

INTERFAITH MARRIAGES IN THE NAME OF LOVE: PROSPECTS FOR MARITAL STABILITY AMONGST A GROUP OF PEOPLE OF INDIAN ORIGIN IN THE DURBAN METROPOLITAN AREA, SOUTH AFRICA

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This paper is about stimulating an interest that has been inadequately researched by scholars who study interfaith marriages in different parts of the world. Ideally interfaith marriages should be based on mutual respect for both faiths, and marriage should be solemnised without imposing religious conversion on a spouse. Yet, interfaith marriage is proscribed by most religious faiths in the world and prescribes either one of the spouses to embrace a particular religious orientation. In the South African context, interfaith marriages within the Indian Diaspora need not be perceived as new social phenomena. Its origin can be traced early in their social evolution in the country primarily amongst the Hindu and Muslim faith groups. This paper examines the role of different faith groups in proscribing and prescribing the form that interfaith marriages should take, the causal factors that affect marital stability and the extent to which one of the spouses has to make adjustments, adaptation, tolerate religious differences and make compromises to preserve the institution of marriage and family life.

Key Words: Religion, Interfaith, Marital Stability, Diaspora, Change

Introduction

This paper is about stimulating an interest in a growing but understudied phenomenon by scholars who study interfaith marriages in different parts of the world. The objective of this paper is to investigate the impact of religious switching in pursuit of marital stability. It explores the meaning and implications and realistic difficulties of people of different faiths uniting in marriage by focusing on the ideology that woman is for man and that reluctantly accepting religious conversion in the “name of love” as a compromise to avert the breakup of a romantic relationship by relinquishing one's faith. The basic assumption of this paper is founded on the principle that the sociological and other challenges facing interfaith marriages amongst the South African Indian diaspora is no different to other faith groups in the world. Moreover, it asserts that interfaith marriages are more prevalent in plural societies compared to homogeneous ones. This assumption was also made by Emile Durkheim as far back as 1912 in his description of primitive societies in which religious belief is known to establish social stability. Religion therefore offers social stability in a homogenous society. Durkheim argued that “religion acted as a source of solidarity and identification for the individuals within a society, especially as part of a mechanical solidarity system, and to a lesser, but still important extent in

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the context of organic solidarity. Religion provided a meaning for life, it provided authority figures, and most importantly for Durkheim, it reinforced the morals and social norms held collectively by all within a society” (Thompson 1982: 1).

This paper examines trends and patterns amongst a select group of sixty six respondents selected through a snowball sampling technique in the Durban Metropolitan area which is known to have the highest concentration of Indians in the country comprising different faith groups. The paper examines the nature and extent of marital stability and how religious differences are accommodated, adapted to or results in conflict.

Insofar as the structure of the paper is concerned, it commences by examining the concept of interfaith marriages from an international perspective in terms of its trends and patterns followed by an analysis of challenges faced within interfaith marriages. The paper then focuses on the socio-historical evolution of interfaith marriages within the Indian Diaspora in South Africa moving on to providing an overview of the marriage policy, trends and marital stability for the country as a whole and the Diaspora. Finally, the paper tests the empirical data to ascertain the extent to which interfaith marriages affect marital stability within the South African Indian Diaspora, the underlying factors that contribute to such stability, prospects and challenges for marital stability and family life.

Conceptualising Interfaith Marriages - International Trends and Patterns

Interfaith marriage is referred to as mixed marriage either religious or civil between partners professing different religions. It connotes a marriage in which both partners remain adherents to their divergent religious faith. There are many religious doctrines to interfaith marriages: some may forbid it; others may oppose it but may permit it under certain circumstances; whilst others may accommodate on condition of certain specifications regarding ceremony, custom and tradition. Hence interfaith marriages contain dimensions of religious conversion, cultural adaptation and religious disassociation attached to it.

Given the social complexity of interfaith marriages especially in the globe long before the dawn of the 21st Century, the United Nations General Assembly on the 10 December 1948 in affirming the Universal Declaration of Human Rights provided due recognition to interfaith marriages. Article 16 states three aspects regarding marriage and religion: Firstly, men and women of marriageable age, without any limitation imposed by race, nationality or religion, have the right to marry and to found a family. They are entitled to equal rights to marry, during marriage and upon its dissolution. Secondly, the marriage arrangement shall be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses. Lastly, the family is the natural and fundamental social unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the state (International Religious Freedom Report: 2012). The Declaration provided protection broadly for those who were persecuted by

virtue of exercising their faith for reasons of worshipping a single deity, or multiple deities, or no deities at all. Hence the declaration encapsulates the freedom to believe including the freedom not to believe as a universal human right.

