

## **CHAPTER 4. SEXUALITY AND SPIRITUALITY: THE YOGA MODEL OF SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION OF WESTERN MARRIAGE**

### **4.1. INTRODUCTION**

Marriage serves as an efficient and formidable architect of human capital in modern society (Gallagher, 2000). Marriage can be defined as a legally recognized union of a couple to establish rights and obligations. It can be based on a wide range of reasons that include love, attraction, shared values, and desire for mental, emotional, and social support. The definition of marriage can vary depending on cultural, social and legal contexts. In some cultures, it involves exchange of goods or property, while others are arranged and led by families or religious leaders. Similarly, legal definitions vary among jurisdictions, with some countries recognizing same-sex marriage, while others preclude. So, marriage generally is perceived in society as a meaningful merger of two individual human personalities to lead a life together creating a family (Cherlin, 2010). Nonetheless, emotional breakups in relationships leading to divorce pose a serious threat to sustain marriage and family life in modern society.

### **4.2. STATEMENT OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM**

Marriage in Western cultures refers to the legally and socially recognized union of two people, encompassing much of Europe, North America, and other areas influenced by Western traditions (Ingraham, 2008). When it comes to the expressions of sexuality, the West has inherited a traditional dislike that led to the marginalization of sexuality. Even the Western scientific disciplines such as psychology and sexology have not defined and demarcated sexuality beyond the limitations of sexual functioning and performance (Kleinplatz and

Krippner, 2005). So, the prospects of sexuality concomitant to spirituality as such has not been rationally explored in scientific literature.

By profession, I am a psychologist and couple therapist. I was born and brought up in the Russian Federation, which is the largest country on Earth with an area of 17.1 million km<sup>2</sup> supported by a population of about 145 million. Russia's vast landscape and complex history means that it is often characterized as a unique region that links the East and the West culturally over millennia (Neumann, 1996). Experts consider Russia to have a long association with India historically, linguistically and culturally (Rishi, 1982). As I practiced Yoga from childhood and also taught Yoga to my clients (Mikheeva, 2014, 2015), I came to the renowned S-VYASA with a purpose to learn about Yoga research so that I could strengthen scientific and cultural cooperation connecting the East and the West. Being a psychosexual therapist, I came across thousands of cases involving clients of marital and sexual problems where I use my learning, training and expertise to provide professional services to rescue and rehabilitate patients affected by severe mental distress (Mikheeva, 2016a, b).

Due to my professional experience and reading from literature, I found the Western marriage system to have some flaws to withstand and prolong marital relationship amicably. As a result, breakups and divorces have become common in recent decades. After reading numerous research papers related to Yoga and ancient Hindu scriptures on the concept of marriage, I am convinced that a better conceptual model can be developed to galvanize the spiritual transformation of the western marriage to strengthen bonds among couples. Such an approach will help in my profession as a psychosexual therapist to rejuvenate a large number of patients physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually who continue to rely on my professional counseling. In addition, the findings of such an in-depth conceptual investigation will benefit

the scientific community at large. Therefore, I have selected India's top Yoga institute (S-VYASA) to pursue my doctoral studies on the intricate subject of integrating spirituality and sexuality to create a Yoga model of spiritual transformation of western marriage with a long-term research potential for other scholars to pursue in-depth research on this topic.

#### **4.3. WESTERN MARRIAGE CRISES INVOLVING DIVORCE**

Divorce is a legal process that formally terminates a marital union. The highest divorce rate in the world has been recorded in the USA where 45% of marriages often end up in divorce (Amato, 2010). Although statistics vary, Western countries have reported higher rates of divorce in recent decades. The divorce rate in the USA in 2020 was 2.5 per 1,000 people, which is 25% of the total population (National Center for Health Statistics, 2022). Even a recent study states that the divorce rate among adults aged 50 and above doubled between 1990 and 2010 in the USA (Brown and Lin, 2012). In England and Wales, the divorce rate was 7.0 per 1,000 people in 2020, which is 70% of the total population (Office for National Statistics, 2021). Similarly, the divorce rate in Canada in 2020 was 2.4 per 1,000 people, which is 24% of the total population (Statistics Canada, 2022). Russia reported divorce rate of 4.7 per 1,000 inhabitants, which is 47 %, with approximately 683,000 divorces registered in 2022 (Statista, 2022). In India, the divorce rate at around 1% in 2022 remains among the lowest in the world (The Siasat Daily, 2023) with regional variations within the country like the highest divorce rate at 18.7% in Maharashtra and at 11.7% in Karnataka (The Times of India, 2023). There are many challenges couples face in Western society that can contribute to marital dissatisfaction and difficulties. Amato and Previti (2003) for example have synthesized major causes for high divorce that include infidelity, loss of intimacy, sexual incompatibility, sexual dysfunction, changing gender roles, financial stress, communication breakdowns, and parenting challenges.

Similarly, Scott et al. (2013) have shown reasons for divorce that include lack of commitment, infidelity, and conflict/argument, followed by marrying young, financial problems, substance abuse and domestic violence. Besides, Johnson et al. (2002) did a statewide survey in Oklahoma (USA) and found that the most commonly checked reasons for divorce include lack of commitment, followed by conflict/argument, and infidelity. By and large, infidelity can be defined as engaging in sexual or romantic activity outside of the committed relationship or marriage. It can also be specified as the act of breaking a commitment or promise of sexual or emotional exclusivity within a romantic relationship that often involves engaging in sexual or other romantic deeds with someone outside the marital relationship (Mark et al., 2011).

