

## **Results**

The results of the study are presented in two sections. The first section presents the profile of the participants. The second section discusses the themes emerging from the data on the basis of inductive and deductive analysis.

### **Profile of Participants**

Figure 5 shows the profile of the participants. Out of 30 participants 18 were divorced and 12 were separated. Out of those participants who were separated majority of them (6) were fighting their case in the court followed by those who were permanently separated (4). A small number of participants (2) had not yet filed any case. Just over half of the participants (16) were in the age group of 25 to 35 years. Nine participants were in the age group of 36 to 50 years and a small number (5) were in the age group of 51 to 70 years. More than half of the participants (17) got married in the age group of 20 to 25 years while eight participants got married in the age group of 26 to 31 years. About five participants got married when they were below 20 years of age. A majority of participants (21) got married through arranged marriage whereas nine participants chose to get married through self-selection. Marriage for almost one third of the participants (9) lasted from 7 months to 5 years followed by seven participants whose marriage lasted from 6 years to 10 years. For six participants the duration of marriage was between two months to six months. Marriage of a small number of participants (2) lasted for less than one month and from 11 to 20 years. For three participants the duration of marriage was more than 20 years.

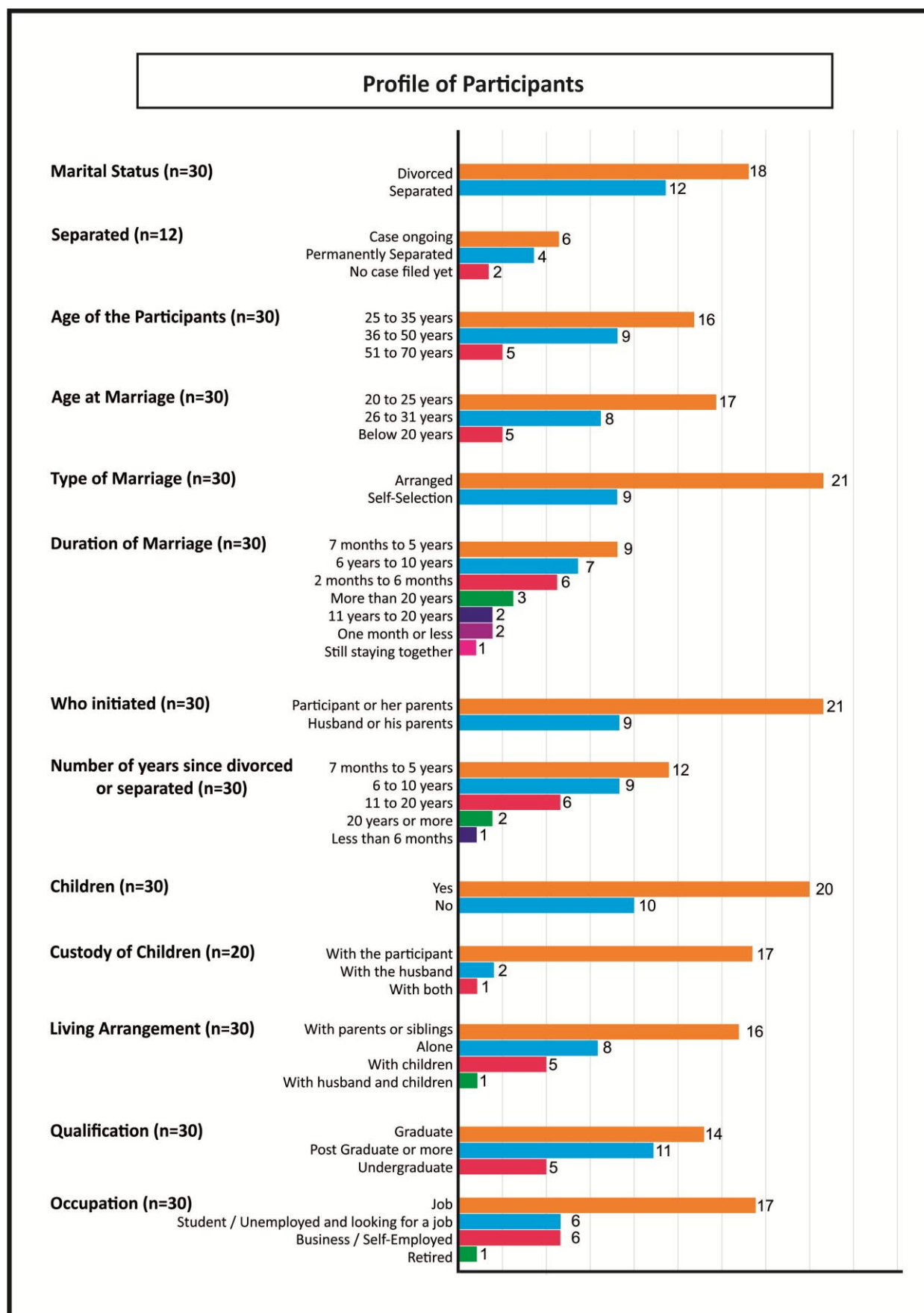
Majority of the participants or their family members (21) initiated their divorce or separation by either filing a case, sending a legal notice to husband and in-laws or by leaving the marital home and not returning. In nine cases it was the husband or his family members who initiated the divorce or separation by either deserting the participant or filing a case against her. At the time of the interview less than half of the participants (12) were divorced or separated before 7 months to 5 years whereas almost one third of the participants (9) were divorced or separated before 6 to 10 years. One fifth of the participants (6) were divorced or separated before 11 to 20 years. A small number of participants, that is, two were divorced or separated for more than 20 years at the time of interview whereas a very small number (1) were divorced or separated before six months at the time of the interview.

Two third of the participants (20) had children out of their marriage whereas one third (10) did not have. Out of those participants who had children, a majority of them (17) had custody

whereas a small number (2) did not have custody of children and one participant had joint custody of children.

Just over half of the participants (16) lived with their parents and siblings whereas somewhat less than one third of the participants (8) lived alone. Few participants, that is, five lived with their children and only one of the participants lived with her husband and children.

A little less than half of the participants (14) were graduates followed by one third of the participants (11) who were post graduates or more. Five of participants were undergraduates, some of which were pursuing their graduation or vocational courses. More than half of the participants (17) were doing a job whereas six participants were either self-employed or doing a business. Another six were unemployed and were looking for some job and many of which were students. One of the participants was living a retired life.



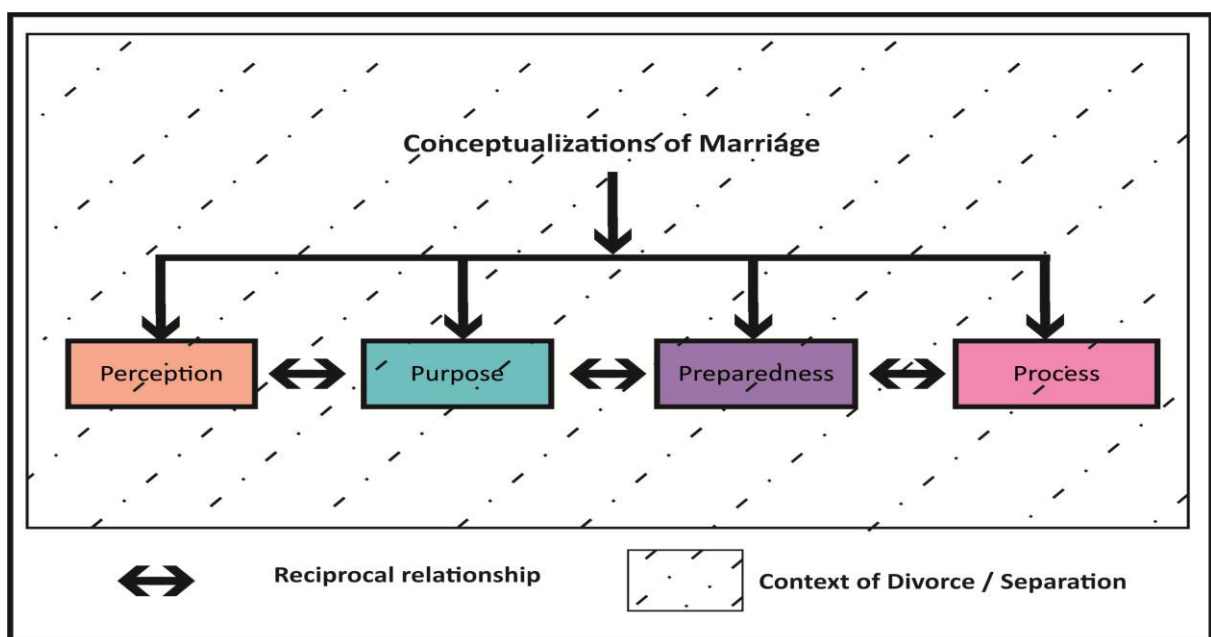
**Figure 5. Profile of participants**

This section presents the thematic interpretation of the data. Even though the focus of the study is to understand the experiences of divorced and separated women, in order to get a complete picture of the divorce and separation experience it will be helpful to examine the experiences of women before their divorce and separation.

The three themes as a result of inductive data analysis and interpretation are discussed below.

### Conceptualizations of Marriage

Almost all<sup>1</sup> the participants spoke about their marital experiences in detail. It is noteworthy to mention at this juncture, how the participants reacted when the question about defining marriage was posed to them. Most of the participants laughed, giggled and smiled at this question. Four to five participants said that nobody is happily married, all married women are repenting and that 80 to 90% of marriages fail. Some<sup>2</sup> of them inquired if they are being asked about their definition of marriage now or before they were married, because according to them their views about marriage had changed after their divorce and separation. Few<sup>3</sup> participants chose to answer it towards the end of the interview saying it is a difficult question. The figure 6 depicts how the divorced and separated women conceptualize marriage.



**Figure6. Conceptualizations of marriage**

<sup>1</sup>Most or almost all refers to 27 or more participants

<sup>2</sup>Some refers to number of participants between 10 to 19

<sup>3</sup>Few refers to number of participants between five to nine

As displayed in the figure 6 marriage was conceptualized across four interconnected areas, that is, perception towards marriage, purpose of marriage, preparedness for marriage, and the process of marriage. Each area is explained in detail below.

**Perception towards marriage.** Marriage, by most participants was perceived as a compulsion, a social norm and something which should happen at a certain age. Participants expressed feeling the pressure to get married in direct and indirect ways from their parents, other family members and the society at large. One divorced participant for instance described in a humorous way what marriage means to her:

“(Laughing) Marriage? One has to marry! Because of parental pressure one has to get married. Parents wish that our daughter should get married. Not getting married is not allowed in the society. We are living in the society so we have to follow the norms. We have to think about our parents and act according to their wishes. They wish that it’s good if our daughter is married and settled.”

Furthermore, marriage was termed as a social construct and a name, label or a tag given by the society to legitimize the man-woman relationship. Within a marriage one may satisfy all the needs which cannot be fulfilled outside the marital relationship. Few participants also said that they do not believe in marriages anymore and that it is not necessary to be married. Living alone is okay and marriage may not make one happy but the society gives too much importance to marriage and forces one to get into it. However, paradoxically the same participants stressed upon the importance of marriage when they were asked about their views on remarriage. Some respondents also expressed that marriage is a beautiful relationship and that it fills empty corners in your heart. It is a pious relationship which needs to be nurtured by understanding, accepting and trusting each other. All the older participants (5) in the age group of 51 to 70 years and also many others perceived marriage as permanent and a bond which cannot be broken easily. The following quotation by a 59 year old separated woman, sums up the views of many participants:

“For one marriage is for keeps, but that is what most Indians think. I don’t think there is any Indian woman at least who ever imagines that this marriage could end at the time of getting married. Ahh ... Means it’s.... ahh ... it’s.... it has a sort of permanency in it you know, it’s not going to end. You don’t see the end of it at the time of getting married. So it’s like till death. Till death do us apart.”

Most of the older participants were permanently separated and not legally divorced. Interestingly, they also introduced themselves using their husband’s last name. Most younger and

middle aged women perceived of marriage as a compromise, adjustment, gamble, game, struggle and a burden. Some of these women also mentioned that marriage is a sacrifice of self, a very big responsibility, and that it is accompanied by many restrictions.

**Purpose of marriage.** Some major purposes of marriage which emerged from the interviews across age, educational and professional qualifications were companionship, financial and emotional security and value. This reflects the patriarchal mindset. In other words, most participants said that it is not possible for an individual to live alone for lifetime and hence a companion, especially during old age is best in the form of a husband. Also, most participants expressed that women need emotional and financial security and their parents cannot provide this for lifetime. Therefore, a husband who can take care of this becomes an essential part of one's life. The quotation below by a 30 year old divorced woman conveys the views of many:

“For girls it is very different. Parents think that if they have a daughter then *eni agal paachal koi hovu joiye, enu naam koini saathe jodavu joiye, pachi paachalthi enu kon, eno koi aadhar joiye, ame gharda thai jaisu*, (someone should be there for her, whose name should be taken with her, she needs some support in the long run, we will be old) Our son will be for his wife, she should not be alone. She should be independent. For these reasons the parents get their daughter married.”

Additionally, many<sup>4</sup> participants believed that it is difficult for a single woman to survive in the society and that society points finger, asks too many questions and ignores those women who are single. Marriage on the other hand provides an identity and value to women. Consequently, one should get married because the institution of marriage is like a platform to find a respectable position and honor in the society. As the quotation suggests:

“Marriage is a platform to stand in the society. What else is marriage? If you do not have a husband or if someone is divorced then the society will not consider you as a part of it. They will ignore you. One should marry because our society is such that wherever you go you need a husband. All children need a father. All will ask a woman what her husband does. Even if you go to a party or meet a new person they will ask about your marital status. So it is very important to be married.”

Some other purposes for getting married which were as communicated by the participants were; to carry forward one's lineage and to contribute to the society in the form of children.

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<sup>4</sup>Many refers to number of participants between 20 to 26

Satisfying one's sexual urges in a legitimate relationship was also reported as one purpose of marriage by few participants.

**Preparedness for marriage.** Although marriage was perceived as a compulsion almost all the participants appeared quite prepared to get married. Getting married was like crossing an important milestone, irrespective of one's educational and professional qualifications. The idea of getting married was naturally accepted, hardly opposed and in most cases awaited. One participant, a doctor who believed that marriage is something that happens to all, recounted her preparedness towards marriage in the following quote:

"I wanted to be in an accepted relationship, respected in society. I wanted to have kids so that is the only way. So, I mean everybody was getting married, so you also get married."

This natural readiness shows how the idea of marriage is central to our society and how most individuals are socialized to get married. Further, not a single participant underwent pre-marital counseling. Parents, 'wise women', married sisters and friends were the ones who advised women to behave in a certain way after marriage. Pre-marital counseling was definitely not heard of a few years ago but now that it is heard of still no one willingly opts for it because preparedness for marriage is so natural that one may not recognize the need to be prepared or have any extra skills for it.

**Process of marriage.** Out of 30 participants 21 had arranged marriages and nine married by self-selection. The arranged marriages were mostly arranged with the help of common relatives and family friends who acted as mediators. Some other sources to find a partner through arranged marriages were matrimonial websites and columns in newspapers. Some criteria for a good match were; financial stability of the family, either good salary, good job or good education of the boy. Ten Participants reported feeling confused and indecisive about the prospective boy but agreed for marriage for various reasons. For example, some were pressurized by parents, family members or close relatives, some felt that they were immature and so they trusted the choice of their parents and some felt that their dilemma would be resolved and everything will be okay after marriage. Thirteen participants expressed that their opinion about their marriage partner was not asked and if at all they gave their opinion then it was not considered important especially by their fathers. Three participants said that they agreed for the marriage although they did not like the boy because their father's financial condition was not good and they did not want to be a burden on their family. A few participants indicated that they also compromised because their horoscopes were not good and that they were not beautiful. As one participant expresses in her own words:

“When I got engaged my father thought that I do not have a good height. I am overweight and I am not even beautiful. I was not attractive. So my father thought that he will not find a suitable match for me.”

Participants who got married through self-selection reported facing some oppositions from family members which were later resolved before or after their marriage. Two participants said that they married their boyfriends in spite of not being too much in love because their fathers were not very keen on getting them married and they wished to get rid of their natal families for reasons like, too much work and poor financial conditions. It will be important to mention here that many participants articulated in direct and indirect ways that it is the responsibility of parents to get their children married.

Most participants irrespective of having an arranged marriage or marriage by self-selection mentioned that their husbands or in-laws demanded dowry in the form of cash, gold, vehicles, gifts for relatives and home and kitchen appliances etc. All parents gave into the dowry demands except one. Many participants mentioned about too many discussions and some remembered having heated arguments with their husband and in-laws regarding marriage arrangements, number of invitees and gifts for relatives. The marriage ceremony was an extravagant celebration for most participants. Some of them also revealed that their father took loans for expensive wedding arrangements and to fulfill the dowry demands. As one participant explained the process:

“We received a long list of things which they (referring to in-laws) asked for. We received a guest list of 22 people and they asked us to give some gold, some cash and pair of clothes to the closed ones. *“Ritual ke naam pe humse sabh kuch le rahe the”*, (they were asking for a lot of dowry under the name of rituals) I asked my parents from where will you give so much? Do you have so much to give? They said let us see.”

Three participants said that they had serious disagreements with the to-be husband or his family members on the day prior to the wedding and they strongly wished to call off the wedding but did not do it for various reasons like; pressure from parents and relatives, fear of who will marry me, and the fear of the community being notoriously harmful to relatives on breaking the engagement.

Women who were divorced or separated recently, spoke at length about the marriage experiences in comparison to other women. Overall, many women described marriage as a unique experience which made them feel special. This unique feeling was mostly because of the importance given to them in ceremonies and celebrations and the excitement to start a new life.





The life experienced soon after marriage was described by the participants as an ‘adjustment phase’ which is explained across the four aspects below. In turn these are continuously influenced by the conceptualizations of marriage and efforts to fit oneself in the marriage as seen in figure 7.

**The honeymoon period.** All the participants shared that the initial period ranging from 15 days to four years after their marriage were the finest times of their married lives. Participants remembered this period with a glee on their faces. Some of them said that this feeling was so unique that it will never come back even if they get remarried. A few participants did share some happy moments and positive incidences with their ex-husbands during this period. A quote about to be mentioned is what a divorced participant reminisced about her good times while married:

“Sometimes we used to eat from the same plate. He used to oil my hair every Sunday. He used to put safety pin in my *saree* every day. When he used to get ice-cream we used to eat from the same cone. Whenever I made *pani puri* he used to fill it for me (laughs). He had brought so many chocolates for me. He knew I loved chocolates. There are so many good things I remember. Once we had gone to the park. We were sitting in a roller coaster ride and I was scared. So I hugged him. I remember he told me that I don’t want to get down from this roller coaster (laughs a lot). There are so many good things.”

On probing further it was found that, it was not that problems did not exist at this time in the marriages but the joy of being married, new relationships and the perceived benefits which the marriage would bring made them ignore the problems or perceive them as normal or negligible.

**Restrictions and abuse.** Almost all the participants expressed feeling restricted on various accounts either by in-laws (especially the mother in-law) or by husband. The power and control of in-laws were omnipresent irrespective of their physical presence in the house. However, it was not that all the participants were mistreated by their in-laws. Though a small number, three participants did say that their in-laws were very good and that they went out of their way to support them. In-laws of these participants neither put any restriction on them nor interfered in their lives. These participants shared good relationship with their in-laws and other family members and felt lucky to find such in-laws. Below are some areas where the restrictions were laid on the participants.

**Talking to others.** Not allowed to talk to parents, neighbors, friends, relatives etc. Not allowed to visit parents or talking to them on the phone.

**Dress.** Forced to wear *sarees* or *salwar kameez*. Sometimes also forced to cover their heads.

**Not allowed to study further.** Forced to discontinue their studies and were not allowed to study further which was promised before the marriage. If at all they were allowed, they were harassed during examinations and some were not allowed to appear for the examinations.

**Job.** Some were forced to leave their jobs, some were not allowed to do a job and some were forced to do a job because their husbands did not earn. Women who were employed complained of too much work pressure and problems in managing work and home and receiving no support from other family members especially husbands.

Some other restrictions reported by the participants were like; not allowed to surf the internet, use the laptop, watch television, using the phone, not allowed to eat what they like, using electricity, shampoo, being forced to meditate, eat certain foods or not eat certain foods etc. Some of them reported feeling suffocated in such an environment. Experiences of restrictions are expressly stated by some participants below:

“Everything changed from my freedom to almost everything. Everything was snatched away from me. I had nothing of my own. I was dancing like a puppet on their (referring to in-laws) tunes. Nothing was in my control. If they said I had to do this I would say yes. If they said I had to go somewhere I would say yes. I could not think on my own. They would take all decisions for me.”

“I had told her (referring to mother-in-law) before marriage. I had asked her very clearly that is it ok if I wear suits? At that time she said ok and then suddenly she is asking me to wear *sarees*. Then, I used to wear *sarees*. But sometimes I used to wear suits. I had told her that I am not comfortable wearing *sarees* all the time. I love wearing *sarees* but if you force me to wear it then I may not like it. Initially they did not say anything. Later she started forcing me to wear *sarees*.”

“My mother-in-law would even mind if I washed my hair in the interval of two days. She would tell my husband that his wife is using a lot of shampoo.”

Twenty four participants reported that they were victims of either physical, sexual or verbal abuse immediately after marriage out of which very few<sup>5</sup> retaliated. Experiences of abuse are discussed in detail in the next theme and therefore not discussed in this section.

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<sup>5</sup>Very few refers to number of participants less than five

**Personal readjustments.** Many participants recollected about feeling uncomfortable and not very happy about the changes in their personal lives that their marriage called for. But, these changes were not questioned and in fact efforts were made to accept these changes with a hope that all will be okay with time. Conceptualizations of marriage most of which were positive definitely influenced their decision to accept the unwelcome changes in their lives.

Participants remembered feeling very tired, sleep deprived, doing too much work, working like a maid, handling too many responsibilities, waking up early, cooking for all, making tiffin for husband, taking care of likes and dislikes of family members, serving family members during illness, and fulfilling endless expectations and dealing with too much interference from in-laws. Amidst all this they missed the life they lived in their natal homes. The following quotation further emphasizes feelings of a participant on making too many adjustments:

“There was no privacy. All would come in the room every now and then. Then, now since I was married I had to work. I was not prepared for all this and I really do not like all this. I used to cut fruits and serve to all. They were all watching TV nicely including my husband. I was not happy, I was ordered to wake up early, prepare fresh food, when husband comes I was supposed to prepare variety of foods in evening, no freedom to watch television, keep the house clean, do dusting. In short I was asked to keep myself busy with the household work in my leisure time also. She (referring to mother-in-law) expected me to keep doing work all the time. I am also a human, I need rest.”

Six participants immediately got pregnant after their marriage which called for further readjustments on the personal front. They admitted that their pregnancy and presence of young children in the early phase of their married lives created pressure and stress in their lives and relationships. The quote below is from a participant who was reflecting on the times when she made many personal as well professional adjustments and how pregnancy made matters worse for her. She said:

“I got pregnant right away. So that was also unplanned which was another foolish thing to do.”

**Professional readjustments.** Most participants communicated how their marriage led to discontinuation, change or transfer of jobs and sometimes leaving midway the ongoing studies especially if the marriage happened in a different city. Education was not a priority for many and was discontinued in between if the marriage was finalized because marriage was the priority. This did not appear as a big issue as long as marriage was good but, was later realized as a big mistake after the divorce and separation happened. One participant who was the oldest among all said that

she had many aspirations related to her career which she thought she would be able to fulfill after marriage since her husband was an educated man. Still regretting not being able to pursue higher studies below is what she shared during the interview:

“I wanted to join NID. I was sure that I would have got admission. So I told him (referring to ex-husband) that let me do that course and we can plan for the baby after three years. He said no. He said we will not use any precautions and let the baby happen naturally. He said I can join the course, but if I get pregnant then I should leave the course. I said then what is the use of doing the course? So, he started all this from the beginning (laughs).”

