
Hindu Marriage and Married Life: Some Reflections

Dr. Shiva Kumar Chaturvedi, Columbus, Ohio

It is interesting to see that in the modern world of prevailing ignorance, confusions, conflicts and blind consumerism, we are in constant search of human relationships that could provide us a sense of togetherness, security, happiness, love, and peace of mind. Among the multitude of human relationships, 'marriage' is perhaps the most important one, and the one that is normally pursued by both males and females.

What is Marriage?

The Oxford dictionary defines marriage as, "the legal union of a man and a woman to live together and often to have children." Some others say, "It is a social institution that provides a vehicle for companionship between male and female." The *Taittiriya Brahmana* says, "He, indeed, is without *Yajna* who has got no wife," and, "He is himself a half man, the second half is wife." In fact, one can find hundreds of definitions and meanings of marriage, which are primarily based upon individual's experiences and perceptions.

The Meaning and Purpose of Life

Human beings have a great variety of needs such as physical, material, social, intellectual, and spiritual. Our multidimensional innate nature within individualized mental and psychic fields creates a wide variety of desires, dreams, and aspirations. The desire for good health and wealth, for companionship, and for sensual pleasures are some of the universal desires that are normally pursued in this world by a householder. These desires and activities are linked together with the purpose of life through a concept called *Purushartha*. There are four *Purusharthas* or goals of life. They are:

Dharma which includes ethical, moral and spiritual duties.
Artha includes achieving wealth and other material possessions.

Kama, which is the sensual desires, aspirations, and longings of various kinds.

Moksha is the supreme and ultimate goal of life, that is, the state of salvation and Bliss.

The Institution of Marriage (Grihastha Ashram)

The union of husband and wife forms a composite institution known as *Grihastha Ashram*. Through marriage the united couple (*Dampati*) enters an uncharted ground of life. After marriage both the husband and wife must work together towards achieving the four *Purusharthas*. Within this harmonious state of *Grihastha Ashram*, the married couple should strive to achieve true love, peace and finally the *Atmananda* (bliss through *moksha*). If this does not happen, then the purpose of married life is defeated.

Married Life, Its Trials and Tribulations, and Process of Transformation

Many conflicts and confusions do arise in married life. They should be viewed as the good opportunities for critical self-examination and renewal of initial commitment to eternal union, rather than as an excuse for an untimely separation. If the compatibility (physical, mental, social, economical, cultural, spiritual, etc.) between the male and female is good, the likelihood of a successful and long lasting married life is better. For this,

- Both the partners within the sacred boundary of *Grihastha Ashram* must have common purpose and goals of life.
- The relationship between husband and wife must primarily be based upon the sense of 'duties', and not on the notion of 'rights'.
- The married life must be lived to foster continuity and innovations towards noble family, cultural, and spiritual traditions.
- Both of them must be ready to make compromises and sacrifices to maintain and strengthen the life-long bond.

The Marriage is an Eternal Bond Between the Bride and the Groom

Marriage is a firm and lifelong companionship. Both the husband and wife must move together to keep each other happy and healthy and at the same time to move closer to the common goals of peace and happiness. The marriage is also an everlasting bond between the two families, two family traditions, and two cultures.

The Marriage is for Procreation, and not for Recreation

The husband and the wife are expected to generate a world of their own, and beget illustrious children; educate them, train them, and give them noble *samskara*, so that they can carry on the family traditions.

The Marriage is a Crisis

Marriage acquires its true meaning and reaches perfection only when the conjugal relationship is based on willingness to sacrifice for the good of the partner, the family, the society, and the world. It involves relationship with in-laws and others. If a crisis arises it must be transcended. The married couple should take all the help from those who are near and dear to them, including prayers to the Almighty. The married love should be experienced, but with self-restraint, and should never be controlled by blind passion.

In Essence Marriage is not a Social Contract in the Modern Sense of Term, but a Dharmic Institution

The husband and wife are responsible not only to one another, but also they are obliged to the Rishis, fathers, and the entire world. The Vedas emphatically declare that ‘the whole world is one family (*Vasudhaiva kutumbakam*)..

Arranged Marriage, or Knowledge-based Marriage

The term ‘arranged marriage’, as it is understood and practiced by many of us today, is to a large extent a misnomer and corrupted version of the Vedic tradition of marriage. In fact those who are most ignorant about the sense and purport behind the *Vivah Samskar* have coined this term. Among the various positive and negative injunctions laid down by our Rishis, the notion of how to achieve a long, lasting, and a creatively *sattvika* married life is of great importance. Therefore, it becomes necessary to maximize compatibility between a bride and her groom.

Here the term compatibility includes physical, mental, intellectual, and spiritual characteristics of both the male and female. Since some of these characteristics may not be easily visible, and can also change in a positive or negative way over time, the knowledge about family traditions and *samskaras* becomes a key informational element in the search for a better match.

Love Marriage, or Passion Marriage

The term ‘love marriage’ as it is understood and mostly practiced today is a misnomer too. It should really be called a ‘passion marriage’ or a ‘passion-lust marriage’. The physical attraction is primarily the cause of this so called ‘love’. In the modern world, the social upbringing of kids is being guided primarily by the cinema, the print media, audio-video, TV, internet, etc. and they rarely provide an understanding about meaning and purpose of self-discipline and spiritual living. Even the boundaries between the notion of good and bad are being blurred. Every kind of action is just a fun, and for fun. The so-called ‘love’ is nothing but a commodity, which can be bought or sold around a corner of a street. There is a very little awareness of the fact that true love, hidden within the depths of our nature, could be found and experienced only after one has gone through the phases of compromise, self-discipline, and sacrifice.

If one can look carefully at the development of the modern practices of dating, one cannot fail to notice that a simple act of meeting between a male and female, just to know each other better, has grown into a living-together tradition, while still unmarried. The consequences of the living-together trap, based on a recent study as stated below, are sufficient to illustrate the failure of the passion-lust-greed-driven search for a perfect match, under the guise of ‘love’.

- Couples who lived together before marriage divorce at a higher rate than those who did not.
- Most men in a live-in relationship are not monogamous, and women, too, have their extra-live-in affairs.
- Exchanging love for debt, and becoming entwined in each other’s financial woes prevents the easy escape one might seek down the road.

Warnings

- The so-called love-marriage may be a total failure when the ‘love’ itself may be passion-lust-greed driven

and not guided by respective family traditions and cultures. The majority of us can easily fall prey to the powerful forces of the sensual and sexual gratification. So one of the best safeguards against such potential hazards is to keep ourselves away from such potential situations till we acquire a strong sense of self-discipline and control.

- On the other hand, the so-called arranged marriage will be a total failure too, if those involved and deeply concerned about building “the sacred marriage institutions” live under the spell of ignorance and darkness.

An Appeal

The author appeals to the readers to come forward for individual and collective learning of Vedic wisdom about

the art and science of great living. The sharing of our own experiences with one another, and integrating them with the experiences of our great *Rishis* (seers) can be a truly transforming experience. We should not allow ourselves to flow with the mainstream of misguided modernity, under the spell of ignorance and darkness. Let us not call the *Vedic Vivah Samskara* an ‘arranged marriage’. The better term is Knowledge-Based Marriage (KBM). The love marriage in the contemporary situation is largely a ‘Passion Marriage’.

