



TRANSFORMATION AND CHALLENGES IN SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS: A COMPREHENSIVE STUDY OF FAMILY AND MARRIAGE IN CONTEMPORARY INDIA

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ABSTRACT :

This research aims to investigate the evolving dynamics of social institutions, specifically focusing on family and marriage, in contemporary India. Rapid socio-economic changes, urbanization, globalization, and cultural shifts have significantly influenced traditional structures, giving rise to new patterns and challenges. The study will explore the complexities surrounding familial and marital relationships, considering factors such as changing gender roles, economic pressures, technological advancements, and cultural diversity. By employing a multidisciplinary approach, the research aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the current state of social institutions in India and their implications for individuals and society.



KEYWORDS : *evolving dynamics , Rapid socio-economic changes , urbanization, globalization.*

INTRODUCTION

Marriage and family serve as pivotal frameworks in the fabric of numerous societies. Although deeply intertwined throughout history in Indian culture, their interconnection is evolving into a more intricate tapestry. For sociologists, delving into the dynamics between marriage and family unveils a captivating and multifaceted area of study. The exploration of Indian society has experienced rapid growth in recent decades, mirroring India's increased prominence in a globally interconnected cultural, economic, and political context. Social institutions, defined as groups of people united by a common purpose, are integral components of the societal structure, governing the behavior and expectations of individuals. This paper delves into both historical and contemporary facets of today's realities. Social institutions encompass established norms and subsystems that underpin each society's survival, with distinct sectors executing specific tasks and bearing responsibilities crucial to overall societal functioning and stability. Although the establishment of these responsibilities varies among societies ranging from economic and governmental to family, educational, and religious institutions each plays a vital role.

Marriage and family, foundational structures in most societies, have historically been closely intertwined in the Indian system. Society, as a collective of individuals, sees the lives of its members profoundly influenced by marriage, family, and religion. Individuals within this framework harbor diverse needs that propel them to behave in customary ways governed by norms. The collaborative efforts of individuals to fulfill these needs give rise to social institutions. These institutions, formed through group activities guided by interconnected norms, inherently aim to satisfy human needs. When discussing societal processes, the focus is on society in action, prioritizing shared expectations over

individual considerations. Social institutions emerge when interrelated and crystallized norms pertain to specific human activities within a defined time and space, forming a structured framework. This article examines recent trends in family, religion, and marriage functions, noting slight variations that possess universal characteristics. A comprehensive understanding of these institutions is achieved through an exploration of human relationships.

MARRIAGE

Marriage stands as a universal social institution, and the term "vivaha" in Hindu culture denotes the ceremonial act of "carrying away" the bride to the groom's residence. In Hinduism, marriage is not viewed as a civil contract but as a sacrament. Defining marriage proves to be a complex task, with varying interpretations even among sociologists. For the purpose of this discussion, marriage is conceptualized as a legally recognized social contract between two individuals, traditionally rooted in a sexual relationship and implying a lasting union. Diverse perspectives exist on the definition of marriage, encompassing considerations such as the genders of the spouses and the contemporary use of the term 'marriage' carries diverse meanings and interpretations for different individuals. For some, it symbolizes the union between men and women, essential for the continuation of the human species. Others perceive it as a sanctioned platform for intimate relations. Meanwhile, a distinct group sees marriage primarily as a conduit for companionship. These perspectives, among others, contribute to the intricate nature of marriage, defying simple definition in a brief statement. Numerous sociologists and philosophers have presented varying viewpoints on the significance and breadth of marriage.

Understanding of traditional expectations, such as childbearing. Sociologists find particular interest in exploring the relationship between the institution of marriage and the institution of family, recognizing that historically, marriages have been pivotal in the creation of families—the fundamental building blocks of society. Both marriage and family establish sanctioned status roles within society.

The evolution of the institution of marriage is crucial to understanding societal changes. Family and marriage, regarded as the oldest and most fundamental institutions in societal subsystems, play vital roles in the existence and functioning of society and the continuation of the human race. The concept of marriage varies across nations, castes, and religions, reflecting the diverse perspectives that shape this institution. As society undergoes changes, the dynamics within the institution of marriage also evolve, influencing broader societal structures and norms.

EVOLUTION IN THE INSTITUTION OF MARRIAGE:

Marriage, as an accepted social pattern, signifies the establishment of a family, with some thinkers viewing it as a sacred union essential for salvation and religious duties. The age-old belief is that marriage transforms an individual into a householder, facilitating the performance of religious duties and fulfilling the procreation and care for offspring. Despite the perception of marriage as a necessary evil, society encourages it for safety and old age concerns, even though it brings about significant lifestyle changes, especially for women who often surrender their identity.

Arranged marriages have long been predominant in Indian society, with parents and respected family members traditionally planning the majority of marriages. Historically, marriages occurred at a young age, but contemporary trends indicate an increase in the average age of marriage for women, reaching 21 years according to the 2011 Census of India. Notably, a shift in societal norms is observed, where individuals, both men and women, are willingly challenging traditional roles and embracing new concepts of marriage.

The practice of dowry, once considered a woman's share of family wealth, has seen changes in perception. Traditionally including valuables like jewelry and household goods, dowry is now viewed differently, and since 1956, Indian laws treat males and females equally in matters of inheritance. However, changing family norms and contemporary societal shifts are challenging traditional concepts, including the institution of marriage.

