

CHANGING TRENDS OF MARRIAGE: EMERGING COMPLICATION, PARADOXICAL THINKING AND SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

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Abstract

Marriage is one of the most ancient, indispensable, significant and universal social institution in all societies and cultures which has constructed since the beginning of human civilization. Marriage is a universal social phenomenon and it is a permanent bond between husband and wife which is intended to fulfill the economic, social, cultural, biological and emotional goals. Similarly, marriage establishes a new family which supports in giving facilities for the reproduction and upbringing of children. In changing context, individual freedom is greater matter rather than marital burden and partner's ambiguity. In this modern era, there are various marriage allied complications, contradictions and changing trends. Sociological observations of marriage have brought out multifaceted marriage systems and its challenging transformations. Similarly, the change in gender relationship and independence between men and women has resulted in a considerable rise in the instability of marriage and its implication in the society. In this circumstance, this paper tries to analyze the conceptual and rational debates of orthodox and customary established marriage, marriage practice and its social, cultural, biological and emotional implications. Likewise, this study provides an analysis of contradictory thinking and declining trends of marriage in this contemporary society.

Keywords: *Marriage, gender, divorce, freedom, transformation*

Meaning and significance of marriage

Marriage is a socially and legally certified union, generally between a man and a woman and it is a physical, emotional and cultural union which is regulated by society and culture. The universality of marriage points to its functional importance for maintaining social equilibrium. There are various functions of marriage such as continuity of lineage, expand family members, creation of new relations, provide economic and social cooperation, increase love, happiness and harmony, regulation of sex relation etc. Universally, there are various common elements of ideal marriage and marital relationship such as intimacy, love, trust, respect, kindness, commitment and understanding. Similarly, there are different characteristics of marriage such as marriage

is a universal social institution, marriage is a permanent bond between husband and wife, marriage is a specific relationship between two individuals of same and opposite sex, marriage requires social cultural and legal approval, marriage establishes family and children, marriage legalizes sexual activities between husband and wife.

Sociological observations of marriage have brought out multifaceted marriage systems and its challenging transformations. Marriage is a social and biological fact that a man and a woman can unite jointly as male and female in a joining together which is created a new family and formations of living principles and standards. Marriage is one of the most ancient, indispensable, significant and universal social institution in the society which has constructed since the beginning of human civilization. Generally, it is assumed that the institution of marriage is a universal feature in human societies and it is a unique institution of human history to facilitate various social, cultural, political, psychological and biological implications.

Intellectuals and Scholars Debates

Marriage as a set of rules and regulations, which specify the rights, duties and privileges of the husband and wife with regard to each other (Lundberg, 1958). According to Encyclopedia Britannica, “marriage is a physical, legal and moral union between man and woman in complete community life for the establishment of a family.” Similarly, marriage is a state of being united to a person of the opposite sex as husband or a wife in a consensual and contractual relationship recognized by law (Mazumdar, 2001) and it is a state of being united to a person of the opposite sex as husband or a wife in a consensual and contractual relationship recognized by law (Nagpal, 2011). Equally, marriage is a system of roles and is a process through which primary relations are instituted (Ahuja, 1993). As stated by Horton and Hunt marriage is the approved social pattern whereby two or more persons establish a family. Correspondingly, Thorton (2007) has explained that “marriage defines womanhood, manhood and adult status; it governs living arrangement and is also central in determining the division of labor and authority within the family. Historically, the status of wife and husband is one of the most important transitions in people’s lives. Marriage is the central element in defining economic well- being, physical health and mental health” (Thorton, 2007).

Koos (1953) has argued that “marriage is a dividing line between the families of orientation and family of procreation. These individual roles are different in these two forms of family. The roles in the family of orientation are different for the various stages as the child passes through infancy, childhood and adolescent stage”. Commonly, the author further argued that these roles are not associated with social and cultural duties and responsibilities. After marriage an individual enters into the family of

procreation and plays the role of a husband, a father and an earning member. All these roles are associated with number of duties and obligations (Koos, 1953). According to Malinowski, marriage is a contract for the production and maintenance of children and a legal marriage is one which gives a woman a socially recognized husband and her children a socially recognized father (Ember & Ember, 1995).

