
UNIT 6 MARRIAGE

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6.0 OBJECTIVES

After studying this unit you should be able to:

- explain the institution of marriage;
- describe the various forms of marriage;
- explain what is implied by mate-selection;
- discuss changes that have taken place in the institution of marriage; and
- explain marriage goals and stability in marriage.

6.1 INTRODUCTION

In this unit we will explain the institution of marriage. We will also explain various aspects connected with it. This will include discussion on forms of marriage. Such forms include monogamy, polygamy and rules such as those of endogamy and exogamy. We have also described mate-selection as an important aspect of marriage. Some of the related areas covered are love marriages, preferential marriages, and mate selection practices among tribals. The last part deals with changes in marriage, its forms, mate selection practices, age at marriage, and so on. We thus provide a full picture of the institution of marriage.

6.2 THE INSTITUTION OF MARRIAGE

Marriage is an important and universal social institution of society. As a social institution, it provides a recognised form for entering into a relatively enduring heterosexual relationship for the bearing and rearing of children. It is thus primarily a way of regulating human reproduction. This reproduction, however, also has a sociological dimension. The right of sexual relationship, that universally accompanies marriage, provides legitimisation to the children born in wedlock; this legitimacy is of great importance in the matters of inheritance and succession. Besides, through marriage there comes into existence the family, a relatively stable social group, that is responsible for the care and training of children. In all these respects, then, marriage has historically provided the institutional mechanisms necessary for replacement of social members and thereby has been meeting the important prerequisites of human survival and society's continuance. However, these societal prerequisites do not encompass all the values and goals of marriage.

In some societies, particularly in the industrialised western societies, the chief aim of marriage is not only procreation but companionship, emotional, and psychological support are equally emphasised. The idea of companionship in marriage as a main feature, however, is a recent development. For the major part of human history, all societies have emphasised marriage to be a social obligation. It is invested with several familial, social and economic responsibilities.

Historically marriage has been found to exist in a wide variety of forms in different societies. Also it has been found to perform differing functions. Indeed, even the manner in which marriage partners are to be obtained reveals an astonishing variety of modes and customs. There is an almost endless variety in nearly everything concerning marriage. This has led to several definitions of what marriage is.

6.3 FORMS OF MARRIAGE

As has just been pointed out, above, and in Unit 5, marriage has a large variety of forms. These forms can be identified on the basis of the number of partners and rules governing who can marry whom.

In terms of the number of partners that can legitimately enter into matrimony, we have two forms of marriage, namely, monogamy and polygamy.

6.3.1 Monogamy

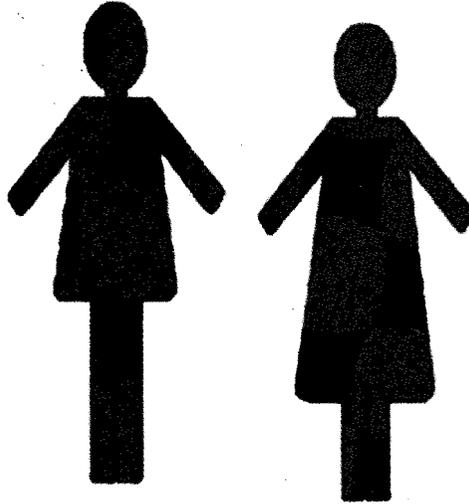
Monogamy restricts the individual to one spouse at a time. Under this system, at any given time a man can have only one wife and a woman can have only one husband. Monogamy is prevalent in all societies and is almost the universal form in all modern industrial societies. Even where polygamy (see Key Words) is permitted, in actual practice, monogamy is more widely prevalent. Due to constraints of financial resources and almost an even balance between the ratio of men and women in the population, a vast majority of individuals living in polygamous societies cannot have more than one spouse at a time.

In many societies, individuals are permitted to marry again often on the death of the first spouse or after divorce; but they cannot have more than one spouse at one and the same time. Such a monogamous marriage is termed as serial monogamy. Most western societies practise serial monogamy.

A society may also practise straight monogamy, in which remarriage is not allowed. Most upper caste Hindu females were obliged to follow the norm of straight monogamy prior to the enactment of Widow Remarriage Act of 1856, as until then widows were not allowed to marry again. These restrictions had not, however, pertained to men.

They were allowed to remarry after their spouse's death. However, in some lower castes, widow remarriage was permitted. In such a remarriage usually the deceased husband's brother was considered a preferred mate. This practice helped keep property within the family. It is also called levirate marriage.

