



MARRIAGE PERSPECTIVES AND STATUS OF WOMEN IN ANCIENT INDIA

G.SURAJ

Assistant Professor of History
Government College for Women, Thiruvananthapuram

ABSTRACT

Marriage is defined as an agreement with high expectations for a happy and peaceful life, based on mutual trust and confidence. Since the late 1800s, marriage has been subjected to continuous legal revisions that have continued into the twenty-first century. The institution of marriage can be regarded the foundation of all human societies that we are aware of. Love is defined as an enduring affection between a husband and wife, and their tie is similar to that of a body and soul, a sign of oneness and inseparability. Marriage's definition varies around the world, not only between cultures and religions, but also throughout a culture's and religion's history, expanding and contracting in who and what is included, but it is typically defined as an institution in which sexually-based interpersonal relationships are recognised. A wedding is a ceremonial agreement between two parties in which they consciously and legally agree on a new living situation in which they will behave for the benefit of both parties.

Keywords: Marriage, Divorce, Vedic Society, Widow Remarriage, Believes

INTRODUCTION

Marriage is a socio-religious and legal institution that establishes the foundation of a family. It is a sacrament for Hindus, a sacred knot for Christians and a sanctified settlement for Muslims. Marriage is solemnised with first-rate expectancies grounded on the concord and mutual self-assurance for a satisfied and serene life. Marital balance has become the backbone of the family. The sacramental feature of marriage is rooted withinside the perception that even death couldn't dissolve the wedding ties. Most primitive humans have allowed the dissolution of marriage beneath a few circumstances (Finnis: 190). From decreased cultures, few examples of divorce rites are located in which such symbolic acts because the breaking of the rod, tearing of the leaf or casting away of a few items are publicly performed (Britannica).

A state, an organisation, a religious institution, or a local community can all recognise marriages. It is frequently seen as a contract. Civil marriage is performed and carried out by a



government entity in line with the jurisdiction's marriage rules and has no religious content. Before the state, civil marriage recognised and creates the inherent rights and obligations of matrimony. A religious marriage takes place under the auspices of a religious institution and has religious substance. Religious marriage recognises and establishes the inherent rights and obligations of matrimony before the religion.

Marriage can be ended through divorce or annulment in several cultures. Despite national laws prohibiting child marriages and polygamy, child weddings and polygamy may occur in some locations. Historically, married women in most cultures had little rights of their own, as they were considered the property of the husband, along with the family's children; as a result, they could neither own nor inherit property, nor could they legally represent themselves. Marriage has undergone steady legal reforms since the late nineteenth century and continuing into the twenty-first century, all geared at increasing the rights of the woman. Spouses were given legal identities, men were no longer allowed to physically discipline their wives, wives were given property rights, and divorce laws were liberalised.

Religious Perspective of Marriages

Marriage usually imposes normative or legal duties on the parties involved, as well as any offspring they may have or adopt. Most sovereign nations and other jurisdictions confine marriage to opposite-sex couples in terms of legal recognition. In recent years, an increasing number of nations, particularly industrialised democracies, have repealed bans on interfaith, interracial, and same-sex marriages and established legal recognition for them. It is regarded as sacred by Hindus and Christians, and as a contract by Muslims. According to Christian beliefs, the Lord created a woman from the rib he had removed from the man, and he brought her to the man.

The power of divorce was viewed as a logical consequence of marital rights in all ancient societies. Originally, this power was solely vested in the husband, and the wife was not permitted to seek a divorce under any circumstances. A husband might divorce his wife for any reason that made her distasteful to him under ancient Hebrew law, and there were few or no limits on his arbitrary and capricious use of this power (Ameer Ali: 471). Divorce was easy and common among the early Romans, as well as the Athenians. A husband may divorce his wife for any reason he wanted. Only with the arrival of Christianity did marriage become seen as an irreversible union (Milton: 76). It was clear from experience that this was



not a rational or scientific attitude.

The union is sanctioned by the performance of sacred rites that bring a permanent alteration to the spouses and yield a sacred and indissoluble marriage, according to Hindu texts. As a result, after the rituals are properly performed, the conjugal tie is forever established due to the indelible and internal changes that occur within the spouse as a result of the rites themselves (Holden: 1). Marriage is a sacrament, a sacred institution with tremendous spiritual importance that cannot be measured solely by its uses and purposes (Alladi Mahadeva Sastri: 208). As a result, traditional Hindu marriage is not dependent on consent and can be performed virtually without it. When the *sati*, or self-sacrifice of the widow on the funeral pyre of her dead husband, is viewed as the Hindu wife's responsibility, the holy relationship might also last beyond the lifespan of the husband. The brutality of society toward this group of people manifested itself in the imposition of *sati* on her (PKB Nayar: 5).

