

# THE SACRAMENT OF MARRIAGE

## Contemporary Challenges

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**Abstract:** The sacrament of marriage faces various challenges in the modern world. Some of the serious challenges to the sacrament of marriage and family are enumerated. There is a phenomenal increase in the number of inter-faith and inter-ethnic marriages both in the West and in the East. For several reasons, some Catholics opt for civil marriage, some of them neglecting the sacramental marriage. Break-up of marriage which often leads to divorce is one of the most profound crises in the society as the spouses deny each other and in the process, deny themselves. Due to issues related to dowry, even among the Catholics, often from the beginning of married life, there are conflicts between the couple and between the bride and her in-laws. Although migration, which takes people away, has its advantages, it has enormous effect on the institution of marriage and family in varying degrees.

**Keywords:** Marriage, sacrament, family, society, pre-marital sex, trial marriage, civil marriage, mixed marriage, inter-religious marriage, extra-marital sex, dowry, domestic violence, divorce, remarriage, migration, bride, cultures, education, employment, children, plurality, ministers, faith, baptism, communion, civil marriage, cohabitation, sacrament, children, oppression, victimization, harassment, violence, suppression, murder, suicide, infanticide, abortion, globalization, poverty, injustice.

### 1. Introduction

Marriage has been one of the important social institutions that play a significant role in order to stabilize familial relationships and regulate the sex life of human beings. Marriage is a universal social institution that has been established by the human society and a sacrament that has been divinely instituted. It works as the cornerstone of the family. Marriage can have different implications in different cultures, its purposes, functions and forms might differ from society to society. However, the importance of marriage has been drastically diminished

in the modern times. Today, many members of the young generation perceive marriage as an old-established social institution and the relevance of marriage drifts towards several transformed visions.

Some of the serious challenges to the sacrament of marriage and family are pre-marital sex, trial marriage, civil marriage, mixed marriage, inter-religious marriage, extra-marital sex, dowry, domestic violence, divorce and remarriage, same sex unions, work pressure, migration and a multitude of other problems. Our attempt here is to look into some of the major contemporary challenges to marriage such as pre-marital sexual relations, mixed marriages and Inter-religious marriages, civil marriages, dowry, migration, etc.

## **2. Mixed and Inter-Religious Marriages**

Mixed marriage is understood as a marriage between a Catholic and a non-Catholic (e.g., between a Catholic and an Orthodox Christian). Mixed marriages in the strict sense mean the marriage between a Catholic and a baptized person who is not in full communion with the Catholic Church.<sup>1</sup> Inter-religious marriage is the marriage between a Catholic and non-Christian (e.g., between a Catholic and a Hindu). This is also called a marriage in disparity of cult as it is contracted between a baptized person and an unbaptized person.<sup>2</sup> According to canon 85 of the *Motu Proprio Crebrae Allatae* of Pope Pius XII (1948) the mixed marriages between the Catholic and non-Catholic partners of the eastern tradition is not valid if it is not blessed by a Catholic minister.<sup>3</sup>

There is a practical difficulty even in the blessing of such a marriage. According to the practice of some regions the marriage has to be blessed by the parish priest of the bridegroom. If the bridegroom is a non-Catholic, the Catholic bride has to follow his tradition. Some of the couples are not interested in following any traditions and they want to live free of such rites. Such people go away from the Church leaving his/her Catholic faith and get married.

Of late, mixed marriage has become a universal phenomenon in the Church. In the modern society, because of the revolutionized social and religious consciousness, people are questioning age-old values,

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<sup>1</sup>*The Code of Canon Law (CIC)*, can. 1124; *The Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches (CCEO)*, can. 813.

<sup>2</sup>*The Code of Canons for the Eastern Churches*, can. 803.

<sup>3</sup>Joseph Kallarangatt, "Marriage and Family in the Christian Tradition," *Indian Journal of Family Studies* 1, 2 (2003): 7-32, 28.

including marriage and family.<sup>4</sup> In India, Christians live in a multi-cultural, multi-religious, and multi-lingual society; they cannot remain isolated from other cultures and communities. A natural consequence is the occasional mixed and inter religious marriages. The opportunity for higher education, employment, and wider cultural exchange has contributed greatly to this phenomenon. However, unless one is very careful while opting for such relationships, such a course of action can adversely affect the growing children. Some young people want to have complete freedom in life and so they opt for any type of marriage. This growing trend calls for serious attention to scientific inquiry into the level of marital and family satisfaction among these couples and the personality formation and interpersonal experience of their children.

