

Attitudes and Perceptions of Generation Z towards Intercaste Marriage

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ABSTRACT

Marriage in India is not merely a union between two individuals, but a social institution deeply rooted in traditions, cultural expectations, and, significantly, the caste system. Intercaste marriages- unions between individuals of different caste backgrounds have historically faced resistance due to entrenched societal norms, family pressures, and concerns over social status and community honor. However, with rapid modernization, increased access to education, and the influence of global values, younger generations are beginning to challenge these traditional boundaries.

This research examines the attitude and problems surrounding intercaste marriage among Gen Z respondents. Results indicates that although young people have in general an open and welcoming attitude towards intercaste marriage, their decisions continue to be significantly under the control of social pressure, family expectations, and cultural norms. Significantly, women respondents indicate encountering higher resistance through conventional familial adjustment expectations, particularly in the household of the husband, where stricter caste norms may prevail. Women tend to encounter emotional and social consequences involving family honor and conservative tradition. Male respondents, on the other hand, have a tendency to face economic issues, including inheritance and dowry-related problems, but experience fewer cultural adaptation pressures.

In spite of these impediments, the extent of personal opposition to intercaste marriage among Gen Z is comparatively low, showing a move away from well-entrenched caste ideals toward more individualized and forward-looking attitudes. The major obstacles continue to be external—grounded in public mores and family authority—instead of personal resistance. The research points toward the promise of this generation, with proper support from families, education, and social institutions, to overcome caste divisions and help shape changing marital norms in India.

Key words: Generation Z (Gen Z), intercaste marriage, attitudes, social norms.

In no society does a man or a woman have a completely open choice of marriage partner and there are always used to be some restrictions and the main one is endogamy, which is the most essential feature of caste. Endogamy forbids its members to marry outside the caste and intercaste marriage cuts at the root of this essential characteristic. Every caste is sub-divided into sub-castes, every one of which forbids its members to marry persons outside it. Thus every sub-

caste is endogamous. But the endogamy of a sub-caste is not as rigid as that of a caste. This principle of endogamy is so strict that one sociologist regards endogamy as "the essence of the caste system". There are few exceptions to this general rule of endogamy which are due to the practice of hypergamy which permits a man to marry a woman of the same caste if other conditions allowed that but a woman could not marry a man of lower caste group since it would mean loss of status of her family.

Moreover, family honour and reputation holds great importance in Indian society. Inter-caste marriages are often seen as threat to family honour as they challenge the caste based structure. When the Hindu Marriage Act was passed in 1955, it legally enabled marriages across castes and varnas—but societal acceptance has lagged far behind legal sanction.

According to the present practice in marriage, dowry usually subsumes material gifts and cash paid to the bridegroom and his kin. The gifts are no longer a token of affection from parents to the daughter but instead an elaborate demand from the marital family. The practice was a means of giving gifts to the daughter during the marriage so the couple could start a life on their own and to compensate her share of the property, because she is otherwise excluded from inheriting parental property. Dotal (dowry giving) marriages were common in the Near East, Europe, East Asia, South Asia, and pockets of the Americas. Although the custom has largely disappeared in the Western World, it remains popular in some of the South Asian countries, including India. Evidence shows that real dowry payments, the transfer of wealth from bridal families to grooms and their families at the time of marriage, have risen over the last five decades (Rao, 1993). Moreover the liberal and progressive attitudes of parents are also a great encouragement. We can visualize, that changes in almost all the features of the caste-system have taken place. The progress in legal sanction of inter-caste marriages was achieved within about 25 years because people had in the meantime accepted it as a durable change. A number of studies showed that there was favorable response in inter-caste marriages among young people.

With advancement of time we find vast majority of younger generation approve of inter-caste marriages. The number of boys as compared to girls is more who prefer inter-caste marriages. Majority approve of marrying into a caste which is of equal status as their own one. Girls of high income group consider companionship and love being the purpose of marriage. On the other hand boys of low income group do not consider companionship and love at all important as being the purpose of marriage. The attitudes of the people generally go on changing depending upon the changing patterns of life mostly by education, general behaviour and socio-cultural changes. Inter-caste marriages are similarly affected by such changes in society. Boys and girls of all classes now-a-days have ample opportunities to mix up in such institutions. They being at the transitory stage of adolescence are easily led or mixed into emotional relationships which frequently result in inter-caste marriages. They are inclined to believe that the selection of a mate only relates to the heart. This sort of attitude is quite understandable in view of the westernized influence of education and culture. Besides traditional and rigid bonds of caste-system are breaking up and young people do not feel inhibited.

