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Hindu Marriage: Meaning, Functions and Forms

Introduction:

Marriage and family sociologically signifies the stage of greater social advancement. It is indicative of man's entry into the world of emotion and feeling, harmony and culture. Long before the institution of marriage developed, man and woman may have lived together, procreated children and died unwept and unsung. Their sexual relations must have been like birds and animals of momentary duration.

Marriage as an institution developed over the time. It may have been accepted as a measure of social discipline and as an expedient to eliminate social stress due to the sex rivalry. The growing sense and sensibility may have necessitated the acceptance of norms for formalising the union between man and woman.

Meaning of Marriage:

Marriage is the most important institution of human society. It is a universal phenomenon. It has been the backbone of human civilisation. Human beings have certain urges like hungers, thirst and sex. Society works out certain rules and regulation for satisfaction of these urges.

The rules and regulations, which deal with regulation of sex life of human beings, are dealt in the marriage institution. We can say that the Marriage is as old as the institution of family. Both these

institutions are vital for the society. Family depends upon the Marriage. Marriage regulates sex life of human beings.

Marriage creates new social relationships and reciprocal rights between the spouses. It establishes the rights and the status of the children when they are born. Each society recognises certain procedures for creating such relationship and rights. The society prescribes rules for prohibitions, preferences and prescriptions in deciding marriage. It is this institution through which a man sustains the continuity of his race and attains satisfaction in a socially recognised manner.

Sociologists and anthropologists have given definitions of marriage. Some of the important definitions are given below. Edward Westermarck. "Marriage is a relation of one or more men to one or more women which is recognised by custom or law and involves certain rights and duties both in the case of the parties entering the union and in the case of the children born of it.

As B. Malinowski defines, "Marriage is a contract for the production and maintenance of children".

According 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

Ira L. Reiss writes, "Marriage is a socially accepted union of individuals in husband and wife roles, with the key function of legitimating of parenthood".

William Stephens, the anthropologist, says that marriage is:

- (1) A socially legitimate sexual union begun with
- (2) A public announcement, undertaken w
- (3) Some idea of performance and assumed with a more or less explicit
- (4) Marriage contract, which spells out reciprocal obligations between spouses and between spouses and their children.

William J. Goode, the famous family sociologist has tried to combine the two objectives of marriage i.e. to regulate sex life and to recognize the newborn. It was perhaps for this reason that American sociologists came out with the statement that no child should be born without a father.

Although different thinkers have tried to provide definition of marriage, but there is no universally acceptable definition of marriage. There seems to be, however, a consensus that marriage involves several criteria that are found to exist cross-culturally and throughout time. For example, Hindu marriage has three main objectives such as Dharma, Progeny and Sexual Pleasure

Individual happiness has been given the least importance. It is considered to be sacrament, a spiritual union between a man and a woman in the social status of husband and wife.

In Western countries, marriage is a contract. Personal happiness is given the utmost importance. People enter into matrimonial

alliances for the sake of seeking personal happiness. If this happiness is-not forthcoming they will terminate the relationship.

Marriage is thus cultural specific. The rules and regulations differ from one culture to another. We can, however, identify certain basic features of this institution.

(1) A heterosexual union, including at least one male and one female.

(2) The legitimizing or granting of approval to the sexual relationship and the bearing of children without any loss of standing in the community or society.

(3) A public affair rather than a private, personal matter.

(4) A highly institutionalized and patterned mating arrangement.

(5) Rules which determine who can marry whom.

(6) New statuses to man and woman in the shape of husband and wife and father and mother.

(7) Development of personal intimate and affectionate relationships between the spouses and parent and children.

(8) A binding relationship that assumes some performance.

The above discussion helps us to conclude that the boundaries of marriage are not always precise and clearly defined. It is, however, very important institution for the society as it helps in replacement of old and dying population.

Functions of Marriage:

Marriage is an institutionalized relationship within the family system. It fulfils many functions attributed to the family in general. Family functions include basic personality formation, status ascriptions, socialization, tension management, and replacement of members, economic cooperation, reproduction, stabilization of adults, and the like.

