



Dhanak of Humanity

An organization of interfaith/caste couples



Annual Report : 2012-13

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

During the year 2012-13, around 40 individuals/couples from Delhi/NCR and other states were offered counseling and support for their union. Primarily, the support was for sharing the legal information related to their marriage solemnization or registration under Special Marriage Act -1954 & Hindu Marriage Act - 1955. Around, 35 couples/individuals with interfaith background were counseled through email, phone and meeting. 3 inter-caste Hindu, 1 Muslim and 1 Sikh couples were also helped for their marital union during the year.

The focus of work during the year was on building a network of all groups and individuals that are working on Right to Choice. Therefore, network building visits were made to Latur & Pune (Maharashtra) and Ahmedabad (Gujarat). Various stake holders like senior police officials and leaders from religious community and Khap were also met to explore their stand of Right to Choice. Several RTIs and representations were made to the Dept. of Revenue of NCT Delhi and the Marriage Officers at various districts of Delhi. In addition to this the RTIs were also filed at the Marriage Officers in Faridabad and NOIDA. Similarly, the data related to couples in various homes for couple in Haryana and Punjab with the help of RTI.

Representations were made to the Special Secretary Revenue Delhi and City Magistrate NOIDA for inclusion of police verification report as the address proof for marriage solemnization/registration under Special Marriage Act -1954 and also against the Marriage Officer of Dist. North-East Delhi for continuing the practice of sending intent to marriage notice to the homes of marrying couples. Dhanak was working as a group since the year 2004 but, in October 2012 it was registered with the name of 'Dhanak of Humanity' in Delhi under the Societies Registration Act. Moreover, during past several years of its work it was using the activity based contribution from its members. A yearly contribution of Rs.1200/- and donation from couples/individuals are introduced from the current financial year to meet the essential expenses of Dhanak activities. Therefore, an account was opened in the name of DHANAK.

Endeavors

A. Counselling and Support to Couples/Individuals

Counselling of aspiring couples/individuals for mixed marriages is an essential and integral part of Dhanak of Humanity (DOH). In addition to the practice of counseling, DOH has also started assisting in solemnization and registration of marriage under Special Marriage Act – 1954 and Hindu Marriage Act – 1955. The assistance in marriage is started with the 3 broad objectives; one, it was about of getting the 1st hand experience of the nuances of marriage solemnization/registration which were more or less alien to DOH till last year. Second, it helped DOH to understand the concerned rules and guidelines related to implementation of the 2 mentioned Acts which generally arbitrary and based on the personal discretion of the officials. Third, to establish the existence of DOH amongst the officials that there is an organization that is working specifically on the issue of mixed marriages. Around 35 couples/individuals with interfaith background were counseled through email, phone and meeting. 3 inter-caste Hindu, 1 Muslim and 1 Sikh couples were also helped for their marital union during the year.

DOH direct involvement in the process of intervention has resulted in solemnization of 3 interfaith marriages. Others were helped through regular online or telephonic counseling or by linking them with other individuals/organisations in Delhi/NCR or in other states to assist the couples/individuals.



Supriya & Tauseef with their parents after solemnization of their marriage at the office of ADM North, Delhi

B. Perspective Building Meetings

Mixed marriages will not bring a social change unless there is a change in the perspective of the individuals in mixed marriage. Therefore, in consideration to the above mentioned objective 2 perspective building meetings with the couples were organised on the topics of “sharing of personal experiences for the aspiring couples” and “circumcision” were held in Delhi.

CASE STUDY

Dealing with the address proof

Shri. Umesh Narian Pandey, Marriage Officer of Jhansi was approached by Sunaina and Tariq (names changed). They filed their form for Intended Marriage with the help of an advocate and with the consent of their parents from Jhansi in the month of May 2012. The SDM sent a police enquiry, locally known as LIU (Local Intelligence Unit) to confirm their residence proofs. The police inquiry at their respective houses found that Supriya and Tauseef are working and staying in Delhi. The police officials who did the enquiry discouraged both the parents for the marriage of their daughter/son with a person from different faith.