Notwithstanding the international provision and protection of interfaith marriages, such marriages will vary within and outside of nation states. In religiously homogenous societies interfaith marriages are more than likely to be rare as compared to secular ones. When one considers western societies such as America, interfaith marriage has increased in contemporary times. Naomi Schaefer Riley (2013a) in her book titled "*Til Faith Do us Part*" asserts that in the last decade 42% of all marriages in the United States included people of different faiths. She concludes that the rapidly growing number of mixed-faith families has become a source of hope, promoting openness and tolerance amongst divergent faith groups that historically have been insular and suspicious of other faiths. Riley (2013) maintains that despite this positive trend, what may be perceived to be good for society as a whole often proves to be a challenge for individual families at a micro level. In support of this observation Bossard and Boll (1957: 182) aptly conclude the challenges interfaith marriages encounter, stating that: "since most faiths regard marriage and family behaviour as their special domain resulting in the disapproval of out-marriage which they perceive threatens family stability, interfaith marriages, then, start out with the possibility that they may have somewhat less chance of success than interfaith unions" (Bossard and Boll 1957: 182).

In the case of Jewish and Islamic faiths strong religious prescriptions restrict its adherents from interfaith marriages. Interfaith marriage in Judaism was historically looked upon with very strong disfavour by the Jewish clergy and it continues to remain an enormous controversial issue. Be it traditional or orthodox, Judaism imposes strong restrictions on interfaith marriages. With time, the evolution of Conservative Judaism became more accommodating of gentile spouses in the hope that they could be converted into the faith. Although modern-day liberal Rabbis are willing to officiate at interfaith marriages, couples are often persuaded to raise their children within the doctrine of the Judaic faith. Notwithstanding such compromises within the Jewish community in America, it is claimed that more than half of American Jews were marrying out in the 1990s (National Jewish Population Survey 2003: 18).

Similar to Judaism, in Islam women are prohibited from marrying outside their faith. It is permissible for men to wed non-Muslim women but embracing the faith is a prescription. In addition, it is religiously mandatory that the children be socialised to be Muslims. However, Islamic Jurisprudence (*Sharia*) has different interpretations on interfaith marriage, depending on which of the two spouses are Muslims. A Muslim man for instance is permitted to marry up to four non-Muslim women from those considered to be "People of the Book" (that is, Christians and Jews), but they must be chaste and all of the children usually must be socialised

within the Islamic faith (Simon and Howard 2003: 3). If a non-Muslim woman is married to a Muslim, she is expected to convert to Islam. In the case of the man being a non-Muslim then the marriage is suspended until her husband embraces Islam as his faith. If he accepts it just for the sake of marriage only, the marriage will not be recognised (Riley 2013a:2).

In so far as Hinduism is concerned it is believed that there are innumerable paths to God and that one's belief or perception of God is a personal matter. Consequently the Hindu faith makes very little prescriptions on interfaith marriages and leaves the responsibility to the individual to decide on his/her own destiny. Hence there are no prescribed conversion rituals and *yajna*² marriage rites in theory can be solemnised between a Hindu and a non-Hindu. These rites take the form of invoking ancient Indo-Iranian deities and may be contrary to the non-Hindu individual's faith. Interfaith and inter-caste marriages are not un-common in the urban parts of the Indian sub-continent, but less pronounced in the rural areas where very strong sentiments about cross faith marriages are maintained. There are many social norms surrounding marriage subjecting individual's to enormous pressure to marry within their respective caste and religious grouping. Deviation from such social norms could cost the individual or couple the support of friends, family, and community resulting in exclusion from a communal life style which is characteristic in much of the rural parts of the subcontinent. In developed and metropolitan areas, it is more common to observe the prevalence of marriage between members of different castes and religions although social pressures (especially from family) often discourage interfaith marriages. Among *diaspora* Hindus globally, these pressures are still prevalent but less intense. Hence interfaith marriages are much more common among Hindu diasporic communities naturalised in countries apart from their homeland. Priests are also more willing to solemnise such marriages in such communities since traditional Hinduism does not prescribe religious conversion. In theory, non-Hindu spouses are welcomed since religion within the faith is considered only as a means to understanding the Divine truth. However, in practice, orthodox Hindus are often rigid on their belief system and prohibit interfaith marriages (Wikipedia 2013: 2).

Within Christianity, different denominations practice their own set of rules and prescriptions in respect of interfaith marriages. Over time Christianity has adopted a more liberal approach towards interfaith marriages. Despite this, some churches may forbid interfaith marriage. Considering that there is distinction between inter-denominational practices of the Christian faith, some sects may extend their own rules and practices to include other denominations on interfaith marriages. On the other extreme, within the Zoroastrian faith, rigid adherence to the faith disallows interfaith marriages. Adherents of Zoroastrianism who marry outside their faith grouping risk being expelled from all religious services and rites. Often their children are also not allowed to participate in religious activities (Wikipedia 2013: 3).

Marital Stability and Challenges within Interfaith Marriages

There is increasing evidence that interfaith marriages are predisposed to the risk of marital stability and present challenges for the institution of family life. Religion is considered to be a complementary trait for marital stability. It is known to enhance marital companionship. According to Lehrer and Chiswick (1993: 386) households in which spouses differ in their religious preferences are known to enjoy reduced efficiency and are characterised by greater marital conflict. Statistics correlates interfaith marriages with higher divorce rates than same-faith partnerships (American Research Identification Survey (ARIS): 2001). Similarly, interfaith marriages are correlated with lowered rates of religious participation and it is therefore widely seen as a threat to institutional religious vitality. Adaptation, accommodation and tolerance of diverse sets of religious teachings and practices are known to be a precursor to stability within interfaith marriages. Anything short of these elements results in religious conflict which serves as a source of marital stability within interfaith marriages. In essence a marital bond consummated in the name of love is challenged by differences in faith which Naomi Schaefer Riley (2013a) ironically affirms in her book titled "*Till Faith do us Part*".

