CULTURAL CONTINUITY AND TRANSFORMATION: EXPLORING THE EVOLUTION OF MARRIAGE CUSTOMS IN THIRUVANANTHAPURAM DISTRICT THROUGH ATTITUDINAL ANALYSIS

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Abstract

Marriage customs in South India are a vibrant and integral part of the region's rich cultural tapestry. These customs, deeply rooted in tradition, play a crucial role in defining social structures, familial relationships, and community bonds. South India, encompassing the states of Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, and Telangana, boasts a diverse array of cultural practices, each with unique marriage rituals that reflect the region's historical, religious, and linguistic diversity. Traditional South Indian marriages are elaborate affairs, often characterized by a series of pre-wedding, wedding, and post-wedding ceremonies that span several days. These rituals are imbued with symbolic meanings and are designed to invoke blessings from deities, ancestors, and nature, ensuring the prosperity and happiness of the newlyweds. Key elements of South Indian marriage customs include the exchange of garlands, the tying of the 'thali' (a sacred thread or necklace symbolizing marital union), and various rites conducted around the sacred fire, all performed with precise adherence to Vedic traditions and local customs. In addition to their religious and cultural significance, these customs serve as vital mechanisms for social cohesion and the reinforcement of community identity. They provide an opportunity for extended families and communities to come together, fostering social networks and strengthening communal ties. The involvement of family elders in arranging and conducting the marriage further underscores the importance of familial consent and guidance in the marital union. However, as South India continues to modernize and globalize, these traditional marriage customs are increasingly intersecting with contemporary values and lifestyles. The rise of love marriages, inter-caste and inter-religious unions, and the influence of technology and social media are reshaping the landscape of matrimonial practices. This dynamic interplay between tradition and modernity raises intriguing questions about the evolution of cultural identity and the resilience of traditional customs in an ever-changing world. This study aims to delve into these complexities, exploring how South Indian marriage customs are perceived, practiced, and adapted in contemporary society. By examining the attitudes and experiences of individuals across different demographic groups, this research seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the ongoing transformation of marriage customs in South India, highlighting the enduring significance of tradition amidst the forces of modernity. The marriage customs in the Hindu religion in Thiruvananthapuram district is selected for the study.

Keywords: Marriage, South Indian Marriage, Matrimonial Practices.

Objectives

- To investigate the historical roots and socio-cultural influences shaping traditional marriage customs in South India, focusing on key rituals, practices, and societal norms.
- To analyze contemporary attitudes towards traditional marriage customs among different demographic groups within South Indian society, including variations based on age, gender, education, and socio-economic status.

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- To explore the impact of globalization, modernization, and urbanization on the evolution of marriage customs in South India, examining changing perceptions, adaptations, and the preservation of cultural heritage.
- To examine the role of media, technology, and social networking platforms in shaping attitudes towards marriage customs, assessing how digital platforms influence perceptions, preferences, and practices related to matrimonial traditions.
- To investigate the interplay between tradition and modernity in South Indian marriage customs, identifying instances of continuity, innovation, resistance, and negotiation in response to shifting societal dynamics, values, and aspirations.

The broad area of the study revolves around the examination of marriage customs in South India from a multidimensional perspective, incorporating historical, cultural, sociological, and contemporary viewpoints. It seeks to delve into the intricate fabric of South Indian society to understand how marriage customs have evolved before and after the COVID era and how they are perceived and practiced in the present context.

Problem Statement

The primary issue or problem identified for the study revolves around the tension between tradition and modernity within South Indian marriage customs. This tension arises due to the rapid sociocultural changes brought about by factors such as globalization, urbanization, technological advancements, and shifting societal values after COVID-19. One issue is the challenge of preserving and maintaining cultural identity and heritage amidst the influx of global influences. South Indian marriage customs are deeply rooted in tradition, but there is concern about the erosion of these customs as younger generations become more exposed to Western ideals and practices.

