Marriage as a Lived Experience for Maritally Separated Women: A Study Report

Suhana Verma
Research Scholar, Indraprastha College for Women, University of Delhi, Delhi, India.

(Corresponding author: Suhana Verma)

ABSTRACT: Marriage, a pivotal life stage in Indian society, is typically viewed as a lasting commitment where divorce carries stigma and is generally undesired. This qualitative study engaged 15 non-working Indian-Hindu women from Delhi through in-depth interviews, offering an insider's viewpoint on their experiences of marriage, separation, and life post-divorce. Thematic analysis highlighted key aspects such as conceptualizations of marriage, utilized coping strategies, and personal growth following separation. Although insightful, this study's scope is limited by its modest sample size and singular geographic focus. This research thus calls for additional exploration into the impacts of divorce across genders and diverse cultural and geographical contexts, as well as the need for longitudinal studies. Notably, the results emphasize the necessity for increased awareness of domestic violence, gender sensitivity, and the value of marriage counseling. The profound insights from this study offer a valuable resource for family life educators, therapists, researchers, and counselors, empowering divorced women and fostering positive changes within relationships.

Keywords: Marriage, qualitative study, divorce, women's experiences, stigma, counseling, contributions, limitations.

I. INTRODUCTION

Marriage is a universal social institution that encompasses various ways of selecting partners and plays a crucial role in family formation and reproduction [16]. It holds significant importance in society, influencing individual, household, and community behaviors, and contributing to human capital resources [30]. Additionally, marriage serves as a vital connection between continuity and change, providing sustenance, emotional support, and socialization [5]. In Hindu ideology, life is divided into four stages: Brahmacharya, Grihastha, Vanaprastha, and Samnyasa. The Grihastha phase, centered around marriage, encompasses religious/moral aspects (Dharma), economic aspects (Artha), and physical life (Kama). The Vedas and Smritis emphasize the significance of marriage, considering it a sacrament and a necessary step towards spiritual liberation. In traditional Hinduism, marriage is seen as vital for the preservation of race and societal continuity, typically occurring within the same religious community [28].

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The primary causes of marital breakdown in Kashmir, include violence, family interference, infidelity, incompatibility, and childlessness [14]. The research identified in-laws' interference and a hostile environment as divorce instigators in Pakistan, leading to stigmatization and economic challenges for women [24]. Also, an increased risk of suicide post-divorce is found [31]. Desai (1991) and Gupta (1991) highlighted the need for more comprehensive research on marital disruption in India. A correlation was suggested between crimes against women and divorce rates in India, particularly related to marital violence [25]. The research emphasized violence, alcoholism, and individualism as contributors to rising divorce rates [32]. A study explored the implications of increasing divorce rates in British South Asian communities [10]. A study identified cruelty as a major factor for divorce, with financial dependency posing challenges for women. Comparative research by Amato [2] revealed similarities in financial and psychological struggles post [18] divorce between Indian and American women, with Indian women facing additional hardships due to

patriarchal structures and cultural attitudes. A research focused on women's perceptions of divorce, and infidelity, disagreements, and a lack of commitment as primary reasons for divorce [33]. Post-divorce, individuals experience higher rates of depression, substance abuse, and poor health [2].

Domestic violence is a significant factor contributing to divorce in India, with women survivors often facing increased discrimination and human rights violations post-divorce [22].

According to the research, in the Hindu tradition, marriage is considered a sacrosanct union binding not just two individuals but also their families, with customs like arranged marriages and dowry being prevalent. India's predominantly patriarchal society, supported by legislation, seeks to preserve marriage, assigning women passive roles and men dominant ones. [27] Women's identities are often defined by their roles as wives and mothers. Married women with mental illnesses face intensified discrimination, with societal values taking detrimental forms such as domestic violence and dowry harassment. Despite protective legislation, societal norms often override these provisions in real life.

The research noted that in India, divorce and separation are considered uncommon. However, his research, utilizing a comprehensive, nationally representative survey, illuminates the prevalence, trends, and variations in these phenomena. The study also uses education as a gauge to assess the impact of societal changes on marital longevity between 1987 and 2007. Findings reveal an increasing trend in divorce and separation, with noticeable differences based on region, religion, urban/rural residence, and the number and gender of children. Notably, marriages involving better-educated women demonstrated greater resilience, and the gap between these women and less-educated ones has widened over time [6].

Historically, divorce was rare in India, but with societal changes due to modernization and technology, traditional norms have evolved. This transition, accentuated by an increase in women's workforce participation and demographic shifts from rural to urban living and extended to nuclear families, indicates a considerable societal transformation. As personal welfare becomes a priority, the dissolution of marriage is now more common. This study examines the influences of these changing trends, including sociocultural shifts, technological proliferation, and Western culture. Utilizing a balanced sample of 50 male and 50 female respondents, it aims to understand these divorce trends and propose potential solutions to mitigate divorce-related issues [34].