Marital stability amongst interfaith couples is known to be characterised by less happiness as compared to those belonging to like religions that are less predisposed to divorce. Interfaith couples are more exposed to stresses and strains beyond those experienced in most marriages within same faith groups since they have "built-in" differences in areas that are particularly sensitive to the families of origin, and will at times require extra effort from the couple in building bridges in order to create a strong and lasting marriage (Ezzeldine 2011: 1). This is partly due to interfaith marriages being consummated with lesser consideration for the fundamental spiritual, doctrinal, and practical issues that divide them and love for each other is a predisposing factor in consummating a marriage. Couples that marry early (in their twenties and thirties) are known less likely to have come to terms about the religious dimensions of family life once married and the social, spiritual and emotional challenges underlying such marriages. It is also a phase in a time when matters of faith is of lesser importance for younger interfaith couples, only to encounter challenges in reconciling their respective faiths as they grow older and raise children, suffer the loss of a parent, or experience other major life challenges (Riley 2013a: 1). The underlying causal source of such challenges amongst interfaith couples according to Riley (2013a: 2) stems from a lack of devotion to diversity as well as to a romantic ideal that blinds the anticipation of potential future problems emanating from religious differences. Even when they recognise deeply held differences, couples believe that love conquers all. As a result, they fail to ask the necessary questions about how they will reconcile their divergent world views about raising children, celebrating holidays and festivals, interacting with extended families, and different aspects of family and social life.

An obsession with tolerance at all costs, Riley (2013a: 2) argues, has made discussing the problems of interfaith marriage taboo.

Contrary to the belief that religious differences in interfaith marriages can be a source of marital instability there is increasing evidence that such marriages do in fact enjoy stability. It is based on the assumption that interfaith marriages cannot be sustained by love alone. Considering that the religious encounters amongst mixed families comes with a wide range of social-psychological challenges, it demands much higher levels of emotional investment and intensity over longer duration of time (McCarthy 2007: 189). McCarthy (2007: 190) observes through an analysis of qualitative data that religious difference in families might be a valuable growing ground for those skills required for meaningful participation in an increasingly diverse society. Love amongst interfaith couples comes first, and the live-and-let-live approach characterised by tolerance is often the foundation that holds interfaith partnership together. McCarthy further states that:

considering interfaith marriages are widely prevalent in pluralist and secular forms of societies, they demonstrate the potential for managing religious difference with respect, integrity, and creative problem-solving. Interfaith families are also not immune to the social power imbalances that help make religious difference politically problematic in contemporary society. While many couples are able to manage religious difference on purely religious grounds, for many others confronting religious difference exposes an otherness within otherness. Such confrontation betrays the notion of religion as a matter of freely exercised choice within a marriage characterized by such diversity (McCarthy 2007: 191).

A consolation for those challenged within interfaith marriages by religious conflict is the extent to which marital instability persists amongst those within intra-faith marriages. All couples, whether of the same background or not, will encounter differences in their marriage at some point in time in their family life cycle. Individuals originate from different “family cultures,” which defines their roles and expectations which are transferred into their own marital relationship. Couples who are raised in a particular societal context are more than likely to share similar cultural values even though their families of origin come from different cultures and religious orientation. Therefore, all couples are required to learn to manage and resolve their differences in a marriage even if they share the same cultural and religious background (Ezzeldine 2011: 2). Despite cultural and religious convictions all couples in order to sustain marital stability need to negotiate differences when entering a marriage especially in light of the fact that they come from two different family orientation, and strive to develop their own sense of family identity by choosing traditions, habits and beliefs they value most and want to celebrate these in their family including their own children. Notwithstanding such ideal societal expectations, for interfaith couples the process of forming a family is more complex, emotionally and spiritually demanding. Despite these complex challenges, successful intercultural and interfaith relationships are known to be rewarded with

many personal and societal benefits. The ability of couples to manage differences amongst themselves and their respective families generally promotes communities that have more integrated identities and a greater appreciation for diversity (Ezzeldine 2011:2).

Inter faith Marriages amongst the Indian diasporic Community in South Africa – A Socio-historical Perspective

Within the South African Indian diasporic community interfaith marriage is not an atypical phenomenon when compared to other communities globally. Since the arrival of Indians first under the system of indenture followed by their trading class counterparts (1860s – 1911) interfaith marriages amongst the diverse ethnic, linguistic and religious groupings was largely influenced by demographic factors. Given the unequal ratio of males over females which in 1885 was 3:1 for the entire indentured population (Palmer 1957: 28; Meer 1972: 37; Chetty 1980: 30) which situation was further influenced by demographic changes implemented through the repatriation scheme post indenture resulted in a decline in the male population. As a consequence, more males than females returned to India. In addition the high death rate of the older male population and immigration restricted to the wives of males already living in South Africa further reduced the male population size.