As Albert I. Gordon has noted, there is a phenomenal increase in the number of inter-faith and inter-ethnic marriages both in the West and in the East.<sup>5</sup> This trend of inter-religious marriages is on the increase in India today with the emergent cultural and social exchanges and encounters. Plurality in religions and customs are really a blessing, but the Church has to see to it that our relationship with people of different faiths should not lead to the depreciation of the sacrament of marriage.

The trend among the young generation to marry someone outside one's religious and faith background is a major shift from the traditional practice. The Catholic views on marriage such as sacramentality, life-long commitment, fidelity and indissolubility are considered too restrictive and unreal for them. More and more young people challenge the very custom and relevance of getting married within one's religious community.

The Extraordinary Synod of Bishops on "The Pastoral Challenges of the Family in the Context of Evangelization" held in 2014, highlights the concern of the Church over certain widespread practices of the society today, which have been corroding the fundamental Christian principles and the essential family values.<sup>6</sup> In India, we see Catholics opting for mixed marriages and inter-religious marriages. Sometimes, adherents of various religions are seen in a Catholic family, which is a

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<sup>4</sup>Sebastian Payyappilly, "Mixed Marriage: A Pastoral Challenges to the Family," *Asian Horizons* 8, 2 (2014): 303-317, 303.

<sup>5</sup>Albert I. Gordon, *Intermarriage: Interfaith, Interracial, Interethnic*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1964, 5.

<sup>6</sup>Payyappilly, "Mixed Marriage," 303.

challenge for the upbringing of the children in faith.<sup>7</sup> Those marriages highlight the inherent difficulties of these unions in the Catholic upbringing of children. As a general principle, the Church discourages mixed and inter-religious marriages because it is a challenge to the sacramentality of marriage and it adversely affects the upbringing of the children in Catholic faith.

There are many issues the couples who belong to two different faiths face as they want to get married. Mixed marriages always constitute a problem. This is aggravated in cases where the non-Catholic partner has strong religious convictions that are not in harmony with the Catholic teachings.<sup>8</sup> In the open society of today, mixed marriages cannot be avoided. Yet, Catholics ministers feel that these marriages are often detrimental to faith and a threat to the harmony in the family.

It is true that the life style of every believing community is conditioned by faith; Catholics are no exception. In an inter-religious marriage, the faith practices of the couple, if they want to maintain their original observances, are negatively affected. For example, in the case of a marriage between a Christian girl and a Muslim boy, the girl is practically always lost to faith.<sup>9</sup> If husband and wife do not agree on their faith and religious convictions, their longing for complete unity remains unfulfilled and tensions are caused. Inter-faith families create situations of 'double belonging' in faith and culture, which has a unique impact on the faith formation of the children. The love in such families is put to test because of the insistence of canon 1125, which expects the Catholic partners to obtain the assurance (promise) from the other partner for the baptism of their children.<sup>10</sup>

Another hurdle posed by inter-religious marriage is that it affects the social status of one of the partners. The partner who belongs to another religious faith does not usually want to appear before others during the family celebrations like birthday party, baptism, marriage,

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<sup>7</sup>Third Extraordinary General Assembly of Bishops, "Pastoral Challenges of the Family in the Context of Evangelization: *Instrumentum Laboris*," [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/synod/documents/rc\\_synod\\_doc\\_20141018\\_relatio-synodi-familia\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/synod/documents/rc_synod_doc_20141018_relatio-synodi-familia_en.html) [accessed on 3 August 2017].

<sup>8</sup>Karl H. Peschke, *Christian Ethics: Moral Theology in the Light of Vatican II*, vol. II, Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 2016, 528.

<sup>9</sup>Peschke, *Christian Ethics*, 529.

