

a life of adventure even if she comes to grief as a consequence of her rashness.

9. "MARRIAGE"

I. INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

This poem appeared in the author's fourth volume of poems which was originally published in 1960, and subsequently in another edition, in 1965, under the heading of *The Unfinished Man*. As the title of the poem shows, it deals with the subject of marriage, with the ecstasies of marriage in the beginning, and with the disillusionment which marriage brings later in life to both a husband and his wife. There is nothing exceptional about the theme of this poem because every married man knows the realities of marriage. Every married man has tasted the sweetness of his relationship with his wife, and he also knows the misery and the pain which it causes to both the partners in course of time because of the differences of opinion, the clashes of views, the incompatibilities of temperaments (of which they had never been aware before), and the misunderstandings which take place because of the relatives and even because of the children about whom the husband and the wife form different notions. However, the author in this poem does not go into the causes of the disillusionment but merely points out the fact of disillusionment after drawing our attention to the initial raptures of the relationship between a husband and a wife.

II. A SUMMARY OF THE POEM

The Feelings of a Married Couple at the Time of Their Marriage

When a man and a woman, who are in love with each other, get married, they feel that they would never be separated in life, and that they would experience the pleasures of their sexual relationship and genuinely enjoy their married life without interruption and forever. The poet himself has had an experience of the pleasures of married life. In fact, he had, for some time after the marriage, felt so happy, and his wife too had felt so happy, that neither of them could believe that they would ever cease to love each other. It had been impossible for them even to believe that the act of sexual intercourse committed by Adam and Eve in Paradise could have offended God so deeply as to lead to their expulsion from that place.

The Subsequent Feelings of a Man and His Wife

However, the author subsequently found that his conjugal life with his wife was tending to make him regret the marriage; and the same was his wife's impression of their conjugal life. Thus they now felt like the Biblical person, Cain, who murdered his brother Abel and who, thereafter, spent many years of regret, repentance, and aimless wandering in a mood of desolation. The spell of marriage had now been shattered for both the author and his wife.

The Poet, Not Cynical About Marriage Despite its Unhappiness

At the close of the poem, the author says that he would not like to destroy the mystery of marriage by dwelling upon its dark side and the suffering which marriage brings in the long run for both the husband and the wife. Having frequently attended the marriages of other people in response to their invitations, he does not feel justified in criticizing or condemning marriage. The fact, that he has frequently attended other people's marriages, shows that he has not become cynical about the bond which marriage establishes between a man and a woman.

III. NOTES AND EXPLANATIONS

Stanza 1 (Lines 1-4)

Eternity—timelessness; everlastingness; infinity; immortality. **With touching grace**—with a grace which really moves the heart of an on-looker; gracefully and in an emotional manner.

Complacent—feeling perfectly satisfied; feeling contented. **Fated**—destined.

Explanation. Lovers, when they marry.....separated (lines 1-4)—When a man and a woman, who are in love with each other, get married, they feel perfectly satisfied and happy because they feel sure that their love would last for ever and that they are destined to remain together for ever and ever. These lovers feel deeply moved by the thought of the immortality of their love; and their attitude towards each other at this time is marked by grace and dignity.

Stanza 2 (Lines 5-8)

The groom—the bridegroom; the husband.

The darkened room—the room in which the newly married couple are to spend their first night and in which they would switch off the lights.

Roars out—proclaims; announces. **The joy of flesh and blood**—the sensual pleasure; the pleasure which the couple would enjoy during their sexual intercourse. Their flesh would tingle or throb with sensations of delight, and their blood would flow through their veins more quickly for the same reason.

The use of nakedness is good—The nakedness of men and women, when they are about to engage in sexual intercourse, is certainly something desirable, and it is also beneficial in the sense of being a source of the greatest joy to them.

Explanation. The bride is always pretty.....is good (lines 5-8)—When the ceremony of marriage is over, those, who had come to witness the marriage, always say that the bride is beautiful and that the bridegroom is lucky in having acquired such a beautiful woman as his wife. Nobody ever finds fault with the looks and the appearance of the bride. The relatives and friends who had come to attend the ceremony of marriage are always at pains

to pay compliments to both the bride and the bridegroom. Then comes the time when the marriage is to be consummated. The newly married couple switch off the lights in the room where they have to spend the night; and the darkened room seems to proclaim that the married couple would experience pleasurable thrills and sensations of delight in their bodies and in their blood during the sexual intercourse which they are going to have. The married couple would now take off their clothes; and the nakedness of a married couple at such a time is something desirable, and also a source of great pleasure to the couple.

