Chapter - VII

Koraga weddings and marriages

This chapter covers marriages in history and in the present, in written records of the nineteenth, twentieth, twenty-first centuries as well as in the past and through news, interviews and data collection in 2010-2013. How has globalization impacted Koraga customs, and rituals, especially the institution of marriage? The chapter also covers Hindu-Aryan marriage types, the social milieu in the Koraga, etc.

7.1. Introduction

Weddings and marriages have had a significant impact on the Koragas in the past resulting in their current status. In particular, two experiences with the Pratiloma form of marriage have led to their status in the past as untouchables. The first Pratiloma (‘born in the reverse order’) marriage between a high caste Brahmin woman ancestor and a lowest caste Sudra male ancestor, led to their offspring being bracketed as Chandala, lower even than the Sudras. The children born of such wedlock were considered to be of an intermediate sub-caste, the lowest, the ‘slave caste’, the Chandala.

The second attempt at a Pratiloma marriage - a historic blunder - involved Hubbashika – the low caste tribal chieftain of the Koragas who tried to break rigid caste laws by asking for the hand of an upper caste princess. To control Hubbashika, King Chendashena, a kinsman of Lokaditya, proposed a marriage between his sister and Hubbashika. Accepting this proposal, Hubbashika, with his people, went to the wedding hall, where they were disarmed and killed. This led to the extermination of Chief Hubbashika and his nephew, and his entire tribe of Koraga warriors was deprived of all privileges, including the owning of land, the wearing of clothes and
economic independence. This ill-fated attempt at becoming a higher intermediate caste led to loss of warrior status and reinforced the ‘untouchable’ tag of the Koragas.

7.2. Marriage – its definition

1976 – *The World Book Encyclopedia*, 1976 edition, defines marriage as a contractual relationship uniting a man and a woman. The relationship arising from the agreement to live as husband and wife, is imposed by law, and is referred to as *marital status*, considered a legal relationship. Society provides the institution of marriage to help sustain a family life. Between husband and wife, with the stabilizing and near permanence of relationship, children, women and the elderly are hopefully provided a safe haven. Family life and therefore the community are given steadiness.

2013 – the same definition plus a few more features

All societies on the planet have recognized different forms of marriage as the legitimate way to express love, have sex, and form family units. Marriage is so important for the survival of the human race, and by extension, culture, that it has always had legal, religious and community sanctions. The ancient Macedonians even had a god who presided over weddings called Hymanaeus.

Without marriage, it becomes hard to commit to a family life and provide for children and the elderly. Marriage is expected to continue till the death of one of the parties. In our discussion of Indian marriage, marriages can be either through love or arranged. Deviant forms of marriage outside of India include (in Africa today) women of substance (wealthy and powerful) marrying poorer women to be housewives in their homes. Of course we cannot omit same-sex marriages that many countries in the world now permit. Since 2000, several countries have legalized same-sex marriage.
There is also common law marriage, which is union without a wedding or other forms of legal recognition – the couple just cohabit for a long time together.

In the West, love, mutual consent marriages are the norm. Sometimes, a step like an engagement or betrothal precedes the actual wedding. In countries like India, the parents of the bride or groom, intermediaries, brokers, elders of the community, or family members, arrange the marriage. The prospective bride or groom may or may not be asked for consent. Brides, especially the very young ones, are not asked at all. In rural and illiterate parts of India, and the rest of the very backward world (like parts of Africa, for instance), parents marry off their young, below age children, who have no choice. Some children (girls) live in their parental home, till they are sexually mature, and then are sent to their marital home.

7.3. Traditional Hindu marriage

In a traditional Hindu marriage, there is a union of two people of both sexes, whose responsibilities include the Hindu quad of dharma (duty), artha (wealth or possessions), kama (sexual love), and moksha (spiritual enlightenment). The wedding ceremony is followed by rituals for consummation, which is an important part of the marriage. In the north, gold and red are common colors for the wedding ritual. The south follows a more unrestricted color code for weddings, especially for the bride.

7.4. The reasons for marriage:

Economic security is an important reason. The husband is the wage earner, may be better educated, and supports his wife, children and sometimes his parents too, and the extended family.

Family security, the kind of social set up that takes care of young children is another key reason. Human children take a long time (actually the longest time among
all planetary mammals) to mature and be self-sufficient. The family, with parents who are married to each other, supports the human child till he/she is independent.