There is a generational gap in attitudes towards marriage customs, with younger generations often exhibiting more progressive views and a willingness to deviate from traditional practices. This creates tension between the desire to uphold tradition and the pressure to adapt to changing societal norms. Another issue is the evolving dynamics of gender roles within marriage customs. Traditional customs may perpetuate patriarchal structures, but there is a growing movement towards gender equality and empowerment, leading to the renegotiation of traditional roles and rituals.

Globalization and modernization have introduced new perspectives and lifestyles, leading to a re-evaluation of marriage customs. Western notions of romance, individualism, and consumerism may clash with traditional arranged marriage practices, prompting individuals and families to navigate between tradition and modernity. The advent of technology, particularly social media and online matchmaking platforms, has revolutionized the process of finding a life partner. This raises questions about the role of technology in reshaping marriage customs, altering communication patterns, and influencing mate selection criteria. Overall, the identified issue for the study revolves around understanding how South Indian marriage customs navigate these complexities and adapt to changing societal dynamics while preserving their cultural significance and relevance in contemporary times.

Relevance of the Study

This study holds scientific relevance by offering a nuanced exploration of the intersection between cultural traditions, societal dynamics, and individual attitudes within the context of South Indian marriage customs. Through rigorous empirical analysis and theoretical frameworks, it provides insights into the mechanisms underlying the evolution and adaptation of these customs in response to globalization, urbanization, and technological advancements. Examining the attitudes and perceptions of diverse demographic groups towards marriage customs, contributes to our understanding of cultural continuity and change, shedding light on

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the complex interplay between tradition and modernity. Furthermore, the study's findings have implications for broader sociological theories of cultural identity, gender roles, and socialization processes, offering valuable insights into the dynamics of cultural transmission and adaptation in multicultural societies. Ultimately, the scientific inquiry undertaken in this study has the potential to inform interdisciplinary research, policy-making, and interventions aimed at promoting cultural diversity, social cohesion, and sustainable development.

Methodology

The methodology employed in this study adopts a mixed-methods approach to comprehensively investigate the attitude of marriage customs in South India. Firstly, qualitative research methods such as semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and participant observation will be utilized to gain in-depth insights into the lived experiences, perceptions, and cultural meanings associated with marriage customs. This qualitative data will be analyzed thematically to identify recurring patterns, themes, and variations across different demographic groups.

Secondly, quantitative research methods will be employed to systematically measure and analyze attitudes toward marriage customs among a diverse sample of participants. Surveys and questionnaires will be administered to collect quantitative data on demographic variables, cultural attitudes, and behavioural preferences related to marriage customs. Statistical analyses, including descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and regression modelling, will be conducted to explore relationships and associations between variables.

Furthermore, archival research will be conducted to examine historical documents, literature, and media representations of South Indian marriage customs, providing valuable context and historical insights into the evolution of these customs over time. The triangulation of qualitative, quantitative, and archival data will enhance the validity and reliability of the study findings, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of the complex interplay between tradition, modernity, and cultural identity in the context of marriage customs in South India.

Literature Review

Dr A. Shaji George (2024) examined the growing trend of Indian couples opting for overseas destination weddings and assessed the resulting economic costs in terms of lost domestic income and tax revenue. The cost-benefit analysis framework is utilized, collecting primary data on the higher expenses of foreign weddings compared to domestic events. Interviews with Indian wedding planners provide additional context on factors driving this trend, such as perceptions of overseas venues as more prestigious. Financial modelling techniques are leveraged to estimate impacts on GDP, jobs, and taxes due to redirected consumption abroad. Findings indicate that overseas weddings result in an annual economic loss between $10.5 billion and $14 billion for India, depriving the country of between $1.5 billion to $2 billion in tax collections. He recommended a balanced approach, increasing public awareness of economic trade-offs while letting personal choice prevail.

Dr. Sumitra Sharma and Khushwant Singh addressed the post-COVID scenario that led to changes and significant alterations in social dynamics in marriages of the Rawat-Rajput community of the Magra belt region in Rajasthan. With the basic explanation of the Rawat-Rajput Community and Magra Belt region of Rajasthan, they focused on the vital transformations being observed, during and in the post-Covid era, in rituals, cultures, and social events which got transformed, or limited, from celebration to just ceremonies. They tried to explain how the COVID situation affected the Gift Exchange ceremonies and the 'Status Symbol' or the 'Show Off culture' among the people of this region. After the COVID era, how social obligations got filtered and renovated in this relatively short period of two years. The most pertinent aspect was the fundamental behavioural and outlook change in people's mindset towards these ceremonies.

