Research Paper

SOCIOLOGY

Hindu Marriage: A Study of Changes From Vedic Period To Modern Times

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ABSTRACT

The main thrust of this paper is to sociologically analyze Hindu Marriage from Vedic period to Modern times by focusing on the changes it has undergone in its traditional philosophy, customs, rites and rituals, age at marriage, mate selection, economic issues, relationships and roles, alternative arrangements to marriage and others with special reference to Gujarat society. The study is based on secondary sources of data such as books, journal articles, web sites, census etc. Content analysis is the research method used to study the data. The data is analyzed from postmodern perspective.

The main objectives of the study are:

• To understand the concept of Hindu Marriage from Vedic philosophy and traditions.

• To examine the various aspects of Hindu marriage.

• To analyze the changes the Hindu Marriage has undergone over a period of time.

• To ascertain the present scenario of Hindu Marriage in Indian society.

Hindus consider marriage as a sacrament rather than a mere socio-legal contract. It has undergone a wide variety of changes over a period of time. There is a wide gap between the traditional philosophy of marriage and the modern concept of marriage. In search of happiness or individuality some are trying to embrace alternative arrangements to marriage. It is time for sociologists to rethink and redefine marriage.

KEYWORDS : Vedic Period & Philosophy, Marriage, Alternative Marriages, Westernization, Modernization

INTRODUCTION

Marriage is a basic social institution. Since time immemorial, marriage has been the greatest and most important of all the social institutions in Hindu society. Scholars considered that the birth of human is the birth of marriage. Pandey (1949) marked that marriage has its source in the family rather than family in marriage itself. Marriage as an institution existed in rudimentary form among pre-civilized societies and it acquired the status of an institution when religion patronized and sanctioned it as a compulsory part of life, besides a legal sanctity. Individuals and groups consciously or unconsciously are maintaining their purity through the customs of marriage.

In the past, there was a stage where no concept of husband or wife existed (Chakraborti, 1999). In fact, Sternback (1941) speaks of the introduction of the system of marriage, first by capture and next by the purchase of women; after that an endogamy system was replaced by the exogamy. Promiscuity was another form of marriage that existed in the past. But, Meyer opines that there is nothing of promiscuity in Vedic Literature. However, due to transformation of society the collective forms of marriage were replaced by the individual (monogamous) marriage. Earlier, marriage by force took place all over the world, but with the rise of the concept of individualism and private ownership individual marriage system came into practice (Chakraborti, 1999 p.6). Therefore marriage grew up as an institution of civilized society.

The term 'Marriage' has been derived from merry (French) that means happiness and its equivalent in Hindustani is *'Shad'*, a Persian word. The Urdu word for marriage is *Shadi*. Westermarck defined marriage as a more or less durable connection between male or female, lasting beyond the mere act of propagation till death. Lundberg said that marriage consists of the rules and regulations which define the rights, duties and privileges of the husband and wife. According to Otto Larsen marriage is a contractual agreement which formalizes and stabilizes the social relationships which comprise the family. But, in Hindu society, marriage is viewed as a sacrament rather than a mere socio-legal contract. Usha Sharma (2005) said that marriage is a legally and socially sanctioned union between two opposite sexes.

Review of Literature

Basu (2001) studied the changing concept of Hindu Marriage. She stated that the traditional concept of marriage is now changed and Hindu marriage today has assumed more or less the nature of a contract for the mutual benefits of the parties concerned, duly aided by different legal provisions and reforms. Tripathi (2011) studied Vedic philosophy of marriage through modern influence. She concludes that due to rapid erosion and degradation of the norms and tenets of the marriage institution, the society is heading towards the total disintegration.

Data Analysis

To understand the concept of Hindu marriage from Vedic Philosophy and traditions

Marriage is a sacrament and it is a tie which can never be broken by anyone including death. It is a union of seven births. Therefore, it is sacred and indissoluble. Every Hindu is supposed to go through four ashrams. In general, all the ashrams are important for the development of an individual. But, the Grihasthasram has been glorified, not in terms of absolute superiority of other three ashrams, but in its significance for the social values (Manu Smriti- 6.89). The ultimate goal of marriage institution is to attain *Moksha* (salvation). But, it cannot be attained till a male progeny is born. The term *Putra* (son) in Sanskrit is interpreted as one who can rescue his own father from the hell. Ritually, a son is significant for a father to perform social duties and for other reasons also. He can free from *Pitru-rina* (debt towards forefathers) only when he himself has a son. The objects of marriage are mainly three –*dharma* (practice of religion), *Proja* (progeny) and *Rati* (sexual pleasure). According to Ramayana, wife was considered as half of the male, *dharmapatni,* a friend and adviser to be associated by the husband in all religious rites and ceremonies (Taittiriya Samhita, III, 1.2.57). According to Mahabharata, those who have wives can fulfill their due obligations in this world; those who have wives truly have a family life; those who have wives can be happy and lead a full life (Manu Smriti IX, 45-47). There are several reasons for considering the Hindu marriage as a sacred. Manu has said that husband/ wife should be faithful to each other and should always try to see that they do not get separated.

