

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. BACKGROUND

This doctoral thesis for the first time attempts to link two totally dissimilar fields of study namely sexuality and spirituality to develop a theoretical *Yoga* model of spiritual transformation of western marriage, intrinsically using the Hindu scriptural concept to reduce emotional breakups in a couple's relationships. When it comes to religion, the contentious subjects of sexuality and spirituality are often at loggerheads (Machacek and Wilcox, 2003). Perhaps everyone agrees that sexuality forms the foundation of humanity and human existence (Ventriglio et al., 2018). But, the subject of sexuality is a convoluted spectacle as it incorporates major scientific disciplines such as biology, sexology and psychology to specifically address the provoking topics of sexual intimacy, sexual intercourse, sexual identity, and sexual expressions (Lehmiller, 2023). Spirituality on the other hand, is equally multifaceted human endeavor as it incorporates diverse disciplines such as religion, culture, tradition, art, anthropology, ethnicity, philosophy and psychology.

Conflicts between religion and spirituality are often ambiguous in society, if not so obvious. Although the catchphrase "spiritual but not religious" may out rightly declare the perceived opposition, spiritual sensibility appears to be equal to religious membership (Jordan, 2019). Religion at large is social and it is based on specific sets of structured beliefs focused on God through devotion, rituals and practices shared by a community of followers (Horton, 1960). Spirituality on the other hand is individualistic, an inherent factor of being human, centered more on individual practice of creating beliefs to understand the meaning of purposefulness in society (Tanyi, 2002). So, I have used both religion and spirituality rather reciprocally in this

thesis to complement their relevance to the discussed subject matter.

Unlike other world religions, Hinduism scripturally accepts the combined sexual-spiritual approach in a more balanced, acceptable, practical and graceful manner. Hindu religion incidentally is one among the oldest great religions of the world. It clearly instructs its followers to use the priceless human life to achieve eternal enlightenment as an end game in life (Agoramoorthy, 2014). According to Hinduism, marriage is considered a sacred union between a man and a woman to pursue the four major values of life that include dharma (moral values), artha (economic values), kama (psychological values) and moksha (spiritual values). Although marriage remains an important social institution across many Western nations, the attitude towards marriage has shifted lately with less emphasis on monogamy and lifelong relationships (Campbell and Wright, 2010). To make matters worse, the modern-day Western marriage has become a kind of civil contract, and scholarly debates have increased to explore the rapidly aggregating divorce rate that shakes the institutional foundation of marriage (Von Schmädel, 2009; de Burgos Seguí, 2024; Grumbach et al., 2024).

The term divorce itself is a complex phenomenon since sexual dissatisfaction in marital relationships has been reported to increase emotional tension, conflict, decrease in intimacy and infidelity that eventually ends up in divorce. According to Mark and Jozkowski (2013), sexual satisfaction is a key factor to sustain relationships, and intimately satisfied couples have shown higher levels of connection gratification. Also, Amato and Previti (2003) have listed infidelity, incompatibility and alcohol or drug use as major causes of divorce.

In fact, the spiritual and sexual connection is polygonal, and scholars consider spirituality to promote sexual fulfillment among couples (Bajpai and Maiti, 2021). Marriage in Hindu culture

involves the holy union of two souls. There are various traditional ceremonies for marriage events and some have been codified into the legal system and local customs. Experts suggest that the Hindu religious concept of marriage with its strong spiritual underpinnings can be beneficial for Western countries if adopted naturally (Bhattacharyya, 2020). Marriage transcends sexual connection from body to spiritual level through yoga, which naturally has the potential to build emotional bond, trust and intimacy while preventing infidelity, the root cause for divorce. Such an amiable marriage agreement with a strong yogic component will certainly build enduring monogamous liaison in which the couple contribute to the human values of dharma, artha, kama and moksha (Sarbacker, 2011; Bea, 2008). But some may ask how does it work essentially?

Studies showed that when couples practice yoga and meditation, they have the potential to deal with their deal partners with clarity and calmness while speaking, touching and denoting gestures with emotional attunement that flows in sync to embellish resilient bondage (Helminiak, 2006). Besides, yoga has the ability to transform couples' relationships from physical to spiritual level through three steps that include physical (sexual health), emotional (intimacy, mindfulness) and spiritual (consciousness) to reduce disputes and strengthen connections and happiness (McCreary and Alderson, 2013). Yoga also has the capacity to enhance sexual health, prevent infidelity, reduce divorce, build emotional bonding between partners, and strengthen monogamous relationships (Bubber and Gala, 2023), and in the end, transcends the Western marriage from social construct to spiritual union. Therefore, I have designed this doctoral thesis research to explore the above mentioned three steps scenario where the yogic transformation of sexual relationships could transcend couples from physical dimension to spiritual dimension with a potential to strengthen passionate relationships while reducing emotional breakup and divorce.

