



**1. What information is available concerning the extent and level of inter-caste marriage (and anything on the Chhetri and Newari castes in particular)?**

Relatively small numbers of inter-caste marriages generally have occurred in Nepal over recent generations. No statistical information was found on the numbers of such marriages between individuals from these caste groups.

**2. Is any information available to indicate current societal attitudes to such marriages?**

Previous RRT *Research Response* NPL32600 of January 2008 provides information on the prevalence of and societal attitudes towards inter-caste marriage in Nepal. A brief update is provided below.

In their 2008 study on inter-caste marriage between dalits and non-dalits in Nepal, Keshari Kansakar and Sita Ghymire refer to anthropologist Christoph von Furer-Haimendorf's observation in 1957<sup>1</sup> in relation to the parallel system of Hindu caste societies and ethnic populations that functioned similarly: 'Intermarriage between castes or sub-castes not too far removed from each other in social status is permissible.' Such marriages were 'prevalent among Brahmins, Chhetris, Newars and other ethnic groups as long as the couples observe rules of interdining.'<sup>2</sup> Other scholars clearly disagree about the extent of inter-caste marriage in Newar society which has been the subject of considerable anthropological investigation.<sup>3</sup>

Whilst Nepalese law outlaws discrimination on the grounds of race, sex or caste, such discrimination is commonly practiced, especially in rural areas. The US Department of State in its Nepal country report on human rights practices in 2009 stated that

Discrimination against lower castes and some ethnic groups, particularly Madhesis and Janajatis, was especially common in the Terai and in rural areas in the western part of the country, even though the government outlawed the public shunning of Dalits and made an effort to protect the rights of disadvantaged castes. Better education and higher levels of prosperity, especially in the Kathmandu valley, were slowly reducing caste distinctions and increasing opportunities for lower socioeconomic groups. Better-educated, urban-oriented castes continued to dominate politics and senior administrative and military positions and to control a disproportionate share of natural resources.

Caste-based discrimination is illegal; however, Dalits were barred occasionally from entering temples and sharing water sources. Progress in reducing discrimination was more successful in

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<sup>1</sup> Von Furer-Haimendorf, C 1957, 'The inter-relations of castes and ethnic groups in Nepal', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, Vol. 20, No 1/3, pp. 243-53.

<sup>2</sup> Kansakar, K. and Ghimire, S., 2008, 'Intricacies of Inter-Caste Marriage Between Dalits and Non-Dalits in Nepal Couples' Perspectives, September, Social Inclusion Research Fund, <http://www.socialinclusion.org.np/researchbriefdetail.php?m=english&h=Dalits&pg=2> – Accessed 16 July 2010 – Attachment 1

<sup>3</sup> See e.g. Gellner, David N. and Quigley, D., 1995, *Contested Hierarchies. A Collaborative Ethnography of Caste among the Newars of the Kathmandu Valley, Nepal*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, chapter 4 – Attachment 2

urban areas.

Resistance to intercaste marriage (upper and lower caste) remained high.<sup>4</sup>

Reports indicate that a small number of inter-caste marriages are accepted. However, there are also reports that such marriages have led to severe social ostracism, physical violence and suicide.

In 2009, the government made available a payment of Nepali Rs.100,000 to a couple from different castes who married, although some women believed the money should be invested in education and to provide employment opportunities for women.<sup>5</sup> The state minister for industry also recently intervened in order to separate a couple from Kapilavastu (southern Terai plains) who had been married in Mumbai in 2009, as the marriage was a hypogamous one (where a high-caste woman marries a low-caste man). The woman's family had filed charges against the son-in-law for trafficking.<sup>6</sup> A similar incident published on the Ground Report public journalism website was reported to have occurred in September 2009 where a low-caste man in Dailekh district was fined Rs. 60,000 for marrying a woman from a high-caste community; he was similarly prevented from continuing his relationship with the woman as a result of attacks made on him by the new bride's relatives and neighbours, and he was forced to flee to safety. The report states that many "similar incidents of human rights violations arising from caste-apartheid deep-rooted in Nepal are reported every year; however the state of Nepal has done nothing to prevent them."<sup>7</sup> A US-based Advocacy Project report on inter-caste marriage in six districts of Nepal published in February 2009 provides information specifically on marriage between Dalit and other non-Dalit castes. Couples of such marriages had faced extensive discrimination and hardship, although some had been accepted by both couple's families and sometimes received support from district authorities.<sup>8</sup>

