Three Views Paper

Marriage
in the following three cultures:

Greek (*Greek Orthodox*),
Mexican (*Mexican Catholic*),
and Indian (*Hindu*)

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Introduction:

“Miracles occur naturally as expressions of love. The real miracle is the love that inspires them. In this sense everything that comes from love is a miracle” (Williamson).

Marriage has a different meaning for many people. For me, marriage is about a union between two people in love who want their family and friends to witness and share their love together. Marriage rituals are practiced during this emotional and very special event. Some people follow the customs of their culture strictly, whereas others change their customs and rituals around to fit their needs. Depending on a person’s religion or country, customary rituals can also impact the marriage ceremony. In addition, marriage ceremonies in some cultures are a very important moment for the families involved; thus, the event is not nonchalant but a very formal event.

I chose to write about marriage rituals because I believe that marriage ceremonies are absolutely beautiful and wonderful. I love that each and every ceremony is very individualistic for the couple involved. In addition, the culture of each person in the marriage also brings out a more dynamic, unique ceremony.

A (Greek Orthodox) wedding in Greece, a (Hindu) wedding in India, and a (Mexican Catholic) wedding in Mexico are the three specific cultures in which their marriage rituals will be scrutinized. These three cultures have many differences in their norms for the marriage ceremony, but also they have similarities in the various aspects of how each celebrates a wedding. Within in each of these three cultures, their beliefs and faith play an integral role in influencing the rituals of the marriage ceremony.
Research and the Comparisons and Contrasts among the Three Cultures:

“Love is what we are born with. Fear is what we learn. The spiritual journey is the unlearning of fear and prejudices and the acceptance of love back in our hearts. Love is the essential reality and our purpose on earth. To be consciously aware of it, to experience love in ourselves and others, is the meaning of life. Meaning does not lie in things. Meaning lies in us” (Williamson).

In Greece, within the Greek Orthodox Church, a marriage ceremony has a very structured layout. In the past, teenagers that were dating had a chaperone. If the relationship escalated, outdoor weddings were very traditional and often paid by relatives. Then, the dowry of woman is unpacked and displayed at the reception. Traditionally after the wedding, young children were placed on the marital bed for fortuity for newlyweds so they would be fertile and give birth to many children. Honey was used to make the sign of the cross on the door of the groom’s home to signify a sweet and prosperous life (Mordecai, 184). Today, in Greece, chaperones don’t accompany teenagers on dates. However, a dowry is still given to the bride from her family in the form of land or financial assets.

In Greece, in order to get married in the Greek Orthodox Church, the Bishop doesn’t accept a wedding application until the bride and groom have attended three sessions of premarital counseling. The wedding celebration last several days, but the actual ceremony has only two parts. Before the wedding begins, a band escorts the bride to church and then, the band returns to retrieve and walk the groom to the church. The ceremony commences with the bride and groom being handed a white candle, which represent their willingness to accept Christ into their lives. Following the candle, the first part of the ceremony begins the service of betrothal, which is the engagement part of the ceremony. The priest offers prayers and identifies names from the Old Testament. The priest blesses the couple’s rings that he holds in his right hand and then, he blesses the couple by making the sign of the cross over their heads. Then the bride and groom
exchange rings, which are placed on the right hand (fourth finger) because the right hand is blessed by God and it is to the right that those who will inherit the eternal life will ascend (http://www.yasou.org/church/wedding.htm). The rings are symbolic of the seal of promise and fidelity of the couple to each other. In addition, the ring is representing the never ending circle of God’s love. The religious sponsors – family, friend, or godparent - called Koumbara or Koumbaro are witnesses to the marital union and they exchange the rings three times on the couple’s finger. The number three is often repeated numerous times to represent the Holy Trinity (God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit). The exchanging of the ring happens three times to also symbolize the strength of the married couple (Mordecai, 185).

The second part of the ceremony takes place after the exchanging of the rings, ceremony of the sacrament of marriage. This part of the ceremony is comprised of many components including, the crowning, the common cup, the dance of Isaiah, and the removal of the crowns. The Priest begins by joining the bride and groom’s hands together, which stayed joined till the end of the ceremony. Then, the crowning of the bride and groom begins. They each get crowned with stefanas, which are two flower crowns – beaded - attached by a white ribbon, which symbolize physical and spiritual unity. In addition, the stefana symbolizes the “presence of Christ who blesses and joins the couple and establishes them as the King and Queen of their home, which they will rule with wisdom, justice and integrity” (http://www.yasou.org/church/wedding.htm). The flowers on the crowns are frequently orange blossoms. The Koumbaro or Koumbara then exchange the wedding crowns three times of the heads of the bride and groom. This repetition of the number three again displays recognition of the sealing of their union.