The first chapter provides details on the overall introduction of the entire doctoral thesis. It synthesizes the overall objectives and the need for the study that include specific chapters on sexuality, spirituality and the *Yoga* model of spiritual transformation of western marriage. The second chapter describes objectives, hypothesis, methods and analysis. The third chapter explores the literature research by providing details on the concept and practices of Hindu marriage systems in ancient Indian tradition. It also provides citations from diverse Hindu scriptural documentations. The fourth chapter outlines the conceptual Yoga model of spiritual transformation of Western marriage. It synthesizes the contemporary marriage systems in practice in the West by highlighting the ongoing crises involving infidelity, emotional breakups and divorce with statistics from around the world. It presents a detailed theoretical Yoga model on how spirituality could play a key role in enhancing couples' lives to improve relationships among them to reduce breakups. The fifth chapter discusses the sacred association of couples and how it will lead to divine transcendence, by interpreting the literature from the Vedas, Upanishads, tantra and Taoist scriptures that highlight details on the role of sexual energy progressing towards enlightenment through spiritual progress. This chapter substantiates the published yoga literature on spirituality catalyzed by yoga and how it could maximize sexual intimacy while minimizing emotional breakups.

The sixth chapter further explores the less known sexual and spiritual aspects on the role of erotic temples, sexual energy and spiritual advancement with examples from popular Hindu temples and deities dedicated to sexual energy. The seventh chapter narrates facts on contemporary India's sexual spiritual paradox. The eighth chapter explores sexuality and spirituality from the angle of social evil to spiritual redemption. It underlines how women involved in one of the oldest professions of prostitution can be spiritually elevated towards

enlightenment with comparisons of examples from ancient scriptures. The ninth and last chapter concludes with an appraisal by thoroughly reviewing the strengths and weaknesses of sexuality and spirituality evidence presented in this thesis.

1.2. NEED FOR THIS STUDY

The doctrine of Hindu marriage and *Yoga* offers unique life-style benefits to ensure long-term positive relationships among people in general and married couples in particular. Little is known in scientific research literature on the logical integration of sexuality, spirituality and *Yoga* and this thesis attempts to explore these least understood thematic subjects systematically. So, the results will be of great interest to yoga specialists, sociologists, sexologists, psychologists, psychiatrists, and psychosexual therapists. Also, the practical significance of the research is based on the fact that spiritual seekers locally, regionally and globally will be able to use the ideas, concepts and guidelines proposed in the study to incorporate into their lives for the overall growth and spiritual development.

The Hindu scriptures along with appropriate yoga conceptual practices provide immense knowledge for the transformation of the Western marriage consequence, from a contiguous civil contract scenario to a decisive sacred union leading to harmony among couples. Within this sacred union, a Western Yoga practitioner might realize all the four goals of life with the spouse's concrete support, help and cooperation. The long-lasting spiritual partnership together with the four life goals being fulfilled becomes the basis for reaching enlightenment as the final goal of Yoga. Thus, a model of spiritual transformation of Western marriage based on Yoga and Hindu scriptures is desperately needed for the Western Yoga practitioners and spiritual seekers considering the fact that Yoga has gained immense popularity in the West lately. Therefore this

doctoral study on Yoga is of great significance and importance in the current global perspectives, where everyone is desperately trying to search for a happier spiritual life.

1.3. SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The scope of this study is to create a tangible theoretical model of spiritual transformation of Western marriage catalysed by the Yogic and ancient Hindu scriptural concepts of sacredness associated with matrimony. In fact, data connecting the integrated aspects of the three differing subjects of yoga, spirituality and sexuality are poorly understood in scientific literature. Therefore this study aims to explore the key components involved in this rarely researched scientific undertaking in a cross-sectional and multidisciplinary standpoints. The overall outcome of this thesis impact can be consequential and far reaching since not many researchers have synthesised all the *Yoga*-related themes under an integrated elucidation of sexuality and spirituality. Therefore, the thesis attempts to create, shape and gadget through a systematic approach to generate spiritual, psychological, physical and emotional transformation of the Western marriage system catalysed by the Yogic and ancient Hindu scriptural ideologies. More longitudinal research work nevertheless needs to be done in near future as the thesis has presented a clear roadmap to achieve the final objective.