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Discrimination, Subjugation and Violence: Lived-experiences of a 'Pardesi Bahu' in Rural Haryana

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ABSTRACT

Haryana, a northern state of India has earned quite a reputation for its rapid economic growth and technological advancements over the years. Paradoxically though the economic progress has not translated into social development. The social scene of the state paints a rather dismal picture with longstanding female deficits and gender discrimination which has created an imbalance in the proportion of marriageable males and females in their respective cohorts. The consistently skewed sex ratios of the state have inadvertently led to the presence of relatively less females in comparison to males on the matrimonial landscape, thus, ensuing the crisis of male marriage squeeze which has pushed a substantial number of its socio-economically disadvantaged men to the cusp of involuntary bachelorhood. This shortage of brides is being addressed through non-customary cross-region marriages whereby men are marrying (or purchasing) women as wives from impoverished regions of eastern and southern India. In these matrimonial alliances that are driven by necessity, compulsion and convenience, is manifested inhuman treatment of the incoming brides. For a number of these pardesi bahu's discrimination, subjugation and violence has become a harrowing reality. There are instances where they have been victims of trafficking, forced marriages and domestic violence. Some distressing incidents of these cross-region women having been sold by their parents/relatives and purchased by their alleged partners like a commodity have also been noted. They are often refused respectable status and denominated as servants in host societies. This paper, situated in the rural backdrop of Haryana draws heavily from field research carried out in its six villages to lay bare the perturbing physical, emotional, sexual abuses and inhuman treatment meted out to cross-region brides in their alien conjugal settings.

KEYWORDS: Male Marriage squeeze, cross-region brides, domestic violence, trafficking, forced polyandry.

INTRODUCTION

Marriage and family life are fundamental for all human civilizations to sustain. The institution of marriage in any society indubitably relies upon the availability of mates, that is, a prescribed proportion of males and females in respective marriage cohorts. Any imbalance in the existing pool of eligible mates results in 'marriage squeeze' (Akers, 1967). The phenomenon of marriage squeeze manifests the complex situation of one sex outnumbering the other in a matrimonial context and the difficulties encountered by the preponderant sex in securing suitable companions. Quite naturally, a society that is heterosexual and

monogamous in nature requires a more or less equal number of marriageable males and females (Mishra, 2013), failing which the matrimonial prospects of several individuals get jeopardized. While the preponderance of marriageable men over marriageable women in any population grouping at a given point of time leads to 'male marriage squeeze'; the excess of marriageable women over marriageable men causes 'female marriage squeeze'.

The crisis of 'male marriage squeeze', that is, a surplus of marriageable males is being faced by several states of India namely Haryana, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan. The shortage of marriageable girls in these states can be attributed to various demographic, socio-cultural and economic factors. Demographically, the long-standing gender imbalance and numerical deficit of females in the sex ratio counts is largely responsible for the prevailing bride shortage (Kaur, 2004; Ahlawat, 2009; Mishra, 2013; Mukherjee, 2013). The culturally engrained son-preference (valued as an asset) and daughter aversion (devalued for being a liability), brutal elimination of the girl child via inhuman practices of infanticide and feticide, neglect of their health and nutrition, and, rapidly declining fertility have resulted in the birth of comparatively fewer girls in the population (Kaur, 2004; Ahlawat, 2009). Subsequently, the sex ratios have become increasingly skewed and an imbalance in the proportion of potential mates has gradually generated. This demographic imbalance becomes further intensified due to the prevalence of various customary norms regulating the institution of marriage such as endogamy, exogamy and hypergamy. Given that these norms place extensive caste, gotra and territorial confines on matrimonial decisions, it has become a herculean task for men to find local brides. Along with the demographic and cultural determinants various socio-economic and individual characteristics such as educational levels, occupational status, income, size of landholdings, age, character, previous marriages, addiction/non-addiction to substance etc. too have a strong bearing on the marital prospects of men. The men who are educated, have government jobs (or other high income yielding work), own substantial property and assets, belong to respectable families and bear good moral character command a superior position in the marriage market. They do not experience much difficulty in securing a desirable match for themselves. On the contrary, the men who fail to meet the preferred criteria, that is, those who are poor, less educated, have crossed the ideal marriageable age, are divorced/widower, have little/no land, are alcoholic/addicted to any other substance or have notorious reputation are deemed unsuitable for nuptial considerations. Men such as these are getting pushed out from the pool of eligible and are finding it extremely challenging to get married in a community sanctioned conventional marriage, especially in a setting that has less females in the marriageable ages.