Many of these functions, while not requiring marriage for their fulfilment, are enhanced by the marital system". In fact, evidence suggests marriage to be of great significance for the well-being of the individual. Researchers have shown that compared to the unmarried, married persons are generally happier, healthier, less depressed and disturbed and less prone to premature deaths. Marriage, rather than becoming less important or unimportant, may be increasingly indispensable

The functions of marriage differ as the structure of marriage differs. 'For example, where marriage is specially an extension of the kin and extended family system, then procreation, passing on the family name and continuation of property become a basic function. Thus, to not have a child or more specifically, to not have a male child, is sufficient reason to replace the present wife or add a new wife.

Where marriage is based on "free choice," i.e. parents and kinsmen play no role in selecting the partner, individualistic forces are accorded greater significance. Thus in the United States, marriage has many functions and involves many positive as well as negative personal factors : establishment of a family of one's own, children,

companionship, happiness, love, economic security, elimination of loneliness etc.

The greater the extent to which the perceived needs of marriage are met, and the fewer the alternatives in the replacement of the unmet needs, the greater the likelihood of marriage and the continuation of that marriage. At a personal level, any perceived reason may explain marriage, but at a social level, all societies sanction certain reasons and renounce others.

Forms of Marriage:

Societies evolved mannerism and method for selection of the spouses, according to their peculiar socio-economic and political conditions, and in accordance with their levels of cultural advancement. This explains on the one hand the origin of the various forms, of marriage and on the other the differences in the attitude of societies towards the institution of marriage.

Some have accepted it as purely a contractual arrangement between weds, while others hold it as the sacred union between man, and woman. Forms of marriage vary from society to society. Marriage can be broadly divided into two types, (1) monogamy and (2) polygamy.

1. Monogamy:

Monogamy is that form of marriage in which at a given period of time one man has marital relations with one woman. On the death of the spouse or one of the partners seek divorce then they can establish such relationship with other persons but at a given period

of time, one cannot have two or more wives or two or more husbands.

This one to one relationship is the most modern civilized way of living. In most of the societies it is this form, which is found and recognized. It should be noted that on a societal basis, only about 20 per cent of the societies are designated as strictly monogamous, that is, monogamy is the required form.

When monogamy does not achieve stability, certain married persons end their relationship and remarry. Thus, the second spouse, although not existing simultaneously with the first, is sometimes referred to as fitting into a pattern of sequential monogamy, serial monogamy or remarriage.

Advantages:

Keeping in view the advantages of monogamy the world has granted recognition to monogamous form of marriage. The following are its advantages:

1. Better Adjustment:

In this form of marriage men and women have to adjust with one partner only. In this way there is better adjustment between them.

2. Greater Intimacy:

If the number of people in the family will be limited there will be more love and affection in the family. Because of which they will have friendly and deep relations.

3. Better Socialization of Children:

In the monogamy the children are looked after with earnest attention of parents. The development of modes of children will be done nicely. There will be no jealousy between the parents for looking after their children.

4. Happy Family:

Family happiness is maintained under monogamy which is completely destroyed in other forms of marriage because of jealousy and other reasons. Thus, in this form of marriage, family is defined as happy family.

5. Equal Status to Woman:

In this form of marriage the status of woman in family is equal. If husband works she looks after the house or both of them work for strengthening the economic condition of the family.

6. Equalitarian way of Living:

It is only under monogamous way of living that husband and wife can have equalitarian way of life. Under this system husband and wife not only share the familial role and obligations but also have joint decisions. The decision making process becomes a joint venture.

7. Population Control:

Some sociologists have the view that monogamy controls the population. Because of one wife children in the family will be limited.

8. Better Standard of Living:

It also affects the standard of living within limited resources. One can manage easily to live a better life. It helps in the development of independent personality without much constraint and pressure.

9. Respect to old Parents:

Old parents receive favouring care by their children but under polygamy their days are full of bitterness.

10. Law is in favour:

Monogamy is legally sanctioned form of marriage while some are legally prohibited.

11. More Cooperation:

In such a family there is close union between the couple and the chances of conflict are reduced and there is cooperation between husband and wife.

12. Stability:

It is more stable form of marriage. There is better division of property after the death of parents.

Disadvantages:

1. Adjustment:

Monogamy is a marriage between one husband and one wife. So if the partner is not of choice then life loses its charm. They have to adjust between themselves but now-a-days divorce is the answer to their problem.

