

Marriage and Migration

Citizenship and Marital Experience in Cross-border Marriages between Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal and Bangladesh

RAVINDER KAUR

This paper explores issues of agency, marital experience and citizenship in the context of a specific form of women's marriage migration that is taking place in both national and transnational contexts, much of this phenomenon spurred by skewed sex ratios in Asian countries. The resulting bride shortages in female deficit regions and countries have led to the "import" of women from areas with better sex ratios. The paper explores this "import" of brides from West Bengal and Bangladesh, and unravels the differences in the marital experience of cross-national and cross-regional Bengali brides. Focusing on issues of citizenship and religion, and how they affect these women and their children from such marriages, it calls for the provision of meaningful support structures for such brides, the first step towards which would be to acknowledge the growing volume of female deficit-induced cross-region marriages.

Introduction

Women's migration has come to evoke many of the dilemmas facing social science and feminist analysis today. In earlier migration studies, female migration was ignored or paid little attention as women were seen as "associational migrants" or "trailing wives", implying a lack of agency and a near total dependence on migrating males. Further, migrant women were seen as "wives" and never as "workers", eclipsing their economic roles (Piper and Roces 2003). Indeed, women migrating on their own were considered a non-existent phenomenon. Recent literature on gender and migration has questioned many of the above assumptions and generalisations. While some of this questioning has resulted from an overall increase in the volume of women's migration and the emergence of a significant number of single female migrants, it has also allowed researchers to gender the study of migration and unveil its complex realities. Documentation showing women migrating across the world to pursue work and economic mobility, sustain households, earn money for dowries, escape constricting social structures, and myriad other goals has shed light on its multilayered nature (Agrawal 2006; Arya and Roy 2006; Palriwala and Uberoi 2008; Shah 2006).

Questions of female agency in migration have especially come to the fore with many scholars questioning an overarching "victim perspective", which uniformly views women as forced migrants, especially those who end up in the sex or entertainment industry, in forced labour, or in cross-border marriage migration. Given women's generally subordinate status in Indian society, how do we understand their migration? Is it possible to separate voluntary and involuntary migration? Can choice, or the lack of it, be attributed out of context? In the battle between structure and agency, which axis represents the true picture of the different forms of female migration? If we stress the migrant's agency, do we take away from activists the ability to deploy macro-structural analyses of geographic, class and gender inequalities towards defending women's rights? On the other hand, if we deny their agency in making contextual choices, do we end up compromising with reality or failing to understand "bargaining strategies" (Kandiyoti 1998), or identifying sites and modes of resistance so important in making and unmaking social structures?

This paper explores issues of agency, marital experience and citizenship in the context of a specific form of women's

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Ravinder Kaur (ravinder.iitd@gmail.com) teaches at the department of humanities, IIT Delhi.

marriage migration that is taking place in both national and transnational contexts, and may be referred to as long-distance, cross-region and cross-culture marriage. Much of this phenomenon has been spurred by skewed sex ratios in Asian countries. The resulting bride shortages in female deficit regions and countries have led to the "import" of women from areas with better sex ratios.¹ As research progresses, it is evident that such long-distance, cross-region marriage is becoming a socially, if not numerically, significant category of marriage migration in India. The marriages being explored in this paper are mainly those taking place between men from Uttar Pradesh and women from West Bengal and Bangladesh.²

Bengali Brides in UP

A major objective of this paper is to unravel the differences in the marital experience of cross-national and cross-regional Bengali brides. Technically, the marriages of Bangladeshi women in India would be categorised as "transnational marriages", while those of Indian Bengali women may be referred to as "cross-region" marriages. Culturally, the inhabitants of Bengal – West Bengal in India and Bangladesh – belong to the same ethnic stock, differing primarily in the religious faith they follow with some variations in dialect and regional cultural practices. When women of both "Bengals" marry into the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh (UP), they are "cultural strangers" in their new marital homes. "Border crossings" of three types – territorial/national, religious and cultural – mark the marriages and the fates of the two sets of brides.

The fact that UP has received Bengali women not only from West Bengal but also from Bangladesh allows us to ask certain other questions about long-distance marriage than hitherto addressed (Chaudhry and Mohan 2011; Kaur 2004). Is the marital experience of Bangladeshi women different because they are from another country? Are these women treated worse if they are not only culturally different, but also from another country? Do Indian Bengali women fare better in cross-region marriages than their Bangladeshi counterparts? In the case of Bangladeshi brides, does crossing national boundaries affect the experience of citizenship if and when it comes into play? Does crossing a "national" border exacerbate the social distance even if the geographical marriage distance is not much greater? How do political relations between the concerned nations affect the difficulty or ease of marital border crossing? Very importantly, if the religion of the brides is different, how does it affect the marriage and children born of it? While there is not yet sufficient ethnographic evidence to answer all these questions satisfactorily, an attempt is made here to do so with the limited evidence available.

Geographies of Marital Migration: Local and Global

In India, marriage migration has been the most significant type of migration for women. Indeed, females dominate among internal migrants. In 2001, 42 out of 65 million female migrants cited marriage as the reason for migration. In contrast,

most males migrated for employment (Sekher 2012). In a largely patrilineal and patrilocal society, women move to their husbands' homes upon marriage. Indian women are not unknown to move transnationally for marriage. The scandal of the large number of Non-Resident Indian (NRI) marriages that end disastrously (especially in the state of Punjab) has drawn the attention of media, governments and scholars. However, not much attention has been paid to cross-border and cross-region marriage migration and its implications for the migrating women. The media and activists have generally painted these marriages with a uniformly negative brush. Yet the complex nature of the phenomenon demands a more thorough interrogation – both conceptual and empirical – covering the diverse geographic and social locations of the actors involved.³

Long-distance Marriage Migration

As with other forms of labour, the sexual and reproductive labour of women also moves from less to more developed locations as a consequence of the integration of local and global economies and markets.⁴ Lavelle⁵ calls this "spatial hypergamy" and the assumption is that women move to more favoured locations to achieve greater economic security or upward mobility through marriage. Feminist and Marxist scholars have focused on the exploitative nature of such marriages, painting women as hapless victims of gendered inequalities which are compounded by economic and geographic ones.⁶ Those engaged in human trafficking studies have emphasised the nature of such marriages as a "traffic" or "trade" in brides (Blanchet 2003, 2005; Jeffery and Jeffery 1996; Pandey and Kant 2003).⁷ A popular programme on Al-Jazeera labels such marriages as "modern-day slavery".⁸ In my work, I have argued that rather than collapse diverse forms such as trafficking, bride buying, bride-price marriage, and cross-region marriage into one homogeneous category, it may be more useful to consider the last as having its own distinctive characteristics (Kaur 2004).⁹

In recent years, the literature on transnational, long-distance, cross-cultural marriage has become more nuanced (Constable 2005, 2006; Davin 2005; del Rosario 1994; Lu 2010).¹⁰ Documenting the wide variety of forms and circumstances of such marriages has led to a better understanding of women's agency and the new structural factors at play in marriage markets. Equally diverse are the marital experiences of women in such marriages. Constable has argued that many characterisations of "mail-order brides" are viewed from a 1970s western feminist perspective in which marriage is seen as an exploitative patriarchal institution and gender relations are expected to conform to what is really a "western, feminist, white and middle class version of gender equality" (2003: 65). She is critical of measuring all marriages and cultures by a universal western feminist rod and contends, "It is important to view such marriages not as unique but as representative of many of the issues and concerns raised by the institution of marriage in general" (ibid: 224).

