



EXTRA-MARITAL RELATION: A CONTRADICTORY ASPECT OF SOCIETY

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ABSTRACT

Social institutions are the basic ingredients for the survival of a society. Likewise, the norms, customs or values associated with the institutions are also essential. The social construction of such rules in marriage as a primary social institution plays a vital role in every marital relationship. The changes in the cultural elements of society have been articulated in the moral codes of diverse social institutions. With this, the extra-marital relationships are not uncommon in today's society. Globally, the rate of extra-marital relations is increasing during the last decades. Such increase cases have been a challenge to the traditional norms of marriage as social institution. This has affected the marital relationships as well as the society as a whole. Hence, this paper has been made to investigate such relationships among married couples from sociological lens. The paper has also been connecting to show the reasons behind raising extra-marital relationships as a social problem in contradiction to the traditional norms of marriage in contemporary society.

Keywords: *extra-marital relation, traditional norm, marriage, social institution.*

INTRODUCTION

Marriage is socially defined as a basic social norm of human community. Marital relations seem to be good for societal benefits (Schneider, 1985). Marriage emphasises legal and social obligations to man-woman and to the society (Nwoye, 1991). It is considered as the main domain of kinsmen. In India, marriage is constructed as spiritual union (Jain, 2012). Similarly, extra-marital relations are also socially constructed as disruptive and risky affairs for any marital relations as well as for the society (Schneider, 1985). Traditionally, extra-marital relation has been considered as a sign of wrong deeds in primary relationships (Glass, 2003). A common belief is held that about 66% of men and 55% of women engaged in extra-marital affairs in some way or other throughout the married life (Gass and Nichols, 1988).

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Across the world, in all cultures, marriage is the oldest form of social institution. It has been considered as the only union between two sexes which is subjected to diverse social and legal provisions (Bethmann and Kvasnicka, 2010). Sex and procreation can only take place within marital relation as per legal and extra-legal norms. Thus, within the marriage contract, sexual intercourse is implied (Hamilton, 2004). Various studies have shown that extra-marital relations can be impacted negatively on marriage which may leads to devastating experiences (Pittman, 1994). This relation is defined as emotional or sexual act by a person who breaches violation of an already committed relationship (Moller and Vossler, 2015).

In many discourses, extra-marital relation is often equated with extra-marital sex with heterosexual intercourse. Significantly, Edwards defined extra-marital behaviour ranging from flirtation to intercourse. Moreover, in terms of coitus or intercourse there is also variation regarding frequency and number of partners (Sprey, 1972). Sometimes, such relations are also intensely emotional that separated the emotional self from sexual self (Thompson, 1982). Studies of 1980s highlighted gender differences played a prominent role in extra marital relations (Glass and Wright, 1995). It showed that men, due to their greater need for sensations, more likely to engaged in extra marital relationships (Lalasz and Weigel, 2011). Moreover, differences in responses are also observed between men and women. For women emotional commitment outside a relationship is unfaithful even there is no physical act, in contrary, for men physical intimacy outside the committed relationship is unfaithful (Thornton and Nagurney, 2011).

Nevertheless, globally, marriage is seen as a tool to provide wellbeing to the families and children. This social policy of marriage is manifest through legislation. In this regard, the law makers proposed and accepted marriage as mechanism for socially desirable outcomes. Government suggests that marriage itself promotes social welfare (Hamilton, 2004). Keeping in view the social importance of marriage, extra-marital relation is considered as the violation of purity and social welfare nature of marriage. Countries all over the world have different legal definitions regarding extra-marital relations. In some countries like Malaysia, Sweden, Finland, Netherlands, Belgium, Austria, Britain and Singapore this is not a punishable act while in some Islamic countries like Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Egypt, it is an offensive



behaviour (Chowbe, 2011). In context of India, there is difference in ancient and modern period definitions and punishments for extra-marital relations. For example, the Hindu

