



Middle-Class Marriage Trend Moving towards Destination Wedding

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Abstract

Marriage in a middle-class Indian family is like once -in- a -life festival that is celebrated wholeheartedly spending lifetime savings. Parents start saving money for their children's marriage right from birth to spend lavishly during the marriage. The act of saving money becomes more necessary if the parent has a girl child as our society is still suffering from the disease of dowry and in some cases dream of the parents themselves to giveaway, every possible gift to their daughter during the marriage. In Indian marriages, almost every friend and family gather to enjoy the ceremony and it becomes really difficult to handle such a huge crowd. Generally, a nearby banquet hall is booked or free space is decorated to conduct the function but recently the concept of a destination wedding has become very famous, it no more means foreign locations, now they can even be organized at nearby hills or famous spots with very close near and dear ones to enjoy at fullest. There are many reasons that have provided such an option for marriage to a middle-class family. During COVID, the concept of gathering every relative and friend for marriage was blown up and opened the scope of organizing the ceremony with minimum people. Also, an increase in the purchasing power of families and people moving away from clans are other reasons provoking middle-class families to opt for destination weddings. In this paper, it has been tried to find the social pros and cons of a destination wedding.

Keywords: Middle class, destination wedding, dowry, clans, marriage, ceremony

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Introduction

Marriage is one of the universal social institutions like that of the family. The institution of marriage and family is closely connected and complementary to each other. Marriage is the institution established by human society to control and regulate the sex life of men in a legal and customary manner.

Indian weddings have changed from simple three-day affairs to elaborated affairs with Bollywood performances. But Indian weddings have also adopted a minimalist style. Even though the event only lasts for a day, it is celebrated in grand style.

A wedding generally costs an Indian about one-fifth of his lifetime earnings. We know India is a diverse country and people of different religions reside here without much hustle. Every religion has its own marriage rituals and even within the religion, the marriage rituals differ. In Hindus, 'Kanyadaan', 'Panigrahana', and 'Saptapadi' are three important rituals that are frequently performed at weddings. These rituals involve the father giving away the daughter, holding hands voluntarily close to the fire to symbolize the couple's impending union, and walking seven steps before the fire while exchanging vows. The

couple becomes husband and wife by taking the seventh step and the *Saptapadi* vows. In India, Jain and Buddhist marriages include many common features but are mostly focused on their particular religious scriptures and ideals.

Amar Das, the third Guru of Sikhism, established the Anand Karaj rite, through which Indian Sikhs are married. The couple walks around The Guru Granth Sahib four times and finally gets married. Indian Muslims observe a typical Islamic wedding, which includes the ceremonies of Nikah, the groom paying the bride a cash dower known as '*Mahr*', the couple signing a marriage contract, and a reception.

Indian Christian marriages adhere to established Christian wedding traditions. The betrothal rite, practiced by Protestants in India, honours an engaged couple by praying for them and having their engagement rings blessed by a Pastor. The Haldi/Ubtan/Mayun ritual, or the *Roce* ceremony, as it is known in the Goa region of India, is held the day before the wedding. During this ceremony, haldi or turmeric paste is spread on North Indian Christians and coconut paste is used on South Indian Christians. In a church wedding, Indian Christians meet in front of a priest, frequently in a church or other place of worship, and exchange vows. Scriptural readings are done. The bride and groom exchange vows of matrimony.

In this paper, it has been focussed on how middle-class marriages are shifting from traditional weddings to destination weddings. Here, a few basic theoretical concepts should be clear that are considered as the core of this paper, like the middle-class population of our country, the traditional wedding, gathering, and finally the concept of a destination wedding. The findings of this article are the reason behind the transition of marriage style, the pros and cons of the structure of Indian Society, and it is the new future of Indian weddings.

Literature Review

Cultural Significance of Weddings in India

Indian weddings hold profound cultural significance, deeply intertwined with diverse traditions and rituals. Kapadia, in "Marriage and Family in India" underscores the centrality of marriage as a pivotal social institution in India. It serves not only as a union of two individuals but also as a means of regulating social life, uniting families, and upholding cultural traditions. (Kapadia, 1966) Karve's work, "Kinship Organisation in India", further reinforces the idea that weddings in India are not merely personal events but crucial societal celebrations with enduring implications. (Karve, 1965)

Rise of the Indian Middle Class

The growth and transformation of the Indian middle class have been instrumental in reshaping social and spending behaviours, including those related to weddings. The Pew Research Centre's Report (2021) on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic reveals shifts in India's middle-class dynamics. Changes in economic circumstances have influenced how families allocate resources for weddings, making it a pertinent subject of study. (Kochhar, 2021)

