**Preferential and Prescriptive Marriages**

**INTRODUCTION:** Rules prohibiting certain persons as spouses may be accompanied by rules designating others as particularly appropriate. If it is the rule – no matter whether it is sometimes broken – that a man ought to marry a person in a particular category of person, this is called a preferred or preferential marriage. For example, one must marry his/her cross cousin and, if one would like to have the prescription waived in one’s case, compensation has to be paid to the losing party.

There are many societies in which marriage between first cousins is permitted or even sought, where there is a rule of lineage exogamy they must of course be cousin belonging to different lineages. Since a person derives his lineage membership from a parent of one sex, it is usually the child of his parent’s siblings of the other sex who becomes his mate. In this relationship the children of the siblings of opposite marriage are cross-cousin. Prescribed or prescriptive marriages are usually with the matrilateral cross-cousin.

Prescribed or prescriptive cross-cousin marriage is most commonly found in patrilineal societies. **Levi-Strauss** has said that preferential mating has for its main purpose the strengthening of solidarity within a tribe. They are often designed to promote inter-familial cordiality by making certain linkages imperative. The following are the rules that are found under prescribed or prescriptive marriage.

**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. Different forms of marriages are based on rules governing eligibility such as endogamy and exogamy.
ENDOGAMY:

In endogamy a member is required to marry within his own group. Lewis defines endogamy as “The rule that requires a person to marry within a specific social group of which he is a member”. In the Indian context, the caste is defined as an endogamous group just as the tribe endogamy. The Gond is a tribal group. In caste, for instance, a Brahmin would not marry a Rajput. In the same way, a Gond would not marry a Santhal. However, there are cases of intercaste and inter-tribal marriages though such marriages are not the rule. Where the society is stratified on class lines, a member would marry within his own class. In this sense membership of class is endogamous. Eriksens writes: “In a sense, all human groups are both endogamous and exogamous to varying degrees. One is expected to marry one’s own kind, but not someone classified as a close relative and who is not is naturally, culturally specified, although the people classified as parents, children and siblings in Europe are virtually everywhere seen as close kin”.

The views that support endogamy are as follows:

(a) People prefer their own group as members of a group show more or less similar physical characteristics.

(b) A group always wants to keep their human resource potential in original form. So the members do not want to establish marriage relation with outsiders.

(c) Conception of high and low rank plays among the groups, which resists a high-rank group to develop relationship with a low-rank group.

(d) Dissimilarity in religion gets differences in norms and values, belief and practices. So people have to select their mates from own religious group for maintaining good adjustment.

(e) Geographical barriers between two places often discourage the group to establish marital relationship because of difficulties in access.
EXOGAMY: Exogamy is the general rule of marriage when a person marries outside a specific social group of which he is a member. In other words, a marriage outside the lineage is a descent group either from the father’s and 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 on lineages. 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 and descent group. Marriage outside this group is exogamy.

Among the tribals too there are clans. A clan is a lineage-group. A Gond, for instance, is not allowed to marry his own clan. The Bhils of western India have about forty clans. Normally, a tribal village consists of one or two clans. In this situation all the members of the village are brothers and sisters. Because of this there is the practice of village exogamy according to which a tribal would not prefer to marry within his own village.

Westermarck has provided yet another interpretation for exogamy through an anecdote once when his barber had come to his house. Westermarck enquired from him, “Are you married”? “No” the barber replied, Westermarck suggested that he could have married in his village as there were enough girls. To this the barber commented: “Oh, the girls of my village are good for nothing. I knows them all”. The statement made by barber shows that it is instinct in man to look for a girl who generates curiosity. Such a man is considered heroic who brings a girl from great distance. Such kind of male attitudes also explain the prevalence of exogamy. Westermarck gives yet another empirical evidence to support the practice of exogamy. In London, there are two schools situated on opposite sides of the road. One is a co-educational school while the other one is exclusively for girls. He found that the boys
of the co-education school often went to the girls’ school in search of love and romance. When they were reminded that there were girls in their own class and they could very well choose one from among them, the boys replied: “The girls of our school! We know them all; they are rotten”, and hence exogamy.