Based on the LIU report, the SDM Jhansi called Supriya and Tauseef and asked them to submit affidavits stating their present address of stay and job in Delhi. They were also asked to write the addresses of the concerned police station and the ADM/SDM in Delhi, which shall be contacted by him. SDM Jhansi sent letters to Police Station, Mukharjee Nagar and SDM North-West in Delhi with a list of questions about the couple. Surprisingly, he also enquired about the age of the couple doubting the age certificate submitted by the couple to his office. The SHO, Mukharjee Nagar sent his report back to SDM Jhansi, confirming the residence and age proof of the couple. But, this 4 month long exercise proved useless when the SDM Jhansi turned down the couples request with a verbal apology of his oblivion about the section 5 of SMA. According to the Section – 5, they can't marry from the place where they are not residing at the time of marriage.

After failing in Jhansi, the couple restarted the process at the office of SDM West, Delhi with DOH help. They tried using their police verification report as an address proof since the couple didn't have any of the required proof of residence in Delhi. Initially their request was declined by concerned Marriage Officer. But, later he agreed to accept the police verification report after he was shown state govt. rules related to acceptance of police report as address proof. In the meantime the jurisdiction of the Marriage Officer shifted to District North therefore, they approached the concerned ADM with a request for usage of the police report as address proof. Luckily he accepted it as an address and finally, the couple got married after 7-8 months of perseverance.

C. Networking & Liaison

i. With Groups & Organisations

There are a few organisations or groups that are working on the issues of "inter-faith & caste alliance/marriage". Some are working primarily on the mentioned issue and others are working on it as an important aspect of their larger vision for human rights, communal harmony and gender equity. But, there is no alliance or network of all such

people who are working on it at various places. As a result the socio-political issues of mixed marriages remain largely unaddressed and keep sporadically surfacing in the name of honour crimes. In consideration to its limited visibility, DOH realised that it is important for us to form a forum/network of all such groups that are working



Participation in a seminar organized by Maharashtra Andhshradha Nirmulan Samiti at Latur, Maharashtra

on RTC which can be used for sharing the views, suggestions and experiences with prospect of building solidarity and collective action for advocacy and opinion building in our society related to the cause.

The efforts resulted in formation of CHAYAN - a consortium for promotion of Right to Choice on 24th November 2012 in Delhi with the participation of organisations viz.



Participation in a seminar organized by Manaviya Ekta Manch at Pune, Maharashtra

Association for Advocacy & Legal Initiatives - AALI (Lucknow, U.P.), Mahila Swarozgar Sangh – MSS (Banaras, U.P.), Dhanak of Humanity – DOH (Delhi), Nirantar (Delhi) and Centre for Alternative Dalit Media - CADAM (Delhi). In addition to this DOH also tried to

share its objective and endeavours with Andhshradha Nirmulan Samiti, Religions for Peace, SM Joshi Socialist Foundation, Muslim Satya Shodhak Samaj, Delhi

University, Sugawa Prakashan, Mahila Swarangeen Utkarsh Mandal – MASUM, Manaviya Ekta Samuh, Loknaad and several other organisations from Rajasthan and Maharashtra at Latur, Pune, Mayanmar and Ahmedabad.

ii. With Individuals

Government officials like police, marriage officers, doctors, advocates and marriage counsellors are some of the important stake holders in mixed marriages. Therefore, in consideration to their deciding role in the union of couples with interfaith/caste background couple of senior police officers from Delhi Police, Medical Social Worker of Sufdarjung government hospital, leaders from Sikh, Muslim, Hindu and Khap (caste) communities were met with. Mr. Amod Kanth, retired senior police officer & Mr. Sudhir

Yadav, Special Commissioner, Delhi Police were met with to explore the possibility of orienting the Delhi Police about the activities of DOH and getting required help in need. Similarly, the religious and khap leaders were met to seek their help in stopping the parents against physical aggression on their daughter/son. Moreover, they were also met to get the contacts of Qazis, Acharyas and Grathis who can be contacted by DOH for religious marriage solemnization in addition to marriage solemnisation/registration according to Special Marriage Act. Swami Agnivesh – President, World Council of Arya Samaj, Sister Tresa from CBCI, Maulana Jamil Ilyas – Head of All-India Organisation of Imams of Mosques, Sardar Tersem Singh from Gurudwara Rakab Ganj Saheb and Pradhan Ram Karan Solanki – President around 300 village Khaps in Delhi and its vicinity.

