



Extramarital Affairs and Raising Divorce Rate in Contemporary Indian Society: A Sociological Analysis

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Abstract

This study examines the relationship between extramarital affairs and rising divorce rates in contemporary Indian society from a sociological perspective. For decades, marriage in India has been strongly associated with social responsibility, especially for women, and divorce often negatively affects women's social status. (Desai & Krishnaraj, 1987). However, following the 2018 Supreme Court ruling that criminalized adultery as a ground for divorce, public and academic debate on marital instability and changing societal values has intensified. (Uberoi, 2006). This research paper is based on qualitative research using secondary sources such as academic journals, government reports, and sociological research. It explores the causes of extramarital affairs, whether they are influenced by the modernization and westernization of marriage patterns. And what are the social consequences of divorce and marital conflict? The study found that increasing individualism, women's economic independence, monogamous family structure, and exposure to global culture have led to the complexity of extramarital affairs in married life in India, with unintended consequences in married life.

Keywords: Extramarital affair, Divorce Rate, Modernization Theory, Westernization, Sociological Perspective.

Introduction:

For many decades, divorce has significantly reduced the social status of women in Indian society. Marriage is often considered a social responsibility primarily placed on the shoulders of women. (Desai & Krishnaraj, 1987). Traditionally, family involvement, emotional responsibility, and long-term commitment within marriage have been structured in ways that place the greatest burden on women. (Uberoi, 2006). At the same time, in cases of marital breakdown, women are often blamed. (Sharma, 2012). So, after 2018, when the court clarified that adultery is no longer a criminal offense, a legal ground for divorce. This judgment has sparked both social and academic debates on the relationship between adultery and divorce in Indian society, with implications for the Indian marriage system as well. (Pinto & D'Mello, 2006).

The Indian family system, as seen traditionally, implies a set of moral and emotional values. (Uberoi, 2006). In previous generations, marriage was determined mainly through the family, and personal emotional satisfaction was not considered as important as social stability. (Goode, 1963; Giddens, 2013). Even if there were problems in marital life, husband

and wife were expected to stay together for the sake of family honor and the future of their children. (Sharma, 2012). In modern Indian society, especially in urban areas and in rural settings, the meaning of marriage has changed a lot. (NFHS-5, Government of India 2021). Now, emotional compatibility, personal happiness, and mutual respect are considered essential elements of a marital relationship, because nowadays, regardless of the standard of education, both men and women keep their equal respect and emotional support in married life. (Giddens, 2013). When these expectations are not met, in many cases, people develop emotional or physical relationships outside of marriage, which ultimately creates conflict in married life. Or is it having an impact on family conflict? It can be understood from a sociological point of view. (Pinto & D'Mello, 2018).

Literature review:

Divorce and extramarital affairs in Indian society have been widely discussed in sociological and gender studies. Earlier studies mainly focused on the stability of the traditional Indian family system, while recent studies have emphasized the impact of modernization, women's empowerment, and changing social values on marriage. (Goode, 1963) argued in his "World Revolution and Family Patterns" theory that modernization led to the decline of traditional family authority and increased the importance of personal choice in marriage. Similarly, Giddens (2013) explained that marriage in modern society is dependent on emotional satisfaction rather than social obligation. According to her, when emotional expectations are not met, individuals are more likely to leave the relationship or seek emotional support outside of marriage.

In the Indian context, Uberoi (2006) studies the transformation of family, kinship, and marriage and shows that the traditional joint family system has gradually moved towards a nuclear family structure. This change reduced social control over marital relations and increased the likelihood of marital conflict. (Sharma, 2012) also argued that modernization, education, and urbanization have changed the structure of Indian society and significantly affected marriage patterns and divorce trends.

However, recent studies have shown that increased education and employment opportunities have changed women's attitudes towards marriage and divorce (Government of India, 2021). Several recent academic studies have specifically examined the growing trend of divorce in contemporary India. (Pinto and D'Mello, 2018) found that the rise in divorce in urban India is closely related to changes in expectations within marriage, lack of emotional compatibility, and increased individualism. Similarly, Deslahra (2024) argued that changing social values, the influence of social media, and modernization are important factors for marital instability in modern Indian society. Kondamudi and Ashok (2024) also highlighted psychological factors such as emotional dissatisfaction, communication problems, and lack of trust as the main reasons behind divorce.

