

Marital Life and Role Expectations

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Introduction

You have already learnt about the meaning of marriage and the values in family life in the preceding units. Some of the relevant questions are: What is your concept of marital life? What type of relationship exists between husband and wife? Marital life is believed to be the happiest, most important and beautiful period in the life of an individual. In marriage the couple promises to be faithful to each other. A happy and fruitful marital life can be built on this foundation.

The essence of marriage is the interpersonal relationship between the spouses. This relationship is an ongoing, dynamic process. It can be strengthened if the couple adhere to role expectations in marriage.

In this chapter we discuss the nature of the relationship between husband and wife. We also emphasize the role expectations in marital life and the changes that occur in their roles over time. The effects of dysfunctioning families in marital life are also mentioned in this chapter.

Role Exeptions in Marital Life

Shakespeare wrote that the world is a stage upon which men and women are acting out the drama of life.

The same thing can be said of marriages. There are many cultural and social expectations about appropriate

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behaviour for males and females. The goals, purposes and functions in marriage can be achieved only when each family member plays his or her particular role.

a) **Marital Roles**

What is meant by marital roles? Marital roles are the behavioural expectations of husbands and wives in a particular society at any given time. Roles are cultural creations, rather than biological imperatives. Roles provide the facility for the smooth running of society by a division of labour for men and women.

b) **Changes in Gender Roles**

Are there any hard and fast rules for assigning sex type roles? Can we change the gender roles? Of course there are no definite rules to assign roles to men and women. Cultural variations and the purposes of spouses may bring about changes in marital roles. But they cannot violate nature's goals for marriage. So we can find that some marital roles are unchangeable.

c) **Disparity in Role Conceptions**

In the past there were clearly defined roles for man and woman. Today we all are living in a rapidly changing society. In the modern society, there are no definite patterns of behaviour or roles for men and women. There is wide disparity in role conceptions. This changing nature of gender roles creates problems for all types of couples as they settle down to live together.

d) **Factors Affecting Changes in Roles**

The industrial revolution, emancipation of women, urbanization, employment of women, preoccupation of men with career etc. are some factors which have left their imprint upon family roles.

Role of Man

Role patterns for each sex are based on masculinity and femininity. Men and women are born with certain

basic characteristics. Each culture has its own expectations of the roles of males and females.

Unique male roles: What is the key role of man? On what basis do we assign this role to the male? In most cultures strength and courage are still considered to be the qualities of men. They are also independent, tough and can control their emotions in better ways than women. Physical strength and social dominance are more functional for the male roles. So man is generally expected to be the provider and protector of the family. He is the master of the family. According to the traditional role expectations, he is the bread earner and the head of the family. He is expected to acquire a job to support his wife and children. He has to show determination in the achievement of difficult goals.

Leadership role: The man is also entrusted with the role of leader and supervisor of all family endeavours. For the child, his/her first heroes will be his/her own parents, particularly the father who holds the position of authority in the family.

Role as a husband: As a husband he has the role of sex partner, companion, confidant, decision maker and accountant. He must train himself to be a better observer so that he can be of great help to his wife. He must notice his wife and praise her performance and ability. He should also give emotional support to her.

Role as a father: The father holds a dominant position in the family. In our culture, he is the chief authority in the home. Children need him for their all round development. They learn many good qualities from him. Some of the qualities are sense of justice and fairplay, steadfastness, inspiration to be useful etc. Hence he should be firm without being despotic, decisive without being dictatorial and gentle but not weak.

Role of Woman

Females, in most cultures, have been conditioned to carry out the reproductive function.

Traditional roles: The woman is biologically, psychologically and emotionally prepared for motherhood. She is trained to carry out the roles of birth, nurture, protection, gratification and giving comfort to children and men. In the life of woman, these functions are given priority over all other engagements. According to the traditional role expectations, she is oriented towards rearing capable children, helping her husband to achieve the goals of the family and being useful to the community in which she lives. But are all women satisfied with this role concept? Talented and ambitious women, in addition to these functions, want to develop their special aptitudes.

