



Degradation of Marriage system in Hindu Society in Nirad C. Chaudhuri's 'To Live or Not To Live'

Ch Ramana^{1*}, Prof. T. Narayana²

^{1*}(Assistant Professor, KL University, Andhra Pradesh)

²(Head, Dept. Of English, Andhra University, Visakhapatnam, AP, India.)



Article Info:
Article Received: 4/1/2015
Revised on: 18/1/2015
Accepted on: 24/1/2015

ABSTRACT

Nirad C. Chaudhuri, the most controversial writer, occupies a prominent and unassailable place in Indo-Anglian literature. As a brilliant scholar and intellectual, Chaudhuri has presented new-fangled ideas on Hinduism and the Hindu way of life which have aroused a great deal of controversy due to their controversial and prejudicial character. Marriage in Hindu Society was a sort of divine activity in olden days. But it now becomes an act of business in which monetary activity plays a crucial role and the character of the partner is completely negligible. In his book, 'To Live or Not To Live', he slanders the prevailing process of Hindu marriage system which is degraded and also he has shown a pathway to keep sustainability of Hindu marriage system.

Keywords: Hindu, Marriage, tradition, family, Relationship, Culture, etc.,

© Copyright VEDA Publication

INTRODUCTION

Nirad C. Chaudhuri's fifth book, *To Live or Not to Live (1970)*, subtitled "An Essay on Living Happily with Others" is a collection of his articles published in various magazines and newspapers. The aim of this small, informal, and discursive book, as he mentioned in introduction of the book, is to consider how we can have a happy social and family life under the conditions to which we are born in this country. He criticized the life in India sarcastically. The book consists two parts. The first part deals with social life and the second part with family life. He examines social and family norms, man-woman relationship and marital loyalty. He presented a wide variety of

socio-family issues in Indian society. He discusses urban culture in India; the condition of working and non-working women; post-independence Indian youth; the relations between the male and female; the forms and occasions as well as the spirit and content of social life; marriages- their degradation in Hindu society; the extended family and the nuclear family in India; and Indian attitudes to work, money, status, religion, food, etc.

MARRIAGE SYSTEM IN HINDU SOCIETY

The practice of not visiting the young women by the young men before marriage was existed in the orthodox Hindu family. Most of the



marriages were arranged, there was no question of love marriages in Indian Hindu society then. But now it is quite confusing whether the people follow the Western society, one loves and then marries, or Hindu society, one marries and then loves, concerning to marriages. This has led to a great confusion of values. Chaudhuri, himself saw his bride only when he was about the martial bed. When his brother advised him to see his bride before the marriage proposal was made, he simply rejected. He writes: "when my brother, who had married by looking at his future bride by proxy through my eyes and who then had had eleven years of married life, proposed that I should go and take a good look at any girl my father was going to select for me." (p.155). Besides Hindu tradition, he felt it was brutal act for visiting brides. But it is quite interesting to note that the same man, in his maturity, now he pleads for the modernization of Hindu society

Chaudhuri believes in the geometry of love. He writes: "The truth of the matter is that love is primarily visual, though in persons without sight it may be tactile. Without seeing there is no loving, and no man can love a woman if the geometrical properties of her body do not tally with his geometrical predispositions, which will control his aesthetic and amorous inclinations." (p.156). Every person has his own inborn likes and dislikes. Chaudhuri wants everyone to satisfy the inclinations of his mind.

DEGRADATION OF MARRIAGE IN HINDU SOCIETY

Chaudhuri considers fruitful married life as an essential requirement of a good society. He has stressed the value of fruitfulness in married life in the beginning of the chapter. He begins this chapter "A sound, sensible, and therefore successful marriage is the foundation of a good, happy, and fruitful family life. Perhaps the adjective fruitful will give rise to a good deal of scandal in these days in India, for it is likely to be taken as the key-word of a reactionary attitude towards 'family planning' or, to call a spade a spade, towards the means of enjoying the pleasure of sexual intercourse without the attendant risk of conception.." (p.152).

Chaudhuri expressed his dissatisfaction with the Indian system of marriage in his very first work, 'The Autobiography of Unknown India'. He describes Indian marriages there in these terms: "Marriages may be personal events in the West, with us they are family events, and if anybody denies that there can be drama and romance in such marriages he should come and see for himself what the demoniac energy and meddlesomeness of third parties can make of the union of passive firsts and seconds."⁶ The tone of this sentence clearly shows that he is writing a sociological tourist guide for the occidental.

