

THE CHANGING ASPECTS OF MARRIAGE RITUALS AND PRACTICES IN RURAL HARYANA: A SOCIOLOGICAL INSIGHT

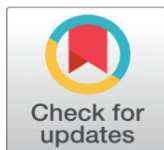
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ABSTRACT

Marriage, as a social institution, holds a pivotal role in structuring human relationships and ensuring cultural continuity. In rural Haryana, wedding rituals have historically embodied the region's deep-seated traditions and communal values. However, the dynamics of these rituals have shifted over time, reflecting broader societal transformations. Thus, keeping in view, the present study has been undertaken to know and analyse the changing aspects of wedding rituals, ceremonies and practices in rural Haryana along with the assessment of the effects on the family and the institution of marriage. The study adopts a descriptive and exploratory research framework, focusing on four districts of Haryana: Rewari, Jind, Ambala, and Sirsa. 40 male & female respondents (10 from each district) possessing 60 plus year of age were selected through purposive/convenient sampling. Data was collected by using qualitative methods, specifically through in-depth discussions and direct observations, to capture the lived experiences and insights of participants. The findings indicate a significant change in the nature and style of traditional rituals such as tail chadhana, baan, and Nyonda dalna, etc. Some of meaningful wedding ceremonies have largely been reduced to symbolic gestures or have disappeared altogether. This erosion of ritualistic depth not only marks a change in matrimonial customs but also signals a shift in the cultural fabric of rural Haryana. The study underscores the tension between cultural preservation and the forces of modernization, offering a critical reflection on the future of these fading traditions.

Keywords: Marriage, Rituals, Change, Symbolic, Modernization

1. INTRODUCTION

Marriage is a social institution as well as a religious sacrament. It also plays a significant role in establishing the family, which is the first unit of society. Marriage is an institution accepted for social order in all types of societies. Still, in religious scriptures, marriage is recognized for its religious and spiritual significance and physical, mental, and social importance. In the Ashram system, marriage is the prerequisite for entering the Grihastha Ashram from a Brahmacharya. According to Westermarck (1891), marriage is a relationship between one or more men and one or more women which is accepted by custom or law and includes the rights and duties of both the parties involved in this union and the children born to them. Majumdar and Madan (1956), defined marriage as a social ritual, it generally includes social recognition

in the form of civil and religious ritual which brings together two people of different sexes through sexual and other genetic and co-related socio-economic factors. It gives the right to participate in relationships.

Purpose of Marriage

According to the meaning and definitions of marriage, marriage is related to various types of human satisfaction. Majumdar and Madan (1956), talked about the major four purposes of marriage which are as follows:

1. Satisfaction of sexual needs in a regular and socially recognized manner.
2. Achievement of a reliable social system of child-rearing.
3. Transfer of culture.
4. Economic cooperation and division of labour.

Traditional Hindu Marriage

Marriage has been accepted as a sacred religious sacrament in the Hindu social system. According to Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (1926), marriage is a partnership that requires patience. This is not a spontaneous event but a serious ritual, which despite being serious and perishable, is overwhelmed with the feeling of devotion and reciprocity. As per P.H. Prabhu (1952), marriage is a sacrament for a Hindu and hence the relationship between the parties entering into a marriage has to be sacramental and not in the form of an agreement.

Eight forms of Hindu marriage are prevalent - *Brahma Vivah*, *Dev Vivah*, *Arsh Vivah*, *Prajapatya Vivah*, *Asura Vivah*, *Gandharva Vivah*, *Rakshas Vivah*, and *Paishaic Vivah*. Among these eight forms, the first four types are considered ideal and the last four are considered inferior. (Prabhu 1979, page 153-154)

Wedding

A wedding is a ceremonial event where two people formally unite in marriage. It is often a significant occasion, symbolizing love, commitment, and the start of a shared life. The ceremony can vary in style and tradition, reflecting cultural, religious, or personal values. Weddings typically include vows, exchanging rings, and celebrating with family and friends. It's a day of joy, marking the beginning of a lifelong partnership.

