Chapter 2- Marital Relationship from a Sociological Perspective

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The societal processes associated with capitalism and urbanization have had a transformative impact on families and relationships all over the world. Greater opportunities for both men and women in the domains of education and work, and exposure to western cultures and media have led to significant changes in the fabric of family life. Emergence of new patterns of relationships, changes in attitudes and role expectations; and the consequent altering of power dynamics in relationships have become more prominent. The influences of such processes are also evident in the way relationships are being perceived and marital bonds are being formed in society. It is not uncommon to find more and more women entering the labor market not only in search of supplementary incomes, but also in search of fulfilling careers. The increased incomes of urban families have brought to surface the challenges that need to be addressed not only at the workplace, but also in the family sphere. The husbands and wives need to cope with their new status as ‘career couples’, besides managing their familial obligations. It seems worthwhile to explore such changes that define modern day marital bonds in a culturally diverse society like India from a sociological standpoint.

The familial and work lives of the married couple are intertwined in contemporary family configurations which have implications for overall health of the relationship. In this context, the present chapter aims to present an overview of theoretical and conceptual understanding of the dynamics of marital relationship among dual career couples. Following a brief outline of the chapter, an extensive review of literature on different components of marital relationship is presented. It contains review of studies on various aspects of marital processes. The next section deals with the meaning and issues related to dual career couples. The next section focuses on literature specifically related to dual career couples in the context of marital relationships. This is followed by a discussion on
how marriage has been understood in societies around the world and particularly in India. Lastly, we take a brief look at the classical sociological perspectives that may be used to understand marital relationships and how social constructionism may present us with the tools to arrive at a deeper understanding of what happens in a dual career marriage in India.

2.2 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Evidence from literature shows people who are in marriage are healthier and happier (Gottman, 1994). Decades of research on marital relationships has demonstrated that the health of a committed relationship is influenced by numerous overlapping variables, including psychological factors (cognition and affect), socio-demographic factors (parenting, finances, and social support), life stressors and transitions, and physical and mental health factors (Bradbury, Fincham, & Beach, 2000). Various constructs such as satisfaction, quality, adjustment, stability, happiness, success typically form part of the evaluation of marital relationships in social sciences (Fincham & Bradbury, 1987; Gottman, 1994; Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Lenthall, 1977; Spanier & Cole, 1976; Spanier & Lewis, 1980).

Studies on intimate relationships typically depend on a variety of concepts that attempt to describe the dynamics of the relationship. The most prominent among the concepts used to study marriages are marital quality, marital satisfaction, marital conflict, marital adjustment, etc. It can be a formidable task to attempt to define each of them in ways that make them mutually exclusive. While the definitional and operational implications will be dealt with in the individual chapters on these concepts, we now look at some of the existing literature to understand how these concepts have been used to understand marriages hitherto.

2.2.1 MARITAL QUALITY

There is no consensus on what defines and constitutes marital quality. Infact, marital quality is seen as a combination of happiness, satisfaction and adjustment in marriage and many a times, quality and satisfaction are used interchangeably in literature (Norton, 1983; Spanier & Lewis,
However, in general, subjective evaluations of the marital relationship of the couple is referred to as marital quality (R. A. Lewis & Spanier, 1979). Psychology has focused a lot in exploring the association between marital quality and depression (Beach, Arias, & O’Leary, 1986; Culp & Beach, 1998). A close examination of the research on marital quality shows that a wide range of areas and variables starting from newlywed couples to elderly couples, physical and mental well-being; parenting, age, education, socio-economic status, work influences, gender dimensions, religiosity, communication, division of labour and so on have been studied (Fincham & Bradbury, 1987; Helms-Erickson, 2001; Debra Umberson, Williams, Powers, Chen, & Campbell, 2005; Whisman, 2001).

One of the most widely researched areas in the context of marital quality is the gender role stereotypes and ideologies (Subrata Dasgupta & Basu, 2011; Faulkner, Davey, & Davey, 2005; Helms, Proulx, Klute, McHale, & Crouter, 2006; Ogletree, 2014). As early as 1975, Bernard (1975) proposed that marital experiences qualitatively differ for men and women. Drawing from an interview of 194 midlife couples, Helms et al. (2006) found that differences in gender attitudes of the partners resulted in low levels of marital quality over time. The influence of gender on marital satisfaction analysed in a longitudinal sample drawn from National Survey of Families and Household in the US indicated that, men with affinity towards traditional gender role attitudes experienced lower levels of marital satisfaction (Faulkner et al., 2005). Examining the ways in which traditional marital expectations were associated with satisfaction in marriage among 114 Indo-Pakistanis living in a Western country revealed interesting results (Ahmad & Reid, 2008). Belief in traditional marital beliefs was correlated with low levels of marital satisfaction.

Research on division of labour and influences on marital quality has also shown interesting results on gender attitudes. Assessing men’s emotional investment in women’s marital quality, Wilcox and Nock (2006) found that gender equity expressed through sharing of household tasks and dyadic commitment to institutional ideals about marriage positively influenced women’s marital quality. Various scholars note that more than the actual helping and time spent in housework, the perception of household tasks is

Another area that has caught the attention of family researchers is the elements that define long and satisfying marriages. The findings of a study by Kaslow and Robinson (1996) based on interview of couples married over 25 years found that love, mutual trust, and support as factors keeping them together. On similar lines, Mackey and O’Brien (1995) found that interpersonal conflict levels had negative association with marital satisfaction and conflict was highest during child rearing years. The study also revealed that physical and psychological intimacy played a key role in satisfying relationships. In a longitudinal exploratory study that sought to examine the nature and magnitude of fluctuations in marital quality based on national sample of married persons who were followed over an eight-year period, found evidence that marital quality is a relatively stable phenomenon (S. M. Johnson & Talitman, 1997). Another longitudinal study by (D. R. Johnson & Booth, 1998) found that both dyadic properties and individual qualities influence the quality of marital unions.

Some studies sought to examine the association between age gap between the husband and wife and marital quality. Glick (1988) found that divorce rate was lower among those couples who had a low age-gap. This finding was corroborated by the findings from other studies (Booth & Edwards, 1992; Heaton, 2002). Differences in age between the couples may imbalance the power structure as the older person may dominate the younger one (Blood & Wolfe, 1960; Vera, Berardo, & Berardo, 1985). Regarding sharing of household responsibilities and tasks, Blood and Wolfe (1960) noted that older men may be more inclined to perform independent tasks than assist their wives. Another strand of literature suggests that age differences in favour of men can lead to positive influences on marital quality (Cowan, 1984; Fowers, 1991). Similarly,
both Cowan (1984) and Groot and Van Den Brink (2002) found that when husbands were older than the wives, the couple reported happiness in marriage than otherwise.

Time spent together in interaction and joint activity had a significant association with marital satisfaction (Snyder, 1979; L. K. White, 1983). Similarly, the value of spending time together and companionship in marital life enhanced satisfaction (Bennett, 2000). A study by Majhi & Panda (2015) explored the extent to which there are associations between the variables of marital satisfaction, couple’s leisure patterns, and shared leisure satisfaction. Based on a data of 200 married couples, the study concluded that the correlates of marital satisfaction vary by gender and is influenced by emotion-work satisfaction, household labour relations and gender ideologies.

Greater emphasis on love, intimacy, and disclosure in marital unions has brought about greater expectations from spouses influencing one’s own personal well-being, thereby highlighting how spouse’s expressions of love influence one’s own wellbeing (A. J. Cherlin, 2004; Giddens, 1992). Proulx, Helms, and Buehler (2007) examined the association between marital quality and personal well-being and found evidence that factors such as gender and marital duration influence the association. Carr, Freedman, Cornman, & Schwarz (2014) found that correspondence between a man’s marital appraisals and his life satisfaction was conditional on his wife’s assessment of marital quality. A study among 220 newlywed couples in the United States revealed that the interaction between couple discrepancies in cognitive and behavioural egalitarianism influenced perceptions of marital quality for both husbands and wives (Ogolsky, Dennison, & Monk, 2014).

Another important variable that has been explored in association with marital quality has been the presence or absence of children (Bradbury et al., 2000). Some studies found that though children increase marital stability, they have negative implications for marital satisfaction (Belsky & Rovine, 1990; Waite & Lillard, 1991). Shek (1996) examined the connection between marital quality and their relationship with children. The findings suggest that adults with positive signs of marital adjustment
and satisfaction perceived parent-child relational quality to be better. At times, the parental responsibilities can cause stress influencing the quality of relationships. Lavee, Sharlin and Katz (1996) noted a significant association between parenting stress of both the couples and marital quality. Analysing data from 1101 participants from the National Survey of Families and Households, Fishman and Meyers (2000) found that mothers who experienced marital dissatisfaction were less involved with their children leading to their psychological distress. A longitudinal study based on 97 couples showed that for higher levels of perceived difficulty with parenting was related to lower initial levels of marital intimacy and this association did not differ across husbands and wives (O’Brien & Peyton, 2002). However, differences in attitudes towards child rearing between the married partners had a negative influence on marital intimacy over time.

The effect of education on marital quality has also caught attention of various scholars (Bumpas & Sweet, 1972; Houseknecht & Spanier, 1980). Bumpass (1972) found positive association between education and marital happiness for men. On the other hand, women with higher levels of educational were likely to be divorced compared to a woman with a lower education level. In analysing how external stresses such as work mediates marital quality, Neff and Karney (2004) find that stress has a negative influence on marital perceptions and the way the partner interprets that perception. Based on a sample of 334 males and 189 females -married white-collar workers - Hughes, Galinsky, & Morris (1992) found evidence for work-family interference mediating the relationship between job characteristics and marital quality. The study employed multiple regression analysis and found that job characteristics predicted dimensions of work family interference which inturn predicted marital quality.