Wedding Industry and Trends

The wedding industry in India has evolved significantly, with trends reflecting societal changes and adaptations to external factors. An article "The Fate of Indian Wedding Industry in Post-Covid-19 Era," published in Catalyst- Journal of Management Studies, explores the dynamic landscape of weddings in India. It delves into the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on weddings, including shifts in preferences for more intimate ceremonies and destination weddings. (Raj, A. et al, 2020)

Destination Weddings and Their Popularity

Destination weddings have gained remarkable popularity in India, offering couples unique and picturesque settings for their nuptials. An India Outbound Report (2021) indicates that the destination wedding market is on the rise, with an expected annual growth rate of 30.6%. This trend signifies the increasing allure of destination weddings among Indian couples, challenging conventional wedding practices (India Outbound, 2022).

Impact of Purchasing Power on Wedding Choices

Economic factors, particularly the increased purchasing power of the middle class, have played a substantial role in shaping wedding preferences. Income levels, consumption patterns, and standards associated with the middle-class impact decisions regarding wedding expenditures. While definitions of the middle class may vary, institutions like the World Bank provide valuable insights into the economic dimensions of this demographic group.

Impact of COVID-19 on Wedding Trends

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought about profound changes in wedding trends throughout India. A source discussing the pandemic's influence on Indian wedding trends reveals the emergence of more intimate and destination weddings as a response to health concerns and restrictions on large gatherings. This shift underscores the adaptability of Indian weddings in the face of adversity.

In this comprehensive literature review, various dimensions have been explored related to the transition from traditional weddings to destination weddings within middle-class Indian families. The cultural richness of Indian weddings, the evolving middle-class dynamics, trends in the

wedding industry, economic factors, and the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic collectively contribute to the evolving landscape of weddings in India. These referenced sources serve as a solid foundation for further research into this dynamic and evolving trend.

Methodology

An empirical study was done to find the trend shift. A list of 100 families was acquired in which details of people getting married this year were given, the data was collected from various sources like photography studios marriage banquets, destination wedding organizers, etc. Both quantitative as well as qualitative analysis was done. People were interviewed to know their opinion about the wedding whether they wished it to be done in the traditional way or they would be opting for a destination wedding and proper observation was done for the same. Several questionnaires were prepared out of which few were objective whereas few were subjective.

Middle-Class Families

The newly developing class out of the bourgeoisie/industrial was initially referred to as the middle class. The word was later applied to socioeconomic groupings, namely the skilled professionals, that were positioned between the industrialist bourgeoisie on the one hand and the working classes on the other (Chanana, 1964).

The middle class falls between the lower and upper classes socioeconomically and is situated in the middle of the social order. As a result of global cultural and economic diversity, the criteria for defining members of this class vary greatly between countries. Examples of the "middle class" in a particular country rely on a variety of characteristics, including social services provided, educational attainment, attitudes

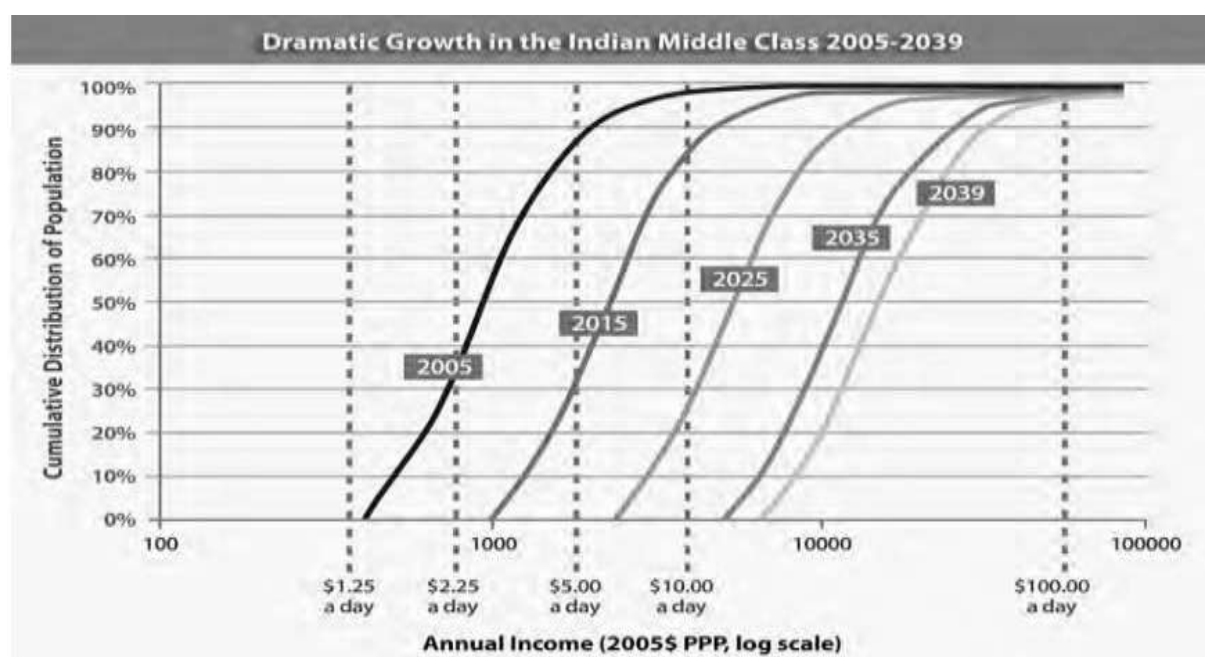
of "the wealthy," and purchasing power (Mazumdar and Madan, 1986).