<sup>10</sup>Indian Theological Association (ITA) Statement 2015, "Marriage and Family Today: An Indian Theological Search," *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection* 79, 9 (2015): 701-716, 703.

etc. They find it difficult to face their own relatives and sometimes even feel loneliness. Hence, Karl H. Peschke states: "For these reasons the Catholic Church, conscious of her duty, discourages the contracting of any type of mixed and inter-religious marriages, for she most desires that her children be able in matrimony to attain perfect union of mind and full communion of life."<sup>11</sup>

### 3. Civil Marriages

For several reasons, some Catholics opt for civil marriage. While opting for such a marriage, some of them neglect the sacramental marriage. Civil marriage is a marriage performed, recorded and recognized by a government official.<sup>12</sup> Indian Special Marriage Act of 1954 supports and sanctions civil marriage saying "parties who do not wish to marry in a religious ceremony can instead opt for a civil ceremony pursuant to the Act."<sup>13</sup> Since civil marriage takes place without any religious affiliation, majority of the people opt for it because of various reasons. There are increasing cases of Catholics who for ideological or practical reasons, prefer to contract a merely civil marriage. They either reject or at least defer Catholic marriage. Some people prefer to have civil marriage because in certain circumstances it can be easily dissolved during the lifetime of the parties. These are ready to make certain commitment, but they do not want to renounce the possibility of divorce. By seeking public recognition of their bond on the part of the State, couples show that they are ready to accept not only its advantages but also its obligations. Nevertheless, this situation is acceptable to the Church.<sup>14</sup>

Civil marriage contracted by Catholics keeps them away from the sacrament of marriage. In the Western cultures, marriage is considered essential for the fulfilment of personal needs and happiness and many opt for civil marriage. As a result of globalization, the Western ideology of marriage is finding its way to the Indian Church. People of India also regard marriage as a personal matter concerned with love-

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<sup>11</sup>Peschke, *Christian Ethics*, 529.

<sup>12</sup>"Civil Marriage," [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Civil\\_marriage](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Civil_marriage) [accessed on 15 September 2017].

<sup>13</sup>"Marriage in India," <http://www.madaan.com/marriage.html> [accessed on 15 September 2017].

<sup>14</sup>John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio* (22 November 1981), New York: St. Paul Publications, 1982, §82.

making, home-making and living together just as in *de facto* unions.<sup>15</sup> Most of the Catholic marriages used to be arranged by parents in consultation with their children. Today, the concepts of 'love' and 'freedom' have altered the marriage system in Catholic families. However, when the parents do not approve the proposal their children bring, they opt for a civil marriage. The young generation considers marriage merely as a means of emotional fulfilment, which is possible in civil marriage or cohabitation.<sup>16</sup>

The Church is very much concerned about the institution of marriage and family. Marriage is understood as "The matrimonial covenant, by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of the whole of life, is by its nature ordered toward the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of offspring; this covenant between baptized persons has been raised by Christ the Lord to the dignity of a sacrament."<sup>17</sup> Marriage between a baptized woman and a baptized man has always been considered the sacred union, a sign of the union between Christ and the Church. It is a perpetual and indissoluble union.<sup>18</sup> Sacramental marriage demands the authentic personal love of the spouses with the qualities of permanence, continuity, fidelity and perseverance in the conjugal communion.

In the modern world, under the influence of social media, people lose the real meaning of love, sexuality and the sacramentality of marriage and thus many of them opt for civil marriage or cohabitation. In short, marriage is seen today as a 'vehicle of personal fulfilment' and not merely as something sacred and divine. When we analyse the nature of both civil and sacramental marriages, they are contradictory because there is no total commitment in civil marriage and the possibility of divorce is more in such marriage. The Church does not welcome civil marriage since it is against the sacramentality of marriage.

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<sup>15</sup>Nobert Thomas, "Sociological Challenges of Marriage and Family in India," *Vaiharai* 18, 1&2 (2013): 150-172, 151.

<sup>16</sup>Thomas, "Sociological Challenges of Marriage," 157.

<sup>17</sup>*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1994, §1601.

<sup>18</sup>Jorge L. Savino, "Christian Marriage: The Reality and Pastoral Care" in *Eleven Cardinals Speak on Marriage and the Family: Essays from a Pastoral Viewpoint*, ed. Winfried Aymans, 113-129, San Francisco: Ignatius, 2015, 113.

