

Marriage

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Marriage

Marriage is one of the universal social institutions. It is established by the human society to control and regulate the sex life of man. It is closely connected with the institution of family.

In fact, family and marriage are complementary to each other.

As Gillin and Gillin have said, “Marriage is a socially approved way of establishing a family of procreation”.

As Westermarck has remarked, “Marriage is rooted in the family rather than the family in the marriage”.

Marriage is an institution of society which can have very different implications in different cultures.

Its purposes, functions and forms may differ from society to society, but it is present everywhere as an institution.

Definition and Characteristics of Marriage

Definition of Marriage

There is no definition which adequately covers all types of human marriage. It has given a number of definitions and explanations among which the following may be noted.

1. Edward Westermarck in his “History of Human Marriage” defines marriage as “the more or less durable connection between male and female lasting beyond the mere act of propagation till after the birth of offspring”.
2. Malinowski says that marriage is a “contract for the production and maintenance of children”.
3. According to Robert H. Lawie, “Marriage is a relatively permanent bond between permissible mates”.

4. Broadly speaking, however, marriage may be defined as “a socially sanctioned sex relationship involving two or more people of the opposite sex, whose relationship is expected to endure beyond the time required for gestation and the birth of children”. -Dunchan Mitchell’s “A dictionary of Sociology”.

5. Alfred McClung Lee writes, “Marriage is the public joining together, under specified regulations of a man and woman as husband and wife”.

Characteristics of Marriage

1. Universality: Marriage is more or less a universal institution. It is found among the preliterate as well as literate peoples. It is enforced as a social rule in some of the societies.

Examples: In Japan, celibacy is publicly condemned. In Korea, unmarried individuals are called 'half' persons.

Among the Hindus, marriage is a sacrament which is regarded as more or less obligatory.

The Todas of Nilagari refuse to perform funeral rites for a girl if she dies before her marriage. But they do perform it after completing some sort of marriage ceremony for the corpse.

According to the Chinese philosopher Confucius, an individual who remains unmarried throughout his life commits a great crime. As Levi-Strauss has observed that the unmarried primitives of Central Brazil are made to lead a miserable life.

2. Relationship between man and woman: Marriage is a union of man and woman. It indicates relationship between one or more men to one or more women.

Who should marry whom? One should marry how many?-are the questions which represent social rules regarding marriage which differ significantly.

3. Marriage bond is enduring: Marriage indicates a long lasting bond between the husband and wife. Hence it is not coextensive with sex life.

It excludes relationships with prostitutes or any other sexual relationship which is viewed as casual and not sanctioned by custom, law or church.

Marital relationship between man and woman lasts even after the sexual satisfaction is obtained.

The Hindus, for example, believe that marriage is a sacred bond between the husband and wife which even the death cannot break.

4. Marriage requires social approval: A union of man and woman becomes a marital bond only when the society gives its approval.

When marriage is given the hallmark of social approval, it becomes a legal contract.

5. Marriage is associated with some civil or religious ceremony: Marriage gets its social recognition through some ceremony.

This ceremony may have its own rites, rituals, customs, formalities, etc. It means marriage has to be concluded in a public and solemn manner.

Sometimes it receives as a sacrament the blessings of religion. Marriage among the Hindus, for example, is regarded as a sacrament. It is connected with rituals such as-Homa, Saptapadi, Panigrahana, Mangalya Dharana, etc.

6. Marriage creates mutual obligations:

Marriage imposes certain rights and duties on both the husband and wife. Both are required to support each other and their children.

FUNCTIONS AND IMPORTANCE OF MARRIAGE

The importance of marriage consists in the functions that it performs. The main functions of marriage are as follows:

1. Regulation of sex life: Marriage is the powerful instrument of regulating the sex life of man. Sexual impulse is powerful in man.

He is exposed to its influence throughout his life. It is an urgent and an irresistible need of man. It has to be controlled and regulated in a proper manner to avoid chaos and confusion in society.

