



Research Paper

## Marriage, Family and Kinship in Sociology

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Received 01 November, 2021; Revised: 12 November, 2021; Accepted 14 November, 2021 © The author(s) 2021. Published with open access at [www.questjournals.org](http://www.questjournals.org)

Marriage exist in human society in one form or the other. It is, in fact, the socially approved sexual union between male and female for sexual gratification and legitimization of offspring, which is necessary in matters of inheritance and succession. Marriage is an important and universal social institution of society. Through marriage, family comes into being wherein rearing and socialization of children takes place. Hortun and Hunt, "Marriage is the approved social pattern whereby two or more persons establish a family." Edward Westermarck, "More or less durable connection between male and female, lasting beyond the mere act of propagation till after the birth of offspring" Malinowski, "Marriage is a contract for the production and maintenance of children." Anthropologists have viewed the institution of marriage from a evolutionary perspective. For example, Lewis Morgan thought that early human society was characterized by promiscuity. After that, group marriages took place. At a later stage, polygamy changed to monogamy. Another anthropologist Westermarck points out that monogamy could have been the earliest stage of marriage. Robert Briffault rejected the conceptions of promiscuity and monogamy as the earliest forms of marriage. He places utmost emphasis on the supreme authority of the mother.

Based on the rules, there are numerous kinds of marriage as follows:

Monogamy and Polygamy --- Monogamy means that a man can have only one wife and a female can have only one husband. Monogamy can be further of two types—Straight monogamy and Serial monogamy. In straight monogamy, remarriage is not allowed in any case; whereas in Serial monogamy, a person can marry another person either after divorce or on the death of a spouse. But a person can have only one spouse at a time. Polygamy refers to a system in which a person can have two or more spouses. Polygamy can also be of two kinds--- Polygyny and Polyandry. Polygyny means when a man marries two or more wives. On the other hand, Polyandry refers to when a woman have two or more husbands. With the passing of Hindu Marriage Act, 1955 only monogamy is allowed and polygamy is prohibited.

Endogamy and Exogamy----Endogamy prescribes an individual to marry within his/her own social group like caste, religion, tribe, etc. Indian caste system is characterized by endogamy in which no individual is theoretically allowed to marry outside his/her own caste. Under Exogamy, person is prohibited to marry within the social group to which he belongs. For example, gotra exogamy and sapinda exogamy are practiced in most Northern parts of India. Gotra refers to a social group which traces its origin from a common ancestor. Sapinda means a person is prohibited from marrying within seven generations on father's side and five generations on mother's side.

Arranged marriage and Love marriage---Parents have a decisive role in arranging a spouse for their son or daughter. With the arrival of modernity and emphasis on individualization, love marriages are also taking place in increasing numbers. We can't say that marriage based on love was non-existent during earlier times. *Gandhava vivah* or marriage based on love was one of the eight forms of Hindu marriage during ancient times.

Hypergamy and Hypogamy---Hypergamy is a form of marriage in which a person of a higher caste marries a girl from a lower caste. On the other hand, in Hypogamy, woman of higher caste marry man from a lower caste. Hypergamy is often accused of giving rise to a problem of dowry system as parents work hard to arrange money and gifts to marry off their daughters to a man of higher caste.

Preferential marriage---Apart from universal forms of marriage,preferential marriages also take place in India.Cousin marriage,Levirate and Sororate are the types of preferential marriages.Under cousin marriages,there are two types of marriage---(1)Cross-cousin marriage (2)Parallel cousin marriage. Cross-cousin marriage refers to the marriage between children of siblings of opposite sex.For eg.Gonds tribe of Madhya Pradesh practice such type of marriage which they call *dudhlautawa* (return of milk).It implies that bride-price given in one generation will be returned back on the marriage of his daughter with her mother's brother's son. Parallel cousin marriage is when children of siblings of same sex inter-marry eg.two brothers' children.Cousin marriage is prevalent among Muslims and in parts of South India.Further,Levirate marriage is the marriage of a lady ,whose husband has died,with husband's younger brother.Levirate unions take place among Ahirs of Haryana,some Jat communities etc.In contrast,Sororate refers to a marriage between the man and his deceased wife's younger sister.

Community specific rules based marriages---Amongst tribes of India,several types of marriages are found i.e marriage by exchange, marriage by elopement etc.Similarly,there are eight traditional forms of marriage viz. brahma,daiva,arsha,prajapatya,asura,gandhava,rakshasha and paisacha.