Matrimonial laws do not consider extra-marital relation as a ground for divorce (Murthy, 1988), similarly, for Manu a upper caste man having relation with lower caste women is not comes under punishable acts but the adversely it is an offence (Chowbe, 2011). However, according to section 497 of Indian Penal Code, 1860, a married man would face punishment if he is in sexual relation with another married woman without the knowledge of her husband; on the other hand, there is no any direct punishment for a woman (Santosh, 2021). Besides, the Constitution of India, define extra-marital relations (adultery) on sexual ground rather than any emotional commitment with another person apart from spouse and where, the woman cannot filed complain of her husband, but the husband of the accused woman can file complain where the law will punish the man not the woman. Besides, the Indian constitution considers adultery as civil issues rather than a criminal offence (Indian Bureau, 2019).

Sociologically, the functioning of a society is based on the maintenance of its equilibrium. A balanced equilibrium can be sustained in accordance with the norms and moral codes of a society. Without such customs, a society will become normlessness as articulated by Durkheim. A pathological society is the outcome of such normless behaviours and actions of individuals within the society. Nevertheless, in one hand, changes in societal norms and on the other hand, not coping up with such changes leads to pathological or anomic social conditions. Likewise, since the last decades marital relations have been witnessing such instability and breakdown of its standards and values. In modern society, monogamy is accepted as ideal marriage, but with the changes of societal customs and the outlook of individuals, such monogamy marriage has shaken by extra-marital relations between the married spouses. Deviation from such path of society will not only bring disturbance to the primary relationship between married spouses but also to the larger society. With such divergences among the spouses there is also deviation in the expected norms of marriage as social institution. Hence, through this paper an effort is made to explore such deviations in marriage in reference to extra-marital relations, its factors as well the social repercussions.

APPLICATION OF METHODS



The study has been based on qualitative approach. For the study, both primary and secondary sources of data collection method have been used. The sample were selected randomly throughout the Golaghat district of Assam based on the information given by the district

counsellor, reported cases at the district Police station, and the Mahila Samiti of the district within the year 2019-2021. For primary data collection, questionnaire method has been used which were mail to the samples. The questionnaires were sent to 557 individuals belongs to diverse age groups, socio-economic backgrounds, education qualifications, of which 295 (135 women, 160 men) were responded. The criteria for the selection of the samples were: the respondents must be married and have an extra-marital relation either by herself/himself or by the respective spouse for about minimum 1 month during the married life. To maintain research ethic, approval from the concerned sources, from where the samples selected, have been taken to maintain the privacy of the samples and all the samples provided informed consent. For secondary data, the various literatures like magazines, articles, newspapers, books and other related documents were used. The study is exploratory in nature.

ANALYSIS

Extra- Marital Relation: a Non-Ethical Code of Conduct

Extra-marital relations are socially constructed under marital scripts according to the social construction perspective put forwarded by Peter Berger and Luckmann (1966). The social world, through which individuals are socialised, internalised the reality as sole reality, non-problematic with no explanation and doubt. Like this, the marital script is also constructed where for some extra-marital relation comes under this marital fist (Atwood and Seifer, 2007). In Indian society, marriage is considered as the building block of primary kin. As a moral code of conduct, in contemporary society, monogamy is recognised as an ideal form of marriage. It is the union between one man and woman who can meet mutual needs without the necessity of others (Nuebeck and Schletzer, 1962). Thus, engaging in a relation to meet the emotional and sexual needs, outside the marriage is not welcoming. This relation may vary from with one or more frequent relationships to isolated affair (Weil, 1975). As per the traditional norms of marriage, extra-marital relation is non ethical. It is a threat to the unity of the family as well as illustration of deviancy of society. Thus, from sociological perspective,



extra-marital relation is a normlessness situation of marriage. Such relations are non-functional in nature. However, with the growing of such normlessness aspect of marriage, the harmony and solidarity among the members of society, more specifically within a family will

get affected negatively. Such change in marital relation might welcome various anti-social instances between the spouses like betraying, incompatibility, frustration, discouragement, stress, anxiety, divorce, etc (Weil, 1975). Besides, extra-marital relations can also distinguish between strongly emotional, sexual or both with a person other than spouse (Thompson, 1984). Though the Constitution of India declares extra-marital relation as civil issue, it is also denoted as anti-social behaviour by traditional norms which would bring social problems to the society. To maintain the stability of marriage, which is an important social component of society, the study on extra-marital relations, as pathological aspect of marriage must be taken seriously for proper understanding the changing trends of marriage as well as the society.

