

Re-imagining Marriage: Analysing the Emergence of Sologamy

*Vishnudas Dwarakamai*¹

ABSTRACT

For many years, the institution of marriage has been crucial in maintaining cultural continuity, regulating society, and upholding the law. Marriage, which has historically been defined as a union between two people, has changed from being a patriarchal institution based on religious and cultural standards to a more pluralistic and personalised idea. The act of marrying oneself, or sologamy, is critically examined in this essay as a performative and symbolic challenge to traditional marriage norms. The study situates sologamy within broader discourses on identity, empowerment, and the legal boundaries of interpersonal relationships by tracing the historical evolution of marriage and comparing it with contemporary expressions of self-love and autonomy.

Utilising a variety of interdisciplinary sources, including media analysis, sociological theory, and legal literature, the study examines how sologamy is positioned both culturally and legally in various jurisdictions. Despite not having legal recognition in any nation, its increasing prominence in the US, UK, and India highlights its symbolic significance. The research highlights the ceremonial formalisation of personal commitment that sets sologamy apart from routine self-care practices. It also inquires whether current legal systems implicitly support or oppose such actions.

Divergent opinions are evident in public discourse and media representations: some view sologamy as a feminist declaration of independence and defiance of patriarchal standards. In contrast, others write it off as selfish or escapist. In response to these criticisms, the study emphasises how sologamy challenges conventional wisdom regarding emotional fulfilment and relationships. In the conclusion, the study makes the case that, although not being enforceable by law, sologamy signifies a cultural change in the way that intimacy, independence, and identity are viewed. In an increasingly individualistic society, it challenges academics and decision-makers to reevaluate the parameters of non-traditional partnerships and the growing range of personal expression.

¹ Third-year BA LLB (Hons.) Student at School of Law, CHRIST (Deemed to be University), Bangalore. Author may be reached at vishnudas.dwarakamai@law.christuniversity.in

Keywords: Sologamy, Autonomy, Intimate Choice, Feminist Jurisprudence, Marriage Evolution, and Legal Recognition.

INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, marriage has served as a legal and cultural institution with roots in familial continuity, religious approval, and societal governance.² It is still firmly ingrained in Indian law frameworks and normative expectations, frequently seen as a rite of passage and a pillar of individual legitimacy³. But these conventional ideas are starting to be called into question by recent developments in identity politics, feminist jurisprudence, and individual autonomy. Sologamy, also known as self-marriage, is one of the most controversial trends. It is a symbolic act in which people pledge to themselves without a partner. Sologamy encourages critical investigation into the changing definitions of intimacy, selfhood, and legal personhood despite its lack of official legal status.

This essay uses doctrinal analysis, constitutional interpretation, and cultural critique to examine the consequences of sologamy within the larger socio-legal debate on autonomy and marriage. It examines how self-marriage challenges long-standing marital standards and reflects new forms of emotional agency by drawing on feminist legal theory and comparative jurisprudence. In the Indian context, where constitutional jurisprudence, particularly under Article 21, has progressively upheld the right to personal liberty, privacy, and intimate choice, the phenomenon is especially pertinent⁴. Despite not being recognised by law, sologamy could find implicit resonance in these changing constitutional norms.

Accordingly, the research is guided by the following questions.

How does sologamy contradict conventional legal definitions of marriage under Indian law? Which constitutional precepts, if any, lend credence to the idea that self-marriage is a sign of personal autonomy? What does the media's and society's perception of sologamy tell us about changing ideas of identity and selfhood? By tackling these issues, the study hopes to advance

² FLAVIA AGNES, *LAW AND GENDER INEQUALITY: THE POLITICS OF WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN INDIA* (Oxford Univ. Press 1999).

³ Hindu Marriage Act, No. 25 of 1955, India Code (1955); Special Marriage Act, No. 43 of 1954, India Code (1954)

⁴ INDIA CONST. art. 21.

new research on nontraditional intimate behaviours and how they relate to autonomy, culture, and the law.

