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MARRIAGE, LINEAGE, AND PROPERTY IN VEDIC AND SMRITI LITERATURE : A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE FORMATION OF THE FAMILY INSTITUTION

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ABSTRACT

In ancient Indian society, marriage, lineage and property played an important role in the structure and development of the family. The objective of the presented research paper is to study the mutual relations of these three and their impact on the institutional structure of the family in the context of Vedic and Smriti literature. In this, Vedic literature, Dharmasutras, Dharmashastras and related historical and sociological studies have been used. An attempt has been made to understand the social importance of these systems through text analysis and sociological approach. The study also takes into account the possible gap between the rules described in Vedic and Smriti texts and actual social behavior. These arrangements were also related to the rights of women, and family status. Analysis shows that the marriage played a significant role in organizing a couple of relationships and householder life, and in maintaining relations between family's identity and generations and property and succession played an important role in the transfer of family resources.

Keywords: Marriage, Lineage, Family Institution, Property, Vedic Literature, Smriti Literature

INTRODUCTION

In ancient Indian society, the family was an important institution of social life. Through this, the person joined the relation, social identity, religious obligations and economic resources. To understand the structure of the family, the study of reciprocal relationships of marriage, descent and property is necessary. Marriage played a role in organizing family relations as well as giving social and religious recognition to the relationship between husband and wife. Through this, the formation of family and expansion of kinship got a social basis. Historical and sociological studies are helpful in understanding the relationship between marriage and family structure Saifi and Rani (2021), Adhikari et al. (2024). Analysis of these relations is also necessary in terms of comprehensive social system Srivastava and Willoughby (2023). The descent played a role in maintaining relationships between family identities and generations, while the arrangements of property and succession affected the transfer of family resources and affecting the rights associated with them Majumdar (2010), Lubin (2018). Studies related to women's property rights provide additional basis for understanding the distribution of family resources and the status of women in this context Halder and Jaishankar (2008).

Thus, the sociological study of Vedic and Smriti literature provides a basis for understanding the interrelationships of marriage, lineage and property and the institutional structure of the ancient Indian family.

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RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The main objectives of this research paper are as follows:

1) To study family formation and kinship relations along with the role of marriage as described in Vedic and Smriti literature.
2) Understanding the role of family in taking forward children and lineage.
3) To study the ideas and rules related to property, stridhan and inheritance in Vedic and Smriti literature.
4) To conduct a sociological study of the ancient Indian family keeping in view the difference between the rules described in ancient literature and their observance in the society.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND RESEARCH GAP

In understanding ancient Indian marriage, theological rules and property rights, P. V.Kane's History of Dharmasastra, Gooroodass Banerjee (1879) and Julius Jolly's Outlines of an History of the Hindu Law of Partition, Inheritance, and Adoption (1885) are useful texts. In these, the rules of marriage, inheritance, property division and stridhan are discussed. On marriage and family relations, Mandal (2024) has discussed the types of marriage, marriage rituals and the status of women, while Makwana and Xavier (2016) have studied the historical changes in Hindu marriage. The Vivah Sukta (10.85) of the Rigveda is the main source for understanding marriage, husband-wife relationships and family life. On the status of women in Vedic literature, Majhi (2023) and Ghosh and Varma (2024) and Adhikari (2020) have studied the status and rights of women in Smriti literature and Manusmriti.

In the in Manusmriti (9.194–197) and Yajnavalkya Smriti, there are rules related to stridhan and inheritance. Regarding lineage and progeny, Bhattacharya (2018) has discussed Niyoga and the system of carrying forward the lineage, while Nishimura (2019) has made the meaning of terms like 'Prajakama' and 'Putrakama'. Yagnavalkya (2.127) is also helpful in understanding the rules associated with Niyoga and lineage continuity. Halder and Jaishankar (2008) have a historical analysis of women's property and rights on property and inheritance, while Lubin (2018) has noticed the difference between property related rules and social practice. The studies of Mullatti (1995) and Sonawat (2001) are also useful in understanding the social, religious and economic aspects of the Indian family. The presented research tries to understand by linking marriage, lineage continuity and property inheritance, how the rules related to these influenced the structure of the ancient Indian family. The main objective of this research is the sociological study of the mutual relations between these subjects.

