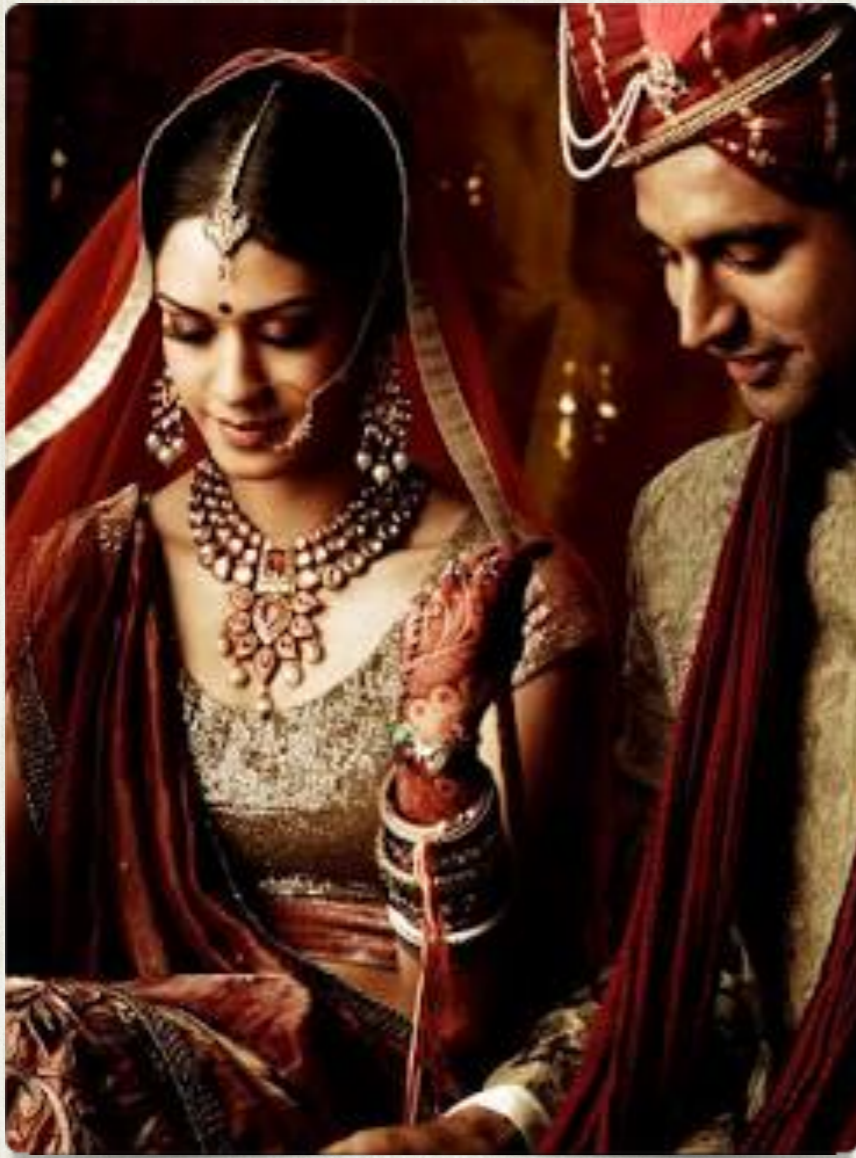


EUMIND 15-16:
WEDDINGS AND MARRIAGES

A comparison between two cultures



DIFFERENCES IN THE CEREMONY

INDIAN WEDDINGS

- An Indian marriage is a very elaborate event, typically more than a few days long.
- It involves ceremonies such as the painting of the bride's feet with henna (called Mehendi).
- The wedding is typically divided into three parts: pre-wedding, main, and post-wedding. The pre-wedding includes all the preparations and a party the night before where each side of the family can meet each other and dance and have fun. A Pandit, who has selected the day of the wedding based on the bride and groom's horoscopes, conducts a prayer with family members to provide the couple with a happily married life.