Marriage in India is deeply entwined with complex social, economic, and religious factors. Marital dissatisfaction and divorce could potentially arise when these intertwined factors become sources of conflict

[12]. A strong association between dowry payment and domestic violence, which could contribute to marital instability and potentially lead to divorce. This research emphasizes the role of dowry-related practices in influencing divorce rates in India [29]. The research found that factors such as the financial independence of women, changing societal attitudes, and stress from rapid societal changes were contributing to rising divorce rates in Kerala [19].

A growing trend among urban Indian women to remain single, indicating evolving perceptions of marriage and the potential benefits of avoiding marital discord and the possibility of divorce [9]. Divorced women in India often face mental health challenges, including depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder, primarily due to societal stigma and reduced social support following divorce [25]. According to Sheshadhry and Ramaswamy (2019), domestic violence is a significant factor contributing to divorce in India, with women survivors often facing increased discrimination and human rights violations post-divorce. Rapid urbanization, increased education, and financial independence of women are contributing to the rising divorce rates in India [23]. The children of divorced parents in India often face numerous social, psychological, and academic challenges due to the lack of a supportive and stable family environment [8]. Srinivas (2015) found that despite the challenges and stigma associated with divorce, many women in India perceive it as a means to escape from an unhappy marriage and gain a sense of empowerment. Changing demographics and societal norms in India are leading to a greater acceptance of divorce, especially among younger, urban populations [11]. A study found that child custody battles in the context of divorce can contribute to prolonged conflict, with potentially damaging effects on children's mental and emotional well-being [3]. Moreover, according to research, women especially mothers, face economic instability, housing issues, and mental health problems after divorce [7]. A study indicated that the economic consequences of divorce often leave women in a vulnerable state, struggling with reduced income and an increased likelihood of poverty [2]. Another study examines the experiences of divorced women as they navigate new relationships post-divorce. The findings reveal that women often experience societal stigma and face challenges in forming new relationships due to the perceived 'failure' of their previous marital relationship [35].

The conceptual framework underpinning the study.
Amato [2] contends that divorce is a continuous process, commencing prior to, and extending beyond, its legal conclusion. As per the Symbolic Interaction Theory, Mead (1934, as cited in [36] emphasizes the need to understand the ways individuals interpret events. This theory is centered around the notion of the self as both

an actor and an object of action, suggesting that through socialization, individuals internalize societal symbols, beliefs, and attitudes to manage life's challenges. The Objectification Theory, a central concept in feminist theory, refers to the act of perceiving and treating a person, usually a woman, as an object. Nussbaum (1995) and Langton (2009) pinpoint traits of objectification, such as instrumentality, denial of autonomy, and silencing. Within the confines of Indian culture, the concept of self among women is complex, moulded by societal and philosophical influences [20,15]. Mascolo et al. (2004) associate the inner self with spiritual truth and social relationships, underlining the importance of duties and hierarchical interdependence in extended families [17]. The Stress and Coping Theory, as defined by Pestonjee (1999) and Moos and Billings (1982), asserts that coping strategies profoundly affect individuals across psychological, physiological, and social realms. They categorize coping responses into three types: appraisal-focused, problem-focused, and emotion-focused [22,4].

Rationale. This study delves into the transformation of Indian women's perspectives on marriage after experiencing divorce or separation, taking into account societal conditioning that compels them to prioritize their roles as wives and mothers over individual needs. Chosen for their firsthand understanding of the trials and social stigma that divorced women encounter—factors that can even affect fundamental rights such as housing—this research examines how these women surmount these challenges and proposes methods for society to help alleviate this stigma. The findings of this study present a perspective on the experiences of divorced women, casting light on their adept handling of these predicaments.

III. METHOD

Research Design. This study employs a qualitative research design with an interpretative approach, based on constructivist theory. This theory asserts that to understand the world of meaning, one must interpret it. The research aims to elucidate the process of constructing meaning, defining how meanings are conveyed in social actors' language and behavior. The research operates within a relativist ontology, acknowledging the existence of multiple realities, which it examines by exploring various forms of evidence from diverse individual perspectives and experiences.

An interpretative epistemology supports this study, backed by interviews as the primary data collection technique, and a qualitative, descriptive methodology. These approaches align with the study's objectives, which are to identify, examine, and comprehend the comprehensive experiences of marital separation. The focus lies on subjective evidence, gathered through the subjective experiences of individuals.

The research adopts an inductive methodology, shaped by the researcher's experiences in collecting and analyzing data. The semi-structured, one-on-one interview method is used to gather detailed personal data. This method, a common qualitative data collection tool, encompasses in-depth, semi-structured, and loosely structured forms of interviewing, designed to encourage participants to discuss freely the topics defined by the researcher.

In this study, 15 semi-structured interviews will be conducted to interpret the experiences of women in India who have undergone marital separation. The interviews will focus on several domains, including life history, views on marriage, family and cultural background, daily routines, personality traits, interactions with in-laws and family members, roles within marriage, societal influences, and the mindset of family members.

