically and religiously oriented. But in interreligious marriages mate selection and arrangement of marriages are done by the partners themselves without the consent of elder members or even without their parents’ consent. So this kind of marriages are sometimes seems as “deviant” by ‘others’.

WOMEN IN MARRIAGE: INDIAN SCENARIO

In a society where value based on culture, tradition and religion plays a significant role, marriage is one such institution which recreates and regenerates the same value over generations. And in Indian society women are considered as carriers of these cultural values. Thus the marriage is a very important event in the life of a woman in Indian tradition.

Traditionally women position in marriage in all societies has been one of general subordination of men. According to the cultural ideal of ‘pativrata’, the husband was the first god for the wife, her most important and perhaps only dharma was: to obey him, to serve him, to sacrifice herself for him, to remain faithful to him up to death. “‘Husband- worship’ is the technical term that paraphrases the totalit of the virtues of a wife. Foregoing one’s own desires, passivity, complete merger of the personality of wife with the fact that of the husband constitutes the appropriate role behaviour for the wife” (Mies 1980)

Ross (1961) observed that “Indian women play the role of the slave of husband quite naturally, with great ease, indeed almost gladly can be explained only the fact that they have learnt to sublimate this role totally into a religious one. Only through worship of her husband a woman could attain salvation (moksha)”

But now the responsibility and role of men and women inside the marriage has changed due to various factors like urbanisation, industrialisation, modernisation, westernisation, globalisation, etc.

“Along with men, women of India have also begun to realise that the supreme goal of woman’s life is not circumscribed to merely love-making dutifulness to husband, child bearing and domestic work, they have begun to realise that woman’s life has a higher and a more serious objective” (Desai 1957). “Women have begun to realise that as members of the society their lives have a definite and higher objective as well as greater responsibility” (Kapur 1970).

Women’s high education, professional employment, and occupational status have contributed considerably towards changing the role of married women from that of house keeper and
obedient servant to the master of the house that of a companion to her husband. It is true that some changes have occurred in the life of women but this change is commonly seeing only among some urban educated employed women. Women lives in countryside as well as women who live in urban areas and those who have less education and no job still are the victims of patriarchy in the institution of marriage.

STUDY LOCATION

Kerala is one of the Indian states in South India and wedged between the Lakshwadeep sea and Western ghats. It is commonly known as “God’s own country”. In Kerala there are fourteen districts and these districts are divided into three zones; North, Central and South Kerala according to their geographical as well as cultural differences. In order to capture the diversity author deliberately selected three districts they are Malappuram in north, Ernakulam in central and Thiruvananthapuram in south, each districts represents each zone of Kerala.

METHODOLOGY

Snowball sampling method was used, Interview guide and interview schedule were used for collecting the data. Sixty women from different religions were interviewed which include 15 Muslim women, 24 Hindu women, and 21 Christian women from different parts of Kerala.

WOMEN IN INTERRELIGIOUS MARRIAGES

With the support of legal Sanction of Special Marriage Act, 1954 many youngsters in India are enter into the marital relationships according to their wish. Even though Indian Government supports these kinds of marriages, society and parents are still reluctant to accept interreligious marriages, because “romance” is prohibited in our society. We know that our society is patriarchal in nature. Women should be under the guardianship of a male throughout her life. Marriages are decided by the elder male members in the family. If a woman decides her marriage by herself shows her independence in asserting her sexuality, it creates a lot of tensions because she questioned the traditionally sanctioned power of patriarchy.

According to Dhawan (2011) “Marriage, however, is also about intimate relationships between two individuals located within material, cultural, and political realms of the social order. Any attempt by individuals, especially women, to challenge existing hierarchies of caste, class, and community is seen as potentially disruptive of the social order”. When compared to men’s family, it is unacceptable to a family that their daughter has “love affair” because the romance of their daughter threatens their honour, power and status and also she challenges the patriarchal authority of male members in her family. This shame and dishonour is not in men’s family when they married outside their faith. Society accepted it as ‘rebellious’ nature of men but at the same time women are ‘perverse’.

