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Marriage in the Age of Coronavirus: From ‘big fat’ to ‘small virtual’

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Abstract

Humanity has faced several challenges over and over again since the dawn of civilized existence and it continues to face them now as well. Technology has become a juggernaut in contemporary society. It has revolutionized the wedding sector to a great extent. The digital age has also lend a hand to the wedding industry to produce in leaps and bounds. The idea of destination weddings, themed functions, grand outdoor venues and beach weddings have brought many people to the limelight, thereby catching the attention of millions of people across the countryside. This paradigm shift has also permit free pass to the couples to accomplish their wild thoughts, thereby breaking the stereotypes. However, the outbreak of Covid-19 has severely hit all the latest trends of marriage. People have been cancelling their bookings and are waiting for the conditions to be normal in the country. Many of them have been giving priority to simple marriages at home in the presence of few family members, keeping in view the guidelines of the government of India. This paper likes to conclude that this pandemic and subsequent lockdown has taught us to change, improve and admit the realities of life with a high degree of resilience. Furthermore, this deadly disease is going to stay and it is high time that we should bring a change in the trends of marriage so as to adjust easily to the new challenges that coronavirus has brought for the human race.

Keywords: Coronavirus, COVID-19, Contemporary, , Lockdown, Marriage, Pandemic, India, Wedding

Introduction

Humanity has faced many challenges over and over again since the dawn of civilized existence and it continues to face them at the present moment also. Man has created many institutions over the centuries in order to accomplish various needs and goals. These social systems have assumed different forms in different ages and one such institution is marriage. In ancient times, marriages were more simple and small in form. Though the institution of marriage has undergone several changes in the modern times but it is still measured as a vital social institution.

Indian weddings are not just about the bride and the groom but all the near and dear ones from both the paternal and maternal side tends to get involved in the course of marriage. Moreover, the marriage planning begins months in advance and suitable arrangements are made after taking the help of each possible contact within the family to make the wedding a 'grand affair'. India is now recognized for its big fat weddings across the world. The concept of 'destination wedding' has made a recent trend in India. Although the concept is not an Indian concept, but it has caught the interest of millions of Indians. Preferred locations and theme based functions have made people more crazy where different venues become the hotbed of pleasure, gossip and rest. In this scenario, the wedding industry acts like an engine that not only fulfill the 'essential needs' but it drives several other industries such as apparel, catering, hospitality, jewellery, flowers, transportation etc. However, in the past few months due to the coronavirus pandemic, the whole wedding industry has taken a massive hit. Consequently, the dazzling wedding industry that promise to provide fun, variety and astonishing venues have been shunned by the people in India. As a result, lakhs of labourers and workers connected with such industries have been suffering from huge economic loss during this coronavirus outbreak. However, some creative wedding planners have been coming up with their new-fangled ideas of using technology in innovative ways to regenerate the delight of a big fat Indian wedding in this corona-infected world.

Marriage as an Institution

Marriage as an institution came into being within the society to bring a man and a woman together as husband and wife so that their union can produce their offspring. Our society recognizes marriage because it is an institution that benefits society in a way that no other relationship does. The social science research indicates that marriage provides unique benefits for a man, woman and the children resulting from the marital union. Marriage assures that children have access to a mother and father and the unique contributions that both provide to child development. It is based on the anthropological fact that men and women are different and complementary to each other but the biological fact is that the reproduction depends upon a man and a woman only, and the social reality is that a child needs both a mother and a father. Therefore marriage is said to be the fundamental building block of all human civilization. Many thinkers have defined marriage in their words and they highlighted the significance of marriage in their piece of work. Hunt (1940) writes “marriage is the approved social patterns whereby two or more persons establish a family.” Mazumdar (1951) defines marriage as “a socially sanctioned union of male and female or as a secondary institution devised by society to sanction the union and mating of male and female, for purpose of (a) establishing a

household, (b) entering into sex relations, (c) procreating and, (d) providing care for the offspring.” Radha Krishnan (1956) writes, “Marriage is not a mere convention but an implicit condition of human society. It is an adjustment between the biological purposes of nature and the sociological purposes of man.”

