The Changing Scenario of Marriage in India : A Sociological Analysis

*Dr. Priyanka N. Ruwali

Social change is a natural phenomenon. New conditions emerge and to meet new challenges a society adopts, adjust and change. After 67 years of independence, we cannot expect Indian society to remain static and completely traditional. Among the institutions that have shaped human civilization, marriage and family occupies a vital position. These together not only form the cradle of our future society, but also the hub of social life for the people. Like other institutions of the society, marriage also has been undergoing a gradual transformation and adjustment in different situations and epochs of history. The story of change in modern India begins particularly, with the advent of British colonial rule. Later on the advent of Western education, the process of urbanization, modernization and industrialization accelerated these changes. The rural and normative guidelines regulating marriage are also bound to change to meet new demands and expectations. Simultaneously many factors- legalistic, political, socio-economic and cultural also have cumulative impact upon the institution of marriage of urban family. The present study aims at knowing the continuity and change in marriage in urban society of India. The present study is an attempt to understand and analyze the impact of urbanization on marriage. The study focuses on the process of changes, which are taking place in sacramental Hindu marriage system. This is a secondary data base study.

Marriage is conceived differently by social scientists in different fields while the popular concept of marriage is that it is a union between a man and a woman. Anthropologists like Lowie, Murdock and Westermark emphasize on social sanction in the union and how it is accomplished by different rituals and ceremonies. Sociologists like Blood, Lantz and Snyder, Bowman, Baber Burgess etc, view it as a system of roles and as involving primary relationships. Indologists look upon Hindu marriage as a *sanskara* or a *dharma.* The generally acceptable definition among British social anthropologists was proposed in a volume entitled 'notes and queries in anthropology' according which "Marriage is a union between a man and a woman such that children born to the woman are the recognized legitimate offsprings of both partners".[1] the definition of marriage proposed by Westermark, Malinowski and Red-cliff Brown centre on 'The principle of legitimacy'. [2]Red-cliff Brown writes: "Marriage is a social arrangement by which a child is given a legitimate position in the society, determined by parenthood in the social sense". [3]Westermark defines marriage as "a relation of one or more men to one or more women which is recognised by custom or law; and involves certain rights and duties both in the case of the parties entering the union and in the case of the children born of it". According to him marriage is "more or less durable connection between male and female, lasting beyond the mere act of propagation till after the birth of offspring". [4]Gough made a brave attempt to put forward her own definition of marriage taking into account a wide diversity of different cultural patterns. To her "Marriage is a relationship established between a woman and one or more other persons, which provides that a child born to the woman under circumstances not prohibited by the rules of the relationship, is accorded full birth-status rights common to normal members of his society or social stratum". [5]Rivere proposes that marriage be studied as, "one of the socially approved and recognized relationship between the conceptual role of male and females. This relationship will reflect aspects of the particular society's conventional ideas about the two categories and it will be possible to define it by opposing it to other possible male-female relationships which exist in the society". G.P. Murdock has suggested that marriage exists only when the economic and the sexual functions are united into one relationship. In all societies said [6]Murdock, "Marriage involves residential co-habitation and in all of them it forms the basis of the nuclear family". The social anthropologists of the western societies have highlighted the importance of personal relationship between man and woman in the capacity of husband

*Assistant Professor, Deptt. Of Sociology, DSB Campus Kumaun University Nainital, email: krisnakiran14@gmail.com

and wife. It is because of the fact that greater importance is given to individual in these societies. In the Indian society, on the other hand greater importance is given to religious and socio-cultural obligations, and individuals' personal happiness or his/her personal liking and disliking get least importance. Traditional Hindu marriage is viewed as a sacrament as discussed by Prabhu (1961), Kapadia (1966), Chatterjee (1972) and Shastri (1972). [7]P.N. Prabhu on the basis of ancient Hindu literature says, "Among the Hindus' *vivah* is generally considered as obligatory for every person, because in the first place, the birth of a son is said to enable one to obtain *moksha* i.e. the ultimate aim of Hindu life". [8]Manu considers marriage as a social institution for the regulation of proper relations between the sexes. [9]Kapadia considers Hindu marriage a sacrament in the sense that it is irrevocable and indissoluble. According to the traditional Hindu concept of marriage, Kapadia was of the opinion that marriage is a social duty towards the family and the community, and there was little idea of individual interest. The traditional Hindu concept of marriage enables one to fulfil *dharma* (socio-cultural and spiritual obligations towards the family, community and society), *praja* (progeny as social obligation towards society) and *rati* (pleasure as individual sexual gratification).

