

Gained in Translation: The forgotten past

We often see today that young men and women marrying against their parents' wishes are being killed. Society does not seem to accept those who marry outside their caste or religion. We should be very concerned that those who participate in these cruel killings do not know Hindu culture.

In olden times, girls had the right to choose their partners. It was not considered a crime to marry the person one loved. Shakuntala-Dushyanta, Nala-Damayanti, Savitri-Satyavan, Rukmini-Krishna, Subhadra-Arjun, are examples of people falling in love and marrying.

Even though her elders objected, Rukmini sent a proposal to Krishna. When Rukmini sent this through a trusted friend, and when Krishna came to the temple at the appointed time to pick her up, her brother tried to stop them. Their relatives pacified him and arranged for the wedding. At one time, this incident recited in Mahakavi Bammara Pothana's verses used to be read out to young girls awaiting marriage.

There was also opposition to Krishna and Satyabhama's wedding. Yet, acceding to Satyabhama's request, the wedding was arranged. No was killed to save anyone's honour. Parents wanted their children to live happily. This was the humanity and dharma of society of that time.

Ancient dharma accepted inter-caste marriages. In the Mahabharat, there is the story of King Shantanu marrying Satyawati who belonged to the Besta caste. Society did not oppose the love marriages of youth. Today, the courts too do not oppose such marriages.

Looking up at the Arundhati star is common in wedding rituals today. Even if the wedding takes place in the day, the purohit turns to the bright day sky, indicates some corner and says, look at the Arundhati star. It is well-known that Arundhati and Vashista's wedding was an inter-caste one, yet their marriage is regarded as the ideal one. These stories from the Kruta, Treta and Dwapara eons point to the freedom of men and women. People glorify Krishna and accept his teachings today. Why then does present-day Hindu society not accept the culture which has come down to us from his times? The eight marriages ascribed to Krishna actually indicate the eight forms of marriages.

Society is also disapproving of atrocities in ancient literature. But atrocities have increased in modern society. Recent news reports indicate that the mother of a youth who eloped with a girl in Muzaffarnagar was kidnapped and gang-raped. This is an incident which should make civilised society hang its head in shame. In this context, one should recall the incident in Dandakaranya. King Dandu ruled over Vindhya giri. He was Ikshvaku's son. It seems that he came to Shukracharya to learn the arts. He lusted after Shukracharya's daughter Arāja and raped her. As a result of Shukracharya's curse, a rain of mud fell on the king and his kingdom and both were destroyed. That area is called Dandakaranya today. Shukracharya's curse indicates the justice of those times. Arāja, it seems, continued to do tapasya there.

Has today's society really understood the history of yesteryears, even though it speaks so highly of it? What kind of culture is this that instead of progressing in ethics and culture, we forego our very humanity? The stories we hear from the Puranas are from differing periods. Hindu culture is an amalgamation of events from differing periods and societies, and this amalgamation is older than Manu dharma. Manu dharma shastra is a creation of selfish individuals and was manufactured due to the biased viewpoint of our rulers of that period. The prescriptions for man-woman relationships, division of caste, and rituals are most unnatural and inhumane. It was this ideology that corrupted and polluted Hindu culture. It not only stopped the earlier practices but also codified them differently. We should condemn Manu dharma shastra. We should not only

condemn the honour killings, but also prevent them. The Supreme Court has laid down that the dictates of khap panchayats are illegal.

In ancient times, as society progressed from inter-family marriages to community marriages and paired marriages, society accepted the love marriages of youth. These also helped in the progression of society. We should caution people to analyse issues with scientific reason, and dissuade them from violent, stupid acts. People should understand this is their civic responsibility, and not leave democratic governments to protect the institution of marriage or consider it a law and order issue.

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