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COVID 19: IMPACT AND RESPONSE

VOLUME X

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COVID-19 AND CHANGING TRENDS OF MARRIAGE IN INDIA

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Abstract:

The outbreak of the pandemic Covid 19 has had a major impact on the institution of marriage especially in a country like India which prefers to organize lavish wedding ceremonies. The economic slowdown has brought about many changes in the sector of marriages. Crucial elements like spending choices, arrangements done for the wedding, size of the gathering etc. are now to be all taken into consideration by the families. In a nutshell, this research paper will make an effort to study the changing trends of marriages in India owing to Covid19 pandemic.

Keywords: Pandemic, Covid19, marriage, economy, changing trends.

Introduction:

Human societies have passed through different stages of evolution before arriving at the present stage. The phenomena with early society present to us a picture, which are not easy at first to understand. This difficulty arises from their strangeness. This gradually demonstrates that the primitive societies were the basic and fundamental units of human society. Before arriving at the present stage, we find the human society going through a process of evolution which can be traced as Stone Age: Eolithic Period, Palaeolithic Period, Mesolithic Period, Neolithic Period, Copper Age, Bronze Age and Iron Age.

In different ages, man had different patterns of surviving and each age had various inventions made by man which characterized the peculiarity of that particular stage. These new discoveries / inventions suggest how man was capable to make these things and thereby marked the progress of his life. The origin of the institution of marriage is the result of a slow evolutionary process. In the primitive times, there was no marriage system, sex relations were promiscuous. In the process of evolution we find that certainty is established in place of uncertainty and order in place of disorder. Institutions were formed for the betterment for society by human beings themselves. Each institution had a specific laid down rules for functioning. These differed from one society to the other. Hence an institution is an organization of norms to achieve some goal or activity that people feel is important. Institutions are structural process through which groups and individuals strive to carry out their activities. Social institutions are

an organized set of beliefs and practices which are followed by people. Five basic institutions followed in complex societies are: - Family, Education, Marriage, Religion, Economy and Polity. Marriages have been a part of all societies at all point of times. But since the past one year the world has witnessed changes in many sectors owing to the COVID19 Pandemic. Like every other sector, the wedding industry has been severely affected by the pandemic. Big fat Indian weddings have now become small intimate gatherings with just a handful of people. Lavish wedding venues are now replaced with small spaces with limited seating. The 1000+ guest list is now trimmed down to less than 30 people. Something which was once considered recession proof has been stalled by the COVID19 pandemic. The wedding industry which feeds a number of other businesses like catering, mehndi artists, florists, photographers are bearing the brunt of pandemic.

Literature review:

Michael J. Rosenfeld, Reuben. J Thomas (2012) – “Searching for a mate: The Rise of the internet as a social intermediary”

The social impacts of the new technologies claim that the efficiency of internet communication leads to superficial relationships that cannot be compared with those relations that are face-to-face. All in all this article was helpful from the present research as it showed all sections of society - be it heterosexuals, or lesbians being impacted by the gays "Internet Era"

Sharma Ram Mani, “Marriage in Ancient India” (1993)

The book gives the reader a proper understanding of Hindu social organization, the study of the system of marriage in ancient India which is a necessity. A study of the origin and development of this aspect of Hindu way of life is what has been attempted in the present book which has been divided into eight chapters. In his views on importance of marriage the author deals with the sacrament of marriage which has been very significant at all times in human societies of all kinds of people particularly the Hindus. It helps to study Hindu marriage as a social institution right from the Vedic period. In the views on origin of marriage the writer talks of the evolutionary theory of marriage and compares it with the Indian views regarding the origin of marriage. Monogamy as a doctrine is also discussed by the author in his views on forms of marriage which was of great help to the researcher from the angle of understanding the research topic in a much broader way.

Covid-19 and recent trends of marriage in India:

In the pre covid era, planning a wedding was nothing less than a festival. From innumerable market visits to face to face invites, wedding preparations were an occasion for interactions, gatherings, travel and a lot more. Over the last few months, the way weddings are planned and executed has seen a complete shift. Each aspect of wedding planning is now adapted