According to Indian culture, it is the duty of father or elder male member in the family to gift their daughter to groom through “Kanyadan” at the time of marriage. In India marriage is not between two individuals but it between the two families. If a daughter has love affair the society started to tease her parents and say that they don’t know how to raise their child. Some of the participants conceded that after their elopement, society started teasing their
parents because of their elopement with their lovers, who belongs to different religions. To avoid this shame, some of the participants’ natal families sold their houses and migrated into another places. “Women’s elopement brought shame and ignominy to her family and seriously impaired its sense of humour” (Aparna 2011). But at the same time the love affair of men society would say “he is a man and men are like that”.

The refusal of women’s ability to exercise to select her partner on the basis of her love is evidently one of the diverse strategies deployed by patriarchy for the control of women’s emotions and sexuality. While analysing a Muslim boy- Hindu girl elopement case in Bengal Gupta (2011) said that “The patriarchal tendency to deny a woman her ability and right to assume control of her own life was thus reinforced by communal prejudices”. Women are denied basic rights of participation in the ‘social actions’ one of the contexts being denial of citizenship right (Rajan 2003 cf. Jayanrima 2011)

Selection of a life partner by women is a denial of the structures of oppression which controlled her entire life. Here the author looks that, is the women are “brave enough” to carry out that “denial” in their entire life and are they succeeded in their marriage life? We know that in all marriages, whether it is a self arranged or arranged by parents, the women are treated as ‘second citizens’. But here in interreligious marriages women exercise her agency in choosing a partner according to her wish. The question analysed in this paper is that; has she been able to exercise her agency throughout the life?

In interreligious marriages women get an opportunity to marry according to her wish, decision to marry a particular person is one of the most important decisions in one’s life, here women are ‘liberated’ but what is her life after the marriage?. Before conducting this study author thought that woman who married outside her faith has “power” to “decide” her life by her own way because she has chosen her life partner by herself. But, when interviewing the women, their life is also similar or even more ‘worse’ than women who married in same faith. Female conversions are high among interreligious marriages and children are following their father’s religion even though the women are not converted into their husband’s religions. Through the case analyses author came to know that ‘as usual’, in interreligious marriages also “Men are the fruit takers of patriarchy and women are the victims of patriarchy”

DOWRY IN INTERRELIGIOUS MARRIAGES

Everybody knows that dowry is a social evil but the practice of giving and demanding dowry is increasing day by day. Today bride grooms and his family in Kerala demands high dowry according to the grooms’ educational qualifications. “In certain parts of South India the bridgroom price is standardized and varies with the academic qualifications of the boy” (Srinivas 1942). They find that dowry is the easiest way to achieve wealth without any much effort and also they think that they can recoup what they spent for their sons’ education and could use for their own girl children’s marriage. “Husband and his family started looking at the incoming bride as a source of property and wealth, the male dominated society became greedy, husband and in-laws started demanding more dowry from the bride and her parents” (Nithya 2013). For getting a ‘good marriage’ or ‘better match’ to their daughters’ women’s family are willing to give the demanded dowry. Several scholars argues that giving dowry is not only for getting a quality groom but also a symbolic representation of showing others that their social status, wealth, preserves family honour and house hold reputation (Srinivasan 2005, Heyer 1992, Rao and Rao 1980).
Eloped marriages do not involve economic transaction between two families. The eloped female, enters her husband’s house with empty hands, that is, without any dowry. This situation creates problems for her in the in-laws house, especially with mother-in-laws and sister-in-laws. In Kerala, dowry is symbol of status, man gets dowry according to his educational qualifications and employment. It is a symbol of showing bride’s wealth (Jananeethi 2004). Four women respondents said that they had arguments and disagreements with their mother-in-laws for reasons related to dowry.