Given the importance of religion in the lives of individuals, various studies have examined direct and indirect associations of religiosity on quality of relationships. Based on a survey of ninety-seven couples, Mahoney et al. (1999) examined the impact of spirituality on marriage and found that involvement in joint religious activities positively influenced marital
adjustment and reduced marital conflict for the marital dyad. There seems to be gender differences in experiences of spirituality and their influences on marital relationship. Men’s spirituality directly influenced marital relationship than that of the wife (Giblin, 1997; Litcher & Carmalt, 2008). However, Fincham, Ajayi, and Beach (2011) distinguished the effects of religiosity and spirituality. They found that religiosity of the husband mattered for his satisfaction, but more so for the wife, while spirituality was significant to both the partners. Studying a sample of 342 married couples, Stafford, David, & McPherson (2014) found that a firm belief in the sanctity of marriage was an important contributor to marital satisfaction.

Though a good number of literature on marital research focused on Western societies, the recent decades have witnessed a surge in studies of non-Western societies. Expanding the research on marital quality in non-western contexts, Pimentel (2000) examined married people in the age group of 20-54 years in China and found that parents continue to play an important role in choice of mate and is linked with marital happiness. Based on structural equation modelling, Lavee and Katz (2002) found that division of labour and perceived fairness moderated marital quality for women but not for men, in a study conducted across three ethnic religious groups in Israel. Using exploratory factor analysis, Allendorf and Ghimire (2013) found factors such as gender, education, spouse-choice, and marital duration as crucial determinants of marital quality in Nepal. However, caste, occupation, age at marriage, and number of children also turned out to have association with marital quality. For men, the effects of education, spousal choice and duration had significant implications in achieving higher levels of marital quality.

### 2.2.2 Marital Conflict

Most attention in research has been directed to exploring the role of ‘positive’ components of marital quality (D. R. Johnson, White, Edwards, & Booth, 1986) and their relationship with various dimensions of marriage. The ‘negative’ components of marital processes, usually associated with marital disagreements and conflict, are not explored as much. It is not unusual for intimate relationships to have conflicts. In general, conflict in
a relationship consists of negative behaviour and interactions that cause strain in the quality of the relationship. Specifically, marital conflict refers to covert/overt interaction between spouses that is identified by the spouses as disagreement or a source of difficulty in the relationship. Couples may complain about sources of conflict ranging from verbal and physical abuse to personal characteristics and behaviour (Fincham, 2003). It is important that the role of marital conflict is recognized in the life of the couples due to its influences on the relationship and its association with other aspects of the marriage.

Issues of conflict in marital relationships has caught the attention of scholars in psychology and communication studies and marital therapists. Studies have focused not only on potential factors that cause conflict (Amato & Rogers, 1997; Rosen-Grandon, Myers & Hattie, 2004), but also on conflict structures and resolution styles (Fincham & Beach, 1999; Gottman, 1994). The influences of stressors in marital relationships such as patterns of communication, skewed division of labour and poor parenting can become more consequential in explaining conflict behaviours and lead to low levels of marital satisfaction (Cohan & Bradbury, 1997; Repetti, 1989).

The conflict arising over power is a strong predictor of marital dissatisfaction (Kurdek, 1994). Power is an integral part of any relationship, especially close romantic relationships, because it determines how the partners relate to each other and how decisions are made. The relative economic independence accorded by a career can embolden the woman to consider herself powerful to some extent. Conversely, husbands too face the prospect of sharing the power that they traditionally held. “Individuals display more dominance when they perceive they are relatively equal in power to their partners than when they perceive they have more or less power than their partner” (Dunbar, Bippus, & Young, 2008, p. 15). The study also quotes reports that marital adjustment and relational satisfaction are often found to be lowest in wife-dominant marriages.

Conflict promoting attributions or behaviour has been shown to lead to increase in conflict in marriage (Fincham & Beach, 1999). Examining self-
reported destructive, constructive and withdrawal behaviours of 373 newlywed White and Black American couples, Birditt, Brown, Orbuch, and McIlvane (2010) found that conflict behaviours have implications for divorce and separation and these consequences can last even upto 16 years later. Violence in relationships and presence of psychological aggression among newlyweds can lead to divorce (Ehrensaft & Vivian, 1996). Karney and Bradbury (1997) pointed out that marital discords tend to disrupt satisfaction in intimate relationships and to eventual divorce or separation.

Also, gender differences were evident in the way husbands and wives coped with conflict-behaviours. Men displayed more instances of withdrawal in response to conflict (Kluwer, Heesink, & Vliert, 1997). While husbands seemed to be more stable over time in expression of destructive and withdrawal behaviours, wives’ expressions decreased over time (Birditt et al., 2010). Unrealistic expectations and relationship beliefs, especially of the wives, can enhance conflict behaviours (Bradbury & Fincham 1993). In cases where the woman is working, the additional responsibilities of housework and childcare can also enhance marital conflict (Faulkner et al., 2005). A close examination of 79 couples showed that conflict is a result of mutual influences of husband-wife interactions and wives alone cannot be considered as culprits of dysfunctional marital interaction (Gottman & Levenson, 1999). In assessing factors that trigger conflict, finance, communication, and intimacy scored as conflict promoting factors (Kurdek, 1994; Storaasli & Markman, 1990; Tichenor, 1999). In a study by Storaasli and Markman (1990), husbands reported that issues of communication and intimacy triggered conflict. Based on dyadic hierarchical linear modeling of 100 husbands' and 100 wives' diary reports of 748 conflict instances, marital conflicts on money were found to be more problematic and recurring and sometimes remained unresolved compared to other factors causing conflict (L. M. Papp, Cummings, & Goeke-Morey, 2009). Tichenor (1999) also noted that discussions over financial matters could trigger feelings of defensiveness and vulnerability among married partners. Issues of alcoholism and addictions that also affect the financial security of the family can augment marital conflict.
The role of familial responsibilities and interactions including that of parenting, division of labour, relationship with relatives in impacting marital conflict has also been examined. In assessing the implications of parenting on marital conflict, various scholars have noted that raising children is a challenge for married couples (A. Cherlin, 1977). In a sample of 113 families, Lindahl and Malik (1999) found strong associations between destructive forms of marital conflict and negative parental behaviours especially of men. The cost and time involved in raising children can diminish marital intimacy and increase conflict among married partners (Allendorf & Ghimire, 2013; A. Cherlin, 1977). Direct or indirect interventions of parents or in-laws in family affairs of the married couple can also influence marital conflict. Bryant (2001) noted that interference on in-laws in the private lives of the married couple can lead to marital tensions and disharmony. Further, Barry and Williams (1987) noted that such interferences would restrict autonomy in decision making and impose expectations on the couple leading to marital strains. Issues over money and debt concerns are reported to be frequent triggers of marital tension (Dew, 2008). Kluwer et al. (1997) noted that perceived inequity in division of labour can lead to conflict. Differences in religiosity between the partners emerged as conflict triggering factor in marital relationships (Curtis & Ellison, 2002).

Tolorunleke (2014) stressed that conflicts in marriage are inevitable. However, more than the mere presence of conflict, the conflict management style and skills are bound to be determinants of successful marriage (Gottman, 1994). Roloff and Miller (2006) noted that couples who relied on positive problem solving techniques and used fewer complaints and criticism had more satisfying relationships. In examining the influences of conflict styles, Segrin, Hanzal, and Domschke (2009) found that behaviours such as hostility, negativity and withdrawal are related to lower levels of marital satisfaction especially in early years of married life. Specifically, ‘demand-withdraw’ pattern of conflict in marriage leads to feelings of misunderstanding and can lead to relationship disruption and reduction of relational quality (Caughlin, 2002).
Conflict is highest in the closest relationships, like marriage, but those relationships also represent the highest level of support and satisfaction. This suggests that conflict can be both a negative and a positive part of close relationships depending on how it is carried out (Fincham, 2003). The decisions couples make about how to manage or avoid a conflict can influence their relational outcomes (Dunbar et al., 2008). Similarly, “conflict resolution is integral to a successful relationship and it can be argued that resentment engendered by partner transgressions is likely to fuel couple conflict and impede [further] successful conflict resolution” (Fincham, Beach, & Davila, 2004, p. 73).

Rollins and Bahr (1976) argue that in marital interactions, husbands’ perceptions must be distinguished from wives’ perceptions. Differences between male and female socialization and unbalanced division of labor in families (Zipp, Prohaska, & Bemiller, 2004) suggests that perceptions of authority and power by men and women frequently differ. However, even when women are “objectively overburdened” with household work, they often report that it is a fair arrangement because equity in relationships is subjectively based on their sex role ideology (Van Willigen & Drentena, 2001). Since equally balanced relationships are likely to have least conflicts, the couples may convince themselves that they are equal (even when they are not), or if and when they recognize inequity may use their control attempts to change this power difference.

How marital conflicts are handled have taken two different routes in related literature. One stream takes conflict areas for granted and focuses on the adaptive strategies that couples adopt in order to overcome the challenges posed by dual career lifestyle. These strategies could involve availing assistance from extended family and social networks, sharing in household tasks, etc. The second stream looks at the daily lives of the couples and inquires about how the daily interactions pose conflicts and how these are resolved in a differential or equalized power situation. The lifeblood of this stream of research in marital relationships is the recognition that power is distributed asymmetrically in marriage. So, the strategies that individuals use to resolve conflicts behaviourally have caught the attention of psychologists and communication experts.
2.2.3 Marital Adjustment

The increasing interest in adjustment among the marital dyads comes in the context of decreasing stability in marital unions (Mitchell & Plauche, 2016) especially in European countries. Briefly, adjustment means better adaptation, emotional stability and social effectiveness of people which meets the demands of the environment (Bharambe & Baviskar, 2013). Many scholars agree that marital adjustment is an evolutionary process and is related to aspects of happiness, gender role attitudes and satisfaction in life (Hashmi, Khurshid, & Hassan, 2007).

Persistence of gender differences in adjustment behaviours in marital unions was noted by different scholars. For instance, women compatibility management in marital relationships better than men (Ackers, Marchington, Wilkinson, & Dundon, 2004; Behnke & Meuser, 2003). Even when women are involved in careers, women are interested in balancing career and family life and are also willing to compromise career prospects in short run than men are (Nathawat & Mathur, 1993). A study on marital adjustment among a sample of 210 married individuals showed significant gender differences. Males who married early reported higher levels of adjustment than females and marital adjustment has positive associations with age at marriage (Yizengaw, Kibret, Gebersulis, & Tsehay, 2014).