Constable (2003) questions the assumption that all such marriages imply hypergamy and upward mobility for women.¹¹

Thus, Kerala women earn more and are more highly educated than the Haryana men some of them choose to marry (author's data). In a sample of 85 cross-region marriages in Haryana and UP, the percentage of illiterate grooms (30) far exceeded that of illiterate brides (18.50). The educational levels of women were also higher. Besides, in several cases the women belonged to higher castes than their husbands. Women's reasons for entering cross-border marriage vary – some are left out of the marriage market if they are perceived as being “socially over-age” or found lacking in feminine looks (and hence require higher dowries) (Blanchet 2003, 2005; Kodoth 2008); others may be escaping a violent marriage, wishing to enter a second marriage, or rejecting stifling caste or gender norms enforced by communities and families. In the sending families, women are seen not as a resource but as a burden, and marriage is seen as a way of sending away “extra” members of the household – a strategy for balancing household resources and members (Kaur 2010). The out-marrying women generally come from families in which there is a preponderance of daughters (Kaur 2004).

More recently, the ability to migrate through marriage is being seen as an advantage that women may have over men, as the latter are tied to space and place by livelihoods based on land, which they inherit from their parents. As Bourdieu (1990: 145, 152), explicating Marx, says, “It is the land that inherits the eldest son – the property appropriates its owner”. Thus, much of the “bride drought” faced by rural men in countries like Japan and South Korea is when local women desert rural areas either to work or marry in cities (Constable 2005: 11; Knight 1995).

Cross-region and Transnational Marriages

Cross-region marriages in India are different from the “correspondence/introduction agency marriages” prevalent in east Asia, as the spouses have never met or communicated before marriage. Thus, for all practical purposes, the spouses are complete strangers. They do not share anything: language, food or clothing, including most behavioural norms that govern everyday practices. Conventional arranged marriages in India, whether short- or long-distance, are ideally governed by locally specific marriage rules, i.e., the marriage usually takes place between individuals belonging to the same region, religion, caste and class. Marriages are generally hypergamous and accompanied by dowry. The families of the groom and bride may or may not know each other prior to arranging the marriage but they ensure that rules of caste endogamy, *gotra* exogamy, and other important rules such as village or territorial exogamy are met. Regardless of whether the norms of behaviour in the woman's conjugal home are significantly or only a little different, the burden of adjustment is always on her. Marriage rules ensure that the basic cultural environment she would have to operate in would be broadly familiar to her.

In patri-virilocal marriage migration, the distance between a woman's natal and marital homes has traditionally been small. With urbanisation and changing criteria of spouse selection, the distance has been increasing among upwardly

mobile families in different social groups. Marriage distance has been seen as crucial to the autonomy a woman is able to exercise in activities as diverse as venturing out of the home, visiting a friend or health centre, or taking fertility or financial decisions. Scholars have argued that the greater the marriage distance, the weaker is her position in the marital family as she is unable to access the support of her natal family easily (Dyson and Moore 1983). Marriage distance thus becomes a crucial variable in defining a woman's marital experience. The much greater physical distance in cross-region marriages affects the marital experience of the bride. The disadvantage to her is multiplied by the wide cultural differences she has to bridge.

The prevalence and increasing “popularity” of cross-region marriage, especially in female deficit areas, raises several important questions. Are marriages that cross several borders at the same time – nation, region, religion, language, culture – accepted? Does this imply that norms supposedly held dear by communities break down in the face of a shortage of brides? Most importantly, are caste rules transgressed and dowry not demanded? The fact that many large, dominant agricultural castes and lower labouring castes worry little about the elaborate rules of caste purity, religion, age, and other hierarchies that Hindu upper castes are strict about, raises important questions about the dominant social construction of marriage. Thus, on the one hand is the absolute necessity of wives and daughters-in-law in agrarian economies (Kaur 2008); on the other is the convenient cultural fiction that a woman has no identity of her own. Brides are disciplined to embrace and acquiesce culturally to be acceptable. The community colludes in overlooking prescribed marriage norms and injunctions and accepts Bangladeshi Muslim women as Hindu wives. Historically, too, men from the bride-scarce areas in north India have been known to marry out of caste (Chowdhry 2004; Darling 1925). The low caste status of their wives, although of some importance, was not seen as an obstacle as according to the Hindu system a woman loses her own caste at marriage and acquires, or is subsumed into, the caste of the husband.

Sex Ratios and Marriage Squeeze

Indian demography has been characterised by a skewed sex ratio for over a century, with fewer women than men in the population. It is only recently, in the last two decades, that the overall sex ratio has begun to improve due to improvements in female life expectancy. However, the picture remains dismal in many north and north-western states of the country, especially in Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat. Since 1961, fewer and fewer girl children have been born with the child sex ratio falling steeply since 1991. Thus, the child sex ratio has deteriorated from 976 in 1961 to a low of 914 in 2011. Progressively, smaller cohorts of girls eventually result in what demographers call a “male marriage squeeze”, with fewer marriageable women than men in the population. As of 2009-10, unmarried men in the north in the age group 25-49 constituted slightly 11% of the 25-49 male population, while unmarried women in the same age group

constituted about 3%; hence, excess males are close to 8% of the population (25-49) (NSSO EU 2009).

Guilmoto (2012) predicts that even if sex ratios at birth return to normal by 2020, the proportion of men unmarried at age 50 is expected to be 10% in India by 2065. Although the shortage may not be felt immediately everywhere as men delay marriage, dip into younger age cohorts, or marry widows or divorced women, it is quite obvious that many regions of India are experiencing bride shortages. Societies employ various strategies to cope with the fewer number of marriageable women: some allow a higher percentage of involuntary bachelors; others allow wife sharing or "import" of women from other regions. The impact on marriage patterns is much more complex at the level of the region and caste or community – families may resort to "exchange marriage" (families with daughters to give have a higher chance of getting their sons married); men from peasant castes marry tribal women or lower-caste women, as in Gujarat; bride-scarce Muslim communities (like the Mewat region in Haryana) may seek brides from other Muslim communities which are located far away and are culturally different (see Manjit Singh's report on Mewat, nd). Men may also be much older by the time they acquire a cross-region bride who may be considerably younger.