Marriage being mainly performed for *dharmna* and not for pleasure, it was considered a sacrament among Hindus. Several reasons may be given for considering the Hindu marriage sacred: (i) *dharma* (fulfilment of religious duties) was the highest aim of marriage; (ii) performance of the religious ceremony included certain rights like *havan, kanyadan, panigrahan, saptapadi,* etc., which being based on the sacred formula, were considered sacred; (iii) the rights were performed before *agni* (the most sacred God) by reciting *mantras* (passages) from Vedas (the most sacred scriptures) by a Brahmin (the most sacred person on earth); (iv) the union was considered indissoluble and irrevocable and husband and wife were bound to each other not only until death but even after the death; (v) though a man performed several sacraments during the course of his life, a woman performed only one sacrament of marriage in her life, hence it's greatest importance for her; (vi) emphasis was on chastity of a woman and the faithfulness of a man; and (vii) marriage was considered to be a 'social duty' towards the family and the community and there was little idea of individual interest and aspiration. Hindu marriage is not only a sexual contact, a pattern of marriage like in other societies, but it is a religious *sanskara* essential for each Hindu. According to the sacramental concept of Hindu marriage, the principle of familism is supreme and primary and must be followed while the individuals' interest, needs and happiness are considered secondary to the interest of the family and community as a whole. [10]Irawati Karve also observed the same "In India marriage is a sacrament and no normal man or woman must die without receiving this sacrament" and "for this reason, Hindu parents have always considered the marriage of their children one of their most sacred duties". This Hindu attitude towards marriage has been from the ancient *vedic* times when it was regarded as a social and religious duty and it is looked upon as a sacrament even today. In this way, Hindu marriage can be defined as a religious sacrament, in which a man and woman are bound in permanent relationship for the physical, social and spiritual purposes of *dharma*, procreation and sexual pleasure. [11]In ancient texts, the union of male and female have been emphasized through several myths and symbols. The marriage which institutionalized this union was considered as a social obligation and a medium to attain *moksha.* [12]In vedic period it was regarded as a sacrifice, and unless one entered into married life he was supposed to be "one without sacrifice", a contemptuous remark for Vedic Hindus. [13]Manu points out that "to be mothers were women created and to be fathers men; the Vedas ordain that *dharma* must be practised by man together with his wife. In the Hindu society in the early period, eight modes of acquiring a wife were referred to, of which four were considered proper and desirable (*dharmya*) which had the approval of the father/family, and four were regarded as undesirable (*adharmya*) which did not have the approval of the father. The proper marriages recognised by the Smritis were *Brahma, Daiva, Arsha, and Prajapatya* while the four undesirable marriages were *Asura, Gandharva, Rakshasa, and Paishacha.* The field of marriage among the Hindus is restricted by endogamous and exogamous rules. The endogamous rule of Hindu marriage allows a person to marry only within caste. It does not talk of intercaste marriage on the other hand the rule of exogamy prescribes that a person cannot marry within his own *gotra, pravar* and *sapinda.* The gotra exogamy

prohibits marriage between members of the same gotra; pravar exogamy prohibits marriage between members of the same praver and the sapind exogamy prohibits marriage between persons related to each other within certain generations on the father's and mother's side. In vedic period the bride and the groom were grown up persons, qualified to give consent, but later on the marriageable age of the bride fell lower and lower in the *dharma shashtra* period. These *dharma sutras* prescribed that a girl should be married before she attains her puberty. The later *smritis* presents five categories of marriageable girls, namely *nagnika* (explained as naked), *gauri* (eight years old), *rohini* (nine years old), *kanya* (ten years old) and the *rajaswala* (one who has reached on puberty) and among these *nagnika* was regarded as the best for marriages. [14]P.H. Prabhu writes, "Most particular care, however, has to be taken to perform the vivah of maidens as soon as they attain the marriageable age. A girl who continues to stay in her father's home more than three years after attaining puberty is called a *vrishala* or a *shudra* i.e. a very low type, and the father or other guardians of such a girl who is not careful enough to give her in marriage in proper time is said to be incurring a great sin".