Monogamy



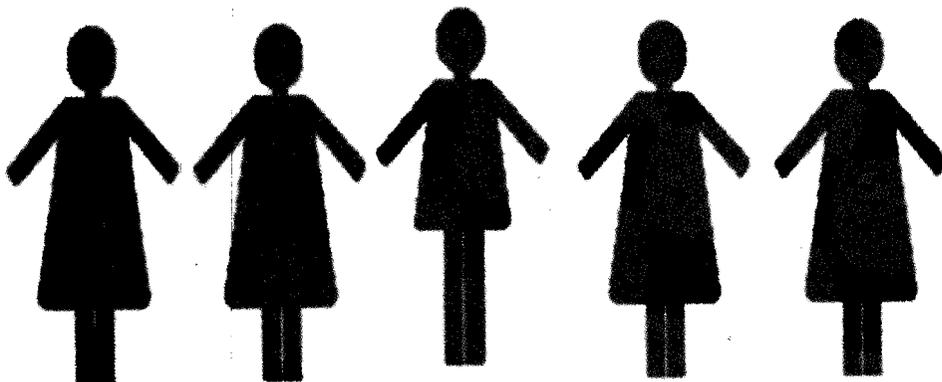
6.3.2 Polygamy

Polygamy denotes marriage to more than one mate at one time and takes the form of either: **Polygyny** (one husband with two or more wives) or **Polyandry** (one wife with two or more husbands).

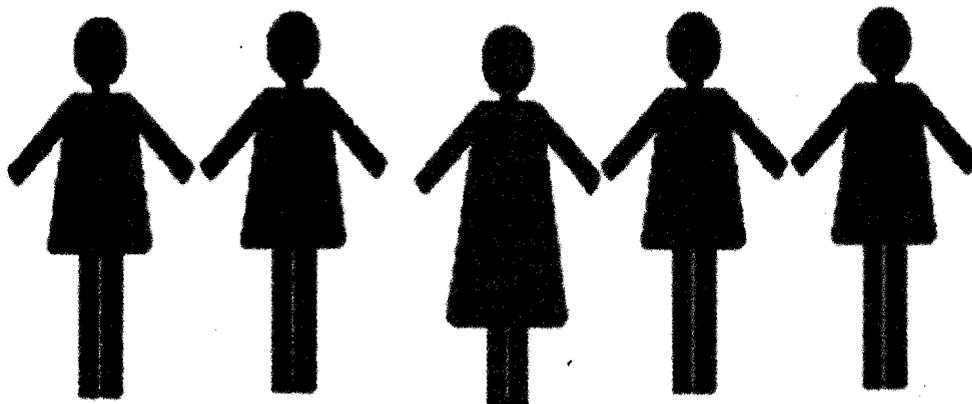
While monogamy is permitted in all societies, polygamy, in the form of **polygyny**, is the preferred form in several societies. **Murdock's** research, based on an analysis of 283 societies, revealed that 193 of these were characterised by **polygyny**, 43 were **monogamous** and only 2 practiced **polyandry**.

Preferential rules for the choice of wives/husbands are followed in some polygamous societies. In certain societies males marry the wife's sisters, and females their husband's brothers. Such marriages are termed as **sororal polygyny** and **fraternal polyandry**, respectively.

i) Polygyny



Male
+
Female



Polyandry

Among polyandrous societies, “fraternal” polyandry is by far the most common. In these societies, a group of brothers, real or classificatory, are collectively the husbands of a woman. This kind of polyandry has been found by the researchers in various parts of the world. Tibet has been described as the largest and most flourishing polyandrous community by Prince Peter. Polyandry is reported to be widely prevalent among some tribes in South India, Todas are considered a classic example of polyandrous people. In North India some groups of Jats are reported to be polyandrous.

Usually where economic conditions are harsh, polyandry may be one response of society, since in such situations a single male cannot adequately support a wife and children. Also, extreme poverty conditions pressurise a group to limit its population.

Activity 1

Which type of marriage has been frequently practiced by your family members and friends and why? Write a short note on “Type of Marriage in My Community” and discuss your note with other learners at your study centre.

6.3.3 Rules of Endogamy and Exogamy

All societies have prescriptions and proscriptions regarding who may or may not marry whom. In some societies these restrictions are subtle, while in some others, individuals who can or cannot be married, are more explicitly and specifically defined. Forms of marriage based on rules governing eligibility/ineligibility of mates is classified as endogamy and exogamy.

