

Cross-Region Marriages in Haryana: An Analysis of Determinants

Paper Id.:15638, Submission Date: 10/01/2022, Acceptance Date: 20/01/2022, Publication Date: 22/01/2022

Abstract

Situated in the rural backdrop of Haryana, the study focuses at the unusual long-distance matrimonial unions binding together complete strangers from disparate socio-cultural and geographical backgrounds into 'marriages of compulsion' that have come to be called as 'cross-region marriages' in the existing literature. The present study is a steadfast investigation into the determinants of cross-region marriages. It illustrates how various demographic and socio-cultural factors such as skewed sex-ratios and prescriptive-proscriptive rules of marriage along with individual shortcomings of poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, disabilities, being overage etc. are affecting the nuptial prospects of certain men in rural Haryana, who unable to secure marriageable girls in their customary matrimonial context have taken to bring brides from underdeveloped and impoverished regions of different northern, southern, eastern, western and central states of the country. It also highlights different compulsions and motivations like extreme poverty and inability of the parents to afford a local marriage, spatial hypergamy, undesirable local matches, personal shortcomings etc. that are experienced by cross-region brides and their families, making them opt for out-marriage in rural Haryana.

Keywords: Skewed sex-ratio, Male marriage squeeze, Bridal shortage, Involuntary bachelorhood and Cross-region marriages.



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Introduction

The institution of marriage and family life forms cornerstone of any human civilization. Marriage also makes a significant life-cycle ritual in one's life. Among other things, the basic pre-requisite for a marriage to materialize is the availability of mates. In other words, keeping in line with the society concerned, a desired proportion of marriageable males and females is essential for a marriage to take place. Now, in a monogamous heterosexual society, in order for men and women to get married they need to be in a more or less equal proportion in their respective marriage cohorts (Mishra, 2013). Any disproportion therein would result in marriage squeeze and the gender that is numerically preponderant (in surplus) would face challenges in getting married (Akers, 1967). When the marriageable males are more as compared to marriageable females in a given population, it is referred as male marriage squeeze, and, when marriageable females exceed marriageable males, it signifies female marriage squeeze. Rural Haryana is currently going through the crisis of male marriage squeeze as a substantial number of its men are unable to find spouses locally. To quote statistics, the Census enumerations of 2011 with respect to the never-married males of rural Haryana in 25-49 years age group was 9.93 percent. Quite the opposite, it was just 1.25 for their female counterparts. Apparently, the proportion of unmarried men is quite high in Haryana. Guilamoto (2012), in his study projected that in the period of 2020-2080 around 40 million additional men in India won't be able to get married. The problem is so acute in Haryana that in one of its districts named Jind, unmarried men even formed *Kunwara Sangathan* or *Avivahit Purush Sangathan* (Unmarried Union) in 2009 and during the campaigns of Lok Sabha elections held in the year 2014, the members of the union raised slogans such as '*bahu dilao, vote pao*' (i.e., bring brides in exchange of votes) to bring the problem of missing brides to the attention of the state government and its representatives. Interestingly, some political leaders promised brides for the unmarried men to garner their votes and support (Siwach, 2014).

The matrimonial prospects of an increasing number of men in the villages of Haryana are being adversely impacted. Given the shortage of local brides, these disadvantaged men are facing two possibilities, either to remain bachelors lifelong or seek brides elsewhere. Since to be married has a special social and religious significance in the life of an individual as (a) it provides for procreation and perpetuation of family name, (b) a married couple is required to perform certain religious and cultural rites, (c) is considered a pertinent determinant of man's social adulthood or masculinity, for unmarried men are often ridiculed and stigmatized, and (d) women are needed to manage households, provide farm labor, offer care to the sick and elderly within the family and perform various other productive functions; to

remain unmarried isn't a desirable option for these men. Thus, being unable to secure spouses from their customary marital pools these men have started bringing (on some occasions buying) brides from less developed impoverished regions of various other states namely Assam, Bihar, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Andhra Pradesh, Tripura, Kerala etc. (Kaur, 2004; Ahlawat, 2009; Kukreja and Kumar 2013; Mishra, 2013; Chaudhry, 2016; Singh, Parihar and Devi, 2018). These unusual marriages that have emerged as a redressal strategy to address the issue of male marriage squeeze and increasing bachelorhood in rural Haryana are popularly known as 'cross-region marriages'.

