

**Understanding the Custom of Marriage by Elopement
among the Nepalis of Sikkim**

A Dissertation Submitted

To

Sikkim University



**In Partial Fulfilment of the Requirement for the
Degree of Master of Philosophy**

By

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
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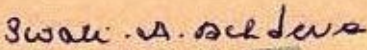
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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the dissertation entitled “Understanding the Custom of Marriage by Elopement among the Nepalis of Sikkim” submitted to Sikkim University for the award of the Degree of **Master of Philosophy** is my original work. Any content or any part of this dissertation has not been submitted to any other institution or for any academic purpose.


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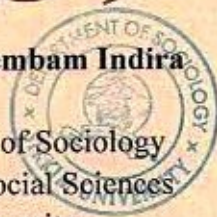
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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled “**Understanding the Custom of Marriage by Elopement among the Nepalis of Sikkim**” submitted to Sikkim University in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the award of the degree of **Master of Philosophy** in the **Department of Sociology**, embodies the result of bona fide research work carried out by **Jashi Maya Gurung** under my guidance and supervision. No part of the dissertation has been submitted for any other degree, diploma, associate-ship or fellowship.

All the assistance and help received during the course of the investigation has been duly acknowledge by her.

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CONTENTS

| | |
|---|-----------------|
| Acknowledgement | |
| List of Tables | |
| List of Figures | |
| | <i>Page No.</i> |
| CHAPTER 1 | 1-28 |
| 1.1 Introduction | 1-2 |
| 1.2 Statement of the Problem | 3-6 |
| 1.3 Literature Review | 6- 17 |
| 1.4 Conceptual Framework | 18-22 |
| 1.5 Rationale | 22-23 |
| 1.6 Objective | 23 |
| 1.7 Research Question | 23-24 |
| 1.8 Methodology | 24-25 |
| 1.9 Area of Study | 26 |
| 1.10 Limitation of the Study | 26-27 |
| 1. 11 Chapterisation | 27-28 |
| CHAPTER 2: Historical Backdrop of Nepalis in Sikkim | 29-52 |
| 2.1 Introduction | 29 |
| 2.2 Sikkim: A Brief profile | 29-31 |
| 2.3 Ethnic composition of Sikkim | 31-32 |
| 2.4 Locating Nepalis in Sikkim; Who are Nepalis? | 32-34 |
| 2.4.1 Migration and Settlement of Nepalis in Sikkim | 34-36 |
| 2.4.2 Identifying Nepali' as Sikkimese origin | 36-38 |
| 2.4.3 Common Festivals and Dress code of Nepalis | 38-39 |
| 2.4.4 Caste structure of Nepalis | 40-45 |
| 2.4.5 Clan and lineage System | 45-48 |
| 2.4.6 Food Culture | 48-50 |
| 2.5 Categorization of Caste and Communities under Reservation Policy | 50-52 |
| CHAPTER 3: Social- Cultural and Economic Background of the Respondents | 53-75 |
| 3.1 Introduction | 53 |
| 3.2 Gender of the Respondents | 53-54 |
| 3.3 Age of the Respondents | 55-56 |
| 3.4 Educational Background of the Respondents | 56-59 |
| 3.5 Occupation of the Respondents | 59-61 |
| 3.5 Monthly Income of the Respondents | 61-62 |
| 3.6 Religion of the Respondents | 63-64 |
| 3.7 Marital status of Respondents | 65-66 |
| 3.8 Types of Family of the Respondents | 66-67 |
| 3.9 Caste of the Respondents | 67-69 |
| 3.10Type of Marriage among the Respondents | 69-71 |
| 3.11Forms of Marriage | 72-74 |
| 3.14 Jari Payment | 74-77 |

| | |
|--|-----------------|
| CHAPTER 4: Nepali Marriage Systems: Rites and Rituals | 78-108 |
| 4.1 Introduction | 78 |
| 4.2 Life cycle Rituals | 78-79 |
| 4.2.1 Birth Rites | 79-80 |
| 4.2.3 Puberty Rites | 80-81 |
| 4.2.4 Death Rites | 81-82 |
| 4.3 Marriage System among the Nepalis of Sikkim | 82-83 |
| 4.3.1 Friendship and Courtship period | 83-87 |
| 4.3.2 The process of an Arranged Marriage | 88-89 |
| 4.3.3 Involvement of parents and Relatives | 89-90 |
| 4.3.4 The engagement ceremony | 90-91 |
| 4.3.5 Wedding Day | 91-92 |
| 4.4 Procedure of Solemnizing an Elopement Marriage | 93-95 |
| 4.4.1 Elopement Day | 95-96 |
| 4.4.2 The involvement of Mediator | 96-97 |
| 4.4.3 Chor-ko-Shor Rituals | 97-99 |
| 4.4.4 Sindur-Potey | 99-100 |
| 4.4.5 Dhogbhet (Reception) | 100-101 |
| 4.4.6 The Bride-price and Exchange of Gifts | 102-105 |
| 4.4.7 Bhagdatta | 105 |
| 4.4.8 Sending away and Receiving the Bride | 105-108 |
| CHAPTER 5: Culture of Elopement Marriage in Sikkim; An Empirical Analysis | 109- 156 |
| 5.1 Introduction | 109-110 |
| 5.2 The Cultural Norms of Endogamy | 110 -112 |
| 5.2.1 Inter-Religion | 112- 117 |
| 5.2.2 Class Difference | 117-122 |
| 5.2.3 Inter- Region | 122-126 |
| 5.2.4 Inter-caste | 126-131 |
| 5.2.5 Inter-Community Marriages | 131-132 |
| 5.3 Contributory Factor | 133 |
| 5.3.1 Transition to Modernity | 133 |
| 5.3.2 Education and Modern job implications in Elopement Marriage | 134-136 |
| 5.3.3 Role of Social Media | 136-137 |
| 5.4 Various Challenges Faced by Couples Related to Elopement Marriage | 137-139 |
| 5.4.1 Consequences of Early Marriage | 139-140 |
| 5.4.2 Marital Problems: Separation and Divorce | 140-144 |
| 5.3.4 Social and Ritual Exclusion | 144-149 |
| 5.5 Local Bodies Role in Marital Related Issues | 149-152 |
| 5.6 Role of Samaj in Marriage | 152-153 |
| 5.7 State's Responsibility in Marriage | 153-154 |
| 5.7 Role of Caste Association | 154-156 |
| CHAPTER 6: Conclusion | 157-169 |
| Bibliography | 170-177 |
| Appendix | 178-182 |

LIST OF TABLES

| Table No. | Title | Page No. |
|------------------|---|-----------------|
| 2.1 | District wise Distribution of Rural and Urban Population in Sikkim | 30 |
| 2.2 | Distribution of Population according to Marital Status in Sikkim (1981-2021) Census | 31 |
| 2.3 | Different Ethnic Groups and the Socio-Economic Categories in Sikkim | 51 |
| 3.2 | Gender of Respondents | 53 |
| 3.3 | Age of Respondents | 55 |
| 3.4 | Education of Respondents | 56 |
| 3.5 | Monthly Income Respondents | 61 |
| 3.6 | Religion of Respondents | 62 |
| 3.8 | Types of Family Respondents | 66 |
| 3.9.1 | Caste Structure of the Respondents | 68 |

LIST OF FIGURES

| Figure No. | Title | Page No. |
|-------------------|---|-----------------|
| 2.1 | Caste Hierarchy of Nepali Society | 43 |
| 3.5 | Occupation of the Respondents | 60 |
| 3.7 | Marital Status of Respondents | 65 |
| 3.9 | Caste categorization of the Respondents | 67 |
| 3.10 | Type of Marriage among the Respondents | 69 |
| 3.11 | Forms of Marriages | 72 |
| 3.12 | Reproducing a copy of written record on Jari-Kal | 72-73 |
| 4.1 | Meeting Place | 85 |
| 5.1 | Types of Marriage | 110 |
| 5.2 | Types of Endogamy | 112 |
| 5.4 | Shows respondent's choice of local/non-local spouse | 124 |

CHAPTER I

Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

Marriage is a social institution found in all societies. Every society has certain socially acceptable and obligatory norms and rules to be followed by its members while choosing a spouse. Marriage sanctifies the permanence of the union of two individuals by performing certain rituals and ceremonies. Since time immemorial, it is regarded as an essential custom, which must be performed as a life cycle ritual by almost all the individuals in the society. According to Murdock "Sexual unions without economic cooperation are common, and there are relationships between men and women involving a division of labor without sexual gratification, but marriage exists only when the economic and the sexual gratification are united in one relationship, and this combination occurs only in marriage" (Murdock 1949:8). Customarily, marriage plays a crucial role in socially legitimizing the sexual relationship between the couple, endorse procreation, and sanctioning between the inheritance of property and family name. A society without the institution of marriage would be in promiscuity, therefore, to regulate a society from having a sexual relationship with close family members and relatives including mother and son, brother and sister, and father and daughter, there is a ban on incest relation.

For Gennepe (1960), marriage is the incorporation of a stranger into a group. Universally, it is regarded as a union between a man and woman and grants them socially approved status as husband and wife. Lowie (1932) describes marriage as a permanent bond between the mates and shares biological, economic, and social functions including education. It has also been argued that it gives a conjugal right

meaning a socially approved sexual right to the couples in the family that results in the procreation of children (David & Jain, 2009;188). In Indian society, marriage is a lifelong union and in the married life of the couple, the wife generally plays the role of a caregiver who takes care of the socialization and emotional needs of others in the family and the husband mostly plays the role of breadwinner to support the family.

According to Abraham (2015), Hindu marriage is a sacrament and a religious duty, for Christian, marriage is a sacrament that cannot be dissolved very easily and for Muslims, it is a contract, which cannot be annulled easily. In almost all known societies, depending on the religious background of the couple, various rituals are performed as part of the marriage. In the case of civil marriage, these rituals are non-existent. In both cases, they are bound to register the marriage under the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955 ¹or under the Special Marriage Act, 1954 ² as mandated by the Supreme Court of India. With the amendment of Article 377 ³ on 6th September 2018, the Supreme Court of India has permitted marriage between two individuals of the same sex or homosexual marriage. Hence, marriage no longer remains only between a man and a woman but between the two individuals of the same sex or different sexes. The definition of marriage changes over time and the meaning of marriage differs across religions. Developmental idealism relating to family suggests that modern people aspired to the attributes of individualism, intergenerational independence, marriages at mature ages, and courtship as part of the process leading to marriage, gender equality, and planned and low fertility as the positive impact of modernization (Thornton & Arbor, 2010).

¹Hindu Marriage Act 1955 was enacted in the Indian constitution to legally formalize marriage of two individuals belonging from different socio-economic backgrounds but within the same religion.

² Special Marriage Act 1954 enables different religious couples to legally solemnize marriage.

³ Article 377, 2018 have legalized the homosexual marriage in Indian society.

1.2 Statement of the problem

There are many forms of acquiring mates or choosing a spouse to establish a formal marriage and family. Following Jha (1994), the different forms of acquiring mates among the primitive society include acquiring mates by negotiation, acquiring mates by services, acquiring mates by exchange, acquiring mates by prohibition, acquiring mates by capture, acquiring mates by the intrusion, acquiring mates by trial and acquiring mates by elopement. In many parts of India, arranged marriage is the predominant form of selecting a spouse where the parents and kins of both the bride and groom play important role in choosing a 'suitable' spouse for their children. In an arranged marriage, spouses are expected to build affection with their partners and the rest of the family members after marriage (Dube,1990).

In some societies, the practice of elopement is considered a contemporary issue while in other societies it has been a customary practice. Among the Kalasha tribe of Pakistan, marriage by elopement is considered a modern culture and among most of the Nepalis communities in Nepal choosing a spouse through elopement has been a customary practice (Naz, 2015). Elopement is found to be practiced among the Fiji of Oceania, Gusli of Kenya, Iban of Borneo, Red Indians of Brazil, Kurnai of Australia, Muria Gonds of Bustar, Bagata, Baiga tribe of Central India, Zou tribe of Manipur, Ho tribes of Bihar and Khond tribes of Andhra Pradesh (Jha,1994). However, each community/tribe has a different ritual to formalize the marriage.

To a considerable extent, marriage by elopement is looked down upon by people in many societies of India like Rajasthan, Bihar, Kerala, Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Haryana, and Punjab (Engineer, 1988; Chowdhry,2007). In parts of India, the eloped

couples often must face the tyranny of their relatives like honor killing ⁴which is often reported in the media because the couple who are in love try to choose their life partner which is not according to the prescribed structure and customary norm of the society. Often, the couple who are involved in inter-caste, inter-community, inter-religion relationships feels that their partners will not be accepted by the parents and relatives, hence they decide to run away from home, which they believed was the only option available to them (Chowdhry,2007)

Contextualizing the study, Nepali communities of Himalayan regions of India like Kalimpong, Darjeeling, Sikkim share many similar features of culture, caste, marriage, festivals, etc., with the Nepalese of Nepal. Although many Nepali communities have been practicing marriage through the process of elopement, earlier it used to be confined within the caste or community (Parker,2013). However, in recent years, there have been changes from endogamous marriage practices to inter-caste marriages (ibid).

In Sikkim, different types of acquiring spouses for marriage were prevalent in the olden days, such as marriage by negotiation, marriage by elopement, marriage by capture, and marriage by service. Nonetheless, the commonly prevalent customary practice has been arranged marriage and marriage by elopement (also known as Bhagawney pratha or chori biya in Nepali) ⁵among the Nepali community of Sikkim. The book entitled, Human Ecological and Statutory Status of ethnic Entities in Sikkim (2017) reported that arranged marriage was prevalent in all Nepali communities. Besides, except for the Bahun community, marriage by elopement has been a

⁴Honor Killing is a social practice that is found in the Northern and Southern part of India, where inter-marriage with low caste is punishable. Honor killing is socially sanctioned punishment where men and women are brutally murder and punished for bringing dishonor in the family, caste and community.

⁵Bhagawney Pratha/ Chori Biya is one of the traditional forms of marriage in Nepali culture known to be conducted by the all-ethnic communities except the Bahuns.

customarily prevalent and accepted way of acquiring life partners among the Chettris and Matwali⁶ communities of Sikkim. Although inter-caste marriage among the different caste groups has been prevailing, in many cases, marriage between so-called 'high caste and low caste' is found to be problematic in the Nepali society of Sikkim (Subba,1989). Even if there is a conflict between the families of an eloped girl and boy, they try to resolve the issue through negotiations. Liwang (2000) states that marriage by elopement among the Nepali communities is generally accepted by the family and community members after conducting some necessary rituals. However, if the conflict persists and cannot be resolved at the societal level, State intervention is also being sought in other parts of Indian society (Chowdhary,2007).

With this backdrop, the present research focuses on elopement-based marriage in Sikkim among Nepalis. The reason for focusing only on marriage by elopement is to unfurl the misconception associated with the term "elopement". Elopement-based marriage is taken for granted by the members of the Nepali society as it has been customarily practiced. When anyone from outside the state learns that elopement is widely practiced by the Sikkimese people across ethnic groups, they are surprised and the very first question they ask is "why elopement" especially if the family has no objection to solemnizing the alliances of the couple. The next question is why they don't go for an arranged marriage.

These questions intrigue the researcher as falling in love followed by elopement which is frowned upon in mainland Indian culture and other parts of the world is practiced as a customarily acceptable way leading to solemnizing a marriage among many ethnic communities of Sikkim. Although there exists a diverse range of cultural

⁶Matwali communities include the various ethnic groups who are in the habit of drinking and eating non-vegetarian food.

practices linked to marriage in different times and spaces, the dominant cultural pattern and behavior observed by many of its members may be heavily biased towards the majoritarianism experiences, relegating the cultural practice of the minorities. Therefore, this research attempts to find out, understand and interpret the socio-cultural and economic significance of marriage through elopement in the study area.

1.3 Review of Literature

The concept of marriage, types of marriage, and rituals related to marriage have been studied by various anthropologists and sociologists. For the present research, relevant literature has been reviewed to comprehend the historical backdrop and changing norms and practices related to marriage systems in India. Another section of the literature reviewed has focused on understanding the changes and continuity of different aspects of the marriage system occurring in Nepali society. For this purpose, the literature has been divided into three sub-headings which are discussed below.

1.3.1 Caste, marital choices, and changes in Indian society

Srinivas (1952) revealed the existence of caste hierarchy in India in which high caste groups practiced arranged marriage, marrying a girl before puberty, widowed burning on their husband's funeral pyre, and the low valuation of daughters during the colonial period. On the other hand, the low caste groups although had a different inferior position in the social ladder of hierarchy practice more self-choice marriage, have flexibility in marriage and divorce. He pointed out that the book-view shows caste as static and close-ended, in reality 'Sanskritization', the process in which the lower group was changing their status and power by adopting the culture of higher caste was happening. Since independence, many developmental changes in the institutional system have been amended to protect the fundamental rights and privileges of citizens

but still, the caste hierarchy in ritual practices are highly maintained during marriage and other social practices.

Dumont and Sainsbury (1980) argued that for many centuries the existence of the caste system of Hindu society has been based on purity and impurity. 'Hierarchy' is the essence of caste in which caste stands for inequality both in theory and practice. The authors argued that the two extremes of the caste hierarchy are the Brahmins at the top and the untouchables at the bottom wherein different caste groups have different 'power' and 'status' in Indian society. They argued that marriage alliance is the means for preserving status and hierarchy that occupies a prominent place in ritual and social life in India.

Gupta (1976) in his study mentioned the prevalence of eight different types of marriage found in Hindu Scriptures in 200 B.C to 800 A.D. The eight forms of marriage are Brahma, Daiva, Arsha, Prajapatya, Asura, Gandharva, Rakshasa, and Paisacha. Among these different types of marriages, he argued that Brahma marriage (arranged marriage) is more purposeful for the family because from the ages Brahma or commonly known as arranged marriage is valued more in Hindu society. He discusses the existence of the exchange of gifts between the families, but the non-existence of dowry demand in Brahma marriages. The bride price has been there in the Asura form of marriage. He argues Gandharva or the elopement marriage refers to marriage by mutual consent of the couple besides parents' consent. Gupta's study has also highlighted the changes in mate selection in Indian society, He has critically analyzed the marriage patterns and gave the example of the most literate society of India, i.e., Kerala where even the most educated individuals have favored arranged marriage more than love marriage. He cautiously argued that arranged marriage is most favored in the Indian context because of its structural setting which is different

from western societies. He highlighted that the marriage patterns of modern societies have led to negative consequences on family, religious structure, kinship ties, and stratification systems.

Crowin's (1977) study in a small village called Mahishadal in West Bengal among the Indian Bengali society has revealed that even with the existence of traditional Hindu customary rule of endogamy, a few couples and families are accepting inter-caste love marriage. His study has highlighted that because of the enactment of the secular marriage Act 1954, the couple has got equal treatment towards the mate selection with or without parental consent. His study found that the locales are giving more preference to class over caste.

Dube (1990,2008) in his study on Indian society has revealed the background of Indian society where the existence of different types of marriage and customary practices were mentioned. He believed that marriage strengthens kinship and family. He points out that the joint and extended family took the initiative in selecting the spouse for their children. He stated that in many Indian societies, arranged marriage was predominantly found in which negotiation and careful calculation existed and in a few tribal societies elopements have also been found. Those who have a marriage by elopement solemnized either by taking the legal procedures of the Special Marriage Act 1954 or ritually conducting the marriage in Arya Samaj temple. Dube has also revealed endogamy and exogamy as well as hypergamy and hypogamy rules of marriage. His studies found the preferences of one's own caste and religion while seeking alliances in marriages.

Chowdhry (2017) discloses that the traditional marriage system supports the endogamous customs, caste hierarchy, dictatorial, and at times uses violent methods

in rural and semi-urban north India. These traditional orthodox authorities of family, caste, and community are slowly challenged by establishing a new kind of inter-caste alliance by the couple. Her study in Haryana and Punjab found that couples are involved in self-choice marriages and marriage by elopement has become a new way toward establishing a family. She pointed out that the popular Hindi film culture based on the romantic notion of love has influenced the couple to go ahead with self-choice marriages. She argues that both formal and informal body the caste panchayat, community, and family criminalized runaway marriages as marriage by elopement symbolizes dishonoring the family traditional values as well as family's status. As a punishment, 'honor killing' was meted out by the upper caste family for uprooting the customary marriage norms.

Dhanda (2012) has focused on various cases of a runaway or the elopement marriage of people belonging to different caste and communities, between the inter-caste and inter-religion couples. The author also revealed that the runaway couples usually marry in Arya Samaj Temple in Haryana where pandits perform a short ritual to solemnize the marriage. Thereafter, the couples appealed to the legal court for marriage registration and requested the state to provide them protection from their family and kin members for fear of harm by the couple's relatives.

Banerjee (2013) has critically examined the structure of the modern Indian arranged marriage system in which the commercial matrimonial advertisement is playing the role of agents in the marriage market. He has also talked about the contemporary upper-middle-class Bengali society in which despite the economic and educational upliftment of an individual, caste endogamy is preferred. He points out that unlike before where parents and relatives play an important role in selecting a spouse, at present new forms of advertisement in the media such as newspapers, various

matrimonial websites provide opportunities in arranging spouses. His study found that when a woman marries outside the caste, she prefers to marry higher or like her caste and qualification whereas when a man marries outside the caste, he chooses to marry a girl from lower than his caste also.

Singh & Sekhar's (2013) study on inter-caste marriage in Indian society has talked about the changing dimensions that are taking place in the traditional practices of marriage. They argued that modernization, globalization, and industrialization brought changes in the traditional marriage practices.

Bhandari (2020) has discussed the modern changes that are initiated by the educated and modern family. His study shows the changing dimension that is taking place in the institution of family, kinship, and marriage in Indian society. He points out the changes in the marriage age, role of the family in accepting the pre-marital relationship of the couple. The author found that family gives tremendous importance to the qualities that a person seeks in a partner to be a suitable spouse. After critically examining the author found that while choosing a suitable spouse along with the caste and class factors, other subjective qualities are also taken into consideration in the modern time. He also highlighted the pertinent issues of the reproduction of class and status.

1.3.2 Marriage Practices and Rituals among the Nepalese of Nepal

Barnouw's (1955) study on Eastern Nepalese Marriage Customs and Kinship Organization has discussed the marriage patterns that existed among the Nepalese in the traditional era. His study found the existence of elopement-based marriage or theft marriage since traditional times. This form of marriage was practiced among the Matwali community including Rai, Sherpa, Magar, Gurung, Subba in the Himalayan

region of Nepal. However, his study shows the Tagadharis or the high caste of Nepal did not practice stealing type of marriage. His study has also emphasized on the social restrictions among young boys and girl before marriage. However, the boy and girl who were fond of each other have chosen elopement-based marriage. The study also has details about the process of elopement-based marriage.

L. Jones (1977) discussed the different types of marriage that are found in Nepal - arranged marriage, 'chori biya' (marriage by theft), or marriage by elopement and adulterous marriage. He argues that marriage by elopement was traditionally practiced in the Limbu community. However, he had not mentioned other Nepali communities. In elopement-based marriage, the bride price, expensive and elaborative customs of marriage are not performed but as a part of customary practice, a small amount of fine is paid to the bride's family either in the form of cash or kind. He further argues 'chori biya' or marriage by elopement in literal connotation does not mean a boy has stolen a girl without her consent rather the couple has the consent to elope for marriage. After the atonement made by the boy's family with the girl's family, marriage is solemnized later.

Bista (2000) in his study reveals that marriage by elopement usually existed in the Matwali community, especially among the Rai. Elopement has been customarily practiced when the couple did not have parents and when the families are poor to do the arranged marriage. His study highlights that marriage by elopement was the impact of modernization.

Min Liwang (2000) pointed out that marriage by elopement has been a predominantly found and socially accepted practice in Nepali society. He argued that the reason for elopement is due to inter-caste and inter-religion marriage. He mentioned that in

certain communities like Rai, Limbu, Tamang, Gurung, and Sunuwar, chori biya is pre-arranged by parents of partners but he has not mentioned the reason for such arrangement. He has also briefly discussed the different rituals that are performed after the elopement such as 'Chorko sor' (the boy's family and relative must persuade the girl's family by making customary offerings), sindoor potey or tika talo which is performed at the boy's house that is followed by performing the ritual of dhogbhet (an event where boy's and girl's parents are ritually introduced with each other in the girl's house). His study found that till the ceremony of dhogbhet, the groom and bride's family are not allowed to meet with each other.

Sunar and Gauchan's (2009) study discussed the caste structure and its domination that prevailed in Nepalese society. He argues that based on caste, people have different social status. The study also highlights the level of discrimination that exists among the high, middle, and low castes. According to them, different caste associations are also formed to mobilize, discuss and change the existing caste-based discrimination.

Parker (2013) also discussed the marriage system in eastern Nepal among the various Nepali ethnic groups. According to him, arranged marriage, marriage by capture, marriage by elopement were predominantly found in Eastern Nepal. His study revealed the changes from endogamous arranged marriage practices to inter-caste marriage between Chettri-Bahun, Matwali, and Kami-Damai. His study found that although there were increased inter-caste marriages, marriage between high castes, or Matwali groups with lower caste communities like Kami, Damai was found to be undesirable. The upper caste group is found to be concerned about preserving their customs, religion, and lineage thereby restricting the inter-caste marriage between the high caste and low caste.

Ghimire and Samuel (2014) revealed that elopement marriage is dominant in contemporary Nepal especially among the youth. They have given three reasons for elopement i. due to the modern notion of love ii. excessive use of mobile phones iii. defaming of the girl by the locals having prior knowledge about her courtship. They also briefly discussed the acceptance and non-acceptance of the couple depending on the caste of the girl and boy. Their study found that the couple was generally accepted by conducting some necessary rituals if a boy brings a girl from the same caste or higher caste. However, if a boy brings a girl of the 'untouchable' caste, the boy's family ostracizes the couple from the clan but in the girls' family, the couple is generally accepted after the birth of their first child only. In a nutshell, his study shows the positive as well as the negative impact of love and arranged marriage among middle-class Nepalese.

Basnet & Das's (2019) study on intermarriage between the Nepali and Madhesi in southern Nepal has discussed the acceptance and denial of intermarriage of the couple belonging from two opposite communities who had distinct cultural backgrounds. Nonetheless, authors argue couples in the modern generation are crossing the boundaries of caste and community. Due to the educational development and economic opportunities, the younger generations are slowly giving away the traditional norms of endogamy in marriage practices.

1.3.3 Marriage system among the Nepalis of Darjeeling and Sikkim

Sinha's (1975) book discusses the social, political, economic, and cultural patterns of Sikkimese society. The study has classified Nepali communities into three categories, viz, the Gorkhalis, the Kiratis, and the Newars. All these Nepali groups have settled in Sikkim in different historical eras. The Kiratis including the Rai, Magar, and Limbu

are the oldest inhabitants of Sikkim. The Newars came with the emergence of trading and business in the state. His study has found that there were substantial inter-caste marriages between the Kirati groups of Nepali in Sikkim. On the socio-religious ground, the Nepalis in Sikkim have been divided into two groups: 'Tagadharis' those who wear the traditional sacred thread such as Brahmans and Chhetris. Matwalis group who do not put the sacred thread and are in the habit of drinking and eating non-vegetarian food. He also described the existence of caste hierarchy where the 'Tagadharis' group looked down upon the 'Kiratis' group. He argues that inter-caste marriage has traditionally been there in Sikkim. Regarding religion, his study has found that the Nepali groups in Sikkim have largely followed the Hindu belief and practices. He revealed that the Nepali community had been the subjugated community that had fewer privileges and opportunities in terms of occupation and identity until the emergence of democracy in Sikkim.

Das (1983) discussed the history of Sikkim beginning from the 17th century. His study focuses on the history of communities or the inhabitant of Sikkim such as the Limbu, Magar, Tamang, Bhutia, and Lepcha. His study has focused on the political scenario, occupational patterns, cultural and religious practices that existed in Sikkim. At the same time, he has talked about the role of elite figures in the process of educational development in Sikkim.

Balikci's (2008) study on the Lama, Shamans, and Ancestors in Sikkim discussed the religious practices of Sikkim. His study has narrated the religious practice that has existed during the monarch's time and the changes that took place. Earlier, before the rise of Hinduism, and Christianity in Sikkim, the aborigines used to practice the animist culture. His study revealed the important role of the shamans, community head, and ancestor healer in any of the life cycle rituals. His study also highlights the

traditional form of marriage practices among the Limbus, Bhutia, and Lepcha where an arranged marriage remained the culture of the high class. Family belonging to a poor economic background did not do a lengthy procession of marriage.

Subba (1989) discussed the Nepali community and the existence of a caste hierarchy among them where different castes and communities are placed one above the other on the social ladder. In the Nepali society of Sikkim, the Bahuns are socially and culturally placed in the topmost hierarchy where they maintain their religious, spiritual, and social practices separate from other caste groups. Brahmans and Kshatriyas are referred to as twice-born caste and inter-caste marriage between them was rarely allowed. Traditionally, Bahuns used to accept inter-dining from hill communities except lower castes.

Singh (1993) in his study on the people of Sikkim has highlighted the various ethnic composition and its diverse forms of rites of passage from birth to death. Nepali society has different cultural practices in each ethnic community. However, some important practices bind these ethnic communities into one bunch of Nepalis: religion, language, culture, common festival, and history. His study shows the different caste hierarchy that has been existing in the Nepali community in which each group has been placed on a different hierarchical position based on their occupation and commensality. He found the existence of arranged marriage, marriage by capture, and marriage by elopement. He reveals that except Bahuns all other communities including Chettri have practiced elopement-based marriage in Sikkim. His study discusses rituals, rules of marriage performed during the arranged marriage, and marriage by elopement. The rules of endogamy and exogamy have been the basic rules of marriage among the Nepalis of Sikkim. Parallel cousin marriage is forbidden among all the Nepali communities. On the other hand, cross-cousin marriages were

practiced among a few communities. Meanwhile, his study shows that there was no right to inheritance of property among the women members in a family.

Lama (1994) proclaims that there exists a strict caste system and strict prohibition of caste exogamy in terms of marriage between the higher and lower caste in Nepali society. Because of social ostracism and severe punishment for inter-caste marriage, elopement has evolved as a way for social acceptance in which a boy and a girl from different castes and social backgrounds could proceed to marriage. Further, he argues that due to the practice of elopements among teenagers many families are in distress leading to early separation and divorce.

Bhasin's (2002) study on Ethnic relations in Sikkim points out the dimension of social and cultural relationships among the different ethnic groups. The author discussed the existing social and cultural relationship of Nepali, Bhutia, and Lepcha in Sikkimese society. Simultaneously talks about the historical occupational patterns among the various ethnic groups. Author shows the existing pure and impure cultures that are embedded among all the above communities. He points out the acceptance and non-acceptance ritual practices of raw and cooked food in the various phases of life cycle rituals.

Allendorf (2013) in her study in Pariwarbasti village of Darjeeling, West Bengal has focused on the changes from traditional arranged marriage to modern love marriage. Her study found that marriage by elopement was more common than arranged marriage due to the growth of the educational system, technological changes, and foreign influences. The author points out that except for some inter-caste elopements particularly between Dalits and higher castes which remain problematic otherwise

most inter-caste marriages between the middle and higher castes have been quickly accepted by family and community.

Firdos (2014) points out the legal aspects enacted by Sikkim Durbar on 15th March 1969 which happen to be still in practice. He argues that the marriage of a Sikkimese woman with a non-local man cannot officially transfer immovable properties to her children or husband's name. Instead, she can sell or mortgage her property only to a Sikkim subject holder. Hence, a woman cannot enjoy the privileges and other state benefits equal to a man. He suggests that Sikkimese women should be granted freedom to exercise their rights to handle property irrespective of their marital status.

Chhetri's (2019) study on Nepalis in the Eastern Himalayan Borderland has discussed the history of Nepalis in the Indian States emphasizing the Sikkimese society. Her study begins with the history of Nepalis and how the major sections of Nepali groups had immigrated from Nepal. Her study has pointed out the political, social, and economic conditions that had influenced the Nepalis to settle in various parts of the Eastern Himalayan region. The author also discussed the historical and political identity formation of the Nepalis in India. According to her study, the language, culture, sense of alienation, and unequal treatment from the existing authority has been the foundation to thrive for the formation of Nepali as a community. Interestingly, she argues that the modern political advent has influenced the Nepali groups to be categorized into different groups, viz, Other Backward Class, Most Backward Class, Scheduled Tribe, and Scheduled Caste.

1.4 Conceptual Framework

Various theories have been postulated over time which emphasized on studying and explaining marriage institutions and their importance in human society. Accordingly, this research attempts to study by using mainly three theoretical perspectives of the social systems namely functionalism, conflict, and phenomenology.

Durkheim (1897) viewed marriage and family as an important institution in maintaining and strengthening social solidarity by serving society's needs by reproducing children, socializing, and regulating the relationship between the sexes, and maintaining the division of laborers between husbands and wives. According to Durkheim, when society transits from pre-modern to modern society, the material culture including the economic system and the division of labor also changed. Simultaneously, the immaterial culture including the culture, values, and norms are also found to be changed. Durkheim propounded the concept of sacred and profane, beliefs and practices related to religion. For Durkheim, religious values and beliefs become an integral part of human life to sanction a certain practice to be moral conduct (Abhram, 2018).

