

CHAPTER 5. SEXUALITY AND SPIRITUALITY: SACRED RELATIONSHIP OF COUPLES AND THE DIVINE TRANSCENDENCE CONNECTION

5.1. INTRODUCTION

Marriage is a sacred deed involving the holy union of souls (Orden et al., 1968; Sophia, 2013). There are various traditional marriage ceremonies worldwide and some have been codified into the legal system as customs. Studies have shown that marriage maintains harmony in life (Tao, 2019). Thus, marriage remains an important social institution across countries and cultures. Sadly, the attitude towards matrimony has shifted with less emphasis on monogamy and enduring rapport in recent decades, especially in the West (Campbell et al., 2010). As a result, divorce has become a serious psychological issue in Western society since the emotional breakup mentally impacts couples and their children (Schaan et al., 2019).

When couples adopt the model specified featured adopted in this thesis, they have the potential to transcend their sexual connection from the lowest physical to the highest spiritual scale. At that juncture, their interpersonal relationships can transform to strengthen emotional bond, trust and intimacy while preventing infidelity and relationship breakups. This chapter provides some insights on how couples can pursue spiritual transcendence by upholding righteous values in life through sexual energy shown in scriptures with interpretations from published literature.

5.2. LIFE VALUES, SEXUAL ENERGY AND SPIRITUAL TRANSCENDENCE

Although sex enacts a vibrant measure in enhancing psychological, physical and spiritual health of partners, scientific publications on the subject of “yoga and sex” are limited in social

science literature. For example, a search of the keyword “yoga” in the Web of Science database has yielded 4344 papers published between 1956 and 2024. But, when the words “yoga and sex” were searched, it showed only four papers, indicating the rarely deliberated content.

Marriage obligates couples to uphold the four Purusharthas or values in life that are mandated in scriptures; they include dharma, artha, kama and moksha (Rambachan, 1994). Dharma refers to righteous responsibilities involving self, family and society. By fulfilling one’s duties uprightly, married couples create a harmonious family ambiance (Figure 1). Artha means to obtain wealth by working honestly for the larger interest of the individual, family and society. Kama refers to the fulfillment of desires including physical and emotional intimacy. Moksha means to pursue spiritual values to attain freedom from birth and death (Shukla, 2004). Intestinally, Kama appears before Moksha indicating its rank, value, and significance in the ordinary life of a Hindu devotee and experts consider it as a vital means for an ordinary devotee to attain enlightenment and not a hurdle to divine growth (Dahiya, 2021). Thus, as depicted in Figure 1, couples are indebted to spiritual progress by backing each other to reach the final goal of self-realization or enlightenment (Agoramoorthy, 2014, 2015, 2019a, b).

The Yoga model of spiritual transformation has the potential to maximize couple’s intimacy and minimize divorce predicts that on a physical level, Yoga can improve sexual and mental health directing to greater fulfillment and bondage among partners. On an emotional level, Yoga can cultivate a deeper sense of intimacy minimizing the threat of divorce since it finds a mindfulness route to dissolve disputes. On spiritual level, Yoga can transcend the ego leading to deeper sense of divinity during intimacy. So, spiritual awareness through yoga has the potential to transform partners’ relationship from the mundane physical scale to an elevated spiritual scale linking body, mind and spirit (Brotto et al., 2009).

This model coincides with the observations of sexual health and spiritual transformation from published literature. For instance, a report illustrates that when women and men practiced yoga, they improved sexual functioning and gratification compared to those who did not (Dhikav et al., 2010a, b). Besides, yoga is known to enhance fair-mindedness, integrity and goodness to uphold values in life. Similarly, yoga has been indicated to increase couples' sexual desire and functioning with enriched pleasure (Dhikav et al., 2010a). The mind-body connection cultivated through yoga boosts awareness and sensitivity during passionate sex and a study demonstrated that yoga reduced stress and anxiety in women while improving the overall sexual functioning (Brotto et al., 2009). Furthermore, yoga cultivates a deeper sense of intimacy, heading to a deeply-contented and spiritually-transformative experience (Agoramoorthy, 2019a). Yoga also nurtures a profound sense of awareness and connection with body and mind directing the couple towards cherished sexual immersions (Clark and Powers, 2012).