Conceptualizing Cross-region Marriages

Cross-region marriages represent a unique phenomenon in rural Haryana whereby several of its men having failed to find local marriageable girls have begun procuring brides from poor families residing in the rural areas of distant eastern, north-eastern, northern, southern and central states of the country. The marriage distance in these matrimonial alliances stretches beyond thousands of kilometers in most cases. The men and women uniting in cross-region marriages as husbands and wives are complete strangers and have nothing in common. They not only have different customs, traditions, beliefs, dress style and behavioral patterns but they speak different languages too. These marriages are cross-cultural in nature and involve physical and social distance. Another unique feature of these marriages is that the wedding expenses that generally include wedding attire of the bride and some additional set of clothing, jewellery for her, wedding ceremony and feast at her place, and/or payment to go-betweens, are incurred totally by the grooms and their families. The girls are from extremely poor families of underdeveloped regions with scarce resources. They aren't in the position to bear the wedding costs, not even a part of it. Also, there exists no give and take of dowry in these marriages.

Cross-region marriages are predominantly mediated by cross-region brides who themselves assume the role of go-betweens and arrange marriages for men from among their conjugal kin, village or adjoining villages with their sisters or other female kin from their native villages or neighboring regions. While a free visit back home or establishing a reputation in the conjugal village or having someone from their own place settled in their marital region to ease their loneliness and provide them solace may be the primary motives, some of them benefit in cash or kind too though their gain isn't usually substantial. The husbands and other male affine of the cross-region brides also play a significant part in mediating cross-region marriages. In some cases, truck/bus drivers either visiting the bride-sending regions for their job-related assignments or employed there have facilitated these marriages. Few incidences have been found to be of human trafficking, where the innocent girls had been abducted and trafficked into the rural areas of Haryana for the purpose of marriage. In all afore-cited categories of mediators or facilitators, (though not all) some men or women have been reported to be working as brokers or *dalals* who charge money to arrange such marriages from the grooms or their kin and often use deceit and exaggeration vis-à-vis the groom's financial status, disabilities, age, previous marriages, criminal disposition etc. to allure or convince the poor parents or guardians of cross-region brides. A few such instances have also come to light in which parents/guardians took money in return of marrying their daughters/wards.

Cross-region marriages are largely inter-caste in nature as brides and grooms have different caste status and several considerations of endogamy, exogamy and social distance that are otherwise quite rigorously observed during match-making in Haryana are conveniently ignored in these marriages. Marriages have remained a contentious social issue in rural Haryana and are surrounded by tensions. The local inter-caste marriages are met with strong opposition and resentment from community with transgressing couples being mercilessly killed or excommunicated for allegedly tainting the family honor. On the contrary tacit acceptance persists vis-à-vis cross-region marriages despite these flouting various prescriptive and proscriptive marriage rules, in the wake of male marriage squeeze and ensuing challenges of men to get married locally. At this juncture, it becomes imperative to explore into the factors and conditions that are making it difficult for several Haryanvi men to have local marriages and accordingly pushing them for out-marriage. Also, what compels or motivates the families of the brides to give their daughters in marriages in the settings that are not only geographically far stretched but culturally unfamiliar as well.

Review of Literature Over the last two decades, several comprehensive and noteworthy studies have been conducted on the phenomenon of cross-region marriages. The term 'across-region marriages' was first used to document these unusual and unconventional marriages in 2004 by Ravinder Kaur in her seminal work '*Across-Region Marriages: Poverty, Female Migration and Sex ratio*'. From then on different scholars have interpreted these marriages differently. These marriages represent for some, a 'new form of commercially mediated marriages involving payment to middlemen/go-between' (Chaudhary, 2016), while others have labelled these as 'purchase of women' (Chowdhry, 2005), 'bride-buying' (Singh, Parihar and Devi, 2018) and 'bride-trafficking' (Pandey and Kant, 2003). While out-marriage isn't new in Haryana (Kaur, 2004; Chowdhry, 2005; Ahlawat, 2009) and one may find reference of such marriages even in the documents dating back to colonial times (Darling 1947), which records the practice of external women being brought from Kangra hills, Bikaner and the plains of Ganges, the frequency of such marriages has sharply increased over the years. Also, men are bringing brides not only from the neighboring states from within their caste (which had been an approved practice), the radius has in fact expanded to far off eastern, western, central and southern states with women being brought not only from different castes but at times even from different religious backgrounds. Several researchers concluded declining sex ratios to be the main reason behind cross-region marriages (Kaur, 2004; Ahlawat, 2009; Singh, Parihar and Devi, 2018; Mishra and Kaur, 2021). They emphasized that shortage of brides is an implication of strong son preference and excessive male sex ratio. Singh, Parihar and Devi (2018) documented poverty, unemployment, land ownership, having no sister for exchange in marriage (*satta-batta*) and death or desertion of wife as some additional factors impacting the marital chances of men in Haryana. Roy, Rai and Nangia (2018) believed poverty and unemployment to be amplifying the problem. Reflecting upon the characteristics of the men opting cross-region marriages, other researchers too have described them to be poor, less educated, unemployed, lacking substantial landholdings, being handicapped, previously married and addicted to substance, all of which leaves them undesirable for matrimonial considerations in a local context (Kukreja and Kumar 2013; Chaudhry, 2016; Kaur, 2016). With regard to the women, their families have been reported to be extremely poor and unable to marry their daughters in a local context that demands both a well-organized marriage ceremony and substantial dowry (Kukreja and Kumar, 2013; Mishra, 2013;). Some studies pointed that a few instances of cross-region marriages might also be planned moves of women to escape their impoverished lives back home and keeping spatial hypergamy in view (Blanchet, 2003; Chaudhry, 2016).

