UNIT 3   MARRIAGE

Contents

Learning Objectives

After reading this unit, the students should be able to:

➢ define the different rules and types associated with marriage;

➢ outline the various functions of a marriage; and

➢ discuss changing aspects of marriage in the contemporary times.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Marriage is a phenomena found in all types of societies though the pattern of marriage differs in different societies. The first section of the unit would introduce the students to the concept, definition and meaning of marriage, the various types of marraiges that are prevalent in different societies. Herein, we would be able to answer the question as to why marriage rules though not similar among the different societies yet have almost the same functions. With the changing times, marriage too has come under the hammer and the institution itself is going through various changes. These would be discussed in the last section of this unit.

3.2 CONCEPTS, MEANING AND DEFINITIONS

Marriage by most anthropologists has been described as a universal phenomena yet the debate continues as to how marriage came into existence. In the early year's social thinkers and anthropologists basically the followers of the theory of evolutionism were of the opinion that human beings lived in a state of promiscuity where individual marriage did not exist. In such a society all the men had access to all the women and the children thus, born were the responisbility of the society at large. This slowly gave rise to group marriages to bring regulation and general order in the society where either many men were married to several women or sereval men were married to a single woman and vice- versa. However, later in

the day the natural instinct of jealousy imbedded in human beings has been assumed as the reason behind single marriages to restore harmony in a society. So far in the theoretical part Block 3 unit 1 Classical Theories, and also in Block 1 unit 2 Philosophical and Historical Foundations of Social Anthropology, we have discussed that the earlier societies were nomadic and the rule of the age was anarchy, so it is impossible to state exactly where and when marriage first originated. While anthropologists like Bachofen, *Das Mutterrecht* (1861), McLennan *Primitive Marriage* (1865) and others were of the view that society emerged out of mother right, there were others like Sir Henry Maine through his work *Ancient Law,* (1861) postulated that since the emergence of soceity the rule was partiarchy. So far this goes, the debate continues. Leaving this aside let's start with understanding what the term 'marriage' stands for, instead of trying to focus on how marriage originated, through some of the definitions provided by anthropologists who had worked in this field.

George Peter Murdock (1949) has defined marriage as a universal institution that involves residential co-habitation, economic co-operation and the formation of the nuclear family. While Westermarck had emphasised on marriage as a recognised union between a man and a woman, that the spouse live together and that the couple have clearly recognised mutual sexual rights. These definitions could not be considered as universal definition of marriage as it failed to encompass types of marriages such as polygynous and polyandrous marriages. Such definitions also did not take into account marriages where the spouses lived in separate residences and societies where the responsibility of the child lies with the mother's brother rather than with the biological father. These are some of the aspects which we would take up in later part of the unit.

Kathleen Gough (1959) in her study of the Nayars has defined marriage as a 'relationship established between a woman and one or more other persons, which provides that a child born to the woman under circumstances not prohibited by the rules of the relationship, is accorded full birth-status rights common to normal members of his society or social stratum'. This definition of marriage by Gough took into consideration polyandry which was missing in the earlier definitions. While, Edward Westermarck in a later edition of his book, *The History of Human Marraiges,* fifth edition rewritten 1921 due to the criticisms levied redefined marriage as a social institution which may be defined as a relation of one or more men to one or more women that is recognised by custom or law, and involves certain rights and duties both in the case of parties entering the union and in the case of the children born in it. However, among the Azande of Sudan where marraiges based on homosexuality is a prescribed norm it does not find a place in the above definitions of marriage.

William N. Stephens defined marriage as 'a socially legitimate sexual union, begun with public pronouncement undertaken with the idea of permanence, assumed with more or less explicit marriage contract which spells out reciprocal economic obligations between spouses, and their future children'. This definition also fails to take into considertaion the taboos that exist in various societies related to marriage. Thus, for the convinience of anthropological discourse we would refer to the definition of marriage as in Notes and Queries (given below) to understand the types of marriages acceptable and practiced in 80% of the societies across the world. The other forms of marriages would be taken up as variations from the prescribed norm as they are acceptable only in a few societies.