According to Bambawale (1982), “when self choice was exercised and no economic transaction took place, the parents of male respondents felt cheated out of this right to dowry”. At the same time, the women’s parents do not feel any ‘relief’ of not paying dowry to their daughter but they feel “ashamed”. The sense of shame could be because of the non-acceptance of self-choice as well as the taboo associated with interreligious marriages in our society.

CONTINUING CHALLENGES

Economically and educationally backward couples struggle more when compared to other interreligious married women after their marriage. Some women reported that their marriage had affected the families in which they are born. In some cases, the siblings (especially female unmarried siblings) of interreligious married couples were forced to stop their studies due to social rejection; the incidence of such type of social rejection is high among the family of women. In two cases, the younger sister(s) of the eloped women were forced to stop their studies permanently due to societal pressure as well as their family decided to reduce the risk of similar attempts from the female siblings. One respondent’s sister was pursuing her graduate degree, after her elder sister’s elopement, the family stopped her studies and arranged her marriage as they feared that she would also follow her sister. In another case, one respondent’s sister’s education was stopped temporarily. However, with the interference of her teachers, she got the chance to study again.

GENDER JUSTICE IN INTERRELIGIOUS MARRIAGES

Author analysed gender justice of women in this paper by “decision making power”. Decision making power of female is the one of the criteria of gender equality and gender justice. Blood and Wolfe (1960) and Donald (1980), says decision making is the primary and main indicator of marital power. In this paper decision making in terms of, decision on which religion they and their children should follow, form of worships, decision on job, education and marriage of their children, financial dealings, and interaction with their respective natal families.

Most of the working women in this study said that their husbands give “respect” and giving equality in their marital relationship; and they also included in decision making process and their decisions are taken in account. Roth (2001), in his study he found that women who have education and work, have equal decision making power with their husbands in house hold decisions when compare to women who have less education and job. In this study also women who have job and economically sound have shared egalitarianism with their husbands. And these women are more self-esteem when compare to other women who have no job in this study. Numerous studies have documented the evidence that the working women’s participation in decision making process increase by the fact that she contributes her resources to the functioning of the family.
But on the question of sharing household works most of these women said that they are managing household works along with their professional works. According to our traditional norms of our society husband is the master and he is the head as well as authority of the family, his ‘duty’ is to dominate the house and wife is the subordinate and her ‘duty’ is to serve him as a master and she also should worship him ‘faithfully’. The women who have ‘equal power’ and “getting justice” from their husbands are small in number in this study.

GENDER JUSTICE IN RELIGIOUS ASPECTS

The decision to marry a particular person is one of the most important decisions in one’s life and according to women it is the expression of her ‘sexuality’. Through love marriages or self arranged marriages women get an opportunity to marry according to her wish in that case she is ‘empowered’ and she is fighting against patriarchy, in the sense that according to Indian culture elder men decides girls’ marriage in the family. But after marriage most of the women lose her parents as well as her relatives support because she married against their wish. For her survival she again becomes the victim of patriarchy in the sense that most of the time women have to convert in their husbands’ religion for their ‘survival’.

Previous studies show that parent’s different faiths negatively affect the well being of their children (Gordon 1964), so to avoid that most of the cases either one of the couple, convert into spouse’s religion. But in this study women are converted into husbands’ religion to avoid conflict and well being of their children. But most of the working women are not converted and they following their religion and their children don’t have any religion.

In this study out of sixty women author came across twenty one converted women and gave insights into their life situations vis-a-vis their religious identity. They said that they are in “dual religious identity conflict”, because after conversion their community people says that they are not belonging to their religion because they are converted and their husband’s community people are not accepted them as “their people” for them these women are “new Islam” or “new Christians” or “new Hindus”.

The main reason of conversion after marriage of women was to give the children a uniform religious background so that they never face any “discrimination”, ostracism or “centre of attraction” by the society and get acceptance from in-laws and for harmonious life. The question is why women would convert? Why a man can’t? The answer is simple, because of patriarchy. Here we can see plainly “gender injustice”.