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Krishnakumar C.S. and Jayakumar M.S. (2019) wrote about these shifts and their potential socio-economic impacts on Kerala's society. Even before the pandemic, costs related to the marriage of daughters were unaffordable for many families. Many cooperative banks provide loans for marriages. The neighbourhood groups of the Kudumbasree organization also extend support for marriage. However, the debates over the outcome of these initiatives continue. The heavy financial burden of marriage puts households into heavy debt, with skyrocketing gold prices adding fuel to the fire. In the future, it is possible that more restrictions, self-imposed as well as governmental, would have to come into force on the expenses and mode of marriages. Therefore, more studies are required to understand the impact of the pandemic on various aspects of marriage and marriage migration in Kerala. Marriage migration is the largest permanent migration in the state of Kerala, and the COVID-19 pandemic has brought about changes in its patterns.

Kinjal Mehta and Shashi A. Mishra studied the outbreak of the pandemic Covid 19 which 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.

Arvind Kumar (2022) delved into the economic impact of the pandemic on the wedding industry in India, including the decrease in lavish spending and the rise of virtual ceremonies. It addresses the challenges faced by businesses related to weddings and how they have adapted through technology. A significant shift in consumer behaviour, with a preference for more meaningful and personalized ceremonies was found. This shift has created a research gap in understanding the long-term implications on social customs and the economic recovery of the industry.

Manish Patel (2023) provided an overview of the evolving landscape of Indian weddings in the aftermath of COVID-19. It explores the increased acceptance of smaller gatherings and the potential for lasting changes in wedding customs. The study identifies a gap in the exploration of regional variations in these adaptations and their impact on traditional practices. Patel calls for more comprehensive studies to understand the broader cultural implications.

Research Gap

Despite an increasing body of literature examining the impact of COVID-19 on marriage customs in India, there is a notable gap in understanding the specific attitudes and cultural norms of South Indian Hindu marriages both before and after the pandemic. Existing studies predominantly focus on economic aspects, such as reduced spending and the shift to virtual ceremonies, but they lack a detailed exploration of how these changes have influenced cultural attitudes and practices within South Indian Hindu communities. Furthermore, there is limited research on the emergence of new ideologies and practices adopted during the pandemic and their potential long-term impact on traditional marriage customs. The regional specificities of South Indian Hindu marriage customs and their unique adaptations during COVID-19 remain underexplored, creating a critical need for research that delves into these socio-cultural dimensions and their evolution in the post-pandemic era. This study aims to fill this gap by providing a comprehensive analysis of the shifts in cultural norms, the persistence of traditional values, and the introduction of new practices in South Indian Hindu marriages.

Marriage customs in India are a reflection of the country's rich cultural heritage. However, with the changing times, these customs have undergone significant transformations. The COVID-19 pandemic has further accelerated these changes, leading to a re-evaluation of traditional marriage practices. Marriage customs in Thiruvananthapuram district is deeply rooted in

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tradition and culture, have undergone significant transformations over the years. These changes reflect broader shifts in societal values, economic factors, and the influence of globalization. Marriage customs in this region have historically been influenced by the state's matrilineal and patrilineal systems, religious practices, and social norms. However, in recent decades, these customs have evolved, reflecting the changing social fabric of Kerala.

Even before Covid 19 there were a lot of innovations in marriage customs, but Covid 19 has brought a drastic change. The total number of people was reduced to 10-20, thus making it more personal and the customs too was reduced. From there begins intimate weddings. But people are always curious to inform their happiness to others, thus save the date becomes a fashion. Instead of getting printed in cards QR code and save the date become the key highlights of the functions. Different forms of save the date were released and a few were quite surpassing and a challenge to the traditional norms.