Etymology and Historical Origin of Marriage in India

The word 'Marriage' is derived from the word 'Merry,' which means 'happy,' and its Hindustani equivalent is *Shadi*, which is a Persian word. *Shad* is the Arabic word for joy. As a result, marriage brings satisfaction and contentment. Kinship and marriage are fundamental to the concept of society. Even in primitive communities, people felt compelled to live together and contribute to the advancement of the human species. The only option was to marry. On the other hand, a man's individuality is incomplete without a woman, and the perfection of womanhood is only considered when a progeny is present.

The Hindu term for marriage is *Vivaha*, which means "bring up away the bride." The *Vivaha* is vitally necessary for a Hindu. Every Hindu is required to complete four *Ashrams*. Marriage is the only way to get into the second *ashram*, the *Grihasthas* home stage. Every Hindu's ultimate goal is *Moksha* (salvation), which cannot be accomplished until a male progeny is born. In Sanskrit, the phrase *Putra* (son) means "one who rescues a parent from hell."

Divorce was very uncommon in early Vedic society. Women held a prominent position in society. They had complete autonomy over their spiritual and intellectual development (Pratima Asthana: 1). A legally and socially sanctioned union between man and woman is a marriage where it brings together two distinct portions of man and woman's existence. They're like two plants that have been pulled from their plots and put into another.



As a result, the institution of marriage can be considered the primary element of all forms of human society that we are familiar with. It has a particularly intimate relationship with the family, which consists of parents and children. Marriage, which dates back to the dawn of civilisation, is the foundation of the social group.

Marriage and family are, strictly speaking, two sides of the same coin, as one cannot exist without the other. The marriage has the impact of physically and spiritually transferring her from her paternal family to her husband's. During her husband's lifetime, there was no possibility of divorce. A Hindu marriage cannot be dissolved by adultery, prostitution, or degradation. Marriage and family are, strictly speaking, two sides of the same coin, as one cannot exist without the other. The marriage has the impact of physically and spiritually transferring her from her paternal family to her husband's. During her husband's lifetime, there was no possibility of divorce. A Hindu marriage cannot be dissolved by adultery, prostitution, or degradation (Indra: 82).

Marriage is seen as a sacred and lasting connection in most societies, including Hinduism. When we look through the Bible, we find many verses that support the idea that marriage is a holy bond created by God alone and that no one should break it. "Man must not separate, then, what God has put together," the Holy Bible says. A more intense viewpoint is represented in Hindu writings. Marriage is a sacrament for Hindus, and thus indestructible. It's a relationship that will last not just for this birth, but for all future births as well. The pursuit of happiness in this life and beyond is, without a doubt, the objective of all human activities. Humanity, according to the Hindu religion, is made up of two indivisible entities: *Pursh* and *Parakriti*, or male and female sexes. The two things have distinct attributes that appear to be in opposition to one another, but when they are combined, they form a perfect whole. The *Purusha* is bestowed with attributes like courage, strength, and authority, whereas the *Parakriti* is endowed with qualities such as inspiration, delicacy, and self-surrender. Both of these seemingly opposing attributes are necessary for the harmonious development of the human psyche. These two creatures have an innate affinity to one another, which manifests as the physical or sexual desire between the male and the female. This attraction eventually evolved to the institution of marriage, which took many forms depending on the geographical, social, and cultural conditions of different locations.

Only through marriage can one's life become flawless and complete. In the words of Manu, the lawgiver, "let man and woman married in marriage continually exert themselves,



so they may not be disunited and break their mutual fidelity." Another lawgiver, Yajnavalkya, allowed a woman to be supplanted if she always bears female children. Divorce was virtually nonexistent among the caste Hindus of the Vedic period, but it was common among people from the lowest social strata. Surdas, robbers, and other low-caste persons used to be able to divorce their wives with ease. A husband did not divorce his wife until she proved barren or adulteress among the other three varnas, namely the Brahmanas, Kshatriyas, and Vaisyas. The unpopularity of the caste Hindu divorce system is also revealed by foreign tourists and Persian Chroniclers. Despite all of these mantras promoting marriage's indissolubility, there are elements, both internal and external, at work to weaken the durability of the installed links. This is known as marital emotional instability or discord, and it can take several forms, the most extreme of which is divorce.