Although the demographic imbalance and various personal inadequacies may handicap men in the marriage market, they still hold an edge as they are able to "import" brides long-distance from poorer regions or from other nations. Thus, north Indian men have been acquiring brides from several eastern and southern states and, in some cases, from Bangladesh and Nepal. States supplying brides push them out largely due to family poverty, the necessary obligation to marry daughters, and the inability of poor parents to pay dowry.

What is also to be noted is that not all men experience the bride shortage. It is usually the "less valued" males – those with less or no land, the poor, the unemployed, the disabled or the socially disgraced who are unable to get married. Widowers or divorced men also have a difficult time remarrying. Research also shows that it is usually a younger brother in a family of several brothers who has to resort to finding a bride outside his cultural region (Kaur 2004).¹² In such families, often only one son's marriage is arranged and in some cases the wife may be shared between all the brothers (Kaur 2004, 2007). Thus, stratification among males is clearly at work, with the less fortunate having to remain bachelors or having to marry out.¹³

Skewed Sex Ratios in UP

Unlike Punjab and Haryana, UP has not received the same attention where sex ratio imbalances are concerned. This is surprising because if one looks at the record of UP since 1901, it is not very different

Table 1: Sex Ratios, India and Uttar Pradesh (1901-2011)

Year	India	UP
1901	972	938
1911	964	916
1921	955	908
1931	950	903
1941	945	907
1951	946	908
1961	941	907
1971	930	876
1981	934	882
1991	927	886
2001	933	898
2011	940	908

from that of Punjab and Haryana. Uttar Pradesh's sex ratio has been skewed in favour of males for over a century, with its western region being the worst off. Despite some improvement in 2011, the overall sex ratio in UP remains an abysmal 908. Even worse, the child sex ratio (0-6 years) declined further from 909 in 2001 to 883 in 2011 (Table 1).

Infanticide and neglect as a means of eliminating daughters were documented for UP during the British period (Jeffery and Jeffery 1997). The present low sex ratios can probably be attributed to a combination of a small but declining incidence of infanticide, neglect of female infants and girl children (high neonatal and under five mortality rates), higher levels of maternal mortality, and sex-selective abortion of female foetuses.

Uttar Pradesh, together with the rest of north and north-west India, is in the grip of a marriage squeeze. Jeffery and Jeffery (1997: 232-33) mention the significant percentage of unmarried Jat men in UP. Interestingly, a complex marriage market within UP is evident as the low sex ratio areas of western UP draw brides from poorer districts of eastern UP, which in turn draw brides from poor states such as West Bengal, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and Assam (Kaur 2012, unpublished data; Sethi 2007). While all caste groups are affected by the marriage squeeze, in data recently collected by the author in Basti district of eastern UP, dalits form a large proportion of the men seeking brides from West Bengal and its neighbouring states (Kaur 2012).

Marriage Migration between UP, West Bengal and Bangladesh

Across India, West Bengal has been the major bride supplying state (Kaur 2010). Bengali women are acquired as wives not only from West Bengal but also from Bangladesh by men of several Indian states (Blanchet 2003, 2005; Chaudhry and Mohan 2011; Kaur 2004, 2008). Table 2 shows the sex ratios in West Bengal and in Bangladesh (the bride-sending state and country in this paper) in comparison to that of UP (the bride-receiving state in India).

Table 2: Sex Ratio in India, Bangladesh, UP and West Bengal 2001 and 2011

Year	2001	2011
India	933	940
UP	898	908
West Bengal	934	947
Bangladesh	952	962

No of women to 1,000 men.

There is some evidence that "bride import" has been taking place in UP for a long time. Some of this may be attributed to contingent factors but there is sufficient evidence showing that the import of brides from Bangladesh into several districts of UP hit its peak in the 1980s, while that from West Bengal is continuing (Bhalla 2011; Blanchet 2003, 2005; Chaudhry and Mohan 2011; Jeffery and Jeffery 1997; Kaur 2004, 2008; Kumar 2012; Manjul 2007; Sen 2005).

Trafficking and Marriage Migration

The Indo-Bangladesh border is considered an "open border". Migration is organised through a *dalal* (male brokers) network in Bangladeshi and Indian villages. It costs less to migrate to India than elsewhere (for example, to the Gulf countries),

due to which many marginal Bangladeshi families – men, women and children – end up in different parts of India (Ramachandran 2005).

While a significant component of the activity of brokers and touts is to traffic women and children to Mumbai and Kolkata, providing brides for needy men forms a much smaller fraction of this activity. As a result, such marriage migration has remained a nearly hidden aspect of cross-border migration. Sometimes subsumed under trafficking, or more specifically designated as trafficking for marriage (Blanchet 2003; Sen 2005), it represents a minor strand in the Indian state's tracking of illegal Bangladeshi migrants in India. Sen's report states that according to the non-governmental organisation (NGO) Sanlaap, more than 10,000 women from Chapainawabgunj district of Bangladesh were trafficked to Lucknow, Firozabad, and other parts of India during the 1980s and 1990s (2005: 655). Bangladeshi girls are found as brides not only in UP (which has the largest number) but also in other states of India such as Haryana and Gujarat.

Gujarat shares a border with Pakistan and villages around the border have a substantial Muslim population where Bangladeshi brides make their way. The Mewat area of Haryana is primarily populated by Muslims and there are purportedly 185 Bangladeshi brides in Mewat, according to journalist Ruchika Khanna (2005). Thus, Bangladeshi Muslim women are generally routed into the low sex ratio areas of northern and north-western states that have a Muslim population. However, as their presence in the Hindu villages of UP shows; they are also married off to Hindus. This author also came across some Bangladeshi women married to Hindu villagers in Haryana. A study in Mewat, Haryana, identified 322 households with cross-region brides who were mostly Muslim, primarily from West Bengal, Assam and Andhra Pradesh (Singh, nd). A recent survey by this author in Basti district of UP yielded five women who admitted to being from Bangladesh.

According to Blanchet (2003), the "trade" in brides between Bangladesh and UP peaked in the 1980s. While some cases were still in evidence in the early years of the 21st century, the influx of such women appears to have declined since then. Brides were brought from several districts of Bangladesh – Rangpur, Rajshahi, Jessore, Satkhira, etc – and married into several districts of UP – Basti, Gonda, Sidharthnagar, Faizabad, Etah, Nainital, etc. Most Bangladeshi brides were brought by a "dalal" or "dalali", Bangladeshi terms for male and female brokers. According to Blanchet's evidence, most of these brokers were Bangladeshi. Many of the girls were first brought to Kolkata and later routed to UP. She also notes that poor Bangladeshi migrants in cities like Jaipur are willing to sell their daughters into marriage.