In fact, there are some definite reasons for which the practice of exogamy has got approval. They are:
(a) A conception of blood relation prevails among the members of a group. Therefore, marriage within the group members is considered as marriage between a brother and a sister.
(b) Attraction between a male and female gets lost due to close relationship in a small group.
(c) There is a popular idea that a great increase of energy and vigour is possible in the progeny if marriage binds two extremely distant people who possess no kin relation among them.

The Hindus do not select their marriage partner having the same gotra-name. It is believed that ‘gotra’ denotes a large group where members originated from a common ancestor. Similarly we find marriage alliances are not permitted inside a certain group of tribe. For instance, clan is a sub group of tribe that corresponds to ‘gotra’ of Hindus. By nature clan is exogamous. Sometimes exogamy is maintained in the territorial level also. A man cannot choose marriage partners from among the known girls of his village; he has to marry a girl from other village.

PREFERENTIAL MARRIAGES:

Marriages between kinsfolk are common in primitive societies. In Australia, it is a common practice that a man must marry a kinswoman since he is related by bond of kinship. According to their tradition many of the primitive societies prefer certain relatives who as mates. These preferential mating may be classified as follows:-
(1) Cross-cousin marriage.
(2) Parallel-cousin marriage.
(3) Levirate.
(4) Sororate.
(5) Filial inheritance.
CROSS COUSIN MARRIAGE:

It is a kind of marriage which means marriage of a man with either his mother’s brother’s daughter or his father’s sister’s daughter. This is popular and orthodox type of marriage among the tribal communities of India. But marriage with mother’s brother’s daughter is more common. This type of marriage is found to be prevalent among most of the tribes of North-East India such as the Garos, the Khasis, the Kukis, the Karbis, the Noctes, the Nagas etc. The Gonds, the Oraons, the Baigas and some other tribes of the rest of India practise this type of marriage. Virtually all the tribes of North and Central Melanesia practise cross-cousin marriage. It is also practised in Ceylon (Sri Lanka), Australia, Polynesia, South and East Africa, Siberia etc. There are two types of cross-cousin marriages: (a) Symmetrical and (b) Asymmetrical. When both mother’s brother’s daughter and father’s sister’s daughter are acceptable as a mate, it is called a Symmetrical cross-cousin marriage. It is also termed as bilateral cross-cousin marriage. In Assam symmetrical cross-cousin marriages are prevalent. Similarly the Dravidians practise symmetrical cross-cousin marriage.

Asymmetrical cross-cousin marriage is the one according to which, marriage is preferred with either mother’s brother’s daughter or father’s sister’s daughter and not with both. That is if one marries mother’s brother’s daughter, he cannot marry father’ sister’s daughter and vice versa. Marriage with mother’s brother’s daughter is called Matrilateral cross-cousin marriage and that with father’s sister’s daughter is termed as patrilateral cross-cousin marriage. The Trobriand Islanders of Melanesia permit marriage only with father’s sister’s daughter. The Murngins of Australia and the Miwork of California practise asymmetrical cross-cousin marriage. Cross-cousin marriage is the only form of exogamy under dual organization of a society. Cross-cousin marriages are often devised as a balance against the high bride price, the bargaining of price is often minimized among the familiar kin. Moreover, the amount lost in paying bride-price for getting a bride is regained in due course when a girl from his family has to be given in marriage to the same family. The simple implication here is that the bride-price paid for A’s marriage would be returned to his family when a daughter would marry her mother’s brother’s son. The Gonds of Madhya Pradesh express mother’s brother’s daughter as ‘dudhlautawa’, i.e., return of milk. The rules of prescribed marriage mean that these will be necessarily followed and these will be adhered to so rigidly that there will be no
exception possible. The more a society developed, the more will be difficult to cope with the system and one may like to take concession.

PARALLEL-COUSIN MARRIAGE:

It means the marriage of man with either his father's brother's daughter or mother's sister's daughter. It is prevalent among the Semitic Arabs and also found amongst the Muslim of India. It is also practised by the Riangs of Tripura. It has been said that marriages with close relatives lead to fewer number of issues. That is why marriage of this kind is discarded in many societies.