Selection of participants. The study, executed in New Delhi, encompassed non-working, divorced women from middle or upper-class backgrounds. Its goal was to encapsulate a spectrum of experiences, involving women with or without children. Selection criteria were determined based on aspects such as gender, employment status, religion, age, and socioeconomic class, specifically targeting Hindu women above 18 due to the unique implications of divorce on this demographic. This strategy guaranteed uniformity and homogeneity in the examination of the effects of marital dissolution.

Participant selection technique. For this study, a purposive sampling technique was used to select participants, who were then identified through a snowball sampling approach. A total of 15 women were interviewed as part of the study.

Tools used. The study employed interview schedules as its primary method of data collection. Comprehensive interviews were carried out with chosen participants, recognizing the necessity of interaction to evoke and refine individual insights. The selection of interviews as the most appropriate method was guided by an interpretative epistemological stance. An "In-depth Interview Guideline" was utilized, encompassing areas such as the marriage process, divorce experiences, coping strategies, needs of divorced women, societal pressures, and views on remarriage. To ensure accuracy, the interviews were documented using a digital recorder.

Procedure. The objective of this study is to delve into women's understanding of marriage and their subsequent reinterpretation of it post-divorce. Interviews were carried out with chosen participants, utilizing a structured interview schedule. The participants were non-working Hindu women hailing from middle or upper-class backgrounds. For accuracy, the interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed. Privacy and confidentiality were guaranteed to the participants, and the interviews were conducted in a private setting, with

the language used being the participant's choice. Thematic analysis, a method that amalgamates inductive and deductive approaches, was used to dissect the data, thereby capturing the intricate details of the participants' experiences.
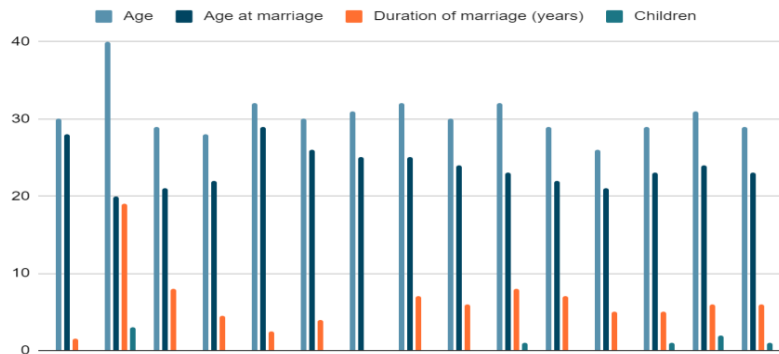
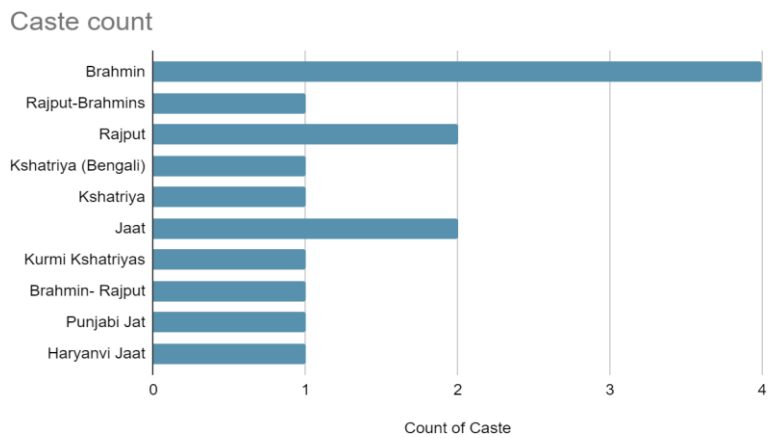## IV. RESULTS

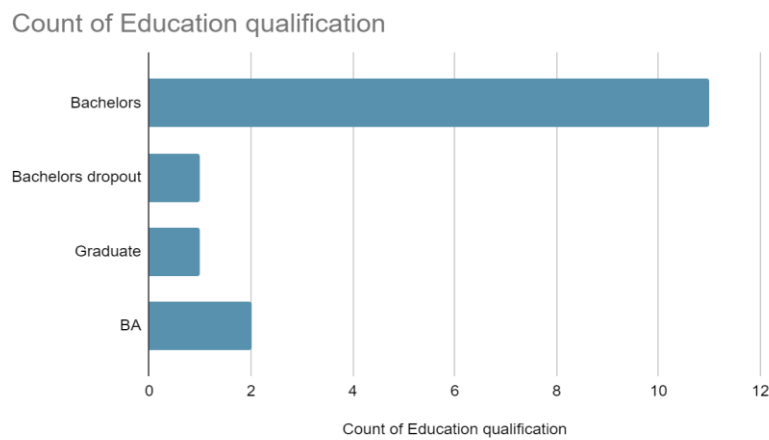### Profile of the Participants

Fig. 1.

Fig. 2.

Fig. 3.