In this context, the perspectives of young adults called Gen Z aged approximately 18 to 25 serve as a critical lens into evolving cultural values in contemporary India. **Generation Z** is individuals born roughly between the mid-1990s and early 2010s — has grown up in an era of digital connectivity, social awareness, and evolving cultural narratives. Compared to previous

generations, Gen Z is more exposed to diverse perspectives, individual rights, and progressive ideologies. As a result, their attitudes are shaped by higher education, urbanization, expanded access to the internet, and exposure to global ideas, may be redefining marriage criteria and challenging caste-based constraints. Yet, despite their personal openness, their decisions are often mediated by external factors such as familial expectations, social norms, and economic considerations.

Many surveys indicate a marked increase in positive attitudes toward intercaste unions, a persistent “attitude-practice gap” remains—where willing acceptance doesn't always translate into actual intercaste marriages. Various studies have been conducted to know the view points of the young people about inter-caste marriages, Kapadia, K.M (1984) reported in his investigation that 51 percent of 513 university-graduates interviewed by him were willing to permit their children to have inter-caste marriages. Only one-third of them were against inter-caste marriages.

Chatterjee (1986) had said that 105 matrimonial advertisements for brides which appeared in The Tribune, dated 7th June 1986, more than 50 percent of the prospective grooms mentioned their castes and thereby insisted on matches from the same caste. Very few advertisements mentioned, "Caste-no-bar". But since last on and a half decade many matrimonial advertisements and sites show ‘Caste-no-bar’. Kanak and Rakhee(2018) in a study found that youth prioritize mutual compatibility and equality over traditional caste roles. Many reject dowry and dominance-based marital structures. Career success is often valued more than marital conformity.

In this paper, the author seeks to investigate these dynamics and to inquire young adults' attitudes towards intercaste marriage. The research meanders through demographic change, educationally mediated exposure, city life, and social media, to discern the intersection of cultural inertia and contemporary sensibilities.

Materials and methods-

The age-group of the respondents is from 18 to 24 years consisting of girls and boys from urban and rural areas, selected through Snowball Sampling. The study includes sample belonging to all income groups i.e. low income group, middle income group, high income group. Self-constructed questionnaire was used by investigator. Before the actual collection of the data, pre-testing was done. It was administered to ten boys and ten girls of the same age group. Significant changes have been made in the questionnaire as a result of such pre- testing. Based on the suggestions made and observation of the investigator the questionnaire was modified. Frequency and percentages were calculated to analyze the data.

Results and Discussion-

Table-1

Distribution of respondents

	GIRLS			BOYS			Total
	(Income Group)			(Income Group)			
	Low	Middle	High	Low	Middle	High	
RURAL	5	5	6	5	8	5	34
URBAN	12	12	10	13	10	9	66
TOTAL	17	17	16	18	18	14	100

Boys and girls brought up in varying circumstances frequently hold varying views regarding marriage. Young people from urban backgrounds, especially, perceive marriage differently compared to those from rural backgrounds, influenced by the varying social norms and varied exposures to culture of their environments. Significantly, around 66% of youth come from urban environments, where the effects of modernization, individualism, and variable perspectives are much more acute compared to rural areas.

Table-2

Views of Gen Z regarding purpose of marriage

	Girls		Boys		Total	
	F	P	F	P	F	P
a) Sexual Gratification	7	14	8	16	15	15
b) Religion	10	20	12	24	22	22
c) To perpetuate the name of family	10	20	10	20	20	20
d) Additional source of income	4	8	5	10	9	9
e) Companionship & Love	19	38	15	30	34	34

Every individual has different views on the purpose of marriage. These views vary by gender. Sexual gratification is considered an important purpose of marriage by all boys and girls. 38% of girls, 30% of boys see companionship and love as the main purpose of marriage. In contrast, additional source of income from spouse is not an important consideration for marriage. More boys than girls do not see religion as an important factor in marriage. This suggests that boys are less tied to tradition compared to girls.

