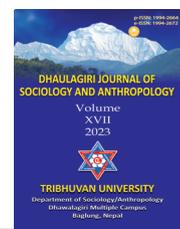


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Book Review

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The book is a result of serious work on practices of modern matchmaking in the new Indian middle class—such as matchmaking practices. Bhandari explores the modern professional web services to the family-arranged efforts of marriage. While noting the forms, the author argues that the 'modern' construction of middle-class identity in India is about remaking and adjustment where a neat explanatory category lacks; thus, she rejects the clear modern category with specific features. Moreover, the author dives into several issues of matchmaking efforts that go from marriage and family formation to caste and class preferences, the changing perspectives of marriage, and the age of marriage in the new generation that focuses on career and study. In her book, the author brings vivid perspectives of parents whose children are prospective couples. The parents the author met tried to show that though they do not want to engage in their children's choice for finding a match, they just want to ensure that their children might not put themselves in the 'wrong choice.' This is parents' wish to try to be modern without showing their traditional lay-off, where parents' engagement in finding a match for children is highly valued. The book's most important feature is Bhandari's comprehensive writing that finely elaborates on many possible and urgent aspects of marriage in India that match with practices in other South Asian countries where religion, caste and class stand essential. Divided into nine chapters, the author discusses premarital pursue from delayed marriage to an 'elongated singlehood'. She argues that 'modern romances cannot be delinked to the desires for marriage and matchmaking practices'. (p. 44).

For the work, Bhandari explores semi-ethnographic

fieldwork with almost 100 respondents and tries to solve the curiosities of modern middle-class matchmaking and marriage choices, new forms of matrimonial bridges such as matrimonial agencies to matrimonial websites, the definition of a 'good match' and 'modern couple' and reasons for the present-day generation's delayed marriage. The author also finely delineates how romantic coupledom changes the perspectives of traditional family principles by acquiescence, but not simply through outright rejection, as a strategy and expression of a woman's agency (p. 134). The new middle-class family seems awkward in accepting a daughter-in-law with a 'modern' education, employed and skillful habit who does not want themselves in ghoonghat or dupatta covering the hair. As Parul argues, the parents think such a family is essentially threatened by her modern outlook and fear that she might take their son away from them (p. 140). Also, parents feel that the new daughter-in-law might not follow their agency of tradition and rituals and family dynamics. However, the new generation couple uses their agency of being modern but does not challenge the parental authority or cultural practices of family dynamics. However, they prefer some gentle approach and use their agency to change the traditional, more patriarchal approach.

Bhandari's presentation of new middle-class generation youths is quite crafty in conducting courtship, making a sure pathway for marriage. The new generation couple wants to keep family values intact and then slowly change the 'traditional' perspectives of parents by winning their favor through practical and emotional aspirations. Unlike other scholarly contributions on marriage (Mody



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2008; Grover 2009; 2011) with respondents from Delhi, Bhandari's work stands varied in the subject. Bhandari also references how the study of marriage has been changing in India. She argues that earlier works focused on kinship while discussing marriage. Then her focus shifted towards cultural and individual aspects like patriarchy and womanhood. In recent decades, marriage studies have been drastically changed because of shifting consumerization and expansion of the new middle class, new commercialization and globalization, development of communication and technology and the changed migration trend (Palriwala and Kaur 2014). This has been remarkably contributed by professional matrimonial websites, which have considerable prospects in South Asian countries like India, however in Nepal, it has not even been started because of Nepal's small market.

When discussing the marriage and matchmaking scholarship in South Asia, the issue of caste importantly comes up. In Hindu religion-guided societies like India and Nepal, caste has been an important issue to focus on. Scholars (Srinivas 1956; Dumont 1998; Beteille 1965) have predominantly discussed caste and marriage in the Indian context. These scholars have also noted that the Hindu religion guided Indian society takes caste as an honor of family values. Bhandari brings such context in a few instances where she shows that India's middle-class has put caste in an important standard to finalise the marital knot. However, some narratives in the chapter also showed that the long process of spouse selection could alter caste endogamy (p.90). This is a crucial finding in caste-based Indian society where caste comes as the most urgent feature during the spouse selection process. Moreover, sociologists argue that class is not a determination of wealth or money but also a mixture of cultural capital or taste. In the case of an Indian middle-class family, the author concludes that class homogamy is a primary ingredient of a 'good match', but the class does not only determine economic status, as sociologists say, it also shows 'similar struggles, shared desires and ambitions of everyday living' (p.96).

The author also sheds profound light on understanding a 'good' wife in typical middle-class Indian society. She finds that educated women in Delhi are the 'most compelling sign of modernity and, therefore, a suitable option for a spouse' (p.112). Middle-class families find a working woman a good preference for the match because the income of husband and wife can both strengthen the family economy in expensive cities like Delhi and also that the family can 'boast' itself to be modern, which has allowed women to work and earn. However, regarding educational status, the typical modern middle-class Indian family does not prefer the higher educational status of a woman than her husband. Recent studies¹ in India also show 'misogyny'

1. <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/misogyny-in-the-matrimonial-market-data-shows-indian-men-prefer-wives-without-jobs-8531246/>

in the Indian matrimonial market. According to the study, working women are less chosen by males in the spouse selection process. However, those women working in 'feminine' jobs have more possibility of finding a spouse soon than the 'masculine' jobs like 'technical' supervisor (the 'feminine' and 'masculine' categories are article writer's categorizations).

While reading the book, one feels that the author could have shortened some direct quotes of respondents. Furthermore, some background elaboration of the narratives could also have been said briefly. The great strength of the book rests on smooth language with extraordinary storytelling. However, some crucial issue is felt to be less discussed. For example, the issue of caste and marriage have been tremendous in the Hindu religion-guided South Asian societies like that of India. Thus, the author could have discussed more on how caste is deeply linked with marriage. She tries to discuss this in several subsections in the chapters, but the issue deserves a single chapter with more narratives.

Bhandari's profound researches concentrate on marriage, middle-class, family and relationship trends, primarily in the South Asian context. This book also adds a stone to the family and marriage studies in South Asia.

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