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CASTE AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF FEMININITY: A STUDY OF MATRIMONIAL ADVERTISEMENTS

Abstract

Newspapers are seen as an adequate medium for contacting a large number of people. Advertisements in newspapers solemnly for marriage purposes are one of the key components which bring together alliances in modern times. The proposals in advertisements include the basic information of both Wanted brides and Wanted grooms. Physical attributes of bride are one of the main features which are seen more often in these advertisements. The mentioning of physical attributes like beautiful, fair, slim, tall and smart girl wanting for marriage gives an edge and stands out for more responses for brides than the ones which do not mention these characteristics. Besides identifying the most preferred attributes of a bride this paper also examines such preferences according to the caste background. The content analysis of matrimonial advertisements has been carried out which have been published in a well reputed widely circulated English newspaper of Punjab.

Keywords: *Matrimony, Advertisement, Bride, Caste, Beautiful, Fair, Slim.*

Introduction

The paper is an attempt to examine the social construction of feminine attributes to be displayed for the marriage of a girl. Indian society is still characterised by its caste system. The social practices, customs and rituals for marriage revolve around the features of the caste to which one belongs. Therefore, it is significant to find out whether there are any specificities of feminine features required for matrimony with regard to one's caste status. In this context, the study aims at examining one of the most common practices that is, matrimonial advertisements in present times to find the marriage prerequisites for a girl across various castes. For this purpose, matrimonial advertisements for brides have been analysed which clearly depict how social spaces of arranged marriages - an old practice of Indian tradition, have expanded in the modern setting. Traditionally, marriage is understood as a social and a religious duty for families - a *dharma* - which is essential for the attainment of

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moksha. As a universal social institution it is practised in the case of Hindu society, 'marriage is the only sacrament performed for a woman with the belief that the life mate is predestined, the fate is preordained, and thus they should be right for each other. Women are helpless as far as choice is concerned and therefore must succumb to the celestial forces of the universe' (Gupta 1976: 77). Arranged marriages are a norm in India and the decision to get their children married are taken by the elders of the family, sometimes even while the child is in the womb. People prefer to marry their daughters at an early age. Many families even fix their children's marriage without consulting with them. Each social group in India has its own rules and regulations regarding mate selection. The selection of a spouse depends upon religion, caste endogamy and village exogamy in India. Caste and *gotra* in Indian society play a very significant role. Caste is an endogamous unit whereas *gotra* is an exogamous unit, meaning families prefer to marry their children in the same caste lines but different sub-caste. Marriages within seven generations on the father's side and five generations on the mother's side are also prohibited in Hindu religion. Though much of this ideal typical construction of Indian marriages has undergone change, but most of the practices are still in vogue.

Keeping in mind the caste lines of the groom's family, *ghatak*, *vichole* or middlemen who were in the business of matchmaking used to help families to find the brides that suit with the social criteria. Marriages used to function and perform under their word of mouth. Increasing marriageable age of both men and women, occupational changes and increasing level of education of women have made the institution of marriage undergo many changes. These forces have not only affected the basic structure of marriage, but also the process of the selection of a mate. The values, beliefs and practices related to various aspects of marriage have also changed. People who were earlier engaged in the match-making process have lost their relevance and social status. People are becoming more socially conscious to new platforms of spouse selection.

Matrimonial advertisements in the newspapers have become one of the popular methods to find a suitable match. Advertisements are considered the mirrors of the society. Social attitudes, norms and behaviour are conditioned through advertisements. Hundal states, 'Advertisement serves as the most important vehicle of communication of ideas and opinions' (2015: 37). Advertisements are straightforward and make use of narratives which are easy to understand. In 1920s the predominance of advertisements and the institutionalized structure of matchmaking for weddings began to rise. Majumdar states that 'matrimonial, read by numerous consumers, created a sense of an open market in marriage negotiations'. She states that with opening of a new form of selection criteria of brides and bridegrooms the practice of advertising has led to a 'trade of marriage negotiation' (2004: 920). Matrimonial advertisements consist of two to three lines which give information regarding

the bride and groom's family lineage, social status, work, date and time of the birth. The content of advertisements varies according to the social group. These advertisements do not only mention the specification of their own particulars but also mention the qualities desired in their life partner. Some advertisers put emphasis upon the educational background while some give more detailed information regarding the kinship of family. There are some advertisements which even lack basic information. There is no such example of a perfect matrimonial advertisement, it depends upon the seeker which makes it an appropriate one.