Table-3

Views of respondents regarding inter-caste marriage preferences

	Girls	%age	Boys	%age	Total	%age
a) Favourable	14	28	14	28	28	28
b) Indifferent	14	28	9	18	23	23
c) Unfavourable	22	44	27	54	49	49

The table indicates that a significant portion of both girls and boys are not in favor of marrying intercaste, with 49% expressing disapproval. Additionally, 23% of respondents remain undecided on the matter. The data suggests that approval for inter-caste marriages is largely contingent on caste parity or upward mobility. Specifically, 28% of the total sample prefers to marry within their own caste, and this preference is consistent across all income groups and genders.

Table-4

Views of respondents regarding Family Member marry outside the Caste

	Girls	%age	Boys	%age	Total	%age
Yes	12	24	13	26	25	25
No	38	76	37	74	75	75

b) Are they leading happy life?	Girls	%age	Boys	%age	Total	%age
Yes	7	58.33	6	46.15	13	52
No	-	-	-	-	-	-
Don't know	5	41.66	7	53.84	12	48

A significant majority (75%) of respondents disapprove of family members marrying outside their caste. Boys (26%) are slightly more accepting than girls (24%), but the difference is marginal. 52% of respondents believe that those who married outside caste are leading a happy life. A considerable 48% are unsure, indicating lack of clear information or communication about such marriages. No one explicitly said "No", which could suggest either reluctance to judge or genuine lack of negative outcomes.

Table-5

Attitudes regarding the choice of caste for marrying

	Girls	%age	Boys	%age	Total	%age
Marriage in	31	62	43	86	74	74
a) Equal to your caste						
b) Lower to your Caste	-		-		-	
c) Higher to your Caste	19	38	7	14	26	26

62% of girls and 86% of boys prefer to marry within their own caste. This is the dominant preference for both genders. The overall total is 74%, showing a strong societal preference for caste-endogamous (same caste) marriages. 38% of girls is open to marrying into a higher caste. Only 14% of boys are open to the same. The total comes to 26%. The table shows no data or

perhaps no respondents willing to marry into a lower caste suggesting this is either socially unacceptable or extremely rare in the surveyed group. Boys are more conservative than girls regarding caste in marriage, with a much higher preference (86%) for marrying within their own caste. Girls are relatively more flexible, with 38% open to marrying into a higher caste. The absence of data for "lower caste" marriages could imply social stigma or complete rejection of this option among respondents. Caste continues to be a significant factor in marriage choices, especially among boys.

Table-6

Factors aiding in the selection of partner

For the selection of partners, which of the following statements do you agree to	Girls	%age	Boys	%age	Total	%age
a) Partner selected with assistance of mediator	11	22	8	16	19	19
b) Partner selected by parents	14	28	16	32	30	30
c) Partner selected by parents with your consultation	16	32	12	24	28	28
d) Partner selected by you in consultation with your parents	7	14	10	20	17	17
e) Freedom of choice	2	4	4	8	6	6

The majority of both girls and boys prefer some form of parental involvement. The most preferred option overall is partner selected by parents (30%), followed by partner selected by parents with your consultation (28%). This shows a strong reliance on traditional family decision-making, even among boys.

Girls (32%) lean more toward being consulted by their parents. Boys (32%) lean slightly more toward outright parental selection without their consultation. This may suggest greater agency desired by girls in the process. 19% overall prefer a mediator-assisted selection, with girls (22%) showing slightly more preference than boys (16%). This reflects the continued cultural importance of matchmakers in arranged marriages. Only 6% overall prefer complete freedom of choice. Girls (4%) are less likely than boys (8%) to support full autonomy. This indicates that romantic or love-based marriages without family involvement are still relatively uncommon or socially less acceptable in the surveyed group. Only 17% overall (girls 14%, boys 20%) prefer selecting their own partner with parental consultation. The result suggests a small but emerging trend toward semi-autonomy in partner selection. Traditional structures dominate the partner selection process. There is limited space for individual autonomy, especially among girls. A negotiated middle ground (parental selection with consultation) is gaining traction. The idea of love marriages without family involvement remains marginal in this context.

