

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC FACTORS OF COLLECTIVE MARRIAGES IN LAHORE

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ABSTRACT

Collective marriages are universal phenomenon and known as mass marriages. The main focus of the present research was to explore the phenomenon of collective marriages and its socio-economic factors. For this purpose, case study method was used. The in-depth interviews of the ten couples who got married through the collective marriages project since 2005 to 2007 were conducted with their full expression, emotions and comments. Besides this, parents of the girls who got married through collective marriages residing in the city Lahore were also interviewed. Collective marriages were successfully organized and gave economic benefits to many people. As it was a new concept so many people hesitated to accept it. However, it is considered as a positive step as it helped a lot to the society. Therefore, it is suggested to continue.

Key words Collective marriages, socio-economic factors

INTRODUCTION

Marriage is a social, spiritual, or legal union of individuals. This union may also be called matrimony, while the ceremony that marks its beginning is usually called a wedding and the married status created is sometimes called wedlock. (Anonymous, 2007) Horton and Hunt (1984) considered it as acceptance of new status, with a new set of privileges and obligations, and the recognition of this new status by others.

In our society marriages are managed mostly by the parents and it is recognized as a burden on parents in the case of girl marriage. During the last few years, the concept of collective marriages was adopted to lessen the economic burden of poor parents by arranging marriages for their daughters. Collective marriages can be defined as “the marriage of two to many hundred couples at the same place and same time organized by government or non-government organizations to provide financial assistance to poor families for a wed-lock.” (Khan, 2006)

The concept of mass marriages exists in the religion of Christianity, Buddhism and Sikhism. Wolfe (2008) described that in the Christianity the Sun Myung Moon introduced the mass marriages to make couples true parents without any sin and considered mass marriages as ritual of salvation and restoration. Chye (2007) explained that in Buddhism, mass marriages held to remind the newly-wed, the teachings of the Buddha on the role of both husband and wife. Takhar (2005) discussed that mass marriages also held in Sikhism as usually took place in the presence of Guru Jagjit Singh. Large numbers of Namdhari (sect of Sikhism) couples, all dressed in white, walked around a huge ceremonial fire, four times.

Different societies have adopted collective marriages for the different purposes. However, some countries celebrate mass marriages due to some seasons or festivals like Assyrians. Abraham (2002) described that Assyrians celebrated their new year with mass marriages. Similarly, Seeney (2007) mentioned that Galicnik wedding festival was organized for those men who migrated to other cities to earn money and come back in summer. On their arrival, mass wedding ceremonies are organized for them. Wiki News (2007) reported that in Belgium, the mass marriages were organized to eliminate the racial discrimination and create tolerance among the society. Moreover, Hayrapetyan (2008) explained that in the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh, mass marriages were held with the aim to stimulate a baby boom in the territory.

Many Muslim countries have the concept of mass marriages. Xinhua News Agency (1996) reported that in Egypt, mass marriages held to solve the problem of economic burdens of their youth supported by Supreme Council for Youth and Sports. Similarly, Nytime (2008) reported that in Palestine, many hundreds women had been widowed as a result of war. Their husbands had been killed either in disputes with Israel or in the fight between Hamas and Al-Fatah. Therefore, mass marriages were organized to support the widows of war. Moreover, the single fighters who were unable to marry got financial assistance through mass wedding. Bareth (2002) mentioned that Collective marriages also held in many cities of India to provide financial assistance to poor, save money and spent saved amount on the other useful purposes.

Pakistan has adopted the concept of mass marriage as well. Naseer (2005) explained that In Lahore, Governor Khalid Maqbool organized mass marriages for

Muslims and Christians at Alhamra Cultural complex, fortress stadium and Governor House to support poor families by giving those cash and dowry.

In Pakistan, to arrange a marriage ceremony of a girl is a serious problem for the poor families. Our norms and customs force the bride's parents to arrange a huge dowry with luxurious items and daily usage goods. Nobody can violate the dowry customs in the society as it produces negative consequences for bride after her marriage which includes physical and mental abuse and sometime divorce as well. Srinivas and Bedi (2007) explained dowry is vital for the security and status of bride after her marriage. Moreover, they mentioned that dowry enhance the social status of groom. As a result, bride enjoyed more power and control in her home which ultimately reduced the marital violence. Therefore, many girls parents are unable to marry their daughters due to insufficient or unavailability of dowry.

