

It is a final termination of unsatisfactory relationships.

Extent of Desertion and Divorce in India

No statistics are available about the deserted families in India. Data are also not available about divorces given under the Special Marriage Act, 1954 and the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955.

Social Consequences of Desertion and Divorce

The consequences of both desertion and divorce are similar except that wife and children suffer much more emotionally in the former case because it entails a humiliating rejection of the spouse. It also carries with it lack of certainty. Will the husband return? He may have met death unnoticed. Such are the other problems which the wife and her children have to face.

Disorganization of the family does not end with divorce or desertion. This crisis is the final outcome of the long process of family disorganization. But it is final in the sense that it represents a formal break in a previously intimate relationship. Both husband and wife have to adjust to the new situations. If there are children, their lives must continue in new and strange circumstances. Thus, many consequences follow from divorce.

(i) *Personal Disorganization of Divorced Persons.* A certain degree of moral turpitude is often bestowed on the parties in divorce, on the ground that one or both must have committed an immoral or at least an undesirable act. Divorced persons, therefore, often have a sense of guilt, either conscious or unconscious, which complicates their reactions to other persons, whose attitudes in turn are coloured by moral condemnation. When the divorced person is viewed suspiciously by many righteous persons, his difficulties in readjustment are considerably increased.

Divorce also represents a fundamental change in role and status for all concerned. This change may bring crisis in their lives. Only those with a strong and well integrated life organization may survive it with comparative ease. But one has to adjust to the new situation. The preliminary attempt at readjustment is naturally along the line of former behaviour patterns, formal ways of defining the whole situation. But this reversion is never wholly successful largely because of its incomplete character. An entirely new life organization must be worked out, which takes into consideration all of the manifold factors in the new situation.

It is just possible that even before desertion or divorce many such persons may have developed symptoms of personality disorganization as a result of emotional crisis to which they have been subjected. These psychological manifestations include suppressions, regressions, ambivalent motivations, blockages, cleavage between lust and love, loss of self-confidence and ambition, doubts, indecision, nightmares, morbidly transferred attachments or aversions—all

these and more. Such persons may face further crisis after the desertion or divorce.

The crisis which each divorce entails for the parties involved varies with the particular situation. However, it has been observed that divorces or desertions which have taken place in case of those whose marriages were arranged by their parents involve less crises than in case of those who married for love.

(ii) *Divorce and Sex Adjustment.* The explosive and imperious character of sex urges creates a great problem for satisfactory personal reorganization because of visceral tensions. Both habit and nature in man are united in the sex activity of married life. When these twin forces are suddenly interrupted the life organization is in serious danger or derangement. The disorganization may be either temporary or permanent and the result will be determined by the degree to which the person is drawn to some overexpression of sex behaviour and the success with which this urge is transferred, sublimated, repressed or allowed to run riot. Rigid repression may be practised. One may become deeply interested in some other love object, be in work, children, or various substitutes may be sought which offer physical release. Divorced males often seek satisfaction with casual companions and personal disorganization is the result.

Divorced woman is often faced with more difficult situation. She is often subjected to a variety of insulting proposals merely because of her ambiguous status. No matter how virtuous she may be, she is often considered fair game by all the amateurs. Some of them may become prostitutes.

(iii) *Divorce and Injured Ego.* There are very few instances in which both parties have come to an agreement about the dissolution of marriage and it is often one party which presses for such an action. Such a situation is extremely humiliating to the person who feels that he or she is lacking something to fill the life of the other. The rejected person with injured ego often feels difficult in adjusting his or her personality.

(iv) *Divorce and Habits.* A large number of contacts and relationship of marriage life are habitual in character. There is some element of habituation even in the periodicity with which a married couple may have sex relations. Many other activities of married life become even more completely routinized down to such petty details as frying the bacon and buttering the toast. When the marriage is

broken such habits struggle to find their usual expression. The inevitable failure to do so brings unrest, dissatisfaction and sadness to each party.

(v) *Divorce and Social Relationships.* A wide variety of complications are introduced into the social relationships of both the parties after desertion or divorce, which may consequently result in personal disorganization of some sort. Firstly, his or her relationships to other persons, both those who are aware of this changed status, and those who are not, become subtly altered. Gossip in all its poisonous and malicious forms is an irritating and often an object of terror to the divorced person. It is often believed that every divorced person is guilty until he or she has been proved innocent. The friends of divorced persons also often become suspicious of them. They are thus forced to cut off arbitrarily from many of the groups with which they were formerly connected. The maladjustment resulting from the lessening of these contacts is particularly bitter because of the high emotional tensions involved. Sometimes whole groups or even communities may be driven into two hostile camps over the divorce of a prominent couple. In such situations the divorced person is forced to redefine his situation at the same time that he is making new friends. Lacking this ability and cut off from the old values, personalities may become disorganized.