Despite the male-female ratio gap closing, finding a spouse within one's religious and ethnic grouping was a difficult encounter in their early historical evolution as a diasporic community. This was especially so in the early years of indenture resulting in marriages outside of one's religious group. Marriages registered in 1872, 12 years after the arrival of indentured Indians, recorded the highest marriage statistic between Muslims and Hindus. A total of 67 per cent of recorded marriages was between Muslims and Hindus (Meer, 1980). Given the fact that the colonialist employers accorded little respect for the heterogeneous composition of indentured Indians, they were seconded to employers in mixed groups to different parts of the colony which may in part be responsible for the high rate of interfaith marriages between Muslims and Hindus. These cross religious marriages presented another source of challenge for the next generation to preserve its religious and cultural sense of identity. Strong attempts were made to preserve religious and cultural identities making marriages across religion and language lines almost taboo (Desai and Vahed 2007). For instance, not only Muslim marriages across religious lines attracted opposition, inter caste marriages was strongly discouraged. Although some social mixing was taking place between and amongst the different religious and caste groupings during the periods of colonialism and thereafter apartheid, a distinct line was drawn on marriages outside of these groups. Inter-marriage amongst Memon and Gujarati speaking Muslims was discouraged. Within these two groupings the choice of marital partners was often determined by village identity and for purposes of cementing business and commercial interests.

Within same faith groups, it was almost taboo for Memons and Gujarati speaking Muslims to marry Muslims originating from the South Indian indentured group. Those marrying a South Indian Muslim were dispossessed by their families, ostracised or banished from extended family networks. Marrying a *Kolcha*, a derogatory status accorded to non-Muslims of Indian extraction was a violation of family and village pride. Similarly, within the Hindu community caste, class and linguistic factors played an important role in determining the choice of a marital partner.

However, over time with education, social stratification and greater individual choice on marriage partners, some degree of tolerance emerged for religiously and ethnically mixed marriages, including marriages with non-Muslims. In many instances, where religious boundaries were crossed due to marriage, it was incumbent for the non-Muslim spouse to embrace Islam (Khan 2009). Although the main reason for the prevalence of endogamous marriage was to preserve religious group identity it also helped to solidify social ties between and amongst families. In this instance the choice of a marital partner was more a family arrangement than an individual choice. As far as the marriage form was concerned, monogamy was generally the rule among all faith groupings, with some differences especially amongst those belonging to the Islamic faith. Cross-cousin marriages were prevalent to some extent amongst those of South Indian descent, and those belonging to the Islamic faith (Mesthrie, 1990). Endogamous marriages even to this day continue to be a trend for the different groupings within the Diaspora but there are instances where these trends are crossed resulting in marriages across faith groups in the name of love.

Overview of Marriage Policy, Trends and Patterns in Marital Stability

Marriage and family life in South Africa has largely been shaped by the legacy of colonialism and apartheid. Racial segregation prevented the mixing of racial groups but within each of the racial groups no restrictions were placed on interfaith marriages. For example during the early years of colonialism, marriage across race groups although considered taboo, one finds that many Dutch and British soldiers cohabited with the local indigenous populace resulting in the emergence of a race group dubbed coloured. Even on the sugar plantations of the Natal coastland, colonial sugar barons forced indentured females into sexual favours and on the extreme perpetrated sexual violence (Desai and Vahed 2007: 18). Amongst the more affluent passenger Indians intimate relationships with white females was prevalent to some extent, often in a clandestine way. Marriages amongst Indians and coloureds were also prevalent to a certain extent. In the Cape Peninsula, where large communities of Coloured people are concentrated, marriages between Indian and Cape Coloureds were prevalent. However, with the advent of apartheid in the late 1940s cross-racial marriages were restricted legislatively through the

promulgation of the Mixed Marriages Act of 1949 which prohibited marriages across race groups, but marriages within same race and faith groups was permitted (Rebirth Africa Life on the Continent 2000: 1).

Historically, the Marriage Act of 1961 was the only law which provided for the recognition of marriage as defined by the South African legal system. The Act was racially and culturally biased in that it did not recognise relationships formalised according to indigenous African rites (“customary” marriages) as well as relationships formalised in accordance with Hindu or Muslim customary law. Large sections of the Indian Diaspora were victims of such a legal system. With the legislation of the Recognition of Customary Marriages Act, Act 12 of 1998 which came into effect in November 2000 (Budlender *et al.* 2004) some measure of relief appears imminent for the recognition of religiously ordained marriages. To provide some indication on marriage trends, the Community Agency for Social Enquiry study of 1998 cited by Budlender *et al.* (2004: 10) at a national workshop towards improving registration of divorces and marriages in South Africa is worth a reflection. In the survey, 34 per cent of the respondents cited that their marriage was in keeping within the provisions of civil law, 37 per cent through customary law and a significant 44 per cent of marriages were formalised through religious rites which points to the direction of national marriage trends (Bah and Rama 1999). Specifically within the Indian community, Budlender *et al.* (2004: 15) cite that as at 1996, 26,396 and 22,499 marriages were concluded by traditional rites within the Muslim and Hindu communities respectively for persons aged 16 years and above.