Endogamy requires an individual to marry within a culturally defined group of which he or she is already a member, as for example, caste. Exogamy, on the other hand, the reverse of endogamy, requires the individual to marry outside of his/her own group. Endogamy and exogamy are in reference to certain kinship units, such as, clan, caste and racial, ethnic or religious groupings. In India, even village exogamy is practised in certain parts of north India.

- i) Religious endogamy is one of the most pervasive form of endogamy. Most religious groups do not permit or like their members to marry individuals of other faiths. In addition, various groups in the social hierarchy such as caste and class also tend to be endogamous. Endogamy is a very important characteristic of the Indian caste system. Among Hindus, there are over three hundred castes/sub-castes and each one of them is endogamous. Despite modernising trends in India, which

have diluted caste restrictions in many respects, inter-caste marriages are still few and mostly limited to educated urban individuals. Although the norms of caste endogamy were widely prevalent, Hindu scriptures by allowing **anuloma** and **pratiloma** marriages, institutionalised, to a limited extent, inter-caste marital alliances. The **anuloma** marriage permits an alliance between a lower class woman and higher caste man, while the **pratiloma** marriage is an alliance between higher caste woman and a lower caste man. The former is referred to by the sociologists as hypergamy and the latter as hypogamy.

- ii) Rules of exogamy among Hindus are very specific. Hindus are traditionally prohibited from marrying in their own gotra, pravara and sapinda (gotra, pravara and sapinda refer to a group of individuals assumed to have descended from a paternal or maternal ancestor and are variously termed as clan, sib or lineage). The Hindu Marriage Act (1955) forbids marriage between sapinda, and specifies that marriage between two persons related within five generations on the father's side and three on the mother's side is void, unless permitted by local custom.

The exogamic rule, prohibiting marriage between siblings (brother-sister) and parent-child is followed in virtually all societies. Sexual relations between the members of an elementary nuclear family (other than parents) are termed as incest.

Check Your Progress 1

Note: i) Use space below for your answers.

ii) Compare your answers with those given at the end of this unit.

- 1) Distinguish between monogamy and polygamy. Use about three lines.

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- 2) Write a brief note on endogamy and exogamy. Use about four lines.

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6.4 MATE SELECTION

The process whereby people choose marriage partners is called mate selection. While in some societies, individuals are relatively free to choose their mate from the 'field of eligibles', in some other societies those getting married have almost no say regarding whom they wish to marry. Even in the former situation individuals are not entirely free to choose their mates. Culture and social pressures, in subtle or explicit ways, do influence choice.

In all societies there is some notion of a 'good match'. Further, within endogamous limits also, certain relationships are preferred. Thus, mate selection is usually influenced by considerations of 'good match' and preferential mating.

In India, considerations of caste, religious and family background have traditionally been of great importance in selection of mates. In addition, looks of the girl and her competence as housewife, are also considered to be important. In urban middle class families, the earning capacity of the girl is also given considerable weightage, these days, in the selection of a bride.

6.4.1 Preferential Marriage

While some societies prohibit marriage between certain categories of relations (kins), other societies permit or even require certain kind of relatives to get married to. Thus marriage with particular cross cousins (father's, sister's or mother's brother's offsprings) are approved or permitted in many societies. Among Arabs and Muslims in India, marriage between parallel cousins (child of father's brother or mother's sister) is common. Possible reasons for permitting or preferring cousin marriages are: (a) family wealth is not dispersed as it remains within related family groups; and (b) relationships do not fade away as they are constantly renewed among offsprings of related families.

i) Marriage arrangements

In some societies, the decisions regarding mate selection are made by parents/ relatives; in some other societies individuals are relatively free to choose their own mates. Marriage arrangements thus tend to follow two patterns, namely, parent arranged (arranged marriage) and self-choice (love marriage)

ii) Arranged marriage

Traditional societies like India, where extended family network has been crucial, arranging marriage has been the concern of parents and elders. In additions, gains in terms of family prestige, economic prosperity and power (especially in affluent families) have also been sought through 'proper' marriage alliances. Consequently, marriage has been considered to be a serious matter which could not be left to the 'fancies' of the immature. As such, in traditional societies 'arranged' marriages have been the norm. Such marriages have also been unavoidable because in these societies there used to exist rigid sex-segregation, due to which marriageable young girls and boys could not come together and know one another. Even today, heterosexual intermingling is not widely prevalent, and young people especially girls, themselves, seem to prefer arranged marriages, which saves them from many psychological tensions which modern youth undergo in many of the western societies.

