

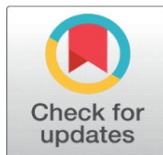
GATHBANDHAN: A CULTURAL ANALYSIS OF THE RITUALS AND THE PRACTICES OF MARRIAGE SYMBOLIZING SUSTAINABILITY

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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on the vital intersection of environmental and cultural sustainability within event tourism, specifically emphasising marriage events. As the demand for unique and memorable wedding experiences continue to rise, this chapter delves into how event planners and participants can contribute to environmental preservation and cultural enrichment. By examining the strategies and practices that promote sustainability in marriage rituals and events, this study offers insights into creating meaningful celebrations that leave a positive legacy for both the environment and cultural heritage. The chapter “Gathbandhan: A Cultural Analysis of the Rituals and the Practices of Marriage Symbolizing Sustainability” critically analyses the various sustainable rituals and practices related to marriage using the cultural theory. The academic study is interdisciplinary as it focuses on different areas such as culture, economy, society, environment etcetera. The study focuses on representation as a key feature of cultural theory. The marriage rituals and practices are represented as icons, symbols, and indices embedded in various cultures which are also markers of sustainability. Some practices provide an alternative to technological hegemony in modern times. The study depicts the marriage rituals or practices as signs embedded in a network of signs where the signifier is the ritual or practice studied and the signified is the idea of multifaceted sustainability. The academic study views marriages with their varied rituals and practices as cultural texts with a politics of reception. The various rituals and practices of marriages depict consumption, a chief tenet of cultural theory as a route to sustainable economic growth. The study attempts to rehabilitate the traditional marriage rituals and practices that have been marginalized in modern times by focusing on them and proving them to be markers of sustainability.

Keywords: Event Tourism, Sustainability, Marriage Rituals, Cultural Theory, Consumerism, Postmodern Marriages

Theme:

In the postmodern era, weddings have morphed into elaborate and extravagant events characterized by lavish dresses, opulent venues, and the commodification of love. The paper seeks to illuminate the significance of the age-old rituals in the context of modern-day sustainability challenges and opportunities.

Aim of the Study:

The aim of the study is to highlight the growing importance of mindful event planning that considers ecological and cultural preservation in an era of consumerism and globalisation. The chapter serves as a gateway to a broader exploration of how modern weddings can align with sustainable practices and cultural significance.

Objectives of the Chapter:

To provide a comprehensive cultural analysis of marriage rituals and practices, highlighting their significance in sustainability, cultural theory, and contemporary

consumerism. It seeks to shed light on the multifaceted aspects of marriages as cultural texts and their role in environmental, social and economic sustainability.

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The primary texts selected for the academic study are Vivaha Samskara, The Hindu Sacrament of Marriage by Pandit Sri Rama Ramanuja Achari and Wedding Customs and Wedding Rituals in Christianity, Judaism and Islam (2019) by Maryke Strydom.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In *Encyclopedia Britannica*, marriage or matrimony or wedlock is the union of a man and woman as husband and wife. The union is legally and socially sanctioned between a couple and is regulated by laws, rules, customs, beliefs, and attitudes. It prescribes rights and duties of the partners and provides a status to the offspring born within wedlock. There are two aspects to a marriage namely the philosophy of marriage and the rituals associated to it. The philosophy of marriage is based on the union of two bodies and eventually the union of two souls. The ritualistic aspect of marriage focusses on the rituals based on the religion that is followed by the partners in a marriage. Marriages are primarily of two types namely civil marriages which should be licensed and recognized by a state and a religious marriage which is performed according to the norms of a religion. Marriages signify the union of two families. Marriages may be celebrated with pomp, show and fanfare or they may be simplistic. Marriage is a social institution that forms the basis of a family unit. Marriages may be based on compatibility, or they may be alliances of convenience. Marriages may be endogamous or exogamous. An endogamous marriage is a marriage within one's own community. It is the oldest social regulation of marriage. When the communication with outside groups is limited then the consequence is endogamous marriage. The familial and cultural pressures on an individual are to make one marry within one's social, economic, and ethnic group. Exogamous marriages involve the practice of marrying outside one's group. Such kind of marriages are prevalent in communities with complex kinship relations, and they bar marriages within the same large group that trace their lineage to a common ancestor. Marriages may be arranged or based on love. The arranged marriages are marriages which are arranged by the families and contribute to the existence of large, extended families. They advocate love between the partners after the marriage and there are socioeconomic benefits that are associated to them which are directed to the larger family. There is an intermediary involved in negotiating an arranged marriage. The love marriages happen when two individuals fall in love irrespective of their caste, creed, or sect after dating each other for a while, the dating results in courtship and a successful courtship gets developed into marriage. It is modern in its outlook and is prevalent in nuclear families and is not based on the socioeconomic aspects accruing to the family. The 21st century brought changes in the tradition of marriage due to the significance of procreation and ease in divorce. In 2000, the same sex marriages had been legalized in Netherlands and it came into effect on 1st April 2000. The other countries that legalized same sex marriages are Canada in 2005, France in 2013, the United States of America in 2015, and Germany in 2017. Some countries extended benefits to the same sex couples in the form of a registered partnership or civil union.

