**CHANGING PATTERNS OF MARRIAGE IN INDIAN**

**SOCIETY**

GaganpreetKaur\* and Sukhdev Singh\*\*

***Abstract***

*Like the other social phenomenon, the institution of marriage has also been experiencing profound changes. The practice of monogamy has largely been followed by all sections of society. Taking consent of the children for their marriage, declining stability of the marriage coupled with enhanced greed of the bridegroom’s family are some of the perceptible changes occurring in the institution of marriage. Economic development, arrival of technology, increased materialism in the life, legislative efforts are some of the important factors responsible for generating changes in the institution of marriage. New social phenomenon such as gay/lesbian relations, cohabitation, DINK Syndrome are emerging in this modern age which were not part of traditional Indian society. Even if the new trends are emerging yet importance of marriage has not diminished.*

Marriage is one of the important social institution found in all societies of the world not withstanding having different forms of mate selection and different types. One of the core issue of this institution is that it sanctioned the union of male and female for purpose of establishing a household, procreating and providing care for the offspring (Majumder, 1977). The marriage is the basic and important unit of society because of the role it plays in generation of human capital resources and the power that is vested in it to influence individual, household and community behavior (Sriram, 1993). It is also a major source of nurturance, emotional bonding and socialization and a link between continuity and change ( Desai, 1995).

Change is a law of nature. Everything in this world is under a change. The social institution like family and marriage are also getting influenced by the societal forces. Both the institutions have with stood the ravage of time and the shocks of centuries. Whereas the family has largely been changed from joint to nuclear one, the institution of marriage in India has undergone vast changes like age at marriage, spread of divorce, reduction in times of marriage and extravagant expenditure on it etc. some changes are

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

\*Research Scholar,\*\*Professor of Sociology, Deptt. Of Economics and Sociology, Punjab Agricultural University, Ludhiana-141004

considered good for society while some are felt in negative term. In the present paper a modest effort is made to see the changing pattern of marriage in India with following specific objectives : to study the changes occurring in the marriage institution and to examine various factors responsible for change

**Methodology**

The discussion in the paper is based on the secondary sources. The prime purpose of the paper was to highlight the changing patterns of Marriage in Indian Society. Old Manu scripts, books, journals, printed material and other related studies were made base to arrive at conclusion.

**Emergence and Evolution of Marriage**

The first evidence of marriage ceremonies dates about 2350 B.C., in Mesopotamia. Our earliest ancestors most likely lived in a ‘primal horde’ (Coontz, 2005). In a primal horde there was no long term pair bonding, males and females copulated with many partners. There was no bonding between men and

women and infants were more developed at birth than in later periods, Males were neither providers nor protectors making the forming of pairs redundant (Fisher, 2004).

Roughly 5000 years ago the invention and increased use of the plough and draft animals altered human interaction. More productive agricultural production created much more complex societies by allowing cities to increase in size, enabling the division and specialization of labour. The major societal shifts greatly impacted families and marriages. In some societies, especially more contemporary agrarian societies, marriages can be identified as relatively equal partners both producing equally toward the economic survival of the family.

The major change that industrialization caused within the family institution was the separation of work from family life. The separation of work and family life impacted marital systems in several ways. First of all, families transitioned from large extended family systems to smaller nuclear households. The advent of the industrial economy also facilitated the transition from a producer to consumer culture. In the earlier family systems, families produced all the goods they needed from shelter to food and clothing. This shift from producers to consumers has impacted the marital arrangement significantly. (Sinha, 1984).The trends of increasing educational attainment among women and decreased fertility were sparked. These changes have brought about more opportunities for women outside the domestic realm and decreased the economic dependence of one sex upon the other. (Leete, 1994). Despite the issue of increased levels of divorce, the shift away from seeing marriage as solely an institution for economic cooperation and the production of children have opened up a myriad of options in today’s society. This is not to say that all pressures to marry have vanished, but marrying for economic survival is no longer the norm. Rates of cohabitation, single parenting, couples remaining voluntarily childless, and the openness of same-sex partnerships have also expanded within the post-modern framework.