Holding positive self-concept is crucial for marital adjustment both for individuals and couples (Sharpley & Khan, 1980). On similar lines, maintaining individuality and at the same time, the ability to be intimately connected with each other as a couple forms a crucial component of good marriage (Skowron, 2000). A study in the USA revealed that unhappily married adults who divorced or separated ended up no happier, on average, than unhappily married adults who stayed married and that two out of three unhappily married adults who avoided divorce or separation ended up happily married five years later (Waite et al., 2002). Evidently, walking out of a marital relationship as a solution to adjustment problems is a contentious issue.

A study consisting of a sample of 93 couples who were followed up at five intervals between one month and two years revealed that during the first months, age, income, and education influenced marital adjustment but
this influence weakened in time (Quinn & Odell, 1998). Examining results across the two-year interval suggests that interpersonal trust, desired spousal behaviour change, and emotional maturity are highly associated with marital adjustment. Marital processes of interpersonal trust and desired change in spousal behaviour at one month are predictive of marital adjustment at two years.

Unhappiness and dissatisfaction remained in the process of marital adjustment in cases where wives were employed (Nye, 1958). Using Dyadic Adjustment Scale to measure adjustment of 82 married couples, Murstein and Williams (1983) found that gender role behaviours of husbands was not only important for their own adjustment in marriage but also of their spouse and vice-versa. Behaviour of wives which demonstrated trust in the husbands was found to be important in the adjustment and satisfaction of husbands (S. M. Johnson & Talitman, 1997; Quinn & Odell, 1998). During the initial years, adaptation in marital systems is a crucial predictor of marital adjustment (Odell & Quinn, 1998). An exploration of the factors that predict marital adjustment in the first two years of marriage revealed that interpersonal trust, emotional maturity and desired spousal behaviours emerged as key factors (Odell & Quinn, 1998). In exploring the role of intimate factors in influencing marital adjustment among 402 married individuals, Cupach and Comstock (1990) found that satisfaction in sexual communication was positively related to dyadic satisfaction. The influence of rewards in marital adjustment held good for urban women in comparison to their rural counterparts (Hansen, 1989).

Sears and Galambos (1992) explored the relationship between the working conditions of the women and marital adjustment among two earner couples. The results revealed that the influence of work overload affected adjustment in marriage. Further, having a support system at home assisted in dealing with such work stressors. Bell’s (1971) study found that the manifold demands of a dual career family could not be met by the nuclear family alone and emphasized the role of the extended family in supporting and sustaining the dual career structure. Dual-career couples are “pressured to do more, be more, know more, think more, talk more,
relate more- and do all this as quickly as possible. The complaint, “There’s never enough time” is heard so often in therapists’ offices it might well be the theme song of the 21st century” (P. Papp, 2000, p. 6). Dual-career partners utilize their shared work and organizational experiences to help them function more effectively at home.

Studies on professional women found them to be enjoying the independence that financial autonomy brought in matters of personal preferences and the say in matters of common importance in the family. Even when there were difficulties in managing home and work together, they sought to overcome the problem by being flexible in their domestication. Men who were in dual career relationships in the West were relatively more involved in their lives at home (Willmott, 1971).

Marital adjustment is a concept often used in the literature with a variety of meanings. Not unlike the other related concepts in marital literature, marital adjustment carries with it the burden of cultural implications. There is no telling if culturally diverse populations would accept unanimously the ways in which any particular couple demonstrate being ‘well adjusted’ in marriage. So is the issue regarding the factors that determine one’s adjustment or maladjustment. Ranging from personal traits to cultural ideologies, a variety of factors – both objective and subjective – have been held responsible for any couple to arrive marital adjustment. It does seem important, then, to keep in mind that probably the best judges of adjustment in marriage are the couple themselves. This will be further taken up in the Chapter that explores the nature of adjustment among our respondents.

2.2.4 Marital Studies in Indian Context

Social institutions develop and thrive nested in socio-economic conditions that are favourable to them. Even when they have cultural beliefs, religious motives and explanations, they are susceptible to change as socio-economic conditions change. Marriage is no exception to this. The last few decades have witnessed profound changes in the fabric of Indian culture. Education is shown to have a positive relationship to individualistic ideas about marriage and an inverse relationship to approval of traditional practices like child marriage and arranged marriage
(Barber, 2004). However, these relationships cannot be universally presumed for all societies, and nor for all sections of the same society. The motive for marriage shifting from the economic need to sexual complementarity, and further, to demands for personal fulfilment. This change has occurred over time as production gradually moved out of the households, and the marketplace, institutional network, and governments replaced the services once provided by the family (Mikkola & Miles, 2007).

The marital relationship is no longer as sanctified as it was believed in the past, and is viewed only as a bonding and nurturing life-long relationship and friendship. Indian marriages are still largely resilient and lasting, whereas in many developed countries they seem to break up for seemingly trivial reasons. In India, divorce rates are among the lowest in the world. Analysis of National Family Health Survey data show that about two out of 100 Indian marriages end in divorce (James & Goswani, 2010). However, this comes in the midst of claims that divorce rates in India’s urban sphere are slowly mounting. Aura (2008) reports that census data can only capture the marital status of the respondents at the time of the survey which is conducted at 10-year intervals. Those who have divorced and remarried within this time period also get classified as ‘married’, thereby masking a probably higher rate of divorce.

Industrialization (and other related changes in social structure) altered the traditional normative expectations and value systems of the Indian society. Paid jobs at urban areas or factories gave a newfound financial autonomy to younger men at home. And men began to have preferences that were at variance with the norms and preferences of their parents and to express them. This was widely noticed in mate selection by the men. Once traditional normative orientations toward marriage and family began to erode, this change in people’s attitudes in turn provided a new stimulus for further changes in socioeconomic arrangements in the society (Tsuya, 2001).

The discipline of sociology has hosted a good amount of research on marriage and family, though studies on interpersonal relationships and personality dimensions within marriage has been mostly a subject matter of social psychology. Relatively less attention has been paid to
understanding the dynamics of the marital dyad itself. Discussions on the ‘couple relationship’ in India has mostly confined to self-help text, popular articles, and journalistic writings. In researches on family in non-western contexts such as India, the focus has largely been on changing familial structures, composition, intergenerational transfers, elderly care, and type of marriage (Patel, 2005; Pal, 2006; Mishra, 2012; Gupta, 2012). In researches which had marriage as their focus, factors such as role of caste, dimensions of patriarchy, the system of arranged marriages, gender roles, and marital patterns across different cultures and tribes were taken as the research-worthy dimensions (Goswani, 2012; Kadam, 2015; Malhotra, Vanneman, & Kishor, 1995). A study by Dhar (2013) on the impact of caste system used in-depth interviews to collect data from 15 couples and found the pervasive effect of caste system strongly discouraged inter-caste marriages.

In identifying factors that contribute to marital satisfaction/ conflict/ adjustment, a variety of psychological variables like personality type, communication patterns, attribution, expressions of affection, etc. has been considered. These reflect the almost exclusive treatment of this subject by psychologists. Most variables considered in these researches tend to be individual-oriented or relationship oriented. The issues identified, and strategies proposed are those that are helpful for psychological intervention. However, marital satisfaction, marital conflict and its contributory factors have not received as much academic consideration from sociologists in India. The present section focuses on examining the studies that have dealt exclusively on marital relationships Indian context.

One of early studies from a psychosocial perspective on work family issues concerning women in India by Kapur (1970), examined the degree of marital adjustment and motivations for women to seek employment. Based on interviewing 300 education women, the findings revealed that besides wife’s employment, attitudinal compatibility between the marital dyad influences marital adjustment. Choudhary (1988) concluded that partners with greater age difference are likely to experience more adjustment problems than with partners with lesser age difference.
A few studies have explored implications of traditional gender role orientations on marital quality of Indian couples. An interesting study carried out among working Asian Indian mothers in the United States showed that women in two-career families face the double burden of working at home as well (Balagopal, 1987). Even in cases where husbands pitched in assisting with household work, the “second shift” began for women at home (Hochschild & Machung, 2012). Using interviews of Indian married couples in the USA, Dasgupta (1992) found that even as traditional role expectations were mediating the functions of a husband and wife, there was openness to sharing and providing mutual assistance. Since marriage in India is considered to be a pious duty, middle class women still hold very traditional views regarding marital life (S. Sinha & Mukherjee, 1989). Attending to tasks and performing domestic duties give as sense of identity as mothers and wives thereby confirming to the traditional gender roles (Bharat, 1995). For women in India, marriage implies a change from the status of kanya or kumarika (unmarried girl) to suhagin (married woman). This change involves an ideological change too, from belonging to the natal home to fitting into the marital home (Skoda 2002). For women, the change of position is largely hypergamous since families make every effort to marry their daughters to those of a higher social status (Sharangpani, 2010, pp. 252–253).

In a study of mate selection behaviour of relatively affluent section of urban population in Kolkata, it was found that caste preferences did not necessarily fade in importance even when economic prosperity was on the rise. The study found that there was no reason to expect that economic growth by itself will undermine caste-based preferences in marriage (Banerjee, Duflo, Ghatak, & Lafortune, 2009). A study based on a sample from distressed and non-distressed couples in Bangalore city in examining the relationship between sex roles and marital adjustment showed that couples were creating gender-neutral constructions of marriage (Isaac & Shah, 2004). In examining different dimensions of marital quality in a rural Indian setting, Allendorf and Ghimire (2013) found that gender complementarity and joint family system play an important role in determining marital quality in non-Western contexts. Dasgupta and Basu
examined the role of gender role stereotype in marital quality among 350 couples aged 30-50 years and found that preferences for traditional patterns had positive associations with marital quality.

An intergenerational study by Sharma et al. (2005) among the Dogra Brahmins in Jammu revealed that the concept of marriage and the related areas were very differently understood by the two generations. The mothers considered divorce a taboo whereas the daughters were of the opinion that divorce “should be taken if the situations are not according to you because now they are also educated and want to spend their life according to their own choice” (Sharma et al., 2005, p. 255). Sharma refers to researches conducted by Hate and Kumari where majority of the respondents felt that women exercising their right to divorce indicated a healthy development and improvement in their status and so favoured divorce as a better solution to save oneself from a life of torture or lack of adjustment and faith between the spouses.