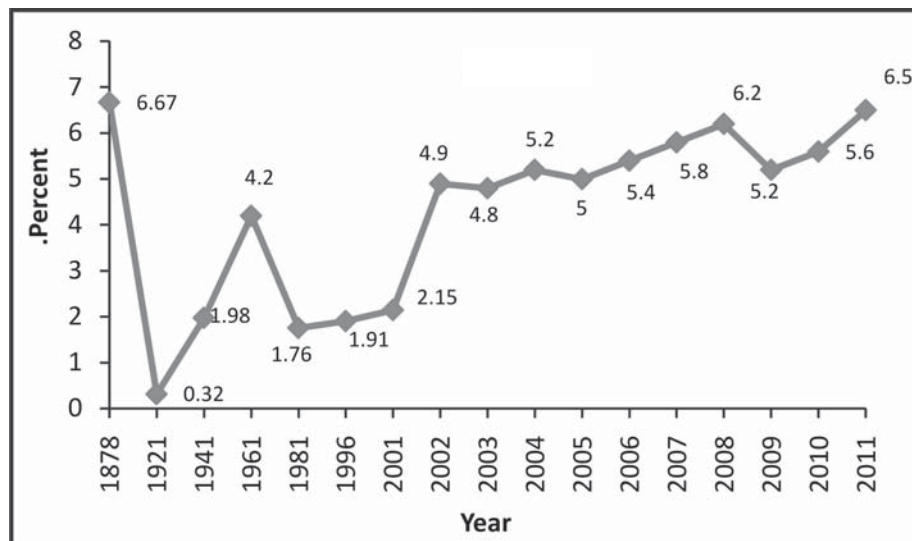
Although the new South African Constitution (1996) has liberalised child and family law, Sloth-Nielsen and van Heerden (2003) assert that it does not expressly protect the right to family life. Instead the constitutional provision on dignity, equality and concern for marginalised groups in South African society has heralded a wide range of revision on the legal meaning of family, how the law should protect family members and the reshaping of relationships between family members including children. The authors assert that whilst there was an absence of rights to protect family life, the constitution had advanced developments in areas such as domestic violence, custody allocation of children, recognition of same sex marriages, religious and customary marriages and the status and rights of illegitimate children. Given that South Africa represents a wide range of multi-cultural and multi-faith communities dubbed as the Rainbow Nation, the rationale for not prescribing the right to family life is argued on the grounds that families are constituted, function and are dissolved in a variety of ways hence precluding the need for constitutionalising it (Sloth-Nielsen and van Heerden 2003: 130). As a consequence, South African family law is undergoing piecemeal revisions to accommodate the diverse family and marriage arrangements in the country.

The Bill of Rights in South Africa states that the government may not discriminate directly or indirectly against any individual based on religion; in addition, no one may deny members of a religious group either the right to practice their religion, or to form, join, and maintain religious associations with other members of that group. Cases of discrimination against persons on the grounds of religious freedom may be taken to the Constitutional Court. The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom (Statistics South Africa 2012).

Interestingly, of all race groups, in so far as the Muslim community is concerned, polygamy is contested in terms of the Constitution since it guarantees the right to freedom of religion to all South Africans in respect of customs and traditions prescribed therein. It is on the basis of the latter that the foundation for the recognition and application of religious family law systems is to be found, allowing for religious groups to lobby for legislative recognition without constitutionalising the right to have any system of family law recognised by the state. Muslim Personal Law (MPL) provides men with the justification to practice polygamy, although monogamy is generally the rule for adherents of the Islamic faith. Polygamy is supported by legislation in certain Muslim countries which include but not limited to infertility or long-term illness of the first wife and excessive wealth on the part of the husband making it possible for him to support widowed or divorced mothers (Moosa, 2009). In the case of South Africa, Muslims of Indian and those of Malaysian origin are currently in the process of lobbying the constitutional court for the recognition of Muslim Personal Law (MPL), which if accepted will provide protection to both women and children within a polygamous family relationship.³

The changes in the wider South African society since the beginning of liberalisation have led to two contradictory trends in marriage and family life. Bossard and Boll (1957: 185) observe that on the one hand, some previously oppressed and discriminated against minorities in the country are now (re)claiming their ethnic/cultural heritage with pride and therefore creating new social boundaries. On the other hand, the democratisation and liberalisation of the country has led to an intensification of inter-ethnic, inter-racial and inter-class interaction—that is, the breakdown, or crossing, of ethnic and other boundaries. With such high levels of social integration – a break away from the social polarisation of the past has ranked South Africa as “politically correct” in the spirit of nation building. Such social integration has added a new dimension to marriage and family life in South Africa with the emergence of interfaith marriages coupled with cross racial marriages. While trends in interfaith and cross racial marriages and its impact on marital stability is a matter for future study, in so far as the Indian diaspora is concerned it would appear that marital breakdown resulting in divorce or separation remains constant since their early social evolution as compared to nineteen years after democracy. It will be noted from Graph 1 that as early as 1878, 6.67% of the diasporic population were either divorced or separated which lowered significantly

to 1.76% in 1981 - the last statistical count during the apartheid era. However, when compared to the past 19 years since democracy there has been a steady increase in the actual percentage of divorces in civil marriages solemnised for the first time peaking similarly to trends observed in 1878. In 1996 the actual percentage for the diasporic community was 1.91% gradually increasing to 6.5% in 2011.



