

Epilogue: Some Reflections and Lessons Learnt

From the time of conceptualizing the study and till date I am a spectator of astonished reactions, and a range of questions from people regarding the topic of my research. Most people I shared my topic with were curious to know the reason behind undertaking a topic which they found strange and depressing. Some also advised me to change my topic to how to save marriages instead of studying divorce and some also said that my study is incomplete if I do not take men's views into consideration. There were also some who made a joke of the topic, nullifying its importance. This is a clear reflection of the societal attitudes towards marriage, divorce and women. It further reflects that not only divorce, but research on divorce also has a stigma attached to it. Initially I felt a little uncomfortable and tried to protect myself from these strange reactions by either re-wording my area of research or by not sharing it with many until I came across a participant who shared with me in her interview that she proudly tells people about her marital status and that she is not ashamed or sorry about it at all. Unknowingly, she and many other participants taught me not to be defensive about my area of research. I learned how not to feel bad, but to feel proud about my topic of research.

I undertook this study with an experience of neither divorce nor of marriage, but of being a woman. These three aspects were advantageous as well as disadvantageous. Being interviewed by a woman the participants had ample opportunities to explain to me what they feel and experienced and a level of comfort, and good rapport could be established during the interviews. Some of them said that what they shared with me in the interviews, they were not comfortable in sharing with their mother. Women abused their ex-husbands and in-laws freely. At the same time being a woman and living in a similar social context as that of the participants I realized that at times I missed asking for clarifications and explanations. At the same time, having a single status like the participants and doing research on a phenomenon that they were experiencing created a platform for egalitarian conversations between me and the participants. However, not having experienced marriage or divorce, often in the process of the interviews I received advices from the participants, tackled questions about why am I still single, and faced concerns from participants about my state of mind after the completion of this study. Few participants also remarked in indirect ways that I cannot completely understand what they are undergoing.

Overall a sense of sadness prevailed during most of the interviews. The topic being sensitive, as a researcher I was uncomfortable and concerned about causing distress to the participants. There were times when my mind wavered between consoling the participant and

focusing on my questionnaire. At times I too got carried away emotionally and cried along with the participant. The approach used in most cases was to soothe the pain first and then focus on the research. Attempts were made to calm the participant with a cup of tea or coffee, telling them motivating stories, praising them for their achievements and giving them examples of other participants. However, in the process of interviewing and in going through the transcripts at a later stage, I also realized that the interviews did more good to women than harming them. The interview process served as a tool to help the participants understand or clarify some aspects of their lives which they were not clear of earlier. The interview process also helped the participants think about those aspects of their lives which they had not thought of earlier. The quote below explains how a question in the interview made a woman realize that in fact she does not miss her husband, but misses a partner:

I: So, do you miss him? Or you miss a partner?

R: Maybe I miss a partner. Because as a person he was not very good to me, so maybe a partner in life.

Another participant talks how she feels about herself currently after having shared her experience.

“I just told you everything whatever happened and as I told you I am not ashamed of it because now you know when you said how I feel or what are my feelings now? Many a times I sit back and go back and dissect my life and one satisfaction I have is that I always come out like, I give myself good marks I have not faulted. And I think this is a great consolation that in whatever life situations I have been, one thing I would have done is that I have not broken down. I have not given up I have always been positive; I have always tried to build my life again from whatever was left.”

Additionally, participants of the interview while answering questions were also observed engaging in revisiting their deepest feelings and developing newer appraisals about their own selves, ex-husbands or their divorce. As the following quotes reveal:

“I am regretting my marriage, I do not want to regret my divorce.”

“My husband was a bad husband he was a bad father but he was a good son.”

Moreover, many participants expressed feeling a sense of relief after sharing their experiences in the interview. Some of them also sent me text messages to convey that they are

feeling good and thanked me for listening to them. When I expressed my gratitude to them and gave token gifts as a mark of appreciation after the interviews, many of them said that in fact they have to thank me for listening to them. Thus, the interviews provided the participants the opportunity to look back at their divorce and separation experience from a new vantage point, thereby reaching new conceptualizations about their current situations.

The difficulties and challenges faced in identifying and requesting the divorced and separated women to participate in the study have already been discussed in the methods chapter. On nearing completion of the 30 interviews I asked a few participants about their reason for saying yes to participate in the study. Some of them said that they shared their experiences so that others can be helped in similar situations. Some also said that they would be happy to counsel or help other women who are undergoing difficult times because of their divorce or separation. Some participants appreciated the topic and expressed strongly how important it is to conduct research on the same. I also realized that some participants accepted to be interviewed because it was an opportunity to share their feelings with a complete stranger in a private and safe setting. Few women also conveyed that it is their responsibility to share their experiences so that the problems faced by divorced women can reach to the people at large. Below are the words of one participant:

“I needed a place where I can speak my heart out. When I came to know that you are writing a thesis I was keen to meet you. Also people should know my story and realize where the society is moving.”

Each participant taught me something. Each interview was a story of failure as well as triumph. Each story made me sad, brought tears to my eyes, and at the same time inspired me to rise against all odds. Lastly, I revisited the questions which boggled my mind during the inception of the study, that is, what do we need to save? Marriage? Or the Individual within the marriage? What is important? A happy marriage or a happy individual? This research taught me that more than saving marriages, we need to concern ourselves with nurturing the individual so that one may find her true potential and lead a fulfilling life, within or without marriage.