The marriages have evolved over a certain period and have been characterized by complex laws and rituals. A marriage has certain social and personal functions such as sexual gratification, sexual regulation, division of labor between the

sexes, economic production, consumption, satisfaction of personal needs for affection, status and companionship, procreation, providing care, education, and opportunities of socialization to the children and regulation of the lines of descent. Marriages are instrumental in conferring the right of inheritance on the progeny, and in building social relations. Marriages are a source of fueling the economy with revenue by providing a source of livelihood to many by involving them in the marriage related tasks.

The present study focuses on marriages as an environmental, cultural, economic, and social product. Marriages are perceived through the lens of cultural theory to understand them in their varied aspects. Marriages are seen as contributing to the longevity of homo sapiens in nature and they put the mark of legality on the process of procreation thereby contributing to the gene pool and ensuring the growth of the species. At the same time marriages are organized and conducted by deriving resources from nature. Marriages are cultural products as the ritualistic aspect of a marriage represents the nuances of the culture in which they are rooted. Marriages fuel an economy by utilizing its economic resources and there are several parties involved in providing and consuming these economic resources in the form of finished products. Marriages form the basis of an important social institution as marriages support the system of family which extends to form societies and nations on a larger scale.

2. SUSTAINABILITY

The concept of sustainability refers to conserving the natural and physical resources and maintaining the processes continuously across the temporal dimension to avoid the depletion and exhaustion of these resources and the related processes. The idea of sustainability ensures the preservation of the economy, the planet Earth, ecosystems, natural habitats, biodiversity, societies, cultures, and nations. Sustainability has three facets namely economic, environmental, and social and in addition to these also cultural. The focus of sustainability is on profits, planet, and people. Sustainability advocates development that is sustainable or development that does not harm the existing systems to carve out its path of progress and growth. The needs of the current generation should be met in a way that there is a provision for the future generations to meet their own needs. Sustainability ensures that the production of waste as well as pollutants is restricted and negligible. Any sustainable practice should conserve the natural resources, support a healthy community and workforce, and earn revenue so that the practice remains financially viable for a longer period (Mollenkamp, 2023). Marriages are economic, environmental, social, and cultural practices that over a period have imbibed the idea of sustainability due to the need for conservation of resources and processes. Since the idea of sustainability is at the heart of marriages hence the traditional rituals followed in marriages of different faiths cater to the goal of sustainability. The marriages comprise of economic sustainability as they involve various vendors and parties in their realization. There is a kind of consumerism associated with marriages which creates a need for certain kinds of products and services that drive the economy or fuel it with revenue. A typical wedding will involve event planners and event managers who will plan and execute the event thereby consuming resources and generating revenue in the process. The event planners and managers will have a group of peripheral vendors who provide various resources and services such as the owner and the manager of the venue of the marriage, the wedding florists who decorate the venue of marriage with flowers, the wedding stylist or designer who otherwise decorates the wedding venue, the transporters who manage the travel logistics and the food caterers who provide food for the ceremony and other celebratory occasions associated with marriages. These peripheral vendors make use of natural and physical resources and generate finished products that earn revenue which in turn is pumped into the economy. The peripheral vendors cooperate and coordinate with each other in a team and thereby support the event managers in conducting the event. The other contributors to an economy in relation to a marriage are the clothiers, the outfit or dress designers, a makeup artist or a beautician, jewellers, stationers etcetera who provide resources to conduct the rituals of marriage and generate revenue in the process that in turn powers the economy. Marriages generate employment in various sectors which may be both organized and unorganized thereby playing a key role in running the economy. Marriages create a directly proportional relationship between generation, contribution, consumption and sustainability of resources and services as more the generation of the resources and services depending on the demand existing in the market, the more the contribution, the more the consumption and the more the need for sustainability of the economy through revenue generation. The destination weddings and the exotic honeymoons which are the highlight of modern wedding celebrations provide a boost to tourism as hosts select picturesque locations for the purpose thereby ensuring the flow of revenue across states and regions in a nation or across countries on a global platform.