Graph 1: Marital Breakdown Trends amongst the South African Indian Diaspora for the Period 1878-2011 in Per cent

Source: Compiled, adapted and reanalysed from Statistics South Africa (2011) on Divorce and Marriage, Amoateng and Richter, (2003: 260-261) and Gustafson and Worku (2006) Marriage Rate Calculations.

Note: Through re-adaptation of the data from different sources, it provides a longitudinal trend on divorce/separation incidences for comparative purposes. It also confirms the assumption that in the early evolution of family life amongst the Indian diaspora, it was characterised by high levels of marital instability with an accelerated trend in the post-apartheid South Africa.

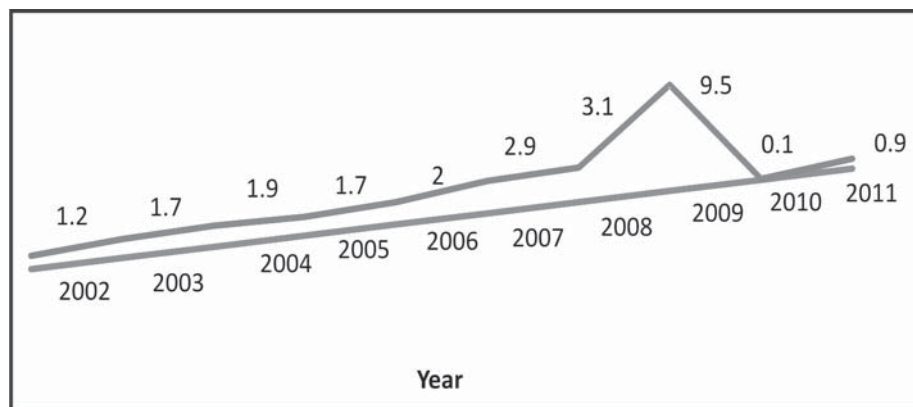
Such a trend from Graph 1 suggests that within the diasporic community divorce and marital instability trends had increased and gradually lowered during colonial times. Similar trend is noted during the apartheid era. Interestingly, in the post-democratic period the trend suggests a steady increase in the actual percentage of civil divorces. Such a trend in marital instability although provides a longitudinal insight on statistical patterns, it however does not isolate how interfaith marriages impact on the observed percentages. However, what this trend suggests is that the percentage of marital breakdown trends during the colonial period (1878) recorded the highest (6.67%) but reduced significantly during the later days of the apartheid era (1981) by 1.76%. In the post-democratic period marital breakdown rates has

escalated to 6.5% as at 2011 which is no different to that observed during the colonial period.

Interfaith Marriages and Marital Stability within the Indian Diasporic Community

In the conceptual framework, several studies have confirmed a correlation between interfaith marriages and marital instability globally. Data for this study was drawn from semi-structured interviews amongst a select group of respondents involved in interfaith marital relationships using a snowball sample of sixty six respondents. This section tests out whether the assumptions hold true for the Indian diasporic community in South Africa. However, no recorded statistics attest to the nature and extent of marital instability amongst the Indian diasporic community, but national data for all race groups as depicted in Graph 2 suggest that for the periods 2002 – 2009 a steady increase in civil divorces amongst mixed race and interfaith couples has been noted with the highest recorded for 2009 at 9.5%. This finding suggests that a correlation exists between cross racial and interfaith marriages and marital breakdown.

The empirical data derived from a snowball sample of 66 respondents in the Durban Metropolis is analysed to test how the Indian diasporic communities compare to national trends in respect of marital breakdown. This section will commence by providing a brief demographic profile of the study respondents gender, age, educational level, religious affiliation, form of solemnizing marriages followed by the marital status of respondents in interfaith relationships. Within the study population 33.3% and 66.7% were males and females respectively. In so far



Graph 2: Divorce Trends amongst South African Mixed Couples for the Period 2002-2011 in Per cent

Source: Compiled, adapted and reanalysed from Statistics South Africa (2011) on Divorce and Marriage

as the age distributions of respondents in interfaith marriages are concerned, almost 50% (47.4) of the respondents were below the age of 35 years suggesting that a significant percentage of respondents in the study are youthful.

TABLE 1: AGE DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS IN INTERFAITH MARRIAGES BY GENDER

<i>Age</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Total</i>
61+	1.7%	5.0%	6.7%
56 - 60	3.3%	6.7%	10.0%
51 - 55	6.0%	10.0%	16.0%
46 - 50	3.3%	11.7%	15.0%
41 - 45	2.3%	3.3%	5.6%
36 - 40	1.7%	3.3%	5.0%
31 - 35	5.0%	8.3%	13.3%
26 - 30	8.3%	8.3%	16.7%
22 - 25	0.0%	6.7%	6.7%
18 - 21	1.7%	2.7%	4.4%
Total	33.3%	66.7%	100.0%

From Table 2 it will be noted that cumulatively 73.6% of the study respondents had educational levels ranging from matric to university levels of which more than a quarter (26.6%) were in possession of either a university or technikon level of education.⁴

TABLE 2: AGE DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS IN INTERFAITH MARRIAGES BY GENDER

<i>Educational Level</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Total</i>
Grade 5 -	5.0%	10.0%	15.0%
Grade 9 -	3.3%	5.0%	8.3%
Grade 11	0.0%	3.3%	3.3%
Matric	20.3%	26.7%	47.0%
Technikon	1.7%	6.7%	8.3%
University	3.3%	15.0%	18.3%
Total	33.3%	66.7%	100.0%

Interestingly a closer examination of the educational levels of respondents suggests that females were better educated as compared to their male counterparts in all categories.