#### 4. Divorce and Remarriage

Break-up of marriage is one of the most profound crises in the society because it is not just a matter of the institution or of the violation of rules and laws, but of the spouses' denial of each other and of who they are.<sup>19</sup> One neither wants nor expects a divorce while entering into a marital relationship. It happens when selfishness takes control over self-giving. As a result, marriage dies even before one of the spouses dies.

There are various reasons for the dissatisfaction or failure in marriage. Couples living and working in cities and metros, are exposed to more economic and relationship options, which prompt them to opt out of their unsatisfactory or unequal marriages.<sup>20</sup> Stress is another reason for deterioration of family values and the quality of marital life.<sup>21</sup> Stress can be caused because of the demands from the society, which the spouses have to contend with or because of expectations from each other. In an insecure and stressful work environment married couples carry work problems home and it results in deteriorating marital and family life. Another problem people encounter is the extended working hours in the office/company which leave little time for spouses to spend quality time together at home. Today, most of the married couples in profession are after making money and they find no time to be with the spouse. Finding less time with the partner and children in the family is yet another reason for dissatisfaction in marital life.

Coming together of two individuals in marriage and adjusting to each other involves investment of energy and adaptation. Communicating and understanding each other's needs and helping each other to grow together are a lifetime task. This requires constant effort and commitment. Sometimes, spouses fail to adjust themselves to their difficult situations. High expectation from the spouse to be an ideal lover, homemaker, etc., is said to be another reason for dissatisfaction that leads to break-up in marital life.

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<sup>19</sup>Dominik Duka, "Reflections on the Family" in *Eleven Cardinals Speak on Marriage and the Family: Essays from a Pastoral Viewpoint*, ed. Winfried Aymans, 39-44, San Francisco: Ignatius, 2015, 43.

<sup>20</sup>G. Felix, "Arbitration and Reconciliation in the Context of Pastoral and Marriage Dispute or Conflict," *Vaiharai* 18, 1&2 (2013): 190-205, 191.

<sup>21</sup>Cajetan D. Menezes, "The Effects of Stress on Christian Marriages in Urban India," *Indian Journal of Family Studies* 1, 2 (2003): 88-103, 88.

Due to the powerful influence of the virtual world on the real world of marriage, people lose the desire for a successful marital life and a stable family. Most of the divorced people opt for civil marriage because of their unpleasant experiences in the first marriage. Divorce disturbs the whole notion of marriage and deviates from the vision of God regarding marriage. It harms the human culture and system. The field study that was made in April 2017 reveals that the number of broken families is increasing in an alarming manner. People are really fed up with their marital life because of innumerable reasons. The divorce of the parents adversely affects the growth of the children in many ways. As a result, the children develop a negative impression on the institution of marriage. For these reasons, there is a tendency among today's young people to opt for civil marriage, cohabitation or single life.

### **5. The Curse of Dowry**

Originally dowry was given to the daughter by her parents at the time of marriage in order to ensure her and her husband's economic and material security after the wedding.<sup>22</sup> This practice was exploited by the families of the grooms and in the long run, the great demand for dowry encouraged female infanticide and neglect of the female children in certain poor quarters. Today, the dowry system has become a sort of extortion of money and property from the bride's family. It also has led to oppression, victimization, harassment, violence, suppression and degradation of women. There are many reports of dowry-related deaths.<sup>23</sup> In response to the negative effect, the Dowry Prohibition Act was enacted in 1961, which declared the dowry system illegal.<sup>24</sup> In spite of the Act and other legislative measures, it is practised in almost all regions, irrespective of caste and creed.<sup>25</sup>

Dowry system prevails in the society and is widely practiced even among the Catholics in India. It is practiced widely in the southern

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<sup>22</sup>Thomas, "Sociological Challenges of Marriage," 162.

<sup>23</sup>Johnson Pradeep R., "Psychological Challenges of Marital Life in India: A Christian Perspective," *Asian Horizons* 8, 2 (2014): 258-271, 261.

<sup>24</sup>Thomas, "Sociological Challenges of Marriage," 162.