However it should be remembered that arranged marriages are rarely forced marriages; the needs and preferences of the young people getting married are not entirely ignored.

6.4.2 Love Marriage

In the western urban-industrial method of mate selection, individuals go through the process of dating and courtship, they make selections, based on the consideration of feelings for one another. This is termed as 'love marriage' by Asians/Indians. For, in such marriages, mate choice is done by the individuals concerned on grounds of mutual affection and love, rather than on pragmatic considerations of social status, wealth or other familial advantages. These 'love marriages' stress the individual's supreme right to love and be loved in a romantic-sensual sense. Such love is considered as the essence of happiness in marriage.

There is an important difference between love marriage and arranged marriage. Whereas in the latter at the individual's level one has vague expectations from marriage (in fact, individuals enter into it primarily for performing their social duty), in self-choice marriage there are great expectations of happiness and companionship from one's partner in marriage. However, these are not very easy to attain and retain in day-to-day life after marriage, where practical problems of existence confront the couple. Mature personalities are able to adjust to this gap between dream and reality. The less mature find it difficult to adjust. At times the gap between fantasy of romantic love and exigencies of practical life is so wide that the strain becomes impossible to bear and marriage ends in a failure.

Evidently such marriages involve a risk, and since the partners entering such a union had not done so for familial or social reasons, the love marriage tends to be more fragile than the arranged marriage. Many of the love marriages become unstable not so much because of the mistaken selection but because of non-fulfilled expectations in marriage.

Activity 2

Try to arrange a debate cum discussion with students at your study centre on the topic of "Love Marriage Versus Arranged Marriage in the Contemporary Urban Society; and Why?" Request your Academic Counsellors to Co-ordinate the debate.

6.4.3 Mate Selection among Tribals

Though premarital relationships among tribals are tolerated, and self-selection is permitted, all regular marriages are parent arranged. Even marriage by 'capture' is effected, in some tribes, at the instance or connivance of parents. Irregular marriages are effected through elopement, intrusion or forcible application of vermilion, all of which are eventually accepted by the parents and the families concerned, as signifying wedlock. In practice various other forms of mate selection are in existence. The more important among these are discussed below.

i) Selection by purchase and service

Mate selection 'by purchase' is the most prevalent practice. In this, bride-price has to be paid to the girl's parents. The amount of bride-price rates from a nominal price (as in case of Regma Naga) to such a high price (as in case of Ho) that many young men and women have to remain unmarried.

Some tribes (Gond) have found a way out of the high bride-price. The would-be groom lives and works in his would-be father-in-law's house as a suitor-servant for a number of years before he can ask for the girl's hand in marriage.

Another way of avoiding the payment of bride-price is through an exchange of girls/women among eligible families.

ii) Youth dormitories

Tribes having youth dormitories provide a wide scope for the youth to choose their mates. Therefore, marriage by mutual consent with parents approval has been the general practice. Where parents object, elopement is a solution. Eventually the parents welcome the couple's return.

iii) Selection by capture

Mate selection 'by capture' has been a feature of Naga, Ho, Bhil and Gond tribes. Among Nagas, female infanticide was resorted to because of fear of raids for bride capturing. Among the Gond capture takes place often at the instance of parents of the bride and amongst the Ho it is prearranged. Besides physical capture, there is also a ceremonial capture. Among Central Indian tribes peaceful captures are effected on the occasion of certain inter village festivals.

iv) Selection by trial

Mate selection by trial also exists among some tribals. A young Bhil has to prove his prowess before he can claim the hand of any girl. This is generally done through a dance game. On Holi festival, young women dancers make a circle around a tree or pole on which a coconut and gud are tied. The men folk make an outer ring. The trial of strength begins when a young man attempts to break the inner circle in order to reach the tree/pole. The women resist his attempt with all their might; and in case the

man is able to reach the tree and eat the gud and break open the coconut. He can choose any girl from the surrounding inner circle, as his wife.

Cases are reported among some tribals, where a girl desirous of marrying an unwilling mate thrusts herself on him, bears all humiliations and harsh treatment till the man yields. Such a marriage is termed as marriage by intrusion.