Unable to secure a matrimonial match locally, these disadvantaged bachelors have started looking for brides from outside their customary marriageable circles and have given rise to an unusual practice of marrying (or at times purchasing) women from the underdeveloped and impoverished regions of eastern, southern and central states of the country such as Assam, West Bengal, Bihar, Odisha, Jharkhand, Tripura, Chhattisgarh, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala etc. (Kaur, 2004; Ahlawat, 2009; Chaudhry & Mohan, 2011; Misra, 2011; Kukreja & Kumar 2013; Mishra, 2013; Mukherjee, 2013) and also from neighboring countries like Nepal and Bangladesh (Blanchet, 2003). This matrimonial arrangement that has emerged and gained momentum in wake of the crisis of male marriage squeeze is being widely referred to as "cross-region marriages" and the brides thus procured are called "cross-region brides". Of these four states, Haryana which is exceedingly prosperous economically but lags behind socially, happens to be the leading site of such unusual marriages and hence serves as the perfect locale for present research.

CROSS-REGION MARRIAGES IN HARYANA

Conceptualization and Contextualization

In all hitherto societies, not everybody always got married. It is considered normal for four to five percent of men and women to remain unmarried in any given population (Kaur et. al., 2016). However, any increase beyond that in the never-married proportion becomes a serious cause of worry and requires developing effective mechanisms to cope with the matrimonial crisis. In Haryana too, the shortage of marriageable girls has prevailed since colonial times (Darling, 1947; Chowdhry, 1994) and the society has adopted various ways to ease the matrimonial predicament in the form of involuntary bachelorhood, out-

marriage and fraternal polyandry (Kaur, 2016). In the past, men remained unmarried to restrict the number of children born so as to avoid fragmentation of land into smaller holdings (Kaur, 2008). Out-marriage is another redressal strategy that has historically been practiced among economically impoverished Jat peasantry and few of the lower castes such as Chamars (Darling, 1947; Jeffery & Jeffery, 1997; Chowdhary, 1994; Ahlawat, 2009). Another method to mitigate male marriage squeeze has been surreptitious fraternal polyandry or bride sharing among brothers, more so in poor households (Hershman, 1981). It is evident here that neither the conundrum of low sex ratios is something unique and new nor is society's response to it in the form of out-marriage. What is peculiar however is that the age-old practice of out-marriage certainly has acquired new dimensions. For instance, earlier such marriages were arranged mostly in the adjoining states (Darling, 1947; Chowdhry, 1994), but the distance between conjugal and natal homes has now stretched beyond thousands of kilometers with brides being sought from distant parts of eastern, central and even southern India. Also, the practice which was limited to the men of some specific castes such as Jats, Yadavs or Chamars in the past has now become common within the lower socio-economic stratas of most caste groups (Ahlawat, 2009). Further, there has been a steep increase in the frequency of out-marriages. These represent not only a few isolated instances here and there but a large number of cross-region brides can be seen residing in rural parts of Haryana. In some of the villages, their count goes even beyond a hundred. With time, these marriages seem to have become increasingly institutionalized in rural Haryana.