Newspaper advertisements can be traced back to 1600s in Europe when pamphlets came into being. By the mid-19th century, matrimonial advertisements were quite common in newspapers of Regency and Victorian period Britain and people started to publish advertisements. People used to frown upon the seeker of the advertisements as it shows the inability to find a mate. In India, mainly the urban and educated working class started publishing ads in newspapers under the category of the same religion and same caste in the 1920s. There are newspapers in India which have been publishing advertisements in weeklies and dailies. Nowadays, every section of Indian society is sending particulars in the newspapers for marriage purposes. The matrimonial contents are printed under the section of 'Classifieds' of every newspaper. These advertisements bifurcate into two parts- 'The Brides Wanted' and 'The Bridegrooms Wanted'.

The information about the advertiser is sub-categorised into religion, caste, profession and astrological charts. It is not just the social parameters that influence the match-making decision but also the physical appearance of a girl that has an equal impact. Fascination over beautiful and good-looking brides is seen in Indian families. It has been seen that the advertisements that specify women's beauty are more eye-catching and get more responses than the others which do not advertise. Women's beauty plays a very significant role not just for themselves but for the groom's family as well.

According to Anand, 'Regarding personal appearance a clear trend is discernible. It appears that there is a great concern about the appearance of the bride than with that of the groom. Moreover, we can also see that both men and women tend to present themselves in a better light to the other party'(1965: 68). Etcoff argues that 'Beautiful people find sexual partners more easily, and beautiful individuals are more likely to find leniency in the court and elicit cooperation from strangers' (1999: 25). Etcoff further states, 'Males focus more on physical appearance because appearance gives many clues about whether a woman is healthy and fertile, able to successfully carry off the pregnancy, and whether she may be receptive to that man'(ibid: 76). Kumari (1978) in her study has found that youth placed top priority to health, beauty and charm in arranged marriages, while personal qualities and educational qualifications are placed at second and third priority respectively.

Theoretical perspective

Sociological theories help in examining the ideologies that perpetuate and reinforce beauty ideals in men and women in mating relationships. Physical appearance of a person has its roots in biological make-up. Skin colour, colour of the eyes, height, body type and size depend on the genetics that one inherits. Social identities such as, gender, race, caste, class and religion provide and reflect the experiences of one's position in society.

Herbert Spencer adopted Darwin's Sexual selection of mate to 'survival of the fittest'. In social realm, humans who are most capable will survive in society due to biological mechanism that made them superior. In many arenas, people who own the means and have power over the resources are considered to be powerful. In marriage institution, same principles apply to females and males. Women who are physically attractive, for instance, have almond shape eyes, small nose, plum lips, fair skin colour, long wavy hair and slim body shape and size affects the choice of male in mating relation. Females who fall under the category of ideal feminine beauty are desired. They are treated as fittest in society and chances to wed these women are more than the ones who do not have at all. 'Beauty is an advantage for men as well as for women, although the magnitude is greater for women' (Etxoff 1999: 52).

The reasons for the selection of fairer women were suggested by a neuroscientist V.S. Ramachandran, who states that 'light skin is more transparent window to health, age, and sexual interest than darker skin'. He suggests that 'Light skin was sexually selected by men because light-skinned women were the least able to deceive them and biologically advantageous became an aesthetic preference' (c.f. Etxoff 1999: 105). Females who are physically attractive in context of their skin colour, sharp features, body type can engage more prospectus grooms for marriage. Not only the grooms are attracted towards beautiful brides but also families make an extra effort for bringing beautiful daughters-in-law home. In the context of bridegrooms, the fittest in arranged marriages are the ones who have more economic power, high caste and class. They are considered to be more powerful and highly demanded in arranged marriages.

Critical Race Feminism Theory (CRFT)

Distinct bodily features are considered to be racial signifiers such as shape of the nose and eyes, the size of the lips and ears, and the colour of the skin and eyes. When people create a hierarchy on the basis of racial signifiers and discriminate the ones who are not aesthetically good looking it creates a socio-racial order in society. Critical Race Feminism seeks to understand how society is organised along with socially constructed intersections of race, gender, class and other dimensions of diversity that form social hierarchies in women.

