

Marriage

The institution of marriage, quite like that of the family, is universal. There cannot be a family without marriage. Thomas Hylland Eriksen very rightly says that marriage is essential for human survival. Women are important, because it is they who procreate children; men do not. Similarly, women cannot procreate without alliance with men. The observations made by Eriksen need to be quoted here:

To conclude, marriage and the family being two aspects of the same social reality, viz., the bio-psychical-cum-social drives (needs) of man, are coeval with each other and with culture, because without the family there could be no preservation of the species and culture; and without marriage there could be no family. A search into the origins of marriage is, therefore, unnecessary and not likely to lead us to any important conclusions which cannot be arrived at, and understood, with reference to the functions and forms of this important and universal institution. Historical data are relevant only in finding out why a particular society has developed a particular form of marriage and not why the institution itself has developed. In order to study its functions, we would look into the reasons underlying marriage.)

What is Marriage?

Eriksen has made an attempt to define marriage. He observes:

200 • Marriage

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(Whether or not persons choose their spouses, marriage is very commonly perceived as a relationship between groups, not primarily between individuals.)

The Reasons for, and the Nature of, Marriage

The possibilities of sex-gratification, irregular or/and institutionalized, outside the family being present in every society, the conclusion becomes compelling that, although regularized and socially sanctioned sex-gratification is a basic reason for the formation of the family and the institution of marriage, yet it is not the only, nor the final, cause. Satisfaction of the sexual life is implied in a healthy and normal physical survival, but the exact manner this satisfaction takes place is decided by the cultural traditions of a people. Bio-psychic needs always present themselves to us as culturally reoriented drives. Besides, sex-gratification is not the only purpose of man's existence, and therefore, not the only cultural end to which marriage is directed. Thus, among the Sema Naga marriage to one's father's widows (other than one's mother) takes place more because that is the only way of getting possession of the paternal property which is, according to the tribal law, inherited by a man's widows, than for sex-gratification. Even where sex-gratification forms the dominant motive for marriage, as is generally the case, the

3/ Besides, the economic organization of some tribes is found so much dependent upon co-operation and division of labour between the two sexes that a stable functioning is possible only when the two sexes enter into socially sanctioned and permanent or semi-permanent relations with each other, i.e., marry. The limited food-gathering economy of the Kadar, the full participation in the day-to-day economic pursuits by women among the Andaman Islanders and the Maria Gonds makes it imperative that men and women marry.

ing of children is also the responsibility of a family. From all considerations marriage is an institution which regulates sex relations and condemns promiscuity.

Yet another definition of marriage is given by D.N. Majumdar and T.N. Madan in their book *An Introduction to Social Anthropology*. They write:

Marriage ensures a biological satisfaction (that of sex) and a psychological satisfaction (that of having children) on the individual plane, and on the wider collective plane, it ensures a two-fold survival, that of the group and its culture.

The definition given by Majumdar and Madan stresses the importance of: (i) sex, (ii) children, and (iii) survival of society at large. The meaning of marriage comes close to the concept of marriage propounded by the Hindu *Shastras*. P.N. Prabhu, who dwells elaborately on Hindu social institutions, says that marriage among Hindus is for: (i) *dharma*, (ii) procreation of children, and (iii) *rati*, that is, sex. It is the duty of a Hindu to enter into marriage. There is no salvation without marriage. Second, a man and woman should bear children, and finally, it is for sex. Hindu *Shashatrakaras*, however, give precedence to religion over procreation and sex.

From all considerations it could be said that marriage is not a personal affair. It is not just an institution only for the fulfilment of biological needs. It is a social alliance *par excellence*. Whatever may be the kind of society it has same inbuilt mechanism for providing legitimacy to the sexual needs. However, the functions that marriage institution performs have different priorities in different societies.

Characteristics of Marriage

On the basis of the definitions of marriage given above, we present some of the major features or characteristics of marriage as under:

- (1) The institution of marriage fulfils the biological needs of the individual. Freud argued that the man has two innate needs—sex and hunger. Sex is fulfilled through the institution of marriage. However, this desire is fulfilled according to the priorities fixed by the society. For instance, among the Hindus, sex occupies a third place in the hierarchy of goals set by the *Shashatrakaras*. The

tribals and the western society, on the other hand, give first priority to sexual fulfilment.