Marriage has come to be such a regulative means. Hence marriage is often called the licence for sex life.

Marriage regulates sex relations also. It prohibits sex relations between the closest relatives, that is, between father and daughter, mother and son, brother and sister, etc.

Such a kind of prohibition is called "incest taboo". Marriage also puts restrictions on the premarital and extra marital sex relations.

2. Marriage leads to the establishment of the family:

Sexual satisfaction offered by marriage results in self-perpetuation It means marriage insists on the couple to establish a family of procreation. It is here the children are born and bred up. It is the marriage which determines the descent of the new born individual. Inheritance and succession follow the rule of descent.

3. Provides for economic cooperation: Marriage makes division of labour possible on the basis of sex. Partners of marriage distribute and divide work among themselves and perform them.

In some of the primitive tribes we find a clear-cut division of work between the husband and wife. Even in the modern industrial societies, we find husband and wife working outside the family to get more income to elevate their economic status.

4. Marriage contributes to emotional and intellectual interstimulation of the partners:

Marriage brings life-partners together and helps them to develop intense love and affection towards each other.

It deepens the emotions and strengthens the companionship between the two. It also helps them to develop intellectual cooperation between them.

5. Marriage aims at social solidarity: Marriage not only brings two individuals of the opposite sex together but also their respective families, groups and kindreds. Friendship between groups is reinforced through marriage.

It is often suggested that by encouraging marriage between different groups, castes, races, classes, religious, linguistic and other communities, it is possible to minimise the social distance between groups and strengthen their solidarity.

FORMS OF MARRIAGE

The main forms of marriage are: Polygyny, Polyandry, Monogamy, and Group Marriage. Each of these types may analysed here.

Polygyny

Polygyny is a form of marriage in which one man marries more than one woman at a given time. Polygyny is more popular than polyandry but not as universal as monogamy.

It was in practice in most of the ancient civilisations. It prevailed among the ancient Hebrews, Assyrians, Babylonians, Indians and others.

At present, it is widespread among primitive tribes but it is often simply confined to the wealthier classes.

Polygyny is in practice among the Eskimo tribes, Crow Indians, Hidatsa of North America, African Negroes, the Nagas, Gonds and Baigas of India. However, it is permitted in Muslim Community.

Types of Polygyny

Polygyny is of two types:

1. Sororal Polygyny and
2. Non-Sororal Polygyny.

1. Sororal Polygyny is a type of marriage in which the wives are invariably the sisters. It is often called 'sororate'. The Latin word 'Soror' stands for sister.

When several sisters are simultaneously, or potentially the spouses of the same man, the practice is called 'sororate'.

It is usually observed among the tribes which pay a high bride price.

The death of the wife or her childlessness is compensated by supplying a new spouse who is generally the younger sister of the deceased woman.

2. Non-Sororal Polygyny as the term indicates, is a type of marriage in which the wives are not related as sisters.

For social, economic, political and other reasons, both the types are practised by some people.

Causes of Polygyny

Sociologists and anthropologists have made several studies to find out the causes of polygyny. Some of the factors mentioned by them are as follows:

1. More women less men: Polygyny becomes a natural practice whenever there is an excess of females over males.

Even though the balance of sex ratio is normally maintained, it is likely to be upset for some reason or the other.

Such a situation makes the members to practise either polygyny or polyandry if they want to have legitimate sex life.

Plains Indians and Eskimos, for example, practise polygyny due to the imbalance in the sex-ratio.

2. Economic advantage: Some of the African tribes (Ex: Longos and the Thongas) practise polygyny for economic reasons. In the tribes women contribute to the family income by various means.

Sometimes the first wife compels the husband to go for second marriage so that she can reduce her load of work at home.

3. Women as badges of distinction: Among some tribals, a man's social status is often measured in terms of the number of wives that he has.

Greater the number of women greater is the prestige. Early Kings used to marry many more women for this reason also.

