Marriage: An Overview in Global Context

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ABSTRACT

The paper tries to focus and share about a legal and socially recognised relationship, typically between a man and a woman, referred to as "marriage." This union is governed by laws, norms, customs, and religious beliefs that specify the rights and obligations of the partners and grant status to their kids. Marriage has existed in a wide variety of forms throughout history. There are numerous significant tasks involved in marriage. Divorce rates have increased and are now typical. These variations in marital patterns strongly imply that marriage as an institution is evolving throughout time. Still, marriage is a very significant institution in our society.

Introduction

One of the earliest institutions for creating a family and procreating child is marriage. Marriage is the legally recognised union of a man and a woman as husband and wife following socially prescribed rules. Cohabitation may or may not be started by it. It confers societal legitimacy on the establishment of a new procreative family. Men and women are admitted to family life through marriage, which entails living in the close personal ties of a husband and wife with the primary goal of having and raising children. This institution has social approbation and religious sanction.

As a social institution marriage has been defined by Westermarck "as 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." According to L. A. Hoebel- "Marriage is the complex of social norms that define and control the relation of mated pair to each other, their kinmen, their offspring and society." Jacob and Sterw have defined, "Marriage as a term for social relationship of husband and wife or of plural mates, also used for the ceremony of uniting marital partners." Similarly, according to Ellen Key, "Marriage signifies the living together of two people upon the ground of love and the parent-hood of children." According to Louie, "Marriage devotes those unequivocally sanctioned unions which persist beyond sensuous satisfaction and thus come to marriage life." Majumdar and Madan have said that, "Marriage involves the social sanction generally in the form of civil or religious ceremony authorizing two persons of opposite sex to engage in sexual and other consequent and correlated socio-economic relation with one another."

Marriage is thus an alliance whose offsprings have social recognition and approval. This approval is obtained in the form of and by way of performance of social ceremonies. Undoubtedly procreation is essential for survival of all of human society but such procreation must have social recognition.

The marriage ceremony may be a fairly straightforward act or the focus of extravagant celebrations lasting many days, but its primary aspect is always that it is a public agreement. As an institution, it implies certain reciprocal rights and obligations everywhere. The marriage institution in one community differs from that in another based on the specific set of rights and obligations.

We may argue that marriage is an institution that deals with the reciprocal social relationships and cultural behaviour of a man and a woman who publicly symbolise their union with the implied goal of starting a family through procreation, among other potential goals. Marriage institutions are thus intimately connected with family institutions and family groups.

Even though a man and a woman's relationship is the foundation of every marriage, the institution may be set up so that one or both spouses can engage in two or more of these relationships at once. This is the case in the so-called plural forms of marriage permitted in certain societies. Further more, the marriage institution may involve certain institutionalized behaviour on the part of the pin of the spouses and of other individuals in the society. For example, a husband in our society is expected to protect his wife from all insults delivered by nonrelatives.

The specific cultural elements of the marriage institution differ from one society to the next, as is the case with all institutions, and to some extent also among subgroups and classes in our own society. Such variations in the specifics are, to a significant measure, related to the
various aims of marriage institutions and the emphasis placed on them.

**Objectives of Marriage Institutions:**

A certain channelization of sex activity between husband and wife is a universal feature of marriage, but such activity is by no means always institutionalized in terms of absolute fidelity on the part of the spouses. Among the Ilaha of South Africa, for instance, exists the custom of lukamb (Brelsford, V., " Lukamb: A Description of the Bala custom," Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute, Vol.63,1933, pp. 433-438) whereby a wife takes an official lover with the consent of her husband after the two men have completed a series of institutionalized negotiations involving economic exchange and other obligations. Formal wife-lending of one sort or another accurs with fair frequency in the marriage institutions of primitive peoples. At the other extreme lies the absolute exclusion of wives from any social relations whatever with men. Other than their husbands, found in some Mohammedan societies.

Founding a family of procreation is also a universal objective of marriage institutions and therefore stress is usually laid upon physical procreation by the partners to the marriage. However, the emphasis upon the husband's biological paternity of the children varies. Furthermore, in most societies adoption is institutionalized under certain circumstances.