- (2) Procreation is another feature of marriage. It is in the interest of society that children are born out of marriage. This ensures the survival and continuity of the human race. Among the Gonds of Madhya Pradesh and Bihar the objective of marriage is to produce a large number of children. A large family is said to be a prestigious family. The same ideology holds true among the tribals of Rajasthan. However, under the impact of small family programme, this objective of marriage is increasingly giving way to a change in outlook.
- (3) Upbringing of children is also an objective of marriage. It is believed that if children are not socialized properly, the result would be a fractured citizenship. The strength of a nation rests on the capability of the future generations.
- (4) It must be stressed that nowhere in any society is there a marriage institution without some form of rules. The marriages solemnized or contracted according to the rules of the society are honoured and legitimized. The marriage which does not conform to the rules of marriage is void.
- (5) Marriage is performed according to the tradition of society, and the terms of its dissolution are also governed by social rules. For instance, among the Hindus, marriage is a sacrament and cannot be dissolved easily. Among tribals, however, marriage is a social contract. It can be dissolved at the will of either of the spouses. Among Muslims and Christians also similar rules exist.
- (6) In western society a new ideology runs through the new generation. It is argued that marriage should be built on pure love. The ideology of 'pure love' transcends class boundaries. This kind of marriage is termed as "love marriage". Actually the marriage pattern is determined by the ideology which a particular society holds. In some instances, particularly among tribals, environmental and historical factors play an important role in this regard.

Forms of Marriage

All persons normally do get married. Monogamy appears to be a natural form of marriage. But, a person could choose his mate through other forms of marriage also, namely, polygyny and polyandry. Anthropologists have widely discussed the forms of marriage. Sometimes it is termed as acquiring a mate. These forms of marriage are: (i) monogamy, and (ii) polygamy. Polygamy is further divided into (a) polygyny, and (b) polyandry. Some anthropologists have also found traces of group marriage. But this form of marriage is fast on the way to extinction. In this part of chapter we shall discuss the forms of marriage as found in different societies.