Few participants remembered deciding not to seek a job, settling for a lower salary job, not being able to give their 100% in their professional life and also letting go of a good opportunity because marriage, forming a family and taking care of the family was their priority. Also, some of them were restricted from their husbands or in-laws to do a job. The upcoming quote highlights the experience of one participant who was a nurse:

“He (referring to ex-husband) was so much suspicious that he made me leave my job. He made me sit at home. I accepted his decision and sat at home. But there was no source of income. How would sitting at home help? I am so much educated and what is the use of that? I sat home without doing a job for two months. I did not go anywhere. Not even to my parent’s place.”

Some women took long leave due to marriage and joined back their work and few started with a new job after marriage or helped their husband in his work or business.

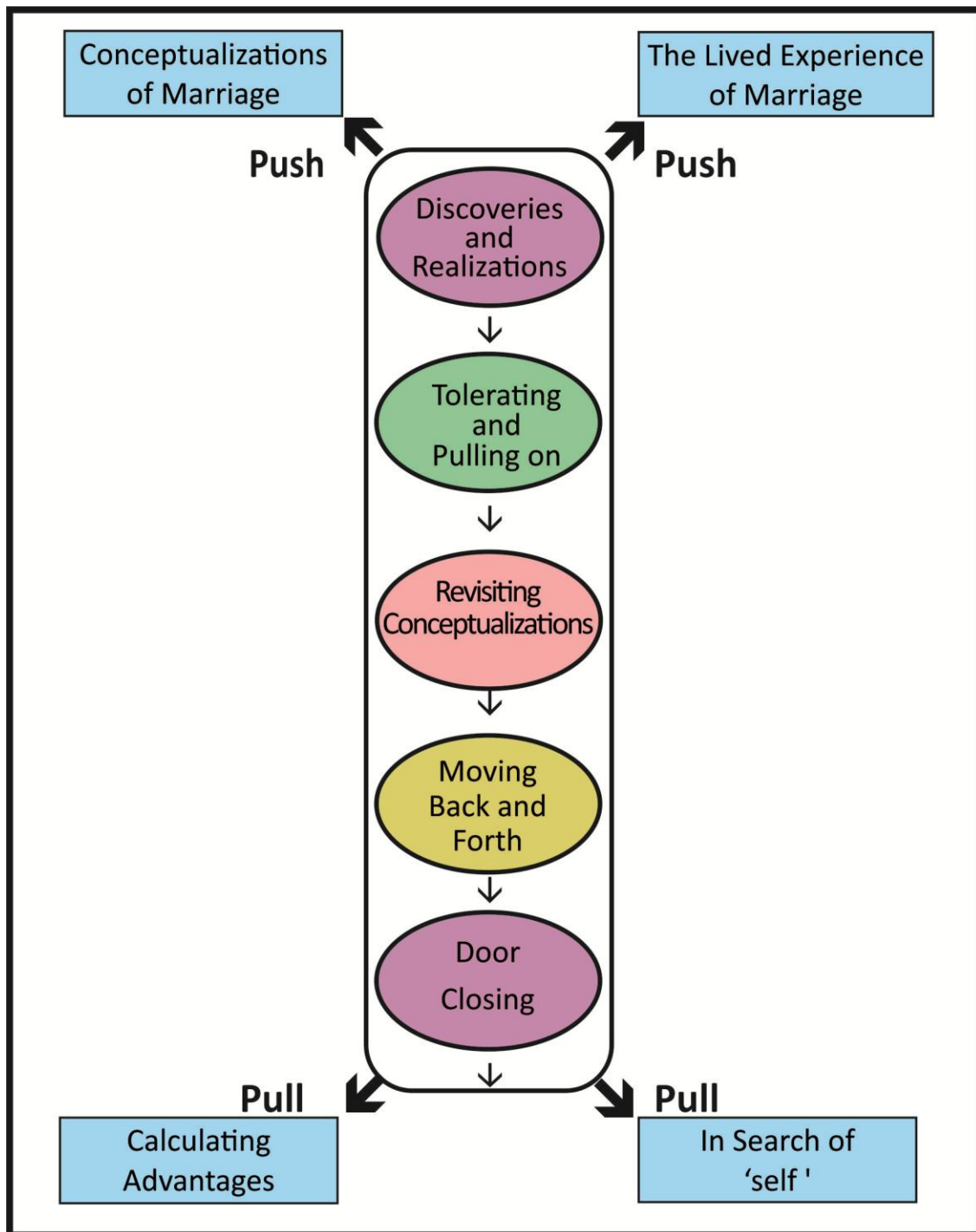
Thus, the lived experience of marriage was very different from what most participants had perceived marriage to be. Nonetheless, the experience was still colored by their overall conceptualizations of marriage. As a result of which in spite of the restrictions and abuses and feeling uncomfortable with the personal and professional readjustments women made endless efforts to fit in the family and become an ideal wife and a daughter in-law. These troubles were perceived as normal and ignorable in the initial phase of marriage. Most women hid from their parents about being beaten and pocketed insults with a hope that all will be okay someday. Some women did confess about feeling trapped, making the wrong choice and regretting the marriage but were not contemplating leaving the conjugal family or the husband at this point of time. Trying to fit and adjust was a priority rather than divorce and separation. One participant below talks about making adjustments in spite of facing many unwelcome changes after marriage:

“I took them (referring to the changes after marriage), I took them in stride trying to adjust I mean, I, I knew that a girl has to mix with the boys family and I think every Indian girl is raised like that, that right since she is a little girl you know that she has to go to her husbands’ family and become a part of her husband’s family and that is exactly what I was trying to do. You try to mingle and become a part of that family and I was sort of trying to suppress my own identity like I was very happy to change my name officially. I just wanted to become Mrs.”

The above quotation which sums up the lived experiences of many participants highlights that the conceptualizations of marriage had a strong influence on the lived experiences and therefore the participants made efforts to fit. Overall those participants whose age at marriage was 25 years or below (22) were observed making more professional and personal readjustments in comparison to the women whose age at marriage was between 26 to 31 years (8). If we connect this with the symbolic interaction theory then we can say that the perceived meaning of marriage life derived from the socialization process makes the problems appear negligible and solvable. Further, as per the feminist theory which advocates that within the family certain division of labor is normal, the women were observed making many personal and professional readjustments without much resistance. The lived experiences also reveal that the responsibility of sustaining a marriage rests more on a woman than on a man, and women are obligated to make adjustments in order to be accepted in the conjugal family. Additionally, in connecting this situation with the social exchange theory we can say that the individuals made adjustments, compromises and efforts to fit in the marriage because they were still expecting that being married is and will be advantageous to them, if not now then at least in the long run.

### **Journeying through Divorce and Separation**

As mentioned in the earlier chapter the study views divorce and separation as a process and not as an event. The journey towards divorce and separation was described as one of the longest and the most traumatic period of their lives by most of the participants. The process of getting out of the marriage seemed as problematic as much as it was easy getting into the marriage. The journey through divorce and separation is projected in five stages in the figure 8 capturing the overall experiences of the participants and the internal and external tug or war. As displayed in the figure 8, besides passing through these stages women’s experiences were influenced or rather pulled by their conceptualizations of marriage and the lived experiences thereafter. Further, influencing the journey of divorce were two strong pull factors which were in turn influenced by the stormy journey of divorce and separation. These two factors were calculating advantages of being out of the turbulent marriage and searching the ‘self’ which was seemingly lost amidst the process.



**Figure8. Journeying through divorce and separation**

The first stage began with a small puncture in the ‘everything is good’ feeling after the honeymoon period was over. In this stage the participants discovered and realized certain aspects within the marriage which broke their hearts and dampened their spirits to make adjustments. Some of these aspects were; too many restrictions, never-ending abuse and violence, extra-marital affair of the husband, too much interference from the in-laws, husband being engaged to someone before marriage, husband having a fake degree or no job etc. The quote below explains the feeling

of a 28 year old divorced participant when she finds out about her husband's affair on accidentally opening his Facebook account:

"I came to know that he (referring to ex-husband) was having affairs with girls, not just one but many. And I was alone at home and it was like a sinking kind of a feeling that everything has gone down and suicidal thoughts came. As if *ab kuch bacha hi nahin* (nothing is left now), everything was invested in Ravi (husband), as trust was the basic thing that I had on him."

Nevertheless, it was observed that making adjustments did not discontinue even with some striking and unacceptable realizations. Many of these realizations though were later described as reasons for their divorce which are discussed after this theme. Many participants conveyed about realizing at this point that they had made the wrong choice and that they were in the wrong place. Some also said that they regretted their marriage. The following words are from a separated participant about discovering something on the very next day of her marriage.

"I saw him chewing something. So, I asked him. What do you keep chewing? So, he said "I eat little *ghutka* (tobacco) and I will leave it." I was shocked at it. I was like shit *mein kahan fas gai* (where have I landed myself in trouble) but then I could not do anything because it was the first day. I trusted him on that, that he will leave it."

Interestingly, the realizations brought with them more shocks than power to retaliate or oppose the perceived wrong happening with them. Further, many of them mentioned that their sex life with their spouse was completely normal and good at this point of time. Some were pregnant and a few had already become mothers. This reflects that in spite of the realization that something is really wrong with their marriage the perceived benefits that the marriage will reap had a major influence on their psyche and most of them were still not thinking about divorce or separation at this point of time.

In fact the realization that 'my marriage is in trouble' was handled by making efforts to save the marriage by tolerating and pulling on the toxic relationship and abuse which characterized the second stage in the journey through divorce and separation. Most participants communicated that major efforts to save their marriage were made by them at this stage. Also, the problems in marriage were still hidden from parents to save the parents from worrying, to maintain the dignity of their husbands and honor of their conjugal and natal families and also with the hope that 'all will be okay'. The quote below from a 47 year old divorced participant conveys the act of tolerating and pulling on clearly:

"*Manne maare* (he would beat me), *gaado aape* (he would abuse me) I tried to hide it as my daughter's room was just across our room. In the out-house my maid servant used to live,



*meri kya izzat rahi, servants ko bhi dikhta tha ki sahib kya dehte hai isko* (where was my dignity, the servants also knew the way he treated me). All the time I am trying to preserve my respect, my dignity protect my child from not knowing what's going on. I was like a *zinda laash* (living dead) *bahar mai bahut hashti thi, dikhati thi ki mai khush hu* (I would laugh and pretend that I am happy) because I wanted this to work as I had come from a broken house and I had an enough with sadness, *dukh* (unhappiness) and all. I wanted to be happy and I wanted to be strong and I told myself that it's okay, there are lots of people whose marriages don't work but God has given me a beautiful home, beautiful *khandaan*, (*family*) *ek respect, ek dignity milli hai muje samaj mai* (I have received respect in the society)"

The stage of tolerating and pulling on lasted longer for those women whose duration of marriage was five years or more. Some other reasons given by the participants for tolerating and pulling on were: pregnancy, children being too young or at important stages in their academic career, younger sisters still unmarried, guilt of breaking the marriage, fear of the husband and in-laws, what will people say and where will I go? The following words are from a participant who almost died tolerating her husband's physical abuse:

"I wanted to leave him and go back to my parents. But both my sisters were unmarried. I was worried that nobody will marry them because of me. I kept on tolerating. This went on and on. I was pulling on with the fear of being beaten, scolded and insulted. He would threaten me again and again that I will send you to your parents' place. I would plead him not to do that."

This reflects that internally at this stage many of them thought about leaving but were unable to execute the same fearing the reasons stated above. Only one or two participants stated that they retaliated to the abuse. It will be worth mentioning that sex life of most participants was normal with their spouse even at this stage. For example, one participant who endlessly spoke about multiple affairs of her husband very conveniently mentioned giving birth to two children amidst her rough marriage. However some participants also spoke about how sleeping with their husbands and becoming pregnant in spite of the problems was an opportunity for them to save their marriage. The upcoming dialogue from a victim of severe abuse emphasizes this clearly:

Respondent: This went on for nine years. Very soon I discovered that I was pregnant again.

Interviewer: Hmm... so while he was hitting you... you guys still had physical relationship?

Respondent: Yes, because for me sleeping with him was like an opportunity to win him back. I slept with him to give him sexual satisfaction. I anticipated that he will change after that. Sometimes, sex was painful but I would not utter a word. I started looking at everything as an

opportunity to improve him or win him. Having sex with him, cooking his favorite food, saying yes to all what he said, and taking care of his smallest needs. But it was all in vain. He never cared. For him I was just a property. An object of sexual satisfaction. I was someone with whom he had the liberty to do anything at any time. I was like a dustbin, he would shout on me, push me, kick me, spit on me, throw things on me, and insult me. He would throw all his frustration on me. I also took my pregnancy as an opportunity. I thought after we have the baby he will improve. So, I decided to carry on with my pregnancy.

Interviewer: Hmm... so was he good to you during pregnancy?

Respondent: what good? When I was two and a half months pregnant he kicked me in my stomach.

The subsequent stage was characterized by problems within the marriage appearing beyond repair. Many participants at this stage described feeling detached, fed-up, irritated and falling out of love and feeling disrespectful towards their husbands and in-laws. Some of them specifically mentioned that there was no sex during this time. Some denied sex to their husbands and some were denied sex by their husbands. This reflects that sex is an important indicator for hopes that the marriage will last. Many participants acknowledged that they questioned and revisited their conceptualizations of marriage, husband, in-laws, parents, society etc. This was a crucial stage which weakened the push factors and strengthened the pull factors. The feeling of revisiting their conceptualizations was expressly stated by the following participants:

Respondent: That day my heart broke into pieces. What made him say that? What was my fault? (cries ... for a while and silent)

Interviewer: Relax.... (Silence for a long time).

Respondent: For someone whom I left everything; my home, my parents, my family, my studies everything he slapped me. This was a shock to me. I felt somewhere I started regretting for marrying this man. He was not at all the same person when I loved him.”

“*Dimag kharab ho gaya tha* (my mind was spoilt). I felt that what is this? This is not the way how someone treats their daughter in-law and wife. I was confused that why they (referring to ex-husband and in-laws) are treating me like this. They had told my father that they will treat me like their daughter. I could not see even the D of daughter. I did not feel very good getting into that family. I mean one has to make adjustments but it has to be from both the sides.”

“I still remember what he told me on that day. He told me that if you do not take care of me I will not mind, but if you fail to take care of my parents then it is a big problem. Now this is

the definition of marriage. And till date I cannot digest this. Am I getting married to him or his parents?”

Participants shared that their tolerating and pulling on was doing more bad than good to their marriage, their children and themselves. They remembered and spoke about incidences where they felt extremely sad about the kind of marriage they were in and how shattered, helpless and hopeless they felt about their situations. Some of them also expressed feeling that they would have been happier single than married. Therefore the experiences that altered the conceptualizations of marriage compelled the participants to think about themselves and the advantages to them and their children in moving out of the marriage.

A sprout emerged breaking apart the dormant seed giving birth to the next stage which witnessed a lot of internal and external back and forth. The problems as narrated became serious to an extent that they were no more a private affair and there was no choice but to involve others. It is worth mentioning that others were involved to save the self out of the bad marriage and not the marriage only, in most cases. These others were parents, in-laws, elder children, psychiatrists, other family members, friends, relatives etc. At this stage the participants went back to their natal homes, were taken back by parents or brothers or were sent back by their husband and in-laws. Some of them reported frequent fights, disagreements, arguments, and being a victim of abuse during this period also. Most of them mentioned that they went back to their conjugal families and made further efforts to reconcile and live together and sometimes there was a long waiting period to hear something from the husband and in-laws and take them back. Those who went back after a temporary period of separation mentioned that they were still skeptical about improvements in the relationships but they did so on being persuaded and forced by parents and fearing the social stigma. Some of them returned to conjugal homes on conditional basis. The quotes below are from two different participants who returned to their marital homes in this stage:

“Everybody was telling me to go. They asked me that if my sister in-law is getting married and if he is calling me back then what is my problem? So, I went. But I went half-hearted. I did not feel like going. Things had soured between us. In the wedding I was the daughter-in-law. All were celebrating. She found a good man. I could not come to the same level of cheerfulness and happiness. The spirit that I had before marriage of laughing and making others laugh had gone. I just could not smile. I lost my smile.”

“I stayed with my parents for few days and later went back with him. He called me many times and said sorry. I had no one to look forward to. I had ruined my own life by choosing a

wrong life partner. Where could I go, so I went back. This time I went back for my daughter. I did not want her to live her life without a father.”

Having lived separately for a while or having contemplated about the grave and irreversible problems the participants were now seriously thinking about the good life without the husband and its perceived benefits. Thoughts now, were more in the direction of how do I get rid of this relationship and what can I do to come out of this?

A few participants being overwhelmed with the fear of upcoming financial difficulties for them and their children were seen making attempts to safeguard their future at this point of time. Some of these attempts were described as pursuing vocational courses, higher studies and looking for jobs so that they would be financially and professionally equipped when they quit the marriage. The following excerpt highlights and emphasizes the above point:

“Actually I wanted a divorce and I was not independent. I had decided to wait till my son completes his 12<sup>th</sup>. And if I want a divorce then I cannot be dependent on my husband. I will give this credit to my sister. She is very ambitious and strong. She likes taking risks. She took a risk and we made a yoga studio. Now I can take it forward from there. And now I am so strong that I do not think that I need anybody’s support.”

Another excerpt is from a participant who successfully finished her PhD within her much troubled marriage and is now a professor in the University:

Respondent: He had an affair with the secretary and my daughter was three a half years old, and he would tell me to get out, get out... that’s when I did my PhD. To wake up at 2 in morning and study, study *halat kharab hojati thi* (My condition was very bad).

Interviewer: So...you mean to say that the information about him having an affair motivated you to do a Ph D, study further and do something with your life?

Respondent: Yeah because he started telling me to get out, *itne chote bache ko leke mai kaha jaungi* (where will I go with such a young child) So my mother and a very good friend of mine told me to start Ph D then I registered for it.

The last stage was beyond the saturation point of tolerance and fear. This was when one decided that the problems were enough and I did not want to or rather could not live with this person anymore. This was adopted as the last resort when everything else failed. For few participants this stage came fast and for most it took a lot of time. This door closing period comprised incidences like filing a case, receiving the legal notice, legal divorce, judicial separation or permanent separation. Twenty one women said that they initiated their divorce process by either

moving out of the house or by filing a case against the husband and in-laws. At this point participants reported feeling that divorce or separation was the only solution to their suffering. Many described taking a sigh of relief and feeling free from abuse and restrictions. As one participant reveals:

“Even if my husband’s dead body is lying in front of me it will not affect me at all. I mean I hate him so much that his death will not affect me at all.”

Not only the initiators (21) but also the non-initiators (9) reached this stage of door closing wherein they expressed that even if their husband wants to reconcile they will not want to go back. Following is a quote from a participant who is a non-initiator, illustrating the door closing and explaining why she does not want her husband back in her life:

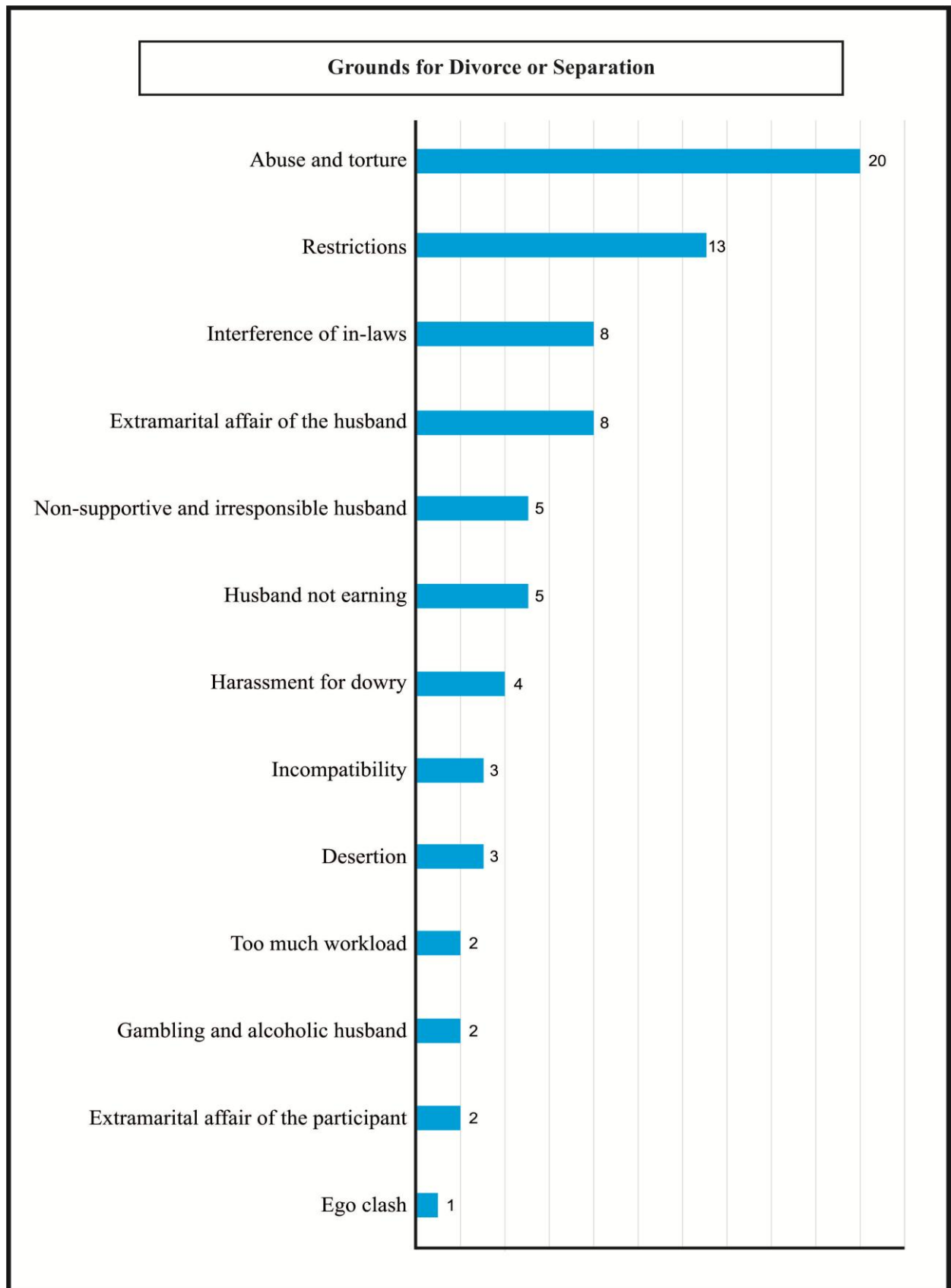
“Because he (referring to ex-husband) cheated me (cries). I was so much in love with him that I felt that I will not be able to live without this man. Today, I can live without him and I am living without him and I feel that I am better off because he is not with me. Now if someone tells me that he is coming back and he will leave everything for you and he has changed....I cannot take him back in my life. I do not have any feelings for him. Once my daughter had asked me that what if papa comes back?”

Some participants at this juncture also expressed that how the traumatic marriage had changed them for bad and that they were not happy with themselves. They searched within them the kind of woman they were before marriage and how the marriage had made them bad to worse. Not to forget the sad feeling of being in a failed relationship was omnipresent and depressive feelings were at the peak at this point of time which will be the focus of discussion in the theme of stages of coping and adjusting with divorce.

