XIV *Kanyādāna*

A Five traits of *kanyādāna*

Indian marriages have "always" been characterised by five traits. Firstly, marriage is patrilocal, i.e., a bride joins her husband's family, and not the other way around. This makes the framing of marriage in terms of *kanyādāna*—a present made to the prospective groom by the bride's father—look natural.

Secondly, men are allowed to have several wives, but not the other way around. This rule is called polygamy. Polygamy might typically mean that rich men can support several wives, while poor ones won't find any (*bhāryā* literally means the woman to be supported).

Thirdly, marriage would typically be performed in a hypergamous fashion (see ⟨109⟩), i.e., a man can take a wife from his own class or from a lower class, but not from a higher one. Therefore, *śūdra* men can only marry *śūdra* women, and Brahmin women can only marry Brahmin men. One should not be surprised to see violations of hypergamy (see YSm 1.92–93), as this system makes mating difficult for males of a relatively low class and females of a relatively high class. Under polygamy and hypergamy together, poor, low-ranking males will have tremendous difficulties in obtaining a wife. Since men may take several wives, but not the other way around, the problem of not finding a marriage partner is worse for men than it is for women.

Fourthly, with respect to modern-day Bengal, but surely extending across time and place, Fruzzetti (1982, p. 31) mentions that "daughters should be married and not kept in their father's house for too long. Since a woman has to be a mother before she can become a complete person, the foremost duty of a father is to find husbands for his daughters. The presence of unmarried women is unauspicious for the men of the house". See ⟨110⟩. Relatedly, "divorce and permanent return to the father's house is ruled out".[655]

Lastly, *kanyādāna* is often supplemented by payments of some sort that flow to either the bride's family or the groom's family. For example, Manu's third and fifth marriages (see ⟨108⟩) involve payments made to the bride's family. With respect to

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[655] Trautmann (1981, p. 291)

modern-day Bengal, Fruzzetti (1982, pp. 29–60) describes and discusses two kinds of "gift": the sacred form of *sampradān* (i.e., *kanyādāna*) on the one hand and the non-sacred form of *pon* (dowry) on the other. In particular, she provides interesting details on the negotiations and on their outcomes. While the third trait should theoretically lead to payments by a groom's family, the fourth one might work towards payments by a bride's family.

B   Trautmann's classification of marriage

Trautmann (1981, chapter 4) covers the transaction of marriage. He points out that the transaction is not between two freely-contracting individuals, but rather between groups: the bride's relatives and the groom's relatives. Such group decisions are not unknown to economics (collective decision making) or marketing (family decisions). The transferred object is "dominion over the woman".[656]

Manu identifies eight different types of marriage (see ⟨108⟩):

1. "Brāhma": giving a girl to a man of learning and virtue
2. "Divine": giving a girl to a rite-performing priest
3. "Seer's": giving a girl to a bridegroom after accepting a bull and a cow
4. "Prājāpatya": giving a girl with the words "May you jointly fulfill the Law"
5. "Demonic": giving a girl after the payment of money
6. "Gāndharva": giving a girl after voluntary sexual union
7. "Fiendish": abducting a girl from her house in a violent fashion
8. "Ghoulish": secretly raping a sleeping, drunk, or mentally deranged woman

Trautmann thinks that the first four marriages belong to the *kanyādāna* type, i.e., they are gifts of some sort. However, both the third marriage (where the father "accepts a bull and a cow, or two pairs of them") and the fifth one (where "a girl is given after the payment of money to the girl's relatives and to the girl herself") seem to involve "sale and purchase"[657]. Trautmann (1981, p. 290) argues that, in the third marriage, (i) the price is reduced to a minimum and the transaction does not therefore come under the heading of "sale and purchase", and (ii), the price is given *dharmataḥ*. Trautmann's classification of the fifth marriage, where wealth is given *svacchandyāt* ("out of his own free will")[658], is not quite clear. One might argue that this fact of giving *svacchandyāt* sets the fifth marriage apart and involves buying (a *kanyā*). It has to be borne in mind that the giving of the girl (not the giving of cows or other items) is the focal point. In any case, I concur with Trautmann's characterisation of the last three types of marriage as "mutual choice, forcible seizure, and theft", respectively.[659]

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656 Trautmann (1981, p. 277)
657 Trautmann (1981, p. 277)
658 Trautmann (1981, p. 290) translates this as "at one's own desire".
659 Trautmann (1981, pp. 277, 291)

Referring back to Trautmann's exchange taxonomy (section XII.A), we may classify marriages by way of gifting (the first four kinds) as "sacred", while marriage by sale and purchase (the fifth kind of marriage) would be called "profane". Mutual choice (i.e., "abduction of a consenting maiden"[660] according to the sixth marriage) or forcible seizure of a girl (marriage no. 7) would be termed "noble", as the proper manner employed by *kṣatriya*s. The remaining case of theft lies outside of Trautmann's taxonomy.

