

Abstract

The thesis entitled “**PHILOSOPHY OF MARRIAGE: AN EAST-WEST COMPARATIVE STUDY**” attempts to explicate the essence of marriage from an ethical and philosophical perspective. Even though marriage is a social issue and skeptic may raise a question about its philosophical significance but after a painstaking examination of the outlook of marriage from East and West, it reveals that marriage is an integral part of life. Marriage has the biological and cultural necessity and men as social and rational animals cannot overlook their engagement in marriage in a normal situation. To avoid marriage is certainly a mental blockage of humans because it goes against biological and cultural necessity. Marriage is deeply associated with philosophy because if philosophy is all about a way of life, then the marriage cannot be dissociated from life. However, the concept of marriage and the history of marriage is a very complex and complicated phenomenon. If we look at the history of marriage from antiquity down to the postmodern period, then it would seem very clear to us that due to overlapping customs, traditions, and cultural diversity, the concept of marriage takes different approaches and interpretations.

The comparative study of marriage between East and West makes the thesis very interesting. The West differs from the East both economically and culturally. Western society leads a materialistic life and the Eastern country like India leads a spiritualistic life. The West does not believe that there is a life after death, whereas the Indian spiritual tradition views that there is a life after death. As a result of that, the meaning of life and the value of the world is determined differently in the West as well as in the East. In the West, the purpose and objective of marriage are justified from pragmatic and rational ways, whereas in the East the purpose and objective of marriage are justified from a spiritualistic perspective. Based on these two perspectives, there developed two different types of marriage, namely, formal

marriage and informal marriage. Court marriage is formal, whereas ritual marriage is informal. When formal marriage was not developed, informal marriage based on rituals were present. In Western society, marriage is formal and marriage is court marriage or legal marriage. But in India, marriage can be done both formally and informally. Informal marriage based on rituals is called conventional (traditional) marriage. Formal marriage (court marriage) emphasizes the legal aspect and it is just like a tie or an agreement between the husband and wife. There is a concrete rule to derecognize court marriage based on the willingness of both the husband and the wife and the consequence is termed as divorce. The term 'divorce' means separation by law. On the contrary, there is no mental separation in the case of ritual marriage. The very essence of ritual marriage is the unification of two souls into one soul. Thus there is no scope for mental separation in the case of spiritual or conventional marriage. The souls remained unified even after the death of the husband. In Indian shastras, there are as many as eight different types of marriages are recognized. However, among them, some are superior to others. However, in the case of formal marriage emphasized has been laid only on laws and nothing else.

Let us examine the philosophical relevance of marriage. Why marriage of any sort, formal or informal, spiritual or legal, matters to philosophy? In the West, great philosophers, such as Kant, Hegel, Mill, Russell, Nietzsche, and others were deeply engaged to explore the philosophical relevance of marriage. In the East, particularly in Indian traditions and shastras, we find plenty of literature where the philosophical relevance of marriage has been outlined. Kant, for example, conceived marriage as a 'social contract', while criticizing Kant, Hegel conceived marriage as a wedding ceremony. Hegel criticized Kant by saying that in marriage the term 'contact' is highly objectionable because any contact is a mere agreement which is unlikely in the case of marriage. We think there remains a misunderstanding between Kant and Hegel. By the term 'contact', Kant does not mean mere social contact; rather he

conceived it as moral contact where obligation and promise are involved. Kant was more concerned about sex problems as he thinks sex involves the degradation of humanity. Thus the contact of moral sexuality involves a promise and mutual acceptance. Contrary to Kant, Hegel claims that marriage involves a sense of membership in social life, and in this regard, the wedding ceremony constitutes a marriage. A public declaration through the wedding ceremony is essential. Hegel further contends that marriage involves a union of wills and it differs from contact. Through the marriage system, there is a transition of *personality to a new personality*. In the Indian system, we find the same sense as Hegel. Like Hegel, it is revealed that marriage is the unification of two different souls into one soul and such unification is a sort of transition of personality to a new personality. To Mill, an ideal marriage forms an ideal family and a very similar way in Indian shastras emphasized has been laid on an ideal marriage to form an ideal family. To form an ideal family we need to have an ideal progeny. Mill ignores gender discrimination while talking about marriage. In this regard, he attempts to overcome customary prejudices. Like Nietzsche, Mill gives importance to friendship because the master-slave (master-servant) relation that we observe in marital relations can only be overcome through friendship. Following Swami Vivekananda, we can say that women are just like a wing of a bird without which social development is not possible. In summing up we can say that marriage is essentially a biological and cultural necessity where friendship plays a significant role. Marriage is the unification of the soul. The best possible means of marriage is to bring good progeny. The marital relationship has developed moral responsibility, moral commitment, love, and friendship. All these are looked-for the reconstruction of a better society, family, and community at large. This is where the philosophical significance of marriage is grounded.

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