



MARRIAGE IN THE MODERN INDIAN SOCIETY: AN OVERVIEW

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Abstract

The institution of marriage and its trends need to be studied in greater depth, especially in the Indian context where the social dynamics of marriage and the process of mate selection have been witnessing tremendous changes. Many studies reflect the changes that have occurred in the institution of marriage nowadays, because of the introduction of urbanization, industrialization, secularization, modern education impact of Western culture, and marriage legislations in the Indian society. This paper sheds light on the prevalent forms of marriage in the Indian society. An effort has also been made to cover the studies depicting a sociological insight into the institution of marriage and its emerging trends or patterns.

Keywords: NRI marriage, Arranged marriage, Love marriage, Modern society, India

INTRODUCTION

In a country like India, marriage is regarded as a one-time event in life by the people which is usually sanctified and glorified with much social approval. As we all know that marriage is considered as a heavenly alliance between the two individuals, therefore, in this bond, two human beings enter into the world of emotional, physical, mental and spiritual union through the marriage vows. Marriage is again taken as a social necessity and marrying children is the primary responsibility of parents in India. It is believed that sons should be married as soon as they start earning whereas daughters should be married as soon they become young in early twenties.¹ Marriage is not only an important social institution but the stepping stone to build the family unit and is the most significant legal contract of each society. However, in this contemporary society, even the meaning of marriage has changed thereby making it more complex and a different affair for the entire human race. Factors like urbanization, new legislative measures and

¹ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3705690/>

influence of the western societies are flipping the minds of the Indian people towards love marriages, live-in -relationships and break-up in relationship thereby affecting the entire society.

STUDIES ON MARRIAGE PATTERNS IN INDIA

Hershman (1981) focused primarily on Jats and his analysis presents the patterns of Punjabi marriage. A person who gives a women in marriage place oneself in a position of inferiority to the taker and by taking a women one assumes the position of superiority to the giver. People that time resolve the position in order to maintain a status of equality by exchanging women. In this way to preserve their honor, Punjabi Muslims exchange their sisters within closed groups whereas Punjabi Hindus and Sikhs solve the difficulty by accepting the inferiority of wife giver role and by creating from this principle an arrangement of exogamy based upon the rule of non-exchange.

Madan's work (1965, 1975) on the Brahmins Pandits of rural Kashmir revealed that Pandits of Kashmir who were well known for their learning believed in the notion of kanyadan. Madan reports that the marriage of one's daughters into households of higher socio- economic standing was popular and desirable as it was one of the ways in which a chulah (household) may its rise its own status. But there was a general agreement that too much difference between the.....household was not enviable (Madan, 1965).

A number of studies have been carried out in an effort to observe the impact of modern trends corresponding to formal education, industrialization and urbanization. Changing patterns are being witnessed in several areas such as age at marriage, inter-caste marriage, arranged versus love matches, matching horoscopes and so on. Though inter-religious marriages take place in the country and there are special regulations too, to sustain such type of marriages in India. But the fact is that the figures of such forms of marriage are too small since marriage for large number of population is that which prevails within one's religious group and family as well. A 1993-94 survey of 1842 over 1800 ever-married rural women in ages 15-39 years confirms that few women have a say in the choice of their husband (Jejeebhoy, 2001).

In contemporary society, marriage is not mandatory and some men and women enter into married life during their early thirties and for the majority of people, the probability of marrying is declining and the proportion of a person's adult life spent as a married person is also declining. Marriage behavior and family life are continuously going through changes all over Asia. Many young folks are coming up with new trends like to marrying late, having less children, and married women working outside the house (Leete 1994; Retherford, Ogawa, and Matsukura 2001). Therefore in modern society such things are common-many do not marry at all, those that do marry are doing so later in life and others marry several times. When individuals do tie the knot they gradually do more so in a civil manner rather than going through a religious ceremony. Although the majority of marriages are of two never married parties, an increasing proportion of marriages consist of at least one person who has previously been married and many of these people already have children from a previous marriage.

Gopal, Hemant in his work on 'The Changing Concept of Hindu Marriage in Modern India: With Special Reference to N.R.I. Marriages' reveals that inter-caste marriages are nowadays being accepted by large number of people. Approximately, 59% approved this type of marriage owing to the fact that the stability of such marriages is measured to be no less than the traditional marriages. Nearly 51% people believe that the partners are equally compatible to each other and understand each other in a better way. He further argues that immigration to foreign countries for money-making and to attain a vigorous living has become a huge persuasion among the educated youngsters these days. In order to achieve their aim, marriage with an NRI partner seems to be the easiest procedure to them. According to his findings, 49% persons consider that immigration is the leading intention for NRI marriages, 14% persons love affair inspire them to go for NRI marriage, 13% persons are pressurized by their family members to tie the knot with a NRI spouse because this method would further open the way to the other family members to settle in a foreign country, 23% persons perform their professional ambitions by marrying a NRI spouse to settle out of the country whereas 1% persons reflect it could be any of the above reasons to get married a NRI spouse. His work reflects the idea that parents in contemporary times use their daughters, sometimes-even their sons as a passport to move out of the country. Such type of marriages have been depicted as `passport marriage`; `paper marriage`; barter marriage; sham marriage; holiday-marriage etc.

