

CHAPTER 3. LITERARY RESEARCH

3.1. SEXUALITY, SPIRITUALITY AND HINDUISM

During the course of my literature research, I have examined various religious perspectives on sex, sexuality and spirituality (Table 1). I compared the standpoints on marriage, sex, gender roles, monogamy, polygamy, divorce, sexual conduct, role of women, cultural influence and modern views followed in Hinduism, Christianity, Islam, Jainism, Sikhism and Zoroastrianism thoroughly reviewed by subject experts (Asha et al., 2009; Chakraborty and Thakurata, 2013; Mahajan et al., 2013). The above mentioned religions continue to coexist in Indian society.

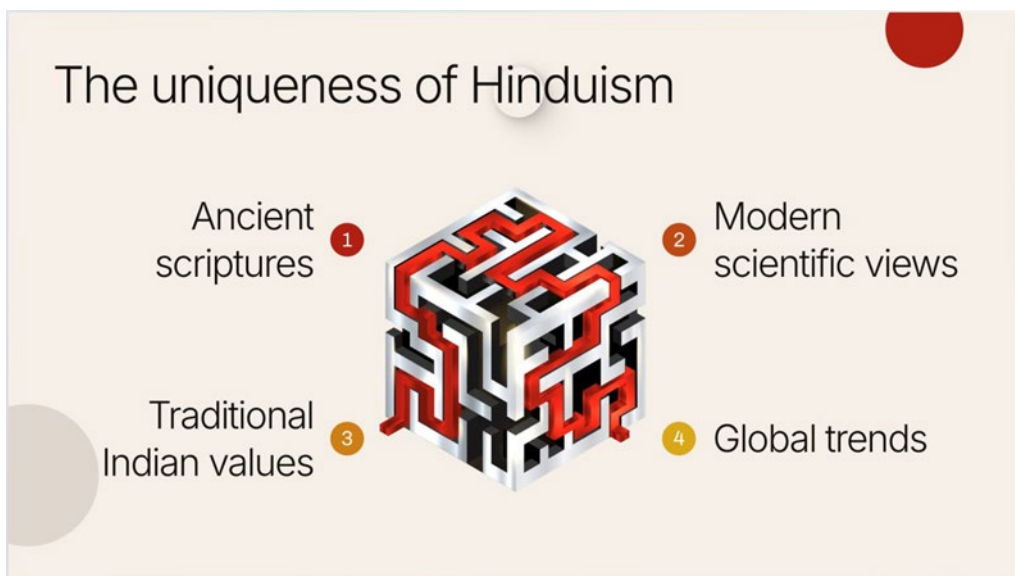


Figure 1. Hinduism uniquely integrates ancient scriptures, traditional values, modern scientific views and rapidly changing global trends.

Besides, I have assessed the scientific literature by comparing different perspectives on Indian sexuality across three major time periods that include ancient times, colonial era and modern

times (Table 2). After evaluating the existing sexuality and spirituality literature across religions, I found Hinduism to have a profound approach to sexuality and spirituality as it combines and balances cultural, philosophic and spiritual wisdom generated from Hindu scriptures with modern multifaceted scientific views, while uniting traditional values delicately alongside rapidly evolving global trends as shown in Figure 1.

What is interesting about India's amazing historical heritage is that even after extensive influence of Moghul empires and British colonial rule over centuries, the ancient traditional wisdom and culture remain unbroken in society where people adopted to external religious and political influence gradually while preserving their traditional, cultural and spiritual values that continue to exist and such flexibility makes the Hindu religion unique in the world (Parekh, 1999). So, I decided to focus on the extraordinary Hindu spiritual heritage focusing on yoga as a practical aspect of it to pursue my doctoral thesis work. Yoga coincidentally is deep-rooted in Hindu spiritual, philosophical and deific thoughts. The oldest known Vedic scripture Rig-Veda mentioned about the existence of yoga in India at the outset (Frawley, 2019). The Haṭha Yoga text that appeared in 11th century started to serve as the foundation for most of the modern yoga progression in society (Newcombe, 2017). The ultimate aim of yoga is to unite the individual soul with the divine to becoming liberated from worldly attachments. Detailed specifics on sexuality, spirituality, Hinduism and Yoga are presented in subsequent chapters to suit in accordance with divergent contexts to make the overall thesis discussion rationally and spiritually wholesome.

