The Marriage Systems Mirrored in the
MĀRKAṆḌEYAPURĀṆA

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INTRODUCTION-Purāṇas, the Hindu religious scriptures, are invaluable treasures of the world literature. These Purāṇas constitute a vast sector of the rich Sanskrit literature and are a great literary public property. In Indian literature, the Purāṇas occupy a unique position. Generally the word *Purāṇa* signifies 'old traditional story' (*Purāṇam ākhyānam*)[1]. Besides the *Purāṇas* are said to be a store house of civilization, history and culture of ancient India. The *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa* containing 9000 verses, is one of the oldest and most important of the extant Mahāpurāṇas and included into the Rājaṣikapurāṇas. Among the different topics of discussion, this purāṇa contains some information regarding marriage also. This paper is an attempt to discuss about marriage system reflected in the *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa*. The methodology of the paper is descriptive and analytical.

IMPORTANCE AND SOCIAL IMPICATION OF MARRIAGE-
Among the religious rites marriage occupies an important place. Marriage signifies the union of generally two individuals of the opposite sex. It is one of the sixteen saṁskāras and is regarded as the base of all the saṁskāras. It is considered as a sacred bond and one of the most important duties of a house-holder. According to the view of G.R. Gupta, marriage is the institution which fulfils four functions.[2] Such as: Marriage is a religious performance without which the individual is incomplete. It is considered to be a part of religious duty (*dharma*). The sacrifice offered to the gods and deities by unmarried persons are said to be incomplete. He becomes complete only after he secures a wife.[3] Secondly marriage implies children who will carry the names of a father and his *vaṁsa* and become future caste members. Thirdly it is considered that a person's soul will not be saved if there are no children to perform the funeral rites and *piṇḍa-dāna* rite which propitiate the pitaras. The fourth function of marriage is to satisfy the sexual desires of the partners in a socially acceptable manner.

So all parents wish to get their sons or daughters married.

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We find the description of marriage in a number of ancient scriptures like the *Ṛgveda*, *the Atharvaveda,* various Smṛtiśāstras and different Purāṇas etc. In early India, marriage was considered to be an oblation and ritual performed in accordance with social tradition.[4] Marriage has been contributing largely to the growth of Indian society since the ancient time. In ancient Indian society, after completing *Brahmacaryāśrama*, one had to enter into *gārhathyāśrama* where they needed to marry. According to *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa*, a person is considered himself to be complete after obtaining his wife.[5] The *Taittirīyoupaniṣad* also advocates, marriage to be obligatory for all the people,[6] otherwise a man is considered to be incomplete. The similar view is expressed in the *Śatapathabrāhmaṇa* also.[7] A married person had only the right to perform sacrifice. It is declared in the *Taittirīyabrāhamaṇa* that an unmarried person is not fit for performing sacrifice.[8] In the same *brāhamaṇa* it is also stated that wife is one half of the husband.[9] The *Mahābhārata* also enumerates the various roles of wife in the life or her husband thus-

ardhaṁ bhāryā manuṣyasya bhāryā śreṣṭhatamaḥ sakhā /
bhāryā mūlaṁ trivargasya bhāryā mitraṁ mariṣyataḥ // [10]

It means the wife is the half of the body of a husband as well as support for the attainment of the objects of human life, greatest friend and the friend of a dying one. According to the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa,* without wife and children the life of a householder is unbearable.[11] Likewise, *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa* also states that marriage means taking a wife and it has been considered as 'holy' or 'conducive to merit'. This is the cause of gaining the heaven and also of the final emancipation. Without marriage there is endless bondage.

vatsa kasmāt tvayā pūṇyo na kṛto dārasaṁgrahaḥ
svargāpavargahetutvād bandhaṣṭenāniśaṁ vinā// [12]

This was told to a Prajāpati named Ruci by his ancestors. The marriage is the means for begetting sons by whom the gods and the Pitṛis are satisfied.