"Marriage is a union between a man and a woman such that the children born to the woman are recognised as legitimate offspring of both partners" (Notes and Queries on Anthropology 1951: 111).

3.2.1 Prescribed and Preferential Marriages

Societies have their own norms when it comes to marriage whom to marry and who is out of bounds. In certain societies there are certain rules of suitability based on which a person has to acquire a mate. While selecting one's mate one has to follow certain rules and choose the bride/groom within these norms. A man/woman might be prohibited from acquiring a mate who does not fall under the suitable category as for example in the Hindu society a woman belonging to a higher caste cannot marry a man belonging to a caste lower than her. Such, rules when strictly followed even though when very few members of the suitable category are available is termed as prescribed norms. The rules which are preferred but not strictly followed are known as preferential norms. Cross cousin marriage in many societies is seen as a preferential norm.

Incest taboo is a universal norm for almost all societies, which pertains to restrictions in marriage and sexual relations among certain categories of close relatives generally related by blood like father and daughter, mother and son and sometimes also parallel cousins. Though, incest taboo was not prevalent among the earlier Greek and the Hawaiian royal families where it was a prescribed norm for marriage. In these ancient royal families it was believed that royalty could only be passed down to the child of two royal family members, usually a brother and sister. The Tallensi of Ghana also does not strongly prescribe to the norm of incest taboo between brother and sister while a relationship between a man and the wife of a lineage mate is an unpardonable sin (Mair, 1997).

The rules of either endogamy or exogamy are also prescribed norms in many societies to which a man has to adhere while acquiring a mate. *Endogamy* refers to marriage within a group, while *exogamy* means marriage outside the group. Endogamy encompasses marriage within the believers of the same faith or religion, caste in Hindu society and within members of the same tribe.

In societies where endogamy is prevalent parallel cousin marriage is the preferential norm. Among such societies marriage between first cousins is permitted, though where the rule of lineage exogamy is practiced cousin belonging to different lineage is preferred. For easy understanding; the children of siblings of opposite sex (brother- sister) - are called *cross-cousins*; while the children of siblings of the same sex (brother-brother) are called *parallel cousins*. In many of the Islamic societies a man marries his father's brother's daughter known as *parallel cousin marriage* which is a very rare form of endogamy. The Kurds of eastern and southeastern Turkey still continue with the practice of parallel cousin marriage.

Cross-cousin marriages are the preferential norm in societies where the rule of exogamy is adhered to. A man's lineage is traced either through his mother's or father's side. If the lineage is traced through the father than marriage with his aunt's (father's sisters) daughter is the preferred norm and when lineage is traced through the mother than the preferred norm for marriage is mother's brother's daughter. When a man marries a daughter of his mother's brother it's a *matrilateral cross-cousin marriage* while if he marries a daughter of his father's sister then it's a *patrilateral cross-cousin marriage*.

Matrilateral cross cousin marriages are common in many of the matrilineal societies like the Kachins and the Purum as described by Edmund Leach in his work '*The Political System of HighLand Burma: A Study of the Kachins Social Structure*' (1970), while Meyer Fortes had described the Ashanti and Tallensi of Ghana. In such societies the rules of descent and authority lies with the mother's brother and as such marriage to his daughter puts an end to all such questions of inheritance, authority and it is a way to avoid conflicts which we would discuss more fully later.

Besides the above mentioned prescribed and preferential marriages, levirate and sororate at times form a prescribed norm for widows and widowers in a few societies. *Levirate* is a marriage form, in which after the decease of an elder brother the younger brother is obliged to marry the widow. The term levirate is derived from the Latin word *levir* meaning husband's brother. This is a type of marriage often seen in societies where exogamy is not prevalent. *Sororate* on the other hand is a practice in which a widower marries's his dead wife's sister.

Reflection and Action

Find out the various preferential and prescribed norms for marriage in your own society and also reflect upon the reasons for the same.