Radcliffe-Brown states that marriage is a social arrangement by which a child is given a legitimate position in the society determined by parenthood in the social sense. As said by Radcliffe Brown, the elementary systems are characterized by preferential marriage which can be further classified into restricted and generalized marriage system (Strauss, 1949). According to Emery (2013), “marriage rule restricts the choice of mate within a certain group. It’s a marriage within caste, tribe, race or other groups. Caste endogamy is prevalent in Indian society. According to this rule of marriage it is required that the marriage partner should be selected from same group i.e. within the same caste or tribe. The endogamous groups refer explicitly to the caste, and sub-caste. Caste endogamy specifies that the marriage should compulsorily take place within the caste and the sub-caste endogamy limits the marriage relations within the same sub-caste” (Emery, 2013).

According to John Levy and Ruth Monroe, “people get married because of the feeling that being in a family is the only proper indeed the only possible way to live. People do not marry because it is their social duty to perpetuate the institution of family or because the scriptures recommend matrimony but because they lived in a family as children and cannot get over the feeling that being in a family is the only proper way to live in society” (Levy & Monroe, 1954). Mazumdar (2001) has argued that marriage as a socially sanctioned union of male and female, or as a secondary institution devised by society to sanction the union and mating of male and female for four purposes such as establishing a household, entering into sex relations, procreating, and providing care for the off-spring (Mazumdar, 2001).

Marriage is a relation of one or more men to one or more women which is recognized by custom or law and involves certain rights and duties both in the case of parties entering the union and in the case of children born out of this union. According to Robert H. Lowie, “marriage denotes those unequivocally sanctioned unions which persist beyond sexual satisfaction and come to underline family” (Singh, 2015). Murdock (1949) has explained that “sexual unions without economic co-operation are common, and there are relationships between men and women involving a division of labor without sexual gratification, e.g., between brother and sister, master and maidservant, or employer and secretary, but marriage exists only when the economic and the sexual are united in one relationship, and this combination occurs only in marriage” (Murdock, 1949).

Hence, Pimentel (2000) has explained that marriage is one of the most intense human relationships and the quality of this relationship is continually redefined by spouses and is potentially crucial to their overall experience of family life (Pimentel, 2000).

Marriage and its emerging complications

Marriage is a common social phenomenon which is linked with reciprocated responsibilities, liabilities, privileges, rights, compulsions etc. Commonly, marriage performs social, cultural, economic, emotional and sexual implications. Max Weber has claimed that marriage is an indispensable institution which regulates and legalizes the individual behavior and desires in different contexts. Similarly, Michel Foucault highlight on deconstructing the institutions of marriage and its significance. It is argued that marriage is not only a matter concerning two individuals but is looked upon as an event involving families and communities at large (Rao, 1981). As said by Duncan (1979), “marriage is engrained in family rather than the family in marriage” (Duncan, 1979). According to Johnson (2006), “the institution of marriage is a complex normative pattern that applies to all marriages in a particular social system. The marriages conform to the pattern in varying degrees, but married partners all know the pattern itself and they regard it as morally valid and binding. It is viewed as the most important event in the life of an individual between birth and death and signifies transition into adulthood” (Johnson, 2006).

Thakur and Banerjee (2004) have explained that “marriage can be conceptualized in three ways: as an institution, as a rite/ritual and as a process. As an institution, marriage consists of a set of patterned behaviors, expectations and relationships that are organized and endured over time. As a rite/ritual, it includes the ceremonies through which married status is achieved and as a process, it is a phenomena which is marked by gradual changes that lead to ultimate dissolution through separation, divorce or death (Thakur & Banerjee, 2004). Similarly, the larger importance on self-realization mutually with changing aspirations for paid work, are the main driving forces behind the rearrangement of family formation in both marriage and childbearing and the increasing fragility of couple relationships in modern societies (Steel et al. 2012).

Successful and failure of marriage

Marriage is a universal social phenomenon and it is a permanent bond between husband and wife which is intended to fulfill the economic, social, biological and emotional goals. Similarly, marriage establishes a new family which supports in giving facilities for the reproduction and upbringing of children. Likewise, marriage regulates and controls sex relationship compatible with recommended practices, rules and regulations. Usually, the couples perform their reciprocal responsibilities on the basis of socially accepted values and principles.

Mainly, there are five pillars of successful marriage such as trust, validation, acceptance, respect and recognition. Healthy and friendly communication is a basic component of a successful marriage. It tolerates partners to speak their concerns, confusions and troubles. Fair communication creates a good environment of healthy relationship of partners. According to Wood et al. (2014), the commitment to marriage values, sharing common interests and working to achieve them, openness of opinions and feelings, communication, trust, role model virtues, and sexual desire and fulfillment against all odds are the basic features of a successful marriage (Wood et al. 2014). Perry and Steven (1992) has argued that each time one or both spouses choose to ignore signs of discord and avoid communicating, what each of them is really feeling is that their relationship is coming closer to the end (Perry & Steven, 1992). Similarly, Glaser (2002) has explained that in an unhealthy marriage, partners do not communicate openly and honestly disappears. Lies and withholding important information from each other become the order of the day. Similarly, partners complain to third parties about their spouses instead of talking to them and settling problems, thereby diminishing the quality of the marital relationship (Glaser, 2002).