A cross-region marriage is not similar to a conventional Haryanvi marriage. Various prescriptive and proscriptive rules of mate selection which are traditionally followed while arranging marriages within Haryana are vehemently bypassed in cross-region marriages. To begin with, matrimonial matches in Haryana are usually sought and finalized between individuals and families from more or less similar religious, caste and class backgrounds. In addition, marriages are necessarily endogamous in the context of caste and religion, exogamous in terms of village and brotherhood, hypergamous for women, arranged within a geographical radius and are generally solemnized with substantial dowry. In cross-region marriages none of the above norms are considered. Such alliances transgress the ironclad rule of caste endogamy, entail great geographical distance between natal and conjugal regions which stretches beyond thousands of kilometers and the man and woman thereby united are complete cultural strangers. They have different castes, food habits and behavioral patterns. They speak different languages and dialects. Sometimes their religious backgrounds are different too. Socio-cultural heterogeneity thus makes a distinguishing feature of cross-region marriages. The only commonality seems to be their difficult circumstances which bind them together into unions that are determined not by companionship or choice but by compulsion. In Haryana such marriages are being resorted to because women are required for performing various productive and reproductive functions within a household. In the bride-sending regions, the families of the incoming women being economically poor fail to marry off their daughters to local grooms as they can't afford to provide any dowry. When Haryanvi men visit them with 'dowryless' and 'all wedding expenses paid' proposals of marriage, the poor parents/relatives of these women readily agree (Kaur, 2004; Ahlawat, 2009; Kukreja & Kumar, 2013). By doing so they are able to carry out their social obligation of marrying a daughter, that too without incurring any expense.

Given that Haryanvi society is patrilineal, patrilocal and patriarchal in nature, once married the woman is supposed to reside at her husband's place. Quite naturally the onus of adjustment is more on the incoming bride as she has to acclimatize and adapt herself according to the customs, norms and routine of her new (marital) home. Cross-region marriages are no exception in this regard. In fact, the challenges of adjustment are far accentuated in such marriages as the couples united are complete cultural strangers who have nothing in common, neither norms, traditions and caste status nor language, food habits or way of life. Unfamiliar Haryanvi dialect, language barriers, dietary shifts from rice to wheat and vegetarian meals, restricted mobility, practice of carrying a veil, cumbersome domestic chores and farm labor, severed ties with natal family, loneliness etc. make some of the common difficulties that cross-region women encounter and wrestle (Kaur, 2004; Ahlawat, 2009; Chaudhry & Mohan, 2011; Kukreja & Kumar, 2013; Mishra, 2013). In the more recent literature on the subject it's been found that these women not only have to deal with afore adjustment related issues in their conjugal homes but some of them are also victims of discrimination, subjugation and domestic abuse (Kukreja & Kumar, 2013; Ahlawat, 2016; Parihar, 2018; Shrivastva, 2018; Upadhyay, 2020). Studies show that while a number of cross-region brides have been incorporated into their marital surroundings and have secured happiness; parallelly exist numerous less fortunate ones who are denied human rights, respectable

status and acceptance; are physically, sexually and verbally abused on daily basis; and for whom conjugality has become a harrowing lived reality. The present study is an academic endeavor to lay bare that parallel reality.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

To analyze various forms of discrimination, subjugation and violence endured by cross-region brides in their marital homes in rural Haryana at the hands of their husband and conjugal kin.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present research is located in the rural backdrop of Haryana. The research design used for the study is exploratory as well as descriptive in nature. Keeping in view the subject of research, both primary and secondary data have been utilized to situate the conundrum in a proper perspective. The interview technique of data collection and narratives have been used to gather the primary information; secondary data on the other hand, has largely been drawn from various books, journals, project reports, research articles, newspapers etc.

To carry out fieldwork, two districts of Haryana, namely, Rohtak and Sonipat were randomly selected through lottery method as research settings. Further, for the purpose of data collection, three villages each were purposively chosen from these two districts — i.e., Karountha, Kharainti and Kharkara villages from Rohtak district; and, Aanwali, Gorar and Sisana villages from Sonipat district. Ultimately, from these six villages, extensive data on seventy-two cross-region brides was obtained by conducting in-depth interviews and narratives. Given the absence of sufficient numerical data and sampling frame on such marriages, snowball sampling was utilized to select the sample. Twenty-four out of these seventy-two cross-region brides were found to be victims of discrimination, subjugation and inhuman treatment in their marital homes. The present research centers around the lived experiences of these brides. Of the twenty-four selected brides, five were from Karountha village, four were from Kharainti village, three were from Kharkara village, and four brides each belonged to Aanwali, Gorar and Sisana villages respectively. Following is the tabular presentation of the selected sample.