FORMS OF MARRIAGE-According to Sūtra literature, there are various forms of the Hindu marriage system which differ from each other in their performance and mode. The Gṛhyasūtras[13] and the Smṛti texts[14] have recognised eight forms of marriage. In the *Viṣṇupurāṇa*[15] and in the *Mahābhārata*[16] eight forms of marriage are mentioned. All these forms were prevalent in ancient Indian society. These eight forms of traditional marriage are *Brāhma, Prājāpatya, Ārṣa, Daiva, Āsura, Gāndharva, Rākṣasa* and *Paiśāca* which all have individual

characteristics and description.[17] The above mentioned eight forms of marriage are also accepted by Manu.[18] The various forms of marriage have been discussed more or less in various scriptures, especially in the Smṛiśāstras like *Manusmṛti, Yājñavalkyasmṛti* etc. In the Brāhma system of marriage, the father of the bride invites the groom and gives his daughter, decked with ornaments.[19] In the *Prājāpatya* marriage, the bride is given to the groom, and the groom requests for her hand as a duty. Both follow the same faith and conduct. Giving the bride to the bridegroom in marriage after saying "both of you live together accomplishing the duties of a householder" is called *Prājāpatya* from of marriage, as quoted in *Manusmṛti*.[20] In *Ārṣa* marriage, after receiving a pair of cows from the groom, the father gives his daughter to the groom.[21] It is called *Daiva* marriage when the priest is duly offered a maiden, having ornaments and garments given after performance of sacrifice.[22] In the *Āsura* marriage system, the father of the bride receives money under realization, from the bride groom.[23] In *Gāndharva* system a man and a woman get married with equal love of the both side.[24] In *Rākṣasa* form the woman is carried away by force, as a result of which a battle takes place,[25] whereas in *Paiśāca* form, the maiden is stolen away while she is in sleep or lying in an unconscious condition.[26] Among all eight types of marriage, the *Brāhma* marriage is considered for all castes and the other forms of marriage are permitted for non-Brāhmaṇas.[27]

Among the abovementioned forms of marriage, the *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa* gives two examples of the *Rākṣasa* marriage. In one example, Nābhāga, the son of king Diṣṭa, married a *Vaiśya* lady named Suprabhā by this from of marriage. It was evident from the courageous speech of Nābhāga like, "I have abducted Vaishya's daughter under the *Rākṣasa* form of marriage. If there is anyone who possesses the strength, let him free her". As a result of this act a battle happened between him (Nābhāga) and the king's soldiers.[28] The second example is the marriage of King Avikṣit, the son of great king Karandhama with Vaiśālinī, daughter of the king Viśāla. He drives out all the kings at *Svayaṁvara* by his power. The relatives of the princess took her to the prince by force, even when the princess did not approve him at the *Svayaṁvara*.[29] There is another important incident of marriage which is the instance of both the *Gāndharva* and *Rākṣasa* forms of marriage. King Cārukarman's daughter princess Sumanā, selected king Nariṣyanta's son, Dama at the *Svayaṁvara*. But three princes (Mahānanda, Vapuṣmān and Mahādhanu) tried to marry Sumanā by force. The father of Sumanā, asked the kings about the righteousness

or otherwise so that his and Dama's righteousness be not violated. Though certain kings, approving *Gāndharva* marriage, justified Dama to be the husband of Sumanā, yet some other kings answered that she should belong to him who forcibly carried her away after slaying those who opposed him and thereby supported the *Rākṣasa* form of marriage. This was recommended as the best for the Kṣatriyas.[30] But as Sumanā had chosen Dama as her husband before her father and all the kings that present in her *Svayaṁvara*, this might be said as the *Gāndharva* form of marriage. They also pleaded that a maiden once married loses her maidenhood and the marriage creates a bond upon her, hence it was not worthy on their part to carry her away from Dama.[31], Dama then, in accordance with marriage rules, asserted his right and defeated the other kings and married Sumanā.[32] It is stated in the *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa* that the *Gāndharva* form of marriage was decided for the Kṣatriyas only and not for the other castes.[33]