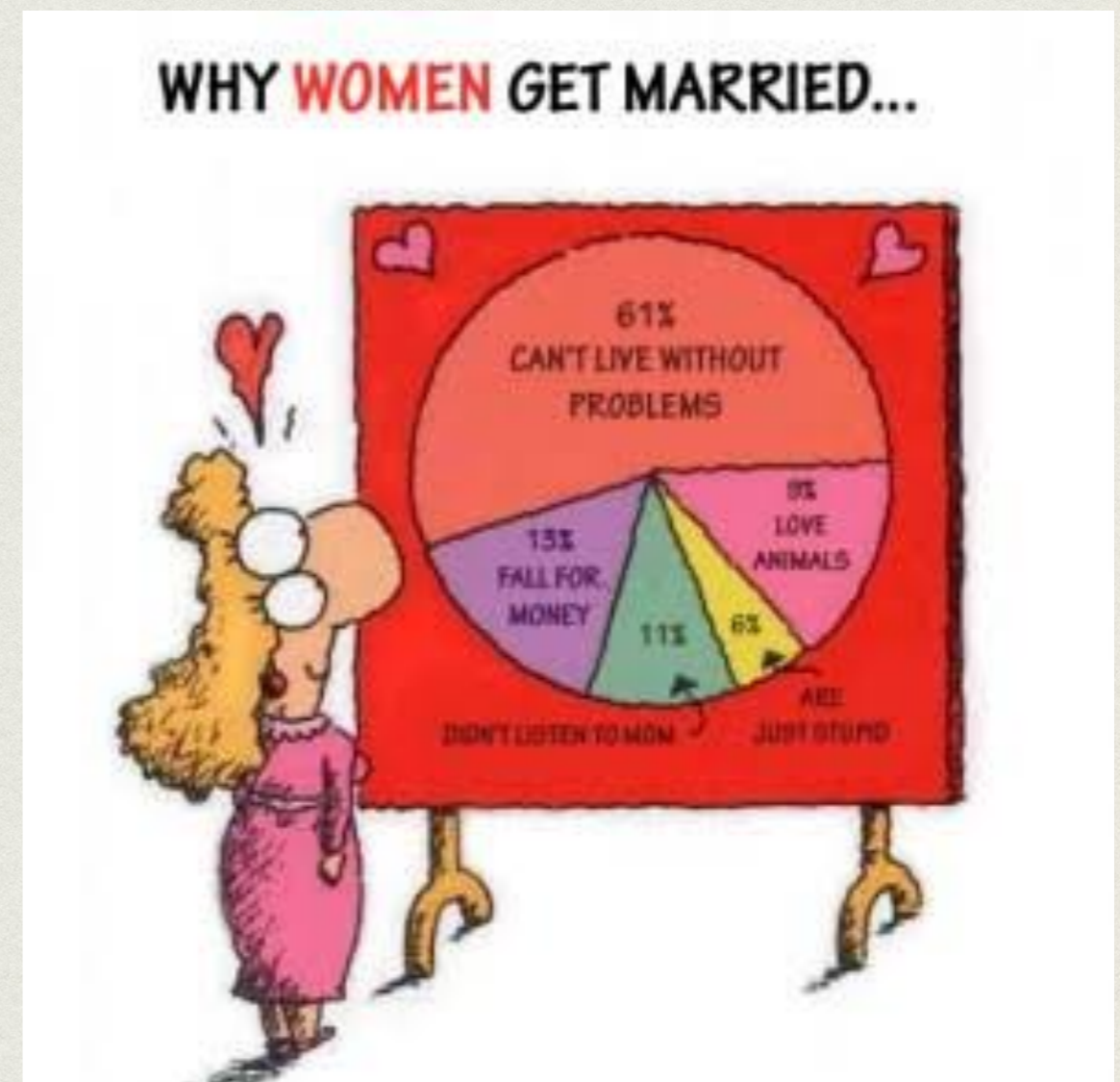
WESTERN WEDDINGS

- A Western wedding is typically not as elaborate as an Indian one; it lasts a short while in comparison.
- The Western custom of a bride wearing a white wedding dress, came to symbolise purity in the Victorian era. In the past the veil was worn to deter any evil spirits.
- The ceremony comprises the bridal shower, the actual ceremony and the reception.