METHODOLOGY AND LIMITATIONS

This research is based on qualitative and descriptive method.An attempt has been made in the study to understand marriage, lineage continuity, stridhana and inheritance, family relations, social roles, rights and duties on the basis of the original texts and available translations of Rigveda's Vivah Sukta (10.85), Manusmriti and Yajnavalkya Smriti as primary sources. Additionally, related historical, sociological and feminist studies have been used to understand and analyze the interpretation of primary sources within the broader social context.

Due to differences in the time, purpose and social context of creation of various texts, their views cannot be considered to represent the uniform condition of the contemporary society. The rules and ideals described in texts may differ from actual social behavior. This difference has been taken into account based on available sources. The findings must therefore be understood in the context of the sources selected and the limitations of their sociological analysis.

MARRIAGE AND THE INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURE OF FAMILY

In ancient Indian society, marriage was an important institution related to family formation, social recognition of marital relations and kinship. In Vedic literature, marriage was also associated with the relationship between man and woman and the establishment of household life and family responsibilities. The mention of marriage ceremony in the Vivah Sukta of Rigveda indicates the formal establishment of marriage relationship (Rigveda, 10.85.36). In the same Sukta, the newlywed bride has been addressed as 'Empress', which expresses the expectation of her respectable place in the new family (Rigveda, 10.85.45). The ideal of unity and mutual harmony in marital life also comes to the fore in this Sukta (Rigveda, 10.85.46). These contexts are helpful in understanding the religious and social significance of marriage Thakur (2019), Mandal (2024).

The nature and social beliefs of marriage have been presented in a more systematic manner in the Smritis. Manusmriti gives a classification of eight types of marriage (Brahma, Daiva, Arsha, Prajapatya, Asura, Gandharva, Rakshasa and Paishacha) (Manusmriti, 3.20–21). This classification is helpful in understanding the different forms of marriage based on religious and social norms. Banerjee (1879) also discusses the types of marriage and the conditions of valid marriage. This helps in understanding the formal and institutional aspects of marriage. Although it would not be correct to accept the rules given in the scriptures as a complete description of all the marriage customs of the contemporary society. Therefore, it is important to keep in mind the possible gap between the ideals of marriage and the actual practice Makwana and Xavier (2016).

Marriage was also related to procreation and continuity of lineage. Expectations related to children and future generations come to the fore in the Vivah Sukta of Rigveda (Rigveda, 10.85.42). Terms like 'Prajakaam' and 'Putrakam' are helpful in understanding the social importance of the desire to have children Nishimura (2019). It is in this context that the system of Niyoga is mentioned, which was related to the concern of carrying forward the lineage in certain circumstances Bhattacharya (2018). The institutional structure of marriage was also related to property and inheritance. Manusmriti and Yajnavalkya Smriti contain provisions related to stridhana that highlight the property rights of women within marital relationships (Manusmriti, 9.194–195; Yajnavalkya Smriti, 2.143–144). This makes it clear that the rules of economic rights were also associated with family relations. But the mention of any right does not automatically prove its practical use Halder and Jaishankar (2008), Lubin (2018).

In this way, marriage provided a social and religious basis to family relations and linked the responsibilities related to children, descendants and property to the broader social system.