Table 1. Comparing different views of sexuality across six major world religions (source: Mahajan et al., 2013)

Aspect	Hinduism	Christianity	Islam	Jainism	Zoroastrianism (Parsi)	Sikhism
View on Marriage	Sacred, essential for procreation; social duty	Covenant; divine institution; lifelong faithfulness	Endogamous; considered a contract with strict divorce rules	Contractual; mainly for procreation	Righteous act; issues with interfaith marriages	Blissful union with mutual consent; monogamous
Purpose of Sex	Procreation, pleasure, duty to family and society	Procreation, extending relationship, public order	Procreation, extending relationship; regulated to maintain public order	Procreation only within marriage; celibacy encouraged	Procreation and spiritual union	Procreation, companionship, and spiritual union
Gender Roles	Traditional roles; evolving with modern influences	Male and female roles defined; sex within marriage only	Men and women from a single soul; modesty emphasized	Men and women expected to follow strict ascetic practices	Traditionally strict, though modern views are evolving	Equal rights; women highly respected and given equal status

Aspect	Hinduism	Christianity	Islam	Jainism	Zoroastrianism (Parsi)	Sikhism
Polygamy	Historically permitted for the rich and powerful (kings), but now mainly monogamous	Not permitted	Permitted with conditions	Not practiced; celibacy is ideal	Not practiced; monogamy emphasized	Not practiced; monogamy is required
Divorce	Infrequent traditionally; increasing acceptance in modern times	Discouraged; marriage seen as lifelong	Divorce follows strict rules with provisions for maintenance	Not commonly practiced; marriage is a lifelong pledge	Divorce is rare	Allowed in civil court but generally discouraged
Sexual Conduct	Varies; within marriage traditionally; evolving now due to modern views	Strictly within marriage	Strict regulations against sodomy, homosexuality, and premarital sex	Strictly regulated; celibacy is encouraged after children are born	Generally conservative but evolving	Sexual relations strictly within marriage; premarital sex not allowed

Aspect	Hinduism	Christianity	Islam	Jainism	Zoroastrianism (Parsi)	Sikhism
Role of Women	Traditional roles with increasing modern influences	Women to be respected; equal but distinct roles	Equal in creation but with specific modesty and behavioral expectations	Celibate nuns highly respected; strict conduct rules for women	Evolving; women more independent now, but traditional views strong	Equal to men; historical and religious teachings support gender equality
Cultural Influence	Deep-rooted in traditions influenced by scriptures	Biblical teachings influence marital and sexual norms	Quranic teachings and traditions influence norms	Ascetic principles and non-violence core values	Strong traditions with modern integration	Emphasis on equality, truthful living, and progressive values
Modern views	Balancing traditional values with modern influences	Some shift towards modern views but traditional values strong	Some modern interpretations but traditional rules generally upheld	Some modern families adopt flexible views	Struggle with integrating modern views due to strong traditional beliefs	Generally progressive with a strong foundation in equality and reform

Table 2. Comparing different perspectives on Indian sexuality across time periods

(source: Chakraborty and Thakurata, 2013)

Domain of Sexuality	Ancient Times	Colonial Era	Modern Times
1. Women's status, roles, and rights	Women were respected, involved in spiritual and social roles, but gradually declined due to medieval practices of purdah and sati.	Women's roles were further restricted by Victorian values, promoting male dominance and limiting women's rights and freedom.	Ongoing efforts for gender equality, increasing recognition of women's rights, though traditional roles still persist in many areas.
2. Marriage	Polygamy and monogamy both practiced; monogamy was common among ordinary people, polygamy among rulers. Arranged marriages were the norm.	Colonial influences emphasized strict monogamy, criticized traditional practices, and promoted arranged marriages with more stringent norms.	Both arranged marriages and acceptance of love marriages, including inter-caste and inter-religion marriages.
3. Sexuality in Adolescence and Young Adulthood	Natural approach to sexuality and nudity, especially in rural areas. Education on sexual roles began early.	Colonial laws imposed strict control on sexuality, limiting open discussions and education about sex.	More education on sexuality, but still balancing traditional values and modern views on sexuality.