C   Lévi-Strauss' universal form of marriage versus Parry's observation

If marriage takes the form of *kanyādāna*, one might expect that the dowry or other forms of payment flow from the groom's family to the bride's family. This would be well in line with Lévi-Strauss (1969, chapter X), who argues for "marriage by exchange" "in its general aspect as a phenomenon of reciprocity, as the *universal form* of marriage."[661] Remember that both Manu's third and fifth marriage (see ⟨108⟩) involve payments made to the bride's family.

However, at least with respect to modern India, the results of fieldwork seem to point in another direction. For example, Parry (1986, p. 463) finds that in north-Indian wife-giving, balancedness in the sense of Blau (presumably Blau (1964, pp. 118–125)) [and Emerson (1962), one might add, see subsection XI.E(4)] seems violated: "[It is not] clear that the unreciprocated gift produces the differentiation in power predicted by Blau (1967)—for in north India wife-giving affines are commonly required to put up with the most peremptory and disdainful treatment at the hands of those to whom they act as perpetual donors." That is, Parry opines that the data contradict balancedness. Parry (1986, p. 463) summarises: "With the hypergamous variant of this system it seems that Hindu ideology has even succeeded in periodically excluding segments of north Indian society from what Levi-Strauss calls 'universal form of marriage'—one based on reciprocity."[662] The tension between balancedness and data (as seen by Parry) has to be resolved in one way or another.

A priori, it is not clear who should pay whom for making a marriage possible. The direction and size of dowry payments (if any) or the direction and extent of honouring or disdainful treatment should be dependent on several factors. Firstly, the relative scarcity of suitable brides or grooms should be relevant. Here, gender-specific abortions (in modern times), infanticide, and neglect play a role. Second comes the involved persons' "quality", with class as one of its components. According to Kauṭilya, rescission might be possible for sexually-defective brides (or grooms).[663] It seems that

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660 Trautmann (1981, p. 291)
661 Lévi-Strauss (1969, p. 143)
662 Lévi-Strauss (1969, p. 143)
663 See, for example, KAŚ 3.15.12.

this form of rescission is modelled more closely on rescission of merchandise (subsection VII.C(2)) than on rescission of gifts (subsection VII.C(5)). Thirdly, the relative problems of remaining unmarried should be important. Recall the inauspiciousness of unmarried women in a household, mentioned in section A.

One line of attack on Parry's problem may use the Shapley value. If one considers balancedness (see subsection XI.E(4)) as the "natural" or "expected" outcome and if one does not doubt "the most peremptory and disdainful treatment at the hands of those to whom they act as perpetual donors", one is forced to draw specific conclusions about the coalition function. Let us assume a giver G of the bride and the receiver R together with the coalition function v defined by

$$[6] \qquad v(G) \ , \quad v(R) \ , \ \text{and} \ v(G, R) > 0$$

The coalitions with just one player reflect the state where the two people in question do not marry one another, but remain unmarried or marry a third person. The positive worth of the grand coalition reflects the idea that marriage and children therefrom are highly valued.

Now, assume that G's Shapley value is negative at $-c$, where c denotes the cost of disrespect suffered by G's family or the cost of dowry. Then, applying equation [1], one finds

$$[7] \qquad -c = Sh_G = \tfrac{1}{2}\left(v(G) - v(\varnothing)\right) + \tfrac{1}{2}\left(v(G, R) - v(R)\right)$$

which implies

$$[8] \qquad v(G) = v(R) - 2c - v(G, R) < v(R)$$

Thus, $-c < 0$ implies that the bride's family is worse off outside the specific connection than the groom's family. Perhaps, the inauspiciousness of unmarried women, but not of unmarried men, in a household may provide the underlying rationale. Thus, the gift of a girl is only an apparent gift. The girl's family is worse off if she cannot be married-off, and in particular not married-off to a man of higher class.[664]

Wrapping up, the current author thinks that important aspects of *kanyādāna* should be seen as an exchange in line with the upper left pattern in Figure 2 on p. 143. Then, A stands for the groom's family, which provides the service of accepting the bride into the groom's family, against a dowry payment made by B, the bride's family. In defending this interpretation, I do not intend to deny the merit-producing aspect (see chapter XIX on dharmic giving) of *kanyādāna*.

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664 Note, however, that Parry (1986, pp. 461–462) himself observes that many north Indian castes do not systematically apply hypergamy, meaning that the apparent explanation of the sort "gift given by the bride's family against the bride's elevation in rank" cannot hold water here.

D   Matching grooms and brides in the cases of polygamy and hypergamy

(1)   Discrete examples

With a view to subsection XI.B(3), I would like to discuss *kanyādāna* from the point of view of matching. We begin with some discrete examples. Assume 16 marriageable young people: 8 male, 8 female. In Table 9, the men and women are listed according to their social class (second and seventh column, respectively). For the men, I have indicated the number of supportable women in three different constellations.