Studies in Indian context have looked at the concept of conflict within marital relationships. A study by Madhavi and Vimala (2011) on 500 women software professionals in Chennai found that women in the age group of 25-35 years had more work-family issues than other age groups. Though the study did not adopt a life-cycle perspective, it may be argued that this age group represents the peak of activity in acquiring a strong footing in one’s career and at the same time, in the family domain, the heavy childrearing responsibilities. A combination of these two is known to raise the stress levels of individuals especially when the organizations do not have supportive employee policies. The same study also found no association between work-family stress and a variety of other factors like education, designation, family type, income, etc. However, age, marital status and size of the family were found to be significant related to the role stress for the career-women. Though high role overload was reported among the women professionals, no issue was identified in the report which was related to the career of the husband.

The literature has shown that childcare is one of the most important areas of conflict among married partners (Madhavi & Vimala, 2011; Sudarshan & Bhattacharya, 2009). Panda’s (2010) comparative study in
Bhubaneshwar and Delhi did not make any distinction between dual career or dual-earner couples. He identified a definite change in the attitude of the working women towards the sharing of responsibilities at home by their spouses. However, child-care emerged as an important area where the couples had a serious difference of opinion. It is thus evident that despite the changes that are happening in the family sphere with regard to the roles, the ‘responsibility’ for the regular care of the child seems to rest with the wife. A large-scale survey in Delhi (Sudarshan & Bhattacharya, 2009) indicated that there was a sudden increase in household duties as a result of marriage and, additionally, of childbirth. Marital problems due to a ‘working wife’ were reported by respondents to be a relatively common occurrence. Kalliath et al. (2011) interviewed 21 dual earner couples who were all in full-time employment to find that more men than women considered work to be their first priority, whereas for women, both the domains were important and they “considered their family to be deserving of time and attention” (2011, p. 47). This finding is not surprising since traditionally, Indian society considers female to be the primary care-giver in the family and the income of the woman to be of supplementary in nature.

Recent studies on the attitude of women towards marriage and family have noted the change towards self-respect and the development of personality as necessary goals of life. Kapur found that “a large majority of *the women desired to have a relation of co-partnership with their husbands. They expected a large measure of happiness in their married life and demanded personal gratification of their emotional, physiological, social and economic needs out of their marriage. They put more emphasis on their privileges than on their obligations (Kapur, 1970, p. 10)” . Henry and Parthasarathy (2010) noted that the expectations of youth about marital partners bordered on the Western concept of companionship marriage. This is a clear sign of changing times. This, however, does not mean that traditionally women did not have any sense of self-worth. It only means that the sources of self-worth for Indian women have shifted from the discharge of traditional duties and obligations to the fulfilment of hitherto unexpressed need for self-gratification. This indicates a definite
and significant change in their attitude towards marriage and marital relationship (Hall, 2006).

Sex role differences and the extent to which these are internalized are important in familial relations. Traditionally, women’s roles emphasise care taking, sensitivity to the needs of others, emotional experience, emotional adaptability, reflection, expressiveness and sensitivity to cues from internal experiences. In contrast to this, men’s roles emphasise emotional stability, instrumentality, self-protection, self-expansion and self-assertion (Isaac & Shah, 2004). A study by Murickan (2002) among couples in Kerala outlined the complexity of the dynamics between role expectations of husbands and wives when the modern ideals intersect with traditional outlooks. A vast majority of his female respondents had expected to find a companionable partner in marriage. Instead a good number of them encountered a dominant-dependent relationship in their actual married life. However, what may be important to note is also that 98% of the couples reported to be satisfied with the actual situation (Murickan, 2002, p. 72). Even when expectations are not fulfilled in marriage, the cultural ideal of gendered roles seems to take precedence even when they entertain hopes of a different scenario. Moreover, like Sharangpani (2010) found, women ingeniously redefined the situation in such a way as to make it sound advantageous both to themselves and to others. A study in a southern city in India concluded that “the type of match between couples is the best predictor of marital adjustment, suggesting that the better the couple are at negotiating gendered roles, the better their adjustment will be” (Isaac & Shah, 2004, p. 11).

Role expectations are radically changing due to influence of mass communication and education. Ratra and Kaur (2004) posited that difficulties in adjustment for modern women stem from the lack of premarital preparedness. The education, the preparation and life perceptions vary with economic status. Those women who entered into marriage with a positive attitude and greater knowledge about married life reported greater marital satisfaction. Conversely, marital apprehensions and fears were inversely related to marital satisfaction (Ratra & Kaur, 2004). A similar unpreparedness for marital sexual relationship and the
ensuing trauma of sexual debut was reported from a study in Gujarat (Joshi, Dhapola, Kurian, & Pelto, 2001).

The research on marital satisfaction in dual career families has established that marital and familial roles in contemporary societies are subject to a complex interplay of contradictory forces (Ramu, 1987). Both the traditional expectations and cultural assumptions regarding the gendered roles continue to be communicated with varying effectiveness to the men and women at different stages in socialization. Yet at the same time, they are also exposed to egalitarian values and changing economic conditions which instils in them a different set of values. Such situations, signs of a society in transition, pose a dilemma to the married couples as to what expectations need to be entertained. Ramu claimed that “the changes now underway are making dual-earner families more egalitarian than they were, for example, in the 1960s and 1970s” (Ramu, 1987, p. 904).

What emerges from the discussion on literature is that men and women experience marital relationships differently. And at the same time, the influences of satisfaction of each of the spouse is dependent on the other. Men too are equally affected by the wide-ranging social changes in India. Access to higher education and western ideas may have brought about some changes in the conception of the Indian men about family, marriage and marital relationships. Men being a part of paid labour force is not anything new in India. However, like most traditional societies, women’s entry into the same paid labour force is seen as a sign of changing times and has attracted most academic attention in terms of familial change (Aura, 2008; Kapur, 1970; Ramu, 1987; Vaijayanthimala, Kumari, & Panda, 2004). Even when they have assessed the role of husbands in the changes in marital relationships, most studies have also relied on the reports of the wives. Thus, the study focused on the earner role of the wife while the husband’s role was taken for granted. Consequently, the possible adjustment that men had to make to their orientations, expectations and role-fulfilment in everyday lives were not part of the research questions.

The competing pressures from cultural prescriptions and changing times find their expression in both men and women, though working, consider
men as the providers for the family, but not so much as playing a role in the domestic chores of the family. The ambiguity regarding their role and the dual obligation-privilege combination that comes along with a working wife is noted by Ramu (1987) in his study of husbands in Bangalore. He found that even when husbands of working women were willing to participate in every aspect of family life, domestic labour had been completely left to the wives. The normative prescriptions that permit the husband’s refusal to join in the housework and a corresponding reluctance from the part of the wife to allow the husband to share in the domestic duties (Ramu, 1987) – both conspire to ensure that the wife is left to bear all the drudgery and the ‘double shift’, albeit willingly. Ramu (1987) pictures the husbands in dual-earner families as enjoying the best of both worlds – they do not see their superior status as under threat and at the same time enjoy the added status of being ‘modern’ and ‘benevolent’ along with enjoying the financial benefit of added source of income. However, in the context of greater awareness of the rights of women, there is reason to believe that the traditional-modern roles dilemma would be more poignant. In this both the spouses can end up in potentially difficult situations: husband’s refusal to let go of his traditional privileges at one extreme, and/or his total embrace of ‘modern’ values may both put pressure on the wives resulting in conflicts. Similarly, a wife who is ‘modern’ with regard to her idea of marriage and about her expectations from the husband may lead to conflicting expectations. How the couples negotiate the expectations of each other and the expectations from the society in their daily lives is still an open question.

2.3 DUAL CAREER COUPLES

Higher education and greater participation of both men and women in paid labour force and increased demand for skilled labour have paved way for a generation that is both ambitious and demanding (Skinner, 1980). This leads to the emergence of dual career couples which is a relatively new phenomenon in non-western contexts.

Neault and Pickerell (2005) define dual career couples as two people in a committed relationship each with a definitive career focus. In other words, only those couples where both husband and wife invest considerable
attention and time to maintain their current income-profile and even to better it by obtaining promotions or performance-based increments are classified as dual career couples. Globally, the growth of dual-career couples in urban centers has also been high in the last century.

With the coinage of the term “dual career” by Rapoport and Rapoport in 1969, there has been a growing body of literature concerning this phenomenon. Dual-career families are those where both heads of the household pursue careers, and their work requires a high degree of commitment and special training, with a continuous developmental character involving increasing degrees of responsibility (Rhona Rapoport & Rapoport, 1971). Hertz (1986) noted dual career couples as the “new ideal middle class marital relationship”. Dual-career couples are qualitatively different from dual-earner couples. Those couples who are employed in professional positions form dual career couples while the earner couples are those into non-professional employment (Rhona Rapoport & Rapoport, 1971; Sekaran, 1982, 1986). In dual-earner couples, only one partner may have a career while the other holds an employment without career aspirations. These dual-earner couples are also referred to as dual-worker families or two-paycheck families or two-person career. Thus, dual career couples are those where “both partners pursue an occupational career occupying or seeking jobs which are characterized by high professional standards, a high degree of commitment and a developmental sequence” (Rusconi, 2002). Career is distinctively different from a job, where salaried ranks, higher level of responsibility, authority and reward with clear indications of advancement are not as well defined as in a career (Wilensky, 1960). “‘Dual career couples’ refer only to couples in which both partners are involved in an upward mobile professional trajectory” (Saraceno, 2007) where their careers necessitate a high degree of commitment and have a continuous developmental character (R. Rapoport & Rapoport, 1969). Many terminologies are used in literature to describe the nature and focus of dual career couples like “coordinated career” couples (Butler and Paisley, 1980); “conjoint career couples” (Adler et al., 1989). Conjoint career couples and coordinated career couples are those couples who pursue
their careers in the same field (Butler & Paisley, 1980) and sometimes can be even professional colleagues (Adler et al., 1989). As such dual career could be considered an elite concept because it does not, in relevant literature, include those not qualified professionally, though they may have to outperform others in their field in order to retain a livelihood-income.

