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Q4(a)

Give an account of the recent trends of marriage in the Indian context. How are these different from traditional practices?

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2025 · Sociology GS 1 · 20 marks · Systems of Kinship

Systems of Kinship: Family, household, marriage; Types and forms of family; Lineage and descent; Patriarchy and sexual division of labour; Contemporary trends.

Core demand of the question

- **Describe recent Indian marriage trends:** age, choice, live-in, divorce, online, inter-caste, delayed marriage, dual earners
- **Contrast with traditional practices:** arranged, caste endogamy, patrilocal joint household, early marriage, dowry as alliance
- **Use sociological names:** Srinivas, Uberoi, Beteille, family studies
- Avoid moral panic; show continuity as well as change

Revision summary

Traditional Indian marriage was typically early, arranged, caste-endogamous and family-led.

Regional and religious diversity always qualified the textbook joint-family model.

Recent trends include later age, schooling, online matching, dual earners and more public exit options.

Endogamy and parental ratification persist inside modern forms such as matrimonial apps.

Inter-caste, live-in and queer unions are visible but still minority or legally incomplete.

The story is hybridisation of alliance, not a clean replacement by Western companionate marriage.

Introduction

Marriage in India is still a central institution of kinship, property and honour, but the ways people enter, delay and exit it have shifted. Traditional practice, especially among Hindus of the Sanskrit belt, meant early, arranged, caste-endogamous and patrilocal unions that joined two families rather than two individuals. Recent trends do not abolish that grammar. They stretch it: later age, more education, online matching, some love-arranged hybrids, and a small but visible rise in separation, live-in arrangements and public debate on same-sex unions.

Body**Traditional pattern**

Classical ethnography and family sociology described marriage as alliance and as a rite that completed adult status. Endogamy of caste and often of sub-caste, hypergamy in some regions, dowry or bridewealth, and the daughter's departure to the husband's house

organised the system. The joint household ideal, even when the empirical household was smaller, placed elders as matchmakers. M. N. Srinivas's Sanskritisation showed how marriage rules carried status. Patricia Uberoi and others stressed that the "Indian family" was always regional and religiously diverse: matriliney in parts of Kerala and the Northeast, consanguineous patterns in the South, Muslim and Christian personal laws. Still, the dominant public model was arranged, early and family-led.

Recent trends and how they differ

Age at marriage has risen with schooling, especially for women, though child marriage has not vanished in some states. The arranged-love binary has softened into "arranged love" and parental ratification after dating, as several urban studies show. Matrimonial sites and apps industrialise caste and class filters; they modernise the search without dropping endogamy, a point that matches André Béteille's caution that the middle class may secularise style faster than it secularises marriage. Dual-earner urban households renegotiate residence and care, yet patrilocal pressure and the second shift remain. The **Special Marriage Act** offers a civil route that still meets social sanction. Live-in relations have some legal recognition for protection, not full kinship equivalence. Divorce and separation are more speakable, especially in cities, but stigma and economic dependence keep rates modest by global standards. Inter-caste and inter-religious marriages exist and are politically charged; surveys such as IHDS still find them a minority. Same-sex intimacy is decriminalised, while marriage equality remains legally unsettled.

The difference from tradition is therefore greater individual say, later timing, more mediated markets, and more **legal pluralism**-not the death of caste, dowry or family control. Continuity of honour killings and wedding spectacle sits beside change.

Flow diagram

Traditional marriage -> Caste endogamy early arranged
Traditional marriage -> Patrilocal family alliance
Recent trends -> Later age education
Recent trends -> Love-arranged online
Recent trends -> Divorce live-in debate
Recent trends -> Caste endogamy early arranged

Conclusion

Recent Indian marriage is later, more mediated by education and markets, and slightly more open to exit and self-choice. Traditional caste alliance, patrilocality and family ratification still structure the majority pattern. Sociology should map that mix, not announce a simple shift from custom to contract.

Facts & figures

Rising age at marriage

Linked to girls' education and urban labour, while child marriage remains in pockets.

Matrimonial markets

Websites and apps often reproduce caste and class filters, modernising search more than endogamy.

Legal pluralism

Personal laws, the **Special Marriage Act**, and partial recognition of live-in protection coexist with social sanction.

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