Divorce and Economic Position

Many masculine occupations and professions are dependent upon the goodwill and respect of other persons. This interested circle may range from the relatively small group of clients or medical practitioner or a grocer to the entire country when the divorce of a leading person is considered. This all-important goodwill may be severely affected by a divorce depending upon the reason for divorce. Many employers also take into consideration the marital status of their employee for permanency, promotion, etc.

Alimony represents another problem for the husband, when it is granted to the wife by the court. Such awards imply the ability of the husband to support two households, which middle or lower income groups do not have.

In case alimony is not granted or is insufficient wives are forced to take employment to support themselves or their children, unless help is coming from some other sources. The employment which she gets may not be of the type for which she is fitted by training

inclination and may affect her personality. The divorced women who have never worked before must often face severe economic handicaps. The divorced woman may contract illicit sexual relationships because she is unable to support herself. In the lower social level many prostitutes are recruited from this group who exploit their only resource, when they face the world alone.

Children of Divorced Persons

In the family children are accustomed to look to their parents for affection and security. The sudden interruption of this relationship in the primary group is a shock to the child's developing personality. He has been reared in an atmosphere of strong affection and when this tie is broken he is bewildered and does not know which way to turn. His position may take various forms, which are discussed below.

Children with Re-married Parents. One situation is that the divorced parents may remarry. This is very often the case in Western countries, but rarely so in our country. But the new home can seldom take the place of the old. The new step-father or mother will always be fundamentally a stranger, lacking the wisdom and affection found in the old. For the average child of divorce, the intangible aspects of family solidarity have gone out of his life. Few children, however, may make a satisfactory adjustment to their new status. When the parents remarry, the additional complexities of step-parents and half-brothers and sisters arise. A bewildering variety of roles is created for the child. Strange adults, brothers, and sisters are suddenly introduced into his life and he finds the adjustment very difficult. His parents are completely absorbed in the new families and the child of the first marriage may find himself without a real home. From such complex situations personal disorganization looms as an unpleasant possibility.

Children with Divorced Persons. Children in the broken home where father or mother is absent often fall prey to juvenile delinquency, adolescent crime, sex offences or become vagrants. A sense of guilt often attaches to the children of divorcee because their parents have somehow transgressed the mores and such a child must face a moral problem which a child whose parents have died never faces. If the divorced woman lacks economic resources, the child may go for employment at an earlier date before completing his education. The child's difficulty may be carried over to the

play group. The child who lives with one of his divorced parents is often susceptible to the humiliation of his playmate, who has parents. Thus, his role in the group may undergo a subtle change and his status suffers for no fault of his. Emotional maladjustment may even continue many years after he has left the play group and he may be prone to various symptoms of personal disorganization such as missing classes, smoking, and loitering in the streets.

Children With Joint Family Members. In case where joint family system prevails divorce may not affect the children. In such cases children often remain with the mother's or father's family and do not experience drastic interruption. Uncles and aunts act as substitute to fathers and mothers and the continuity of the basic family relationship remains substantially unbroken.

Desirability and Undesirability of Divorce

Divorce is nearly always really a tragedy, for it generally means disorganization of the personalities concerned and of their children as we have seen above. Sometimes one party wants a divorce in order to marry another person. This leaves the other mate to feel that he or she has been judged and found wanting, that he or she failed to pass the test of a successful and co-operative spouse. This makes the divorce process an emotional upheaval for the rejected person. Or, the rejected person may feel humiliated because his pride is hurt.

Because marriages have proved unstable in the modern society, many critics of manners and morals believing in old social values blame divorce for the current problems of family disorganization. But this appears to be one-sided reasoning, because divorces occur after the family is disorganized and when one or both the parties have a strong desire to dissolve their relationship. They do not occur in happy, well-adjusted families. Divorce in fact gives only a legal status to the marriage already disrupted. On the other hand, there are many unsatisfactory and unhappy marriages which are not terminated because of religious belief, pressure from in-laws, small children who need care, inability of the wife to make her own living and fear of loss of prestige.

But it is also to be pointed out that widespread divorce is prejudicial to public interest, and often partial divorce or separation is allowed at the first instance so that the parties may reconcile during that period, and have a normal family life again. Wholesome

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family life is desirable in the first state, because (i) it is conducive to effective living and, therefore, to effective citizenship, and (ii) for responsible parenthood and adequate care and training for the children, which is nowhere well supplied outside the family system.

Avoidance of Family Tensions and Divorce

We have discussed the various factors which cause tensions between husband and wife in a family and ultimately lead to desertion or divorce. The effects of such tensions, desertion or divorce are not conducive to the welfare of the individual, the family and the society at large. Therefore, steps must be taken to mitigate such tensions in the early stages by various means such as proper education of the spouse before and after marriage through literature, family counselling agencies, courts and services after divorce.