- It is seen as a union of two families rather than of two individuals.
- In Indian weddings, the Mangala Sutra (a gold necklace with two pendants to symbolise the bond between two souls) is tied around the bride's neck instead of exchanging rings. This necklace also lets others know that the bride is married.
- The bride's family may attempt to steal the groom's shoes and later sell them back to him in a fun way to "haze" the newly married couple.
- It is seen as a partnership of two individual people.
- Couples exchange rings to signify their loyalty to each other.
- The bride may throw her bouquet to the assembled group of all unmarried women in attendance, with folklore suggesting the person who catches it will be the next to wed.

DO PEOPLE MARRY FOR REASONS OTHER THAN LOVE?

- In our (admittedly limited) experience, people across the world get married for almost the same reasons. Love is probably one of the main reasons, but there are other reasons why people may choose to get married. Briefly, they are:
- **Benefits:** Some people marry for money or for the benefits associated with marriage such as legal benefits, inheritances, etc.
- **Unplanned pregnancies:** Pregnancy before marriage may cause couples to rush into marriage in order to avoid the social stigma of being a single parent and also to avoid having to raise a child without support.



- **Societal pressure:** Society places an emphasis on happily married life, and some people who are heavily influenced by peer pressure feel compelled to marry to increase their social status.
- **Parental pressure:** Parents sometimes pressure their children into marriage for whatever reason (perhaps because they want to see their child in domestic bliss while they're still alive to witness it). In India, where a heavy emphasis is placed on family and community, some people are pressured into marriage so as to have children and continue the family lineage.



THE GOVERNMENT AND MARRIAGE

- In both countries, the government plays no official role in the wedding ceremony.
- However, in order for a marriage to be considered legal, a marriage certificate must be obtained from the Marriage Registrar Office or some other designated authority.



ARE ALL INDIAN MARRIAGES "ARRANGED" BY THE PARENTS?

- It is true that in the past, parents would present their child with a list of approved men (or sometimes just one) and the child would have to make their choice, but this practice is beginning to disappear in most urban cities.
- However, the custom is still prevalent in some rural areas.



SIGNIFICANCE OF THE CEREMONY: IS IT DIFFERENT FOR THE WEALTHY AND THE LESS FORTUNATE?

- In India, an emphasis is placed on family life and communal living, so a wedding ceremony is definitely a milestone in a person's life.
- A wedding in India can be an expensive affair, and those who can afford it, splurge on it. Sometimes, those who can't afford it borrow huge sums of money, leaving them heavily in debt. This has brought about the tradition of mass weddings (in some communities) for those who are economically less fortunate, where sometimes as many as 40 couples are married at once, reducing overall expenditure.
- In Europe also, weddings have become costlier, although they are not as elaborate as Indian weddings.



CONCLUSION: IS MARRIAGE THE MOST IMPORTANT EVENT IN A PERSON'S LIFE?

- We conclude that in India, where family and community is highlighted, weddings are an important milestone in a person's life. Most people see it as the most important decision that can be made. (This view is changing among the younger generation, though.)
- In contrast, in Europe (partly due to an increasingly high divorce rate) commitment and marriage is rapidly losing importance and couples are no longer as eager to marry.

NOTE:

- It is difficult to state talk about "Indian weddings" in general because the customs differ across communities and states. Therefore, certain standard traditions have been discussed.
- Certain generalisations have been made. We realise that all of our statements do not apply to all people from all communities.



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