The crucial sociological theory that has possibly explained marriage and its role in society is the functionalist framework of Talcott Parson. The 'system and function' remains a central part of Parson's theory to understand society. Parson (1996:233) viewed society as having multiple interconnected and interdependent institutions such as family, religion, education, kinship, and marriage. This institution works together to ensure a balance for the whole society. The functionalist perspective sees marriage and its positive role in general rather than the dysfunction of a few marriages. They

stress the importance of marriage as a social institution related to institutions of family, kinship, and caste.

A marriage often serves the process of dictating the spouses' social status and creating a hierarchy of roles and power between the couples that often seemed to be appropriate and functional in society. Parson argued, marriage as an institution serves to provide different parts to the team of a family as husband and wife, father and mother, in-laws, etc. However, when the members could not do those expected roles and obligations as expected, they experienced disruption and change, leading institutions such as the family to become disorganized and marriage broken.

In a similar line, Merton (1968) has identified two types of functions, manifest and latent, in which some aspects of society can be both functional and dysfunctional. For him, elements like education, religion, family, and marriage help to contribute to social stability and dysfunction if they disrupt social peace (Haralambous 2016:245). Merton argues that there is a 'set of roles' which an individual has to perform as per the situation. A woman/man after marriage becomes a husband /wife, father/mother, son-in-law/daughter-in-law. He/she must perform the role according to their status. However, Merton points out that the rules and norms designed for society may not be functional for the whole. Some groups might experience discontent and it may be dysfunctional for them (Ransome,1988). Merton's idea of 'manifest' and 'latent' function has also been examined and incorporated to comprehend the function as well as dysfunction of existing custom related to marriage. The traditional endogamy rules of marriage may be functional for some people in the community, but they may be not functional for other sections of the community who possibly think of bringing a change in societal norms. Therefore, Merton's theory of Latent and Manifest function

is important in this study which has helped to understand the function, dysfunction, and change in the marriage norm.

From the functionalists' point of view, marriage can be viewed as one of the crucial goals of an individual to attain in life for various functional purposes like establishing a family, providing a social and legal inheritance of family line and property to children, and ensuring overall progress of human civilization. Therefore, by incorporating the functionalist perspectives of Durkheim, Parson, and Merton, the present study attempts to understand the function of marriage in general and the function of elopement-based marriage among the Nepali society in Sikkim and highlight the dysfunctional part of such marriage.

The exponents of conflict theory see societal elements contributing to disintegrations and opting for change from marriage roles. Conflict theorists Marx and Engel (1884) argued that there are indifferences and inequality between the wife and the husband in terms of power and status. Conflict theorists argue that men always deal with public spheres-related responsibilities. At the same time, women are isolated in the private domain, in which they are more oppressed in the patriarchal and capitalist society. It shows how marriage remains the primary site of women's oppression where women do not benefit from the institution of marriage. Marx and Weber argue that the economic condition of a person also determines the market position (Haralambos,2016).

According to Gramsci, society's dominant ideology reflects the beliefs and interests of the ruling class as they exercise their cultural hegemony. The ruling class can bring the social order by generating consent on the other inferior groups through socialization agents such as education, culture, values, norms, etc. (Pearson 2017:

153). He points out that the ruling class power also manifests itself in the hegemony it exercised over the ideological, cultural, and economic spheres where habits and modes of thought of the ruling class often penetrate on the proletariat.

Simultaneously, the conflict theory helps to understand the level of conflict and negotiations between the family of bride giver and bride-taker to resolve any issues developed out of elopement and life after marriage. Marx's and Weber's concept of class is also equally relevant in this study to explore the role of the economy while determining the spouse selection, and to perform the marriage rituals in society.

We also take into consideration the works of a few prominent phenomenologists. Schutz's work focuses on an everyday intersubjective world in which people create social reality and are inhibited by the pre-existing social and cultural organizations created by their predecessors (Ritzer,1999). The life-world is mostly shared, but there exist private aspects of that world. According to him, the 'recipe of knowledge and stock of knowledge are embedded during the process of socialization (Schutz, 1970). Both of these concepts help understand the everyday life of a particular society.

Phenomenologists Peter Burger and Luckman (1966) argued about the social construction of reality in which they view that reality is socially constructed. This knowledge about reality is shared by the group of members in their everyday life. The social construction of reality consists of three phases; the First one is Externalization when an individual creates a new meaning and has an interpretation of any real situation through their lived experience. Secondly, those knowledges are shared in a group and the knowledge is sedimented and legitimized by the society which they called it as typification or objectivation. Thirdly, the process of internalization takes place when an individual of the society learns, socializes, and shares the knowledge of an intersubjective world in an objective way which is often taken for granted.

The phenomenological theories of Alfred Schultz and Berger and Luckman's theory of social construction of reality have helped to comprehend the culture of elopement-based marriage among the Nepalis in Sikkim. It has given a dimension to see and analyze how the culture of elopement-based marriage has been constructed, shared, and taken for granted in everyday life in the studied villages. Their shared knowledge about the phenomenon has been a source of reality. Their lived, shared and taken-for-granted situation has helped the researcher to better reflect on the research topic which is discussed elaborately in the findings.

1.5 Rationale of the study

The review of literature on the marriage system by different authors has revealed the preferences, challenges, and consequences broadly related to marriage that has existed in Indian society as well as in the Nepali social fabric. The review also highlights the different processes of selecting a spouse for marriage in different parts of India and Nepal in which the preferences have been found for that of arranged marriage whereas marriage by elopement has a negative social sanction in the mainstream Indian society. However, marriage by elopement is widely traditionally practiced by many communities of Northeast India like the Meiteis of Manipur, many Nepali communities of Eastern Himalayas, and different tribes- Muria Gonds, Baiga, Zou, Ho, Khond as accepted ways towards leading to a formal alliance of the couple. Few authors who had written on Sikkim such as Subba (1989), Lama (1994), Sinha (1975) (Singh, 1975) have revealed that among various Nepali communities traditionally marriage by elopement has been co-existing along with the marriage by negotiation. The authors have highlighted the reasons for elopement is due to orthodox rules in the caste system but have not elaborated and investigated much on it. Although elopement-based marriage and inter-caste/ inter-community marriages have existed

for a long time in Sikkimese society, only a few studies have briefly mentioned them. Therefore, the present study sincerely attempted and analyzed the subject matter in detail and has tried to fill the research gap by finding out the various reasons, negotiations, changes, and challenges of couples who had married through the process of elopement in Sikkim. This study also examines the social construction of knowledge and reality that contribute to the acceptance and nonacceptance of the couple in selecting their spouse.

1.6 Objectives:

- ☐ To study the marriage system in general and marriage by elopement prevailing among the Nepalis of Sikkim.
- ☐ To explore the prevalence and comprehend the socio-cultural and economic significance of marriage by elopement.
- ☐ To find out the contributing factors for rising inter-caste, inter-religion, and inter-community marriage among the Nepalis of Sikkim.
- ☐ To explore the process of negotiations, commonly perform rites and rituals between the bride-givers and bride-takers to solemnize the marriage.
- ☐ To study the various challenges encountered by the family and couple, if any, before and after the marriage.

1.7 Research Questions

- ☐ What types of marriage and modes of acquiring a spouse are prevalent among the Nepalis of Sikkim?
- ☐ What are the socio-cultural factors that influence the couple to choose elopement over other types of selecting a spouse as a way towards tying a marriage knot?
- ☐ Are there any changes in elopement-based marriage, if so, what are they?

- ☐ Has marriage by elopement impacted inter-community, inter-religion, and inter-caste marriages?
- ☐ What are the commonly prevalent customary rites and rituals associated with marriage by elopement among Nepalis?
- ☐ What kind of challenges the couple and family may have encountered before and after the marriage?

1.8 Methodology

The present research attempts to comprehend the elopement-based marriage system among the Nepalis of Sikkim. This study has used the functionalist, conflict, and phenomenological approaches to understand broadly the institution of marriage and explicitly elopement marriage in the context of Sikkimese Nepalis.

The primary and secondary sources have also been used to study, understand, and analyze the marriage system of the Nepali communities. Primary data was collected through intensive fieldwork. The topic of study “Marriage by elopement” is a sensitive issue as it involves the interrogation of the interpersonal reason of the respondents for having undergone elopement, so the researcher has tried to build the rapport and explained the purpose of research to the respondents before taking the interview. Then the interview was conducted by using a semi-structured interview schedule. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected. To collect in-depth information, the case study and narrative methods have been used for selected respondents. The observation method supported by field notes was also employed to supplement or counter the information provided.

To know the historical data of the Nepali community and marriage practices in Sikkim the published literature on the specific subject has been reviewed and referred

to. The data collected through fieldwork are analyzed and interpreted by referring to relevant secondary sources such as books, journals, articles, gazetteers, and official documents. Internet resources available in various websites related to marriage in general and elopement have also been referred for the completion of this study.

1.8.1 The Study Area

As a first step, relevant data has been collected by using purposive sampling from those people who had consummated marriage through the process of elopement. In the second step, snowball sampling derived from the purposefully selected respondents has also been used to reach the targeted number of respondents. A total number of 56 respondents were interviewed from both the villages of Duga and Deorali representing high, middle, and low castes which were purposely chosen.

Out of 56 respondents, 10 respondents were chosen from those who had arranged marriage to know their opinion on elopement as well as well arranged marriage. To get a comprehensive picture, the respondents representing different age groups, caste, class, gender, religion, education were chosen. Both husband and wife were interviewed if available but in case of unavailability of one of the spouses, the one who was available during the time of fieldwork was interviewed for gathering relevant information. In addition, four members of the All Sikkim Scheduled Caste Association (ASSCA) were also interviewed to understand the role of caste association to solve the issues related to inter-caste marriages in Sikkim.

For this study, two villages, i. Deorali and ii. Duga villages under the Central Pendum GPU were selected. Central Pendum Gram Panchayat Unit is situated in East Sikkim, under Village Administrative Centre Duga. As per the latest census of 2011, the GPU comprised a total population of 5,434 out of which 2,764 are male and 2,670 are female. The 2011 census shows that the male literacy rate is higher than the female

literacy rate as it stands at 85.54 percent, while the female literacy rate is 74.69 percent.

The reason for selecting the two above-mentioned villages is because our pilot survey shows large numbers of elopement-based marriages taking place in the GPU. As the demographic profile of Central Pendam GPU (2014) Karmithang and Duga village consists of multiple Nepali communities occupying different caste groups, it provides a perfect location for fieldwork to acquire the targeted respondents. In total, the two villages have 187 households of which Duga village has 125 households while Deorali has 62 households. Caste-wise categorization shows that 51 households belong to high castes (Sharma and Chettris) or Other Backward Class of State and General in central (OBC). 78 households consist of middle caste groups - Rai, Magar, Gurung, Bhujel, etc., known as Other Backward Class in both Central and State. 58 households of -Kami, Damai, and Sunar which belong to the Scheduled caste category. Accordingly, a sample size of 17 respondents has been selected representing high caste. 19 respondents from the middle caste. And 15 respondents were chosen representing Kami, Damai, and Sarki, 5 respondents from Scheduled Tribes.

1.9 Limitation of the Study

The field visit was during the pandemic, therefore the researcher had difficulties while conducting the fieldwork. The challenges the researcher faced were the frequent lockdowns and restrictions on mobility and interacting with people, limited vehicular movements, demand of high charges of taxi fare, and limited time. Some of the respondents did not want to have long face-to-face interaction while others did not like to have any kind of interaction. So, out of 56 respondents, ten respondents were contacted and interviewed through telephonic conversation, while the rest were met personally and had face-to-face interviews. The topic of the research could have been

broadened in different ways. However, with limited time, money, and constraints in the field, the scope of the study is limited as it addresses only the intended questions.

1.10 Chapterisation:

The study has been divided into six chapters which are briefly described as follows:

Chapter One is an introductory chapter that gives an overview of the study. It has incorporated the statement of the problem, literature review on the marriage patterns in Nepal, India, and Darjeeling and has attempted to contextualize it into Sikkimese society. It also included the rationale of the study, objectives, research questions, methodology, and the limitation of the study.

Chapter Two: Historical Background of the Nepalis in Sikkim. The chapter begins with an overview of Sikkim by highlighting a brief background of various ethnic communities and Nepalis cultural and religious beliefs, migration and settlement in Sikkim. Simultaneously, it has incorporated the caste structure and stratification of the Nepali society, the clan system, and common festivals are also discussed.

Chapter Three: The Socio-Economic and Cultural Background of the Respondents In this chapter researcher has detailed the field settings and the socio-economic and cultural background of the respondents has been analyzed. by interpreting both quantitative as well as qualitative data collected from the field. The data were analyzed and distributed into various tables taking important variables.

Chapter Four: Nepali Marriage Systems: Rites and Rituals. This chapter has provided the various life cycle rituals in Nepali society. Along with it, the chapter has focused and elaborately discussed the different rites and rituals that are generally performed in solemnizing arranged as well as elopement-based marriages.

Chapter Five: The Culture of Elopement Marriage in Sikkim: An Empirical Analysis - deliberated on the various socio-cultural and economic reasons given for undergoing elopement-based marriage. It also discusses endogamy and the various challenges encountered in the process of marriage. Further, it also highlights the role of Samaj, Panchayats, State, and Caste Association. Lastly,

Chapter six concludes and summarizes the findings of the study.

CHAPTER 2

Historical Backdrop of Nepalis in Sikkim

2.1 Introduction

This chapter gives an overview of the population of Sikkim, and the ethnic compositions in the State. The chapter has highlighted the historical backdrop of the Nepalis in Sikkim. In general, it begins with the geographical facts about the state, migration and history, political movement, ethnic compositions, belief systems and its population size. The caste structure, kinship, lineage, food habits, and dress patterns are also discussed to understand the culture and customs of the Nepali community. At the end of the chapter, it shows how the reservation policy of the constitution of India has categorized the Nepali population into different categories.

2.2 Sikkim: A Brief Overview

Before the merger of Sikkim into the Indian state it was a feudal nation ruled by the Chogyal dynasty from 1642-1975⁷. In 1861⁸ Sikkim was made a British Protectorate, but Sikkim was never formally colonized by the British (Chhetri, 2019). The state of Sikkim was integrated into the Indian union as its 22nd state on 16th May 1975 by the 36th amendments Act of the Indian constitution guided by article 371F⁹. Sikkim is located between Nepal in the West and Bhutan in the East. To the South lies the Darjeeling district of West Bengal and China on its North. The year 1940 marks the first political movement of the Sikkim National Congress (SNC) where the leaders were motivated by the Indian struggle for independence. Most of the SNC leaders

⁷ 1642-1975 marked the history of Sikkim ruled by the Chogyal's Dynasty.

⁸ In 1861 Sikkim was made a British Protectorate under the first political officer J.C. White.

⁹ Article 317 F is a special act in the Indian constitution which gives provision to safeguard the State.

were the Nepalis of Sikkimese origin who contested against the feudal system in Sikkim (Gupta, 1975). Due to the geopolitical confrontation with the neighbouring country of Bhutan, China, India, and Nepal, the political leaders initially led by L.D Kazi¹⁰ and his supporters demanded the complete merger of Sikkim with India. After the merger of Sikkim into the Indian union, the nature of democracy as practiced in India came into existence where citizens are allowed to participate in free suffrages to choose their chosen elected representatives (Gupta, 1975). Correspondingly, Sikkim has witnessed a transition towards democratic politics and modern ways of education, employment, several cultures, and lifestyle.

Table 2.1 District-wise distribution of urban and rural population in Sikkim

| District | Population | Urban (%) | Rural (%) |
|-----------------|-------------------|------------------|------------------|
| East | 286,583 | 43 | 57 |
| South | 146,850 | 14 | 86 |
| West | 136,435 | 4 | 96 |
| North | 43,709 | 11 | 89 |
| Sikkim | 610,577 | 25 | 75 |

Source: Census of India 2011

As far as the inhabitants are concerned, Sikkim has a total population of 610,577, out of which 323,070 are male and 287,507 comprise the female population according to the 2011 Census of India. Table 2.1 shows the urban and rural population of Sikkim in the four districts of East, South, West, and North. As compared to other districts of Sikkim, the East district has a dense population having the highest urban settlement. On the other hand, North Sikkim is the least populated district.

¹⁰ L.D Kazi was the first elected Chief Minister of Sikkim during 1975-1979.

Table 2.2 Distribution of population according to marital status Sikkim, 1981 to 2011

| Year | Total (Nos.) | Never Married | Married | Widowed | Divorce/Separated |
|------------------------|---------------------|----------------------|----------------------|-------------------|--------------------------|
| 1981 Percentage | 316,385 (100%) | 184,158 (58) % | 119,483 (37%) | 10,505 (5.7 %) | 2,166 (1.17%) |
| 1991 Percentage | 406,457 (100%) | 240,350 (38.4%) | 156,158 (59 %) | 8,271 (2%) | 1,621 (0.39) |
| 2001 Percentage | 540,851 (100%) | 303,669 (56 %) | 217, 164 (140. %) | 15,474 2.8% | 4544 1.1% |
| 2011 Percentage | 610577 (100%) | 305,986 (50%) | 278,114 (45.5%) | 20,327 (3.3%) | 6,150 (1%) |

Source: Census of India, Sikkim Series, Government of India, 1981, 1991, 2001, 2011

*Data in the parenthesis shows percentages.

Table 2.2 shows the marital status of the population of Sikkim from the census 1981 to 2011. As the population increased, the never-married population has also recorded high as compared to married population. Census surveys in 1989 revealed that the maximum number of the women got married at the age between 14-20 years of age. In modern times, both men and women are delaying their marriage age because of the fact that many of the women and men are more into education and professional fields. In the divorced and separated category, it is recorded less as compared to other North-eastern regions and South Indian Society (Chattopadhyay,2011).

2.3 The Ethnic Composition of Sikkim

The population of Sikkim comprises mainly three different ethnic groups. They are Bhutia, Lepcha, and Nepali. These ethnic groups have very distinct food habits, ways of living, art, culture, history, and language. The Bhutia community who represented the Tibeto-Burmese stock had brought Tibetan culture, language and Lamaistic

Buddhism, and semi-settled agricultural practices (Sinha,1975). Lepchas also have a long history of their origin and settlement. All the ethnic groups have their own language, culture, and social practices, and have a strong socio-cultural bond among them (Risley, 1894). Lately, a few of the Lepchas are found to be converted into Buddhism and Christianity. Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity are the main religions that are followed by the people of Sikkim. State Socio-Economic Census 2006 reports show that Hindus constitute 57.76 percent out of the state's total population, followed by Buddhists with 26.39 percent and 9.91 percent of the population are Christians. Apart from the above-mentioned religious group, some minority religious groups of Muslims, Sikhs, and Jains are also present in Sikkim. The various religious, economic, and political 'push' and 'pull' factors have influenced the people from different parts of the regions to immigrate and settle in Sikkim (Sinha, 1975). People from plain areas have settled in Sikkim under the protection of the British Raj since 1888.

Therefore, today Sikkim has become a hub of heterogeneous ethnic communities who have their own origin, history, mythology, culture, customs, and religious faith. As per the latest census of 2011, the Nepali community constituted the highest population of 68.85 percent, Bhutia consists of 13.08 percent, 7.8 percent are Lepchas and other communities consist of 9.29 percent.

2.4 Locating Nepalis in Sikkim; Who are Nepalis?

Weberian perspective defines community in terms of harmony shared by its members which are formed based on the mutual orientation of social action (Neuwirth, 1969). Further, the Weberian proponents viewed that the members of society have a definite territorial and geographical boundary, symbols in the form of language, food, culture,

and some other characteristics that are shared by the members of a society (Neuwirth,1969). Nonetheless, members of a community have some degree of consciousness and identity which exclude those unlike them. Community solidarity is established in intra-group relationships and a group member generally follows the norms and values that goes with the interest of the larger society. The element of community usually involves the rational interest in social, economic, political, and cultural actions (Maclver, 1917). However, Anderson (2006) talked about an imagined community ¹¹ in which he argues the members of the community may not know each other closely and may not have met with each other, yet in the mind of each individual they imagine themselves as a member of some community.

The term Nepali is regarded as a much-contested concept that has differentiated ‘Nepalis’ from ‘Nepalese’ of Nepal origins. It is important to note that there is a difference in the suffix of the term Nepali as “is” is used while writing about Indian Nepalis and ‘ese’ in the context of Nepalese from Nepal. In the Indian context, Nepalis are multi-ethnic groups of people organized into one homogenous identity in terms of common political, cultural, economic, and social history (Sinha, 2007) (Subba, 2003) (Chettri et.al., 2011). Subba (2012; 58) stated that “It is the etic situation which brings culturally, racially, linguistically and religiously divergent ethnic groups under a common identity called ‘Nepali’ or ‘Gorkhas’ who are socially constructed as a homogenous community in India”.

The Nepalis are a heterogeneous community and have considerable cultural and customary differences (Subba, 2012). The study of Sinha (1973) has classified the

¹¹Imagined Community was propounded by Benedict Anderson in 1983. The concept of imagined community is used in his work to trace the history and significant factors for building a community. He argues that to form a community besides geographical, economic, and cultural history, the community can also be imagined that helps the members of the community to be globally integrated.

Nepalis in Sikkim inclusive of the three sub-cultural stocks; the Kiratis, the Newari, and Gorkhalis. The Kiratis include Limbu, Rai, Magar, Thapa, Gurung and Tamang. Newari includes Pradhan who have different caste systems and cultural patterns. Chhetri-Bahun and Kami, Damai were considered as Gorkhas on the basis of language because this group has only one language of Nepali Devanagari script. Racially, the Nepali are divided into two groups, the Caucasoids and Mongoloids. Linguistically, the majority of the ethnic groups have their own ethnic script and dialect. As per the Sikkim Socio-Economic Census (2006), the total number of sixteen sub-communities are clubbed into the Nepali community in Sikkim. Those are Chhetri, Bahuns, Pradhan, Rai, Thapa, Magar, Gurung, Limbu, Sunuwar, Tamang, Damai, Kami, Sarki, Sanyasi, Bhujel and Sherpa. All these various castes and ethnic communities are clubbed together under one umbrella term 'Nepalis'.

As recorded in the census of Sikkim, Nepali is the most used language to communicate in the daily lives of the people (Cordani, 2013: 4). Thus, the Nepali language has been spoken as a common language in the everyday life of not only Nepali people but also the other ethnic groups of the state. The recognition of 'Nepali' as a lingua franca in the Indian constitution in 1992 also played a great role in recognizing different ethnic communities into a homogenous group of Nepali because of the common denominator of 'language' (Chettri, 2019). Therefore, it can be stated that one of the important factors for clubbing different ethnic groups into Nepali is based on the 'language' used in the day-to-day lives of the various communities.

2.4.1 Migration and Settlement of Nepalis in Sikkim

There is various social, political, and economic history about Nepalis' migration and settlement into the Indian territory. Nepalis have had a history of migrating to India

since the 17th century. To be precise, the first “recorded” history of Nepalese migrating to Sikkim is from 1774. The fact that many other communities such as Limbu or Mangar were present in Sikkim much before the British interest was drawn towards Sikkim as recorded in the history of Sikkim and Nepal tells a different story. Gurung claimed that all Nepali communities like Subba, Tamang, Magar, and Rai are not immigrants in Sikkim as they are found to be inhabiting before the coming of the British (Gurung,2011).

The historical fact shows that it is due to the employment opportunities in India, the Nepali communities have migrated to various parts of the Indian States. With the treaty of Saugauli (1816), the border between India and Nepal was opened to allow recruitment of Gorkha soldiers in the form of the Gorkha Regiment during the British colonial time (Shakespear, 1983). The India-Nepal friendship Treaty of 1950 has also allowed a free movement of the people in both these countries. Simultaneously, the different groups of Nepalese from Nepal fled to Sikkim due to the monarch’s torture (Sinha,1984). The historical accounts show the Nepalese were recruited in Gorkha Regiment to different states of India namely Assam, Darjeeling, and Kalimpong, and after fulfilling their responsibilities got retired and settled back in those areas rather than returning to their homeland (Subba, 2012). Those who were settled in India did not want to return to Nepal for fear of facing the dominant authority of the king and were unwilling to oblige the traditional hierarchies of kinship, caste, and clan (Gellner,2018).

Another pertinent factor that has led the Nepalese to migrate and settle in Sikkim is the land revenue system that was established by the British in the late 19th century. The British introduced the land revenue system that encouraged the inflow of

Nepalese in the vast, uncultivated tract of land to increase their revenues. They required manual laborers for construction works or several agricultural sectors which also influenced the Nepalese to migrate. However, the migration of the people not only brought their occupational and caste system, but they also brought culture and tradition with them (Sinha,1975).

2.4.2 Identifying Nepalis as a Sikkimese Origin

It is important to discuss how the different groups of Nepalis are clubbed into the identity of Nepalis of Sikkimese origin. After India got independence in 1947, the British left their administration from India. Meanwhile in Sikkim, the traditional monarchy system was abolished and Sikkim was merged into the Indian Union after which democratic governance was established. During the monarchical time, the Nepalis were subjected to various discriminatory practices and ill-treatment until 1962 (Ghatak,1993). They were exploited by the Kazis and Thikadars (contractors) for employment and other basic rights of identity and educational opportunities (Chakravarti & Nepal, 2012: 149). This ill-treatment was slightly settled after the enactment of the peasant agitation of 1949 which enforced the eradication of Zamindari system¹² and forced labour in Sikkim (ibid).

There were conflicts between the three communities of Sikkim - Bhutia, Lepcha, and Nepalis. The historical account of Sikkim recorded that the conflict between the Nepalis Bhutia, and Lepcha did not emerge before the mass settlement of Nepalis,

¹²Similar to the other parts of Indian Society, the Zamindari System was also applicable in Sikkim. The Zamindari system recognized the zamindars as landowners who let out their lands to tenant farmers in return for a share of the produce and to collect the amount of taxes.

encouraged by the British (Das,1983). It was only after the Nepalese community started vastly outnumbering the Bhutia-Lepcha community that the conflict gradually arose owing to the Bhutia-Lepcha communities fearing being depopulated. There occurred a situation when the pre-existing group began to be considered Nepalis as 'other people' based on later migration, language and religion. Due to the constant upheaval of the notion of local versus nonlocal and to safeguard the ethnic identity and privileges, the Sikkimese citizenship 'Sikkim Subject Regulation Act, 1961' was enacted by the eleventh king of Sikkim (Rao, 1978:20-21).

When the Act was drafted, there occurred a public outcry against the Act, because it did not include a vast majority of the Nepali community of Sikkim. Then, when the decision taken by the King could not satisfy the masses, the Sikkim Subject Certificate (SSC) Regulation Act was amended. The re-amendment of 1962 entailed to provide Sikkim Citizenship to every rightful citizen of Sikkim under the following criteria; (i) who was born in the territory of Sikkim and is resident therein; (ii) has been ordinarily resident in the territory of Sikkim for not less than fifteen years immediately preceding such commencement; (iii) is the wife or minor child of a person mentioned (Gurung, 2011: 45).

The sole purpose of this legal recognition of the Sikkimese identity has been aimed to protect the interest of the earlier Nepalese settlers along with Bhutia and Lepchas. This Act was the very initial step taken up that granted Sikkimese citizenship to all Nepalis who had settled in Sikkim before 1961. It also enabled them to enjoy equal privileges along with the Bhutia-Lepcha and other communities of Sikkim. Further, the Act distinguished them from Nepalese born in Nepal or other parts of the world or India to Sikkim born Nepali (Chhetri,2019).

Until the promulgation of the Sikkim Subject Regulation Act, the idea of who was a Sikkimese was quite vague and the feeling of Sikkimese nationalism against the rising Indian interference could not be stopped. Henceforth, the Sikkim Subject Regulation Act of 1962 was a significant step to give an identity to Nepalese who migrated before 1961 from that of later migrated Nepalese or natives of Nepal. During that time, the Indian Constitution did not provide dual citizenship to any individuals residing permanently in India (Risley,1984). Therefore, a Certificate of Identification (COI) is provided to the Sikkimese people as descendants of Sikkim. Thus, the Sikkim Subject became the basis to certify as an Indian citizen. Nepalese who migrated and settled permanently in Sikkim before 1961 became legal citizens of Sikkim and bonafide Indians of Nepali Origin (Risley, 1984; Ray,1984).

2.4.3 Common Festivals and Dress Code of Nepalis

Festivals are an important aspect of Sikkimese Nepali. Ethnic-wise, there are a number of festivals celebrated on special occasions. For example, the Gurung celebrate the Tamu Lhochhar in which they worship their clan deity (Moisala, 2002). Among the Rais, the festival of Sakewa is observed where they worship their own deity for the growth, prosperity, and wellbeing of their community (Rai, 2012). Likewise, the Hindu Chhetri-Bahun have the Teej festival in which the womenfolk worship Lord Shiva for the long life of their husband. However, despite having cultural variations some important festivals are commonly celebrated by the larger Hindu Nepali society. Those festivals include Dashain¹³, Deepawali¹⁴, Mage

¹³Dashain is the main festival of Hindu Nepali that is celebrated in the month of October.

¹⁴Diwali also known as festival of lights, celebrated in between the month of October-November.

Sankranti¹⁵, Asharpanda¹⁶, and Bhanu Jayanti¹⁷. Each of these festivals or auspicious days has its own religious, spiritual, and historical importance in the everyday life of the Nepali community.

Besides the common festivals, various ethnic communities have their own dress code and ornaments for both men and women that they wear during auspicious occasions or in any important festivals. However, when the different ethnic groups have converted or have started to follow the Nepali Hindu culture, they have adapted the Hindu dress code in the marriage. For example, generally in the Hindu marriages, the bride usually wears red saree, red blouse, and red veil. *Potey mala* (green necklace) is worn by married women as a symbol of a married woman. For boys it depends on their wish to wear traditional Nepali Dawra Suwral or modern formal suits. However, this study observed that among the Bahun, Chhetri and Kami community, men usually were wearing the traditional Dawra Suwral in arranged marriages whereas men of other communities such as Rai, Gurung and Tamang were seen wearing western formal suits. In general, traditional dress codes including *Dawra Suwral*, *Dhaka ko topi* are worn for boys. *Dhaka ko Sari*, *laccha* for girls, symbolizes the customary traditional dress of Nepali.

¹⁵ Mage Sankranti is celebrated by the Nepali in the first month of the year which is marked as an auspicious occasion of tuber harvest. On this day, yam, selroti, sweets and a variety of tubers are cooked and served to the family and neighbors.

¹⁶ Asharpanda is observed in the months of June to July. It is celebrated in the beginning of rice plantation. From ancient times, it has had its own historical significance. During the plantation, people did not have time to cook and served full meals. Therefore, Nepali people are used to eating curd, bitten rice and bananas in their lunch. Since then, it has become a tradition among the Nepalis to serve the above-mentioned food.

¹⁷ Every year 13th July is celebrated as Bhanu Jayanti, by Nepalis across the globe in the memory of Nepali literary legend Bhanu Bhakta Acharya.

2.4.4 Caste System of Nepalis

The different ethnic groups are stratified into different hierarchical categories following the caste structure and system of the Nepali society. Similar to Indian society, even among the Nepali society, the caste system is found to be based on the varna system (Sharma,1978). The history of the Nepali caste system originated from the time of Rana king Jang Bahadur Rana's enactment of the law code 1854, The Muluki Ain. There was a unified system of customary law based on the Dharma Shastra. According to the ancient law, the society was organized in such a way that almost all the different ethnic communities were included on the caste hierarchy (Cameron, 1998). Hofer (2004) has divided the caste system in Nepal into five hierarchical divisions. They are namely:

1. Wearer of the holy cord or Tagadharis - They are the Brahmins who are the wearers of holy thread. They are placed at the top of the caste hierarchy and are considered to be pure, a twice born caste, and from whom water and any items are acceptable by the other caste groups. Upadhyay Bahun, Thakuri, Jaisi Bahun, Newar Bahun, Terai Bahun, Chhetri and Sanyasi belong to this category.
2. Non-Enslavable Alcohol drinker or Matwalis. This category is further sub-categorized into two categories of non-enslavable alcohol drinkers (namasinya matwali) that included Magar, Rai, Gurung and Sunuwar and
3. Enslavable alcohol drinkers or (masinya matwali). Both the non-enslavable and enslavable Matwalis- consume alcohol and non-vegetarian food. Among the Matwalis also there was a hierarchy in which non-enslavable Matwalis are

known to have higher status than enslavable Matwalis. Chepang, Tamang, Tharu, Haya, Kumal and Gharti are considered to be part of this category.

4. Impure but Touchable caste (Paninachalne chhoichitto halnunaparna) - They are regarded as impure but touchable meaning water and other things can be taken from them. Those who belong to this category include Kasai (Butchers), Kulse (Newar Musician), Muslims, Europeans and other foreigners.
5. Impure and untouchables (Paninachalne chhoichitto halnuparna). They occupied the lowest position in the hierarchy of caste. Kami, Damai and Sarki belong to this category and are considered as untouchable castes. It is considered that even water cannot be taken from their hand.