Similarly, the Special Secretary from Department of Revenue, Delhi and ADM of district West Delhi was met with to enquire the possibility of presence of only one of the marrying couples under some circumstances during submission of intended marriage form. Mr. Tamhane, from Census Commission of India was met with to enquire about the categorization and classification of 'other religions and persuasions' in the census data on religion.

d. Advocacy

Cabinet has approved the bill on compulsory registration of marriage in the month of April 2012. The bill is based on the 18th Law Commission of India in its 205th report dealing with amendments to the "Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006 and Other Allied Laws" had recommended that the government should make registration of marriages of all communities within a stipulated period mandatory. Most of the states are already doing the marriage registrations as per there state legislative provisions. But, on the contrary the governments are overlooking an important existing Act viz. Special Marriage Act -1954 which is the only legal provision for a civil marriage. The Act needs amendment to make it popular. But, besides the required amendments, the other major concern is about separate rules and guidelines for implementation of the Act in each state. Delhi is divided into 9 revenue/administrative districts and surprisingly all of them are not following the guidelines. The arbitrary practices like

dispatch of intended marriage notice to the homes/relatives of marrying couples, concerned police station for confirmation of address proof etc. are being followed by some.

These intimidating practices act as a major deterrent in implementation of the Act and therefore, DOH is making representations against them in Delhi and NCR. Practice of sending notices is stopped in the office of ADM, North-East Delhi and Newspaper publication of news about planned marriage by marrying couples is stopped in NOIDA after making representation to the concerned Marriage Officers. Similarly, representation from DOH for inclusion of address verification by police as an option for couples without address proof too is under consideration by the office of Spl. Secretary Revenue, Delhi and City Magistrate, NOIDA.

e. Resource Centre

There is very less information available information about the socio-political dynamics of mixed marriages. Only a few people have written or documented about it and the legal knowledge is largely confined with the legal fraternity which is using it for their own benefits. Therefore, DOH is in the process of building a resource centre on information related to mixed marriages by collecting the related literature and studies. Moreover, it is also using the Right to Information Act an important tool for collecting various information essential for marriage solemnisation and registration in the offices of Marriage Officers in Delhi and NCR.

The RTI is also being used to get the secondary data related to marriages and religion census. Mostly the RTI's were delivered in person to confirm the receipt of the applications and also for getting the orientation of the concerned offices. Data related to number of marriages solemnised/registered under SMA and HMA was collected and several clarifications were sought regarding the rules/guidelines for SMA. The visits to various offices also helped in learning about the various arbitrary practices during implementation of SMA.

Offices of 9 Marriage Officers and Spl. Secretary Revenue - Delhi, City Magistrate - NOIDA, DM - Gurgaon, ADM - Faridabad, Spl. Secretaries - Govt. Of Punjab & Haryana

and Census Commission of India were approached for getting the required information during the year. The information related to religion was sought with the consideration of the fact that most of the couples associated with Dhanak are not keen in writing the religion or caste of their children in various documents. Therefore, the collected information proved helpful in understanding the status or classification of "Others, All, None, Two Religions/Castes etc." being used.

f. Dhanak in news

Dhanak was covered by a Hindi magazine viz. Shukrawar in its Feb 2013 publication and by Deccan Herald on 17th July 2013 (copies attached with the report)

Link:<http://www.deccanherald.com/content/327310/hitting-right-notes.html>

Resource Mobilisation & Finances

Resource Mobilisation (April 2012 – March 2013)

