

ہمسفر میریج کونسلنگ سیل

HUMSAFAR

MARRIAGE COUNSELLING CELL

**MEDIA
REFLECTIONS**

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ہمسفر کی طرف سے شہر میں تین سادہ شادیاں انجام
 ہمسفر میریج کونسلنگ سیل کا کسٹمر کی طرف سے شادیوں کے بارے میں
 چلائے جا رہے ہیں اصلاحی پروگرام کے تحت شہر سرینگر میں کل 23 ستمبر جمعرات کو تین
 سادہ شادیاں انجام دی گئیں۔ پہلی شادی فیضان احمد نقشبندی (نواکدل) کی محترمہ سینہ
 عزیز شیخ صاحبہ (شالہ ٹینگ) کے ساتھ دوسری شادی آفتاب احمد آپچھکوٹی (نورباغ)
 کی محترمہ زبیدہ وانی (بٹہ مالو) کے ساتھ اور تیسری شادی عنایت نبی
 ڈار (حول) کی محترمہ مصباح تجلی ڈار (حیدر پورہ) کے ساتھ انجام دی گئی۔ ان
 شادیوں کے مہر موقع پر ہی نقد ادا کئے گئے۔ اسراف، دکھاوا، بارات، بے پردگی،
 آتش بازی اور ناجائز لین دین سے بچتے ہوئے انجام دی گئیں ان تینوں شادیوں کی
 نکاح مجلسوں میں شرکت کرنے والے کئی لوگوں نے ہمسفر کے زعماءوں سے یہ عہد
 کیا کہ وہ اپنی اولاد کے نکاح اور شادیاں سادگی کے ساتھ اور بغیر کسی بری رسم کے
 انجام دیں گے۔ یہ نکاح ادارہ کے چیئرمین فیاض احمد زرو نے مسجد میں پڑھا دیئے۔

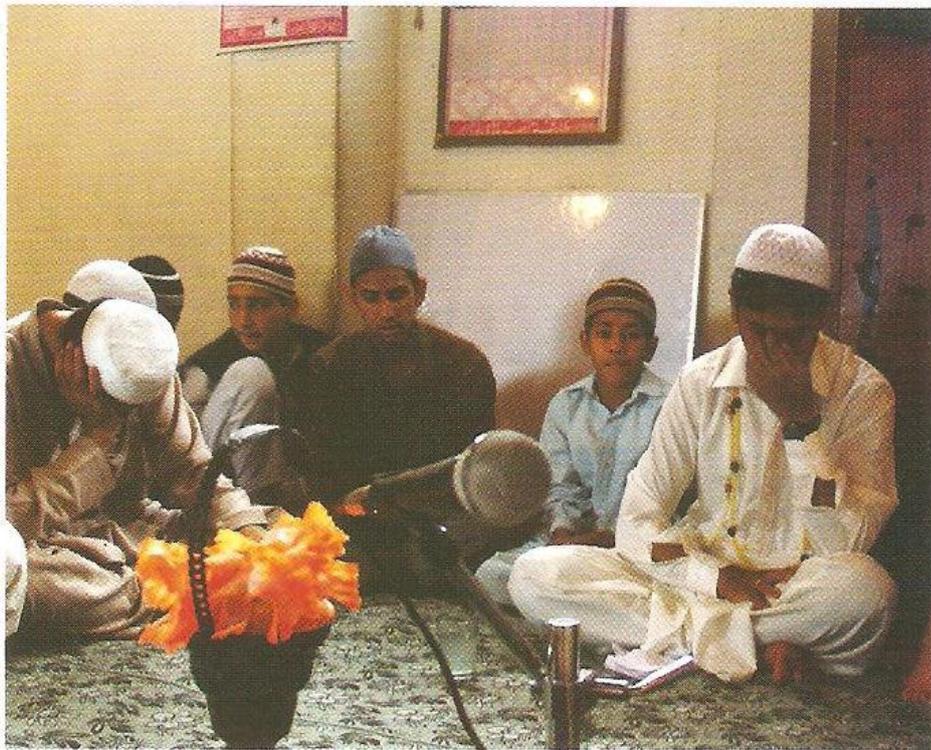
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CONVEYOR

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thanks to Humsafar Marriage Council





Humsafar Marriage Council's head Fayaz Ahmad Zaroo delivers a nikah sermon. Since its establishment in July 2005, more than 500 marriages have been solemnised through Humsafar, while around 5,000 eligible grooms and brides, who have avowed to marry in accordance with Islamic teachings, stand registered with it

Photo: Yasir Iqbal



SOCIETY

HUMSAFAR IN THE VALLEY OF SINGLES

Simple weddings gain ground in Kashmir, thanks to Humsafar Marriage Council

BY UMAR SULTAN

For Mukhtar Ahmad Zargar, 35, the thought of getting married would always be followed with disquiet. Tying the knot was not a big problem for this 31-year-old cosmetics dealer from Chattabal area of Srinagar, but that his marriage ceremony, if conducted as per tradition, will set a precedent of pomp and show for his six younger siblings would always put him at his wits end.

