

1 The Metaphor of Marriage in Maharshi Ramana's Physicality to 2 Spirituality

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7 **Abstract**

8 Marriage as an institution in India has strong spiritual connotations. It goes beyond the mere
9 satisfaction of physical desires-one of the four goals of human life i.e. Dharma (conducting
10 one's duty with compassion and righteousness), Artha (earning money), Kama (satisfying
11 physical desires) and Moksha (liberation). These goals have been sanctioned by the Hindu
12 scriptures which complete the cycle of life. The present generation in India and elsewhere has
13 indulged in pursuing Artha and Kama so much, that they seem to have neglected the other
14 main two goals of life-Dharma and Moksha. It is by incorporating these into life that the
15 Kama may be meaningful. The present paper explores the religious connotation of the term
16 ?Kama? in Hinduism keeping in view Maharshi Ramana's poetry. It considers the metaphor
17 of marriage in a spiritual sense and relates the usage of this metaphor to other poets in Indian
18 religious tradition. It is in this perspective that metaphor of marriage is to be seen portraying
19 the higher concept of union of soul-bride and God- bridegroom.

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21 **Index terms**— marriage, soul, God, spirituality.

22 **1 Introduction**

23 Indian spiritual philosophy rests on the attainment of liberation from the multiple fetters of body and thought.
24 Maharshi Ramana says:

25 To know the lord is To know our Being, Free of seeming fetters Of body and thought (Anantanarayanan, 1997: 26 44) Hindu philosophy of religion corroborates the resplendent reality of self-realization beyond body consciousness. 27 However, the realization of this Bliss can be obtained only in human body. Human body is a rarity to be got 28 as the soul travels through endless circles of birth and cycles of time. The sheaths of ignorance keep the self- 29 effulgent light covered in the wraps of senses, ego and worldly enjoyments. The goal of life according to Hindu 30 religious thought is to remove these sheaths and be aware of Being-Consciousness-Bliss. The same is true of 31 the idea of Hindu marriage where the two persons pursue Dharma (conducting one's duty with compassion and 32 righteousness), Artha (earning money), Kama (satisfying physical desires) and Moksha (liberation). The concept 33 of marriage in spiritual terms goes to antiquity in India. Progeny by procreation was, no doubt one of the major 34 goals of the institution of marriage. Author ? : Department of English, B.P.S. Women University, Khanpur Kalan 35 (Sonipat), Haryana, India. E-mail : kiransikka@yahoo.com 36 but attached to such goals were other more 37 important goals of spirituality. That is why, the idea of marriage in Hindu thought exists beyond the physical 38 union of two persons and enters the realm where it symbolizes and conceptualizes the union of human soul and 39 God. The idea of this union has been used as a metaphor in the poetry of the most of the saints of India: Guru 40 Nanak, Mirabai, Kabir, Sheikh Farid, Mahatma Buddha and Ravidas-to name a few-who have all looked upon 41 marriage not as a satisfaction of mere physical desires but to pursue the important goals of life already cited. It is in this broader meaning of metaphor that the present paper views marriage in Maharshi Ramana's poetry.

42 2 II.

43 3 Metaphor

44 The online etymology dictionary traces the etymology of the word "metaphor" to late 15th century from French
45 métaphore meaning "to transfer the sense of one word to another word". It's Latin and Greek origin can also be
46 traced over to indicate the same meaning—"to carry over". The similarity of sense in metaphor, whether decorative
47 or an enriching mode of conceptualization, is its essential element. Metaphor is, thus, a mystery of language
48 which when viewed as a figure of speech suggests resemblance according to its traditional view.

49 Metaphor has traversed a long distance from the classical period to modern age with contributions from
50 Aristotle to Gerard Steen. There are two sets of views about metaphor. Encyclopedia Britannica defines it as a
51 "figure of speech that implies comparison between two unlike entities, as distinguished from simile, an explicit
52 comparison signaled by the words "like" or "as." Aristotle talks of two kinds of style: the clear and simple style
53 which makes use of proper words and the style which raises poetry from commonplace to unusual and lofty by the
54 ornamental words. The greatest thing by far is to be a master of metaphor ??House, 1970: 121). For Aristotle,
55 poetry is a craft to be achieved by using linguistic devices such as metaphor.