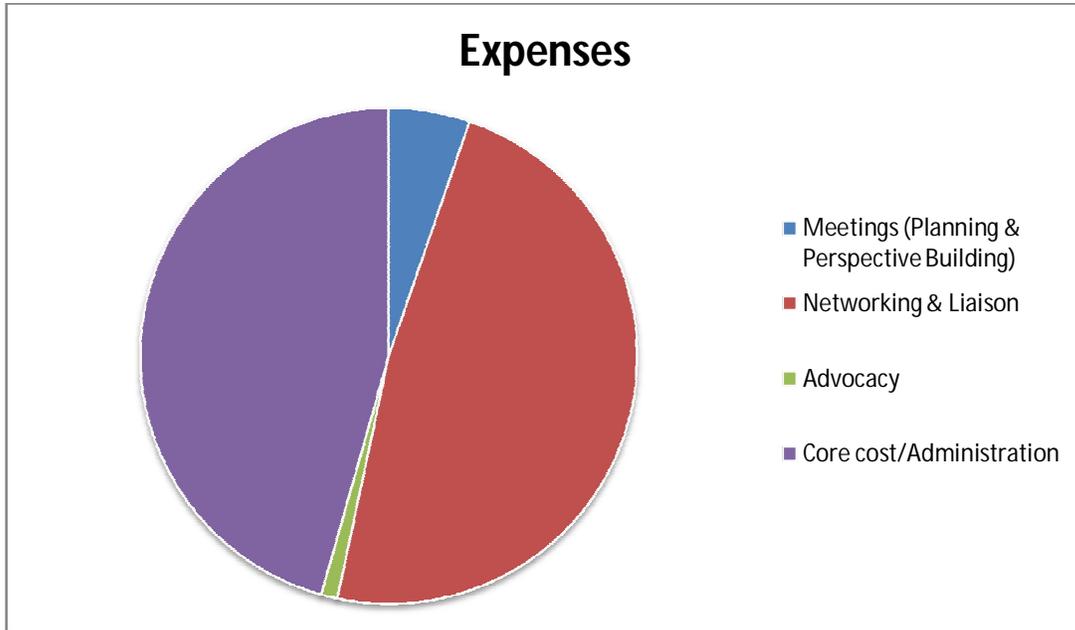
S.No.	Source	Amount (Rs.)
1	Annual Contribution	39,800
2	Donations	10,000
3	Bank Interest	00,239
	Total	50,039

Expenditure Profile

During the year 2012-13, Dhanak of Humanity's expenditure on Administration and Regular Programs was as follows:

Meetings (Planning & Perspective Building)	:	Rs.2011
Networking & Liaison	:	Rs.18342
Advocacy	:	Rs.406
Core cost/Administration	:	Rs.17421

The pie chart below shows the percentage expenditure on the above heads:



Source: Dhanak of Humanity Balance Sheet 2012-13

ADMINISTRATION & PERSONNEL

DHANAK OF HUMANITY TEAM

Dhanak of Humanity is fortunate to get solidarity support from an organization viz. SRUTI based at Hauz Khas Enclave, New Delhi. Therefore, it is using SRUTI's office space for carrying out its administrative endeavors. The space is also used for holding meetings related to counselling, planning and perspective building. Following persons are managing the administration on voluntary basis.

- | | |
|----------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1. Asif Iqbal | Co-founder & General Secretary |
| 2. Shabana Siddiqui | Secretary |
| 3. Shweta | Volunteer |
| 4. Shakeel | Volunteer |
| 5. Raghvendra Sharma | Volunteer |
| 6. Abdul Mabood | Volunteer |
| 7. Priyanka Parmar | Volunteer |

- | | |
|------------|-----------|
| 8. Mahfuz | Volunteer |
| 9. Mukhtar | Volunteer |

The General Secretary is involved with Dhanak of Humanity endeavors and administration in the capacity of an honorary full time worker and others are volunteering their time according to their requirement and availability.

Hitting the right notes

Nafeesah Ahmed , April 20, 2013



The rules of matchmaking are fast changing. In most instances, horoscopes and caste are not the only criteria, but compatibility is. Nafeesah Ahmed wonders if these are significant pointers to the changes in urban Indian society.

Marriage in India is big! It has been, forever, and perhaps, will always be. Our fascination with 'The Institution' is now so embedded into our psyche that upon close examination, it could reveal itself alongside strains of our DNA.

Remember the TV commercial where the father of a young girl sees a potential match for her in every boy he comes across? Yes, however much we'd like to protest and term this ad an exaggeration, there's no denying the fact that we, as a nation, are a super-obsessed lot when it comes to matchmaking and happy matrimony.

There is also no escaping the fact that most of us are reared on one belief — that our marriage is one of the most important events in our lives, thereby making the act of selecting our life partner more important than everything else in the world.

As for the process — well, in our part of the universe, matrimonial ads are placed and pored over, numerous profiles scrutinised, word dispatched to all the near and dear ones (however near or far they may be), and every well-meaning friend or relative is entrusted with the task of looking out for the 'suitable boy' or girl for the eligible one in the family.

But behind all the drama and excitement hides the fact that for most individuals, getting married, although hugely important, becomes the be-all and end-all of their lives. Dr Gitanjali Sharma, a Gurgaon-based marriage therapist and a life coach, puts it simply, "Somewhere along the line, we forget that marriage is just a part of life. Getting married should not become the sole purpose of a person's life. These perceptions, and the general view of marriage, needs to change."