The rituals in marriages contribute to environmental sustainability. In a Hindu wedding, the throwing of rice by a bride during “*vidaai*” basically is based on the principle of sustainability as the bride wishes for the prosperity of her family by throwing the rice or any other cereal back when she leaves her parents’ home to go to her in-laws’ or her husband’s place that in turn signifies the replenishing of the resources that she has consumed during her stay in her parents’ home. The ritual of cake cutting in Christian weddings signifies the first joint action on the part of the newlyweds and the sharing of blessing and happiness with friends and family which is a key to sustainability because the more one gives the more it grows. The ritual of cake cutting also signifies that the bride will be losing her virginity and since the groom puts his hand on the bride’s so it’s not just her but him too. This in turn is related to fertility and sustainability (*Wedding Customs*). Some of the marriage rituals and practices such as the ritualistic use of turmeric, sandalwood paste and mehndi which are biodegradable substances in Hindu and Islamic weddings or creating and distributing wedding invitation cards made out of leaves or using earthen utensils for ceremonial cooking or the ritualistic practice of taking the bride to the bridegroom’s abode in a “*doli*” or “*palki*” thereby reducing the consumption of fuel which is a non-renewable form of energy are instances of being environmentally viable and sustainable. In Judaism, the throwing of barley in front of the bride and the groom on the day of the marriage ceremony symbolizes the wish that their offspring may be plentiful which has the idea of environmental sustainability at its heart. Such practices provide an alternative to technological hegemony in modern times.

Marriages ensure social sustainability which is based on shared knowledge of values related to marriage. These values are in turn to be protected, promoted, and preserved among future generations in a society. Marriage which is an essential and significant social institution that forms the bond between two individuals goes a long way in maintaining the family unit, the society, and the nation at large. There are two aspects to marriage. The core aspect is the essence of marriage that signifies warmth, affection, bonding, care, sacrifice, life-long companionship, sustenance, succor, strength etcetera. The essence of marriage has all the virtues associated to it. The other aspect related to marriage comprises rituals and practices which are meaningful and have significance in its context. The coupling of the essence with the rituals and practices makes a marriage significant. In modern times, traditional marriages are losing their importance and are being substituted by innovative modern-day marriages which reduce the ritualistic quotient of a marriage. The rituals and practices during a marriage exhibit features of sustainability that have explicit relationships with nature, economy, society, culture, polity etcetera. Marriages lay the foundation of a healthy family, a healthy society, and a healthy nation. Thus, marriages which form the firm foundation of a polity and a society also make a case for the longevity of the family unit.