Official data also supports the argument that marital norms are slowly changing in India. (Government of India Report 2021). show a steady increase in separation and divorce rates, especially in urban areas and among educated women (Government of India, 2021). These studies indicate that although the divorce rate in India is still lower than in Western countries, social attitudes towards marriage and divorce are changing significantly.

Research gap:

Several studies have examined divorce and changing family patterns in India, yet there are significant gaps in the existing literature. Most earlier studies have focused on either divorce

trends or quantitative demographic patterns (Census of India, 2021), but they often lack an in-depth sociological explanation of the emotional, cultural, and psychological factors that lead to extramarital affairs and marital breakdown. The role of emotional dissatisfaction, changing expectations, and personal choice in marriage has yet to be explored.

Moreover, limited research has been conducted on how modernization and westernization together affect both extramarital affairs and divorce in Indian society. While some studies discuss modernization and others focus on gender roles, there is a lack of integrated analysis that links these factors into a single framework (Giddens, 2013; Sharma, 2012). Hence, this study tries to explore why it happens and how it causes the divorce rate in contemporary Indian society by providing a sociological analysis and integrating modernization perspectives, gender roles, and changing societal values.

Objectives of the study:

- To examine why extramarital affairs, happen and their leading causes of divorce in contemporary Indian Society.
- How Modernization and westernization are affecting Contemporary Indian marriage system

Methodology:

This research paper has been prepared based on qualitative method, and secondary data collected from articles, recognized journals, government reports and academic papers have been analysed. Qualitative methodology is adopted in this study because the main aim of this study is to understand the sociological relationship between extramarital relationship and increasing divorce rate that. And thematic analysis method has been used to analyze this collected data. Through this process the important issues of modernization, westernization, mental dissatisfaction, gender equality and changing family structure have been identified and analysed. This approach also helps to understand the patterns and relationships between extramarital relationships and divorce in a sociological context (Giddens, 2013).

However, since this study relies entirely on secondary data, it has some limitations. This study did not collect primary data like interviews, field work. Consequently, the results are dependent on the accuracy and interpretation of existing literature and reports. (Government of India Report 2021). Despite these limitations, the study provides a comprehensive sociological understanding of the topic by combining various academic and practical sources.

Theoretical perspective:

Modernization has changed the meaning of marriage from a social obligation to a relationship based on emotional satisfaction and personal choice (Sharma, 2012). And with increasing education and employment opportunities, especially for women, the traditional structure of marriage is gradually changing (Government of India, 2021). As a result, when emotional expectations are not met, individuals are more inclined to seek satisfaction outside of marriage, which increases the likelihood of extramarital affairs and divorce. So modernization theory in contemporary Indian society explains how industrialization, urbanization, education and technological development bring about social change (Goode, 1963).

Reason behind extramarital affairs:

In the previous generation, the word alien was not used, but that does not mean there was no such thing; it was not seen as openly (Goode, 1963). because the social control was much stronger at that time. Society strongly discouraged divorce, and many people stayed in relationships even in unhappy marriages for fear of social stigma. But today, modern Indian society places a lot of importance on personal happiness and emotional harmony, and that is absolutely applicable. (Giddens, 2013). However, when these expectations are not met, many times people start looking for emotional satisfaction outside of marriage, which in many cases turns into extramarital affairs. (Pinto & D’Mello, 2018). Such relationships create emotional distance between husband and wife, weaken mutual trust, and ultimately increase the chances of divorce. (Deshlahra, 2024). Here, studies have shown that modern communication media have brought about rapid changes. Today, people are increasingly exposed to global culture through media, movies, and the Internet. (Giddens, 2013). Western ideas about love, relationships, and personal freedom are deeply influencing the young generation of India (Kondamudi & Ashok, 2024). As a result of this, marriage is now considered a partnership based on equality and emotional connection rather than just a religious or social institution (Uberoi, 2006). And it is right to consider it fruitful. But why is the relationship alienated from marriage? Where is the happiness of married life interrupted? Study shows that not only through social media spread the cases, but other reason also exists. (NFHS-5, Government of India, 2021). Compared to the traditional society, the age of the modern world, and what alienation and divorce are related to each other, where there are no social barriers in the Western culture, there is no traditional pressure, modern India is also following that. (Goode, 1963; Giddens, 2013). Where earlier, due to social pressure, husband and wife were forced to stay together despite conflict, but nowadays it is relatively less. On the other hand, some examples noted that, due to the presence of elders in joint families, many times marital problems were easily solved. (Sharma, 2012). But now the problems of husband and wife living alone in the nuclear family are rapidly becoming bigger. (Uberoi, 2006). Also, in contemporary Indian society women are more independent than before due to the increase in education and employment opportunities in the contemporary Indian society. (Government of India, 2021), and conflicts are getting involved in the use of this freedom. (Desai& Krishnaraj, 1987). Earlier, women were financially dependent on their husbands, but now they are able to make decisions on their own, which is confusing women, too. (Ahuja, 2014). As a result, when the trust between husband and wife breaks down, women no longer want to force the relationship, which easily takes the form of divorce. Researchers such as Pinto and D’Mello (2018) attribute this to a lack of emotional adjustment and an increase in individualism. Deslahra (2024) further identifies the impact of social media as a catalyst for marital instability, saying social media provides easy avenues for extramarital affairs. An information of this is provided below.