Table-7

Consideration While Selecting the Mate

	Girls	%age	Boys	%age	Total	%age
a)Caste and subcaste	43	86	46	92	89	89
b)Income of parents	5	10	3	6	8	8
c)Occupation of partner	50	100	25	50	75	75
d)Income of partner	50	100	47	94	97	97
e)Physical appearance	35	70	50	100	85	85
f)Character	43	86	50	100	93	93
g)Behavior	36	72	46	92	82	82

97% respondents consider the income of the partner important. Income is equally valued by girls (50%) and boys (47%). The result suggests financial stability is a top priority for both genders in mate selection. Character is valued by 93% total (girls 43%, boys 50%). Behavior is also significant (82% total). This reflects the importance of personality traits and compatibility, not just external or material factors. 75% respondents overall value this factor. Girls (50%) emphasize this much more than boys (25%). Table indicates girls prioritize job security/status in a potential partner more than boys do. 85% respondents overall consider this important. 50% of boys vs. 35% of girls — showing boys place greater importance on looks. However, it's still important to both groups. 89% total care about caste and subcaste. Cultural and traditional norms still strongly influence partner selection. Gender difference is small (43% girls, 46% boys). Only 8% overall consider this relevant. The result suggests modern youth are less concerned with family background wealth and more with the partner's own qualities.

Top three considerations are- income of partner (97%), character (93%) and caste and subcaste (89%). Girls prioritize income, occupation of partner, character and caste. Boys prioritize physical appearance, character and behavior. Modern values (like character, income, and behavior) are important but traditional values (like caste) are still very influential.

TABLE-8

Reaction of parents to the proposal from different caste

	Girls	%age	Boys	%age	Total	%age
Readily acceptable	11	22	27	54	38	38
Acceptable to one parent	6	12	12	24	18	18
Not acceptable	33	66	11	22	44	44

66% of girls report that their parents would not accept a proposal from a different caste. Only 22% of girls say their parents would accept it readily. The study suggests that girls face stricter parental control or greater cultural restrictions in matters of inter-caste marriage. 54% of boys say their parents would readily accept a proposal from a different caste. Only 22% say it would be unacceptable. Implies boys enjoy more family flexibility or privilege in partner selection, even across caste lines. Only 18% overall say that the proposal would be acceptable

to one parent. This may reflect internal family conflict or one parent being more traditional than the other. 44% of parents overall would reject a proposal from a different caste. Only 38% would accept it outright. Result shows that inter-caste marriages still face significant resistance, especially for women.

Parental acceptance of inter-caste marriages is still limited, especially for daughters. Gender plays a major role: girls face more opposition from their families than boys. The difference in acceptance levels between boys and girls highlights societal double standards. While some change is visible (38% overall acceptance), traditional caste boundaries still influence marriage decisions strongly.

TABLE-9

Factors affecting Attitudes towards intercaste marriage

	Girls	%age	Boys	%age	Total	%age
Parents	28	56	18	36	46	46
Society	21	42	10	20	31	31
Caste & noncaste considerations	24	48	19	38	43	43
Liberal attitude of people	17	34	9	18	26	26
Influence of films	10	20	7	14	17	17
Loss of interest in traditional customs	18	36	29	58	47	47

More girls (56%) than boys (36%) felt that parental attitudes are a considerable factor in influencing their attitude towards intercaste marriage. Overall, nearly half (46%) of respondents feel a parental influence on their attitude. A greater number of girls (42%) feel attitudes in society are a factor influencing their attitude towards intercaste marriage compared to boys (20%). About 31% overall feel a societal influence is a principle factor. Societal influence was a major factor with 48% of girls and 38% of boys, total 43%. This shows that the traditional considerations of caste determine attitudes towards marriage still exert a considerable influence. 34% of girls and 18% of boys see the liberal mindset of others as influencing their attitude. Overall, 26% feel this liberal attitude impacts their views. Least influential factor, with 17% of respondents is films affecting their attitude. Interestingly, more boys (58%) than girls (36%) see loss of interest in traditional customs as a factor. This is suggesting that boys may be more influenced by changing cultural value.