The individual definition of infidelity can moreover vary depending on cultural, social, and personal factors. For example, some may consider emotional intimacy outside marriage as a form of infidelity, while others may disregard it, but at the same time, it can cause significant emotional damage to trust and intimacy that are essential for a healthy relationship (Blow and Hartnett, 2005). Research suggests that infidelity can have substantial adverse impacts on both individuals and relationships, including emotional distress, dissatisfaction, and increased risk of divorce (Mark et al., 2011). Many couples struggle to rebuild their relationship after an instance of infidelity, especially when a partner who was cheated feels betrayed and unable to forgive the offender. Infidelity can also be a sign of communication gap, lost intimacy and dissatisfaction. Research also suggests that there may be gender differences in the reasons for infidelity, with men more likely to report sexual motivation for infidelity, while women may be more likely to report emotional dissatisfaction or a desire for intimacy (Mark et al., 2011).

#### **4.4. SEXUAL RELATIONS ROOTED IN SEXUALITY**

Sexuality is rooted in sex as it includes intimate feelings, sexual emotions, romantic temptations and erotic behaviors (Salu, 2011). Hence, sexuality may not be merely neutral since it has its positive and negative cognitive magnitudes (Renaud and Byers, 2001). Humans in general subjugate sex substantially using two approaches, either suppress it, which is negative or sustain it, which is positive to improve better carnal and cognitive relationship to pursue spiritual uplift. When one rejects sex by assuming it to be an animal instinct and relating it to a muddy sinning endeavor with a primeval embryonic level of consciousness, it will lead to the enlargement of fear, anxiety, and distress in their psyche (Hays, 2023).

Such an internal cognitive split is against the basic principles of yoga that advocates the union of individual consciousness with divine consciousness (Singh, 2012). The split in psyche is called “schisis”, which is the root cause for schizophrenia (Lavretsky, 2008). Also, the self-conflict in the psyche causes one to become neurosis and psychosis, an exceedingly precarious psychiatric condition displaying delusions, visions, hallucinations, and voices that warrants immediate clinical help (Insel, 2010). Sadly, many modern spiritual gurus consider this cracked phenomenon as kundalini rising of an enlightenment episode. But, psychiatrists consider it as a severe psychotic episode revealing just madness (Boyd, 2022). In the end, it damages the brain, and for that reason I don’t think that brain damage is what yoga aims to achieve.

Experts state that negative sexuality impacts everyone in society, from childhood to adulthood (Target, 2007; Renaud and Byers, 1999). For example, on physical, cognitive and emotional levels, the negativity distorts intellect, and develops psychosomatic problems that include anxiety disorders, neurosis, and psychosis. On a spiritual level, it creates spurious Kundalini

awakening and feigned enlightenment. On a family level, it frustrates relationships leading to divorce. On a global level, it creates conflicts, crimes, combats and wars (Pettman, 2010).

The beauty of positive sexuality is that it is self-directed, sexuality-influenced, socially-accepted, community-coped, and understood by adults in a way it leads to individual growth and spiritual progress (Williams et al., 2015). Unlike the West, India's predominant Hindu religion recognizes sexuality in an inclusive positive sense where spiritual wisdom forms the foundation of society. India is also the land of Kama Sutra, where the world's oldest text on sex originated. Sexuality by the way is not about genitality; it's all about how the powerful energy urges humans to have relationships to achieve the wholeness in life so that everyone can go beyond themselves responding to aloneness and disconnection (Giblin, 2014). Some may wonder how it impacts people at large. On a physical, cognitive and emotional level, it promotes better body, mind and psycho-emotional health (Anderson, 2013). On a spiritual level, it leads to genuine Kundalini awakening and mystical insight. On a family level, it forms amicable long-term relationships founded in love that sustains liaison without conflict (Horn et al., 2005). On a global level, it promotes world peace, friendship and empathy (Hudson et al., 2023).

#### **4.5. THE YOGA MODEL**

The yoga model outlined in this thesis has the potential to move forward to transmute negative sexuality into positive sexuality, by shifting humanity from destructive outlook, which is an illustration of Kali Yuga to constructive outlook, which is an illustration of Satya Yuga, to benefit society at large. Even a research paper appearing in the Journal of Positive School Psychology encourages scientists to develop techniques to promulgate righteousness in society

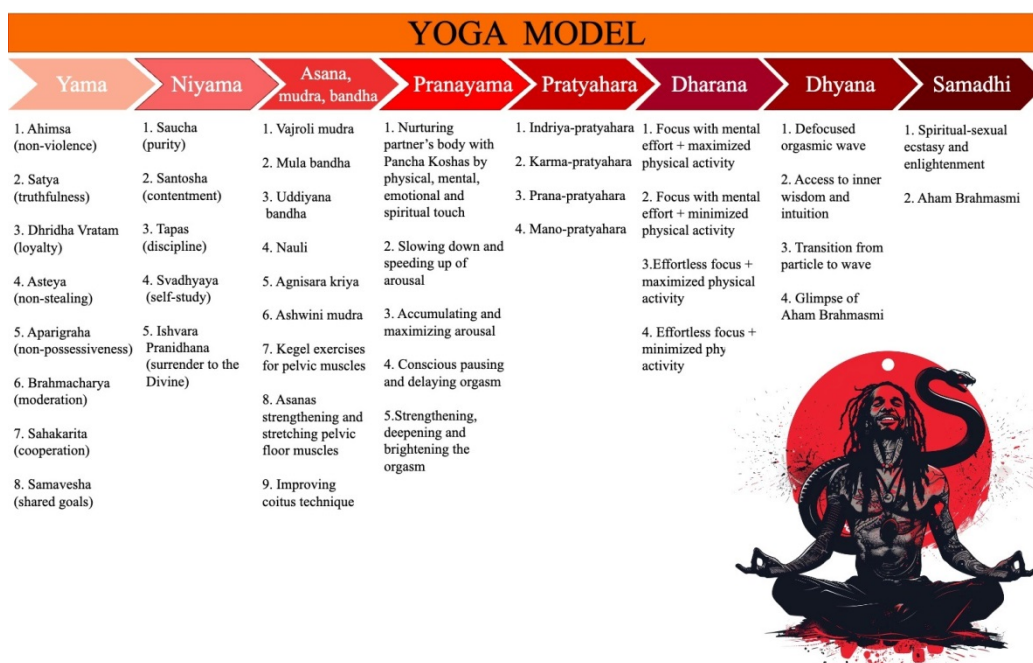
that was once a preeminent trait in the Satya Yuga (Bhayani et al., 2022). I have scrutinized below how they model may work on couples, helping them to rejuvenate relationships to sustain satisfied conjugal existence while progressing towards spiritual divinity (Figure 3).

