



## MARITAL DISSOLUTION AND STABILITY: BIBLE VS. CHITRA BANERJEE DIVAKARUNI'S ARRANGED MARRIAGE: A CRITICAL NOTE

**S.F. Filomine White Sheela**

*Ph. D Scholar cum Guest Lecturer, Department of English & Comparative Literature,  
Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai.*

### **Abstract**

*This paper is a humble attempt to get a bird's eye view on marriage from the vision of Bible and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni. Generally speaking, let no man separate what God has united, the view point is universally true, but how one applies in the form of marriage matters here a lot. Even though men practice marriage and divorce God's plan is only for uniting.*

**Keywords: Procreation, Adultery, Desertion, Dowry, Matchmaker, Divorce.**

Marriage is the process by which two people make their relationship public, official, and permanent. It is the joining of two people in a bond that lasts until death, but in practice is often cut short by divorce. Over the course of a relationship that can last as many as seven or eight decades, a lot happens. Personalities change, bodies age, and romantic love waxes and wanes. And no marriage is free of conflict. But even in these early times, marriage was much about love and desire as it was social and economic stability. In its roundness, the engagement ring, a custom dating back to the Ancient Rome, is believed to represent eternity and everlasting union. It was once believed a vein or nerve ran directly from the 'ring' finger of the left hand to the heart.

Many other modern day marriage traditions have their origins in these ancient times. Understanding of marriage contrasted greatly from culture to culture. Some cultures viewed the institution as endogamous (men were required to marry within their own social group, family, clan, or tribe), exogamous (marrying outside the geographical region or social group) or polygamous (allowing men to take more than one bride). Polygamy was formally banned towards the end of the Roman Empire with laws against adultery, fornication and other relationships outside a monogamous lifelong covenant. The seeds of modern marriage were sowed here and they extended into the modern Western world.

During the Victorian era romantic love became viewed as the primary requirement for marriage and the rituals of courting became even more formal. An interested gentleman could not simply walk up to a young lady and begin a conversation. He had to be formally introduced and only after some time was considered appropriate for a man to speak to a lady or for a couple to be seen together. Once formally introduced, if a gentleman wished to escort a lady home from a social function he would present his card to her and at the end of the evening the lady would review her options and chose who would be her escort! She would then notify the lucky gentleman by giving him her own card requesting that he escort her home. Almost all courting took place in the girl's home, always under the eye of watchful parents. If the courting progressed, the couple might advance to the front porch. It was also rare for couples to see each other without the presence of a chaperone, and marriage proposals were frequently written.

Divorce has existed for about as long as marriage so although had a lot of practice at monogamy. The ancient Greeks liberally allowed divorce, but even then the person requesting divorce had to submit the request to a magistrate, who would determine whether or not the reasons given were sufficient. In contrast divorce was rare in early Roman culture. However, as the empire grew in power and authority, civil law embraced the idea that either husband or wife could renounce the marriage at will. Throughout the last thousand years, divorce was generally frowned upon and from the earliest years of the Christian age the only 'proper' way to dissolve a marriage was by annulment - a status that was granted only by the Church.

Marriage is the union of a man and a woman who makes a permanent and exclusive commitment to each other of the type that is, naturally fulfilled by bearing and rearing children together. The spouses seal and renew their union by conjugal acts that constitute the behavioral part of the process of reproduction, thus uniting them as a



reproductive unit. Marriage is valuable in itself, but its inherent orientation to the bearing and rearing of children contributes to its distinctive structure, including norms of monogamy and fidelity. It has sometimes been suggested that the conjugal understanding of marriage is based only on religious beliefs. This is false, although the world's major religious traditions have historically understood marriage as a union of man and woman that is by nature apt for procreation and childrearing, this suggests merely that no one religion invented marriage. Instead, the demands of our common human nature have shaped all of our religious traditions to recognize this natural institution. As such, marriage is the type of social practice whose basic contours can be discerned by our common human reason, whatever our religious background.