2. Monopoly:

According to Sumner and Keller, “Monogamy is monopoly.” Wherever there is monopoly, there is bound to be both ‘ins and outs’.

3. Childlessness:

Some inpatients can't have kids or some barren cannot have kids. If one of the partners has some problem couples cannot have children. They have to suffer from childlessness.

4. Economic Factors:

Marriage in monogamy does not play part of income. They have to depend upon their own occupation for living. If they are poor they will remain poor. So monogamy effects the economic condition of man and woman.

5. Better status to Women:

Monogamy provides better status to women in the society. They are counted equal to men. Some people do not like this form of marriage.

6. Adultery:

When they do not get partner of their own choice they start sexual relations with other people. This also leads to the problem of prostitution.

2. Polygamy:

Distinguished from monogamy is polygamy. Polygamy refer to the marriage of several or many. Polygamy is the form of marriage in

which one man marries two or more women or one woman marries two or more men or a number of men marry a number of women. According to F.N. Balasara, “The forms of marriage in which there is plurality of partners is called polygamy”.

Polygamy, like other forms of marriage is highly regulated and normatively controlled. It is likely to be supported by the attitudes and values of both the sexes. Polygamy itself has many forms and variations. Polygamy is of three types: (i) Polygyny, (ii) Polyandry and (iii) Group marriage.

Let us now discuss forms of polygamy in details,

(i) Polygyny:

Polygyny is a form of marriage in which a man has more than one wife at a time. In other words it is a form of marriage in which one man marries more than one woman at a given time. It is the prevalent form of marriage among the tribes, Polygyny also appears to be the privilege of the wealthy, in many African societies the rich usually have more than one wife.

This type of marriage is found in Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya and Uganda. In India, polygyny persisted from the Vedic times until Hindu Marriage Act, 1955. Now polygyny is visible among many tribes of India.

Viewing polygyny cross-culturally, polygynous families evidence specific organisational features:

1. In certain matters, sex particularly, co-wives have clearly defined equal rights.

2. Each wife is set up in a separate establishment.
3. The senior wife is given special powers and privileges.

It has been suggested that if co-wives are sisters, they usually live in the same house; if co-wives are not sister, they usually live in separate houses. It is believed that sibling can better tolerate, suppress and live with a situation of sexual rivalry than can non-siblings.

Polygyny may be of two types: (i) Sororal polygyny and (ii) Non-sororal polygyny.

Sororal polygyny is one in which all the wives are sisters. Non-sororal polygyny means the marriage of one man with many women who are not sisters.

Causes of Polygyny:

1. Disproportion of sexes in the Population:

When in any tribe or society male members are less in number and females are more, then this type of marriage takes place.

2. Out-migration of male Population:

To earn the livelihood male members migrate from one society to another. This way there is a decrease in the number of males than females and polygyny takes place.

3. Hypergamy:

Hypergamy also gives rise to polygyny. Under this system the parents of lower castes or classes want to improve their social status by marrying their daughters in the higher caste or classes.

4. Desire for male Child:

Among the primitive people importance was given to make children than females. Thus man was free to have as many marriages as he liked on the ground to get male children.

5. Social Status:

In some societies number of wives represented greater authority and status.

Particularly the leaders of primitive society increased number of wives in order to prove their superiority. A single marriage was considered a sign of poverty. So where marriage is taken as sign of prestige and prosperity the custom of polygyny is natural.

6. Economic Reason:

Where the people of the poor families were unable to find suitable husbands for their daughters they started marrying their daughters to rich married males.

7. Variety of Sex Relation:

The desire for variety of sex relations is another cause of polygyny. The sexual instincts become dull by more familiarity. It is stimulated by novelty.

8. Enforced Celibacy:

In uncivilized tribes men did not approach the women during the period of pregnancy and while she was feeding the child. Thus long period of enforced celibacy gave birth to second marriage.

9. More Children:

In uncivilized society more children were needed for agriculture, war and status recognition. Moreover, in some tribes the birth rate was low and death rate was high. In such tribes polygyny was followed to obtain more children.

10. Absence of children:

According to Manu, if wife is unable to have children, man is permitted to have more marriages. He further says if a wife takes her husband then he should live with her one year and take another wife.