**Importance of Marriage in Hindu Ideology**

Marriage is indispensible in every society. According to Hindu ideology life is divided into four stages Brahmacharaya, Grihastha, Vanaprashta and Samnyasa. The second satge‘Grihastha’ dealt with marriage. The second stage grihastha dealt with marriage and included the goals of Dharma, Artha and Kama.(Madelbaum, 1995). Dharma deals with the dharma or the religious aspect ,Artha deals with the economic aspect and Kama is the physical aspect . The Vedas and the Smritis gave an authentic written foundation to the institution of marriage. Marriage constitutes an essential and important stage in one's life and is often referred to as the *'Grihastha ashram - a stage without which one cannot achieve mukti*(salvation). The Vedas consider marriage as a sacrament, a social and religious duty. (Sengupta, 1967). Marriage constitutes an important process in a persons life cycle.

According to the traditional Hindu view, marriage is a sacrament. The marriage is indispensible as for the perseverance of race and body. For the vast majority of people, marriage is always within one’s own religion group and the family also, thereof prevails within it. (Sonawat, 2008).As far as the Hindus are concerned ,vivaha is generally considered obligatory for every person as it is placed in the first place . Vivaha is one of the *sarira – samskara* [sacrament sanctifying the body]each of every man and woman must pass through at proper age and time.The Hindu believe that one’s progeny is connected with and is instrumental to happiness both in this world as well as hereafter(Manu Smriti).Manu Smriti clearly states that “he is a perfect man, who consists of his wife, himself and his offsprings.

**Changes Occuring in the Marriage patterns**

**a. Changes in the Forms of Marriage:** Though in the traditional Hindu society, monogamy was the prime form of marriage yet polyandry, polygamy, bigamy and marriage by exchange were quite popular. Now over the time polygamy, polyandry and exchange marriages have severely declined and monogamy is being followed by most people of Indian society.

**b. Change in the Aim and Purpose of marriage:** The traditional Hindu marriage consider “dharma” as for performance of religious duties.Earlier the marriages were to perform the sacred duties and functions. The prime function was to become kins and protectors of the family. With the advent of variety of factors like mass media, consumerism, globalization the sacred types of relations are turning fade.The aims and purposes have changed their meaning from respect, faithfulness, sincerity to lessrespect, greed and unfaithfulness etc .

**c**. **Change in Process of Mate Selection:** In olden times, parents usually selected the spouse and there was hardly any say of the girl. There are numerous stories and stocks which support that parents used to marry their daughters according to their own will. Now due to various factors like increasing education among girls, urbanization, economic independence etc children are consulted in marriage matters and even girl and boy talk and try to know the views of each other before executing marriage ceremonies. The Indian system therefore crumbled when forced by changing reality in the form of extended education of girls, the effect of this on raising ages at marriages and making the choice of spouse themselves (Cadwell, 1992). The marriages which were earlier held by middlemen are now replaced with matchmaking agencies and the advertisement by newspaper and various social networking sites (Jones,2010).

**d.Change in the Age at Marriage:**  When one goes to age at marriage in India, it comes out that children used to get married at early age and it was more in case of girls. In some specific cases like Rajasthan girls were married at very early age i.e. age of 3-4 years even when they did not know the meaning of marriage. The marriage system was heavily dependent on arranged marriage at an early age in the traditional societies of India. The sexuality of women needs to be carefully controlled to uphold the honour of the family husbands and wives should not to be too emotionally attached, as this could threaten the unity of the patriarchal family (Jones, 2010). Early marriage helps to protect young women’s chastity, marks a clear break from their natal families, makes them more likely to accept the structure of authority in their new family and weakens the husband-wife bond (Reddy, 1982).Now due to arrival of various factors like technology and awareness among girls there is a big change. Legally, the age for girl’s marriage is 18 years and boys 21 years. Further due to arrival of professional education, children are busy in studies for a longer time and hence marriages get delayed in 25-30 years. The trend towards late marriage is associated with the socio economic changes that enhance the status of women by increasing educational and employment opportunities (Puri ,1999). It has played a major role in determining the growth rate of population through its linkage to marital fertility. The delayed marriage makes considerable difference in lowering fertility rates. The fertility rate in India in 1970 was 5.6 which has reduced to 2.8 in 2008. (World Bank Report, 2008).

e.**Change in stability of Marriage (Increase in Divorce Rates)**

In the olden times institution of marriage was quite stable and hardly any divorce was noted. Fear of kinship system, strong social codes, never allowed married couples to break up marriages even if they want to live together or not. In the past divorce carried a considerable stigma and the pressure for the sake of the children and also for the sake of appearances and family honour, was very strong (Goody, 1973). Now due to legislatives, education, technology advancement and more awareness has changed stability in the institution of marriage. Divorce is increasing in society across the globe. In the agro based states like Punjab and Haryana there is increase of 150% since last decade and in Kerala known as most literate state there in an increase of 350% divorce rates since last decade. Love, personal commitment and intrinsic satisfaction are now seen as the cornerstone of marriage (Allen and Grow, 2001)

**f. Change in field of selection (Increasing number of Inter caste Marriage )**

Until sometime back, marrying a person belonging to some other caste or religion was not permitted by the families. Kapadia (1982) conducted a study on intercaste marriages in India and the data revealed that more than fifty percent parents expressed their willingness to allow their children marrying outside their own caste. Only one third were against this departure from custom.