Marriages are projections of cultural sustainability as they uphold age old traditions which play a significant role in ensuring the longevity of a culture. In a Hindu marriage ceremony, the ritual of “*kanyā-dāna*” which means giving away the damsel during marriage is a main feature when a statement of intent is made by the bride’s parent or guardian mentioning the time, date, place, and the astrological parameters marking the day and purpose of marriage as begetting of progeny, prosperity, and companionship and the performance of other marital, social, and religious duties (“The Hindu Sacrament of Marriage”). It is an ancient marriage ritual without which a Hindu marriage ceremony is incomplete. In a Jewish wedding, there is an age-old tradition of throwing confetti made up of nuts and raisins on the groom after the blessing as a symbol of fertility. This ritual also extends to the marriage ceremony. Nuts such as almonds are considered bitter and sweet symbolizing the flavors of marriage. Many a times the groom is also thrown along with the candy (*Wedding Rituals in Christianity, Judaism and Islam*, 89). In a Christian wedding, there is a ritual of the bride throwing a bouquet of flowers on a group of spinsters and the bridegroom throwing a garter, that is, a piece of cloth beautifully crafted with lace and ribbons on a group of bachelors so that they would be showered with good luck, and they would get married soon thereby ensuring fertility and continuation of their lines of families. This ritual is particularly rooted in specific cultures (*Wedding Rituals in Christianity, Judaism and Islam*, 77). In the context of an Islamic wedding, there is a ritual of a ceremonial bath called the “*Ghusl*” which refers to the washing of the entire body for purification. It is a purificatory ritual and the couple cleanses their bodies of the body fluids such as semen and menstrual blood. According to the Islamic Sharia law a believer must purify himself or herself before conducting the religious acts such as reciting the *Qur’an*, holding the *Qur’an* in their hands before certain prayers, and entering the mosque. It is mandatory for the bride and the groom to be pure before participating in a sacred act such as marriage (*Wedding Rituals in Christianity, Judaism and Islam*, 130). These ancient customs and traditions are cultural markers rooted in different faiths which typify specific cultures and their continuous practice across a temporal and a spatial dimension to ensure cultural sustainability and the preservation of the identities of those cultures in which they are rooted.

3. CULTURAL ANALYSIS OF MARRIAGES:

A cultural analysis of marriages is primarily presented to explore the connections between marriages and sustainability with several associated denotations and connotations which are embedded in various domains of meanings and interpretations.

3.1 Culture and Signifying Practices:

Culture refers to the ground in which the practices, representations, languages, and customs of any specific society are rooted. Culture concerns itself with shared social meanings which helps us to make sense of the world. The meanings are generated through signs which are primarily linguistic signs. Language is not a neutral medium that forms meanings and knowledge about an independent object world existing outside of language. It is constitutive of the meanings and knowledge that it brings into view and makes intelligible to us. These processes of meaning production are described as signifying practices. The meanings are produced symbolically in language as a “signifying system” (“An Introduction to Cultural Studies”, 7). The study depicts the marriage rituals or practices as signs embedded in a network of signs where the signifier is the ritual or the practice that is studied and the signified is the idea of multifaceted sustainability. In a Hindu marriage ceremony, there is the ritual of “*Aśmarohana*” which means to tread on a millstone. The grinding stone represents conflicts and hurdles in the life of a married couple. The couple is expected to be as firm as a stone to their commitment in marriage and be determined to overcome all conflict and challenges in their marriage (“The Hindu Sacrament of Marriage”). The consummation of the marriage happens after the Christian marriage ceremony has taken place because the Christian church shuns sexual activity outside marriage so that promiscuity can be checked in a society and a culture. An appropriate family name is bestowed on the progeny born within wedlock. The honeymoon is a time when the bride and the groom take time off after the wedding to go on a vacation together (*Wedding Rituals in Christianity, Judaism and Islam*, 78). A Jewish wedding ceremony is not held on a Sabbath or on any other holy days as no contract agreement may be done on a Sabbath or on any other holy day, the bride and groom may not be intimate on these days, and extreme circumstances of joy may not be mixed with those of sadness in order to ensure that the emotions of the wedding day may be worked appropriately and not mixed with other inappropriate emotions (*Wedding Rituals in Christianity, Judaism and Islam*, 92-93). An Islamic marriage is considered to be a civil concept and not sacramental (*Wedding Rituals in Christianity, Judaism and Islam*, 119). These rituals of Hindu, Christian, Jewish, and Islamic weddings are signifiers which are embedded in a signifying system, that is, a network of signs related to marriages and are described by language in order to make them intelligible to us. They have an associated signified of social and cultural sustainability which upholds the system of marriages in terms of being embedded in a society and a culture thereby foregrounding the identities of the said society and culture.