Moreover, extra-marital relation can also be considered as a deviant path to meet the needs of spouses. In this context, the respondents argued one of the reasons for involving in such relations is not happy in their married life. So, if a person is not satisfying or happy with married life, easily come in relation outside the marriage to fulfil those needs. In the eyes of society, such path is a deviated path that breakdown the expected norms of marriage as a social institution. Thus, sociologically, extra-marital relations can be labelled as one of the deviant or non-ethical aspects of society.

Extra-Marital Relation: Why to Involve and With Whom?

The sociological literatures argued that through cultural heritages, socialised a child to set a positive attitude towards love and negative attitudes towards sex. Sexual practices and sexual partners are taught to be evil. Thus, the physical sensual and affectionate are learned to be as different. But after marriage, society expected towards marital partners to fulfil both these elements (Winch, 1958). Similarly, the psychoanalytical theory suggested that as sex is degraded as dirt, there is the possibility to seek love from one person and sexual gratification from another. Due to the labelling of sex as dirt, it can be used to degrade someone (Winch, 1958). For those, sexual intercourse can be a medium to humiliate others rather than a part of marital relation (Horney, 1937). Both of these are not witnessed in the study as the respondents do not confirm any contextual factors. Commitment is regarded as the important



factor of love and to maintain a long-term marital relationship. It is believed that people with high commitment avoid intimate relation outside marriage and with lower more likely to involve (Hadi et al., 2016) which is confirmed in the study. Being questioned the reasons

behind involvement in extra-marital relations, the various responses came which can be categories under two headings namely emotional support and sexual satisfaction as argued by Thompson (Thompson, 1984). Besides, some of the respondents are also argued for fulfilment of both the emotional and the sexual needs. Emotional needs are basically like lack of love and support, loneliness, insecurity, seeking of freedom, emotional involvement, revenge and anger while sexual needs are physical attraction, sexual dissatisfaction with partners, desire for multiple sexual partners and sexual fantasy. Under emotional needs, the rate of women is higher than men. Women whose husbands are not supportive, not able to give time or lives not in together, make relations outside the marriage for psychological causes or emotional support. According to the women respondents, they search for love and emotional support outside their marital relation for their own mental peace. Apart from emotional needs, sexual need is also a factor for a few numbers of women respondents. The women engaged in extra-marital relation for sexual satisfaction as their husbands are much elder to them, busy with their job, not live together and not having a satisfactory sexual relation with respective partners. However, in case of men, they responded the causes of having sexual relation outside marriage during the pregnancy of their wives, ill health of the wives, and orlack of privacy due to the children. Some of the men said that as their wives are working women, mostly remain busy with both professional and personal chores, and such less time for husbands. Some of the men don't have cordial relation with their wives, does not get respect and love in marital relation, so engage in extra-marital relation in seeking of that. Besides, 56 (fifty-six) respondents argued to have extra-marital relation in strive for both emotional and sexual needs which they have been deprived from marital partners. However, there are also some scholars who claim that extra-marital relations can also occurs in romantic relationships (Mark et al., 2011) where both the partners are happy and sexually satisfied (Pronk and Righetti, 2015) which is disapproved in the current study.

