

**Department of Extension Education and Communication Management**  
**College of Community Science, ANDUAT**

**Name of Course: Introduction to Rural Sociology**

**Course Code : HSOC 311 2(2+0)**

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**Meaning and Definition of Marriage**

Marriage is an institution to satisfy physical, psychological, social, cultural and economic needs of men and women. The primary aim of marriage is the regulation of sexual activities through a stable relationship, which otherwise may cause to social disruptions. Marriage has been defined as an institution for admitting men and women into family life, legitimating offspring and establishing other rights and obligations of husband, wife and children. Marriage is one of the universal social institutions established and nourished by human society. It is closely connected to the institution of family. According to Gillin and Gillin, "Marriage is a socially approved way of establishing a family of procreation." Westermarck says that marriage is rooted in the family rather than the family in the marriage. Marriage is an institution of society with different purpose, functions and forms in different societies but is present everywhere as an institution. According to Malinowski, " marriage is a contract for the production and maintenance of children." According to Robert H Lowie, " Marriage is a relatively permanent bond between permissible mates."

**Types of Marriage**

**Types of Marriage on the Basis of Number of Mates**

1. **Monogamy:** this is a form of marriage in which a man or woman remains in marriage with only one man or woman at a time. He/she can remarry another in the circumstances of divorce or death of partner. This is the most common type of marriage present in the world.
  - a) **Serial monogamy:** In many societies individuals are permitted to marry again often on the death of the first spouse or after divorce but they cannot have more than one spouse at one and the same time.
  - b) **Straight monogamy:** In straight monogamy the remarriage of the individuals is not allowed.

2. **Polygamy:** Here, a man or woman is permitted to marry more than one woman or man and live with all partners at a same time. Here, a man is married to more than one woman. This is permitted among Muslims and some of the tribes.

3. **Polyandry:** Here, a woman is married to more than to one man

a) **Fraternal Polyandry:** Here, woman marries men who are brothers. This practice is common among the Khas tribes of Uttaranchal.

b) **Non- Fraternal Polyandry:** If the husbands of a woman are not brothers. That form of marriage is called non- fraternal polyandry. This is prevalent among the Nair caste of Kerala

**4. Polygyny:** Polygyny is a form of marriage in which one man married more than one woman at a given time. Polygyny is more popular than polyandry but not as universal as monogamy. It was a common practice in ancient civilizations. At present it may be present in primitive tribes like Crow Indians, Baigas and Gonds of India. Polygyny is of two types:

a) **Sororal polygyny:** It 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 in those tribes that pay a high bride price.

b) **Non-sororal polygyny:** It is a type of marriage in which the wives are not related as the sisters.

## 5. Group Marriage

Group marriage refers to a type of marriage, whereby a group of women are married to a group of men and all of them have common husbands and wives.

### Functions of Marriage

**Satisfaction of Sex:** Married persons are permitted to have sexual relationship with their respective spouses and not with anyone else. Thus, marriage regularises sexual relations.

**Procreation & Nurturing of Children;** Marriage fulfils the function of producing children and bringing them up according to social norms. Thus, it is an important function of marriage is to ensure the survival of the child.

**Economic cooperation & Security:** marriage provides valuable and reliable help to an individual in economic activities. In a married life, husband and wife look after the economic needs of each other and also the economic needs of their children.

**Companionship & Emotional Support:** Marriage provides a constant companion, a life partner on the form of husband and wife.

## **Forms of Marriage**

In the Mahabharata four distinct forms of marriages are mentioned. They are: Brahma, Gandharava, Asura and Rakshasa.

Gautama and Asvalayana, two of the ancient law-giver of the Hindus, refer to eight different forms of marriage. They are Brahma, Daiva, Arsha, Prajapatya, Asura, Gandharva, Rakshasa and Paisacha. Among them four were considered proper and desirable (dharmya) which had the approval of the father/family. The other four were regarded as undesirable (adharmya) which did not have the approval of the father. The proper marriages recognized by the “Smritis” were Brahma, Daiva, Arsha and Prajapatya while the four undesirable marriages were Asura, Gandharva, Rakshasa and Paisacha. **Brahma** was the form of marriage in which a fully dressed girl – with proper decorations and ornaments – was given to a man of the same class by performance of the ceremony mentioned in the holy texts. The bridegroom used to be learned person of pure character and selected/approved by the bride’s father.