Afzal (2009) found that thereligion plays important role in intercaste marriage. Women belonging to Muslim and other religious group were less likely to have intercaste marriages than Hindus. Also working women were more likely to have intercaste marriage than non-working women in Punjab.

**g.Change in Economic Aspects of Marriages**

Marriage is often held in cities as a social or a civil ceremony than religious ceremony . The concept of Indian wedding has seen drastic changes, over the last few years. In the past, the ceremony was a family affair, confined to an economical budget, even though the guest list was long. On the contrary, in the present time, the occasion is generally celebrated in an elaborated way, with number of rituals that are conducted before, during and after it. A long guest list, colorful and extravagant venue, lavish feast and a series of rituals are the key ingredients of the 'big fat Indian wedding' that we see today. In many cases, the wife's family is expected and obliged to provide a substantial dowry at the time of marriage and thereafter to continue to make presentations to the husband's family. (Miher, 1988). Huge amount is spend on ceremony to make it a ‘grand gala’. Money is spent lavishly for decorating marriage mantaps, arranging grand dinner, take- home sweets, music orchestra, video-shooting, photography, marriage processions etc.

**Factors responsible for changing marriage patterns:**

**1. Economic factors:** Changes in marriage institution are clearly related to the remarkable development in education, increasing urbanization and involvement of women in economic activities outside household. People have started “going out of the family” for work and women also have joined men in process of finding out jobs and earning money. This has boosted self- respect and self- confidence of women. These developments have affected the institution of marriage (Kapadia, 1982).The another factor is affluence materialism. Through technological improvements the living standards and real purchasing power of individuals have been enhanced. The primary effect of this increased affluence of marriage breakdown is that people can better afford the expenses of divorce which include not only legal fees but also the cost of maintaining a second home and added cost of recreation for the children(Afzal, 2009).This all is an indication towards changes occurring in institution of marriage.

**2. Social factors:** In the past, there were joint families in which there was interdependence of family members and there was closely interacting community. In the transition, today’s highly urban and affluent society, work patterns have become more differentiated reducing the necessity to interact with the community. This pattern has given rise to individualism (Sonawat, 2008).There is a sense of ‘Systemness’ this is concept of functional theory which describes how society becomes increasingly complex through structural differentiation and specialization. Now, the society is characterized by high degree of specialization in terms of employment, education, health care, transportation. Prior to this specialization the family served the economic, educational, recreational, health care, procreative, protection and affection roles for its members. Gradually, through industrialization these responsibilities have been taken from family and institutionalized outside the home ( Sinha,1984).The institution of marriage has gone a tremendous change as there is a great change in living condition, values, norms and traditions in the patriarchal society girls had no say in the family matters especially in marriage affairs. Earlier they could not interfere or raise any question even if their own marriages were fixed. In the past, the divorce was seen as ‘Stigma’ but now the time has changed. Girls are openly coming forward with the views starting from selection of mate and have full rights for divorce if the marriage is not successful.Other things such as changes in the public perception are often referred to in the vernacular as ‘changing times’. People have now become more self centered and sense of individualization is pulling them away from traditional norms of marriage and forming household without legal marriage (Herzberger,1993).

**3.Psychological factors**: In the past, for women the greatest personal achievement and source of reward was to be married, raising children and ensuring an optimal home and family life. No other life content could provide the same sense of personal worth. For men self fulfillment lay in maintaining good employment, marrying the woman of their dreams and providing financial support to their family. Men and women have clear cut idea of their respective roles. However increasing urbanization, institutionalization of family roles, technological improvements in home care products and increased affluence reduced the potential of home life to provide stimulation and feelings of worth from satisfactory personal achievements. (Hines,1997). In addition, the ethos of individualism encouraged both men and women to realize their own potentials. The growing economic independence of women led to demands for more egalitarian family norms in the areas of child rearing, decision making, finances and household tasks. These changes in family norms and role expectation brought increased friction into homes due to departure of established patterns. Women grapple with the desire to have both career and children so there is conflict in marital relations and disturbed domestic life.