Another incident occurred in November, 2009 where relatives and neighbours of the Chhetri bride who was to marry a Dalit man, attacked the couple on the day of the wedding.<sup>9</sup>

The *Himalayan Times* reported in June 2010 on a couple who had been forced to leave their village of Mygdi after the woman's family members beat her up.<sup>10</sup>

A different picture of the current situation is reflected in a *Nepali Times* article published in 2009 which described the marriage between a Chhetri woman and a Newari man that had lasted for 30 years, the article suggesting that younger Nepalese were less likely to be

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<sup>4</sup> US Department of State 2010, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2009 – Nepal*, March, Section 6 - Attachment 3

<sup>5</sup> 'Grants for inter-caste marriages' 2009, *Straits Times*, 14 July, [http://www.straitstimes.com/Breaking%2BNews/Asia/Story/STIStory\\_402890.html](http://www.straitstimes.com/Breaking%2BNews/Asia/Story/STIStory_402890.html) - Accessed 20 July 2010 - Attachment 4

<sup>6</sup> 'Nepal minister forces Mumbai temple marriage to end' 2010, *Nepal National* 2 June, <http://story.nepalnational.com/index.php/ct/9/cid/739985502eaed63/id/642293/cs/1/> - Accessed 20 July 2010 - Attachment 5

<sup>7</sup> 'Dalit community faces threat to life for inter-caste marriage' 2009, Ground Report website, 25 October, [http://www.groundreport.com/article.php?articleID=2909897&action=print\\_article](http://www.groundreport.com/article.php?articleID=2909897&action=print_article) - Accessed 15 July 2010 - Attachment 6

<sup>8</sup> 'Inter-caste marriages in Nepal face violence and intimidation' 2009, Advocacy Project website, 12 February, <http://www.advocacynet.org/page/intercaste> - Accessed 20 July 2010 - Attachment 7

<sup>9</sup> 'Inter-caste marriage spells trouble' 2009, *Naya News*, [http://www.nayanews.com/news.php?subaction=showfull&id=1260892758&archive=&start\\_from=&ucat=1&](http://www.nayanews.com/news.php?subaction=showfull&id=1260892758&archive=&start_from=&ucat=1&) - Accessed 20 July 2010 - Attachment 8

<sup>10</sup> 'Locals evict inter-caste couple' 2010, *Himalayan Times*, 7 June, <http://www.thehimalayantimes.com/printNepaliNews.php?id=248998> - Accessed 15 July 2010 - Attachment 9

constrained in their choice of marriage partner by traditional caste structures. Rural areas though were more likely to retain traditional attitudes towards inter-caste marriage.<sup>11</sup>

A more recent article published in the *Khatmandu Post* in March 2010 also referred to a 10 year old marriage between a couple one of whom had a Chhetri and the other a Newar background, the article suggesting that more open attitudes to such marriages were beginning to be in evidence;

With women in the valley crossing the threshold and opting for a career rather than bowing to their parent's decision to marry them off, the cases of inter-caste marriage is surely on the rise. Sociologists take this move as a positive one. "The trend is indeed very positive," says Krishna Bahadur Bhattachan, a sociologist. "Women are coming out of their houses, which means they are exposed to men and the intimacy is bound to flourish," he adds.

Inter-caste marriage is however, not a new phenomenon. It has been part of our society for generations. The only difference is that now is more readily accepted by society.

In the past, inter-caste marriages happened but were rare. The marriage of Chhaya KC and Rajendra Man Singh is a case in point. They were married off 10 years ago on their parents' consent, and are living a happy married life. "It was quite a shock for us since we had no idea that our parents would oblige us without any resistance," they say. "The society then was not as liberal as it is now."