**Economic Cooperation** is a common objective of marriage Institutions. Everywhere the partners to a marriage agree to certain division of labor, and the marriage may also involve property considerations. The cultural behavior involved, however, differs widely. In one group the wife's duties may make her a household doudge, in another her importance may be that of an additional field hand, and in a third her chief economic contribution may be embroidering ornamental knick-knack for the house. Liken rise the husband's economic relations with his wife show considerable variety of pattern from one society to another. Control of the purse is not a universal male privilege.

**Emotional and for intellectual inter stimulation** of the partners is often one of the objectives of the marriage institution, although this may often be a relatively minor objective.

A prominent objective in some marriage institutions is **linkage of the pin or status groups to which the spouses belong** and a specific regularization of their social relations. Such an objective was often dominant in the marriages of European royalty where by family, religious and political alliances were strengthened and maintained.

All of these and other more specialized objectives are combined in many marriage institutions. The emphasis given to one or other of the purposes of marriage may vary and with it the institutionalized behavior. In a society which puts a premium upon the economic purposes, relatively less attention may be paid to sexual relations between the partners, and so on.

**Different Forms of Marriage**

1. **Monogamy:**

   It is one of the oldest form of marriage. It is the marriage of one man to one woman, and it has been and it the leading type of marriage. This type of marriage arrangement is the most & prevalent in all societies, even in those permitting other forms. The advantages of monogamy are -

   (i) The best care for children is ensured by monogamy. Under it, the mother and father collaborate on behalf of their children. More and better care can be taken to ensure that both parents are involved in their children's upbringing when a couple is monogamous than when they are not.

   (ii) Only members of the monogamic family are capable of producing the highest levels of love, tolerance, and affection.

   (iii) Compared to other marriage arrangements, monogamy forges more firm and durable family relationships. Affection between parents between parents and children, and between children themselves is more wholesome. Legal relationships and blood relationships are simpler, less entangled, and less frequently the cause of permanent and annoying frictions. The cohesive power of the family is greater. As a result, it is probable that monogamic families tend to increase the unity and cohesiveness of society itself.

   (iv) Monogamy favers not only the preservation of the lives of the children but of the parents. It is only under monogamy that aged parents are cared for to any great extent by their children. (The advantages of monogamy are thus many and for reaching.) Monogamy at its best presents superior opportunities for social interaction, and seems better fitted than any other type of marriage to produce the highest qualities of love and to lay the foundations for the finest forms of society life.

2. **Polygamy:**

Polygamy is the type of marriage in which more than one man and woman enter into a matrimorial alliance and each one is allowed to have more than one wife or husband. In this system biological basis of fatherhood are not considered very important.
3. Polygyny:

Polygyny is the practise of having multiple women married to one guy at the same time. The practise of polygyny and slavery are closely intertwined. Women taken prisoner during battle were made into the brides, concubines, and slaves of their conqueror. (A concubine is a kind of second rate slave-wife) Under polygyny purchase is also common. Eskimoos, Negros and the Chinese practice this. Hebrews and Asyro-Babylonians also follow this. (In the past the kings and feudal lords kept captive and other women with them). It is the commonest form of carriage everywhere. So far as we know it is not universal but is the privilege of the powerful and the rich.

4. Polyandry:

Polyandry, is the marriage of one woman to two or more men. It can be (i) fraternal and (ii) non-fraternal. Polyandry is fraternal when a woman is treated as the wife of all the brothers living in the family and the offspring is considered as the son of eldest brother. In a non-fraternal polyandry, a woman is supposed to have more than one husband but it is not essential that these husbands should either be brothers or must live at the same place. They can live seperately and woman may go from one husband to the other at a place where he is living. Polyandry is not so common and is usually found in societies where female population is less than the male population. It is found in socially recognized form only in few cultures, such as that of the Tadas of southern India, the northern Tibetan tribes, certain East African Tribes, (e.g., the Bahima) occasionally the Eskimo, and a few other.