56 This view of metaphor underwent a complete change with inputs from Coleridge, I. A. Richards, Cleanth
57 Brooks, Max Black, to name a few from the inexhaustible list that keeps on growing forever. Coleridge asserts
58 that words are living powers and not merely articulated air ??Erdman, 1978: 249). Tracing an interplay in
59 mind, word and thing, Coleridge accepted Volume XIII Issue II Version I connection between language and
60 truth based on divinity. He defines poetry as self-expressive activity with the help of modes like metaphor. In
61 The Philosophy of Rhetoric, Richards called metaphor an omnipresent principle of language and admitted that
62 they steer our thoughts. He proposed two very useful terms "tenor" and "vehicle" as components of metaphor
63 while talking about metaphors. The tenor is the idea conveyed or illuminated by the vehicle which is the actual
64 figurative expression ??Richards, 1936: 92-96). Cleanth Brooks defines modern poetic technique by calling it the
65 rediscovery of metaphor and the full commitment to metaphor. He calls poem an organic whole where poetic
66 images are not merely assembled but related to each other just as blossoms are related to other parts of a growing
67 plant. The beauty of a poem is like a flowering plant which needs a stalk, stem, leaves and roots ??Brooks, 1976:
68 60). Max Black in "More about Metaphor" made a strong case in favour of metaphor:

69 Conceptual boundaries not being rigid, but elastic and permeable; and because we often need to do so, the
70 available literal resource of the language being insufficient to express our sense of the rich correspondences,
71 interrelations, and analogies of domains conventionally separated; and because metaphorical thought and
72 utterance sometimes embody insight expressible in no other fashion ??Ortony, 1993: 33).

73 George Lakoff and Mark Johnson in Metaphors We Live By accept metaphor pervasive in language and
74 thought ??Lakoff and Johnson, 1980: 5). Zolton in Metaphor defines it as a mode of conceptualization and
75 "who we are and what kind of world we live in" (Kövecses, 2010: xi-xiii). Grounded into human experience of
76 each kind-cultural, perceptual, social and physical, we express the way we experience the world. The cognitive
77 view of metaphor takes into view this faculty of human mind to translate the abstract via concrete. The various
78 dimensions of human experiences in the outside world are manifested in the form of objective reality and expressed
79 in the form of subjective imagination of the writer. Metaphor captures the world of a poet in totality. Since the
80 boundaries of language are not fixed, it goes to the credit of a writer or a poet to make use of the boundless
81 capability of metaphor to enter the world of reality and the world beyond reality-a world of senses, reasoning,
82 perception and imagination. It is in this background that the present paper talks about metaphor of marriage
83 in Maharshi's poetry.

84 4 III.

85 5 Maharshi's Life

86 To know Maharshi Ramana is to know about your own self His life takes even the most uninitiated people on an
87 inner journey of body to self which opens many doors of Truth, Bliss and Consciousness. His life, his philosophy
88 and his works of prose and poetry are not mere philosophical statements but practical lessons of enlightenment.
89 He wrote whatever he practiced and taught the same to his devotees. Devoid of complex method of meditation,
90 his path is a simple path of self enquiry leading to a natural state of everlasting happiness.

91 The journey of Maharshi's life starts from Tiruchuzi in South India. Born on 30 th December, 1879 in an
92 ordinary middle class family to parents Allagmmal and Sundara, he was not very academically inclined. He spent
93 his childhood as an ordinary boy without even an inkling of the future spiritual transformation. However life
94 takes the course as it has to and as it is predestined. God had other things in store for him. His father died
95 when he was twelve years old. The family moved to his uncle's house where he spent a few years without any
96 remarkable incident. After a few years two incidents changed his life forever. An intense experience which had
97 repercussions on his future changed the course of his life. Despite being perfectly physically healthy, he had an
98 experience of near death. He felt the inert lifeless body and had a feeling that he was about to die. He awakened
99 to the immanent reality of a soul which never dies. He realized the import of Shri Krishna about what he said
100 in Bhagavad Gita regarding the immortality of soul "na hanyate hanyam?ne ?ar?re" (2.20).

101 He sought liberation from the inherent tendencies of ego clouding the mortal humans throughout their lives.
102 He was constantly aware of his identity with the Self-the deathless spirit. "The other thoughts might come and
103 go like the various notes of music, but the 'I' continued like the fundamental sruti note that underlies and blends
104 with all other notes," (The Collected Works ix-xvii) he himself explains. This 'I' for him was a liberation, a
105 miracle, an awareness and an awakening. It was in this background that Venkatraman was named Maharshi
106 Ramana-a title given to a great sage who inaugurates a new path. He opened a new path of jnana marga for his
107 devotees who turned to him for spiritual instructions.