Role as wife: As a wife, she is expected to be an affectionate companion, a good sex partner, confidant and social secretary of her husband. She has to take charge of the social life of the couple. She should develop interest in her husband's work. She should be able to understand his world of activities. Moreover she should be able to give intellectual companionship to her husband.

As a home maker: It is the duty of the woman to make her house a beautiful place to live in. She has to take care of the basic needs of the family such as nutrition, clothing, recreation etc.

Role as a mother: She represents to her children the ideas and ideals of perfect womanhood working in harmony with her husband. The child's first attachment is to his/her mother. She is his/her source of nourishment, warmth and comfort.

Changing Roles of Man and Woman Today

You may be wondering whether the couples are following the traditional roles of man and woman today. What

are the changes that have occurred in their roles? Why? Let us look at the changed role concepts and the reasons for these changes.

Reasons for Role Changes

Today family roles are changing largely because they have become less appropriate for the social and economic realities of the modern world. Most of the families are small in size and more women are employed. We can see changes in the styles of femininity as well as masculinity. The man is not maintaining the image of the brave, strong, tough, aggressive male of the past. The gentle, passive, submissive female is a character of yesterday. Opportunities are open for both sexes in education, work and family life. So greater flexibility is required in the role expectations of husbands and wives.

You may be interested to know what exactly are the changes in role concepts. Is there confusion in male's roles? We shall discuss these changes one by one.

1) Sharing roles

Originally the husband was the head of the home and the chief authority in the family. But now the domination of the man seems to be giving way to equalitarian roles between husband and wife. More women have moved into employment outside the home. So the husband has to share the provider role with his wife. He also has to give up his position as the custodian of family wealth as the wife has come to share spending. He has to accept her equality in community affairs also. They share household chores including the care of children.

2) Economic equality

A working wife plays an important role in decision making. When the women are employed, there is a tendency for the couple to share power equally. Wives are less dependent upon their husbands. The husbands

in turn are freed from the burden of total support to their wives. Husbands provide more emotional support to working wives.

3) Changes in the leadership role of man

The vocational demands may take the man away from home for long periods of time. In his race for achievement and success, he may forget his major duty towards his family. Naturally we can find a decline in the respect given to husbands and fathers. The leadership role of man also tends to be reduced proportionately. At times, they stay away from home to avoid responsibility in difficult situations. Then, the handling of the situation falls on the shoulders of the mother.

What happens when fathers are reluctant to take up their responsibilities? In such cases, children may develop certain behaviour problems such as anxiety, aggressiveness and antagonism.

You can observe the shrinking of father's role and an enlargement of the mother's role within the family. The masculine role has been greatly modified by the new role demands of the female.

4) Role expectations in different classes of society

Do you think that role concepts are the same among people of different social strata? There are differences. In the case of lower class males and females, the traditional definitions of masculinity and femininity persist. For them, roles are strictly segregated. But for the middle and upper classes, the spouses have sharing roles. They share responsibility in providing family finances, in bringing up children, and in giving them good education.

Even in the middle and upper classes, is this type of relationship accepted by everybody? The answer is no.

In actual practice in India, the husbands have more say in the family.

5) Woman's expectations of man's role

Do you feel men are becoming more effeminate in today's culture? What do women expect from men?

Men are taking more interest in domestic tasks, and in the care of children. But they are still less gentle, less family oriented and less domestically oriented than women. There is no doubt that men are still trained to be more materialistic, and more success-minded than women. They have more efficiency, competence and material success.

A woman still expects many of these traits in a man. Many women still want the male to be strong and at times they want to depend upon males. They still admire and feel safe with a strong male. The man has to exhibit some courage and strength to meet the role expectations of his wife.

6) What do husbands expect from the wife?

The wife should become the companions of the husband. She is expected to give love and affection to him. He expects an equal sharing of responsibilities. He expects cooperation, support and recognition for his efforts.

Factors Influencing Choice of Marital Roles

Marriage roles differ from many other roles in everyday life. There are no definite general role patterns. Each couple has to work out a role pattern for themselves. There are many factors influencing the choice of marital roles. Some of them are the followingL

Family

Customary roles are learnt largely from the family. It is through the attitudes, expectations and habits formed in the family that a boy or girl gets basic training in

role expectations for him or her as well as for the opposite sex. In some families the parents consciously instill what they feel is the appropriate sex role behaviour in their children. Children also learn sex roles and authority patterns by imitating the behaviour of their parents.