Following the crowning is the drinking from the common cup. Before the drinking occurs, there are readings from the Bible, including the Epistle and the Gospel.
Typically the reading from the gospel is Jesus’ first miracle at the wedding of Cana at Galilee when Jesus turns water into wine. Following the reading, the bride and groom drink three sips from a common cup of sweet wine, which is symbolic of the Jesus’ first miracle and the couple sharing their life together. The meaning of the “common cup” of life “denotes the mutual sharing of joy and sorrow, the token of a life of harmony. The drinking of wine from the common cup serves to impress upon the couple that from that moment on they will share everything in life, joys, as well as sorrows, and that they are to ‘bear one another’s burdens.’ Their joys will be doubled and their sorrows halved because they will be shared” (http://www.yasou.org/church/wedding.htm).

Subsequently, the dance of Isaiah begins shortly after the drinking from the common cup. The priest leads the couple by holding their hands three times around the table in the front of the sanctuary. On the table, there is the Gospel and the cross. The dance around the table represents the unending journey of husband and wife. Following the priest and the couple are the Koumbara or Koumbaro who hold the stefana of the couple in place. The dance also is symbolic of the first steps as a married couple. Furthermore, the church, represented by the priest, leads them in the way they must walk. This path guided by God is symbolized by the table at the center, which has the Gospel and the cross of Jesus on it. This circular path around the table is symbolic of the way of Christian living as a perfect orbit around the center of life, who is Jesus Christ. (http://www.yasou.org/church/wedding.htm).

The removal of the crowns is the final aspect of the second part of the ceremony. The Priest blesses the couple and removes the crowns. He then calls upon God to grant the couple a long, happy life. Separating the couple’s joined hands reminds them that only God can separate the couple from one another. Traditionally the newlyweds are showered with sugared almonds called koufeta. They are symbolic of the early days of
the Church in which “honey dipped almonds were offered to the newlyweds by the priest. The white symbolizes purity. The egg shape represents fertility and the new life which begins with marriage. The hardness of the almond represents the endurance of marriage and the sweetness of the sugar symbolizes the sweetness of future life. The odd number of almond is indivisible, just as The Bride and The Groom shall remain undivided” (http://www.yasou.org/church/wedding.htm).

Mexican Catholicism originated when Spain colonized Mexico hundreds of years ago. In a Mexican Catholic wedding ceremony, similarly to the Greek Orthodox Church, young people were chaperoned on dates. However, somewhat different from Greece, in Mexico, there was a portador, a go-between, which was a person that would deliver a written marriage proposal to the prospective wife’s father to ask for permission for his daughter’s hand in marriage. The father had the authority to deny or accept the proposal. Today, correspondingly to the Greek Orthodox Church, young people are not chaperoned on dates, but couples meet at prearranged spots after receiving parent’s approval. In Mexico, the dating customs are very similar to those in the U.S., but the approval of family of a potential husband is more important to them than in the United States. Also, if a young girl stays out too late (after dusk), it is a sign of bad character.

The ceremony of a Mexican Catholic wedding is not broken up into parts like the Greek Orthodox wedding. In addition, the structure of the wedding isn’t as organized as in the Greek Orthodox Church in Greece. Typically, there are traditions of what is said and the order of events in the ceremony. But, there is much more freedom in the organization of the ceremony in the Mexican Catholic Church compared to the Greek Orthodox wedding.

The ceremony typically follows a certain arrangement, but there are other ways that the ceremony is organized. The priest welcomes everyone and says a passage from
the Bible. He could also bless the couple saying “Christ abundantly blesses you with his love” (Mordecai, 111). The couple then says to the priest that they have “come to wed freely, without reservation” (Mordecai, 111). Following this introduction, the bride and groom then give their consent for marriage before God and the church by repeating these words: “I, (name of bride, husband), take you to be my husband (wife). I promise to be true to you in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health. I will love you and honor you all the days of my life” (Mordecai, 111). Following these words, the priest blesses the coins and the rings. Unlike in the Greek Orthodox Church, in a Mexican Catholic wedding the priest also blesses coins that the groom gives to the bride. The coins represent the groom’s dedication to his wife to care for their home and to provide for their family. The bride typically responds, “I accept your symbolic gift of dedication and promise on my part that everything provided will be used with care for the benefit of our home and family” (Mordecai, 111). Like the Greek Orthodox wedding ceremony, in both Mexico and Greece the priest blesses the rings before the couple’s exchange them. Also, like the Greek Orthodox Church, the rings in the Mexican Catholic church symbolize the couple’s love. Furthermore, similarly to the Greek Orthodox Church wedding ceremony, the Mexican Catholic Church ceremony emphasizes the Holy Trinity during the exchanging of the rings. The rings symbolize the bride and groom’s love and fidelity in the name of God the Father, of God the Son, and of God the Holy Spirit.