The first four categories mentioned above are known as pure and water-acceptable caste groups and within these categories water and raw food is accepted reciprocally from each other irrespective of who is ranked higher, the receiver or the offeror. However, they were not even allowed to accept water from impure low castes. Hofer argues that an enslavable caste group is that group whose members in a caste of certain offence can be punished by enslavement.

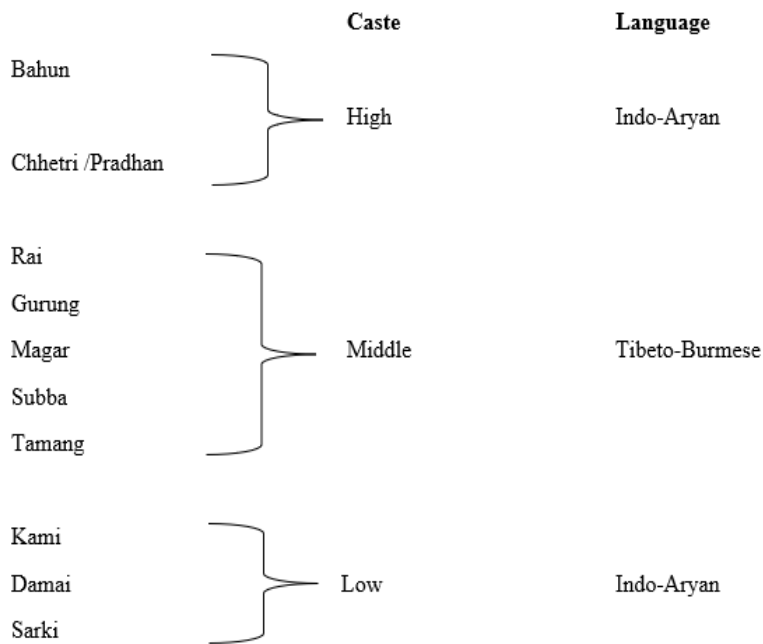
Following Hofer's stratification of the Nepali caste division and hierarchy, the Bahuns followed by Chhetri are placed at the top of the ranking. They are considered to be the matwali group, a pure and water-acceptable caste whose male members wear the sacred thread. They are traced to the Indo-Aryan stock. However, even among the Bahuns category, there is a hierarchical division of Upadhyaya Bahuns, Jaisi Bahuns, Thakuris, Newar Bahuns, Terai Bahuns. Next in the hierarchy is the Chhetris.

The Matwalis groups originated from the Tibeto-Burmese stock. They are known to be alcohol drinkers and consumers of non-vegetarian food. They are placed below the

Tagadharis and in the middle position of a caste system. Then beneath the Matwali group, there come two different groups - Muslims/foreigners, and another group consisting of Kami, Damai, and Sarkis. In the hierarchy of caste, these two caste groups are placed in the lowest position. They are termed as "Pani ma na chalney " impure or untouchables' castes from whom water and cooked food cannot be taken (Sharma,1978).

In the context of Sikkim, the traditional caste system and hierarchies based on ritual purity and pollution that has been prevalent in Nepal has visibly penetrated in the Nepali society of the state. Therefore, the Nepali communities of Sikkim have followed similar patterns of caste boundaries, beliefs, and practices as persists in Nepal. Sinha (1975) has divided the Nepalis of Sikkim into three groups: 'Tagadharis' those who wear the traditional sacred thread such as Brahmans and Chhetris. and Matwali' group who do not put the sacred thread and are in the habit of drinking and eating non-vegetarian food. The Kamis and others who are treated as untouchables occupied the lowest strata in the caste. hierarchy. Similarly, the study of Sinha & Subba (2007) on Nepalis in North East India has categorized Nepali communities into three categories, viz. high, middle and low castes.

Figure 2.1 Caste Hierarchy of Nepali Society



Source: Field work during November-December 2019

Newars have their own caste hierarchy. However, in the Nepali caste hierarchy Newars are also regarded to have similar caste status with Chhetris but below the Bahuns. Nepali society of Sikkim based on caste and occupation follows the practice of ritual purity and impurity between the caste groups (Sinha & Subba, 2007). Thus, the operational caste structure we found in the course of study is that the Bahun are placed at the top of the caste hierarchy. Next to the Bahuns are Chhetri and Pradhan. They are followed by the Matwali group such as Gurung, Rai, Tamang and Magar. Below these groups are the Sarki, Kami and Damai who were given the lowest social position in the caste hierarchy. Cameron (1988) termed this group as Shudra.

The caste one belongs indicates the traditional occupation of the group and these occupations were hereditary in nature. The occupation of the Bahuns (Brahmins) who are an upper-caste group were priesthoods and had a history of ruling Nepal for a very

long period (Rai,2017). Likewise, Pradhan's were heavily occupied with the business across the hilly region of Nepal, West Bengal, and Sikkim. The middle caste group were known to pursue farming, cultivation, and engaged in small business. The majority of the caste groups were traditionally engaged in farming, animal husbandry and related activities.

The domestication of cattle and agricultural practices also differed between the high caste and other castes. For example, piggery farming was not there amongst the upper caste (Subba,2007). The Damai, Sarki, and Kami castes worked as tailors, cobblers, and potters respectively. The Damai community was well known for playing musical instruments and engaged in the musical profession. The Damai community used to do the tailoring and were folk musicians. They used to play folk songs called 'Naumati Baja' or nine types of musical instruments during marriages. The Kami community was known as blacksmiths who used to make basic tools used in agriculture or construction and Sunar was a goldsmith. Sarki was engaged in cobbler, tannery work and making shoes (Singh,1993). These castes or communities were recognized as 'untouchable' or low castes in Nepali Hindu culture (Gurung,2020). However, Damai claims to be at par with the Kami community but higher than the Sarkis.

During the traditional time, the relationship based on caste and occupation was that of reciprocity. Each caste group was dependent upon the other for basic services in their day-to-day life. However, those traditional hereditary occupations existed when the society had no exposure to other modern occupational systems.

After the introduction of different technological changes, improvement in transportation facilities, the coming up of the modern bureaucratic system, and the ongoing changes in many of the professional fields, slowly changes people's

occupational patterns. Education has remained an important modern factor for bringing changes in the traditional occupational patterns. The hereditary caste-based occupation is found to be changing in Sikkimese society as many individuals belonging to different groups have taken up different modern occupations and they are in various professional fields. It is interesting to find that some use their caste name viz. Chhetri as surname/title while others use clan (thar) names as their surname such as Khadka, Bhattarai, Karki, Gurung, while others use their ethnic community as their surname, viz Rai. So, anyone who is familiar with the Nepali social structure knows who belongs to which category – upper, middle or lower caste.

2.4.5 Clan and Lineage System

Many clans are found all over Indian society. The clan organizations differ from one particular region to another meaning clans can be local and non-local. The clans may be organized territorially and members of such a clan may be confined to one particular area or they may be spread over the territorial areas. According to Dumont (1980), each caste group has multiple Jatis and 'Tharr'/clan who follow the notions of ritual purity and impurity. The members of a clan believe clan men have descended from the common ancestor. A clan is always exogamous, and it has a major role to play in the settlement of the marriage. Simultaneously, it functions to organize ceremonies, rituals, fairs, and festivals that are performed at the clan level (Jha, 1994). Simultaneously, clan members worship their kul deity or ancestral deity in a collective form. Most of the kul deity worshipped involves the blood sacrifices of domesticated birds and animals (Adhikari,2016). In fact, in every household they have a puja room where they believe and worship their clan deity. They maintain it as a sacred room and only the person belonging from the same clan is allowed to enter. Others are not allowed to enter in the 'puja room' known as Bhararkota or room of

Kul deity. Because it has been believed that the entry of any individual from other communities besides own clan members will pollute clan deity.

Among the Nepalis of Sikkim, 'Jat (caste) and thar (clan)' plays an important role in marriage. Each jat has different thars. Clans are known as a group of selected kins by birth (Jha,1994). Each clan has many sub-clans or lineages. Marriage is preferred within the endogamous caste but exogamous clan. The Brahmin/Bahun have been divided into two broad sub-caste categories as Upadhyay and Jaishee. Sharma, Dahal, Bhattarai, Koirala, and Adhikari come under the Upadhyay caste category whereas Kharel, Panday and Gimirey come under Jaishee category. Upadhyay Bahuns prefer to marry within the Upadhyay caste only because Upadhyay are known to be a higher caste group as compared to Jaishee category (Singh,1993). For example, among the Upadhyay Bahuns, Koirala and Adhikari clans or any two clans having similar status can marry each other because both clans have different gotra. Adhikari clan from Upadhyay Bahuns have Kashyap Gotra, Koirala belong to Moudgalya gotra. However, there may be more than two thars having the same gotra known as shagotri. For example, Koirala, Timshina, and Karki from Upadhyay Bahun belong to Moudgalya gotra and marriage between these three clans is forbidden because of the belief that they share a common patrilineage.

Among the Chhetris, Paural, Bista, Katwal, Subedi, Basnet, and Karki are some of the clans who have different Gotra. Paural belongs to Atryree gotra, Bista in kashyap, Katwal-mandaw, Subedi-vatsya and Karki have Modgaulya gotra (Singh,1993). Marriage between the Karki and Basnet, and Bista and Karki are acceptable. Similarly, among the Damai, Pariyar, Sundas, Bagdas, Mothey, Dass, Bardawa, Sewa, Labar, Suji, Hingmang, etc., are the different jat having different thars. Every community has different clans. Even in the Kami community, they have different

thars which are Durnal, Darnal, Scintury, Rasaily, Gazmer, Khati, Sapkota, Gahatraj, Lohar, Ruchal, etc., (Singh,1993).

The Rai also have different thars of Chamling, Bantawa, Thulung, Kulung, Khaling, Dungmali, Nechali and Dumi. Gurungs have been broadly divided into two clan groups. Under each clan, there are different sub-clans. One group includes four clans, and another has sixteen clans. Among these clans, the first four clan groups include Ghale, Lama, Ghonday, and Lamichhane. Sola- *Jat* (Sixteen clan) includes Ghyabre, Kyabchne, Kurumchee, Jangre, Thorje, Dorjali, Rilami, Poju, Chormi, Pom, Migi, Kholali etc., (Singh,1993). First four clans are known to have higher status than the latter as these clans belong from the aristocratic family background in Nepal (Macfarlane,1992).

Gurung's have two clans - Ghonday and Ghale and Lama and Lamchane are known as 'Daju bhai' brothers. Therefore, those clans who are known as brothers, marriage between them is not-encouraged. Instead, the clan Ghale and Lamchane, Ghonday and lama can marry each other. Similar to the Indian society, among the Nepali society also gotra plays a crucial role in the marriage alliances which forbids incest of a person belonging from same clan and gotra. Theoretically, an individual who shares the same clan, gotra and lineage is termed as blood relatives who are often referred to as a brother, sister, aunts, uncle, fraternal or maternal uncle/aunt. Since the thars are traced from both the patrilineal and matrilineal side which regulates the marriage alliance and descent accordingly. Those who fall under any of the father's or mother's clans for a few generations are prohibited to marry each other (Singh,1993). In each caste group, the same clan group is prohibited to marry up to the seventh

generation from the father's side and up to the fifth generation from the mother's side as they are considered to be from the same blood group.

In order to avoid marrying close relatives, there exist the notion of incest taboo which was originated to prevent society from promiscuity (Barlow,2002). There are positive and negative reasons for the incest taboo. Firstly, it prohibits marriage between the parents and child or between the siblings within the family to prevent role confusion and secondly for scientific reasons such as to protect from Thalassemia or blood disorder, and other kinds of deformities (Levi-Strauss, 1949).

Similar to the findings of Singh (1993) and Cameron (1988) the present study also found the significance of caste endogamy and clan and gotra exogamy in the marriage. However, this study observed some changes that are taking place. For example, among Upadhyay and Jaise Bahuns, although the preference for marriage is caste/sub-caste having similar hierarchy, nowadays girls/boys from Upadhyay category who considered higher than Jaishee are found to be marrying with a guy/girl from Jaishee Bahun or vice-versa. The respondents from Upadhyay Bahun revealed that, in the contemporary time, marriage between Upadhyay and Jaishee Bahuns are taking place in many of the families where boys from Upadhyaya Bahuns are marrying a girl from Jaishee Bahuns. Family accepts the newly wed girl as daughter in law; however, during the main clan rituals including funeral rites and clan puja, girls from below Upadhyay are restricted to perform important rites and rituals.

2.4.6 Food Culture

Long ago there was a rule of interaction described by religious law 'Muluki Ain' in Nepal that included commensality, sexual relationship, marriage, entry into room and food and non-food transaction. Those rules of social interaction were also based on

the kind of work one caste group used to perform (Cameron,1998). There was clear avoidance of receiving cooked food and water from the Kami, Damai and Sarki groups due to the nature of their work.

As stated earlier, the Brahmins and Chhetris were not involved in drinking liquor and were vegetarian while the Matwalis are those who do not put sacred thread and are in the habit of drinking alcohol and eating meat (Sinha,1975;8). The various groups of Nepalis have different dietary patterns with respect to food, eating meat, and drinking habits. In terms of food, some important food grains are symbolically represented as sacred. Subba (2003) reveals that traditionally each caste group has its respective food habits which are culturally produced and consumed at the same time some food grains are conserved as pure 'choko'.

Subba (2007) argues that the Bahun accept the food and water from Chhetri. Chhetris also accept water and food from hill communities except from Kami, Damai, Sarki, and Majhi who are treated as belonging to low caste. Uncooked food items are accepted and exchanged between all the castes but at the time of death and birth rite, some of the cooked food items are not accepted from castes who are considered to be lower in the caste hierarchy (Cameron,1988).

Some of the food items that are symbolically treated as sacred and not served to any caste group except to one's clan are Kalo dal (Black pulses) and boiled rice commonly known as "Bhat" at the time of any religious event in one's family (Stone,1977). Those meals are cooked and prepared in their kitchen by family members and it is served within the families and relatives. For other caste members, the meal was usually cooked and served outside the main kitchen. Among the Newars also there is

intra-food acceptance and unacceptance of food items. The traditional beaten rice is considered safer and non-polluting among the Newars (Bhutia,2020).

Some caste groups such as Kami, Damai, and Sarki are constrained to enter the main kitchen which is known as Basna Kota of the high and middle caste. For instance, among the Rai community, only Rai from the same clan are allowed to enter and participate in any ritual conducted in the sacred room where the hearth called 'challah' resides. That specific room is symbolically considered as the most sacred place as they believed that their ancestor's soul lived.

Therefore, through the food culture also one can see an explicit caste boundary between the pure and impure caste which is not enforced physically but has been an institutionalized act within the broader caste hierarchy among the Nepali society. However, Sinha & Subba (2003,2009) have argued that Nepalis of Indian origin are more liberal and do not follow the orthodox rules of caste hierarchy as it is practiced in Nepal and the mainstream Indian society. To many extents, the argument may be valid but there still prevails the caste purity, impurity, and boundaries even in the food culture based on caste. The social and religious interaction in terms of acceptances of food or exchange of foods, inter-dining, and inter-marriage between the high, middle, and low caste has a substantial boundary that has either allowed or restricted certain groups till date.

2.5 Categorization of Caste and Communities under Reservation Policy

The Indian reservation system ¹⁸ was implemented in Sikkim in 1978. This reservation policy categorized the various ethnic communities of Sikkim into different

¹⁸Before the Mandal commission, the Indian reservation system was introduced in Sikkim in 1978.

categories. Simultaneously, Mandal commission ¹⁹ brought by the Indian government in 1980 brought changes to it. It gave a new legal identity to the various groups of people in Sikkim that emphasized to divide those groups into different categories, viz, the most backward class, other backward class, scheduled tribe and scheduled caste based on religion, class, tribe, ethnicity, etc.,

Table 2.3: Different Ethnic Groups and the Socio-Economic Categories in Sikkim²⁰

| Socio-Economic Categories | Ethnic groups |
|--|--|
| Scheduled Tribe | Bhutia-Lepcha ST in central BL in State |
| Scheduled Tribe | Limboo, Tamang ST in central/State |
| Scheduled Caste | Kami, Damai, Sarki |
| Other Backward Classes in State and General in Central | Bahun, Chhetri, Newar and Sanyasi |
| Other Backward Classes in Central/ State | Rai, Gurung, Mager, Bhujel, Dewan, Thami, Mukhia, Jogi etc., |

Source: Ethnicity and Democracy in the Eastern Himalayan Borderland, 2020

Table 2.4 describes the ethnic compositions of Sikkim. The categories are segmented for public policies, identity politics, and for the development of the community of Sikkim (Chhetri, 2017). The government of India declared Bhutia and Lepcha as Scheduled Tribes and Kami, Damai, Manji, and Sarki as Scheduled Caste in 1978. Later in 2003, Tamang and Subba were recognized as Scheduled Tribes (Khamdhak, 2020). The remaining caste groups are recognized as Other Backward Classes and Most Backward Classes (Chhetri, 2019). However, Chhetri Bahun falls under the general category in the central list and Other Backward Class in the state list. Rai, Magar, Gurung, Bhujel, etc., are categorized as Other Backward Class in both the

¹⁹ Later the Mandal Commission was brought in Sikkim that revised and categorized the ethnic communities into different categories.

²⁰

Chhetri, 2013 has provided the detailed background of the Nepalis in Sikkim. Study also has highlighted the categorization of different ethnic groups in the modern context.

central and state list (Vandenhelsken, 2009). All these different communities have been enjoying the benefit of reservation in terms of education, employment, and scholarships as granted by the state according to their communities location in the lists of reservation policies.

CHAPTER 3

Social-Cultural and Economic Background of the Respondents

3.1 Introduction

The main aim of the present chapter is to understand the social, cultural, and economic background of the respondents under investigation. It is crucial to know the socio-economic and cultural aspects of the respondents to understand the larger social structure of the contemporarily Nepali society in Sikkim. Simultaneously, tracing the past will help us to understand the cultural practices, continuity and changes in the marriage and family that might have occurred over the years.

After analyzing the collected quantitative and qualitative data and by dividing the population under study into a discrete number of categories, this chapter aims to give an overview of the relevant backgrounds of the respondents. It attempts to demonstrate the different aspects that are involved in the process of choosing a spouse. To support the arguments, different variables such as gender, age, education, religion, marital status, caste, income, occupation, marriage types have been taken into cognizance. Besides the four members of the association, a total number of 56 married respondents were interviewed from both the Duga and Deorali villages of Central Pendam, Gram Panchayat Unit of East Sikkim.

3.2 Gender of the Respondents

| Gender | Frequency | Percent (%) |
|--------|-----------|-------------|
| Women | 26 | 46.4 % |
| Men | 30 | 53.6% |
| Total | 56 | 100 % |

Source: Fieldwork November-December 2020

Oakley (1998) argues that gender and its roles are socially and culturally constructed. The study of gender shows the role of women is mostly similar across society (Komarovsky,1989; Simon,1995). Merton points out an individual must perform multiple roles which he calls a “set of roles”. Historically, women are associated with activities within the private domain. Her role reflects in the socialization process, nurturing of the child, and performing the roles of domestic chores. On the other hand, men are associated with the work of earning, decision making, and protecting the family (Haralambous, 2016). However, when the traditional society paved the way towards development, women started to take part in paid work outside the domestic domain. Nonetheless, working women are expected to make great sacrifices in the dual role; taking care of the family and earning as well.

Contextualizing in Sikkim, the study of Bhutia (2019) on Sikkimese women argues that establishing a favorable balance between workplace and home has become difficult for women. Because women as a mother, wife, and a daughter/daughter in law are expected to do the household duties even if she is a working professional. Gender as one of the most important variables in this study has helped to understand the division of role between the man and woman in a family. In this study, 46.4% were women and 53.6% were men respondents. Both the genders have different socially constructed gender roles and statuses in society after the union of marriage.

Nepali society follows the patriarchal system therefore there exists a structured division of roles in the family which is taken for granted as customary that should not be questioned. However, as it was informed by a few male respondents that they help their wife and mother in household activities in their spare time. They said they assist in cooking, cleaning, gardening, and sometimes in taking care of their children.

However, most of the domestic work has been handled and considered to be women's work.

3.3 Age of the Respondents

| Age | Frequency | Percent (%) |
|--------------|-----------|-------------|
| 15-25 | 3 | 5.4 % |
| 25-35 | 15 | 26.8 % |
| 35-45 | 17 | 30.4 % |
| 45-55 | 11 | 19.6 % |
| 55-65 | 3 | 5.4 % |
| 65-75 | 5 | 8.9 % |
| 85 above | 2 | 3.6 % |
| Total | 56 | 100 % |

Source: Fieldwork November- December 2020

The age group is a crucial variable in any research. In social science research, age groups have been taken to see and understand the generation gap in any culture. Age is considered as an important determinant factor which would help to give a different knowledge about marriage in different periods. Therefore, the data collected from the field include various age groups with the assumption that it will throw light on the past and present customary practices of marriage. Simultaneously, these age differences will help us to understand the changes that have taken place in the mate selection process, caste system, and rituals.

The elderly respondents aged above 55 years informed that during the traditional time, there was the practice of child marriage among the Nepali community of Sikkim. Girls were married before they reached puberty. Most of the parents and relatives used to choose a spouse for their son/daughter. In those kinds of marriages, the couple was married by performing rituals of an arranged marriage. However, after the implementation of the Child Marriage Restraint Act 1929 in Sikkim, the practice of child marriage was legally prohibited. The respondents from the older generation

informed that falling in love and courtship was there when they were young also but it was not very common during their time. They further said that even the way of expression was not too open in society. The older generation considered romantic relationships of love affairs and open dating as a modern phenomenon.

As many as 30.4 % of respondents fall in the 35-45 years age group, followed by the 25-35 age group representing 26.8 % of the respondents, and 19.6 % of respondents were found in the 45-55 years age group. Respondents aged below 45 years old said that the idea about open dating, introducing a boy/girl as a boyfriend, girlfriend to family members are new changes that are common among the youngsters. Nowadays, family members allow their grown-up children to fall in love and allow them to choose a partner of their choice. However, the study observed that families expect their children to choose a spouse that would be suitable for the family as well as the person.

3.4 Educational Background of Respondents

| Education Level | Frequency | | Percent (%) | |
|----------------------|-----------|-------|-------------|--------|
| | Men | Women | Men | Women |
| 0-5 | 5 | 6 | 9 % | 10.7 % |
| 6-8 | 8 | 4 | 14.2% | 7.1% |
| 8-10 | 7 | 6 | 12.5 % | 10.7 % |
| 10-12 | 5 | 4 | 9% | 7.1% |
| Graduation and above | 5 | 6 | 9% | 10.7% |
| Total | 30 | 26 | 100 | |

Source: Fieldwork during November-December 2020

The educational institute has been one of the most important institutions in human history for bringing development to society. In a pre-industrial society, there was no formal educational system. In that case, people used to learn by imitation. The basic knowledge and skills were learned informally by copying from an adult (Haralambous, 1980). However, in modern society, formal education has been one of

the developments that have helped people to do better in their lives. The modern educational system has been an important agency to bring a secular value and practices (Haralambous, 2013).

Dumont argues formal education or the school is the second institution after family where socialization takes place and the school acts as a bridge between the family and the whole society that prepares children for an adult role. From the functionalist point of view, the major role of education is the transmission of society's norms and values to the individual. Through education, history has been learned by an individual that helps them to link between the past and present society and help in developing a sense of belonging (Haralambous, 2016). In an industrialized society, there exists a complex and specialized division of labor, and formal education helps to provide skills that are required in modern society. The educational institute helps an individual to learn the skills that are critical for surviving in the advanced industrialized society (Ritzer, 2019).

Until the early 20th century, there were only monastic schools in Sikkim. That monastic/lamaistic system of education was helpful for those who were preparing for the religious profession. The early 1950s is remarked as a period of educational development as formal modern education was taken off in Sikkim (Kharel, 2013). The various government schools, missionary schools, and village schools were established. However, initially, there was a smaller number of enrollments in these schools (Singh, 1975).

After Sikkim became a part of India in 1975, education was given more priority by the state. Since then, there has been an increase in the number of schools, colleges, and training centers in different parts of Sikkim. With the establishment of the

government educational system in Sikkim, the common people also got equal opportunities to attain and achieve their education in diversified fields. According to the census of 2011, the literacy rate of Sikkim was 81.42 percent, where male literacy was at 86.55 percent while female literacy rate was at 76.04 percent respectively.

The educational background of the respondents helps us to comprehend the changing attitude of the people towards certain norms of the culture. This study observed that the person who did not continue their studies is found to marry early in their life. The study found that men and women who were school dropouts had married between 15-25 years while those who have undergone higher studies have married between 25-35 years. Out of the total, 19.7% of the respondents had married after completing their higher studies and finding a job. However, an equal number, 19.7% of the respondents have attended only up to the primary level of education while 21.3% of the respondents were found to have studied up to class eight only. Most of them dropped out of school in their teenage years due to family and financial difficulties and sometimes due to lack of interest in studies. 12.5 % of respondents have attended up to the senior secondary level of education. 22.9 % of the respondents have pursued their studies up to senior secondary level while another 19.7% of the respondents have completed graduation and above.

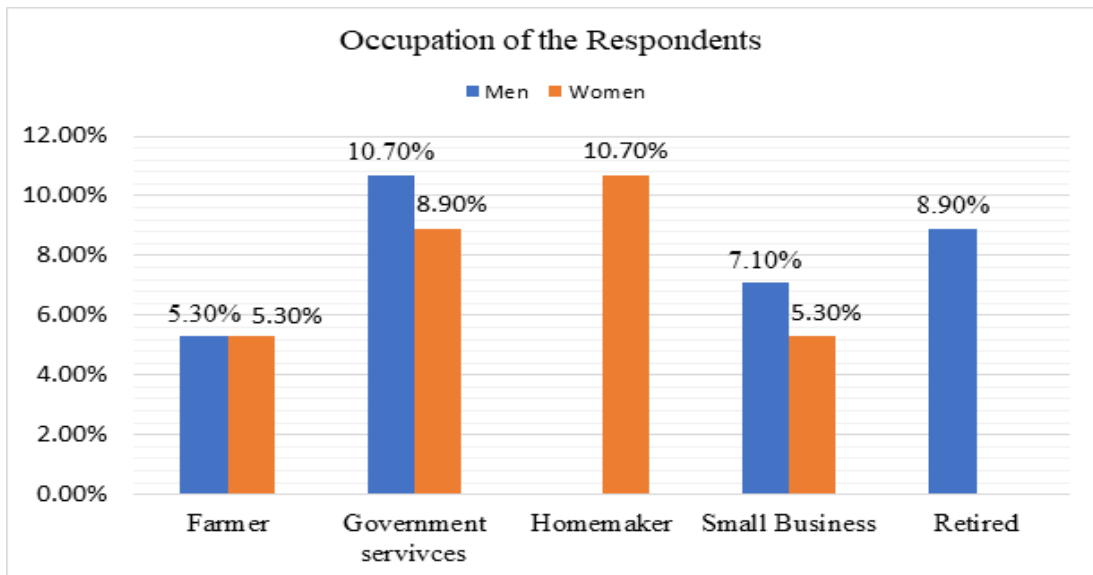
The elderly respondents who were 50 years and above revealed that they didn't have much opportunity to attain schools as they had more siblings to look after. The respondents narrated that, *“during the traditional time, education for the girl child was not given priority in the state. Girls were married early; they had many siblings and most of the time the elder daughter had to look after the younger siblings”*. However, a few of them used to manage to attend the night school that was organized by some educated women in the village.

It was observed during the fieldwork that parents are concerned about their children's education. From every family, both the girls and boys are enrolled and attending formal education. However, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the younger generations were learning through online classes.

After completing their education, many of the respondents were found to be working in the private and government sectors. However, those who were homemakers and retired persons were not involved in any kind of paid work, rather they were indulged in the household work and doing some agricultural work.

3.5 Occupation of the Respondents

The historical facts show that traditionally people in Sikkim were involved in agricultural practices for their sustainable livelihood. Most of the Nepalis were also engaged in agricultural practice, dairy farming and worked as manual construction workers (Risley, 1901). They worked as a peasant under the agrarian system where they had to pay a certain fixed amount of taxes to the landlords. Most of the population was landless. They were caught within the existing inequality and had fewer political rights (Chhetri,2019). Along with the taxes, they too had to share thirty to forty percent of cultivated crops with the landlord. They earned their livings through agricultural practices, animal husbandry, and the earned by selling vegetables (Ghatak,1993;143). As the Sikkimese society slowly changes from that of traditional into the modern society through the various processes of development, there occurred changes in the occupational patterns among the inhabitants (Ghatak, 1993).



Source: Fieldwork Source: Fieldwork November- December 2020

In this study, the educational background, occupational status, and monthly income of the respondents have been analyzed and attempted to correlate with other parameters. Their educational attainment has obviously determined their occupation and their monthly income. The empirical data shows that the maximum number of respondents were found to be working in the private sector/company. The respondents who had completed their graduation were working in administrative posts as human resource (HR) managers and supervisors whereas those who had studied below class twelve were found to be working as casual workers. Respondents who have completed higher studies especially in technical courses have found a relatively better job than a person who had dropped out at the primary level. The occupational status of a person is equally examined to capture the nuances of mate selection and getting married since an individual's job and salary sources determine their quality of life as well as their status.

As many as 19.6% respondents, 10.7% men and 8.9 % women working in the government sectors. They consist of teachers, police personnel, and panchayat

members. Another 8.9% of the respondents were retired government employees who were receiving their pensions. Occupation-wise distribution shows that 13.4% of the respondents were involved in running small grocery and cosmetic shops in the village and nearby town. Around 10.6% of the respondents were farmers as they were found to be dependent on agricultural practices. However, only 10.7% of the women respondents were not involved in any kind of paid work, rather they were dependent on their husband's salary for any kind of expenditures. After analyzing the empirical data, it shows that most of the women interviewed were financially independent as they were earning and equally contributing to the expenses of children's education and household expenses.

3.5 Monthly Income of Respondents

| Monthly Income | Frequency | Percent (%) |
|----------------|-----------|-------------|
| 5000-10,000 | 8 | 14.2 % |
| 10,000-15,000 | 20 | 35.7 % |
| 15,000-20,000 | 17 | 30.3 % |
| 25,000-30,000 | 8 | 14.3 % |
| Above 25,000 | 3 | 5.4 % |
| Total | 56 | 100 % |

Source: Fieldwork November-December 2020

The empirical situation revealed the income patterns of the respondents. Therefore, to capture the reality of the financial situation or class position of the respondents, their monthly income was asked and segmented into five categories. Our study found that those who were involved in farming consisted of 10.3% and were getting below Rs. 10,000 per month. On the other hand, respondents who were working in private sector jobs were receiving between Rs. 10,000-20,000 per month. Among them, the casual workers were getting a maximum of Rs.12, 000 per month while those in the managerial positions were getting above Rs. 15,000 per month. The respondents working in government sectors earned above Rs. 30,000 per month and similar

amounts were earned by those who were doing business although they had irregular earnings as it depends on the sale of goods.

Marx argues that an individual status and other quality of life are determined by his class position (Haralambous, 2015). The study after careful analyses found that the family members who were having decent jobs and earned relatively well had a better life opportunity than those whose earnings were less. In many cases, those who had better income were able to provide better education facilities to their children. It was observed that besides education, their children were studying in private schools, owned Smartphone or iPads, laptops for online classes, and trained in music and dance classes. On the other hand, respondents who had below Rs.10,000 per month were finding it difficult to provide quality private education, smart phones for online education that are required for their children's education.

To understand the role of class position in marriage, the income details and occupation of the respondents have been analyzed. Our study found that the respondents whose families had a relatively good income background had grandly organized their children's marriage functions. Their parents had invited more guests, organized grand feasts and marriage ceremonies. A few of the respondents from the lower-income group informed that their family had also managed to conduct their children's wedding grandly by taking loans from neighbors and relatives. They informed the researcher that they took loans from local money lenders and had to pay 10 % interest per month. In some of the cases, marriage has been completed simply just within the family members without spending much.

3.6 Religion of Respondents

| Religion | Frequency | Percent (%) |
|-----------|-----------|-------------|
| Hindu | 40 | 71.4 % |
| Christian | 8 | 14.3 % |
| Buddhists | 8 | 14.3 % |
| Total | 56 | 100 % |

Source: Fieldwork November-December 2020

Religion is considered as one of the most important variables to understand the significance of sacred rituals during marriage. Selwyn's (1979) study on Hindu marriage ceremony in Indian society has detailed the various cycles beginning from the Haldi ceremony to the last rites of marriage that occurred between the bride's and groom's families. The author mentioned that the marriage procession among the Hindus is large in Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Punjab, Delhi (Selwyn, 1979). Similar to the Pan Indian Hindu society, among the Nepali society also, varied rituals are performed by those following different belief systems to solemnize the marriage. The detailed ritual of marriage is discussed in chapter four.