Of a total of 112 cases studied by Blanchet, 97 were Muslim while 15 were Hindu. Forty-three of the women in her sample were below the age of 16 at the time of marriage. While another 41 were between 16 and 18 years, 14 were between 19 and 21 years, and the rest were between 22 and 30 years.¹⁴ According to her, the age gap between the men and women was

substantial. Amongst women, 85% were illiterate, only three had been married before, 17% had been separated or divorced, and almost 4% were widowed. These statistics underscore the point that in such marriages Hindu men overlook rules that enjoin them to marry only unmarried, chaste women from their own caste, region and religion.

Most of these women were illiterate and a few had completed primary education. For the majority, this was their first marriage, also explained by the fact that nearly half were less than 16 years old. A majority stated that the inability of parents to arrange for a dowry was the reason for long-distance marriages. These two main reasons were followed by a variety of other reasons such as parents needing money, failed previous marriage, girl too old for marriage, girl not attractive, family violence, or the fact that the father took no interest in arranging the daughter's marriage.

Blanchet mentions another study carried out by the NGO Association for Community Development (ACD) in which nearly 60% of the women were 22 years old and above, and one quarter were 27 and above. She presumes that most of these women had been married before (Blanchet 2003: 29). She attributes the subsequent decline in the inflow of Bangladeshi brides into UP to two factors: one, improvements in Bangladesh's economy and availability of work for young women; and two, adverse information on the condition and experience of Bangladeshi brides in UP. There is a shift in the age at marriage as well, with parents being under less pressure over young unmarried daughters.

Disguised Trafficking?

While skewed sex ratios provide the overarching reason for long-distance, crosscultural marriage within India and between Bangladesh and India, many other factors contribute to this trend. On both sides of the border, the pressures to marry off daughters are the same. Among both Hindus and Muslims, early marriage is preferred and there is a loss of honour for the family if daughters remain unmarried. The out-marrying women are generally from families in which there is a preponderance of daughters (Kaur 2004). Not having to pay dowry is an immense relief for poor parents and for that reason needy grooms who do not demand dowry are welcomed. As Blanchet says, "Many daughters agreed that if a marriage in UP was the only kind they could afford, they would accept" (ibid: 27), indicating that daughters too acquiesce to parental and societal imperatives.

Blanchet has argued that Bangladeshi women and their parents are victims who are not aware that the girls are being "sold" by middlemen/women as brides to UP males. She documents their marital experience as being marked by a sense of deep alienation in a harsh society. These women are literally prisoners as husbands and their families confine them at home, fearing they might run away. Once they have borne children, the chances of their running away decrease and they become resigned to their lot. They are not allowed to intermingle with other Bangladeshi or Indian Bengali brides. As Blanchet's case studies show, there were instances where many women

returned to Bangladesh without their children; they preferred to be beggars in Bangladesh than “bought” wives in UP. Based on evidence she collected from women who returned to Bangladesh, Blanchet reveals that a happy return is not assured as these women become unacceptable as a consequence of having married Hindus.

Blanchet’s understanding of these marriages as “bride trafficking” comes mainly from interviews with women who returned, visits to some districts of UP, and from studying the role of brokers who make money from arranging such marriages. They may have deceived parents and their daughters with rosy pictures of what life was like as a bride in UP or have concealed the groom’s true socio-economic standing, age or personal characteristics. Her conclusions are swayed more by narratives of women who escaped and returned with tales of unmitigated woe and unhappiness. The women who stayed on have little presence in her study even though she admits that parents appreciate the fact that marriage in UP is monogamous and there is no divorce.

While Blanchet admits to certain conceptual difficulties in collapsing trafficking, bride-buying and cross-national marriage, she elides over the fact that many of these women may have been willing participants in the marriage (Blanchet 2003: 14). Equally, the fact that she admits that most marriages are long-lasting and monogamous, that parents did not receive monetary compensation for giving their daughters in marriage, that the receiving community acknowledges these as marriages in which appropriate ceremonies may be performed even if the wives are granted a lesser status than local brides weakens the case that this is mere trafficking. Some of the marriages are arranged by women who had come as brides earlier; in other cases, parents or women themselves have approached brokers, and in the majority of cases women have stayed in their marital homes even though from lack of choice.

Compulsory Marriage and Female Agency

In data collected by this author in Basti district, one wife had been requesting her husband to take her to see her family in Dhaka. It was not that he was not amenable, but he said he did not know where her home was and would lose his way trying to reach there. Being rural and illiterate, he was incapable of managing the travel and lacked the confidence to try. Another husband with a Bangladeshi wife said border crossing was difficult as passports were required.

The above examples point to a more complex reading – not all marriages are a failure and not all brides are unhappy after the initial adjustment, which surely weighs much more heavily on them. A respondent from this author’s survey said: “I am happy here, but not too happy because my husband is an alcoholic”. Another said, “I was not forced to get married; my parents asked me and I said yes”. As stated at the beginning of the paper, the varied reasons for which women marry strangers far away from home point to the difficulties of assessing “voluntariness” or lack of choice in such marriage migration. Women may have made choices under difficult circumstances,

yet many of them weigh the options available to them and take a considered decision. Jeffery and Jeffery (1997) describe the case of Sabra, a young widow with a daughter who left her parental home to marry a man from UP in order to escape constant fighting with her parents. Blanchet’s data also indicates that many Bangladeshi women who ended up in UP had been married before and would have been unable to remarry in their own society.

Blanchet mentions that in UP these women are referred to as “*kharidan aurat*” (bought woman). Jeffery and Jeffery also mention that in Bijnor, UP, men who are unable to get a local bride have to purchase one, referred to as “*bahu mol lena*” (1997: 130-31). They clarify, however, that money is paid to the go-between (who could even be a relative) but not to the parents (Chaudhry and Mohan 2011; Kaur 2004). Men regard marriage expenditure on getting a cross-region bride as “buying a bride” and often threaten women by reminding them of their “bought” status; however, women do not think they have been bought or sold and parents see themselves as marrying off their daughters in dowry-less marriages. According to Blanchet, in UP, buying a bride is simply considered a lower form of marriage (2003: 11).

However, my fieldwork with Indian Bengali brides in villages in Etah and Basti districts did not yield the use of any derogatory term for the brides; they are referred to as “*Kalkatahi*” (referring to Kolkata), which serves as shorthand for their region of origin. Indeed, with so many long-distance Bengali brides in the region, they are now accepted as a viable and sometimes necessary option if a son is to be married. The incompleteness of the acceptance, however, comes out in Indian Bengali bride Gulabi Devi’s lament that “her husband’s younger brother doesn’t touch her feet on festivals or while going out of town”.