In the study it has been validated that most of the respondents, especially women who marry at early age, are in extra-marital relations with their friends they come in contact through social media like Facebook and Instagram which is found in the study of Burgess and Cottrel



(1990) (Ogwokhademhe and Ishola, 2013). They said that chatting with online friends for a long duration build good emotional bonding which resulted in establishing intimate relation like married couples. In addition, some women are also having relation with their husbands'

friends. They come in contact through their husbands and become closer sexually. Such relations are mainly for fulfilling the sexual needs. On the other hand, men are having such extra-marital relations mainly with their female friends and colleagues. Moreover, social media is also a platform too for them to build extra-marital relation as flirtation. Some of the male respondents also confessed to have sexual relations with their wives' friends, sisters, and cousins and house maids, but they claim such relations are only limited to physical attraction not emotional bonding. Emotional bonding for men that established outside the marriage are with colleagues and female friends or with someone whom they known personally for a longer period of time. Along with, out of all the cases, 9 cases are found to be with homosexual relations. According to them as they married to heterosexual partners because of family pressure and thus engage in extra-marital relations for both emotional and sexual needs.

DISCUSSION

The extra-marital relation is one of the non-sanction relationships of society (Kell, 1992), which exist between the shadow of odium and focused on lustful reflection (Seveik, 2017). The first scientific investigation on the reasons for extra-marital relation was conducted by Glass and Wright, and found 17 justifications where men presenting more sexual justifications and women were related to emotional justifications (Scheeren et al., 2018), which is again justified in the current study. As mentioned above, the study highlighted diverse forms or types of extra-marital relation where the partners for extra-marital relations are range from person of face-to-face relation to online friends as per the responses in the study. The study challenges the stereotypical belief that extra-marital relation is highly sexual, however, 18 respondents claimed to have serious emotional intimacy (love) with extra-marital partners. The study reveals women are more emotionally connected to extra-marital partners than men. In the study, men are more sexually attracted to someone if their sexual urges are not fulfilled within marital domain. Though, there is gender difference in the motives of extra-marital relations, but all the respondents confessed to have their relation



outside marriage at least for 5-6 months. These relations occur with men when their wives get pregnant, victims of chronic ill and mostly not live in together. However, in case of women, though not living together is a reason, but mostly they involve when they do not get importance and lacking in emotional intimacy from their marital partners. Besides, the study

also reveals that a few women are having relations with younger men out of fantasy or old age of the husband. Here, the marital partner is itself is a cause. In such case, the respondents opined that they married a man much older to them because they don't have choice and now their married life is not working. Such statements are also justified by the deficit model by arguing that extra-marital relation is the result of dissatisfaction in married life and problems in marriage (Etemadi et al., 2016).

But in case of men, sexual needs or sexual fantasy is more common as factors of extra-marital relation as observed in the study. This notion is also supported by evolution model. This perspective opined that by nature men is desire for multiple sexual partners (Etemadi et al., 2016). Apart from sexual satisfaction in married life, men are often pursuit for variety and fun. Many researchers are also viewed that men can ignored social norms more easily than women and thus engaged more in extra-marital relations (Barta and kiene, 2005) which is rejected by the current study. Moreover, the reasons are not only limited to either sexual fantasy or flirtation as suggested by many studies, but some serious emotional bonding which they cannot experience in marital relations which is regarded as one of the causes to grow extra-marital relation. In this context, according to some researchers, extra-marital relations grow in a bad and dull relations (Scheinkman & Werneck, 2010) is highly supported in the study. The study also reveals that in case of working men and women, the extra-marital relations are mostly with own colleagues. The reasons, according to them is as they remain in touch for most of the time, frequently attending official parties, meetings and holidays, they came close with strong emotional bonding and in some cases only as sexual partners. Such cases are more prevalent among those who do not live with marital partners because of their work.

On the contrary, besides, emotional and sexual needs, sometimes extra-marital relations are the results of context or societal norms. In the study it has been seen that homosexuals who married to heterosexuals are also involve in extra-marital relations. They responded that as



their married life does not bring emotional as well as sexual satisfaction, they want to maintain and enjoy their sexuality with someone whom they find companion. For them as society does not understand their sexual orientations, they are bound to involve in extra-marital relations by keeping aside its negative impact and non-ethical nature.