The three most significant demographic factors overall are parental influence, caste factors, and loss of interest in traditional customs. Girls are more likely to emphasize parental or social influence, while boys emphasize loss of interest traditional customs much more strongly. Films are the least important factor for both genders. The data clearly outlines that while traditional influences (parents, caste) continue to be influential, changing culture attitudes (more liberal, less interest in customs) are also influential, with some gender differences.

TABLE-10

Factors hindering intercaste marriage

	Girls	%age	Boys	%age	Total	%age
Fear of parental rejection	32	64	23	46	55	55
You dislike	17	34	16	32	33	33
Fear of relatives & friends	27	54	13	26	40	40
Fear of losing property rights	14	28	34	68	48	48

Fear of parental rejection is the most commonly cited hindrance overall (55%), with a stronger concern among girls (64%) than boys (46%). Fear of losing property rights is significantly more concerning for boys (68%) than girls (28%), suggesting that financial or inheritance issues play a larger role for males. Fear of relatives & friends is more prevalent among girls (54%) than boys (26%), highlighting social pressure as a gendered issue. Personal dislike is the least cited factor (33% overall), with similar percentages for both genders.

TABLE-11

Reasons for Parental disapproval of intercaste marriage

	Girls	%age	Boys	%age	Total	%age
Being conservative	36	72	25	50	61	61
Being out of caste	35	70	23	46	58	58
Fear of society and relatives	36	72	14	28	50	50
Loss of dowry	21	42	32	64	53	53
Family reputation	16	32	10	20	26	26

The table shows that for girls (72%), parental conservatism directly limits autonomy in marriage choices. The caste identity itself is a core barrier, particularly for girls. Again, this points to stricter control over girls' marriages due to cultural purity, ritual practices, and social expectations. Honor-based cultures tie a girl's actions directly to family status and reputation. Boys might be allowed more freedom, or families may expect daughters-in-law to assimilate, regardless of caste.

TABLE-12

Problems and difficulties in intercaste marriages

Problems with social interactions	13	26	8	16	21	21
Restrictions in-						
a)Eating habits	14	28	5	10	19	19
b) Way of dressing	23	46	0	0	23	23
c)Incompatible customs	16	32	3	6	19	19
d)Lifestyle differences	12	24	4	8	16	16

The young respondents probably do not have much awareness about the aftermath of marrying outside the caste, which is evident from their responses. Intercaste couples may face social exclusion, criticism, restrictions or difference in way of eating, dressing, customs and

lifestyles especially in extended families. Girls report this more because they're expected to adjust into the husband's family, where caste norms might be stricter. Girls may face more judgment or resistance from in-laws, relatives and neighbors.

Intercaste marriage is not primarily resisted due to personal bias, but because of social expectations, family control, and financial pressures. Girls face emotional and social barriers, often tied to family honor. Boys face economic threats, often tied to inheritance and status.

The main challenges in intercaste marriages are not just social judgment from outside, but internal cultural conflicts within the home especially for women. Girls are expected to change more aspects of their lifestyle: how they eat, dress, celebrate, and behave. Boys often remain in their cultural space, facing fewer adaptation demands. The evidence points to Gen Z having a more accepting and open mind toward intercaste marriages than the other generations. The level of personal dislike for intercaste marriage is quite low, reflecting that young individuals are not ideologically opposed strongly. But their decisions still largely depend on external pressures, particularly from relatives, parents, and society.

Girls belonging to Gen Z experience more resistance and emotional repercussions, especially from family honor, conservative customs, and societal expectations. Boys, being slightly more autonomous in decision-making, are worried more about property rights and financial repercussions, e.g., the loss of dowry.

Even with these pressures, the overall openness and lowered personal bias indicate a distinct change in attitude among Gen Z. With proper guidance from families, education, and society they can potentially undermine caste barriers and foster more open marriage options in the years to come.

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