As discussed below, overall, Indian Bengali brides fare far better than Bangladeshi brides who are disadvantaged in several ways. The latter have little or no recourse to parental support structures. Many women (from both sides) suffer domestic violence, but this is often due to male alcoholism and insecurity. This, unfortunately, is an experience they share with local UP wives and is not peculiar to their non-local status.

West Bengal to UP Migration

Indian Bengali brides form the largest contingent of cross-region brides within India and can be found in far-flung corners of the country – Kashmir, Punjab, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh in the north, and Rajasthan and Kutch in the west (Kaur 2004, 2010). The presence of Bengali brides in UP and Punjab has been documented from the colonial period onwards (often referred to as an “age-old practice”) (Darling 1925; Jeffery and Jeffery 1997). While accounts from that period reveal a trickle of such women, there is evidence that since the 1980s and continuing into the present century, a regular stream of West Bengali women has been finding its way into UP villages (Dutta 2008; Gurung 2008; Sen 2005). Such brides can be found in several districts of UP, including its hill

districts that now constitute a separate state, Uttarakhand. A few women have come from the adjoining states of Bihar and Jharkhand.

Although the number of West Bengal brides in UP is very high (a survey by the author in 2012, of 91 cross-region marriages in Basti district revealed that 72 brides were from West Bengal, six from Bihar, one from Jharkhand, six from Assam and five from Bangladesh), in this paper, for purposes of comparison, I will look mainly at a sample of 10 marriages in a single village in Etah district of UP, supplementing the data from other villages and districts when necessary. In Amroli Ratanpur, of the 3,000 men enrolled in the voters list in 2008, 400 (13%) were bachelors – a significantly high number. Most of the districts into which men of this village married in the past had a sex ratio below 900. According to the villagers, men began to bring brides from other states (mostly West Bengal) about 16 years ago. Of the 10 such marriages studied in 2008, eight of the brides were from various districts of West Bengal while two were from Chhattisgarh, a neighbouring state.

While traditionally marriages took place within a distance of 15-120 km, the marriage distance here ranges from 800-1,300 km. All the brides were Hindu by religion (in contrast to Bangladeshi women) and had married Hindu men from various castes – upper, middle and lower.¹⁵ Their age at marriage ranged between 17 and 38 years and two of them were marrying for the second time. Some women had higher educational achievements than their husbands and many had been employed or were earning their own wages. The men were either small landowners or daily wage agricultural labourers

or semi-skilled workers such as masons. Most of them came from poor families of several sisters. The marriages were generally arranged by local men who already had Bengali wives or other men who, similar to a Bangladeshi dalal, had become regular arrangers of such marriages. More men than women in the sample were illiterate and the average age gap between the men and women was only 6.5 years. Most of the brides in village Amroli Ratanpur came in the late 1990s or in the early years of the present century. The data on recent arrivals shows that while the migration from Bangladesh might have declined, it has not abated from West Bengal and continues apace.

That women may be marrying for reasons other than poverty is patent from the case of Urmila, a widow with a young daughter, from Nadia district in West Bengal who married Jagdish Singh, a widower with a daughter from his previous marriage. Interestingly, Urmila is a Thakur (upper caste) while Jagdish Singh is a Jadav (untouchable caste) – querying a straightforward hypergamic reading of the marriage. Although Urmila has no contact with her own family any more, she and Jagdish have two children of their own, and the couple is happy with each other. The lack of demand for a dowry on the part of the grooms and their bearing the expenditure for the marriage celebrations are often important reasons for parents who agree to such matches.

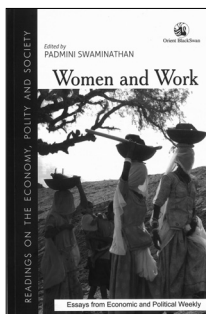
Men seeking brides were rarely particular about the caste of the bride. If they are not themselves from a dalit community, they ask for a “clean caste” bride but the predominant view is that a “woman has no caste” (or identity) of her own and is

NEW

Women and Work

Edited by

PADMINI SWAMINATHAN



The notion of ‘work and employment’ for women is complex. In India, fewer women participate in employment compared to men. While economic factors determine men’s participation in employment, women’s participation depends on diverse reasons and is often rooted in a complex interplay of economic, cultural, social and personal factors.

The introduction talks of the oppression faced by wage-earning women due to patriarchal norms and capitalist relations of production, while demonstrating how policies and programmes based on national income accounts and labour force surveys seriously disadvantage women.

This volume analyses the concept of ‘work’, the economic contribution of women, and the consequences of gendering of work, while focusing on women engaged in varied work in different parts of India, living and working in dismal conditions, and earning paltry incomes.

Authors:

Maitreyi Krishnaraj • Maria Mies • Bina Agarwal • Prem Chowdhry • Ujvala Rajadhyaksha, Swati Smita • Joan P Mencher, K Saradmoni • Devaki Jain • Indira Hirway • Deepita Chakravarty, Ishita Chakravarty • Uma Kothari • J Jeyaranjan, Padmini Swaminathan • Meena Gopal • Millie Nihila • Forum against Oppression of Women • Srilatha Batliwala • Miriam Sharma, Urmila Vanjani • J Jeyaranjan

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incorporated into the caste/community of the husband. Yet, as is evident from the narrative of one Indian Bengali brahmin bride who got married to a man of the Prajapati (potter) caste – a much lower caste – it continues to play a role even in poverty-driven marriages. She maintained that her cousin sister who arranged the match did not disclose the low caste of her husband at the time of marriage, and that her brothers refused to drink water at her home for several years after they found out.

Affinal and Conjugal Ties

In south Asia, marriage is seen as a relationship not only between two individuals but also between two families or kin groups. For Bangladeshi brides, however, there is no opportunity for affinal relationships to develop. Thus, the normal goals of south Asian marriage – status hypergamy, building wider social contacts, etc – achieved through finding suitable affines are not met. Bangladeshi affines simply do not exist for the wife-takers. Husbands are unable or disinclined to visit Bangladesh, and Bangladeshi brides are often refused permission by husbands and the latter's families to visit their natal homes. In Blanchet's sample, 47% of the women never returned to visit their families. Relatives who managed to visit them were often not allowed to speak directly to them and were treated badly such that they returned with a disheartened view of the fate of their daughters, sisters or co-villagers.

Although one cannot assert that true affinity develops even in the case of West Bengal brides, they fare much better than their Bangladeshi counterparts. In the former's case, the marriage ceremony often took place in the bride's village, with the groom paying for the ceremony and gifts to the bride. Bangladeshi brides, on the other hand, are brought to UP villages by touts (male or female) and a marriage ceremony may or may not be performed. None of their relatives are present; only the broker is present.