When people fall in love they don’t think about religion. When a relationship advances further to a more serious note, the question of religion erupts. These converted women acknowledged that before marriage and at the time of “romantic period” their husbands didn’t have any demand that their wife should convert into their religion, they also assured religious freedom to them. But later when the husbands reconciled to their respective natal families the whole story changed. In this study most of the time women conversion is due to pressure from the families and religious people from the husbands’ side. But in some cases husband’s attitudinal change demands conversion, as he start to think about ‘his’ Children’s ‘future’.

On the question of religion of their children, most women show a very strong desire to pass on their own religion to the kids. Because they spend more time with their children when compared to their husbands, but because of the male dominated society for all practical
purpose children take the name and religion of father. In this study even though, women is not converted into their husbands’ religion but their children are following their father’s religion.

Author is not saying that there is no religious conversion among men in interreligious marriages. But when compare to female conversion male conversion are few in interreligious marriages. “Inner motivation independent on social and familial pressure is the main reason of men converted into wife’s religion that is only small in number” (Hacker 2009). According to Salisbury (1969), “because of the females' traditionally subordinate family role, they should convert more frequently than their husbands; i.e., the sex role of women in the family constrains them to adopt the husband's faith”. From this statement it is clear that conversion among female is a “usual” and “natural” process for getting “harmonious” life in interreligious marriages.

“Those who become involved in mixed unions are thought to have turned their backs not only on their religion, but also on the whole tradition within which they have been raised” (Donnan 1990). Thus conversion becomes an issue, and loss of religion is thought to involve a loss of its accompanying cultural tradition. Here in this study women are underwent “coercive conversion” they are brainwashed and threatened by the religious leaders and families of their husband and sometime their husbands themselves.

The reason why women has to convert into her husband’s religion because men still have more power in marital relationships, that is why, if a husband has strong feelings in his religion the wife has to convert into his religion, whether she has strong religion feelings in her ‘own’ religion is doesn’t matter, it is a “natural” process. We can see here a strong “gender gap”, “gender injustice” and “gender inequality” in interreligious marriages. All the conversion in this study is happened by the compulsion from husband’s family and husbands themselves. Not even a single woman decided her conversion by herself. Here we can see the power of men in marital relationship and patriarchy very clearly. Most of the women are admonished and disowned by their family and community because of their conversion into their husband’s religion.

We know that all religions are patriarchal in nature. Nowadays religions become a business and it is the reason of conflict between peoples who have different beliefs as well as same beliefs, it is very unfortunate. A religion or a man can change a woman’s outer appearance but they never think about women’s inner -self.

Author also looked the financial dealings of the couples in this study to understand the gender justice in handling financial matters of the family. Managing financial assets by husband and wife is the ‘heart’ of study in marriage (Burgoyne and Morison 1997 cf. Carrie 2007)

While analysing the economic background of these converted women, author found that except two women, the women who converted into their husbands ‘religion, don’t have any job so that they don’t have money, financial independence of women is one of the factor of decision making power in family. Financial freedom brings empowerment of women within family and within society. One of the female participants said that “who is going to take my words in account, I am not earning and financially supporting to my husband, and he is taking care of all the matters in the house, so I have to obey what he says”

WOMEN DECISION ON JOB
In our society there is a notion that only “particular” jobs are “fit” for women. For example the jobs which has no demand on “night duty” (Teacher job, Office based work in public sector, etc) is better for women. For a woman what kind of job she should take is the decision from the male members of the family. After marriage her husband decides whether she has to go to work or not. In this study five women who worked before marriage resigned their job according to their husbands’ decision.