Differences in opinion, gap in expectation, psychological deprivation, marriage age, sexual incompatibility, differences in choices between marital spouses are some factors of marital instability(Sandberg et al., 2012).The coming of social media platform is also a contributing factor in marriage instability. In the study it has been confirmed that through such platforms the access to online dating leads to strengthening of intimate relation outside the marriage. Earlier marital relations are considered to be socially expected kin to form a family with psychological, social, economic support to the individuals. However, such earlier notions of marriage have been taken place by extra-marital relations. The study confirmed how a person seek for satisfying needs outside the marriage is becoming very common, if the needs do not as per the expectation inside the marital relations. In contrary to the traditional belief of discussing or putting effort to strengthen the marriage, focus is given on to get rid of the marriage itself. Escaping from the problem instead of solving is also validating in marital relations. The findings of the study illustrated such changing cultural elements of marriage which is a contradict aspect of society. Now a days, it has been witnessed how marriage as a social institution has changed its morality and elements of emotional commitment. However, such characteristics have been changing with the change of society. Now a days, individuals are becoming more individualistic in nature, individual comfort and satisfaction is gaining more importance than family's welfare, societal norms and institutions. Such non-ethical consideration in any primary kin affected a whole family.

The responses of the study assured the gender difference in the causes as well as the reaction to extra-marital relations. The study also clarifies that extra-marital relations are not only confine with the negative impact. Such relations are not the problems nor resulted in problematised marriage as found in various literatures. Such relations are also based on genuine affection, respect, mutual interest, which one may not find in the marital relation as highlighted in the present study (Weil, 1975).



CONCLUSION

The repercussions of extra-marital relations have been interpreted in diverse way by various scholars ranging from tension and anxiety to unimportant for marriage stability (Weil, 1975). Kinsey opined until discovered such relation does not disturb marital relations (Kinsey et al., 1948). On the other hand, some scholars suggested it as contributed in sexual adjustment within marriage by providing scope in learning new techniques of sexual intercourse. For some women, they learn orgasm with another and can satisfied their husbands and for some males, such relations made them realise that their wives are better partners (Simpson, 1966). Whatever the literatures suggested the current study confirmed extra-marital relation as a dominant factor of problematic marriage. The study extended the existing literatures on extra-marital relations and highlighted how lack of communication between couples can be a cause of marital problems. Extra-marital relation is one of them which regarded as socially unacceptable behaviour. At the same time, the growth of extra-marital relation is welcoming variety of breakdowns in committed relationships and in some extreme cases, may resulted in loss of life. It is considered as the prominent factor for divorce in different cultures (Fincham and May, 2017). It not only affects the relation between spouses but the whole family. In almost every case, the children are highly affected. Their personal growth, believes in social institutions like marriage and family, etc., will be shaken because of witnessing extra-marital relation within the marital scripts. Such socially disapproved relations never get social recognition and thus hamper in the growth and development of a person. Thus, rather than satisfying needs, such intimate relations outside the marriage hampers not only the relations of a family but the society at large. The existence of any disorganised relation also disorders the functioning of society. Similarly, the social structure of a society will lead towards undiscipline order. People will lose faith in relations, social institutions, social process and the social structure due to such negativity which may further create a gap among the individuals of a society. It disrupts the morale of the society as well as the psychological stability of individuals. Moreover, the situation is worse in case when everyone gives cold eyes on such issues rather than combatting. Thus, instead of murmuring or giggling, focus should give on combatting such problems. The study highlighted how the intimate relation outside marriage is no more a personal problem but flatter into a social problem as it affecting the majority of the people of a society as well as it is not confined to a particular society but universally increasing at a high pace. Significantly, attention should be given on to look for



the root cause of such social rampant by reformatting the social values in order to save the humanity from societal muddle.

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