

Gender Roles in Modern Indian Marriages

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Abstract : An image of a modern and progressive India garners the rhetoric of 'choice' marriages, gender egalitarian relationships, and search for 'love' in conjugal unions. Such an image especially resonates with the lives of young professionals, who, largely belonging to the middle class, consider themselves to be the global face India. While this rhetoric of 'progress' and 'love' is abounding in both Indian and non-Indian public discourses, it is imperative to scientifically analyse the veracity of these claims. This paper thus queries and problematises the notions of being modern and progressive, through the lens of gender roles as expected and desired in a process of matchmaking. The fieldwork conducted is based on qualitative methodology, involving in-depth interviews with 100 highly qualified professionals, (60 men and 40 women), between the age of 24-31, belonging to the Hindu religion and of varied castes and communities, who are residing in New Delhi, and are in the process of spouse-selection or have recently completed it. Further, an analysis of the structure and content of matrimonial websites, which have fast emerged as the new method of matchmaking, was also undertaken. The main finding of this paper is that gender asymmetries continue to determine a suitable match, whether in 'arranged' or 'love' marriages. This is demonstrated by analysing the expectations of gender roles and gender practices of both men and women, to construct an ideal of a 'good match'. On the basis of the interviews and the content of matrimonial websites, the paper discusses the characteristics of a 'suitable boy' and a 'suitable girl', and the ways in which these are received (practiced or criticised) by the young men and women themselves. It is then concluded that though an ideal of 'compatibility' and love determines conjugal desires, traditional gender roles, that, for example, consider men as the primary breadwinner and women as responsible for the domestic sphere, continue to dictate urban Indian marriages.

Keywords : gender, India, marriage, middle class

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