Table 1: Distribution of respondents across selected villages

Districts	Villages	No. of Respondents
Rohtak	Karountha	5
	Kharainti	4
	Kharkara	3
Sonipat	Aanwali	4
	Gorar	4
	Sisana	4
Total		24

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATIONS

A detailed analysis of the extensive data collected from twenty-four cross-region brides through in-depth interviewing and narratives is presented in two parts: while section A brings out the socio-economic and demographic profile of the respondents where variables like caste, age, education, family composition, occupation etc. has been discussed, section B reflects upon the lived experiences of discrimination, subjugation and violence as endured by these brides within conjugal settings.

A. Socio-economic and Demographic Attributes

To get a nuanced understanding of cross-region marriages and situate the inhuman treatment meted out to cross-region brides in an apposite framework, a comprehensive analysis of socio-economic aspects of the men and women entering these unusual matrimonial relationships was imperative. The field reflections are laid out in the following paragraphs.

Analysis of data on natal places of cross-region brides documents that out of the twenty-four brides, seven were from Assam, six were from West Bengal, four were from Bihar, two each from Odisha and Jharkhand, and one each belonged to Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Madhya Pradesh. The incoming brides coming from distant states are found to be cultural strangers speaking different languages, having diverse food habits, mode of dressing, customs traditions, mores and even climatic conditions. Having nothing in common with their spouses, these brides encounter endless adjustment related problems. In majority of the cases, the distance between the source and destination areas is stretched beyond thousands of kilometers. The marriage rule of territorial exogamy is thus being reconfigured and expanded from the normative radius, in the wake of the crisis.

The data on the caste status of cross-region brides revealed that, except 3 brides remaining all belonged to lower caste backgrounds. Fourteen brides were found to be Scheduled Castes (Musahar (1), Bhuiya (1), Chamar (6), Balmiki (3), Bhumali (2), Dusad (1)), five were from backward and other backward classes (Bairagi (1), Jogi (1), Kushwaha (2), Kumhar (1), two were Brahmins, one was a Rajput and two belonged to Scheduled Tribes (Bhil (1), Bhumij (1)). The caste data on their husband's reflected that fourteen men were Jats, five were from backward classes (Chippi (1), Kumhar (2), Lohar (1), Jogi (1)), four belonged to Scheduled Castes (Chamar (2), Dhanak (2)) and one was a Brahmin. It can be inferred here that the phenomenon of cross-region marriage isn't restricted to any one or two particular caste groups. Those men who have low socio-economic status in the immediate society, whether they belong to dominant landowning castes, are upper caste Brahmins, come from Backward Classes or Scheduled Castes are resorting to this practice given the existing shortage of marriageable girls within their own society. Further, except one, all the marriages were inter-caste in nature. The different and low caste status of the brides is being largely overlooked in cross-region marriages. Caste based discrimination wasn't found endemic among the brides as the conjugal families didn't make any reference to them being from different castes except in one case where the bride faced regular derision from her parents-in-law for being a lower caste non-vegetarian. In none of the cases, the husbands made derogatory remarks on their wives' low caste status. Thus, caste seems to have become largely insignificant in the wake of necessity. As far as the religious affiliation of the couples is concerned all the brides were Hindu by religion, except one who was a Muslim. All twenty-four husbands followed Hindu religion.

With respect to the socio-economic backgrounds of the couples, it was found that the natal families of the brides were extremely poor with hand-to-mouth existence with their monthly income being less than four thousand rupees. In as many as sixteen cases the parents/guardians were marginal laborers, two were poor peasants, four were vegetable hawkers, one was a sweeper and one ran a tea stall. With respect to the family composition and orientation, it was observed that fourteen belonged to the nuclear family set up and ten were from joint families. Also, these brides came from large families with ten to eighteen members and were characterized with preponderance of daughters. It was seen that given the socio-economic impoverished backgrounds, the natal families could not offer much support and consolation to the brides at times of violence and exploitation. Regarding their husbands, it was observed that they belonged to low-income families. Eight of them were engaged in agriculture and dairy to earn their livelihood, five were auto/truck drivers, four were construction laborers, two worked at factories, one was a potter, one worked at a departmental store and the remaining three were unemployed. While six of them were landless, eighteen had marginal landholdings ranging from half acre to two acres. With regard to family type, twelve were living in joint families and the remaining twelve in nuclear households. The family size ranged between three to twelve members. Regarding their educational levels, the majority of these women i.e., fifteen were illiterate, five had studied up to primary level, two had studied till eighth standard and 2 were matriculates. With regard to their husband's educational levels, nine of them were illiterate, six had studied up to primary levels, four had middle education, three were matriculates and two had studied till higher secondary. Due to their low educational levels, the cross-region

brides were largely unaware of their rights and the existing legislations that could offer them protection in difficult times.