Figure 1. Couples have the potential to transcend from physical to spiritual scale linking body, mind and spirit to fulfil the four major goals in life leading to ultimate happiness.

Studies have found higher levels of sexual satisfaction, greater mindfulness and superior sense of connection among couples during sex. Furthermore, one in four women and one in nine men or over 10 million adults yearly on average in the USA undergo intimate partner violence that often precedes post-traumatic stress disorder (<https://ncadv.org/STATISTICS>). A practice termed trauma-sensitive yoga has been designed by scientists with its application has been reported to meaningfully help victims to improve mental health (Ong et al., 2019; Nguyen-Feng et al., 2019). It's obvious that yoga facilitates mindfulness, which is a key marital predictor to decrease violence in married life steering to the cessation of disagreements, arguments and fights leading to breakups while fortifying amicable relationships. A research study corroborated this view on how mindfulness could solve all emotional regulation snags resulting in the dipping of emotional breakup and divorce while firming up sexual fulfilment among couples (Shabankare et al., 2021).

5.3. SEXUAL ENERGY AND SUPER-CONSCIOUSNESS

Scientists consider sex as a sacred spectacle since it proceeds to peak practices of love, eroticism and mental harmony. But, scientists argue that less research has been focused on the elusive subject of sacred sex and bliss (Hernandez-Kane and Mahoney, 2018). Besides, publications on the topic of sex and enlightenment in social science literature are sadly limited. A quick search of the title keywords “sex and enlightenment” in the Web of Science showed only 28 papers published between 1987 and 2024. Nevertheless, editorials appeared in a leading psychiatry journal appealing scientists to investigate deeper into the significance of ancient spirituality and religion and their relevance to modern psychiatry (Tandon, 2023a, b).

Spiritual and sexual bond is undeniably polygonal and scholars consider spirituality to promote sexual fulfillment among couples (McCreary and Alderson, 2013). Although most western religions enforce stringent codes on sexual morality, eastern philosophies of Hinduism and Taoism consider sex as a spiritual and psychological route to divinity. In fact, Hinduism reiterates that its faithful must pursue spiritual enlightenment as an end goal in life (Agoramoorthy, 2014). If not, human life becomes nothing but a glorified livestock. Spiritual paths, be it yoga, tantra or Taoist sexual revelation, they all have the potential to transform sex into an elevated spiritual endeavour by linking body, mind and spirit (Richardson, 2007).

Tantra by the way is a complex but unique system of India's philosophy and spiritual practice that still exist in practice (Fic, 2003; Gray, 2016). While I was searching the Tamil scriptures on tantra by checking the ancient texts and palm leaf scriptures at Annamalai University and Thiruvaduthurai Adeenam library in Tamil Nadu (Figure 2), I came across an interesting poetic scripture called Tirumantiram, composed by a revered Tamil sage Tirumular (Zvelebil, 2021). He was considered as one of the 63 Tamil poet-saints or Nayanars, and also among top 18 famed mystical sages in the ancient Tamil culture called Siddhars (Siddha in Sanskrit).

Sage Tirumular knew more about the tantric goddess worship of Srividya through Srividya Mantra, which was part of the Srividya tantric system that might have been established later in north India (probably in Kashmir) according to the opinions of Tamil scriptural experts (Harper and Brown, 2002). So, the tantric thoughts existed widely in Tamil scriptures long before it came into practice in Sanskrit literature and then restricted to some specific groups of tantric adherents. Hence, I will not venture in-depth into the origin and contexts of tantra and its association to Yoga as the subject itself deserves a separate doctoral thesis exploration in future.



Figure 2. My field visit to Thiruvavaduthurai Adheenam, a famous Saivite mutt, located at Thiruvavaduthurai (left) and Annamalai University at Chidambaram (right) in Tamil Nadu to collect data from ancient Indian scriptures. At Thiruvavaduthurai Adheenam library, I had the privileged to meet Shri. Narayanasamy, the author of several books on Saiva Sithandam (Photos by Anastasia Mikheeva).