Most Christians see marriage as a gift from God and a sacred institution. Having a sound Christian perspective on marriage is vitally important today as many in our society are trying to redefine marriage to fit their particular social or political agendas. Love and relationships are a central theme in the Bible, beginning in Genesis and culminating in Revelation. God designed us for a relationship with Him. The whole of Scripture speaks of our relationship with Him: how to have it, how to hold onto it, how to rest in it, how to communicate it, how to enjoy it. But, God did not want us to just have relationship with Him alone. He created others that we might also learn to live with and love those He places in our lives, the most intimate of human relationships, for the purpose of refining us, chiseling off our selfish human nature, and making us more. Marriage also has purposes beyond each individual marriage that relate to God's plan for mankind. In fact there are three clear purposes outlined in Genesis. Christian marriages are to (i) reflect God's image: Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness.... So, God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them" (Genesis 1:26-27). Each individual (as a male and as a female) is created in the image of God. However, a married couple has a unique capacity to reflect His image as husband and wife. When we recognize our purpose is to reflect the image of God, we see that we have an opportunity to be a witness to a lost world. (ii) Reproduce: God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it" (Genesis 1:28a). Marriage is an opportunity for men and women to produce children. Children are a gift from God and with them comes great responsibility: children are to be raised in His "likeness." (iii) Reign: God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it" (Genesis 1:28a). According to this verse, married couples are to "subdue" the earth. To accomplish this requires good stewardship in the physical realm over that which God has given. It also requires diligence in the spiritual realm. Together married couples are to be "soldiers" directed by God to accomplish His intentions on earth. Marriage is a significant institution by which a lost world can see Christianity in action. Marriage is the most intimate of human relationships in which husbands and wives learn to model Christ's love. Marriage is the 18-year training ground for children so that they can also love "one another." Marriage provides a unique opportunity to reflect Him as a couple. Marriage provides a platform for accomplishing God's intentions for mankind.

Marriages in India appear to be successful due to the extremely low divorce rates, many of these marriages may not be happy due to the effects after divorce. Many women in arranged marriages are unhappy but remain married because divorce would bring shame to the family name, she will be judged harshly by her community, and may not have financial security. Most parents in India have the best intentions for their children to marry a suitable spouse. Parents work hard to look for a well-educated person, a good family background, and who will be a good provider for their son or daughter. Typically women who are in a bad marriages stay with their husbands because if she divorces him she will then bring shame to her family. Women are harshly criticized and are isolated from the community than men are. Many women do not have any other options but to stay in bad marriages because if they divorce their spouse they will have to find a job so she can depend on herself and for her children, pay divorce lawyers, the community will see her as an outcast, she will have no support from her family because she has brought shame to their family name, it will be harder for her to remarry etc. The consequences for divorces are much more complicated for women in India than for men and shows why numerous of women stay in a bad marriage.



Now that we are in the twentieth century more women in India are allowed to get a divorce but only under certain circumstances. India has five common grounds which allow people to divorce their spouse which are 'adultery, desertion, cruelty, impotency, and chronic disease.' People in India believe that once a spouse have sexual intercourse with someone other than their partner they should get a divorce and are then harshly judged upon their community. Laura Palmer emphasizes,

Although the law considers adultery by either sex as grounds for divorce, an adulterous woman is generally judged more harshly than a man by their community. (562-66).

Women are generally judged worst because the people may believe that she did not satisfy any of the husband's needs and is then frowned upon. Some men take advantage into their customs because they know that women usually cannot do anything about it. Many women in India have to keep quiet and do as their told. Unhappy arranged marriages in India are a serious problem that many women go through. Women fall into depression because of their spouses who repeatedly beat them physically, mentally, and spirituality. The bride's parents do not mean any harm to their child when finding a suitable spouse. Parents look into the candidate's family reputation, if their financially well, how they are in general and note into account they may lie at times and later show their true colors after the wedding. Sometimes even with the help of a traditional matchmaker, the candidates could have lied of any abuse encounters they must have had. Arrange marriage is a trap for numerous women in India that can lead to a domestic abuse, suicide attempts, and an unhappy marriage.

**Arranged Marriage** is a collection of eleven stories, covering almost all the aspects of marriage, be it first love, demanding kids or the unsatisfied couple quitting their relationship to search for newer pastures. The stories are diverse in theme, characters and narration, and yet bound together by the common thread of marriage. Some of these stories talk about the steady love that glues a couple together while others expose the misplaced trust a woman places in her violent husband. And, still others revealed the bitter sweet relationship a wedded duo enjoys. The stories elicit pathos of each woman's struggle while trying to adapt to alien culture and trying to save their arranged marriage, orchestrated by their parents on the basis of status and skin colour of men rather than the compatibility factor. The stories also show as to how women lived their lives not just for themselves, but also for their husbands ignoring their abuses and intolerance. The stories can be best described as cross-cultural themes, of which the author has shown deep understanding considering the complexities of this culture. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni writes, the matchmaker considers family background, economic position, general character, family reputation, the value of the dowry, the effect of alliance on the property, and other family matters.