They were from totally different backgrounds. One with a Newar upbringing and one a Chhetri, marriage for them was in a sense a compromise. Their culture differed, in addition to the language and surely the lifestyle. "But I came to find out all it takes for a happy married life is mutual understanding," says Rajendra, 37, a bank officer.

Chhaya, 30, says, "His family was very supportive and helped me out with my ordeal of adjusting to a different culture."<sup>12</sup>

## Attachments

1. Kansakar, K. and Ghimire, S., 2008, 'Intricacies of Inter-Caste Marriage Between Dalits and Non-Dalits in Nepal Couples' Perspectives, September, Social Inclusion Research Fund, <http://www.socialinclusion.org.np/researchbriefdetail.php?m=english&h=Dalits&pg=2> – Accessed 16 July 2010.
2. Gellner, David N. and Quigley, D., 1995, *Contested Hierarchies. A Collaborative Ethnography of Caste among the Newars of the Kathmandu Valley, Nepal*, Clarendon Press, Oxford.
3. US Department of State 2010, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2009 – Nepal*, March.
4. 'Grants for inter-caste marriages' 2009, *Straits Times*, 14 July, [http://www.straitstimes.com/Breaking%2BNews/Asia/Story/STIStory\\_402890.html](http://www.straitstimes.com/Breaking%2BNews/Asia/Story/STIStory_402890.html) - Accessed 20 July 2010.

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<sup>11</sup> 'Caste no bar. The boundaries of social hierarchy blur rapidly as inter-ethnic marriages catch on' 2009, *Nepali Times*, 16-22 January, <http://www.nepalitimes.com.np/issue/2009/01/16/Nation/15581> - Accessed 15 July 2010 - Attachment 10

<sup>12</sup> 'Mixed marriages no longer taboo' 2010, *Kathmandu Post*, 16 March, <http://www.ekantipur.com/the-kathmandu-post/2010/03/16/Nation/House-panel-to-govt-Revise-Nepal-India-strip-maps/6233/> - Accessed 15 July 2010 - Attachment 11

5. 'Nepal minister forces Mumbai temple marriage to end' 2010, *Nepal National* 2 June, <http://story.nepalnational.com/index.php/ct/9/cid/7399985502eae63/id/642293/cs/1/> - Accessed 20 July 2010.
6. 'Dalit community faces threat to life for inter-caste marriage' 2009, Ground Report website, 25 October, [http://www.groundreport.com/article.php?articleID=2909897&action=print\\_article](http://www.groundreport.com/article.php?articleID=2909897&action=print_article) - Accessed 15 July 2010.
7. 'Inter-caste marriages in Nepal face violence and intimidation' 2009, Advocacy Project website, 12 February, <http://www.advocacynet.org/page/intercaste> - Accessed 20 July 2010.
8. 'Inter-caste marriage spells trouble' 2009, *Naya News*, [http://www.nayanews.com/news.php?subaction=showfull&id=1260892758&archive=&start\\_from=&ucat=1&](http://www.nayanews.com/news.php?subaction=showfull&id=1260892758&archive=&start_from=&ucat=1&) - Accessed 20 July 2010.
9. 'Locals evict inter-caste couple' 2010, *Himalayan Times*, 7 June, <http://www.thehimalayantimes.com/printNepaliNews.php?id=248998> - Accessed 15 July 2010.
10. 'Caste no bar. The boundaries of social hierarchy blur rapidly as inter-ethnic marriages catch on' 2009, *Nepali Times*, 16-22 January, <http://www.nepalitimes.com.np/issue/2009/01/16/Nation/15581> - Accessed 15 July 2010.
11. 'Mixed marriages no longer taboo' 2010, *Kathmandu Post*, 16 March, <http://www.ekantipur.com/the-kathmandu-post/2010/03/16/Nation/House-panel-to-govt-Revise-Nepal-India-strip-maps/6233/> - Accessed 15 July 2010.