Along with a detailed analysis of the above-mentioned demographic factors and individual shortcomings that have appeared in the existing literature, the role and relevance of the socio-cultural factors and changes taking place in rural social structure on account of modernization have also been incorporated in the present study while probing the determinants of cross-region marriages.

Objective of the study The present research article aims to determine the factors that are responsible for cross-region marriages at source and destination regions, where source region has been operationalized as the native states of cross-region brides from where they are brought and destination region is their conjugal setting i.e., Haryana.

Research Locale and Methodology The present research has been conducted in the rural backdrop of Haryana. The research design used for the study is exploratory as well as descriptive in nature. Further, both primary and secondary sources of data have been utilized to place the conundrum of cross-region marriages in a suitable framework and address it comprehensively. While the in-depth interviews, narratives and observation techniques of data collection have been used to gather primary information; secondary data concerning the phenomenon has been drawn from various books, journals, project reports, research articles, newspapers etc. From Haryana, two of its districts, namely, Rohtak and Sonapat that have appeared as pronounced sites for cross-region marriages in existing literature on the subject, were selected as research settings for the study. Further, from these two districts, two villages each were purposively chosen for data collection. The villages selected from Rohtak district were Kharainti and Kharkara; and, the ones chosen from Sonapat district were Gorar and Sisana. Eventually, from these four villages, extensive data on forty-five cross-region couples was obtained by conducting in-depth interviews with the help of a

well-prepared interview guide and engaging narratives capturing their lived-experiences. Given the absence of sufficient numerical data and sampling frame on such marriages, snowball or referral sampling was employed to identify the couples and select the sample for study. Of the forty-five interviewed cross-region couples, twelve and ten belonged to Kharainti and Kharkara villages of Rohtak district, while from Gorar and Sisana villages of Sonipat district, eleven and twelve couples were selected, respectively.

Analysis and Inferences

A detailed examination of the collected data has been presented in two parts: while Section-I brings out the determining factors of cross-region marriages as operating at the bride-receiving region, Haryana; Section-II reflects upon the numerous push and pull factors or compulsions and motivations that induce cross-region brides and their families to choose long-distance cross-regional matrimonial alliances with Haryanvi men who are not only complete strangers but also significantly differ from them with respect to socio-cultural and physical backgrounds.

Determinants of cross-region marriages at the bride-receiving region of Haryana (Destination)

The matrimonial crisis of men in rural Haryana is consequence of a set of demographic and socio-cultural factors coupled with personal inadequacies of the individuals concerned, a detailed analysis of which has been given under the following sub-heads:

