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Purulia, West Bengal

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I hereby declare that the above mentioned information is correct to the best of my knowledge and belief.

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Sd/

Professor Dr. Gopal Krishna Dash
(President)

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Significance of the marriage rituals in Ancient India: The Vedic perspective

Soumik Piri

Vivaha Samskara or marriage is a highly important ritualistic event in the life of a Hindu. It is an exciting event for the couple getting married and their families. From ancient times, marriages have been arranged between families by the process of sending wooers to the house of the bride, going through the process of selecting her and in some cases with the exchange of gifts and money. Considerations such as Caste, Gothra, Sapinda relationships and the qualities of the bride and the groom have played a part in choosing brides and grooms.

The word Vivaha comes from the root 'Vah' - to carry. Some other words meaning marriage are PanigrahaGa, Parinaya, Udvaha, Upayama etc. PanigrahaGa is the earliest ritual of marriage which is mentioned in Zg Veda. Meaning holding of hand, Panigrahana appears to have been common to many other cultures as a marriage ritual. Parinaya comes from Agni Parinayana, namely circumambulating the fire. Udvaha also comes from the root 'Vah'. Upayama means bringing closer referring to acquiring a bride to be part of the household. A lot of importance was given to the journey of the bride to her husband's home with elaborate rituals prescribed for it. It appears that for this reason, the word Vivaha is the most commonly used one to represent marriage. All the Grhya Sutras use the word Vivaha as the main heading when writing about the marriage ceremony. Vivaha represents the journey of the bride to her husband's house to become a partner in the stage of Grhastasrama with her husband.

It is said in Tandya Maha BrahmaGa, इमौ वै लोकौ सहास्तां तौ वियन्ताव भूतां विवाहं विवाहवहै सह नावस्त्विति। Tan.MB.VII.10.

Heaven and Earth were once together but they separated, then they said, 'Let us have a marriage, let there be co-operation between us.'

As Apararka says, उपयमनपाणिग्रहणशब्दबत् परिणयणशब्दोऽपि दण्डिन्यायेनैव कर्म समुदाये शास्त्रेषु प्रयुज्यते। Apa.91

With the words Upayama and Panigrahana, Parinaya also appears in the scriptures of rituals.

Marriage rituals which evolved in an era long gone past are even today being practiced with the basic elements unchanged. Marriage is an event involving not just the couple but families and friends as well. Marriage forms an important milestone as one step into the life of a householder and prepares to start a family. It is also the vehicle to carry on the traditions of conducting religious obligations by performing yajnas etc. for the well being of the family as well as to please the souls of ancestors. Marriage is the first step in a man's life in Grhastashrama which is considered by many to be the superior of the four Ashramas. Grhastashrama was an important stage in the development of man. A man was expected to fulfill his social responsibilities and desires by raising a family, earning money through his profession and to ensure continuance of his lineage. Even though ultimately, the ideal goal would be to attain Moksha, the seers of the Vedic age realised the practicality of life as a Grhasta. Grhastashrama also fulfilled the innate desire to continue the human race by marriage and procreation.

According one ancient view, man and woman represent Pradhana Purusa and Prakruti and they come together in marriage to prolong creation. It was considered that a man has to get married and produce offspring to have lived a complete life.

एव अर्धो ह वा आत्मनो यज्जया तस्माद्याव ज्जायां न विन्दते नैव तावत्प्रजायते असर्वो हि तावद्भवति। अथ यदैव जायां विन्दतेऽथा प्रजायते तर्हि हि सर्वो भवति। S.Br.V.2.1.10

The wife is indeed half of one's self; therefore, as long as man does not secure a wife and beget an issue, he remains incomplete. When a man gets a wife and begets progeny, only then he becomes complete.

तस्मत् पुरुषो जायां वित्त्वा कृत्स्नतरमिवात्मानं मन्यते। Ai.Br.1.2.5

Therefore a man, after securing a wife, regards himself as wholly complete.

A man needs to have a wife to complete religious duties as a householder. It is essential to have his wife with him to keep the household fire burning continuously. The household fire is called Garhapatya in Rg Veda as mentioned in the Panigrahana ritual. Marriage therefore becomes an important religious duty apart from being the vehicle to fulfill secular requirements of society. Importance was given to the wife in fulfilling the requirements of religious duties. It was a couple that performed religious duties. The wife was considered an essential part of such dutie

अपत्यं धर्मकार्याणि शुश्रूष रतिरुत्तमा। दाराधीनास्तथा स्वर्गः पितॄणां आत्मनश्च ह॥ **Ma. Sm. IX.28**

Offspring, religious rites, faithful service, highest conjugal happiness and heavenly bliss for one's ancestors and oneself depend on one's wife alone.

Apastamba in his Dharma Sutra states as follows emphatically:

जायापत्योर्न विभागो विद्यते। पाणिग्रहद्वि स्वत्वं कर्मसु। Ap.Dh.S.II.6.13.16.17

A man and woman should perform religious acts together as a married couple and there is no question of separation between them.