Most organizations, including the World Bank and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), define those who make less than US \$2 per day as poor. According to the 2015 purchasing power parity, the mean daily income for people in the middle class is between US \$10 and \$100 (Kharas, 2010). Political finance in India was examined in the 2018 book "Cost of Democracy" by

Devesh Kapur and Milan Vaishnav, which revealed that around 50% of Indians identify as middle class (Kapur and Vaishnav, 2018).

Several types of research have been conducted to know the rise in the population of the middle class in India and the baseline has been considered as the beginning of economic liberalization in 1991 which had a positive impact on social mores, consumption, growth, and urbanisation.

Fig. 1, Dramatic growth in Indian Middle Class (2005-2039).



Source: *ResearchGate.net*

From the above graph, (Fig. 1) we can see the increase in the middle-class population in India which means the purchasing power parity of this segment of the population has increased, and hence they have more money to spend on luxury, here we are considering destination wedding as luxury as it is an extended form of Indian traditional marriages which includes several add-ons like dance performances, parties, and many more things.

Indian Traditional Weddings

As already discussed in the Introduction different religion has different customs and

rituals for their wedding if we talk specifically about Hindu Marriages in India as they are the most in numbers, the wedding lasts for an average of 3 days with all sort of functions such as the mehndi, a painting done on the bride's hands and feet. Instead of corsages, garlands are given to guests of honour, and a lot of flowers or rose petals are scattered for luck.

The traditional Indian wedding is typically divided into three distinct phases: the pre-wedding, main wedding, and post-wedding ceremonies. These divisions serve as a comprehensive framework to ensure that all aspects of the wedding are meticulously

planned and executed, creating a memorable and joyous occasion for both families involved.

The pre-wedding phase is a time of extensive preparation and celebration. It encompasses various activities and rituals, one of which is a lively party held the night before the wedding. This pre-wedding party is a significant occasion, as it provides an opportunity for members of both the bride and groom's families to come together, socialize, dance, and revel in the excitement of the impending union. It fosters a sense of unity and camaraderie among the families, setting a joyous tone for the upcoming wedding day.

A crucial element of the pre-wedding phase involves religious ceremonies led by a Pandit, a Hindu priest, or a religious scholar. The Pandit conducts prayers and rituals to bless the couple and wish them a long, prosperous, and harmonious marriage. These rituals are steeped in tradition and hold deep spiritual significance, symbolizing the couple's commitment to each other and seeking divine blessings for their journey ahead.

One of the unique aspects of the pre-wedding phase is the selection of the wedding date. The Pandit plays a pivotal role in this decision-making process by examining the horoscopes of the bride and groom. Based on astrological considerations, the Pandit determines an auspicious day and time for the wedding ceremony. This ensures that the union takes place under favourable cosmic conditions, believed to enhance the couple's prospects for a blissful and enduring marriage. A wedding altar (mandapa) is erected on the day and the groom is received by his future mother-in-law, where his feet are washed and milk and honey are offered. His sister-in-law tries to steal his shoes, and if she succeeds, the groom has to pay her to get

the shoes back. He wears a turban with a flower veil.

In Indian weddings, there are special customs and traditions that have important meanings.

Before the wedding, the bride doesn't eat to show that she's ready for marriage. Her parents make sure she's okay and well-fed before she starts fasting.

During the wedding, there are rituals where the bride's sari is tied to the groom's shawl. This shows that they are connected and will start their life together.