A legitimate outlet for love and sex is another crucial reason. Consummation of the marriage is a must in many religions. Love and sex are also the bases for gay, same-sex marriages. Loneliness is a powerful stimulant for any kind of marriage.

7.5. Types of marriage

Polygamy (the practice of one man having more than one wife) is permitted in certain religions, such as Islam (due to Sharia law), the Mormons, and in many ethnic groups like the Todas (in Nilgiris) and Eskimos of Alaska in the past. Rama’s father, King Dasharath, in The Ramayana, had three wives, but Rama was married only once to Sita. In The Mahabharata, Lord Krishna had 16, 108 wives, all of whom resided with him in Dwaraka, where his palace was. Post Independence, in 1955, with the promulgation of the Hindu Marriage Act, it became illegal for Hindus to have more than one wife. Jains, Buddhists and Sikhs too cannot have more than one wife. The Koraga men in the past, would marry more than once, however, that is no longer the case.

Polyandry (the practice of one woman marrying several brothers) is common in Leh and Ladakh and the erstwhile Tibet. The most famous case of polyandry is in The Mahabharata, where Draupadi married all five Pandavas – Yudhisthara, Arjuna, Bhima, Nakula and Sahadeva.

But the majority of marriages are heterosexual and monogamous – one man marrying one woman. Ancient Aryans recognized several different kinds of weddings – each with a different criterion.
7.6. Eight kinds of marriage

The eight kinds of marriages, according to the Hindu law books and *The Arthasastra* of Kautilya are:

Gandharva: ‘Lovers marrying secretly.’ This kind of marriage is a voluntary union based on mutual love and consent between bride and the bridegroom. This kind of marriage is a voluntary union of a maiden with her beloved. Parents do not play any role in such marriages. Sexual intercourse before the wedding is common, and not outlawed for such marriages. The *Kama Sutra* considers this to be the ideal marriage. In Hindu mythology, these marriages are in abundance. Bhima with Hidimba; Dushyant and Shakuntala; Kamdeva and Rati, Daksheya and Prajapati, Kach and Devyani, Arjuna with a servant maid – are few of the examples that are there in common perception.

Brahma: ‘A father giving away his well-adorned daughter.’ The daughter marries a man learned in the Vedas; her father willingly welcomes the bridegroom and his family with respect. After the bride and the bridegroom are schooled in Brahmacharya Ashrama, both agreeing to spend their life together, the father of the bride gives away his daughter (who is adorned with ornaments) to the bridegroom.

Prajapatyā: ‘The joint performance of sacred duties (by a man and a woman) without the prior consent of the woman’s father.’

Aarsha: ‘A marriage regularized by the husband who presents two cows to his father-in-law. This present of the cow with another cow/bull was considered a religious ritual and given as a token of gratitude to the father-in-law. The groom is also obliged to fulfil the commitment of Grihasthashram.'
Daiva: ‘The giving away of a girl with heavy ornaments to the officiating priest inside a sacrificial altar’ where the Yajna is being performed. Such marriages were common in the past, when Yajna was a living part of Aryan sub-continental culture.

Aasura: ‘The giving away of a girl in exchange for bride price.’ The bridegroom pays the value to the father or kinsmen of the bride after deciding the price according to the position of the bride’s family in society. This form of marriage may still be popular amongst low caste Hindus and few tribes of India.

Rakshasa: ‘Abduction of a woman (for marriage by force)’. Raiding parties of Kshatriyas kidnapped the bride from her home. Hindu scriptures described this type of marriage as forceful seizure of a maiden, sometimes even killing the bride’s family members in the process, women being the source of many battles in ancient times.

Paishacha: ‘Abduction of a woman while she was sleeping or intoxicated.’ The bride was kidnapped after she was molested/raped when her relatives were asleep, or intoxicated during a festival; this was a sneaky act. This type of marriage was condemned and is considered the lowest form of marriage. This marriage was recognised only because the children that resulted from the unwilling intercourse (unwillingness on the part of the drugged woman) needed to have legitimacy.