Table 3 depicts a breakdown of the religious affiliation of respondents by gender. A vast majority of respondents were of the Hindu faith (45%), followed by Islam (38%) and Christianity (15%). When analysed by gender it appears that females originating from the Hindu and Islamic faiths display a greater tendency to marry

outside of their respective faiths as compared to their male counterparts with the exception of Christianity in which a higher percentage (8.3%) of males as compared to females (6.3%) married outside of their faith.

TABLE 3: RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION OF RESPONDENTS BY GENDER

<i>Religious Affiliation</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Total</i>
African Traditional Culture	0.0%	1.7%	1.7%
Christian	8.3%	6.7%	15.0%
Hindu	6.7%	38.3%	45.0%
Islam	18.3%	20.0%	38.3%
Total	33.3%	66.7%	100.0%

The formalisation of marriages amongst respondents in the study took a wide range of forms. Although almost 50% (48.3%) of the respondents formalised their marriages both through common law and religious ceremonies, a significant percent (28.3%) married religiously whilst 1.7% of the respondents in terms of common law only. In so far as gender differences on the formalisation of marriage is concerned, female respondents ranked the highest on religious forms of marriage with 17.4% of the study population reporting accordingly as compared to males at 11.7%.

TABLE 4: FORMALISATION OF MARRIAGE AMONGST RESPONDENTS BY DIFFERENT FORMS AND GENDER

<i>Formalisation of Marriage</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Total</i>
Religious	11.7%	17.4%	28.3%
Common law only	0.0%	1.7%	1.7%
Both	16.7%	31.7%	48.3%
Cohabitation	0.0%	2.4%	1.7%
Undisclosed	5.0%	11.7%	16.7%
Total	33.3%	66.7%	100.0%

It will be noted from Table 4 that a significant number of respondents (16.7%) did not disclose the way in which they have gone about to formalise their marriage. One explanation for the non-disclosure of the way in which their marriage was formalised may be attributed to cohabitation which is generally considered a religious taboo within the community and subject to social ostracism.

From Table five it will be noted almost 80% (78.3%) of respondents within interfaith marital relationships continue to enjoy marital stability, whilst 8.3% were divorced, 11.7% separated and 1.7% were deserted by their spouses. This finding is significant in the light of the fact that in Graph 2 since the post-apartheid era mixed marriages across racial groups has shown a steady decrease in civil divorces (0.9% as at 2011), whilst in this study interfaith marriages for the Indian diasporic community shows an exceptionally high level of instability (13.4%) and breakdown (8.3%).

TABLE 5: MARITAL STATUS OF RESPONDENTS BY GENDER

<i>Marital Status</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Total</i>
Married	30.0%	48.3%	78.3%
Divorced	1.7%	6.7%	8.3%
Separated	1.7%	9.0%	11.7%
Deserted	0.0%	1.7%	1.7%
Total	33.3%	66.7%	100.0%

When compared to gender and marital stability, the finding suggests that female respondents tended to have higher levels of marital stability as compared to their male counterparts. Such a trend may be partly attributed to females bringing into the marriage stronger levels of emotional maturity on religious issues due to their higher levels of education as compared to their male counterparts in the study. The prevalence of higher educational levels amongst females in the study is an indicator that education is an important factor that can influence interfaith marital stability.

The different forms of marriage and gender indicating the high levels of marital stability amongst this study cohort are listed in Table 6. It will be noted almost 50% (48.5%) of the respondents enjoyed a high level of marital stability and had to make no adjustment, adaptation, negotiate religious differences nor they had to change their religions. The highest level of interfaith marital stability was recorded for females (30.1%) as compared to their male counterparts (18.4%).

TABLE 6: FACTORS IDENTIFIED BY RESPONDENTS FOR INTERFAITH MARRIAGE STABILITY

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Total</i>
Adaptation/Adjustment	5.1%	10.1%	15.2%
Tolerance	5.1%	5.1%	10.2%
Negotiated Differences	3.0%	2.7%	5.7%
Change Religion	1.7%	19.4%	21.1%
None	18.4%	30.1%	48.5%
Total	33.3%	66.7%	100%

For interfaith marital stability, the data suggests that female respondents had to make higher levels of adjustment, adaptation, tolerance, negotiate differences and change their religion. In so far as interfaith marital relationship is concerned, the data suggests that females (19.4%) had to change their religion of origin during marriage as compared to an insignificant percentage (1.7%) of male respondents. The findings therefore suggest that changing ones religion offers greater likelihood of marital stability as compared to making adaptation, adjustment, tolerance and negotiating differences within interfaith marriages.