**Daiva** form of marriage was one in which the father of the girl gave her to a sacrificial priest as a part of his fee for officiating at the ceremony. The bride was properly dressed, decorated with jewellery which formed part of his fees.

In the **Arsha** form of marriages, instead of the dowry, the marriage was based on a system of barter in which the father of the bride was given a pair of cattle or two cows by the young man in exchange for his daughter.

The **Prajapatya** form of marriage is one in which the bridegroom is duly worshipped and married to the bride with due honors and blessing with these words, “go both of you and fulfill the duties of a householder”.

In the **Asura** form of Marriage, bride-price is given by bridegroom to the bride’s father. This is sort of economic contract. There is no limit of the amount given.

The **Gandharva** form of marriage was the union of a willing girl with a man in solitude when both of them were in love. In this form of marriage, neither the consent of the parents nor the rites of dowry was essential. Only the will of the marrying parties was given importance. This marriage is believed to spring from desire and had sex satisfaction as its chief purpose.

The **Rakshasa** form of marriage was marriage by capture in which the girl was forcibly abducted by the man. If she cried for help and if her kinsmen came to her rescue, they were killed.

The **Paisacha** form of marriage was marriage by seduction, stealing or fraud, where the girl was sexually violated while she was asleep, intoxicated or unconscious or when incapable of protecting herself.

Of these eight forms of marriage Brahma is considered to be the best marriage, where a girl is married to a boy of merit in the same caste or in a caste of equal status.

In the Mahabharata age, the two most prevalent forms of marriage were Brahma and Gandharva. Gandharva marriage was declared to be proper for a Kshatriya. Many of the heroes of Mahabharata contracted this form of marriage; for instance, Arjun married Ulupi and Chitrangada, and Dushyanta married Shakuntala.

**Swayamvara:** A variant of the Rakshasa form marriage was considered to be the norm for princely houses; for instance, Arjun won Draupadi and Nala won Damayanti.

Marriage within the caste was the prevalent order of things during the period of the Smritis and the Puranas. Marriage was rigidly regulated by the caste system and caste laws.

As a matter of fact, a man of higher caste could marry a woman of lower caste which is called anuloma marriage. But a woman of high caste marrying a man of lower caste which is called pratiloma marriage was not allowed.

Another custom relating to marriage was the law of consanguinity – close relationship by blood over generations. There are sapinda, gotra and pravara degrees of relationship. They are intended to prevent marriage among certain kins and gotras.

The present custom of Hindus is that marriage within the same gotra is to be avoided.

**Endogamy** Endogamy is a social custom that requires a person to select a spouse from within certain groups. These endogamous groups specifically refer to Varna, caste and sub-caste. Thus, a boy from a particular caste marries a girl from the same caste. Caste endogamy was functional in early society because (1) it made marital adjustments easier, (2) it preserved the occupational secrets of the caste, (3) it maintained the solidarity of the caste, and (4) it checked the decrease in the membership or strength of the castes. The most typical endogamous rules are enforced by tribe race, religion and social class.

Hindu couples planning to marry are obligated to belong to the same caste and sub-caste. Sub-caste refers to a further subdivision of castes into endogamous categories which, for all practical purposes, are themselves independent castes.

The negative effects of caste endogamy are that, it creates (1) inter-caste tensions which adversely affect the political unit of the country, (2) the problem of marital adjustment, because the field of selection remains limited, and (3) problems of child marriage and dowry system.

### **Exogamy**

The term 'exogamy' is essentially covered by the incest taboo which is prohibited universally. Similarly, universally banned is the marriage between brother and sister. An interesting exception to

the latter prohibition occurred in the royal families of ancient Egypt, Hawaii and the Incas of Peru. The explanation for this is the determination to maintain intact a royal line of descent in societies which had not developed a system of inter marriages with foreign royalty.