4. Childlessness of the first wife: Barrenness on the part of the first wife is also the cause of polygyny.

The childless Wife herself may insist on the husband to go for the second marriage.

5. Constancy of sex urge in man: Unlike the woman, man is susceptible to sex stimulation throughout the year.

Polygyny provides him opportunity to enjoy sex life throughout the year.

6. Other factors: In addition to the above, the following factors also favour polygyny.

(i) Taste for variety. Men go after several women for they have a taste for variety.

(ii) Enforced celibacy. Sex relations with a woman during her menstrual, pregnancy and lactation periods are tabooed. This enforced celibacy is a case in favour of polygyny.

(iii) Earlier ageing of the female. Among some tribes men marry more women because, they believe that ageing is faster in women.

(iv) Desire for more children. The desire for more children on the part of men also supports polygyny. The African 'Guni' and 'Hihi' tribals practise polygyny for this reason.

(v) Captured women in wars and fights are normally taken and enjoyed by the victorious men as their additional wives.

(vi) Men may also marry more women to establish their masculinity.

Polyandry

Polyandry is the marriage of one woman with several men. It is much less common than polygyny. It is practised among the Tibetans, Marquesan Islanders of Polynesia, the Bahama of Africa, the tribals of Samoa and others.

In India, the tribes such as Tiyan, the Toda, the Kata, the Khasa and Ladakhi Bota also practise polyandry. The Nairs of Kerala were polyandrous previously.

Types of Polyandry

Polyandry is of two types. 1. Fraternal Polyandry, and 2. Non-Fraternal Polyandry.

1. Fraternal polyandry: When several brothers share the same wife, the practice can be called alephic or fraternal polyandry. This practice of being mate, actual or potential, to one's husband's brothers is called "levirate." It is prevalent among the Todas.

2. Non-fraternal polyandry: In this type, the husbands need not have any close relationship prior to the marriage. The wife goes to spend some time with each husband. So long as a woman lives with one of her husbands, the others have no claim over her. Nair polyandry was of this type.

Tibetans too have this type. Both these types of polyandry must be distinguished from "wife-sharing" or "wife-lending", which is much more common among the primitive But in all cases it is temporary.

Causes of Polyandry

No universal generalisations can be made with regards to the causes of polyandry. Still factors such as scarcity of women, the desire to keep the property intact, heavy bride price, poverty and the sterility of men, etc., are favourable to polyandry though not always.

The Todas of India used to practise female infanticide prior to the British influence. This led to a surplus of males and naturally to polyandry.

For the same reason the Marquesan Islanders practise polyandry. Still, in Ladakh polyandry was practised even though women outnumbered men there.

Polyandry is often practised due to poverty and heavy bride price. Poor young men who are not capable of paying the bride price and maintaining the wife individually often marry a woman collectively.

Still, in some instances, even the rich people practised polyandry. Among the Toda, property considerations and sex-parity have also caused polyandry. The Tibetans practised polyandry in order to keep the joint property intact.

Social Implications of Polyandry

Polyandry has its own implications. It gives rise to the problem of determining biological paternity of the child. But the primitives have their own social methods of determining the fatherhood of the child.

Such kind of fatherhood is known as "sociological fatherhood".

Among the Polyandrian Todas, one of the husbands goes through what is called a "bow-and-arrow" ceremony with the woman and thereby becomes the legal father of her child.

He continues to be called the father of the children born to her till the other husband(s) goes through the same ceremony.

Among the Samoa, the children after the first few years are given the liberty to choose their parents for their permanent stay.

The selected parent becomes the actual father of the children. If they feel that they are not treated properly they may move on to others.

Polyandry is said to be an adjustment with poverty. It tends to keep the birth-rate at a low level even by providing sexual satisfaction to all.

Hence, it tends to have an adverse effect on the growth of population.

The practice of polyandry requires good understanding between the wife and the husbands on the one hand and among the husbands themselves.