Stanza 3 (Lines 9-12)

I went through this—The poet now becomes personal and says that he too had gone through this experience of getting married. **Believing all**—The poet had believed all that he had heard people say about the intense pleasure which a married couple experienced. He and his bride were so deeply and passionately in love at the time of their marriage that they could not believe the Biblical story of God's expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise simply because Adam and Eve had fallen in love with each other and had enjoyed the pleasure of sexual intercourse. They could not believe that sexual intercourse was the real cause of the original fall of Adam and Eve from the grace of God. This is a reference to the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise (or the Garden of Eden) as a punishment for their having disobeyed God by eating the apple which God had forbidden them to eat. The poet here says that he and his wife were so much in love at the time of their marriage that they could not believe that any pair of lovers could offend God by loving each other and by engaging in sexual intercourse. (The eating of the forbidden fruit, namely the apple, implies enjoying the pleasure of sexual intercourse).

Wordless—speechless; so deeply in love with each other as not to be able to have any talk. **We walked among the trees**—The poet imagines that he and his wife were walking among the trees of Paradise at the time of their marriage and after the marriage.

Explanation. I went through this.....as the breeze (lines 9-12)—The poet tells us that he too had got married, and that he too had thought himself to be a lucky man who had acquired a pretty bride. He and his bride were at that time so deeply in love with each other that they could never believe the story of Adam and Eve as narrated in the Bible. According to the Biblical story, Adam and Eve had been expelled from Paradise by God because they had tasted the forbidden fruit and thus offended God. The poet and his bride were so much in love with each other at the time of their marriage that they could never believe in the possibility of their doing any wrong by enjoying the pleasures of sexual intercourse. They were so much in love with each other at that time that they imagined themselves walking

The word "grace" has religious associations, but 'they touch eternity with grace' conveys the idea of endless joy. The second stanza brings evocatively alive all the joys of the body. This general view is applied to Ezekiel's own case:

I went through this, believing all,
Our love denied the Primal Fall.
Wordless, we walked among the trees
And felt immortal as the breeze.

It was so absorbing at the beginning that the idea of man's fall from grace seemed incredible. But Ezekiel does not ignore the realities of marriage. The initial excitement is followed by the feeling of satiation:

the same
Thing over and over again.

It is the paradox of marriage that it leaves one a sadder and a wiser man."—**Chetan Karnani**

"*Marriage* is one of the finest of the love-poems of Ezekiel. The poet has explored the various facets of love and marriage in his poems. The theme is always love but there are variations, as in music. To the poet, love is the prime source of inspiration and supreme joy of life; but it is followed by frustration and disillusionment. Romance is soon replaced by harsh reality; the woman no longer remains a fairy but becomes a creature of flesh and blood, with her own whims and caprices. The wife is different from the beloved and bride."—**Raghukul Tilak**

"The poet considers himself to be a modern Cain who is doomed to wander and remain unsatisfied; and, even though the poet is tragically aware of his fate, he chooses not to reveal it. He assumes a happy role before the world. He is a frequent wedding guest and his choice of not being deprived of this position is only too superficial. The musical scheme of the lines rhyming together in a stanza of four lines relieves the tension which the poet feels on account of the loss of love and failure in marriage. Marital failure is as much the theme of the poet as his other failures, experienced from time to time."—**Anisur Rehman**

their love would never come to an end, and that they themselves would never die. The fervour and the passion of their love made them think that they would live for ever and love each other for ever.

Stanza 4-5 (Lines 13-20)

The same/Thing over and over again—The same process was repeated again and again. They came together again and again, and they separated from each other again and again. This most probably refers to the repetitions of the sexual intercourse which they had with each other, followed by a physical separation from each other every time. The idea is that their sexual relationship continued, and that their physical union and their physical separation became a frequent occurrence in their lives.

Then suddenly the mark of Cain—Then came a sudden and abrupt change in their lives. This change occurred in their conjugal relations. Gone was the passion and the fervour of love. Their relationship was now marred by a feeling of repentance and remorse similar to that which was experienced by Cain. Cain and Abel were the two sons of Adam and Eve. Cain quarrelled with his brother Abel and, in a fit of anger, killed him. But soon afterwards Cain began to be troubled by a sense of guilt. His murder of Abel then began to haunt him; and in that state of regret and repentance he took to a life of aimless wandering.

Began to show on her and me—The mark of Cain appeared on both the poet and his wife. They both began to feel troubled by a sense of guilt in having married each other. They both felt that their marriage had been a mistake.

The mystery—the mystery of marriage which provides ecstatic pleasure to a man and his wife at the time of marriage, and which becomes a cause of regret and a sense of guilt later in their lives.

Harping—talking repeatedly. **On the suffering rest**—about the subject of the suffering which marriage eventually causes to both the husband and the wife.

Myself a frequent wedding guest—The poet says that he has often attended weddings in response to the invitations that he received. Thus he has not become cynical about marriage; but he does know that the initial raptures of marriage subsequently give way to feelings of frustration and disappointment.

IV. WHAT THE CRITICS SAY

“In its finish and flow, *Marriage* moves with the ease and assurance of a great poem. The initial excitement is described in these haunting lines:

Lovers, when they marry, face
Eternity with touching grace.
Complacent at being fated
Never to be separated