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Hindu Marriage Duties

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The special section on Hindu marriage in the June issue of Hinduism Today has done a good service to the youth of today. I have written a few additional points to explain the privileges, rights and responsibilities of the husband, wife and other members of the two extended families. Every member of the extended family on both sides is related to the boy and girl and is responsible for their actions and their future lives. It is not a union or contract of partnership just between two individuals as in the Western culture. This extended family consists of paternal grandparents, parents, sons, daughters-in-law, unmarried daughters and future generations on both sides.

The first question asked in the article was, "What is the central purpose of marriage?" The primary purpose is participation of the two families in the union. That means dedication of every member of the family with responsibilities assigned or associated with their relationship and fulfillment of God's objective for continuity of his creation from one generation to the next. To be brief, the purposes of marriage are: 1) Merging of the girl into the husband's family which may include grandparents, great-grandparents, unmarried sisters, brothers, uncles and aunts. 2) Procreation. 3) Husband and wife are responsible to act as educators of the future generation. This responsibility is shared with grandparents, uncles, aunts and other relatives living in the same house

What are the duties of the husband? In addition to those mentioned, the responsibility of the husband is also towards the other members of the two extended families. This is because the marriage is agreed upon by the senior members and accepted by all members of the two families on both sides. The

senior-most members on the two sides accept the responsibility for the girl and future generations on both sides. The marriage is not a contract between two individuals that can be broken or terminated by simple divorces, as is done in the Western world and now under certain circumstances also in Eastern cultures. The husband is a direct representative of his entire extended family. He takes over his responsibilities in the marriage and fulfills them according to the wishes of the elders and the rules and regulations of Hindu culture.

What are the special duties of the wife? The first and foremost duties are to the elders and other family members who are directly dependent upon the husband's joint family. Her next responsibility is to the children and future generations. All this involves proper care, nurturing, respect, affection, education and continuity of cultural heritage of the family for future generations. She is responsible to bear and nurture children according to the wishes and expectations of the entire family.

What is the Hindu view of sexuality? The sex relationship was accepted only for procreation of future generation. Strict abstinence for pleasure was the unwritten and written rule in life, according to the ancient teachings of elders. Strict observance of duty, prayer and puja were expected before conception took place between the individuals. Over a period of years and due to the association of pleasure involved in sexual relationships, it became permissible to have sex relationships without the intent to conceive a child. Abstinence is taught to the children and strictly observed until they get married. Thereafter, they have a faithful relationship with only one spouse.

What is the basis for happiness in a marriage? Happiness is a state of mind. It is based upon the conditions of the union of two families, the couple's acceptance of the total situation and their understanding of the rights, responsibilities and obligations of the two families. Being a husband and wife in proper form and manner helps them grow into a happy and satisfying marriage. The marriage is dependent upon the total religious rites and ceremonies under which it is performed and the commitment and the sakshi-the personal responsibility for its success-taken on by every member of the extended family. The greatest responsibility is on the husband and wife.

Dr. Prem Sahai was born in Lahore in 1928. He has been a teacher and writer for 28 years on the principles of education and the history of science and religion. His most recent book is "Hindu Marriage Samskara."