3.2 Representation:

The cultural analysis of any entity focusses on the idea of representation. The study focuses on representation as a key feature of cultural theory. The representation refers to the social construction and representation of the world in meaningful ways. The study of culture is perceived as a signifying practice of representation. The textual generation of meaning is to be explored. It demands the investigation of the modes by which meaning is produced in a variety of contexts. The cultural representations and meanings have a certain materiality, and they are embedded in sounds, inscriptions, objects, images, books, magazines, and television programs. They are produced, enacted, used, and understood in specific social contexts (“An Introduction to Cultural Studies” 8). The marriages are representations of economic, environmental, social, and cultural sustainability as explained above within the purview of study. The marriage rituals and practices are represented as icons, symbols, and indices embedded in various cultures which are also markers of sustainability. In a Hindu wedding ceremony, tying the sacred necklace or auspicious thread made of gold and black beads called the “*mangalsutra*” as presented by the bride’s mother to the bridegroom after it is sanctified by the priest through a brief puja is an important ritual without which the marriage is incomplete. The bridegroom then ties it around the bride’s neck while reciting that he is placing the “*mangalsutra*” around her neck as a mark of good fortune, love, and friendship. It represents a Hindu woman’s married status (“Hindu Wedding: The Sacred Rites of Matrimony”). In a Christian wedding ceremony, the wearing of the crown by the bride represents purity (*Wedding Customs*). In a Jewish wedding ceremony, the ring is of two types, one is ornamental and is in the shape of a temple and has the Jewish words “*Mazel Tov*” meaning good luck inscribed on it. The ring is in the shape of a roof which represents the roof of the couple’s new home. This ring was used in the medieval times. The second type of ring is a plain metal ring with no stones. One should not be misled regarding the value of the ring. If the value of the ring is misleading, then the

marriage may get dissolved. The groom may borrow the ring from someone, but the bride should be aware of it and must return it. The ring is expected to touch the bride's skin and should not be put over a cloth. The ring may be in the form of a perfect circle which represents marriage and an imperfection in the ring is good as it shows the flawed human condition in the marriage (*Wedding Rituals in Christianity, Judaism and Islam*, 114-115). In many Islamic traditions, a young girl is veiled as soon as she reaches puberty, and the veil represents womanhood when it is ideal for a woman to get married. The *mangalsutra*, the tiara or the crown, the ring, and the veil are objects which are socially constructed and have significant representations in the matrix of marriages which are embedded in different social and cultural systems. These objects have been used for the purpose of marriage in different societies and cultures since time immemorial thereby preserving the identities of those societies and cultures. They are ultimate cultural representations which have a materiality, and they are produced, enacted, used, and understood in the specific social context of marriage. These objects are representations of social, cultural, and economic sustainability as the buying and selling of these objects such as *mangalsutra*, the tiara or the crown, the ring, and the veil help the jewelers and the clothiers to earn profits and generate revenue which is pumped into the economy thereby contributing to the economic sustainability. The marriage rituals or practices are representations that may be iconic which are based on similarities, for example, the ring is used in marriages across different societies and cultures thereby representing love, companionship, and marital bonding. The *mangalsutra*, the tiara or the crown, the ring, and the veil are all symbols of marital status, love, companionship, bonding, purity, chastity, and womanhood. These objects have an indexical representation with marriage being the cause and the use of these objects before or during the marriage ceremony as the effect that in turn leads to another effect that is of economic, social, and cultural sustainability.

