

The Epics¹: The Ramayana and the Mahabharata

(The Ramayana and the Mahabharata are the two well-known epics of India. The Epics are the Vedas of the masses. These are the national Epics of India and many festivals are celebrated in every nook and corner of the country to commemorate the memory of the heroes of the Epics.)

The Ramayana

The Ramayana is the oldest of the Indian epics. Maharishi Valmiki is considered the original author of it. Originally there were 6000 couplets in Valmiki Ramayana which in due course of time rose to 12000 and ultimately touched the figure of 24000. The Ramayana consists of seven books known as the 'kandas'. Maharishi Valmiki is regarded as the first poet in Sanskrit and his poetic work is considered 'the first poetry' in the Sanskrit. The geographical horizon of the Ramayana shows that it is much older than the Mahabharata. It is assumed that the Ramayana was composed in C. fourth century B.C. and it achieved its present form by the first century B.C. The 'Ramacharitmanas' authored by Tulasi Das in medieval period achieved large popularity in India.)

The Mahabharata

The Mahabharata, which is considered to be the work of Vyasa, originally consisted of 8,800 verses. It was known as 'Jaya' which means a collection dealing with victory. Later, its verses were raised to 24,000 and it

came to be known as Bharata because of its containing the stories of the descendants of Bharata, one of the earliest Vedic tribes. Finally, its verses were raised to 1,00,000 and it came to be known as the Satasahasri Samhita or the Mahabharata. In the given chapter, the main subject of our study is the Mahabharata.)

Rules of Marriage

Marriage was a sacred religious bond and not a contract during the period under consideration. Marriage was imperative in order to have a son and to perform yajana and religious rites and rituals. We should keep it in mind that under patriarchal system while sons were considered important for the continuity of the patrilineage, daughters were viewed rather differently. Daughters did not have any claim to the resources of the household. Two types of marriages, **endogamy** and **exogamy** were in vogue. Under endogamy marriages were settled within a unit. This unit may be a gotra⁵, a kula, a caste or a group living in the same locality. Exogamy refers to marriage outside the unit. This type of marriage i.e., the exogamy was preferred. The high varnas prohibited marriages in the same gotra. The families claiming high status in society, married their daughter at a very young age.)

✓ Types of Marriages

We find mention of eight types of marriages in the Dharmasutras and Dharmashastras. These are:

1. Brahma Vivaha

Sons and daughters were married under guidance of their parents under Brahma-Vivaha. The father of the daughter would offer his daughter properly dressed up and decorated with ornaments to able groom. It was considered the best of all types of marriages.

2. Prajapatya Vivaha

This marriage was solemnised for offsprings. Under the marriage the bride and groom enjoyed equal rights in respect of Dharma, Artha and Karma. All rites and rituals were duly performed in this type of marriage.

3. Arsha Vivaha

Under this type of marriage the father of the bride would marry off his daughter to groom after getting a pair of bull and cow from groom's side.

4. Daiva Vivaha

Under this type of marriage, the bride's father would offer his daughter in marriage to priest groom while performing the religious rites.

5. Asura Vivaha

Under the marriage the bride was offered to groom in exchange for money-taken from the groom's party.

6. Gandharva Vivaha

It was a type of love marriage. The bride and the groom would marry without permission of their parents. The Kamsutra holds it to be an ideal marriage. This type of marriage was more popular among the Kshatriyas.

7. Rakshasa Vivaha

Under this type of marriage, the bride was snatched from her family and was forcibly married to the groom.

8. Paishacha Vivaha

It was the lowest kind of marriage. Sexual intercourse was made with a girl while in her sleep or while under influence of some intoxicants and then forced into marriage.

(Of these eight types of marriages the first four types were considered good. Asura, Gandharva, Rakshasa and Paishacha Vivaha were not considered good. The Paishacha Vivaha, in particular, has been condemned by all the Dharmashastras. The Asura, Gandharva, Rakshasa and Paishacha Vivaha were perhaps, practised by those people who did not follow the Brahmanical norms.) The ideal marriages were