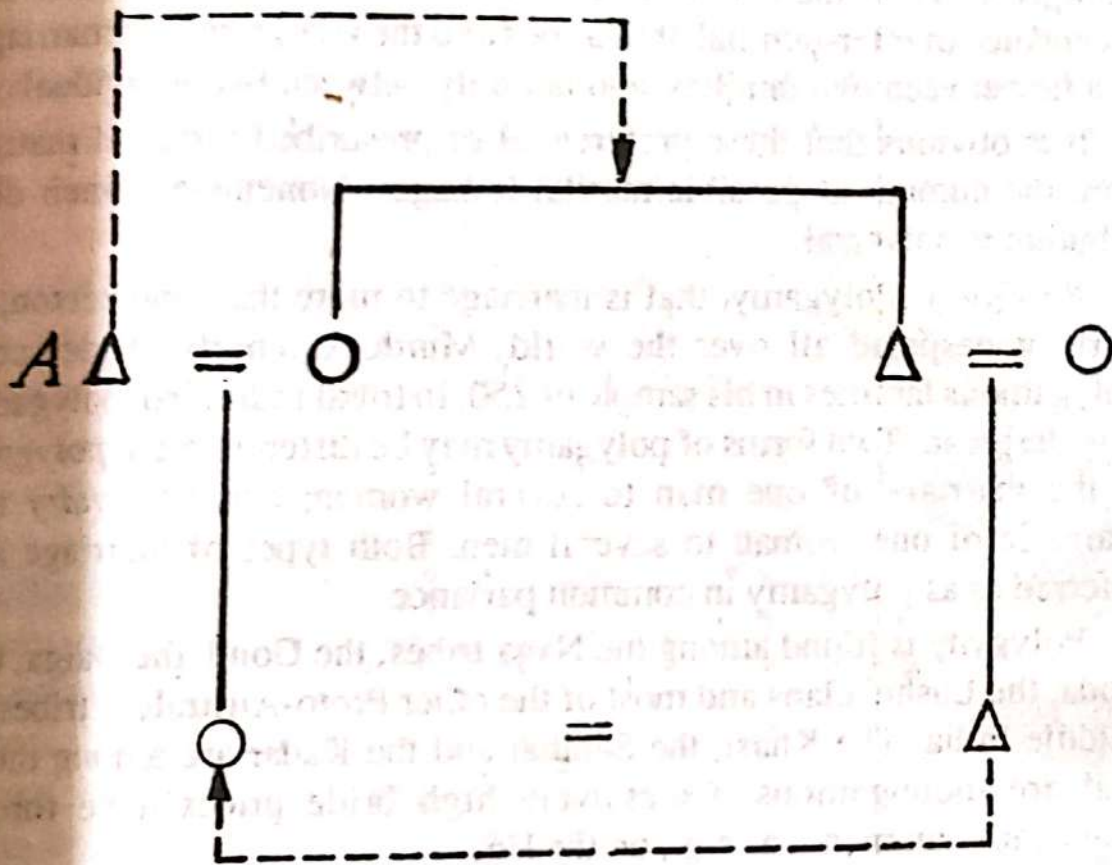
Preferential Marriage

In some societies there is the practice of giving or receiving daughter from groups which are considered socially higher. In all societies there are instances of preferential marriages. Among these may be included: (i) levirate, and (ii) sororate. These two forms of marriage have already been discussed. Here, we would only say that after the death of husband or wife, this proves to be a useful means of maintaining the link between two kin groups that was established through the original marriage.

8 (In certain cases there is a prescription, or only a preference, expressed for marriage to a particular kin. Thus, we find that a Gond must marry his/her cross-cousin, and if one would like to have this prescription waived in one's case, a compensation has to be paid to the losing party. Fifty-four per cent of Gond marriages were found by Grigson to be of this type. The Kharia and the Oraon practise *cross-cousin marriage*, and so do the Khasi, though the latter can have such a marriage only after the death of one's own father, with one's paternal aunt's daughter. The Kadar prescribe marriage with paternal cousins; they are thoroughly endogamous.

Cross-cousin marriage, as a form of exogamy, the only form of exogamy under dual organization, is often explained to be a device for avoiding payment of a high bride price, and also for maintaining

property in the household. The Gond of Madhya Pradesh call this form of marriage *dudhlautawa*, 'return of milk'. The implication is that the bride price paid by A for his wife would be returned to his family when A's daughter marries her mother's brother's son.



C. Levi-Strauss has said that preferential mating has for its main purpose the strengthening of solidarity within a tribe. Others, like Homans, doubtful about the primitives' concern with, and ability of understanding what is good for them in the remoter sense in which solidarity is good for a people, have said that preferential mating is the outcome of other features of a society. Thus, the rule of marrying one's mother's brother's daughter may be only expected in matripotestal families. Exogamy amounting to scope for marrying anyone except one's sister and mother, with some prejudice against marriage to first cousins on the father's side, has been reported from the Lushei clans of Assam.

Levirate and Sororate: Preferential marriages are also often designed to promote inter-familial cordiality by making certain linkages imperative. Among the Toda, the practice has been for one woman to marry several brothers (*fraternal* or *adelphic polyandry*). This practice of being mate, actual or potential, to one's husband's brothers is called *levirate*. When several sisters are simultaneously, or potentially, the

spouses of the same man, the practice is called *sororate*. It is generally found to prevail among tribes that pay a bride price for a wife. The death of a spouse is compensated by supplying a new spouse, generally a younger sister of the deceased. Levirate and Sororate emphasize the acceptance of inter-familial obligations and the recognition of marriage as a tie between two families, and not only between two individuals.

It is obvious that these preferential or prescribed forms of mating limit the number of possible marital linkages. Nonetheless, their distribution is universal.