Themes
Conceptualization of marriage
Meaning of marriage. Almost all the participants believed in the permanency of marriage, a space where two partners put effort, build friendship, and trust, and resolve issues whenever problems arise. This is evident in their responses as follows:
Mere hisab se shaadi ka matlabtha ki ap ek permanent rishte me judgae h kisikesath. Mre lie ye ek bahut strong spiritual connection h do logo k beech me. Jaha ap ekdoosre ko pyaarkre, prem se rahein. Zindagi 100 percent smooth to nihoti but jo bhi issues aye sath me solve kre.
Purpose of marriage. The interviews identified key reasons for marriage, including companionship, love, societal norms, parental expectations, and financial and emotional stability. This has been reflected in the following verbatims:
Marriage kekaafi purpose ho skte h kuch log jaise financial stability k liekrte h, kuch emotional security k lie, kuch log intimacy k lie. Mere lie shaadiek strong beautiful connection h like to stay with a partner whom you can love, care and support. Mere hisaab se shaadime pyaarhonabhizaruri h pyaarni h to ap kyu shadikro formality thode hi h.
Shadinihogi to parivarnihoga, parivarbanane k lie krte h warna dunia nashthojaegi.
Hasty Marital Decisions. Participants hurriedly married under parental pressure, viewing marriage as compulsory. Pre-marital counseling is rare, as preparation is seen as natural without specific skills. Verbatims from participants support these observations.
hamarishaadi hui tab puchniskte the ab jaisanithakewal parents baatkrte the ladkaladkibaatnikrskte the koi maukanimilabaatkrne ka aur nadekhaedoosre ka. Aur meri shaadi bahut jaldijaldihogai family ka pressure 1997 me family ki zyadachaltithi
Mein padnachahtithi but wo nihopaya because marriage to krni hi pdegi
Anticipatory archetypes
The construct of a good husband. Most of the participants responded that their ideal partner should show care, respect, equality, and consensual or shared understanding.
Good husband good wife ka matlab h wife ka kam h uskadhyaanrkhelekin husband ka b kaam h biwi ka dhyaanrakhebaccho ka bhidhyanrakhedono ka hi kamhota h.
Just being there for the person and understanding the person and being together in tough times ki jo bhi h we are in this together jo bhihoga we'll stay in through like having that person along jiskesthaap ye cheez feel Karo.
The construct of a good wife. Participants emphasized the importance of a wife's ability to manage household chores and provide nurturance to the husband and family

and women are expected to fulfill these roles, even if they do not receive the same treatment in return.
"Ek good wife ka matlab mere hisab se h ki me bhiapnepati ko khushrakhujaiseghar k sarekaamacche se kru, unkadhyaanrakhujaiseunkekapde press kru, office se pehleunhe ready krne m help kru, lunch banau, parivaar ka dhyanrakhu aur jab bhihumethoda time mile hum ekdoosre k sathbaharjayeghumnefirneyahi sab."
Marriage as a 'lived experience'
Honeymoon period. Almost all the participants demonstrated that they were really happy in the initial periods of their marriage. Almost everyone reported, " *Beginning me to sab acchatha, sab theek se baatkrte the itna issue nitha. But baad me thodathoda issues start hue*".
Uprooting and rerooting
The wife has to adjust all the time, she has to leave everything, her old life, and she is expected to adjust to a completely new environment.
time lagamujheitna easy nitha. 6-7 mahine to lag hi gaye the. Sabkojaanaasabkesath adjust hone me time lag jatah .Hamesha meri baatni suni jaatithi, bahut adjust karnapada.
Adjustment. Participants accepted post-marriage adjustments, hoping for improvement. They faced exhaustion, sleep deprivation, and workload akin to maid duties, with interference from in-laws. The following example illustrates a participant's thoughts about making too many changes:
"aisalaga jail me agaibaharninikalskte koi marzini mother in law ka raajthsa wo jo boltithiwahihotatha."
"Na bahar ja skte the, na koi ha yanathihamari hum ekkatpootli the, kaamkrne wale the".
"mepoore time kabhisasuralwalo ki suntirehtithi to fir apne husband ki poore time taane aur galia".
Socialization from familial relational patterns
Patterns in parent's Marriage
The participants witnessed how their parents are in a relationship, what kind of relationship they have, and how they deal with their issues. In most responses, the participants responded their mother was the submissive who has to accept all the demands posed by their father.
"My father is a good father but he is not a good husband. Bht, it's like mere mummaar papa, jiszamane me unkishadi hui thiussezamanekehisaab se my father is a very good husband. Woh strong hain, mummy ko jo financially chahiyewoh mummy ko detehaintheek h, but ek care, pyararwohsaaricheezeinnhihain mere father me"
Learning from parents' experiences
The participants learned from parents' relational patterns about how their relationship is, and what learning they can take from their parent's pain and suffering.
jaise ki hardawaiharinsaaan ko suit nikrtihar ki bimari same nihoti. To jaise mere parents ke case me distance se solve hui lekin meri life me kyapata problem distance

se aur kharabhojaehume communicate bhikarnachahiye agar apne distance dedia wo insaan communicate hi nakre to wo cheezmujhesahinilage.

Transition to Ending a Troubled Marriage

Sunk cost fallacy. This phenomenon, known as the sunk cost fallacy, occurs when individuals are reluctant to abandon a plan or decision due to the significant investment they have already made, even if it would be more beneficial to do so.