The age at marriage of the brides ranged between 14-22 years. It was found that in thirteen out of twenty-four cases, the wife was below the legally sanctioned age of eighteen years at the time of marriage. In two cases it was as low as fourteen years which raises serious concern for their physical, psychological and reproductive health. As shocking as it may be, more than half of these marriages are child marriages and thus illegal. With respect to the age of men at the time of marriage, fourteen were between the ages of 26-33 years and ten were in the age interval of 33-40 years. Majority of men having passed the ideal marriageable age of twenty-five or twenty-six had lost all hopes of marriage within a local scenario and in the absence of any alternative, took the decision for out-marriage. With respect to the order of marriage, for twenty-two brides it was their primary marriages, while two brides out of which one was a widow and the other one deserted by her husband, had married a second time. As far as husbands are concerned, for twenty it was their first marriage, three had married a second time and for one it was his third marriage. The duration of marriage had been reported between one to fourteen years. The husbands and wives within cross-region marriages were found to be having enormous age gaps manifesting grave compatibility issues. In as many as ten cases it ranged between 7-10 years while in the remaining fourteen cases it ranged between 10-15 years. Majority of the brides had complex feelings for their husbands. They didn't like them, not only because they were abusive alcoholics but also because they were quite old. Three brides maintained that had it not been for their survival, they would have left them way back.

The data regarding modus operandi of these marriages reveal that eighteen of these marriages were arranged by the former cross-region brides themselves, two were mediated by migrant laborers from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, two were facilitated by the truck/bus drivers who were natives of Haryana and two of the brides were trafficked. In as many as seven cases, parents/relatives had taken money from the groom to marry their daughters. Out of seven, in four cases it was the bride's father who directly appropriated the money and in three cases brides were orphaned and sold into marriage by mama (maternal uncle), chacha (paternal uncle) and bua (paternal aunt). All the brides got to know from their husbands after marriage that their kin had accepted money. In five cases, no payments were made at all, neither to the parents nor mediators. In thirteen cases, marriages were solemnized at the bride's natal place with proper rituals and in the presence of parents and comprehensive kin network from the bride's side. Six marriages were formalized in temples, out of which four took place at the source region while two were held at the destination region. Three marriages were solemnized at the men's residence itself with mere exchange of garlands and application of vermilion. In two cases couples were cohabiting without any formal marriage. There was no exchange of dowry in all the cases and the marriage expenditures were incurred by the grooms themselves. All the marriages were unregistered, except two in which the couples were carrying a certification slip from the temple where their marriages were formalized. Since these marriages can't be verified, women have no legal protection. While, the cross-region brides cited abject poverty, average physiological features, previously terminated marriages and inability of their parents to meet the dowry demands of local men as the main reasons for their marriage over long-distances; the intersecting reasons identified by men for out-marriage include poverty, lack of gainful employment, landlessness or marginal land ownership, previous marriages, over age, addiction to alcohol or other substance, lack of family elders to find suitable proposals and highly skewed sex ratios.

B. Discrimination, Subjugation & Violence: A Harrowing Lived Reality

During fieldwork it was found that there are two broad spectrums within cross-region marriages as far as the treatment of cross-region brides is considered. On the one end of the continuum, many cross-region brides have been accepted and gradually incorporated in their conjugal homes and community, once the initial adjustment related difficulties are surmounted. However, parallelly exist the distressing dark side to these marriages, where the brides form a vulnerable lot. Not only do they contend the challenges of adjustment but also face discrimination, subjugation and domestic violence on an everyday basis. Sadly the perpetrators letting loose a regime of extreme horror on them are their own husbands and in-laws. Their ill-treatment is varied and it ranges from physical battering, sexual abuse, verbal denigration, confinement and strenuous labor to denial of food, respect and healthcare, a detailed analysis of which has been subsequently presented.