While dual-earner status has gained certain level of acceptability among the urban population in India, the concept of dual career is still relatively new. A career has been traditionally the forte of the husband, and the wife, especially a homemaker, went wherever her husband’s career took her. This is not very different even in dual-earner or career-earner couples. A career-earner couple would almost always be one where the career was pursued by the husband and what the wife did was just a ‘job’ which provided ‘additional’ income to the household (Rachlin, 1987). Therefore, even in a career-earner couple, the geographical mobility of the couple was more determined by the career of the husband than by the job of the wife. At the most, though, the wife would attempt to find a suitable job at the new place, thus retaining her ‘earner’ status. Other than focusing only on their career development, dual career couples are required to also work towards having a satisfying family life. Dual career couples include only the couples in which both spouses belong to the higher occupational classes. This work type, in contrast to the dual-earner family where both husband and wife are wage earners, is a job done primarily for growth, gaining money and personal satisfaction. A ‘job’ does not require the amount of training or commitment of time that is expected of a ‘career’. Simultaneous commitment to work, personal growth, responsibility and career advancement is a characteristic feature of dual career couples (Bruce & Reed, 1991).

Thus, as a two-salaried couple, the lifestyle of the dual career represents high level of aspiration and commitment to career while at the same time negotiating the concerns of maintaining a healthy family life. Against this backdrop, the following section discusses the dilemmas and stresses that accompany a dual career lifestyle. The challenges that arise in holding and nourishing two-professional-careers while maintaining life and relationship
balance and its implications on marital relationship as studied in literature is explored in the next section.

2.3.1 Marital Relationship Among Dual Career Couples

The increased engagement of women in work life has brought into focus the consequences it has had on familial life. One of the central issues of families where women are engaged in active career is the implications it has on marriage and family. Dual career has been a favourite topic among the scholars of social psychology and management. Various accounts in literature across different disciplines of psychology, organizational behaviour, and sociology have brought out the challenges that face such families on a regular basis. The discipline of psychology has primarily focused on the different psychological consequences and coping mechanisms in managing stress among dual career couples arising due to their dominant career focus (Nauta, Epperson, & Kahn, 1998), while the implications in terms of job experiences and organizational commitment, have been studied in a management perspective. The focus of such studies has mostly been on career aspirations, relocation decisions, achievement factors, employee relationship, job satisfaction, employee absenteeism and stress due to child care costs, and so on (Garg, 2015).

As dual career lifestyle is increasingly becoming more common, more literature is available on the issues confronted by the dual career couple, on interface between work-family conflict and the spillovers across these two domains (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Higgins & Duxbury, 1992; Perrone & Worthington, 2001). However, the interface of career with the marital relationship has received lesser attention. This section focuses on examining literature on factors influencing marital processes among career focused couples.

Literature has well-acknowledged that the domains of work and family are closely interlinked and mutually interdependent. Predominant themes in family studies in 1970s in the western world reflected the emergence of dual career families with the notions of career advancement of both husband and wife. The unrealistic expectations, incongruent boundaries between the career and marital domain; and the desire for egalitarian
attitudes of the dual career couples, are farfetched from reality as most of the household responsibilities still remain the forte of women (Bryson, Bryson, & Johnson, 1978; Hopkins & White, 1978; Netemeyer, McMurrian, & Boles, 1996). Presence of high levels of career aspirations were associated positively with role conflict for women unlike for men (Holahan, 1979). As Rapoports (1971) highlight, dual career marriages have a greater potential for equality in task performance and responsibility for each spouse. Given that the domains of work and family are closely interlinked and mutually interdependent, and the spillovers are bidirectional, there is a lot of stress and strain affecting the marital life of the couple (Galvin, Bylund, & Brommel, 2012). Most of the time, the intrapersonal conflicts that persist in work and familial roles can translate into conflict within marriage (Kluwer, Heesink, & de Vliert, 1996). Based on interviews of men in dual career marriages, Gilbert (1985) found that an egalitarian sharing of familial roles and responsibilities between the partners at home were associated with men experiencing conflict of career and familial demands.

Another line of thought contends that given that both lead highly stressful career lives, the married partners are more dependent on each other and thus, there is a greater willingness to share the responsibilities of housework together. Thomas, Albrecht and White (1984) presented an interesting perspective of dual career marriage. Not only do these couples have high and distinct professional and personal goals, they also have responsibilities and risks and competing demands on a constant basis. Dual career marriages have high ambitious goals even for their marriage and when they are prioritized, it can lead to satisfaction in marriage (Li & Fung, 2011). The nature of goals may vary over the stage of marriage, for instance, younger couples are focused on personal growth, and it is companionship goals which are the focus of older couples. Examining the influence of work-family conflict on marital adjustment among dual career couples shows that performing household tasks together as a couple leads to higher levels of adjustment (Burley, 1995).

As noted by a few scholars, there are potential benefits and significant opportunities to a dual career lifestyle, observed in structuring of lives,
sharing of responsibilities and risks, greater economic security, express of egalitarian values and opportunities for socialization (Price-Bonham & Murphy, 1980; Ray, 1988). The positive side to a dual career family lies in the fact that it can be rewarding to be married to an intelligent and powerful spouse, though the demands of time seeping into career and family can be quite strenuous for the marital relationship itself after attending to the needs of work, children and housekeeping (Singh, 2015). Friedman and Greenhaus (2000) highlighted that there is a strong association between high job autonomy and strong network and satisfaction in childcare. The benefits of having fulfilling careers can also lead to satisfying marriages in cases where the dual career couple can manage their resources well (Silberstein, 1992) and function effectively at home (Hertz, 1986).

However, in general, the competing demands of family life and occupation present stresses and strains on the dual career lifestyle. Aiming at both career satisfaction and happiness at home, dual career couples have to manage the demands at the workplace and at home simultaneously. The spillovers between work and home can lead to challenging situations and the increasing expectations from each other, and can lead to greater stress on a regular basis (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985). Abele and Volmer (2011) emphasised that in fulfilling the multiple roles, demands and stresses of work and private life, dual career couples have the biggest challenge of time. The dual career lifestyle has different implications for male and female. Gilbert (1985) views that career goals and opportunities, mobility and relocation decisions have greater bearing on men than family related factors, while women are guided more by household and childcare responsibilities in their choices of mobility and career goals than by mere career pursuits. Silberstein (1992) stressed that arrival of children can alter the pre-existing work-oriented lifestyle of the dual career couples, though most of the modifications in career choices were being carried out by women (Karambayya & Reilly, 1992).

The role over-load that comes with minding a career and a family brings with it pressure and stress unknown hitherto. A casualty in this development is often the quality of marital relationship. Those dual
career partners, who employ frequent strategies that indicate to their partner in some way that they are cared about and the relationship is valued, continue to enjoy the ‘best of both worlds’. Silberstein (1992) notes that dual career couple’s involvement in work-family combination and depletion of time and energy, can negatively influence marital intimacy. However, it is to be seen whether the trend of dual career among married couples is still stressful for the couples who go through such an experience and what strategies they use to cope with the conflict that arise.

Based on data collected from 34 professional dual career couples, the study by Thomas, Albrecht, and White (1984) analysed the determinants of marital quality and stability in dual career couples. They examined the importance of effective and quality communication for marital quality. Perceptions of equity in relating to the partner and sharing of responsibilities in daily lives can enhance marital quality and reduce marital stress among dual career couples (Guelzow, Bird, & Koball, 1991).

Spousal support is another important factor especially for dual career couples (Perrone & Worthington, 2001). Agreement in core ideologies, validation and overall positive regard for spouses and affirmation received from the spouse can go a long way in enhancing marital satisfaction (R. A. Lewis & Spanier, 1979). Particularly, spousal support holds important for career working women as mothers have reported lack of personal time, distortions in health and satisfaction (Cherpas, 1985; Kalliath et al., 2011). The presence of support from spouse and expression of love are significant contributors on marital quality and influence the way conflicts are resolved at the work-family domain (Perrone & Worthington, 2001).

The findings on the influence of children on dual career marriages has not been conclusive. While children have been seen as bringing stability to marriages (Thornton, 1977), others have noted the strains it can have on marital unions (Svarer & Verner, 2008). Thomas, Albrecht, and White et al. (1984) note that the added responsibility of parenting to the already stressful lives of the two-professional marriage can have negative influence on the marital interactions and quality. Based on a survey of 28
dual career couples, Holahan & Gilbert (1979) found evidence for impact of children on inter-role conflict.

There is no doubt that greater education and career focus of women have brought about greater financial autonomy and a sense of power for women. This is also evident in the delay in age at marriage, and age at first birth. However, in aspects such as decision making, division of household labour, and perceptions of marital equality, traditional gender role attitudes seem to prevail. For instance, it is common for women to take decisions on matters concerning everyday affairs and for men to take the more significant decisions for the family (Fox & Murry, 2000). Recent additions in the literature suggest that women in dual career families are beginning to have opportunities to be a collaborative partner, indicative of a movement towards equality (Bartley, Blanton, & Gillard, 2005).

Holmstrom (1973) notes that the professional couples seemed equal from a distance, however, the notion that men’s work was superior and more important than that of the woman prevailed and the domestic realm remained the forte of woman.

Empirical research consistently reveals the significance of gender in defining roles and process of marital adjustment in dual career couples. The involvement of men in traditional domains of housework and childcare was limited and traditional gender roles operated. In some cases, women also perpetuated such gender notions by performing all tasks alone at home even as it got highly stressful as they perceived that sharing the housework would make it more egalitarian (Yogev, 1981). Interestingly, Hardesty and Betz (1980) noted high levels of marital adjustment among wives who were more educated than husband.

Studies on the family have received wide attention in global sociological literature, ranging across themes such as married relationships, cohabiting partners, parenthood, and old age. However, comparatively less attention has been given to understanding the dynamics of the marital dyad itself, especially from a sociological perspective. It would be interesting to explore the marital dynamics in the context of India, which has retained much of its cultural roots and yet is advancing towards a modernised version of relationship networks. In this context, the
dissertation attempts to understand the subtleties, quality of marital relationship and the adjustment process among urban couples who have a definite career focus.