The following verbatim summarises it:

"unhonemujhpe hath uthaya me unsedarne b lag gai aur mene in laws ko bataya to saas ne bola menebhi maar khaih".

"Mere husband mujhebaarbaar cheat karte the aur fir bolte the ki ye sab normal h sab karte h ajkalkaun reh sakta h zindagibharekinsaan k sath"

"Aisabhihua h unhone jab mujhpe hath uthaya wo itnipeekeaaye the ki wo mana krne lag gae ki unhonemujhpehaathuthaya, aur kehnelagamera bahut burawaqtchalrha h"

Cost-benefit analysis of the relationship

Participants recognized the negative impact of their marriages and expressed a preference for being single, considering the potential benefits of leaving. Concerns about children and social stigma prolonged the divorce process in India, aligning with social exchange theory. They realized that continuing the marriage was not worthwhile. It is stated below:

"Menebaarbaarcheeze face ki batayagharwalo ko unhone kaha dekho aur koshish krte raho lekin itne salaguzargayeabitak koi change niaaya to kabaega".

"3saaltakmene wait kia shayadtheekhojaelekinek din samajh a hi gayakabhikuchtheeknihoga"

"Mere husband ne ekbaar hath uthayamenesochashayadabhiboorasmaay h isliehogayahogalekinekbaar ap chuprehte ho to wo cheezbaarbaarhoti h to fir mene khud step liaapne lie".

Conceptualization of self

During marriage

Fractured self. Women's narratives portrayed a deep sense of inner turmoil and a perception of a fractured self. They expressed feelings of emptiness and a loss of identity, describing themselves as "dead" and lacking a sense of self (wajood).

tab aisalaga jail me agaibaharninikalskte koi marzinimother in law ka raajtha wo jo boltithiwahikhane ka bantathahamara to koi wajoodnitha hum bas kaamkrne wale the.

Ye eksach h, aur ye change zaruritha agar mujheekacchi life chahiyefirse to. Us time me literally dead hogaithi

Codeswitching.

Code-switching involves conforming to societal norms by modifying language, behavior, and appearance. Women often adopt expectations of husbands, in-laws, and society, sacrificing their authentic selves for acceptance and fair treatment.

Eknayaparivaarnayi family sb naya to apko adjust bhikarnapadta h eknaye environment me. To meraaisatha ki me bas parivaar me bandhke reh gai sabkadhyaanrakhtithi, apnepati ki saarizaruratein poori krtithimene poori koshish ki ekadarshpatnibanne ki jo hopaya sab kia.

me 8 saal, 9 saal, 10 saal sacrifice krtirahiarkrtekrte 18 years ho gaye

Role objectification. Objectification, a key concept in feminist theory, involves reducing individuals, particularly women, to mere objects and disregarding their mental and moral agency. In the study, women were often perceived and treated as objects assigned societal roles, restricting their autonomy and voice.

Panopticism

The concept of panopticism, introduced by Foucault, involves internal surveillance where individuals are constantly observed and questioned. Participants in the study expressed a lack of personal space and autonomy, with their lives subject to constant scrutiny and interrogation.

"surveillancehameshatha but notice baad me huarealisebaad me kia. Mere in laws ki family sari cheeze relatives ko btate the ab me thoda uncomfortable feel krtithi me open up nithi".

"mebhicheezechhipanelagijaise mere dustbin me chips ka packet h uskamrpkya h, ice cream h to uskikyamrp h. Fir poorekhandan m batate the ye to 800 rupey ki icecreamkhati h 300 rupey ki chips khati h aur humarebete ka paise udarhi h though me earn krrhithilekinunhe job se bhidikkatein hone lag gai thi wo bhichhut gai thi.

Women's role

Participants described the scrutiny and control over their daily lives by in-laws, including their behavior and compliance with family demands, emphasizing the restrictive domestic role of women and their lack of privacy. This is reported as follows:

Woh me unhi ka khyaalrakhakrtithiMera koi khayal rakhnewalathanhi are mjhehumesha degrade kiyajatatha. Hum to ekkatpootli the, kaamkrne wale the. humejhuknapadtathakyuki hum bahu the ghr ki

" Mujhe subah se lekarraathojatithi kitchen me, poore time me kaamkrterehtethi, itnakarnekebaadbhichikchikkarte the usmebhitaanemarte the ki kuchnikarti".

Post-separation growth

Self-discovery

After codeswitching, abandoning themselves to fit in, and being there for others they realized that they have gone a long way away from themselves and they need to find themselves and cherish themselves. This is demonstrated in the following verbatim:

"changeyahiaya ye patachalgayaekaadmikisi ki madad k bina reh skte h"

"jocheez me apneghr se dekhtiayi hu me nichahtithi wo same cheez mere sath ho kyunkisehneke consequences menedekhe h apka koi wajoodnibachta."

"meneapnishaadi se seekha ki khud k liyebhijeenaseekho, me apnishaadi me doosroke bare me itnasochtithi ki khud ko bhul hi gai thi."