3.2.2 Types of Marriages

Depending on the type of society, the marriage pattern and style also vary. Before going into the depth of the topic let's outline the types of marriages universally found which are (a) Monogamy and (b) Polygamy. ***Monogamy*** is a form of marriage in which the practice is to have only one spouse at one time. In the western world the divorce rate is increasingly higher and serial monogamy is witnessed. ***Serial monogamy*** pertains to a state where a man has a series of wives one after the other, but only one wife at any given point of time. Thus, in the United States where divorce rate is high but only monogamy is legal, serial monogamy is widely noticed. In societies like the Hindu society of India monogamy pertains to ***non-serial monogamy*** where a man has a single wife throughout his life. In such societies the divorce rate is rare and as such it is the preferred norm.

Polygamy is a term derived from the Greek word *polys gamos* meaning often married. It is a form of marriage in which an individual has more than one spouse at any given time, or married to more than one individual. In polygamy when a marriage involves one man with many women it is known as ***polygyny***. The wives of a man if sisters or related then such a marriage is known as *sororal polygyny*. In many of the Islamic countries this practice is prevalent. In some Australian Aboriginal societies, the elder brother often marries the two eldest sisters. While the younger sisters of the wives' would also marry their sisters' husband's younger brother or brothers. This is said to create a clear advantage in power and self-sufficiency in these societies. The Swazi society of Africa practice sororal polygyny. In societies practicising sororal polygyny it is believed that two sisters have better chances of getting along with one another rather than two unrelated women who have not grown up together. It is a resilient approach because sisters are assumed to have less of a competitive approach towards their husband's affection because as sisters they would be more inclined towards maintaining harmony and live in mutual understanding.

The rules of residence in sororal polygyny differ from society to society. In some societies the wives co-habits like among the Zulus of South Africa, while in the Swazi society each wife sets up separate residence. Upon death of a husband, the marriage does not come to an end. A blood relative of the husband assumes full

responsibility of providing domestic, economic, and material support for the women. If the wives of a man are not rleated such a marriage is known as *non-sororal polygyny*. In the Coromo islands non-sororal polygyny is practiced (Madan & Majumdar, Mair et.al).

Polyandry derives its name from the Greek word *poly* 'many' and *andros* 'man'. Thus, in this type of marriage a woman is married to more than one man. Societies where polyandry has been found are Tibet, Canadian Arctic, northern parts of Nepal, Nigeria, Bhutan, parts of India and Sri Lanka. It is also encountered in some regions of Mongolia, among the Mosuo people in China, and in some societies of Sub-Saharan African such as the Maasai people in Kenya and northern Tanzania and American indigenous communities. Polyandry has been practised in several cultures — in the Jaunsar-Bawar region in Uttarakhand, among the Nairs, Theeyas and Todas of South India, and the Nishi of Arunachal Pradesh. Indian examples would be detailed in Unit 5 Kinship, Marriage and Family in India, of the same block. The Guanches, the first known inhabitants of the Canary Islands, practiced polyandry until their disappearance.

Fraternal polyandry refers to a marriage in which a woman is married to two or more brothers also known as *adelphic* polyandry. The term fraternal has its origin in the Latin term frater- 'brother'. Account of Fraternal polyandry in Indian Hindu society is seen in the great epic Mahabharata where the five Pandava brothers were married to princess Draupadi. Polyandry is found in certain regions of Tibet and Nepal as a socially accepted practice.

The type of marriage where a woman is either married to a number of non-related men or related kinsmen (clan brothers) such a marriage is known as *non-fraternal* polyandry. In the recent past the Todas' of southern India practiced both fraternal and non-fraternal polyandry where the husbands were either brothers or related kinsmen but with the changing age monogamy has made inroads into this society and is fast becoming a part. Though among the Nayars of Malabar Coast of Southern India the husbands were not related they had to belong to a social strata equivalent to that of the woman as prescribed by the society. In societies where polyandry is practiced, when a woman becomes pregnant the paternity is not ascribed to the biological father (genitor) but is accepted through a ceremony wherein any one of the brothers as sociological father (pater) can assume social responsibility of the child by paying the midwife, as in the case of the Nayars of Southern India. While in some cases the eldest brother assumes the responsibility of the child in case of fraternal polyandry (Gough 1959, Mair 1997).