“I gave up my passion of ‘nursing’ to ‘nurse’ my husband and children” – Vilasini (42)

“I was a nurse in a private hospital, so I had night duties, my husband was not happy when I went for night duties, he said that ‘I have a good job with good salary, so you don’t need to go for work. I married you to ‘service’ me not the patients in the hospital’. We had arguments based on this, but for harmonious life I gave up my job. After that I became a ‘good house wife’, I already lost my parents because of this marriage and I don’t want to lose my husband because of my job. So I gave up my ‘passion’, now I am ‘nursing’ my husband and children”

- Vilasini (42), Thiruvananthapuram

Decision on their children’s education and marriage: Like intra religious marriages, decision on their children’s education and their marriages are decided by the husbands. But only a few women got the “opportunity” to take part in the decision making process of their children’s’ education and marriage.

Some female participants said that, they decided together of their children’s education like, in which school or college their children should admitted. But in most of the cases male took decision on children’s education, because he is the ‘breadwinner’ of the family.

One remarkable case in this study on the decision of child’s education is that;

“I was a Christian and I converted into Islam, because my husband is a Muslim. At the time of admission in school, I decided to send my son into St. Mary’s school, because the fee is very less and it is nearby our home. But my husband didn’t accept that because, that is a Christian school and he admitted our son in a Muslim School, in that school fee is very high”

The husband thought that his wife “consciously” tried to send the child into a Christian school, because she was a Christian. After family, school is the secondary place for socialisation of children. He was afraid that his child would follow Christianity if they send their child into that school. He couldn’t tolerate that and that is why he sent his child to a Muslim School even though the fee is high. Here the husband used his “power” by overrating his wife’s decision, which she thinks was an objective one.

In another case one of the couple’s daughter got admission in B. tech in one of the best colleges outside Kerala, but father didn’t allow his daughter to go and take the admission from that College although the mother was supportive. He said to her wife that “if she moves out, we can’t control her and we don’t know whether she will follow ‘you’” and he added “amma veli chaadiyal molu mathilu chadum” it roughly means “if mother jump over the fence, the daughter will jump over the wall”

Here the husband found fault with her wife by their “mutual act” of marrying outside their faith. By saying “the daughter will follow you” he stated indirectly that what his wife had
done is ‘not good’, because she opposed her parents and thereby defied the societal norms. Here husbands are the ultimate power of decision making on their children’s education. And the male wanted his wife and female children within his eyes sight to ‘control’.

Most of the women has/had no power to decide their children’s marriage like intra religious marriages.

**ROLE OF RELIGION AND RELIGIOUS POLITICAL PARTIES**

Religion plays an important role among intermarried couples and it is high among financially deprived and educationally backward couples in this study. All religions opposed interreligious marriages may be because of fear of loosening followers of their respective religion. Each inter religious marriage does in some degree represent a confrontation of two religious systems.

Some of the converted women in this study are converted only because of the interference of their husbands’ respective religious people.

Each interreligious marriage challenges the religious values because these couples violate the existing traditional norms and values of religions. According to Bambawale “the mixed religious marriages historically have been an ideological dilemma as well as a threat to the different religious groups”. So religions threatened them back in terms of ostracism and excommunication. To avoid it, each religion says to convert in their respective religions. If the couples are economically unsound they will be the ‘prey’ to the threat of different religious groups.

One respondent in this study said that, at the time of her father-in-laws death, the church people refused to take his body for cremation. They demanded that if she converts into Christianity they would do the funeral in their church otherwise they wouldn’t. She signed the paper for surety that she would convert after the cremation.

In another case one of the Muslim respondents was not ‘allowed’ to participate in her sister’s wedding by her Mahl committee and threatened her family by saying that if she would participate the wedding they would ostracise the entire family. They demanded that if her husband gets converted into Islam then only she can participate in any ceremony happening in her family.

One participant shared her experience that; she is a Parallel college teacher and married a Christian man. After her marriage, the church, NSS (Nair Service Society) and SNDP (Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana) directed to their respective communities that they should not send their children to that Parallel College, run by the participant and her husband, because they married outside their faith. The organisations asked their followers to isolate the couple so that they will learn a lesson for challenging the religious norms.