Marriage is a social relationship in which a man and a woman are socially and culturally permitted and legitimated their family existence. An unsuccessful marriage results from a continuing accumulation of anxiety, suffering, miscommunication, stress, hurt, dislike and misunderstanding in a marital relationship. Fincham and Steven (1999) have explained that the act of approaching a conversation with quarrel, accusations, and deprecating comments are indications of a failed marriage (Fincham & Steven, 1999). An absence of communication, on the other hand, complicates issues, undermines the foundation and purpose of marriage, makes partners lose interest in the union and can have severe consequences for the ability of the couples to sustain the union (Raush et al. 1974). Grych et al. (1992) have asserted that partners in a failed marriage experience feelings of insecurity and need (i.e. deprivation) when not around their partners as they tend to critically judge each other's differences when conflict arises such that they are unable to solve problems; they feel stifled if the other partner is not ready to hear them out or take their point of view into consideration, thereby resulting in withdrawal of intimacy, sex and love (Grych et al., 1992).

Correspondingly, Bumpass (1994) has argued that modernization has given rise to the development of urbanization, information technology, and modern society, has also belittled the concept of traditional marriage. It has rendered marriage immaterial, and made it no longer commensurate with today's expectations (Bumpass, 1994). It is a common belief that stress and fighting over money constitute one of the major problems that couples face. In tough economic times, for instance, financial strain can actually cause misunderstanding and fights and more conflict over things unrelated to money,

as well as money-related issues (Gottman 1993). Gottman (1993) has explained that fighting and persistent physical abuse such as beating, biting, grabbing, punching, slapping, kicking or shoving, forced sex, and the use of weapons in extreme cases are common among partners experiencing failed marriage (Gottman, 1993). And, marriage has become a “throw-away-commodity,” even perceived by some as mere household garbage to be used and thrown out (Busari, 2011).

The negative feelings between couples sometimes make them do despicable things such as exchanging harsh words and beating and physically abusing each other in the presence of children. Couples sometimes disengage completely from one another without any consideration for their children (Busari 2011). It appears that the traditional promise “till death do us part” is no longer relevant, nevertheless lasts only as long as “my needs” are provided for, and the failure of a spouse to meet the financial and sexual needs of the other spouse creates a marital crisis. Wood et al. (2012) noted that frequent disagreements, abusive behavior, and disrespect among couples are signs that all is not well in a marriage. Wood et al. further stated that some couples resort to constant name-calling or rude behavior and bringing up issues that purposely hurt the other person. Some partners not only curse each other but may even throw objects at each other (Wood et al., 2012).

Rise of divorce and tragedy of marriage

Marriage and divorce are socially and culturally constructed which recognize the shifting patterns of the individual status, marital relationship and family arrangement system. Like marriage, divorce is almost universal in all societies but varies in degrees and conditions imposed by the legislations and procedures of the society (Parvez, 2011). The divorce rates have increased considerably during the recent years not only in developed societies but developing societies as well. Hence, divorce is prevalent in many societies throughout the world (Goode, 1970). The people who have those in society, their marriage may contain a possibility to be ended by extramarital experimentation or by divorce (Rahman, 2007 & Ahmed, 2005). Giddens’ has developed two different sets of values and behaviors prevalent in classic patriarchy and modern society in the context of marriage and divorce in different social circumstances (Giddens, 1992).

Feminist perspectives have strongly criticized the sociological standpoints. Feminist theories are concerned with how gender inequalities, discriminations, unfairness and injustices are influenced by marriage, family and family structure. Feminists are so critical of the traditional gender beliefs and male domination in families and marriage perceptions and practices. Feminists argue that orthodox and conventional patriarchy claims that wives and children are the property of husbands and fathers. In consequence,

male dominance is reflected in the dominance of husbands over wives in all relationships and interactions (Uprety, 2017). In this context, traditional belief of marriage is not in favor for women and their independent existence. It is a fact that many marriages in the past were troubled and distressed but as because divorce was not socially and culturally acceptable, these problematic marriages remained to continue. With the traditional views of marriage and family life which are based on rigid roles and sharp gender inequalities, and emphasized the married couple as a single unit, rather than a partnership of two individuals (Coontz, 2005). According to Grath (2001), divorce is a legal or customary decree that a marriage is dissolved in other words, divorce is a permanent separation of married people as a result of unexpected marriage outcome.