In connecting the same with the theories of symbolic interactionism and feminism in the theoretical framework we can say that the meaning associated with divorce is not very positive for the women and therefore they try to pull on the bad marriage, tolerating abuse in the private sphere of the family. The process of divorce thus becomes lengthy and difficult. Delaying the divorce and separation for betterment of children, to protect the honor of the father or husband and to avoid social stigma illustrate the encompassing nature of Indian women’s self (Mascolo et al., 2004). The stage of the ‘door closing’ in the journey of divorce and separation and the act of initiating the divorce or separation exemplify the theory of social exchange in that there is realization that continuing to live in the marriage is becoming more strenuous than before, and hence one chooses to leave or accepts the decision of the spouse to be left.

## **Grounds for Divorce or Separation**

Figure 9 displays the grounds for divorce or separation as described by the participants. Overall, among all the reasons that were described by the participants as grounds for their divorce and separation abuse and torture from either the husband or in-laws turned out to be the leading one. Of all the women interviewed 20 reported they were victims of either, physical, verbal or sexual abuse and torture. Restrictions of several kinds which have been discussed in the previous themes was the second most important reason for divorce and separation. Out of all the participants 13 said that they faced restrictions of various kinds. Interference of in-laws especially of the mother-in-law and sister-in-law was the third most important reason stated by eight participants. Some of them specifically stated that they had no problems with their husbands as such and it was only because of their in-laws that problems occurred in their marriage. Few participants also expressed about being able to forgive the husband but not the in-laws. A similar number of participants, that is, eight of them said that their divorce happened because their husbands cheated on them and had affairs outside the marital relationship. Five participants stated that their divorce happened because their husbands were irresponsible and did not support them and also did not earn for the family. These women described how they were distressed due to their husband's overall non-supportive behaviors especially on their fights with their in-laws. Further, they were very unhappy about the husbands being irresponsible towards sharing workload with them and refusal to take up financial responsibility of the family. Some of these women were also breadwinners and took complete responsibility of the family expenditures. Many of them remembered paying all the bills, child's expenses, car loans, house loans, buying grocery of the house and also taking care of the husband's luxurious demands. A small number of participants, that is, four women stated harassment for dowry as a reason for their divorce and separation. Some of the other reasons stated by the participants were incompatibly with their partners, desertion, too much workload, husband into gambling and alcoholism, extramarital affair of the participant and ego issues. It is important to note that most participants reported more than one reason for their divorce.

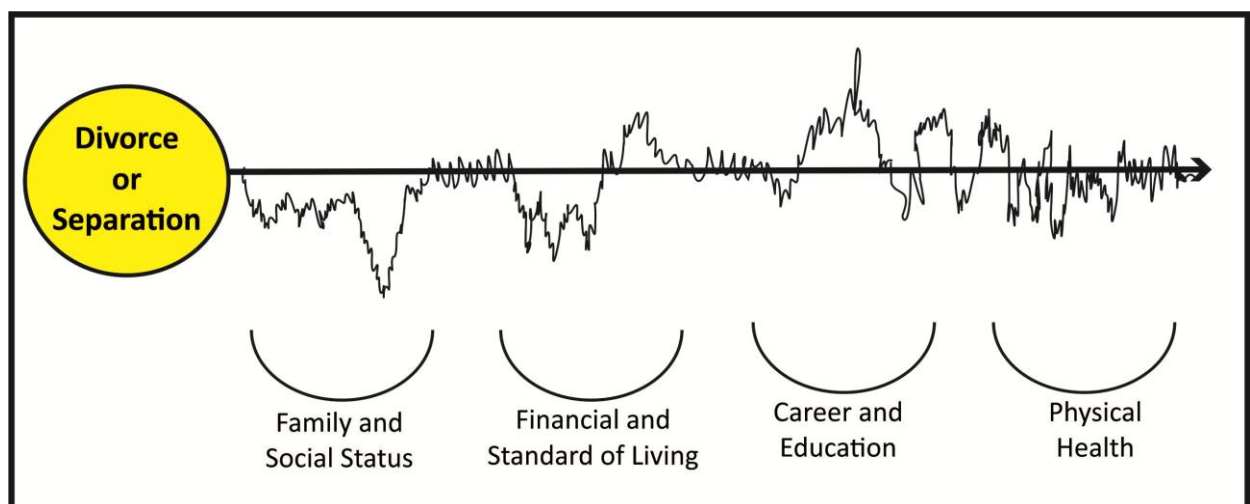


**Figure9. Grounds for divorce or separation**

The following themes have emerged as a result of deductive data analysis and interpretation. The three upcoming themes answer the first research question, that is, how do women's lives change after divorce and separation?

### **Cardiogram of Losses and Gains**

Life after divorce and separation brought about many changes in the lives of the participants which can be compared to a cardiogram. Participants experienced several losses and gains in most spheres of their lives. The figure 10 illustrates a cardiogram of losses and gains in the lives of the participants after their separation and divorce in four major areas, that is, family and social status, financial and standard of living, career and education, and physical health.



**Figure10. Cardiogram of losses and gains**

**Family and social status.** Marriage in a patriarchal society brings a gain in women's status in a variety of ways through playing the traditional roles, domestic work, reproduction, child care, rituals surrounded around married women etc. It has been discussed in the earlier themes that many participants described the first few years of their marriage as the best period of their married life and how this influenced them in delaying their divorce or separation. Therefore, being married is an effortless escalation in one's social status and value in the society and hence divorce and separation bring a loss in this status. Women who were divorced and separated no longer fulfilled the traditional roles of a wife, home maker, daughter in-law etc. As marriage is the norm in our society and therefore glorified, divorce and separation are considered as deviant social facts. Being divorced and separated brings even lesser value compared to being single never married. Further, just being a mother of a child does not suffice to reconstruct this loss in the familial and social status.



Also a woman's real home is considered her husband's home by the society and hence not being a part of the conjugal home and family made many participants consider themselves as a misfit in the society. Irrespective of one's educational, professional and financial status value and respect comes only with being married. A quest for this status by most participants is also discussed in the themes of needs, remarriage and constructions of success and happiness. Thus, the loss in familial and social status brings the waves of the cardiogram downwards as displayed in the figure 10. The following quote by a 31 year old divorced woman highlights a loss in the familial and social status:

"A woman who is divorced always faces and hears taunts of the people in the society. She is labeled as an unlucky person *abhagan* (ill fated). People will blame her for not being able to save the marriage. She will be pitied for not getting a good husband. Women have to struggle. She has to listen and bear the taunts of people in the society. Parents also speak a lot. Parents also have to listen from people. The girl becomes a burden for her parents. People say words like "you are back, your marriage broke?"

More aspects related to this loss of status have been discussed in the section of social stigma.

**Financial and standard of living.** Most participants (28) experienced a downward economic mobility after their divorce and separation. Women lost their money, fixed deposits, house, and priced possessions like jewelry, vehicles, hard earned home appliances and equipment due to their divorce and separation. In such situations participants who were unemployed and received no or little alimony suffered more compared to those who were employed or were already breadwinners and loan payers in their conjugal homes. One separated participant sadly expressed that her husband took the car loan and the home loan on her name since she had a government job. The house is on the husband's name the car is not in a condition to be used. Further, she has also lost her government job and is finding it difficult to pay the loans. She said:

"I do not have any money for my own self. I have no money. I have to think for spending even a single penny. Today he has a permanent job. That car is with me. I am still paying the loan. He has spoilt the car. It is in tatters. I am not driving. I am not even able to sell it. That house money I have not got back. My father is spending all the money for the legal matters. Why should he pay? Till now we have spent 2.5 lakhs. I am tired now. Even if I pass from some branded shop and if I am unable to buy I feel very angry on my situation."

However, those who were earning well and managing the family expenditures while married also complained that their savings were eroded in paying the house rent or loan, school fees of children, lending money to husband and not getting it back or paying up the loans taken by the husbands but on their names. When these women were divorced and separated they regretted making wrong financial investments. But still, the financial situation of these women was better compared to those who were unemployed. The following quote from a divorced participant who was the sole breadwinner of the family while married highlights the above point:

“The lawyer asked me about the kind of case that I wanted to file. He was asking me to ask him for alimony. I was laughing because in all these years he had not given me a single penny then how will he give me anything now. I did not expect anything.”

Due to the downward economic mobility there was a definite decline in the standard of living and women remembered compromising on small expenditures like food and clothing which normally one would take for granted. Presence of children and their demands increased this financial burden.

Moreover many of them felt dependent on their parents for financial help and did not like this feeling. As the parents had already spent a lot in the wedding and also gave dowry, there was an unsaid understanding that her right over family money no more exists. Due to this women were at a double disadvantage after their divorce and separation and realized the hard way that they had to fend for themselves and their children. As the quote states:

“I am not working. This is my age to earn and give money to my parents but I am asking money from them. I had a good job. I was earning 35,000/- but I had to leave it because of depression. So I feel very bad that I am dependent. Though my parents are not making me feel it.”

It will be noteworthy to mention at this juncture that although most of the participants suffered serious financial strain right after their divorce and separation, it did not last very long and they pulled through it. As the waves in the figure 10 suggests a downward mobility followed by a gradual upward mobility in the area of financial and standard of living. It was an upward economic mobility for two women after their divorce, one who got a very good amount of money as alimony and the other one who had not discontinued her well-paying job after marriage.

**Career and education.** Even though the participants shared having financial difficulties in varying degrees that affected their standard of living, their professional status supported them

in their economic hardships and gave them a sense of control over their lives. The area of career and education thus was one sphere of life in which most participants gained after their divorce and separation as displayed in the figure. Although, many participants communicated that they lost their jobs first due to marriage and later due to divorce and that they had to discontinue their education due to their marriage but ultimately most of them indicated a progress in this area after their divorce and separation. However some participants who were aspiring to build a good career were upset due to the ups and downs in their career because of their divorce and felt that they could have been in better positions professionally. As the quote suggests:

“I was into teaching and at that time I was drawing a salary of 12000/-. I left that job because of my marriage and if I would have been working till now then at least I would be getting 20,000/- today. I would have been single I would have had no liabilities and I would have savings basically. Today, I don’t have anything (sulks).”

Divorce and separation interestingly for many provided an opening to develop their careers. By not having any other option but to manage one’s own finances women articulated that they managed amidst the difficulties to reach a new height in their careers which they claimed they would never have reached if they would have been married. For example beginning their own catering business, saloons, day care centers, art and craft class, yoga studio and being a famous mehndi artist, a bank manager, a professor, a doctor etc. One participant remembered, how in spite of having no money she started with her craft classes from her son’s pocket money. She narrated her experience as below:

Respondent: I thought of starting a hobby class. But I did not have any money to buy paints or papers to start the class. I did not want to take the money from anyone. My mother used to give pocket money to my elder son. He told me that he has 2000 rupees.

Interviewer: Wow....

Respondent: So, he said he can give me that money to buy things provided I return him the money once I earn. So he said let us buy all the things. So, we went and bought all the things. We got handbills printed and announced in the locality. My mother gave me some waste metal rods and wooden planks from which we made boards. Everything was ready and my hobby class started.

Interviewer: Great....

Respondent: I used to charge 80 rupees per student and I started earning some money.

Some participants who had discontinued their studies due to marriage began studying again and completed their unfinished degrees whereas others who felt inadequate about their education also opted for higher education after divorce and separation. The below quotes from two separated participants illustrate the same.

“I started doing my BA from a distance learning course. This is my final year. After one year I will be a graduate. It was something I had left half way so I wanted to complete it. It will now help me to find a good job. I also started working. I have not disclosed it to many people that I am working because then Deep (ex-husband) will not agree to give me the alimony. So, now I feel very strong and independent. There is no time to feel depressed or cry or anything.”

“My MBA was pending, I had left it half way because I was too much excited for marriage. I started it again. I cleared it with difficulty but I cleared it.”

A few as above reported that they hid their employment status from most people as they had filed for maintenance and revealing it would go against their case. A few also said that they settled with low paying jobs because taking up well-paying jobs would go against their case for maintenance.

**Physical Health.** Health was an area where many lost and some gained after their divorce and separation as displayed in the figure 10. Eighteen participants said that the experience of separation and divorce had taken a toll on their physical health and that they were deprived of sound sleep only because of the pain and suffering that they have undergone. Some health problems which the participants mentioned they were suffering from because of their divorce and separation were: deficiency of B 12, calcium, iron, Vitamin D, pain in the joints, too much tiredness, high blood pressure, bulimia, thyroid, diabetes, cholesterol, hormonal imbalance, hair loss, and dark circles. The following excerpts from two participants in their mid-thirties sum up the situation of many participants:

“I am so weak today. My body has lost its vitality. Today I think I have toiled so much that I am older than my mother.”

“My health is like a 50 years old person.”

Out of these 18 participants many said that they were unable to sleep well and that sometimes they wake up in the middle of the night with horrifying dreams, thoughts about future and haunting memories from the past. One participant was hospitalized because she collapsed on not being able to sleep for four to five days. She lived with her husband for 20 years to realize that

he has an affair. Much shattered with the incident she is suffering from severe insomnia. Below is a description of her experience in her own words:

“Sometimes I go in the past and I cannot stop my thoughts at all. I have flashes of memory and I just cannot control my thoughts. My thoughts are very rapid. I think of school, and then I think of marriage, I think of children and then I think of him. This happens to me once in a week. At least once a week I sleep by 4 in the morning. Now I have decided that something like this should never happen with me. Whenever I am unable to sleep I will consult the doctor. I will tell him to increase the dosage.”

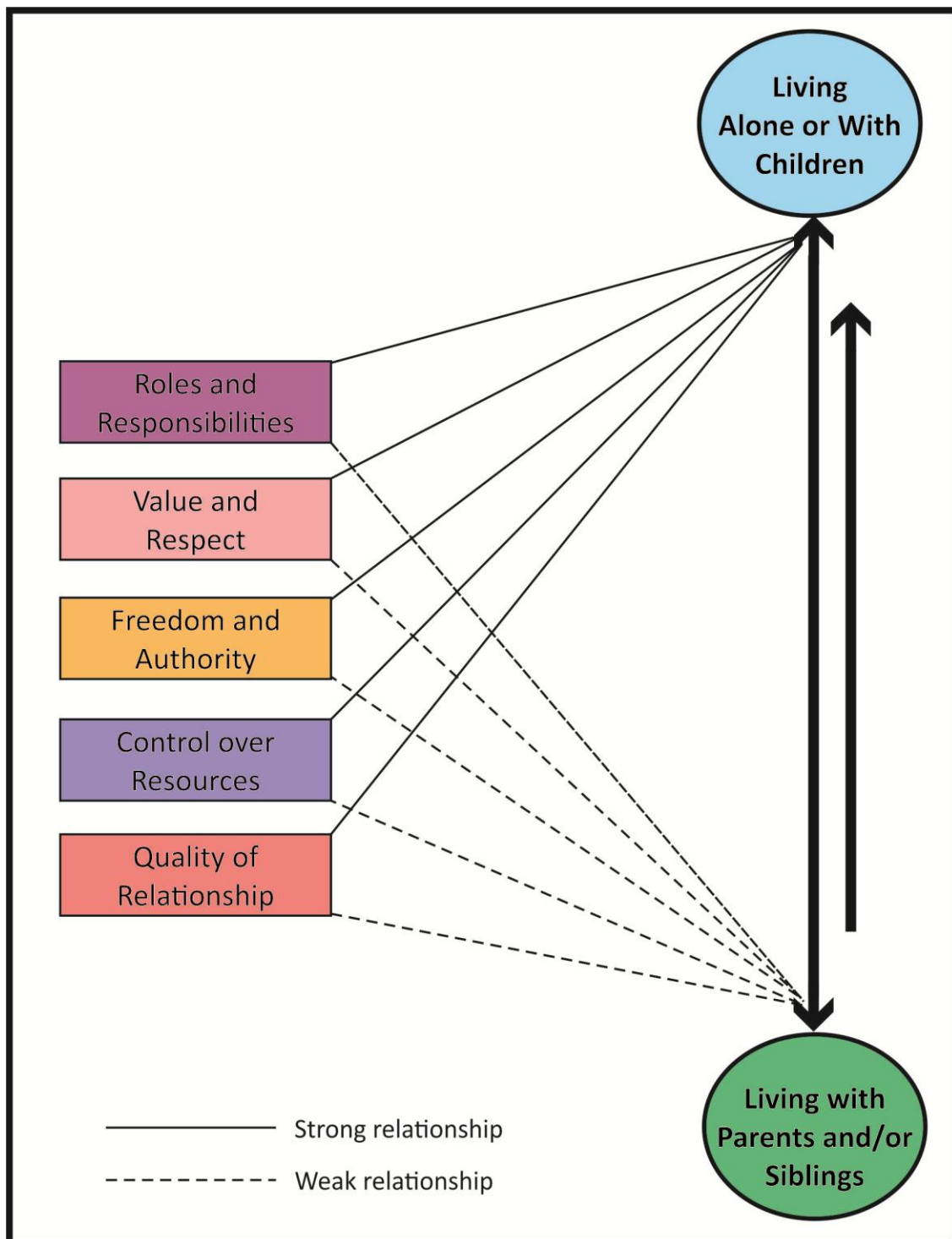
Five participants specifically said that they have an improvement in their health and can sleep well because they are now at a safe place and out of a toxic relationship. One participant out of these five had recently suffered a heart attack and underwent a bypass surgery but according to her it had no connection with her separation.

Other participants said that their health and sleep are okay and did not connect it with their divorce or separation. Some out of these said that they fall asleep as soon as they lie on their beds as they keep very busy and hence get tired.

Thus, in the cardiogram of losses and gains most areas brought a loss for most women and some areas also brought a gradual gain. However, in spite of the difficulties and challenges faced the cardiogram still has waves and not a straight line which reflects that even amidst these losses and gains the women continued to find themselves and meanings to their lives.

### **Reworking the Living Arrangements**

Divorce and separation definitely call for living separately from each other. It requires either the husband or the wife to move out of the house. In most cases it is the woman who moves out given the patriarchal context. In the current study also in most cases it was the woman who moved out of the husband's house. This necessitates to re work the living arrangements immediately. Although most women instantaneously start living with their parents (except older women whose parents had died and one woman who continued to live with her husband) after their divorce or separation they gradually start living alone and with children or express their intentions to live alone in future. The figure 11 symbolizes the dynamics of reworking the living arrangements across five major domains which are very differently experienced by women living alone or with children and women living with parents and siblings.



**Figure 11. Reworking the living arrangements**

**Participants living with parents and siblings.** From the point of view of support (more in terms of financial, emotional and child care) it may appear that participants living with their parents and siblings after their divorce and separation will be better off in comparison to those living alone or with children. Sixteen participants lived with their parents or siblings. However,

in spite of the advantages, life seemed more challenging for those living with the natal family after the divorce and separation. The below domains illustrate this further.

***Roles and responsibilities.*** Except for two to three participants those living with their natal families played many roles and had much more domestic work related responsibilities on them. They felt that their family members expected too much out of them in terms of work and according to them they were the ones who did the most work in comparison to other family members. Most of them cooked for their families and did a lot of housework apart from their jobs and business. Hardly did anyone complain directly about the amount of work but expressed being burdened in indirect ways. The upcoming excerpts from two divorced participants illustrate the above points clearly:

“Since the time I wake up I am running around behind my son. Then I help my mother. I wash some vessels, I sweep and mop the floor. Then my mother plays with my child. We have lunch and then we sleep and take rest for a while. Then I study for my Montessori course. I am doing a six months course and then I will start doing my job. I know of some vacancies in schools. Then in the evening my father and siblings come and they play with my son. I free my mother of all the work. I manage the kitchen in the evening.”

“People expect me to do work at home. Before marriage he (referring to the father) never told me, now he tells me. I do not like it. I am not able to do household work and I don’t like to do it, earlier my parents never used to tell me anything but now sometimes they ask me to clean the house. If you are single and staying with your family, then they will surely expect you to work and help them. If you are married and if you are visiting them then they will treat you like a guest and do things for you (laughs).”

However two to three women also said that they do not work and all the work is being taken care of by their mothers. These women did not have children and their brothers were unmarried.

***Value and respect.*** Almost all the participants who lived with their parents expressed a decrease in their value and respect. Additionally, in spite of doing so much work and handling many responsibilities participants felt that they had less or no say in family matters or decisions in their natal homes. Many shared that they felt as if they are a burden on their parents and even the maids can replace the work that they were doing. In other words they are not indispensable. Three participants shared that their children are not loved enough by their parents especially fathers and felt very unhappy about it. Women thought they will get value and respect in their

conjugal families which they did not get. Later these women searched for this in their natal families. Staying alone for the pursuit of value and respect was expressed by many who were staying with parents and siblings. Below is an expression of a 37 year old divorced participant who lives with her father and brother's family and feels insulted due to her father's behavior:

“He (referring to father) keeps comparing me with my sister-in-law. I do all the work and he keeps praising her. I feel insulted. If you are finishing ten tasks you expect appreciation. He appreciates but not me. He appreciates my sister in-law. My father is very traditional. He believes all what his brothers in the village say. His negative point is that if anybody speaks badly about me, he does not have the courage to answer them. How can someone insult the daughter if the father is sitting? But somehow he allows it. Ideally he should stop others. I do all the work which ideally my brother should do. I call the plumber. I supervise the painter. He sees doing me all this work but still he does not appreciate me (cries). Once you are divorced and you come back to your parents place your value decreases. You cannot live your life peacefully.”

***Freedom and authority.*** Most participants (except two) said that they have no freedom and autonomy to live according to their wishes and that they have to follow the unsaid rules laid down by their father. Participants who came back to their parents' home after many years expressed feeling out of place as their way of living had changed and their parents expected them to behave in a certain way and follow their schedules and way of life. Some participants also shared that they feel suffocated in their homes as there was no privacy and that they never get the 'me time'. The following quotes from a divorced woman who returned after ten years further emphasizes the above points:

“I was at my parents place, so in that one year what happened was I think Gaurav (son) was very small and plus you know my parents being old they had lots to instruct me you know now at that time when my divorce was going on I did not need instructions right, and they had lots of instructions. You should get up on time, you should eat on time your baby is this and that... and plus my child he was very naughty at that time so he would just shout all the time and these people had stayed alone. See, I was not there with them for the last so many years so they had their life had settled you know they will watch their *satsang* (discourse) in the morning. And very disciplined, 8' o clock breakfast and how I am 4' o clock lunch and totally opposite.”

Another participant shares her feeling on not getting enough freedom:

Interviewer: Did you ever think of staying separately?



Respondent: Yes, every day. Every day I tell my mother. I tell her that I want to go away. Because I have a habit of living alone with freedom. Here at my father's home I do not have the freedom. Even if I want to watch TV at 1 in the night with all the lights on there is no problem. But here my father has a problem. I feel scared that if something is wrong my father will speak and that he will not like it. I am a little lethargic. I like to do things my way. Now that I am married and have moved on. I feel why should my parents interfere? I do not have much salary or else I feel that I can stay separately. So, I have no choice but to stay with them.

One more participant shares about not getting privacy:

"Sometimes I feel suffocated because they never leave me alone. Even if I want to go for a recharge my mom comes along with me. My mom always wants to accompany me everywhere. Sometimes I feel good that they care for me. And sometimes it is a burden on me."

Further, some participants who were mothers also painfully expressed their concern over losing the motherly authority over their children. They felt that their children do not listen to them or do not respect them because their parents are in a position of authority in the home. Many of them acknowledged the pressure and strain emanating out of this situation.