In various commentaries of Yoga Sastra, different blocks or elements of practices are described. For example, the Hatha Yoga Pradipika states that the sequence of Yamas, Niyamas, Asanas, Kriyas (if needed), Pranayama, Mudras, and Nadanusandhana (altogether) leading to Samadhi (Svatmarama, 2002). The Gheranda Samhita (1895) on the other hand promotes the sequence of seven practices that include Kriyas, Asanas, and Mudras and among them Dharanas, Pratyahara, Pranayama, Dhyana, and Samadhi with mentioning of Yamas and Niyamas. The Shiva Samhita however suggests practicing Asanas, Mudras, Pranayama, Nadanusandhana, and Dharana (Mallinson, 2007). The Goraksha Samhita describes Asanas, Mudras, Pranayama, Nadanusandhana, Pratyahara, Dharana, Dhyana, and Samadhi, which resembles the same procedure as in Patanjali Yoga Sutras with the absence of Yama and Niyama. After reviewing all the above cited commentaries, I have adopted Patanjali's eight limbs of Yoga as the basis for my model (Figure 3) as I consider it as spiritually and rationally comprehensive, by incorporating all aspects of Yama, Niyama, Asana, Pranayama, Pratyahara, Dharana, Dhyana, and Samadhi systematically (Vivekananda, 2012).

#### **4.5.1. Yamas (ethical disciplines)**

In this model, the couples build a strong and long-lasting monogamous relationship with cooperation to pursue the four major goals in life dharma (Manusmriti 2.6–2.12; Bhagavad Gita 3.35), artha (Arthashastra, Book 1; Mahabharata, Shanti Parva), kama (Kamasutra 1.2.1; Bhagavata Purana, Canto 10) and moksha (Chandogya Upanishad 6.14.2; Bhagavad Gita 2.72). Also, they adhere to the following other eight aspects of ethical principles:

**Figure 3. The Yoga model of spiritual transformation of Western marriage**



(i) Ahimsa (non-violence): Couples promote compassion, forgiveness, and empathy by reducing conflicts to nurture a loving atmosphere in an exquisite lifestyle (Singh, 2013).

(ii) Satya (truthfulness): They emphasize sincerity, loyalty, honesty, transparency and trust through better communication to sustain harmony (Menski, 1996).

(iii) Dridha Vratam (faithfulness): They avoid sinful behaviors such as cheating, infidelity, and causing emotional injury to promote stable relationships (Sharma, 2005).

(iv) Asteya (non-stealing): Mutual respect to ensure passionate bond (Gupta et al., 2012).

(v) Aparigraha (relinquishment): Avoid selfishness, jealousy, insecurity and possessiveness (Chandra, 2010).

(vi) Brahmacharya (balance or self-management): Promote self-discipline and balance while managing desires to ensure satisfaction (Sivananda, 1980).

(vii) Sahakarita (cooperation): Couples work together to resolve problems with better decision-making abilities to foster resilience in relationships (Sharma, 2005).

(viii) Samavesha (achieve shared goals): They cooperate to pursue purusharthas or life's four main goals to foster a shared purpose in marital life (Singh, 1992).

#### **4.5.2. Niyamas (observances)**

Niyamas refer to righteous duties or compliances one must observe to lead a spiritually-enriched life and it includes the following five basic principles to adhere daily:

(i) Saucha (purity): Uphold physical and mental purity with a focus on health to strengthen intimate relationships in life.

(ii) Santosha (contentment): Uphold contentment and avoid jealousy, envy, conflict and displeasure to foster pleasure and intimacy.

(iii) Tapas (discipline): Tapas incorporates obligation to the amicable up-keeping of a happier relationships to ensure strong intimate bond.

(iv) Svadhyaya (self-study): Couples introspect to comprehend partner's thoughts, emotions, and actions to enhance empathy.

(v) Ishvara Pranidhana (surrender to God): They surrender to god so that ego will be replaced with devotion leading to unity and shared purpose in life (Bhavanani, 2013).

When couples combine the above described ethical guidelines in life, it strengthens their intimate relationship in terms of connection, communication, respect, trust, and growth to resolve conflicts and secure relationship stability. By integrating Yamas and Niyamas daily, they create a harmonious, balanced, and fulfilling affinity with a potential to reduce the risk of divorce. It also contributes to the achievement of the four major goals in life efficiently while strengthening loyalty, love and intimacy (Singh, 1992). Besides, it turns one's lifestyle to improve relationships among couples and family (Stone, 2009). Studies have shown that when

couples adopt Yamas and Niyamas, they create better relationships with less divorce risk (Bhavanani and Natyalayam, 2014; Bubber and Gala, 2023).