In Sikkim, the major religions followed by the Nepalis are Hinduism, Buddhism, and Christianity. According to Singh, (1993) initially, the large group of Nepalis used to follow their own religious beliefs. For example, Rai and Subba still follow the traditions of worshiping their archaic gods and goddesses. People used to believe and follow the practice of Shamanism locally named as *Jhakri*, *Dhami*, *Bongthing*, *Pheydongba*²¹(Sinha,1975). When Hinduism made inroads into Sikkim, many started

²¹ Jhakri or Dhami is a spiritual healer or Shamans of Nepali community who plays an important role in the Nepali society. It is believed that Shamans have the spiritual power to deal with evil spirits.

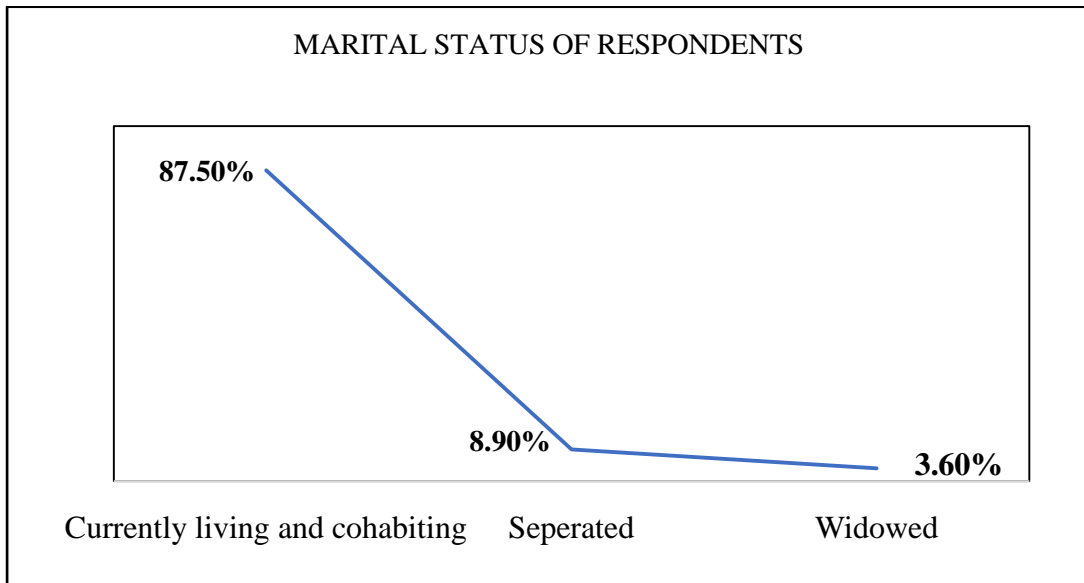
Pheydongba is referred to as the Subba' community priest/healer who plays an important role in the times of deaths and puja. Likewise, *Bongthing* is a male priest of the Lepcha community.

to practice Hindu custom, occupation, purity and pollution and ritual hierarchy (Subba, 1989).

However, later they started to convert and follow different religious faiths and beliefs (Singh, 1975). Few community members of Nepali have converted to Christianity (Gurung, 2018). Now, the mainly followed religious faiths are Hinduism, Christianity, and Buddhism. As per the census of 2011, a majority (57.76%) of the Nepali population follows the Hindu religion. All the important and sacred institutions of Nepalis associated with religious mythology, incarnations, scriptures, sages, and legendary ruling dynasties and their origin can be traced in India and Nepal (Sinha, 1975).

Those who worship family deities have a separate stand to which only close family relations can access. Generally, the rites and rituals are performed by priests from the same caste (Singh, 1993; 8). Our empirical data also shows that the majority (71.4%) of the respondents are Hindus followed by an equal number of Christians and Buddhists. Each religion observed its belief, customary practices, rites which are related to marriage.

3.7 Marital Status of Respondents



Source: Fieldwork November-December 2020

The married respondents were purposefully selected while collecting the empirical data. The lived experiences shared by them have provided fruitful information for the study. Table 3.8 depicts the marital status of the respondents in which 87.5 % of them were living and cohabiting with their spouse while 8.9% of women respondents were found to be separated and another 3.6% of the respondents were widowed.

In this study, all separated couples had similar kinds of reasons for their separation. The common reasons for separation as mentioned by the women respondents were excessive use of alcohol and extramarital affairs of their husbands. The study observed that after separation the wife is generally found to live in a neo residence with her children. Some women who had separated from their spouses were found to be staying in their natal home. A male respondent revealed that his wife had an extramarital affair and left him and his two children for another man. So, the study

found that it is not only man who leaves his wife for another woman but women also do the same.

3.8 Types of Family of Respondents

| Family type | Number | Percentage (%) |
|----------------|--------|----------------|
| Joint Family | 18 | 32.1 % |
| Nuclear Family | 38 | 67.8 % |
| Total | 56 | 100 % |

Source: Fieldwork November-December 2020

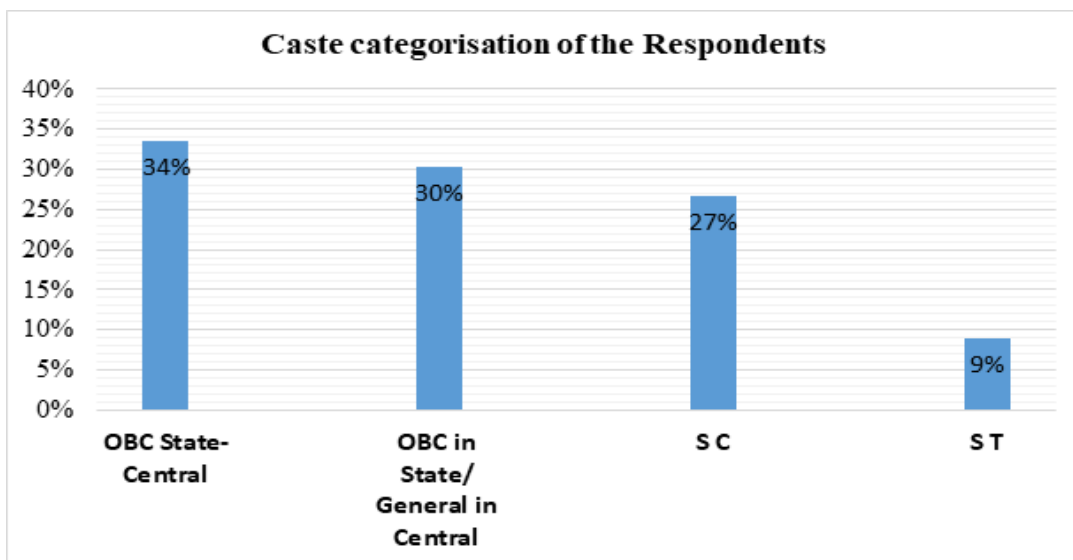
Family as a primary institution of society plays an important role during the whole process of mate selection, rituals and functions organized marriage of the younger generation. Family is also taken into consideration in this study to understand the role of the parents in selecting the spouse for their children. It is important to understand the responsibility of family and kin members in the marriage of their children as basic socialization begins at home. In both the nuclear and joint family types, grown-up children were told by parents and relatives to marry a person who would be suitable for the family and the individual. Many respondents informed that their parents told them to marry within the boundary of acceptable caste. Though the family members do not force them to marry their chosen person directly, they keep reminding them about their preference.

The empirical data shows that 67% of the respondents were living in a nuclear family. After their marriage, the respondents who were staying in the nuclear house had decided to live separately because they said living in a joint family would create more misunderstandings and family quarrels while some of them said they stay separately because of their occupation and children's education. Other respondents shared that they had to live separately because their marriage was not accepted by the boy's family. On the other hand, 32.1% of respondents were found to be living jointly with the boy's family. The respondents who were staying in the joint families

informed that they were getting the support of family members in many aspects of their own lives and their children's lives.

3.9 Caste of Respondents

Following the reservation policy of the Government of India, the present study has divided the respondents belonging to different Nepali communities of Sikkim into four categories. i. Other Backward Class (OBC) in both the central and state lists ii. OBC list in the state but general category in the central list. iii. Scheduled Castes and iv. Scheduled Tribe (Tamang). Rai and Gurung who are clubbed into the OBC category consist of 34% respondents while Bahun and Chhetri respondents who are put into the category of OBC in State and General in Central list comprise 30%. The remaining 27% of the respondents were from the Scheduled caste category such as Darjee, Biswakarma, and Sarki and 9 % of the respondents were Tamang and Subba who are categorized as the Scheduled tribe.



Source: Fieldwork November-December 2020

However, if we follow the traditional patterns of the caste system, different communities have been put into the hierarchical order of the High, Middle, and Low

castes on the basis of caste structure prevalent in the present day Sikkimese Nepali society. This pattern of the structure of the caste is further strengthened by our field findings. The present research reveals that the highest castes such as Brahmins and Chhetris correspondingly are listed in the general category of the central government while the socially and ritually considered to be lowest caste groups are given a new political status of scheduled caste so that they avail the benefits of reservation and improve their socio-economic status. To an extent, the general category has become synonymous with high caste while scheduled caste has been identified as low caste. Chhetri (2017) found that during the traditional time, there was explicit social, political, and economic inequality in the Nepali caste-based society. However, with the implementation of the reservation policy in Sikkim as directed by the government of India, the state aims to bring just an equal society to all Sikkim Subjects.

Table 3.9.1 Caste Structure of the Respondents

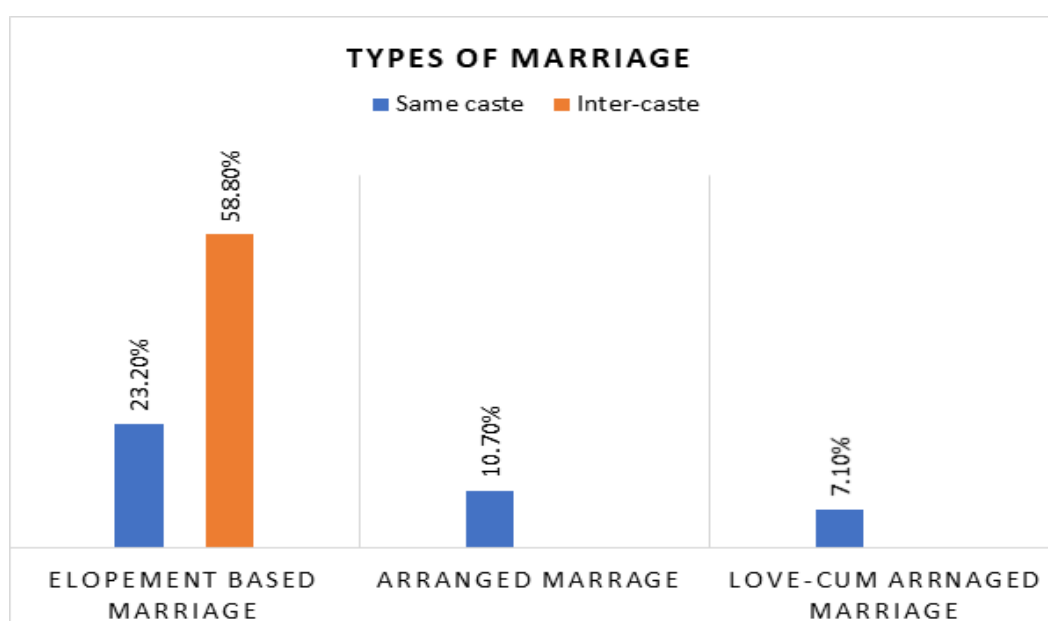
| Caste | Communities | Frequency | Percentage % |
|--------|-------------|-----------|--------------|
| High | Bahun | 7 | 12.5% |
| | Chhetri | 10 | 17.8% |
| Middle | Gurung | 11 | 19.6 % |
| | Tamang | 3 | 5.3% |
| | Rai | 8 | 18% |
| | Subba | 2 | 3.5% |
| Low | Kami | 6 | 12.5 % |
| | Damai | 7 | 10.7% |
| | Sarki | 2 | 3.5% |
| Total | | 56 | 100% |

Source: Fieldwork November-December 2020

The respondents reported that before ten years back there was acute caste discrimination for conducting an inter-caste marriage between the so-called ‘high caste and low caste’. In many of the cases, it was not acceptable. The family used to boycott their children for marrying outside the caste. But inter-caste marriage is widely occurring in recent years.

The study also found out that some of the couples who had married to the Scheduled caste have been socially and ritually ostracized from one’s family, clan and caste. The empirical data shows that marriage with the equal or higher caste is not much of a problem but marrying with a spouse from a Scheduled caste community has been a persisting problem. The traditional rule of endogamous marriage is still found to be practiced as most of the respondents preferred their children to marry within their caste, ethnic community and religion. The respondents revealed that though societies are changing and progressing in the economic and political arenas, some of the undesired customary practices based on caste have not waned.

3.10 Type of Marriage among the Respondents



Source: Fieldwork November-December 2020

The study found two types of arranged marriage that are commonly practiced by the Nepalis of Sikkim to marry, i. totally arranged by the parents or relatives, prior to the formal proposal of marriage the bride and groom have not met each other ii. love cum elopement marriages where the girl and boy were in courtship, decided to elope because of some underlying reasons.

As the data was purposively taken, the majority (82.1%) of the respondents had an elopement-based marriage, out of which 23.21 % of the couples belong to the same caste while the bulk of the couples are from different caste groups, On the contrary, 17.1% of the respondents had an arranged marriage by strictly following the rule of caste and religion endogamy. For example, a Sharma girl can marry a Sharma boy but outside of one's clan. None of the couples from arranged marriage had married outside of one's caste and religion.

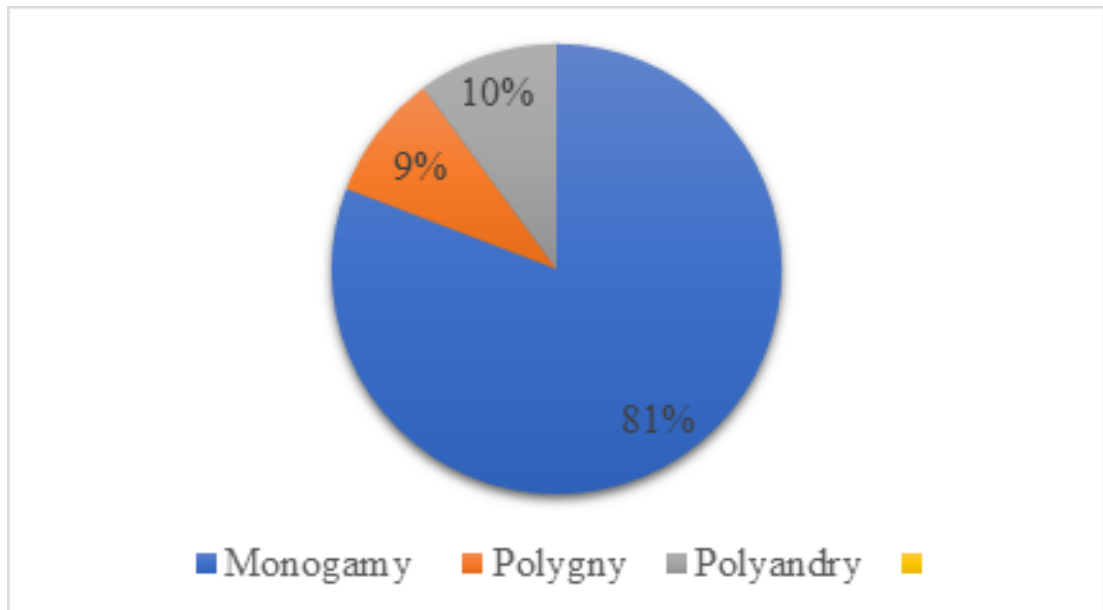
The elderly respondents who had arranged marriage revealed that arranged marriage is better than runaway-love marriages. According to them, in an arranged marriage, there would be the approval of parents and it is valued more. Arranged marriage is considered more respectful for the couple and their respective family. During the fieldwork, researchers were informed by the respondents that customarily marriage by elopement has been practiced by almost all the communities except Bahuns. However, the empirical data showed that presently even among the Bahun community also the elopement-based marriages are taking place. The study also observed that nowadays couples who are in a relationship reveal their relationship status to their family members. Our data shows that around 7 % of couples had love -cum arranged marriage. They were found to introduce their respective partner to their parents before

marriage. They have taken the consent of parents to marry their chosen person and their parents arranged the marriage.

Analysis of field data shows that inter-caste marriage is taking place in every Nepali caste and community. Among those who had marriage through elopement, many of them had chosen a partner from different castes and communities. They have their interpretation for their selection of spouses from a specific caste and community. The inter-caste as well as intra-caste married couples were found to be in courtship before deciding to marry their partner. In a maximum of cases, couples have selected their spouse after falling in love and spending a few months/years with each other. Although marriage between the same caste-category is most commonly practiced, this study observed that there are inter-caste marriages between various caste groups such as the high and middle, high and low, middle and low caste. This is possible because elopement marriage is customary accepted and has been institutionalized in the Nepali society of Sikkim.

Thus, we can see the changes that are taking place in the institution of marriage, in which people have undergone inter-caste marriage and even parents do not have much problem if their children choose their spouse from the marriageable caste and community. However, there found to be some social and ritual restrictions from marrying a spouse from a community who is considered to be lowest in the caste hierarchy.

3.11 Forms of Marriages



Source: Fieldwork, November-December 2020

Depending on the nature of society, there are many forms of marriage. In many parts of Indian society, monogamy, polygamy, and polygyny forms of marriage are prevalent. Polygamy is a union of a man or woman with two or more spouses. Lowie defines polygamy as a socially and culturally constructed phenomenon where there are several reasons for men or women to marry one or more than one partner (Abhram,2018). Polygamy has sub-forms of polygyny and polyandry (Jha,1994).

In Polygyny, a man marries more than one wife in his lifetime. Polygyny is practiced in primitive society, and it was common amongst the wealthier classes who can afford the bride price and had a large amount of agricultural land (Karve,1965). On the contrary, polyandry is a form of marriage of a woman with more than one or two men at a time. Tambiah (1966) outlines that in such forms of marriage, the woman would have one or more husbands who may be fraternal (husbands are brothers) or non-fraternal (husbands may not be brothers). This type of marriage was found among the

Nayar of Kerala, Tibet, and among the tribal as well as among a few Hindu communities of India (Uberoi,1993; Levine, 1988; Majumdar, 1962).

Understanding these types of marriage in the Sikkimese context, monogamy is the general norm among all communities though some communities allow polygamy also. The practice of polygamy was found among the Bhutias, Lepcha, and Nepali communities in Sikkim (Singh,1993). According to Singh (1993), there was the marriage custom of junior levirate and junior sororates among the Bhutia, Lepcha, and Nepali. The marriage practice between a man with his deceased wife's sister is known as junior sororate. In junior levirate, a woman is married to one or more than two men who are brothers. She is common to all the younger brothers along with her husband which is also known as fraternal polyandry. However, the elder brother was not allowed to cohabit with the wives of the younger ones. The first child born out of such marriage is named after the eldest brother whom the child called a father. Simultaneously, the second brother became the second child's father and so on (White,1909).

The study of (Singh, 1993; Rai,2013) shows lately the polygyny and polyandrous marriage have been found to be declined in Sikkim. On the contrary, Rai's (2013) study suggests that in many parts of the Sikkimese society, among the Bhutia community junior levirate is still in practice. However, in this study, the majority of couples are found to be from the monogamous form of marriage as 81% of the respondents were married and living with one husband/wife and their children. As many as 19% of the respondents consisting of both men and women were found to be practicing polygamy marriage. Around 10% of the women respondents had practiced serial monogamous marriage in which they have married for more than one time after

their separation from their first or second husband. Another, 9% of the men respondents were found to have married more than one wife in their life (Polygyny marriage), in which most of them were separated from their wife while a few of them were having two wives but the wives were staying separately. The researcher did not find any case of sororate marriage among the respondents. However, the villager informed me that there was one case of such marriage where a man had married the younger sister of a deceased's wife. It is interesting to note that in all of the second marriages, spouses have separated from their previous spouse without using any modern judicial system. All of them have followed the customary practice of 'Jari payment with lekha pari' to validate their second marriage.

3.12 Jari payments

Traditionally the culture of Jari payment has been found to be practiced among the Nepali communities (Singh, 1993). Either one is Hindu, Buddhist, or Christian, in case of a woman leaving her first husband for another man while he is still alive or without divorcing then a form of fine called the Jari payment is collected from the second husband.

The bride price or the amount spent by the first husband during his marriage needs to be repaid by the second husband as well as to her parent's family to settle the matter. This customary norm is practiced as an integral part to prevent any kind of conflicts between the three families: the woman's first husband's family, the second husband's family and her parental family. The Jari payment is known as a compensation or a return of bride-price to the man and his family by the second husband of a woman (Barnouw, 1955).

It is believed that a woman is being taken care of by her husband after their marriage by giving all the items, luxuries and essentials which are needed. Woman is asked to return gold or silver ornaments, and other valuables if she had received as bride-price during her previous marriage. Sometimes, she is asked to return more than she and her family had received.

A woman respondent said, “When I married my second husband, we were threatened by my first husband ‘s family. Later, my family called me and my second husband to resolve the matter as my ex-husband’s family were frequently calling my parents to return the bride-price. On a pre-decided day and time, local panchayats, family members representing my family, first husband’s and second husband’s families assembled in my parents’ home to make a ‘jarikal’ Jari payment. From my side, my second husband had to give Rs.6000, two bottles of juice and offered a ‘khada scarf’ each to the assembled people seeking forgiveness”.

एक स्वामिनी जारीकल विधवा रु 3061/00
 सिनाप पत्र अकारनामा |

आज ता 4.11.94 का लि
 विगत के दि दिन अधि रम्फु I. B. M. निवासी-
 कुमारे के घर स्वामिनी नेपाल बासी
 संग पैडला गरके विधाना आज
 यतीका दिनका अवधिमा चढे रम्फुमा पैला पढे-
 हुँदि तथा सरकार बानाके हुकुम मनाविक-
 आफ्ना स्थानेया बाँव पैयायत तथा बाँवले-
 बुढापकाके साथीमा निरन सरकारले आ-आपना-
 धर-द्वय तथा उभायी लगायत हुँदि नफाँका-
 इच्छा मनाविक (जारीकल) लेनदेन - गेँदे-
 या एक अकारनामा गेँदेथे |

I. जारीकल रु 3061/- औरत लेजाने पछवाट-
 गवाहाहरके साथीमा आफ्ना गुलीखुबाँमा मा
 औरतके पहिलो विवाहित लेजाने घर स्वामिनी
 गरियो |

II. जारीकल रु 3061/- मा अर्कोको स्वामिनी
 लेजाने (जारी) पछवाट पनि सबै गेँव समाजके
 बनाविकके साथीमा स्वामिनी गेँदेथे |

उपर्युक्त हामी हुँदि पढेका अर्द्ध
 मनाविक मनाविकमा हामी हुँदि पढेको हुने नरामा
 प्रकारके रिस राग दसा लवी तथा ईवी रुद्वे हने
 मनाविक आजका दि 4.11.94 का दिनमा हामी हुँदि पढेने
 आ-आपना धर-द्वय तथा रली सुगौला साथमा गवाहा
 साथीमा आ-आपना इच्छा गरियो

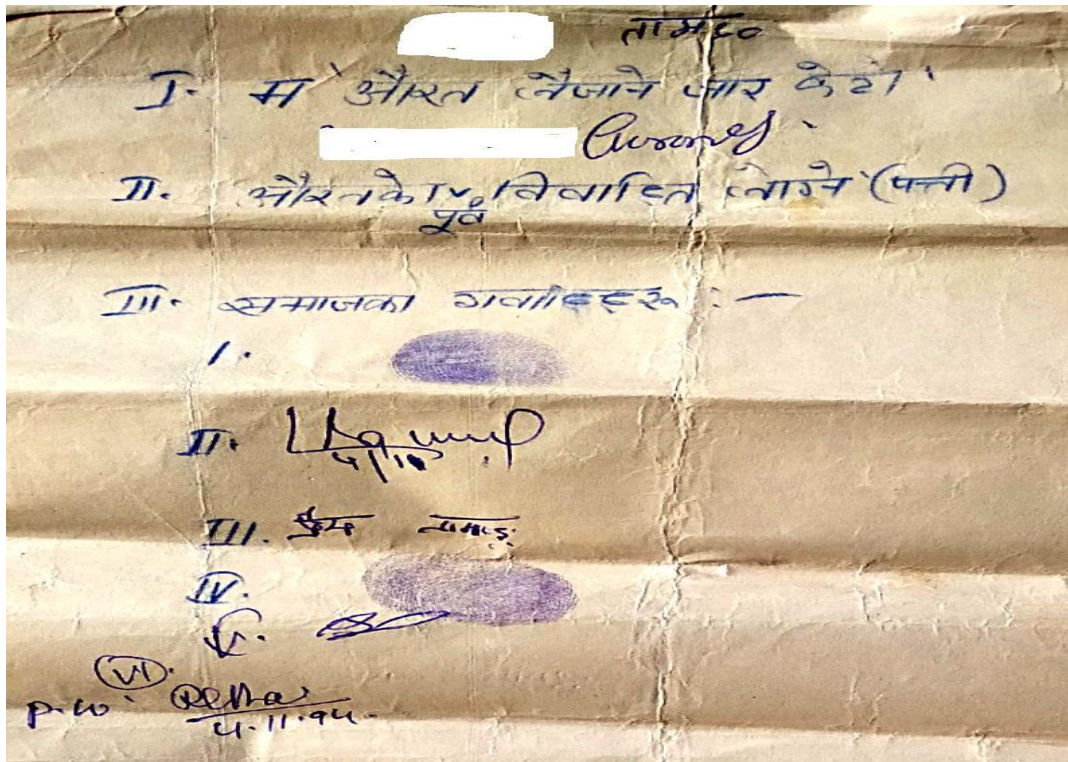
Reproducing a copy of written record on Jari-Kal²² in the year 1994

Many of the respondents viewed that the practice of Jari payment is conducted to prohibit rivalries between the families of the couple. It is thought that a woman eloping with another man has dishonored the ex-husband and his family's reputation. So, to compensate for their degraded reputation, Jari-payment is an important ritual. To settle the marriage of a woman with the second husband, the woman's family

²²The formal compromise paper was made in a Nepali vernacular dated 04.11. 1994. The Jari-Kal ₹ 3061 was paid by the second husband to the first husband in one of the villages in the studied area.

along with relatives of both the present husband and ex-husband conducts a small gathering including the aged persons, village heads/panchayats and family and relatives.

Archival document indicating the main signatories involved in Jari payment in 1994



Source: Record maintained by a respondent showing signatures of ex-husband, second husband and witnesses.

CHAPTER 4

Nepali Marriage Systems: Rites and Rituals

4.1 Introduction

Marriage is considered as one of the most significant life events of an individual's life. Marriage as an institution defines the wealth, power, and status or honor of an individual in society (Dube, 1980). This chapter attempts to discuss the life cycle ritual among the Nepalis that includes the birth rituals, puberty rites, marriage and death rites. The major section of this chapter deals with the marriage system along with the various rites and rituals that are customarily conducted to solemnize a marriage. This chapter has emphasized more on understanding the marriage by elopement, the period of courtship, rituals of elopement-based marriage and, the process of negotiation between the bride giver and bride taker.

4.2 Life Cycle Rituals:

Before the discussion on marriage, this section intends to briefly discuss the major occasions a person must undergo throughout their life. There are many significant life-changing events known as life cycle rituals. The life cycle ritual as defined by Van Gennep (1960) is a ceremony to mark a change in a person's biological and social status at different phases of life. Rites of passage are rituals concerned with changing an individual or group into another social status by marking their incorporation into typically more valued status (Forth, 2018). It further indicates that the ceremonies marked the end of temporal periods and the beginning of new ones. There are three different forms of rites of passage: 'rites of separation', 'rites of transition', and 'rites of incorporation. Each ritual that is performed in society has its

religious essence and meanings. The birth, initiation to adulthood, marriage, and death rituals are described as transition or changing rituals.

The life cycle of Nepali communities, the rites of passage in each caste and community differ as per their religious and cultural belief (Singh,1993).There are different ways or procedures for undergoing a certain ritual in families and communities. However, despite the heterogeneity and complexity of diversified Nepali ethnic communities, there are general patterns that are commonly observed (Rai,2013) among Nepalis.

4.2.1 The Birth rites- The Birth rites are an auspicious occasion for a family. The birth period is also known as ‘Sutak’²³ in Nepali terminology. This period is observed as a pollution period by the family, and they are not allowed to perform certain social and religious activities (Balikci,2008). Those neighbors and relatives who come to visit the mother and child would not take water and cooked food from a newborn baby’s house. After visiting a post-natal woman, an individual will purify themselves by taking a bath, symbolically touching the fire, sprinkling holy waters including cow urine, and rubbing Mugwort leaves or ‘Tetipati leaves’ on their body.

Those who take care of the mother and newborn baby during the process of childbirth also take part in the purification ceremony. During a child's birth, along with the mother, the whole family is kept away and observed a period of pollution, and no close relatives take food and water from the family until the naming ceremony of the child is held. The days for the naming ceremony vary for a baby boy and a baby girl. It may be on the fifth, seven, or nine days for a boy and in the case of a girl, the fifth or seventh day after the birth of a baby. On the day of the naming ceremony called

²³Sutak a Hindu terminology that specifies a certain period of impurity applicable to the members of the family lineage and relatives of a person at the time of birth and death of a family member.

'nauran' a religious priest is invited to do the ceremony and to ritually conduct the purification rite (Singh, 1993). On this day, both mother and child must take a purification bath. Only after conducting this ritual, mother and child and the whole family is considered 'pure'. The baby's name is chosen by the priest by seeing his or her horoscope which includes the birth time, day, month, and horoscope sign. The name given by the priest is not often used. To address a baby in daily lives another name is given according to the choice of the parents or relatives which is generally used in everyday life and official documents. After six months, a rice-feeding ceremony is performed after which the baby starts to eat solid food like rice and grains for the first time. When a baby boy completes three to five years a ceremony called 'Chhewar' (hair cutting ceremony by maternal uncle) is performed. A baby girl's nose and ears are pierced at any time but there is no specific ritual performed for it. Nowadays, many families have also started celebrating the birthday party of their children. In the above-mentioned rites, the relatives and neighbors are called for the feast and the guests give the blessings to the baby and gifts in cash or kind.

4.2.2 Puberty Rite - Another important rite among the Nepalis is the puberty rite. Puberty rite was observed by almost all the Hindu Nepali communities (Singh,1993) but not by the Christians and Buddhists. It is usually observed for five to seven days after a girl starts her first menstruation cycle (Das,2008). It depends on the communities' customs whether to observe the puberty rite or not as some communities like the Gurung, Pradhan, Bhujel, Sharma, and Chhetri used to practice the puberty rite (Sinha, 1975). Puberty rite marks an important life changing event in women's life as it signifies the women to reach a stage of responsibility, fertility, and productive being (Das, 2008).

During her first period, girls are asked not to cook in the kitchen, not allowed to go to the field, temples and touch the flowers, vegetables, and pickles. They were also kept separately from the male members throughout the menstruation period. The older generation women respondents said that, when they were young, they were asked not to see the menfolk including their brother's and father's face as it was thought that it would pollute them and would bring a great sin. During the festival of Diwali called 'Bhai tika', if a girl is in menstruation, she is not supposed to put tika on her brothers' forehead. However, as time passed that rigidity in the observation on puberty rite, and menstruation as taboo has been changing. Slowly, educated women are also doing away with those traditional notions of pollution during menstruation but have not completely vanished.

4.2.3 Death Rites- The death rites and their procession differ according to the religion and community (Singh, 1993). The Hindus cremate the deceased at the riverside and the Buddhists cremate in the forest area cemetery. Among the Christians, the dead bodies are usually buried (Decker,2017). Those who follow Christianity observed shorter mourning periods and the rituals related to death are shorter while among the Hindus and Buddhists it is observed for longer days. In a Hindu family, sons are obligated to carry their parents' deceased bodies. Usually, it is the eldest son whose service is inevitable in the rituals related to the death of his parents as he is supposed to light the funeral pyre. All the sons must bathe, shave their heads, eyebrows, and face. The mourning period is observed for thirteen days for Hindu Nepalis and the family of the deceased is said to be polluted during this time (Balicki,2008). A Brahmin priest is called to do all the offerings and prayers in the name of the deceased person. The family members of the deceased's person are not supposed to eat salt, meat, milk, etc., for the duration.

After the funeral rites, again on forty-five days, a ritual is known as ‘paitalisdin ko kaam’ is conducted, followed by a small procession to complete the funeral rites. On the death anniversary, a ritual called ‘Barsadin’ is conducted in the name of the deceased by the family members and offers a cow, clothes, and a few amounts to the priest and poor people. The collected money ‘Saraw²⁴’ is used to return the debt if family members have borrowed money from relatives and neighbors. A few families also donate a waiting shed which is built in the name of the deceased’s person because it is believed that offering something in the deceased’s person’s name would take the soul to heaven and attain salvation.