Pre-marital Relations

For the tribals, where marriage is a contract, pre-marital relations are not strictly adhered to, and the concept of virginity is not predominant. The high caste Hindus may also deviate from the ideal of virginity though it may be stressed in theory. In primitive societies on a general plane all over the world pre-marital relations among the young, unmarried persons are sanctioned, and in some cases regulated. This must be related to the sharp divisions between the idea of marriage as an economic institution and for sexual gratification. "Pre-marital intercourse, therefore, is not taken too seriously and among adolescents is an aspect of courting experience, or simply a matter of indifference."

Among some tribes, like the Muria, adolescent life is one of preparation for all the activities of adult life; and in their dormitories grown-up girls are often found to train younger boys in the art of love and sex-life.

Extra-marital sex relations are not so easily tolerated. One of the main causes of Maria murder and suicide has been reported to be marital infidelity. However, such sex-jealousy is by no means universal. The Tharu men are so much under the thumbs of their beautiful wives that they take no offence at the latter's lax sex morals. The Khasa have developed a double standard of morality whereby a woman as a wife (*ranti*) has to observe a strict sex-morals code, but as a daughter (*dhyanti*) has free scope to have as many liaisons and amours as she likes. In view of this, the Khasa women never completely cut off themselves from their parents' households. The strains which the Khasa wife suffers by being wife to several men, who are mentally and physically unlike each other, are relieved by the unfettered life of abandon which she can lead in her parents' village.

Prohibition. A taboo on sexual relations between closely related kin like parents and children and between siblings is universal. An extension of this 'nuclear prohibition' is found everywhere, including among the castes and tribes of India. Since the

Ban on Incest

The most universally found norm is the taboo on incest. No society permits marriage between brother and sister, or between parents and children. Marriage is prohibited among close relations. Banning incest is a very controversial idea, though it is found in all societies. Lewis has defined incest as:

Exogamy

Exogamy is a general rule of marriage. When a person marries outside a specific social group of which he is a member, it is exogamy. In other words, a marriage outside the lineage group is exogamy. A lineage is a descent group either from the father's or mother's line which traces its origin from a common ancestor. In such a situation it becomes interesting to differentiate between the close kin and the descent or lineage. Certainly, the size of the group of close kin is smaller. Normally, it consists of father, children and siblings. Beyond this small group there is a larger group which consists of descent and lineage groups. According to the rules of exogamy one is not allowed to marry within the lineage and descent group. Marriage outside this group is exogamy.

Means of Acquiring a Mate

Lowie first used the term "means of acquiring a mate" in his book *Primitive Society*, first published in 1921. Later on, in the book *An Introduction to Social Anthropology* by D.N. Majumdar and T.N. Madan (1957), the same phrase was used. Since then it has become a pattern with the authors to carry forward this phrase. However, Lowie used this terminology only to show the means whereby a mate is secured among the tribals. The legitimacy of the 'means' for acquiring a mate is a suspicious matter. For instance, a Bhil or a Gond may bring his wife by elopement, but the legitimacy given to this means is not of any high respect. Both the husband and wife in this case are considered to be debased.

Generalizations about primitive tribes are dangerous, but few exceptions will be found to the statement that matrimony with them is

not so much a sacramental as a civil institution. However, there are two basic and popular forms of matrimony known as marriage by exchange and marriage by purchase. In both, a girl is treated as an asset which her family will not surrender without receiving adequate compensation.

The common means of acquiring a mate is marriage by exchange. Among some tribals of the country a man is not only forbidden to marry his sister and other kin women, but is practically obliged to mate with a particular type of cousin or some more remote relative. With this limitation exchange is commonly practised. It should be mentioned here that compared with exchange marriage purchase has an exceedingly wide distribution. However, there are several varieties of purchase. In some regions, a woman is, to all intents and purposes, a transferable and inheritable 'commodity'; in others, there will be found only the appearance of purchase, since the bride-price offered is balanced by an equivalent gift or dowry. Here, we shall discuss some of the widely prevalent means of acquiring a mate among tribals:

(1) By Probation

This form of marriage is found in some tribes of the heartland of the country, like the Kuki. In this the prospective spouses meet each other before actually entering into the marriage bond. This enables them to get know each other. The Kuki male goes to his beloved, stays there for some time. They are also, by custom, allowed to have sexual relations. If they are agreeable to it, the marriage is contracted. But, if the probation period between the two is not happy, they part company and try elsewhere. However, during the probation period, if the girl conceives, the male is obliged to solemnize the marriage. Hoebel has an interesting observation on this means of acquiring a spouse. Among the tribals bride-price is not so important as the fecundity of the wife to procreate children. If a woman is found to conceive within the least period, she is supposed to be a desirable wife.

