Mass weddings: Social service, social crisis too

LITTLE CHOICE Regular feature in villages, but look beyond lens of philanthropy and mass weddings are an offshoot of agrarian crisis, with poor left with no way out

Through only the extremely poor among them Dalit, some to Kastur marriages, his associate says they still come across a number of cases where people seek financial aid but refuse to be a part of mass weddings.

"Despite extreme poverty, they feel ashamed in marrying their daughters off from one another place instead of home. They request us to give the stuff, which we can't," he says.

Chamkaur Singh, a sweetmaker from Kalerinder's village, is one such example. He first refused to accept when his in-laws from Baramula visited him to tie the knot in a mass wedding a year back. "The ceremony was going to take place in my village only. That meant there would be no hardship. I had a bath of bhaanis of so many friends, now it was my turn to return," he says.

He feels it was an embarrassing way of getting married. But some influential relatives intervened and convinced him, explaining the situation of the girl's family.

The truth of that poverty that forced a large section of people to accept this new social order.

Simar Kaur, cousin-bride of Kalerinder, first got her daughter married in a mass wedding two years back. So when Kalerinder's elder son shared the idea of a mass wedding, she immediately agreed. "We know what poverty is. My daughter was also married in a similar way," she says.

Simar is thankful to Kastur but at the same time expresses helplessness. "It was possible for us to manage on our own. Others why would we not have done it on our own and celebrated the occasion with brothers and sisters?"

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