4.3 Marriage System among the Nepalis of Sikkim

Historically, endogamous marriage in terms of tribe, caste, religion, the community has been widely accepted and preferred in the Nepali Society. However, a few instances of inter-community, inter-tribe, and inter-caste marriage were there in Sikkim (Singh,1993). The best example of inter-community marriage is the marriage of the twelve/last Chogyal, the former king of Sikkim who had married an American lady called Hope Cooke.²⁵ However, during those traditional times inter-caste, inter-community, and inter-tribe marriage were not rampant as it is in the contemporary time.

There was acceptance of marrying certain groups and communities while there was a restriction on marrying some other groups. For example, among the Lepcha and Subba, inter-tribe marriage has been commonly practiced for the ages. Among the Nepali community, inter-caste marriage between the high castes such as Sharma and Chhetri was not acceptable. Among the Matwali or the middle caste groups, inter-

²⁴Saraw is known as a collection of cash/ money at the time of marriage and death.

²⁵Hope Cooke an American Lady and a former queen of Sikkim.

community marriages were culturally accepted. However, there were socially and culturally constructed rules where an individual from certain specific groups could intermarry with each other. Likewise, even among the Damai community, inter-community marriage was there where they used to marry within their community but outside of their clan. But the marriage between the high and middle-caste Nepalis was not a very acceptable or desirable phenomenon. Nonetheless, each caste, tribe, and community preferred to make a prospective spouse within the same category (Balikci, 2008).

As mentioned in Chapter 1, there were different types of acquiring spouses in Sikkimese society such as marriage by arrangement, marriage by elopement, marriage by capture, and marriage by service which were mostly found amongst the Bhutia, Lepcha, and Nepalis (Singh,1993). Historically the Nepali ethnic communities such as Bhujel, Chhetri, Darjee, Biswakarma, Gurung, Rai, Tamang, Thami, Magar, and Newar have been practicing negotiated or arranged marriage along with marriage by elopement (Subba,1994).The proper and prestigious type of marriage has always been an arranged marriage (Singh,1993). However, nowadays, the love cum arranged marriage is a new phenomenon that is also being practiced along with elopement-based marriage and an arranged marriage.

4.3.1 Friendship and the Courtship Period:

Before proceeding to the detailed rites and rituals of arranged and an elopement marriage, it is important to discuss the period of courtship and friendship journey where an individual meets, likes, and sometimes develops the bonding of lifelong relationship. The courtship phase is regarded as one of the processes through which human beings get attracted to a partner with whom he/she falls in love (Fowler, 2007).

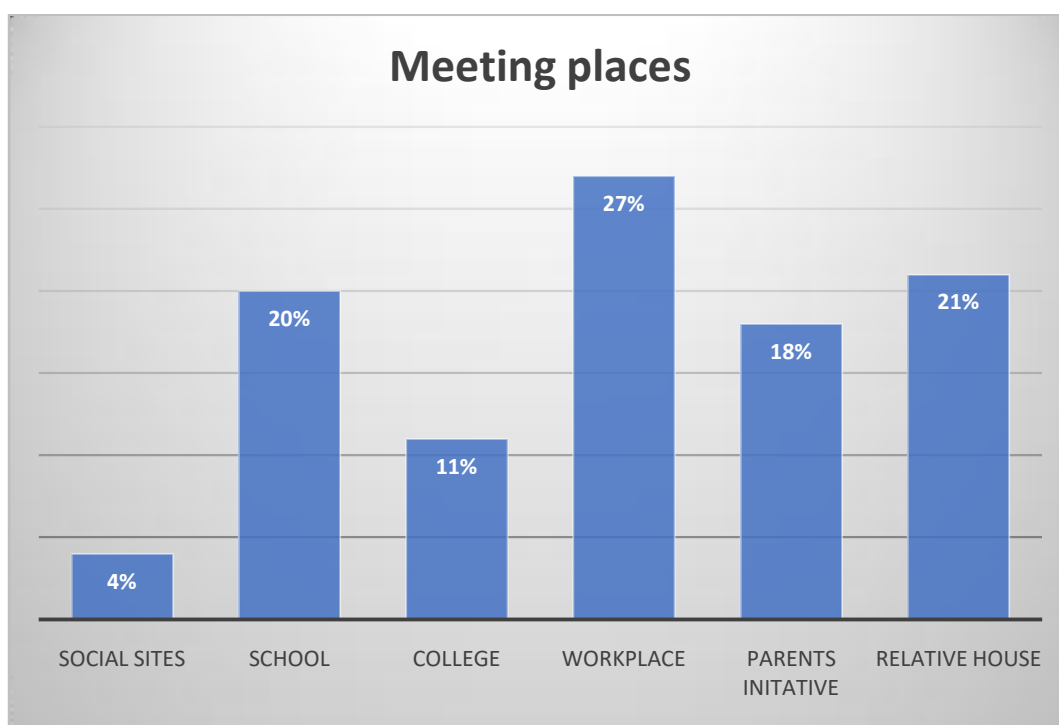
They share a bond of romantic love and try to understand each other's interests, hobbies, and other familial background (Allendorf, 2013). Fowler (2007) has argued that this phase of courtship allows an individual to express love, emotional, psychological, and financial support to their respective partner. In addition, sexual desires can be added in the modern context. In this courtship phase, a boy and a girl try to know each other, their family background, and also navigate their relationship for future marital prospects.

A 48-year-old woman from Duga village said that "In our time we used to wait for a boy to express his feelings for the girl. A girl never made the first move even if she likes the boy because it was considered as inappropriate". Traditionally, it was the boy who should take the initiative to express his love for a particular girl whereas a girl was denied expressing her feeling of love. If the girl accepts the proposal of the boy to be his girlfriend, then they usually meet secretly in markets, funfairs, fields, festivals, or in any kind of public gatherings where their chances of meeting any known person from the village are limited.

It is not that the desire for companionship or sexual desire did not exist in the earlier time, but it was not explicitly expressed like nowadays. However, today, the idea of open relationship and courtship, romantic love before marriage has become a more common practice than ever in Sikkim. Their dating was simple as they used to go to watch fun fairs, community festivals, or some events near their home. They used to exchange letters, scarves, and photographs as a symbol of love for each other. Earlier the dating period was short whereas in modern times the younger couples were found to be having a longer pre-marital relationship. They were often assisted by some friends whenever and wherever they went for dating.

During the earlier times, the idea of romantic love, boyfriend, and girlfriend was not so much in existence as the family members discouraged such relationships. A 65-year-old man said, "During our time, if the family gets to know that someone is involved in a love affair in the village, the couple along with the family used to get warnings and threats to move out from the village. Another woman respondent said, villagers used to say the couples are polluting the village and neighbor's child and influencing the younger ones in such unwanted behavior".

The below diagram 4.1 shows the first meeting place of the couples.



As informed to the researcher by the older generation that love, relationship, dating, the live-in relationship before the marriage was not very common during their time. Society was not opened to allow the young couple to be involved in a premarital relationship. They rarely had any courtship before the marriage.

Bista (1987) described that in the traditional time, community members had their cultural events where a boy and girl could find a suitable partner for themselves. For instance, among the Gurung and Subba Nepali community, the folk festivals such as the Rodhi culture ²⁶and Dhan Nacch ²⁷were common meeting places for boys and girls as they used to sing and dance along with other community members. After meeting in such public places, a man usually proposes to the girl whom he is in love with. Those elder generations who had love relationships mostly have eloped to marry their loved ones. In a rare case only, a man was asked to take permission from her father for the formal marriage.

The empirical data shows that 21% of the respondents including men and women have met their partner for the first time during their visits in the relative's house where their siblings or aunts had married and settled, mainly in different parts of Sikkim and West Bengal. 27% of the respondents had met in their workplace. Most of them had met while working in the liquor companies, pharma companies in and around Rangpo, and other places of East Sikkim since it is nearer to home. Whereas 20% of the respondents knew their partner since school as they used to go to the same school or nearby schools. In the present scenario, before marriage, often a girl and a boy knew each other and had interaction in public spaces such as school, workplace, and colleges where they have initiated their relationship.

Before becoming a girlfriend and a boyfriend, most of the girls and boys were generally regular conventional friends. After that, the boy used to express his love and fondness to the girl by sending messages through letters, friends, relatives, neighbors.

²⁶Rodhi Culture is specifically related to the Gurung community. Since ancient times, it has been regarded as an important cultural event of the Gurung community where the Folkman gather together to celebrate their traditional festivals by performing cultural activities.

²⁷Dhan Nacch is associated with the Subba community which is performed at the time of paddy harvest season.

Nowadays, electronic mails, messages via mobile phones, and other mediums are sent out to express one's love for the girl or the boy. Interestingly, at present couples are also seeing and meeting through online social sites like Facebook and Instagram. In this study, 3% of the respondents said they have met their spouse through Facebook and had married after meeting in person.

Many of the younger generation respondents of around 35 years age group, were in a relationship for more than one year. Some of them even informed the researcher that they had multiple breakups with their boyfriends/girlfriends. Such breakups are considered to be normal these days and there is no stigma attached to them. However, a girl/boy will try to keep such matters private and secret from family and relatives. It was found that many couples tried to hide the relationship as they were afraid that they may be separated from their partner or taunted.

During fieldwork, a couple revealed that they had seven years of courtship. In some cases, those who were courting from their teenage years have awaited each other until they complete their studies and till one of the partners gets a job before the marriage. During the period of courtship, the couple established the bond of love, care, trust, and understanding of each other before finally deciding to get married. If the boy and girl want to take their relationship a step further, they may start talking about their marriage to their friends, siblings, relatives, and parents.

When asked about the caste and class consciousness while dating a person from different groups, the respondents informed that most of them were aware of the consequences of undergoing inter-caste marriage. Therefore, they often select the person from within the marriageable categories so that they would not face any trouble from their family. Likewise, pleasing attributes, personalities, and qualities in

terms of speaking, doing work, behavior and characteristics are searched for in a person to be a future spouse. Among all the female respondents, the boy's occupation and his source of income were a top priority. Along with the economic capabilities of a boy, his caring, understanding, and supportive qualities were also considered to be qualities of a good husband. And importantly, it was found that the younger generation gives priority to educational qualification and occupation while choosing a partner.

Therefore, it can be stated that the phase of courtship is significant as it allows the partner to understand the details of each other and their family's background as well. Consequently, through the ongoing discussion and argument it is well evident that the phase of courtship from traditional society to modern society is found to be changing. Accordingly, couples would take a rational decision and decide whether they want to marry each other and lead a married life or not.

4.3.2 The Process of an Arranged Marriage:

The historical fact of Sikkim proves that, during the traditional times, most of the arranged marriages were initiated by the boy's family or relatives from both girl and a boy's family (Rai,2011). The middle man such as a maternal or fraternal uncle, aunt has played a crucial role in the spouse selection for their niece and nephews.

At the initial stage, the boy's relatives who act as a middleman or a representative on behalf of the boy go to meet the girl's parents to formally propose to the girl for marriage. The middleman includes the maternal uncle who visits the parents of the prospective bride. Two to three elderly relatives of the boy visit the girl's family with some fruits, gifts and sweets, and some traditional gifts along with them. For instance, while proposing to a girl from the Sharma community, the middleman must take a

traditional janai-supari along with some fruits, flowers, and milk (Sagun) as presents (Rai,2013).

If the girl and boy know each other and the boy's family may informally approve the girl, the girl's parents will accept the proposal and accept the gifts. However, if they are unknown to each other then they are given a short time to become accustomed with each other. Simultaneously, if a boy is from considerably the so-called 'good family', the girl's mother may also persuade a girl to accept a man's proposal for marriage. Upon final agreement to the union from both sides based on the appropriateness of the horoscope, as a mark of agreement, the boy's parents gift the girl's parents, Janai (sacred thread) and supari (betel nut) especially in the case of Bahuns.

In the case of Tamang, Subba, and Gurung, the receiving of 'alcohol' and 'traditional scarf' as a 'Sagun' symbolizes the agreement for marriage. After finalizing the marriage, both families negotiated on the amount of the bride price to be given by the groom's family. At the same time, they also discuss the responsibility for the upcoming marriage ceremonies. Once the date for marriage is finalized, the invitation is sent to the relatives, neighbors, and villagers.

4.3.3 Involvement of Parents and Relatives

It was informed by the respondents that, in the traditional times in most arranged marriages, the bride and groom did not know each other before the marriage. Parents and relatives used to take the responsibility of fixing the marriage alliance. The primary and secondary relatives who are connected through kinship, clan, and alliance are invited.

Along with the relatives, friends and villagers are also invited including one or two persons from each household. As an invitation, the unbroken betel nut, two pieces of cloves, and small cardamom are wrapped in a small bag which is traditionally used as an invitation called 'Nimto'. However, nowadays people are using printed invitation cards where all the details of both the bridegroom, venue, marriage date, and time are mentioned and the cards are sent out via emails, WhatsApp, and other electronic platforms.

Nowadays, if a couple having premarital affairs feels that they want to have a more reputable and prestigious form of marriage, the boy may ask his parents and relatives to talk with the girl's family since arranged marriage is the most preferred and respectable way. This type of marriage may be termed as love cum arranged marriage which is commonly found in the western world.

A 40-year-old women respondent who had a love cum arranged marriage narrated that "We were in a relationship for 3 years. I was doing my BA in Kalimpong, and he already had a job at that time. He waited for me until I completed my graduation. After completing my studies, I returned home to Sikkim then I joined a job in a Company in Human Resource post. When we were ready to get married, we both informed our respective parents. In both families, we didn't have any problems because we both are from the same caste and religion. We introduced each other's parents. Later, when we had saved a few amounts of money, we helped our parents to organize our engagement and wedding".

4.3.4 The engagement ceremony- After a few days or weeks of coming into a consensus for marriage, an auspicious engagement day is fixed by consulting with the priest. It also depends on the financial position of the family to organize a grand

engagement or not. Mostly, the engagement ceremony would be simple and shorter than the final marriage. A few relatives and a few villagers are invited from both the couple's sides to attend and witness the ceremony. During the celebration, the prospective groom and bride will exchange a gold ring in front of the family members, relatives, and guests. However, in many families, the engagement part is directly done on the day of marriage. The wedding day is finalized after the engagement.

4.3.5 The wedding day – The wedding is celebrated in the girl's house after weeks or months depending upon the date scheduled by the priest. On this day the boy's family has to offer the items to the girl's family that have been fixed during the formal proposal day. The gifts or offerings also vary as per one's caste and community. If the girl belongs to the Matwali community or if her family is non-vegetarian, the boy's party has to give the meat, alcohol, and money. There would be an exchange of gifts between the close relatives of the couple (Bronouw,1955).

The groom, accompanied by a few friends, parents, and relatives would arrive in the house of the bride. In many parts of Sikkim, after the arrival of the groom in the bride's house, he and his party are sprinkled with uncooked colored rice. The groom would be covered under an umbrella to protect from sunlight, rain, and sprinkling rice. The groom gives some amount to the girls who are mostly younger sisters of the bride. Among Subba and Lepcha communities, the groom and his party acted as if they were beaten with the nettles by a few women just for fun (Balikci, 2008).

After receiving the groom, the wedding rituals would start where the bride and groom are taken to the courtyard where the puja is held. The bride and groom exchange rings if they have not consummated an engagement ceremony. The bride's parents wash the

feet of the couple and this ritual is known as Ghora-Dhunu. The priest does the needful rites by chanting the mantra from the religious scriptures. There are important rites that are performed such as Kanyadan, Panigrahana, Ghoradhunu, Saptapadi or Sathfero, and Juthokhane (Rai,2013). The kanyadan rite ²⁸ is one of the most important parts where a father has to ritually give away the unmarried daughter to the groom. In the absence of the father, maternal uncle or eldest brother do the kanyadaan ritual. Afterward, the sindur-potey rite is done where the groom puts the vermilion and ties a green necklace to the bride. After tying the knot of the scarf of both bridegrooms, they are asked to make three rounds of ‘yogya’ around the sacred fire. In each round, there is meaning attached with it signifying the duty of the husband and wife. The groom and bride vowed to the fire-deity that they would perform every role of a good husband and wife and would take every responsibility of a married couple. They vow to each other that they would be life-long companions who would be there for each other in every woe and happiness.

After the completion of conducting all the rituals, the priest or headmen of the community pronounced the couple as husband and wife, and the couple can legitimately cohabit. The priest prays to the ancestral god to bless the couple with children, wealth, healthy life and prosperity. In some communities, Shilok dance is also held in the bride’s house. A piece of traditional music called Naumati Baja ²⁹ is played while the groom and his companions enter the marriage venue. It also plays while the bride is leaving her natal house and also before entering the groom’s house.

²⁸

²⁹Naumati Baja is a traditional folk music practiced by the Damai community. It is mostly played in arranged marriages which symbolizes a grand marriage ceremony.

4.4 Procedure of Solemnizing an Elopement Marriage

Elizabeth Gilbert in Merriam Webster's dictionary defines elopement to run for marriage with one's chosen mate in a secretive manner or basically without a parents' consent. To Bandyopadhyay (1929), elopement refers to an intended and planned process opted by the heterosexual lovers who run away from their respective homes for marriage and cohabitation. However, anthropologists define it as one of the processes for acquiring a mate to marry and establish a family (Jha, 1994). The study by various scholars in different societies in different places of the world shows the practice of elopement-based marriage in Tonga (Marcus, 1979), Nepal (Jones, 1977), Pakistan (Marsden, 2007), India (Dhanda,2012) (Chowdhry,2007), (Bandyopadhyay,1929) l.

In each society, the meaning and significance of elopement are slightly different. However, the main point derived from the above-mentioned studies is that elopement-based marriage is secretly escaping with the lover without the knowledge of the parents to get married and establish a family.

Traditionally, among the Nepalis elopement marriage is stated as (Chori-Biya) marriage by stealing which means a thief steals a woman for marriage (Barnouw,1955). However, in today's Nepali society the understanding of elopement-based marriage has changed. Man is no longer termed as a 'thief' for making an elopement because it has been understood by the society that both the boy and the girl have an agreement with each other before an elopement for marriage (Jones, 1977). The act of elopement reflects the individual's choice of mate selection based on love, affection, or attraction between the couple (Allendorf,2019). The operational meaning of elopement marriage in the present study is that marriage by elopement no longer

means that a girl or a woman is taken against her will but elopement acts as a medium for marriage. Therefore, elopement is a process in which the partners elope from home to get married with or without the consent of their guardians. The respondents refer to this kind of marriage as ‘love marriage’

Elopement-based marriages have increased over time. Across the Nepali society, there are some rules and practices to accept marriage by elopement. In every community, there are certain cultural norms and customs related to marriage by elopement that are conducted to solemnize a marriage. After performing the important rituals, the couples are known as husband and wife.

The writing of Marcus (1979) has explained the various events that occurred in the Tonga society where elopement-based marriages are solemnized through some rituals. The ritual included in those societies is the ‘reconciliation’ with or without the marriage ceremonies in between the boy’s and girl’s family to settle the marriage of the eloped couples. When the settlements are made between the families, the marriage ceremonies are decided, some hold it in grand ways while in some instances ceremonies are not found to be celebrated in front of the society. Naz’s study in Pakistan shows that widow remarriage usually takes place with an elopement. Elaborate rituals are never conducted for those men and women who go for a second or third marriage. Instead, the couple after elopement stays as a married couple (Naz,2017).

Likewise, coming to the Indian society especially among the Southern, Northern, and Central India, the eloped couples go to the temple to formally and ritually recognize them as a married couple. They also take help from the civil court to register their marriage to formally legalize their relationship (Chowdhry,2007). Simultaneously,

some couples also opt to tie the knot in an Arya Samaj Temple with the participation of a few close friends and the priest. In the Northern and southern parts of Indian society, the run-away couples are not socially accepted, and the family members do not conduct any marriage rituals (Chowdhry,2007), (Dhanda, 2008).

Apart from the mainstream Indian society, the Nepalis, Nagas, and few tribal communities are found to accept an elopement marriage after conducting few important customary rites of marriage (Visto,2001), (Allendorf,2013). Various rituals are set as mandatory to perform while establishing the marriage union of an eloped couple (Bista, 1987). Among the Nepali communities across the country, they perform certain rites and rituals to recognize an eloped couple as married (Jones,1977). These different phases of customary practices need to be followed to recognize the couple as husband and wife, failing to perform such customary rituals may not recognize them as a married couple in the Nepali society. They may neither get the marital status of being a husband and wife nor get respect when they become parents. However, in Nepali society, each caste or community has its own set of cultural traditions, negotiations, the demand of bride price, and ways of conducting marriages as per their religious and community belief (Singh,1993).

Except in a few cases, once the couple elopes to marry, sooner or later they are generally accepted by one or both the families. Even if the couple is not accepted by both the families, some parts of the marriage rituals are performed by one of the families to recognize the alliance. The following are the generally followed steps for an elopement-based marriage among the Nepalis of Sikkim.

4.4.1 Elopement Day- In the majority of the cases, the boy and the girl who are in a relationship usually plan the day they should elope. After the elopement, they do not

go far away. Sometimes, the boy takes the girl either directly to his house or someplace where both could spend at least two days together (Bronouw,1955). They informed their family about their decision to marry through the help of friends or relatives or via phone. Generally, the boy's family will insist the couple come home. After coming to the boy's house, his family and relative inquiries about the girls' family background, age, caste, profession, education, and the set of customs that are being practiced in her community.

The empirical data revealed that the boy's family usually accepts the girl after an elopement made by a couple because there would be chances of bringing dishonor of a girl's family and girl's reputation in the village in case of refusal by boy's parents. After elopement, the girl would not return home because she had spent the night with the boy and there would be questions on her chastity and character. It is always thought marrying her off would be better than keeping her home as it may bring disgrace to the family. Therefore, to avoid conflict between the families and communities, the couples have been traditionally found to be accepted after elopement provided, they belong to the marriageable castes.

4.4.2 The Involvement of Mediator

The mediator or the negotiator is a person who is involved in any kind of social activity, conflict. They consist of two or more individuals or groups and play an important role in negotiating the matters to be solved, namely the family disputes, neighbor conflicts, and other various cases (Bornouw,1955). Simultaneously, customarily in marriage mediators play a vital role starting from the initial phase of the courtship of the couple. A mediator could be a friend, cousin, relative, neighbor, or matchmaker from the side of the boy or the girl. Mediators try to bring two families

together by their friendly, supportive, and convincing qualities. While making the elopement of the couple, the friends may also act as a mediator. However, the mediator that is chosen to settle marriages is usually from the older generation, the mediator is commonly called lami or Kaliya (Bronouw,1955). Among the Nepali society, the negotiators are the elderly persons, preferably from the same caste of the boy or/and the girl as the person must know the customary and traditional practices of marriage. If there is discord between the bride and groom's family, skillful negotiators sort out the differences and bring the alliance into an agreement. It is believed that the same caste mediator would better negotiate the bride price and other requirements. A minimum of two to four negotiators is sent from the boy's family to the girl's family for the settlement of the alliance.

4.4.3 Chor ko shor ritual - The very first rite that is conducted after making an elopement is the 'Chor ko Shor' ritual. As discussed before, Chor ko Shor rituals mean that the man has stolen a girl to marry without her will. After the elopement of the couple, on the third day, lami or Kaliya³⁰ from the boy's family will go to the girl's family and inform them about their daughter's whereabouts, wellbeing and try to get consent for the marriage from her parents and relatives (Bronouw,1955). The mediators play an important role while negotiating the parties for the marriage.

The elderly respondents revealed that, usually kaliya or the mediator are welcomed at evening time. Mr. Tamang, 60 years old, narrated that "during the earlier time people used to remain busy at day time. Head of the family either father or mother and other siblings had to go to work and there were chances of not meeting with the head of the family during the day time. On the other hand, there were chances of refusal and conflict between the kaliya and family. So, in order to avoid any misfortune, the best

³⁰ Kaliya or lami is a mediator who plays an important role in uniting families of an eloped couple.

time for the chor ko shor ritual was set at evening time”. Except in a few cases, this study found out that most of the respondents had informed the researcher that they had performed this ritual at evening or night time.

They are sent by the boy’s family to the girl’s place to negotiate and settle the agreement for marriage. Again, those mediators will search for a known person from the girl’s village who knows the girl’s address and family to facilitate the negotiations. Through this middleman, the boy’s relatives reached the girl’s house and informed the girl’s parents about their visit. Then one of the negotiators offers a traditional scarf (khada) along with two bottles of local or millet wine to the girl’s father in a Matwali community as a form of respect. However, the custom of sagun or offering varies from ‘Tagadharis to Matwalis’ communities (Ghatak, 1993). If the girl’s family are from the ‘Matwali community,’ they may offer alcohol and meat. The acceptance of such offerings symbolizes the approval of marriage.

The negotiators persuaded and convinced the girl’s parents to accept the boy and girl for marriage. On behalf of the couple and boy’s favor, the negotiators attempt to persuade the girl’s father and family by praising or talking about the positive qualities of the boy and his family. It is usually accepted if the daughter selects the spouse up to the family’s standards and expectations. However, the negotiation does not end easily between the boy’s and girl’s parties. From the girl’s side maternal uncle, father’s sister, and father’s brother are called to witness and participate while deciding the marriage. In case of unavailability of a girl’s maternal and fraternal relatives, negotiation is likely to settle only with an involvement of the girl’s parents.

But in exceptional cases, if the girls’ family finds the boy unacceptable for marriage, despite the negotiators trying hard to break through the discordance, further

discussion would not be allowed, and the couple would be denied the union. If the girls' family finds the boy's family, caste, and occupational background to be suitable for their daughter, the negotiation is done smoothly, and marriage would likely take place. Simultaneously, if a girl's family accepts the alliance, they may demand bride-price and other requirements for the ceremonies which vary from community to community and family to family (Singh,1993). After the negotiation, the formal wedding ceremonies are fixed which take place after a week or month. The following rituals are commonly found to be performed for elopement marriage.

4.4.4 Sindur-potey: After having the girl's guardian's approval, the couple along with the boy's parents and relatives go to the nearby temple for Sindur potey ritual. It is believed that to live a long bond of married life, couples must go to one's religious institution either in the church, temple, or monastery. The couple seeks the blessing of God and Goddesses through prayer and offerings. The priest would see the couple's horoscope and ask the couple to visit on an auspicious date for the rite. Among the Hindus, the rite of sindoor-potey is found to be commonly practiced without which marriage remains incomplete (Bronouw,1955). However, Barnouw argues that in the traditional times Rai community did not do the Sindur Potey rites because there was no priest among them who could read Vedas. From Hindu mythology, the act of Sindur-potey is an important ritual as it signifies the couple as husband and wife. They usually offered sweets, money, and some fruits in the temple. The priest conducts the puja before the sacred fires by chanting mantras from the religious scripts. The groom is asked to put vermilion on the middle part of the girl's head and ties a green necklace as a symbol of marriage. It is believed that conducting such religious marriage rituals would bless the couple for a long life together as God Shiva and Goddess Parvati.

In an arranged marriage all the rites of marriage are conducted generally in the girl's house or in the wedding venue where all the marriage ceremonies are held. However, in an elopement case, this rite is usually performed in a temple. Only a few family members from the boy's side are involved to witness the Sindur-potey rite.

4.4.5 Dhogbhet (Reception)

After the chor-ko- shor and Sindoor-potey rituals, the Dhogbhet (reception) ceremony is conducted in the bride's house (Bronouw,1955). Before the Dhogbhet ceremony, the family of the girl starts to prepare the list of guests to be invited from the boy's side. On the other hand, the boy's parents would also generally start collecting the items, money, and other gifts to be paid to the girl's family as a bride price in some communities while in others just simply exchange gifts between the bride's and girl's family takes place. The girl's family decides the number of guests to come along with the bridegroom in the function and it also depends on the financial position of the girl's family to organize it grandly or not. In the case of elopement marriage, it is usually first organized in the bride's house within a few months or a year.

It has been informed by the older respondents that in the earlier time when there were no landline or mobile phones and internet connectivity, invitations were sent through a mediator to the couple, his parents, close relatives, and a few friends. But within the village, the girl's father or brother, assisted by one or two people, goes to give the invitation to the relatives, neighbors, and villagers. Sometimes, the list of guests would be small, and the villagers may not be invited. As like an arranged marriage, betel nuts, cloves, and small cardamom are used for the invitation. In recent times, invitation cards or e-invitation cards are also used for an invitation.

After the arrival of the bride and groom at the bride's father's residence accompanied by the groom's parents and relatives, they would be welcomed by a group of women who are the bride's relatives. Before the entry of the bride-groom and parties in the girl's house, bride-price in the form of cash or kind is paid to the girl's family. After offering the gifts, a ceremony known as Tika Talo is done where the newlywed couple is blessed by the parents and elderly relatives followed by the villagers. They apply tika on the couple's forehead, put on a Khada (scarf) or a garland, give gifts in the form of cash or kind, and bless them. The bride and groom would be assisted by younger sisters and brothers from each side who are called Lokhantay.

From this day, the parents of the couple would be called and known as 'Shamdhi-Shamdhini'. Starting from the head of the family, all the relatives of the boy and the girl greet each other by bowing down to each other. It is believed that without performing the ritual of Dhogbhet, they are not acknowledged as relatives- in-laws. This ritual is very significant without which the couple is not allowed to visit the girl's family.

All guests have the feast and attend the cultural event at the end of the day. Before sending the bride and groom both the families and guests participate in the social gathering and dance for entertainment or for refreshment. It is being observed that in elopement-based marriages, the traditional Naumati Baja is not performed. Some families invite a few women and men to sing their traditional songs in their dialect. For instance, among the Tamang, Tamang Selo, and the Rai perform their traditional Selli song and dance.

4.4.6 The Bride Price and the Exchange of Gifts

In every society, there are some forms of gift exchange, in any event, especially marriage. The practice of dowry is not present, but a customary rule of bride price is commonly found among the Nepalis in Sikkim (Singh, 1975). However, as mentioned above in some Nepali communities there is no bride-price. In Nepali society also the newlywed couple is showered with gifts in the form of cash or kind. The value of the gifts given by relatives is little more than the gifts received from local villagers. It also represents an honor of a particular individual with others. Reciprocity is expected as gifts with similar values are expected to be returned to any prominent event of the person who presented the gift. Like the practices among the Andaman Islanders (Mauss, 1950:27), among the Nepalis also gifts have been exchanged to help and to serve as links between families. Gifts circulate among members in a very strict order, and such circulation serves to strengthen strong spiritual values (Mauss 1950:27). Correspondingly, among the Nepalis also it is obligatory to reciprocate the gifts to maintain a good relationship in society. First, the negotiator must present all the demanded items before the head of the families including community members, grandparents, father, maternal uncle, etc. They must present the gifts or items as fixed beforehand. The girl's guardians especially, the community head, grandfather, aunt, and maternal uncle play crucial roles while keeping a check on it. The local wines, milk, curd, piglet, paddy, sheep, goat, silver, gold, etc., are demanded. However, as mentioned before the items vary as per the caste and community (Singh,1993). For example, if a guy marries a Gurung girl he must give a pair of sheep, traditional millet wine, a few kilos of rice, pair of local chickens, traditional food items including seli-roti, etc.,

As revealed by the older generation respondents, even if the bride price was not demanded, the boy's family used to give the gold and silver items to the girl on the wedding day. Close relatives like maternal uncle, fraternal aunt, brother, and parents must be provided with traditional offerings. The groom's family used to give bronze plates, bowls, curd, seli roti, paddy, millet wine, and local wines to each relative who attended the ceremony. The other eatables such as snacks, alcohol, meat, and some amounts of paddy were asked from the groom's family to feed the guests (Balicki, 2008).

The researcher was told by a 75-year-old man that in his time the groom has to offer gifts traditionally in the first hour of marriage. If a man marries a Rai girl, he must give kilos of pork meat, a local pair of chicken consisting of one hen and cock, two bottles of local alcohol, millet wine, seli roti all packed in a traditional basket made up of bamboo and leave plates. Example if boy marries a Rai or Subba girl, his party has to offer raw pork and packed it in a special basket made of bamboo, known Perengo³¹ (Bronouw,1955).

Historically, some form of fine must be given. The first payment that must be paid by the boy's family is 'chori danda' which means cultural payment for making an elopement. The second payment is called jat Danda (fine for making inter-caste) marriage (Hofer,2004). If the couples are inter-caste, the boy's family must pay a fine for violating the rules of marriage. Barnouw 1955 argues during the traditional times, in addition to the chori danda, the girl's family members are provided with a sum of Rupees known as Rit bhath. 'Each member of the girl's family was offered meat,

³¹It is a small basket made up of bamboo for carrying food items. It has a cultural significance among the Nepali community because during the earlier time, people used to craft bamboo baskets to carry raw meat on marriage day.

wine, and a silver rupee by the groom. Those younger than himself were given eight annas and no meat or wine. The money thus received are known as Rit Bhath³².

Respondents revealed that, earlier the amount was Rs. 61, then it was increased to Rs. 101 to Rs. 201 as a tradition. However, nowadays it has little increased, so the boy must pay Rs. 500- Rs.1000 for making an elopement and for inter-caste marriage. Those couples who had elopement with the same caste are exempted from any payment but for the inter-caste elopement, the fine has to be paid. Elderly respondents revealed that if the groom's side failed to pay those demanded bride-prices, the groom and his relatives often used to get mortified in front of all the guests. However, this study did not find any cases where a boy's family has been harassed for bride-price.