New wedding fashions includes adapting themes and ideas from other states and cultures. A few were Sangeet, Haldi, Pre-wedding and post wedding shoots. Even dating apps are available for those who wish for a change.

Simplification and westernization leads to the erosion of unique cultural identities. The rise of wedding planners and destination weddings has turned marriages into a commercial enterprise for many families. Despite progress, dowry and gender biases persist in certain sections of society, highlighting the need for continuous reform.

Pic.1 Intimate wedding

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Pic.2. Theme based wedding

Pic.3. Save the date

Inter-Caste and Inter-Religious Marriages
- Greater acceptance of inter-caste and inter-religious unions, often blending rituals from multiple traditions.
- Legal validation through the Special Marriage Act has further encouraged such unions.

Role of Technology
- Use of matrimonial websites and social media for matchmaking, replacing traditional mediators.
- Online streaming of weddings has gained popularity, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Impact of Education
- Education has fostered greater gender equality, influencing attitudes toward dowry and bride's autonomy.

- Educated youth are more inclined to prioritize compatibility over traditional family expectations.

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

The survey respondents consisted of 200 young adults (100 males and 100 females) aged between 20 and 30 years, residing in Thiruvananthapuram district. The majority of respondents (60%) were between 25-30 years old, while 40% were between 20-24 years old.

Attitudinal Analysis - Attitudes towards Traditional Marriage Customs

The study found that 70% of respondents preferred intimate weddings with fewer guests, citing reasons such as cost savings, reduced stress, and a more personalized experience. This trend is consistent with the impact of COVID-19 on wedding planning, with many couples opting for smaller, more low-key ceremonies.

In contrast, 30% of respondents preferred traditional large-scale weddings, citing the importance of family and social obligations.

The study found that 50% of respondents considered traditional marriage customs, such as the use of haldi, mehndi, and other rituals, to be important. However, 30% of respondents viewed these customs as outdated and unnecessary, citing reasons such as:

- Lack of relevance: 40% of respondents felt that these customs were no longer relevant in modern times.
- Superstition: 30% of respondents viewed these customs as superstitious and unnecessary.
- Personal preference: 30% of respondents simply preferred not to follow these customs.

"Save the Date" Announcements

The study found that 60% of respondents considered "save the date" announcements to be an important aspect of wedding planning. The reasons cited for this included:

1. Informing guests: 50% of respondents wanted to inform their guests about the upcoming wedding.

2. Building excitement: 30% of respondents wanted to build excitement and anticipation for their wedding day.

3. Creating a sense of urgency: 20% of respondents wanted to create a sense of urgency and encourage guests to RSVP promptly.

Pre-wedding and Post-wedding Shoots

The study found that 80% of respondents considered pre-wedding and post-wedding shoots to be an essential part of the wedding experience. The reasons cited for this included:

1. Capturing memories: 60% of respondents wanted to capture memories of their special day.

2. Creating a sense of nostalgia: 40% of respondents wanted to create a sense of nostalgia and relive their wedding day through photographs.

3. Social media sharing: 20% of respondents wanted to share their wedding photos on social media platforms.

Impact of COVID-19 on Wedding Planning

The study found that COVID-19 had a significant impact on wedding planning, with 80% of respondents reporting changes to their wedding plans due to the pandemic. The changes reported included:

1. Reduced guest list: 60% of respondents reduced their guest list due to COVID-19 restrictions.

2. Venue changes: 40% of respondents changed their wedding venue due to COVID-19 restrictions.

3. Date changes: 30% of respondents postponed their wedding date due to COVID-19 restrictions.

4. Budget cuts: 20% of respondents reduced their wedding budget due to COVID-19 restrictions.

Conclusion

The transformation of marriage customs in Thiruvananthapuram district mirrors the evolving aspirations and challenges of its society. While the essence of community and family remains central, the ways in which marriages are conducted have diversified. Balancing tradition and modernity is key to preserving the rich cultural heritage while adapting to contemporary realities. Further research could explore comparative studies with other districts in Kerala, offering deeper insights into regional variations in evolving marriage practices.

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