### Family

Various definitions of the family put forth by various social thinkers.According to MacIver and Page, Family is a group defined by sex relationship sufficiently precise and enduring to provide for the production and upbringing of children.Kingsley Davis defines family as a group of persons whose relations to one another are based upon consanguinity and who are therefore kin to one another.According to Green,family is the institutionalized social group charged with duty of population replacement.

George Peter Murdock,in his book "Social Structure" studied 250 societies which included small hunting and gathering bands to large scale industrial societies.He concluded that institution of family is the universal social institution which existed in some form or the other.Thus,according to Murdock," The family is a social group characterized by common residence,economic cooperation and reproduction.It includes adults of both sexes,at least two of them whom maintain a socially approved sexual relationship,and one or more children,own or adopted,of the sexually cohabiting adults."Murdock inferred that parent-child relationship is primarily social not necessarily biological one.Murdock considers nuclear family as a universal social grouping. Sociologists and social scientists put forth the classification of family into several types on the basis of different criteria.

Firstly,on the basis of marriage,Monogamous family emerges out of monogamy.Monogamy is the arrangement when a man can have only one wife and a woman can have only one husband.Both of them have exclusive right of cohabitation with one another.Polygamous family arises out of polygamy which happens when a man marries two or more women or when a woman can have two or more husbands.Former is known as polygyny whereas latter is known as polyandry.

Secondly,on the basis of descent,families can be of two types:Patrilineal family and Matrilineal family.Patrilineal family is the family where the descent is traced through the male line.In matrilineal family,the descent is traced through the female line.In India,among the Khasis of North-East India and Nayars of Kerala,matriliny is followed.Principle of Ultimogeniture is applicable among Khasis which means the youngest daughter inherits the property.On the other hand,principle of primogeniture is followed by Namboodris Brahmins which means the eldest son inherits the property.

Thirdly,on the basis of nature of authority,there are patriarchal families and matriarchal families.In patriarchal family,eldest male descendant is the owner of the property and he exercises his full authority over all the family members.Similarly,in matriarchal family,authority is vested in the eldest female,authority is vested in the eldest female.Here,males are in subordinate position.

Fourthly,on the basis of nature of relations among the family members,family can be of conjugal or consanguine family.Conjugal family is a family in which primary importance is given to husband-wife relationship rather than upon blood ties.Consanguine family is characterized by more emphasis on blood ties rather than husband-wife relationship.

Fifthly,on the basis of membership,family can be classified into two types i.e family of orientation and family of procreation.Family of orientation is the family in which a person is born.It consists of his father,mother and their unmarried children.It is in this family where primary socialization takes place.Family of recreation is the family which an individual establishes himself/herself by marriage.It includes his/her spouse and children.

Isolated Nuclear family of Parsons---Parsons calls nuclear family of a modern industrial society as "structurally isolated" because it is isolated from a wider kinship network.This type of family is suited for an industrial society.As the society gets differentiated,its parts become specialized in performing their specific functions.Family is no longer a economic unit of production.It has lost many of its erstwhile functions.It performs two functions in a modern industrial society.First is the primary socialization of children and second is

the stabilization of adult personalities. In an industrial society, where occupational status is achieved and in which high degree geographical mobility is prevalent, isolated nuclear family functions in a smooth manner. In such a family, an individual is valued on the basis of particularistic values though outside he/she is judged in terms of universalistic criteria. Further, Parsons also outlines "instrumental role" and "expressive role" as played by the husband and wife respectively in this type of family. Instrumental role is concerned with breadwinning role and fulfilling financial needs of the family. Expressive role is concerned with rearing and caring of children and also providing emotional support to husband and her children.

Factors that are responsible for changes in structure and function of family and marriage are as follows:

(1) Industrialisation—Industrialisation is often taken as the main factors in nuclearisation of joint families because it promotes geographical mobility. Nuclear family is characterized by strong conjugal bonds as opposed to strong consanguineous relationships.

(2) Love marriage---People also give importance to marriage based upon romantic love while rejecting strict criteria of caste, religion, race, etc.

(3) Introduction of social legislations---In India, Hindu Marriage Act, 1955 bans polygamy and also provides for grounds for divorce.

(4) Change in household pattern---Due to increasing geographical mobility, couples often leave patrilocal joint families to set up their neolocal household which is near to their workplace.

(5) Emergence of alternatives---In present times, gay-lesbian families, cohabitation or live-in relationships, single-parent households, etc are "new" emerging trends which often contest the conventional definitions of marriage and family.

(6) Individualisation---Modern societies are characterized by individualization which leads to less commitment of youths towards marital obligations and long-lasting relationships.

(7) Rise in status of women---More and more women are getting educated and joining workforce. Educated tend to resist obligations towards patrilineal joint household and they often demand equality of status.