11. Religious Reasons:

Polygyny was permitted in the past if wife was incapable of forming religious duties in her periodic sickness because religion was given significant place in social life.

12. Patriarchal Society:

Polygyny is found only in the patriarchal society where more importance is given to males and male member is the head of the family.

Advantages:

(1) Better status of children:

In polygyny children enjoy better status. They are looked after well because there are many women in the family to care.

(2) Rapid growth of Population:

In those societies where population is very less and birth rate is almost zero, for those societies polygyny is best suited, as it increases the population at faster rate.

(3) Importance of Males:

In polygyny males occupy higher status. More importance is given to husband by several wives.

(4) Division of Work:

In polygyny there are several wives. Therefore, there is a proper division of work at home.

(5) Variety of Sex Relations:

Instead of going for extra marital relations husband stays at home because his desire for variety of sex relations is fulfilled within polygyny.

(6) Continuity of Family:

Polygyny came into existence mainly because of inability of a wife to produce children. Polygyny provides continuity to the family tree. In absence of one wife other women in the family produce children.

Disadvantage:

1. Lower status of Women:

In this form of marriage women have very low status; they are regarded as an object of pleasure for their husbands. They generally do not have a right to take decisions about their welfare; they have to depend upon their husband for fulfillment of their basic needs.

2. Jealousy as stated by Shakespeare:

“Woman thy name is jealousy”. When several wives have to share one husband, there is bound to be jealousy among co-wives. Jealousy leads to inefficiency in their work. They are not able to socialize their children in a proper manner in such atmosphere.

3. Low Economic Status:

Polygyny increases economic burden on the family because in many cases only husband is the bread winner and whole of the family is dependent on him.

4. Population Growth:

This type of marriage is harmful for developing society and poor nations because they have limited resources. Further increase in population deteriorates progress and development of that society.

5. Fragmentation of Property:

In polygyny all the children born from different wives have share in father's property. Jealousy among mothers leads to property conflicts among children as a result property is divided and income per capita decreases.

6. Uncongenial Atmosphere:

Polygyny does not promise congenial atmosphere for the proper growth and development of children. There is lack of affection among the members. As such families have large number of members. They fail to provide proper attention to all of them. This gives rise to many immoral practices in the society.

(ii) Polyandry:

It is a form of marriage in which one woman has more than one husband at a given time. According to K.M. Kapadia, Polyandry is a form of union in which a woman has more than one husband at a time or in which brothers share a wife or wives in common. This type marriage is prevalent in few places such as tribes of Malaya and some tribes of India like Toda, Khasi and Kota etc. Polyandry is of two types:

(i) Fraternal Polyandry and

(ii) Non-Fraternal Polyandry.

(i) Fraternal Polyandry:

In this form of polyandry one wife is regarded as the wife of all brothers. All the brothers in a family share the same woman as their wife. The children are treated as the offspring of the eldest brother, it is found in some Indian tribes like Toda and Khasis. This type of marriage was popular in Ceylon (Srilanka at present).

(ii) Non-Fraternal Polyandry:

In this type of polyandry one woman has more than one husband who is not brothers. They belong to different families. The wife cohabits with husbands in turn. In case of Fraternal Polyandry, the

wife lives in the family of her husbands, while in case of non-fraternal polyandry, the wife continues to stay in the family of her mother. This type of polyandry is found among Nayars of Kerala.

Causes of Polyandry:

1. Lesser number of Women:

According to Westermarck, when the number of women is lesser than the number of males in a society, polyandry is found. For example, among Todas of Nilgiri. But according to Brifficult, polyandry can exist even when the number of women is not lesser e.g. in Tibet, Sikkim and Laddakh polyandry is found even though there is not much disparity in the number of men and women.

2. Infanticide:

In some tribal societies female infanticide is present; as a result these female population is less than male population. Further males do not enjoy good status. Therefore, one female is married to a group of brothers and polyandry exists.

3. Matrilineal System:

Just in contrast to above noted point, it has also been argued that polyandry exists in matrilineal system where one woman can have relationship with more than one man and the children instead of getting the name of father are known by mother's name.

4. Poverty:

Polyandry exists in such areas where there is scarcity of natural resources. It is for this reason many men support one woman and her children.

