

Traditional Sinhalese marriage customs

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Customs and rituals have been part and parcel of the Lankan society from ancient times. They have been handed down from generation to generation spanning over the 2,500 year old history of the country. Most of these customs and rituals are connected with the day to day lives of the people in the social and religious spheres. Even though Sri Lanka is on the threshold of the global village, with technological advances, traces of these traditional customs and rituals are still evident in certain parts of the country, faithfully observed by certain sections of our society. During ancient times, pre-Buddhist Sinhalese marriage laws and customs would have been similar to those prescribed in the laws of Manu (Manava - Dharma - Sastra) written in North India sometime between the 3rd century B.C."1st century A.C. The work, which is a compilation of the traditions of the ancient Indo-Aryan Hindus, reflects a rigid patriarchal society with extended family households. The laws are particularly odious due to its repressive attitude towards the fairer sex.

Kandiyana law recognized two forms of marriage, namely, *diga* marriage and *binna* marriage. In *diga* marriage, the woman went to live in her husband's house and gave up her claims to the parental estate. This was the usual mode of marriage among the Kandiyans. *Binna* marriage was a marriage where the husband contracted to go and live in the wife's house.

The Sinhalese custom of fraternal polyandry where a wife would be shared in common by several brothers has long fascinated those interested in local society and culture. The practice euphemistically referred to as '*eka-ge-kema*' or '*eating in one house*' is no longer legal, though it is possible that it may still be surviving in some remote areas.

Objectives of the study are to: Examine social institutions and processes across a range of historical periods, social structures, and cultures, Be familiar with the concepts of culture and its components (e.g., norms, values) and to identify and understand differences and commonalities within diverse cultures, Be familiar with social change, Become familiar with the role the economy plays in the society, Describe different social institutions and their various influences on the individual

In this qualitative research data was collected through case studies, surveys and literature surveys

It was found that cross-cultural and trans-historical perspectives of the marriage, will become more aware of the diversity of family forms across cultures and time periods, as well as consider some of the factors which may have helped to create diversity.

Key words: Customs, Rituals, Kandiyans, Sinhalese Marriage, Pre-Buddhist

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