***Control over resources.*** Those women who lived with their parents and siblings did because either they or their parents were not stable financially and they needed each other's support. However, this led to losing control over resources which they called as their own. Living with the families was a good support and relief in terms of not having to buy or rent a house. Participants reported contributing their share in the family to run the expenses and also buying things like grocery, vegetables, snacks and gifts for their brother's children. But, many felt that their contributions were in vain or were not acknowledged by their family members. Few also said that they are unable to save for their children because they have to contribute in the families. Some of them also said that now they do not have facilities like an independent cupboard or a private room. The participant below who is now living separately from her family sadly expresses about her contributions being in vain:

"It is easy to talk badly about your husband but it is difficult to talk badly about your father. He (referring to the father) was so much involved in the community work that he has ignored us as a child. He has literally avoided me as a child. I get a very bad feeling. He was not like that. We had a cook since ten years. I used to leave for office at 9.00 am. I used to leave without eating. I stayed there for one year and he removed the cook. He expected me to make breakfast and lunch and everything. He was using me. My child wanted to eat varieties. She

was tired. She would be in school all day and my child was never dependent on him. But he ignored her also. If it would have been some other grandfather he would take interest in the child and in her studies. Initially he used to tell me to give her away. He said that she is going to be like her father. So, how painful it is to hear this from your father about your child. I was giving money to my father. He never said no for it. I used to cook and get vegetables, grocery etc. He never offered me any money. It was really very painful. I was thinking about all this and so I was crying last night.”

***Quality of relationship.*** The quality of relationships of most participants appeared strained with most of their family members and they reported having small disagreements and fights on regular basis. It was interesting to note that relationship with the family members was less complicated for women who were the only children in families, had sisters as siblings or whose brothers were still unmarried. Relationships brought many interpersonal complications and issues for women whose brothers were married and had their own families. Presence of children also created some resettlement issues which were not there for women without children. However some of them also said that they are able to work only because their children are being taken care of by their parents or sister in-law and hence chose to tolerate the disagreements. As the following dialogue highlights:

Interviewer: Is your brother’s wife good?

Respondent: (Laughs) yes she is good. If I do all the work she is good.

Interviewer: Can you explain that?

Respondent: See, I made lunch and came to office. I will go home and cook the dinner. I do all the work. She does some basic preparations. So we have no such issues. Because she has no workload. She also goes away frequently to her mom’s place. She also tries to impress my father. I cannot do such things. Sometimes I feel my father takes her side always but it’s okay. The only good thing is that she takes care of my son while I am at the job place. She is very cunning. She escapes work by saying that she does not know it.

The upcoming quote describes a participant’s relationship and minimal communication with her father:

“Not much. There is a distance between us. It depends, certain things we talk certain things we don’t talk. 90% we fight. He (referring to the father) is almost 70 plus now. So, he must be feeling that why am I here with him? He is not very verbal, he is not concerned, I mean as a parent he is concerned but then see actually we do not talk much about the case.”

**Participants living alone or with children.** Thirteen participants lived either alone or with children. Parents of a few women lived in the same city whereas parents of some participants lived in another city. Parents of a few participants were no more. It appeared that life of those participants living either alone or with children would be difficult. However, in spite of some disadvantages life seemed easier and in control for these participants in comparison to those living with their parents and siblings.

**Roles and responsibilities.** These women had fewer roles and responsibilities in comparison to the women living with parents only because much of their domestic work responsibilities were shared by their maids and children. These women had hired services and maids for most of their work especially domestic work. Many of these women instructed their cooks while giving interviews. Most of these participants had hired a cook and a full time maid whereas they focused more on their job and business. Thus, the burden of double work was not felt. They also reportedly were training their children to become independent and learn all the work. A participant below explains how she delegates her work to her maid:

“See that maid, comes once in a day to my house right and I instruct her. She has a cell phone now, otherwise I used to instruct my mother that earlier what I used to do I used to tell, her to half cook things. Like, cut the vegetables, put the dough right, so she used to do that and I used to come and cook.”

**Value and respect.** It was in the pursuit of value and respect also that many of the participants lived away from their parents. As the dialogue communicates the views of many participants who were living with their parents and siblings:

Interviewer: Why did you wish to go and live separately?

Respondent: So, that my value increases and people honor me. I don't want anybody to point a finger on my son and say that he is staying at his maternal uncle's place.

When living alone there was no question of feeling valueless from the family members. Rather than feeling bad about lesser value and respect these participants were observed valuing and respecting themselves. The following quote highlights the same:

“Women are to be protected, respected loved and cherished. *Ghar ki Lakshmi* (goddess of the home) *agar humko koi aisa nahi mila jo humme Lakshmi ki tara treat kare, toh humme apne aap ko as a goddess treat karna chahiye so that hum apne aap se pyaar kare aur apne aap ko*

*respect de* (if we don't find anyone who treats us like goddess Lakshmi then we should treat ourselves as goddess so that we start loving ourselves and start giving respect to ourselves).”

Two participants were asked to leave their parental homes by their fathers due to disagreements. One participant out of these two said that she did not want to go back even if her parents are old now and they are calling her back. This reflects a quest for self-respect.

***Freedom and authority.*** These women also felt that they had more freedom and authority and in spite of being busy all day their life was in their control. Participants expressed that they could do whatever they want and whenever they want without any interference or control from anybody. It was observed that their schedules had lot of scope to pursue their hobbies and have ‘me time’ which was not the case with the participants living with their parents. They were the head of their families and took most decisions by themselves and were in the positions of authority for their children. The following excerpts indicate freedom and ‘me-time’ of the participants living alone:

“Mornings, I go for a walk. I take a walk with my dog for an hour. I come back and I feed the birds. Then these days I am busy with a baby squirrel. It was very small. I feed it, tickle it, cuddle it. I put it to bed. Then I observe the birds. I am very natural. My whole day is spent in all this. People ask me that am I not lonely. But I do not know what loneliness is. I like this freedom. I am happy this way.”

“After I come home in the evening I prepare the dinner. Then I do my drawing. This is what I have made (points to a beautiful collage on the wall). I have dyed the paper and cut it. It is a long process. So I do all this in the evening after dinner. I give time to my daughter because she is in 12<sup>th</sup> standard. I keep watching her when she is studying. She does not like it. If there is some good movie or some good songs being played in TV then I watch TV for half an hour.”

***Control over resources.*** Living in a separate house away from parents was a viable option only for those who were financially and professionally stable. Although these participants had to pay up all their bills, rents, loans and manage all the expenditures alone they felt a sense of control over their money and resources and could plan their future investments. Most of them said that contributions did not go in vain and unacknowledged by their family members. Most of these women had already bought an apartment for themselves or were planning to buy one soon. One participant who lived in a rented flat and her parents in the same city shares about her expenditures:

“My biggest expense is my rent. Apart from that I have a running kitchen, but I don’t use it much. Most of the time I eat at my parent’s place. Of course breakfast and dinner, I make over here and I mean although the rent is the highest but still it is manageable within my salary and I mean, ya electricity and telephone and it is covered in my salary so I still save.”

**Quality of relationship.** The quality of relationship with their parents, siblings and even children appeared positive for those participants who lived alone or with children. Many acknowledged that the relationships are good because they live away from each other. These participants and their parents visited each other regularly. Quotes from two participants living away from their parents reflect the above aspects:

“I don’t want to go back because I am much more peaceful over here. I can take better care of them (referring to parents) by living here. When I go there I am not able to take care of them when I am living 24 hours with them because they are so much of complains about me. When I live here they don’t have those complains because they don’t know what time I get up what time I eat. But then I can still take care of them so you know I think good from far, far from good not like that exactly but you know (laughs).”

“Just because I am staying here my relationship is good with them. I know that if I would have been staying with them I would have been a burden on them. But yes, if I would have been earning well then they would not say anything. So, I am sure that had I been staying with them the scenario would have been different.”

Thus, women living alone or with children were definitely at an advantageous position in all domains compared to women living with parents or siblings. Overall a vast difference was seen in the confidence level of the participants of both the categories, that is, participants living alone appeared more confident in comparison to those living with parents.

**Living arrangement of unique case.** One participant who had sought restitution of conjugal rights continued to live with her husband and children because she did not want her children to suffer because of her divorce. Overall, she appeared independent, confident and very happy with her life. This particular participant performed all the domestic roles and responsibilities apart from managing her business because she felt that it is her duty. She said:

“See, I know that he (referring to ex-husband) is also a human being. On humanity basis I feed so many poor children on festivals. So he is also a human. And he is doing so much for children. As a father he is a good father. If you remove his and mine relationship from

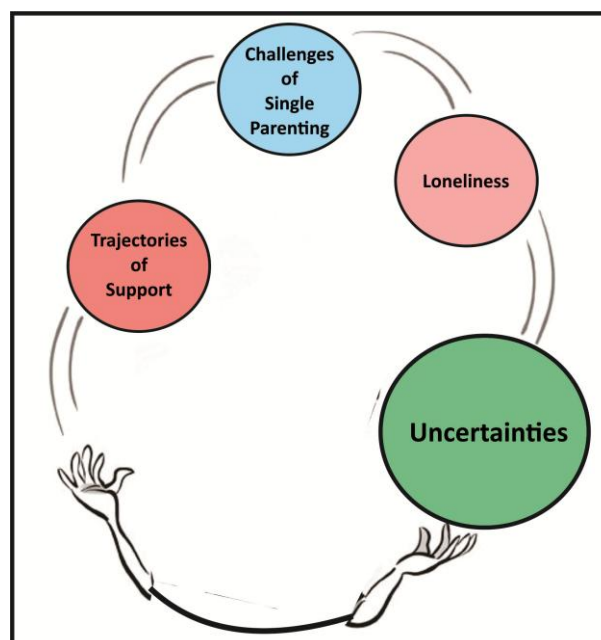
between then as a father he is a good father. Then, on humanity basis it is my duty to cook for him or take care of his house.”

She specifically stated that she did not contribute her finances to run the family. Her husband gave her money to run the house. Both of them had fixed roles and responsibilities and did not interfere in anybody’s life. Both of them had complete freedom and authority to live the life as they want. The quality of their relationship according to the participant had improved because they did not talk to each other unless required. She further said:

“He is paying and I am doing all the work. I tell him in advance that this is the expenditure of running your house. And I take all the money for the whole month together. Not in installments. If you expect me to take care of your house you have to give me all the money together. I am not his wife to keep asking him the money for small things. This is an organization and both of us are running it together. So, he has to tell me a date and pay me on that date. Then I will not complain.”

### **Managing Alone**

Divorce and separation brought with it an urgent management of most things alone. And given the situation of divorce and separation more impact was felt when things needed to be managed alone. The researcher could feel an emanating need from the participants that there is nobody and there will be nobody and I will have to handle it all myself. As displayed in figure 12, following were the major domains in which the participants expressed that they were juggling single-handedly.



**Figure12. Managing alone**

**Trajectories of support.** Most participants said that they received support from their parents and some other family members more in terms of emotions, finances and childcare especially during the early years of their divorce and separation. However, the support was gradually weaned away and although it existed it was not as much as before. Many participants when asked about their source of support or about people who supported them in their times of need, named their parents, children and some male friend whereas some also said ‘nobody’.

Further, support from family came easily to those women who got married through arranged marriages (21) in comparison to those women who got married through self-selection (8). Some of these participants also expressed a reluctance and discomfort to seek support as they were feeling guilty to get married through self-selection and for not listening to their parent’s warning at the time of getting married. Participants who were the only daughters also received good support in comparison to others who had siblings especially males.

Additionally, it was observed that support was coated with many conditions, that is, pressure to reconcile with the husband (especially from the father who feared the social reactions) or to remarry. Many said that their mothers supported their decision but could not go against their fathers. One participant also stated that her parent’s relationship was spoilt because her mother supported her and her father wanted her to go back to her husband.

Those participants whose children were old enough and in a position to provide support mostly lived away from them due to jobs or were married in a different city. Parents of these women were either too old or no more. However, most of these women were okay with this situation and said they did not expect any support from anybody. Some participants also conveyed that many of their relatives and friends avoided them in the early years of their divorce and separation because they assumed that participants would ask them for financial help.

Thus, support was maximum in the early years and slowly withered away. Most participants were observed coming to terms with the fact that ultimately they will be without anybody’s support. Some of them also laughed about not receiving any support saying they did not expect anything different. Whereas a few also took it very positively and empowered themselves due to this situation.

Overall, despite sharing many examples of problems in the support system most participants paradoxically conveyed that they received good support. Below are some quotes

which reflect experiences of few participants related to the support they received or did not receive:

“Children’s all responsibilities were taken up by my mother. She told me not to worry at all about my children. She told me that she will take care of my children like her own children. She told me to calm down and try to forget my past. She was a big support. She told me to concentrate on work and do my best.”

“When I stayed here alone it was a growing experience, they say na ‘call for growth’ it was like that for me because when I stayed here alone I realized that when you fall there is someone to help you but when no one is there you have to get up on your own and move on.”

“Sometimes I feel that the real exam after your divorce begins from your own home. Initially everything is new for you and you innocently assume that your family members will support you. But, later you realize that it is a battle to be fought alone and sometimes you have to also fight your family members.”

“I take it positively that my parents did not support me. Of course my mother was not alive. Just my father was there. But if they would have supported me then I would not have been this successful. Enemies are your best friends because they carefully point out on your minus points, so we know where to improve upon.”

**Challenges of single parenting.** Participants (20) raised some noteworthy concerns in rearing their children singlehandedly as described below.

***Compensating father’s absence.*** Most participants who had children, were concerned and guilty that their children are deprived of their father’s love, guidance and their presence in their lives unlike most other children. As a result of this feeling many of them made efforts to find a way to make up for his absence and made attempts to create a sense of family. Some of them tried to fill this gap in their children’s lives by taking them on holidays and picnics, buying them gifts and taking them out for dinner regularly, being strict with them and behaving like a father etc. One participant felt so strongly about this that she actually gave away the child’s custody to the father so that he grows up under his father’s guidance. Another participant continued to stay with her husband even after her divorce so that her children are not affected by the divorce and also continue to get affection and guidance of both the parents. Some of them also allowed their children to spend time with their biological fathers and some wished to remarry to provide their children with a father figure. The following quotes highlight the above points further:



“Actually I am avoiding the social life. If I go to someone’s house I get an odd feeling because all have families but we do not have. I also do not want my daughter to feel that she does not have a father. So I take her to places which make her feel good.”

“I never stopped my daughter to meet her father. Because I have learned from my own scars, I did not have a very great equation with my own dad and I realized that how important it is to have an equation with your dad or with your daughter. So in fact her relationship has improved after we separated, there were times when I wanted to put my poison into her hearts, I really tried to keep myself from doing that.”

***Concerned about their future and upbringing.*** Yet another concern was to earn enough so that they can fulfil the increasing demands of their children and support their education. Most participants expressed that they wanted to give a good life to their children and thus made many sacrifices for it. The below excerpt indicates this:

“Very soon my son will grow up and his demands will increase. He will see something in school and demand. I am his mother and father both. I spend everything for him. All his expenditures are on me. I have a policy on him. I save 3000 rupees every year for him so by the time he grows up I will have enough money.”

Participants described feeling extremely concerned about their children more so because they were the only parent available for them. They feared that who will take care of their children if something happens to them. Two participants stated that they actually battled death and a few stopped themselves from committing suicide because they had dependent children. Emerging out of this concern were either strict or different child rearing practices like teaching them to be independent, purposely not helping them in solving their own problems, teaching them how to cook, being gender sensitive, how to be good husband and wife, and caring for their younger siblings. One participant shares her concern in the upcoming quote:

“I do not want my daughter to go through the suffering that I have undergone. At that time I will break. If the history repeats itself I will not be able to tolerate. I tolerated and came out of my suffering but I am too attached to her and I am very protective of her. So if something happens to her I will not be able to bear that. But, now I also feel that giving a lot of protection to her is a minus point for her. Tomorrow if I die she will be unable to live without my protection. It should not be that she can only live under my protection. Gradually I am teaching her to be independent and solve her own problems. She is not very happy with that but I know that she will get used to it.”

A few participants also shared that they wanted happy marriages for their children and did not want their own divorce to influence their child's marriage. Parents of two such women were separated. One such participant said:

“My mother had a bad life; I had a bad life I don't want to pass on this to my daughter. I want to see her live a very good life, it is said that the circle goes on and on (crying). I want to see my daughter have a good life, have a good marriage, be a good child (Voice trembling).”

***Learning not to expect from children.*** One other challenge related to single parenting was more internal. In other words most participants (except for those who had very young children) were learning not to expect anything in return from their children in future. Some were also preparing themselves and their children that they will live separately or in old age homes once their children are married so that they would not be a burden on their children and also do not be an interference in their married lives like their in-laws did. However, a few participants did expect that their children should take care of them and their parents but at the same time also expressed their skepticism about it. Two excerpts highlight the above points:

“My daughter will get married and go away. Who knows about my son? Today's generation is unpredictable. Parents have to listen to children. It is the opposite. There are feelings for parents but no respect. Children will feed their parents that's it.”

“I have clarified with him (referring to son) that I am not going to stay with him after he gets married. I have told him that I will go and live in old age home. I don't want to feel bad if he ignores me in my old age. I have accepted that I am alone. Even if my sister in-law has a headache my brother takes her to the hospital. But when I go for injections nobody accompanies me. The nurse in the hospital asks me that hasn't anybody accompanied you? I tell her that I am enough. This happens always. Nobody comes with me. I don't expect from anybody.”

Some other concerns and challenges of single-parenting articulated by the participants were when to disclose to their young children about their marital status, how to justify their decision, how to convince and prepare them for remarriage, safety of their children when they were alone at home and missing a partner when children are sick or need help in school.

In the middle of the challenges most of them were proud of themselves that they were rearing their children alone. Even though most participants stressed difficulties and challenges in bringing up their children alone, their overall assessment of single-parenting was positive and

many of them took pride in it. Interestingly, having a child pulled them through their problems and gave them motivation to live a life. A 59 year old participant proudly shares in her own words:

“They (referring to sons) always give me credit, they say Maa, it was because we had a maa like, you, they say we would not have been here, if we had any other woman as our mother, they always say that and that is my reward that fills me with pride! (wet eyes)”

**Loneliness.** Loneliness was something that embraced all the participants irrespective of they having accepted their divorce and even after many years of their divorce and separation. All the participants expressed in direct and indirect ways that they were lonely.

Participants also felt that nobody understands them and their emotions. Many of them said that they cry when they are lonely especially in the night and then come to terms with the fact that they have to face life alone. Many participants also said that they have nobody to go out with on weekends because many of them did not have friends and those who had their friends were married. Loneliness was dealt with in many ways which is discussed in the theme of approaches to coping. Some of them also said that no relationship can replace the love of a husband and hence they miss a partner in their life. The following quotes describe feelings of loneliness of two participants:

“I am not boasting that I am very strong or I never have my weak moments or I never cry No, I have my weaknesses I binge till, I suffer from bulimia. I empty the fridge and then vomit it then I tell myself no, not again, not again I, I keep trying to control myself you know sometimes, somebody, my sons or somebody gave me a big packet of chocolates. I finished pound of chocolates in one night and I am a medical person myself I know how bad it is. I have done hopeless things but then next morning again I am positive and I say ok, bygone is bygone you did a bad thing, today is a new day start a new day every morning I tell myself new day today start your life new that’s how I go on.”

“Many times, especially during the festivals. People go for shopping. I feel I do not have anybody of my own. I mean all these people are mine but my husband is not with me. I miss him especially when it is festival time. I feel lonely during the morning walk. In the night when I lay in bed I feel lonely. When I take him (referring to son) to the garden if I see a couple walking I feel that there is nobody to hold my hand (crying). Then I hold my son’s hand, but till when? And at the end I am alone. And this is like a punishment. What is my fault?”

**Uncertainties regarding future.** One of the biggest and the most difficult to manage was facing the life full of uncertainties and unexpected difficulties. This was more in the case of separated women, who were yet to file a case (2) and those who were in the process of seeking a divorce (6) in comparison to the legally divorced (18) and permanently separated women (4). However, some divorced women also spoke about facing the uncertainties. The ongoing case brought and indefinite halt in their lives. Women felt suffocated because they were unable to plan out their careers, education, travel plans, seeking another jobs, falling in love, getting remarried etc. Women described that they felt emotionally and financially drained due to the ongoing divorce case because it involved allegations, dealing with expensive, rude, incompetent and eyeing lawyers, transfer of the judge, visiting a different city where the case has been filed, difficulty in taking leave from jobs, difficulty in telling the new recruiter that she will need leaves at regular intervals etc. One separated participant said:

“What will I tell the man with whom I fall in love? To wait? Why will he wait for me? So, remarriage and all is okay. I understand that we need a life partner. But at present there are so many uncertain things in my life that even if I wish I cannot think of remarriage.”

When the case is new and recent at that time parents or siblings accompany them to the court. But as time passes participants visit the court alone. Frustrations and disappointments are natural at this time and women felt that nobody understands their plight. Those participants who were divorced and aspired to remarry also had to deal with uncertainties because they had established their careers with difficulties and remarriage might require them to shift in a different city or country. Many participants voiced about being unsure if they or their children will be able to adjust with new partners and fathers. Some of them also feared history repeating itself and dreaded a second divorce. Two quotes also reveal handling uncertainties:

“I have to enjoy life and I have to build my career. What if the case will go on for a ten years. My life will be wasted. There is no guarantee if I will find someone. I have good offers here, but I have filed a case for maintenance. They are asking for a bond. Now if I accept a job then I will be difficulty. If I break the bond then I will be in difficulty. And if there is a break in my career it will be difficult for me to find a job later.”

“I can change the job and become a branch head. But I am already 39 and I also want to get married. So I don’t even know if will live in the same city.”

Thus, the three themes: cardiogram of losses and gains, reworking the living arrangements and managing alone demonstrate that the event of divorce and separation brought about major changes in the lives of women. However, all the changes also gave new directions to their lives. If we

connect these themes with the feminist theory and Indian women's conception of self we can see how marriage and motherhood are strongly connected to women's identity, disruption in which can bring about major changes in their lives and make it difficult for them to live in the society. Being divorced or separated, these women no longer fall into the normative social structure. The fact that most women had custody of children is a reflection of the gendered belief that women have an inherent maternal ability. Nevertheless, improvement in career and education, which gradually leads to improvement in financial situation and many other aspects of women's lives illustrates a gradual emancipation and rebellion against the social forces which subjugate women.

The following themes answer the second research question, that is, how do women adjust and cope with the divorce and separation in their lives over time?

### **Pathways of Coping and Adjusting with Divorce and Separation**

Coping and adjusting with divorce and separation may begin much before the divorce and separation taking place and may continue until lifetime. Below are the broad pathways derived for coping and adjusting with divorce and separation by capturing the overall experiences of all the participants. The five stages below give a broad picture of what most Indian women will experience emotionally while coping with their divorce and separation. However it is important to keep in mind that the experience and pace of passing through each of these stages will be different for different individuals since they will be differently influenced by a variety of other factors which are discussed in the later sections of this chapter.

**Extreme grief and anger.** In the first few weeks or even months after their separation and divorce most participants communicated about feeling extremely sad and depressed with their situations. Many indulged into a feeling of self-pity and that 'why did this happen with me' or 'what was my fault'. Most of them recounted weeping all day, not talking to anybody, not eating well, sleeping all day, not going out of their homes and feeling unattractive, incompetent helpless, angry and insecure about their future. The words of one participant sums up the feelings of most participants in this stage:

"I was an introvert. I used to take everything personally. I could never be a good person. I could never be a beautiful person. I could never do anything right. I used to have that feeling that I am falling into a bottomless well and nothing can save me. I am falling and falling. I used to self-pity and always feel sorry for myself. There was lot of guilt. All sorts of things were there. I was just in a state of depression. I was thinking why God did this with me."

