

Marriage In The Forms Of Ancient History

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Marriage has existed in all human societies , past and present . In the ancient India , marriage was considered a religious act and most important sacrament . In the ancient history modern according to Manu smriti there were 8 forms of marriages in ancient India :-

1. Bramha vivah
2. Daiva vivah
3. Arsha vivah
4. Prajapartya vivah
5. Gandharva vivah
6. Asura vivah
7. Rakshasa vivah
8. Pisaka vivah

The first four form of marriages were ancestral custom and were valid if approved by father . The rest of forms involved the father receiving money from the bridegroom .

Gandharva marriage was a love marriage where men and woman would fall in love and marry without their parents 'knowledge . This was not a dating process like in modern culture.

Marriage is union of two people who commit to loving and caring for each other. The first recorded evidence of marriage ceremonies date back to about 2350 bc. In mesopotamia . Over the next several hundred years of marriage became a widespread institution.

The India subcontinent has been home to a wide variety of marriages. Over the time from historical vedic religion to classical orthodox hinduism and eventually era of social reform and female emancipation marriage has changed and evolved in interesting ways . Some of the ancient marriage types are still prevalent while other types vanished or have got modernised with the strong wind of industrialisation , urbanialisation and globalization witnessed by India .

According to Manu smriti , the law of Manu or manav dharma shastra there are 8 main form of hindu marriage in ancient India namely Brahma vivah Daiva vivah Arsha vivah Prajapartya vivah Gandharva vivah Asura vivah Rakshasa vivah Pisaka vivah . Although not all eight marriage had religious sanction , It is said that in the ancient time , all these forms of marriages were observed among many communities of people . out of these eight different forms of marriage only first four were approved and encouraged in the society . The specific characteristics of these eight different forms of hindu marriage are as follows:

- Brahma marriage: In these types of marriage the girl's father himself invited a Veda learned and pious man and gave him his highly dressed and bejeweled daughter in the marriage solemnized by a brahmin.
- Daiva marriage: In these types of marriage ,the girl's father gifted her properly dressed and bejeweled daughter to a priest as dakshina (fee) for officiating Over a sacrifice .
- Arsha marriage: marriage in which the girl's father gave away his daughter , according to the rule , in exchange of a pair of cattle or two cows given by the bridegroom , for the fulfillment of scared laws .

- Prajapartya marriage: marriage in which the bridegroom was duly worshipped and married to the bride by her father with due honor and words of blessings may both of you perform together your duties . Besides this no marriage ceremonies were performed.
- Asura marriage: marriage in which the bridegroom received a maiden , after bestowing as much wealth as he afford to the kinsmen and to the bride herself according to his own will .
- Gandharva marriage: marriage in which there is voluntary union of a girl with a man in solitude When both of them were in love . In the this form of marriage neither the consent of the parents nor the rites of dowry was essential only the will of the marrying parties was given importance. This marriage was believed to spring form desire and had sex satisfaction as its chief purpose.
- Rakshasa marriage: It was a marriage by capture or abduction that is a without obtaining the consent of the girl or her parents. The maiden were captured or abducted from her home after her kinsmen have been slain or wounded and their house broken open .
- Pisaka marriage : It was marriage by seduction , stealing or fraud. The girl was sexually violated while she was asleep or intoxicated or unconscious or mentally distributed and later given her the social status of a wife .

Institution of marriage in ancient India.

It is held many scholars that the human race must be must be originally lived in a state of promiscuity , where individual marriage did not exist , where all the men in a horde or tribe has indiscriminate access to all the women and where the children born of these unions belongs to the community at large . A passage in the mahabharata describe in detail how such a state of things existed in Indian society till it was prohibited by a sage named shewtaketu who was shocked beyond measure to find his own mother going out with a stranger in the presence and with approval of his own father.

Marriage a divine sacrament

But during Rig vedic period the institution of marriage was strongly planted. According to the rig Veda the purpose of marriage was to enable a man by becoming a householder to perform sacrifice to the gods and to procreate sons. Marriage (vivah) was one of the scared sacraments which every individual had to undergo and was also the second stage , grihasth – ashrams (householder) among the four stages of life prescribed in the ashrama dharma. The term dharmpati used in the rig Vedic period designates the mistress as well as the master of the house that is both husband and wife .

In ancient India marriage was a medium for bringing together the two distinct halves of life man and woman. Husband and wife were not separate entities of capable of division ,but two halves constituting an entire , single or organic whole.

It was in their wholeness that prefect humanity could manifest itself. During those times the family rather than the individual was regarded as the social and political unit and hence Marriage was regarded as a sacrament.

According to ancient hindu marriage is not a temporary contract to serve the momentary physical demand or to enjoy good company for Some time and then to lapse at the slightest inconvenience.

It is a permanent union which stands various vicissitudes in life only to grow stronger and more stable.

The primary function of marriage was the continuity of the race through the procreation of children and to ensure transmission of the cultural heritage.

Marriage was regarded as a sacred religious union brought about by divine dispensation.

Criteria for selecting a bridegroom

Several factors like having intelligence good character, good health and wealth were taken into consideration while choosing a bridegroom. Also other aspects like a bridegroom being a celibate and having the support of the relatives and his friends were taken into account. Kaatyaanyana says that a bridegroom who is lunatic, guilty of grave sins, leprous, impotent, belonging to same gotra, bereft of eyesight or hearing an epileptic should be avoided. Mahabharata observes that friendship and marriage should take place between those alone whose wealth is similar and whose learning (in families) is of equal status, not between rich and poor.