3.3 Materialism and Non-Reductionism:

In a culture, representations are produced by corporations for profits. The cultural analysis tries to probe the phenomenon of attributing meanings to cultural products or texts at the time of production which is centered on signifying practices that cultural analysis tries to connect with political economy. The cultural analysis concerns itself with power and the distribution of economic and social resources in the context of the cultural product or the cultural text. It studies who owns and controls cultural production, the distribution mechanism of cultural products, and the consequences of patterns of ownership, and control for contours of the cultural landscape ("An Introduction to Cultural Studies", 9). In the case of analysis of marriages as a cultural product or a cultural text, there is an involvement of the political economy of a state at the micro level and since marriages are also global phenomena there is an involvement of the global economy at the macro level. The involvement of the political economy of a state and the global economy in organizing and conducting marriages as explained above is with the main motive of earning profits through revenue generation and by supporting businesses and vendors who play key roles in planning and conducting those marriages. There are corporations that plan and are responsible for conducting and managing marriages. There are matrimonial bureau's which are organizations such as Bharat Matrimony, Shaadi.com, Sycorian Matrimonial Services etcetera at the national level which act as matchmakers bringing together couples and families and binding them in wedlock. These organizations are run on profits. Social media platforms such as *Facebook* and dating applications such as *Tinder* also play an important role in creating and realizing marriage alliances. The tourism of a nation gets impetus due to destination weddings being conducted nationally in one or the other region of the state or internationally in one or the other nation of the globe and profits accrue to the economies of a region or a state. The marriages are perceived to be connected to the political economy of a state, for example, the generation of discourse regarding Hindu marriages in India and abroad, the foregrounding of the philosophy and the infinite number of rituals in relation to the Hindu marriages, exploring their contours from various perspectives, and the dissemination of these discourses to the Hindus at large in India and across the globe is a result of the effect of the dominant discourse of the Hindutva ideology of the present government in India which forms the unconscious archive of ideas in the present era. The other aspect is that the discursive formation of Christian, Jewish and Islamic marriages in India and abroad, the generation and dissemination of discourses regarding these marriages is an essential characteristic of the religious pluralism existing in India and the opportunity of exploring other avenues of earning revenue in a pluralistic economy. The power of the ruling elites gets manifested in the foregrounding of discourses related to certain kinds of cultural products or cultural texts such as that of Hindu marriages and in addition to them the weddings of different faiths to showcase the concerns of Indian pluralism and the sustainability and durability of the Indian society and culture due to pluralism and multiculturalism. The distribution of economic and social resources in relation to the weddings of different faiths is supported by the secular ideology of the nation and by the fact that it leads to the healthy growth of the economy and a

pluralistic society and culture. The ruling elites own and control the cultural production of the discourses in relation to weddings of different faiths. The distribution mechanism of discursive literature in relation to marriages, the prioritizing of the ritualistic aspects of these marriages and the consequences of patterns of ownership of discourses generated in the domain of marriages, and control for contours of the cultural landscape in which the discourses related to the marriages germinate and grow thereby showcasing the cultural moorings of a society is a primary agenda of the ruling elites. The marriages are also seen to be multicultural in nature as there are certain rituals and practices in a marriage which have been imbibed from marriages of other faiths or from those held in other cultures. In a Hindu marriage, the practice of conducting a ring ceremony or engagement ceremony may have been imbibed from a Christian or Jewish or Islamic wedding practice. In a Hindu marriage ceremony, the “*mehndi ceremony*” when *henna* is applied to the bride and the bridegroom is a practice that has been borrowed from an Islamic wedding tradition. In Islamic wedding ceremonies in Bangladesh, the “*gai-haldi ceremony*” has been borrowed from a Hindu marriage ceremony. Thus, there is a practice of borrowing marriage rituals from the traditions of different marriages thereby making a marriage culturally and socially more vibrant and diverse.

The cultural analysis of marriages upholds non-reductionism as culture has its own specific meanings, rules, and practices which are not reducible to or explainable solely in terms of another category or level of social formation. The cultural analysis is against economic reductionism, that is, an attempt to explain a cultural text, in this case marriages, by reference to its place in the production process. A cultural analysis implies that the processes of a political economy does not determine the meanings of texts or their appropriation by audiences. On the contrary, political economy, social relationships and culture must be understood in terms of their own specific logics and modes of development. Each of these domains is “articulated” or related together in context-specific ways (“An Introduction to Cultural Studies”, 9). In this case, marriages form the cultural text or cultural product that need not be interpreted as a social institution or as a component that triggers the process of economic production. It may not just be understood in relation to the political economy that is in place in a nation. The cultural text of marriages may be interpreted from a religious, a cultural, a social, and a scientific perspective thereby giving rise to innumerable number of interpretations and multiplicity of meanings which are level players in a system of meanings. Marriages may also be studied and analyzed from the points of view of Communication Studies, Media Studies, and entertainment. The signification in relation to marriages is continuous and varied thereby avoiding mere economic reductionism and promoting non-reductionism.