Some participants also said that they were seriously ill, hospitalized and on bed rest which was a result of either abuse or the trauma that they passed through in their marriage. A victim of severe abuse in remembering the initial days when she was brought to her parent's home indicated the following:

“For a month I was in bed rest. I was battling with so much back pain. At that time I was not feeling anything because it was a big escape from death. Both my daughter and I were saved or else he would have killed us on that day. At least he would have killed me. But then after a few months I started feeling bad about myself. I would cry all day. I would not feel like talking to anybody. I would get angry on small things. Sometimes I used to remove all frustrations on my daughter. I have hit her many times. After hitting her I would cry more and feel guilty. I was in depression.”

Almost five to six participants admitted that they felt suicidal but stopped themselves from committing suicide on thinking about their parents and children whereas three participants confessed to actually attempting suicide and being saved by family members. One participant said that she felt suicidal several times after her divorce. Below are her words:

“In the initial days I was having a very strong suicidal instinct. I wanted to jump from the ninth floor. Every day in the night it used to happen. Then I have to stop myself as the instinct was very strong, because I used to think that I have been treated really badly. I had been cheated.”

Thus, the first stage was a stage of extreme grief, shock and disbelief irrespective of one being the initiator or non-initiator.

**Blame and revenge.** In this stage the participants were observed blaming others who according to them were responsible for their divorce and therefore they wanted to take revenge from them. The people who were the target of blame and revenge were ex-husbands, in-laws, mother-in-law, sister-in-law, parents etc. Most of them at this point of time were of the opinion that it was not their fault at all that the divorce and separation happened and that they had already done enough to save their marriage. Participants abused their husbands and in-laws, spoke badly about them and wished ill fate for them. Some of them even wished that their husbands should die and that they did not even want to see their faces. The following quote highlights feelings of blame:

“The guy has something wrong within; he is a sick man, bloody sick man. (Abuses)”

Interestingly this was also the time when cases were being filed or cases were already going on and some participants angrily expressed that they wanted to teach their husband and in-laws a lesson by either lingering the divorce case, not giving a divorce, sending them to jail, asking for alimony and not giving any custody or visitation rights. One of the participant for instance expressed angrily:

“I had made up my mind and I was not feeling bad about 498 as I wanted to teach them a lesson. I wanted to make sure that.... I don’t care if I get anything or not but at least they shouldn’t dare to spoil the life of another woman. I told him (referring to lawyer) that “I am not looking for making money out of the divorce, but whatever my dad had spent on my marriage I want all that back. Because after one month of the marriage they have taken the decision to drive me out of the house. They have no rights to destroy my life, now I would be roaming around with the tag of a divorcee.”

The following quote reflects how furious a participant was to take her gold back from her husband:

“I told him (referring to the ex-husband) that he is an impotent. He is not worthy of being called a male. My gold was with them, while I was here. I told him that dare he change the place of my gold forget selling it. I told him that I will tear his chest apart and take it back.”

Few women also shared that they removed their frustration on their children, poisoned them against their father and hit them with no fault of theirs. It will be noteworthy to mention that many participants at this stage, also spoke negatively about all men in general and expressed strongly that divorce happens only because of men. The below excerpts from three participants convey this very clearly:

“A man is only yours while he is having intercourse with you. After he gets down from the bed he is not yours.”

“In olden days it was that a woman would stay at home and the man would go out and earn. Today most women go out and earn. She can make her identity. But the man has still not changed. *Purush na badlayo ane badhu potani giraft ma leva gayo....stri ne dabava gayo.....etle chuta cheda thava lagya. Stri ek suppress thayeli stri che.* (The man did not change and tried to keep the woman in his control and suppress her, which is why the divorce is happening. Women are suppressed).”

“I still say 80% of the faults lie in man I am that much sure that without any survey the fault is with the man and not with the women.”

**Facing the reality.** This stage was reached by many after the dust of blame and revenge had started settling. Participants at this juncture appeared mellowed down and recollected feeling lonely, missing the good times with their husbands and out of place in their parent's home. Some of them shared that they were interested and curious about the whereabouts of their husband's life and also expected their calls or messages on birthdays, anniversaries and festivals. One divorced participant sadly stated the following:

“In between I had thought that I should go back and compromise, but then I thought what if they will kill me? My inner voice said that if I go back again I will not return alive. My face had become pale. I was dark. It was a bad condition. I had put on weight. I had cried when he did not come on *karva chauth*. I was expecting him to come and talk for a compromise. I was wondering that why did he spoil my life.”

A few participants reportedly met their husbands or communicated with them through messages or phone calls in spite of the ongoing divorce case or separation or at times even after that. This was mostly due to some matters and issues regarding children or to comply with the visitation rights. The excerpt below explains an experience of one participant on celebrating her daughter's 18<sup>th</sup> birthday with her husband nine years after their divorce:

“It was Anita's 18<sup>th</sup> birthday and we celebrated it together for Anita. I wasn't expecting to celebrate with him but she had IIT entrance exam so I asked my husband as in will he drop her and for my good gesture he asked me also to join them for a movie if I wanted to come *tane aavu hoy toh tu pan aavje* (you can come if you want). That was the first time he asked me to come, I first told no and then I said ok, and asked if you are sure I should come, he said yes, otherwise I would not have asked you. Then we went for dinner and beer and wine in car as I wanted to make her 18<sup>th</sup> birthday memorable for her.”

Around this time some participants also counted and analyzed the advantages of not being with their husbands. Many spoke about enjoying their freedom, being relieved from restrictions, torture and abuse, pursuing hobbies and loving their 'me-time'. Many of them realized that they have no choice but to gather courage and fend for themselves and their children and therefore started studying and working. Thus, at this stage one came face to face with the reality of being on a 'no return path' and also that this path is better than the older one for sure.

**Acceptance and forgiveness.** A long process though, this stage was characterized by accepting and forgiving most people involved in the divorce and separation, that is, ex-husband, in-laws, parents, children and more importantly themselves. Some of them during this stage were



observed indulging into self-reflection and confessed that it was their fault too. However, they were very clear that at this point of time they had no intention to go back. Most participants at this stage said that they have neutral or no feelings for their ex-husband whereas a few also said that they still love them, respect them for what they are and wish them a good life ahead. Some of them shared that their husband's presence, absence, moving on, death does not affect them anymore. Now they were also no more interested in finding out the whereabouts of the husband. Interestingly some of women specifically mentioned that although they have forgiven their husbands they are unable to forgive or accept what their in-laws did to them.

The following quotes are what two divorced participants respond when they are asked what they feel for their ex-husband at present:

"I have no feelings of love or no feelings of hatred. I have nil feelings now. That time was different and that time has gone. I have taken care of myself and things are ok now in my life. If I am happy today why should I wish bad for him or his family members? I wish they should not treat his next wife the way they have treated me."

"Nothing. I have no feelings for him. Now I do not even get angry. First I used to feel very angry on him that he has wasted my life. Not only my life but he has wasted my daughter's life also. But I do not wish bad for him. I have forgiven him. I take it as my destiny. It was written in my fate. He has a wife and children why should I wish bad for him. I am not angry at all."

Further, at this stage the participants gradually came to accept themselves and restoring faith in their hidden skills and potentials. During the initial periods of life after divorce and separation those participants who shared feeling suicidal, unattractive and having a low self-esteem now expressed a desire to live, pursue their goals and felt more in tune with self. Some of them also reported taking care of themselves, dressing up and feeling good after a long time which they had been avoiding. As the quotation suggests:

"I take good food. I eat on time and I take good sleep so that I can work. I have to work and for that I have to keep myself healthy. The moment I fall in bed. I fall asleep."

Furthermore, participants were observed investing most of their time and resources in their children. Some of them also shared that their children resemble their father in looks and characteristics and remind them of their husband but they are not affected by it.

Additionally, divorce and separation also at this point of time were accepted as inevitable and irreversible facts of life. Most participants accepted their divorce and separation as their destiny and considered it as not an end of life or personal failure. Interestingly, the stage of forgiveness and acceptance came easily and earlier to those participants who were financially stable and had good support from family and friends.

**Looking beyond divorce and separation.** This is the supreme stage of adjusting with divorce and separation where participants expressed feeling that they are not the only ones who are divorced and separated and that there also are people who are having more problems than them. Good and bad memories of the marriage and divorce now become hazy and participants indulged in looking beyond and making peace with their past. The below quote is from a participant who seems to have come to terms with her divorce and is now looking forward to life:

“I think I have come back to the stage where I am again finding myself. What I am looking for again in life, what is the purpose of my life? Is it just a partner or more than that?”

Thus, this stage gave a chance to make overall evaluation of their divorce, separation and themselves and at the same time plan for their future. A few participants had come to accept the fact that they are alone and that nobody will live with them, not even their children. Although most were open with the idea of remarriage or live-in relationships, deep down they were skeptical about finding a partner now and were slowly coming to terms with that reality too.

Interestingly, some of them at this stage wished to thank their ex-husbands because it was due to their harassment that they feel stronger and empowered today. Some participants shared how proud they were of themselves that they have emerged and grown out of difficult life situations. The quote below suggests the same:

“I know that if I die today, I can face God, I can answer his questions, I am ready, let death came today, I am not afraid of death because, I know one thing that I did my duty you know, I was a good daughter, I was a good sister, I was a good wife and I have been the best mother and I have been a good Professor.”

Thus, the broad pathways discussed in the form of five stages above reflect experiences of all the participants in general with most of them being in the third and fourth stages of coping. However, this may not mean that one may not go back to the previous stages. Participants were observed crying and smiling when they shared certain episodes in connection to their past. This implies that whilst passing through the pathway of coping and adjusting with divorce and

separation one may plunge back into the past and feel miserable once again but can definitely rise again and have the potential to reach the last stage. Overall, coping and adjustment with divorce and separation was easier for those women who had themselves initiated their divorce process (21) and also for those women whose marriage lasted for shorter durations, that is, less than five years (17).

### **Resources for Coping and Adjusting with Divorce and Separation**

The types of resources that were used or which were available to the study participants for coping and adjusting have been broadly divided into three categories. These resources do not stand alone but interact with each other to enable adequate and inadequate coping with divorce and separation.

#### **Material resources.**

- **Financial stability.** As discussed earlier divorce and separation brought about a downward economic mobility for most participants in the initial period. However, most participants found themselves able to reach financial stability after a few years. Coping and adjusting with divorce and separation appeared easier with financial stability. Women who were highly educated, who had stable and well-paying jobs, good positions at the work place, financial support from parents and sufficient alimony appeared more resolved and adjusted compared to those women who were not financially stable. The following words are from a participant who is a businesswoman and did not take any alimony from her husband:

“I am pretty much strong and independent girl. I have that money power. *Paise ke age duniya zukti hai* (the world bows down to you if you have money). It is very simple.”

However, there were also a few cases wherein despite being financially independent the women faced problems in coping and adjusting with their situations. Although financial stability was an important resource for coping and adjusting with divorce and separation, it was not the only important factor. Furthermore, the ability to survive financially became a source of confidence and pride for most participants and thus even if they had less income they were content to having more control over their money. One participant shares in her own words how she brought up her sons in the best way in spite of having financial difficulties:

“One thing is certain, see I will be independent, in all my life since I was twenty-one, I think I will not go and will be dependent on any one. I will have my pension every month, but I will not go to anybody unwelcome, that is for sure even these two boys (referring to sons) whom

I have given my life, I have given everything can you imagine? At this stage of life when I am three years away from retirement, I don't have any bank balance. I have been sending them everything; they had completed their education in 2010. I have been paying money; even now I am paying off. Five lakhs rupees for my older son's loan, who is getting married, that's why you will not see like there is a marriage in this house, because it's going to be very simple."

The same participant goes on to share how her positivity influenced her sons:

"Yes, all these years, I am a very positive person, that is why my sons are who they are can you imagine? This son who called (referring to a phone call from her son) is an MBA from Oxford, they are, I gave them (sons) the best education."

- **Time.** Women who were divorced many years ago (on an average more than 7 to 8 years) seemed to be better adjusted with their divorce and separation in comparison to those women who were recently divorced or separated. During the interviews these women were more keen and interested in sharing what and how they have achieved in their lives despite all odds, rather than focusing upon how 'bad' their marriage, ex-husband or in-laws were. Whereas those participants who were recently divorced and separated talked more about their 'bad' marriage and the divorce process. Time is an important element that enabled women to come to terms with their situation and heal the wounds caused due to divorce and separation.
- **Legal closure of the case.** Full and final settlement of divorce was an important resource for coping because it aided one in planning for the future. Long waiting period of the ongoing case and the uncertainty surrounding it led them to feel a sense of burden thereby making it difficult for them to move on. Those participants who let go of their alimony or who took divorce through an out-of-court settlement or mutual consent experienced peace and relief. However, this was not an affordable option for all because letting go of the alimony was not in the hands of the women in many cases. Women shared that that they were tired of the pending legal case, but their fathers were not ready to let go because they had spent a lot for the wedding and dowry. Women who had filed for maintenance, domestic violence, 498a suffered lack of closure. These women confessed feeling tired of the long pending case, but at the same time voiced a desire to seek justice. Hence, legally divorced and permanently separated participants appeared more resolved in comparison to

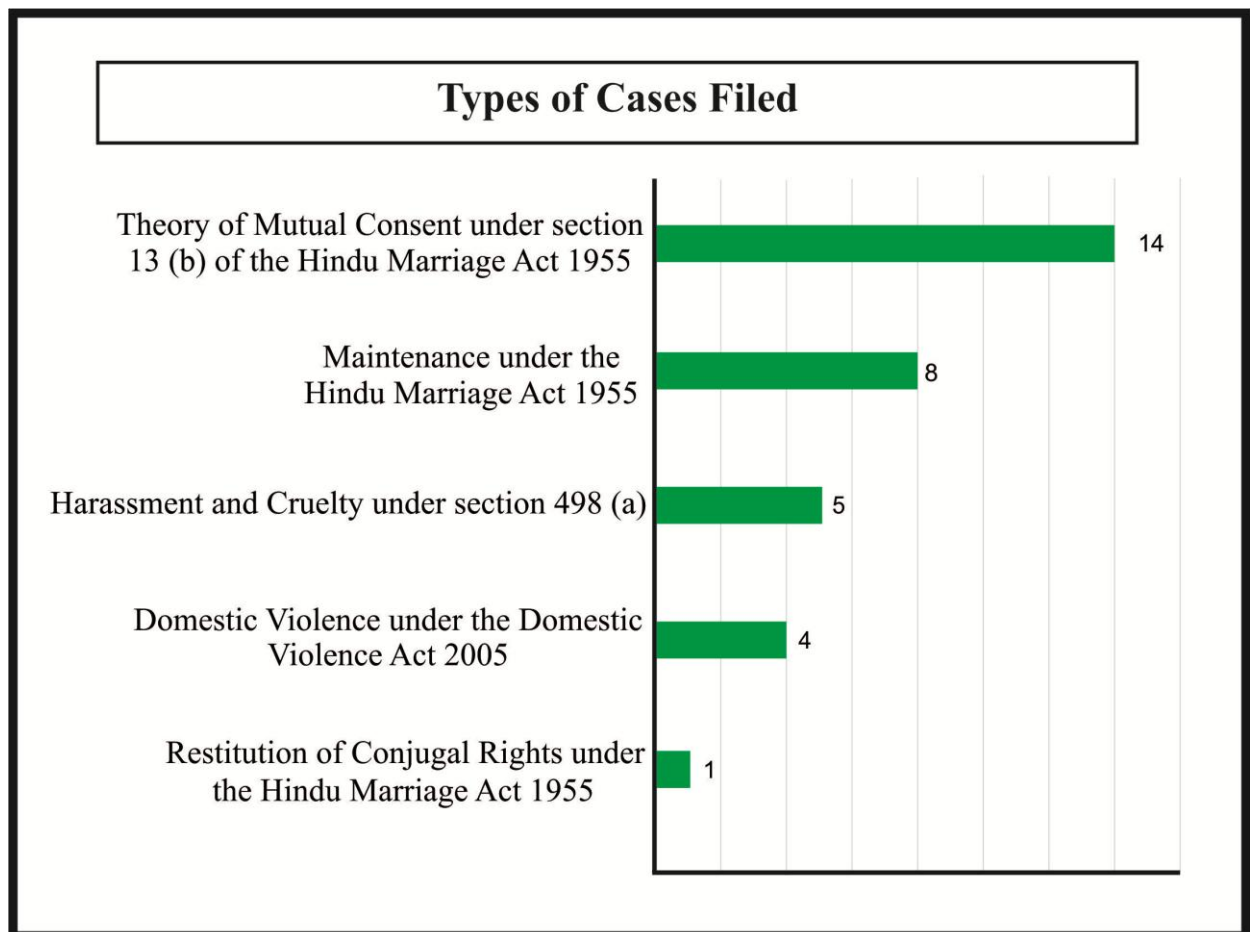
the separated individuals whose legal cases were pending. The excerpt below from a separated woman indicates the burden of the long pending divorce case:

“My divorce case is going on and I don’t know that for how many years it will go on. My pending divorce case is like a 100 kg stone tied to my legs. It will come with me wherever I go.”

Another participant below is seen talking about how taking a divorce was her priority over the alimony:

“A lawyer lady told me that I should ask money from my husband for my daughter. A thought came in my mind at that time that if he is giving me the divorce I should not say no and take it, *kal uth ke naa de toh* (what if he does not give me a divorce in future). At that time I was like *mai iss aadmi se chutkara pau and mutual settlement kar lu* (I wanted to get rid of this man and come to a mutual settlement) because I knew *kaani kodi nahi nikalne wala* (he was not going to give a single penny from his pocket) and I was not into this, I was not a worldly woman and so *chup chap divorce le liya* (I took the divorce silently). I took the divorce gracefully.”

Out of 30 participants, four women were permanently separated from their husbands without filing any case and two women were still contemplating which case to file. Figure 13 presents the details of the cases filed by the other 24 women of which 18 were divorced, whereas divorce cases were ongoing for six women. In many cases more than one case was filed for seeking a divorce. Since all the participants were Hindus, divorce was sought under the Hindu Marriage Act 1955. Fourteen women sought divorce with the help of the theory of mutual consent under the section 13 (B) of the Hindu Marriage Act. Out of these fourteen women, seven opted for an out-of-court settlement and used the theory of mutual consent only to seek a legal divorce from court. Most women used this theory to get a divorce faster. In other words, if the divorce is sought by a mutual consent it may not necessarily mean that issues were mutually sorted out. Only one woman out of these fourteen specifically mentioned that she and her husband sorted out their divorce in a peaceful manner and always went together for court proceedings. Eight women had filed for maintenance or alimony from their husbands under the Hindu Marriage Act. A criminal law, that is, Harassment for Dowry, under section 498 (a) was used by five women whereas the Domestic Violence Act 2005 was used by four women. One participant continued to live in the same house with her husband and children on the basis of Restitution of Conjugal Rights under the Hindu Marriage Act.



**Figure 13. Types of cases filed**

#### **Social resources.**

- **Support.** Support, especially if received immediately after divorce and separation was a significant resource for coping and adjusting with divorce and separation. Most participants seemed to benefit from the support received mostly in terms of financial support, emotional support and sharing in child care. Thus, women who received support and care from significant others in the early stages after divorce and separation showed better coping compared to others. Women who failed to receive this support expressed feeling lonely and depressed during those times but in retrospection counted it as one of the reason why they were stronger. One participant said that she did not receive any support from her family when she divorced her husband because she got married through self-selection. But she looked at it positively and below is what she said in her own words:

“They (referring to father and brother) could not tell me that it is ok, you come back and we will feed you. I still went to my father’s house. I kept my daughter in the hostel for one year.

Then I did it all by myself. *Shunya ma this sarjan karyu* (I started from zero and created all this. Points to things around her beautiful home). I did not even have one mattress. I had borrowed it from my friend. And then slowly I established myself. I passed through a lot of struggle but I enjoyed that struggle. Now I can vouch that I can go anywhere. I can do anything. I take it positively that my parents did not support me. Of course my mother was not alive. Just my father was there. But if they would have supported me then I would not have been this successful.”

- ***Presence and absence of children.*** Dynamics with children have been discussed in the chapter in the themes of single parenting and significant relationships and therefore only aspects related to children as resources will be discussed here. Children were directly and indirectly a resource to cope with divorce and separation for those women who had them. It has been mentioned earlier that participants who felt suicidal and saw no reason to live indicated that they had no choice but to deal with their situation bravely because they had to take care of their very young children. Participants felt closest to and most responsible towards their children. Those women whose children had grown up received support from their children in the form of words and actions as they had seen their mother suffering and some were also victims of abuse themselves. Whereas all the participants who did not have children indicated feeling luckier that they do not have any liabilities and therefore they have come out of their grieving faster and will not face many problems in remarriage in comparison to women who had children. Hence, children’s presence as well as absence both proved as a resource for coping and adjusting with divorce and separation. However, those women who had children and their custody (18) appeared to have better adjusted to their divorce or separation in comparison to women who did not have children (10). Further, those women who had children but did not have their custody (2), seemed very lonely and expressed missing their children a lot.

### **Individual Resources.**

- ***Self-Concept.*** Participants who were inherently stronger and had a positive self-concept coped and dealt better with difficult life situations after their divorce and separation. Such participants, in spite of not having many other resources made undying efforts to deal with difficult situations. Many of these participants also remembered incidences of their childhood and gave credit to their upbringing which made them stronger as a person and better equipped to deal with the divorce and separation. Some of these participants also said that they give the credit of their growth after their divorce and separation to their own

selves rather than anybody else. Further, those participants who were majorly responsible for running their families even after marriage developed a self-concept of being capable to do any work and face any difficulties. As a result of which some difficulties faced during the coping and adjusting period appeared negligible to them. The quotes below from three participants convey the above points and clearly reflect a strong and positive self-concept:

“It is because of my upbringing. We were five children. And our parents were so busy with everything that they could not give us a lot of time. They gave us good values, everything was there. But, if we would get hurt then normally all parents will come running, but our parents were not there for us. We had to take care of our own selves. We would take care of each other. My mother was a teacher and she would have to go in another village for her job. My father was a manager in hero cycles. So he had a touring job and he would be home only for one week in one month. So, we did not get that feeling of attachment. We were always independent. Actually circumstances made us very strong.”

“It is your will power. You have to learn from your experiences. The person whose will power is strong can do anything. This only comes with experience. Not all can do it.”

“I was strong from my childhood. I never used to accept failures as a child. I was not heartbroken with my divorce because I thought that this is my destiny. I do not break easily. I am a hard nut. I do not know how to give up.”

- ***Emotional closure.*** Apart from the legal closure of the case, the emotional closure of the relationship was an essential resource for coping with divorce and separation. Those participants who had come to terms with their reality, accepted their divorce and who had started exploring future options appeared more resolved and better adjusted in comparison to those who were still in the stage of blaming their ex-husbands and feeling revengeful towards people. These were mostly older and middle aged women and those women whose divorce took place before seven to eight years. Emotional closure was comparatively easier for those participants who did not have children because they did not have to meet their ex-husbands regularly. Women who had children shared meeting their ex-husbands or getting to know about them through their children which at times disturbed them. The following quote is from a participant who is divorced three years ago. She is sharing about her telephonic conversation with her husband a few days before the interview. She expressly states how disturbing it was:



“Then he (referring to ex-husband) would send messages to me to tell me that I am missing my daughter. Then he would send me messages like I miss you and I love you and all. It was all shit. He never cared. I spoke to him before a few days and I asked him that in whatever happened is it my fault? He said that no it was all his fault and that he spoiled it all. He told me that he is missing me. I told him that he will miss me for sure because he just has good memories of me. But I have all bad memories. I told him that his message, his gifts, his thoughts all give me only pain and nothing else. The pain that he gave me while he was hitting me was less than this pain. He apologized and said that he is not doing it intentionally. I told him that if he wants to do something for the child then he can deposit money. I gave him the account number.”

