

Marriage: Characteristics and Types of Marriage

Meaning and Types:

Like family, marriage is another important social institution. Marriage and family are two aspects of the same social reality i.e. the bio-psychic and social instincts of man. Marriage is one of the most ancient, important, universal and indispensable social institution which has been in existence since the inception of human civilization. As an institution marriage is designed to satisfy the biological needs especially the sexual needs of the individuals in a legal, customary, culturally defined and socially approved way.

It also admits men and women to family life and fixes certain rights and duties in respect of children born of their union. As a stable social institution it binds two opposite sexes and allows them to live as husband and wife. It also confers on them social legitimation to have sexual relations and have children.

Definition of Marriage:

Different scholars and sociologists have tried to define it.

(1) According to Encyclopedia Britannica, “Marriage is a physical, legal and moral union between man and woman in complete community life for the establishment of a family.”

(2) According to Malinowski, “Marriage is a contract for the production and maintenance of children.”

(3) Edward Westermarck in his famous book ‘History of human marriage’ defined, “Marriage is a relation of one or more men to one or more women which is recognized by customs or law and involves certain rights and duties both in case of parties entering into the union and in the case of children born of it.”

(4) According to H.M. Johnson, “Marriage is a stable relationship in which a man and a woman are socially permitted without loss of standing in community to have children.”

(5) According to Lowie, “Marriage is a relatively permanent bond between permissible mates.”

(6) According to Horton and Hunt, “Marriage is the approved social pattern whereby two or more persons establish a family.”

(7) According to Hoebel, “The complexes of social norms that define and control the relations of a mated pair to each other their kinsmen, their offspring and their society at large.”

Thus from the above analysis it is concluded that marriage is both a biological, psychological, cultural and social affair. Marriage is a special type of relationship between permissible mates involving certain rights and obligations. That is why Lundberg is right when he opines that “Marriage consists of the rules and regulations which define the rights, duties and privileges of husband and wife with respect to each other.”

Characteristics of Marriage:

Marriage may have the following characteristics.

(1) Marriage is a universal social institution. It is found in almost all societies and at all stages of development.

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(2) Marriage is a permanent bond between husband and wife. It is designed to fulfill the social, psychological, biological and religious aims.

(3) Marriage is a specific relationship between two individuals of opposite sex and based on mutual rights and obligations. Relationship is enduring.

(4) Marriage requires social approval. The relationship between men and women must have social approval. Without which marriage is not valid.

(5) Marriage establishes family. Family helps in providing facilities for the procreation and upbringing of children.

(6) Marriage creates mutual obligations between husband and wife. The couple fulfill their mutual obligations on the basis of customs or rules.

(7) Marriage is always associated with some civil and religious ceremony. This social and religious ceremony provides validity to marriage. Though modern marriage performed in courts still it requires certain religious or customary practices.

(8) Marriage regulates sex relationship according to prescribed customs and laws.

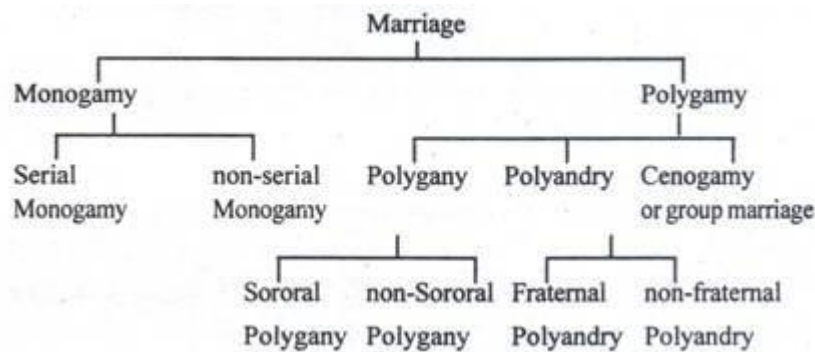
(9) Marriage has certain symbols like ring, special cloths, special sign before the house etc.

Types of Marriage:

As a universal social institution marriage is found to exist in all societies and at all stages of development. Types or forms of marriage varies from society to society. Types or forms of marriage in different communities, societies and cultural groups differ according to their customs, practices and systems of thought. In some societies marriage is a religious sacrament whereas in others it is a social contract. However, there are several types of marriage which is classified on different basis.

(A) On the basis of number of mates:

On the basis of number of mates marriage may be classified into three types such as Monogamy, Polygamy and Endogamy or group marriage. This can be known from the following diagram.



(1) Monogamy:

Monogamy is an ideal, widespread and rational type of marriage. It is found in all civilized societies. Monogamy refers to a marriage of one man with one woman at a time. This type of marriage is normally unbreakable in nature. It continues till death. Today the principle of monogamy i.e. one husband and one wife is practised and emphasised throughout the world. Monogamy is of two types such as serial Monogamy and non-serial Monogamy.

(i) Serial Monogamy:

In serial Monogamous marriage the possibility of remarriage exists in case of divorce or death. In spite of his remarriage he remains to be monogamous.

(ii) Non-serial Monogamy:

In case of non-serial monogamy the question of remarriage does not arise by either of the couple. Here a spouse has the same single spouse throughout his life.