Demographic Factors

Demographically, the ever-declining sex-ratios of the state serve as the starting point of discussion around male marriage squeeze in Haryana. The deep-seated son preference and daughter aversion has led to perpetually low sex ratios in the state ever since the first Census enumeration in 1881. Quoting more recent statistics, the sex-ratio counts of Haryana for the years 1991, 2001 and 2011 were recorded as 865, 861 and 877, respectively, which is very low. Such low sex-ratios can be attributed to the patriarchal mindset that regards sons as potential assets while daughters as liabilities. Sons are favored for the economic, socio-cultural and religious values attached to them. They are considered essential for continuation of lineage, inheritance of family property, carrying out last rites of the parents and numerous related rituals, provide care to the parents in their old age and also contribute economically towards the family income. Daughters on the other hand, once married are said to be belonging to someone else's home and leave their natal family behind. Also, marriage of a daughter by some is associated with drain on family's economic resources as organizing a wedding, meeting exorbitant dowry expectations and other post-wedding lifelong rituals is a costly affair. Owing to such thoughts, practices and differential values attached to the offspring of different sex, parents by and large prefer to plan their families with sons. Being undesirable, girl children are often subjected to discrimination and inhuman treatment that ranges from denying them proper food and nutrition, education, affection, timely medical aid etc. to their cruel elimination via female infanticide and feticide. Consequently, relatively fewer girls are born in the population and sex ratios become increasingly skewed. One of its upshots is the imbalance in the customary pool of marriageable, with males significantly outnumbering females. On account of spousal shortage, the men who are unable to find local girls for marriage have started looking for brides cross-regionally. One of the men stated in the given context, "the low sex-ratios of the state are primarily responsible for male marriage squeeze. When there are less girls, where would each one of us get brides. Naturally we would bring them from elsewhere, otherwise who would manage our houses".

Socio-cultural Factors

In every society, there are certain prescriptive and proscriptive rules of mate selection that are observed vis-à-vis the institution of marriage. The marriage norms in Haryana mainly comprise of endogamy (marrying within the specific groups), exogamy (marrying outside specific groups) and hypergamy (women marrying in higher social groups). Endogamy is practiced in terms of religion and caste, which implies that one must marry within one's own religious and caste groups. That is to say, *Hindus* must marry among *Hindus*. Likewise, people belonging to a particular caste must marry in his/her own and no other caste, for instance *Jats* must marry *Jats*, *Brahmins* must marry *Brahmins* and so on. The choice of a mate is thus restricted to one's own religious and caste group, of which he's a member, and, all other groups get disregarded from mate selection. While adhering to the norm of caste endogamy, is exercised *gotra* exogamy and village exogamy. *Gotra* is a patrilineal clan whose

members trace lineage from a common ancestor, be it real or mythical, and are considered as brothers and sisters. Any marital relation between the members of a same gotra is equivalent to incest and hence firmly forbidden. By rule, one has to leave three sets of *gotras*— one's fathers, mothers and paternal grandmothers. In some cases, marrying in one's maternal grandmother's *gotra* is additionally prohibited. Further, all other *gotras* inhabiting in the village must also be ignored from matrimonial considerations even if marital ties with those *gotras* can be established, due to the fictive kinship relations of *bhaichara* (brotherhood) that are strictly observed in the village. In a layman term, all the people residing in a particular village become brothers and sisters owing to the norm of brotherhood even if they are from different *gotras*. Along with that, the adjoining villages with which the bond of brotherhood is established are to be excluded while finalizing a match. Given these umpteen endogamous and exogamous considerations, the marital pool of the individuals becomes invariably constricted and in a demographic situation where there are already less females in comparison to males, male marriage squeeze gets further intensified. In addition, the norm of hypergamy, i.e., the cultural practice of women marrying into families that have relatively higher socio-economic status in comparison to their own, also adversely affects the marital prospects of certain men by creating a surplus of women at the top and scarcity at the bottom. While the higher-class men have enough choices to make a final selection, the lower-class men particularly bear the brunt and face challenges in securing matches locally.

Not all men get married. Historically too, men have remained unmarried to prevent land fragmentation or due to personal reasons. Earlier, given the joint family structure such bachelors were looked after by their married brothers and were accepted as part of their households. However, such a practice is on decline as with time the rural society has undergone some changes. The men maintained that with the advent of modernization, even in rural areas the joint family structure is being increasingly nuclear and the heightened spirit of collectivism and responsibility that individuals had in old times towards their parents or siblings are being replaced by individualism, greed and selfishness. Married brothers consider their unmarried brothers a burden and are no longer willing to take their responsibility. Till the time their mothers are around, men like these don't face much problems. But when the mothers grow old and ill or pass away, these men struggle even for their day-to-day tasks. Knowing that nobody would look after them and their needs in the absence of their mothers or once their mother's grow too old or ill to run their chores, these bachelors have started bringing brides from other states.

Individual Insufficiencies

.While skewed-sex ratios and socio-cultural factors are responsible for creating and accentuating marriage squeeze against men, whether one would be able to secure a match locally or not, invariably depends upon the attributes of men themselves such as their education, nature of job, income, assets owned, age, character, family reputation, marital status, substance addiction etc. Those who excel on these parameters i.e., who are educated, employed in well-reputed jobs, earn well, own substantial land and come from respected wealthy families don't experience marriage squeeze. However, those men who are uneducated/less educated, engaged in petty jobs, have low income, are from poor backgrounds, are landless or do not own much land, have physical or mental disabilities, had previously been married face challenges in finding a local bride as such men are deemed undesirable and do not make a preferred pick for nuptial considerations. The probability of a local marriage tends to be low for them.

