

Different Types of Marriage Rites in Hinduism... Forms of Marriage, Agni Purana



Lord Shiva and Mother Parvati's Vivah Samskara (Wedding Ceremony)

Marriage is an important event of one's life. There are particular rules and regulations which are involved in different kinds of marriage. The rules and regulations involved in a marriage ceremony vary according to the social status of an individual. In Agni Purana, the Deity of Fire has described the various forms of marriage that are present in the society depending on the social status.

The Purana narrates that a Brahman may take four wives, a Kshatriya may have three wives, a Vaishya will have two and a Shudra on the other hand can have only one wife. A woman can be given away only once in marriage. And a man who robs or carries away a married woman is considered a thief.

The Purana mentions that only under certain conditions can a woman marry for a second time. The conditions are namely moral degradation of her husband, his death, renunciation by him of all worldly pursuits, his resorting to a monastery. It has also been said that a widowed woman may marry the brother of his husband or as an alternative she may marry anyone of her choice.

The Deity of Fire in his description of the various rites involved in marriage says that a man should not marry a woman belonging to his own Gotra (family lineage) or from a family acknowledging the leadership of the same Rishi as his own. At the same it has been mentioned that marriage with a woman is not forbidden where the bridegroom is not related to her within seven degrees in the father's line or five degrees on the side of the mother.

Besides the several regulations involved in various forms of marriage, the Agni Purana has also explained the different forms of marriage. The Brahma Marriage is characterized by the giving away of the bride to man of good and noble parentage and possessed of excellent virtues and who has been specially invited and requested by her father for that purpose. This sort of marriage is in fact considered as the best form of uniting a man and a woman in holy wedlock, as it is supposed to carry the bride's forefathers to heaven.

In the Arsha Marriage the bride is given away with the presents of a couple of bullocks to bridegroom, while in the virtue giving Prajapatya Marriage, the bridegroom or his relatives on his behalf ask for the hands of the bride. The other forms of marriage which have been mentioned in the Purana are the Asura Marriage, the Gandharva Marriage, the Rakshasa or the Paishacha form.

Eight types of marriage rites From Manusmṛti (Laws of Manu) Chapter III

20. Now listen to the brief description of the following eight marriage-rites used by the four castes (varna) which partly secure benefits and partly produce evil both in this life and after death.

21. They are the rite of Brahmana (Brahma), that of the gods (Daiva), that of the Rishis (Arsha), that of Prajapati (Prajapatya), that of the Asuras (Asura), that of the Gandharvas (Gandharva), that of the Rakshasas (Rakshasa), and that of the Pisakas (Paisaka).

22. Which is lawful for each caste (varna) and which are the virtues or faults of each (rite), all this I will declare to you, as well as their good and evil results with respect to the offspring.

23. One may know that the first six according to the order (followed above) are lawful for a Brahmana, the four last for a Kshatriya, and the same four, excepting the Rakshasa rite, for a Vaisya and a Sudra.

24. The sages state that the first four are approved (in the case) of a Brahmana, one, the Rakshasa rite in the case of a Kshatriya, and the Asura (marriage in that) of a Vaisya and of a Sudra.

25. But in these institutes of the sacred law, three of the five (last) are declared to be lawful and two unlawful; the Paisaka and the Asura rites must never be used.

26. For Kshatriyas those before mentioned two rites, the Gandharva and the Rakshasa, whether separate or mixed, are permitted by the sacred tradition.

27. The gift of a daughter, after decking her (with costly garments) and honouring her (by presents of jewels), to a man learned in the Veda and of good conduct, whom (the father) himself invites, is called the Brahma rite.

28. The gift of a daughter who has been decked with ornaments, to a priest who duly officiates at a sacrifice, during the course of its performance, they call the Daiva rite.

29. When the father gives away his daughter according to the rule, after receiving from the bridegroom, for (the fulfillment of) the sacred law, a cow and a bull or two pairs, that is named the Arsha rite.

30. The gift of a daughter by her father after he has addressed the couple with the text, 'May both of you perform together your duties,' and has shown honour to the bridegroom, is called in the Smṛti the Prajapatya rite.

31. When the bridegroom receives a maiden, after having given as much wealth as he can afford, to the kinsmen and to the bride herself, according to his own will, that is called the Asura rite.

32. The voluntary union of a maiden and her lover, one must know to be the Gandharva rite, which springs from desire and has sexual intercourse for its purpose.

33. The forcible abduction of a maiden from her home, while she cries out and weeps, after (her kinsmen) have been slain or wounded and (their houses) broken open, is called the Rakshasa rite.

34. When a man by stealth seduces a girl who is sleeping, intoxicated, or disordered in intellect, that is the eighth, the most base and sinful rite of the Pisakas.

35. The gift of daughters among Brahmanas is most approved (if it is preceded) by a libation of water; but in the case of the other castes (it may be performed) by the expression of mutual consent.

If you didn't understand the above then here it is in a gist once again...

According to the holy texts there are eight different types of Hindu marriages. According to many of these eight types of marriages prevailed in ancient India. Among these eight types all have religious procedures. The last four are not religiously defined and most of the times were condemned.

Brahma Marriage:- According to the Brahma marriage if the boy completes his Brahmacharya (student hood), he is eligible to be married. This marriage is done when the father of the boy approaches the girl's parents and asks for her hand. And then the Brahma marriage is arranged. In this there is no system of dowry. One of the most important ritual of this marriage is Kanyadaan (where the father gifts his daughter to the groom.) Among the eight types the highest type of marriage is the Dharmasastras.

Daiva Marriage:- In the case of Daiva marriage the girl is married to a priest. In this kind of a marriage the girl's family look for a suitable man for their daughter and if nobody turns up they go looking for a groom in such places where a sacrifice is being conducted. According to the religious texts Daiva marriage is inferior to Brahma marriage. It is considered degrading for the woman to look for groom by herself or by her family.

Arsha Marriage:- The third type of marriage is called Arsha marriage that is marriage with the sages. In Arsha the bride is given in exchange for two cows, which is received, from the groom. Marriages of this type are said to have happened when the parents of the bride couldn't afford the expense of their daughter's marriage at the right time. Without choice the girl is married to an old sage. This is not considered as a noble marriage as it involves monetary or business transaction.

Prajapatya Marriage:- This kind of marriage is almost similar to the Brahma marriage. There are only two major differences, one is that there is no monetary transaction and Kanyadaan is not a part of Prajapatya marriage. In this marriage the bride's father goes in search for a groom for his daughter.

Gandharva Marriage:- Next is Gandharva marriage, is like the modern day love marriage. Here the bride and the bridegroom marry secretly without the knowledge of their parents. It is not believed to be a right kind of marriage as it is against the will of the parents so it is inferior kind of marriage.

Asura Marriage:- In the Asura kind of marriage the groom is not considered suitable for the bride. He is in no way a match for the girl. The bridegroom gives as much wealth as he can afford to the bride's parents. So this system of marriage is more like business.

Rakshasa Marriage:- The Rakshasa marriage is done, when the groom fights battles with the bride's family, defeats them and then carries her away and then persuades her to marry him. This is not at all considered as the right kind of marriage as it includes force.

Paishacha Marriage:- Paishacha marriage is the last kind of marriage. It is considered as the most inferior type of marriage. In this the girl is married against her wishes. This kind of marriage is prohibited.

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