Besides those eight forms of traditional marriage, there was evidences of Svayaṁvara marriage also which was arranged by the family members of the bride. Svayaṁvara marriage system was popular among the Kṣatryas. In this type of marriage, the princesses choose their soul-mates by their own selection.[34] In the *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa,* there are some rules which are followed in the *Svayaṁvara* system of marriage. *Svayaṁvara* is considered as a duty of righteousness (dharmakṛtya)[35] where the bride choose her life partner based on the power, heroism, prowess, fortitude, beauty etc. The *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa,* gives enough examples of Svayaṁvara marriage system. For example, Princess Vaiśālinī chose king Avīkit[36], Vīrā, the daughter of king Vīryacandra chose king Karandhama[37]. Again king Hemadharman's daughter Parā, king Sudeva's daughter Gaurī, Bali's daughter Subhadrā, Vīrabhadra's daughter Nibhā, Vīra's daughter Līlāvatī, Bhīma's daughter Mānyavatī and Dambha's daughter Kumudvatī all chose Avīkṣit at their *Svayaṁvara*[38] and king Cāruvarman's daughter Sumanā chose king Dama at her Svayaṁvara.[39] In the context of marriage it is noteworthy to mention the other three customs of marriage viz. monogamy, polygamy and polyandry, depending on the number of wife or husband.[40]

Monogamy: If a man has single wife it is called monogamy. This is common and best kind of marriage custom. It is mentioned in the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* that the co-wives are the root cause of unhappiness for the householder.[41] This indicates the positive side of Monogamy. There are some stories in the *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa* which contain the

evidences of Monogamy. For example, Ṛtudhvaja did not remarry after the death of his wife Madālasa. [42] Besides, we find other specimen of monogamy in case of the couples like Nābhāga and Suprabhā, [43] Vatsaprī and Saunandā,[44] Karandhama and Vīrā,[45] Dama and Sumanā, Naricyanta and Indrasenā[46] etc.

Polygamy: If a man has more than one wife it is called polygamy. [47] We find that polygamy prevailed in ancient time especially in case of the gods, the sages and the kings. In the *Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad*, we find that sage Yājñavalkya had two wives named Maitreyī and Kātyāyanī [48]. The *Aitareyabrāhmaṇa* also describes that the king Hariścandra had one hundred wives. [49] *Smṛti* texts permit the Kcatriyas and the Brāhmaṇas to accept wives from other castes also besides their own cast.[50] The *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* [51] and the *Mahābhārata* [52] explain the distribution of the daughters of Dakṣa.

In the *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa* we get various instances of the acquisition of wives. Such as- king Dakṣa had twenty-four daughters. Dharma married thirteen out of the twenty four. [53] Svārociṣ, Manu's father had three wives. [54] Marīci's son Kāśyapa had also married thirteen wives. [55] Again king Khanitra had three wives. [56] It is also noted that king Avikṣit [57] and Marutta[58] had many wives.

Polyandry: In this form of marriage, one woman can marry more than one husband at a time. Again brothers can share one wife in common. But in the *Brāhmaṇa* literature the polyandry marriage system is denied. In the *Aitareyabrāhmaṇa* it is quoted that one person may have many wives, but one wife should not have many husbands.[59] The *Mahābhārata* also explains about polyandry system. Here it is described that there is no offence of a person receiving many wives through marriage.[60] But in case of women it is not approved. The *Mahābhārata* and the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*[61] cite the example of Draupadī, who was the common wife of the Pāṇḍavas. Here when the father of Draupadī heard that the five Pāṇḍavas would marry his daughter Draupadī, he opposed this polyandry system.[62] There is another example of polyandry in the *Mahābhārata* where Jatilā was married by seven seers. [63] The *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*[64] and the *Viṣṇupurāṇa*[65] give examples of this marriage, where the Prācetas married Vārkṣī. In the *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa*, also there is some description on Draupadī's marriage.