5. Bride Price:

In societies where there is bride price, polyandry exists. Brothers pay for one bride who becomes wife of all of them.

6. Division of Property:

To check the division of ancestral property polyandry is favoured.

When all the brothers have one wife then the question of division of property does not arise.

7. Production and labour:

Polyandry not only avoids division of property but it also increases production in agriculture. All the brothers work together because they have to support only one family. Thus production and income increases, further there is no expenditure with regard to labour because all the husbands contribute their share of work.

8. Social Custom:

Polyandry exists in some societies mainly because of customs and traditions of that particular society. Generally, polyandry is found in such areas which are situated far away from modern developed areas.

Advantages:

(1) Checks Population Growth:

It checks population growth because all the male members of the family share one wife. As a result population does not increase at that rapid rate, the way in which it occurs in polygyny. Therefore, it limits the size of the family.

(2) Economic Standard:

Polyandry helps to uphold the economic standard of the family. It strengthens the economic position of the family because all the members work for the improvement of the family.

(3) Greater Security:

With large number of males working after the family affairs, other members of the family especially women and children feel quite secure. Greater security among the members develop sense of well-being among the members of the family.

(4) Property is kept Intact:

In polyandry family does not get divided. The property of the family is held jointly and thus it is kept intact.

(5) Status of Women:

In polyandry one woman is wife of large number of husbands. As a result she gets attention of all the members and thus enjoys a good status in the family. She feels quite secure because in the absence of one husband other males are there to fulfill her basic needs.

Disadvantages:**(1) Jealousy:**

When all the men have to share one woman, family quarrels and tensions are bound to be there. Husbands feel jealous of one another which adversely affects congenial atmosphere of the family.

(2) Lack of Model:

When children have large number of fathers they fail to select appropriate model for themselves. This adversely effects their personality configuration.

(3) Health of the Woman:

It adversely effects health of a woman because she has to satisfy several husbands. It not only has negative effect on the physical health but also on mental health of the woman.

(4) Sterility:

According to biologists if the same woman cohabits with several men, it may lead to sterility, further lack of sex gratification give rise to extra-marital relationship of husbands.

(5) Status of Men:

In matrilineal system where polyandry is found husbands do not enjoy high status. They do not give their name to the children.

(6) Lack of Attachment:

In many tribes where polyandry exists husbands do not live permanently with their families. They are visiting husband who visit the family for a specific period. They do not get love and affection of their children because children feel unattached to their fathers.

(7) Less Population:

This form of marriage decreases population growth. In some tribal societies where polyandry continues to exist may get extinct after a gap of few years.

(8) Loose Morality:

This is another outcome of this practice.

(iii) Group Marriage:

Group marriage is that type of marriage in which a group of men marry a group of women. Each man of male group is considered to be the husband of every woman of female group. Similarly, every woman is the wife of every man of male group. Pair bonded or Multilateral marriage are the substitute term for group marriages.

This form of marriage is found among some tribes of New Guinea and Africa. In India group marriage is practised by the Toda Tribe of Nilgiri Hills. Except on an experimental basis it is an extremely rare occurrence and may never have existed as a viable form of marriage for any society in the world.

The Oneida community of New York State has been frequently cited as an example of group marriage experiment. It involved economic and sexual sharing based on spiritual and religious principles. Like most group marriage on record, its time span was limited. Rarely do they endure beyond one or two generations.

Levirate and Sororate:

(i) Levirate:

In levirate the wife marries the brother of the dead husband. If a man dies, his wife marries the brother of her dead husband.

Marriage of the widow with the dead husband's elder brother is called Senior Levirate. But when she marries to the younger brother of the dead husband, it is called Junior Levirate.

(ii) Sororate:

In Sororate the husband marries the sister of his wife. Sororate is again divided into two types namely restricted Sororate and simultaneous Sororate. In restricted sororate, after the death of one's wife, the man marries the sister of his wife. In simultaneous sororate, the sister of one's wife automatically becomes his wife.

Concubinage:

Concubinage is a state of living together as husband and wife without being married. It is .cohabitation with one or more women who are distinct from wife or wives. Concubinage is sometimes recognised by various societies as an accepted institution. A concubine has a lower social status than that of a wife. The children of a concubine enjoy a lower status in the society.