Table 9: Discrete matching examples

men	social class	const. A	const. B	const. C	women	social class
		number of supportable women				
M1	B	2	0	1	W1	B
M2	B	1	1	1	W2	B
M3	K	2	0	1	W3	K
M4	K	1	1	1	W4	K
M5	V	2	1	0	W5	V
M6	V	1	2	3	W6	V
M7	Ś	2	1	0	W7	Ś
M8	Ś	1	1	1	W8	Ś
		1∞1, 2	2∞1	1∞1		
		2∞3	4∞3	2∞5		
		3∞4, 5	5∞5	3∞3		
		4∞6	6∞6, 7	4∞6		
		5∞7, 8	7∞8	6∞7, 8		

In constellation A (third column), all four classes are equally well off economically and each male can support one or two wives. One possible matching outcome is given in the last row of the third column. Read "1 ∞ 1, 2" as "M1 marries W1 and W2". By hypergamy, the *vaiśya* male M6 and the two *śūdra* males M7 and M8 do not obtain a wife. Constellation B is characterised by relatively poor Brahmins and *kṣatriya*s. M1 and M3 cannot afford to support a wife. In this matching example, *śūdra* M7 finds a wife, while M8 does not. Finally, in constellation C, Brahmin M1 marries a Brahmin wife, whereas M2 obtrains a *vaiśya* wife, even though W2 is available. Similarly, *kṣatriya* M4 weds a *vaiśya* wife. W2 and W4 do not find a husband, while M6 only gets two wives despite being able to support three.

(2)   A continuous model

I now turn to a continuous model, where a man may have "one fifth" of a woman. While the interpretation seems difficult, think of "1/5 woman" as "obtaining one woman with probability 1/5". Another interpretation is given in the Mahābhārata, where Draupadi belonged to the five *Pāṇḍava* brothers. She gives a son to each of them. We start with a continuous model of male polygamy, where a man may have 5.2 women all for himself.

Assume a continuum $[0, 1]$ of potential grooms. If you wish, you may multiply this number by 1.000 in your mind. Then, instead of saying that 2/3 of all men are married, you may wish to express this ratio by saying that 667 out of 1.000 men are married. A particular man m from this interval is assumed to have an income of m that allows him to support sm wives. We address s as the supportability parameter (remember *bhāryā* in the sense of "woman to be supported"). The larger is s, the more women can be supported by a man with a given income. The inverse $1/s$ is the income per married woman.

Assume a quantity w of marriageable women or an interval $[0, w]$ of marriageable women. Again, multiply by 1.000 if you prefer. The women's identity or even their characteristics (in terms of virtue or beauty) are not important in this model.

Furthermore, assume an income minimum $\hat{m} < 1$ such that men below this threshold will not be able to find a wife. Then, appendix B shows that the demand for women equals

[9] $\dfrac{s}{2} \left(1 - \hat{m}^2\right)$

Rather than elaborating on this model of male polygamy, we add female hypergamy to our model. In order to simplify matters, we do not work with four different social classes as in the discrete section above. Instead, we assume two continua of classes. Male grooms v (*vara*) belong to class $c_v \in [0, 1]$, where 0 stands for the highest class and 1 for the lowest. Similarly, female brides k (*kanyā*) belong to class $c_k \in [0, 1]$.

As in the model of male polygamy considered thus far, grooms v have an income $m_v \in [0, 1]$, which allows them to support sm_v wives. The two properties of belonging to a specific class on the one hand and of having an income on the other hand are independent of one another. This means that high-class males are as likely to be poor or rich as middle-class or low-class males. We assume that high-class males choose wives "first" and lower-class males choose wives "later". Female hypergamy is consistent with two matching patterns (and mixtures of these patterns). Men of class v with income m_v might choose sm_v wives from classes below their own and, with that restriction, choose wives (i) from as high a class as possible or (ii) from among all the classes. The following model works under the second assumption. It corresponds with constellation C in the discrete subsection above.

As shown in appendix B, the lowest class (with the highest index) that is just able to find a wife is given by

$$[10] \quad c_v^{\min} = 1 - e^{-\frac{2w}{s(1-\hat{m}^2)}}$$

The proportion of classes of men able to find a wife (if income permits) is $c_v^{\min}$. Therefore, this proportion of married men is relatively large if the quantity of women w is large or sustainability s is small. In fact, these two assertions can be put together: the proportion of classes of men able to find a wife is large if the ratio $w/s = w \cdot \frac{1}{s}$ is large, i.e., if the income necessary to marry all of the women is large. Furthermore, the amount of married men (in terms of class) is large if $\hat{m}$ is large, i.e., if only the rich can afford a wife.

Importantly, in order to find a wife, a man must (i) belong to the relatively high classes and (ii) have an income above $\hat{m}$. The overall proportion of men satisfying both of these requirements is given in the appendix. Assume a relatively large $\hat{m}$, i.e., only rich men will find a wife. $c_v^{\min}$ is then large so that men of relatively low social class, but boasting an income above $\hat{m}$, will find a wife. Inversely, a relatively small $\hat{m}$ implies that poor men may find a wife (even if only the chance of getting a wife with a positive probability), but that men of low social class will not.