Close blood relationship is typically a bar on marriage for all people in all times and places. Frequently first cousins may not marry. Alliance of affinity, as well as blood relationship, has been included within exogamous rules. Among some people, marriage between persons belonging to the same village or other territorial group is banned, or at least discouraged.

Exogamy is a social custom which forbids selection of a spouse from certain groups. There are two types of exogamy practiced by Hindus. They are Gotra exogamy and Sapinda exogamy. They are intended to prevent marriage among certain kins and gotras.

### **Gotra Exogamy**

Gotra is a group whose members are believed to have descended from a common mythical ancestor. Initially there were only eight Gotras, but gradually their number increased to thousands. The Gotra exogamy prohibits marriage between members of the same gotra.

### **Sapinda Exogamy**

Sapinda means one who carries the particles of the same body. Sapinda relationships arise from being connected by having particles of the same ancestor. Marriage between such persons is prohibited. Since there is no limit to persons related by blood, some limit is prescribed for avoiding persons for marriage related to each other within certain generations on the father's and mother's side. In practice and according to law, five generations from father's side and three generations from mother's side are avoided. However, breach of sapinda exogamy was never penalized, though breach of gotra exogamy was considered a heinous practice.

### **Cousin Marriage**

There are four types of cousins (1) chachera (father's brother's son/daughter), (2) mamera (mother's brother's son/daughter), (3) phuphera (father's sister's son/daughter) and, (4) mausera (mother's sister's son/ daughter). Of these, chachera and mausera cousin (where the two sibling parents of the child belong to the same sex) are called parallel cousins and mamera and phuphera cousins (where the two sibling parents of the child are of opposite sex) are called cross cousins.

Of these two forms of cousins, cross cousin marriage was practiced in ancient Hindu society. Even now cross cousin marriages are practiced among Hindus and Muslims.

The main arguments for and against cousin marriages are biological, social, psychological and cultural. The arguments against cousin marriages are: (1) it will lead to biological degeneration of family because parental defects will be transmitted to their children, (2) it will create secret

relations between primary relations in the family and thereby lead to immorality; and (3) it will be against our religious norms. Arguments in favour of cousin marriage are: (1) one's property will remain in one's own family; (2) it will create stronger bonds of love between brother and sister, and (3) with the breakdown of joint family cousins no longer live together in the same house.

### **Hypergamy and Hypogamy**

As a matter of fact, a man of higher caste could marry a woman of lower caste which is called anuloma marriage (hypogamy). But a woman of high caste marrying a man of lower caste which is called pratiloma (hypogamy) marriage was not allowed.

### **Inter-caste Marriage**

It is a marriage between man and woman belonging to different castes. Inter-caste marriage in India is generally understood to mean not only marriage between sub-castes of a major caste group (as between Brahmin sub-castes), but also marriage between two major castes (as for eg. Brahmins and Vaishyas).

Inter-caste marriages which are increasingly common in India, especially in urban and industrial areas, are not between high and low caste people but between the members of various sub-castes within a large caste group (as between Brahmin sub-caste). At present, many of the modern minded and liberal people in India believe that inter-caste marriages should be accepted (legally such marriages are permitted) by the people/ society. Also they believe that inter-caste marriages would help breakdown the traditional caste system. It will also help wipe out caste distinction and untouchability.

Formerly marriage outside one's caste was not to be even thought of. Today many men and women are prepared to break through the bonds of caste if mutual love or attraction demand it.

However, studies conducted on inter-caste marriages show three features.

- 1) When a person outside the caste is wealthy and had a social prestige, there has been a general approval.
- 2) Persons with higher education and who are older marry outside the caste.
- 3) Even today, the large number of marriages are within the caste and these are marriages arranged by parents. The only significant change is with respect to the restriction against sub-castes which has now been practically eliminated at least in the urban areas among the educated persons.

Arranged marriages are the marriages arranged by the parents of the bride and the bridegroom, considering all the norms and customs of the society and religion.