It may also lead to extra-marital and pre-marital sex relations. The polyandrous Khasa wife has to follow the norms of marriage. But her unmarried daughter can freely mix with visitors at home.

It is to be noted that polyandry is not the common practice even among the communities where it is permitted.

On the contrary, monogamy is becoming popular everywhere. Polyandry is slowly disappearing.

Monogamy

Monogamy is the form of marriage in which one man marries one woman. This is the most widespread form of marriage found among the primitives as well as the civilised people.

If it was very popular during the early times, it has almost become a universal practice at present.

It is practised among the tribals such as Kadars, Santals, the Khasis, the Canella, the Hopi, the Iroquois, the Andaman Islanders, the Veddas of Ceylon, the Sevangas of Malaya and others.

Monogamy has a long history of its own. Westermarck is of the opinion that monogamy is as old as humanity.

Ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle had recommended only monogamous marriage. Ancient Romans and Spartans also had given recognition to it.

Ancient Jews, Christians and Indians had given importance to it. Ancient Hindus regarded monogamy as the most ideal form of marriage.

Advantages of Monogamy

Monogamy seems to be superior to other forms of marriage. It enjoys certain merits over other forms. Some of them may be noted.

1. Universally practicable: Since there is one-to-one ratio (One-man-to-one-woman) in almost all the societies, only monogamy can provide marital opportunity and satisfaction to all the individuals. Neither polygyny nor polyandry can equally satisfy all.

2. Economically better suited: No man of ordinary income can think of practising polygyny. Only a rich man can maintain a couple of wives and their children. Only monogamy can adjust itself with poverty.

For example, even though Koran permits a Muslim to have four wives at a time, no ordinary Muslim can think of marrying four wives for the simple reason that he cannot maintain them.

3. Promotes better understanding between husband and wife: Monogamy produces the highest type of love and affection between husband and wife. It contributes to family peace, solidarity and happiness.

Vatsayana, an authority on "Kama Sutra" remarked, "At best a man can only please one woman physically, mentally and spiritually. Therefore, the man who enters into marriage relations with more than one woman, voluntarily courts unhappiness and misery".

4. Contributes to stable family and sex life:

Monogamous family is more stable and long-lasting. It is free from conflicts that are commonly found in polyandrous and polygynous families. There is no scope for sexual jealousy also.

Unlike polyandry and polygyny, it does not give opportunity for having extra-marital sex relationship because sex relations are more strictly regulated here. Herbert Spencer has said that monogamy is more stable and the consequent family bond is stronger.

5. Helps to better socialisation: Since husband and wife have better understanding, they can give greater attention to the socialisation of their children.

Children are well looked after and the parents can give their special attention to them. Under polygyny, the husband cannot devote himself fully to each of his wives and children because they are too numerous.

6. Aged parents are not neglected: It is only in monogamy that old parents are protected and looked after properly.

Under polygyny, old wives are often discarded and in their place younger wives are brought in.

7. Provides better status for women: Women are given only a very low position in polygyny. Their rights are never recognised.

They can be divorced at will. But in monogamy, women enjoy better social status. In the modern societies they enjoy almost equal social status with men.

Group Marriage

Theoretically group marriage means the marriage of two or more women with two or more men. But this arrangement is practically rare.

Here the husbands are common husbands and wives are common wives.

Children are regarded as the children of the entire group as a whole.

Children call men of such a group their fathers and all the women their mothers. Some of the tribals in Australia, India, Tibet and Ceylon are believed to have practised group marriage.

Some writers have said that group marriage is not in existence.

If at all it is in practice, it is clubbed with polyandry. For example, two Toda brothers marry two women as their common wives.

It is also said that monogamous or polygynous or polyandrous marriage associated with the practice of concubinage, sexual hospitality or socially tolerated adultery, is mistaken to be group marriage.

Many studies have revealed that the practice of group marriage is almost on the verge of extinction.