2.3.2 Dual Career Couples and Marital Studies in India

Being a relatively new and yet uncommon phenomenon, dual career has not received as much attention as dual earner couples. In many cases, such a distinction has hardly been made. Mahajan (1966) examined the two roles women play when they are employed and highlighted the conflicting roles they face in pursuing a career and balancing the traditional roles in the home sphere. The implications of the focus of women in full-time careers are more than merely economic. Such changes influence the norms and thereby assist in redefining roles at home in the underlying patriarchal structure (Desai & Krishna Raj, 1987). Panda (2011) notes that the stressors of dual career and role conflicts affect the career goals of wife more compared to that of the husband. However, the author noticed changes in the way responsibilities of housework are being shared by partners, or being carried out using paid help.

Higher levels of marital adjustment were displayed by wives while the husbands showed greater efficiency and better overall well-being (Jaisri & Joseph, 2014). Bhikaji and Hari (2016) found evidence for better adjustment and overall better mental health in marital life among single earner married couples than the dual ones. Srivatsava and Shukla (1995) stressed the importance of reciprocal compatibility in influencing marital adjustment of dual career couples.

Literature has mixed results on the association of career and marital adjustment in Indian context. Some scholars have found no significant association between career and marital adjustment (Hasnain, Ansari, & Sethi, 2004) (Hasnain and Sharma, 2004; Kumar, 1994). Kumar (1994) found no significant gender difference was found in cases where wives were employed. Neither the employment status of the woman or gender differences was related to marital adjustment. In fact, it was found that those couples who were married for more than 10 years had higher levels of marital adjustment. Comparing adjustment in marriage between
educated housewives and working women in India, Nathawat and Mathur (1993) found that marital adjustment was relatively better among working wives.

2.4 THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

How a social institution is understood depends on the perspective one chooses to employ. Further, as societies undergo change, the meaning of marriage may change and at a micro level, at different points of time, an individual may come to perceive marriage differently. This does not, however, mean that there are no commonly held beliefs about marriage in the societies. It has been found that despite the variety in the beliefs within a society, there are commonalities that emerge (Hall, 2006). Different perspectives approach marriage with different goals, and thus, in this section, we briefly explore the way marriage has been understood across different dominant perspectives in Sociology.

2.4.1 FUNCTIONALIST PERSPECTIVE

The functional perspective views all social institutions as revolving around the needs of the society. Social institutions are based on the consensual values that members of the society share among themselves. In this regard, family emerges as the pivotal unit fulfilling these shared societal needs and aspirations, extending to include satisfaction of physical needs, procreation for growth and strengthening of family lineage, providing and sharing physical and emotional care for family members and in a way enabling socializing so as to integrate family members into the vast sphere of society. Therefore, family is an integrative institution according to functionalist school.

The functionalist perspective conceptualizes marriage as a mutually beneficial arrangement where the female members receive protection, economic support and status in return for emotional and sexual support, household maintenance and the production of offspring (C. L. Glenn, 1987). At the same time, men in the family depend on their counterpart in terms of care and nurture, services in terms of provision of food and sexual partnership. The functional school believes that family performs the primary function of meeting the needs of society to socialize children and
reproduce new members. Family inculcates the importance of values and specifies norms to its members, who also as members of society organize harmoniously to fulfil common goals and interests. Functionalist theory assumes that gender division of labour in the household is functional for society. For instance, men play instrumental roles in the family associated with economic provider and women play expressive roles associated with affection, nurturing and providing emotional support (Goode, 1963). Societal transformations bring in disruption and changes in the institution of family leading to weakening of social consensus and disorganizations in the family. Social cohesion is important for the continuance of both family and society. Traditionally the relationships within the families are well structured towards cohesion and marriage itself as an institution is seamlessly connected to other institutions. One of the key assumptions of functionalism is that every institution and every member/participant in the institution has specified roles to play in society. The integrity of the society is maintained when all parts work well together and all individuals fulfil their assigned role. The phenomenon of ‘breakdown of the family’ is due to the strains that get imposed onto the familial relations on advent of societal transformations. Functionalists view that over time, nonfamily institutions have begun to take on some of the functions that were originally the portfolio of the family. The diminishing role of family in its primary functions and obligations towards its members has led to progressively diminishing integration of family into the society as a whole. The opportunities for younger members to be exposed to non-family institutions that begin an almost parallel socialization abound (Hoelter, Axinn, & Ghimire, 2004). Such rapid societal transformations are seen as disruptive of the harmony in the society and should be resisted.

In this framework, marriage is conceptualized as an institution that helps build the society. Marriage as an institution should be understood “not merely a set of social arrangements but also the ideas, beliefs and values by which those arrangements are sustained” (Beteille, 1992, p. 13). The interdependence of various institutions which make up a society adds to the complexity of understanding them. In recognizing the importance and dynamics of marriage as an institution in India one has to keep in mind
the institutions of religion, caste and economy. Marriage is the beginning of a family which is the basic unit of a society. Hence, various institutions unite in their efforts to maintain and defend the marriage system that exists in any society. To this extent, the relationship between marriage as an institution and the actors in it is discursive. In the same process of serving to symbolize, enact, and pass on a set of traditions to future generations, institutions, especially marriage, also places constraints on the day-to-day behaviour of the individuals. “An institution is not simply any social arrangement, but one whose members acknowledge its moral claims over them, and are prepared to submit to its demands, at least some of the time, even when they find those demands unreasonable” (Beteille, 1992, p. 18).

However, this is not to say that institutions have a definite and irreversible hold on every aspect of the individual. Institutions are dynamic in nature. The validity of an institution is the legitimacy accorded to it by the society, and this depends on the shared values and principles that a society holds on to. It is possible that in time some institutions lose their meaning or become redefined in their purpose and enactment because of changed situation. A change in one institution can also induce changes in other institutions, leading, theoretically at least to the transformation of the whole society. Such transformations are, in functionalist point of view, best brought about through a slow process of evolutionary changes.

In Indian society, such a stance was very strongly advocated in the case of marriage. In a society where relationships are building blocks of familial status and prestige, and the self-concept of individuals itself is perceived relationally (Aura, 2008), a breakdown in the most intimate relationship like marriage is a challenge to the system itself. This is not to say that marital breakdowns are a new phenomenon in Indian society. But in a traditional society, strains in marital relations were frowned upon, and at the same time considered a part of married life which the partners had to learn to live with. However, a good amount of responsibility to keep the family together was assigned to women. Pressures from family and other
members of the society had a relatively good role to play in keeping the marriages together.

An important way in which societies attempt to resist changes in key institutions is by attaching them to the lifecycle of an individual. This is done by creating rites of passage. These indicate well-defined stages in the life of an individual in a particular society and is characterized by a pattern of obligations, privileges and types of relationships among the members. “Passage from one stage to another involves corresponding changes in the individual’s habitual interaction system. To facilitate such passages and to restore equilibrium after the more critical ones, various peoples develop group techniques which take the form of commemorative ceremonial rites. Such rites are commonly designated as Rites of Passage” (Bossard & Boll, 1948, p. 247).

Marriage as a rite of passage is part of the life of every individual in virtually every society and is associated with rituals and change of status and roles. "Marriage constitutes the most important of the transitions from one social category to another, because for at least one of the spouses it involves a change of the family, clan, village, or tribe and sometimes the newly married couple even establish residence in a new house. The change of residence is marked by the ceremonies by rites of separation, always primarily focused on the territorial passage" (Gennep, 1960, p. 116). The rites of passage in marriage and ceremonies attached to it reinforce the obligations attached to it and remind the society and the actors involved how permanent this bond is meant to be. For functionalist school, such reinforcements are crucial in maintaining stability of a society.

The stigma attached to a marital breakdown was deterrent enough for marital survival in a society where individuality is relationally defined. So the pressures to remain in an unhappy marriage were relatively strong and the prospect of becoming a divorcee was frightening. In many ways, a functionalist perspective supports the marriage system as it existed in the past and considers the emerging realities as threats to the integrity of the society itself.
2.4.2 Gender Perspective

Gender roles and expectations form an integral part of understanding the interaction between the marital dyad. The feminist theorists in particular conceptualize family based on women’s experiences in the family while making gender as a central concept in analysing family as a social institution. Family is conceptualized as a system of power relations and social conflict (Thorne & Yalom, 1992). Feminist theory criticizes the functional view of defining roles of men as economic providers and women as providing emotional support. It is argued that this conceptualization of the family is based on stereotypes about the roles of male and female members of the family. This would lead to hierarchy of gender that gets reinforces and replayed in the society through interactions among members of the family in the household. “In a real sense, the debate about women’s place in the family is actually a debate about women’s place in society” (C. L. Glenn, 1987, p. 348). In a feminist perspective, conception of marriage is linked to gendered roles in marriage. A good wife, according to traditional prescription, is a submissive one who places the interests of her spouse and others in the family before her own (Madan, 1994). This conception militates against the egalitarian view of marital relationships (Goode, 1963).

Feminists see marriage and family dynamics as the origin and locus of the persistent force of male domination. Feminist discourses often see arranged marriages as an illustration of male domination characterized by exchanges and legal discourses favourable to men (Rubin, 1975). The fact that marriages were arranged was often pointed out as an illustration of the social restraint forced on women in India. However, Sharangpani (2010) points out that this might be a simplified argument which does not take into account complex meaning-making processes that underlie the feeling of empowerment in Indian urban women. While noting that her women respondents claim arranged marriage as a form of self-determination, she also points out that it could be a classic “instance of paradoxical agency—where seemingly agentive actions themselves replicate and reify the structures of domination” (Sharangpani, 2010, p. 271). The economic independence of women is often cited as one of the
chief reasons for the breakdown of the traditional Indian family. However, the ‘idealness’ of the traditional family itself is being questioned by feminist scholars and repositioned as another concept that idolises submissive stereotypes of women. Dasgupta and Lal’s contention in this regard is that “the ideal Indian family, which people feel will break with women’s economic independence is more imagined than real” (Dasgupta & Lal, 2007, p. 13).

As a response to the narrow understanding of marriage in several societies, Hensman (2005, p. 711) calls for a more integral and broader perspective: “marriage as a social relation – i.e., a relatively stable relationship between two people encompassing mutual desire as well as care, which is recognized and supported by those who are close to them”. However idealistic this perspective may sound, this is a direction worth pursuing.