The interviewed men were found to be lacking on these socio-economic parameters. To begin with, they belonged to poor and low-income families with their monthly family income ranging from 2,500 to 10,000. Vis-à-vis their educational achievements, ten were illiterate, twelve had studied up to primary, eight up to middle, eleven were matriculates, only three had secondary education and one held a diploma in electricals. Further, twenty of them made their living from agriculture and live-stock operations while remaining worked as manual laborers, sweepers, barbers, carpenters, electricians, mechanics, drivers or ran small grocery shops in the village. Thus, the majority of men were engaged in less-prestigious, small-scale and low-paying callings. Only twenty-three had land, though that was also unsubstantial with their landholdings ranging from half acre to one and a half acres. As many as eighteen of them were addicted to alcohol and were infamous for their quarrelsome nature. They were rejected locally many times, before they eventually settled for

cross-region matches. For four of them who had previously been married and three who suffered from physical and psychological handicaps, their marital status and disabilities added to their challenges. Thus, lacking majorly on the measures that render men desirable in a given matrimonial context, these men failed to find brides locally and hence sought cross-region marriages as an alternative.

Push and pull factors at the bride-sending regions (Source)

Just as observed in the case of Haryanvi men, there exist various compulsions and motivations at the source regions of the cross-region brides too that drive them and their families for out-marriage to a geographically far and socio-culturally alien destination. These push and pull influences have been analyzed in the following manner:

Extreme Poverty:

All forty-five brides belonged to extremely poor families with their parents being engaged in low-paying jobs of agricultural/manual labor, factory workers, hawkers, rickshaw pullers, tea plantation workers, barbers etc. They had limited resources for survival and could hardly make two square meals a day. Some of the girls mentioned having received marriage proposals from their own communities and regions but owing to the economic constraints their parents could neither afford the expenses of a local marriage nor meet the exorbitant dowry demands expressed by prospective local grooms and their families. Since marriage is deemed significant for women (just as in the case of men) as it provides them security and companionship, and, to keep unmarried daughters at home once they have attained marriageable age or passed it, is considered a stigma, non-marriage was not a choice available to the girls. Given that the chances of a local marriage were negligible due to the poor economic condition of the parents, the girls and their families settled for cross-region marriages. Also, as stated already, in cross-region marriages the entire wedding expenses are incurred by the grooms and there are no dowry related obligations at all. The fact that they didn't have to pay for anything served as the biggest motivation for the girls' families to agree for a cross-region marriage. A bride from Bihar substantiated, "my uncle's son told my mother that not even a single penny would be required from us. He promised that the groom was wealthy and I would live there happily. My mother questioned him why he isn't marrying one from his own region if he's as rich as he claims. To which he answered that there are less marriageable girls in Haryana. Anyhow, my mother got me married to my husband as she had no money. Not only didn't he ask for any dowry, he paid for the expenses as well. Now also whenever my mother visits us, he pays for her travel fare".

The cross-region brides mostly come from large families with several daughters. Here, the birth order of the girls plays a crucial role in determining their probabilities of a local or cross-regional marriage. Though a few of the brides happened to be the eldest born girls in their respective families, in majority of the cases girls had lower order amongst their siblings, generally the third, fourth, fifth born or so on. One of the brides explained that the parents while marrying the elder daughters end up draining whatever resources they have and when it is the time to settle down their younger ones, that is those born at third, fourth, fifth order, they are sadly left with nothing. Consequently, when they are approached by Haryanvi men with 'dowry-free, all expenses paid' marriage proposals for their daughters, they instantly agree for the match.