Critical Race Feminism is an offshoot of critical race theory, first appears

in Adrien K. Wing's work, which 'focuses on women of colour, who face multiple discrimination on the basis of race, gender and class, revealing how all these factors interact within a system of white male patriarchy and racist oppression'(c.f. Hilal 1998: 368). This perspective is central in examining the relationship between the skin colour of women and the discrimination that they face in society. The Western hegemonic ideology portrays that white females are more attractive and acquire more opportunities in society as compared to black or brown women. Deliovsky states, 'White patriarchal discourse represents white women as the 'benchmark woman' - a hegemonic ideology and social location that define dominant and subordinated femininities'(2008: 49).

Caste-Colour Discrimination

The evidence of the caste system and colour discrimination existed for centuries in historical and religious texts in India. The nomadic Aryan race that invaded Dravidians through the north-west used to oppress and force people to work in unethical fields just because their skin-tone is darker. Varna, the social system practiced in India is followed, which directs the people with whom to interact based on the colour of the skin and occupations. The hierarchy of people depends on the Varna.

Parameswaran & Cardoza prescribe social ranking as, 'the white Brahmins (intellectuals and priest) are the most valued and ranked in the top-most position, second are the red Kshatriya (warrior and rulers), yellow Vaishyas (merchants and traders) hold the third rank in the social hierarchy, fourth are the brown Shudras (servants and manual workers) and the fifth are the black Dalits (also known as untouchables/outcastes, their job is to process animal and human waste) (c.f. Orbe & Harris 2015: 173). The correlation between caste and the colour of the skin depends on social occupation. People engaged in traditional occupations will pass same genes to the newer ones. The classification of varna specifically belonged to the Hindu religion, but the integration of people caused the system to be followed by other religions too. Caste is regarded as a 'ritual purity' by the Aryans as it ascribed by birth and is passed down over generations and division is based on hereditary groups.

Geographical location and climatic conditions also affect the colour of the skin. Béteille noted that, 'regional and caste differences often cut across each other'. 'People from the lower castes in North India tend to be, on the whole, darker than those from some of the highest castes in the South'(1967: 450). Mostly people residing in northern region of India particularly from Jammu and Kashmir and Punjab are of fair colour due to cold weather. Central and southern parts of India have hot and humid climate which cause darker skin tone of inhabitants. Brahmins have means and people from lower castes do menial jobs for them that is why the colour of their skin is relatively fairer than the Harijans. Whereas, Harijans spend a lot of time under the sun doing

physical labour which causes their skin tone to be darker. Where it has been seen that lower caste people residing in northern regions are fairer than the highest caste in the south, because of the climatic conditions. People of India were also enslaved in a similar manner by British in pre-independent era just because of their skin colour.

Caste is one of the main particulars of Indian aborigines to abide by. It gives distinctive character, genetic identity and rules of marriage. Bèteille states that 'the physical distribution of men and women are based on skin colour, stature, nasal index, and head form' (1967: 448). He also argues that, 'physical types are not sharply differentiated but represented on a continuum', highlighting how caste plays an important role in arranged marriages even today. Banerjee argues, 'the institution is so prevalent that matrimonial advertisements in Indian newspapers are classified under caste headings, making it immediately obvious where prospective brides or grooms can find someone from their own caste'(2013: 34).

The cultural aspect of feminine beauty ideal in one's family is constructed through caste and biological characteristics one inherits. The ideal bride virtue of duties towards family and her beauty is praised in the religious text and is even sung at wedding functions. Every culture has its own way to select a bride. Marriages are arranged by parents so that racial purity is maintained is one of the crucial factors promoting casteism in Indian society. Nowadays it is not just with the likeness of social parameters but the physical attributes of a girl matter extensively to the bridegrooms family. Colour of the skin, shape and size of the body, height etc, are the main parameters which will decide whether a girl is accepted or rejected for a marriage proposal. Bride is expected to foster with the beauty standards. She presumes that it is a natural process and perceives beauty ideals without any doubt and questioning. Bride's family plays a crucial role in inculcating popular beauty standards.