Marriage amid COVID-19

SARS-CoV-2 is a novel coronavirus (abbreviated as COVID-19) that has caused a coronavirus disease. It was declared a global pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO) on March 11, 2020 (WHO, March 11, 2020).¹ The government of India under prime minister Narendra Modi announced the nationwide lockdown on 24 March 2020 for 21 days, thereby limiting the movement of the whole population of India as a preventive measure against the COVID-19 pandemic in India (Gettleman, Jeffrey; Schultz, Kai, March 24, 2020). Due to this deadly virus, where all the schools, colleges and universities have been closed and majority of people have been asked to work from home, this pandemic has also affected the marriage ceremonies as hotels, restaurants, party venues and temples were directed to shut down their services during the complete lockdown in the country.

There is no doubt that COVID-19 has gained access into many aspects of our lives, including how we celebrate our marriage ceremonies. As the number of COVID-19 cases have been increasing within the country, so do the government have been putting restrictions through subsequent lockdowns, strict guidelines, norms of social distancing and so forth. As a result, many families have preferred to take the easy way out, thereby postponing their wedding ceremonies. But large number of people are still determined to get married, and are turning towards the new trend of 'simple marriage' at home. India's well-known matchmaking and matrimonial portal known as Shadi.com has also come up with a "novel" way to organise what can best be portrayed as no-contact weddings. This matrimonial site has come up with the notion of "weddings from home", which is a kind of twist on the "work from home" procedure that corporate sector have taken up to make sure the running of big businesses amid COVID-19 lockdown. On the other hand, many people are swapping the long-established customs with online weddings and socially-distanced ceremonies. Zoom weddings have also been trying to serve the couples in this hard time. Within this framework, all the ceremonies are broadcast with the help of internet and hence all the safety measures are taken into consideration within the ambit of latest vogue.

But the fact is that the coronavirus pandemic has put all the marriage ceremonies to a halt in India. Though adjournment of wedding ceremonies is not the viable solution as this pandemic scare is not going to end anytime soon. Moreover, long engagements are not easy to maintain in this contemporary society and such arrangements can also bring negative consequences for the couples also. Besides, parents might fall sick and elderly relatives might pass away due to some ongoing disease or age factor. Keeping in view of all the problems, there is no point in

¹ WHO. (2020). " WHO characterizes COVID-19 as a Pandemic, 11 March 2020". Available at: www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/events-as-theyhappen

waiting for the virulent disease to come to an end, so we must come up with best possible ways to alter the unhappy situation for the families and couples as well.

Towards a New Trend

Who would have ever imagined that the trend of airbrush makeup and glittering jewellery would be replaced by surgical face masks by the bride? Masks, face shields and strict social distancing have become the new norms in this age of coronavirus. The fear of infection and death have ingrained into us in the absence of a drug or vaccine, so all the safety protocols lies at the heart of all the ceremonies in this present-day situation.

As discussed earlier, the concept of micro wedding is in trend in which people call on their close guests only. In this way, many marriage ceremonies are being organized as spartan affair, with the bride and groom along with their immediate families. Even the Union Health Ministry has issued the guidelines to maintain social distancing, gathering of not more than 50 people are allowed at the functions of any marriage ceremony (Hindustan Times, May 05, 2020).² Though things have been opening up with a number of relaxation and the wedding ceremonies are back again. But the reality is that the COVID-19 has changed the whole scenario, therefore we need to adapt ourselves in the changing times.

Within the ambit of this new disease, where public celebrations and social gathering have become a new taboo, we must think of adopting the simple forms in the furtherance of fresh concepts. Though loneliness, depression, and other maladies are exacerbated by the COVID-19 limitations, but this pandemic has taught us so many lessons, for example, life is about finding happiness in simple things. Let us learn to live a life that is simple and true. We need to cut down the unessential things from our life. There is an urgent need to change, improve and admit the realities of life with a high degree of resilience. The best way to survive is to live in sync with nature. Earlier, people used to prefer their 'Aangan', that is courtyard for the wedding functions. This is the most excellent way to organise personalised functions with close relatives and people who matter the most. Let us go back to the old culture again, where people used to celebrate their wedding ceremonies in their lawns, farmhouses and terraces. This is even the most outstanding way to keep the expenses down. Albeit, some people have come up with new themes and solutions in this high time to fulfill their needs, we hope that simple weddings is going to be the new trend in future.

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² Hindustan Times. (2020). "Covid-19: 50 people to be allowed at weddings, 20 at funerals, says govt". Available at: <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/covid-19-50-people-to-be-allowed-at-weddings-20-at-funerals-says-govt/story>

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