Anthony Giddens has illustrated that pure relationship lacks ontological security. To Giddens, 'ontological security' is the confidence that most human beings have in the continuity of their self-identity and in the constancy of the surrounding social and material environments of action (Giddens, 1990). Uprety (2017) has argued that divorce is a more complex and problematical social phenomenon and it is a fragile accident in marital relations as well as familial relationships. Divorce brings considerable distress and behavioral disruptions in the life of the person concerned. It is not a sudden incidence, however a culmination of a prolonged socio-emotional, economic and political process in which husband and wife disrespect and dispute all reconciliatory endeavors and they no longer want to live together. It is the end product of marital discord initiated by direct and indirect reasons, explanations and results. Divorce is a social problem and is considered an important factor in family disintegration and collapse and it may leave the spouses in a state of upset, depression, social and marital deprivation due to many factors and actors.

In this present context, expansion of urban and industrial structure of society, growth of individual freedom and mobility, increase in competitive and advanced education, growth of career and employment opportunities, increase independent status of women and power relation, increase extra-marital relation, modern technological and market pressure in marital life and weakening position of patriarchy are the major causes of divorce in modern societies (Uprety, 2017). Similarly, Pothen (1986) argues that divorce is a product of multiple factors such as biological, psychological, environmental, familial, economic, social, cultural, religious, political etc. So, causes of divorce have multi-dimensional aspects and viewpoints.

The analysis of the broad conceptual framework, the flow of modernization, urbanization and industrialization are most influential causes of rise of divorce. The rate of divorce in a society is also related to broader social forces like cultural, social, political, religious and concerned institutional and organizational settings. All these types of causes promote

ambiguity of social and family life which in relationships and interactions to the family weakens and the stigma of divorce increases (Uprety, 2017). Marital termination provides some escape from a distressing relationship, the transition of divorce brings a change in life conditions that has depressive consequences (Menaghan & Lieberman, 1986). Hence, it is fact that marriage and divorce have significant effects on individual's life, familial relationships and societal structure. While marriage makes various fundamental and social relationships and social ties, the divorce incorporates separate social impact on the divorcees and their family. In the changing milieu, divorce is a significant social incident which affects couples, children, families and societies.

Challenges faced by couples in failed marriage

Tikumah (2009) has argued that sexual dissatisfaction among couples in most cases leads to emotional disengagement, which consequently leads to infidelity. Similarly, complaints about sexual dissatisfaction in marriage are hard to express and unpleasant to receive (Tikumah, 2009). Omage (2013) explained that a wide educational gap between spouses may be a major contributor to a failed marriage. Likewise, Beckham (1992) has asserted that women who have married down the socioeconomic ladder experience smaller gains from marriage in terms of the fulfillment of their material needs, and thus may over time feel deprived and enjoy the marriage less, potentially resulting in a failed marriage. Correspondingly, age is a vital cause that sometimes contributes to troubles in marital life and may perhaps effect in marital uncertainty and insecurity. Booth and John (1985) have contended that age is a significant factor that may result in marital instability. Matthews et al. (1995) has argued that an earlier marriage of a husband or wife may increase the likelihood of conflict and dissolution of a later marriage. Couples who are very young when married are believed to be at risk of experiencing unstable marriages because the necessary experience needed to establish a happy home is potentially yet to be gathered (Blood & Wolfe, 1960).

It is noted that tension and conflict are embedded aspects in unhappy marriage. And, couples conflicts or marital conflicts have a devastating impact on children because they can trigger psychological and behavioral problems in children (O'Hagan, 1993; Davies et al., 2008). Likewise, in some marriages, children are the cause of conflict, but generally children are a stabilizing factor in marriages, and when children are absent, a marriage is likely to be rocked by minor storm (Hetherington et al. 1998). It is claimed that parental relation is essential cause linked to marriage success or failure. Ekiran (2003) has explained that disapproving parents are not helpful and frequently avoid couples when they face turbulence in their union (Ekiran, 2003). In the same way, there are further challenging issues for spouse such as the issue of career, mobility and freedom, the matter of confidence and love, the question of extra-marital relationship,

pressure of social control of sexuality, issue of caste hierarchy and varied social and cultural restrictions and boundaries associated to marriage and marital life.