The study conducted by Dove: India's Beauty Test Report (2020), reveals the pressures and anxieties of women in conforming to an ideal standard of beauty in arranged marriages. An alarming 9 out of 10 single women in India feel that they are judged and rejected based on their looks during the marriage process. Furthermore, 80 per cent of women stated that to look beautiful they took extra care of their skin and body. While 46 per cent of women suggested that they have been using Photoshop and editing applications to make their photographs more appealing. 68 per cent of women, claimed that rejections based on beauty during arranged marriage proposals impacted their self-esteem and confidence.

The main objective of the study is to understand the construction of beauty ideals in brides in relation to caste groups in Punjab. The social construction of beauty of bride in marriages is subjected to the social-cultural context, which varies from community to community and within a society

over a period of time. The context may not be universal but is open to the subjective understanding of the seekers of these advertisements.

Methodology of the Study

In order to understand the ongoing process of selection of mate for matrimonial alliance, the advertisement contents play a significant role. Most of the leading newspapers in English as well as in vernacular languages carry classified sections for the purpose. As per the Registrar of Newspaper for India, 31 march 2018, in Punjab the average circulation of newspaper on the daily periodicity in Punjabi language is the largest in the case of *Ajit* and *Jag Bani*, whereas the similar status is enjoyed by *The Tribune* among the English language newspapers. For the present study, *The Tribune* was selected. An average of 500-700 advertisements are printed on every Saturdays and Sundays, and about three to four pages are allotted to the classified advertisements. The matrimonial advertisements that appeared in *The Tribune* were collected for eight months from May to December 2020 for analysis. During this period, the total number of advertisements printed in this newspaper were 35,566. As the primary purpose of the study is to examine the preference of beautiful women needed in marriage through matrimonial advertisements printed in newspapers the content analysis of the written text has been done. The researcher has used 'word counting' as a technique while making the content analysis. The use of certain keywords in different texts have helped to identify the most popular words used by prospective bridegroom's families to describe the physical appearance of women in these advertisements. The Tribune has 34 listings on their official website, which broadly includes the castes, sub-castes, profession, divorced, widowed, *mangliks* and NRIs. In this study which aims at examining the preference of physical attributes of the brides' vis-à-vis the caste affiliation, the matrimonial advertisements printed under the heading of caste and sub-caste affiliations have been analysed. Out of the 34 listings the study is limited only to the content analysis of the physical attributes of women published under the sub-headings of caste groups and no other feature or qualities of women (for example: education qualifications, professional work, income and other social parameters) have been studied. The research is also limited to classified advertisements only and no other online matchmaking services have been referred.

Findings

At the outset, it may be informed that the cost of the advertisements can vary between 300 and 5000 rupees, depending upon the words and space. The average cost of matrimonial advertisement in *The Tribune* ranges from 800 to 1500 rupees to which 5% GST is also applicable and its classified matrimonial advertisements can be booked online and through telephonic service. One can choose to print the same advertisement multiple times in a

newspaper. An advertisement appeared on 26 September, 2020 is given below just for reference.

‘High status family required preferably from Trinity suitable match for very handsome, 5’11” /27, PR Australia, having a business in India and Melbourne. Girl should be very beautiful, slim, educated and smart’.

It was found that, both the sections ‘Brides Wanted’, advertised by the boy side and ‘Bridegrooms Wanted’, advertised by the girl’s family mention words related to the external appearances of women. For that purpose, advertisements appearing on Saturdays and Sundays were analysed. It was found that the Saturday section of ‘Brides Wanted’ has more advertisements 20,431 (57.44%) than the Sunday section of ‘Bridegrooms Wanted’ 15,135 (42.56%), which depicts that the number of boys looking out for girls is more than the girls looking for boys.

Out of the total advertisements on both days, there were 8486 (23.86%) advertisements which mentioned the prospective bride’s physical appearance as an important parameter in marriages. The ‘Bridegrooms Wanted’ section had a relatively very high percentage of advertisements mentioning the physical aspects of women as the main criteria, i.e., 65.76 per cent. It indicates that woman herself or her family is mentioning physical beauty as an important parameter in the marriage.