Thus, although the study aimed to know the pathways of coping and adjusting with respect to time it was discovered that more than time (which is also a resource) it was also the other resources and the interaction between these which enabled adequate or inadequate coping after divorce.

### **Approaches to Coping and Adjusting with Divorce and Separation**

The approaches to coping were analyzed based on the framework of Moos and Billings (1982, as cited in Pestonjee, 1999). It was observed that participants in the process of their coping and adjusting with divorce and separation used all the three approaches rather than any one approach depending upon the stressor event and the meaning attached to it. Additionally, many of the approaches discussed below were adopted unknowingly and only a few were adopted consciously. Each approach and the strategies used within it are discussed below.

**Appraisal-focused coping.** This approach involves attempts to define the meaning of a situation and includes such strategies as logical analysis and cognitive redefinition. It was observed that while participants were in the process of coping in the initial stages they compared themselves with ‘superior others’ and reported feeling sad and inferior about their situation. The quote below illustrates the same:

“When I came back here (referring to parent’s home) I saw my brother and his wife going out and enjoying life. They would go out for eating and to the parks. I used to look at them and feel jealous. I used to feel that there is nobody with whom I can go out and have fun.”

Whereas in the later stages of coping and adjusting, the participants compared themselves with the ‘inferior others’ and reported feeling happy and superior about their situations. As the quote below conveys:

“I compare myself with others. With others who are married. For example, today if I want to go out of the house I am not answerable to anybody. I can leave. But if my friend Avni wants to leave then she has to answer, she has to cook food and then leave. So I am happy.”

It is noteworthy that in both the cases the superior and inferior others were the same persons, that is, married women and they were just perceived to be superior or inferior by the participants. Most of the participants communicated that they indulged in active introspection and conveyed feeling at a much better place than before and that time is the best healer and God has a plan for them. Many of them redefined their situations by accepting that whatever has happened has happened for good. A participant below is seen expressing her approach to dealing with her situation:

“I think God had already decided that I am going to be divorced so he taught me so many things so that I can prepare myself to face the situation. God told me to be ready. To prepare and train myself for the next phase of my life. So I got trained and told myself that I have to live alone, I have to take care of my daughter, my business and my home expenses. That is how I got ready. I keep myself strong. I love to get ready and pamper myself. I always tell all women that you should pamper yourself. Women are beautiful they have been blessed with the beauty. Nobody has been given this beauty like a woman. You should be happy, you should love yourself. Only if you love yourself you would be able to love someone else. If you do not love yourself you cannot love anybody else.”

**Problem-focused coping.** This approach seeks to modify or eliminate the source of stress to deal with the tangible consequences of a problem or actively change the self and develop a more satisfying situation. Following this approach participants were observed indulging in behaviors and doing things which eliminated or modified their source of stress. It emerged that most participants at least in the long run were quite alert and clear about their source of stress and were seen making active efforts to change the stressor situations. For example, the problems of financial difficulties were handled by completing unfinished degree, pursuing a vocational course, indulging in further studies, establishing a new business, and seeking employment.

Loneliness was handled by strategies like, joining clubs and associations like Art of Living, Gayatri Pariwar, Swadhyay Pariwar, singles club, talking to few close friends, listening to music, listening to discourse, keeping the television or radio on all day, going for regular outings and vacations with children and friends, playing games on mobile and laptop, chatting on social media and preparing oneself for new relationships and remarriage. The below quotes indicate problem focused coping used by participants:

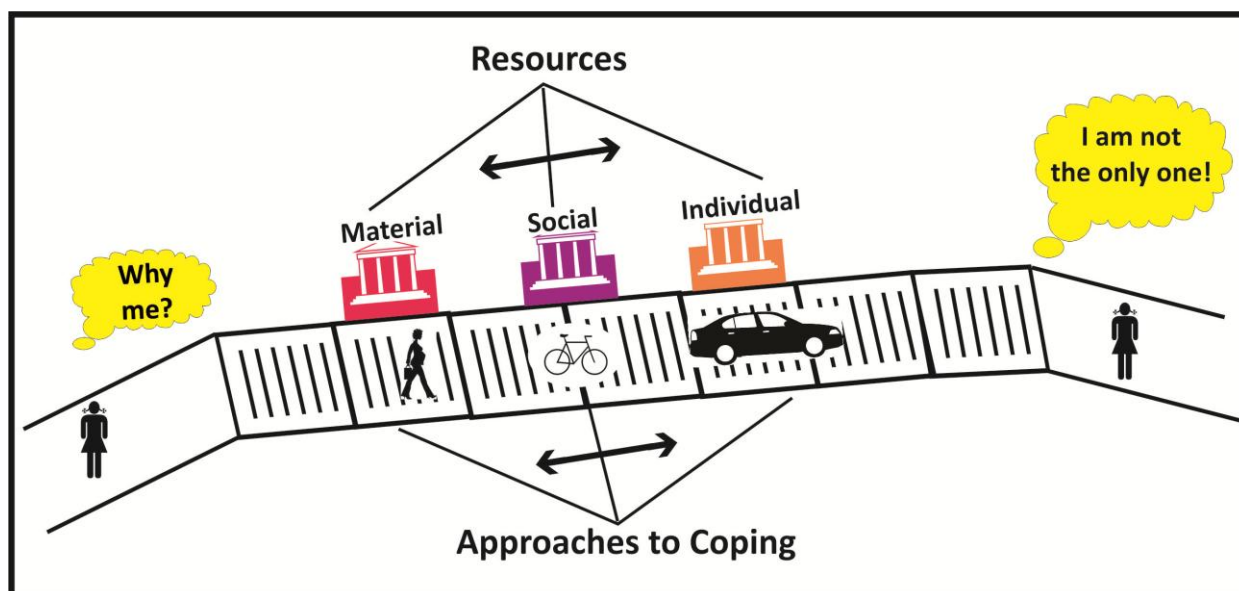
“I get my strength from Param Pujya Pandurang Shastri. He is my divine guru. I really feel inspired from him. After coming in contact with him I feel that life is worth living. His lectures give me a reason to live.”

“I get up at 5.30 in the morning and then I watch discourse on TV. I sip some green tea and do some yoga. I also want to donate my organs. I have become very positive because of listening to discourse.”

**Emotion-focused coping.** This approach includes responses whose primary function is to manage emotions aroused by stressors and thereby maintain effective equilibrium. Most participants understood their emotions and also strongly believed that nobody else understood their emotions. They used the following strategies to deal with their variety of emotions. Keeping busy all day, having faith in God, learning not to expect, pursuing a hobby, going for a holiday with children, spending time with friends, abusing and cursing the husband and in-laws, weeping, consulting a counselor, etc. Furthermore, many participants were seen undertaking alternative therapies like reiki, acupuncture, meditation, yoga, walking, going to the gym, and writing a diary etc. Participants also shared that they pamper themselves and love themselves more than anybody else. This reflects filling the gaps of love and warmth themselves. The below quote indicates emotion focused approach to coping used by one of the participants who talks about dealing with her emotions:

“Learn to protect yourself, you have to become fearless like an army, so to become fearless you have to face facts, pray, get strength from the lord. Give yourself a lot of love. You have to heal yourself, you have to nurture yourself, and no one is going to come and heal you. Be in nature, be very gentle to yourself and your soul, heal yourself. And your place wherever you are in whatever condition you are try to make a little paradise around you. Introspect, see what your faults are, try to change yourself, you cannot change anybody but yourself. And work hard. Life is a journey from birth to death it’s like a school, we are in a school.”

The figure 14 symbolizes how women cope and adjust with their divorce and separation, that is, the pathways, resources and approaches to coping.



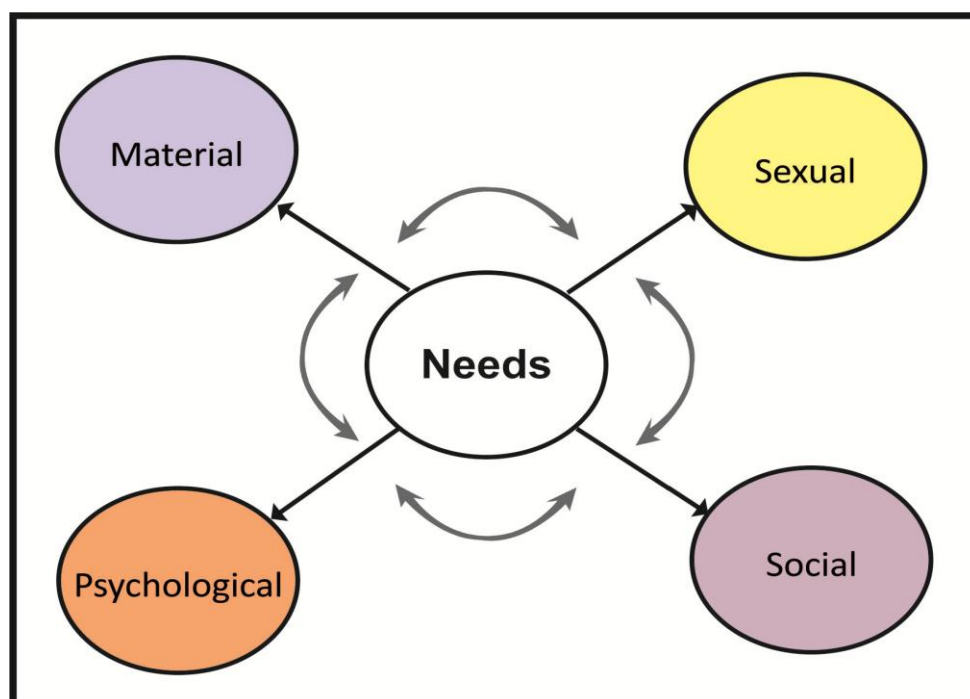
**Figure14. Pathways, resources and approaches to coping and adjusting with divorce and separation**

The figure illustrates that coping and adjusting with divorce and separation is like a journey on a very long bridge which one has no choice but to cross. It is an internal voyage from “Why me?” to “I am not the only one!” The material, social and individual resources discussed above are depicted as convenient stores on the bridge in the picture. This implies that in order to have a smooth journey on the bridge one must have adequate resources. The figure 14 also shows a person walking, a cycle and a car which portrays the different approaches adopted by divorced and separated participants which have a significant effect on their coping and adjustment. It is important to note that the picture depicts only salient patterns of coping. These patterns will be very subjective in nature, that is, there would be women who have minimum resources but have coped to a great extent and there would be women who would have maximum resources but are still unable to cope. Coping and adjustment nevertheless happens because of variations, interactions and interconnections between pathways, resources and approaches and not due to any single demographic factor. Connections can be drawn to the three themes discussed above with the theory of Indian experience of stress and coping by Pestonjee (1999). It suggests that individuals cannot remain in a continuous state of tension and that even if a deliberate and conscious strategy is not adopted to deal with stress, some strategy is adopted knowingly or unknowingly to take care of self. The pathways to coping and adjusting with divorce and separation can also be connected with the theory of adaptation and set point model of happiness in the theoretical framework which states that over time people adapt to the most extreme positive and negative circumstances of life.

The following theme addresses the third research question, that is, what are the needs of divorced and separated women?

### **Needs of Divorced and Separated Women**

Needs did not emerge very clearly when the participants were asked directly about what are their needs on being divorced and separated. However, in the course of the interview, a range of needs were articulated by the participants in direct and indirect ways. The needs of divorced and separated women are classified in four domains in the figure 15. Further, many needs were interconnected. For example, a participant who was well-off financially did not feel too lonely but someone who was not well-off financially felt more insecure and a need for emotional support and respect in the society.



**Figure15. Needs of divorced and separated women**

**Material needs.** As already discussed earlier, divorce and separation brought a downward economic mobility in the lives of most participants. Seventeen participants directly expressed the need for money and a well-paying job and other materialistic resources like their own house, car, two wheeler, good clothes, good furniture in their house etc. The materialistic needs were expressed more for childrearing and resulted out of the insecurity of the future. One separated participant said:

“I really need a good job for my son. I cannot live at the mercy of my father for lifetime. I want to give him a good education and so I have to get a good job and earn. And what if they (referring to parents) will not be there.”

Below is one participant stressing about the importance of being financially stable if you are divorced:

“If you see, money is nothing but it gives you status to stand in society, it gives you confidence it helps you to divert your mind and try to live happily. If you are earning then its good, but if not you require money and after certain period you don’t like to beg money for your personal needs. You cannot live like a beggar. This need comes when she (referring to a divorced women) will feel that she is a divorcee and she is not earning.”

Further, many participants, recollected incidences where they stopped themselves from buying things which they desired because they had to fulfill other priorities. Some of them were concerned about their inability to fulfill the increasing demands of their children due to their professional and financial instability. However, many of them also proudly communicated about taking care of their children’s expenses in spite of the difficulties. One participant was married at the age of seventeen and was not even a graduate. Today she is a famous mehndi artist and financially independent. She sadly expresses the below remembering her poor financial condition in the past:

“I have no hobbies (sad), I have not fulfilled any of my desires in my life. From the time I have come back I have not worn any earrings or any bangles or any new clothes. I had no money and I came back with my daughter. I had no scope for fulfilling my dreams. I was confused whether I should give her good nutrition and education or should I fulfill my dreams (cries). In my age of enjoying and fulfilling my dreams I had a responsibility if bringing up a daughter. It was a big responsibility and I did not want to throw that responsibility on anyone else.”

Those participants who did not mention that they have a financial need directly did refer some difficult times in the past when it was their need and also shared about some experiences in their current life where they made compromises due to limited materialistic resources. So, overall most participants indicated that they have a need for materialistic resources.

**Sexual need.** Fifteen participants expressed a need to satisfy their sexual desires after their divorce and separation. These fifteen women were mostly young, that is, in the age group of 25 to 35 years. Some were quite frank and open while telling about their sexual needs and some just

stated it briefly and did not want to discuss much about it. Below are the excerpts of some participants talking about their sexual needs:

“Even I feel at times *koi to ho* (at least someone should be there) I need that thing (referring to sex) desperately. Desperately is a very bad word. But, sometimes when you control it you need it. It is very very very difficult. So, I do not think that sex is bad. It is a need.”

“Yes I do have an urge for sex but then it gets suppressed. It is natural. I definitely have the urge many times. Because it is natural and it is our food. Just like we eat food when we are hungry this is also a food.”

Out of the 15 participants who admitted to having the sexual need two participants frankly mentioned that they indulge in self-stimulation to gratify their needs. They also expressed that it is better to masturbate rather than being in a relationship with someone whom you cannot trust. Some participants described this need as so strong that they wished to enter intimate relationships or get married to satisfy it. Few participants said that they diverted their minds in work and meditation so tackle this need. Below is a quote from a participant who wishes to enter into relationships to satisfy her need but does not do so due to fear of the society.

“There are physical needs. If you want to have sex with someone it is a taboo socially. What if I sleep with someone to satisfy my need and someone finds out about it. Sex is a big thing. Even if someone comes and tells you that they had sex we will also raise eyebrows. People are very judgmental.”

One participant in describing her meeting with a prospective boy for remarriage in a hotel room, shares the following which indirectly describes a need for satisfying one’s sexual desires:

“I have taken many risks in my life. Then I went and met him (referring to a prospective man) there. First day itself he said....he drinks and he smokes. I had told him that then I do not want to marry you. He said he was ready to give up if he has my support. So I thought let me at least see and judge what kind of man he is. That man must probably not have had sex in a long time. We had sex. I was knowing all the risks of HIV AIDS I still had sex with him.”

Out of those participants who did not mention this as their need some said that they did feel the need after the immediate years of their divorce and separation but they do not feel it now. Some of them also recollected their sexual encounters with their ex-husbands being so horrible that they fear having sex with someone now. Few women also said that it is not sex but the body warmth that they need whereas two participants out of 30 completely denied having the sexual need.

**Psychological need.** Almost all expressed a need for a companion and a partner across their interviews. When describing their psychological needs seven participants voiced that they need a person or a space where they can vent out their feelings. Some also said that they need to experience what a husband's love is. Furthermore, participants expressed that they need someone to talk to them about their daily activities, taking small decisions, accompanying them for a cup of coffee or movie. Additionally, some said, they need someone to listen to them and their feelings without judging them or advising them. Some words which participants used were need for a vent, outlet of my feelings, catharsis and a non-stop listener. One participant highlighted this need in the following quote while sharing that she needs to talk to someone to heal from within and so talking to her friend helps:

"I feel that at least there is someone who is listening to me and who understands me. My mother tells me to keep quiet and change the topic. She tells me to concentrate on my job and study."

One more participant describes a similar need while she says the following:

"Right now I am feeling relaxed and relieved that I am pouring out my heart to someone (referring to the researcher). I am feeling that someone is listening to me."

It has already been discussed further that almost all the participants confessed to feeling lonely and insecure at some point of time in their life because of being alone after their divorce and separation. Participants shared that in spite of people around them they feel an emptiness from within which only a husband can fill. The quote below from a participant talking about her relationship with her male friend suggests the same:

"He (referring to a male friend) came he stayed and of course, needless to say we had sex. At that time I had psoriasis in my head. My head was covered and I had thought that nobody would think me pretty ever again. Someone to confide in, who was sitting next to me and softly asking me what was wrong with the department, how I was being treated?"

**Social need.** Not many participants were keen to build many social relationships and preferred to remain a little away from the society as reported by them. However, it was observed that in some subtle ways these women still followed the social norms maybe with a desire to be accepted by the society. As the quote indicates:

"Actually the way I behave in the society all know that I am a person with good character. I come home on time and I do not wander here and there. I do not go here and there. I just go out with my son on Sunday or do his work."



This reflects that participants aspired to find space and dignity in the society. Nine participants stated directly about their need to be valued and respected in the society whereas others stated it indirectly. Some words used by the participants were, *kimmat*, *kadar*, *aabru*, *izzat*, value, *maan*, respect etc. The following quotes emphasize this need further:

“One must have a good name in the society. One may not wear diamonds or own a nice car but your personality should be such that when you come out of the house people should look at you and say: Here she is!”

“In olden times women were not allowed to step out of the house. Today they can even fly the planes. I feel that the society always looks down upon a divorced woman. So for a woman it is a challenge to live in the society and it is more difficult for a divorced woman. So she should live such a life that she sets an example for others. She should live in such a way that people salute her.”

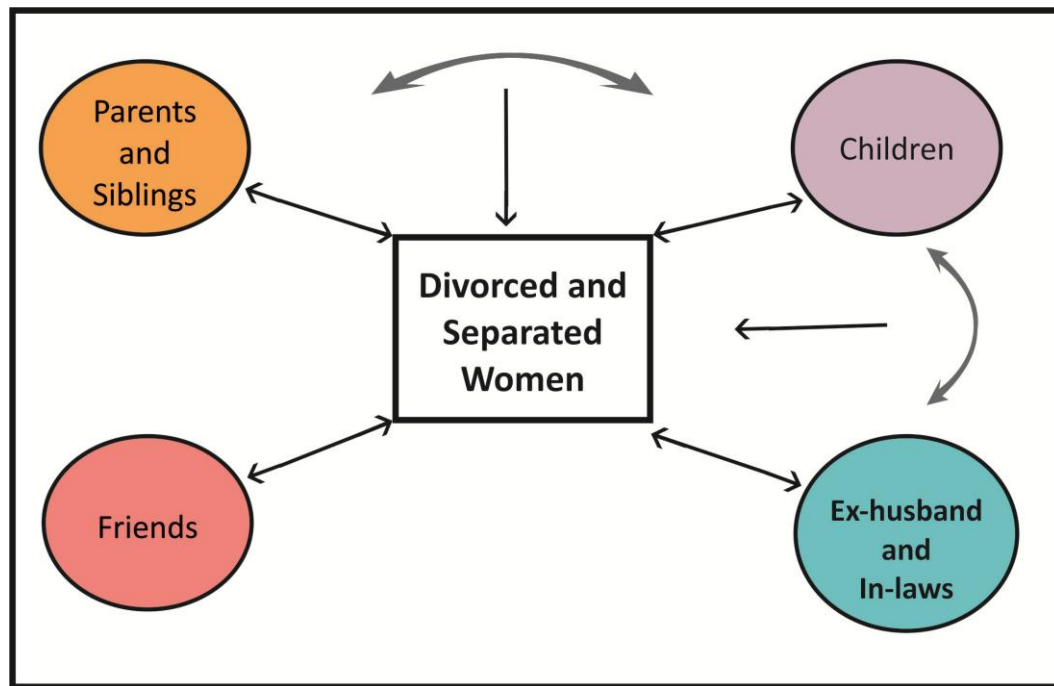
Few participants also described their need to have a family and a man’s name after their name. Some women also confessed about hiding their divorce status from the society at large because it brought them disrespect and uninvited questions and advises. This also reflects an attempt to comply with the norm of being normal in the society. More details on how women deal with the society has been discussed in the theme of dealing with the society.

Thus, in connecting the theme of needs of divorced and separated women to the feminist theory and the theory of symbolic interactionism we can say that if we compare the purpose of marriage with the needs emerging due to divorce or separation then there is much similarity. Marriage, supposedly provides all the above mentioned needs (financial and emotional security, legal sexual relationships and status in the society), and hence in the wake of divorce and separation these needs became more visible. In other words, satisfying certain needs is socially approved only in a conjugal relationship, whereas meeting such needs outside a marital relationship is considered unacceptable non-normative.

The following two themes discuss the fourth research question, that is, what are the dynamics of the network of significant relationships in the lives of women and what impact do these have on women?

### **Dynamics and Impact of Significant Relationships**

Displayed in figure 16, are some significant relationships in the lives of participants and the dynamics within each relationship and their impact on the women.



**Figure16. Significant relationships**

**Parents and siblings.** All the participants spoke about their parents and siblings while sharing their experiences and feelings in the process of their divorce and separation. Notwithstanding the ups and downs the dynamics of relationship with parents and siblings were a mixed bag. In other words participants reported changing dynamics in the relationship with their parents and siblings at different points of time in the process of their divorce and separation.

Most participants said that parents and siblings were their biggest source of strength during their divorce process and that without them it would have been difficult to deal with the problematic situations. In some cases it was the father and in most cases it was the mother with whom the participants felt a close bond. Many participants said that they felt much closer to their parents after their divorce and separation. However participants also reported facing many problems with their parents in the course of their divorce and separation. Many of these problems have been discussed in the themes of trajectories of support and living arrangements of divorced and separated women. The excerpt below describes one participant's negative relationship with her father after her divorce:

"I tell my father that I am an orphan. He tells me that my emotions are like a gutter and he does not listen to me. He feels that he has also suffered like me but my mother was always there for him. I do not discuss anything with him. Because now I have realized that he does not care for me at all."

Most participants spoke about their siblings but only a few mentioned about having a good rapport with them. Most siblings were married and hence busy with their own families as stated by the participants. Older women who were separated, painfully shared how hurting it was, when they tolerated abuse while married for their sisters and now their sisters do not understand their emotions. Most women did not expect much from their siblings but expressed feeling hurt on not being cared for. One participant expresses about people who do not understand:

“Married people and people with families, my own sisters, for them I have done such a lot, I have helped them with their kids, I have done everything for them, even they don’t understand my loneliness, No. I feel sometimes, I sit and cry you know, I feel very very lonely and when sisters don’t understand it hurts.”

A few women did acknowledge that their siblings were their pillars of support in their bad times.