After the exchanging of the rings, a lazo, which is rosary beads, is tied around the couple. Likewise to the Greek Orthodox Church, the lazo is like a stefana in the wedding ceremony in the Greek Orthodox Church. The lazo binds the couple together signifying unity. The priest says to the couple while the lazo is being tied around them, “Let the union of binding together with this rosary of the Blessed Virgin Mary and be an inspiration to you both. Remember the holiness necessary to preserve your new found
family as a family of God can only be obtained by mutual sacrifice and love. May the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph be your example for life” (Mordecai, 111-112). After they have exchanged vows, the priest wraps the rosary beads around the bride and grooms necks in a figure eight shape symbolic of unity. At the end of the ceremony, the lazo is given to the bride as a memento of her becoming the mistress of the groom’s heart and home.

During the closing of the ceremony, the priest offers the bride and groom prayers and says he “expresses desire for peace of the world, the welfare of the Church, and for the unity of all men” (Mordecai, 112).

“A wedding is an important religious ceremony in the Hindu religion and one of the most important of the sixteen Hindu sanskars or sacraments. It is not only establishing the bond between two people, but also the bond between two families” (http://weddings.iloveindia.com/indian-weddings/hindu-marriage/index.html).

The Hindu wedding ceremony in India is a very large celebration of the union of two souls, and this union is called aatmas. The marriage ceremony is not just about the union of the bride and groom and exchanging rings, but also about the beginning of a bond between their two families. For an Indian Hindu wedding ceremony, there are many important aspects to the event including selection of a spouse, dowry, clothing, jewelry, and the decoration of mehendi on bride’s hands and feet.

Unlike in both the Greek (Orthodox) and Mexican (Catholic) wedding, in India, no dating or courtship occurs before marriage. Typically, the bride and groom meet for the first time on the wedding day. The Indian Hindu belief is that the love between the two will grow during the marriage. Parents chose the spouse based on the personal qualities of the future spouse and the highly valuable girl’s virginity. Often, parents ask friends if they had a potential suitor for their child. After the selection of a spouse is
complete, the parents of the future husband and wife meet, exchange photos and talk on the phone. Typically, the bride and groom don’t meet before the wedding day, but sometimes the parents arrange a meeting for the two to make sure they fit. Sometimes, if a young man is interested in a girl, his friends may assist him in pursuing her by talking to her parents.

The dowry of the bride depends on the status of her family. **Similar to the Greek Orthodox Church**, a dowry is given to the bride in the Hindu Wedding ritual. The larger the dowry, the more honor given to the bride’s family. A dowry can range from a plot of land, clothing, a maid or even a house. Recently, a law has been enacted against the giving or taking of dowries (Mordecai, 132).

The clothing worn on the wedding day is very traditional, symbolic and a very important part of the wedding. Normally, bridal attire consists of sari, salwar kurta, and lahenga. The sari is made of gold embroidered silk and has bright red, yellow, green and magenta drapes to accentuate the sari. Sometimes the bride’s head is covered with a pallav to protect her face, the most beautiful part of her body. In some places, the pallav identifies your social class. A salwar kurta is the shirt and trousers worn by the bride. A lahenga is a long skirt worn by the bride. The groom in traditional clothing wears a long white silk jacket with an erect collar and white trousers.

The bride is typically covered in jewelry. She wears bangles, necklaces, and nose rings. In different parts of the country, the jewelry is worn differently. In the north, a gold ring is attached to the nose and to the ear by a gold chain. In the south, diamond stud piercing on both sides of the nose signify the deflowering of a young woman. The mangalsutra, which is a gold chain with black beads, is worn throughout the nation of India. Around the neck, a bride wears a yellow string necklace with a jewel to signify
good fortune. Brides also wear silver anklets, called payals which make a clinging
sound allowing her location to be always known since her steps are always heard.

Mehendi is worn by both the bride and groom. The groom only wears it on his
hand, but the bride wears it on her hands and feet. The mehendi symbolizes the strength
of love in a marriage and the darker the mehendi, then the stronger the love and bond
between the bride and groom.

An Indian Hindu wedding ceremony begins with the honoring of Lord Ganesha,
whose blessings and protection are invoked. Typically at eleven o’clock at night the
ceremony begins, but sometimes the priest will chose a different time based on the stars
and planets. The priest will offer puja ceremonies, which are Hindu religious ceremonies
in which prayers for the groom and the bride and their marriage are offered by the priest
conducting the wedding.