LINEAGE, PROGENY AND GENERATIONAL CONTINUITY

In ancient Indian literature, lineage and children have been considered an important basis for the continuity of the family and maintaining relations between generations. In the Shikshavalli of Taittiriya Upanishad, instructions are given to carry forward the tradition of children (Taitiriya Upanishad, 1.11.1). This statement provides the basis for understanding childbearing as a family and social responsibility. Continuity of lineage was also linked to carrying on family identity and traditions. The Atharvaveda stresses family unity, love, and the continuity of lineage. It highlights harmony among family members and the importance of having children to continue the family line (Atharvaveda, 3.30.1; 2.3.3). In the patrilineal system, due to the lineage being linked to the male line, the rules regarding the family status and inheritance rights of sons and daughters were different. One system related to carrying forward the lineage was Niyoga. In Yajnavalkya Smriti, there is mention of the rights of a son born from Niyoga (Yajnavalkya Smriti, 2.127). Under this system, in some circumstances the questions of continuity and succession of the dynasty were interconnected Bhattacharya (2018). Adoption was also a valid way to maintain the continuity of the lineage. Details of its historical and legal aspects are found in these texts Jolly (1885). This makes it clear that apart from the children received from birth, there were other solutions to carry forward the lineage and family. Lineage was also related to property and inheritance. Thus lineage can also be understood as a system involving biological ties as well as family identity, social obligations and transfer of property.

In Manusmriti, continuity of lineage has also been given importance from the religious point of view. According to Manu, through the son one attains the worlds, through the grandson the idea of continuity is added and through the great grandson this tradition continues (Manusmriti, 9.137). The son is said to save his father from the hell called 'Put' (Manusmriti, 9.138). Ideas related to the importance of a son are also found in the Shunashepa narrative of Aitareya Brahmana (Aitareya Brahmana, 7.13). These references make it clear that along with continuity of the family, children were also linked to religious duties towards ancestor.

PROPERTY, INHERITANCE AND STRIDHANA

In the Vedic and Smriti literature, property was linked to family, lineage and inheritance. The rules for the distribution of property determined who would inherit the family property and how it would be passed on to the next generation. Manusmriti and Yajnavalkya Smriti contain rules related to distribution of property and inheritance (Manusmriti, 9.104, 9.118, 9.130–131; Yajnavalkya Smriti, 2.135–136). Manusmriti mentions equal distribution of ancestral property among brothers after father and mother (Manusmriti, 9.104). Besides, there is also a provision of giving money from the brothers' share for the marriage of unmarried sisters (Manusmriti, 9.118). These rules show that in the division of property, the rights of family members as well as their obligations were taken into account. The Taittiriya Samhita mentions the division of property among sons (3.1.9.4), while the Gautama Dharmasutra states that sons inherit their father's property (28.1). Another passage of the Taittiriya Samhita (6.5.8.2) led to debates about women's inheritance rights. Property in a joint family was related to the income of the individual as well as the resources of the family. When money earned through family resources could be considered the property of the entire family was an important question Jolly (1928). This shows that the nature of wealth could depend on both an individual's earnings and the resources of the family.

The concept of stridhan is important to understand the property rights of women. Manu has described six types of stridhan - money received at the time of marriage, money received at the time of farewell, money received as a gift, money received due to affection, money received from brother and money received from parents (Manusmriti, 9.194). According to Yajnavalkya, the property received from father, mother, husband or brother, received in front of fire, Adhivednik (money received on husband's second marriage), gifts received from relatives and property received after marriage are called 'Stridhan' (Yajnavalkya Smriti, 2.143–144). In the discussion of the historical development of stridhan, there is also mention of other separate property of the woman along with gifts received at the time of marriage and from family members Jolly (1885). Women's rights over stridhana and the rules for its inheritance could vary in different legal traditions. In some circumstances, the husband who took the wife's property may have an obligation to return it Banerjee (1879). The role of various relatives of the woman is also discussed in the rules related to inheritance of stridhan Banerjee (1879).

Finding the rule of property or inheritance in the literature does not prove that it was followed the same in all areas and families. Therefore, property related beliefs and rules can be understood from the Vedic and Smriti literature, but caution should be exercised while drawing conclusions about actual social behavior.

