

Vol 6 Issue 7 April 2017

ISSN No : 2249-894X

*Monthly Multidisciplinary
Research Journal*

*Review Of
Research Journal*

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RNI MAHMUL/2011/38595

ISSN No.2249-894X

Review Of Research Journal is a multidisciplinary research journal, published monthly in English, Hindi & Marathi Language. All research papers submitted to the journal will be double - blind peer reviewed referred by members of the editorial Board readers will include investigator in universities, research institutes government and industry with research interest in the general subjects.

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MARRIAGE CEREMONIES DURING MUGHAL PERIOD

Dr. Chandravan Naik
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ABSTRACT

Vivaha is the most important of all the Hindu samskaras. For several reasons marriage was held in esteem by ancient people. Hindus in Mughal days, too, regarded it as "one of the greatest felicities of human life." Marriage was the rule and the few who turned their face from it from pious motives were highly respected.

KEYWORDS: ancient people , Marriage Ceremonies , Mughal Period.

EARLY MARRIAGES

Early marriages were no doubt in vogue in those days. Socio-politic and religious circumstances compelled a father to have his daughter married as early as possible. The anxiety of a Brahman general of the Peshwa who could not get his daughter married at the age of 9 may well be imagined: "If the marriage is postponed to the next year," he writes from the battle-field, "the bride would be as old as 10. It will be a veritable calamity and scandal."

The assertion of European travellers like Pelsaert, Mandleslo, Thevenot and others that the barbarians would marry their children in teens may further corroborate it. Gandharb Sen, the Raja of Sangaldip, according to Jayasi, made preparations for the marriage of his daughter at the age of 2." But Varadraja, a pupil of Bhattoji Dikshit, considered it an evil practice among the Southerners to marry a daughter before she had attained the age of four. An enlightened king like Akbar was fully conscious of the dangers inherent in such early marriages and issued orders that the boys were not to marry before the age of 16 nor girls before 14. It was the duty of the Kotwal to verify and note down the ages of the couple before giving his consent to the marriage. It is interesting to note, however, that the Mughal princes were married when fairly grown up.

INTERCASTE MARRIAGES

Intercaste marriages were out of fashion. In addition to the consideration of varna, the particular family to be related was thoroughly examined. The reason for this, as Abul Fazl asserts, was the desire for best progeny for which physically, mentally and morally fit matches were necessary as the children inherit the good or bad qualities of their parents. The curious reader may refer to the Ain for details regarding caste restriction.



MARRIAGE AMONG MUHAMMADANS

No such restrictions exist among Muhammadans. Barring a few close relations such as mother, grandmother, sister, niece, aunt etc., they have complete freedom of choice. But in spite of this, it is to be regretted, marriages between Shias and Sunnis, Turks and Indians were very rare. Mughals, too, maintained their distinction. Siadat Khan, a noble of Aurangzeb's reign refused to marry a daughter of the Shia courtier, Ruhullah Khan.

Marriages between near relations were common among Muhammadans. Akbar, however, disliked this custom and though it highly improper to get into matrimonial alliance with near and dear ones. Abul Fazl commends it in certain circumstances when it is to be regarded as a "slight evil for a great good." Among Hindus it was thought improper for a younger brother or sister to marry so long as the elder was unmarried. Some Maharashtrians, however, did indulge in it for practical convenience.

AGE OF HUSBAND AND WIFE

Hindus followed Manu's edict that a bridegroom should be older than his bride. There was no such restriction in Muhammadan law. The evil spread so much that Akbar had to issue strict orders declaring such marriages illegal. He further laid it down that if a woman happened to be older by 12 years than her husband, the marriage should be considered as illegal and annulled.

Widow marriages were not looked with favour in Hindu society. So the difference in age between a husband and wife became enormous when an old widower had no other choice than either to marry a girl of tender years or not to marry at all.