During the interviews, all the cross-region brides maintained that they had frequently been subjected to physical, psychological and sexual abuse by their husbands and in-law's over trivial matters. Slapping, kicking, shoving, arm twisting, dragging by hair etc. were some of the manifestations of physical violence recounted by them. Majority of these brides revealed that they experienced severe battering as frequently as over a week or two. As many as eight brides reported to have been battered mercilessly even during their pregnancies, which resulted in miscarriages. Unemployment and excessive consumption of alcohol were noted as crucial factors for aggressive behavior of the husbands as eighteen of the twenty-four brides lamented that their husbands were chronic alcoholics, would get instigated easily under the influence of alcohol and beat them brutally. In the initial days of marriage, these women were bashed mainly due to their inability to cook Haryanvi food properly, communication gap, refusal to carry out chores and error in following the custom of 'veil'.

It was further found that alongside physical assaults, the sexual abuse against these brides was also quite endemic. They have no sexual autonomy and have experienced forced sex by their intimate partner. Nineteen of the brides maintained that their husbands imposed on them sexually, thus pointing towards an evaded issue of 'rape within marriage'. They added that any refusal and non-compliance lead to severe physical abuse to ascertain their subordination. Three of these brides revealed that they were forced into sexual intercourse by their husbands even within the first week of childbirth. The fact that they were bleeding heavily and the pain was excruciating, couldn't deter the husbands from satisfying their need.

Additionally, the cross-region brides regularly face verbal and emotional abuses. Some of the brides lamented that they are constantly reminded of the fact that they came from poor families where they hardly had anything to eat. References were often made about their parents' poor financial status and inability to arrange for them local matches. In this context, the trafficked brides and those who had been brought with direct payment to their parents/kin also substantiated that their husbands and in-laws often reminded them of their purchased status to command compliance. They were discriminated against and looked down upon for being an impoverished 'outsider'. They were repeatedly criticized for their dark skin, short stature and body odor. Twenty-one of them maintained that they were not allowed to participate in festivals, marriages and other celebrations of the village nor were they taken to any family functions. On the contrary, their local sisters-in-law are never stopped from being part of such festivities. As many as ten brides revealed that their mother-in-law's kept telling them that they didn't want such ugly brides. They were pejoratively called paro, molki or kharidi hui and Biharan. All this colloquialism suggests that the cross-region brides are deemed as 'lesser brides'.

The presence of forced polyandry was also noted in the field analysis. Two of the brides shared that in the past they had been forced by their mother-in-law's and husbands to cohabit with their unmarried/widowed brothers-in-law. In two other cases, the fathers-in-law also attempted to violate the brides. When the brides complained about it, they were called liars and badly thrashed. Violence against cross-region brides is an aftermath of systemic inequalities manifested across all the patriarchal structures within society and is used as an instrument to command their adherence and subordination. In a matrimonial context, the negotiation power of a woman largely stems from her economic self-sufficiency, literacy and awareness, and natal kin support; all of which together strengthens her position in a conjugal setting (Ahlawat, 2016). Given that the cross-region brides are financially dependent, are illiterate or less educated and lack awareness of their rights and legal provisions, and they come from extremely poor families which can hardly lend them any support; they find themselves embroiled in multiple layers of vulnerability, thus, exposed to marginalization and increased violence, with no bargaining power at all.

Another significant revelation from the field was that various restrictions were imposed on cross-region brides with respect to their movement and social interactions in the conjugal settings. All the twenty-four respondents sustained that they were mostly confined to the periphery of the house and agricultural fields and their movements were strictly constrained by their mothers-in-law, other female relatives and husbands. They stepped outside the house only for carrying out domestic chores, such as fetching water and wood, getting fodder for the animals, making cow dung cakes, disposing household waste to the village dump yard etc.; and,

for cattle care and farm operations. Eighteen of them further bemoaned that they weren't allowed to meet, befriend and communicate with other women of the neighborhood, thus making their social circles almost negligible and leaving them isolated. Constrictions were so stringent that even the existence and nature of their ties with native families was regulated by their husbands and in-law's. Seventeen of them hadn't visited their native place ever since their weddings, nor were they allowed any telephonic communication. They felt extremely lonely due to absence of any consolation from the natal family as well. Surveillance and restrictions were mainly exercised by the marital families against cross-region brides to thwart their attempts of escape.