At total of 27.2% of respondents in the study reported experiencing marital stability challenges for a wide variety of socio-religious reasons as illustrated in

Table 7. Religious conflict tops the list of challenges amongst 17% of the study sample of which females (11.9%) reported more than their male (5.1%) counterparts of such a challenge. In so far as interaction with family members, females are to a certain extent as compared to their male counterparts, tend to be more challenged. However in so far as to whether the latter two variables are influenced by religious challenges is not fully ascertained in this study for the simple reason even in like religion marriages, interaction with family members and conflict arising from child care practices is also prevalent as marriage and family challenge. Despite this, it would appear that religious conflict as a singular variable can be identified as presenting challenges for interfaith marriages.

TABLE 7: CHALLENGES FACED WITHIN INTERFAITH MARRIAGES

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Total</i>
Interaction with Family	1.7%	6.8%	5.1%
Conflict with Children	1.7%	3.4%	5.1%
Religious Conflict	5.1%	11.9%	17.0%
Total	6.8%	22.1%	27.2%

Conclusion

The study highlights interfaith marriage amongst the South African Indian Diaspora is similar to trends, patterns and stresses for marital stability as compared to such forms of marriages in other parts of the world. A relationship exists between religious diversity and marital stability amongst interfaith couples. From a socio-historical perspective interfaith marriage amongst the South African Indian Diaspora is not a new social dynamic since their arrival to the country despite the fact that religions of different persuasions (Hinduism, Islam and Christianity) prescribe and proscribe the institution of marriage based on certain divine principles. Despite such restrictions, the study highlights that couples entering the domain of interfaith marriages based on love make certain compromises for marital stability resulting in high levels of marital satisfaction. This is contrary to what has been theoretically conceptualised about interfaith marriages in research studies elsewhere in the world. For interfaith marriages to sustain stability, the study highlights that either spouse has to make compromises and adjustments in so far as their religious belief is concerned. It is often the female that has to make such a compromise. Even though the female has to make compromises, the ability to do so may be attributed to their higher level of education and the emotional maturity that accompanies it to manage interfaith differences for marital stability. Since religion plays a dominant role in determining the success or otherwise for marital stability, it comes as little surprise that an overwhelming number of interfaith couples have solemnised their marriages by both secular and religious formality or through religious customs and traditions only. Trends and patterns on interfaith marriages suggest that couples are likely to

marry younger, and are better educated. Interfaith marriages amongst Hindu and Muslim couples are more common as compared to Hindu-Christian or Muslim-Christian faith couples. An interesting finding in the study is the comparison of marital stability within interfaith marriages in the diaspora as against national trends on mixed marriages. It is observed that marital instability and breakdown for the diaspora is overwhelmingly higher as compared to the national trends for mixed marriages alone. This finding strongly suggests that religious differences within interfaith marriages have a strong influence in determining marital stability. From a longitudinal perspective, when looking at marital stability within the Diaspora as a whole illustrates that the level of breakdown in marriages since their early arrival in the 1860s onwards has recorded a high percentage but lowered towards the end of the colonial years. Similar trends have been noted during the early years of apartheid with a gradual reduction closer to its demise. However, a contrary trend is noted in the post-apartheid era with a sudden increase in marital breakdown rates no different to that recorded in the early colonial years. Such a finding affirms that the institution of marriage and family life within the diaspora is sensitive to social and political changes as a whole. A new challenge for the Diaspora coupled with interfaith marriages is the increasing trends in cross-racial marriages post-democracy. As a country, which is just encountering racial inclusiveness, cross racial marriages are more than likely to be another source of challenge for marriage and family life. National marital instability trends amongst mixed couples as highlighted in this study show a sudden decrease in terms of the number of recorded civil divorces as compared to trends observed in the Diaspora which is exceedingly high for this study cohort. Cohabitation, amongst interfaith and cross racial couples within the Diaspora given the more liberalised social-political transformation taking place in the country, can in the future add a new dimension to marriage and family life within the Diaspora all in the name of love.

Notes

1. The authors would like to thank MsZubeida Ahmed, Ms Arleen Ramlall and Mrs Sharon Ori for their assistance in administering the questionnaires.
2. In Hinduism, Yajña (Sanskrit; also anglicized as Yagna, Yagya or Yadnya) is a ritual of sacrifice.
3. It must be noted that the Muslim community in South Africa is not in full agreement with the MPL and gender rights group have shown strong opposition to this Bill as it comprises women's right in a variety of ways. The strongest support for this Bill originates from Muslim theological bodies who entrench the position that the MPL embraces all facets of family life in keeping with divine prescriptions that is not compatible with secular family law provisions in the country.
4. It would have been interesting to find out the rate of divorce or stability among the two highest interfaith marriage groups (age groups 51-55; 31-35; 26-30;). However, we are trying to establish a profile of respondents distributed by age and gender to look at the most

popular age category at which interfaith marriages are concentrated. We conclude that for this cohort interfaith couples are youthful cumulatively. A deeper analysis of age and interfaith marriage could be an interesting study, but for this paper it suffices to profile the respondents.

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