In another case the Hindu right wing organisation, RSS threatened a house owner who gave house to interreligious married couples. And in other case woman’s family paid money to religious leaders as a penalty because their daughter married outside their faith and to avoid ostracism for entire family.

“It is generally assumed by theologians, moralists and other churchmen that an interfaith marriage will usually result in a marked deterioration in the religious practice of the spouses.
It is taken for granted that the weaker partner (from the religious viewpoint) will either be converted to the other's faith or will eventually cease to practice altogether. Consequently most of the major religions have sought to discourage their members from entering into a "mixed" marriage”, (Mulhearn 1969).

Radical religious groups play an important role among financially deprived and educationally backward interreligious married couples. Because these people depend on religious institution when compare to ‘high class’ interreligious married couples.

RECONCILIATION TO THE NATAL FAMILIES

Out of sixty women in this study 21 women are converted into their husbands’ religion. When we analyse the social background of these converted women, we can see that they have less education and they are financially unsound. And these converted women didn’t reconcile to their individual families yet (during the time of interview 2014).

A woman stepping beyond the threshold of her house with her lover, most of the time she could not have the hope of re-entering her house any time later. There was no hope of redemption if she converted into her husband’s religion. If a family support their children’s intermarriages, they will also face ostracism and excommunication by the religion. According to Kannan (1962) “conservatism of the parents and the opinion of the community had reflected greatly in the opposition of the parents. The opinion of the community was even more severe than the conservative nature of the parents. The parents of the females, were in particular, affected considerably by the opinion and ostracism, first feared and later often realised of the community”

In this study some of the non-converted women have not reconciled to their respective natal families (during the time of interview), the reason because they married outside their faith. In some cases husbands themselves refused their wives to meet their natal families.

After 5 years of marriage, once I got a call from one of my relatives that my parents wanted to meet me. I was so happy because I was waiting for that moment. When I told that ‘happy news’ to my husband, he denied me to go to meet my parents. That news was “happy” for me only. He said that ‘you can forget everything so easily, but I can’t’, why he made a comment like that because when my parents and relatives came to know about our relationships before our marriage, my relatives beaten him up so badly, he couldn’t forget and forgive my parents. And he added that ‘if you want to go you can; but never come back and nobody is waiting for you here’. Because of his ‘revenge’ I ‘again’ lost my parents” – Gita (45)

CONCLUSION

When compare to intra religious married women, interreligious married women need to “adjust” (adjust in terms of conversion, give up the job, women can see their parents only whenever their husbands “allow”/ “permits”) more for a harmonious life, because these women lost all her supportive agencies because of their out-group marriage. Most of the women think that they already lost their parents and relatives because of their ‘act’, so they feared that they would “lose” their husbands if they won’t adjust and obey them. And this segment also gives the insight that; women who need gender justice and gender equality in
interreligious marriage, they should not only need a good job with good income but also need a strong family support.

Yes, it is true that choice of marriage partner without the support of parents is definitely a big matter which author should not take it as lightly rather should give an insightful thought to such a complicated issue. In movies we can see that when the lovers from different religious background (for example a Malayalam movie “Thattathin maraythu” means “Behind the veil”) joined together after big fights and difficult situations, there is happy ending and on the screen we can see that “they lived happily ever after”. Such glorified imageries of love and marriage in such movies does not showing the turn that the life is taking after the marriage more particularly for the women. Most of the time this ‘slogan’ “they lived happily ever after” happens only in fairly tales and movies. On the basis of this study, instead of writing “‘they’ lived happily ever after” we can write “‘men’ lived happily ever after” and “women ‘adjusted’ ever after”

REFERENCE

• Mokashi, P. R. 1982. *Mate Selection in Intermarriages in Bombay*. Poona: Continental Prakashan
• Samita, Sen, Ranjita Biswas, Nandita Dhawan. 2011. *Intimate Others: Marriage and Sexualities in India*. Kolkata: STREE