And changing, it is, in some ways more than others. The very institution of marriage, in the Indian context, is undergoing a monumental change. As the rules of the game continue to evolve, the way people view marriages today is somewhat diametrically opposite to the very version that our parents grew up with.

It isn't news that more and more young people are accepting the challenge of choosing their own partners when it comes to 'settling down'. What is new, though, is that these youngsters are adopting

novel ways when it comes to finding their mates. Some take it a step further and extend their choice to the selection of a court marriage over a religious ceremony, or for that matter, a quiet wedding over splurging on a 'big fat' one.

Matchmakers of yore

In the days when marriages across the globe are actually being proposed and solemnised on Skype, the Indian marriage market is witnessing its fair share of changes. It is, however, imperative to mention here, that this paradigm shift is more evident amongst the educated and progressive lot in urban India. Changing societal values, in tandem with economic growth and cultural evolution, have nudged us to take a closer look at what's trending in the world of love and marriage in modern India.

Look around and you'd agree that the art of matchmaking in modern, urban India has undergone a sea change. As traditional astrologers and their exercise of matching the kundalis of the prospective bride and groom make way for drawing up of a compatibility chart between the couple-to-be; as the dated practice of exchanging photographs, then glances, and finally the garlands, gives way to harmless dating and the concept of courtship. We have reason enough to believe that the shift in the way young Indians look at the act of getting married is seeing new horizons.

Today, both partners try and spend maximum time together and make efforts to understand each other. A well-rounded education, exposure to the 'western culture', and the realisation of a need to share a close bond with one's partner has this generation prioritising common interests, similar work or education backgrounds, over the age-old practices from our past. Dr Gitanjali adds, "The younger generation focuses more on compatibility. Today, they believe that relationships should be based on companionship, friendship and equality and that's why they want to have a say in choosing their partners."

It is this need to find true friends in their companions that has changed the way most of us look at pairing up for life. Around us, we find countless stories of couples meeting their partners during their college days or at the workplace.

One such story is of a Bengaluru-based couple — Subhadra Gupta and Vikas Katoch. Subhadra, a school counsellor, and her husband Vikas, a social development professional, met while studying at the Delhi School of Social Work. Their friendship continued beyond the classroom, and finally, while working together with an NGO based out of Dharamshala in Himachal Pradesh, they both discovered their special one in each other. "Matching of horoscopes and caste issues had no place in our relationship," says Subhadra. "Our parents agreed readily after both the families met, and instead of any elaborate rituals, we opted for a simple, Arya Samaj wedding," she adds.

Love — online & off it

Finding true love can be tough, but ever since we discovered the World Wide Web, many a hearts have skipped beats, and love and friendship have blossomed online. Years ago, a friend met her husband-to-be in a chat room. Friendly chatroom banter was soon making way for stronger emotions at both ends, and before they knew it, he flew down from the US to meet her, and after a brief courtship period, they were married. There are numerous cases where people have found love on the Internet, be it via dating sites, social networks, or even myriad matrimonial pages.

In fact, some online matrimonial sites have made the task of finding a suitable mate far easier than you'd imagine. Even those who frown upon the method of looking for a mate online are warming up to the idea, and do it privately, without involving the entire family. For those of you who simply cannot bear to register yourselves in the matrimonial market, have faith, for there are more options for you now, than ever before.

One such option is Find Life Over Here (Floh), a singles only network active in Bengaluru, Mumbai and Delhi/NCR, which aims at bringing together single people using fun, interactive events. These mostly range from exclusive cookouts with world class chefs to sangria making contests, grape stomping, wine tasting and more.

For those who love the outdoors, there's sailing at the Gateway of India, treks and hikes, heritage walks across the city, besides dance workshops, paintball 'matches' etc, and the list gets more innovative with time. These events act as ice breakers, taking out all the awkwardness that comes with meeting other

single people.

Siddharth Mangharam, CEO, Floh, believes, “A shared experience is worth a thousand profile pictures and that’s how we founded Floh in 2011. It is not a dating site, and every individual is screened before they gain access to the network. Interestingly, about 65% of our members are women.”

The good news is that expansion plans are in the pipeline and soon Floh is set to be available in other cities too. He adds, “Our members are urban, educated and independent, and have a passion for different experiences. Post the first interaction, if two people seem to click, then they continue to meet and interact on their own. Many of them end up in serious relationships, and some even get married.”