Experiential learning

Following separation most participants went through a period of agony and from that agony, they learned life lessons for themselves and how to carry forward their life smoothly. Almost all the participants learned lessons about how to conduct their lives ahead. They expressed their learning in the following verbatim:

"jitnaanyayjhelogeutna aur hoga to himmatjhutaoaakelerehnapadeakeleraho. Badtammezi mat saho."

"Meneseekha ki me independent hongi job hogi tab hi shaadikrungi, me agleinsaan ko zyadajaane ka time lungi jisseunke interest aur mere interests match hopae."

"Time is the most important thing. Find yourself some time. Khudkosochnesmjhnekeliye time do and faith."

Redefining marriage post separation

Not rushing

Participants admitted to rushing into marriage and discovering hidden aspects of their partners (relational paradox). This led them to prioritize understanding compatibility and taking more time before considering remarriage. It is stated in the following verbatims:

"poora time laganachahiyejanne k lie jaise ki me kischeezke under ja rhi hu"

"Mene to yahiseekha ki ekdoosre ko jaane ka smaay lo acche se hartareeke se jaano ki wo insankaisa h kaisaswabhav h wo doosrokesathkaiserehta h."

Not settling for less

Participants expressed a newfound awareness that they deserve better and should not settle for anything less when considering future relationships or marriage. This is illustrated in the following responses:

"*Aur uske lie mere hisab se mujhe logo se milnachahiye jo mere expectations h jo insaanunhe fulfill krpaeuskesatbsochnachahiyelekin*

Kyukimujhepyaarmilanishaadi me meinek partner m wo dhundungi. Pyaar h to respect h, respect h to dosti h".

Expanding one's worldview beyond marriage

Women recognized that life encompasses more than just marriage and its associated responsibilities. They realized the importance of self-care and discovered meaningful pursuits outside of their marital roles.

"Abhi me kisi aur nayeinsaan ko laane k lie ready to ni hu lekin me khud par dhyaandenachahti hu khud se pyaarkrnachahti hu. Zindagi me shaadi k alawa aur kyaacchicheeze h unhekhojnachati hu".

Casting doubts on the institution of marriage

Participants carried emotional scars from their past experiences, leading to doubts about the institution of marriage and fear of future partnerships. This resulted in fatalistic attributions and perceiving marriage as a gamble.

Fear of future partnerships.

Most participants showed their fear of being involved in future relationships because of their painful past. This is reported in the following statement:

"itna sab hone kebaad me harladke ko ekshak ki nazar se dekhnelagi hu. Bharosanikrpatibilkul. Me daily koshishkrti hu ki meinapni ye cheeztheekkru".

Fatalistic attributions about marriage.

Gamble h acchamila to jackpot burahua to cage me rahogehameshaapkobahar b aananibhi bahut uncertainty hoti h.

"Jo kismat me hota h wahihota h. Aapharcheez fight nikarskte."

Stigma

Participants reported significant disruption to their daily lives post-divorce due to feelings of social exclusion. Many participants reported stigma which is depicted below:

"Neighbourskaafi judge krteh, divorce hogayanayishaadi ka sochobaarbaar pin point krte h yaha p logo ki mentality aisi h bahut".

"Parents koshishkrrhe the chhipane ki lekinzarurihota h aapapni reality accept krosamne wale ko krne do jo krna h".

"Relatives judge krte h arreiska to talak hogaya ab kyahogaiska bahut face krti hu".

An attitude of 'other men'

Participants faced post-divorce negative experiences with men, including sexual advances, harassment, threats, and exploitation.

"mujhezyada tar divorcee ladke hi milte h aur jo non-divorcee hote h wo bas ek hi nazar se dekhte h sexual favour k lie. Ye challenges to h hi lekin me haarnimanungimujhe to strong rehna hi h"

"Aisalagta h ki meri zyada value ni h. Aur in fact matrimony p jab ladko ko patachale ki ye divorcee h to unkanazariyadekhne ka badaljata h wo mujheek body k lie hi dkehte h".

Coping mechanisms

Appraisal-focused coping. Participants coped by analyzing their situation and redefining it cognitively. The quote below illustrates the same:

"Kabhi kabhi roti thi, fir baad me theekhotithi fir aisedheeredheere me theek hui".

"Mujheapni strength patachali aur mujheapneliyejeene ka maukamila life me".

"Dekhajaayemujhezindagi ne ekmaukadia h"

Problem-focused coping. Participants actively addressed stress by modifying its sources or changing their situation. They tackled financial stress through education, vocational training, or starting businesses, and combatted loneliness by joining clubs, maintaining friendships, engaging in hobbies, traveling, and

preparing for new relationships. The below quotes indicate problem-focused coping used by participants.

"Me apne friends k sath time spend krti hu, ghumnejaati hu unkesath wo protect krte h mujhe".

"Me apni family k sathrehti hu unkadhyaanrakhti hu"

Emotion-focused coping. Participants managed their emotions from stressful situations through various strategies including staying active, placing faith in a higher power, adjusting expectations, and expressing their feelings. They also used alternative therapies like meditation, yoga, and journaling, emphasizing the importance of self-care and self-love.