Another ritual involves tying a cord or thread around the necks of the bride and groom. This is done by their older family members to protect them from bad things and bring good luck.

In Indian weddings, they don't exchange rings like in some other weddings. Instead, they use a special necklace called the Mangala Sutra. It has two gold pendants on a string, and the groom ties it around the bride's neck with three knots. This necklace tells everyone that the bride is now married. Among some communities, like the Khasas, marriages used to be simple and based on agreements. But recently, some people have tried to follow the more traditional Brahmanic way of getting married. In these weddings, the bride is given away without a big dowry, and the groom goes to the bride's house to accept her as a special gift. They do some religious ceremonies, and the idea is that the marriage is forever, with no going back (Mazumdar, D., 1963).

Marriage in Middle-Class Families and their Education Trends

In middle-class families, there exists a notable connection between marriage practices and educational trends. As

middle-class households prioritize education as a means of social mobility and economic stability, they often encourage their children to pursue higher education. This emphasis on education can delay the age at which individuals choose to marry, as they prioritize academic and career pursuits. Additionally, middle-class families may allocate a significant portion of their savings to fund their children's education, leaving fewer resources for extravagant weddings. Consequently, there is a discernible correlation between the value placed on education within middle-class families and the evolving patterns of marriage, including the preference for more modest and economically viable wedding celebrations.

Destination Wedding

Destination weddings have gained increasing popularity, surpassing traditional nuptials in recent years. These unique celebrations typically involve inviting a select group of close family members and friends to join the wedding festivities. What distinguishes destination weddings is their location, often set in picturesque natural settings, far from the couple's hometown. While the concept of destination weddings was initially associated with foreign locales, India has also embraced this trend, blending its rich cultural heritage with the allure of distant, scenic venues.

The diverse cultural history of India ensures that every wedding celebration, whether at home or abroad, retains a sense of familiarity and warmth. This fusion of cultures and traditions adds a unique charm to destination weddings in India.

In recent years, there has been a significant surge in the popularity of destination weddings, with them now constituting a substantial 25% of the wedding market. Previously considered a choice for those who had already experienced a traditional

wedding, destination weddings have evolved into a fashionable trend. More couples are opting to finance their own weddings, empowering them to curate distinctive and memorable experiences for their special day.

This shift reflects not only changing preferences but also the desire for a personalized and intimate wedding celebration in a captivating natural backdrop, making each destination wedding a truly memorable and cherished experience for all involved.

Findings

According to the Financial Market Infrastructures (FMI) report, the destination wedding market is estimated to be worth more than \$290 billion by 2031, from a relatively low base of \$21.5 billion, although many travel barriers could affect that. According to the report, catering makes up a large part of the destination wedding market and its share of the total value in 2021 will be 39 percent. A report on the demand trends for destination wedding services says that with drone video, couples can take advantage of high-quality materials and photos, saving time and money compared to traditional photography solutions. Another trend noted in the report is that a new generation of couples is focusing on sustainability and many consumers prefer eco-friendly weddings.

The findings are completely based on discussion with the people getting married this year, they gave mixed responses. Most of the couples were interested in destination weddings as the name itself excites a lot. There are certain barriers in Indian culture and society that are still acting as a barrier to the choices of youth to get married the way they want. In India, it is known that marriage is not just a bond between two people, it also unites two families along with all the relatives of both ends. The

recent COVID pandemic has increased the scope of limited guests in wedding ceremonies, earlier all the relatives were invited to the marriage even friends of relatives were also invited, and sometimes fear of losing social connection with relatives was the reason for inviting them to marriages. But now the increase in the trend of a destination wedding has sorted out many things although parents are still supporting the traditional form of the wedding as they have to live in and face the society.

It was also asked why are people opting for a destination wedding, and several answers were obtained like the headache of organizing everything on their own would be eliminated, the family would have much more time to enjoy with friends and other family members, and on top of everything, this would be a new beginning of a trend in one's family.

The biggest reason behind the shift towards destination weddings is an increase in the purchasing power of the middle class, now they have more savings to invest in lavish parties and choose other destinations for marriages rather than their hometown. It is gradually becoming a status symbol for Indian middle-class families similar to the iPhone. Even people are ready to sell their assets to organize a grand wedding.

Conclusion

In this brief study, the researchers have found the importance of a wedding ceremony in one's life, all the relatives, friends, and family very eagerly wait for this occasion, it was found that the other people are more excited than the couple who are getting married as it is a kind of festival for them. Destination weddings are an add-on to their excitement. Even much research at the market level has found an increase in the destination wedding market and its graph is continuously increasing.

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