(i) *Education About Proper Choice of Mates.* The uneducated young in the modern age of democracy, stimulated by movies and other literature, are more prone to romantic marriages which bring difficulties in marital relationships after some time either due to differences in their cultures, attitudes or fundamental values. They must be made aware of the consequences of such marriages and may be advised to leave such matters to their parents, who can better choose for their companion according to their own cultural setting, because conjugal affection, rather than romantic love, forms the basis of a truly successful marriage. Elliott and Merrill rightly point out, "Conjugal affection is not included in the romantic complex, based as the latter is upon unfamiliarity, excitement, personal attraction and similar considerations.... Conjugal affection, on the other hand, comprises an intangible but nevertheless fundamental group of expectations, attitudes and values that insure a successful marriage. It involves such considerations as complete communication between husband and wife ; their just participation in various activities ; the harmonious mutual adjustment of the many habitual relationships of marriage ; consensus derived from similar definitions of important situations ; and finally the simple fact of personal friendship."²⁸ In this connection the system of tallying *Patris* (horoscopes), which to some extent indicate the nature of the parties is worth pursuing. Also marriages within their own castes or at least within their class can be more successful owing to similarities in cultures.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 381.

In spite of all such advices still many young persons are likely to marry mates of their own choice. In such cases they must be taught that romance is not the only sound basis of marriage and the marriage should not be dissolved when romance is on the wane. They should be informed that love which enables a marriage to endure is something finer, deeper, and more realistic than the romantic love of the movies and popular stories. Mr. Landis points out, "Many divorces arise because the romantic expectations with which young people often enter marriage are frustrated by the unromantic realities of the marital situation. If these expectations could be modified in the direction of greater realism, a large number of marriages might conceivably be saved."²⁹ Elliott and Merrill remark, "Men and women are demanding greater personal satisfaction from the estate of matrimony. But then one has to work harder at making marriage a success. Also greater emphasis upon personal happiness in marriage deserves analysis as to its essential validity. Life exacts difficulties as well as pleasures and is full of petty annoyances, disappointments and disillusionment, both in and out of marriage. Probably no married people were completely happy before marriage, nor they can expect to be completely happy after marriage. Many young men nourished in the romantic tradition may blame their marriage if they feel unhappy whereas the difficulty may lie either within themselves or in situations external to marriage."³⁰

(ii) *Family Counselling Agencies.* Often there are tensions in the family owing to the reasons already stated such as differences in temperament, attitudes and social values ; economic difficulties, ill health, conflict on child's training, etc. There should be family counselling agencies with trained social workers in family matters. They should try to analyse the situation and suggest methods for removing that tension. Such family counselling agencies are found in some of the industrially advanced countries particularly U.S.A. But unfortunately such agencies have not found their due place in India. The first family welfare agency was started in Bombay in 1950, which is reported to be doing good work. Besides counselling service to the client it renders some practical assistance. Community

²⁹ Landis, Paul H., "Control of the Romantic Impulse Through Education", in the journal, *School and Society*, August, 1936.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 450.

resources like schools, hospitals, trusts and charities are approached to render all the necessary help to the client and the family.

There are also courts of domestic relations in U.S.A. which are presided by persons of wide social experience and social understanding which help in preventing temporary discord through reconciliation of domestic relations, which otherwise often lead to permanent family disruption. All those welfare agencies which add to the welfare of the family, and ease tensions, e.g. maternity and child welfare centres, agencies rendering financial assistance to the economically backward families or family planning clinics should be assisted and encouraged by the state.

(iii) *Counselling Courts*. When the matter comes to the court for divorce they should try to gather the facts of the case through the social worker and analyse it before giving decision. Let us cite one example here. Once a husband went to a court for divorce on the ground that his wife often scolded him and called him vicious names. She talked wildly, wept, and went into tirades of rage whenever he remonstrated. The attorney was a man with unusual amount of insight into the human nature. He said, "Is not she rather frail? The rush of city life is probably too much for her nerves. You might take her to the country." The husband said, "You may be right. I think I will call on a doctor." He consulted a psychiatrist on the way home. Gradually her health improved and her emotional disturbance was over. The husband came to understand the source of her peculiar behaviour and became much more tolerant and sympathetic in his attitude.

(iv) *Help After Divorce*. In spite of these measures there may be certain cases where there is constant tension in the family which is not only affecting the life organization of the husband and the wife but also their children. In such cases some employment or financial assistance should be provided to her for her own and the maintenance of children. Because many such women resort to prostitution if they are not able to secure employment, and this leads to further social disorganization. No other environment has proved so favourable for the upbringing of children as the home which the parents create, if the home is relatively harmonious, but if it is utterly unharmonious or positively harmful, the state must seek to protect the children in some other way.³¹

³¹ Maciver, R. M., and Page, C. H., *op. cit.*, p. 276.

Future of Family Organization

To be sure, the instability of the modern family as measured by divorce and separation and economic discord, will continue to increase for some time. Because these are the by-products of man's attempt to evolve a new pattern of human relationships. Formerly, social and economic pressures made it imperative for the family to hold together in spite of other difficulties. But today it must depend much more on its intrinsic strength.