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’. Westernmark 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, dharmapati, 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 Ka-
ma-Sutra believed that the bride should be younger than the bride-
groom 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 mar-
riages 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
pheras’, ‘Sapta Padi’, ‘Var Ghodyu Pokavanu Che’ etc were and are some of the most important rituals and rites performed before, dur-
ing and after marriage even in contemporary times although the time duration has been reduced.

To analyze the changes the Hindu Marriage has under-
gone 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 chang-
ing 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 sig-
ificantly 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, cus-
toms, 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 Var-
na, 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 so-
ciety 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, fami-
ly, 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 com-
patibility 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 re-
sponsibilities, 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 polygamyandry were prac-
ticed in the past. After the Independence, the implementation of the Special Marriage Act, 1954 and the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955, prohib-
ited polygamy and strictly enforced monogamy.