Government recognized this serious issue of the society and took initiative to adopt the collective marriages to support the people. Government not only provided a sufficient dowry to bride but arranged wedding ceremonies of all couples according to rituals as well. The ceremonies organized in Alhamra Hall, Fortress Stadium and Governor House. Government tried to create a full scene of traditional wedding as they invited a police band, school girls for songs, separate stages for couples and proper sitting arrangements for other guests. There was Khutba of Nikkah for the Muslims couples. Moreover, father of the Church performed the religious ceremony for the Christian couples. Lunch was served at the end of the ceremony.

The main objective of this research was to explore the social and economic factors of collective marriages in Lahore.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The collective marriages were organized by the Governor of the Punjab. The researchers got lists of couples from Governor House who got married through collective marriage scheme during the period of 2005-07 in Lahore and those parents whose daughters were married by same procedure. Through random sampling fifteen couples and bride parents resided in Lahore were selected. The universe of the present study consists of those ten couples and the bride parents who were willing to give an interview. The selected respondents included eight Muslims, two Christian's couples and the bride parents. .

The researchers used interview guide for data collection in the present study for in depth interviews. An interview guide was an outline based on four topics (general, economical, social and psychological). Each topic had open ended questions which helped to collect required information. The interviews were conducted

with the full expression and comments of the respondents.

Case study technique was used for data collection. It included all the required information of the couples and parents of bride. The data was analyzed on the basis of categories. Categories included personal profile of respondents and key theme. The key themes elaborated the purpose of collective marriage, economic status of respondents, verification procedure by government, response of society toward collective marriage, satisfaction level of respondents, economic and other benefits to the respondents.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Economic position of parents whom daughters were married through collective marriage: 75% of fathers and 60% mothers whom daughters were married in mass marriages were illiterate. They were minor employees with salary ranging from 3500-6000 Rs. 20% of them were single parent and have no earning member in family. The average size of family was consisting of seven members. 60% of them had no permanent source of income while 10% were unemployed. Therefore, they were unable to afford the marriage expenses of their daughters.

The above mentioned figures show the majority of beneficiaries of collective marriages were illiterate people.

Medical screening before marriage: The men, who had no dangerous or communicable disease, were allowed to take benefit from this scheme. As a result, only healthy men got married through collective marriages. This condition secured the future of brides and also helped to develop a healthy family and ultimately a healthy society.

Dowry given by Government: Government provided dowry to all couples. The dowry included furniture (bed, chairs, and tables), sewing machine, pedestal fans, cash gifts, necessary utensils and other household goods, Sixty percent of the couple received artificial gold set while forty percent received original gold set.

The dowry items show that government tried to provide necessary household items with expensive items like gold or cash which are part of the dowry culture.

Social Impact of Collective Marriages: Collective marriage is a new concept in Pakistan and it is an unusual procedure as compared to the simple marriage so different people showed different attitude toward it. 60% respondents were criticized to take dowry from government by their relatives. The major criticism was that the respondents were unable to marry their daughters and received a grant from government. 10 % respondents hesitated to invite their relatives on the wedding occasion. 30% respondent encouraged for the collective

marriages by their relatives. Their relatives showed the positive attitude. They were interested in collective marriages and wanted to know complete procedure of it. Moreover, they were happy as the girls got married at a proper time without any expenses. Easy access to dowry had changed the negative opinion of the relatives of the respondents. As a result, they wanted same kind of wedding for their daughters. 40% bride respondents were psychologically disturbed due to criticism. The 30% brides told the researchers that their self respect was hurt due to collective marriages. Furthermore, 10% brides told the researchers that they felt themselves in the isolation after their marriage. They had no support of their husbands and in-laws as they were unhappy due to part of collective marriages. One of the major factors of embarrassment of these brides was their published snapshot in newspapers. As media reporter covered all the ceremony, they took snapshot of brides without permission and published them in the newspaper besides reporting the event. However, the respondents adjusted with the passage of time.

The above mentioned figures show that majority of relatives wanted a dowry arranged by parents of bride without any government support. However, collective marriages were accepted and appreciated by people as they got dowry with out any cost.