<sup>25</sup>Vimal Kumar, Bala Kiran, Joseph Thambi, M. R. Sharma and Shaji George, "The Impact of Dowry System in the Christian Communities," *Asian Horizons* 7, 2 (2013): 357-375, 366.



states like Kerala, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu.<sup>26</sup> Parents demand huge amounts of dowry at the time of the marriage of their sons because it has become a social custom. Though all sections of society suffer from the dowry system, the middle class and the poor suffer the most and as a result, their daughters cannot be given in marriage. Studies show that in most of the cases, in these families, dowry is not a onetime payment. The wife's family is often expected to offer the husband 'gifts' on many occasions, some of which are the birth of a child, the baptism, purchase of a new vehicle, construction of a new house, launch of a business etc. Moreover, the wife's family is expected to give 'gifts' to the in-laws on important occasions such as their wedding.<sup>27</sup>

Due to issues related to dowry, often from the beginning of married life, there are conflicts between the couple and between the bride and her in-laws. These continuing demands make the woman feel that she is never a full member of her husband's family. Ultimately, it is the woman and her family who suffer the most. Many of them are compelled to take loan on excessive interest rates or to sell their property, including their house. The following are some of the violence related to the practice of dowry.

The demand for dowry often leads to several forms of ill-treatment, physical and mental harassment and humiliation of the bride. She has no choice but to suffer.<sup>28</sup> Her own family usually pleads with her to tolerate the suffering, including torture, since they think that a daughter leaving the husband is a disgrace to them. Moreover, the life of a woman is always considered as dependent on the man, and hence they are worried about her future if she would leave the husband. She does not get support from the neighbours, friends or relatives, since such a support would bring them in conflict with her husband's family.

Dowry is one of the major causes of domestic violence in India and its extreme form is murder. The official website of the Crime Records Bureau of India lists thousands of dowry deaths a year. The estimated number of dowry related deaths in India is above 25,000 a year.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>Kumar *et al.*, "The Impact of Dowry System," 359.

<sup>27</sup>Kumar *et al.*, "The Impact of Dowry System," 366.

<sup>28</sup>Ram Ahuja, *Violence against Women*, New Delhi: Rawat Publication, 1998, 129.

<sup>29</sup>Shaji George Kochuthara, "Dowry as a Social-Structural Sin," *Asian Horizons* 8, 2 (2014): 337-356, 341.

Parents like their girl child to be happy and her marital life to be peaceful. The parents of the girls spend huge amounts of money on weddings to impress the in-laws and try to meet all demands for gifts and valuables with the hope that the girl would never return home with a 'stigma'. But after the wedding, some young women discover that they are not as welcome to their in-laws as their dowry is. If the husband and in-laws consider the dowry received as 'insufficient', she is likely to suffer violence and humiliation. For the reasons cited above, she is not usually welcome to parents' homes either. Often, these girls contemplate suicide in a desperate situation to escape humiliation and violence. At times the husband and his family directly or indirectly force her to commit suicide.<sup>30</sup>

In some cases, the wife is considered as a source of income.<sup>31</sup> The husband's continuous demands for more often lead to mental and physical torture. Though there are dowry related murders in many parts of the country, only a few cases are reported. In order to stop offences of cruelty by the husband or his in-laws against the wife, new provisions were added to the Indian Penal Code: "If a death of a woman is caused by burns or bodily injury or occurs in suspicious circumstances within seven years of her marriage and it is shown that just before her death she was subjected to cruelty or harassment by her husband or in-laws in connection with demands for dowry, the husband or in-laws will be considered to cause her death."<sup>32</sup> Though the law has brought some changes, the dowry related violence and murder are on the increase. With the death of the wife, the man becomes eligible to remarry and to obtain dowry again. Naturally, his family members also will benefit from the new marriage.

Consequences of dowry include female infanticide, late marriage for many girls, unsuitable matches for girls, low status of women, breakdown of marriages, unhappy married life, dissension between families, increase in immorality, increase in mental diseases, increased rate of suicide and impoverishment in poor and middle class families due to financial burden, etc.<sup>33</sup> The practice of dowry is an unjust

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<sup>30</sup>Mohd Umar, *Bride Burning in India: A Social Legal Study*, New Delhi: APH Publishing Corporation, 1998, 121. See also Kochuthara, "Dowry as a Social-Structural Sin," 351.