METHODOLOGY

This study examines the socio-legal aspects of sologamy and how it defies traditional marital rules using a qualitative, multidisciplinary technique.⁵ The study's main focus is doctrinal, entailing a careful examination of Indian legal frameworks like the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955, and the Special Marriage Act, 1954, as well as Article 21 constitutional provisions that protect individual freedom and self-determination.⁶ To determine whether sologamy, although not being legally recognised, receives implicit support within broader constitutional interpretations, landmark rulings extending the extent of intimate rights are analysed.

The research uses secondary sources, including peer-reviewed journals, legal commentary, and academic materials retrieved through SCC Online, Manupatra, and SCOPUS, to place sologamy within changing cultural narratives. The writings of Rochona Majumdar, Archana Parashar, and Flavia Agnes offer important perspectives on gender, identity, and the symbolic meaning of marriage⁷. In countries like the US, Japan, and Brazil, where self-marriage has become more popular, a comparative legal lens is used to provide a more nuanced picture of how it is seen and treated by the law globally.

In order to capture public opinion and the cultural framing of sologamy, the methodology also incorporates media discourse analysis. To track how self-marriage is portrayed, whether as spectacle, escapism, or empowerment, news stories, interviews, memes, and social media narratives are examined. By integrating doctrinal research, comparative analysis, and cultural discourse, this triangulated method guarantees a multi-layered examination of sologamy as a legal aberration and a reflection of evolving ideas of autonomy and selfhood. To maintain academic integrity and consistency, all handwritten literature reviews and source summaries are kept in research notebooks and cross-referenced with the typed draft.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

⁵ RONALD DWORKIN, *LAW'S EMPIRE* (Harvard Univ. Press 1986).

⁶ Hindu Marriage Act, *supra* note 3; Special Marriage Act, *supra* note 3.

⁷ Agnes, *supra* note 2; Archana Parashar, *Women and Family Law Reform in India*, 11 INDIAN J. GENDER STUD. 1 (2004).

The goal of the study is to determine whether the practice of self-marriage, in spite of its lack of official legal recognition, is consistent with Indian law's evolving constitutional values of autonomy, dignity, and intimate choice. Examining sologamy as a new socio-legal phenomenon that questions conventional ideas of marriage, intimacy, and legal personhood is the main goal of this study. It also seeks to investigate how media narratives, feminist jurisprudence, and comparative international viewpoints construct sologamy as a cultural spectacle or as a means of personal empowerment.

This research's contribution to current Indian legal scholarship on non-normative forms of intimacy is what makes it significant. There is little room for the analysis of symbolic and performative manifestations of self-defined commitment in the current legal discourse, which primarily conceptualizes marriage as a bilateral institution based on reciprocity, enforceable obligations, and family-centric norms. This paper emphasizes the conceptual shortcomings of current family law frameworks in addressing new practices of identity and autonomy by placing sologamy within constitutional jurisprudence, feminist legal theory, and cultural discourse. The study emphasizes sologamy's significance as a cultural practice that reflects broader changes in how autonomy, dignity, and personal choice are understood in modern society, rather than arguing for its legal recognition.

ANALYSIS

Doctrinal Gap: Why sologamy cannot qualify as marriage in law

Due to its failure to meet the doctrinal prerequisites of marriage under Indian law, sologamy presents the first and most evident obstacle to its inclusion in the legal framework. Marriage is explicitly considered to be a bilateral connection between "two persons" by both the Hindu Marriage Act of 1955 and the Special Marriage Act of 1954.⁸ The laws govern cohabitation, maintenance, succession, and divorce procedures, rights, and duties that inherently need reciprocity. Sologamy, on the other hand, is a unilateral act in which a person commits to himself symbolically. Since no reciprocal legal obligations may be imposed against the self, self-marriage cannot be a legally recognised marriage under Indian law, according to strictly doctrinal reasoning.