It is interesting to find that these advertisements have been put according to the caste that is, under the headings of castes and sub-castes, the Brahmins, Rajputs, Jats, Baniya/Aggarwals, Khatri, Aroras, Ramghariya/Dhiman, Kamboj, Sainis, Tonk/Kshatriya and SCs were found to be mentioning the physical attributes of bride-to-be. The Brahmin caste found in these advertisements includes the gotras such as Gaur Pandit Brahmin, Sarswat Brahmin, Punjabi Sarsut Brahmin, Sharma and Brahmin Sikh. Mainly in Punjab Gaur and Saraswat or Sarsut are found. The social interaction between the Gaur Brahmin and Sarsut Brahmin is very strict as Ancient Gaur does not inter-marry and does not take food even from Sarsut. The Sarsut Brahmin on the other hand intermingle with Baniyas, Khatri and Aroras, Suds and Kayaths and even eat flesh.

In Punjab, Ibbetson argues that ‘there are no Rajputs because there are no Rajas and those who are notoriously of pure Rajputs descent are Jats because they till the land’ (1974: 8). Classified advertisements in Rajput section involve castes and sub-castes as follow: Rajput Khatik, Thakur Rajput, Jaiswal Thakur, Rana Rajput, Rajput Parmar, Chauhan, Kashyap, Dadwal, Mair, Swarnkar and Lodhi Rajput.

Among various castes, the Jats are the prominent in administrative and in economic sector. Agriculture is their traditional occupation, though they have diversified their economic activities over the years. They are mainly Sikhs divided into various gotras, such as Dhillon, Virk, Sidhu, Bhullar, Aulakh,

Gill, Dhariwal, Mangat and Chahal and they are found to be the highest in matrimonial advertisements, followed by Kaler, Baath, Sandhu, Randhawa, Sekhon, Vraich, and Hundal.

The commercial and mercantile activities are largely carried out by Baniya caste. The Baniya is generically used for a 'shop-keeper' in Punjab. Aggarwal sub-caste is found to be the largest among the Baniyas. Under the section of Aggarwal caste, Garg, Singla, Bindal, Goyal/Goel, Gupta, Jindal, Mittal, Bansal, Kansal and Anshik are found to be most prominent. The Khatri is also regarded as a major mercantile caste in Punjab. The sub-caste associated with Khatri are Malhotra, Khanna, Wadwa, Verma, Kapoor, Bhatia, Chawla, Gulati and many more. 'There is a large subordinate class of Khatri, somewhat lower, but of equal mercantile energy, called Rors, or Roras' (Ibbetson 1974: 247). The Aroras claim to be of Khatri origin, while Khatri reject this connotation and described it as *Aur* or another, giving them the name. According to Ibbetson, 'All Aroras are said to be of the Kásibgotra' (ibid: 251). They are the traders first and after then anything and everything. There is a separate section of Aroras in advertisements. There is also a separate section of Khatri/Arora which means that some sub-divisions among Khatri and Arora intermarry.

Ramghariya and Dhiman castes are considered excellent carpenters and blacksmiths. For Sikhs, Ramghariya caste is used while Hindus use Dhiman caste. Saini's are the most skilful cultivators on a small scale and are found both among the Hindus and Sikhs. Kambojs are one of the finest cultivating caste in Punjab. The main Kamboj clans found in advertisements are Thind, Jausan and Sikh Kamboj. The Matrimonial advertisements have a separate section for Kshatriya/Tonk, who generically called Chhimbas and claim origin from Hindu Rajputs.

The Scheduled castes (SCs) form the lowest strata of the Indian society consisting of labourers and menial workers. There are 39 different scheduled castes found in Punjab, out of which two, namely, Chamar/ Ad-dharmi and Balmikis/Mazbi are the most numerous and are found highest in matrimonial advertisements. They all have distinct occupations which made them unique and different from each other.

It was found that matrimonial advertisements printed in newspaper have a direct relationship with caste in Punjab. Analysing eight months of advertisements, the researcher has identified twelve attributes of physical beauty for women in marriage proposals, which have been given codes as follows:

- **B:** Beautiful
- **V.B:** Very / most / extremely Beautiful
- **B+S+ F:** Beautiful, Slim and Fair

- **S+B:** Slim and Beautiful
- **F+B:** Fair and Beautiful
- **T+B:** Tall and Beautiful
- **F:** Fair
- **W:** Wheatish (refers to colour of the skin)
- **S:** Slim
- **S+F:** Slim and Fair
- **T:** Tall i.e., advertisements that mention the height of women
- **A:** Smart used in advertisements
- **Others**