Factor	Sociological impact on marriage	Source
Economic Independence	Women are no longer financially tried to unhappy marriages; they can choose to leave if trust is broken	Government of India 2021; Desai & krishnaraj1987
Nuclearizing	The transition from joint families reduces elder intervention, leading	Uberoi, 2006; Sharma, 2012

	to a rapid escalation of married conflict.	
Global Culture	Exposer to western ideas influence personal happiness like love, care, romanticism rather than social norms.	Giddens, 2013; kondamudi& Ashoke, 2024.
Legal Reforms	The 2018 decriminalization of adultery shifted the focus of punishment to civil grounds for divorce.	Supreme court of India 2018, pinto& D' mello, 2006.

Affecting the family beyond the Society:

One of the most important sociological effects of extramarital affairs and divorce is the weakening of the traditional family system. (Uberoi, 2006). Historically, the Indian family system is based on trust, faithfulness, and long-term commitment between husband and wife but the current extramarital relationship breaks trust in each other and creates emotional distance between husband and wife. (Sharma, 2012). Because marriage is not just a personal relationship; It is a social institution, deeply connected with culture, religion, and families (Giddens, 2013). In traditional Indian society, marriage was considered a sacred and lifelong bond, and family stability was considered crucial to maintaining order in society. (Goodes, 1963).

But the increasing presence of extramarital affairs and the gradual increase in divorce rates in contemporary India are bringing about major changes in social relations and social values. (Government of India, 2021; Deshlahra, 2024). As a result, the stability of the family is affected, which also affects the socialization process of the children and the emotional environment of the family. (Sharma, 2012). Children who grow up in marital conflict or divorce often experience stress, insecurity, and confusion about relationships. From a sociological point of view, it can also influence their future social behavior and attitude towards marriage. (Kondamudi & Ashok, 2024).

Another important sociological effect of extramarital affairs and divorce is that social values and attitudes about marriage are changing very easily (Uberoi, 2006). Currently, couples perceive marriage as a personal institution rather than a social institution emotionally. (Giddens, 2013). The transition from obligation to personal choice that marriage may seem to the next generation is a challenging one.

Conclusion:

Although India still has a relatively low divorce rate compared to many other countries, the increasing incidence of extramarital affairs and divorce indicates that Indian society is slowly moving away from traditional family-centered values to individual-centered values. (Government of India, 2021). From a sociological point of view, this change is considered to be a reflection of both challenges and changes in the institution of marriage in contemporary Indian society. (Giddens, 2013).

Finally, the reason why divorce and extramarital affairs are deeply related to each other is that the Western meditation concept is deeply related, and that is the main reason for the current modernizing society and social media, but other factors are also important behind this alienation, which are discussed above. But it has to be remembered that there is a

historical context in Indian society which has always been dominant in terms of diversity, but now Indian society is losing its diversity due to radical modernization and we ourselves will reshape our next generation about marriage is like a personal institution rather than social institutions.

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