#### **4.5.3. Asanas (body posture), mudras (dynamic exercise with ritualistic gesture) and bandhas (inter-lock)**

Asanas, mudras, and bandhas are powerful yogic practices that impact the body at Annamaya Kosha level. When they practice Halasana, Dhanurasana, Naukasana, Ardha Matsyendrasana, Siddhasana, and Kegel exercises, it strengthens and relaxes pelvic muscles to promote sexual health. The Kegel exercises are known to not only improve sexual efficacy, but also resolve sexual pain disorders (Lolowang et al., 2019; Rochera, (2016). In addition, Vajroli mudra, Ashwini mudra, Mula bandha, Uddiyana bandha, Nauli, and Agnisara kriya are also encouraged (Mishra and Singh, 1984). The coitus technique described in Kama Sutra can also be adopted (Gupta, 1994).

The Asanas enhance muscle strength, flexibility, blood flow and lymphatic circulation, aiding in the removal of toxins and improving overall health. Mudras influence flow of energy impacting physical and mental health; it also supports digestion, elimination, and circulation (Jayachitra, 2012). Bandhas as a whole strengthen muscles, hormonal balance, blood and lymphatic circulation, and rejuvenate the body. Overall, the combination of asanas, mudras and bandhas contribute to improved sexual health, intimacy, vitality and stress reduction, mental clarity, and emotional stability that will make couples to become skillful romantic partners. Chances of breakup in relations will become minimal due to improved communication skills and healthier mental and emotional health. Scientists perceive sexual health closely connected to the concept of human rights in terms of protecting privileges (Miller et al., 2015).

When couples practice the above mentioned asanas, mudras, and bandhas, it can significantly boost sexual intimacy and health (Brotto et al., 2009). When asanas such as Halasana, Dhanurasana, Naukasana, Ardha Matsyendrasana, and Siddhasana are practiced, they stretch the pelvic floor muscles to increase blood circulation to genital region that naturally enhances triggers sex hormone levels (Tabatabaie et al., 2024). Regular practice can increase physical and sexual strength leading to enhanced satisfaction by preventing frustration in relationships. The practice discussed above can also calm the nervous system, reduce stress and promote emotional balance and mindfulness by improving libido and sexual function (Atkinson, 2013). Reduced stress levels lead to less conflicts and more mental stability, promoting happier life. When couples adopt the yoga model, they boost physical closeness, emotional bond, intimacy and sexual energy leading to complete sexual gratification (Sovatsky, 2014).

#### **4.5.4. Pranayama (breath control)**

Prana means breath, which is a vital life energy that sustains life in the body. It's believed to flow through 72,000 channels or nadis in the human body that influence physical, mental, and spiritual health of humans (Rogers et al., 2021). The concept of prana can be connected to the flow of sexual energy and vitality (Singh and Kumar, 2017). When it flows with intensity, it boosts sexual arousal. When it's activated or stimulated in lower chakras, it can intensify sexual arousal. When the energy is balanced, it can increase intimacy and sexual gratification. Pranayama has been reported to serve as a unique means to control sensations while expressing intimate behavior to attain emotional stability (Betal, 2015). It also influences the autonomic nervous system, enhancing emotional balance as it cultivates mindfulness. The heightened awareness during intimacy allows partners to appreciate each moment by intensifying sexual gratification, sensations and emotional connection. By practicing breathing movements,

couples reduce anxiety and stress by balancing sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems leading to enhanced intimacy and strong emotional bond (Whitwell, 2012).

Prana connects to various aspects of sexual experiences. Through specific breathing techniques, couples can modulate the pace of arousal. Be it the intense sexual arousal or prolonged intimate experiences, slow deep breathing like Ujjayi can calm the nervous system by reducing stress while creating mindfulness to deter anxiety (Epe et al., 2021). It can also dissipate excessive arousal, preventing premature climax. Rapid breathing like Kapalabhati stimulates the nervous system by enhancing arousal and sexual excitement (Dhikav et al., 2010a). Controlling the breath allows couples to synchronize arousal to create pleasant sexual experiences. For example, alternate nostril breathing can calm the mind and prepare for sexual arousal and a scientific report states that sexual anxiety can lead to decreased sexual desire and pranayama techniques can resolve such anxiety disorders (Rakshith et al., 2017).

Deep diaphragmatic breathing or belly breathing increases oxygen intake to focus energy in the lower abdomen and pelvic region that can heighten arousal by bringing awareness and energy to the genital area. Visualizing the movement of air flow as a warm and glowing energy circulating in the body can amplify sexual energy. The visualization tempts pranamaya kosha and by envisioning the vital air intensifying in the pelvic region, a heightened state of arousal can be created to fulfil deep intimacy. Such a practice guides couples to experience intensely more revealing orgasms increasing emotional and spiritual bond (Singh and Kumar, 2017).

Even a simple touch has great significance in terms of prana and relational comfort in the romantic life of couples as they have exclusive rights to allow each other to sensually touch some restricted parts of the body that others cannot access (Suvilehto et al., 2015). A study

reports high frequency of touch among couples, nearly 85% in 4-hrs of spent time (Debrot et al., 2021). Studies have also shown evidence on how the avoidance of touch and edgy intimacy trigger negative outlooks towards touch (Chopik et al., 2014). That is why this model has incorporated how the amorous touch affiliated with prana influences couples at four levels that include physical, mental, emotional and spiritual as described below.