Divorce was infrequent in the cultured portions of society, according to Buddhist literature. In the 'Kanhadipayana,' a lady tells her husband that even though she didn't love him, she didn't marry again because it was against the family's norm for a married woman to marry again (Kanhadipayana Jataka: 444). As a result, women in the upper castes of society were hesitant to take advantage of the lower castes' divorce custom.

Background of Marriage in the Medieval Period

In Indian history, the medieval period was a watershed moment. With the end of Aryan and Aryo-Buddhist India, a new age began with a radical change in social life. Religion had a strong influence on marriage and divorce during the medieval period. As previously stated, social traditions have influenced marital practices from the dawn of humanity. They were outside the reach of religion, except in the medieval period, when some castes, such as the Rajputs and the Nambudiris, practiced a special kind of dissolution of marriage.

The divorce among the *Nambudiris* of the Malabar Coast was the most intriguing of all. When her kinsmen or neighboring Brahmins accused a woman of immoral behaviour, she was excommunicated and imprisoned. The maid or servant (*Dasi* or *Vesali*), who seemed to be essential to every *Nambudiri* clan, was then investigated, and if she found her mistress guilty, she was immediately secluded and placed under supervision. If the family could select the most suitable dwelling for the purpose, the *Sadhanam* (the person or the accused woman was referred as) was moved there; otherwise, was held in the private residence while the



other people looked for alternative lodging. If the chief found the accusation to be justified, the accused was punished accordingly.

Divorce was not widely practiced during the Sangam Period. In society, women were treated with great respect. They exercised their right to choose their life partners. They were well-versed in *Kalavu* and *Karupu*, or illegal and legal weddings, as well as prostitution. The most essential attribute of ancient Kerala women was chastity. In Tamil, chastity is referred to as *Karpu*. It is the moral purpose's shaky foundation. They regarded *Karpu* as far more vital than life itself. They were extremely loyal to their spouses. Chaste ladies were held in high regard throughout society. They were unaware of the practice of divorce at the time.

They have to experience both arranged and love marriages. Love marriages were popular, and it was even thought respectable for a young lady to elope with her sweetheart, as long as they returned to their homes and married properly. There were arranged marriages, inter-regional marriages, and examples of chieftains and noblemen, such as *Cherpan* and *Kunru Kizhavan*, falling in love with and marrying women from the lower classes (A Ve Cuppiramaniyan 45:207). The Sangam poets were usually supportive of and encouraged love marriages. However, the local women used to embarrass the young lady in love on occasion (V Kanakasabhai: 121). The community never criticised those who eloped under the lure of mutual love.

The Akananuru's Sangam poet, Nalaimudi Nettayar, opined that just as the body and spirit are intertwined, so are the husband and wife (A Taccinamurtti: 339). Women who practised chastity were revered and admired. The dedicated housewife was the one who carried out home responsibilities with zeal. Even if sati was rarely practised, widows' living conditions were not ideal. Despite this, the noblewomen faced the pain of separation with courage, knowing that they would be reunited after death in the other world (Tiruvalluvar and K Subrahmanya Pallai: 1160).

Prostitution was still seen as a legitimate business. Prostitutes, on the other hand, were seen as intrusions into idyllic family life. However, they are mentioned so frequently in the poems and have such a high social status that there is no doubt that the harlots of the Sangam era were not the degraded prostitutes of today. There was no proof that a man who left his wife and went to prostitute should be punished (Manikkanar A: 3). Even though writings such as *Kuruntogai* mention harlots defying spouses and their relations and enticing men, the harlots provided their



companions with more cultural enjoyment than anything else. The association of married men with harlots shattered the family's calm on occasion.

In unequivocal words, Tiruvalluvar opposed the association of married men with the harlots known as *Parattaiyar*. It was evident that it was a destructive evil because of its widespread prevalence. He desired for a good guy to be mindful of public women who speak sweetly but are truly thirsty for filthy lustre (Tiruvalluvar and K Subrahmanya Pallai: 178). Harlotry became a well-established system, and males were frequently victims of such public women's enticements. *Cheripparattai* and *Kadalparattai* were the two most common forms of *Parattaiyar*. The *Cheripparattai* appears to have been a public harlot, but the *Kadalparattai* desires to have only one relationship. Even among the harlots, the *Kadalparattai* is thought to have had a superior social rank. Men have gone as far as marrying such harlots and keeping them as second wives. In certain cases, the protestations of lawfully married spouses exacerbated the family climate (Herbert: 71, 72).

