

# Hinduism and islam on human relationships



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## Hinduism

Marriage in Hinduism is portrayed as a very important thing and examples of religious devotion to your partner can be found between Krishna and Radha or between Rama and Sita in the famous poem The Ramayana. Hindu gods get married and have children also. The gods also demonstrate what an ideal relationship with one's husband/wife should be. For example, the gods Shiva and Parvati are often held up as the ideal couple. Women will often pray for a husband like Shiva and follow Parvati's patient example in waiting for one to come along (It is said that Parvati waited sixteen years until she met Shiva).

Marriage is enforced in Hinduism and is regarded as a religious duty and choosing to stay single is not encouraged. One cannot reach moksha (release of the soul from the chain of rebirth) unless they fulfil their dharma (religious duty in life). Marriage is also the 13th samskara a Hindu will pass through in their life. The samskaras are sixteen rituals, which mark stages in a person's life (the first concerns the moment of conception whilst the last are the funeral rites). Another reason why Hindus are encouraged to marry is because some religious rituals can only be carried out if you are married. A quote from a book called Hinduism: A New Approach reinforces this idea:

'No religious ritual can be performed by a man without his wife, and no man or woman's life is seen as complete without marriage.'

Also included in the samskaras are four ashramas, which follow the cycle of growing up, adulthood and getting old, and are Brahmacharyi (student), Grihastha (householder), Vanaprastha (retirement) and Sannyasin

(renunciation). For Hindus, marriage is when a person passes from their student stage to their householder stage.

The most common type of marriage performed in India is an arranged marriage. This is when the parents and elders in the families of both the bride and the groom are arranged to marry after both individuals' horoscopes are considered and the social, financial and religious status of the other family are also taken into account.

## Islam

Marriage in Islam is supposed to offer tranquillity to the soul and peace to the mind, so that man and woman may live together in an atmosphere of love, mercy, harmony, co-operation, mutual advice and tolerance, and lay the foundation for raising a family. In Islam it is one of the most sacred contracts that two beings can subject to.

Marriage in Islam is the basis of a social Islamic society and is a recommended act towards all Muslims. When two Muslims marry Allah unites their souls so that the partners can live in tranquillity.

Here is a quote from the Qur'an that lays down the nature of marriage:

'Among his signs it is that, that He created you from dust; and then - behold, ye are human beings scattered (far and wide). And among His signs is this, that He created you mates from among yourselves, that ye may dwell in tranquillity with them, and He has put love and mercy between your (hearts): verily in that are Signs for those who reflect.'

This quote can be interpreted to mean that Allah is aware that human beings need partners and so provides them with 'mates'. This quote also reinforces the Islamic view that men are allowed more than one wife and when researching I have discovered that it was commonplace for a Muslim man to have many wives but now it is only practised by a minority of Muslims who mainly live in the Middle-East.

Here I will discuss the marriage ceremonies and symbols linked to both Hinduism and Islam

## Hinduism

The Hindu marriage ceremony has several steps. The first step actually occurs before the marriage and is when the horoscopes of both partners are looked upon to decide the best date to have the wedding. Both the parents and elders on both the bride and the groom do this.

Also several days before the marriage small parties are thrown to start the celebrations. It is traditional for the marriage to be held at the home of the bride but nowadays it is held in a hall or mandir.

A day before the wedding the palm and feet of the bride are decorated with "Mahendi". A canopy or mandapa decorated with flowers is erected at the place of wedding. On the wedding morning, various ablutionary rituals are performed on both the bride and the groom in their own homes. Their bodies are anointed with turmeric, sandalwood paste and oils, which cleanse the body, soften the skin, and make it aromatic. They are then bathed to the chanting of Vedic mantras

The major stages of the Hindu Ceremony are: -

All pujas begin by worshipping Lord Ganesh this is because no other God will accept any offerings before Lord Ganesh has had his dues. Next the Bridegroom is welcomed by the bride's mother. The mother-in-law to be also offers him advise that marriage is a weight matter and not to be lightly entered into by showing him various symbols such as the yoke used to tie bullocks to a cart. After that the parents of the bride wash the right foot (or just the toe) of the bridegroom with the five auspicious liquids (milk, curd, ghee, sugar and honey).

The bride and groom exchange garlands and in the days of yore, this was the first time they may have actually met face to face! The parents of the bride proffer her hand in marriage to the groom and officially request him to accept her as his bride. The groom usually offers clothes and jewellery to welcome her to his home. Now the sacred fire, central to all Hindu religious ceremony, is invoked and sacred oblations of wood, grains and ghee are poured in and the bride places her foot on a stone at the corner of the mandap. The bridegroom tells her to be as firm as the stone/ mountain so as to face the vagaries of the life ahead.