Table 1 shows the relationship between the physical attributes of 'Brides Wanted' in matrimonial advertisements along with the caste of the seekers. The particulars found in 'Brides Wanted' section are printed by the family of the groom/boy who are searching for a suitable match. The advertisements clearly state that how a girl should look and to which type of family she should belong. It is found that advertisements use different expressions for the physical appearance of women. For instance: 'Desire to marry with beautiful girl', 'the only demand is a beautiful girl', and use of words like: 'requires, seeks, in search for, want, need, looking for, preferred, qualified beautiful girl for their son' are mostly used while referring to the physical appearance of bride. The significance of the physical appearance of women in these advertisements is also seen when lines like: 'email details with photos, or WhatsApp girl's recent photo without photoshop or editing' are used in these advertisements.

Table 1 Caste group and Preference of Physical Attributes in Brides (Brides Wanted)

Attributes	B	V.B	B+S+FS+B	F+B	T+B	F	W	S	S+F	T	A	Others*	
Caste													
Brahmin	209	5	8	20	1	18	14	-	8	8	10	5	2
Rajput	53	-	2	1	-	1	2	-	2	2	-	2	-
Jat	244	6	34	20	3	67	6	1	7	12	41	18	9
Bania/Aggarwal	255	5	8	15	1	8	8	-	9	8	1	20	-
Khatri	245	21	6	31	2	27	8	-	10	8	8	15	6
Khatri/Arora	190	11	8	20	1	9	13	-	4	-	5	13	12
Arora	91	5	-	20	3	3	8	-	10	-	2	5	6
Ramghariya/Dhiman	55	-	2	2	1	8	4	-	4	-	9	6	4
Saini	29	-	2	2	-	3	4	-	1	1	2	1	-
Kamboj	19	-	2	-	-	6	1	-	1	2	-	3	1
Tonk/Kshatriya	12	-	1	-	-	1	1	-	1	1	-	1	-
Scheduled Castes	100	1	3	3	3	19	2	-	8	2	4	9	6
Total	1502	54	76	134	15	170	71	1	65	44	82	98	46

*Others include words like (P) Pretty, (GL) Good Looking, (C) Charming, (SF) Sharp features, (LY) looks younger and (H) Healthy.

The total number of advertisements mentioning physical appearance related to woman is 2358 in 'Brides Wanted' section. Beautiful (B) word has been appeared maximum in these advertisements for 63.69 per cent, and Aggarwal caste have used it maximum, that is, 1502 times which amounts to 16.98 per cent.

Khatri caste has been identified as using the Very Beautiful (V.B) attribute highest being 38.88 per cent. It has been also noticed that advertisements have used various other expressions like: 'seeks really beautiful girl', 'most beautiful' and 'extremely beautiful girl'.

Jat caste have relatively very high number of advertisements in relation to the other castes in mentioning three basic features altogether for women i.e., Beautiful, slim and fair (B+S+F) which amounts to 44.73 per cent.

Colour of the skin is one of the main parameters in accepting and rejecting the brides for marriages. Fair (F) skin colour is used highest by Brahmin caste 19.71 per cent. Brahmins are very vocal about demanding lighter skin colour brides, so that they could maintain the racial purity of their caste and genes. Brahmins associate fair skin colour as being beautiful.

Wanting to have a slim woman has appeared 65 times out of which, both Khatri and Arora caste accounts to 15.39 per cent. Where Slim and Fair (S+F) attribute is most used by Jat caste i.e., 27.28 per cent.

Tall and Beautiful (T+B) variable is used more profoundly in 'Brides Wanted' section which clearly states that boy or his family is in search of a tall girl, using expression like 'bride must be highly qualified with the height of 5'6 or above', 'girl should be tall and beautiful', 'wanted an actress like tall, qualified match from valued family' appears 170 times, and mentioning of Tall (T) variable for women appears 82 times which is found highest in Jat caste for 50 per cent.

There is no clear understanding as for what purpose the Smart (A) word is used. For instance, the advertisements used in this context were 'suitable smart match needed' and 'physically smart girl needed for their handsome son' is confusing to identify. For 98 times Smart word is used and Aggarwal caste has used it the most often for around 20.4 per cent.

Whereas attribute, charming is used multiple times. This attribute was unclear for the identification purpose as in which context it was used. According to Webster dictionary word charming means 'extremely pleasing or delightful'. But advertisements did not mention whether they are mentioning personality as charming or physical appearance as charming.