**Children.** Children were the biggest asset for those who had them and all of them shared a special bond with their children. Except for two to three participants most of them were heavily invested in their children in terms of emotions, time, money and energy. Lives of women revolved around their children especially if the children were young or middle aged and many of these participants saw their children as their best companions. One participant felt that she was destined to meet her daughter and that is the only reason why her marriage happened. Most participants expressed that their children reciprocated their love and care. Those children who lived away made frequent phone calls and paid regular visits to their mothers. Some older women whose children were married or of the marriageable age said that they were slowly learning to detach themselves from their children (especially sons) because they were unsure and fearful about their dynamics with their daughter in-law in future and did not want to be an interference in anybody’s life. A few women with young children also mentioned that that they were unsure until when their children will support them. One participants expressed the above feeling with an idiom:

*“Locha pocha maadi na ane chhelchabila laadi na(When children are so young that they cannot take care of themselves they belong to their mother and when they are young and indepent they belong to their wife)”*

Thus, the bond with the children was strongest but deep within a preparation to live a life without anybody had already begun. Out of ten women who did not have children nine felt luckier about it for various reasons like it would be a burden on them if they had children and that they

would not have been able to take a divorce and also that presence of children would have created problems in their remarriage.

Children's relationship with their fathers and grandparents also influenced participants' relationship with their children as described below:

***Children and their fathers.*** Children of eight participants were still in touch with their fathers. These participants had variety of opinions about the father-child relationship, that is, some encouraged such relationships as they wanted their child to have a father figure, some did mind their children meeting their fathers but had no choice because the fathers had visitation rights and some older participants did not bother to know if their children spoke to their fathers or not. Participants confessed that their relationship with their child strained at times because of the father-child relationship and at times the father poisoned that child against them and bought them expensive gifts which they themselves could not afford for their children. These participants indulged into arguments with their ex-husbands and recollected that they also felt negative towards their children during such episodes. As the below quote suggests:

“He would be poisoning my child but my child is such a person that she would not share anything. But, when she would come back I would get angry on her. She would talk about her father and she would get her old toys from there so I would feel upset. I know it was not right on my part but I was helpless. Then he would send her gifts and all. Once he sent her a tablet and a pair of shoes. I sent it back. I thrashed him. I told him that she is just nine years old and just because of you do not have any responsibility towards her then don't spoil her. He can give her books instead.”

Those children who were not in touch with their fathers were too young to share a bond with their fathers or miss them. Some of these children did not know who their father was and some thought that he is no more or that he is out of the country for a long time. Some children who were themselves victims of their father's abuse hated their father. One participant with older children who was permanently separated shares about a strained relationship between father and children:

“Once he (referring to ex-husband) had come in the afternoon. I had gone for a bath. My younger son wanted to start some business. So my husband offered him some money. Suddenly my husband left. I asked him (referring to son) why your dad left suddenly. He did not tell me very clearly. Then he told me after a few days that they had a fight. My husband offered him some money for business so he told him that when we needed the money for

education you did not give now why are you giving? He told him that he neither wants his money nor his name. He told him to get out. After that day he never came.”

Those participants who had given away the custody to the ex-husband were unhappy about the limited and gradually decreasing contact with their children. These participants conveyed missing their children a lot and showed their photographs to the researcher and shared about their activities and achievements.

***Children and their grandparents.*** Children’s relationship with their grandparents was also an important indicator of participant’s relationship with their parents and in-laws after their divorce and separation.

Seven participants spoke about the reciprocal and intimate bond of their children and their maternal grandparents. Children looked upon their maternal grandparents for warmth security and guidance. The below quote from a participant who lives with her parents, indicates the above point:

“My father treats my daughter as my son. He comes home daily and gets something for her. The moment he enters her house he asks about her.”

Three participants shared that their children were still close to their paternal grandparents and visited them regularly. These participants did not mind this relationship because two out of three were also in touch with their mother-in-law and continued to share a good relationship with her.

Three participants were very disappointed in sharing that their fathers did not treat their children well, insulted them, ignored them and deprived them of the love that they deserved because of which their own relationship with their father had strained. The below quote from one such participant who lives with her parents, indicates the above point:

“He (referring to father) does not love my son as much as he loves my brother’s son. Just because he is daughter’s son. And my son can make out. He remains scared in the house. I have grown up feeling scared of my father and now he is growing up feeling scared of his grandfather. Sometimes he calls me in the office and says that my father is angry. Sometimes they have some fights in the house.”

**Friends.** After talking to the participants about their friends it seemed that having friends is a male prerogative. Twenty one out of 30 women said that they did not have a close friend.

Some of these women did not have any close friend before marriage and some who had were unable to maintain friendships with them due to restrictions from their husbands and in-laws. Nine participants said that they were lucky to have good friends most of which were their friends before marriage. Though some out of these nine women did confess that some of their friends also turned their back against them found faults in them, were judgmental about them, taunted them, gave them unnecessary advices, considered them free all the time, considered them immature because they are single and at times also made fun of them and their situations. Only one or two participants shared about having friends who stood by them against all odds. One participant on being asked if their friends changed after her divorce answered the following:

“Yes totally! Some that I thought who were great friend, dropped me like a hot potatoes, totally!”

Further nine out of 30 participants said that they had intimate friendship or relationship with a male friend with whom they shared their feelings and spent time. Women mentioned about their close male friend when they were asked about their friends, sources of support and what makes them strong. However they gave out very limited information about these men in their lives. Only one participant was open about her relationship with a male friend whereas others just mentioned about it and said that they would not like to talk about it. As the following quote suggests:

“He (referring to God) has given me a one very special friend, whom I would not like to talk about, he has a given me a beautiful friend, he is far away from me but he is there and he is an amazing person and good willing. He will be there in my life but I am thankful in whatever capacity.”

**Ex-husband and in-laws.** Many participants were not in touch with their ex-husbands and in-laws however they were aware about their whereabouts through relatives and children and this disturbed them at times. Seven women said that they are in touch with their ex-husbands out of which five were in touch because of their children. Most of the conversations of such contact were regarding schooling, career, health or marriage of the children and to coordinate pick up and drop of the child since either the mother or the father had visitation rights. One participant lived in the same house with her husband and one participant communicated with her husband to discuss the ongoing case with her husband. Another participant said that her husband is still her good friend and she does not mind taking his advice in many matters of her life. According to the participants

most ex-husbands were either married and had children or were living with someone. The quotes below describe words from a participant who is in touch with her ex-husband:

“One is tremendous gratefulness to my first husband for taking over the responsibility of Rujuta when I was acting irresponsible. I was taking huge risks with my life and what my dad and mom did was in the best interest for my daughter. They threw me out, I do not know whether that was right or wrong. But I have a tremendous feeling of gratefulness to him and his wife for grooming my daughter gracefully.”

Interestingly three to four participants shared that their husbands wanted to have physical relationships with them after their divorce and separation in spite of being married to someone else. Participants reportedly denied such requests from their husbands.

Two participants shared that they had a very good relationship with their mother-in-law even after their divorce and that they regularly communicated and visited each other. However, they were unsure if they should continue with this. Two out of four participants who were permanently separated remembered meeting and talking over the phone with their mother-in-law and sister-in-law. The following excerpt indicates the above points:

“Today also I have a good relationship with my mother in law, my sister in-law. When she (daughter) used to visit them my mother in-law would send me what I like. I am still in touch with her but now I have lessened the contact because then your expectations would increase. She has also visited this house. This Diwali I called her home. She told me that I will never find a daughter in-law like you. You are perfect.”

### **Dealing with the society**

When discussing the experiences of participants in dealing with the society at large, three major domains came up. They are described as below.

**Social life.** Most participants had a very limited social life which they said that they chose purposely. Twenty Five participants said that although they are invited to social functions and parties they avoid being a part of it and felt uncomfortable in such situations. Many of them said that most social functions are for couples and families and hence it was difficult for them to identify themselves with most people in the social functions and that they also felt uncomfortable on such occasions. As the quote describes:

“I feel very bad when I see girls of my age who are my friends and cousins who are happy and they are well settled. I feel good for them but I feel bad for myself. Many of my cousins are around the same age as me. I avoid going and visiting them because I feel very bad from inside. I do not feel jealous but then they make me feel that I am lacking in something or that it was my fault that I could not adjust in that family. This gives me pain. I feel bad.”

Women admitted that they consciously chose to avoid being too much social more so to protect themselves and their children from unwanted questions, comments, advices and judgments from friends, relatives, colleagues and neighbors. Many of them said that they have built their own cocoon with significant others and enjoy doing better things rather than indulging in a social life.

“I and Anita (daughter) believed that this was our small cocoon, not bothered about the outside world, and we made this place (referring to her home) such a way that it will nurture us back. Slowly, slowly we made this place good, we cleaned it all.”

Some participants shared that women and few men too feel insecure and threatened in their presence because they were single. A few of them also said that they do not mind being social but they have no time for it.

Participants also shared that they have faced problems in making new friends and building long lasting relationships given their divorced status. Four to five women were sad to share that they have no company even for a cup of coffee, movie or to go shopping with someone.

Though, five women also said that they have a good social life and that they happily attend social functions and parties.

**Social stigma.** All the participants shared about feeling stigmatized due to their divorce and separation and how it made their normal life difficult. According to most participants the society has no place or respect for divorced women and views divorced women as abnormal, deviant, characterless, *abhagan* (ill fated), irresponsible, failure misfit, or *bichari* (poor thing). The level of stigma varied with age, number of years lived together, presence of children, reason for divorce, professional status of the participant and the overall circumstances of the divorce. For example: those participants who were on good professional designations faced lesser stigma. Older women expressed their concerns and difficulties that they faced or are facing in getting their children married due to their own marital status. Young participants who had no children faced lesser stigma compared to middle aged and older participants who had children. Additionally not



only the participants but their children also faced stigma in places like school, among relatives, among friends etc.

Many participants shared that when they returned to their parent's home, the relatives and neighbors were too much curious and interested in their whereabouts and some also made nasty comments to them in indirect ways. One participant used an idiom to describe how the news of someone's divorce spreads like wildfire:

*“Kaagda na modhe kankotri*(Giving an invitation card to a crow who will caw and let the whole town know about it)”

Emerging out of this stigmatization and unwanted reactions from the society many participants were observed using strategies to avoid stigma. One major strategy used was to keep their divorced and separated status a secret from most people like; tenants, landlords, neighbors, relatives, workplace, and children's schools, friends etc. As the below quote indicates:

“At that time when he (ex-husband) went away I had to put up a fake smile. I had to maintain my status in the society. I could not tell people that he ran away to the US. Children also had to pretend in front of their friends. They have to tell that he calls.”

Some other strategies used to avoid the stigma were dressing simply, not applying makeup, not talking to men, not going out with friends, reaching home on time and behaving in a certain way to maintain the dignity of their parents, children and themselves. Some of them chose to tolerate the situation silently whereas a few also retaliated and did what they like, not bothering about the social reactions.

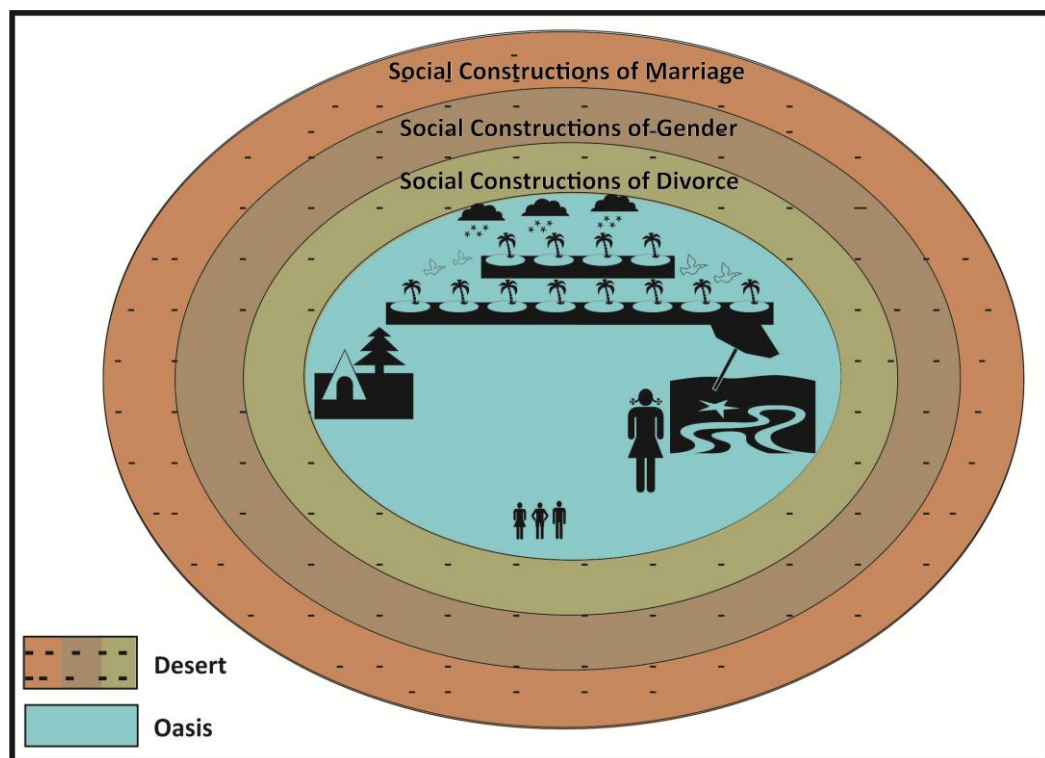
**Men.** Except for one or two women who were on senior positions professionally all of them spoke about having bad experiences with men in the society. Participants alleged that men (friends, friends of the ex-husband, relatives, relatives of ex-husband, fathers of their children's friends, lawyers, therapists, colleagues, bosses, neighbors, prospective men from matrimonial websites, cousins etc.) approached them for sexual favors, tried to exploit them, harassed them, threatened them and took undue advantage of their situations. Four to five women mentioned that many of their online friends and prospective males from the matrimonial websites were more interested in one night stands and sexual relationships rather than marriage. Most participants had not one but many of such experiences with men. Their divorced and separated status made the men feel that now these women are 'available' and that they can oblige her by fulfilling her sexual needs. Participants described ways in they had to protect themselves from the men. Some

participants also said that married men are more dangerous. The following quote reveals one participant's perception about what men think about divorced women:

*“Saali aatli saari bairi che kon vaaparva nai mange. Ek vakhat so suvdaviye. (She is such a hot lady, who would not want to use her; I need to sleep with her at least once). All men have this kind of desire. All men. Even if they are married. They do not care about the face or looks. They are just interested in the body.”*

Participants described using strategies to protect themselves from ‘men’ in the society. Some of them left their jobs, changed their jobs, let go of their due promotions, stopped talking to the best of their friends and relatives, reducing contacts with colleagues, not allowing anybody to visit home, not telling anybody that they live alone or that they are single, being nasty, ignoring people, pretending to not understand the non-verbal cues and comments etc. One participant describes dealing with one such situation:

*“ya lots, ya lots kadam kadam pe (at every step), I used to say no to them, I was punished for saying no, again and again even at work. There were two gentlemen, one was the HOD who proposed me for an affair and I told point black on his face. He stood there for half an hour while I was supervising and looking at me. I said sir it's a very personal decision and I would not like to live life like that. I don't want to get in such things. One more colleague, my neighbors etc.”*



**Figure17. Dealing with society**

Thus, the above figure 17 represents the world of the divorced and separated women with their significant others. This small world is like an oasis in the desert. Life is most comfortable in this niche which has been carved by them with difficulty and little support. The desert oasis is surrounded by three strong layers which represent the social constructions of divorce (which is the social stigma related with divorce), social constructions of gender (which sees a woman with respect only if she is married) and social constructions of marriage (which lays a compulsion to be married if you want to live a good social life). The bigger the circle the stronger its construction and even stronger is its impact on the peaceful existence of the oasis. The interconnections and power attached to these unbreakable layers makes it very difficult to deal with the society. However, in spite of facing many challenges in dealing with the society interestingly the main motive of the participants was to comply with the society and its norms by using various strategies. Hence, one continues to live in the oasis amidst the desert.

The last three themes answer the fifth research question, that is, what is the perception of divorced and separated women regarding their happiness and success in life?

### **Constructions of Happiness and Success**

When the participants were asked if they considered themselves happy 22 said 'yes'. Some of which also said that they are 'very happy'. However, seven participants said that they are not happy with their lives and one of them said that she is unsure about her happiness.

Out of those women who said that they were happy, most of them acknowledged their happiness to their freedom, not having to face any restrictions and the fact that they are out of all the wrong relationships and the sad times being over. Some of these women also said that they are happy because they are financially independent. A few connected their happiness with their self-growth after their divorce and separation and that they are looking forward to and enthusiastic about their new life. Few participants also said that they are happy because they are satisfied with their efforts to save their marriage and do not regret their divorce.

Below are some quotes from the participants who described why they think they are happy:

"Today I am the happiest person in the world. I am living the best life. Nobody has a life like me. I am carefree. I am not afraid of the society and nobody can question me. I am not at all worried if someone will marry my son or not. I am happy because I am free of all the wrong relationships. Just because I was married I had to be attached to all the wrong relationships which gave me only pain. I am free now and that is why I am happy. There was no

commitment, no love and no feelings in my relationship with my husband. And I was just dragging myself in it. I wasted my time with him. In taking care of one fake relationship I ignored so many other relationships. I ignored myself.”

“Because when I was married I was under so many restrictions. I felt as if I am tied to a rope. Now after my divorce I am free. I can do everything freely. I do not have any baggage. I want to make a good future for my son and now it is completely in my hand without any restrictions. So I am happy. I am happy that have an aim in life and I have all the freedom to fulfill that aim.”

“I have few relationships but those are very beautiful relationships. And so I am very happy and I feel very wealthy these days, I have come out as a winner. I feel like that these days, and he (points above to refer God) has made me very strong and wise and also kept me little foolish so that I don’t become fat in my head. “*thodi foolish hu*(I am little foolish) which is also nice”. I think life is beautiful and that is why I am happy.”

Interestingly these participants also gave out some tips to remain happy and cheerful. Some of which were learning not to expect anything from anybody, looking at the brighter side of life, spending time with happy and positive people, and having faith in God and oneself. Some women said that their divorce taught them many things about their life and unraveled their hidden potentials and they have learned to count their blessings and are much happier and satisfied with lesser things and facilities in life. The upcoming quotes suggest ways to remain happy as suggested by one of the participant:

“It is only when you can leave those baggage. If you cannot leave it or break it, you can never be happy. It is a process. One has to be alert. I still judge people sometimes and then I tell myself that I am not supposed to do this. One thing which has kept me happy all this time is to imagine that you are at a place where you are safe and secure and you have all that you want. Things around are bad. But you can imagine good things. Every day, before sleeping I imagine that I am in that kind of a world. So I escape to a place which is comfortable for me and it makes me happy. But next day when you get up in the morning you should be able to relate to the world. You have to face the reality. You can’t start complaining that people don’t care for you and nobody loves you and all that. I am lucky. (Smiles) I always apply one statement which one person told me. Whatever is mine will never go and if it still goes it means it is not mine.”

One more participant says:

“Do things which make you happy it will help to divert your mind, and you will stay happy. For example, I like to cook, so when I get time I try to make new dishes. Also you can talk to a person whom you trust or go to doctor or a psychiatrist and talk, and if there is no one whom you can trust talk to yourself that’s the best thing, just vent it out cry if you want. For me it was my family who was so supportive. Try to overcome it. It is difficult, but try to keep yourself busy. In being busy don’t forget yourself, keep yourself fit and beautiful so that you will feel good about yourself. Move out, do more shopping go wherever you like and do whatever u like. Make up your mind that you have to do this and you will do anything to fulfill it. Look beyond rather than looking behind. Don’t keep on cribbing; once you stop cribbing automatically the pain will heal. I started doing my PhD and I started exercise. There is also a social system which makes you realize that you are divorced and they make your life miserable, *ki jina muskil kardeta hai*, (make it difficult for you to live) societal pressure will force you to think that it’s a big thing that has happened with you, but it isn’t like that. You will fear that who will marry you but that is not the aim of life. The aim of life is to live happily.

Those participants who said that they are not happy connected their unhappiness with their long pending case, financial instability, loneliness, not having a partner or husband, feeling a vacuum inside them etc. Two to three women also informed that they were or are undergoing counseling because of their depression and that their divorce and separation is a major reason for their unhappiness. Below is what some participants express as reasons for their unhappiness:

“No. I am not. I need that partner in my life. I need him very badly. Someone who loves me and who is ready to be with me for my lifetime.”

“Unhappiness is there I feel alone, even though my whole family, my friends are with me.”

“Because I do not think that my life is complete. Something is missing in my life. There is no peace. I am never relaxed. I feel okay for a few hours but it is temporary.”

When participants were asked if they considered themselves successful or what is success according to them, it emerged that, having a conjugal family and being married was a strong indicator of success for most participants. Out of 30 participants 16 considered themselves as unsuccessful and 14 considered themselves as successful. Most participants who felt that they are unsuccessful felt so because they did not have a family or that their marriage had failed. Some of them also said that they feel unsuccessful because they neither have a family nor they have a good

job. Two participants said that although they are unsuccessful right now they see themselves as highly successful a few years from now and on saying that they indicated that they will have families of their own after a few years. Many of these participants who felt that they are not successful held important designations in their professional fields and had good salaries. The upcoming excerpt is described by a participant who feels she is unsuccessful:

“Not at all (referring to success). Because I do not have a complete life. Neither do I have a job neither am I part of a family. I feel that it is important to get married. Not only it gives you a beautiful identity but it also makes you complete. A woman is complete only in a marriage. The role that she plays after marriage gives meaning to her life. She is meant to serve people and only then her life is complete. I think I am an unhappy person.”

Further, participants who said that they are successful, acknowledged their success to having emerged successfully out of very difficult life situations, learning a lot in the process of divorce, being independent, being courageous, having achieved a lot in life, and rearing their children single-handedly. As the quote highlights:

“Today I have pain in my joints, difficult financial conditions, a pending divorce case and a growing daughter to take care for. But, I still call myself successful because I have the courage and strength to deal with all the difficulties that I face.”

Some of these participants also felt that they lost money and many job opportunities and promotions due to their divorce and that their co-workers of the past are now much ahead of them professionally. By saying this they meant to say that if their divorce would not have happened then they would be better off professionally which further reiterates the fact that a good family life is a basis to become professionally successful. These participants did acknowledge that they were proud of themselves when they look back and analyze their journey but yet what mattered most was to be successful in all areas of life, that is, financial independence, good health, professional stability, emotional independence and most important for a woman is to have a family of her own. So, being successful in one area is good but it is not complete success. Being successful in most areas and not having a family is not good. But, having a family and not being successful in other areas was considered okay. This reflects that the primacy of family was a very strong pointer to feel successful. The dialogue with a professionally successful participant below describes constructions of happiness and success of most participants:

Interviewer: Will you call yourself a successful person?

Respondent: Somehow not.

Interviewer: Why?

Respondent: Because my priorities are closely connected with my life partner. In this relationship I have been unsuccessful. Yes, I have been successful in other relationships and my profession but I am not successful completely. Successful person is married to everything, husband, children, society profession etc. so in that sense I am not successful. I have also made many mistakes.

Interviewer: Ok, but otherwise in general will you call yourself successful?