Individual Attributes and Shortcomings

With economic constraints being the catalyst, individual shortcomings of the cross-region brides such as illiteracy, disabilities, unattractive physical attributes, former marriages, being overage etc. also rendered them less desirable and affected their probabilities of having a local marriage. Majority of the brides were either illiterate or had attended primary school. Only a handful of them had attained middle level education. Few of them suffered from physical and psychosocial disabilities due to which they weren't able to find suitable grooms locally. "No proposal came for me as I had a limping foot. Besides, my parents couldn't afford dowry. I was becoming over-age and my younger sisters had also become of marriageable age. So, when his (referring to her husband) proposal came, my parents readily agreed", lamented a bride. Quite a few brides mentioned being dark in complexion, short-statured and unattractive to be the reasons for not finding a local match. Some of the brides had been abandoned by their husbands and a few were widows. Some of them even had children from previous marriages. These brides were unable to find grooms for their secondary marriages. Besides the stigma of a failed previous marriage was

overwhelming. They were often taunted by their neighbors, community members and even kin. When they received proposals for cross-regional alliances, they agreed at once having no other alternative. Difficult circumstances of the family such as having either irresponsible and alcoholic fathers or absence of parents/guardians to find them suitable grooms were some more reasons quoted by women for their out-marriages.

Lack of suitable local men

A few of the brides maintained that they weren't getting suitable proposals in their own regions, due to which they had to marry cross-regionally. The men who approached them for marriage were good for nothing. They were either alcoholic, drug addicts, immoral, criminals or unemployed. Few of them were already married, had children or were middle-aged. The girls didn't wish to marry such men. Their parents were unable to find them desirable matches as they couldn't offer any dowry. Thus, to escape the unsuitable matches in their regions, the girls agreed for cross-region marriages. A bride from Odisha narrated, "only one proposal came for me. He was a forty-five-year-old alcoholic widower, while I was barely seventeen. Though my father had agreed for the match, my mother and I refused. I knew I had no future with him. I wasn't certain of what my life would be in Haryana either, but I was ready to take the chance. Some women from my neighborhood were married there and were happy". In another unique case, in order to avoid the unsuitable alliance forcibly imposed by her guardians, a bride from West Bengal eloped with a Haryanvi man who had gone to her native region to find himself a bride.

Deception and Trafficking

Few of the brides had been betrayed by their close relatives such as brothers, sisters-in-law, uncles, aunts — both real as well as classificatory, and, in two unfortunate incidents even by parents. They had been sent to Haryana in the guise of work, sight-seeing, helping sister or aunt in raising their children but were later on married to Haryanvi men, in some cases against their wish. Three of the brides mentioned being sold into these marriages by their parents/guardians for greed of money. Further, two of the cross-region brides were found to be victims of trafficking. One had been abducted from the fields while she was playing with her siblings and the other from outside a railway station when she was visiting a relative with her grandparents. Though less in number, these cases do raise significant concerns vis-à-vis the agency of the brides and their human rights.

Spatial Hypergamy

Not all brides were found to be passively obliging their parents' commands or were victims of deception and trafficking, some had consciously planned their move from their less developed native regions to a developed state of Haryana and allegedly affluent *sasural* (marital home) to escape their impoverished lives, with the hope of a better and happy future. A cross-region bride from Assam shared, "my cousin who is married in the same village had told me that she had sufficient food and money. She just had to do the household chores and tend cattle. I got fascinated. We didn't even have adequate meals. She arranged my marriage here. Though unlike her, along with the household chores I have to work in the fields as well, but I don't mind the work. At least I'm not starving anymore. I got my sisters married here too". "I had heard that people in Haryana are very rich. They have plenty food and resources. That's why I asked a girl from my neighborhood who had been married in Haryana to find me one such groom", added a bride from Uttar Pradesh.

Conclusion

Thus, at the bride-sending and bride-receiving regions a combination of factors is at play that are resulting in cross-region marriages. While sex ratio is the most apparent cause signifying disparity in the proportion of marriageable men and women on matrimonial landscape of Haryana, the endogamous-exogamous restrictions and structural changes taking place in rural life also accentuate marriage squeeze against men, making it difficult for them to have a conventional marriage. Poverty, lack of education, low-income, unsubstantial landholdings, previous marriages, addiction to substance, unsavory reputation are several other factors that render these men undesirable, significantly affecting their marital chances. For women, abject poverty and inability of the parents to afford a local wedding and meet related dowry expectations were the primary push factors. The fact that cross-region marriages are dowry free and all expenses are borne by the grooms themselves served as the chief incentive for them. The individual shortcomings of the women in terms of complexion, marital status, physical attributes etc. also made it difficult for them to have local

marriages. Further, some were found to be tricked into these marriages by their own for paltry sums of money and a few had been victims of trafficking. Interestingly, some of them chose cross-region marriages to escape their impoverished lives back home. It would not be wrong to state that cross-region marriages are driven by difficult circumstances and compulsion on both the ends. However, while these marriages have gained social sanction in the face of glaring necessity, the brides aren't truly accepted as own and are often stigmatized as outsiders in the host society

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