⁸ Hindu Marriage Act, *supra* note 3; Special Marriage Act, *supra* note 3.

Contract theory supports this restriction even more. The statutory form of marriage in India contains fundamental contractual features like mutuality, consent, and capacity, even if it is not legally contractual under Hindu law.⁹ According to traditional contract law, two separate parties must make an offer and accept it, backed by consideration, for an agreement to be enforceable. This structure is destroyed by a unilateral act of self-marriage, making it null and void. This explains why, despite sologamy's cultural significance in countries like the US, Japan, and Brazil, no jurisdiction in the world has recognised it as a legitimate marriage. Therefore, the doctrinal gap emphasises the conflict between a cultural understanding of marriage as a performative ritual of commitment and a purely legal understanding of marriage as bilateral.

Sologamy and Constitutional values of autonomy and dignity

Sologamy aligns with the fundamental principles that support the right to autonomy and dignity, even though it is not legally recognised as marriage. When read broadly, Article 21 of the Constitution safeguards not only life and liberty but also the private decisions that make up an individual's identity. In *Justice K.S. Puttaswamy v. Union of India* (2017), the Supreme Court recognised privacy as fundamental to dignity, signalling a constitutional shift in favour of defending personal autonomy.¹⁰ In a similar vein, the decriminalisation of same-sex relationships in *Navtej Singh Johar v. Union of India* (2018) upheld the constitutional protection of intimate relationships from governmental meddling¹¹. Lastly, the Court upheld adult women's freedom to select their life mates in *Shafin Jahan v. Asokan K.M.* (2018).¹²

In this legal framework, sologamy may be viewed more as a form of self-expression that resonates with the constitution than as a legal institution. Although it cannot be recognised as "marriage," it represents the freedom of the individual to specify the conditions of their own emotional commitments. According to this viewpoint, sologamy is consistent with the Supreme Court's dignity-based reasoning, which upholds the right to intimate self-fulfilment and identity expression without interference from the government. This suggests that self-marriage cannot be written off as a culturally pointless behaviour, but it does not imply that courts should or would recognise it as a legally binding partnership. Rather, it is a component of India's wider

⁹ Indian Contract Act, No. 9 of 1872, § 10, India Code (1872).

¹⁰ *Justice K.S. Puttaswamy (Retd.) v. Union of India* (2017) 10 SCC 1 (India).

¹¹ *Navtej Singh Johar v. Union of India* (2018) 10 SCC 1 (India).

¹² *Shafin Jahan v. Asokan K.M.* (2018) 16 SCC 368 (India).

development of constitutional liberty, which recognises various forms of intimacy even outside of frameworks governed by the state.

Empowerment vs. Escapism: A Socio-Legal Debate

There is intense debate over the socio-legal definition of sologamy, with viewpoints ranging from escapism to empowerment. Sologamy can be viewed as a radical rejection of patriarchal marital rules from a feminist jurisprudential perspective. According to Judith Butler's performativity theory, self-marriage is a symbolic act in which people reclaim marital customs to validate their own identities outside of their partners.¹³ According to Martha Nussbaum's capabilities perspective, self-marriage allows people to thrive with dignity and self-worth by expressing emotional autonomy. For women who defy family pressure to be married or for those who want to reclaim intimacy on their own terms, sologamy may be empowering in this way.¹⁴

However, issues of escapism and commercialisation are also brought up by sologamy. Critics contend that rather than being a genuine form of resistance, rituals of commitment are reframed as acts of self-commodification, reflecting neoliberal consumer society. This change is best illustrated by the emergence of "solo wedding packages" in Japan, where weddings are promoted and used as lifestyle items. This perspective casts question on whether sologamy actually challenges patriarchal norms or only rebrands them within consumer-driven logics of identity-making, as empowerment and consumption are inextricably linked.