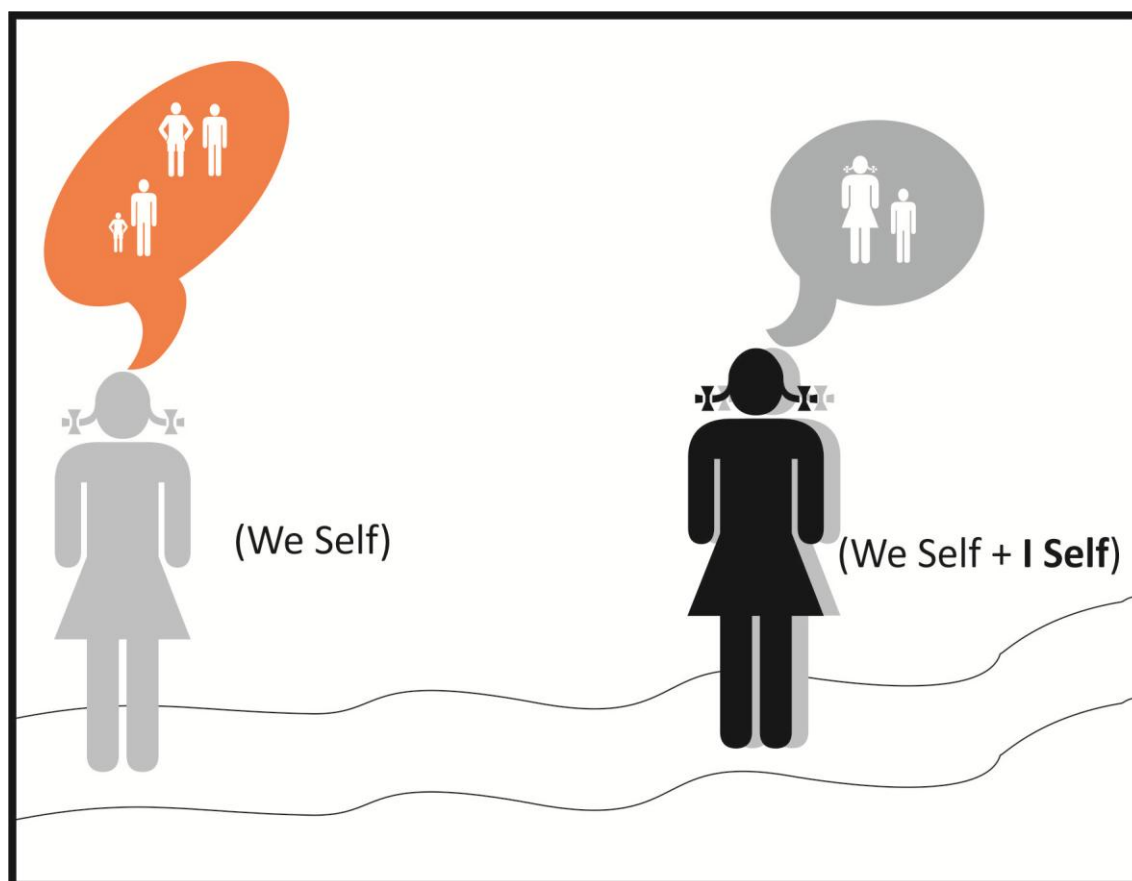
Respondent: Yes, 100%

The figure 18 portrays an individual on a stepping stone towards success and also feeling happy with that. This can be connected to the theory of adaptation and the set point model of happiness which states that most individuals are bound to experience stable levels of well-being on adapting to life situations over time. The figure also portrays the happy person thinking about having a family which is the ultimate goal to feel happy and successful. This can be connected to the theory of symbolic interactionism wherein the participants' constructions of happiness and success are associated with their being married and having a family.



**Figure18. Constructions of happiness and success**

## Glimpses of Shift in Self



**Figure19. Glimpses of shift in self**

The figure 19 symbolizes participants' course of shift in 'self' whilst experiencing divorce and separation. The grey figure depicts a woman in the Indian culture (we-self). Her color is lighter in the first figure because she gives herself a low rank within the social hierarchy. Her concept of self is relational in nature, which is, being a daughter, wife, daughter-in-law, mother etc. This is discussed in the theoretical framework of the study by Kakar (2007) and Mascolo et al. (2004). Further, as displayed in the figure while walking on the crooked road, that is, on passing through the turbulent times, the grey color remains but in the background, that is, we self and a darker image appears, that is, the I self. Also, significant others are now fewer. This can be well connected to the points highlighted by Parikh and Garg (1989) in the theoretical framework of the study which state that while confronting with inevitabilities within their micro and macro identities women find the freedom, dignity and grace to be persons as well as women. Thus, a transformation and a slight shift in self from we-self to I-self was observed in all the participants of the study. The following points suggest a shift.



- The fact that 21 out of 30 participants initiated their divorce process and many out of which let go of their alimony definitely indicates a subtle shift in self. Divorce is a bold step more so because these were the same participants who recollected giving into their parental pressure while getting married and making sincere efforts to fit and adjust in their family and delayed their divorce due to parents, children and social reactions. However, when it was beyond tolerance they chose to separate or take a divorce and not die or remain married. As one participant who initiated the divorce and took no alimony conveys:

“Life teaches us so much in its course. Tremendous! The lessons we learn. It like Sita coming out of the *agni pariksha* (Test of fire) It is similar to that. You have to pass through it with tremendous faith in self and God. My mother always used to tell me that you gave up that man and all the luxury he gave you for some silly reason. Maybe God has some different plan for me. He wants to take me to some other place where I can be of help to somebody instead of relaxing and compromising with life. Letting him be unfaithful. So I am happy. I have money. I have a house. I am getting to eat two meals.”

- Except for three participants who were permanently separated, 26 said that they use their father’s middle name and last name now wherever needed. Those women who had children were either already using their name after the child’s name instead of the father’s name or planned to do so in the future. Interestingly one participant who was permanently separated stated that she prefers to use neither her husband’s name nor her father’s name. This is a reflection that participants were making attempts to redefine their identities or gaining their identity which they thought they had lost in the process of their divorce or separation. The below quote reflects the same:

“He (referring to son) has his father’s name behind him right now in school because at that time I did not know that I will live here forever. So, after his 10<sup>th</sup> grade I will put my name after his name. I am not going to go to his father for any signatures. Because after the boards and all father’s signature is needed. But I will change when he comes in 10<sup>th</sup>.”

- When participants were asked that how they have changed as a person after their divorce or separation most of them indicated self-growth. Participants gave examples to indicate that they have become stronger, bolder and empowered after their divorce and separation. While recollecting experiences of the past many participants indulged in self-pity, seeking support and feeling helpless about their situations. But, as the interview progressed they appeared courageous, inspiring, powerful and winners who emerged and evolved out of difficult situations and took pride in it. The participant below shares about her self-growth:

“I have grown as a person, you know, I, I used to be, at a very different level of function from what I am now. I have people who call me for advice that ok please tell us what do you say. It is so helpful to me at that time people used to advise me you know so there is a, I like that transition I like that change in myself.”

- ‘A life of my own’ feeling reflected in many of the narrations, that is, throughout the interview participants used many words in connection with the word ‘my’. For example: My life, my decision, my house, my money, my children, my identity, my self-respect, my value, my ambitions, my journey etc. Some of them also said that I love myself, I have learned to love myself, I live for myself or I want to live for myself etc. The same women had shared about making number of sacrifices in their married lives and giving less priorities to themselves. However, some of them who were mothers still said they made sacrifices for their children and parents. The upcoming quotes communicate the same:

“I have changed, I decided that now I know my life is mine, I have to live it and in fact I feel the sense of freedom because, I told you I was always worried about my sisters, setting them, I was helping them, even after my sons left. My sister’s sons got admission in Ahmedabad, they stayed with me, so I really never had time or life of my own. Since last year I moved to Baroda, I suddenly found myself.”

“If I am divorced does not mean I am dead. I am still alive. My life is not over. Why should I spoil my life? If he can face it why not I?”

- Amidst the uncertainties it also appeared that participants were independent and had a sense of control with their lives especially the ones who were living alone or with children. They seemed clearer with their lives, that is, what they wanted to do and what they did not want to do. Decision making power had improved and most participants said that they can now take a stand against what they did not appreciate. As the quote reveals:

“I am independent. I do not need anybody’s support. I have managed my life very well. I have saved enough money to support myself till I die. I had some shares. I sell the shares when the price increases. There was a boom in the share market which was fictitious. But fortunately I earned a lot of money. I made fixed deposits. Currently I have a lot of money.”

One more participant states:

I: Do you think that you are a changed person after your divorce.

R: More positive, more independent and stronger and yes ready to fight. I am not at all a fighting person. My philosophy has always been live and let live. But, now my thinking has changed. Now, I think that if someone does not let me live then I am not going to let that person go. If someone disturbs my things I will disturb him also. I will not let go. If I have not harmed you then why are you disturbing and interfering in my life. I cannot let anybody spoil my life just like that.

- Most participants looked forward to life and, recognized their fears and limitations and were working on it. Divorce and separation had definitely dampened their spirits but had not killed it. Many of them had started looking at their divorce as a positive aspect for growth and appeared less afraid of people and situations. Most of them who sacrificed their aspirations due to marriage saw divorce as an opportunity to fulfill their aspirations and pursue their goals and hobbies. The two quotes suggest the same:

“I am feeling a lot of enthusiasm from within. I want to achieve so much. Eight years of my life have failed. Now I want to compensate for the lost time.”

“It’s just you are out of relationship it is strange but the life is still there, don’t stop, go ahead make it a success, if you want to make it a failure then it will happen. But don’t put yourself on negative note, it will take time, but you will grow with passage of time you will make it a success. It isn’t about failure it’s about your perception. Life has changed but it has not stopped.”

- A quest for self-respect and value still existed and was much stronger in comparison to before. But since now there was no marriage which could give it to them they were gradually learning how to find their feet in the society and were observed protecting the dignity of themselves and their children in the society. The upcoming quotes highlight these points further:

“Once I had an experience where a boy contacted me through Shaadi.com and then he was shocked to know that I am a divorcee. He reacted badly. So, I scolded him that I am also a human and I am not evil. So, nobody can insult me like that.”

“When I tell people that I have a house in Alkapuri they do not believe me. When I say my house is in front of INOX people are shocked. I brought my father in this house blindfolded. He opened his eyes and he said that now I will slap on people’s face. I told him no need to slap because people will themselves get a slap.”

- Many examples suggested that most participants were learning to live without a man or rather playing the roles of a masculine gender. On being asked when you need the help of a man in your life, many laughed. Participants were learning many technical skills and also felt more confident and empowered with their life. They could now manage things like supervising a carpenter, electricians, plumber, painter, repairing some home appliances, going to the bank which they thought they could not do earlier etc. Below is what two participants said:

“If I am calling myself a successful person then I don’t need a man to fix bulbs and put cylinders. I don’t want a male person to do my work but when it comes to emotions, feelings and romance I really need that person.”

“Somewhere, I am like a man now; there is now a power within me.”

- Finally many participants said that on deep introspection and constant analysis of selves they found that the experience of divorce has changed them and their personality to a great extent. As a result of which many of these women wished to thank their ex-husbands, in-laws and God because of whom they could get an opportunity to unravel their real self and hidden potentials. The following quote indicates the same:

“I have decided that when my divorce case is done I will shake hands with him (referring to ex-husband) and say thanks to him. Because if he would not have treated me badly I would not have known my real capacity. Capacity to tolerate pain, insults, rejection, betrayal whatever you say. That Saryu was just Deep’s wife. She could not do anything on her own. She knew only to be a victim of violence. This Saryu is different. She knows what she is and where she wants to go. People tell me that I am a fool to have lived with this man and to tolerate his nonsense. But no one said that what I did was true love. At least I know that what I did for Deep was true.”

The reason why this theme is titled as glimpses and not total shift in self is because it was observed that in spite of the above examples most participants still felt happy and successful in the primacy of family as discussed in the earlier theme and most of them still aspired to remarry as discussed in this theme and the following theme.

Thus, there were fluid boundaries between the two identities, that is, we-self and I-self. In other words, with the lives of divorced and separated women being strongly connected to the

society the we-self continues to guide and influence the participants and their identity. However, a sprout of I-self has emerged within all the participants with a strong potential to grow tall.

### Conceptualizations of Remarriage

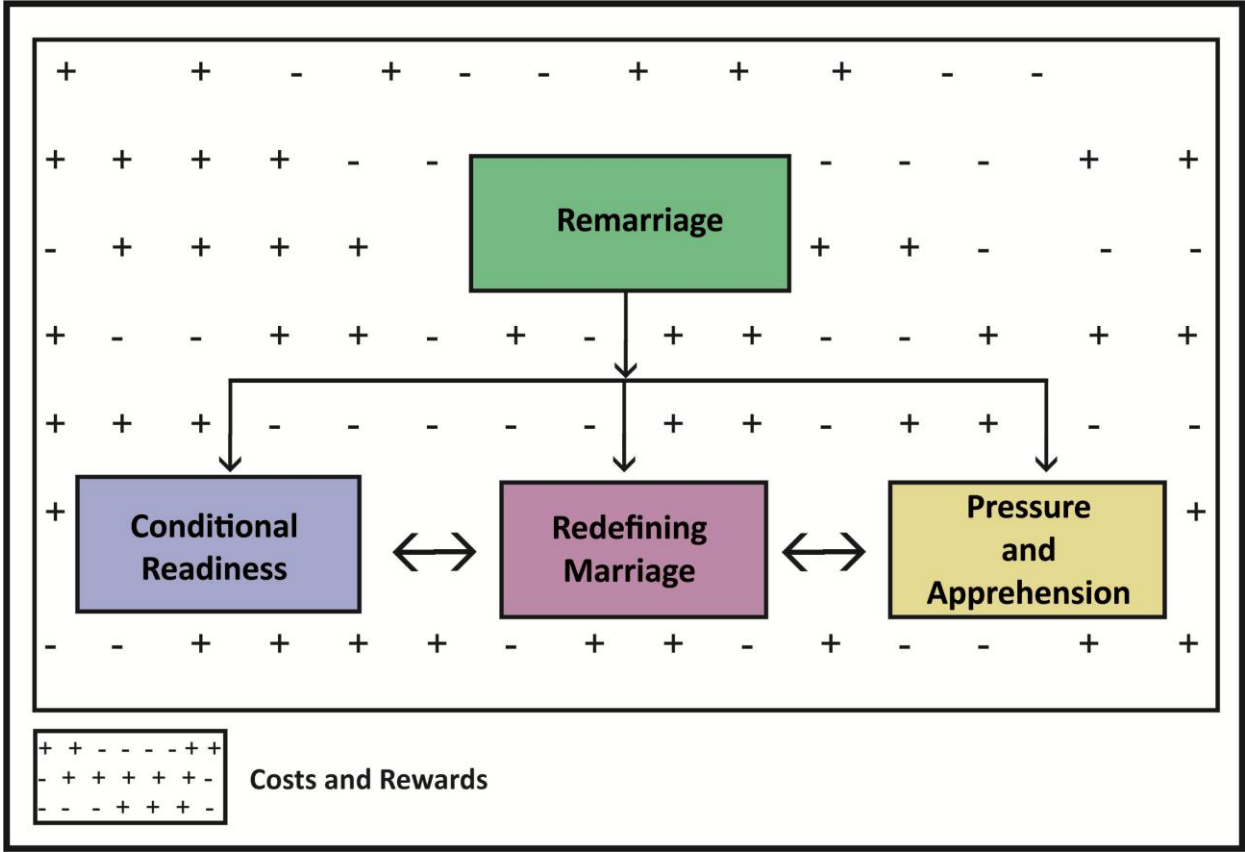


Figure20. Conceptualizations of remarriage

As displayed in the figure 20 remarriage was conceptualized around three interconnected aspects, that is, conditional readiness, redefining marriage and pressure and apprehensions associated with it.

Irrespective of the lived experience of marriage and the experiences of divorce and separation twenty eight participants were open and positive with the idea of getting remarried. Out of which some of them also communicated about being open to new intimate relationship or live-in relationships. The two participants who were not interested in getting remarried were permanently separated and their ages were 68 years and 70 years. Below is a quote from a woman who was a victim of severe abuse yet describes having faith in marriage and is ready for remarriage:

“Such an experience has definitely affected me. But if I have one example of a bad marriage then against that I have three examples of great marriages. My parents and both my sisters’

marriages are great. All of them have a great understanding with each other. So, marriages may not necessarily fail.”

One more participant shares her views on marriage while discussing remarriage:

“Marriage....as far as I believe is a beautiful relationship. Marriage should happen. Because, there is lot of strength in the *saat pheras* (seven vows), there is some scientific reason. I believe in it. But, since my weightage, I mean I used to give a lot of weightage to all the rituals...but at my level it did not work out. I tried my level best. So marriage for me was a beautiful thing. It was a beautiful relationship. It connects two people. It gives you importance as a person. Marriage gives you a reason to live.”

Not only the participants but their children were also prepared for their mother’s remarriage. A few of them also said that their children actually want them to get married and find a partner. One participant’s son was so keen for his mother’s remarriage that he regularly screened prospective husbands for her on matrimonial websites. However, participants also communicated that their children had their own concerns associated with their remarriage. Some of which were their mother being shared by someone else or her love and attention reducing for them. Some of the participants also mentioned that they were also slowly preparing their children for their remarriage by explaining to them that it is difficult to live alone and that they also need a partner.

Many participants who were legally divorced said that they were already meeting and talking to some prospective boys but those who were separated said that their wish to remarry and moving on with their lives was hampered and inadvertently delayed because of their ongoing cases.

Variety of reasons were described for getting remarried many of which were similar to the purpose of marriage like, emotional and financial security, companionship in old age, gaining value and respect in the society and satisfying physical needs. Getting rid of loneliness was the major reason reported for readiness for remarriage.

Those participants who had young children wished to remarry for the above reasons as well as for providing a father figure to their children and needing help in child care. It is noteworthy that readiness for remarriage was coated with many conditions which if not met then the participants preferred to live alone and said that they would be happier single. Some of these conditions were; I will not leave my job, I will wear whatever I want, I will not be able to stay with the in-laws, he (husband) has to respect me, he has to accept me with my child, I don’t want

to move to a different city, I will give money to my parents etc. The below quote emphasizes the conditions laid by a participant:

“If my live-in-partner wants to marry me then fine. But then I will have many conditions. For example I will not allow them (referring to future in-laws) to rule me. I mean my in-laws. They cannot decide what I should wear and eat. If your guests are coming then I will make and prepare all the things for them. But if I have my own program then don’t expect me to be available. If it is possible then I will cancel it but don’t expect that I will be available for you. I have no interest in changing people. We have to accept the person as it is. Even if he is a mumma’s boy. Because now I know how to tackle with such people. But if he has taken my responsibility then he has to maintain it.”

Nevertheless, having laid these conditions participants were also skeptical about being able to find the kind of person who would agree to these conditions as a result of which some were slowly accepting the fact that they will have to live without a partner all their life.

Amidst their desires to remarry or being into new relationships participants were observed redefining what marriage means to them and who is an ideal husband. Many now expressed their disbelief in the institution of marriage, marrying someone from the same caste, matching of horoscopes or marrying someone you love. Having experienced the marriage closely and coming out of a bad marriage enabled many to see the flip side of the marital institution. Interestingly they were still ready to plunge into it again. This reflects that, marriage is the final destination for most individuals. The following quote reveals how a participant is perceiving marriage after her divorce:

“If marriage just means that girl has to sacrifice, you only have to give, manage home, nurture kids, compromise on everything, and if a feeling of hug or thank you is also not going to get us then I don’t want that in my life. Now there is a psychological impact on me as there was pressure of child, as why kids are not happening. So somewhere I used to feel that am I a child producing machine, and the logic that if there would be a child than everything would be all right. I think that what a non- sense logic it is. Now I feel that may be if I think of a guy later on in life then I would say that what if I don’t have to have kids. I may have, but I would like to know his take on this, and if the person is ok then I may think of him that there is a level and he is open.”

Further, this time unlike their first marriage all the participants were very clear about the kind of partner they wanted and had a strong say in the partner selection process. This prerogative was not exercised neither realized at the time of their first marriage. Most of them clearly

articulated what kind of partner they want and who according to them is an ideal partner. When participants were asked about the kind of partner they prefer for their remarriage they gave varied responses. Some common desired qualities of the new partner were; maturity, education, intelligence, responsible and understanding person, well settled and financially stable. Most participants specifically said that they preferred someone who is divorced or a widower, whereas some said they would want to marry only a divorcee. Overall, many participants felt that a divorced person would have undergone the pain of the failed relationship and thus will be a better match for them. Most of the participants who did not have children specifically stated that they don't mind getting married to a divorced person but he should not have children whereas many of the participants who had children were okay with a person who had children of his own and were ready to mother his children. The below excerpts highlight participants' views regarding the choice of a partner:

“A divorced person is fine. But not with kids. A divorcee will hate his wife but a widower will still have feelings for his wife. If a single boy is ok in getting married to me then I do not mind but generally a single man will never prefer a divorced woman. A single woman will get married to a divorced man. That is the gender discrimination that we have.”

“I am scared for my children. I have not undergone a surgery. If I marry then my husband will desire children. What if I become pregnant and give birth to his children? Then there would be differences with my children. If I find someone who does not want his children and accepts my children as his own then that will be a best match for me. Even if I find someone who is a divorcee and has a child I am ok with that. I will take care of his children same like my children. A widower will also do. If he also has a child then there is no need to give birth to a child.”

Some of them were also open to marry single never married men but laughed out with skepticism on the possibility of finding such a person. One participant said that now her standards for an ideal man are very high and if someone wants to marry her then he has to match her standards.

Thus, the aspects of conditional readiness and redefining marriage indicate that the second marriage for the participants was not a repetition of how their first marriage was and they envisioned now a more egalitarian relationship with their husband.

Further, the participants also described being forced, constantly advised and pressurized by parents, relatives and friends to get remarried but none of them mentioned about being affected



by it or giving into those pressures as they did during their first marriage. One participant when asked about her ideas on her remarriage said that she is very hurt by this question because everyone keeps asking her about it. It appeared from most responses that the society made them feel that they have made a mistake by taking a divorce and this mistake can be corrected by getting remarried.

Further, many participants conveyed that although willing to remarry they were apprehensive about many aspects associated with the remarriage. Some feared about the history repeating itself, that is, what would happen if their second marriage also failed. Some expressed concerns over being able to trust any man now especially the ones who had married by self-selection.

Some other apprehensions were what if my husband taunts me about my past. Those women who had children were skeptical about the kind of father their new husband will be and that will the child be able to accept him and will they have a good bond. Participants were also concerned about the impact their remarriage will have on their children especially if they have new children out of that relationship. However, these apprehensions and concerns did not stop the participants in thinking about their remarriage. The following quotes highlight concerns with remarriage:

“I am not saying that I will not get married at all. If I get a good boy then I am open to marriage. Someone who understand me takes care of me, loves me. Forget love at least he should respect me. And he should be someone who is ready to accept me along with my past. Someone who does not taunt me all the time because of my past. Can I find someone like that? If I will find someone like that then I am open to remarriage. But I don’t think there is anybody like that. When I was a virgin, my husband was suspicious of me. Now that I am not a virgin what will my next husband say? How can I trust that he will not say anything like that? It is difficult for me to trust any man now.”

“If I find someone naturally it is fine, but I strongly feel that even at this age the thinking of men is the same. It is very difficult. It is difficult to surrender yourself to someone. If you find someone it is good. But it is not possible to find someone like that. You will find people to flirt. Men do not have this mental level that they can think of a relationship for companionship. *Indian men ko sirf bistar chahiye chahe wo kitne bhi saal ka ho* (Indian men just want to have sex irrespective of their age). And I am not available for that. I do not think I am that low.”

Thus, the conceptualizations of remarriage were a mixed bag of readiness with conditions, apprehensions with pressures and in the process forming new perspectives towards marital relations. Nevertheless, throughout the interviews all the participants stressed the importance and advantages of being married and none of them said that marriage should not happen. Thus, there is turbulence in the institution of marriage and ideas, attitudes, perceptions and definitions of marriage are surely changing and shifting from the traditional ones, and yet the institution of marriage is certainly not dying. The three themes: constructions of happiness and success, glimpses of shift in self and conceptualizations of remarriage illustrate that the difficult and challenging circumstances arising due to divorce and separation make the women independent in many areas of their lives and enable them to develop a stronger sense of self. At the same time, the women feel more successful and happier only on acquiring the marital status again.