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Q9

Intercaste marriages between castes which have socio-economic parity have increased, to some extent, but this is less true of interreligious marriages. Discuss.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2024 · GS I · 10 marks · Social Empowerment, Communalism and Secularism
Social empowerment, communalism, regionalism and secularism.

Core demand of the question

- Discuss why intercaste marriages have increased somewhat among groups of similar socio-economic standing
- Discuss why this is less true of interreligious marriages

Revision summary

Intercaste marriage has increased a little where education, income and urban life already match.

The **Hindu Marriage Act** does not bar intercaste unions. The **Special Marriage Act** offers a civil path.

The rise is selective and still a minority practice. Caste violence has not vanished.

Interreligious marriage is rarer because personal law, conversion fears and honour politics raise the cost.

Class can sometimes buy a caste exception. It rarely buys a religious exception in today's climate.

Constitutional choice of partner exists. Social enforcement is still family and community.

Introduction

Marriage in India is still largely an **alliance of families**. It is not only a choice of two adults. Where **class, education and urban work** already match, caste as a marriage wall has **thinned a little**. Religion remains a **thicker wall**. Personal law, community honour, and political fear sit on it. The question asks for that **uneven change**. It does not ask for a story that India has become a dating market.

Body

Intercaste marriage and socio-economic parity

Sanskritisation once meant copying the twice-born. Today, in cities, **class Sanskritisation** often means an IIT, a bank job, an English flat. When two families share income, education and a similar ritual "respectability", the remaining caste gap is easier to bargain. This is especially true within a **broad varna band** or among OBCs of like status. Campuses, offices and cities raise **love marriages** that families later **regularise**. The **Hindu Marriage Act, 1955** does not forbid intercaste unions. The **Special Marriage Act, 1954** offers a civil route.

Surveys such as NFHS rounds still show **intercaste marriage as a minority practice**. Urban and educated pockets report more of it than a generation ago.

Parity matters because marriage is also **property and food**. A Dalit-upper-caste union without class match still meets **honour violence** and khap-like sanction more often than a same-class intercaste match among dominant groups. Even the "increase" is **selective**. It does not dissolve untouchability at the well.

- **Class match:** Education and income can substitute for jati sameness in some urban markets.
- **Law:** Civil and Hindu law allow the union. Social boycott still polices it.
- **Limits:** The rise is "to some extent", as the stem says. It is not a collapse of caste.

Why interreligious marriage lags

Religion organises **personal law** (Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Parsi) and a **sacred canopy** of food, festival and burial. An interreligious match threatens **lineage, conversion fears, and the child's identity**. The **Special Marriage Act** exists precisely because religious law may not bless the pair. Notice periods and local harassment have been used as **chill**. Political campaigns around "love jihad" and anti-conversion statutes in some States raise the **risk cost**. Families that will accept an intercaste match inside one faith often refuse a Muslim-Hindu or Christian-Hindu pair even at the same income.

- **Personal law and ritual:** Two canons of kinship, not one.
- **Majority-minority anxiety:** Demography is imagined as a marriage plot.
- **Institutional friction:** Housing, police, and marriage registrars can all become obstacles.

The contrast is therefore **not** that Indians love caste and hate religion. It is that **class can buy a caste exception** more easily than it can buy a **religious exception** in a polarised public.

Flow diagram

Class education urban work -> Some intercaste marriage
 Jati honour -> weaker if parity Some intercaste marriage
 Personal law community -> Few interreligious marriages
 Polarised politics -> Few interreligious marriages
 Special Marriage Act -> Some intercaste marriage
 Special Marriage Act -> Few interreligious marriages

Conclusion

Intercaste marriage has edged up where status already matches, because class can negotiate jati. Interreligious marriage remains rarer because law, honour and politics treat faith as a harder boundary. **Article 21** choice of partner is the constitutional hook. The family and the street still write the real statute.

Facts & figures

Special Marriage Act, 1954

A civil marriage statute for couples who marry outside religious personal law, including many interreligious unions.

Hindu Marriage Act, 1955

Does not prohibit marriage between different Hindu castes; social sanction is extra-legal.

Lata Singh; Shafin Jahan

Supreme Court rulings that adult choice of partner is part of liberty under **Article 21**, against family and State overreach.

NFHS pattern

National Family Health Surveys have consistently shown intercaste marriage as uncommon at the all-India level, with higher traces in some urban and educated groups.

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