When the husbands of a woman are father and son such a marriage is known as *familial polyandry*. It is a very rare form of polyandry and has been found prevalent among the Tibetians. There are many speculations for such a marriage and one of them relates to the small population size of the tibetians and the high altitude in which they live. A wife if taken from other communities who live in the low lands, it becomes difficult for her to adjust to the harsh climatic conditions and as such sharing a wife by father and son is taken up as an option.

Polygynandry another variety of polygamy pertians to a marriage where several men are married to several women or a man has many wives and a woman has many husbands at any given time. Such marriages were prevalent among the Marquesans of Polynesia and also among the Todas of the Nilgiri hills and the Khasas of Jaunsar Bawar of India.

3.2.3 Ways of Acquiring a Mate

Marriage as the term implies has a lot of connotation in different societies. It does not just mean a man finding a girl to be his wife. Even when a man chooses a mate for himself he has to ascribe to the norms of the society while claiming his bride. Herein, we would outline some of the prescribed customs in societies through which a man can acquire a mate.

Marriage by negotiation is a very frequently practised way of acquiring a mate. It is found in most of the simple societies like the Ituri of Congo region in Africa, Siwai of Soloman Islands, the aboriginals of Australia, Andamanese of Andaman Islands and also in complex societies like the Hindu society of India, China, Japan, Europe and America. In such a system either the girl's family or the boy's family (as per the custom) puts forward a propsal for marriage through a thrid party or mediator. This third party is generally someone known to both the would be bride and groom's family. In Indian context it is also known as *arranged marriage*. In earlier times the bride and groom meet each other only during the wedding, but this rigidity is being relaxed now a days. In such a system bride price, bride wealth, dowry also has an important role to play and it is usually a long drawn process where consensus of the bride and groom's family is all done by the mediator.

Bridewealth is usually the compensation given upon marriage by the family of a groom to the bride's family. Varieties of currencies and goods are used for paying the bridewealth depending upon the societies. Mostly the bridewealth is movable property given by the groom's family. For example reindeers are given as bridewealth by the reindeer-herding Chukchee, sheep by the Navajo, cattles by the Nuers, Maasai and Samburu of Africa, spears in Somalia etc. The amount of bridewealth to be paid is based on various factors of which some are related to the status of the broom's family and others on the bride and her social acceptance as prescribed by the society. For example: if a woman has given birth to a pre-nuptial child than her bridewealth is very low whereas among the Kipsigis of western Kenya if the distance of the brides natal home is very far away from the marital home than the bride wealth is very high as she is able to spend less time at her natal home and devote more time to the domestic chores in the husbands home. In some cases if the groom's family is not able to pay the bridewealth than compensation is made in the means of bride service in the form of labour wherein the groom goes to the brides house and helps in the hunting, farming and other related activities. The time span of the bride service varies from society to society and it might last from a few months to several years (Nanda et.al). *Dowry* on the other hand is the transfer of goods and money from the bride's family to the groom's family. Previously a practiced norm in the Hindu society, the tradition of dowry was prohibited in 1961 under Indian civil law and subsequently by Sections 304B and 498a of the Indian Penal Code. The move was made to protect the women from dowry related harassment and domestic violence.