In our country this type of marriage among the Muslims, women traditionally inherit the property, perhaps to control the property devolution, they preferred parallel-cousin marriage. Again, among the Bedwins of Arab, this type of marriage is very popular. The Bedwins is a nomadic people. Such marriages help to keep their males within the band and so manpower is protected for fighting and other purpose of defence.

Usually in a community, where cross-cousin marriage is allowed, parallel-cousin marriage is forbidden. A man maintains formal as well as respect full relationship with his female parallel-cousin. Joking relationship prevails only among the cross-cousin. Significance of joking relationship lies in the possibility of marriage, whereas respectful relationship indicates rigidity of the incest taboo. In most of the societies of the world parallel-cousin marriage is prohibited.

LEVIRATE (Latin-Levir means husband’s brother):

When a widow marries her brother-in-law (deceased husband’s brother) this system of remarriage is known as Levirate. This is practised by the natives of Australia, the Biblical Hebrews, the Incas, the Muslims of India, the Kukis, the Lushais, the Nagas, the Karbis, the Vedas etc. In
patrilineal societies, after the death of a man, his heir is his brother who not only succeeds to his status and responsibilities, also inherits all the possession of the deceased brother, including his wife or wives. Levirate consists of two types, Junior Levirate and Senior Levirate.

**Junior Levirate:** When the younger brother marries the wife of his deceased elder brother, it is known as junior levirate. This is found to have been practised by Australians; the Biblical Hebrews, the Incas, the Muslims of India the Kukis, the Lushais, the Nagas, the Karbis and the Veddas etc.

**Senior Levirate:** When marriage takes place between the widow and elder brother of the deceased husband, it is called Senior Levirate. The Bhumijas of Orissa, the Hos, the Panions (south India), the Kirghiz, the Turks, the Mongloids etc. practise this system of marriage. The custom of Levirate is regarded more as a duty than as a right. The nearest relative is obliged to care for the widow left with children, land and herd. In some societies the children of the new couple are regarded socially as the children of the dead man.

**SORORATE:** (Latin, *soror* means sister):

In sororate a bereaved husband marries his deceased wife’s sister. That is, a girl marries her deceased sister’s husband. In some cases it is mandatory and in others, it is performed on permissive basis. Like Levirate, Sororate is also of two types:

(i) Senior sororate and
(ii) Junior sororate.
**Senior sororate:** When the bereaved husband marries his deceased wife’s elder sister, it is called Senior Sororate and it is very limited in its distribution.

**Junior sororate:** When the bereaved husband marries his deceased wife’s younger sister, the system of marriage is called the Junior Sororate, which is prevalent in many parts of the world. Hindus, Muslims, and many tribes of India are found to practise sororate. It is practised by virtually every tribe of North America outside the Pueblo area and is found widely distributed throughout the world. Sororate is sometimes mistaken for Sororal Polygyny. Under the true sororate a man is married to one sister at a time. But, in sororal polygyny a man is not required to wait for the death of his wife to marry her younger sister. He asks her hand when she comes of marriageable age. In this way he can marry several sisters at a time. High rate of bride price generally leads to difficulties in securing mates, which results in sororate marriage. Younger sister of the deceased girl is given to her husband as a compensation for his loss. Both levirate and sororate signify interfamilial obligation and cordiality.

**FILIAL INHERITANCE:**

When a brother or a son is permitted to inherit the secondary wives of the dead man, it is called Filial Inheritance. The Incas are found to have observed this custom. In case of the son, he generally inherits the wives of his dead father other than his uterine mother. This is practised by the Sema Nagas. Filial inheritance is possible only where there is polygamous marriage. It also helps to keep the woman in the family. In this context we should know
that, in a few societies son was found to inherit father's all wives, except his own mother. This is known as filial widow inheritance. Example of this remarriage is found among the medieval Mongols. The Sema Nagas also exhibits the same practice.

CONCLUSION:

Preferential and prescriptive marriages, as is clear by the title, are the marriage customs in which some males or females are preferred for establishing matrimonial relationships. In such cases the marriage is a means for uniting two families for welfare of both. The preference is clearly based upon certain advantages concerning new relationship and adjustment and respect in the new family. The rules of preferential and prescriptive mating are however customary and not written, it is obvious that these preferential or prescribed forms of mating limit the number of possible marital linkages. Nonetheless, there distribution is universal.

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