Marriage Restrictions or Rules of Marriage

No society gives absolute freedom for its members to select their life-partners. Even in societies where 'free marital choice' is allowed, the selection is not absolute but relative.

Rules regarding "who should marry whom" always govern such a selection. Endogamy and exogamy are the two main rules that condition marital choice.

Endogamy

Endogamy is a rule of marriage in which the life-partners are to be selected within the group. It is marriage within the group, and the group may be caste, class, tribe, race, village, religious group, etc.

Thus, we have caste endogamy, class endogamy, subcaste endogamy, race endogamy, tribal endogamy and such other forms.

Example. In caste endogamy, marriage has to take place within the caste. Brahmin has to marry a Brahmin. In subcaste endogamy, it is limited to the subcaste groups.

Here a Shivalli Brahmin has to marry within Shivalli subcaste, a Gangadiagar Vokkaliga has to marry within his sub-caste group, and so on. Endogamy prohibits marriage outside the group. Even today intercaste marriages are not encouraged:

Factors, such as-the policy of separation, virtual geographic separation of people, the desire to keep wealth Within the group, religious, racial and cultural differences between peoples, sense of superiority or inferiority, etc., are said to be the causes of endogamy.

Endogamy as a rule of marriage has its own advantages. It contributes to the group unity and solidarity. It keeps women happier within their group.

It helps to preserve the property within the group. It also safeguards the purity of the group. Finally, it helps to keep under secret the strength and weakness and also the professional secrets of the group.

Endogamy has its, disadvantages also.

(i) By dividing the society into small endogamous units, it strikes at national unity.

(ii) By limiting the choice of life-partners, it often gives scope for evil practices such as polygyny, dowry system, bride price, etc.

(iii) It may also make its followers to develop hatred and contempt for other groups.

(iv) It is also said that "close-in-breeding caused by endogamy may affect the biological potentiality of the offsprings.

For these disadvantages, endogamy is condemned. The modern civilised people are more in favour of exogamy than endogamy.

Exogamy

Exogamy is almost the opposite of endogamy. Exogamy is a rule of marriage in which an individual has to marry outside his own group. It prohibits marrying within the group.

The rule of exogamy insists that the so-called blood relatives shall neither have marital connections nor sexual contacts among themselves.

Near relatives are not supposed to marry among themselves.

But the degree of nearness differs from community to community.

In Malenesia and Australia among some people, a son may marry his father's wife if she is not direct mother. Similarly, marriage of cousins is allowed among Muslims.

Forms of Exogamy

Exogamy assumes various forms in India.

- 1. Gotra exogamy:** The Hindu practice of one marrying outside one's own 'gotra' is gotra exogamy.
- 2. Pravara exogamy:** Those who belong to the same pravara (uttering the name of a common saint at religious functions) cannot marry among themselves.

3. Village exogamy: Many Indian tribes (Example: Naga, Garo, Mundal have the practice of marrying outside their village.

4. Pinda exogamy: Those who belong to the same 'Pinda' (or sapinda) cannot marry Within themselves ('Pinda' means common parentage).

Causes of Exogamy

Various factors must have caused exogamous marriages.

1. The desire on the part of a few to show that they are distinct from others must have encouraged exogamy.

2. Some people feel that they become very cheap and insignificant if they marry within the known circle of relative and friends. Hence, they want to go out of the group to select their life-partners.

3. The practice of female infanticide must have compelled a few tribals to go out of the tribe to find out mates for them. Due to the shortage of girls they are forced to do this. Some used to kidnap girls belonging to other groups.

4. The belief that close in-breeding would affect the biological quality of the offsprings, has also added to the practice of exogamy.

It may be noted that endogamy and exogamy are not mutually exclusive. In some societies both the rules may coexist.

For example, in India both are practised by the caste Hindus. Castes and subcastes are endogamous in nature.

But 'Gotra'-a small unit of subcaste is exogamous. Such rules differ from society to society.

Thank You