

Arranged Marriages in India (author unknown)

People of India basically follow the arranged marriage system, and they consider it as something great. Dating is a taboo in that country. However, it has its own merits and demerits. Indian people give much importance to family relationship. The system seems to protect the family. The parents take care of their children, and the children obey their parents. Parents find suitable spouses for their children from appropriate families. So, there is no chance of marrying outside their own religion, caste, social status or economic class. This protects the couple from the problems that usually originate from disparity of religion, caste and class. Through a marriage two families come into mutual relationship, and both families together try to work out the marriage if problems arise in the marriage.

Nevertheless, the arranged marriage system has its flaws. This system originated when child marriage was the custom in India. Children at an early age, even before their puberty, were given in marriage. Such children could not give valid consent to marriage, and so parents were consenting. The purpose of child marriage was to prevent those children from seeking by themselves (when they become adults) somebody from lower caste or lower class for marriage. It was a means of restriction to their children from marrying outside their race and social status. Thus arranged marriage system is a product of caste system. It has developed to promote racism and classism, and it is not based on any spiritual value.

Child marriages are now abolished by law, and the children are free to choose their own partners, according to law. But, you know, racism is in the blood, and the parents, even now, try to control their children by arranging marriages within the limits of race, caste, class and religion. If children find their own mates, parents would threaten them in many ways -- threatening not to give them any share of family property or wealth; threatening to drive them out of their own homes. If any children marry according to their own desire, parents would consider it as a threat and shame to the family. So, many men and women just accept what their parents arrange for them. They don't want to lose their share of property, and they don't want to invite any shame to their family. Even if they don't like the spouse they get, they accept what they receive and suffer the consequences silently. According to divine plan marriage should happen through love and the consent of those who marry. In arranged marriages, it is the parents who decide and give consent. Very often there is so much force and fear involved in marriage--force from the parents and fear from the part of children who wish to marry. It doesn't fit into the modern definition of marriage, which is the total partnership of the whole of life, which happens through mutual consent, and love of those who enter into marital union. Marriage should happen through mature decision of those who marry, and not of their parents.

It also should be noted that arranged marriages are prevalent among the high-caste and high-class people. They are the people who want to protect their "status".

People of lower strata do not care about this very much. The reason for this is: they have nothing to lose. However, they also try to imitate the way of higher-level people, believing that it is something great. Another reason for arranged marriages among the lower class is ethnic rivalry and pride over their own race.

Matrimonial classifieds in newspapers or help of marriage brokers are sought in arranged marriage when the family fails to find "suitable" spouses for their children. All necessary "qualifications" (racial, religious, economic, educational, etc.) of the "candidates" would be stated in the advertisement.

A modern curse connected with arranged marriage is dowry. It is a social evil in India though it is prohibited by law. When they arrange a marriage, the consent of boy and girl who are to enter into marriage is not important; the negotiation is on the amount of dowry, which is to be given by the girl's family. It has become something like a trade in modern Indian culture. The girls from poor families, and the girls who are orphans are not good commodities in this trade; so they remain unmarried. If the promised dowry is not given by due date, the girl would be persecuted and thrown out by her husband's family; or, she would die in a "domestic accident". Do not think that I am exaggerating; it is happening in India everyday.

Another drawback of arranged marriage is that the partners to marriage do not know their future spouses before marriage. In arranged marriage it is not important at all. In many cases, the boy and girl who get ready to enter into marriage may see each other two or three times before marriage, and that meeting would be in the presence of parents and other family members. Thus, marriage happens without knowing each other. Many people who work in far away places, especially in gulf countries come home for a leave, and marriage is arranged within a week or two. Legally speaking, you do not give valid consent to accept something you do not know. It is consent that brings a marriage; and, if there is no valid consent, there is no marriage according to the law of the Catholic Church. Marriages contracted because of force or fear would be invalid according to Canon Law. If we strictly analyze, many marriages happening in India are invalid.

Good marriages, that are arranged, do occur. Parents who love their children, and who are not vitiated by false family pride, seek the consent of their children when they are given in marriage. "Good" arranged marriages happen when the parents help their children to find their own partners according to their own desires.

The dating that we find in America is a good opportunity for boys and girls to know each other and select their future partners with total freedom and true consent. However, this opportunity is misused by many boys and girls and has brought disaster to their own lives. They totally discard desires of their family. They take dating for total freedom from parents and religion, and total freedom for sex.

This has brought much misunderstanding about dating, especially in the circle of people of India.

Arranged marriage system in India is bad in one sense but good in another sense. It is bad when marriage is arranged with such a hatred and prejudice over other religions, castes and races; it is bad when parents over-protect and control their children to the extent of denying every wish, and even every right of their children in choosing their partners. Arranged marriages are wonderful when parents and children love each other sincerely, and total freedom is given to children for final consent to marriage; and, when arrangements are made for the would-be-spouses to meet and to know each other.

Dating system in America is bad when children totally disregard every genuine wish of their parents and consider everything as their freedom and fundamental right to the extent of practicing sex before marriage and considering marriage as a mere contract that can be terminated by a divorce decree. They often have no respect for their religious values at all. According to a friend of mine, dating system is to help the youth to learn to divorce and not to marry. You date with some one, then reject the person and accept another one; so you learn to divorce. It is wonderful when there is sincere attempt to seek the partner for an intimate union. When this happens, there is respect for family and religion; and, they seek parent's advice.

Whether it be arranged marriages or courtship marriage, people seek perfect husbands and perfect wives. A perfect husband or a perfect wife is a myth. No such person lives or ever lived in this world. We should not expect anyone to be 100 percent perfect. We are all called to be perfect, but we are only on the way to it. We have to accept each other with each one's weaknesses and failings. As there is no perfect wife or perfect husband, there is no perfect marriage either. Success of marriage is in mutual understanding and acceptance, and also in mutual love and respect.