Domain of Sexuality	Ancient Times	Colonial Era	Modern Times
4. Homosexual and Ambisexual Behaviors	Same-sex acts and diverse sexual orientations accepted in Manusmriti, Arthashastra, Kamasutra and public art, but not socially well ingrained and accepted.	Heavily stigmatized and criminalized under colonial laws, with strict societal norms against homosexuality.	Legal acceptance and decriminalization of homosexuality with strong support from activist groups for decades.
5. Repressed Sexuality	Sex was considered a natural part of human life, but regulated by religious and societal norms.	Colonial laws suppressed sex, sexuality, and sexual desires leading to conservative thinking. As a result, sex became a taboos in society.	Struggle continues between tradition and modern views with more cultural variations.

6. Prostitution and Pornography	Prostitution existed (e.g., Devadasi system) and pornography regulated to some extent.	Prostitution discouraged, but regulated to please colonial solders. Pornography was controlled.	Legal status varies, but prostitution persists, and pornography is widely accessed despite some legal restrictions.
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<p>7. Sexual health issues and Healing</p>	<p>Traditional medicine systems like Ayurveda addressed sexual health and diseases, focusing on health balance and holistic treatment.</p>	<p>Colonial rulers ignored traditional practices and imposed Western medical interventions.</p>	<p>Renewed interest in traditional healthcare practices and modern medical approaches to sexual health.</p>
<p>8. Gender Roles</p>	<p>Women had significant roles in spiritual and sexual contexts with some evidence of gender flexibility.</p>	<p>Colonial rulers imposed strict gender roles by promoting male dominance with less women freedom and flexibility. Homosexuality became illegal in colonial rule.</p>	<p>Modern Indians seek to normalize gender equality and recognition of LGBTQ+ rights, although traditional gender roles persist in many areas.</p>
<p>9. Sexual Education</p>	<p>Kamasutra and other texts used long ago for sex education across India.</p>	<p>Sex education was limited and conservative, influenced by colonial morality.</p>	<p>Increasing efforts to include sex education in schools, influenced by both traditional and modern perspectives.</p>
<p>10. Sexuality in Literature</p>	<p>Due to the influence of Vedas and Kamasutra, social morality, marriage, fertility prayers, and sexuality as natural part of life.</p>	<p>Colonial values stigmatized Indian sexual liberalism and promoted sex as social taboo.</p>	<p>Contemporary India reflects an open dialogue on sex due to global influence but also adding traditional values.</p>

<p>11. Sexuality in Arts</p>	<p>Erotic temple sculptures, caves paintings, and texts like Kamasutra celebrated and integrated sexuality into daily religious life.</p>	<p>Colonial introduction of English language and repression led to the condemnation and suppression of traditional erotic art. But, traditions maintained discreetly.</p>	<p>Renewed interest in traditional erotic art while modern artists explore sexuality, gender, and identity, influenced by global and traditional styles.</p>
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3.2. SEXUALITY AND SPIRITUALITY PORTRAYED IN HINDU SCRIPTURES

In Hindu tradition, the creation itself is symbolized in Shiva lingam as a continuous sexual merger between *Purusha* and *Prakriti* (Somasundaram, 1986; Banerji, 2008). Brihadaranyaka and Chandogya Upanishads that are considered to be the principal Upanishads, do not show any negative outlook towards sexual act as such. In contrast, the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad contains verses (Brihadaranyaka 6.4) describe how men should approach women for intercourse, how to entice them to engage in sex and how to make love. They also suggest remedies to facilitate or prevent impregnation, or to ensure the birth of a son with desired qualities and completion. Sexual desire like any other desire may bind the soul to the mortal world. Whereas sexual actions performed with detachment propelled righteous attitude as one's duty towards God and ancestors, as a religious duty, as a ritual offering, as a sacrifice are considered obligatory. The thirteenth Khanda of second chapter of Chandogya Upanishad describes the sexual union of husband and wife (Varadpande, 2011). This Khanda describes the five stages through which the union of Jivatma with Paramatma takes place within sexual

intercourse: devotee is constantly thinking of God and reciting his name; devotee is pouring his heart to God (intensely praying to Him to reveal Himself to His devotee); devotee feels the presence of God and loses his own consciousness in that Presence (this is the state of trance called “reposing in the Beloved”); devotee awakens from that trance and works with Him (devotee becomes the agent of the Lord); devotee in the bliss of his union with God sees God everywhere and speaks like his master Vamadeva: “I am the Sun, I am the Moon, I am everything”.