The central part of the marriage ceremony is when the bride and groom circumbulate the sacred fire four times. (In some communities, this is done seven times.) This signifies the marriage contract between the couple to have been witnessed by the Gods through the sacred fire and the bride and groom take seven steps together. With each step they take a vow to be together, to grow together, to strengthen each other, support each other etc.

and pray to the Gods that these vows will be fulfilled. Then the couple touch each others' heart and promise

'May my heart be thine and thy heart be mine. When I talk to thee, please listen to me with perfect attention. I promise to listen to thee with equal attention.'

The marriage ceremony is completed by offering ghee in to the sacred fire. The priests bless the bride and groom and guests shower the couple with their own blessings, flowers and rice

## Islam

The night before the actual wedding there is a party which takes place at the home of the bride. Then on the actual wedding day the family moves towards the place of marriage from the groom's house. The groom precedes them grandly and is joined by musical instruments and drums. As soon as the groom reaches the venue. Both the brothers and sisters of the bride play an important role at the beginning, the brothers exchange money and food with the bride and groom whilst the sisters greet the guests.

Before starting the actual ceremony, asks the bride whether she is happy and agrees to the marriage and he is usually joined by witnesses. The priest also asks the groom his consent in similar fashion. After this the groom is asked to read from the Qur'an. Next the bride and groom are asked to sign a contract and the groom goes and gives money to all his sister-in-laws in exchange for blessings.

Dinner is served to the men and women separately and then the bride and groom are asked to sit together for the first time. Then read a few prayers and can only see each other through the reflection of mirrors. Dates and sweets are given to the guests for a religious purpose and then they leave.

During the night, the groom stays at the bride's house and is accompanied by his younger brother. The bride's parents give him gifts and money the next morning and the father of the bride asks the groom to take good care of his daughter. Then the bride departs to live with the groom.

The final part of the ceremony is on the fourth day after the wedding, when the bride is taken back to her parents' house and they are all treated to a reception held by the groom's family to honour the marriage.

## Hinduism

Hinduism encourages couples having sex; Kama (sensual pleasure) is one of the four purushartas, which are the aims of life. Sex is believed to be a good thing and should be enjoyed. It is also needed to produce children (or more importantly sons). This is why sex is seen as a duty of married life.

Although sex should be enjoyed, Hinduism is very strict about the teaching of self-control and is against all sorts of prostitution. Hinduism also teaches that sexual relationships should always occur between married couples. Sex before marriage is also discouraged in Hinduism. Traditionally sex can only occur in the householder stage and should not occur during the student stage

Until recently contraception was completely against the ideas of Hindus because of the law ahimsa, which is the law of non-violence to all creatures. Contraception was also not used by Hindus because it was seen as lucky by the parents to have sons. Recently Hindus are using contraception more and more because of better medical supplies and resources. Hindus are also against abortion because of Ahimsa. It is seen as murder of the baby foetus and results in bad karma. However, abortion may be allowed if the birth of the child is going to cause more trouble than the abortion. In general, Hindus favour contraception more than they do abortion.

## Islam

Sex is seen in Islam as an act of worship and satisfies our needs as well. Sex is also seen as very important and is needed to carry on the Muslim race; sexual intercourse is seen as a gift from Allah. Islam feels very strongly about sex before marriage and shouldn't happen. Adultery is shunned and can be punishable by death. Islam is also against homosexuality and is described as impure.

Contraception and abortion are both frowned upon in Islam because the conception of a child is seen as a gift from Allah. This is reinforced by the quote below:

'He bestows (children) male or female according to his will (and plan), or He bestows both males and females, and He leaves barren whom He will. For He is full of knowledge and power'



Contraception can however be permitted under special circumstances like if the family is too poor to raise a child or if it will be born with any defects or diseases or that it might jeopardise the mother's health.

## Hinduism

Historically men have dominated the Hindu society and religion. But in the last 100 years there has been a change. A married woman is supposed to have a different dharma than those to men. Traditionally a wife is supposed to perform religious duties, make food for her family and keep the house in order. She is also has a responsibility to look after the children. A married man however is supposed to protect and support his family.

However, since birth sons are seen as more important than girls. This is because girls 'cost' more to the family when they get married, also sons are seen as a continuation of the family and they also carry out their parent's funeral rites which save their parent's soul from the hell of Punnama where parents without sons are supposed to go.

Nowadays, especially with British Hindus, women and men have more equal roles and have shared roles.

## Islam

Women and men have equal rights and duties in the household in Islam. Muslims are also taught that Allah will judge men and women equally. Women are allowed to take part in all equal activities such as studying, refusing to marry, voting in politics, owning their own businesses and inheriting.

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Even though men and women have equal rights, it is stated in Islamic teaching that men make the final decisions. Usually, men go out to work and the women stay at home but there is no law about this and women can go to work if they want. But, men are also expected to help at home.

Here is a quote from a scripture called the sahih-Al-bukhari:

'A man asked the prophet o messenger of Allah, who deserves the best care from me? The prophet answers your mother. The man asked whom then? The prophet said your mother, he asked again and the prophet said your mother for the third time, then the man asked for the fourth the time and the prophet said you father'

The explanation for this is that it was believed that the Prophet Muhammad showed more respect to women than men.