Six of the 10 Indian Bengali brides in Amroli Ratanpur village had regular contact with their natal homes and in some cases their husbands also visited their homes. The fathers of the brides visited them occasionally and in some cases, the bride's brother had accompanied her after marriage to her marital home. In some cases, there is gift-giving and exchange between the families, as in the case of Ahivaran Singh and his wife Roma Devi from Medinipur district. If visits are not very frequent, it is more because of the economic costs that include travel, gift-giving, and other expenditure.

While real affinity may not emerge, it would be an incomplete representation of the truth to argue that companionate conjugality fails to develop in all such marriages. Husbands are often protective towards their wives and affection is not unknown. If women are beaten or ill-treated, it is often due to drunkenness or the husbands' character, and local wives may be subject to similar treatment.

For both sets of brides, their own cultures, and sometimes their premarital pasts, were wiped out as they were expected

to embrace the culture and society of their husbands. The burden is on them to learn the language as quickly as possible, learn to cook local food, give up their own dietary preferences and adopt local cultural practices (such as the face veil or *ghunghat*) and stringent norms of interaction with males inside and outside the household. Women in UP practise seclusion (*purdah*) and their mobility outside the home is highly constrained. Bengali Muslims also practise *purdah* but the meaning of the two sorts of veiling differs (Mandelbaum 1998).

If the difference in language was the defining feature of "*bidesh*" (foreign land) for Bangladeshi women (and unspoken but striking at their psychological well-being, the difference in religion), for Hindu women it was the practice of *purdah* that embodied difference. The fact that freedom to go out of the house (except for work) was extremely limited affected the psychological well-being of Bengali women from both sides of the border, especially as they came from less patriarchal and restrictive cultures. Not being able to celebrate their own feasts, fasts and festivals, which gave them relief and joy from poverty or relentless farm work, made them spiritless, as Sushma, an Indian Bengali bride, complained. The mother of one Bangladeshi bride quoted by Blanchet said, "Bengali wives are like cows one gets to plough the field; they get fed because they work and give birth to children" (2003: 21).¹⁶

Women in such marriages (and even in cross-region/culture marriages) are stripped of their "social body" and given a completely new identity in which their old one has no part. Brides adopt the rites/rituals, feasts and festivals of the husband's community. After a while, their physiognomy comes to resemble that of local women, with the change in dress, mannerisms, acquisition of local language – thus, the body itself gets rewritten as a Hindu or a UP body. In one case, a woman underwent an emotional catharsis on encountering a field-worker who could speak to her in Bengali – the suppressed language re-emerged.

Crossing the border of religion in marriage is far more traumatic and difficult, as evident from the low incidence of inter-religious marriage in India. Despite many villages in UP having a mixed Hindu-Muslim composition and Muslims being India's single largest religious minority, inter-religious marriages are rare. In the rural areas of the north especially, such a marriage is a rare occurrence. As relations between the two communities have been vitiated by a long history of riots and conflicts, Muslim-Hindu marriages pose a great challenge to the families and individuals involved. In such marriages, however, the Muslim identity is simply suppressed.

One of the respondents in my survey mentioned that a Bangladeshi Muslim bride married to a Hindu used to do "namaz" (Muslim prayer), due to which people realised that she was a Muslim and stopped visiting her; they resumed social intercourse only after she gave up the practice. Thus, she had to give up her religion in order to be accepted by local society.

In Blanchet's data, of the 112 women whose case studies were put together, 97 were Muslim and only 15 were Hindu

(2003: 31). That the Hindu systems allow men to accept Bangladeshi Muslim women as spouses has been explained earlier. But for the women it is one of the most difficult transitions. Blanchet remarks "The borders crossed here (of religion) are far more consequential than those which demarcate countries and problems caused are damaging to the spirit" (ibid: 36). Marriages are performed according to Hindu rites and women are forced to hide their Muslim identity. She notes the shame these women felt at being married to a man of another religion. Remarriage of the Muslim women was possible, especially in the case of Muslim families where both divorce and polygamy are recognised as being legitimate.

The difficulties caused by being married to a man of a different religion were brought out by one of Blanchet's respondents Tahomina, who returned to Bangladesh. On her return, the woman was considered a "sinner" who needed to be purified before she could be reintegrated into the society. An official reconversion ceremony was performed and her children were circumcised. She suffered terribly because her family was unwelcoming and her children treated badly. The children were unhappy in Bangladesh because they did not know the language and did not relate to anyone. Even though she had reconverted to Islam, her children were insulted, and all of them were pejoratively called "Hindu".

Future and Fortunes of Children

Most Hindu Bengali wives reported that their children were treated alike with children of UP brides in the day-to-day context of village life; they did not face any discrimination. Blanchet also does not mention targeting of children as being those of "lesser" wives in the UP villages. However, most cross-region couples – Bangladeshi and Indian – felt that their children would face difficulties in finding spouses within the local community. When and for whom rules of caste endogamy and religious purity are significant varies in the Indian caste system. A sufficient dowry and the shortage of women in UP would ensure the marriage of daughters, but sons would find it difficult as they are meant to continue the lineage. Parents in cross-region marriages felt that they would have to arrange their sons' marriages in families of similar couples, or go back to the mother's community to look for a match. If sufficient in number, would such children end up forming another sub-caste? Would children of Muslim mothers face greater difficulty due to the hybridity in religion? If those of Indian Bengali mothers could go back to seek brides in West Bengal, where would the half-Bangladeshi children go as there were no affinal ties for these women? As Blanchet discusses through the case of Tahomina, her children were unwelcome in her natal home as well.

Local Understandings and Effects of Transnationality

There is a predominant understanding of "nation" as territorially discrete and internally homogeneous. Borders are literally drawn and divide people into those belonging or not belonging to the nation. Ibrahim (2008: 9), while discussing understandings of "region", presents a view that may be equally applicable to a nation and its borders. She argues

that, "a region may be more productively thought of as an experiential category, i.e., subjectively experienced rather than objectively given". Bangladeshi wives saw their marriages in UP as being uprooted to a "foreign" land. As Blanchet explains, the use of the term "bidesh" is relative. For these women, it is defined as a place where the language is not Bengali. Thus, it is not the crossing of the national border that creates difficulties for these women; rather, the difference in language sums up the larger cultural divide – where to these women the food habits, hygiene, climate crop patterns, gender division of work, and many other customs are unfamiliar. Bidesh starts beyond the state adjoining West Bengal, that is, Bihar, where the language begins to differ (2003: 16).