Another form of marriage is the Swayamvara, which was common among royalty in ancient times, and is followed by TV reality shows like The Bachelorette. The bride to be can make a choice from a number of prospective grooms – all stalwart princes and kings from outside the kingdom who have to perform some feat. In the past, princesses were given the choice to select a prince of standing in the crowd of princes in attendance. The wedding took place instantaneously when the princess
garlanded her chosen prince in the public court. Nala-Damayanti, and Prithviraj Chouhan-Sanyukta are instances from mythology and history. In *The Ramayana*, Rama was able to lift Shiva’s bow and won Sita’s hand. In *The Mahabharata*, Arjuna’s arrow punctured the eye of the rotating fish target and he won Draupadi.

Among the Koragas, mutual consent marriages (old style Gandharva), the joint performance of sacred duties (by a man and a woman) without the prior consent of the woman’s father (old style Prajapatya) both occur. When marriages end, it could be due to the following reasons – death (leaving behind widows or widowers), divorce (leaving divorcees), or separations.

What about the Koragas past and present? Gender relations can play an important part in the household, the local economy, and tribal relations. In the past, Koragas practiced *Aliya Santana*, a form of matrilineal inheritance. Now-a-days, many Koragas practice *Makkala Santana*, a form of patrilineal inheritance. The Sappina, Ande, and Kappada Koragas practice endogamy. Each sub-division is further sub-divided into clans or *balis*. None of them marry within their own clan. And this has been the case for centuries. With the change from matrilineal to patrilineal, Koraga women may not have the influence or affluence that they once had.

7.7. The past

Vasudevan’s book, published in 1998, gives details of marriage in the past. He mentions that as the moral fiber of the Koragas is very strong, the institution of marriage has not posed much problems for them. Marriage is considered to be sacred and indissoluble though men were at liberty to take more than one wife. While
women marry into their own caste, men could marry into a caste lower than theirs. Girls were married either before or after puberty.

Marriage expenses were generally met by the master to whom the Koraga were attached. The head ‘slave’, with a load of vegetables, prostrated himself to the master, with the prospective bride and groom and asked permission to conduct the marriage. The master then gifted the head slave Rs. 2.00 with a mura (40 seers) of rice to the bridegroom’s party, and Rs. 1.00 and a mura of rice to the bride’s party. After the wedding was over, the newly wedded couple visited and prostrated before the master, who gave them betel nuts and poured oil on the bride’s head, and gave them a small sum of money in blessing.

Francis Buchanan gave other details that back up what Vasudevan mentioned in his memoir to the Koragas. Men, he says, could have more than one wife, and all the wives lived together under the same roof. However, taboos were literally cast in stone. A non-Koraga man who co-habited with a Koraga woman, became an outcaste. A Koraga woman committing adultery, was whipped, and her lover, if a Koraga, was fined. The moral standards for all the 15 slave castes mentioned by Vormika, were very high.

7.8. Twentieth century marriage

All the customs mentioned above were already history when Vasudevan published his book in 1998. But, he gives other details on the then present state of marriage among the Koragas. Monogamy was the norm. Weddings were conducted on a Sunday morning, and were accompanied by drum beating, dancing, and followed with a sumptuous feast. The venue for the wedding ceremony was the bridegroom’s house, with a Koraga elder officiating over the ceremony.
The bride and groom are given a cold water bath, seated on a mat in front of the Koraga elder. A small quantity of rice is heaped in front of bride and groom, and after invoking the blessings of the sun, the Koraga elder showered the heads of both bride and groom with the rice. The rest of the party then does the same, the women following the men. The bridegroom then gifts two pieces of silver to the bride, followed by a feast for all present.

If the husband and wife fell out with each other, they can divorce after the husband formally presents the case to the community. Remarriage for widows and widowers was allowed. Koraga widows can be heads of households, and they can continue to wear red bindi of married women whose husbands are still alive.

There is no child marriage in the Koraga community. Both boy and girl must reach puberty before the marriage takes place. No marriages were encouraged within the clan (bali). Weddings are conducted on Sundays, which is considered auspicious. The Gurukira - the headman - conducts the wedding. Before the wedding, he, along with the parents of the bridegroom, and the groom go to the bride’s home with betel leaves and betel nuts, areca nut flower, fruits, etc. Both parties – the groom’s as well as the bride’s exchange a few types of food.

7.9. Twenty-first century marriage

Registered weddings among Koragas are now taking place, skipping the expense of a ritual wedding, and also sans parental approval. These findings are backed by data.