**4.Technological factors:** The arrival of new technology has also been emerging as a new factor for generating changes in the institution of marriage. Earlier there used to be the joint families in which grandparents and other senior members had control over the juniors but now there are nuclear families in which both the parents are working and children are ignored to a great extent. They do not have any surveillance on them and they become isolated and take support of mass media and others technologies such as computers, mobiles, television etc. They make use of networking sites which make them away from family members but closer to outer world (Kolenda, 1987).

**5.Legislative factors:**The legislative measures taken by the government in the last 50 years or more has helped to changed the nature of institution of marriage as now legal safeguards are provided in marriage which were not part of traditional Hindu society.Many of the beliefs, values , ideals and rules of marriage laid down by the Hindu S*hastrakaras*have lost their original meaning and importance and purpose now. During the British rule and also after independence legislations were passed in order to bring about desirable changes in the Hindu Marriage system. The laws were related to: (i) age at marriage (ii) field of mate selection (iii) number of spouses in marriage (iv) breakage of marriage (v)dowry to be taken and given (vi)remarriage. Various inhuman practices associated with the marriage such as the practice of sati has been removed by law. Legislations have not only abolished child marriages but also fixed the minimum marriageable age for boys and girls as for girls are 18 years and boys 21 years. The legislations have also made clear the selection in marriage that is, who should marry whom. They have also legalized intercaste and inter-religious marriages and have made provision for registered marriages. Legislations have made provisions for divorce. Equal rights are conferred on men and women in this regard. (Rao, 2004)Legislations have also specified the conditions of divorce.Legislations have also been undertaken to give special protection to women preventing the exploitation of their helplessness and weaknesses by others. In order to loosen the tight grip of the patriarchal values over the joint families legislations have also been undertaken providing equal opportunities, privileges, rights and facilities even to women.

**Emerging new institutions**

Besides Shift in Age, education, caste,dowry and divorces there are some structural changes in the marriage pattern which have a great impact on the society. Though limited in number but in metropolitan cities and urban areas there are occurring some other serious problems which are as follows:

**Gay relationships/ Lesbians**

Though it seems as a shock to the Indian society but gay/ lesbians are emerging in India at a fast rate. According to a report by NGO there are thousands of gay/ lesbians in metropolitan cities of Indian society. It is a kind of relationship where the same sex persons marry to each other. In 2004, the Civil Partnership Act has given same sex couples similar legal rights to married couples in respect of pensions, inheritance, tenancies and property. Though this kind of emerging instititution is not conducive for the smooth working of the society and thus marriages follow a different pattern than in traditional societies.

**Cohabitation**

The young people may find marriage less important because premarital sex is becoming increasingly acceptable. Cohabitation is when the couple moves from dating to living together which may or may not lead to marriage(Manning, 2007). Today, it is more socially acceptable for couples to begin a sexual relationship ,set up a home and have children outside formal marriage. Since 2002, cohabiting couples have had the same right to adopt as married couples.

**One-Person Households**

When one person establishes his family is the one person household. People are now more self centred. Men as well as women want to establish their own identities by independently establishing households. There are almost three in ten households (6.8 million people) who are one person holded houses(World Bank Report, 2008).

**Living apart together’**

It is Commonly seen in the western countries where the people though being married are living far from each other. As people are getting more isolated and have greater egoistic attitudes they don’t want their privacy to be interfered so they adopt the path of Living apart together. In 2008, according to a survey by British Social Attitudes it was noted that every 1 in 10 adults are ‘living apart together’ or ‘LATs’.

**DINKSyndrome (Double Income no kids)**

The term was coined in the 1980s at the height of “yuppie" culture. The post-2000 economic crisis have solidified this social trend as more couples wait longer to have kids, with one in five choosing not to have them at all. People don’t want to take responsibility of the kids and want to enjoy their life without any tensions. They find the kids as the additional responsibility.