#### **4.5.4.1. *Physical touch:***

Be it a romantic touch or kiss, they all have significant positive association with levels of arousal, orgasm, and sexual satisfaction (Maclaren, 2014; Wu, 2022). To be exact, Kama Sutra has defined 26 different types of erotic kisses with details on the right places to place the kiss (Vatsyayana, 2012). Even a simple romantic touch during intimacy can trigger sexual stimulation from five great elements spiritually as explained below: (i) Space: When couples perform a series of gentle massage strokes or effleurage, it can be compared to space since the quixotic touch creates a sense of mental expansiveness through prana similar to the extravagance of space. (ii) When they practice petrissage or kneading and lifting, it resembles the reminiscence of air as the amorous movement brings a sense of lightness in the body-mind complex resembling like floating in air. (iii) When they engage in rubbing and friction, it can be associated with fire as the intense caressing generates heat in the body, stimulating prana, blood flow and metabolism, creating warmth and energy similar to the transformative power of fire. (iv) When they involve rhythmic tapping, which is similar to water flow, as the pranic cascade promotes the flow of bodily fluids augmenting vigor. (v) When they practice compression with firmness and pressure, it can be compared to earth as the grounding provides stability and support with relaxation nurturing a deep pranic connection with the earth element. Even a simple integration of physical and pranic movements in intimacy offers a holistic

approach to not only healing, but also addressing the physical, emotional, and energetic aspects of couples' well-being with bosom harmony and vitality (Johnson, 2002).

The above explanation shows that a practice of pranayama, all aspects of the eight limb yoga model presented in this thesis can be directly or indirectly connected to five great elements or Pancha Mahabhutas (Nanthakumar, 2019). Furthermore, in the following shloka 825 in Tirumantiram explains on how couples can reach maximum sexual intercourse pleasures if they practice pranayama through Pariyanga Yoga to control of their prana.

“Rubbing the woman’s body with diverse fragrant;

Decorating her hairs with fragrant flowers

Man enjoys the woman in sexual union? If he but knows how to target

Prana through the spinal cavity, the erotic pleasure never ceases” (shloka 825).

#### **4.5.4.2. *Mental touch:***

When couples consider themselves as an embodiment of Shiva-Shakti energy, the sacred awareness elevates them to a higher spiritual level. Viewing the partner as a deity activates the Ajna chakra that governs intuition, perception, and mystical insight. The elevated spiritual awareness expands the flow of prana in head and brain stimulating mental clarity with a deeper sense of divine association. The above elucidation coincides with the statement from Shiva Purana where verse 10 in Parvati-khaṇḍa states that when a woman revere her man as the lord and love him unconditionally, will obtain all enjoyments including enlightenment along with him (Shastri, 1950).

#### **4.5.4.3. Emotional touch:**

The couples' emotional touch is perceived as an embodiment of Shiva for women and Shakti for men with adoration, ecstasy, gratefulness, and altruism (De, 2021). This approach aligns with the principles of karma yoga, where actions are performed without expecting benefits. Serving a partner with limitless love activates the anahata chakra or the heart's center that's governed by compassion, emotion and affection. Such selfless service that couples interchange to each other triggers emotional equanimity deepening spiritual bond. By perceiving the partner as a divine being, the yogic couple creates energetic alignment, enhanced intimacy, and emotional tenderness that balance the flow of prana throughout their bodies by deeply nourishing happiness. Scientific studies also support the role of emotions on how yoga practice improves couples' relationship gratification through improved mindfulness and emotional intelligence (Galloway et al., 2022). Besides, the scripture Tirumantiram describes on how couples can prolong the length of sexual pleasure by controlling Prana through Pariyanga Yoga training (Tirumular, 1991) in the following shloka.

“When Pariyanga Yoga is practiced by the male and female lovers  
Upward they drive the coach of breath that has its wheels in right and left  
There they collect the waters of the heaven  
And never the organs tiring know” (shloka 827).

#### **4.5.4.4. Spiritual touch:**

As highlighted in the Yoga Magazine (1990), human sexual life has three distinct functions that integrate three gunas that include producing progeny (tamas), enjoying erotic pleasure (rajas) and attaining enlightenment (sattva). So, the sexual touch incorporates deeper spiritual connection among couples so that they perceive themselves as an embodiment of Shiva-Shakti

energy to progress towards the ultimate enlightenment. This concept is rooted in Bhakti Yoga where the couples' love is directed towards the divine, activating the Sahasrara chakra that links one to the divine Self. The activation elevates the flow of prana to raise spiritual transcendence. Bhagwat Gita (18.40) states that whatever life it may be, whether it's on earth or in heaven, they all have three gunas that originate in prakrti (White, 1998). But, how do couples' love transcends to spiritual bliss by balancing the delicate three gunas? The following outlines describe the roles of three gunas and how they transform the lives of couples to strengthen physical, mental, emotional and spiritual bond:

- Kama (tamas): Lust and ego-filled desire aimed to gratify one's own senses.
- Prema (rajas): Love, intimacy and sex aimed at gratifying Shiva-Shakti energy recognized by both partners.
- Bhakti (sattva): Pure, unconditional love and devotion towards divine presence engulfed by the couples.
- Divine Love (beyond three gunas): Blissful state of love transcending three gunas and connecting couples with the divinity, achieving a state beyond physical, mental, intellectual and emotional realms.

By incorporating the doctrines of spiritual devotion, couples develop a sacred bond by considering themselves as Shiva-Shakti energy to elevate their relationship to absolute divinity. On a psychological scale, the ultimate freedom or enlightenment has been considered to be an altered state of consciousness that does not exclude the functioning abilities that remain normal even in the transformed state (Ullman and Reichenberg-Ullmann 2001; Jacobs, 2020).

#### **4.5.5. Pratyahara (withdrawal of senses):**

Pratyahara refer to conscious retraction of energy from all sensory stimulations so that couples can proceed in spiritual path. There are four types of pratyahara as described below.