Marriage by exchange also forms a part of the marriage by negotiation system. Herein, such a system the bride price or bride wealth, whichever is applicable to the society, is waived off by marriage through exchange. This happens generally if there are daughters or sisters for exchange for the grooms. This helps in not only forming an alliance but also strengthens the bond between groups. Examples of such excahnge is seen is societies of Australia, Melanesia, Tive of Nigeria and also in the some of the tribes in India- Muria Gonds, Baiga of Bustar and the Koya and the Saora of Andhra Pradesh. (Majumdar 1986, Jha 1994 et.al)

Marriage by service is found among some of the tribes in North East India. Among the Naga's of North East India the bride wealth forms a part of the marriage negotiation and if the groom's party is not able to pay the bride wealth then the compensation is through service. The boy works for the bride's family and only when the brides family is satisfied that the marriage is solemnised.

Marriage by probation invloves the consent of the brides parents alongwith the girls consent wherein the groom stays at the brides place on trial basis. Herein, the groom is allowed to stay with the girl so that they both get to know each others temperament and if the girl likes the boy the marriage takes place, else the boy has to pay compensation in cash to the girl's family. Among the Kukis of Manipur of India such a marriage is a practised norm (ibid).

Marriage by capture is found in many societies. The capture can be a physical capture or a ceremonial one. Among the tribes of Yahomamo of Venezuela, Northern Brazil and the Nagas of Nagaland in India during raids the men from one village capture and take home females of the other village and marry them as wives. Such a situation is ascribed as physical capture. In ceremonial capture a boy desiring to marry a girl propositions her in a community fair or festival and makes his intentions towards her known by either holding her hand or marking her with vermillion as in the case of Kharia and the Birhor of Bihar (ibid).

Marriage by intrusion is a type of marriage wherein a girl forces her way into the boy's house and forces him to accept her as his spouse. Such marriages are seen in Birhor and Ho of Bihar and also among the Kamars of Madhya Pradesh.

Marriage by trial is a process in which the groom has to prove his strength and valour while claiming his bride. In the two great Indian epics Mahabharata and the Ramayana we have examples of how Draupadi and Sita were claimed by Arjuna and Lord Rama after they proved their skills in the *swayamvar* (a gathering where the eligible males are invited to prove their strength to claim the bride). Such marriages by trail are still found in many societies in India and some of the examples are the Bhils of Rajasthan and the Nagas of Nagaland.

Marriage by Elopement is a customary marriage in some societies whereas looked down in others. In societies where a huge amount of wealth is required for the marriage rituals and which is usually difficult for the families to bear in such societies marriage by elopment has come up as a customary practice. Such marriage is quite in vogue among the Karbis of Karbi Anglong district of Assam. In other cases marriage by elopment takes place when either of the prospective groom or bride's family does not approve of the wedding or when marriage is fixed with a distasteful partner. In such a case, the would be bride elopes with the partner of her choice. Such marriage by eleopment is seen in almost all parts of the world (ibid).

3.2.4 Divorce

Divorce is the situation wherein the husband and wife separates and gives up the vows of marriage. It can happen due to many reasons and the most common one is incompatibility of the two partners. Divorce is a situation which can be unpleasant and painful for both the parties as it leads not only to physical separation of two people, but all that has been build up during the time together like family, children and material objects. Divorce is also a universally accepted norm as marriage but still it is looked down in many societies more so in the case of the wife in a patrilineal society.

3.3 FUNCTIONS OF MARRIAGE

Marriage is a sanction for two people to spend their lives together and it has many implications and functions related to it. Some of the functions are mentioned herein.

Biological Function

The most important function of a marriage is to beget children. The society gives recognition to children born out of wedlock and the children thus born are ascribed status as per the norms of the society. A society basically channelizes the sexual rights through the institution of marriage and it helps in mating within the rules and regulations as ascribed by a society. This helps in maintaining the norms of incest taboo also.

Economic Functions

In order to do away with the discrimination of labour by sex, marriage comes in as a protective measure wherein the men share their produce with the wives. Marriage leads to an economic co-operation between men and women ensuring the survival of every individual in a society.