Many colours of love

“Love or arranged...?” is one of the most common questions a newly married couple often gets asked. The question might stump an outsider, but every Indian gets the connection. While the concept of arranged marriages might continue to baffle the rest of the world, more youngsters see themselves opting for a ‘love marriage’, even if it means going against the family. However, in cases where both sides of the families accept the choices made by their children, we witness what has come to be known as a ‘love-cum-arranged marriage.’

Bengaluru-based lifestyle designer, Mahashweta Shah, a quintessential Gujarati girl, and Abhilash Mana, an IT professional from Kerala, met at a party in Geneva. While Mahashweta was pursuing her Master’s in design, Abhilash was posted there on work. Within months of knowing each other, they realised they were meant to be together. Convincing Abhilash’s parents took a little while, because of the caste differences involved, but after a few rounds of honest discussions and a persevering stance by the two, his parents finally gave in, and today, they are happily married. “Ours was a typical love-cum-arranged marriage,” they chime, almost together, and laugh.

But no marriage is all fun and games. We’ve often heard the phrase, ‘there are no guarantees in life’. Similarly, every marriage comes with its own challenges, and there is no telling how long the marital bliss will last. If some love marriages fail, so do arranged ones. But if you thought it would daunt people from opting for love marriages, especially the ‘inter-faith’ ones, think again.

Religion no bar

Inter-faith marriages are not new to India. Our history bears witness to many a tale of alliances between clans, tribes and kingdoms. These marriages were a means of ensuring peace and cordial relations amongst the two sides. Today, we find a lot many couples opting for such marriages. Overcoming opposition from parents and family is often the biggest hurdle, and once that’s taken care of, things become easier to tackle.

Citing an example of a successful marriage between a Hindu girl and a Muslim boy, Dr Gitanjali shares, “The marriage worked out because of the husband’s supportive nature and the fact that he never pressurised his wife to convert to Islam, nor did he force her into following religious customs.

The couple has also given their children the right to choose their own religion, once they turn 18. When it came to counselling, not only the couple, but their parents came in too. Flexibility and empathy towards your partner is required if one wants to make an inter-religion or inter-caste marriage a success,” she adds.

It is also encouraging to know that while there are many NGOs across the country working for the cause of inter-caste marriages, there are a few that focus entirely on inter-faith marriages. One such organisation is the New Delhi-based Dhanak. Founder member Asif Iqbal gives us an insight into the kind of work his organisation is involved in. He elaborates, “We offer couples a platform to share their inter-faith marriage experiences and counsel those who seek to develop their perspective towards peaceful religious co-existence. We also organise regular meetings to address other issues that come up in such marriages.”

“Secondly, we look into the legal hurdles faced by people while opting for an inter-faith marriage, and right from the beginning, we’ve been trying to present a model where there is no religious conversion for the sake of marriage. Lately, we’re in the process of initiating a dialogue with various religious heads and the Khap Panchayat leaders to present a case for such alliances,” he adds.

Changing mindsets

So, be it a marriage without conversion, or a live-in relationship, it is evident that the modern generation is happy to embrace change. This willingness to experiment also sees couples opting for a live-in relationship, even if they aren't brave enough to acknowledge it.

New Delhi-based Zara Ali met her husband Rajat Arora, at work, when they were both in their early twenties. Their courtship period lasted for about three years before they decided to live-in. Zoya says, "It was a natural step for us to move in together.

It was too early for marriage, and back then, our careers were our priority." Rajat adds, "Before we broke the news to our families, we wanted to be absolutely sure about our decision. We ensured that failure was never an option, and after living together for about two years, and after trying to understand and appreciate each other for who we were, as two individuals coming from separate worlds, we decided to finally involve the families and get married."

Change, it seems, is no more restricted to a few case studies. Instead, it's permeating deeper. The Indian marriage system is witnessing the emerging trend of delayed marriages, and the strong leaning towards the nuclear family setup.

Then there are those who choose to be single by choice. Today, more women around us retain their maiden names after marriage, couples consciously opt to adopt or not have children at all, or those that are happy having their kids take on the surnames of both parents. This list, perhaps, will only get longer with time.

What's important and notable is that these are not weak beginnings, but a strong sign that the way we perceive and deal with the 'most important' milestone in our lives is about to change, for the better.

(Some names have been changed on request)