However, Monogamy is an ideal or best form of marriage because of its different advantages which are as follows:

- (1) It is suitable for all society and for all levels of people.
- (2) It provide better sex satisfaction to both husband and wife.
- (3) It promotes better understanding between the spouse.
- (4) It minimizes jealousy, hatred and quarrels in the family.
- (5) It upholds gender equality and provides equal status to men and women.
- (6) It provides stable sex-life and stable family life.
- (7) Children are taken proper care by parents.
- (8) It facilitates easy rules of inheritance and succession.

Because of the above advantages Monogamy is considered as the best form of marriage and is practiced everywhere. The only disadvantages of Monogamy is divorce which is resulted due to the monogamous boredom.

2. Polygamy:

Some cultures allow an individual to have more than one spouse at the same time. Having more than one marriage partner at a time is known as polygamy. It was practised in most of the societies of the world but now the trend is towards monogamy. However, as anthropologist George Murdock (1959) found, 80 percent of societies had some type of polygamy.

There are three basic forms of polygamy:

(a) Polygyny:

It refers to plurality of wives or having more than one wife at the same time. In many societies, having several wives is a mark of prestige, distinction and status. It is very common among Muslims in Africa and in Middle East and Asia.

(b) Polyandry:

It is a type of marriage in which a woman can have several husbands (plurality of husbands) or two or more husbands simultaneously. It is very rare form of marriage. Wherever it is practised, the co-husbands are usually brothers, either blood brothers or clan brothers and are of the same generation.

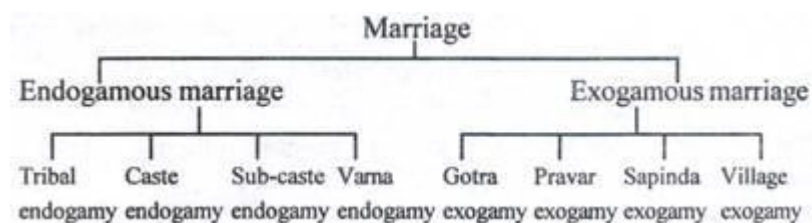
It is known as adelphic or fractural polyandry. The Todas (South India) and Khasa (North India) are the famous examples of polyandry. One motive in this case would be the maintenance of land and property within one family.

(c) Group Marriage:

It is one more type of polygamy, in which several or many men marry to several or many women. It is practised in some indigenous societies.

(B) On the basis of choice of mate or on the basis of rules of mate selection:

Marriage may be divided into two types i.e. endogamous and exogamous marriages on the basis of choice of mate or on the basis of the rules of choice of mate. Endogamy is divided into four sub types such as caste, sub-caste, varna and tribal endogamy. Similarly exogamous marriage may be divided into four sub-types such as Gotra, Pravar, Sapinda and village exogamy. All this can be presented in the following diagram.



(1) Endogamy or endogamous marriage:

Endogamy or endogamous marriage refers to the marriage within one's own group such as within one's own caste, sub-caste, varna and tribe. In other words

there are several types of endogamous marriage such as caste endogamy, sub-caste endogamy, varna endogamy and tribal endogamy.

(a) Caste endogamy:

Caste endogamy is a type of endogamous marriage in which marriage takes place within one's own caste. In a caste based society endogamy is strictly followed. Members of each caste marry within its own caste group.

(b) Sub-caste endogamy:

It is another type of endogamous marriage. In a caste based society each caste is divided into many sub-castes. Like caste each sub-caste is also an endogamous unit. In sub-caste endogamy marriage takes place within one's sub-caste only.

(d) Tribal endogamy:

Tribe is a territorial group. Tribal endogamy is a type of endogamous married in which the choice of mate is restricted to one's own tribal group. Like caste tribe is also an endogamous unit.

(ii) Exogamy or Exogamous marriage:

It is just opposite to the endogamy or endogamous marriage system. It refers to a system of marriage in which an individual has to marry outside one's own group such as caste, family or village. This is a sound marriage system which leads to the creation of healthy and intelligent children. However there are several forms of exogamy such as:

Village exogamy:

According to this principle marriage within one's own village is forbidden each and every society prescribes certain rules relating to marriage. Some societies put several restrictions on marriage among kins whereas some other societies allows marriage between a limited number of kins.

Hence in those societies marriage is sanctioned on the basis of preference or priority. Accordingly socially sanctioned marriage among kins is known as preferential marriage. In other words on the basis of preference marriage may be divided into four types such as cross-cousin marriage, parallel cousin marriage, levirate and surrogate.

(i) Cross-cousin marriage:

When marriage takes place between one's mother's brother's daughter/son with father's sister's son/daughter we called it as cross cousin marriage. The marriage of Abhimanyu with Sashikala is an example of this cross-cousin type of marriage. This type of marriage supposed to be practised in some part of Orissa, Rajasthan, and Maharashtra etc. This type of marriage occur to avoid payment of high bride price and to maintain one's family property.

(ii) Parallel Cousin marriage:

When marriage takes place between the children of either two sisters or two brothers it is known as parallel cousin marriage. This type of marriage is mostly found among Muslims.

(iii) Levirate:

When a woman marries her husband's brother after the death of her husband it is known as levirate. This type of marriage is found among some tribes like the Gond, the Munda or the Santal etc. This type of marriage is permitted in Islam.

(iv) Sororate:

When a man marries his wife's sister after the death of his wife or even when the wife is alive it is called as sororate. This type of marriage is found among some tribes like the Kharia and the Gond. Islam allows a man to marry his wife's sister only after the death of his wife. Two sisters at the same time are not allowed to remain in one man's marital bond.