3.4 Articulation:

The cultural analysis of a cultural text or cultural product involves the idea of articulation that theorizes the relationships between different components of a social formation. Articulation is based on forming a temporary unity between elements that are different. Articulation suggests both expression or representation and juxtaposition (“An Introduction to Cultural Studies”, 9-10). In this case, the cultural analysis of marriages theorizes, expresses, or represents and juxtaposes the relationship between marriages and sustainability which are different components of a social formation and have no apparent connection between themselves but they have been put together to focus on the conservation of natural and physical resources which are used as finished products in marriages and to make the processes involved in creating the finished products sustainable.

3.5 Power:

The power in this case is understood in terms of the processes that generate and enable any form of social action, relationship, or order. Power may be constraining but may also be enabling. In this case, the foregrounding of the ritualistic aspect of Indian marriage ceremonies in India and abroad through media texts is to project the culture and tradition of a growing nation that in turn elucidates the power of the ruling elites in furthering their global agenda of being “*swadeshi*”. The ritualistic wedding practices are markers of social and cultural traditions and apparently play a key role in sustainability. Thus, the traditional marriage ceremonies are still in vogue and are organized and conducted in addition to court marriages even in the present era.

3.6 Popular Culture:

The marriages are a part of the popular culture because of their mass base and popularity. They have spectacle, pomp, splendour, glamour, glitz, happiness, and attraction which make them endearing to the masses and these qualities are responsible for making, maintaining, and reproducing discourses and discursive practices which are ultimately popular

and associated with sustainable marriages. Thus, gala, and picturesque weddings are designed and executed with great pomp and show.

3.7 Texts and Readers:

In a cultural analysis, the text does not always comprise of written word but may be in the form of images, sounds, objects, and activities or practices which are sign systems that signify with the same mechanism as language. They are referred to as cultural texts. In this context, the cultural text is marriages. During a marriage ceremony music is played in the form of “*shehnai*”, gifts are exchanged by the bride’s and the bridegroom’s families and several rituals or practices are followed as a part of the ceremony. The critics read the cultural texts and the meanings that they attribute to these texts are not the same as the active audience or readers. The critics are advanced readers and the texts are forms of representations that are polysemic in nature. The marriages are read as cultural texts by the critics which are not only perceived as instances of generation of resources to create finished cultural products for consumption through their realization but also as exhibition of instances of sustainability. This aspect makes marriages postmodern in nature and in addition to it marriages may be read and interpreted from various subject positions or critical positions thereby suggesting the possibility of multiple readings and multiple meanings being produced in relation to them.

3.8 Subjectivity and Identity:

The process of consumption defines the identity of individuals, societies, and cultures. The analysis focusses upon the subjectivities and identities of individuals, societies, and cultures. The cultural analysis involves the exploration of the kinds of people, the way the subjects are created, and the way people identify with themselves. The identities are discursive formations or constructions or products of discourses. The praxis associated with marriages in different cultures typify those cultures and represent the subjectivity and the identity of that culture. In a Hindu marriage ceremony, the “*Vaivahik homa*” and “*Laja homa*” are conducted during which the sacred fire is invoked, and oblations of clarified butter are poured into the “*homa kunda*” which is a small square pit holding the spiritual fire fueled by square pieces of dried wood. The groom chants Vedic mantras and utters “*svaha*” at the end of a verse. Agni represents the mouth of Lord Vishnu and represents illumination of the mind, knowledge, and happiness. Lord Vishnu is a divine witness. During “*Laja homa*” parched rice is offered to the sacred fire. The brother of the bride places parched rice into the hands of the bride and half of it falls in the hands of the bridegroom. The mantras are chanted. The bride prays to Lord Yama, the god of death so that he grants long life, health, happiness, and prosperity to the bridegroom. In Vedic times, it was customary to perform Agni puja or sacred fire worship called “*homa*” every day. The couple’s performance of this ritual for the first time after getting married signifies their entry into the “*grihastha ashrama*” which is the householder stage of life (“Hindu Wedding: The Sacred Rites of Matrimony”). The rituals that belong to ancient Vedic tradition are followed during Hindu marriage ceremonies even today. They foreground the subjectivity of the individual, the society and the culture as the individuals taking part in the Hindu wedding are Hindus who belong to a Hindu community or society and a Hindu culture. During a Hindu wedding the following of these rituals is mandatory.