During the last few decades the idea of marriage as a sacrament has weaken and the trend of the "personal concept of marriage" is gaining ground. Young people today marry not for performing religious duties but for companionship, and the marital relations are no longer suppose to be unbreakable, as divorce is socially and legally permissible. A democratic country, modern India, has been affected in different aspects, through the process of industrialization and marriage is one among them though not with a revolutionary change. Traditional India, as has been stated stressed over child marriage with certain limitations, while today parents first provides them education knowing it as essential and then for a suitable spouse the search starts. Traditional pattern of marriage, laid down by dhrmashashtra, followed the restrictions firmly, and people did not allow their children to go against these rules, regulations and limitations. Modern trend has also affected marriage pattern [15]"but it is difficult for them (Hindu parents) to accept the new marriage patterns, which are more appropriate for an industrial than an agricultural society, such as: the right of men and women to chose their own mates the new emphasis on romantic love, and perhaps most difficult of all, the breaking down of cast endogamy". The number of such people who believe in the concept that marriage is a sacrament solemnized primarily for the fulfilment of one's religious and social duties and for the good of the family is decreasing on the other hand, the number of such people who believe that marriage is a social contract which is entered into primarily for the good of the individual and for his or her personal happiness and satisfaction is found to be increasing. This trend of emphasizing the "personal concept of marriage" and weakening the idea of sacrament started from the third decade of the 20th century as is revealed by the studies carried out at that time and is gaining ground among the urban families [16](Merchant).

[17]In Merchant's study, on an average, the young educated woman favoured marriage at the age of 19.7 years. in 1959, during the first phase of the author's study- the majority of the educated working women thought that the most suitable age for a girl to get married was between 20 or 24 years, whereas- the second phase of the same study the corresponding figures were 18 and 22. [18]Ross (1961) found that in her sample, consisting primarily of the educated Brahmin families living in Bangalore, none of the unmarried women wanted to be married before the age of nineteen. There was a direct relationship in [19]Gore's study between the education of the respondent and the age of marriage given for boys and girls- the more educated respondents tended to suggest higher ages. [20]The university students in Matthew's study regarded any age between 22 and 24 as the most suitable for a woman to marry. [21]Ghurye had suggested that the average age of female at marriage should be about 22 years and in the case of male, it should not be above 25 years. the young educated urban women's expectations from marriage are gaining new dimensions more of these women now expect marriage to meet, not only their basic needs, but also all the other needs of their lives- resolution of their psychological and emotional problems, possession, of husbands, home, and children, companionship, love, sentiments, interests, values, understanding, social life and intellectual. Expectations of satisfaction of their individual needs and of personal happiness from marriage are mounting. Another indication of their multiple expectations from marriage is seen in the analysis of their various desires and aspirations with regard

to the type of husband they would like to have. More and more educated women want to have a mate who is economically well placed, educated, intelligent, liberal, affectionate and understanding.

According to the traditional Hindu concept, marriage was an alliance between two families rather than two young people, entered into primarily for the welfare of the family. As such, in traditional Hindu families, marriages of children were arranged by their parents who were morally obliged to find mates for their children who in turn were obliged to accept their parents' choice. Since marriage was arranged by the families, without or with merely formal consent of the prospective mates, and since their individual interests were subordinate to the family ends, love was not a necessary basis for mate selection. Love between husband and wife was supposed to be the result of marriage rather than a prelude to it. There was hardly any freedom of choice in the selection of mates. Now the attitude begins to change with regard to the type of marriage and the procedure of mate selection. [22]Yogendra Singh has indicated that in mate selection, the principle of personal choice especially in urban families is today increasingly reconciled with parents' approval. The number of love marriages and marriages by choice are increasing. [23]Margaret Cormack's study in 1959 of 500 students from different states and the union territory of Delhi revealed that in 92% cases, ego's parents' marriage was arranged by their parents while only in 8% cases it was a self arranged marriage. Since last three to four decades, however, we find that parents have stated consulting their children in mate selection. Initially they consulted only sons but later on even daughters also came to be consulted. It could thus be said that change in the process of mate selection is from 'parental' to 'joint selection'. Children do not want complete freedom of selecting the partners by themselves. They want that parents and children should jointly select the partners. [24]B.V. Shah's study (1964) of 200 students of Baroda University showed that 66.5% students wanted to select their brides in consultation with their parents, 32.5% wanted to give more importance to their own voice and only 1.0% percent would go exclusively by parents' choice.

In [25]Gore's study of the Aggarwal families of Delhi, who were supposed to be quite orthodox and traditional, 42% of the respondents were found to hold the view that while marriage should be arranged by the elders, the parties to the marriage should also be consulted. His data clearly bring out a relationship between the levels education and the preference for consultation of the boy and girl in the choice of spouse in arranging the marriage – the more educated a woman is, the more likely she is to consider it important that the boy or girl concerned be consulted regarding marriage. In the [26]Kapur's study of "the changing attitudes of the educated working women", it was found that even within ten years- the time after which the author had studied the attitudes again- the number of such women who preferred arranged marriage but the whole hearted consent of the marriage partners had increased. At the same time, the number of those women who preferred love marriage with the whole hearted consent of the parents had also increased. Educated working women were found, in increasing numbers, to disapprove of "purely arranged marriages", as well as of "purely love marriages". More of them are now approving of the "Modern type of arranged marriages" and the "rational type of love marriages". The study shows their increasing preference for a sort of quasi-traditional kind of marriage and mate selection where the willing consent of the prospective marriage partners and parents is considered desirable, weather the marriage is "arranged or love".