Researchers learned from the elderly respondents that the maximum share of the gifts was given to the maternal uncle and father's elder sister rather than the bride's parents. However, the study of Singh (1993) argued that unlike the Matwali community bride-price among the Tagadharis group, especially Bahun, did not exist. This study also found a similar finding that the Bahun community does not demand bride-price like some of the Matwali group and Damai-Kami.

If in case, a boy's family offers any kind of items in the form of cash or kind including sweets, pot of curd, money as a part of customary practice the girl's family do accept it. Contrast to Sinha's findings on bride-price, this study observes that it depends upon the individual's family and community whether to demand the bride-price or not. Simultaneously, this study found that even in recent times the practice of bride price is still relevant among the Nepali community. Nevertheless, some changes are taking place in the customary practice of bride price; the girl's family no longer

³²Rith Bhath is also known to be a part of bride-price received by the bride's family in the form of cash and kind.

demands many things as it used to in earlier times. The bride-price has become negotiable and if the groom finds it difficult to find a sheep or a goat then he can compensate for it with money. They can also bring other eatables which could be useful to serve the guests on the wedding or reception day.

4.4.7 Bhagdatta –As like kanyadan, Bhagdatta is a rite when a community head from bride's family will be called to publicly pronounce that 'from the day onwards we are giving you our daughter to your family, and she will be under your family's protection (Singh,1993). All her responsibilities will be taken by the husband and his family till death. Her husband should be liable to provide her with every happiness, need, and given every right in her in-law's house. An elderly woman informed the researcher that this ritual is important as we asked the groom's family not to humiliate her and make her husband's family look after her properly. This rite separates the bride from her father' clan to be merged with that of the husband's clan. Even after her husband's death, her last rites should be carried out by her sons and in-laws. It has been revealed by the elderly respondents that after marriage a daughter has to stay in her in-law's house and follow every ritual of her husband's family. Her husband's house becomes her real home. With this rite, she would be allowed to perform every religious rite in her husband's family. So, this ritual is conducted to give the daughter-in-law the right of a family member.

4.4.8 Sending away and Receiving the Bride- In both arranged and elopement-based marriage practices, after the completion of the wedding ceremony, the bride is sent to her in-law's house with the bridegroom on the day of marriage. The collected gifts, jewelry, clothes, silk sarees, bronze plates, etc., are also sent with her. The next day, the reception party is also being held in the groom's house.

On the third day, the shila pujne is undertaken by the bride where she cooks food for the boy's family members, kinsmen, and other relatives. Among the Nepalis it is also called Dhal Bhat ma Chalawnu, a ritual to get a woman into one's 'Kul deity' which means to ritually allow her to participate in every religious and social event as a clan member. It also symbolized that the bride is accepted by all the clan members for inter-dining. However, the bride is admitted in the boy's family 'Kul' (deity) if she belongs to the same or acceptable caste. If the girl is from an unacceptable caste, she would be restricted to perform any of the social and religious rituals in the husband's family and at the community level.

In the case of elopement-based marriage, the newlywed couple comes to visit the girl's family after the third day of Dhok-bhet or marriage reception called 'Dhuran Farkawnu' in Nepali term. The newlywed couple would bring some snacks, drinks and fruits. In case of an arranged marriage, they visit the family on the sixteenth day. The couple conveys their gratitude to the persons who have helped her family in organizing a successful wedding. The couple usually offers presents or money to the Samaj (community) head and other important helpers. The local chef/cook would be offered two bottles of juice or beer with a traditional scarf as respect for helping the bride's family.

After analyzing the empirical data, it is found that all the respondents from arranged marriages have done every important marriage ritual in their homes by inviting the priests, many guests, and have exchanged multiple traditional gifts. In an arranged marriage the customs, expenditures, and the preparations period for marriage are long. The families belonging to the high and middle castes and class have followed the extravagant marriage functions as they have the manpower, resources (funds), and time to maintain their traditions. In an arranged marriage, most of the rituals are

conducted on the wedding day by inviting a priest to solemnize the marriage. A maximum number of the respondents informed that to conduct the arranged marriages, the couple must belong to the same caste, religion, and preferably similar class.

In contrast, in an elopement-based marriage, the couples are from different social, economic, and cultural backgrounds. In an elopement-based marriage also the study finds that all the significant marriage rituals of their children are performed. Respondents reveal that from the traditional times, even in elopement marriages, the rituals are long but may not be extravagantly celebrated as in arranged marriage. However, even in elopement marriages, the celebration of the wedding ceremonies depends on the economic situation of the couple's family background. The engagement part, inviting a priest in a home to conduct the rituals, is not performed in elopement marriages. The respondents whose spouses were from scheduled caste or couples belonging from low-income class have married simply by performing basic rituals.

From the total number of respondents from an elopement-based marriage majority of the respondents with 76% have done all the customary rituals of elopement-based marriage. However, 24% of them did not do all the customary rituals of marriage because their family has refused to conduct any customary rituals due to the societal issues of caste, religion, and marrying outside the community or state. However, the couple themselves have gone to the temple to conduct some part of the marriage ritual to recognize them as husband and wife. Couples belonging from Hindu did the 'Sindoor Potey' rituals, meanwhile, only 5% of the respondents from Christians who had eloped with Hindu/Buddhist have done court marriage after their elopement and due to the unacceptance from one of the families.

The ongoing discussion and empirical analysis can be analyzed from Durkheim's concepts of sacred and profane. To Durkheim “Religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden. Religion divides things into sacred and profane. A sacred thing is those who are protected and kept separate from everyday life. Those sacred rites are performed to maintain cohesion in society” (Durkheim,1912). Thus, through this perspective, all the rites, processions and rituals related to marriage are sacred in a society that would legitimize the man and woman as a husband and wife. At the same time, after conducting the marriage rituals the couple are socially and ritually entitled to cohabit and have legitimate children, a stable family, and the right to inheritance. Without performing such a sacred part of the marriage, simply living in couples are likely to be regarded as conducting profane acts in many societies including the Nepali society.

CHAPTER 5

Culture of Elopement Marriage in Sikkim: An Empirical Analysis

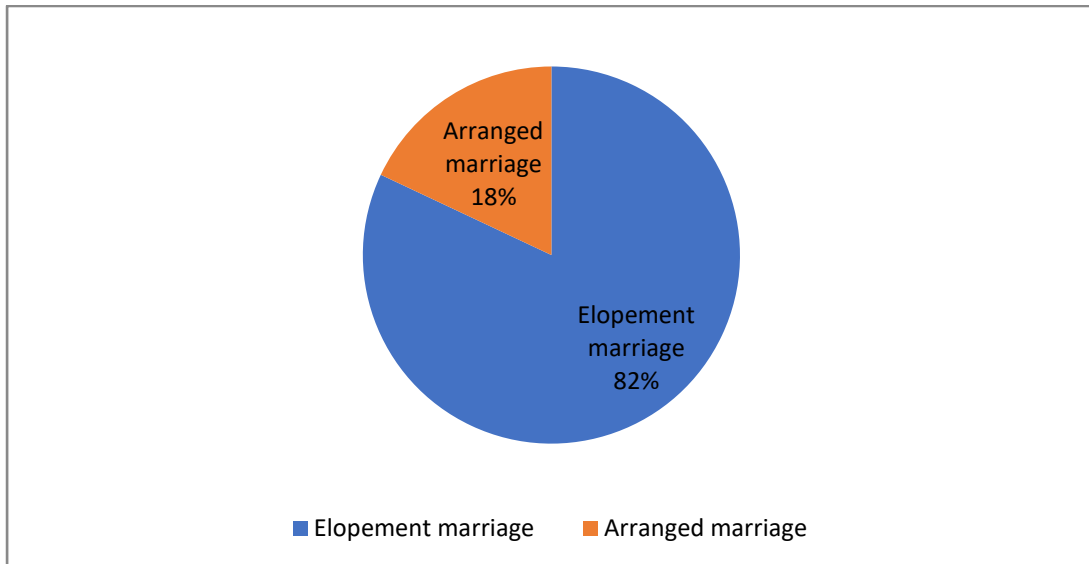
5.1 Introduction

This chapter basically attempts to bring out how elopement-based marriage has been prevalent among the Nepalis in Sikkim. The studies by Subba (2008), Lama (1994), and Sinha (1975) have argued that elopement marriage has been performed since the traditional time by a majority of the caste groups other than Bahun and Chettris. In Nepali society which means the remaining caste and communities practiced elopement-based marriage along with arranged marriage. The study among the Nepalis in Nepal, Darjeeling, and Sikkim showed the reason for such marriage is because of the inter-caste and inter-religion marriages (Liwang, 2000; Lama, 1994). In addition, Bista (2000) argues that the parentless girl used to do elopement marriage to get support from her husband and in-law's house.

Hence, it will not be wrong to say that since the traditional time, elopement-based marriages which are usually known as love marriage these days is very common in Sikkimese society. The couples who are in love and belonging to similar or different backgrounds have often chosen elopement-based marriages. There are diverse reasons for undergoing an elopement marriage among the Nepalis in Sikkim. Those different cultural, social, and economic reasons are discussed in the section below. Moreover, this chapter has also attempted to address the various challenges that couples have faced before or after the marriage. Similarly, the last sections of the chapter also highlighted the role of Panchayats, Samaj, State and Caste association in Sikkim that

sometimes acts as a mechanism to sort out any of the marriage related issues while at other times it may hinder.

Figure: 5.1 Type of Marriage



Source: Field work November- December 2020

Figure 5.1 illustrates the graphical analysis of the empirical data in which the majority (82 %) of the respondents were interviewed from elopement-based marriage. On the other hand, 18% of respondents are chosen from the family who had an arranged marriage. However, the data representing the two types of marriages were collected purposively.

5.2 The Cultural Norms of Endogamy

The norms of endogamy in the form of class, caste, religion, and village are said to be important while deciding on marriage. Lewis defines endogamy as “The rule that requires a person to marry within a specific social group of which he is a member”.

Many Indian families prefer the marriage rule of endogamy³³ (Dube, 1992) in terms of caste, religion. The customary norms are crucial while taking any noteworthy family matters. The members of the society have a strong sense of belonging and values to the customary norms in everyday life.

Historically, before the advent of any legal law to govern society, there was a rule encoded by the religious scripts made by the society. The religious standpoint was above all to define every cause and result. The central role and decision were headed by the church/priest. Priests had the vital role to make rules, organize and implement those rules in a society. Similarly, people also willingly followed those rules as it is without questioning (Ritzer, 2013). The family and its members became the agency³⁴ to implement those defined rules. They accepted believing those rules as the ultimate truth to define their life and surroundings. There were no such circumstances where an individual was free to question the customary rules (Das, 2006). Likewise, the ideal rule of marriage was the rule of endogamy. The endogamous rule of marriage ensures that marriage should be within the same caste outside the clan, same religious group, and within the community. More than class endogamy, caste, and religious endogamy have been given more priority in Indian society (Banerjee, 2009).

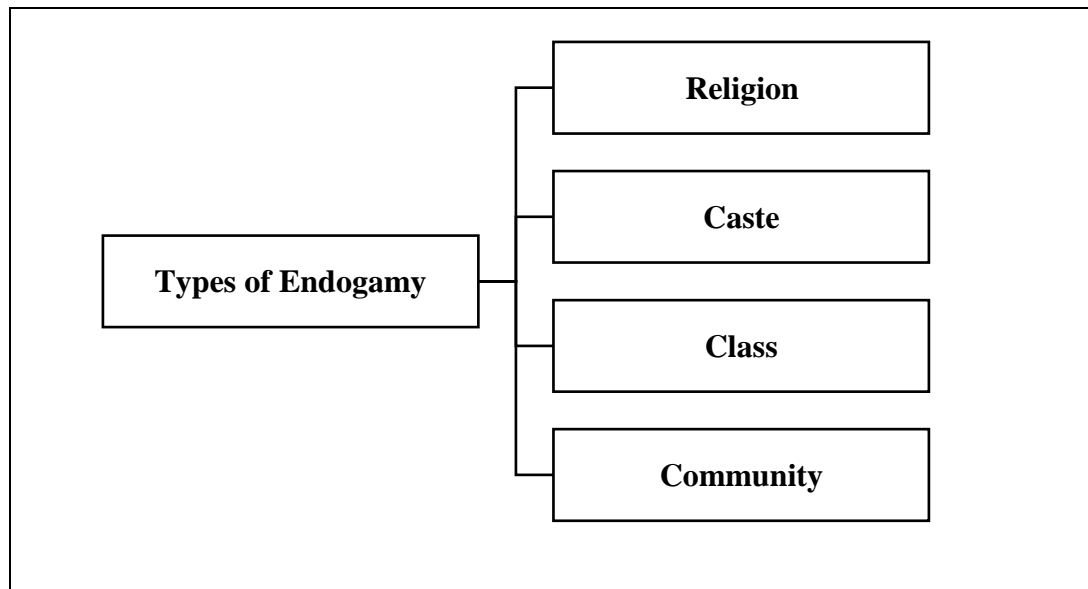
Those rules of endogamy have been directed by the religious institutions and the caste system. B R Ambedkar (1936) saw endogamy at the heart of caste and stressed that inter-caste marriage was one way of ridding India of caste. Though the features of caste is changing with the growth of social reform movements, however, the couple who didn't follow the endogamous rule have often fallen as the victim and have to

³³ Rule of Endogamy refers to the norms of marriage where preferences for a spouse selection takes place within the same class and status.

³⁴ Agency is a concept introduced by Anthony Giddens in his work on Structuration theory where he uses the term agency as an actor or the individual.

bear the brunt of the dominance of cultural norms imposed by the society (Dhanda, 2012) (Abhram,2014). In the Indian context, the caste is well-defined as an endogamous group just as the tribe endogamy. In caste, for instance, a Brahmin does not marry a Rajput. In the same way, a Gond would not marry a Santhal (Jha, 1994).

Figure 5.2 Types of Endogamy



Source: Fieldwork on November-December 2019

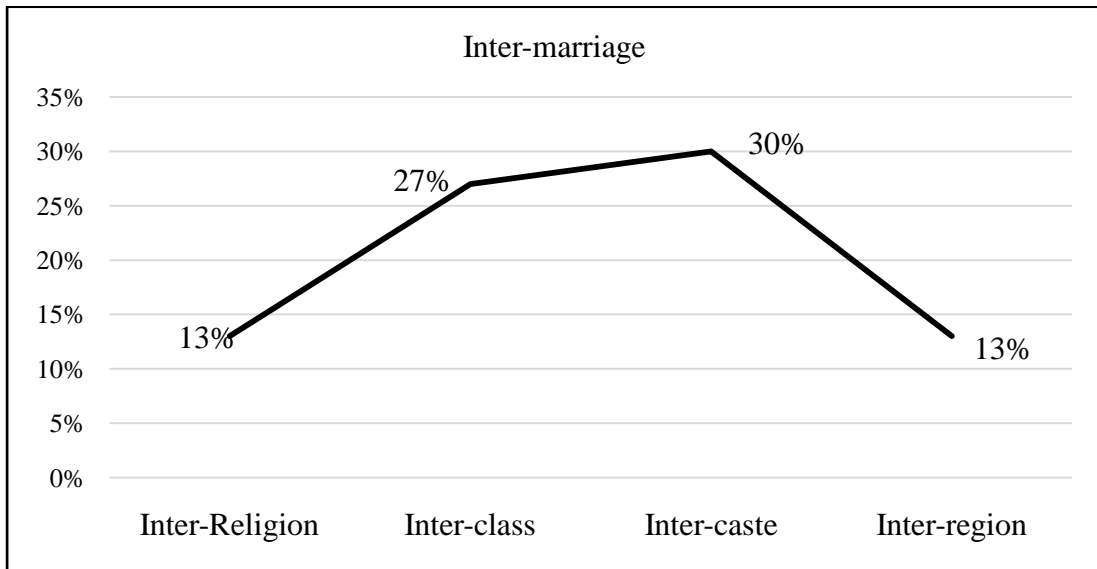
Hence, many Indian societies are gradually changing their customs and traditions. In the context of Sikkimese society also, the rule of endogamy has been often found to be implemented in cultural and religious ceremonies and especially in the institution of marriage where couples belonging from the same caste, religion, and community are maintaining those endogamous traditional customs and folkways practices (Sinha, 1975). Besides caste and religion, class in terms of family background, property, and status is also given importance in the selection of a spouse for their grown-up children. The following sections have detailed the multiple reasons or factors which may possibly have made an elopement-based marriage an institutionalized customary practice.

5.2.1 Inter-Religion

During the traditional time, Buddhism was dominant in Sikkim where a large portion of the population followed it. A few populaces have been followers of animistic practices. The study of Chhetri (2019) shows that Hinduism was extensively brought by the Nepali population in Sikkim. The proselytization of Christianity also influenced certain communities and their families to convert their religious faith as some sections of Lepcha and Nepali also converted their religion into Christianity (Sinha, 1975). From the Nepali population, some of the members from the Darjee and Biswakarma communities have converted their religion (Gurung, 2019). Consequently, there arose a situation of the mixed culture of Buddhism, Hinduism, and Christianity in the Sikkimese society where the families or the communities started to demarcate the religious boundaries from each other. The family expects the patriarchal norms to be followed by the future generations and religion is one of the main components which restrict or allow the continuation of the culture of a particular society (Madan,2004).

In this study, it is found that when marriages take place between a Hindu boy and a Christian girl there are fewer chances of the girl being converted into the boy's religion when a girl has accepted Christianity and has performed baptismal vows. Among the Christians, the empirical findings show that the girl and boy are often asked to do the confession for marrying a non-Christian. Sometimes, a boy or a girl may refuse to convert and the non-conversion of the boy/girl into one another family's religion and traditions may generate dispute in the family.

Figure 5.3 Empirical Findings of Elopement based Marriage



Source: Fieldwork November-December 2019

A respondent, Mrs. A. Biswakarma, a 33 years old woman narrates that, *“My husband was a Hindu and I have been a Christian since birth. My husband’s family wanted us to do ‘Sindur potey’ a Nepali Hindu marriage ritual but I refused. I was supposed to convert into my husband’s religion but I could not convert. So, my mother-in-law said, being somebody’s daughter in law and wife, one has to learn and follow the religion and culture of the husband. When I did not convert to Hinduism, we were asked to live separately. From my family and church side, we were asked to do the confession for one whole month for marrying a Hindu man. As a punishment, I was not allowed to go to church for three months. Later, after completing the confession, some of the church members were invited to my home. They offered prayer and accepted us as husband and wife and we were accepted in the Church”.*

Sharing his opinion on elopement another 72-year-old man respondent said that, *“Marriage through elopement is considered as a sin against the will of Jesus. Along*

with the man or girl the entire family has to confess and seek forgiveness in the church. Family members have to kneel and sit on the floor continuously for one month while seeking forgiveness to god and church for violating the rule of holy marriage”.

As per the Church rules, Pastors are not invited to perform the ceremonies in elopement-based marriages.

A few respondents said that if the wife converts into the man’s religion there is no problem to conduct the customary ceremonies to accept the marriage but if the wife denies being converted to any other religion, the husband’s family does not accept the couple. The study found that usually, Christian girls do not convert to a man’s religion if she has taken a baptismal vow. If a girl is a Hindu she is usually found to be converted or acclimatized into the man’s religion. To support this argument Mrs. Gurung said, before her marriage, she was a Hindu by birth. Her family follows the Hindu culture. Her husband was a follower of Christianity. After marriage, she got converted to Christianity because traditionally a woman has to assimilate to the man’s culture and religion.

Another respondent, Mrs. Sangati, a 30 years old Christian got married to the guy she fell in love with. After marriage, her in-law wanted her to convert to Buddhism. She was told that a wife has to convert into her husband's religion and one has to follow the customs of the husband's family. She was a Christian by birth and unwilling to change her faith so she disagrees with her in-law’s decision. At last, the couple decided to live separately. Now, both of them follow their respective religious faith.

Through the empirical evidence, the study also found that some people also converted to other religions, especially Christianity as they found Hinduism to be discriminatory as its followers do not allow inter-caste marriages. Mr. Chettri’s who belongs to a

high caste Hindu family married a beautiful Kami (SC Hindu) girl through the process of elopement. His family followed the rigid norms of Hinduism and believed in the hierarchical division of the caste system. His family and relatives were against him for marrying a SC girl. According to them, he had sinned against his parents and relatives. He and his wife were discriminated against as his parents expelled them since they were threatened by the community members that if they allowed their son and daughter-in-law, the clan would boycott the parents from attending any social and religious functions. Although his wife's family was not happy with the marriage, they accepted them. So, ultimately, they converted to Christianity. According to him, Hinduism did not allow them to have inter-caste marriage so they had to convert to other religions which treated them with respect, without any discrimination.

Another respondent Mrs. K. Darjee, age 35 years, belonging to a Scheduled Caste community narrates that *"I have married to a Pradhan (higher caste) guy. We both were in a relationship before marriage for almost 5 years and knew about the caste problem that was likely to happen in the future. Despite that, we eloped to marry. He took me to his house on the day of our elopement as we did not have any place to go except my husband's house. Unfortunately, we were asked to go away from his house as his family did not accept us as I am from a lower caste. Till now we are not in touch with his family. His family declared him dead. We could not perform all the rituals of marriage. Later, we converted to Christianity"*.

Thus, from the empirical evidence it can be argued that since the ages, religious endogamy has been one of the essential components of an arranged marriage. Respondents revealed that after marriage women are expected to convert into the man's religion and worship his 'kul deity'/clan deity. In another way, it can be stated

that the subsequent conversion of women into the man's culture also reflects the patriarchal system of Nepali society where women have always been culturally subordinated to the man. If a woman does not adhere to the man's religion, she is not accepted as a member of the family as it is thought that she is not continuing the culture of the man's family. Couples belonging from two different religious backgrounds of Christian and Hindu or Buddhist and Hindu or any other faiths made elopement as a way to marry. Thus, the inter-religion has become one of the reasons for elopement-based marriage among the Nepalis in Sikkim.

5.2.2 Class Differences

The economy is one of the essential qualities that are taken into consideration in both men and women for formalizing a marriage union (Banerjee, 2017). Weber defines the concept of class as any group of people found in a similar market situation. According to Weber, the class position determines the market position of a person and other life chances (Haralambous,2016). The class position of a family determines how rich or poor one is and accordingly their status is measured in society. For example, in Indian society, the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) and its allied services command high status and class. A man/woman IAS officer will look for a girl/boy who belongs to similar social status and class especially in an arranged marriage (Dhanda, 2018). Even if the man whose qualification is an IAS but from a very poor economic background has a very high chance of marrying a girl from a rich family as his future prospects are secured, has a higher social position and power that commands respect in the society. On the contrary, a man with a low-income occupation and without a regular job may not be getting a girl from a rich family.

The following narration given by respondents will give us clarity on how an individual chooses their partner.

Mrs. Shobha Rai said that she fell in love with her classmate when they were doing their graduation. Her family is richer than his as her father is a government official. Her husband was poor as he didn't have a father and her mother was a farmer. After graduation, she got a job in a government school but her friend could not get one. They waited for two more years for him to get a secular job but still, he remained jobless. Her family started objecting to their relationship as he was poor with no regular income. However, she decided to marry him as they both were in love and committed to each other but her family members were against their marriage. They eloped and were accepted soon by both the family members after performing the rituals.

Another respondent, Mr. Suresh Chhetri, a 40 years old working as a school teacher revealed that his wife belongs to the same community and religion but had completed till class 12 only and she was from a very poor family. He encouraged her to study further after their love marriage but due to family responsibility, she could not complete her graduation. According to him, his wife was very beautiful, much younger than him and he fell in love at first sight. He proposed to her and she reciprocated. After courting for one year, they decided to marry. His parents came to know about their relationship but did not want to go and meet her parents as the girl was young and poor. He eloped with her and after that some rituals were performed after which they were accepted as husband and wife.

After analyzing the study, it was found that though people have their rationality of choosing a spouse, in a love marriage a girl or a boy from a poor economic

background doesn't need to get a husband/wife only from a poor family. If the girl is beautiful or has some other desirable qualities or by chance if she is in love with a boy from a rich family, she may become a daughter-in-law in a well to do family and at times some girls may become much poorer in her conjugal family as she didn't give much importance to the economic standing/earning capacity of the boy. Similarly, a poor boy also may marry a girl from a well-to-do family even without having a regular job.

The economy also plays an important role in deciding whether a couple should go for an arranged or elopement marriage as many respondents during the fieldwork informed the researcher that they had eloped for marriage due to poor economic status. The couple from the Sharma family belonging to the same caste revealed that "We could have done an arranged marriage with the consent of our parents as we belong to the same caste and similar class. But to do an arranged marriage, society expects huge marriage celebrations, great feasting and fun fare which needs to spend lakhs of rupees that is far from a parent's ability. If we cannot do all the functions with elaborate rituals, arranged marriage would not feel like an arranged marriage. Traditional music player Naumati Baja (traditional folk music players) have to be invited and nowadays we do not get the musician who plays it. Even if we get it, it has become more expensive".

Another respondent Mr. Rai 31-year-old says, "We belong to the Below Poverty Level class group. In an arranged marriage there would be more expenses from the start to the end of the marriage. Working in a factory, I do not wish to spend unnecessary expenses on marriage. Instead, I prefer to do some savings that is why we married through elopement with the blessings from both the family".

Mrs. Rai, 33 years old says, “Elopement marriage is better because most of the parents want their daughter to be married to a man a little richer than themselves. She adds I have two children; my son is studying in class six and my daughter is in class eight. They have already started demanding smartphones, new things to play with, and expensive dresses which we cannot afford always. With less salary, it’s difficult to manage everything in today’s time. I feel we may not be able to arrange a long and expensive marriage for our children”.

On the one hand, Mr. Sharma, 55 years old says, “In my family, all my children have married through arranged marriages. Their spouses are from the same religion, caste and have identical family backgrounds. I managed to arrange marriages for my sons and daughters by getting help from my siblings and relatives. It was not that difficult for us to do marriage ceremonies because all my children are government employees. Each of them had helped each other to solemnize the marriages and receptions of their siblings”.

On the other hand, Mrs. Chhetri has reasons for elopement marriages as she says, *“Arranged marriage is a lengthy process and requires more expenditure as both the families have to exchange gifts and give gifts to all the close relatives which would cost more money. Nowadays, everything has become expensive, bridal dress, marriage hall, food, and beverages. For a simple bridal saree or suit, one has to spend more than Rs. 5000 depending on the material and design. Although one can wear a cheaper dress and ornaments, it does not look good. Everyone wants to wear expensive and nice dresses in marriage. People have started to imitate what is shown on television and other mass media and wish to wear beautiful dresses and*

ornaments. Belonging to a low middle class and having less income that is beyond one's wish".

Besides, inter-caste couples who underwent elopement marriage, the study found that even couples belonging to the same caste and community who fall under the low-income group also eloped for marriage as they found it difficult to have an arranged marriage. Infact among those 27 % respondents who said they had inter-class marriage also includes the respondents who said they could not have arranged marriage because of poor economic background. Unlike in the case of Haryana, Punjab, and Kolkata (Chowdhry,2007; Banarjee,2017), elopement with marriageable caste or religion no longer carries disrespect and humiliation in Nepali Society. It can be summed up that people think an arranged marriage is a lengthy process though it is considered to be reputable and more honored. The expenses are heavy as compared to elopement marriages. Respondents who were working in a private company and low-income category argued that since they did not have government service and were working as manual laborers, drivers, factory workers they could not afford to do the expensive arranged marriages.

Many respondents found that arranged marriage needs more expenditure and takes longer than elopement marriage but it could be argued that if there is an understanding between the bride giver and bride taker, the ceremonies could be shortened up and expenditure could be reduced. One of the main reasons for elopement marriage is found to be class inequalities between the husband and wife's family or poor economic background of the couples. However, expectation from each other's family and the need for performing every ceremony elaborately seems to be more in an arranged marriage.

Thus, from the ongoing argument, it can be stated that a class position in terms of occupation, family's economic background, and the individual monthly income becomes important determinant factors for arranging a marriage event. It takes a large amount of money which may not be conceivable for the couple belonging to a poor or middle family to organize a great marriage occasion. Because they find it difficult to buy expensive things that are beyond their reach. Therefore, Weber theory of class position and market situation of having unequal status and unequal life chances is very relevant while choosing life partners, performing marriage ceremonies and also living a sustainable life in the Nepali society as well.

5.2.3 Inter-Region

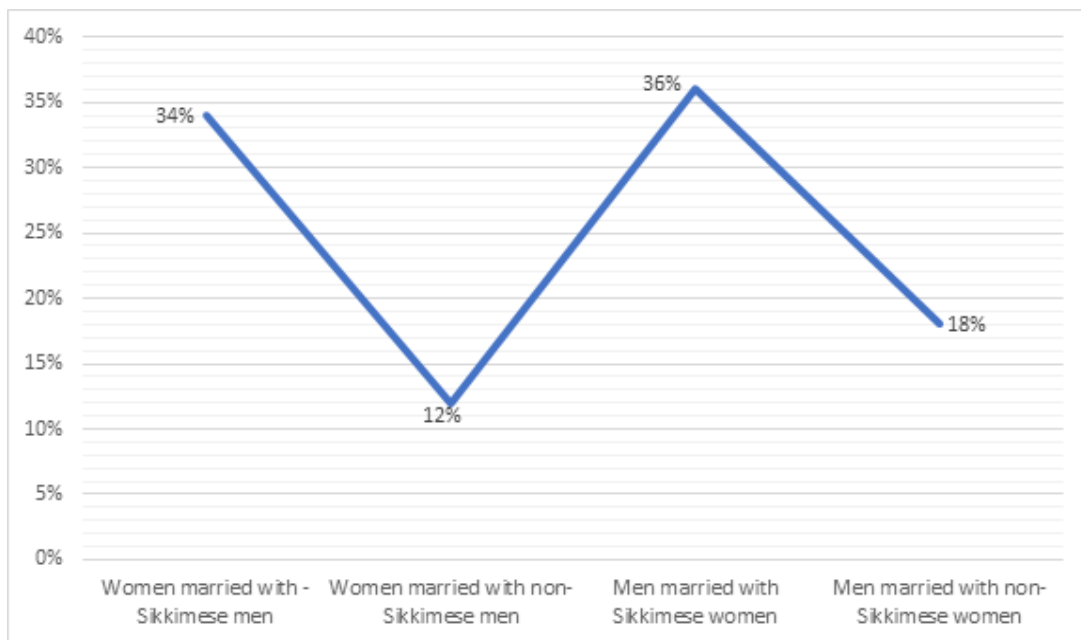
The Indian Nepali ethnic groups are distributed mainly in Darjeeling, Kalimpong of West Bengal, and Sikkim, and mainly northern parts of India (Chhetri,2013). Inter-regional marriage of Nepali of Sikkim with other Nepalis located in Eastern Himalayas should not have been an issue as they shared a similar language, caste structure, and other cultural backgrounds. However, like any other communities in India, the Nepalis of Sikkim also want to marry their daughter nearby, particularly in the same State as it is considered that it will be helpful for parents to look after their children and vice versa. It can be substantiated with Grover's (2009) argument that marrying near or within the boundaries would be fruitful for women to get additional support from families in any of the post marital conflicts.

The field data revealed that 80% of the respondents viewed that their daughter should marry the Sikkimese guy for their secured future. Marriage with the Sikkimese man who holds proper documents such as Sikkim Subject Certificate, regular government job, and immovable property like land and house are considered important security

for future benefits of self, spouse and children. It is thought that marrying away their daughter with someone belonging to another region such as West Bengal or another State of India will make the girl more insecure if the man does not have good economic backups even if the person belongs to the same community and of the same religion. Moreover, in West Bengal and other States, there is higher competition and limited chances of getting a secured job as these states have large populations, more educated people, limited jobs and more competition. Moreover, if the distance is far, support from the natal family will be less.

The married women's property regulation act 1962 enforces certain rules that apply to women in terms of inheriting a share of her father's property in Sikkim. A Sikkimese woman who is married to a non-local shall have no right to inherit or the right to acquire immovable property (land) after marriage. Her husband and offspring born out of such conjugal relation are also not entitled to hold or transfer her property if she had received it before marriage but she can either sell or transfer her property to her siblings or to person of Sikkimese origin. Sikkim Succession Act 2008 also repeats the same rules for women in property inheritances (Firdos, 2014). The state used residential certificates and certificates of identification (COI) as an instrument of differentiation between the two genders in providing public goods and services. COI is important for local people for applying services, receiving state benefits, and also the portion of the father's land (Firdos, 2014). So, while considering the future of married life, most of the parents wanted their daughters to get married to the Sikkimese men. They said that after marriage also, women have some facilities to earn independently in the state.

Figure 5.4 shows respondents' choice of local/non-local spouse



Source: fieldwork November -December 2020

In this study, 12 % women respondents who were in love relationships with non-Sikkimese have also opted for an elopement marriage. Some of them were aware of the fact that their marriage would not be pleasing for the girl's family and would never accept the guy as son-in-law as they are relatively lower in class than the girls. A 28 years old respondent from the Sharma family who is a primary school teacher said she was in love with a Tamang guy from the same village. Though her husband and in-laws' family have been staying in Sikkim for a long, they did not have the Sikkim Subject Certificate as they could not produce the valid documents of their Sikkimese origin. Subsequently, her husband could not get any secure government job. They were in a relationship for six years before the marriage and their families got to know about their affair. Her parents advised her to break up with him and find another guy who has a regular government job. But she could not end the relationship, then finally decided to get married and settled with him. She says, after marriage, her

siblings do not look after her as they are not economically on par with the rest of the family members.