Thiruvalluvar describes the married lady as "life's companion" and a woman of unshakable purity. Vasuki, his wife, was known for her chastity and fidelity. Brahmins of the Pallava period were polygamous, marrying multiple wives. For marriage, they did not limit themselves to their caste. Brahmin women also married males from the Kshatriya, Vaisya, and Sudra castes. The marriage of Brahmin boys to non-Brahmin girls was known as '*Pratiloma* marriage,' whereas the marriage of Brahmin boys to non-Brahmin females was known as '*Anuloma* marriage.' The offspring born as a result of these marriages were acknowledged by society and assigned to specific occupations.

The enduring affection between husband and wife is defined as love. Their bond is like that of a body and soul, a sign of oneness and inseparability. *Silapathikaram* is a Tamil classical composition in which Kovalan, Kannaki's husband, is charmed by Madhavi's elegance and grace even though she is a devadasi. At one point, Kovalan realised his wrongdoing to his wife and went back to her, Kannaki, to ask for forgiveness. "You have been pursuing a life of moral turpitude condemned by wise men," Kannaki said. But I am a woman of unrivalled loyalty." Her love for her spouse was as big as the planet, as high as the sky, and as deep as the ocean. The wife stayed with her husband even after he died because she loved him so much. The queen of Pandian, Kopperumdevi, died the instant she watched her husband die. Loyal women were held in high regard in society. During this time, loyal women began to worship. According to *Silapathikaram*, King Sengootuvan sculpted a statue for Kannaki and



established a temple for her. In subsequent eras, this sort of devoted female worship evolved into *Mariyamma* and *Bhgavathi* adoration. They were devout Christians, and the majority of them worshipped Mother Goddess. There were few options for divorce in such a situation.

Women are recognised as the "pivot" of family life in Sangam literature. In all of the literature, the guy is expected to be the family's leader. In addition, it was a patrilineal society. The male line passed down descent and property. The Sangam literature contains references to queens accompanying valiant monarchs and assisting them incorrectly ruling the land. They remained a steadfast source of strength and assistance. Women were commended for their loyalty and blamelessness, which were considered good traits. Virgins prayed to Lord *Muruga* to find a valiant husband. Married ladies prayed to Lord Siva for the health, wealth, and longevity of their husbands. To triumph a war, they also worshipped *Kotravai*, the goddess of war. In the later portion of the Sangam period, *Kotravai* worship grew more popular.

During the Sangam period, moms were brave enough to send their boys to combat gladly. *Mudin Magalir* or *Maraikudi Magalir* is the name given by *Purananuru* to the brave woman. Sangam moms wished for their sons to be brave enough to die as great soldiers. The parents planned for their daughters to marry brave men. According to tradition, the bridegroom pays for the bride's price, with half going to the bride and the other half going to her father. The bride had the option of keeping the money for herself, which she used to buy jewels and other luxuries.

By the eighth century A.D., women had begun to lose their dominance and began to be degraded (Ilamkulam Kunjanpilla: 121). The influx of Aryans from North India, and the subsequent Aryan colonisation of Malabar, signalled the start of a new age defined by profound socioeconomic and political developments (Lopez: 1). South Indian society was filled with distinctions based on upper and lower rank as a result of Aryan immigration. It sparked uncertainty in the minds of all professional groups, leading to frequent clashes. The Brahmins, a small proportion, emerged as the most powerful arbitrators and peacemakers, offering advice to the reigning kings as well.

Aryan notions of womanhood began to gain traction over time. The Brahmanical sastras and Samhitas supplanted the dogmas and ideas that regulated the social fabric of ancient Tamilakam with the introduction of varnashrama dharma. As a result, women's social status changed dramatically, jeopardising their freedom. They also became victims of Brahmanical norms and restrictions, which reduced them to a subordinate position. Women,



regardless of their social level, became victims of similar stereotypes. The birth of a female child became associated with a curse and poor fortune. They were restricted nearly entirely within the four walls of their homes.