108 M. Anantanarayana expresses the experience of awakening to the reality in beautiful words "The boy was
109 taken up into silence, the ecstasy of being which is beyond words but of which words have held tiny glimpses
110 the impassionate speech of mystics and seers. For, otherwise we should have possessed total darkness and not
111 the half light of wisdom" (Ananthanarayanan 8). The experience not only changed his whole life but charted a
112 future course on which not many tread. The remarkable thing about Venkatramana was that he immediately
113 recognized the fetters which bind human soul. He decided that he could not belong to both the worlds-the world
114 of ordinary people where one continues without awakening to self-effulgence and the world of God which is within
115 our own self. The same

116 **6 The Hindu Life**

117 The four stages of a Hindu's life are called Ashramas. The first stage is Brahmacharya-the student life. The
118 second stage is Grihastha-the life of house hold. The third stage is that of a Vanprastha-the stage of a hermit
119 and the fourth is Sanyasa or the wandering ascetic stage. In Hinduism one has to remain immersed in the first
120 stage to attain spiritual and practical knowledge for twenty five years after which one gets prepared for the next
121 stage of earning a living and leading a family life. Hinduism supports both the pursuits-earning money (Artha)
122 and satisfying physical desires (Kama). It lasts for fifty years and man prepares to lead the life of a hermit and
123 an ascetic. However, it is the second stage of human life that has led most of the spiritual seekers in India to the
124 door of knowledge. The bonds of marriage, family and society are very strong in India with a deep metaphorical
125 import. If one takes an overview of lives and poetry of Saints and Seers in India, one finds the metaphor of
126 marriage a dominant one.

127 V.

128 **7 Religious Poetry in India**

129 Kee n sunaehee gøreæe aapan ka (n)nee soe lagee aavehi saahurai nith n paæeaa hoe naanak suthee paæeai
130 jaan virathee sa(n)n (Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ang 23).

131 Haven't you heard the call from beyond, O beautiful soul-bride? You must go to your in-laws; you cannot stay
132 forever with your parents. O Nanak, one who sleeps in her parents' house is plundered in broad daylight.

133 Mirabai too, born in 1498 as a princess in Rajasthan always considered Sri Krishna as her eternal companion.
134 She grew up in a noble Rajput family and was married to the crown prince of Mewar. Her constant devotion
135 to God resulted in conflicts within the family. Her husband died and she refused to throw herself in the funeral
136 pyre. She became a wandering mendicant poet immersing herself deeply and whole heartedly in love for God. In
137 one of her most emotional poems she writes and makes use of the metaphor of marriage in the following words:
138 Pain and madness for Rana Our wedding bed is high up in the gallows People noticed me, point finger at me.
139 They see my desire (Poetry Chaikhana) Mirabai left the royal palace and continued her devotional life not caring
140 about the world outside.

141 Further, Kabir stands unique as a Saint because of the great tradition that prevails in India. He is revered by
142 Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs alike. Born in Varanasi probably around 1440 (the exact year is not known), he acts
143 as a human bridge to connect the different devotional traditions. He became a disciple of Swami Rama Nanda,
144 a Hindu. He found a creative way to display his love for God, Iswara or Allah-whatever name we wished to give.
145 In a poem titled "My Body is Ravi Das's poetry echoes of the same metaphor of physical union in continuation
146 with the tradition of Indian spiritual poetry. The Saints who have been discussed before do not need any further
147 exposition as their poetry invariably refers to the indissoluble union of soul and God as God is the primal source
148 where the soul-bride has to go and merge.

149 **8 VI.**

150 **9 Maharshi Ramana's Poetry**

151 Maharshi Ramana continues the same tradition although he was not married and a family man. Having been
152 exposed to a very short lived but peaceful and loving relationship of his parents-Alggmal and Sundara, (both
153 means beauty), he made use of metaphor of marriage extensively in his poetry. The first five poems addressed
154 to Arunachala make use of this metaphor. "The Marital Garland of Letters" (The Collected Works) is No one
155 knows my invisible life reality has also been realized by many other saints in To take the case of Guru Nanak,
156 who was born on 15 th April, 1469 in Talvandi and died in 1539. He continued' live with his family and discharge
157 his duties. Most of his religious poetry known as sabads makes abundant use of the metaphor of marriage. In

158 rich evocative images he talks about the human soul as bride and God as the house of in-laws. "Sajjan mere
159 rangle" is a sabad where Guru Nanak makes use of metaphor of soul-bride.

160 10 Global

161 even titled on the metaphor of marriage and in its 108 stanzas; most of the stanzas explain the love of God in
162 the garb of physical union. In the invocation itself Maharshi seeks permission from God Ganesha to bless him
163 to make this Marital Garland of Letters worthy of bridegroom Arunachala. The same metaphor continues in
164 the poem in different words and expressions that the present researcher noticed the repetition approximately
165 reference to his parents Algu and Sundara who were happily married to quote his words, "May thou and I be
166 one and inseparable like Algu and Sundara, Oh Arunachala" (Maharshi Ramana :82).

