

Egyptian marriages- types and traditions research papers example

[Sociology](#), [Social Issues](#)



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Marriage is an extremely important institution in the human society in all parts of the world. Indeed, this event marks the beginning of a new bond to be shared between the newly wedded couple. While the customs, traditions and ceremonies pertaining to weddings might differ from culture to culture and country to country, the sanctity of this institution remains the same everywhere. As with any other country in the world, in Egypt too, marriage is regarded as a very important occasion. In fact, it is the Egyptians who are said to be the first to have declared the laws of wedding to the world (Negm).

For Egyptians, marriage is a moral and legal way of deriving satisfaction, both biological and psychological, in this world. They regard the nuptial bond as a means of retaining the sacredness of the relationship between a man and a woman and as a way to strengthen relations in the society. In this context, marriage is an imposition of a religious nature in the Egyptian culture, and the youth is, therefore, encouraged to enter into matrimony (Negm).

With respect to monogamy and polygamy, in ancient Egypt, monogamy was

rather the norm. While the financial constraint of the husband was one reason for avoiding polygamy, another perhaps more important reason for adhering to monogamous marriages was that the societal dictates of those times stated that a wife must be held in high regard. However, later on polygamy became a common affair with kings and the ruling class taking several wives and appointing one among them as the principal or the main wife. Polygamy became popular in the later days of the Egyptian civilization predominantly to ensure an heir and to build or cement relationships with other kings and powerful leaders (Dunn). Even today, polygamy is practiced in the Egyptian society, although strict personal laws have been enforced. However, if a man wishes to marry a second time, the ' Khul' law states that he should inform his first wife and the marriage registrar and the violation of this law is punishable (Leila).

Types of Marriage Practiced by the Egyptians

At present, there are two styles of marriage that are practiced in Egypt namely, official and Urfi marriages. As per the nation's current laws, marriages must be officially registered with the civil registrar. If the registration of marriage is not done, the relationship between a man and a woman is considered illegal. The benefits of marrying officially are that it allows partners to apply for divorce, avail of alimony and demand for the support of a child (Negm).

In contrast, the Urfi marriage can be understood as a customary act and a contract that is not officially registered with the concerned authorities of the country. This marriage style has existed since long in Egypt and was

regarded as advantageous by widows who received huge pensions and did not want to lose the sum by re-marrying officially. However, today there are two main reasons why Urfi marriages have gained popularity in the nation namely, high costs of traditional marriages and the forbiddance of sex before marriage in the conservative culture of Egypt. In other words, the Urfi marriage presents the Egyptian youth with a means to save on wedding expenditure and allows them to satiate their sexual desires before entering into a lifelong commitment (“ The Urfi Marriages”).

The Urfi marriage is essentially an informal and undocumented institution that has greater ill-consequences for the woman than for a man. Since no legal divorce is granted in the case of Urfi marriages, the partners cannot legally be regarded as divorced. Although the husband can officially remarry, should the wife do so, she takes upon her the risk of being accused as polyandrous, which is a punishable offence in Egypt (“ The Urfi Marriages”). Another wedding style practiced in Egypt is marriage within the family i. e. nuptials between relatives. Egyptians have been practicing this style of marriage for several beneficial reasons. According to the Egyptians, marrying off relatives helped to keep the wealth within the family, boosted the family’s power and increased its size. Although, in the modern times science has shown that marrying relatives could prove detrimental to the growth and development of the progeny, this wedding style is common in Egypt even today (Negm).

Ceremonies and Events in the Official Egyptian Marriage

The official Egyptian wedding customs and traditions, while primarily adhering to the ancient Egyptian culture, also show influences from other civilizations such as Islam, Roman and Greek. On the whole, the modern Egyptian wedding customs have remained similar to that during the ancient times, albeit with some minor changes to suit the need of the times (Negm). A typical Islamic marriage contract in Egypt includes the ' moqaddam sadak' i. e. dowry given by the groom to the bride, the ' moakhar sadak' i. e. money to be paid to the wife in case of divorce and the ' esma' i. e. divorce rights usually given to men. It also comprises of the ' qayma' i. e. list of jewelry and furniture to be given to the wife in case of divorce or death of the husband and the ' nafaqa' i. e. alimony. Christian marriages in the Egyptian society are more flexible with respect to meeting these marriage requirements, although there are certain traditions to be followed that demarcate who purchases what for the wedding (Kondos).