CONCLUSION

Matrimony or wedlock, is a customarily or ritualistically recognised union among couples which establishes role and obligations for them and any biological or adoptive children (in-laws and other families through marriage). Marriage's definition varies around the world, not only between cultures and religions, but also throughout the history of any given culture and religion, expanding and contracting in who and what is included, but it is typically defined as an institution in which interpersonal relationships, sexually-based, are recognised. A wedding is a ceremonial agreement in which two parties mutually and legally agreed upon a new living condition to act for the betterment of both the parties. Marriage is based on the premise that both partners will live together. It also suggests that the parties will live in peace and trust with one another.

Love, commitment, cooperation, and sacrifice are among the finest human ideals, values, and virtues found in the family, which is a worldwide institution. Marriage and family are old institutions, and deep and powerful sentiments and customs have developed up around them. Several Hindu writers go into great depth about the responsibilities of husband and wife to one another. It is claimed that a husband and wife should remain faithful to one another and should always make it appear as if they are not separated. In the Vedic era, a wife was a husband's companion in good times and bad, mistress of the household, and partner in all of his worldly and spiritual needs. Through subjection in the ecclesiastical and legal domains, women's status in society deteriorated even further during the medieval period. It promoted the idea that women were unsuitable for liberty and had no right to self-determination. They should be subject to the authority of men at all times throughout their lives (Malladi Subbamma: 186). Due to a variety of socio-political factors, the purdah system, which was not previously prominent in Indian society, became popular (Madan 66: 2). The rising rate of female infanticide, the practice of child marriage, and the inhumane practice of sati, as well as the religious prohibition on widow remarriage, formed part of the social culture. As a result, women have lost their dignity in society and have become victims of fossilised and out-of-date customs such as female infanticide, child marriage, the devadasi system, the purdah system, the dowry system, and other wicked systems.



REFERENCES

- A Tatinamurti. *Akananuru*. Thiruchirappalli, Bharathidasan University, 1999, p. 339.
- A Ve Cuppiramanian. *Natrinai: An Anthology of Amour*. Madras, Department Of Tamil Development-Culture, Government of Tamil Nadu, 1989, p. 45:207.
- Alladi Mahadeva Sastri. *The Vedic Law of Marriage Or, the Emancipation of Woman*. New Delhi, Asian Educational Service, 1988, p. 208.
- Ameer Ali, Syed. *Mahommedan Law Vol II*. Delhi, Himalayan Books, 1985, p. 471.
- Britannica. "Vol. 14." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, E.B, 1980.
- Finnis, Harold J. *Dictionary of Sociology and Related Sciences*. 1964, p. 190.
- Herbert, Vaidehi. *Kalithokai: Translation in English with Meanings*. Government of Tamil Nadu, 1999, pp. 71, 72.
- Holden, Livia. *Hindu Divorce: A Legal Anthropology*. London, Routledge, 2016, p. 1.
- Ilamkulam Kunjanpilla. *Studies in Kerala History*. National Book Stall, Kottayam, 1970, p. 121.
- Indra, Prof. *The Status of Women in Ancient India: A Vivid and Graphic Survey of Women's Position - Social, Religious, Political and Legal in Ancient India*. Banaras, Motilal Banarsidass, 1955, p. 82.
- Lopez, Lawrence. *A Social History of Modern Kerala*. University of Kerala, 1998, p. 1.
- Madan, G R. *Indian Social Problems: Social Disorganization and Reconstruction*. Vol. 2, Bombay, Allied Publishers, 1973, p. 66.
- Malladi Subbamma. *Women: Tradition and Culture*. New Delhi, Sterling Publishers Private Ltd, 1985, p. 186.
- Manikkanar A. *Purananuru*. Madras, Varttamanan Publications, 1990, p. 3.



- Milton, John. *Milton on the Son of God and the Holy Spirit: From His Treatise, on Christian Doctrine*. Norwood, Pa., Norwood Editions, 1978, p. 76.
- P.K.B Nayar. *Widowhood in Modern India*. The Women Press, 2011, p. 5.
- Pratima Asthana. *Women's Movement in India*. Delhi, Vikas Pub. House, 1974, p. 1.
- Tiruvalluvar, and K Subrahmanya Pallai. *Tirukural*. Madras, South India Saiva Siddhanta Works, 1986, p. 1160.
- Tiruvalluvar, and Pazmarneri S Sundaram. *The Kural*. New Delhi, Penguin Books, 1992, pp. 912, 913, 919.
- V Kanakasabhai. *The Tamils Eighteen Hundred Years Ago*. Madras South India Saiva Siddhanta Works Pub. Society, 1966, p. 121.