The Peer Group

The peer group is oriented towards new attitudes and expectations for both sexes. They create new role expectations. These are usually in direct contrast to customary roles.

Culture

In our culture, men have more freedom of action. The women are expected to behave according to the norms dictated by society. Education has given her social and economic equality. But still she is restrained to traditional roles by our culture. This ties her down to house keeping and child care in addition to outside employment.

Employment of Women

This is a role assigned by culture, not by nature. Today, women are bearing a double load of work. Employment gives economic independence to the woman and she shares the financial burden of the family. She is fatigued after a day's work. There are more emotional and physical strains for the working woman. She may neglect her duties at home and may even refuse sexual rights to her husband. In some cases the husband may feel inadequate in his roles as provider. Children also suffer from lack of care and supervision. She may not be able to satisfy her role expectations. She may face the following problems:

- i) good health
- ii) willingness of the husband to share household duties

- iii) adequate pay
- iv) a mother substitute if there are young children in the family and
- v) co-operation from all family members

A couple has to face many adjustmental problems, if both of them are committed to their jobs.

Role Conflicts

You have already learnt that couples should have a clear concept of their roles when they marry. This concept forms the basis of marital adjustment. The goals in marriage can be achieved when these roles are played properly.

Do you expect that the couple can adhere to role expectations always? If not, why? When do role conflicts arise?

Role conflicts occur when there are discrepancies in role expectations and the actual behaviour of the couple. It also occurs when partners relate to each other in some new or different ways because of emotional changes.

Reasons for Role Conflicts

No two persons are exactly alike. There are differences in attitudes, behaviour and beliefs. Husbands and wives gather different role concepts from their families. For success in marriage, each one has to produce in his/her personality some resemblance of the partner's image of a man/woman. They have to change their values, attitudes and behaviour to fit in with the new role concepts.

In the case of the woman living along with her husband and other family members, the mother-in-law may criticize her. She may be forced to change her behaviour

in order to fit in with her mother-in-law's concept of an ideal wife.

Role conflicts are brought about by the strain put upon the wife in meeting the role expectations of her husband and his family and in adapting to the demands of his work. The husband also faces problems when his wife is having an established role in her life.

Money management is another area creating role conflicts. Money management is the handling and spending of the family income. Usually conflicts arise over the issues of who should handle money and how it should be spent. You may think it is a simple question touching only the surface. But the decision has far reaching effects on family life. It affects the attitudes and relationships of the couple. Problems of domination, submission, insecurity, inferiority feelings etc. are created by the decision regarding the spending of family income. This in turn leads to conflicts between husband and wife.

The other areas bringing about conflicts in marriage are unrealistic expectations from marriage, sexual incompatibilities, the discipline of children, struggle for domination etc. However, the most difficult problem is difficult in communication. The failure in communication occurs at a deeper level of sharing feelings, expectations, intentions and personal needs.

How can we resolve role conflicts?

In marriage, spouses are involved in the lives of each other. Hence disagreement in some areas is inevitable. How couple manage conflicts is more important.

Conflict Management

There are many ways in which conflicts can be managed by the couple. In the first method, compatibility can be achieved when one partner is dominant and he/she attempts to get the other person comply with his/her

desires and the partner agrees and accepts the complementary role. But when the disagreement is very strong and both partners are not willing to give in, tension is intensified. They may emotionally withdraw from each other's relationships without finding out an actual solution for the problem. An uneasy peace is achieved. There may not be any quarrels, but both of them are not happy or satisfied.

How can one manage conflicts without hurting the personalities of both the spouse? The best method to solve the problem in a reasonable way is by negotiating with each other. Changes are to be made in the roles of both partners. This helps them to learn and understand more about themselves and about each other. This will deepen their relationship.

Personal Factors to be remembered

In quarrels, be very careful in the use of words. Pay attention to the good things your partner does. Do not pay too much attention to his/her faults. Don't fall asleep without making up a quarrel. Control your temper. Don't compare your spouse with your parents. Learn to compromise to forget and to forgive. The partner's should have flexible personalities. They should understand each other.