to suit the regulations and restrictions in the COVID world. From sanitization protocols to socially distanced seating arrangements, a whole bunch of new trends are now a part of the new normal. Let's throw light upon a few of the many changes that are now a part of these ongoing trends. These are: Open air venues: Most people would want to avoid enclosed spaces with air conditioning. There will be more inclination towards opting for open spaces where it's easier to set up socially distanced seating arrangements. Mobility of the people is much easier in this case and the venue will not appear crowded. Focus on digital: From wedding invites to interactions with planners, digital is the way to go. With many still sceptical about stepping out, interactions on video calls is preferred. In addition to this, a lot of guests would prefer to attend a wedding over video calls rather than attending it physically to avoid risk of health. Invitees are also shared through the WhatsApp along with the link of the wedding ceremony. Home weddings over destination weddings: With fewer people being able to travel, many soon-to-wed couples are leaning towards having smaller intimate weddings in their hometowns. Having closely observed these trends in the last few months, the wedding industry is slowly starting to navigate through the challenges of COVID19. Though wedding celebrations are now conducted on a much smaller scale, it still requires a whole lot of planning and meticulous execution. There are many in the industry who are looking at innovative avenues to support the wedding sector to adapt to the new normal. Online shopping- Indian weddings are known to involve a lot of shopping owing to the many rituals which are a part of the custom. Many brands are offering online shopping discounts to enable the customers to have a wide range to choose from. There's no doubt that weddings in a post covid world are going to be different. The only way for the wedding industry to emerge stronger from the impact is to adapt and innovate. Let's see what is the new normal adopted by the wedding planners.

Changes adopted to suit the new normal:

The new reality of Indian weddings has emerged in the era of COVID-19 as 'digital' continues to evolve as the new 'prefix' to wedding planning. The wedding industry post-COVID-19 will have a new reality which will follow new formats keeping in mind health and safety parameters and rethinking the guest experience. With the help of Indian wedding industry expert. Lets try to put together the trends that are currently being followed and also will play a key role in the future of weddings and the industry overall.

Health and safety measures: Installation of sanitisation fans similar to mist fans to make sure all the guests walking in are sanitised without manual effort. Planners or venue owners will help couples ensure that sanitization is top of mind before and during every celebration. Temperature reading will be mandatory at the entrances and Hygiene kits will be given to all guests.

Ceremonies adopt socially-distanced seats: Since downsizing the guest list for weddings is the new normal, we might see ceremony venues accommodating social distancing with spaced-seating arrangements. Some event planners are known to adopt more creative seating arrangements like theatre seating or circular seating, allowing the guests to have a 360-degree view of the ceremony and couple. Essentially due to social distancing, the physical placement of chairs on each table will reduce to be able to keep a 6 feet distance from one another.

Hair and makeup: Trends will also evolve with more focus on eyes and interesting hairstyles in case the bride decides to wear a mask. There will also be a high focus on sanitization since the make-up team works in close proximity to the bride for extended hours with most of the makeup tools being disposable and the team to wear masks, face shields and PPE kits for all appointments.

Weddings in shifts: Couples who do not want any change in plans including a full guest list can celebrate as they initially planned, but in shifts. With shift weddings, couples can host their wedding day festivities at their original venue and with their full team of wedding vendors but the guests come in shifts, allowing them to adhere to social-distancing guidelines.

Food and beverages: While delectable food is still top of mind for couples, the manner in which dishes are prepared and served will follow stringent safety precautions. Most event planners have confirmed that they are likely to opt for a sit-down plated meal instead of a buffet. This would also mean no long queues and crowds which are a risk. Menus will largely be digital or single use, with greater emphasis on wellness-oriented food sections for healthier meals and a greater level of immunity.

Is sologamy the new trend ahead?

In the first week of June, a 24-year-old woman from Vadodara married herself, notching up a first of its kind in India. Kshama Bindu, a sociology student and blogger who identifies as bisexual, told reporters that her decision to go solo in the marriage which was primarily intended to inspire people ‘who are tired of finding true love.’ Initially, she had planned a traditional temple wedding for herself with all the Vedic marriage rituals but decided to dump the idea after some political leaders raised objections and the priest ditched the bride. Braveheart Kshama went ahead regardless and tied the knot with herself at a private ceremony, attended by friends and family. Not only is that she supposed to have gone on her honeymoon all by herself to Goa. Her parents attended the ceremony online as they were in another city and didn’t prefer to travel owing to the still ongoing pandemic. What is interesting is the questions that this leaves us with. What will be her upcoming life like? Will she hold down the same job? Get a child? Change her city? Join politics? Become a spokesperson for interest groups advocating sologamy? Or just be forgotten given how short our attention spans are? Or still in a few tears time would she prefer to “actually” marry? Only

time will show us if this case happens to pick up trend. Will this prove to be a voice of many other women across India advocating the many advantages of being a bride without a groom.



The long queues of well wishers are gone; instead couples do the rounds and are wished from a distance. Photographers are taken from a distance too. Guest are regularly reminded to stay off the stage, and some planning agencies even offer a service where they appoint monitors to ensure distancing all through the venue. (Photo Courtesy Radiance Events, Lucknow)

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