5. Group Marriage:

Group marriage may occur as an alternative in a few cultures, such as the C-hukchee where" second or third cousins, or even unrelated men desire of cementing a firm bond of friendship, will form a group exercising marital rights over all the wives of the men concerned."

6. Companionate Marriage:

Companionate Marriage is the marriage of two persons on the understanding that as long as there are no children the marriage may be dissolved simply by mutual consent and with perfect understanding.

7. Endogamy:

In all the societies there are certain principles which must be observed in so far as marriage is concerned. There are certain preferences as well as prohibitions. In some societies Inter-caste marriages are not permitted and preference is always given to marriages within the caste. The system under which one is required to marry within the group is called endogamy. Endogamy is the practise of only allowing members of one caste or clan to marry. Close kin marriages are, however, infrequently permitted. According to Hoebel, "It is a social requirement that a person marry within a designated social group of which he is a member."

8. Exogamy:

As against endogamy is the system of exogamy which requires that a person should not marry within a group to which he belongs. Hoebel says that "It may be defined as a social rule that prohibit a person from marrying within a defined social group of which he is a member.

9. Inter-Caste Marriage:

In some societies, including India, caste-system exists. In this system each caste believes in the purity of its blood and as such does not encourage mixing with other castes. Under the system of inter-caste marriage, a marriage outside one’s own caste is not only permitted but also encouraged. In this type of marriage there is also provision for marriage among the boys and girls belonging to higher or lower castes. Thus, when the men of higher castes are allowed to marry or they actually marry the women belonging to lower caste the system is called Anuloma. On the other hand, when women of higher caste marry men of lower caste the system is called Pratiloma.

10. Arranged Marriage:

This type of marriage is arranged or settled by the parents of both boys and girls. The consent of the boy or girl is not so essential. The parents take upon themselves the responsibility of marrying their children without taking the parties concerned into confidence.

11. Love-Marriage:

The system under which the youngsters themselves select their life-partners is called 'Love Marriage. Both boys and girls feel that they are mature enough to decide about their future life and selection of their mates with whom they are to pull on throughout their life. They therefore, argue that let their choice and word be final in such matters and not those of the parents. Love and romance which proceed such marriages have found encouragement due to advanced industrialization.

Functions of Marriage

Marriage has many important functions to perform and they are as follows:

1. Social Recognition:

Marriage gives social recognition to all sexual relationships, which otherwise would have created many social problems. Marriage alone makes the society accept the relation ship of boy and girl, as husband and wife.

2. Procreation of Children:

Another function of the marriage is to have legitimate children. The children born as a result of socially recognised marriage are accepted by the society as legitimate and legal heirs to the property and other aspects of the family.
3. Sense of Sympathy:
After the marriage alone the husband and wife and their children develop a sense of sympathy for each other and they begin to share each other's joys and sorrows. They then sacrifice their everything for the sake of each other.

4. Basis of Family:
The other function of marriage is that it is the basis of family life. After marriage family comes into being and with that the virtues of all the family life emerge in the society.

5. Stability in Relationship:
After marriage alone relationships comes into being e.g. the relationship of husband and wife, son or daughter, father-in-law and mother-in-law or that of grandfather and grandmother etc. These relations get stabilized with the passage of time but only after marriage and not before marriage.

6. Perpetuation of Lineage:
It is only after marriage that there is desire to perpetuate the name of the family. The children perpetuate the names of their parents and then come grandchildren, great grandchildren etc. After some time then there is a desire to perpetuate the lineage there are no offshoots, then every effort is made to have them, so that the name of the family continues.

Other features of the Institution:
There are certain other features of the marriage institutions. Some of these are universal; others are to be found only among certain peoples of the earth. Some seem to have a basis in the biological characteristics of man others grow out as superstition and still others appear to be accidental inventions which become established in the folkways.

Age:
The age at which individuals are allowed to enter the married state is everywhere recognized. In almost all cultures participation in full marriage is restricted to those who have at least reached puberty. However, in some cultures, participation in full marriage is restricted to those who have at least reached puberty. However, in some cultures, for example parts of Hindu India, child marriage is institutionalized. The girl is formally married to her husband while still a child in order to avoid the possibility of her marrying anyone else when she grows older, although sexual relations are not expected until puberty. In modern America, the age of marriage varies, but as a general rule it is set at some years i.e. three or Four, after puberty, in recognition of the attitude of society that marriage requires not only sexual maturity but also some degree of mental maturity.