The Khanda further describes these steps of reaching the supreme blissful state in coitus with a woman: “He summons of a woman – that is Himkara. He makes request to her – that is the Prastava. He lies down along with his woman – that is the Udgitha. He lies on a woman – that is the Pratihara. He is performing sexual act with her – that is the Nidhana (supreme blissful state). He reaches climax – that is also the Nidhana. This is Vamadeva Saman woven in the coitus. He who thus knows this Vamadeva woven in the coitus, becomes able for coitus, procreates from coitus to coitus, lives his full life, lives gloriously, attains greatness with progeny and cattle, and earns a great name for himself” (Chandogya Upanishad 2.13.1-2).

उपमन्त्रयते स हिंकारो ज्ञपयते स प्रस्तावः स्त्रिया सह शेते स उद्गीथः प्रति स्त्रीं सह शेते स प्रतिहारः कालं गच्छति

तन्निधनं पारं गच्छति तन्निधनमेतद्द्वामदेव्यं मिथुने प्रोतम् ॥ २.१३.१ ॥

स य एवमेतद्द्वामदेव्यं मिथुने प्रोतं वेद मिथुनी भवति मिथुनान्मिथुनात्प्रजायते सर्वमायुरेति ज्योग्जीवति महान्प्रजया

पशुभिर्भवति महान्कीर्त्या न कांचन परिहरेत्तद्ब्रतम् ॥ २.१३.२ ॥

॥ इति त्रयोदशः खण्डः ॥

upamantrayate sa himkāro jñapayate sa prastāvaḥ striyā saha śete sa udgīthaḥ prati strīm

saha śete sa pratihāraḥ kālaṃ gacchati tannidhanaṃ pāraṃ gacchati

tannidhanametadvāmadevyam mithune protam || 2.13.1 ||

sa ya evametadvāmadevyam mithune protam veda mithunī bhavati

mithunānmithunātprajāyate sarvamāyureti jyogjīvati mahānprajayā paśubhirbhavati

mahānkīrtyā na kāṃcana pariharettadvratam || 2.13.2 ||

|| iti trayodaśaḥ khaṇḍaḥ ||

References to sexual intercourse as a sacrifice are found in the Chandogya Upanishad (5.8.1-2), and Brihadaranyaka Upanishad (6.2.13 and 6.4.2-3): semen is the oblation poured into the fire in the female sexual organ, and from this sacrifice arises the fetus as the fruit of sacrifice. “The woman, O Gautama, is verily the sacrificial fire; of that the middle part is the fuel, the hair is the smoke, the vagina is the flame, penetration is the coals and the pleasure the sparks. In that fire, the gods pour semen as their libation. From this libation arises the fetus” (Chandogya Upanishad 5.8.1-2):

योषा वाव गौतमाग्निस्तस्या उपस्थ एव समिद्यदुपमन्त्रयते स धूमो योनिरर्चिर्यदन्तः करोति तेऽङ्गारा अभिनन्दा

विस्फुलिङ्गाः ॥ ५.८.१ ॥

तस्मिन्नेतस्मिन्नग्नौ देवा रेतो जुह्वति तस्या आहुतेर्गर्भः संभवति ॥ ५.८.२ ॥

॥ इति अष्टमः खण्डः ॥

yoṣā vāva gautamāgnistasyā upastha eva samidyadupamantrayate sa dhūmo

yonirarciryadantaḥ karoti te'ṅārā abhinandā visphuliṅgāḥ || 5.8.1 ||

tasminnetasminnagnau devā reto juhvati tasyā āhuter garbhaḥ sambhavati || 5.8.2 ||

|| iti aṣṭamaḥ khaṇḍaḥ ||

Almost same verse is found in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad (6.2.13): “The woman, O Gautama, is fire. Her sexual organ itself is the fuel. The hairs are its smoke, the womb its flame,

what is placed inside the coals, and the sensations of pleasure its sparks. In this fire, the gods pour semen as the oblation. From that manifests a person and he lives for the span of his life”.