**Conclusion**

Changes are bound to occur and institution of marriage is also experiencing many changes. Technological, economical, new educational patterns and changes in life styles, are major factors playing profound role in this change. With the passage of time the age at marriage, process of mate selection, aims and the purposes of marriage , trends of divorce rates and the economic aspects of marriage have undergone a tremendous change.There are definitely serious consequenses of the changing marriage patterns as the increasing age at marriage makes a considerable difference in lowering the fertility rates. Various factors such as the social, economic, psychological, technological and the legislative play a great role in the change of marriage institution. As people are becoming more independent in the wake of liberalization, consumerism and its generation of unreal aspirations have increased the gap between desires and their fulfillment.Further, the new values made acceptable, or even desirable by such consumerism are “getting rich quick in any way possible”. In such a setting the existing unequal power relationships within the family become a channel for acquiring wealth quickly at any cost. Conflicts in this institution are also emerging due to the interaction of tradition with modernity .New patterns in the marriage like Gay , Cohabitation etc. are also emerging in some places which may have more effects in the coming time. Though these new trends are observed today the importance of marriage has not diminished. It is still universally practiced. Though its sanctity is affected a little, it is not reduced to the level of a mere civil contract. Hindu men and women are still emotionally involved in their marriages.

**References**

Afzal, S.( 2009). To estimate an equation explaining the determinants of dowry.IUR *Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities.***1**:33-47.

Allen B. and Grow M (2001) *Anatomy of Love: The Natural History of Monogamy, Adultery, and*

*Divorce*. Simon & Schuster. New York

Coontz, S. (2005) *Marriage,* A *History: From Obedience* to *Intimacy or How Love Conquered Marriage.*

New York.

Cadwell, J.( 1992). “The causes of marriage change in South India,” *Population Studies***3**: 343-361.

Desai, M. (1995).Towards family policy research.*I J of Social Work* **56***:*225- 231.

Fisher, H. (2004). Why We love: The Nature and Chemistry of Romantic Love. Henry Holt &

Co. New York

Goody, J. and Tambiah, S.J. (1973). *Bridewealth and Dowry*. Cambridge University Press.

Herzberger, S.(1993). Consequences of retaliatory aggression against siblings and

peers: Urban minority and children’s expectations. *Child Development,* **64**: 1773-1785.

Hines, A. (1997). Divorce-related transition, adolescent development and the role of the parent-child

relationship: A review of the literature. *Journal of Marriage and Family,* **59**: 375–388.

Jones, G.(2010). Post traumatic stress disorder among battered women: Risk and resiliency factors.

*J Marriage and Family*, **8**:17-28

Kapadia, K. M. (1982). *Marriage and family in India*. Calcutta,India: Oxford University Press.

Kolenda, P. (1987). *Regional differences in family structure in India*. Jaipur, India: Rawat Publications.

Leete, R (1994). The Continuing Flight from Marriage and Parenthood among the Overseas Chinese in

East and Southeast Asia: Dimensions and Implications. *Population and Development Review***4**: 811-29.

Miher, M. (1988). "*Status relations in South Asian marriage alliances: Toward a general theory*".

Contributions to Indian Sociolom *(NS)* **22**: 145-69.

Majumder, P. (1977) Matrimonial Migration: a review with special reference to India. *J of Biosocial*

*Science.***9**: 381-401

Manning, W. ( 2007)The Changing Institution of Marriage: Adolescents’ Expectations to

Cohibit and to Marry.*J of Marriage and Family***69**:559-575

Miller, B.D. 1980. "Female neglect and the costs of marriage in Rural India*". I J Social Welfare***14**:95-

129.

Mandelbaum D (1995) *Society in India.*PopularParkashan .Bombay.

Puri D. (1999) Gift of a daughter: Change and Continuity in Marriage patterns among two

generations of North Indians in Delhi . Ph.D Thesis. University of Toronto, Canada.

Rao,C.N.(2004) *Sociology of Indian Society*,S Chand &Co. Ltd, New Delhi.

Reddy, V. (1982*).Marriages in India*.*A Psycho-sociological Study*.The Academic Press.Haryana

Sengupta, N.( 1967). *Evolution of Hindu Marriage*.Popular Prakashan.Bombay

Sinha, D. (1984). Some recent changes in the Indian family and their implications for socialization.*IJ*

*Social Work,***45**: 271–285.

Sonawat R.(2008) *Understanding Families in India: A Reflection of Societal Changes*, SNDT

Women’s University, Bombay ,India

Sriram, R. (1993). *Family studies in India: Appraisal and new directions.* Sage Publishers.New Delhi.

World Bank Report ( 2008). “From whispers to voices: Gender and social transformation in Bangladesh,”

Bangladesh Development Series. Washington, DC: World Bank.