Another respondent Mrs. Gurung 26 years old staying in her natal home near Singtam narrated that, “I am married to a guy from Adarshgoan, a rural village in Darjeeling, West Bengal. Before our marriage, he was working as a private teacher in Singtam. We were in a relationship for one year and soon after we decided to marry. After our elopement, my parents scolded me and warned me how we both would survive in remote areas, where there are no facilities for jobs. But somehow, he managed to find a teaching job in a private school in his town where he used to earn Rs.7000 per month. However, his income was not sufficient to manage our expenses. Then, we decided to come back to Sikkim to work. Right now, our son is studying in a private school. Husband works in a private firm where he gets little more than in Darjeeling. I am also working in a private company”.

Many of the women respondents informed that selecting their respective spouse from within the state while carefully observing his family background and future stability was observed to be the most preferred choice of marriage by their parents. The study shows, a local Sikkimese man is mostly preferred as a husband material as compared to non-locals. By local man, we meant those who hold the Sikkim Subject/Certificate of identification.

Men are not restricted to marry from outside the state because they would be living and holding a job and property within the state. His children would be getting better facilities as compared to women who married non-Sikkimese. In the case of the man, there is no such boundaries as 18 % of male respondents have married girls from Kalimpong, Darjeeling and Nepal. They did not find any such geographical

boundaries acting as restrictions in choosing their partners like the women. Earlier, their wife were able to get a government job but now it has become difficult.

Accordingly, we can substantiate the empirical findings with Schutz's (1970) concept of 'stock of knowledge' and 'life world'. According to Schutz's, the life world of a particular society is constituted by the daily lived experiences, and those experiences become the recipe of knowledge which ultimately becomes a stock of knowledge. The center of the life-world is the reality of everyday life that is governed by practical reasons/motives. Therefore, through the findings of the study, it can be argued that the lifeworld between local and non-local can be understood with reference to their past and present live experiences, the reality of their socio-economic conditions and the priviledges/discrimination experiences by them while living in Sikkim. Therefore, this study indicates that marriage with a Sikkimese man/woman is more favored. Hence, the concept of life-world and stock of knowledge is explicitly visible and equally relevant as it is everyday reality encountered by them.

5.2.4 Inter-caste

An inter-caste marriage is another factor accountable for the emergence of elopement marriage since marriages between high castes and low caste communities were not permitted in the caste-based society as there is an unequal status attached based on caste (Mody, 2002). In such marriages, the individual gives more preference on their personal choices in the selection of spouse than the parent's decision on marriage (Allendorf, 2013). There are norms of caste endogamy that are found in all Indian societies where the preferences are more given to same-caste marriage (Chowdhry, 2007).

To marry within the same caste is considered crucial for the whole kin and community. First, same-caste marriage but clan exogamy is considered to be a prestigious and honored form of marriage in a family where one would set as an ideal example for other family members who will look up to them. Second, it is honored because there would be no barrier while participating in any religious events that are conducted in the family or society. Third, it would strengthen the culture and traditions of one's caste and community. Considering this positive role, the same-caste marriage was appreciated more than any other marriages (Dube, 1990). Despite having such a rule of caste endogamy, couples who are in a love relationship are trying to give away with the traditional rules of caste endogamy (Dhanda, 2012).

Among the Nepali society also the same-caste marriage is highly preferred (Barnouw, 1955). However, inter-caste marriage within the middle caste group was practiced and acceptable following some of the marriage rituals (Singh, 1993). It has been reported that in Sikkim, inter-caste marriage was less frequent between the various castes occupying different strata, However, in recent times, inter-caste marriages are continuously rising among different castes (Lama, 2001).

Mr. Rai, aged 75 years old narrates that, *“In the olden times, the rules of marriages were strict. Strict because there were organized caste and community groups. Some high caste groups used to be considered superior where they did not allow the low caste people to visit inside their house. Marriage between high castes and other castes was beyond acceptance. If any high caste individual is found to be married to a low caste group like Kami, Damai, and Sarki who are considered as untouchable, the couple and their family used to be ostracized from the village. The community members used to shave the man's head for marrying with low caste and woman was*

ill-treated. Those couples had to run to other villages and States and they didn't return to their village”.

Another respondent who had inter-caste marriage revealed that “Since olden days, I have heard and seen people who undertook inter-caste marriage had to elope to marry. Because for an arranged marriage, the boy and the girl should belong to the same jat or caste. Till today, I have hardly seen someone outside of a particular caste going for an arranged marriage. For an arranged marriage, the detailed background of the boy is looked upon. In case, if the parents do not like a boy, then one would be separated. During our courtship, we always had a fear that we might be caught by our parents and forced to separate us. Therefore, to avoid any hassle, we secretly eloped to marry”.

Mrs. Sharma, 35 years old Brahmin narrates, “I and my husband were in a relationship for 3 years before marriage. I belong to the Bahun (Brahmin) family while my husband is a Tamang (ST). During our courtship, we kept our relationship secret from our family members. Later, my relatives came to know about our relationship and suggested that I should not marry him as we belong to different castes. As I belong to a high caste, my family wanted me to marry a boy from a high-caste only. From my family side, we were not accepted and marriage rituals were also not conducted from my side”.

A woman aged 67 years from Darjee (SC) community narrated, “My daughter was married to a Pradhan boy through elopement. In my family, the couple was accepted but in the boy's family, they are still not accepted. The couple has two children and is staying away from his parental village. They had been ritually declared dead by his family. If his family would not have ostracized the couple then their ‘Samaj’ or

community members would have restricted his father's family from participating in many festivals and rituals of the relatives and communities such as death rituals, birth, or marriages.

The 55 years old woman respondent from the Tamang community said, "my elder son was in a relationship with a girl from Darjee community. When I found out about it, I told my son to discontinue any relationship with her because she belongs to the low caste".

In yet another case, a 56 years Gurung man says he had married a Sarki woman. He was also ritually boycotted from his family. He had to start a new family and was helpless as he was young. They did not have sufficient money to buy food, to buy new clothes and a house. Eventually, he and his wife established a new family after working hard, and later he got a government job which helped him to upgrade his family's status and lifestyle. Yet, at the time of his parent's death, he was not allowed to perform his parent's death rituals as a punishment by his clan members.

Respondents from the middle caste narrated that there is a proverb in Nepali among the middle caste Matwali group, "Jun sukai jat saga Biya garnu hudaina. Rai, Gurung, Tamang, Magar, Subba jat ko lewda ramro huncha" which means marrying within this group would be better because all these castes belong to the same position. There would not be any caste discrimination in the in-law's house. With this proverb which has been culturally captivated from generation to generation, it can be seen that how a family plays a crucial role in socializing an individual's preference in the matter of mate selection that they considered would be most suitable.

Therefore, from the above empirical findings, it can be concluded that the rule of caste endogamy has been the most prominent rule of marriage. For conducting an

arranged marriage, caste endogamy is set to be one of the most crucial cultural practices among the Hindu Nepali (Parker,2013). Though, in recent times, love cum arranged marriage is also acceptable among the Nepali communities if it is within the preview of acceptable castes.

Srinivas (1959) has talked about certain attributes of castes such as hierarchy, occupational differences, restriction on commensality and pollution. In line with what Srinivas has argued about the attributes/elements of caste, in this study also, similar elements of caste were found, it was not only the High castes who were maintaining ritual purity, rather all the castes maintained some kinds of ritual purity at the time of death and marriage rites in which a person from different castes and clans were restricted to participate in a sacred religious rite. The caste hierarchy is found to exist across the castes. The characteristics of caste stated by Srinivas are still found to be very relevant even at present as the various caste groups still maintain the caste hierarchy and boundary in the studied villages. Ghurye' s ideas of social and religious restriction based on caste are also seen to be equally relevant in this study.

For instance, Mrs. Sharma 29 years married to a Gurung (*middle caste*) man reveals that *“Nowadays young educated boys and girls do not see the caste of a partner, rather they see understanding, loving and caring nature of a boy/girl. In the first instance, parents will oppose and might not accept them but later they will accept. She adds, my father is a well-known priest. My elder brother is a Sanskrit teacher in a government school. Father teaches Balan dance to young boys from our community to preserve the traditional culture. My elder siblings have had arranged marriages where their spouses were selected from the same caste. When I informed them about my marriage decision, at first, they did not accept us. I eloped with my boyfriend. My*

fraternal uncle, maternal uncle, and other few relatives pressured my father to ritually boycott me from my caste. Instead of my relative's pressurization on him, he did not boycott me. Later, after a month, they accepted us and conducted a marriage ritual in my home".

In contrast to traditional norms of marriage, the inter-caste couples are in the process of changing the caste-based society. The tradition of caste endogamy has violated the central belief that all individuals are human beings. People have made the elopement as a resistance against the traditional rigid rules. In maximum cases, the inter-caste couples are found to be making an elopement than the same-caste couples. Henceforth, there are various reasons given by respondents to get married by elopement such as lack of parental support, societal obligation, family expectation, inter-caste relationship, pregnancy. In addition, villagers have viewed and internalized that arranged marriage is only a way of marriage for the endogamous group. Thereby, elopement has been ingrained in Nepali society as a socially sanctioned culture.

5.2.5 Inter-Community Marriages

Durkheim argues that as society changes from pre-modern to modern society, the cultural patterns of society are also changing with time (Abhram,2000) not in a drastic way but in a seldom process. He identified one of the reasons for change as the division of labor in society. Thorsten argues that the marriage system and its rules are in a process to change due to global influences. As a result of modernization, urbanization, and globalization (Thorsten, 2005), family and marriage as a basic unit of society are also changing.

The inter-community marriage was well-known in Sikkim's history where the inter-tribe marriage between the Bhutia and Lepcha, Lepcha with Limboo/Subba was

common (Subba, 2014). However, the inter-community marriage of Bhutia or Lepcha with the Nepali communities was not common (Nakene, 1966). Similarly, marriage between members of different communities even if they follow similar religious backgrounds was not rampant like nowadays. Nonetheless, these days the inter-community marriage between the Bhutia - Chhetri, Tamang-Lepcha, Lepcha- Gurung, Bhutia/Lepcha with any other Nepali community are commonly found.

Mrs. Chhetri is married to a Bhutia man. They were in a pre-marital relationship during the school days. When her then friend completed his studies and got a government job, he proposed to marry her. She narrated that since she was also holding a government job, therefore they did not have much problems after elopement and marriage. Mr. Bhutia, had married a girl from Tamang community in 1993. She is from Kalimpong, West Bengal. Before marriage, they were friends and studied in the same school in Kalimpong. They used to like each other. After completing class X, he returned to Sikkim and found a job. Later, he proposed to her to marry him. They then eloped for marriage.

Although intra-community community is the preferred choice, inter-community marriages are gradually rising in Sikkimese society. As the society became plural, modern, having multiple cultures, people belonging to different communities shared, interacted and learned each other's culture in daily life. Intercommunity marriage has become one of the mediums to unify the different communities. One may argue that despite having a set of cultural norms of each caste and community related to marriage, the inter-community marriages between the different communities are widely practiced and increasingly taking place in the state.

5.3 Contributory Factors to Elopement

As discussed earlier, in the majority of the Nepali communities, culturally there have been practices of elopement marriage. However, the meeting place of the couples were mostly during the community festivals, fun fairs and sometimes in relatives' houses. There are various reasons for undergoing this type of marriage which was detailed in the above section such as inter-caste, inter-religion, inter-regional, inter-community marriages. In addition to it, some other contributory factors as well as changes in the marriage systems are because of the following reasons.

5.3.1` Transition to Modernity

Marx's modernization or modernity was defined by the capitalist economy that brought the transition from primitive to capitalist society (Ritzer, 2009). In Durkheim's view, modern society is held together by the specialization of people and their need and interdependence for various services (Ritzer, 2000). Transition to modernity was a new development in Sikkim which not only brought the modern governing authority but also brought significant changes in the social, political, economic, and environmental sectors. According to Sinha, (1975), the democratic phase of the political system paved a better way for the Sikkimese society as it introduced the new governing bodies after the abolition of the monarchy system in Sikkim. The structural changes brought a new system of governing body, occupational patterns as well as a modern educational system. Simultaneously, when the democratic system came into formation, it also gave its citizens a new kind of legal identity, privileges to work in the administrative sectors or official services. The modern system not only brought structural changes but simultaneously brought changes in cultural values in society (Ritzer, 2019). Undoubtedly, the development

and change in structural level had its implication on the cultural and everyday lives of the people in Sikkim.

5.3.2 Education and Modern Job's Implication in Elopement Marriage

The establishment of government schools even in the remotest part of Sikkim has been a major contributing factor in the development of people's thinking and personality formation. The school played a very significant role in educating the common people as they started to get the chance to study at formal educational institutions (Chhetri, 2017). The educational opportunities have helped them to uplift their living standard in terms of the economic, social, and political fields. According to Berger, modernization has been successful to bring the value of 'secularization'. Thus, the modern education system has been an important agency to bring secular values and practices. The cultural values of secularization have helped a society to upgrade or change the underdeveloped and odd practices that were based on the ground of religion (Haralambous, 2013). Likewise, to uplift their standard and livelihood, women started to empower themselves by attaining higher studies and trying to be financially independent that subsequently impacted their perception and choice on marriage. Not only men, but women started to take a stand to have a secure or a better job and become financially independent before marriage (Bhandari, 2020).

The coming up of industrialization also helped the people to upgrade their nature of jobs. After the establishment of the Indo-Sikkim treaty (1950), the government of India had taken special responsibility in introducing economic development in the State. This plan has helped in the development of various infrastructures and communication systems by initiating the allocation of roads, power, and bridges. Agriculture development was given more priority by introducing multiple cropping

facilities and by providing improved seeds and fertilizers. Most of the young men were recruited in the army, police and Indian Reserve Battalion, postal services, telephone exchange, communication services also introduced the job opportunities where the people got to serve in various positions (Sinha,1975), (Chhetri,2017).

Since the early 1980s, special attention has been given to the promotion of the small or medium-scale sectors/industries in Sikkim such as Sikkim Flour Mill, Yoksom Breweries, Soap Industries, and Denzong Rubber (Singh, 1993). According to the Trade, Commerce, and Industry 2019 report, there were a total of 118 registered industries established in Sikkim. These industries are administered by both the central and state rules. Subsequently, many of the residents of Sikkim left their traditional occupation and joined other modern services under the central, state, and private sectors.

As the market became competitive, there was high demand for more educated and skilled people to handle the modern setup in the field of education, administrative sectors, industries, etc., Majority of the educated youth in the state got government and private jobs while some were involved in trade and business. Today educated youths are working under different sectors for their livelihood (Bhutia,2019).

Thus, it can be stated that due to the industrial setup and job opportunities in various parts of Sikkim, the people started to move out of their houses to work in those established job sectors which probably was a little far from the villages. Generally, they start staying near to the workplace and far from home. Once they start working, they do not depend on their family for finance. Many of them shifted their occupation and no longer depend on agricultural activities. In the workplace, they come across

different people from diverse socio-economic and religious backgrounds. A few of the respondents reported that they met their spouses at their place of work.

5.3.3 Role of Social Media

The important developments in the field of mass media technology such as radio, television, mobile phone, and internet access have been the key factors for changing the way of life of people. Many marriages in Indian society have been conducted by finding a suitable bride/groom through the advertisements placed in matrimonial social sites (Bhandari, 2020). Besides matrimonial sites, social media platforms have also become a widely accessible hub for connecting people across the world where people from different backgrounds are virtually meeting and marrying in real life (Banerjee,2013).

In Sikkimese society also the networking social media sites have indeed played a major role for the young boys and girls to connect with each-other. There were situations where couples who were introduced and became friends via social networking sites like Facebook (FB) have got married and settled in real life. It has been an easy platform for the youngsters to better communicate with each other. To support the above arguments, a 52 years old respondent said, *nowadays young boys and girls from different family backgrounds are meeting on Facebook and Instagram. It has been an easy platform for them to see and talk with the likeminded ones.* He adds, sometimes, *teenage and unmarried boys and girls are too much into the mobile phone. They do not have to go to meet their paramour frequently as they talk often on the phone and know about each other's whereabouts.* Another 25 years old woman from the Gurung community said *After breaking up with the first guy, a year later she met another guy through Facebook.* She added, *the guy sent her request to be his*

friend and before accepting his request, she checked his profile. She found him to be good looking and accepted his request for friendship. Subsequently, they became virtual friends for one month, then exchanged each other's phone number and started texting each other through WhatsApp for months. After that they decided to meet in person. Later, several personal dating followed and both of them decided to elope to marry.

The online sites are creating a space for the couple to know more about each other before the marriage. Through social media platforms, the boy/girl is directly approaching the person they like. The old ways of meeting and communicating through a letter, asking a common friend to help while sending a friendship request has changed. In the present-day situations besides meeting in the community programmes, there are high chances of the couple meeting in the educational institutes, workplace and social media platforms. Then they become friends, have a brief courtship and decide to marry.

5.4 Various Challenges Faced by Couples Related to Elopement Marriage

This section discusses the challenges that have been faced by the respondents either before, during, or after the marriage. It becomes important to reflect on the experiences shared by the respondents to understand the structure of Nepali society. Each of the respondents has faced different challenges to get married and after marriage. There are diverse societal norms and values which are considered as appropriate by the family and society as a whole but when those norms are being challenged by the members of society it is viewed as dysfunctional. According to Robert Merton (1957), social structures can have positive benefits as well as negative consequences, which he called dysfunctions. Merton (1957) separated functions into

two categories: manifest and latent. Manifest functions are the consequences that are planned or intentional and recognized, whereas latent functions are the consequences that are unintentional and often hidden.

Additionally, Merton discussed '*functional alternatives*' as the norms and values which might be functional to one individual can be dysfunctional to another and which is considered as dysfunctional can be functional to another. While a girl/boy marries into a new family, two and more families have been integrated in the Indian society. Simultaneously in the studied area, it is found that contestation between the families concerning their children's establishing a marriage union occurs on issues related to caste, class, religion, and region. It is also found that the different social and cultural factors of a particular society greatly influence personal choice, family expectation, and perception.

One of sociology's greatest tools for understanding and analyzing social problems is the sociological imagination (Mills, 1959). The sociological imagination helps to relate the most personal problems which Mills called as a 'personal troubles' of an individual's life to other social forces of the wider society and its history. It helps us to comprehend an individual's knowledge, experiences, thoughts, and actions. Sociological imagination would also help to relate personal troubles with those of other people who are affected by the structure of society, culture, and social change (Mills 1959:6-7).

The study observes in some cases some kind of disturbance and some sort of conflicts to initially accept an eloped couple for marriage while the couple makes unexpected marriage decisions. Simultaneously, there were instances where a few families have not conducted any of the marriage rituals of their son/daughter when the couple goes

beyond the expected norms and values of the family and community especially in the case of higher caste marrying the lowest caste. Marriage which is supposed to be an individual choice becomes a 'public issue' because the problem which an individual experiences is shared by many other individuals of similar background in the society as the problems are rooted in the society (Mills, 2000). To settle in a society with family, one has to deal with the multifaceted structure of the society either by compromising, conflicting, or through consensus. The very different challenges stated by respondents are as follows:

5.4.1 Consequences of Early Marriage

Respondents who have married during their teenage years said they did not know what marriage was like, the responsibilities and liabilities associated with it but they fell in love, eloped, or arranged by parents and got married. While doing so, they left their studies in the mid-way which makes their parents worry thinking about their future. Lama argues that elopement has led to early marriages among the teenagers in Sikkim (Lama,2003). Among those who had married early, it was found that hardly any female respondents completed their studies or go for higher education as they find it difficult to manage family responsibility with education. Both the boy and girl who had married at an early age had faced difficulties while carrying out the household chores, pregnancy, and child care, earning and having to take up more responsibilities than someone of his/her age group.

On the other hand, respondents who had married after the age of 25 years revealed that they had planned for their marriage and were saving money for future needs. Those who had married in their teenage years are anxious about their family as they leave their studies for marriage. Since they didn't have a good educational

background, they could not find well-paid regular jobs. Subsequently, future consequences of early marriage have made parents anxious and disturbed, thereby in some circumstances, they tried to delay the marriages of the eloped couple by separating them for a few years or by delaying to accept the couple as husband and wife. But in the majority of the cases, once eloped the girls were married off. However, if the teenage girl's family accepted the couple and were willing to perform the required rituals the boy's family generally obliged with it. If either of the boy or the girl's family doesn't accept the couple for various reasons, some kind of conflict develops.

5.4.2 Marital Problems: Separation and Divorce

Although ideologically marriage is expected to have a lifelong relationship as a couple, yet in recent years, marital breakdown or the separation of husband and wife has become a common phenomenon in many societies. The reasons behind the breaking up of the conjugal ties vary, from couple to couple and from society to society. It could be unsatisfactory in the in-law's house, abusive husband or wife, incompatibility and casteist slurs, and so forth. In the Indian scenario, a maximum number of couples have taken the legal procedures while dissolving their dissatisfied marital life. On the contrary, some husband-wives are separating without any court resources (Dommaraju, 2016).

Marital breakdown is divided into three main categories: divorce, which refers to the legal decision for the termination of marriage, separation, which refers to the physical separation of the spouses where they no longer share the same dwellings. Third, is called 'empty shell marriage where spouses live together as legally and ritually married but their marriage may exist for the namesake only (Haralambous, 2013).

There are numerous factors leading to the marital breakdown of the spouses and ultimately to the family disintegration. Parson argues that married couples have high expectations from each other and often the spouses are unable to cope up with their married life aspirations (Rodman,1965). Because of the modern job facilities, couples have to remain far from each other which leads to an emotional burden on the spouses (Goode, 1960).

While in Sikkim's context, the marital breakdown is known to be found from ages. The separation and divorce are solved through the help of legal laws or by following the customary law where the parties do not intend to go through legal procedures (Singh, 1993). The couple with the valid reason for the separation was accepted amongst the Matwali and scheduled castes (Singh, 1993) and also in other communities. The dissolution of marriage is acceptable in a family through the customary rules in case if both the husband and wife placed a valid reason for their separation. Before the legal judiciary system came up, the local community head, guardians, and relatives used to gather while solving the matter.

There is divorce and separation in which a spouse either man/woman is unglued from their husband/wife. The reasons for breaking up the marital bond could be varied/similar in both the women and men. However, in this study, 8% of the women were separated from their husbands. Also, it is being observed that the women respondents had not taken up the matter to the court, the couple just separated from each other. While interviewing them they revealed that they had taken the help of guardians and local panchayats to dissolve their unhappy marital bond.

In addition, respondents viewed that during the traditional time, the headman used to look after the affairs of divorce and separation. They used to hold a meeting where

both the parties along with the couple were asked to come to a specific place and listen to their unhappy marital grievances. In many of the cases, the meeting was not short as the panchayats wanted the spouses to reconcile their differences and reunite concerning their future and status in society. Thus, the separation/divorce was not done in one meeting. Those people who were called for the meeting would be asked to come again in either to the boy or the girl's place for finalizing the matter. When the spouse is sure not to continue their union, a formal representation is made by pointing to the detailed cause and future responsibilities.

The main reasons for the separation as narrated by the respondents are discussed below. The respondent Mrs. Rai said, *"I wanted to separate from my husband because he became an alcoholic after marriage. He didn't give me any monthly salary to run the family. We had fights and arguments every evening. I complained to my parents and in-laws. I waited not to ruin our marriage thinking about my child's future. I delayed for a long time thinking that he would stop his drinking habits but he could not improve his behaviors. We both did not want to compromise so I told my parents that I wanted to be separated. From my side, I asked him to provide school fees and expenses for my son and make him a legal heir of his property. However, after months and years of separation, none of his family received my calls and grievances. I complained to the police station about the case. However, I was told to complain to the marriage registration court for a better solution. I was being told that for legal separation and marital rights, I need a marriage certificate which I don't have. After that, I have not pursued the matter and it's been 10 years and the problem is unsolved"*.

In another case, Mrs. Darjee has left her husband for being abusive. She claimed that her husband used to torture her mentally as he used to say many vulgar words if she returns a little late at home. She was not allowed to go anywhere apart from home to market. He often used to get hyper in small things and used to break phone, vase, and mirrors during arguments. It was affecting their children as they were scared of his behavior. After nine years of marriage having two children, she decided to end the marriage. She said her husband keeps sending some clothes, money, and stationery items for children but she returned them to him. She is not accepting any of her husband's help after their separation. She feels she can provide the basic things that her children need. She stays in her parental home and her parents and siblings are helping her in providing educational expenses, food, and emotional support to her and her children. She is working in Zydus company and doing little savings for her children.

Another 43-year-old woman said her husband was having extra affairs with another woman in the town. When she got to know about their affairs, she informed her parents. She thought they would scold him and asked him to leave the woman. But he eloped with the girl the very next day. As her husband practiced polygynous marriage since he married a second wife while the first wife was still alive, the respondent decided to live separately with her children who were all grown up. Her son is already working in a bank so they don't have any financial problems.

Thus, from the cases discussed above, we can see how separation is being done in the village, where people are unaware to legally divorce in court. In traditional times the local community, elderly people used to play an important role in bringing consensus to the families. The panchayat has a limited role in solving the marital problem as

they have limited power. If they cannot solve the matter, they ask the couple to go to the police and court. Separation or divorce of husband and wife affects the children as they need the love and care of both the parents. Women and children who are staying in extended families are getting substantial help from their parents and siblings.

The separated respondents and their guardians suggested that along with the traditional marriage rituals, the couple should mandatorily register their marriage in court as it is easier to take up the matter if a conflict arises between the couple. The children and the wife would get the maintenance allowance, the right to inherit the father's or mother's property, identity, care, and protection from the parents till they become fully independent.

5.4.3 Social and Ritual exclusion

Social exclusion as a concept developed in France in the late 19th century. At that time, social exclusion was focused on the study of socio-economic inequalities that existed in western societies. It focused on the marginalized groups who were poverty-ridden and deprived of equal livelihood about privileged groups of people. Accordingly, the plan and policy were made while concerning the development of the people and situation (Sen, 2000). The Department of International Development (DFID) defines social exclusion as “a process by which certain groups are systematically disadvantaged because they are discriminated against based on their ethnicity, race, religion, sexual orientation, caste, descent, gender, age, disability, HIV status, migrant status or where they live. Discrimination occurs everywhere including public institutions, such as the legal system or education and health services, as well as social institutions like the households” (Khan,2012).

Social exclusion not only exists based on economic factors rather social exclusion exists on the ground of religion, ethnicity, race, and caste (Chaudhry,2013). The caste system continues to determine the political, social, and economic life of the people in Hindu societies (Das, 2004). The scheduled caste is stereotypically considered low and impure based on their birth and traditional occupation. Thus, they face multiple forms of discrimination, violence, and exclusion from the rest of society (Jodhka, 2012). On the religious and caste ground, the scheduled caste who are termed as 'Dalit' or 'untouchables' has been reporting discrimination and violence they faced (Gupta, 1993). The caste system, in its poorest manifestation, is reflected in the form of 'untouchability' (Ambedkar, 1935). Both men and women are deprived of basic human rights and dignity for being 'Dalit', though the Constitution of India prohibits the practicing of untouchability. Caste in today's India is not static, it is slowly showing mobility and changes in terms of the occupational, political, and educational fields. However, it is still a reality in many parts of the country (Jodhka, 2012) in which the idea and practice of 'untouchability' has not waned.

In Nepali society 'untouchability' and caste -discrimination has been understood as 'panni ma chalney jat' (water acceptable caste) and 'panni ma a chalney jat' (that caste where even water cannot be accepted) (Hofer,2004). The former referred to high castes who are touchable and while the latter denoted an unacceptable caste which in a literal sense meant the low caste (Bhattachan, Sunar & Gauchan, 2009). Since time immemorial, the practice of 'untouchability' in the form of 'pure' and 'impure' has been ingrained among the Hindu Nepali society (Subba,1988). The caste system and its cultural practice of pure and impure has remained a major problem when it comes to the marriage and religious activities in Hindu Nepali society (Muktiaar,2018).

Among the Nepalis of Sikkim also there are many instances where the practice of untouchability and caste discrimination has often been reported in media. The News Channel Sikkim Chronicle (2020) reports the existence of caste discrimination based on inter-caste marriage between the High caste boy with SC girl or vice versa. This report is being reinforced by the respondents from the SC community. They recounted that on the day-to-day basis the practice of ‘untouchability and ‘discrimination’ are not invisible because everyone visits each other’s houses without any restrictions. Many of the younger respondents shared that they have friends who treated them well and have a reciprocal relationship and many times even share food also. However, when it comes to the matter of marriage, religious rites, death rites and birth ceremonies of those caste groups who are considered as high caste, the women/men from Scheduled Caste are not permitted to participate in cooking in the main kitchen of the higher castes.

Mrs. Darjee said that she had never seen a man or a woman from her community working or cooking in religious events of the village. There is a restriction which is not forceful but those restrictions have been entrenched into their consciousness where an individual from SC and other caste members maintains the social boundaries.

To support the above argument Mrs. Tamang 75years old man narrates, *“During our time those who belong to Kami-Damai (SC) communities were restricted to enter into the house of other caste groups who were considered as high castes. The low caste people were allowed to come to high caste houses to work in the field, and mend their ax, sickles, and knives. But they were not allowed to enter the kitchen and puja room of the house. For them, people used to keep extra glass, cups, bowls, and plates*

outside the house. Those utensils were used to serve food and water to them whenever they came to work in the house of higher castes. Those used utensils had to be washed by the low caste only”.

Mr. Baraily, Assistant Engineer married with Rai girl said, *“Since ages, I have heard about the social boycott of a person marrying with SC girl/boy. I had a doubt that maybe I also would have to face it in the future. I was in a relationship with a Rai girl for many years and our parents were aware of the relationship and had accepted us. However, when community members of her side got to know about our marriage, they opposed us. The clan members and members of other castes held a meeting where they formally had made a lekha-pari (written letter) stating that a girl marrying a kami boy is boycotted from participating in any of the clan's religious and social occasions. They had written that because of inter-marriage with Kami boy she had polluted the whole clan members. To purify and bring back the dishonored status of the clan, a ritual sacrifice - Kirryia of a girl is important. When we get to know all about the ill treatment of caste -discrimination we could not sit back. Therefore, through family, media and association we came out to address the issues and find a solution. Afterwards, again held a mass meeting in Panchayat ghar including Rai community members, witnesses, association members, panchayats and families. In that meeting, the Rai community members who had used derogatory terms and ill-statement about our marriage and about the SCs seek a written and verbal apology in front of all gatherings. Though the apology was not sufficient to eradicate the mindset of people, yet we accepted compromise and settled the matters”.*

The findings of the present study show that the majority of the inter-caste marriage of high castes and middle caste with the scheduled caste including the Damai, Kami, and

Sarki have been looked down on and not accepted. The man or the woman who are also found to marry with SC are often ritually boycotted, pronounced to be dead by performing the dead rituals, cut off from all relations with the family, clan and caste. They are even not allowed to participate in any of the family's occasions including the death rites of the parents.

Except during rituals, on everyday interaction commensality in terms of eating and drinking takes place without any discrimination and exclusion on the basis of caste and tribe. However, marriages were allowed only between the touchable groups, although the preference for marriage remains within the same caste. Marriage within the Kiratis groups or middle castes is acceptable and inter-caste marriages of high caste Bahun and Chettri were also found to be unobjectionable.

It was informed by the older respondents that, in the earlier time, the family used to call the priest to officiate the 'Kiriya' (declaring someone dead by conducting some parts of death rites for marrying with a SC girl/boy) either in the boy or girl's family. In order to purify and regain the pure caste status from pollution, the family had to symbolically sacrifice their clan member for breaking the customary code. Even in today's Nepali society especially in rural areas, clan and community members tend to socially and ritually boycott a member for marrying a person from SC community.

Therefore, we can visibly picturize the intersectionality of caste, class or status, religion and even region in Nepali society through the lens of marriage practices. However, unlike the traditional period, in the contemporary times, there is no explicit visibility of untouchability in day-to-day lives among the Nepali society, meaning every caste group accepts and exchanges edible and non-edible items. However, as far as marriage is concerned, the preference of endogamous marriage in all aspects

remains unquestionable. Nonetheless, the dichotomy of caste and inequalities are in the consciousness of a person and reside inside the family, clan, caste and society. Nowadays, people who feel discriminated against on the grounds of caste are trying to revolt against the ill practice of customs through the help of the media and by mobilizing the awareness of it.