"*kuchnithodadukhhotatha fir himmataatithisambhalna h zindarehna h baccho ko sambhalna h fir dukhhotatha fir himmatlekin ab dukhnihota.*"

Baakimene khud pe bhidhyaandia, walk krnejatithibhagwan ka keertankrtithi

" *mekhudpe dhyana deti hu yoga krti hu, walking krti hu, gharwalokesathwaqtbitati hu*".

Social support

Most participants reported that they got support from their friends and family which helped them heal themselves and someone who understood them. The social support is stated in the following quotations:

"My family was very supportive of me so I think their support really helped me."

"nilagta aur shayad poori akelehoti to problemnhotisare relatives k phone aate h jaisemera bhai and bhabi"

"Me free feel krti hu ab, I am surrounded by my family who loves me."

V. DISCUSSION

This study investigates the lived experiences of 15 Hindu non-working upper/middle-class women in Delhi who have separated or divorced, exploring how they view and define marriage, perceive a good spouse, and navigate post-separation life. Participants generally saw marriage as inevitable and enduring due to societal expectations, a perspective influenced by their experiences with husbands and in-laws, and societal pressures [25]. However, many struggled with their marriages, which often commenced hastily, leading to unmet expectations. Research indicates that divorce was rare and stigmatized historically, but societal changes have shifted this perception [13]. Indian marriages can be challenging for women due to patriarchal societal norms and gender roles. They often have to adjust significantly to fit into their husbands' families and maintain marital status, a value heavily tied to their social esteem. Factors like financial dependence, societal stigma, and fear of living alone complicate divorce. Participants' ideal spouse definitions revealed desires for respect, equality, and care, with little mention of financial safety. Women experienced objectification, limited autonomy, and restrictive domestic roles [25].

Divorce is a difficult journey often marked by a sunk-cost fallacy, cognitive dissonance, and loneliness. The participants faced societal stigmatization but were also able to assert more agency than in marriage. Post-separation, women redefined marriage, prioritizing knowing their prospective spouse better and not settling for less than their expectations. They recognized the importance of life beyond marriage and its responsibilities, a revelation obscured during their marital lives. Participants were cautious about future relationships due to emotional scars, trust issues, and concerns about the risks of marriage [26]. They experienced a fractured sense of self due to constant adaptation to appease others, leading to a diminished sense of self. Post-separation, they embarked on a journey of self-discovery and experiential learning.

VI. CONCLUSION

This study sought to investigate the complex lived experiences of marriage among fifteen women from high and middle-class families in Delhi who have experienced marital separation. Despite numerous accounts of dissatisfaction within their marriages, the vast majority of participants acknowledged the cultural normativity of marriage, approaching it with an inherent sense of inevitability. Marriage was often perceived as an immutable institution, with societal pressures playing a significant role in propelling women toward this path.

These women found themselves adopting a flexible approach within the marriage, often modifying their behaviors and conceding to various marital norms in order to harmonize with their new families, even in the face of unexpected challenges and adversities. Notably, factors such as financial dependence, perceived permanence of marriage, the existence of children, the social stigma associated with divorce or separation, and the fear of solitude were identified as significant impediments to initiating the process of divorce.

Furthermore, the study unveiled participants' conception of an ideal spouse. They portrayed a desirable husband as one who provides emotional care, promotes equality, and shows respect. An ideal wife, conversely, was depicted as proficient in domestic duties and family care. Alarmingly, the study also underscored that women were frequently objectified, and expected to conform to societal roles and responsibilities, often at the cost of their personal autonomy and privacy. This study serves as a critical exploration of the nuanced reality of marriage within this demographic, offering insights for understanding the constraints, adaptations, and cultural expectations that shape women's marital experiences.

VII. IMPLICATIONS AND DIRECTION FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The study's findings hold value for reducing the stigma towards divorced women and informing family

counselors, educators, and social welfare groups. Longitudinal research can provide deeper insights into divorce and remarriage experiences, while comparative analyses across cultures can broaden understanding. Integration of domestic violence awareness and gender sensitization programs in education is recommended. Further research could explore variables like crime, domestic abuse, mental health, and self-conceptualization. The study provides a foundation for self-help resources, couple counseling, and self-help groups to support healing and personal growth. The insights gained can empower individuals and contribute to the development of tailored counseling modules, offering practical strategies and a sense of shared experiences.

REFERENCES

[1]. Amato, P. R. (2000). The Consequences of Divorce for Adults and Children. *Journal of Marriage and the Family, 62*(4), 1269–1287.

[2]. Avellar, S., & Smock, P. J. (2005). The Economic Consequences of the Dissolution of Cohabiting Unions. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 67*(2), 315–327.

[3]. Bhargava, P. (2013). A study on child custody in the context of divorce in India. *Journal of the Indian Academy of Applied Psychology, 39*(1), 142-151.