This tension is further demonstrated in the Indian setting. Instead of being a true act of feminist rebellion, Kshama Bindu's 2022 self-marriage was reduced to a quirky novelty by the media circus surrounding it. The idea that sologamy operates inside a culture of spectacle was reinforced by popular reportage, which frequently sensationalised the act rather than addressing its deeper symbolic implications. Such depictions show how commodification can eclipse resistance and run the risk of trivialising a potentially transformational assertion of autonomy.

Sologamy is positioned within a discourse of loneliness, generational transitions, and societal disengagement from traditional commitments in another line of criticism. According to others,

¹³ JUDITH BUTLER, *GENDER TROUBLE: FEMINISM AND THE SUBVERSION OF IDENTITY* (Routledge 1990).

¹⁴ MARTHA C. NUSSBAUM, *WOMEN AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT: THE CAPABILITIES APPROACH* (Cambridge Univ. Press 2000).

the custom represents a generation that is becoming more and more estranged from the conventional institutions of marriage and the family. Sologamy could be interpreted as a rejection of social norms rather than an embracing of self-determination in India, where there is still a lot of familial pressure to get married. According to commentators, this rejection occasionally reflects underlying fears about intimacy, divorce, and the brittleness of committed relationships in a culture that is changing quickly. Therefore, escapist interpretations emphasise disengagement and retreat from relationship commitments, whereas empowerment narratives emphasise agency and autonomy.

Sologamy ultimately reflects a socio-legal conflict between autonomy and commodification, between rebellion and retreat. It is a feminist act that shows how people, especially women, may take back rituals of commitment in ways that suit them. It runs the risk of turning intimacy into just another consumer spectacle as a neoliberal product. Although Indian constitutional doctrine offers a framework for validating autonomy, it is still unclear whether sologamy should continue to be a symbolic cultural practice or become a topic of legal acknowledgement. The argument highlights the larger difficulty of striking a balance between individual liberty and social expectations, as well as the question of whether the law should change to accommodate new ways of defining oneself or stick to established ideas of marriage.

Cultural Spectacle and Media Representation

The emergence of sologamy is arguably most evident in media debate. Kshama Bindu's self-marriage in Gujarat in 2022 received a lot of media attention and went viral on social media.¹⁵ The divisive responses, condemnation by conservative politicians, and joy by feminist pundits showcase the societal discomfort with self-marriage. Sologamy is frequently trivialised in the media as novelty or spectacle, with an emphasis on its entertainment value rather than its symbolic defiance of conventional standards. Its deeper socio-legal ramifications are undermined by memes and viral criticism that draw attention to its peculiarities.

Comparative viewpoints reveal comparable dynamics. In the US, self-marriage rituals are often depicted as feminist affirmations of autonomy, but they are also sensationalised in the media.¹⁶

¹⁵ Photos: *Kshama Bindu Marries Herself in Gujarat's First 'Sologamy'*, TIMES OF INDIA (June 9, 2022), <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/vadodara/photos-kshama-bindu-marries-herself-in-gujarats-first-sologamy/photostory/92100469.cms>.

¹⁶ Erika Anderson, *I Married Myself*, N.Y. TIMES (Mar. 25, 2017).

The spectacle of a bride performing without a companion is the lifeblood of the solo wedding industry in Japan, which commodifies empowerment for consumer consumption. Celebrity self-marriages in Brazil highlight how media, entertainment, and cultural criticism are combined¹⁷. These instances show a common pattern: culture accepts sologamy as a symbolic performance, even though the law does not acknowledge it. Because it directly questions the sanctity of marriage as a pillar of social life, this cultural absorption is most noticeable in India. As a result, sologamy's legal invisibility and cultural prominence coexist, highlighting the widening gap between how society and the law define intimacy.

FINDINGS

The research shows that the Indian marriage law's current statutory structure does not allow for sologamy. The Special Marriage Act of 1954 and the Hindu Marriage Act of 1955 both describe marriage as a relationship between two people, assuming reciprocity and obligations on both sides. In terms of contract law as well, self-marriage is void ab initio where there is no offer, acceptance, and consideration between separate parties. Even while sologamy is becoming more and more popular, no jurisdiction in the world recognises it as a legitimate marriage because of this doctrinal restriction. Legally speaking, sologamy is still beyond the purview of legally binding partnerships, whilst marriage is still regarded as a bilateral institution.

