

ARRANGED MARRIAGE

In the Hindu tradition arranged marriage is the most prevalent form of marriage. Rather than a man or woman seeking a relationship with a partner, family members, kin or community elders will select a mate based on particular criteria and the couple will enter into a marriage. Mate selection is not taken lightly; it requires a certain amount of expertise and can take anywhere from six months to over three years to successfully arrange a marriage (Dhruvarajan 36).

Although some may think that this is an ancient or outdated practice, the majority of marriages in India are still arranged, even among the educated middle class population of modern India (Medora, Larson & Dave 414).

In Hindu society, marriage is not only a union between two individuals; it is also the joining together of two families. The primary importance of a marriage is the sharing of common goals among families rather than merely achieving personal happiness (Hamon & Ingoldsby 214). Marriage in Hindu tradition is not only a ritual celebration but a religious, economic, political and social event for both the couple being married as well as their family and community (Mullati 18).

India is a collectivist culture in which emphasis is placed on the needs and goals of a group, particularly the family and extended family, rather than on the individual. In Hindu tradition the extended family system is considered to be the most essential institution and it thereby defines the social norms and values (Hamon & Ingoldsby 211). Due to the nature of collectivism there is greater emphasis placed on the needs of the family as a unit. Arranged marriages have the potential to benefit one's family and therefore it is one's duty to allow their family members to select a mate for them. In comparison, western cultures are individualistic

and place a larger priority on individual happiness and success. In individualistic cultures love and romance are considered to be of vital importance when choosing a marriage partner (Hamon & Ingoldsby 213), whereas among Hindus, intense emotional affection can be viewed as threatening the structure of the family (Levine, Sato, Hashimoto & Verma 3).

In Hindu tradition, love and romance are not considered prerequisites for marriage. In fact, love is often considered a weak foundation for marriage and is expected to develop after marriage takes place (Hamon & Ingoldsby 213). Many Hindus believe that feelings of love or romantic attraction can overtake more appropriate traits in a spouse and hinder the traditional purpose of arranged marriage (Hamon & Ingoldsby 213). In arranged marriage dating is not considered to be a necessary step, however feelings toward this may be changing among modern Hindus.

In mate selection there are many factors to be considered and potential partners are carefully screened to ensure compatibility. Family ideals, values, history, and background are assessed as well as social, educational and economic statuses to ensure they are compatible with one's own (Hamon & Ingoldsby 215, Mullatti 19). Religious and caste endogamy are also considered to be vital factors (Mullatti 18). In Hindu tradition, individuals believe that their marriage partner is predestined (Gupta 77). Many Hindu families will consult an astrologer to ensure that prospective partners are indeed compatible. The astrologer will match the partners' horoscopes and predict important aspects such as financial success and future children (Hamon & Ingoldsby 218).

The most important consideration in a Hindu marriage is caste endogamy, in which members belonging to a certain caste marries within that caste (Hamon & Ingoldsby 214). Following traditional endogamous rules, a girl's family status may be improved if she marries a

boy of a higher sub-caste; such a match is known as Anuloma. However, Pratiloma matches, which refers to a girl marrying a boy of lower sub-caste, are considered taboo (Mullatti 19). To marry outside of one's caste or religion is often still considered taboo, however the Hindu Marriage Act of 1955 legalized inter-religion and inter-caste marriages (Mullatti 18).

Most young Indian adults prefer arranged marriage because they believe that their elders have more wisdom and knowledge than they do, and therefore are better equipped to select prospective mates. It is believed that choosing a spouse is a significant issue, which is better left to more responsible members of the extended family (Gupta 77). In modern Hindu society there is an increasing trend to consult the young adults and obtain input regarding their prospective mates, this trend is leading to marriages that are semi-arranged (Hamon & Ingoldsby 216).

The influence of western media (movies, television, Internet, etc.), widespread education, urbanization and technological progress has resulted in transformations among youth in modern India regarding their values, ideals, attitudes, beliefs and perceptions. These influences have caused many young people to desire greater freedom and independence to express themselves and make their own decisions, including the decision of whom they marry (Hamon & Ingoldsby 219). A minority of Indian youth who are influenced by western ideals are opting to select their own marriage partners and are therefore choosing to be in love marriages, against the approval of their parents.

In order to find the perfect mate, the use of matrimonial advertisements is becoming increasingly popular, so much so that they are becoming routine in major Indian newspapers (Hamon & Ingoldsby 216). As respondents reply to these advertisements the pool of prospective partners are narrowed down and the young adults may meet, talk on the phone and occasionally go on a chaperoned date. After a few encounters the man typically proposes to the woman. If

the woman accepts the proposal the extended families are informed of their decision to marry (Hamon & Ingoldsby 217).

Arranged marriages have been prominent throughout Hindu tradition and continue to be prevalent in modern times. A marriage that is arranged by one's family and elders in the community is not based on love; rather it is based on the needs of the family as a collective unit. Great consideration is put into the pairing of individuals to allow for the best possible union for both the couple being married and the extended family. Although attitudes may be shifting somewhat, modern Hindu young adults still prefer arranged marriages, as they feel that they do not possess the necessary knowledge and wisdom to choose their own mate. The attitude change that has occurred has allowed young adults to be consulted regarding their potential partners and allowed them more control over their final marriage partner.

REFERENCES AND FURTHER RECOMMENDED READING

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