



Traditional Marriage Customs in Rajasthan, India: A Study of Kayad Village of Ajmer District

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Abstract

The present research study was conducted in Kayad village of Ajmer district of Rajasthan in the year 2013. This research article focused on the traditional marriage customs in kayad village and discusses various types of marriages, attitudes, perception about marriage in Rajasthan. Data were collected by personal interview and group discussions from each family of both Hindu and Muslims cast residing in the village and have different marriage rules, regulation and customs on the basis of their religion. In the study, observed a change in the stereotype thoughts of people that they prefer education instead of proposing early marriage for girls and now priorities of both bridegrooms and brides are getting shared and people are favour for intellectual and emotional relationships rather than lifetime compromises of marriage in kayad village.

Keywords: Marriage customs, hindu religion, muslims, arrange marriage and kayad village.

Introduction

Marriage is an important event of one's life. The rules, regulations and culture involved in a marriage vary according to their social status. The deity of fire has described the various forms of marriage in Agni Purana which are based on the social status of an individual. The process of marriage is a very good indicator of social trends. Marriage defined in many ways such as an institution, a gamble, the bedrock of procreation of family life, a life sentence or a heaven-programmed union is an ideal medium to gauge the value shifts in a society¹. In the 1950s' (i.e. before pre independence era), some of the important considerations in arranged marriage in India were that the girl and the boy should be of same caste, religion and the family of the bridegroom should be economically rich enough to support the bride. Arrange marriages are becoming flexible, adaptable based on contemporary, practical and realistic factors¹. A woman can be given away only once in marriage. The Purana mentions that a woman can marry for a second time only under certain conditions i.e. moral degradation of husband, his death, renunciation by him of all worldly pursuits, his resorting to a monastery. A widow woman can marry with the brother of his husband or an alternative she may marry anyone of her choice. The deity of fire also mentioned in his description of the various rites involved in marriage that a man can not marry with a woman of same *Gotra* (family lineage) or from a family acknowledging the leadership of the same Rishi as his own. According to the holy texts there are eight different types of Hindu marriages prevailed in ancient India and all have religious procedures. Among all, the last four types of marriages (Gandharva Marriage, Asura Marriage, Rakshasa Marriage, Paishacha Marriage) are not religiously defined and most of the

times were condemned, while the remaining types of marriages (Brahma Marriage, Daiva Marriage, Arsha Marriage, Prajapatya Marriage) are not condemned. In India, the Hindu wedding takes place inside a canopy called a mandap. The bride is necessarily painted in elaborate mehndi (henna) designs covering her hands and feet before the ceremonies begin. The ceremonies like Ganesh Poojan, Arrival of the Vara Yatra, Grahshanti, Kanyadan, Hastamilap, Wedding Ceremony, Dhruvadarshan, bidhai and vadhupravesha are most popular ceremonies in the Hindu marriages and meant to honor the love couple's and ensure the success of their marriage by invoking the blessings of deities and joining the families in celebration. It is the bride's father who promises his daughter's hand to the groom, a ritual known as the *Kanya-dhan*.

In India, Muslims generally follow similar marriage customs those are practiced by Muslims of the Middle East, which are based on islamic convention. These Islamic traditions were first handed down to medieval Indians by propagators of the Islamic religion that involved sultans and Moghul rulers at the time². On the evening of the wedding day, a bridal service known as the henna ceremony is held at the bride's home which is sometimes done before two days of actual wedding. During this bridal preparation ritual, both turmeric paste and mehndi is placed on the bride's skin by *mehndiwali* (a female relative) for the purpose of improving and brightening her complexion. In India, muslim marriage ceremony is also preceded by a marriage convoy which known as the groom's *baraat* and from this convoy arrives the groom, who will share a sherbet drink with a brother of bride at the marriage place ceremony which could either be at the house of either groom or bride. The drinking event happens as the sister of the bride does some tomfooleries

and playfully striking guests using flower-filled cudgels. The marriage ceremony of Muslims known as *Nikaah* is officiated by the Maulvi or Qazi along with the Walises (fathers) of both groom and bride and the bride's legal representative. The *Nikaahnama* (marriage contract document) is signed not only by the couple but also by the Walises and the Maulvi in the wedding ceremony and after the *Nikaah*, the married couple can join each other to be seated among commonly separately seated male and female attendees.