##### ***4.5.5.1. Indriya-pratyahara:***

This involves observing sensory pleasures neutrally without attachment. Couples face pleasures that originate from sound (space), touch (air), sight (fire), taste(water), and smell (earth) daily; they must deal with them without any attachment while being in love. When they develop strong attachment in love, the mind will create dependency leading to addiction that scientists brand it as love addiction (Schaeffer, 2009; Dineen and Dinc, 2024). Detaching sensory desires allows couples to cherish their intimate moments mindfully that can heighten profound sexual pleasure without leading to addiction. For example, Yoga Sutra (2.54-56) states that senses retire from stimulating objects when mind takes an inward dive, and from that comes the supreme mastery of the desire-obsessed senses. Even yoga gurus like Swami Satchitananda have compared senses to mirrors reflecting outside and therefore yoga practitioners must turn inward to observe the reflection of pure light (Burns, 2023).

##### ***4.5.5.2. Karma-pratyahara:***

This involves control in actions. For example, when couples engage in intimacy, they offer their action (e.g. sexual act) to the divine within the loving partner focused on altruistic service. When sex act is perceived as a sacred rite by adoring and immersing in the divine Shiva-Shakti energy, it becomes a self-sacrificing transcendent exercise. Such a selfless act to the divine among couples fosters resilient devotion by renouncing the ego, the root cause for all selfish

deeds. As a matter of fact, sacred intimacy deepens love, harmony and sanctity among couples that leads to enriched deific life with no chance for breakup in relationship (Sovatsky, 2014)).

#### ***4.5.5.3. Prana-pratyahara:***

This involves the control of breath by withdrawing desire-propelled pleasures prompted by the stimulating sense organs. So, couples need to shift their concentration from outward sensory desires to inward divine love by focusing on prana in the heart's center or Anahata chakra. The transformation of couples' sexual desire into divine love occurs by focusing on the heart chakra during intimate encounters to boost emotional bond and intimacy. At that juncture, a trace of tranquility in silence occurs through sensual stimuli and reaction that proceeds to deeper emotional and spiritual connection as perceived by Ellens (2009), who concluded that genuine sexual experience is all about emotional and spiritual intimacy.

#### ***4.5.5.4. Mano-pratyahara:***

This involves the withdrawal of mind where couples direct their mind away from all sensory distractions. Then only, the mind can be focused on the divine sexual union to sustain mindfulness in higher spiritual resolution. When couples integrate pratyahara in their daily lives, they get enormous benefits that include conscious clarification of desires, tranquility of thoughts, sensory enjoyment detachment, deep mental silence, mindfulness, self-control, sanctified intimacy, selfless service, emotional expansion, and spiritual spread that Bhagwat Gita (17.16) refers to be the austerity of mind.

The pratyahara practice deeply influences both pranamaya kosha and manomaya kosha. When senses are withdrawn, conserved prana moves inward balancing vital energy in the body that helps couples to withstand vibrant relationships. Redirecting prana from sensory pleasures to

the heart's center consolidates vital energy nurturing emotional warmth and affection. By quieting the mind to reduce sensory overload of chatter and noise, leading to better mental clarity and reduced distractions to improve communication among couples. Scientists consider the calm and illuminated mind to be more receptive to engage sensual emotions and intimacy (Whitwell, 2012). When sexual acts are performed as offerings to the divine, it elevates mental attitudes and aligns thoughts with higher spiritual values. Such an alignment of prana with spiritual value elevates the energy flow intensely.

#### **4.5.6. Dharana**

Dharana is the practice of mental concentration focusing the mind with one thing such as a mantra or breath. While giving the definition of a mantra, the ancient Tamil poetic sage Tirumular stated that mantra is nothing but an absolute concentration of the mind (Zvelebil, 2021). Within the context of sexual intimacy, it can be understood as concentrating on the intimate energy to attain wholeness in contentment. At physical and mental levels, it can maximize pleasure by releasing the popularly phrased happiness hormones (endorphin, dopamine, serotonin, oxytocin, etc.) that can heal psychosomatic problems and improve overall health including sexual pleasure and fitness (Hotze and Griffin, 2013; Nieuwdorp, 2024). Then the question is how to concentrate on sex energy for spiritual progress. To answer this, I have designed four levels of dharana in the model to benefit couples' relationships to reduce divorce.

##### ***4.5.6.1. Mental focus on sexual energy with maximum physical activity:***

This involves intense focus on sensual pleasure while engaging in vigorous physical activity with maximum emotion and physical strength where couples completely cooperate in sex, both physically, mentally and emotionally. Their mind focused on sensual pleasure by channeling pranic energy to immerse in intense intimate involvements. Such vigorous and emotionally

expressive action will trigger the mind to stir deeply buried suppressed emotions from childhood involving fear, anger, and sadness, which is the cause for various depressive and anxiety disorders. In fact, emotional distress creates nervousness, fear, and sadness leading to anxiety disorders that scientists consider the most common mental problems in modern society (Amstadter, 2008; Barlow, 2018). When suppressed emotions are released through intense physical movements, it can heal psychosomatic disorders as the practice induces ecstatic state due to the burst of endorphins and dopamine (Bancroft, 2005).

#### ***4.5.6.2. Mental focus on sexual energy with minimum physical activity:***

When couples engage in a relaxed and gentle pace of intimate actions focusing on sexual pleasure with minimum physical activity, it creates a paradoxical effect in the nervous system. It combines sympathetic activation during action with parasympathetic arousal during inaction, creating a harmonious balance in ecstasy. The result is similar to a report where moderate massage therapy upgraded the functioning of the immune system, neuroendocrine system, as well as psychological outcomes (Diego and Field, 2009).