Table 2 depicts the matrimonial advertisements mentioning the 'Bridegrooms Wanted'. The particulars in this section are given by the girl's parents or by the girl herself which consist of her age, religion, caste, educational qualification, profession, and about the physical appearance. A total number of advertisements which mention physical appearance regarding women's beauty accounts to 4565 in 'Bridegrooms Wanted' section which are printed on Sundays.

Table 2 Caste group and Preference of Physical Attributes in Brides (Bridegrooms Wanted)

Caste	B	V.B	B+S+F	S+B	F+B	T+B	F	W	S	S+F	T	A	Others*
Brahmin	331	30	30	60	50	-	82	5	26	38	16	24	10
Rajput	129	5	-	35	15	-	36	-	7	6	3	4	4
Jat	411	30	65	70	30	14	35	17	23	24	44	29	23
Aggarwal	309	75	35	55	45	-	70	-	29	48	14	39	1
Khatri	360	32	30	61	33	7	43	7	25	29	10	38	13
Khatri/Arora	222	17	25	46	25	1	16	4	16	22	6	19	12
Arora	96	13	5	31	15	-	12	-	14	6	2	2	3
Ramghariya/Dhiman	82	1	5	10	5	-	13	6	5	11	7	7	4
Saini	37	-	2	11	5	-	7	-	4	7	1	4	1
Kamboj	29	2	-	1	5	1	2	1	3	1	4	4	1
Tonk/Kshatriya	42	-	-	5	5	-	5	-	5	6	2	1	4
Scheduled Castes	220	6	4	30	25	-	54	4	25	26	-	5	3
Total	2268	211	201	415	258	23	357	44	182	224	109	176	79

*Others include words like (P) Pretty, (GL) Good Looking, (C) Charming, (SF) Sharp features, (LY) looks younger and (H) Healthy.

It was found that among all the attributes mentioned, Beautiful (B) word alone as an attribute to describe a woman is used 49.69 per cent in 'Bridegrooms Wanted' section. Accompanied by slim and beautiful (S+B) attribute which accounts to 9.09 per cent and then fair (F) which accounts to 8.21 per cent.

Jat caste mentions beautiful (B) as a main feature which constitute to 18.12 per cent, the popular expressions used by the parents to convey that their daughter is physically attractive are: 'born beautiful daughter', 'match needed for their beautiful daughter', 'beautiful match' or 'qualified match for beautiful girl'. It has been found that very beautiful (V.B) is used 211 times in 8 months out of which Aggarwal caste have used it most i.e., 35.54 per cent. While mentioning all three attributes together beautiful, slim and fair (B+S+F) and beautiful and slim (B+S), Jat caste accounts to using it the most, that is, 32.33 per cent and 16.87 per cent respectively.

Fair and Wheatish skin colour were used to describe a woman's skin colour. Wheatish colour is associated with the colour of the wheat (grain) found and largely grown in the region of Punjab. The grain colour is associated with women's skin colour who has lighter tone of skin and is considered as a proud factor of physical beauty in women. Brahmin caste has been found highest in mentioning the word Fair for their daughters 21.87 per cent. Whereas, Fair and Beautiful (F+B) and fair (F) attributes are used highest by Aggarwal caste i.e., 19.38 per cent and 17.45 per cent respectively. Wheatish (W) skin colour is used maximum by caste Jat i.e., 38.63 per cent. The height of women as a Tall (T) has been also found to be highest in Jat caste 40.37 per cent.

Aggarwal caste uses Smart word by 22.16 per cent which is used highest as compared to other castes. Jat caste have the largest proportion of using other words like pretty, good looking, charming, healthy, sharp feature and looks younger constituting about 29.11 per cent. Mainly looks younger (L.Y) attribute is used for women who are divorced, widowed or their age is relatively older than the others. For example, advertisements use expressions like: 'looks like 25 years old but is 32'. It may be mentioned that body type of a bride in these advertisements have also been observed, expressions like 'girl is slightly healthy, bit healthy or perfect healthy are used by the seekers.