GENDER RELATIONS, FAMILY AUTHORITY AND WOMEN'S AGENCY

Analysis of relationships between the ability to make respect, rights, family responsibilities and decisions to understand the situation of women in ancient Indian family. Addressing the new bride as empress in the Vivah Sukta of the Rigveda presents the ideal of her respected place in the marital family (Rigveda, 10.85.45). In contrast, the position of women in Manusmriti is expressed in terms of dependence on father, husband and son (Manusmriti, 5.147–149). From these contexts the question arises to what extent social respect translates into freedom and decision-making rights Thakur (2019). Manusmriti links women's dignity to the welfare of the family (Manusmriti, 3.55–59), while the relevant provisions of Chapter 5 present limitations on women's freedom (Manusmriti, 5.147–149). This difference shows that women's dignity and their autonomy cannot be considered the same concept. Getting respect in the family and getting freedom in decisions related to property, family decisions or one's life were different things. While interpreting these rules, it should be kept in mind that the rules mentioned in the texts and their actual observance in the society could have been different Ghosh and Varma (2024).

Women's agency refers to their ability to express their views and influence decisions within social situations. Maitreyi's dialogue in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad brings out women's intellectual participation through questions of property and knowledge (Olivelle, 1998, 2/4/1-14; 4/5/1-15). Similarly, Gargi's philosophical discourse reflects his ability to question and present arguments (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, 3.6–8). These examples clarify the intellectual role of some women, but on the basis of these it cannot be concluded that all the women of the contemporary society got equal opportunities and freedom. Another side of women's agency is concerned about their rights and control over property. Provision related to stridhan in Manusmriti and Yagnavalya smriti gives the basis of understanding the property of women (Manusmriti, 9.194-195; Yagnavalkya smriti, 2.143-144). The main question is how the right to inherit property changed into the ability to make independent decisions about its use. Therefore it is necessary to understand the right and actual control separately Halder and Jaishankar (2008).

From the sociological point of view, the status of women cannot be assessed on the basis of either respectable ideals or restrictive rules. The marriage hymns, theological provisions and examples of women's intellectual participation in the Upanishads together present a complex picture. Comparative analysis of these sources helps in understanding the relationship between family power, property and decision making. However, these texts may not represent the experiences of all social groups.

MARRIAGE, LINEAGE AND PROPERTY: A SOCIOLOGICAL SYNTHESIS

Marriage, descent and property were interrelated processes that maintained the structure of the ancient Indian family. Marriage gave family relationships social and religious recognition, descent connected one generation to the next, and inheritance determined how family property was passed on. The classification of eight forms of marriage in Manusmriti brings out the standard distinctions between different forms of marriage (Manusmriti, 3.21). The relationship of lineage and succession can be understood through the system of daughter-son. This system offers an alternative way to maintain continuity of lineage and succession in the absence of a son. This indicates that the question of descent was also linked to religious obligations and transfer of property to biological children (Manusmriti, 9.130–133).

The rules regarding property distribution are helpful in understanding the structure of rights within the family. Manusmriti contains provisions related to property division and economic interests of unmarried sisters (Manusmriti, 9.104, 9.118). These rules recognize the economic interests of female relatives in certain circumstances, but they cannot be considered as proof of equal inheritance rights. It is important to understand the difference between the right to property and free control over it Jolly (1885), Lubin (2018), Halder and Jaishankar (2008).

From the sociological point of view, the mutual relations of marriage, lineage and property affected the status, rights and obligations of family members. In the context of women, respect, recognition of property and the ability to take independent decisions were different aspects. Therefore, instead of considering the structure of the family as a uniform system, it is more appropriate to understand it on the basis of rules related to marriage, lineage and property and the rights and limitations arising from them.

CONCLUSION

It is clear from the presented study that in Vedic and Smriti literature, family appears as an important institution related to marriage, lineage, property and social responsibilities. Marriage played a role in establishing family ties, while progeny and continuity of lineage were linked to the transfer of property. The rules of property and inheritance affected the rights and responsibilities of family members. The provisions of Stridhan provide a basis for understanding the property rights of women, but the right to acquire property and the ability to take independent decisions on it were different aspects. Similarly, there appears to

be a gap between the ideals related to the dignity of women and the limitations placed on their freedom. Also, the rules given in the texts cannot be considered fully representative of the actual practices of the contemporary society. Therefore it is important to keep their historical context in mind. Thus, sociological study of these texts is helpful in understanding the structure, rights and inequalities of the ancient Indian family.

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