[4] Billings A. G., Moos R. H. (1984). Coping, stress, and social resources among adults with unipolar depression. J. Pers. Soc. Psychol. 46, 877–891. 10.1037/0022-3514.46.4.877

[5]. Desai, M. (1995). Towards family policy research. *I. J. of Social Work, 56,* 225-231.

[6]. Dommaraju, Premchand. (2016). Divorce and Separation in India. *Population and Development Review.* 2016.

[7]. Gahler, M. (1998). Life after Divorce: Economic, Social, and Psychological Well-Being among Swedish Adults and Children Following Family Dissolution. Swedish Institute for Social Research. Stockholm University, Stockholm.

[8]. Ghosh, B. (2006). Children of Separated Parents: A Study from West Bengal, India. *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage, 45*(1-2), 123-136.

[9]. Grover, S. (2014). Why More Urban Indian Women Are Choosing to Stay Single. The Caravan Magazine.

[10]. Guru, S. (2009). Divorce: Obstacles and Opportunities – South Asian Women in Britain. The Sociological Review, *57*(2), 285–305.

[11]. James, K. S. (2017). India's demographic change: opportunities and challenges. *Science, 356*(6342).

[12]. Kapadia, K. M. (2013). Marriage and family in India. Oxford University Press.

[13]. Kaur, Gaganpreet & Singh, Sukhdev (2013). Changing patterns of marriage in Indian society. *Indian Journal of Economics and Development, 9,* 261.

[14]. Khan, T., & Hamid, W. (2021). Lived experiences of divorced women in Kashmir: a phenomenological study. *Journal of Gender Studies, 30,* 4, 379-394.

[15]. Langton, R. (2009). Sexual Solipsism: Philosophical essays on pornography and objectification. Oxford University Press.

[16]. Majumder, P. (1977) Matrimonial Migration: a review with special reference to India. *J of Biosocial Science, 9*, 381-401.

[17]. Mascolo, M. F., Misra, G., & Rapisardi, C. (2004). Individual and relational conceptions of self in India and the United States. *New Directions for Adolescent Development, 104*, pp.9-26.

[18]. Mattoo, N., & Ashai, Y. (2012) A Study on Impact of Divorce upon the Attitude and Social Relations of Women in Srinagar District. *Studies on Home and Community Science, 6,* 2, 113-120,

[19]. Naveen, K. H., & Nair, S. (2013). A study on increasing the rate of divorce in Kerala. *International Journal of Scientific and Research Publications, 3*(8).

[20]. Nussbaum, M. C. (1995). Objectification. *Philosophy & Public Affairs, 24*(4), 249-291.

[21]. Pathak, A. (2020, March 5). Crimes against women as a correlate of incidents of Divorce in India. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary and Current Research,* Vol. 8.

[22] Pestonjee, D. M. (1999). Stress and coping: The Indian experience. New Delhi: Sage.

[23]. Pereira, V. (2014). Rising Divorce Rates in India: A Study of Its Causes and Remedies. J*ournal of Family & Adoption Law, 1*(1), 37-50.

[24]. Qamar, A., & Faizan, H. (2021). Reasons, Impact, and Post-divorce Adjustment: Lived Experience of Divorced Women in Pakistan. *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage, 62*, 5, 349-373.

[25]. Reed, Megan Nicole, "Marriage and Family In India" (2022). Publicly Accessible Penn Dissertations, 5634.

[26]. Seshadri, S., & Ramaswamy, S. (2019). Contextualizing the Narratives of Women Survivors of Domestic Violence and Divorce in India: A Human Rights Perspective. *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage, 60*(5), 372-390.

[27]. Sharma I, Pandit B, Pathak A, Sharma R. Hinduism, marriage and mental illness. *Indian J Psychiatry. 2013 Jan., 55*(Suppl 2), S243-S249.

[28]. Sonawat, R. (2008) Understanding Families in India: A Reflection of Societal Changes, SNDT Women's University, Bombay, India.

[29]. Srinivasan, S., & Bedi, A. S. (2007). Domestic violence and dowry: Evidence from a South Indian village. *World Development, 35*(5), 857–880.

[30]. Sriram, R. (1993). Family studies in India: Appraisal and new directions. Sage Publishers.New Delhi.

[31]. Stack, S., & Scourfield, J. (2015). Recency of Divorce, Depression, and Suicide Risk. *Journal of Family Issues, 36*(6), 695–715.

[32]. Thadathil, Aneesh & Sriram, Sujata. (2019). Divorce, Families, and Adolescents in India: A Review of Research. *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage*, *61*, 1-21.

[33]. Thomas, C., & Ryan, M. (2008) Women's Perception of the Divorce Experience: A Qualitative Study. *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage, 49*, 3-4, 210-224.

[34]. Vincent, P. and D'Mello, L. (2018). Changing Trends of Divorce in India: Issues & Concerns. *International Journal of Management, Technology, and Social Sciences (IJMTS), 3*(2), 152-158.

[35]. Walsh, F. (2015). Types and patterns of post-divorce relationships: An analysis of women's narratives. *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage, 56*(5), 395-410.

[36]. White, J. M., & Klein, D. M. (2002). Family theories. Thousand Oaks: Sage.