To examines the various aspects of traditional Hindu Marriage

Age at Marriage

In traditional society, guardian should give away his daughter in marriage before she attained her puberty. Vedas, Brahmins and *Kama-Sutra* believed that the bride should be younger than the bridegroom at the time of marriage. Brahmanism accepted pre-puberty marriage pattern and influenced the rest of the other castes groups in Hindu society.

Mate Selection

Mate selection is an essential process. Endogamy is one of the mate selection procedures where a family has to select a spouse for their daughter or son within the group or community. The purpose behind endogamy is to preserve marital adjustment easier. Exogamy marriages are prohibited in Hindu society. Cross cousin marriages are also preferred in Hindu society. The customary laws are supporting cross cousin marriage rather than religious sanctions.

Rituals and Rites

'Mandap Mahurah', 'Ganesha puja', 'tikka', 'chadi, 'mandva', 'Griha shanti', 'mameru', 'Pokavu', 'barraat', 'aarti', 'Kanya-Daan', 'Mangalpheras', 'Sapta Padi', 'Var Ghodyu Pokavanu Che' etc were and are some of the most important rituals and rites performed before, during and after marriage even in contemporary times although the time duration has been reduced.

To analyze the changes the Hindu Marriage has undergone over a period of time

Hindu marriage is a sacrament as well as a contract in modern society. The aims, forms, customs, and functions of Hindu marriage are changing in present times. Earlier, *dharma, artha, kama and moksha* were the prime aims of Hindu marriage. But today, in order of priority, with regard to the traditional aims have been reversed with sexual pleasure as prime priority followed by praja and *dharma*. Although, most of the marriages are performed by the sacred rites and rituals but significantly traditional philosophy of Hindu marriage are kept changing. The traditional concept of Hindu marriage is totally replaced by the individualist nature of society. Moreover, the modern objects of marriage are to fulfill their loneliness and personality, to bring division of labor, to support their ego, attain their common goals, legitimized their sexual relation and love. Hence, Hindu orthodox ideology, customs, attitude, behavior and acceptable social norms come in conflict with the new emerging values and beliefs of modern Hindu social life.

The modern form of Hindu marriage, mate selection process and age at marriage are result of modern legislation. The rules regard to Varna, castes, sub caste, endogamy and exogamy, *sapinda* and gotra are prohibited in modern society. Moreover, the attitude towards the cousin marriage is also changing. Mate selection process has been changed and traditional factors in mate selection process are no longer associated in arranged marriages. Moreover, urban Hindu society is turning towards modern sources of mate selection such are newspaper advertisement, family connections, matrimonial web sites, marriage bureaus, match makers, NGOs etc. In present times, family, parents and children are given an equal contribution to select a spouse. Society has learnt an art of spouse selection and understands the demands of modern times. Therefore, sometimes family insists their son or daughter to select a spouse based on a number of compatibility factors. In fact, parents as well as children prefer love cum arranged marriages.

Hindu society is dramatically changing due to cultural contacts, world culture, westernization and Americanization. In fact, people are moving from collectivism to individualism. General awareness about consequences of early marriage, educational commitments, family responsibilities, fulfillment of dreams, career and expectation of perfect life partner are responsible for increasing age at marriage. In fact, as a necessary pre-condition of marriage dowry has becomes a major social problem. Non- payments or deferred payment of dowry has resulted in broken marriages and bride burning. The various forms of marriages such as polygyny, polyandry and polygynandry were practiced in the past. After the Independence, the implementation of the Special Marriage Act, 1954 and the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955, prohibited polygamy and strictly enforced monogamy.

To ascertain the present scenario of Hindu marriage in Indan society

Changes in the form, object, and function are leading to other alternatives of marriage in modern society. Due to individualistic nature of society, people are becoming more conscious about their expectations and needs. All marriages cannot succeed, some end in marital disharmony. Modern society brings social change as well as other crucial threats for marriage institution such are increasing extra marital relations, various modern grounds of divorce, singlehood, living together and sexual alternatives. To protect human rights and to eradicate social evils Indian government has introduced various Acts and Amendments. The Child Marriage Restraint Act of 1930 was amended in 1978 and raised the minimum age at marriage for a boy to 21 and in case of girl 18 years. Under the Hindu Marriage Disabilities Removal Act, 1946, and Hindu Marriage Validity Act, 1949 Anuloma and Pratiloma marriages are permitted. The Special Marriage Act, 1954 repealed the Special Marriage Act, 1872. The Hindu Marriage Act, 1955 applies to whole India except Jammu and Kashmir. The word Hindu in the Act includes Sikhs, Janis, Buddhists, and Schedule Castes. The Dowry Act, 1961, prohibited dowry among the Hindus. The Widow Remarriage Act, 1856 permitted widows to remarry and right of Maintenance out of the estate of her husband. These crucial changes in the objects of marriage are the result of literacy rates, democratic ideas, secularism, western ideology, cultural contacts, industrialization, urbanization, modernization, technological advancement and globalization.

Conclusion

The institution of Hindu marriage mediates between individual and society. But, the traditional concept of Hindu marriage from Vedic period to present times has shown its different colors with different shades. In fact, these changes have been brought major changes such as hidden dowry practices, bride burning, disintegration of family, domestic violence, singlehood, role conflict in marriage and finally divorce. It is time for sociologists to redefine and relocate marriage as an institution in modern times.

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