It is said that a man is born with three debts and these are repaid by 1. Studying Vedas (Brahmacarya), 2. Conducting Yajnas and 3. By begetting sons. Debts owed to Rsis are to be repaid by Brahmacarya, to Gods by conducting Yajnas and to one's parents by begetting sons. A man needs to get married to beget sons and repay the debt owed to his father.

जायोमानो वै ब्राह्मणस्त्रिभिर् ऋणवान् जायते ब्रह्मचर्येण ऋषिभ्यो यज्ञेन देवेभ्यः प्रजया पितृभ्यः। Tai.Sa.Vi.3.10.5

A man is born with three debts. Debts to Rsis are repaid by Brahmacarya, to Gods by Yajnas and to one's father by producing sons.

According to Prof.P.V.Kane, the period of Rg Veda is 4000 B.C. The earliest reference to marriage is in the Rg Veda. This is the marriage of Soma, the Moon with Surya, the daughter of Savita, the Sun. The two Asvins are sent to meet the Sun and negotiate the alliance. Savita, the Sun knowing that Surya is happy with the alliance gives her to Soma.

सोमो ऋधूयुरभवदक्षिनास्तामुभा वरा । सूर्या यत्पत्ये शंसन्ती मनसा सविताददात्॥ R.V. 10.85.9

Soma, the Moon is desirous of a bride and the two Asvins negotiated on his behalf with Savita, the Sun for the hand of his daughter Surya. Savita knowing that his daughter liked the alliance gave her to Soma.

Rg Veda, in the 10th Mandala describes the steps in the marriage ritual and also contains many of the mantras used in marriages. The early marriage rituals depicted in Rg Veda are fairly simple and do not contain many of the features which were introduced subsequently. Further steps were elaborated in Atharva Veda. Subsequently, all the Samskaras including Vivaha have been dealt with in detail in the Grihya Sutras. Grihya Sutras belonging to different branches of all the four Vedas specified the ways to conduct the Vivaha Samskaras in detail. Apart from the references in the Vedas, additions were subsequently made to the rituals making them more and more elaborate. Smritis which came later further modified the rituals. Sociological and geographical factors influenced the contents of the Samskaras. Dharma Sutras, Puranas, Epics, Kama Sutra, Kavyas and Natakas also depicted the marriage ceremony which influenced the way marriage was conducted in the later periods with additions and modifications.

Early marriage rituals as described in Rg Veda were fairly simple. It appears that the main ritual was Panigrahana which means holding of hands. The journey of the bride to her husband's wife was given a lot of importance with rituals to be observed for getting the chariot ready, obstacles on the way etc.

The rituals as described in Rg Veda are the following:

- Negotiation and selection of the bride
- Selecting an auspicious day
- Panigrahana
- Carrying the bride to her new home in a chariot
- Consummation of the marriage

From the above, it is clear that child marriages were not prevalent in the early era. Consummation took place immediately after marriage and this meant that only girls who had reached puberty were ready for marriage. Child marriages came into vogue later in the Dharma Sutra and Smrti periods.

Rituals mentioned in Atharva Veda are the following:

- Selecting an auspicious day
- Ritual bath of the bride
- PanigrahaGa
- Asmarohana
- Laja Homa
- Journey to the groom's house
- Sitting on a bull's hide
- Consummation of marriage

Here one can notice that Asmarohana, Laja Homa and Sitting on a bull's hide have been introduced. Other features like Saptapadi, Dhruva Arundhati Darsana etc. were introduced subsequently. All rituals had specific goals as their purpose such as praying for Longevity, Faithfulness, Good Children, Wealth, Cattle, Harmonious relationship etc. Some rituals involved warding off of evil spirits, machinations of enemies and dangers while going on journeys etc. Some Grhya Sutras mention the use of Music, Dance and Musical Instruments in the marriage ceremony. Expiation or Prayascitta is also part of Vivaha Samskara. Napita Karma has been mentioned in Baudhayana Grhya Sutra.

Vivaha Samskara does not figure prominently in Yajur Veda and Sama Veda even though Grhya Sutras, Dharma Sutras and Smrtis belonging to these two Vedas describe Vivaha Samskaras in detail.

Yajur Veda deals mostly with Srauta rituals while Sama Veda is liturgical with emphasis on the musical aspect of the Slokas. The marriage ceremony is also dealt with in Smritis, Puranas, Itihasas, Kama Sutra, Kavyas and Natakas etc. However, the basis of all rituals is in the Grhya Sutras. Smriti texts which came after Grhya Sutras brought in many changes to the rituals. Different commentaries on the Grhya Sutras have led to the establishment of Prayogas, Paddhatis and Karikas which explain the rituals and their contexts elaborately.

ABBREVIATIONS

Tan. MB.	Tandya Mahabrahamana
Apa.	Apararka
Sa.Br.	Sathapatha Brahmana
Ai.Br.	Aitareya Brahmana
Ma. Sm.	Manu Smriti
Ap.Dh.S.	Apastamba Dharma Sutra
Tai.Sa.	Taittiriya Brahmana
R.V.	Rg Veda

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