योषा वा आग्निर्गौतमः; तस्या उपस्थ एव समित्, लोमानि धूमः, योनिरर्चिः, यदन्तः करोति तेऽङ्गाराः, अभिनन्दा
विस्फुलिङ्गाः; तस्मिन्नेतस्मिन्नग्नौ देवा रेतो जुह्वति; तस्या आहुत्यै पुरुषः संभवति; स जीवति यावज्जीवति, अथ यदा

म्रियते ॥ १३ ॥

*yoṣā vā āgnirgautama; tasyā upastha eva samit, lomāni dhūmah, yonirarciḥ, yadantaḥ karoti
te'ṅgārāḥ, abhinandā visphuliṅgāḥ; tasminnetasminnagnau devā reto juhvati; tasyā āhutyai
puruṣaḥ saṁbhavati; sa jīvati yāvajjīvati, atha yadā mriyate || 13 ||*

An interesting perception to discuss within the research scope of spirituality and sexuality is Brahmacharya. In Hindu scriptures including the yogic traditions, Brahmacharya is sketchily translated as “celibacy” or “chastity”. But, it has a much broader and more nuanced meaning. Brahmacharya is one of the Yamas, or ethical guidelines, in Patanjali's 8-Limbs of Yoga. It is a basic principle that emboldens energy conservation and desire control with a focus on spiritual practice exclusively without any distraction. While it may seemingly envelop total sexual abstinence, especially for those on a serious monastic spiritual path, it doesn't necessarily mean complete avoidance or suppression of the natural sex energy of others.

The renowned sage Tirumular who wrote the earliest Tamil scripture titled “Tirumantiram” evidently did not promote celibacy by abstaining from sex. Tirumular, an ardent devotee of Lord Shiva, has been recognized by both Tamil Saiva School as one of 63 Nayanmars (sacred Shiva saints) and Tamil Tantric Siddha School that honored him as the legendary among the eighteen eminent Siddhas (Venkatraman, 1977). Experts also consider Tirumular and Patanjali

to be contemporaries (Braud, 2008). In the following shloka 2033, sage Tirumular stated that even the immortal gods cannot control their sexual desires (Tirumular, 1991; Govindan, 1993).

“Control, control the senses five thus say those who know not
None, not even the immortals the senses five control
When you the senses five control verily are you an inert mass;
Sublimate them toward the Lord that wisdom’s way, I learned” (shloka 2033).

Sage Tirumular also dedicated a chapter on Pariyanga Yoga where he vividly portrayed details on sexual intercourse between couples to reach the highest form of pleasure and bliss (Tirumular, 1991; Govindan, 1993). Pariyanga means bed, and the sage meant the world to be body of ultimate being where the woman or Shakti abides in human form to exhibit sexual play between Shiva (male) and Shakti (female) where the erotic ecstasy leads to the transformation of supreme bliss or enlightenment. Even modern psychotherapists promote the development of spiritual emergence as a counseling technique through sage Tirumular’s Pariyanga Yoga to deal patients suffering from psychiatric complications involving dissatisfied marriage, emotional crisis, transpersonal issues, and family relationship crunch and restore them as enlightened beings in society (Sovatsky, 2009, 2014). The following shloka of Tirumantiram for example described details on how to pursue sexual union through Pariyanga yoga to attain bliss.

“This is Pariyanga Yoga that lasts five ghatikas
Beyond in the sixth
The damsel sleeps in the arms of lover
In union blissful that fills the heart and passes description” (shloka 830).

Similarly, the subsequent shloka 831 stated that only those who are qualified as a successful yoga practitioner alone can pursue the path of Pariyanga Yoga as it is not easy for everyone to

adopt the ever challenging yogic task. To answer a query from onlookers on who practiced this form of perplexing rigid yogic system, sage Tirumular responded in shloka 832 by stalwartly stating that the Supreme Lord Shiva practiced Pariyanga Yoga with his beloved Shakti.

“Unless it be, He had on success practiced

The Pariyanga Yoga of five ghatika length

No yogi shall

A woman embrace” (shloka 831).

“Who may you ask, Is He that achieved this audacious Yoga?

The lord is He that wears heavenly Ganga on His matted lock,

For ghatika five He embraced Sakti of speech ambrosial sweetness

Thinking and thinking not of the act performed” (shloka 832).

Therefore, Brahmacharya may mean conscious management for householders (gṛhastha) by honoring sexual energy through responsible use while proscribing it to dominate the mind with intense desire since it's all about the restrain and proper channeling of sexual energy towards spiritual energy rather than complete retention or rejection of sex (Tirumular, 1991; Govindan, 1993; Sovatsky, 2014). While the ancient Yoga texts might not explicitly frame Brahmacharya as fidelity, such interpretation can be derived from a broader understanding of the concept as it relates to self-control, ethical conduct, and the responsible use of energy (Satchidananda, 2003).