Satisfaction level of Respondents: The researchers included questions in the interview guide to check the satisfaction level of respondents. A scale was designed in which values ranges from 0 to 1. The value 0 to 0.5 was assigned as unsatisfied. The value ranges 0.6 to 0.8 was assigned as less satisfied and 0.9 to 1 as fully satisfied. The result showed that 70% of Parents and couples who were part of collective marriage were fully satisfied with the government efforts of collective marriages. The satisfaction level of respondent was shown from the willingness to marry their other daughters or relatives through the same procedure and good feeling after their marriage. However, 30% couples were less satisfied. They were not willing to completely depend on the government in case of wedding of their own sisters and daughters. Beside this, all of them suggested that government should continue this programme.

Economic Benefits of Collective Marriages: In the Pakistan, it is really difficult for poor parents to arrange a dowry for their daughters. Heyer (2006) mentioned that dowry increased the expenditures of the parents on the marriage of their daughters. Moreover, women were used as capital transfer. Therefore, Collective marriages are economically beneficial for the respondents by providing them dowry and arranged wedding ceremonies. The dowry received through the collective marriage released the girl's parents from the burden of the expense which entailed many daughters. Government also provided the fare to respondents and their relatives to come on the

wedding place. Moreover, each groom received 5000 Rs from the governor of the Punjab as salami (amount received by groom by bride relatives). As a result girls got married without any expense which ultimately reduced the economic burden of bride's parents. As collective marriages financially helped the poor, therefore, it is a positive step to reduce the poverty. In fact, many girls could not marry at a right time due to lack of dowry. Qasmi (2006) stated that due to financial problems many girls remained unmarried that ultimately increased suicide and moral degradation. Therefore, collective marriages organized by government helped girls to marry at a right time by providing them dowry. In fact, wedding ceremonies in our country involves a lot of expenses including organize all event; serve meal to a large numbers of guests etc. However, government allowed couple to invite 60 guests.

Thus, collective marriages supported the parent and couples economically.

Other Benefits: Marriage is a religious obligation in Islam. Using collective marriages procedure it is easy for parents to fulfill their religious obligation to marry their daughters. In Pakistan, males are earning members of a family which make them financially independent. Consequently, it is easy for them to manage their marriage ceremony expenses. On the other side, girls are financially dependent on their parents. Therefore, it is considered the responsibility of bride parents to arrange a sufficient dowry for their daughters. It creates problems for the parents as well as for the bride. As Qasmi (2006) explained that parents tried to arrange the dowry by getting loans. Ultimately, all families were financially bounded for a long period of time. In contrast, collective marriages have positively affected the society. As the people marry at a same time through the same process so it leads society toward equality. As mass marriage involves government, public supporting NGO or social workers so it promotes mutual cooperation and unity among society.

The status of women increased through mass marriages because government supported women and their parents and tried to solve their problems. Many women in dowry oriented society faced violence from their in-laws due to fewer dowries or no dowry at all. Kishwr (1986) explained that brides were humiliated with constant taunt. Brides were on the defensive position in their daily life after marriage. Furthermore, Qasmi (2006) explained that dowry custom influenced in-laws to commit crimes like burning the bride, murder or poisoned them. However, in mass marriages women received sufficient dowry from government that helped to reduce domestic violence on poor women.

In some countries, collective marriages are organized to solve the common problems of the people. The people who follow the collective marriages for religious purpose feel good about it. The counties who organized it in

relation to any seasons or occasion considered it as entertaining event. Although in Pakistan many people resisted and considered it as a charity. Except of this fact, it helped a lot to the people who adopted it to gain economic benefits.

Conclusion: In the end it can be concluded that Collective marriages are universal phenomenon. Dowry and wedding ceremonies made the marriage very complex and expensive. Government of Pakistan realized this problem and adopted the concept of collective marriages since 2004 to 2007. Collective marriages were successfully organized and gave economic benefits to a lot of people. It helped the poor girls for their dowry and other marriage arrangements. Thus it reduced their economic burden. Besides this, it helped them to marry at their proper age as well. Beneficiaries were satisfied with it. As it was a new concept so many people hesitated to accept it. However, it is considered as a positive step for the welfare of public. Therefore, it should be continue on regular basis in all part of the country. There are many ways to improve the collective marriages some of them are following. It is necessary to provide quality items in dowry. Government should try to create more positive image of collective marriage through media and emphasis on the point that it is not specific to the lower class. In addition, the picture of married couples who married through this procedure should not publish without their permission. Furthermore, government should adopt some technical programs for the groom to enhance their skills and abilities. It will also help them to better earn which ultimately secure the financial future of bride as well.

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