NUMBER OF WIVES

Monogamy was the rule among the generality of the Hindu, who "would take to a second wife only if the first wife is sick or proves barren or if the children die." Abdul Fazl and Badauni, besides several European travellers, testify to it. Polygamy was, however, not unknown. Princes and the richer classes of men did indulge in it. But, as Mukundram notes, public opinion did not look upon it with favour.

NEGOTIATIONS OF MARRIAGES

The selection of a match was left solely to the discretion of the parents. The boy had little say while the girl, with the exception of upper class Rajput virgins, had none at all. Usually there were Purohitanis or female match-makers who knew of "all eligible parties and suitable matches" and could suggest many for selection.

EXPENSIVE WEDDINGS

Marriage has always been an expensive affair in India. Hedges found the Muhammadan weddings very magnificent and expensive. Grose, a later 18th century traveller, writes about the Indians' lavish expenditure on feasting, ornaments on their horses, processions, music, dancing girls, fireworks, etc., A Hindu of ordinary means, according to Bocarro, a 17th century traveller to Sind, would spend four or five thousand rupees on a marriage.

HINDU MARRIAGE RITUALS

The Procession: It is difficult to give a comprehensive description of the marriage ceremonies among Hindus which differ from caste to caste, from tribe to tribe and from province to province. But religious and social conservatism is so strong in India that the outlines of the Samskaras, as Abul Fazl notes, are observed in much the same manner everywhere as in Vedic times. Abul Fazl refers to 8 forms of marriages recognized by the Smritis but Brahmya form seems to have been the most in vogue.

The Nuptial: After such preliminary ceremonies as presentation of garments for the bride, etc, the principal marriage rituals commenced at a fixed hour in the booth where the pair had been brought and seated on a raised platform. A fairly comprehensive account of the marriage rituals may be found in the Padumavat, Ram Charit Manas and Sur Sagar. The narrations of the European travellers, usually based on hearsay, are not

reliable.

Gifts and Presents: Reference may be made here to another ceremony called tamol in which presents are offered in cash, gold, clothes by bride's father to the bridegroom and some of his relatives at a joint meeting of the two parties. As a gesture of goodwill to his Hindu subjects Akbar is said to have ordained that the village officials should present two narials (coconuts) one on their own behalf and the other on behalf of the Mughal Emperor to the parties.

MUHAMMADAN WEDDINGS

Muhammadan weddings have been described at some length by the European travellers Pelsaert, Thevenot and Manucci. Scattered references to the marriages of the princes are also available in the Persian chronicles of the period. The marriage celebration which, according to Pelsaert, lasted from three to four days, began with the sending of sachaq (four precious gifts usually along with the red dye) for the bride. Fruits and sweetmeats arranged in beautiful trays together with some cash were also sent. Rupees fifty thousand were sent by Jahangir as sachaq on the marriage of Khurram with the daughter of Muzaffar Husain.

Dowry

Dowry system was rather rigorously observed in Mughal days. Several European travelers have referred to this custom which was harsh to the poor who found it difficult to get their daughters married on account of their inability to pay handsome dowries. Sometimes a poor father had not the means to procure even a wedding outfit for his daughter. Tukaram could get her daughters married only through the contribution of the villagers.

CONCLUSION ;

From the given article we can understand about the marriage ceremonies in the olden time. It is said that Vivaha is the most important of all the Hindu samskaras. In those times, the children were married to each other at a very young age. Intercaste marriages were very rare at that time. But, no such restrictions existed among the Muhammadans. Also, marriages between Shias and Sunnis, Turks and Indians were very rare. The Hindus followed Manu's edict that a bridegroom should be older than his bride but, there was no such restriction in Muhammadan law. In Hindus, according to the Monogamy rule anyone would take to a second wife if the first wife is sick or proves barren or if the children die. We can also see that marriage has always been an expensive affair in India. In Hindu marriage rituals there were Processions, Nuptials, Gifts and Presents. The marriage ceremony in Muhammadan lasted from three to four days. Dowry system was rigorously observed in Mughal days.

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