Wedding-related Rituals and Practices

Rituals and practices are vital for understanding how societies maintain cohesion and structure. Rituals are symbolic, repeated behaviors that reinforce social norms, values, and collective identities. They can be religious, cultural, or secular and often involve formal ceremonies, such as weddings, funerals, national holidays, and everyday practices like greetings or mealtime traditions. Rituals serve multiple functions in society. They help individuals transition through life stages, known as rites of passage, by marking significant changes in status or identity. These practices also create a sense of belonging and unity within groups, fostering social integration. Durkheim's (1912)¹ in his concept of "Collective effervescence" highlights how rituals generate emotional energy and solidarity among participants. From a functionalist perspective, rituals maintain social order by reinforcing shared beliefs and values. Conflict theorists, however, argue that rituals can perpetuate power imbalances, benefiting dominant groups. Symbolic interactionists focus on the meanings individuals attach to these practices, which are constructed and maintained through social interactions. Overall, rituals and practices are essential for the continuity of social life, shaping individual identities and group dynamics while reflecting and reinforcing the underlying social structure.

Wedding-Related Rituals and Practices in Rural Haryana

In almost all the communities of Haryana, there is a tradition of marrying within one's community, but due to the spread of education, industrialization, and the influence of media, inter-caste marriages have also started taking place. Here, in agricultural communities and most of the castes, marriage within the same Gotra is prohibited and marriages take place on caste-based endogamy and Gotra-based exogamy. Many marriage-related traditional practices are prevalent here such as *Ubtan Mehendi*, *Ghudchadhi*, *Sehra*, *Godd Bharna*, *Sagai*, *Tail Chadhana*, *Mahnda*, *Bhaat Nyotna*, *Bhaat Bharna*, *Lagan (Teva)*, *Nyonda*, *Baan Baithna*, *Banna-Banni*, *Banwada Nikalna*, *Chadhat*, *Chak Pujan*, *Milani*, *Barothi*, *Jutha Churai*, *Phere*, *Kanya-Daan*, *Chhand Kahlai*, *Vidai*, *Khodiya*, *Ratjaga (Vidhu Aagman)*, *Dai Dhan Dhokna*, *Bar-Ruqai*, *Kangna*, *Gauna*, *War-Pher*, the practices like applying *Thapa*, opening the *Kangana*, making the brother-in-law sit in the lap, showing the

¹ Durkheim, E. (1912). *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. (Translated by Karen E. Fields, 1995). Free Press.

face, and inviting others, etc. The period from the fixation of the marriage relationship (Sagai) to the second visit of the bride at her husband's home (Gauna) has also been drastically short over time. A ceremonial series of about four years has remained confined to 4-6 hours only.

Some changing Hindu wedding related Rituals and Practices in Rural Haryana

Change is a universal social process and an unchanging law. Nearly every element of society has undergone change, including information technology, music, fashion, and behaviour. Even within the Haryana social milieu, there have been some modifications to the long-standing Hindu customs surrounding marriage, and some of these customs are currently disappearing. A number of the primary causes of this include widespread wealth, government welfare programs, population growth, current levels of mistrust among people, and people relocating in pursuit of work. Being stuck in the past, viewing customs as unnecessary, a lack of interpersonal cooperation, the dominance of the capitalist system, and the acceleration of technological advancement in the modern era, among other issues. Some traditions, like *tail chadhana*, *baan*, and *Nyonda dalna*, are disappearing or appearing in a different form in this state as a result of the change.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