Some religions consider premarital and extramarital sex as sinful taboos while others condemn the same-sex and same-gender alliances as immoral endeavors in society. The long inventory of Christian saints had declared that the most revered were virgins while others publicly relinquished sex. However, eastern traditions of Hinduism and Taoism have demonstrated on the significance of directing sexual energy for spiritual awakening (Anand, 1989). Chinese sexology scriptures found buried in a burial tomb dated back to 168 BC showed three major works namely “Ten Questions and Answers (Shi-Wan)”, “Methods of Intercourse between Yin and Yang (He-yin-yang-fan)” and “Lectures on the Super Tao in Universe (Tian-xia-zhi-tao-tan)” and they portray details on sexual intercourse and Taoist tantra practices to attain bliss through sex (Ruan, 2013). A glimpse of self-absorption (*samadhi* in Sanskrit) by humans was

first experienced during sex through a thoughtless mind, as recounted by Ohso (1989). When sexual intercourse transcends to meditation, it transforms to unconditional love where it surpasses eternal bliss. In other words, sexual energy can be transformed to the highest form of benevolent love where deifying energy blooms (Ohso, 1989).

But, supporters of celibacy argue that sex hinders spiritual growth as they believe that sex and spirituality are adversaries (Shivanand, 2022). Opponents on the other hand claim that sidestepping sex is dysfunctional to divine headway since subduing sexual energy goes against the natural inclination to sex inherently (Ohso, 1989). It concurs with the recent psychological findings that any effort to subdue sexual thoughts can lead to an intensification of sexual feelings by multifold (Efrati, 2019). Likewise, Taoism perceives sex as an energetic force that can be refined through techniques like subtle breath energy (*qigong* in Chinese) and combined energy (*héqi*) where sexual partners harmonize body and mind to connect universal energy (Chang, 1986).

5.4. SCRIPTURAL SANCTIFICATION OF SEXUAL ENERGY

In Hinduism, creation begins with sexual union of male and female, which is symbolized in the form of Shiva Lingam, an abstract icon of the Supreme Self that demonstrates the union of consciousness and energy. When sex is raised from an animal instinct to super-consciousness, a sanctified union paves the way to pursue life's four goals fulfilling moral, economic, psychological and spiritual values as revealed in Figure 3. Upanishads are the concluding knowledge part of the Vedas, the cornerstone of Hindu philosophical and spiritual wisdom. The largest Upanishads, Brihadaranyaka states that women's purpose becomes complete only when men occupy their other halves. Hence, marriage rituals involve exchanging of pledges using

the holy water to sanctify matrimonial unity witnessed by gods so that couples can pursue life's four goals.