"My worry was that it will take us decades to accrue enough money to marry off my three brothers and three sisters, all in their late twenties," he says.

It was amid this disquiet that Mukhtar was introduced by a friend to Humsafar Marriage Council, a Muslim matrimonial organisation. After two months of listing himself at the Humsafar, Mukhtar found a suitable match in Fareeda Khan of Hawal area.

In August 2007, the couple got married under the

supervision of Humsafar (meaning companion), away from the splendid ceremony and pricey rituals. The ceremony cost Mukhtar less than one hundred thousand rupees; it included 'mehr' (the amount paid by the groom to the bride) of Rs 50,000, and the cost of 'walima' (a feast thrown by the groom at his home a day after the arrival of the bride).

Around three years into the wedding, Mukhtar and Fareeda find themselves deliriously happy with their one-and-half-year-old son. Mukhtar's sister was also married in the same manner a few months later, while his two other sisters are scheduled to get hitched this year. Fareeda's sister has too decided to go the Humsafar way.

Indeed, couples like Mukhtar and Fareeda are very few in a place where people love to spend lavishly on marriages. In early '90s, when death made the only news in the Valley, a temporary halt was put on the ostentatious marriage ceremonies. As the violence started to decline gradually however, the olden days of extravagant marriage ceremonies returned with traditional enthusiasm. And this brought on the self-imposed burden of spending beyond ones means. The wedding industry, according to many estimates, is worth around Rs 10,000 crore. Most of the spending is on the traditional feast, wazwan, which often consists of 10-15 mutton dishes.

As marriages became more and more expensive, they got delayed. Until the early '90s, most Kashmiri girls would get married at 20. Now the average marrying age for women is 27, while in men it has surged from 24 to 32 years, according to a recent study by Sociology Department of Kashmir University. "Singlehood is one of the worst fallouts of the ongoing conflict in the Valley," says well-known sociologist Prof Bashir Ahmad Dabla, who supervised the study that was conducted among 1,500 people in 10 districts of the Valley.

Says Shahzada Saleem, a research scholar in the KU's Sociology Department, "The number of single men and women in Kashmir has gone up to 65 per cent. They comprise 45 per cent females and 20 per cent males."

Understandably, singlehood has given rise to pre-marital sex and mental depression in the Valley, as suggested by Prof Dabla's study. Around 16 per cent of those surveyed said they engaged in pre-marital sex because of late marriages while 24 per cent said their

single status led to depression.

"The changes in the institution of marriage led to the emergence of many social evils in Kashmir. Some began to opt for court marriages while many indulged in adultery," Humsafar's 43-year-old director Fayaz Ahmad Zaroo told *Conveyor* in his Kaka Sarai, Srinagar office.

Since its establishment in July 2005, more than 500 marriages have been solemnised through Humsafar. Says Zaroo, "Around 5,000 eligible grooms and brides stand registered with Humsafar who have avowed to marry in accordance with Islamic teachings."

The process under Humsafar, whose activities are supervised by the Islamic Dawah Centre, a donation-funded institute run by a group of local Islamic scholars, starts with a registration fee of Rs 400. The parties are asked to submit their complete profile, with the consent of their families. When the choice of the two parties matches, they are informed about each other and asked to verify on their own if they find it suitable to tie a knot. If the parties agree mutually, Humsafar finalises the date of 'nikah' and the amount of 'mehr,' of course, with the consent of parties. The 'mehr' is paid at the time of 'nikah' whether in cash or in kind.

"We strictly monitor and control the marriages of our clients from the begin-

Knotty situation

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ning till the bride arrives at the house of her husband," says Zaroo. "And we don't allow rituals which are not allowed in the Shari'a."

The council also ensures that the two families do not exchange any cash or item without informing it. "We don't even allow visits to each other's family without our prior information," says Fayaz. "We take care that if any item is presented to bride or bridegroom by their would-be-in-laws, it shouldn't become a liability for the other to repay. Gifts are allowed but they are not to be reciprocated necessarily."

After performing simple 'nikah' ceremony, Humsafar does not allow any extravagant feast other than simple 'walima.' The Humsafar also conducts counselling for aspiring couples and their families and teaches them about their rights and duties before and after marriage. "We receive at least one registration a day, sometimes it even exceeds a dozen," says Zaroo.

Zaroo attributes the growing corruption in the society to people's propensity to engage in unnecessary customs. "When people feel they cannot meet the expenses of prevalent customs, they turn to 'haram' (prohibited) means of earning," he says.

"Marriage is an occasion to celebrate and not to turn us into paupers. Let's make it simple." ■