According to Paul Popenee, people should marry after they are physically mature, after they are emotionally mature, and before they are intellectually mature and this is in the early twenties which is the normal time for marriage.

But we know that at the age, when a girl attains puberty, her reproductory organs are in a process of development and they just start functioning, but they are not fully developed. For example, a potter when shapes clay pots, it remains in a process but it takes time to be ready for use. In the same way a girl at her teen age is not fully matured for marriage. The same thing happens for the boys also. So to be matured and adjusted physically and mentally, it is an essential condition and pre-requisite for marriage. When both the boys and girls are educated properly or given proper education and when they become self-dependent, self-reliant, have decision making power, emotionally matured, socially adjusted, physically matured and mentally developed etc. Then only they can lead their life happily. Thus we can say that due to certain changes which have occurred in each society whether Indian or Western, so for as age is concerned at the time of marriage we think that a girl should be married at the age of 20-24 years; and the boys must attain the age of 25-29 years, at the time of marriage.

Social Sanction:
Marriage differs from casual liaisons between the sexes primarily in the social recognition which is accorded to it. The standard mechanisms for insuring this social recognition are publication of intentions and a regular ceremony. The other members of the society are thereby given notice that the two parties to the marriage are (1) recognized as having a legitimate right to fulfill its purpose; (2) are taboo as objects of romantic interest on the part of others; (3) are henceforward expected to cooperate in institutionalized behavior, e.g., the husband to " love, honor and protect in sickness and in health," the wire to " love, honor and cherish. The religious ceremony not only gives notice of the new relationship to social contemporaries but also to the supernatural. Marriage may therefore be viewed as a contract between at least two individuals. In many cultures, the contract for practical purposes included not only the bride and groom but also their respective families, particularly if property considerations and social status are important.

Among the contractual obligations that may surround marriage are exchange of bride for bride between families, giving a bride in exchange for service by the bridegroom, giving a bride in exchange for a bride price presented by the girls family by the groom, exchange of economic goods between the two families, the presenting of a dowry to the husband along with the bride, the giving of a gift by the groom directly to the bride, etc. The contract may include provision regarding the names of the prospective children, the obligation of husband and wife or one of their families to provide and maintain a given social position for the married couple and their children, to provide certain religions training for the children, and so on. It should be understood that all marriage obligations are not explicit in the contract. But among all peoples there is a fairly definite
understanding, either formalized or informal, which both parties are supposed to know when entering the married state and to which they thereby agree at least by implication.

**Positive aspects of marriage rites:**

The most general social object of marriage ceremonies, however, is to give publicity to the union. For this reason witnesses are commonly required. Publicity among some people has been given even to sexual consummation by the requirement that witnesses be present in the marriage chamber. A feast, party, or other gathering is a common feature of marriage ceremonies as a mechanism for providing publicity. The marriage rites also serve the purpose of strengthening the marriage tie by impressing upon the bride and groom the solemnity of their undertaking. For this purpose various symbolisms are used in different cultures, for example, the joining of hands tying together of the couple, the use of a ring, the exchange of clothing such as handkerchief or belt, drinking together, and the mixing of each other’s blood. A third purpose of the ceremony in some cultures may be to facilitate the consummation of the marriage through suggestive or magical symbolism. For example, in some cultures eggs or glass and earthenware vessels are broken at weddings, and red color is used for decorations, all perhaps symbolic of defloration. Still another aspect of the wedding ceremony among some peoples may be provision for making the wife fruitful or insuring male offspring. Symbol of this purpose is the use of small children in the ceremonies as flower girls and ring-bearers and the like; the throwing of some kind of cereal (e.g. rice) or fruit on the bride. Or the bride may be equipped with a bundle in imitation of a body on her back. Or she may be required to ride on a stallion that she may have male offspring. Empty dishes, trays, and tables may be avoided as suggestive of sterility. Ceremonies are also intended in some cases to facilitate the delivery of the young wife. She may have to leave the laces of her shoes untied during the ceremony or to avoid all constrictions in her costume.