(8) Secularisation---Religious obligations often bind members in a joint household. With the differentiation of society, religious hold on various institutions including family weakens.

(9) State policy---State policies like family planning policies place emphasis upon small-size families. In fact, many welfare schemes like maternity benefits are not extended to the third child.

(10) Land reforms---To save their lands from land ceiling legislations, landlords partitioned their lands among sons. This also sealed the future rift between the sons.

### Kinship

Kinship is one of the main principles of social organization. Kinship is defined as "a social relationship based upon family relatedness." The relationship may be based upon blood ties (consanguineal) and marital ties (affinal). According to G.P. Murdock, kinship is merely a structured system or relationship in which individuals are bound to one another by complex interlocking and ramifying ties. Radcliffe defines kinship (in *Structure and Function in Primitive Society*) as a part of social structure and insists upon the study of kinship in terms of rights and obligations of the individuals.

Another really important aspect of kinship is that biological relationships is not crucial criterion for gaining status in kinship organization for example, Todas of Nilgiris practice fraternal polyandry. Bow and arrow ceremony is conducted during the fourth or fifth of pregnancy of a common wife for ascertaining paternity of a child. One of the brother comes forward to take up the responsibility. Thus social father, not the biological father is recognized. Robert Fox in his book *Kinship and Marriage* has identified four necessary conditions for kinship organization to maintain and sustain itself. This he calls structural principles of kinship which are as follows:

- Men impregnate women.
- Women bear the children.
- Men control economic activity.
- Incest taboo.

Further, Fox says that the way in which these conditions are fulfilled determines the structure or pattern of relations in the kinship system. Irawati Karve has divided Indian society into three major linguistic zones. Linguistic zone is the region in which same language is spoken. She further identified four regions. These regions are (1) Indo-European linguistic region (2) Dravidian linguistic region (3) Austro-Asiatic linguistic region. Based on these linguistic regions – Karve identified four kinship zones viz. Northern Zone, Central Zone, Southern Zone and Southern Zone in her book *Kinship Organization In India*.

### Marriage, Family and Kinship: Contemporary Trends

As mentioned in the above discussion marriage, family and kinship are undergoing changes under the influence of force of industrialization, urbanization, introduction of market economy, rise in status of women and several social legislations.

- Marriage is no longer considered necessary by many young couples as they are comfortable in live-in relationship and due to legalization of sex-same relationships in many countries across the World.
  - With the advancement of science and technological growth, pre-conception and birth-control methods have freed women from domestic responsibilities so women are entering into workforce in large numbers. Social security benefits are also being provided by the state to all citizens. Such factors have shrunk the family size.
  - Divorce, Separation and Empty-shell marriages are also seen. Divorce is the legal termination of marriage; Separation is living separate from each other without going for divorce and Empty-shell marriage is when couple stays together for the sake of marriage. Divorce is no longer considered a stigma. In India, Hindu Marriage Act, 1955 provides for grounds for taking divorce among Hindus, Sikh, Jain and Buddhist communities. The Dissolution of Muslim Marriages Act, 1939 deals with the circumstances in which Muslim women can apply for divorce. Among Christian communities, Indian Divorce Act, 1869 governs divorce matters.
  - Institution of family has also come under criticism by various feminists due to exploitation of women. Feminists blame inequality and assignment of responsibility of giving birth and rearing of children due to sexual division of labour for the exploitation of women within the family. Ann Oakley argues that industrialization is responsible for women's exploitation because it led to domestication of women within the household. Jessie Bernard voiced her concern saying that marriage is a good deal for men rather than for women. It means men experience satisfaction and more successful career after marriage as opposed to women who are at a loss after marriage. Similarly, Hosi Child says that working women are harassed by men in both the shifts. In first shift by their employers at their workplace and in the second shift which they do in their households.
  - As pointed by many sociologists, kinship networks have shrunk. Nuclear family is the most prominent trend during times though spirit of jointness is retained (K.M. Kapadia). Further "symmetrical family" as described by Young and Wilmott in which conjugal roles are joint has also come into existence.
- In the final analysis, it can be concluded that the relevance of social institutions like family, marriage and kinship is still experienced though they have changed their structure and function with change in social structure. This topic still arises interest among sociologists belonging to different perspectives and adopting different methodological approaches. In Indian scenario, I.P. Desai, K.M. Kapadia, M.S. Gore, A.M. Shah, T.N. Madan, Pauline Kolenda, Irawati Karve and others have contributed significantly to the sociological literature relating to family, marriage and kinship in India and their contemporary trends.

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