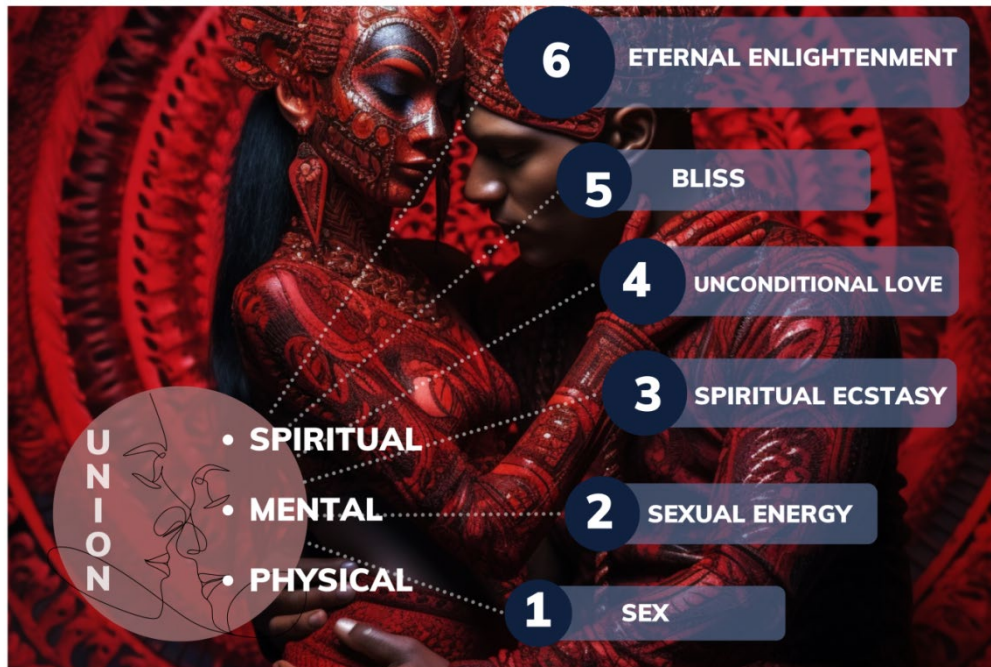


Figure 3. Physical, mental and spiritual union leading to bliss and enlightenment.

Moreover, the Brihadaranyaka erotically recites how the sexual acts performed with detachment driven by righteous outlook become a sacrificial gift to gods. Likewise, Chandogya Upanishad relays sexual merger uniting individual awareness and universal consciousness. It seductively catalogues how to attain supreme sexual bliss that include inviting wife with requests, lying in bed to have sex and lastly reaching climax called Vamadeva Saman woven in coitus (Jayaram, n.d.). Those who procreate from that climax will attain progeny, posterity and spiritual uplift. Even the oldest discourse on eroticism, Kama Sutra tantalizingly displays the vibrant liaison of sex and enlightenment (Chopra, 2005).

Although sex is a means of procreation to gratify the amorous human cravings, eastern intellectual notions strikingly reveal that it furthermore leads to blissful moments of enlightenment. As depicted in Figure 3 that reinforces the model presented in earlier chapter, on a physical level, sex boosts grander eroticism and serenity. On a mental level, sex cultivates an intense sense of intimacy as it finds thoughtful directions to create compassionate love while dissolving differences. On a spiritual level, sex transcends ego into a deeper sense of divinity resulting in the ultimate illumination of wisdom (Figure 3). Although the notion of sex as a means to enlightenment may seem eccentric superficially, scientists believe that it is created on profound psychological and philosophical paradigms from the ancient spiritual perspectives that all experiences including sex are a source of transcendental mindfulness (Francoeur, 1992).

Understanding the ongoing sexual disconnect in society riddled with taboo and shame toward sexuality, sexual expression and sex *per se*, psychologists were compelled to create a new theory recently labelled “Sex Positive Psychology” (Williams et al., 2015). Moreover, there is growing interest lately however among scientists to examine deeper into the Asian scriptural wisdom so that its relevance to psychiatry can be recognized (Tandon, 2023b). Such an effort will certainly unravel the puzzles hidden in the psychological perceptions of sexual-spiritual integration to uncover the lemon to lemonade moment of conquering eternal enlightenment that everyone strives to apprehend.

5.5. CONCLUSION

Spiritual values are known to strengthen the amiability among couples and when they share similar beliefs and practices, it can form a rigid foundation for an enduring relationship (Hernández-Baqueiro et al., 2024). Spirituality can help couples to show empathy and

compassion while increasing intimate warmth as it provides a deeper emotional linking that can lead to superior intimacy, love and loyalty (Çetintaş & Ekşi, 2020). Modern spiritual seekers in society are increasingly facing a hard dilemma either to involve themselves in shallow sexual endeavors or to avoid the burden of nuptial commitment totally. A recent study for instance shows that many men prefer to stay single; they vehemently avoid marriage due to their sloppy seducing skills, low confidence, repulsive outlook, introvert attitude, lack of effort to approach women and bitter past experience with them (Apostolou, 2019). Unfortunately, these options are neither preferable nor rewarding for individuals, their families and the society at large. Thus, marriage has the potential to resolve the problems in life to pursue happiness (Carr et al., 2014). By uniting sexuality and spirituality, intimacy among couples can be intensified while reducing the risk of mental health hazards induced by immediate breakups and eventual divorce. But, more quantitative long-term research is needed in the future to unravel the psychiatric riddles surrounding sexuality and spirituality.