Some marriage rites are supposed to influence the external appearance or behaviour of the children. In Estonia for instance, it is said that if the bride wears no chains or bells, she will have quiet children. Other ceremonies may be performed to make the couple prosperous. In Morocco dates are eaten to make them wealthy. Rites may also be included intended to make the couple happy, such as the use of honey and other sweet things. Parts of the ceremony may also be symbolic of the willingness of the bride or groom to occupy the expected social position in the family together with duties pertaining thereto. For instance, among the Caribs in Guiana, the groom goes on a ceremonial hunting expedition on the day of his marriage, while the bride prepares food and drink in the new house, both actions symbolic of the duties which they will perform after the ceremony is over. Among some slavonic peoples the groom gently beats the bride during the ceremony to signify that he is "bess". Various symbols of the power of the wife may also be used.

Thought many such customs come to be rationalized after curiosity has raised questions as to their purposes, often customs originate accidentally and without purpose. They continue as folkways simply because they have been long associated with marriage.

**Negative aspect of marriage rites:**

In addition to the rites which are intended to produce positive benefits for the young couple, the ceremony may include patterns intended to protect them from various evils and disasters. Shooting of guns and noisemaking at weddings in some cultures are intended to frighten away evil spirits, (as well as the burning of incense, batting and washing, and painting decorating the bride and groom to make them unrecognizable to evil spirits). Disguises are worn by the bride and groom among some peoples to escape recognition by evil spirits. The attendants, such as bridesmaids and groomsmen, in certain cultures are thought of as protecting the bride and groom either from supernatural or natural enemies and dangers. The practices of the bride wearing veil and walking on a carpet or some other ground covering serve also as protection. The custom of throwing old shoes. after the happy couple has been variously interpreted as a ceremonial means of clearing the air of evil influences and as a reminder of the necessity of avoiding the evil influences of the ground. Various food taboos are also imposed with the purpose of protecting the couple from danger.

Larger social aspects- finally marriage rites may symbolize the new relationship between the two families of orientation. Mock fights followed by reconciliation between the relatives of bride and groom, although interpreted sometimes as survival of marriage by capture, also serve as an expression of the independence of the two groups about to be united by a common interest. Giving the bride away by a member of her family symbolizes the interest of the latter in the transaction. Weeping by the bride's female relatives symbolizes their loss. Mingling together in feast or dance after the ceremony symbolizes the union between the two groups formed by the marriage link. Congratulations, charivaries, practical joking, and other patterns of behavior indicate the interest which the society as a whole, not necessarily kinsmen, take in the union.

**DIVORCE:**

A feature of the marriage institution in most cultures is an institutionalized pattern for breaking up the relationship under certain conditions. Divorce on various legal grounds, varying from state to state, is the institutionalized method of ending the marriage relationship, while desertion is the informal method, the "poor man's divorce." Among the more general legal grounds for divorce
are infidelity, desertion, irritations and tensions, misunderstandings insanity, neglect and failure to provide, conviction of a felony. Incompatibility, probably one of the most common immediate causes of divorce is admitted as a legal ground in only one state, New Mexico. Divorce by mutual consent is permitted legally in the United States. Divorce lanes usually include provision also for Care of the children, alimony division of property and other matters of mutual concern to the partners of the dissolved marriage.

For many years, the United States has had the terrible distinction of being the most divorce-friendly nation in both Europe and North America. It has been established that divorce rates have risen in the US. In comparison to practically every other supposedly Christian country, the United States offers more freedom when it comes to the legal dissolution of marriage.

In addition to leading the world in the annual number of legally dissolved marriages, the United States is also experiencing a rapid surge in divorce rates that is outpacing those of other developed nations, including India today. If this trend continues, it won't be many decades before husband and wife permanently form a family, which will no longer be common.