How, though, does citizenship affect Bangladeshi women embedded in the UP countryside? Does anyone look for illegal migrants in these villages? If women marry Indian men (Muslim or Hindu), are they less at risk of deportation or do they automatically get Indian citizenship rights? Talking about Bangladeshi brides in India, the Kutch (Gujarat) police superintendent Harekrishna Patel says:

We all know how porous the international border in West Bengal is, but differentiating the girls who come from Bangladesh, from the ones from WB [West Bengal] is a daunting task. We have been discussing this issue of Bengali girls being brought in to Kutch for over a decade now without much result. But, there is no complaint registered in such cases also, which makes it difficult for us to initiate action. Anyway, even if these girls are from Bangladesh they become natural Indian citizens by virtue of their marriage to an Indian (Bhattacharya: 2008).

A bride who may want to return to Bangladesh and approaches an NGO may face difficulties in returning. According to the police, unless the girls are rescued from the red light areas or from the place where they were engaged in Commercial Sexual Exploitation (CSE), their case would not be booked under trafficking laws (Sen 2005: 658). Further, if the nationality of the girls is not confirmed, the Bangladesh government refuses to take them back and rehabilitate them (ibid).

Citizenship is exercised through the prism of social and legal orders and political circumstances prevalent at the time. A Bangladeshi bride who wishes to escape her marital family may deliver herself to the police who are searching for undocumented Bangladeshis, even though being married to an Indian man protects her from deportation. Blanchet describes an incident related to her by a retired female Bangladeshi broker. Two Muslim women who had been married off to two Hindu men in Haridwar in Uttarakhand (formerly a part of UP) came forward with their origin when the police were searching for illegal Bangladeshi immigrants in the area. They returned to Bangladesh, leaving their children behind (Blanchet 2003: 25). Yet, others may hide their origin if they wish to continue staying with their marital families and avoid harassment. Thus, national boundaries come into play only in specific contexts (see Chaudhuri 2005 on issues of citizenship in relation to Bangladeshi domestic workers in Delhi). Most other times, it does not matter to either state or

society. Border crossing may have become more difficult in recent times. Some brides and their husbands fear that they will need passports to visit the brides' homes in Bangladesh and since they are mostly illiterate rural residents, they have little chance of possessing passports. Additionally, rumours can place couples in a state of tension and insecurity. As Blanchet also notes, when the political issue of illegal Bangladeshis in India is at a high pitch, even migrant wives have more to fear (2003: 2). Respondents in Basti district interviewed recently mentioned that a "truckload of Bangladeshi brides had been repatriated".¹⁷

Bangladeshi 'Dalal' and Indian 'Go-between'

According to Blanchet, Bangladeshi brokers are referred to as dalal and dalali – people who sell and buy. On the Indian side, the word dalal usually refers to a pimp and is not used for people involved in arranging marriages. As commercial matchmaking is not as organised or of great volume in India yet (in contrast with east Asia), the large variety of people – relatives and co-villagers involved in arranging sometimes one and occasionally more marriages defy easy categorisation.

Bangladesh brokers differentiated their work into two categories – arranging girls for the marriage market in UP, and for sex work in Mumbai. Those who arranged girls for the marriage market claimed they stuck only to this, even though there was less money in it. Both categories of brokers are known as dalal and dalali, thus blurring the distinction for the outsider. In nearly 50% of the cases in Blanchet's data, the marriages were arranged by a dalal or dalali. However, as Blanchet reveals, many of the dalalis were mature women, at one time poor themselves, who had developed networks between Bangladesh, Kolkata, Mumbai and UP. They came from the same villages and communities as their "victims", spoke the same language and could couch their business in the moral language of performing the meritorious service of arranging marriages.

Blanchet also clarifies that the same person could be referred to as a dalal, a relative or neighbour, depending on the context and relationship of the moment. Thus, there was an ambiguity about the role of the broker – some were referred to as guardians, *maasi* (mother's sister) or aunty (related to the mother or the father). However, Blanchet argues that people became disaffected with them when they realised their daughters had been "sold" and that, perhaps, the brokers were in it only for the money.

As Bangladeshi brokers did not have kinship or cultural rootedness or moral authority in the receiving society in UP in India, they could not monitor the marital experience of the girls once they had been married off; they also had no recourse to mediating on behalf of an ill-treated bride. Thus, the transnational aspect of this marriage migration limits the role of the broker to simply completing the transaction, while in cross-region marriages, especially those initiated by former brides, intervention and redress remains possible. For transnational brides, this limitation of the broker or

go-between further circumscribes and limits both their freedom and support structures in contrast to the Indian brides.

Working as a "dalal" is often risky business and even though such matchmaking may not be illegal, it takes on the smell of illegality. Misrepresentation of the characteristics and circumstances of grooms was seen as tantamount to cheating. In India and Bangladesh, the average age at marriage remains lower than the legal age; hence, girls who would normally be married off by their parents at a young age were, when detected in cross-border marriages, declared underage and trafficked. Transnational brokers had more to fear if they were caught than national brokers, hence citizenship issues affected not only the brides but also the brokers.

In the case of women from West Bengal, most marriages had been arranged by UP males, many of whom worked in Kolkata's jute mills, and were mostly referred to as "go-betweens", fitting in with the traditional category of individuals who help arrange marriages. Sometimes these men had Bengali wives themselves or were related to men married to Bengali women. In some villages, brides themselves had brought other women – a famous female broker, Asha (in Etah district), was known to have arranged over 40 such marriages. According to other Bengali women married near her village, this broker-bride has become extremely prosperous from her earnings from arranging marriages. Some of the marriages did not work out (the brides ran away) and, in one case, the groom complained to the police that he had been cheated of his money. As a result, Asha was sent to jail but was released soon. She also claimed to have been assaulted by another dissatisfied groom, indicating that the business can sometimes be risky and that making money was not easy. Asha, while being married to a Hindu, had a Muslim lover in the village and claimed that her children were by him. Interestingly, she had also arranged her Muslim lover's marriage with a Bengali bride.

Women who are themselves Bengali brides and bring another female relative or co-villager for marriage to UP are not considered brokers. The activity of such women can be seen as part of what is known as "chain migration". The motives of such women in bringing other brides from their native community may be very different from those of professional and commercial matchmakers. Foremost in their mind is that besides augmenting their own community, it gives them an opportunity to visit home without having to incur expenditure on travel, etc. The prospective groom pays for all travel expenses, and the woman gets to meet her natal family.

Conclusions

It is clear that women from several Indian states are moving for marriage to areas with female deficits. It is also clear that it is generally the less advantaged men who marry such women. These marriages transgress hegemonic local and pan-Indian norms of caste endogamy and dowry. How should these marriages be understood and located? Are they simply marginal and aberrant forms generated by historical contingencies of developmental and demographic imbalances

(Kaur 2004, 2008)? Do they suggest that the marriages of those who belong to the lower ends of social hierarchies – of gender, caste, economic status, physical disability or those affected by social taint (honour) – have often been transgressive but have been elided over by theoretical stances that have been overly oriented towards structure rather than practice and constructions that have privileged brahminical or upper-caste norms and ideals? As Giddens (1986: 72) says, “A good case can be made to the effect that only dominant class groups have ever been strongly committed to dominant ideologies”.