(2) By Capture

In a civilized society, marriage by capture is condemned. However, among Nagas, there are some sections who, even today, acquire their mate by capture. One variety of marriage by capture is that prevalent among the Kharia and Birhor tribes. When a man finds a suitable occa-

sion like a fair, a weekly market or a public place, he applies *sindur* on the forehead of the woman he likes. By this gesture, it is understood that the woman has been married publicly by the man. There is yet another variety among the Gonds. Marriage by capture is practised where the parents of the girl approve of it. The same is applicable to the Bhotias, a pastoral tribe living in the foothills of the Himalayas. But this kind of capture is known to the parents of both the girl and the boy in advance.

(3) *By Trial*

This method of acquiring a mate is actually the trial of the physical strength of the boy. The girls in most of the tribal groups desire to marry boys who are full with vigour and power. This kind of marriage by trial is found among the Bhils of Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh. The Bhils of Rajasthan, however, do not practise marriage by trial.

(4) *By Purchase*

One very common practice of acquiring a wife is by purchase. We have discussed it earlier. Lowie, in his study of primitive society, has made certain observations. He mentions marriage by purchase being found among the Kirghiz, a turkish tribe of south-western Siberia, the Ho of Bihar, the Ewe tribe of Togo of West Africa, and the Kai of New Guinea. In our country marriage by purchase is known as marriage by paying the bride-price especially among all the major tribal groups such as the Gond, Santhal, Chaudhara and Bhil. Earlier, the amount of bride-price was nominal. But, during the last one decade, it has gone up very high.

(5) *By Elopement*

It is practised where the arranged marriage is discarded. When one or both the parents object to the love marriage, the partners resort to marriage by elopement. This method is occasionally observed among Gonds, Bhils and Garasias of Rajasthan. However, the bride-price is settled after the elopement when the spouses settle in their life. Among the Garasias of Rajasthan, the bride-price is realized even after a child is born.

(6) By Exchange

There is a practice among the some tribes and even among the lower and intermediate castes to marry by exchange. It is a practice which saves a man from paying the bride-price. According to this, the brother gives his sister in marriage to another man and gets the latter's sister as his wife. In this case, there is no transaction of bride-price. This form of marriage thus saves both the families from any expenditure. In most of the Indian tribes, this means of acquiring a mate is sometimes practised.

(7) By Intrusion

Sometimes a girl forcefully intrudes into the house of the boy for whom she develops a liking. Sometimes gets insulted but continues to stay there till she is accepted as the daughter-in-law by the parents of the boy. This method of intrusion is observed among the Ho, Kamar and Munda tribes. Even the tribals who practise it, do not look upon it with favour and respect.

(8) By Service

This method of acquiring a mate is rare. Evans-Pritchard, in his study of 241 tribal groups, found that only 30 observed it. In our country, the Bhils and Gonds occasionally observe marriage by service. When the parents of the boy cannot afford to pay the bride-price, the boy gives his services to the parents of the girl. Wages for his service are negotiated and the amount accumulated on account of his service is transferred to the amount of bride-price. When there is final adjustment, the marriage is arranged.

There are rules for marriage. There are forms of marriage. There are ways of acquiring a spouse. Despite all these aspects, there is one specificity of marriage peculiar to primitives. It has been a common notion among all the tribals of the world that some sort of compensation must be yielded in return for the bride. However, there may be some exception in this rule but the study of different forms of marriage, like monogamy, polygyny and polyandry and also of the varying means of acquiring a mate indicates that the core aspect of primitive marriage is the payment of bride-price. It is argued that bride-price has to be paid by the parents of the girl, for they not only gave birth to the girl but also brought her up, nurtured her and in the present context educated her. Bride-price is considered to be valid compensation for such a long period of the rearing girl.