167 The metaphor can be explained in the background of strong relationship between husband and wife in India.
168 In the next metaphor, however the tone changes as he complains to God that he has lured him home but does
169 not allow the divine union, "Entering my house and luring me (To thine) why didst thou keep me prisoner in
170 thy Heart's Cavern oh Arunachala!"(83) Simultaneously, he asks the God why he drew him near. The metaphor
171 again sounds of physicality as he asks God further not to turn him away as people will blame him ??83). In yet
172 another comparatively stinging statement, he calls mind a female prostitute who wanders in the street to find
173 customers. The strumpet mind will cease to walk the street if only she finds Thee (83). He makes a request to
174 hold the mind wandering in distractions permanently so that his search may stop. His questioning continues in
175 the same form when he asks God to prove his chivalry as he is not ready to embrace him after abducting, "After
176 abducting me if now thou dost not embrace me, where is thy Chivalry, Oh Arunachala?" (83).

177 The metaphor of physical union recurs when Maharshi compares the worldly entanglements of ego, attachment
178 and sensual pleasures to the modesty of a woman outraged by others. He questions God to be watching
179 nonchalantly and not paying attention to the outrage of modesty, "Does it become thee thus to sleep when
180 I am outraged by others, Oh Arunachala! "(84). Maharshi calls these worldly attachments as "the cruel snares
181 of fascinating women" and requests God to "honour me with union with thyself, Oh Arunachala! (84). In a rich
182 metaphor of evocative images pointing towards sensual description of physical union, the following lines are self
183 explanatory and need no further comments, "Tear off these robes, expose me naked, then robe me with thy love,
184 Oh Arunachala! (85)". Of course, the repetition of the word "robe" twice in the stanza refers to two different
185 ideas-the first "robe" refers to worldly sense entanglements and the second "robe" refers to the "robes" of divinity.

186 The most amazing thing in Maharshi's metaphor about physical union is that it presents all the shades of
187 this union-complaint, dissatisfaction, eagerness and excitement. It also elaborates the activities involved in this
188 union-luring (83), hold her bound (83), embrace (83, 86, 88, 92), outrage (84), honour (89), robe me with love
189 (85), leaving (89), touch (90), espouse (90), cleave (92), ravished (92), enter (93), entice, stealing into heart,
190 draw in (93) and to wear the marital Garland(94). Maharshi expresses his anguish if God-The bridegroom does
191 not embrace the soul-bride. The repetition of the verb 'embrace' reiterates the fact of union which is more than
192 physical and enters the world of transcendence. This request is repeatedly made in the poem several times. Quite
193 openly Maharshi uses the metaphor in the following words, "Enfold me body to body, limb to limb, or I am lost,
194 Oh Arunachala!" (88). He also expresses his anguish when God refuses to solicit his prayer. In the manner of a
195 bride who wants her conjugal rights, He asks, "Does it not shame Thee to stand there like a post cleaving me to
196 find thee by myself, Oh Arunachala!" (89). He calls God his refuge as he melts away and enters him. The God is
197 "standing means both sky and clothes, hence it means one who is clothed in the directions of space infinite. Here
198 the naked does not have any negative connotation as in spiritual poetry the word is used quite often in a positive
199 sense. Naked means to be free from the worldly attachments. There is another reference to the ultimate union of
200 soul and God when Maharshi offers an invitation to God, "Let us embrace upon the bed of tender flowers, which
201 is the mind, with in the room of the body (or the ultimate truth) Oh Arunachala!" (92). Two comments need to
202 be made here. It is a conceptual metaphor where body is referred as a room. Body acts as a container which can
203 embody the ultimate truth of union with God. Lakoff and Johnson have mentioned this category in Metaphors
204 we Live By, "We are physical beings, bounded and set off from the rest of the world by the surface of our skins,
205 and we experience the rest of the world as outside us. Each of us is a container, with a bounding surface and
206 in-out orientation."(1980: 29). It is in the category of ontological metaphors that we keep these metaphors.

207 11 VII.

208 12 Conclusion

209 The metaphor of marriage makes better sense when viewed in Indian perspective. Marriage in India is not only
210 the marriage of two persons but also of two families, ways of life and ways of thoughts. In India marriage has to
211 be worked upon with persistence, devotion, surrender of ego and compatibility. All these attributes can also be
212 assigned to soul's relationship with God. This relationship is all encompassing. It has to be nurtured with love,
213 devotion and surrender of ego: That is why marriage in India does not mean the satisfaction of sexual desires
214 only. Of course our ¹



Figure 1: A

215 scriptures sanction this aspect when they refer to Kama (physical desire) as one of the goals of life. Still it is
216 only one of the four goals which have been considered together for the emancipation of human soul.
217 In comparison, generally speaking, marriage in the West is for convenience and is losing its importance. If it
218 does not work, people let it go! In India the relationship is still strong only because of its spiritual roots. However
219 it is not denying the fact that divorces are on the rise because of materialism. There is a need to go back to our
220 culture, poetry and Saints to nourish the roots which are drying up for the want of water of spirituality. The
221 spirituality has that nectar which can sustain the eternity of life even when the human body ceases to exist and
222 mingles with God.

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