The paper also shows how transnationality or nationality influences the marital experience of women and their children in long-distance, cross-region, crosscultural marriages. The boundaries are that much harder to cross for the transnational bride, even if her ethnicity is the same as that of the national bride. The different religion of the bride – while not important to the husband and his kin – is something that erodes a part of the self of the bride who has to convert or hide her religion. Further, the lack of even minimal support structures for the transnational bride leaves her at the mercy of her in-laws and local village society. However, this is not to say that all such wives are treated badly or that they fail to draw their own equations with their husbands and in-laws.

Most Bengali UP brides, whether transnational or national, “reconcile” to staying, having little choice in charting an alternative life since patriarchal structures do not encourage them to rejoin their natal families. As one woman said when

asked if she had ever thought of running away, “Sometimes I did feel that I wanted to run away, but then where would I go? Had I run away, I would have belonged neither here nor there (*na yahan ki, na vahan ki*).”

In Japan, China and South Korea, civil society and government have acknowledged the phenomenon of long-distance/international brides and have made efforts to integrate them into local society, address cases of abuse, as well as provide them with support structures (Constable 2005; Knight 1995). In India, however, where the phenomenon of such marriages remains unacknowledged by the state and where village society supports husbands, government and civil society have not made any effort to support them in any way.

Since bringing a wife from elsewhere is by itself not a criminal activity, not much attention is paid to this social issue. Often police and local society sympathise with local men who cannot find brides and do not see these “stranger” brides as problematic. In Haryana, where there is a large number of women from different parts of the country and where the media has paid considerable attention to the issue, some NGOs¹⁸ have taken up the cause of such women to “rescue” brides who were very unhappy or wished to leave their marriages. However, what is required is a systematic effort to provide such brides with meaningful support structures, the first step towards which would be to acknowledge the growing volume of female deficit-induced cross-region marriages.

NOTES

- 1 India, China and South Korea are the major countries with skewed sex ratios. Taiwan and Singapore have also been importing brides from poorer south-east Asian countries such as Cambodia and Vietnam.
- 2 Such marriages in Haryana have been documented in Kaur (2004). Between 2002 and 2010, newspapers regularly reported on “bought brides” and cross-region/culture marriage.
- 3 Worldwide, marriage migration has taken new forms and shapes as women choose to migrate through marriage to fulfil various aspirations, or are forced or persuaded by families to enter into long-distance national or transnational marriages (Palriwala and Uberoi 2008). Well known by now is the phenomenon of “mail-order brides” in which men from western countries have been marrying women from Asian countries (Constable 2003; Del Rosario 1994; Yutani 2007). Such marriages are sometimes called “introduction or correspondence marriages”, as women marry foreign men after brief introductions through marriage agencies or after communicating with them through letters or over the internet. With the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the decline of the economies of its constituent units, many of their women are seeking spouses in western countries. Women in many African countries are also following a similar route (Johnson-Hanks 2007). More recently, commercially mediated marriages have been occurring in many parts of Asia – China, South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, Japan and India – where marriage bureaus, agents, brokers or go-betweens arrange marriages for needy bachelors (Duong et al 2007; Hugo and Xoan 2007; Lu 2008; Lu and Yang

- 2010; Wang and Chang 2002). Such marriages take place between transnational or national cultural strangers, and a fee is paid to go-betweens by the grooms. The large majority of such marriages are taking place in countries characterised by bride shortages as a result of skewed sex ratios. In China and India, the movement of brides is both within borders as well as across international borders (Blanchet 2005; Davin 2005; Kaur 2004). Outside of India and China, such marriages are mostly transnational, with brides coming from poorer countries such as North Vietnam, Cambodia or the poorer parts of China; Japanese men acquire brides from the Philippines, South Korean men acquire ethnic Korean women from China (Freeman 2005; Knight 1995). In wealthy eastern nations such as Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and Singapore, it is the rural or poor or less educated men who find themselves brideless – a marriage squeeze being caused either by a shortage of women, or by women fleeing to urban areas to work or marry, or by women refusing to marry (Davin 2005; *The Economist* 2011; Lu 2008; Lu and Yang 2010).
- 4 Reproductive labour is taking on new meanings with a boom in the surrogacy industry – wombs are rented out to have children for others.
- 5 As discussed in Constable (2005: 10).
- 6 See Truong (1996) for a Marxist viewpoint and Constable (2003) for a discussion suggesting a more nuanced viewpoint, stressing that women's agency in such marriages should also be taken into account. Constable critiques Glodava and Onizuka's analysis in their book *Mail-Order Brides: Women For Sale* (1994).
- 7 Wang and Chang (2002) also talk about the commodification of marriage.

- 8 “India has the world's largest number of slaves, among them an increasing number of women and girls sold into marriage” (<http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/slavery21stcenturyevil/2011/10/2011101013102368710.html>).
- 9 See Constable (2006); Kaur (2004) and especially Lu (2010) for a trenchant critique of this tendency.
- 10 Del Rosario's (1994) work on Filipina mail-order brides argued that women saw such marriages as a way of fulfilling natal family obligations. They had a culturally different understanding of marriage and house-holding, within which they viewed gender relations. They negotiated with Dutch husbands according to their own values, while adjusting to the former's expectations and culture in their role as wives. She showed that a homogenised picture of Filipina wives and their foreign husbands was not confirmed by her data, statistical or experiential.
- 11 Various contributions in Constable's volume on cross-border marriages (2005) show women marrying downward socially or economically, even if the locations they moved to were more favourable.
- 12 See Bourdieu (1990) on the different marital fates of brothers of different birth orders.
- 13 This is no longer the case in Haryana where bride-import has almost become the fashion; the palpable shortage of brides is propelling younger men to take the route of cross-region brides at earlier ages without waiting in futile hope of finding a local bride. Another important factor influencing the popularity of such marriages, especially in UP, is that they are comparatively economical for the men.
- 14 Child marriages remain an issue of concern in Bangladesh as parents try to avoid dowry and

marriage expenses by marrying off girls before adulthood.

- 15 In more recent data, many of the grooms are from dalit castes (author's survey in 2012 of 91 cross-region marriages in Basti district of UP).
- 16 See also Piper and Roces (2003) on the imbrications of work and marriage migration.
- 17 From author's survey (2012).
- 18 Organisations helping brides in distress: Shakti Vahini (Ravi Kant), Empower People (Shafiq Khan) and AIDWA in Haryana, and Vatsalya in Lucknow, UP.

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