Society places expectations on women to marry by a certain age, viewing marriage as a significant 'samskara' that marks a woman's acceptance into womanhood. Marriage is considered a

means for women to establish their female identity, where they are not only expected to be wives but also mothers, prioritizing the interests of their husbands and children above their own.

In earlier times, singlehood faced severe condemnation, and unmarried women had limited standing in society. However, recent years have witnessed significant transformations in the lives of women worldwide, influencing their attitudes, values, aspirations, and ways of participating effectively in all aspects of life. The majority of young women aspire to live independently, pursuing their life goals with a newfound sense of autonomy.

Family

Family demography is then related to the study of events that shape the families and characteristics of individual members of these families. According to the Encyclopedia of Population ("Family Demography," 2018), family demography can be defined as the "study of the composition of families and of the transitions that individuals make into and out of various types of families."

Modern society exhibits diversified family household types, including single-parent families, reconstituted families, unmarried cohabitation families, traditional families, couples with no children families, and roommate family households. This diversity arises from contemporary trends such as unmarried cohabitation, delayed marriage, delayed childbirth, increased maternal workforce participation, rising divorce rates, and a decrease in the proportion of "intact" family units (comprising two biological parents and their dependent children).

According to the 2011 Census, the total number of households increased by 33% from 25 crores to 33 crores since 2001. Among these, approximately 22 crores belonged to the rural area and 11 crores belonged to the urban areas. Furthermore, data from census reveal that on one hand there has been an increase in the number of households with 1 to 4 members, a significant decline in households with 5 and above members.

India has a longstanding tradition of the joint family system, where extended family members, including parents, children, spouses, and grandchildren, live together. The oldest male member, known as the "Karta," traditionally serves as the head of the joint family, making important decisions that other family members typically follow. However, with the influences of industrialization, urbanization, education, and economic development, India has witnessed the dissolution of traditional joint families into more nuclear-like family structures over the years.

Changes in family system:

In the past six decades, cultural trends in many parts of India have witnessed a rapid shift from joint family setups to nuclear families, mirroring global population trends. By the 1990s, the traditional large joint family, accounting for a small percentage of Indian households, displayed, on average, lower per capita household income. Although joint families persist in some areas, their prevalence is diminishing due to a combination of cultural traditions and practical considerations. Notably, youth in lower socio-economic classes tend to spend more time with their families than their urban counterparts, reflecting diverse parenting ideologies.

With the spread of education and economic growth, the traditional joint-family system is undergoing rapid transformation across India. Attitudes towards working women have evolved, and the concept of arranged marriages remains prevalent. The average age of marriage for women has increased to 21 years, according to the 2011 Census of India, with a decrease in early marriages.

While nuclear families have become more prevalent, they often retain functional extensions of the traditional joint family, emphasizing frequent visits, financial assistance, aid in childcare, and involvement in life-cycle events. The modified extended family remains favored, even among the middle and upper classes embracing pseudo-Western culture.

Adolescence and young adulthood present stressful stages for Indian youth, caught between desires for emancipation and the constraints of the extended family matrix. Arranged marriages persist as the norm, with limited allowance for dating, and discussions on sex and sexuality remain taboo. In

traditional Indian families, communication tends to be one-sided, with adolescents hesitating to share personal concerns with parents.

Elderly individuals in India are generally revered, considered fountains of knowledge, and treated with respect. Old age is seen as a time for relaxation, solitude, and enjoying time with grandchildren. The passing on of traditional family values is emphasized, highlighting the importance of family time, love, play, and work in nurturing the foundation for children.

Contemporary family dynamics exhibit a shift in conjugal bonds, with wives assuming equal roles in decision-making, budgeting, and various family matters. The increasing emancipation of wives is evident in their companion roles, participating in social visits, meals, and leisure activities with their husbands. The husband-wife relationship reflects a more egalitarian partnership, with mutual consultation and trust in serious matters.

Parent-child relationships have evolved, with authority shifting from patriarchs to parents who consult their children on important decisions. Discipline methods have shifted towards economic and psychological approaches rather than physical means. Despite these changes, children continue to prioritize the welfare of their parents and siblings, displaying respect and fear for their elders. The relationships between daughter-in-law and parents-in-law have also experienced changes, although the shift is more significant in relations with fathers-in-law compared to mothers-in-law.

Change in Marital Unions

The significant transformation within families can be attributed to a discernible shift in marriage and kinship patterns, as highlighted by researchers such as Cherlin (2004), Das (1976), Shah and Patel (2011), and Uberoi (1998, 2004). While marriage continues to hold its place as a crucial milestone in an individual's life journey, there has been a noteworthy transition from regarding it solely as a cultural norm to perceiving it as an economic choice. Scholars like Becker (1974) and Shah (2005) note that individuals now exercise autonomy in partner selection, with women increasingly sustaining their professional careers post-marriage, effectively managing both personal and work lives.

Social and ideational changes are further evidenced by the escalating prevalence of inter-caste and inter-religion marriages in India. Goli et al.'s (2013) study indicates a near doubling of such unions between 1981 and 2005. Despite this rise, they emphasize that inter-economic status marriages surpass both inter-caste and inter-religion unions in absolute numbers. In tandem with Goli and colleagues' findings, an analysis of matrimonial ads in four prominent newspapers underscores a growing inclination toward professional and educational homogamy among those seeking partners, even as caste and religion persist as prominent criteria in mate selection.

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