There have been many studies related to the change in the institution called marriage in Indian society but mostly have been confined to the family and marriage as hardly any such study has been done so far on the changing rituals and practices of Hindu marriage in Haryana. The studies of some scholars like **Kapadia (1955)** conducted a study on graduate teachers of secondary schools among 513 teacher respondents living in 294 joint families and found that 93 out of 219 respondents had never lived in a joint family. Lived in families. Of the remaining 49 teachers, 35 are not interested in joint life and 14 have not expressed their opinion in this regard. After marriage, the structure of the family tends to change within itself, which also opens the door for future changes. Regarding the changes taking place in traditions, **Marriott (1955)** studied Kishangarhi village in the Aligarh district of Uttar Pradesh and explored the interaction between small and big traditions. He identified two concepts: localization, where urban civilization's ideology, tradition, customs, and way of life reach the village level, and universalization, where parts of small traditions reach long traditions and their form changes at regional and national levels. Both processes are active in ancient Indian civilization and continue to evolve in small communities. **Singh (1986)** in his study explores the impact of modernization on Indian tradition, focusing on internal changes in cultural traditions, the influence of Islam, the West's influence, and the social structure changes. He adopts a historical perspective and identifies five forces in Indian society: Sanskritization, Islamization, Westernization, Modernization, and Globalization, which all contribute to adaptive change, with structural and functional unity. **Gupta (1976)** in his study reveals that changes in Indian society are often both traditional and modern. The social norms here welcome the traditional as well as prestige and glamour-oriented marital role. Models involving significant changes in the value system are quite likely to permeate the "romantic ideal" system in the long run. They also raise some questions as to whether such changes will be part of a continuum. That is, it seems difficult to stand firm for a long time against the tremendous forces of change in the form of acceptance of the ideals of the modern West. **Bloom and Reddy (1983)** in their study found that Indian marriage customs revealed changes in objectives, timing of marriage and childbearing, rural-urban differences, decline in child marriage and two-stage marriages, and a higher rise in age at marriage. The study also found that age patterns in India do not resemble Western patterns, but cohabitation and first-birth patterns do. Socio-economic factors explain less variation in marriage and fertility timing within local communities. **Navedomsky (1980)** in his study collected primary data from observations and surveys in a large East Indian community in rural Trinidad. This study describes several important changes in the institution of marriage including increasing age for marriage, preference for individual choice in the selection of spouse, absence of village exogamy and importance of local and nuclear family, changes in the marriage ceremony, inter-household personal roles, and changes in kinship behaviour and ideology. He found that the cultural traditions of India provide a satisfactory explanation of the contemporary family and marriage of rural East Indians. **Kumawat's (2013)** study, based on Udaipur, Rajasthan, found that in independent India, the spread of education, new employment opportunities, urbanization, increasing vocational education, co-education, marriage responsibility, and anti-dowry Due to the influence of laws, there has been a massive change in the traditional conditions of men and women in Indian society. Now women have come into the mainstream of the new economy, business mainstream, and specialized professions like doctor, engineering, journalism, film, literature, politics, etc. As a result of the influence of Western country's beliefs, modern education, and industrialization, the ideology of the individual has evolved in India, due to which the form and patterns of the institution of marriage are also changing. The other aspect is the change like

traditional marriage. Now the traditions are fading and some have become optional instead of binding, like the rounds are now reduced to only three or four instead of seven, and some religious rituals are also no longer necessary like *Chhat Poojan* and others, etc. **Ahlawat (2015)** in her ethnographic survey-based study found that marriage norms and sanctions in rural Haryana reveal that these norms are influenced by the perception of honour for women and girls. Violations of these rules can restrict personal choice and limit marriage choices. The state, which is rapidly urbanizing with a consumerist culture, faces challenges in balancing tradition and modernity. While constitutional provisions protect women's rights, it is also known for foeticide, honour killings, and violence against women and families over marriage partners due to limited life partner options in rural environments. **Malik (2020)** in his study found that the only two economically prosperous agricultural communities of Haryana, Rode, and Bishnoi, have been married for centuries due to the limited number of their fraternity. Since then, we have been following the *Watta-Satta* marriage (exchange) tradition under which a person marries his son or daughter in the family which has a son or daughter and, in this relationship, the brother-in-law and the brother-in-law are the brother-in-law of each other. Both are brothers. But now that too is changing. Now educated young men and women are abandoning this tradition and getting married voluntarily. **Gandhi (2023)** examines the evolution of marriage in Hindu society, highlighting the decline of traditional practices like polygamy and bigamy, the shift from sacred to secular rituals, and the rise of partner selection influenced by factors like education, urbanization, and economic independence. It also discusses emerging marriage systems like homosexuality, lesbianism, and single-person households.

Research Methodology

To explore the changing wedding rituals in rural Haryana, a descriptive and exploratory research approach has been adopted. This methodology was chosen to gain a deep understanding of the shifts in traditional wedding practices and their cultural implications. The study focuses on four districts of Haryana: Rewari, Jind, Ambala, and Sirsa. These districts were purposefully selected to ensure the representation of diverse regional and cultural aspects within rural Haryana.

Sampling Technique

The study employed a purposive or convenient sampling method to identify participants who could provide meaningful insights. A total of 40 respondents were selected, with 10 respondents from each district. All participants were aged 60 years and above, as they are well-acquainted with traditional wedding rituals and are capable of comparing past practices with present trends.

Data Collection Methods

The study relied on qualitative methods to collect data, ensuring an in-depth understanding of participants' lived experiences and observations. Two primary techniques were used:

1. **In-Depth Discussions:** Semi-structured discussions were conducted with respondents to explore their memories and perspectives on wedding rituals. This approach allowed flexibility, enabling respondents to share their insights freely.
2. **Direct Observation:** Researchers observed wedding ceremonies and rituals in the study areas to document current practices and compare them with traditional customs.