In addition to the above-mentioned ways of mate selection, probationary marriages are also reported among the Kuki, who permit a young man and woman to live together at the girls home for some weeks, and then decide whether to get married or not. In case they decide to separate, the young man has to pay cash compensation to the girl's parents.

Check Your Progress 2

Note: i) Use space below for your answers.

ii) Compare your answers with those given at the end of this unit.

- 1) Explain what is meant by preferential marriage. Use about three lines for your answer.

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- 2) Explain with examples how mate selection is done among tribals. Use about three lines for your answer.

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6.5 CHANGES IN MARRIAGE

Industrialisation and urbanisation have ushered in changes which have profoundly affected the institution of marriage all over the world. While different societies, and within each society different groups, have responded differentially to industrialisation and urbanisation, nonetheless certain common trends in the changes affecting marriage are discernible.

6.5.1 Changes in the Forms of Marriage

Societies with traditions of plural marriages are turning towards monogamy. Due to the general improvement in the status of woman and her gradual emancipation from the clutches of male dominance, even in those societies where polygamy is permissible, incidence of polygamous marriages, and plurality of wives, are on the decrease. In India, the Hindu Marriage Act has banned both polygynous and polyandrous marriages. Even in a Muslim country like Pakistan, legislation was introduced making it necessary for the kazi to solemnize plural marriages only if the first wife gave her written consent. The trend towards monogamy has also been encouraged by the new idea of romantic love as the basis for marriage propagated by the western societies. It is a marriage in which one specific individual is considered to be the ideal partner.

However, it would perhaps be wrong to assume that this trend towards monogamy is also towards straight monogamy. While conditions in modern society have made marriage unstable and the marriage bond is revokable, individuals are willing to risk another marriage in order to find happiness. Parents and friends too are sympathetic in this matter. Hence, societies are likely to move towards the condition of serial monogamy, rather than maintain straight monogamy.

6.5.2 Changes in Mate Selection

In traditional societies like India, where mate selection was entirely a prerogative of parents and elders, a dent has been made. Young men and women are increasingly being given some say in the matter of mate selection. From a position in which they had no say whatsoever concerning whom they were to get married to, a stage has now come in which the concerned individuals are consulted and their consent obtained. In urban middle class families, sons and daughters have even come to enjoy the right to veto marriage proposals initiated by others. In the more advanced and enlightened urban families, parents are now giving opportunities to their children to become acquainted with prospective mates. "Dating" a practice in which a boy and a girl meet each other to get to know each other and enjoy themselves with relative freedom is a phenomenon which can be seen in different colleges and universities of predominantly metropolitan cities in India. It is again an imitation of the Western Society and is the result of exposure of people to Western culture to a far greater extent than it was earlier.

In India, mate selection through newspaper advertisement has become quite a popular practice among urban middle classes and the latest development is the reported harnessing of the services of computers in bringing potentially compatible mates together.

6.5.3 Changes in Age of Marriage

In India where, traditionally, child marriages were prescribed, preferred and encouraged, various efforts were made by social reformers to bring this practice to an end; accordingly, the Child Marriage Restraint Act, popularly known as the Sarda Act, was passed in 1929. However, early marriage continues, in spite of the impact of modern industrialisation and urbanisation, especially among the rural people. In urban areas, too, there was a strong tendency to get a daughter married off as soon as possible.

But with increasing enrolment of girls in schools and colleges, and their desire to take up employment, along with the problems of 'settling down' in life for the vast majority of boys, the age at marriage is perforce being pushed up. Further, as part of its population policy, the Government has now prescribed the minimum age of marriage as 18 years for girls and 20 years for boys. In urban areas, however, marriages are now generally taking place beyond these prescribed minimum ages.

6.5.4 Changes in Marriage Rituals and Customs

Contemporary changes in India present us with a paradoxical situation. With greater intrusion of technology and science, it was expected that a secular-scientific outlook would emerge and, consequently, the non-essential rituals and customs have always pleaded for avoiding of wasteful expenditures on meaningless customs and rituals. But observation indicates that, contrary to the expectations of enlightened people, marriages in India are tending to become more traditional insofar as the ritual-custom complex is concerned. Today, there is a revival of many rituals and customs, which, soon after independence, appeared to have become weak. To an extent, this revival is a function of affluence. Many people in society have a lot of money to spend lavishly on weddings, and there is a tendency among the not-so affluent to imitate the affluent.