But in his second work, Chaudhuri surprised everyone by denouncing the Western system of marriage as frivolous. He does not like the Western system of divorce. It is surprising that in 'A Passage to England', the Hindu system of marriage got unqualified approval and uniform praise. Thus, Chaudhuri wrote: "We are often told by our Western friends that they just cannot understand our system of marriage. Most of us do not understand theirs either. In any case, countless millions have found happiness in our system, and it is not to be spoken of light."⁷ This is a flattering compliment, but the Hindu system of marriage, at present, is not as successful as Chaudhuri makes it out to be. Hindu culture offers no alternative to unsuccessful marriage. A poor husband has to put up with a nagging wife, or a devoted wife has to put up with a vicious husband. Since Hindu society makes marriage a life-long permanent contract, there are so many unhappy marriages which just continue because of sacramental sanctity.

Chaudhuri, who was reluctant to inspect the brides and he saw his bride when he was about to enter the martial bed, now criticizes the arranged marriages and pleads for the modernization of Hindu society, The tradition of marriages has been fast worsening in India because of the faulty system of arranged marriage. The marriages in Hindu society have become pure commercial transactions. Chaudhuri writes: "I must say that marriages as they are brought about in contemporary Hindu society have become a mere commercial transaction at that. That money should enter as a consideration in most marriages is not something any reasonable and realistic person will or should dispute. For women



marriage is a; means of living, bare or affluent, and so far as it is that monetary calculations will enter into it. What is wrong is to make it nothing but an affair of money. This is precisely what it has become.”(p.162).

Chaudhuri considers marriage as a social institution the way of which can take place that it can ensure a happy family life. He writes: “for this object what is needed is pleasantness of personal relations in the family, created by affection, understanding, sympathy, and courtesy for one another within it.”(p.162). But most of the people in the family appear to be incorrigibly selfish and unreasonable which play vital role to build up healthy relationship among the family.

Giving matrimonial advertisements in newspapers is one of the symbols for degradation of marriages in Hindu society. Now marriages appear as if it seems the business transaction between two parties. The women, who secure economic independence and well educated, also take the help of the advertisements for getting married. Chaudhuri gives a pathetic instance of a Viadya Bengali girl who is employee and well educated. He quotes such advertisement as it follows: “Suitable match for convent educated 23 years old, tall (164cm.), slim, fair, handsome Vaidya, Bengali girl, permanent lecturer, college in Delhi, also proficient in French”(p.163)

Money is one the of major parameters in arranged marriages. Most of the parents enquire about the financial status of the bridegrooms to whom they want to get their daughters married. But they don't bother about values or character. Chaudhuri writes: “when I inquire about the criterion by which this is determined I always have the salaries and only the salaries mentioned. In my young days some fathers and mothers talked about the character or talents of the young men, nowadays nobody pays any attention to these things.”(p.164)

The parents have ceased to be a cultural influence on their children. Hence it is difficult to determine the cultural status of a family reputation is missing in Hindu society. Chaudhuri writes: “Most arranged marriages today are very speculative business transactions, in respect of personal relations even when not in respect of money” (P.168). The

worst aspect of arranged marriages is that they do not treat love as the basis of marriage. They prove to be a gamble because, in most cases, they stifle the natural affections of the soul. Chaudhuri wisely says: “.....the unnatural segregation is the most cruel and frustrating thing in contemporary Hindu society. This starvation of natural cravings results either in a deadening of the sensibilities, or in continuous suffering, or in a wild and perverted breaking out” (p.171). This unnatural segregation of the sexes is the main reason for the frustration of Indian society i.e oriented toward acquisition rather than achievement.

CONCLUSION

In his conclusion, Chaudhuri recommends some fundamental changes in Indian society. He proposes that young men and women in India should be allowed to meet each other and they must know about one another before their marriage proposal is made. If young men and women are allowed to meet before a formal proposal for marriages is made, many unhappy marriages could be avoided in India. This is a useful suggestion which shows Chaudhuri's concern for the reformation of Hindu society. He wants the Westernization of Hindu society as far as marriage is concerned. The prose-style of the book is largely free from his stupendous learning and the formal graces of style. Since Chaudhuri has written this book for his fellow countrymen he uses easy, simple and conversational style combined with force of conviction and logic.

REFERENCES

- [1] Chaudhuri C. Nirad. *A Passage to England*, London: Macmillan&Co Ltd, 1959. Print
- [2] Chaudhuri C. Nirad. *Autobiography of an Unknown Indian*, Mumbai: Jaico Publishing House, 1964. Print.
- [3] Chaudhuri C. Nirad. *To Live or Not To Live*, New Delhi: Indian Book Company, 1970. Print
- [4] Karanani, Chetan. *Nirad C. Chaudhuri*, Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1980. Print
- [5] Kaul, R.K. *Nirada C. Chaudhuri ,The Renaissance Man*, Jaipur and New Delhi: Rawat Publications, 1998
- [6] Mehrotra, Aravind Krishna, *A Concise History of Indian Literature in English*, Ranikhet: Permanent black, 2008.
- [7] Yaravintelimath, C.R. *New Perspectives in Indian Literature in English*, New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Private Limited, 1995.