Avoid scathing criticism and curb the impulse to make cutting retorts. Settle a problem through mutual discussion. If things cannot be resolved mutually, you will need to seek help from a family counselor or spiritual counselor. Although seeking help from a counselor is not common in India, we need to adapt ourselves to changing situations.

Role Changes in Different Phases of Marriage

As you have gone through the changes in marital roles you may have noticed that the relationship in marriage

is not a static one. It is an ongoing process. In marriage you will find a variety of separate stages. Each stage requires new adjustments and re-valuation of the old ones. The couple has to re-organise their ideas, values and goals for the smooth running of their married life.

Early years of marriage

Marriage takes the new couple to new and unfamiliar ways of life. Every day they have to take some decisions, solve some problems and make plans for the future. The first year of marriage is one in which the husband and wife belong predominantly to each other, expenses are low, health is usually good and needs are simple. Their unique plan of life is in the making. Each one is becoming established in the routine of his/her job.

During the first year or two of marriage the couple faces a multitude of adjustments. The following are some of the areas of adjustments in marriage which will be affecting their behaviour or role in early marital life.

Relationship between husband and wife

When you get married you say "I take you". It is not just the company, thoughts or the body of the partner that you take. You take the whole of the other person.

Accepting each other

The husband and the wife have to accept each other with all their shortcomings. At the same time, they should maintain their individually, personal worth and self-respect.

Communication

The spouses should show the ability and willingness to communicate with each other. Communication is the breath of married life. It is not enough to love, to care or to respect. The lover must express affection.

Give and take

The couple should possess the ability to give and take. To give oneself to the other means to share one's most intimate feelings. They should be co-operative and should be capable of emotional interdependence.

Personality factors in relation to role expectation

You know man and woman differ in their physical structure. Do they show differences in their emotional and psychological structure too?

As every cell of the body is different, so also every feeling, every reaction, and every attitude of man and woman have particular characteristics according to one's sex. The respective nature of man and woman determines their roles in marriage. Success in marriage can be attained when the couple respects the characteristic qualities which nature has given to each of them and when they adhere to their respective roles. Do not expect one's own characteristics in the other partner and do not try to change him/her.

Personal habits

Most of the problems faced by the couples arise from their basic personality patterns. Each person learns particular habits and attitudes from early childhood. So regardless of their similarities, each partner, always brings to marriage enough differences in their attitudes, punctuality, formality and informality in housekeeping and management of home, observing social conventions etc. may bring about role conflicts in marriage. Only if both partners are willing to compromise from the beginning of marriage, can they get along smoothly.

Sexual relations

Why do you consider sex as an important factor for the success of marriage? It is because; sexual relationships directly and indirectly influence the adjustment in

other areas of life. It is the physical foundation of marital relationships. If there is any frustration in sexual relationship it will affect the emotional, mental and social adjustment of the concerned person.

Sexual adjustment in marriage

You know that biological factors are important in determining the sexual satisfaction of the individual. Cultural factors are also equally important. What are the other factors? From where does an individual gain his sexual attitudes?

The sexual attitudes and expectations are learnt by an individual from his/her early childhood from his/her family and his peer group. The cultural norms of the society in which he/she grows up and matures and his/her biological structure modify the acquired attitudes of the person. Knowledge of sexual anatomy and appropriate sexual activities are also necessary for good adjustment. The other factors conducive for good sexual relationship are complete emotional acceptance of each other and an understanding of each other's behaviour.

Sexual maladjustments in marriage

Unfavourable attitudes towards sex, ignorance about sex and sexuality lack of proper sex education, unfavourable sexual experiences of early years of life, unrealistic expectations about sex in marriage and the unwillingness to be open with one's partner etc. are some of the reasons for sexual maladjustment.

Psycho sexual development influences an individual's sex life. Fixation or regression at any stage of development will adversely affect the sexual adjustment. According to Freud at one stage of development, the male and female children are attracted to the parent of the opposite sex – the boy to the image of his mother, the girls to the image of her

father. For the boy this phenomenon is known as Oedipus complex, for the girl it is Electra complex. Normally the boy and girl will pass through this stage and begin to identify with the parent of one's own sex. If they are fixated to this stage, in their later marital life it will cause problems in sexual relationship with the partner.