The traditional Hindu marriage pattern is endogamous, involving persons of the same cast or sub-cast, the same province, and the same religion. The attitudes of the people are changing in this respect, and more and more of them are now approving of, and entering into, inter-cast, inter-provincial and even inter-faith marriages. [27]Kapadia in his study of 513 university graduates in early 1950s found that 51% were willing to marry their children outside their own cast. And only one-third were against this departure from the custom. [28]Narmadeshwar Prasad in his study in Bihar in 1954 found the favourable tendency towards inter-cast marriage in the rural as well as in the urban industrial areas. He studied five casts-Brahmin, Rajput, Ahir, Dhobi and Chamar- and found that higher casts-brahmin and rajput- in the rural areas did not like this idea but in the urban industrial area, 85% people in each cast were in favour of intercast marriage. [29]Ghuriye also maintained

that whereas formerly marriage outside one's cast was not to be even thought of, today many educated young men and women are prepared to break through the bonds of cast if mutual love and attraction demands it. Marriage in the traditional Hindu society regarded essentially as *dharmic* (religious), is gradually becoming secularized in the modern era. The trend is towards making it consensual. Till the middle of the 1950s the Hindu law did not permit divorce, it was nearly five decades ago that our law-makers swung Hindu society from the rigidly reactionary position of "sacramental marriage" to the acutely modern notion of "divorce by mutual consent. [30]Kapadia in his study of 240 graduate teachers in 1951 found that about 50% of his respondents considered divorce desirable, about 25% considered it undesirable, and 17% described it as harmful and undesirable. [31]Kuppuswamy, in his study of 895 persons in South India found that there is more or less uniform response in favour of divorce irrespective of the age, sex, rural or urban residence, or literacy of the respondents.

In Hindu tradition in all times widow remarriages have never been given due recognition and are mostly snarled at as such marriages lack their sacramental character. [32]Manu has stressed "A true wife must preserve her chastity as much after as before her husband's death". [33] Vatsyayana is of the view that having sex relations with a widow is akin to prostitution. This pitiable situation is further re-in forced when Manu and Yajnavlkya pointed out that a widow should not mention even the name of another man after her husband's death. Thus widow remarriage was strictly prohibited in ancient time. At present attitudes towards widow remarriage is gradually changing. [34]Gore, in his study has found that "widow remarriage is an area where most respondents seem willing to break with tradition in permitting a widow to remarry".

With the advent of modernization, industrialization and urbanization, traditional outlook took a backseat in the society. Traditional marriage is now considered as a loss of individuality, loss of privacy, lack of freedom, lack of individual growth, lack of social and sexual variety, dissatisfaction with spouse, sexual frustration, problem with in-laws etc. All these factors have lead to a change in the form and purposes of marriage. At present the new trend of live-in-relationship is emerging in urban Indian society. Live-in-relationship or cohabitation is an arrangement where two people, who are not married, live together in an intimate relationship, particularly an emotionally or sexually intimate one, on a long term or permanent basis. Today individuals have become career oriented. Women are going out for work. This is preventing them to go into the bonds of married life that is full of responsibility. Economic independence of people in urban society also paves way to live-in relations as these people don't want interference in their personal life. These days' young men and women are getting opportunity to know and spend time with each other. This enhances the chances of getting into live-in relationship. Many people believe that live-in relationship is a good way to test their relationship before marriage. Besides there are many other alternative forms of marriages are emerging as-[35] the intrinsic marriage, utilitarian marriage, open marriage, two step marriage/multi step marriage, temporary marriage, group marriage, consensual marriage, covenant marriage, commuter marriage, swinging and sexually open marriage. If an analysis is made of need of such relationship, avoiding responsibility would emerge as the prime reason. The lack of commitment, the disrespect for social bonds and the zero tolerance power in relationship have given rise to find these various alternatives to marriage.

The processes of educational and urban development have, no doubt, created new situations and problems and have upset certain traditional mores and values. Yet the marriage institution continues to be the core of Indian society and has not experienced a general disintegration.

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