#### ***4.5.6.3. Effortless focus with maximum physical activity:***

This incorporates maintaining an effortless concentration during vigorous physical activity, creating a perplexing training of the nervous system. This erotic rehearsal supports the wisdom depicted in Bhagwat Gita (4.18), which states that seeing dynamic action in inaction and inaction in dynamic action is the wisest among humans. It indeed prepares the mind for a deeper state of meditation (Chaudhuri, 1955).

#### ***4.5.6.4. Effortless focus with minimum physical activity:***

This involves graceful concentration with minimal physical activity to promote a state of

moderate pranic flow with unity. When couples engage in intimacy in a graceful and relaxed fashion, it allows them to experience ecstasy rather naturally when the mind reaches a state of equanimity. Also, focusing without tension balances the mind, which is the essence of equanimity quoted in Bhagwat Gita (2.48). Suppressed emotions are known to cause serious mental health problems (Kaplou et al., 2014). Therefore, scientists have promoted various emotion regulation strategies (Gross, 2015). Yoga offers a natural remedy to tackle mental health maladies among couples to regulate their emotions (Siegel, 2014). The effortless focus with minimal physical activity described above promotes mindfulness, which in turn enhances emotional regulation (Winter et al., 2021).

When couples experience intimacy in relaxation after intense physical and mental deliberation as shown above, they will feel the upsurge of endocannabinoids in the body (Androvicova et al., 2017; Fuss et al., 2017). The lipid-based neurotransmitters are naturally produced in body promotes long-lasting and in-depth ecstasy. In general, neurotransmitters and hormones play a significant role in both sexual and spiritual experiences of blissfulness and enlightenment. Enlightenment is often associated with altered states of consciousness and significant shifts in brain chemistry with implications of neurotransmitters and hormones. Human brain uses over 100 neurotransmitter receptors and some of them are small molecules while some are large proteins (Niyonambaza et al., 2019). Some are them are involved in creating altered states of consciousness (Sessa, 2021). Studies showed elevated levels of serotonin during profound bliss of deep meditation (Esch, 2013) and intense sexual interactions (Pfaus, 2009). Dopamine likewise has been known to enrich delight during meditation (Kjaer et al., 2002) and ecstasy during sex (Giuliano and Allard, 2001). Also, endorphins and oxytocin are reported to promote bliss during meditation (Rokade, 2011; Van Cappellen et al., 2016) and pleasure during sex (Khajehei and Behroozpour, 2018). But, science has not understood clearly the biochemical

and neurophysiological mechanisms driving the mystical enlightenment episode.

When couples fully relax, it releases tensions both physically and mentally, with widespread mindfulness self-absorption with maximum pleasure. The deepest relaxation slowly dissolves all suppressed feelings and emotional patterns from childhood that include strong likes (raga), dislikes (dvesha), anger, hate, sadness, truncated self-esteem, and fear of death. This can be compared to a conscious yogic death with a sense of being beyond life and death, removing the klesha of fear of death (Abhinivesah). So, the practice has the potential to lead to Turiya state of consciousness with a glimpse of Turīyāīta, the ultimate state of universal consciousness, where one experiences the Self as identical with the Atman Brahman to become a Jivanmukti (Lakshmanjoo, 2003).

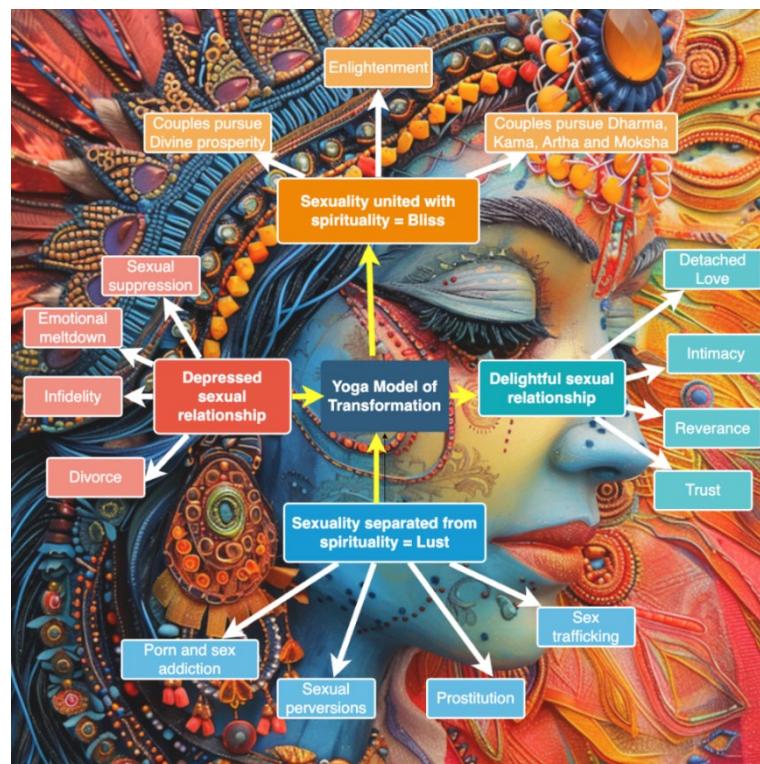
#### **4.5.7. Dhyana (meditation)**

Yogic meditation has been reported to be effective in improving mindfulness and emotional intelligence among couples (Galloway et al., 2022). When couples meditate together, it opens a pathway to ecstasy in the form of an elegant defocused orgasmic wave in their bodies with a profound sense of union and dissolution of the ego. The connection unfolds in the form of shared experience to access inner wisdom and the transition starts from a particle to wave scenario to reach the universal consciousness (Drouin, 2019; Lee, 2019). Usually, meditators often perceive themselves as non-doers where all experiences unfold naturally. Likewise, during a defocused orgasmic wave, the couples surrender to the natural flow of pleasure with no division between them by breaking their ego barrier to immerse in togetherness. As the ego dissolves spontaneously, couples gain an instant access to inner wisdom. When they shift their individuality to interconnectedness, like from a particle to wave scenario represented in physics, they merge in a fluidly interconnected state of oneness in consciousness. The inter-

link of all beings foster compassion and unconditional love with awareness of the union of individual consciousness with universal consciousness, representing the initial stage of Turiyatita, culminating in an enduring spiritual awakening and self-realization (Frawley, 2020).