अहिंसासत्यास्तेयब्रह्मचर्यापरिग्रहा यमाः ॥ २.३० ॥

ahimsāsatyāsteyabrahmacaryāparigrahā yamāḥ || 2.30 ||

Ahimsā (non-injury), satya (truth), asteya (abstention fromstealing), brahmacharya (continence) and aparigraha (abstinence from avariciousness) are the five yamas (forms of restraint) (Patanjali Yoga Sutra 2.30).

In Bhagavad Gita (Chapter 7, Verse 11) Shree Krishna says that He is the controlled, virtuous, and well-intended sexual activity of a householder:

बलं बलवतां चाहं कामरागविवर्जितम् ।

धर्माविरुद्धो भूतेषु कामोऽस्मि भरतर्षभ ॥ 11 ॥

balam balavatām chāham kāma-rāga-vivarjitam

dharmāviruddho bhūteṣhu kāmo 'smi bharatarṣhabha ॥ 11 ॥

“O best of the Bharatas, in strong persons, I am their strength devoid of desire and passion. I am sexual activity not conflicting with virtue or scriptural injunctions” (BG 7.11).

Scriptures also mandate that Brahman needs to be meditated upon as in procreation, immortality and joy from reproductive organs. For example, the Taittiriya Upanishad (3rd chapter 10th section) states the following:

अथ देवीः । तृप्तिरिति वृष्टौ । बलमिति विद्युति । यश इति पशुषु । ज्योतिरिति नक्षत्रेषु । प्रजातिरमृतमानन्द इत्युपस्थे । सर्वमित्याकाशे

As satisfaction in rain, as strength in lightning, as fame in cattle, as light in stars, as procreation, the immortal, and joy in generative organ, as all in the ākāśa (space). As the reproductive organs bring about to all these to the attain immortality through a discharge from debts through a son, so Brahman should be regarded as dwelling in these forms. So, all things including sex organs that exist in ākāśa should be contemplated as Brahman (Sastri, 1903).



**Figure 2. Ancient Hindu wedding ceremony (Painting courtesy by Granger-
<https://fineartamerica.com/featured/3-hindu-wedding-ceremony-granger.html>)**

3.3. MARRIAGE IN THE ANCIENT HINDU TRADITION

The Hindu marriage is called *Vivaha* in Sanskrit. India has a long historical tradition and cultural heritage of marriage ceremonies (Figure 2). The Sanskrit treatise *Arthashastra* for example narrates in overall the standards of statecraft and science of living, and it has outlined eight different forms of marriage that were in practice in the ancient Indian culture (Rangarajan, 1987). Those types of marriages were based on the traditions, customs, culture and rituals that existed at that time in ancient India. Among the eight forms of marriage, the first four are considered virtuous sanctioned by scriptures where the possibility of divorce bluntly forbidden while the remaining four are considered immoral and not scripturally sanctioned where the possibility of divorce allowed (Table 3).

The practice of marriage largely is considered a societal institution in Hindu society that promotes an ethically appropriate relationship between a male and a female, as prescribed in *Manusmriti*, which is ancient India’s legally provisioned codes of societal conduct. It is also called Dharmasastra or protocols deriving from religious treatises sanctioned by sages. Unlike the Western marriage system that devises a kind of social and legal contract, the Hindu marriage is considered to be an institution based on Hindu religious and spiritual rituals since children are procreated by parents to uphold righteousness (dharma) prescribed in scriptures (Sternbach, 1941). Besides, the scriptures highlight that the matrimony pulls together two discrete halves of man and woman to establish unity and totality manifesting the flawlessness of humanity.

The ancient Indian marriage involved elaborate rituals and celebrations comprising the participation of the clans of bride, groom, close and far relatives, including many people from all walks of life in society associated with the rejoicing lineages. The epic Mahabharata (4. 72) beautifully narrates how the marriage of Abhimanyu (Arjuna’s son) and Uttara (Virata’s daughter) was sanctified with magnificence. The celebrations included playing of many musical instruments, beatings of drums, and supplies of several sorts of liquor for guests, accompanied by amazing dances by dazzling girls, and glowing star guests.