Confusion about sex and false attitudes towards sex

In Indian society discussion on sex continue to be a taboo since long. This conservative attitude of elders prevents the imparting of healthy facts about sex to the teenagers. So they may turn to some other source to get information. They may be knocking at the wrong doors and getting wrong and dangerous information. Inaccurate and distorted information creates unhealthy attitudes towards sex. Later on in married life it will create a number of problems.

The role of man and woman in sexual adjustment depends upon the attitudes and expectations each person brings into marriage. Both the spouses should have balanced and positive attitudes towards sex.

Relations with in-laws

Marriage joins not only the man and woman together, but their families also. Hence, in-laws are the new relatives acquired through marriage. You may wonder whether in-laws are bringing problems to every marriage.

The relationship with in-laws may bring about problems in some marriages. The circumstance in which each person lives is different. If the son-in-law or daughter-in-law fits in with the expectations of the respective family he/she will be accepted easily. Otherwise problems may arise.

Interference of mothers

Usually it is the mother-in-law who is more involved in in-law problems. Mother's lives are tied up with the lives of their children. They are very close to children. Some mothers are reluctant to give up their roles and try to maintain their responsibilities and expect privileges from their married children. The boy or the husband should understand this phenomenon and manage the situation accordingly.

Husband's mother interferes more often

The mother is the first woman in the life of her son. After the son's marriage some mothers cannot accept another woman loving and caring him, even though it is his wife. The wife feels the mother-in-law to be a threat to her marital happiness. Only an intelligent and understanding husband can solve this problem. He should give due importance to both of them. Don't make them rivals. The wife should not be in competition with the mother. Give mothers time to find out new interests.

Other in-laws

Sister-in-law also creates problems in the life of married couple. Brothers-in-law and fathers-in-law also share a small part in the in-law problems. Care of elderly relatives also creates troubles.

Why do the parents interfere?

Parents are concerned with the growth and achievements of their children from the time of their birth. Hence, when children get married it is difficult for the parents to ignore or to be indifferent about their lives. At the same time the young couple is eager to be independent. They do not like the interference of parents.

In many cases, the parents are not economically independent. They are forced to live with their married children. This also creates problems.

Positive contribution of in-laws

The in-law relationships are not always a problem. If the young wife appreciates her husband's mother and loves her as a second mother, she will find her very helpful.

Cultural factors affecting role changes

The role expectations vary with different cultures. Culture conditions the personality of an individual. Marital roles are determined by the culture in which one grows up. The couple coming from two different cultures will behave differently in a given situation. They will be having different expectations and their goals in marriages will be different. There may be few common interests. Each brings from his/her culture quite often different values, attitudes, customs and styles of living. Cultural differences make mutual understanding and communication difficult.

What should the couple do to adjust to each other?

The couple requires more adjustment than others in a homogenous marriage. Before marriage, they should think carefully whether they are capable of making all the adjustments in such a marriage. To achieve marital satisfaction they should work with more maturity, understanding and determination than a couple marrying from similar backgrounds. If the couple can accept one another without trying to recast the mate into one's own particular mould, they may get along well.

Religion

Society may accept inter-racial marriages. But it seldom approves inter-religious marriages. The chances for

success of an interfaith marriage depend upon the ability of the couple to face the situation maturely and realistically. Before marriage, they should have a clear evaluation of the difficulties they have to encounter and overcome.

Areas of conflict

One's desire to make the other person adopt his/her religion causes major marital problems. Whether the parents and friends will accept the match is another difficulty. This affects the relationship of the parents. The religion to which children shall belong their education, choice of child training methods, the use of birth control measures etc. are some of the major areas of conflict.

Adjustments

If they are of an understanding nature and tolerant of each other's religion and have no desire to impose their own religion on the mate, they will get along well. If they have a clear idea of the many obstacles they have to encounter and if they are flexible enough to make their adjustments, their marriage may become successful.

Importance of early years

During the early years the couple has to make all the above adjustments for the success of their marriage. Each partner must learn how far he/she can take the mate in different areas and which are the things he/she must avoid.