In a Christian wedding, embarking on a honeymoon owes its origin to the tradition of the past referred to as “Bride-by-capture”. According to this tradition the bridegroom would kidnap the bride and marry her. The bride’s family would come to rescue her. The bridegroom would hide for a month. On the other hand, the bride’s family would accept the action, rid themselves of anger and the bride and the bridegroom would get acquainted with each other and drink mead, a honeyed wine (*Wedding Rituals in Christianity, Judaism and Islam*, 79). This practice is not there anymore but it has metamorphosed into the tradition of going on honeymoons in the modern times, that is, a vacation for the couple after marriage. The tradition of going on honeymoons is rooted in the western culture and forms an important component of the identity of that culture so much so that it has been adopted by other cultures as well.

In an Islamic wedding, it is especially noted that the “*Gai-haldi ceremony*” is practiced in Bangladesh. The bride’s “*Gai-haldi*” is held on the first day at the bride’s home whereas the groom’s “*Gai-haldi*” occurs on the second day in the groom’s home. The bride, her female family members, and her friends gather at the bride’s home and massage oil and turmeric on the bride’s skin. The bride and the other women wear yellow sarees that may be decorated with turmeric paste. The bride may have red in her yellow saree. The turmeric paste is applied to the groom. The bride’s in-laws visit the bride with gifts for her and her family members with sweets, clothing, and jewellery. The bride’s mother-in-law along with the groom’s grandmother binds a red and yellow arm bangle to the bride as a bond between the two families. *Ladoo* is offered to the bride by the groom’s grandmother and other female family members as well as by her own female family members. This shows her acceptance of them and their acceptance of her. The celebration continues till night, and it is like the

henna ceremony conducted in Islamic weddings of other cultures (*Wedding Rituals in Christianity, Judaism and Islam*, 132-133). This ceremony is usually a part of the Hindu marriages, but the Islamic marriages held in Bangladesh have this ceremony as a part of their wedding festivities which foregrounds their identity as a separate society and a separate culture.

4. CONCLUSION

Marriages that signify “*Gathbandhan*” or the union of two bodies, minds and souls have the crucial aspect of sustainability embodied in them. Sustainability is an important idea in today’s world so that the depletion of resources can be stemmed, and sustainable processes can be adopted to buttress the replenishment of resources. The idea of sustainability advocates generation of awareness regarding depletion or exhaustion of resources, responsible consumption, and meticulous community behaviour to save planet Earth from being completely denuded of its resources. Marriages in a way are responsible for economic sustainability as they drive an industry and in turn an economy through creation of jobs and generation of revenue. They form the basis of environmental sustainability as many of the marriage rituals are conducted using eco-friendly substances, renewable sources of energy, and less consumption of electricity or power especially when it is a daylight wedding and they factor in the survival of the species, that is, homo sapiens by making them contribute successfully to the gene pool. Marriages ensure social and cultural sustainability by sustaining the family unit, the society, and the polity. They also ensure the continuance of social and cultural traditions which are responsible for typifying a society and a culture. A trend of “*Green Marriages*” may be initiated to conserve the resources of the planet Earth and to adopt sustainable processes which may go a long way in preserving Earth for the future generations.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

None

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None

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