This story, **Silver Pavements, Golden Roofs** is about a young girl Jayanti, who comes to Chicago to stay with her aunt for her graduation studies at an American university. But, slowly she is disillusioned with the riches of America and the anomaly in her aunt's marriage. In a hard hitting manner, the story revealed the imperfection of aunt's perfect marriage and the true face of racism suffered by Indians on foreign land. Lee states, Divorce still carries a great stigma, India is a country in which divorce sometimes is not an option for many women and those seeking dissolution have encountered violence.

Numerous of women do not have a voice in their marriage and have been victims of domestic abuse. The thrust of the narrative is on the perspective on marriages of long-standing and that differences that can develop in such marriages when the couple lives abroad cut off from family and culture.

**The Word Love** is one of the story, which is about an Indian graduate student living in Berkeley with her American boyfriend. When her mother comes to know about this she avoids talking to her, because of this reason, she gradually gets alienated from her boyfriend. At this juncture, the author has precisely handled the concept of a new scene that opens towards young Indian immigrants, when they go abroad they are completely alienated from their family. She has been able to capture the unsettled sensibility of Indian women living in a modern world and the consequent result of experiencing the guilt of living together. That is, Indian women struggle to be a modern women but stumbles with traditional values and customs. S.Pothen has stated that arranged marriage in India is sacred. It is not just a traditions customs but a lasting of seven births by the gods. Many people do not realize that



arranged marriages, it is harder for women to get a divorce since they will be frowned upon. Communities will judge harshly on women than men, the family name will be in shame and they will become an outcast.

Another off beat story was, **Perfect Life**, this is the story of, an Indian American Meera, living with her boyfriend, Richard. She refuses to marry, even though several requests from her mother, because one day she finds a young boy under the stairs. Finally, she adopts him and named him as Krishna. The Child Protective Services find out about the boy and takes him away from her and put in foster care. Krishna, the small boy ranaway after some days. Meera is in search of him and mourns like a mother, who had lost a child. The author has dealt with the subject of the mother-child relationship concentrating mainly on the love, thus explored the opinion as why individuals want to become parents.

**Affair** is the story about Meena and Srikant, a couple who got married after their perfect horoscope matching. But soon they realize that they are mismatched in every phase of life. This results in extra-marital relationship of the couple, where Srikant sleeps around with his close friend and his wife Meena has affair with an American in her office. As a result, the perfectly arranged marriage becomes nothing and latter ends up in divorce. Here the author concludes the point that the harmony of partners does not depend on their horoscopes, instead, the couples might try to adjust to their partners in all course of time. To adapt, M.H. Abrams's definitions of realistic fiction, "represents life and the social world as it seems to the common reader, evolving the sense that its characters might in fact exist and such things might well happen"

**Meeting Mrinal** is the story of Asha, whose husband Mahesh ditches her for his white secretary, Jessica. To compound the miseries she is also not on good terms with her teenage son. When she meets up with her childhood friend, Mrinal, she tries to camouflage her pain and sufferings and tries to portray a rosy picture of her beautiful married life. But Mrinal could see through this deceitful behavior, as reality is not different for her either. Through this story the author accentuates the fact that though the protagonists defy the tradition of an arranged marriage this has resulted only in isolation and loneliness for them. The author splendidly portrays the characters' explosive convergence of two incompatible pressures – one, to abide by the traditions and please their husbands and two, to strive for a modern and independent lives.

To conclude, most arranged marriages in India have an extremely low divorce rate but not only because their happily married but because women are trapped. Women do not have any options but to stay in an unhappy marriage due to the effects of divorce. Arranged marriages in India are sacred and breaking the family traditions, both spouses will be looked down upon. Divorce will bring shame on the family name, women will be judged harshly by the community, and they will not be financially stable since the men were the provider.

God planned for marriage to be a life-giving relationship. This doesn't just mean that it ought to lead to the husband and wife having children and starting a family together. Often Marriage is described as a blessed union of two souls, happily ignoring the hardships of a lifelong commitment, the hazards of living with a man of your exact opposite nature, making small and big compromises with or without your consent, while inwardly hoping to let things be alright by themselves. But, as a coin has two sides, one side can never be overlooked in preference to the other. Though, most novelists try to paint either a fantastically beautiful or a grim ugly picture. But, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni has tried to strike a balance between the two in her book Arranged Marriage and has done so with style.



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