Social Function

Marriage is the way to forming a family. A marriage sanctions the status of both husband and wife in a society and thus, they are also collectively accepted by society as husband and wife. In many societies there are norms where only a married person can take part in the rituals. For example in the Hindu society there is a ritual during wedding in which the bride is blessed with oil. In this ceremony atleast seven married women hold a ring with the tip of their right hand forefinger on the brides head. Oil then is poured on this ring by the married women. It is believed that the oil which pours down from the head to below takes away all the evil and brings in good luck to the would be husband and wife. Normally, widows and divorcees do not take part in such rituals. Marriage helps in forming new kinsmen and widening his network.

3.4 DEVIATIONS IN MARRIAGE

Till now we have discussed the general trend that we had seen in the societies so far that has been observed and written by anthropologists at different times. Herein this section we would discuss about the deviations in the marriage rules and the coming up of new types of kinship and family due to a change in the pattern of mate selection. In the present era two new types of relationship has emerged which were not prominent in the earlier days – lesbian and gay relationship. A lesbian relationship is based on the liking of a girl for another girl instead of a man as it happens in the normal course. Anthropologist Gill Shepherd explored female sexual relationships among Swahili Muslims in Mombasa, Kenya, and found that relationships between females were perfectly acceptable, as were relationships between men. Women were allowed to choose other women as sexual partners after they are married; so many such women also have a husband at home, or are widowed or divorced (http://en.wikibooks.org/wiki/Cultural_Anthropology/ Marriage,_Reproduction_and_Kinship#Lesbianism_in_Mombasa accessed on 23rd March, 2011). In other cases in the present day a women has sanction by law to take up another women as legally wedded. Such marriages are certified by law in a few American States like Connecticut, Iowa, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Vermont, plus Washington, D.C. and the Coquille Indian Tribe in Oregon. In 2005

Canada through the enactment of the civil marriage act became the fourth country in the world to accept same sex marriages.

On the other hand a 'gay relationship' is based on a man having a liking for other man commonly known as homosexual relationship. In Nicaragua, the ideal for masculinity is "machismo", and being described as a man who is dominant, active, and violent. While, in the U.S., the term machismo refers to a man dominating his female partner, often described as male chauvinism. However, in Nicaragua, this can also be applied to the sexual relationship between man. Greek mythology and Greek history is galore with reference to homosexual relationships. One example is the story of Apollo and Hyacinthus; Apollo fell in love with a mortal boy, Hyacinthus, and became a mentor to the youth. He taught Hyacinthus the art of war and sports and visited him often. Other Greek gods and Greek heroes have stories attributed to them about their same-sex relationships, Zeus and Hercules among them.

When talking about movements for homosexual rights Brazil emerges as the first country to take up this issue. What sets them apart however is the promenience with which same-sex rights is being fought for in their culture. SOMOS was the first organised homosexual group formed in 1979 in Brazil. As of today there are over 70 groups that are interested in gay rights operating within the country. The São Paulo Gay Pride Parade is also one of the largest in the world, with over 2 million particpants a year. Even the Brazilian President, Luiz Lula, has been fighting to pass a 'homophobia law' which would count criticizing homosexual behaviour as a crime (http://en.wikibooks.org/wiki/Cultural_Anthropology/Marriage,_Reproduction_and_Kinship#Homosexuality_in_Brazil accessed on 25th March, 2011). Nepal on the other hand has accepted same sex marriage and thus, many same sex people from different countries come to exchange their marriages vow's, which otherwise is banned in their own country.

3.5 SUMMARY

We can sum up the unit by stating that marriage is a universal phenomena ascribed and prefered in all human societies. The type of marriage and ways of acquiring a mate varies from society to society. Marriage has a legal sanction to it and the children born of wedlock are always accepted by the society. It is the means of achieving economic and social security for the wife and the children. In course of time marriage has seen many changes like the lesbian and gay weddings but till date it is very much a part of society, though at times debates have arisen for the need of marriage when two people are willing to live together.

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Sample Questions

1) What is marriage?

2) What is prescribed and preferential marriage?

3) What is fraternal polyandry? Illustrate with the help of examples.

4) What is the difference between bride wealth, bride service and dowry?

5) Examine the functions of marriage.