Closely connected to the role of wife at home is the possibility of her joining the labour force. NSSO data of 2006 showed that the workforce participation rates for poor women in India have remained higher than those for women above poverty line. This could indicate that the greater numbers of women in the workforce are part of it due to economic pressures rather than out of choice (Sudarshan & Bhattacharya, 2009). Further, the 2011 census data on female labour force participation records a drop rather than a steady increase. Moreover, marriage often meant a change of place and job, or even loss of job for many women. Several researches have pointed out that “working status was not a guarantee of equitable relationships within the family” (Rajadhyaksha; & Smita, 2004, p. 1679). The underlying reason is that families and familial relationships continue to be influenced by the gendered understanding of societal roles and help individuals to construct a universe around them that justifies and perpetuates unbalanced power equations within families. Marriage too thus becomes an arena where power dimension is active due to the multiple ways in which it can be exercised and imposed.

An analysis of marital relationship therefore should take into account the imbalances introduced within the relationship due to unequal distribution of power. This has serious repercussions for the self-image of both
spouses and for the possibilities and extent of marital adjustments. A study in Bangalore (Isaac & Shah, 2004) showed that marital relationships seemed to have moved from a more traditional attitude in earlier generations to a more egalitarian model in the last two decades though this impetus seemed to be stronger in women.

2.4.3 CONFLICT PERSPECTIVE

Examining marriage from a conflict perspective attempts to uncover the differences that are either ignored or ideologically distorted by the functionalists. Marital relationship is seen as a power relationship which influences the relationship dynamics between the couple. Just as in the larger society, conflict is viewed as fundamental and inevitable among any intimate relationships such as marriage (Canary, Cupach, & Messman, 1995). Power is an integral part of any relationship, especially close romantic relationships, because it determines how the partners relate to each other and how decisions are made.

It assumes that perceptions of legitimate authority to make decisions and access to a variety of resources increase individuals’ perceptions of their own power compared to their partner. “Individuals display more dominance when they perceive they are relatively equal in power to their partners than when they perceive they have more or less power than their partner” (Dunbar et al., 2008, p. 15). Women who are in positions of power tend to believe that they face more resistance from their male partners. This is attributed to the internalization of the notion that the traditional culture “does not support powerful women especially in relational contexts” (Dunbar et al., 2008, p. 21).

The Marxists view marital relationships as both a reflection and a reinforcement of societal inequalities. Marxists see family and marriage as a reflection of social institutions adapting themselves to promote and support the capitalist system in economy. Marx predicted the doom of family and marriage as institutions after the capitalist system was done away with.

Conflict perspective views that aspects such as decision making, involvement in household work, sharing finances etc. can trigger conflict
as it is all about struggle over limited resources. Generally, the woman assumes the role of a subservient one almost adhering to the patriarchal notions and social customs, thus, trying to compete for equality with her partner. Power differentials are also present in the area of sexuality according to the conflict theory where the ‘superior’ ones are in pursuit of their interests and needs actively.

Since this perspective assumes that conflict is pervasive and fundamental to society, it welcomes societal transformations that expose the power relations operative within institutions, including marriage. However, even as changes are seen as necessary and good for the society, conflict perspective is aware that in time the new arrangement will itself become conflict-ridden.

2.4.4 Symbolic Interactionist Perspective

Symbolic interactionism, in contrast to the macro perspectives of functionalism and conflict, did not theorise on societal changes. As propounded by Cooley, Mead and Blumer, Symbolic Interactionism focused on individual behaviour in society and emphasized that human behaviour was not merely a mechanical response to external stimuli, rather it was constructed creatively and selectively (Rank & LeCroy, 1983). Through interaction, interpretation of symbols, and the filtering process of the mind, meaning about the world and a conception of self is acquired. The latter is developed by perceiving what others perceive of one’s self. Thus, self-image is actually, as Cooley (1902) noted, a "looking-glass" phenomenon.

Symbolic interactionism provides a useful framework for analysing how people define and act in relation to marriage. Western scholars have used it to explore the link between subjective understanding and behaviour of people with regard to religion, workplace culture, parenting and other familial contexts to explain various family processes, including gender role negotiations (Hall, 2006). However, analyses of how people behave toward marriage based on their interpretation of marriage as an institution is relatively uncommon. A fundamental theoretical tenet of symbolic interactionism states that one’s subjective interpretation of an object, situation, or concept plays an important, mediating role in linking
one’s exposure to a stimulus (object, situation, etc.) and one’s reaction to it (Blumer, 1969). If we extend this assumption to marriage, people’s conceptualizations of marriage—or the meanings it contains for them—should exert some influence on marital behaviour and subsequent marital success.

For example, Indian culture teaches marriage as a permanent, life-long relationship. Those who adhere to this view may despite times of hardship work harder at improving a marriage and individual happiness, because they believe that divorce is not an option. Similarly, taking cue from the society to internalize the ideal husband/wife may stick to such roles regardless of their spouse’s desires or circumstances which may lead to resentment, complaining, and obstinate behaviour. There are potentially a variety of meanings of marriage with corresponding behaviours and consequences that individuals can incorporate into their marital experience. Similarly, those who consider the marital relationship to be less than permanent are less likely to participate with abandon in sharing resources and may show less commitment in marriage. The spouses who entertain unrealistic expectations and beliefs about marital roles may show less marital satisfaction, lesser willingness and/or capacity to accommodate the partner and to resolve conflicts in their marriages. One cannot therefore underestimate the role of subjective interpretations that the individuals have built over time about marriage, marital roles, marital happiness, etc. in their ability to cope with marital adjustments.

Marriage requires redefining the self in relation to the spouse, and to children, in-laws, and a whole host of significant others through a lifetime. The married person sees his or her former relationships differently simply by being in a different reality-making dyad, and experiences a shift or change in his or her own identity. The couple makes new friends; new definitions of self-evolve; and a new subjective reality is created through the institution of marriage, giving each partner a sense of order and belonging in the world (Alford-Cooper, 1998). An individual’s understanding of his/her role in the married life is an integral part of his/her sense of self. While Hindu women generally feel a strong identification of the self with the family, the effect of a major role change
such as marriage depended upon the extent to which the individual interiorized the familial role and status.

Considering the importance that symbolic interactionism attaches to the construction of meaning about things/people/situation, socialization and social interaction assumes significance. One’s early experiences in the family, experiences of close relationships, etc. can help form an idea about what one should expect from a marital relationship (Hall, 2006). While this may help the individual to formulate expectations, it also means that different individuals, by virtue of being brought up in different homes, may have different experiences and conceptions about marriage. Based, again, on how much he/she considers his/her conception unchangeable, he/she will be open or closed to negotiations and adjustments in married life. Examining the beliefs and perceptions of the marital partners, therefore, can give an insight into the intensity of adjustment that may be necessitated and the extent of adjustment one may be open to.

2.4.5 **Social Construction of Reality**

Symbolic Interactionist perspective and the theories that fall within its ambit have demonstrated the importance of societal influences in shaping the life-scripts of people in that society. Of noteworthy importance are the signs and symbols which are created by humans to facilitate communication, but eventually take on an existence of their own to the extent that people can become constrained by the signs that they created. Thinking of social life as a drama not unlike one performed on a stage allowed (Blumer, 1969) to demonstrate how people are often living out scripts even when they believe they live life on their own terms and how a sense of self is created using performances to specific audiences. Cooley’s looking glass self-theory described how social actors and the way in which an individual perceived their responses become crucial building blocks of one’s sense of self.

Blumer’s four basic premises when he first talked of symbolic interactionism is relevant to be quoted here (Blumer, 1969: 2):
1. The meaning of things is not inherent.
2. Human beings act towards things on the basis of the meaning things have for them.
3. The meanings of such things are derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one’s fellows.
4. These meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the things he [or she] encounters.

Berger and Luckmann (1966) took this forward, using a phenomenological approach, when they showed how social reality that is often taken for granted by social actors are, in fact, constructed realities. “The world of everyday life is not only taken for granted as reality by the ordinary members of society in the subjectively meaningful conduct of their lives. It is a world that originates in their thoughts and actions, and is maintained as real by these” (P. L. Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 33).

Two important concepts that hold up Social Constructionism as proposed by Berger-Luckmann, are institutionalization and legitimation. Social institutions have an independent reality. However, they are not objective in the same way as natural objects. Using habitualized interactions with other social actors and nature, humans routinize the patterns of behaviour. These patterns of behaviour are communicated to others using socialization through a variety of agents. They are, in effect, transmitted to others as patterns or institutions that have an independent reality of their own and to which everyone submits. This is presumably on which social order is said to depend. So it locks down the roles of various actors in the society to predictable parameters, defines what is normal for anyone to be under specified circumstances thus creating a complex system to which most people show allegiance unquestioningly. However, these institutions require to be legitimized which again is fulfilled by individuals because of the apparent objective reality of the institutions that they have inherited. Legitimation can be accessed through religion, literature, history, film, etc. Later work by researchers using social constructionist perspective, especially on gender, opened up the way this perspective can throw light on social processes. This perspective has also
been used quite profitably by studies on power, emotions (Harré, 1986), sexuality (Laws & Schwartz, 1977), equality (Harris, 2000), illness (Conrad & Barker, 2010), etc.

Without entering into a debate about the application of social constructionism to all forms of reality as experienced by people in their daily lives (Elder-Vass, 2012), we now turn to how marital relationships may be understood as constructed in a particular context.

2.5 MARRIAGE AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF REALITY

Even before the path-breaking Social Construction of Reality (P. L. Berger & Luckmann, 1966), Berger and Kellner had discussed how this perspective can be profitably used to understand marriage (1964). They advocated the importance of looking at marriage not only from an institutional perspective, which was afforded by the macro perspectives of sociology, but also as a process in the society which individuals go through. In their opinion, such investigations of the processes that affect the married persons’ understanding of what a marriage is must be undertaken by microsociology.