Table 3. Elaborate Hindi marriage systems and rituals in ancient India (Source: <https://ithihas.wordpress.com/2016/10/26/institution-of-marriage-in-ancient-india/>)

Name of ritual	Significance
Vadhuvara gunapariksha	Exploring the fitness of a bride or groom
Varapresana	Family/relatives negotiate for the bride
Vaagdhana	Finishing negotiations to finalize the wedding

Shraddha	Ritual performed to honor the dead ancestors
Mandapakarana	A temporary tent to conduct the marriage rituals
Gauriharapuja	The bride worship Lord Shiva and Gauri (mother goddess)
Tailaharidraropana	Ritual to spray turmeric powder on the bride and groom
Snaapana, Paridhaapana and Samnahana	After bath, bride wears dress and a string of darbha (botanical name <i>Desmotachya bipinnata</i> ; it's a grass species found on riversides and its used as a sacred material in rituals to purify offerings
Madhuparka	When groom arrives at the bride's home, receives honey and milk
Pratisarabandha	Binding an sacred string on the wrist of the bride and groom as a matrimonial rite
Parasparasamikshana	The bride and groom see for the first time after removing a cloth that separated them during the wedding ceremony
Kanyaadana	Father gives the bride to the groom signifying the handover of care and obligation from the bride family to groom family
Mangalashtra bandana	Groom secured a thread with gold around the neck of the bride to denote the status as a married woman
Agni sthapana homa	Sacred fire ritual for wedding ceremony by Sanskrit chants
Panigrahana	Ritual where the groom holds the hand of the bride
Laaja homa	Fried grains offered to fire as part of the wedding ritual where the families bless the newlywed couple
Agniparinayana	Groom leads bride by going around sacred fire and holy water
Saptapadi	They go around the fire 7-times as per spiritual principles
Murdhaabhisheka	Spraying holy water on the groom and bride

The bride’s father presented the groom with 7000 horses, 200 elephants and ample of unimaginable wealth (Meyer, 1917). The tradition of gifting wealth materials and throwing lavish bridal parties continues even today that can be witnessed when India’s richest still hold glitzy nuptial rites in fashion attended by the world's super-rich (Dhillon, 2024). The concept of marriage in contemporary Hindu society has undergone significant transformations over several centuries (Kanth et al., 2024). In the past, marriage was considered as an exclusive religious ritual, family obligation and societal responsibility as marriages used to have elaborate ritualistic procedures (Table 4). But, the concept has slowly started to transform due to the influence of time, individual choices, changing values and expression of freedom (Sengupta, 1958; Singh, 2024). Nonetheless, some of the marriage rituals are still being continued. The eight categories of ancient marriages are outlined in Table 4 that echoes the ancient cultural standards and principles of that time in history. But, some categories are outdated, while others have reformed, progressed and underwent radical change over time.

Table 4. Eight different categories of marriages outlined in the Ancient Indian culture

Marriage category	Religious perception	Description
Brahmavivaha	Virtuous	Marriage between a bride and a groom, who has good more character and better exposure to the study of the Vedas.
Prajapatyavivaha	Virtuous	This is similar to the above where parents handover bride to groom with a promise that couples would fulfill their four aims of life together following the scriptural mandate.
Arshavivaha	Virtuous	The family of the groom presents a legal gift of cattle to the family of the bride for the marriage ceremony.

Daivavivaha	Virtuous	Family gives the bride as a sacrificial fee to the groom when they couldn't afford marriage expenses and the groom serves as the priest in the wedding ceremony.
Asuravivaha	Sinful	The groom's family pays dowry to the family of bride to settle the marriage.
Gandharvavivaha	Sinful	This involves love marriage where couples marry due to erotic charm, romance and sex. This marriage is allowed only for Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra castes in ancient India (Sharma, 2008), but more common now in society.
Rakshasavivaha	Sinful	This is a brutal marriage where bride is forced to marry a groom against her will. It is condemned in scripture.
Paishachavivaha	Sinful	This category involves men raping woman or seducing mentally-unsound women, which considered a marriage mainly to sustain the dignity of woman. But, it's scripturally condemned (Manusmriti - Verse 3.27).

3.4. COUPLE'S SPIRITUAL LIFE PRESCRIBED IN SCRIPTURES

According to Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, the purpose of a woman is to complete the man and fill his one half. The verse describes how Prajapati created a woman as a companion because he did not enjoy being alone: "He felt no joy at all. Therefore, a person who is lonely does not experience joy. He desired to have a companion. He became as big as a man and woman in close embrace. He divided himself (his body) into two. From that manifested a husband and a wife. Hence, Yajnavalkya used to say, "This body is but one half of oneself, like one of the two shells of a split pea." Therefore, this space is filled by the wife. He became united with her.