MARRIAGE IN THE MODERN INDIAN SOCIETY

With the passage of time, various changes have been observed in the social structure of modern society especially in the institution of marriage. The patterns of marriage vary from region to region and from time to time within India. The wave of modernization, western education, secularization and social change, attitudes towards the above mentioned patterns of marriage have been shifting gradually and adversely. Generally there are three broad types of marriages that take place nowadays in India- arranged marriage, self-arranged love marriage and NRI marriage. Nevertheless, the form and purpose for marriage differs in all the three types of marriage.

1. Arranged Marriage

Arranged marriage is a tradition that is usually observed in the societies of the Indian subcontinent. Despite the fact that romantic love is "wholly celebrated" in the Indian society through the medium of mass media (such as Bollywood) and folklore, but people still believes that arranged marriage is the most suitable form of marriage.

Arranged marriage is a type of marital union where the brides and grooms are selected by the partners themselves, with total involvement of their families along with the help of their social circles in the process of mate selection. In this way, family, friends and relatives of the potential bride and groom select a suitable partner for them with or without the help of the third-party (that is professional matchmakers). In the urban areas as well as in the rural counterparts, parents nowadays arrange various meetings for their marriage-ready sons and daughters in order to provide them a chance to meet with the multiple potential

spouses with an accepted right of refusal. According to the tradition, the boy's family arrive (with the boy) and be seated with the whole family of the girl except the girl, who then makes a remarkable entrance dressed in good clothes, thereby bringing tea and other refreshment for the boy's family. This practice is called as "seeing the girl". However, this practice has been attacked by some feminists as a classic instance of gender-bias and the objectification of women.

The major factors that are taken into account while fixing arranged marriage by the parents are the following:

1. Reputation- of the family.
2. Vocation- the more prestigious, the better.
3. Wealth.
4. Appearance- height and color are the main traits to consider.
5. Values- traditional/ liberal.
6. Caste/ Religion.
7. Horoscope- must be compatible (this was traditionally true).
8. Medical- Hereditary disease is becoming an increasingly important factor.

2. Love Marriage

Love marriage is used to describe a marriage where the individuals love each other and get married with or without consent of their parents. Transition from the joint families to the nuclear families, agrarian society to the industrial society along with liberation and empowerment of women has influenced not only the cultural moorings of the society, but also the nature and character of marriages. In a country like India, the term love marriage is used to describe a marriage which is decided upon by the couple at their own, without consulting their parents or families. In a love marriage, people tend to use pre-screening criteria that put emphasis on the outward appearances such as looks and possessions. These marriages generally break the barriers of caste, community and religion.

Arranged marriage actually brings those people in a partnership or relationship that have been brought up with a similar belief system. This advantage plays an important part in building a base to the relationship. In arranged marriage, the chances of having cultural differences are very less as compared to the love marriages. Love marriages need not essentially happen between people of the similar religion, caste and culture. This type of marriage brings individuals with dissimilar beliefs and cultures together. Therefore, the couples need to put in extra efforts to arrive to a consensus. The fact is that arranged marriages are preferred over love marriages, to solidify family ties, to create new ties, and as deference to the parents' wishes. Though love marriages do not enjoy the same respect and position in the society as arranged marriages but parents are becoming more thoughtful of their children's feelings in the contemporary times. Therefore, love marriages are performed with the same vigor and joy as arranged marriages.

3. NRI Marriage

NRI marriage is that type of marriage in which at least one person or both the marrying spouses are a non-resident Indian. Though in common practice, NRI marriage is considered to be between a non-resident male and an Indian bride. Different motives are mostly seen behind these NRI marriages in India. People prefer marrying a NRI person since it has become an easy way to get immigration through this type of bonding. NRI marriages that are largely taking place in India are also changing the living standard and economic interests of many families. There is no doubt that there is a charm among people to settle in overseas because they think that life is more prosperous in foreign countries. There are many success stories of NRI marriages but at the same time, the problems of abandoned brides by NRI grooms have really frightened the people about such marriages. Despite the rising cases of desertion, fraud and parallel conjugal life, people especially the youngsters are ready to try their luck through such routes of marriage. The idea is quite clear that immigration is the foremost goal for majority of such marriages.

Many aggravated risks have been noticed in the NRI marriages like the woman being secluded far away from her home in an unknown foreign land; unavoidably facing restraints of language; lack of awareness of local illegal justice; lack of knowledge about the law enforcement and authorized system; lack of support system of family, relatives and friends to turn to; lack of understanding about the accessible financial assistance and about a place to take protection or shelter in times of distress. The truth is that the occurrence of run-away husbands and limping marriages of NRI spouses has become a grave socio-legal trouble in contemporary Indian society.

CONCLUSION

Each form of marriage was exclusive in ancient times. Matrimonial laws were preserved and followed without any disagreement. Though contemporary Hindu marriage has its own issues that challenge the long-standing methods but still marriage as an institution has stayed alive in the face of societal turmoil. It is of no doubt that our Indian society is passing through a cultural clash between Indian and western ethos in modern times. In this scenario, attempts have been continuously made by the families, laws and other agencies to provide freedom to personal liberty and to exercise the right to live an independent life whereby people can choose their spouse and other priorities in life.

To conclude, time has changed along with the forms of marriage. But marriage is still considered as a sacred bond in present society. This knotting process of two individuals not only involves the couple only but the two families of the bride and the bridegroom as well. Be it arrange marriage or love marriage, marriage is just an institution to fulfil some responsibilities towards each other, towards one's family and society at large. Therefore, love marriage vs. arranged marriage is just a question that prevails in the mind of people now and then who are either not satisfied with a relationship or are scared to live with an unknown partner for the rest of their life.

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