#### 4.5.8. Samadhi (absorption)

Samadhi is the final state of absorption reaching the pinnacle of Anandamaya Kosha leading to profound spiritual ecstasy or enlightenment (Krishnananda, 1989). It involves the integration of spiritual and sexual energies, transiting to the ecstatic state of consciousness. This represents the ultimate spiritual evolution, where individuals achieve complete surrender and unity with the Super Consciousness where all existence ceases (Miquel, 2015).



**Figure 4. Yoga model depicting transformation: Sexual and spiritual union leads to spiritually progressive life among couples.**

Couples experience a profound sense of union with each other and the divine by transcending the boundaries of individuality and ego, where the experience of spiritual-sexual ecstasy brings a deeper sense of fulfillment and contentment, surpassing all transient pain, pleasure and passion (Mumford, 2021). The couples attain liberation from the cycle of birth and death, experiencing freedom from suffering and separation (Frawley, 2020). Samadhi on the Anandamaya Kosha level represents the final stage of Aham Brahmasmi, where individuals realize their identity as the Universe to achieve a complete union with the Super Consciousness (Murthy, 2010). Through this profound state of absorption, individuals experience eternal bliss and liberation by transcending all limitations to achieve a unison with the Super Consciousness (Sovatsky, 2014).

#### **4.6. TRANSFORMING THE DEPRESSED SEXUAL RELATIONSHIP TO A DELIGHTFUL SEXUAL BOND**

The model introduced in this thesis is based on the concept of linking sexuality and spirituality rather logically as no one has proposed hitherto this intangible yogic concept to strengthen marital relationship as illustrated in Figure 4. Sexuality refers to a human ability to experience pleasure from sexual activity in its broadest sense including biological, psychological, physical, erotic, emotional, social, and spiritual aspects (Capasso et al., 2022). If sexuality detaches from spirituality, it will lead to unconnected lust as suggested by Levant (1996). On the other hand, if spirituality detaches from sexuality, it often slips into the coldhearted passionless “ghost of piety with a hollow center” as described by psychologists Ferder and Heagle (1992, 2002). Thus, when couples detach spirituality from sexuality, it will trigger an emotionally-distorted loveless state destroying relations through sexual suppression, infidelity, emotional meltdown, divorce and even prostitution as depicted in Figure 4.

When the quality of sexual relationship is not fully established, an unfulfilled partner starts to seek pleasure outside. Demand creates supply so the cause of prostitution is based often on the displeased, disconnected and disappointed sexual relationships connected to couples. The yoga model provides a pathway to harmonize relationship among couples that would decrease sex trade demand both regionally and globally. Thus, scientists consider spirituality as an envisioned guide of sexuality (Ferder and Heagle, 2007). If the link between sexuality and spirituality is dented, couples will lose their deific direction and become vulnerable to the impulsive dark side of sexuality (Giblin, 2014). The murky dark side of sexuality includes pornographic cravings, sex addictions, and sexual perversions (Figure 4). The demand for the shadowy side of sex is the root cause for the ever increasing sex trafficking in modern society (Meshkovska et al., 2015; Rai and Rai, 2021).

Social scientists therefore reiterate the integration of spirituality and sexuality as a fundamental principle of life to access far-reaching fulfillments of the deepest human potentials (Nelson, 2008). The Yoga model illustrated in Figures 3 greatly influences sexual health among couples by linking sexuality and spirituality that lead to delightful sexual relationships by strengthening trust, reverence, intimacy and detached love. This approach has the potential to result in a spiritually-enhanced lifestyle where couples pursue divine prosperity while achieving the four major human values in life.

#### **4.7. CONCLUSION**

When couples adopt Yamas and Niyama in their daily lives, it creates harmonious relationships (Bubber and Gala, 2023) by reducing the risk of emotional disintegration. By adopting specific asanas, mudras, and bandhas into a regular yoga routine, couples can promote physical,

emotional, and sexual well-being by strengthening marital relationships. Pranayama promotes happier feelings and emotions during physical intimacy within a marital relationship (Saradananda, 2017). Through pratyahara, couples can develop deeper emotional, sexual and spiritual connections to cultivate a harmonious relationship. By practicing dharana during intimacy, couples can deepen emotional and spiritual connections to achieve a fulfilling relationship. Dhyana opens the gateway to experience a defocused orgasmic wave and profound union among couples and the universe (Mahaprajna, 2002). This final journey of Samadhi or self-discovery and divine union deepens connection among couples (Evola, 2018; Baker, 2023), fostering unconditional love and eternal bliss (Figure 3). The Yoga model presented above has emphasized better advantages for couples to pursue their duties in life amicably while pursuing spiritual growth. This approach will not only strengthen physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual connection, but also motivate them to fulfil four major life values while directing them towards eternal bliss, which is the sole purpose of having a human life as prescribed in the ancient Hindu scriptures (Agoramoorthy, 2014; Sharma, 1999).