6.5.5 Changes in Marriage : Goals and Stability

It was seen earlier that procreation has been the most important function of marriage in traditional societies. In all communities, a large number of children, bestowed higher status upon parents and among Hindus sons were particularly desired. Thus, a large-sized family was one of the cherished goals of marriage, and the blessings showered upon the bridal couple included good wishes for several children.

But modern conditions of life have made a large family burdensome; in fact, even those with three or four children are being disfavoured.

Several developing Countries are seized of the problems that exploding populations can cause and are, therefore, committed to encouraging the small family norm. Restriction of family size is the declared official policy of many of these. India, in fact, was the first country to adopt an official family planning programme. In those Asian and African countries where there are democratic governments, through vigorous education efforts, citizens are being made to realise and accept the advantages of limited procreation.

China has also adopted a very strict population control programmes which involves certain disincentives and punishments for couples that do not restrict procreation.

All these efforts are gradually influencing the values of people in India, and other countries. It is being realised that it is better to have about two healthy and well-cared for children than a large number who cannot be adequately fed, clothed or looked after.

As procreation, and along with it parenting role, are tending to become less important, other functions like companionship and emotional support from the spouse and children are becoming the more important goals of marriage. In fact, the younger people today are entering matrimony for happiness and personal fulfilment.

The conditions causing marital instability are likely to worsen rather than improve in the future. Our outlook, values and ideals pertaining to marriage are also undergoing change. What then is the future of marriage? Predictions concerning social life are difficult and risky. But, there appears to be little chance that marriage, as a major event in individual and social life will ever be given up and abandoned. If evidence from western societies is any guide, high rates of divorce will not automatically deter people from getting married. Notwithstanding marital instability, the individual's quest for finding happiness in marriage will continue.

Check Your Progress 3

Note: i) Use space below for your answer.

ii) Compare your answers with those given at the end of this unit.

1) Comment briefly upon changes in the forms of marriage. Use about five lines for your answer.

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2) Describe how the goals and stability of marriage are changing. Use about five lines for your answer.

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6.6 LET US SUM UP

In this unit various practices related to the institution of marriage were discussed. We have presented the institution and forms of marriage early in the unit. These indicate the wide differences in marriage practices and procedures. Our discussions on mate selections indicate that society and social rules are based upon different aspects of marriage. In many cases marriage happens within a very narrow choice. Finally we have indicated how marriage as an institution has been changing. This shows that marriage itself is a dynamic institution, always undergoing modification.

6.7 FURTHER READINGS

- 1) Gore, M.S., 1965. "The Traditional Indian Family" in M.F. Nimkoff (ed.), *Comparative Family Systems*, Houghton-Mifflin: Boston.
- 2) Kapadia, K.M., 1966. *Marriage and Family in India*, Oxford University Press: Mumbai.

6.8 KEY WORDS

- Endogamy** : When marriage is within a specific caste, class or tribal group.
- Exogamy** : When marriage occurs outside a certain group of relations.
- Monogamy** : When marriage involves one husband and one wife alone.
- Polygamy** : When marriage involves more than one mate at one time.
- Polyandry** : When more than one man is married to a woman.
- Polygyny** : When more than one woman is married to a man.

6.9 MODEL ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) In monogamy there is one husband and one wife. In polygamy there is more than one mate at one time. Polygamy has two sub-types: polyandry and polygyny.
- 2) Endogamy requires that a person marries within a clearly defined group. He or she is forbidden to marry outside it. Exogamy requires that a person marries outside a particular group. There is a certain group within which a person should not marry.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Preferential marriage refers to that type of marriage, which defines, whom we should marry. Such marriages are common in South Indian (Cross cousins) and among Muslims (Parallel cousins)
- 2) Mate selection among tribals is done in several ways. These include; (i) by purchase of bride, (ii) youth dormitories; (iii) selection by capture of bride; (iv) by athletic trial of bridegrooms.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) The forms of marriage are undergoing change. Societies with a tradition of plural marriage are turning towards monogamy. In this way women's place in marriage has improved. However, remarriage for another partner is now acceptable. Thus, serial monogamy is becoming a generally accepted practice.
- 2) In earlier times marriage had procreation as one of the main objectives. Today the goal is a small family and the drive is to restrict family size. Couples are now entering marriage with the hope of personal and emotional fulfilment. This makes for very high expectations on the part of both, husband and wife.