<sup>31</sup>Kumar *et al.*, "The Impact of Dowry System," 368.

<sup>32</sup>"Dowry System in India," [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dowry\\_System\\_in\\_India](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dowry_System_in_India) [accessed on 25 September 2017].

<sup>33</sup>Kumar *et al.*, "The Impact of Dowry System," 367.

practice, which really contradicts the Catholic faith and practice. The lives of many women are made unbearable due to dowry and it creates constant tensions, conflicts and disharmony in family. Besides, it also affects the growth of the children and they undergo psychological and mental agony.

Dowry is one of the major instruments of patriarchy; perpetuating the oppression of women strengthening the view that girl child is a burden and curse to the families.<sup>34</sup> The financial demands and dowry related issues from the husband and relatives continue for the life time. In this way, a girl child becomes a continuous burden to her parents and family. Millions of female foetuses are aborted in India every year. Modern technological developments have made easy prenatal sex discernment and this has led to wide-spread sex-selective abortions in the Indian society. According to 2011 census of India, the sex ratio is 914 females per 1000 males and the main reason for this is selective female foeticide.<sup>35</sup> Many couples prefer sons to daughters because they consider sons as a source of income and girls as burden for the family. Christians are not an exception. Dowry is one of the major reasons for the preference of sons.<sup>36</sup>

The dignity of the wife is violated due to the continuous harassment and humiliation from the part of the husband. When the worth of a person is calculated by the material benefit from that person, what causes it violates basic human dignity. Dowry commodifies and degrades women.<sup>37</sup> In some cases, even her basic needs of food, clothing and healthcare are denied when demands are not met. Her freedom to visit her parents, relatives and friends are curtailed as ways of isolating and torturing her mentally.

The dowry system results in the denial of justice to women. Parents feel that the male child is a source of income and hence they are ready to spend any amount of money on him. They feel that investment on the girl child is useless as she will belong to another family. This causes an unequal treatment of boys and girls. Parental property is also not shared equally and it is a great injustice done to them. They

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<sup>34</sup>Kumar *et al.*, "The Impact of Dowry System," 375.

<sup>35</sup>Kochuthara, "Dowry as a Social-Structural Sin," 350.

<sup>36</sup>Kumar *et al.*, "The Impact of Dowry System," 372.

<sup>37</sup>Kochuthara, "Dowry as a Social-Structural Sin," 352.

are neither given equal opportunities nor equal share.<sup>38</sup> Dowry results in the denial of education for girls. The better she is qualified, the more burdensome she becomes for the family, because to find a boy of equal status means paying more dowry.<sup>39</sup>

## 6. Migration and Cultural Encounters

Migration is the movement of habitation of people from one place to another. At present, it is a global phenomenon. As per the recent statistics, there are about 232 million international migrants and 740 million internal migrants and about 3 million people are moving to the cities every week.<sup>40</sup> This fact suggests that migration is actually a structural reality<sup>41</sup> of the contemporary society. "Migration may be domestic or international on the basis of from where and to where they move. It may be forced or voluntary on the basis of the motive behind their movement."<sup>42</sup> Irrespective of the fact, whether it is domestic or international, forced or voluntary, it has enormous effect on the institution of marriage and family in varying degrees and extent.

Globalization, unjust land acquisition, lack of employment and unsustainable agriculture, poverty, injustice, wars and conflicts contribute to the growing displacement and migration.<sup>43</sup> This situation leads to single-parent families, weakening of husband-wife relationships and results in dysfunctional families. Studies show that most of the migrant students as well as migrant workers are youth and they tend to live misusing their freedom.

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<sup>38</sup>Thomas Srampickal and Joji Chirayil, *To Act Justly and Deal Honestly: A Course in Justice and Truthfulness for Undergraduates in Theology*, Thrissur: Marymatha Publications, 2008, 39.

<sup>39</sup>Kochuthara, "Dowry as a Social-Structural Sin," 350.

<sup>40</sup>"International Organization for Migration: World Migration Report 2015," <https://www.iom.int/world-migration-report-2015> [accessed on 20 September 2017].