So, it is concluded that there are various contradicting issues and challenges embedded to the conventional meaning of marriage and the changing trend of marriage significance. There are various challenges and fearful experiments faced by couples in failed marriage such as sexual distressing, age gap, financial crises, educational inconsistency, social disparity, family pressure, issues of children, matter of son preference, ignore or negative parents, conventional marriage taboo, gender biased marital perception as well as gender biased or stereotyping social treatments and cultural judgments of marriage and its implications in their lives. Similarly, in a marital life, sexual meaning or opinion is a sensitive matter which couples cannot be discussed and shared freely because of societal stigmas of sexuality and existing orthodox understanding.

Weakening position of marriage in Nepal

Marriage is a legal union between a man and a woman as accepted by societies and cultures. It has the potential to enhance spouses' lives and insert to satisfaction of life. It operated to exist comprehensive and familiar in marriage related rules, regulations and implications. Nevertheless, over the past three decades marriage degrees have considerably weakened including its social implications and structural benefits.

In this changing era, changes in social viewpoint of new generation, particularly, young people have added to the breakdown of marital relationships including its traditional symbol and meaning. Similarly, the change in gender relationship and independence between men and women has resulted in a considerable rise in the instability of marriage and its significance in the society. The societal reading explores the challenges of failed marriages and their implications for delinquency. It is claimed that changing and unfaithfulness relationships and rejecting social responsibilities and duties are the main causes responsible for failed marriages.

In changing context, individual freedom is greater matter rather than marital burden and partner's ambiguity. There are various marriage allied complications and contradictions such as orthodox patriarchal thinking and rigid marriage rule, individual freedom and social responsibility, economic suffering and family pressure, partner's love/gratification and inconsistency, rigid meaning of sexuality and gender relation, marriage related legal provision and gender bias implementation. It is clear that nearly all new couples in agree about how all everyday jobs and burdens should be shared or jointly, mainly household works, child caring, household everyday expenditure, life chances and professional career. In contrast to the conventionally understood roles and responsibilities whereby wives take care of the household works and caring duties while husbands provide the earnings and all productive works to sustain the whole family members.

After 1990s, there are diverse structural changes and social pressures in marriage and its significance in Nepali society, the prevalence of marriage has started to decline or weakening position. There are multiple causes and factors of declining situation of marriage and its significance such as focus on women's education and career, rise in global youth migration, increasing ratio of divorce, rise of fake and intentional or artificial marriage, starting and legalizing of cohabitation, the questioning in the meaning of orthodox marital implication and significance, weakening position of patriarchal thinking, less or lack of trust and respect for spouse, less belief of marital symbols and restrictions and the questioning of gender biased responsibilities and irrational social treatments between husband and wife. These types of changing trends of marital position have been paralleled by changes in gender roles and transformation of couple's responsibilities. So, it is asserted that the change and transformation in marriage trends are determined in great part by the performance and attitudes of young people or young couples. Usually, they have tried to new ideas and new practices which are in both delaying marriage and ingoing into new and romantic family compositions. These types of transformative ideas and trends have led to a pointed decline in conventional marriage practice and a rise of new family formations have shaped by new perspectives of contemporary thinking.

Conclusion

In the present context of Nepal, there are various complications of marriage such as partner's misunderstanding and poor communication, economic and social crises, social and cultural obligations, family pressures and traumas, technological pressure and mass media interference, personality conflicts and freedoms, selfishness and jealousy, value difference and emotional infidelity, power inequality and humiliation, sexual frustration and reproduction etc. Similarly, modern life style, high expectation, extra marital relation, lack of commitment, intimacy, kindness, love, acceptance etc. are additional pressures for successful marriage and marriage structure.

So, it is concluded that marriage is a social, cultural, political and emotional relationships which defines and manipulates different social roles, responsibilities, duties, rights as well as obligations of husband and wife. There are various marriage allied paradoxical meaning and multifaceted complications such as conventional social norms and values, rigid and orthodox cultural explanations, unbending thoughts and principles, customary beliefs and judgments and social control and sanction of sexuality. These types of meanings and complications are embedded each other which are delineated and controlled the dealings marriage and married couple including their private lives and public lives. In the changing context, although gender inequality and injustice continues, marriages tend to be more egalitarian, which means women and men consider each other

as equal partners and do not rely on traditional beliefs and assumptions of marriage practice and thinking. Similarly, it is believed that personal happiness has become more important than marital commitments, family obligations, cultural taboos and social restrictions.

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