Research Methodology

The present study was undertaken in Kayad village of Ajmer District in Rajasthan during the year 2013. The Hindu (Gurjar) and Muslim religion are residing in Kayad village. A sample of 10 families, 5 families from each religion was selected randomly for studying the tradition of marriage customs of Kayad village. Data were collected by personal interview and group discussion with each family. For this study, the data was separately collected for both prospective bridegrooms and brides to fulfil the objective of the study. The collected data were based on age and education of bridegrooms and brides and tradition of marriage culture in Kayad village. Only first marriage is considered in our study. The study have enriched in discussions on the marriage culture, wedding culture variation, the gradual changes in mate selection, importance of marriage in Kayad village and ultimately the shift of the declared and demanded side of the arranged marriage in the last three decades in the marriage customs.

Results and Discussion

The people of Kayad village of Ajmer district was adopted arrange marriage in Gurjar as well as in Muslim community. Generally in the Indian community, arranged marriages serve six most important functions: i. It helps to maintain the social stratification in the society. ii. It gives parents control over family members. iii. It enhances the chances to preserve the ancestral lineage. iv. It strengthen the kinship group. v. It allows the consolidation and extension of family property. vi. It enables the elders to preserve the principle of endogamy. The selection in marriage in Indian context can be viewed from three points namely the field of selection, the party of selection and the criteria of selection³. Ninety-five percent of all current Indian marriages are arranged, either through child marriages or family arrangement. The Hindu Marriages Validity Act (1949) said that 'no marriage between Hindus shall be deemed to be invalid or even to have been invalid by reason only of the fact that the parties belonged to different religious, castes, sub-castes. However, Hindus are still heavily caste minded though situation is gradually changing about stereotype thinking. Patil's study in the city of Mumbai (1980) showed that the trend of caste endogamy is not only changing in terms of generation but also sweeping over those in the Hindu community who are merely matriculated. An important aspect of Kayad village marriage is low age marriages of females and though scrutinizing

matrimonial data is impossible to capture the average age of marriage of the Kayad villagers, mainly in Gurjar cast. Main reason of Gurjar cast people get married at low age was low sex ratio. As the legal age at marriage for females in India is 18 years, none of the advertisers would dare to search groom for his daughter before she is 18 years old. International conventions do not clearly state that when a girl is too young to marriage. However, few international bodies such as the UNICEF and the United Nations Population Fund (UNPF) have suggested 18 years age for girls as minimum age of marriage. The early marriage system is a barrier in fulfilment of the objectives of the Millennium Development Goals⁴. Early marriage of girls and boys impairs the realization and enjoyment of virtually every one of their rights. The imposition of a marriage partner on children or adolescents who are in no way ready for married life, and whose marriage will deprive their freedom, education, opportunity for personal development, and other rights⁵. The National Population Policy of India (2000) reemphasized that more than 50% Indian girls marry below age 18 despite legislative efforts, in the nooks and corners of India. Higher income, urban stay, better education helps to pull up female age at marriage. Income of husband sometimes has positive effect on wife's age at marriage⁶. Till 1960, the rate of increase in age was gradual expect the trough of 1930 (when India experienced an economic slog along with political uncertainties besides the enactment of child marriage restraint act which was enforced in 1930.) and after 1960, the rate become faster. As recorded in 1931 Census of India, the proportion of very young married women was unusually high because of the rush by parents during the late 1920s to marry off their daughter before passing of the child marriage act which attempted to prevent girls marrying before the age of 14 and men before 18 years⁷. The high rise in the age at marriage was observed during 1960s and in later decades. Using different indicators of levels of nuptiality at national level, found a shift in the age at first marriage of females and the reduction in the incidence of marrying at early ages (less than 18 years) although a significant proportion still gets married in their teenage especially in rural areas of less developed states⁸.

The present study revealed that religion, education, status of women and employment are playing significant role in increasing the age at marriage in the kayad village. The maximum people of the Kayad village get married before completed secondary education. Only 20% people were graduated before marriage. It is generally believed that parental control leads to early marriage. Where parental influence is low and daughters have the freedom of choice regarding mate selection, are found to marry one year later than those strictly controlled by family, as revealed in a study based on four Asian countries. On the contrary, Davis and Blake opined that these two variables are not at all associated negatively⁹. For instance, in Japan and parts of Europe, parental control was associated with late marriage. Age at marriage is basically influenced by a series of interrelated social, economic and women's status factors. The effect of economic factors on marriage age differs

in the Western and Eastern world and wife's age at marriage was found to be highest in the upper class followed by middle and lower class in India.