From that human beings were born” (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 1.4.3).

स व नैव रेमे, तस्मादेकाकी न रमते; स द्वितीयमैच्छत् । स हैतावानास यथा स्त्रीपुमांसौ सम्परिष्वक्तौ; स इममेवात्मानं
द्वेधापातयत्, ततः पतिश्च पत्नी चाभवताम्; तस्मातिदमर्धवृगलमिव स्वः इति ह स्माह याज्ञवल्क्यः; तस्मादयमाकाशः

स्त्रिया पूर्यत एव; तां समभवत्, ततो मनुष्या अजायन्त ॥ ३ ॥

*sa va naiva reme, tasmādekākī na ramate; sa dvitīyamaicchat | sa haitāvānāsa yathā
strīpumāṃsau sampariṣvaktāu; sa imamevātmānaṃ dvedhāpātayat, tataḥ patiśca patnī
cābhavatām; tasmātidamardhabṛgalamiva svaḥ iti ha smāha yājñavalkyaḥ;
tasmādayamākāśaḥ striyā pūryata eva; tāṃ samabhavat, tato manuṣyā ajāyanta || 3 ||*

“No man, even in anger, should ever do anything that is disagreeable to his wife; for happiness, joy, virtue and everything depend on the wife. Wife is the sacred soil in which the husband is born again, even the Rishis cannot create men without women” (Adi Parva, Mahabharata Book, 1.74.50-51). Marriage has been an integral part of Hindu tradition for millennia. In the earthly plane, a marriage symbolically represents the same relationship that exists at the universal level between Purusha and Prakriti. Purusha refers to soul or consciousness and it factually means man or male. Prakriti is something, which is created or nature in all matters. It literally means female creator. So, marriage is considered a sacred union between man and woman is not only physical linking, but also spiritual, emotional and universal linking according to scriptures.

Ancient texts provide guidance on the rituals, customs, and values that reinforce sacred union. For example, the Yajurveda describes various rituals involved in a Hindu marriage, such as exchange of vows and pouring of sacred water. Hindu marriage is not viewed as a purely human affair, but as a sacred covenant in which gods participate as witnesses as well as donors of the

bride. During the ceremony, the priest first marries the bride to the gods and then presents her to the groom as a gift from the gods.

Marriages in Hindu culture specifically aimed at pursuing the unison of the four aims of human life; they are known as the *purusharthas* (Balsekar, 2012; Ranganathananda, 2002). They include: (1) *Dharma* refers to duties and obligations towards oneself, society, and the universe. In the context of marriage, it involves fulfilling one's obligations towards one's spouse, family, and society. By fulfilling their *dharma*, the couple creates a harmonious and stable environment around them (Rai, 2018). (2) *Artha* refers to the pursuit of wealth and other material possessions. In the context of marriage, it involves working together to earn a living and accumulate wealth for the benefit of the family. This can include managing finances, investing in property or businesses, and other economic activities that contribute to the well-being of the household (Scharfe, 2004). (3) *Kama* refers to the fulfillment of physical, emotional, and other desires, such as love, passion, pleasure, and happiness. In the context of marriage, *kama* refers to the emotional and physical intimacy between the spouses, and the pursuit of happiness and fulfillment through their relationship (Dahiya, 2021). (4) *Moksha* refers to the ultimate goal of spiritual liberation and freedom from the cycle of birth and death. In the context of marriage, *moksha* refers to the shared effort of the couple to grow spiritually, and support each other in their pursuit of self-realization and enlightenment (Mishra, 2013).

3.5. CONCLUSION

In the ancient Hindu religious treatise and Yoga texts, marriage has been perceived as a sacred bond between a man and a woman to pursue the four aims of the human life known as *purusharthas*, which is considered vital to pursue a meaningful life on earth without

compromising on ethical values. Thus, marriage is seen as a means of achieving these four crucial righteous aims in unison while aiming for spiritual growth. Within the scope of the marriage life, scriptures clearly suggest householders how they should control, manage, and channelize sexual energy and transform into spiritual energy with awareness, contemplation, positive intention and moderation.