Conclusion

To sum up, the findings depict that beauty ideals of women in marriage is seen as an asset for a bride as well as for groom's family. The matrimonial advertisements act as a cultural text, as it represents social parameter of different sections of Indian society. In eight months of analysing the contents, it was found that 23.86 per cent of advertisements highlighted physical description of women. It was interesting to note that the advertisements of 'Brides Wanted' are more than the 'Bridegrooms Wanted,' the mentioning of

the beauty characteristics of women are found to be more in the 'Bridegrooms Wanted' section i.e., 65.76 per cent. It is the girl's family which claims to advertise more regarding the beauty ideals for their daughter than the boys. It has been found that 76.52 per cent of matrimonial advertisements mention the word beautiful alone and with other combining variables like slim, fair and tall.

Parents, family members, and even prospective brides and grooms themselves equate fair skin with physical beauty in seeking suitable partners. Women themselves use fairness as a status symbol and as an achievement. The words describing the physical beauty of women in marriages are considered normal and unknowingly its forms as an internalization process in one's life. Every girl starts to put herself in a position where she could fit in with the standards of beauty. From a younger age, she is told to look attractive for her significant other, and for the ceremony of wedding.

Jat caste amounted for the largest proportion of giving the advertisement of 19.85 per cent, followed by Khatri caste 16.41 per cent and Aggarwal Caste 14.33 per cent. The presence of colourism is witnessed at 8.89 per cent in the matrimonial advertisements. Jat caste has used Wheatish colour to describe their preference in women which accounts to 40 per cent. On the other hand, Brahmin caste has used Fair skin colour most as preference for women i.e., 21.52 per cent. Not a single advertisement holds a word for dark or medium complexioned skin colour.

The shape and body size of women in these advertisements also hold a very significant role. Slim, healthy, perfect healthy, and height of a girl holds up to 8.80 per cent. It was found that the demand for tall girls was stated as a very important attribute by Jat caste. The main reason to ask for a tall and beautiful bride is for the basic reason that men in their families usually have a taller height and have strong physique. The hereditary occupation of the Jats is agriculture doing hard and physical labour. They are used to work under harsh climatic conditions, therefore Jat caste is relatively taller than the other castes.

Significant advantage is given to the physical description of women in arranged marriages. It is not only the print matrimonial services that provides information regarding the beauty of bride, but other online services like shaddi.com, bharatmatrimonial.com and jeevansathi.com that focuses upon beauty of women. The fundamental difference between these services is that in newspapers display pictures are not printed and through expressions and words used by families, seekers have to make an idea regarding the description of bride. While online services provide pictures of prospectus brides and grooms. These services have become immensely popular nowadays amongst educated, urban and working men and women.

The concept of beauty has been socially constructed, hence, it varies from society to society over time. Even at one point of time, the subjective meanings vary from one group of people to another set of people. The reality of our society also clearly depicts that the profiles of brides stand out more if they make use of words like, Beautiful, Slim and Fair. The mindset of men and women in society is constructed through the use of media, and discourses that the beauty of the girl points towards her happiness and success. Recently a strong initiative has been taken by the Hindustan Unilever, Dove India which urges to stop the beauty test. Three out of four Indian women are rejected for their looks during the arranged marriage process. To break free from beauty biases, Dove Self-Esteem Project is committed to empower eight million young people by 2024 by helping women to boost their self-confidence and self-worth so that they don't fall under the victims of beauty myth.

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Notes

1. Ghataks are the traditional matchmakers who used to arrange marriages for families based on strict caste rules.
2. Vichola is a mediator between two families in arranging marriage in north India.
3. Brahmins, Khattris and Aroras caste in Punjab are found to be of both Hindu and Sikh religion.
4. Punjab has two major religious affiliations under Scheduled caste (SCs) i.e., Balmikis and Mazbis. Balmikis are of Hindu religion while Mazbis are Sikhs.
5. Religion as the main parameter in these advertisements are not observed. Other religions like., Muslims, Christians and Jains matrimonial advertisements were also printed but there was no mentioning of physical attributes of women.
6. Marriages in the same caste are preferred by both bride and groom. There was no mention of Caste No Bar, while some advertisements clearly mentioned the matching of horoscope details as a priority, followed by sharing of a picture on some social media platforms without any photoshop editing applications.
7. Websites accessed: <https://www.dove.com/in/dove-self-esteem-project/our-mission.html> - Accessed on 23 October, 2021
<https://learn.releasemyad.com/the-history-of-matrimonial-ads/>-Accessed on September 17, 2021
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