## **Inter-religious Marriage**

Inter-religious marriage in India is basically understood to mean marriage between persons belonging to different religions.

## **Influence of Legislations on Hindu Marriage**

Over a period of time many beliefs, values and ideals related to Hindu marriage have lost their original meaning and purpose. People started questioning certain evil practices like child marriage, sati system, restrictions of widow remarriage etc. consequently during the British rule and even after independence various legislations were enacted. Some of them were; The prevention of Sati Act, 1829, The Hindu Widow Remarriage Act, 1856, The Civil Marriage Act, 1872, The Child Marriage Restraint Act, 1929 and its amendment in 1978, The Hindu Marriage Act, 1955 and The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961 and its amendment in 1986.

The above mentioned legislations have led to significant changes in the Hindu marriage system. Some of the important impacts of legislations on the institution of Hindu marriage are:

- i) Divorce is now socially and legally permissible. Thus marital relation has ceased to remain unbreakable.
- ii) Provision for widow remarriage and divorce has affected the ideal of 'pativrata'.
- iii) Marriage is no more a religious duty rather it is performed for lifelong companionship.

## **Marriage among Muslims**

Marriage among Muslim is universal and obligatory. Since the Muslim community discourages celibacy, marriage has to be performed. It is true that marriage among Muslim is a civil contract as it is meant for procreation of children and legalizing sexual intercourse; it is a religious duty also. It is considered an 'ibadat'. Characteristic features of Muslim marriage are; acceptance of the proposal of marriage by the bride; capability of the bridegroom to enter into a marriage contract; preference system i.e. parallel cousins (father's brother's daughters) and cross cousins (mother's brother's daughters) are given preference; and marriage is valid only if it is free from legal complications.

It may be noted that man and women did not enjoy equal rights with regard to the provision of divorce. Women have always been at the receiving end. However, industrialization, urbanization, modernization and spread of modern education have drastically changed the perspective. Spread of small family norm and lesser incidence of divorce are some of the impacts of social change on the institution of Muslim marriage

## **Marriage among Christians**

The Christian community has two major denominations: Catholics and Protestants. The Catholics owe allegiance to the Pope. The Pope is the supreme authority in the Catholic Church. All the teachings of the Catholic Church have the approval of the Pope. The Protestants have several denominations or groups. Hierarchical approach is limited within each denomination.

As per the teaching of the Catholic Church marriage is a sacrament. There is no provision for divorce. However a marriage can be declared null and void if one of the spouses is already married and the partner from the first marriage is still alive. A marriage can also be declared null and void in case if the spouse is of unsound mind, impotent etc. at the time of marriage. But the procedure to get a marriage declared null and void from Church is very tedious as the clearance has to come from the Vatican.

Among the Catholics mixed marriages are permitted (with a person from any other religion). However the Catholic spouse has to make an undertaking that the offsprings would be brought up in the Catholic faith.

Among the Protestants divorce is permitted. Marriages are usually performed within the church in the presence of relatives and friends. Married couples are free to register their marriage for legal purpose. Protestant couples usually seek divorce from a court of law. Among the Protestants, remarriage is also permitted after divorce.

According to the teaching of the Church free consent from both the parties is must. Consent must be an act of the will of each of the contracting parties, free of coercion or grave external fear.

## **Tribal Marriage**

Family comes into being only through the establishment of culturally controlled and sanctioned marital relations. Marriage, therefore, is universal. We find various forms of prescriptions and proscriptions regarding marriage among tribes, also. However, uniqueness of tribal marriage lies in the ways by which mates are acquired. There are: probationary marriage among Kuki; marriage by capture among Nagas, Ho, Kharia and Birhor; marriage by trial which is recognition of personal courage and bravery among Bhil; marriage by what has been called purchase or bride price prevalent all over tribal India: marriage by service---a solution to the problem of high bride price among Gonds and Baigas; marriage by exchanging women of two households for avoiding the payment of high bride price prevalent all over India except Khasi Tribe; marriage by mutual consent and elopement among those tribes who have youth dormitories, and marriage by intrusion among Birhor and Ho.