A couple may be able to make adjustments successfully in the early years. But marital life is a continuous process. Aging and maturity bring about changes in the lives of the couple. The new and changing situations in life makes further adjustments in the roles of husbands and wives necessary and inevitable.

Role changes with the arrival of children

The next phase in marriage starts with the arrival of children in the family. It signals the beginning of a new stage in the relationship of husband and wife.

Life along with offspring

There are radical role changes to be made with the birth of children. Parenthood brings fulfillment and completion to marriage. It fundamentally changes the whole character of marital relationships.

Problems related to transition to parenthood

The coming of the child is early anticipated, loved and cherished by the parents. But transition to parenthood brings about a number of readjustments in the lives of parents. The arrival of the child upsets the balance maintained in the family.

Parental role

Parental role brings personal, social and economic privations.

Economic problems

The father is worried about his responsibility and additional expenses. The wife may have to give up her career and take up the role of a full time housewife. This affects the income and expenditure of the family.

Personal difficulties

The wife may be embarrassed about the conditions of pregnancy and its effects on her social life and marital relations. Men also have to make role changes. When the wife is overburdened with child care and other household chores, he may have to share her duties.

Social participation

The social life and recreation of the parents are severely affected. The young couple is tied down with the care

of children. When they can entrust some one else for child care, they can have joint participation in social activities. Otherwise they attend social functions separately. However, joint participation gives more satisfaction to the couple.

You have already learnt that, in the early phase of marriage, the couple had a child-centered relationship. They had very few outside interests. Their lives were built around their children.

Feelings of uselessness

Some women feel that their lives are empty and futile. When parental responsibilities diminish, they may be having a feeling of uselessness. For such women, ending of parental role is a traumatic experience. It may cause neurotic difficulties. They can try to learn new skills and become engaged in some activities. Husbands are occupied with their work. In this way, they can adjust to the changes in the family.

Adjustment with in-laws

Children may get married and the parents have to adjust to the children's spouses. Another adjustment is the care of aging parents. Caring for the elderly may help to fill the gap created when children leave home. But in many cases the care of aging parents deprives the couple of the opportunities for social participation and development of new interests.

Role as grandparents

You may be well aware that many men and women become grandparent before grand parent middle age ends. This is a new role in the life of the couple.

Formal roles

Some grandparents play a formal role following a hands off policy as far as care and discipline of grandchildren are concerned.

Surrogate parent role

In some other cases they assume the responsibility for the care of children. Grandmothers are more active in this role.

Fun seeker role

Another role is that they impart special knowledge to their grand children and teach them certain skills.

The role of grand parents gives couple more satisfaction than their earlier role of parents.

Role changes in old age

You must have observed the role changes in early adulthood and middle ages of the couple. What are the changes during old age? How does the couple adjust to these changes? You also know that the couple had a close, intimate relationship in the early phase of their marriage. Later on, it changed into a child-centered relationship. In old age, the relationship between a husband and wife again takes the form of a pair centered relationship.

Effects of retirement

The pattern of family life undergoes further changes with the retirement of the husband. Perhaps the greatest adjustment of all occurs during this period.

The husband retires and suddenly faces the insults of old age. He feels unwanted and has no motivation to compete with other men. He feels lost and does not know what to do with his free time. He tends to be depressed and unhappy. He is irritable in his treatment of his wife. He always criticizes and finds fault with the spouse. He does not want to help the wife in her household duties thinking it is woman's work.

Common interests

Retirement forces the couple to be together most of the time. They can develop a pattern of togetherness in recreational activities. The same pattern can be applied to other areas of life. With the change of time mutual interests can be developed. When children leave home the parents are drawn towards each other more closely.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have examined the role expectations in marital life. We have described the role of a man and a woman in marital life. We also discussed the factors influencing choice of marital roles. Another important issue covered in this chapter is about role conflicts, reasons for role conflicts and conflict management.

We also described the role changes in different phases of marriage. Apart from personality factors in relation to role expectations, we also examined other factors such as relations with in-laws, cultural factors affecting role changes, religion, as well as problem related to transition to parenthood.

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