Scope/Area of Inquiry

The research focused on traditional rituals such as *tail chadhana*, *baan*, *Banna-Banni*, *Banwada Nikalna*, *Chadhat*, *Chak Pujan*, *Milani*, *Barothi*, *Jutha Churai*, *Phere*, *Kanya-Daan*, *Nyonda dalna* etc. These rituals were examined to understand their symbolic meanings, current relevance, and the extent to which they have transformed or disappeared.

3. RESULTS & FINDINGS

The findings of the study reveal a significant transformation in wedding rituals in rural Haryana over the past few decades. These changes reflect the influence of modernization, economic shifts, and evolving social values, which have collectively impacted traditional matrimonial practices.

Decline in Traditional Rituals

Rituals that once held profound cultural and emotional significance, such as *tail chadhana*, *baan*, and *Nyonda dalna*, have either been reduced to symbolic gestures or have disappeared entirely. Most of the respondents, expressed concern over the fading importance of these rituals, which were once considered integral to wedding ceremonies.

Simplification of Ceremonies

Weddings, which traditionally spanned multiple days with elaborate customs, have become shorter and less intricate. Financial considerations, time constraints, and the growing influence of urban lifestyles have led to a preference for simplified ceremonies. The multi-day festivities, which once fostered a strong sense of community bonding, have now been condensed, often resulting in a loss of their communal essence.

Commercialization of Weddings

The study also highlights the increasing commercialization of weddings. There is a noticeable shift towards grand displays of wealth, with an emphasis on lavish decorations, catering, and entertainment. This trend has overshadowed the cultural and spiritual significance of rituals, with many families prioritizing outward extravagance over traditional practices.

Impact of Modern Values

Modern education, inter-generational differences, and exposure to global cultures have significantly influenced wedding rituals. Younger generations often view traditional customs as outdated or burdensome. Consequently, many practices are being replaced or modified to align with contemporary values and lifestyles.

Loss of Cultural Identity

Respondents expressed concerns that the erosion of traditional wedding rituals is leading to a gradual loss of cultural identity in rural Haryana. Rituals that once symbolized familial and social unity are now being overlooked, reducing the depth and richness of matrimonial customs.

Shift in Gender Roles

The study found a noticeable change in the roles played by men and women in wedding ceremonies. Traditionally, women were the primary participants in rituals which symbolized fertility and prosperity. However, with these rituals fading, the role of women has become less prominent, shifting the focus of weddings to broader social gatherings rather than intimate, family-centered rituals.

Rise of Inter-Regional Influences

Inter-regional marriages have introduced new customs and practices. Respondents noted that younger generations are incorporating rituals and traditions from other states or cultures, diluting the uniqueness of Haryana's own matrimonial customs. This blending of traditions has further accelerated the loss of local rituals.

Generational Divide

During study we came across with a growing generational divide in attitudes toward wedding rituals. Older respondents expressed a sense of nostalgia for the past and viewed the changes as a loss of cultural heritage. In contrast, younger respondents saw the modifications as necessary adaptations to modern lifestyles. This divide has created tension within families, with elders often feeling alienated from contemporary wedding practices.

Preservation vs. Modernization

The study reveals a tension between preserving traditional rituals and adapting to modern demands. While some families make efforts to retain certain practices, these attempts often lack the authenticity and community involvement that characterized weddings in the past.

4. CONCLUSION

On the basis of the facts above, we have arrived at the conclusion that the institution of marriage is undergoing change with regard to its rituals, ceremonies, and durability. It is found that rapid changes have been taken or taking place in the wedding practices which were of 2-4 of duration during the earlier time (approximately 30 years back). *Bhaat*

Bharna, *Nyonda dalna*, and *Kanyadaan* are rituals and practices that not only strengthen the social fabric of relationships but also provide financial assistance to the family of the bride and/or groom, reduce the financial burden of marriage, a sense of unity in the network of kinship. Some rituals and practices functioned like co-operative banks. Haryana's changing wedding customs reflect the state's larger social, cultural, and economic shifts. This alteration illustrates how tradition adjusts to contemporary circumstances while maintaining its symbolic meaning, signifying both continuity and change. Society must strike a balance between cultural legacy and advancement in order to promote more sustainable and equitable practices and guarantee that weddings continue to be inclusive and meaningful.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

None.

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