The *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa* advocates monogamy marriage system and disapproves the polygamy and polyandry system.[66] This *purāṇa* shows good examples of the Monogamy. In the episode of

Svārociṣ, there are two dialogue stories, one is between Kalahaṁsī and Cakravākī and other is between a deer couple. Both of these two conversations depicted in this *purāṇa* are on the marital life of Svārociṣ which suggest that Monogamy is superior to Polygamy and Polyandry. The first story reflects Kalahaṁsī's realisation that their monogamous relationship with their husbands was ideal relationship. Because in this kind of relationship, they share mutually equal love and care. In the second instance the male deer advised the group of female deer, who were trying to entice him for mating,[67] not to be like Svārociṣ and find their respective male partners. Because Svārociṣ was not at all doing the right thing by having three wives at the same time. And thereby the deer supported the Monogamy. [68]

Inter-caste marriage: Inter-caste marriage is popular since the Inter-caste marriage is popular since the Vedic period. When a man or woman marry individual of another caste is called inter-caste marriage. Though the marriage between the couple of same caste was praiseworthy yet we get some evidences of marriage of man of upper class with a lower cast woman.[69] The *Pāraskaragṛhyasūtra* prescribes that Brāhmaṇas can marry from the three varṇas, Kṣatriyas from the two varṇas and Vaiśyas from his own caste only: *tisro brāhmaṇasya varṇānupūrvyeṇa / dve rājanyasya / ekā vaiśyasya/*[70] . We find the description of inter-caste marriage in the *Smṛti* texts like *Yājñavlkyasmṛti, Vedavyāsasmṛti, Vaṣiṣṭhasmṛti* etc.[71] In the *Yājñvalkyasmṛti*, it is described that inter-cast marriage was condemnable. [72] The wife from other varṇa had no right to do any ritual of her husband in the presence of *savarṇā* wife.[73] The *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* contains many examples of inter-caste marriages. It also states that one should marry one from his own caste and later on he can accept wives from the other castes. [74]

The *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa* contains some examples of intercaste marriage where Cyavana's son Pramati married a *Kṣatriya* lady[75], king Diṣṭa's son Nābhāga married a *Vaiśya* lady.[76] For low-caste marriages and for breaking the rules of marriage this *purāṇa* prescribes some punishments also.[77] As stated in this *Purāṇa*, the *Sagotra* and the *Sapravara* marriages are not allowed. One should marry a girl which belongs to different *gotra*.[78]

Qualifications for selection of bride: In the context of marriage the qualifications or signs of both of the bride and the bridegroom are noticeable. The *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa* prescribes some necessary qualifications of bride and bridegroom. A man should select a girl to marry who is free

from all sickness, equal in quality, not deformed etc. He should marry a girl who is not having an excessive limb, who is marked with all the auspicious characteristics, whose name is agreeable. He should not select a girl who is having an excessive limb, of low family, disfigured, sickly, tawny coloured, talkative and contaminated by everybody. [79] The *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa* also mentions that the bride-groom should not be poor and aged. According to this *purāṇa* the marriage is performed by the family priest in front of the fire and *samidh* and *kuśa* are offered in the fire. [80] After marriage, the bride was taken to the husband's home. [81] The *Ābhyudayika śrāddha* must be performed. [82] After the bride's arrival, she is honoured in her husband's house. [83]

CONCLUSION-From the above analysis it reveals that as described in other scriptures, the *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa* also describes marriage to be an essential act to be achieved in the lifetime of an individual as the wife is the help-mate of her husband for the attainment of the ends of life. Among the different kinds of marriage more emphasize is given in describing *Rākṣasa* and *Gāndharva* marriage. The custom of monogamy has been preferred to polygamy and polyandry. This *purāṇa* is very important to evaluate the sprit to evaluate the spirit of the c*a* also cites examples of inter-caste marriage. Thus this knowledge of various kinds of marriage narrated in the *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa* is very important to evaluate the sprit to evaluate the spirit of the culture and civilization of society of that time.

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