The typical events in the official Egyptian marriage comprise of an engagement, the ' Henna Night', the wedding day proper and the evening wedding party that is more of a social affair than a religious ceremony. The engagement ceremony involves the suitor visiting the bride's family to ask for her hand in marriage. During this ceremony, an agreement is reached upon with regards to the dowry and valuables to be gifted to the bride. The engagement also acts as a formal announcement to the society that the couple is soon to enter into a marital commitment. This ceremony is carried out amidst much pomp and splendor and an exchange of rings. Earlier, the time gap between engagement and wedding was not kept long. However,

nowadays couples choose to have their marriage fixed for later dates as it gives them more time to prepare for the extravagant event (Negm).

One the night before the wedding date, the families and friends of the bride and groom celebrate the ' Henna Night'. This event, an essentiality among the Muslims, is celebrated separately between the ladies and gents. The bride applies a tattoo of henna to her hands and feet amidst a lot of dancing and singing. Similar revelry can be seen occurring at the groom's party as well (Negm).

On the day of the wedding, typically a Thursday, the all-important marriage contract is signed and registered in front of a ' mazoun' or registrar before family and friends. While, among Muslims, this ceremony can be carried out at the bride's home or the mosque, among Christians, it is to be strictly performed in a church.

That very evening, normally after sunset, the most public of the wedding events takes place. In the ancient times, for the wedding party, the bride was shifted to her new house on a horse or a camel in a procession called as ' zaffa' that consisted of a music band and women's singing or ' zaghareet'. Nowadays, the newlywed couple dressed in their best and accompanied by a similar loud procession is transferred to the reception venue in a well-decorated vehicle. They are then seated on a specially decorated couch called as ' kousha'. Guests, for whom attendance is an obligation, bless and present gifts to the couple. Everyone attending the party is treated to a lavish spread of food and drinks. This party usually lasts through the night. It is only after the wedding party that the newly wedded couple is allowed to

spend time with each other alone in their new house or as is the case nowadays, in a newly rented home or hotel room (Negm).

Ceremonies and Events in the Urfi Marriage

When compared to the official Egyptian marriage that involves a lot of festivities, gaiety, and events that must be followed, the Urfi style of marriage is a subdued affair. Instead of going through elaborate ceremonies before the actual wedding, in the Urfi marriage, couples are only required to say the words ‘ We got married’ and pledge their commitment before a Muslim cleric and God. This style of marriage requires that two witnesses be present at the occasion who must sign a paper that states that the couple is married (“ The Urfi Marriage”).

While earlier the Urfi marriage was considered illegal and went unrecognized, a law passed in 2000 made this marriage legal and allowed the woman to seek divorce. However, the lady still cannot demand child support and alimony (“ The Urfi Marriage”).

There is another way in which Urfi marriages are conducted in Egypt, which is regarded as controversial. In this form of the Urfi wedding, called as ‘ zawag al-’urfi’, no witnesses are present and the couple signs on the documents that declare them as being wedded. In such controversial Urfi marriages, the respective families are also not informed of the nuptials (“ The Urfi Marriages”).

If the extravagantly high marriage costs in Egypt are brought down, then perhaps the incidence of Urfi marriages would decrease too. But for those who choose to marry officially, even on a moderate scale, the celebrations

are carried out with great intensity that stems from the fact that family bonds are highly venerated in this culture. As for the happy couple entering into matrimony, whether in the official or the Urfi style, with or without the blessings of their family and friends, they always surge with a fervent hope that their marital bond would last forever.

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