The groom rides on a decorated horse followed by his family and a brass band to
the bride’s home. The bride’s family introduces their family to the groom’s family; this
introduction of families is called a milni. The procession to the bride’s home can include
hundreds to thousands of people; all these people are called the barat. In the past,
married women were excluded from the procession, but today, close women relatives not
only join in the procession, but also dance in it. Welcoming the groom with a garland,
which is a necklace of flowers, the bride’s mother also applies a tilak to the groom’s
forehead. A tilak is a very sacred mark of auspiciousness. It is made up of sandal paste,
sacred ashes, or red turmeric powder. Both the bride and the groom have a tilak on their
forehead. Depending on your belief, the ingredients of the tilak are different. For
instance, if you believe in Vishnu, the believers apply a sandal paste. After the
application of the tilak, the groom gets down off the horse and goes into the tent where
the Brahmin awaits.
The Brahmin sits under the tent-like structure called a mandapam, decorated with flowers. There is a fire-lit metal vessel representing the Radiant One where the wedding ceremony takes place. While the Brahmin reads from the sacred Sanskrit texts, the bride and groom pour offering of rice and butter. Then the couple exchanges the flower garlands and walk around the fire-lit metal vessel seven times. This exchange of garlands is similar to the exchange of rings in both a Mexican Catholic wedding and a Greek Orthodox wedding. The exchange of garlands is symbolic of their life long union. Similarly, in both the Mexican Catholic wedding and a Greek Orthodox wedding, the rings like the garland symbolize and acknowledge a pledge of the bride and groom to each other.

Following the exchange of garlands, the next part of the ceremony is called the hathleva, which is the joining of the bride and groom’s hands. Some henna (mehndi) are put on the right hands of the couple and then the hands are bound together by a cloth. The binding of a cloth is similar to the crowing of stefana in a Greek Orthodox ceremony and the lazo (rosary beads) in a Mexican Catholic wedding. The couple prays together to God to bless their marriage. The hathleva (joining of the bride and groom’s hands) symbolizes an eternal bond that will unite the couple as one mind and one spirit even though they are separate individuals.

The actual wedding part of the ceremony called the vivah begins with the bride and groom sitting in front of a holy fire. A pundit leads the ceremony, performs havan and recites religious sayings. Offerings are made in the havan to the holy fire. The fire represents in Hindu beliefs a sustainer of life. The pundit explains to both the bride and the groom their responsibilities to each other. Similarly to the Greek Orthodox wedding ceremony where the bride and groom do the Isaiah dance and walk around the altar thee times, in a Hindu wedding ceremony the couple walks around the fire seven times.
exchanging the seven vows of their duties. The fire represents god. “These seven promises taken together by the bride and groom build’s the foundation of their relationship and marriage. It speaks of the loyalty, love, and commitment they will share in their married life” (http://weddings.iloveindia.com/indian-weddings/hindu-marriage/index.html).

The bride’s father following the vows will give the groom red-tinged rice and betel plants leaves. He then gives his daughter to the groom and promises to take care of the wedding expenses. The groom’s father then takes the bride’s hand and places it in the groom’s while pouring water all over it. Like a ring used in both the Greek Orthodox ceremony and the Mexican Catholic wedding, a tali, which is a jewel usually set in gold, is placed around the neck of the bride as an indication of her marriage.
Conclusion:

Although all three cultures are located in three very different areas, the wedding ceremony of each has some similarities and differences. For all three, the importance of a marriage as the union between two people was emphasized. In addition, in each culture the wedding ceremony was not only important for the bride and groom, but also in the union of the two families. In all three cultures, family played an integral role in the initial stages of courtship and in the marriage ceremony. In all there ceremonies, an object of some sort connected the bride and groom. In a Mexican Catholic wedding, it was a lazo; in the Greek Orthodox, it was a stefana; and in the Indian Hindu wedding, it was a piece of cloth. The symbolic meaning behind the connection of the couple is to show unity to the other companion.

There were also differences between the three weddings. In a Greek Orthodox wedding, the components of the ceremony are very structured and the number three is repeated amply. For a Mexican Catholic wedding, there is no particular structure but more of a universal sequence of events in the ceremony. Coins are a unique characteristic for the Mexican Catholic wedding. Finally, for a Hindu Indian wedding, a bride and groom are chosen by family and typically don’t meet till the day they get married. The wedding can last up to several days. The ceremony takes place underneath a canopy-like structure called a mandapam and led by a Brahmin. The mehendi drawings and exchange of garlands are two important components of the ceremony.

I enjoyed researching and reading about how even within each culture, there were differences depending on the region. There is such diversity even within a norm within a country.
Works Cited Page