That the cross-region brides are often denominated as servants and made to toil vigorously, is another disturbing finding. Majority of these brides were found to be overburdened with strenuous domestic responsibilities and agricultural tasks with hardly any help from other family members. Their marital journeys manifest a perpetual struggle, day in and day out. They have to contend with abusive husbands, unsupportive kin and even forced add-on partners (in some cases); while engaging in arduous household chores, farm labor and child care. All the brides complained that they were made to work the entire day without allowing any rest in-between. Sometimes after a long day of taxing labor, they weren't even given proper diet and nutrition. The socio-economic impoverishment of these brides have placed them in difficult positions where they don't own any choice and refusal isn't a luxury that they can have. Ten brides divulged that when they refused to work on different occasions in the past, it had serious repercussions. They were starved for days and brutally beaten. They had been forced to work even during sickness, pregnancies, miscarriages and immediately after child-birth. Some weren't even allowed postnatal rest to recover and regain their health. Fifteen brides exclaimed that they were put back to domestic duties even before completing ten days of child-birth.

Thus, various intertwined forms of coercion and constraint constitute the lived reality of cross-region brides in Haryana. They are given low status, shackled to exhaustive domestic responsibilities and subjected to extreme violence. Their ill-treatment is determined by a complex intersection of socio-cultural construction of gender, economic impoverishment, illiteracy, racial characteristics, identity of being a (purchased) outsider and loosening of ties with natal family, that positions them in a perpetual state of vulnerability and produces conditions for their increased exploitation. The varied forms of violence meted out to them has serious consequences not only on their physical and reproductive health but emotional well-being as well since it greatly undermines their self-esteem and self-worth.

CONCLUSION

'As you sow, so shall you reap' is a phrase that aptly places the burgeoning matrimonial crisis of marriageable Haryanvi men in perspective. Haryana, a northern state of India which has earned quite a reputation for its unprecedented economic growth, is paradoxically infamous for its longstanding gender disparity and devaluation of fairer sex palpably manifested in its abysmally low sex ratio and child sex ratio counts. A grave ramification of decades of female deficits is evident in encapsulation of their proportion in marriage cohort's vis a vis their male counterparts. This demographically driven imbalance exacerbated by socio-cultural configuration of the customary model of marriage, is severely affecting the nuptial prospects of several socio-economically disadvantaged men, pushing them to the altar of involuntary bachelorhood. Fieldwork revealed that at least ten percent to fifteen percent of males in the selected villages are unmarried in peak marriageable ages of 28-40, and this percentage is likely to move upward if sex ratios continue to be low, as with each passing year more and more men will be added to the already existing strata of unmarried men. Given that marriage is a social mandate imperative for procreation and propagation of lineage; an economic necessity, requiring female labor for productive and reproductive purposes; and, a significant parameter for determining men's masculinity: the shortage of local marriageable girls is being dealt through unconventional cross-region marriages whereby disadvantaged men are bringing complete cultural strangers as brides from economically impoverished eastern and southern parts of the country.

In the last two decades, rural Haryana has seen a steep increase in the incidents of cross-region marriages. In the wake of necessity these marriages have gained social acceptance; but as ironic as it may be, the incoming brides rarely receive the same level of acceptance. For a number of these brides their conjugal

lives are replete with distressing episodes of discrimination, subjugation, and domestic abuse that they contend on an everyday basis. Some of them aren't even allowed proper food and health care. They have no respect or human company. They are treated as servants from whom arduous labor is expected and commanded, day in and day out. The fact that these women are illiterate, come from impoverished family backgrounds, have no money and lack any kind of support from their parents or other kin make them vulnerable and more susceptible to marginalization and abuse. The unjust treatment exhibited towards cross-region women is indeed increasingly alarming and requires strong interventions from state and society alike in order to provide the vulnerable lot a dignified life and secure their overall wellbeing.

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