2.5.1 MARRIAGE AS NOMOS-BUILDING

Marriage has a nomos-building instrumentality. Marriage helps the society organize itself and contributes to its stability. Durkheim found marriage as contributing to social order and an antidote to anomie. Marriage is a “social arrangement that creates for the individual the sort of order in which he can experience his life as making sense” (P. Berger & Kellner, 1964, p. 1). Social constructionist perspective studies marriage as a “process that constructs, maintains and modifies a consistent reality that can be meaningfully experienced by individuals” (P. Berger & Kellner, 1964, p. 2)

The symbolic base of every society supports a comprehensive system of typifications using which an individual account for his/her experiences of reality. Such typifications are shared ones “thus acquiring not only the character of objectivity, but being taken for granted as the world *tout court*, the only world that normal men can conceive of” (P. Berger &
Kellner, 1964, p. 3). Marriage is one among the many social relationships that helps the individuals recognize and reinforce how one’s life is to be ordered. The typifications that help an individual to make sense of his/her world are communicated and even sustained by ongoing conversations among the societal actors that take this typification for granted. Through marriage, an individual acquires another person as a significant other who, in as much as the two share a similar broad typification, becomes a partner in conversation. Thus, the conversations validate “over and over again the fundamental definitions of reality once entered into, not of course, so much by explicit articulation, but precisely by taking the definitions silently for granted and conversing about all conceivable matters on this taken-for-granted basis...The reality of the world is sustained through conversation with significant others” (P. Berger & Kellner, 1964, p. 5).

2.5.2 Objectivation

In Berger-Kellner’s (1966) scheme, ‘objectivation’ is one of the three moments in the ongoing dialectical process which make up society. Objectivation refers to “a process by which subjectively experienced meanings become objective to the individual and, in interaction with other, become common property and thereby massively objective” (P. Berger & Kellner, 1964, p. 9) In societal interactions, signs and even everyday objects are objectivated when a social agent attributes it subjective meanings which are also shared by others. “The reality of everyday life is not only filled with objectivation; it is only possible because of them” (P. L. Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 50). They see production of signs as the most significant case of objectivation because signs are typically those that point to subjective meanings. When these

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1 Conversation’ plays a significant role in Berger-Kellner’s conception of how reality is constructed. Conversation involves any interaction that happens between people using symbols. The principal mode of this interaction in everyday life uses language, hence the use of the word ‘conversation’.
meanings are shared in common by the society, the signs get strengthened and the subjective meanings they represent are objectivated. “The externalized products of human activity attain the character of objectivity” through objectivation. Thus, every single social institution is objectivated human activity, and roles people play are representations of the institutional order. Partners in a marriage bring with them certain conceptions about their roles, though the nuances of the performance are negotiated through the marital conversations.

2.5.3 **Centrality of Marriage Relationship**

In fact, Berger and Kellner argue that “marriage occupies a privileged status among the significant validating relationships for adults in our society.” Marriage is “a dramatic act in which two strangers come together and redefine themselves.” The partners are strangers in the sense that they come from “different face-to-face contexts” or “different areas of conversation” (1964, p. 6). Marital relationship is central to the private spheres of most adults in the society (P. Berger & Kellner, 1964, p. 8).

While functionalism speaks of losing certain functions of family to other institutions of society as deterioration of family, constructionism looks at the phenomenon differently. Traditionally, the family and especially the marital partners were part of a much ‘larger area of conversation,’ an area that has subsequently shrunk to individual families. While earlier several institutions/actors in society combined to provide the meaningfulness to marriage relationship, the modern times see the couples left to themselves to make sense of their little world. Though the larger society does provide certain standard definitions and meanings to marriage, the responsibility to make it work falls on the two individuals. The broad definitions and parameters provided by the society are usually internalized by both partners as expectations from marriage relationship. However, it is also possible, since the partners do not exactly share the same immediate milieu, that their expectations differ. In any case, both enter marriage with taken-for-granted notions of marriage inherited from the immediate social context and learnt through socialization. “These relatively empty projections now have to be actualized, lived through and filled with experiential content” (P. Berger & Kellner, 1964, p. 15) by the
couple. One’s world is constructed in conversation with significant others in one’s life, and marriage brings about a disruption in fundamental ways to the economy of significant others. Post marriage, one’s “marriage partner becomes the other par excellence, the nearest and most decisive co-inhabitant of the world” (P. Berger & Kellner, 1964, p. 11), and marital conversation (between partners) dominates all other conversations. In a very real way, marriage can trigger a reinventing of all other relationships while spousal relationship retains its pivotal character.

### 2.5.4 Construction of a Common Reality

The marital partners come from dissimilar face-to-face contexts and tend to construct their own realities based on their socialization. This, however, poses a problem in marriage. If the partners’ individual definitions of reality cannot be merged into a common definition, it can subvert the relationship itself. Such merging happens through a process of constant ‘conversation’ between each other regarding each other’s perceptions of reality. These repeated conversations act as a typifying or objectivating apparatus which begin to make a shared conception of their world real to the partners. The longer this apparatus recreates the common conceptions, the more objective and stable the created reality becomes and the married couple ‘settles down’. This process is, by no means, a linear or straightforward process. As conversation continues, some conceptions are abandoned, some repaired, and some strengthened. The purpose is to create a world in which experiences have a reality that is shared by both the partners.

The new objective reality invented by the couple is often not recognized, much less acknowledged, as a new reality by individuals themselves. In fact, individuals are more likely to speak about it as a ‘discovery,’ and in an attempt to stabilize the reality of this constructed meaning, reinterpret past events in its light. In other words, the partners construct meaning not just about them as a couple that will sustain their newly invented world, but also creates a new self-image that will go along with the new world.

The construction, reconstruction, and renovation of new reality are an ongoing process for any married couple. This study is to understand how
this process actually plays out in the day-to-day lives of a group of couples who have an added dimension of career-focus to deal with. According to social constructionist perspective, a variety of societal actors are involved in a dialectical relationship with the married individuals and have an important role to play in the little world that the latter create for themselves. This is more so in a collectivistic society like India where married individuals retain very close ties with their families and friends. It will be, therefore, educative to discover how these societal actors influence the marriage and how they are perceived by the protagonists of the marital conversation. The concepts of social constructionist perspective will hopefully help to arrive at a deeper understanding of this dialectical relationship in life of dual career couples.

2.6 IMMEDIATE SOCIAL CONTEXT OF THE CAREER COUPLE

If we imagine a marital relationship to be a socially constructed reality, the importance of the immediate social context, interacting with which the individuals construct their reality, cannot be overstated. In India, considering the importance that family, society and religion plays in the private lives of individuals, it is reasonable to assume that societal factors do impinge on the conflicts experienced by the couples in their private lives. It has been shown that “support obtained by spouses outside the marriage can influence positively how the spouse behaves within the marriage” (Fincham, 2003, p. 26).

A variety of studies, as explicated in our review, have explored the importance of personality factors and organizational atmosphere in shaping the marriage of working professionals. However, our aim in this study will be to explore the extent and nature of the impact that various social actors in the immediate context of the working professionals have on the latter’s marriage relationship. Based on the review of literature, we classify these actors and elements into various networks as follows:

**Familial Network:** Family Network includes members of the families of both partners, and children if any. The role of natal family begins with mate-selection and the actual conduct of the wedding/marriage, but does not end there. Indian culture places a lot of premium on the relationship
with extended family members compared to non-Asian cultures. Therefore, the role they play in marital relationship of our respondents will be explored at depth.

**Social network**: Social network includes friends and colleagues of the individuals. This is especially important since our focus is on dual career couples. Career focus can be a compelling reason to develop non-family relationships at workplaces and with people of similar interests. Other important elements of social network are social media, mobile phone, counselor and/or therapist.

**Religious Network**: The role of cultural elements as expressed through religious beliefs, practices and respect for religious persons is significant in a traditional society. In India, most marriages are solemnized by a religious ceremony and religious rituals are interwoven with the life-course of most individuals. Religious network of an individual consists of the rituals, holy places, practices, and religious figures that a person revere as well as those that the partner revere.

Each of these social actors have their specific characteristics and uniquely influence the relation dynamics of the marital dyad, especially in a culturally rooted Indian society. The operational dynamics of these social actors in marital unions among dual career couples will be explored at greater detail in the following chapters.

**2.7 CONCLUSION**

Though not a new area of study in the Western contexts, exploration of the dynamics of the marital relationship among dual career couples has not received much attention in Indian context. The spread of well-paid employment for women has created a social space which has transformed the way concepts like family, marriage, bread-winner, and work, etc. were understood traditionally. Men who have so far been seen as breadwinners are beginning to recognize that women’s income is not necessarily just a supplement to the ‘family income’. Even as Indian society is getting used to this idea of a dual career family, the independent career focus of each partner in the dual career marriage presents newer challenges: Partners in marriage who give career equal, if not more, importance compared to
their marriage relationship. The patriarchal cultural landscape ensures that such a scenario emerges primarily when the women begin to think about their own careers since it is considered normal, maybe even mandatory, for an urban man to pursue a career.

A close examination of the literature on marital relationships based on constructs such as quality/satisfaction, conflict, adjustment and support clearly indicate the complex interactions and implications that different components have on marital relationship. Given the evolving nature of family structures and functions, it would be imperative to examine the nature of such influences and the way marital relationship would respond. Secondly, most studies have focused on only one spouse’s marital appraisals and have not considered that both own and spouse’s appraisals may contribute independently to well-being [i.e., actor vs. partner effects] (Cook & Kenny, 2005). The literature on dual career concept has largely remained focused on nature and consequences from a women’s points of view except some notable exceptions (Ramu, 1987). Further, the influence of one spouse’s (dis)satisfaction in marriage can determine the overall quality of relationship itself and this has to be examined beyond the typical focus on young or midlife persons and across different configuration of family structures (Beach, Katz, Kim, & Brody, 2003).

The movement of Indian economy towards greater liberalization is likely to bring about new career opportunities for both men and women. Though paid labour force participation of women may have experienced a decline in the recent years, it seems likely that more urban women will have access greater opportunities to pursue a career of their own, thus leading to growing numbers of dual career couples. The following chapters will explore the marital lives of the dual career couples: the quality of their relationship, disagreements that arise between them, the ways in which they address these issues and the role of the immediate societal actors in their relationship.