Changes in the Attitude of Indians about Marriage

In ancient India, marriage was considered necessary for the purpose of 'Moksha' (salvation) and man treated women as slaves due to complete economic dependence of women on men. Later, the stereotype thinking of people were changed gradually with the advent of women education and gradual improvement of women's status in the twentieth century, many women started feeling that marriage was not a necessity especially if married women were treated as slaves, they should have the right to end the relationship¹⁰. One research study in 1930 reveals that about 50 percent of unmarried girls declared their wish to remain unmarried due to the fear of physical, mental and socially exploitation. While another study in 1946 showed that the figure has come down to 46 percent due to the wish of marriage life. This very change is for the fact that marriage is not always an economic necessity but an emotional need as well. It is necessary to pointed out that 93 percent unmarried women felt marriage as a necessity and they wished to get marry to a man of their choice.

Recent Shifts in Parameters of the Arranged Marriage in India:

Since the beginning of fourth century, India has a rich tradition of arrange marriages that have been practiced mainly to establish a sacred bond between two families¹¹. Change in attitude is a maze of flexible, dynamic and modifiable components; hence it is extremely difficult to separate and evaluate the impact of any single factor on the thinking of man about arrange marriage. The set of social, economical, political, cultural and legal forces influence the thinking of the young heart that consequentially affects their behaviour. However, the effect of all these gamut of factors are so intertwined that it is next to impossible to separate out the effect of each of the factors and attempting to do so is rather unscientific in social science research. The Hindu marriage act (1955) brought a revolution for girls by fixing the minimum age of marriage at 15 years, by providing the provision of divorce, separation and giving permit to inter-caste marriage of their choice. Women's education and economical self dependency subsequently brought tremendous change in the attitude of people towards marriage. Later, the fixation of legal marriage age at 18 years and provision of legal rights to property for women also added momentum in this shift. Again, the last decade of the twentieth century visualized a distinctive shift from a closed to an open economy that might have brought about social ramifications in terms of behavioural patterns and preference choice for the Indian arranged marriage market. It is worthwhile to briefly point out the findings of a recently research study which is purely based on content analysis of 200 matrimonial advertisements is as follows: i. The parents of the bride demanded employment, fair complexion, respectable family, independent living and low family liabilities of the boy while the parents of the groom demanded fair complexion, family

status, aptitude for household activities and good moral character of the girl. The conditions of arrange marriage is totally changed comparison than before independence era due to women education and economically self dependency. ii. There is a clear cut understanding about the desirability and thinking of boys with respect to matrimonial matches. For instance, an IAS, doctor and engineer boy is more readily solicited than from other services. iii. The preferred age gap (actual and the desired) is more in the north Indian advertising than the south Indian people. iv. The particulars of 'horoscope' and 'zodiac signs' are more desired by the southern than the northern people and females desire these particulars much more than the males. Males are less prone to cast affiliation, thus men is a greater rebel than the female. Moreover, the northerners are more 'law breaking' in their attitude than their counterparts from the south Indians.

Conclusion

The marriage is a very important and memorable event of one's life. India is a country of variations in language, caste, creeds, and culture especially in social customs of marriage. In this research article, different marriage customs prevailed in kayad village were analysed to study the traditional customs, changes in attitude of people about arrange marriage, shift in the parameters of arrange marriage in the kayad village as well as India. The generalizations about arrange marriage based on pre marriage advertisements alone has its own limitations and one ideally needs to look at the post marriage scenario as well to understand the gaps exist between the demand and supply tension to prove any hypothesis surrounding this social transformation. Besides, in this age of information, communication and entertainment (ICE), the role and efficiency of other personalized interacting mediums in fostering human bonding are equally significant. The present study suggests a welcome change from the stereotype thoughts of people proposing child marriage for girls in favour of education and cultured grooming and other reason may be a change in the perception of having a minimum age gap between the partners, which was earlier practiced quite stringently. One more encouraging change observed in our analysis is that the people are specifying their own caste; there is a significant decrease in the preference for the same caste. A clear cut trend is observed towards professional education and training between both sexes in the declared parameters a fall out of the globalization process. While at the same time the options in demanded parameters are widening or remaining open ended than ever before. The empowered and employed women are strongly highlighting their working status in search marriage relations. This could be attributed to three possible causes firstly as a statement of their economic self sufficiency, second, to assert the marketability of their qualification, and third, an indirect hint of their desire to hold on to their job even after marriage. Today's prospective bridegrooms prefer well educated life partners than conventional homely housewives of the yesteryears. To sum up the study, one can conclude that the Indian societies are

changing, preferences are becoming more flexible, gender equations are becoming more equitable and perhaps there is an emergence of a general trend in the attitude among the youths to recognize opposite sexes as equal partners in life. Now, the priorities are getting shared and people are looking for intellectual and emotional relationships rather than lifetime compromises.

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