In general, cities and industrial hubs have a greater divorce rate than rural areas when it comes to formally ending a marriage. The divorce rate varies according to religion. We have two extremes. One may regard a marriage as an iron-clad bond, no matter how one party or the other may have been victimized or subjected to a living death. The other extreme is to divorce marriage from religion completely and to regard it in no way as sacred.

Approximately two thirds of the marriages are dissolved or broken at the request of the wife. In many cases agreements are wracked by the two parties before application is made for divorce. The fact that the application is made by the wife may be a formality based on common agreement and may not indicate that one party is more responsible than the other for the divorce.

The grounds that are given in the courts for dissolving marriages are often misleading or insufficient. Desertion is frequently cited, but the question at once arises: what brought about the desertion? Incompatibility is more specific, but even then, one would like to know what led to the incompatibility. Neglect or mental cruelty likewise raises the question who is the more responsible. sexual immorality, another common cause, usually brings in "other women" with a train of complicating circumstances.

To a significant extent, the formal dissolution of families is a sign of graver wrongs. Being an everyday promise, marriage itself is being seen with less significance. The societal values that support the family are being sacrificed in some socioeconomic classes, specifically the richest and poorest. Family life necessitates selfless deeds, chastity on an individual level, and social accountability.

Family instability has been exacerbated by rising divorce rates, rising divorce rates knowledge, and rising divorce rates laxity. A few centuries ago, only the wealthy or the socially influential turned to the law. Many people today who would not have considered divorcing three or four decades ago are familiar with the laws governing divorce and expect to be able to do so freely if the need arises. People, nowadays, are both marrying and divorcing more than formerly.

Is More Divorce More Family Disorganization?

Children of divorced parents experience the same psychological harm as one would expect from broken households, but children of incompatible parents who are "fighting it out" may experience much more severe psychological damage. Some claim that facing a marital misadjustment wisely and moving on to resolve it promotes character. However, in general, the weight of evidence tends to suggest that the candid and intelligent use of divorce as a tool of societal adjustment has made marriage a more viable human institution, taking into account as many limitations and issues as feasible.

The following suggestions whereby marital conflicts may be reduced are - (1) eliminate needless annoyances, (2) hold frank discussions but avoid arguments over problems, (3) be just but do not always expect justice, (4) work out plans together, (5) given special attention to enlarging areas of agreement, (6) avoid quarrelling over nonessentials and overlook petty differences, and (7) at all times play the role of a good sport. - ( Hornell and Ella Hart, personality and the Family (D.C. Heath and Company, Boston, 1941), pp 329-35).

The important factors which makes for success in modern marriage are as follows:

(1) The presence of personality attributes including an upbeat temperament, emotional balance, a conciliatory nature, a sympathetic outlook, and self-confidence, notably on the side of the spouse.
(2) Cultural backgrounds that are similar.
(3) A peaceful and compassionate home environment.
(4) A socialised personality as shown by the quantity of friends, involvement in groups, and level of education.
(5) The continuation of religious rituals.
(6) A profession with a moderately high level of social control, outstanding education, reasonable security, and little to no mobility.
(7) A love affair that develops from friendship rather than infatuation.
(8) The husband and wife's sex desires are similar in intensity and have grown holistically.
Better marriages make an excellent starting point for improving the family. On the other hand, poor marriages are perhaps the chief cause of family instability, divorce and desertion. Since many people assume that marriage is not a serious affair, they make hasty and ill-advised marriages and think that they can easily extricate themselves. The easier divorce is made, the wider will be the assumption that marriage is unimportant and the more careless the attitudes regarding it.

Legislation alone is not enough. If marriage and the family are not supported by public opinion, then legislation cannot improve matters. Public opinion has to shift from seeing marriage as a communal safety net to seeing it as an expression of simply individualistic inclinations. The family should be regarded not as a temporary arrangement to be taken carelessly, but rather as a socially significant and sacred institution that involves human feelings and close relationships that should be treated as having a lasting impact on personality. A more wholesome social life would result from widespread knowledge of the strategies for securing sound marriages and stable family units.

The most prevalent institution in human civilization, we might assume, is marriage. Marriage has remained the foundation of human civilisation from the prehistoric era to the present. As a result, the institution of marriage holds a significant place in human civilization.

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