Criteria for selecting a bride

Rules for the selection of the bride were far more elaborate than those for selecting a bridegroom though in some respects they are the same like the necessity of good family and absence of disease. Aasvalaayan gruhasutra says one should marry a girl who is endowed with intelligence, beauty, good health and possessing auspicious characteristics. Kamasutra recommends that the bride must be younger than the bridegroom by at least three years, virgin and of the same caste. An undesirable bride was one who had tawny (orange – brown or yellowish - brown colour) hair, excessive limb (such as a sixth finger or a deficient limb), who is hairless or very hairy, talkative, has a hoarse voice, very dwarfish or very tall, belonging to the same gotra as of the bridegroom and having a dimple on her cheeks when she laughed.

Manu, Manu Smriti and Yajnavalkyasmriti say that the girl to be chosen must not be brotherless. This was because during ancient times when a man had no son he would stipulate with the person marrying his daughter that the son born to her would be his (i.e. the girl's father's) son and would offer pindas as a son of maternal grandfather. The result would not be able to offer pindas to his father (biological father). Therefore brotherless maidens were not chosen as brides.

Tallying of horoscope

Tallying of horoscopes played no part in the settlement of marriage in ancient India.

The Grihyasutras and Dharmasutras nowhere suggest or recommend that horoscopes of the parties should be consulted before deciding their marriage. The reason was during those days the science of astrology was in its infancy and made its progress only during 400-900AD.

A reference to parents of brides consulting an astrologer for the marriage of their wards occurs perhaps for the first time in the 7th century work Dasakumarchaitra.

Custom of dowry

In prehistoric times women were regarded as chattel and so it was the bride's father and not the bridegroom's who was regarded as justified in demanding a payment at the time of marriage.

The bridegroom carried away the bride and deprived her family of her services and hence he could not have dreamt of demanding dowry or donation. Therefore dowry was unknown in ancient India.

Among rich and royal families gifts were used to be given to son-in-laws at the time of marriage. They were voluntarily given out of pure affection.

The dowry system is connected with the conception of marriages as dana or gift. A religious gift in kind is usually accompanied by a gift in cash or gold. So the gift of the bride also was accompanied by a small gift in cash or ornament. It is only in medieval times and in Rajputana that we find the dowry system assuming alarming proportions, however happened only in the case of royal and aristocratic families (13th century -14th century A.D.) but during the last 150 years the dowry system has assumed scandalous proportions.

Stridhan

The word Stridhan derived from Stri , woman and dhan ,property and means literally woman 's property. Stridhan consisted of movable property like utensils ,ornaments apparel that was given to the bride at the time of marriage. According to Manu and yajnavalkya, Stridhan usually consisted of gifts received from near relations at any time and from non relation at the time of marriage . By 1100 A.D. commentators like vijneshwara belonging to the mitakshara school began to plead that all properties acquired by a woman like property acquired by inheritance , partition etc. Should be considered as Stridhan. However, women were not allowed the right of disposal over this property and could only enjoy its income. The dayabagha school of Bengal did not accept this amipilfiction of Stridhan ,but it allowed women the right of disposal over Stridhan in the older and narrower sense of the term .

Marriageable Age

The age of marriage for both sexes varied considerably from age to age ,from province to province and from caste to caste. A boy was to marry after he finished his Vedic studies which varied from 12, 24,36 and 48 years or as much time as was necessary to master one Veda or a portion of it . Hence the earliest a boy could marry was at the age of 20 (Twelve years of study after his upanayana ceremony which took place at the age of eight).

Angiras says that the bride should be two, three or five years younger to the boy which means that the girls were married not before the age of fifteen . This was the trend during the Vedic age and continued till about 5th century B.C. the writers of dharmasutras who flourished from 400 B.C.-100A.D. began to advise that marriage of girls should not be delayed after their puberty.

Causes for lowering the marriageable age of girls .

- The Institution of jainism and buddhist and the instances of Several grown up maidens taking holy orders against their parents desire and some of them later falling from their spiritual ideal must have strengthened the view of those who favoured marriages at about the time of puberty .
If a girl is married before her personality is fully developed there was no danger of her joining a nunnery . we may therefore conclude that during the period 400 B.C -100 A.D. the marriageable age was begin gradually lowered and the tendency on whole was to marry girl at about the time of puberty.
- From about 200 A.D . Pre puberty marriages became the order of the day. Yajnavalkya insists that girls should be married before their puberty. The analogy of upanayana was also utilized for lowering the marriage age for girls.
Smriti writers of the period 500-1000 A.D. began to encourage the marriage of girls at the age of eight as it was the same age for boys to undergo upanayana ceremony.

Though during the Vedic period girls like boys used to undergo the upanayana ceremony ,over the period of time it was completely given up and marriage was prescribed as a substitute for upanayana for girls.

- The parents of lower section of the society where the custom of bride price was prevailing were the first to take advantage of lowering the marriageable age of girls for their own selfish ends. Their example Was followed by other classes.
- The ramification of the caste system into hundreds of sub castes and the prohibition of inter caste marriages among them from about eighth and ninth century A.D. further accentuated the evil of child marriage.
The section of a suitable bridegroom was becoming progressively more difficult and parents did not like to take a rise of losing a good bridegroom at hand by postponing the marriage to a later date.

- Sati system which had become popular also helped in this cause . If the father died and the mother followed him there would be at least a father – in – law to look after the young orphans if they were already married.
- Joint family system and the satisfactory economic condition in the country favoured early marriage and the young couples were taken care of . It was also presumed that the girl could adjust with the family members of her husband and no chance of scandals would arise if married before puberty.

Inter caste marriages .

All the writers on dharmashtra start with the proportion viz. that the four castes Brahman , Kshatriya , Vishaya and shudra are arranged in descending scale of social status and that marriage is or was permissible between a male of a higher caste with a woman of a lower caste.

But the union of a woman of a higher caste with a male of lower caste was reprehensive was not permitted.