<sup>41</sup>Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, *Erga Migrantes Caritas Christi* (03 May 2004), Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2004, §1.

<sup>42</sup>Joseph Kuduppil, "Marriage and Family in the Context of Migration" in *The Pastoral Challenges of Marriage and Family: Response from India*, edited by Scaria Kanniyakonil, Dominic Vechoor and Anto Cheranthuruthy, 199-212, Kottayam: OIRSI, 2015, 200.

<sup>43</sup>Indian Theological Association (ITA) Statement 2015, "Marriage and Family Today: An Indian Theological Search," 704.

Since there are different types of migration and each type has got its own reason, we focus on migrant students who are going away from their parents/family for higher studies or better job. Though migration has its own advantages, it has got consequences too which at time become a threat to the sacrament of marriage.

The migrants face many challenges pertaining to culture, customs and religious believes. Many of the adults find it difficult to integrate and to respect the socio-cultural conventions of the new places. Cultural identity crisis is a challenge faced by the second generation of the migrants.<sup>44</sup> The children of the migrating family find one culture at home, another at school, another in the outside world, still another at the Church. These differences trouble the children and have a negative impact on their future.

While the youth are away from the family for higher studies or job, they are influenced by various cultures, languages and religion. The migrant friendship group is constituted of members of various religions and cultures. Their association with the people of other cultures and faiths becomes an asset in their life. At the same time, this social interaction sometimes leads them to opt for inter-religious or inter-cultural marriage. In this way migration becomes a threat to the traditional celebration of the sacrament of marriage.

Live-in relationships and pre-marital sex are found more among the migrants and the youth who are away from their parents for their studies or job. The migrant youth have poor communication with their parents and they cultivate relationships with the virtual world. Besides, when they are bored, they tend to connect themselves with the digital world, which gradually leads them to a new relationship called "online affair."<sup>45</sup> Unlimited access to social networking without adequate guidance leads the youth to believe that the number of virtual friends defines their worth. Often they become addicted to the cyberspace and social media that lead them to live-in relationships, pre-marital sex, alcohol and drug addiction, etc. Migrants who are subjected to verbal, physical and sexual abuse often experience loneliness, distress, disappointment and marginalization.<sup>46</sup> They fail to practice their faith for the lack of time to go Church.

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<sup>44</sup>Kuduppil, "Marriage and Family in the Context of Migration," 206.

<sup>45</sup>Pradeep, "Psychological Challenges of Marital Life in India: A Christian Perspective," 268.

<sup>46</sup>Charles Irudayam, "Migration and Poverty: Issues and Responses of the Church," *Asian Horizons* 8, 4 (2014): 789–809, 792.

## **7. Conclusion**

The traditional family in India across regional, linguistic and religious communities has undergone drastic changes, giving way to new forms of marriage and family since independence. There has been a gradual shift during the decades leading to the present cyber mediated communities. The Western culture has very much influenced and still influencing the young generation of the Indian Church. These developments also influence a drastic change in the social and relational experience, including the family and its members.

On the one hand, we see more development in the field of communication media, educational system, social structures, etc. On the other hand, there is a decline in the values and personal life of the people. In the traditional family system, there was solidarity, a feeling of belongingness, security, mutual respect, loyalty, psychological and emotional nurturing, prayerful atmosphere, etc. But with the changing patterns, the traditional family and its psycho-social-economic influence on personal development are on the decline. Pre-marital sex, cohabitation, trial marriage, dating, drug addiction, domestic violence, dowry, migration, etc., are on the rise in Indian cities and they badly affect the life of the young people in the Church and their choice of marriage. The print, electronic and the cyber media reflect and legitimize family diversity and present some of the new forms as the ideal.

Today, each family must be aware of the negative and destabilizing influence of the world on the individual and the society. None of the members of the Church can run away from this world and remain unaffected by the developments in the society. They need to exercise proper discernment and use their freedom with responsibility. This is the challenge of the Catholic families in India today. However, families do not have to be at the mercy of the changing circumstances but need to make deliberate attempts to strengthen the positive elements in the age-old practices, refining them in the light of the modern lessons that life teaches in order to build up healthy families where individuals can be born, brought up and live with integrity.