The practice also symbolically aligns with the autonomy, dignity, and identity ideals found in the Constitution. Intimate and self-defining decisions have been gradually added to Article 21 by landmark decisions, including *Shafin Jahan v. Asokan K.M.*¹⁸, *Navtej Singh Johar v. Union of India*¹⁹, and *Justice K.S. Puttaswamy v. Union of India*.²⁰ Sologamy reflects the spirit of this jurisprudence by enabling people to rethink commitment without outside approval, even though it has no legal standing. The act can be viewed as a performative assertion of selfhood from a feminist standpoint, mirroring Butler's idea that identity is formed via repeated acts and Nussbaum's focus on emotional autonomy as essential to human flourishing. However, the practice is also vulnerable to commodification, as seen by the solo wedding market in Japan and media representations in the West, where consumer spectacle frequently coexists with empowerment.

¹⁷ Yuko Ogasawara, *Solo Weddings and Changing Intimacy Norms in Japan*, 45 J. CONTEMP. SOC. 67 (2019).

¹⁸ Shafin Jahan, *supra* note 12.

¹⁹ Navtej Singh Johar, *supra* note 11.

²⁰ K.S. Puttaswamy, *supra* note 10.

Sologamy has mostly arisen in India due to cultural prominence rather than official legal sanction, as demonstrated by Kshama Bindu's 2022 self-marriage. The polarisation surrounding non-normative intimacy is highlighted by media reactions, which range from conservative outrage to feminist jubilation. The practice is frequently sensationalised in coverage, trivialising its symbolic connotations. However, its increasing popularity points to a more significant change in the way that intimacy, independence, and the validity of relationships are perceived. These changes show a growing divide between society, which is experimenting with new forms of intimacy and identification, and the law, which still favours bilateral marriage. As a cultural practice, sologamy represents the constitutional values of autonomy and dignity, even if it is not a legal category. It also critiques the inflexibility of current family law and poses significant issues for future legal change.

CONCLUSION

This study has looked at sologamy as a practice that challenges accepted notions of autonomy, marriage, and the law. According to the research, self-marriage is illegal in India because of statutory frameworks like the Hindu Marriage Act of 1955 and the Special Marriage Act of 1954, which assume reciprocity and mutual obligations between two different people. Such a union is null and void from a contractual standpoint as well because there are no two parties involved. Although this doctrinal conclusion is obvious, sologamy's social and constitutional aspects show that the phenomena cannot be written off as unrelated to legal discussion.

Rather, sologamy represents a symbolic connection with the autonomy, dignity, and self-determination qualities found in the constitution. This study has demonstrated that the practice serves more as a performative assertion of selfhood than as a legal category by referencing feminist jurisprudence and comparative viewpoints. Its prominence in India, especially as a result of Kshama Bindu's much-reported ceremony, illustrates broader changes in the way that intimacy and relational legitimacy are viewed in a culture that is balancing tradition and individual liberty. Sologamy also highlights how autonomy is both celebrated and devoured in global cultural economies, exposing the conflict between commodification and empowerment on a worldwide scale.

In legal academia, this research makes a contribution by redefining sologamy as a cultural activity that challenges the boundaries of the law, rather than as a need for statutory codification. The study illustrates how self-marriage compels us to reconsider long-standing dichotomies between the person and community, autonomy and obligation, legality and symbolism, by integrating theological exclusion with constitutional ideals and feminist philosophy. Future research could examine whether the law should continue to be based on bilateral marriage models or change to acknowledge non-traditional forms of intimacy and identification. For the time being, sologamy's importance comes from its ability to rethink what it means to commit, fit in, and exercise autonomy in modern society rather than from its enforceability.