5. 5 Local Bodies Role in Marital Related Issues

The participation of the local bodies either the community head or the sarpanch's as an intermediary plays an important role while solving any conflicting issues in a village. Since the traditional time, the community head played a role that was crucial to maintain the cohesion of a community. In any of the serious decisions be it of developmental projects, upliftment of the society, and solving the familial matters, the representative body has been playing a prominent role (Madsen, 1991). In the matter of marriage and its related issues, local panchayats provide a mechanism to serve justice and equality to the parties concerned. However, in every society, justice and equality may not be served equally to the affected communities or castes. For instance, in many disputes of inter-caste and inter-religion marriages, local bodies known as khap panchayats ³⁵ have failed to harmonize the principles of hierarchy and equality in Indian society (Madsen,1991), (Chowdhry,2007). Unlike the caste panchayat system of Haryana, Punjab, and Rajasthan, the Panchayat system in Sikkim is different. In this sense, in the field areas, panchayats are not elected based on caste in a particular village because the village setup is mixed up with various castes and communities and dominant caste groups were not present. There is no specific caste panchayat for one particular group in the village.

³⁵Khap panchayat is a traditional social institution engaged in resolution of disputes in the village/community. They pronounce harsh punishments based on age-old customs and traditions. Their dictate is considered to be regressive measures to modern problems.

In Nepali society also the panchayat involvement has been regarded as important in resolving marital issues (Barnouw, 1955). In Sikkim also the role of panchayat is significant. The elected panchayat as representatives is not only involved in the developmental projects for the villages, but their role is equally relevant in the marriage and domestic issues that occurred within their premises. In this study also the villagers said, the local panchayat is always informed in any of the social issues or events. The panchayat's role is reflected in the family matters of separation/divorce of husband and wife, reuniting the couple, in childcare decisions, in any kind of serious conflict that happens between the neighbors. They are even involved in the domain of solving the issues on extramarital affairs of any man/woman in the village. Those mentioned problems are often said to be solved at a societal or village level before proceeding to the police or legal court. However, if there are any such instances where an extreme violation of the rules and values of society, the social punishment is charged in the form of paying fines, compensation and seeking apologies between the parties.

Two of the respondents interviewed were members of panchayats. One was a 34 years old male member of the Gram Panchayat Unit in Central Pendam. While interviewing he said, *each village's panchayat looks after any of the concerned matters. If the matter is serious and is out of the family's control, then local village panchayats are informed to visit and settle the matter at the village level. If the matter is found to be overwhelming, then the panchayats hand over cases to the local police station for further legal procedures. However, most of the separation cases and childcare are settled at the panchayat level.* He added, *even if the cases are registered in the police station, police however inform the village panchayat and suggest the family solve the matter within the premise of the village/panchayat.*

Another respondent Mrs. Sharma is a member of Panchayat in South Sikkim. As informed by her, in her concerned area too panchayats are called to settle the cases of inter-marriage, under-age marriage, and separation cases. In case of inter-caste marriage, if there is an objection from the family members of a girl/boy, panchayats are informed to visit and settled the matter, however, panchayats according to her, never decide to separate the inter-caste couple even if the family seemed to be dissatisfied with the marriage. In case of underage marriage, parents are advised to separate the couple and to make them continue their studies if the couple is found to be students.

In this study also the villagers informed that the panchayats play important role in marital issues that comes to them such as in the separation of husband and wife, reuniting the couple, polygamy/polygyny, and extramarital affairs. The panchayats are found to take written agreements from both the families which are witnessed by important people and make a judicious decision that would be suitable for both the affected families. After receiving the complaint from the family members, a meeting is held on a neutral spot on a particular day. Along with the panchayats, few important members of Samaj, from both families are called to the meeting. After the gathering of all the persons, the panchayat addresses the reason for holding a meeting. Both the aggrieved families are asked to talk about the detailed facts of issues. After hearing grievances from both sides, panchayats asked them to decide for themselves. A decision that would be better for couples and families.

It is informed by the panchayat, at a first go, the final decision is not drawn. Panchayat gives time to the couple and family to rethink/reconsider an issue before the final solution. Panchayat allows the couple to decide what the parties want in their

life. Considering the decision of the couple and family, the panchayat accepts their decision as a final. On the final day of the decision, the panchayat makes the written representation or 'lekha- pari' on behalf of the couple, families, and witnesses. The letter or lekha-pari includes the detailed cause of the meeting, discussion, and final decision derived from the meeting. At the same time, the signatures are collected from the entire participants of the meetings. A copy of lekha-pari paper is given to both the families/couples to keep it as proof. In the end, the panchayat gives counseling to the families to maintain co-operation and order in the society.

5.6 Role of Samaj in Marriage

Maclver defines 'Samaj' or society as a web or network of relationships. For Morris Ginsberg, a society is a collection of individuals joined by certain relations or modes of behavior that mark them off from others who do not enter these relations or who differ from them. Samaj is created having a basic segment of territory, population, likeness, differences, interdependence, co-operation, and conflict (Abhram, 202014). It has its norms, values, culture, and status which are graded as fundamental units of a Samaj.

In the context of this study, we are referring to Samaj not only to the larger social system but to the local clubs. Every locality has a Samaj in Sikkim. The role of samaj is to look after the people's wellbeing and to understand and help the community in good and bad times. The samaj has collective norms and values which are considered as important while maintaining order in a society. If we see the samaj of Haryana, Panjab, and Rajasthan, there is caste samaj where the majority of the samaj are created based on jat (Hershman,1981). Different status and roles are given to a group of individuals in a samaj which is collectively made by the members of the samaj. Being a member of a samaj is obligatory to participate and perform the roles given to

them on any occasion like in funerals, marriage, sports, or religious programs, etc. The head of the samaj is the president who would notify, discuss, and guide the other members/groups of Samaj to attend any of the social and religious functions. The treasurer's role is mostly involved in the monetary matters in which he would maintain a record file of every collection and expenditure in a samaj. They collect Rs.100-300 from each samaj household either monthly or quarterly. With the collected amount, they buy utensils, electronic things, furniture which are used in any functions of the members. The women also have their group called 'Chheli Morcha' formed within the samaj which acts to perform the function of solving the dispute and domestic violence.

5.7 State's Responsibility in Marriage

In Sikkim along with the customary law of marriage, the Hindu Marriage Act 1955 and the child marriage restraint Act or Sharda Act 1929, Indian Christian Marriage Act 1872 have been implemented in the state (SSLSA, 2017). However, the Special Marriage Act of 1954 is still in the process to be implemented in the State. Under the Hindu Marriage Act 1955, the couple from the different social and economic backgrounds may take a legal procedure to formalize their union. However, this act prohibits the marriage of two people who are related through blood ties. This means persons belonging to the same sapinda, gotra from both mother's and father's sides are not allowed to marry.

During the 1990s, the then government initiated the 'small family' scheme to improve women's status from the grassroots level. It encouraged the women to delay early marriage and continue their studies. "Girls who are 13 years of age as of April 1, 1997, and who are not married, received a fixed deposit certificate of Rs 2,000 from

the State Bank of Sikkim in their names. The Scheme also provided an incentive of Rs 2,000 if she gets married after the age of 21 years. An additional incentive of Rs 500 was specified if she marries at the age of 22 and if she marries at the age of 23, an additional incentive of Rs 1,000 is paid to her. So far, this scheme has covered over 1,200 children” (Lama, 2001; Subba, 2014).

The widow remarriage scheme was also initiated in 2016 by the state Social, Justice, Empowerment, and Welfare Department. This scheme was started to raise the widow’s social status and ensure social security for women. Through this scheme, the widow remarried couple is entitled to receive the incentives of Rs.30,000/- once at the time of marriage. The Sikkim Social Welfare Department, Under the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, has been implementing Dr. Ambedkar Scheme for Social Integration in Sikkim since 2017 through which Rs.30000 is given to the inter-caste couple, categorically if a boy/girl is from a Scheduled Caste community.

5.8 Role of Caste Association

Association is denoted as an organized group with a formal structure. The associational group has the stated purposes, written rules, membership criteria, standard of procedures, and clearly defined authority structure (Abraham, 2014). Rudolph argues, “membership in a caste is completely ascriptive: once born into a caste, a man has no way to change social identity in so far as the social structure and cultural norms recognize caste. Caste norms prescribe the ritual, occupational, commensal, marital, and social relationships of members, and caste organization and authority enforce these norms within the group and with other caste groups. Caste members are culturally and socially quite homogeneous since they share the same occupation, social status, and ritual position”. The historical account of Indian society

shows the reason for forming the caste association in the overall development in the social, political, economic, and cultural aspects (Rudolph,1960; Vaid,2012).

In Sikkim, there are various caste and community associations for example, All Sikkim Gurung Association, Akhil Kirat Rai Sangha, All Sikkim Limboo Association, Sikkim Tamang youth society, All Scheduled Caste Welfare Association, Chhetri-Bahun Kalyan Sangha, etc., In one sense the caste group is formed to strengthen or revive their traditions, culture, art, and language in the modern era. Secondly, this caste association is functional as to have equal opportunities and status at par with other caste/communities.

Sikkim Scheduled Caste Welfare Association is seen to be effectively coming into the picture. They are taking rallies for awareness programs for the persisting discriminatory practices that occurred among the lower castes, especially those people belonging to the scheduled castes. Caste today is not stagnant, the occupational, political, and educational mobility is seen in reality (Jodhka,2015). Nonetheless, article 17 of the Indian constitution has delegalized the practice of untouchability. However, in everyday practices in the Nepali society the notion of purity and pollution based on caste is still persisting. Even among the tribals, the notion and practices of touchable and untouchable people are seen to be observed in Sikkim which may be influenced by the Hindu Nepalis.

Subba & Sinha (2007) and Singh (1993) argued that Indian Nepalis are liberal in matters related to caste. They are right in some aspects of caste; however, this study shows that the high caste and middle caste people discriminate against the lowest castes till date in terms of marriage and still barred them from entering the kitchen of the higher caste. As one's title in the personal name often indicates the caste category

one belongs to, many of those belonging to the higher caste category always give emphasis to knowing the title or the surname of the other person. A few scheduled caste respondents informed that it annoys and makes them feel disgusted a lot when their surname is being asked. From the empirical findings, it can be drawn that in recent times, people facing casteist discriminations are slowly opening up and trying to get justice. Further, this study found that in case of complained of any caste-based discrimination, the member reaches out to ask for justice for the aggrieved family to caste association. Members of the association revealed that they do the first investigation report in the nearest police station in any of the issues found related to caste discriminatory practices but they have not filed the case and imprisoned anybody. The reason could be because of the fact that the social practices of caste have been deeply ingrained into the culture of the society which is shared and followed by the masses. Thereby, imprisoning and giving punishment to some individuals or a group of people may not be enough to diminish the practice of discrimination. Therefore, even the state or authority let the people decide and solve the issues within the preview of customary practices in the society. Therefore, one of the prime aims of the All Sikkim Scheduled Caste Association is to seek equal treatment for all as human beings. The association also emphasized breaking the ill practices of society that bifurcate the human beings on the ground of caste.

CHAPTER 6

Conclusion

Marriage is an important life cycle ritual or event of an individual's life and the society in order to continue human civilization. The family, kinship, and caste are an integral components of marriage in all societies in India including the Nepali society without which marriage and its significance cannot be understood. There are various religious customs, rules, and norms to be followed during the marriage. Those members who want to marry need to undergo the customs, beliefs, and practices related to a particular community. There are eight forms of marriage that were found in traditional Indian societies such as Brahma, Daiva, Arsha, Prajapatya, Asura, Gandharva, Rakshasa, and Paisacha. Among these different types of marriages, Brahma marriage commonly known as arranged marriage is valued more in Hindu society where joint and extended families take the initiative in selecting the spouse for their children. In many Indian societies, arranged marriage is predominantly found in which negotiation and rational calculation prevails. This marriage system supports the endogamous customs, kinship network and importantly caste hierarchy (Dube,1990).

On the contrary to an arranged marriage, elopement-based marriage has also been found widely to be practiced in many societies across the world. The findings of various studies by Marcus (1979) Chowdhary (2007), Jones (1977), Bista (2000), Min Liwang (2000), Dhanda (2012), Lama (1994), Allendorf (2017), Banerjee (2013) have shown the significance of marrying through elopement in Western as well as Asian societies. Their study suggests that as compared to an elopement-based marriage, an arranged marriage is widely regarded as prestigious in the society because of the fact that an arranged marriage with the rule of endogamy continues to serve the caste,

class, and community tradition that has been ingrained in a particular society. In many Indian societies, parents and relatives take the responsibility of finding a suitable spouse for their children. Hence, falling in love, choosing a spouse by oneself was rarely considered as desirable behavior in large parts of Indian society. Nonetheless, in a few so-called primitive/tribal societies, traditionally self-choice marriage has been practiced. In these societies, parents play a limited role in choosing the spouse of their children as they expect the latter to find their own significant partner. However, when the society started tilted towards modernization, the modern values and ideas emerged into the masses. The developmental changes brought by industrialization, modernization, and westernization brought changes in the primordial concepts and rules concerning marriage and family (Singh & Sekhar's, 2013). Modern urban Indian families started allowing their children to select their partner on their own but arranging a partner for their children still remains the main responsibility of the parents. Therefore, the practice of self-choice marriage with an elopement is severely discarded as it is considered as breaching the traditional values of a family and that of the larger community (Chowdhry, 2007). Those couples who are found to break the traditional norms of a family, kins, caste and community are strictly outcasted or punished for their act in the name of 'ijat' honor.

This study was carried out to understand the elopement-based marriage among the Nepalis of Sikkim. The main focus of the study is to comprehend the significance of marriage by elopement in the studied areas. It has attempted to find out the various rites and rituals of the study, contributing factors for the rise of inter-caste, inter-class and inter-religion marriage and the different challenges faced by couples before or after marriage. Moreover, this study has been carried out to unfurl how elopement-based marriage has become customary practices that acts as medium to legitimized a

couple in the Nepali society. For this study, the sample was drawn from the two villages, Duga and Deorali under the Central Pendam Gram Panchayat Unit in East Sikkim District. The empirical data was collected through in-depth interviews by using semi-structured interview schedules. Additionally, narratives, case study, and observation methods were also gathered. After which, the collected data has been extensively analyzed and has also been substantiated with the existing literature, important sociological concepts, and theory wherever it was deemed relevant.

The population of Sikkim comprises mainly three different ethnic groups. They are Bhutias, Lepchas, and Nepalis. In the mid-20th century, some kind of conflict occurred between these three groups on the issue of local versus non-local as the Nepalis were later migrants and out-numbered the so-called local population of Sikkim. To safeguard the ethnic identity and privileges, the Sikkimese citizenship or 'Sikkim Subject Regulation Act, 1961' was enacted to give protection to those Nepali populaces who have migrated to Sikkim before 1960. Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity are the main religions that are followed by the people of Sikkim. Each community has very distinct food habits, ways of living, art, culture, history, and language. The majority of the Nepalis followed the Hindu culture, while a few practiced the animist belief system. The study has detailed the historical background of the Nepalis and their socio, economic and cultural accounts before discussing the marriage practices in general and elopement marriage in specific.

The Nepalis are a heterogeneous community and have considerable cultural and customary differences between the groups. In the Indian context, Nepalis are multi-ethnic groups of people organized into one homogenous identity in terms of common political, cultural, economic, and social history. Sinha (1973) has classified the Nepalis in Sikkim into three sub-cultural stocks; the Kiratis, the Newari, and

Gorkhalis. As per the Sikkim Socio-Economic Census (2006), a total number of sixteen sub-communities such as Chhetri, Bahuns, Pradhan, Rai, Thapa, Magar, Gurung, Limbu, Sunuwar, Tamang, Damai, Kami, Sarki, Sanyasi, Bhujel, and Sherpa. All these various castes and ethnic communities are clubbed together under one umbrella term 'Nepalis' and Nepali is the commonly used language in the state. Until the mid-19th century, there was not much division of occupations as the majority of the Nepali population were dependent on farming and had a similar pattern of earnings (Sinha, 1975). It can be stated that they occupied a homogeneous class since all of them were in a similar class status (Singh, 1993) so the features of mechanical solidarity were found. Similar to Indian society, even among the Nepali society, the caste system is found to be based on the varna system (Sharma, 1978). Tracing the history of Nepali caste system, Hofer (2004) has divided caste into five categories. Those are Tagadharis, Matwalis that was subdivided into two categories - non-enslavable alcohol drinkers and enslavable alcohol drinkers, impure but touchable and, impure and untouchables. In the Nepali society also there exists a hierarchical division of the social status of people on the ground of caste. By virtue of being born in a particular caste, an individual inherits occupational patterns and social status based on it. In the context of Sikkim, the traditional caste system and hierarchies based on ritual purity and pollution that has been prevalent in Nepal has visibly penetrated in the Nepali society of the state too. Sinha (1975) has divided the Nepalis of Sikkim into three groups: 'Tagadharis' those who wear the traditional sacred thread, 'Matwali' who do not put the sacred thread and are consumers of alcohol and non-vegetarian diet. Lastly, the service castes like Kami, Dami, and Sarki who are treated as untouchables, are placed in the lowest strata in the caste hierarchy. Similarly, Sinha & Subba (2007) has categorized Nepali communities into

three categories, namely high, middle and low castes. For the purpose of administration, after the reservation policy in 1978, various caste and ethnic communities of Nepalis are categorized into different categories of Other Backward Class (OBC), Most Backward Class (MBC), Scheduled Tribe (ST) and Scheduled Caste (SC). The present study finds that except Chhetri- Bahun that falls under the general category in the central list of reservation policy and Other Backward Class in the state list, many other ethnic groups such as Rai, Magar, Gurung, Bhujel, and are categorized as Other Backward Class in both the central and state list. Kami, Damai, Sarki are classified under SC while Tamang and Subba are under ST.

The study finds that there is more of a similarity between Indian and Nepali caste structures. However, we cannot totally fit in the Indian stratification of caste based on varna in the Nepali caste system. For instance, in both the structures, the Bahuns/Brahmins are placed on the top of the caste hierarchy followed by Kshatriyas/Chettris while Kami, Damai, and Sarki communities or Shudras were recognized as 'untouchable'/ low castes in Nepali Hindu culture (Gurung,2020) and also in the context of India. Almost every caste also had their own traditional occupations which were hereditary in nature. The occupation of the Bahuns (Brahmins) were priesthoods and that of Damai were folk musicians and tailors. The positioning of the Chettri as along with the Pradhan (trading and business community), second in the hierarchical position in Nepali caste structure in Sikkim differs from that of Vaishyas who occupied third place in caste hierarchy in India.

Similar to the findings of Singh (1993) and Cameron (1988) the present study also found the significance of caste endogamy and clan and gotra exogamy in the marriage. The study finds that there are different dietary patterns with respect to food,

eating meat, and drinking habits between the various communities. As stated earlier, the Brahmins and Chhetris were not involved in drinking liquor and were vegetarian while the Matwalis are those who do not put sacred thread and are in the habit of drinking alcohol and eating meat (Sinha,1975;8). Those groups who have been vegan and teetotalter customarily are considered purer and positioned at the top of the caste hierarchy. Thus, consumption of alcohol and eating non-vegetarian food differentiates the groups from each other.

Contextualizing marriage in the Nepali society, along with arranged marriages and elopement-based marriages has been practiced traditionally in Sikkim in majority of the Nepali communities. The study found that families play a crucial role in socializing their children in the matter of mate selection with whom they can have marriage alliance and whom they cannot. In traditional times, the Nepali society was more rigid in terms of caste, religion, and community as it was organized in a collective way where family and kinship ties, cultural values, and practices were very strongly embedded and any activity was carried out in collective action. The customary rules of endogamy in the form of class, caste, and religion were given more priority to regulate the marriage alliance, yet the presence of inter-caste and inter-community marriages have also been reported intermittently. Among the Matwali groups, inter-caste marriages between the marriageable castes have been prevalent since long but not so much among the Bahuns and Chhetris. Inter-caste marriage was acceptable within the boundaries of caste and communities but it was not acceptable if it was beyond the caste boundaries. It was believed that marrying with the same caste, community, and religion has been considered as a prestigious act because it is assumed that one would follow and keep the tradition alive. Many respondents

informed that their parents told them to marry within the boundary of acceptable caste. Though the family members do not force them to marry their chosen person directly, they keep reminding them about their preference.

When Sikkim started to change towards development in the political, social and economic sectors, the Nepali community along with other communities began a new phase of development (Sinha, 1975). As society moves towards a market economy, it becomes more competitive. There was a high demand for more educated and skilled people to handle the modern institutions in the field of education, administrative sectors, banks and industries. The people started to move out of their houses to work in those established organizations often located in urban set up. Many of them shifted their occupation and no longer depend on agricultural activities. So, borrowing Durkheim's concept, this phase of changes in occupational diversification can be termed 'organic solidarity where there are diversified divisions of labour and one particular individual is specialized in one skill which makes people dependent on each other for various services (Ritzer, 2000).

Similar to the Hindu society of India where caste and religion endogamy become deciding factors in marriage even among the Nepalis, the rules of endogamy are strictly followed in an arranged marriage. However, the findings of this study suggest that many of the modern educated people are slowly breaking the traditional orthodox authorities of family, caste, and community by establishing a new kind of inter-caste, inter-community, inter-religion alliance through elopement-based marriages. Unlike the mainstream Indian societies, elopement-based marriage in the Nepali society is culturally accepted by performing the rites and rituals which has been set as a part of the whole process for validating the marriage.

The present research finds that inter-caste marriages between the high caste and middle caste are acceptable after negotiations between the concerned parties. The empirical findings of the study suggests that elopement marriages transcend the boundary of traditional caste, class, and religion and breached the regional boundaries. It is interesting to note that many respondents are found to choose their partner after identifying certain parameters of compatibility which they considered important in their life. Similar to Banerjee's (2019) findings, it is observed that some respondents were giving more emphasis on subjective qualities of social status based on class rather than caste and religion while choosing a prospective partner. For girls marrying a Sikkimese man who holds valid documents of being a Sikkim Subject, regular government job, land and house are important criteria for marriage.

In today's Nepali society a guy/girl from a high caste is marrying a girl/boy from a low caste or visa-versa. As pointed out in the previous chapter, the study finds that a high caste marrying with a scheduled caste is unacceptable till date. They are socially and ritually excluded by the majority of the ethnic groups in the state. In spite of the protective constitutional act against any forms of untouchability, the study finds that there still exists a social and ritual boycott if a higher caste marries a SC girl/boy. However, harsh punishment like honor killing is completely absent in the tradition of Nepali society. Nonetheless, there are socially constructed rules and payments of fines in some communities that need to be obliged by the groom's family as part of customary practices. Caste system is an existing reality among the Nepalis as marrying a person from SC has often been considered a taboo by others. Gramsci's argument that the dominant groups attempt to exclude the lesser-known groups through their ideological hegemony can be aptly applied here. To address the pre-existing challenges faced by men/women on the ground of caste, the caste association

like “All Sikkim Scheduled Caste Association”, panchayat and samaj are actively playing vital roles to bring equality.

The field data shows that couples belonging from different backgrounds of class, caste, religion, and region have internalized that those who are from different backgrounds and have unequal status should go for an elopement as a way for marriage. Interestingly, the study finds that besides inter-caste couples who underwent elopement marriage, even couples belonging to the same caste and community who fall under the low-income groups also eloped for marriage as they found it difficult to have an arranged marriage. Unlike in the case of Haryana and Punjab (Chowdhry,2007; Banarjee,2017), elopement with marriageable caste or different religion no longer carries disrespect and humiliation in Nepali Society. It can be summed up that people think an arranged marriage is a lengthy process that needs more expenditure while comparing with elopement marriage. Although this study argued that if there is an understanding between the bride giver and bride taker, the ceremonies could be shortened up and expenditure could be reduced, thereby the families can have love cum arranged marriages. However, expectation from each other’s family and the need for performing every ceremony elaborately seems to be more in an arranged marriage.

In recent times, love cum arranged marriage is also increasing among the Nepali communities if it is within the preview of acceptable castes. In maximum cases, the inter-caste couples are found to be making an elopement than the same-caste couples. Henceforth, there are various reasons given by respondents to get married by elopement such as lack of parental support, societal obligation, family expectation, inter-caste relationship, inter-religion, pregnancy. Though intra-community marriage

is the preferred choice, inter-community marriage between the major three ethnic communities of the state is gradually rising.

Along with the customary rules of marriage, other pertinent factors which possibly has led to the continuous rise of elopement marriages is due to education, the access of job opportunities where people from rural areas have shifted to the urban areas or vice versa for studies as well as for finding a job. These institutional spaces facilitate in meeting youngsters belonging to different socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. In addition to it, improvement in transportation and communication technologies also facilitates people to have long-distance relationships. In today's world because of internet facilities, social media websites– Facebook, Instagram, matrimonial advertisements and mobile phones the probability of the couple meeting through this medium is very high as they can easily communicate with each other and express their feelings. This research finds that initially the couples may have been just conventional friends and later many of them liked each other, fell in love and then decided to marry often by using the short cut method of elopement as informed by a few respondents.

As discussed previously in chapter one, this study broadly analyses mainly by using functionalist's theoretical framework. Durkheim (1897) has stated that the marriage and family as an important institution reproduces children, socializes, and regulates the relationship between the sexes, and maintains the division of laborers between husbands and wives. Men and women are expected to carry out those expected roles and responsibilities for the wellbeing of the society. Similarly, Parson (1996:233) argues that every part of the system is integrated with each other for the positive function of the society that would possibly bring order and stability. To Parson,

marriage, family and kinship are important subsystems of the society which are interrelated and interdependent with each other for the functioning of a holistic society. Thus, the empirical findings of this study correspond with Parson's theory of 'system and function' and Durkheim's concept of transition of society from pre-industrial to modern society since with the passage of time, and social transformation brought by democratic politics, expansion of educational and service sectors in Sikkim, there are changes in the various aspects of the marriage system.

However, in contrast to Parson's view, Merton says there are two functions - latent and manifest. Some rules may serve as a positive function for the whole while some may create dysfunction in the society. Applying Merton's concept of latent and manifest function, it can be stated that elopement-based marriage has both positive and negative functions in the society. Firstly, through the elopement it can be viewed that eloped-couples who belong to diverse backgrounds attempt to integrate and maintain order and stability between different groups in the society which earlier was divided on the ground of caste rigidity, class dichotomy, religious and regional boundaries. Secondly, elopement-based marriages take place beyond the caste and class partitions. Consequently, this type of marriage became functional as it legitimized the inter-caste, inter-community, inter-religion and inter-tribal couples which were regarded as unacceptable in the traditional society.

On the other hand, early marriage through elopement has its dysfunctional aspects in the Nepali society because the empirical findings of the study suggests that teenagers who have eloped early in their youth have faced lots of difficulties. Those couples who had married during their teenage years could not take the burden of responsibility of the families. They dropped out from schools and often did not complete their

studies, subsequently unable to get a reasonably good job. Many of them generally remain poorer compared to their contemporaries who had better educational qualifications as they could not get stable, regular jobs. It is observed that early marriages also lead to frequent separation and divorced leading to many men and women marrying multiple times in the Nepali society.

In present day Sikkimese Nepali society, day today interaction between the groups having different social status happens without any discrimination and ostracism. However, marriages were allowed only between the touchable groups, although the preference for marriage remains within the same caste. There is no explicit evidence of untouchability in day-to-day interaction in the public space in Sikkim. Yet, the empirical data shows that a few families have not conducted any of the marriage rituals, in case of a higher caste marrying someone belonging to the lowest caste in the hierarchy. As far as marriage is concerned, the preference of endogamous marriage in all aspects remains unquestionable. Moreover, the dichotomy of caste and inequalities are in the consciousness of people and display it especially in marriage ceremonies. It has been noted that the cases of elopement-based marriage are continuously increasing among the Nepali society. Nowadays, it is observed that love in combination with elopement marriage is more frequent than arranged marriage among the Nepali as well as other communities in Sikkim. Consequently, elopement has become a customary, institutionalized practice that legitimized the couple for marriage in Nepali society.

For policy recommendations, the researcher suggests that along with the customary rites and rituals, registration of marriage in the court may be made compulsory for the stability of a marriage. Moreover, nowadays, a marriage certificate has become an

essential document in many official works such as applying for a passport or visa and even for acquiring birth certificates for the children. In case of disputes between husband and wife, the marriage certificate as a legal document facilitates the court in divorcing legally, hence the children and wife may get benefit by receiving financial assistance from the husband. The state may also encourage inter-caste marriages between higher castes with the scheduled caste people. Although one time incentive is given for such marriages by the government, the incentives for inter-caste marriage with SC boy/girl should be continued and increased from time to time, and if the couple are from poor family background there should be some provisions for continued financial support for few years or till one of the couples gets a job. Discrimination and exclusion on the basis of caste should be discouraged and for that the SC/ST Atrocities Act and Rules should be implemented in letter and true spirit.

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APPENDIX

Interview scheduled

Understanding the Custom of Marriage by Elopement among the Nepalis of Sikkim

Name of the Researcher: Jashi Maya Gurung

Name of the Supervisor: Dr. Khangembam Indira

Name of the Department: M.Phil. Department of Sociology Sikkim University,
Gangtok, East Sikkim

BASIC INFORMATION ABOUT RESPONDENTS

Name: Age:

Gender: Caste/Spouse's Caste:

Religion: Education:

Occupation: Income:

Family Structure: Joint/Nuclear/ Extended

Marital Status: Currently living and cohabiting / Divorce/ Separated/ Widowed/

Widower

QUESTIONS RELATED TO COURTSHIP

- ☐ Where did you meet your partner before marriage?
- ☐ How long you both were in relationship before deciding to get married?
- ☐ Who proposed first? Does anybody help you in expressing your feelings for each other?
- ☐ How old were you when you got married? How old was partner at the time of marriage?
- ☐ What qualities did you see in your partner to be husband/wife?
- ☐ How did you keep in touch with each other? Letter, Phones, email, friend/ meet in person?
- ☐ Where you both used to meet with each other?
- ☐ What was your wife/husband occupation when you both decided to get married?
- ☐ Were your Guardians aware about your courtship? Yes/No?
- ☐ If yes, how did they react at first when they get to know about your courtship?

QUESTION RELATED TO MARRIAGE

- ☐ What is marriage for you? What is the importance of marriage in life?
- ☐ Who selected a spouse for you? Family/ self-choice?
- ☐ What was your age at the time of marriage?
- ☐ Did you both know each other before marriage?
- ☐ What did your family see in your partner to be a suitable husband/wife?
- ☐ What is your opinion about an arranged marriage?
- ☐ Do you think an arranged marriage is better? If yes/No, can you share your viewpoint regarding both the marriages?

- ☐ How was your marriage ceremony held?
- ☐ Who all were invited? Where your family conducted your marriage ceremony?
- ☐ What are the important rituals that are conducted in an arranged marriage?
- ☐ What kinds of gifts are exchanged in an arranged marriage?

QUESTION RELATED TO ELOPEMENT BASED MARRIAGE

- ☐ How did you know about the practice of elopement-based marriages?
- ☐ Can you tell me the reason was behind to choose an elopement-based marriage over other forms of marriage?
- ☐ What do you feel about the importance of elopement-based marriage?
- ☐ Who helped you both in informing about your marriage decision?
- ☐ After elopement did you directly take your partner in your home? If yes how did your family reacted on your decision?
- ☐ If no, could you share where did you both stay after making an elopement?
- ☐ Did both of your parents accept your decision of marriage at first goes?
- ☐ If Yes/No can you tell me any reason behind the acceptance/ Rejection of elopement?

QUESTION RELATED TO MEDIATOR

- ☐ Who helped you both to inform about your marriage decision?
- ☐ How many members were chosen from boy's side? Who were they?
- ☐ Were they from same caste? Why do you feel same caste mediator has to be present in elopement-based marriage?
- ☐ What is their role? How did they do act as bridge between both families?
- ☐ What is the discussion they do with girl's family?

- ☐ Can you share, how did the parties/ go-between member settle your marriage proposal?

QUESTIONS RELATED TO CUSTOM OF ELOPEMENT-BASED

MARRIAGE

- ☐ What are the important customary rites and rituals in elopement-based marriage?
- ☐ Did your family organize the marriage ceremony in your house?
- ☐ How long does it take to solemnized elopement-based marriage?
- ☐ Who all are invited to attend the marriage?
- ☐ What is the items family demand during marriage?
- ☐ What are the gifts that are given to a girl/boy in marriage?
- ☐ To whom the bride-price is to be paid? Is it to family members/ girls?
- ☐ How much a man and his family have to pay bride-price?
- ☐ Do you inherit any movable and immovable things from your family?
- ☐ What is the historical importance of customary practice of bride-price?

QUESTION RELATED TO CHALLENGES

- ☐ Did you face any kind of problems during your courtship/ prior or after the marriage?
- ☐ If yes/No, could you share what kind of problems you both had to face in a family/Society?
- ☐ Did you have to face any problem related to inter-marriage? Either in the caste, class, religion or in any matter?
- ☐ If Yes/No, could you share what was the reason for acceptance/ non-acceptance of your marriage?

☐ If yes, did you reach out for any help to Family/ SHG/ Friends/ Panchayat/ Police?

☐ What is the role of panchayats/ Samaj role in issues related to marriage?

QUESTION RELATED TO CASTE ASSOCIATION

☐ What are the aims of the caste association in Sikkim?

☐ How do caste associations address the issues of inter-caste marriage?

☐ How the Caste association helps the aggrieved families?